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Slavery in Massachusetts

The institution of slavery is a dark reminder of what human beings are capable of doing to one another. That same institution has left a deep and indelible scar on the United States. When the topic of slavery is mentioned, it is most commonly associated with the south. People tend to have a preconceived notion of slavery and believe it was simply the "peculiar institution" that existed solely in southern plantations.

The reason for this misconception may lie in the fact that slavery as a whole, came to an end with the conclusion of the Civil War and the sub-sequent abolition of slavery by the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. The Civil War is often misrepresented as a portrayal of good versus evil with the south fighting for the right to continue slavery, while the great and noble north was fighting to abolish slavery, while the real issue at hand was state's rights.

However, a deeper look into history reveals that slavery was as much a part of northern life as it was in the south. Due to a variety of circumstances, the face of northern slavery may have been different, but it was still deeply embedded into northern society and culture. In fact, the institution of slavery in the north, predates even the founding of the United States itself, and its roots can be found in colonial Massachusetts.

Slavery in the north traces its roots to Massachusetts, which was the first New-England colony to employ slaves\(^1\). Although it's impossible to be able to date the first black slaves in Massachusetts, there is enough evidence to be able to estimate that 1624-1629 would be a reasonable time frame, which would also predate the settling of the Massachusetts Bay colony\(^2\). Samuel Maverick or Mavericke, who arrived in
Massachusetts in 1624, is thought to be one of the first slave-owners in Massachusetts and was said to be in possession of two negroes before the arrival of future Massachusetts Bay governor John Winthrop in 1630.\textsuperscript{3}

Escalating tensions between the settlers of the Massachusetts Bay colony and the Pequot Indians, over the rights to land, property, and hunting grounds, eventually led to the Pequot War, which would eventually lead to slavery becoming firmly entrenched in Massachusetts.

C.S Manegold does a good job of chronicling the arrival, establishment, and expansion of the Puritan settlers who arrived from England. She notes that by 1634, Winthrop and the Puritans were well-established and the colony was "bursting at the seams."\textsuperscript{4} She notes that new houses began to appear along the Mystic and Charles Rivers and that Boston became the new headquarters for the Puritans. It was there, in John Winthrop's house, that the Court of Assistants, met on the first Tuesday of each month to discuss their plan for the growth of what would later become the United States of America.\textsuperscript{5} However, even though the colony was thriving and growing at an astronomical rate, tensions were brewing beneath the surface that would later erupt in bloodshed and the establishment of slavery in North America.

Expansion down the Connecticut River Valley happened very quickly, against the will of the Pequot Indians, with the establishment of Windsor, Hartford, and Wethersfield.\textsuperscript{6} To the south of those establishments, the towns of Lyme, Westbrook, Chester, Essex, and Deep River quickly sprang up.\textsuperscript{7} The incredible rate at which these towns were born, shattered the already thin calm that existed and made war even more inevitable. Disputes about land, property, livestock, and hunting grounds quickly
escalated and were beginning to be resolved by violence. This violence would be instrumental in allowing the Puritans to be able to continue to expand inland and the importation of the first slaves into the Massachusetts Bay colony.

Manegold notes that the Pequot Indians were among the most powerful and numerous tribes in the area and were also capable of being brutal. With the murder of a trader in July of 1636, the colony was on the brink of war.

War came in the spring of 1637, when Massachusetts Bay soldiers traveled south from Boston, where they met up with soldiers from Plymouth and Narraagansett Indians, who they had allied themselves with, and attacked the Pequots at the Mystic River estuary. The Massachusetts soldiers, along with the Narragansetts' burned the entire Pequot village to the ground and either captured or killed every man, woman, and child. Manegold notes that soldiers wrote about the horrific smell of burnt flesh and disembowelment. The death toll estimate for the Pequots' range from 400-600 and historian Alden T. Vaughan noted that the Pequot War helped to clear the biggest remaining obstacle to Puritan expansion.

It should be noted that the key to Puritan success in the Pequot War was the willingness of the soldiers to be brutal. Manegold pointed out that even though the Pequots' were known for the brutal tactics, the Puritans, believed to be backed by God, were willing to go even further.

The end of the Pequot War brought about the first steps toward slavery in the colony of Massachusetts. Manegold notes that most of the captured Pequots were either sold or given to the Narragansetts, while others were given to soldiers as favors of war. It was left to the Governor to supervise and determine what happened to the rest of the
prisoners and while some were given out as favors, it would be one decision that forever changed the face of North America.\(^\text{15}\)

After the war, in Boston, seventeen shackled prisoners, two female and fifteen male, were boarded onto the Salem-built ship *Desire* and were sold as slaves in the West Indies by Captain William Pierce.\(^\text{16}\) Upon arrival in the West Indies, the Pequots were sold and traded for cotton, tobacco, and a group of Africans.\(^\text{17}\) John Winthrop made a note of the *Desire's* cargo in his personal journal on February 26th, 1638, when he wrote that the *Desire* was carrying "some cotton, and tobacco, and negroes, and etc..."\(^\text{18}\) The note in Winthrop's journal is widely regarded as the first written documentation of African slavery not only in the colony of Massachusetts but in all of New England.\(^\text{19}\) The Pequot War did more than just set a precedent for slavery in the colony of Massachusetts. The first legal code of Massachusetts established in 1641, known as the Massachusetts Body of Liberties, legally allowed slavery. Item ninety-one in the Body of Liberties states that, "There shall never be any bond slavery, villeinage, or captivity amongst us unless it be lawful captives taken in just wars, and such strangers as willingly sell themselves or are sold to us. And these shall have all the liberties and Christian usages which the law of God established in Israel concerning such persons cloth morally require. This exempts none from servitude who shall be judged thereto by authority."\(^\text{20}\) The colony was scarcely a decade old and the sale of Africans had already worked its way into the colony not only in precedent but in law, and would remain a vital economic institution for almost a century and a half.

The Massachusetts Historical Society notes that the slave trade in Boston began in 1644, when Boston merchants started importing slaves directly from Africa, sell them in
the West Indies, and would bring home sugar to make rum, in what would become known as the triangular trade.\textsuperscript{21} The British Parliament, for twenty-four years, from 1672-1696, granted a monopoly in the slave trade to the Royal African Company.\textsuperscript{22} To skirt this monopoly, Boston shippers resorted to smuggling. An example of this smuggling occurred in 1681 when a Boston merchant named John Saffin wrote to shipmaster William Welstead and warned him that authorities were planning to seize a slave ship that was on its way to Rhode Island. Saffin told Welstead that he should intercept the slave ship and direct it to Nantasket so it could unload its slaves to avoid being caught.\textsuperscript{23} Parliament would repeal the monopoly in 1696 which would allow Massachusetts merchants to freely and openly engage in the slave trade, whose peak period would be from 1704-1769.\textsuperscript{24}

It is important to remember that slaves were considered property as well as an investment, and during the slave trade they were treated as such. The Massachusetts Historical Society notes that the buying and selling of slaves was conducted just like any other business transaction. Bills of sale were used in slave transactions and they were also witnessed and recorded just like other business moves.\textsuperscript{25} Some slave transactions and agreements also included clauses and variations. Several examples of this included selling "half-ownership" of a slave, the inclusion of additional money along with the slave, and the promise of other goods if the slave proved to be a good worker.\textsuperscript{26} As with any business transaction, disputes and ownership rights also flared up with the buying and selling of slaves as well. The Massachusetts Historical Society lists several examples of these disputes on their website. In 1762, Captain John Sale was sued for illegally selling free Africans and in 1740, Mary Mountire testified her ownership over two slaves
so that they would not be sold as part of her dead husband's estate. Also, just like with the purchase of cars or other devices, slaves could be tried out by a potential buyer to determine if they wanted the slave or not.\textsuperscript{27} Also, slaves were advertised for just like other items that were available to purchase. Robert Deroschers notes that the growth of the slave trade in Massachusetts coincided with the growth of newspapers.\textsuperscript{28} The Boston Gazette, which was established in December of 1719, soon became the premier newspaper in Boston and by the time that they stopped advertising slaves in 1781, there had been 1,103 different advertisements posted for slaves for sale.\textsuperscript{29} These examples clearly illustrate the role of slaves as property. Lastly, the average price of a slave was anywhere from twenty to thirty pounds in the 17th century and somewhere in between forty and fifty pounds in the 18th century.\textsuperscript{30}

The Pequot War, the Massachusetts Body of Liberties, and the thriving slave trade in Boston clearly dispel the notion that slavery was merely the "peculiar institution" of the south, however, it should be noted that the face of slavery in the north was most certainly different than its southern counterpart. William Piersen, in his book Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth-Century New England, does a great job describing the type of slavery and its culture and atmosphere that existed in New England.

Piersen points out that the face of northern slavery was different because it had to be. The climate in New England was much harsher than in the South and therefore, slaves were used as much more than just field hands and unskilled laborers.\textsuperscript{31} Since slave labor would never bring in large amounts of agricultural profit, and the fact that many northerners couldn't afford more than a few slaves at most, an interesting structure was
established that defined northern slavery, which Piersen refers to as "Family Slavery."\(^{32}\)

The weather and climate was a key factor in establishing Piersen's notion of family slavery. The poor soil didn't allow for excess plantation, so slaves often worked closely with their masters and had much more personal relationships with each other, which was quite the opposite of southern slavery.\(^{33}\)

The harsh conditions in Massachusetts and the rest of New England did more than just lead to a patriarchal slave society however. The conditions also wreaked havoc on the slave trade as well. A lot of northern states received their slaves from the West Indies and many men, such as Josephy Dudley of Massachusetts, pointed out that slaves from the West Indies tended to be "the worst servants they have."\(^{34}\) Even with that being said, many people preferred their slaves to be from the West Indies instead of Africa because of their higher survival rate due to the weather conditions in the New World, that Africans had not experienced and had trouble adapting to.\(^{35}\)

Africans that were shipped to the New World were not desirable to Northerners unless they had gone through a "seasoning" period which was expected to last around two to three years, and if they were able to not perish from disease, they were deemed fit to be shipped to the northern colonies.\(^{36}\) However, one-third to one-fourth of Africans tended to perish during the seasoning period.\(^{37}\) Piersen notes that conditions in Massachusetts tended to be better but the longer voyage and the colder climate proved to be a strong gamble as well.\(^{38}\) Due to the low survival rates, Massachusetts did allow drawbacks on import duties on imported slaves that died within their first six weeks to one year after their arrival in the colony.\(^{39}\)
The conditions and types of tasks expected of slaves in Massachusetts also factored in to the types of Africans that buyers wanted. Peter Fanueil of Boston wanted a slave that had already endured the small pox disease since he now had immunity from surviving it. Unlike southern plantation owners who wanted slaves in their mid to late teens who could immediately begin to work upon their arrival, northerners wanted younger slaves that they could personally train from the ground up within the family for specialized roles. They were willing to sacrifice immediate productiveness for long-term reward.  

Two more of Piersen's points should be further expanded upon and they are an in-depth exploration of "Family Slavery," and the percentage and growth of the Negro population in the north. As noted previously, due to several circumstances, large groups of slave gangs were hardly ever used in the north and the fact that northern slave owners could hardly afford to purchase slaves in the first place, providing separate living quarters was rarely feasible. This forced slaves and their masters to be constantly near each other, which often times led to the development of personal relationships. The development of these relationships was facilitated due to the fact that many northern slaves were purchased when they were quite young, so they were brought up with their owner's children and resembled something similar to a family member. Some slaves even rose to prominence in their respective households by being trusted to run the everyday activities of the house.  

Slaves that had gained the trust of their master may even earn the opportunity to travel, with the story of Briton Hammon being a perfect example. Massachusetts soil is not conducive to year-round planting, so slaves who had earned the trust of their master
may be sent out to earn some extra money for the household. On Christmas day in 1747, Briton Hammon was sent out on a sea voyage after gaining clearance from his master. After enduring a long list of hardships, he was finally reunited with his master close to thirteen years later. His master was happy to see him instead of being angry and he actually thought Briton was dead rather than thinking he had run away. This may speak to the nature of northern slavery and the paternal element that existed within it.

Along with being able to gain such a level of trust from their masters, Piersen points out that it was even possible for slaves and their masters to sit and eat together at the same table. The death of a slave was also interesting as well. Many slave owners took the loss of a slave not only as an economic loss but as a personal loss as well and many slaves often remembered their master's families in their will. Lastly, when freedom eventually did come, many slaves did not want to leave the house of their master and the ones who did, often took the surname of their favorite owner. While paternal relationships did exist, one must be very careful to not make the assumption that these were equal relationships. Slavery was still bondage and slaves were still property that were expected to work and please their masters.

The other issue that Piersen explores is the growth of the slave population and the population density of slaves in certain cities. He notes that although Africans were the fourth most populous group in New England, those statistics are actually quite misleading. In the 17th century there were less than 1,000 negroes in New England and when the Negro population ranged from 11,000-16,000, only 2,700 of them lived in Massachusetts. Piersen also points out that the negro population was not spread out around the colony of Massachusetts, but was rather highly concentrated in only a few
areas. Boston was the most populous city which contained about one-third of Massachusetts entire negro population. Although the percentage of slaves was increasing by the middle of the 18th century, this growth began to stagnate due to the large ratio of men to women, which was almost two to one in Boston in 1754. Although the number of deaths in Boston was decreasing in the years 1730-1760, the percentage of deaths was still relatively due to the low population. Piersen does point out that the mortality rates do not separate free blacks from slaves and that by 1764 it is estimated that forty percent of the black population could be free blacks. Lastly, due to the paternal nature of slavery in the north, and the fact that they were treated rather well since they were an investment, the high death rate may be reflective of the high percentage of free blacks who were subject to poor conditions and treatment.

The records from the New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS) give credence to Piersen's claims. When looking at their vital records in Massachusetts to 1850, the search for negro returned 289 results in the Birth, Marriage, and Death index. Of those records, 136 were deaths, 21 were births, and the rest were marriages. Piersen's claim that negroes were not evenly dispersed throughout the colony, and later state, are confirmed by these records. The 289 results came from only thirteen towns: Dorchester, Milford, Concord, Salem, Lynn, Danvers, Scituate, Dracut, Burlington, Warren, Lincoln, Brookline, and Cohasset. Of these thirteen towns, Concord, Dracut, Burlington, Warren, Lincoln, and Cohasset had only several negroes, so this adds to Pierson's claim that the negro population was highly concentrated.

Certain cities in these results were notable for certain things. Dorchester, Salem, and Brookline had a high percentage of deaths, while Lynn and Scituate featured a lot of
marriages and births, and Danvers was notable for its large amount of births. The deaths in Dorchester are easily explained, since it was part of the Boston area, where slaves and free blacks were used as laborers and the male to female ratio was very high. This would also account for the lack of marriages and births. The issue of marriage was usually left up to the master's discretion and Scituate and Lynn were most notable for marriages. Lastly, the town of Danvers is interesting because there was a high birth rate but not many marriages or deaths.

Piersen noted that by 1764 about forty percent of the negro population was estimated to be free, which predates the abolition of slavery in Massachusetts. So when looking at the search results, it's important to look at the time of birth or death and the language that was used in the index. Sometimes it was clearly spelled out that a negro belonged to a certain person but other times the writing is ambiguous. Sometimes the index just said that the negro was a servant of someone, so the closer the date was to the latter half of the 18th century one has to be careful to not assume that the negro was a slave, since some former slave owners did let their freed slaves stay on as servants. While 1783 is the accepted date for the end of slavery in Massachusetts, the BMD index does have some interesting listing after 1783. There is a case in Dorchester in 1806 where a negro boy was said to have passed away and that he belonged to a Stephen Hall. This flies in the face of Reverend Jeremy Belknap's claim that the Federal Census of 1790 listed no slaves. In addition this leads one to wonder if there was still some people trying to keep slaves.

Before looking at the rise of the abolitionist movement and the legal end of slavery in Massachusetts, it's necessary to look at the options and methods that slaves
took before the eradication of slavery to try and earn their freedom. The Massachusetts Historical Society notes that there were several ways that a slave in colonial Massachusetts could gain their freedom. The most obvious and straightforward way would be for a slave to simply run away.62 This however was certainly dangerous and just like newspapers advertised slaves that were for sale, newspapers also ran advertisements for slaves that had run away. The second way a slave could gain his or her freedom was through the act of manumission. Manumission was the legal act of freeing a slave.63 Manumission could also work both ways, as a slave could also purchase their freedom in some instances.64 Slaves could also petition and try to use the legal system as a means to gain their freedom. One such petition occurred in Boston on April 20th, 1773, by the slaves Peter Bestes, Sambo Freeman, Felix Holbrook, and Chester Joie.65 Fueled by the Revolutionary feelings that were present in the colonies at the time, they hoped it would mean brighter days for them as well, which prompted their petition to Massachusetts lawmakers in order to try and gain their freedom.66 Lastly, slaves could also take their claims to freedom to the courtroom as well, with the case of John Saffin being one of the more prominent cases. Samuel Sewall was an opponent of slavery and in 1700 he wrote, "For as much as Liberty is in real value next unto life, [n]one ought to part with it themselves, or deprive others of it, but upon most mature Consideration."67 This vehement attack on slavery was inspired by the dispute between John Saffin and his slave named Adam. In 1694 Saffin had leased his Adam to a man named Thomas Shepard, and Adam was promised his freedom upon the completion of the lease.68 When Adam had finished his term of slavery with Shepard, Saffin reneged on his promise and Adam sued for his freedom and won the case.69 The case is somewhat controversial since Sewall was
the judge in the case and Saffin charged the judge with jury tampering but to no avail.\textsuperscript{70} This case was significant because it showed that the legal system was a viable option for people of color and that they did possess some rights under the law. Even though slaves were clearly considered property, the courtroom was one place that they could expect to be treated equal, despite the fact that laws were put in place to control their everyday lives. The courts found that all contracts made with slaves were just as binding as contracts made with free men.\textsuperscript{71} This led John Adams to remark that he, "never knew a jury by a verdict to determine a negro to be a slave...They always found them free."\textsuperscript{72}

The years directly following the American war for independence had a strong impact on the anti-slavery movement due to the feelings of independence and liberty that pervaded the colonies. However, the movement to limit and end the importation of slaves in Massachusetts can be seen as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century. Although the motives for doing so may not have been altruistic, they are significant nonetheless.

The initial desire to eliminate slavery from Massachusetts arose in an attempt to strengthen the economy. James Allegro points out an anonymous essay titled, \textit{Some Considerations Upon the Several Sorts of Banks}, which proclaimed that slavery would be non-existent in the country within the next twenty years.\textsuperscript{73} Although this was a highly unrealistic and short-sighted claim, it does reflect the economic downturn marked by inflation, higher taxes, and debt that existed in Massachusetts in the early part of the century.\textsuperscript{74} The essay urged the colonists to reconsider the impact that slavery had on the stability and prosperity of the colony and argued that the current financial problems would not subside until African slaves were replaced by indentured servants that could
work out their terms of service and eventually help further settle and grow the economy. Nathaniel Appleton was also a proponent of using white indentured servants. In his pamphlet, *Considerations on Slavery: In a Letter to a Friend*, published in 1767, he argues that African slavery prevented the importation of white indentured servants who would gladly come here for much less money. These white servants he argued, would help with the growth and expansion of the colonies by eventually marrying and further settling the towns. They would also give the colonies a sense of respectability and provide a bulwark against enemies due to their European presence.

The growing economic concerns led to a series of laws that limited the importation of slaves. Beginning in 1700, colonists petitioned for the legislature to enact a law requiring importers to pay forty shillings for each slave imported into the colony. The petition fell on deaf ears until 1705 when, "An Act for the Better Preventing of a Spurious Mixt Issue," was passed, which required shipmasters to pay four pounds for each imported slave and an eight pound penalty for each slave on board if they were in violation of the act. To further fuel their desire for white indentured servants, a forty shilling reward was given for every white male between the ages of eight and twenty-five that was brought into the colony beginning in 1709. In 1728, further steps were taken to limit the importation of slaves. A new act entitled "An Act More Effectively to Serve the Duty on the Importation of Negroes" was passed. The act kept in place the four pound importation tax for each slave, but also added a fine of one-hundred pound if shipmasters lied about the exact cargo that was on board their ships. Although these acts were not put in place because people had good abolitionist intentions, they did help to set a
precedent that people would turn to in the Revolutionary years to try and eliminate slavery in Massachusetts.

Nathaniel Appleton's publication also found quite the audience and a push was made in the years preceding the Revolution to end slavery in Massachusetts. Several measures were taken, beginning in 1766, to end slavery in the colony. James Otis pushed for a bill in the assembly to prevent enslavement and the importation of slaves into the colony. Although it failed, another bill was pushed in 1771 to end the importation of African slaves and although the legislation was passed, it was vetoed by Governor Thomas Hutchinson. In June of 1774, the bill was revisited, and although both houses agreed to the law, the tensions between the colonies and England were at the boiling point and the bill was never officially passed. Things had also changed drastically in the Bay colony as the French threat had been eliminated and the economic outlook was brighter. In turn, the call for indentured servants was tempered, since they no longer felt like they needed protection. Lastly, Thomas Hutchinson was not willing to limit slavery as a means to help the economy which is shown by his veto of the 1771 proposal. However, there was a push in 1777 for an act that called for, "the practice of holding Africans and the children born of them, or any other persons in slavery, is unjustifiable in a civil government, at a time when they are asserting their natural freedom." Again, the bill was not enacted and this meant that the end of slavery in Massachusetts would come after the Revolutionary War and would be decided in the courtroom rather than through legislation.

1783 is seen as a major turning point in the abolition movement in Massachusetts with the conclusion of the Quock Walker cases that stretched from 1781-1783. Quock
was purchased in 1754, along with his parents, Mingo and Dinah, by James Caldwell of Worcester. Caldwell passed in 1763 and one-third of his property, which included Quock, went to James' wife Isabell, who had married Nathaniel Jennison. When Isabell died seven years later, it was assumed that Quock would go to Jennison and that's where the dispute began.

Quock claimed that James had promised him his freedom at the age of 24 or 25 and after his passing, Isabell had promised him freedom at the age of 21. Jennison refused to release him and Quock ran away to James' brothers farm. Jennison went after Quock and not only did he take him back but he gave him a harsh beating as well. This began the court cases that would eventually lead to the end of slavery in Massachusetts.

The two men both filed lawsuits, with Jennison suing the Caldwell's for enticing his slave to run away and for lost damages, while Walker sued Jennison for assault and battery. Jennison's case was argued first and since he was able to provide a bill of sale, he was awarded damages. Walker's case was heard next and on June 19, 1781, the decision that was reached was that Quock was a free man. The decisions are clearly contradictory and Robert Spector points out that the jury assumed Quock to be a slave, but in the second case, Quock's attorney was able to convince the jury that slavery was contradictory to natural law.

After the decisions were rendered, both the Caldwells and Jennison appealed. However, Jennison defaulted on his appeal in the Walker vs. Jennison case by not showing up. In the Caldwell appeal, the Caldwells' attorneys referenced the "free and equal" clause of the Massachusetts Constitution: "All men are born free and equal, and have certain natural, essential, and unalienable rights; among which may be reckoned the
right of enjoying and defending their Lives and Liberties; that of acquiring, possessing, and protecting property; in fine, that of seeking and obtaining their safety and happiness..."95 Jennison's attorneys based their argument off of the Bill of Sale, Biblical recognitions of slavery, and Massachusetts custom. The jury found in favor of the Caldwells' and ruled that Quock was free.96

Jennison did not fare any better in his appeal of Walker vs. Jennison. He tried to argue that the "free and equal" clause in the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 deprived him and other slave owners of their property and obliged them to take care of their former slaves.97 Jennison ultimately lost his appeal. In the final case, known as Commonwealth vs. Jennison in April of 1783, Chief Justice William Cushing concluded that the Declaration of Rights negated slavery in Massachusetts because it was in violation of the "Free and equal" clause, which officially ended slavery in the state.98

Even though Commonwealth vs. Jennison ended slavery in Massachusetts, Emily Blanck notes that freedom did not come immediately for slaves.99 Since it was a court decision rather than through legislation, the onus was on slaves to stand up to their masters and assert their freedom and go through the legal system to obtain it.100 The courts continued to expand on their ruling in the following years. In 1784, fines were put in place for anyone that got caught kidnapping a free negro. Also in 1787, due to the fear of Massachusetts becoming a safe haven for fugitive slaves, it was declared that any Negro that was not a citizen of Massachusetts could only stay in the state for two months. Lastly, in 1788, the state finally took the last step in fully abolishing slavery by ending the slave trade, although it's rumored that Massachusetts was still involved in the slave trade up until the turn of the 19th century.101
Although the Quock Walker case receives most of the attention and recognition for the abolition of slavery in Massachusetts, another case was just as important. The 1781 case in Berkshire county of Brom and Bett vs. Ashley, otherwise known as the Mum Bett case, was just as significant. This case occurred less than a year after the adoption of the state constitution and was a landmark suit because there was no claim that Bett's owner John Ashley had violated any laws, such as assault and battery like the Quock Walker case. This meant the Mum Bett case was a direct challenge to the institution of slavery in Massachusetts.

Ashley had been a member of a local committee in 1773 that wrote the Sheffield Declaration. The Declaration expressed the anger of the colonists in Massachusetts at how they were being treated by Britain. It is rumored that Bett's freedom suit was prompted by dinner table conversations about liberty and freedom that were contained in the Sheffield Declaration. Others believe her suit was prompted by a beating that Bett received from John Ashley's wife. Either way, Bett fled and sought the help of attorney Theodore Sedgwick.

The case began in May of 1781, when Bett obtained a writ of replevin, which ordered Ashley to release Bett to the sheriff because she did not belong to Ashley, which Ashley refused to do. The case was tried in August of the same year, on the premise that the state constitution outlawed slavery. The jury decided that Bett did not belong to Ashley and she was declared free and was awarded 30 shillings. Ashley initially appealed the ruling but dropped it after the first ruling in the Walker vs. Jennison case, which may have convinced him that an appeal would not go in his favor.
The Quock Walker and Mum Bett cases were both landmark suits in Massachusetts state history. They were significant because both cases broke new ground because there had been no previous precedent in Massachusetts history for the freeing of slaves based solely on the institution of slavery. Also the Massachusetts State Constitution did not clearly state that slaves were included in the "Free and Equal" clause and slavery had seemed to be firmly entrenched in Massachusetts since the 17th century and the passing of the Massachusetts Body of Liberties.

The history of slavery in Massachusetts is long and complex. Massachusetts was the first New England colony to implement slavery and it was the first state to abolish it. Slavery in Massachusetts predates even the settlement of the colony itself.

As the colony of Massachusetts began to expand and encroach upon Pequot land, the brutality of the settlers was on full display, which resulted in the beginning of the slave trade in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Body of Liberties, passed in 1641, legally established slavery in the colony and Boston soon became a major player in the importation of African slaves.

As noted by William Piersen and confirmed by the NEHGS, the negro population was highly concentrated in certain areas. Slavery in Massachusetts and New England also differed greatly from southern slavery due to weather and climate, the lack of slave gangs, and the financial conditions that allowed for many Massachusetts residents to only purchase a handful of slaves at most. This led to what Piersen dubbed as "Family slavery," where slaves were raised from a young age to be part of the family. Slaves in Massachusetts had close relationships with their owners and were often skilled in many different areas. These close relationships could be seen when slaves passed away, when
slaves were given their freedom, and also in the story of Briton Hammon, where some slaves had earned the utmost trust from their masters.

The abolition movement in Massachusetts is even more complex. The desire to end slavery in the colony had existed since the beginning of the 18th century. However, these attempts were not influenced by altruistic intentions, they were actually based off of quite selfish desires and of economic concern.

As the Revolutionary period approached, and with the passing of the state constitution that contained the very important "Free and Equal" clause, the calls to end slavery became even louder. The landmark cases of Quock Walker and Mum Bett, along with the abolition of the slave trade in 1788, officially ended slavery in the state of Massachusetts. Even though Massachusetts was the first state to abolish slavery, it's very important to point out that they did not have the desire to try and abolish slavery in the rest of the country. In fact, the state was careful in trying not to encroach on the rights of other states and people who may have traveled with their slaves from other states into Massachusetts. Massachusetts desired to free only its own slaves and negroes that had been in the state before 1787. The state had no desire to become a safe haven for runaway slaves.

The institution of slavery is often thought of as the "peculiar institution" of the south. People tend to not realize that Massachusetts and the rest of the northern states were heavily involved with slaves as well. The north may not be full of plantations and the structure of "Family slavery" may have been different than southern states, but the Pequot War, the Massachusetts Body of Liberties, and all the petitions by slaves to try
and gain their freedom, are all reminders that slavery was far from just a southern institution.
Notes

17. Manegold, C.S. Ten Hills Farm: The Forgotten History of Slavery in the North. p. 43
29. Deroschers, Robert. "Slave For Sale Advertisements AND Slavery in Massachusetts, 1704-1781." pg 1
34. Piersen, William D. Black Yankees. pg 4
35. Piersen, William D. Black Yankees. pg 5
42. Piersen, William D. *Black Yankees*. p 31
44. Piersen, William D. *Black Yankees*. p 31
47. Piersen, William D. *Black Yankees*. p 14
52. Piersen, William D. *Black Yankees*. p 22
68. Allegro, James T. "Increasing and Strengthening the Country: Law, Politics, and the Antislavery Movement in Early Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts Bay. pg 7
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