

Gaspee Essay

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Thank you, your honor, my name is Joseph Wanton. I feel that under no circumstances should these scoundrels sitting in front of you today be set free to roam the streets again. These men have committed the worst act of defiance against their own country: treason. Their very presence in this courtroom has defiled the name of our King and His land on which most of us, save a few, appreciate. There is so much evidence against these so-called Gaspee Raiders that their conviction provides for itself. They should suffer the same ill fates as all others who have disowned their country in this way: namely being hanged, and drawn and quartered. Although these heinous crimes need no explanation, I will do so now.

The first, and most obvious case to present is that His Majesty's Ship Gaspee was destroyed by being burned in the water as she sailed, which in itself is a crime. It clearly stated in the Dockyards Act that any citizen who is caught burning a ship of our crown is "Adjudged guilty of felony and shall suffer death" [1]. This crime is considered high treason, as it is no misdemeanor. To those of you who doubt the King's power in this case, think again. Because of the Treason Act of Henry the eighth, the jurisdiction of the Crown is expanded to all places where treason against it is committed [2].

Those reasons alone were enough to constitute treason, but the destroyers were not content with destruction of Royal property. One of the men decided to attack one of His Majesty's soldiers, Lieutenant Dudingston, just because he happened to be in their way. I believe that the assailant among us is none other than Joseph. Bucklin. I have heard reports from my sources that he has been

the least affected by this story, meaning he has something to hide. He was heard to have said; "I have killed the rascal" [3] after a gunshot was fired, the very same which threatened Dudingston's life. The next day, a drunken citizen was seen walking the streets with Lieutenant Dudingston's uniform hat on bragging that he had been shot [4]..

Of course, Dudingston was just following his orders, which were, "to prevent breakers of the revenue laws and to stop illicit trade so long and so successfully carried out in the colonies." [5] The colonists were angered at the enforcement of the laws and the power that the Crown stood for, but they have no power against it. This is because of the Declaratory Act, which gives England complete and total control of the colonies as long as they are chartered. The colonists agreed to be ruled by our King when the area was settled, and there are much better ways of making your point that do not involve burning a ship and wounding an officer of His Royal Highness. So today, your honor, I make a stand against these men so that they are used as an example for the next atrocity that is committed against the country we all owe our lives to. This cannot and will not be justified in an English court of law. Ask yourself this: if the smallest colony can do this and go unnoticed and unpunished, how much harm can the largest colony inflict?

Footnotes

1. Staples, pg xxii
2. *ibid*, pg xxlii
3. Burning of the Gaspee
4. *ibid*
5. Gaspee affair

Works Cited

Gaspee Affair: Prelude to a Tea Party. Providence, RI: Leonard Stewart Smith, 1972.

Staples, William R. *The Documentary History of the Destruction of the Gaspee*. Rhode Island Publications Society.

"The Burning of the Gaspee." *Gaspee Days Souvenir Program* 3 June 1966.