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THE EASTON FAMILY OF SOUTHEAST MASSACHUSETTS: THE DYNAMICS SURROUNDING FIVE GENERATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM, 1753-1935

By

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M. A. University of Montana, 1996

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for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Montana

July, 2006

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Price, George R., Ph.D., July, 2006

Interdisciplinary

The Easton Family of Southeast Massachusetts: The Dynamics Surrounding Five Generations of Human Rights Activism, 1753-1935

Chairperson: Tunde Adeleke

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Although there have been plenty of notable individual human rights activists in American history, rarely do we see examples of entire families of notable activists, or a significant activist tradition continuing in one family over several generations. The Eastons are an exception to that rule, producing five successive generations of notable human rights, anti-racism, and anti-slavery activists. How this tradition of activism was encouraged and maintained for five generations, spanning a period of nearly two hundred years, is the most important subject of this dissertation.

The first chapter of this dissertation explores the social and experiential context that formed the Easton family and initiated their activist tradition. The dynamics that are examined there include: the relations between Africans and Native Americans in early colonial Massachusetts; their response to the English assertion of dominion and claimed superiority over people of color in the colony; and the struggle of Caesar Easton (the father of James and Moses Easton) and his Titticut Wampanoag Indian community to keep their remaining lands in the mid-18th century.

Chapters two through five each focus on the life of one particular Easton family member, while demonstrating the connecting threads of influence and tradition between that particular person and other members of the extended family, across the five generations. These focal individuals include: Revolutionary War veteran, iron products manufacturer, and leader of the first sit-in protests in American history, James Easton (1754-1830); noted abolitionist and author, Hosea Easton (1799-1837); abolitionist, school integration activist, and printer/publisher, Benjamin F. Roberts (1815-1881); and teacher, playwright, and political activist William Edgar Easton (1861-1935).

As a case study, seen in changing contexts over time, the Easton family of southeastern Massachusetts provides us with particular examples of some elements and processes by which determined parents, families, and communities have successfully encouraged and nurtured the character traits necessary to help people to respond to social injustice with opposing action, and to believe that they actually possess the power to become agents of major social change. It is hoped that this study can provide some insight into how such processes have actually functioned in historic circumstances.

Preface

The ways in which racial ideologies have shaped the structure of American society are diverse, multi-layered, inconsistent, and often modified by factors not related to race or racism. At various times and locations in U.S. history, social hierarchies have been assembled, dismantled, and reassembled, with the primary classification criteria shifting back and forth between race, class, ethnicity, economic status, and, to some degree, level of acquired education. The only constant in this dynamic process throughout U.S. history is that wealthy males who could be classified as "white persons" have consistently been positioned at the top of the hierarchy. At the national level, nearly all of the U.S. presidents have been white males of considerably more than average wealth, and so have the overwhelming majority of state governors, and the majority of owners of nationwide or multi-state businesses. But at the local town and city level there have always been more exceptions to this rule. Although most of the exceptions have occurred since the early 1960s, such as the advent of Afro-American mayors of major U.S. cities and the slowly increasing number of women and minority corporate executives and academics, we can find exceptional examples as far back as the early colonial era.

A descriptive list of such examples of non-white-male members of the uppermiddle and higher strata of American and colonial English society, dating back to the 17th century, could include:

Anthony Johnson, an African indentured servant of Jamestown, Virginia colony, who, by 1651, had become a free owner of 250 acres of Virginia land and had five servants of his own.¹

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Paul Cuffe, son of an African father and a Wampanoag Indian mother, born free in Massachusetts in 1759, who became a sea captain and owner of a successful transatlantic shipping business, which he built from scratch. Cuffe used some of his wealth to establish a school in the town near his residence, and to carry a shipload of African American citizens who desired to emigrate to Africa to Sierra Leone, in 1815.²

James Forten, a Philadelphian of African descent, who, after being held captive by the British during the American Revolution, worked his way up in a sailmaker's shop to become foreman and, at the age of thirty-two, bought the business from his employer. His success in the sailmaking business allowed him to become relatively wealthy for an American of any color in the early republic, and he became a well-known philanthropist, donating thousands of dollars over the course of his life, primarily to abolitionist causes.³

James Easton, a Revolutionary War veteran of mixed African and Wampanoag Indian descent (and a key figure in this study), who, with the help of his sons, established an iron implement manufacturing business and a small academic and vocational school in North Bridgewater (now Brockton), Massachusetts, during the first two decades of the 19th century. He and his sons also farmed 120 acres of land in the same location.⁴

George Washington Bush, a "mulatto" who became a very successful butcher and cattle trader in 1840's St. Louis. He used some of his accumulated wealth to help finance a wagon train expedition of midwestern American citizens who desired to emigrate to the Oregon Territory, including himself and his "white" wife, in 1844. Bush was the only man of color in the wagon train. After eventually settling on the Olympic peninsula in what is now Washington state, he became one of the leading citizens of Thurston County, Washington, and one of his sons was elected to the state legislature.⁵

Many more exemplary persons could be added to the list, especially if we include the late 19th and the 20th centuries. All had to overcome a variety of obstacles, some related to American racism, and some related simply to the fact that they had no inherited wealth and therefore had to create their own opportunities and advantages and capitalize on the few fortunate circumstances which presented themselves. It should be noted that there was no government assistance for higher education, job training, or small business loans in the eras prior to the 1930s, although people occasionally received help from private philanthropists. The significance of their accomplishments increases the more closely we examine the obstacles, including the vigorous and concerted efforts by many white Americans of the new republic and the antebellum era to *create* obstacles in the path towards success and inclusion for people of color.

As the economic value of the productions of slave labor (especially cotton), and the many industries which relied on such products, increased dramatically between 1800 and 1850, so did popular support for the institution of slavery and for racism. Consequently, free people of color and anybody who opposed the institution of slavery became popular targets for discrimination and abuse, sometimes with violent fervor. This anti-color and anti-abolitionist sentiment reached its most fervent

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pitch during the 1830s, at the same time that abolitionism was rapidly on the rise. During that decade, rioting and other forms of mob violence against people of color and abolitionists occurred in most northern cities, especially in cities which had relatively large colored communities, like Philadelphia, New York, and Hartford. Besides the riots and general viciousness towards people of color in the first half of the 19th century, posters and cartoons were displayed pervasively in various public places, caricaturizing and ridiculing them. Such images even appeared in school textbooks.

The institution of slavery had created a fixed association in the minds of most Americans in which people of color, whether free or enslaved, were synonymous with the most menial and servile physical labor, and with a corresponding low social status. Any attempt to deconstruct this stereotype and create alternative images of people of color as equal or potentially equal American citizens was met with adamant opposition. For example, apprenticeship, which was the primary means for training in skilled trades before the industrial factory era, was traditionally for "white" males only, and racial discrimination in hiring was normal. Only a few American colleges admitted people of color during this era, and there was violent opposition, in the "free North", when "blacks", with the help of "white" abolitionists, attempted to start their own colleges. The means by which free people of color resisted this opposition to their own social uplift and inclusion is a crucial element of this study.

Several key questions arise as we learn about people such as those listed above, who achieved various degrees of social and economic success in early American society in spite of such adverse circumstances. What were the different personal and group dynamics that led to such successes? How much of a role did

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individual character strengths play in the process? Did the individuals and families of color who experienced higher-than-average material and educational attainments in that era have successful role models from their own social groups or families to inspire them? Or, did they have to look much further away for role models, such as in accounts of distant accomplished persons of color found in newspapers, pamphlets, public speeches, or books? How much of a role did philanthropists or other benefactors, such as guardians, teachers, ministers, or abolitionists, play in creating advantageous circumstances for these exemplary people of color? How uniform or varied was white opposition to the advancement of people of color to positions of social and economic equality with themselves? We know that, regionally, antiequality beliefs were much more uniformly held in the South than in the North, but did attitudes about race vary much from town to town or state to state in the "free" North? More specifically, does the historical record reveal windows of opportunity for people of color created by pockets of egalitarianism and tolerance within microcosms of white American society, at the town or neighborhood level, in particular places, at particular times? These are some of the questions to be explored in this dissertation.

Most of these questions are addressed and possible answers are offered through an examination of the life of James Easton (1754-1830) of North Bridgewater, Massachusetts, and the lives and circumstances of several of his children, grandchildren, and some other members of their extended family. A conscious tradition of resistance and social advancement developed and was maintained in this family, throughout the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth, which both contributed to and mirrored developments within the larger

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American society. The evolving and varied social and cultural contexts in which Easton and his family lived can provide us with a very illuminating picture of some of the circumstances through which persons of color might find both motivation and means to overcome the many obstacles to equal inclusion in mainstream American society.

The fact that James Easton chose to remain in the small town of North Bridgewater for the last fifty of his seventy-six years on Earth, is remarkable and informative in itself, while it also raises some key questions. North Bridgewater was a town in which people of color made up a minute one and one half percent of the population. Even so, there was considerable opposition to their pursuit of equal opportunity, and to James Easton's efforts at business success and equal standing among the similarly-accomplished "white" males of the community in particular. That opposition was painfully described within the writings of Easton's son, Hosea, which shall be examined later in this work. Nevertheless, the opposition from the Euro-Americans of that town was not unanimous, and the evidence shows that Easton and his sons at different times formed business partnerships with local whites, bought and sold land with them, and even intermarried with them. It is also certain that the great majority of customers for Easton's iron products were whites.

Not only did James and his wife, Sarah, live out most of their years in North Bridgewater, but three of their seven children also remained there until their deaths, many of their descendants have lived out their lives in that town (called "Brockton" since 1874), and many are still there today. Although the records show that they met with some considerable adversity at times, they also were able to do well and prosper. Apparently, James and Sarah Easton felt that they would be better off staying in

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North Bridgewater than they would by relocating to nearby cities like Boston or New Bedford, which had much larger populations of people of color and corresponding community support systems, and where they also had relatives. Why, then, did they make this significant choice? A careful examination of their social and cultural circumstances, and their individual character traits, can help explain some likely reasons.

The story of James Easton and his descendants provides us with an illustration of another important human social dynamic- the sources of the motivation and courage necessary to become activists for fundamental social change. The apparently innate human sense of the existence of justice and injustice, shaped as it is by social laws, cultural norms, religious beliefs, and other factors, is expressed and suppressed in ways that vary greatly from individual to individual. In the United States, we have had, throughout our history, certain individuals who were exceptionally committed to remedying not only the injustices that they experienced themselves, but those injustices which afflicted and oppressed large numbers of others- other individuals, as well as other cultural, ethnic, or class groups. Although there have been plenty of notable individual human rights activists in American history, rarely do we see examples of entire families of notable activists, or a significant activist tradition continuing in one family over several generations. We have often found cases in which social activism has reduced the amount of time that parents spend with their children, and, perhaps partly in consequence of that, activism will often skip a generation or two within a family. The Eastons are an exception to that rule, producing five successive generations of notable human rights, anti-racism, and antislavery activists. How this tradition of activism was encouraged and maintained for

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five generations, spanning a period of nearly two hundred years, is the most important subject of this dissertation.

The first chapter of this dissertation explores the social and experiential context that formed the Easton family and initiated their activist tradition. The dynamics that are examined there include: the relations between Africans and Native Americans in early colonial Massachusetts; the English assertion of dominion and claimed superiority over people of color in the colony; the possible impact on the first Eastons of color caused by early Quaker opposition to slavery; and the struggle of Caesar Easton (the father of James and Moses Easton) and his Titticut Wampanoag Indian community to keep their remaining lands in the mid-18th century.

Chapters two through five each focus on the life of one particular Easton family member, while demonstrating the connecting threads of influence and tradition between that particular person and other members of the extended family, across the five generations. Besides James Easton (1754-1830), these focal individuals include: noted abolitionist and author, Hosea Easton (1799-1837); abolitionist, school integration activist, and printer/publisher, Benjamin F. Roberts (1815-1881); and teacher, playwright, and political activist William Edgar Easton (1861-1935).

Questions regarding the role of social context, the extent and variation of racist and/or egalitarian attitudes among local whites, the creation of obstacles to and opportunities for the social advancement and inclusion of people of color in America, become even more vital when they are explored through the dynamics behind the creation and maintenance of an activist tradition within this one particular family. As a case study, seen in changing contexts over time, the Easton family of North Bridgewater, Massachusetts provides us with particular examples of some elements

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and processes by which determined parents, families, and communities have successfully encouraged and nurtured the character traits necessary to help people to respond to social injustice with opposing action, and to believe that they actually possess the power to become agents of major social change. It is hoped that this study can provide some insight into how such processes have actually functioned in historic circumstances, and that what is learned here can be applied to similar circumstances in our present world.

¹ Charles Johnson and Patricia Smith, <u>Africans in America: America's Journey through Slavery</u>, New York, Harcourt Brace and Co., 1998. pg. 37-39. Darlene Clark Hine, William C. Hine, and Stanley Harrold, <u>The African American Odyssey</u>, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 2003, pg. 51-52.

²Lamont D Thomas, <u>Rise to Be a People: A Biography of Paul Cuffe</u>, Urbana, University of Chicago Press, 1986. Wiggins, Rosalind Cobb, <u>Captain Paul Cuffe's Logs and Letters</u>, 1808-1817, Washington, D.C., Howard University Press, 1996

³ Julie Winch, <u>A Gentleman of Color: the Life of James Forten</u>, London, and New York, Oxford University Press, 2003.

⁴George R.Price, and James Brewer Stewart, eds., <u>To Heal the Scourge of Prejudice: The Life and Writings</u> of Hosea Easton, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1999

⁵ Quintard Taylor, <u>In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the West, 1528-1990</u>, N.Y., W.W. Norton and Co., 1999. James de T. Abajian, <u>Blacks and Their Contributions to the American West:</u> <u>A Bibliography and Union List of Library Holdings Through 1970</u>, Boston, G.K.Hall, 1974.

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Chapter One

The Origins of the Easton Family and their Activist Tradition

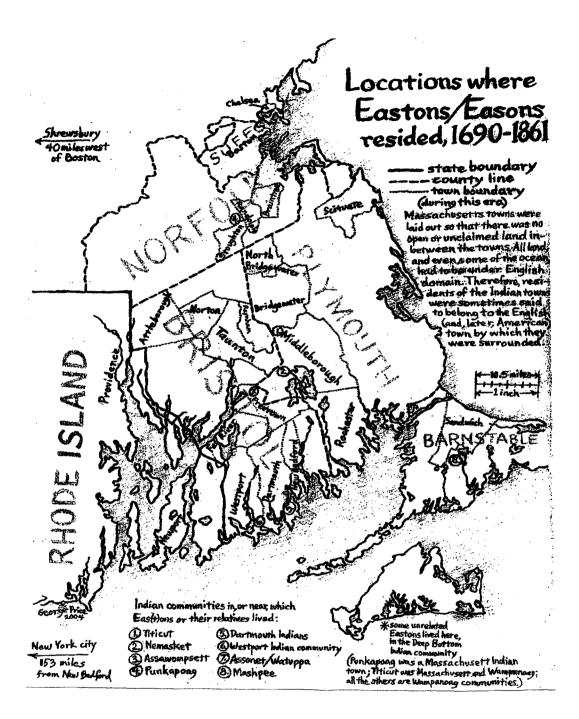
In 1789, when James and Sarah Easton led the first known sit-in protest against racial segregation in history, they were compelled in part by a long series of personal and ancestral struggles against English colonialism and American racism. The Easton family was formed during the late 17th century, at a time in English colonial history when racial concepts and categories were still nascent and divisions between social elites and commoners were more clearly-defined and consequential than race. From its inception, members of this family defied racial definitions as consistently as they defied racism, slavery, and social injustice. The family began with the blending of people of African and Native American descent who were the "servants" of Rhode Island Quakers, and eventually included people of European ancestry as well. The social and historical context which moved such diverse peoples to join together into families and communities and engage in resistance against their common oppressors is essential to the unveiling of the Easton family saga.

The Easton family's tradition of active opposition to social injustice began while they were part of the mixed Wampanoag and Massachuset Indian community of Titticut in the mid-18th century, as they fought to keep their lands from being confiscated by local English colonists.¹ Their activism increased after the American Revolution, when veterans in the family and other veterans of color in their community were denied the equal rights for which they had fought and suffered. Several family members in the next two generations became abolitionists. At least one fought in the Civil War. Two went west to California during the Gold Rush. Another became a teacher in the post-Reconstruction era South, and later a published

author and political activist in Texas and California. For five generations, over a span of some 200 years, a thread of active resistance to oppression and social injustice was carried on by at least some Easton family members in each one of those generations. The writings of some of the later Easton activists clearly show that they were conscious of the legacy of the earlier Eastons who went before them.

The roots of this remarkable family tradition can be found and better understood through an examination of the diverse circumstances and influences present in the southeastern Massachusetts colonial communities in which the Eastons first lived. The history of relations between people of African and Native American descent in this region is especially pertinent to understanding the Easton family, for it was through the joining of such people that the roots of this family germinated. The common struggles of both groups, as they sought to survive and live fully under the oppressive reach of a society intent on dehumanizing and dispossessing them, was also the seedbed of Easton family activism.

The relations between Africans and Native Americans in colonial and early national Massachusetts, and how the Eastons were situated in this context, will be the focus of this chapter. Rather than deal here with all tribal groups in the land that is now the state of Massachusetts, I will focus instead on the two tribal groups in eastern Massachusetts which were more closely connected to the Easton family and to their social and geographic environment: the Wampanoags in Plymouth Colony and vicinity, and the Massachuset tribe in Massachusetts Bay Colony, whose ancestral homelands bordered the Wampanoags on the north (see map on next page). Relations with the English people in their environment will also be dealt with, especially the English methods of acquiring land.



Africans were first brought to Massachusetts possibly as early as 1638. One document certainly suggests this and there is no known documentary evidence that confirms any earlier date. An entry in Massachusetts Bay Colony governor John Winthrop's journal for February 26, 1638 mentions a ship, the *Desire*, which had just returned from a seven-month voyage, and whose cargo included, "some cotton, and tobacco, and negroes."² But, for several reasons, we can not be certain that those "negroes" were of African origin or ancestry. The Massachusetts Bay colonists had already begun to enslave American Indians the year before, during the Pequot War, and had shipped many of those enslaved Pequots to the English Caribbean colonies. Since the *Desire* had stopped in the British Caribbean before returning to Salem, and since Indians were frequently referred to by the English of that era as "negroes", the Africanness of the *Desire*'s human cargo is brought into question.

Another example of the questionable origins of enslaved persons in New England is found in a reference to "negro" slaves being brought into Massachusetts from the Bahamas in 1639. Contextual evidence and the afore-mentioned linguistic peculiarity suggest that these enslaved persons could just as possibly have been Indians as Africans, either Pequots or Caribbean natives. George Moore quoted an Englishman of Providence Island in the British Caribbean who, in 1638, referred to a shipment of enslaved Pequots from Connecticut as, "the Cannibal negroes brought from New England."³ The frequency of references to Native American Indians, both "full bloods" and mixed, as "negroes", "mulattoes", "colored people", and even "blacks", has been profusely documented, first by Jack Forbes, and more recently by other historians.⁴ As a result of this imprecision in racial labeling--before racial categories

were more clearly defined, beginning with Carolus Linneaus in 1735—we often can not know exactly what sort of people of color are being referred to in the records.

How, then, can we determine when references to enslaved "negroes" actually mean persons captured in Africa, rather than Native American captives? If the reference includes an actual mention of African origin, such as "Africans", "Guinea man", or "Moor", or a specific African location as being the place of capture or purchase, we can safely assume that those referred to were indeed Africans. Physical descriptions of enslaved individuals that include distinctly African characteristics can also be useful in confirming African origins and identity. The best source for that type of verification can be found in runaway slave advertisements, which usually provided carefully detailed physical descriptions of the escapees to better facilitate their speedy return.

Based on such types of more specific evidence, the earliest clear references to Africans as slaves in Massachusetts occurred in 1644 and 1645. The 1644 incident is found in a well-documented court case of a dispute between crew members of a slave ship that had sailed out of Boston and captured Africans on the Guinea coast.⁵ In 1645, an Englishman named Emanuel Downing advised others in Rhode Island that, should they enter into a "Just warre" with the Narragansett Indians, they "might easily have men, woemen and children enough to exchange for Moores,...", which implies that New Englanders were certainly involved in the African trade by that time. ⁶

At what point Africans and American Indians first came into contact with each other in the Massachusetts colonies, either as slaves, indentured servants, or free people, is not known. Depending upon the real origins of that 1638 shipment of "negroes", it is safe to say that such encounters were probably occurring by the mid-

1640s, if not a few years earlier. The specific native tribal groups involved in these first contacts would likely have been the Wampanoags and the Massachuset tribe, whose homelands were nearer the port cities of Boston, Salem, Plymouth, and Dartmouth (later, New Bedford), where the first Africans were brought into the colonies. The Nipmuc people, to the west of the Massachusets, would probably have made contact with Africans a little later than the other two groups, when English people entered their homelands in the late 1640s and the 1650s.⁷

As in the Virginia colony, some of the first Africans in Massachusetts were indentured servants, rather than permanently bound as slaves. Blacks, Indians, and some poor whites served together as indentured servants from the 1640s through the rest of the 17th century and less frequently in the early 18th century. They would often intermarry or develop friendships leading to close relations and shared communities on the fringes of English society when their years of indenture ended. Intermarriages between whites and people of color were much less frequent than black/Indian marriages since whites were discouraged from doing so by the English elites throughout the early colonial period and because marriages between "whites" and people of color ("Negroes, mulattoes, and Indians") were ultimately made illegal in the colony in 1705. Nevertheless, many examples of such marriages during the colonial era, before and after passage of that law, can be found. Mixed marriages, especially between Africans and Native Americans, contributed greatly to the creation of mixed communities.⁸

By the 1660s, it was more common for Africans in Massachusetts to be in a condition of permanent bondage than indentured, and by the 1680s a large proportion of Native women and children of the region, along with a smaller proportion of the

Indian men, were also enslaved. Many Wampanoag women and children were captured during King Philip's War of 1675-76, while many of their men were either killed or captured and transported to serve as slaves in the West Indies and other foreign lands.⁹ As permanent enslavement of blacks, Indians, and mixed-race people gradually replaced indentured servitude as the normal means of securing a more permanent labor force, familial relations between Africans, Afro-Americans and Native Americans increased. Simultaneously, such relations between the two groups of color and Euro-Americans became less common. These trends fluctuated at different times and in different locations throughout the colonial era, and on through the first few decades of the early American republic, when racial lines became more clearly drawn.¹⁰

It was at this point in the development of interracial relations in colonial New England, in the late 17th century, that people of color living as "servants" with English people of the surname "Easton" first appear in the colonial records. The "blacks" and "Indians" who were to establish the Easton family were probably first brought together as slaves and/or indentured servants of Peter Easton and/or his son, Nicholas, of Newport, Rhode Island. Peter was a son of the Nicholas Easton who co-founded Newport and he served as President (1650-54) and Governor (1672-74) of Rhode Island colony. In the wills of Peter and his son are the only known records of any Eastons who freed slaves or servants in New England before the Revolutionary era. The fact that these Eastons became Quakers during the 1650s probably led to the manumission of their servants, although the Quakers were certainly not united against slavery at this early point in their history. They did not take an official stand against slavery, as a denomination, until 1758.¹¹

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Peter Easton's son, Nicholas, died in 1677, seventeen years before the death of Peter. In his will, Nicholas freed an Indian woman immediately, and certified that two children, one "Indian" and the other designated as "negro", were to be freed on their twenty-fifth birthdays-- which may have occurred sometime between the mid 1680's and the 1690s. Peter Easton died in 1694, and mentioned five "servants" (this word was applied to both indentured servants and slaves in colonial records) in his will, only one of whom was designated by the term "negro" (a girl named Kate). The racial designations of the other four servants were left unstated. One of these servants, a man named Primus, was freed immediately, while three of the other four were to be freed after short indentures (seven years each), and Kate was to be freed upon her eighteenth birthday. It is probable that one or two of these manumitted servants or slaves of Nicholas and Peter Easton was a grandparent of James Easton.

We know that the Eastons of color were free at the beginning of the 18th century because James Easton's best-known son, Hosea Easton (1799-1837), wrote that he was "of the third generation (removed) from slave parents." It is clear from the context in which Hosea Easton wrote that, that he meant he was of the third generation born to parents who were free at the time of their children's birth.¹² Hosea was born in 1799, when his father, James, was 45 years old. Several documents, along with much credible circumstantial evidence, establish that James Easton's father was Caesar Easton of Titticut.¹³ The age of Caesar Easton, at the time of the birth of his son, James, in 1754 is unknown, but it is reasonably possible that Caesar could have been born any time between 1700 and 1720 (See genealogy chart on next page.). Based on this timeline, it is more likely that the family of the Eastons of color originated with one or two of the servants of Peter Easton who were freed in 1701,

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Easton Genealogy, 1690-1861 (abridged)	Richard and Mingo GonduaryRWV=of Titticut (earliest record, 1732)Revolutionary War	Mercy Gonduary Sampson & PatienceDunbar	of Titticut of Scituate, Braintree & Stoughton	married in 1750	Amy, b. 1752	<u>on James Easton</u> QWV Si	n_{1754} born 1756	1. Francis Cisco 1780 married, 1783, in N. Bridgewater J Joshua, b. 1760 RWV	2. Jack Robbins 1787 Samuel, b. 1762 RWV	(all children born in N. Bridgewater)		<u>Joshua James, Jr. Sarah Caleb Sylvanus Mary Hosea</u>	b. 1786 b. 1787 b. 1789 b. 1791 b. 1793 b. 1795 b. 1799	d. 1837 d. 1864 d. 1829 d. ?(after	abolitionist blacksmiths 1856) at	t married married married	married kobert Chioe John Louisa Anna Keith Roberts Packard Wainer Matrick	12 children nephew of daughter	including: Paul Cuffe of Quack	Timothy, John H., and <u>Benjamin F. Roberts</u> Matrick	Easton born 1815, Boston		m. Mary E. Thornton, 1888 printer, publisher, abolitionist,	teacher, writer, activist activist, Boston school desegregation	
Easton Genealogy	<u>Unspecified Servants of Peter and/or Nicholas Easton</u> of Newport, R.I., freed after 1694	Caesar Easton born c. 1710-1720?	of Titticut & Middleborough	married c. mid-1740s	RWV	n Caesar Eas(t)on	48 married	Eunice Sewell	included Eason 1. Rosanna Prince 1778 2. Ja	and Caesar) 1768	2. Sally Brayton	1798 Jo	son b.	ũ	born c. 1800	1 000	married, 1822, N.Y. N.Y.	Eleanor Charles Frederick Easton Marie Legett	b. 1826 born 1824, N.Y., N.Y. b. 1826, New Orleans	married married, 1852, N.Y.	Thomas Marie Charles F. Jr. William Edgar Easton	_		m.2. Lillian Blake, 1912 teacher, v	barber, activist

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rather than with any of the servants of Nicholas Easton, who were freed earlier. Since Caesar Easton is labeled as a "Negro" in the Plymouth county records, even though he was a member of the Titticut Indian community, it is likely that one of his parents was of African ancestry and the other was Wampanoag. At least one of them was likely a servant of Peter Easton.¹⁴ These facts and other evidence suggest that the English Eastons of Newport are the likely source for the Easton name first being taken by people of color in southern Massachusetts.

The records also indicate that these free Eastons of color settled in southeastern Massacusetts before any white Eastons settled there permanently. The first Nicholas Easton had originally settled in Massachusetts Bay Colony before being banished to Rhode Island in 1637 for his adherence to the "heresies" of Anne Hutchinson, but no other white Eastons lived in eastern Massachusetts again until some of his descendants began to migrate into the Dartmouth area and into Nantucket in the 1730s and '40s.¹⁵ A likely reason that the Eastons of color migrated into southeast Massachusetts soon after their manumission was their connection to the Wampanoag tribe and a natural desire to rejoin their relatives. Newport Island ("Aquidnek" in the Wampanoag language) was the westernmost ancestral territory of the Wampanoags, while the bulk of their homelands were in southeastern Massachusetts. If the Indians whom the white Eastons manumitted had been Narragansetts, they most likely would have traveled west when they were freed, to re-connect with the Narragansett tribe on the other side of Narragansett Bay.¹⁶ Instead, the Eastons went east and settled in Titticut.

Before we continue to examine the Easton family's experience in Titticut, it is important to understand more of the historical background concerning the

incorporation of people of African descent into the Indian communities of Massachusetts. The formation of kinship bonds between Africans and Native Americans in colonial Massachusetts was not only a result of being enslaved together. Bonds also developed through escaping slavery together, through the welcoming of escaped and freed slaves into Indian communities, and from the fact that free people of color were not always welcome in colonial English towns, where they were seldom treated as equals with the "whites".

Much of this animosity among the whites towards free people of color, and Indians in particular, in the early 18th century, had intensified as a result of what is known as King Philip's War of 1675-76.¹⁷ That war was an attempt by the Wampanoag Indians, with some assistance from a few allied Indians of neighboring tribes, to drive the English eastward out of their homelands and perhaps back across the ocean to the place from whence they came. Fifty years of aggressive encroachment by the English in their attempt to establish complete dominion over all the land and resources within their claimed territories had taken its toll and left the Indians exasperated.

During King Philip's War, many of the English towns in the inland parts of Massachusetts Bay Colony were abandoned by the fleeing English as the Indians burned the towns down. Consequently, the English became more fearful of the Indians and their black and mixed-race allies and kinfolk. The town of Middleborough, for example, which was abandoned and burned down during the war, passed a law after it was rebuilt in 1694 stating that no "strong Indians" (meaning, probably, either free or armed Indians) should be allowed to live in the town.¹⁸ The local histories and vital records also show that the only blacks and Indians present in

that town through most of the rest of the colonial era, were enslaved persons, or an occasional Indian called in by the town selectmen to dispatch a mountain lion, wolf, or other wild animal.¹⁹ In another example, the Massachusetts colonial legislature, the General Court, passed a law in 1675 which stated that any Indian entering the city of Boston would be subject to arrest and imprisonment. That law is still on the books.²⁰

When free Africans or Afro-Englishpersons resided in English colonial towns, including those in Massachusetts, they were constantly reminded that they would not be considered as equals with even the lowest class of "whites". As their numbers grew during the 18th century, free people of African descent were subjected to many restrictive laws that were not applicable to whites, and were even subject to many of the slave codes. They could not vote, even if they met the property requirements; they could not own certain kinds of property, such as pigs (in Boston) and canes (unless actually needed for support or walking); they could not serve on juries; they were barred from most schools and all colleges; they were barred from public celebrations; they had to compete for employment with free white laborers and slaves, who were generally preferred before them; and they could, at any moment, be captured and forced into slavery.²¹ It is no wonder that, under such conditions, free Afro-Americans often preferred to live in Native American tribal societies, where they could become accepted as equals and live as truly free persons. Free Indians and Africans were, therefore, also brought together by their common exclusion from English society.

Exclusion, marginalization, enslavement, and persecution by the English, along with some deep cultural differences from the English, could be called "push factors"

that repelled both blacks and Indians from English society and brought them into common bonds with each other. There were also some very significant "pull factors" that created their unions. One of these factors was the similarities between Native American and African indigenous cultures. The cosmologies, relationships to land and spirits, and other lifeways of the Wampanoags and Massachusets, although each were unique, had much in common with those of the Fon, Ewe, Igbo, Senufo, and other west-central African tribes from whence their new allies and kinfolk came. For example, they all considered themselves to be caretakers of their lands, in cooperation with a creator spirit and other subsidiary local spirits, rather than owners of the land in the English legal sense. Both the American and African tribal groups considered natural resources a gift from creator spirit, not only for the use of humans, but meant equally for the use of all species, and to be used in sustainable, limited ways. All of these indigenous groups lived in small, environmentally sustainable village societies, made up of closely-knit clans with clearly-defined kinship responsibilities and a rich, active ceremonial life.²²

Typically, these indigenous societies, in Africa and America, had ceremonies for every first-fruit harvest of wild or horticultural products, and for every stage or "passage" of the human life span. These ceremonies involved not only prayers and offerings to a wide array of intermediary spirits, but also much singing, dancing, feasting, and gift-giving. Every person in the community would have designated social and ceremonial roles and every individual was honored and celebrated at different stages of their lives, with puberty (or manhood and womanhood) ceremonies being perhaps most important. Certainly, even given that there were also some significant cultural differences and distinctions between these peoples, American

Indians and indigenous west Africans had much more in common culturally with each other than they did with the English and most other Europeans.²³

Another "pull factor" that brought Native Americans and Africans together in colonial Massachusetts was the vacuum created by American Indian tribal depopulation, especially the rapid loss of Indian males. As Native American males were killed in colonial-era wars, or captured and sold into slavery in the Caribbean islands, a complimentary gender imbalance was created between Native American females and Afro-American males. In 1764, there were approximately 1,700 to 2,000 Indians in Massachusetts, and females outnumbered males by a ratio of 2 to 1. In that same year, there were an estimated 5,779 slaves in the colony, most of whom certainly were of African descent, and about 70 % of them were males. Of the enslaved females, perhaps about 400 to 500, or 7.5% of all the slaves were Indian women.²⁴

The reduction in Native American male numbers in colonial Massachusetts was caused by multiple factors. Not only were many native men killed in their 17th-century wars against the English, but they also died in large numbers when they were conscripted by the English, or when they volunteered, to fight against the French and against other Indians during the first half of the 18th century. Besides those who were lost through death, some of the Indian men who survived the wars came home so severely disabled from their wounds that their ability to engage in productive work for the support of their families and their people was greatly reduced.²⁵ As happened to Indian men two hundred years later in the west, the increasing incursions by the English and consequent loss of tribal lands and resources made it increasingly difficult for native men in Massachusetts to engage in their traditional social roles of

hunting, fishing and protecting their people as warriors. Consequently, due to the resulting despair and frustration, many Indian men succumbed to alcoholism, which was gladly encouraged by English merchants and land speculators.²⁶ In addition to all of the above, as the whaling industry grew during the late colonial era, often the only profitable work that Wampanoag and Massachuset men could find would be on the whaling ships, which often meant spending seasons, and even years, away from home at a time. Due to the extremely hazardous nature of that work, many Indian sailors did not return home at all.²⁷

Economic hardships incurred by Native American women due to the departure and disabling of Native American men, and to the dispossession of their lands, also contributed to the pull of free African American men into their lives and their communities. Indian women who had not been captured in war and forced into slavery were often pressured to work for the whites for wages, or enter into indentures to pay off debts. Plymouth county court records verify this and also show that Indian women were commonly forced into indentured servitude as a sentence for alleged crimes, including petty theft. In 1716, two Titticut Indian women, Mary Mew and Jane (no surname) were each sentenced to five years of servitude because they could not pay the fines after being convicted of stealing a letter case containing "Eight Pounds in Bills of Credit" from Thomas Palmer. Palmer was a former minister to the Indians, who had been defrocked due to his alcoholism. In a similar case, Joan Sachemus, of Kingston, was convicted by the Plymouth Court of General Sessions in 1738 of stealing a Bible and 9 pounds, 9 shillings worth of thread, cloth, and other sewing materials. The court ordered Sachemus to pay a fine of 40 shillings or "be publicly whipped with 10 stripes", pay the victim 9 pounds, 9 shillings (even though

the goods had already been returned), and pay the court costs of 12 pounds, 9 shillings, and 6 dollars. Since Sachemus was unable to pay the fines, she was indentured for three years to the gentleman who paid the fines for her, as was the custom. The terms of indenture imposed by Massachusetts courts would vary according to the severity of the crime and the amount of money owed by the convict. The man who paid Joan Sachemus' fine, and received her labor for three years in return, was Elkanah Leonard, Esquire, of Middleborough, who would later figure prominently in the dispossession of the Titticut Indian lands, including those of the Easton family.²⁸

At the root of Wampanoag and Massachuset economic difficulties was the loss of their lands and traditional resources to the English. The Indians' old subsistence economies--their ability to live bountifully and sustainably in reciprocal relationships with the local natural resource base--decreased as their lands were confiscated and consumed by the English. While the English methods for dispossession of the Indians' lands will be addressed later, it is important now to understand how that loss created a necessity for Indians to absorb African-descended people into their tribes. As their lands and resources became no longer available to them, the indigenous people had to adjust to participation in the English cash economy, and consequently often found themselves working for, and in debt to, English colonists. Being thus dispossessed and coerced, Native Americans were increasingly brought into close contact with Africans and their descendants, as laborers, indentured servants, soldiers, or slaves. These conditions, along with the other circumstances mentioned above, led to many black male/Indian female marriages from the late 17th century on through the

early 19th century.²⁹ Many of these intercultural marriages were conducted by white ministers and are recorded in both church and civil records.³⁰

When they were freed from their service to whites, black/Indian couples often returned to the Indian wife's tribal community, which was sometimes just a small remnant of the community the woman had left behind before her years of service. The black men who entered these communities were received with mixed sentiments. Their physical labor, skills, and knowledge of the English language and customs were highly valued, as the need to negotiate and deal with the English in business and legal matters steadily increased, especially during the first half of the 18th century. Afro-English people in the colonial North, after a few decades or generations in America, had become generally more familiar with English laws and customs than most Indians because they had usually spent more time living and working in close proximity to the English. Unlike the normal situation for enslaved Africans in the South, slavery in the northern colonies typically involved working in the households of wealthy city and town dwellers as butlers, cooks, coachmen, assistants to skilled tradesmen, and other types of work that would require them to be in close constant contact with their masters and other whites. Northern slaves also usually lived in the homes of their slaveholders, and the slaveholders even took them to church with them, where the slaves were often married or baptized while being Christianized.

Nevertheless, that same valued and useful familiarity with English culture was sometimes a source of fear and resentment for many of the Indians who received these "Afro-Englishmen" into their communities, since even an Africanized English cultural incursion brought a threat to their tribes' cultural integrity and continuity. Because of the fact that many of these displaced Africans, or second or third

generation "Afro-Englishmen", had lost much of their indigenous African ways of being and had become culturally more like the English, they therefore became unintentional agents of native cultural transformation when they moved into Indian communities-- an influence the Indians resisted and resented to varying degrees. While some Indians realized that change and adaptation were, to some degree, inevitable, they also understandably sought to hold on to a way of life that had served them very well for thousands of years. It is also understandable that some of the remaining native men in those tribal communities would naturally resent that their places in Indian society, and in the hearts of Indian women, seemed to be increasingly usurped by African or Afro-English men.³¹

While some people of African descent who were absorbed into Wampanoag and Massachuset communities before the mid-18th century may have brought some friction or need for adjustment to those Indians, it seems that most of the newcomers adapted themselves well to Indian cultural norms. It was not until the later colonial period and after the formation of the early American republic (between, roughly, 1740 and 1820), that an incursion of Afro-Englishmen and Afro-Americans who were more culturally and economically Anglicized than their predecessors increasingly brought both cultural change and new ways of surviving into tribal communities. By that time, very little land remained in tribal possession and the Native peoples had lost much of the means and resources to continue living in their traditional ways.³² It was during the beginning of this period of rapid land loss, economic struggle, and Afro/Native intercultural alliances, in the 1740s, that the Eastons of color first appear in the documentary records of Massachusetts and in the Titticut Indian community. There is at present a gap in the historical record between about 1700, when the

Eastons were manumitted on Newport Island, and the 1740s when they surface again less than thirty miles northeast of Newport. Their absence from the colonial records during that timespan would make sense and be normal if the Eastons had been living in Titticut or other Indian communities. Individual Indians and other people of color were seldom included or mentioned by name in those records, unless they married in a church, made an appearance in court, or sold land to an English person. The earliest known record of Eastons of color in southeastern Massachusetts is a land deed for Caesar and Mercy Easton, who were evidently the parents of James Easton, dated 1748, for 90 acres in the Indian reservation called Titticut (a.k.a., Teticut, Kehteticut, Ketiticut, and various other spellings).³³

This Easton Titticut land deed of 1748 is very significant for several reasons. First of all, this land deed clearly demonstrates the direct involvement of the Easton family in the struggle of the Titticut Indian community to maintain tribal authority over its lands in their ongoing effort to protect those lands from English encroachment. Their participation in that struggle is the earliest recorded evidence of the tradition of Easton family social activism, and may indeed have laid the foundation of a tradition that continued for the next four generations. Secondly, the document provides us with some very important genealogical information about the Easton family. It is through this document that we learn the names of James Easton's mother and his maternal grandparents. Caesar Easton married Mercy Gonduary of Titticut, who was the daughter of Richard and Mingo Gonduary.³⁴ Richard Gonduary is described in the land deed as "a Negro man", who evidently acquired the land, in 1732, after his marriage to Mingo, who apparently was a native of Titticut. Evidently, both Caesar and his wife, Mercy, were of mixed Afro/Native ancestry. It has not yet been

determined who the parents of Caesar Easton were, but in all records in which his name appears (two land deeds and three Plymouth county court records) he is described as a free man of color, and, according to his grandson, Hosea, he was born free. It was not that unusual for a person of color who was born free to be given the common slave name "Caesar". Several examples of this (besides Caesar Easton) have been found in various Massachusetts records to date, including two Indians named "Cesar", and there was also a family of Wampanoags at Mashpee in the late 18th century with the surname Caesar.³⁵

A close examination of the Easton Titticut land deed begins to reveal Caesar Easton's role in the struggle by the Titticut Indians to keep their lands, and this is revealed further in court documents and other records which shall be described below. The land deed begins with a lengthy reference to an earlier deed from 1732, which described the acquisition of the land by the previous owners, Mercy Easton's parents, Richard and Mingo Gonduary. Reference to an earlier deed was a somewhat common practice in Plymouth land deeds, and this detailed reference included the names of all of the original signatories. What is remarkable about the inclusion of the names of the original signatories of the1732 deed, along with new signatures of those original signatories who were still living in 1748 (plus an additional Indian signature not found on the 1732 deed), is that the signers were the Indian elders of Titticut, who were involved in this process as an act of resistance to English encroachment. A total of nine Titticut Indian elders, seven men and two women, signed this document.³⁶ Their purpose for signing the document evidently was to demonstrate their joint authority, as tribal leaders, to authorize any sale or transferal of their lands by individual members of their tribal community and to attest to the right of the tribe to

collectively determine and affirm the rightful ownership of all the land on the Titticut Reservation. The English, during this era, were attempting to leave such decisions to individual Indians and the Massachusetts colonial legislature. When Caesar Easton's land rights came under attack from their English neighbors a few years later, it was apparently the strength of this legal document that allowed Caesar Easton and the Titticut Indians to defeat their common adversaries and keep the Easton's portion of the reservation intact with the rest.

To better understand the components of this struggle to keep their remaining lands, it will be useful to first explore briefly the history of land use and land ownership at Titticut. Native American cultural traditions regarding the use and care of the lands of Massachusetts preceeded the introduction by Europeans of the concept of land ownership by several thousand years. Understanding the differences between Native American and European cultural concepts regarding land and how to live upon it is crucial to understanding the roots of Anglo/Native conflicts over land, such as the conflict at Titticut.

Traditional Native American cultural concepts relating to the land upon which they lived express a sense of belonging to the land, rather than owning it as property that they could dispose of or transfer ownership of to others. They did have a tradition of protecting territory and recognizing tribal homeland boundaries, but more as the hereditary caretakers of those lands than as owners in the western legal sense. The tribal origin stories within their oral traditions describe the establishment of permanent reciprocal relationships between spirits, land, and all of the species (including humans) that were placed in specific locations. Those locations, or "territories", were recognized by all of the tribal nations within a region as the

specific homelands of the specific tribes who, according to their beliefs, were placed upon those lands. All of the members of each tribe were responsible for making the appropriate prayers and offerings to the spirit guardians of their specific lands and resources and for following closely the spirit-given directions for caring for and sustainably using those lands. The sense of responsibility to the land that is generated by such a cosmology gave Indian tribes a deep concern for maintaining the balance and integrity of the ecosystem, so that it would continue to provide sustenance for them and the generations of their descendants to come. To do otherwise would mean to break their relationship with everything that was sacred to them and threaten the continuation of life itself.³⁷

In light of such a long-held cultural perspective on the correct relationship of humans to land, it would seem that the European concepts of ownership of, dominion over, and the buying and selling of land may have been so different from their own experience as to be incomprehensible to the Native people—which is precisely what many Native Americans, both then and now, have claimed. Consider the following example from the Sauk leader, Black hawk:

My reason teaches me that land cannot be sold. The Great Spirit gave it to his children to live upon, and cultivate as far as necessary for their subsistence; and so long as they occupy and cultivate it, they have the right to the soil—but if they voluntarily leave it, then any other people have the right to settle upon it. Nothing can be sold, but such things as can be carried away.³⁸

It is primarily because of this traditional cultural orientation that the validity of most early colonial land deeds and bills of sale are suspect, especial when they involved English translators for Indians who spoke very little or no English. Many of the earliest so-called Indian "land grants" to the English were based on nothing more than an erroneous, and perhaps overly optimistic, English interpretation of Indian sign language or hand gestures.³⁹ During the early English land acquisittion period in the 17th century, Wampanoag and Massachuset leaders may have understood the early land deeds as nothing more than an English way of establishing peace and friendship or bonds of alliance between neighbors, which was a very important tradition among traditional Native Americans. The deed signing encounters in those early decades often involved an exchange of gifts and eating food together, which closely resembled traditional alliance making and peace making ceremonies between tribes.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Native leaders and other Indians clearly became painfully aware before long--perhaps within the first decade or two after the English arrival--that the English understood their "talking papers" to mean something much more invasive and rather unfriendly.⁴¹

Colonial era English cultural and legal perspectives regarding the proper means for acquiring Indian lands varied in some key ways. Some Englishmen, like Massachusetts Bay Colony governor, John Winthrop, held to the concept of "vacuum domicilium" regarding Indian hunting and gathering territories outside their villages and cultivated lands. Under that concept, Indians only had legal property rights to lands which had been "subdued" (cultivated) or "improved" (built upon, containing homes, storage facilities, etc.). Lands that had been used and cared for by the indigenous people for thousands of years in seasonal cycles as hunting, fishing, and wild plant food and medicine gathering sites were not considered to be Indian property, and therefore required no deed of purchase. But, when that concept was challenged by competing European colonialists, such as the Dutch in New Netherlands and western Connecticut, or the French in what is now Maine and New Hampshire, the English found deeds of sale to be useful and even expedient to

protecting their claims. But that usefulness had much more to do with addressing the moral accusations of other Europeans and other Englishmen, than any consideration of the rights of the Indians.⁴² At the same time, some Englishmen, such as Roger Williams, were compelled by their own moral sense to execute deeds of sale and pay what they considered to be a fair price when acquiring Indian homelands. Williams believed that the English right to "unsubdued" American lands by royal patent was invalid in the eyes of God.⁴³ When Edmund Andros became royal governor of the United Colonies of New England in 1686, the use of legal deeds and establishment of title became required for all subsequent acquisitions of Indian land. Many Indian land deeds after that point, as well as some before, were written to affirm and amend the early colonial land grants and purchases and legally resolve any disputes over those previously ceded lands.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, the customary colonial era English ethnocentrism and their sense of innate superiority over other human --combined with their insatiable "need" for the Indian lands--caused them to disregard whether or not the Indians understood English land ownership concepts and laws or to bother to find out anything about Indian concepts and laws. It is obvious that most colonial era English had little or no respect for, or understanding of, Native cultures, laws, and customs.⁴⁵ It is also evident that, in their zealous pursuit of American Indian lands and resources, some English even showed little regard for their own laws. Many examples can be found in the colonial records of illegal and extralegal methods used to acquire the Indian lands. Such methods included: allowing their livestock to roam into Indian gardens and wild food gathering areas in hope that the Indians would move; getting Indians drunk before persuading them to sign a land deed; encouraging individual Indians to sign a deed

for the sale of some other Indian's land (as was the case in the attempt to take part of Caesar Easton's land); using the threat of violence; and forcing or pressuring Indians to sell land to pay off their debts.⁴⁶

The English also failed to learn much about the social structure of Native societies and their customs regarding leadership and government, which conveniently allowed them to create land deeds based on two pivotal false assumptions. First, the English assumed that American Indian nations were monarchies and that the Indian monarchs were vested with the same or similar powers of authority that belonged to their own monarchs. In reality, traditional Native American leaders were representatives of small extended family or clan social units who met in councils to solve social problems by deliberation and consensus. They were servants of the people who performed their leadership roles as needed, when problems arose or decisions had to be made. They were not full-time politicians, nor were they kings, queens, princes, or any other type of monarchs. Nevertheless, English accounts, documents, and especially land deeds consistently refer to Wampanoag and Massachuset sachems (male leaders) and squasachems (female leaders) as "kings", "queens", "princes", or other types of rulers.⁴⁷ The second pivotal error was that the English assumed that the Indian rulers were the owners of all, or at least most, of their tribes' teritorial lands, as was also the custom in England.

Had they not made those assumptions, how could the English write up the deeds of sale for Indian lands? Who would the sellers of the land be? Could they persuade an entire tribal council to--after careful deliberation that typically went on for days at a time-- come to a consensus that they should sell their source of life and well-being, which they did not ever imagine could be owned or sold? It was much easier to pull aside one council member, declare that person to be a monarch, have him or her place their mark on a piece of paper that they did not understand, and then let them find out the meaning of that act later, through painful experience. And the English could then proclaim that they had legally acquired the signature of the "king" and rightful owner of the Indian land on a document which the English wrote and only they understood. Through most of the 17th century, the historical record suggests that Titticut was a Wampanoag Indian village in Wampanoag territory, although at least one account says it was Massachuset Indian land. Claims varied depending upon whether land deeds signed by Wampanoag or Massachuset sachems were recognized. In 1645, the English claimed that the Wampanoag sachem, Massasoit Ousamequin, who had welcomed and assisted the Pilgrims during the 1620s, had sold them a large but illdefined mass of land west of Plymouth. That land deed was later interpreted to include the lands that became the towns of Middleborough and Bridgewater, and the boundaries of those towns encompassed the Wampanoag villages of Titticut, Assawompsett, and Nemasket (see map on pg.). A Wampanoag sachem of Assawompsett named Tuspaquin is said to have put his mark on land deeds for the expanding town of Middleborough in 1663, 1664, 1667, 1669, 1672, and 1673. Interestingly, each one of those marks of Tuspaquin is a different symbol.⁴⁸ During "King Philip's War" in 1675, Tuspaquin led the attack that burned most of the town of Middleborough to the ground. Massasoit's son, Metacomet ("King Philip") had a home in Titticut that he lived in during the deer hunting season, which further indicates that Titticut was part of the Wampanoag territory.

The assertion that Titticut was Massachuset land comes from two land deeds signed by a Massachuset sachem named Josias Wampattuck ("White Deer"), one deed dated June 9, 1664, the other one December 23, 1686.⁴⁹ The 1664 deed is of crucial importance to Titticut since that deed was initiated by Wampattuck himself for the purpose of protecting the land of the Titticut Indians. Using the authority granted to him by the English to sell lands adjoining Titticut to the town of Bridgewater, Wampattuck granted the land on which the village of Titticut already laid, plus lands a few miles on each side of the Indian town to the Indians living there. Thus, Wampattuck provided the Titticut Indians with a legal document protecting their lands which the English were bound to recognize. That document later became the basis for the English recognition of Titticut as an Indian reservation in 1724.⁵⁰

Why did Josias Wampattuck, a Massachuset sachem, seek to protect a Wampanoag village? The probable answer to that question is that Titticut was by then a mixed Wampanoag and Massachuset Indian town. Sometime before 1672, and possibly before Wampattuck deeded their land in 1664, Titticut was designated by English missionary, John Eliot, as one of the "praying towns" for Christian Indians of both the Wampanoag and Massachuset tribes. These neighboring tribes most likely had a long history of alliance through intermarriage, which was a common custom between neighboring Native American tribes throughout America before the advent of European contact. As Indians were displaced from their lands and, in the process, incorporated aspects of Christianity into their cosmologies and identities during the 17^{th} century, these intertribal marriages and intertribal towns became more common. That trend increased after King Philip's War. Wampattuck, who resided in the Massachuset village of Mattakeeset (near present-day Pembroke, east of Bridgewater), probably had relatives in Titticut, as it is certain that he had descendants there by the 1740s. An examination of the Indian names on various Titticut-related documents of the early through mid 18th century, shows a nearly equal mixture of Wampanoag and Massachuset surnames.⁵¹

That ingenious act of Josias Wampattuck in 1664 probably inspired other Indians to use the English land laws for their own protection, since, beginning in the early 1700s, Indians who were not necessarily sachems or squasachems began to appear in land deeds as individual owners of lands. These deeds usually involved sales of land to English individuals and towns, but they also involved the sale or granting of lands to their own children or grandchildren-clearly a defensive or protective act. In the cases of Richard and Mingo Gonduary in 1732 and Caesar and Mercy Easton in 1748, the tribal leaders jointly granted tracts of land to individual tribal members.⁵² Even though the Indians found some legal protection in acquiring individual deeds to their lands, the conversion of tribal lands to individual Indian ownership primarily benefited the English, as they no longer needed to seek out or claim some Indian to be a monarch in order to purchase Indian land. In the 1720s and '30s, the Massachusetts General Court appointed what they called "guardians" over the remaining Indian communities, purportedly with the intent of protecting the Indians from those who would exploit them. Under that system, individual Indians had to have the permission of the guardians and the General Court itself in order to sell any of their lands. Petitions for such permission were almost always granted.

Faced with this new English system for dispossessing them of their remaining lands, the Titticut leaders took additional steps towards protecting their lands from transferal to English ownership. The Titticut Indians made their own land rights laws, in defiance of English legal jurisdiction over them. Under those laws, "foreigners", or non-tribal members (including Indians of other tribes or communities) who married

into the Titticut community, had no right to sell off any Titticut lands without permission of their tribal member spouse and the tribe itself. If the Titticut Indian spouse died, and the couple had no surviving children, the outsider spouse had no right to sell the land at all. Since this Indian law was in conflict with Massachusetts colonial law, the "foreigners" would generally win their cases if it went to the courts, as Massachusetts colonists sought eagerly to acquire lands from the dwindling remnant tribal communities in the mid-eighteenth century.⁵³ The English "guardians", appointed by the colony to manage and protect the interests and property of the Indians would occasionally intervene to prevent such sales, but more often than not they would either approve the sale or defer to a ruling by the court that was favorable to the person intent on purchasing Indian land. When the colonists could not acquire the land itself, they sometimes would take the resources on those lands, such as trees or hay, which caused many Indians and their guardians to bring them into court.⁵⁴

Of all the Massachusetts Englishmen who were intent on acquiring Titticut Indian lands during the 1740s and '50s, perhaps none was more aggressive and resourceful in this pursuit than Elkanah Leonard, Esq., of Middleborough. Leonard was at one time one of the wealthiest men and largest landowners in Middleborough, and his lands bordered the southern edge of the Titticut reservation. His lands also bordered the Wampanoag community of Assawompsett to the east of him, where he also pursued and bought Indian land. (see map on pg.)⁵⁵ Elkanah Leonard was a lawyer who also shared an interest in his uncle Major George Leonard's iron foundry, and he had a small foundry, or "bloomery", of his own on his land. Iron foundries used tremendous amounts of wood as fuel to run their furnaces in those days, and the

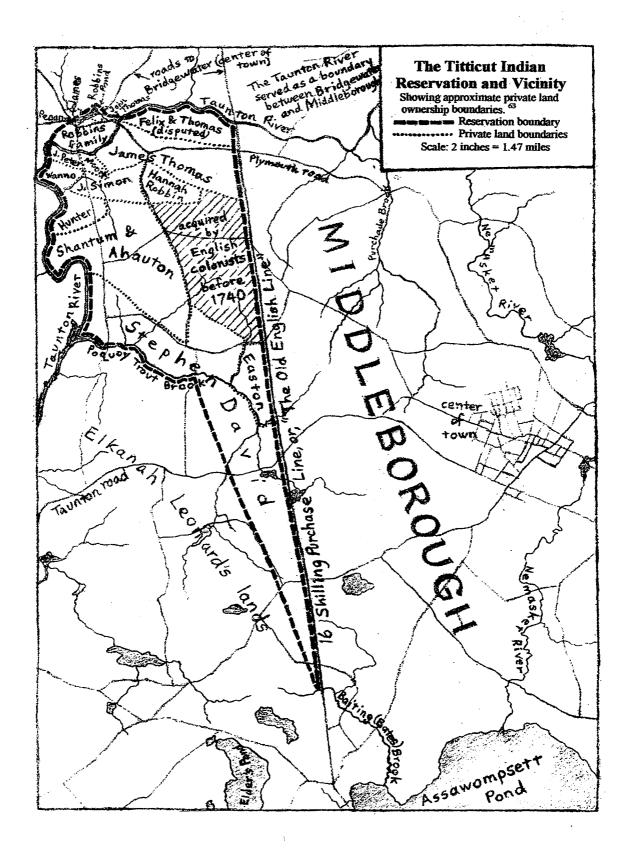
pursuit of wood often compelled the pursuit of land. But, as we shall soon see, wood was not Leonard's only motivation for a seemingly insatiable appetite for more land.

The Leonard family had a long history of various kinds of relations with the Indians of this part of Massachusetts, dating back to the time just before King Phillip's war of 1675-76. The Leonard family ran a large iron foundry in Taunton, which was just west of Middleborough and in the heart of Wampanoag territory at that time. According to one popular legend about the family, the Leonards were friendly with the Wampanoags and would often repair their firearms and make hatchets for them at their foundry. For that reason, the legend goes, during King Philip's War, Metacomet himself ordered his warriors to spare the town of Taunton, lest any harm should come to any member of the Leonard family.⁵⁶ One of Elkanah Leonard's relatives, Uriah Leonard, kept the head of King Philip (Metacomet) at the old Leonard family home a few miles west of Titticut "for some time" at the end of the war.⁵⁷ Why he possessed the head is uncertain, but the colonial authorities eventually retrieved it and displayed it on a pike in several Massachusetts towns over the next twenty five years.

Elkanah Leonard was also a partner in the failed Massachusetts Land Bank experiment of 1740.⁵⁸ It is not certain how much money Leonard lost by investing in that scheme, but evidently his losses were severe and may have had some bearing on his determination to acquire nearby Indian lands, as well as the lands of many of his English neighbors, a few years later. Beginning in 1741, soon after the Land Bank was effectively quashed when Parliament forbade the bank from printing its own currency, many gentlemen of Plymouth and the surrounding counties took Elkanah Leonard to the Plymouth Court of Common Pleas seeking repayment of debts. A total of thirty-six cases were brought against Leonard between September, 1741 and May, 1749.⁵⁹ In 1749, the Massachusetts General Court, at which Leonard had been a sitting member less than a decade earlier, declared that Leonard's lands were to be auctioned off to repay six thousand pounds (old tenor) in debts.⁶⁰ If Leonard's Land Bank losses and his subsequent ruin at the hands of his creditors did not provide enough motivation to pursue Titticut Indian lands, the trees on those lands alone would have been of tremendous value as fuel for the furnaces of the Leonard family's iron business.⁶¹

Elkanah Leonard used a variety of methods, both legal and extralegal, during the 1740s and '50s to acquire the lands of Indians as well as of other English persons. In one incident that occurred in 1751, Leonard invited a Massachuset Indian of Titticut named Job Ahauton into his home, where he plied him with alcohol into signing a deed of sale for some of Ahauton's land.⁶² Ahauton petitioned the General Court for the nullification of that land deed, due to the fraudulent manner in which his signature was procured, but his petition was dismissed. Leonard had an Indian accomplice who helped him to manipulate and deceive Ahauton named Stephen David, who filed a counter petition claiming that Ahauton was a "common drunk" and that it was nobody's fault but his own that he signed that deed.⁶³

Stephen David was a "foreign" Indian who acquired Titticut land through marriages to two different Titticut Indian women. David sold more Titticut lands to the English than any other Indian in Titticut, and in 1754, the tribe petitioned the General Court to ban David from selling any more of their land. David's land lay between the lands of Elkanah Leonard and Caesar Easton, at the southern end of the reservation (see map on page 32), and David evidently assisted Leonard in acquiring



part of theEaston land by including part of Easton's land in a sale of his own land to Leonard.

Elkanah Leonard made a claim to seventeen of Caesar Easton's ninety acres through the Plymouth County Court of Common Pleas in May of 1753, alleging that he had been "seised" of those seventeen acres of land since May of 1751, when he bought the disputed tract of land from Stephen David. In spite of Leonard's high standing in the community and his familiarity with the courts⁶⁴, Caesar Easton won this first case against Leonard, probably due largely to the strength of his land deed document of 1748.⁶⁵

Less than one year later, in March of 1754, Elkanah Leonard's wife, Elizabeth, and his son, Elkanah, Jr., acting on behalf of Elkanah, Esq., who was at this time "non compos mentis", registered a land deed with Plymouth County claiming that Caesar Easton had quit claim to the property in question and relinquished it to the Leonards in consideration of ten shillings "and for divers other good causes and considerations." Although registered at that later date, the signatures on this new deed, which allegedly included Caesar Easton's mark, bore the date, May 16, 1753, which was the day after Elkanah had lost to the Eastons and the Titticut Indians in court. In May of 1755, on the basis of this new land deed, which was probably fraudulent and never agreed to by the Eastons--- certainly not on the day after their victory in court-- Elkanah Leonard's surrogates took Caesar Easton to Plymouth Court again. This time the jury returned a verdict for the plaintiff, Elkanah Leonard, Esq., and ejected Caesar Easton from sixteen acres of his land.⁶⁶ There was no appeal filed, and no further legal actions regarding those lands have been found to date.

Whether or not Elkanah Leonard, Esq. lost his mental faculties in response to his earlier defeat in Plymouth Court by a group of "Indians and Negroes", or if it was the cumulative effect of over a decade of personal financial disaster, or both, is unconfirmed. A story is told that, in his later years, Leonard began to wear his shoes with the soles facing upwards and the tops of the shoes facing the ground. When asked why he did so, Leonard answered, "Because the world has turned upside down." Understandably, it seemed so to him.⁶⁷

Since we know of no earlier examples of activism by Easton family members, Caesar Easton's battle with Elkanah Leonard over the Easton land in Titticut may have been the beginning of a tradition of resistance to injustice that continued in the Easton family for another 200 years. The Titticut Indians were dispossessed of most of their lands during the 1750s and '60s, and the remaining lands were gone by the late 1780s. In the 1790 census, there were no Indians counted living in Titticut. Although Indians living in intact, sovereign, tribal communities, who fit the constitutional category of "Indians not taxed", were often not counted in the census, it is not likely that a tribal community was still in place at Titticut at that time. A state report on the Indians of Massachusetts published in 1827 stated only six Indians were counted within the boundaries of the town of Middleborough, which included Titticut and Assawompsett.⁶⁸ It is unknown which year the Eastons were dispossessed of their remaining Titticut lands, but records from during and after the Revolution show the adult children of Caesar and Mercy Easton had dispersed to Bridgewater, Taunton and Dartmouth.⁶⁹

Caesar Easton's sons, James and Moses, served in the Continental army during the Revolution, which was an experience that, for many soldiers of color, inspired a hope

in their hearts that they were on the verge of initiating a new society founded on principles of justice, liberty, and equality. Many of those soldiers spent the rest of their lives trying to make that dream a reality for all Americans. Few Revolutionary War veterans insisted more fervently that the dream be fulfilled, or worked harder to try to make that happen, than James Easton.

http://geocities.com/quinnips/contents/html, pp. 13, 21, note 1, 24, note 19. Also published in an

¹Titticut was located within the bounds of the town of Middleborough, Massachusetts, in the northwestern corner of that town, and partly within the bounds of Bridgewater. The Massachusetts colonists laid out the boundaries of their towns in the same manner that counties are laid out, with no open or unclaimed space in between them. Under that arrangement, the remaining Indian villages all became contained within the boundaries of an English town, and therefore subject to colonial laws. See map on page 3.

² George H. Moore, <u>Notes on the History of Slavery in Massachusetts</u>, New York, D. Appleton & Co., 1866, reprinted, New York, Negro Universities Press, 1968, pp. 5, 6.

³ Ibid., page 6.

⁴ Jack D. Forbes, <u>Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples</u>, 2nd ed., Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1993. Russel Lawrence Barsh and Heather Steel, "New England Afro-Indians and Abolitionism: A Shared Struggle", unpublished (?) article, 2000, pp.2-6. Joanne Pope Melish, Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1998, pp. 37-38. Ann McMullen, "Blood and Culture: Negotiating Race in Twentieth-Century Native New England", in, James F. Brooks, ed., Confounding the Color Line: The Indian-Black Experience in North America, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2002, pg. 264. The best way to find evidence of this phenomenon is to peruse the vital records, censuses, and other primary source documents in which people were labeled racially and compare the names to documents regarding known and recognized Indians, and observe for oneself how the same individuals are categorized by different racial labels in different records. I've found scores of examples of this English tendency to lump all people of color- and occasionally non-English Europeans- under the same labels, but one my best finds was a list of "The Deaths of Blacks" in the records of Rev. Ebenezer Gay (1696-c.1787), pastor of the 1st Congregational Church of Hingham, Massachusetts. This list of people under the categorical heading, "blacks", from his congregation, who died between 1743 and 1787, has specific racial labels written next to most of the names, as follows: 28 as "negro"; 8 as "Indian"; 7 as "mollato"; 14 with no racial designation given; and 1 labeled as "a Spanish woman". This was in the Hingham Vital records, Vol. 2, no page number, but in a section labeled "Dr. Gay's Records", which is after page 150.

⁵ Moore, pp. 9-10.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 28-29. The rest of the quote from Mr. Downing, though peripheral to this study, is quite enlightening regarding English motivations for engaging themselves more zealously in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and replacing English indentured servants with permanent slaves of color. To do so, says Downing, "... wilbe more gayneful pilladge for us than wee conceive, for I doe not see how wee can thrive until wee get into a stock of slaves sufficient to do all our buisines, for our children's children will hardly see this great Continent filled with people, soe that our servants will still desire freedom to plant for them selves, and not stay but for verie great wages. And I suppose you know verie well how wee shall maynteyne 20 Moores cheaper than one Englishe servant."

⁷ Thomas L. Doughton, "Unseen Neighbors: Native Americans of Central Massachusetts, A People Who Had 'Vanished'", published in its entirety on his Nipmuc website,

abridged version in Colin Calloway, ed., <u>After King Philip's War: Presence and Persistence in Indian</u> <u>New England</u>, Hanover, N.H., University Press of New England, 1997. Rootsweb.com, <u>Rhode Island</u> <u>Counties and Towns</u>, shows dates of settlement and incorporation for some of the earliest English incursions into Nipmuc territory.

On the frequency of white/non-white intermarriages see Gary B. Nash, Forbidden Love: the Secret History of Mixed Race America, New York, Henry Holt & Co., 1999, Lorenzo Greene, The Negro in Colonial New England, 1620-1776, New York, Columbia University Press, 1942, reprint, Port Washington, N.Y., Kennikat Press, 1966, pp. 199-210, and Winthrop Jordan, White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press, reprint, 1995, pg. 137. For more on Massachusetts anti-miscegenation laws, see, Louis Ruchames, "Race, Marriage, and Abolition in Massachusetts", in The Journal of Negro History, vol. 40, no. 3, July, 1955, pp. 250-273. A well-documented case of colonial era scoffing at the Massachusetts anti-miscegenation law occurred in 1730 and 1731. Captain Benjamin Warren was brought to the Plymouth County Court of General Sessions in December of 1730 on a charge of joining in marriage an Indian man (who may also have been part African) named David Church with a white widow named Mary Hampshire of Plymouth. The case was "quashed" on jurisdictional grounds, and when Warren's accusers took the case to the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court the following April, the case was dismissed and Warren allowed to recover costs (4 pounds) from the plaintiffs. David Thomas Konig, ed., Plymouth Court Records, 1686-1859, Boston, Pilgrim Society, and the New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2002, Court of General Sessions, Dec., 1730, vol. 9, pg. 12, and Konig's note on the appellate case, Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, April Term, 1731.

⁹ Francis Jennings, <u>The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest</u>, New York, W.W. Norton, 1976. Almon Lauber, <u>Indian Slavery in Colonial Times Within the Present Limits</u> of the United States, reprint, Williamstown, Massachusetts, Corner House Publishers, 1979, originally published in 1913, pp. 126, 139-146.

¹⁰ Horton, pp. 643-645. Greene, pp. 201-204. George Fredrickson, <u>The Black Image in the White</u> <u>Mind: the Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914</u>, N.Y., Harper and Row, 1971, pp. 2-4. Thomas F. Gossett, <u>Race: the History of an Idea in America</u>, Dallas, Southern Methodist University Press, 1963, pp. 26-35.

¹¹ Peter Easton's manuscript will, dated 26 April, 1691, can be found in the collections of the Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, Rhode Island. A detailed synopsis of Nicholas Easton's will was published in, John Osborne Austin, *The Genealogical Dictionary of Rhode Island, Comprising Three Generations of Settlers Who Came before 1690* (reprint, Baltimore, 1978), 293-295. For more on these Eastons, and the earliest colonial antislavery legislation, passed in Rhode Island in 1651, see Thomas W. Bicknell, *The History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations* (New York, The American Historical Society, 1920), pp. 267, 299, 303, 312, on the Eastons, and pg. 500 on the first anti-slavery legislation, not only in R. I., but first in all of the New English colonies. See also, Franklin Bowditch Dexter, ed., <u>Extracts from the Itineraries and Other Miscellanies of Ezra Stiles, D.D., LL.D., 1755-1794, with a selection from his correspondence</u>, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1916, pp. 12, 134, 253-54, and 353, on the Eastons, pp. 92-99 on the spread of Quakers (which included the Eastons) into the Dartmouth area and Nantucket. Most of these Quakers came from Newport, Rhode Island families.

¹²Hosea Easton, <u>A Treatise on the Intellectual Character</u>, and the Civil and Political Condition of the <u>Colored People of the U. States</u>; and the Prejudice exercised Towards Them (Boston, 1837, and reprint in George R. Price and James Brewer Stewart, eds., <u>To Heal the Scourge of Prejudice</u>: The Life and <u>Writings of Hosea Easton</u>, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1999, 89).

¹³ Plymouth County Deeds, 42: 242-3. Several 19th century documents state that James Easton was born in Middleborough to free people of color in 1754. A thorough search of Middleborough vital records and town histories reveals no birth record for James Easton or any free people of color with the surname Easton or any similar name. The likely explanation for this is that the Eastons resided in Titticut, an Indian village situated within the boundaries of the land claimed by the town of Middleborough, but actually located about three miles from the physical structure of the town. A settlement or precinct called North Middleborough was established within the boundaries of the Titticut reservation, in 1743, as English encroachments upon the Titticut lands increased rapidly. Emery, pp. 9-10. Records of the births, marriages and deaths, of the Indians in Titticut were not kept by the clerks of Middleborough. Sometimes vital records of Indians and other people of color were kept by the churches, but the Indians of Titticut had their own church, led by Indian preacher John Simons (one of the signers of the 1748 land deed) until 1757, from which no known written records have survived. Emery, pg. 8. Plymouth court records show Caesar Easton to have been the father of at least one son, named Richard, exact age not given, but called an "infant" in 1753. Plymouth County Court of Common Pleas, August, 1754, vol. 10: 605-607.

¹⁴ See genealogy chart on page nine.

¹⁵ A thorough examination of several types of primary and secondary records, including census records, court records, genealogical lists, land deeds, probate records, vital records, local histories, and the Massachusetts Archives card index, collectively support these dates for the presence and absence of the English Eastons in eastern Massachusetts before 1750. Another Easton family, the descendants of Joseph Easton (sometimes given as Eaton) of Hartford, Connecticut, were in western Massachusetts, north of Hartford, by the early 18th century.

¹⁶ See map on page three. For confirmation that the islands in Narragansett Bay and the lands to the east of that bay that are now part of the state of Rhode Island were originally Wampanoag lands, see: John Abbot Goodwin, <u>The Pilgrim Republic; an historical review of the colony of New Plymouth, with sketches of the rise of other New England settlements, the history of Congregationalism, and the creeds of the period.</u>, Boston, Ticknor and Company, 1888, pg. 164, 165; Frank G. Speck, <u>Territorial Subdivisions and Boundaries of the Wampanoag, Massachusett, and Nauset Indians</u>, New York, Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1928, pp. 52-55.

¹⁷ Since England did not have a king named Philip during those years, some explanation for the name of this war is necessary for those not familiar with this history. One of the Wampanoag leaders, or "sachems", was a man named Metacom or Metacomet, whom the English called "Philip". Metacom was a son of Massasoit, one of the sachems who had welcomed and assisted the Mayflower Pilgrims during the 1620s. Some say that Massasoit gave his sons English names, but there is no substantial evidence for that. The English referred to the Indian sachems as kings (reasons for that will be examined later in this chapter), hence the name, "King Philip". Metacom, or Philip, is traditionally given credit for initiating the formation of the intertribal army, and for starting the war, which is a topic worthy of extensive reassessment.

¹⁸ *Middleborough Town records, Part I, 1658-1705*, pp. 74, 79. The exception to this law would be the Indians living in the Indian villages of Titticut, Assawompsett, and Nemasket, which, as stated earlier, were technically contained within the boundaries of Middleborough.

¹⁹ Ibid., pg. 53, and part II, pg. 100. On slavery and names of slave holders in Middleborough, see, Thomas Weston, <u>History of the Town of Middleboro, Massachusetts</u>, Boston and New York, Houghton, Miflin; Cambridge, the Riverside Press, 1906, pp. 100-105.

²⁰ This law is still on the books and there has long been a movement, led by local Indians, for its repeal, which recently received support from the mayor of Boston, in November, 2004. <u>News From</u> Indian Country: the Independent Native Journal, vol. 18, no. 25, December 13, 2004, pg. 3.

²¹ Lorenzo Greene, <u>The Negro in Colonial New England, 1620-1776</u>, New York, Columbia University Press, 1942, reprint, Port Washington, N.Y., Kennikat Press, 1966, pp. 298-304, 312-314, 391. On the last point- free people of color being forced into slavery or held in violation of colonial law- it should be noted that there are cases on record in the Plymouth Court records of such persons being freed through those courts. Plymouth Court Records, Common Pleas, vol. 14, April, 1771, pp. 249-252, vol. 15, October, 1779, pp. 219-220, 227-228, record the cases of Toby Tarbet and his daughters, Dinah and Matildah, Easton relatives by marriage, who at one time were illegally held in slavery.

²² Although there certainly were a few large kingdoms, and even a small empire in Africa at this time, the Africans who were captured and sold into trans-Atlantic slavery were typically from the small indigenous societies, which were sometimes subjects or tributaries to the larger, often Islamic, kingdoms. Contrary to some popular misconceptions, seldom were the wealthy or Islamic Africans sent into slavery, except occasionally by their rivals. Rather, the dominant groups and individuals in western and central Africa were usually the ones who captured and sold the indigenous people to the Arabic and European peoples.
²³ Peggy V. Beck, Anna Lee Walters, and Nia Francisco, <u>The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge, Sources of</u>

²⁵ Peggy V. Beck, Anna Lee Walters, and Nia Francisco, <u>The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge, Sources of Life</u>, Tsaile, Arizona, Navajo Community College Press, 1996, pp. 159-160, 143-144. Duane Champagne, ed., <u>Native America: Portrait of the Peoples</u>, Detroit, Visible Ink Press, 1994, pp. 202-203. George B.N. Ayittey, <u>Indigenous African Institutions</u>, New York, Transnational Publishers, Inc., 1991, pp. 27-30. Malidoma Patrice Some', <u>The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose Through Nature</u>, <u>Ritual</u>, and <u>Community</u>, New York, Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1998, pp. 268-269.

²⁴ Russell Thornton, American Indian Holocaust and Survival: a population history since 1492, Norman. University of Oklahoma Press, 1990, pg.210. Notes on Daniel Gookin's "Historical Collections of the Indians of New England", 1674, as reprinted in Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Series I, Vol. 1, 1792, pp.201-206. The editorial notes included post-Gookin, or 18th century population estimates given by Rev. Isaac Backus, "Captain Jerningham" and Benjamin Bassett. These estimates were probably severe undercounts, due to the tendency of the English to not recognize phenotypically African Afro/Indians as Indians, and due to their general lack of knowledge about more remote and isolated tribal groups, so I added about 40% to their tallies. Records on slave populations came from Moore, pp.50-51. The most helpful article on this topic, specifically in southeastern Massachusetts, is, Daniel R. Mandell, "Shifting Boundaries of Race and Ethnicity: Indian-Black Intermarriage in Southern New England, 1760-1880", in Journal of American History, September, 1998. See also, James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860, N.Y., Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 37-39

²⁵ Daniel Mandell, Behind the Frontier: Indians in Eighteenth- Century Eastern Massachusetts, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1996, pp. 124, 129-130.Colin G. Calloway, First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History, Boston, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004, pp. 150, 155-157. Weston, pp. 90-91.

²⁶ Calloway, pg. 143. O'Connell, Barry, ed., <u>A Son of the Forest and Other Writings by William Apess</u>, a Pequot, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1992, and 1997, pp. 35-37, 47.

Russel Lawrence Barsh, "'Colored' Seamen in the New England Whaling Industry: An Afro-Indian Consortium", in James F. Brooks, ed., Confounding the Color Line: The Indian-Black Experience in North America, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2002, pp. 77, 81-84.

Plymouth Court Records, General Sessions, vol. 6:89-90, vol. 7:83, and vol. 9:23-24, 87-90. The Sachemus family descended from 17th century Massachuset sachem Josias Wompattuck, who granted the land set aside as the Titticut reservation. On Thomas Palmer, see William E. Nelson, "The Larger Context of Litigation in Plymouth County", section II, no page number, preceding note number 37, in Konig, ed., Plymouth Court Records (prev. cited).

²⁹ Mandell, "Shifting Boundaries...", pp.468-9. John Milton Earle, <u>Report of the Governor and</u> <u>Council, Concerning the Indians of the Commonwealth, Under the Act of April 6, 1859</u>, Boston, William White, 1861, pg. 10

³⁰ The published "Vital Records to 1850" for nearly every town in Massachusetts include the marriages from the church records and usually apply a racial label to the small minority of people in the entries who were not "white".

³¹ Mandell, "Shifting Boundaries...", pp.470, 476-7 ³² Barsh, pp. 84-85. Mandell, <u>Behind the Frontier</u>, pp. 181, 193, 204-205.

³³ Plymouth County Deed Records, Book 42, page 242, for the Gonduary/Easton land deed of 1732/1748. Some other documents which refer to Caesar Easton include, Records of the Plymouth County Court of Common Pleas, vol. 10, pp. 365-369, 605-607, and vol. 11, pp. 21-25. Caesar Easton is the only Easton man of color in any Middleborough records of an age to possibly be the father of James Easton, whom the records say was born in Middleborough. Titticut was contained within the boundaries of Middleborough.

³⁴ "Gonduary" is probably a misspelling based on a mispronunciation of another name, since that name does not appear on any other known Massachusetts document, during the colonial era or in the early republic. An extensive search of records and databases turned up only one other use of this name: a Jewish immigrant in New York in 1930. Most likely, Richard "Gonduary" was an ancestor of Richard Gundiway (also spelled, Gundaway) of Mattakeeset, who was a Revolutionary War soldier (Massachusetts, Secretary of the Commonwealth, Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the

Revolutionary War, Boston, Wright & Potter Printing Co., 1896. Vol. 6, pg. 950. There is also a family of the surname Gunderway still living in the area of the Mattakeeset homelands, in Pembroke, Scituate, Hanover, and Hingham. Massachusetts Vital Records to 1850 for the towns of Pembroke and Scituate. Massachusetts State Census records for the years 1855 and 1865. Google search for people of the surname Gunderway presently in Massachusetts.

³⁵ State of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Archives, <u>Index card file to the General Colonial Court</u> Records, 1664, through the Revolution, Vol. 31, pp. 95, 96 (a Penobscot Indian named "Cesar"); vol. 32: pp. 430, 580-581 (a Natick Indian named Cesar Ferrit). James Easton had a brother named Caesar, apparently named after his father.

³⁶ The names of the Titticut Indians who signed the Easton land deed were Leah Shantum, John Simon, Benjamin Wanno, Joshua Peter, Joseph Peter, Joshua Shantum, Jude Shem, Mary Shem, and Job Ahauton (grandson of Leah Shantum).

³⁷ Beck, Walters, and Francisco, pp.67-70. William Simmons, Spirit of the New England Tribes: Indian History and Folklore, Hanover, NH, University Press of New England, 1986, pp.45-46. Constance A. Crosby, "The Algonkian Spiritual Landscape", in Peter Benes, ed., Algonkians of New England: Past and Present, Boston University, 1993, pp. 35-41.

This quote from The Autobiography of Black Hawk, Iowa City, The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1932, pg. 88, and several other relevant examples and quotations from Indians of several Northeastern tribes on this topic can be found in, George S. Snyderman, "Concepts of Land Ownership Among the Iroquois and Their Neighbors", in William N. Fenton, ed., Symposium on Local Diversity in Iroquois Culture, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 149, Wash., D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1951, pp. 13-34. Calloway, pg. 181. James Axtell, Natives and Newcomers: The Cultural Origins of North America, N.Y., Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 240, . James Warren Springer, "American Indians and the Law of Real Property in Colonial New England", The American Journal of Legal History, vol. 30, no. 1, Jan., 1986, pp. 38, n.58, 42, 44, and 48. Besides the cultural evidence, the numerous early colonial period English accounts of Native Americans "tresspassing" upon lands that they "sold" or "ceded" under English law, and seeming to completely disregard those laws and legal documents, could be interpreted as evidence that the Indians simply did not comprehend the English legal notions regarding land.

³⁹ Such was the case with the English claim on the lands that became Jamestown, Virginia. Axtell, pg. 240.

⁴⁰ Neal Salisbury, Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500-1643, N.Y., Oxford University Press, 1982, pp. 200-201. Colin G. Calloway, New Worlds for All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remakin of Early America, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, pp. 22-23.

⁴¹ Francis Jennings, in his groundbreaking book on New England colonial history, <u>The Invasion of</u> America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest, New York, W.W. Norton and Co., 1976, pg. 137, almost dismisses the significance of how the concept of land ownership was so foreign to Native American understandings about the land, as he passingly acknowledged: "Some students [not scholars?] have doubted that Indians understood how they were dispossessing themselves by sale of land to Europeans. Perhaps that was so in the earliest transactions, but Indian sophistication grew rapidly. European power soon drove home the lesson that a land sale involved full and final alienation of right." I think that where I differ in my assessment of this point is in how long it may have taken for the Indians to make the connection between the increasingly aggressive and hostile behavior of the English and the ceremony of putting their marks on the talking paper. Native American sophistication and intelligence granted, I would probably allow a longer period of time (perhaps at least a decade longer on average) for this awareness to become fully realized, considering their difficulties with the English language ("legalese" English, by the way) and the drastic difference in cosmological perspectives regarding land.

Jennings, pp. 135, 138. Salisbury, pp. 176-77, 193-201. Springer, pp. 33, 35-38.

⁴³ Salisbury, pp. 193-194.

⁴⁴ Jennings, pp. 140-143. Salisbury, pp. 199-201.

⁴⁵ Sample statements from colonial era English affirming this fact can be found in: John Winthrop (first governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony), "Generall Considerations for the Plantation in New England," London, 1629, in The John Winthrop Papers, Allen B. Forbes, ed., Boston, Massachusetts Historical Society, 1929-47, vol. 2, pg. 118; Robert Gray, A Good Speed to Virginia, London, 1609, a pamphlet quoted in Gary B. Nash, Red, White, and Black: the Peoples of Early North America, New Jersey, Prentice Hallll, 1992, pg. 39; quote from Rev. John Aylmer in 1558, "God is English.," quoted in Carl Bridenbaugh, Vexed and Troubled Englishmen, 1590-1642, New York, Oxford University Press, 1968, pg. 13.

⁴⁶ Jennings., pp. 144-145. Axtell, pg. 252. Virginia Anderson, "King Phillip's Herds: Indians, Colonists, and the Problem of Livestock in Early New England", William and Mary Quarterly (3), vol. 51, no. 4, October, 1994, pp. 606-620. ⁴⁷ The concept of Indian leaders as monarchs became so prevalent after its introduction by the English

that it has become a generally unquestioned "fact". Many anthropologists and historians have amended the misconception by speaking of "high sachems" and lower or "sub-sachems". This distinction may

have some basis in the observations of presiding officers ("presidents"?) at the council meetings (see Daniel Denton, <u>A Brief Description of New York, Formerly Called New-Netherlands</u>, London, 1670, pp. 11-12). But the presiding officers typically held no greater power in decision making than any of the other leaders. Be that as it may, the myth of "supreme" or high sachems gradually became internalized by partially deculturalized tribal people, which may have also been, in part, a survival tactic as they were pressured to prove their "Indianness"--as understood in the minds of most Americans--during the 19th and 20th centuries. See Ruth Wallis Herndon and Ella Wilcox Sekatau, "The Right to a Name: The Narragansett People and Rhode Island Officials in the Revolutionary Era", <u>Ethnohistory</u>, 44:3, Summer, 1997.

⁴⁸ Weston, pg. 601.

 ⁴⁹ Goodwin, pg. 164. Speck, pp. 57-58. S. Hopkins Emery, <u>The History of the Church of North</u> <u>Middleborough, Massachusetts, in Six Discourses, Preached by its acting Pastor, S. Hopkins Emery,</u> <u>Middleborough, Harlow and Thatcher, 1876, pg. 7. William B. Taylor, "Indian Artifacts of Titicut", in</u> <u>The Middleborough Antiquarian</u>, vol.11, no.2, pg. 5. Nahum Mitchell, <u>History of the Early Settlement</u> <u>of Bridgewater, in Plymouth County, Massachusetts</u>, Boston, 1840, Bridgewater, Henry Pratt, 1897, pp. 21,22. Some sources date Wampattuck's land grant to 1644. Ebenezer W. Peirce, <u>History of</u> Middleborough, in D. Hamilton Hurd, comp., <u>History of Plymouth County, Massachusetts...</u>, Philadelphia, J.W. Lewis & Co., 1884, pg. 944. The signature of Josias Wampattuck on the 1686 document was either a forgery or signed by another Indian, since Wampattuck died in 1669.

⁵¹ Massachuset family surnames at Titticut in the mid-18th century include: Shantum, Ahauton, Thomas, Sachemus, and Robbins. Wampanoag family surnames at Titticut during that same era include: Wanno, Simons (a.k.a., Simon, Symon, and Symons), Felix, Anthony, and Easton. Many other surnames are of uncertain tribal origin.

⁵² The only other case, out of 62 Titticut and Assawompsett land deeds surveyed, in which several unrelated members of the tribe were the grantors of land to another Indian was the case of Thomas Felix, jr., in 1745. Plymouth Deeds, Vol. 37, pp.205-6.

⁵³ Mandell, <u>Behind the Frontier</u>, pg. 90.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 147-149. Plymouth Court Records, Common Pleas, vol.1,pp.33-35, 339-343; vol. 8, pp. 309-312; vol. 10, pp. 539-542; vol. 21, pp. 79-81.

⁵⁵ The part of Middleborough where Leonard lived is now in the town of Lakeville.

⁵⁶ John S. C. Abbott, <u>History of King Philip, Sovereign Chief of the Wampanoags</u>, N.Y., Harper and Brothers, 1899, pp.309-310.

⁵⁷ Ebenezer W. Peirce, <u>Indian History, Biography and Genealogy: Pertaining to the Good Sachem</u> <u>Massasoit of the Wampanoag Tribe, and His Descendants</u>, North Abington, Massachusetts, Zerviah Gould Mitchell, 1878, pg.246.

⁵⁸ Andrew McFarland Davis, "Alphabetical List of Partners in the Land Bank of 1740", <u>New England</u> <u>Historic Genealogical Society Register</u>, Vol. 50, January, 1896, pp.187-191, 309.

⁵⁹ Plymouth County Court of Common Pleas, some of the more noteworthy of the thirty-six cases would include: vol. 8: 204-206, May, 1742; v. 8: 344, Jan., 1743 (bond note called in from 1729); v.8: 503-508, March, 1744 (Benjamin Russell, a Dartmouth blacksmith, called Leonard on a fifty pound bond. Court note mentions that, "The Defendt. Being a member of the General Court Then Sitting", a continuance was granted to the next session, wherein Leonard admitted to the debt and chancered a lesser judgment.); v. 9: 70-73, Sept., 1744 (In this case, several debts over a period of nine years, owed to James Warren, Esq. of Plymouth were demanded. It was decided to appraise and seize some of Leonard's lands in order to satisfy the debts.); v. 9: 141-145, May, 1745 (Jonathan Williams, a "Boston Wine Seller", successfully sued Leonard for failing to pay over one hundred pounds to Williams on the profits from a small iron foundry or "bloomery" on Leonard's homestead, which Leonard had lost the rights to in an earlier action.). Leonard also brought about a dozen cases against his own debtors during this time period, not always successfully, and when he was able to collect any money it was sometimes immediately seized by Leonard's creditors, with the aid of the sheriff, on a few occasions (see, v. 8: 109-114, 204-206, v. 9: 53-58, 216-219, for examples).

⁶⁰ Plymouth County Land Deeds, Book 44, 1756-1758, # 101, "Leonard to Whitten", dated, May 14, 1757, refers to a Massachusetts General Court decision of January 18, 1749, in which a portion of Leonard's lands sufficient to cover his debts, were ordered to be sold at auction.

⁶¹ William Reed Deane, "Genealogical Memoir of the Leonard Family", in <u>New England Historic</u> <u>Genealogical Society Register</u>, October, 1851, pp. 407, 412, 413. J.W.D. Hall, "Ancient Iron Works in Taunton", <u>New England Historic Genealogical Society Register</u>, January, 1884, pg. 274.

⁶² Mandell, <u>Behind the Frontier</u>, page 136. Ahauton was the grandson of Leah Shantum, one of the tribal elders who signed Easton's land deed, and his signature (misspelled) was added to the deed as a later witness.

⁶³ Massachusetts Archives Colonial Records, Vol. 32, pp. 489-490, 527-528.

⁶⁴ Leonard was not just a gentleman lawyer who savored the title, "Esquire", but the Plymouth Court records show that he was a practicing, frequently-working lawyer, beginning in the 1720s, possibly beginning at the young age of 18 years. Plymouth County Court of Common Pleas, vol. 1:277-282. He represented a variety of clients, usually other gentlemen who were seeking satisfaction from debtors, but on at least two occasions he even represented local Indians (Ply., Common Pleas, v. 1: 339-343, v.6: 20-23). In another case, in 1738, he had an Indian woman bound to himself for three years of indentured servitude due to her inability to repay a debt (Court of General Sessions, vol. 9: 87-90). ⁶⁵ Plymouth County Court of Common Pleas, May, 1753, vol. 10: 365-369. About 2 months after the Eastons won this case, Stephen David was acquitted of beating his second Titticut wife, Betty, to death the year before. There is no court record of his acquittal, but the well-known Baptist minister, Isaac Backus, who pastored a church in North Middleborough at that time, refers to the beating death, David's imprisonment, and his acquittal in his diary. William G. McLoughlin, ed., The Diary of Isaac Backus, vol.1, pp. 230, 285, and 292. There are court records regarding Stephen David being charged for the cost of the coroner's inquest on the body of Betty David, and the cost of his jailing while awaiting trial. Plymouth County Court of General Sessions, vol. 2: 85-86, September, 1753, No mention is made of who served as Stephen David's lawyer, but his good friend and neighbor, Leonard, would be a likely suspect. After she was beaten, Betty David went to the Leonards' house for help, where she died two weeks later. Backus, pg. 230.

⁶⁶ Plymouth County Deeds, Book 42, page 208, recorded March 24, 1754. Plymouth County Court of Common Pleas, May session, 1755, vol.11:21-25.

⁶⁷ Ebenezer W. Peirce, "History of Middleboro", in, D. Hamilton Hurd, comp., <u>History of Plymouth</u> <u>County, Massachusetts, with Biographical Sketches of Many of its Pioneers and Prominent Men</u>, Philadelphia, J.W. Lewis and Co., 1884, pg. 1030.

⁶⁸ Plymouth Deeds, index to grantors and grantees shows the years between roughly 1740 and 1760 as having the largest volume of land transferal activity. Such activity slowed considerably for the next twenty years, followed by a brief spurt of Titticut Indian land sales between 1783 (the year the Revolutionary War ended) and 1796. United States Constitution, Article 1, sections 2 and 8. Mandell, Beyond the Frontier, pg. 173. State of Massachusetts, House Report #68, pg.5. One Middleborough town historian, S. Hopkins Emery (see note # 30), writing in 1876, claimed that the last land of the Middleborough Indians was sold in 1760, but the other evidence cited above and in Middleborough town records and Plymouth Court records (Ply. Common Pleas, Aug. 1804, v.21:79-81) show Indians losing land at Assawompsett in Middleborough in 1788 and 1804, which therefore renders Emery's claim to be false. It was typical of 19th century town historians in Massacusetts to make exaggerated claims about the demise or even extinction of local Indians (see Introduction).

⁶⁹ 1790 U.S. Census. The known and probable children of Caesar and Mercy Easton at this time and their locations: James Easton (Bridgewater); Moses Easton (Taunton- which bordered with Titticut. Moses was in Dartmouth by 1800); Caesar Easton (jr.) (Bridgewater or Middleborough- or Titticut?) Caesar, jr. does not appear in the Bridgewater census in 1790, even though church records place him there in the early 1780s. A Plymouth Court record places him in Middleborough, occupation "labourer"in April, 1800. Ply. County Court of Common Pleas, v. 20:108-113. There was a "Cesar Eston" in Providence, R.I. in 1790, but this may be an unrelated person. No record is found for their sister, Hannah Robbins in 1790, or her husband, Jack. The 1790 locations of the other likely sons of Caesar and Mercy, Aaron and Richard Easton, are also unknown.

Chapter Two

James Easton: Living the Ideals of the American Revolution

Revolutionary rhetoric -talk of "liberty", "equality", "the rights of all", and the "end of tyranny and oppression"- fired up the imagination and hopes of diverse types of people in the English American colonies of the late 18th century. These hopes and dreams varied, and were as diverse as the people who carried them. For many poorer Euro-Americans there was the hope of greater opportunity for economic and social advancement, and relief from excessive taxation. For those who already owned vast plantations and numerous slaves, there was the hope of replacing the political power vested in the monarchy and the colonial governors with a more extended system of shared power which men of property from their own class could dominate. For enslaved African Americans, in both the northern and southern colonies, the meaning of the word "liberty" was not at all ambiguous. To them it meant the end of slavery, just like the word "equality" meant the end of being treated as inherently inferior beings. When an estimated five thousand African Americans¹ were recruited into the state militias and the Continental Army, it was with promises of freedom and equality. The implications of these proposed revolutionary changes in the social order were full of possibility, charging the air with excitement.

With few exceptions, the new nation that was formed out of the American Revolution did not quite live up to the actual and implied promises that were made to African American veterans and their families. Although as many as 200,000 slaves were freed during the Revolution (most of those by the British), and most of the northern states ended slavery within 20 years after the war's end, "freedom" did not

mean acceptance into American society as equals. It did not even mean equal economic opportunity, as most Euro-Americans in the "free" North expected Afro-Americans to do the same kinds of work that they did as slaves, only now as paid servants or paid laborers. In spite of these circumstances, many African American Revolutionary War veterans continued to strive for nothing less than the full and equal American citizenship that they felt their military service and contributions to the American economy had earned them. James Easton (1754-1830) of Massachusetts was such a man.

During the course of his life, James Easton educated himself, became a skilled blacksmith, served the patriot cause in the American Revolution, successfully operated his own iron foundry for over twenty years, and ran one of the earliest combined vocational and academic type schools in the U.S. He also led what appears to have been the earliest sit-in protests in U.S. history, protesting against segregated seating in two Massachusetts churches, first in 1789 and several more times during the next 37 years. Easton accomplished most of this while residing in North Bridgewater, Massachusetts (now Brockton, about twenty miles south of Boston), a town in which free people of color, in the early 19th century, made up only about one and one half percent of the population, and the extended Easton family made up nearly half of that "free colored" population.²

In North Bridgewater, Easton and his family faced much of the same racial discrimination and opposition that free people of color faced throughout the U.S., but, being far removed from any substantial African American community, they faced these obstacles nearly alone. Although the Eastons had some friends and relatives (through marriage) among the local Euro-Americans, they did not have the

community support system that people of color could find in places like Boston, New York, or Philadelphia, where free colored populations were much more concentrated. Yet, James Easton remained in North Bridgewater from 1780 until his death in 1830. That fact alone makes the accomplishments of James Easton even more remarkable, while raising some provocative questions. How did James Easton successfully operate a business there for so long, in the face of racist opposition, while competing with several local white-owned iron foundries? Why did the Eastons remain in North Bridgewater under such conditions? Did Easton have some unusual or outstanding human character traits, or was he just stubborn--or both? How well-accepted were the Eastons by the local white citizens during James Easton's lifetime and in the decades following his death, before most of his descendants became classified as "white persons" in 1880?³ And, finally, what was Easton's legacy to the larger African American, and, ultimately, the American society?

James Easton was born on November 12, 1754 and was only six months old when the first parcel of his family's Titticut lands were taken by the Leonard family, through the Plymouth Court of Common Pleas. During the first ten years of his life, James witnessed the dispossession of most of the lands of the Titticut Indians and the drama of the struggles of his family and relations to keep their lands. The agony of all of their losses certainly must have made a profound impression upon him. It is clear that two vital lessons that the Easton family--and probably many others in their tribal community-- learned through their struggle were that justice must be fought for, and that it does not come easy, if it ever comes at all.

The Easton family's presence in Indian, rather than English, communities during the late colonial era fit a common pattern. Most free Afro/Indians in colonial

Massachusetts, including the two most famous ones, Capt. Paul Cuffe and Crispus Attucks, usually lived in Indian communities, rather than English towns. It was not until slavery ended in Massachusetts in 1783, at the end of the American Revolution, that we see the beginning of a large movement of free people of color into the Euro-American cities and towns, pursuing their dreams of equality and opportunity in the newly-liberated America for which many of them had fought. After the demise of the Titticut Indian reservation, the Eastons' relationship to the Wampanoag community continued on through the 19th century, and some family members have maintained that relationship to the present day. Several marriages between Eastons/Easons and Wampanoag Indians can be found in the historical records. These marriages include that of James Easton's daughter, Mary, to John Wainer, a nephew of Paul Cuffe, and Peter Eas(t)on, who married Cuffe's daughter, Rhoda. A man named Newport Eason (relation to James unknown) married a woman named Grace Sachem, in 1796. "Sachem" is the Wampanoag/Algonquian language word for "chief" or "leader". Both Newport and Grace were designated in the marriage record as being of Dartmouth, Massachusetts, and were therefore probably of the same Wampanoag community there to which the Cuffes, Wainers, and James Easton's brother, Moses, belonged.⁴

Fortunately, we have more than just fragmentary evidence from civic and church records available to put together a biography of James Easton. Two historians and one of James Easton's grandsons wrote about him during the mid-nineteenth century, when his memory was still fresh in the minds of many who knew him. The historians were William Cooper Nell, recognized as the first professional African American historian, and Bradford Kingman, a town historian and genealogist of North Bridgewater. The grandson was Benjamin F. Roberts, an abolitionist, who

initiated the successful movement to desegregate Boston's public schools in the 1840's – a movement in which William Nell also played a key role.⁵

In his most significant published work, <u>Colored Patriots of the American</u> <u>Revolution</u>⁶, William Nell describes James Easton and his life accomplishments in unprecedented detail. Nell, was the first to provide us with information on Easton's Revolutionary War service, his business endeavors, his civil rights activism, and his struggles to run a school for young men of color in his factory. On Easton's service to the patriot cause Nell wrote:

James Easton, of Bridgewater, was one who participated in the erection of the fortifications on Dorchester Heights, under command of Washington, which the next morning so greatly surprised the British soldiers then encamped in Boston.⁷

The records of the Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War do show an extensive service record for James Easton (also spelled Eason and Eston at various points, for the same person), but it does not include Dorchester Heights on March 4, 1776, the battle to which Nell referred. The man who became Easton's father-in-law after the war, Samson Dunbar, is shown to have been there, but not Easton. Of course, the absence of any mention of Easton at Dorchester Heights in the military records does not necessarily mean that he was not there. British General William Howe estimated the crowd of Americans who put up the fortifications to be "not less than twelve thousand men". Although that number is probably an exaggeration, it is certain that a large portion of that crowd consisted of volunteers who were not officially enlisted or recorded by name. James Easton, who was twenty one years old at that time, was probably one of those volunteers. ⁸

In the military records, the earliest service shown for James Easton is in Captain James Allen's company, in Colonel Simeon Cary's regiment in New York on August 9, 1776. There is no indication of when he completed his stint in Cary's regiment, but he was probably one of the 5,000 men recruited in late June, 1776 to serve in Canada and New York until December 1, 1776. The record shows that "Eason" enlisted next in Captain John Russell's company of Colonel Gamaliel Bradford's regiment on January 16, 1777, and served in that unit until July 6, 1777. There are three separate records of his service in this same company and regiment, using the three different previously mentioned spellings of his surname, with the same date of initial enlistment.⁹

The historical record also indicates that Easton served in the most heated area of battle during that early part of the war, the Lake Champlain and Hudson River valleys. The most interesting story to come out of the records is the one concerning the end of his Revolutionary War service. On a faded muster return list of John Russell's company in Gamaliel Bradford's regiment, after the name "James Eston", is scrawled the words, "keled July the 6th, 1777". (In case there is any doubt what "keled" means, the index card for that same entry translates it as "killed".) How could this be, since we know that Easton lived on through many other adventures until the year 1830? A chronology of all of the significant battles and other events of the Revolution indicates that the only significant battle that occurred on July 6, 1777 was the fall of Fort Ticonderoga on the southern end of Lake Champlain. But the fall of Fort Ticonderoga was actually more a case of the Continental forces running away from conflict than an actual battle. The American patriots had held the strategic fort for over two years, but when they woke up on the fifth of July, 1777, and were faced with the overwhelming numbers of British General John Burgoyne's troops pointing numerous cannons down at them from a nearby hill, they decided to sneak away that

night and abandon the fort. But, if there was no battle, why was James Easton listed as killed?¹⁰

The short answer to the question is that the officer who scrawled that record *assumed* that Easton was killed. An excerpt from an account of the fall of Fort Ticonderoga written by historian John C. Miller provides some illumination:

The rebels made good their getaway; all the British saw of the garrison was a cloud of dust kicked up by the fleeing Americans. Guns, cannon, ammunition, and provisions they found in plenty, but of rebels none except four soldiers who had been left behind to fire a large cannon at the British when they came within range. But even this suicide squad was found "dead drunk by a cask of Madeira."¹¹

Had they not indulged so heavily on the wine, and instead fired the cannon at the British, as their commander had ordered them to, they most certainly would have perished –hence their officer's assumption that he had been "keled". ¹²

A search of several primary and secondary reports of this incident has turned up no further information on the fate of those four men, once in British hands. If they were all allowed to live, as obviously James Easton was, it is likely that they spent some time in one of the notoriously wretched British prison camps. We know that 228 prisoners were taken by the British once they caught up with the fleeing rebels on July 7th. Another possibility is that the prisoners were "paroled", as the British called it, which meant that they could return to their homes if they took an oath not to serve the rebel cause again for the duration of the war- but that option was usually only offered to gentlemen officers.¹³ Whatever the case, James Easton served in the Revolutionary army for a total of about 11 months, and possibly spent an even longer period of time as a British prisoner of war. He does not appear again in the historical record until September 3, 1780, when he was "received into" the 4th Church of Christ in the North parish of Bridgewater, Massachusetts.¹⁴

It was in that Congregationalist church, and in a Baptist church in the neighboring town of Stoughton, that Easton first demonstrated his uncompromising insistence that he and his people be treated with the respect and courtesy that they had earned – as veterans, as productive citizens of the new republic, and as children of the same God. In March of 1789, one and a half years after the ratification of the U.S. Constitution, and one month after the first President of the United States took office, the voting members of the North Bridgewater Church of Christ (including Easton's former commanding officer, Col. Simeon Cary) voted to expand the segregated seating arrangement for their congregation. They decided to build an elevated balcony, which in those days was called a "gallery", or a "porch", for the exclusive seating of the people of color. The "negroes" were to all sit in this gallery, and nowhere else. Although the church records do not describe the seating arrangements in great detail, the records show that prior to the 1789 remodeling, all white male church members sat on the main floor, in purchased or rented pews (as was the custom in that era), the white women (whether all or some it is not clear) sat in elevated galleries on the east and west sides of the main floor and there was one long pew in the back of the main floor designated "the negro pew", where all of the small number of African Americans and other people of color in the congregation were required to sit. The church choir, which included some white males, sat in one section of the women's gallery, and there was one elevated pew for the hearing impaired, designated "the deaf new." The elevated "porch" for the people of color was to be a little higher than the side galleries, and have its own separate stairway and entrance.¹⁵

Evidently, at the dawning of the new republic--the promised society of freedom, equality, and justice for all-- it had become "necessary", or desirable, in this

American church to raise segregation to "new heights". It was no longer tolerable to the Euro-Americans in some churches for the people of color to sit in church on the same floor as themselves, or to even have such persons easily visible from the floor. As northern slavery ended in the two decades after the Revolution, and a large influx of newly-freed Afro-Americans, including many veterans of the war, moved into northern cities and small towns, "white" Americans hustled to preserve the "distinctions" that they had been taught must exist between them and people of color. They felt obligated to assure their former slaves that "freedom" did not mean social equality with "whites". They also had to deal with an influx of long-free Afro-Americans, Afro-Indians, and American Indians, recently dispossessed of some of the last of the Indian land holdings, who were also moving to cities to pursue economic opportunities.¹⁶

It is not certain how soon after this church seating arrangement went into effect that James Easton and his wife Sarah (1756-1833) began to protest against it, but the records indicate that it may have happened in 1789. When the 4th Church of Christ in the North parish of Bridgewater made the decision to build the "Negro Porch" in March of 1789, Easton was still a young man, just married for six years, father of two small children, with a third child expected in May, and probably trying to establish himself professionally as a blacksmith. It may not have seemed wise or prudent to him at that time to initiate any serious protest movement, although town historian Bradford Kingman reports that the church decision "created no little feeling on the part of the colored population". That statement indicates that at least a verbal expression of protest was made at that time.¹⁷ The account given by William Nell of the Easton church seating protests, which were the first sit-in demonstrations on

record in American history, provides us with a possible sequence of events, but no dates:

The family were victims, however, to the spirit of colorphobia, then rampant in New England, and were persecuted even to the dragging out of some of the family from the Orthodox Church¹⁸, in which, on its enlargement, a porch had been erected, exclusively for colored people. After this disgraceful occurrence, the Eastons left the church. They afterwards purchased a pew in the Baptist church at Stoughton Corner, which excited a great deal of indignation. Not succeeding in their attempt to have the bargain cancelled, the people tarred the pew. The next Sunday, the family carried seats in the waggon. The pew was then pulled down: but the family sat in the aisle. These indignities were continued until the separation of the family [from that church].¹⁹

Combining Nell's account with the 4th Church of Christ records and the records of the "Baptist Church at Stoughton Corner" (or, East Stoughton Baptist Church²⁰), along with the historical account of Bradford Kingman, we find that such protests occurred on at least six different occasions in those two churches, between 1789 and 1827.²¹ According to Nell's sequence of events, the first protest occurred in the 4th Church of Christ in the North parish of Bridgewater, shortly after the "porch" was built in 1789. Nell briefly refers to some Easton family members being "dragged out" of the church, without providing any details. Given the history of Easton family passive resistance protest that is revealed through the collective evidence, it appears likely that they were dragged out of the white seating area after sitting there in protest.

The Easton's next act of protest, according to Nell, was to leave the 4th Church. That was a very serious action for a church member to take in those days, and in that church the procedure that was normally followed was that the persons who desired to leave would first request a formal dismissal (something like an "honorable discharge" in the military) from the congregation, which they could then present to the next

church that they sought to join, as a way of proving that they were not forced to leave their former church because of any misconduct or heresy. Although the church records routinely mention when people requested such a dismissal, there is no record of the Eastons ever making such a formal request. Perhaps James and Sarah felt it would be futile to seek a formal dismissal because of the nature of their protest. Surely, many "whites" of that era would have thought such a protest to be nothing more than "impudence" or "ungratefulness" on the part of the "colored people". One peculiarity in the 4th Church records suggests that the Eastons were indeed no longer members of the church during the 1790s. The baptisms of the two Easton children who were born during the 1780s, Joshua and James, Jr., are recorded in the church records, but none of the five Easton children that were born between 1789 and 1798 were recorded as baptized in this church.²²

Although there is no mention of James and Sarah Easton in the East Stoughton Baptist Church records until 1807, it is still possible that they attended that church for at least part of the 1790s. It is also likely that not much time elapsed between their leaving the 4th Church of Christ in the North parish of Bridgewater and joining the East Stoughton Baptists, since it was considered socially improper (and in some towns still illegal) for Christian citizens to not belong to a church in those days, and the Eastons were constantly in pursuit of respect and acceptance in American society. Members of the 4th Church in Bridgewater were required to pay a "ministerial tax", and when several members left the church in 1784 to join the new Baptist Church in neighboring East Stoughton, the governing committee of the 4th Church met with the similar committee of the East Stoughton Baptist Church to determine which of their former members were actually attending the Baptist Church, and therefore exempt

from the tax. A list of the names of exempt persons is given in the 4th Church records, with the stated condition of their exemption being, "so Long as they Steadily...[illegible]...and worship with the Baptist Society." In those days, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish between church law and civil law, as they were often one and the same.²³

There are several likely reasons why the Eastons chose at that time to go to the Baptist Church in East Stoughton. The most likely reason is because Sarah Easton was from Stoughton and had family members in that church. Sarah had previously been a member of that Baptist Church, from which she was formally dismissed in December of 1780, the same month that she joined the 4th Church of Christ in Bridgewater.²⁴ Her father, Sampson Dunbar, still resided in Stoughton in the 1790's, and was one of the original members of the East Stoughton Baptist Church, as was her brother, Joshua Dunbar.²⁵ Both Sampson and Joshua were Revolutionary War veterans.²⁶ Two other Revolutionary War veterans of color, Calvin and Luther Jotham, who resided in North Bridgewater with their families and were surely wellacquainted with the Eastons, also belonged to the Baptist Church in East Stoughton. And, lastly, the Eastons resided in the part of North Bridgewater that bordered with East Stoughton, and were only about two or three miles from the Baptist Church.²⁷

Having few other churches to choose from in their area that were not of too great a distance to travel, and possibly also due to some encouragement from those Euro-Americans within the 4th Church of Christ in Bridgewater who were friendly to them, the Easton's evidently returned to that church sometime before or during the year 1800. The records of the 4th Church show that protests over segregated seating by unnamed "blacks" began again in the summer of 1800, which, combined with other

evidence, suggests that the Eastons had probably returned by then. The fact that the Eastons continued to reside in Bridgewater throughout the 1790s is evident in that Plymouth County land deed records show that James Easton owned at least 24 acres of land in the North precinct of Bridgewater at that time, and the tax rolls for Bridgewater in 1798 list James Easton as present and possessing taxable property.²⁸ That the Eastons had friends among the white population of the North precinct of Bridgewater is also clear through information found in the Plymouth County land and court records, and by the fact that James Easton and his sons were able to succeed in business there with primarily white clientele. The fact that Easton neighbors Ephraim Packard, in 1782, and Jabez Field, in 1787, sold James Easton land adjoining their own properties in Bridgewater indicates at least a high level of tolerance, if not friendship. Additional evidence for this claim includes the fact that in 1784, James Easton was cutting timber in partnership with his white neighbors David and Ephraim Packard, and that, in 1787-89, he was a partner in an iron business with his white neighbors Samuel, William, and Isaac Brett.²⁹

This second protest against segregated seating in the 4th Church of Christ occurred sometime before August 4, 1800, for the records of the church state that a meeting was held on that date, "To see what measures the Parish will take to prevent the blacks from occupying the seats appropriated to the use of the white people so as to prevent any disturbance in time of Publick worshipe". Apparently, a "disturbance in time of Publicke worshipe" had already taken place. Some persons of color had attempted to sit in the "white" section during a church service. Although these socalled "blacks" are unnamed in this and all of the rest of the 4th Church's accounts of trouble over seating arrangements, it is likely that all of the protests involved the

Eastons. The extended Easton family made up about one half of the "free colored" population of North Bridgewater during most of the time that they lived there, becoming a little more than half after 1820, and several of the other people of color in North Bridgewater went to the Baptist Church in East Stoughton. Of the forty three people of color found in the 4th Church records between 1776 and 1794 (no people of color are mentioned individually by name after 1794), twenty eight of them are part of the extended family of James and Sarah Easton. Two of Sarah Easton's sisters and their husbands and children were members of the church during the 1780's and '90's, as well as James Easton's brother, Caesar Easton, his wife, Eunice, and their children. The August 4th meeting concluded with a vote upholding church policy, stating that the "blacks" would only be allowed to sit in "the seats in the porch above". ³⁰

At a meeting of the 4th Church of Christ in the North parish of Bridgewater in January of 1801, somebody put an item on the agenda, "To see if the Parish will make any alteration [to the seating policy?] to accommodate the blacks". Apparently, the item was dropped from the agenda, as there is no record of any further discussion of the topic. The issue was brought up again in 4th Church meetings in 1804, 1816 and 1827, and each time it was apparently after some sort of protest had taken place. On March 12, 1804 a church meeting agenda item reads, "to see if the Parish will take any further methods to prevent the blacks from seating in the seats with the white people in the meeting House...". Again, there is no record of any further discussion of the matter at that time. Was the issue too divisive? Was there a friend of the Eastons on the church board who offered to talk to them privately on the matter? The records are silent on why the issue was sporadically raised and dropped. After over twenty years of getting to know James and Sarah Easton and their growing family,

were some of the Euro-American citizens of North Bridgewater beginning to recognize their humanity and all that they had in common with each other? Did James Easton's increasing success at his iron business in the early 19th century make some sort of positive impression on his fellow citizens?

Sometime after the 1804 protest, it appears that the Easton family left the Congregational Church again, since the East Stoughton Baptist Church records state that James and Sarah Easton became members of that church on August 2, 1807. It was during this tenure at the Baptist Church, in the year 1812, that the protests there which William Nell described in his book occurred. Two very noteworthy facts found in Nell's account of the protests at the East Stoughton Baptist Church suggest that the Euro-American members of that church were not unanimous in the disdain for integrated seating and racial equality among the believers in Christ. The fact that the Eastons were able to purchase a pew in the "white" seating area reveals that at least one person was not opposed to treating the Eastons on an equal basis with the "whites". Secondly, the fact that the offended church members did not succeed in, as Nell puts it, "their attempt to have the bargain cancelled", suggests that there may have even been some considerable support or sympathy for the Eastons within the church hierarchy as well as among the general membership. An examination of the church records confirms what Nell's report suggests.

The Baptist Church records for September 1, 1812 state:

the Church Voted to Repair James Easton Pew in the Galery [sic] that some ill dispos'd person has taken the seats therefrom with his consent 2^d Chose a committee to Compremise [sic] with James Easton to see if he would make any proposals to settle the late difficulty between him and this Church Viz Seth Alden Jona. Blanchard Major Thomas Curtis³¹

On the next page in the record book, we find the report of the above-named

committee, along with the names of at least one white ally of the Eastons and another

possible ally, within the minutes of a church meeting held October 1, 1812:

2 Voted that the members present felt no hardness towards Sister milly Holbrook for Selling her part of a pew belonging to Isaac Beals and herself to James Eason

3 Voted that the members present are Dissatisfied with the Conduct of James Eason for the following reasons viz

1st Because he has been guilty of dissimulation in his Conduct 2nd Because he did not receive the Brethren which have Been sent to compromise with him on the Subject in love as Becomes a Christian 3rd Because he has repeatedly unjustly implicated the Church by saying that they have Joined in affinity with the world and also because some of the Breathen [sic] did not agree to his Conduct he has said they ware [sic] hypocrites

4 Voted to suspend James Eason from the Communion of the Church until the members is Satisfied N B this passed unanimously³²

These church minutes raise several important questions regarding the varying attitudes of the church members, while revealing just a little in the way of answers. It is clear by the willingness of at least one member, Milly Holbrook, to sell part of her pew to Easton that not all of the white Baptist Church members agreed on the segregated seating arrangements. If the co-owner of the pew, Isaac Beals, agreed to the sale, then that would be at least two dissenters. But the members' expressed desire to "compromise" with Easton "on the Subject" suggests even more ambiguity on the topic within the church. Were the church doctrines on segregation unusually vague and ill-defined compared to most other Baptist doctrine, in which there is generally no room for compromise? Was segregation a strictly secular social custom in this case, completely unconnected to, or not actually addressed at all by, the doctrines of this faction of the Baptist Church (the Warren Association)? Another possible reason

See H The offeren and I . Canton were long at 13 Eason berty Jud mention prefers Then formest speak cloth has ton The first the melly Hellingh for the and Allow her find of a give belonging to Asonikusk ness 3 off that the members present are apatisfied with the Conduct of Junes Eason for The following reasons in " Therawise he has been guilty of iffernalation Descause he is not seen the firstheres which there men Sciel I Campramise Dith him an they Subject in have as toreamer a christian 3) Because in how as torrown a christion the Couch by is aging that they have frind for affinite with the stand they have frind Some of the Breathen to not agree to his Landa I had they work agree to his 4 Wiles the Suspend James Edon from the formation of the Care himtill the menders

Courtesy of the New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston, Massachusetts

for the suggestion to compromise is that James Easton may have threatened to take the issue to the courts and, if so, the members were, in effect, attempting to settle the matter out of court.³³ No court record concerning this incident has yet been found,

although the English traveler/journalist, Edward Abdy claimed there was such a case.³⁴

Perhaps what is most revealing in these Baptist Church meeting minutes is the depth of the righteous indignation James Easton felt towards anyone who would deny his full humanity and his right to equal treatment, particularly, those who would do so in the name of Christ. Unlike these untypically flexible Baptists, Easton was not willing to compromise at all on the matter, and he had apparently refused to receive their representative committee into his house before the church expelled him from their communion. When James Easton accused the Stoughton Baptists of joining "in affinity with the world", regarding their practice of segregated seating, he likely meant that the practice was indeed secular, or "worldly", with no basis in the teachings of Christ. James' son, Rev. Hosea Easton, who was thirteen years old at the time of this protest, would later write that racial discrimination in the churches was a form of "idolatry", and that only social "custom", not scripture, compelled people to discriminate on the basis of color, "leaving law, justice, and equity altogether out of the question".³⁵

James Easton called the Stoughton Baptists "hypocrites". There are several possible reasons, taken individually or collectively, that could have given Easton reason to make this judgment against them, including: the segregated seating policy; their criticism of his protest against it; and their condemnation of his unwavering stance on the issue. Clearly, Easton felt that if anyone in that church should be admonished or sanctioned for behavior "unbecoming a Christian" it should be the racists who tarred his pew, or those who condoned that behavior, rather than himself. The use of the word "repeatedly" in the third listed reason for the church's

"dissatisfaction" with Easton is also very important, since it indicates that Easton protested against racism in this church on several occasions, which William Nell also affirms. These quoted sentiments of James Easton also illuminate how the motivation for his protests were more than simply the stubborn determination of a Revolutionary War veteran to claim his rightful place in American society, but that they also had some deep roots in a sincere Christian faith. What also makes this particular record extremely valuable is that there are no known writings of James Easton and this record is the only direct quote from him found to date.

How long after the 1812 suspension from communion the Eastons may have persevered in their protests at East Stoughton Baptist before they finally left the church is uncertain. In August of 1826, the Baptist church members voted to send some of their members to visit about a dozen different individuals who "had not met with nor had communion with the church in a long time".³⁶ Sarah Easton was one of the persons designated for a visit, but James, who was still living at that time, was not on the list and apparently was no longer of interest to them. No record of any visit to Sarah is found in the rest of the records for 1826 through April of 1832, but some very clear communication between them evidently occurred. At a church meeting on April 9, 1832, about a year and a half after James Easton's death, the church members "voted to Exclude Sarah Easton she having been a long time from the communion and for writing the Church a very unbecoming letter."³⁷ One can only imagine what Sarah wrote to them, since the letter was most likely destroyed, but perhaps she let them know in no uncertain terms that she had no desire at all to rejoin their church.

If the Eastons did not leave the East Stoughton Baptist Church immediately after the church meeting of October, 1812, they may have left before December of 1816,

when the church seating issue arose again in the the 4th Church of Christ of North Bridgewater. Although it is not clear what caused it, the 4th Church records for December 5, 1816 indicate that the congregation was ready to compromise on the issue. They did not abandon segregated seating altogether, but allowed the people of color to move out of the elevated porch into pews in the back of the two women's galleries:

Voted That People of color may occupy the two Back Seats in the West Gallery & the short back seats in the East Gallery of our meetinghouse & no other seats or that they may have ground for one Pew in the North West corner of the Gallery & ground for another Pew in the North East corner of the Gallery *as they Choose* [my emphasis] and that the Parish Clerk serve the people of color with a copy of this vote³⁸

The language used in this record gives another indication of a possible general change of heart towards, or a growing respect for, the Eastons and other persons of color in their town. Instead of calling them "blacks", as in previous records, they refer to them as "people of color", which, along with the term "colored people", was a more generally accepted term by most free African Americans and people of mixed race in that era. They also gave the people of color a choice (although very limited) of which seats they would like to accept. In light of the strident racism prevalent in the 1790's and early 19th century, as the rights and privileges of citizenship in the new republic became more decisively exclusive of all but "whites", this small change is truly significant.

The last mention of the church seating issue in the records of the 4th Church of Christ in the North parish of Bridgewater occurred in November of 1827, after a new church had been built. In the context of a discussion on the selling of pews and a new seating area for young women in the gallery, this very brief record on the seating of people of color appears: "voted that the south west and north west pews be reserved for the people of color that is that they may have the use of them". It is not clear from this statement whether these pews were in the gallery, or on the main floor, or if "may have the use" implied that sitting there was optional to the people of color. It is also not known when, if ever, the practice of segregated seating ended in this church, but in Bradford Kingman's history of the town, written in 1865, he states in a footnote that the only church in town at that time that still had *gallery* seating reserved for people of color was the First Methodist Episcopal Church. Kingman does not say whether other types of segregated seating arrangements still remained.³⁹

The first of these sit-in protests by the Eastons and possibly a handful of other people of color, occurred about five decades before Frederick Douglass and other abolitionists sat in the improper places on public trains and ships until they were thrown out. There is no earlier use of passive resistance sit-ins on record. The likelihood that some dissenting whites in the 4th Church of Christ and in Stoughton Baptist supported integrated seating could help to explain, in part, the Easton's courageous persistence in the face of such vicious opposition. But there were a few other reasons why the family did not simply pack up and move to Boston, where they could have joined Rev. Thomas Paul's African Baptist Church (established in 1806), or to one of the two other black churches established in the 1820's. At the time of the first three protests, from 1789 to 1804, there were no black churches in Massachusetts, and it was the norm for African American Christians in New England to attend churches that were dominated by Anglo-Americans who relegated the church members of color to a second class status in *all* matters related to church activity, seating arrangements included.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, James Easton's unrelenting pursuit of equal status made him a staunch integrationist by default, if not by intention, which probably would have prevented him from joining an all-black church if one had been established right there in North Bridgewater.

Other reasons why the Eastons stayed in North Bridgewater can be found in their multi-generational attachment to the lands of the region and in their business and economic situation. North Bridgewater (now Brockton) was located right in between the ancestral lands of James Easton's family at Titticut, and those of Sarah Easton's people in Braintree. In 1765, Sarah's family moved to the eastern part of Stoughton, which at that time bordered with Braintree on its east side and the North precinct of Bridgewater to the south. Although Sarah's family members were commonly referred to as "mulattoes" or white persons (by implication) in the local records, some evidence suggests that they were also part Massachuset Indian and therefore were connected to those lands for many generations. The distance between Titticut and the former part of Braintree where the Dunbars lived is about fifteen miles, and it is only about eight or nine miles from Titticut to East Stoughton.⁴¹

As mentioned previously, James Easton was definitely involved in the iron business within a few years after the Revolution, but he may have first worked at an iron foundry long before his Revolutionary war service. There were several iron foundries in all of the towns surrounding Titticut during the mid 18th century when James Easton was growing up. Many of the local farmers engaged in some iron work during the winter, such as manufacturing nails.⁴² Much of the woodcutting or logging activity in the area was done for the purpose of fueling the iron furnaces, and when people of the laboring class were not actually working in the iron foundries they were often cutting trees for the foundries. Although apprenticeships in skilled iron work

were usually reserved for white men, the men of color who did much of the menial labor duties in and around the foundries could have learned much about the more skilled aspects of the trade through observation. They may have also been asked to fill in at times for white men who were temporarily absent from their posts. That Caesar Easton and his sons, who were listed as "Middleborough laborers" in various court records, sometimes worked for the Leonards, Keiths, Bretts, Packards, or other local iron manufacturers is a likely possibility.

By the turn of the 19th century, James Easton had developed considerable skills and a regional reputation as a successful blacksmith, although it is not certain at what point he became successfully self-employed. Again, a passage from Nell's <u>Colored</u> <u>Patriots</u> paints a vivid picture:

Mr. Easton was a manufacturing blacksmith, and his forge and nail factory, where were also made edge tools and anchors, was extensively known, for its superiority of workmanship. Much of the iron work for the Tremont Theatre and Boston Marine Railway was executed under his supervision. Mr. Easton was self-educated. When a young man, stipulating for work, he always provided for chances of evening study. He was welcome to the business circles of Boston as a man of strict integrity, and the many who resorted to him for advice in complicated matters styled him "the Black Lawyer". His sons, Caleb, Joshua, Sylvanus, and Hosea, inherited his mechanical genius and mental ability.⁴³

In 1798, James Easton was the only man of color in North Bridgewater who owned real property valued at \$100 or more. Easton's house and 25 acres of land were appraised at \$495.30. Kingman cites a figure of \$105 in value for Easton's "dwelling house" alone.⁴⁴ This could indicate that he had already become well-established in the area as a skilled blacksmith and iron tool maker by this time, but it is not clear whether he had his own foundry by then or was a partner with, or working for, somebody else.

As for Nell's claim that Easton's reputation for quality work extended as far away from North Bridgewater as Boston, the records of the city of Boston confirm that that was the case as early as 1801. In March of 1801, Easton was one of four ironsmiths selected by the "freeholders and other inhabitants" of Boston to be the "Cullers of Hoops and Staves for the year ensuing." The job of the cullers was to certify the quality of the work of other blacksmiths doing business in Boston. Any person chosen for such an important city position would have to be generally recognized as an expert in their field, and for a man of color to receive such an appointment during that era--in spite of customary prejudices and discriminatory treatment--would indicate that he possessed a more remarkable expertise than normal.⁴⁵

The earliest clear record of James Easton being self-employed and owning his own iron foundry can be found in Kingman's Hisory of North Bridgewater. Kingman described a foundry that Easton built in 1814:

About the year 1814 James Easton & Sons built a dam, erected a building, and commenced manufacturing spikes, axes, adzes, plane irons, chisels, bar iron, axles, etc., ... They continued business for about six years and failed. Caleb and Sylvanus Easton continued the business for ten years longer, under the name of C. & S. Easton, when they retired.⁴⁶

Although Kingman mentions no earlier Easton iron business, that was not necessarily his first attempt. He may have run a smaller foundry or a small blacksmith shop earlier at a different location on his land. By 1814, James Easton's land holdings had increased to a total of 54 acres, all adjoining his homestead.⁴⁷ As his business grew, and certainly after he had established his own foundry/factory, and then his school, he had even more incentive to stay in North Bridgewater. But, beyond economics, it is evident that Easton's sense of mission that fueled his persistent struggle for equal treatment in the church also motivated him to make his business, and later his school,

an instrument for creating opportunities for people of color, as well as for reforming "white" attitudes towards such people.

For James Easton to succeed as a self-employed artisan of color in early 19th century Massachusetts required not only a high degree of professional skill and some remarkable personal characteristics, but also some beneficial circumstances, some actual benefactors, and perhaps a little luck. Such is the case with all successful business ventures, but Easton not only had to battle the additional obstacles created by racism, he was also engaged in a field that was extremely competitive because of the large number of iron foundries in the region.

Easton apparently had a broad regional customer base, as well as a local clientele. Considering the close relationship between the Easton and Cuffe families and the fact that Nell specifically mentions that James Easton manufactured anchors, it is quite possible that James Easton did some ship ironwork for Capt. Paul Cuffe. A letter to Paul Cuffe from James Easton, Jr., dated October 8, 1816, reveals something about the closeness of the two families, as well as some details about the Easton business and, at that time prospective school. Easton begins the letter by letting Cuffe know that he had returned home safely after having just spent a week with the Cuffes, and other members of their extended family in Westport/Dartmouth, which would have included his cousins, the children of James Easton's brother, Moses, and their families, and his sister, Mary.⁴⁸

The main purpose of this two-page letter was to ask Capt. Cuffe for economic assistance for their business and to establish "some good instertution" [sic], as, apparently, the school had not yet begun to operate. Easton also expressed a concern that people of color who were scattered in small remote communities needed

education to help them to unite and "form a society". Easton asked Cuffe for a loan of \$1,000 and offered some of the family lands as collateral. From the many spelling errors in the letter of this second oldest of the Easton children, it is evident that the Eastons were at this time still somewhat lacking in education themselves, yet certainly able to teach the basics of literacy to the illiterate, as well as enough mathematics to keep adequate business accounts. Mention is also given in James Jr.'s letter of the extent to which the Eastons had to travel- apparently all over New England- to market their manufactured goods, and how many of their customers were unable to pay their bills.⁴⁹

No record of Paul Cuffe's response to this request has yet been found, but two months later (on Christmas day, 1816) the Easton's received over twice as much funding than the amount they had requested from Paul Cuffe. On that day, James and Sarah Easton mortgaged 73 acres of their land (which appears to have been all they owned at this time) to Samuel Rodman, a New Bedford Quaker, abolitionist, and wealthy shipping merchant, for \$2,050. Rodman was the son-in-law of Quaker merchant, William Rotch, who was a frequent business associate and friend of fellow Quaker and ship owner, Paul Cuffe. During the previous year, on May 24, 1815, Samuel Rodman had purchased another mortgage of 50 acres of land from James Easton for \$1,000, to be paid back within five years. What may have transpired during the two months between the time that Cuffe received the letter from James, Jr. and the purchase of the second mortgage by Samuel Rodman, is that Cuffe paid off the earlier mortgage of \$1,000 to Rodman, or gave the money to the Eastons (as James, Jr. requested) to take care of the matter themselves.⁵⁰ With this considerable influx of capital, James Easton could then not only meet his own family's economic

and educational needs, but serve the needs of the community of people of color (African American, Native American, and mixed) in his small region by providing employment and, for a brief period of about ten years, education.

North Bridgewater historian, Bradford Kingman makes no mention of the school that was attached to the factory, but the writings of James' son, Hosea Easton, and grandson, Benjamin Roberts, describe the school in some detail. Roberts wrote, "A manual labor institution was started...where some twenty colored young men were instructed a portion of each day in reading, writing, and arithmetic, at farming, black [iron] and white [tin] smithing, and shoe making." It was extremely difficult for young men of color to find apprenticeships, which in those days was the most common way to develop a skilled trade. Easton's factory school equipped students with several skilled trades as well as some academic education. It is unclear from the limited accounts available, just how many young men were assisted through this institution. Did Roberts mean only twenty altogether, or that about twenty were taken in and enrolled in the program at any given time? Hosea Easton gives no number of the students at all.⁵¹ Besides the Easton brothers themselves, only one other product of the Easton school has been confirmed to date, Joel W. Lewis, an Afro/Native abolitionist, who ran a successful blacksmith shop in Boston from the early 1830s through at least 1870. His brother, the pioneer historian and activist, Robert Benjamin Lewis was likely also a student of the Eastons.⁵² The Easton school was one of the first schools of its type in the United States, established almost ten years before the manual labor education movement that began in the 1820's with the founding of such schools as the Oneida Institute and Oberlin College.

After about twenty years (c.1809-1829) of struggle against substantial racist opposition to their existence, both the factory and school were forced to close. Hosea Easton described the demise of the school and the factory in the most uncompromising prose, clearly expressing his excruciating memories:

The enterprise was followed for about twenty years perseveringly, in direct opposition to public sentiment and the tide of popular prejudice. So intent were the parties in carrying out the principles of intelligent, active freemen, that they sacrificed every thought of comfort and ease to the object. The most rigid economy was adhered to, at home and abroad...the rules of morality were supported with surprising assiduity, and ardent spirits found no place in the establishment. After the expenditure of this vast amount of labor and time, together with many thousands of dollars, the enterprise ended in a total failure. By reason of the repeated surges of the tide of prejudice, the establishment, like a ship in a boisterous hurricane at sea, went beneath its waves, richly laden, well manned and well managed, and all sunk to rise no more... It fell, and with it fell the hearts of several of its undertakers in despair, and their bodies into their graves.⁵³

That last sentence refers, in part, to Hosea's father, James, who died on November 6, 1830, in North Bridgewater, just about two years after the business and school to which he had given so much of his life came to an end. Even though a predominantly white customer base must have accounted for much of the success of the Easton family business over the twenty years in which it was in operation, ultimately, according to Hosea Easton and Benjamin Roberts, it was white racism that brought it to its end.⁵⁴

Both concrete and circumstantial evidence of the persecution that the Eastons suffered at the hands of their opponents can be found in the Plymouth County court records. Beginning in April, 1817, just four months after the Eastons signed the second mortgage to Samuel Rodman, a long series of lawsuits were brought against them--mostly for small debts--by people whom they did business with, including some competing blacksmiths and their relatives. Between April, 1817 and November of 1822, thirteen such cases were brought, seven of them in the year 1818 alone.⁵⁵ It seems that as soon as it was widely known that the Eastons had received the mortgage payment from Samuel Rodman, all of their creditors sought to take advantage of this opportunity to collect whatever payments they could.

Those facts alone are not necessarily evidence of persecution, since, for legitimate creditors, it would have been completely appropriate to seek payment if the agreed upon time for making payment had expired and they had also previously agreed that the Eastons would pay them as soon as they had the means. It was common practice in 18th and early 19th century Massachusetts for people to use the court system as a means to force the settlement of debts. The creditor would file a legal writ with the county court of common pleas which would essentially threaten the debtor with suit or prosecution if the debt was not promptly paid, after which the local sheriff would deliver a copy of the writ to the debtor.⁵⁶ Once the debtor was informed, nearly half of these types of cases were then settled out of court, which is what happened in all three of the cases filed against James Easton and Sons in 1817, and in one of the seven cases filed in 1818. In the other six cases of 1818, the Eastons "defaulted", meaning they did not show up for court, while the plaintiffs appeared. In such cases, the defendants had to pay costs of court besides the amount owed to the plaintiff. The total amount of money that the Eastons were forced to pay in the thirteen court cases of 1817-1822 was \$836.46.

Whether this is evidence of persecution or not could be better determined if we knew more facts about the legitimacy of these suits and the motivations for bringing them at the same time that the Eastons were beginning to educate young men of color and equip them with competitive, marketable skills. An examination of

James Easton's Plymouth court experiences prior to 1817, considered in comparison to those of 1817-1822, raises some cause for suspicion. James Easton had only been called into court for debts on four occasions prior to 1817.⁵⁷ The first two occasions were in 1789 and 1791, in which he was named as a co-defendant with his business partners, Samuel, William, and Isaac Brett. They lost the first case and won the second one. Easton's next court appearance was not until 1814, when he was sued by a Middleborough trader named Gamaliel Rounseville and the jury ruled in Easton's favor. Then James Easton sued Rounseville during that same session of the Court of Common Pleas and won again. The next case is in November of 1816, when Easton was successfully sued by neighbors Luke and Ames Packard for \$200 on a note dated June 8, 1815. It is therefore clear that before the onslaught of suits that began in April, 1817, James Easton had a history of remaining current with his personal business debts, with one known exception, and staying out of the courts. His only other court appearance was in 1815, in the afore-mentioned case in which he acted as attorney for his wife's niece. Although not a professional lawyer registered with the Massachusetts Bar, James Easton may have been the first American of African descent allowed to serve as a lawyer in the Massachusetts court system.⁵⁸

Considering the above facts, along with what we know about the prevailing attitudes of New England whites during this era towards the education of people of color for skilled professions, combined with the testimonies of Hosea Easton, Benjamin Roberts, William Nell, and R. B. Lewis⁵⁹, referring specifically to the opposition the Eastons faced, there are at least some valid reasons to suspect that these suits were part of a commonly-held culture of resistance toward racial equality. For most whites in antebellum America, the demonstration by people of color of

abilities, skills and personal characteristics that defied preferred stereotypes and revealed not only an equal aptitude with whites, but even occasional examples of *superiority* in some aspects over some whites, was intolerable.

An additional motivation for opposition to the Easton's from some members of their community was likely inspired by the marriage, in February of 1818 of James Easton's son, Caleb to Chloe Packard, a member of one of the more prominent white families in Bridgewater. Chloe was also four or five months pregnant at the time of their marriage. The peak of the suit frenzy began two months after this marriage, and although the Rodman mortgage money probably had immensely more to do with it than Caleb and Chloe's marriage, when we consider the prevailing social attitudes and the fact that marriages between whites and people of color were still illegal in Massachusetts at this time, the marriage must have provided some extra fuel to the fires of antagonism.⁶⁰

By April of 1819, court records reveal that the Easton family business and school no longer operated under the name of James Easton and Sons, but had been turned over to Caleb and Sylvanus Easton and given the name, "C. & S. Easton." The purpose for this change in corporate title and ownership was probably intended to legally protect the business from a forced closure due to non-payment of debts. Since Caleb and Sylvanus were able to continue the business another ten years, it is evident that this tactic was successful. But it was certainly not an easy ten years. In the Plymouth Court of Common Pleas record of April, 1819, Caleb and Sylvanus brought an unspecified case against Bridgewater Deputy Sheriff, Benjamin Kingman. "Neither party appeared" so the case was dismissed.⁶¹ One month later, on May 18, 1819, another Bridgewater Deputy Sheriff, Edward Vinton, rode out to the Easton

family land and "seized and carried away" \$468 dollars worth of the Easton family farm and foundry property. Caleb and Sylvanus took the sheriff to the Court of Common Pleas in August of that same year. The jury found the deputy guilty of trespass and illegal seizure of the property and awarded Caleb and Sylvanus \$597 and unspecified costs of court. Deputy Sheriff Vinton appealed the case and the appellate court, in October of 1819, upheld the previous verdict and awarded the Easton brothers \$390 and \$238.43 in costs. If James Easton, James, Jr., or Joshua Easton, the partners named in court documents as "James Easton and Sons", had brought the case in any of their own names they may not have been able to recover anything.⁶²

How much of the Easton's actual property was returned is unknown, since much or possibly all of it may have been auctioned or otherwise sold off during the five months between the actual seizure and the conclusion of the court case. A complete itemized list of all of the seized property, with the dollar value of each item given, appears in both court records and is so lengthy that it takes up two pages (see appendix). This very detailed list provides us with an inventory of the Easton foundry which confirms much of what Nell and Roberts described regarding the variety of products that they manufactured, plus additional items not mentioned by those authors. In addition, the document describes a variety of farm products, including three and a half bushels of barley, a rye sieve, and ten pigs. How much this entire incident set back the Easton enterprises and how well they were able to recover is unclear, but it certainly fits the pattern of persecution described by the four abovenamed authors. Notably, two of those authors were Easton family members, possibly three of them were students in the Easton school, and the other author, William Nell, knew the family intimately and was a meticulous researcher.⁶³ Therefore, their

accounts were the accounts of eyewitnesses, as well as men who had heard the stories first-hand --most likely, repeatedly--from those who had participated in these events.

The lawsuits against the Easton family business continued during the 1820s, one against James Easton and Sons in 1823, and also a spate of five suits against C. & S. Easton between November of 1827 and August, 1830.⁶⁴ That last record indicates that Sylvanus died (cause unknown) sometime before June of 1830 and that the company of C. & S. Easton ceased doing business at that time. Five more suits were filed against James Easton and Sons between April of 1832 and August of 1838, for debts incurred in 1817 and 1818.⁶⁵ James Easton, Jr., last surviving partner of James Easton and Sons died one month after the August, 1838 suit. The last suit against the family business, under the name of C. & S. Easton, with Caleb Easton named as defendant, was filed in August of 1839.⁶⁶ At that time Caleb was called a "shoemaker", which remained his profession for the rest of his life. Whether he and the other shoemakers in the Easton household of the 1840s, '50s, and '60s were selfemployed or working for someone else is not known. As Hosea Easton described it, it appears that James Easton's dream of a family-run factory and school came crashing to a halt with the death of his son, Sylvanus, in the Spring of 1830. James Easton died that Fall, and three of his remaining four sons died before the turnultuous decade of the 1830s ended.

Having lived most of his adult life in a small New England town, away from the larger African American community, and the circles of organized social activism during the less well-known era that preceded the abolitionist movement, James Easton's life and accomplishments have heretofore received little notice. As far as we know, Easton never published anything, and we find no evidence of him ever

belonging to any activist organizations (except for the Continental Army!), but he certainly made a lasting contribution to African American and American history, and left us quite a legacy. One legacy is the inspiration that we can draw from his persistent efforts to stand up against all of the racist opposition that he encountered in his 76 years, from which William Nell, Benjamin Roberts, Joel and R. B. Lewis, and countless others undoubtedly also drew inspiration. But, besides that, his legacy is revealed in the lives and accomplishments of his children.

James and Sarah Easton had seven children who all survived to adulthood, although most of them died at relatively young ages. Four of these children became active abolitionists. Two of them continued the family business after their father retired. One of the abolitionists also became a doctor, and the other was active for a time in American Indian land rights issues. And it is certain that several of them were teachers for a time in the school that was attached to James Easton and Sons' iron foundry. A brief summary of the primary life accomplishments of each child follows (in order of birth).

Joshua Easton (1786-1835) became well-known in the African American uplift and abolitionist movements in Boston. He was a member of the Massachusetts General Colored Association and was that organization's delegate to the inaugural annual meeting of the New England Anti-Slavery Society in 1833. He was the only man of color to serve as a member of the "Board of Managers" for the NEASS until his early death from scarlet fever in 1835. His death was eulogized in <u>The Liberator</u>, as were the deaths of his three activist siblings. ⁶⁷

James Easton (Jr.) (1788-1838) was a doctor, and the only non-white doctor mentioned in Bradford Kingman's history of North Bridgewater, though given a much more brief mention than the rest of the doctors in that section of the book. The following is an excerpt from James Jr.'s obituary in William Lloyd Garrison's Liberator:

Doctor Easton was a very skillful Thompsonian physician. He was a man who will be much lamented by every person acquainted with him; especially by those who have been restored to health by his arduous and unremitting attention to their maladies...⁶⁸

In a letter from prominent abolitionist and underground railroad activist, Maria Weston Chapman to her sister, Deborah Weston, we find an account of how James Easton, Jr., provided medical assistance and transportation for a woman who was apparently a fugitive slave. The Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society paid him \$14 for his services and Chapman attempted to raise another \$13 that they still owed him at the time she wrote that letter. That incident occurred in 1837, one year before his death.⁶⁹

Sarah (Easton) Roberts (1789-1837) was an abolitionist and the wife of abolitionist and African American uplift activist Robert Roberts. They had twelve children, including the above-mentioned Benjamin F. Roberts (subject of chapter four of this work). She died exactly one week after the death of her younger brother Hosea, and was also eulogized briefly in the <u>Liberator</u>.⁷⁰

As mentioned above, Caleb Easton (1791-1864) and his brother Sylvanus became the official proprietors of the family business and school in 1818, evidently as a means of saving the business from their father's and elder brothers' creditors. Caleb's marriage of that same year to Chloe Packard endured whatever adversity and opposition they faced until their deaths in the 1860's. Census records and tax rolls indicate that they were economically "upper middle class", based on the value of their property given in those records. Caleb and Chloe lived out their entire lives in North Bridgewater and had six children, at least three of whom married Euro-Americans. Ironically, most of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of James and Sarah Easton, through their son Caleb, passed into the "white" racial category, by the time of the 1880 census.⁷¹

Sylvanus Easton (1793-1830) is the least-documented of the Easton children, not much more being known about him than what is mentioned above. The only other official record on Sylvanus, besides the previously mentioned suits against their business, is a Plymouth court record of an assault case brought against him in 1815, when he was a young man of twenty two years. He was accused of assaulting Joseph Brett and found guilty by a jury in the Plymouth Court of Common Pleas.⁷² Sylvanus appealed to the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court six months later and the verdict was overturned. Court records provide no details regarding the evidence or arguments, but it is remarkable that an all-white jury ruled in favor of a man of color against a white man from a prominent Bridgewater family. Bradford Kingman said that Sylvanus "died single", but does not mention how or when.⁷³

Mary (Easton) Wainer (1795-?) was the only one of the Easton children who returned to a Wampanoag Indian community (her relatives, the Dartmouth Wampanoags) rather than strive towards assimilation into the American or Afro-American mainstream. She married Paul Cuffe's nephew John Wainer (who was ³/₄ Wampanoag) in 1821, and then disappeared from the documentary record until 1859, where she is listed in the papers of John M. Earle, Massachusetts Commisioner of Indian Affairs, at "age 64", along with her husband John Wainer, and many other "New Bedford Indians" from the Dartmouth/Westport area. Earle had taken depositions from some of them in response to a petition that two of the Wainer

brothers had circulated in an attempt to regain tribal land that had been illegally settled on by the colonial English. Here, it becomes evident that Mary, in a different social and cultural context, continued in the Easton family tradition of pursuing justice for their people.⁷⁴

The youngest of the Easton children was the most remarkable. It is difficult to briefly summarize the life of Hosea Easton (1799-1837), since he accomplished so much in his short but eventful life. Hosea Easton was a very active and well-known abolitionist in the early years of the movement, a leader in the African American uplift movement, an educator, a published author, and an ordained minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Easton first served as a minister in Boston (1828-1833), in both the Black Baptist and Methodist (which later became African Methodist Episcopal) churches. Next, he served two churches (consecutively) in Hartford, Connecticut (1834-1837). Hosea also participated in all but one of the first series of National Conventions of the Free People of Color (1830-1835), missing only the convention held in 1833 when he returned to North Bridgewater where his mother, Sarah, was dying. Rev. Easton traveled constantly all over the Northeast, and was much in demand as a public speaker for abolitionism, as well as to preach in various churches, to raise support for educational and uplift projects, such as Freedom's Journal, the first African American newspaper, and the Hartford Literary Society. He was frequently mentioned and quoted in the Liberator, and in the writings of several leading abolitionists, including William Lloyd Garrison, William Nell, and Frederick Douglass. Hosea Easton's two most significant published works are An Address: Delivered before the Colored Population, of Providence, Rhode Island, on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 27, 1828, and A Treatise on the Intellectual Character, and

<u>the Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the United States</u> (1837). He too was eulogized in the <u>Liberator</u>, by his good friend, the Rev. Jehiel C. Beman. A more detailed biography of Hosea Easton and an evaluation of his work is provided in the next chapter.⁷⁵

The legacy and example of James and Sarah Easton encouraged and inspired their children to carry on the struggle through the virulently white supremacist Jacksonian era, and, for those who lived that long, on through the Civil War. The children of James and Sarah Easton grew up listening to stories of the Revolutionary War from their father, their maternal grandfather, Sampson Dunbar, their Easton and Dunbar uncles, and other African American veterans who lived in and near North Bridgewater.⁷⁶ More than the stories of battles, military tactics, and escapades, it seems it was the stories of high ideals, high hopes, and the excitement of anticipating a new egalitarian society, which moved these children the most. And they were certainly moved by witnessing, and eventually participating in, their parents' and elders' struggles against the <u>non</u>-egalitarian and unjust society that America actually became. Like other leading free men of color of his generation, James Easton could not be content with anything less than equal opportunities and rights for *all* citizens of the nation that they had fought for and helped to build with their labor and ingenuity.

¹ I use the term "African American" here while fully realizing that this statistic probably includes hundreds of Native Americans, mostly from the New England colonies, and many persons of mixed "racial" heritage, who often moved between African American and Native American communities and identities. On the frequency with which Native Americans have been classified as African Americans, see Jack D. Forbes, <u>Africans and Native Americans</u> (Champaign-Urbana, 1993). Although the demographic evidence on participation of people of color in the Revolution is incomplete, since military records did not always include racial information, the estimated figure given here is supported by the work of Benjamin Quarles, Gary B. Nash, and others. See Benjamin Quarles, The Negro in the

<u>American Revolution</u>, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1961; Gary B. Nash, <u>Race and Revolution</u>, Madison, Wis., Madison House, 1990; Lt. Col. Michael Lee Lanning, <u>Defenders of Liberty: African Americans in the Revolutionary War</u>, New York, Citadel Press, 2000. These same sources and others put the number who served the British during that war around 20,000, mostly escaped slaves from Virginia and the Carolinas.

² Bradford Kingman, <u>History of North Bridgewater</u>, <u>Plymouth County</u>, <u>Massachusetts</u>, from its first <u>settlement to the present time</u> (Boston, 1866), 209,210,318. U.S. Census records for 1790,1810, 1820, and 1830.

³ U.S. Census of 1880 for Brockton, Plymouth County, Massachusetts, enumeration district 561, pg. 48. The families of the children of James and Sarah Easton's son, Caleb, who married a white woman named Chloe Packard in 1818, were initially marked on this census as "mulatto", which had been their designation on the previous censuses going back to 1850, but the census taker crossed out the M (for mulatto) and wrote a large and dark W for "white" over the M. The Eastons of Brockton and their many descendents who still live in that town and its vicinity have been classified as white persons ever since then.

⁴ Kingman, 498. John Milton Earle papers at the American Antiquarian Society, box 2, folder 4<u>: New</u> <u>Bedford Indians;</u> ibid., letters received, #26. <u>Massachusetts Marriages</u>, vol. 38, pg. 17. <u>Vital Records of</u> <u>Dartmouth to 1850. Westport Marriages to 1850</u>. John Milton Earle, <u>Report to the Governor and</u> <u>Council Concerning the Indians of the Commonwealth, under the act of April 6, 1859</u>, Boston, 1861, lxxiii, 115-116. The connection between Wampanoags of the Middleborough area and the New Bedford/Dartmouth area is an ancient one. It was the custom of the Middleborough area Wampanoags, long before European contact, to winter in their villages around Assawompsett Pond and migrate to a place on the coast that they called "Acushnet" (what is now the New Bedford area) in the late Spring. There they would spend the summer fishing and gathering shellfish, and tending many gardens that they planted between the two sites.

⁵ William C. Nell, <u>Colored Patriots of the American Revolution</u>, Boston, Robert F. Wallcut, 1855, 33-34. Kingman, <u>History of North Bridgewater</u>, 215, 318, 379, 497, 498. Benjamin F. Roberts, "Our Progress in the Old Bay State", <u>The New Era</u>, 31 March 1870.
 ⁶ibid

⁷ Nell, Colored Patriots, 33.

⁸ John C. Miller, Triumph of Freedom: 1775/1783 (Boston, 1948), 85.

⁹ State of Massachusetts, Massachusetts State Archives, <u>Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the</u> <u>Revolutionary War (Boston, 1899)</u>. National Archives microfilm M881, roll 467, frames 1424, 1425. The three towns from which Easton was mustered into the service were all associated with Indian communities- Dartmouth, Bedford, and Sandwich. "Bedford Village" was the name of New Bedford at the time of Easton's enlistment (<u>From Old Dartmouth to Modern New Bedford</u>, Old Dartmouth Historical Society web page, <u>http://www.whalingmuseum.org/city.htm</u>). Sandwich was the closest English town to the Wampanoag village of Mashpee on Cape Cod. Col. Simeon Cary was a prominent citizen of the town to which Easton moved after the war, North Bridgewater. Kingman, <u>History of North Bridgewater</u>, mentioned throughout. Col. Gamaliel Bradford had also served as one of the colonial "Guardians" for the Indians of Titticut, from 1758 until sometime before the Revolution. Microfilm collection of the Massachusetts State Archives, Vol. 32, reel 2, page 352.

¹⁰ <u>Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors</u>, vol. 22, pg. 126. A muster roll for Capt. John Russell's company, dated June 18, 1777, remarks that Easton was then, "On Command [at] Skeensborough", which was the nearest town to the south of Ft. Ticonderoga. "On Command" was a term that meant that the soldier had been sent out from the group on a special assignment or mission. ¹¹ Miller, Triumph of Freedom, 177.

¹² As for the other three men on this suicide mission, they apparently picked one man from each company in the regiment, rather than have all four come from the same company. James Easton was the only soldier in this particular muster return from John Russell's company listed as killed.
 ¹³ Lieut. General John Burgoyne, <u>A state of the expedition from Canada, as laid before the House of Commons, by Lieutenant-General Burgoyne, and verified by evidence...</u> London, 1780, appendix ixxxv. Ketchum, <u>Saratoga</u>, 212.

¹⁴ There were approximately 60,000 "free people of color" (tribal Indians not included) in the United States in 1790, according to the first federal Census. Barbara M. Van Amburg Delorey, ed., <u>A Copying</u> Out of Ye Olde Recordes, Beginning With ye 4th Church of Christ in Bridgewater-1740, Brockton, MA, 1980, 140.

¹⁵ Ibid., 367-369, 418-419. Kingman, <u>History of North Bridgewater</u>, 95.

¹⁶ Horton and Horton, pp. In 1789, the same year that the porch was erected, eleven "negro" heads of households and their families were "warned out of town", including James Easton and his fellow war veterans, Calvin and Luther Jotham. "Warning out" was a common practice of New England town councils in that era, as a device for ridding the town of paupers and unemployed persons who might become an economic burden to the town treasury. The warned out people were given 15 days to prove that they could support themselves, or they would be forced to leave. In this case, Easton, the Jothams, and a man named Isaiah Fuller must have proven their economic stability since they all appear the next year in the U.S. census for Bridgewater. It is not known what happened to the rest. Whether or not this "warning out" was in part a retribution for a church seating protest (two of the other heads of households, Titus Fuller and Obadiah Wallis were married in the church, if not church members) is also uncertain. Bridgewater Massachusetts Selectmen's Records, 1703-1863, microfilm number 0910366, pp. 9, 10.

¹⁷ Kingman, <u>History of North Bridgewater</u>, 95.

¹⁸ "Orthodox Church" was an early name for the Congregationalist churches.

¹⁹ Nell, <u>Colored Patriots..</u>, pg. 33.

²⁰ East Stoughton, Massachusetts was formed out of the southeast corner of Stoughton and was incorporated by its present-day name of Avon in 1888. The church then became the Avon Baptist Church.
²¹ Van Amburg Delorey, A Conving Out, 450, 485, 572, 662, David Handler, Stiller, Stiller,

²¹ Van Amburg Delorey, <u>A Copying Out</u>, 459, 485, 572, 662. Record books of the Avon Baptist Church in the manuscript collections of the New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston, Massachusetts. There are two record books, a large folio and a small book, and I shall cite them accordingly (the NEHGS just acquired these items in the Fall of 2004, and they have not yet been catalogued.) Kingman, History of North Bridgewater, 96, 101. Nell, Colored Patriots, 33-34. Another published account of the Easton church seating protests exists, by English gentleman journal writer, Edward Abdy, but it appears to be second hand and contains some questionable facts. Abdy's account also credits James Easton's son Joshua with leading the protest, which suggests that Abdy heard the story from someone who knew Joshua Easton, who resided in Boston at the time that Abdy visited there and wrote his account. Edward S. Abdy, Journal of a Residence and Tour in the United States of North America, April 1833-October 1834, 3 vols., London, 1835, pp.135-136.

²² Van Amburg Delorey, <u>A Copying Out</u>, pp. 76-87. Bridgewater Town Records, vol. 4, pg. 383
 ²³ Van Amburg Delorey, <u>A Copying Out</u>, pg.402

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 105, 141.

²⁵ Avon Baptist Church records, large folio, pp. 6 and 7.

²⁶ <u>Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors</u>, index and vol. 1: 109; vol.13:134a, 144; vol. 22:212; and vol. 27:167

²⁷ Van Amburg Delorey, <u>A Copying Out</u>, 105, 402, Kingman, <u>History of North Bridgewater</u>, 379, i (map), Howard Hansen, "Map of Town of Stoughton, Province of Massachusetts Bay, 1751", in William F. Hanna, <u>History of Avon, Massachusetts</u>, Avon, MA, Town of Avon Centennial Committee, 1988. The two churches also were evidently located just a few miles apart from each other. The Jotham brothers were part of the group that left the 4th Church for East Stoughton Baptist in 1784. Besides the fact that James Easton and the Jotham brothers were Rev. War vets and people of color living in a small town where they were a considerably distinct minority, other evidence of their acquaintance and, perhaps, friendship would include the fact that Luther Jotham served as witness to a land deed in which James Easton sold some of his land to Amos Shaw in 1788. Plymouth Deeds, vol. 68, pg. 154.
²⁸ Plymouth Deeds, vol. 65, pg. 208, vol. 66, pg. 103, vol. 68, pp. 33, 154. U.S. Direct Tax for Maine and Massachusetts, 1798, Assessment Dist. No. 10, page 525.

²⁹ Plymouth Deeds, vol. 65, pg. 208, vol. 68, pg. 33. Plymouth County Court Records, Court of Common Pleas, vol. 16: 250-252 and vol. 17: 400-402, 550-552.

³⁰ Van Amburg Delorey, <u>A Copying Out</u>, 367, 64-209. Thirty two of these individuals are mentioned in marriage records, which do not necessarily imply church membership. Only eighteen of the 43 are mentioned in baptismal records, all of them part of the Easton extended family. Only nine are mentioned as having received the sacrament of communion, and all but one of those are Easton relatives.

³¹ Avon Baptist Church Records, small book, pg. 38

³² Ibid, pg. 39

³³ James Easton was no stranger to the Plymouth county courts. I have collected 20 court cases involving James Easton, mostly as a defendant, sued for debts, but in a few cases as the plaintiff, and in one case as "attorney by law" representing his wife's niece, Sarah Dunbar Howard, in a land dispute. Plymouth Court of Common Pleas, Aug. 1816, vol. 26:93-98, 98-106; James Easton named as "attorney by law" for Howard in a deposition for the case taken in April, 1815 in Quack Matrick's house in Stoughton. Quack Matrick was another black/Indian Rev. War vet, mentioned in Nell's Colored Patriots, who will be described in more detail in the next chapter. The case was heard in Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, July, 1815, pg. 372. Mention of James Easton as lawyer and the money he was paid for his services, are in the docket attachments for this case. William Nell wrote in Colored Patriots... that James Easton was sometimes referred to as "the black lawyer". Nell, pg. 33 Did Easton serve as a lawyer in any other cases? Although the first African American to pass the bar exam and practice law in Massachusetts, John Swett Rock, did not do so until about thirty years later, was James Easton the first American of African descent to actually serve as a lawyer within the Massachusetts legal system?

³⁴ Abdy, pg. 136 (see note 22).

³⁵ Hosea Easton, "An Address: Delivered before the Coloured Population, of Providence, Rhode Island, on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 27, 1828", in, George R. Price and James Brewer Stewart, eds., To Heal the Scourge of Prejudice: The Life and Writings of Hosea Easton, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1999, pp. 58, 56.

³⁶ Avon Baptist Church Records, small book, pp. 95-96.

³⁷ Ibid., unnumbered page, minutes of meeting held April 9, 1832.

³⁸ Van Amburg Delorey, <u>A Copying Out</u>, pg. 572

³⁹ Ibid., 662. Kingman, pg. 65, unnumbered footnote.

⁴⁰ For a thorough description of these conditions, see James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks (New York, 1996), and Carol V.S. George, Segregated Sabbaths: Richard Allen and the Rise of Independent Black Churches, 1760-1840 (New York, 1973).

See map on page three of the previous chapter. Regarding Sarah's possible ancestral connection to the Massachuset tribe, her mother, Patience Crouch was from Scituate, which, along with the adjoining town of Pembroke, was the traditional homeland of the Mattakeeset band of the Massachuset tribe. At the time of her birth, there were several Mattakeeset women who also had the name, "Patience", including a female sachem named Patience Keurp, indicating a tradition or preference associated with taking that English name. Plymouth Court records, and Mass. Archives There is also an Indian Crouch family listed in the Earle Report on the Indians of Massachusetts in 1859. Because both the Easton and Dunbar families, though called "mulattoes" and "negroes", etc., by the English, were frequently intermarried with and living among Indians, the likelihood is that the failure to label them as "Indians" in the colonial records is solely attributable to English ignorance regarding racial mixture and Indian identity from the Indian perspective. Regarding the origins of her father, Sampson Dunbar, who was born in 1721, "a mulatto servant of Cornelius Thayer" of , I have long wondered how he got the surname "Dunbar". Rev. Samuel Dunbar was at that time a pastor and "guardian" of the Christian Indians of the nearby Massachuset "praying town" of Punkapoag.

⁴² from Isaac Backus, Collections of the MHS....

⁴³ Nell, <u>Colored Patriots...</u>, pg. 33. A search of the papers of the Tremont Theater in the Boston Public Library's Rare Book and Manuscript room turned up no mention of James Easton among those who did the iron work, although James Easton could have manufactured some of the iron materials that the contractors used, and the Eastons may have worked on the project as sub-contractors. The theater was built in 1827, three years before James Easton died, so it is likely that his sons would have done the actual work. Tremont Theatre Papers, Ms.Th.4, items 155, 156, 131, 144; Ms.fTh.9, "Minutes of the Meetings of the Tremont Theatre Board of Directors, Boston, 1827-1845.

⁴⁴ U.S. Direct Tax for Maine and Massachusetts of 1798. Kingman, <u>History of North Bridgewater</u>, 215. ⁴⁵ Edward W. McGlenen, ed., Boston Town Records, 1796 to 1813, Boston, Municipal Printing Office, 1905, page 100.

⁴⁶ Kingman, pg. 379

⁴⁷ Plymouth Deeds, vol. 108, pp. 101-103; vol. 112, pg. 210; and vol. 152, pg. 147.

⁴⁸ The manuscript letter to Paul Cuffe from James Easton Jr., dated October 8, 1816, is in the Paul Cuffe Papers, Folder 8, Old Dartmouth Historical Society Library, New Bedford, Massachusetts, Capt. Paul Cuffe's sister, Mary, married a Wampanoag man named Michael Wainer. Their son, John Wainer, married Mary Easton, daughter of James and Sarah and sister of James Jr.

The above quote from Nell does not include James, Jr. -who was also a doctor- as one of the sons who inherited their father's "mental ability". Perhaps the omission was inadvertent.

⁵⁰ Plymouth Deeds, vol. 127, pg. 81; vol. 131, pg. 89. Kathryn Grover, The Fugitive's Gibraltar: Escaping Slaves and Abolitionism in New Bedford, Massachusetts, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 2001, pp. 21, 45. In the 1780s Rodman used some of his wealth to purchase freedom for three different slaves. Rodman's widow, Elizabeth, at the age of 93, was the first to sign the New Bedford petition to repeal the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 (Grover, pg. 221). ⁵¹ Roberts, "Our Progress". Easton, <u>A Treatise</u>, 110-111.

⁵² Joel W. Lewis was a frequent advertiser, for both his blacksmith shop and boarding house, in the Liberator, from its inception. On his education in Easton's school see Benjamin F. Roberts, The Self Elevator, vol. 1, no. 1, March 30, 1853, pg. 3. Also, U.S. Census, 1870, Chelsea, Suffolk, Mass., pg. 33A. ⁵³ Hosea Easton, <u>A Treatise...</u>, pg. 111

⁵⁴ Roberts, "Our Progress". Brockton, Plymouth County, Vital Records Through 1850. Kingman, History of North Bridgewater, 498. A document has recently been brought to my attention which suggests that the school and iron foundry were either still operating, or the family was attempting to revive them, in 1832. A report from the New England Anti Slavery Society states that Rev. Hosea Easton was soliciting funding for the institution at that time. Records of the New England Anti Slavery Society, vol. 1, MsfA. 31. 1831-1833, two articles, dated April 30, and May 28, 1832.

Plymouth County Court of Common Pleas: April, 1817, vol. 26, pg. 248, action 33, Azor Harris v. James Easton, James Easton, Jr., and Joshua Easton, demand payable to Nahum Washburn; vol. 26, pp. 249-250, action 35, Abel Kingman and Eliphalet Kingman v. James, James Jr., and Joshua; Nov., 1817, vol. 26, pp. 487-491, William Brett, Jr. and Cyrus Brett v. James, James Jr., and Joshua; April, 1818, vol. 27, pp. 23-28, action 51, David Reynolds v. James Easton, on a note dated June 5, 1815, action 52, Ezekiel Merritt v. James, James Jr., and Joshua; August, 1818, vol. 27, page 138, action 38, Daniel Dunbar v. James, James Jr., and Joshua; August, 1818, vol. 27, pp. 139-144, action 44, Galen Latham v. James, James Jr., and Joshua; action 45, Zenas Keith v. James, James Jr., and Joshua; vol. 27, pp. 167-168, action 96, Moses Packard v. James, James Jr., and Joshua; action 97, Moses Packard v. James Easton; April, 1820, vol. 28, pp. 117-122, action 86, Peter H. Peirce and Stephen B. Pickens v. James, James Jr., and Joshua; August, 1820, vol. 28, pp. 150-151, action 36, Abel Kingman, Nathan Hayward, Benjamin Southworth, Perez Southworth, Jr., and Loring Burr v. James, Caleb, and 45, action 60, William Pratt v. James, James, Jr., and Joshua. ⁵⁶ David Thomas Karia a law Sylvanus (Eastons lost the appeal to this case at the Supreme Judicial Court); Nov., 1822, vol. 29, pg.

David Thomas Konig, ed., Plymouth Court Records, 1686-1859, Boston, Pilgrim Society, and the New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2002, Editor's Introduction: "A Guide to the Use of the Plymouth Court Records", pp. 142-144.

⁵⁷ Plymouth County Court of Common Pleas: October, 1789, vol. 17, pp. 404-405, action 11, Proprietors of the Iron Ore and Millstones in the West Shares v. Samuel Brett, William Brett, Isaac Brett, and James Easton; April, 1791, vol. 17, pp. 550-552, Proprietors of the Iron Ore and Millstones in the West Shares v. Samuel Brett, William Brett, and James Easton (the defendents won this case, but lost the previous one, including an appeal); Nov., 1814, vol. 25, pg. 176, action 73, Gamaliel Rounseville v. James Easton; pg. 211, James Easton v. Gamaliel Rouseville; Nov., 1816, vol. 26, pp. 184-189, action 94, Luke Packard and Ames Packard v. James Easton. ⁵⁸ See note 33.

⁵⁹ Robert Benjamin Lewis, Light and Truth; Collected From the Bible and Ancient and Modern History, Containing the Universal History of the Colored and Indian Race, from the Creation of the World to the Present Time, Boston, B. F. Roberts, 1844, pg. 331

⁶⁰ Kingman, <u>History of North Bridgewater</u>, 318, 379, 498. Louis Ruchames, "Race, Marriage, and Abolition in Massachusetts", in The Journal of Negro History, vol. 40, no. 3, July, 1955.

⁶¹ Plymouth County Court of Common Pleas, April, 1819, vol. 27, pg. 324, action 20, "Caleb Easton and Sylvanus Easton, Bridgewater traders, copartners in trade negotiating business jointly under the firm of C. and S. Easton" v. Benjamin Kingman (Bridgewater Deputy Sheriff).

⁶² Ibid., August, 1819, vol. 27, pp. 362-363, action 11, Caleb Easton et al, v. Vinton. Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, October term, 1819, pp.316-317, Caleb Easton et al v. Edward Vinton.

⁶³ Dorothy Porter Wesley and Constance Porter Uzelac, eds., <u>William Cooper Nell, Selected Writings:</u> <u>1832-1874</u>, Baltimore, Black Classic Press, 2002, pp. 34-40. (add more later)

⁶⁴ Plymouth County Court of Common Pleas, Nov., 1823, pg. 262, action 58, William Linfield v. James Easton, Jr.; Nov. 1827, vol. 30, pg. 620, action 83, Hugh Orr v. Caleb Easton and Sylvanus Easton; Nov. 1828, vol. 31, pg. 111, action 34, Blue Hill Turnpike Corp., v. Caleb Easton and Sylvanus Easton; April, 1829, vol. 31, pg. 168, action 30, Thomas Weston, Jr. and Thomas Weston v. Caleb easton and Sylvanus Easton and Galen Packard (Caleb's wife's cousin, and, apparently a business partner); April, 1829, vol. 31, pg. 181, action 53, Charles Wiley and Stephen G. Davis v. Caleb Easton and Sylvanus Easton; Aug., 1830, vol. 31, pg. 452, action 14, Edward Vinton (Deputy Sheriff) v. Caleb Easton (Blacksmith), "surviving partner of the late firm of C and S Easton."

⁶⁵ Ibid., April, 1832, vol. 32, pp. 142-147, action 18, James Ames v. Joshua Easton and James Easton, Jr.; August, 1833, vol. 32, pg. 349, action 63, Alpheus Leach v. James Easton, Jr. and Joshua Easton; Aug., 1834, vol. 32, pp. 541-546, action 115, James Ames v. Joshua Easton and James Easton, Jr.; Aug., 1836, vol. 33, pg. 226, action 16, Isaac Reynolds v. James Easton, Jr.; Aug., 1838, vol. 34, pg. 106, Galen Latham v. James Easton, Jr.

⁶⁶ Ibid., Aug., 1839, vol. 34, pp. 312-317, David Ames v. Caleb Easton (the only one of James Easton's sons still alive at that time).

⁶⁷ First Annual report of the Board of Managers of the New England Anti-Slavery Society, presented Jan. 9, 1833, Boston, 1833, 7. Second Annual report of the Board of Managers of the New England Anti-Slavery Society, presented January15, 1834, Boston, 1834, 4, 21. James Oliver Horton, and Lois E. Horton, Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North (New York, 1979) 88. The Liberator, February 7, 1835.

⁶⁸ Kingman, <u>History of North Bridgewater</u>, 185. <u>The Liberator</u>, vol. viii, no. 39, September 28, 1838.
 ⁶⁹ Weston Papers, Rare Books and Special Collections, Boston Public Library, MS.A.9.2.3, p29.
 (courtesy of Kathryn Grover).
 ⁷⁰ Robert Roberts. The House Security Directory of Content of Con

⁷⁰ Robert Roberts, <u>The House Servant's Directory, or a Monitor for Private Families: Hints on the</u> <u>Arrangement and Performance of Servant's Work</u>, Graham R. Hodges, ed., Armonk, N.Y. and London, 1998. <u>The Liberator</u>, vol. vii, no. 31, July 28, 1837.

⁷¹ Kingman, <u>History of North Bridgewater</u>, 318, 379, 498. U.S. census records for North Bridgewater, Plymouth County, MA, 1850, 1860, and for Brockton, 1870, and 1880.

⁷² Plymouth County Court of Common Pleas, April, 1815, vol. 25, pp. 305-306), Commonwealth v. Silvanus (sic) Easton.
 ⁷³ Massachusetts Supreme Indicial Court, Oct. 1815, in

⁷³ Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, Oct., 1815, item number 18, pg. 101.2, Commonwealth v. Sylvanus Easton. Kingman, <u>History of North Bridgewater</u>, 379, 498.
 ⁷⁴ Ibid. 408. John Milton Farle Proventing Proventing Proventing 10, 100 Proventing 1

⁷⁴ Ibid., 498. John Milton Earle Papers, Box 2, Folder 4: <u>New Bedford Indians</u>, in the collections of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.
 ⁷⁵ William Lloyd Garrison, Thoughts on African Collections

⁷⁵ William Lloyd Garrison, <u>Thoughts on African Colonization: or...</u>, Boston, 1832, 17, 62-65. (Can add the Douglass citation here later) <u>The Liberator</u>, vol. vii, no. 29, July 14, 1837.

⁷⁶ As shown in the genealogy chart on page nine of chapter one, there were six Easton and Dunbar men, that we can confirm, who were Revolutionary War veterans, namely, James Easton, Moses Easton, Sampson Dunbar, and Sampson's sons, Asa, Joshua, and Samuel. Two African American Revolutionary War vets who lived in North Bridgewater during the Easton childrens' childhood were the brothers, Calvin and Luther Jotham. They appear in the 1790 census for Bridgewater, next to James Easton, and are mentioned by Bradford Kingman, who says that they later moved to a community in the state of Maine where several other Easton relatives resided. Kingman, pg. 318.

Chapter Three

Hosea Easton: Forgotten Abolitionist "Giant"

Into the social environment of hope and struggle for equality in America, and, specifically, into the town of Bridgewater, Massachusetts,¹ entered Hosea Easton (1799-1837), the youngest child of James and Sarah. Hosea participated in Easton family sit-in protests at the ages of one, five, thirteen, seventeen, and twenty-eight years. He was fifteen when his family's combination iron foundry and school was built, and was an eye-witness and co-participant in their triumphs as well as in their battles with many adversaries. With such a wealth of exemplary role models and personal experiences to draw upon for inspiration and courage, combined with a profound Christian faith, Hosea Easton developed an enduring sense of mission toward the righting of social wrongs and eliminating injustice, particularly the injustices based in racism. His family's long history of interracial mixing and defiance of racist institutions and norms also provided Hosea with an abiding awareness that alternatives to both the racist social norm and the racialist paradigm were a real possibility.

During the late 1820's, Easton became prominent as a leader in the fight for human rights and liberty in the United States, and he worked passionately and incessantly throughout the course of his brief lifetime for the cause and the world which he had inherited. In fact, in the last ten years of his life, from the ages of 28 through 38, Hosea Easton compiled far more significant lifetime accomplishments than the great majority of the other activists of the early abolitionist movement--and also received a disproportionate quantity of the battle wounds experienced by such activists.

Those last ten eventful years of Hosea Easton's life began with his marriage to Louisa Matrick, on January 13, 1827. Louisa was the daughter of Quack and Chloe Matrick of Stoughton, and, like the Eastons, the Matrick family was also a mixture of African and Native American ancestry. Quack was most likely a descendant of the Quok family of the nearby Punkapoag Massachuset Indian reservation.² And, like James Easton, Quack Matrick was also a veteran of the American Revolution, as well as a member of the Stoughton Baptist Church at the same time when the Eastons made their series of sit-in protests there. Hosea and Louisa probably knew each other all of their lives and grew up listening to the same stories about their families' similar struggles: to keep their Indian reservation lands;³ to see the Revolution's ideals fulfilled for all Americans; and against racism of all sorts. Clearly, they had much in common. They were married until Hosea's death parted them ten and one half years later. Louisa died of consumption in 1842, five years after Hosea. Together they produced three children: Sampson M., in 1830; Hosea, Jr., in 1835; and Maria A., in 1836.⁴

It was also in the year 1827 that Hosea made the crucial career change from manufacturing blacksmith to Christian minister/social activist. In January of 1826, Hosea dissolved a partnership in an iron manufacturing business with a young African-American man named Thomas Jacobs, of Stoughton.⁵ Before going into business with Jacobs, Hosea most likely had always worked in the Easton family business, including as a teacher in the school, where he also likely received his academic education and industrial training. Having witnessed the tremendous

difficulties that his father and older brothers had faced due to the persecution from their opponents -about which he would later write so movingly- Easton may have felt that he must battle the opponents of equality in a more direct way than he could ever manage to do in the role of a manufacturing blacksmith. In order to defeat the monster of racism, or "prejudice", as they referred to it in that era, Hosea felt that he must attack it at its heart. As Easton later made clear in his writings and speeches, he perceived that the heart of racism was spiritual, ideological, and institutionalized in social "custom", as he called it. The weapons that he chose to spend the rest of his life using were uncompromising, insightful truth, and his unusually adept facility with the English language.⁶

Although there is no record of him being called a "reverend" or minister until 1831, it is evident that by the end of 1827 Hosea Easton had moved to Boston, become an activist, and begun to prepare for a ministry.⁷ Both Hosea and his oldest brother, Joshua were members of the first abolitionist organization in Boston, the Massachusetts General Colored Association, founded in 1826. Some sources say that Hosea and Joshua were founding members of the organization, while others do not include them in the list of founders, while still acknowledging that they were members. It is possible that they were among the founders in 1826, though they still lived in North Bridgewater at that time, just 15 miles southwest of Boston. Other members of the MGCA included such significant leaders of color as David Walker, John T. Hilton, James G. Barbadoes, Coffin Pitts, William G. Nell (father of William C.), Thomas Dalton, Samuel Snowden, Thomas Cole, and the Easton's brother-inlaw, Robert Roberts. While one of the first organizations nationwide to demand the immediate abolition of slavery, the MGCA also worked against the oppression of free

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people of color in the North and for their complete inclusion in the rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of American citizenship.

By early 1828, Hosea was already a leading activist. He was also deeply involved in the work of Boston's Colored Methodist Episcopal Church. In March of 1828, Hosea Easton was called upon to chair "A large and respectable meeting of the people of Colour.", held in Boston, at the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church. The purpose of that meeting was to confirm a commitment among the people of the community to support Freedom's Journal, which was at that time the nation's only newspaper published by African Americans. One of the speakers at that meeting was David Walker, who would publish his inspirational and controversial Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World the following year. In June of 1828, Hosea Easton's first (known) published work appeared, An Appeal to the Christian Public, in behalf of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the same church where the meeting for Freedom's Journal was held. The church needed Easton's by then well-recognized skill with words to help raise funds to pay off the mortgage on their recently constructed meeting house. In this pamphlet, Easton provided a brief account of the ministerial experiences of their pastor, Rev. James Lee, and a description of the important work of their church in the Colored American community in Boston's west side. The end of the pamphlet contains the endorsements of four Euro-American Methodist ministers.⁸

Shortly thereafter, on November 27, 1828, Hosea Easton delivered a powerful and revealing "Thanksgiving Day Address" to the "Coloured Population" of Providence, Rhode Island. Easton had not intended to publish the lengthy speech, but, as he recalls in the introduction, "by the ardent request of a Committee chosen for that purpose, by the Coloured Population of Providence, he was influenced to yield to their

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solicitation." The <u>Address...</u> thus became Easton's first substantial published work, articulating the grief and pain of victims of racism, as well as the liberating hope of equality through "uplift"--self-improvement efforts by the victims of racism. At the time that this speech was given, Hosea's brothers Caleb and Sylvanus were in the midst of their final spate of court battles with those who wished for their business and school to fail. Easton's words reveal how deeply wounded and exasperated by racism he was at this time.⁹

The speech begins with a very patriotic giving of thanks for the greatness and prosperity of America, but this tone soon takes a somewhat sarcastic turn, as Easton begins to describe how some of America's citizens are systematically excluded from the benefits of liberty and prosperity. In the following passage, he eloquently declares his belief that only in a state of true liberty can the human mind and spirit develop their full potential:

The voice of Liberty calls the energies of the human soul to emerge out of nature's darkness, and to explore divine spiritual principles....How admirable it is, that the higher the soul arises by being expanded by intelligent perception, the more it breathes forth praise and thanksgiving to God..

To Easton, the ultimate crime resulting from slavery and the deprivation of liberty for people of color was that an entire segment of the human community was being systematically robbed of the experience of manifesting their full humanity. ¹⁰

In the course of this <u>Address..</u>, Easton goes on to describe: the violent atrocities committed within the institution of slavery; the day-to-day realities of segregation, racism, and lack of true liberty for "free" people of color in the north; the "diabolical" evil of the colonization movement; and, finally, the hope of victory through "uplift". Even though Easton concludes with a lengthy exhortation on the importance of uplift, there is a hint in an earlier section of the speech that uplift and efforts at selfimprovement may not be enough. In one instance, while dealing with the problem of lack of opportunity for higher means of employment, Easton describes the futility experienced by young people of color, like the students from the Easton's school, when they tried to apply their skills in the job market, only to find closed doors.

"...when they have obtained their education, they know only to feel sensible of their misery. Their minds being expanded, their perception brightened, their zeal ardent for promotion; they look around for business, they find that custom cuts them off from all advantages." ¹¹

Even so, Easton sticks by his advocacy of uplift as the answer, combined with a hope for divine intervention. It is this aspect of Easton's thought, and emphasis--the responsibility of the *victims* of racism to transform their circumstances-- that develops in a radically different direction during the later years of his life.

Hosea Easton also became a leader in one of the most significant developments of the abolitionist movement of the 1830's: the National Convention of Free People of Color. Several years before William Lloyd Garrison would establish his anti-slavery newspaper, <u>The Liberator</u>, in 1831, which is often mistaken as the starting point for the abolitionist movement, leaders in the urban free colored communities of the north were coming together with increasing frequency and growing numbers to take up the causes that were in the common interests of their people. As demonstrated by the Massachusetts General Colored Association, these causes included the abolition of slavery, opposition to the American Colonization Society, the education and advancement of free people of color, organizing their own churches, the promotion of <u>Freedom's Journal</u>, and the search for other ways to effectively oppose segregation and racism. The National Convention of Free People of Color was a result of the growing need for such leaders to unite in order to achieve their common goals, and fight their common enemies, who seemed to be multiplying rapidly during the Jacksonian era. When Hosea Easton met with these leaders in September of 1830, it was for the purpose of organizing, and creating a constitution for the proposed annual conventions.¹²

The first National Convention of Free People of Color was held in Philadelphia, in June of 1831, and "Rev." Hosea Easton was selected as one of the four delegates from Boston, along with his brother-in-law, Robert Roberts, James G. Barbadoes, and Rev. Samuel Snowden. This was the second time on record (the first was earlier that same year) in which Easton was referred to by the title of "Reverend", but there is no record of him pastoring a church until two years later, in Hartford. The agenda for the convention included such issues as: healing divisions and strengthening the ties between the people of color; the feasibility of immigration to Canada; and how to defeat the work of the American Colonization Society. The issue of immigration to Canada surfaced because, during the white race riots in Cincinnati in 1829, when hundreds of African Americans were driven out of the city, many fled to Canada-which some people of color were then contemplating as a means of escaping white American racial hostility.¹³

The primary complaint against the American Colonization Society was that it promoted a plan that would rid the U.S. of free African Americans by shipping them to African colonies, thus removing the most significant threat to the institution of slavery from within the U.S. borders. The mere presence of free blacks in the south--and there were thousands at this time--was an inspiration to slaves to pursue freedom, and the free colored activists in the north were spearheading the abolitionist

movement. Equally grieving to the African American community was the audacity of the ACS in promoting their plan under a guise of benevolence and even as an antislavery program. Easton had described this ploy very accurately in a section of his 1828 Address, which was quoted by Garrison and other abolitionists:

"Our ancestors were stolen property, and property which belonged to God. This is well known by our religious community; and they find that the owner is about to detect them. Now if they can slip away those stolen goods, by smuggling all those out of the country, which God would be likely to make an instrument of, in bringing them to justice, and keep the rest in ignorance; by such means, things would go on well with them, and they would appease their consciences by telling what great things they are doing for the coloured population and God's cause. But we understand better how it is....They will steal the sons of Africa, bring them to America, keep them and their posterity in bondage for centuries....then transport them back to Africa; by which means America gets all her drudgery done at little expense..."¹⁴

Perhaps the most exciting occurrence at this first convention was a proposal put forth by three radical white abolitionists who had recently resigned in protest from the ACS; William Lloyd Garrison, Arthur Tappan, and Simeon Jocelyn. Those gentlemen submitted a plan "..that a College be established at New Haven, Connecticut....for the liberal education of Young Men of Colour, on the Manual Labour System..". For Hosea Easton, this proposal signified the possibility of reviving the work began by his father some twenty years earlier, but on a scale much more grand. The project would require \$20,000 to complete, and "a benevolent individual" (most likely Arthur Tappan) donoted the first \$1,000--leaving the responsibility for raising the remainder to the convention delegates. Besides the excitement of the proposed college, which had the potential to be a most powerful tool for the cause of "uplift", having white allies in the movement for liberty and equality was another reason for renewed hope. Hopefully, these allies could help turn other whites away from their fears and prejudices, and bring more white influence and resources to the overwhelming task of eradicating American racism.¹⁵

But white abolitionists were an extremely small minority in antebellum America. The social climate during the Jacksonian era was becoming ever more racist, with ever less tolerance for any dissent from the growing popular acceptance of white supremacy as a foundational ideology from which to build the expanding nation. As the nation moved its borders to the west and the south, encountering more Indians and bringing more Africans along the way, an implicit decision was being made, both consciously and subconsciously, throughout the nation. Americans were concluding that lines had to be drawn regarding who could participate in reaping the economic benefits of territorial and industrial expansion. Evidently, the American consensus was that preserving Anglo/white social dominance should remain the first priority when considering issues of social inclusion. People of color, under this ideology, could only be included in American society where they would serve the needs and interests of the white majority. That way of thinking was the impetus for both the movement to colonize free African Americans in Africa, and the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which called for the removal of the remaining intact American Indian nations to a remote territory outside the boundaries of the United States, which eventually became the state of Oklahoma. The momentum of this social development would not permit attempts at uplift, social elevation, and equal inclusion for non-whites--even when initiated or promoted by whites. President Andrew Jackson, slaveowner and famed "Indian-fighter", reflected America's ethnocentric expansionist fervor in his annual address to Congress for 1830:

What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by

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a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms...filled with all the blessings of liberty, civilization, and religion?¹⁶

In such a society, as the events which followed the convention confirmed, there was no room for a "Manual Labor College for Young Men of Colour". The news concerning the proposed college reached the white population of New Haven late in the summer of 1831. A town meeting was held in September, during which many speeches were made against the idea of a "colored college" being established in New Haven. Several of the speakers claimed to be against slavery and for the "improvement" and education of blacks, but, nevertheless, they would not allow such a school to be built in *their* town. The request to permit the college to be built was voted down by a margin of 700 to 4. Even though their vote effectively ended the possibility of the school being built there, apparently that was not enough to restore the local citizens' sense of well-being and security, nor their civil demeanor. A series of inflammatory newspaper editorials followed, criticizing the "unwholesome colored population", and by early October white mobs were rioting in the black section of town and pelting Arthur Tappan's home with garbage. This sort of reaction to black attempts at uplift, education, and any other form of self-help became a common pattern throughout the urban north during the 1830's, and it was to have a profound effect on Hosea Easton.¹⁷

With the advent of William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper, <u>The Liberator</u>, in 1831, Hosea Easton and the other Afro-American abolitionist activists found a new ally which provided an extremely important vehicle for making their voices heard. Not only did Easton and other abolitionists of color find a nationwide publisher for their

essays and speeches, but the <u>Liberator</u> also regularly announced their meetings, speeches, conventions and other events. It also published articles about those activities, including transcripts of the minutes of the meetings and conventions. A two part essay by Hosea Easton, under the signature, "A Native of North Bridgewater" (and also sub-headed, "by a man of color"), was published in the <u>Liberator</u>, in December, of 1831. In this essay, titled, "Prejudices of Society", Hosea responded to the citizens of New Haven who rejected the idea of a colored men's college, and provided his views on the roots of the problem.¹⁸

The root of perhaps all of the evil in American society, Easton suggests in the article, can be summed up in one word- "prejudice." In the call and response style of many a black preacher, Easton provides twelve questions regarding the cause of twelve different examples of racist injustice in American society, and the given response to each one is, "Prejudice." Two of Easton's examples deal with the hypocrisy of America's professed Christians and reveal the deep impression made on Hosea by his family's church seating protests:

What induces christian churches, while enjoying the light of that truth which declares that God has no respect of person, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him, to have respect to the complexion of their members? Prejudice.

Why is it that professed ministers of the gospel tell their congregations, in one breath, that God has made of one blood all nations of men; and in the next, tell them there is a difference between a black, copper-colored, or yellow American and a white one; and so great a difference, that the colored Americans cannot enjoy what belongs to them as citizens and countrymen? Owing to Prejudice.¹⁹

In the second part of the essay, Easton also attacked the white American christians' refusal to mix socially with Christians of color and described their fear of interracial marriage. Since two of Hosea's older brothers had married Euro-American women, he

was certainly well aware of the opposition and social repercussions that they had faced.²⁰

It should be made clear here that Hosea Easton's use of the word "prejudice", both here and in his later writings, was not defined simply as a personal or individual racist sentiment. From the context of this work, as well as in many other writings by abolitionists of that era, "prejudice" seems to describe a culturally entrenched, allpermeating entity, very much like what is today called "institutional racism." Easton's repeated use of the words "custom" and "tradition" in this same context help to make that point clear. The following passage from the article provides a most vivid example of how Hosea Easton understood "prejudice" to mean systemic inequality or institutional racism:

The prejudices of society generally arise from custom—that is, opinions made habitual without examining their merits. When a class of opinions, upon whatever subject, have been formed and cherished; when maxims or conclusions have become familiar to the mind, and take root in it, they are seldom removed without a special effort. When society is thus infested with these maxims, it is disposed to retain, cherish and treat them respectfully, as one would an old acquaintance: therefore whatever may be advanced in opposition to them,--although to a disinterested mind it may be the most obvious truth,-is rejected without examination. It is from this cause so many inconsistencies are retained in society. Old errors are fondly preferred to new truths.

In other words, when enough people by into the lies and pass them down from generation to generation, the individual prejudice becomes a society-wide phenomenon, as is also made clear by the title of Easton's article.

Hosea Easton's commitment to education and training in skilled professions for people of color included an attempt in April of 1832 to solicit support for his family's school in North Bridgewater. In the records of the New England Anti-Slavery Society, we find a report regarding a request to them from Easton for assistance:

(Monday, April 30, 1832)

Mr. Easton, a colored gentleman from North Bridgewater being present, was requested to make some statement relative to the "Good Samaritan, or Mechanical Society," an institution designed to afford instruction to colored boys employed in the Iron Foundry in that place; after which it was voted that a Committee be appointed to take into consideration the subject proposed by Mr. Easton and report their answer in relation to the same...

(Monday, May 28, 1832) The Committee appointed to take into consideration the communication of the Rev. Mr. Easton, respecting the "Good Samaritan Society" reported that in their opinion, the Society is unable at present to render them any assistance,

which report was accepted.²¹

When the Easton's school was first referred to as "The Good Samaritan Society" is unknown. This is the only known record of their use of that name, but the name certainly reflects sentiments regarding true uplift and emancipation that Hosea later expressed in his writings, as shall be shown below.

Easton continued to participate in the annual National Convention of Free People of Color through 1834, often leading prayers, as chaplain, and proposing and seconding various resolutions. In between conventions, Easton continued to work fervently for the burgeoning anti-slavery movement, lecturing at churches and halls all over New England. Apparently, Easton was called away from the Convention of 1833, since his name does not appear in the minutes after the first day. His mother, Sarah, died a couple of weeks after that convention, so he may have been called away to spend time with her. Sometime later in 1833, Hosea, Louisa, and their son Sampson moved to Hartford, Connecticut, where he pastored two churches, and resided for the rest of his brief life.²² The first church that Easton pastored in Hartford was the Talcott St. Congregational Church, which had been established as a primarily a congregation for people of color in 1819. Hosea's cousin, Peter Eason, had pastored

that same church from 1821-1823.²³ Following a national trend, after the turn of the 19th century, more and more free colored Christians in New England chose to start their own churches, rather than suffer the demeaning experiences associated with being forced to sit in the segregated "negro pews" and balconies in the white churches. ²⁴

The colored churches also became meeting places for the growing number of uplift-related societies and organizations. Not long after Easton's arrival in Hartford, he joined with several local black leaders in forming such an organization, the Hartford Literary and Religious Institution, founded in January of 1834. Easton was appointed as the institution's "general agent", in charge of traveling throughout New England to raise funds by speaking to churches and to sympathetic abolitionists. Unfortunately, at this same time another wave of racist-inspired mob violence spread throughout the urban northeast, leading the members of the institution to "call him home". It was no longer safe for Easton to travel--especially for the cause that he was espousing. White race riots broke out in Boston, New York City, Utica, N.Y., Pittsburg, and Hartford, during the years 1834-36. The riots in Hartford, in 1834 and `35 hit Hosea pretty close to home. ²⁵

According to Edward Abdy, the English gentleman traveler and writer, Hartford in the 1830's had a particularly acute case of the racist uglies:

"Throughout the Union, there is, perhaps, no city, containing the same amount of population, where the blacks meet with more contumely and unkindness than at this place. Some of them told me it was hardly safe for them to be in the streets alone at night....To pelt them with stones, and cry out nigger! nigger! as they pass, seems to be the pastime of the place."²⁶ In 1834, a group of white youths attacked one of the parishioners of Easton's church as he left the building one evening. The man was defended by a black neighbor, named Jack Blackson, who fired a round of buckshot and hit four of the white boys. White mobs responded by rioting in Easton's neighborhood for three consecutive nights, during which time they tore down Blackson's house and several other homes of free people of color. ²⁷

A very similar event occurred in June of 1835. This time it began with a gang of whites gathered outside the Talcott St. Church, shouting taunts and epithets at the congregation while they were holding a religious service! When the service was over, the mob attacked the congregation as they left the building. The ensuing riot lasted only two days this time, and even the local press was outraged at the rioters' behavior, especially at how the incident started. In 1836, when Easton founded and began to pastor a second church in Hartford, the Colored Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, this new church's building was burned to the ground that same year. ²⁸

During these years in Hartford, Easton continued to travel and speak for both the abolition of slavery and of racism. After the fire, Easton added to his speeches a pitch for funds to rebuild the church. But an even more significant change in his speeches occurred after the fire: instead of speaking of the uplift and self-improvement of the people of color to mixed audiences, he began to preach increasingly to predominantly white audiences, exhorting them to repent from their racism and bring the healing to American society that, as he was now convinced, only their actions could bring. What Easton had learned from the events of the mid-1830's was that not only did black attempts at uplift fail to bring the desired social change, it apparently provoked the ugliest Afrophobic hysteria imaginable! At the time he wrote his 1828 <u>Address</u>,

Easton had only just begun to sense this futility. By this point, nine years later, he fully realized it. It was the proponents of slavery and racism who needed most to change, not the victims. Still a man of profound Christian faith, Rev. Easton became convinced that the ultimate hope for colored Americans lay in the power of God to bring white racists to repentance and transformation. And he saw himself playing a role as one of God's agents working to bring that vision to fruition.²⁹

Hosea Easton's A Treatise on the Intellectual Character, and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the U. States; and the Prejudice Exercised Towards Them, published in 1837, four months before his death, was the crowning achievement of his brief life, for it was Easton's supreme attempt at reaching racist Americans with the message that he now felt they needed to hear. Within its 54 pages, the <u>Treatise</u> is a philosophical and theological discourse on the subject of race and racism, of a greater scope and depth of analysis, arguably, than anything else previously written on this topic by an American. Stanhope Smith and Benjamin Rush may have come close to producing equally thorough bodies of work on the topic in their various writings, but neither offered a single treatment that can compare to this particular work in its depth and detail of analysis, regardless of how we might evaluate all of their reasoning and conclusions. Among African American writings prior to Easton's Treatise, we find many examples of works that deal with the general topic of slavery and race relations in America, and also some that promote theories of human racial origins and differentiation. Several such articles appeared in Freedom's Journal, and David Walker's Appeal made many astute and incisive comments on these subjects. Yet none of these works quite compare in the depth of intellectual

analysis, nor the quality of formation and presentation of argument that we find in the <u>Treatise</u>. 30

Easton begins his <u>Treatise</u> in a manner appropriate for a Christian minister writing on the topic of race: by showing the original oneness of humanity, coupled with a biblical and historical account of the loss of that original God-ordained oneness. The first sentence of Easton's introduction makes a powerful counterpoint to all of the conflict and disharmony that he describes throughout the remainder of the <u>Treatise</u>: "..one great truth is acknowledged by all Christendom, viz.--God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth." He then goes on to give a Christian environmentalist explanation for the physical variety within the one human species. That is followed by a biblical/historical account of the divergent paths taken by the descendants of Noah's sons who populated Africa and Europe, thus providing an explanation for variety in cultural and intellectual development between different human groups.

It is at this point that the <u>Treatise</u> takes on a somewhat Afrocentric demeanor. Although not the first to do so, Easton extols the glories of ancient African civilization by repeatedly making references to Egypt as his primary example. By contrast, Easton describes how the descendants of Noah who eventually settled in Europe became brutal and cruel Barbarians. As for the eventual ascendancy and domination by Europe over Africa and the rest of the world, and European achievements in technology and academics, Easton attributes that to a combination of brute force and the adaptation of Egyptian/African cultural refinement--first by the ancient Greeks, then the Romans, and so on, as the now familiar Afrocentric historiography goes. But, the point of Easton's historical overview was not to make

any sort of argument for innate African cultural, spiritual or intellectual superiority over Europeans. Easton was attempting to show a very environmentalistic, cause-and-effect relationship between worldwide historical events and circumstances, and the degradation of *all* of humanity, leading to the abysmal state of affairs that was U.S. interracial relations in 1837.³¹

The four chapters which comprise the remainder of the <u>Treatise</u> deal with: the damage done to the victims of slavery; the nature of racial "prejudice" (the term used by Easton and his contemporaries, before the word "racism" was invented), and the means by which it is passed on from generation to generation; the effects of racism on the so-called "free" people of color in the north; the failure of the United States government to extend its promise of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to all of its citizens (including colored veterans of two U.S. wars); and, lastly, Easton's very biblical, radically Christian, solution to these problems.

In the chapter of the <u>Treatise</u> that details the ways in which racism is taught and passed on over generations, we receive several examples of things that Easton himself must have experienced growing up in Massachusetts, as well as in his adult life traveling throughout New England. Many examples are given of the pervasiveness of racist "instruction" in American society, from stories and common sayings told to children when they are little, to the frequent use of the terms "negro" and "nigger" as slurs, to visual reminders in the form of public posters insulting blacks, and the segregated public facilities, including, of course, the "negro pews" in the churches. ³²

Easton also deals here with the economic motivation for perpetuating racism in the north, and for supporting slavery:

Cotton, rice, indigo, tobacco, and sugar, are great blessings to the world, say

they, and [the enslaved Africans] may as well be made to make them as not... ...But to come at the truth, the whole system is founded in avarice. I believe the premises to be the production of modern philosophy, bearing date with European slavery; and it has been the almost sole cause of the present prevailing public sentiment in regard to the colored population.

One of the profound strengths of the <u>Treatise</u> is the way that Easton consistently ties the institution of slavery in the south to the "prevailing public sentiment" of racism in the north. He clearly demonstrates how both sections of the country profited from slavery and the perpetuation of racism, thereby not allowing northern "liberals", such as "anti-slavery" colonizationists, and even some sincere abolitionists, to be let off the hook and escape from guilt. ³³

One other group that Easton does not allow to escape their guilt is the Christian clergy. The following examples are unambiguous:

It becomes the interest of all parties, not excepting the clergy, to sanction the premises [of racism], and draw the conclusions, and hence, to teach the rising generation...."The love of money is the root of all evil"; it will induce its votaries to teach lessons to their little babes, which only fits them for destroyers of their species in this world, and for the torments of hell in the world to come. When clergymen, even, are so blinded by the god of this world, as to witness the practice of the most heinous blasphemy in the house, said to be dedicated to God, ...without raising their warning voice to the wicked, it would not be at all surprising if they were to teach their children.... that a negro is not like a white man, instead of teaching them his catechism.

The impact upon Easton of the resistance by his parents to segregated seating in the church gives substance to what is meant here by "most heinous blasphemy". While Easton was certainly attempting to appeal to the white conscience, it is clear that he by no means was trying to appease white people. He was performing the role of God's prophetic voice of warning to a people that Easton saw as doomed to receive divine retribution, if they did not repent.³⁴

Easton even envisioned the form which their repentance should take, found in the biblical example of the "Good Samaritan". The analogy bears some interesting correlation to present-day discussions of affirmative action and reparations for African American descendents of slaves: "..New York emancipated her slaves, after beating them several hundred years, left them, half dead, without proscribing any healing remedy for the bruises and wounds received by their maltreatment. But the good Samaritan had quite a different view of the subject." Easton then powerfully elaborates on what it means to be a Good Samaritan in the United States--calling for affirmative, remedial action on the part of white Americans, to heal the people who were wounded by their avarice:

...emancipation embraces the idea that the emancipated must be placed back where slavery found them, and restore to them all that slavery has taken away from them. Merely to cease beating the colored people, and leave them in their gore, and call it emancipation, is nonsense. Nothing short of an entire reversal of the slave system in theory and practice--in general and in particular---will ever accomplish the work of redeeming the colored people of this country from their present condition.

Of course, when Easton, a staunch anti-colonizationist, says, "..the emancipated must be placed back where slavery found them..", he is not referring to Africa. He is referring to a *human condition* that needs to be restored--the glory of what the captive Africans, in Easton's perception, had once been. ³⁵

Slavery, as Easton saw it, was the root cause of the damage to the physical and psychological condition of African Americans, and also of the oppressive social circumstances which they were forced to live under, in the north as well as the south. At several points in the <u>Treatise</u>, Easton emphasizes the devastation wrought by slavery on human life, and how its cumulative effects, carried over from generation to

generation, create an ever-worsening human condition. The effects upon whites, from supporting the institution, are briefly described as primarily spiritual, manifested in a degradation of their moral character, and thus endangering their eternal souls. For blacks, as the subjects of slavery, the effects are physical, mental, moral and psychological, increasing in severity in direct proportion to the amount of time that an individual and his/her direct ancestors had spent under slavery's degrading power. In concordance with his Afrocentric historiography, Easton observed that slaves who had come more recently from Africa, and freedmen or escapees who were born in Africa, and had spent relatively little time under slavery, were in a much better, or "elevated", human condition, compared to those persons who, along with their progenitors, had been under slavery for a few or more generations. By making this point of emphasis, Easton hoped to persuade whites that the negative personal characteristics and faults that they claimed to find in nearly all of the colored population were the result of the majority of whites' own doing, through the propagation of slavery and prejudice, and not a result of any traits inherited from Africa. 36

Besides laying the responsibility, or blame, for the damage wrought by slavery upon the Euro-Americans, Easton also argued that the damage was so severe that slaves and ex-slaves could not heal themselves and therefore the primary responsibility for bringing them healing and restoration rested upon whites as well. In making his argument, Easton used several illustrations that, taken out of their carefully constructed context, could easily be found offensive. Descriptions of actual and alleged African American physical characteristics, which whites had claimed were all examples of defects, were repeated by Easton, in an attempt to show which characteristics were the result of slavery, and which were part of God's intended "variety in nature", and therefore not defects at all. Even within this context, some of the stereotypes that Easton lists make disturbing reading material, to say the least. Combined with his descriptions of the psychological damage done to African Americans by slavery, Easton portrays an image of slave degradation and helplessness that could have been particularly unsettling to those who had recently escaped from slavery. Consequently, in the course of attempting to bring healing and redemptive thought and action to American society, and deliver his people from the agony of racism, it appears that Easton may have offended some people, both white and black, including some key figures within the abolitionist movement. Those offenses had a direct impact on how Easton and his work were remembered, and forgotten, by those who came after him.

There are two key reasons why Hosea Easton and his <u>Treatise</u> were neglected and ignored by most abolitionists who came after him. The first reason involves the changing personnel and tactics within the movement, starting in the early 1840's. Beginning with J. W. C. Pennington, and then Frederick Douglass, the colored leadership in the movement shifted from consisting primarily of free people of color, who had been free for generations, like Easton, Nell, John T. Hilton, and Samuel Cornish, to men like Pennington, Douglass, Henry H. Garnet, Martin Delany, and William Wells Brown, who had been slaves themselves. With the advent of Frederick Douglass upon the abolitionist speaking circuit, in 1841, white abolitionist leaders like William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips, decided that promoting dignified, oratorically skilled former slaves, such as Douglass and Brown--making the institution of slavery appear even more horrible for binding and abusing such nonstereotypical specimens of African American humanity as these--would be an effective tactic. Although some whites within the antislavery movement paternalistically preferred the image of the helpless, debilitated slave, many gladly welcomed this change, since it kept the focus on slavery in the south, instead of dealing with the unpleasant and uncomfortable topic of racism in the north, which Easton and many of the other "old guard" black leaders had often troubled them with. Accordingly, the slave narrative autobiographies, which had been infrequently published before this time, soon became a profusion.

How, then, could passages from the <u>Treatise</u> which argue that slavery had a completely debilitating and dehumanizing effect upon the slaves, either aid the new abolitionist tactical approach, or be received as anything but an affront to the dignity and pride of people like Douglass, Delany, Brown, Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth? The following passage, the context of which was an attempt by Easton to argue against a perceived need to prepare slaves for gradual emancipation through education, rather than the immediate abolition of slavery, is the prime example:

...slaves cannot be educated for free men. A slave is metamorphosed into a machine, adapted to a specific operation, and propelled by the despotic power of the slave system....A slave, as such, in undergoing the change from a moral, intelligent being, to a mere machine, lost all the innate principles of a freeman. Hence, when the principles of slavery ceases to act upon him...he is left a mere out-of-use wreck of machinery; under nothing but the withering influence of the pelting rain of wickedness.³⁷

It is unlikely that any of this "new guard" of black, former slave, abolitionist leaders, upon reading such words, would have had anything further to do with the entire publication, except, perhaps, to discourage its circulation. Although Garrison and others had often quoted from Easton's <u>Thanksgiving Day Address</u>, and several of

his speeches and convention resolutions, the <u>Treatise</u> received little notice after 1840. The name of Hosea Easton was also, notably, omitted from several histories of the African American movement for freedom and equality written by members of this black abolitionist new guard. Such works include: Martin Delany's, <u>The Condition</u>, <u>Elevation</u>, <u>Emigration</u>, and <u>Destiny of the Colored people of the United States</u> (1852), which even omits Easton from a list of the founding members of the National Convention of Free People of Color; and William Wells Brown's, <u>The Black Man</u>: <u>his antecedents</u>, <u>his genuis</u>, and <u>his achievements</u> (1869), and his expanded version of that work, <u>The Rising Son</u> (1874), which also contains many mini-biographies of colored American leaders and accomplished persons. A successful effort to hide, or even bury, the <u>Treatise</u> during the 1840's and 50's may have caused Brown and others to forget Easton, or to have never even heard of him, by 1869.

The second key reason for Easton's neglect by those who came after him is that he died, of an unnamed, brief illness, in July of 1837, just four months after the publication of his <u>Treatise</u>. Therefore, he was not around to debate or defend its tenets, or to publish a modified revision. Had Easton lived to publish a slightly revised edition of his <u>Treatise</u>, leaving out the more excessive descriptions of slave degradation, and including some exceptions in his argument, such as mentioning some of the former slaves that he knew personally--as persons of high ability and noble character--he would probably have been much better remembered. For example, Easton was well-acquainted with Rev. Henry Drayton, a former South Carolina slave who had participated in the Denmark Vesey conspiracy of 1822, and then fled to Philadelphia. He also knew J.W.C. Pennington. How many others Easton knew who had actually experienced the horror of slavery is uncertain, although he claimed, in the

<u>Treatise</u>, to have "..numerous...colored acquaintances.." who had purchased their own freedom or escaped from slavery. Nevertheless, judging by the above description of slave degradation, and the fact that most of the influx of fugitive slaves into the north occurred after Easton's death, one wonders if he knew many. Most of the people of color that he knew during his lifetime were of the generation who had been freed when slavery ended in the north during the Revolutionary War, or earlier. Easton's own ancestors had been free for three generations, dating back to about 1700. But, there is a more likely reason than ignorance, as to why Easton did not include the exceptions in his argument regarding slave degradation. He probably felt that it was necessary to magnify the helplessness of the enslaved population, for the purpose of convincing his primary intended audience--sympathetic whites--that the redemptive, restorative work that needed to be done could not be done without them. ³⁸

As we examine the subject of the <u>Treatise</u>'s impact and Easton's legacy, it is important to note that Easton did not offend all, neither did all forget him. Rev. Amos G. Beman, a well-known black abolitionist, who was mentored by Easton in Hartford, at the Talcott St. Church, made two weighty statements, written in1859 and c.1869, reminiscing about Hosea Easton:

"We have had the instruction of some of the best minds of our race which the country has produced. Dr. Hosea Easton, a giant in his day, as many remember, lectured and wrote much."

"Long will the name of Rev. Hosea Easton, whose powerful mind knew no superior among the colored people of the country, be remembered." ³⁹

Evidently, twenty to thirty years after Easton's death, Beman still knew many people who remembered him. William C. Nell, one of the most active and accomplished

black abolitionists of the 19th century, remembered Easton very well in 1855, when he wrote <u>Colored Patriots of the American Revolution</u>. Several lengthy passages from Easton's <u>Treatise</u> are quoted in Nell's book, taking up a total of nearly four pages of its text. Significantly, none of the passages which Nell quoted dealt with slave degradation, but rather with the issues of equal rights for American citizens of color, especially veterans, and the systemic denial of those rights due to white racism. ⁴⁰

As a result of the neglect of Easton and his work, a very significant piece of African American writing was nearly lost, and not allowed to make the impact on American society--particularly, on white American social and theological thought-that it possibly could have. Had abolitionist publishers (the Treatise was published by Isaac Knapp, who also printed The Liberator) and African American church and uplift organizations not been the only entities in America who promoted such works, perhaps the Treatise may have found some other outlet for publication, and made some inroads into the American consciousness. But, considering its eloquent, uncompromising, moralistic critique of white American society, both north and south, its Afrocentric account of world history, and, finally, its prophetic call for racist Christians to repent, it most likely would not have found much popular interest. Just a glance at the full title of the <u>Treatise</u> would have turned most Americans away. By 1837, most white Americans pretty much had their minds made up as to what the "intellectual character, and ...condition of the colored people" was, and they didn't want to hear anything about "the prejudice exercised toward them"--certainly not from any "Rev. H. Easton, a colored man".

¹ The north precinct of Bridgewater was not incorporated as the separate town of North Bridgewater until 1822.

² Daniel T. V. Huntoon, <u>History of the Town of Canton, Norfolk County, Massachusetts</u>, Cambridge, John Wilson and Son, University Press, 1893, pg. 37. Various records give Quack's name as Quok, Quork, Quoacke, as well as Quack. William F. Hanna, <u>History of Avon, Massachusetts</u>, Town of Avon Centennial Committee, 1988, pg. 6. Hanna tells us that the Matrick home was at one time said to be a station on the underground railroad. Hosea and Louisa's marriage in Bradford Kingman, <u>History of North Bridgewater</u>, Boston, Bradford Kingman, 1866, pg. 498, and in <u>Vital Records of Brockton</u>, Mass. to the Year 1850, pg.197.

³ At about the same time that Josias Wampattuck granted the land for the Titticut Indian Reservation, in 1667, he also granted 6,000 acres to the Ponkapoags, bordering the town of Stoughton on its northwest side. By 1760 the Ponkapoag reservation had been reduced nearly 90% to 710 acres. Huntoon, <u>History of Canton</u>, pp. 13, 14. On Quack Matrick's military service, see: William C. Nell, <u>Colored Patriots of the American Revolution</u>, Boston, Robert F. Wallcut, 1855, pg. 35; Revolutionary War Pension Lists, Pension Roll of 1835, Vol. I, Massachusetts, pg. 548; Huntoon, <u>History of Canton</u>, pg. 626.

⁴ On children of Hosea and Louisa, see: Norfolk County, Mass. Probate Records, vol. 80, 1847, pp. 1013-1014, 1179, and 1406; U.S. Census for 1850, Hartford County, Connecticut, pg. 289B, Town of Bloomfield, and pg. 266, City of Hartford; 1860 U.S. Census, City of Hartford, pg. 1210; Vital Records of Hartford County, FHL Microfilm roll #1313828, Item 3, pg. 51. Sampson Easton married a woman named Louisa and they had a son born in 1849, whom they named Hosea. That grandson of Hosea Easton, ironically, became a black-face minstrel performer in Australia, where he died in 1899. Story and death certificate can be found at http://www.nugrape.net/minstrel.htm

⁵ Classified advertisement in <u>The Farmer's Cabinet</u> (Amherst, New Hampshire), vol. 24, no. 33, April 29, 1826, page 4. The ad was datelined, "Londonderry, Jan. 23, 1826." Plymouth County Court of Common Pleas, August session, 1827, vol. 30, page 453. Thomas Jacobs was a native of Salem, Mass., of about the same age as Hosea. Massachusetts state census for 1855 and 1865. The 1855 census places his year of birth as 1800, and the 1865 census puts it as 1795. Jacobs' father was also named Thomas Jacobs and is listed in the 1798 Massachusetts and Maine tax list, page 21, as a landowner in Salem. ⁶ Even the earliest of Hosea's writings demonstrate a fluency and aptitude with English that far surpassed the example given in the previous chapter from his much older brother, James, Jr., who may have been one of his first teachers. The importance of the mastery of language and literacy is also

evident in Hosea's commitment to "literary institutions" in Hartford and elsewhere. ⁷ Carter G. Woodson, <u>Free Negro Heads of Families in the United States in 1830</u>, Washington, D.C., The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Inc., 1925, pp. 71, 72. Hosea was first referred to as "Rev." in print in <u>The Liberator</u>, March 12, 1831, in a report on a meeting held February 15, 1831.

⁸ <u>Freedom's Journal</u>, April 25, 1828. David Walker, <u>Appeal....to the Coloured Citizens of the World</u>, Peter Hinks, ed., University Park, PA, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000. Hosea Easton, <u>An Appeal to the Christian Public in Behalf of the Methodist Episcopal Church</u> (Boston: 152 Ann Street, 1828). The white Methodist ministers who endorsed Easton's appeal were Rev. William Jenks, Rev. Henry Lamb, Rev. B.B. Wisner, and Deacon Henry Hill.

⁹ Hosea Easton, <u>An Address: Delivered Before the Coloured Population of Providence, Rhode Island,</u> on <u>Thanksgiving Day</u>, <u>November 27, 1828, by Hosea Easton of North Bridgewater, Mass.</u> (Boston: David Hooton, 1828).

¹⁰ Easton, Address, 3-5

¹¹ Ibid., 7

¹² The Anglo-African, vol.1, no.10, October, 1859, quoted in Howard Holman Bell, ed., <u>Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions</u>, <u>1830-1864</u> (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 5,6.
 ¹³ Bell, <u>Minutes</u>, 5. Richard H. Wade, "The Negro in Cincinnati, 1800-1830", <u>Journal of Negro History</u>, 39 (January, 1954), 49-51. John M. Werner, <u>Race Riots in the United States in the Age of Jackson</u>, <u>1824-1849</u>, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Indiana, 1973.

¹⁴ Easton, <u>Address</u>, 9-10. William Lloyd Garrison, <u>Thoughts on African Colonization</u> (Boston: Garrison and Knapp, 1832, reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1968) part 2, pp.63-64.
 ¹⁵ Bell, Minutes, 6-7.

¹⁶ Ronald Takaki, <u>Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th-Century America</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 103, 80-144. Russell Thornton, <u>American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A</u> <u>Population History Since 1492</u> (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 113-118. Angie Debo, <u>A History of the Indians of the United States</u> (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), 117-149.

¹⁷ Robert A. Warner, <u>New Haven Negroes: A Social History</u> (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), 50-55. Michael Kuczkowski, "One Blood: the lost legacy of a radical black activist who was ahead of his time", <u>Hartford Advocate</u>, vol.24, no.36, February 5, 1998.

¹⁸ <u>Liberator</u>, vol.1 nos. 50 and 51, Dec. 10th and 17th, 1831. Even though the essay was only signed, "A Native of North Bridgewater", and, "by a man of color", there is plenty of contextual evidence within the essay that this is the writing of Hosea Easton. Many phrases used here echo those used in the <u>Address...</u> of one month earlier, and one, "to trace an effect back to its cause", is prescient to his <u>Treatise..</u> of 1837.

¹⁹ Two notable points about this second statement must be mentioned. One is the use of the descriptor, "copper-colored", instead of the customary, "red"- to this day, many Wampanoags and other New England Indians refer to their coloring as "copper-colored", rather than brown. Also, it is clear in this statement, that Easton (as did many of his peers) thought of all non-white people as "colored people", or, as we would say today, "people of color." (Add citation on this discussion that appeared in <u>The Colored American</u>).

²⁰ The second of those marriages was that of James, Jr. to a white widow named Anna (French) Keith, in 1825. They had two sons, Joshua and James H., who emigrated to the Midwest in the 1850s.

²¹ <u>Records of the New England Anti Slavery Society</u>, Vol. 1, 1831-1833. Boston Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts, MsfA. 31. Thanks to Hilary Moss for this discovery and citation.

²² Bell, <u>Minutes</u>. Kingman, <u>History of North Bridgewater</u>, 498. Carter G. Woodson, <u>Free Negro</u> <u>Heads of Families in the United States in 1830</u> (Washington, D.C.: The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Inc., 1925), 72.

²³ Rev. King T. Hayes, "A Historical Profile of Fifteen Black Churches of Hartford, Connecticut" (unpublished and undated in Special Collections of the Hartford Public Library), 2-5. Rev. Peter Eason also was married to Paul Cuffe's daughter Rhoda, from 1819 until his death in 1824. <u>Vital Records of Westport, Massachusetts to 1850</u>.

²⁴ Anonymous, <u>Sesquicentennial Celebration of Metropolitan A.M.E.Zion Church, Hartford,</u> <u>Connecticut</u> (Hartford: 1983),3-5. Hayes, pp. 2, 4, 5. Ellsworth and Marion Grant, <u>The City of Hartford</u>, 1784-1984 (Hartford: 1984), 60.

²⁵ <u>The Emancipator</u>, February 17, 1835.

²⁶ Edward Abdy, Journal of a Residence and Tour in the United States of North America, April. <u>1833-October</u>, <u>1834</u> (London: 1835), 3:206-207.

²⁷ John W. Steadman, <u>Scrapbooks on Hartford, Connecticut History</u>, 4 vols.

(Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society)

²⁸ Hartford Courant, June 15, 1835. No report on the fire could be found in the

local papers, and the brief mentions by Easton and <u>The Liberator</u>, do not state the fire's cause.

²⁹ Easton, <u>A Treatise</u>, appendix (unnumbered, after page 54). <u>The Concord New Hampshire</u> <u>Observer</u>, reprinted in <u>The Liberator</u>, April 14, 1837. Jennie F. Copeland, "Mansfield in Other Days", in <u>The Mansfield</u> (Massachusetts) <u>News</u>, March 27, 1937.

³⁰ For a more thorough analysis of Easton's <u>Treatise</u> see Price and Stewart, <u>To Heal the Scourge</u>. This book includes reprints of both the <u>Treatise</u> and Easton's 1828 <u>Address...</u>, as well as a biographical introduction with analysis by the editors.

³¹ Easton, <u>A Treatise...</u>, 5-20.

³² Ibid., 39-42.

³³ Ibid., 42-43.

³⁴ Ibid., 43.

³⁵ Ibid., 51-53.

³⁶ Ibid., 21-26, 45-46, 50-53.

³⁷ James Brewer Stewart, <u>Holy Warriors: the Abolitionists and American Slavery</u> (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 41-42. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., <u>The Slave's Narrative</u> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), xv-xvii, 319-327. David W. Blight, ed., <u>Narrative of the</u> <u>Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself</u> (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1993), 2-20. Easton, <u>A Treatise</u>, 51. ³⁸ Easton's obituary appeared in <u>The Liberator</u>, July 14, 1837, written by Rev. Jehiel C. Beman, an "old guard" leader from Connecticut, and father of Rev. Amos G. Beman. For more on Rev. Henry Drayton and the Vesey conspiracy, see Peter P. Hinks, To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1997), 26-27, 38,63, 97, 104. Ironically, Easton wrote an obituary for Henry Drayton (in Zion's Watchman, June 2, 1837) just a little over a month before his own death. On the Easton family's emancipation, see: Easton, A Treatise, 26; Price and Stewart, To Heal the Scourge..., 3,4, 40n.. ³⁹ Amos G. Beman Scrapbooks, vol. 2, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

⁴⁰ Nell, <u>Colored Patriots</u>, 34, 333-336.

Chapter Four

Benjamin F. Roberts and the Battle for Integration and Equality in 19th-Century Boston

Benjamin Franklin Roberts was only 19 years old when he wrote the first of his many articles and editorials that would be published in his lifetime. In November of 1834, <u>The Liberator</u> published a lengthy response that young Roberts wrote to an article which had appeared in that paper a couple of weeks earlier. The earlier article, purportedly written by a "colored layman"- although contextual evidence suggests that it may have been written or substantially altered by William Lloyd Garrison himself- was an account of the dismal prospects for employment and training in skilled trades for people of color in Boston. The article painted a rather bleak picture of the situation, and Roberts asserted in his response that, although the situation was indeed bleak, the author had seriously underrepresented the actual number of skilled tradespeople of color residing in Boston at that time. While providing the <u>Liberator</u> readers with more accurate statistics on the topic, and demonstrating that he was well-acquainted with the community of skilled and accomplished people of color in Boston, Roberts also demonstrated that there was no need to exaggerate the situation since, even if the brightest aspects of it were presented, reality was bad enough.¹

The title of Roberts' article was "Bad Enough at Best." The point of emphasis in the article was that the more significant problem than the lack of skilled people of color in Boston was the rampant "prejudice" that prevented opportunities for application of their skills once the people had attained them. Much of the language and spirit of "Bad Enough at Best" clearly reflected, and perhaps was intentionally modeled after, Benjamin's uncle Hosea's two-part <u>Liberator</u> article, "Prejudices of

Society", as well as parts of Hosea Easton's 1828 Address to the People of Color of

Providence.... Compare, for example, the following passage from "Bad Enough at

Best":

Are there not in the churches, places erected in the most remote corners, for the colored man to worship? Do not even the drunkard, the thief, the robber, and the murderer, refuse to ride the stage with the most decent and respectable colored man?....Is not the most atrocious villain, if he wears a fair skin, considered in the eyes of the community a gentleman to the most honest colored man? All this is the effect of *Prejudice*.

to these passages from Hosea Easton's 1831 article, "Prejudices of Society":

What induces christian churches, while enjoying the light of that truth which declares that God has no respect of person, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him, to have respect to the complexion of their members? Prejudice. Why is it that professed ministers of the gospel tell their congregations, in one breath, that God has made of one blood all nations of men; and in the next, tell them there is a difference between a black, copper-colored, or yellow American and a white one; and so great a difference, that the colored Americans cannot enjoy what belongs to them as citizens and countrymen? Owing to Prejudice.²

In this first sample of his writing and first glimpse inside his mind, Benjamin

Roberts also provided us with a strong piece of evidence that indicates he was, during

the years just prior to writing this article, a student at his grandfather and uncles'

school in North Bridgewater:

After I served an apprenticeship at the shoemaking business, I came to this city with a good recommendation, in search of a place; I applied at several shoe stores for employment, showing my recommendation, but was refused, I suppose, merely on account of that well known crime--viz.of having a dark skin.

In his later writings, during the Boston school integration movement, Roberts

mentioned his early education in the grammar schools of Boston. Apparently, during

his teen years, he was a student at the Good Samaritan School in North Bridgewater.

That would suggest that Caleb and Joshua were still running the school, after the

deaths of their father, James, and brother Sylvanus in 1830, at least until 1833 and perhaps longer. James Jr., who was practicing medicine in New Bedford from 1833 through '35, may have also still been with the family business in North Bridgewater in the years prior to that, and perhaps while Benjamin was there. These other uncles may have been nearly as influential on young Benjamin as was Hosea. In an article that Benjamin wrote in 1870, he leaves no doubt that his grandfather, James, also had a profound and enduring influence on him as well.³

Benjamin Roberts' father, Robert Roberts, was also a published author and longtime activist for equal rights and against slavery. Robert Roberts, after serving for many years as a butler to a Boston financier named Nathan Appleton, was the butler of former Massachusetts governor and senator, Christopher Gore, from 1825 until Gore's death in 1827. That same year he completed writing one of the first books written by an African American and published by a commercial press, The House Servant's Directory.... That book provided valuable and very useful advice for succeeding at what was one of the most lucrative and readily available types of employment for men of color during that era. But providing such advice and attempting to make the most out of an oppressive situation did not necessarily mean that Robert Roberts supported the status quo in employment opportunities for Americans of color. Along with his brothers-in-law, Hosea and Joshua Easton, and several other leading men of color, Robert Roberts was a founding member, in 1826, of the Massachusetts General Colored Association, an abolitionist and human rights organization that preceded by several years the better-known antislavery organizations founded by Boston whites. Robert Roberts also participated in the National Conventions of the Free People of Color and occasionally wrote letters to

<u>The Liberator</u>. Growing up in a family such as this, and in this particular time in U.S. history, it seems that Benjamin Roberts' path towards a commitment to social activism was almost inevitable.⁴

After not being able to find work in Boston as a shoemaker, Benjamin Roberts began to learn the printer's trade. It is likely that he was apprenticed to either Isaac Knapp, the printer of the abolitionist newspaper, <u>The Liberator</u>, or to David Hooten, a frequent printer and publisher of abolitionist literature, since these two men were probably the only printers in Boston at that time who would take in a young man of color as an apprentice. In 1838, the year after both his mother, Sarah, and his uncle Hosea died, Roberts opened his own printing shop and began publishing and printing his own newspaper, <u>The Anti-Slavery Herald</u>. He was only twenty-three years old at the time, and Boston had never before had a black-owned and operated newspaper, although three such papers had been published in New York by that time: <u>Freedom's</u> <u>Journal</u> (1827-29); <u>The Rights of All</u> (1929); and <u>The Colored American</u> (1837-1842). Following the examples of his grandfather and uncles, Benjamin Roberts also began to train other young men of color as apprentices in his printing business, which made it even more difficult to successfully launch this enterprise.⁵

Roberts initially received support in this venture from Rev. Amos A. Phelps, a prominent white abolitionist, as well as from others, including, most likely, his relatively prosperous father. Phelps wrote a letter of recommendation for Roberts, but just one month later he asked Roberts to return the letter, apparently because of some criticisms of Roberts and questions that had been raised by others regarding Roberts' character. Roberts wrote a letter back to Phelps, which he sent with the return of Phelps' letter, containing a passionate defense of his character and the sincerity of his

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intentions for his business and labor in the cause of freedom and equality. "My whole soul is engaged in the cause of humanity", he proclaimed. He also had some scathing rebukes for what he felt were hypocrites in the abolitionist movement who opposed his work for racist reasons.

Here is sir the <u>first</u> efforts of the colored man in this country of the kind, vis. the paper <u>published</u>, <u>printed</u> and <u>edited</u> by colored persons in Massachusetts ---shall <u>this</u> be defeated?....I was not aware that so many hypocrites existed in the Anti slavery society. According to what I have seen of the conduct of some, a black man would be as unsafe in their hands as in those of Southern slaveholders.

Roberts also expressed an observation in that letter which was commonly related by many black abolitionists throughout the duration of the movement- that many white abolitionists professed to love the slaves in the far away South, but had no desire to see their free black neighbors become equal citizens with them in their own society. "It is of no use to say with the mouth we are friends of the slave", wrote Roberts, "and not try to encourage and assist the free colored people in raising themselves."⁶

Apparently, <u>The Anti-Slavery Herald</u> did not survive past October of 1838. In a brief announcement that Benjamin Roberts wrote which appeared in <u>The Liberator</u> on October 12, 1838, he explained the demise of the paper while at the same time defiantly declaring that "..on January 1, 1839, the Herald will be revived and continued through the year." Roberts went on to describe how important it was to him to continue the mission of both his print shop and the paper:

Were it not for circumstances connected with a printing establishment started in this city for the purpose of encouraging colored lads to the branch, said paper would without doubt have been published regularly. It is with deepest regret that the paper has been thus discontinued. Between this and the aforesaid time, every endeavor will be made to promote the success of said paper, by giving lectures in regard to the principles to be therein contained, and soliciting subscribers, that the great object and aim intended, namely, general improvement among the colored people, may be fairly promulgated. On that same page of the <u>Liberator</u>, William Garrison wrote that even though he looked favorably upon "every laudable effort made by any of our colored friends to do good", he believed that the chances for the success of Roberts' paper were "as one to ninety-nine." The remainder of Garrison's comments effectively discouraged potential supporters from responding affirmatively to Roberts' appeal. Evidently, the paper was not revived and there are no surviving copies of <u>The Anti-Slavery Herald</u> known to exist. ⁷

Roberts continued to run his own printing business for approximately another 40 years, printing antislavery pamphlets, books, handbills, and a variety of more conventional items. Shortly after the discouraging lack of support for his efforts from Phelps, Garrison and other Boston abolitionists, and the demise of the <u>Anti-Slavery</u> <u>Herald</u>, Benjamin Roberts moved his family to the nearby town of Lynn. There, in 1841, he printed that town's first directory. One of the most important books that B. F. Roberts printed was the world history, <u>Light and Truth...</u> by Afro/Native American abolitionist Robert Benjamin Lewis, who, along with his brother Joel W. Lewis had, evidently, at one time been a student in the Easton family's school. Roberts launched another paper in 1853, called <u>The Self-Elevator</u>, but that paper also had a short life, due to lack of support. One issue has survived and is in the collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society. I will describe <u>The Self-Elevator</u> further in the context of my discussion of the Boston school desegregation movement, during which the paper was formed.⁸

The Boston School Desegregation Struggle

Because human beings are generally slow learners and do not study much of the world, or even their own nations, beyond that which is local and immediate, history repeats itself. In the United States, one area of social and intellectual interaction that has seen much repetition of activity over the last two centuries is the discourse regarding the imagined "need" for segregation of the so-called "races" of humanity. Those who believe that the human race can be divided into four or five "distinct" and hierarchically-endowed racial categories, have often argued that social segregation of the races is necessary to preserve those distinctions, which they also assume to be part of an essential natural order, whether god-given or not. In the minds of such persons, the public schools have repeatedly been a focus of their concerns, as they fear that children who are reared and educated together in racially mixed settings will inevitably mistake their innumerable common human attributes for a license to form the broad range of social unions that equal members of the same society tend to form, including friendships, and, ultimately, marriages. Such a threat to the preservation of the imagined racial distinctions, and the related distinctions of class and caste, have been seen by many Americans- even to this day- as something to be avoided at all costs. Of course, in order to imagine these alleged distinctions, one must also deny the pervasive reality of "racial mixture" and the endless examples of gradient variation in human form.

This debate over the imagined necessity for and the legal validity of public school segregation, in a country officially proclaimed to be dedicated to the "equality of all men," has repeatedly manifested itself in some important Supreme Court cases of the 20th century. Those cases include *Gaines v. Canada, Registrar of the University of*

Missouri (1938), Sweatt v. Painter (1950), and the better-known Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954), which ultimately brought an end to the de jure segregation of publicly-funded schools in the United States. Although the circumstances varied somewhat in all of these and other school desegregation cases, the issues and arguments were essentially the same. In the Brown case, the arguments both for and against school integration very closely paralleled a case that was brought to the Massachusetts Supreme Court about one hundred years earlier, Roberts v. The City of Boston (1849). The man who brought that case to the Court, on behalf of his five-year-old daughter, Sarah, was Benjamin F. Roberts.

Long before the Roberts v. City of Boston case and the movement to desegregate the Boston public schools, there was first a movement initiated by Boston's citizens of color to create their own schools, and to secure the approval and assistance of the city of Boston in forming such schools. Although those early schools created by and for the black community, in response to lack of educational opportunity in the larger general community, became part of the structural foundation for segregated schools for blacks in Boston, those early schools should probably not be called "segregated schools." The people of color did not forbid white students from entering and attending their schools, as they were open to all who wished to attend. Selfsegregation involves a very different social and psychological dynamic than segregation that is imposed upon a subordinate minority by a dominant majority. If members of the "white race" chose not to attend the schools created and operated by the people of color, the de facto segregation created by such choices is not the same as de jure segregation or segregation imposed by the majority group upon a minority group by force. The perceived need by people of color, or by any oppressed minority

group, to create their own separate schools has always been a product of specific social conditions, and its merits have been broadly debated from the post-Revolutionary era to the present day. This debate, during the period between 1840 and 1855 in Boston, sharply divided the community of color there, and even pitted brother against brother in the Roberts family.

It is necessary to begin this story with some contextual background on the state of public school educational opportunities in early republic Boston. In the era after the American Revolution, many free African Americans, including veterans like James Easton, learned that the promises of a free society of equal opportunities for all did not apply to them, and would probably never apply unless they fought for it. In 1789, when Boston's first public school system was created under the directive of a new state law, schooling for children of color, as well as for poor whites, was very rare. The first public schools in Boston were grammar schools and state law required that students be able to read and write before they could be admitted to them. Free, publicly-supported primary schools for the younger pre-literate children were not established in Boston until 1818. Before then, only the children whose parents could either teach them basic literacy at home or afford to send their children to private primary schools were able to attend the public grammar schools. Under those conditions, many poor blacks, like poor whites, were compelled to create or find whatever educational opportunities they could while they appealed to the city and to the state to provide their children with primary schools.⁹

For those children of color who were fortunate enough to find educational opportunities and become eligible to attend the public grammar schools, the challenges of attending school in a hostile, racist environment often proved to be too

discouraging for them to continue. As slavery gradually ended in the northern states, the large influx of newly-freed African Americans into northern cities like Boston became a source of fear and uncertainty for white citizens who believed in racial determinism and white superiority. Although there were exceptions, most whites took harsh, proactive measures to maintain their racially distinct and socially-stratified social order, such as maintaining segregated seating areas in churches and expressing hostility towards blacks who sought to elevate their social standing through education. The resulting discouragement, and the desire to protect their children from cruelty and insults, led some black parents to request that the city of Boston provide them with separate schools.

The colored community's first request for their own city-supported school was made in 1798 and denied by the city. In response to the city's rejection of their request, African American Revolutionary War veteran, Primus Hall immediately opened a school in the basement of his house. In 1806 Hall's school for children of color was moved to the basement of Rev. Thomas Paul's African Baptist Church on Belknap Street. With the assistance of sympathetic white philanthropists and teachers, African Americans in Boston continued to utilize their own schools independently of the city's school system. Shortly after the African School received a substantial endowment from white philanthropist, Abiel Smith in 1815, the Boston School Committee decided to incorporate the African school into the city's common school system, administer the Smith endowment, and provide oversight and additional "support." Once the African School was incorporated into the public school system, its separate status and customary blackness became official and, thus, institutionally segregated by the mechanisms of the Boston School bureaucracy and the

determination of a majority of Boston's white community. Whether that segregation was really legal or not, though, became the subject of much contention in the 1840s and '50s.¹⁰

By the late 1820s, some African American citizens of Boston had observed that the now officially segregated schools that were originally created by their own choice (although a choice made by default) were not fulfilling their original purpose. The colored community had hoped that their own schools would be a pathway to equality within white American society, but by this time it had become clear that their schools were not providing their children with an education equal to that which was provided to the children in the schools for whites. By 1832, there were two primary schools and one grammar school (the old African School) for the children of color, under the auspices of the city of Boston. Their facilities were in generally poorer condition than the white children's schools and there was dissatisfaction with the character and quality of a couple of the teachers in the black schools. It seemed to many blacks that the Boston School Committee considered education for Afro-Americans to be of a much lower priority than education for whites, and there were plenty of reasons to think so. The following passage from David Walker's <u>Appeal...</u> provides a clear picture of the situation in late-1820s Boston:

Here is a fact, which I this very minute take from the mouth of a young coloured man, who has been to school in this state (Massachusetts) nearly nine years, and who knows grammar this day, *nearly* as well as he did the day he first entered the schoolhouse, under a white master. This young man says: "My master would never allow me to study grammar." I asked him, why? "The school committee," said he "forbid the coloured children learning grammar ---they would not allow any but the white children to study grammar." It is a notorious fact, that the major part of white Americans, have, ever since we have been among them, tried to keep us ignorant, and make us believe that God made us and our children to be slaves to them and theirs. *Oh! My God, have mercy on Christian Americans!!!*

Many more examples of white disdain for the idea of black social elevation through education can be found in the historical record. The vehement protest by white citizens of New Haven in 1831 against the idea of establishing a colored college there (described in the previous chapter) is just one of several such occurrences. In another Connecticut town, in 1833, a white Quaker teacher named Prudence Crandall, who ran a school for girls, met virile opposition from the community when she allowed a few colored girls to be admitted as students. After she refused to expel the colored girls, the white parents withdrew their daughters and Ms. Crandall's school became, by default, a school for colored girls. When she extended an invitation to girls and young women of color throughout New England to come enroll in her school, the opposition became violent, and Crandall was forced to close the school. Opposition to Noyes Academy, an integrated college in Canaan, New Hampshire, became so vile in 1836 that local white citizens were moved to tie the school building to 100 yoke of oxen and drag it into a swamp.¹²

When one of the white friends of the people of color in Boston requested that the city open a high school for the colored grammar school graduates, he was told by the School Committee that black children did not need an education beyond grammar school. The common belief of most Americans at that time was that blacks only needed enough education to be suited for the most menial occupations in society. In the words of one New York newspaper editor, "what benefit can it be to a waiter or coachman to read Horace?"¹³ The stigma of caste inferiority had become the reason that people of color deserved educational inferiority. Many African Americans also felt a sense of futility about pursuing higher education, since discrimination in hiring

severely limited their employment prospects. Hosea Easton described the situation eloquently in an 1828 speech:

In those schools, we have youths well qualified for the common business of life; but when they have obtained their education, they know enough only to feel sensible of their misery. Their minds being expanded, their perception brightened, their zeal ardent for promotion; they look around for business, they find that custom cuts them off from all advantages.¹⁴

Being relegated to all-black schools had become increasingly associated with the stigma of inferiority, and, for some blacks, integration into Boston's common schools seemed to be the path toward eventually escaping the stigma.

In 1830s Boston, only a minority in the black community desired to re-integrate into the white public schools. That minority grew to a majority during the next two decades, coinciding with the rise in abolitionist activism and the addition of white abolitionist voices to their cause. Having new allies among some of the more elite members of white society, such as Wendell Phillips, Lydia Child and David Lee Child, understandably gave some hope to the black activists for equality and integration. But, most African American citizens of Boston at that time, rather than abandon their own schools to integrate into the public schools, sought only to have the city make improvements to the black schools and give the colored citizens more of a voice in decision making, especially in the hiring of teachers. In 1835, that majority of the community of color was encouraged when the city built a new grammar school to replace the inadequate facility in the basement of the African Baptist Church. They named it the "Smith School" after their primary benefactor, Abiel Smith. At the time when the Roberts case came to trial in 1849, there were still a large number of blacks, though no longer the majority, who were content with continuing the segregated black schools and making improvements to them whenever possible. There was also a large number who were simply apathetic on the issue, perhaps due in part to the fact that they had to devote so much of their time and energy to menial labor and the other demands that poverty makes upon the limited resources of the poor.¹⁵

Benjamin Roberts left the town of Lynn and moved back to Boston with his wife, Adeline, and their four children in March of 1847. During the time that they were gone, the movement to integrate the common schools had gained much momentum and three petitions for school integration had been brought to the Boston School Committee, in 1840, 1844, and 1846—all rejected by the committee. While in Lynn, Roberts had certainly kept informed on these developments, through the Liberator newspaper and his network of activist friends. As soon as he returned to Boston, he plunged head on into the school integration movement. His first act of defiance against the system of racially segregated schools--just one month after their arrival in the city-- was to attempt to enroll his daughter, Sarah, in the common primary school nearest to their home. There were five primary schools located closer to the Roberts family home on Andover Street than the closest of the two primary schools designated for children of color. Primary schools at that time in Boston were for children of the ages four to seven. That April of 1847, Sarah had just turned four. Benjamin and Adeline had one other school age child at that time, Benjamin Jr., who was 9 in 1847. Apparently, they did not attempt to enroll him in any of the forbidden common grammar schools until a little over a year after their arrival.

In almost every published account of the Roberts school desegregation case, the story is told that, if Sarah Roberts wanted to exercise her right to a public school education, she would have had to walk past five segregated white schools on her way

to the segregated black primary school that she was required to attend. (Some writers have mistakenly repeated the assumption that Sarah actually *made* such a "long walk", which a careful examination of the records shows is not so. This shall be illuminated further below.) It is also commonly told that her father attempted repeatedly to enroll her in the white schools nearer to their home, only to be rejected every time. That is the story that Roberts' attorney, Charles Sumner, told to the court, which is the primary source most frequently referred to by scholars of this case. The Sumner account is basically true, but there is more to the story. One unique published account informs us that, after three rejections, Sarah was actually *accepted* into one of the white schools and attended "for several months" before being expelled due to white racism. That account was written by Benjamin Roberts himself, in 1870, and published in an obscure African American newspaper of the day called, <u>The New Era</u>, based in Washington, D.C.¹⁶

After going first to an individual school committee member and then to the district school committee, followed by a trip to the general (Boston) school committee to request a ticket that was required to enroll a child in a common school, and being refused in each request, Roberts took Sarah to the Otis primary school without a ticket and she was accepted. Sarah's acceptance into the Otis school apparently occurred in the Fall of 1847.¹⁷ According to Roberts,

[Roberts] took his little child one morning and led it to the primary school nearest his residence, and asked the teacher to receive it, which request was favorably responded to. She was admitted and attended school regularly day after day for several months, when an effort to obtain a certificate of admission for another child in the intermediate [grammar] school was opposed by the committee, who clothed themselves fully with the authority of expelling the former child, because its father positively refused the unnatural and insulting solicitation of continuing it as a pupil to the exclusion of the latter, who could only be admitted to the caste [Smith] school. A lawsuit was [then] commenced by him against the city for damages...¹⁸

This most detailed account provides us with some very important facts regarding both the Roberts case and the character of Benjamin Roberts that have, to this point, been over-looked by scholars. First, this is the only known account of the Roberts case in which it is revealed that Sarah was not the only Roberts child that Benjamin attempted to enroll in a whites-only school. Knowing that Benjamin Roberts, Jr. was of grammar school age at this time, and considering Roberts' use here of the third person tense in telling his story, it is evident that the child who attempted to enroll in the "intermediate school" was most likely Benjamin Jr.. His father was probably encouraged regarding the possibility of Benjamin Jr.'s acceptance in a white grammar school due to the long tenure of Sarah's acceptance at the Otis primary school. Roberts then, apparently, used the fact of Sarah's acceptance and success as a student at Otis to appeal to the school committee for a ticket ("certificate") for his son. When the school committee denied the logic of Roberts' argument and refused admission for his son into the grammar school, Benjamin Roberts, probably in the same unambiguously irate sort of language that he used towards Rev. Amos Phelps ten years earlier, let it be known to them that he was insulted and that they were wrong. Then, when Roberts refused to accept the proposal that Sarah could continue at Otis while Benjamin Jr. must go to Smith, the school committee responded that the only wrong in this situation would be to allow Sarah to stay at the Otis School, and they therefore expelled her. It was at that point, according to Roberts, in the Spring of 1848, that he brought suit against the city for damages.¹⁹

The next, and perhaps most important, piece of information that we can gain from the combination of this account, Roberts' report in the April, 1851 <u>Liberator</u> article, and a careful reading of the Supreme Judicial Court record, is that Benjamin clearly never allowed little Sarah to make that "long walk" to the colored primary school next to the Smith School. In the court record, after chronicling Roberts' various applications and rejections for admission of his daughter into the common schools, and giving detailed measurements of the distances from the Roberts home to all of the various schools, white and black, it is stated that,

The plaintiff might have attended the school in Belknap street [the colored primary school], at any time, and her father was so informed, but he refused to have her attend there.

Additional evidence for this can be found in a speech that Benjamin Roberts gave to a "meeting of the colored citizens of Boston" at the Belknap St. Church on March 24, 1851, which was published in the Liberator of April 4, 1851. In one section of this speech, Roberts tells stories of other families of color who were both accepted into and expelled from the white common schools closest to their homes. In the cases of these other families, Roberts describes how their children then had to make long walks past the whites-only schools to attend the schools designated for children of color. Next, Roberts briefly mentions Sarah's court case and how she attended the Otis School "for several weeks", but says nothing about her making a long walk similar to the other children he just described. If Sarah had made such a walk, it would have fit very well into the context of that section of his speech to say so. Such a puzzling omission alone does not necessarily prove that it did not occur, but, taken with the rest of the evidence, including what we know about the attitude and character of Benjamin Roberts and the Easton family tradition, the likelihood of Roberts submitting his daughter to the humiliation of either the walk or of attending a school bearing the stigma of inferiority is extremely minute.

Let us consider the evidence for Benjamin Roberts' refusal to ever send his children to a "caste school" that may be found in the character of Roberts and in the traditions of his family. It was in the same insistent and defiant spirit shown by his grandparents when they sat in the whites-only sections of those churches in Bridgewater and Stoughton, that Benjamin Roberts absolutely refused to submit his children to the humiliation of being forced into segregated and second class schools. As the tone of the entire article, "Our Progress in the Old Bay State", indicates, Roberts was fully conscious of his family's well-deserved rights and position of honor in American society, and, in the Easton family tradition, he would not hesitate to defend their rights, their honor, or their dignity. There was also, perhaps, a little elitism in the Easton family tradition, as well as among a few other Boston families of color. One concern repeatedly expressed in the integrationist petitions is the lesser quality of education that was offered in the colored schools. It would have been extremely difficult for members of a family who for over half a century had persistently pursued the best that American society had to offer-- and who did so not only in spite of, but also because of, the constant resistance they faced--to accept anything less than the best possible opportunities in education, business, and all forms of social advancement. Tellingly, shortly after Sarah and Benjamin Jr. were last refused admission to the common schools of Boston, Roberts moved his family to the adjacent city of Cambridge, where the common schools were integrated, rather than submit to the dictates of segregation. Roberts would rather commute to his print shop and to activist meetings in Boston than allow his children to make the long walk to mediocrity and the stigma of inferiority.²⁰

Another source of motivation for Roberts' refusal to send his children to an allblack school is seen in a report that Roberts wrote on behalf of the colored integrationists of Boston and submitted to the school committee in August of 1850. It is clear in the following passage from that report that he was motivated, in part, by a desire to keep his children from having to repeat his own painful experiences of walking past whites only schools to attend the Smith School when he was a child.

Many of us speak from past experience: when young, and after the establishment of the Colored School, and we were transferred from all the district schools to it, in traveling from the residences of our parents, there, we passed the doors of several schools, and while we witnessed the boys and the girls of our neighbors enjoying the blessings of the nearest schools to their homes, and we were not only compelled to go by *them*, but several others, our feelings were anything but agreeable. The pupils of the several schools, as we passed, took particular notice of our situation; and we were looked upon, by them as unworthy to be instructed in common with others.²¹

When Benjamin Roberts decided to sue the city of Boston for depriving his daughter of the right to attend the public school nearest to her home, he chose to ask a young African American lawyer, Robert Morris, to take his case. Morris was the first person of color to pass the bar exam in Massachusetts, just a little over one year before Roberts approached him in the Spring of 1848. Morris was a well-known activist and had become somewhat of a celebrity among the people of color and some white abolitionists in Boston when he won the first case on which he served, soon after passing the bar. Morris and Roberts decided to base their case on a state law passed in 1845 which stated that "any child unlawfully excluded from public school instruction in this commonwealth, shall recover damages therefore against the city or town by which such public instruction is supported."²² They reasoned that to deny children access to the schools closest to their homes was the equivalent of excluding them from school. They also chose not to introduce the issue of physically unequal

facilities between the black and white schools since the city could respond to that by simply upgrading the condition of the black schools so they could claim they were providing adequately equal opportunities for education.²³

The City of Boston prevailed in the case at the Suffolk County Court of Common Pleas in October, 1848. That same month Morris filed for an appeal of the court's decision with the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. Morris was encouraged to do so by a white Boston lawyer named Richard Fletcher, who was sympathetic to both the abolitionists and the integrationists and was in line for an appointment to the S.J.C., which he received in January of 1849. Considering the potential magnitude of this case, Morris and Roberts solicited one of the most able lawyers in the state, Charles Sumner, to serve as lead attorney, with Morris as co-counsel. As important as his skill in court was the fact that Sumner had long proven himself to be one of the most committed anti-slavery and equal rights advocates in Boston. A little over a year after agreeing to take on the Roberts case, Sumner was elected to represent Massachusetts in the U.S. Senate, where he became nationally known for his forceful antislavery stance. As Morris and Sumner began preparing the case, in the summer of 1849, Benjamin Roberts joined and sometimes led other colored advocates for the integration of the Boston schools in petitioning the School Committee and in nearly waging war against their perceived opponents within the community of color, who saw some considerable value in maintaining a separate school for children of color.²⁴

The idea that equality between Black and White Americans could never be realized as long as race-based separate institutions exist—*even in places where integrated institutions exist as well*—was first articulated by the school integrationists of color in Boston in June of 1844. Meetings of the leading colored activists were

held, a petition was presented to the School Committee (the "Dalton Petition"), and articles were published in <u>The Liberator</u> requesting "the immediate and entire abolition of the Colored Schools in Boston", specifically the Smith School and the two colored primary schools.²⁵ From that point on, until the Smith School closed in 1855, an increasingly acrimonious debate ensued over the usefulness or counter-productiveness of race-based schools toward the purpose of the elevation of the status of people of color in American society. In many places in the U.S., the debate continues to this day.

In mid-1840s Boston, the colored integrationists argued that the very existence of schools run exclusively for people of color promoted the public sense of stigma and caste toward such people. Echoing some observations made by Hosea Easton just ten years earlier, similar to those which had also been expressed by Quaker anti-slavery activist Anthony Benezet sixty years prior to Easton, the integrationists noted how little children develop their racial attitudes based on what they see. If they repeatedly see people of color as socially separate from white people, engaged in the most menial forms of labor, and typically living in meager and difficult economic circumstances, then the children internalize those images as normal and therefore "right." Growing up with such expectations and beliefs about people of color, then, would make a person less likely to perceive injustice in the situation, or to desire change-even more so if they perceive that there is some benefit for themselves in the status quo.²⁶ Easton and Benezet referred mainly to such impressions upon the minds of white children. In the Dalton petition, the colored integrationists also perceived a seriously dangerous impact of segregation upon the minds of children of color as well:

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People are apt to become what they see is expected of them. It is very hard to retain self-respect, if we see ourselves set apart & avoided as a degraded race, by others. Do not say to our children that however well-behaved their very presence in a public school is contamination to your children.

Among the leading integrationists, before Benjamin Roberts returned to join them in 1847, were John T. Hilton, William C. Nell, Thomas Dalton, Benjamin Weeden, Henry Weeden, and Thomas Cole. From 1847/48 on, Robert Morris Jr., Isaac Snowden, Robert Johnson, William Watkins, Jr., Charles H. Roberts (no relation), Lemuel Burr, and Charles L. Reason also became significant leaders in the movement. A few women of color also became notable activists for school integration, including Angeline Gardner, Eunice R. Davis and Mary L. Armstrong, who, together formed a committee of mothers in support of boycotting the Smith School in 1850.²⁷

The other, and smaller, group within the community argued that the raceexclusive schools, churches and other institutions provided many vital and necessary functions for strengthening as well as uplifting the people of color. One of the first issues they raised in support of continuing the Smith School, the colored primary schools, and other race-based institutions was the opportunity provided by such institutions for leadership roles, such as teachers and preachers, who could be positive role models for children of color. This sentiment was expressed enthusiastically in a campaign to get a man of color, Thomas Paul, Jr. installed by the Boston School Committee as headmaster of the Smith School. Paul was an 1841 graduate of Dartmouth College and the son of Thomas Paul, the founder and long-time pastor of the first African American church in Boston. Thomas Paul, Jr. had a very strong letter of recommendation from the president of Dartmouth and he had experience as head master of an African American school in Albany, New York. His supporters could have easily argued that to hire Paul would be a step towards resolving the dilemma that both Hosea Easton and Benjamin Roberts had written about in the 1830s, regarding the lack of opportunities for people of color once they did become educated or learn a skilled trade. Ironically, Benjamin Roberts was one of the leading opponents of the campaign to hire Thomas Paul, reasoning that his hiring would only prolong the existence of what he considered to be a degrading institution which stood blocking the path of the advent of equality. By 1849, this pro-separate schools group included one of Benjamin Roberts' younger brothers, John H. Roberts, who, in an article he wrote for the <u>Liberator</u>, made a statement in support of hiring Thomas Paul, or any other "liberally educated" colored man, reminiscent of those earlier writings of his uncle, Hosea, and his older brother:

...certainly some educated colored man should have [the teaching position at Smith School], if anybody; for if there is to be no opening, what encouragement is there for effort? The age is one of improvement and advancement, and liberty is on her march of triumph through the world.²⁸

Although the antagonism between the two groups was bitter at times, they really had much in common, including a sincere concern for the elevation of their people and the dismantling of American racism. The pro-colored schools group supported plans for maintaining and improving the Smith school as a segregated institution, but they also, by and large, favored the integration of the public schools for those people of color who wished to send their children there, with a few cautious reservations. As the leader of these "separatists", as they have been called, Thomas Paul Smith (a cousin of Thomas Paul Jr.) stated in 1849,

The real points of difference between the two parties in this recent school agitation are in reality very trifling; though in the excitement of controversy,

mole hills have been mountains, the brook narrow and easily crossed has been magnified to a wide and boisterous river, rapid and impassable, and individuals far-seeing, honest and conscientious, occupying such positions as in their judgment were the right ones, have been assailed, insulted, prejudged and pre-condemned, stigmatized and denied a hearing, and that, too, in the nineteenth century, and by professed Christian men.²⁹

Naturally, Smith was also of the opinion that most of the abusiveness was generated by the integrationists, rather than by those who shared his views, although he does seem to suggest that some of the blame must be shared by his party. Newspaper reports on these meetings (including complete transcriptions published in <u>The</u> <u>Liberator</u>) indicate that most of the blame for the divisiveness and polarization did indeed lay at the feet of the more radical integrationists, especially Benjamin F. Roberts, William Nell, John T. Hilton, William Watkins, Jr., as well as a few others. The other group, which accepted the validity and usefulness of both types of schools, seemed much more civil and willing to reason. Besides John H. Roberts and Thomas Smith, the members of that group included Rev. James Simmons, Joseph Russell, and Thomas Paul, Jr. It is also clear that many people fluctuated in their opinion on the value of the exclusive schools, because the two sides really were in basic agreement about many of the more vital issues concerning the free people of color in America.

The antagonism between the two groups increased greatly in the four months before the Roberts appeal case came to trial in December, 1849. Perhaps the most acrimonious meetings on the topic were the ones held in August and September, shortly before the new school year was about to begin. A boycott of the Smith School had been initiated by radical integrationists in1844, with little effect in the first two years, but at the end of every summer, before school began again the boycott flame would be re-kindled. In the last three years of the 1840s, and on until the end of both school segregation and the Smith School in 1855, the boycott of the Smith School and

the colored primary schools gained increasing popular support. When the boycott began in 1844, the average daily attendance at the Smith School was 130 students. That figure dropped to a low of 49 students during the 1849-50 school year, but rose slightly during the early 1850s. When the Smith School closed in 1855, the average daily attendance was 68. Total enrollment figures for that time period showed the same rate and pattern of fluctuation.³⁰ The reduction of participation in the exclusive schools by about half is indicative of the near even split in the community on the issue, although it must be realized that many of the parents who continued to send their children to the exclusive schools did not have much choice. Some of the integrationists started their own private "protest schools", but most people in the colored community could not afford to pay tuition. Several of the integrationists, including leaders John T. Hilton (who created a protest school at one time) and Benjamin Roberts, sent their children to integrated schools outside of Boston. The fact that the low point in Smith School attendance occurred after September of 1849 is clearly related to the level of discord and even violence that was present in the community of color at that time.

Perhaps the most contentious of these 1849 meetings of the colored community on the subject of equal school rights and the value or danger of continuing the Smith School was the meeting held at the "Independent" (formerly called "African") Baptist Church on Belknap Street on August the 27th. This meeting was organized by and controlled by the integrationists, and only two of the large number of separatists present were allowed to speak, briefly, while being hooted at and ridiculed by the integrationists. Beyond the sharp contention, though, this meeting and the reports and repercussions which followed from it provide us with much illuminating information

regarding the nature of the conflict, the characters of the various participants, and some interesting food for thought on the nature of the relationship between these opposing Roberts brothers, Benjamin and John. Although Benjamin Roberts had contributed much of the fuel for discussion to this meeting through a petition to the School Committee (the Jonas Clark petition of July 1849), an appeal to the mayor and aldermen, and a rather incendiary handbill, all of which he evidently played a part in authoring, as well as through some fiery statements that he made at meetings in July and August, he was, mysteriously, not present at this meeting.³¹ On the other hand, John Roberts did attend the meeting and was one of the two opposition speakers allowed to speak, the other being Thomas Smith. John later wrote a vivid description of the meeting for the <u>Liberator</u>, in which he also provided some insightful analysis of the issues and tactics of the two movements:

Mr. T. P. Smith being loudly called for from different parts of the house, arose and asked if the party there dared to hear fair discussion. (Shouts of yes, yes; no, no; cheers and hisses.) The resolutions were then presented and read, no attention being paid to the numerous cries of `not ready,' proceeding from all parts of the house, or to the votes in opposition to their passage. The object seemed to be to hear one side, or nobody. It was confusion, discord, gag and excitement all through. R. Morris, W. Watkins, Wm. G. Allen and others spoke, amid alternating hissing and applause. At one time, three cheers were proposed for T. P. Smith, and deafeningly given. Then for Watkins, the School Committee, &c.—The meeting, I am sorry to say, was characterized by too much party spirit to do good. I feel that if our people are anxious to be elevated, they must dare to endure free discussion on any questions connected with their rights and wrongs.³²

When Thomas Smith mentioned, during his brief opportunity to speak at this meeting, that he knew that those who shared his views on the value of the Smith School were "in the minority", the integrationist leader and elder activist, John T. Hilton, replied that Smith was, "...mistaken in representing himself in the minority, for John C. Calhoun, Henry Clay, the American Colonization Society, and the entire proslavery community" were with him.³³ As Smith expressed in a later article, Hilton's comment was extremely hurtful, as Smith was "born and reared among you [colored citizens of Boston]", and had been a devoted equal rights and anti-slavery activist "since the age of fourteen."³⁴ One record shows that Smith gave an address at the age of nineteen, during a celebration of the anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Great Britain, so it may be true that he had begun his activism at such an early age. It should be noted that Smith was only 22 during this furor of 1849, which may be one other reason for the sharp animosity against him. In one of the more unpleasant tirades against Smith, during the early battle over the possibility of hiring Thomas Paul as master of the Smith School, one of the integrationists (probably Benjamin Roberts) referred to Smith as a "young, ambitious bigot."³⁵

Why did the integrationists so adamantly despise Thomas P. Smith and revile the other pro-Smith School activists as well? Why did they perceive these people to be such a threat when they also favored the integration of the common schools? Both Smith and John Roberts basically asked the same questions while they made their support for integration and the uplift of people of color very clear in their writings. As John Roberts articulated so well in the Liberator,

The position of Mr. T. P. Smith, myself, and many others, is this; We are and ever have been in favor of removing all legal disabilities from our oppressed people; we are in favor of the doors of all the ward schools being thrown open to such colored children as may desire to go to such schools. We are *not* in favor of the abolition of exclusive institutions among ourselves, literary, religious or scientific, until such times as we can enjoy more liberty and equality among the whites. If, however, there are others of our brethren who differ from us, let them enjoy their opinions, and urge forward their measures in an open, free and courteous spirit. ³⁶

John Roberts' last sentence could have easily been phrased as a question, with the

addition of the words, "Why can't they?" Consider also the following statements from

Thomas P. Smith, made just a few weeks later:

I am in favor of the privilege of common ward schools being given to all. The charge that I have ever opposed the granting of that privilege is as untrue as malicious. The special school committee will testify each one of them, that at the late hearing, I declared the right to be `clear as the heavens over our head.' Thus, in that matter, all are agreed.

Living as we do in an age of advancing science and literature, all differences, social and civil, should be conducted upon high principle, and in accordance with the spirit of the age. And when the fatal hour arrives, that we tremble before free discussion, that we fear fair argument and shrink from the light, are we not wrapped in the spirit of the dark ages?³⁷

Some light is shed on the answers to these questions in the aforementioned Jonas

Clark petition and in the "Appeal to the Mayor..." In both of these documents we find

similarly-stated objections to the very existence of the Smith School. It becomes clear

that their objection is rooted in the experiences of Benjamin Roberts and every other

parent of color who, after applying for admission for a child to a common school

closest to their home, were told that an ample provision had been made for children

"of their complexion" at the Smith School. In the Clark petition, the argument is

stated in this way:

A number of us have more than once made application to members of your *Honorable Board* for the admission of our children to the District Schools, but are refused, on the ground that there is an *"exclusive School"* for Colored children to which there is no objection.

As long as the School Board could use the existence of the Smith and other colored schools as an excuse to avoid school integration, it seemed to many activists of color that integration would be forever stalled, and the path to full equality for all American citizens forever blocked. The integrationists were at this time, in every way they could devise, attempting to make sure that all of the relevant authorities, and everybody else, knew that, contrary to the statement of the School Board, the community of color did indeed object to the existence of all exclusive schools. Their other stated reasons for abolishing the colored schools included: the inconvenience of having to travel long distances from their homes to attend school; the fact that recent immigrants from European countries who could be classified as "white persons" were allowed common school privileges that were denied to native citizens of the U.S. whose ancestors had fought and risked their lives in the American Revolution; the fact that Boston was the last city in Massachusetts to maintain segregated schools, while the integrated schools in other cities had offered plenty of proof that integration could be carried out successfully.

In the "Appeal to the Mayor...", which was written "in behalf of the colored citizens of Boston" and signed by John T. Hilton, Benjamin F. Roberts, and Lemuel Burr, the following statement is made concerning the inconvenience of having to walk great distances to uphold school segregation compared to the destructive nature of segregation itself:

This inconvenience is *small*, when compared to the injury that separate schools create in the community. Their existence strengthens a feeling of prejudice between white and colored children, while their abolition will foster a regard for each other.

That statement articulates very well how the integrationists perceived a power at work in the very existence of such institutions to perpetuate injustice and cause serious harm to society. In another statement, taken from the Jonas Clark petition, the integrationists explain that they are opposed to any "exclusive school" because, "It holds up a barrier against a portion of the people, 'solely on account of color,' and encourages the worst of influences in the community." Such a dire view of race-based, or segregated schools, helps to explain the

integrationists' equally contemptuous view of those members of the community of

color who held a different view. A resolution passed at a "meeting of colored

citizens" on the topic of continuing the Smith School, held on July 23, 1849, stating:

Resolved, That it is our hope, that no individual who is identified with us in complexion, will suffer himself to be used as a tool, to prolong the existence of that school.

They were referring specifically to those who supported keeping the exclusive

schools open, and especially to those who supported the hiring of Thomas Paul, Jr. as

headmaster. That is made very clear in the Clark petition:

In regard to the recommendation of a colored man, as Principal in that School, we hail the circumstance an attempt to quiet our efforts against its dissolution. We do, therefore, regard with suspicion and as unworthy of confidence, any individual who is identified with us, that will suffer himself to be a *tool* to suit the wishes of those who are opposed to the full enjoyment of our rights.

As is so often the case, mixed with such strong feelings of betrayal from members of

one's own community, is a deep attachment and commitment to a perceived need for

unity--and even unanimity---within the community. That such feelings were present

among the colored integrationists was made very clear, in no uncertain terms, in an

August, 1849 handbill signed by John T. Hilton, Benjamin Roberts, and Lemuel Burr:

GREAT SCHOOL RIGHTS MEETING!

Every individual who wears a colored face is called upon to meet at the Belknap street Church, on Monday evening next, August 6, at 7 o'clock; --then and there to decide the question, whether we are satisfied to be *humbugged* out of our rights in regard to Common School instruction for our children; also to remonstrate against the appointment of any individual as master in the Smith School, to continue it one moment as an exclusive School. Let our motto be, Down with the School!³⁸

So strong was the desire for unanimity, that the integrationists took to declaring that the colored community was indeed unanimous on this issue, while knowing that there was still a substantial portion of the community who either supported the Smith School or were apathetic on the issue. One possible reason for this desperate quest for consensus and conformity may have been rooted in the fact that the community of color was such a small minority in Boston at this time, only about 1 ½ percent of the population. People of color had basically zero "clout", politically or economically, except through influential and compassionate whites. With the population of the next most despised minority in 1840s Boston, the immigrant Irish, far surpassing them, both in numbers and in social status, and replacing the people of color in many positions of customary employment, there was understandably much cause for concern.³⁹

Between early August and the SJC trial in December, Benjamin Roberts did not attend any more of the several community meetings on equal school rights. It is not clear why. Perhaps he was living with his family in Cambridge, where his children were attending integrated schools. He may have been focused on preparing for the trial, although Robert Morris was still involved deeply in the movement and attending meetings, and it seems that Charles Sumner basically took over the case and did not seek much help from others. Roberts does not appear in the records of any public meetings of Boston activists of color again until March 27, 1850 when he participated in an "Anti-Webster" meeting, in protest of Massachusetts Senator Daniel Webster's support for the then-still-proposed Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. Roberts was appointed to the business committee for this meeting.⁴⁰

I need not say much more about the trial of the Roberts case here, since the trial itself was not as significant to the life of Benjamin Roberts as the events that both preceded and followed it, and the high points of the trial have been well-covered by others. The potent arguments of Charles Sumner, in Roberts v. The City of Boston,

were certainly studied by the NAACP lawyers who argued the Brown case in 1954, and the evidence for that can be found in the records of both cases. The basic argument used in both cases was that segregation imposed on a minority group in society that is historically deemed to be of an inherently inferior status to the dominant majority, reinforces the status of assumed inferiority. The arguments further assert that the inferior status of said minority group is still reinforced even if the segregated facilities are physically of equal quality and are staffed by persons of equal qualifications and abilities to render the services offered in said facilities. In Sumner's opinion, the separate schools for blacks and whites were not "equivalent" facilities, but, even if they were, that would be irrelevant to determining whether or not the rights of the children of color were being violated. Separate schools based on "distinctions of color and caste", were a violation of the Massachusetts Constitution's guarantee of equal rights, and, furthermore, they did real harm to the proscribed class. In Sumner's words:

Who can say that this does not injure the blacks? Theirs, in its best estate, is an unhappy lot. Shut out by a still lingering prejudice from many social advantages, a despised class, they feel this proscription from the Public Schools as a peculiar brand...It adds to their discouragements. It widens their separation from the rest of the community, and postpones that great day of reconciliation which is sure to come.⁴¹

The NAACP lawyers in the Brown case relied on the testimonies of several psychologists and other social scientists to elaborate the same basic points made by Sumner. The testimony of sociologist Louisa Holt compares very well with the Sumner quote above:

Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law; for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the Negro group. A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn. Segregation with the sanction of law,

therefore, has a tendency to retard the educational and mental development of Negro children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racially integrated school system.⁴²

Benjamin Roberts lost his Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Case, when the court's ruling was finally given in March of 1850. The court ruled that separate facilities were not inherently unequal, providing a legal precedent for the Plessy v. Ferguson case of 1896, and similar cases to follow. In February of 1850, anticipating that they might lose the court case, the colored integrationists were already planning an alternative strategy. They decided to conduct another petition campaign for school integration, but this time they would take their effort throughout the state and direct the petitions to the Massachusetts Legislature. Shortly after the Court's decision was announced the Boston activists held another meeting to make a formal, united response to the decision. One of the several resolutions made during the course of that meeting stated:

Resolved, That we recognize with heartfelt approbation the honorable stand which our brother, Benjamin F. Roberts, has made for the school rights of the colored people of Boston, and for the fidelity with which he has persevered in maintaining them; and we assure him that, in the history of our struggles, and, we hope, our successes, his name will not be forgotten.

One of the leading integrationists, Henry Weeden, then moved that, "...a complimentary meeting or festival" be arranged in Roberts' honor. No record that any such festival ever took place has been found to date.⁴³

After no one else, apparently, had acted upon the proposal of the February meeting to initiate a statewide petition campaign, Benjamin Roberts took the initiative in June of 1850 by first placing an advertisement announcing his plan in the Liberator:

EQUAL SCHOOL RIGHTS

The undersigned is about to commence a mission to the several towns in Massachusetts, for the purpose of obtaining signatures to a petition, asking the Legislature of this Commonwealth to pass a law compelling those who have charge of public school instruction for children to make no distinction on account of color, in relation to the admission of children to the schools nearest their residences, and to those to which other children in the several neighborhoods are admitted.

The recent action of the School Committee of the city of Boston, and the subsequent decision of the judges of the Supreme Court, in the case of Roberts vs. the City of Boston, show the great injustice against the colored people perpetrated by those agents in the public service, and demand the serious attention of every citizen of this State.

As it will require means to prosecute this effort, the friends of equal rights are requested to govern themselves accordingly.

BENJ. F. ROBERTS,

Boston, June 12, 1850. 44

Two months later, Roberts presented a report to an "equal school rights meeting" regarding his then well-under-way petition campaign, and it was received with enthusiastic encouragement and support.⁴⁵ In September, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law, which caused considerable outrage among all abolitionists and equal rights activists, and probably distracted much attention away from the school rights petition campaign. Nevertheless, the campaign was very fruitful, as revealed in Benjamin Roberts' next published report, given at a meeting held on March 24, 1851. Roberts told the large crowd that, "Several of these petitions have been forwarded to the Legislature, and subsequently referred to the Committee on Education," and there was discussion at the meeting regarding the possibility that the petitioners might have a hearing before the legislative committee.⁴⁶

The African American community of Boston, joined by activists throughout the state, continued the fight for another four years, under the leadership of William C. Nell and others. Ultimately, they found victory through the Massachusetts legislature

in 1855, when the legislature outlawed segregated schools throughout the entire state, including Boston.⁴⁷

Benjamin Roberts' youthful dream of publishing his own newspaper was rekindled again in the beginning of 1853, and it seemed to him that the time had come to give it another try. On March 30, 1853 the first issue of <u>The Self-Elevator</u> came off of his own press, at number 19 Washington Street in Boston. As its title implies, this paper was completely devoted to "the advancement of General Improvement among the Colored People in this community," in the spirit of the old Massachusetts General Colored Association to which his father and uncles belonged. Roberts also pledged that his new paper would not "engage in political strife…or sectarianism of any form," and, "all extravagant views regarding the manner of affecting our object will be avoided, and in their stead, fair, honorable and just statements, will be strictly adhered to."⁴⁸

However, Roberts' promise not to engage in "political strife" did not mean that <u>The Self Elevator</u> would not deal at all with political issues. In the wake of the turmoil incited by the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, an issue that rose to the forefront in the African American communities was their right to either join state militias, which normally did not admit men of color into their ranks, or form their own. This was necessitated by the need to defend themselves from the growing number of bounty hunters and "slave-catchers" patrolling the Northern states. Many of these individuals were opportunistic mercenaries who would sometimes capture free people of color and then pass them off as escaped slaves, so that they could collect reward money from both the slaveholders and the federal government. Besides the need for self-defense, the activists in the community of color and participants in the underground railroad sought better means to protect fugitives from slavery. In sympathy with that cause, Benjamin Roberts devoted the entire first page and most of the second page of this first issue of the <u>Self Elevator</u> to a speech that William Watkins made before the Massachusetts legislature for the right to form a colored militia company. Robert Morris also presented a speech to the legislature on the same topic, and Roberts promised to print that speech in the next issue of the paper. Whether he did or not is a mystery, since only one copy of the first issue of the paper has survived.

Included in his statement of purpose for <u>The Self Elevator</u>, is another of Roberts' cogent descriptions of racism in antebellum New England, including an account of what we today would call "white privilege":

...custom, being considered law in our community, if a colored man attempts to get an opportunity for his son in a workshop with white journeymen and apprentices, he is referred to *Liberia*, as the proper place for him; or, asked to put him at the "hair-dressing" or "waiting and attending" business, or some other, that is equally degrading, by the majority of the working classes among the whites.....The fact is, our early instructions are detrimental to our elevation: while the son of more favored parents is taught from the cradle, upward, that his chance is as good as another's when he arrives at manhood, to be in the enjoyment of the highest honors in the gift of the American nation; ours are shown no future prospects; the former, grows up full of ambition while the latter is left to meditate the most effectual course for him to pursue to pass life easily.

Roberts follows this somber assessment with an exhortation toward more efforts for self-uplift, and, then, with an optimistic and upbeat note of encouragement for both the community of color in general, and for the chances of his paper's success, in particular. He described the prospects and plans for the paper in this manner:

The prospects before us are encouraging. Having in connection with the paper a general Letter Press Printing Establishment, furnished with a liberal variety of apparatus, sufficient to perform all ordinary jobs in Printing, and being a *practical printer*, we are prepared, with a little assistance from the friends of elevation, to outstride the frivolous predictions of the enemies of the welfare of the colored people.

The paper will be published for a short time, *once a fortnight*, for the purpose of securing a of securing a sufficient number of subscribers to insure its support, weekly. The first three pages of each number will be appropriated to good reading matter, and a portion of the last page will be devoted to business cards.

One wonders if his mention of "the frivolous predictions of the enemies of the welfare of the colored people," was inspired, in part, by a reminiscence of the statements made by William Garrison and Amos Phelps some fifteen years earlier, dismissing the prospects for the success of the <u>Anti-Slavery Herald</u>. (I am in the process of searching, but if I cannot find any reference to the <u>Self Elevator</u> in the <u>Liberator</u>, that could mean that Garrison was equally dismissive of this endeavor, but it could also suggest that Roberts chose not to inform Garrison of his plans for *fear of* dismissal and discouragement. It could also mean that <u>The Self Elevator</u> simply could not sustain itself economically long enough for anyone to give it much notice at all.)

Among the "business cards," or advertisements, on the fourth page of the paper are ads for the businesses of several leading black abolitionists, including Robert Morris, Joel W. Lewis, Lewis Hayden, and Dr. John G. De Grasse. In addition to the advertisement for Lewis Hayden's clothing store, there is a letter to the editor, written under the pseudonym, "Toussaint L'Ouvertuer" [sic], which contains a section that reads like a lengthy advertisement for Hayden's business, after praising him for his "various labors for the cause of freedom." It would have, of course, been dangerous to mention specifically that he was involved in the underground railroad, but he was well-known in those circles as a "station master."⁴⁹

Benjamin and his brother John were not (at least, not completely) estranged from each other after being on opposite sides in the argument over abolishing the Smith

School. In 1852, and again in 1859, they joined together, along with two of their sisters to petition the courts to grant them guardianship over their father and his estate. They did so because they feared that Robert Roberts had lost his mental faculties after he was caught and tried for bigamy. This was the second time that Robert Roberts had been accused of bigamy in a Massachusetts court. Some years after Sarah Easton Roberts died, Robert married Rosanna Swain. While still married to her, he married James Easton Jr.'s widow, Anna, in 1845. After three years of marriage to Anna, Robert finally got around to divorcing Rosanna. Nevertheless, Anna (under the name Anna Easton) sued Roberts in the Plymouth County Court of Common Pleas in 1851 because of the deception, saying that, "her connection with him in marriage greatly injured her good name and reputation and prevented her for a long time from contracting marriage with any other person." The suit, filed in August 1851, was for monetary damages, not divorce. Just a few months before Anna's suit, Robert Roberts, at about the age of 80, married a twenty-five year old white woman named Ellen Ward. (Anna Easton was also a white woman). At trial for bigamy in Suffolk County District Court, Ms. Ward admitted that she new that Roberts was already married but she married him anyway but, "did not care, for Roberts had offered her a handsome present if she would marry him." The newspaper described Ellen as "of good appearance" and "elegantly dressed", so it is likely that Roberts had already lavished many gifts upon her. Roberts' children surely feared that their father would soon squander their considerable inheritances.⁵⁰

The Roberts childrens' petition and appeal were both dismissed. Apparently the court determined that Robert Roberts may be lecherous, extravagant, and unusually virile for his age, but not insane, as his children had claimed. One of Robert Roberts'

other surviving sons, Timothy Roberts, did not participate in the request for guardianship in 1853 because he had gone to California with his Irish immigrant wife, Bridget, during the California Gold Rush. In 1853 Timothy and Bridget moved with a large group of African American self-exiles from then racially hostile California to Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Shortly thereafter, Mr. and Mrs. Roberts became entangled in a quarrel with one of their African American neighbor women, which brought them into the local court and newspaper. Timothy eventually moved back to Boston where his aged father resided with him for a time. Since he hadn't participated in the suit for guardianship and probably also because of the care that he had shown his father, Timothy was treated much better in their father's will of 1860, than were Benjamin and John.⁵¹

Benjamin Roberts moved his family to Chelsea, just across the Charles River, north of Boston, sometime before the 1860 census was taken, but continued to run his printing shop in Boston and continued to be a human rights activist. In 1867, he wrote the following petition to the Boston city council

To the Honorable Board of Aldermen and Members of the Common Council:

Gentlemen----

Your petitioners, colored citizens of Ward three, in the City of Boston, respectfully ask that the word "col." be omitted from the Voting Lists, and from our Tax Bills; for the following reasons:

First—We believe, that it is an unnecessary appendage and calculated to uphold an old spirit of caste, which is detrimental to the best interests of our community.

Second—We believe it is an obstacle in the way of perfect equality in the distribution of the municipal patronage.

Boston, February 5, 1867⁵²

Again, it is clear that Benjamin Roberts regarded racial designations as nothing more than caste assignments and a barrier to equal citizenship for all Americans.

The last three recorded examples of Benjamin Roberts' social activism occurred in the Spring of 1870—three articles written for the <u>New Era</u>, including the earlierdescribed, "Our Progress in the Old Bay State." The first article , published March 17, a little over a month after the 15th Amendment was ratified, was a letter to the editor covering several topics, including Roberts' assessment of the "new era" for the people of African descent:

This new era to the black man places him on an equal footing with all other men in this country. As liberty, equality, and fraternity are not now limited to color or previous condition, the great avenue to success is open, and the prosperous future depends on the proper exertion of all the people to merit their share in the general distribution of mental, physical, and moral business resources. It is the "good time *come*." We must improve it, if we do not wish to be left in the rear. *Sympathy*, after this, for anybody on account of color, will be a thing of the past. Every man now must figure for himself. ⁵³

This statement, naïve as it may seem, clearly reflects the optimism of the time, shared by people of color all over the nation.

In an article titled, "Celebration of the Fifteenth Amendment in Boston," Benjamin Roberts provides us with a vivid account of a parade and procession, which he called, "the largest that the colored people ever had in this part of the country." Roberts also stated that this day was, "the greatest day for the American black men, in Boston, that history has ever recorded." Included in the article is an interesting account of how a man of color named Richard S. Brown was once elected to the Boston City Council by "a majority of two votes, and cheated out of it by some of our weak-kneed pretended friends." Speakers at the grand event included, Charles Lenox

Remond, Edward G. walker, Robert Morris, William Lloyd Garrison, and Wendell

Phillips.54

Besides being a longtime successful printer, Benjamin Roberts was also once a constable and a singer with a quartet that performed at social functions in Boston's black community. He died of epilepsy, on September 6, 1881, at the age of 66. ⁵⁵

of the Colored and Indian Race, from the Creation of the World to the Present Time, Boston, B. F. Roberts, 1844, pg. 331. Benjamin F. Roberts, <u>The Self Elevator</u>, vol. 1, no. 1, March 30, 1853, pg. 3.

¹<u>The Liberator</u>, November 22, 1834, and December 6, 1834.

² Ibid., vol. 1, no. 50, December 10, 1831, pg.1.

³ B. F. Roberts, "Our Progress in the Old Bay State", in, <u>The New Era</u>, vol.1, no.12, March 31, 1870., p.2

⁴ Robert Roberts, <u>The House Servant's Directory</u>, or a Monitor for Private Families: <u>Hints on the</u> <u>Arrangement and Performance of Servant's Work</u>, Boston, 1827, Graham Russell Hodges, ed., N.Y., Armonk, 1998. <u>The Liberator</u>, March 12. 1831

⁵ It is unknown how many young men of color Roberts may have been able to afford to take on as apprentices, but the records name two of them: Benjamin's brother, Timothy, his son, Benjamin F. Roberts, Jr. Although Timothy Roberts is listed in the Boston city directories from 1847 to 1853 as a laborer and in the "clothing" business, his 1852 marriage record gives his occupation as "printer." Sometime after 1853, Timothy and his new Irish bride went to California to try their luck in the gold rush. In 1859 they were in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. James William Pilton, <u>Negro Settlement in British Columbia: 1858-1871</u>, Master's Thesis, Department of History, The University of British Columbia, 1951, pp. 1-2, 45-46. The 1860 census for Boston lists B.F. Roberts, Jr. -who was born the year that his father launched his business- with the occupation, "printer." Eighth Census of the United States of America, Suffolk County, Massachusetts, City of Boston, pg.209. The Boston city directories for 1859, 1861, and 1872-1880 also list Benjamin Jr. as a printer.

⁶ Letter of Amos A. Phelps supporting B. F. Roberts, Rare Books and Manuscripts Room, the Boston Public Library, Ms. A, 21.8 p.48. <u>B. F. Roberts to Rev. A. A. Phelps</u>, Ibid., Ms. 2.0499. C. Peter Ripley, ed., <u>Witness for Freedom</u>, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1993, p. 131-132

⁷ Liberator, Oct. 12, 1838, page 3.

⁸ James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, <u>Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle</u> in the Antebellum North, New York, Holmes and Meier, 1979, p. 82-83. Robert Benjamin Lewis, Light and Truth; Collected From the Bible and Ancient and Modern History, Containing the Universal History.

⁹ Stanley K. Schultz, <u>The Culture Factory: Boston Public Schools</u>, <u>1789-1860</u>, N.Y., Oxford University Press, 1973, pp. v-vi.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp.157-166. Arthur O. White, <u>Blacks and Education in Antebellum Massachusetts: Strategies for Social Mobility</u>, Dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo,1971, Ann Arbor, University Microfilms, 1971, pp. 92-95, 102. White places the date for moving the Hall school to the African Church basement as 1812, but George Levesque, in his thorough study of the pre-school integration struggle history of black education in Boston, agrees with Schultz' earlier date of 1806. George A. Levesque, "Before Integration: The Forgotten Years of Jim Crow Education in Boston", <u>The Journal of Negro Education</u>, vol. 48, no. 2, Spring, 1979, pg. 116. Carl Kaestle and Maris A. Vinovskis, <u>Education and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts</u>, N.Y., Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 50-51.

¹¹ David Walker, <u>Appeal, in Four Articles</u>; <u>Together With a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the</u> <u>World...</u>, Boston, 1830, Peter Hinks, ed., University Park, Penn., Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000, pp. 35-36.

¹² James Brewer Stewart, <u>Holy Warriors: the Abolitionists and American Slavery</u>, N.Y., Hill and Wang, 1996, pp.64-65. White, <u>Blacks and Education...</u>, pg. 261. Fourth Annual Report of the Board

¹⁶ B. F. Roberts, "Our Progress in the Old Bay State", in, <u>The New Era</u>, vol.1, no.12, March 31, 1870., p.2

¹⁷ Sarah C.Roberts v. The City of Boston, Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Record, 5 Cush. 198, December, 1849, pg. 3. Benj. F. Roberts, "Report of the Views and Proceedings of the Colored Citizens of Boston, on the Subject of Equal School Privileges", <u>Liberator</u>, April 4, 1851, pg. 2. Stephen Kendrick and Paul Kendrick, <u>Sarah's Long Walk: the Free Blacks of Boston and How Their struggle for Equality Changed America</u>, Boston, Beacon Press, 2004.

- ¹⁹ The SJC court record, does not specifically mention Sarah's acceptance into the Otis school, or any other of the common primary schools, since Roberts' attorneys chose to only focus on the rejections. But the court record does give an exact date for the last rejection, February 15, 1848, from a school where her father enrolled her "without any ticket of admission", which must have been the Otis School.
- ²⁰ U.S. Census, 1850, Cambridge, Middlesex County, Massachusetts, pg. 66/131.
- ²¹ Benjamin F. Roberts, "Report of the Colored People of the City of Boston on the Subject of Exclusive Schools.", Boston, 1850, pg. 2 (In the Rare Books and Manuscripts room of the Boston Public Library, RB XH.860.R54R)
- ²² Massachusetts Statutes of 1845, chapter 214.
- ²³ Roberts v. City of Boston, pg. 1., Kendrick and Kendrick, pg. 113. Leonard W. Levy and Harlan B. Phillips, "The Roberts Case: Source of the` Separate but Equal' Doctrine", <u>American Historical Review</u>, 56, 1951, pg. 512.
- ²⁴ Kendrick and Kendrick, 115-118, 139, 150-151. Frederick J. Blue, <u>Charles Sumner and the Conscience of the North</u>, Arlington Heights, Ill., Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1994, pg. 51. Horton and Horton, <u>Black Bostonians...</u>, pp. 72-73.
- ²⁵ For a reprint of the petition, the minutes of the meeting, with resolutions, and relevant newspaper articles, see Dorothy Porter Wesley and Constance Porter Uzelac, eds., <u>William Cooper Nell:</u> <u>Selected Writings</u>, 1832-1874, Baltimore, Black Classic Press, 2002, pp. 132-140.
- ²⁶ Hosea Easton, <u>A Treatise...</u>, pg.. Anthony Benezet,
- ²⁷ Arthur O. White, "Antebellum School Reform in Boston: Integrationists and Separatists", <u>Phylon</u>, Vol. 34, no. 2, 1973, pg. 212
- ²⁸ <u>The Liberator</u>, September 7, 1849
- ²⁹ Thomas P. Smith, "Vindication", <u>The Liberator</u>, October 5, 1849. Thomas Smith and John Roberts worked at the same address, 38 Brattle Street, and at least one of them may have also lived there. Smith ran a used clothing store at that address, and John H. Roberts was a "bookkeeper" there. <u>Boston City Directory</u>, 1848-1851.
- ³⁰ White, "Antebellum School Reform in Boston..", pp. 207-208. White, <u>Blacks and Education in</u> <u>Antebellum Massachusetts...</u>, pg. 299.
- ³¹ "Petition of the Colored People: To the School Committee of the People of Boston", in, <u>City</u> <u>Document #42, Report of a Special Committee of the Grammar School Board, presented August</u> <u>29, 1849, on the Petition of Sundry Colored Persons, Praying for the Abolition of the Smith School:</u> <u>with an appendix</u>, Boston, J.H. Eastburn, city printer, 1849 (Commonly, and hereafter referred to as the "Jonas Clark Petition", since Clark's was the first signature.) In the collections of the Boston Athenaeum, and reproduced in, Leonard W. Levy and Douglas L. Jones, eds., <u>Jim Crow in Boston:</u> <u>The Origin of the Separate but Equal Doctrine</u>, New York, Da Capo Press, 1974. "Appeal of the Colored People of the City of Boston, to the Honorable, the Mayor and Aldermen of said City", printed in <u>The Liberator</u>, August 10, 1849. (Hereafter referred to as "Appeal to the Mayor...")
- ³² The Liberator, September 7, 1849

of Managers of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, Boston, 1836, pp.37-39.

¹³ Schulz, pg. 178.

¹⁴ Hosea Easton, <u>An Address Delivered Before the Coloured Population of Providence, Rhode Island,</u> on Thanksgiving Day, 1828, Boston, David Hooten, 1828, p.6.

¹⁵ On the contributions of Lydia Maria and David Lee Child to the cause of equal educational rights for children of color in Boston during the early 1830s, see Schultz, pp. 180-181. David Childs wrote a report to the Boston School Committee in 1833 that did much to persuade them to build the new Smith School. See also Schultz, pp.183-187; Horton, p.72-75; "Our Progress in the Old Bay State"

¹⁸ Roberts, "Our Progress..."

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Thomas P. Smith, "Vindication", <u>The Liberator</u>, October 5, 1849

³⁵ <u>The Liberator</u>, August 7, 1846, cited in, Dorothy Porter Wesley and Constance Porter Uzelac, eds., <u>William Cooper Nell: Selected Writings, 1832-1874</u>, Baltimore, Black Classic Press, 2002, pg. 150. For the "young, ambitious bigot" comment, see, J.J. Debois and Benjamin Roberts, "Proceedings of a Meeting, August 6, 1848", unpublished (?) report in the "Miscellaneous Papers of the Boston School Committee", Boston Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts room, cited in White, <u>Blacks and Education in Antebellum Massachusetts...</u>, pp. 264-65, and, in Scott Hancock, "The Elusive Boundaries of Blackness: Identity Formation in Antebellum Boston", <u>The Journal of Negro</u> <u>History</u>, Vol. 84, no.2 (Spring, 1999), pg. 129, note 31.

- ³⁸ Since there is no record of such a meeting being held until August 27, it is likely that the planned August 6th meeting had to be postponed. A severe cholera epidemic was sweeping through Boston at that time, and the meeting may have been postponed due to the number of interested people who were ill, or were attending to ill family members at that time. Letter of William C. Nell to Amy Kirby Post, August 11, 1849, in, Dorothy Porter Wesley and Constance Porter Uzelac, eds., <u>William Cooper Nell: Selected Writings, 1832-1874</u>, Baltimore, Black Classic Press, 2002, pp. 239-240. Richard A. Meckel, "Immigration, Mortality, and Population Growth in Boston, 1840-1880," Journal of Interdisciplinary History, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Winter, 1985), pg. 405. A total of 611 people died of cholera in Boston in 1849.
- ³⁹ "Appeal to the Mayor...", <u>Liberator</u>, August 10, 1849. Meckel, pp. 398-401. Between 1846 and 1860 the average number of immigrants (mostly Irish) entering Boston each *month* was about the same as the entire colored population.
- ⁴⁰ Liberator, April 5, 1850.
- ⁴¹ Charles Sumner, quoted in, James W. Fraser, <u>The School in the United States: A Documentary History</u>, Boston, McGraw Hill, 2001, pg.86. Benjamin Roberts was the first printer to publish Charles Sumner's complete argument in the Roberts case verbatim, immediately after the trial in December of 1849. <u>Argument of Charles Sumner, Esq.</u>, <u>Against the Constitutionality of Separate Colored Schools, in the case of Sarah C. Roberts vs. the City of Boston</u>, Boston, B. F. Roberts, 1849.
- ⁴² Henry A. Rhodes, "The Brown Decision: Fact or Myth in Connecticut?", in <u>Papers of the Yale-New</u> Haven Teachers Institute, p.1.
- ⁴³ <u>Liberator</u>, April 26, 1850, pg. 2.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., June 14, 1850.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., August 16, 1850. Benjamin F. Roberts, "Report of the Colored People of the City of Boston on the Subject of Exclusive Schools.", Boston, 1850
- ⁴⁶ Liberator, April 4, 1851.
- ⁴⁷ Wesley and Uzelac, pp. 434-446, includes report on the big victory celebration, with speeches.
- ⁴⁸ Benjamin F. Roberts, "Our Object," <u>The Self Elevator</u>, vol. 1, no. 1, March 30, 1853, pg. 2
- 49 Ibid., pg. 3. Horton and Horton, Black Bostonians..., pp. 54-55.
- ⁵⁰ Suffolk County Probate Records, Vol, 18, Docket # 42370, August 1, 1859 (dismissed, October 17, appealed, Nov. 5). Plymouth County Court of Common Pleas, Vol. 36, #23, page unnumbered, December session, 1851. There was considerable press coverage of Roberts' marriage to Ellen Ward and the Roberts bigamy case, both in North Bridgewater, where Anna Easton resided, and in Boston. North Bridgewater Gazzette, Vol. 1, no. 7, June 27, 1851, pg. 2; no.8, July 4, 1851, pg. 2; no.9, July 11, 1851, pg. 2; no. 31, December 12, 1851, pg. 2 (on Anna Easton's suit); Vol. 2, no.17, September 2, 1852, pg. 2; no. 18, September 9, 1852, pg. 2; <u>Boston Post</u>, Vol. 41, no. 52, August 31, 1852; no. 57, September 6, 1852.
- ⁵¹ Suffolk County Probate Records, Vol, 19, Docket # 43224, Robert Roberts' will, Dec. 31, 1860. Timothy was given "the net income" of one of Roberts' large Boston houses, his father's clothes, some furniture, and all of his father's books. Daughters Susannah and Elizabeth received generous annuities. Benjamin and John were given one dollar, each. Interestingly, although the heirs of Timothy and Susannah are mentioned generally, only one grandchild is bequested by name, Benjamin's daughter Sarah, who was designated to inherit a large house upon the deaths of her two aunts. Robert Roberts, <u>The House Servant's Directory, or a Monitor for Private Families: Hints on the Arrangement and Performance of Servant's Work</u>, Boston, 1827, Graham Russell Hodges, ed., Thesis, Department of History, The University of British Columbia, 1951, pp. 1-2, 45-46.
- ⁵² City of Boston Archives City Council Series 1.4, Item 1867-0235-H1

³⁶ The Liberator, September 7, 1849

³⁷ Thomas P. Smith, "Vindication", <u>The Liberator</u>, October 5, 1849

 ⁵³ <u>The New Era</u>, vol.1, no.10, March 17, 1870.
 ⁵⁴ Ibid., vol.1, no. 16, April 28, 1870.

⁵⁵ Wesley and Uzelac, pp. 500-501. The quartet, somewhat ironically, included Elijah W. Smith, a younger brother of Benjamin's "old nemesis", Thomas P. Smith. Adelaide Cromwell, <u>The Other</u> <u>Brahmins: Boston's Black upper Class, 1750-1950</u>, University of Arkansas Press, 1994, pg. 224-225. Vital Records of the City of Boston, at the New England Historic Genealogical Society, vol. 330, pg. 216.

Chapter Five

William Edgar Easton: Fighting the Unfinished Revolution

In the generation of Easton descendants after Benjamin Roberts, a great-grandson of James Easton and a great-grandson of James' brother Moses found themselves on opposing professional paths. Although both men were involved in theater, to differing degrees, they were using that powerful artistic medium in very different ways. Hosea Easton (1849-1899), the first grandson of Rev. Hosea Easton the abolitionist, became a black-face minstrel performer and was part of an African American troupe that found great popular acclaim as they toured Australia and New Zealand in the 1880s and '90s. William Edgar Easton (1861-1935), a great-grandson of Moses Easton, wrote two plays during the early Jim Crow era through which he attempted to counter the popular American preference for black minstrelsy and buffoonery by producing serious drama which portrayed historic African American heroism. The opposing life directions of these two "sons of the American Revolution" were symptomatic of both the limited career choices available to African Americans during their era, and the ability of some African Americans--with sufficient inspiration, means, and determination--to resist and overcome those limits.¹

In his attempt to provide an antidote to the popular black buffoon stereotype and impress a racist society with the most potent images of powerful African American historic figures then available, William Easton chose to write two four-act plays about historic leaders of revolutionary-era Haiti. The first of the two plays, <u>Dessalines</u>, which was written, published, and first staged in 1893, was based on the life of the Haitian general Jean-Jacques Dessalines, who led the revolutionaries to victory after the imprisonment of Touissant L'Ouverture. The second play, <u>Christophe</u>, published in 1911 and first performed in 1912, portrayed the second ruler of independent Haiti, Henri Christophe, who helped to overthrow his former ally and predecessor, Dessalines. Both plays illustrate some very important, and, prior to that time, not generally well-known historical facts about the Haitian Revolution, but teaching history was not Easton's primary concern. Easton clearly stated that he was much more concerned with his "duty...to teach the truth" about the humanity and character of people of African descent through his plays than he was about historical accuracy. Easton spelled out his purpose for writing this sort of historical drama in his preface to Dessalines:

...I will feel fully repaid should Dessalines have accomplished the author's purpose of attracting the attention of the literati of the race to the rich fields of dramatic and narrative art, which by every right are distinctly the property of the Negro....Indeed, we have had excellent caricaturists of the Negro, in his only recognized school of legitimate drama, i.e., buffoonery. But the author of this work hopes to see a happier era inaugurated by the constant production of legitimate drama, written exclusively for Negro players and meeting, he hopes, with the full endorsement of the brother in white.²

Even so, <u>Dessalines</u> does include among its characters, besides the heroic figures, a pair of black buffoons. But there is a key difference between these particular buffoons, Petou and Dominique, and those of the popular minstrelsy shows of that era: Petou and Dominique, though clearly identified as "blacks", were not written to match any of the customary American stereotypes about blacks (although there may be some coincidental resemblance). Petou and Dominique bear much more resemblance to William Shakespeare's buffoons, such as Falstaff or the clownish gravediggers in Hamlet. The buffoons in Easton's play provide the same sort of comic relief and wry observations as those of Shakespeare, without mocking or slandering an entire racial group. The reason for that is that, unlike American minstrelsy, those comic figures are not the *only* type of African American characters portrayed. Besides the previously mentioned heroic figures, there are also other multifaceted human beings of African descent, such as the "mulatto" sons of French masters who deal at length with identity issues while they struggle to determine which side to take in the Revolution. There is also Clarisse, the daughter of a French slave master and a woman of African descent, who falls in love with Dessalines and brings some interesting perspectives on Christianity into the play. There are several other very Shakespearean elements in Easton's plays, in addition to the wry comics, including: the titles, which are simply the names of the protagonists; the fact that those heroic protagonists are flawed and complex; the use of Elizabethan (or semi-Elizabethan) English; the use of a voodoo witch figure who somewhat resembles the witches in Hamlet; as well as some elements of plot, and other theatrical devices.³

Why did Easton so closely follow Shakespearean dramatic form during an era when most serious American theater followed the format of the 19th-century romantic melodrama or the preachy moralist plays? Why did Easton choose the Haitian Revolution as the setting for his plays, rather than the American Revolution? William Easton had ancestors who participated in both of those Revolutions, and he often stated that he admired them all. Why did Easton insert a somewhat contrived message regarding salvation through Catholicism into the final act of <u>Dessalines</u>, including a fictional romance with a Catholic mulatto woman who brings Dessalines to a fictional conversion to Catholicism? Was the lengthy treatment in this play of the identity issues of mixed race people of color, and, particularly, the children of slavemasters, based on personal and family experiences? In order to better understand these and

other vital questions about Easton's work and his motivation, we must become familiar with the story of his life's journey.

Of all the members of this fifth generation of Easton family human rights activists, no one more consciously—in mind and in action—identified with the legacy of James and Hosea Easton than William Edgar Easton. William was born in New York City, but spent most of his childhood in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Although directly descended from James Easton's brother, Moses (see genealogy chart in chapter one, page 9), William repeatedly misled reporters who wrote biographical articles about him by claiming to be descended from Hosea and James. Only once, in a brief article in the NAACP's Crisis magazine, did he clarify that he was actually descended from James Easton's brother, which the historical record confirms. That article was published in 1930, five years before his death. While stating that "his great-grandfather was Captain of Indian Scouts during the Revolutionary War," he fails to mention his name, although he does name his "great-granduncle, James Easton" as he goes on to describe James' service in the war. In that same article, William Easton also acknowledges the Easton family's connection to Paul Cuffe through marriage, although the facts are misstated. The family's collective memory of the facts of the two Easton/Cuffe marriages may have faded substantially by the 1930s, but Easton made sure to mention "Captain Paul Cuffe" by name.

Why did Easton neglect to name his lesser-known, and, apparently, lessaccomplished lineal ancestor, and fail to ever mention or allude to Moses Easton at all in several similar articles? We can only speculate as to the reason, but, clearly, accomplishment—and what the notable accomplishments of people of color could do to diminish racism—meant a great deal to William Easton. It was also very important

to him that his own public image and reputation were visibly connected to other notable men of color.⁴

Even a short list of Easton's life accomplishments, gleaned from the several brief biographical articles on him, is impressive. Although the facts in these articles contradict each other on a few minor points, the following points seem to be certain: Easton was well-educated and attended at least two Catholic Colleges in Canada, including St. Joseph's Seminary in Trois Rivieres, Quebec; he was a teacher in post-Reconstruction era Austin, Texas from, approximately, 1882-1885; editor of the <u>Texas Blade</u> newspaper, 1885-1889, and first president of the Colored State Press Association; a Texas Republican Party political activist, under the guidance of Norris Wright Cuney, which included serving as Chairman of the Travis County Republican Party, and Assistant Secretary of the Republican State Central Committee from 1888-1894, and Secretary from 1894 to 1898; employed as storekeeper of the U.S. Customs House in Galveston, from 1889-1893, and as desk clerk for the San Antonio Police Department from 1894 to 1899.

After moving his family to Los Angeles, California in 1901, Easton worked as an accountant; a tax collector (the "first colored field deputy in the city and county assessor's office"); a newspaper correspondent for the <u>New Age</u>, beginning in 1911; Republican and Progressive Party activist and speechwriter (wrote speeches for at least two California governors); Supervising Custodian of the "sub-capitol" state offices in Los Angeles, beginning in 1915; speaker for the War Department, Bureau of Public Information during World War I; and, finally, as a clerk for the California Bureau of Purchases during the 1920s. He was all of that, besides being a successful

playwright. In the early 1890s, Easton was also involved in the National Congress of Colored Catholics.⁵

As it was for his activist ancestors, and for nearly all activists of color throughout American history, the connecting thread joining all of William Easton's diverse activities and endeavors was the battle against racism and for equality.⁶ Fixed in the center of his consciousness, probably since the age when he first began to understand words (he was raised in a bilingual, French/English household), was the fact that he was descended from people who fought in two different revolutions for the cause of liberty and equality. Easton's repeated mention of this legacy makes it obvious that his father, Charles F. Easton, and perhaps other Easton relatives, spoke often to him about their family's involvement in the founding of America, while the same is evidently true regarding what his mother, Marie Legett Easton, would tell him about her family's roots in Haiti. Charles and Marie may have even dueled back and forth to see whose stories of revolution were the most exciting, measuring their impact by the expressions on the faces of their attentive young sons, William and his brother, Charles Jr. These boys also gradually perceived that, while both revolutions had imperfect results, the American Revolution obviously had not brought liberty and equality to all of its citizens, and especially not to the segment of society to which the American caste system had relegated them. For Charles and William, and so many young people like them, it was clear that in America they must continue to fight an unfinished revolution.⁷

Much notice has been given to the symbolic value of African American service in the American Revolution as the ultimate claim to the birthright of equal American citizenship.⁸ It should also be noted that many African American abolitionists looked

to the Haitian Revolution and the subsequent establishment of the only independent African American nation in the western hemisphere as an example of the dignity and equal humanity of people of African descent. Both black and white contributors to abolitionist newspapers often compared the Haitian Revolution very favorably to its American counterpart, such as this anonymous "Christian Contributor" to Frederick Douglass' The North Star in 1849:

Haiti was in chains which she has since broken, with as much justice on her side as these [American] "Colonies" could plead, and with infinitely more of motive than they could urge or feel....the oppressions they [the Americans] suffered, though real and deserving of prompt redress by "the mother country," were "gossamer to cable," in the comparison with those that Haitiens were enduring from their pale-faced tyrants. Yet, though Haiti sundered the chains which bound her, only some few years later, America refused and still refuses to recognize her as a sister Republic.⁹

Even though most abolitionists of color were opposed to the idea of colonization of African Americans in Africa, the idea of emigration to Haiti had a little more appeal, especially after the passing of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 and the Dred Scott decision of 1857. One of the best examples of writing that shows why some antebellum-era African Americans admired Haiti, was expressed by the black emigrationist, James T. Holly, in 1859:

..the successful establishment of this negro nationality [Haiti]; the means by which its establishment was sought and accomplished; and the masterly vigilance by which the same has been maintained for upwards of a halfcentury, present us with the strongest evidence...of the equality of the negro race, that can be found anywhere, whether in ancient or modern times. Among all the nationalities of the world, Hayti stands without any question the solitary prodigy of history. Never before in all the annals of humanity has a race of men, chattelized and almost dehumanized, sprung by their own efforts, and inherent energies from their brutalized condition, into the manly status of independent, self-respecting freemen, at one gigantic bound; and thus took their place at once, side by side with nations whose sovereignty had been the mature growth of ages of human progress.¹⁰ For many American males of color Haiti was also a symbol of their undeniable "manhood." Touissant L'Ouverture, was frequently upheld in the writings of African American activists as a role model, and, occasionally, so were Dessalines, and Christophe. Rev. John W. Lewis referred to the revolutionary valor of L'Ouverture as, "One of the most beautiful exhibitions of honor, associated with national patriotism" and called him the "Washington of Hayti."¹¹ Holly called Dessalines the, "heroic avenger of his race," and referred to Christophe as the "Frederick the Great" of Haiti.¹² When calls to militant resistance to the Fugitive Slave Law and to slavery itself increased during the last decade before the Civil War, these Haitian revolutionaries, among others, were increasingly held up as models. That trend was exacerbated by the Dred Scott decision of 1857.¹³

Almost from the moment that the Haitian Revolution bore its first fruit, pressure was put on the pro-Haiti advocates by the pro-slavery forces to either defend or deny the alleged and actual brutality of some of the Haitian leaders. Dessalines was known to have dealt very harshly with his opponents of all colors, including the use of torture and mutilation. He was ultimately assassinated by his own troops, who were led by Henri Christophe.¹⁴ For that reason, Robert Fehrenbach remarked that Dessalines was "a most unlikely candidate for a sympathetic dramatic hero," and, "hardly the figure one would expect in the titular role of Easton's heroic drama extolling the Negro race."¹⁵ But there was one very notable feature in the life story of Dessalines that can not be found in the stories of colored veterans of the American Revolution: Dessalines actually *won* a struggle that liberated an entire nation of people of color. While it may be argued that the participation of men of color in the American Revolution was the primary cause for the end of slavery in most of the northern

states, it is obvious that that emancipation was only partial and did not result in complete, equal citizenship for Americans of color. A drama about an unfinished revolution may be poignant, but it could never be the sort of drama of inspirational heroism and emasculation that William Easton had in mind, which he found only in the stories of the victorious blacks of Haiti.¹⁶

Besides the obvious potential benefit to the cause of defeating American racism that such heroic characters may provide, Easton's engagement with the intertwined topics of racial identity, racial ambiguity, and racial allegiance may have been equally effective. These topics are raised and intelligently discussed primarily by the mixed-race characters in the play, while the "blacks" comments on the subject generally consist of expressions of contempt for the "mulatres," with little or no evidence that they had ever tried to understand them. In the list of "Dramatis Personae" in the beginning of the text, Easton labels all the characters as either "Blacks" or "Colored."¹⁷ The identity and loyalty conflicts are introduced in the first scene of the first act, in a brief soliloquy by a "colored" overseer of slaves named Flavien, after he had been threatened and upbraided by several slaves:

It is hard enough to bear the slights of the master and his kin, without having to endure the contempt of his slaves. Three years in Paris have made me a discontented man, and the remainder of my life in Haiti will be a foretaste of hell. Un malatre, drawn from the carcass of a slave, by the unrighteous process of the master, is a human given to the world unable to bear the ostracism of racial prejudice and capable of every slavish hatred....What can we waste upon our sires? I hate them no less than I despise--and in an unnatural manner, too--the mother that gave me birth.

"Three years in Paris..." reflects one experiential element in the lives of many Haitian mulattoes, or "affranchis," as they were often called, which added to their personal identity confusion and frustration. It was typical for the free mulattoes of Saint Domingue (what Haiti was called before independence in 1804) to send their children to school in France. This was especially true for those who were relatively wealthy, as many of the mixed-race descendants of Frenchmen were.¹⁸ While in France, these children were generally treated much more humanely than they had been treated by the French colonists on the island, and were often made to feel like equals with the French in the motherland. Upon their return to Saint Domingue, it was very difficult for them to endure the much less than equal treatment they received in their native land. For example, one issue that the affranchis repeatedly insisted upon was that they should be granted the right to vote and hold political office on the island, which seemed logical to them, since they often held offices in the French military.¹⁹

William Easton probably became very familiar with this aspect of the mulatto identity crisis through his mother's relation of her own experiences. Marie Legett's family emigrated to New Orleans sometime before she was born there in 1826. During her teen years, she was sent by her father, Charles Legett, to be educated in France. French was the Legett family's native tongue and they didn't start learning English until they moved to the United States. Ironically, Marie learned to write in English while she was at school in France. In a letter that Charles Legett wrote to his daughter while she was in France, dated, "New Orleans, 6th July, 1843," he remarked, "Your letters always give me great pleasure, and I am much pleas'd to find you improve so much in writing English." When Marie, upon her return to New Orleans, experienced a sharp contrast between the treatment she received from Louisiana whites compared to that which she had received from the French, her father probably related stories to her of some very similar experiences that he and others of earlier generations went through after returning to Haiti from years of schooling in France.²⁰

Another aspect of the affranchis experience that is discussed in <u>Dessalines</u>, is the anguish of those who were the sons and daughters of their own or their mother's masters when they compared their own status and condition to that of their fathers' children with their French wives. Flavien alludes to this when he speaks of "bear[ing] the slights of the master and his kin," and how he hates both his "sire" and his mother. In the next scene, Rigaud,²¹ a leader of the mulatto allies of the French, states that the affranchis are "natural heirs to every right a Frenchman enjoys upon this island."²² In the later part of the play, when it appears that the French face almost certain defeat, Rigaud and his "confrere" and caste-mate, Lefebre, discuss what they might do if the blacks win:

RIGAUD: ... if France lose the fight, the mulattos of Haiti will be a people without a home—hated by the blacks and persecuted by the government he is striving so hard and honestly to uphold on this island

LEFEBRE:If France lose—why French soil is good enough for me.

RIGAUD: Yes, I fear it is with you as it is with many of our brethren, who prefer to saunter on the Boulevardes, loll in the foyers of the varieties and drive spirited horses on Bois de Boulogne, ogling fair women and exchanging bon mots with the shop girls, than to remain in Haiti contesting for the rights of men.²³

"The rights of men," to which Rigaud refers are the lost birthrights of the affranchis, the right to live equally as French citizens. They generally were not concerned with liberty or rights for the enslaved blacks, except for some blacks who joined them in their military service for France. Many of the affranchis were slaveholders themselves, and some continued to do so after they emigrated to Louisiana. These mixed race children of the French ruling class, for the most part, considered themselves to be superior to the enslaved people of African descent, but not necessarily because of skin color or any genetic traits. They felt that they were superior because the institution of slavery had prevented the enslaved from acquiring the benefits of "civilization" and especially a French education. This is apparent from the many references in <u>Dessalines</u> to the slaves, in conversations between Rigaud and Lefebre, and others, as "beasts" and "savages," or as persons with untempered passions.

The sense of lost birthright, or natural rights denied, that these offspring of the slave masters felt was another phenomenon that William Easton could write about based on what he learned from two people in his life who were very close to him. I refer here to two people whom he met when he went to post-Reconstruction era Texas as a young man to see what he could do to help the former slaves and their children: the man who mentored him in Texas Republican party political activism, Norris Wright Cuney, and the woman who was his teaching assistant and then became his wife, Mary Elizabeth Thornton.

Norris Wright Cuney, usually called "Wright" or "N. W.," was the son of his former master, Col. Philip Cuney and one of Cuney's mixed-race (tri-racial) servants, Adeline Stuart. Stuart bore eight children by Col. Cuney and he eventually set her free. N. W. was born in 1846 on the Cuney plantation along the Brazos River in Waller County, Texas. The relationship between Philip Cuney and Adeline Stuart continued simultaneously with--and long outlasted--Philip's two legal marriages to white women, and in 1853 Philip moved with his large family of color to Houston. There, Philip Cuney gradually manumitted his slave/children and sent the boys to abolitionist George Vashon's school for children of color in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. Wright Cuney was the third son sent to Vashon's school, in 1859, at the age of 13. The outbreak of the Civil War two years later made it impossible for Philip to continue funding his sons' education. In spite of his love for Adeline and his children

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of color, Col. Cuney still maintained his position of high standing in the Southern aristocracy and, somewhat ironically, he became a General for the Confederacy, while one of his sons of color joined the Union Army.

The same southern white supremacist cultural standards that did not allow Philip Cuney to openly marry the woman who was effectively his mate for life and the mother of most of his children, also would have never allowed him to publicly acknowledge any pride he may have felt for his son, Wright, as he went on to become one of the most powerful politicians in post-Reconstruction era Texas. Philip was absolutely free, however, to make a public display of pride regarding the accomplishments of his children born by his white wives. It is not known if Wright Cuney ever communicated with William Easton how he felt about the limits that southern society put on the relationship that he was able to have with his father, but Easton certainly was aware of worse circumstances than the relatively mild estrangement of the Cuneys.²⁴

Mary Elizabeth Thornton was descended from mixed race people who were the slaves of President James and Dolley Madison. Two granddaughters of William and Mary Easton reported that Mary claimed to be descended from James Madison himself, through her father, Alexander Thornton. Since Alexander Thornton was born in 1845, nine years after James Madison died, it is possible that his father could have been a son of Madison, but there are also other possibilities. James Madison was often in poor health and never biologically fathered any children (on record), although he served as the adoptive father of Dolley's son from a previous marriage. Since Dolley was obviously fertile, James may have been sterile. An alternative candidate for likely sire of Mary Thornton's grandfather is Dr. William Thornton, a

"gentleman doctor" who also dabbled in architecture and, along with Benjamin Banneker, helped to design some of the government buildings in Washington, D.C. Dr. Thornton is also one of two likely sources for slaves on the Madison plantation to acquire the Thornton surname. Dr. Thornton and his wife, Anna, were close friends of the Madisons and were their next door neighbors in Washington, D.C. when Madison served as Secretary of State. The Madisons also frequently entertained the Thorntons at Montpelier, which may have included a common "hospitality" that plantation gentlemen offered to their gentlemen guests: the use of the body of an enslaved woman. A statement attributed by some scholars to Dolly Madison



William Edgar Easton and family, Los Angeles, c. 1912 (left to right) Dorothy, Athenaise, William, Berenice, Mary, and William, Jr.



Below: Mary E. Easton with daughters Athenaise and Berenice, c.1892

suggests such a possibility: "The plantation mistress is only the chief slave in the master's harem."²⁵

Besides the family testimony, there is other good evidence that Alexander Thornton and his wife, Isabella, lived at Montpelier. The names "Alex" and "Isabell" are in a list of slaves at Montpelier on exhibit at the preserved plantation. The 1880 U.S. Census gives the place of birth for both Alex and Isabella Thornton as Virginia-in 1845 for Alex and 1848 for Isabella. Dolley Madison sold Montpelier in 1844 to Henry Moncure, who then sold it to an English immigrant named Benjamin Thornton in 1848. This English Thornton is the other possible source for the acquisition of the Thornton surname by the Thorntons of color, but he did not arrive early enough to be Alex Thornton's father. Additionally, Alexander Thornton's occupation is given as "carpenter" in the 1880 census, and many slaves at Montpelier were trained as carpenters over the years, since the time when James Madison established a sawmill there and taught several skilled trades to his slaves. Madison would then hire them out to help supplement his agricultural and government income, a practice that Mrs. Madison and the successive owners of Montpelier may have continued.²⁶

It may be that, as a general rule, the more substantial the reputation and wealth of a slave master/biological father of slaves, the more likely it is that the descendents of those slaves might feel a sense of lost or denied legacy. Clearly, many of the descendants of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings have felt such a sense of deprival, judging by the effort many of them have put into proving their descent from the third President and toward being accepted at Monticello by the "keepers of Jefferson's honor", including the descendants of Jefferson through his lawful marriage. For whatever reason, it appears that Mary Thornton Easton highly valued her family's connection to James Madison-or at least their acknowledged idea about that connection. Knowing how strongly William Easton embraced and often proclaimed his honorable ancestral connections, there is cause to wonder how much his enthusiasm affected his wife's sense about the significance of her own ancestors. Considering also the fact that they were both teachers during the early years of their relationship, it may be they had a stronger feeling than most about teaching their history and passing on any positive legacy that they could to the next generation. It is clear that they had an emphatic concern about positive identity development in children, especially children of color, although they may not have used those terms, or agreed with modern psychologists specializing in identity development who assert that African American children must ignore any non-African ancestries they possess in order to develop healthy identities.²⁷

The role of skin color and other racialized physical features in the identity development of mixed race Americans was certainly an important issue in both the Easton and Thornton families. At about the same time in history that most of the descendants of James and Sarah Easton, through their son Caleb, began to "pass for white," both of the two brothers of Mary Thornton Easton left their kinfolk to pass into white society, where they lived out the rest of their lives as "white" men. One of William and Mary Easton's grandsons passed into white society after he was presumed to be white when he enlisted into the segregated U.S. Army during World War II. William and Mary, and, arguably, all of their children could have passed for white, and William took great pride in never having done so. But that does not mean that he always wore a sign hanging over his shoulders proclaiming, "I am a colored man," or always corrected anybody who might have assumed otherwise. The censustakers who recorded the information on William Easton's family for the 1910 and the 1920 U.S. Census, evidently assumed that they were all white, and apparently nobody corrected him. On birth certificates, death certificates, and other census records, Easton family members were often labeled as "white" persons, yet, for the most part, they consciously and intentionally identified themselves as "Colored" or "Negro" people. There are probably many reasons why they made this decision, in spite of the opportunities presented to them had they chosen to live as "white" people. The attachment to the value of their family legacies, so strongly emphasized by both William and Mary Easton must have been one of the reasons.

Another reason for William Easton to *continue* to choose a public identity as a "Colored man", or "race man", as black activists were often called back then, was the amount of effort and struggle that he had invested in the cause of eradicating all

social stigma associated with being a person with non-white ancestry in America. That was his life's work and purpose. It gave his life meaning and some honor among his peers. The decision that Easton made as a young man just out of a Canadian Catholic seminary--from a northern family who had not known slavery since the late 17th century and a Haitian family who had been free for perhaps two or three generations--to begin a career devoted to the uplift of recently freed people of color in the American South was the pivotal and defining point in his life. It is also notable that, unlike many other northern black activists who were happy to work on behalf of their southern brethren from a distance, Easton actually went to live in the deep South among the people he chose to align himself with and serve, for nearly twenty years.

To carry out that objective in the post-Reconstruction and early Jim Crow eras was a commitment to embark on an emotional roller coaster ride. The ride began with the optimism generated by the events of Reconstruction, including unprecedented political victories and opportunities for education for African Americans in the South. The black and white Republican activists in the South always faced opposition to these positive advances, and experienced victories as well as defeats while fighting their opponents. But the sometimes wild ride came to a heart-breaking downward plunge and a temporary halt in the late 1890s, with the disfranchisement of Southern blacks, the rise in white supremacist violence, and the nearly absolute demise of the Republican Party in the South.²⁸

Charlotta Bass, the editor of the "race paper," <u>The California Eagle</u>, wrote a reminiscence of William Edgar Easton, twenty five years after his death, in which she made the following remarks concerning the value of Easton's decision:

There was no physical evidence to identify Mr. Easton with the so-called "Negro" race, or people of African descent, except his own desire to be so

identified. While a citizen of Texas....Mr. Easton never shrank from his duty to the Negro people in securing their freedom from the tyranny imposed upon them by the state politicians and authority.²⁹

In the eyes of many African Americans and other people of color during the Jim Crow era, a person who had the option of passing into white society and decided to live as and share the common struggles of an American of color was deserving of some special honor or degree of respect, especially if he or she was a well-educated or highly skilled person, such as William Easton. But not all people who had such an option and "stayed with the race" did so for altruistic or unselfish reasons. Many just could not bear the idea of having to separate themselves from family and friends, perhaps limited to only an occasional or very rare visit in secret. Others came back after passing for a year or two because they did not find it easy to adapt to Euro-American cultural modes, or, as one such person said, "The white folks are just too boring!" Others just could not stand "living a lie."³⁰ How difficult was it for a person who had experienced the struggles and triumphs that many people of color experienced during the Jim Crow era, and who understood American history and society as men like Easton knew it, to be one person on the inside and another on the outside? How, during that time in history, could a person passing for white endure the constant barrage of racist jokes and comments in nearly every whites-only social situation, at work and at play? How could they explain why they were not laughing along with everybody else?

Coming close after his painful experiences in Texas, including, besides the political losses: the death, in 1897, of his mentor N. W. Cuney; the loss of his desk clerk position with the San Antonio Police Department, in 1899; and the loss of some close friends in the Galveston hurricane of 1900, the Easton family moved to Los

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Angeles in 1901. Two years later, Easton became extremely ill and had a near-death experience. While lying on what he thought was his death-bed, he asked his wife, Mary, to send for a priest. That request surprised her greatly, since they had left the Catholic Church sometime after the 4th National Congress of Colored Catholics in 1893 and joined the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

William Easton's mother, Marie Legett, had first brought Catholicism to this branch of the Easton family from traditionally Catholic Haiti. At the same time that Easton wrote <u>Dessalines</u>, he was very active in a national organization of colored Catholics, and gave a speech at one of their conferences in which he urged the Catholic hierarchy to hold a moratorium on building churches for Catholics of color and to build them schools and colleges instead. At that time Easton believed that, "the Catholic Church...has always been first in extending a helping hand to the needy, in raising up the humble and rebuking the proud...," which helps to explain his insertion of the pro-Catholic element into the last act of <u>Dessalines</u>, while being careful to distinguish between the true faith and the hypocrasy of those who oppressed others in the name of Christ. After Dessalines questions her regarding the "Christian" slavemasters' insistence that slaves must obey the masters, Clarisse, the Catholic heroine figure in <u>Dessalines</u>, responds with a hint of what would now be called "liberation theology" by saying,

The word slave, to my knowledge, does not appear [in the Bible] in manner such as that; for, if 'twere so, could the Israelites, who were His chosen people, thus rebel against their Egyptian masters?Oh! sir, could I but tell thee what I know of the good Christ and his trials, all for wicked man's salvation, thou wouldst soon perceive the difference between the truth and its perversion.³¹

When Easton recovered his health, he and his family returned to the Catholic Church, where they remained members for the rest of their lives.³² Also during 1903, Easton became employed as an accountant for the Green Chili Pepper Company in Los Angeles, and during the rest of that first decade of the 20th century he worked as a field deputy for the city and county assessor's office.

During that first decade in Los Angeles, Easton again became involved in Republican Party politics, this time mostly as a speech writer and occasional speaker. One of the first speeches that he was called upon to give was for the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, June 19, 1903. The L.A. community of color, some white Republicans, and perhaps others joined together in Verdugo Park, just north of downtown L.A., for the celebration. "Prof. [Wm.] Edgar Easton" was the principal speaker for the event, and un-attributed newspaper clippings from his brother Charles' scrapbook reveal how well received his speech was, and the fact that one newspaper reprinted it in full. According to one account:

He reviewed the history of the Negro from his advent in this country up to the present and held his audience spellbound, except when overcome by enthusiasm that was emphasized by a burst of applause.

The theme of this speech was the progress that "the Negro" had made since emancipation, but Easton also gave a lengthy history of the "black man's" heroic participation in every war that the U.S. ever fought, from the Revolution to the then very recent Spanish/ American War. Besides the heroics of battle, Easton paid homage to the "nobility of character" of Southern blacks for not executing vengeance upon the whites for the "250 years of cruelty" they had received at their hands, when they had opportunity to do so during Reconstruction. Easton closed the speech with an appeal to his audience that they would always show the same loyalty to the

Republican Party that they had shown to the United States in all of its wars. The party deserved this loyalty, Easton claimed, "in acknowledgement of its basic principle of civic and political equality."

All of the mayors who served Los Angeles during William Easton's time there, from 1901 until his death in 1935, were Republicans. Since African Americans made up one of their most faithful groups of supporters, Republicans were obligated to at least give ear to their concerns and offer some lip service to addressing those concerns. Sometime during the term of Mayor Arthur C. Harper—between 1906 and 1909—William Easton reminded him of that obligation and, "...demanded and received for the race, in acknowledgement of its loyalty at the polls, an ordinance making the refusal to serve members of the race a misdemeanor with, as a penalty, loss of license to do business."³³

Sometime during the first decade of the 20th century, and perhaps beginning a little earlier, William Easton experienced a bout with alcoholism. According to Charlotta Bass, Easton was an alcoholic when she first met him in 1910.

According to his own testimony, it was due to disappointment in realizing his political ambition to eradicate the conditions in the Lone Star State that held the Negro in virtual bondage...that caused him to leave Texas and come to California. One learned the meaning of frustration from Mr. Easton, a brilliant, a marvelous personality, on the verge of complete disaster in an effort to drown his fears and appease his disappointments with alcoholic beverages.³⁴

Friends and acquaintances who knew of William Easton's former reputation and past accomplishments helped him to recover and to return to writing. Those who came to his aid included Oscar Hudson, the first editor of <u>The New Age</u> race paper, which Hudson founded in 1907, and John Neimore, founder and first editor of Los Angeles' longest-running race paper, <u>The California Eagle</u>. Neimore was also from Texas, and may have known, or known of Easton there. Hudson sold his paper to

well-known Los Angeles race man and politician Frederick Roberts (no relation), and William Easton continued to write articles for him, as well as serve as publicist for <u>The New Age</u>. Those two papers must have been the ones that Delilah Beasley was primarily referring to when she stated that Easton was, "for many years a writer of short, humorous stories for weekly and daily papers." With Easton's past experience as editor of the <u>Texas Blade</u>, it is certain that he was of considerable assistance to those editors as well. Easton also wrote two other shorter plays besides Dessalines and Christophe.³⁵ There was also a white journalist who befriended Easton sometime before 1909, John S. McGroarty, an editorial writer for the L.A. Times who frequently denounced racism and promoted black equality. In a special section of the <u>Times</u> on the leading notable Negro citizens of L.A., published February 12, 1909, McGroarty said the following about "W.E. Easton:"

He has served the city and county faithfully and well as deputy assessor. He is a brilliant man, a scholar and a dramatic author of ability, and an orator possessed of rare persuasive eloquence.

When Easton completed his second four-act play, <u>Chistophe</u>, in 1911, he included a poem that McGroarty wrote for him, "Africanus Triumphans," in the prologue of the play.³⁶

Within a year after <u>Christophe</u> was published, three full productions of the play were staged, one in New York (March 21, 1912), and two in Los Angeles (May 22, and 30, 1912). The first performance was produced by the same woman who produced the first performance of <u>Dessalines</u> at the World's Columbian Exhibition of 1893, the most acclaimed African American actor and producer of serious drama in that era, Henrietta Vinton Davis. Davis' production starred the best-known serious African American male actor of the era, Henri' Strange in the title role, while she took the dual lead female role of Valerie/Pere L'Avenge. One report stated that Easton had his friend Davis in mind for that role when he wrote the play. All three productions received positive notice in several newspapers and were well-attended. The New York production was held at the Lenox Casino in New York City, and both L.A. productions were held at the Gamut Auditorium on Hope Street. Several Easton and Thornton family members were involved in the Los Angeles production of <u>Christophe</u>, including two sons of Mary Thornton Easton's sister, Martha—Luke and Monte House—and William and Mary's youngest daughter, Dorothy, who recited John McGroarty's poem, "Africanus Triumphans."³⁷

<u>Christophe</u>, unlike <u>Dessalines</u>, was not written completely in Elizabethan English, although there are several lapses into that linguistic mode, especially in the final scene. Perhaps Easton had observed the difficulty his audiences may have had with the archaic language of the first play and sought to make <u>Christophe</u> more accessible. On the other hand, there are also many more patches of dialogue in French, without translation in this play. <u>Christophe</u> retained several Shakespearean elements, including: three comic figures—Jacques, La Belle, and Omnes—with only the latter character being a real buffoon; deceit, betrayal and revenge upon the ruler/protagonist by someone who was a close confidante; and a murder/suicide involving the flawed ruler/protagonist in the finale. This second historic drama, though still partly fictionalized, was a little more historically accurate than <u>Dessalines</u>. Easton may have improved his knowledge of Haitian history with the help of a very thorough history of Haiti written by J. N. Leger, a descendant of one of Dessalines' officers, titled, "Haiti: Her History and Her Detractors," published in 1907. There is a section at the beginning of the published play, titled, "Argument of the Play," which is an act-by-

act summary of the story which also includes historic figures and elements not mentioned in the play. In addition to that, Easton wrote a chronological synopsis of Haitian history, which he inserted as an appendice to the book of the play.³⁸

Coinciding with the publication of William Easton's Christophe, in 1911, the first Hollywood motion picture studio—the Nestor Company—was established. Within a few years there were several more movie studios and Hollywood had become the center of this increasingly popular new industry. Easton decided to try to sell some of his stories and story ideas to the local movie studios. According to his granddaughters, Athenaise Smith and Millie Price, what would usually transpire in these encounters went along these lines: William would show them several of his stories, perhaps leaving them with the studio executives for a few days. Upon his return, they would tell him that they liked his stories, but could not understand why so many of them (but not all) were about "colored people" and race issues. Easton would then respond by telling them that it was due to the fact that he was a man of color himself. Immediately upon receiving that revelation, they would inform him that they were no longer interested in his work. On one such occasion, Easton became so infuriated that he tore up his scripts in their presence, while saying some unreported choice words, and stormed out of the studio office. According to Smith and Price, at least one of his story ideas was stolen by one of the studios and became "Madame X," the most remade movie in the history of Hollywood films.³⁹

In 1915, about the same time that the movie studios rejected Easton while admiring his work, the first major Hollywood "blockbuster" premiered—a white supremacist film which glorified the Ku Klux Klan and vilified all African Americans called, "The Birth of a Nation." African Americans in Los Angeles protested the

making of this film as soon as it went into production, and there were protests all over the country when it was released. It was then obvious to all the studio heads that race movies of the sort that William Easton proposed were the exact opposite of what the majority of the American public wanted to see at that time.⁴⁰

Although Easton may have had reason to be even more discouraged than most people about the success of "The Birth of a Nation," a very positive development in his life that occurred later that same year made it possible for him to recover from any depression. His work as a Republican Party activist for 33 years was rewarded with the well-paying, though humble-titled position of Custodian of the State offices at the California Sub-Capitol at Exposition Park in Los Angeles. This was a supervisory position in which Easton was responsible for supervising, hiring, and firing the janitorial and maintenance staff of the offices, the vast majority of whom were white. Easton used this opportunity to hire many men of color to join his staff, although the majority of people he supervised during his tenure there were white. Several of the men of color that he hired were college graduates or college students who had just arrived in Los Angeles and were directed through the community grapevine to "go talk to Mr. Easton." Several of these young men later became established in professions such as lawyers, judges, doctors, and educators.⁴¹ The Custodian of the Sub-Capitol position was a patronage political appointment that Easton had earned by campaigning for and writing speeches for California Governor Hiram Johnson. Easton was obviously over-qualified for the position, and seven months after his hiring he was provided an opportunity to prove that. The Civil Service Exam system was inaugurated at that time and since Easton's government position fell under those auspices, he was required to take the exam and re-apply for his job. He competed

against sixteen white men for the job and scored higher than all of them on the exam. Easton remained in that job until 1919 when he was appointed manager of the State Purchasing Office in the Sub-capitol.⁴²

William Easton was appointed by the Department of War Speakers Bureau in 1918 to give speeches in support of U.S. participation in World War One. Easton's primary duty for the Speaker's Bureau was to serve as one of several "Four Minute Men" in southern California, which meant giving speeches of approximately four minutes in length in movie theaters while they changed reels, or during intermissions at other public entertainment venues. After receiving the appointment, Easton sent a letter of thanks for the appointment to Emmett Scott, the Assistant Secretary in the War department who was in charge of that program. The letter seems to be much like the type of patriotic pep rally speech that the government expected him to give, but, being William Easton, he was compelled to turn these speeches into an appeal for racial justice in America. This excerpt from that letter makes it clear how Easton intended to use this opportunity:

Every American citizen, be he of whatever race, creed or national derivation, should be a warm supporter of the United States in this great war for World's Democracy and no citizen more so than the American Negro. To him, in an especial manner, an appeal to arms for Liberty should have an especial significance and should possess all of the qualities of a command.

The spirit of patriotism that actuated him to become a colossal figure in the Civil War which resulted in the manumission of four million of his brethren again should actuate him; a war equally as Holy and more sweeping in its results for Human Freedom. There can be no World Democracy which does not include the races of darker integument; there can be no World Democracy that fails to effect favorably the present status of the Negro in the American sun. This is so logical, that to deny or combat it would be irrational and, when Peace is attained by the Allies, will be its best argument for the perpetuation of a World's Democracy for which they fought and won.⁴³

We cannot be certain how much William Easton may have actually believed the official rhetoric about a "war for World Democracy," or a "war to end all wars," but we do know that he was not naive. He was very well-informed and extremely politically savvy. Claude Hudson, a founder of the Los Angeles chapter of the NAACP, and long time activist and community leader once told William Easton's daughter, Dorothy, "Everything I learned about politics I learned from your father, Professor Easton."⁴⁴ Undoubtedly, Easton knew what white politicians wanted to hear, and he knew the effectiveness of using their own words when appealing to them to live up to their stated ideals.

Like the abolitionists, uplift activists, and Revolutionary War veterans of previous generations, who held up the words of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence when appealing for equality in America, Easton could use the words of American leaders of his day to appeal for equal opportunity for people of color in a worldwide, or international context. The unfinished revolution could now be spread as a cause for oppressed people around the world to embrace, with the U.S. taking the lead by setting an example and ending racial discrimination within its own gates. But, like Benjamin Roberts, Hosea Easton, James Easton and all of their fellow activists, and the Hatians who called upon the French revolutionaries to consistantly apply their liberation rhetoric to people of color, William Easton surely knew not to expect too much. After all, the American president who was responsible for those humanitarian rallying cries of World War I, and who proposed the League of Nations also loved the film, "Birth of a Nation."⁴⁵ Nevertheless, such obstacles could not prevent Easton from trying to finish the American Revolution. That was his life's work.

¹ There were actually three Hosea Eastons in the family: Rev. Hosea had a son named Hosea, born in 1835. See: Norfolk County, Mass. Probate Records, vol. 80, 1847, pp. 1013-1014, 1179, and 1406; U.S. Census for 1850, Hartford County, Connecticut, pg. 289B, Town of Bloomfield, and pg. 266, City of Hartford; 1860 U.S. Census, City of Hartford, pg. 1210; Vital Records of Hartford County, FHL Microfilm roll #1313828, Item 3, pg. 51 Hosea the minstrel was the son of Rev. Hosea's other son, Sampson. A story on Hosea Easton and minstrelsy in 19th-century Australia can be found at http://www.nugrape.net/minstrel.htm It also includes an image of Easton's actual Australian death certificate. In addition, see, Errol G. Hill and James V. Hatch, <u>A History of African American Theater</u>, London, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 107-134, esp., 115 and 126 for Hosea Easton.

² William Edgar Easton, <u>Dessalines, a dramatic tale: a single chapter from Haiti's history</u>, J. W. Burson Company, 1893, pp. v, vii.

³ Although there were several short articles regarding performances of Easton's plays in newspapers of his day, only one thorough, scholarly critique of an Easton play has been published in recent decades, Robert Fehrenbach's "William Edgar Easton's Dessalines: a Nineteenth Century Drama of Black Pride," <u>CLA Journal</u>, Vol. 19, 1975, pp. 75-89. Hill and Hatch (pp. 88-89, 138-139) do a great job of describing the historical context in which William Easton worked, and some of the people involved in producing and performing his works. See also, Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., <u>Black American Writing from the Nadir: The Evolution of a Literary Tradition, 1877-1915</u>, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1989

⁴ <u>Crisis</u>, August, 1930, page 276. Born at Titicut, Moses Easton lived much of his life with the Dartmouth area Wampanoags and in neighboring New Bedford. In 1813, Moses paid Paul Cuffe 15 dollars "towards my son Chas. voyage." Charles was William Easton's grandfather. There is no further information on the voyage. Paul Cuffe Papers in the New Bedford Free Public Library. Thanks to Tina Furtado for helping me to locate the original document when the microfilm copy was too difficult to read. What do William Easton's repeated references to James and Hosea Easton, and to Paul Cuffe say about the collective memory of the African American community regarding those men at the turn of the twentieth century? Were they still well-remembered, or was Easton hoping to re-introduce them into that collective memory?

⁵ Frank L. Mather, <u>Who's Who of the Colored Race</u>, Chicago, self-published, 1915, pg. 98. Delilah L. Beasley, <u>The Negro Trailblazers of California</u>, Los Angeles, by author, 1919, reprint, 1998, N.Y., G. K. Hall & Co., pp.258-259, 273-274. "A Great Editor, Author, and Dramatist," unidentified newspaper clipping from Charles F. Easton Jr.'s scrapbook, dated, June 27, 1914. "Social Uplift", <u>Crisis</u>, Vol. 11, no. 2, pg. 61. "Educated Negro Laymen," <u>Los Angeles Times</u>, Feb. 12, 1909, Vol. 3, no.5, pg. 3. Charlotta A. Bass, <u>Forty Years: Memoirs From the Pages of a Newspaper</u>, Los Angeles, self-published, 1960, pp. 33-35. Maud Cuney-Hare, <u>Norris Wright Cuney:a Tribune of the Black People</u>, New York, The

Crisis Publishing Company, 1913, reprint, New York, G.K. Hall & Co., 1995, pp. 99, 174, 209. An excellent recent book on African American history in Los Angeles, Douglas Flamming, <u>Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America</u>, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2005, pp. 38-39, 61-62, 165, describes Easton's political life at length. On his Catholic organization activities, see, Cyprian Davis, <u>The History of Black Catholics in the United States</u>, N. Y., Crossroads, 1990, pp. 179-180,

187, and, David Spalding, "The Negro Catholic Congresses, 1889-1894," <u>Catholic Historical Review</u> 55, 1969: pp. 337-57.

⁶ Why "nearly" all activists of color, rather than simply "all?" Because there have always been a small number, especially in recent decades, who have felt free to pursue other vital world issues, such as environmental, world health, anti-war, and economic justice issues. But very few of these have been able to completely ignore racism, as the issues are all so closely connected and intertwined. Many of us long for the day when the battle against racism is over and we are free not to even think about it except in times of intentional commemoration.

Charles F. Easton Jr. was also an activist against racism and for the uplift of his people, but on a more limited scale than William. While William was sent away to the finest schools, through the assistance of a wealthy relative in their mother's family, Charles stayed in New Bedford, went through the local public schools and followed the trade of his father: he became a barber. But he was also active in community organizations, holding several offices in the local chapter of the Knights of Pythias, an African American fraternal organization, including president. He kept a scrapbook of articles on racial and other social issues, including many clippings about the deeds of his younger brother. The scrapbook was made from the account ledger of his mother, Marie, who was a self-employed seamstress.

- ⁸ Elizabeth Rauel Bethel...(find and add later). William C. Nell, Colored Patriots of the American Revolution, Boston, Robert F. Wallcut, 1855.
- ⁹ "Recognition of the Liberian Republic", <u>The North Star</u>, January 5, 1849. The article deals with the U.S. refusal to recognize both Liberia and Haiti.
- ¹⁰ James T. Holly, "Thoughts on Hayti," in, C. Peter Ripley, ed., <u>Witness for Freedom: African</u> American Voices on Race, Slavery, and Emancipation, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1993, pg. 198. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 191-193. Patrick Rael, Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2002, pp. 223-226.
- ¹¹ Lewis, John W., The Life, Labors, and Travels of Elder Charles Bowles, of the Freewill Baptist Denomination, Watertown, CT, Ingalls and Stowell's Steam Press, 1852, quoted and cited in Patrick Rael, Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2002, pp.224.

- 13 Benjamin Quarles, Black Abolitionists, London, Oxford University Press, 1969, pp.225-237. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, "The Affirmation of Manhood: black Garrisonians in Antebellum Boston," in, Donald M. Jacobs, ed., Courage and Conscience: Black and White Abolitionists in Boston, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1993. ¹⁴ J. N. Leger, <u>Haiti: Her History and Her Detractors</u>, New York, The Neale Publishing Company,
- 1907, pp. 158-160. Carolyn E. Fick, The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution From Below, Knoxville, Tenn., University of Tennessee Press, 1990, pp. 231-234.
- ¹⁵ Fehrenbach, "William Edgar Easton's Dessalines...", pp. 75-76.
- ¹⁶ Errol Hill, perhaps the leading scholar of the history of African American theater, wrote that, "The Haitian revolution engendered more plays by black authors than any other single event in the history of the race." He also pointed out that William Edgar Easton was the first of "over a dozen" black playwrights to write such plays, with the publication of <u>Dessalines</u> in 1893. Errol Hill, "The Revolutionary Tradition in Black Drama," Theatre Journal, Vol. 38, No. 4, Dec., 1986, pg. 414.
- 17 Easton also refers to the mixed --race people as "mulattoes," "Franks," and "French," and Haitians and French of the 19th century also referred to them as "affranchise." I feel free to use all of these terms, along with "mixed-race," interchangeably.
- 18 The name, Haiti was the name that the original inhabitants of the island, the Arawak Indians, called the island. Dessalines' government restored the name on Independence Day, January 1, 1804. Fick, pg. 236. ¹⁹ Leger, pp. 41-47.
- ²⁰ Letter from Charles Legett to Marie Legett, July 6, 1843, in the collection of Lorraine Khazan, New Bedford, Massachusetts.
- ²¹ Rigaud, no doubt, is based on the mulatto general, Andre' Rigaud, who was educated at Bordeaux, France, a goldsmith by trade, and who spent nearly the entire Haitian Revolution fighting for the rights of the mulatto segment of that society, usually by allying himself with France in exchange for promises of equality.
- 22 Dessalines, Act One, Scene Two, pg. 17. The affranchise, for the most part, considered themselves to be superior to the enslaved people of African descent, but not necessarily because of skin color or any genetic traits. They felt that they were superior because the institution of slavery had prevented the enslaved from acquiring the benefits of "civilization" and especially a French education. This is apparent from the many references to the slaves, in conversations between Rigaud and Lefebre, and others, as "beasts" and "savages," or as persons with untempered passions.

²³ Ibid., Act 3, Scene 1, pg. 78.

- ²⁴ Cuney-Hare, Norris Wright Cuney..., pp. xx-xxi, 3-7. Merline Petrie, The Handbook of Texas Online, http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/CC/fcu20 print.html
- ²⁵ Interview with Athenaise Smith and Millie Price, Oxnard, California, December 21, 1998. Allen C. Clark, "Doctor and Mrs. William Thornton," Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Vol. 18, May, 1914, pp. 144-203. (Add note on Banneker) James Hugo Johnston, Race Relations in Virginia

¹² Rael, pg. 224

and Miscegenation in the South, 1776-1860, dissertation, University of Chicago, 1937, pg. 189 (I will add other citations on that quote later during revisions, when I have more time to find them in my files of notes.)

- ²⁶ U. S. Census, 1880 for Travis County, Texas, city of Austin, Enumeration District 138, page 15, family #124. E-mail correspondence with Matthew G. Hyland, doctoral student and intern at Montpelier, October 19, 1998. "Montpelier Enslaved Community," Montpelier.org webpage.
- ²⁷ Beverly Daniel Tatum, <u>"Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?</u>", New York, Basic Books, 1997
- ²⁸ Citations for Eric Foner, etc.
- ²⁹ Bass, Forty Years..., pg. 33.

³⁰ Joel Williamson, <u>The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since</u>

Emancipation, N.Y., Oxford University Press, 1984

³² Davis, <u>History of Black Catholics...</u>, pg. 179. Smith and Price interview.

- ³⁴ Bass, Forty Years..., pp.33-34.
- ³⁵ Easton's two other plays were both one act plays, and there is no record of them ever being performed or published. One was titled, "Is She a Lady in the Underworld," and the other was called, "Misery in Bohemia." References to these plays found in, Mather, <u>Who's Who...</u>, pg. 98, and Hill and Hatch, <u>History of African American Theater</u>, pg. 139. Beasley, pg. 258.
- ³⁶ William Edgar Easton, <u>Christophe: A Tragedy in Prose of Imperial Haiti</u>, Los Angeles, Press GraftonPublishing Company, 1911.
- ³⁷ Hill and Hatch, <u>History of African American Theater</u>, pp. 89, 138-139.
- ³⁸ J. N. Leger, <u>Haiti: Her History and Her Detractors</u>, New York, The Neale Publishing Company, 1907. The author, apparently a Haitian envoy to the U.S., claimed for himself the title of, "Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Haiti in the United States," which appears under his name on the title page. Even so, Easton may have still read the book.
- ³⁹ Smith and Price interview, December 21, 1998. Leonard Maltin, <u>Leonard Maltin's 2006 Movie Guide</u>, New York, Signet, 2005, pg. 795. "Madame X" was filmed in 1906, 1916, 1929, 1937, and 1966.
- ⁴⁰ Joel Williamson, <u>The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since</u> <u>Emancipation</u>, N.Y., Oxford University Press, 1984, pg. 176. Flamming, pp. 88-89.
- ⁴¹ Beasley, pg. 259. Flamming, pg. 62. Bass, pg. 34. <u>Crisis</u>, December, 1915, pg. 61. Smith and Price interview, Dec., 1998. Although my mother and aunt were very certain that Easton had hired several promising young men of color who later went on to notable professional careers, the only one that they could name on that day was a "Judge David Williams."
- ⁴² Beasley, pg. 259. Flamming, pg. 62 Mrs. Smith stated that Easton wrote speeches for "five different California governors," while in a separate interview, Mrs. Price gave the number as three. Delilah Beasley mentioned that Easton was a close associate of Johnson's successor, William D. Stephens, so he was likely one of them. Another may have been Johnson's predecessor, James N. Gillett.
- ⁴³ The entire letter and Scott's response was printed, without comment, in Beasley, pp. 273-274. (See appendix.)
- ⁴⁴ Smith interview, Dec. 21, 1998.
- ⁴⁵ Williamson, pg. 176. Woodrow Wilson said about the film, its perverse version of history, and its racist slander against African Americans, "It is all so terribly true." He then arranged for it to be shown in the White Hose to his cabinet members, then a second showing for the Supreme Court Justices.

³¹ Dessalines, pg. 62.

³³ Beasley, pg. 259.

Appendix I

Transcription of the Petition of John Simon to the Governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony, September 14, 1753

(from the Massachusetts State Archive Colonial Records collection, Vol. 32: 419-421)

To His Excellency William Shirley Esq. Captine and Governer in Cheif in and over his Majesty's Provice of the Massachusetts Bay in New-England and the Hon. His Majesty's council & house of Representatives in the Gen. Court Asembled at Boston

The Humble Petition of John Simon of Titecutt Indian man and preacher their to Indians at this present time approved of by the Corporation in his own name and behalf of the little flock he has their with him~

Humbly begs leave to enform this Honoured Court of the great grievances that we now ly under~ That notwithstanding the care that was taken by our Antient Ansestors to prevent our selling of Land and coming to want as will appear by the Records if examin'd into~

Yett by the repeated entreaty's of us Indians and the Indulgence of this Honour'd Court, we have parted with almost all our Lands in that place. And when some of us by sickness or by other Accidents has been reduced to great want and Nessecity and to prevent our Suffering it may be right to sell some Land but the great sale of Lands by some of our Indians have obtain'd at this Court of late we apprehend to be rong for two reasons~ First that they got in Debt by a Laisey & indolent life, and the encouragement of some of our English Neighbours who prompt them on to run in Debt on purposes to sell their land

Secondly two Indians who has sold large tracts of land we Aprehend had no write to any Land at all further than to sitt down and improve with us. This argument we have offer'd to the Honourable Committee's that came from this Court to sell Lands but they tell us it is too late for the sale is granted and they must do the work, but if we would stop these Indians from selling Land we should have come to the General Court sooner~ The two Indians I now speak of are Stephen David and James Thomas who tho' they have sold more Land than would fetch us five Hundred pounds Lawfull Money, Yett we Understand they have offer'd a petition to the Guardians for approbation for the sale of more lands, we Humbly pray may not be granted. for the two reasons above mentioned~ In the first place that Stephen David has led a very bad and Wicked life. and never had any rite to sell Land in Titecutt further than an Artfull Write that some of the English Neighbour's found out for him to gett away our Lands as we think

As to James Thomas he never had any rite to any of our Titicutt Lands till before the year 1743. When he got a deed of gift from Mary Mooet of about Sixty Acres and soon after He came to this Court for Liberty to sell it which accordingly was done and he [sold?] all that he had any rite too. And our English Neighbour's [illegible] that he

could have leave for sale prompt him on to run in Debt and he being very prood & Laisey was willing to do it~

And now for near ten years he has lived that life, and we believe has never done one months work in the whole time. But constantly comes to this Court for the sale of Lands which has always been granted and Since that first sale he has sold five different Sales. The last of which takes in the Meeting House in which we meet to Worship in and where I now live, So that I even cant have Liberty to gett a little wood for my Fire, although I am now very unable to gett it as I have but one Legg left~ And your humble petitioner would humbly pray your Excellency and Honour's to take these things under your Consideration and do what in your Wisdom you shall think fit. And that the little Society of us be not wholly brock up. For all the Support your petitioner has is only twelve pounds old tenor a year as a preacher paid me by the Corporation, and a Small pention of fifteen pounds old tenor for the loss of my Legg in the late Expedition which was the fifth time I ventur'd my Life in Defence of the English people~

And this James goes now Clothed in Broad Cloak Beaver Hatt Watch in his pockett and his Coffee Tea & Chocklate and appears very much like a gentleman at home & abroad and as we understand is now in Debt Seven or Eight Hundred pounds old tenor to one Gentleman who no Doubt intends to have a good [Peneath?] of land for it. Which we humbly pray may not be granted before wee have a hearing at this Court, or some other methode that your Excellency and Honours shall think fit~

And that some other Methode may be taken to improve the Indian Lands more for our benefitt than has been~

And your humble petitioner for himself and his Small Flock as in Duty bound Shall ever pray

John Simon

(Note: the "Corporation" to which Simon refers, was most likely the Corporation for the Promotion of the Gospel in Foreign Lands, under which he was apparently ordained.)

Reply of the General Court to John Simon's Petition Mass. Archives, Vol. 32: 421

In the House of Representatives Sept. 14th 1753~ Ordered that the Guardians for the Titicut Indians Take Special Care that they approbate no petition from Stephen David or James Thomas for sale of Land until they Strictly Examine into the right which they may respectively have to the Lands they may petition to Sell. inasmuch as it is Suggested to this Court that the said Stephen & James have sold Considerable Lands that they had no right to and are now applying to the said Guardians for their approbation for the sale of more

Sent up for Concurrence T Hubbard Spkr. [signature] In Council Sept. 14, 1753 Read & Concur'd Thos. Clarke [illegible] [signature] Consented to, W Shirley [signature] List of Personal and Business property of the Easton family in North Bridgewater that was illegally confiscated by the sheriff in 1819. Plymouth Court of Common Pleas, August, 1819, vol. 27, pp. 362-363.

11. Caleb Easton and Sylvanus Easton (Bridgewater Traders), and "Copartners in trade jointly negotiating business under the firm of C. and S. Easton" v. Edward Vinton (Bridgewater Deputy Sheriff). Trespass, for seizing, taking and carrying away on 18 May 1819 at Bridgewater "thirty bushels of potatoes of the value of ten dollars, seventy five pound of cast steel of the value of nineteen dollars and fifty cents, one hundred pounds of English blistered steel of the value of sixteen dollars, two and one half dozen of Refuge axes of the value of twenty dollars, one dozen post axes value of thirteen dollars, two broad axes value of seven dollars, six adzes of the value of twelve dollars, thirty five hundred weight of scrap iron of the value of sixty dollars, five hundred of old junk iron value of twenty dollars, two hundred pounds axles tree moulds value of fourteen dollars, twelve cider barrels and one hogshead value of twelve dollars, two draft chains value of five dollars and fifty cents, one set of waggon wheels, axles trees and shafts of the value of eighteen dollars, one pair of chaise wheels value of fourteen dollars, one grindstone value of three dollars, one hundred weight of bar iron value of five dollars, one horse cart and harness value of twenty dollars, seven dung forks value of seven dollars, nineteen draw shaves value of nineteen dollars, twenty double plain irons value of thirteen dollars and thirty three cents, one coal waggon and wheels of the value of twenty five dollars, two steel scythes of the value of three dollars and fifty cents, ten hundred weight of English Hay of the value of ten dollars, two dozen chizels value of ten dollars, two large hoes value of three dollars, one hatchet, billhook and squares value of two dollars and fifty cents, one peck of peas value of one dollar, one and a half peck beans value one dollar, two pair horse traises value seven dollars, one plough value two dollars, one saddle of value five dollars, two bridles value two dollars and fifty cents, two bushels oats value one dollar, one sleigh and Bells value twenty two dollars, one iron bar value four dollars, one set horse fetters value one dollar, one par value one dollar, four gridirons value four dollars, one string of cart boxes value one dollar, three pair harnesses value two dollars, one Rye Sieve value one dollar, one chair and a parcel of washers value one dollar and fifty cents, one coopers axe value two dollars, three and half bushels of Barley value of three dollars, and fifty cents, one half dozen broad hatchets value ten dollars, eight dry casks value of four dollars then and there found and being. Also with force and arms then and there took, and drove away one sow and nine pigs the property of the said Caleb and Sylvanus of the value of thirty dollars, then and there being, all said goods and chattels sow and pigs together being of the value of four hundred and sixty eight dollars." Jury found deft. guilty and awarded pltfs. \$597 and [blank] costs. Appealed by deft.

Appendix III

William Easton's letter to Emmett Scott, the Assistant Secretary in the War Department, followed by Scott's response. Reprinted from Delilah Beasley's Negro Trailblazers of California, pp. 273-274.

"Los Angeles, April 4, 1918.

(Hon. Emmett J. Scott, Special Assistant Secretary War Department, Washington, D. C. "Dear Sir: Kindly permit me to accept with thanks the honor you have vouch-safed me in tendering me the position on the Speaker's Bureau of the War Department, in your division. Every American citizen, be he of whatever race, creed or national derivation, should be a warm supporter of the United States in this great war for World's Democracy and no citizen more so than the American Negro. To him, in an especial manner, an appeal to arms for Liberty should have an especial significance and should possess all of the qualities of a command.

"The spirit of patriotism that actuated him to become a colossal figure in the Civil War which resulted in the manumission of four million of his brethern again should actuate him; a war equally as Holy and more sweeping in its results for Human Free-dom. There can be no World Democracy which does not include the races of darker integument; there can be no World Democracy that fails to affect favorably the present

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status of the Negro in the American sun. This is so logical, that to deny or combating would be irrational and, when Peace is attained by the Allies, will be its best argument for the perpetuation of a World's Democracy for which they fought and won. "Out of this war will come new conditions, new lines of thought and a some spiritual direction. Every soldier who has been abroad fighting for Human Liber

who, in the presence of death, communed with his soul and who has survived this gr struggle for a World's Democracy, will return to his country a missionary for conditions of faith and practice. There shall be no excuse, no shame for a Democra charged with race discrimination; no carping criticism, no finger of scorn pointed by the Central Powers when we lay claim to be an exemplary Democracy for all world.

"The world will be better because of this war, and if the white American be first fill the trenches, first to sail beneath the seas, and first to soar through the night, it is not because the Blackman was reluctant, but because of restricted opp tunity, and God takes cognizance of all these things. This war is educational; it is the conscience of men in training; it is drawing men closer to God and closer to other, and when such time comes, Ho sees fit to give us peace, it will be a lasting in universal peace.

"Yours very sincerely, "(Signed) WILLIAM E. EASTON "National Representative All American League of California

"War Department, Washington, April 16, 1918

"Mr. William E. Easton, National Representative All American League of Californi

Los Angeles. "Dear Mr. Easton: Thank you for your letter dated April 4, expressing your with reference to the great war for world democracy. The sentiment expressed by with reference to the great war for world democracy. The sentiment expressed by altogether worthy, and I am pleased to have you write me in this strain. Let thank you for your acceptance of the invitation to serve as a member of the Brea Bureau.

> "Yours very sincerely, "(Signed) EMMETT J. Scout "Special Assistant, Secretary of War

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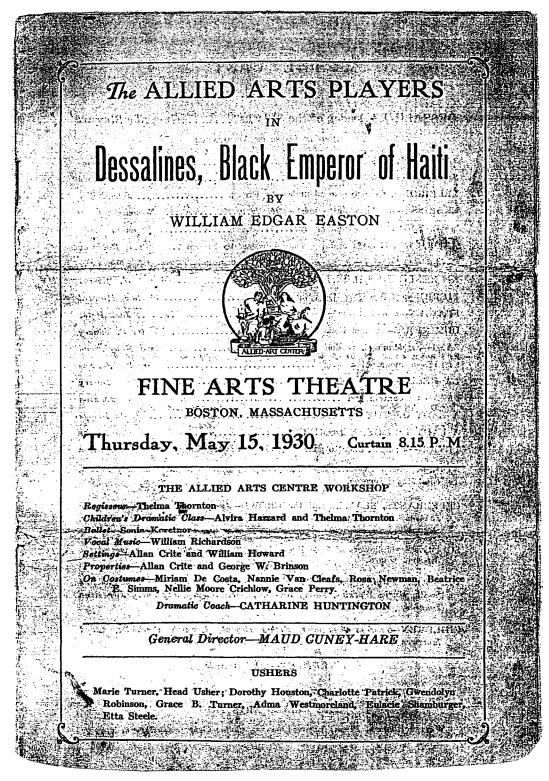
Appendix IV

Page from Charles F. Easton Jr.'s scrapbook, showing articles about his brother's accomplishments. Their mother's business ledger, on which Charles pasted the articles is visible on the right, with the date "1867" in the upper right corner.



Appendix V

Playbill for the last known performance of "Dessalines," in May of 1930, five years before William Easton's death. Maud Cuney-Hare directed.



Some Notes on Methodology and Sources

The difficulties involved in doing biographical research on free people of color in the colonial and antebellum periods are many. Socially marginalized people, including some poor "whites", as well as people of color, were often omitted from official records of that era, such as birth, marriage and death records, local histories, newspaper accounts, and church records. Occasionally, a local clerk would put an addendum at the end of a list of marriages, deaths, or other vital records, under the heading, "blacks", or, "negroes". Nevertheless, many families and individuals were omitted even from such addenda. When people of color were mentioned in the public records of New England towns, their names were usually interspersed among the whites, rather than in addenda or separate records. Nevertheless, exclusion or omission of marginalized people from public records was a common practice. To be fair, it should be pointed out that these omissions were not always intentional on the part of local record keepers or civil authorities, but due largely to the reality of limited social contact between marginalized peoples and the mainstream society- a circumstance in which births, marriages, and deaths of marginalized people often went unreported to local officials.

Fortunately, the vital records for nearly every Massachusetts town, up to the year 1850, were gathered and re-published during the late nineteenth century, in which church records, which included people of color who were members of "white" churches, were used to supplement the incomplete town and county vital records. Before the wide-spread establishment of Afro-American church denominations between the 1790s and 1840s, it was common for people of color to belong to the

same churches as the local Euro-Americans. That tradition began when slavery still existed in the North and slave owners would not only bring their slaves to church, but they would also baptize and marry them to each other (or to free people of color) there as well. These more complete published vital records have proven useful, and they are alphabetized or have alphabetical indexes in which the people of color are usually included right alongside the other names, although sometimes they are added in at the end of a section, as in the original records. Many local records are also now widely available on the internet, but usually require a subscription fee to access the sites.

Marginalization and omission from the vital records of colonial English and white American society especially pertained to people who lived in Massachusetts' American Indian communities, which included many free "blacks" and "mustees"¹, as well as a relatively few "whites". Non-Indian members of Indian communities usually had married into and/or been adopted into these communities. Although members of Indian communities were subject to colonial English and later to state laws, they were considered to be alien to white society, and were not admitted to American citizenship or taxed, according to the U.S. Constitution². While Indians and other free people of color were welcome to associate with whites as laborers, servants, or slaves, they were not generally expected to socialize with whites as equal citizens of the same society. Conversion to or adaptation of Christianity by Indians and blacks, along with their assimilation to English or Anglo-American culture and economics, did not necessarily make them any more acceptable to most "whites" as social equals. These facts about exclusion of members of Indian communities help explain why there are very few records regarding the Easton family from the time before they left the

Wampanoag community of Titicut, sometime between the late 1750s and the American Revolution.³

During the mid-nineteenth century there was a profusion of town histories published on nearly all of the towns in Massachusetts. They were usually written by a local gentleman scholar from a family of long and prominent standing in the community and it seems that every town "had to have one". These local histories were generally very exclusive, focusing on the deeds of prominent citizens and omitting even some of the white citizens who were not normally marginalized.

It is understandable, therefore, how people of color were seldom mentioned at all in these works. When blacks were given any notice it was usually for some comic relief, such as in stories about inept, foolish, superstitious or ignorant slaves. Such mention is generally of no use to the researcher attempting to reconstruct the lives of people of color, except perhaps in those instances in which the name of the slave (normally only a first name) is given along with the name of his owner. Indians were usually acknowledged in those histories only as the former inhabitants of the lands on which the town stands, and were generally considered to be extinct. Many of these histories, as well as many mid-nineteenth century Massachusetts newspapers, included stories about the "last Indian" to live in that town, in which the author typically alleged that the Indian was the last of his or her tribe. In a subtle acknowledgement that there may be some mixed-race descendants of the tribe still remaining, they would usually add the phrase, "full-blooded", after the word, "last".

Fortunately, or, perhaps more accurately, due to the remarkable attributes and accomplishments of the Easton family, one local historian of North Bridgewater, Bradford Kingman, gave the Eastons an untypically large amount of notice compared

to that usually given to people of color. Published in 1866, at a time when it was popularly considered patriotic to be anti-slavery, Kingman's history of North Bridgewater devotes nearly two pages to the "colored people" of the town's history, both during slavery times and after. After listing the names of several people of color who at one time had lived in the town, Kingman makes the following statement regarding the Eastons:

There is one family of these people who have become quite numerous, - the descendants of James Easton, who came from Middleboro' previous to the incorporation of the town. He had seven children, three of whom settled in this vicinity. Caleb married, and had six children, some of whom are now residents of the town.⁴

In a chapter of the book which covers the manufacturing history of North Bridgewater, Kingman provides us with a short paragraph on James Easton and Sons' iron business. Here we find a descriptive list of the products which the Eastons manufactured, the approximate years in which the business operated, and mention of the location of their foundry within the town. It is from this location description, combined with the Easton land deeds registered with Plymouth County and several maps, that I was able to pinpoint the exact location of the Easton homestead and foundry.⁵ The Eastons were one of only two families of color mentioned in Kingman's genealogical register of the families of North Bridgewater. The other family of color, the Sewells, were related to the Eastons by two different marriages. The family register information was also very helpful to my work, providing much useful information on marriages and inter-family relations.⁶ Interestingly, Kingman wrote a second edition of this work in 1895, while Jim Crow segregation and popular racism were on the rise throughout America, and in that edition there was absolutely no mention of the Eastons or any other people of color.⁷ One type of official record in which marginalized people have been traditionally *in*cluded beyond their demographic proportions, and almost never intentionally *ex*cluded, is the court records. These records provide us with some evidence and insight regarding the types of legal conflicts and difficulties that marginalized people would often find themselves in during these eras. We can also find in the court records much evidence regarding their social context, including the attitudes of the social leaders towards them, and the status and treatment that was bestowed upon poor and marginalized people by the majority. Massachusetts has a long history of meticulous record-keeping, dating back to the earliest colonial settlements, and court records are certainly no exception to that rule. Access to these records for historians and other researchers has improved greatly in the last two decades.

Prior to the late 1970s, Massachusetts court records were not very accessible, unless one was willing and able to travel to the county seats where they are kept and spend long hours, days, or weeks in musty courthouse basements carefully perusing the fragile and dilapidated documents. Since that time, many of these records have been microfilmed, and some have now been transcribed and even made available on CD discs.⁸ Thanks largely to this technological development, I was able to find more than fifty Plymouth county court documents involving the Easton family members, their in-laws and relatives, or other associates.

Many of these court records were related to James Easton and Sons' business expenses and the debts incurred therein. Although they usually involve the Eastons as defendants, owing people money, on some occasions the Eastons were the plaintiffs, suing to recover money owed to them. In several of these cases the Eastons won

judgements against "white" men of standing in their community, from all-white-male juries. In the one rare case of an Easton being accused of a violent crime, James Easton's son, Sylvanus, was accused and convicted of assault against an Anglo-American man, but got the verdict overturned on appeal to the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court.⁹ Records such as these provide us with some unusual details on the lives of free people of color during these foundational eras, as well as on some of the complexities and nuances of the structure of the society in which they lived.

In researching the Eastons, Plymouth County land deed records also proved to be very useful. Fifty-three such records, beginning with James Easton's father on the Titticut Indian Reservation in 1742, followed by many land deals involving James and his immediate family and grandchildren through the 1850s, have been found to date. These records reveal the extent of James Easton's land holdings (120 total acres in North Bridgewater), as well as: the exact location of these lands; who he purchased them from and who he sold land to, and when; the market value of his lands; and who his neighbors were. They also provide us with a chronological timeline of Easton's rise to relative prosperity. By comparing these records to the court records, along with what little was written in local histories and personal accounts, certain hypotheses regarding Easton's business ventures can be made. These combined records also provide us with the names of some Easton relatives, allies, and adversaries.

Interestingly, in light of the voluminous court and land deed records in which they were involved, the Eastons do not appear in the Plymouth County probate records at all. The reasons for this fact could be a combination of cultural and experiential factors, as well as Easton family dynamics. Native American cultural traditions relating to property redistribution and inheritance were very clearly laid out

and understood by all family and community members, and the Titticut Wampanoags surely were no exception to that rule. In such societies, disputes over inheritance were very rare, which, along with their multitude of reasons to distrust the English and American court systems, probably made the idea of filing with probate courts unnecessary and unappealing. The Eastons certainly had enough reasons to form an aversion to the court system, based on the majority of their experiences therein. Indigenous peoples, both Native American and African, would give away their possessions frequently during social ceremonies, and the well-being of the extended family and community was often a higher priority than the accumulation of personal wealth.¹⁰ Though tempered over time by their involvement with and participation in the majority American society, such cultural attitudes towards property, family, and community, may have remained to some extent within the Easton family well into the mid-nineteenth century.

Other types of records and sources that proved useful to this research are cited in the endnotes at the end of each chapter and in the bibliography. Newspapers of the period and census records were also among the more useful sources.

As a final note on methodology, an explanation of the racial terminology used in this dissertation would be appropriate and helpful at this point. I am convinced by modern scientific evidence, as well as by the history of the construction of the commonly used racial terms and categories, that these terms and categories are arbitrary, indefinable, and therefore meaningless in any absolute or concrete way. The various terms are used and defined differently, depending on who is using them, and on their historical and social context. This is especially problematic in the history of labeling people of mixed African and Native American ancestry, such as the

Eastons.¹¹ One of the most serious problems with the standard usage of racial terminology is that such terms serve to obscure, ignore, or minimize the pervasive reality of "interracial" mixture, which by the mid-eighteenth century was quite extensive.¹² I realize that most historians are aware of these deficiencies in the use of common racial terminology, but generally do not find the terms problematic enough to discard or reconfigure. Nevertheless, for the sake of clarity and accuracy, especially in a study of a "tri-racial" American family such as the Eastons, I feel that these inadequacies in terminology must be addressed and clarified when possible and as necessary. I think that where I differ from many other historians is in how necessary I feel this process is.

Since I do not subscribe to the idea that any of the commonly accepted racial terms are valid, I use them interchangably, in a variety of types of applications, when I deem such use necessary or appropriate for the sake of clarity or to illustrate a point. Wherever appropriate, and when the information is available, I use the categorical terms by which a particular individual referred to him or herself, thus reinforcing the validity of the person's self-identification. When referring to categories mentioned in particular documents, I use the terminology found therein and apply quotation marks when necessary. Sometimes I use two or more categorical terms to describe persons of mixed ancestry, even though many documents regarding such persons only refer to one ancestral category, the common example being the use of terms that signify African ancestry exclusively, such as "black", or "Negro", when an individual is known to also have ancestry from one or two other continents.

Beyond the purpose of clarification and accuracy, my methods of applying and using racial terms are also designed to make a point regarding the absurdity of the

racial categorization tradition. Another way in which I make that point is to use quotation marks around the accepted, quick and easy racial terms, such as "white", "black", or "Indian". However, when I grow weary of making the point, or I think that such reminders are tedious and unnecessary, I acquiesce to the normal usage of the terms, without quotation marks or clarifying remarks.

I should also add that I am not usually moved by any sort of sensitivity to popular political correctness. For example, I find that the term "colored people" seems to be synonymous with the more accepted phrase, "people of color", although I am well aware of the historical connotations, and consequent sensitivities to the former term. Nevertheless, if the use of "colored people" seems to fit contextually, and makes just as much sense as any other term, I will not be afraid of offending a few people by using it. I certainly find it to be an immeasurably less offensive term than the recently re-popularized term, "nigger".

Sometime, hopefully in the not-too-distant future, as we grow and evolve significantly in our understanding of what it means to be human, all racial terminology will be considered archaic.

^{1 &}quot;Mustee" was a word commonly used in the colonial era to describe a person of mixed African and Native American ancestry, although other terms, including "mulatto" and "Negro" were also used to describe such persons. By the 19th century, mustee had dropped out of common usage, and was normally replaced by mulatto.

² The Constitution, in article I, sections 2 and 8, implied that Indian communities were separate, "foreign" nations. It was not until the Immigration Act of 1924 that Congress granted U.S. citizenship to all American Indians, regardless of residence on reservations or other separate Indian communities, or tribal membership.

³ Titticut, located in what is now the town of North Middleborough, was one of the so-called "praying towns", which was a label applied to villages of Christianized Indians by the English during the mid-17th century. There were probably less than twenty tribal members left there when they were rapidly being dispossessed of their remaining lands during the mid-18th century. This shall be discussed in more detail in chapter one, including James Easton's father's legal battles to try to keep their land.

⁴ Bradford Kingman, <u>History of North Bridgewater</u>, <u>Plymouth County</u>, <u>Massachusetts</u>, from its first <u>settlement to the present time</u>, with family registers, Boston, Bradford Kingman, 1866, pp. 317-319. Slavery ended in Massachusetts in 1780.

⁵ Ibid., pg. 379. By comparing the 1866 map of North Bridgewater in Kingman's book to a map of

Brockton made in 1948 and a current Brockton street map, I discovered that the Easton foundry site is located in what is now a large public park. I plan to explore that site, along with a local librarian/archeologist and photograph it for the book. There will also be a map.

- 7 Bradford Kingman, <u>History of Brockton, Plymouth County, Massachusetts, 1656-1894</u>, Syracuse, N.Y., D. Mason & Co., 1895.
- 8 Perhaps the best example of this new development in the accessibility of sources for researchers is, David Thomas Konig, ed., <u>Plymouth Court Records</u>, <u>1686-1859</u>, Boston, Pilgrim Society, and the New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2002, a CD which includes the records of the Court of General Sessions, the Court of Common Pleas, some appellate records from the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, and two very informative introductory essays, one by William E. Nelson, the other by David Konig.
- 9 Sylvanus Easton's conviction for assault is found in Plymouth County Court of Common Pleas, April term, 1815, Volume 25, pp. 305-306 (no docket number). His successful appeal is in Plymouth County Record Books, 1813-1853, Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court appeals from the Court of Common Pleas, pg. 101.2 (pg. 101, second item), October term, 1815, docket number 18, Commonwealth v. Sylvanus Easton.
- 10 This statement is generally more applicable to Native American tribal societies than equatorial African societies, however examples and exceptions can be found on both continents. Peggy V. Beck, Anna Lee Walters, and Nia Francisco, <u>The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge, Sources of Life</u>, Tsaile, Arizona, Navajo Community College Press, 1996, pp. 159-160, 143-144. Duane Champagne, ed., <u>Native America: Portrait of the Peoples</u>, Detroit, Visible Ink Press, 1994, pp. 202-203. George B.N. Ayittey, <u>Indigenous African Institutions</u>, New York, Transnational Publishers, Inc., 1991, pp. 27-30. Malidoma Patrice Some', <u>The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose Through Nature, Ritual, and Community</u>, New York, Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1998, pp. 268-269.
- 11 For an excellent study on the topic of the history of labeling "red/black" people, see Jack D. Forbes, <u>Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples</u>, 2nd ed., Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1993.
- 12 Winthrop Jordan, <u>White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812</u>, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press, reprint, 1995, pg. 137. Gary B. Nash, <u>Forbidden Love: the Secret History of Mixed Race America</u>, New York, Henry Holt & Co., 1999, (will get page numbers later).

⁶ Ibid., pp. 497, 498, and 665.

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