

Uncovering "the Hidden History of Mestizo America" in Elizabeth Drinker's Diary: Interracial Relationships in Late Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia

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Late one morning in February 1795, an odd assortment of people appeared on Elizabeth Drinker's doorstep on Philadelphia's Second Street—at least it seemed like an odd group to the Drinker family. Elizabeth recorded the incident in her diary: "Alice, a yallow woman, who has taking our cloaths in to wash for some time past, came here before dinner, in great distress, her Child in her Arms, her husband John Wright, a negro Man, and a white Girl, attended by a Constable, who was taking them all to Jail, for keeping, as he said, a disorderly or riotous House."¹

Clearly the constable—and Alice's neighbors who had presumably reported her—thought that there was something suspicious about all these people of varying skin colors—white, black, and "yellow," or mulatto—being together in the same house. To eighteenth-century elite Philadelphians and the city's authorities, this particular combination of a mulatto woman and child, a white girl, and a black man usually meant only one thing—a house of prostitution.² Faced with the evidence of the company she kept, the Drinkers could not provide Alice with an unqualified reference; they told the constable that they "knew nothing of the business and but little of Alice [and] could say no more in her favour but that we hop'd she was honest." After the group left for jail,

1. Elaine Forman Crane, ed., *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker* 3 vols. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 1:651. Hereafter cited as *Drinker Diary*. I would like to thank Elaine Forman Crane and Amy Winans for their valuable comments and to express appreciation to Elijah and Nancy Anderson for many years of conversations on race and mixed race in America.

2. "Disorderly houses," operated by both black and white women, were the target of legal restrictions, especially in South Carolina, where interracial sexual relations among non-elite whites and blacks threatened ideas about social order. Timothy J. Lockley, "Crossing the Race Divide: Interracial Sex in Antebellum Savannah," *Slavery and Abolition* 18(1997): 159-73.

the Drinkers' main concern was their fear of losing all the laundry they had given Alice – "a dozen quite new Shirts and Aprons and many other things, as they [the Wrights] had left their house open and nobody in it." Elizabeth was pleasantly surprised when, an hour later, Alice "return'd in good Spirits" with the news that she and her husband had made bail, though "the white Girl was put in Jail." Soon afterward, Alice "brought our Linnen home, nothing missing."³

The entries on this incident mark Alice Wright's first appearance in Elizabeth Drinker's diary, though Wright had been working for the Drinkers for some time as a washerwoman—a common occupation for many of Philadelphia's poorer women, especially black and mixed-race women.⁴ She continued to work for the Drinker family until her final illness and death in 1803. In the nearly fifty years of the diary, and the thousands of people with whom Elizabeth Drinker had contact, Alice Wright was one of just nineteen individuals whom Elizabeth Drinker referred to as "mulatto" or "yellow." Most were servants or workers in the Drinker household and their family members; two were criminals, and two came to the attention of the Drinkers' Quaker meeting. Undoubtedly there were more people of mixed European and African ancestry among the many Drinker identified as "black" or "negro," and perhaps even some among the thousands she viewed as "white," but Drinker did not note, or perhaps even notice, their mixed heritage.⁵

In 1995, in his presidential address to the Organization of American Historians, "The Hidden History of Mestizo America," Gary Nash challenged historians to break "the silence in our history books on the topic of multiraciality," to reveal "a powerful theme in American history that has been largely hidden—that people of many kinds, in every era and in every region of this country, have found loopholes in the ruling system

3. *Drinker Diary*, 20 Feb. 1795 (1:651-52).

4. Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 150.

5. Besides Alice Wright, five other people identified as "mulatto" worked for the Drinker family: Tom Batt, Fanny Rodney, a waiter named Stevens or Stevenson, an unnamed gardener, and an unnamed woman who worked for the Drinkers' daughter Nancy Skyrin. Four others worked for friends of the Drinkers: Poll worked for the Parr family; two "girls" were with the Whartons; and a "boy" worked for the Gardners. Lydia Williams and William Merritt sought to place their children with the Drinkers, and Hannah Gibbs was the child of a servant. The neighbors were an unnamed man and a woman named Rachel. The criminals were one man and a woman named Elizabeth. Quakers discussed Hannah Burrows and an unnamed woman. Diary citations are given below with the specific discussion of each individual.

of racial division and classification.” Nash cited statistics that about three-fourths of all African-Americans have multiracial ancestry and that nearly all Latinos are multiracial, as are a sizeable majority of American Indians and millions of America’s so-called whites.⁶ But these mixed ancestries have remained hidden behind the rigid racial classifications of American society and the legal fiction of “one drop of blood,” which still influences the way Americans identify themselves and each other as “black,” “white,” or other mono-ethnic categories.⁷

By the time of the American Revolution, most of the English colonies and newly formed United States had passed laws assigning mixed-race individuals the same legal status as blacks, whether enslaved or free, whether newly arrived from Africa or descended from several generations of African-Americans. Like other Anglo-Americans, eighteenth-century Pennsylvanians had adopted the term “mulatto” from the Spanish to describe people of mixed ancestry, but in English usage the word was primarily descriptive of appearance. To Spanish and French colonizers, mulattos and *mulâtres* tended to be members of a third caste in between black slaves and white masters; to the English, the word “mulatto” indicated individuals with lighter complexions and more European features, but it said nothing about their status.⁸ Throughout the colonial era, mulattos, like blacks, tended to be enslaved but might, under certain circumstances and in certain regions, become free. When speaking of groups of people with some African heritage, Anglo-Americans tended to lump them all together as “Negroes” or “blacks.” Laws such as Pennsylvania’s 1725-26 Act for the Better Regulating of Negroes, which applied to all free people of color, used the language “blacks and mulattos,” to insure that there was no legal loophole. As English political systems became dominant, English racial ideology evolved and took hold in places with diverse European populations like New York and Pennsylvania.⁹

6. Gary B. Nash, “The Hidden History of Mestizo America,” *Journal of American History* 82(1995): 949.

7. Scott L. Malcomson, *One Drop of Blood: The American Misadventure of Race* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000); F. James Davis, *Who Is Black? One Nation’s Definition* (State College: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

8. Jack D. Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 131-89. I use the word “mulatto” to mean people of mixed black and white ancestry; I use the word “mestizo” as Nash does, in the sense of “racial intermixture of all kinds.” Nash, “Hidden History,” 941.

9. James T. Mitchell and Henry Flanders, comps., *Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania from 1682 to 1801* (Harrisburg: Clarence M. Busch, 1896), 4: 59-64; Edward Raymond Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania: Slavery, Servitude, Freedom* (1910; New York: Arno Press, 1969), 26.

Winthrop Jordan drew the connection between sexuality and racial terminology to explain why the Anglo-American colonist "remained firm in his rejection of the mulatto, in his categorization of mixed-bloods as belonging to the lower caste." Jordan may have meant his use of the male pronoun to be generic, but as he continues, he clearly is writing only about men, white men who had sexual relations with (or longings for) black women:

Interracial propagation was a constant reproach that he was failing to be true to himself. Sexual intimacy strikingly symbolized a union he wished to avoid. If he could not restrain his sexual nature, he could at least reject its fruits and thus solace himself that he had done no harm. Perhaps he sensed as well that continued racial intermixture would eventually undermine the logic of the racial slavery upon which his society was based. For the separation of slaves from free men depended on a clear demarcation of the races, and the presence of mulattos blurred this essential distinction. Accordingly he made every effort to nullify the effects of racial intermixture. By classifying the mulatto as a Negro he was in effect denying that intermixture had occurred at all.¹⁰

Jordan's explanation overemphasizes white male responsibility for racial terminology. Although white men were responsible for the language of legislation and public pronouncements, white women participated in the development of the language of race within daily discourse. Naming racial categories is a form of power, imposed by people with power over those without, and the same elites have also held the power to write history. We can learn what Elizabeth Drinker called people, but she provides few hints to what mixed-race people called themselves.¹¹

10. Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 177-78.

11. On the power dynamic of naming and defining racial categories, see Jordan, 216-65, 482-511; Davis, *Who Is Black?*; Everette E. Dennis, "Racial Naming," *Media Studies Journal* 8.3(1994): 105-112; Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 193-245; Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed Race* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); Virginia R. Dominguez, *White By Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986); Ruth Herndon, "The Right to a Name: The Narragansett People and Rhode Island Officials in the Revolutionary Era," *Ethnohistory* 44(1997): 433-62; Daniel R. Mandell, "Shifting Boundaries of Race and Ethnicity: Indian-Black Inter-marriage in Southern New England, 1760-1880," *Journal of American History* 85(1998): 466-501; Bettye Collier-Thomas and James Turner, "Race, Class and Color: The African American Discourse on Identity," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 14(Fall 1994): 5-34.

Jordan also emphasizes sexual relationships between white male slaveholders and enslaved women as the sole source of mulatto offspring, but historians have found evidence of a variety of interracial unions: sexual relations and marriages between English servants and black servants or slaves; marriages between blacks and non-elite whites in the back country; and sexual activity in houses of prostitution in Charleston and New Orleans. While men passed laws against interracial unions, women had much of the responsibility for insuring that such unions did not take place between servants within their own household. "The history of racial categories," Martha Hodes writes, "is often a history of sexuality as well, for it is partly as a result of the taboos against boundary crossing that such categories are invented."¹²

The full history of the development of racial terminology, particularly as it was used in everyday speech, is yet to be written. Elizabeth Drinker's diary can serve as a useful source in identifying some aspects of evolving racial terminology in Philadelphia. Drinker's usage of words identifying race may suggest patterns in the language of racial definition, as white Philadelphians spoke of individual "mulattos" but also

12. Martha Hodes, *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), xvii. Other recent work on the variety of interracial relationships in early America includes: Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1998); Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Catherine Clinton and Michelle Gillespie, eds., *The Devil's Lane: Sex and Race in the Early South* (New York: Oxford, 1997); Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); James Hugo Johnston, *Race Relations in Virginia and Miscegenation in the South, 1776-1860* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970); Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Jean R. Soderlund, "Black Women in Colonial Pennsylvania," in Joe William Trotter, Jr., and Eric Ledell Smith, *African Americans in Pennsylvania* (State College: Pennsylvania State University Press 1999), 73-92; Gregory Stephens, *On Racial Frontiers: The New Culture of Frederick Douglass, Ralph Ellison, and Bob Marley* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Jan Ellen Lewis and Peter S. Onuf, eds., *Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson: History, Memory, and Civic Culture* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999); Mark R. Schultz, "Interracial Kinship Ties and the Emergence of a Rural Black Middle Class: Hancock County, Georgia, 1865-1920," in John C. Inscoc, ed., *Georgia in Black and White: Explorations in the Race Relations of a Southern State, 1865-1950* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 141-72. For earlier work, See Edward Byron Reuter, *Race Mixture: Studies in Inter-marriage and Miscegenation* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1931).

held to rigid divisions of people into "red, white, and black."¹³ The diary can also be a vehicle for uncovering some of America's "hidden mestizo history." It illustrates attitudes of Philadelphia's Quaker elites toward ethnic minorities and poor whites who, in their view, comprised the "lower sort" of people; it also reveals their attitudes toward inter-ethnic relationships. Drinker may also provide a window into the lives of the "lower sort" themselves, as well as their relationships with each other, in a city that was remarkably diverse and residually mixed. Finally, unlike most other early American sources that chronicle changes in speech and attitude, this diary represents the voice of a woman and so may illuminate women's roles in the evolution of attitudes toward mixed-race individuals and relationships. How did Drinker differentiate between mulatto and black, and how did her perceptions—and those of other Philadelphians—change over time? What can we learn about Philadelphia's racially and ethnically diverse laboring population, including people of mixed race, through the diary of one well-to-do Quaker woman?

For the first three decades that she kept her diary, Elizabeth Drinker perceived few people as mulattos, though there were many that she called "black" or "negro." In two cases, she may have simply repeated the terminology she had read in the news or heard from others: a "mulatto" woman known as Elizabeth was convicted of murder and executed in 1774, along with four men; a "molato" man, convicted of burglary along with a white man and a black man, was executed in 1783.¹⁴ The trials and executions of these mulattos must have confirmed and reinforced the stereotype that well-to-do Philadelphians like Elizabeth Drinker held about blacks as well as people of mixed parentage: they were prone to commit crimes.¹⁵

From 1759 until the 1794, Drinker called only one other person "mulatto," the servant of friends. When Drinker went to visit William and Margaret Parr in November 1759, she noted that "Molato Poll . . . was brought to Bed last Evening," that is, she had given birth. Drinker

13. Gary B. Nash, *Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early North America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1992).

14. *Drinker Diary*, 4 May 1774; 16 Feb. 1783 (1:199-200, 409). The "mulattoe woman" had been convicted of murdering her child. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, [CD-Rom] (Provo, UT: Accessible Archives), entry no. 17997, 20 April 1774.

15. For a recent discussion of perceptions of crime and race, see Daniel A. Cohen, "Social Injustice, Sexual Violence, Spiritual Transcendence: Constructions of Interracial Rape in Early American Crime Literature, 1767-1817," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 56(1999): 481-526.

ordinarily did not comment on the childbirth of servants, either her own or those of her friends. The stereotypical servants who gave birth were young, unmarried women who had engaged in illicit sex, and so Drinker would not have wanted to take note in print, but Poll's case seems to have been different. Perhaps she was married to another of the Parrs' servants, a fairly common pattern among older servants in large households, thus making the birth perfectly legitimate. Or perhaps Poll confirmed another stereotype held about black and mulatto women: they were highly sexual beings who became pregnant easily and often. This stereotype may have been strongest of all in the case of mulatto women, since they seemed to be the very embodiment of interracial sex, living evidence that such activity had already gone on and would continue.¹⁶

Of the other individuals Elizabeth Drinker identified as "mulatto," most worked for her, her daughters, or her friends as servants or hired workers. Some were servants of acquaintances and merited only passing notice: former neighbor Janny Gardner tried to persuade the Drinkers to buy the remainder of her family's "malato Boys time"; friends Sally and Sammy Wharton had "two malota girls." Drinker never even mentions these servants' names. Nor does she give names to the "deaf malato man" who was paid for "putting our garden in order" or the mulatto woman who was buried in Friends' burial ground at Fairhill.¹⁷ What is interesting about even these brief references is that they, and all the other references to mulattos after 1783, occur within ten years, from December 1794 to July 1804.

Beginning in the mid-1790s, Elizabeth Drinker became acutely aware of the presence of the mixed-race individuals in her midst. She writes of mulatto neighbors, a mulatto driver, a mulatto washerwoman, and a mulatto waiter who served at her daughter's wedding dinner. Two mulatto families came asking her to take their daughters into her household as servants under indenture. A mulatto woman preacher was pestering the Society of Friends to admit her to membership, and a mulatto woman was buried in the Quaker burial ground. Drinker's newfound consciousness of mixed-race people was in part a consequence of world

16. A second reference three years later calls her "Parr's Poll." *Drinker Diary*, 30 Nov. 1759, 20 Sept. 1762 (1:40, 96). Another possibility is that Poll was, in fact, a slave. On the image of black and mulatto women as highly sexual, see Jennifer L. Morgan, "Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder": Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1700," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 54(1997): 167-92; Jordan, *Black over White*, 150-51.

17. *Drinker Diary*, 27 May, 5 Aug. 1799, 28 March 1800(2: 1172, 1196, 1286, 781).

events and Philadelphia's changing population: there actually were more mulattos in the city. In the 1790s, French and mulatto refugees, with some black slaves, fled St. Domingue (Haiti), and several ships arrived in Philadelphia, rapidly increasing the city's black and mulatto population. The mixed-race population also may have increased with the immigration of freed and runaway slaves from the southern states who came seeking the benefits of Pennsylvania's Abolition Act of 1780.¹⁸ From 1790 to 1800, according to the federal census, the free non-white population of Philadelphia more than tripled from 2,099 to 6,795. In these years, the census did not distinguish between black and mulatto, as it would do from 1820 to 1860, but people of mixed ancestry probably constituted a large proportion of the increase. Drinker noticed more mulattos in her world because, in fact, there were more. But events in Philadelphia and within her own household may also have intensified her perception of mixed-race individuals.¹⁹

Elizabeth Drinker held stereotypes about mulattos, just as she did about blacks and other ethnic groups and the "lower sort" in general. The "lower sort" was likely to be dishonest, lazy, and drunk.²⁰ The men drank too much and were quick to violence. The young women flirted shamelessly and were apt to go off "frolicking" for days at a time: older

18. The gradual abolition law was the first passed by individual states, but it was also the most restrictive. It provided that blacks born in Pennsylvania after 1780 would be free, though they were to be bound or indentured to white families until the age of 28. A. Leon Higginbotham, *In the Matter of Color: Race and the American Legal Process* (New York: Oxford, 1978); Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, 111. Free adult blacks who migrated into Pennsylvania—and who carried manumission papers—received some guarantee of continued freedom. In some regions of the south, mulattos were manumitted more frequently, and they had advantages over dark-skinned slaves in running away. See Robert Otwell, "Becoming Free: Manumission and the Genesis of a Free Black Community in South Carolina, 1740-90," *Slavery and Abolition* 17(1996): 1-19; David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic," *WMQ* 56(1999): 243-72; Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 140.

19. "U. S. Historical Census Date Browser," <<http://fisher.lib.Virginia.edu/cgi-local/censusbin/census/cen.pl>>, March 2001; Turner, *Negro in Pennsylvania*, 253. This jump in the city's free black population did not reflect large numbers of manumissions: in 1790, the number of slaves in Philadelphia was just 373; by 1800, the number was only 85. The census did not begin to enumerate "mulattos" separately until 1820, a practice it continued until 1860, but Philadelphia seems to have had a relatively high proportion of mixed-race people early on. W. E. B. Du Bois noted in 1901 that in Philadelphia and New York, "the mulattoes we see on the streets are almost invariably the descendants of one, two, or three generations of mulattoes, the infusion of white blood coming often far back in the eighteenth century." *On Sociology and the Black Community*, ed. Dan S. Green and Edwin D. Driver (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1899), 358-60.

20. *Drinker Diary*, 9, 19 April 1798 (2:1020, 1024).

women complained and were "ill natured."²¹ German men were out to make a lot of money, very quickly, and were not necessarily honest; the German tavern keeper in Reading was "a dirty old Dutch woman"; at a second "Dutch house," the food was barely tolerable. Her neighbors were "two of the most wicked spiteful revengfull persons I think I ever knew." Not coincidentally, she also noted, "they are dutch foulk."²² The French drank and were excessively noisy; in France and Haiti, they carried out shockingly ruthless executions.²³ The "Irish papist" father of her servant girl was apt to be "in Liquor," and a stereotypical "Wild Irish-Man" was "not fit to be trusted."²⁴ Epidemic disease arrived on ships from Ireland or the Caribbean and spread rapidly in poor sections of town like the so-called "Irish-town."²⁵ Blacks were thought to have special immunity to disease; mulattos, on the other hand, seemed especially likely to be carriers, particularly of yellow fever.²⁶

Like many other Anglo-American elites, Elizabeth Drinker was never very comfortable with the diverse society in which she lived. Into the 1790s, many of Philadelphia's blacks lived in the heart of the city, the commercial center where the Drinkers and other merchants lived and worked.²⁷ The area was home to a mixed European population as well; according to Benjamin Franklin, residents often heard more German in the streets than English, a development he rued.²⁸ Drinker certainly must have agreed; she seems to have suspected that some Germans who spoke "Dutch" to her German servant were just pretending not to know

21. *Drinker Diary*, 10 Feb. 1780; 30 Nov. 1796; 12 Aug. 1797 (1:366; 2: 863, 952).

22. *Drinker Diary*, 14 July 1760; 29, 30 Aug. 1771; 23, 24 May 1782; 29 Nov. 1795 (1:65, 168, 399-400, 756).

23. *Drinker Diary*, 23, 29, 31 Aug. 1798; 11, 28 Jan. 1794; 23 Dec. 1802 (2:1072, 1075-76; 1:541-43; 2:1601-2).

24. *Drinker Diary*, 25 May 1807; 21 Oct. 1777 (3:2039; 1:247). Some of Drinker's ancestors had come to Pennsylvania from Ireland, but she held typical Protestant Anglo-Irish attitudes toward Irish Catholics.

25. *Drinker Diary*, 10, 11 March 1794; 12 Oct. 1793 (1:500, 547, 517).

26. Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia...* (1794; Philadelphia: Independence National Park, 1993); J. M. Powell, *Bring Out Your Dead: The Great Plague of Yellow Fever in Philadelphia in 1793* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949; reprint, 1993).

27. Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 164. For residential patterns in the city, see Billy G. Smith, *The "Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

28. John B. Franz, "Franklin and the Pennsylvania Germans," *Pennsylvania History* 65 (1998): 23-24; Benjamin Franklin, "On a Proposed Act to Prevent Emigration" (1773), *Benjamin Franklin: Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1987), 710.

English.²⁹ Her neighbors were just as likely to be German, French, Scots-Irish, Jewish, black, or mulatto as English. This varied crowd was inside as well as outside her home, for she employed live-in servants and day workers of English, Irish, Scottish, German, Swedish, and African ancestry, as well as the few identified as "mulatto."³⁰ During the British occupation of Philadelphia 1777-1778, while her husband was imprisoned by the Americans as a suspected Tory, she was forced to quarter a Scottish major who came with "3 Horses 3 Cows 2 Sheep and 2 Turkeys with several Fowls, in our Stable, he has 3 Servants 2 White Men, and one Negro Boy call'd Damon, the Servants are here all day, but away at Night, he has 3 Hessians who take their turns to wate on him as Messengers or orderly men as they call'd 'em so that we have enough of such sort of Company."³¹

The Revolution forced this particular multitude on the Drinker household, but for most of her life she lived in a mixed household, with both black and white servants. Holding onto good servants was a problem in both wartime and peacetime; this difficulty was one reason the Drinkers hired servants from whatever ethnic group they could. The resulting mixture sometimes led to trouble. In 1804, her maid Nancy Stewart was "in ill humour for some time" with the three black household workers and quit because of them. "Peter was backward in waiting on her," she claimed, and "she would not eat with Negroes"—"which we did not require her to do," Drinker added.³² Sometimes the conflict was between servants and neighbors of different ethnic groups. German neighbors feuded with the Drinkers' newly hired black servant, Tom Thomas. Mrs. Pantlif "set their dog at him, who bit his thigh in 2 or 3 places" and her husband "beat and brus'd [him] shamefully." A few weeks later, the dog bit another neighbor's "Negro Boy in the

29. *Drinker Diary*, 21 Nov. 1777 (1:256). For examples of Drinker's usual concern for animal welfare, see *Drinker Diary*, 16 July 1793; 24 Oct. 1796 (1:489; 2:854).

30. For example, in the 1770s, the Drinkers employed a German stableboy, Harry Catter; an Irish maid, Ann Kelly, and another maid, Jane Boon, who was probably of Swedish origin. Alison Duncan Hirsch, "Philadelphia Quaker Elizabeth Drinker and Her Servant Jane Boon: 'Times Are Much Changed, and Maids Are Become Mistresses,'" in Nancy L. Rhoden and Ian K. Steele, *The Human Tradition in the American Revolution* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 2000), 159-82. Drinker sometimes gives the ethnic origins of her white servants; in other cases, their names indicate their probable ethnicity. For example, it is likely that Nancy Stewart was of Scottish ancestry. *Drinker Diary*, 24 Aug. 1804 (3:1763).

31. *Drinker Diary*, 1 Jan. 1778 (1:272). Drinker later discovered that the "Hessian" orderlies were from the German principality of Anspach rather than Hesse.

32. *Drinker Diary*, 24 Aug. 1804 (3:1763).

thigh." Drinker, who usually expressed horror at cruelty to animals, noted without comment that the neighbor "had the Dog shot." The Drinkers were delighted when authorities found "a large quantity" of stolen goods in the Pantlifs' house and the family disappeared.³³

Such antagonism between neighbors and among servants was not always the case. English and German or black and white servants in the same household often had good relationships with each other. Harry Catter, a German boy, and Jane Boon, probably of Swedish ancestry, worked side by side, carrying food and medicine at Elizabeth Drinker's behest to wounded soldiers during the British occupation of Philadelphia. The Drinkers' white maid, Sally Dawson, and their daughter's black maid, Patience Gibbs, were close in age, about fifteen, and had "a fine frolick" playing in the new "shower bath box" that Nancy Skyryn had installed in their Germantown home in 1798. Sally and her mistress also had some fun with a young black boy, Scipio Drake, whom they dressed in "girls cloaths" while they boiled his clothes to rid them of lice. Neighbors of any ethnic group could be helpful as well as antagonistic. When the Drinkers fled Philadelphia during the yellow fever epidemic of 1798, they put their cat and her kitten outside in the yard and "hired Malato Rachel next door to take care of them."³⁴

Mixed-race people created little particular controversy as long as they lived and worked among blacks; controversy arose only when blacks and mulattos threatened to mingle with whites, such as when Philadelphia authorities found Alice Wright and her husband consorting with the "white girl." The young woman was probably working for Alice, assisting in the laundry business, but Philadelphians were quick to assume that their business was sexual—they were operating "a disorderly house"—rather than anything as mundane as laundry. Mixed-race people also were suspect as potential carriers of disease, a stereotype that probably had its origins in the fact that ships from the West Indies often brought simultaneously both mulattos and epidemics of yellow fever or malaria. By the 1790s, Philadelphians had already had more than a century of experience with epidemics of tropical origins, and they were well aware that disease frequently erupted soon after the arrival of ships from the Caribbean.

In July 1793, refugee ships arrived carrying French-speaking whites,

33. *Drinker Diary*, 23-24 May, 11 July 1782; 20 July 1784 (1:399-401, 425).

34. *Drinker Diary*, 9 Oct. 1777; 31 July, 28 Sept. 1798 (1: 241; 2:1060, 1074); Hirsch, "Elizabeth Drinker and Jane Boon," 174.

mulattos, and their slaves fleeing the violent revolution in St. Domingue. The city officially welcomed them, and Quakers and other groups offered assistance, but, for many white residents, the refugees brought anxieties about disease, violence, and racial intermingling.³⁵ Philadelphia had been free of major epidemics for fifteen years, but in August 1793, a month after the arrival of the Santo Domingans, a "putrid fever"—later identified as yellow fever—broke out. One attorney who fled to the country described the terrifying scene he left behind: "The Houses shut up & the Streets empty except the french Sailors, People of St. Domingo of all Colours with their Heads tied a few Citizens whom you do not know posting along with Sponges in their noses & the Herse Constantly passing."³⁶ The hearses were frightening enough, but the unfamiliar scene of "people of all Colours" with Afro-Caribbean-style headdresses heightened the terror of white Philadelphians. West Indian immigrants, particularly mulattos, became permanently associated with yellow fever.

By August 1793, Elizabeth and her children had already fled to the country, but she feared for relatives, friends, and servants still in the city. Their coach driver, a black man named Joseph Gibbs, became ill and went "to some Negro House." The Drinkers hoped that his illness was not "the contagious fever" and asked one of their doctors to visit him. They next heard that he was "very ill, of the pleurisy and has a bad cough, has been blooded 3 times." Elizabeth recorded in her diary the prevailing view of blacks' immunity to yellow fever: "'Tis remarkable [that] not one Negro has yet taken the infection, they have offered to [serve] as Nurses to the sick."³⁷

Drinker continued to associate mulattos—from St. Domingue or not—with the threat of disease and death. In August 1798, when rumors of another yellow fever epidemic spread throughout the city, people rushed to leave town, but Elizabeth's husband and son believed that flight was unnecessary. Elizabeth carefully listened to what people were saying: the

35. Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 141–43.

36. Powell, *Bring Out Your Dead*, 69. Also see J. Worth Estes and Billy G. Smith, eds., *A Melancholy Scene of Devastation: The Public Response to the 1793 Yellow Fever Epidemic* (Canton, Mass., 1997); Jacqueline Bacon, "Rhetoric and Identity in Absalom Jones and Richard Allen's *Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia*," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 125 (2001): 61–90.

37. *Drinker Diary*, 27, 28 August 2, 8 September 1793 (1:497, 499, 502). Modern researchers have concluded that blacks did fall sick, although at a lower rate than whites.

shoemaker's wife came to get medicine for her son, who was "ill of disorder'd bowels"; the worried mother brought word that a man and woman on nearby Water Street were said to have yellow fever. The next day, Elizabeth sent someone to check: "The Man and wife in Water Street have not the Yallow fever." That optimistic news was quickly reversed: "We hear again that the fever is in Water Street near us, jaring reports are common." A hearse drove by—never a good sign—and most of their neighbors were leaving town, except "the Huxters & poorer sort of people."³⁸

Some of the Drinkers' neighbors were of just that sort: the house next door was rented to five or six families—"ordinary noisey people," "not very nice, or cleanly," Drinker said—and she became "alarm'd" when she heard ominous noises one morning: "A Malato man, a drinking fellow, who has a room next door, was [this] morning in the act of vomitting and very hard straining, not altogether like a drinking Man emptying his stomach, but more like a very sick billious straining." The servants became nervous too: A few days later, "our black Sarah told me this morning that she heard a man straining hard to vomit in the Malatos chamber next door." There was also a puzzling, recurrent smell of burnt sugar coming from the house. Another neighbor reassured them that the man had "a very hard cough" but was not sick in any other way. The landlord promised to try to evict the cougher.³⁹

The disease soon came much closer. On August 17, the Drinkers learned that Oliver Wadsworth, a young white apprentice living with their daughter Nancy Skyryn's family, had come down with yellow fever. Nancy's children immediately came to live with their grandparents until the family could go to the country. A black man hired to care for Oliver asserted that the boy did not have yellow fever, but Elizabeth sniffed, "it is not likely he know any thing about the disorder." The doctor advised sending him to the hospital, where he died four days later. The doctor had reassured the Drinkers that the disease was not contagious from one person to another, "but that it is in the air, and spreads very fast." No matter, insisted Elizabeth, "we must leave," and so they shut up the house and left for Germantown.⁴⁰

A few years later, in 1798, in the midst of another epidemic, one of

38. *Drinker Diary*, 16 Aug. 1798 (2:1068).

39. *Drinker Diary*, 12, 15 Aug. 1798 (2:1065-67).

40. *Drinker Diary*, 17-22 Aug. 1798 (2:1068-72).

the Drinkers' young white servants, Sally Dawson, became ill. Elizabeth thought it was a cold, probably a result of her being "imprudent" in "running out" nights. "At this time, almost every disorder is look'd upon as the Yellow fever," Elizabeth complained, and she refused even to consider the possibility that Sally had yellow fever. Elizabeth was very fond of Sally, who had been bound to the Drinkers when she was barely nine years old, after the death of her mother. The Drinkers had sent her to school, and Elizabeth had treated her for various illnesses in the ten years she had been with the family. Even the doctor did not diagnose yellow fever the first day he visited, but just one day afterward he said that she did indeed have the dread disease and should go to the hospital. Four days later she was dead; the doctor said he had "seen but few cases of more malignant disease than hers."⁴¹

Sally's death might not have been nearly the shock it was had she been of mixed race, but until then Elizabeth never had any mixed-race servants living in the house—at least none that she called "mulatto." She had a succession of black servants, both children and adults who lived in her house. But the mulatto men and women who worked for her were all day workers; perhaps she was unwilling to risk having them lodge in the house because of their perceived risk of contagion. Or perhaps it was their choice not to live in.

Drinker's diary reveals far more about her and her attitudes than it does about those who were the object of her perceptions. Evidence is sparse on the "lower sort," especially those of mixed race, and the diary does at least hint at some aspects of mulatto life in late eighteenth-century Philadelphia and how they compared with others in similar economic situations. Young, unmarried white servants tended to live in, as did the young black girls and boys who were required by law to be bound as servants to white families. By the late 1790s, adult black servants were choosing to live with their own families, although some men, usually coachmen, stayed with their employers most of the time and only occasionally went to their own homes and families. Mixed-race servants seem to have lived "out" all along, but whether that was their own choice or their employers' is unclear.⁴²

Mixed-race women and men seem to have chosen occupations that

41. *Drinker Diary*, 20 Dec. 1793; 14 April, 23 June 1795; 3 March 1796; 9 Oct. 1800; 27 September–3 October 1803 (1:535, 670, 695; 2:780, 1346, 3:1687–91).

42. For example, in 1800 Drinker reported that Patience Edwards, a young black widow, "goes home at night as Mary did." Drinker was probably glad to hire a widow since Mary Fortune had left the Drinkers' service because her husband had started working in Quakertown, outside the city. *Drinker Diary*, 14, 16 July 1800 (2:1318).

allowed them to work as semi-independent contractors. For women, the most common occupation was taking in laundry, which they picked up from clients and did in their own homes. If they picked up more business than they could handle, they might hire other poor women, as Alice Wright seems to have done. Mixed-race men frequently found employment as waiters; Drinker reminisced about a mulatto man named Stevens who "was well known to many families in this City, as very handy waiter at weddings." In fact, he had served as a waiter at her daughter Nancy's wedding.⁴³

The Drinkers and their friends usually employed black men as coach drivers, often men with names carried over from slavery, like Pompey, Caesar, Oroonoco (or "Noke"), and Portuga (for Portuguese).⁴⁴ The Drinkers employed one mulatto driver for three months, while their regular driver, Jacob Turner, was suffering from rheumatism. Turner recommended Thomas Batt, "a yallow man," who proved to be a very good driver when sober but sometimes became "a little intoxicated with liquor" or worse.⁴⁵ After leaving the Drinkers' service, Batt took up another occupation popular with black and mulatto men: he went to sea. A few days after his return, his wife came to ask Henry Drinker to help get her husband out of jail. She had had him arrested the night before when, in a drunken fit, he had threatened to kill her. Henry visited the magistrates, but they decided to let Batt cool off in jail for a few more days. Tom Batt lived up to many of Elizabeth's stereotypes of the "lower sort."⁴⁶

Other mulattos belied the stereotypes. After the arrest (apparently false) of her household in February 1795, Alice Wright continued to work for the Drinkers. In April of that year, she helped nurse Peter Savage, one of the black children bound to the Drinkers. Besides continu-

43. *Drinker Diary*, 22 May 1798 (2:1036); Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 150. Mulatto immigrants from St. Domingue established highly successful catering businesses. Alison Duncan Hirsch, Exhibition Review of "Discovering America: The Peopling of Pennsylvania," *Journal of American History* 81(1994): 204.

44. Other names from slavery were Scipio, Cato, and Samson. *Drinker Diary*, 23 Aug. 1773; 14 June 1774; 6 Oct. 1793; 18, Oct. 23, Dec. 1794; 23 June 1795; 2 Aug. 1798; 10 Aug. 1800 (1:166, 201, 515, 606, 632, 695; 2:1060, 1328). For the use of classical names for slaves, see Sobel, *World They Made Together*, 158.

45. *Drinker Diary*, 8 March, 18 April, 30 May 1796 (2:781, 793-94, 807).

46. *Drinker Diary*, 20, 26 Oct. 1796 (2:854-55). On black seamen, see W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.)

ing to do laundry for them and at least one of their married daughters, Alice also did housework and whitewashing. Her husband seems to have had Drinker's respect as well. In 1799, George Wright-Drinker now knew that to be his name—came to the house to pick up medicine for Alice, when she came down with “something like the flux” a few days after she finished whitewashing the Drinkers' cellar. Alice was able to use her relationship with the Drinkers to good advantage; in fact, she may have cultivated the relationship with the Drinkers as a resource for her family and friends. When relatives needed work or assistance, she brought them to the Drinkers. In 1800, she recommended a young widow, Patience Edwards, whom Drinker called “black,” to work for them; a year later, she introduced them to her aunt, Fanny Rodney, who went to work briefly for the Drinkers' daughter, Nancy Skyryn.⁴⁷

During slavery and after, mulattos often served as patrons or intermediaries for those with less access to the dominant white society. Partial white or American Indian ancestry, in and of itself, did not change a person's legal status, although in some regions it could affect the individual's social standing among both blacks and whites. Historians have found that, at least for some regions at some points in history, some mulattos enjoyed “greater affluence, had more access to education, worked at less menial jobs, and lived in more comfortable circumstances than their darker-skinned cousins.”⁴⁸

Free, mixed-race individuals like Alice Wright could provide essen-

47. *Drinker Diary* 18 Nov. 1799; 22, 31 Aug., 12 Oct. 1801 (2: 1438, 1441, 1455). Alice may very well have referred others to the Drinkers.

48. Adele Logan Alexander, *Ambiguous Lives: Free Women of Color in Rural Georgia, 1789-1879* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1991), 162, 181. By the end of the nineteenth century, W. E. B. Du Bois saw in Philadelphia a well-defined “colortocracy,” a light-complexioned elite who served as leaders of the black community. *The Philadelphia Negro*, intro. by Elijah Anderson (1899; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Elijah Anderson, “The Emerging Philadelphia African American Class Structure,” Elijah Anderson and Tukefu Zuberi, eds., *W.E.B. Du Bois's Agenda, Then and Now, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 568 (March 2000): 54-77; Michael B. Katz and Thomas J. Sugrue, *W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and the City: The Philadelphia Negro and Its Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); and Julie Winch, *The Elite of Our People: Joseph Wilson's Sketches of Black Upper Class Life in Antebellum Philadelphia* (State College: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

Other discussions of a mulatto elite are in Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 235-39; Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 199; Larry Kroger, *Black Slaveowners: Free Black Slave Masters in South Carolina, 1790-1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1985); Thomas N. Ingersoll, “Release Us Out of This Cruell Bondegg: An Appeal from Virginia in 1723,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 51 (1994): 777-82. For modern commentary, see Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson, and Ronald Hall, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans* (1992; New York: Doubleday, 1993); Lawrence Otis Graham, *Our Kind of People: Inside America's Black Upper Class* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999). For earlier work, see Edward Byron Reuter, *The Mulatto in the United States* (1918; Boston, Badger, 1969).

tial assistance to relatives escaping from slavery. When her sister escaped from a slave plantation in Virginia with her three small children, Alice went to the Drinkers for assistance. Within a few days, they arranged for the runaways to go to a safe house in New Jersey; in her diary, Drinker carefully abbreviated the exact location to conceal their whereabouts from prying eyes. Alice was not so successful when she applied to the Drinkers for another favor. In 1800, she asked to have a black child bound to her, just as the Drinkers had young black men and women bound to them. Elizabeth does not record her own reaction, but she and Henry undoubtedly rejected the request, since, like other elite whites, they believed that black children were better off in white households. Drinker overlooked this one moment when Alice overstepped her bounds; as her former washerwoman neared death, Drinker noted that "she has been one of our humble servants" and had Patience Edwards take oatmeal and wine to her for a medicinal gruel. A few days later, the Drinkers sent their young black coachman, Peter Woodward, with their coach to Alice Wright's funeral as a sign of respect. Alice Wright may have seen herself as an entrepreneur and community leader, but to Elizabeth Drinker what was important was that Wright had appeared properly "humble."⁴⁹

Other mulattos were anything but humble. In 1795, Elizabeth noted that her husband and other leaders of the Quaker men's meeting met in her back parlor with Hannah Burrows, "a Mulatto Woman who has for some time past, made her appearance frequently in our meetings as a preacher or teacher." Drinker did not think highly of most women preachers, even those from England; for a mulatto woman to preach seemed beyond the pale. Burrows was applying for full membership in the Society of Friends, which did not yet permit full membership to blacks or mulattos. The underlying fear apparently was that letting blacks and mulattos become full members would open the door to interracial marriages. Henry Drinker's brother Joseph wrote an open letter declaring that this fear was the real reason Quakers would not accept blacks and mulattos as members. If people of color became members, he said, then "the privilege of intermarriage with the whites could not be withheld," and "such mixtures are objectionable" to the Quaker leadership. In 1796, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting finally agreed that

49. *Drinker Diary*, 10 April 1795; 7 Aug., 18 Nov. 1799; 10 Aug. 1800; 1, 23, 25, 26 Feb. 1803 (1:668; 2:1196, 1239, 1329; 3:1622, 1629, 1630).

color should not affect applications for membership.⁵⁰

Philadelphia's Quaker elites had long abhorred interracial sex and marriage. In 1723, James Logan sent a "Negro boy" working at his estate, Stenton, in Germantown, to be sold in Carolina. "His manhood coming up him," Logan wrote his agents, "he had happened unluckily to direct his Inclinations to the wrong Colour and my Servants at the Plantation where he lived being generally of the fairer sort, his company was no longer tolerable there. . . . Were his Amours rightly placed he might I believe have made a valuable servant."⁵¹ This prejudice against interracial unions persisted long after the Society of Friends denounced slavery in 1754 and, in 1774, ordered its members to manumit their slaves.⁵²

Other religious leaders objected as well to interracial marriages. In 1806 Methodist preacher Thomas Branagan warned against black men taking up with "white women of easy virtue" to produce "mungrels and mulattos." He predicted that soon "half the inhabitants of the city will be people of Colour."⁵³ In 1800, the minister at Gloria Dei, Philadelphia's Swedish Lutheran church, echoed that concern after referring "a negro [who] came with a white woman" to "the negro minister." The minister, Nicholas Collin, was "not willing to have blame from public opinion, having never yet joined black and white. Nevertheless," he admitted, "these frequent mixtures will soon force matrimonial sanction. What a parti-coloured race will soon make a great portion of the population in Philadelphia[!]"⁵⁴

In the eyes of Philadelphia's ministers and other leading citizens,

50. *Drinker Diary*, 11 March 1795 (1:657); Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 180; Thomas E. Drake, "Joseph Drinker's Plea for Admission of Colored People to the Society of Friends, 1795," *Journal of Negro History* 32(1947): 11-12; Jordan, *White Over Black*, 420-22. Elizabeth Drinker thought that what Quaker minister Ann Alexander had to say was "wide of the mark," and another woman, identified only by initials "R.G." (probably Rachel Gibbons), created "a very great rumpus" at meeting and "was twice carried out forcibly." *Drinker Diary*, 15 March 1805; 20 Oct. 1795 (3:1817; 1:743).

51. James Logan to Gibbons and Alou, 31 Aug. 1723, quoted in J. William Frost, *The Quaker Origins of Antislavery* (Norwood, PA: Norwood Editions, 1980), 127.

52. Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 53, 89.

53. Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 179.

54. Nicholas Collin, "The Records of Gloria Dei Church," excerpted in Billy G. Smith, *Life in Early Philadelphia: Documents from the Revolutionary and Early National Periods* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 196; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 180.

mulattos themselves had become emblematic of the horrors of interracial sex and the dangers of sexuality itself. Elizabeth Trist, whose mother ran the boarding house where Thomas Jefferson stayed in Philadelphia, met a mulatto woman during a journey to join her husband in Natchez in 1784. This "Mullato Woman nam'd Nelly. . . was exceeding kind to us, gave us water melons, green corn, apples—in short, everything that she had was at our service. Her conversation favord rather more the Masculine than was agreeable. Yet I cou'd not help likeing the creature, she was so hospitable. She gave us the history of her life. She may be entitled to merit from some of her actions. But chastity is not among the number of her virtues."⁵⁵

By 1794 Philadelphia already had a "parti-coloured race" of mulattos, made up of refugees from the Haitian revolution, runaways and freed slaves from the southern United States, and a new generation of children born from interracial unions in Philadelphia. To Elizabeth's horror, one of these mixed-race children was born right in the heart of her own household.

In 1788, Sally Brant, a white girl, ten years old, came to live with the Drinkers after the death of her father and remarriage of her mother. She was, Elizabeth wrote, "one of the most handy and best servants we ever had—and a girl of very pritty manners." But as Sally came into her teens, she developed a "vile propensity" to engage in "ogleing," kissing, and worse.⁵⁶ In 1794, when she was sixteen, Sally seemed sick and Elizabeth began to suspect that she was pregnant—though she was careful not to be so explicit in her diary, which might be shared with others. Elizabeth's worst fears were confirmed when she and Henry had a "trying conversation" with the girl and Sally finally named Joe Gibbs, their coachman, as the father. Servant girls occasionally became pregnant—the Drinkers may have gone through this experience with other maids—but what made this case particularly shocking was that Sally was white, Joe was

55. Annette Kolodny, ed., "The Travel Diary of Elizabeth House Trist," in William L. Andrews, ed., *Journeys in New Worlds: Early American Women's Narratives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1990), 230.

56. *Drinker Diary*, 31 July 1794; 8, 19 April 1795 (1:578, 667, 673).

black, and so of course their baby would be “yellow,” as Elizabeth said.⁵⁷

The Drinkers immediately fired Joe, and when Henry saw him loitering around the house, “he laid his cane over his back, and told him, if he ever found him sculking about our neighborhood he would lay him by the heels.” When Joe sent a letter to Sally, Elizabeth intercepted it. The Drinkers hoped that he had left for good and gone to New England. Out of “pity” for Sally, “and in hopes of her reformation,” they did not bring Joe to trial as they might have under Pennsylvania law.⁵⁸

For the last few months of her pregnancy, Sally remained with the Drinkers’ gardener and his wife at the family’s country estate, Clearfield, in Germantown, after the Drinkers returned to the city. Before departing, Elizabeth hired a “useful woman,” a midwife, to be on hand for the birth. The baby girl was born healthy, and Sally named her Hannah Gibbs, bestowing the father’s last name on her. When Elizabeth came to Germantown to visit, she was horrified at this name, a sure sign of Sally’s lack of repentance, and she quickly changed the baby’s name to Catherine Clearfield—naming her for her birthplace and disavowing the father. Drinker well knew the power of bestowing names; she was following the pattern of slaveholders giving place names to their slaves, though she used the name of her estate as a surname, rather than a first name, as slaveholders did. She cared little that Sally “appear’d displeas’d” with the change.⁵⁹

Soon afterward, Sally’s mother urged the Drinkers to “bring her home, as she [the mother] is fearful she will be too fond of the poor yellow child. – her fears are natural,” Elizabeth wrote, “but we have not yet concluded what is best to be done.” Finally, Sally did return to

57. *Drinker Diary*, 11, 19 Aug., 30 Sept., 6 Dec. 1794 (1:581, 584, 600, 624). Sally’s mother married Gershom Johnson, who operated a coach from Philadelphia to Lancaster. Collections of the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania, vol. 402: Northern District Monthly Meeting, Philadelphia Marriages, 1772-1907; Births Deaths and Burials, 1772-1882, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 178; Francis White, *The Philadelphia Directory* (Philadelphia, 1785), 37. Servant Jane Boon may have become pregnant in 1778 while she was part of the Drinker household; she left their employ rather quickly, after a bout of what may have been morning sickness. She ostensibly went to live with an aunt but soon afterward married a German deserter from the British army. Drinker was uncharacteristically silent about the marriage until after it had occurred. Hirsch, “Elizabeth Drinker and Her Servant Jane Boon,” 175; *Drinker Diary*, 8 July, 19 Aug., 7 Sept. 1778 (1:315, 321, 325).

58. *Drinker Diary*, 19 Aug. 1794; 14, 21 Feb., 3 March 1795 (1:584, 649, 652, 655).

59. *Drinker Diary*, 9 Nov., 13, 23 Dec. 1794 (1:616, 627, 632). On place names for slaves, see Sobel, *World They Made Together*, 157. A slave in Gloucester County, Virginia, bore the given name Gloucester, which he discarded when he ran away. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 555-58.

Philadelphia, and the baby was left with the gardener's wife. When the family hired a new gardener, George Fry, his wife took over the infant's care. The Frys soon were complaining that they "were tired of their Nursery," and the Drinkers arranged for the child to be cared for by "a Negro woman in the neighbourhood," Sally Morris, "till we can otherwise dispose of it." After Sally's return to the city, with Joe gone for good, she began to flirt with other young men. The Drinkers threatened to send her back to her mother and stepfather. Her mother said that she was willing to take Sally back, but she wanted nothing to do with the baby: "She should not care if the child's brains were beat out &c." The Drinkers concluded that they had a moral obligation to keep Sally, since "were we to turn her off, upon her mother's terms, she would be in the high road to further ruin."⁶⁰ Luckily for the Drinkers' tortured consciences, the problem resolved itself. Caty Clearfield died at age seven months, still in the care of Sally Morris in Germantown. Elizabeth went to great lengths to reassure herself that she had done all she could:

Many are the number of poor little Infants that go out of the world, for want of particular care, 'tho I have no reason to suppose this child was neglected, I paid Mary Courtney, between 8 and 9 pounds for nursing it &c, she did her duty by it, I doubt not, and Betsy Fry appear'd to take good care of it—And Sally Morris, I do believe did her best, she has had several Children of her own, her family were very fond of it and I was told they weep'd much when it died—I should have taken it home, if suited, and brought it up, or had it brought up in our family, but a fear of bringing the parents together, or reviving the former likeing to the sire, as the mother is still in our house, but tis gone, and no doubt but all's for the best.

The Drinkers gave the baby a proper burial, and Elizabeth tried to rationalize away her own responsibility in little Caty's death, but the baby's death may well have been the result of being taken from her mother and shunted from one caregiver to another.⁶¹

This experience, which tore apart her household for many months, may have provided a personal reason for Drinker's heightened awareness of mixed-race identity in the mid-1790s, when she began to refer to

60. *Drinker Diary*, 13 Dec. 1794; 8, 11, 19 April, 9, 15 May 1795 (1: 627, 667, 669, 672, 679, 681).

61. *Drinker Diary*, 19 April, 2, 14 July 1795 (1: 672, 698, 704-5).

many more individuals as "mulatto." The birth of a mixed-race child to a young white woman living in her own household made her so uncomfortable, was so potentially embarrassing for her family, that she never even used the word "mulatto" to describe the child. Instead, resorting to her schoolgirl French, Drinker called the infant "the Jaune pettet," "the little yellow one," and said that she was "very Yallow for one so young."⁶² But after the birth and death of "Caty Clearfield," Elizabeth Drinker began to see mulattos where previously she had seen only blacks. Increased immigration of mulattos into the city may have heightened her awareness of them, but her own perception of racial identity was changing as well.

Though Drinker certainly knew where mulattos came from, that is, that they had mixed ancestry, she does not seem to have used the word—or synonyms like "yellow"—to mean anything more than skin color. When Lydia Williams came in 1796 to ask the Drinkers to take her daughter as a bound servant, Drinker called her "a yallow woman" but her daughter Judia, a "black child." In 1801, William Merritt, "a Malato man," asked the Drinkers to take his six-year-old daughter Becky. Becky came "on trial" a few days later to work for Elizabeth's daughter Nancy Skeyrin. During the period of at least four years that she stayed with the family, the Drinkers referred to her as "little black Becky Merritt" or "Black Beck."⁶³

These children were probably darker in complexion than their parents, but it is also possible that Elizabeth Drinker had begun to call anyone with any African ancestry "black" or "negro." By 1799, she was referring to Alice Wright, whom she had once called "yellow," as one of the "Negros, who are usefull to us, when they behave well." But when Alice referred her aunt to Nancy Skeyrin in 1801, Elizabeth called her a "yellow" or "malatto" woman. Like other Americans, Drinker at times noted "mulatto" appearance and at other times conflated all people with

62. *Drinker Diary*, 6, 23 Dec. 1794 (1:624, 632).

63. *Drinker Diary*, 2, 20 April 1800; 13 Oct. 1804 (2:1288, 1292; 3:1773).

64. Fanny Rodney lasted only six weeks in the position. *Drinker Diary* 18 Nov. 1799; 22, 31 Aug., 12 Oct. 1801 (2:1239, 1438, 1441, 1455). Advertisements for runaway slaves in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* sometimes used the words "mulatto" and "black" or "Negro" to describe the same individual, but the ads also gave very specific physical descriptions: "a remarkable light mulatto" (6 Nov. 1782); "his colour between a mulattoe and a black" (3 July 1776); "of a yellowish complexion" (29 June 1769); "nearly the color of an Indian" (10 March 1779); "remarkably white" (10 Aug. 1774).

darker skin into one category of "blacks" or Negroes."⁶⁴

Elizabeth Drinker herself participated in hiding the "mestizo history of America." Little Becky Merritt, whose father was a mulatto, became "black" in Drinker's racial typology; by 1799, Alice Wright, the "yellow" laundress, became one of the "Negros" working for the Drinkers. The word "mulatto" in general was disappearing from Drinker's vocabulary toward the end of her life. The interracial relationship between Joe Gibbs and Sally Brant was covered up, forceably ended, their offspring removed from contact with them—and from public view. Hannah Gibbs, a mulatto child, became Catherine Clearfield, a black child; she was taken from her white mother and given to a black woman. When Hannah Gibbs died, the mestizo population of America decreased in reality, not just in perception.

Historians who have taken evidence from Drinker's diary have (unwittingly, for the most part) perpetuated the concealment or distortion of America's mixed-race population. When Elizabeth's great-grandson, Henry Drinker Biddle, published extracts from her diary in 1889, he included what he found interesting and important, mostly entries that related to public affairs, especially during the Revolutionary era and the yellow fever epidemics. He omitted most of the material about servants and the "lower sort," except in some cases where they put his Quaker ancestors in a good light and other instances where the material had a certain antiquarian appeal. For example, his only inclusion of Sally Brant was an entry in 1794, when Drinker noted that "Our little maids Sally Brant and Betsy Dawson helped to turn the hay."⁶⁵ The only mention of Joe Gibbs came in 1793, when "poor black Jo" was bled and "thereby relieved"—a reference that showed his ancestor's Quakerly concern for her servants.⁶⁶ Of course, Henry Biddle completely omitted the story of Sally Brant's pregnancy.

When historians wanted to use the Drinker diary as a source for social history, the Biddle version was sorely lacking. As a result of his abridgement, key elements, such as race, went unnoted. Historians have told the story of Sally Brant and Joe Gibbs, but with the assumption that both were white. Their tale becomes simply one of a pregnant white servant girl and a mistress whose interference seems overbearing. The

65. Henry D. Biddle, *Extracts from the Journal of Elizabeth Drinker, from 1759 to 1807* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1889), 232; Drinker, 1:578.

66. Biddle, *Extracts*, 190-91.

description of the baby as "yellow" seems to mean only that the baby suffered from jaundice. This bleached account completely overlooks the interracial complications of the incident as revealed in the unabridged edition of Elizabeth Drinker's diary.⁶⁷

Individual writers have in recent years begun to address the "mestizo history" of America through autobiography, family history, and oral history.⁶⁸ The 2000 federal census allowed people with biracial or multiracial ancestry to identify themselves by more than one race, and commentators have written of mixed-race Americans as a recent phenomenon.⁶⁹ Historians have much work to do in tracing this history back to colonial America. The complete edition of Elizabeth Drinker's diary is one rich source for the lives of the "lower sort" who intermarried and intermingled. Historians need to continue the painstaking work of uncovering this history, of which women are such an integral part.

Men wrote the laws and most of the publications that classified mulattos as a category of "Negro." By the early 1800s at least one woman, Elizabeth Drinker, had also come to deny the existence of interracial relationships. Historians have largely overlooked the role of women in either classifying people by race or in preventing "race mixing." The unexpurgated edition of Elizabeth Drinker's diary provides a look into one woman's evolving ideas about race and her decisive actions to insure the continued separation of people into "blacks" and "whites."

67. Sharon V. Salinger, "To Serve Well and Faithfully": Labor and Indentured Servants in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 109-110; Carol Berkin, *First Generations: Women in Colonial America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 100-101.

68. Recent books include: Edward Ball, *Slaves in the Family* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998); Lise Funderburg, *Black, White, Other: Biracial Americans Talk about Race and Identity* (New York: William Morrow, 1994); Shirlee Taylor Haizlip, *The Sweeter the Juice: A Family Memoir in Black and White* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994); James McBride, *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996); Judy Scales-Trent, *Notes of a White Black Woman* (State College: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995); Henry Wiencek, *The Hairstons: An American Family in Black and White* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999); and Gregory Howard Williams, *Life on the Color Line: The True Story of a White Boy Who Discovered He Was Black* (New York: Penguin, 1995). Oral histories provide the source for the history of an otherwise unrecorded mulatto community in William L. Montell, *The Saga of Coe Ridge: A Study in Oral History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1970).

69. "For Seven Million People in Census, One Race Category Isn't Enough," *New York Times*, 13 March 2001, Washington Edition; Lawrence Wright, "One Drop of Blood," *New Yorker*, 25 July 1994.