WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON'S *LIBERATOR* AND BOSTON'S BLACKS, 1830-1865

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IN 1830 Boston's blacks attended separate schools, were not permitted by state law to marry whites, were not accepted for jury duty, were not allowed to serve in the militia, were forced to sit in segregated areas provided for them in many places of worship and public amusement, and had to accept the "Jim Crow" accommodations on transportation facilities. Yet by 1865 instances of prejudice in nearly every one of these areas had almost disappeared.

On the other hand, by the end of the Civil War, Negroes in New York and Providence were still fighting for integrated schools, in Philadelphia they continued to battle the proscription of "Jim Crow" cars, and in Connecticut they had not yet been granted the franchise. What, then, were the various factors that helped to make the situation in Boston unique? How much of a role did William Lloyd Garrison and *The Liberator* play? Specifically, how significant was *The Liberator* as spokesman for Boston's black community from 1830 to 1865, during the thirty-five years the paper was published?

During the summer of 1830, fresh from a Baltimore jail, a young but experienced William Lloyd Garrison was moving ahead with plans to edit and publish a newspaper in Washington, tentatively to be called *The Public Liberator and Journal of the Times*. But when Benjamin Lundy began to spread the rumor, perhaps in self-defense, that he might move his *Genius of Universal Emancipation* from Baltimore to the capital, Garrison, who had worked with Lundy previously, decided to direct his journalistic pursuits elsewhere.[1]

[1] "Proposals for Publishing a Weekly Periodical in Washington City . . . ," Aug., 1830, *Anti-Slavery Papers*, Boston Public Library; William Lloyd Garrison to the Reverend George Shepard, Sept. 13, 1830, *Anti-Slavery Papers*, Boston Public Library; William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson, Feb. 15, 1874, *Anti-Slavery Papers*, Boston Public Library.

On January 1, 1831, his editorial compass having pointed the way to Boston, Garrison published the first of more than 1,800 weekly issues of *The Liberator*, a paper, he immediately warned, that would not equivocate and that would be heard, even by those who might not want to listen. In the very first issue, Garrison promised the nation's 320,000 free Negroes, particularly the nearly 160,000 living above the Mason-Dixon line,[2] that "your moral and intellectual elevation, the advancement of your rights, and the defense of your character, will be a leading object of our paper," whereupon he leveled a blast at Massachusetts' forty-five-year-old racial intermarriage law, echoing the sentiments expressed the year before by David Walker in his much-publicized appeal to blacks everywhere.[3]

Already Garrison had received promises of support from several leading black abolitionists, including the wealthy James Forten of Philadelphia, and he was pleased with the effect the paper was having upon the colored community generally: "Upon the colored population in the free states, it has operated like a trumpet call. They have risen in their hopes and feelings to the perfect stature of men: in this city, every one of them is as tall as a giant."[4]

The Liberator was scarcely six-weeks old when James G. Barbadoes, one of Boston's most influential colored citizens, thanked Garrison publicly for his past and present services to the city's blacks. And in August John Hilton, Grand Master of Boston's Prince Hall Masonic Lodge, with several of his associates, sent a sizable donation to the paper, affirming that "the descendents of Africa . . . are now convinced of the sincerity of

[2] *Fifth Census; or, Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States . . .* (Washington, Printed by Duff Green, 1832), 9, 15, 23, 25, 29, 35, 49, 55, 59, 67, 77, 79, 143, 147, 149, 153, 161, 163; *Anti-Slavery Examiner*, quoted in the *New York Colored American*, March 7, 1840.

[3] *The Liberator*, Jan. 1, 1831, 1, 3; Jan. 8, 1831, 1, 7; David Walker, *Walker's Appeal, In Four Articles. . . .* (Boston, First Edition, Sept. 28, 1829), 11.

[4] James Forten to William Lloyd Garrison, Dec. 31, 1830, *Anti-Slavery Papers*, Boston Public Library; William Lloyd Garrison to the Reverend Samuel J. May, Feb. 14, 1831, *Anti-Slavery Papers*, Boston Public Library; *The Liberator*, Dec., 29, 1865, xxxv, 208.

your intentions, and are proud to claim you as their advocate."[5]

The Liberator's first years were especially difficult; without the black subscribers who made up some seventy-five percent of the subscription list in 1834, the paper could not have survived. That year, Garrison appealed for more subscribers in the larger black communities of New York, where approximately 225 took the paper, and Philadelphia, where probably no more than 300 subscribed.

Some 150 blacks took the paper in Boston, but since that city's Negro population numbered perhaps just over 1,900, compared to approximately 15,000 in New York and about 10,000 in Philadelphia, this actually demonstrated relatively strong colored support for *The Liberator* in the city where it was published. And these figures certainly compare favorably with the impact the *New York Colored American* later had upon Boston's colored community, where only sixty-five subscribed at the end of 1839. True, Garrison admitted, the blacks were "poor and trodden down; but how can they arise, without having a press to lift up its voice in their behalf?" And *The Liberator*, Garrison hoped, would be that voice.[6]

Soon several important black organizations and societies

[5] James G. Barbadoes to William Lloyd Garrison, in *The Liberator*, Feb. 12, 1831, I, 26; John Hilton *et al* to William Lloyd Garrison, in *The Liberator*, Aug. 20, 1831, I, 133.

[6] William Lloyd Garrison to Robert Purvis, Dec. 10, 1832, *Anti-Slavery Papers*, Boston Public Library; "*Liberator* Appeal for Subscribers," April 15, 1834, *Anti-Slavery Papers*, Boston Public Library; George Thompson to Robert Purvis, Nov. 10, 1834, *Anti-Slavery Papers*, Boston Public Library; *The Liberator*, Dec. 15, 1837, VII, 203; *New York Colored American*, Dec. 7, 1839; *Fifth Census*, 23, 51, 65; *Sixth Census or Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States. . . . In 1840* (Washington, 1841), 46, 114, 152. In April, 1834, William Lloyd Garrison estimated that the black population of New York was 20,000 and of Philadelphia 25,000. The census figures for those two cities for 1830 and 1840 show that Garrison was wide of the mark. Even if he was including all of Philadelphia County, he was far from accurate, since that county's population in 1840 was just under 18,000. Garrison states that in all 400 took the paper in Philadelphia, 300 in New York, and 200 in Boston. Therefore, based on his estimate that seventy-five percent of those who subscribed were black, the conclusion can be drawn that approximately 300 colored took the paper in Philadelphia, 225 in New York, and 150 in Boston.

were beginning to take advantage of *The Liberator*'s columns to advertise their meetings and even publicize the problems that were discussed. Of such groups, *The Liberator* devoted most space to the Adelphic Union Library Association. Formed in 1836, its primary purpose was to provide adult blacks with the necessary means to broaden their education. Unable to find a common meeting ground with the city's white community, the blacks were determined to move ahead alone with plans to initiate a lecture series and collect books for a library.[7]

Under the direction, first of John Hilton, and then William Cooper Nell, who later would lead the fight to desegregate Boston's schools, the organization prospered for more than ten years, its progress clearly noted in *The Liberator*. From October to March each year, the association held lectures on various topics of educational and current interest. Open to both blacks and whites, the lectures also featured speakers from both races.

Many of the topics discussed demonstrated a continuing desire to see the black man's condition improved. Carefully explored were such issues as the Nat Turner slave insurrection of 1831, "Prejudice—its influence in developing the character of the colored people," and the question, "Do separate churches and schools for colored people tend to foster prejudice?"[8]

One probable explanation for the constant publicity for the Adelphic Union in *The Liberator* was the role played by prominent abolitionists who were often asked to lecture, notably William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips. Most of the speakers scheduled to appear in 1843 were well-known abolitionists, and tickets for the series were available at the Anti-Slavery Office.[9]

7 *The Liberator*, March 12, 1831, I, 43; April 9, 1831, I, 59; May 21, 1831, I, 83; May 28, 1831, I, 87; Jan. 5, 1833, III, 3, 4; Feb. 14, 1835, V, 26; July 4, 1835, V, 107; Jan. 2, 1837, VII, 3.

8 *The Liberator*, Feb. 21, 1840, X, 31; March 6, 1840, X, 39; Jan. 8, 1841, XI, 7; Feb. 26, 1841, XI, 35; March 11, 1842, XII, 39; Feb. 3, 1843, XIII, 19; Nov. 17, 1843, XIII, 183.

9 *The Liberator*, Jan. 21, 1842, XII, 11; March 11, 1842, XII, 39; Feb. 10, 1843, XIII, 23; Sept. 9, 1843, XIII, 155.

In addition, women were invited to speak before the organization. What made this especially significant was the split that had begun to develop in abolitionist ranks by 1839, one of the major points of contention being whether women should be allowed to take part in the various antislavery proceedings, a position William Lloyd Garrison strongly advocated.[10]

The abolitionist schism directly involved the city's colored community, for with the formation of the anti-Garrison Massachusetts Abolition Society a battle began for the support of Boston's blacks. The rift had actually begun in 1837 as a result of Garrison's continuing attacks upon the clergy. The response to Garrison took the form of two clerical appeals, in the second of which a group of predominantly antislavery ministers accused Garrison of being antireligious and charged him with unfair tactics "harmful to abolition." This group also alleged that the editor of *The Liberator* had convinced many of Boston's blacks to follow his ungodly ways and desert the city's antislavery churches, particularly those that were unfriendly to him.[11]

Garrison denied the charges and, led by John Hilton, the city's black leadership came quickly to their own and Garrison's defense. They denounced the clerical appeal, explaining that in religious matters they had minds of their own and followed no one but God, never requesting nor receiving any directions from Garrison. And in the pages of *The Liberator* they took to task the *New England Spectator*, the journalistic mouthpiece of the ministers who had signed the appeal, for its "offensive article . . . impeaching the moral and religious character of the colored citizens."[12]

In the meantime, with the widening abolitionist schism, the blacks of the city were being called upon to take sides. Here the recently established *New York Colored American* missed

[10] *The Liberator*, Aug. 11, 1837, VII, 129; William Cooper Nell to Mrs. Maria Weston Chapman, Nov. 5, 1839, *Anti-Slavery Papers*, Boston Public Library; Louis Filler, *The Crusade Against Slavery, 1830-1860* (New York, 1960), 129-134; Aileen S. Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics On Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850* (New York, 1969), 39-77.

[11] Filler, 131; *The Liberator*, Oct. 27, 1837, VII, 173.

[12] *The Liberator*, Sept. 22, 1837, VII, 154; Nov. 24, 1837, VII, 190.

a real opportunity to enlist much-needed support of an influential segment of Boston's colored population. Instead the paper antagonized many by refusing to publish a slate of resolutions passed at one of the earlier Boston meetings supporting Garrison and opposing the clerical appeal.[13]

The Reverend Samuel Cornish, the editor, explained his refusal on the grounds that he had not wanted to add fuel to the abolitionist fire. Although up to now a strong supporter of Garrison's, Cornish opposed blacks taking sides in any contest among abolitionists because this would create more dissension, and the only real losers would be the colored people themselves.[14]

Despite Cornish's logic, Boston's predominantly pro-Garrison black leadership attacked the *New York Colored American* for turning its back on them, and Cornish in turn leveled a strong blast at them, advising them to "keep cool" and not follow the irrational course of some of their leaders, particularly John Hilton. Actually the attack by Boston's blacks against the only colored newspaper in the United States was far stronger than Garrison's. The editor of *The Liberator* diplomatically limited his comments to a reasonable, low-keyed appeal to Cornish, suggesting that he subsequently keep the pages of his "fine paper" open to a full and free discussion of all the crucial questions affecting the black people.[15]

Significantly, just before the *New York Colored American* was to begin a subscription drive in Boston in 1838, Charles Ray, one of the paper's proprietors, promised that the publication would welcome a complete discussion of every issue. But Ray continued to show concern over the abolitionist split, and the fact that many other reform causes were being mixed up with the antislavery movement, from his point of view was diluting the struggle for abolition.[16]

[13] *The Liberator*, Oct. 6, 1837, VII, 163.

[14] *New York Colored American*, Oct. 7, 1837.

[15] *New York Colored American*, Oct. 14, 1837; *The Liberator*, Oct. 20, 1837, VII, 171; Nov. 3, 1837, VII, 179.

[16] *The Liberator*, June 29, 1838, VIII, 103; *New York Colored American*, July 7, 1838; May 11, 1839.

In the meantime the schism grew, and Garrison's "old organization" allies were now confronted in Boston by the forces of "new organization" abolitionists who opposed what many of them felt to be Garrison's anti-political, non-resistance, perfectionist, women's rights fanaticism.[17]

At a recent meeting William Cooper Nell had fought for passage of a resolution which implied that any black who did not fully support Garrison was an enemy to the antislavery cause, but its wording was opposed by James G. Barbadoes who felt the resolution unfair because it seemed to censure anyone who supported both abolitionist groups.[18]

Actually Barbadoes had broached an important issue because certain blacks were becoming caught in the abolition crossfire, the most notable example being the Reverend Jehiel C. Beman, a relative newcomer to Boston, who had only recently helped organize the all-black Zion Methodist-Episcopal Church in the city. Before coming to Boston, Beman had been a temperance minister in Connecticut and had traveled about southern New England as a moral reform lecturer organizing churches among his fellow blacks.[19]

As far as Garrison was concerned, Beman was a traitor because in 1839, when the new organization forces began making plans to open a colored employment office in Boston, they asked Beman to run it and he accepted. Garrison was sure that this was merely a new organization trick to win black support. He unjustifiably felt that Beman was trying to sell his services to the highest bidder; as a result the minister became a central cog in the struggle by both abolition groups to destroy one another.[20]

[17] Elizur Wright to Amos Augustus Phelps, Sept. 5, 1837, *Anti-Slavery Papers*, Boston Public Library; Elizur Wright to Mrs. Maria Weston Chapman, Feb. 5, 1839 and Feb. 18, 1839, *Anti-Slavery Papers*, Boston Public Library.

[18] *The Liberator*, Oct. 25, 1839, IX, 170; Nov. 1, 1839, IX, 175.

[19] Robert A. Warner, "Amos Gerry Beman, 1812-1874, A Memoir on a Forgotten Leader," *Journal of Negro History*, XXII, 201, 204 (April, 1937); *Boston City Directory*, 1839, 30; 1848-1849, 31; *New York Colored American*, Sept. 23, 1837; Jan. 27, 1838.

[20] *The Liberator*, Feb. 21, 1840, X, 31; Feb. 28, 1840, X, 35; *New York Colored American*, Sept. 28, 1839; Nov. 9, 1839.

Beman had admitted to a Garrison supporter that he had taken the job because he needed money, and that this was the only source available to him. But he could not understand all the commotion, since his acceptance of this position did not seem to him to demonstrate that he was taking sides. After all, he had been subscribing to *The Liberator* since the first issue, and he had always been a strong supporter of Garrison's. Garrison had even paid him a friendly personal visit when he had been a minister in Connecticut.

Here, he felt, was an opportunity to aid his fellow blacks and at the same time to ease his difficult financial situation. However at the height of the abolitionist split, his explanation was not enough for Garrison, and the editor of *The Liberator* was undoubtedly in some way involved when John Hilton opened a competing employment office even before Beman had a chance to open his.[21]

Garrison was also concerned over a letter that had recently appeared in the opposition newspaper, the *Massachusetts Abolitionist,* signed "A Colored Man," in which the writer had not only come out in full support of the new organization, but had also gone so far as to imply that the majority of Boston's blacks supported his position. In response the city's blacks met and unanimously denounced both the letter and the anonymous writer, daring him to unmask himself, and James G. Barbadoes joined John Hilton and William Nell in the attack. Here the forces of "new organization" were accused of sacrificing the black man for their own personal interest, while Garrison was again decisively endorsed as the black man's "best friend and benefactor."[22]

In this controversy the *New York Colored American* again determined to remain neutral, although it did express some concern over the way Beman had been treated. Actually Beman had many opportunities to vent his spleen in the *Colored American,* but he apparently preferred not to stoop to that level, and Beman's standing with Boston's black community

21 *The Liberator,* Aug. 23, 1839, IX, 135; March 20, 1840, X, 47; Warner, 204.

22 *The Liberator,* April 3, 1840, X, 53; *New York Colored American,* April 11, 1840.

did not suffer in any way, although Garrison continued to carry a grudge against him.[23]

Actually, both antislavery factions were to blame, Garrison particularly for creating a tempest in a teapot resulting from his unfounded fear that he might lose the support of Boston's blacks, and the new organization abolitionists for trying to use Beman to draw Boston's black population into their camp, an effort that ended in failure.[24]

By 1840 the battle between the old and new organizations had reached a new plateau, revolving mainly about the question of political participation. Garrison was now becoming apprehensive of political activity of any kind, but he was averse to force others to share his views, and he was especially tolerant of any political interest expressed by the members of Boston's black community.

Perhaps Garrison's struggle with his fellow abolitionists, and his realization that blacks outside Massachusetts were now demanding the right to vote, had helped make him aware of the need to compromise on this issue in order to maintain colored support. As a result, Garrison softened his position, as he would again later when the question of black military participation challenged his nonresistance views, conceding that in any situation where it was clearly a question of either exercising political rights or losing ground in the struggle for equality, the black man had no choice but to take part in America's unholy political system.[25]

[23] *The Liberator*, Aug. 14, 1840, x, 131; Oct. 16, 1840, x, 167; July 30, 1841, xi, 123; Feb. 23, 1844, xiv, 31; Aug. 8, 1845, xv, 127; *New York Colored American*, March 28, 1840; May 2, 1840; July 4, 1840; Letter from "A Carolinian," Oct. 17, 1840.

[24] *Massachusetts Abolitionist*, March 7, 1839; May 9, 1839; Aug. 18, 1839; Sept. 19, 1839; Dec. 12, 1839; March 5, 1840. Compared to *The Liberator*, the *Massachusetts Abolitionist* gave very little coverage to affairs involving Boston's black community. For the most part, the only advertisements and announcements placed in the *Abolitionist* by a black man were those inserted by Beman and which related to the Massachusetts Abolition Society's employment office.

[25] *The Liberator*, March 29, 1839, ix, 55; Kraditor, 123-124, 127-128, 132, 134, 158-168. Professor Kraditor quite correctly shows that Garrison was not nearly as narrow and doctrinaire regarding certain issues as many of his critics have made him out to be. [See Walter M. Merrill, *Against Wind and Tide: A Biogra-*

So as he began to advise against giving any support to the Union and its "pro-slavery" Constitution, Garrison could still use the pages of *The Liberator* to ask the colored voters of Boston to vote for Bradford Sumner over Abbott Lawrence for Congress, and announce that election ballots were available in the Anti-Slavery office. And in 1841 he even permitted the Liberty Party for which he had little respect to insert an announcement warning black voters to make sure their names were on the city's voting lists so that they could properly cast their ballots. Apparently Garrison realized that more of Boston's blacks might have voted in the election of 1840 than ever before, and that quite a few might even have voted Whig.[20]

In 1848 *The Liberator* reported that a group of the city's

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phy of William Lloyd Garrison (Cambridge, 1963) and John L. Thomas, *The Liberator: William Lloyd Garrison* (Boston, 1963).] In her analysis of Garrison's opposition to all political parties in principle, Professor Kraditor notes that Garrison remained willing to accept the right of the individual to take part in politics so long as his actions in no way aided the cause of slavery and so long as he supported only candidates opposed to slavery, regardless of their party. However Kraditor makes no mention of any possible role the attitudes of the northern free blacks, who made up the vast majority of *The Liberator*'s subscribers, might have played in the formulation of Garrisonian strategy. To have dogmatically refused the black man on ideological grounds either the right to vote or the option to battle for that right would have been a serious error on Garrison's part. Undoubtedly the editor of *The Liberator* realized this, and therefore this must have played some role in the shaping of his strategy and tactics. To assume that this played no part in his thinking is to imply that Garrison gave little consideration to the views of his northern black supporters.

20 *The Liberator*, Nov. 8, 1839, IX, 179; Nov. 22, 1839, IX, 187; May 7, 1841, XI, 75; Dec. 10, 1841, XI, 199; *New York Colored American*, Dec. 5, 1840; Thomas Cole to Mr. [Charles] Ray, in the *New York Colored American*, Dec. 26, 1840; *Sixth Census*, 46; Lemuel Shattuck, *Report to the Committee . . . Appointed to Obtain the Census of Boston for the Year 1845* (Boston, 1846), 43-44; Jesse Chickering, *Statistical View of the Population of Massachusetts, from 1765 to 1840* (Boston, 1846), 151-153. Thomas Cole, one of Boston's leading black citizens, felt that approximately 700 of Boston's colored had voted in the Presidential election of 1840. This estimate seems rather high, especially when compared with Lemuel Shattuck's estimate of the numbers of blacks who voted in Boston in 1838 (249) and 1845 (357). Even though these were not Presidential election years, based on Dr. Shattuck's estimate of the number of blacks residing in Boston in 1840 (1,988), we find that the number of black males who were even eligible to vote could not have been any more than 700. The sixth national census estimates the population of Boston at 2,439 blacks in 1840. But based on evidence of a sizable tabulating error for ward 2 noted by Mr. Chickering, it appears that his figures and Dr. Shattuck's are more reliable than those published by the National Census.

blacks had met to discuss forming auxiliaries to the Liberty Party, and while some of Garrison's supporters strongly opposed the idea, an amended resolution was passed sanctioning the abolition of slavery by "both moral and political action." And at the fifteenth annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in New York the following year, Garrison only mildly rebuked Thomas Paul Smith of Boston after Smith had related how in the election of 1848 "he, with most of the colored voters of Boston, went with the Free-Soil Party."[27]

By 1852 even Garrison's staunchest supporter, William Nell, had gone political, signing a petition demanding that the women of Massachusetts be given the right to vote. By the mid-1850's Boston's black voters began turning to the newly formed Republican Party, and in the spring of 1859, at a meeting attended by Nell, a resolution was adopted claiming that the "depressed state of the free black man was due to his political weakness," and demanding that blacks everywhere be granted the franchise. The pages of *The Liberator* make clear the growing political bent of a large segment of Boston's colored community.[28]

What also becomes clear is the fact that a vocal minority of the city's Negroes were not as strongly for integration as William Lloyd Garrison and, particularly, William Nell, but supported continued separation, as is shown by *The Liberator*'s account of the different roles that Nell and Thomas Paul Smith played in the battle for equal school rights in Boston.

Nell was the arch-integrationist, perhaps the most vehement black integrationist in all the free states, and his views fit in well with Garrison's. Partly for this reason, Garrison was more than willing to open up *The Liberator*'s pages to Nell and his ideas, especially after Nell's return from Rochester where he had spent two years working with Frederick Douglass on the *North Star*. Article after article appearing in *The*

[27] *The Liberator*, Jan. 28, 1848, XVIII, 15; Aug. 25, 1848, XVIII, 133; *North Star*, in *The Liberator*, Oct. 20, 1848, XVIII, 166; May 18, 1849, XIX, 78.

[28] *The Liberator*, Dec. 10, 1852, XXII, 199; March 4, 1853, XXIII, 35; Oct. 12, 1855, XXV, 163; Sept. 5, 1856, XXVI, 147; Oct. 23, 1857, XXVII, 170; Oct. 30, 1857, XXVII, 174; June 3, 1859, XXIX, 87.

Liberator during the 1850's bears the Nell signature and the Nell imprint, and the paper's point of view in relation to local black affairs is often colored by Nell's own attitudes.

Early in his career Nell had concluded that the best way for the black man to attain equality was "by linking our interests and sympathies with those who now persecute us," and while Nell had offered his reluctant support to the various national black conventions that he attended during the 1840's, he continually made clear his view that whites should also be invited to attend. Exclusive institutions on both sides, he felt, were wrong.[29]

Nell could not understand why blacks in Boston continued to attend their own churches when the opportunity to attend with whites on a basis of equality began to present itself. In a report to *The Liberator* he expressed his surprise, concluding that his fellow blacks did this for reasons "peculiarly their own, and not compatible with correct ideas of elevation and self-respect."[30]

It came as no surprise when Nell began to play the leading role in the fight to close the all-black Smith School and integrate the city's white schools. In many respects this struggle was a turning point for Boston's blacks. By the early 1840's, especially after the excitement over the George Latimer fugitive slave case in 1842, the blacks of the city, as *The Liberator* shows, were beginning to play a more decisive role in the battle for equality. By 1843 they had actively begun to support the already protracted efforts to repeal Massachusetts' racial intermarriage law, and to stop the use of "Jim Crow" cars on the state's railroads. And the following year they instituted on their own the fight for equal school rights.

Unable to budge the Boston school committee from its segregationist stand either by repeated petitions or other forms of protest, by 1849 many of the city's blacks had begun to boycott the Smith School and had set up an independent school of

[29] *The Liberator*, Nov. 12, 1841, XI, 184; Aug. 4, 1843, XIII, 122; Nov. 19, 1847, XVII, 185; Jan. 27, 1854, XXIV, 15.

[30] *The Liberator*, May 8, 1857, XXVII, 76.

their own, while many others had chosen to leave Boston to afford their children the opportunity of attending the already integrated schools outside the city.[31]

Thomas Paul Smith, however, could not support these efforts because he and the minority who followed him wanted the Smith School, named after the deceased white merchant, Abiel Smith, left open. It was not that Smith opposed integrated schools for those who wanted to send their children to them. What did concern him were the interests of those who wished to maintain separate institutions for the educational training of their children.

When William Nell denounced Smith's stand, most of the city's black leaders took Nell's position. However, one of Smith's backers, in a letter to *The Liberator,* pointed out emphatically that "we are *not* in favor of the abolition of exclusive institutions among ourselves, literary, religious, or scientific," at least until complete equality shall be attained. Regarding the question of who should teach in the Smith School and who should fill the recently vacated principal's position, the writer felt that "all liberally educated colored men have an opportunity to compete . . . and certainly some educated colored man should have [the principal's post],* if anybody."[32]

This segment of the black community wanted Thomas Paul, Jr., the late minister's son, who had been active in Negro education for many years, named principal, and, much to Garrison's chagrin, Paul had made it clear that he was more than willing to accept. At one time Paul had been employed as an

[31] *The Liberator,* Oct. 12, 1849, XIX, 162; Nov. 9, 1849, XIX, 180; Dec. 10, 1852, XXII, 199; Wendell Phillips to William Lloyd Garrison, in *The Liberator,* April 15, 1853, XXIII, 58; April 7, 1854, XXIV, 55; Report of the Committee on Education, in *The Liberator,* March 30, 1855, XXV, 52. In 1849 Boston's blacks also brought their case to court, and by the end of the year the famous case of *Roberts v Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (the case that the United States Supreme Court used as a precedent in the 1896 case of *Plessy v Ferguson*) was being argued in the Massachusetts Supreme Court. And as the pressures began to build, a heated debate broke out between the integrationists and the separationists.

* My brackets.

[32] *The Liberator,* Sept. 7, 1849, XIX, 143.

apprentice in *The Liberator* offices, and Garrison had done much over the years to help Paul advance in his profession; but now Garrison felt he had been placed in the middle of a difficult situation and it was making him uncomfortable, especially since he felt wholly committed to the cause of equal school rights.[33]

Smith then complicated things for Garrison by demanding that *The Liberator* give him the opportunity to explain more fully his position, and the editor reluctantly complied, fearing that he might be drawn too deeply into what he now felt was rapidly becoming too much a "personal controversy." Smith, for his part, felt he had to make a strong, persuasive statement, because he was now beginning to come under further attack for some of the methods he had used in actively supporting Paul's candidacy for principal.[34]

"Shall we," he asked, "abolish our institutions, because the whites won't admit us to theirs? *Never,*" he said,

[33] William Lloyd Garrison to the Reverend Samuel J. May, Feb. 14, 1831, *Anti-Slavery Papers*, Boston Public Library; Wendell Phillips Garrison and Francis Jackson Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison, The Story of His Life, Told by His Children* (New York, 1885), I, 221; Oliver Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times* (Boston, 1880), 101; *The Liberator*, March 12, 1831, I, 42; Dec. 15, 1837, VII, 203; Dec. 22, 1837, VII, 207; Sept. 17, 1841, XI, 151; Oct. 1, 1841, XI, 159; Nov. 19, 1841, XI, 187; May 12, 1843, XIII, 74; Sept. 21, 1849, XIX, 151; Nov. 23, 1849, XIX, 187.

[34] *The Liberator*, Sept. 28, 1849, XIX, 154; Oct. 5, 1849, XIX, 160; *Boston Chronotype*, in *The Liberator*, Jan. 4, 1850, XX, 2; Feb. 8, 1850, XX, 23. By the end of 1849 much of the controversy focused around the question of whether the Boston school committee should hire a black principal for the Smith School. The school committee seemed to favor such a move, feeling that this would undercut the boycott of the school by the black parents. Led by William Nell, those who supported integration accused Smith of hiring himself out to work for Thomas Paul's appointment as principal. Thomas Paul Smith emphatically denied this and the charge was never proved. But later evidence showed that Smith had tried to fool the prestigious James McCune Smith, black leader of New York (no relative), into writing a letter supporting the idea of a black principal for Boston's Smith School. However when James McCune Smith learned that the whole issue in Boston actually revolved about the question of school integration or separation, he quickly sent a letter off to Boston explaining that he strongly supported integrated schools, and accusing Thomas Paul Smith of having purposely misled him by trying to have it appear that hiring a black schoolmaster rather than integration was the key to the Boston school controversy.

for so doing, we rashly destroy the means of all future happiness and improvement. . . . I see no baleful influences, no degradation, no oppression or prejudice, caused by colored schools. . . . We believe colored schools to be institutions . . . of great advantage to the colored people: we believe society imperatively requires their existence among us . . . we feel from experience . . . that from no other source can we obtain so much practical good.[35]

In 1855, some five years later, Boston finally integrated her schools, under pressure from a bill passed by the state legislature. However the Smith School was left open on a trial basis, but since only seven students attended, it was obvious where the majority sentiments of Boston's black community lay. Soon the Smith School itself was integrated and William Nell's long struggle against exclusive educational institutions had finally borne fruit, much to Garrison's satisfaction. The idea of separate institutions, however, did not die.[36]

The battle for equal militia rights began in earnest in 1853, William Nell reporting how the blacks of the city had taken their cause to both the Massachusetts Legislature and that year's state constitutional convention. Garrison, who still believed strongly in peace and nonresistance, was quick to express his view that "all war, and all preparations for war, are contrary to humanity—we feel no other interest in this subject than that which concerns the equality of all classes in the state."[37]

But as he did over the question of political participation, here, too, Garrison eventually began to compromise his position. In 1858, at the Crispus Attucks Day celebration only recently reinstituted among Boston's blacks by William Nell, Garrison spoke, expressing the view that "CRISPUS ATTUCKS, who fell in King Street, and PETER SALEM, who

[35] *The Liberator*, Oct. 5, 1849, XIX, 160; Feb. 15, 1850, XX, 27.

[36] *Boston Evening Telegraph*, Sept. 3, 1855; *The Liberator*, Sept. 7, 1855, XXV, 142.

[37] William Cooper Nell to William Lloyd Garrison, Feb. 1853, in *The Liberator*, March 11, 1853, XXIII, 39; *Boston Daily Courier*, June 22, 1853; *Boston Commonwealth*, in *The Liberator*, July 1, 1853, XXIII, 102.

killed Major Pitcairn on Bunker Hill, are as much deserving monuments as JAMES OTIS and JOSEPH WARREN," and not long after he strongly attacked Republican Governor Nathaniel Banks's veto of a state militia bill that would have permitted black participation. Then, shortly after the Civil War began, Garrison admitted that while he remained a peace man, he recognized that the black man's arguments for a place in the militia were, as he put it, "unanswerable."[38]

Finally, when the federal government agreed to allow the formation of separate black Union army regiments and the Massachusetts 54th was organized, Garrison was present when they trooped the colors. He had actively backed Governor John Andrew's efforts to raise the regiment, and he now found little difficulty rationalizing his position. After all, he asked,

> What would peace gain if men who will fight for other things would not fight for liberty? . . . When we get . . . liberty, we shall have peace. . . . I am glad to see the men of the north who will not accept my peace-views acting earnestly . . . in support of my liberty-views.[39]

Garrison supported Abraham Lincoln in the 1864 Presidential campaign, precipitating a rift with Wendell Phillips. Soon many of the city's blacks were taking sides, some remaining with Garrison, while others sided with Phillips. The split widened the following year when after Congressional passage of the thirteenth amendment, Garrison announced that he was planning to cease publication of *The Liberator* at the end of 1865 and work for the dissolution of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Several of his leading black supporters broke with him over this, but William Nell did not. Instead Nell offered a farewell tribute to Garrison that appeared in the final issue of *The Liberator*.[40]

[38] *The Liberator*, March 12, 1858, XXVIII, 42; Jan. 13, 1860, XXX, 5; Jan. 20, 1860, XXX, 10, 11; May 24, 1861, XXXI, 82.

[39] Governor John Andrew to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, in the *New York Herald Tribune*, May 23, 1862; *Boston Journal*, in *The Liberator*, May 30, 1862, XXXII, 86; June 5, 1863, XXXIII, 90.

[40] *The Liberator*, Aug. 5, 1864, XXXIV, 128; Oct. 14, 1864, XXXIV, 167; William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson, June 20, 1864, *Anti-Slavery Papers*, Boston

The issue of December 29, 1865, was the last; *The Liberator* had done its work. Through its columns the hopes and aspirations of a people had been charted, perhaps not completely, but nonetheless adequately. One area where *The Liberator* undoubtedly did fail, however, was in its inability to portray the key role Boston's black churches played in the lives of the black community. Garrison, following the lead of William Nell, was too much the integrationist to come to grips with the question of the need for black churches and the purpose they obviously served.[41]

However *The Liberator* was able to chart the activities of the city's blacks as concern grew over the status of fugitive slaves. In 1842 Boston's Negroes came out in strong support of a personal liberty law, and the following year they formed the New England Freedom Association, their own arm of the underground railroad, and by the mid-1850's, after the intense outpouring of emotion over the Shadrach, Sims, and Anthony Burns fugitive slave cases, the city's black lawyers began successfully to take charge of the legal strategy involved in the freeing of fugitive slaves in the Massachusetts courts.[42]

Never quite brought into focus in the pages of *The Liberator* is the role played by the average black man during the thirty-five-year period of conflict and confrontation. Except for infrequent references to active black concern during several of the court battles involving fugitive slaves, it is the black leadership whose views are most often reflected.

However this does not in any way detract from the important role *The Liberator* actually played over the years as a forum for the often divergent views of the leading figures of Boston's black community. For the leaders obviously did re-

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Public Library; *Anti-Slavery Standard*, in *The Liberator*, May 12, 1865, XXXV, 74; May 19, 1865, XXXV, 78; May 26, 1865, XXXV, 81-82; Dec. 29, 1865, XXXV, 208; William Lloyd Garrison to Helen Garrison, May 10, 1865, Feb. 16, 1866, and June 8, 1868, *Anti-Slavery Papers*, Boston Public Library.

[41] William Lloyd Garrison to Nathaniel T. Allen, Dec. 8, 1874, *Anti-Slavery Papers*, Boston Public Library.

[42] *The Liberator*, June 3, 1842, XII, 87; March 31, 1843, XIII, 51; July 18, 1856, XXVI, 114; Nov. 21, 1856, XXVI, 187.

flect the attitudes of a large segment of the population, and *The Liberator* covered so many "mass meetings" involving the city's blacks that the views of the colored community on certain issues did come through, even if partially distilled.

If a black newspaper had been published in Boston during this period, many conclusions might have been different. Actually, two attempts were made, the *Anti-Slavery Herald* in 1838, and *The Self-Elevator* in 1853.[43] While neither paper was published for very long, each reflected a view held by many blacks during the antebellum period that although certain whites were sincere in their efforts to help the black man, the black people together had to do all that they could to help themselves,

> because no class of men, however pious and benevolent, can take our place in the great work of redeeming our character, and removing our disabilities. They may identify themselves with us, and enter into our sympathies. Still, it is ours to will and to do.[44]

But what if *The Liberator* had never been published in Boston, and Garrison had gone to Washington as he had originally planned? Not only would much of the focus of the anti-slavery movement obviously have been different, so probably would have been the direction taken by Boston's black community.

But comprising a relatively small, close-knit segment of Boston's population, with the majority living within the shadow of the State House, and with one prominent center of militant abolitionist thought close by, Boston's black citizenry could count three advantages not cumulatively possessed by any of their counterparts in the other large cities of the north. This at least in part helps explain the ability of Boston's black citi-

43 "For The Liberator," from F. W. Barker (?), undated letter, *Anti-Slavery Papers*, Boston Public Library; *The Liberator*, May 4, 1838, VIII, 71; Oct. 12, 1838, VIII, 163; April 1, 1853, XXIII, 50. Both the *Anti-Slavery Herald* and *The Self-Elevator* were edited by Benjamin Roberts, one of Boston's leading black citizens. His daughter, Sarah, was the plaintiff in the case of *Roberts v Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (1849).

44 *New York Colored American*, March 4, 1837.

zenry to make strides in the struggle for equality that were made by no other sizable community of free blacks outside Massachusetts prior to the Civil War. And William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* unquestionably played a key role.

After publishing *The Liberator* for a little over a month, Garrison wrote in a letter to his close friend, the Reverend Samuel J. May, "This then is my consolation: If I cannot do much in this quarter, toward abolishing slavery, I may [at least]* be able to elevate our free colored population in the scale of society."[45] That he was able to contribute so much to the attainment of both goals was his lasting triumph.

Though at times narrow and dogmatic, and perhaps mistaken in certain of his attitudes and actions, Garrison can in no way be faulted for focusing throughout his lifetime upon the twin goals of humanity and equality for men everywhere. And his newspaper, *The Liberator,* remained for thirty-five years a more than adequate mirror of those events that marked the black man's continuing struggle for humanity and equality in Boston.

* My brackets.

[45] Garrison to the Reverend Samuel J. May, Feb. 14, 1831, *Anti-Slavery Papers,* Boston Public Library.