# Freedom's Agenda: African-American Petitions to the Massachusetts Government 1600—1900

Early in the nineteenth century wealthy Bostonians developed one of America's most glittering neighborhoods on Beacon Hill.

On the other side of the hill – the North Slope – William Cooper Nell grew up in a predominantly black neighborhood. Exploring the Massachusetts State House as a boy he was impressed by the historic atmosphere that seemed to celebrate the ideals of democracy. Later in life Nell would deliver many petitions to the State House seeking equal rights for black citizens.

Downtown, on Washington Street, abolitionist attorney Ellis Gray Loring took a thirteen year old black boy from Salem as a servant. Decades later Robert Morris became one of two black attorneys in America who had passed the bar.

Morris also signed petitions, as did Lewis and Harriet Hayden. Their Beacon Hill boarding house became a "temple of refuge" for runaway slaves like themselves.

Today these petitions, and more, are preserved at the Massachusetts Archives. Dating to the colonial period, they provide a fascinating window into the past and a link to our own times, identifying issues that became central to the modern civil rights movement.

The petitions highlight stunning progress and stubborn injustices that remain with us today.



# Slavery in Massachusetts

"I suppose you know very well how we shall maintain 20 Moors cheaper than one English Servant."

Emmanuel Downing to Governor John Winthrop, 1630's

In 1641 Massachusetts became the first English colony to legalize slavery. Although some questioned its morality, the institution survived until after the Revolution.

#### The Selling of Joseph

Massachusetts was founded by Puritans who were famously harsh, but also moralistic. Samuel Sewall, a judge in the Salem Witch Trials, admitted his errors and thought more deeply about injustice. In 1700 he published the Selling of Joseph, often called the first anti-slavery tract.

The Puritan founders also had a unique interest in education (linking literacy with bible reading.) By establishing public schools and Harvard College in the seventeenth century they may have planted the seeds for later reform.



Massachusetts Historical Society

#### Morals and Moralizing

It seems that each generation has moral blind spots. In this 1765 edition of the Boston Gazette and Country Journal, the left column has an idealistic protest against the Stamp Act and its burden on "the widow, the orphan and others who have few on earth to help or even pity them." The right column offers a reward for the capture of a runaway slave and an ad for the sale of a "likely Negro Girl about 16."

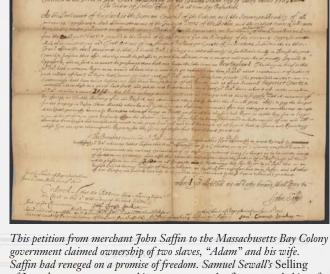


The Boston Gazette and Country Journal campaigned for American rights before the Revolution. Note the irony of front page ads in the right column.



A "slave census" for the town of Marshfield, 1754 Massachusetts Archives

Thomas Hutchinson State House Art Collection



of Joseph was a response to this controversy and reflects an early hint of reform. Massachusetts Archives

Prince Hall founded an African lodge of Masons. In later generations Prince Hall Masons have included sociologist W.E.B. DuBois and Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall.





In 1777 Prince Hall, a free black man, submitted this anti-slavery petition to the legislature in the newly independent "State of Massachusetts." It points to the "inconsistency of acting themselves that part which they condemn in others." Despite its moral force, slavery persisted. Massachusetts Archives

#### "Where was the moral issue?"

Vetoing a bill to end the slave trade in 1771, colonial governor Thomas Hutchinson asked "where was the moral issue?"

# Free and Unequal

### "All men are bern free and equal."

#### Declaration of Rights, Massachusetts Constitution of 1780

Slavery ended in Massachusetts when Mum Bett and Quock Walker brought separate lawsuits to win their freedom, citing language in the new state constitution.

> Mum Bett, also known as Elizabeth Freeman

#### **Seeking Restitution**

Before it served as George Washington's headquarters and poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's home, the wealthy Vassal family kept slaves at their Brattle Street mansion in Cambridge. Fellow Tory Isaac Royall owned plantations on the island of Antigua and held a large number of slaves at his Medford estate. Both families fled on the

eve of the Revolution and former slaves submitted petitions to the Massachusetts government for redress.





Massachusetts Archives photo of Vassal House



Provincial elegance: the Vassal and Royall Houses. Restored slave quarters are shown to the right of the Royall House and are central to current interpretation of the site. Courtesy of Royall House and Slave Quarters



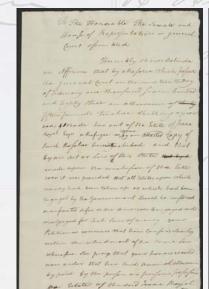


Slavery at the Vassal House: In old age Anthony and Cuba Vassal petitioned for help: "The land your petitioners now improve is not sufficient to supply them with such vegetables as are necessary for their family." In a second document John Hancock approves the payment of twelve pounds for each. Massachusetts Archives

A Modern Controversy

Seventy seven slaves were burned alive during a rebellion at the Royall's property in Antigua. When Isaac Royall Jr. left Massachusetts for England, he felt an emotional tie to his former home. Royall donated money to Harvard College that helped establish a law school. Today the Harvard Law School seal reflects the Royall family crest.

Currently there is a debate about its appropriateness.





"Belinda," a former slave on the Isaac Royall estate, submitted several petitions to the Massachusetts government.

She had been captured in Ghana at the age of 12. Because of "age and infirmity" she was awarded "fifteen pounds twelve shillings per annum" from the Royall estate. This 1785 document shows that the promised "maintenance" was not received each year. Massachusetts Archives

#### Cruel and Unusual

After the Revolution, James and Thomas Handasyd Perkins made a fortune trading with China. Earlier, as slave traders, they told agents not to take infants since they were difficult to sell.

### The Abolitionist Movement

# "Partially enjoying the fruits of liberty" John T. Hilton, an early leader in Boston's black

John T. Hilton, an early leader in Boston's black community, describing the status of African-Americans in Massachusetts

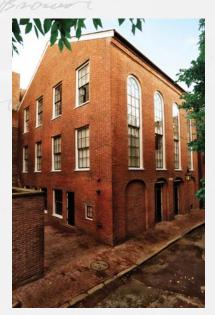
During the nineteenth century Boston became a center of the abolitionist movement although there remained widespread resistance to the prospect of equal rights for black citizens.

#### Why Massachusetts?

While life was difficult for African-Americans here it was often worse in other states, north and south. In Massachusetts a literate and literary elite included a small but dedicated group of abolitionists. Many citizens saw the inconsistency between celebrating the ideals of the Revolution and the continuing institution of slavery. For African-Americans, meeting and organizing, writing and publishing, were *officially* tolerated in Massachusetts, though not without risk.

The African Meeting House on Beacon Hill was a place of worship as well as community organizing. In 1832 William Lloyd Garrison and eleven others signed the American Anti-Slavery constitution in its vestry. Today it is the site of the Museum of African-American History. Massachusetts Historical Commission







#### Abolition in Black and White

History textbooks have long recognized some abolitionists: William Lloyd Garrison, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and usually Frederick Douglass. Douglass often appears to be an anomaly, a forceful and eloquent black man holding his own on the national stage. Today, historians look further. Abolition was not simply a gift from benevolent activists outside the black community. It was also the work of capable organizers within, people who made history without making the history books. Some of their names appear on these petitions.

William Lloyd Garrison, originally from Newburyport, devoted his life to the abolition of slavery. His organization and newspaper; the Liberator, promoted the cause. Some of the exhibit's printed petitions were set in Garrison's office. Metropolitan Museum of Art

#### "Bobalition" Posters

Most in Massachusetts were not abolitionists. On July 14, black
Bostonians celebrated the 1808 abolition of the Atlantic slave trade with marches and banquets.
On at least one occasion the festivities were violently attacked.
"Bobalition" posters mocked the event and the African-American dialect. ("Abolition" is pronounced "Bobalition" in this racist satire.) Library of Congress



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The names of black and white abolitionists appear side by side on this 1850 petition, proposing secession from the union over the issue of slavery.

Massachusetts Archives

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# Public Accommodations: Jim Crow in Massachusetts

"I refused to move, and they clutched me, head, neck and shoulders... I had interwoven myself among the seats. In dragging me out, it must have cost the company twenty five or thirty dollars, for I tore up seats and all."

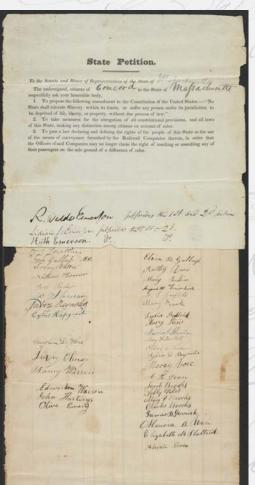
Frederick Douglass on being evicted from a Massachusetts railroad car

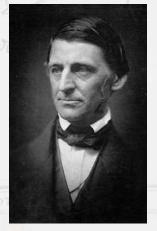
#### Out of Town on a Rail

The phrase "Jim Crow" is associated with segregation in the American south. It may be surprising that the term was first used for segregated railway cars in Massachusetts. "Jim Crow" cars were sometimes called "Jimmies." Shortly after boarding in Lynn, Frederick Douglass refused to move to a separate car on the Eastern Railroad. The conductor and several assistants ripped up the seat, with Douglass in place, and ejected him from the train.



Frederick Douglass





Ralph Waldo Emerson

Ralph Waldo Emerson signed this 1844 petition that included a protest against railroad discrimination. A benevolent figure by all accounts, Emerson was the great grandson of Cornelius Emerson who was actively involved in the slave trade.

Massachusetts Archives

Frederick Douglass signed this 1842 petition against railroad discrimination that he had personally experienced in Massachusetts. The petition includes the names of William Lloyd Garrison and community activist William Cooper Nell. Massachusetts Archives



"fim Crow" was a character of derision in minstrel shows.
"fim Crow" laws separated the races.



An idealized image of nineteenth century railroads

#### Rating the Railroads

The Liberator, edited by William Lloyd

Garrison, published a "Traveler's Directory," rating Massachusetts railroads. The
Boston and Lowell Railroad and the Boston and Worcester were listed as "equally
free for all." The Boston, New Bedford and Providence Railroads maintained

"a vile distinction enforced by brutal assaults." The Eastern Railroad had the worst
record. Using tactics that anticipated the modern Civil Rights movement, including

"ride-ins" and boycotts, protesters changed its policies.

I on than

# Integration or Separation

### "The time for the separation of the races has come." Reverend Henry J. Duckrey

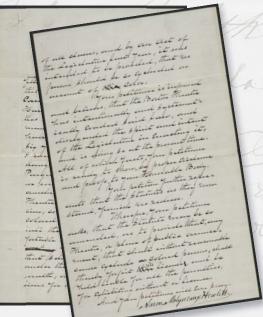
The persistence of segregation led to protest. Some in the black community sought greater economic independence or outright separation.

#### Aaron Molyneaux Hewlett

Aaron Molyneaux Hewlett, of Worcester, became director of the Harvard College Gymnasium and served from 1859 to 1871. Despite the Harvard connection he experienced and protested discrimination at a Cambridge skating rink and at a theater. His son Emanuel became the first African-American lawyer to win a U. S. Supreme Court case but also suffered discrimination as shown in a Washington Post article from 1907.

Hewlett is surrounded by period equipment including a medicine ball, boxing gloves, and dumbbells. Harvard University

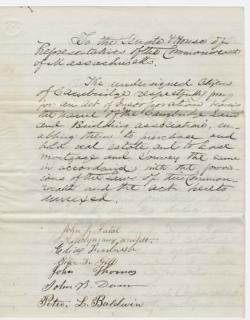




In 1866 Aaron Molyneaux Hewlett petitioned that "any Theatre, or place of public amusement, that shall without reasonable cause, exclude colored persons, shall thereby forfeit its license." Massachusetts Archives

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The Cambridge Chronicle reported on Hewlett's experience attempting to enter a segregated skating rink. Cambridge **Public Library** 



Seeking fairness and self-sufficiency, Hewlett incorporated the Cambridge Land and Building Association in 1868 to provide loans to members of the black community. Massachusetts Archives

#### WHITE LAWYERS HAVE PLAN

Bar Association Asks Court to Set Aside Room to Serve Lunch.

This Would Exclude the Colored Barristers, Who Are Not Members of the Organization.

the race question involved will be solved by the exclusion of negroes from the room set apart for bar association members.

The lunch room was closed last Tuesday, and its erstwhile patrons had to go elsewhere for their luncheon. Then the day, and its erstwhile patrons had to go elsewhere for their luncheon. Then the second of the secon

#### Father and Son: A Common Experience

As an attorney practicing before the U.S. Supreme Court, Emanuel Molyneaux Hewlett was eligible for admission to a court house lunch room. Protest by white attorneys closed the room which had been "a great convenience to the lawyers especially during bad weather." A rule change banned lawyers - like Emanuel Hewlett - who were not also members of the District Bar Association and the room reopened.

#### Disillusionment

As pastor of the Mount Olive Baptist Church in Cambridge, Reverend Henry Duckrey favored a northern migration of southern blacks for a better life. In 1903 the Cambridge Tribune reported on his candidacy for the School Committee. Opponents raised "the partisan cry of 'Save our schools' which he interpreted to mean, save our schools from people of his own race." Disillusioned by 1915, he advocated separation and planned "a 'jitney bus' service...for the use of colored people." Shortly after that announcement, he left Massachusetts for Philadelphia.

Reverend Duckrey proposes an independent bus line. Cambridge Public Library



"I never heard of the Elevated hiring a colored man as a conductor or motorman... If any white people care to do so they may patronize our lines...but they will be primarily for the people of our race." Reverend Henry J. Duckrey on the need for an independent bus line.

### School Desegregation: Separate but [Un]equal

"All children are equal before the law,"... "Mot the few who can pass the examination of a skin scanning committee" William Cooper Nell

As in the twentieth century, black citizens identified equal education as a critical step toward full equality. Using techniques similar to those of later activists they organized protests, petitions, and a court challenge to segregated schools.



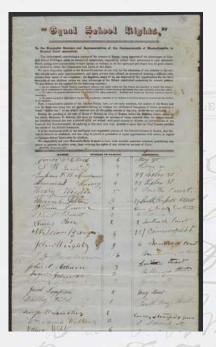
William Cooper Nell Massachusetts Historical Society The Abiel Smith School: A wealthy philanthropist, Abiel Smith, had donated money to establish a school for black children. By 1848 it had fallen behind other Boston Public Schools by almost every measure. The Mather School library had nine hundred volumes, the Mayhew School four hundred, while the Smith School had one. Massachusetts Archives photo



#### The Activist: William Cooper Nell

At the segregated Abiel Smith School twelve year old William Cooper Nell was cited for academic excellence. White students were invited

to a banquet at Faneuil Hall and awarded a medal. Nell received only a voucher for Benjamin Franklin's autobiography. Nell served as a waiter at the banquet. "You ought to be here with the other boys," said one official. "Why have you not taken steps to bring it about?" thought Nell. He began a lifetime of activism including petitions to end school segregation.



This 1851 petition against school segregation includes the signer's addresses. Many, including Belknap Street, Southac Street, and Smith Court are black neighborhoods on the North Slope of Beacon Hill.

Massachusetts Archives

This boarding house was home to William Cooper Nell (on the North Slope of Beacon Hill.) Massachusetts Archives photo



#### The Attorney: Robert Morris

Morris was born in Salem in 1823 and started waiting on tables before the age of thirteen. One Thanksgiving he served abolitionist lawyer Ellis Gray Loring at a Salem home. Impressed with Morris's demeanor Loring invited the boy to return with him

to Boston as a servant. Morris sat outside, next to the driver, on the segregated stage coach. A few years later Loring

encouraged Morris to study law. He later challenged school segregation in the courts.



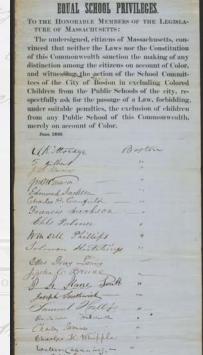
Attorney Robert Morris Social Law Library

Patrick A. Collins

#### Returning the Favor

Morris was called the "black lawyer" but also the "Irish lawyer" because so many clients were Irish immigrants. He was sympathetic to a young boy harassed by classmates in the Chelsea schools. One of ten Irish students in a class of one hundred, the child's arm was broken at one point. Starting as an office boy with Morris, Patrick Collins later studied law and became mayor of Boston.

This 1851 petition against segregated schools includes the names of socially prominent abolitionists including Wendell Phillips, son of a former mayor, and attorney Ellis Gray Loring, who mentored Robert Morris. Charles Sumner, less prominent at first, later became famous as a Massachusetts Senator. Massachusetts Archives



### Roberts v. The City of Boston, 1849

"The cause of equal school privileges originated with us. Unaided and unbiased we commenced the struggle."

Benjamin Robert on efforts to desegregate Boston schools

In 1954 the landmark Brown v. Board of Education decision struck down segregation in public schools. The prior legal doctrine allowing "separate but equal" schools originated with the Supreme Judicial Court in Massachusetts.

#### Sarah and Benjamin Roberts

Benjamin Robert's daughter Sarah was forced to walk a longer distance to a segregated school. Her maternal grandfather James Easton was a Revolutionary War veteran who tried to integrate his local

church. After buying a pew, he found it covered with tar the following week. Benjamin Roberts published a newspaper for a time and ran a printing business. He brought suit to desegregate Boston public schools. Some black parents disagreed, thinking that a segregated school was safer.



ieveral black activists were related to the Roberts family, including charles Lenox Remond of Salem. A dynamic speaker, be may have een the first African-American to testify before a Massachusetts egidaltive committee (examining railroad discrimination in 1842.) Benjamin Roberts submitted this petition in 1850 protesting school segregation. "Your petitioner, being by birth a Bostonian and grandson of one of the "Soldiers of the Revolution, having two sons and three daughters who are all banished from the schools nearest their residences as a result of not wearing a skin quite as pale as the children of their neighbors." Massachusetts Archives





The Roberts case was heard in the same courthouse that was later the scene of dramatic and violent protests against the return of fugitive slaves during the 1850's. Boston Athenaeum

Roberts approached black attorney William

Morris to handle the case. Morris joined with another young attorney, the future Senator Charles Sumner, in representing the Roberts family.



Domineering and austere, Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw of the Supreme Judicial Court was not moved by moral arguments against segregation.

#### The Roberts Decision

The doctrine of "separate but equal" was born in Massachusetts. In 1849 the Supreme Judicial Court ruled that separate schools, if equal, did not violate the principle of "equality before the law." The decision was cited to justify segregation in later cases in Nevada, California, New York, Arkansas, Missouri, Louisiana, Kansas, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Oregon, and West Virginia. It became entrenched in national law when followed by the U. S. Supreme Court in the case of "Plessy v. Ferguson" that upheld segregation in New Orleans in 1896.

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This successful petition by Eunice Ross led to school desegregation in Nantucket. The Massachusetts legislature ended segregation in all public schools in 1855, after the controversial Roberts decision. Massachusetts Archives

### The Right to Serve

"On their return from victory they may march up State Street over the spot consecrated by the martyrdom of Crispus Attucks, amid the plaudits of admiring citizens." William Cooper Nell on the prospect of recruiting black soldiers

Barring military service by black men was a double insult, questioning courage and competence, while denying a claim to equal rights.

#### The Militia Law

Massachusetts law allowed only "white male citizens" to serve in the militia. Nineteenth century militias were, in part, social organizations with comic opera uniforms, dinners, and balls. During the crisis years of the 1850's their military purpose became more important. In 1853 Robert Morris appeared before a legislative committee to advocate authorization of black units. The legislature was unmoved. Black activist William Watkins called the hearing "a humbug, a legislative farce."



After the Civil War, the "Shaw Guards" served as honor guards at the funeral of Senator Charles Sumner. Black militia units were banned before the war. In 1876 budget cuts in Massachusetts struck down this unit.



One of many petitions sent to the legislature, this requested authorization to form the "Massasoit Guards." This black unit would be named for a Native American leader. Although arms were ordered and uniforms designed (dark blue with light blue trim) the unit decided not to march without legislative approval. (1851) Massachusetts Archives

#### A History of Service

In an 1850 lecture William Cooper Nell made the connection between the ideals of the American Revolution and the quest of African-Americans for equal rights. He went beyond a philosophical argument to document the service of black soldiers in American wars. Beginning with the Boston Massacre, he identified Crispus Attucks,

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of black and Native American ancestry, as the first to die in the American Revolution.



A period ad for Nell's history of African-American military service. Houghton Library, Harvard University

Many documents recount the service of black veterans and some provide vivid detail. In June, 1776, Chester Parker of Dracut addressed the Provincial Government in Watertown. He fought "In the Battle called the Bunker Hill" and discharged his "firelock" seventeen times. "Wounded by a Ball from the Enemy in his Knee" he was carried away and requested funding to replace his lost musket. Massachusetts Archives

Non Dr. 11 Thillips Ann G. Phillips Att J. Wallein Glory! Sentie & greene

Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863 brought hope and also an authorization to recruit black soldiers for the union army.

#### Three Regiments

Massachusetts recruited three African-American regiments during the Civil War, the 54th, 55th, and 5th Cavalry. News that black soldiers could not be officers led to divisions within the black community. Some opposed recruitment. "Equality first, guns afterward" was the sentiment voiced by William Wells Brown. Robert Morris agreed and argued against enlistment. William Cooper Nell was discouraged by the ban but thought the historical opportunity should not be missed. Similar concerns arose over the issue of equal pay.

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Governor John Albion Andrew telegraphs Senator Charles Sumner on recruitment of black officers. "Get me leave to commission colored chaplains, assistant surgeons, and...second lieutenants." Andrew notes "a member of the Mass. Med. Soc., speaking four languages and a member Suffolk Bar" being disqualified (possibly references to Dr. John V. De Grasse and Robert Morris.) Black officers were not commissioned until later in the war. Massachusetts Archives



For several generations this monument, opposite the Massachusetts State House recognized the sacrifice of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, of the 54th Regiment, who died at Fort Wagner. Appropriately, the names of the regiment's fallen black soldiers were added in 1981. Massachusetts Archives photos



#### The Glorious 54th

In modern times the 54th Regiment's 1863 assault on Battery Wagner, near Charleston, South Carolina, has become one of the most famous Civil War incidents. It has been described as a "hopeless" mission, a frontal assault on heavily fortified positions. Although disastrous in terms of casualties, it served to validate the courage and commitment of black soldiers. By the end of the war ten percent of soldiers in the Union army were black and 37,000 had died.



The 54th Regiment flag held aloft at Fort Wagner by Sergeant William H. Carney. State House Art Collection



A Colonel's account of Carney's heroism at Fort Wagner: "Having received two very severe wounds, one in the thigh and one in the head, still he refused to give up his sacred trust... Boys the old flag never touched the ground," he said when entering the field hospital.

Massachusetts Archives

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William H. Carney, Library of Congress

**Sergeant William H. Carney** of New Bedford was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for action at Fort Wagner. It was the first incident in American history leading to this recognition for a black soldier. After the war, Carney died in a tragic elevator accident while working at the State House.

# Democracy (In)action

"In Massachusetts the blacks have the rights of citizenship, they may vote in elections, but the prejudice is so strong that it is impossible to receive their children in the schools."

Alexis de Tocqueville

Under the 1780 Massachusetts constitution African-American men had the right to vote. Full participation in the democratic process remained elusive.

#### **Power Play**

A friend and advisor of Civil War Governor John Albion Andrew, Lewis Hayden remained active in Republican politics after the war, serving one term in the legislature. Hayden and others wanted a substantial role in

party politics including input on the nominee for governor. Most party leaders thought that abolition of slavery was enough. They took African-American support for granted and pushed Hayden and others to the side. The resilient Hayden worked as a messenger in the Secretary of State's office.

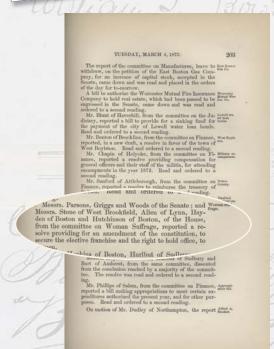
Later, political maneuvering diluted the black vote. This 1975 listing shows no African-American legislators between 1902 and 1947. Massachusetts State Library



Lewis Hayden Houghton Library, Harvard University



Harriet Hayden was an active partner and advisor to her husband Lewis Hayden. Ohio History Connection



#### Insufferable

Hayden and wife Harriet favored women's right to vote. As a state representative he supported an unsuccessful attempt to grant women's suffrage, as shown in the 1873 House Journal to the left. The issue split the abolitionist community. Some, like Frederick Douglass, argued that the priority should be voting rights for black men. Former ally Susan B. Anthony, dismissing "the old anti-slavery school," wrote "Let the question of women be brought up first and that of the negro last."





In 1850 black women in the Gilmore family petitioned for the right to vote, one of the earliest petitions from women on this subject. The hand written words "Women who ought to be legal voters" appear on one side. A nameless official wrote "women who think they out to be voters" on the other. Massachusetts Archives



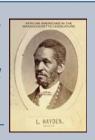
Lewis Hayden's home: This was a boarding house in the nineteenth century purchased with the help of abolitionists. Lewis and Harriet Hayden sheltered many fugitive slaves here. The doorway reflects a later remodeling. Massachusetts Archives photo

The Gilmore women who signed the voting petition were descendants of Toby Gilmore, an African-American soldier, who "served forty two months in the Continental Army," In 1782 he petitioned the government for help in retirement. The value of "State Securities" in his possession was devalued and inadequate to purchase property. Massachusetts Archives

Lewis Hayden may have been the most politically active leader in the black community. Born into slavery in Kentucky, his parents' marriage ended

when his father was sold. Later, Henry Clay, the famous statesman, broke up

Hayden's own marriage by selling his wife and one child. Remarried, Hayden even
tually escaped and settled in Boston. During the 1850's his clothing store and boarding house
offered refuge to fugitive slaves. Later he recruited soldiers for the African-American regiments.



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# At J. Wale Equal Justice J. Phillips

"One of the most revolting scenes I have ever witnessed took place this morning in the yard of the Leverett Street prison." Baltimore Sun article, 1849

Issues of equal justice remain in the forefront of our national debate today, echoing concerns that have been voiced by each generation of African Americans.

#### The Case of Washington Goode

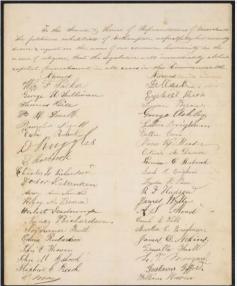
Washington Goode, a black man, was hanged at Boston's Leverett Street jail on May 25, 1849 - the first execution at the jail in thirteen years. Abolitionists charged that the death penalty was imposed, in part, because of Goode's race. Goode was convicted in the stabbing death of Thomas Harding "a rival for the affections" of a woman named Mary Ann

Potition on Capital Punishment.

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Sojourner Truth signed two petitions protesting the death penalty while living in Northampton, Massachusetts. Born into slavery in New York, she selected her distinctive name as an itinerant preacher. Notice the biting satire in the printed petition.

Massachusetts Archives

Williams. The case struck a chord because it raised the issue of equal punishment and the inhumanity of the death penalty.



Sojourner Truth

Protests in the Washington Goode case foreshadowed similar controversies in the twentieth century and today. One hundred and thirty petitions were submitted requesting clemency. Over 24,000 Massachusetts residents signed including William Lloyd Garrison, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.

#### A National Issue

The execution was reported in newspapers far beyond Massachusetts. A reporter for the *Baltimore Sun* was deeply affected by the event and submitted a moving account of the day.

"One of the most revolting scenes I have ever witnessed took place this morning in the yard of the Leverett Street prison. ... I learned that the wretched man had attempted to commit suicide the night before ... with a piece of glass. But for the timely arrival of the physician, he must have died in a few minutes.

The officers were required to carry the condemned man in an arm-chair because of his feeble condition occasioned by the loss of blood the night previous...Goode beheld for the first time the fatal instrument which was to complete the awful tragedy. At this moment he seemed to realize his fate and leaned his head back in hopeless agony.

Such a scene I hope never to witness again. The cold pouring rain- the shivering meager group assembled around the gallows- the ghostly appearance of the bleeding victim...

All the efforts of a host of philanthropists to have the sentence of death commuted to imprisonment for life were to no avail."

Goode was hanged, still strapped to his chair.



The Leverett Street Jail was located in Boston's West End. Few reminders of the neighborhood remain today.



WANTED.
TONS of Granite, for breaking up at the House of Correction, in Leverett-street. Stone Cutters' Granite chips are for the purposes as good as any stone. Any person willing to contract for the whole on any part of the above, are requested to send in their proposals to the subscriber within ten days; 200 tons to be delivered per week at the Gaol in Leverettsstreet.

march 16 JOSIAH QUINCY, Mayor.

Bleak House: Nineteenth Century ad for granite to be cut by inmates at the Leverett Street jail.

# On the Shoulders of Giants

This exhibit presents a first chapter in an unfinished history.

These African-American petitions are reminders that principled struggle conveys dignity even in defeat. It is also important to remember that the larger story is not one of failure. Building on the foundation of earlier activism, the modern civil rights movement achieved unimaginable success.

While we have not attained perfection as a society, we can celebrate these twentieth century milestones in the quest for fairness and equality.

#### Desegregating the American Military

Despite warnings that it would lead to problems with unit cohesion and battlefield performance, President Harry S. Truman signed an executive order desegregating the U.S. military on July 26, 1948. In 1989 General Colin Powell was appointed Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the nation's highest military position.



Historical Context: President Truman's decision to integrate the military shares the front page with a story about lynching. Library of Congress

General Colin Powell was the first African-American Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. United States Army



#### **School Desegregation**

In 1954 Chief Justice Earl Warren spoke the historic words that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" in announcing the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, *Kansas*. This issue remains in the headlines and in the courts today, but the terms of the debate have shifted. Few try to justify school segregation in principle.



Nettie Hunt and daughter Nikie on the steps of the U. S. Supreme Court Library of Congress





The U.S. Supreme Court's historic desegregation order in Brown v. Board of Education National Archives

| Supreme (                  | Court of the United               | States                        |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
|                            |                                   |                               |
| No.                        | 1 , October Term, 19              | 54                            |
| Oliver Brown, Mrs.         | Richard Lawton, Mrs.              | Sadie Emmanuel et al.,        |
|                            |                                   | Appellants,                   |
|                            | va.                               |                               |
| Board of Education of      | f Topeka, Shawnee Cour            | nty, Kansas, et al.           |
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| Appeal from the United St. | tales District Court for the      |                               |
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| This cause came on to be   | e heard on the transcript of the  | record from the United States |
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|                            | ot, It is ordered and adjudged by |                               |
| of the said District       |                                   |                               |
| hereby, reversed with cost |                                   |                               |
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| the opinions of this Co    | ourt as are necessary             | and proper to admit           |
| to public schools on a     | racially nondiscrimin             | story basis with all          |
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# Ast & Walle Milestones while & Greene

#### **Public Accommodations**

The landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 had many provisions including a ban on discrimination based on race, religion or ethnicity in hotels, motels, theaters and restaurants engaged in interstate commerce.



The Civil Rights Act of 1964 headlined newspapers across the country.



President Lyndon B. Johnson and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
Library of Congress



The Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination was established in 1946 to enforce state laws against discrimination in public accommodations, employment, bousing, credit and education.

### The Right to Vote

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 has been effective in protecting the rights of African-Americans. It included enforcement provisions for particular states with a history of discrimination. The U.S. Supreme Court has recently relaxed enforcement. Currently there is a trend in some states to make registration and participation more difficult.



The 1965 attack on peaceful marchers at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Sehna, Alabama was a turning point in national opinion on the struggle for voting rights. Alabama Tourism Department

President Barack Obama and former Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick. While Democrats and Republicans may disagree on public policy, the historical significance of this photo is clear.



#### Then and Now

In the nineteenth century, abolitionists campaigned to change Massachusetts law banning interracial marriage. In 1843 Massachusetts became the second state to end the prohibition (through legislation.) In 2004 Massachusetts became the first state to legalize same-sex marriage through a Supreme Judicial Court decision. Similar arguments about the "freedom to marry," as a "vital personal right," were made in both cases.



Mildred and Richard Loving. In 1967 the U.S. Supreme Court struck down state laws banning interracial marriage in the case of Loving v. Virginia. Library of Congress

This 1843 petition from Nantucket, protests the Massachusetts ban on interracial marriage as being "Wrong in the sight of God... Unworthy of the dignity of the Commonwealth since it stands as a perpetual insult and badge of degradation to a respectable portion of its citizens." Massachusetts Archives

