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SARTORIAL PRACTICES AND DAILY LIFE: EXAMINING BLACK WOMANHOOD IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BOSTON

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ABSTRACT

SARTORIAL PRACTICES AND DAILY LIFE: EXAMINING BLACK WOMANHOOD IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BOSTON

August 2023

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During the nineteenth century, the northern slope of Boston’s Beacon Hill neighborhood was home to a free African American community. Central to the Beacon Hill neighborhood was the African Meeting House, which operated as a Baptist church, home, school, and meeting space for Black community members. Archaeological investigations have revealed the story of not just the African Meeting House, but the surrounding vicinity and larger community. The African Meeting House collection provides a case study to understand the ways racism, sexism, and classism impacted the quotidian lives of Black women in freedom. Using Black feminism as a theoretical framework, this research analyzes objects of personal adornment and clothing-related advertisements placed in the newspaper, The Liberator. Sartorial practices provide insight into the everyday, lived experiences of the Black women occupying Beacon Hill. The cultural materials analyzed in this research are used to highlight the lives of Black women as they performed economic labor, maintained their households, and participated in political life.
DEDICATION

For Connor
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the midst of the antebellum era, a free African American community was growing on the northern slope of Boston’s Beacon Hill neighborhood. The complete abolition of slavery in Massachusetts was a lengthy process, but the end of enslavement in Massachusetts is often attributed to Elizabeth Freeman and Quock Walker, two African Americans that sued for their freedom in 1781 and 1783, respectively (Bell 2021).

Although those residing on Beacon Hill were free from enslavement in the literal sense, they were not free from the ongoing legacy of racism, sexism, and classism brought on and maintained by the institution of chattel enslavement. In freedom, Black Bostonians were living in a contradictory society that continued to support and profit from enslavement (Farrow et al. 2005), while simultaneously attempting to distance itself from the institution of enslavement (Sesma 2016, Bell 2021). The northern slope of Beacon Hill stands as a testament to the struggles and triumphs of African Americans as they created lives for themselves in nineteenth-century America. Free African Americans were building community institutions like the African Meeting House and Abiel Smith School, operating businesses, and supporting their community.

Boston’s African American community residing on Beacon Hill has been extensively studied by archaeologists (Bower and Rushing 1980, Bower 1984, Dujnic
This community has been central to discussions on community building, labor, health, education, foodways, economic advancement, and racial inequality (Bower and Rushing 1980, Bower 1984, Dujnic 2005, Patalano 2009, Descoteaux 2011, Landon and Bulger 2013, McCann and Walsh 2018, Paresi and Costello 2018, Paresi and McCann 2020, Jordan 2021, Malcolm 2022), but to date, no archaeological analysis has taken an explicitly gender-focused approach to studying Black Bostonians. Although various facets of life on Beacon Hill have been discussed by archaeologists, the lives of Black women have not been analyzed to the same degree. By invoking Black feminist theory, this research specifically seeks to explore the stories of Black women as they built lives for themselves in freedom.

The difficulty in discussing Black women and their lives on Beacon Hill is because of their systematic marginalization. Aside from extensive archaeology, much of what we know about the individuals occupying the African Meeting House and the immediate vicinity stems from primary research into probates, census records, city directories, and tax assessor's documents (Rosebrock 1978, Bower 1990:46); all documentation that typically renders women invisible and unnamed, regardless of race. Historical documentation upholds state ideology and shapes historical narratives through both inclusion and exclusion (Sesma 2016:55). Black women’s presence in historical documentation is lacking. Women were often subsumed under their husband’s names and married women could not buy property under their own name (Horton 1986:61). When Black women do appear in historical documentation, axes of race, gender, and class intertwine to ensure less information is included in official documentation (Lee 2019).
Black women often worked multiple, irregular, and informal jobs for their economic survival that frequently occurred within their own households, which resulted in their labor going unrecorded and unrecognized in archival sources (Lee 2019:98). Historical documentation upholds a gendered and racialized patriarchy.

With an urban site like the African Meeting House, we may not be able to analyze Black women on an individual level, but we can still center them in the narrative of Beacon Hill. Maria Franklin (2001:112) argues “With historical archaeology… we have the potential to recover the vast majority of Black lives who left nothing but the material vestiges of their stories behind.” As Black women are rarely located in archival documentation, archaeology provides an opportunity to discuss their stories. A Black feminist approach to archaeology understands that the experiences of African American women are not homogenous to Black men or even to one another (Franklin 2001, Battle-Baptiste 2011, Sesma 2016). The experiences of Black women are complicated by overlapping axes of gender and race; thus, the stories of Black women are lost when analyses do not take their specific experiences into account (Franklin 2001, Battle-Baptiste 2011, Sesma 2016). The cultural materials recovered from the African Meeting House are physical remnants of Black women’s lives as they attended community functions, worked towards equality, maintained their homes, and economically supported themselves and their families, all while navigating racism, sexism, and classism.

In the nineteenth century, free Black women were simultaneously adhering to, and adapting widespread ideas on womanhood (Horton 1986, Carlson 1992, Yee 1992, Richardson 1993, Bulger 2013, 2015, Herzing 2022). Under the “cult of true womanhood,” the prescribed place for women was within the home, where they would uphold notions of piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness as the hallmarks of
womanhood (Welter 1966). However, true womanhood was usually only attainable by white, upper- and middle-class women, who had the economic means and protection of their race to do so (Welter 1966, Horton 1986). Free Black women were engaging with the cult of true womanhood, while altering it to form their own ideas of womanhood that suited their lived experiences as Black women (Horton 1986, Carlson 1992, Yee 1992, Richardson 1993, Bulger 2013, 2015, Herzing 2022). As race is inseparable from gender, it was also inseparable from ideas of womanhood. While white women’s influence was generally limited to the home, the roles and influence of Black women extended well beyond the domestic sphere (Horton 1986, Carlson 1992, Yee 1992, Richardson 1993, Terborg-Penn 1997, Lee 2019). Black women were homemakers, but they were also community activists and wage laborers (Horton 1986, Carlson 1992, Yee 1992, Richardson 1993, Terborg-Penn 1997, Lee 2019). Free African Americans in Boston were also a community mobilized around abolition and racial equality. As race and gender are intertwined, racial liberation was also central to Black womanhood (Horton 1986, Carlson 1992, Terborg-Penn 1997, Yee 1992).

The African Meeting House archaeological collection encompasses public and private life, making it an ideal collection to examine Black women’s lives in various spheres. Excavations uncovered privies, a midden, building trenches, drains, and living surfaces that have been attributed to both domestic and community life. To understand the everyday impacts of race, gender, and class on Black women, this research uses objects of personal adornment from the African Meeting House and advertisements placed in *The Liberator*, a Boston-based, abolitionist newspaper to address the following question: How were free Black women negotiating race, gender, and class through sartorial practices? This question is examined within the boundaries of Black women’s economic labor, their
household economy, and their contribution to abolitionist politics. Objects relating to personal adornment were selected to answer this question because they are used in public and domestic spaces and are hallmarks of both identity construction and labor (Heath 1999, Fisher and Loren 2003, Loren 2003, Thomas and Thomas 2004, White 2004, 2008, Jordan 2005, Joyce 2005, Loren and Beaudry 2006, Voss 2008, Franklin 2020, Flewellen 2018, 2022). Objects of personal adornment are used to construct identity; therefore, they can be understood within the boundaries of free Black womanhood. The daily task of dressing oneself is a highly personal and quotidian act, but sartorial practices exist within and are influenced by social, political, and economic institutions (Voss 2008), making objects of personal adornments an ideal avenue for studying the influences of race, gender, and class in the everyday, lived experiences of Black women. Joining a growing body of archaeological literature (Franklin 2001, Wilkie 2003, Battle-Baptiste 2011, Bulger 2013, Horklacher 2016, Sesma 2016, Flewellen 2017, 2018, 2022, Lee 2019, Herzing 2022), this research centers the experiences of Black women as they participated in community activism, maintained the domestic sphere, and labored for wages, by utilizing Black feminist theory.

Definition of Terms

Words like “fancy,” “fashionable,” “plain,” and “modest” are often used in this study to describe clothing. “Fancy” and “fashionable” are words that appear in The Liberator, suggesting historically, these are adjectives that were used and understood in relation to one’s physical appearance. For the purpose of this work, the word “fancy” refers to objects of personal adornment that are elaborate, ornamental, decorative, and generally more expensive. “Fashionable” is used to describe artifacts that are on trend and

5
sought after in the nineteenth century. In opposition, the word “plain” is employed to describe personal adornment items that are undecorated, and trend towards utilitarian. Finally, “modest” is used to describe personal adornment items that are conservative and demure.

**Chapter Overview**

This thesis is comprised of seven chapters. Chapter Two discusses archaeological studies concerning personal adornment, as well as Black feminist theory. Chapter Three provides the historical overview of the northern slope of Beacon Hill, from its conception throughout the nineteenth century. Chapter Three discusses the African Meeting House, 44 Joy Street, the Abiel Smith School, and 2 Smith Court, all of which were properties that contributed to the African Meeting House archaeological collection. It also provides an overview of the cult of true womanhood and the ways Black women adhered to and altered its tenants to suit their needs. Chapter Four discusses the archaeological excavations that took place between 1975 and 2005, and it also details the methodology used for this research. Chapter Five describes the artifact and archival sample used in this research, as well as the results of Chapter Four. Chapter Six provides a comparative analysis of archaeological collections from the Boston African Meeting House, the Nantucket African Meeting House, the Abiel Smith School, and the Boston-Higginbotham House. Chapter Seven is a discussion of the ways race, gender, and class impacted the economy and politics of dress among the free Black women in nineteenth-century Boston. Chapter Seven frames the dress practices of Black women in terms of their activism, domestic life, and labor. Chapter Seven also concludes by summarizing the main themes and arguments of this research.
ARCHAEOLOGY AND PERSONAL ADORNMENT

Dress artifacts are more than functional objects, rather they hold multiple uses and meanings in constructing identity (Loren and Beaudry 2006, White and Beaudry 2009). Identity has long been acknowledged as something that is embodied and performed (Butler 1988). If identity is something we do (Butler 1988), objects of personal adornment are by extension an active construction of identity because dress practices shape and reflect our identities (Fisher and Loren 2003, Joyce 2005). Personal adornment artifacts are also used to reflect how an individual wants to be perceived (White 2008:33). For the purpose of this work, dress is defined as alterations or additions to one’s body (Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1992:1). Dress includes “modifications of the body such as coiffed hair, colored skin, pierced ears, and scented breath, as well as an equally long list of garments, jewelry, accessories, and other categories of items added to the body” (Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1992:1). This research includes all artifacts generally related to dress including anything associated with clothing or accessories, such as buttons, fasteners, beads, jewelry, textiles, shoes, and materials used to create garments like pins and thimbles.
Items related to personal adornment are imbued with meaning based on the user’s or wearer’s values, identity, and cultural ideologies (Beaudry 2006, Loren and Beaudry 2006). Dress practices always exist within broader political, economic, and social power structures that impact the ways clothing is used for identity expression (Voss 2008). Dress artifacts are tangible remains of the steps marginalized groups took to navigate oppressive power structures (Loren 2003, 2007, Thomas and Thomas 2004, Loren and Beaudry 2006, Voss 2008, Flewellen 2018, 2022, Franklin 2020). Invoking different styles of dress allows “an individual to ‘dress up’ or ‘dress down’ enabling one to reveal and conceal different selves and to gain access to restricted social arenas” (Fisher and Loren 2003:225). Clothing has historically been used to gain power, access, and to resist subjugation in oppressive settings (Loren 2003, 2007, Loren and Beaudry 2006, Voss 2008). Clothing can and has been used to transcend social boundaries by oppressed groups.

Sociohistorical context is key to any critical analysis of small finds and personal adornment-related items (Beaudry 2006, Loren and Beaudry 2006). To highlight this point, Mary Beaudry (2006:86-88) uses the story of Grace Stout, a housemaid in seventeenth-century Massachusetts, and a silver thimble (Loren and Beaudry 2006:259-260). A silver thimble associated with a wealthy woman is expected; she can afford lavish objects given her socioeconomic status, but in the hands of a lower-class woman, such an object warrants further investigation (Beaudry 2006:86-88, Loren and Beaudry 2006:259-260). Grace Stout stood out because she was able to attain goods, like a silver thimble, that were outside of her means as a housemaid (Beaudry 2006:86-88, Loren and Beaudry 2006:259-260). Thus, when an unidentified silver thimble was found at a scene of a theft, Grace Stout was convicted of the crime because she had access to the space and was
known to have bought a silver thimble (Beaudry 2006:86). She had been stealing from her employers to afford lavish goods (Beaudry 2006:86-88, Loren and Beaudry 2006:259-260). Sewing implements were used “in the construction and negotiation of identity and served as symbols of status or, conversely, as indicators of behavior or ambitions unbefitting a person’s perceived or assigned station in life” (Beaudry 2006:86). Sociohistorical context is vital to understanding small finds.

Objects of personal adornment have been used to understand race, gender, and class-based identities in the past (Wilkie 1994, Heath 1999, Loren 2003, Thomas and Thomas 2004, White 2004, 2008, Loren and Beaudry 2006, Voss 2008, Franklin 2020, Flewellen 2018, 2022). In terms of class and status, highly decorative artifacts, or expensive accessories recovered archaeologically suggests that the original wearer had both market access and a high enough economic standing to afford fancier goods (White 2004, 2008). Higher end goods signal a higher-class status, particularly when they are found in an archaeological context that dates to an era where a given object was at the height of fashion (White 2004, 2008). When undecorated items such as buttons or buckles are recovered archaeologically, these objects suggest a lower status, but they also might suggest utilitarian, casual attire (White 2004:62). Clothing and accessories are also often gender specific. When items like fans, chatelaines, jewelry, and cosmetic tools are recovered archaeologically, these are generally considered markers of femininity (White 2004, 2008). Artifacts generally associated with women underscore the ways gendered norms were reproduced and constructed (White 2004, 2008). Decorative and fancy feminine artifacts also denote gentility among women (White 2004:59).

When the dress practices of African Americans are examined archaeologically, they tend to focus on contexts of enslavement (Heath 1999, Thomas and Thomas 2004,
Galle 2010), and more recently contexts in the postbellum era (Flewellen 2018, 2022, Franklin 2020). Clothing has historically been a mechanism for racialization (Heath 1999, Thomas and Thomas 2004, Flewellen 2018). Enslavers generally provided coarse fabrics and ensured enslaved individuals were kept in tattered clothing to signal their status as an enslaved person (Heath 1999:52, Thomas and Thomas 2004:115). Despite what enslavers provided, enslaved African Americans were still finding ways to personalize their clothing and indicate their status among their peers, as evidenced by artifacts like beads and decorated buttons recovered from plantations (Heath 1999:53, Thomas and Thomas 2004:124, Galle 2010). Consumer goods located in the archaeological record show that enslaved African Americans were earning money and participating in consumer culture (Heath 1999:62, Thomas and Thomas 2004:116, Galle 2010). Enslaved African Americans used accessories and fashionable clothing items as portable forms of wealth, to disguise their identity as an enslaved person, and to equalize hierarchies that enslavers attempted to impose on them by altering their clothing with personalized items (Heath 1999:53, Thomas and Thomas 2004:116).

Dress artifacts are also indicative of labor. Utilitarian, plain, and sturdy artifacts of personal adornment are often interpreted as indications of manual labor (Lindbergh 1999:55-56, Flewellen 2022:218-219). In plantation settings, in both antebellum and postbellum eras, dress is often specific to the particular type of labor being carried out by African Americans (Thomas and Thomas 2004:117, Flewellen 2018, 2022). For Black women laboring at the Levi Jordan Plantation, clothing was often situational (Flewellen 2018, 2022). Black women wore clothing that served different functions based on if they were laboring in fields as opposed to domestic spaces (Flewellen 2022:219-220). When laboring within white households, Black women were cognizant of their appearance for
their safety, as they often faced racial and sexual violence from white employers (Flewellen 2022:221). The plethora of Prosser buttons recovered archaeologically at the Levi Jordan Plantation, in combination with photographic evidence suggest that the garments Black women wore in white people’s domestic spaces reflected “sanitation, cleanliness, and trustworthiness,” along with ideas of modesty (Flewellen 2022:220-221). Dressing in such a way was “a response to the threat of racialized and sexual violence Black women faced from their White employers as Black women pushed against controlling images of the hyper-sexualized Black feminine body through modesty” (Flewellen 2018:176). Critically however, dressing modestly may have reinforced the mammy stereotype (Flewellen 2018:176). Black feminism can be used to understand that free Black women in the nineteenth century were not “absolutely liberated nor…pure victims” (Flewellen 2018:140), as they navigated overlapping axes of oppression in their everyday existence. The way Black women dressed in white-controlled spaces was a direct result of racialized and sexualized violence (Flewellen 2018, 2022). Dress artifacts also represent the tangible remains of the tasks they were performing. Black women often occupied the role of washerwoman or launderess, and artifacts such as buttons left behind in the process of washing clothing highlight the types of sartorial duties they carried out daily (Jordan 2006).

In addition, archaeological studies of objects of personal adornment have suggested that clothing reflects the community politics of African Americans (Franklin 2020:573-574). Maria Franklin (2020) examined clothing fasteners from graves at the Third New City Cemetery, a late nineteenth-century African American cemetery located in Houston, Texas. She analyzed where on the body a fastener was recovered to determine the garments men and women were wearing at the time of burial (Franklin
Inexpensive fasteners, and by extension, inexpensive clothing forms, dominated the assemblage, but Franklin (2020) argues this community still understood and engaged with the trends of the Victorian era. Clothing was contextualized within community politics to argue African Americans were engaging with politics of respectability (Franklin 2020). For African Americans, politics of respectability were a common tool during the nineteenth century to uplift themselves and their community and to deny racialized, stereotypical images of African Americans (Higginbotham 1993, Ball 2012). For Black women, respectability was connected to ideas of modesty (Franklin 2020:574-575). Wearing modest clothing in the face of rampant nineteenth-century stereotypes, such as jezebels, was a response to threat of sexualized violence (Flewellen 2022:221) and a way for Black women to “define themselves as deserving of just treatment” (Franklin 2020:575). Dress was essential to the construction and negotiation of Black women’s identities as they negotiated race, gender, and class.

**Black Feminism**

Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1991) theory of intersectionality is a major component of the theoretical framework used in this analysis. Race, class, and gender identities intersect and converge on various axes to create individual experiences of power and oppression (Crenshaw 1989, 1991). Crenshaw (1991:1242) argues that when “practices expound identity as woman or person of color as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling.” Black women do not discretely experience race or gender; they experience race and gender simultaneously, which creates a specific and unique social, political, and economic positionality. To convey the
experiences and marginalization of Black women, race and gender must be understood as linked identities.

Intersectionality is not only grounded in Black feminism, but it grew from it (Grzanka et al. 2017:19). Black feminism seeks to center the experiences of Black women (Hill Collins 2000, Combahee River Collective 1977). Traditional feminist theory tends to be Eurocentric in regard to understanding gender-based oppression, and historically it has not grappled with race and class in tandem with gender (Battle-Baptiste 2011:37, Combahee River Collective 1977). Black feminism however, is a tool for understanding the ways intersecting identities impact Black women’s lives, and its purpose is to both understand and overcome social injustice (Hill Collins 2000:22). In the nineteenth century, Black men dominated in political and abolitionist spheres (Horton 1986), and it is therefore these histories and perspectives that continue to dominate. By homogenizing this history, the specificity of Black women’s experiences, and the injustices they faced, are lost. Black feminism is a framework for nuancing the lives of Black women.

Moya Bailey (2021) uses the term “misogynoir” to understand the racialized, anti-Black sexism that Black women experience. Bailey (2021:1) defines misogynoir as the “co-constitutive racialized and sexist violence that befalls Black women as a result of their simultaneous and interlocking oppression at the intersection of racial and gender marginalization.” Black women are targeted by misogynoir from both Black and white communities (Bailey and Trudy 2018:762, 767, Bailey 2021). Misogynoir is often perpetuated and reinforced through “controlling images” (Bailey 2021:2).

Controlling images are harmful stereotypes attached to Black Americans that “are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life” (Hill Collins 2000:69). These
stereotypical images include caricatures such as mammys, jezebels, and matriarchs. Ideas of Black women as subservient, hypersexual, or “physically powerful” (Yee 1992:42-44) underscore these controlling images. These stereotypes grew out of the context of enslavement and continue into the present day (Yee 1992:42-44, Hill Collins 2000:69-88, Davis 2001:5). Controlling images “other” African Americans, ensuring they stay on the margins of society (Hill Collins 2000:70). Black women are a threat to accepted social expectations, “but they are simultaneously essential for its survival because those individuals who stand at the margins of society clarify its boundaries. African-American women, by not belonging, emphasize the significance of belonging” (Hill Collins 2000:70). Controlling images serve to objectify Black women as less than human, justifying the exploitation of their labor and sexuality (Hill Collins 200:71).

Patricia Hill Collins (1986, 1998) argues that Black women are “outsiders-within.” Collins (1998:6) states “the outsider-within location describes a particular knowledge/power relationship, one of gaining knowledge about or of a dominant group without gaining the full power accorded to members of that group.” In regard to this study, the outsider-within placement is used to understand the precarious position that free Black women would have occupied in nineteenth-century society. Black women in Boston were no longer enslaved, but the free Beacon Hill community was established while the majority of African Americans in the United States were still enslaved. Despite their status as free women, they were still facing the oppression and exploitation brought on by the legacy of enslavement as they navigated nineteenth-century gender ideology. While white women were depicted as pious, pure, domestic, and submissive (Welter 1966), the othering of Black women that began during enslavement ensured that they could never fully achieve these ideas of womanhood. Whitney Battle-Baptiste (2011:55)
states “to be within a system while always maintaining a marginalized presence is a part of a legacy brought on by colonialism and maintained by racism and classism.” Systemic misogynoir ensures that Black women, even in freedom, inherently could not achieve white society’s ideas of true womanhood.

To highlight the lives of Black women, Black feminists tend to focus on themes of labor, domesticity, community development and activism, and various forms of oppression and resistance (Hill Collins 2000, Franklin 2001, Battle-Baptiste 2011, Flewellen 2018, 2022, Lee 2019), all of which are central to this study. Survival is also central to these studies (Franklin 2000, Battle-Baptiste 2011, Flewellen 2018, 2022, Lee 2019). The sheer act of survival in a hostile, white society is an act of resistance (Hill Collins 2000:201). The “struggles for group survival are just as important as confrontations with institutional power” (Hill Collins 2000:202).

Black feminism highlights the impossible burden that Black women shouldered. Archaeologists have argued labor is often tied to notions of survival for Black women (Franklin 2000, Battle-Baptiste 2011, Flewellen 2018, 2022, Lee 2019). In the case of the Boston-Higginbotham House, Mary Boston labored as a domestic, while also maintaining boarders within her home and performing household labor (Lee 2019). Taking on the arduous task of maintaining boarders supplemented Mary Boston’s income, helping her household to survive economically (Lee 2019). While existing outside the home, Black women took steps to appear modest and unassuming to survive in outwardly hostile environments (Flewellen 2018, 2022, Franklin 2020). Within the home, Black women were caregivers, nurturers, and mothers, who created spaces of resistance and solace against the racism they experienced in the outside world (Herzing 2022). Meanwhile, Black women took on roles associated with community development and racial equality.
Black women opened their homes to freedom seekers and built relationships with community members to not only foster community development, but to ensure the survival and uplift of their race (Battle-Baptiste 2011:130, Lee 2019). Cultural materials left behind in the archaeological record are evidence of their lived experiences (Franklin 2001:112) that remain invisible in historical documentation.
CHAPTER 3
HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND

Historical Overview of Beacon Hill

The history of African Americans is an integral part of urban development in Boston. During the nineteenth century, the African Meeting House, along with much of Boston’s Black community, was located on the northern slope of Boston’s Beacon Hill neighborhood. Today, Beacon Hill is heavily gentrified, but historically this neighborhood was considered highly undesirable by much of Boston’s white population. In the eighteenth century, people tended to congregate in Boston’s North End where the harbors and extensive wharves brought maritime commerce into the city (Whitehill and Kennedy 2000:10-11). These wharves were a major source of income for Bostonians (Whitehill and Kennedy 2000:10-11), and much of the money flowing in and out of the city was tied to enslavement (Farrow et al. 2005). As a port in the Transatlantic Slave Trade network, enslavers and individuals profiting from trading and selling products produced by enslaved labor gained their wealth via the sea.

What would become the Beacon Hill neighborhood fell within the Trimountain region, a hilly area that was sparsely settled during the eighteenth century (Whitehill and Kennedy 2000:8, 10). As people tended to live in the North End, the Trimountain area
was mainly used for pastures (Rosebrock 1978:3). However, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Boston began to rapidly develop. The Trimountain region was largely leveled and new roads and bridges connecting the Beacon Hill and West End neighborhoods to the rest of Boston meant that this area was more accessible than before (Whitehill and Kennedy 2000:51-52, 79-84). The North End may have been where people made their livelihoods, but the area was also notorious for gambling, taverns, and other vices (Horton and Horton 1999:34). People began spreading into the West End to start families or seek other opportunities away from the busy wharves (Descoteaux 2011:26).

As the West End developed, the wealthy elite began moving to the southern side of Beacon Hill, surrounding the Boston Common (Domosh 1996:29, Whitehall and Kennedy 2000:52). The wealthy enslaved or employed Black Americans, which suggests African Americans had been well acquainted with the area, even prior to the abolition of enslavement in Massachusetts (Levesque 1994:33). Black women, who were either enslaved or paid domestics for the wealthy families on the southern slope of Beacon Hill, were likely the people who became familiar with the neighborhood first (Levesque 1994:33). Geographically, African Americans in Boston became concentrated on the northern slope of Beacon Hill (Levesque 1994:34-39), specifically around the African Meeting House, and later the Twelfth Baptist Church (Malcolm 2022). The area became known as “Mount Whoredom,” “Satan’s seat,” or where “Beezelbub holds a court,” due to explicit, anti-Black racism (Whitehill and Kennedy 2000:70-71). In terms of gender, Black women out numbered Black men by approximately 10% between the years 1820 and 1860 in Boston (Levesque 1994:63).

Historically, Christianity practiced by white people and churches was complicit in racism and weaponized to oppress marginalized groups (Tisby 2019). Meanwhile, Black
churches have always stood against inequality and racism (Tisby 2019:19). In white churches, African Americans were often forced into segregated pews and endured humiliation and insults (Horton and Horton 1999:41-42). As a result, Black Americans in Boston sought other avenues for worship. Without a church building of their own, religious services were frequently held in homes, becoming a “private protest against racial discrimination” (Horton and Horton 1999:42). Aside from homes, public buildings were also used for religious meetings. Schoolhouses and even Faneuil Hall became spaces used by African Americans to conduct religious services (Horton and Horton 1999:42).

Needing a space of their own, plans were set in motion to build a Baptist church to serve the Black community. The push for abolition, education, and fundamental human rights went on for generations, and with each succeeding generation, the ideology and methods for securing these rights changed (Horton 1976). The African Meeting House grew out of a separatist mindset. It was an institution created by and for African Americans, separate from white churches in Boston (Levesque 1994:266, 268). Facing residential segregation, economic discrimination, and racism in all forms, separate community institutions and organizations formed out of necessity (Levesque 1994:265). Separate institutions, like the African Meeting House, were seen as “an asylum from white prejudice” (Levesque 1994:265).

On March 23rd, 1805, 8 Smith Court was purchased from Augustin Raillion by the African Meeting House building committee (Bower 1990:Appendix I, 2). The committee consisted of Daniel Wild, John Wait, William Bentley, Mitchell Lincoln, Ward Jackson, and Edward Stevens; all of whom were white men (Shaw 1817:269-270). The committee held the land in trust until the debt was paid, and the deed was then
transferred to the congregation (Shaw 1817:270). In July of 1805, a committee of free Black men including Thomas Paul, Scipio Dalton, and Cato Gardner raised a large portion of the funds needed to complete the building (Bower 1990:Appendix I, 2). To constitute the new church, Thomas Paul and Scipio Dalton contacted the First and Second Baptist churches, and on August 5th, 1805, the First African Baptist Church was constituted (Bower 1990:Appendix I, 2, Horton and Horton 1999:42). By the end of 1806, the African Meeting House was finished, and Thomas Paul would serve as the church minister until 1829. The original African Meeting House congregation included twenty-four members, fifteen of whom, were Black women (Levesque 1994:268, 294-295). The men in this founding congregation were Scipio Dalton, Abraham Fairfield, James Broomfield, Charles Bailey, Richard Winslow, John Basset, Obediah Robbins, Thomas Paul, and Cato Gardner (Levesque 1994:294). Despite making up a majority of the congregation, the women’s names have not been located or identified to date (Grover and da Silva 2002:74).

The African Meeting House was built in response to anti-Black racism, and throughout the lifespan of the church, it continued to navigate said racism. Outside the walls of the church, the Black community in Boston was policed by the Fugitive Slave Act, the impacts of the Dred Scott v. Sanford case ruling, segregation, and mob violence. Even within the church, the congregation faced violence. In 1835, vandals entered the African Meeting House and damaged the pulpit and altar (Liberator 1835:83). Lacking rights and access to formal political, economic, and social institutions, marginalized groups often have no choice but to rely on support from within their communities (Levesque 1994:344, Horton and Horton 1999:39, 55). Institutions meant to serve Black communities frequently took on multifaceted roles, and the African Meeting House was
The church basement was originally meant as a place for pastors to reside, but there is no evidence that suggests any of the Baptist pastors ever lived here. Instead, various Black community members lived in the basement apartment sporadically until 1854 (Bower 1990:48, Yocum 1994:24-25). Several of the individuals who resided in the African Meeting House apartment had occupations relating to clothing and shoes. Two tailors, Henry Weeden and Isaac Barbadoes, lived in the basement apartment from 1846 to 1848 and 1850, respectively, and David D. Rue, a bootblack, resided in the apartment in 1836 (Bower 1990:48).

The basement of the building also included a school room, meant for the education of Black children. The African Meeting House was central to the fight for education for African Americans. Legally speaking, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, schools were not racially segregated. However, very few Black children attended public schools in Massachusetts, because they “received no benefit from the free schools” and faced discrimination within the public school system (Levesque 1994:166). Thus, African Americans began calling for separate schools specifically meant for them. The Black community believed schools created by and for them would allow for more control over their education (Levesque 1994:166). A group of benefactors including Abiel Smith, a white merchant, donated funding for the express purpose of including a
schoolroom within the African Meeting House (Levesque 1994:167). The exact date classes began is unclear, but this private school was formally recognized by the Boston School Committee in 1812, perhaps to “exercise some control over this autonomous school developing outside the system of public schools” (Levesque 1994:168, Yocum 1994:20). In 1815, Abiel Smith died, leaving a great deal of money intended for the education of African Americans (Levesque 1994:168, Grover and da Silva 2002:8).

After decades of organizing and advocating for access to education, Black Bostonians had succeeded in securing a school room to educate their children. However, it quickly became clear the school in the basement of the African Meeting House was insufficient. Disparities existed between schools meant for white children, and schools meant for African American children (Levesque 1994:170, Yocum 1994:23, Grover and da Silva 2002:81). In 1833, the Boston School Committee found the schoolroom in poor condition. The committee reported the schoolroom “low and confined,” and “hot and stifled in summer and cold in winter” (Levesque 1994:170, Yocum 1994:23, Grover and da Silva 2002:81). In response to these issues, the Boston School Committee provided funding to build an entirely new school (Grover and da Silva 2002:82). White Bostonians however, fought against a new school for African Americans. They argued that building a new school for Black Bostonians would result in a great decline of the area (Moss 2009:139). Eventually, using funds left by Abiel Smith, the city of Boston was able to buy land on Belknap Street, next to the African Meeting House, to build the school (Levesque 1994:172, Grover and da Silva 2002:23). The school officially opened in 1835, and the African School would move from the basement of the African Meeting House, into the new building. The newly opened school was named the Abiel Smith School to honor its benefactor. The school room in the African Meeting House continued to be used
as a Sunday school for many years, and in 1841, a school was opened in the basement specifically for young, Black ladies, where they might learn “painting, sketching, rug-work, &c., together with penmanship, composition, etc.” (Liberator 1841:167, Yocum 1994:24). In addition to providing an education, the African Meeting House continued to fight for education for Black Bostonians by holding meetings calling for desegregated schools (Lawton 1850:132). There had been a drastic shift from separatist ideals towards integration (Horton 1976:249, Wesley 1993:214). In 1855, a bill was passed banning segregation in Massachusetts schools.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the African Meeting House served as a vital meeting space for the Black community. The building was used to host celebrations and speakers, and it was home to many local organizations. These gatherings and groups were often political, focusing on abolition, freedom, and equality. According to archaeological ceramic analyses, the celebrations and communal gatherings were generally fashionable and elaborate affairs (Bower 1984:72, Landon 2007:86, Costello 2021). Following the end of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in the United States in 1808, for many years the African Meeting House held a celebration commemorating the occasion, which included a parade followed by dinner (Columbian Centinel 1809, 1810, 1821 in Bower 1990: Appendix I 4, 6). In 1825, the African Meeting House held a gathering to celebrate France formally recognizing Haiti’s independence (Williams et al. 1825). In addition, following the emancipation of all enslaved people in the British West Indies in 1834, an event was held to celebrate the anniversary at the African Meeting House (Hilton et al. 1842:119). Speakers like Frederick Douglas and Maria Stewart frequented the African Meeting House, and they focused on freedom for African Americans (Landon 2007:1).
The groups that formed or met at the African Meeting House focused on meeting the community’s financial, educational, and personal needs. The African Society met at the church. It was a mutual aid society that provided financial relief to community members, and it called for temperance and the abolition of slavery (Horton and Horton 1999:28). The New England Freedom Association was formed at the church, by African Americans, with the purpose of aiding fugitive enslaved people along the Underground Railroad (Nell et al. 1845:199). This group included both men and women (Nell et al. 1845:199). The First Independent Baptist Female Society was a church group that “organized bazaars, conducted sewing circles… distributed circular and handbills publicizing activities and events under church sponsorship; they taught Sunday Schools, the Bible and Adult classes” and “engaged in the work of fund raising, publicity and pedagogy; all such efforts helped to raise the money without which church construction, enlargement, repair and upkeep would have been impeded” (Levesque 1994:325-326). The New England Anti-Slavery Society was also formed at the African Meeting House by William Lloyd Garrison, the white editor of The Liberator. The society included both white and Black Bostonians, and it advocated for the immediate end of slavery and rights for free African Americans (Horton and Horton 1999:91).

Prior to the start of the Civil War, men like Robert Morris and Charles Remond petitioned the Massachusetts government to allow African Americans to join and establish local militias but were denied several times (Gettings 1993:133). Although African Americans had fought in all of America’s wars, they were not formally authorized to serve in the military until 1863, when the Emancipation Proclamation was signed. With the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, Massachusetts finally established an African American regiment. That same year, a recruitment meeting
was held at the African Meeting House for the 54th Regiment, one of the first Black infantry units in the United States (Gettings 1993:135). Although Black Americans could enlist in the military, they were not treated as equals to their white counterparts. They were to be paid less than white soldiers, they were unable to obtain the rank of officer, and, if captured, a Confederate congressional ruling stated that Black men would be sold into slavery or executed (Horton and Horton 1999:136-137). Eventually, recruits began pouring in, and the 55th Regiment was also formed in 1863.

The African Meeting House was a heavily used building, and by the middle of the nineteenth century, the building had become dilapidated (Yocum 1994:30). In 1852, fundraising plans began to fix the church, and an amount of $2,500 was requested (Yocum 1994:30). Fundraising was interrupted by the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act, and several leading members of the church had to flee Boston (Yocum 1994:30-31). By 1855, fundraising was finished and work on the building began (Yocum 1994:31). During exterior renovations, an apse was extended off the back of the building (Bower 1990:70). A stair tower was added to the western wall of the apse, which connected the basement to the church sanctuary (Bower 1990:70). Two doorways at the front of the church were bricked up, and two new doorways were added (Yocum 1994:34). Windows were enlarged and decorative elements were altered (Yocum 1994:34).

The African Meeting House was the nucleus of this Black community, but also integral to this research are the buildings that historically surrounded the plot of land the church occupied. To the west of the African Meeting House, is 2 Smith Court. Like the land the African Meeting House sits on, 2 Smith Court was previously owned by Augustin Raillon (Grover and da Silva 2002:71). It was purchased from Augustin Raillon in 1803, by William Henry, an African American tailor, who built two tenements on the

In 1852, Joseph Scarlett, a Black chimney sweep and entrepreneur, bought the property (Bower and Crosby 1985:5). In 1853, he built a two-story, brick residence on the land (Grover and da Silva 2002:73). He owned the property until 1878 (Grover and da Silva 2002:73). Following Joseph Scarlett’s ownership, the building was bought by white individuals. In 1878, Joseph Scarlett sold the property to William A. Prescott, who in turn sold the plot to Samuel A. B. Abbott that same year (Grover and da Silva 2002:73). In 1899, the tenement would be sold again to Mary Power (Grover and da Silva 2002:73).

Along with 2 Smith Court and the land the African Meeting House occupies, 44 and 46 Joy Street were previously owned by Augustin Raillion (Landon 2007:63). In 1811, part of 44 and 46 Joy Street were mortgaged to Nancy Collins and her two daughters, Sarah and Ann Collins (Rosebrock 1978:16, Grover and da Silva 2002:79, Landon 2007:63). This sale included an eight-feet long strip of land at 44 Joy Street, which extended south of the North Yard at the African Meeting House (Rosebrock 1978:16, Landon 2007:63). A tenement building was constructed at 44 Joy Street, and African Americans occupied this building continuously between 1810 and 1835 (Bower 1990:50, Landon 2007:65). In 1836, the property was bought by John D. Bates (Bower 1990:61, Rosebrock 1978:17). He demolished the tenement building and then built a two-story stable on the property (Bower 1990:61, Grover and da Silva 2002:161, Landon 2007:64). In 1866, the land changed hands again, and the deed was transferred to the Proprietors of the Home Club Stable in Joy Street (Rosebrock 1978:17, Bower 1990:61). The Home Club demolished that existing stable and constructed a new one (Bower

At some point before 1834, part of 46 Joy Street was bought by Joseph Powars, who operated a tenement building on the lot (Grover and da Silva 2002:80). His heir, Joanna Powars Stanford, later acquired the property (Grover and da Silva 2002:80). The tenement at 46 Joy Street was occupied by African Americans between 1822 and 1824, 1826, and 1831 (Grover and da Silva 2002:80). Joanna Powars Stanford sold 46 Joy Street to the City of Boston in 1834 for the construction of the Abiel Smith School (Grover and da Silva 2002:158, Landon 2007:63). The Abiel Smith School was built between 1834 and 1835, and it remained as a functioning school for Black children until 1855, when separate schools for Black and white children were outlawed by the state of Massachusetts. The Abiel Smith School then functioned as an integrated school until 1881 (Grover and da Silva 2002:82).

Following the end of the Civil War, membership at the African Meeting House generally continued to grow, but African American presence on Beacon Hill began to decline towards the end of the nineteenth century (Levesque 1975:509, Bower 1990:60, Yocum 1994:27, 39, Hayden 1992:20). Around 1890, the Black community living in Beacon Hill began moving into Boston’s South End (Hayden 1992:20). Those living in Beacon Hill were experiencing high rents for dilapidated housing, and the community’s composition had begun changing (Hayden 2019). Jewish people began moving into Beacon Hill, and they began gentrifying the area (Schneider 1997:5, Hayden 2019). Further, after the Civil War, many African Americans sought to escape Jim Crow laws, violence, and discrimination in the southern United States by migrating to northern cities.
In Boston, they tended to settle in the South End (Hayden 1992:19, Schneider 1997:5). Boston’s African American community was no longer centered in Beacon Hill, and the church’s membership had long outgrown the available space. In 1898, the church made the decision to move to the South End, selling the building, and ending the Baptist congregation’s tenure in the church (Yocum 1994:39). The African Meeting House would then become a synagogue for the Jewish congregation, Anshi Libavitz, from 1904 to 1972 (Bower 1990:Appendix 1, 20). In 1972, the Museum of African American History acquired the building, and in 1974, the African Meeting House became a National Historic Site.

The Cult of True Womanhood and Black Women

The nineteenth century brought strict gender ideals for Black and white communities alike. Aimed at middle class and aspiring white women, the “cult of true womanhood” (Welter 1966:151-152) took hold in the early nineteenth century. With the concept of true womanhood, came the concept of the “ideal” woman. Women were expected to be pious, pure, domestic, and submissive (Welter 1966:152, Carlson 1992:61-62, Yee 1992:40). A woman was often defined by her relationship to other people. She was “mother, daughter, sister, wife” (Welter 1966:152). Women were judged by how well they fulfilled the tenants of the cult of true womanhood, and without them, they were essentially nothing (Welter 1966:152).

A pious woman was a religious one (Welter 1966:152-154). Women were considered naturally and divinely pious, whereas men often neglected their religious duties, tending more towards sin (Welter 1966:151-152). Women, therefore, had a duty to bring religion into their husband’s life (Welter 1966:152-153). Attending church and
doing church work were encouraged by women’s magazines and literature, even though these activities took place outside the domestic sphere because piety was integral to true womanhood (Welter 1966:153). However, participating in movements or societies outside of the church, and engaging with intellectual pursuits were discouraged, as these activities conflicted with women’s domestic duties, and ideals of womanhood (Welter 1966:153). Closely associated with piety, was purity. A woman’s value was dependent on her chastity; without her virtue she was “no woman at all” (Welter 1966:154). A virtuous woman held power over men, because her purity was a tool to control men’s actions (Welter 1966:156). A woman was to be chaste until marriage, where she would remain committed to her husband alone (Welter 1966:154, 156).

In marriage, ideals of true womanhood dictated that women were submissive and obedient to their husbands (Welter 1966:159). Women were not necessarily inferior and unequal to men, but by nature they were meant to fulfill a different role (Welter 1966:159). Women were dependent on their husbands (Welter 1966:159). While men labored outside the home, women’s duties fell within the domestic sphere, where they were responsible for homemaking and childcare (Welter 1966:161, Carlson 1992:61-62, Yee 1992:40). In the home, women were responsible for moral uplift, housekeeping, and all needlework (Welter 1966:164-165). Women needed to be well educated on homemaking, but a literary education might disrupt ideals associated with true womanhood, and lead to social disarray (Welter 1966:165-166).

The ongoing legacy of enslavement altered notions of femininity amongst Black women (Hill Collins 2000:47, Edwards 2000:87, Battle-Baptiste 2011:39-41). Enslaved women “shouldered the work load of their race unable to draw upon the protections generally afforded to their sex” (Horton 1986:53). It was Black women’s labor in
enslavement and in freedom that essentially made white women’s adherence to the cult of true womanhood possible (Battle-Baptiste 2011:170). Enslaved Black women were objectified, sexualized, and forced to labor outside their domestic sphere, where they labored as domestics, field hands, and provided childcare for white people (Battle-Baptiste 2011:170). Their labor benefited their enslavers first and foremost, over their homes, husbands, and children (Hill Collins 2000:50, Davis 2001:5-6). Black women were not perceived as frail or delicate by enslavers in the same way white women were, and they were frequently subjected to physical and sexual violence (Horton 1986:53, Yee 1992:42-43, Davis 2001:6-7). In addition, enslaved women’s reproductive capabilities were closely controlled by enslavers (Hill Collins 2000:51, Davis 2001:6-7). Enslavers desired a consistent and growing population of enslaved labor; thus, they extorted Black women into having children by providing better rations and lighter work (Hill Collins 2000:51). The context of chattel enslavement disrupted Eurocentric and patriarchal gender ideals, often violently (Davis 2001, Battle-Baptiste 2011:40-41).

Freedom provided an opportunity for Black families to adapt and live in accordance with nineteenth-century gender ideology (Horton 1986:55). Adhering to prevailing gender ideology was not necessarily an act of conformity. Rather, accepting nineteenth-century gender ideology was political (Ball 2012:8-9). Accepting gender norms was an avenue for free African Americans to subvert racist stereotypes (Horton 1986:58-59). Acting in accordance with gender conventions was a way for African Americans to “conteract the distortion of slavery and other racial injustices,” such as enslaver’s emasculation of Black men or the over sexualization of Black women (Horton 1986:58-59). However, for African Americans, true womanhood was heavily influenced by racial politics. For free Black women and men, race was inextricably linked to gender
ideology, and this overlap altered the ways African Americans negotiated gender roles (Horton 1986, Carlson 1992, Yee 1992:40-58, Horton and Horton 1993). Black women may have been seeking to adopt ideas of true womanhood, but the gender ideology of the nineteenth century was “extreme and did not conform to the realities of life for most women and men of the period” (Horton 1986:51). Black women were altering and adapting gender ideology to account for the reality of their lived experiences (Bulger 2013, 2015, Herzing 2022).

Black women’s negotiation of gender expectations and race culminated in several ways. Firstly, Black women were often unable to remain solely in the domestic sphere, as they were expected to under the cult of true womanhood due to pervasive, anti-Black racism. Out of necessity, Black woman often needed to perform economic labor to supplement their husband’s income (Horton and Horton 1999:20, Lee 2019). Despite their “free” status, African Americans living in Boston had little opportunity for economic advancement and social mobility. Skilled white laborers saw Black men as direct competition for their jobs, as they could be paid less than their white counterparts (Singleton 2002:196). Thus, many skilled trades were closed off to Black men altogether, and instead they were relegated to the lowest paying and least skilled positions (Singleton 2002:196). Some of the skilled professions available to them related to clothing or personal appearance, such as hairdressers or clothing store owners (Horton and Horton 1999:8), because white people saw these jobs as “beneath them” (Singleton 2002:196). Black women generally needed to work because of their material realities, and they too had limited job prospects. Generally, the common positions available to Black women were still based around the domestic sphere, as skilled labor for women in general was difficult to attain. Black women would frequently wash and repair clothing to earn an
income, maintain boarders, or work as domestic servants in white homes (Yee 1992:52, Richardson 1993:198, Horton and Horton 1999:20, Davis 2001:90, Battle-Baptiste 2011:128, Lee 2019). Black women were facing the arduous task of maintaining the domestic sphere, in addition to earning an income. Economic labor was an affront to true womanhood, but within the African American community, the importance Black women’s contributions to the household economy was not only recognized, but encouraged (Horton 1986:62, Carlson 1992:65, Lee 2019). Black women’s economic labor was imperative for the survival of their families.

Whereas under the cult of true womanhood, joining social groups and movements had the potential to weaken white women’s commitment to piety and by extension their womanhood (Welter 1966:153), this was not the case for Black women. For Black Americans, gender ideology was intrinsically connected to notions of racial uplift and community activism (Horton 1986, Yee 1992, Bulger 2013, 2015) because Black women’s time and influence was needed “for the elevation of their race” (Horton 1986:62). The tenants of true womanhood laid the framework for women to provide moral and spiritual guidance within the home (Welter 1966:163), but for Black woman, ideas of uplift extended into the public sphere as well (Carlson 1992:62, Yee 1992:40, Richardson 1993). In addition to running and providing for their households, Black women also labored within the public sphere, where they were community advocates for abolition and civil rights (Yee 1992, Richardson 1993, Horton and Horton 1999:21). Black women were active participants in securing and advocating for racial equality (Yee 1992:41, Richardson 1993). Despite Black women’s participation in public politics, their position in relation to Black men was complicated. While some Black men believed Black women were equal to them (Terborg-Penn 1997), others did not (Horton 1986:5,
Horton and Horton 1999:21, Yee 1992:55-56). Some Black men felt that Black women should participate in public life in ways that serve men, such as fundraising for “male leadership activities,” rather than taking on prominent roles of their own (Yee 1992:55-56). Gender equality was generally secondary to pursuits of racial equality (Yee 1992:56, Terborg-Penn 1997:36). Black men “tended to perceive the problems of black women primarily in terms of the struggle against racism rather than as a struggle against sexism” (Terborg-Penn 1997:28). Even though Black women were not always seen as equals to Black men, their place in community politics was generally accepted (Horton and Horton 1999:21), because the entanglement of race and gender meant that understandings of Black womanhood often involved and necessitated activism and community uplift (Yee 1992, Horton 1986:57). The “politics of freedom” (Horton 1986:64) dictated that it was Black women’s duty to her race to work towards justice and equality.

The cult of true womanhood presented an educated woman as a threat to patriarchal power structures (Welter 1966:166, Carlson 1992:62), but in addition to playing roles in community activism, Black women were advocating for and seeking out education (Horton 1986:57, Carlson 1992:62, Yee 1992:49-51, Richardson 1993:200, Davis 2001:99-109). Gender was intertwined with ideas of racial equality, therefore for Black women an education was a moral and political imperative (Richardson 1993:200). During the early nineteenth century, it was still illegal to teach enslaved African Americans literacy (Yee 1992:49, Richardson 1993:200). In 1850, census data suggests that only 13.6% of Black Bostonians were illiterate, and that number drops to 7.6% in 1860 (Horton and Horton 1999:13). Most African Americans were literate at least on a basic level (Horton and Horton 1999:13). Being educated as a Black woman was a form of resistance and self-improvement (Carlson 1992), because it was a direct action they
were taking against the institution of enslavement (Yee 1992:49). In terms of education, Black women and girls were taught traditional feminine domestic skills like sewing and knitting, but they also received formal education in reading, writing, and math (Yee 1992:49). In Boston, Black women and girls could have received an education at the African Meeting House or the Abiel Smith School. An education was necessary for Black women for several reasons. Firstly, Black women were responsible for educating their children within the home on their respective social and domestic roles (Horton 1986:57, Carlson 1992:61-62, Yee 1992:50). Secondly, education provided Black women with the skills to perform paid labor both inside and outside the home, because as aforementioned, a woman’s income was often necessary given the low paying and seasonal work available to Black men (Horton 1986:60, Carlson 1992:63, Yee 1992:51). Educated Black women could become schoolteachers, a position that contributed to the education of African Americans, and by extension the uplift of their entire community (Giddings 1988:101, Carlson 1992:65).

Black women were also deeply engaged with the concept of purity, but for Black women, the concept of purity was much more complex than it was for white women. Purity for Black women was not just a way to control men’s morality as it was for white women (Welter 1966:156). Black women were strongly urged by their community to remain pure (Yee 1992:45) because Black women were highly sexualized by white society. White oppressors and enslavers painted Black women as promiscuous to justify their sexual and reproductive exploitation (Horton 1986:58, Giddings 1988, Collins 2000, Davis 2001). Accepting the pillars of true womanhood meant that Black women were attempting to overcome and erase this stereotype (Yee 1992:44).
For Black women, submissiveness was a complicated tenant of true womanhood. Like the other elements of true womanhood, submissiveness was tinged with racialization. Enslaved Black men undoubtedly internalized patriarchal ideas (Battle-Baptiste 2000:40), and these ideas followed them into freedom. Black women were by no means passive (Yee 1992:41), but there was an expectation from Black men that they remain submissive (Horton 1986:73, Coleman 1997:29-30). In the nineteenth century, Black liberation was measured by the ability of Black men and women to participate fully in American life, which not only meant racial equality, but it also meant the “obligation to live out the gender ideals of American patriarchal society” (Horton 1986:70). The myth of the “overbearing” and “emasculating” Black woman grew from the context of enslavement (Battle-Baptiste 2011:40-41), and it is this stereotype that African Americans were attempting to overcome (Horton 1986:70). It was women’s “duty to the race” to support men’s masculinity (Horton 1986:70), because submissiveness liberated Black women from stereotypes (Yee 1992:4). James Oliver Horton (1986:73) argues:

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The ideology of gender required that black men be made to feel the “king of their castle” no matter how humble the castle and no matter the hardships extracted from women who should have been treated as fully contributing partners in the family economy. So long as black liberation meant the creation of a black patriarchy, black women could not themselves be liberated.
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For free Black men, freedom and manhood were bound together (Walker 1829, Horton 1986:55, Horton and Horton 1993:134). For Black women, the defense of Black manhood was the defense of Black men’s autonomy and freedom, even while it created or
perpetuated inequities for Black women. If the goal for African Americans was to participate in society as equals, upholding patriarchal power structures was the byproduct.
Archeological Background

This study utilizes the African Meeting House archeological collection, which includes artifacts from an urban environment. Various people, households, and institutions contributed to the archeological deposits at the site. The African Meeting House was excavated between 1975 and 2005 by the Museum of African American History (then the Museum of Afro-American History), the National Park Service, and the Fiske Center for Archeological Research. Each institution generally used the original grid system, but each entity used different naming conventions and recovery methods that do not align with one another. When provenience information is mentioned in this study, it is always referenced and written exactly as each institution named it.

To date, approximately 65% of the exterior of the site has undergone archeological investigations, which makes the African Meeting House “one of Boston’s most thoroughly excavated archeological sites” (Landon 2007:4-5). This is particularly impressive considering that African Diasporic sites are disproportionately destroyed, understudied, and undervalued (Babiarz 2011, Schumann 2019). Excavations have taken place in the exterior and interior of the building. The exterior excavations are separated
into four areas: the North Yard, South Yard, West Alley, and East Alley (Figure 1). The main interior investigations took place in the basement of the African Meeting House.

The North Yard is located immediately behind the church. The African Meeting House’s building footprint, along with the North Yard, is the original land that was purchased from Augustin Raillion in 1805. The North Yard refers exclusively to what would have been the historic, nineteenth-century yard space owned and used by the African Meeting House. The North Yard was excavated in 1975, 1978, 1983, 1985, and 1987.
2005. In the 200 years between 1805, the year the land was acquired, and 2005, the year of the most recent archaeological investigation, the North Yard has undergone an immense amount of ground disturbance. Therefore, it is difficult to precisely date archaeological deposits at this site. Rather, previous excavators tend to date the deposits as either being pre-1855 or post-1855, because in 1855, the African Meeting House underwent major alterations. Many previous archaeological deposits were disturbed by this event.

The oldest proveniences in the North Yard date to the construction of the African Meeting House. There is evidence that suggests the plot of land acquired in 1805 was graded and cleared prior to construction (Bower 1990:76). Between the years 1806 and 1855, evidence suggests that the North Yard was kept relatively free of debris, likely because this was not a highly trafficked area (Bower 1990:70, 76). The North Yard has an extensive drainage system as well as a privy, both of which predate 1855 (Bower 1990:76, 78, 81, Landon 2007:29, 33). The drainage system and privy were likely built around the same time the African Meeting House was, but the exact timeline is unknown (Bower 1990:70).

By 1855, the African Meeting House needed repair. During this year, a stair tower was constructed on the exterior of the church, which connected the basement and sanctuary (Bower 1990:108). The African Meeting House privy was destroyed when the stair tower was built, and its contents were mixed and spread throughout the North Yard, creating a sheet midden level (Bower 1990:72, 76, Landon 2007:28). Subsequently, cultural materials accumulated on top of the midden during the last half of the century (Bower 1990:72). The final potential mid- to late-nineteenth century level in the North Yard is a provenience characterized by the presence of slate that likely facilitated draining
Eventually, the Jewish congregation, Anshi Libavitz, acquired the building in 1904 (Bower 1990:Appendix 1, 20). In 1909, congregation Anshi Libavitz dug a trench for pouring concrete along the south wall of the African Meeting House foundation, capping off the Baptist congregation’s occupation of the site (Bower 1990:71). Several twentieth-century disturbances such as a roof fire in 1973 and foundation repointing in 1977 also impacted archaeological resources in the North Yard (Bower 1990:109).

The West Alley includes the space between the African Meeting House and 2 Smith Court. Units were placed in the West Alley in 1985 and 2005. These units contain several tightly dated features that represent various construction episodes relating to 2 Smith Court and the African Meeting House. The oldest deposits include foundation stones and a trench associated with a structure built by William Henry, a tailor (Bower 1990:87). Like in the North Yard, a level which may represent the grade of the property prior to construction of the church was also uncovered (Bower 1990:84, 86). The 1806 builder’s trench for the African Meeting House was excavated along the west wall of the church (Bower 1990:87, Landon 2007:43-44). Archaeological excavations also identified building and repair trenches as well as a splash apron related to the 1854 tenement built by Joseph Scarlett (Bower 1990:86, Landon 2007:44). Additionally, excavations yielded ground surfaces dating to the first and second half of the nineteenth century (Bower 1990:84, 86, Landon 2007:42-43). Similar to other parts of the site, evidence of the 1973 fire as well as other twentieth-century deposits were present in the West Alley.

The East Alley includes the space between the African Meeting House, the Abiel Smith School (46 Joy Street), and 44 Joy Street. Despite being two separate properties, the stratigraphy at the Abiel Smith School and African Meeting House is similar (Pendery
and Mead 1999:23), suggesting that the area was shared, highlighting “the relationship between the institutions of the Smith School and the AMH as African American strongholds in the community” (Landon 2007:14). The East Alley was excavated in 1976, 1985, 1995, and 1996. The historic East Alley was four feet wide, however today the property line is further east (Bower 1990:89). The proveniences that predate 1855 include an early nineteenth-century robber’s trench and foundation, which borders what would have been the boundary of the historical, four-foot alley (Bower and Crosby 1985:2, Bower 1990:89, 96). Further, an early nineteenth-century drain runs the length of the East Alley (Bower 1990:93, Pendery and Mead 1999:24). East of the drain is a ground surface dating to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Bower 1990:93). A level likely associated with construction activities in 1855 overlies these earlier levels (Bower 1990:92). Like all the other excavated areas of the site, modern disturbances were also detected in the East Alley (Bower 1990:92, Pendery and Mead 1999:23).

The South Yard is presently owned by the African Meeting House, but historically this was not the case. Today, the South Yard is the eight-foot piece of land that extends behind the 44 Joy Street property. While Ann Collins owned the tenement building at 44 Joy Street, the South Yard contained a privy associated with the structure (Bower 1990:142, Landon 2007:62). The privy was closed around 1835 (Bower 1990:142). At some point prior to 1873, a wooden shed covered the entirety of the eight-foot stretch of land (Bower 1990:61,146, Landon 2007:64). The Jewish congregation bought the land in 1909, and sometime in the twentieth century, the shed was removed (Bower 1990:65).

The South Yard was excavated in 1975, 1978, 1985, and 2005. Likely because the North and South Yards were entirely different properties historically, “the nineteenth-century property line has high archaeological visibility” (Bower 1990:61). An early
nineteenth-century, slate covered drain runs east to west along the boundaries of the North and South Yards (Bower 1990:66). As the drain is on the edge of the North Yard, this feature likely predates 1855. There is a second drain that also predates 1855, running from the southeast corner of the South Yard, towards the northwest corner of another drainage feature (Bower 1990:65-66). The 44 Joy Street privy was in use from approximately 1811 to 1839 (Bower 1990:68, Landon 2007:62). However, the upper layers of the privy are disturbed, and filled with a large amount of architectural debris, likely because of the destruction of Ann Collins’ tenement building, and the subsequent construction and demolition of the two stables and shed that occupied 44 Joy Street (Bower 1990:68, Landon 2007:38-39). The lower levels of the privy are connected to the tenants residing at 44 Joy Street (Landon 2007:39). The wooden shed that spanned the length of the South Yard also left behind archaeological evidence. Brick piers, post holes, and other architectural debris associated with the shed were discovered archaeologically (Bower 1990:66-67). Like the rest of the site, the South Yard was affected by twentieth-century activities. The South Yard included remains of a Victory Garden, a burned level from the roof fire in 1973, and an area impacted by an oil tank explosion that occurred during the fire (Bower 1990:65).

Excavations have also taken place inside the African Meeting House. In 1977, work was done to the front entranceway of the African Meeting House. Trenches were placed inside the entrance, but only monitoring took place at that time (Bower and Charles 1982:Stratigraphy 10). The basement of the church was tested in 1984 and 1986 (Bower et al. 1984, Bower 1987). The 1806 builder’s trench for the African Meeting House was uncovered, however most of the basement floor was drastically altered when the floor was lowered sometime between 1880 and 1906 (Bower 1990:96). A privy dated
between 1790 and 1806 was also located during the excavations in the basement (Bower 1987). It did survive the floor alterations relatively intact, and it has been attributed to Augustin Raillion, a white hairdresser, and his wife, Sally Raillion, who owned the plot of land prior to the construction of the Meeting House (Bower 1987:9). The personal adornment artifacts that were recovered from basement contexts are not included in this research. They were either found in areas affected by twentieth-century activities, or in a privy that is not associated with the African Meeting House or the Black community residing on Beacon Hill.

This study includes the definitively nineteenth-century contexts from the African Meeting House excavations. The urban nature of the site has resulted in ongoing disturbances to archaeological deposits. Due to various building episodes and yard alterations in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, the site stratigraphy is complex. Contexts associated with the occupation period of African Americans are the ones that were identified and used in this analysis. Contexts that were disturbed by twentieth and twenty-first century activities are not included in this research, even if nineteenth-century materials were present, because it is difficult to date their original deposition with any level of certainty. Few field notes from the 1975 to 1986 excavations are accounted for, thus archaeological reports were used to determine which deposits were from the nineteenth century. Table 1 includes a complete list of the excavated nineteenth-century features and levels that were considered for this research. Not every nineteenth-century context associated with African American occupation includes objects of personal adornment.
### Table 1. Nineteenth-Century Contexts Associated with African American Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Level/Feature</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Yard</td>
<td>IV n</td>
<td>S1E1, S2E3, S2E2, S2E1, S2E0, S2W2, S3W5, S3W4, S3W3, S3W2, S3W1, S3E0, S3E1</td>
<td>Drainage</td>
<td>Post-1855</td>
</tr>
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<td>North Yard</td>
<td>V n</td>
<td>S2W4, S2W3, S2W1, S0W2, S1W2, S0W3, S0W1, S0E4, S3E1, S3E0, S2E3, S2E2, S1E3, S1E1, S2E1, S2E0, S0E1, S3W4, S3W3, S3W2</td>
<td>Midden/Yard Surface</td>
<td>Post-1855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Yard</td>
<td>VI n</td>
<td>S3W1, S2E3, S2E2, S1E1, S2E1, S2E0, S3W4, S3W3, S3W2, S2W4, S2W3, S2W2, S2W1, S1W3, S0W2, S1W2, S1W1, S0W3, S0W1, S0E4</td>
<td>Midden</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Yard</td>
<td>VII n</td>
<td>S1W3, S1W2, S1W1, S1E3, S2W1, S2W2, S2W4, S3W4, S3W1</td>
<td>Yard Surface</td>
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<td>S0/E2</td>
<td>Trench for Feature 65</td>
<td>Pre-1855</td>
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<td>S0/W8.54, S2/W3, S0/E2, S1/E2, S1/E1, S0/E1</td>
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<td>S3W2</td>
<td>Terminal Box for Drainage</td>
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<td>Feature 4</td>
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<td>Feature 20</td>
<td>S1W4</td>
<td>Wooden Drain</td>
<td>Pre-1855</td>
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<td>S1W4</td>
<td>Splash Apron</td>
<td>Pre-1855</td>
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<td>North Yard</td>
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<td>S0E4</td>
<td>Slate Drain</td>
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<td>Feature 30</td>
<td>S2W2, S2W1, S1W1</td>
<td>Slate and Terracotta Drain</td>
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<td>Brick Drain</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Yard</td>
<td>Feature 32</td>
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<td>Wooden and Slate Drain</td>
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<td>Feature</td>
<td>Area/East</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Date</td>
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<td>Feature 57</td>
<td>S0/E1</td>
<td>Pre-Partially Excavated Area/Midden</td>
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<td>Feature 59</td>
<td>S2/E5</td>
<td>Waste Pit</td>
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<td>S1/E1, S0/E2, S1/E2</td>
<td>Brick, Slate, and Wood Drain</td>
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<td>Brick Drain</td>
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<td>Feature 9b, 50</td>
<td>S4W7, S4W8, S4W9, S5W7</td>
<td>Privy</td>
<td>c. 1818-1835</td>
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<td>VI e</td>
<td>N4E4, N4E5, N10E4, N11E4, N10E5, N11E5</td>
<td>Alley Surface</td>
<td>c. 1855</td>
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<tr>
<td>East Alley</td>
<td>VIII e</td>
<td>N10E5, N11E5, N11E4, N10E4</td>
<td>Alley Surface</td>
<td>Pre-1855</td>
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<td>Fill</td>
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<td>Stone Drain</td>
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<td>N10E5, N11E5, N10E4</td>
<td>Trench for Feature 28</td>
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<td>Feature 28</td>
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<td>Level V w</td>
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<td>Alley Surface</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Alley Surface</td>
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<td>N4/W8.54</td>
<td>Trench</td>
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<td>N4/W8.54</td>
<td>Alley Surface</td>
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<td>N4/W8.54</td>
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<td>West Alley</td>
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<td>Alley Surface/African Meeting House Builder's Trench</td>
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<td>Builder's Trench for Henry House</td>
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<td>West Alley</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Alley</td>
<td>Level 7</td>
<td>N9/W8.54</td>
<td>Alley Surface</td>
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West Alley Feature 14, 15  N11W8, N11W9  Splash Apron  c. 1854
West Alley Feature 17, 67  N11W8, N11W9  Builder's Trench for Scarlett House  c. 1854
West Alley Feature 16  N1W8, N1W9, N2W8, N2W9  Builder's Trench for Henry House  c. 1803
West Alley Feature 23  N1W8, N1W9, N2W8, N2W9  Stone Foundation for Henry House  c. 1803
West Alley Feature 29, 61, 61b  N1W8, N1W9, N2W8, N2W9, N11W8, N11W9, N4/W8.54, N9/W8.54  African Meeting House Builder's Trench  c. 1806
West Alley Feature 64  N9/W8.54  Repair Trench for 2 Smith Court  Post-1854

**Laboratory Methods**

The assemblage for this study encompasses all artifacts that would have contributed to one’s physical appearance. This includes artifacts associated with clothing, shoes, and accessories. The assemblage also includes artifacts used to style hair, and objects used to produce, alter, or repair clothing. Counts of each artifact type were established to determine any overarching patterns within the dataset. Various material culture studies were also consulted to determine the function of a given artifact (Karklins 1985, Lindbergh 1999, Sprague 2002, White 2004, 2005, 2008, Beaudry 2006). In addition, decorative techniques, or lack thereof, on each artifact were noted. Buttons were examined for decoration because these appear in this sample in large amounts. Buttons were categorized as decorative if they had any carvings, gilding, inlays, molding, or if they would have been textile covered. Material types for each artifact were also noted to understand cost. When possible, objects were gendered using previous archaeological
research to determine who may have been using or wearing specific artifacts (Lindbergh 1999, White 2004, 2005, 2008, Beaudry 2006, Franklin 2020).

The beads and pins in this study were measured to determine their potential use. Bead diameter can be used as a possible indicator of function. Beads with a diameter of less than 6 mm are generally used for embroidery, while beads larger than 6 mm are often used for jewelry (Karklins 1985:115). However, it is important to note that beads smaller than 6 mm could also be used for jewelry (Karklins 1985:115). All beads could have been used for jewelry, but not all beads could have been used for embroidery (Karklins 1985:115).

Pin length was also measured to determine if they were used for sewing purposes, as clothing fasteners, or if they were part of an accessory (Beaudry 2006:24). Lills are approximately 12 mm, short whites are 24 to 30 mm, long whites are 3 to 7 cm, double long whites are 7.6 cm, wig pins are 19.05 cm, while lace, mourning, and shroud pins have variable lengths (Beaudry 2006:24). Lills, short whites, and long whites are commonly used for sewing purposes, and double long white pins were used to hold folds on blankets and household furnishings (Beaudry 2006:24-25). Lace pins were used to create intricate patterns in lace (Beaudry 2006:26-27). The remaining pin types, mourning and wig pins, are associated with one’s appearance. Mourning pins are blackened and worn on mourning garments, while wig pins were used to secure wig components in place (Beaudry 2006:25-27).

Aside from an artifact-based analysis, for further sociohistorical context, I relied on The Liberator (1831-1865), a Boston-based newspaper, edited by William Lloyd Garrison. The Liberator was accessed through digitalcommonwealth.org. The newspaper was released weekly and ran between 1831 and 1865. The Liberator was selected for
analysis for several reasons. Firstly, it was locally produced, and no newspapers produced by African Americans ran for significant lengths of time during the nineteenth century.

For example, the *Anti-Slavery Herald* and the *Self Elevator* were owned and edited by an African American man, Benjamin F. Roberts, but they were unsuccessful, perhaps in part because of *The Liberator* (Horton and Horton 1999:90). Secondly, Black Bostonians would have been reading this newspaper. Although William Lloyd Garrison was a controversial figure among Boston’s abolitionist community, he relied on Black Americans for the survival of his paper (Jacobs 1993:15). William Lloyd Garrison himself, argued that “three-quarters of the subscribers to his newspaper were black” (Jacobs 1993:15). Finally, *The Liberator* did in many ways serve the local Black community; it was anti-slavery, contained articles concerning race-based issues (often written by African Americans), published advertisements from local businesses owned by Black and white individuals, and announced social events (Horton and Horton 1999:89).

All published newspapers were analyzed for advertisements relating to personal adornment. This included advertisements relating to ready made and secondhand clothing, fabrics, clothing washing and ironing, sewing supplies, accessories (which included things like watches, handbags, jewelry, decorative combs, etc.), hair care, or grooming supplies (such as razors, combs, and brushes). “Wanted” advertisements relating to personal adornment were also included. These advertisements were transcribed, and the gender of the business owner and location of the business were noted. Each distinct advertisement and business were counted.

Taking the archaeological and archival evidence in tandem produces a more complete picture of the specific adornment strategies used at the African Meeting House. The archival source provides examples of what was available, in demand, and fashionable
at the time. The archaeological record demonstrates the reality of what the Black community living around and frequenting the African Meeting House consumed and wore in this space. To juxtapose the archaeological and archival evidence, each dataset was broken down into the following functional categories: accessories, clothing, clothing production and repair, hair styling and grooming, and shoes. The accessories category encompasses beads, buckles, a handbag fragment, jewelry, and a glove fastener. Beads were placed into the accessory category because all beads could have been used for jewelry (Karklins 1985:115). The clothing category includes the items that were attached to garments, like buttons, clothing fasteners, and textiles. The clothing production and repair category includes all sewing implements, including thimbles and pins. The hair styling and grooming grouping includes combs, brushes, and wig curler. Finally, the shoe category includes the shoe fragments.
CHAPTER 5
RESULTS

This sample includes sartorial artifacts recovered from nineteenth-century contexts associated with African American occupation (Table 2). There are a total of 197 personal adornment artifacts discussed in this analysis, most of which were recovered from the North Yard (Table 3). Personal adornment object counts differ from those presented by Beth Ann Bower (1990:12), Steven Pendery and Leslie Mead (1999:Appendix A), and David Landon (2007:54-61) because this research solely considers the nineteenth-century archaeological deposits associated with African Americans that are undisturbed by twentieth and twenty-first century activities, rather than the artifact assemblage as a whole. A majority of the artifacts (n=164) date to the first half of the nineteenth century, so this research focuses mainly on that time period. These artifacts were left behind by people occupying and visiting the African Meeting House, 44 Joy Street, the Abiel Smith School, and 2 Smith Court, and will be used to understand how race, gender, and class influence sartorial practices.
Table 2. Count of Sartorial Artifacts by Functional Grouping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accessories</strong> (n=23)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beads</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buckles</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handbag</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewelry</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring-Stud Glove Button</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clothing</strong> (n=84)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buttons</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>41.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hook-and-Eye Fasteners</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textiles</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clothing Production and Repair</strong> (n=27)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pins</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thimbles</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hair Styling and Grooming</strong> (n=8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brushes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combs</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wig Curlers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shoes</strong> (n=55)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoe Fragments</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>27.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>197</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

51
## Table 3. Distribution of Sartorial Artifacts by Excavation Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>North Yard</th>
<th>South Yard</th>
<th>East Alley</th>
<th>West Alley</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1855 and Prior</td>
<td>Post-1855</td>
<td>1855 and Prior</td>
<td>Post-1855</td>
<td>1855 and Prior</td>
<td>Post-1855</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessories</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>39</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing Production and Repair</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair Styling and Grooming</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoes</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Beads

Beads adorned a range of textiles, from clothing to purses, and were also frequently used for jewelry. This sample includes six glass beads (Figure 2). The beads were recovered from the North Yard, South Yard, and West Alley. Three beads were excavated from the North Yard. One blue, sub-spherical bead was located in a ground surface level that predates 1855. The other two beads from the North Yard date to after 1855. A blue, faceted bead was excavated from a yard surface that accumulated post-1855, and a faceted, black bead was found in the waste pit feature. The bead from the South Yard is black and sub-spherical and was found in the privy feature associated with the African American 44 Joy Street occupants. Finally, two beads were excavated in the West Alley, both of which predate 1855. The first is a black, tubular bead that was found in a trench associated with the William Henry House at 2 Smith Court, dating to approximately 1803 (Bower 1990:87). The second bead in the West Alley is black and disc shaped. It was found in a brick splash apron feature related to the 1854 structure built by Joseph Scarlett at 2 Smith Court (Bower 1990:86).

After measurements, three of the beads could have been used for embroidery, while the remaining three were potentially used for jewelry. The embroidery beads consist of one tubular, black bead, one faceted, blue bead, and one sub-spherical, black bead. The jewelry beads include one sub-spherical, blue bead, one disc-shaped, black bead, and one faceted, black bead. Beads are largely considered gendered artifacts and are
typically associated with women (Russell 1997:70, White 2005:81-83). They were worn strung together as jewelry items and embroidered into a range of textiles (White 2005:81).

Beads have been extensively studied in relation to African Americans (LaRoche 1994, Yentsch 1995, Stine et al. 1996, Russell 1997, Heath 1999, Lee 2011, Agbe-Davies 2017). Blue beads are often discussed as Africanisms or interpreted within the bounds of spirituality and rituals (LaRoche 1994, Yentsch 1995, Stine et al. 1996, Russell 1997). Rather than solely equating beads to African American ethnicity and culture, beads should also be understood in terms of their context- historically, spatially, and archaeologically to understand their meanings and uses (Agbe-Davies 2017). This research does not interpret beads as a marker of ethnicity, rather it considers sociohistorical context to draw conclusions.

**Brushes and Combs**

There are a total of seven hairbrush and comb fragments. There are two hairbrush fragments, neither of which still has bristles. The first brush fragment is composed of bone and was found in the West Alley, in the 1806 builder’s trench for the African Meeting House. The other brush fragment is wooden and came from the 44 Joy Street privy in the South Yard. The brush was recovered from the privy level dating to approximately 1800 to 1840 (Landon 2007:39). Brushes would have been a tool for detangling and styling hair.

There are five comb fragments, which likely represent three different combs. Two of the distinct combs are made from black vulcanized rubber, while the final comb is made from tortoiseshell. All comb fragments included in this research were excavated from the North Yard in levels deposited in the second half of the nineteenth century. The
first vulcanized rubber comb consists of a singular fragment. A majority of the outside edge is still intact, although one end is missing. Approximately three-fourths of its teeth are broken off. The second black vulcanized rubber comb has two fragments, is curved, and still has teeth. The third comb consists of two tortoiseshell fragments.

Combs can be categorized as a dressing comb or a decorative comb (White 2005:104). The former categorization refers to combs that serve functional purposes, like grooming or styling, while the latter classification encompasses combs that were worn as an accessory or used to hold hairstyles in place (White 2005:104). The tortoiseshell comb and the vulcanized rubber comb (Figure 3) composed of two fragments are curved, meaning these were likely decorative combs, as these combs were generally curved to fit the shape of the head (White 2005:107). Tortoiseshell combs were imported into the United States, and tortoiseshell was a common material for decorative combs (White 2005:108).

Decorative combs are gendered artifacts worn by women to style their hair and were considered highly fashionable items (White 2005:104). The remaining comb was likely a dressing comb, and would have been used for utilitarian purposes, like detangling hair or creating a hairstyle (White 2005:104). Dressing combs were used by men and women alike, as they were critical to general hair maintenance.

Figure 3. Tortoiseshell and Vulcanized Rubber Decorative Combs. Photograph by author, 2023.
Buckles

Buckles were used to fasten breeches, stocks (neckwear), hat bands, garters, girdles, and shoes. Buckles were worn by men, women, and children alike, but some types of buckles were specifically gendered (White 2005:32). For example, shoe buckles were worn by all genders, but women wore girdle buckles and men would have worn stock and knee buckles (White 2005:32). Towards the end of the eighteenth century, buckles fell out of fashion in favor of other clothing fasteners, including ribbons and buttons (White 2005:32), which explains the low number of buckles recovered at the African Meeting House. There were four buckle fragments recovered from the nineteenth-century deposits at the African Meeting House, which likely represent two distinct buckles.

All four of the buckle fragments came from the North Yard. The only possibly identifiable buckle was found in a terminal box for the drainage system in the North Yard, meaning that it likely dates to around the time the African Meeting House was built in 1806 (Bower 1990:70). This buckle is made from a copper alloy and still has a fragment of fabric attached. The buckle is approximately 26 mm in length, lacks a roll, and has two tongues attached to the pin. The small size of the buckle suggests that it could potentially be boot or garter buckle (White 2005:46). Boot and garter buckles were worn by men (White 2005:32). Three other buckle fragments were found in a yard surface deposited after 1855 (Bower 1990:71-72). The three fragments likely represent one distinct buckle. This buckle consists of two ferrous fragments and one fragmented pin with two tongues. The highly fragmented nature of this buckle makes its original purpose difficult to identify.
Buttons

Buttons are the largest category of personal adornment artifacts from the African Meeting House, and this tends to be the trend across archaeological sites (White 2008:20). Buttons are extremely common in the archaeological record, as they were both fashionable and used in large numbers. There were a total of eighty-one intact and fragmented buttons in the nineteenth-century contexts. Buttons served the functional purpose of fastening various garments, but they were also often used as an embellishment on clothing.

Most of the buttons in the African Meeting House collection were found in the North Yard (n=55). The buttons from the pre-1855 deposits were overwhelmingly found in features, but two buttons were found in a ground surface from the first half of the nineteenth century. These two buttons were a Prosser button and a copper alloy button.

In addition, several buttons were located in the 1855 midden levels. The bone buttons include a panty-waist button and two five-holed buttons. Three wooden buttons were recovered, two of which had one hole, while the third had five holes. A Prosser button and a four-holed, pewter button were also recovered. In addition, eight copper alloy buttons were found. Decorated buttons include one with a basket weave pattern, a gilt, copper button that has “TREBLE GILT STAND COLOUR” printed on its back, a gilt and textured copper button, and a gilt, copper button. Finally, a marbled, black inset likely from a composite button was also excavated.

Of the features, the African Meeting House privy had the highest number of buttons (n=6). The following buttons were excavated from the privy: one composite button made from glass and metal, with a green and red plaid pattern under the glass
(Figure 4), one bone button with one hole, one plain Prosser button, one pie crust Prosser button, a plain, copper alloy button, and a gilt, copper alloy button with knurling on its front. All other North Yard buttons that date to before 1855 were recovered from the various drainage features throughout the yard (n=14). One plain, copper alloy button was found in a terminal box. A gilt, copper alloy button was also found in a wooden drainage box. One Prosser button, one four-holed, wooden button, and one domed, copper alloy button with a knurling pattern were all excavated from a slate and terracotta drain. Five buttons were recovered from a wooden and slate drain, which consisted of: one four-holed, bone button, one five-holed, bone button, one four-holed, Prosser button, and two gilt, copper alloy buttons, one of which has “TREBLE GILT STAND - COLOUR” on its back. Finally, four Prosser buttons were recovered from a brick, slate, and wooden drain.

Several buttons also came from post-1855 yard contexts. The bone buttons from these contexts include two with one hole and one with four holes. One composite button (porcelain, with a missing copper shank) and one Prosser button were also found. The remaining buttons were made from metal. Several of the metal buttons had descriptive information on their back. These buttons consisted of two gilt, copper alloy buttons imprinted with “MANN/NE PLUS ULTRA,” a gilt, copper alloy that said, “SUPER FINE STRONG,” two gilt, copper button fragments imprinted with “TREBLE GOLD COLOR,” and lastly a gilt, copper button impressed with an image of an eagle holding olive branches and “MANN/ NE PLUS ULTRA.” The final two copper buttons
excavated from the post-1855 yard surface are also copper. One is domed and the other is gilt.

All five buttons in the South Yard came from the 44 Joy Street privy levels associated with the African American tenants in the building. Two five-holed, horn buttons, and one horn button with one hole were found in the privy. The remaining buttons found in the early privy levels included a fragmented, wooden button with ribbing around the edge and a naval button. The naval button is made from a copper alloy, and features an eagle perched atop an anchor, surrounded by a border of thirteen stars and a rope, and dates to 1812 (Landon 2007:69). Seven buttons were excavated from the West Alley, all of which date to before 1855. Three buttons were found in the 1803 trench associated with the William Henry house at 2 Smith Court. Two of the buttons found in the 1803 trench were copper alloy buttons, while the third button was bone and had a single hole. Four buttons were also found in the 1806 builder’s trench for the African Meeting House. Within the 1806 builder’s trench, there was a bone button with five holes, a fragmented, bone button with an indeterminate number of holes, and two copper alloy buttons.

There were fourteen button fragments recovered from the East Alley, which represent thirteen distinct buttons. All buttons from the East Alley in this analysis were found in historical alley surfaces that date to the first half of the nineteenth century. The plain buttons include one porcelain collar button, one Prosser button, one five-holed, bone button, two four-holed, bone buttons, and two copper alloy buttons. The decorated buttons include two one-holed, bone buttons, one carved and pierced bone button fragment with a scalloped edge (this button could have potentially once had a metal shank, although no evidence of that remains), two gilt, copper buttons, and two fragments
of a gilt, copper button with a raised outline of a circle at its center. The gilt, copper button with a raised circle has “FINE ORANGE” stamped on its back, while the two other gilt buttons have “PLATED” and “ROBINSONS JONES & CO/ BEST RICH” stamped on their backs.

Of the eighty-one buttons and button fragments in the African Meeting House collection, thirty-six button fragments were considered decorated. Buttons were categorized as decorated if they had any carving, gilding, inlays, molding, or if they were once textile covered (Table 4). The decorative buttons (n=36) include two carved, organic buttons, sixteen copper, gilded buttons, a composite button with a glass inlay, a glass inlay from a button, three molded, metal buttons, one pie crust Prosser button, four copper buttons with both molding and gilding, and lastly, eight one-holed, bone or wood buttons that would have served as button molds for textile covered buttons (White 2005:69).

Table 4. Count of Button Decoration Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decoration</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carved</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilded</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>44.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inlaid</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molded</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molded and Gilded</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textile Covered</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More than half the buttons are plain, suggesting those on Beacon Hill tended to wear plainer clothing. Gilded, or gold plated, buttons with no further decoration are approximately 44.44% of the decorated button assemblage. When combined with the molded and gilded category, gilding is found on approximately 55.55% of the decorated buttons. Gilt buttons were highly fashionable between the late eighteenth century and the
early nineteenth century, and tended to be worn by men during this time frame (White 2005:64-65). Textile covered buttons (n=8) are the second highest decorated button category. This category includes the one-holed button molds that would have been covered with textiles or thread. The one-holed button molds include six bone buttons, one horn button, and one wooden button. The textiles are no longer present because organic materials do not survive well in the archaeological record. Textile or thread covered buttons would have been among the most expensive buttons one could purchase (White 2008:28). In general, decorated, or fancy buttons would have been more costly than plain, undecorated buttons (White 2008).

To understand button cost and the possible gender of the wearer, buttons were categorized by material type (Table 5). Button prices depended on material and decoration and tended to vary greatly (White 2005:51-52). Metal buttons (n=39) are the largest button category, and these buttons tend to be more expensive (White 2005:52). Metal buttons began being mass produced in the United States during the nineteenth century (White 2005:51), and the high number of metal buttons in the archaeological record suggest they were readily available to Bostonians. Wood, horn, and bone buttons are considered inexpensive button materials (White 2005:69, 71). Ceramic, or Prosser buttons, began being produced in 1840 (Sprague 2002:111). The ceramic button category includes one collar button and twelve sew-through buttons. These buttons became widely available after that point and were inexpensive due to their mass production (Sprague 2002:124).
Determining the gender of the wearer from a button is difficult. By the nineteenth century, buttons were found on both women’s and men’s clothing (Lindbergh 1999, Franklin 2020). Generally, metal buttons are associated with men (White 2005:65), but they were used on women’s clothing (Ferris 1984:3, Franklin 2020:571). Prosser buttons and collar studs were worn by men and women alike during the nineteenth century (Lindbergh 1999:52, 56). Organic buttons also appeared on both women’s and men’s clothing in the nineteenth century (Ferris 1984, Venovcevs 2013, Franklin 2020).

Essentially, buttons of all materials were found on women’s and men’s clothing; even highly decorated buttons were found across women’s and men’s garments (Lindbergh 1999:54). However, higher numbers of buttons have been found on men’s clothing than on women’s clothing (Franklin 2020:571). Nineteenth-century men’s clothing tended to use buttons on the front of shirts, on collars, on sleeve cuffs, and to fasten trousers (Franklin 2020:569). Fewer buttons were required to fasten women’s dresses, skirts, and bodices (Franklin 2020:567).

Table 5. Count of Button Materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bone</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceramic</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horn</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>48.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fasteners

There are three miscellaneous fasteners within this data set, which are hook-and-eye closures and a spring-stud button. The hook-and-eye closure (Figure 5) was made from a copper alloy wire and could have been used on any garment that needed edge-to-edge fastening (White 2005:74). The hook-and-eye fastener was used on both women’s and men’s clothing, but was more commonly associated with women (White 2005:74). On women’s clothing, the hook-and-eye was commonly used to close garments like bodices and corsets, and on men’s clothing they were used on coats and waistcoats, particularly when garments had buttons with sham buttonholes (White 2005:74-75). The eye half of a hook-and-eye closure was found in the East Alley, in a level dating to approximately 1855 (Bower 1990:92). A hook fragment of the hook-and-eye fastener was recovered from the South Yard, in the 44 Joy Street privy.

The spring-stud button came from the North Yard and it is still attached to a piece of leather. It is imprinted with the words: “PAT. JUNE 11 1889.” Given that this level has been dated to 1855, this fastener is likely intrusive. The spring-stud fastener is therefore counted amongst the post-1855 artifacts in Table 3. This spring-stud button was initially invented expressly to be used on gloves (Blatchford 1898:635, ARaymond 2014). The spring-stud button replaced the traditional button and button-hole closure with a fastener that could be pressed together and pulled apart. Victorian women often wore long gloves.

Figure 5. Hook-and-Eye Fragment. Photograph by author, 2023.
(Mathews 2018); thus, this fastener made it significantly easier to put on and take off gloves (Fastener News Desk 2022).

**Jewelry**

This analysis encompasses ten jewelry or accessory fragments. Unlike most of the other artifact categories in this sample, jewelry generally does not serve any utilitarian purpose; rather, jewelry is often decorative. Chains, an earring, a ring, a paste gem, and one indeterminate, decorative fragment were found in the nineteenth-century contexts.

Five chain fragments were recovered at the African Meeting House, all of which were found in the North Yard. Three fragments were found in a brick and slate drain, dating to approximately 1806. These three chain fragments mend and are made from a copper alloy. The chain fragments appear to have been created from oval chain links that were bent into twisted “figure eight” shapes. The other two chain fragments mend and were deposited after the 1855 renovations at the African Meeting House. Like the chain found in the drain feature, these chain fragments also mend and are composed of a copper alloy, however the shape of the individual links is different. This chain is made from oval shaped links and can be classified as a trace chain (White 2005:122).

Chains were expensive, handmade objects that could have been used for necklaces, or to hang items from the waist, like chatelaines (White 2008:31, White 2005:129). Waist-hung appendages were accessories worn by women that signaled their economic status (White 2005:129). Items like scissors, watches, perfumes, keys, and needles could be hung from a woman’s waist from chains (White 2005:129). Waist-hung chains are difficult to discern from watch chains without evidence of the object that was once attached to a chain (White 2005:129). Watch chains were a men’s accessory, and
like chatelaines, watches were an indication of high status and refinement (White 2005:132-133). Given that the chains in this sample are fragmentary, it is impossible to state with certainty who may have used these chains.

The earring (Figure 6) and ring fragments were excavated from pre-1855 contexts. The ring appears to be a copper alloy. The front of the ring includes a dark circle, and it is flanked by a leaf on both sides. Rings were worn for a variety of reasons. Rings were worn by women and men alike, and could signify class, marriage, friendship, mourning, group affiliation, or simply be worn as a fashionable accessory (White 2005:93-96). Exactly who wore this ring is difficult to ascertain because the band is broken and slightly crushed, but its small size and delicate band suggests it was worn on a woman’s or possibly a child’s finger. There are two copper alloy earring fragments, which mend to form a hoop shape. Plain hoop earrings were fashionable among both women and men in the early nineteenth-century, but most earrings were worn by women (White 2005:89-90).

A single cowrie shell was recovered from the 1854 builder’s trench for the extant brick building at 2 Smith Court. Native to the Pacific and Indian Oceans, cowrie shells could have possibly arrived in the United States through the Transatlantic Slave Trade (Franklin 2004:130, 132). Boston was a major port for the Transatlantic Slave Trade until 1808, when the Act Prohibiting the Importation of Slaves came into effect. It is likely cowrie shells began arriving in the city at least in part due to chattel enslavement.
However, the bulk of cowrie shells made it to the United States because they were globally traded goods (Heath 2016). Cowrie shells were used for adornment (Ogundiran 2002:433, Thomas and Thomas 2004:111), but they served a range purposes. They were used for games, rituals, health, and as money (Franklin 2004:132, Ogundiran 2002, Heath 2016). The cowrie shell in this sample does not include any modifications or holes that necessarily suggest this shell was strung from a piece of jewelry or embroidered onto an accessory. However, the cowrie is included in this sample because of the possibility it was used as an object of personal adornment.

A singular paste gem was found in the East Alley, located in a provenience dating to approximately 1850. The gem is made from blue glass and has four holes where it would have been sewn or threaded onto a garment or piece of jewelry. Paste gems were frequently produced to mimic precious and semi-precious stones (White 2005:100). Paste gems could have been used in any number of jewelry items including but not limited to brooches, seals, rings, and earrings (White 2005, White 2008:31). Paste gems were worn by upper and lower classes alike because they were inexpensive (White 2005:100). The low cost of paste gems meant the wearer did not have to fear the possibility of replacing a lost or stolen faux stone (White 2005:100). Due to their versatility and widespread use across jewelry items, paste gems cannot be attributed to one gender (White 2008:31).

The final object included in this category was found in the North Yard, in a context deposited during the 1855 renovations to the church. The object in question is a rectangular, copper alloy fragment with a brown paste gem. The object is fragmented, so it is unclear what it was originally. However, it is highly decorative and could have potentially been part of a pendant or brooch.
Leather

There are a total of fifty-six leather fragments in this study. Due to the wide breadth of objects leather was used for, only fragments that could be definitively identified as personal adornment objects are included in this sample. Indeterminate leather fragments were not included.

Leather shoe fragments are the largest category of leather goods (n=55). In the North Yard, twenty-seven shoe fragments were found in an early nineteenth-century terminal box for a drainage system (Bower 1990:76). Two leather shoe fragments were also found in the remains of the African Meeting House privy. The privy has a terminus post quem of approximately 1835 to 1840 (Bower 1990:81). The remainder of the shoe fragments (n=26) were excavated from the 44 Joy Street privy. Twenty-three shoe sole fragments were found in the privy, along with three shoe welt fragments. Nearly all the shoe fragments recovered archaeologically are too fragmentary to draw substantial conclusions about the wearer’s gender, however two relatively intact shoe soles were recovered from privy levels associated with African American occupation at 44 Joy Street. The two nearly intact shoe soles are approximately 27 cm and 16 cm in length, respectively. The smaller shoe sole may have been for a child’s shoe, whereas the large sole may have been for a man’s shoe. The final leather artifact found in the privy is a handle, potentially from a purse or bag. The handle was folded over lengthwise and sewn together.

Pins

Pins served a variety of purposes in nineteenth-century society, from clothing fasteners to sewing implements. This sample includes a total of twenty pin fragments, all
of which are a copper alloy. Pins were recovered in the North Yard, East Alley, and West Alley.

Five pin fragments were found in the North Yard. Four pin fragments were found in midden levels, and one pin was located in a post-1855 waste pit. In the East Alley, two fragments that mend to form a complete pin were found in a circa 1855 alley surface, as was one intact pin. The highest number of pins were excavated from the West Alley. Unlike the North Yard and East Alley, all the pin fragments recovered from the West Alley were deposited prior to 1855. Four pin fragments, two of which mend, were found in an alley surface dating to approximately 1855. Additionally, three pin fragments and one whole pin were found in the African Meeting House building trench, and one pin fragment was found in the builder’s trench for the Scarlett House.

Measuring pin length can aid in determining the function of a particular pin, but this is only useful if the entire pin is present. The majority of the pins in this sample are too fragmented or incomplete to fully establish their intended function. Only three pins in this analysis are complete. The two whole pins found in the North Yard are approximately 26 mm and 27 mm, respectively. The intact pin in the West Alley is approximately 30 mm. Based on Mary Beaudry’s (2006:24-25) pin classification, all three of the whole pins fall into the “short whites” category, which are essentially common sewing pins.

Sewing and embroidery are generally acts associated with femininity and women, but sewing and pins can be indicative of men’s labor too (Beaudry 2006). Although several professional, male African American tailors including William Henry, Joseph J. Williams, Henry Weeden, and I. Barbadoes lived at the African Meeting House or within the immediate vicinity of the church (Bower 1990:48, 50, Landon 2007:57), it is possible
that in this instance, pins might not be indicative of their labor. Generally, professional tailors and seamstresses have enough skill and expertise that they have no need for pins, instead opting to use their hands to hold fabric in place (Beaudry 2006:39). In the context of this sample, the pins likely do not represent expert or professional labor, instead the pins may indicate the labor occurring at the household level.

Textiles

A single piece of fabric that may have been part of a garment was excavated from the African Meeting House. It was deposited after the 1855 renovations to the African Meeting House. There are other textile fragments within the nineteenth-century deposits, however there is no evidence to suggest that they were once part of an article of clothing. The fragment of fabric has evidence of an indeterminate ferrous fastener still attached. The fabric itself is woven.

Where this fragment of fabric was produced cannot be ascertained, but it was likely produced by enslaved labor. Enslavement in the north was dwindling by the nineteenth century, but profits made from enslaved labor were not (Farrow et al. 2005). The northern textile industry, which relied on cotton produced by enslaved labor in southern states, was rapidly growing (Farrow et al. 2005). By 1845, thirty-one textile mills in Massachusetts, Maine, and New Hampshire produced one-fifth of all textiles in the United States, and textile manufacturers refused to oppose enslavement because it could impact profits (Farrow et al. 2005:35-36). The textile fragment in this sample emphasizes the notion that African Americans in Boston were self-emancipated or freed, but they lived in a context where others were not. It also highlights how insidious enslavement was in the United States.
Thimbles

Thimbles are an indication of sewing activities. There are a total of seven thimble fragments in this data set, which constitute three distinct thimbles. Six thimble fragments were found in the circa 1855 midden level, which represent two different thimbles. The final thimble is intact and was deposited after 1855.

Thimbles, like pins, are generally objects associated with women and sewing (Beaudry 2006). All three of the thimbles are made from a copper alloy and have knurling. Thimbles made from copper alloy tended to be utilitarian and inexpensive (Beaudry 2006:105). No further decoration is present, nor are there any numbers on the thimbles that would indicate size (Beaudry 2006:106). There also does not appear to be any significant wear patterns on any of the thimbles, however surface oxidation may have obscured any wear that may have once been present. Although the standard industry size cannot be ascertained, the thimbles appear to have been for adult use.

Wig Curlers

The wig curler came from a midden deposit dating to the first half of the nineteenth century. Approximately half of the wig curler remains, and it is made of white ball clay. It would have been used by hairdressers to curl and style wigs. African American barbers and hairdressers including William Henry, Joseph Henry, Lewis Johnson, and Thomas Innis lived in and around the African Meeting House (Bower 1990:49, 51, Landon 2007:65). Previous investigations at the African Meeting house have attributed the wig curler to the labor of hairdressers in the area (Landon 2007:60). Wigs were worn by both women and men in gendered styles, and because they were expensive and difficult to maintain, they were often used as a symbol of high status during the
eighteenth century (White 2005:116-117). Wigs, however, were not just worn by the wealthy elite; rather they were worn by all classes, as well as by African Americans (White 2005:116). Wigs were also often necessary to achieve the elaborate hairstyles that were fashionable during the eighteenth century (White 2005:117). However, by the nineteenth century, wigs had fallen out of favor (White 2005:115). Older men who were more conservative, and those who worked in specific professions like law continued to wear wigs (Corson 1971:298).

**Gendering Artifacts**

As already established, women and men alike were possibly interacting with the artifacts discussed here. Therefore, artifacts were attributed to a gender if they were most likely used or worn by that group. However, some artifact classes were used by both genders, therefore those artifacts are counted under the “both” category in Table 6. Items that could be associated with either men or women but were too fragmentary to draw conclusions about were also placed in the “both” category. The “women” category includes beads, decorative combs, fasteners, earrings, the ring, pins, and thimbles. The “men” category includes the identifiable buckle, one shoe sole, and a wig curler. The “both” category includes the brushes, unidentifiable buckle fragments, buttons, the dressing comb, bag strap, chains, paste gem, cowrie, indeterminate shoe fragments, and the textile fragment. Table 6 shows that most (n=151) of the artifacts in this assemblage could have been used or worn by both men and women. Between the two genders discussed in this research, there are more artifacts generally associated with women than men. Although most of the artifacts could be associated with women and men alike, this
does mean that women were contributors to this assemblage, providing the space to
discuss their stories.

**Table 6. Count of Gendered Sartorial Artifacts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>21.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>76.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Liberator Advertisements**

There are a total of 1,828 individual printings of *The Liberator* (1831-1865), and
each issue of the paper was examined for articles relating to personal adornment and
appearance. Newspaper advertisements listed various items for sale like textiles, shoes,
clothing, accessories, and combs, as well as services like tailoring, hairdressing, and
shoemaking. Oftentimes, the same advertisement was run for many weeks, months, or
even years. Across the 1,828 newspapers, there were a total of 206 advertisements
relating to sartorial practices. Forty-seven of the personal adornment advertisements were
from people seeking jobs, or business owners searching for new people to hire. The
remaining 159 advertisements were from businesses or organizations promoting the
goods and services they offer. Of the 159 promotion advertisements, a total of sixty-seven
businesses and organizations were counted. Business ownership was not established for
the “wanted” advertisements because a majority of these did not include names of the
person or business that placed them.

To sort the archival data, advertisements were then grouped into broader personal
adornment categories. The advertisements were sorted into the same functional categories
as the artifacts, which are: accessories, clothing, clothing production and repair, hair styling and grooming, and shoes (Table 7). The “accessory” category includes a range of objects such as jewelry, watches, stocks, hats, gloves, suspenders, pocketbooks and bags, bonnets, boas, and wallets. These are items meant to accessorize clothing. The “clothing production and repair” category includes advertisements promoting the services of seamstresses and tailors, as well as textiles, buttons, needles, and thimbles. The “hair styling and grooming” grouping consists of businesses advertising haircutting services, razors, hair pins, hairdresser’s scissors, curling tongs, brushes, dressing combs, decorative combs, and hair products. If the purpose of a pair of scissors or shears was not explicitly stated in an advertisement, the context of the advertisement was considered. If scissors were discussed alongside goods largely relating to hair, like combs or razors, they were included in the “hair styling and grooming” category. The “clothing” category encompasses all advertisements selling premade and secondhand clothing. The “shoe” category includes all advertisements that mention shoes and boots, as well as shoe and boot repair and production. Forty-eight advertisements listed a range of goods or services; therefore, they were counted in all relevant categories (i.e. an advertisement promoting clothing repair services and ready made clothing was included in all relevant categories). A majority of the advertisements pertained to goods, rather than services or employment.
Table 7. Functional Categories by Advertisement Subject Matter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Goods</th>
<th>Services</th>
<th>Goods and Services</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accessories</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing Production and Repair</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair Styling and Grooming</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the advertisements are grouped in the same way the artifacts are, it becomes clear that the “clothing production and repair” category is the largest (n=77), followed by “hair styling and grooming” (n=68). This differs from the artifact assemblage, where “clothing production and repair” (n=27) and “hair styling and grooming” (n=8) are among the smaller categories. The difference in the case of the “clothing production and repair” category may in part be due to the delicacy or expense of sewing implements. Pins are small and fragile, meaning they either degrade in the archaeological record, or are difficult to recover due to their small size. In addition, artifacts like thimbles and needles may have been well cared for because of their cost, and therefore would not have been lost or discarded in high numbers (Beaudry 2006:44, 87). The “clothing production and repair” category had the highest number of employment-related advertisements. The “employment” category is a count of advertisements from individuals seeking employment, or businesses seeking employees. Seamstresses, tailors, and clothes cleaners
(dry cleaners) are considered skilled occupations (Horton and Horton 1999:139). When African Americans were able to attain skilled work, they were generally in positions that white people did not want to perform (Singleton 2002:196). Sewing-related work was an occupation often relegated to African Americans (Horton and Horton 1999:8, Singleton 2002:196). *The Liberator* was aimed at African Americans (Jacobs 1993:15), and if “clothing production and repair” occupations were skilled positions easiest to attain, that likely accounts for the number of employment advertisements in this category.

There is a major discrepancy between the hair-related artifacts (n=8) and the hair-related advertisements (n=67). This difference may in part be because combs and brushes were often made from organic materials (White 2005:108), which would not survive well in the ground. Even though there are few hair-related artifacts, the large number of “hair styling and grooming” advertisements suggests that hair care was an important part of one’s physical appearance and economic survival. As clothing-related occupations were relegated to African Americans, so too were hair-related positions (Singleton 2002:96). All but one of the seventeen “hair styling and grooming” advertisements in the “service” category, were placed by Black business owners offering haircutting or hairdressing services. The dominance of Black business owners offering hair services underscores the ways African Americans were relegated into specific forms of skilled labor.

The “shoes” and “clothing” categories also appear at different rates in the artifact and archival samples. Shoes are among the highest categories in the artifact assemblage but the lowest in the archival data. This is notable because organic artifacts like leather generally do not survive well in archaeological contexts. However, many of the shoe parts present in the artifact assemblage were found in a waterlogged privy, which preserved the shoe fragments. The plethora of leather shoe fragments (n=55) have been attributed to an
African American cordwainer, Cyrus Barrett, who resided at 44 Joy Street between the years 1828 and 1833 (Bower 1990:50, Landon 2007:64, 175). Shoe-related advertisements were few in *The Liberator* likely because shoemaking is a skilled trade (Horton and Horton 1999:139) that needed to be learned from an individual who had that skill set. Of the combined shoe-related advertisements from the “goods,” “services,” and combined “goods and services” categories (n=13), only six advertisements were placed by African Americans. The low number of advertisements placed by African Americans represented in the shoe category suggests that shoemaking was a difficult to attain skillset for this demographic.

The “clothing” category was the highest in the artifact assemblage (n=84), but among the lowest in the advertisement assemblage (n=39). Clothing artifacts are 43.15% of the artifact assemblage, and a majority of the “clothing” category is composed of buttons (n=81). Multiple buttons often appeared on clothing and are the most commonly found personal adornment object in the archaeological record (White 2008:20). The low number of advertisements in the “clothing” category (n=39), but the high number of advertisements in the “clothing maintenance and production” category (n=77) suggests the industry for clothing care and production was much larger.

To understand what goods and services were easily accessible to Black Bostonians, geographic information was assembled for the sixty-seven individual advertisers (Table 8). Again, “wanted” advertisements are not considered in this count. By far, a majority of the businesses that placed advertisements in *The Liberator* were based in Boston (n=49), likely because the newspaper was Boston based and produced. This means that a vast majority of the goods and services being advertised in *The Liberator* were geographically accessible to Black Bostonians. Considering African
Americans were a majority of The Liberator’s subscribers (Jacobs 1993:15), these businesses may well have been the shops they were frequenting.

**Table 8. Advertiser Locations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boston, MA</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>73.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowell, MA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn, MA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Bedford, MA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trenton, NJ</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worcester, MA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>67</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, the gender of the business owners in this sample was also examined (Table 9). Determining gender of the business owner speaks to the positions Black women were able to attain in society. Approximately 79.10% (n=53) of the business owners were men, whereas only 13.43% (n=9) of the business owners represented in The Liberator were women. The “unknown” category includes the advertisers where gender could not be determined. The clear difference between business ownership between men and women suggests that it was difficult and rare for women to be business owners. Given the widespread notions of the cult of true womanhood, which relegates women to the domestic sphere, this finding is unsurprising.
For women who owned businesses, gender was also categorized by race (Table 10). Only nine women are represented in *The Liberator* as business owners. When grouped by race, only two Black women placed personal adornment advertisements in *The Liberator*. These two women were Nancy Prince, who was a seamstress, and Christiana Carteaux Bannister, who was a hairdresser. Black women were wage laborers, but their occupations still generally kept them working within the domestic sphere (Yee 1992:52, Richardson 1993:198, Horton and Horton 1999:20, Battle-Baptiste 2011:128), often in informal and irregular occupations (Lee 2019). The small number of Black women who operated formal businesses were outliers, and they were not the norm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender and Race</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Woman</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Woman</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>55.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown Woman</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, the race of each business owner was determined using census records, marriage and death records, images, and secondary research (Table 11). If an individual could not be located or if their race could not be discerned beyond a reasonable doubt, they were listed in the “unknown” category. The same applies to advertisements where no
name was listed. White business owners make up approximately half of the sixty-seven businesses in this sample. It was difficult for Black Americans to gain skilled or entrepreneurial occupations, because white Americans worked to keep African Americans out of positions that might result in their social mobility (Horton and Horton 1999:8-9, Singleton 2002:196), and the advertisement data underscores this difficulty. Even in a newspaper with a majority African American customer base (Jacobs 1993:15), African Americans were still under-represented in business ownership and skilled labor.

Table 11. Race of Advertiser

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>52.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The “wanted” advertisements were considered separately and broken down by gender (Table 12). The advertisements related to employment were largely related to clothing and hair services (Table 7). Two categories were created. The “help wanted” category refers to businesses seeking employees, business partners, or apprentices. The “situation wanted” category refers to individuals who are seeking work or opportunities. If gender was not explicitly stated, pronouns or gendered words (i.e. “journeyman”) were used to determine the subject the advertisement was discussing. In addition, twenty-four of these advertisements reference race, but only eight advertisements reference race in regard to women. Two employers were seeking Black women, whereas six Black women were seeking employment. More men were the subject of these “wanted” advertisements than women. The data also shows that more businesses were seeking men to hire, but more women were placing advertisements requesting employment. This data underscores
the notion that Black women needed to work for survival, to either economically support themselves or their families (Horton and Horton 1999:20). It also lends itself to understanding the employment strategies of women. Where census records tend to render women’s occupational labor invisible (Lee 2019), *The Liberator* advertisements show that women were in fact working, they were likely working in informal, irregular capacities that therefore were not listed in census records (Figure 7).

*Table 12. Wanted Advertisements by Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help Wanted</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>80.77%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation Wanted</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>71.43%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19.23%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 7. Advertisement from Mary Waters Seeking Employment.*
*Figure is reproduced from The Liberator 1862:135.*

Finally, qualifying words were examined in *The Liberator* personal adornment-related advertisements (Table 13). Qualifying words were only included if they were used to describe personal adornment-related items. Reoccurring qualifying words were found
across fifty-five advertisements. *The Liberator* was directed at an African American audience, a community that was pressured to dress plainly and modestly (Horton 1986:58, White and White 1998:103, Mhoon 2004:26) to subvert controlling images, a point that will be expounded on in Chapter 7. Despite the societal pressure for modesty and simplicity, terms like “fashionable” and “fancy” appear at a higher frequency than words like “plain.” “Fancy” and “fashionable” were both terms used to describe goods like hats, furs, combs, clothing, accessories, shoes, and hair. These two terms may have been interchangeable. More fancy or fashionable items were being advertised towards African Americans than plain items were, yet undecorated clothing items (n=52) dominated the “clothing” artifacts. The plainer items may dominate the artifact assemblage because nicer items were likely carefully curated, and not discarded unless necessary. Community pressures to dress plainly may also account for the low number of decorative artifacts found in the African Meeting House collection.

*Table 13. Sartorial Advertisements with Qualifying Words*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fancy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion/Fashionable</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>37.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fancy and Fashion/Fashionable</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plain</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modest</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 6
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

To contextualize the sartorial objects discussed in this research, three archaeological sites were selected to compare against the African Meeting House. The Abiel Smith School, the Nantucket African Meeting House, and the Boston-Higginbotham House were analyzed for sartorial artifacts. Conclusions presented here are drawn from available catalog data, archaeological reports, and associated site research. These sites are contemporaneous, nineteenth-century, free African American sites located in Massachusetts. The African Meeting House collection encompasses educational, communal, and domestic activities. Therefore, the three comparative sites encompass the range of activities taking place at the African Meeting House. This chapter presents data from each site individually, followed by a comparison.

Abiel Smith School

The Abiel Smith School operated as a school for Black children between 1835 and 1855, at which point it became an integrated school until 1881 (Grover and da Silva 2002:82). Geographically, the school is located directly next to the African Meeting House, and the occupation of the schoolhouse by African Americans overlaps with the time frame of the African Meeting House collection. Like the African Meeting House, the
Abiel Smith School was also intended to serve the free Black community residing on Beacon Hill. In addition, just as the African Meeting House was more than solely a church, the Abiel Smith School functioned as more than a school (Jordan 2021). The Abiel Smith School provided Beacon Hill’s Black community with an education, a space for community gatherings, and healthcare (Jordan 2021).

Nineteenth-century contexts from the easement and contexts from the backlot of the schoolhouse were used in this comparative dataset. Archaeological contexts identified by Steven R. Pendery and Leslie A. Mead (1999) and Dania Jordan (2021) associated with the Abiel Smith School operations were analyzed. The artifacts were recovered from an extensive privy and drainage system, as well as various fills. All cataloged artifacts related to sartorial practices were included in this assemblage (Table 14). As with the African Meeting House collection, indeterminate textile and leather fragments that could not definitively be associated with a shoe, garment, or accessory were excluded. A total of 314 artifacts related to personal adornment were identified.

**Table 14. Sartorial Artifacts from the Abiel Smith School**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beads</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>30.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buckles</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buttons</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>25.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye Glasses</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fasteners</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair Pin</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewelry</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight Pins</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>31.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thread Spools</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watches</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>314</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nantucket African Meeting House

The Nantucket African Meeting House was used by the local free Black community on the island of Nantucket from sometime in the 1820s through 1911 (Beaudry and Berkland 2007:400). Like the African Meeting House in Boston, the building functioned as a church, community gathering space, and as a school for Black children (Berkland 1982, Beaudry and Berkland 2007). The Boston African Meeting House and the Nantucket African Meeting House were in use for approximately the same time period, and they served nearly identical purposes for free African American communities.

Archaeological investigations at the site were carried out in 1993 and 1996 (Berkland 1982, Beaudry and Berkland 2007). Excavation units were placed in the yard spaces surrounding the building, directly against the structure, and inside the building itself (Berkland 1982, Beaudry and Berkland 2007). To compare the Nantucket African Meeting House collection to the Boston African Meeting House assemblage, personal adornment and sewing artifacts were counted from the archaeological proveniences associated with the church. Ellen Berkland (1982:17) states that archaeological levels in “Horizon 2” are associated with African American use of the building, and these are the ones examined for this analysis. Personal adornment-related artifacts from inside the building were included in the sample if they were recovered from contexts without modern debris. Only twenty-seven personal adornment-related objects were recovered from the Nantucket African Meeting House (Table 15), likely because no dense artifact deposits like a privy or midden have been located to date. In addition, the yard of the Nantucket African Meeting House was swept, which would have kept debris from accumulating (Beaudry and Berkland 2007:405).
Table 15. Sartorial Artifacts from the Nantucket African Meeting House

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artifact</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belt</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buttons</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fasteners</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grommet</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair Pin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money Clip</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needle Case</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pendant/Medal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pin (Lapel)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight Pins</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thimble</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch Fob</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Boston-Higginbotham House

Located next door to the Nantucket African Meeting House, the Boston-Higginbotham House was occupied by Native and Black Americans for more than a century. This site was selected for analysis to serve as a domestic comparison to the Boston African Meeting House collection. Seneca Boston, a freed African American, purchased the property in 1774 and built a house on it (Bulger 2013:10). He married Thankful Micah, a Wampanoag woman, and the pair had six children (Bulger 2013:10). In 1802, the home was passed to Freeborn Boston, their son (Bulger 2013:10). Seneca and Freeborn Boston died in 1809, and the property passed to Freeborn Boston’s wife, Mary Boston, and their three children (Bulger 2013:10). Mary Boston worked as a domestic, but she also took in boarders during her tenure as matriarch of the home (Lee 2019). The house passed between women in the Boston family until 1915 (Bulger 2013:13). The assemblage associated with Mary Boston is the one that will be analyzed.
here. Proveniences associated with Mary Boston were selected because her tenure on the property coincided with the highest number of sartorial artifacts. Selecting one household also provides more historical specificity. She resided in the house from 1804 to 1834 (Bulger 2013:111), a time frame which coincides with both the Nantucket and Boston African Meeting Houses.

The Boston-Higginbotham House was excavated by the University of Massachusetts Boston in 2008 and 2014 (Lee and Landon 2017). The stratigraphy has been dated and grouped into “lots,” or related stratigraphic levels and features (Lee and Landon 2017). Lots O and P have been associated with Mary Boston’s occupation of the site (Herzing 2022), and are part of a privy fill located during excavations in 2014 (Lee and Landon 2017). The personal adornment items in these two lots are the ones considered here (Table 16). One artifact, a plastic umbrella tip, is excluded because it is likely intrusive (Herzing 2022:71). Four objects described as either hoops or rings in the catalog are also excluded. Current catalog data notes these objects as “small finds,” so it is unclear if these objects are jewelry, washers, or any other circular object.

Table 16. Sartorial Artifacts from the Boston-Higginbotham House

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sartorial Artifacts from the Boston-Higginbotham House</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Artifact</strong></td>
<td><strong>n</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beads</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buttons</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fasteners</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Site Comparison

To understand the Boston African Meeting House (AMH), Abiel Smith School (ABS), Nantucket African Meeting House (NAMH), and the Boston-Higginbotham House (BHH), artifacts were grouped into functional categories (Table 17). The artifact groupings highlight major similarities and differences across the four sites. These similarities and differences will be discussed in this section in the order they appear in the chart.

**Table 17. Comparison of Functional Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>AMH</th>
<th>NAMH</th>
<th>ABS</th>
<th>BHH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessories</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11.68%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>42.64%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>44.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing Production and Repair</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13.71%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair Styling and Grooming</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.06%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoes</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>27.92%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Accessories**

The “accessories” category is comprised of beads, belts, jewelry, eye glasses, watch fragments, a money clip, a pendant, and a pin. The accessories appear at each site, but they appear at higher percentages at the community sites. The highest number of accessories is at the Abiel Smith School. The difference between the Abiel Smith School
and the meeting houses may be due to the nature of the sites. Churches tend to be places where people dress modestly and adhere to more conservative moral codes, and the lower number of accessories in comparison to the Abiel Smith School could suggest that at the two meeting houses, African Americans were dressing plainly, with fewer accessories. The Abiel Smith School however, at its core is a school. Archaeological analysis on bottle glass at the Abiel Smith School has argued that the higher frequency of alcoholic beverage bottles at the schoolhouse than the African Meeting House suggests the Abiel Smith School was more relaxed in terms of etiquette (Jordan 2021:63, 81). It may have been a place where community members felt they had more space for self-expression. The higher number of accessories in the three community spaces in comparison to the domestic site suggests African Americans in Boston and in Nantucket were expressing their sense of individuality through physical appearance. Accessories appear in all the community sites, suggesting a trend toward self-expression in these spaces.

The Boston-Higginbotham House sample has few (n=3) accessories. The domestic nature of this site might offer some explanation. A home is a private space, where Mary Boston, her children, and her boarders might not have been utilizing particularly decorative dress items. The home was likely where these individuals dressed in a more casual, or utilitarian manner, rather than wearing expensive or restrictive items. The lack of decorative items might also be reflective of Mary Boston’s occupation as a domestic. Manual labor in general warrants dressing in a utilitarian way, rather than in garments that are restrictive or that would make it difficult to work. Mary Boston was likely dressing for her occupation as a domestic, however if she was working for white families, her artifact assemblage points to a deeper meaning. As a Black woman working as a domestic, sexual violence from white people was a constant threat (Flewellen 2022:221).
A generally unassuming and unadorned wardrobe may have been a way for Mary Boston to signal ideas of modesty and protect herself against white violence. Class is likely not the defining factor for this assemblage, as archaeological studies have established the Boston household as a middle-class one (Bulger 2013, Cacchione 2019, Lee 2019, Herzing 2022). Fancy or fashionable clothing might have been carefully curated and reserved for special, public, occasions.

**Clothing**

The “clothing” category amongst these sites is among the highest for each of them. Buttons and fasteners are small items that appear on men’s, women’s, and children’s clothing, and they are easily lost. At the Boston African Meeting House, Nantucket African Meeting House, and Abiel Smith School, the percentage of clothing artifacts is relatively similar. As spaces that served their communities in nearly identical ways, this is expected. The clothing artifacts are the result of people attending worship services, celebrations, and community meetings and events. The clothing category is also the highest for the Boston-Higginbotham House, but at approximately 94.94%, this category is almost the entire assemblage. Some of these objects can be attributed to the boarders residing at the property, but this high percentage most likely also represents Mary Boston’s labor. One of the many tasks women frequently performed for boarders was laundry services (Horton and Horton 1999:20). The high percentage of buttons could suggest she was carrying out gendered domestic duties, like washing clothing.

**Clothing Production and Repair**

The “clothing production and repair” category experiences variability throughout the sites. The objects in this category include straight pins, a pin case fragment, thread
spools, and a thimble. The Boston African Meeting House collection includes public and domestic spaces; therefore, the expectation is that each site would experience similarities in this category. This is not the case. The Boston and Nantucket African Meeting Houses experience the most similar percentages in this category. An artifact of note from the Nantucket African Meeting House among the sewing implements is a pin case fragment, an artifact associated with women. Pin cases could be costly, and were suspended from chatelaines, and hung from a woman’s waist (Beaudry 2006:71, 79). These cases were a status symbol, but they were also an object of convenience (Beaudry 2006:71). As women often brought their sewing work with them to church services, the Black woman using this pin case was highlighting her middle-class status by exhibiting this object, while performing the gendered activity of needlework. The Boston African Meeting House has a higher count in this category than the Nantucket African Meeting House likely because of the duality of the collection. The higher count underscores the public and private; Black women were performing needlework at church services, community groups, and within their homes on Beacon Hill.

Of all the collections examined here, the Abiel Smith School has the highest count for sewing implements. Abiel Smith School students received an education in reading, writing, grammar, geography, and arithmetic (Yocum 1998:15-17), along with an education in religion, morality, and piety (Paul 2000). Given the high number of pins (n=99) along with the thread spool fragments (n=3), young girls may have also been learning needlework. Needlework could have been taught alongside religion, as sewing is often used to instill Christian values within women and girls (Beaudry 2007:113). Consistently keeping one’s hands busy prevented idleness, and by extension inappropriate behavior (Beaudry 2007:113). Ideas of purity and piety were central to ideas of Black
womanhood (Yee 1992:45), and the high number of pins at the Abiel Smith School indicates that these notions were taught through formal schooling. From adolescence, young Black girls were being taught these values of Black womanhood that ultimately sought to overcome stereotypical, controlling images.

The Boston-Higginbotham House sartorial assemblage has zero items related to clothing repair and production. This again, is unexpected. Pins are small, delicate artifacts that can easily fall through a screen during excavations. They may have also decayed in the ground, so the lack of these materials can potentially be partially explained by the nature of archaeological work. But, considering sewing implements were found in all other assemblages in this comparison, along with the fact that as a home headed by a woman, who lives with two daughters, the expectation is that there would be pins or thimbles recovered archaeologically. The lack of sewing implements could mean that Mary Boston was not doing significant amounts sewing or mending for her household.

Mary Boston’s ceramic assemblage has shown a lack of utilitarian vessels for food preparation (Lee 2019:95). Given that Mary Boston worked two jobs, one as a domestic and one operating a boarding house, she simply did not have the time for time consuming food preparation, so she likely relied on consumer goods as the subsistence strategy for her household (Lee 2019:95). Needlework, like food preparation, is time consuming. If Mary Boston was turning to consumer marketplaces for subsistence, she may have also turned to outside businesses for any of the needlework she needed.

**Hair Styling and Grooming**

For each of the assemblages discussed here, the “hair styling and grooming” category is the smallest. The objects in this grouping include hair pins and combs. In the
case of these three public sites, the Boston African Meeting House had four decorative
hair comb fragments, the Nantucket African Meeting House had one hair pin, and the
Abiel Smith School had two hair pins. These would have all been hair styling
implements, not ones meant for grooming and hygiene. These are artifacts specifically
associated with women, in this case, the Black women frequenting these sites. Hair, like
every other aspect of Black Americans’ bodies, was highly racialized (White and White
established the light skin and fine, straight hair of white women as the feminine standard
of beauty, making it impossible for African American women with dark skin and curly
hair to achieve beauty ideals (Rooks 1996:25-26, Hill Collins 2000:89, Byrd and Tharps
2001:14). Black women often opted to cover their hair while they labored, which
protected hairstyles and saved time on maintenance (Byrd and Tharps 2001:23). Yet, hair
has also always been a point of pride and an avenue for self-expression amongst African
Americans (White and White 1995:45, 48). Public gatherings and church services
provided an opportunity to adorn themselves fashionably among their peers.

**Shoes**

The comparative data suggests that in terms of shoes, the African Meeting House
assemblage is an anomaly. There is a major difference between the shoe counts in the
comparative collections, in comparison to the Boston African Meeting House. Shoes,
objects worn by men, women, and children alike, are not typically artifacts that survive
well in the archaeological record, as organic materials tend to decay in the ground. The
Boston African Meeting House, however, presents an exception. The African Meeting
House collection encompasses the 44 Joy Street privy, where Cyrus Barrett, a cordwainer,
may have been disposing of the off casts of his trade (Bower 1990:50, Landon 2007:64, 175). Cyrus Barrett was one of many contributors to this privy, and the shoe fragments likely came from multiple people. The conditions of the privy preserved these organic materials. The high amount of discarded shoe leather has been used to suggest Cyrus Barrett operated a successful business (Landon 2007:176), and the high number of shoe fragments may also speak to the general class of the Beacon Hill neighborhood. If the African Americans in the area were able to discard such materials in high numbers, this underscores the fact this was a middle-class community. The low number of shoe fragments found at the Abiel Smith School and Nantucket African Meeting House is likely because these are public spaces. Shoes were probably only discarded or left behind if necessary, in the context of a public place like a school or church. In the case of the Nantucket African Meeting House, a baby shoe and another shoe fragment were found inside the building, under the floorboards. A small child may have lost a shoe, and it was unable to be recovered by a parent.
CHAPTER 7
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The nineteenth-century deposits at the African Meeting House are a result of church services, community events, labor, and household activities. It is often difficult to gender many objects of personal adornment with absolute certainty, and this is compounded by the urban nature of the assemblage. However, the multiplicity of this assemblage makes it possible to examine the lives of Black women. Given that the African Meeting House archaeological collection encompasses community, domestic, and educational contexts, the roles and lives of Black women are considered here in multiple settings. Where historical documentation has rendered Black women unnamed and under-represented (Sesma 2016, Lee 2019) archaeology provides the opportunity to explore their stories. The personal adornment artifacts recovered from the African Meeting House can provide insight into the ways race, gender, and class impacted the everyday lives of the Black women occupying Beacon Hill. Using items of personal adornment and advertisements from *The Liberator*, this research foregrounds Black women’s economic labor, household contributions, and participation in community and personal politics.

**Sartorial Practices and Labor**

To maintain a family and household, Black women worked for their survival (Horton and Horton 1999:20, Battle-Baptiste 2011:128, Lee 2019). However, previous
archival research suggests the Black women in and around the African Meeting House were not taking part in formal wage labor (Bower 1990:48-52). Eight women were identified as residing at the African Meeting House and surrounding properties which include 44 Joy Street, 46 Joy Street, and 2 Smith Court (Bower 1990:48-52). A Mrs. Smith resided at the African Meeting House in 1851 (Bower 1990:48). Elinor Augustus (1826-1835), Jane Jefferson (1825-1833), and Ann Colburn (1820) resided at 44 Joy Street, and Jane Kemp (1839), Louisa Loring (1818), Susannah Prior (1823-1846), and Mrs. Standing (1856) resided at 2 Smith Court (Bower 1990:49-52). There was either no occupation listed for these women, or their occupation was listed as “widow” (Bower 1990:48-52). Yet, as discussed in Chapter 5, women placed the majority of the studied advertisements in The Liberator seeking employment. Although historical documentation makes little reference to Black women’s economic labor, I argue that the sartorial artifacts found in the African Meeting House collection shed light on Black women’s economic contributions to their households.

Undeniably, the work available to Black women was severely limited (Horton and Horton 1999:19-20, Lee 2019). Widespread misogynoir generally kept Black women laboring in subservient positions, such as household domestics for white people, where they often faced physical and sexual violence at the hands of the families they labored for (Hill Collins 2000:54). Therefore, Black women may have opted to labor from their homes, carrying out unrecognized and informal labor. Sewing and washing was common, informal labor that Black women took on to survive (Horton 1986:60, Battle-Baptiste:128, Lee 2019:98). The pins and thimbles may be the result of clothing production and repair, whereas the buttons may be indicative of taking in laundry. With no protection from white violence, working as a seamstress or laundress from their own
home may have been a way to guarantee their safety. Considering Black women would never achieve true womanhood in the eyes of white people, the types of paid labor they performed could have been an active construction of Black womanhood. If Black women needed to labor to survive, carrying out work typically associated with femininity may have been a way for Black women to forge their own ideas about womanhood.

In addition to sewing and laundry services, operating a boarding house is also an example of Black women’s informal labor that is rendered invisible by historical documentation (Lee 2019). The West Alley was historically a space between the African Meeting House and 2 Smith Court. William Henry, his family, and various borders resided on the property in tenements between the years 1804 and 1852 (Gover and da Silva 2002:72-73). Historic and archaeological research has shown that Black women were often heavily involved in the operation of boarding houses (Horton and Horton 1999:20, Lee 2019), and the plethora of clothing artifacts recovered archaeologically speak to their labor. Susannah Henry (later Susannah Prior), William Henry’s wife, continued to operate her home as a boarding house after her husband’s death (Grover and da Silva 2002:73). During the day, husbands would operate boarding houses, but in the evening, women would cook, clean, and wash clothing for their boarders, as these were traditionally feminine tasks (Horton and Horton 1999:20). Caring for boarders is common, informal labor for Black women (Lee 2019), and the plethora of buttons recovered archaeologically may in part be due this labor. Where historical documentation does not list an occupation for Susannah Henry, the buttons found in archaeological contexts associated with her time at the property could be indicative of her labor.

Many of women’s options for income centered around domestic activities, but Black women labored outside of the domestic sphere as well. Teaching was an option for
educated Black women (Carlson 1992:62, Yee 1992:64). Unlike broader societal gender norms, for African Americans education and intelligence were not seen to counter femininity (Carlson 1992:69). Schoolteacher was an acceptable and feminine occupation for Black women (Carlson 1992:62). To the east of the African Meeting House, stood the Abiel Smith School. Excavations at the African Meeting House included the East Alley, the space between the Abiel Smith School and the church. Twenty-one personal adornment artifacts were found in the East Alley, potentially because of educational activities. The entrance to the schoolroom at the African Meeting House was on the eastern side of the building (Bower 1990:92). The East Alley would have also been used by those going to and from the Abiel Smith School (Landon 2007:14).

The personal adornment artifacts recovered from the East Alley included pins, buttons, fasteners, and jewelry fragments. Nineteen of the artifacts were found in a level with a mean ceramic vessel date of 1808, and a terminus post quem of 1860 (Bower 1990:92). The other two artifacts were found in contexts that predate 1855 (Bower 1990:93, 96). These dress artifacts could be associated with school activities. A few Black women, including teachers like Miss Woodson and Susan Paul, and Chloe A. Lee, an assistant to the headmaster, are associated with the Abiel Smith School (Levesque 1979:123, Hill 1993:37, Paul 2000). Shirley J. Carlson (1992:65) states Black teachers were

expected to combine intellect and high morality with a pleasing personality, physical grace, and perhaps beauty to represent an ideal of black womanhood… she was an economically independent woman praised first and foremost for her intellectual attainment and assistance to the race. Thus, the teacher not only
assisted in educating the young, the role emphasized by the larger culture, but she was also essential to the “up lift” of the entire black community.

In addition, teachers were expected to be modest and moral (Carlson 1992:66). Black teachers were plagued by misogynoir as they lived their lives. Historical accounts detail Black women being publicly shamed for visiting the homes of Black men, dressing up, and staying out late (Carlson 1992:66). A heavy burden was placed on Black, female teachers to essentially be the ideal Black woman (Carlson 1992:65-66).

Of the fourteen buttons found in the East Alley, seven fragments, comprising six complete buttons, were decorated. Considering the pressure placed on Black teachers because of their racial identity, the mostly plain buttons suggest a slight trend towards plain, less decorative dress practices. By dressing without the boldness common during the Victorian era, Black schoolteachers may have been attempting to avoid the wrath of their community. However, along with the decorated and undecorated buttons, two earring fragments and a ring were also found in the East Alley. If the ideal Black woman is to be beautiful and sophisticated (Carlson 1992:65), these decorative items may have been an expression of that idea. In addition, if Black teachers were meant to be “economically independent” (Carlson 1992:65), decorated buttons and accessories may highlight that independence and the middle-class status of these women. Choosing to spend income on nicer personal adornment items may have also been a subtle way for women to express their own individuality and style in a setting where they were generally expected to dress modestly.
As highlighted by *The Liberator* analysis in Chapter 5, Black women had even fewer economic opportunities than their male counterparts, particularly outside the domestic sphere. Yet, Black women were entrepreneurial. Women placed most of the advertisements seeking work. Two formal business owners in the advertisement sample were Black women: Nancy Prince, a seamstress (Figure 8), and Christiana Carteaux Bannister, a hairdresser (Figure 9).

Operating a business outside the home was uncommon for Black women, as African Americans were generally relegated to low paying, unskilled work (Horton and Horton 1999:8, Singleton 2002:196, Lee 2019:98). Writing for Black women, Maria Stewart (1879:32) states

Unite and build a store of your own… Fill one side with dry goods, and other with groceries. We have never had an opportunity of displaying our talents; therefore the world thinks we know nothing… Possess the spirit of independence… Possess the spirit of men, bold and enterprising, fearless and undaunted.

In this quote, she is calling for Black women to better their socioeconomic position, by being independent and entrepreneurial. Using their knowledge of clothing and beauty,
Nancy Prince and Christiana Carteaux Bannister are examples of Black women doing just that. In an era where white femininity was the standard of beauty (Rooks 1996:25-26, Hill Collins 2000:89, Byrd and Tharps 2001:14), advertisements placed by Madam Bannister suggest that she is making a conscious effort to celebrate the beauty of Black women. Where other advertisements in the nineteenth century market products for hair straightening towards Black women (Rooks 1996:26-27), Madam Bannister sells products meant for scalp health and growth. Her products aid natural hair, giving a radical suggestion for the nineteenth century that Black women have beauty.

However, it is not just Black women with formal businesses who were entrepreneurial. The unnamed women in The Liberator seeking employment may not have had a storefront, but they were using their skills to sustain themselves and their families. The pins, thimbles, buttons, and clothing fasteners in the archaeological record could be the materials left behind by Black women surviving off their gendered skill sets. These Black women, and the Black women like them, were striving for economic equality. Prevailing nineteenth-century ideology placed women in the domestic sphere or in positions subservient to men (Welter 1966), but Black women were challenging and resisting patriarchal and racial notions of what Black women should be in nineteenth-century Boston.

**Sartorial Practices and Homemaking**

Within their homes, Black women were primary caregivers, homemakers, and educators. Black women lived with their families in the African Meeting House, 44 Joy Street, and 2 Smith Court (Bower 1990:53-54, 56). Some of these women were undoubtedly carrying out informal labor, but working within the domestic sphere allowed
Black women to “[balance] their childcare and household responsibilities” (Lee 2019:98) against their economic survival. Black women who made the choice to remain in the home were not doing so “to mimic middle-class White women’s domesticity but, rather, to strengthen the political and economic position of their families” (Hill Collins 2000:54). By removing themselves from the formal labor force, Black women were able “to return the value of their labor to their families” (Hill Collins 2000:54). Black women who remained in their homes with their children were resisting the idea that their only role in society was as exploited labor for white people (Dill 1988:422). Black women were denied traditional feminine roles due to their socioeconomic position, so defining themselves as wives and mothers was inherently a form of resistance (Hill Collins 2000:54-55).

The presence of pins and thimbles in the archaeological record may be evidence of both fulfilled gendered expectations, and the cultural reproduction of gendered behaviors. Sewing and embroidery work were tasks that fell well within the realm of feminine household labor, and these unpaid, domestic tasks were likely being carried out by women within their homes. The pins, thimbles, and various fasteners recovered archaeologically suggest these women were returning their labor to their domestic spheres by repairing, washing, or sewing garments for their families. In addition to carrying out domestic chores, Black mothers were responsible for teaching daughters the domestic skills they will one day need for their own households (Horton 1986:57). The pins and thimbles could represent the actions Black mothers residing in the African Meeting House, at 2 Smith Court, and at 44 Joy Street took to educate their daughters. From a young age, girls were taught to sew. In doing so, they would have been instilled with the value that this task was closely associated with domesticity, piety, and womanhood.
(Beaudry 2007:113). Further, teaching a child sewing meant they could use that skill to provide for themselves and family in the future. If children knew how to sew, they could potentially participate in their household economy, perhaps by helping their mother mend or produce clothing. There could have been a very real need for children to earn money, considering the limited and often seasonal work available to fathers (Horton 1986:60, Singleton 2002:196).

As the people who likely had control over much of their family’s sartorial practices, middle-class, Black women may have had the choice and control over the types of clothing and fabrics they were consuming. Only a single clothing fragment is present in this sample, but it foregrounds the impact the institution of enslavement continued to have on Black women. To boycott goods made from enslaved labor, shop owners would sell “free labor” goods. Out of the 206 personal adornment-related advertisements in The Liberator, only nine individual advertisements refer to consumer goods produced by free labor. These nine advertisements are from seven distinct business owners selling free labor materials. However, none of these businesses are based in Boston. Instead, they are based in New York, Philadelphia, and Lynn, Massachusetts. Regardless, the presence of the free labor advertisements suggests that people, like Black women, were conscious of their consumption. Frances Ellen Watkins, a Black woman poet, is known to have stated that she was willing to “pay a little more for a ‘Free Labor’ dress, [even] if it was coarser” (Quarles 1969:75). Although it is unclear how available free labor textiles were in Boston, consumption of ethical goods is a place where race and gender intersect for Black women. Black women would have been supporting abolitionist causes, while carrying out their quotidian domestic duties of repairing, caring for, or even making their family’s clothing.
The archaeological record foregrounds women’s domestic labor surrounding personal adornment, and it also provides insight into the care and maintenance Black Americans were putting into their physical appearance (Flewellen 2018, 2022). The hair-related artifact assemblage is small, but these items are still present. These artifacts may represent the more private and domestic aspects of the African Meeting House collection, and speak to everyday, mundane activities. The brush and dressing comb fragments are utilitarian objects that represent the care members of the Beacon Hill community put into maintaining themselves and their physical health. For African Americans, communal and familial hair care was a common practice that continued into the twentieth century (White and White 1998:39, Flewellen 2018:169-170). As ideas of Black womanhood expected Black women to be educated, and then educate their children on domesticity, work, and life (Horton 1986:57), the communal activity of hair care provided time for mothers to teach their children (Flewellen 2018:169-170). Communal grooming created “a space where knowledge was internalized and shared as processes of social reproduction unfolded” (Flewellen 2018:170). By setting time aside within the home to educate their children, Black mothers were fulfilling notions of Black womanhood that tied gender to community advancement.

The sheer amount of labor Black women do is often overlooked (Hill Collins 2000:46), and the household labor they did concerning sartorial practices for their husbands, friends, and family may have been largely taken for granted, because it was expected of them by the gender ideology put forth by their community. At home, women were expected to carry out feminine duties like washing, sewing, and embroidery, along with childcare and education. These acts Black women took surrounding sartorial practices in their home represent the acts Black women took to uplift their communities.
Black women were ensuring their family’s needs were met, and their children had the skills they needed as they went about their lives, because it helped to ensure their community’s survival.

**Sartorial Practices and Activism**

Feminist scholars have long argued that the personal is political (Hanisch 1970). This research argues that for Black women, the simple act of getting dressed is just that; both deeply personal, but heavily influenced by political overtones. Black womanhood frequently came with the responsibility of racial uplift, and this drastically impacted the ways Black women experienced womanhood (Horton 1986:57, Carlson 1992, Yee 1992).

Black women were inundated with ideas concerning how they should or should not dress, by both Black and white communities (Higginbotham 1993:15, White and White 1998:104). Black women were often ridiculed and criticized for wearing particularly fashionable or extravagant clothing (Higginbotham 1993:15, White and White 1998:91-92, 104, Mhoon 2004:26, Ball 2012:29). During the nineteenth century, newspaper and magazine articles argued that African Americans should dress conservatively and plainly (Horton 1986:58, White and White 1998:103, Mhoon 2004:26), “despite the ostentatious styles popular among white Victorians” (Paresi and Costello 2018). Black women were harshly judged by their peers when they wore fine dress (White and White 1998:103, Ball 2012:30). They were told that spending earnings on nice clothing was not just inappropriate and wasteful, but it also made it seem as if they were imitating the dress of their oppressors (White and White 1998:103, Ball 2012:30). Black Americans' concern for their appearance came from a need to subvert the racial stereotypes wielded against them, and to further the anti-slavery cause (White and
Fashioning oneself was an act of agency that could transform Black Americans “from slaves into ideal free men and women” (Ball 2012:31). Black women were told by their community to dress modestly (Higginbotham 1993:15, White and White 1998:91-92, 104, Mhoon 2004:26, Ball 2012:29), and by doing so they were reinforcing notions of purity and piety, which worked against controlling images of the oversexualized Black woman (Horton 1986:58, Rooks 2004:52, Flewellen 2022:221). Black women understood the power of dress and manners lay not in their ability to change whites’ minds but rather in their status as a symbolic assertion of “the unwelcome truth” that whites refused to see: her humanity, individuality, and determination to thrive as a free woman (Ball 2012:29).

Generally, the artifacts in this sample are plain. Most of the buttons (n=45), all clothing fasteners (n=3), buckle fragments (n=4), and the fabric fragment (n=1) are devoid of any patterns or molding. Women and men alike could have been wearing most of these artifacts, and the plainness of the artifacts indicate more utilitarian clothing, rather than highly decorated clothing (Lindbergh 1999:55, White 2004:62). The plainness of these objects is significant because large skirts, small waists, and bright colors were hallmarks of nineteenth-century women’s fashion (Matthews 2018). For women, clothing tended to be restrictive, but highly decorated with buttons, beads, ribbons, embroidery, frills, and lace (Matthews 2018). Highly decorated buttons likely adorned more fashionable, expensive clothing, whereas undecorated buttons were likely sewn onto cheaper, plainer, more utilitarian clothing (White 2005:73). In addition, buttons made
from expensive materials like shell (White 2005:71) also likely would have adorned more fashionable and extravagant clothing items. No particularly expensive button materials are present in this collection, rather cheaper and widely available materials like metal, bone, and ceramic (Marcel 1994, White 2005:69-72) dominate the assemblage.

Previous archaeological analysis on faunal remains, small finds, and ceramics at the African Meeting House have argued this is a middle-class community (Landon 2007, Descoteaux 2011, Landon and Bulger 2013), therefore the lack of expensive and decorated objects is likely not the result of low economic status. The largely undecorated nature of the artifact assemblage may be because this community made conscious consumer decisions, but it could also be due to personal politics. The plain artifacts interpreted within the boundaries of Black womanhood take on political connotations. Purity for Black women necessitated overcoming jezebel stereotypes, and in practice this meant dressing with modesty (Flewellen 2018:145). The plain, undecorated artifacts suggest that those frequenting the African Meeting House and the surrounding area were wearing more utilitarian, less conspicuous clothing. Shying away from elaborate clothing and leaning
into ideas of plainness and modesty may have been a response to the aforementioned misogynoir they faced from their community from the quotidian act of getting dressed, but it may have also been a way to subvert controlling images of Black women (Flewellen 2018:145). The sole collar stud button (Figure 10) in this sample underscores notions of modesty. An item potentially worn by women (Lindbergh 1999:52), it would have been used to hold a collar closed at the neck. One advertisement in *The Liberator*, placed by E. F. B. Mundrucu (Figure 11), also notes “bosom studs” for sale. By buttoning a garment at the neck, no bare skin could have been exposed, reinforcing ideas of piety and purity. Black women’s clothing may have been more modest and utilitarian to showcase their humanity.

Black women were also undoubtedly participating in more clandestine, subversive forms of resistance. Free Black communities and their churches were integral parts of the Underground Railroad (LaRoche 2014). The African Meeting House is rumored to be a location on the Underground Railroad (Bower et al. 1984:4), along with countless other homes and businesses in the neighborhood (Grover and da Silva 2002). Clothing was an important aspect for freedom seekers to consider as they escaped enslavement. Clothing was a mechanism for racialization (Heath 1999, Thomas and Thomas 2004, Flewellen 2018), and tattered, rougher clothing was an easy way to identify a person as enslaved (White and White 1998:8-10). In addition, advertisements for self-emancipated African Americans tended to list the clothing they were wearing (Heath 1999), so it needed to be replaced when people escaped enslavement (LaRoche 2014:92). While discussing Lucy Foster, Whitney Battle-Baptiste (2011:130) argues that it was “possible that her role in the anti-slavery movement went undocumented and even unnoticed. There was no need for recognition on her part, just the ability to be there as a conduit toward freedom.” A
countless number of Black women on Beacon Hill may have found themselves in this same position.

Maintaining a household’s clothing was part of a woman’s domestic duty, and for Black women it was also part of her community-based work (Higginbotham 1993). As members of church and community groups, Black women were constantly collecting and redistributing clothing to impoverished African Americans (Higginbotham 1993). An advertisement in *The Liberator* (Figure 12) requesting clothing for self-emancipated enslaved men underscores this point. In addition, members of the First Independent Baptist Female Society, a church group of the African Meeting House, organized sewing circles (Levesque 1994:325). Considering the needs of their community, these sewing circles were almost certainly spent mending or producing clothing. Collecting secondhand clothing, repairing damaged garments, and producing entirely new items of clothing represent Black women’s anti-slavery actions and work for community liberation. *The Liberator* advertisement (Figure 12) demonstrates a need for clothing collections and drives. Black women could have been collecting and discarding new or secondhand clothing items to disguise freedom seekers, which might account for any number of shoe fragments, textiles, buckles, and buttons left behind in the archaeological record. Black women’s labor for the Underground Railroad represents everyday acts of resistance.

*Figure 12. Advertisement for Clothing for Fugitives. Figure is reproduced from The Liberator 1860:3.*
The African Meeting House was also a site that celebrated African Americans and the work they put into achieving freedom for themselves and others. In northern cities, parades were often a hallmark of Black celebrations (White and White 1998:95). Fancy attire was an integral component to these celebratory parades (White and White 1998:96-97). At the African Meeting House, there were yearly celebrations that marked the end of the importation of enslaved people into the United States (White and White 1998:96). Celebrations included a parade, followed by a gathering in the evening (Liberator 1844:119). These parades were celebratory for Black Americans, but they often resulted in white hostility. The mere presence of Black Americans on streets and other public spaces often led to harassment or violence from white people (White and White 1998:119). If Black Americans simply existing in public resulted in violence, then a “proud and smartly dressed group of blacks striding down the middle of the main thoroughfares of town was an act of provocation almost too much to bear” (White and White 1998:120).

Despite the chance of violence, archaeological evidence suggests Black women coupled their modest clothing with fashionable items. Approximately 44.44% (n=36) of the studied buttons are decorated. Buttons were used by men and women to decorate clothing and did not necessarily need to be functional (White 2005:57). These decorative buttons likely adorned nicer, more extravagant clothing. The recovered jewelry, decorative hair combs, and gloves (evidenced by the spring-stud button) would have further served as items to accessorize Black women’s appearance. “Dressing up” was likely situational and may have been reserved for occasions where it “would have been seen and appreciated among other African Americans in a homogeneous space” (Flewellen 2018:152). As a space meant to service the Black community, celebrations
held at the African Meeting House provided the opportunity for extravagant dress, but fancier dress practices were likely reserved for these special occasions.

As discussed in Chapter 5, forty-seven of the advertisements in this study include the words “fancy,” “fashionable,” or both (Table 13). The presence of these words in The Liberator mean that nicer goods were not only available, but were being advertised to a Black audience. Of the 206 clothing and appearance-related advertisements in The Liberator, sixty-two advertisements mention various accessories for sale, some of which overlap with the sartorial artifacts, like jewelry, gloves, beaded objects, and combs. The presence of these items in both the advertisements and in the archaeological record suggests that Black women were consuming the goods being advertised towards them, including the higher-end, fashionable items.

Conclusion

During the nineteenth century, free Black women were living their lives according to their own values, while navigating misogynoir and institutionalized inequality. Black women were forging their own gender conventions, heavily influenced by race and personal politics (Horton 1986, Carlson 1992, Ball 2012). The sartorial practices of Black women underscore the ways race, gender, and class affected their everyday, quotidian experiences (Flewellen 2018, 2022). Black women were striving to uplift themselves and their community amidst extreme, anti-Black racism. Although we may not be able to fully locate the lives of Black women in historical documentation (Sesma 2016, Lee 2019), this research highlights the contributions Black women made to their homes and communities. Clothing, although mundane, was integral to all aspects of life. Clothing-related artifacts
and advertisements underscore the ways Black women were wage laborers, homemakers, and active in their communities.

Previous analysis of historical documentation (Bower 1990:48-52) has not revealed the type of wage labor Black women residing in the vicinity of the African Meeting House performed. However, as highlighted in Chapter 5, this research uses advertisement data from *The Liberator* to argue Black women were likely working in informal capacities that went unrecorded in official documentation. While Black men often worked low paying and seasonal jobs (Horton and Horton 1999:20, Singleton 2002:196), Black women labored for their survival, and the survival of their households (Carlson 1992, Yee 1992:52, Richardson 1993:198, Horton 1986, Horton and Horton 1999:20, Davis 2001:90, Battle-Baptiste 2011:128, Lee 2018). The sewing implements and clothing fasteners left behind in the archaeological record may have been a result of Black women’s informal, economic contributions to their homes, as needlework and laundry services were common tasks Black women took on for economic survival (Horton 1986:60, Battle-Baptiste:128, Lee 2019:98).

Although it was rare, Black women performed wage labor outside the home as well. Black women like Nancy Prince and Christiana Carteaux Bannister were independent and entrepreneurial; they used their skills to resist patriarchal notions of what womanhood should look like by building businesses of their own. In addition, Black schoolteachers were meant to exemplify Black womanhood, by appearing beautiful, yet modest and moral (Carlson 1992:65-66). The personal adornment artifacts found between the African Meeting House and Abiel Smith School may highlight this duality. Mostly plain buttons were found in the East Alley, yet jewelry fragments were recovered as well. Black schoolteachers could have been adhering to plainer forms of dress, while accenting
their clothing with jewelry items to express their identity as an individual with agency, despite the outside pressures placed upon them (Carlson 1992).

Dress was also an important aspect of the household economy. The pins and thimbles that were recovered archaeologically could represent wage labor, but they may also represent the ways Black women sought to take control of their labor. Black women frequently labored under exploitative and difficult conditions for white people (Dill 1988:422, Horton and Horton 1999:19-20, Collins 2000:54). By fulfilling the role of mother or wife within the home, and taking on tasks typically associated with these positions, Black women were resisting the idea their only role was exploited laborer (Dill 1988:422, Hill Collins 2000:54-55). The pins, thimbles, and even combs in the African Meeting House collection could represent the ways Black women returned their labor to their households. Black women educated their children within the home (Horton 1986:57), and sewing and embroidery work was a tangible skill mothers could teach to daughters so they could use that skill to support themselves and their families in the future. Hair care was a communal activity (White and White 1998:39, Flewellen 2018:169-170), and may further represent the ways Black women labored for their families. Hair care provided time for Black women to educate children (White and White 1998:39, Flewellen 2018:169-170), ensuring that they had the skills and knowledge to flourish in freedom.

Given the historical circumstances of the nineteenth century, the act of getting dressed, styling one’s hair, and selecting accessories was deeply personal, but highly political. The archaeological evidence suggests the politics of Black women were embodied and expressed through clothing. The objects of personal adornment trend towards being plain and undecorated, which suggests a more simple and modest style,
opposed to the extravagant clothing that was popular amongst women in the nineteenth century (Mathews 2018, Paresi and Costello 2018). By dressing in ways that were deemed more modest and conservative, Black women were resisting racialized ideas and stereotypes of Black womanhood, and highlighting their humanity and agency as real people, not caricatures.

Aside from personal politics, the clothing artifacts represent other political actions as well. Boston was a hub for Black political activity, and Black women were participating in political actions (Yee 1992). If women were generally responsible for most, if not all, aspects of clothing maintenance and creation within the domestic sphere, this sentiment may have also extended to the public realm. The single textile fragment, fasteners, shoe fragments, and buttons could be indicative of Black women’s political activity. As African Americans fled from enslavement, new clothing was often required (LaRoche 2014:92). With church groups, Black women frequently helped collect and repair secondhand clothing (Higginbotham 1993). Black women on Beacon Hill could have been collecting clothing to supply to various parties along Boston’s Underground Railroad network. Black women were also there alongside men celebrating their community’s political advancements towards equality and abolition. Although few, the jewelry and accessory fragments along with the decorated buttons could have been saved and worn by Black women specifically for celebratory occasions. Well-dressed African Americans were often met with harassment or backlash from white communities (White and White 1998:119), but the ornate artifacts might indicate that Black women were actively choosing to celebrate themselves and their achievements, despite the threat of violence.
The personal adornment objects from African Meeting House archaeological collection are a primary source to understand the lives of Black women. The personal adornment artifacts provide a way to discuss how commonplace the effects of racism and sexism were for Black women, and the ways they navigated it in their everyday lives. Where historical records are silent, material culture provides an avenue for pursuing their stories. This analysis has highlighted how integral Black women were to abolition, their communities, and their households. This research inserts Black women into the existing archaeological scholarship of the African Meeting House and Beacon Hill community for the first time. The sexism, racism, and classism that Black women experienced seeped into every corner of their lives, yet they resisted and survived.
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