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# From Slave Ship to Harvard: Yarrow Mamout and the History of an African American Family

By James H. Johnston



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**From Slave Ship to Harvard: Yarrow Mamout and the History of an African American Family** By James H. Johnston

**The biography of a remarkable individual and the chronicle of a family's rise from slavery to winning the American dream.**

*From Slave Ship to Harvard* is the true story of an African American family in Maryland over six generations. The author has reconstructed **a unique narrative of black struggle and achievement from paintings, photographs, books, diaries, court records, legal documents, and oral histories.** *From Slave Ship to Harvard* traces the family from the colonial period and the American Revolution through the Civil War to Harvard and finally today.

Yarrow Mamout, the first of the family in America, was an educated Muslim from Guinea. He was brought to Maryland on the slave ship *Elijah* and gained his freedom forty-four years later. By then, Yarrow had become so well known in the Georgetown section of Washington, D.C., that he attracted the attention of the eminent American portrait painter Charles Willson Peale, who captured Yarrow's visage in the painting that appears on the cover of this book. The author here reveals that Yarrow's immediate relatives-his sister, niece, wife, and son-were notable in their own right. His son married into the neighboring Turner family, and the farm community in western Maryland called Yarrowsburg was named for Yarrow Mamout's daughter-in-law, Mary "Polly" Turner Yarrow. The Turner line ultimately produced Robert Turner Ford, who graduated from Harvard University in 1927.

**Just as Peale painted the portrait of Yarrow, James H. Johnston's new book puts a face on slavery and paints the history of race in Maryland.** It is a different picture from what most of us imagine. Relationships between blacks and whites were far more complex, and the races more dependent on each other. Fortunately, as this one family's experience shows, individuals of both races repeatedly stepped forward to lessen divisions and to move America toward the diverse society of today.



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### **Editorial Review**

#### Review

". . . a masterfully researched detective story with a wealth of detail about the rise of an African-American family."-John R. Wennersten, University of Maryland, Eastern Shore

". . . Portray[s] an illuminating, thought-provoking, relatively unusual moment in early American history."-Publishers Weekly

"James H. Johnston has given us a clear and vivid look at a long-neglected aspect of American history. This book is in turn disturbing and elevating, horrifying and inspiring. It is impossible to ignore."-Harold Holzer, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

"An absorbing study and story of a slave in America. Once begun, this book is very hard to put down. It weaves a prodigious amount of research into a compelling narrative, of not just one man's journey, but also of the struggle of every man and woman to achieve identity and success against often overwhelming odds. This is a book that no book club and no course on slavery in America should be without."-Edward Papenfuse, Director of the Maryland State Archives

"Part historical narrative, part genealogical detective work, this book will appeal to a range of academic and general readers, especially those interested in race relations in early America."-Library Journal

"Johnston has given Americans a rare treasure, a true story of an African American family, and its triumph over slavery. The great American painter Charles Willson Peale, best remembered for his portrait paintings of leading figures of the American Revolution, would have very much approved--Johnston's done with a whole lot of research, patience, and writing, what Peale did with his brush almost 200 years ago."-Sidney Hart, Senior Historian, National Portrait Gallery

#### About the Author

**JAMES H. JOHNSTON**, an attorney and journalist, has published extensively on national affairs, law, telecommunications, history, and the arts. His contributions include papers on local Washington, D.C., history, Yarrow Mamout, and an edition of *The Recollections of Margaret Cabell Brown Loughborough*.

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