The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, and the Atlantic Working Class in the Eighteenth Century

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Abstract This article uses the myth of the many-headed Hydra, commonly employed by members of various ruling classes around the Atlantic to describe the class struggles that surrounded them, to illuminate the history of the working class in the eighteenth century. It concentrates on two groups of workers, wage laborers (especially sailors) and slaves, two zones of the Atlantic, Europe and North America, and four moments in the history of the Atlantic working class: 1747, when, in the Knowles Riot in Boston, sailors and slaves fought the King's press gangs and in so doing created one of the central ideas of the 'Age of Revolution'; 1768, when, in the London port strike, sailors, Irish coalheavers, and others pioneered one of the central ideas and activities of the modern working-class movement, the strike; 1776, when, in the American Revolution, sailors and slaves helped to instigate and win the world's first colonial war for liberation; and 1780, when, in the Gordon Riots, the polyglot working class of London liberated the prisons amid the greatest municipal insurrection of the eighteenth century. It argues that fixed, static notions of race, ethnicity, and nationality among historians have obscured a vital world of cooperation and accomplishment within a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, international working class.

Introduction

Through the harsh winter of 1740-41, as food riots broke out all over Europe, a motley crew of workers met at John Hughson's waterside tavern in the city of New York to plan a rising for St. Patrick's Day. The conspirators included Irish, English, Hispanic, African, and native American men and women; they spoke Gaelic, English, Spanish, French, Dutch, Latin, Greek, and undoubtedly several African and Indian languages. They were a mixture of mostly slaves and wage laborers, especially soldiers, sailors, and journeymen. During their deliberations, David Johnson, a journeyman hatter of unknown European background, swore that 'he would help to burn the town, and kill as many white people as he could'. John Corry, an Irish dancing-master, promised the same, as, apparently, did John Hughson himself and many others, a large number of African-Americans among them. And they eventually put at least part of their plan into action, burning down Fort George, the Governor's mansion, and the imperial armory, the symbols of Royal Majesty and civil authority, the havens and instruments of ruling-class power in New

York. They did not succeed, as evidenced by the 13 burned at the stake, the 21 hanged, and the 77 transported out of the colony as slaves or servants. The corpses of two of the hanged dangled in an iron gibbet on the waterfront as a lesson to others. As the bodies decayed in the open air, observers noted a gruesome, yet instructive, transformation. The corpse of an Irishman turned black and his hair curly while the corpse of Caesar, the African, bleached white. It was accounted a 'wondrous phemenonon'.[1]

One of the many remarkable things about this upheaval is the way in which it confounds much of contemporary historical understanding. Here we have a polyglot community of workers who by current wisdom should never have been able to conceive, much less execute, a joint rebellion. Here we have 'white' Europeans pledging themselves to the destruction of 'the white people' of New York, by which they obviously meant *the rich people*. Here we have, not a slave revolt or a 'great Negro Plot' (as it has long been called), not a mutiny by soldiers and sailors nor a strike by wage laborers, but rather a many-sided rising by a diverse urban proletariat – red, white, and black, of many nations, races, ethnicities, and degrees of freedom.[2]

The events of 1741 were part of a broader history of the Atlantic working class in the eighteenth century, a class that suffered not only the violence of the stake, the gallows, and the shackles of a ship's dark hold, but now the violence of abstraction in the writing of history. For concepts such as 'nationality', 'race', and 'ethnicity' have obscured essential features of the history of the working class in the early modern era. Historians who consciously or unconsciously posit static and immutable differences between workers black and white, Irish and English, slave and free in the early modern era, have frequently failed to study the actual points of contact, overlap, and cooperation between their idealized types. Without such cooperation, of course, the economy of the transatlantic world could never have functioned.

Our study starts from the material organization of many thousands of workers into transatlantic circuits of commodity exchange and capital accumulation and then proceeds to look at the ways in which they translated their cooperation into anti-capitalist projects of their own, as did those who gathered and whispered 'round the fire at Hughson's tavern in New York. It is thus a study of *connections* within the working class – connections that have been denied, ignored, or simply never seen by most historians. It is also an effort to remember, literally to *re-member*, to reconnect as a way of overcoming some of the violence, some of the dismembering the Atlantic working class has undergone. Our effort to remember begins with a myth about dismemberment.

The Myth of the Many-Headed Hydra

The slaying of the Hydra was the second of the twelve labors of Hercules. A Greek version of the story is perhaps best known. Confronted with the monstrous, many-headed Hydra, a water snake with nine to a hundred heads, Hercules found that as soon as he cut off one head, two grew in its place. With the help of his nephew Iolaus, he learned to use a firebrand to cauterize the stump of the beast's neck. Thus they killed the Hydra. Hercules dipped his arrows in the blood of the slain beast, whose venom gave to his arrows their fatal power.

Allusions to the story appear often in the annals of European conquest in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For instance, in 1751, a former governor of Surinam returned to Holland, where he wrote poetic memoirs recollecting his defeat at the hands of the Saramaka, the victorious maroons:

> There you must fight blindly an invisible enemy
> Who shoots you down like ducks in the swamps.
> Even if an army of ten thousand men were gathered, with
> The courage and strategy of Caesar and Eugene,
> They'd find their work cut out for them, destroying a
> Hydra's growth
> Which even Alcides would try to avoid.

Mauricius was a European conqueror writing to and for other Europeans assumed to be sympathetic to the project of conquest. He likened their labor to that of Hercules, here called Alcides. Hydra is identified with the former slaves who had freed themselves, and who in subsequent war assured their freedom – a first permanent victory over European masters in the New World, preceding by a generation the victory of the Haitian people.[3]

The Hydra comparison came easily to the pens of slaveholders worried about rebellion. Thus, in the aftermath of Bussa's Rebellion (Barbados, 1816) a planter wrote that Wilberforce and the African Institute 'have pierced the inmost recesses of our island, inflicted deep and deadly words in the minds of the black population, and engendered the Hydra, Rebellion, which had well nigh deluged our fields with blood'.[4]

The Hydra analogy was restricted, however, neither to the West Indies, nor only to Afro-American slaves. In 1702 when Cotton Mather published his history of Christianity in America *(Magnalia Christi Americana)* he entitled his second chapter on the sectarian opposition to the New England Puritans, 'Hydra Decapita'. 'The church of God had not long been in this wilderness, before the dragon cast forth several floods to devour it', he wrote of the antinomian controversy of the 1630s. The theological struggle of 'works' against 'grace' subverted 'all peaceable order'. It prevented an expedition

against the Pequot Indians; it raised suspicions against the magistrates; it confused the drawing of town lots; and it made particular appeals to women. To Cotton Mather, therefore, the Hydra challenged legal authority, the demarcations of private property, the subordination of women, and the authority of ministers who refused to permit open discussions of sermons. The antinomians of America had begun to call the King of England 'the King of Babylon'. The struggle in Massachusetts was thus a theological dress-rehearsal for the English Revolution of the 1640s.

Thus in many different contexts did various ruling classes use the ancient myth of the many-headed Hydra to understand their metropolitan and colonial problems, usually referring to the proletariat whom European powers were either conquering or disciplining to the life of plantation, regiment, estate, workshop, and factory. The capitalists of London, Paris, and the Hague thus cast themselves as Hercules. Why did they do so? One might consider the question unimportant, since after all was not this a 'Classical Age' in European history when allusion to classical myth was commonplace? Yet this begs the question, for why was it a 'Classical Age'? Part of the answer lies in a project common to Roman and European ruling classes, both of which sought by conquest and tribute to control the rest of the world.

Part of the answer lies too in the fact that the European bourgeoisie of the early modern era was only beginning to develop an understanding of its time and place in the world, and – aside from Christianity and its myths – the only tools available to them for understanding social development were those classic texts rediscovered and made available during the Renaissance, which on the one hand assisted the 'scientific revolution' through the revival of neo-Platonism and other hermetic traditions, and on the other provided examples and models of social formations, or modes of production, which supported the doctrine of European progress in social development.[5]

Hercules could be seen as revolutionary. It is not just that his labors were immense, gigantic, and inter-continental; they seemed to summarize, as myths often do, an enormous transition in human history. Indeed, taking the Neolithic Revolution as the beginning of history, Hercules belonged, as the oldest of the deities in the Greek pantheon, to the dawn of the ages. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, the generally accepted interpretation of the myth was that it expressed the transition to agrarian civilization. A myth that summarized the neolithic revolution might well be used to summarize the revolutionary rise of capitalism.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century the geographic zones of this latter Herculean struggle were the four corners of the north

Atlantic, or the coast of west Africa, the Caribbean islands, the north American colonies, and the maritime powers of northwestern Europe. Within these zones the experience of human labor was organized in seven basic ways. First, there were those who hunted and gathered their subsistence, like some of the Indians and European hunters of north America and the poor commoners and scavengers of countryside and city in England and Ireland. Second, the women, servants, and children whose work was consigned to domestic settings of kitchen and cabin. Third, the unwaged but 'independent' farmers who themselves presented a variety of types, from the poor tenants and *klachan* farmers of Ireland, to the villages of west Africa, to the communal cultivators among the Iroquois and the small-holders of America. Fourth, the unfree indentured servants who had been compelled to leave their vagabonding ways to be transported to the west Atlantic. Fifth, the artisanal craftworkers of town and plantation who have been so carefully studied in recent historiography. Sixth, the sailors and navvies of the mercantile powers who formed the mass of eighteenth-century wage labor. And, seventh, the unfree, unwaged slaves whose mass, cooperative labor cleared the forests, drained the swamps, built the infrastructure of roads and ports, and labored in the plantations of sugar, tobacco, coffee, and cotton. Our remarks in this paper are restricted to two zones – Europe and the North American colonies – and to two kinds of workers – wage laborers (especially sailors) and slaves.[6]

We will look at four moments in the history of the many-headed Hydra in the eighteenth century: 1747, when, in the Knowles Riot in Boston, sailors and slaves fought the King's press gangs and in so doing created one of the central ideas of the 'Age of Revolution'; 1768, when, in the London port strike, sailors, Irish coalheavers, and others pioneered one of the central ideas and activities of the modern working-class movement, the strike; 1776, when, in the American Revolution, sailors and slaves helped to instigate and then to win the world's first colonial war for liberation; and 1780, when, in the Gordon Riots, the polyglot working class of London liberated the prisons amid the greatest municipal insurrection of the eighteenth century. All of these moments were in crucial ways the work of 'a motley crew' – a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, transatlantic working class, whose presence, much less agency, is rarely, if ever, acknowledged in the historiographies of these events.

1747: Seamen, Slaves, and the Origins of Revolutionary Ideology

Free wage laborers, mostly seamen and others who congregated in urban areas, and unfree unwaged laborers, slaves who lived in city and countryside, were two of the rowdiest heads of the Hydra in

Britain's north American colonies. Seamen and slaves each engineered their own cycles of rebellion during the course of the eighteenth century. The revolts that made up these cycles were not only connected in important ways, they were, taken together, much more crucial to the genesis, process, and outcome of the American Revolution than is generally appreciated.

Jesse Lemisch made it clear years ago that seamen were one of the prime movers in the American Revolution. They played a major part in a great many of the patriot victories between 1765 and 1776. Seamen led a series of militant riots against impressment between 1741 and 1776, and indeed their agency was ackowledged by both Tom Paine (in *Common Sense*) and Tom Jefferson (in the Declaration of Independence), both of whom listed impressment as a major grievance and spur to colonial liberation.[7]

But what has been less fully appreciated is how the sailor's involvement in revolutionary politics was part of a broader, international cycle of rebellion that spanned the better part of the eighteenth century. For merchant seamen entered the revolutionary era with a powerful tradition of militancy well in place. They had already learned to use portside riots, mutiny, piracy, work stoppage, and desertion to assert their own ends over and against those mandated from above by merchants, captains, and colonial and royal officials. They would soon learn new tactics.

After the declaration of war against Spain in 1739, struggles against impressment took on a new intensity as seamen fought pitched battles against press gangs all around the Atlantic. Seamen rioted in Boston twice in 1741, once when a mob beat a Suffolk County Sheriff and a Justice of the Peace for their assistance to the press gang of *H.M.S. Portland* and again when 300 seamen armed with 'axes, clubs, and cutlasses' attacked the commanding officer of the *Astrea*. They rose twice more in 1745, first roughing up another Suffolk County sheriff and the commander of *H.M.S. Shirley*, then, seven months later, engaging Captain Forest and *H.M.S. Wager* in action that resulted in two seamen being hacked to death by the press gang's cutlasses. Seamen also animated crowds that attacked the Royal Navy and its minions in Antigua, St. Kitts, Barbados, and Jamaica throughout the 1740s.[8]

The most important early development in the seaman's cycle of rebellion took place in Boston in 1747, when Commander Charles Knowles of *H.M.S. Lark* commenced a hot press in Boston. A mob, initially consisting of 300 seamen but ballooning to 'several thousand people', quickly seized some officers of the *Lark* as hostages, beat a deputy sheriff and slapped him into the town's stocks, surrounded and attacked the Provincial Council Chamber, and posted squads at all piers to keep naval officers from escaping back to their ship. The

mob was led by laborers and seamen, black and white, armed with 'clubs, swords, and cutlasses'; the 'lower class', observed Thomas Hutchinson, 'were beyond measure enraged'. The sailors originally assembled for 'self-defense', but there was a positive element to their protest as well. As Knowles remarked:

The Act [of 1746] against pressing in the Sugar Islands, filled the Minds of the Common People ashore as well as Sailors in all the Northern Colonies (but more especially in New England) with not only a hatred for the King's Service but [also] a Spirit of Rebellion *each Claiming a Right* to the same Indulgence as the Sugar Colonies and declaring they will maintain themselves in it.

Maintain themselves in it they did: sailors defended their 'liberty' and justified their resistance in terms of 'right'.[9]

This was the essential idea embodied in the seamen's practical activity, in their resistance to unjust authority. Sam Adams, who watched as the maritime working class defended itself, began to translate its 'Spirit of Rebellion' into political discourse. According to historians John Lax and William Pencak, Adams used the Knowles Riot to formulate a new 'ideology of resistance, in which the natural rights of man were used for the first time to justify mob activity'. Adams saw that the mob 'embodied the fundamental rights of man against which government itself could be judged'. But the self-activity of some common tars, 'zealous abetters of liberty', came first. Their militant resistance produced a major breakthrough in libertarian thought that would ultimately lead to revolution.[10]

This was only the beginning, for both the cycle of seamen's rebellion and for the articulation of a revolutionary ideology in the Atlantic world. In the aftermath of the 1740s, Jack Tar proceeded to take part in almost every port-city riot in England and America for the remainder of the century. Whether in Newport, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, London, Liverpool, Bristol, or in the Caribbean, tars took to the streets in rowdy and rebellious protest on a variety of issues, seizing in practice what would later be established as 'right' by law.[11]

The years leading up to the Knowles Riot were ones in which the winds of rebellion also slashed through many of the slave societies of the New World. The struggles included the First Maroon War of Jamaica (1730-1740), slave rebellions on St. John in the Danish Virgin Islands and in Dutch Guyana (1733), a plot in the Bahama Islands (1734), a slave conspiracy in Antigua (1735-36), a rebellion in Guadeloupe (1736-38), the Stono Rebellion (1739), the St. Patrick's Day rising in New York (1741), and a series of disturbances in Jamaica (early 1740s). The connections among these events are not always easy to discover, but the life of a slave named Will, who took part in the rebellion of St. John, then the conspiracy of Antigua,

and finally the plot of New York, suggests something important about the movement and exchange of subversive experience among slaves. Another Antigua conspirator, banished from his own island, turned up as a leader of a plot on the Danish Island of St. Croix in 1759.[12]

The movement toward rebellion among African-Americans accelerated after 1765, as demonstrated in some important recent work by Peter Wood, who has argued that 'black freedom struggles on the eve of white independence' intensified as slaves seized the new opportunities offered by splits between imperial and colonial ruling classes. Running away increased at a rate that alarmed slaveholders everywhere, and by the mid-1770s, a rash of slave plots and revolts sent the fears of their masters soaring. Slaves organized risings in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, in 1772; in St. Andrews Parish, South Carolina, and in a joint African-Irish effort in Boston, in 1774; in Ulster County, New York, Dorchester County, Maryland, Norfolk, Virginia, and the Tar River region of North Carolina, in 1775. In the last of these, a slave named Merrick plotted with a white seafarer to get the arms that would make the intended revolt possible.[13]

Such conspiracy and exchange was facilitated by the strategic position that many urban slaves or free blacks occupied in the social division of labor in the port towns, as day laborers, dockworkers, seamen, and river pilots. Northern ports, with their promise of anonymity and an impersonal wage in the maritime sector, served as a magnet to runaway slaves and free blacks throughout the colonial period and well into the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries. Many found work as laborers and seamen. Slaves too were employed in the maritime sector, some with ship masters as owners, others hired out for a given time. By the middle of the eighteenth century, slaves dominated Charleston's maritime and riverine traffic, in which some 20 percent of the city's adult male slaves labored. The freedom of Charleston's 'Boat negroes' had long upset Charleston's rulers, at no time more than when they involved themselves in subversive activities, as alleged against Thomas Jeremiah, a river pilot, in 1775. Jeremiah was accused of stockpiling guns as he awaited the imperial war that would 'help the poor Negroes'. Jeffrey J. Crow has noted that black pilots were 'a rebellious lot, particularly resistant to white control'.[14]

Peter Wood concludes that between 1765 and 1776 North American slaves generated a 'wave of struggle' that became 'a major factor in the turmoil leading up to the Revolution': 'It touched upon every major slave colony, and it was closely related to – even influential upon – the political unrest gripping many white subjects in these years'. Wood's treatment of this cycle of rebellion as 'a significant chapter in the story of worker and artisan political unrest' invites us to link it to the revolutionary struggles of other workers.[15]

1776: The Mob and the 'Many-Headed Power' in America

Revolutionary crowds, rowdy gatherings of thousands of men and women, began in 1765 to create an imperial crisis of unprecedented dimensions. Mobs were crucial to the effective protests against the Stamp Act, the Townshend Revenue Act, the increased power of the British customs service, the Quartering Act, the Tea Act, the 'Intolerable Acts', and therefore in the revolutionary rupture itself. All of this we can now appreciate because of important recent scholarship.[16]

What has not been appreciated is that most of these mobs were interracial in character, and that these potent if temporary unions of free waged and unfree unwaged laborers were instrumental in winning many of the victories of the revolutionary movement. The 'Sons of Neptune' (themselves both black and white), other free blacks, and slaves were probably most united and most effective in their battles against impressment. The crucial Knowles Riot of 1747, which witnessed the birth of the revolution's language of liberation, was led by 'armed Seamen, Servants, Negroes, and others'. Later, as the revolutionary movement began in 1765, some 500 'seamen, boys, and Negroes' rioted against impressment in Newport, Rhode Island, and in 1767 a mob of armed whites and blacks attacked Captain Jeremiah Morgan in a press riot in Norfolk. Lemisch noted that after 1763, 'Armed mobs of whites and Negroes repeatedly manhandled captains, officers, and crews, threatened their lives, and held them hostage for the men they pressed'.[17]

Workers white and black also participated in the popular upsurges against the Stamp Act, whose successful repeal was perhaps the key moment in the development of a revolutionary movement. In 1765 'disorderly negroes, and more disorderly sailors' rioted against the Stamp Act in Charleston. A few months later, Charleston slaves (some of whom may have taken part in the earlier action with seamen) assembled and cried for 'liberty', which moved city elders to keep the city under armed guard for ten days to two weeks. One protest led to another in which the slogan took on a different, more radical meaning.[18]

Seamen, again assisted by African-Americans, also led the militant opposition to the renewed power of the British customs service in the late 1760s and early 1770s. As Alfred F. Young has shown, seamen even drew upon the custom of the sea to forge a new weapon in the arsenal of revolutionary justice, the tarring and feathering that intimidated a great many British officials in the colonies. We can hear the clunk of the brush in the tar bucket behind Thomas Gage's observation in 1769 that 'the Officers of the Crown grow more timid, and more fearfull of doing their Duty every Day'.[19]

Seamen also led both the Golden Hill and Nassau Street Riots of New York and the King Street Riot, better remembered as the Boston Massacre. In both instances, sailors and other workers resented the ways in which British soldiers labored for less than customary wages along the waterfront; in New York they also resented the soldiers' efforts to destroy their 58 foot liberty pole, which, not surprisingly, resembled nothing so much as a ship's mast. Rioting and street fighting ensued. Thomas Hutchinson and John Adams, among others, believed that the actions in New York led directly to the 'Fatal Fifth of March' in Boston. Adams, who defended Captain Preston and his soldiers in trial, called the mob that assembled on King Street nothing but 'a motley rabble of saucy boys, negroes and molattoes, Irish teagues, and outlandish Jack Tarrs'. Seamen also took part in the Tea Party, provoking Britain to a show of naked force in the Intolerable Acts, and an eventual confrontation that proved irreconcilable. During the revolution itself, tars took part in mobs that harrassed Tories and rendered their efforts less effective.[20]

Occasionally we get a glimpse of radical ideas and practices in transit, how the oppositional ideas of 'these most dangerous people' actually spread from one port to another during the imperial crisis. Governor William Bull of South Carolina, facing Stamp Act protests in Charleston, found that the 'Minds of Men here were so universally poisoned with the Principles which were imbibed and propagated from Boston and Rhode Island'. Soon, 'after their example the People of this Town resolved to seize and destroy the Stamp Papers'. In explaining this development, Bull noted that 'at this time of Year, Vessels very frequently arrive' from Boston and Newport, where seamen and slaves had helped to protest the Stamp Act, just as they would do in Charleston. 'Principles' as well as commodities were transported on those ships![21]

Those Adams called boys (apprentices), negroes and mulattoes, Irish teagues, and outlandish Jack Tars made up a huge portion of the urban population that was linked by tenacious cultural ties. A subculture of 'apprentices, servants, slaves, and perhaps some, journeymen, laborers, and sailors', revolved around common work experiences and a common cultural life of revels, masques, fairs, May-day celebrations, street parties, taverns, and 'disorderly houses'. 'Apprentices, servants, and even negroes' drank together in Hell Town in Philadelphia, just as 'seamen and Negroes' caroused 'at unseasonable hours' in Charleston and workers black and white congregated at Hughson's tavern in New York. Magistrate Daniel Horsmanden suggested that such taverns provided

opportunities for the most loose, debased, and abandoned wretches amongst us to cabal and confederate together and ripen themselves into these schools of mischief,

for the execution of the most daring and detestable enterprizes. I fear there are yet many of these houses amongst us, and they are the bane and pest of the city. It was such that gave the opportunity of breeding this most horrid and execrable conspiracy.

Grogshops, tippling houses, and dancing cellars existed in every Atlantic port, much to the despair of colonial ruling classes, who sought to criminalize and otherwise discourage contact between the free and unfree workers who used such settings to hatch conspiracies and even form a 'maritime underground railroad' through which many escaped to freedom. There was, therefore, a history of interracial cooperation that underlay the joint protests of sailors and slaves against impressment and other measures during the revolutionary era.[22]

Seamen and slaves thus expressed a militant mood summed up by Peter Timothy when he spoke of Charleston, South Carolina, in the summer of 1775: 'In regard to War & Peace, I can only tell you that the Plebeians are still for War – but the noblesse [are] perfectly pacific'. Seamen in particular and wage workers in general were foremost among the most radical parts of the colonial population, who pushed the revolutionary vanguard to more extreme positions and eventually to independence itself. Contrary to the recent argument of scholars who claim that sailors, laborers, slaves, and other poor workingmen were in no position to 'shape the revolutionary process', it is clear that these groups provided much of the spark, volatility, momentum, and the 'sustained militance' for the attack on British policy after 1765. In the process they provided an image of interracial cooperation that should cause us to wonder whether racism was as monolithic in white society as is often assumed.[23]

Paul Revere's famous but falsified account of the Boston Massacre quickly tried to make the 'motley rabble' respectable by leaving black faces out of the crowd and putting into it entirely too many fancy waistcoats. It is not, therefore, surprising that well-to-do colonists often fearfully called the mob a 'Hydra', a 'many-headed monster', a 'reptile', and, more sympathetically, a 'many-headed power', using the same mythic terms that other parts of the Atlantic bourgeoisie had long used to describe and interpret their struggle against a diverse Atlantic working class.[24]

Such fears are understandable, for the politicized mob was one of the three most important 'mass organizations' (along with the militia and the army) in the revolutionary movement, and it was probably the hardest of these to control. Moreover, it was in most instances quintessentially democratic – not only could anyone join, but workingmen could even rise to positions of momentary or long-term leadership. Given these facts, and the way in which such mobs were

absolutely crucial to the making of the revolution, their subsequent suppression by former revolutionaries can be seen as part of an American Thermidor, their condemnation by big landowners, merchants, and even artisans as part of a literal 'enclosure movement' designed to move politics from 'out of doors' to legislative chambers. When Sam Adams, who helped to draw up Massachusetts's Riot Act of 1786, ceased to believe that the mob 'embodied the fundamental rights of man against which government itself could be judged', he cut himself off from an important source of democratic creativity and expression, the force that years ago had given him the best idea of his life.[25]

Of the five workingmen killed in the Boston Massacre in 1770, John Adams said: 'the blood of the martyrs, right or wrong, proved to be the seed of the congregation'. Adams thus made clear the working-class origins of the revolution and the new nation, for the blood of the martyrs, as everyone knew, was the blood of a journeyman, an apprentice, and three wage laborers: a ropewalker and two seamen, one of whom was a half-black, half-Indian runaway slave who lived in the Bahama Islands. His name was Crispus Attucks. Of this martyr John Adams had said earlier, his 'very looks would be enough to terrify any person', or at least any person like Adams himself. He might well have said the same about the 'motley rabble' Attucks had led into battle, thereby speaking the fearful mind of the moderate leadership of the revolutionary movement. It would not be long before workingmen and women all over America would be marching against the British under flags that featured a serpent and the motto, 'Don't Tread on Me'.[26]

1768: From Ireland to London, where the Serpent Learns to Strike

Patrick Carr, another Boston worker who was to be a martyr of the coming revolution, represented that part of the Atlantic working class that hailed from Ireland. Carr, like many others, left Ireland in the 1760s well-experienced in the ways of mobs and their confrontations with British military power. Many of his compatriots went to London, where they helped to make the London port strike of 1768.[27]

Indeed, the strike in London cannot be understood apart from Ireland, where the hangman's noose and the woodsman's axe had centuries before been the principle tools of the English Ascendency. Following the Williamite confiscations of the 1690s, the forests, and the human culture dependent upon them, were largely destroyed; the agrarian policy subsequently introduced into Ireland promoted pasturage for the export of cattle rather than an arable farming that could feed the population. As a result, a large population, having

neither forests nor lands to subsist upon, either left the land altogether or submitted to a standard of subsistence so utterly mean that it beggared the powers of description of independent observers and caused even the rulers to *wonder* at how an oppressed population could tolerate such conditions. The Irish language was 'banished from the castle of the chieftain to the cottage of the vassal', from whence in hard times it migrated to the boozing kens of London and the 'low tippling houses' of American and Caribbean ports. The 'Hidden Ireland' – its conspiratorial tradition and willingness to act outside the law – was carried along in the diaspora within people like Patrick Carr.[28]

The 'Whiteboy Outrages', the name given to the largest and longest of agrarian rebellions in Ireland (1761-1765, with sporadic outbursts through 1788), were a major part of the subversive experience of the mobile Irish. These protests took place in a period of increased expropriation and accumulation, intensified by the demands of two world wars. With the outbreak of cattle disease, the murrain, in continental Europe, and the passage in 1759 of the Cattle Exportation Act, the value of Irish land increased greatly. The poorest of the cottiers who had a potato patch or a cow kept on the common land, suddenly found that even these were to be denied, as landlords, their agents, and bailiffs evicted them in search of new grazing lands, taking over whole baronies, and erecting walls, hedges, and fences to keep their herds in and the former tenants out. Against this, the Irish cottier and laborer reacted with what Lecky called 'an insurrection of despair'.[29]

In October, 1761, nocturnal bands of 200-400 people, dressed in flowing white frocks and white cockades, threw down fences enclosing lands in Tipperary. The movement quickly expanded to new areas in Cork, Kilkenny, Limerick, and Waterford, and to actions designed to redress other grievances, such as the manifold tithes (of potatoes, agistment, turf, or furze) imposed by an alien religious establishment. Sounding horns, carrying torches, and riding commandeered horses, the Whiteboys opened gaols, rescued prisoners, attacked garrisons, stole arms, released 'prentices, maimed cattle, ploughed wasteland, prevented export of provisions, burned houses, reduced prices, and everywhere tore down walls, fences, hedges, and ditches. These rebels were originally known as, and often called, 'the Levellers'.

The overall strength of the Whiteboys remains unknown, though it was reported that 14,000 insurgents lived in Tipperary in 1763. Their largest gatherings, 500-700 strong, took place in 1762 in Cork and Waterford. Using military techniques, the poorest cottiers and laborers (many of them spalpeens, or migratory laborers) formed themselves into an autonomous organization quite separate from the

middling and upper classes. Indeed, the proletarian experience of the hundreds of thousands of Irishmen who had soldiered in the French army since 1691 lay behind the Whiteboy movement.[30]

Of necessity much of their movement was anonymous and mysterious. It was conducted 'under the sanction of being fairies', it was said in 1762, and led by mythological figures such as 'Queen Sieve' who wrote,

We, levellers and avengers for the wrongs done to the poor, have unanimously assembled to raze walls and ditches that have been made to inclose the commons. Gentlemen now of late have learned to grind the face of the poor so that it is impossible for them to live. They cannot even keep a pig or a hen at their doors. We warn them not to raise again either walls or ditches in the place of those we destroy, nor even to inquire about the destroyers of them. If they do, their cattle shall be houghed and their sheep laid open in the fields.

Whiteboy captains who would carry out these threats called themselves 'Slasher', 'Lightfoot', 'Fearnot', and 'Madcap Setfire'.[31]

Theirs was a movement inspired by strong notions of justice. The High Sheriff of Waterford, for instance, could find no person willing to whip a convicted Whiteboy, though he offered 20 Guineas and though a large body of troops was present for the occasion. When English law was enforced, as in the hanging of Father Sheehy in 1766, the people undermined its effect. The earth over his grave was treated as holy ground; a 'Sheehy Jury' became proverbial for partiality. Four years later his executioner was stoned to death and ten years later his prosecutor killed, by people who refused to forget.[32]

The Whiteboy movement attacked tithes and alarmed many Protestants, but it ought not be interpreted as a sectarian phenomenon, since both Catholics and Protestants were present among both the Whiteboys and their victims, and since wealthy Catholics and Protestants cooperated to stop the risings.[33] And although it began in rural settings against enclosures, the movement ought not be interpreted exclusively as 'agrarian unrest'. Just as the creation of a landless proletariat is a necessary corollary to the expropriation of land, so the forms and experience of that struggle will move with the wandering, roving proletariat thus created. An historian of the transported convicts to Australia wrote, 'The Whiteboy Associations were, in a sense, a vast trades union'. Whiteboy sabotage, according to Constantia Maxwell, was taken up by Dublin journeymen. The Friendly Society of Philadelphia's ship carpenters, its historian avers, was also associated with the Whiteboys. Therefore, when in the late 1760s, the terms of exchange between England and Ireland included one and a half million pounds in remittances to absentee landlords, three million pounds worth of exports, and thousands of hungry laboring people, we need to add to

such material commerce, a cultural exchange that is broader than coleric playwrights and sad balladeers, and which includes the rebellious organizations of 'hidden Ireland', because these surfaced in London in 1768 with great effect.[34]

Proletarian labors in London were characterized by high turnover, by absence of guild fellowships, by ethnic heterogeneity, and by working conditions that were seasonal, dangerous, and subject to harsh discipline. The productive power of such social labor arose from the assembly of many people in one place at one time. Harvesting and road-making, canal-digging and soldiering required such labor, as did the loading, sailing, and unloading of ships. The Irish concentrated in the mass labor of coalheaving, a hot, filthy, back-breaking line of work, but crucial to the energizing of England's greatest city. Individually weak and pitiful, as a collective mass such wage laborers had power and posed danger. 'A body of men working in concert has hands and eyes both before and behind, and is, to a certain degree, omnipresent', wrote Karl Marx.[35]

In the 1760s it took more money to eat, and the hungry people of London began to act directly against price increases. River workers led the groups who stole fresh vegetables, forced vendors to sell their wares at popular prices, and intimidated merchants into both closing down their shops and burying their plate. On 11 May a group of sailors assembled at the Stock Exchange 'and would not suffer any Person except their own Body to enter it'. These actions were not peaceful: murder was a frequence occurrence during the spring and summer. Thomas Davis, for instance, said he 'did not care who they killed, rather than his family should starve'. When a 'Gentleman' asked a young man whether it was foolish for people to risk their lives, he was answered: 'Master, Provisions are high and Trade is dead, that we are half starving and it is as well to die at once, as die by Inches'.[36]

Otherwise, the hungry took indirect actions to increase their wages. The sailors petitioned and marched upon Parliament to increase their wage payments. The shoemakers met often in mass meeting in Moorfields as part of their attempts to get greater wages. The bargemen struck for more money. The sawyers were threatened by the recent introduction of a steam-powered engine installed in Limehouse. They destroyed it. A thousand glass grinders petitioned for higher wages; thousands of London tailors did the same. Leaders were sent to prison, like the three tailors sent to Bridewell 'for irritating their Bretheren to Insurrection, abusing their Masters, and refusing to work at the stated prices'.[37]

In many ways, the riots of the spring and early summer of 1768 appear to be classic instances of the eighteenth-century plebeian 'mob' in action: the forms (petitioning, marching, illuminations, smashing of windows), the heterogeneity of the 'trades' (tailors,

shoemakers, carpenters), and, generally, the subordination of its demands and actions to the middle-class reform movement led by John Wilkes. Yet the activities of that year need to be seen not only as the licensed outrages of the plebeian mob, but as something new, unlicensed, insurrectionary, and proletarian. 'The Extremities to which the Cry of Liberty is carried, seem to threaten the Destruction of all Civil Society', as one newspaper put it. Wilkes and his men could not control the protests of 1768, as demonstrated when some sailors chanted, 'No Wilkes, No King'. Nor did artisans lead these events. The river workers led them, closing river shipping for a time, and almost causing a general strike. In July 'A Spectator' observed the pattern of recent months: 'Thus Sailors, Taylors, Coopers, Lightermen, Watermen, &c. follow one another, the adventurous Coalheavers leading the Van'.[38]

The leaders of the coalheavers, many knew, were 'of the Gang of White Boys in Ireland, driven out from thence for the most Enormous Crimes, as they have bragg'd and given it out themselves', to quote the Solicitor-General of England. The involvement of Whiteboys among the coalheavers was reported by several newspapers and assumed by Samuel Foote, who wrote *The Tailors; A Tragedy for Warm Weather* about the strikes of '68-'69. Horace Walpole, the Earl of Orford, noted that the coalheavers 'are all Irish Whiteboys'; his certainty of this fact allowed him to use the terms coalheavers and Whiteboys interchangeably. Thus the Hydra-head slain by the the noose and the axe in Ireland re-appeared with doubled force in London, as insurgent Irish wage labor. It may have been little enough solace to John Brennan's wife, who had carried the severed Whiteboy's head through the streets and shops of Kilkenny 'collecting money from the populace' after his execution. But the inescapable truth remained, as recognized by the Chief Baron of Ireland's Exchequer: in Ireland, 'England has sown her laws like dragon's teeth, and they have sprung up, armed men'.[39]

The working men and women of riverside London came out of 1768 armed in a new way. The sailors, who collectively decided to 'strike' the sails of their vessels and thereby halt the commerce and international accumulation of capital in the empire's leading city, had in conjunction with Irish coalheavers and others made a major addition to the political language and activity of the working-class movement: the strike.[40]

1780: Insurrectionary London

As several heads of the Hydra fought for 'independence' beneath the symbol of the serpent in America, several others – '*a motley crew, and of every color*' – struck against British power in the Gordon Riots, the

most serious municipal insurrection of the eighteenth century. The riots of 6 June 1780 were named after Lord George Gordon, a Scottish peer who led the Protestant Association, a mass organization dedicated to the repeal of an Act passed two years earlier for the 'Relief of Roman Catholics'. Parliament and the Bank of England were attacked; aristocrats found their houses demolished and their persons besieged. London parks became military encampments; strategic points were defended by artillery; the municipal bourgeoisie armed itself. Between four and five hundred people were killed. To the London working class the 6th of June 1780 was a glorious day because the prisoners of Newgate were liberated.[41]

Exact estimates of the number of prisoners freed on the night of 6-7 June 1780 must vary because of the disorders of the night and because of the many different prisons, jails, and other places of confinement that were opened. More than twenty crimping houses (where impressed sailors were confined prior to embarkation) and spunging houses (where debtors were held at the pleasure of their creditors) were forcibly opened in Southwark. The prisoners of Newgate, the largest and most terrible dungeon, were liberated amid such fire and destruction that one spectator felt 'as if not only the whole metropolis was burning, but all nations yielding to the final consummation of all things'.[42]

The prisoners 'delivered from the Gaol of Newgate' were of several ethnicities – English, Irish, African-American, but also Italian, German, and Jewish. Of those liberated whose original cases can be found, five had been charged with crimes against the person (a rapist, a bigamist, an anonymous letter writer, and two murderers), two charged with perjury; the overwhelming majority were imprisoned for crimes against property: two counterfeiters, six burglars, ten highway robbers, and fifty larcenists escaped; most were propertyless. Several inside Newgate had American connections; they, like others both inside and outside the prison walls, had been affected by the revolutionary war under way for independence and the pursuit of happiness. Continuing the struggles sailors had waged over the previous forty years against impressment, the rioters fought for freedom against confinement. They did so in a 'Republican Phrenzy' and a 'levelling spirit'.[43]

In fact, sailors themselves were prominent among the rioters, as indicated by the frequent mention of cutlasses and marlin spikes as principle weapons in the armory of the crowd. It had been a terrible year for sailors – the winter was cold, the war had been a fatigue, the press-gangs marauded the streets. The incidence of mutiny in the Royal Navy had begun to increase soon after the American Revolution broke out. A seaman by the name of Richard Hyde was tried for the liberation, or 'delivery', of the Newgate prisoners. One of the Newgate

turnkeys insisted that Hyde had insulted him, calling him 'one of Akerman's Thieves', and threatened him by saying he would 'cut his Throat and kill his Master'. Other sailors broke into prison-keeper Akerman's house, where they obtained the keys to the gaol's main gate.[44]

Two other deliverers of Newgate, 'not having the Fear of God before their Eyes but being moved and seduced by the Instigation of the Devil', to use the language of the indictments against them, were named John Glover and Benjamin Bowsey. They were African-Americans, and former slaves. Their activities at Newgate were decisive, and for that reason their importance to the subsequent history of Atlantic working people can be likened to the more well-known leaders of the Afro-London population, Ottobah Cugoano and Olaudah Equiano, whose fame partly arises because they were writers. Glover and Bowsey were activists.[45]

John Glover lived in Westminster where he was reputed to be a 'quiet, sober, honest' man. He worked as a servant to one Philips, Esq., who was evidently an attorney, for during the afternoon of 6 June he sent Glover to his chambers in Lincoln's Inn to fetch some papers. The streets were full of people and news: the day before 'the Mobbing of the Lords' had taken place, petitioners were returning from Parliament, the ballad singers were exhausting their talents, the clerks and law men of the Inns of Court had begun to arm themselves to do duty against the mob. Ignatius Sancho, a well-to-do African grocer, wrote from Westminster that evening observing 'at least a hundred thousand poor, miserable, ragged rabble . . . besides half as many women and children, all parading the streets – the bridge – the Park – ready for any and every mischief'. The day was a moment of truth when none could avoid taking sides. Glover did not gather the law papers, but instead joined one of the columns forming toward Newgate whose approach filled him with determination, for on Snow Hill he was seen striking the cobblestones with a gun barrel and shouting 'Now Newgate!' He was one of the first persons who showed his face at the 'chequers of the gate' whose keeper was addressed by him as follows, 'Damn you, Open the Gate or we will Burn you down and have Everybody out', a threat he made good, for he was later observed 'to be the most active Person Particularly in piling up combustible matters against the Door and putting fire thereto'.[46]

The London Black community (10,000-20,000 people) was active during the week of 6 June. Later, Ottobah Cuguoano spoke from, of, and for this community when he said 'the voice of our complaint implies a vengeance'. Such voices were the voices of 6 June. While Glover and others were busy at Newgate, Charlotte Gardiner, 'a negro', marched with a mob ('among whom were two men with bells, and another with frying pan and tongs') to the house of Mr. Levarty,

a publican, in St. Katherine's Lane, near Tower Hill. *Charlotte Gardiner was a leader of this march*, shouting encouragements ('Huzza, well done, my boys - knock it down, down with it'), and directions ('Bring more wood to the fire'), as well as taking two brass candle sticks from the dining room. She did not even attempt to defend herself at the Old Bailey, and on 4 July she was found guilty and sentenced to die. The following Tuesday she was hanged.[47]

John Glover was identified well enough at the Old Bailey for purpose of hanging. But for historical purposes, his identification, like that of the nameless millions of the African diaspora, is much more difficult. Yet there is evidence to suggest that he took his name from an early member of the Committee of Correspondence of Marblehead, Massachusetts, a General John Glover who raised an American military regiment in 1775 among the multi-ethnic mariners and fishermen of this important Atlantic port. The John Glover who helped to deliver Newgate was probably a captured prisoner from General Glover's regiment.[48]

The problem of identification arises again when we consider a second African-American, Benjamin Bowsey, a man who came as close as any to being the leader of the 6 June delivery. His voice was apparently exciting, encouraging, and capable of arousing indignation. He was among the group of thirty who first approached the prison, marching three abreast, armed with spokes, crows, and paving mattocks. Later, he was indicted on three bills, one for riot, one for pulling down Akerman's house, and one for breaking, entering, and stealing. Bowsey had been in England for six years, and had probably been a slave in Virginia.

Men like Glover and Bowsey and women like Gardiner arrived in growing numbers in London, where they found work as fiddlers, lovemakers, cooks, boxers, writers, and especially domestic servants, day laborers, and seamen. The overall coherence (learned on plantation and shipboard) of the African population posed a police problem in London where it was expressed in clubs for dance, music, eating, and drinking, or in knots of American runaways and London servants. John Fielding, the Chairman of the Westminster Quarter Sessions whose office was attacked during the riots, was some years earlier already alarmed at the growing immigration of this population. The plantocrats, he said,

bring them to England as cheap servants having no right to wages; they no sooner arrive here than they put themselves on a footing with other servants, become intoxicated with liberty, grow refractory, and either by persuasion of others or from their own inclinations, begin to expect wages according to their own opinion of their merits; and as there are already a great number of black men and women who made themselves troublesome and dangerous to the families who have brought them over

as to get themselves discharged, these enter into societies and make it their business to corrupt and dissatisfy the mind of every black servant that comes to England.

The Afro-London community by the 1770s had began to fight for the freedom of a proletarian – mobility and money.[49] They continued the fight in attacking Newgate, one of the chief symbols of state power and repression, amid a war across the Atlantic that continued a discussion of popular rights inaugurated generations earlier by the Levellers and other radicals of the English Revolution.

Conclusion

By looking at the revolts of the many-headed Hydra – laborers black and white, Irish and English, free and enslaved, waged and unwaged – we can begin to see how the events of 1747, 1768, 1776, and 1780 were part of a broad cycle of rebellion in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world, in which continuities and connections informed a huge number and variety of popular struggles. A central theme in this cycle was the many-sided struggle against confinement – on ships, in workshops, in prisons, or even in empires – and the simultaneous search for autonomy. The circulation of working-class experience, especially certain forms of struggle, emerges as another theme, linking urban mobs, slave revolts, shipboard mutinies, agrarian risings, strikes, and prison riots, and the many different kinds of workers who made them – sailors, slaves, spalpeens, coalheavers, dockworkers, and others, many of whom occupied positions of strategic importance in the international division of labor. That much of this working-class experience circulated *to the eastward*, from American slave plantations, Irish commons, and Atlantic vessels, back to the streets of the metropolis, London, cannot be overemphasized. This interchange within a predominantly urban, portside proletariat took place over, around, beneath, and frequently against the artisans and craftsmen who are generally credited with creating the early working-class movement.

What consciousness pertained to this motley proletariat? We do not have a complete or definite answer to this question, although it is important that some points be raised despite the fact that we have in this segment of our longer study only concerned ourselves with slaves and maritime wage-workers. First, we need to emphasize that consciousness arose from experience. The struggle against confinement led to a consciousness of freedom, which was in turn transformed into the revolutionary discussion of human rights. The experience of cooperation on plantation, ship, and waterfront led to a consciousness of interdependence and produced perforce new means of communication in language, music, and sign. Second, the

various workers we have considered here brought with them the traditions of their own histories, which were preserved and amplified within the Atlantic world of the eighteenth century. Thus, pan-Africanism originated in Africa, not on the slavers, and became a potent Atlantic force by the 1780s. The antinomian and anti-authoritarian traditions of self-government, a heritage of the English Revolution of the 1640s, was preserved and expanded in North America. Finally, a third point arises form our investigation. At its most dynamic the eighteenth-century proletariat was often ahead of any fixed consciousness. The changes of geography, language, climate, and relations of family and production were so volatile and sudden that consciousness had to be characterized by a celerity of thought that may be difficult to comprehend to those whose experience has been steadier.

We hope our conclusions will be of interest to all those who think that a working class did not exist in the eighteenth century (before the rise of the factory system), and to all those whose conceptions of nation, race, and ethnicity have obscured both a field of force in which all history unfolds and a popular world of vital cooperation and accomplishment. The many heads of the transatlantic Hydra may be likened to a popular drink of the eighteenth century called 'All Nations', a compound of all the different spirits sold in a dram shop, collected in a single vessel into which the dregs and drainings of all the bottles and pots had been emptied.[50] We shall have to study all nations to understand the beast who has called forth such great violence, physical and conceptual, down through the ages.

Notes

[1] Quotation in D. Horsmanden, *The New York Conspiracy* ed. T. J. Davis (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 309. See P. Linebaugh, 'A Letter to Boston's "Radical Americans" from a "Loose and Disorderly" New Yorker, Autumn 1770', *Midnight Notes*, 4 (1983) and T.J. Davis, *Rumor of Revolt: The 'Great Negro Plot' in Colonial New York* (New York: Free Press, 1985).

[2] Davis, *Rumor of Revolt*, 194.

[3] This paper, which represents work-in-progress, is a continuation of themes we first struck in M. Rediker, 'Good Hands, Stout Heart, and Fast Feet: The History and Culture of Working People in Early America', and P. Linebaugh, 'All the Atlantic Mountains Shook', both in G. Eley and W. Hunt (eds.), *Reviving the English Revolution: Reflections and Elaborations on the Work of Christopher Hill* (London: Verso, 1988). R. Price, *To Slay the Hydra: Dutch Colonial Perspectives on the Saramaka Wars* (Ann Arbor: Karoma, 1983), 15, quotes Mauricius. Our work has received much encouragement

from Christopher Hill, whose essay, 'The Many-Headed Monster', in *Change and Continuity in 17th-Century England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), we particularly value.

[4] Quoted in H. Beckles, *Black Rebellion in Barbadoes: The Struggle Against Slavery, 1627-1838* (Bridgetown, Barbados: Antilles Publications, 1984), p. 107.

[5] The ideological fabrication and the essentially racist project represented by the 'Classical Age' is elaborated in wonderfully exact scholarly thoroughness by M. Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, Volume I: *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987).

[6] These paragraphs, as well as those that follow, owe much to our previous work, viz., Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), and Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the 18th Century; Or, History By the Neck* (Penguin: London, 1991).

[7] P. H. Wood, '"Taking Care of Business" in Revolutionary South Carolina: Republicanism and the Slave Society', in J. J. Crow and L. E. Tise (eds.), *The Southern Experience in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 276. J. Lemisch, 'Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 25 (1968), 371-407.

[8] G. B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 221, 222; J. Lax and W. Pencak, 'The Knowles Riot and the Crisis of the 1740s in Massachusetts', *Perspectives in American History* 19(1976), 166-167; D. M. Clark, 'The Impressment of Seamen in the American Colonies', *Essays in Colonial History Presented to Charles McLean Andrews by his Students* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931), 217; C. Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt: Urban Life in America, 1743-1776* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1955), 115; R. Pares, 'The Manning of the Navy in the West Indies, 1702-1763', Royal Historical Society *Transactions* 20 (1937), 48-49.

[9] Knowles quoted in Lax and Pencak, 'Knowles Riot', 182, 186; emphasis added. On the relationship between 'liberty' and 'right', see Lemisch, 'Jack Tar in the Streets', 400.

[10] See Lax and Pencak, 'Knowles Riot', 205, 214; Rediker, *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea,* 251-253. The interpretation offered here, stressing the ways in which the seamen's actions generated revolutionary ideology, is exactly the opposite of that proposed by Bernard Bailyn, who sees the ideas of revolutionary movement as giving meaning to the seamen's 'diffuse and indeliberate anti-authoritarianism'. See his *Pamphlets of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), 583.

[11] Rediker, *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea,* ch. 5.

[12] D. B. Gaspar, *Bondmen and Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua, with Implications for Colonial British America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) 37, 210; M. Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 335-339; P. H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Norton, 1974); Davis, *Rumor of Revolt,* 158.

[13] See Wood, 'Taking Care of Business', 276, and his more recent '"The

Dream Deferred": Black Freedom Struggles on the Eve of White Independence', in G. Y. Okihiro, ed., *In Resistance: Studies in African, Caribbean, and Afro-American History* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 170, 172-173, 174-175; J. J. Crow, 'Slave Rebelliousness and Social Conflict in North Carolina, 1775 to 1802', *WMQ* 3rd ser. 37 (1980), 85-86; H. Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 87, 200-202.

[14] G. B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 72; B. Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 84; Lemisch, 'Jack Tar in the Streets', 375. For the percentages of black workers in the maritime sector in the early 19th century see S. White, '"We Dwell in Safety and Pursue Our Honest Callings": Free Blacks in New York City, 1783-1810', *Journal of American History* 75(1988), 453-454; I. Dye, 'Early American Merchant Seafarers', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 120 (1976), 358. On South Carolina, see P. D. Morgan, 'Black Life in Eighteenth-Century Charleston', *Perspectives in American History* New ser., 1 (1984), 200; Wood, 'Taking Care of Business', 276; Crow, 'Slave Rebelliousness', 85. On the black seamen in the West Indies, see Gaspar, *Bondmen and Rebels*, 109-111.

[15] Wood, 'The Dream Deferred', 168, 181. Wood argues that the cycle entered a new phase (to last until 1783) when Lord Dunmore made his famous proclamation (November 15, 1775) that offered freedom to any slave who would fight in the king's army (177).

[16] It is important to note that early Americans mobs acted within relatively undeveloped civil societies that lacked police forces and usually lacked standing armies; local militias could not easily be mobilized against them, because militiamen were often part of the crowds. Urban mobs thus created enormous disequilibrium because there were so few other institutions or corporate groups to counterbalance them and guarantee social stability. Local authorities were too close to the action at hand, imperial authorities too far away. Crowds were, therefore, extremely powerful. They often succeeded in achieving their aims and usually managed to protect their own, which meant that individual members of the crowd were rarely arrested and prosecuted. Crowd activity itself was thus infrequently criminalized (even when it was condemned), a singular fact that makes it difficult for the historian to establish the precise social composition of early American crowds, as, for example, George Rudé has done for crowds in England and France in the eighteenth century. See, for example, his *Wilkes and Liberty: A Social Study of 1763-1774*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962. But such difficulties do not make the quest to understand the role of sailors and slaves impossible, for indeed the power of the crowd insured that it would be the object of extensive commentary, if not the kind of direct legal analysis that would have come in the wake of repression.

[17] T. Hutchinson, *The History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts-Bay* ed. L. M. Shaw (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), vol. II, 332; Lemisch, 'Jack Tar in the Streets', 386, 391; Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt*, 309. For specific accounts of the riots, see *Newport Mercury*, July 16, 1974 and June 10, 1765; *New York Gazette, Weekly Post-Boy*, July 12, 1764 and July 18, 1765; *Weyman's New York Gazette*, July 18, 1765.

[18] A. M. Schlesinger, 'Political Mobs and the American Revolution', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 99(1955), 244; Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt*, 313-314; Morgan, 'Black Life', 233; P. Maier,

'The Charleston Mob and the Evolution of Popular Politics in Revolutionary South Carolina, 1765-1784', *Perspectives in American History* 4(1970), 176; Wood, 'Taking Care of Business', 277.

[19] A. F. Young, 'English Plebeian Culture and Eighteenth-Century American Radicalism', in M. & J. Jacob, eds., *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), 193-194. See also S. Rosswurm, *Arms, Country, and Class: The Philadelphia Militia and the 'Lower Sort' during the American Revolution* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 32-33; D. Hoerder, *Crowd Action in Revolutionary Massachusetts, 1765-1780* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), 241. Gage quoted in Schlesinger, 'Political Mobs', 246.

[20] L. R. Boyer, 'Lobster Backs, Liberty Boys, and Laborers in the Streets: New York's Golden Hill and Nassau Street Riots', *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 57(1973), 289-308; H. B. Zobel, *The Boston Massacre* (New York: Norton, 1970); L. K. Wroth and H. B. Zobel, eds., *Legal Papers of John Adams* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), vol. III, 266; Hoerder, *Crowd Action*, ch. 13; Rosswurm, *Arms, Country, and Class*, 46-48.

[21] Bull quoted in Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt*, 313-314; see also 114-115; E. Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 54. Lemisch, 'Jack Tar in the Streets', 391, Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 38-39, and P. S. Foner, *Blacks in the American Revolution* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975), 37-38, are among the few historians who call attention to the presence of African-Americans in revolutionary crowds. Others have neglected the issue, perhaps because they distrusted some of these descriptions of 'boys, sailors, and negroes' in colonial crowds, seeing them as self-serving efforts to protect well-to-do citizens who participated in mobs or as means to criticize mob activity by blaming it on the poorer parts of urban society. This seems to be the position of Dirk Hoerder, who admits that seamen and boys were common members of Boston crowds but argues that the presence of negroes was 'negligible' (*Crowd Action*, 374). Sometimes the descriptions of crowds cannot be taken at face value, as when the Boston town meeting sought in 1747 to lay all blame upon 'Foreign seamen, Servants, Negroes, and other Persons of Mean and Vile Condition' for the Knowles Riot, when in fact these groups could not have made up the 'several thousand' who took part in the protest (even if these 'Persons of Mean and Vile Condition' did in fact lead the riot, especially in its early stages). See the resolution of the Boston Town Meeting in *Boston News-Letter*, Dec. 17, 1747. Something similar was going on in John Adams's famous characterization of the mob involved in the Boston Massacre in 1770 quoted above. And yet other sources, written with less tendentious purposes, make it clear that such descriptions of various colonial crowds contained a strong element of truth.

[22] G. B. Nash, B. G. Smith, and D. Hoerder, 'Laboring Americans and the American Revolution', *Labor History* 24(1983), 418, 435. (Nash, Smith, and Hoerder note that social structure varied by city as they delineate common occupational patterns.) See also Nash, *Urban Crucible*, 260, 320-321, and S. V. Salinger, *'To Serve Well and Faithfully': Labor and Indentured Servitude in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 101-102, epilogue; Foner, *Tom Paine*, 48-50; Rosswurm, *Arms, Country, and Class*, 37; Morgan, 'Black Life', 206-207, 219; Davis, *Rumor of Revolt*, 81, 194, 248 (quotation of Horsmanden); Linebaugh, 'A Letter to Boston's "Radical Americans"'; Gaspar, *Bondmen and Rebels*, 138, 204; Rediker, *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, ch. 1; N.A.T. Hall, 'Maritime Maroons: *Grand*

Marronage from the Danish West Indies', *WMQ* 3rd ser. 42(1985), 491-492; Linebaugh & Rediker, 'The Many-Headed Hydra', paper presented to the American Studies Association, 1988, 22.

[23] H. Wellenreuther, 'Rejoinder' to Nash, Smith, and Hoerder in 'Labor in the Era of the American Revolution: An Exchange', *Labor History* 24(1983), 442. Timothy quoted in Maier, 'Charleston Mob', 181; E. Countryman, *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760-1790* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 37, 45 (quotation).

[24] Linebaugh, 'A Letter to Boston's "Radical Americans"'; William Godard quoted in C. G. Steffen, *The Mechanics of Baltimore: Workers and Politics in the Age of Revolution, 1763-1812* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 73; Gouverneur Morris to Mr. Penn, May 20, 1774, in P. Force, ed., *American Archives* 4th ser. (Washington, D.C., 1837), vol. I, 343; Governor William Bull of South Carolina, quoted in Maier, 'Charleston Mob', 185; *Poor Richard, 1747* in L. W. Labaree, ed., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), vol. III (1745-1750), 106.

[25] Maier, 'Charleston Mob', 181, 186, 188, and Maier, 'Popular Uprising and Civil Authority in Eighteenth-Century America', *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser. 27 (1970), 33-35; Hoerder, *Crowd Action*, 378-388. Gordon Wood notes that 'once-fervent Whig leaders began to sound like the Tories of 1775' when confronted by the mobs, popular committees, and 'People Out-of-Doors' in the 1780s. See his *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1969), 319-328, 326 (quotation).

[26] Wroth and Zobel (eds.), *Legal Papers of John Adams*, vol. III, 269, and S.Kaplan, *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1973), 8; E. H. Richardson, *Standards and Colors of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982),

[27] Zobel, *The Boston Massacre*, 192, 199.

[28] This section depends on chapter nine of *The London Hanged*, 'If You Plead for Your Life, Plead in Irish'. W.E.H. Lecky, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1893) is the best traditional account, but it should be checked against modern scholarship summarized in K. A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). This section is indebted to D. Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland: A Study of Gaelic Munster in the 18th Century*, (Dublin, 1925), which describes what we think is unique, viz., aristocratic verse forms applied to a proletarian experience whose consequent feeling – nostalgia – has been so successfully exploited by bourgeois nationalism on both sides of the water.

[29] Lecky, *History of Ireland*, vol. II, 226. Richard Musgrave writes that the Whiteboy movement began around 1759; see his *Memoirs of the Different Rebellions in Ireland* (Dublin, 1802, 3rd ed.), vol. I, 36-54. But most modern historians agree that the Whiteboys first appeared in 1761. Although their movement waned by 1765, their name lived on to describe a variety of agrarian movements throughout the 1780s and well into the 19th century. The best modern studies are M. Wall, 'The Whiteboys', in D. T. Williams, ed., *Secret Societies in Ireland* (Gill and Macmillan: Dublin, 1973), 13-25 and especially J. S. Donnelly, Jr., 'The Whiteboy Movement, 1761-5', *Irish Historical Studies* 21(1978-9), 21-54. Lecky's pages on the Whiteboys are especially valuable because they preceded the destruction of the Castle archives in 1916; see also Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 61-67. M.R. Beames,

Peasants and Power: Whiteboy Movements and their Control in Pre-Famine Ireland (New York, 1983), provides a useful study of the Whiteboy movements of the 19th century. Elsewhere we have discussed the Irish-African connection as it appeared in the 17th century Caribbean. That experience only grew with the momentus migrations of the 18th century, and it spread to as yet unstudied areas in Ireland and in West Africa. We think that it was a major development as the two societies had much in common – a pastoral economy, the relative absence of a commercial sector, the predominance of large kinship groupings as the social basis of production, the absence of 'individualism', and the emphasis upon collective mores, identities, music, and culture. These commonalities represented a basis for exchange when these two peoples found themselves occupying the most cooperative forms of 18th century work – gang labor.

[30] Donnelly, 'Whiteboy Movement', 26, 24, 34-35, 37-38, 39, 41-43; Beames, *Peasants and Power*, 33-34; 'A Succinct Account of a Set of Miscreants in the Counties of *Waterford, Cork, Limerick,* and *Tipperary,* called *Bougheleen Bawins* (i.e. White Boys)', *The Gentleman's Magazine* 32 (1762), 182-183, in which is noted the capture of a man who 'has been some time in the *French* service'. See also Linebaugh, *The London Hanged,* ch. 9.

[31] T.W. Moody, et al., *A New History of Ireland* vol. VIII: *A Chronology of Irish History to 1976* (1982); J.A. Froude, *The English in Ireland in the 18th Century* (New York, 1874), vol. II, 25; Wall, 'The Whiteboys', 16; Donnelly, 'Whiteboy Movement', 28.

[32] Lecky, *History of Ireland,* vol. II, 41-45; Wall, 'Whiteboys', 19, 20. It is worth noting that Sheehy was the only priest known to have been involved with the Whiteboys. The overwhelming majority of priests were strongly opposed, which, according to Maurine Wall, helps to explain the increasing incidence of the popular intimidation of priests in the 1770s.

[33] Wall, 'Whiteboys', 18; J. Connolly, *Labour in Irish History* (London: Bookmarks, 1987), 43. Richard Aston, chief justice of the Court of Common Pleas in Ireland, noted that 'papist and protestant were promiscuously concerned' in the Whiteboy movement; see Donnelly, 'Whiteboy Movement', 46.

[34] C. Maxwell, *Dublin under the Georges, 1714-1830* (1936), 270; A.G.L. Shaw, *Convicts and Colonies: A Study of Penal Transportation from Great Britian to Australia and Other Parts of the British Empire* (1966), 173; J. H. Huston, 'An Investigation of the Inarticulate: Philadelphia's White Oaks', *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser. 18(1971); T. Prior, *A List of Absentees in Ireland* (Dublin, 1769), 3rd ed. The drought of 1765 and ensuing starvation in Ireland forced many to migrate to London and to America. See Donnelly, 'Whiteboy Movement', 52-53.

[35] K. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* ed. Dona Torr (London, 1957), 315. T.S. Ashton & J. Sykes, *The Coal Industry in the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester, 1964), 2nd edition.

[36] T.S. Ashton, *Economic Fluctuations in England, 1700-1800* (1959), 181; W. Beveridge *et al., Prices and Wages in England from the Twelfth to the Nineteenth Century,* vol. I, *Price Tables: Mercantile Era* (1939), 292; *Berrow's Worcester Journal,* 19 May 1768; *The Westminster Journal,* 14 May 1768;

[37] 'The Information of James Brown', *Sessions Papers,* Corporation of London Record Office, London, Bundle 1768.

[38] *Berrow's Worcester Journal,* 12 May 1768; *The Public Advertizer,* 21 July 1768; 'Memorials of a Dialogue betwixt several Seamen a certain Victualler & a S-l Master in the Late Riot', *Shelburne Papers,* vol. XCXXX, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

[39] *The Westminster Journal,* 16 July, 1768; *Berrow's Worcester Journal,* 23 June 1768, 14 July 1768; T.S. 11/818/2696, Public Record Office, London; Foote, *The Tailors; A Tragedy for Warm Weather* (1778), 31; Horace Walpole to Strafford, June 25 1768, in W.S. Lewis *et al* (eds) *Horace Walpole's Correspondence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), vol. 35, 324; see also vol. 23, 33; Donnelly, 'Whiteboy Movement', 50.

[40] It may be true, as John Rule has recently pointed out, that the verb 'to strike' was already in circulation among the working class of London by 1765. This would not alter the accepted etymology of the term, its origins among the labors of seamen, nor would it lessen the importance of the events of 1768, which represented the greatest strike then known in Britain. See the *Oxford English Dictionary,* s.v. 'strike', and the *Bulletin for the Society for the Study of Labour History* 54(1989), 103.

[41] J. P. de Castro, *The Gordon Riots* (1926), and C. Hibbert, *King Mob: The Story of Lord George Gordon and the Riots of 1780* (1958) are two good monographical introductions. They may be supplemented by the materials in J. Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances in England, 1700-1870* (1979), T. Hayter, *The Army and the Crowd in Mid-Georgian London* (1978), and G. Rude, 'The Gordon Riots: A Study of Rioters and their Victims', in his *Paris and London in the Eighteenth century* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 268-292. The story as presented here draws upon the fuller treatment and the sources presented in Linebaugh, *The London Hanged.*

[42] *The Morning Post,* 9 June 1780.

[43] 'London Prisoners', Sessions Papers, 1780, Corporation of London Record Office, London; *The Proceedings . . . of the Old Bailey,* 8 December 1779 and 14 April 1779; *The London Chronicle,* 6-8 June 1780.

[44] On the incidence of mutiny, see A. N. Gilbert, 'The Nature of Mutiny in the British Navy in the Eighteenth Century', in D. M. Masterson, ed., *Naval History: The Sixth Symposium of the U.S. Naval Academy* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1987), 111-121.

[45] *The Proceedings,* 28 June 1780; Indictment Bills, Gaol Book, Sessions Files, vol. 28, June 1780, Corporation of London Record Office. See also O. Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1787), and O. Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1789), both edited and republished in F. D. Adams and B. Sanders (eds.), *Three Black Writers in Eighteenth Century England* (Belmont, California, 1971). It should be noted that Glover, Bowsey, and Hyde (the sailor) represented half of those tried, presumed by the state to have been the ringleaders, for the attack on Newgate.

[46] Ignatius Sancho *Letters* (1782), republished in Adams and Sanders, *Three Black Writers* (Belmont, Ca., 1971).

[47] Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments,* in Sanders, *Three Black Writers,* 106; Gardiner's activities reported in *The London Chronicle,* 4-8 July 1780. Discussions of the size of the London Black population may be found in P. Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984); J. Walvin, *The Black Presence: A Documentary History of the Negro in England, 1555-1860* (New York, 1971); F.O. Shyllon, *Black People in Britain* (1977) and *Black Slaves in Britain* (1974).

[48] In 'A list of Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors in the War of the Revolution' several 'John' or 'Jonathan' Glovers are listed as deserting or captured before 1780, and some are described as of dark complexion. For a fuller discussion of Glover's identity, and of Bowsey's, discussed below, see Linebaugh, *The London Hanged,* ch. 10.

[49] Fryer, *Staying Power*, ch. 4; J. Fielding, *Extracts from the Criminal Law* (1768); F. Lorimer, 'Black Slaves and English Liberty: a Re-examination of Racial Slavery in England', paper presented to the International Conference on the history of Blacks in Britain (1981), quoted in Fryer, *Staying Power*, 203, 541.

[50] F. Grose, *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (London, 1785).