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JAMES OLIVER HORTON AND LOIS E. HORTON. *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997

In 1979, James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton wrote *Black Bostonians*, a path-breaking social history of the black community in antebellum Boston.¹ *In Hope of Liberty*, the Hortons' latest collaboration, is a long-overdue comprehensive history of African Americans in the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century North. Since *Black Bostonians*, many historians have written social histories of black communities in the pre-war North, but there has been no major work to integrate these studies.² In 1993, James Horton published *Free People of Color*, a volume of essays on antebellum free black communities.³ He called it "a progress report, a preview of work that is ongoing."⁴ *In Hope of Liberty* is the logical and necessary synthesis of the work that historians, including the Hortons, have completed thus far on the Northern black experience in early America.

Perhaps the most important function of the book is to remind its readers of the critical role of African Americans in the colonial, early national, and antebellum North. The book is filled with examples of black participation in the important events of American history. The reader sees Crispus Attucks not as a black Bostonian who happened to be the first casualty in a war between white Britons and white Americans but as a rebel in the fight for independence, a goal he shared with his white countrymen but which had special significance for black slaves. Slaves appear in the Salem witch trials as accused, accusers, and expert witnesses. The Hortons demonstrate similar black involvement in the Great Awakening, Bacon's Rebellion, the War of 1812, and other events often thought of as white history. The Hortons, wisely, are not content to point out black participation but, in each case, show how African Americans affected that history. For example, they argue that eighteenth-century black-led interracial riots and protests contributed to the atmosphere of rebellion and the philosophy of republicanism in the years before the Revolution. The book also indicates the central role that Northern blacks played in efforts to improve the status of their race. While internal divisions were frequent and at times bitter, the evidence reveals that Northern blacks tended to be extremely concerned about the conditions of their fellow African Americans. This concern led to mutual aid societies and philanthropic household arrangements in Northern communities and to an often intense involvement in abolition efforts, from formal anti-slavery organizations, both black and interracial, to the underground railroad.

Although the Hortons have done little new research for this book, they achieve a rich understanding of the history of Northern blacks through the diversity of their secondary sources. These sources, which extend back to the nineteenth century, are admirably wide-ranging in subject and style. In addition to social histories of the American North, the authors draw on intellectual and cultural histories of race, such as those by Winthrop Jordan, Edmund Morgan, Gary Nash, and David Roediger.⁵ Their familiarity with the colonial and antebellum histories of women and Native Americans, as well as more traditional scholarship, contributes to the depth of *In Hope of Liberty*. The Hortons draw on many important black autobiographies and also innovatively use white Northerners' writings that mention free blacks in asides or anecdotes.

In Hope of Liberty is not only a vital work of synthesis; it forwards important arguments about African-American history. Its copious examples of black involvement in anti-slavery efforts undermine previous arguments that African Americans in the North neglected abolition.⁶ The authors also take issue with George Levesque's contention that black leaders could not truly have believed that racial "improvement" could persuade whites of the injustice of slavery.⁷ On the contrary, they maintain, previous interracial cooperation had convinced many antebellum African Americans that they could persuade white Northerners to work with them against slavery. Finally, the theme of identity pervades the book. The authors cite the survival of many Africanisms in the culture of the North, from words such as "tote" to American folk music. They make a convincing argument that, as Northern blacks in the early nineteenth century pressed for their rights as Americans, they came to identify themselves as colored Americans rather than as Africans. They still retained strong elements of African culture, blended with Europeanisms. At the same time, the Hortons argue, African American and Native American cultures influenced white Northerners. Although whites seldom acknowledged the fact, American culture has always been an amalgamation, and racial diversity is an integral part of American identity.

In Hope of Liberty is an important extensive history of African Americans in the colonial and antebellum North. Its deft analysis and critical themes make it a valuable resource. It is an ideal book to use in an undergraduate class to convey the essential role and diverse experience of African Americans in American history and culture.

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NOTES

- 1 James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979).
- 2 Important recent works on African Americans in the North include Robert J. Cottrol, *The Afro-Yankees: Providence's Black Community in the Antebellum Era* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982); Leonard P. Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988); Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); William D. Piersen, *Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988); Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991); and Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).
- 3 James Oliver Horton, *Free People of Color: Inside the African American Community* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993).
- 4 *Ibid.*, vii.
- 5 Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery and American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975); Gary Nash, *Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991).
- 6 For example, Frederick Cooper, "Elevating the Race: The Social Thought of Black Leaders, 1827-50," *American Quarterly* 24 (December 1972): 604-625.
- 7 George A. Levesque, "Interpreting Early Black Ideology: A Reappraisal of Historical Consensus," *Journal of the Early Republic* 1 (Fall 1981): 269-287.