“They lived near the bridge where we went over”: Ellen White and Blacks  | BY BENJAMIN BAKER

Ellen White and race was the subject of Benjamin Baker’s 2011 Howard University dissertation. In this article he begins an occasional series on the topic for Spectrum.

Ellen Gould Harmon was born sometime around November 26, 1827, in Gorham, Maine, to Robert and Eunice Harmon. The Harmon’s were married on July 11, 1810, and had a total of six daughters and two sons, the last being the fraternal twins Elizabeth and Ellen. Robert (1786–1866) was an entrepreneur who dabbled in the usual pursuits of the day: agriculture, real estate, and apparel. Eunice (née Could, 1787–1863) was a teacher and homemaker with a penchant for flower gardening.¹

A virtual cult of possibility that Ellen White had black ancestry, in large part due to her facial features, developed in the last decades of the twentieth century. This is not solely a posthumous observation, for *The Minneapolis Journal* stated in 1888 that Ellen White had “a peculiar dark, swarthy face, a low brow and thick lips.” Speculation has also been fueled by the absence of an image of her mother, and a sole extant photograph of her father. White’s activism for black causes in her senior citizen years clinches the certainty in some minds that White was black.

There have been three genealogical studies of Ellen White’s ancestry. The first, done in 1920 by White’s relative Artemas C. Harmon, traced Robert Harmon’s ancestry. The second, by Alice Soule, a professional genealogist, developed in the last decades of the twentieth century.
charted Eunice Harmon's line and was completed in 1983. The third was commissioned in 2000 by the Ellen G. White Estate in response to growing claims of White having black ancestry. Roger Joslyn, then president of the American Society of Genealogists and highly esteemed in the field with expertise in northeastern United States genealogy, conducted the research. All three of these studies concluded that Ellen White was of Anglo-Saxon origin, her ancestors arriving from England to New England in the early seventeenth century. White was not black.\textsuperscript{3}

No research has been done on the influence Robert and Eunice Harmon had on the racial views of their daughter Ellen. In fact, not much research at all has been done on White's parents, primarily due to the paucity of references to them in her corpus. It is not even known where they are buried. However, aside from the safe assumption that, being Mainers, Methodists, and later Millerites, the Harmon's were also anti-slavery, it is known that on several occasions Robert Harmon took his daughter to hear a black Millerite minister speak on his visions, and that Harmon apparently had no problem with Ellen socializing with the man and his wife.\textsuperscript{4} This despite the probability that the local newspaper was referring to the black minister when it derisively editorialized that "the Millerites of the city have recently imported a great bull nigger, who has been rolling up the white of his eyes, showing his ivory, and astonishing the good people by his dreams and prognostications."\textsuperscript{5}

The Harmon's moved to Portland, Maine's capital and largest city, around 1832. While the vast majority of African Americans were enslaved at the time, young Ellen here encountered free blacks. An international commercial seaport and land transportation depot, Portland began commerce with the Caribbean when Britain lifted its trade restrictions in 1830. The industry that made Portland prosperous was largely dependent on black dockworkers, either
descendants of slaves or recent Caribbean immigrants. The Harmon family lived on Portland's Clark Street for years, within walking distance of the cosmopolitan wharves.

It was while walking home from school one day in the fall of 1837 that Ellen was severely injured when an irate girl hurled a stone that connected with her nose. Scores of pages have been written on this incident, so it will not be dwelt on here except for two points. First, this is the most formative event of White's youth, the starting point in the autobiographical sections in her writings and one that receives the most print space. Second, it was from the traumatic aftermath that Ellen began her Christian conversion process; developed an unusual sensitivity to the plight of the suffering and marginalized by experiencing it firsthand; and gained a great appreciation for the education that she was now incapable of receiving. These developments would undergird her relationship to black people throughout her life.

**Religion**

**Methodism** From this injury at age nine to the end of her life, religion would be Ellen White's magnificent obsession. Born to Methodist parents, she inherited a faith tradition with strong ties to blacks. The denomination's founders, John and Charles Wesley, were ardent abolitionists, outspoken against their native England's lead role in the African slave trade. John Wesley experienced American chattel slavery firsthand in his brief but pivotal stint in Georgia from 1736–1737, and would strike a moral blow against the institution in his influential tract *Thoughts on Slavery*. Ellen lauded Wesley frequently in her writings as an ideal Christian pioneer, and he particularly influenced the way she viewed American slavery and the manner she went about condemning it.

*One person integral in establishing a Methodist presence in Ellen's home city was a black minister named Samuel Snowden (c. 1765–1850). A former slave in the South, Snowden was once a member of Ellen's Chestnut Street Methodist Church and pastored in the Portland area before her birth. He was a significant abolitionist and activist, adroitly using his stature as a minister to assist escaped blacks and establish the Underground Railroad throughout New England, most notably Portland and Boston. “Father Snowden,” as he was known by both whites and blacks, was pastor of the May Street Church in Boston when William Foy had his second vision there.*

**Conversion** The biggest religious influence of Ellen's youth was Millerism. First hearing William Miller in March 1840 in Portland, White marks Miller's preaching as the impetus of an intense period of spiritual struggle that resulted in a thorough conversion. She writes about this time at length, and besides being an invaluable look into her early life and a moving religious coming-of-age account, it articulates clearly White's view of herself and God.

Ellen grappled with the notion of a God who burns sinners eternally in hell. This idea caused her no end of torment, and she shrank away from a Heavenly Father who was such a tyrant. Her personality is a relief to her conception of God; instead of wishing to inflict suffering she conveys a keen sensitivity to all things living. In writing about this period she presents herself as an early teen that identified with the suffering and the outcast and with a unique ability to trace the effects of oppression, whether it was oppression of ideas, religions, institutions, governments, or individuals. The most significant breakthrough of her life up to that point occurred when she discovered that God was a “kind and tender parent, rather than a stern tyrant.”

White now had a Heavenly Father of love and grace who placed an inestimable value on human souls, wishing to save instead of destroy. She referred to her fellow humans as “souls.” This was no anthropological fancy; White valued people because she believed that the Godhead invested their most valuable resources to save them from a doomed plight. Each person's soul belonged to God and God alone; his, White

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would often state, “both by creation and by redemption”—and should be valued and appreciated accordingly. White's anthropological system brooked no hierarchies, castes or divisions; each human was equal in the eyes of God.

The Millerite Movement The Harmon family were expelled from their church family, the Chestnut Street Methodist Church, on September 2, 1843, for their refusal to relinquish Millerite beliefs. At that point the Millerite Movement effectively became Ellen and her family's religious home.

Millerites were decidedly antislavery and abolitionist, but with a unique twist. The issue of slavery was not central among Millerites—although it was indeed important for many Millerite ministers, Joshua Himes chief among them—because the Millerite worldview was unapologetically otherworldly. It held that investing energy and resources on resolving earthly problems was pointless, and worse, faithless, for Christ’s second coming was the “fountainhead” of all reforms, the ultimate culmination of abolitionism. As William Miller himself remarked at an American Anti-Slavery Society meeting he attended in 1840, “The poor slave has but little chance to be liberated by these two parties . . . God can & will release the captive. And to him alone we must look for redress.”

The fact that the Millerite Movement was primarily a northeastern United States phenomenon is crucial to this mindset. Slavery was an abstraction to most Millerites: they did not personally encounter slavery, or the challenges other denominations faced from the often-vicious reaction of white masters when their slaves were converted. Although the Millerite movement was signally ordained of God, it failed in its collective oversight that Jesus could come without giving the millions of captive blacks below the Mason-Dixon line a chance to hear that message and prepare themselves. Unfortunately, the mindset that Jesus would terminate black slavery at his second coming and that therefore the Gospel did not need to be preached to blacks would prove stubborn and pervasive among Miller’s heirs, the Seventh-day Adventists. It directed the church’s thinking until the emancipation of the slaves in 1865 and then engendered an informal hand-off policy toward evangelizing blacks that lasted into the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, the Millerite movement was welcoming to blacks and attractive to them. Not only were outspoken black leaders like John W. Lewis and Sojourner Truth active in the movement, but William Still and Frederick Douglass gave William Miller a sympathetic hearing. The most prominent and educated black ministers in the big cities on the East Coast took up Millerism, and although the slaves could not be reached, the top leadership fully supported proclaiming the message to free blacks that could be reached.

William Foy

It was in the apocalyptic atmosphere of Millerism that Ellen White met William Ellis Foy. Born just north of Augusta, Maine, to free African American parents in 1818, William Foy was baptized at seventeen and shortly after was married to a woman named Ann. The Fois had their first child, Amelia, in 1837, and moved to Boston in 1840 so William could study to obtain Episcopal clergy credentials and enter the ministry. It was in Boston that he embraced the teachings of William Miller, although he was initially averse to an imminent parousia.

On January 18, 1842, during a prayer meeting at the Twelfth Street Baptist Church in the heart of Boston, the twenty-three-year-old Foy was “immediately seized as in the agonies of death,” lost his breath, and felt his spirit separate from his body. For two and a half hours an angelic guide gave William a tour of heaven and hell, which he later described in arresting language at once majestic and awful. While he was in vision, ten eyewitnesses, including a physician, testified that they could “not find any appearance of life [in Foy], except around the heart.”

Weeks later on February 4 at the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the Beacon Hill
neighborhood of Boston, William Foy again went into vision, this time for twelve and a half hours. The young black man beholds a scene from the final judgment, and is subsequently escorted to paradise. At the close of the vision Foy’s angelic guide tells him that he will help him declare to the world what he was shown. “I will go,” is Foy’s response.\footnote{13}

This was easier said than done. “The message was so different—and the manner in which the command was given, so different from any I had ever heard of, and knowing the prejudice against those of my color, it became very crossing,” Foy later wrote. “These questions were continually arising. Why should these things be given to me, to bear to the world, and not to the learned, or to one of a different condition from myself? But no peace could I obtain in disobedience. ‘Woe is me if I declare not these things,’ rested heavily upon my soul.”  

Despite his color, youth, and the fact that he had learned to read just several years before, William Foy did honor his promise to the angel. John Loughborough, in the first history of Seventh day Adventism, describes Foy as an “eloquent speaker” whose “visions bore clear evidence of being genuine manifestations of the Spirit of God.” He writes of Foy:

> Having a good command of language, with fine descriptive powers, he created a sensation wherever he went. By invitation he went from city to city to tell of the wonderful things he had seen; and in order to accommodate the vast crowds who assembled to hear him, large halls were secured, where he related to thousands what had been shown. When dwelling on the tender, compassionate love of Christ for poor sinners, he exhorted the unconverted to seek God, and scores responded to his entreaties.\footnote{15}

But all of this did not come without hardship. As he anticipated, Foy was persecuted, and aggressively, if the aforementioned editorial about the “great bull nigger” is any indication. In touching language Foy shares what got him through:

> “They [the visions] have been a great consolation to me, in seasons of temptation and trial. Often, in the silent hours of the night, I have seemed to hear again, the sweet song of the

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angels; and whenever my heart has felt sad and lonely, the things shown me by the angel, have lifted me above the trying scenes of earth."

In mid-1842 William Foy and his family moved to Ellen Harmon’s hometown of Portland. Sixty-five years later in an interview with her personal assistant, Doris E. Robinson, White, just shy of eighty, recalled rather specific details about the Fois, like that “they lived near the bridge where we went over to Cape Elizabeth,” which would have been very close to the Harmon home. She reminisced that her father would take her to Cape Elizabeth on a sleigh to hear Foy lecture in Beethoven Hall. When Ellen heard Foy there she sat near the stand because of respiratory difficulties that were aggravated in greater proximity to others. Sitting by Ann Foy, she witnessed the dynamics between husband and wife while he spoke, and after she was privy to their conversation. “He was a very tall man, slightly colored,” White said of Foy. “But it was remarkable testimonies that he bore."

In the summer of the year that Jesus died, William Foy had two more visions. In one he was shown three “steps of fire” leading to a pathway that entered into the city of God. Multitudes stood on the steps, some advancing upward, others disappearing from view; those who remained on the third step entered the city. The contents of Foy’s fourth and final vision are lost to us."

Shortly after the Great Disappointment, William Foy collaborated with two fellow Millerite brothers, John and Charles Pearson—as friends of James and Ellen White, their father John, Sr., would introduce James and Ellen to each other—and published a pamphlet titled The Christian Experience of William E. Foy together with the two visions he received in the months of Jan. and Feb. 1842. Ellen Harmon possessed a copy of the pamphlet.

“The power of God” first came upon Ellen Harmon at the home of one Elizabeth Haines in Portland in late December 1844. Now known as the “Vision of the Narrow Way,” its contents are similar to William Foy’s third vision. In fact, when she shared it in a public meeting near Cape Elizabeth, Foy was in the audience, listening intently. Ellen White remembers:

“I had an interview with him. He wanted to see me, and I talked with him a little. They had appointed for me to speak that night, and I did not know that he was there. I did not know at first that he was there. While I was walking I heard a shout, and he is a great, tall man, and the roof was rather low, and he jumped right up and down, and oh, he praised the Lord, praised the Lord. It was just what he had seen, just what he had seen. But they told him so I think it hurt him, and I do not know what became of him."

Among other things, Ellen Harmon learned from William Foy how to be faithful to the divine mandate to prophethood in an antagonistic and even hostile society. Foy braved deep misgivings about his race, age, and education, while White was too young, too sickly, insecure, and of an oppressed gender. Harmon literally had a front row seat to witness Foy in living color witness despite his color. Through the persecution he obeyed God in the lonely role of seer, in stark juxtaposition to the example of Ellen’s ill-fated brother-in-law, Hazen Foss, who also received visions but declined the prophetic commission after calculating the
scorn he would face if he shared them.

In Ellen White's advocacy for black causes in the decades before and after the turn of the twentieth century, William Foy's example was summoned. Like Foy crossing the prophetic Rubicon by opting for courage instead of cowardice, Ellen White declared in a speech to General Conference leaders in 1891 titled "Our Duty to the Colored People:"

After my severe illness one year ago, many things which the Lord had presented to me seemed lost to my mind, but they have since been repeated. I know that which I now speak will bring me into conflict. This I do not covet, for the conflict has seemed to be continuous of late years; but I do not mean to live a coward or die a coward, leaving my work undone. 21

Benjamin Baker, PhD, has degrees in theology, education and history. He has authored or edited five books and over one hundred articles. He was a college professor from 2002–2006, and has been the Assistant Archivist at the General Conference since 2011.

References


3. Each genealogy, as well as a statement of the White Estate's conclusions, can be found here: http://www.whiteestate.org/issues/genealogy.html.


5. "When will Wonders Cease?" Portland Tribune, February 10 (1844), 351.

6. In particular, see White, Ellen G., Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, page 25.

7. Ibid., 31.


10. William Miller wrote to Joshua Himes in 1840: "Those colored brethren, too, at Belknap St. with Christian hearts; Heaven, I hope, has stamped them as its favorites. Oh! I had vainly hoped to see you all, to breathe and feel that sacred flame of love, of heavenly fire; to hear and speak of that dear blessed Savior’s near approach.” Miller, William, “Miller’s Letters—No. 9,” Signs of the Times, November 1 (1840), 118.

11. The authoritative work on William Foy is Delbert Baker’s The Unknown Prophet, Revised and Updated (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013).


13. Ibid., 15–21.


17. See "Interview with Mrs. E.G. White," 3.

18. Loughborough, John N., Rise and Progress of the Seventh-day Adventists (Battle Creek, Mt: General Conference Association, 1892), 71.


20. Ibid., 3.


“The power of God” first came upon Ellen Harmon at the home of one Elizabeth Haines in Portland.
“Let the Slave Reply”: The Critical Sabbatarian Adventist Decade, Ellen White, and Blacks | BY BENJAMIN BAKER

Ellen White and race was the subject of Benjamin Baker’s 2011 Howard University dissertation. This is the second article in an occasional series on the topic for Spectrum.

Ellen Harmon and James White (right) were wed on August 30, 1846. Initially averse to marriage because of the nearness of the parousia, the teenaged visionary and the itinerant minister justified their nuptials by simply stating that James could now provide protection for Ellen on the dangerous traveling circuit with all due propriety, and thus complement each other’s ministries. This union, formed with so little fanfare, was the most significant in Seventh-day Adventist history. Along with Joseph Bates, the Whites are credited with the founding of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The Critical Decade

Although the denomination was officially founded on May 21, 1863, the inaugural decade of the White marriage (1845–1855) was foundational in the establishment of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. What seems like all accomplishment and triumph now, though, was sturm und drang for the young couple, and by extension the fledgling Sabbatarian Adventist movement. James characterized the newlywed years thus: “We entered upon this work penniless, with few friends, and broken in health.” Poverty, illness, homelessness, tedious travel, childbirth, infant sickness, and parental dilemmas, combined with the social persecution stemming from her visions, often pushed Ellen to the brink of despair and death. Yet four developments emerged from this decade-long crucible that would shape White’s, and her church’s, relationship with blacks.

In a meeting among Sabbatarian Adventist believers in Boston on November 18, 1848, Ellen White had a vision. Her takeaway for James was: “You must begin to print a little paper and send it out to the people. Let it be small at first; but as the people read, they will send you means with which to print, and it will be a success from the first. From this small beginning it was shown to me to be like streams of light that went clear round the world.” This charge, carried out by James and a dedicated editorial staff, was the genesis of a church publishing industry that would produce billions of pages, in myriad languages, read by hundreds of millions of people. Not only would the printed page be the vehicle in which Ellen White would later communicate with the church about the sins of slavery and the necessity of redressing its damage through the evangelization and education of African Americans, but from the last decades of the nineteenth century and beyond it was the means by which thousands of blacks discovered the Adventist message. Just as Anna Knight (right) read her way into Adventism by mailed publications, so did countless others of her hue.

In the same month that the first paper appeared, Ellen White gave birth to James Edson White (right) on July 28, 1849. Although notoriously flawed, Edson and his Southern Missionary Society’s four years (1895–1899) of nautical evangelism on the Mississippi River in the Deep South would be the base of the efflorescence of African American Adventism. Further, the correspondence between
mother and son during these years would shape race relations and missiology in the church for decades after. Edson also compiled and published *The Southern Work*, began the periodical *Gospel Herald*, and was perhaps the individual who did the most to circulate his mother’s appeals to Adventists to assist Southern blacks.\(^6\)

It was largely in the decade after the Great Disappointment that Ellen White became established as messenger to the remnant. The first article in this series posited that William Foy (right) provided for White an example of faithfulness to the divine mandate to prophethood in an antagonistic and hostile society. Amidst the fantastic tales of visions, physical phenomena, and confounded detractors, White’s resolve to be steadfast to her calling despite often being broken in body and spirit was remarkable. This, as well as the searching missives called “testimonies” that uncannily personally addressed the members of the young movement, all with the aid of defenders and apologists like her husband, Bates, John Loughborough (right, center), and Uriah Smith (lower right), cemented Ellen White’s role as prophet among Sabbatarian Adventists. Perhaps the litmus test of a genuine prophet, though, is to publicly condemn injustice and oppression, which White did in her indictments against the slave institution and the American empire that perpetrated and profited from it. This period, in which White secured her prophetic authority, is so vital to her relationship to blacks because it is from this platform that she would speak out on the unpopular issue of race in the Post-Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras. The issue that was a test of her genuineness as a prophet would later prove one of the greatest tests of her prophetic authority.

Finally, from 1845 to 1855, Sabbatarian Adventists, through much prayer, study, discussion, and debate, arrived at the doctrines that defined the movement: the imminent *parousia*, pre-Advent judgment, seventh-day Sabbath, soul mortality, everlasting gospel, and others. Much later, when large numbers of African Americans encountered the Adventist message, they would deeply identify with the tenets. Aside from statements made by myriad blacks that they embraced the Adventist message because the truths spoke to their condition, this doctrinal identification is borne out by noting that a sizeable portion of the current membership of the North American Division is black; the African-Caribbean islands have the highest church to population ratio of any region in the world;\(^7\) and continental Africa has an Adventist membership of more than seven million, more than any other continent.\(^8\) Such success is not accidental, especially in light of the church’s challenges with race relations. To be sure, many blacks embraced the Adventist message despite often being treated badly because of their color by its supposed practitioners.

**Blacks and Sabbatarian Adventist Eschatology**

Part and parcel of these doctrines was the crystallization in the 1850s of Adventist eschatology, most of which remains unchanged today. In particular, an understanding of the role of the United States in prophecy, as well as the identification of Babylon, were arrived at—positions that have influenced and shaped the church’s attitudes to America, religious liberty, civil rights, Protestantism, social activism, and politics perhaps more than any other.\(^9\) As it turns out, African Americans played an essential role in the development of the church’s under-
standing of these teachings and the broader eschatological scenario.

The first Adventist in print to identify the United States as the beast with “two horns like a lamb” which “spake as a dragon” of Revelation 13:11–18, was John Nevins Andrews (right) in an article entitled “Thoughts on Revelation XIII and XIV” in the Adventist Review of May 19, 1851. America’s two horns were Republicanism and Protestantism, political and religious liberty, as delineated in the Declaration of Independence: “All men are born free and equal, and endowed with certain inalienable rights, as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” America’s true nature was laid bare, however, in its treatments of black people: “If ‘all men are born free and equal,’ how do we then hold three million slaves in bondage? Why is it that the negro race are reduced to the ranks of chattels personal, and bought and sold like brute beasts?” Andrews wasted no time in coming to his conclusion: “…the lamb is such only in pretensions. He [America] is dragon in character.” Andrews then outlines the now-familiar end time scenario in which the United States fully reveals its dragon character by forcing all to receive the mark of the beast. In the article “What is Babylon,” Andrews decisively reveals the identity of the symbolic power: “The Protestant church at the present time holds many hundred thousand slaves. Nor is the fact to be disguised, that the professed church is now the right arm of the slave power. This great fact identifies the Protestant church as a part of Babylon, with absolute certainty.”

John Loughborough would extend Andrews’ exegetical applications in an article titled “The Two-Horned Beast” published in the Review on March 21, 1854. Featuring a large section devoted to excoriating America for slavery, the piece proposes a more accurate rendering of the Declaration of Independence clause: “All men are created free and equal except 3,500,000.” Loughborough calls America out for violating his conscience, and that of his fellow citizens, by imposing the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Echoing Andrews’ identification of American Protestants as Babylon for aiding and abetting the system of slavery and owning slaves, Loughborough leaves no doubt that the Protestants of the United States speak as a dragon. In an expansion of this article in 1857, he again shares the strongest proof he can find for the identification of America as the beast of Revelation 13:11: “In the institution of Slavery is more especially manifested, thus far, the dragon spirit that dwells in the heart of this hypocritical nation. The fearful strides which this government has made on this question up to the present, afford small ground of hope for the future.”

Uriah Smith, probably Adventism’s most influential interpreter of Daniel and Revelation, and Adventist Review editor for almost twenty years, poeticized America’s oppression of blacks in the epic serial poem “The Warning Voice of Time and Prophecy”:

With two horns like a lamb a beast arose -
So with two leading forms a power has risen,
Two fundamental principles, than which
In all the earth none can be found more mild,
More lamb-like in their outward form and name.
A land of freedom, pillared on the broad
And open basis of equality;
A land reposing ‘neath the gentle sway
Of civil and religious liberty.

Lamb-like in form, is there no dragon-voice
Heard in our land? no notes that harshly grate
Upon the ear of mercy, love and truth?
And put humanity to open shame?
Let the united cry of millions tell, -
Millions that groan beneath oppression’s rod,
Beneath the sin-forged chains of slavery,
Robbed of their rights, to brutes degraded down,
And soul and body bound to other’s will, -
Let their united cries, and tears, and groans,
That daily rise, and call aloud on Heaven
For vengeance, answer; let the Slave reply. 
O land of boasted freedom! thou hast cast 
The lie to all thy loud professions, fair, 
Of justice, liberty and equal rights; 
And thou hast set a foul and heinous blot 
Upon the sacred page of liberty; 
And whilst thou traffickst in souls of men, 
Thou hurl'st defiance, proud, in face of Heaven 
Soon to be answered with avenging doom. 
More fully, soon, shall yet this dragon-voice 
Developed be, and louder yet shall speak; 
More fully as the consummation nears, 
And all the wicked, wickeder become, 
The good more good, more holy, just and pure; 
When he against the followers of truth 
Shall lift his voice and vent his furious rage. 
Woe! the beast shall worship, and his mark 
Receive, the vials of God’s wrath shall drink; 
Here is the patience of the saints, and they 
Who God’s commandments keep and faith of Christ.16

Ellen White in the Sabbatarian period also linked Babylon with America and Protestantism. She pens the following in the chapter “The Sins of Babylon” in Spiritual Gifts, Volume 1:

All heaven beholds with indignation, human beings, the workmanship of God, reduced to the lowest depths of degradation, and placed on a level with the brute creation by their fellow men. And professed followers of that dear Saviour whose compassion was ever moved as he witnessed human woe, heartily engage in this enormous and grievous sin, and deal in slaves and souls of men. Angels have recorded it all. It is written in the book. The tears of the pious bond-men and bond-women, of fathers, mothers and children, brothers and sisters, are all bottled up in heaven. Agony, human agony, is carried from place to place, and bought and sold. God will restrain his anger but a little longer. His anger burns against this nation, and especially against the religious bodies who have sanctioned, and have themselves engaged in this terrible merchandise. Such injustice, such oppression, such sufferings, many professed followers of the meek and lowly Jesus can witness with heartless indifference. And many of them can inflict with baleful satisfaction, all this indescribable agony themselves, and yet dare to worship God. It is solemn mockery, and Satan exults over it, and reproaches Jesus and his angels with such inconsistency, saying, with bellish triumph, Such are Christ’s followers!

These professed Christians read of the sufferings of the martyrs, and tears course down their cheeks. They wonder that men could ever possess hearts so hardened as to practice such inhuman cruelties towards their fellow-men, while at the same time they hold their fellow-men in slavery. And this is not all. They sever the ties of nature, and cruelly oppress from day to day their fellow-men. They can inflict most inhuman tortures with relentless cruelty, which would well compare with the cruelty papists and heathens exercised towards Christ’s followers. Said the angel, It will be more tolerable for the heathen and for papists in the day of the execution of God’s judgment than for such men. The cries and sufferings of the oppressed have reached unto heaven, and angels stand amazed at the hard-hearted, untold, agonizing, suffering, man in the image of his Maker, causes his fellow-man. Said the angel, The names of such are written in blood, crossed with stripes, and flooded with agonizing, burning tears of suffering. God’s anger will not cease until he has caused the land of light to drink the dregs of the cup of his fury, and until he has rewarded unto Babylon double. Reward her even as she rewarded you, double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled, fill to her double.17

This brief sampling underscores that for these early Adventist thought leaders, America’s treatment of Africans was not simply a grave human rights violation; it was an omen of apocalyptic doom. In short, slavery ruined a republic that was established according to Divine Providence, leaving a terrible curse that would linger until the very end of the world and reverberate throughout eternity.

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“Said the angel, The names of such are written in blood, crossed with stripes, and flooded with agonizing, burning tears of suffering.”

Next installment: Ellen White's personal relationships with African American Sabbatarian Adventists.

Benjamin Baker is the managing editor of the Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists Project based at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

References

1. James and Ellen G. White, Life Sketches of James White and Ellen G. White (Battle Creek, 1888), 97, 238.
2. “Sabbatarian Adventist” refers to the movement led by James and Ellen White and Joseph Bates, roughly between 1845–1860, that became the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The name “Seventh-day Adventist” was voted and adopted at a meeting of Sabbatarian Adventists in Battle Creek, Michigan, on October 1, 1860; the Seventh-day Adventist Church was officially formed on May 21, 1863 in the same town.

7. Montserrat is 1 in 4; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, 1 in 7; Grenada, 1 in 8; Jamaica, Antigua and Barbuda, and Cayman Islands, 1 in 10. See Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, 2015 Annual Statistical Report (Silver Spring, 2015), 80–83.
8. Ibid., 4, 17–18.
9. For a book-length treatment of this, see Douglas Morgan’s Adventism and the American Republic (Knoxville, 2001).
10. At the time titled Second Advent Review, and Sabbath Herald and later Advent Review, and Sabbath Herald, for convenience and clarity it will be called Adventist Review here.
12. Ibid.: 84.
17. E. G. White, Spiritual Gifts, Volume 1 (Battle Creek, 1858), 191–192.

American-born religion, Adventism’s sui generis belief of America’s sinister apocalyptic role dominated Ellen White’s worldview and writings—especially those on slavery and the Civil War. A double-edged sword, White would later declare that as America’s treatment of blacks revealed the republic’s true nature, so Adventism’s treatment of blacks revealed the church’s true nature. Above all else, to Ellen White and the other Sabbatarian Adventist leaders, African Americans were a people of the eschaton, playing an essential part in the ultimate demise of the beast and Babylon, standing with the Lamb’s remnant in triumph.
Ellen White and race was the subject of Benjamin Baker's 2011 Howard University dissertation. This is the third article in an occasional series on the topic for Spectrum.

During the Sabbatarian Adventist era (c. 1845–1860), Ellen White did not visit and speak at black schools and churches as she did in the first years of the twentieth century, because such black Adventist institutions did not exist at the time. But she and her husband James did have meaningful relationships with individual African Americans in this foundational decade and a half, intriguing connections forged before the onset of the Civil War—a war which, quite simply, changed everything. These relationships are a type of synecdoche of the rapport that Sabbatarian Adventists, all Northerners, had with blacks before Adventism collided with the South.

**After the Disappointment**

The seventeen-year-old Ellen Harmon received her first vision sometime in December 1844, her second following a week later. The dashed Millerite believers in Portland, Maine, regularly met for religious meetings in December 1844 and early 1845 in the Harmon's house on Spruce Street. Ellen shared her visions at this venue, and there is a possibility that William Foy visited one of these gatherings at the Harmon home, and there "had an interview" with her (as she recalled in 1906), later interrupting her in a talk she was giving about her visions, jumping up and down and shouting praises to the Lord for revealing the same thing to him. Adventism's first historian, John Loughborough, records that "after the close of the prophetic period, in the year 1845, he [Foy] heard another [Ellen Harmon] relate the same vision..." Arthur White, Ellen White's grandson and most prolific biographer, contends that the Harmon house was too small to accommodate the crowd that was present during Foy's outburst. Whatever the case, it should be underscored that, as with Millerite crowds, African Americans were also present and integral in post-Disappointment gatherings, and, as we shall see, among Sabbatarian Adventists; and Ellen White had substantive encounters with blacks in this religious milieu.

There is a further connection between White and Foy. Aged believer John H. Pearson, Sr., had a positive impact on the teenaged visionary's spiritual walk, and was an early supporter of her prophetic gift. James White went on a year-long preaching tour with Pearson's son, John Pearson, Jr., from the summer of 1843 to the summer of 1844. It was during this time that John and his brother Charles met Foy, resulting in the Pearson brothers publishing *The Christian Experience of William E. Foy* in early 1845. James most likely met fellow Millerite minister Foy via these mutual contacts in these small circles. It is commonly held that John, Sr., introduced James and Ellen, who married on August 30, 1846.

**The Douglass Family**

Rochester, New York, a bustling port city of roughly 40,000 residents in the early 1850s, was one of the centers of Sabbatarian Adventism. In order to expand the fledgling publishing enterprise, on March 12, 1852, Sabbatarian Adventist leaders unanimously voted that a press and type be purchased post-haste and established in Rochester. James and Ellen White moved there the next month, and the Advent Review office began operating from their house at 124 Mt. Hope Avenue. The press staff, a who's who of early Adventism, produced the bimonthly *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, as well as a string of pamphlets, tracts, and books. The operations were later transferred to a house at 109 Monroe Street.

Rochester was renowned as an abolitionist stronghold...
and a depot vital to the Underground Railroad. During the Whites’ time in Rochester, Frederick Douglass, famed orator and abolitionist, resided in the city on South Avenue, where he published the North Star/Frederick Douglass’ Paper.

In fact, just a couple of months after the Whites moved there, Douglass delivered what is considered to be among the greatest speeches in American History on Independence Day, 1852:

“What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” Adventist publications have tirelessly quoted Douglass’ faith-filled reaction to the Leonid meteor shower of November 12, 1833, and news of his exploits were frequently related in the Review and Herald until his death in 1895. Merritt Kellogg eulogized Douglass in 540 words in the Review of March 5, 1895, concluding: “He will ever stand out in bold relief as a great and
Rochester was renowned as an abolitionist stronghold and a depot vital to the Underground Railroad. unique specimen of American manhood and greatness, and besides being honored by fitting monuments in marble and bronze, a grateful people will hold him in loving remembrance. 7 Douglass is buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery, just blocks away from the White's one-time home. It is not known if the Whites ever met Frederick Douglass during their time in Rochester. We do know, however, that Rosetta (born June 24, 1839), Douglass' eldest child, was a teenager attending seminary and assisting her father with editing in the Rochester office during the three and a half years the Whites lived on Mt. Hope Avenue. Marrying a former slave named Nathan Sprague the year of the Emancipation Proclamation, Rosetta again worked as an assistant to her father when he was appointed US Marshal of the District of Columbia in 1877. In the nation's capital, Rosetta met the prominent black Adventist physician James H. Howard (1861–1936) and his wife Isabel (née Cook), who introduced her to the Adventist message around 1889. Sometime after—the precise year is unsure—she became a member of the First Seventh-day Adventist Church in Washington. As Douglas Morgan, an authority on twentieth-century black Adventism in Washington, DC, has explored in recent monographs, the sophisticated African American membership of First Church posed earnest and compelling objections to denominational leaders' attempts to segregate congregations on the basis of race in the nation's capital. 8 Specifically, Rosetta Sprague—outspoken on issues of race as her father had been—is reported as loudly denouncing Ellen White's firm dissuasion to an interracial couple endeavoring upon marriage, characterizing White's stance as “a wicked catering to race prejudice.” 9 Rosetta Douglass-Sprague died a respected Adventist and civil rights activist in Washington, DC, on November 25, 1906.

Eri L. Barr

“We humbly trust that the day is not far distant when the mountains and valleys of Vt. [Vermont] shall echo with the loud cry of the Third Angel's Message, the last servant of our God be sealed, and his saints go forever free.” 10 So wrote Eri L. Barr in the Review and Herald in late 1857. Now believed to be the earliest African American Adventist minister, Barr was an important and beloved itinerant leader-minister in 1850s Sabbatarian Adventism. Born in Reading, Vermont, on May 23, 1814, Eri was the son of one William Barr, who is listed in census records as “free colored.” 11 Scant
is known of Barr’s early life, other than that he studied English at Wesleyan Academy in Massachusetts in 1836, and, from a letter of his published in a Millerite paper, that he embraced the soon coming of Christ, steadfast years after the Great Disappointment. Barr married Lori Z. Harvey, on December 7, 1842, in Reading, Vermont, and the couple had one child, Emma, the year of the Disappointment. Barr put bread on the table for his family as a mechanic, until he accepted the seventh-day Sabbath in the first years of the 1850s, and, shortly after, began itinerating as a Sabbatarian Adventist minister in New England.

Early Sabbatarian ministers most often traveled and worked in pairs. Barr is recorded as partnering with at least three other men: Frederick Wheeler in 1853; John Nevins Andrews in 1855; and Joseph Bates in 1855–1856. Barr and Bates worked particularly well together, as numerous reports cosigned by them in the Review attest, conducting at least a dozen meetings in tandem in 1856 alone. Bates is considered a cofounder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church along with James and Ellen White, and it is especially significant that in pre-Civil War America a man of color partnered with him in his founding efforts. An Adventist black minister would not speak so freely and frequently to white people again until Lewis C. Sheafe did so in Washington, DC, in the first decade of the twentieth century. In the tiny world of Sabbatarian Adventists, Eri Barr and James and Ellen White would meet on several occasions. The Whites first met Barr in “the mountains of Vermont,” Barr’s home region, on September 3, 1852, in Wolcott, at a meeting in a 400-seat tent that adjoined the house of Seth Hubbell Peck. James White writes that here he and Ellen “met Brn. Byington, Hutchins, and Barr, who continue firm friends of the cause and devoted laborers,” while at meetings “generally attended with great success.” Later that month, on the morning of September 30, Ellen White had a vision in Dorchester, Massachusetts, the contents of which James White adumbrated to Leonard Hastings in a letter. One of the takeaways of the vision was “that brethren Baker, Ingraham, Barr and Wheeler were men to be depended upon.” In June of the next year, Barr reports meeting Robert and Eunice Harmon, Ellen’s parents, in Topsham, Maine, during an evangelistic tour of the state. In May 1857, the Whites attended a tent meeting that Barr was holding in Lancaster, Massachusetts. Although there is no extant correspondence of Ellen White to Barr, she did single him out in two letters addressed to others, to be remarked upon shortly.

In almost a decade as a Sabbatarian minister in the lean years between the Great Disappointment and the official selection of the name “Seventh-day Adventist” in 1860, Barr mainly labored in the New England states of Vermont, Maine, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, as well as New York. Barr was a versatile worker, visiting scattered believers in far-flung locales; correcting errors in doctrine; holding prayer sessions; conducting evangelistic meetings in town halls, tents, and believers’ homes; giving Bible studies; passing out tracts; delivering sermons on Sabbaths and other days of the week; and raising up churches. Barr’s effectiveness as a minister is evinced by his reports of conversions; requests from believers for him to labor in their areas, the featuring of his progress reports in the Review, and his leadership role in “general Conferences”—calling for and chairing—and other Sabbatarian Adventist decision-making bodies. Staggeringly, it would not be until more than a century later that blacks took a leadership role in general Adventist conferences (i.e., mixed race) tasked with directing the movement at large.
As it did with several other Sabbatarian leaders, Barr’s frenetic pace had a deleterious effect on his domestic life. On December 10, 1858, Lori Barr obtained a divorce from Eri for the cause of “willing absence.” The marriage had lasted for just over sixteen years. 21 In this same period, Barr lent his voice with others in encouraging a Sabbatarian group in Connecticut to burn daguerreotypes and cases, with the rationale that the considerable monies spent on the pictures should have been used to fund the spread of the gospel. Both James and Ellen White chastised Barr especially for this, given his stature in the movement. James wrote that “We have been surprised and grieved to learn how some have run from place to place on the cars, encouraging a fanatical spirit in burning daguerreotypes, &c., worse than wasting their Lord’s money, and leaving the brethren in distraction.” 22 Ellen White, meanwhile, altered her earlier commendation of Barr, upbraiding him for the daguerreotype furor, as well as for what she deemed to be his extreme application of the message to Laodicea in Revelation.

I saw that Brother Barr has not been standing in the counsel of God. He has had a wrong spirit, has followed impressions and feeling. It has led him astray. I saw that he was more to be blamed in Connecticut than the church there. He, a servant of Jesus Christ, should be ready to correct these wrong influences in the church, but he gave support to them instead of correcting them, and I saw that he had better have been working with his hands than exerting this wrong influence in the church. 23

Barr apologized for his actions on the ground level, and then issued a lengthy mea culpa in the summer of 1862. 24 Indicating that he had no ill-will toward the Whites, Barr was one of the vouchers for the integrity of James White in a pamphlet titled Vindication of the Business Career of Elder James White. 25

In the spring of 1861, Barr reported from Niles, New York, to Review readers that he was in “feeble health,” to the point that it was difficult for him to write. For the next three years Barr would battle with tuberculosis under the care of Daniel Oviatt (with whom he had established a church in Niles), until he died a week before his fiftieth birthday on May 16, 1864, in Oviatt’s home in Alma, New York. Nathan Fuller, a delegate to the first General Conference and a leading voice in the formation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, stated that at Barr’s last moment “his mind was calm, and he felt that death would be a sweet rest.” 26

Ellen White’s few interactions with Eri Barr are intriguing in light of statements she would make half a century later. The young prophet’s several affirmations of Barr’s ministry show that she supported a black man ministering to whites, and indeed, didn’t even view this dynamic through a racial lens at all. When the conditions changed, however—and the changed conditions are key here—Ellen White would repeatedly write lines like this from 1901: “Colored men are inclined to think that they are fitted to labor for white people, when they should devote themselves to doing missionary work among the colored people. There is plenty of room for intelligent colored men to labor for their own people….” 27 In a strange way, even White’s suggestion that Barr quit the ministry and return to his mechanic trade shows that she viewed him as any other of the one-to-two-dozen Sabbatarian ministers, some to whom she made similar cease and desist advisement. And so, early in her ministry, a leitmotif in Ellen White’s life emerges: her object in life would be the spread of the Adventist gospel through her movement—race, with its maddening attendant complications, would only be a deterrent to that object that had to be surmounted somehow.

The Hardys

Ellen White recorded in her diary on January 25, 1859:
It looks like a storm....We [Ellen, John and Anna Loughborough] rode fourteen miles to Brother Hardy’s. Brother Cramer did not give us the right directions, and we went four miles out of our way. Did not arrive at Brother Hardy’s until dinner time. It was snowing fast. We were heartily welcomed by the family. A good dinner was soon in readiness for us of which we thankfully partook. This is a colored family but although the house is poor and old, everything is arranged with neatness and exact order. The children are well behaved, intelligent, and interesting. May I yet have a better acquaintance with this dear family.28

This African American family may have been inauspicious at the time, but they would exceed even the normal forerunner status of many Sabbatarians by accomplishing firsts statewide, as opposed to just in the movement. The patriarch of the clan, William J. Hardy, was born in Seneca County, New York—a critical zone in Whitney Cross’ Burned-over District—on January 9, 1823.29 Although New York was a slave state at the time of his birth, it is unknown whether Hardy was ever enslaved; a clue, however, may be found in the fact that the year New York outlawed slavery his parents moved to Washtenaw County, Michigan. Hardy married Eliza Watts in 1844, purchased a sizable farm in Gaines Township, Michigan, and the couple had their first of six children a year later. In the summer of 1857, Eliza Hardy accepted the Sabbatarian Adventist message upon hearing Joseph B. Frisbie preach in Caledonia, a town six miles from Gaines Township; her husband joined her shortly after.

Ellen White and the Loughboroughs probably first heard of the Hardy family from John Byington, later the inaugural General Conference president, who overnighted with the Hardys in early October 1857, scrawling in his diary, “a Mulatto family, but very good and kind.”30 Byington’s lodging with the Hardys, as well as White and Loughborough’s visit in 1859, and speaking appointments at the Hardys’ Caledonia church by notables such as Joseph Bates and John Andrews, show the Hardys’ value to early Adventist pioneers. While he was leader of the Caledonia church, Hardy and his congregation put up $1,050 (around $21,300 in 2018) to have conscientious Adventists’ drafts commuted during the Civil War, and, in the 1870s, contributed funds for the Adventist work in California and other frontiers.

During the 1860s and ’70s, William Hardy’s influence expanded simultaneously in the wider community. In 1872, he was elected the county supervisor for Gaines Township and served as a delegate to Republican county conventions, distinguished as Michigan’s first African American to occupy public office, and the first Adventist elected politician. Eugene, William and Eliza’s son, is purported to be the first African American high school graduate in the state of Michigan. Eugene went on to study law, while one of his other brothers, William, attended Battle Creek College.31 There is evidence that Ellen White’s journalized desire—“May I yet have a better acquaintance with this dear family”—was satisfied. In an extremely vulnerable time for the sickly James White, and almost eight years after Ellen’s previous visit to the Hardy home, the bitterly freezing morning of December 19, 1866, found the Whites plowing through inclement weather on the Michigan peninsula. James relates that the couple and their son Willie lodged in a “noisy rum tavern” the night previously, and after driving fifteen miles against a “keen” north wind at five in the morning to reach the Hardy residence, they “thank[ed] God for an Advent home, and simple, healthful fare.”32

William J. Hardy died on June 8, 1888, a local paper eulogizing him in words consistent with Ellen White’s decades earlier: “He was a man of honor, honesty and integrity, and was appreciated by the community in which he lived.”33 Eliza Hardy followed her husband on December 3, 1890. Both are buried in Blaine Cemetery in

“He was a man of honor, honesty and integrity, and was appreciated by the community in which he lived.”
Gaines Township, Michigan.

The Hardys, with their impeccable (Sabbatarian and Seventh-day) Adventist heritage, held a capacity in early Adventism the precise opposite of African Americans after the Civil War: as succorers of white Adventists, not needy, white-terrorized and impoverished former black captives in, say, fin de siècle Mississippi, whom Ellen White’s son Edson encountered. The Hardys’ succor went beyond just providing lodging and leadership; by the late 1860s the family was wealthy and were most likely the main source behind the draft deferment money and the financing of frontier missions. Like Eri Barr, they were among those who helped found—yes, who made—the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Benjamin Baker is the creator of blacksdahistory.org. He writes from Maryland.

Footnotes:

30. John Byington, Diary, October 5, 1852, Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University.