



Fugitive Slave Traffic and the Maritime World of New Bedford

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You may recollect the circumstance that took place a few weeks since, the attempt to capture a slave, who escaped to this place in a vessel from Norfolk, Va., they came at that time very near capturing him. We have just now got information that his owner has offered a high reward for him and that they have actually formed all their plans to take him without any delay. We think it imprudent for him to be here after the boat arrives, and I could not think of any better plan than sending him to Fall River, if you can keep him out of sight for a short time.

In February 1854, a time when the *American Beacon* of Norfolk claimed that slaves were escaping from this Virginia port “almost daily,” the merchant Andrew Robeson of New Bedford wrote to Nathaniel B. Borden of Fall River in an effort to conceal an unnamed fugitive from the man who claimed to own him.¹ According to historian Gary Collison, 1854 was a “particularly bad year” for slaveowners in Norfolk and adjacent Portsmouth,² so distressing that just a month before Robeson wrote to Borden one Major Hodsdon, James M. Binford, Mrs. Smiley, and one of two others had left Portsmouth in early January “in pursuit of their property.”

Hodsdon had first gone to Boston to retain a lawyer and to contact the U.S. Attorney, who sent a letter directing Deputy Marshall Hathaway in New Bedford “to keep a lookout, to make his

plans for securing the fugitives, and to write him by every mail of the progress he made in the prosecution of his duty.” Overriding Massachusetts’s personal liberty law, put in place in 1843 to guarantee rights to persons accused of fleeing slavery, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 gave federal officials authority to mandate the cooperation of state officials in such “renditions.” But Hathaway failed to respond to the attorney’s query after more than three days, and so Hodsdon and his party themselves went to New Bedford, “that den of negro thieves and fugitive protectors,” as the *Beacon* acidly put it. Once there, Hodsdon told the *Beacon*, Hathaway told them that he “had recognized the negroes, and told the street he found them upon, but told them they were gone. He would give them no further satisfaction, except to let them know where the black friends of the negroes at present resided. Going there, the negroes were not to be found.”³

The frustrated Hodsdon told the *Beacon* that he and his fellow slaveowners had done everything they could to keep their mission and its purpose secret; they had even, he said, “disguised themselves, went in different directions and used every endeavor in as silent a manner as could be, to discover the whereabouts of the fugitives.” Yet their careful procedure was fruitless in New Bedford, he charged, “so generally was the matter bruited and so well posted was every citizen upon the subject.” Hodsdon claimed that their reclamation effort “had been made a topic from the pulpits on the day before” and that the bells were tolling all over the city when they arrived, “the tolling being a species of telegraph they use in that sink of iniquity and lawlessness, to let the inhabitants know that masters or officers are in search of their slave property.” The Valley Falls, Rhode Island, abolitionist Elizabeth Buffum Chace may have recollected the same incident in “My Anti-Slavery Reminiscences,” which she wrote in 1891. She noted that the slave owner in one escape in which she assisted had written to a Boston newspaper about his reception in the city. “He said that, when he arrived in New Bedford, the bells were rung to announce his coming, and warn his slave, thus aiding in his escape; and that, every way, he was badly treated. The truth was, as we afterward learned, that he arrived at nine o’clock in the morning, just as the school-bells were ringing; and he understood this as a personal indignity.”⁴ However the bell ringing may be explained, Rodney French’s tolling of the bell in

New Bedford's Liberty Hall in a rumored March 1851 attempt to reclaim fugitives was clearly famous even in the South: in late September 1851 citizens in New Bern, North Carolina, had assembled to declare a boycott on one of his merchant vessels because, they claimed, he "by his acts and public speeches, [did] endeavour to influence and excite the abolition party of his town to resist the execution of the laws of the United States, and in said speeches he called on the fugitive slaves and free negroes to arm themselves, and prevent the taking away runaway slaves."⁵

In response to New Bernians, French declared that he would never turn away from his home "any panting fugitive from the prison-house of bondage . . . no matter how close upon his heels are his pursuers." He never admitted to carrying any fugitive slaves to New Bedford by boat, despite the fact that he had been trading in North Carolina "for the last thirty years" and even held mortgages and notes on properties he had once owned there.⁶ French was in this respect not unusual: he was only one of dozens of New Bedford merchants who traded regularly in southern ports, who sent crews to cut live oak out of southern swamps, and who had family connections with southern commerce.

The connection between the maritime world of New Bedford and the Underground Railroad relates most directly to the third theme states in the August 1998 draft of interpretive themes for New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park. While the presence of fugitive slaves on whaling vessels is less easy to document, there is no question that scores of fugitives reached New Bedford in coasting vessels, either directly from southern ports or indirectly by way of Philadelphia, New York, and other ports. If existing accounts can be taken as evidence of the hundreds of undocumented instances of escape, many more fugitives arrived in New Bedford at its wharves than arrived in the city by overland routes. Indeed, evidence strongly indicates that escaping slavery by water was a well-known path in both North and South—and that the Underground Railroad was something more than the completely unsystematic flight of individuals that Larry Gara has declared it to have been, even if it was something less than the organized system, openly run by northern shipowners who were abolitionists to the man, that

Hodsdon and other slaveowners believed it to be.⁷ As historian David Cecelski has argued, “Documentary sources unveil several dozen accounts of specific runaway slaves who reached ships sailing out of North Carolina ports between 1800 and 1861... one may safely conclude that they represent only the tip of an iceberg. The presence of an escape route along the East Coast was indeed widely known both locally and among northern abolitionists who, though it operated independently of them, frequently assisted fugitive slaves after their voyage from the South.”⁸

Moreover, enough is known to assert that some fugitives, perhaps many more than can be documented, found a place in whaling crews when their opportunities ashore may have been not only limited but virtually foreclosed; some are known to have been pursued by men or agents who claimed them. Some surely had prior maritime experience, as slave narratives and studies of runaway slave advertisements have indicated. For some such as William P. Powell and John Jacobs, life aboard a whaler may have been radicalizing: both went on to significant careers in antislavery reform. A significant number of Southern people of color who were fugitives or who had maritime experience made New Bedford their home for a number of years or the rest of their lives, and their presence helped set a persistent tenor for the town in the antebellum years.

Estimates of the number of fugitives in New Bedford, all of them contemporary, vary widely. In one 1845 letter to her cousin by marriage, Wendell Philips, the abolitionist Caroline Weston, then teaching school in New Bedford, stated that “there are now living here more than four hundred” fugitives; in a letter published in the Boston *Chronotype* in November 1850, one New Bedford Quaker asserted, “We have about 700 fugitives here in this city, and they are good citizens, and here we intend they shall stay.” In 1863 James Bunker Congdon put the number of fugitives in New Bedford before the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law at “about three hundred.”⁹ Research so far has documented the presence in New Bedford of nearly ninety fugitives by full name, another ten by first or last name only, and more than sixty whose presence but not names between 1792 and 1863;¹⁰ of that total, 48 are known to have made the larger part of their escape by coasting vessel, and only two, Frederick Douglass and John Thompson, came to New Bedford for the most part by overland route. People of color with southern birthplaces

made up an unusually high percentage of the population of color in the city: in 1850, 29.9 percent of the 1,008 persons of color in New Bedford told census takers they had been born in the South, compared to 15.0 percent of New York City's 14,000 persons of color and 16.6 percent of Boston's 1,999 colored persons.

In his 1936 volume *The Underground Railroad in Massachusetts*, Wilbur Siebert claimed “the first recorded evidence of befriending the runaway in Massachusetts” took place in Boston just after the 1793 Fugitive Slave Law had passed.¹¹ Siebert's statement of course overlooks the years before 1783, when slavery was an institution in Massachusetts and most newspapers carried advertisements offering rewards for runaways; in this period as in the nineteenth century, slaves escaping New England masters, including Crispus Attucks, sometimes fled to sea.¹² Siebert and most other historians have confined the Underground Railroad to that period when slavery had ceased to exist in Canada and some northern states—that is, to the period when flight to freedom from the South became a feasible proposition. Even within that era, the evidence from New Bedford establishes fugitive slave traffic here somewhat earlier than 1793. In her letter to Phillips, Caroline Weston pointed out that many Quaker descendants “remember when the garrets of Thomas Arnold and Wm Rotch the elder were constantly tenanted by runaway slaves (forwarded to their care by Moses Brown of Providence) which explains how it was that this place became a refuge for slaves.”¹³ Indeed, the first documented fugitive in New Bedford was a man named John who had been living in the family of Thomas Rotch, one of the sons of William Rotch Sr., for more than a year when the reported pursuit of his former owner compelled the removal of him, his wife, and two or three of his five children from the city. On 24 June 1792 Thomas Hazard Jr., who had married Samuel Rodman's sister and was thus indirectly related to the Rotches, sent John with a letter to the Providence abolitionist Moses Brown, whom he asked to find places for John, his wife, their young child, and his sixteen-year-old daughter. “It will be best for them to leave this place in the most private manner,” Hazard wrote, “that no person here may know where they have gone, so that when the person who is in pursuit of them arrives, he may not be able to follow them, in order for greater security, they have changed their

names, we shall find places of security for three of his children here.” Thomas Rotch wrote both Thomas Arnold and Brown about the case about a week later, but what happened to the family is unknown.¹⁴ It is probable, however, that they were not the only fugitives in New Bedford at the time: on 10 July 1792 William Rotch Jr. wrote to his uncle Francis Rotch that he was “almost daily concerned in protecting the injured Africans and promising their liberation where any pretence can be found to avoid the law & Massachusetts being the only state in the Union where slavery dare not rear her head we have abundance of them seek refuge here.”¹⁵

The fate of the first documented fugitives to have arrived by water is equally mysterious. On or about 4 August 1794, a nineteen-year-old fugitive named Bob had stowed himself away aboard the schooner *Betsey* at Richmond, Virginia; in a runaway advertisement placed locally, Captain Noah Stoddard claimed he had only discovered Bob after four days at sea and, “it appearing inconsistent for me to return, the wind being ahead,” decided it was best to bring him to New Bedford. In late April 1797 Captain William Taber of the sloop *Union* used the same rationale for bringing the fugitive James, aged twenty-seven, into New Bedford from York River in Virginia even though he discovered him on board the day after sailing.¹⁶ Whether Stoddard and Taber were truly unaware that they carried fugitives may never be known, but Samuel Sloane of Somerset County, Maryland, seemed to believe that Thomas Wainer of Westport had knowingly carried two fugitives away in April 1799. Sloane repeatedly advertised a forty-dollar reward for the return of his slave Harry and noted as well that Harry’s wife Lucy, who belonged to the hatter William Tingle in Snow Hill in Worcester County, Maryland, had also escaped. “HARRY is supposed to be carried off by a certain THOMAS WAINER, of Westport, in Massachusetts, a Mulatto, who traded here, and cleared out as Capt. of a small vessel from Westport—came to the port of Snowhill, Maryland, where he got a load of corn and staves, and cleared for Norfolk, Virginia, whence, he said, he intended for Westport, whither I suppose him to have gone.” Despite the well-documented antislavery beliefs and activities of the extended family of the African American mariner Paul Cuffe, of whom Wainer was a prominent member, this is the only instance documented to date of a Cuffe vessel having carried fugitives.¹⁷

Two instances of fugitives who escaped by water are known from the 1810s because each in its own way was publicized. In his 1855 account of his escape from slavery, William Grimes (living in New Bedford by 1817) revealed that he had stowed away aboard the Boston sloop *Casket*, bound for New York in 1814, with the assistance of the vessel's crew:

I went with a number more to assist in loading her. I soon got acquainted with some of these Yankee sailors, and they appeared to be quite pleased with me. Her cargo chiefly consisted of cotton in bales. After filling her hold, they were obliged to lash a great number of bales on deck. The sailors, growing more and more attached to me, they proposed to me to leave, in the centre of the cotton bales on deck, a hole or place sufficiently large for me to stow away in, with my necessary provisions. Whether they then had any idea of my coming away with them or not, I cannot say; but this I can say safely, a place was left, and I occupied it during the passage, and by that means made my escape.¹⁸

Before the *Casket* left Savannah, a crew member of color took Grimes into town to get provisions. Once aboard he kept himself hidden every day, but sometimes at night he “would crawl out and go and lie down with the sailors on deck; the night being dark, the captain could not distinguish me from the hands, having a number on board of different complexions.” Indeed, black sailors were no novelty on board either coasting or whaling vessels at the time, as numerous historians have documented.¹⁹ Grimes reached New York without incident, but there he was recognized by a former owner and fled, first to New Haven, then to Providence, then to Newport, and then, judging the winds too stiff to go by packet boat, on foot to New Bedford. He worked first as a servant to John Howland Jr. and then set up his own barber shop and grocery in New Bedford, where he remained until a brush with the law impelled him to leave town in 1817.²⁰

By the time Grimes left New Bedford, a man of color known here as John Randolph had

probably already arrived. Whether he was a slave or a free man has never been certainly established, and the crux of his lengthy defense in Massachusetts courts through 1824 was whether he could justly be seized as property or was the victim of unlawful assault and kidnapping. What is established is that Randolph had come to New Bedford with two slaves escaping the plantation of Hancock Lee in Fairfax County, Virginia, on board the sloop *Regulator*, a packet that regularly carried flour and other goods between New Bedford and Alexandria, Virginia. He is said to have arrived in New Bedford in 1817 or 1818, taken his new name, and bought a house in the city; the slaves who came north with him, later identified as Thomas and Lucy Cooper, settled on Nantucket.²¹ On 5 November 1822, an agent for Lee named Camillus Griffith came to Nantucket in search of the Coopers; unsuccessful, he came on to New Bedford to find Randolph. Randolph claimed that Griffith entered his house, knocked him down, beat him with a “shackle” or handcuff, and held him illegally; in later testimony Randolph stated that Griffith had visited him four days earlier and threatened him with two pistols. Griffith took Randolph to the magistrates of New Bedford and told them he intended to take him to Taunton, where he would prove that Randolph was himself a slave whom he had known as William Mason and that he had the right to seize him.

By this time, William W. Swain, Thomas Rotch (the son of William Rotch Jr.), and others served writs on Randolph that alleged debts to them on his part; this action was a subterfuge, Griffith believed, to extricate Randolph from him. A half century later the African American confectioner and antislavery activist Nathan Johnson told the *Republican Standard* that at Griffith’s hearing before the New Bedford magistrates “a person stood behind him with a heavy pair of tongs in his hand ready to brain him if there was any attempt made for Randolph’s liberation.” Randolph was taken to jail in Taunton, and Griffith immediately set off for Boston to obtain a writ of habeas corpus which would permit him to bring charges against Randolph. He testified in one of his several trials, “I was pursued 60 miles to Boston by two Quakers, Rotch and Swain, in company with a deputy sheriff, taken back to Taunton and clapped into jail” on charges of assault against Butler. During the trials, Griffith tried to prove without success that

Randolph was a slave. His own witness failed to support the claim, and juries consistently found against him. But Randolph almost certainly was a slave. After he was set free from Taunton jail, he was put aboard a vessel bound for New York and then, a few days later, on another bound for Barbadoes.²²

Clearly, local abolitionists could organize themselves sufficiently, and in sufficiently short order, to thwart such efforts as Griffith's even before fugitive slave traffic reached the proportions it would by the 1830s. Nathan Johnson had probably been a New Bedford resident for only several years when the attempted rendition of John Randolph took place; his attendance at the trial may well have been his initiation into antislavery and Underground Railroad work. He was apparently in the thick of it as well on the night of 28 March 1827, when he, Thomas Williams, William Vincent, Norris Anderson, George Allen, Thomas A. Green, and fully twenty other unnamed persons raided a New Bedford dwelling in which one John Howard was then living; with clubs and stones, they broke down his door, broke his windows, and assaulted him. All of the named men except Green, who has not been identified, were men of color and relatively well situated; Williams was a well-known clothes cleaner on First Street; Vincent ran a boardinghouse for mariners (probably of color) and was New Bedford's first subscription agent for *The Liberator*; Anderson owned and ran a soap works on Ray Street (now Acushnet Avenue); Allen was a Nantucket-born mariner; Johnson was a caterer, confectioner, and trader who went on to represent the city's people of color at numerous state and national antislavery and colored people's conventions. Court records are mute on the provocation of their assault on Howard, but the diary of New Bedford merchant Samuel Rodman Jr. identifies it. "Left Taunton about half past 6 o'clock," Rodman wrote on 2 April 1827, after testifying about the infamous "Ark" riot of the year previous. ". . . Father remained at Taunton on acc't of the pending trials of George Nixon for an indigntment [*sic*] for assault and battery procured by Asa Smith and of Nathan Johnson Norris Anderson & others for an alleged riot occasioned by a visit of a coloured man from New York or farther south whose object it was to get information of run-away slaves." The jury found all of them not guilty, and they were immediately released.²³

That New Bedford was relatively welcoming to fugitive slaves is suggested by the reminiscence of Joseph M. Smith, who on his one hundredth birthday in 1911 told a local newspaper that he had been a slave in North Carolina when he stowed away aboard a lumber vessel about 1830. When the boat reached New Bedford, Smith said, "I waited until the captain went down below to dress for going ashore, and then I made a dash for liberty . . . when the ship tied up at the wharf at the foot of Union Street . . . I was over the edge and in the midst of an excited crowd. 'A fugitive, a fugitive,' was the cry as I sprung ashore . . . Had never heard the word 'fugitive' before and was pretty well scared out of my wits. But a slave had little to fear in a New Bedford crowd in slavery days. . . . they stood aside and let me pass."²⁴ George Teamoh, who escaped from Norfolk, Virginia, with the help of the sympathetic wife of his owner in 1853, noted the same positive clamor surrounding one's fugitive status when he arrived in New Bedford.

In New Bedford I passed under the appellation of 'fugitive' which at once commanded the sympathy of that patriotic and generous people, and of whom it would seem useless that I should mention a single word after saying what, perhaps most readers know,—that this locality has always been considered the fugitive's Gibraltar—a truth which puts poetry and fiction to blush; as I had been there but a short while when, acting as without the intervention of reason or deliberation its good citizens gathered around me with charitable offerings and a protest of eternal hatred to slavery and all its alliances. . . . And so with that loyal people, they had no argument for slavery but that of instant death to the institution. But notwithstanding their repeated manifestations of kindness, I was doomed to share a hard lot in that wealthy city. Once there you were 'free indeed,' and then thrown upon your own resources after a few weeks of indulgence.²⁵

A similar hero's welcome greeted Henry "Box" Brown when he arrived in New Bedford in early April 1849. Brown was neither the first nor the last slave to take literally the word

“freight,” the euphemism many Underground Railroad activists applied to fugitive slaves in their correspondence. On March 29 that year, Brown had a white and a black friend pack him into a crate in Richmond, Virginia, and “conveyed as dry goods to a free state.” The box, Brown recalled in the several editions of his escape narrative, was “3 feet 1 inch wide, 2 feet six inches high, and 2 feet wide,” and into it he carried a gimlet with which to cut holes for air and a container of water. He was shipped first to Washington, D.C., and then to Philadelphia, where he arrived twenty-seven hours after he had entered the crate. Members of the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee picked the box up on the wharves, removed it to the committee’s office, and pried the nails from its top; Brown emerged to the awe of those assembled. He was sent to New York City and then on to New Bedford to the home of Joseph Ricketson Jr. “Did you not see an account in the Standard of this week of a slaves having escaped from the South to a city in New England, it was copied from the Tribune which took it from a Vermont paper,” Ricketson wrote to his abolitionist friend Debora Weston on 27 April 1849. “—The said slave came consigned to me about three weeks since from S. H. Gay who received him from J McKim Philada. As you may not have heard of it & the story is so interesting I will send you a copy of the letter I recd with the consignment—The man appears to be a fine fellow, has found considerable employment—he has worked several days for me & if I commence manufacturing oil again I think I can give him constant employment.”

Ricketson went on to say that Brown’s story was so fantastic that some found it hard to believe; people of color falsely claiming to be fugitives and seeking the assistance of New Bedford abolitionists had already become a problem, and there were those who had grown wary of the harrowing descriptions some fugitives offered of their lives in slavery and their subsequent escapes. “Only one man, and he an exdivine of the Orthodox School, Pardon G Seabury, doubted the veracity of the story as Mr Robeson informed me,” Ricketson told Weston, “but he no longer doubts, for as we were standing at the Post Office last Friday, the man came along and I informed him Mr Seabury of it; it was ‘prima facie’ evidence. Orthodoxy stood abashed; God’s image in an ebony case confronted it too strongly; what says he? you dont mean ‘that nigger’;

yes, says I, there is the Hero; such I'll give up says he were it not for exposing the express I would call a town meeting and show him up. His name is Henry Brown and he is the greatest Lion of the age."²⁶

Brown clearly felt no need to hide from pursuers, and indeed his escape was celebrated almost instantly. Within a day or two of his arrival he appears to have attended a party in his honor at the home of William J. Rotch, as merchant Charles W. Morgan recounted in his diary on 4 April 1849:

Sarah & I went to Wm J Rotchs to tea but came home early—I there heard a singular account of the escape of a slave who has just arrived here which I must record—He had himself packed up in a box about 3 ft 2 in long- 2 ft 6 in wide & 1 ft 11 in deep and sent on by express from Richmond to Philadelphia—marked 'this side up'—He is about 5 ft 6 in high and weighs about 200 lb—In this way he came by cars & steam boat to Philada near 25 hours in the box which was quite close & tight had only a bladder of water with him and kept himself alive by bathing his face and fanning himself with his hat He was twice turned head downwards & once remained so on board the steam boat while she went 18 miles—which almost killed him and he said the veins on his temples were almost as thick as his finger Yet he endured it all and was delivered to his antislavery friends safe & well—who trembled when he knocked on the box and asked the question 'all right[?]'—and the answer came promptly 'all right sir'—I think I never heard of an instance of greater fortitude & daring and he has well earned the freedom which he will now enjoy—²⁷

Henry "Box" Brown went on to become a major feature on the antislavery lecture circuit. He commissioned a panorama, which he titled *Mirror of Slavery*, to unwind during his lectures, and he traveled on a lecture tour through England for a time with J. C. A. "Boxer" Smith, the man of color who had crated him in Richmond.²⁸ Like Brown and Frederick Douglass, John S.

Jacobs also went on to a career in antislavery. Jacobs was the brother of Harriet Jacobs, whose *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* caused immediate controversy at its publication in 1861. The Jacobses came from a maritime background: their uncle Mark was a steward on a vessel traveling from their native Edenton, North Carolina, to northern ports. They also had family experience with escape attempts. A relation identified only as Stephen was a seaman who had successfully escaped to the North, and their uncle Joseph had escaped once to New York City, was returned to slavery and sold to a New Orleans owner, and escaped again. John Jacobs, who had long contemplated escape but wished not to leave his sister and her children in slavery, was taken to Washington, D.C., when his master was elected to Congress. In this service he traveled, even to Canada, where, he later wrote, “I tried to get a seaman’s protection from the English Custom-house, but could not without swearing to a lie, which I did not feel disposed to do.” On another trip to New York City, Jacobs ultimately escaped on a boat to Providence and through to New Bedford, where he was introduced to a former Alexandria slave, “William P—,” and stayed a few months before shipping out on the whaler *Francis Henrietta* on 1 August 1839. His earlier disinclination to lie is indicated in the vessel’s crew list, where the “residence” column after his name was left blank. While Jacobs was at sea, his sister Harriet had managed to escape herself and came to New Bedford in search of him; twice after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, she is thought to have hidden in New Bedford when her owner was in New York trying to find her. John Jacobs returned on the *Francis Henrietta* in mid-February 1843, moved to Boston, and became an antislavery lecturer. He traveled in Upstate New York with Jonathan Walker, the white mariner who had been arrested for attempting to carry seven fugitives from Pensacola, Florida, to the West Indies. Walker spent a year in solitary confinement in a Florida jail and had his hand branded with the initials S. S. for “slave stealer.” Walker’s “branded hand” made him an instant celebrity on the antislavery lecture circuit. Jacobs later opened an antislavery reading room in Rochester, New York, near Frederick Douglass’s newspaper office.²⁹

The importance of maritime experience in the fugitive slave phenomenon cannot be underestimated. Mariners, both black and white, had been regarded as radical elements in

American society well before the Boston Tea Party,³⁰ a perception that guided the passage of the Negro Seamen's Acts in many southern states principally after the Denmark Vesey revolt in South Carolina in May 1822. Designed to thwart attempts by ship crews to assist runaway slaves, these acts called for quarantining all black seamen entering southern ports; if they came ashore, they were to be incarcerated until their vessels left port, and vessel masters were to pay the costs of this confinement. The perception grew stronger after the furor created by the distribution of David Walker's *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* throughout the southeastern seaboard in 1829 and 1830. Walker's *Appeal* is considered to be the first antislavery tract to advocate a massive collective uprising on the part of slaves against slavery, and Walker, a free man of color from Wilmington, North Carolina, who had become a clothes dresser in Boston, was sufficiently serious about its message to put in place a network to distribute it among southern slaves. Yet the view that black mariners were antislavery agitators was so pervasive that Walker seems at first to have chosen to rely upon sympathetic white mariners to distribute the tract.³¹

Not only were men of color commonly found on vessels, but people of color were an ordinary feature along the wharves in all seaports—particularly in the South, where free labor had been in short supply since settlement times. As historian Ira Berlin has pointed out, “Probably nothing arrived or left these cities without some black handling it.” Black men, slave and free, piloted and served as engineers, cooks, stewards, and crew on vessels that plied tidewater rivers and hauled cargo from seaport to seaport; they also worked as stevedores loading and unloading vessels and as draymen carrying goods to and from vessels in ports throughout the South. Facing a dearth of skilled labor and a relative paucity of towns in which such tradesmen would congregate, many slaves were trained in such skilled trades as blacksmithing and coopering on backcountry plantations, and a fair proportion were hired out to growing seaport towns, where they added caulking to their repertoire of skills. Women of color often peddled food and goods to sailors and laundered their clothes.³²

Despite the vast difference in regional economies, people of color often performed the

same tasks in the North. Frederick Douglass, George Teamoh, and David Robinson, all fugitives who lived for a time in New Bedford, were caulkers; Lewis Temple, Sylvanus Allen, Thomas Clark, William P. Powell, and Paul C. Phelps, among others, were blacksmiths; James H. Johnson, William Cuffe Jr., and David F. Wainer were shipwrights; Paul Cuffe, Pardon Cook, and Richard Johnson mastered or owned shares in whaling and trading vessels. Other people of color worked in trades servicing mariners: in New Bedford, John Adams, William Vincent, Powell, James C. Carter, James W. Harris, and William Bush all operated boardinghouses for (though perhaps not exclusively for) black mariners; the brothers Richard C. and Ezra R. Johnson were ship outfitters and grocers; Solomon Peneton, John Briggs, Douglass, Teamoh, Thomas H. Jones, Joseph Fields, and other men of color worked as stevedores and general wharf labor; Ezra Johnson and Shadrach Howard, his stepbrother, were sailmakers; Paul C. Phelps was a tailor, perhaps making clothes for mariners. Almost all of these men were active in antebellum antislavery and equal rights movements, and at least four of them were fugitives. Women of color in maritime trades are less easy to identify, though some probably sewed clothes for mariners' outfits and others might have run smaller boardinghouses.³³ Thomas Wentworth Higginson explained in a letter to Wilbur Siebert how the regular presence of black men and women on the waterfront was turned to advantage by Underground Railroad workers:

I belonged to several secret societies in Boston aiming to impede the capture of fugitive slaves; it was also afterwards planned to distress [?] slave claimants. One of these societies owned a boat, in which men used to go down in the harbor to meet Southern vessels. The practice was, to take along a colored woman with fresh fruit, pies, &c—she easily got on board & when there, usually found out if there was any fugitive on board; then he was sometimes taken away by night.³⁴

Such men as Douglass, Teamoh, Robinson, and perhaps Temple learned their trades while in slavery in the South, a fact of considerable significance in any discussion of fugitive

slave traffic. In separate studies, Gerald Mullin and Philip D. Morgan have found that the percentage of runaways who were skilled tradesmen in Virginia and South Carolina, respectively, was greater than their proportion of the total slave population in these colonies in the 1700s and that among skilled slaves “watermen” were among the most apt to run away. “The independent, self-reliant existence of watermen, with their obvious access to a means of escape, no doubt accounts for their prominence among skilled runaways, forming, in fact, one-quarter of the total, when they comprised less than ten per cent of the inventoried skilled,” Morgan has concluded, and has stated more generally, “A skilled, native-born, male runaway who was able to speak English well was more likely to pass as free or attempt to leave the colony than a runaway who was his exact opposite.”³⁵ Runaway advertisements, escape narratives, newspaper accounts, and other sources make plain that the tendency of slaves with maritime skills to escape was probably just as pronounced after 1800. Freddie Parker’s compilation of runaway slave advertisements in North Carolina newspapers between 1791 and 1840 offers numerous cases of skilled slaves believed to have escaped by water to a northern state. Joseph Pittman of New Bern, for example, offered a reward for the return of his slave Jack in the *North Carolina Gazette* on 23 March 1793. “He was late the property of Captain Hosmer,” Pittman wrote, “and as he was brought up to the sea, I expect he will try to get on board of some vessel, with an intention of going to New-England, where he was born. . . . If he has left this town I suppose he will try to get to Washington to take shipping there.” Pittman added a statement that was even then boilerplate in fugitive slave notices along the East Coast: “All masters of vessels, and others, are hereby forewarned from harbouring, employing, or carrying him away, as the subscriber is determined to prosecute with the utmost rigor of the law, any person so offending.” Pittman offered a forty-shilling reward to anyone who found Jack within the county and a four-pound bounty on anyone finding him further afield. Similarly, on 3 June 1820 A. Backhouse of New Bern advertised a \$150 reward for the return of his slave Sam, “by trade a Carpenter;—he is also something of a Seaman. I have been informed that he has procured a Seaman’s Protection and obtained forged Free Papers. He has, no doubt, already gone or will attempt to go to some of the Northern sea-

ports.”³⁶

Sam was far from the only fugitive to rely on protection papers to make his escape. The very prevalence of blacks on vessels and in eastern seaports and the vagueness of the physical descriptions on protection papers made them an ideal subterfuge in the movement of fugitive slaves.³⁷ Frederick Douglass donned sailor’s clothing—“a red shirt and a tarpaulin hat and black cravat, tied in sailor fashion, carelessly and loosely about my neck”—and used another man’s seaman’s protection paper to make his escape from Maryland in September 1838. “One element in my favor,” he wrote in his last autobiography, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, “was the kind feeling which prevailed in Baltimore and other seaports at that time, towards ‘those who go down to the sea in ships.’ ‘Free trade and sailors’ rights’ expressed the sentiment of the country just then.” But because the description on his borrowed protection paper fit “a man much darker than myself,” Douglass opted not to buy a ticket for the train out of Baltimore at the station and hoped that the hubbub on the train would prevent the conductor from examining the paper too closely; indeed, “the merest glance at the paper satisfied him,” Douglass wrote, and he was on his way toward the free states.³⁸

Evidence of the presence of fugitive slaves in New Bedford becomes much more plentiful after 1847, when the town became a city and instituted its first public poor relief efforts. Records of the Overseers of the Poor contain many references to fugitive slaves. There are also plentiful records to fugitives settling in New Bedford in William Still’s *Underground Railroad*, first published by the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee in 1871. Still, whose mother was a slave and whose father purchased his freedom, was the secretary for the Vigilance Committee, and between 1852 and the beginning of the Civil War he kept detailed records of the fugitives the committee aided once they reached Philadelphia. In most instances, fugitives Still mentioned as going to New Bedford, or from whom he received New Bedford correspondence, can be matched to persons listed in such other sources as censuses and city directories. But in this period after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, when the propensity to escape slavery is believed to have reached its peak, it is more difficult to discern the means of one’s escape unless the fugitive

wrote a narrative about it or the escape itself earned some notoriety in its time, as the escape of Major Hodsdon's Norfolk slaves did in 1854.

How John Thompson came to New Bedford in 1842 is known through his own book, published in Worcester in 1856. He escaped on foot, for the most part, from Maryland's Eastern Shore and spent six months working on a farm outside the fugitive slave "station" of Columbia, Pennsylvania, before the announced presence of slavecatchers in his area persuaded him that it would be "best for me to go to sea, and accordingly removed to New York city for that purpose." In New York his lack of maritime skills made it impossible for him to get a berth as an able seaman, "so I was advised to go to New Bedford, where green hands were more wanted, and where, I was told, I could go free of expense." The next morning, "in care of an agent," he boarded a vessel for New Bedford, where he was told he could sail only as a greenhand. Thompson preferred otherwise, and so he convinced a black cook staying in his New Bedford boardinghouse to teach him everything he knew about being a steward in exchange for trying to arrange a berth for the cook on the same vessel. Both plans worked, and on 5 June 1842 Thompson and the cook shipped out on the whaler *Milwood*, owned by New Bedford merchant Gideon Allen and captained by Aaron C. Luce. After some time at sea, however, Thompson's inexperience became clear, and Luce confronted him about his true background. Thompson answered him truthfully:

I am a fugitive slave from Maryland, and have a family in Philadelphia; but fearing to remain there any longer, I thought I would go on a whaling voyage, as being the place where I stood least chance of being arrested by slave hunters. I had become somewhat experienced in cooking by working in hotels, inasmuch that I thought I could fill the place of steward.

Thompson's answer appears to have satisfied Luce, so much so that, Thompson wrote, "The captain became as kind as a father to me, often going with me to the cabin, and when no one was

present, teaching me to make pastries and sea messes. He had a cook book, from which I gained much valuable information. I was soon able to fulfill my duty to the gratification and satisfaction of the captain, though much to the surprise of the whole crew, who, knowing I was a raw hand, wondered how I had so soon learned my business.”³⁹

A case that received considerable attention in its time was the 1854 escape of Clarissa Davis, her two brothers, and her father from Portsmouth, Virginia. Davis’s brothers, the slaves of a “Mrs. Berkeley” of Portsmouth, had managed, probably with the aid of a black crew member, to get aboard the schooner *Ellen Barnes* to Wareham in the early spring of 1854 and had come on to New Bedford. They may have been among the slaves referred to in a 31 March 1854 article in the *Liberator*, which reported that “a number of slaves had escaped by vessel from Norfolk and Portsmouth to New Bedford recently,” or those mentioned a week later in the same newspaper about Portsmouth slaves who “continue to disappear suddenly and mysteriously”; among this latter group were two men and two women “belonging to Mrs. Berkely and William Broecks.” Clarissa, who was supposed to have escaped with her brothers, was unable to and went into hiding for seventy-five days; one source says she hid in a chicken coop. By early August, William Still wrote, “word was conveyed to her” that the steward aboard the steamship *City of Richmond*, who had assisted many fugitives between Norfolk and Philadelphia, would take her on board. She dressed in men’s clothes and left her hiding place at three o’clock in the morning amid a terrific rainstorm; on the vessel, a man named William Bagnal enclosed her in a box, and she was thus delivered to Still and the Vigilance Committee.

Committee members advised her to change her name to Mary D. Armstead and sent her to join her brother “and sister” in New Bedford; her elderly father, who had been permitted to purchase his freedom, followed soon afterward. On 26 August 1855 she wrote Still from New Bedford thanking him for sending “the papers” and keeping her abreast of the Passamore Williamson case, a celebrated fugitive slave rescue attempt at the time. Others from Portsmouth and Norfolk, whether fugitives or free, had preceded her; she told Still, “Miss Sanders and all the friends desired to be remember to you and your family I shall be pleased to hear from the

underground railroad often.” She signed her name with her alias, but in the 1855 census she appears to have taken back her given Christian name, Clarissa. For that census she gave the enumerator the same age she had given Still, “about twenty-two,” and her birthplace as Virginia; also listed there are Charles and William Armstead, probably her brothers; Violet Armstead, either her sister or sister-in-law; and seventy-year-old Samuel, probably her father.⁴⁰

Many of the New Bedford fugitives whom Still assisted traveled at least as far as Philadelphia over water, but precisely how they came to New Bedford is not known. Manifests for coastwise vessels, in the collections of the New Bedford Free Public Library, show a great deal of traffic between New Bedford and southern ports between 1808 (when the records begin) and 1842; by that year, judging solely by these manifests, the number of vessels arriving in New Bedford began to drop to almost none. But the manifests must be used with considerable caution. It is more than likely that vessel captains listed their most recent port of call as their port of embarkation; vessels that had spent a winter in a southern port might have stopped with a cargo in Philadelphia or New York before returning to New Bedford. Moreover, these manifests are clearly incomplete. In 1854, one of the biggest years of fugitive traffic, no vessels at all are recorded as entering the port of New Bedford from a southern port or from Philadelphia. But the daily “Marine Intelligence” column in New Bedford *Evening Standard* for that year shows eighty-four vessels entering from Philadelphia, twenty-one from Baltimore, thirteen from Norfolk, eleven from “Nansemond” (the county bordering Norfolk), eight from James or York Rivers or simply “Virginia,” three each from Richmond and Fredericksburg, and one from Petersburg. One vessel entered from Wilmington, North Carolina, seven from Darien, Georgia, and five from such Florida ports as Apalachicola, Jacksonville, and Key West; another fourteen vessels came from Delaware and the District of Columbia. This count does not include vessels that served for the most part as passenger packets.

Clearly, then, it would have been feasible for fugitives to have arrived in New Bedford, either directly or indirectly, by water: William Ferguson, who with his wife Nancy was identified as a fugitive slave in the city overseer of the poor records in 1848, told the New

Bedford *Standard Times* more than sixty years later than he had left Norfolk “stowed away on a schooner among bags of coal” on board Schooner *Pornony*, bound for Boston harbor, in 1847. African American historian Jane Waters was told that fugitives “oft times . . . would hide away in empty barrels, or great oil casks,” and indeed many manifests of vessels entering New Bedford from southern points list empty barrels and casks among their cargoes. One woman, Isabella White, came to New Bedford stowed away in a barrel marked “sweet potatoes” in about 1850, when she was about four or five years old; she is said to have been brought north under the direction of New Bedford merchant Loum Snow and to have been cared for in his family until she was old enough to go out to service; she spent most of her working life as a domestic for Amelia Jones in New Bedford.⁴¹

While evidence of the presence of fugitives in New Bedford exists, it so far has been impossible to prove whether any New Bedford vessel owners, captains, or crew were actively involved in helping fugitives escape the South. Up to the Civil War, only one case, that of the schooner *Cornelia* in 1845, suggests but still falls short of documenting willing involvement. Owned in part by Joseph Ricketson Jr., the *Cornelia* was captained by his relation Gilbert Ricketson; while in port at Portsmouth, Virginia, late in 1844, a fugitive had stowed away on the vessel, and when Ricketson learned of it he headed immediately back to Portsmouth. Ricketson, his steward, a man of color named Henry Boyer who had lived in New Bedford probably since 1830, and another seaman of color identified only as Smith brought the stowaway ashore in one of the schooner’s boats, and there the slave (coached by Ricketson, Smith later told someone in New Bedford) told officials that Boyer had helped him escape. The Portsmouth *Index* identified the runaway as “Tom, belonging to Mr. Rudder of this town. . . . The boy had been employed on board the *Cornelia*, in fanning grain, when the prisoner [Boyer] persuaded him to secret himself on board, and furnished him with provisions after he was secreted.” Whether Boyer had actually done so is not known, but he was thrown in jail. Despite numerous meetings in New Bedford and Boston about the affair, the castigation of Ricketson in the local and antislavery press, and James B. Congdon’s effort to secure adequate legal representation for Boyer, he remained

incarcerated for years. In April 1849 Joseph Ricketson wrote Debora Weston, “Boyer the man who was in my vessel the *Cornelia* & imprisoned in Virginia was in town last week on his way home I did not see him—I understand his wife is about being married to another man—there is a little notice of this in the *Liberator* of this week taken from a Sandwich paper.”⁴²

Also difficult to establish is a profound presence of fugitives aboard whaling vessels. John Thompson’s rationale for making such a voyage—“I thought I would go on a whaling voyage, as being the place where I stood least chance of being arrested by slave hunters”—seems eminently logical: in his time, the average length of a whaling cruise was thirty-one months, and by 1858 it had risen to forty-three months.⁴³ Moreover, whalers rarely if ever stopped at southern ports. Still, to date only five such cases have been documented—John Thompson, John S. Jacobs, his nephew Joseph Jacobs, a “runaway slave” named William Henry who was in the whaling bark *Hope* between July 1839 and May 1841, and the Virginia fugitive George Weston, who shipped out on the brig *Ocean* in May 1854 and who subsequently went on at least two other whaling voyages from New Bedford.⁴⁴ The ability to determine the presence of others with certainty is fatally clouded by several factors. The logs kept on whaling voyages were official documents and thus were unlikely to record the presence of fugitives; in addition, both white and black mariners used aliases, and the tendency was particularly prevalent among fugitives. “I should think it verry [*sic*] probable that he sailed from this place,” New Bedford merchant Charles Tucker wrote to James Osborne in July 1837 in answer to his query about a boy named Joseph Warren, but, he added, “it has of late become very fashionable for sailors to assume some fictitious name by which they ship and are known by before they sail and by so doing may deprive their friends from tracing them.”⁴⁵

Moreover, many seamen were highly transient, not staying in one place long enough to compile a record that might suggest their origin. Historian Gary Nash has called the free unskilled workers of late eighteenth-century northern seaports “perhaps the most elusive social group in early American history because they moved from port to port with greater frequency than other urban dwellers, shifted occupations, died young, and, as the poorest members of the

free white community, least often left behind traces of their lives on the tax lists or in land or probate records.”⁴⁶ This anonymity characterized unskilled people of color equally, if not more extremely, and continued to be a feature of their lives through much of the nineteenth century as well. Consider, for example, the career of John A. Williams, about whom New Bedford poor relief records reveal much more than can be known about hundreds of his contemporaries. The overseers of the poor wrote of him in 1859, “John A. says he was born in Delaware, came to New Bedford in 1844, not married then. First went coasting from here to Boston, & Philadelphia, about 2 years, then worked ashore stevadoring &c 5 or 6 years, then went to Boston & sailed in the merchant service from Boston to Mobile & from Mobile to Liverpool, then went about 2 years from Liverpool to New Orleans, ‘back & forth from one port to the other carrying cotton,[]’ then returned to New Bedford last July 2d & lived here since. His wife is from Charleston S.C. were married here, by the Revd Henry J Johnson c[olored].” Unlike many black mariners, Williams spent enough time in New Bedford to leave some trace in records—and to suggest, because of his inconsistent reporting of his birthplace, that he was a fugitive. Williams stated that he was born in Philadelphia in protection papers issued in 1843 and 1845, told census takers his birthplace was “unknown” in 1850 and 1860, told another one merely that he had been born in the “South” in 1855, and reported to the overseers of the poor that he was born in Delaware in 1859. Williams is obscure except for these statements, but most black mariners who came to New Bedford are far more obscure: Joseph Lyons, for example, came to the city and sought a seaman’s protection certificate in July 1833. He claimed to be twenty years old, to have been born in Savannah, Georgia, and to be a resident of New Bedford, but he never again appeared in any listing of any sort. According to a *Liberator* from two years earlier, Georgia had a slave population of 217,470 and a free black population of 2,483; that Lyons was a fugitive seems more likely than not.⁴⁷

However, the reporting of a southern birthplace is insignificant by itself. Black whaling crew members who, like John Jacobs, were disinclined to conceal their southern birthplaces made up anywhere from 8 to 24 percent of all whaling crew of color between 1836 and 1860;

their proportion of the black whaling work force shows no rise after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, and indeed no discernible trend prevails in these figures throughout this period.⁴⁸ Many of these men may have been free persons. On the other hand, those mariners who chose to conceal their birthplaces, like John Thompson, who declared it as Adams County, Pennsylvania, may have been numerous, which suggests that the actual number of southern-born mariners in the whaling work force may have been much higher than protection papers and crew lists indicate and that fugitives in whaling crews may have been more abundant than more direct evidence has so far suggested. Philip Piper, for example, listed his birthplace as New York City in the protection paper he received in June 1836 before he shipped out on the whaling vessel *America* in July. But in the 1850 census, he and the rest of his family, except for his father, listed their birthplaces as Virginia (probably Alexandria) or Washington, D.C. Another example is Henry Steward, who told census takers in 1855 and 1860 that he was born in Pennsylvania. However, his protection papers, a crew list, and his New Bedford tombstone show his birthplace as Queen Annes County, Maryland. Steward shipped on the Fairhaven whaler *Favorite* in August 1846 and returned with the ship in November 1849. He seems then to have quit the sea, and by 1860 he was listed in the census as a fruit dealer. Nine years later he died, and his will, signed with a mark, clearly states his origin. He left one dollar to each of his two children, “both of Maryland,” and added, “said children are really named Elizabeth and Cordelia Steward but have sometime been named or styled Brooks—These two daughters are the only children I have & were born in Slavery and have been so long separated from me that the above identification is made.” Still, that Steward was a fugitive when he came to New Bedford is not known; he may have been freed or purchased his freedom after his children were separated, or sold away, from him.

An exhaustive survey of the journals kept on those whaling voyages that carried crew of color might reveal the identities of other fugitives on these vessels. On the valid assumption that at least some black mariners reported their birthplaces truthfully, it might also be possible to check the names and physical descriptions presented in protection papers against those offered in

fugitive slave advertisements placed a short time before the dates of these certificates in the seaport towns that many black whaling crew report as their birthplaces. Still, that fugitives went to sea on whaling vessels is significant regardless of their number. To John Thompson, it was a chance to escape beyond the reach of a man who claimed to own him; to John Jacobs, it was that as well as a chance to learn to read. For whaling agents and captains, it was probably a chance to sign an enterprising and acculturated man onto crews whose skill and productivity were perceived to be, and in fact probably were, in notable decline after about 1830.⁴⁹ The presence of black mariners in nonwhaling maritime work should also not be underestimated. Numerous New Bedford men of color receive protection papers but are not listed on the crew lists of whalers; they were probably engaged in merchant service, if not always or often to southern ports then surely in the trade down East and across the Atlantic. Even though not all fugitives were antislavery activists and not all antislavery activists had strong maritime ties, many of these men and their shoreside cohorts of both sexes in maritime trades and services formed a central and functional part of the community that assisted and welcomed fugitives from southern slavery to New Bedford in the years before the Emancipation Proclamation.

Notes

1. This letter from Robeson was quoted in Edward S. Adams, "Anti-Slavery Activity in Fall River," *Fall River Herald News*, 7 March 1939. The original letter has not yet been found, and no other correspondence from Robeson on fugitive slaves is known to exist.

2. Gary Collison, *Shadrach Minkins: From Fugitive Slave to Citizen* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 45. The names of some of those in Hodsdon's party appeared in "Virginians Aroused!" *New Bedford Republican Standard*, 13 March 1854, 2:1.

3. "From the Portsmouth Globe of Friday. Insult and Outrage upon the Rights of the South!" *The American Beacon, and Norfolk and Portsmouth Daily Advertiser*, 17 January 1854, 2:1. The incident was reported in the *Republican Standard* as "Fugitive Slaves," 12 January 1854, 2:3, "Tempest in a Teapot," 9 February 1854, 2:4, and "Virginians Aroused!," 13 March 1854, 2:1.

4. Elizabeth Buffum Chace, "My Anti-Slavery Reminiscences," in *Two Quaker Sisters from the Original Diaries of Elizabeth Buffum Chace and Lucy Buffum Lovell* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., 1937), 130.

5. "Meeting of the Citizens of New-Berne," *Republican & Patriot* (Goldsboro, N.C.), 2 October 1851; see also an earlier piece on the same issue, "The True Remedy," *Republican & Patriot*, 25 September 1851, and *Republican Standard*, 30 October 1851, 2:1.

6. "Reply/To a Portion of the Citizens of Newbern, in Council," *Liberator*, 20 November 1851, 101:1-4.

7. Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1961), 18, has asserted that "evidence for a nationwide conspiratorial network of underground railroad lines is completely lacking; the nationally organized railroad with its disciplined conductors, controlling directors, and planned excursions into the South did not exist. The abolitionists had no centralized organization, either for spiriting away slaves or for any other of their activities." Gara's argument hinges on the notion—which, if anywhere, is asserted only in the most nostalgic part of the Underground Railroad literature—that there was a "central" or "national" hub for Underground Railroad activities, a belief that clearly led him to minimize the evidence of any systematic escape. Later historians have often overlooked this part of Gara's argument and have seemed often to endorse the idea that there was *no* organization to fugitive slave traffic. Evidence from New Bedford and elsewhere contradicts this notion repeatedly.

8. David Cecelski, "The Shores of Freedom: The Maritime Underground Railroad in North Carolina, 1800-1861," *North Carolina Historical Review* 71, 2 (April 1994): 174, 176; see also Philip D. Morgan, "Colonial South Carolina Runaways: Their Significance for Slave Culture," *Slavery & Abolition* 6 (Dec 1985): 58, which argues that runaway slave notices published in South Carolina newspapers between 1732 and 1782 "are a gross underestimate of the extent of absenteeism among slaves"; the expense of advertising, and the perceived probability of retrieving some slaves, kept many owners from publicly announcing the escape of slaves.

9. Caroline Weston, New Bedford, to Wendell Phillips, 9 February 1845, Weston Papers, Boston Public Library; *Republican Standard*, 1 November 1850, 2:3; James Bunker Congdon, reply to queries of S. G. Howe, American Freeman's Inquiry Commission, 1863, New Bedford Free Public Library.

10. Of the 136 fugitives research has so far identified, 75 were cited by full names and another 8 by first names in various sources.

11. Wilbur H. Siebert, *The Underground Railroad in Massachusetts* (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1936), 5; Siebert took this information from an article in the *Boston Globe*, 15 September 1900.

12. Lorenzo Johnston Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England* (1942; reprint, New York: Atheneum, 1971), 128, has noted that Massachusetts Bay colony passed a law on 13 October 1680 that made it unlawful for masters of vessels to “entertain” any Negro or servant on board or to sail with any such person who lacked a permit for the voyage; the law passed, Greene has said, because both white and black servants were escaping on vessels leaving from Massachusetts ports. W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 12, cites the case of a New England slave named Pompey who escaped slavery by stowing away in firewood on the ship *Morehampton* in 1724; in the same year, Kittery mariner John Moffat found a Marblehead slave “hiding under wood in the forecabin” of his fishing vessel; see Greene, *Negro in Colonial New England*, 164-65. Attucks ran away from a Framingham, Massachusetts, master in the fall of 1750 and may have had prior experience working on coasting vessels; Sidney and Emma Kaplan have suggested that he may first have come to the Boston area on a Nantucket whaler. See Martha S. Putney, *Black Sailors: Afro-American Merchant Seamen and Whalers Prior to the Civil War* (New York, Westport, Conn., and London: Greenwood Press, 1987), 2, and Sidney Kaplan and Emma Nogrady Kaplan, *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution*, rev. ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 8.

13. Weston to Phillips, 9 February 1845, Weston Papers. It is puzzling that Weston mentions Thomas Arnold, who was a Quaker and abolitionist in Providence, Rhode Island, and the father of James Arnold of New Bedford. To my knowledge Thomas Arnold never lived in New Bedford, and it seems unlikely that she meant James as he was living in New Bedford when she wrote to Phillips.

14. Thomas Hazard Jr., New Bedford, to Moses Brown, 6 mo 24 1792, and “Friend Thomas Rotch,” New Bedford, to Moses Brown, 7 mo 1st 1792, Austin Collection of Moses Brown Papers, in Archives of New England Yearly Meeting of Society of Friends, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence. Hazard’s letter mentions that Rotch had written to Arnold, and that “brother W Rotch is now at Nantucket or he would have addressed thee on this subject.” He must have meant William Rotch Jr.; the elder William Rotch was still living in Dunkirk, France, where the family had set up a branch of its whaling business. See John M. Bullard, *The Rotches* (New Bedford: by the author, 1947), 36.

15. Bullard, *The Rotches*, 263.

16. These runaway advertisement appeared in *The Medley or New Bedford Marine Journal* on 26 August 1794 and 28 April 1797. One suspects that captains placed such ads to absolve themselves of criminal mischief, not so that, as Taber’s ad states, “any person claiming him, will know by this information where he is.” Taber added that “every legal method has been taken to prevent the Owner losing the property, in my power.” Most fugitive slave advertisements placed in newspapers in southern seaports routinely warned owners and masters of vessels from taking slaves away under penalty of law.

17. *Medley*, 26 April 1799, 3:4. Wainer’s vessel was probably the *Ranger*, which Cuffe

launched in 1796. On 10 April 1799 the Philadelphia *Daily Advertiser* noted the entry of schooner *Ranger* of New Bedford; it probably called at Philadelphia, perhaps to sell cargo and load more, before heading to Maryland. See Lamont D. Thomas, *Paul Cuffe, Black Entrepreneur and Pan-Africanist* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 18.

18. William Grimes, *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave, Brought Down to the Present Time. Written by Himself* (New Haven, Conn: published by the author, 1855), reprinted in *Five Black Lives: The Autobiographies of Venture Smith, James Mars, William Grimes, The Rev. G. W. Offley, James L. Smith* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), 104-5.

19. See in particular Bolster, *Black Jacks*, and W. Jeffrey Bolster, "'To Feel Like a Man': Black Seamen in the Northern States, 1800-1860," *Journal of American History* 76, 4 (March 1990): 1179-99; Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (Cambridge, Eng., and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Putney, *Black Sailors*; and Margaret S. Creighton, *Rites and Passages: The Experience of American Whaling, 1830-1870* (Cambridge, Eng., and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 6-7, notes that 18 percent of all seamen's jobs in 1803 were occupied by men of color and that about 25 percent of male slaves in coastal Massachusetts had had some experience on board ships in the 1740s. Bolster also found that in 1836 30.5 percent of all berths on Providence vessels were occupied by men of color and 26.5 of all Providence crews had an African-American majority; see "'To Feel Like a Man,'" tables 1 and 5. Closer to home and to the date of Grimes's escape, Creighton found that 28 percent of all New Bedford whaling crew were of color in 1818; see *Rites and Passages*, Appendix II, 214. Putney, *Black Sailors*, 12, 17, found 2028 people of color on New Bedford ships, almost all of them whaling vessels, between 1803 and 1840.

20. Grimes claimed to have been falsely accused of raping and beating a white woman who lived below his New Bedford barber shop; once discharged for lack of evidence, he was arrested a second time and, unable to post his bond, spent three months in jail before being acquitted in Superior Court at Taunton. Grimes then moved quite often among towns in Rhode Island and Connecticut until he settled, more or less permanently, in New Haven. On the New Bedford case, see Grimes, *Life of William Grimes*, 108-11, and "Daring Outrage," *Medley*, 24 January 1817, 3:1.

21. The *Regulator* was owned at the time by John Avery Parker and Weston Howland, whose son Thomas H. Howland (brother of the city's first mayor, Abraham Hathaway Howland) was a member of an Alexandria commission house. Accounts state that the vessel's master when Randolph came to New Bedford was Samuel Chadwick. In the manifests for coastwise vessels sailing to and from New Bedford, only two manifests exist for the *Regulator* under this master. Both are outgoing—one out to Alexandria on 22 March 1815 and the other out to New York City on 3 April 1817. However, the "Marine Diary" column in the New Bedford *Mercury* lists this vessel with this master entering the port of New Bedford on 28 June 1816 (from New York) and clearing for Alexandria on 3 July 1816. On 20 September 1816 the column noted that the vessel, bound "for New-York, cleared at Norfolk 5th inst.," suggesting that its earlier trip from New

York may have been the last stop on a longer trip south; the vessel returned to New Bedford 4 October 1816, cleared for Alexandria on 11 October, and returned to New Bedford on 7 or 8 November 1816, “4 days from Alexandria, with 600 bbls flour, to the Captain, J. A. Parker, Weston Howland and others.” On 7 February 1817 the *Regulator* under Chadwick returned again to New Bedford from Alexandria but had to put in at Dartmouth because ice choked New Bedford harbor; it returned twice more from Alexandria under the same captain in 1817, on 26 September and 12 December. Randolph and the Coopers could have been on any one of these voyages or another in 1818. See Manifests of Coasting Vessels, New Bedford Free Public Library, and “Marine Diary,” New Bedford *Mercury*, which ran in every issue, usually on page 3.

22. The case, *Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. Camillus Griffith*, was first argued in the Court of Common Pleas at Taunton in October 1823, was continued to April 1824, and was argued before the Supreme Judicial Court of Bristol County, held at Plymouth, October 1824. A separate action, *Randolph v. Griffith*, was tried in March 1823, appealed, and argued again before the Supreme Judicial Court at its April 1824 sitting; see the records of the Supreme Judicial Court of Bristol County, Massachusetts Archives, Boston. See also the accounts of this case in the *Medley*, 28 February 1823, 3:2 and 2 May 1823, 2:5-3:1, as well as a full, and somewhat confusing, retrospective account, “The Quakers and Slavery: A Fugitive Slave Case in New Bedford Fifty Years Ago,” *Republican Standard*, 4 March 1878, 3:1-3.

23. The case against Johnson et al., *Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. Thomas Williams*, was argued before the Supreme Judicial Court of Bristol County in Taunton in its April 1827 term. The New Bedford *Mercury* did not report the incident. Rodman’s reference to the trial is in Zephaniah W. Pease, ed., *The Diary of Samuel Rodman: A New Bedford Chronicle of Thirty-Seven Years, 1821-1859* (New Bedford, Mass.: Reynolds Printing Co., 1927). A man of color named John E. Howard lived in New Bedford at the time of the assault, but whether he was the man who was assaulted seems unlikely; he had lived in the city since at least 1820 and, according to the records of the New Bedford Overseers for the Poor, remained a resident until as late as February 1849.

24. Smith’s account appears in Robert C. Hayden, *African-Americans & Cape Verdean-Americans in New Bedford: A History of Community and Achievement* (Boston, Mass.: Select Publications, 1993), 29. Though Hayden’s book is not documented and is often unreliable, Smith’s account appeared in quotation marks and has so been taken as reputable. Hayden adds that Smith got work through William Bush in New Bedford, but there is no evidence that Bush lived in the city before 1849.

25. Teamoh’s mistress in Norfolk, Jane Thomas, arranged for him to ship as crew aboard the *Currituck*, which was carrying tobacco to Bremen, Germany. When the ship returned to New York, Teamoh escaped; he immediately hired a lawyer to sue for his wages and to be able to return to the ship safely to get his things. The court ruled, according to Teamoh and as Thomas had anticipated, that once Teamoh was on the high seas he was free and ruled in his favor.

Teamoh then “took passage,” probably by boat, to New Bedford. Teamoh’s narrative appears in F. N. Boney, Richard L. Hume, and Rafia Zafar. *God Made Man, Man Made the Slave: The Autobiography of George Teamoh* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1990); the quotation appears on page 106. Like Thomas Bayne, another Norfolk fugitive, Teamoh returned to Norfolk near the end of the Civil War, and he became a state senator in 1869; see the introduction in Boney et al., *God Made Man*, 22-23.

26. Joseph Ricketson Jr., New Bedford, to Debora Weston, 29 April 1849, Weston Papers.

27. Charles W. Morgan Diary, 4 April 1859, Charles W. Morgan Papers, Mystic Seaport Museum. Morgan’s admitted middle-of-the-road tendencies on the abolition question are evident in his declaration that Brown had “earned” his freedom; many abolitionists, including New Bedford ones, would have argued that by the law of God no man was a slave in the first place. As Gara has pointed out, some abolitionists were disappointed when Frederick Douglass agreed to purchase his own freedom; Samuel May professed to being “taken quite aback” at the news that Douglass should “acknowledge, or consent that others should acknowledge, that any man had the right of ownership in him.” See *Liberty Line*, 72-73.

28. Brown may well have developed his idea for the panorama in New Bedford; in December 1848 Caleb P. Purrington and Benjamin Russell had unveiled their panorama, *A Whaling Voyage Round the World*, in New Bedford; it seems likely that it was still on view when Brown was in New Bedford the following April. On the *Mirror of Slavery* and its possible New Bedford source, see Nancy B. Osgood, “Josiah Wolcott: Artist and Associationist,” *Old-Time New England* 76, 264 (Spring/Summer 1998): 15-16; on the panorama and Brown’s lecturing career, see Peter C. Ripley, *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, vol. 1, *The British Isles, 1830-1865* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 174-75 n. 11, 298 n. 2, 299 n. 5, and Cynthia Griffin Wolf, “Passing Beyond the Middle Passage: Henry ‘Box’ Brown’s Translations of Slavery,” *The Massachusetts Review* 37, 1 (Spring 1996): 23-44.

29. John Jacobs told his story in serial form in an English publication; see Jacobs, “A True Tale of Slavery,” *The Leisure Hour*, 7 -28 February 1861. The “William P—” he mentioned was probably William Piper, who came from the Alexandria/Washington, D.C., area and was well known in antislavery circles by this time; Jacobs also mentioned a “Robert P—” meeting his vessel in port, which was probably Piper’s son Robert, himself a mariner. Whether the Pipers were fugitives is not known; the family name does not appear among the manumission registrations compiled by Dorothy S. Provine at the Washington, D. C., Public Library; see her *District of Columbia Free Negro Registers, 1821-61* (Heritage Books, Inc, n.d.). Harriet Jacobs’s narrative has been reissued in an excellent annotated edition, Jane Fagan Yellin, ed., *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (Cambridge, Eng., and London: Harvard University Press, 1987). Walker’s narrative was published as *Trial and Imprisonment of Jonathan Walker, at Pensacola, Florida, for Aiding Slaves to Escape from Bondage, with an Appendix, Containing a Sketch of His Life* (Boston: Published at the Anti-Slavery Office, 25 Cornhill, 1845). Walker was living in New Bedford before he went South; he is listed as a master

mariner living at 23 Howland Street in the 1836 New Bedford city directory. He had by that time been corresponding with the Quaker abolitionist Benjamin Lundy and left New Bedford to become part of Lundy's planned utopian colony in Tamaulipas in northern Mexico. New Bedford ship registers show him as master of the New Bedford sloop *Supply*, lost at Pensacola in 1836. Paul Cyr at the New Bedford Free Public Library pointed out to me that Albert Sands Southworth and Josiah Johnson Hawes made a daguerreotype of Walker's branded hand in about 1845, now in the collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society. See *Witness to America's Past: Two Centuries of Collecting by the Massachusetts Historical Society* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1991), entry 146.

30. On the radicalism of mariners, see Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 25, 3 (July 1968): 371-407, and Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*.

31. On Negro Seamen's Acts, see Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 190, 198-201; Putney, *Black Sailors*, 13, 35; and Cecelski, "The Shores of Freedom," 202; for contemporary discussions of these acts, see the second installment of William P. Powell, "Coloured Seamen—Their Character and Condition," *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 24 September 1846, 66:1, and these articles in *The Liberator*—"Free Colored Seamen of the United States," 17 February 1843, 2:3-5; "Rights of Northern Colored Seamen," 24 February 1843, 4:1; "Read This, Freemen of Massachusetts!" 17 January 1845, 2:2-3, on the incarceration of free black seaman Rucius Hathaway of Freetown, Mass.; and "Imprisonment of Free Colored Seamen," 4 October 1850, 1:4-6. On David Walker and his *Appeal*, see Peter P. Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

32. On people of color in maritime work, see Ira Berlin, "Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America," *American Historical Review* 85, 1 (February 1980): 62; Cecelski, "The Shores of Freedom," 193; Gara, *Liberty Line*, 23; Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 3, 9; and Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 3, 9.

33. Most of this information comes from my research in censuses, city directories, local and antislavery newspapers, probate records, tax lists, overseers of the poor records, and other sources on people of color in New Bedford between 1790 and 1860. According to Philip S. Foner, William P. Powell once "stated with pride that free black sailors had distributed David Walker's *Appeal* to slaves in the South"; he was living in New Bedford when the tract was published, and he later admitted to housing fugitives at his colored seamen's boardinghouse in New York. See William P. Powell, Boston, to Gerrit Smith, 4 September 1861, Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University, Syracuse, N.Y. As one of the founders of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833, it would seem odd if he had not housed fugitives in his New Bedford

boardinghouse, which he ran from at least as early as 1836 to 1839. See Foner, "William P. Powell: Militant Champion of Black Seamen," in *Essays in Afro-American History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), 94. Vincent's role with the *Liberator* has already been cited, and Bush is known to have housed fugitives, including George Teamoh, in New Bedford; many sources state but do not document that he was active in antislavery work in Washington, including some involvement in the *Pearl* affair of 1848, before settling in New Bedford. Bush knew Daniel Drayton, who had tried to engineer the escape of seventy-seven District of Columbia and Virginia slaves on board the *Pearl*, and Bush was probably the last person Drayton saw before he took his own life in New Bedford in June 1857. He is buried in the city's Rural Cemetery. Lewis Temple was the vice president of the New Bedford Union Society, the city's first antislavery society for people of color, in October 1834; Richard Johnson, shipowner, trader, and father of Richard and Ezra Johnson, was its president. Peneton, Briggs, the Howard brothers, Adams and others were all active in antislavery work at the local level; some, including Peneton, Shadrach Howard, and Ezra Howard, became prominent in antislavery and equal rights work in California in the 1850s. The only evidence that women were directly involved in maritime trades so far is an advertisement placed by Richard C. and Ezra Johnson in the New York City newspaper *Colored American*, 9 May 1840, 3:4, seeking "five or six first rate tailoresses" for unspecified work in New Bedford.

34. T. W. Higginson, Glimpsewood, Dublin, N.H., to Wilbur Siebert, 24 July 1896, in vol. 13, Massachusetts, Wilbur Henry Siebert Collection on the Underground Railroad, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

35. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, studied 1500 runaway advertisements placed between 1736 and 1801 in Williamsburg, Richmond, and Fredericksburg newspapers. Of 1138 male runaways, 359 were skilled or semiskilled; of this 359, 85, or about 25 percent, were slaves who "went by water," and another 168, or 50 percent, were tradesmen including slaves who worked as blacksmith and in ropewalks; see especially 34-35. Morgan, "Colonial South Carolina Runaways," found that mariners comprised about 9 percent of South Carolina's skilled slaves in the eighteenth century and were a full 25 percent of skilled runaways; the quotations are from pages 63 and 69.

36. Freddie L. Parker, *Stealing a Little Freedom: Advertisements for Slave Runaways in North Carolina, 1791-1840* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994), 5, 621.

37. Putney, *Black Sailors*, 11, cites James Fenimore Cooper on the subject of protection papers. In his novel *Miles Wallingford*, Cooper called these documents "beggars certificates" that "not unfrequently fitted one man as well as another."

38. Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself* (1893; reprint, New York: The Library of America, 1994), 643-45.

39. John Thompson, *The Life of John Thompson, a Fugitive Slave; Containing His History of 25 Years in Bondage, and His Providential Escape. Written by Himself* (Worcester: John

Thompson, 1856), 107-11.

40. The Clarissa Davis escape and her letter to Still are in William Still, *The Underground Railroad: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters, &c., Narrating the Hardships Hairbreadth Escapes and Death Struggles of the Slaves in Their Efforts for Freedom, as Related by Themselves and Others, or Witnessed by the Author. . .* (1872; reprint, Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1970), 44-46. Davis's concealment in a chicken coop is stated in "This Week in African-American History," *The Currents* (Portsmouth, Va.), 19 February 1995. The involvement of the *Ellen Barnes* was revealed in an article in the *The American Beacon and Norfolk and Portsmouth Daily Advertiser*, 16 May 1854, 2:1, which was reprinted in the *Republican Standard*, 25 May 1854, 3:3. The article reports that in mid-May 1854, en route from New Bedford to Elizabeth City, North Carolina, with a cargo of ice and a different captain than had skippered the vessel when Davis's brothers escaped, the *Ellen Barnes* put into Norfolk in distress. The vessel's mate, Thomas Murray, and "a negro sailor" were arrested. The newspaper stated, "They admitted that the negroes were stowed away, and were taken charge of by some men when they arrived at Wareham.—The evidence appearing sufficiently strong against them, they were remanded for trial at the next term of the Hustings Court, which meets on Monday next." "Miss Sanders" was Ellen Saunders, who had been Elizabeth Francis in slavery and who had made her way to Still on 7 October 1854 with Robert McCoy. Both were from Norfolk, and both settled in New Bedford, where Francis's sister already lived. McCoy took the name William Donar. See Still, *Underground Railroad*, 281-85.

41. The Fergusons are listed as "Runaway Slaves" in New Bedford Overseers of the Poor, vol. 1, 122, New Bedford Free Public Library, and Ferguson's escape by vessel is related in "North by Underground Railway," *Standard Times*, 15 May 1910; many thanks to Raymond Patenaude for making me aware of the latter article. On the oil casks, see Jane D. Waters, "A Guide to New Bedford's Black Heritage Trail" (Typescript, New Bedford, Mass., 1976), 11. Isabella White's story was collected by WPA worker G. Leroy Bradford in the 1930s and published in Joseph D. Thomas and Marsha L. McCabe, *Spinner: People and Culture in Southeastern Massachusetts*, vol. 4 (New Bedford, Mass.: Spinner Publications, 1988), 69. Loum Snow is known to have assisted William Carney Sr. with the purchase of the freedom of his wife Nancy, a slave in Norfolk, in 1859; thanks to Carl Cruz for quoting from the correspondence between Snow and the Rev. George Bain of Norfolk on this matter.

42. On the *Cornelia* case, see these *Liberator* articles—"Case of Capt. Ricketson," 3 January 1845, 3:6; "A Righteous Testimony," 24 January 1845, 2:6; and "Capt. Ricketson's Defence," 21 February 1845, 29:6; John Bailey, New Bedford, to William Lloyd Garrison, 10 January 1845, in Walter M. Merrill, ed., *No Union with Slave-Holders, 1841-1849*, vol. 3 of *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1973), 274-75; Joseph Ricketson Jr., New Bedford, to Debora Weston, 29 April 1849, Weston Papers; "Henry Boyer," *Republican Standard*, 3 January 1845, 1:1, which reprints the *Index* article; and "To the Public," *New Bedford Register*, 21 January 1845, 2:4.

43. These averages appear in Lance E. Davis, Robert E. Gallman, and Karin Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan: Technology, Institutions, Productivity, and Profits in American Whaling, 1816-1906* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 18-19.

44. The meticulous local chronicler Henry Howland Crapo identified Henry as a slave in his "Memorandum of Tax Delinquents," 1837-41, New Bedford Free Public Library; the crew list for the *Hope* does not identify crew of color, but a William Henry, aged twenty-three from Petersburg, Virginia, is included. Weston's identity as a fugitive appeared in "Weston, the Slave," *Republican Standard*, 11 May 1854, 2:4. His protection papers and crew lists identify him as from Northampton County, Virginia; he almost always listed his age as twenty-two or twenty-three regardless of the year in which his protection papers were issued. Weston was listed among the crew of the bark *Hecla* in May 1856, again in the *Edward* in July 1856, and then in the *Wave* in July 1860.

45. Tucker's letter is quoted in Creighton, *Rites and Passages*, 50; Elmo Paul Hohman, *The American Whaleman: A Study of Life and Labor in the Whaling Industry* (New York, London, and Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928), 55, citing the same letter, wrote that shipping out under an alias "was one of the most effective means of evading pursuit and capture by enemies and officers of the law."

46. Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1979), 16.

47. Figures for slave and free black populations North and South appeared in *The Liberator*, 16 April 1831.

48. These figures come from my own work and are based on the lists of men of color in whaling crews that Charles Watson, a professor at Roger Williams University in Bristol, R.I., has compiled. Prof. Watson very graciously made xeroxes of his compilation of all crew listings, protection papers, and probate records for people of color in New Bedford between 1790 and 1860, which saved me untold amounts of time.

49. Hohman made the claim about the declining quality of crews in 1928 in *American Whaleman*, 48: "Before that time [1830] the crews were provincial and homogeneous: after 1830 they were cosmopolitan and heterogeneous. The early foremast hands were made up largely of Yankees from the New England seaboard, with an admixture of Gay Head Indians and a small representative of negroes; while during the second period individuals from every race and from a score of nationalities rubbed shoulders in the crowded forecastles and steerages. Coincident with this shift from provincialism to cosmopolitanism went a marked deterioration in skill, experience, efficiency, and morale, as well as a striking increase in the total number of men engaged in the fishery." The more recent work of Davis et al., *In Pursuit of Leviathan*, 186, 192, 195, 313, 316-20, tends to confirm Hohman's point but in different terms. They state, "The evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, conclusively demonstrates that, by a traditional

definition, the quality of whaling crews deteriorated over at least two decades preceding the Civil War,” quality being determined by the proportion of crew members who were unskilled and/or illiterate. Between 1840 and 1858 as well, the productivity of whaling vessels, a computation of capital investment, length of time at sea, and value of catch, declined, but they caution that the two are “not necessarily . . . causally related.” Rising wages in New England industry, other land-based work, and even, for the most unskilled, in the merchant marine probably tended to “bid the best labor away from whaling,” though the authors state that more evidence is needed before such a statement can be “enthusiastically embraced.” But at the same time that declining crew skill should have forced productivity downward, changes in rigging, winches, sail plan, sails, and, after 1850, vessel design made it possible for unskilled crew to do the work that required skill in earlier times.