



Andrew Harris, Vermont's Forgotten Abolitionist

Andrew Harris was a man of constant activity and tremendous energies, all of which were devoted to what at the time was the truly radical cause of racial equality in America. His untimely death of fever in December 1841 at the age of 27 is the only reason he is not remembered as a significant figure in African-American history.

By KEVIN PIERCE THORNTON

Andrew Harris, University of Vermont Class of 1838, was one of the first handful of black college graduates in America, and was very likely the first black graduate of any American college to commit himself to immediatist abolitionism—that is, to the immediate end of slavery in America without the removal of freed African Americans to African colonies.¹ By his mid-twenties, he became a leader of the newly emerging black middle class and one of the central figures in the tiny, emerging black intellectual, antislavery and reform elite of the 1830s. A member of various antislavery and reform societies in both New York and Pennsylvania, he was a featured speaker at the American Anti-Slavery Society convention in 1839. He was also a political abolitionist, which is to say he believed that political action rather than moral suasion alone would be necessary to end slavery. In this capacity he was a member of the convention that nominated James Birney for president on the Liberty Party ticket of 1840. In addition to all his antislavery activity, Harris was an outspoken and courageous advocate for the equality of people of color in the North.

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This cause was at least as important to him as antislavery, and he saw the two as intimately related. He developed a reputation as a powerful orator and was ordained a Presbyterian minister in Philadelphia in May 1841. His pulpit made him a leader in the largest free black community in the North. A classic example of a Second Great Awakening figure and among the first black middle-class intellectuals, he believed strongly in moral reform and revival, and that these values must be embraced by the African American community. He was, unsurprisingly, a strong advocate of black education. In short, he was a man of constant activity and tremendous energies, all of which were devoted to what at the time was the truly radical cause, one not shared even by all abolitionists, of racial equality in America. Harris's untimely death of fever in December 1841 at the age of 27 is the only reason he is not remembered as a significant figure in African American history.

THE ERIE CANAL DISTRICT

Harris's early life is obscure. He was born in New York in 1814. Both of his parents appear to have been black; the only reference to his appearance describes him as a "full-blooded Negro." He was almost certainly illegitimate, and his mother was very young, possibly as young as twelve, when she became pregnant.² At age two Harris was adopted into a devout white family, in Cayuga, in the Finger Lakes region. He was "brought up in the family of a Presbyterian minister, by a man and his wife who never had been worth \$500 in their lives, and had a family of nine children of their own."³ His adoptive family encouraged both his piety and intellectual bent; by his teens "his superior talents, and ardent piety gave him a commanding influence over the religious circle in which he moved, and, for a considerable time, the singular spectacle was presented of a full-blooded Negro presiding over a white Sabbath school." Supported by his adoptive family, he attended the nearby Geneva Lyceum, "an institution designed to fit pious young men for College, with the ministry in view," where he learned Latin and Greek.⁴ This early biographical information, scant as it is, tells us something very important: that Harris grew up in a pious evangelical household at the edge of the canal area's Burnt-Over District during the period in which the revivalist fires were at their hottest. The canal, a conduit for piety and religious ideas as much as it was for goods and people, became famous for its evangelical revivalism during Harris's boyhood. He would have been at the impressionable age of seventeen during the intense revivals of 1831. Immediately, then, all his adult religious and reform sensibilities become recogniz-

able, even obvious. In most ways he grew up to become a typical evangelical reformer of his time. The only thing that made him unusual was the fact that he was black.

But that made him unusual indeed. It is hard to overemphasize how much. His aspirations, and the opportunities rewarded to him, were very nearly unique.⁵ Slavery was still legal in New York all through his childhood. It did not end completely there until 1827, and some masters tried to keep former slaves ignorant and unpaid even after that date.⁶

Harris began searching for a college in 1834. He first looked east along the canal, to Union College, in Schenectady.⁷

But on making his application for admission to College, he found himself surrounded by unlooked-for difficulties. The abolition excitement was then at its height. The Negro riots in New York had just then taken place. Men's minds were every where in a ferment, and as a natural consequence, the imprudent zeal, and misguided efforts, of well meaning friends were constantly increasing the burthens of, and the prejudices against colored men.

Mr. Harris' application for admission to Union College was rejected. The Faculty informing him, that had his application been made at another time, and under other circumstances, they would have received him, but in the present state of public feeling, they decline.⁸

The "Negro riots" referred to here occurred in July 1834 after the black Presbyterian Samuel Cornish (1795-1858) attended a service at Samuel Hanson Cox's Chatham Street Chapel in New York. When some congregants objected to Cornish's presence alongside white women in the pews, an exasperated Cox responded with a sermon asserting that Jesus Christ "was of the dark Syrian hue, probably darker than his brother Cornish." (Cornish was light skinned.) Mob violence began that Tuesday and lasted through Friday. Cox had to leave the city permanently.⁹ In this atmosphere of overheated racism, Union claimed, it was too provocative to admit Harris.

He became a student at the University of Vermont (UVM)¹⁰ by a process of elimination. Working his way north after Union rejected him, he had tried Middlebury, only to be rejected again, for the same reason.¹¹ If in his search Harris was working his way north up the Champlain Canal, which makes sense geographically, that would have left UVM as the end of the line: "The doors of Union College had been shut against him simply on account of his color, and he had been obliged to go to Vermont to a college where that was no bar."¹²

Except that race still turned out to be a bar.

BURLINGTON

First envisioned as Dartmouth's complement west of the Green Mountains, UVM—intended to be the college of the Champlain Valley as Dartmouth was the college of the Connecticut Valley—had been crippled even before it opened by Middlebury College's ability to draw students from Addison County and points south. (Middlebury opened in 1800; although founded in 1791, UVM didn't have a building or students until 1801.) Classes were tiny—no students whatsoever graduated in 1815. Then a fire in 1824 destroyed UVM's sole building and nearly closed the university for good. Rebuilt on a shoestring, it barely survived. In 1833 the Reverend John Wheeler took over as president of a bankrupt and nearly defunct institution consisting of one building on a reduced acre-and-a-half lot. The university graduated two students that year. Wheeler promptly raised a \$30,000 subscription, fought off a faction among the trustees that wanted to use the money to pay off debt, began aggressively purchasing books and laboratory equipment (including a telescope), and succeeded in resuscitating the university. Yet this accomplishment was almost immediately subverted by the Panic of 1837, and the university's situation remained precarious through 1839. Thus Harris matriculated at a tiny, isolated, provincial school with a faculty of five (including Wheeler) that teetered on the edge of bankruptcy the entire time he was there.¹³ It was, moreover, an environment that was largely hostile to him. Once again the "Negro Riots" were an issue: "On his making application to the University of Vermont the Faculty felt deeply the force of the objections already urged [i.e., the political climate in the wake of the riots] as they were extremely urgent to keep aloof from the excitement then raging." But Harris nevertheless squeaked in: "still they did not consider themselves called upon to yield so far to the prejudices of the community, as to refuse the advantages of a collegiate education to a man wishing to qualify himself 'to preach the Gospel to the poor.'" He was admitted.¹⁴

The fact that Harris aspired to preach the gospel to an underserved population undoubtedly went a long way with Wheeler, helping override his concerns about the possibility of a racist backlash against the university. But Wheeler was probably also personally ambivalent about Harris. A lifelong, unusually devoted colonizationist,¹⁵ Wheeler was no friend of either unconditional abolition or of racial equality, despite opposing slavery as a cruel and unchristian institution. As late as 1857 he was arguing, as president of the embattled and shrinking Vermont Colonization Society, that "a lower or weaker race cannot long co-exist with a stronger." In retirement he wintered in the South, where "he

studied carefully the development of public opinion in that part of the country” and where “his influence upon Southern men was considerable,” which implies that he was hardly confrontational about slavery. He was in North Carolina when the Civil War began, and when he died, in April 1862, barely six months before the announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation, he left the by-then ridiculously out-of-date Vermont Colonization Society a substantial \$300 in his will. No one could describe him as a racial progressive, and there can be little doubt that he indeed “felt deeply”—and at least somewhat shared—the “objections” to a black college student.¹⁶

Yet Wheeler (in contrast to the administration of Union) still admitted Harris. In part, as noted above, this was because Harris wished to preach. But we must also give Wheeler his due as a gentleman and a man of honor. He appears to have admitted Harris, despite whatever reservations he may have held, for the simple reason that Harris was qualified, and that there was no rule against admitting colored students. *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* later told this version of the story:

A young colored man named Harris, was examined and admitted to the sophomore class of the University of Vermont at Burlington. He pursued his studies regularly and graduated with his class. A few of the students objected to recite with him, but this insubordination was very soon put down by the College authorities. None of the Faculty were abolitionists. They took the ground in adducting Harris that he gave evidence of the requisite qualifications, and that nothing in the laws of the University warranted the rejection of his application on account of his color. We understood at the time that he previously applied unsuccessfully for admission to Union College. The Faculty [at Union] could find no law or rule excluding him, but having chosen to submit the question to the class, he was voted out. Harris we believe has been dead some years.¹⁷

Wheeler presumably would have been perfectly willing to reject Harris if there had been a racially exclusionary rule in place; but there wasn’t, and he acted accordingly. Whether he knew it or not (and he probably didn’t), facing down the resulting segregationist “insubordination” of the students was his finest hour. While he was certainly not a man to brook challenges to his authority, we must also keep in mind that he led an institution constantly in danger of insolvency and closure. The risk of losing students was a serious matter. Furthermore, we must remember that Wheeler, as a colonizationist, was himself a segregationist of the most extreme and literal kind. In his ideal society Harris would have been deported. But however tortured his path, Wheeler stuck to his rules as his conscience dictated. The segregationist students backed down. Harris stayed, and classes continued. Since Harris’s name does

not appear in any faculty meeting minutes between 1835 and 1838, the decisions to admit Harris and then to call the bluff of the rebellious students were apparently Wheeler's alone.¹⁸

The Douglass account is credible, despite being published second-hand in 1854, almost thirteen years after Harris's death. It gives a slightly different but not incompatible version of events at Union and correctly notes that Harris entered UVM as a sophomore. But it is mostly credible because of the source from which Douglass reprinted it, the *Rochester American*. Between 1844 and 1856 the *American* was edited by Alexander Mann, UVM '38, Harris's friend and classmate. Mann, who was also at least professionally friendly with Douglass in the small world of the Rochester press, and defended Douglass's right to equal treatment as a journalist, is also almost surely the author of the single best source on Harris's life, the December 17, 1841, *Rochester Daily Democrat* obituary. "The writer of this notice knew him well," it says, "and intimately, when at College." Mann is also an example of the sort of personally honorable but racially conservative white man that Harris was able to impress throughout his life. (Mann, a Fillmoreite, eventually supported both the Compromise of 1850 and by extension the Fugitive Slave Act.)¹⁹

Harris entered UVM as a sophomore in November 1835, midway through the semester that began in September. He paid a \$1.00 initiation fee on November 10, and bought his books on the 17th. He began the next term, the second of the sophomore year, on time, on March 5, 1836. He registered for both terms of his junior and senior years, and was most likely resident in Burlington for much, though not all, of that time. (He would spend the winter of 1836-37 in Troy, N.Y.) He was in Burlington to take his final exams with his class in July of 1836, 1837, and 1838. (Exams were only held once a year.)²⁰

Wheeler's toleration only went so far. Harris did not have an easy time of it. There were only twenty-four students in his class (including him),²¹ so though they must have come to know one another well, many fellow students' hostility to him remained undiminished for the entire time he was in Burlington. Ten years before Douglass retold the story, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* referenced it: "Mr. Andrew Harris, unable to obtain a regular standing at Union College, went to the University of Vermont; but even there, though allowed more privileges [*sic*], he was not suffered to stand on the same footing with the other students."²² What that meant in practice is nearly impossible to say, but there are hints that Harris may have held some kind of distinct, if not segregated, status. For one thing he was not listed in the catalogue of students between 1835 and 1838. For another, UVM's final examination

records in the 1830s listed the members of each class, along with their grades, in alphabetical order, but Harris's name only appears in the proper place once out of six exam records from 1836 to 1838; otherwise his name was always listed last, out of order.²³

1836. Record of Examination

Second Class July 1836

	Languages										Mark of				
	Horae	Latin	Greek	Hebrew	French	Spanish	German	Italian	Portuguese	Russian	Maths	Quadrant	Trigonometry	Algebra	Geometry
Adams	14	14	19	17	15	20	18	12	14	10	13	17			
Allen				13											
Benson	12	11	17	16	15	17	18	12	15	15	15	17			
Blackman	10	10	15	16	12	20	18	18	20	20	4	17			
Bahoon						10	7		6	12	8				
Bamron				9	14							6			
Barfenter	17	17	19	19	19	14	20	12	15	12	18	19			
Base	11	9	17	13	18	10	20	10	10	10	13	17			
Dickinson	15	19	18	17	16	10	17	10	15	15	15	19			
Deane	12	11	13	8	12	3	3	3	05	3	00	7			
Eastman	5		10	15	13	5	7	4	5	3	00	7			
Garbutt	9	8	12	7	12	20	20	17	20	20	17	19			
Hammond	10	6	8	4	9	15	10	5	7	3	3	9			
Jones	17	15	16	13	18	20	17	5	15	9	14	17			
Potter	11	14	13	10	7	15	16	6	5	0	8	15			
Pulman	17	18	18	15	10	18	16	4	10	3	5	17			
Reed	10	7	13	13	10	5	17	3	10	0	7	11			
Robertson						18	17	5	10	15					
Smith J. G.	8	8	12	8	9	10	5	0	5	0	3	5			
Stevens						8	8		3	5	7				
Weed	17	13	15	15	15	17	18	6	10	5	05	17			
Willman	12	10	13	12	16	10	18	10	0	8	15	9			
Wood	15	13	14	17	16	17	15	19	14	0	15	10			
Yonon	14	11	15	12	10	17	17	10	14	15	12	15			
Harris	11	16	15	16		11	10	10	12	13	9				

UVM Second Class Exam Records, July 1836. Harris's name is listed at the bottom, in a smaller hand. Special Collections, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont, Burlington.

A few months after taking finals at the end of his sophomore year in July 1836 Harris, apparently running out of money, found a job in Troy, New York. It would mark a decisive turn in his life.

TROY

Harris first appears in the historical record as a public person on November 2, 1836 in Troy, acting as the secretary of a reform-minded “General Meeting of the Colored People of Troy.” He had been “employed to take charge of their school for the winter.”

On motion of Mr. Yates, Resolved, That we cordially welcome among us Andrew Harris, of Vermont, who comes to take charge of our school. We pledge him our cordial cooperation, and regard him, the teacher of our children, equally with our pastor and spiritual leaders, as entitled to our prayers and persevering support.²⁴

What was Harris doing in Troy? For one thing, he was probably broke. “He struggled hard against accumulated disadvantages,” Mann recalled, “and that worst of all annoyances of a student’s life—pecuniary embarrassments.”²⁵ UVM’s tuition was only fifty cents a term, but room, board, and firewood were all expensive. Nineteenth-century college students often worked as schoolteachers to earn money (John Dewey did it immediately after graduating from UVM in the 1880s). Moreover UVM appears to have taken a lengthy winter break during the 1830s, probably because firewood was expensive. There was nothing to prevent Harris from working for months in Troy and remaining a student in good standing, so long as he appeared for and passed his exams in July, which he did. Beyond the job, Troy was appealing for another reason. Located at the junction of the Erie and Champlain canals—in other words at the center of the geography of Harris’s life to that date, and readily accessible from Burlington—it contained the nearest black community to Burlington, a group of some 311 souls.²⁶ It therefore offered Harris his first opportunity not only for membership in a racial community but for leadership, an opportunity that over the course of just a few months he took up with gusto.

In the winter of 1836-1837 Troy was the twenty-first largest city in America, a canal boomtown of some eighteen or nineteen thousand people. Its small colored population was just in the process of becoming a community, especially if “community” is defined by the existence of formal institutions. None had existed in Troy before emancipation became final in New York in 1827. In 1825, when the canal boom was just beginning, Troy’s population was 7,859 and the town-based colored population had been only 32, 7 of whom were qualified to vote under

the 1821 New York Constitution. (New York's constitution required black men to be worth \$250 to be able to vote, so we can take the number of black voters as an indication of the miniscule size of Troy's black middle class.) Rensselaer County's overall colored population in 1825 was 1,004, of which 23 could vote. Thus the black population within Troy was almost nonexistent before emancipation became final, and no black voluntary institutions whatsoever existed before 1828, when a meeting was held to organize an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church. "The first public meeting of the colored people of the city, looking towards reform and advancement," was held in 1830. A black Female Benevolent Society began meeting in 1833. In 1834, the Liberty Street church—the one that became Harris's—was organized by black Presbyterians. A black school opened in the church basement a week later.²⁷

When Harris arrived in late 1836 he was therefore entering a community still in the very earliest stages of organization. Its institutions were brand new and the settled, middle-class population (defined by those men wealthy enough to vote and their families) was still miniscule. Almost all of the black men in Troy were laborers; given the canal trade, it's also likely that many of them were itinerant, or at least impermanent members of the community. On his arrival Harris instantly became the most educated African American in Troy, and though young, a stranger, and a temporary resident, a community leader as well. Moreover, the values he espoused and embodied—evangelical uplift, sober hard work, morality, education, upward mobility, democratic patriotism—were those most prized by the handful of men and women struggling to build a respectable, rooted black community.²⁸

Thus, by the midwinter of 1836-37 Harris was well-established as a leader in the colored community of Troy. The breadth of his reform interests, moreover, become evident over a span of just a few weeks. On February 13, 1837, he was the featured speaker at a mixed-race meeting of the Female Benevolent Society, which met in the new colored church.²⁹

The reading of the report was followed by an address from Mr. Harris,—a young man of color, and a member of the junior class, in "Vermont University." During the exercises, the choir sung [*sic*] several pieces prepared for the occasion. The most perfect decorum was observed, and a deep interest manifested by all, through the evening.³⁰

In March he spoke on one of his favorite topics, the importance of education, at a six-evening-long meeting on reform topics for the colored population.

Mr. Harris evinced much ability in his remarks. His language was good, his enunciation distinct, his gesticulation easy and forcible, and the position of his person firm and manly. There was never a more salutary impression made upon a colored audience in this city.

On subsequent evenings he spoke “with force, upon the consequences to society, of the universal disregard of the Sabbath,” and, later in the week, on temperance, making “a solemn and successful appeal to Christians, to take the high ground of total abstinence, from all that can intoxicate.” In the meanwhile he had earned \$78 as the teacher in the colored school over the winter.³¹

Then, also in March, Harris reappears as the secretary of a “Union Meeting of the Colored People of Albany, Troy and Vicinity.” He was one of two men to draft the circular the meeting subsequently issued, calling for the “combined action” of all people of color within the region “for our improvement in ‘Morals, Education and the Mechanic Arts.’” It is worth quoting at length, because it is one of only two sources (his American Anti-Slavery Society speech is the other) through which we can hear Harris directly:

This measure has been resorted to for the purpose of creating a spirit of union,—oneness of sentiment, and effort among our brethren. . . .

That these subjects are of the first importance to our people, must be plain to all. . . . For, with ourselves, at least, the question is forever settled, that our children and youth are not deficient in native capacity, for high improvement in any department of literature and science. The only deficiency is to be found in the want of opportunity and sufficient inducements for improvement. . . . Virtue and intelligence constitute the sure foundation on which we are to rise. For we believe, that our benevolent Creator will not always suffer his own image—immortal mind—to remain in ruins, although it be in the person of his children, who bear a darker hue than their more highly favored white brethren. When we arise in the dignity of our nature and with confidence in God’s paternal regard for all his offspring, and form plans and make sacrifices for the improvement of our children, in whatever will honor Him, and bless the world, we feel sure his cheering smile and blessing will be secured to us. Here, then, is a sure ground of hope which can never be wrested from us. . . .

All, therefore, that remains is Union and Energy among ourselves. . . .

Let us, therefore, to a man, meet in Albany, on the 20th instant, and complete the organization of a society which may bless our children, and hasten the redemption of two and a half million of our enslaved brethren.³²

To the modern student, the most striking aspect of Harris’s story is the appalling racism that he faced all of his life. But we must also keep in

mind that since boyhood he had lived in places where the canal system was bringing with it growth, increasing prosperity, and new ideas; that the New York Constitution of 1821, ratified when Harris was seven, had established democratic suffrage for poor white men for the first time and allowed at least some black men to vote as well—that is, it at least established the principle of the black franchise; that slavery had ended in New York in Harris’s early teens; that democratic politics were largely being invented in New York by Martin Van Buren at the same time; and that, most important of all, the evangelicalism of the Second Great Awakening, in which Harris had cut his teeth, promised not only that God loved individuals, not only that God named the poor as blessed and ached for justice, but that reformers, called and inspired to do God’s work of improving the world, were destined to succeed. God would advance equality on earth if his servants worked for it. Harris’s belief in the democratic promise of America and his faith in the power of the Lord to transform society sprang from the same sources. St. Luke had written that God has made of one blood all the peoples of the earth. Who then could deny the power of the Lord to make Americans into one people, especially when that mighty work seemed to have begun and was proceeding?

Unless we understand that Harris carried that belief within him even as he was surrounded by racism we fail to understand him, or give him his due.³³ In the circular to the colored people of the Hudson Valley, the central themes of his life are evident: the belief in morality and, especially, education as the means to self-improvement; the need for black unity and “combined action”; the insistence that the image of God was found in the human mind, and that the cause of racial equality was therefore a holy one; the understanding that the noble causes of black equality and the emancipation of slaves were entwined; and the evangelical faith that a loving God would see to it that human efforts at moral reform would overcome all obstacles. Harris would never deviate from any of these beliefs.

Harris was the featured speaker at the meeting on March 20 that the circular had called for, and which was devoted to the idea that education was uplift. Harris spoke “in an eloquent and efficient speech, of more than half an hour. . . . The two points enforced by the speaker, with great earnestness, were education and a more general attention to the mechanic arts.”³⁴ By the end of March 1837, no more than five months after his arrival in the area, Harris had become a leading figure among the colored population around Troy and Albany as well as a well-known figure to local white reformers.

He would soon return to Burlington, but there is one more thing to note about his time in Troy. While there over the winter of 1836-37, Har-

ris made one of the most important connections of his life in Daniel Alexander Payne (1811-1893). Payne, later the sixth bishop of the AME church and the first black college president in America, at Wilberforce, was appointed in June 1837 as the black Presbyterian pastor in Troy. Given the size of the colored population of Troy at the time and the size of the congregation (Payne estimated it to be “forty or fifty persons”), the religious and reform connection, the closeness in their ages (three years), their common belief in higher education for blacks (Payne had had to drop out of a Pennsylvania seminary due to eye trouble), it is no surprise that Harris and Payne became close friends during their brief time together in Troy.³⁵ They would have been natural companions, and in some ways a circle of two. While their mutual time there didn’t last long—Harris was back in Burlington by September 9, when he paid his tuition in cash³⁶—their friendship would be one of the most important of Harris’s life, and would last until his death. As soon as Harris finished at UVM, Payne would provide his means of introduction into the black intellectual, ministerial, and reform elite.

BURLINGTON AGAIN

Harris returned to Burlington no longer a lone scholar but as an active abolitionist and proponent of black equality. One indication of that is that as of October 7, 1837, the New York City-based African American newspaper the *Colored American* began listing “Andrew Harris” of “Burlington College” as the paper’s sole Vermont subscription agent, and his name appears regularly in this capacity between then and April 19, 1838, near the end of his final term at UVM.³⁷ It’s almost certain that Harris first became exposed to the paper in Troy; it didn’t begin publication until 1837.

Does it follow, then, that Harris was active in antislavery activities while he was in Burlington? Probably not. There are two reasons for this conclusion. One was Harris’s situation at UVM. His goal was to graduate, and we have already seen how Wheeler, who ran a very tight ship, was concerned that Harris’s admission might create a backlash. Chances are that the authoritarian Wheeler, though he tolerated abolitionist opinion among his students, would have reacted poorly to Harris drawing attention as a vocal proponent of equality.

The other reason was the state of abolitionism in Burlington. Dominated by a colonizationist Congregationalist establishment, and containing a healthy waterfront working-class minority, it was far from being the most fertile abolitionist soil in the 1830s. Its black population was actually dropping during the decade in which Harris attended UVM, from fifty-three in 1830 to thirty-eight in 1840.³⁸ As late as 1835,

the *Burlington Free Press* was applauding the fact that abolitionist organizer Orson Murray was being thrown out of Vermont towns, and he failed in at least one attempt to organize in Burlington. A tiny, informal, “Anti-Slavery Society of Burlington” eventually began meeting, in either 1836 or 1837, organized by the UVM alumnus and New York anti-slavery apostle Alvan Stewart, and “the anti-slavery students soon found them,” remembered Orville G. Wheeler in 1878. But if Harris was among them, Wheeler, who was in the class of 1837 and surely knew Harris, either didn’t remember or didn’t consider it worth mentioning. By the time the more formally organized, and more active, Chittenden County Anti-Slavery Society organized in March 1838, Harris was only a few months away from graduation. His name was not recorded at the meeting (though, to be fair, only officers’ names were). To sum up, while it’s possible that Harris may have attended a few antislavery meetings in Burlington between 1836 and 1838, there is absolutely no evidence that he did, and the preponderance of the thin available evidence gives no indication that he was ever involved in Vermont antislavery circles. My supposition is that, keeping an eye on his goal, he stuck to his books while in school.³⁹

That eventually led, in due time, to his graduation, and the final story about Harris at UVM. It shows that, despite the presence of a tiny anti-slavery minority, the segregationist impulse and hostility among the majority of his classmates lasted until the very end. The account of the 1838 graduation by “a young lady in Vermont” (that for some reason was not printed in the *Liberator* until October 1839) reported that:

Last week cousin H. and myself went to Burlington, and the next day attended the commencement. Mr. James Harris,⁴⁰ a colored man, who was a member of the graduating class, was not permitted to speak or to come upon the platform to receive his diploma, but was obliged to take it one side. The class declared that if he came upon the stage, they would have nothing to do with the exercises. If I could have presided I should have preferred to have had him speak, whether any of the rest did or not. It would have been an honor to the faculty as well as to the class to have granted him this right. For it was allowed by all that he was a student possessing as much native energy and was as good a scholar as any of the class. Now was not such treatment decidedly wrong? Methinks I hear you answer in the affirmative.⁴¹

In the 1830s, UVM students each gave a graduation oration in order of “the merit of their orations.”⁴² The *Burlington Free Press* has Harris scheduled fourteenth (of 24) to give an oration on what we have seen was a favorite topic of his, the “Development of the Intellect,” which must have been in concert with the belief in education he had expressed

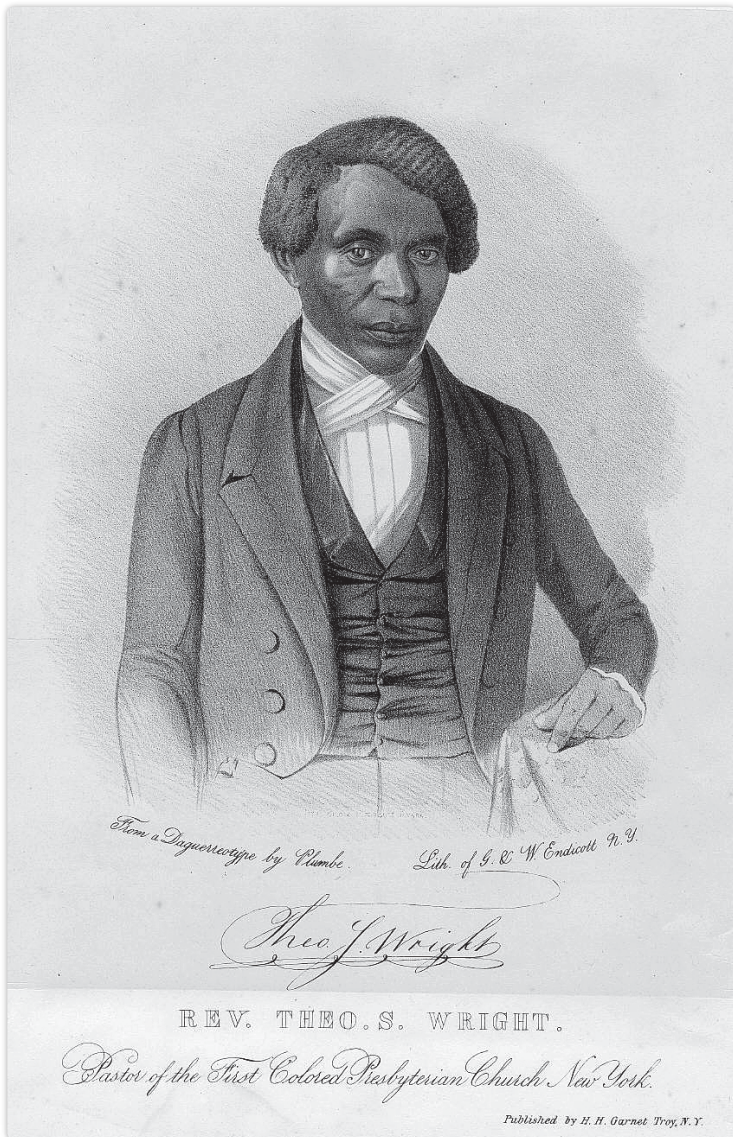
the previous winter in Troy. Though Mann assured his readers that he had “several times heard different members of the Faculty pronounce high encomiums on [Harris’s] excellent character, and scholarship,” the oration apparently didn’t happen. The *Free Press* was likely simply re-printing the schedule.⁴³ Andrew Harris graduated from UVM because he was determined and persistent, not because he was welcome. He was not. But the degree would nevertheless prove a precious credential.

DEBUT

Graduation took place on July 31, 1838. After the final indignity at the hands of UVM, Harris understandably shook the dust of Burlington from his feet as quickly as he could. He returned to Troy for about a week, then left again on the ninth of August, arriving in New York City on the tenth in the company of Payne. The following ten days turned into Harris’s debut among the abolitionist reformers of New York and Philadelphia. His newly minted degree made him a potential star in reform circles and he spent the week showing his promise. On Friday the tenth, the day they arrived, Payne introduced Harris to Theodore S. Wright (1797-1847).

Wright, a generation older than Harris and Payne, was one of the most important African American leaders of the 1830s (along with his friend Samuel Cornish, a fellow Presbyterian pastor, and founding editor of the *Colored American*). In 1833, Wright had been one of the original executive committee members at the founding of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Wright was also an educated man—a graduate of Princeton Seminary—and pastor of the First Colored Presbyterian Church in New York.⁴⁴ Harris could not have made a more supportive or auspicious connection. Wright became an enthusiastic mentor and friend; he would make the trip to Philadelphia to speak both at Harris’s ordination and his funeral. The debut introductions and performances continued on Sunday, the 12th, when Harris led prayers at “Temperance House. Later the same morning they visited Lewis Tappan’s integrated Sunday school and Harris spoke again:

“Mr. A. Harris addressed the audience in an able manner on the blessing which the Bible confers and our duty to study it.” He was to speak at least twice more that day: “The remainder of this day was spent in the sanctuary of the Lord. Both in the afternoon and evening we listened with much satisfaction to the young brother mentioned above, who expounded to an attentive congregation the words of eternal life. We speak truth when we say, if this pious and learned young man lives prayerfully, humbly and studiously, he will become a very



Lithograph portrait of Rev. Theodore Sedgwick Wright, from a daguerreotype by Plumbe. Lithograph by G. S. W. Endicott, New York. Image courtesy of the Randolph Linsly Simpson African-American Collection, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University (via Wikipedia).

useful and an eminent minister of the Lord Jesus.”⁴⁵ With these appearances he was also well on the way toward becoming someone “useful and eminent” among abolitionists, who were constantly searching for articulate, dynamic black speakers they could put before white audiences. Harris’s talks thus also functioned as auditions, and Payne was determined to make the most of them. On Monday, August 13, he and Harris visited the New York “Anti-Slavery office.” On Tuesday they made personal calls. Done in New York, on Wednesday the 15th they sailed for Philadelphia. Arriving there, they went straight to the black Presbyterian church on St. Mary Street (where Harris would later be pastor), to a meeting of the American Moral Reform Society. At this convention, which lasted from Wednesday to Friday, Harris spoke again, apparently repeatedly.

The proceedings of the two following days, Thursday and Friday, were marked with measures and resolutions full of thrilling interest to the human race, especially our injured kinsmen according to the flesh. Those foremost in discussions were Messrs. C.W. Gardner, S.H. Gloucester, J.C. Bowers, J. Bird, R. Purvis, Bias, Nichols, and Harris. As all, except the latter gentleman, are well known to the public, I will take this opportunity of speaking particularly of him. Mr. Andrew Harris is a graduate of the University of Vermont. His personal appearance is very modest—his mental character not of the florid, but solid kind. This seems evident from his public speeches, which evince more of the discriminating logician, than the fanciful poet. His piety seems pure and ardent. Throughout the debates of the Society he displayed great decision of moral character. In a word, his real worth, mental, moral and literary, will not fail to secure the high esteem of all who may become familiarly acquainted with him.

Then, on Sunday, he preached in three churches, along with “Messrs. Gardner. . . and Douglass.”⁴⁶

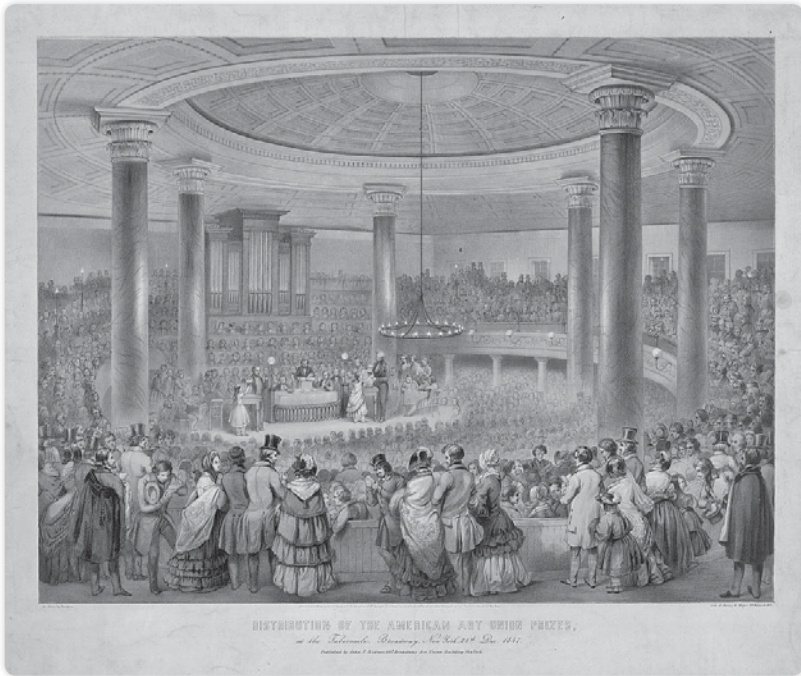
Thanks . . . Payne, over the course of less than a week Harris had not only met some of the leading abolitionists in New York, he had become established among the core abolitionists and moral reformers in the largest free black community in America. His fellow speakers offer a glimpse into this world. Charles W. Gardner was pastor of the First African Presbyterian Church and a very active moral reformer, abolitionist, and advocate for free blacks. Stephen Gloucester, a used clothing dealer, was also one of four ordained brothers who made up black Philadelphia’s leading ministerial family. His father had been the first ordained black Presbyterian in the country. John C. Bowers was a tailor and an active reformer and anti-colonization abolitionist. James Bird, a bootmaker, was extremely active in moral reform and anti-colonization. Robert Purvis was the son of a white Charleston

cotton broker and a mulatto slave, and was probably the wealthiest man in the group. Purvis had attended Amherst College for a year before committing himself to antislavery work in Philadelphia.⁴⁷ James G. Bias was both a physician and a clergyman, and known for harboring runaway slaves. The “Douglass” in question was probably Robert Douglass Sr., a prosperous barber and co-founder of Philadelphia’s First African Presbyterian church and the head of one of the city’s leading black abolitionist families. (His wife Grace was one of the founders of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society in 1833 and his daughter Sarah, a friend of Lucretia Mott and the Grimké’s through her mother, was running a school for black women in the city in 1837. His son Robert Jr. was an artist specializing in portraits.) Nichols I have been unable to find.⁴⁸

What does this circle add up to? For one thing, a respectable black middle class that was just beginning to emerge. Purvis was wealthy and Douglass was well-to-do, while Gloucester struggled to make a living; the others, mostly skilled tradesmen and small merchants, ranged between. Men of the word, they prized education, and knew all too well it was hard to come by. In this regard, Harris, with his degree, was the most impressive among them, young as he was. More than anything they were united by piety, moral fervor, and a hunger for the betterment of their community. In them Harris had, quite literally, found his people. Over the course of the eleven days since he had departed from Troy, he had made his debut among the most educated and activist leaders of black America. He had met leading reformers of both races, established himself as a potential star among abolitionists, and been welcomed into a place among black Philadelphia’s small intellectual and reform elite. By the middle of the spring of 1839, he would move there. During the intervening months, though, he first succeeded Payne as the pastor of the Liberty Street Presbyterian Church in Troy.⁴⁹

THE AMERICAN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY CONVENTION SPEECH

On May 7, 1839, Harris was one of the featured speakers on the first morning of the American Anti-Slavery Society’s annual meeting, held at the Broadway Tabernacle in New York. The reasons why are self-evident. As one of a handful of college-educated African-Americans, and one of an even smaller group among them committed to activist, radical abolitionism, he was a living symbol of the potential for black intellectual attainment. He was also a practiced and impressive speaker, a devoted moral reformer, and a pious Presbyterian. Furthermore, he had obviously impressed Wright, and it’s likely he had similarly impressed Lewis Tappan, the wealthy white abolitionist who had paid for the



The Broadway Tabernacle, 1847 (Library of Congress).

construction of the tabernacle in 1836 to provide a pulpit for the famous evangelist and abolitionist, Charles Finney. (Tappan was not present when Harris visited his Sunday school in August 1838, but he had surely heard about it, and it's very likely that they met before Harris's speech at the annual meeting.) Finally, the annual meeting was developing a tradition of showcasing prominent young, educated black men. James McCune Smith had spoken in that slot the year before, in 1838, while Henry Highland Garnet (another young Presbyterian, who was educated at the abolitionist Oneida Institute) would appear in 1840.⁵⁰ The speech marked Harris's arrival as a national figure among black intellectuals and reformers. He spoke by prearrangement in favor of a resolution he had introduced: "That the degradation and crime charged upon the free colored people of this country, is the result of the wrongs under which they suffer." A "large assembly" of the most active American reformers was on hand to hear it.⁵¹

A close paraphrase of Harris's speech that day was transcribed in the May 16 issue of the *Emancipator*, the New York abolition journal. It is

the only speech, sermon or prose of Harris's still extant. Its subject was the issue nearest to his heart: the argument for black equality, the importance of education in achieving it, and the difficulties imposed by a racist Northern society. Much of it alluded to his own experiences. He began by drawing a link between the condition of slavery and the racism that attempted to justify it. Stating that "it is with feelings of great responsibility" that he spoke as the "representative" of African-Americans, he moved on to the standard abolitionist argument that the "oppression and wrongs of millions" of the enslaved were caused by "the corruption of the human heart" and made manifest in "*slavery*": "the anguish produced by separation of husband and wife, children and parents, and the scourges of the defenseless and unoffending slave, are a fathomless sea, and an ocean without a shore." Then he warmed to his real subject, racism in the North:

But slavery does not stop here. It presses down upon the free people of color. Its deadly poison is disseminated from the torrid regions of the South to the frigid north. We feel it here. Yet, with all this, if the colored man is vicious, or if he is not elevated, it is set down to his natural stupidity and depravity, and the argument is raised that he belongs to an inferior race. The colored people are also charged with want of desire for education and improvement; yet, if a colored man comes to the door of our institutions of learning, with desires ever so strong, the lords of these institutions rise up and shut the door; and then you say we have not the desire or the ability to acquire education. Thus while the white youth enjoy all these advantages, we are excluded and shut out, and must remain ignorant. It is natural to suppose, then, that there should be more crime among us. But is this crime properly chargeable to the colored man, as evidence of the vicious propensities of his race?

Harris was alluding to his experiences with Union, Middlebury, and UVM. And education was the least of it. The desire of any black man for self-improvement, he pointed out, was suppressed in America: "if he wishes to be useful as a professional man, a merchant or a mechanic, he is prevented by the color of his skin and driven to those menial employments which tend to bring us more and more into disrepute. . . . The church itself was not free from the general guilt of oppressing the black man."

Harris went on to explain to his overwhelmingly white audience the no-win burden of racism: "Again, in the social relations of life, wrongs are inflicted upon us that are grievous and heavy to be borne, and we must fold our arms and bear it. But even this is thrown out as a taunt against us, that we do not speak of our wrongs, as evidence that we are too stupid and degraded to feel them: while, if we rise to defend ourselves and to plead our cause, the torch and brick-bat are poured out as arguments on

the other side.” As an example, he spoke of his own recent trip from Philadelphia to attend the meeting at which he was speaking. Denied a seat among the passengers, he had been forced to sit in a boxcar. “On the way, they refused to give the colored man a seat. . . . And why was this? Was it because he had no money? No. Was it because he was not decently clad? No. Was it because he was an idiot, and they feared he would annoy the company with his foolishness? No—it is because he has *the complexion which God has given him*.” Slavery’s spawn, Harris insisted, was an even more pervasive sin, racism:

The bible says the love of money is the root of all evil; and if the love of money is a predominant passion anywhere, it is in this land. Yet, without disputing the correctness of the declaration, it seems to me that slavery has developed a passion in the human heart that is stronger than the love of money; for they refuse to gratify this disposition which the bible says is the root of all evil, through the influence of that still deeper root of evil, *prejudice*.

He ended with a shot against the colonizationists: Despite everything, he said, he would “rather stand and endure it all, choosing rather to suffer affliction with my people, than to immigrate to a foreign shore, though I might there enjoy the pleasures of Egypt. And while I live, let my prayer be, that the same soil which cherished my father may cherish me; and when I die, that the same dust may cover me that covered the ashes of my father.”⁵²

It was a short but an extremely ambitious speech. Fifty-eight years before W.E.B. Du Bois came up with the term, Harris was attempting to explain double-consciousness.⁵³ He was also arguing that the dismantling of slavery—the purpose of the antislavery society—would only be the start of resolving the American race problem. And taking the colonizationist argument head-on, he was insisting that the only viable American future lay in following the logic of equality.

Even to an audience of abolitionists, this was a call to radical action. Some of the praise for him indicated the depth of the problem: “Mr. Harris, a colored graduate of the University of Vermont,” said the *Liberator*, “acquitted himself honorably not merely as a colored man, but as a MAN. This speech would have done discredit to no white speaker on the platform.”⁵⁴

PHILADELPHIA

By May 1839, as he indicated in the Anti-Slavery Society speech, Harris was living in Philadelphia. For the two and a half years remaining to him, he would engage in a whirlwind of activities there.

Why Philadelphia? First, because it had the largest black community

in the free states, about 20,000 people. Harris's friend Payne would move there and run a school from 1840 to 1843 after his convalescence, and described why Philadelphia drew him: "I selected Philadelphia as my field," he wrote, "because that of all the free cities had the largest population of color."⁵⁵ One reason for that was the city's presence on just the right (north) side of the Mason-Dixon Line, which made it a magnet for runaway slaves. But as previously discussed, it was also large enough to include a small middle class and even a few wealthy individuals, most famously the sailmaker James Forten, who had been an anti-colonialist and antislavery activist since at least 1817, and had financed the *Liberator* in its early days. Forten was elderly in Harris's day (he was born in 1766), but he lived until 1842.

The second reason Philadelphia probably appealed to Harris was, as we have noted, that it had a large and energetic community of reformers, both black and white (its Quaker element made it a center of white abolitionism), many of whom were known to Harris and vice-versa.⁵⁶ Finally, Philadelphia afforded Harris the chance to pursue his vocation, in both the religious and aspirational senses of the term. By May 1839 he had begun theological studies there with Albert Barnes, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church and a prominent New School (i.e., revivalistic) Presbyterian theologian.⁵⁷ Harris's vocation reflected both his personal piety and the fact that much of the black intellectual elite was also a ministerial elite (a fact also true for whites of the day). He is listed as a licentiate in the Presbytery of Philadelphia in 1839—that is, he was certified as able to preach in Presbyterian churches, though he had not as yet been ordained.⁵⁸ He did, however, have a job, which was the final thing that brought him to Philadelphia. About the same time he began his theological studies, which was also just about when he gave his address to the antislavery meeting in New York, he had become the interim pastor of Philadelphia's St. Mary's Street Presbyterian Church, also known as the Second African or Second Colored church.⁵⁹ A small building in the heart of black Philadelphia, the St. Mary's Street Church was where Harris had attended his first reform meeting in the city, the evening of the day he had arrived with Payne on their August 1838 trip.

New School Presbyterianism would have appealed to Harris for at least three reasons. First, a Finney-inspired revivalistic style and theology had swept Presbyterians in the Erie Canal district during Harris's formative years. Second, the worship of the black church was (and is) amenable to revivalism, so Harris's congregation on St. Mary's Street presumably would have been comfortable with it. Third, and this cannot be emphasized enough, northern evangelicals were far more sympathetic to and active in moral reform in general and abolitionism in par-

ticular than their more conservative brethren. In fact the association of New School revivalism with abolitionism was an especially inflammatory issue in Philadelphia. In his autobiography, Thomas Brainerd, the white Philadelphia New School minister who would preach Harris's ordination sermon, described how the association of evangelicalism, reform, and abolition led to mob violence in Philadelphia in mid-May 1838, when an Old School denunciation of New School ideas occurred at the same time mob violence against abolitionists and blacks broke out. To Brainerd this was no accident.

All the odium of the antislavery excitement at that time, with exaggerated and unfounded reports of the imprudences of antislavery men, were artfully drawn in and made subservient to the prejudices industriously cultivated toward the New School party. It seemed at one time as though the "powers of darkness" were let loose; for the stormy debates of the Old School Assembly, in doors, were alternated by the incendiary fires and shouts of the mob without, who selected this very time to burn "Liberty Hall" [i.e., Pennsylvania Hall] in Sixth Street, where the Antislavery Society were holding a convention, and the "African Hall" in Thirteenth Street—a modest building in which the colored people were allowed to hold meetings for promoting their religious and social interests.⁶⁰

Harris had a long, two-year road to ordination, and along the way he faced what must have been a grave crisis: he was accused by the daughter of his landlady of seduction, or breach or promise, or both. Payne tells the story:

Andrew Harris fell under a[n]. . . accusation [the fastidious and circumspect Payne will only describe the possible crime as "the snares of Satan"], was tried before a "Police Court Justice," and subsequently before an ecclesiastical court. Being his friend, and believing in his innocence, I made it my duty to be present at both trials. His case was carefully and thoroughly searched to its very bottom; but, finding no evidence of guilt, he was declared innocent and honorably acquitted.

If my recollection is accurate, the ecclesiastical court that examined the charge brought against Rev. Andrew Harris was the "Third Presbytery of Philadelphia," of which Dr. Albert Barnes, the commentator, was a member; and Dr. Barnes was present from the beginning to the end of the trial, and took an evidently deep interest in it. . . . [The] conclusion was that Mr. Harris was "blackmailed by an envious and jealous woman. . . ." Harris was living in the same house with his accuser—boarding with her mother. I think his case was similar to that of the incorruptible Joseph in Potiphar's palace.⁶¹

There is no telling what happened. It is worth pointing out, however, that Harris had a tremendous amount at stake in the affair: his

position, his career, and his standing, both in the black community and among highly moralistic reformers. Everything he had worked for years to become and to achieve was endangered. Moreover, at least early on, he had likely had the chance to make the case go away by marrying his accuser. He was tried twice, both criminally and in the church, and acquitted both times. At the same time it's worth noting that Harris had influential friends, who had many hopes invested in him, acting on his behalf. One of them—his theological tutor Barnes—even served as one of the judges at his ecclesiastical trial.

After a two-year theological and ministerial apprenticeship, Harris was ordained on April 15, 1841. Theodore Wright made the trip from New York for the occasion. The *Colored American* covered it at some length, with the article probably written by Payne, who by that point was established at his Philadelphia school awaiting his own return to the ministry.

It is a cause of gratitude to God that he is raising up young men who have the piety and intellect which enables them to take the most important stations, and fill them with credit to themselves and to the community; and we rejoice to see that there are those, who, overlooking all *prejudice*, are ready to take them by the hand and sustain them, while they stand as pioneers to the glorious cause of *emancipation*.⁶²

The occasion was notable enough for the congregation to print up the Rev. Thomas Brainerd's sermon, which is the only remaining artifact of the day.⁶³ Brainerd, the white pastor of Philadelphia's Third Presbyterian Church at the time, had been converted by Finney and was another New School disciple. His sermon, read out of context, is an unremarkable exhortation arguing that Christian piety will always be rewarded. But in light of the occasion, the setting, and the audience, it becomes a remarkable document, not only because in seven pages Brainerd makes no fewer than nine references to "race," but because the ways he did must have been deeply satisfying and moving to his audience.

For Brainerd's concern was with the race of redeemed sinners:

The blood of Jesus was designed to be available for the salvation of a world. Its efficacy is limited to no one period. . . . It is limited to no race. The nations, diverse in all, but common depravity, may meet and share alike in renewed holiness and the smiles of God.

It was the design of God in the gospel, to level the mountains and elevate the valleys—to break the gates of brass and make a clear, lawful, open, accessible way by which a race ruined, accursed, might if they would, march with songs of joy and shouts of victory from this world of sin, out upon a plains of blest eternity.

Most of Brainerd's remaining allusions to race refer to "the human race" and "our race." The history of salvation he lays out as the journey of "a people despised" becoming "a race redeemed": "To the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. . . a race is climbing." Moreover, he contrasts the divine offer of salvation with compulsion:

Tyrants and bigots may attempt to force the mind, by inflicting pains upon the body, but God does not deal with men in this manner. He approaches man as a free agent. He addresses truth to their understandings. He comes in person to apply this truth to the conscience and the heart. He honours his creatures by applying to them the same principles of government which sway his own infinite mind—the government of truth and duty.

In one sense this is the standard evangelical critique of the counter-reformation (Brainerd describes the "gibbets," "racks" and "chains" of coercion and even disparagingly mentions "popish magnificence"), but on the Mason-Dixon Line in 1841, in a black church, it meant something else as well. Brainerd told the congregation a story in which "a ruined," "accursed," and "despised" people climbs through the love of God, a story in which diverse nations are joined and leveled into one race, "our race," the race of the saved. He said that God wanted them to be free agents, and that God established a principle of government based on truth. He addressed them as "my brethren" and Harris as "my brother." "He honours the gospel," Brainerd advised Harris, "who like Jesus, gives his message with boldness, but with tears of sympathy for the lost, and, who illustrates truth, embodied and glorious, radiating out, from his own personal example."⁶⁴ For at least one day in his life Brainerd, who did not consider himself an abolitionist,⁶⁵ accomplished that.

In tandem with his ministry Harris kept up constant reform and abolitionist activity during the years he was in Philadelphia. Perhaps most importantly, he became an active participant in the national debate among abolitionists over the direction of the anti-slavery movement. The abolitionist movement had begun to split at the 1839 American Anti-Slavery Society annual meeting, the one at which Harris spoke, over the question of how much abolitionists should devote themselves toward a whole series of reform causes. Put another way, was the purpose of the movement the eradication of slavery alone, or was it the advancement of a just and godly society in general? Perfectionists (a.k.a. "Ultraists") believed that God required a commitment to justice in all things. Their opponents wanted a practical focus solely on the problem of slavery.

The dispute emerged in a number of particular ways. One issue was the role of women. Ultraists believed in female equality and called for

it within the movement. The opposition claimed that feminism muddied the waters and alienated at least some men who might otherwise oppose slavery. Another issue was whether abolitionists should engage in direct political action in fighting slavery, as opposed to moral argument alone. The Ultraists mistrusted politics, believing slavery was a sin. Political action, they believed therefore, was the wrong approach. Sin required repentance, not reform or restructuring. Harris, who like the rest of the black clergy was concerned first and foremost with slavery and black equality, voted against perfectionism and in favor of politics.⁶⁶

The next year, in 1840, the split became formal. The opponents of perfectionism broke away from the AASS at a contentious annual meeting in New York – the immediate cause of the breach was the Ultraists' nomination of a woman, Abby Kelley, to the annual meeting's business committee. Then (fully prepared in advance for an eventuality they knew had been coming), the political abolitionists moved to the basement of the same building in which the convention was meeting and formed a new organization on the spot, the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. Harris was one of them, along with seven other black clergymen, including Wright, Henry Highland Garnet, and Samuel Cornish. Following the logic of politics further, Harris also helped form the Liberty Party, and was a member of the convention that nominated James G. Birney for president as the party's candidate.⁶⁷

Beyond politics Harris kept up a swarm of local religious, abolitionist, and reform activities. These are the meetings we can document: He was active in the Eastern Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society and Philadelphia's Leavitt Anti-Slavery Society (organized by blacks as a biracial working man's antislavery organization), as well as in the New York Committee of Vigilance (it aided runaways). He was a Temperance advocate. He helped organize a Philadelphia anti-colonization meeting for colored people. He led a fundraiser for the *Colored American* at his church, and spoke in favor of public education at the same meeting. He was around the corner on Sixth Street for the 1841 dedication of the third church edifice of the Bethel AME church. In August 1841, he attended a three-day convention back in Troy, along with much of the black leadership of New York state (Theodore Dwight and Henry Highland Garnet were there), designed "to secure the extension of the franchise" to working-class black men in New York—those who held property worth less than \$250 (i.e., most of them). A few days later he gave "an animated and soul-stirring address" at a subsequent meeting on the subject in New York City.⁶⁸

And then, suddenly, Harris died. In November 1841, he came down

with a fever; he died on December 1st. The *Colored American* barely had time to run a correction:

Our Rev. young brother Andrew Harris, of Philadelphia, was thought, at the last accounts to be dying. His complaint was intermitting fever.

P.S. Since the above was in type, a letter has been received, which informs us that brother Harris is no more; he died on Wednesday morning about 6 o'clock.

Harris's obituaries show the extent to which he was becoming known and respected. Three Philadelphia papers, and at least five outside the city, ran variations on the following:

DIED On Wednesday, 1st inst., Rev. Andrew Harris, Pastor of the Second African Presbyterian Church, aged 27 yrs. Mr. Harris was a graduate of Vermont University. His people have lost a faithful, self denying pastor; the *colored people* a bright ornament and an effective helper; the cause of truth a hearty lover, a bold and fearless advocate.

His friends are invited to attend his funeral, from the residence of Stephen H. Gloucester, 136 Lombard street, above 5th, to-morrow afternoon, at 2 o'clock.⁶⁹

Three weeks later the *Liberator* and at least six other papers ran the following: "In Philadelphia, Rev. Andrew Harris, late Pastor of the 2d African Church. Mr. H. was a graduate of the University of Vermont and was probably the best educated colored man in our country. As a minister he was very highly esteemed."⁷⁰ His college friend Alexander Mann wrote the lengthy and affectionate obituary in the *Rochester Daily Democrat* that remains the best source on Harris's life. "But he has gone beyond the reach of our praises," wrote Mann, "the many whose friendship he had won feel deeply the loss of so good a man. They had hoped to have seen much fruit of his labors, and their expectations were just being realized, when an allwise Providence, has seen fit to remove him from his field of usefulness, and from a life of labor and mortification to one where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."⁷¹

On Christmas Day, the struggling *Colored American*, in its first issue in three weeks, stated, "The excellent poetry on the death of our esteemed young brother, Andrew Harris, by D. A. P., came to hand too late for this number. It shall appear in our next." "D. A. P." was Payne. One eagerly turns to the next issue of the *Colored American* only to find that the paper never published again after the issue of December 25. The poem never appeared in print.⁷²

Payne came through for his friend, however, in describing the funeral,

which sparked a revival that extended across the city, through New Jersey, into Baltimore, New York, Pittsburgh, and eventually into Ohio:

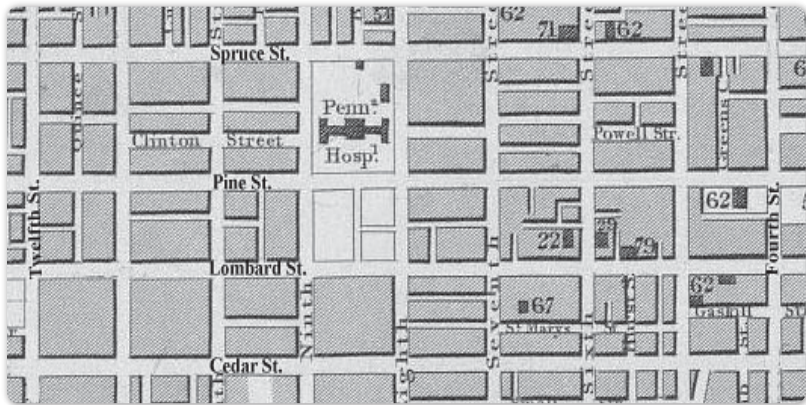
[A] remarkable outpouring of the Spirit. . . began in the city of Philadelphia in the following manner and under these circumstances: A young Presbyterian minister, Andrew Harris, of classical attainments, took suddenly sick, and died at the end of the week. He was the pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church of color. Rev. Theodore S. Wright, of New York, came by invitation to Philadelphia, with a view to be present at the funeral of Brother Harris. While there he preached in the vacated pulpit from Psalms, cxix., 59-60, "I thought on my ways," etc. The sermon made a deep and visible impression on the audience, and yet it was made evident by no sign beyond the fixed attention of the people. His sermon was followed by an exhortation by Rev. D. A. Payne, and an invitation to all who felt concerned about their souls to come forward and occupy the front pews. This invitation was immediately responded to by some half dozen young men and women, with whom we prayed about an hour or two. This encouraged us to protract the meetings, and every night witnessed an increased interest on the part of the people, and a deepened zeal on the part of the ministry. Soon the cries of the anxious inquirer were exchanged for the shouts and rejoicings of the happy converts. The work extended from St. Mary's Street to the surrounding churches. As it deepened sinners were awakened and converted to God by scores and hundreds, till the whole city was enveloped in the hallowed flames, and in every house and every church were heard the cries of the convicted sinner or the praises of the redeemed. Bethel shared largely in the grace of God. Her ministers preached with more than common unction, and her converts were counted by hundreds. Among the precious souls gathered into the ark of safety during this season of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, were many of the best educated and most respectable youths of the city, and that, too, of both sexes. Nor was the work confined to the city of Philadelphia. It extended to all the churches of the Conference District.⁷³

The Presbyterian General Assembly noted Harris's passing and prayed for him among the other ministerial dead. The American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society missed him at their next annual meeting: "His eloquent voice will be heard no more at our anti-slavery anniversaries." Frederick Douglass mentioned him as the "lamented Andrew Harris" in an 1848 story about temperance in Philadelphia, and told the story of his graduation again in 1854. That same year, UVM would list him among its dead alumni.

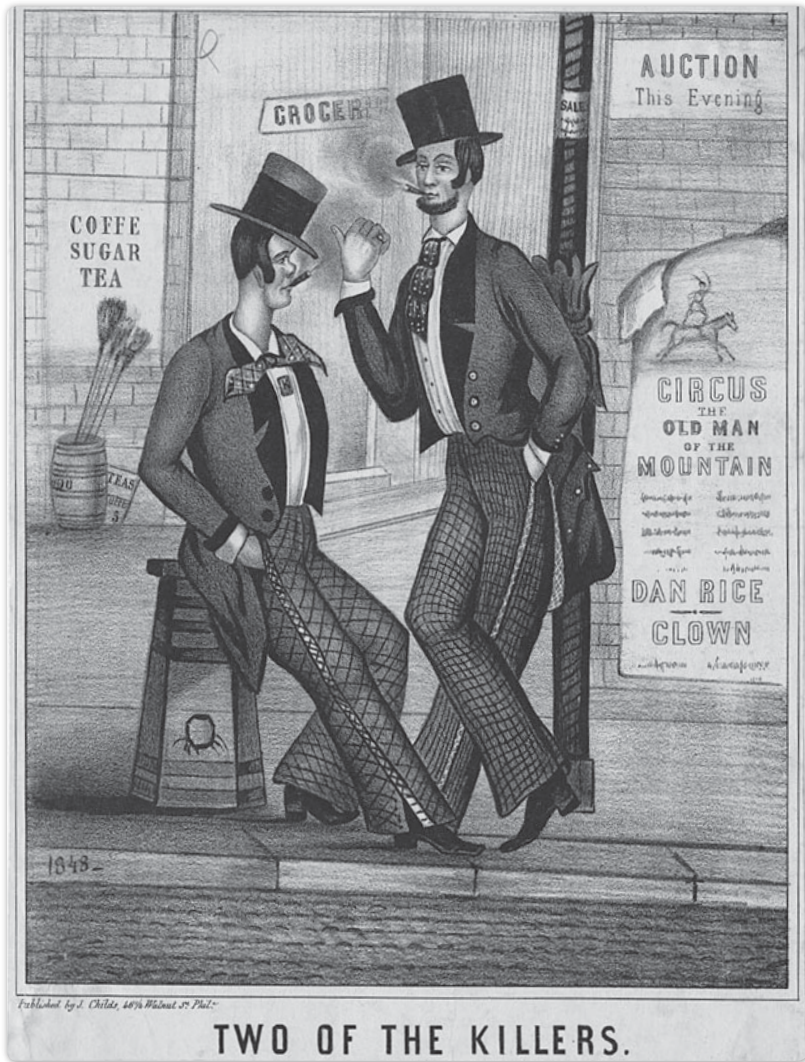
Then Andrew Harris was forgotten. In Vermont he had always been nobody, probably even among reformers. In Philadelphia he had primarily made his mark in a small black society unnoted by the outside world. And in any case he was very young. How well would we know Frederick Douglass today if he had died at 27?⁷⁴

There is one more point to make, regarding Harris's courage. His persistence, determination, and forbearance in the face of rejection and prejudice are amply demonstrable. I would argue that he was physically courageous as well. Harris's demand not just for an end to slavery but for educational, legal, political, and social equality for blacks was at the far edge of the American radicalism of his day. Even among abolitionists in the warm confines of the Broadway Tabernacle, his egalitarianism was radical. But abolitionists were not his only audience. At least one Philadelphia newspaper attacked his appearance at the 1839 annual meeting, mocking Harris for complaining about segregation on railroad cars, arguing that exhortations such as his were "causing them [the free negroes of the North] to become discontented with the sphere of life in which the Creator of all good has seen fit to place them, and to envy and pine after the condition of those with whom they never can hold intercourse," and accusing "Harris, Esq. A.B.A.M. and his sable colleagues" of "impudence."⁷⁵ In the Philadelphia of 1840, in Harris's neighborhood, this was no small matter. It is not much of an exaggeration to say that St. Mary's Street, during this era, was under siege.

The first Philadelphia race riots broke out in 1829. There was another in 1831. In August 1834, a larger riot erupted; a mob destroyed houses and assaulted people on St. Mary's Street, which ran between 5th and 7th and Lombard and Cedar Streets in the heart of the black neighborhood near the Pennsylvania Hospital. The next night they burnt a black church and destroyed more houses on other streets. The night after that they burnt another church and attacked a house on 7th, "below Lombard," in which a hundred blacks had "barricaded themselves."



Philadelphia, 1840, Published by H. S. Tanner (David Rumsey Collection). St. Mary's Street is in the lower right quadrant.



"Two of the Killers." Philadelphia: J. Childs, 1848 (Library Company of Philadelphia).

The next year, 1835, another mob "assembled at the corners of Sixth and Seventh and Lombard Streets" before eventually burning a row of houses on 8th Street. The following night they attacked St. Mary's Street again, where people had once more barricaded themselves. "The whole of the afternoon of that day black women and children fled from the



The California House Riot, St. Mary's Street, Philadelphia, 1849, from The Life and Adventures of Charles Anderson Chester (Library Company of Philadelphia).

city." In 1838 there were riots on 5th Street. In May of that year, a city mob famously burned the abolitionists' Pennsylvania Hall three days after it opened (Philadelphia's firemen refused to put out the fire). In the subsequent rioting the mob burnt a black orphanage and at least one church, and damaged Bethel Church, around the corner from St. Mary's Street on 6th Street. In August 1842, eight months after Harris's death, a mob attacked St. Mary's Street again. This time the rioters beat people, assaulted homes, and burnt both a black-owned meeting hall and Harris's church, the Second African. It was never rebuilt.⁷⁶ The militia had to be called out to quell the riots. Finally, in 1849, St. Mary's Street was attacked again by a mob led by the extremely violent street gang, "The Killers"; a black-owned bar, the "California House," was destroyed.

St. Mary's Street was only two blocks long. It was little more than an alley, and no longer exists. It was very, *very* dangerous to be a prominent black man accused of "impudence" in the Philadelphia of 1840. Andrew Harris had to be prepared for violence every day of his life there.⁷⁷

When I began my investigation of Harris, I expected to find a few biographical facts about an obscure person of interest solely in Vermont. What I found instead was a young man who immersed himself in the

political, reform, intellectual, and religious circles of his generation, “the most educated colored man in our country,” and a representative figure for a new generation of educated and uncompromising abolitionists and advocates of black equality. When Harris died in 1841, he was 27; James C.W. Pennington, the escaped slave blacksmith who attended Yale, was 34; Harris’s friend Payne (Gettysburg Seminary) was 30; James McCune Smith (University of Glasgow) was 28; and Henry Highland Garnet (Oneida Institute) was about to turn 26. The uneducated and as-yet-unknown Frederick Douglass was 23 or 24. Harris’s career had begun in a Troy in which the colored community barely knew what was going on outside their locality.⁷⁸ Taking advantage of the still-developing transportation revolution, the brand-new rise of a reform press, and the energies of the Second Great Awakening, he and his friends, and their mentors from the previous generation (such as Wright and Cornish), built a black reform community in America. With untiring energies they set out from their tiny churches in impoverished alleys to do the task that they believed God had commissioned for them: bringing racial equality to America.

Looking back near the end of his life, in his autobiography Payne described a moment in 1837 when he faced a difficult choice. One day in New York,

I met that gifted man, Theodore Weld, one of the most eloquent of anti-slavery lecturers. He invited me to the Shiloh Presbyterian church, where, at the request of the pastor, I preached. Lewis Tappan and others of the Executive Committee of the Anti-Slavery Society were present. Soon after my return to Troy I received a commission from this committee to be one of its public lecturers, with a salary of \$300 per year and traveling expenses. Here was an inducement. . . . But I had consecrated myself to the pulpit and the work of salvation. Could I turn aside from so high a position and so holy a calling?

Payne ultimately decided that he could not, and never regretted the decision. “When God has a work to be executed he also chooses the man to execute it,” he concluded. “He also qualifies the workman for his work. Frederick Douglass was fitted for his specialty; Daniel Alexander Payne for his.”⁷⁹

Andrew Harris strove to be both Daniel Alexander Payne and Frederick Douglass—that is, he strove to be consecrated both to the work of salvation and to the work of freedom and equality. In a way, he wrote his own epitaph when, a few months before he died, he submitted the following resolution at the 1841 voting rights convention in Troy: “That we consider it criminal in the sight of God and man, lon-

ger silently to submit to our indignities, or suffer them to be transmitted to posterity.”⁸⁰ Harris has been forgotten for too long, and it is long past time to rectify that oversight.

NOTES

¹ Middlebury College claims Alexander Twilight, Class of 1823, as the first black college graduate, but it is likely that Twilight passed as white while at Middlebury. It is more accurate to say that Twilight is currently suspected to be the first person of African ancestry to graduate from an American college. See David Stameshkin, *The Town's College: Middlebury College, 1800-1915* (Middlebury, Vt.: Middlebury College Press, 1985), 108-109. Andrew Harris is almost surely the first black graduate of an American college who was an antislavery immediatist, an anti-colonialist, an advocate of equal rights in America, and a full-time activist. John Brown Russworm (Bowdoin, Class of 1826) became editor of the black-owned antislavery *Freedom's Journal* in 1827 and immediately (and controversially) announced his support for colonization, creating a firestorm of opposition among blacks. He ultimately emigrated himself. James McCune Smith (University of Glasgow, Scotland, 1835, '36, and '37), who held similar views to Harris and spoke to the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) national meeting in 1838, did not, quite obviously, graduate from an American college and, in any case, concentrated on establishing his medical practice in his first years back in America. Henry Highland Garnet (Oneida Institute, 1839) was younger than Harris and later in establishing his career, and in fact followed Harris into the black Presbyterian pulpit in Troy, N.Y. For brief respective biographies see C. Peter Ripley, et al. eds., *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, Volume 3, *The United States 1830-1846* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991). On early black abolitionism see David E. Swift, *Black Prophets of Justice: Activist Clergy before the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989) and Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969). However one considers the case, it is extremely safe to say that Harris was among the very first handful of educated black men to be Garrisonian immediatists. I would like to thank my student Patrick Maguire, my friend Michael Dwyer, and Chris Burns of Special Collections at the University of Vermont, each of whom enthusiastically took up this project and generously shared sources on Harris that I was not able to discover on my own.

² Harris obituary, “Died,” *Rochester Daily Democrat*, 17 December 1841, 3. Harris’s mother is named in the obituary as “Rebecca Verplank, of this city.” In the 1850 census Rebecca Verplank of Rochester is listed as a 49-year-old illiterate black woman, born in 1801 in Maryland. If that birth date is correct (though the birth dates listed on the census can be notoriously inaccurate), she was 13 when she gave birth to Harris. *Seventh Census of the United States*, Third Ward, Rochester City, Monroe County, New York, 197.

In the Rochester city directory of 1851, Mrs. Verplank is listed as a widowed washerwoman. “Colored Persons,” *Daily American Directory of the City of Rochester for 1851-52* (Rochester, N.Y.: Lee, Mann & Co., 1851), 280. For a brief summary of Harris’s life see Ripley, *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 3: 296-297. (NB: This summary misidentifies the *Rochester Daily Democrat* as the *Rochester Daily Advertiser*.)

³ “The Annual Meeting: James C. Fuller,” *The Emancipator*, 16 May 1839, 10; See also “Abstract of the Sixth Annual Report of the Executive Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society,” *ibid.*, 9 May 1839, 6, for an abstract of the same remarks. James Cannings Fuller, who provided to the convention the biographical details on Harris, “whom he had known for a long time by reputation, although personally a stranger,” was from Skaneateles, N.Y. Harris is listed as being from “Cayuga, N.Y.” in the “Commencement of the University of Vermont,” *Burlington Free Press*, 3 August 1838, 2. Skaneateles and Cayuga are just a few miles apart. There appears to be no birth record for Harris, which was not uncommon for free people of color in New York, and he never appears in the census. Harris is also stated as being from Cayuga County in the *Rochester Daily Democrat* obituary.

⁴ Harris obituary, “Died.” Geneva is just west of Cayuga. On the Geneva Lyceum see “Congregational Necrology: Rev. Justus Warner French,” in *The Congregational Quarterly*, 5: 192-193.

⁵ Henry Highland Garnet and James McCune Smith, Harris’s closest contemporaries among black intellectuals in New York, were both graduates of the African Free School in New York City. Harris’s small-town origins make his ability to get an education extremely unusual to say the least, and possibly unique.

⁶ “A Sketch of the Past History and Present Condition of the Colored People of Troy,” *The Anglo-African* (New York), 7 October 1865, 1, tells of slaves in the canal district whose masters concealed the fact they were free after emancipation.

⁷ Harris’s choice of Union is an unsolved mystery. Geneva College (later Hobart) was in the same town as his preparatory school, while both Hamilton and Colgate colleges were closer to his



hometown than Union. His choice may have been influenced by denominationalism (Geneva College was Episcopalian and Colgate was Baptist), or he may have already moved to Troy by 1834 in search of a black community.

⁸ On Union's rejection see Harris obituary, "Died," and James C. Fuller's biographical remarks on Harris at the American Anti-Slavery Society Convention in 1839, "The Annual Meeting: James C. Fuller," *The Emancipator*, 16 May 1839, 10.

⁹ Henry Fowler, *The American Pulpit, Sketches Biographical and Descriptive of Living American Preachers* (New York: J. M. Fairchild & Co., 1856), 373-377.

¹⁰ UVM stands for Universitas Viridis Montis, or "University of the Green Mountains."

¹¹ The Middlebury story is told in the Harris obituary, "Died."

¹² "Abstract of Speeches," *The Liberator*, 17 May 1839.

¹³ See "Historical Discourse by John Wheeler, D.D., Late President of the University of Vermont," in *A Historical Discourse by Rev. John Wheeler, D.D., an Address by James R. Spaulding, Esq., and a Poem by Rev. O. G. Wheeler delivered on the Occasion of the Semi-Centennial of the University of Vermont with an Account of the Proceedings of the Celebration* (Burlington, Vt.: Free Press Printing Co., 1854), 31-35, in Record Group President Series Wheeler, 1823-94, RG 2, Box 7, Special Collections, UVM, <https://archive.org/stream/60640070R.nlm.nih.gov/60640070R#page/n7/mode/2up>. The UVM trustees archives from the period reflect Wheeler's aggressive book and equipment purchasing program. For class sizes in the first fifty years see the *Triennial Catalogue of the University of Vermont*, 1854 (Burlington, Vt.: Free Press Printing Co., 1854). See also T. D. Seymour Bassett, "Origins of UVM, 1791-1833: Overview" in Robert V. Daniels, ed., *The University of Vermont: the First Two Hundred Years* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1991), 10-41.

¹⁴ "Died."

¹⁵ See *A Sermon Preached Before the Vermont Colonization Society at Montpelier, October 25, 1825 by John Wheeler, Pastor of the First Congregational Church, Windsor, Vt. Published by Request* (Windsor, Vt.: Printed by W. Spooner, 1825) in Record Group President Series, Wheeler, 1823-94, RG 2, Box 7, Special Collections, UVM.

¹⁶ 1857 speech: *The Thirty-Eighth Annual Report of the Vermont Colonization Society, Presented at the Annual Meeting in Montpelier on the Fifteenth of October 1857* (Burlington, Vt.: C. Goodrich & Co., 1857), 3. \$300 bequest: *The Forty-Fourth Annual Report of the Vermont Colonization Society, Presented at Their Annual Meeting in Montpelier on the 15th of October, 1863* (Burlington, Vt.: Times Books and Job Printing Establishment, 1864), 21. Wheeler was a long-time supporter of the Vermont Colonization Society and served as its president from 1852 through 1861. I would like to thank my student Alex Jones for his research into Wheeler's colonizationism. Stay in North Carolina: Rev. Ezra H. Byington, *Rev. John Wheeler, D.D., 1798-1862, President of the University of Vermont 1833-1848: A Biographical Sketch* (Cambridge, Mass.: John Wilson and Son, University Press, 1894), 19.

¹⁷ Anonymous, "Colored Students in American Colleges," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 22 September 1854.

¹⁸ College Faculty Records, *Faculty Meeting Minutes, 1827-53*, Special Collections, UVM.

¹⁹ On Mann's career see William F. Peck, *Semi-Centennial History of the City of Rochester* (Syracuse: D. Mason & Co., 1884), 351-352. See also "From Albany," *New York Tribune*, published as *New-York Daily Tribune*, 3 March 1857, 4 and "Savannah; Republican," [New York] *Commercial Advertiser*, 18 December 1860, 2. On Mann's respect for Douglass see "Progress of Justice and Equality, Rochester Jan. 1848," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, published as *The North Star*, 23 June 1848, 1. Mann is established both as a member of the UVM Class of 1838 and the editor of the *Rochester American* in the *Triennial Catalogue of the University of Vermont*, 1854, 29.

²⁰ Harris's term fees, other bills, and payment records are listed in Record Group 42, Financial Records, and Series Early Journals, call number A W15 D 1835-41, pp. 42-43; his examination records are in Record Group 41, Registrar's Records, *Records and Examinations, 1828-1852*, all at Special Collections, UVM. He is also listed in the *Triennial Catalogue of the University of Vermont*, 1854, 29. Other evidence confirming he was a student can be found in *The Emancipator*, which described him as "Andrew Harris of Vermont" (indicating he was a student) as of November 1836, and in *The Colored American*, 1 April 1837, which accurately described him as "a member of the junior class, in 'Vermont University'" as of February 1837. See "General Meeting of the Colored People of Troy," *The Emancipator*, 1 December 1836, 123, and "Colored People of Troy," *Colored American*, 1 April 1837.

²¹ *Triennial Catalogue of the University of Vermont*, 1854, 28-29. One of Harris's classmates, and therefore presumably one of the students who boycotted him, was Calvin Pease, later president of the university.

²² "For the New-York Observer: Colleges and Colored People," *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 23 November 1843, 98.

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²³ *Catalogue of Students and Records and Examinations, 1828-1852*, in Record Group 41, Registrar's Records, Special Collections, UVM. The fact that Harris is missing from the catalogue confused whoever created UVM's general catalogue in 1901, who apparently didn't think to consult the examination or financial records. The entry on Harris in the class of 1838 section reads: "**Andrew Harris**, licensed by presb of Phila 40; d 1841; name not in catalogues or President's record; must have entered after Oct 37." *General Catalogue of the University of Vermont and State Agricultural College, Burlington Vermont 1791-1900* (Burlington: Free Press Association, 1901).

²⁴ "General Meeting of the Colored People of Troy," 123. See also "The Colored People of Troy" in the same issue, 122.

²⁵ "Died."

²⁶ "Colored People of Troy," 122.

²⁷ In 1840, Troy's population was 19,334 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1840") <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab07.txt>; "A Sketch of the Past History and Present Condition of the Colored People of Troy," 1, and 14 October 1865, 1; "Colored People of Troy," 1; Arthur J. Weise, *Troy's One Hundred Years, 1789-1889* (Troy, N.Y.: William H. Young, 1891), 110, 120, 130-131.

²⁸ There is a growing literature on the development of northern black communities and the rise of a black middle class. Much of it emphasizes the importance of evangelical belief, middle-class morality, and patriotism as means of resistance to racism and a counter-example to slavery. As a start see Rita Roberts, *Evangelicalism and the Politics of Reform in Northern Black Thought, 1776-1863* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010); Erica L. Ball, *To Live an Anti-slavery Life: Personal Politics and the Antebellum Black Middle Class* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2012); James O. Horton and Louise E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Leonard P. Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

²⁹ The church was non-denominational, with Presbyterians dominant.

³⁰ "Colored People of Troy."

³¹ "Colored People of Troy—Union Protracted Meeting, Held Six Evenings, to Promote Their Intellectual and Moral Development," *Colored American*, 1 April 1837."

³² "Union Meeting of the Colored People of Albany, Troy and Vicinity," *Colored American*, 15 April 1837.

³³ Whether this vision was realistic and sustainable in the face of slavery and racist violence became the key black internal debate of the 1840s. Garnet famously broke with it in 1843 in his "Call to Rebellion" speech, calling for slaves to use "every means, including physical resistance" to oppose slavery. Harris did not live long enough to really participate in that debate, although, like virtually all of his peers, he endorsed the turn to politics in 1840.

³⁴ "Union Meeting of the Colored People of Albany, Troy and Vicinity."

³⁵ Daniel A. Payne, *Recollections of Seventy Years* (Nashville, Tenn.: Publishing House of the A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1888; reprint: New York: Arno Press, 1968), 65-67.

³⁶ Series Early Journals, call number A W15 D 1835-41, Record Group 42, Financial Records, Special Collections, Bailey Howe Library, University of Vermont, Burlington, pp. 42-43.

³⁷ Harris is first listed as an agent in Burlington in *The Colored American*, 7 October 1837. For further listings as agent see also the issues of 11, 18, 25 November 1837, 9, 16, 23, 30 December 1837, 13 January 1838, 3, 22 March 1838, 5, 19 April 1838.

³⁸ Elise A. Guyette, "Black Lives and White Racism in Vermont, 1760-1870" (M.A. Thesis, University of Vermont, 1992), Table 4.7, "Five Largest African American Communities in Vermont, 1800-1870," 85-86.

³⁹ Murray is mocked in the *Burlington Free Press*, 6 February 1835, 3. For more on his troubles as an antislavery organizer see David M. Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont, 1791-1850* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 146-148. The story of the "Anti-Slavery Society of Burlington" is recounted in O.G.W., "The Long Ago, No. V," *Burlington Free Press*, 26 April 1878, 2. Orville G. Wheeler is listed as a member of the class of 1837 in the *Triennial Catalogue of the University of Vermont*, 1854, 28. Alvan Stewart was from Chittenden County and attended UVM between 1809 and 1811, but did not graduate. He became an antislavery man while practicing law in Utica in 1833 and was instrumental in forming the New York State Anti-Slavery Society in October 1835. He gave up his law practice to organize full time in 1836. This, and the fact that he told a story about Gerrit Smith's conversion to abolitionism when he was organizing in Burlington, leads me to conclude that he could not have been in Burlington before 1836. See Luther R. March, *Writings and Speeches of Alvan Stewart on Slavery* (New York: A. B. Burdick, 1860), 9-39, and "Stewart, Alvan," in James G. Wilson and John Fiske, eds., *Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography* (New York: D. Appleton

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& Co., 1888), 5: 683. On the formation of the Chittenden County Anti-Slavery Society see “Anti-Slavery Society,” *Burlington Free Press*, 16 March 1838, 2.

⁴⁰ She got the first name wrong. There was no James Harris in either the UVM class of 1838 or 1839.

⁴¹ “What has the North to Do with Slavery?” *The Liberator*, 25 October 1839. For a comment on this *Liberator* item see also “I have seen in the Liberator of the 25th October last, an extract,” *Colored American*, 25 April 1840.

⁴² Julian I. Lindsay, *Tradition Looks Forward: The University of Vermont, A History* (Burlington: The University of Vermont, 1954), 163, quoting William Bissell, class of 1836.

⁴³ “Commencement of the University of Vermont,” *Burlington Free Press*, 3 August 1838, 2. Mann’s opinion appears in his Harris obituary, “Died.”

⁴⁴ For a brief biography of Wright see Ripley, *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 3: 187-88; on Cornish see *ibid.*, 3: 95-96. On their friendship and their central places in black intellectual life and black reform circles see Swift, *Black Prophets of Justice*.

⁴⁵ “To the Church and Congregation at T. LETTER II,” *Colored American*, 8 September 1838.

⁴⁶ “To the Church and Congregation at T. LETTER III,” *Colored American*, 15 September 1838.

⁴⁷ Purvis was also the son-in-law of James Forten, the well-to-do black abolitionist Philadelphia sailmaker and early financial backer of the *The Liberator*.

⁴⁸ On Gardner see Ripley, *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 3: 212-213, and Julie Winch, ed., *The Elite of Our People: Joseph Willson’s Sketches of Black Upper-Class Life in Antebellum Philadelphia*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 147. On Gloucester see *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 3: 198-199. On Bowers see Winch, *The Elite of Our People*, 153-154. On Bird see *ibid.*, 156. On Purvis see *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 3: 81-82. On Bias see Winch, *The Elite of Our People*, 127, and Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 148. On Robert Douglass Sr. see Ripley, *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 3: 117-118 and Winch, *The Elite of Our People*, 162.

Frederick Douglass, on the other hand, escaped from Baltimore just a few weeks later, on September 3, 1838. He found Philadelphia so treacherous that on September 4 he went straight to New York, where in fact he was aided by many of the men, including Wright, who had welcomed Harris in August. Frederick Douglass would not make his debut as a speaker before a mixed-race audience until August 11, 1841. See Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, His Early Life as a Slave, His Escape from Bondage, and His Complete History to the Present Time* (Hartford, Ct.: Park Publishing Co., 1881), 202-206. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglasslife/douglass.html>.

⁴⁹ Harris is listed as one of Payne’s successors in the Liberty Street pulpit (and incorrectly listed as Henry Highland Garnet’s direct successor—Garnet in fact took the job in 1841) in “A Sketch of the Past History and Present Condition of the Colored People of Troy.” 1. Payne had strained his vocal chords on New Year’s Eve 1837 and convalesced in Troy through April 1838 before resigning shortly thereafter. (See Payne, *Recollections of Seventy Years*, 68-42.) I believe Payne stayed in Troy until August and then left with Harris; he is certainly the author of the September 8, 1838, letter “To the Church and Congregation at T.,” published in *The Colored American*, the second in a series of letters describing his travels after he left Troy, in which he describes his feelings on leaving (“Very dear Friends,—I left your pretty and flourishing city. . . precisely at 6 o’clock A.M. The sky was somewhat overcast, the atmosphere damp and heavy, yet ever and anon, the sun did throw aside the gloomy clouds. . . . The phenomena of nature was a picture of the emotions of my own bosom, for hope and fear, joy and grief alternately glided across my soul. Hope, that all was well;—Fear, that I was doing wrong, or in error relative to my departure from T. Joy, because of the promises of God, and Grief, because of the forlorn state of the ‘little flock’ whom I left without a Shepherd’s care!”). Since Harris was on the trip Payne describes in the letter, and there was at the time no new pastor as yet in Troy, Harris could not have succeeded Payne as of that date. Harris graduated in Burlington on July 31, was in New York on August 10, and then in Philadelphia until at least August 20. It is unclear when he permanently moved to Philadelphia, but he was likely living there by May 1839. It follows then that he served as a pastor in Troy for an interim period from September of 1838 through the spring of 1839.

⁵⁰ Susan H. Ward, *The History of the Broadway Tabernacle Church, from Its Organization in 1840, to the Close of 1900, Including Factors Influencing Its Formation* (New York: The Broadway Tabernacle Church, 1901). <https://archive.org/details/historyofbroadwa00ward>. On the Smith and Garnet speeches see Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 34.

⁵¹ “Sixth Anniversary,” *The Emancipator*, 9 May 1839, 6. Ripley, *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 3: 296-297, lists attendance at 5,000, but this is almost surely incorrect. The church, built both for reform meetings and to accommodate the crowds drawn by the mesmerizing Finney, was designed to hold 2,400. The next week *The Emancipator*, which carried a paraphrased transcription of Harris’s remarks, reported attendance at the business meeting at about 500. Harris probably spoke to something approaching a full house of 2,400. “Speeches at the Anniversary,” *The Emancipator*, 16 May 1839, 10. *The Colored American* called the assembly, with no more precision, “large and brilliant.”

See “The 6th Anniversary of the American Anti-Slavery Society,” *Colored American*, 11 May 1839. “See also “Power of the Free States,” *Colored American*, 18 May 1839.

⁵² “Speeches at the Anniversary,” *The Emancipator*, 16 May 1839, 10. Interestingly, the speech was reprinted, without comment, under the same title by the *Voice of Freedom* in Montpelier, beginning on the left column of page 1, 8 June 1839. Did this prominent placement indicate that Harris was known in Vermont, or was it due to the mere fact that he had graduated from UVM?

The speech has been anthologized a number of times since. See for example, Ripley, *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 3: 296-297, as well as Philip S. Foner and Robert J. Branham, eds., *Lift Every Voice: African-American Oratory, 1878-1900* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1998), 179-182.

⁵³ Du Bois first defined the term “double-consciousness” in 1897. “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.” W. E. B. Du Bois, “Strivings of the Negro People,” *Atlantic Monthly: A Magazine of Literature, Science, Art, and Politics* 80 August 1897, 194. He published a revision of the article as chapter one of *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903.

⁵⁴ “Anniversary of the American A.S. Society,” *The Liberator*, 10 May 1839. See also “Abstract of Speeches,” *ibid.*, 17 May 1839. The same issue contained yet another positive review of Harris: “not one of the speakers was listened to more attentively, or acquitted himself more ably, than Andrew Harris, a young colored graduate of the University of Vermont. He showed, in a logical and conclusive manner, that if the free colored population of the United States are a degraded and ignorant class, the guilt belongs almost exclusively to the white people. His speech was happily conceived, enunciated with distinctness, and delivered in a modest yet unembarrassed manner.” “Annual Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society,” *The Liberator*, 17 May 1839.

⁵⁵ Payne, *Recollections of Seventy Years*, 72. Regarding the size and vibrancy of the colored population of Philadelphia see Winch, ed., *The Elite of Our People*, and Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia’s Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988). Nash discusses the 1840 population on 247. See also Dell Upton, *Another City: Urban Life and Urban Spaces in the New American Republic* (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 2008), 21, 39. W. E. B. Du Bois lists the 1840 black population as 10,507 in the city and 19,833 in the county, in *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1899), 47.

⁵⁶ As an introduction to the network of reform in Philadelphia see Richard Newman and James Mueller, eds., *Antislavery and Abolition in Philadelphia: Emancipation and the Long Struggle for Racial Justice in the City of Brotherly Love* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011).

⁵⁷ Barnes (1798-1870) was also a friend to the black community of the city. (Frederick Douglass would quote him in “*What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?*”: “Albert Barnes but uttered what the common sense of every man at all observant of the actual state of the case will receive as truth, when he declared that “There is no power out of the church that could sustain slavery an hour, if it were not sustained in it.”) That Barnes was Harris’s tutor is stated in Harris’s *Rochester Daily Democrat* obituary, “Died.” Daniel Alexander Payne also confirmed that Harris was a New School Presbyterian (Payne, *Recollections of Seventy Years*, 326).

⁵⁸ *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, With an Appendix* (New York: Molineux, 1839), 48.

⁵⁹ “Ordination and Installation of Rev. Andrew Harris Over the Second Colored Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia,” *Colored American*, 8 May 1841.

⁶⁰ See M. Brainerd, *The Life of Rev. Thomas Brainerd, D.D., For Thirty Years Pastor of Old Pine Street Church, Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1870), 145. <https://archive.org/details/lifeofrevthomas00brai>.

⁶¹ Payne’s memory, which appears to have been remarkable, is correct in all verifiable details. Harris was in the Third Presbytery and Barnes’s interest makes perfect sense given their relationship. Payne, *Recollections of Seventy Years*, 324-327. The story of Potiphar’s wife’s unsuccessful attempt to seduce Joseph and her later revenge as a scorned woman is told in Genesis, Chapter 39.

⁶² “Ordination and Installation of Rev. Andrew Harris Over the Second Colored Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia.”

⁶³ The St. Mary’s Street Church was burned in 1842, never rebuilt, and dissolved as a congregation in 1867. The Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia has no records from the church.

⁶⁴ Thomas Brainerd, *The Gospel Honourable to Its Advocates A Sermon, by the Rev. Thomas Brainerd, at the Ordination and Installation of the Rev. Andrew Harris* (Philadelphia: Published by the Session of the Second African Church).

⁶⁵ “I have always stood aloof from the abolition societies,” Brainerd wrote in 1837 (he believed their radicalism did more harm than good and precluded the possibility of Christian reconciliation

with slaveholders), but he was also outraged by the murder of Elijah Lovejoy, supported black churches that were destroyed or damaged in the Philadelphia riots of 1838, prayed with slaves on a visit to North Carolina, and smuggled to freedom two light-skinned little girls, whom he pretended were his daughters, on his return from that trip. See Brainerd, *The Life of Rev. Thomas Brainerd*, 109, 140-146, 176-77. <https://archive.org/details/lifeofrevthomasb00brai>.

⁶⁶ For complex reasons the immediate issue in 1839 revolved around women's rights, specifically whether women would be formally recognized as members of the society. Here is *The Liberator's* summary of how the question played out at the meeting: "Amos A. Phelps moved the following amendment to the amendment. . . . 'That the term "person," as used in the 4th Article of the Constitution of this society, is to be understood as including men and women, and as entitling women to sit, speak, vote, hold office, and exercise the same rights of membership as persons of the other sex.' . . . the amendment of Amos A. Phelps was rejected. . . . The question was then taken by yeas and nays, on the resolution, as amended, and carried as follows: 'Resolved, that the roll of this meeting be made by placing thereon the names of all persons, male and female, who are delegates from any auxiliary society, or members of this society.' Those opposed to it were at least in part concerned about what they saw as two related issues: watering down the cause of anti-slavery, and alienating men who could be persuaded to oppose slavery but had no interest in either perfectionism or women's rights. Harris voted 'no.'" "American Anti-Slavery Society. Meeting for Business," *The Liberator*, 24 May 1839.

⁶⁷ A good general account of the 1839-40 antislavery schism can be found in Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1998), 264-281. On the black clergy who joined the American and Foreign Antislavery Society, including Harris, see Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 68, and Swift, *Black Prophets of Justice*, 110. Harris is listed as a delegate to the 1840 AASS meeting in "Annual Meeting of the Eastern Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, 14 May 1840, 2. He is listed as one of the founders of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society in "American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society," *The Emancipator*, 29 May 1840, 18. He is also listed as a delegate to the business meeting of the "American Anti-Slavery Society" on May 12, 1841 ("Business Meeting," *The Emancipator*, 20 May 1841, 11), but since the officers listed include James G. Birney, Joshua Leavitt, Lewis Tappan, Henry B. Stanton, and Theodore S. Wright, I can only conclude the article is mistaken and this was the business meeting of the American and Foreign ASS. Harris is also listed as a delegate to a May 12, 1841 "National Nominating Convention" that nominated Birney for president and James Morris for vice president for the 1844 election ("National Nominating Convention," *The Emancipator*, 20 May 1841, 11). On Cornish, see Ripley, *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 3: 95-96, 216-218.

⁶⁸ Eastern Pennsylvania ASS: "Annual Meeting of the Eastern Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society," and "Pennsylvania," *The Emancipator*, 29 May 1840, 19; Leavitt ASS: "Business Meeting," *ibid.*, 20 May 1841, 11. For a very brief description of the Leavitt Society, see Newman and James Mueller, eds., *Antislavery and Abolition in Philadelphia*, 189; New York Committee of Vigilance: "New-York Anniversaries," *Boston Recorder*, 21 May 1841, 82; Temperance: "From the Philadelphia Daily Republican: Temperance Celebration in Philadelphia," *The North Star* (Rochester), 24 November 1848, 4; Anti-Colonization: Samuel E. Cornish and Theodore S. Wright, *The Colonization Scheme Considered, In Its Rejection by the Colored People—In Its Tendency to Uphold Caste—In Its Unfitness for Christianizing and Civilizing the Aborigines of Africa, and for Putting a Stop to the African Slave Trade: In a Letter to the Hon. Theodore Frelinghuysen and the Hon. Benjamin P. Butler* (Newark, N.J.: Aaron Guest, 1840), 4; *Colored American* fundraiser: "Public Meeting for This Paper," *Colored American*, 5 December 1840; Bethel AME Dedication: A. W. Wayman, *My Recollections of African M. E. Ministers, or Forty Years' Experience in the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: A. M. E. Book Rooms, 1881), 16 <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/wayman/wayman.html>. For the relative locations of Harris's Second African and the Bethel AME ("Mother Bethel" or "First African") churches, see E. L. Carey and A. Hart, *Philadelphia in 1830-1: or, A Brief Account of The Various Institutions and Public Objects in This Metropolis. Forming a Complete Guide for Strangers and a Useful Compendium for the Inhabitants* (Philadelphia: James Kay, Jun. & Co., 1830), 41 and 49; Voting rights, Troy: "Proceedings of the New York State Convention," *Colored American*, 11 September 1841; Voting rights, New York City: "Public Meeting," *ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, published as *Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier*, 3 December 1841, 2; *North American*, published as *The North American and Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), 3 December 1841, 2; *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), 4 December 1841, 2. Versions of this obituary also ran in the *Commercial Advertiser* (New York) on December 4, the *Daily Atlas* (Boston) on December 7, the *Spectator* (New York) on December 8, the *Boston Courier* on December 9, and the *National Aegis* (Worcester) on December 15. Gloucester, who was a member of the most prominent black Presbyterian family in the city, had helped form the American and Foreign Antislavery Society. He succeeded Harris as the pastor at St. Mary's Street Presbyterian (his brother Jeremiah Gloucester had founded it in 1824) and was also involved with the *Colored American*. On Gloucester-



ter, see Ripley, *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 3: 198-199. For more on the Gloucester family see Nash, *Forging Freedom*.

⁷⁰ "Deaths," *The Liberator*, 24 December 1841. Versions of this obituary also ran in the *Salem Register* on December 20, the *Salem Gazette* on December 21, the *Massachusetts Spy* (Worcester) on December 22, the *National Aegis* (Worcester) on December 22 (the *Aegis* ran two versions of the obituary a week apart), the *Yarmouth Register* on December 23, and the *New Bedford Mercury* on December 24. Harris's ordination and death are also both listed in *The American Quarterly Register*, 14: 91 (ordination) and 308 (death). The death is misdated as occurring on December 2.

⁷¹ "Died."

⁷² "The excellent poetry on the death of our esteemed young brother," *Colored American*, 25 December 1841. Abolitionist papers regularly published poetry, but I could find no poem by this title, or one that mentions Harris or was written by either Daniel Alexander Payne or D.A.P. Payne did, however, write poetry. In 1850 he published a small volume of religious poems, *The Pleasures and Other Miscellaneous Poems*, which included two mourning poems, one for his first wife, and one for a daughter who died. There is no poem for Harris in the volume. Daniel A. Payne, *The Pleasures and Other Miscellaneous Poems* (Baltimore: Sherwood and Co., 1850).

⁷³ Daniel A. Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 163-166.

⁷⁴ "Presbytery of Philadelphia New School," *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), 14 April 1842; *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1843* (New York: Daniel Fanshaw, 1843), 41; "Second Annual Report of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society Presented May 10, 1842," *Emancipator and Free American*, 26 May 1842; "From the Philadelphia Daily Republican: Temperance Celebration in Philadelphia," *The North Star* (Rochester), 24 November 1848; "Colored Students in American Colleges," *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (Rochester), 22 September 1854; *Triennial Catalogue of the University of Vermont*, 1854.

⁷⁵ "From the Philadelphia Commercial Herald. The Abolitionists," *The Liberator*, 9 October 1840.

⁷⁶ The St. Mary's Street Church had a troubled, tenuous history. Founded in 1824, it did without a pastor from 1828 until Harris's ordination in 1841 before burning in August 1842. See "Ordination and Installation of Rev. Andrew Harris Over the Second Colored Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia," and Matthew S. Hopper, "From Refuge to Strength: The Rise of the African-American Church in Philadelphia, 1787-1949" (Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, undated), <http://www.preservationalliance.com/files/aachurches.pdf>.

⁷⁷ The riots are described in Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, 26-30. Thomas Brainerd discusses the 1838 Pennsylvania Hall riot in Brainerd, *The Life of Rev. Thomas Brainerd*, 109, 145-146, <https://archive.org/details/lifeofrevthomasb00brai> (Brainerd says two churches burned; Du Bois says one). A good description of the 1842 rioting around St. Mary's Street can be found in "Riot in Philadelphia," *Signal of Liberty* (Ann Arbor, Michigan), 15 August 1842. A description of the 1849 riot can be found in Upton, *Another City*, 106-109. On Philadelphia's black churches, see Hopper, "From Refuge to Strength," <http://www.preservationalliance.com/files/aachurches.pdf>. On the burnings of churches and social halls as attacks on black social networks see Emma J. Lapsansky, "'Since They Got Those Separate Churches': Afro-Americans and Racism in Jacksonian Philadelphia," *American Quarterly* 32 (Spring 1980). For good measure it is worth mentioning that massive anti-Catholic riots wracked the City of Brotherly Love in 1844.

⁷⁸ "One of the most painful embarrassments with which we ever had to contend," the African Americans of Troy claimed in 1837 in a statement written by Harris, "is the want of combined action. And this is more especially felt by us, in consequence of the smallness of our numbers and resources, in any one place in this region" ("Union Meeting of the Colored People of Albany, Troy and Vicinity").

⁷⁹ Payne, *Recollections of Seventy Years*, 67-68.

⁸⁰ "Proceedings of the New York State Convention," *Colored American*, 11 September 1841.