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Secretary of State

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Gaspee Commission Report, 1773

In June, 1773, a year after the *Gaspee* attack, the King's commissioners report that due to coerced and contradictory testimony, they are unable to name any of the attackers.

The honorable the commissioners, appointed by royal commission, for examining into the attacking and destroying his Majesty's armed schooner the *Gaspee*, commanded by Lieutenant Dudingston, and wounding the said Lieutenant, having laid before us, Justices of the Superior Court of Judicature, Court of Assize, &c., within and throughout the Colony of Rhode Island, two examinations of Aaron Briggs, two examinations of Patrick Earle, the examination of Peter May, the examination of William Dickinson, the deposition of Samuel Tompkins, Samuel Thurston, and of Somerset and Jack, indented servants, for our advisement thereon:

It appeareth unto us from our consideration had thereupon, that no particular person or persons are made mention of as being concerned in that atrocious crime, except in the examination of Aaron Briggs, a negro, and of Peter May, one of the *Gaspee*'s people. The confession of the said Aaron upon his first examination was made in consequence of illegal threats from Capt. Linzee of hanging him (the said Aaron) at the yard arm if he would not discover who the persons were that destroyed the *Gaspee*; and besides, most of the circumstances and facts related in both of his examinations are contradictions repugnant to each other, and many of them impossible in their nature. It is evident from the depositions of Tompkins, Thurston, and Aaron's two fellow servants, that he was at home the whole of that night on which the *Gaspee* was attacked; especially as there was no boat on that part of the island in which he could possibly pass the bay in the manner by him described. In short, another circumstance which renders the said Aaron's testimony extremely suspicious, is Capt. Linzee's absolutely refusing to deliver him up to be examined by one of the Justices of the said Superior Court when legally demanded.

Peter May, in his deposition, mentions one person only, by the name of Greene, whom he says, he saw before on board the *Gaspee*; but the family of Greene being very numerous in this colony, and the said Peter not giving the Christian name or describing him in such a manner as he could be found out, it is impossible for us to know at present the person referred to. Upon the whole, we are all of opinion that the several matters and things contained in said depositions do not induce a probable suspicion, that

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persons mentioned therein, or either or any of them, are guilty of the crime aforesaid. It is, however, the fixed determination of the Superior Court to exert every legal effort in detecting and bringing to condign punishment the persons concerned in destroying the schooner Gaspee.

And if the honorable commissioners are of a different sentiment we should be glad to receive their opinion for our better information.

Rhode Island, June 11, 1773

S. HOPKINS, Chief Justice

June 11, 1773

J. Helme, M. Bowler, J. C. Bennet, Assistant Justices

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