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Northward bound: Slave refugees and the pursuit of freedom in the Northern US and Canada, 1775-1861

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Northward Bound

Slave Refugees and the Pursuit of Freedom in the
Northern US and Canada, 1775-1861

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in 1991

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*For Susannah,
whose enduring love
shone brightly through the darkness
and guided me home.*

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List of Abbreviations

AMA – American Missionary Association
AO – Archives of Ontario
ASB – *Anti-Slavery Bugle*
ASR – *Anti-Slavery Reporter*
BAP – *Black Abolitionist Papers*
BHC – Burton Historical Collection
CA – *Colored American*
CML – *Cleveland Morning Leader*
CVC – Colored Vigilance Committee (Detroit)
DBW, UWO – D. B. Weldon Library, University of Western Ontario
EMR – *Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record*
FDP – *Frederick Douglass' Paper*
FHS – Filson Historical Society
FWP – Federal Writers' Project
IHS – Indiana Historical Society
MHS – Massachusetts Historical Society
NASS – *National Anti-Slavery Standard*
NE – *National Era*
NS – *North Star*
NSA – Nova Scotia Archives
NYHS – New York Historical Society
NYPL – New York Public Library
NYVC – New York Vigilance Committee
OCA – Oberlin College Archives
OE – *Oberlin Evangelist*
OHC – Ohio History Connection
PANB – Public Archives of New Brunswick
PAS – Pennsylvania Abolition Society
PF – *Provincial Freeman*
VF – *Voice of the Fugitive*
WHSC – Wilbur H. Siebert Collection
WLC, UM – William L. Clements' Library, University of Michigan
ZW – *Zion's Watchman*

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Northward Bound

Introduction

Here on Freedom's Soil

Since he was a young boy, Henry Bibb yearned for freedom. Born in Shelby County, Kentucky, to Senator James Bibb and an enslaved woman named Mildred Jackson, he experienced the physical, emotional, and psychological traumas of slavery firsthand. Bibb later recalled in his memoir, "I was brought up in the Counties of Shelby, Henry, Oldham, and Trimble. Or, more correctly speaking, in the above counties, I may safely say, I was flogged up... I received stripes without number, the object of which was to degrade and keep me in subordination. I can truly say, that I drank deeply of the bitter cup of suffering and woe."¹

At eighteen years of age, Bibb married his first wife, Malinda, with whom he fathered a daughter. But he was still determined to escape from slavery with his new family. "In the fall or winter of 1837," he wrote, "I formed a resolution that I would escape, if possible, to Canada, for my Liberty. I commenced from that hour making preparations for the dangerous experiment of breaking the chains that bound me as a slave." On Christmas Day, Bibb fled from his enslaver and sought liberty across the Ohio River. He secreted himself aboard a steamboat to Cincinnati, where he met a black man known as 'Dundy' who recommended that he escape to Canada, "over which waved freedom's flag, defended by the British Government, upon whose soil there cannot be found the foot print [sic] of a slave." The freezing winter presented numerous challenges but Bibb journeyed to Perrysburg, Ohio, "where I found quite a settlement of colored people, many of whom were fugitive slaves." The following spring, Bibb returned to Cincinnati, with the plan of liberating his enslaved wife and daughter at a later date. Before he could put his plan into motion, however, Bibb was recaptured and taken back across the Ohio River to Kentucky.²

Not long after, Bibb escaped once again and quickly made his way to Detroit, Michigan. After a brief stay in the city, he crossed the Detroit River into southwestern Ontario.³ In 1851, Bibb founded an independent black Canadian newspaper, *Voice of the Fugitive*, and became a prominent abolitionist in the province. At a local anti-slavery meeting, he declared:

we are happy to meet you here on freedom's soil, we congratulate
you, we rejoice with you, and some of us can sympathise [sic] with

¹ Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave, Written by Himself with an Introduction by Lucius C. Matlack* (New York: Published by the Author; 5 Spruce Street, 1849), 13-14. accessed Sep. 1, 2016. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/bibb/bibb.html>.

² Bibb, *Narrative*, 46 (first quote), 51 (second quote), 55 (third quote).

³ Afua Cooper, "Ever True to the Cause of Freedom – Henry Bibb and the Black's Freedom Champion, 1814-1854," *Northern Terminus: The African Canadian History Journal* 3 (2005-6), 22.

you from experience. I can image [sic] that I see you traveling by night through the dark swamps, some with their little children on their backs, and their wives and others by their side, guided by the North star; and in the distance I seem to hear the slaveholder and his bloodhounds. But you are now in Canada, free from American slavery; yes, the very moment you stept [sic] upon these shores you were changed from articles of property to human beings. You are here entitled to all the privileges and immunities of citizens of Canada so long as you obey her laws. All I have to say to you now is go to work, dig for your bread; you have a right to the products of your own labor, you have a right to worship God according to the dictates of your consciences, you have a right to your own wives and children – no man can sell them here on the auction block.⁴

Between the American Revolution and the US Civil War (roughly 1775-1861), thousands of African American slave refugees escaped from the US South to the northern United States and British Canada. Both regions emerged as contrasting spaces of freedom for people of African descent. Subject to US federal law, the northern states were formally required to recognize the institution of slavery and the rights of southern enslavers to reclaim ‘fugitives from justice.’ Yet northern state governments approved various laws and policies designed to restrict slavery’s extraterritorial influence. Moreover, African Americans, Quakers, and white abolitionists protected self-emancipated refugees. At the same time, African Americans were denied equal rights and citizenship across the northern states.

In Canada, the situation for slave refugees was markedly different. From the late eighteenth century, the British and colonial governments gradually abolished slavery. In 1833, the British Parliament passed the Slavery Abolition Act (also known as the Emancipation Act), which officially outlawed black enslavement throughout the empire from August 1, 1834. Although primarily directed at the British West Indies, the Slavery Abolition Act signaled the formal demise of slavery in Canada. Additionally, the Canadian provinces embraced a policy of formal free soil. By escaping to Canada, freedom seekers shed their enslaved status. Over time, the British and Canadian governments provided lands to slave refugees, shielded them from extradition and re-enslavement, and extended to them the rights and privileges of

⁴ Bibb quote found at “‘Here on Freedom’s Soil’ A Welcome to Canada Henry Bibb, ca. 1850,” *National Humanities Center.org*, accessed Aug. 14, 2019. <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/community/text8/bibbcanada.pdf>. Bibb’s speech is also referenced in Jacqueline L. Tobin, *From Midnight to Dawn: The Last Tracks of the Underground Railroad* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008), 84.

British subjecthood.⁵ *Northward Bound* re-examines the self-emancipation and escape of African American slave refugees between the American Revolutionary War and Civil War (1775-1861), and their respective experiences in the North and Canada. The central research question of this study is: *How did African American slave refugees escape to the Northern US and Canada between the American Revolution War and US Civil War, and in what ways did freedom differ between each region?*

The first part of the question focuses on the motivations and methods by which freedom seekers escaped from the southern US to the North and Canada. Meanwhile, the second part focuses on the experiences of slave refugees in these respective territories. *Northward Bound* contends that freedom seekers fled from the South for numerous reasons, including the threat of impending sale, maltreatment, and the lifelong desire for liberty. This study examines how freedom seekers escaped from the South, starting with wartime refugee migration in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and slave refugee migration in the antebellum era.

Regarding the second part of the question, this study builds upon Damian Alan Pargas' recent typology of freedom in North America. Rather than a singular, static concept, Pargas argues that liberty was fluid and varied between different geographical regions. He distinguishes between spaces of 'formal' freedom (Canada and Mexico), 'semi-formal' freedom (the northern US), and 'informal' freedom (the US South). Slave refugees in Canada enjoyed 'formal' freedom while their counterparts in the northern states lived in a state of 'semi-formal' freedom. Meanwhile, self-emancipators in the US South lived in a state of 'informal' freedom.⁶ Regarding socio-economic opportunities, security from re-enslavement, and access to citizenship, black refugees in Canada officially held greater liberties and privileges. Yet freedom seekers in the northern US were not without freedoms or protections. This study demonstrates that slave refugees often chose semi-formal liberty in the North over formal liberty in British Canada.

Northward Bound analyzes how the motivations behind self-emancipation, directions of travel, and methods of escape evolved and shifted over the period. Particular attention is devoted to African American refugee migration during the Revolutionary War and War of 1812, as well as the migration of freedom seekers in the antebellum era, most often associated with the Underground Railroad (hereafter 'UGRR'). Furthermore, this study examines the settlement and experiences of slave

⁵ For more on the Slavery Abolition Act and British abolitionism, see Natasha L. Henry, "Slavery Abolition Act," *Britannica.com*, accessed Oct. 9, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Slavery-Abolition-Act>; Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

⁶ For more on Damian Alan Pargas' recent typology of freedom in North America, see Damian Alan Pargas, "Introduction: Spaces of Freedom in North America," in Damian Alan Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2018), 3-6.

refugees in the northern US and Canadian provinces between the American Revolution and the Civil War. In doing so, this study analyzes the differences between black liberty in the northern US and British Canada. This study focuses on three broader regions: the northern states (otherwise known as the ‘free’ or non-slaveholding states); the Canadian Maritimes (namely Nova Scotia and New Brunswick); and Upper Canada (roughly present-day southwestern Ontario). The decision was made not to include Lower Canada (roughly present-day Quebec) in this study because significantly fewer slave refugees escaped to this region during the period in question.

Northward Bound makes several important contributions to the historiography of slavery and freedom in North America. First, it offers insight into the nature of self-emancipation in the United States and Canada. Scholarly works on fugitive slaves in North America typically focus on the UGRR and northward slave refugee migrations in the antebellum era. By looking back to the late eighteenth century, it becomes evident that the nature of slave refugee migration was more complex and varied than previously assumed. During this period, it was common for enslaved people to escape from the South to the North, within the northern states or Canadian provinces, from the North to Canada, and even from British Canada to the northern states. In the early national period, when the geopolitical boundaries of the continent were quite fluid, self-emancipators fled in numerous directions. As slavery was gradually abolished in the northern states and Canadian provinces, slave refugees in the South sought asylum in these ‘free soil’ territories.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates that family ties and kinship networks were often central to slave refugee migration to the North and Canada between the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. Contrary to previous studies, which typically emphasize the prevalence of individual (and predominantly male) escapes, this study illustrates that enslaved family units regularly attempted to escape from enslavement. Whereas previous studies of slave refugee migrations focus on nuclear families, this study argues that freedom-seeking family units typically fled in stages rather than as singular, complete units. Escape to the northern US and Canada often resembled patterns of chain migration, whereby freedom seekers followed other family members to specific destinations. Thus, in many instances, kinship networks played heavily into the escape of self-emancipators, including many of those who first fled alone.

More significantly, *Northward Bound* is the first comparative, transnational study of slave refugees in various regions across the northern US and British Canada. Rather than examine a specific region, this study treats the northern US and Canada as two broad spaces of ‘semi-formal’ and ‘formal’ freedom respectively (although it occasionally acknowledges regional differences). This study elucidates a better understanding of how ‘freedom’ was substantively different for slave refugees in each region. It illustrates how the rights, liberties, and protections afforded to refugees

varied greatly between the North and Canada. At the same time, it acknowledges that more slave refugees remained in the northern US than fled to Canada. Thus, it seeks to more clearly understand this seeming paradox: if formal freedom was achievable in British North America, why did most slave refugees choose to remain in the North? Which factors convinced them to accept semi-formal liberty in the 'free' states? How did they seek to expand their rights and liberties?

Northward Bound's comparative and transnational framework highlights the diversity of slave refugee experiences. Across the northern US and Canada, self-emancipated people settled in an array of urban and rural contexts, each of which presented opportunities and challenges. Cities and towns, such as New York, Philadelphia, and Toronto, offered an impressive range of socio-economic opportunities. Meanwhile, rural settings enabled self-emancipators to gain experience with land ownership and establish independent settlements (although employment prospects were lower). Furthermore, slave refugees were at higher risk of recapture and abduction in certain regions. Upper Canada was more secure than the Mason-Dixon borderland for self-emancipated and free blacks. This study demonstrates that there was no single slave refugee experience, but rather a host of experiences across the North and Canada.

As mentioned earlier, *Northward Bound* builds upon Damian Pargas' typology of freedom. Historians of eighteenth and nineteenth-century North America employ terms like 'liberty' or 'freedom' without clearly defining them, detailing what they encompassed, or demonstrating how they varied over space and time. This study fills the gap by delineating between various 'types' of liberty, and different 'spaces' of freedom. This study argues that formal freedom in British Canada afforded greater rights, protections, and security than semi-formal freedom in the northern US. At the same time, numerous factors ensured that self-emancipated people in the North, especially in certain regions, enjoyed relative degrees of liberty and security. In particular, the conflict between state and federal laws, and the activism of black and white activists, created spaces of semi-formal freedom across the northern US.

Slave refugees in Canada were, by and large, secure from re-enslavement, and could ostensibly possess lands, attend schools, and exercise the rights and privileges of British subjects. Conversely, self-emancipators in the North were considered escaped human 'property' under federal law and could be re-enslaved. Given their 'illegal' status, they were also denied access to lands, education, and citizenship. Slave refugees in the North occupied a 'middle-ground' between slavery and freedom. On the one hand, they had liberated themselves from bondage by escaping from their enslavers. Additionally, they received some protections from northern state laws and civil society activists. Without formal freedom, however, slave refugees lived under the constant threat of recapture and re-enslavement. In this regard, comparisons can be drawn between slave refugees in the antebellum North

and undocumented people today.⁷ The next section will examine *Northward Bound*'s historiographical contributions in more detail.

Resistance, Self-Emancipation, and the Underground Railroad

Although historical works on North American slavery first rose to prominence in the early twentieth century, scholarly studies of enslaved resistance and self-emancipation are only a relatively recent phenomenon. Before the 1950s, studies of black enslavement in the United States typically overlooked the physical and psychological traumas of black enslavement. Instead, they often presented a vision of slavery that bore little resemblance to its reality. During the early twentieth century, most scholars subscribed to Ulrich B. Phillips' school of thought, which depicted slavery as a relatively benign institution. Phillips argued that slavery was a wholly positive force that 'Christianized' and educated enslaved communities. Deprived of agency, enslaved men, women, and children were portrayed as docile and grateful for their enslavers' generosity. Given this, resistance among enslaved communities was either downplayed or ignored entirely in historical studies. By and large, mainstream scholarship accepted Phillips' analysis. African American scholars, meanwhile, criticized Phillips' romanticized, white-washed interpretation of black enslavement in the United States.⁸

Since the mid-twentieth century, however, the field of slavery studies has grown significantly. Inspired by the Civil Rights Movement, historians began to re-examine US history through a new lens; one which emphasized black agency, activism, and resistance. Kenneth Stampp's *The Peculiar Institution* was among the first works in this new wave of scholarship to challenge earlier histories of slavery. It contended that slavery, far from benevolent, was actively harmful and oppressive. Stampp contended that southern enslavers were cruel tyrants who sought to maximize profits at any cost. Enslaved people were subject to inhumane conditions, brutal physical and psychological torture, and forced separations. At the same time,

⁷ In recent years, various newspaper editorials and historical think-pieces have drawn comparisons between the 'fugitive slave issue' in the antebellum United States and the plight of undocumented people today. See Pamela Grundy, "Parallels of escaped slaves and undocumented immigrants," *Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 24, 2017. <https://www.charlotteobserver.com/opinion/op-ed/article134830459.html>. Accessed Oct. 9, 2019. Harold Myerson, "Op-Ed: There are echoes of the Fugitive Slave Act in today's immigration debate," *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 1, 2018. <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-meyerson-immigration-fugitive-slave-20180301-story.html>. Accessed Oct. 9, 2019; Manisha Sinha, "The New Fugitive Slave Laws," *New York Review of Books*, Jul. 17, 2019. <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/07/17/the-new-fugitive-slave-laws/>. Accessed Oct. 9, 2019.

⁸ Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment, and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (New York: D. Appleton, 1918); Ulrich B. Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1929).

enslaved people were not helpless or content with their conditions. Stamppp notes that men and women actively resisted their enslavement. They pretended to be sick, engaged in ‘slowdowns,’ sabotaged equipment, disobeyed orders, and ran away either temporarily or permanently.⁹

Revisionist scholars followed suit over the coming decades. George M. Frederickson, Christopher Lasch, Eugene D. Genovese, Herbert Gutman, John W. Blassingame, and John Hope Franklin, produced works that moved away from Phillips’ ‘top-down’ framework toward an analysis of slavery ‘from below,’ as seen from the viewpoint of enslaved people. Moreover, scholars began examining the ‘peculiar institution’ through sociological frameworks. In *Slavery and Social Death*, Orlando Patterson called slavery “one of the most extreme forms of the relation of domination, approaching the limits of total power from the viewpoint of the master, and of total powerlessness from the viewpoint of the slave.” Other histories developed scholarly understandings of the experiences of enslaved women. Deborah Gray White’s *Arn’t I a Woman?* became a benchmark for scholarly studies of enslaved women in the US South.¹⁰

In recent decades, Ira Berlin, Peter Kolchin, Stephanie Camp, Brenda Stevenson, Ann Patton Malone, Anthony E. Kaye, Damian Pargas, and Emily West among others have greatly expanded scholarly understandings of enslaved people, kinship networks, and communities. In contrast to early revisionist works, new histories have sought to rebalance this previous emphasis on agency with other factors. In his essay ‘On Agency,’ Walter Johnson argues that this focus “has reduced historically and culturally situated acts of resistance to manifestations of a larger, abstract human capacity,” which in turn represented “the alienation of enslaved people from the historical circumstances and ideological idioms of their own resistance[.]” In short, recent works have sought to readjust the balance between the actions of enslaved people and the constraints of their oppressive surroundings. This is not a denial of enslaved agency by any means. Rather, it is a contextualization of enslaved peoples’ motivations and actions. Only by gaining a full understanding of their geopolitical surroundings and personal circumstances can we glean why they made certain decisions.¹¹

⁹ Kenneth Stamppp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956).

¹⁰ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1; Deborah Gray White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985). For a sample of early revisionist scholarship, see George M. Frederickson and Christopher Lasch, “Resistance to Slavery,” *Civil War History* 13, no. 4 (1967), 315-329; John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974). Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976).

¹¹ Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619-1877* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1993; New York: Penguin Books, 1995); Ann Patton Malone, *Sweet Chariot: Slave Family and Household Structure in Nineteenth-*

Self-emancipation and escape was the most powerful form of resistance to bondage. Since the 1970s, numerous studies have examined self-emancipation and ‘slave flight’ in North America. Gerald Mullin’s *Flight and Rebellion* was among the first devoted specifically to self-emancipation and escape. Meanwhile, John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger’s *Runaway Slaves* remains the most comprehensive study on the subject. Based on their assessment of escaped slave advertisements, newspaper articles, legal petitions, court and legislative records, and documents from southern enslavers, this sweeping analysis offers the most insight into ‘runaways’ within the South.¹²

Histories of self-emancipation and slave flight have detailed several categories of runaway slaves. Those who escaped for brief periods to avoid punishment or cruel treatment are typically labeled ‘truants’ or ‘temporary sojourners.’ They fled to urban centers, forests, and swamps in the South for a brief respite from their enslavers. Southern cities, note Franklin and Schweninger, “offered opportunities for runaways to hide their identities, create new ones, live with relatives – slave and free – and mingle with others.” While many simply sought a short break from their enslavers, either to avoid punishment or visit family, others sought permanent refuge within urban centers across the South. Baltimore, Richmond, Charleston, and New Orleans among other burgeoning towns and cities absorbed thousands of slave refugees over the antebellum era. Their primary aim was to remain concealed among free urban black populations across the South. Meanwhile, other historical studies, such as Sylviane Diouf’s *Slavery’s Exiles*, examine ‘maroons’ (i.e., those who sought to organize independent settlements and communities outside mainstream society).¹³

Century Louisiana (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Brenda Stevenson, *Life in Black & White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Wilma A. Dunaway, *The African-American Family in Slavery and Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Emily West, *Chains of Love: Slave Couples in Antebellum South Carolina* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Stephanie H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women & Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Anthony E. Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Damian Alan Pargas, *The Quarter and the Fields: Slave Families in the Non-Cotton South* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2010); Walter Johnson, “On Agency,” *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1 (2003), 117-118.

¹² Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Freedom: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹³ Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 125 (quote). For more on truancy in the US South, see Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, Ch. 6; and Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 35-59. For more on ‘informal’ freedom within the South, see Damian Alan Pargas, “Urban Refugees: Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Informal Freedom in the American South,” *Journal of Early American History* 7, no. 3 (2017), 262-284; Pargas, “Introduction,” in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitives Slaves and Spaces of Freedom*; Damian Alan Pargas, “Seeking Freedom in the Midst of Slavery: Fugitive Slaves in the Antebellum South,” in Pargas

Furthermore, tens of thousands of freedom seekers sought permanent freedom outside the South. Rachel Adams notes that self-emancipators “traveled in many directions in search of freedom.” Crossing state and international borders, these refugees believed it was the only way to acquire permanent, true liberty. Many enslaved people headed south for freedom. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, self-emancipators sought sanctuary in Spanish Florida. Similarly, self-emancipators in the Lower South and Southwest regularly fled to Mexico via the Texas borderlands. Others fled to the British West Indies or elsewhere in the Caribbean, and Central and South America. Securing passage aboard ships and seafaring vessels, slave refugees hoped to reach Mexican, Caribbean, and Central and South American ports, where they could begin their lives anew. It is impossible to know exactly how many freedom seekers escaped to each of these regions although the total figure almost certainly lies in the thousands. Yet the most popular destination outside the South for slave refugees (particularly those from the Upper South) was the northern US and Canada.¹⁴

(ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom*, 116-136; and Viola Franziska Muller, “Illegal but Tolerated: Slave Refugees in Richmond, Virginia,” in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom*, 137-167. For more on maroons within the South, see Sylviane A. Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles: The Story of American Maroons* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

¹⁴ Rachel Adams, *Continental Divides: Remapping the Cultures of North America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 61. Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie has also sought to ‘remap’ the histories of self-emancipation and black migration in North America. See Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, “Fugitive Slaves across North America,” in Leon Fink (ed.), *Workers Across the Americas: The Transnational Turn in Labor History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Jeffrey R. Kerr Ritchie, *Freedom's Seekers: Essays on Comparative Emancipation* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), ch.1. For more on black migration to Spanish Florida, see Larry Eugene Rivers, *Rebels and Runaways: Slave Resistance in Nineteenth-Century Florida* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2012); Matthew Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola: Fugitive Slaves on the Atlantic and Southern Frontiers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015). The literature on black migration to Mexico has grown substantially since the early 2000s. See Sean Kelley, “‘Mexico in His Head’: Slavery and the Texas-Mexico Border, 1810-1860,” *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 3 (2004), 709-723; Sarah E. Cornell, “Citizens of Nowhere: Fugitive Slaves and Free African Americans in Mexico, 1833-1857,” *Journal of American History* 100, no. 2 (2013), 351-374; James David Nichols, “The Line of Liberty: Runaway Slaves and Fugitive Peons in the Texas-Mexico Borderlands,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2013), 413-433; Mekala Audain, “Mexican Canaan: Fugitive Slaves and free blacks on the American frontier, 1804-1867” (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 2014); Bram Hoonhout and Thomas Mareite, “Freedom at the Fringes? Slave Flight and Empire-Building in the Early Modern Spanish Borderlands of Essequibo-Venezuela and Louisiana-Texas,” *Slavery and Abolition* 39, no. 1 (2018), 1-26; Kyle Ainsworth, “Advertising Maranda: Runaway Slaves in Texas, 1835-1865,” in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, 197-231; Mekala Audain, “‘Design His Course to Mexico’: The Fugitive Slave Experience in the Texas-Mexico Borderlands, 1850-1853,” in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, 232-250; James David Nichols, “Freedom Interrupted: Runaway Slaves and Insecure Borders in the Mexican Northeast,” in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, 251-274; Alice L. Baumgartner, “Abolition from the South: Mexico and the Road to the U.S. Civil War, 1821-1867,” (PhD Diss., Yale University, 2018). For more on black migration from the United States to the Bahamas, see Irvin D. S. Winsboro and Joe Knetsch, “Florida Slaves, the ‘Saltwater Railroad’ to the Bahamas, and Anglo-American Diplomacy,” *Journal of Southern History* 74, no. 1 (2013), 51-78; Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, “The US Coastal Passage and Caribbean Spaces of Freedom,” in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of*

Unsurprisingly, histories of slave refugee migration to the North and Canada typically focus on the UGRR. Early histories overemphasized the role and contributions of white abolitionists. Wilbur H. Siebert's *The Underground Railroad* is the most well-known early study of the antebellum freedom network. Siebert compiled interviews, testimonies, and letters of former white abolitionists and their descendants, and found local newspaper accounts. Siebert's work was a monumental contribution to scholarly studies of self-emancipation and black migration. As Eric Foner writes, however, Siebert's accounts for certain locales were "prone to exaggeration" and he "tended to ignore replies to his questionnaires that did not fit his image[.]" Most significantly, Siebert's UGRR downplayed the contributions of enslaved and free African Americans.¹⁵ During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, few UGRR histories emphasized black activism. William Still's *The Under-Ground Railroad* (1872) was the main exception. A former UGRR activist in Philadelphia, Still's research focuses on the actions and agency of freedom seekers above all others. African American refugees were not simply 'cargo' or 'passengers'; they were the primary architects of the antebellum black freedom movement.¹⁶

In the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, historians began to reassess the UGRR and black freedom movement. Larry Gara's *The Liberty Line* was the first major study of the era to challenge Siebert's narrative. In this study, self-emancipators who fled from southern slavery were the primary actors. Gara argues that enslaved people formulated and executed their escapes with minimal assistance from external actors. Siebert's UGRR, he contends, was a myth constructed by white abolitionists and their descendants, designed for the benefit of northern white audiences. Instead, slave refugees primarily took refuge in northern black communities, not in the white

Freedom in North America, 275-315; Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, *Rebellious Passage: The Creole Revolt and America's Coastal Slave Trade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

¹⁵ Wilbur H. Siebert, *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1898); Eric Foner, *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2015), 12-13. For other early UGRR histories, which emphasized the contributions of white abolitionists, see Rev. William M. Mitchell, *The Under-Ground Railroad* (London: William Tweedie, 1860); Alexander Milton Ross, *Recollections and Experiences of An Abolitionist, from 1855 to 1865* (Toronto: Roswell and Hutchison, 1875); Eber M. Pettit, *Sketches in the History of the Underground Railroad, Comprising Many Thrilling Incidents of the Escape of Fugitives from Slavery, and the Perils of Those Who Aided Them* (Fredonia: W. McKinstry and Son, 1879); Robert C. Smedley, *History of the Underground Railroad in Chester and the Neighboring Counties of Pennsylvania* (Lancaster, PA: Printed at the Office of the Journal, 1883); H.U. Johnson, *From Dixie to Canada: Romances and Realities of the Underground Railroad*. (Orwell, OH: H.U. Johnson; Buffalo, C.W. Moulton, 1894).

¹⁶ William Still, *The Underground Rail Road: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters Sec. Narrating the Hardships, Hair-breadth Escapes and Death Struggles of the Slaves in their Efforts for Freedom, as Related by Themselves and Others or Witnessed by the Author; Together with Sketches of the Largest Stockholders and Most Liberal Aiders and Advisers of the Road* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1872). For more on William Still, see Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Abolitionists Remember: Antislavery Autobiographies and the Unfinished Work of Emancipation* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), Ch. 2.

abolitionist UGRR ‘stations.’ By placing slave refugees and free African Americans at the center of his study, Gara rebuked the narrative forged by Siebert and others of a predominantly white-led movement. Almost six decades after its original release, *The Liberty Line* is arguably the most influential study of the UGRR. It remains an important study for historians of slave refugees, free African American communities and abolitionism in the antebellum United States, and scholars of cultural memory.¹⁷

In recent decades, numerous historians have contributed invaluable works to the historiography of the UGRR. John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweningers’ *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* examines the motivations behind self-emancipation and how freedom seekers escaped from bondage in exceptional detail. Other recent works have sought to balance Gara’s insights with earlier histories of the UGRR. Keith Griffler, Eric Foner, and others argue that slave refugees and free blacks were the primary actors of the antebellum freedom movement, but also criticize Gara for dismissing the roles performed by northern whites. Both depict the UGRR as an interracial movement in which African Americans collaborated with white abolitionists to ensure the escape of slave refugees. Other scholarly works depict the UGRR as a series of overlapping, interracial networks. The significance of the UGRR and black freedom movement has been reaffirmed over the past few decades. Fergus Bordewich even dubbed the UGRR as the United States’ first Civil Rights Movement.¹⁸

¹⁷ Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1961); Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 13-14. For more on the construction of white abolitionist UGRR memory after the US Civil War and Reconstruction, see Jeffrey, *Abolitionists Remember*. For more on the significance of historical and cultural memory, see David Thelen, “Memory and American History,” *Journal of American History* 75, no. 4 (1989), 1117-1129.

¹⁸ Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*; Keith Griffler, *Front Line of Freedom: African Americans and the Forging of the Underground Railroad in Ohio Valley* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2004), 8; Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*; Fergus M. Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan: The Epic Story of the Underground Railroad, America’s First Civil Rights Movement* (New York: HarperCollins 2005; Amistad, 2006). Over the past few decades, numerous scholarly studies have expanded our understanding of the UGRR, slave refugees, and anti-slavery activism. For recent works on the UGRR and slave refugees, see Tobin, *From Midnight to Dawn*; William J. Switala, *Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania*, 2nd ed. (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2008; first published 2001); David W. Blight (ed.), *Passages to Freedom: The Underground Railroad in History and Memory* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2004); Stanley Harrold, *Subversives: Antislavery Community in Washington, D.C., 1828-1865* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2003); Carol E. Mull, *The Underground Railroad in Michigan* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2010); Richard M. Blackett, *Making Freedom: The Underground Railroad and the Politics of Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); David G. Smith, *On the Edge of Freedom: The Fugitive Slave Issue in South Central Pennsylvania* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014); Cheryl Janifer LaRoche, *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad: The Geography of Resistance* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2014); Richard M. Blackett, *The Captive’s Quest for Freedom: Fugitive Slaves, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, and the Politics of Slavery* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Andrew Delbanco, *The War Before the War: Fugitive Slaves and the Struggle for America’s Soul from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Penguin, 2018); John L. Brooke, “There is a North”: *Fugitive Slaves, Political Crisis, and Cultural Transformation in the Coming of the Civil War* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2019); Robert H. Churchill, *The*

Recent scholarship has made strides in connecting slavery and self-emancipation, and UGRR with the US Civil War. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, slavery was effectively erased as a central cause of the war by white Southerners and Northerners. Instead, growing sectionalism and 'states' rights' were regarded as the primary causes of the Civil War. This was perhaps most visibly symbolized by the emergence of neo-Confederate and 'Lost Cause' memory and ideology, which outright dismissed slavery as the central motivation behind secession. Over time, northern whites also overlooked slavery's centrality to the Civil War as part of a 'reconciliationist' strain of historical memory. African American scholars fought against this erasure of slavery in Civil War memory, but mainstream historical scholarship generally embraced Lost Cause and 'reconciliationist' memories.¹⁹

Since the mid-twentieth century, historians have recognized slavery as the primary cause of the Civil War. Far from bit players, these actors were instrumental in weakening southern slavery and hardening anti-slavery opinion. By escaping to the 'free' North, slave refugees tested the limits and boundaries of slavery in the United States and pushed northern whites towards embracing stronger free-soil, anti-slavery positions. Scott Hancock argues, "When slaves cross the fault line, they continually amplified tensions between the regions and the competing systems of law until the fault exploded into civil war. Black people, not simply slavery, pushed the nation to war."²⁰ Similarly, Matthew Mason writes that the escape of self-emancipators to the northern US and Canada "further alienated" white Northerners and Southerners, and contributed to rising sectional tensions.²¹ *Northward Bound* examines how the debate over slave refugees solidified long-standing divisions not only between the northern and southern states, but also between the United States, Canada, and Great Britain.

Furthermore, *Northward Bound* examines the motivations behind self-emancipation and the nature of northward escape. It analyzes who and why enslaved African Americans chose to escape, how they escaped, and why they chose their

Underground Railroad and the Geography of Violence in Antebellum America (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

¹⁹ For more on US Civil War memory, see David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: the Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2001); Caroline Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013). For studies of the Lost Cause and neo-Confederate memory, see Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan (eds.), *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010); Anne E. Marshall, *Creating a Confederate Kentucky The Lost Cause and Civil War Memory in a Border State* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

²⁰ Scott Hancock, "Crossing Freedom's Fault Line: The Underground Railroad and Recentring African Americans in Civil War Causality," *Civil War History* 59, no. 2 (2013), 173. Hancock's article also serves as an excellent overview of the evolving historiography on slave refugees and the UGRR between the Early Republic and Civil War.

²¹ Matthew Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 120-121.

eventual destination. Most freedom seekers that made their way to the North and Canada fled from the Upper South (namely Virginia, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri). Numerous factors drove enslaved people to risk their lives and escape, including brutal treatment and a long-held desire to be free. However, none proved more profound than the threat of imminent sale and forced separation from loved ones. The interstate slave trade posed an indiscriminate threat to enslaved people. Most freedom seekers escaped on foot but some managed to secure other modes of transportation. Rather than seeking assistance from white abolitionists on a highly organized escape network, most self-emancipators took shelter in northern black communities.

While most freedom seekers escaped without external assistance, this should not suggest abolitionist escape networks played no role whatsoever. On the contrary, countless self-emancipated men and women were assisted by African American and white UGRR agents, as well as vigilance committees and anti-slavery societies. These networks were most developed in the Mid-Atlantic and New England. Activists in Philadelphia, New York City, Boston, and beyond provided food, water, shelter, and transportation to freedom seekers on their journeys to freedom. This study draws upon the records of prominent UGRR activists to examine the profile of self-emancipators and the networks which connected the Mid-Atlantic, New England, and Canadian provinces. In the former Northwest Territory, UGRR networks were less organized than their counterparts on the East Coast. Yet prominent African American and white activists operated throughout the region and offered assistance to self-emancipated refugees from the South.

In most UGRR histories, self-emancipation is depicted as an almost entirely solitary act, with freedom seekers escaping individually or in small groups of two or three. Like Bibb, most self-emancipators avoided escaping in family units due to practical difficulties and the heightened risk of recapture. However, these UGRR records reveal that enslaved families escaped at a higher rate than previously assumed. William Still and Sydney Howard Gay's records also highlight the nature and strategy of family escape more clearly. In particular, they demonstrate that enslaved family units frequently fled in stages or staggered their escapes to the North. *Northward Bound* illustrates the importance of considering family bonds and kinship ties to stories of self-emancipation.²²

Surprisingly, only a handful of books devote significant attention to the complex relationship between self-emancipation, escape, and kinship ties. Most studies serve as biographies of freedom-seeking couples and families. Most notably, Karolyn Smardz Frost's *I've Got a Home in Glory Land* recounts the escape of Thornton and Lucie Blackburn from Kentucky to Upper Canada. Meanwhile, Bryan

²² For more on William Still, Sydney Howard Gay, and freedom-seeking families, see Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*.

Prince's *A Shadow on the Household* examines the efforts of John and Arabella Weems to rescue their children. One of their children, Anna Maria Weems, later launched a desperate bid for freedom to reunite with her legally free members of her family. The cases of Thornton and Lucie Blackburn, and Anna Maria Weems, are discussed later.²³

Other studies examine the efforts of self-emancipated men and women to liberate enslaved families or reunite with loved ones after their escapes. Sydney Nathans' *To Free a Family* is perhaps the most notable example. Focusing on the story of Mary Walker, a "fair-skinned fugitive slave woman" who escaped from her enslaver during a visit to Philadelphia, it details her efforts to reunite with her family. With regards to leaving her children behind, Nathans contends that Walker "believed she had no choice – after a dispute with her owner, he had threatened to send her to the Deep South." For Walker, and many other freedom seekers, self-emancipation and escape was emotionally traumatic. "For her and thousands who fled," writes Nathans, "freedom came at a price; remorse at parting without a word, silence by the forced danger of disclosure, fear for her family's fate." Similarly, Karolyn Smardz Frost's *Steal Away Home* examines the efforts of Cecelia Jane Reynolds, a self-emancipator from Kentucky who escaped to Canada, to free and reunite with her enslaved family.²⁴

Northward Bound builds upon these works by illustrating the efforts of freedom-seeking families to free themselves from bondage. Studies on the relationship between family and self-emancipation are crucial for better understanding the nature of escape from the US South to the North and Canada, and for gleaning insight into the emotional hardships of leaving enslaved spouses, children, and other relatives behind. Moreover, they offer a necessary corrective to the almost universally triumphant portrayal of self-emancipation and escape to the North. As Nathans notes, thousands of enslaved people "fled only when faced with an irrevocable change for the worse in their lives."²⁵

²³ Karolyn Smardz Frost, *I've Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2007); Bryan Prince, *A Shadow on the Household: One Enslaved Family's Incredible Struggle for Freedom* (Toronto: Emblem, 2009).

²⁴ Sydney Nathans, *To Free a Family: The Journey of Mary Walker* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 2; Karolyn Smardz Frost, *Steal Away Home: One Woman's Epic Flight to Freedom – And Her Long Road Back to the South* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2017). I have previously written on the relationship between kinship ties and escape to the northern US and Canada. See Oran Kennedy, "'The Strong Cords of Affection': Enslaved African American Families and Escape to the U.S. North and Canada, 1800-1861," in Joshua Farrington, Norman W. Powell, Gwendolyn Graham, Lisa Day, and Ogechi E. Anyanwu (eds.), *Slavery to Liberation: The African American Experience* (Richmond, KY: Eastern Kentucky University, 2019).

²⁵ Nathans, *To Free a Family*, 2-3.

Promised Lands? Black Freedom in the Northern US and Canada

Closely related to persistent myths of the UGRR is the romanticized notion of the North and Canada as safe havens for freedom seekers. The image of white Northerners and Canadians as abolitionists that defended slave refugees remains entrenched in popular memory. However, the reality for African-descended people in both regions was more ambiguous. For starters, slavery was legal and practiced throughout the northern states and Canadian provinces. In her book *The Hanging of Angélique*, African Canadian scholar Afua Cooper calls slavery “Canada’s best kept secret.” Other historians, such as Robin Winks, Frank Mackey, and Harvey Amani Whitfield, have demonstrated that black enslavement was practiced across Canada into the early nineteenth century. Meanwhile, scholars like Wendy Warren, Jared Ross Hardesty, and others have illustrated the roots of black enslavement in the colonial North. James J. Gigantino, II even demonstrates that slavery was practiced in New Jersey well into the Civil War Era.²⁶

Historians have shed light on how anti-black prejudice shaped white attitudes to slave refugees and free blacks. “Though the North was free soil,” notes Keith Griffler, “it was no promised land for African Americans.”²⁷ Northern whites generally disliked the presence of African Americans and pressured state governments to restrict their settlement. In every northern state, blacks were denied equal rights and fair treatment in the social, economic, and political spheres. Even worse, northern black communities were subject to terror attacks from white Euro-Americans and European newcomers. While northern whites grew increasingly frustrated by the incursion of southern enslavers, kidnappers, and bounty hunters, most did little to prevent African Americans from being claimed as illegally self-emancipated people. In reality, the antebellum North comprised a series of *herrenvolk* democracies. In the words of James Brewer Stewart, a “harsh new spirit of modern racial essentialism” was prevalent throughout the North by the mid-1830s.²⁸

²⁶ Afua Cooper, *The Hanging of Angélique: The Untold Story of Canadian Slavery and the Burning of Old Montreal* (Toronto: Harper Perennial, 2006), 68; Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*; Frank Mackey, *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010); Harvey Amani Whitfield, *North to Bondage: Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016); Wendy Warren, *New England Bound: Slavery and Colonization in Early America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2016); Jared Ross Hardesty, *Unfreedom: Slavery and Dependence in Eighteenth-Century Boston* (New York: New York University Press, 2016); James J. Gigantino, II, “‘The Whole North is Not Abolitionized’: Slavery’s Slow Death in New Jersey, 1830-1860,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 34, no. 3 (2014), 411-437.

²⁷ Keith Griffler, “Escaping the Land of the Free: History, Myth, and the Meaning of the Underground Railroad” (paper presented at Friends of the Network to Freedom Association Underground Railroad Conference, Indianapolis, Indiana, 17 September 2009), 2.

²⁸ James Brewer Stewart, “Modernizing ‘Difference’: The Political Meanings of Color in the Free States, 1776-1840,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 19, no. 4 (1999), 693. For an excellent overview of *herrenvolk* democracy, see Kenneth P. Vickery, “‘Herrenvolk’ Democracy and Egalitarianism in South Africa and the US South,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16, no. 3 (1974), 309-328.

Meanwhile, anti-black prejudice and racial discrimination were commonplace throughout Canada. Robin Winks' *The Blacks in Canada* demonstrates that freedom seekers from the United States faced tremendous hardship in the provinces, most notably from their impoverished and largely uneducated condition, as well as racism from Canadian whites. In this regard, Winks challenges the image of Canada as a 'Canaan Land' for freedom seekers. Jason Silverman's *Unwelcome Guests* also illustrates that Canada was not a post-racial utopia for people of African descent. Like Winks, Silverman emphasizes the racial prejudice of Canadian whites and their resistance to black newcomers. Nevertheless, Silverman places greater emphasis on the agency, resilience, and successes of slave refugees and free African American migrants.²⁹ Racial prejudice occasionally boiled over into overt hostility and efforts to block the migration of free African Americans and self-emancipated refugees into Canada. The prevalence of anti-black prejudice and discrimination undermines the romanticized image of nineteenth-century British North America. Reese Renford notes, "Canada was indeed the promised land of the slave's imagination. With this said, however, Canada was not a perfectly egalitarian utopia for Blacks."³⁰

Central to this study is the following question: what is freedom? While employed frequently in historical scholarship, particular in studies of slavery and self-emancipation, there is often ambiguity or disagreement of its exact meaning. As Eric Foner writes, "freedom has never been a fixed category or predetermined concept. Subject to multiple and conflicting interpretations, it has always been a terrain of struggle, its definition constantly created and re-created."³¹ Rather than offer precise definitions, historians often rely on readers to infer the meaning of freedom. In this regard, other fields have been more successful in defining different concepts of liberty. Political theorists have long wrangled with this question. Isaiah Berlin's essay "Two Concepts of Liberty" forms the bedrock of most modern analyses. He distinguishes between 'negative liberty' ("the absence of obstacles barriers or constraints," often framed as freedom *from* something) and 'positive liberty' ("the possibility of acting – or the fact of acting – in such a way to take control of one's life and realize one's fundamental purposes," often framed as the freedom *to* act). Other theorists have challenged Berlin's binary distinction between negative liberty and positive liberty. Philip Pettit championed the concept of 'republican liberty,' or the idea that freedom entails the possession of rights and privileges. Ian Carter

²⁹ Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1971); Jason H. Silverman, *Unwelcome Guests: Canada West's Response to American Fugitive Slaves* (Millwood, NY: Associated Faculty Press, 1985).

³⁰ Reese Renford, "Canada: The Promised Land for US Slaves," *Western Journal of Black Studies* 35, no. 3 (2011), 215.

³¹ Eric Foner, "The Meaning of Freedom in the Age of Emancipation," *Journal of American History* 81, no. 2 (1994), 436-437.

describes freedom as a “status” and argues that it “is not simply a matter of non-interference, for a slave may enjoy a great deal of non-interference at the whim of her master.”³²

Northward Bound contends that, for slave refugees, freedom was not simply the absence of slavery. Rather, it was also directly linked to equality and autonomy. Land ownership, education, security from re-enslavement, civil and political equality, and citizenship were all considered integral to true liberty. With this in mind, this study builds upon Damian Pargas’ typology by arguing that formal freedom in Canada provided greater access to lands, schools and colleges, civil and political rights, and equal citizenship. Meanwhile, semi-formal freedom in the northern US meant that slave refugees (as well as free blacks) were largely excluded from the means of elevation and equal citizenship. Furthermore, formal freedom conferred slave refugees with greater security from re-enslavement. Upon reaching Canadian soil, African American freedom seekers shed their enslaved status and were recognized as people with claims to British subjecthood. This was not the case in the northern US. Instead, the status of self-emancipators in this region was always contested and susceptible to change. At the same time, ambiguities and conflicts between state and federal laws, and the extra-legal resistance of African Americans and white abolitionists, provided slave refugees in the North with important protections from enslavers, kidnappers, and even federal marshals. In this sense, they lived in a state of incomplete, semi-formal freedom.

Comparative Histories and Black Migration in the US and Canadian Historiographies

The historiography of black emigration from the United States to Canada can be roughly divided into two periods. First, the large-scale, wartime migrations of African and African Americans after the Revolutionary War and War of 1812. Thousands of self-emancipated refugees and free black migrants resettled in the Canadian Maritime provinces and the Bahamas. Numerous works have been published on the migration of the ‘Black Loyalist’ refugees from the United States to Canada after the Revolutionary War. Likewise, Alan Taylor, Gene Allen Smith, and others have shed light on black refugee migration to Canada after the War of 1812.³³ The common

³² Quotes taken from Ian Carter, “Positive and Negative Liberty,” *TheStanfordEncyclopediaofPhilosophy* (Summer 2018 edition), accessed Aug. 19, 2019. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/liberty-positive-negative/>.

³³ Since the 1970s, the historiography of self-emancipation in the Revolutionary War, black Loyalist refugee migration to British Canada, and Black Refugees of the War of 1812 has expanded immensely. Key readings include Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961); Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 24-60, 114-141; Mary Beth Norton, “The

assumption is that the British government issued an amnesty to enslaved African Americans during each war to alleviate a shortage of manpower and create chaos and confusion behind 'American' lines. In turn, self-emancipators served in British lines and fully exhibited their affinity for the Crown. In the process, black refugees became black 'Loyalists.'

Yet there are several problems with this narrative. As Benjamin Quarles and Jeffrey Kerr-Ritchie have noted, this assumes that African Americans "were supporters of the British rather than primarily liberty-seekers."³⁴ Moreover, this analysis presents a top-down version of events in which enslaved Africans and African Americans only fled to British lines in response to respective amnesties. This reductionist approach undervalues the role that self-emancipators performed in forcing the issue upon the British. Alan Taylor's *The Internal Enemy* takes a significant step in correcting this misconception. He claims that freedom seekers during the War of 1812 partly compelled the British to grant asylum by fleeing to their lines. Moreover, he argues that self-emancipators regularly refused to cooperate with the British unless they promised to liberate enslaved family members. In this regard, Taylor restores a great deal of agency to black freedom seekers while acknowledging their structural limitations (after all, the impetus to issue an amnesty to self-emancipators remained with the British government). *Northward Bound* adopts Taylor's balanced approach to black refugee wartime migrations by emphasizing the roles performed by self-emancipators in pressing the British to

Fate of Some Black Loyalists of the American Revolution," *Journal of Negro History* 58 (1973), 402-426; John N. Grant, "Black Immigrants into Nova Scotia, 1776-1815," *Journal of Negro History* 58 (1973), 253-270; Ellen Gibson Wilson, *The Loyal Blacks* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1976); James W. St. G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976); Sylvia Frey, "Between Slavery and Freedom: Virginia Blacks in the American Revolution," *Journal of Southern History* 49, no. 3 (1983), 375-398; Sylvia Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); Mary Louise Clifford, *From Slavery to Freetown: Black Loyalists after the American Revolution* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1999); Cassandra Pybus, "Jefferson's Faulty Math: The Question of Slave Defections in the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (2005), 243-264; Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York: Viking, 2006); Gary B. Nash, *The Forgotten Fifth: African Americans in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and their Global Quest for Liberty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006); Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the American Revolution* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006); Alan Taylor, "The Late Loyalists: Northern Reflections of the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 27 (2007), 1-34; Douglas R. Egerton, *Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Random House, 2011); Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 47-53; Alan Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists: Fighting for Emancipation in the War for Independence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

³⁴ Quote from Jeffrey Kerr-Ritchie, *Rebellious Passage: The Creole Revolt and America's Coastal Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 15.

become ‘reluctant liberators,’ while still acknowledging the significance of top-down decision-making.³⁵

The second strain of the historiography examines African American migration to Upper Canada roughly between 1820 and 1861. Unlike the earlier wartime migrations, this period witnessed an increasing stream of freedom seekers from the US South to the northern states and Canada. By the early antebellum era, the northern ‘free’ states became the primary destination for tens of thousands of slave refugees. Crossing the Mason-Dixon line, the Ohio River, and the Mississippi River, self-emancipated men, women, and children fled to urban and rural free African American communities throughout the North. As discussed earlier, refugees availed themselves of interracial freedom networks which aided them during their escapes. Upper Canada was the primary destination for freedom seekers who sought to leave the United States entirely. Most refugees crossed into the province via the Detroit and Niagara River borderlands, or via Lake Erie’s steamboats.³⁶ Few studies have sought to compare the earlier wartime and antebellum black refugee migrations. Aside from Robin Winks’ landmark study, there has been no significant attempt to bridge the historiographical gap between black wartime migrations to the Canadian Maritimes and antebellum migrations to Upper Canada. *Northward Bound* demonstrates that even within larger sites of formal freedom, there were significant regional differences that shaped the experiences of black refugee newcomers.

Similarly, the historiography on slave refugee migration to the northern US, as well as antebellum black communities more generally, is largely comprised of regional studies. In recent years, there has been a tendency to focus on specific cities or regions, such as New England, the Mid-Atlantic states, or the former Northwest Territory. As a result, there are now detailed histories of the UGRR, abolitionism, and freedom seekers in various locales, including Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and other urban and rural locales. The works of Gary Nash, Eric Foner, Leslie Harris, and Nikki Taylor among others have greatly expanded our knowledge of these subjects.³⁷ *Northward Bound* offers a compelling case for examining slave refugee migration in North America through a comparative lens. First, as there is now an abundance of local and regional histories, scholars must find new ways to analyze and examine this topic. While it is entirely feasible to write detailed accounts of freedom seekers in every town, city, and locale across the northern US, it is unclear

³⁵ Taylor, *The Internal Enemy*.

³⁶ This historiographical strain examines histories of the UGRR and black settlement in Upper Canada. For the former, see Gara, *The Liberty Line*; Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*; Blackett, *Making Freedom*. For the latter, see Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*; Silverman, *Unwelcome Guests*.

³⁷ For sample literature, see Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*; Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia’s Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Nikki M. Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom: Cincinnati’s Black Community, 1802-1868* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005).

how this would improve the quality of the historiography or the field as a whole. Moreover, local and regional studies are quite limited in what they can tell us about the shared and contrasting experiences of freedom seekers across the northern states. Histories of UGRR networks, abolitionists, and slave refugees in Boston, for instance, typically relate little or nothing about their counterparts in the Mid-Atlantic states or former Northwest Territory. Comparative studies yield valuable insights into how context shaped the lives and experiences of self-emancipated refugees across North America. By embracing a comparative and transnational approach, this study seeks to better understand how freedom for African-descended people varied across the northern US and Canada.

The Transnational Turn and Borderlands Studies

Apart from comparative approaches, borderlands and transnational studies offer a useful framework for understanding the history of self-emancipation, abolitionism, black refugee migrations, and the lives of African-descended people in North America. In the past, historical scholarship has been constrained by its emphasis on producing ‘national’ histories. Just as the international boundaries between Canada, the United States, and Mexico frame our understanding of contemporary society, economics, and politics, so, too, have they largely defined our comprehension of the historical past. The international boundaries which shape North America have never been permanent, fixed, or static. Men, women, and children have moved across international boundaries since they were formed. Without formal checkpoints or required documentation, crossing between the United States, Canada, and Mexico in the nineteenth century was significantly easier than it is today.

Migration and mobility are integral components of transnational and cross-border studies. Additionally, transnationalism encompasses the cross-cultural exchange of ideas, values, and beliefs. Karolyn Smardz Frost and Veta S. Tucker define transnationalism as “the movement of people and culture back and forth across international borders[.]”³⁸ Far from impenetrable barriers, the porous international boundaries served as bridges between cross-border communities. Bearing this in mind, the transnational framework is suitable for this study of self-emancipation and freedom seekers in the northern United States and Canada. *Northward Bound* demonstrates that African Americans, African Canadians, and white abolitionists forged transnational communities and organizations, and established interracial freedom networks which extended across international borders. In doing so, they

³⁸ Karolyn Smardz Frost and Veta S. Tucker, “Sources and Resources,” in Karolyn Smardz Frost and Veta S. Tucker (eds.) *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance, and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016), 260.

spearheaded a continental abolitionist movement and acquired transnational identities.

Beginning in the 1990s, historians and scholars from other disciplines have ramped up calls for more transnational studies of North America. In his influential 1999 article “The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History,” David Thelen writes:

The spread across national borders of institutions such as multinational corporations and CNN, of social movements such as feminism and environmentalism, and of unprecedented migrations of people have unleashed processes of hybridization and creolization as people shape new and multiple identities. Even the concept of citizenship, that unquestioned right of nation-states to bestow, has been shaken by movements that claim that people’s rights should accompany them as human beings, not be bestowed on them as residents of a nation-state.³⁹

The growing desire for transnational histories reflects a heightened awareness that we live in an interconnected world. Transnational movements and corporations, as well as intergovernmental and supranational organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and European Union (EU), illustrate that concepts like sovereignty, citizenship, and identity as characterized in terms of the ‘nation-state’ are less relevant than before. Instead, people and nation-states increasingly conceive themselves as part of a wider world, despite what recent backlashes may suggest. As Thelen notes, recent developments related to globalization compelled scholars to “take a critical look at what had once seemed so inevitable as to be nearly invisible, to view from new angles key moments when nations were made, challenged, changes, and unmade, to explore how they confronted internal and external threats and opportunities, and how they developed and may be losing their privileged position as the focus for popular identity and sovereignty.”⁴⁰

Furthermore, the rising prominence of black, Latinx, and indigenous voices in public and academic discussions, has fostered transnational dialogues. In recent decades, scholars have pioneered and developed the concept of black transnationalism between the United States and Canada. Meanwhile, the field of

³⁹ David Thelen, “The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History,” *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (1999), 965-966. For more on the growth of borderlands, comparative, and transnational histories in North American scholarship, see David Thelen, “Of Audiences, Borderlands, and Comparisons: Toward the Internationalization of American History,” *Journal of American History* 79, no. 2 (1992), 432-462. While Thelen’s article “Of Audiences” focuses on the US-Mexican borderlands, its insights can also be applied to the US-Canadian borderlands.

⁴⁰ Thelen, “The Nation and Beyond,” 966.

borderlands studies is closely related to, although not directly synonymous with, transnationalism. The field first rose to prominence in the late twentieth century, particularly after the formation of the Association for Borderlands Studies (ABS) in 1976. Early studies focused overwhelmingly on the US – Mexico border. Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan note that it is “the one border to have generated a systematic and sustained body of work.” However, recent works have made significant contributions to the transnational historiography of other border zones in North America.⁴¹

Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron’s article “From Borderlands to Borders” provides a useful (if slightly strict) distinction between ‘frontiers’ and ‘borderlands,’ and a helpful analysis of the evolving border zones on the continent. In particular, Adelman and Aron devote significant attention to imperial conflicts between the United States, Great Britain, France, and indigenous groups over Canada (especially the Great Lakes region) and the Missouri Valley. The Great Lakes region, and particularly the Detroit River border zone, witnessed an upsurge in interest over recent decades. Released in 2005, John J. Bukowczyk, Nora Faires, David R. Smith, and Randy W. Widdis’ *Permeable Borders: The Great Lakes Basin as Transnational Region* employed both transnational and borderland frameworks in their study of the Detroit River border zone. More recently, Tiya Miles released *The Dawn of Detroit*, an exceptional transnational study of the same region.⁴²

Over the past few decades, historians have written several studies of African American and African Canadian transnational communities. The Detroit River border zone has received the most attention from scholars. Afua Cooper called the river a “fluid frontier” and argued that it brought together black communities in Michigan and southwestern Ontario. Cooper stresses the permeability of the Detroit River. She claimed that African Americans and African Canadians often traveled back and forth across the US – Canadian border. Black mobility was a striking feature of the region and a vital component of transnationalism. Yet black activists fully understood the value of the international border to the antebellum freedom movement. From the late eighteenth century, they took advantage of the border to obtain and preserve their liberty. Other historians published works on transnational black communities in the Detroit River border zone. Gregory Wigmore’s influential article emphasizes the porous nature of the borderland but, in a novel twist, illustrates how enslaved people

⁴¹ Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan (eds.), *Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6.

⁴² Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empire, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History,” *American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (1999), 814-841; John Bukowczyk, Nora Faires, David R. Smith, and Randy William Widdis, *Permeable Borders: The Great Lakes Basin as Transnational Region, 1850-1900* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005); Tiya Miles, *The Dawn of Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straits* (New York: New Press, 2017), 8.

in Upper Canada fled to the United States. Furthermore, Karolyn Smardz Frost and Nora Faires each examined the evolving significance of the transnational boundary, particularly for the UGRR.⁴³

The Niagara River borderland has received less attention from historians and borderland studies scholars. The region has not been overlooked entirely, however. Various scholars of Harriet Tubman, such as Catherine Clinton and Kate Clifford Larson, detailed her experiences in St. Catharines and provided some insight into the region's African Canadian communities. Michael Butler and Nancy Power's study examines the long history of slavery and freedom in the Niagara border zone. Recently, Dann J. Broyld has published several articles on African Canadian communities and transnational activism in the Niagara border zone. Overall, the historiography of this region is much less developed than the Detroit River borderland. This likely reflects the fact that the Detroit River was the primary gateway for black freedom seekers to Upper Canada.⁴⁴

Not all borderlands in eighteenth and nineteenth-century North America were transnational ones, however. Over the antebellum period, new border zones emerged between 'free' northern US and the 'slave' South. The gradual abolition of northern slavery created new opportunities for freedom seekers, who fled to the North in higher numbers. Moreover, it brought the 'Lower' or 'border' North (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois) into regular disagreement and conflict with enslavers and politicians in the neighboring Upper South. Three key border zones emerged between the so-called 'free' and 'slave' states: the Mason-Dixon borderland, the Ohio River borderland, and the Upper Mississippi River borderland. Several works focus on these border zones. David G. Smith's *On the Edge of Freedom* is among the foremost studies of the Mason-Dixon borderland. Smith examines the primary routes which freedom seekers took during their escapes to southwestern and south-central Pennsylvania, the primary actors involved, as well as interstate disputes over the broader issue. Stanley Harrold and Matthew Salafia have produced the most comprehensive histories of slavery and freedom in the Ohio River borderland, although they present contrasting arguments. Meanwhile, M. Scott Heerman, Harriet Frazier, and others have written excellent

⁴³ Afua Cooper, "The Fluid Frontier: Blacks and the Detroit River Region. A Focus on Henry Bibb," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 30, no. 2 (2000), 127-148; Gregory Wigmore, "Before the Railroad: From Slavery to Freedom in the Canadian-American Borderland," *Journal of American History* 98, no. 2 (2011), 437-454; Nora Faires, "Across the Border to Freedom: The International Underground Railroad Memorial and the Meanings of Migration," *Journal of American Ethnic Studies* 32, no. 2 (2013), 38-67; Karolyn Smardz Frost, "African American and African Canadian Transnationalism along the Detroit River Borderland: The Example of Madison J. Lightfoot," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 32, no. 2 (2013), 78-88.

⁴⁴ Catherine Clinton, *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom* (New York: Little Brown, 2004); Kate Clifford Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004); Michael Butler and Nancy Power, *Slavery and Freedom in Niagara* (Niagara-on-the-Lake: Niagara Historical Society, 1993).

books and articles on slavery, freedom, and self-emancipation in the Upper Mississippi River Valley. Across the border regions, tensions flared between southern enslavers and slave catchers, African Americans, northern whites, and state governments over the fugitive slave issue. At times, interstate disputes even spilled over into violence and extra-legal rescues.⁴⁵

The Language of Refugeedom, Freedom-Seeking, and Other Terminology

Historians of self-emancipation and the UGRR have generally avoided employing terminology associated with migration theory and refugee studies in the past. Even today, there is still a measure of hesitation among scholars about describing fugitive slaves as ‘asylum seekers’ or ‘refugees.’ In a recently published book chapter, Afua Cooper, “why the need to keep labelling [sic] these settlers as “fugitives” and “refugees”? When we cast individuals in these roles, it sets up a scenario where [b]lack are always the helpless recipients of charity and [w]hites are always the providers of it.”⁴⁶ Yet the integration of modern terms in historical case studies is a sticking point for some scholars. At the same time, the language of bondage, self-emancipation, and refuge has evolved continues to develop over time. As our understanding of the past and present evolves, so must the language and terminology which historians employ regarding historical actors.

The English word ‘refugee’ originates from the French word ‘*réfugié*,’ which was originally applied to the Huguenots, a minority group of French Calvinists. In 1685, King Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes, which granted important rights and protections to Calvinists and formally outlawed Protestantism. During this period, preachers and worshippers faced heightened discrimination, schools were closed, and churches were destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of Huguenot refugees fled the country. As the term, ‘refugee’ gained was increasingly applied to other groups seeking protection from religious and political persecution. Furthermore, national governments increasingly applied the term to other persecuted minorities.

⁴⁵ Smith, *On the Edge of Freedom*; Stanley Harrold, *Border War: Fighting Over Slavery Before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Matthew Salafia, *Slavery’s Borderland: Freedom and Bondage Along the Ohio River* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017); M. Scott Heerman, “‘Reducing Free Men to Slavery’: Black Kidnapping, the ‘Slave Power,’ and the Politics of Abolition in Antebellum Illinois,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 38, no. 2 (2018), 261-291; Harriet C. Frazier, *Runaway and Freed Missouri Slaves and Those who Helped Them* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009).

⁴⁶ Afua Cooper, “Epilogue Reflections: The Challenges and Accomplishments of the Promised Land,” in Boulou Ebanda de B’béri, Nina Reid-Maroney, and Handel Kashope Wright (eds.), *The Promised Land: History and Historiography of the Black Experience in Chatham-Kent’s Settlements and Beyond* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 195.

Article 120 of France's Constitution of 1793 declared that the country would "grant asylum to aliens banished on account of freedom."⁴⁷

Over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mass refugee migrations continued to take place across the world. Despite numerous efforts, the first internationally accepted definition of 'refugee' was not approved until after the Second World War. In 1951, the United Nations ratified the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Article 1 states that a refugee is someone who:

owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationalist, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.⁴⁸

In recent decades, the term had been retroactively applied to groups who were not previously considered refugees. Yet enslaved people have remained conspicuously absent from the field of refugee studies. At the same time, the experiences of self-emancipators resemble those of refugees elsewhere. Fortunately, some historians have drawn direct comparisons between 'fugitive slaves' and refugees. In 2017, David Blight published an article for *The Atlantic* titled "Frederick Douglass, Refugee." He argues that Douglass' experiences "serve as a striking symbol of one of the first major refugee crises in our history... he was perhaps America's most illustrious *internal* exile. Indeed, until the Civil War all African Americans, slave or free, lived as exiles of a kind in their own land." Blight draws a link between Douglass (and other freedom seekers) with internally displaced people, undocumented people, and refugees today.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, the US National Park

⁴⁷ "Huguenot French Protestant," *Encyclopaedia Britannica.com*, Aug. 3, 2016.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Huguenot>, accessed Jan. 27, 2020; Hélène Lambert, Francesco Messino, and Paul Tiedemann, "Comparative Perspectives of Constitutional Asylum in France, Italy, and Germany: Requiescat in Pace?" in *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2008), 17n4 (translated quote from Article 120 of 1793 French Constitution). My sincerest thanks to Irial Glynn for directing me to the 1793 French Constitution.

⁴⁸ "Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees," *unhcr.org*, accessed Aug. 29, 2019. <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>.

⁴⁹ David W. Blight, "Frederick Douglass, Refugee," *Atlantic*, Feb. 7, 2017.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/02/frederick-douglass-refugee/515853/>, accessed Jan. 27, 2020.

Service explains, freedom seeker “demonstrates what was in the hearts of freedom-seeking African Americans who acted to make liberty a reality.”⁵⁰

Similarly, studies of the black ‘Loyalists’ and fugitive slaves during the War of 1812 designate these historical actors as ‘refugees.’ Alan Taylor’s *The Internal Enemy* describes self-emancipators who fled to British lines as ‘refugees.’ Harvey Amani Whitfield refers to African Americans that arrived in the Canadian Maritimes after the War of 1812 as the ‘Black Refugees’ (the upper case ‘R’ distinguishes these refugees from the black ‘Loyalists’). Other studies on the antebellum and Civil War Era describe self-emancipated Africans and African-descended people as refugees. David Williams’ *I Freed Myself* refers to escaped slaves as refugees, while Ikuko Asaka’s *Tropical Freedom*, refers to ‘former-slave refugees.’ Histories of the UGRR, such as Fergus Bordewich’s *Bound for Canaan*, also refers to self-emancipated men, women, and children as refugees from slavery. Furthermore, there has been a shift in US Civil War studies away from discussions of ‘contraband camps’ to ‘slave refugee camps.’ Recent works from Abigail Cooper, Chandra Manning, David Silkenaat, and Amy Murrell Taylor illustrate the growing popularity of this terminology.⁵¹

Nevertheless, some slavery studies scholars remain hesitant about using the language of refugeedom. On the one hand, historians are naturally cautious about applying modern terms and language to historical actors. Yet, for some scholars, the term ‘refugee’ does not fully accurately reflect the condition of African American freedom seekers. Robert H. Churchill, for instance, argues that refugee is a “more neutral term” which does not quite capture the lived experiences of freedom seekers. “Escapees from slavery,” Churchill contends, “were fugitives in the sense that they were, in law and practice, actively targeted for reenslavement.” At the same time, Churchill perhaps fails to fully appreciate that African Americans, as well as many white Northerners, either disregarded or actively challenged these laws and practices. While federal (and state) laws may have regarded them as ‘fugitives,’ self-

⁵⁰ “Underground Railroad Terminology,” *NPS.gov*, accessed Aug. 28, 2019.

https://www.nps.gov/subjects/ugrr/discover_history/terminology.htm.

⁵¹ Alan Taylor, *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772-1832* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2013); Harvey Amani Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border: The Black Refugees in British North America, 1815-1860* (Burlington, VT: University of Vermont Press, 2006); David Williams, *I Freed Myself: African American Self-Emancipation in the Civil War Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Ikuko Asaka, *Tropical Freedom: Climate, Settler Colonialism, and Black Exclusion in the Age of Emancipation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017); Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan*; Abigail Cooper, “Lord, until I reach my home”: Inside the refugee camps of the American Civil War,” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2015); Abigail Cooper, “‘Away I goin’ to find my mamma’: Self-Emancipation, Migration, and Kinship in Refugee Camps in the Civil War Era,” *Journal of African American History* 102, no. 4 (2017), 444-467; Chandra Manning, *Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2016); David Silkenaat, *Driven from Home: North Carolina’s Civil War Refugee Crisis* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2016); Amy Murrell Taylor, *Embattled Freedom: Journeys through the Civil War’s Slave Refugee Camps* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018). In their works, Cooper and Taylor provide fully justified explanations for referring to ‘contraband’ men and women as refugees.

emancipators and anti-slavery activists fought against this label. Moreover, it was never always clear when the term ‘fugitive’ applied. As will be shown, numerous episodes highlight the legal ambiguity surrounding numerous cases in the northern US and Canada. *Northward Bound* thus generally opts for the term refugee over fugitive.⁵²

Additionally, self-emancipators, free African American and African Canadian activists, and white abolitionists in North America and the British Isles regularly employed the language of refugeedom. To some extent, this undercuts the argument that historical actors (particularly self-emancipated people) did not conceive themselves as refugees from slavery. Various articles, reports, and writings from the era reveal the prevalence of this language among formerly enslaved people, free-born blacks, and white abolitionists. In 1843, the *British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter* published an article titled, “Refugee Slaves in Canada.” In 1861, the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* referred to the “Colored Refugees in Canada” which provided its assessment on the condition of freedom seekers in Upper Canada. One year later, William Lloyd Garrison’s *Liberator* wrote of the so-called ‘contraband’ enslaved people in the Civil War South, “The word “Contrabands” ... is not a proper term to be applied to human beings... Let them be called Colored Refugees, until we can obtain for them a recognized freedom and citizenship.” Similarly, US abolitionist Benjamin Drew (whose collection of interviews with African Americans in Upper Canada informs much of this study) referred to self-emancipated people in Upper Canada as refugees.⁵³

Of course, historians should question whether self-emancipated people in the northern US and Canada conceived of themselves as ‘refugees,’ or if the term was merely projected onto them by white abolitionists. There is no clear answer given the paucity of written testimonies and materials from formerly enslaved people. Yet they understood the weight which the term ‘refugee’ carried among white anti-slavery audiences and were willing to use it to their advantage. Henry Bibb even called his independent black land-owning scheme the ‘Refugee Home Society’ (discussed in Chapter Three). As will also be shown, however, some African American and African Canadian activists were highly concerned about white abolitionists perpetuating negative depictions of helpless ‘refugees’ in Canada. Nevertheless, slave refugees utilized this terminology to their advantage when necessary.

⁵² Churchill, *The Underground Railroad and the Geography of Violence*, 18-19.

⁵³ “REFUGEE SLAVES IN CANADA,” *British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter*, Sep. 20, 1843; “COLOURED REFUGEES IN CANADA,” *ASR*, Jan. 1, 1861; C. K.W., “Colored Refugees,” *Liberator*, Feb. 14, 1862; Benjamin Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery. The Refugee: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada. Related by Themselves, with an Account of the History and Condition of the Colored Population of Upper Canada* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Co., 1856), accessed Feb. 1, 2016. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/drew/drew.html>.

Northward Bound embraces the language of refugeedom. It avoids the terms ‘fugitives’ or ‘runaways’ because, as the National Park Service explains, they “were constructs of the Southern slave-holding societal structure, or by some well-meaning but nonetheless patronizing abolitionists. As such, these terms reflect how slave-holding society viewed African American efforts toward freedom.” Rather, it describes these actors as ‘freedom seekers,’ ‘refugees (from slavery),’ and ‘self-emancipators/liberators.’ On that note, this study also generally refrains from using ‘slave,’ ‘slaveowner,’ and ‘slaveholder.’ Once again, these terms reflect the hegemonic visions of southern white society, which sought to reduce African-descended people to ‘property.’ Like other recent works, *Northward Bound* thus attempts to ‘re-humanize’ freedom seekers. Consequently, this study uses the term ‘enslaver.’ Other terms used in this study, namely ‘kidnapper,’ ‘bounty hunter,’ and ‘human trafficker,’ should not be conflated with enslaver.⁵⁴ On a minor technical note, *Northward Bound* is written in US English. Consequently, ‘color’ is spelled without a ‘u’ in the main body. The only exceptions occur when the traditional UK English spelling (i.e. ‘colour’) appears in the original text. Given that occurs regularly in this study, the author has opted not to include ‘[sic]’ after each instance for this specific word.

Sources and Methodology

Scholars have long struggled to write histories of slavery and self-emancipation in North America. The relative scarcity of writings and testimonies challenges historians to find ways to trace the lives of enslaved and self-emancipated men, women, and children. Narratives, autobiographies, and testimonies from formerly enslaved and self-emancipated people yield invaluable insight into the lives of enslaved African Americans. These literary works typically follow a similar pattern. Beginning at childhood, the author exposes the cruelty and barbarity of the slave system, documenting instances of corporal punishment and emotional trauma. After transitioning into adulthood, the author resolves to escape to the northern US and Canada to obtain their freedom. Autobiographies and memoirs proved hugely popular among nineteenth-century white audiences. However, autobiographies and memoirs were often embellished by abolitionist editors to evoke sympathy and anti-slavery agitation among their predominantly white readership. Additionally, the overwhelming majority of freedom narratives and autobiographies were written by men.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, autobiographies yield important insight into the lives and

⁵⁴ “Underground Railroad Terminology,” *NPS.gov*.

⁵⁵ For more on the role of white abolitionist editors, and an excellent discussion on the utility and reliability of enslaved narratives, see John W. Blassingame, “Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves:

perceptions of enslaved people, their motivations for escaping, and the routes they took to the North and Canada.

Interviews, letters, and testimonies offer invaluable glimpses into the lives and experiences of slave refugees. Benjamin Drew's *A North-Side View of Slavery* (1856) recorded the testimonies of hundreds of black refugees across Upper Canada. Like autobiographies and memoirs, however, Drew likely altered certain details. Furthermore, these testimonies comprise a small fraction of the estimated total number of slave refugees in the province. Likewise, US abolitionist Samuel Gridley Howe's *Refugees from Slavery in Canada West* suffers from similar issues. Nonetheless, it still offers important insight into the lives of slave refugees. Other interviews prove extremely useful for scholars of self-emancipation in North America. During the Great Depression, the US federal government commissioned the Federal Writers' Project (FWP), which involved approximately 2,300 interviews with formerly enslaved African Americans. Yet these sources suffer from similar limitations. Since most interviewers were white men, African American interviewees likely altered their answers to omit certain details. John Blassingame's *Slave Testimony* also offers a vast range of newspaper clippings and testimonies from formerly enslaved people (including self-emancipators).⁵⁶

Furthermore, 'escaped slave' advertisements offer an important glimpse into the demography of self-emancipators, the motivations behind escape, and the various routes to freedom in North America. David Waldstreicher writes, "Runaway advertisements, in effect, were the first slave narratives – the first published stories about slaves and their seizure of freedom." Although typically written from the perspective of white enslavers and bounty hunters, newspaper notices yield important details on black freedom seekers. *Northward Bound* incorporates escaped slave advertisements from US and Canadian newspapers. Moreover, nineteenth-century newspapers discussed the black refugee issue extensively and recorded the escapes of countless self-emancipators. African American and anti-slavery newspapers documented the journeys of freedom seekers from the US South to the northern states and Canadian provinces.⁵⁷

Meanwhile, abolitionist and anti-slavery society records prove extremely useful for understanding the profile of freedom seekers and motivations behind their escapes, and the various networks which spanned the northern states and Canada. The

Approaches and Problems." *Journal of Southern History* 41, no. 4 (1975), 473-492. David Doddington notes that approximately 88% of freedom narratives and autobiographies were written by men. See David Doddington, *Contesting Slave Masculinity in the American South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 26n22.

⁵⁶ Samuel G. Howe, *The Refugees from Slavery in Canada West. Report to the Freedman's Inquiry Commission* (Boston: Wright & Potter, Printers, 4 Spring Lane, 1864).

⁵⁷ David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic," *William and Mary Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (1999), 247.

best-preserved records were kept by abolitionists and anti-slavery societies on the East Coast, especially in Philadelphia, New York City, and Boston. The Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS) left behind detailed records of meetings and other activities. Elsewhere, abolitionist and anti-slavery societies published minutes and accounts of their meetings. Some UGRR conductors also kept personal records of the freedom seekers that arrived at their homes and offices. William Still and Sydney Howard Gay of Philadelphia and New York City respectively logged the details of several hundred black refugees in the 1850s. In Upper Canada, abolitionist missionaries detailed their activities in letters to the American Missionary Association (AMA).

British and Canadian government land, legal, and court records also document the journeys of self-liberated freedom seekers. Black Loyalist refugees that departed from New York City following the Revolutionary War, for instance, were recorded in the so-called 'Book of Negroes.' Upon arrival, provincial records detailed various aspects of the black Loyalists' lives, including where they settled, how much land they received, and the types of employment they occupied. Similar records can be found for African American refugees from the War of 1812 in Nova Scotia and Upper Canada. Land petitions illustrate the size and location of land received by black refugees, and other petitions reveal their primary concerns and grievances. Other government documents, including census records, listings of black residents, and correspondence, are employed in this study, although they also come with limitations. As noted earlier, census takers did not always record accurate information regarding people of African descent.

Chapter Synopsis

Northward Bound is separated into two parts and composed of five chapters. Part I (Escaping Bondage) is comprised of the first two chapters of this study and examines the escape of self-emancipated people. Chapter One illustrates how the northern US and British Canada became spaces of semi-formal and formal freedom respectively, and how slavery evolved and rapidly expanded within the US South. Furthermore, it examines self-emancipation and mass slave refugee migration during the Revolutionary War and War of 1812, demonstrating that freedom seekers exploited wartime chaos by fleeing to British lines to claim their liberty. Chapter Two focuses on self-emancipation and escape to the North and Canada via the black freedom movement and UGRR. It analyzes the routes and trajectories taken by freedom seekers, as well as the strategies employed during their escapes. Particular attention is devoted to the roles played by free African Americans, white abolitionists, and the UGRR in aiding self-emancipated refugees from the South. Like Chapter One, this

chapter also explores the prevalence of freedom-seeking families in the northern US and Canada.

Part II (Forging Freedom) is composed of three chapters that examine the settlement processes of slave refugees across the North and Canada. Chapter Three explores where and why freedom seekers settled within each region, how they supported themselves, and how they set about improving their social and economic condition. Special attention is devoted to the employment prospects and living conditions of slave refugees across the northern US and British Canada, as well as their efforts to procure lands and obtain an education. Chapter Three analyzes the range of opportunities available to self-emancipated African Americans, as well as the obstacles which kept them on the margins of society.

Chapter Four explores the recaption, rendition, and extradition of slave refugees from the North and Canada. By doing so, it aims to understand the security of freedom seekers in each region. The former remained subject to US federal law – in particular the Fugitive Slave Acts – which granted enslavers the right to legally retrieve their escaped human ‘property’ from the northern states. However, the logistical challenges of locating and recovering self-emancipators, the conflict between state and federal law, and the extra-legal resistance of African Americans and white abolitionists effectively transformed parts of the North into sanctuary spaces. Meanwhile, reclaiming self-emancipators from British Canada proved extremely difficult. Freedom seekers were effectively shielded by the Canadian and British governments’ refusal to extradite slave refugees. Nevertheless, southern enslavers employed various legal and extra-legal strategies in their efforts to re-enslave slave refugees in Canada. Yet the resistance of African Canadian activists and white abolitionists, as well as the commitment of the Canadian and British governments to formal free soil, largely protected self-emancipated people from the fate of re-enslavement.

Chapter Five examines the political activism of slave refugees in the northern US and Canada, particularly regarding the transnational abolitionist movement, as well as campaigns for equality and citizenship. Self-emancipated African Americans became some of the most influential abolitionists in the transnational struggle against black enslavement. Through their autobiographies and newspapers, powerful oratory, and involvement with anti-slavery organizations, these men and women developed a unique strain of what Manisha Sinha calls ‘fugitive slave abolitionism.’ Slave refugees were instrumental figures within the campaigns for racial equality and citizenship. Across the North and Canada, they challenged racial prejudice, discrimination, and segregation.

Furthermore, slave refugees in each region were directly involved in electoral politics. Across the North, they endorsed abolitionist and anti-slavery candidates and parties (including the Liberty Party and Republican Party). Some

slave refugees, such as Samuel Ringgold Ward, even assumed important roles within these new parties. Across the Canadian provinces, most black voters supported the Conservatives as a means of demonstrating their allegiance to the British Crown. Across Canada, slave refugees made their voices heard at the ballot box by voting racist politicians out of office. Meanwhile, a small number of slave refugees were also active in emigration schemes from the continent to West Africa, the Caribbean, and Central and South America.

In summary, *Northward Bound* argues that African American slave refugees from the US South possessed markedly types of liberty. Across the northern US, self-emancipators existed in a state of semi-formal freedom. Under federal law, they remained subject to recapture and re-enslavement. Yet they enjoyed important legal protections (namely personal liberty laws and freedom suits) and extra-legal protections. African Americans, white abolitionists, vigilance committees, and self-defense organizations ensured that recapturing freedom seekers in the North became increasingly difficult over the antebellum period. Meanwhile, in British Canada, self-emancipated refugees from slavery could attain formal freedom. After setting foot on Canadian soil, African American freedom seekers were generally shielded from the threat of re-enslavement. Some extradition and kidnapping cases threatened to undermine formal liberty. Yet the British and Canadian governments remained committed to formal 'free' soil, and African Canadians and white abolitionists rushed to the defense of extradition or kidnapping victims.

Part I: Escaping Bondage

Chapter One

Self-Emancipation and the Evolving Landscape of Slavery and Freedom in North America⁵⁸

Before the Age of Revolutions, black enslavement was legal across North America. African and African-descended people were enslaved across the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Far from the traditional ‘North-to-South’ paradigm, slave refugees fled in a multitude of routes, including from South to North, between the northern states, from the North to Canada, within the Canadian provinces, and even from Canada to the United States. At a time when formal ‘free soil’ did not exist on the continent, freedom seekers fled in a multitude of directions. Between the American Revolutionary War and the US Civil War, the landscape of slavery and freedom in North America changed dramatically. The Revolutionary Era was a turning point for the continent for several reasons. First, it marked the emergence of informal and formal free-soil spaces in North America. During the Revolutionary War, the British government offered asylum and liberty to enslaved people who escaped from the American Revolutionaries to Loyalist lines. This amnesty was formulated primarily for strategic reasons but, for thousands of enslaved men, women, and children, it offered a glimmer of hope. The British employed the same strategy during the War of 1812.

The geopolitical landscape of North America changed dramatically during this period. First, the northern states and Canadian provinces enacted gradual abolition measures which prohibited the further introduction of enslaved people. Historian Arthur Zilversmit dubbed this movement the ‘first emancipation.’ This development, writes Steven Hahn, “created a free-labor zone that has long been known as “‘the North[.]’” From the outset, self-emancipated refugees from the Upper South and beyond headed north by the thousands with the hope of claiming their freedom. Moreover, some enslaved people from British North America also exploited the post-Revolutionary War legal jurisdictions to claim their liberty by escaping to the United States. But as slavery declined in the North and Canada, the direction of traffic increasingly shifted towards a ‘North-to-South’ migratory pattern.⁵⁹

At the same time, the institution of slavery was revolutionized in the US South. Most obviously, it witnessed the rapid expansion of enslaved-based plantation economies and the ‘cotton boom’ in the Lower South and Southwest. The closure of

⁵⁸ Portions of this chapter were adapted for the article Oran Kennedy, “Slave Refugees, Self-Emancipation, and the Evolving Landscape of Freedom in the United States and Canada,” *Leidschrift* (forthcoming).

⁵⁹ Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Steven Hahn, *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 4.

the Atlantic slave trade and the relative decline of slavery in the Chesapeake and Tidewater Virginia created a lucrative interregional trade in enslaved men, women, and children. Dale Tomich refers to the development of new enslaved-based economies in North America and elsewhere as the ‘second slavery.’ As slavery fell into decline across the Upper South (most notably in Virginia and Maryland), enslavers increasingly opted to sell enslaved men and women to the developing Lower South and Southwestern enslaved economies. Enslaved African American families were routinely separated by the interregional trade; husbands were sold away from their wives, and parents from the children. Against this backdrop, freedom seekers in the Upper South increasingly looked to escape northward to the ‘free’ states and Canada.⁶⁰

This chapter traces the evolving landscape of slavery and freedom in North America. It explains how Canada and the northern US emerged as respective spaces of formal and semi-formal free soil. First, it will demonstrate that the Revolutionary War, and later the War of 1812, created temporary spaces of refuge for black freedom seekers in the United States. Moreover, it will discuss how the gradual abolition of slavery in the North and Canada, compounded by the consolidation of black enslavement in the US South, encouraged self-emancipators (particularly in the Upper South) to increasingly flee northward. In short, this chapter examines how black freedom seekers fled from their enslavers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In particular, it analyzes the motivations and strategies of self-emancipators during wartime. Furthermore, this chapter examines how the northern US and Canada emerged as semi-formal and formal spaces of freedom, and why African American refugees increasingly fled from the US South to these regions.

Refugees in Wartime: Self-Emancipators in the Revolutionary War and War of 1812

The origins of black enslavement in North America can be traced back to the colonial period. Across the continent, British, Dutch, French, Spanish, and other European colonizers forcibly migrated tens of thousands of enslaved African to the territories which would later become Canada, the United States, and Mexico. According to David Brion Davis, some enslaved Africans were documented “as early as the 1560s” in Spanish Florida. Elsewhere, enslaved Africans first arrived in the early seventeenth

⁶⁰ Dale W. Tomich, *Through the Prism of Slavery: Labor, Capital, and World Economy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Little, 2004), 56-71. For more on the “second slavery,” see Anthony Kaye, “The Second Slavery: Modernity in the Nineteenth-Century South and the Atlantic World,” *Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 3 (2009), 627-650; Dale Tomich (ed.), *The Politics of the Second Slavery* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2016).

century. Several systems of black enslavement emerged across the continent, including large-scale agricultural production, small farmsteads, and urban slavery. Additionally, indigenous groups throughout North America were enslaved by European colonizers and white indentured servants emigrated from England, Scotland, France, and elsewhere.⁶¹

During the colonial period, enslaved Africans and African-descended people escaped from their enslavers in desperate bids for liberty. “No single act of self-assertion,” claims historian Peter H. Wood, “was more significant among slaves or more disconcerting among whites than that of running away.” Self-emancipation, however, proved extremely difficult on a continent in which black enslavement was enshrined in law. In the Mid-Atlantic and New England, freedom seekers attempted to sneak aboard ships and seafaring vessels in port towns and cities. Yet, as noted by Jared Ross Hardesty, self-emancipation “was uncertain and fraught with danger... liberty was always amorphous in an unfree world that steadfastly refused to recognize black freedom.” Escaped slave advertisements for enslaved Africans and African-descended people appeared in colonial New England, Mid-Atlantic, and southern newspapers. Hardesty asserts that forty percent of subjects in Boston newspaper advertisements between 1700 and 1750 “were African slaves.” For most enslaved people, self-emancipation and permanent escape remained a distant dream as long as slavery was legally upheld across the continent.⁶²

The Revolutionary War upended the geopolitical landscape of North America and would have dramatic consequences for the institution of black enslavement. The American colonists’ growing desire for independence from Great Britain led to the beginning of the conflict. Enslaved Africans and African-descended people exploited the fluid, shifting geopolitical landscape of the conflict by escaping

⁶¹ David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 124-140. The historiography of slavery in the colonial United States is too voluminous to list in its entirety. For key overviews of US slavery in the colonial era, see Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, Chapters 1-8; Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 21-96; Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 28-62. Citations refer to the Penguin edition. For an overview of colonial slavery in the Canadian provinces, see Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 1-23.

⁶² Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 239; Warren, *New England Bound*, 212-216; Hardesty, *Unfreedom*, 3, 62. Hardesty asserts that “over ninety” freedom seekers were featured in Boston-based newspapers between 1700 and 1750. Examples of escaped slave advertisements from Mid-Atlantic newspapers, including the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, *New York Gazette*, and *New Jersey Gazette*, see Graham Russell Hodges and Alan Edward Brown (eds.), *“Pretends to Be Free”: Runaway Slave Advertisements from Colonial and Revolutionary New York and New Jersey* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), and Billy G. Smith and Richard Wojtowicz, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves: Advertisements for Runaways in the “Pennsylvania Gazette,” 1728-90* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989). For examples of escaped slave advertisements from the *South Carolina Gazette*, see Wood, *Black Majority*, 239-268. For escaped slave advertisements which focuses solely on female self-emancipators in the Revolutionary Era, see Don N. Hagist (ed.), *Wives, Slaves, and Servant Girls: Advertisements for Female Runaways in American Newspapers, 1770-1783* (Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2016).

to new spaces of freedom to claim their liberty. During the Revolutionary War, African American freedom seekers escaped from their colonial enslavers to Loyalist-occupied zones with the hope of claiming asylum with the British. Facing a shortage of manpower and forced to contend with the increasing numbers of black refugees, the British government sanctioned the reception of self-emancipators into the British armies in exchange for their formal freedom. On November 7, 1775, the Royal Governor of Virginia Lord Dunmore issued a proclamation which had sweeping implications for enslaved people in North America. It promised formal freedom to all “indented servants, negroes... willing to serve His Majesty’s forces to end the present rebellion.” Far from an abolitionist decree, Dunmore’s motivations were purely strategic. The British hoped to enlist black labor and inspire unrest among enslaved communities. Dunmore’s proclamation was an unprecedented promise of asylum and liberty to enslaved people of color in the colonies. Crucially, it extended this offer only to those who were enslaved by the Revolutionaries, and not those who remained loyal to the Crown.⁶³

Dunmore’s Proclamation had a dramatic effect on the Revolutionary War. Political and military leaders of the Revolution understood the potential ramifications of Dunmore’s offer. The manager of George Washington’s Mount Vernon estate, Lund Washington, acknowledged that, among Washington’s enslaved people, “there is not a man of them but would leave us, if they could make their escape... Liberty is sweet.” With almost immediate effect, Loyalist armies and occupied zones became magnets for black freedom seekers. “Wherever the British army moved,” writes Gary B. Nash, “slaves bolted from their masters and headed toward British lines to claim freedom.”⁶⁴

⁶³ Lord Dunmore quoted in Graham Russell Hodges, *Root & Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 139-140; For more on the impact of Dunmore’s Proclamation, see Aline Helg and Lara Vergnaud, *Slave No More: Self-Liberation before Abolitionism in the Americas* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 118-122; Robin Blackburn, *American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation, and Human Rights* (London: Verso, 2011), 124; Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic*, 16-17; Nash, *The Unknown Revolution*, 157-166; Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*, 9-11; Frey, *Water from the Rock*, 63-68; Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles*, 48-49; John Selby, *The Revolution in Virginia, 1775-1783* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1988), 65-66.

⁶⁴ Nash, *The Unknown Revolution*, 162 (Lund quote), 231.

Newspaper advertisements indicate that black freedom seekers across the country readily took up Dunmore's offer. In May 1775, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* published an advertisement for Charles Dix from Birdsboro, Pennsylvania (fifty miles northwest of Philadelphia). He was described as "a smart well set fellow, about 5 feet 5 inches high, speaks good English, has a little stoppage in his speech," and was a "Hammerman by trade, [and] always changes his name, and denies his master." Another advertisement appeared for Dix in June 1776, which stated that the self-liberator "has often run away, changed his name, denied that the subscriber was his master, and has been confined in several gaols in the province[.]" Dix's enslaver asserted that he was likely "on his march to join his Lordship's [Dunmore's] own black regiment, but it is hoped he will be prevented by some honest Whig from effecting it." Not long after, John Crozer and John Anderson, two enslavers from Chester County, Pennsylvania, reported the escape of "two Mulattoe [sic] young men" named Caesar and

Anthony Welsh, who were both thought to have "gone towards the camp with a design to enlist, but it is hoped they will not meet with a Dunmore there."⁶⁵

Hundreds of slave refugees were organized into the Ethiopian Regiment, a military unit that fought in various engagements during the Revolutionary War. Later, several black soldiers were reorganized into the so-called 'Black Pioneers' the following year. They worked as spies, scouts, guides, and interpreters. Several prominent African American leaders emerged from the Black Loyalist military

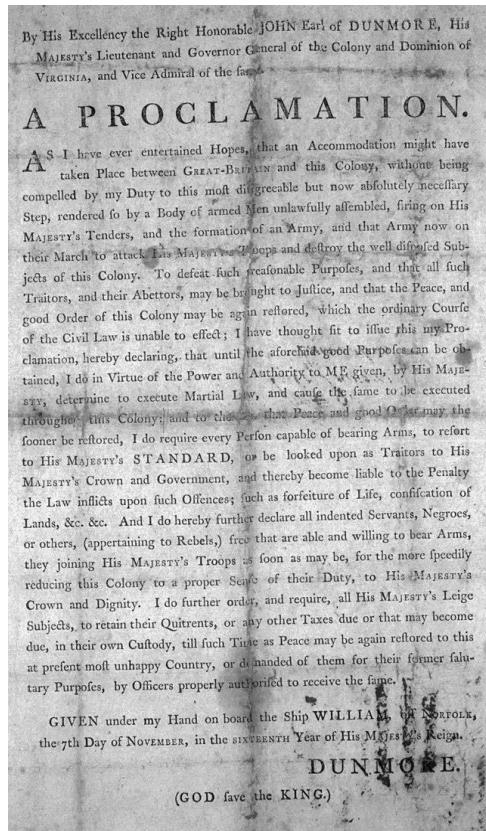


Figure 1: Lord Dunmore's Proclamation

Source: "Dunmore's Proclamation," Wikiwand.com, accessed Feb. 1, 2020. https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Dunmore%27s_Proclamation.

⁶⁵ Smith and Wojtowicz, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves*, 123-124, 129-130; Hodges, *Root & Branch*, 147-148.

regiments, including Titus Cornelius (also known as ‘Colonel Tye’), a self-emancipator from New Jersey who led combat units in several battles, and Col. Stephen Blucke. Women and children performed other roles and services. Meanwhile, the Revolutionaries were reluctant to admit African Americans into the Continental Army throughout the war. Graham Russell Hodges notes that they “realized that talk of liberty was dangerous if heard by America’s actual slaves.” Nevertheless, a very small number of black troops were eventually admitted into Continental ranks. Some colonies, notes Hodges, even allowed enslaved people to serve as substitutes in Continental ranks. Nevertheless, enslaved Africans and African Americans greatly favored the Loyalists because they offered a greater promise of liberty.⁶⁶

Loyalist-occupied zones became spaces of sanctuary for self-emancipators. New York City received thousands of self-emancipated black refugees. Loyalist incursions into neighboring Connecticut and New Jersey enabled more enslaved Africans and African Americans to escape to New York City. In the Chesapeake, the Carolinas, and Georgia, thousands of black freedom seekers fled to various Loyalist outposts. “Although runaways during the war tended to be young, male, and engaged in a craft,” writes Matthew Spooner, “the single most important factor in determining the likelihood of a slave to abscond was proximity to British forces.” The refugee influx into Loyalist spaces Graham Russell Hodges notes that a census-taker “counted 1,951 blacks living in the city, or about 16 percent of the total population of 12,408.” Similar patterns were documented in other Loyalist occupied cities and spaces. As the war turned against them, the British made one final push to encourage further rebellion among enslaved people. In 1779, General Henry Clinton issued the Phillipsburg Proclamation, which stated, “All Negroes that fly from the enemy’s country are free – No person whatever can claim a right to them – Whoever sells them shall be prosecuted with the utmost severity.” Whereas the Loyalists previously targeted young, fit men beforehand, they became increasingly willing to accept men, women, and children of all ages to cause further chaos in the Revolutionaries’ ranks. While Clinton’s proclamation was in part a strategic decision, it also reflected an inability among the Loyalists to stem the tide of freedom seekers towards their lines.⁶⁷

Seven years after it began, the Revolutionary War was formally concluded by the signing of the Treaty of Paris (1782). The British ceded control of the

⁶⁶ Hodges, *Root & Branch*, 141, 147-148; Nash, *The Unknown Revolution*, 162-166, 223-232.

⁶⁷ Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*, 26-30; Hodges, *Root & Branch*, 150; Hodges, *Slavery, Freedom, & Culture Among Early American Workers* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 65-86; Selby, *The Revolution in Virginia*, 67; Matthew Spooner, “Freedom, Reenslavement, and Movement in the Revolutionary South,” in Whitney Nell Stewart and John Garrison Marks (eds.), *Race and Nation in the Age of Emancipations* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2018) 13-27; Matthew Spooner, “Origins of the Old South: The Reconstitution of Southern Slavery, 1776-1800” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2015), 120-171 (quote on page 130); Clinton quoted in Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*, 28.

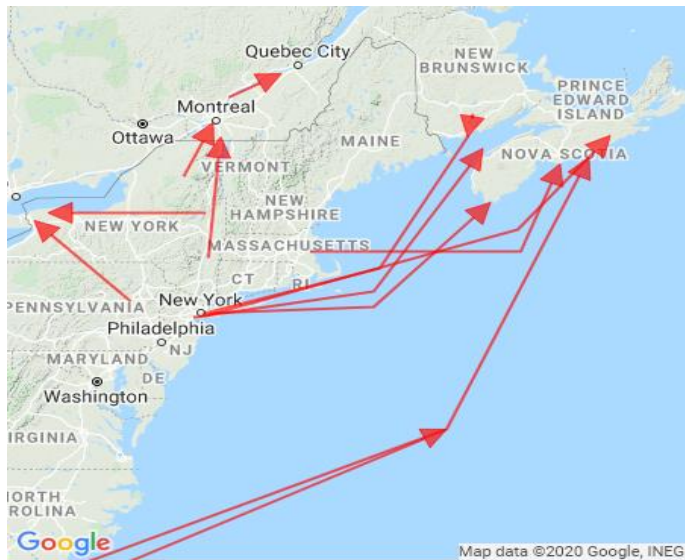


Figure 2: Approximate routes taken by the Loyalist refugees to British Canada. Made in *scribblemaps*

American colonies but, to the Revolutionaries' chagrin, refused to return slave refugees. When charged with property theft, Sir Guy Carleton wrote in a letter to George Washington, "in the case of the Negroes declared free persons previous to my arrival... I had no right to deprive them of that liberty." Beginning in 1783, thousands of black Loyalists were issued official certificates of freedom by the British government and departed from New York City aboard several ships. Roughly 3,000 slave refugees were resettled across the Canadian Maritimes. Nova Scotia received the largest number of freedom seekers, but others were taken to New Brunswick. The details of black Loyalist refugees who departed for Nova Scotia were recorded in the Loyalists' 'Book of Negroes.' Although most entries receive scant attention, the list of people reveals the immense variety of black refugees seeking liberty elsewhere. Many came from New England and the Mid-Atlantic, but the overwhelming majority escaped from slavery in the southern colonies. According to Hodges, about one-quarter of the black refugees that were evacuated from New York City came from New England and the Mid-Atlantic collectively, and "the rest were of unknown origins."⁶⁸

Among the black Loyalist refugees were men, women, and children – many of whom belonged to the same family unit. Sylvia Frey notes that approximately fifty-five percent of black refugees that departed from New York City were women and children (914 women and 740 children). It was not uncommon for parents, typically

⁶⁸ Carleton quoted in Hodges, *Root & Branch*, 156.

mothers, to travel with children in single-parent units. Self-emancipated husbands and wives attempted to escape from slavery and make the journey to the Canadian Maritimes whenever possible. Sam and Betsy Brothers traveled aboard the *Ariel* to St. John, New Brunswick, “with two children aged 12 and 14.” Inevitably, the black Loyalist migration was also marked by profound loss. Exiles were compelled to leave behind spouses, parents, children, and friends in the United States, likely to be never seen again. Moreover, between 1,200 and 2,000 enslaved people were forcibly migrated by their Loyalist enslavers to the Canadian Maritimes, compelled to leave loved ones behind in the United States.⁶⁹

The War of 1812 presented enslaved people with another opportunity to claim their liberty by escaping to the British. During the war, notes Alan Taylor, “Royal Navy warships pushed into Chesapeake Bay and up the Potomac River to punish the United States for declaring war against the British Empire.” From the beginning of the war, British regiments enlisted African American freedom seekers. Secretary of State for War and Colonies Earl Bathurst “broadened the scope of the war,” writes Gene Allen Smith, “suggesting that British forces could liberate American slaves and enlist them in the British black corps in the Caribbean[.]” As the British gained a foothold in the region, black self-emancipators from the Chesapeake and Tidewater Virginia fled to the enemy of their enslavers. Many stole canoes and other vessels to reach British wartime ships. On April 2, 1813, a “canoe of slaves” on the James River near Hampton garnered the attention of an American vessel and its crew, which they believed to be a British ship. According to Smith, the self-emancipators “requested arms” to initiate an uprising and promised the support of approximately 2,000 enslaved people.⁷⁰

Self-emancipation during the war reflected the importance of family and kinship ties among enslaved African Americans. According to Taylor, it was typical for self-emancipators to escape in stages: “in the first, a pioneer runaway made initial contact with the British, and then in the second stage, he returned home to liberate kin and friends.” The case of Presley, a freedom seeker from Kinsale, Westmoreland County, Virginia, illustrates this phenomenon quite clearly. He fled from his enslaver in November 1813 and ran to the British. The following October, Presley (who had renamed himself ‘Washington’) “returned to free his friends and family left behind... [he] guided a British raiding party to Kinsale, liberating the rest of the slaves[.]” The British increasingly understood that enslaved African Americans would not escape from their enslavers unless they promised their family’s freedom. Begrudgingly,

⁶⁹ For Samuel and Betsy Brothers, see “Book of Negroes,” *novascotia.ca*, accessed Jun. 1, 2020. <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanans/BNpages.asp?ID=17>. For more on enslaved people forcibly taken to the Canadian Maritimes, see Whitfield, *North to Bondage*.

⁷⁰ Taylor, *The Internal Enemy*, 1-4; Gene Allen Smith, *The Slave’s Gamble: Choosing Sides in the War of 1812* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) 87-98. For more on self-emancipated refugees in the War of 1812, see Mason, *Slavery and Politics*, 107-108; Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*.

British troops accepted enslaved women, children, and others into their ranks.⁷¹ In April 1814, the British adopted an official wartime sanctuary policy for African American refugees. Admiral Alexander Cochrane issued the following proclamation to encourage enslaved African Americans to escape from their enslavers to British lines:

That all those who may be disposed to emigrate from the UNITED STATES will, with their Families, be received on board of His Majesty's Ships or Vessels of War, or at the Military Posts that may be established, upon or near the Coast... when they will have their choice of either entering into His Majesty's Sea or Land Forces, or of being sent as FREE Settlers to the British possessions in North America or the West Indies[.]⁷²

Throughout the war, thousands of freedom-seeking men, women, and children fled to British lines. In the Chesapeake Bay, Tangier Island became a *de facto* refuge for self-emancipated men, women, and children. While self-emancipated men were enlisted into various regiments, women and children comprised the majority of freedom seekers that fled to the British. Once again, the Americans were reluctant to enlist African Americans. The fear of unrest and rebellion among enslaved people throughout the country weighed heavily on their minds.⁷³ Following the war, approximately 2,400 black refugees were resettled in the Canadian Maritimes after the war. The journey to the Canadian Maritimes was fraught with danger. On September 3, 1814, the Halifax-based *Acadian Recorder* reported on the arrival of a British ship from the Chesapeake after a ten-day trip. Aboard the ship were “a few hundred Negroes (dead and alive)” Upon arrival, the Black Refugees professed their fidelity to the British Crown. A significant portion of African American refugees traveled to the Canadian Maritimes in family units.⁷⁴

Several refugees wrote to their former enslavers from their new homes and communities in the Canadian Maritimes. Bartlett Shanklyn, a blacksmith who escaped from his former enslaver, Abraham Hooe, wrote to him, “When [I] was with you I worked very hard and you neither g[ave] me money nor any Satisfaction but sin[ce] I have been here I am able to [make] Gold and Silver as well as you.”⁷⁵ Others

⁷¹ Taylor, *The Internal Enemy*, 245-249.

⁷² Alexander Cochrane, *Alexander Cochrane*, April 2, 1814. Manuscript/Mixed Materials. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., accessed Sep. 1, 2019. <https://www.loc.gov/item/maj002793/>.

⁷³ Smith, *The Slave's Gamble*, 98-114, 129; Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, & Indian Allies* (Vintage Books: New York, 2010), 327.

⁷⁴ Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 34; “SHIP NEWS,” *Acadian Recorder*, Sep. 3, 1814.

⁷⁵ Letter from Bartlett Shanklyn to Abraham Hooe, 5/21/1820; Records of Boundary and Claims Commissions and Arbitrations, Record Group 76. [Online Version,

expressed sorrow and anguish at having left family members behind. William Whiddington wrote to his mother:

Thanks be to God, I arriv'd in this place safe – and I have no cause to repent coming away – though I was very sorry to leave you, and all my relations. [B]ut though I may never see any of you again, my dear Mother, yet I shall always think of you and love you. [A]nd I hope, I shall act so honestly and soberly in this World that when I die I may meet all of my Friends in a happy state of Eternity[.]⁷⁶

The First Emancipation and Advent of Free Soil

The American Revolution accelerated the political abolition of slavery in the northern US and Canada. For the first time, 'free soil' spaces existed on the continent. However, as Ira Berlin writes, "the demise of slavery was a slow, tortuous process." In 1777, Vermont legislators declared that black enslavement disregarded the "natural, inherent, and unalienable rights" of African-descended people. But the anti-slavery clause's language was ambiguous and permitted black enslavement to continue into the early national period. Three years later, Pennsylvania's gradual abolition statute declared that enslaved children born after March 1, 1780, would be legally freed after serving apprenticeships until twenty-eight years of age. Those born before the act's passage would remain enslaved for life. In Massachusetts, writes Emily Planck, "the freedom suit became a vehicle through which slaves delegitimized slavery rather than challenging their own enslavement." In the case of *Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. Jennison* (1783), the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled that the enslaved Quock Walker, and all other enslaved African Americans in the state, were entitled to their legal freedom. "In one stroke," writes Planck, "the court transformed Massachusetts from the first colony to legalize slavery into the first state to deny all of its citizenry the right to hold human property." Soon after, every state in New England enacted gradual abolition measures.⁷⁷

<https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/letter-from-bartlett-shanklyn-to-abraham-hooe>, March 16, 2019].

⁷⁶ Letter from William Whiddington to Julie Hoxon, 12/9/1820; Records of Boundary and Claims Commissions and Arbitrations, Record Group 76. [Online Version, <https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/letter-from-william-whiddington-to-julie-hoxon>, March 16, 2019]. For more on Black Refugee letters to former enslavers, "Black Refugee letters shed light on life after slavery," *CBC.ca*, accessed Mar. 16, 2019. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/black-refugee-letters-shed-light-on-life-after-slavery-1.2716951>.

⁷⁷ Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation*; Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 228; Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 65-69; Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and Race in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 64; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 60-65; Emily

New York and New Jersey took longer to enact gradual abolition. Slavery, notes Manisha Sinha, held “more widespread roots in these states, and neither boasted a history of antislavery like Pennsylvania.” The enslaved population of New York state doubled between 1703 and 1771, representing a significant financial interest. However, the turmoil brought about by the Revolution, the growing resilience of black self-emancipators, free African American and Quaker activism, and the rise of abolitionist organizations like the New York Manumission Society (NYMS) pushed New York and New Jersey down the path of emancipation. In New York, enslaved children born after July 4, 1799, would be entitled to their legal freedom upon turning twenty-eight if male and twenty-five if female. New Jersey’s 1804 statute was similarly restrictive; enslaved men were freed upon turning twenty-five and women twenty-one. In 1817, New York’s state government passed more sweeping emancipatory legal measures. It declared that every enslaved person born before the 1799 law’s enactment would be freed on July 4, 1827. In New Jersey, self-emancipators continued to undermine the system of black enslavement, but the state never passed a similar act to New York. New Jersey enslavers continued to hold

Planck, *Tyrannicide: Forging an American Law of Slavery in Revolutionary South Carolina and Massachusetts* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 118-127 (quotes 119 and 122). For more on slavery and gradual abolition in Vermont, see Harvey Amani Whitfield, *The Problem of Slavery in Early Vermont, 1777-1810: Essay and Primary Sources* (Barre, VT: Vermont Historical Society, 2014). For more on gradual emancipation in Pennsylvania, see Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 74-98. For more on the Quock Walker case and gradual emancipation in New England, see Douglas R. Egerton, *Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 93-121; Margot Minardi, *Making Slavery History: Abolitionism and the Politics of Memory in Massachusetts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 14-18; Robert M. Spector, “The Quock Walker Cases (1781-83) – Slavery, The Abolition, and Negro Citizenship in Early Massachusetts,” *Journal of Negro History* 53, no. 1 (1968), 12-32; Arthur Zilversmit, “Quok Walker, Mumbet, and the Abolition of Slavery in Massachusetts,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (1968), 614-624; Emily Blanck, “Seventeen Eighty-Three: The Turning Point in the Law of Slavery and Freedom in Massachusetts,” *New England Quarterly* 75, no. 1 (2002), 24-51; Chernoh M Sesat, Jr., “The Revolutionary Black Roots of Slavery’s Abolition in Massachusetts,” *New England Quarterly* 87, no. 1 (2014), 99-131; Melish, *Disowning Slavery*; David Menschel, “Abolition Without Deliverance: The Law of Connecticut Slavery 1784-1848,” *Yale Law Journal* 111, no. 1 (2001), 183-222; Christy Clark-Pujara, *Dark Work: The Business of Slavery in Rhode Island* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 61-85. For overviews of the ‘first emancipation,’ see Helg and Vergnaud, *Slave No More*, 130-136; Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 3-15; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 23-39; Melish, *Disowning Slavery*; Ira Berlin, *The Long Emancipation: The Demise of Slavery in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Patrick Rael, *Eighty-Eight Years: The Long Death of Slavery in the United States, 1777-1865* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2015); Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 228-255; James O. 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), 55-76; George W. Van Cleve, *A Slaveholders’ Union: Slavery, Politics, and the Constitution in the Early American Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 59-93. For more on the significance of freedom suits, see Edie L. Wong, *Neither Fugitive nor Free: Atlantic Slavery, Freedom Suits, and the Legal Culture of Travel* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

African Americans in forms of bondage and involuntary servitude into the Civil War era.⁷⁸

Meanwhile, the further introduction of enslaved people into the Northwest Territory was prohibited under Article VI of the Northwest Ordinance (1787). Later, the Missouri Compromise (1820) admitted Missouri into the Union as a 'slave' state and outlawed black enslavement north of the 36°30' parallel. Consequently, the Mississippi River became a formal geopolitical border between 'free' Illinois and 'slave' Missouri. In reality, however, enslavers found ways to perpetuate forms of black bondage throughout the nineteenth century. Historians Paul Finkelman, Christopher Phillips, and M. Scott Heerman among others have illustrated how indentured servitude in the 'Old Northwest' effectively held African Americans in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois in indefinite periods of enslavement. Nevertheless, the emergence of 'free soil' in the northern states proved hugely significant.⁷⁹

Similarly, slavery was gradually eroded in the Canadian provinces. In each province, enslaved men and women fled from their enslavers to claim their liberty. In December 1783, the *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle* informed readers that "a Negro Man named, DICK... about five feet eight Inches high Stout Made," absconded from his Loyalist enslaver, Benjamin Douglass. One-and-a-half years later, the *Gazette* reported on the escape of 25-year-old John Gibson, "alias JOHN BOOCHER," who "had on when he went away a Green Coat and a small round hat" when he ran away. His enslaver warned "all Masters of Vessels and others" that Gibson may try to sneak aboard a ship. Some enslaved women also fled from their enslavers in the Canadian Maritimes. In October 1785, the *Gazette* printed a runaway

⁷⁸ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 76-85; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 47-71, 94. For more on gradual emancipation in New York and New Jersey, see Mason, *Slavery and Politics*, 14-15; Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 24-55; Eric Foner, *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* 37-46; David Gellman, *Emancipating New York: The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 153-186; Patrick Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery in New York," in Ira Berlin and Leslie Harris (eds.), *Slavery in New York* (New York: New Press, 2005), 111-146; James J. Gigantino, II, *The Ragged Road to Abolition: Slavery and Freedom in New Jersey, 1775-1865* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Gigantino, II, "'The Whole North is Not Abolitionized.'"

⁷⁹ For more on slavery and freedom in the Old Northwest, see Mason, *Slavery and Politics*, 145-158; Paul Finkelman, "Slavery and the Northwest Ordinance: A Study in Ambiguity," *Journal of the Early Republic* 6, no. 4 (1986); Paul Finkelman, "Evading the Ordinance: The Persistence of Bondage in Indiana and Illinois," *Journal of the Early Republic* 9, no. 1 (1989) 21-51; Thomas Bahde, "'I Would Not Have a White Upon the Premises': The Ohio Valley Salt Industry and Slave Hiring in Illinois, 1780-1825," *Ohio Valley History* 15, no. 2 (2015), 49-69; Christopher Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward: The Civil War and the Remaking of the American Middle Border* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 21-43; M. Scott Heerman, "In a State of Slavery: Black Servitude in Illinois, 1800-1830," *Early American Studies* 14, no. 1 (2016), 114-139.

notice for “a black NEGROE WENCH named PHILLIS, aged about 50 Years or upward,” who reportedly had “a Styte on one Eye, and a Wart on her Nose[.]”⁸⁰

The motivations behind self-emancipation in the Canadian Maritimes, notes Whitfield, included brutal physical and psychological punishment, and “possibly forced sexual relations.” Other enslaved men and women absconded from their enslavers in desperate attempts to “keep their families together” or reunite family members that had been forcibly separated. Some newspaper notices reported the escape of small family units within the Maritime provinces. A family of five fled from Caleb Jones, a Maryland Loyalist, in 1786. They likely fled to the free black community in St. John, New Brunswick. Enslaved families, writes Whitfield, escaped “to retain some sense of control over their family lives.”⁸¹

Similar acts of self-emancipation were reported in Lower Canada. In January 1778, the *Quebec Gazette* published an advertisement for “a Negro Lad named Joe, born in Africa, about twenty years of age” who spoke both English and French “tolerably well.” The following year, the *Gazette* reported the escape of Ishmael, a 35-year-old enslaved man with long, curly black hair. The advertisement claimed that he had “black Eyes, broad shoulders, and the tone of voice peculiar to New-England, where he was born.” Ishmael could read English “tolerably well” and could speak some French. Newspaper notices for enslaved people of African descent continued into the final decade of the eighteenth century. In 1790, the *Herald* informed readers about the escape of Richard, a 27-year-old enslaved man from Montreal. No details are provided apart from his height and choice of clothing.⁸²

In Upper Canada, enslaved men, women, and children also escaped from their enslavers in the late eighteenth century. Freedom seekers took advantage of geopolitical tensions and legal ambiguities to secure their permanent liberty by crossing into the United States. Self-emancipators in the Niagara River border zone, for instance, fled to neighboring New York state. In July 1793, Thomas Butler of Niagara posted an advertisement in the *Upper Canada Gazette* for “a NEGRO MAN servant named JOHN,” who likely escaped across the Niagara River to western New York. The following year, Henry Lewis of Niagara-on-the-Lake escaped from Provincial Secretary William Jarvis across the Niagara River to New York. He later relocated to Schenectady, just northwest of the state capital, Albany. Lewis later

⁸⁰ RUN away on the 27th Inst...,” *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle*, Dec. 9, 1783; “RUN AWAY, A NEGRO MAN,” *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle*, Jul. 19, 1785; “RUN AWAY,” *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle*, Oct. 4, 1785.

⁸¹ Whitfield, “Slave Life in the Canadian Maritime Colonies,” in Lovejoy and Oliveira (eds.), *Slavery*, 15.

⁸² “ADVERTISEMENTS,” *Quebec Gazette*, “Jan. 29, 1778; “RUN-AWAY from the Subscriber,” *Quebec Gazette*, Jul. 29, 1779; “RUN AWAY,” *Quebec Herald*, Nov. 4, 1790. For more escaped slave advertisements and documents related to black enslavement in Quebec and Lower Canada, see “Historical Documents,” *QCHistoryXTours.ca*, accessed Jan. 1, 2019. <http://www.qchistoryxtours.ca/historical-documents.html>.

wrote that he chose to escape because he “desired to support myself as [a] free man and enjoy all the benefits which may result from my being free in a country where [sic] a Blackman [sic] is defended by the laws as much as a white man[.]” Enslaved people also escaped from their enslavers to New York via the St. Lawrence River and Lake Ontario. Reverend John Stuart of Kingston, Upper Canada, recorded the escape of “my Negro Boy, without any pretended reason whatever[.]” Stuart believed that the unnamed self-liberator “is gone again to the States. I despair of recovering him.”⁸³

Enslaved people in Upper Canada also escaped to the United States via the Detroit River borderland. Loyalist enslavers in Amherstburg, Sandwich, and elsewhere brought enslaved people with them after the Revolutionary War. Some made direct references to slavery in letters, diaries, and other documents. In September 1801, Peter Russell of Sandwich discussed his enslaved woman named Peggy in a letter to Loyalist Matthew Elliott, whom he attempted to sell. Russell hoped to sell Peggy to Elliott given her ‘difficult’ behavior. She regularly ran away for short periods in response to harsh treatment. He claimed that she “is now at large, being not permitted by my Sister to enter this House, and shows a disposition at Times to be very troublesome, which may perhaps compel me to commit her again to Prison.” In January 1806, Peter’s sister Elizabeth wrote a diary entry about Peggy’s son, Jupiter, which noted that he had been released from prison. One month later, Peter placed a newspaper advertisement for both Peggy and Jupiter (Peggy was “a tolerable cook and washerwoman,” while Jupiter was “tall and strong for his age, and has been employed in the country business, but brought up principally as a house servant”).⁸⁴

Similarly, an enslaved woman fled across the river in 1807 and sought refuge in Detroit’s black community. Her enslaver, John Woods of Sandwich, contacted Detroit jurist Solomon Sibley to reclaim the self-emancipated mother and child but was informed that there were no legal means of recovering the mother and child from the Michigan Territory. That same year, Loyalist James May of Sandwich reported the escape of his enslaved man named Nobbins to Detroit. May believed that Nobbins had escaped because he was “apprehensive that I would whip him” if he returned to his enslaver. Before crossing the river, the freedom seeker was reportedly seen near the home of John Askin, a prominent fur trader in the border region. In a

⁸³ “FIVE DOLLARS REWARD,” *Upper Canada Gazette*, Jul. 4, 1793; “Henry Lewis Seeking Freedom,” *Archives. gov. on. ca*, accessed Jan. 2, 2019. http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/en/explore/online/slavery/henry_lewis.aspx. For Henry Lewis’ letter to William Jarvis, see “Letter from Henry Lewis to his master, William Jarvis,” *TPL Virtual Exhibits*, accessed Jun. 2, 2020. <http://omeka.tplcs.ca/virtual-exhibits/items/show/209>.

⁸⁴ Peter Russell to Matthew Elliott, Sep. 19, 1801. Peter Russell Fonds, MS 75, Reel 5. AO. Toronto, ON; “Diary Entry by Elizabeth Russell,” *TPL Virtual Exhibits*, accessed Jun. 10, 2020. <http://omeka.tplcs.ca/virtual-exhibits/items/show/207>; Afua Cooper, “The Secret of Slavery in Canada,” in Hobbs, Margaret and Carla Rice (eds.), *Gender and Women’s Studies in Canada: Critical Terrain* (Toronto, ON: Women’s Press, 2013), 262.

letter to Askin, May requested that he “keep a good look out for him and prevent him if possible from crossing over on this side of the River.” About six years after Nobbins’ escape, one of Askins’ enslaved women named Madeline also fled across the Detroit River to Michigan. Following her escape, Madeline found work aboard steamboats in the Great Lakes transnational border zone. Askin claimed in a letter, “My negro wench Madeline absconded two days ago & I am certain that Capt. Bullock has taken her into his service[.]” Likewise, Matthew Elliot at Amherstburg lost eight enslaved people who fled across the Detroit River. The former Loyalist initiated legal proceedings to reclaim the freedom seekers. However, the presiding judge ruled that they were formally free upon setting foot in Michigan.⁸⁵

Beginning at the end of the eighteenth century, the Canadian provinces set about abolishing the institution of slavery. In 1793, Upper Canada became the first to enact a gradual emancipation statute. The provincial government resolved to act in direct response to the sale of Chloe Cooley, an enslaved woman in Queenston. Cooley was forcibly removed across the Niagara River by her Loyalist enslaver, Adam Vrooman, and sold to a New York enslaver. Peter Martin, a free person of color and former member of Butler’s Rangers, informed Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe of the events which had taken place in the Niagara River borderland. Anti-slavery advocates in the province, including Simcoe, used the Cooley affair to push for an act to gradually abolish black enslavement within the province.⁸⁶

Enslaved African Americans sought liberty in Upper Canada from the late eighteenth century onward. In June 1804, the New York *Western Repository* printed a report from a man named Valentine Brothers who absconded with his legally free wife across the Niagara River. Brothers claimed there existed “a general opinion prevailing among our fellow-citizens, that a slave from the United States, by getting over the line into the province of Upper Canada, becomes a free man[.]” Brothers asserted that his enslaved man escaped “with a free mulattoe [sic] woman, whom he

⁸⁵ Gregory Wigmore, “Before the Railroad: From Slavery to Freedom in the Canadian-American Borderland,” *Journal of American History* 98, no. 2 (2011), 437-454; David M. Katzman, “Black Slavery in Michigan,” *Midcontinent American Studies Journal* 11, no. 2 (1979), 62; James May to John Askin, Aug. 2, 1807, and John Askin to John B. Askin. Oct. 26, 1813, in Milo M. Quaife (ed.), *The John Askin Papers, vol. II: 1796-1820* (Detroit: Detroit Library Commission, 1831), 561-563, 762; BHC, Detroit Public Library. Detroit. For more on the Detroit River border zone’s early history as an ambiguous frontier between slavery and freedom, see Gregory Wigmore, “Gregory Wigmore: The Canadian Slave Trade,” *NationalPost.com*, Oct. 21, 2013. <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/gregory-wigmore-the-canadian-slave-trade>. Accessed Jan. 2, 2019; Miles, *The Dawn of Detroit*; Veta Smith Tucker, “Uncertain Freedom in Frontier Detroit,” in Smardz Frost and Tucker (eds.), *A Fluid Frontier*, 27-42.

⁸⁶ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 96-98; Natasha L. Henry, “Chloe Cooley and the Act to Limit Slavery in Upper Canada,” *TheCanadianEncyclopedia.ca*, Oct. 30, 2013. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/chloe-cooley-and-the-act-to-limit-slavery-in-upper-canada>, accessed Jan. 6, 2019. For further discussion on the Chloe Cooley case, as well as how black men and women resisted enslavement in Canada, see Afua Cooper, “Acts of Resistance: Black Men and Women Engage Slavery in Upper Canada, 1793-1803,” *Ontario History* 99, no. 1 (2007), 5-17.

kept as his wife. I, with one of my neighbors, went in pursuit of him, and on arriving at Buffaloe [sic] we learnt [sic] that he crossed the Niagara river on Tuesday afternoon.” The two men crossed the river in pursuit of the self-liberator and his wife but were allegedly “surrounded by eight or nine blacks, armed with clubs and a gun[.]” During this period, formal freedom was not guaranteed to everyone who escaped to Upper Canada. Remarkably, Brothers claimed that he was able to recapture the self-liberator and forcibly return him to the United States. The enslaver claimed that the white Canadian residents in the Niagara borderland “do not countenance runaway negroes. On the contrary they [side] with the owners to take them away[.]” Brothers claimed that there were “about twenty runaway negroes about Fort Erie and Newark.”⁸⁷

Elsewhere, Lower Canada and the Maritime Provinces set about abolishing slavery. In 1798, Chief Justice Joseph Monk in Montreal ordered the release of two self-emancipators named Charlotte and Jude. Under British Canadian law, enslaved people could only be detained in “houses of correction, not common jails.” As none existed, Monk felt compelled to release the two freedom seekers and warned other enslavers that he would rule the same way in future cases.⁸⁸ In Nova Scotia, Chief Justices Thomas Strange and Sampson Blowers challenged black enslavement in the province by placing the burden of proof upon white claimants, who often did not possess evidence of legal ownership. Following this, enslaved people across the province felt emboldened to self-emancipate and abscond from their enslavers. In New Brunswick, an enslaved woman named Nancy petitioned for a writ of *habeas corpus* for herself and her son. The court initially sided with her enslaver, Caleb Jones, but issued a writ fourteen years later. During this time, enslavers in the province found it difficult to manage and control enslaved people of color. Like Nova Scotia, the New Brunswick Supreme Court increasingly refused to side with enslavers in self-emancipation cases.⁸⁹

Yet gradual abolition was not met without some resistance. Maritime enslavers sought to exercise and preserve their right to enslave people with little

⁸⁷ “To the Editors of the Repository,” *Western Repository*, Jun. 12, 1804.

⁸⁸ Mackey, *Done with Slavery*, 47-49.

⁸⁹ Natasha L. Henry, “Black Enslavement in Canada,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia.ca*, Jun. 16, 2016. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/black-enslavement>. Accessed Jan. 6, 2019; For key readings on the gradual abolition of slavery in the Canadian Maritimes, see D. G. Bell, J. Barry Cahill, and Harvey Amani Whitfield, “Slavery and Slave Law in the Maritimes,” in Barrington Walker (ed.), *The African Canadian Legal Odyssey: Historical Essays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 363-420; Barry Cahill, “Slavery and the Judges of Loyalist Nova Scotia,” *University of New Brunswick Law Journal* 43 (1994), 73-136; Barry Cahill, “Habeas Corpus and Slavery in Nova Scotia: *R. v. Hecht, ex parte Rachel*, 1798,” *University of New Brunswick Law Journal* 44 (1995), 179-209; D. G. Bell, “Slavery and the Judges of Loyalist New Brunswick,” *University of New Brunswick Law Journal* 31 (1982), 9-42; Harvey Amani Whitfield, “The Struggle over Slavery in the Maritime Colonies,” *Acadiensis* 41, no. 2 (2012), 17-44; Ken Donovan, “Slavery and Freedom in Atlantic Canada’s African Diaspora,” *Acadiensis* 43, no. 1 (2014), 109-115; Whitfield, *North to Bondage*, 85-109.

success. In August 1803, Loyalist enslaver James DeLancey of Round Hill, Annapolis County, sued Halifax merchant William Woodin for harboring one of his enslaved people named Jack. In December 1807, twenty-seven enslavers at Annapolis, Nova Scotia, petitioned the provincial legislature to ensure that their right to hold “property in Negroes was maintained, and acknowledged, if not encouraged.” However, the Nova Scotia Assembly rejected a bill that would have defended Loyalist enslavers against the courts. Without the enforcement of positive law or the complicity of enslaved people, slavery in Nova Scotia swiftly fell into decline.⁹⁰

Over the following decades, British Canada solidified its free soil status. In 1819, Upper Canada’s Attorney General John Beverly Robinson declared that black refugees from the United States were “entitled to freedom through residence in [Canada] and any attempt to infringe their right [will] be resisted in the courts.” In 1824, a fifteen-year-old enslaved person named Tom was sold by his enslaver, Eli Keeler of Colborne to William Bell of present-day Belleville. Natasha Henry notes that it was “one of the last recorded sales of a slave in Upper Canada.” In 1833, the British Parliament enacted the Slavery Abolition Act, which formally outlawed the enslavement of African and African-descended people throughout the British Empire as of August 1, 1834.⁹¹ For southern enslavers, the abolition of slavery in the British Empire deeply troubling. Matthew Karp argues that this was more significant “than any other global event between the American Revolution and the Civil War.”⁹² Indeed, the advent of formal free soil in Canada, as well as the British West Indies, represented an enormous threat to their interests. Edward Rugemer writes that “British abolition created a geography of freedom” in North America and the Caribbean.⁹³ The next section will chart the rise of the ‘second slavery’ in the US South.

⁹⁰ “*DeLancey v. Woodin* (plaintiff’s statement of claim against the defendant for harbouring ‘Jack,’ a fugitive slave,” Supreme Court of Nova Scotia – Annapolis County case files, RG 39 C (AP), vol. 1, file 2. NSA, accessed Feb. 1, 2017. <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=63>; “Petition of John Taylor and Others,” Nova Scotia House of Assembly, RG 5, Series A, vol. 14 no. 49 (microfilm no. 15591). NSA, accessed Feb. 1, 2017. <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=64>.

⁹¹ Henry, “Black Enslavement in Canada.”; George Hendrick and Willene Hendrick, *Black Refugees in Canada: Accounts of Escape During the Era of Slavery* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2010), 11; Henry, “Black Enslavement in Canada.”

⁹² Matthew Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 12.

⁹³ Edward B. Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 259. For more on the response of southern enslavers to the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies, see Edward B. Rugemer, “The Southern Response to British Abolitionism: The Maturation of Proslavery Apologetics,” *Journal of Southern History* 70, no. 2 (2004), 221-248.

The Second Slavery and Interregional Slave Trade in the US South

Beginning in the early 1780s, laws regulating the manumission of enslaved African Americans in the US South were relaxed. This was prompted largely by transformations in the region's agricultural economy. By the end of the eighteenth-century, Upper South planters and farmers began to move away from tobacco to mixed-crop production. Soil erosion precipitated this change. Virginia and Maryland agriculturalists found that their total tobacco yields had fallen dramatically from the colonial period. Over time, hired free black labor proved more cost-effective for Upper South planters and farmers, many of whom became more amenable to manumission reform. In 1782, Virginia's General Assembly enacted "An Act to Authorize the Manumission of Slaves," which permitted enslavers to free enslaved people through their last will and testaments, or other verified documentation. In subsequent years, other southern states approved similar measures. Previously, it was effectively illegal for Virginia enslavers to manumit enslaved Africans and African Americans (it could only be done with the consent of Virginia's General Assembly). Upper South enslavers took advantage of relaxed manumission laws to free 'surplus' enslaved people.⁹⁴

As noted earlier, this brief flirtation with manumission was ultimately short-lived. In the early 1800s, Upper South governments began to tighten manumission laws once again, effectively shutting the door for most enslaved African Americans. The public mood shifted dramatically against manumission reform, in part because of increased fears of revolt. Meanwhile, the Haitian Revolution raised alarm among southern whites, who feared that enslaved African Americans would mount an insurrection. In 1800, their suspicions were seemingly confirmed when Gabriel Prosser led an insurrection in Richmond, Virginia. According to George Van Cleve, Upper South enslavers "firmly believed that the existence of a significant number of free blacks in a slave state increased the possibility of rebellion and other social costs such as crime and flight, and nonslaveowners shared these beliefs[.]" In response, state governments acted quickly to make manumission more difficult and expel free African Americans from their borders. Subsequent laws mandated that free blacks remove themselves from the Upper South following their manumission.⁹⁵

More significantly, black enslavement witnessed an unprecedented resurgence in the US South. Between 1790 and 1810, the enslaved population more than doubled across the region. Several factors account for this dramatic expansion.

⁹⁴ Van Cleve, *A Slaveholder's Union*, 93-97; John P. Kaminski (ed.), *A Necessary Evil? Slavery and the Debate Over the Constitution* (Madison, WI: Madison House, 1995), 15.

⁹⁵ Van Cleve, *A Slaveholder's Union*, 97-99. For more on Gabriel Prosser, see Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

First, the invention of the cotton gin in 1794, combined with westward and southwestern migration during the early republic, led to the development of cotton plantations across the Lower South and Southwest. Additionally, the growth of sugar production in Louisiana also contributed to slavery's expansion. Upper South enslavers, as well as poorer whites, migrated to the Lower South and Southwest in search of land and prosperity. This proved a terrible development for enslaved African Americans in the Upper South, who were either involuntarily forced to migrate with their enslavers or be sold to the Lower South and Southwest. Demand for enslaved labor was also driven by the US Congress' ban on the Atlantic slave trade in 1808. Unable to rely on enslaved Africans, Lower South and Southwestern enslavers looked elsewhere for enslaved labor. Upper South enslavers were more than happy to fill the gap in the market. Indeed, the rise of 'King Cotton' and westward expansion provided black enslavement in the United States with a second life.⁹⁶

While they were undoubtedly valuable before, the interregional slave trade (coupled with the closure of the Atlantic market) led to a sharp rise in the selling price of men, women, and children. Fully aware of the growing demand for enslaved labor in the Lower South and Southwest, and eager to offload surplus enslaved people themselves, Upper South set out to command high prices for enslaved people. Slave trading firms, such as Franklin & Armitage in Richmond, made enormous profits from selling enslaved people to the Lower South and Southwest. As Damian Pargas notes, one Natchez resident in 1835 claimed, "Negroes are selling here at \$1000 for women and \$1500 for men!" Given the inherent value of enslaved people, it is clear why Upper South enslavers were livid about the prospect of men, women, and children running away.⁹⁷

The cotton boom revolutionized the global market. As Sven Beckert writes, "Exports to Great Britain increased by a factor of ninety-three between 1791 and 1800, only to multiply another seven times by 1820... by 1857 it would produce as much cotton as China." However, the ramifications of the new interregional slave trade for enslaved people was terrifying. Steven Deyle estimates that over one million

⁹⁶ Damian A. Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 21-22. For more on the rapid expansion of cotton and sugar production in the southern and southwestern US, and black enslavement, in the Lower South, see Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 175-192; Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Richard Follet, *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820-1860* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2005); Edward Baptist, *This Half has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014); Andrew J. Torget, *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transformation of the Texas Borderlands, 1800-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, "Introduction," in Sven Beckert (ed.), *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 1-27; Calvin Schermerhorn, *Unrequited Toil: a History of United States Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 34-46.

⁹⁷ Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration*, 22 (quote from Natchez resident); 26-27.

enslaved African Americans were forcibly migrated to the Lower South, “approximately two-thirds of whom arrived there as a result of sale.” Men, women, and children were sold indiscriminately at auction, forced to march overland in coffles and chain gangs for weeks (if not longer), transported as ‘cargo’ via carriages and riverboats, or on ships along the Atlantic coast. Various routes and trails developed over the antebellum era. The Ohio and Mississippi Rivers became one of the quickest means of forcibly transporting enslaved people to Natchez and New Orleans (among other places). Various cities on the Eastern Seaboard, such as Baltimore, Richmond, Wilmington, and Charleston, became major hubs for the coastal trade.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 104; Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4. The historiography of the interregional slave trade has grown significantly in recent decades. See Alan Kulikoff, “Uprooted Peoples: Black Migrants in the Age of the American Revolution, 1790-1820,” in Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman (eds.), *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1983), 143-171; Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slave Masters: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Robert H. Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce: The Transformation of the Interstate Slave Trade* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2003); Walter Johnson (ed.), *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Ira Berlin, *The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 99-151; David L. Lightner, *Slavery and the Commerce Power: How the Struggle Against the Interstate Slave Trade Led to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2013); Calvin Schermerhorn, *The Business of Slavery and the Rise of American Capitalism, 1815-1860* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015). Some studies do not focus solely on the interregional slave trade but devote extensive time to its impact on enslaved families. See Wilma Dunaway, *The African-American Family in Slavery and Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 161-244; Jonathan D. Martin, *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 34-43.

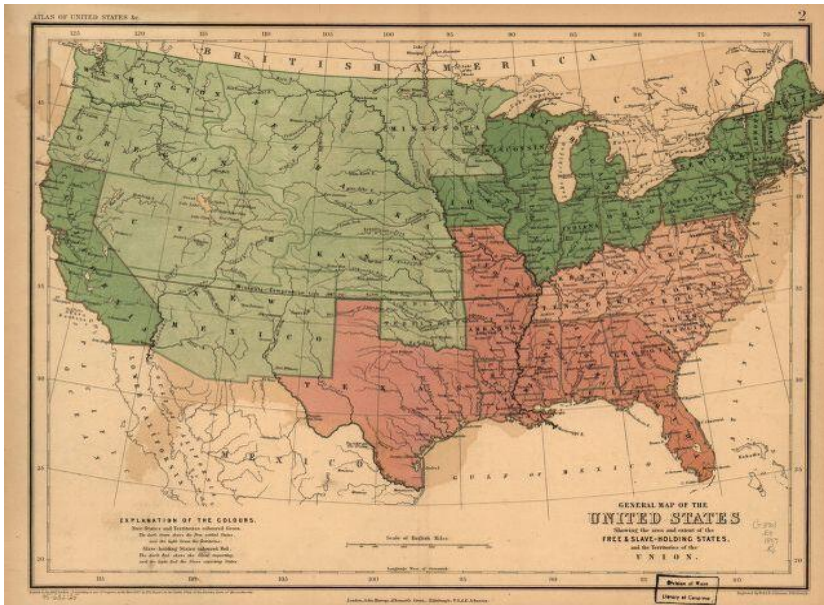


Figure 3: Map of the United States, c.1857

Source: Henry D. Rogers, *General map of the United States, showing the area and extent of the free & slave-holding states, and the territories of the Union* (London: John Murray; Edinburgh: W. & A.K. Johnston, 1857). Map, accessed Jan. 8, 2020. <https://www.loc.gov/item/95682125/>.

The second slavery had a dramatic impact on the enslaved populations of the Lower South and Southwest. Between 1800 and 1850, the number of enslaved African Americans in Georgia rose from 35,000 to 500,000. Similarly, the enslaved population of Mississippi grew to approximately 400,000 over the same period.⁹⁹ Perhaps the most horrifying aspect of the interregional trade in enslaved people was how enslavers and traders rarely paid heed to kinship networks. Countless enslaved families were forcibly separated by sale and forced migration; children were stripped from parents, and husbands from wives. As enslaved families were unrecognized by law, victims of sale had no rights or legal protections. Considered human ‘property,’ they were typically sold to the highest bidders with little concern for kinship ties. Despite slavery’s many horrors, historian Wilma King selected the forced separation of families, either by sale or forced migration, as “the worst of its aspects[.]” In

⁹⁹ Delbanco, *The War Before the War*, 28-30.

essence, nobody was safe; the domestic trade in enslaved people dealt a tremendous blow to enslaved families.¹⁰⁰

In testimonies and interviews, formerly enslaved people spoke of their traumatic experiences with the slave trade and forced migration. James Adams, a freedom seeker from Virginia, told Drew, “I have seen separations by sales, of husbands from wives, of parents from children – if a man threatens to run away, he is sure to be sold.” Similarly, Leonard Harrod of Windsor, noted, “I was taken from my wife suddenly; she knew no more where I had gone than the hen knows where the hawk carries her chicken. Fifteen hundred miles I wore iron on my wrist, chained in a gang from Georgetown to Port Gibson [Mississippi]. There I was sold and put to receive and pack cotton, etc., for six years. Then I was sold to Nashville [Tennessee], one year; then to New Orleans fifteen years[.]”¹⁰¹

Isaac Johnson, a formerly enslaved African American from Kentucky, recounted the horrors of witnessing his family being sold. Johnson provides the following account of the slave auction at which his family was sold: “Then the auctioneer called for Isaac and I was led out, the auctioneer saying, “Time is precious, gentlemen, I must sell them all before night; how much do I hear for this nigger?” ... The next one sold was Ambrose. I could not see him, but I could hear the auctioneer crying for bids and my little four year old [sic] brother was sold for five hundred dollars to William Murphy...in a very short time, our happy family was scattered, without even the privilege of saying ‘Good by’ [sic] to each other, and never again to be seen, at least so far as I was concerned.”¹⁰²

While those who were sold to the Lower South and Southwest faced unspeakable hardships, life in the Upper South was hardly much better for enslaved African Americans. Subject to their enslavers’ total authority, brutal treatment, malnutrition, illness and disease, physical punishment, and sexual assault was commonplace. Without rights or protections, enslaved people could not turn to the authorities or the law. Many self-emancipators discussed their horrible experiences while enslaved. Charles Peyton Lucas, who escaped from Loudoun County, Virginia to Upper Canada, recalled various instances in which he was whipped and beaten by his enslaver. On one occasion, Lucas remembered that his enslaver “tied up” another boy on the labor camp “and laid twenty-five lashes on his bare back with a cowskin[.]” In turn, Lucas’ brother stole one of his enslaver’s horses and escaped to Canada.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011; first edition 1995), 32.

¹⁰¹ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 28, 339-340.

¹⁰² Isaac Johnson, *Slavery Days in Old Kentucky. A True Story of a Father Who Sold His Wife and Four Children. By One of His Children* (Ogdensburg, NY: Republican & Journal Print, 1901), 10-11, accessed Sep. 13, 2018. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/johnson/johnson.html>.

¹⁰³ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 105-107.

Tipping Points: The Motivations, Profiles, and Strategies of Slave Refugees

The emergence of ‘free soil’ spaces in the northern US and British Canada, coupled with the rapid expansion of the second slavery and interregional trade in the South, provided enslaved African Americans with a new impetus to escape northward. Escape posed innumerable physical, psychological, and environmental challenges for freedom seekers. Self-emancipators had to abscond with few provisions and little knowledge of the geographical terrain. Furthermore, they had to assume that northern and southern whites were untrustworthy or hostile. The threat of recapture, punishment, and sale constantly hung over the heads of self-emancipators. Self-emancipators struggled with an existential dilemma: escaping from bondage meant leaving loved ones behind, or even condemning them to punishment or sale. Finally, escaping from southern slavery could result in death. Apart from illness and starvation, freedom seekers could drown in rivers, face inhospitable climates, or perish in any other number of ways. The challenges and risks associated with self-emancipation deterred most enslaved people from trying to escape. Yet the fact remains that tens of thousands were willing to put everything on the line to liberate themselves and their families.

Above all, the threat of sale or forced separation compelled enslaved African Americans to escape. David West, a Virginia who fled to Canada, told Benjamin Drew, “My master died, and I heard that I was to be sold, which would separate me from my family, and knowing no law which would defend me, I concluded to come away.” The moment was truly a turning point for West, who stated, “I tried to content myself to remain, and should probably have done so, but for the dread of being sold south.”¹⁰⁴ The threat of forced separation could come about from various developments. As discussed earlier, the local and interregional slave trades posed an enormous threat to enslaved communities in the Upper South. Furthermore, the death of an enslaver motivated many to escape. In this scenario, their estate (including enslaved people) were typically dispersed among relatives and heirs, or sold to another enslaver or trader. Isaac Williams recalled being sold and separated from his family following the death of his enslaver. “When my first master died,” he told Benjamin Drew, “his widow married a man who got into debt and was put into prison. The woman gave up her rights to get him out. Then we were sold. Every man came to be sold for her lifetime – then to revert to the heirs. The heirs bought in all they could – among them my two sisters.” They were subsequently sent to Richmond, and from there to the Lower South. Williams recalled, “we could not help it – they went

¹⁰⁴ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 87-88.

off crying.”¹⁰⁵ Franklin and Schweninger note that enslaved African Americans “viewed their master’s passing with great anxiety, and some among them viewed it as a time to attempt an escape.” This pivotal moment in the lives of many enslaved men and women proved the final straw.¹⁰⁶

Others resolved to escape in response to brutal treatment, physical or psychological punishment, and sexual assault. Franklin and Schweninger write that enslaved people throughout the South “were beaten, chained, incarcerated, ironed, and whipped; and they watched as their wives, husbands, mothers, fathers, and children, and relatives were flogged.”¹⁰⁷ Narratives, memoirs, and testimonies illustrate the impact which maltreatment and punishment had on enslaved people. The sight of other men and women being physically or sexually assaulted encouraged many to escape. James Adams, a self-emancipator from Virginia, told Drew, “At the age of seventeen, I set out to seek freedom in company with Benjamin Harris (who was a cousin of mine) and a woman and four children... I had seen older men treated worse than a horse or a hog ought to be treated; so, seeing what I was coming to, I wished to get away.” Similarly, Dan Josiah Lockhart from Frederick County, Virginia, recalled a horrifying incident involving his new enslaver. He stated, “I lived with my new master three years and two months. Then he whipped my wife and children... I could not stand this abuse of them, and so I made up my mind to leave.” In 1847, Lockhart fled to Pittsburgh and later to Canada. “The hardest thing in slavery is not the work,” he alleged; “it is the abuse of a man, and, in my case, of a man’s wife and children.”¹⁰⁸

The ‘desire to be free’ was another primary factor behind escape to the North and Canada. James Curry, who escaped from North Carolina, recalled in his memoir, “From my childhood, the desire for freedom reigned predominant in my breast, until I resolved, if I was ever whipped after I became a man, I would no longer be a slave.”¹⁰⁹ Franklin and Schweninger note that ‘habitual runaways’ greatly desired their permanent freedom. They claim that these freedom seekers “ran away not once or twice, but many times, and although often caught and punished, it did not seem to matter how frequent or brutal the punishment or how many threats were made against them and their families.”¹¹⁰ In most instances, a combination of internal and external factors, both short-term and long-term, motivated men and women to seek permanent liberty.

¹⁰⁵ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 54-55.

¹⁰⁶ Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 19.

¹⁰⁷ Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 42.

¹⁰⁸ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 19 (Adams quote), 46-50 (Lockhart quotes).

¹⁰⁹ James Curry, *Narrative of James Curry, A Fugitive Slave* (Originally printed in the *Liberator*, Jan. 10, 1840), accessed Sep. 1, 2019. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/curry/curry.html>.

¹¹⁰ Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 38.

Franklin and Schweninger claim that about eighty percent of freedom seekers across the South were men, most of whom were likely younger than thirty. Most fled alone or, at most, in small groups of no more than a handful. Absconding in larger groups risked alerting enslavers, local whites, and the authorities. By fleeing alone or in small groups of two or three, typically under the cover of night, freedom seekers increased their odds of escape.¹¹¹ Male freedom seekers employed various strategies to escape. Most notably, they attempted to pass as free people of color or, in some instances, white men and women. Moses Roper, a self-emancipator from North Carolina, took advantage of his lighter complexion to employ this strategy. As his mother was “half white” and his father was “white,” Roper noted that he was “very white” for an enslaved man. After being sold to a Florida enslaver, Roper secured passage aboard a ship to New York City in 1834.¹¹²

Newspaper notices also highlight this strategy. In 1801, the *Baltimore American and Daily Advertiser* published a notice for “a negro lad named JIM,” who allegedly “passed for a freeman.” In September, an advertisement for a self-emancipator named Phill claimed, “he is of a light complexion for a negro,” indicating that he potentially sought to pass for a legally free person. Meanwhile, a self-emancipator from Baltimore, Maryland named Nace escaped from his enslaver. According to the advertisement, “his clothes cannot be described, as no doubt he has changed them.” Ten dollars was offered for Nace’s arrest in Baltimore, while fifty was offered if taken out of state. This final sentence leaves open the possibility that Nace would seek to escape to neighboring Pennsylvania or another northern state.¹¹³

Mobility and movement were also key factors that enabled enslaved men to escape more often than women. Enslaved men were often hired out by their enslavers, which afforded them greater spheres of movement and improved spatial awareness. Some enslavers permitted men to hire out their own time in return for a portion of their profits. Baltimore and Washington, DC boasted sizable hired-out enslaved populations who worked in a range of trades and vocations. Consequently, hired-out enslaved men were able to work alongside enslaved and free African Americans elsewhere, and by extension expand their spatial knowledge and social networks.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 210-212; John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, “The Quest for Freedom: Runaway Slaves and the Plantation South,” in Gabor S. Boritt and Scott Hancock (eds.), *Slavery, Resistance, Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 28.

¹¹² Moses Roper, *Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper, from American Slavery. With an Appendix, Containing a List of Places Visited by the Author in Great Britain and Ireland and the British Isles, and Other Matter* (Berwick-Upon-Tweed, UK: Published for the author and printed at the Warder Office, 1848), 7 (quote), accessed May 28, 2020. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/roper/roper.html>.

¹¹³ “Ten Dollars Reward,” (Baltimore) *American and Daily Advertiser*, Jan. 17, 1801; “Fifty Dollars Reward,” *American and Daily Advertiser*, Sep. 23, 1801; “Fifty Dollars Reward,” *American and Daily Advertiser*, Sep. 24, 1801.

¹¹⁴ For more on enslaved hiring in the antebellum South, see Jonathan D. Martin, *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); John J. Zarboney,

Some occupations increased enslaved men's mobility more than others. Sailors and boat workers, for example, enjoyed significantly larger spheres of movement. In the Chesapeake and Tidewater Virginia, hired-out enslaved men often worked on ships, schooners, rafts, and other vessels. Farther west, enslaved men worked on steamboats and smaller vessels on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Boatmen and river workers on the Mississippi River, notes Thomas C. Buchanan, became "heroic figures in the slave community." Enslaved black men on boats and vessels became essential actors on maritime and coastal UGRR routes. With their experience and knowledge, black sailors and boatmen aided countless freedom seekers.¹¹⁵

Meanwhile, enslaved women typically possessed fewer opportunities to escape. This is reflected in the statistics for each southern state. In Virginia, African American women comprised less than one-tenth of self-emancipators between 1838 and 1860. Likewise, in Tennessee, freedom-seeking women accounted for twelve percent of all reported escapes, while in North Carolina they represented only fourteen percent of all cases. In general, these figures symbolize the limited mobility afforded to enslaved women by southern enslavers, as well as the factors which kept them more firmly rooted on farms and plantations. Most importantly, they were expected to remain at home and raise enslaved children. Deborah Gray White writes, "the responsibilities of childbearing and child care seriously circumscribed the female slave's life... women tended to be more concerned with the welfare of children, and this limited their mobility." The practical difficulties of escaping with young children deterred prospective freedom seekers, particularly in the Lower South, from seeking permanent liberty in free-soil spaces. Stephanie Camp argues that enslaved women possessed "a relative lack of knowledge of the geography beyond the plantation."¹¹⁶

That being said, the smaller number of female slave refugees should not suggest that enslaved women were inherently more docile than men. When the opportunity arose, many seized the moment to claim their liberty. As with male self-emancipators, women that absconded were usually younger. Furthermore, female freedom seekers often traveled in small groups, with both men and other women. Most groups were comprised of relatives and kin, although others were composed of friends and acquaintances from one or several farmsteads. For freedom-seeking women, traveling with young, physically fit men proved beneficial. Not only did it

Slaves for Hire: Renting Enslaved Laborers in Antebellum Virginia (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2012); and

¹¹⁵ Thomas C. Buchanan, *Black Life on the Mississippi: Slaves, Free Blacks, and the Western Steamboat World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 10. For more on black watermen and sailors, see David S. Cecelski, *The Waterman's Song: Slavery and Freedom in Maritime North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Schermerhorn, *Money over Mastery*, Ch. 2.

¹¹⁶ Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 212-213; White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 70-71; Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 36-38. For more on the gendered dynamics of self-emancipation in the US South, see Michael Johnson, "Runaway Slaves and the Slave Communities in South Carolina, 1799 to 1830," *William and Mary Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1981), 418-441.

diminish the various physical and environmental hazards, such as traveling long distances or crossing streams and rivers, but it also created new opportunities for supporting themselves. With their added mobility, enslaved men could pose as hired out men or free people of color more easily to obtain resources in towns and cities. Furthermore, female freedom seekers were less likely to arouse suspicion if seen traveling with men.¹¹⁷

Despite this, newspaper notices and other historical records demonstrate that some freedom-seeking women escaped northward alone. In 1826, the Virginia-based *Genius of Liberty* printed one notice for a forty-year-old woman named Rachael, who escaped from Loudoun County, Virginia between Christmas Day and New Year's Day. She was reportedly last seen in the village of Waterford, Loudoun County (approximately forty miles northwest of Washington, DC). Amani Marshall notes that freedom-seeking women exploited white conceptualizations of race and ethnicity to pass for free people of color and, on some occasions, free whites. Around the same time as Rachael's escape, an enslaved woman named Sarah from Fairfax County, Virginia was reported missing. The *Genius of Liberty* claimed that she was likely "passing for a free woman, under the assumed character of having been one of the slaves of the late Robert Gunnell, deceased, and freed at his death[.]" Sarah was last seen in Waterford. Other women attempted to escape with children or while pregnant, although this increased the difficulty of escape.¹¹⁸

Given the practical challenges of traveling in groups and with women, children, and the elderly and infirm, family escapes proved less common throughout the South. The typical structure of enslaved kinship networks also increased the challenges of escaping in family units. The prevalence of 'abroad marriages' (i.e. husbands and wives dispersed across several farmsteads) increased the logistical challenges of escaping with family. Emily West notes that abroad partnerships comprised approximately one-third of all enslaved unions in South Carolina. Across the Upper South, abroad unions and families were also commonplace. Diane Mutti Burke claims that abroad partnerships "were by far the norm."¹¹⁹

Nevertheless, some family units attempted to escape from the South together. In some instances, husbands reunited with wives on neighboring farms before making their escape. Other examples illustrate that freedom-seeking mothers and fathers absconded with children, and even extended families tried to escape

¹¹⁷ Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 212-213.

¹¹⁸ "10 Dolls. Reward," *Genius of Liberty*, Feb. 28, 1826; "20 Dolls. Reward," *Genius of Liberty*, Dec. 8, 1825. Amani Marshall, "'They Will Endeavor to Pass for Free': Enslaved Runaways' Performances of Freedom in Antebellum South Carolina," in *Slavery & Abolition* 31, no. 2 (2010): 161-180; Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 212-213.

¹¹⁹ Emily West, *Chains of Love: Slave Couples in Antebellum South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 44; Diane Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border: Missouri's Small Slaveholding Households, 1815-1865*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 200.

together. However, as Franklin and Schweninger note, “runaway families included a husband and wife and one or two children.” The fear of sale and permanent separation usually compelled families to escape, but so did cruel punishment and brutal treatment from enslavers. Although the odds were stacked against them, enslaved families did everything in their power to stay together, even if it meant launching desperate bids for freedom.¹²⁰

Geographical proximity to the northern states was a huge advantage for enslaved people in the Upper South. Franklin and Schweninger refer to this as the “accident of location.” Enslaved people in Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, and Missouri lived close to ‘free’ state borders. While many freedom seekers sought refuge in cities like Baltimore and Richmond, others desired a more complete form of liberty.¹²¹ After resolving to escape, freedom seekers had to determine if they should remain in the South or head towards ‘free’ territories. Although staying in the ‘slave’ states had some advantages, it also came with serious risks. Bounty hunters and slave patrols regularly scoured the southern states for freedom seekers. If found, the consequences could be devastating. In 1843, John Bell of Alexandria, Virginia described a case involving a self-emancipator who escaped from the notorious slave traders, Franklin and Armitage. He wrote that the man “ran away nearly two years ago, and never farther than Prince George’s County [Maryland], and past [sic] off as a freeman[.]” He was soon recaptured, however, and plans were made to return him to the slave traders. Rather than accept this fate, he decided to “plunge himself into the Potomac, in sight of the Capitol & tomb of Washington & drowned.”¹²²

For enslaved people in the Upper South, escape to the northern states and Canada undoubtedly presented the best opportunity to attain permanent freedom. African Americans and white abolitionists across the region aided self-emancipated refugees on their escapes. Furthermore, while federal law recognized them as ‘fugitives from justice,’ northern lawmakers and judges restricted slavery’s influence in the North. The legal ambiguity surrounding their status, as well as resistance from northern free black and white abolitionists, reduced the odds of southern enslavers successfully reclaiming freedom seekers. For those who felt that semi-formal freedom in the North was not secure enough, they could cross into Canada and claim permanent or formal liberty. If the threat of recapture seemed imminent, slave refugees in the North could quickly abscond to Canada, beyond the jurisdiction of US

¹²⁰ Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 49-70 (quote on pg. 66).

¹²¹ Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 25. For more on ‘informal’ freedom in the US South, see Viola Franziska Muller, “Illegal but Tolerated: Slave Refugees in Richmond, Virginia, 1800-1860,” in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves*, Ch. 5. Texas, Louisiana, and Florida are exceptional cases given their proximity to Mexico and the Bahamas respectively.

¹²² Bell, John, and William Lloyd Garrison. “Letter from John Bell, Alexan[dria, Virginia], to William Lloyd Garrison, 1834 July 13.” Correspondence. Jul. 13, 1834. *Digital Commonwealth*, accessed Jun. 3, 2020. <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:2z10zr705>.

federal law. For others, British North America was the ultimate destination from the outset. Unconvinced that the North was secure terrain, these slave refugees believed that they could only attain their permanent freedom by leaving the United States entirely.

In writings and interviews, self-emancipators depicted the North and Canada's reputation as spaces of freedom. As word reached enslaved communities in the Upper South, more and more freedom seekers resolved to reach these free-soil territories. Memoirs and autobiographies reveal the growing awareness among enslaved people that they could escape from slavery by fleeing northward. Jacob Green, who escaped from Kentucky, later recalled, "I heard so much about the free States of the north that I was determined to be free." Many recounted how they endured numerous obstacles and challenges to escape from the South. William Johnson told Benjamin Drew, "My feet were frostbitten on my way North, but I would rather have died than to go back."¹²³ Self-emancipation was, for many freedom seekers, characterized by a profound sense of loss and anguish. Robert Churchill writes that the decision to escape "was difficult, fraught with risk, and sometimes heart breaking [sic]. In most cases it meant leaving behind family, friends, and the only world that those escaping had ever known."¹²⁴ David West told US abolitionist Benjamin Drew, "I am now in Canada and doing well at my trade, and I expect to do better yet. My only trouble is my wife and family. I never should have come away but for being forced away." Similarly, William Brown recalled, "It is three years ago that I left my family, and I do n't [sic] know whether they are dead or alive. I want to hear from them."¹²⁵

Overall, the northern US and Canada offered self-emancipators the best prospect of claiming permanent freedom. Yet as Franklin and Schweninger note, "The dream of freedom in the North or Canada – the so-called Promised Land – went unfulfilled for the vast majority of runaways[.]"¹²⁶ Countless obstacles lay between southern black refugees and the free-soil territories. Most notably, slave patrols, slave catchers, and city and state authorities acted quickly to recapture those who absconded from their enslavers. Moreover, southern whites (including those who were not among the enslaver class) were hostile to freedom seekers. Coupled with limited resources and a lack of knowledge of the geographical terrain, it is understandable why most self-emancipators were unable to obtain permanent liberty in the North and Canada. Nonetheless, through cunning, resilience, and sheer

¹²³ Jacob D. Green, *Narrative of the Life of J. D. Green, a Runaway Slave, from Kentucky, Containing an Account of His Three Escapes, in 1839, 1846, and 1848* (Huddersfield: Henry Fielding, Pack Horse Yard, 1864), 8, accessed Sep. 1, 2019, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/greenjd/greenjd.html>; Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 29.

¹²⁴ Churchill, *The Underground Railroad and the Geography of Violence in Antebellum America*, 28.

¹²⁵ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 88, 282.

¹²⁶ Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 116.

determination, tens of thousands of freedom seekers managed to escape from the South. On foot, by horseback, or aboard steamboats and ships, self-emancipated men, women, and children took various routes and were aided by a range of actors. Above all, free African American communities provided freedom seekers with anonymity and assistance. Furthermore, black and white activists in the Mason-Dixon, Ohio River, and Upper Mississippi River borderlands and beyond maintained extensive UGRR networks which provided countless slave refugees with food, water, shelter, and transportation.

Conclusion

The Revolutionary Era marked a turning point for the politics of slavery and freedom in North America. Whereas black enslavement was previously legal and practiced throughout the continent, this period witnessed the emergence of informal and formal free-soil spaces in the northern US and Canada. During wartime, thousands of freedom seekers fled to British lines with the hope of obtaining their liberty. Furthermore, the American Revolution accelerated the process of gradual abolition in the North and Canada. Inspired by Enlightenment ideals and economic self-interest (namely, less need for enslaved labor), the northern states and Canadian provinces approved gradual abolition statutes during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Of course, the process of abolition fell short of the expectations of free African Americans and enslaved people in those regions.

Yet the emergence of free soil in the North and Canada presented enslaved African Americans in the South with a newfound sense of hope that they could possibly claim their liberty by heading northward. Yet freedom seekers were not motivated solely by a desire to be free. Rather, they also actively sought to avoid the increasing brutality of the second slavery. In particular, the threat of sale and forced migration remained a pervasive threat for enslaved men, women, and children. As Upper South enslavers sought to sell their ‘surplus’ human property, African American families were torn apart by the indiscriminate interregional slave trade. In turn, enslaved people resolved to self-emancipate. However, the threat of sale was not the only factor that encouraged freedom seekers to escape from the South. Cruel treatment, for instance, was another commonly listed reason behind self-emancipation. With regard to the profiles of self-emancipators, it is clear that men found it easier to escape from bondage than women given their heightened mobility (particularly in the Upper South). For the most part, freedom seekers hoped to escape alone or in small groups to avoid discovery. Faced with the growing dangers of the second slavery, tens of thousands of enslaved men and women willingly risked their lives to protect themselves and their families and loved ones.



Figure 4: The Underground Railroad in the 19th Century

Source: Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division, NYPL. "Underground Railroad 19th Century." NYPL Digital Collections, accessed Feb. 29, 2020. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/863f0211-4262-2898-e040-e00a18060f45>.

Chapter Two

Freedom Seekers, the Underground Railroad, and Escape to the Northern US and Canada

I have been frequently asked how I felt when I found myself in a free State... It was a moment of the highest excitement... In writing to a dear friend, immediately after my arrival at New York, I said I felt like one who had escaped a den of hungry lions. This state of mind, however, very soon subsided; and I was again seized with a feeling of great insecurity and loneliness. I was yet liable to be taken back, and subjected to all the tortures of slavery.

- Frederick Douglass¹²⁷

In the decades after the first emancipation, thousands of enslaved African Americans in the US South escaped to the northern states and Canada. Although most made the journey on foot, others traveled by stagecoach or train, steamboat, and coastal maritime routes. Freedom seekers employed various strategies to reach their respective destinations. Self-emancipated men and women regularly sought to pass as legally free blacks. Steven Hahn argues that free African American communities in the North were the “most important and reliable allies the slaves had[.]”¹²⁸ Passing for free people of color, they hoped to evade enslavers, slave catchers, and local, state, and federal authorities. Others utilized the natural environment, including woods, fields, rivers, dens, and caves, to escape from southern slavery. Finally, other slave refugees were aided by the series of loosely organized, overlapping escape networks. Black freedom networks spanned the entire North and were managed by free and self-emancipated African Americans, Quakers, and white abolitionists. Some took advantage of these networks to reach northern towns and cities, while others escaped via New England, the Niagara borderland, and Detroit River borderland.

This chapter examines how freedom seekers escaped to the northern US and Canada. Which routes proved most popular among self-emancipated refugees? How

¹²⁷ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself* (Boston: Published at the Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), 107-108, accessed May 1, 2018. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/douglass.html>.

¹²⁸ Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 57. In another book, Hahn likens northern black communities with ‘maroon’ communities elsewhere in the Americas and even refers to them as ‘enclaves.’ Although Hahn presents an interesting conceptualization, the comparison between northern black communities and maroons is not quite accurate. Rather than forming completely separate settlements, African Americans across the North typically strove for integration and equality within the broader society. See Hahn, *Political Worlds*, 31-32.

did slave refugees reach the northern states and Canada? What modes of transportation (if any) did they use? And how did they avoid recapture? It will demonstrate that various factors shaped the journeys of self-emancipators to the North and Canada. First, geography was an important determinant; in short, enslaved African Americans typically fled to the closest 'free' state. Thus, self-emancipators in Maryland and Virginia mostly escaped across the Mason-Dixon line to Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York. From there, they typically traveled to New England or British North America. Meanwhile, enslaved people in Kentucky and Missouri typically escaped via Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Many refugees subsequently made their way to the Lake Erie border zone, Canada, or Wisconsin in an attempt to build distance from the South. Others took refuge in towns, cities, and independent farming settlements in the Ohio River and Mississippi River borderlands.

Furthermore, this chapter examines the nature and contributions of interracial freedom networks in aiding slave refugees to the North and Canada. In what ways did the UGRR assist freedom seekers? As mentioned earlier, UGRR histories since the mid-twentieth century have emphasized the agency of enslaved people and the contributions of free African Americans. This dissertation continues recent trends by depicting the UGRR as an interracial movement. Free black communities across the northern US sheltered refugees from the South, while African Americans were among the most instrumental UGRR activists. Black activists managed vigilance committees and other self-defense organizations across the northern states to protect freedom seekers. Furthermore, this study compares and contrasts the nature of the UGRR across the northern US. It examines the differences between freedom networks in the Mid-Atlantic region and New England, which were more organized, with those in the former Northwest Territory, which were comparatively less sophisticated (although they exhibited some degree of management and organization).

Lastly, this chapter explores the nature of escape to the North and Canada. While most studies depict self-emancipation as a predominantly solitary act, this study emphasizes the importance of family ties and kinship networks to slave refugee escapes. As revealed in abolitionist records, enslaved families devised various strategies to escape from the South. Some fled together in smaller groups, while most staggered their journeys in patterns that resemble chain migration. Freedom-seeking families (particularly those with young children) generally found escape more challenging than those who escaped alone or in small groups. Yet they still found ways of traveling covertly and reaching the 'free' states and British North America. Indeed, some self-emancipated men and women returned to the South to liberate enslaved loved ones. Far from insignificant, kinship ties thus remained important to self-emancipated people after their escapes.

Self-Emancipation and Freedom in the Mason-Dixon Borderland

Caroline Hammond recalled her escape from the South as part of the Federal Writers' Project in 1938. Born in Anne Arundel County, Maryland in 1844 to a free black man and an enslaved woman, Hammond was "owned by Thomas Davidson, a slave owner and farmer of Anne Arundel." About twenty-five enslaved African Americans worked on Davidson's farm during her childhood, including her mother. The Davidsons "were considered people of high social standing in Annapolis and the people in the county." Hammond claimed that Davidson was "good to his slaves, treating them with every consideration that he could, with the exception of freeing them[.]" His wife, however, was "hard on all the slaves"; she was the daughter of a family "known all over Maryland for their brutality with their slaves." Following Thomas' death, his wife assumed "full control of the farm and the slaves." Hammond's father attempted to purchase her and her mother's freedom but their enslaver declined the offer. He hatched a scheme to liberate his wife and daughter. "By bribing the sheriff of Anne Arundel County," Hammond noted, "father was given a passage to Baltimore for mother and me. On arriving in Baltimore, mother, father, and I went to a white family on Ross Street – now Druid Hill Ave., where we were sheltered by two occupants, who were ardent supporters of the Underground Railroad." Hammond's enslaver posted rewards of fifty dollars each for the mother and child. In the meantime, plans were made to transport Hammond and her parents from the state. She claimed:

A Mr. Coleman[.] whose brother-in-law lived in Pennsylvania, used a large covered wagon to transport merchandise from Baltimore to different villages along the turnpike to Hanover, Pa., where he lived. Mother and father and I were concealed in a large wagon drawn by six horses. On our way to Pennsylvania, we never alighted on the ground in any community or close to any settlement, fearful of being apprehended by people who were always looking for rewards. After arriving at Hanover, Pennsylvania, it was easy for us to get transportation farther north. They made their way to Scranton, Pennsylvania, in which place they both secured positions in the same family.¹²⁹

Caroline Hammond's escape to Pennsylvania reveals a great deal about freedom seekers and escape in the Mason-Dixon borderland. First, it highlights the

¹²⁹ Interview with Caroline Hammond (A Fugitive). *FWP: Slave Narrative Project*, vol. 8, *Maryland, Brooks-Williams*.1936. Manuscript/Mixed Material, 19-21, accessed Sep. 1, 2019. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn080/>.

role played by UGRR activists across the region, north and south of the line. Second, it emphasizes the importance of family to self-emancipation. And third, it demonstrates the significance of escaping from the Upper South to the ‘free’ states. While many self-emancipators remained in towns and cities throughout Maryland and Virginia, others understood the value of crossing into Pennsylvania. The state had gradually abolished the institution of slavery over previous decades and was home to anti-slavery sympathizers and friends. In some respects, however, Hammond’s testimony is not typical of self-emancipation in the Mason-Dixon borderland. Most freedom seekers did not come into contact with UGRR activists during their escapes to Pennsylvania. Moreover, absent from her interview are some of the most important actors in the antebellum freedom movement: African Americans. Rather than seeking assistance from northern (or southern) whites, most self-emancipators typically sought refuge in free black communities throughout the borderland. In doing so, they hoped to blend in with the larger population and pass for free blacks. The next section will highlight the various ways by which slave refugees escaped to the North via the Mason-Dixon borderland.

For freedom seekers from Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, and other states along the eastern seaboard, Pennsylvania was the natural destination. With its geographical proximity and growing free black populations, it made sense that self-emancipators would increasingly set their trajectories toward the Keystone State. As Max Grivno writes, Pennsylvania became “a haven for runaway slaves” over the antebellum period. Following the state’s 1780 abolition statute, the Mason-Dixon line was irreversibly transformed into a prominent free-soil border between Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland. While it did not formally share a border with Pennsylvania, northern Virginia’s geographical proximity realistically made it part of the Mason-Dixon borderland. In practice, the law’s initial results were quite ambiguous. First, black enslavement lingered in Pennsylvania well into the nineteenth century. Furthermore, the free African American populations of Delaware and Maryland rose swiftly in the early republic. By 1850, approximately half of Maryland’s black residents were legally free. In Delaware, roughly ninety percent of African Americans were legally free people of color. In this regard, the Mason-Dixon borderland was a soft border between slavery and freedom.¹³⁰

As Richard S. Newman writes, Pennsylvania emerged as “one of the first battlegrounds” over the ‘free soil’ principle, “the belief among enslaved people and their allies that certain geographies and territorial domains abetted black freedom

¹³⁰ Max Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom: Free and Slave Labor along the Mason-Dixon Line, 1790-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 45; “SLAVERY in PENNSYLVANIA,” *Slavenorth.com*, accessed Mar. 8, 2019, <http://slavenorth.com/pennsylvania.htm>; Maryland and Delaware statistics from Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1-2.

claims.”¹³¹ Beginning in the late eighteenth century, enslaved people from the Upper South and beyond sought to claim their liberty by escaping across the Mason-Dixon line. In other instances, Pennsylvania free blacks and white abolitionists launched legal cases to liberate those who were brought to the state voluntarily by their respective enslavers. In 1814, an attempt was made to free an enslaved woman from Maryland named Charity Castle, who had been taken to Philadelphia by her enslaver. Pennsylvania law permitted enslavers to bring enslaved people to the state for a maximum period of six months (these so-called ‘sojourner laws’ will be discussed further in Chapter Four). On the eve of their return to Maryland, Charity broke her leg and was declared unfit to travel. Local blacks and abolitionists petitioned the state courts for Charity’s liberty because her enslavers had exceeded the six-month limit. Although the outcome is unknown, the episode illustrates how Pennsylvania increasingly became a “crossroads of freedom for generations of enslaved people and kidnapped free blacks in the United States.”¹³²

Across the Chesapeake and Tidewater Virginia, slave refugees employed a range of strategies and routes to reach Pennsylvania. Rather than heading straight for the Mason-Dixon line, self-emancipators often first sought refuge with free African Americans in the Upper South. Baltimore and Washington, DC, for instance, boasted sizable black communities. African Americans in both cities were, by and large, legally free. In 1830, Baltimore’s black population stood at almost 19,000, roughly three-quarters of whom were legally free. As a result, enslavers, slave catchers, and other local authorities found it difficult to locate illegally self-emancipated people among the larger black population. While many permanent freedom seekers remained in these cities, others sought to use them as a springboard to neighboring Pennsylvania. Both cities had relatively extensive transportation networks with other northern cities. Stagecoaches, trains, and steamboats regularly traveled north from Washington and Baltimore. Furthermore, these cities offered a range of temporary employment opportunities, which would provide freedom seekers with the chance to earn money before escaping to the North. In the case of Baltimore, T. Stephen Whitman writes that the city’s free black population and socio-economic opportunities “allowed many runaways simply to melt into anonymity, living with other blacks, huckstering, pursuing a trade, or working as day laborers.” The city’s

¹³¹ Richard S. Newman, “‘Lucky to be born in Pennsylvania’: Free Soil, Fugitive Slaves, and the Making of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Borderland,” *Slavery & Abolition* 32, no. 3 (2011), 414. The concept of free soil landscapes and geographies has been theorized by 71ouisvil scholars of slavery and freedom in the Atlantic world. For key readings, see Sue Peabody and Keila Grinberg, “Free Soil: The Generation and Circulation of an Atlantic Legal Principle,” *Slavery & Abolition* 32, no. 3 (2011), 331-339; and Ada Ferrer, “Haiti, Free Soil, and Antislavery in the Revolutionary Atlantic,” *American Historical Review* 117, no. 1 (2012), 40-66.

¹³² Newman, “‘Lucky to be born in Pennsylvania,’ 413-414.

docks and shipyards offered freedom seekers opportunities to obtain short-term work.¹³³

Escaped slave notices illustrate Baltimore's reputation as a magnet for freedom seekers (particularly from neighboring counties). In 1811, the *National Intelligencer* printed an advertisement for "a Negro Man named DICK," who escaped from James Walker of St. Clement's Bay. Walker described him as "a very artful fellow" who would likely change his attire. Walker claimed, "I expect he will provide a pass and endeavor to get to Baltimore, as he ran away some years ago and shipped from that port to the West Indies; he has a son and other relations and friends in that city."¹³⁴ Other notices reveal that freedom seekers often sought refuge with legally free family members in the city. In 1839, the *Baltimore Sun* printed an advertisement for a self-emancipator named Wat Hanson, whose enslaver claimed that he had "a free uncle living in Howard street, south of Pratt, by the name of Patrick Hambleton. I am induced to believe that he is secreted in the city by some of his free black acquaintances until a favorable opportunity offers him to make his escape." Similarly, in 1843, Joshua M. Bosley of Baltimore County placed a notice for a sixteen-year-old named Bill Middleton, who "has a sister or two living in Frederick street, and it is likely he will be lurking about them."¹³⁵

Some notices reveal that family units sought refuge among Baltimore's free black communities. In 1842, R. Welsh, who lived four-and-a-half miles from the city, reported the escape of ten freedom seekers. Among the group were a man named Resin, his wife Evelina, and her nine-year-old son Daniel. The group also included Flavella, her husband John Smith, two teenagers, and four children. Given its geographical proximity, it is likely that the group absconded to the city. Other enslavers hypothesized that enslaved families fled to Baltimore in stages. H. W. Waters of Catonsville, Baltimore County reported that a "dark mulatto" named Tom Tucker escaped from his service. Waters wrote, "It is probable that he will lurk about the neighborhood, or else in town, as he has left a wife and children living with me."¹³⁶

Like Baltimore, Washington, DC was the first stop for many freedom seekers heading to the northern states and Canada. By 1840, approximately 8,500

¹³³ Mason, *Slavery and Politics*, 110; Christopher Phillips, *Freedom's Port: The African American Community of Baltimore* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 58, 66-83; Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 33; Andrew K. Diemer, *The Politics of Black Citizenship: Free African Americans in the Mid-Atlantic Borderland, 1817-1863* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2016), 55; T. Stephen Whitman, *The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 72.

¹³⁴ "50 DOLLARS REWARD," *National Intelligencer*, Aug. 11, 1811.

¹³⁵ "ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD," *Sun* (Baltimore, MD), Oct. 23, 1839; "TEN DOLLARS REWARD," *Sun*, Sep. 1, 1843.

¹³⁶ "200 DOLLARS REWARD," *Sun*, Sep. 14, 1842; "ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD," *Sun*, Nov. 8, 1842.

blacks lived and worked in the nation's capital. Enslavers feared that freedom seekers would use Washington as a springboard to the North. In 1818, John A. Sommers of Fall's Church in Fairfax County, Virginia, reported the escape of Henry Tuxe, whom he feared "may be endeavoring to get to some of the Northern states." Similarly, in May 1850, Charles H. Johnson of Calvert County, Maryland reported the escape of Hanson Hawkins, who supposedly fled to Washington because he had "a free wife in the City... [and] it is possible he is lurking there until he can try to make his escape to a free State."¹³⁷

Moreover, the nation's capital was home to an interracial UGRR network. Key figures included Charles T. Torrey, a white abolitionist from Massachusetts, and Thomas Smallwood, a formerly enslaved man from Prince George's County, Maryland. The escape of Anna Maria Weems illustrates the remarkable efforts of African Americans and white abolitionists in the city. Born enslaved in Montgomery County, Maryland, the fifteen-year-old Weems escaped to Washington in 1855 after the sale of her enslaved brothers. She stayed with Quaker Jacob Bigelow while the freedom network formulated a plan to transport her to the North. Once ready, Weems disguised herself in male attire and traveled to Philadelphia by carriage, and onward to New York City and Canada.¹³⁸ Freedom seekers were often housed in churches or stayed with UGRR activists in Washington. Enslavers, slave catchers, and city authorities regularly patrolled the city in search of freedom seekers. In 1858, the *Democratic Watchman* reported that a male freedom seeker "was discovered in the attic of a Methodist church, [in] Washington, D.C... He had lived there four or five months, unsuspected, had used up the communion wine, and picked up his food by nightly sorties into the neighboring pantries."¹³⁹

Self-emancipated women also sought refuge in Washington before escaping to the North. Born in Maryland, Jane Clark resolved to escape from bondage after enduring decades of floggings and abuse. With help from loved ones and white

¹³⁷ Josephine F. Pacheco, *The Pearl: A Failed Slave Escape on the Potomac* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 22; "100 DOLLARS REWARD," *Daily National Intelligencer*, Dec. 21, 1818; "ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD," *Sun*, May 25, 1850.

¹³⁸ The Weems family and Anna Maria's escape from slavery have been covered in various books and articles. See Stanley Harrold, "Freeing the Weems Family: A New Look at the Underground Railroad," *Civil War History* 42, no. 4 (1996), 289-306; Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 536; Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 167-170; Prince, *A Shadow on the Household*; Jenny Masur, *Heroes of the Underground Railroad Around Washington, D.C.* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2019), Ch. 3. For more on the UGRR in Washington, D.C. See Stanley Harrold, "On the Borders of Slavery and Race: Charles T. Torrey and the Underground Railroad," *Journal of the Early Republic* 20, no. 2 (2000), 273-292; Harrold, *Subversives*. For abolitionism in the US South, see Stanley Harrold, *The Abolitionists and the South, 1831-1861* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1995) remains the key text. For more on Thomas Smallwood, see Thomas Smallwood, *A Narrative of Thomas Smallwood, (Colored Man:) Giving an Account of His Birth – The Period he was Held in Slavery – His Release – And Removal to Canada, etc. Together with an Account of the Underground Railroad. Written by Himself.* (Toronto: James Stephens, 1851), accessed Jul. 1, 2019, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/smallwood/smallwood.html>.

¹³⁹ "A runaway slave was discovered...", *Democratic Watchman* (Bellefonte, PA), Aug. 5, 1858.

abolitionists, Clark fled to a cabin in Maryland where she hid for almost one year. She subsequently traveled with counterfeit passes to Washington, where she remained for two years. In 1859, Clark secured passage out of the city; traveling by train to Baltimore and New York City. She traveled onward to Auburn in New York, where she worked as a domestic.¹⁴⁰ The threat of recapture in Baltimore and Washington motivated many freedom seekers to journey onward to the North and Canada. Christopher Nichols recalled seeing “guards at every corner of the street” in Washington. Indeed, the nation’s capital lay at the heart of the interregional slave trade, as well as the illegal kidnapping trade (see Chapter Four). One of the most infamous kidnapping cases in Washington involved Solomon Northup, a free black man who traveled from his home in New York to the capital city for work. Northup was drugged and sold to slave traders, who subsequently sent him to New Orleans where he was enslaved for twelve years.¹⁴¹

Furthermore, Washington and Baltimore’s UGRR networks were constantly under threat from the local authorities. Unless they fled to the North quickly, there was a chance that the versatile escape networks could be dismantled by local authorities. The arrest of UGRR activists highlights the fragility of interracial networks in Washington and Baltimore. In 1839, free black activist Leonard Grimes was arrested and served a two-year prison sentence. Four years later, free black activist John Bush was arrested at his home in Washington following a botched rescue operation. The following year, Charles Torrey was arrested in Baltimore for his role in aiding freedom seekers. From his prison cell, he wrote, “I have freed about 400 who, otherwise, would have lived, and, most of them died, in slavery.” He received a six-year prison sentence but died from tuberculosis less than two years later.¹⁴² In this regard, time was of the essence for freedom seekers that escaped with assistance from UGRR networks in Baltimore and Washington.

With this in mind, freedom seekers had to determine the safest, quickest means by which they would reach the North. The traditional image of slave flight involves freedom seekers traveling on foot under the cover of night. However, most

¹⁴⁰ Jane Clark’s narrative was only unearthed recently by the Cayuga Museum and Case Research Lab in Auburn. See Robin Bernstein, “Jane Clark: A Newly Available Slave Narrative,” *Common-place.org* 18, no. 1 (2018). Accessed Mar. 27, 2019. <http://common-place.org/book/vol-18-no-1-bernstein/>.

¹⁴¹ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 71; Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853* (Auburn: Derry and Miller, 1853), 41, accessed Jul. 1, 2019. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/northup/northup.html>.

¹⁴² Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *The Underground Railroad: An Encyclopedia of People, Places, and Operations* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 235; “Attempt to Decoy away Slaves,” *Liberator*, Dec. 15, 1843; “LIBERTY MEETING,” *Daily Morning Post* (Pittsburgh, PA), Sep. 17, 1844; “Letter from Charles T. Torrey to Milton M. Fisher, 16 November 1844,” *Masshist.org*, accessed Sep. 9, 2019. https://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?item_id=3237&pid=3; “Rec. Chas. Torrey,” *Sun*, reprinted in *Star* (Gettysburg, PA), May 8, 1846; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 4: The United States, 1847-1858*, 184.

recognized that this type of could be quite perilous, especially if confronted by local whites. Consequently, many self-emancipators sought quick passage aboard stagecoaches, trains, steamboats, and ships. As mentioned earlier, Baltimore and Washington shared a host of transportation links with northern cities like Philadelphia, New York City, Boston, and other northern cities. Whereas traveling on foot could take days to reach the Pennsylvania border, traveling by train or boat could reduce the journey to a few hours. African American dockworkers, steamboat workers, and sailors in Washington and Baltimore concealed slave refugees aboard seafaring vessels to northern port cities. Martha S. Jones notes that about seven percent of black male heads of households “were said to be seamen.”¹⁴³ At the same time, traveling by stagecoach, rail, steamboats or ship also posed various risks. Ship captains and train conductors were liable to check black passengers for tickets and free papers. Henry Banks, who escaped from Stafford County, Virginia, recalled being questioned by a ship captain in Washington. After Banks failed to present any papers, the captain brought him to a police constable, who subsequently placed him in jail. After he was returned to Virginia, Banks managed to escape again and successfully reached Upper Canada.¹⁴⁴

Frederick Douglass availed of the region’s shared transportation networks to escape from slavery. Born in Talbot County, Maryland, Douglass originally planned to escape to the North in 1835. He devised plans to escape with other self-emancipators in the region. They considered the numerous physical and logistical challenges before escaping. In particular, Douglass recalled that they “knew nothing of Canada” and that their “knowledge of the north [sic] did not extend farther than New York[.]” Nevertheless, Douglass and the others resolved to head north in search of “doubtful liberty.” However, the group were discovered and Douglass was placed in a local jail.¹⁴⁵ Three years later, Douglass fled alone to Baltimore and secured passage by train to Havre de Grace, where he crossed the Susquehanna River and traveled onward to Pennsylvania. Douglass noted that the railway between Baltimore and Philadelphia was “under regulations so stringent, that even free colored travelers were almost excluded.”¹⁴⁶ While male freedom seekers generally found it easier to conceal themselves aboard trains and ships, some female freedom seekers in the

¹⁴³ Martha S. Jones, *Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Rights in Antebellum America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 22. For more on black sailors in the antebellum US, see W. Jeffrey Bolster, “‘To Feel like a Man’: Black Seamen in the Northern States, 1800-1860,” *Journal of American History* 76, no. 4 (1990), 1173-1199; and W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

¹⁴⁴ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 75-76.

¹⁴⁵ Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 83-92.

¹⁴⁶ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom. Part I – Life as a Slave. Part II – Life as a Freeman* (New York: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855), 326, accessed May 1, 2019. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass55/douglass55.html>. For more on Frederick Douglass, see David Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018).

region also availed of rail and maritime networks. In 1841, James Desvarreux of Baltimore placed an advertisement for nineteen-year-old Cecelia King. He speculated, “She is supposed to have gone on to Philadelphia by the steamboat on the same evening – she being known by the hands and servants on board, and no doubt was enticed away or received assistance from them.”¹⁴⁷

Southern lawmakers attempted to stem the tide of slave refugees heading to the North aboard trains, boats, and ships. In 1837, Virginia’s General Assembly passed a law that required enslaved people to possess written permission from their enslavers to travel aboard stagecoaches, trains, boats, and ships. One year later, Maryland’s state legislature enacted “An Act to Prevent the Transportation of People of Colour Upon Railroads or Steamboats,” which aimed to restrict the ability of free and enslaved African Americans to travel aboard trains, boats, and seafaring vessels. North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Louisiana approved similar measures to restrict black travel aboard trains, stagecoaches, boats, and seafaring vessels. City councils and southern authorities also passed measures designed to prevent African Americans from boarding steamboats, trains, ships, and steamboats. Local patrols and authorities also monitored docks, harbors, and riverboats and seafaring vessels to stop freedom seekers from escaping to the North and Canada.¹⁴⁸

The most audacious maritime escape took place in 1848 when seventy-seven freedom seekers attempted to flee from Washington, DC to New Jersey aboard *The Pearl*. The group sought to sail down the Chesapeake Bay, around Maryland’s Eastern Shore, and land on the New Jersey side of the Delaware Bay. Among the passengers were siblings, couples, and other family units. However, the captain was forced to land near Point Lookout, Maryland due to stormy weather. The passengers were subsequently arrested and charged by Washington authorities who learned of their escape. Most of the freedom seekers were subsequently sold to New Orleans. Responses to the incident varied between regions. The *Washington Union* praised the local authorities, while northern anti-slavery newspapers lamented the recapture of the freedom seekers.¹⁴⁹

Elsewhere, freedom seekers fled to Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York via other routes. Self-emancipators in western Maryland and northern Virginia often headed straight for the Pennsylvania border rather than escaping towards urban

¹⁴⁷ “ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD,” *Sun* (Baltimore, MD), Jun. 25, 1841.

¹⁴⁸ Jenny Bourne Wahl, *The Bondsman’s Burden: An Economic Analysis of the Common Law of Southern Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 95; Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 290.

¹⁴⁹ “THE RUNAWAY SLAVES,” *Washington Union*, reprinted in *Port Tobacco and Charles Town Advertiser*, Apr. 26, 1848; Tricia M. Wagner, *It Happened on the Underground Railroad: Remarkable Events that Shaped History*, 2nd ed. (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot, 2015), 59-62; Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 401-403. For key readings on *The Pearl* incident, see Pacheco, *The Pearl*; Mary Kay Ricks, *Escape on the Pearl: The Heroic Bid for Freedom on the Underground Railroad* (New York: William Morrow, 2007).

centers. Hagerstown, Frederick, and other towns and locales close to Pennsylvania. Indeed, the former was less than ten miles from the Mason-Dixon line. Located within touching distance, it made practical sense for freedom seekers to head directly north rather than flee towards Washington or Baltimore. Newspaper notices highlight that countless slave refugees made the short journey from western Maryland across the Mason-Dixon line. In 1857, the *Hagerstown Chronicle* reported on “a regular stampede [that] took place among the negroes in this neighborhood.” The group was “pursued... and arres[t]ed at Chambersburg, Pa.,” just over twenty miles from Hagerstown.¹⁵⁰

Freedom seekers on Maryland’s Eastern Shore were more inclined to escape up the peninsula to Wilmington, Delaware before crossing into Pennsylvania and New Jersey. In January 1847, Isaac Mason escaped with two others to Wilmington on foot, “it being about thirty-five miles away.” About eight miles from the city, they were informed that “there was a gang of body-snatchers waiting by the bridge to mob every colored person that came that way.” Eventually, they “passed by Wilmington unmolested by any one [sic], and, as near as I can judge, it was three o’clock that morning when the dividing line that runs between the States of Delaware and Pennsylvania were crossed. No words can depict the joy and gratitude that filled the bosom of one who had... stepped from bondage into liberty, from darkness into light.” The climate and time of year had a direct impact on the routes available to freedom seekers in the region. During the summer months, for instance, freedom seekers could escape via maritime routes along the Delaware River. As Erica Armstrong Dunbar writes, the river often froze over during the winter months, “eliminating the sea as an escape route.”¹⁵¹

Harriet Tubman is the most famous freedom seeker that escaped via this route. Born in Dorchester County, Tubman resolved to escape from the South following the death of her enslaver. On September 17, 1849, Tubman and two brothers absconded without informing anyone of their plan. Not long after their escape, her brothers had second thoughts and decided to abandon the plan. Tubman also gave up the plan but remained committed to escaping from bondage. A couple of weeks later, Tubman fled north alone. After some time, she finally reached Philadelphia, where she stayed with friends in the city. Tubman subsequently traveled to the Niagara borderland, where she crossed into Canada. Over the following decade,

¹⁵⁰ “RUNAWAY NEGROES,” *Hagerstown Chronicle*, reprinted in *Agitator* (Wellsboro, PA), Jun. 4, 1857.

¹⁵¹ Isaac Mason, *Life of Isaac Mason As a Slave* (Worcester, MA: [Publisher unknown], 1893), 36-52, accessed Sep. 1, 2019. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/mason/mason.html>; Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *Never Caught: The Washingtons’ Relentless Pursuit of their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge* (New York: 37INK, 2017).

she became a prominent UGRR activist in St. Catharines, Upper Canada, and returned to Maryland to rescue enslaved family members on several occasions.¹⁵²

While overland escape avoided the perils of traveling by stagecoach, rail, and maritime routes, it posed other challenges and obstacles. Most notably, they had to decide which way to go, which time of day or year to travel, where to find food, water, and shelter, where to sleep, and who (if anyone) to ask for assistance. While the natural wilderness enabled freedom seekers to avoid being seen by local whites, its various risks, particularly during cold winters and hot summers, proved serious obstacles. In the winter, freezing temperatures, ice, and snow created various problems for freedom seekers. “The small rivers and creeks across the North were also impassable,” writes Dunbar, “often sending brave and desperate fugitives to premature, icy deaths. Roads, impassable from heavy snow and frozen mud, disabled even the strongest and most agile fugitives, trapping men and women on the run.” More worryingly, refugees from slavery had to contend with the threats of starvation, dehydration, and physical illness, such as hypothermia.¹⁵³

Many freedom seekers recalled the logistical difficulties and natural challenges that they faced during their escapes. James W.C. Pennington, a self-emancipator from Maryland, wrote in his autobiography, “I have no knowledge of distance or direction. I know that Pennsylvania is a free state, but I know not where its soil begins, or where that of Maryland ends? Indeed, at this time there was no safety in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, or New York, for a fugitive, except in lurking-places, or under the care of judicious friends, who could be entrusted not only with liberty, but also with life itself.” Fortunately, Pennington stumbled across some “judicious friends,” a Quaker couple in Adams County, Pennsylvania, that offered him food, water, and shelter. But most were not so fortunate. They had to rely on their wits and intelligence to make their way through forests, fields, fauna, rivers, and other features of the natural wilderness.¹⁵⁴

In recent years, scholars have theorized how African American refugees from the South negotiated the unfamiliar terrain. Rebecca Ginsburg argues that freedom seekers crafted an alternative “black landscape” through which they saw their surrounding environments differently from southern and northern whites. In her

¹⁵² Kate Clifford Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero* (New York: One World Books, 2003), 75-88. In the early 2000s, several excellent biographies were published on Harriet Tubman. See Catherine Clinton, *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2004); Jean M. Humez, *Harriet Tubman: The Life and the Stories* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

¹⁵³ Dunbar, *Never Caught*, 101.

¹⁵⁴ James W.C. Pennington, *The Fugitive Blacksmith: or, Events in the History of James W. C. Pennington, Pastor of a Presbyterian Church, New York, Formerly a Slave in the State of Maryland, United States* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1849), 13, accessed Jun. 9, 2019. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/penning49/penning49.html>. For more on the life of James W.C. Pennington, see Christopher L. Webber, *American to the Backbone: The Life of James W.C. Pennington, the Fugitive Slave Who Became One of the First Black Abolitionists* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2011).

own words, the black landscape was “a system of paths, places, and rhythms that a community of enslaved people created as an alternative, often as a refuge, to the landscape systems of planters and other whites. It was a largely secret and disguised world, as compared to the planter landscape of display and vistas.” Understandably, the black landscape varied between farms and plantations, towns and cities, and broader regions. By developing an independent vision of the natural world, enslaved people and freedom seekers crafted ways to outsmart their enslavers, survive beyond their homesteads, and successfully reach the North and Canada.¹⁵⁵

Narratives and testimonies reveal how freedom seekers took advantage of the natural environment to evade enslavers and slave catchers. James Adams claimed that he “lay concealed in the woods for four days” during his escape. Although most freedom seekers had never ventured above the Mason-Dixon line, their experiences in Maryland, Virginia, and elsewhere taught them how to navigate the Pennsylvania landscape. Sam Davis, a freedom seeker from Virginia, recalled almost being recaptured in Orangetown, Pennsylvania by two white men. He claimed, “I got into a piece of woods – thence into a wheat field, where I lay all day; from 9 A. M. until dark. I could not sleep for fear. At night I travelled [sic] on, walking until day, when I came to a colored man’s house among mountains. He gave me a good breakfast, for which I thank[ed] him, and then directed me on the route. I succeeded, after a while, in finding the underground railroad.”¹⁵⁶ Davis understood exactly how to outwit his potential captors and remain hidden in the natural environment. While the natural world was disorienting for many, other slave refugees coped by transplanting their previous knowledge and experience to these new landscapes. As Ginsburg notes, it was “an expression of geographical intelligence.”¹⁵⁷

Rivers proved another natural hazard for freedom seekers. Charles Peyton Lucas and two others ran to the Potomac River, where they “tied their provisions into bundles” on their backs and “waded and swam” their way to the other side. The group encountered various challenges during their journey. Lucas recalled, “We travelled [sic] by night and concealed ourselves in the bushes by day, for ten days and nights, suffering greatly from hunger and from rain, without shelter. One day in September, we sat on a mountain, exposed to a hot broiling sun, and without food or drink. We could hear people at their work about us, but we did not dare ask for aid. For three days, we had neither food nor drink, excepting green corn. We sucked the juice for drink, and the corn itself was our only food.” The group’s journey was long, arduous, and filled with potential hazards. The freedom seekers drank “muddy water” multiple times and at one point “were run very severely by dogs and men, but we got away

¹⁵⁵ Rebecca Ginsburg, “Escaping through a Black Landscape,” in Clifton Ellis and Rebecca Ginsburg (eds.), *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscapes of North American Slavery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 54.

¹⁵⁶ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 116.

¹⁵⁷ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 19; Ginsburg, “Escaping through a Black Landscape,” 56.

from them.” Fortunately, they came across a sympathetic white resident, who provided them with directions to the Mason-Dixon line. Eventually, Lucas reached western New York, where he remained for a short time before he was advised to cross the border into Canada.¹⁵⁸

Southeastern and south-central Pennsylvania (namely Adams, Delaware, Chester, Lancaster, York, and Franklin counties) received thousands of freedom seekers, mostly from Maryland and Virginia. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, Upper South enslavers placed advertisements for self-emancipated men, women, and children in Pennsylvania newspapers. In 1803, William Tyler of Frederick County, Virginia, placed an advertisement in the *Carlisle Weekly Herald* for Toby, “who sometimes called himself TOBIAS BELT[.]” Tyler claimed, “I followed said fellow to Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, and was informed he took the York road... it is highly probable he has a forged pass or certificate of his freedom, and may change his name.”¹⁵⁹ Southeastern and south-central Pennsylvania, notes David G. Smith, were “part of the great colonial era migration path, with settlers disembarking in Philadelphia and then heading to south central [sic] Pennsylvania before turning south to the back country of Virginia, Tennessee, the Carolinas, and Georgia.” More importantly, both regions were home to sizable free African American populations. Smith writes that “the most important aid to runaways came from free blacks in south-central Pennsylvania.” Following the state’s gradual abolition law, the legally free African American population rose precipitously in the Mason-Dixon borderland. By 1840, almost 700 free people of color were officially recorded in Adams County. Around the same time, approximately 600 African Americans lived in Franklin County.¹⁶⁰

Towns and villages across the region received countless freedom seekers from the Upper South. Gettysburg, York, Chambersburg, Shippensburg, Mercersburg, Harrisburg, Carlisle, Columbia, and Lancaster became home to small yet rapidly growing free black communities – comprised of free-born, freed, and illegally self-emancipated refugees. In each locale, African American activists formed the backbone of the region’s UGRR network. The escape ‘routes’ which ran through southern and south-central Pennsylvania are too numerous to list. Countless freedom seekers fled through Chambersburg, Gettysburg, and Hanover to nearby York, Carlisle, Mechanicsburg, Harrisburg, Lancaster, and Reading. Smaller villages and rural locales formed an integral part of black freedom networks, while a smaller number stuck completely to the natural environment to avoid being seen. Yet the routes taken by freedom seekers were subject to change during their escapes. “Many times,” argues Smith, “the natural routes through the physical landscape were also

¹⁵⁸ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 107-109.

¹⁵⁹ “Sixty Dollars Reward,” *Carlisle Weekly Herald* (Carlisle, PA), Jan. 5, 1803.

¹⁶⁰ Smith, *On the Edge of Freedom*, 13 (quote), 17, 27 (second quote)

modified by information the fugitive might have received. Fugitives might take a more difficult route if it was faster, if they were less likely to be seen, or if they knew a friendly house along the way.”¹⁶¹

Newspapers highlighted the presence of slave refugees in southeastern and south-central Pennsylvania. In 1813, the *Carlisle Weekly Herald* printed an advertisement for Billy Jackson, a “man servant” who was “of that kind of mulatto resembling the Indians[.]” Smith noted that Jackson “cuts hair remarkably well, being a good barber[.]” Women were also among the freedom seekers that fled to Pennsylvania. In 1804, Charles Worland of Hagerstown reported the escape of a forty-year-old woman named Suke, who “was lately seen in the town of Shippensburg [sic], and it is very probable that she may be hired, in or near said town.” Meanwhile, the Gettysburg *Adams Sentinel* published an advertisement for Rachel, a forty-year-old freedom seeker from Frederick County, Maryland, who fled with her ten-year-old daughter. It claimed that she had “gone to Pennsylvania, as she has been taught to believe that she is entitled to her freedom in that state.”¹⁶² Other freedom seekers escaped in pairs or as part of small groups. In 1828, the *Adams Sentinel* printed an advertisement for Jim Hall who “went away with three other Negroes[.]” Patterns of group escape continued throughout the antebellum era. A Maryland newspaper reported in August 1850 that a “party of five runaway slaves were brought in the cars yesterday morning from York, Pa. It appears that eleven slaves owned by different parties in Maryland recently absconded, and succeeded in making their way over into Pennsylvania[.]” The self-emancipators were captured aboard a train in Shrewsbury.¹⁶³

Regional newspapers also described the escape strategies of freedom seekers in the borderland. In 1832, Garland Davis of Charles Town, Virginia, placed a notice in the Gettysburg *Star* for a man named Isaac, whom he alleged had “obtained a free pass from a fellow by the name of John Beeson, & is in Pennsylvania from every information I can get[.]”¹⁶⁴ Other notices detailed the presence of black freedom

¹⁶¹ Smith, *On the Edge of Freedom*, 30-31.

¹⁶² “50 Dollars Reward,” *Carlisle Weekly Herald*, Oct. 15, 1813; “TEN DOLLARS REWARD,” *Carlisle Weekly Herald*, Oct. 26, Nov. 2, 9, 30, Dec. 7, 21, 28 1803, Jan. 4, 11, 1804; “Fifty Dollars Reward,” *Adams Sentinel*, May 12, 19, 1813.

¹⁶³ “\$100 Reward,” *Adams Sentinel* (Gettysburg, PA), Nov. 26, 1828; “ANOTHER ARREST OF FUGITIVE SLAVES,” *Port Tobacco and Charles Town Advertiser*, Aug. 14, 1850.

¹⁶⁴ “\$100 REWARD,” *Star* (Gettysburg, PA), Feb. 28, 1832.

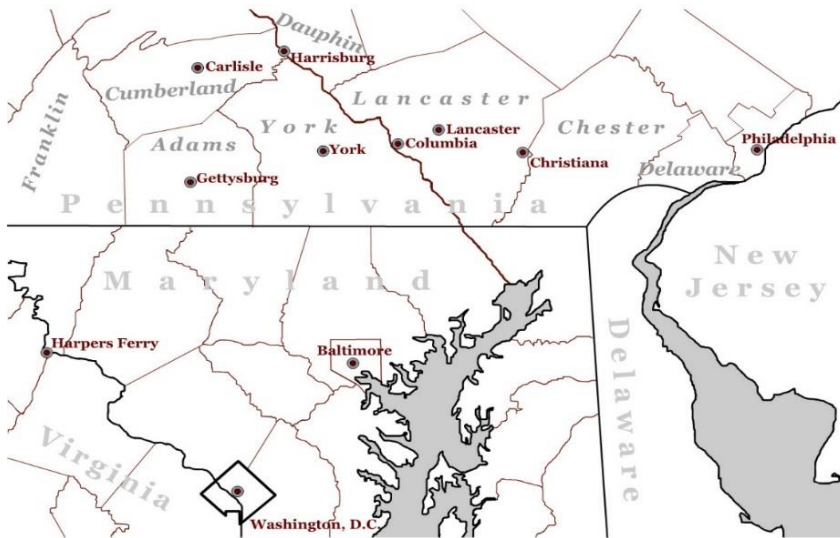


Figure 5: Underground Railroad Locations in the Mason-Dixon Borderland

Source: “The Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania and Maryland,” House Divided: The Civil War Research Engine at Dickinson College, accessed Oct. 3, 2020. <http://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/23240>.

networks in southeastern and south-central Pennsylvania. In 1844, the *Baltimore Sun* claimed that Joshua Ogle, a self-emancipator from Anne Arundel County, was potentially “making his way to York, Pa., where other parties were to meet him... He has no doubt changed his name, but may be easily detected, if closely questioned, as he is by no means smart.” Ten years later, the *Gettysburg Star* reported that a couple of slave catchers traveled to Pennsylvania in pursuit of three freedom seekers. “The chase continued as far as Harrisburg,” noted the paper, “where the pursuing party had the pleasure of learning that their prey had taken the “underground railroad” about one-half hour before and were beyond their reach!”¹⁶⁵

Quakers also assisted slave refugees in southeastern and south-central Pennsylvania. Elijah Pennypacker of Phoenixville, Chester County regularly aided freedom seekers to the North and Canada. From his home, he directed slave refugees onward to Philadelphia, Norristown, and other nearby towns. In November 1855, Philadelphia abolitionist William Still asked Pennypacker to “forward the two boys of whom you make mention, and I will see that they are duly and safely sent on to

¹⁶⁵ “ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD,” *Sun*, Aug. 3, 1844; “It is some time since...,” (Gettysburg, PA) *Star*, Jun. 16, 1854.

Can[ada]... I can plan them under the charge of Somebody who would look after them[.]”¹⁶⁶ Similarly, the Lewis family in York provided food, water, shelter, and transportation to slave refugees. In her unpublished memoir, Graceanna Lewis wrote, “There was never a time when our home was not a shelter for the escaping slave – a place in which he would be protected and sent forward to freedom either to some place in the north [sic] or Canada under the protection of the British Government.”¹⁶⁷

Newspaper articles also made direct references to Quaker assistance in the Mason-Dixon borderland. Enslavers Samuel Simpson and George Turner of Loudoun County, Virginia placed an advertisement for Len and George, “[b]oth of dark complexion, and brothers,” who were no doubt aiming for Pennsylvania, or Ohio, where they are supposed to have friends.” Additionally, the notice stated that Len “has been in the habit of hiring himself and trading with the Quakers[.]” Free blacks and Quakers formed the cornerstone of the interracial UGRR across the region. Quaker meetinghouses and black churches were erected within miles of each other and became important symbols of “a visible, interconnected, and widespread support network for African Americans.”¹⁶⁸

Narratives and testimonies also discussed the role played by Quaker activists in the borderland. Samuel Ringgold Ward recalled that his parents aimed for Cumberland County, New Jersey, “where they had learned slavery did not exist [and] Quakers lived in numbers, who would afford the escaped any and every protection consistent with their peculiar tenets – and where a number of blacks lived, who in cases of emergency could and would make common cause with and for each other.” During their escape, the Wards encountered several free African American communities at Springtown, Bridgetown and elsewhere, before eventually making their way to Greenwich. Ward noted, “there were no slaveholders in that part of the State, and when slave-catchers came prowling about the Quakers threw all manner of peaceful obstacles in their way, while the Negroes made it a little too hot for their comfort.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ “Land of Liberty,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jul. 13, 1886; William Still to E.F. Pennypacker, Nov. 24, 1855. Elijah Pennypacker Correspondence. Elijah Pennypacker MSS, SC 097. Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College. Swarthmore, PA, accessed Jun. 16, 2020.

http://triptych.swarthmore.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/4105/rec/23.

¹⁶⁷ Graceanna Lewis Underground Railroad Memoir. Lewis-Fussell Family Papers, SFHL-RG5-087. Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College. Swarthmore, PA, accessed Jun. 16, 2020. <http://triptych.swarthmore.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/InHOR/id/13628/rec/39>; Snodgrass, *The Underground Railroad*, 323-324; Christopher Densmore, “Aim for a Free State and Settle among Quakers: African-Americans and Quaker Parallel Communities in Pennsylvania and New Jersey,” in Brycchan Carey and Geoffrey Plans (eds.), *Quakers & Abolition* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 121, 124-125.

¹⁶⁸ “\$100 Reward,” *Genius of Liberty*, Sep. 24, 1822.

¹⁶⁹ Samuel Ringgold Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro: His Anti-Slavery Labours in the United States, Canada, & England* (London: John Snow, 35, Paternoster Row), 22-23, accessed May 1, 2019. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/wards/ward.html>.

Others documented the assistance which they received from Quakers and white activists in the borderland. Born in Maryland, James Watkins managed to permanently escape from his enslaver in 1844. During his escape, Watkins was pursued by slave catchers and their dogs. He recalled, "I was concealed in the side of a mountain, when I heard the voice of blood-hounds on my track along with the noise of a number of negro-hunters." After another close shave with two men and a woman, he continued onward until he reached Pennsylvania. At Loganville, he received "a most hearty meal" from a gentleman in the town. The following day, Watkins journeyed onward to York where he was taken in and fed by a possible UGRR activist. Not long after, a local black man instructed him to cross the Susquehanna River and take shelter in Columbia, Lancaster County, where he stayed with a Quaker. Watkins subsequently fled to Philadelphia before traveling to New York City and Connecticut.¹⁷⁰

After crossing the Mason-Dixon line, freedom seekers in south-central and southeastern Pennsylvania had several options. They could remain in the region, taking refuge in free black communities in the border zone. Some likely sought to stay close to enslaved family members in neighboring Maryland and Virginia. Yet this left self-emancipators at greater risk of recapture by enslavers and bounty hunters. As a result, many resolved to build distance from the Upper South. Geography and topography shaped the routes taken by freedom seekers. Most notably, the Appalachian Mountains funneled self-emancipators toward eastern and northeastern Pennsylvania. While some escaped into the mountains, most sought to avoid the challenging terrain. Slave refugees fled to virtually every locale with free black and white anti-slavery populations. Some traveled along the Susquehanna River on foot, by horseback, or by boat.¹⁷¹

Meanwhile, countless freedom seekers sought refuge in Philadelphia. W.E.B. Du Bois described the City of Brotherly Love as "the natural gateway between the North and South, and for a long time there passed through it a stream of free Negroes and fugitive slaves towards the North, and of recaptured Negroes and kidnapped colored persons towards the South."¹⁷² By 1830, roughly 14,600 African Americans officially resided in the city. Furthermore, the city boasted one of the most active abolitionist communities in the country. By the late 1820s, a strong, interracial UGRR network thrived in Philadelphia and its surrounding regions. It is easy to see why Philadelphia appealed to many freedom seekers, although it is impossible to

¹⁷⁰ James Watkins, *Narrative of the Life of James Watkins, Formerly a "Chattel" in Maryland, U.S.; Containing an Account of His Escape from Slavery, Together with an Appeal on Behalf of Three Millions of such "Pieces of Property," Still Held Under the Standard of the Eagle* (Bolton, UK: Kenyon and Abbat, 1852), 20,25, accessed May 27, 2020. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/watkin52/watkin52.html>.

¹⁷¹ Smith, *On the Edge of Freedom*, 30.

¹⁷² W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1899. Reprint, New York: Cosimo, 2010), 25.

understand how many passed through the city. One study estimates that 9,000 freedom seekers escaped to Philadelphia over the antebellum period.¹⁷³

Newspaper notices highlight the city's role as a beacon of liberty for slave refugees. In 1826, the *Genius of Liberty* reported the escape of a thirty-two-year-old named Daniel, who absconded from his enslaver in Fauquier County. His enslaver claimed that he "probably obtained spurious papers, and will attempt to pass himself as a free man. He has a brother, by the name of Dennis, in Philadelphia." In other instances, enslavers alleged that freedom seekers received assistance from free African Americans and white abolitionists. Abraham R. Duffin reported the escape of "a colored boy, named MARK COLE, about 16 years of age," who was "persuaded off by a white boy who came to my residence as an orphan stranger[.]" Duffin claimed that the pair were "probably making their way to Pennsylvania, as they were seen in company on the Philadelphia road."¹⁷⁴

Autobiographies and testimonies also illustrate Philadelphia's status as a beacon of liberty. C. H. Hall, a self-emancipator from Maryland, claimed, "I walked the streets [of Baltimore] every day, and read my own advertisement – "\$100 in the States." Sunday night I was in Columbia, Penn., where I fell in with a friend, and remained there a week, and then came to Philadelphia." He subsequently traveled onward to Upper Canada. Meanwhile, William Cornish of Maryland's Eastern Shore escaped to Wilmington, Delaware, and "took the cars... for Philadelphia. Eleven days from the time I started, I was in Canada." Some escapes to the city were truly extraordinary in terms of planning and execution. Most notably, Henry 'Box' Brown shipped himself from Richmond to Philadelphia in a box. Brown was transported through Richmond and Washington, until he reached Philadelphia in March 1849. Upon arrival in the city, he recalled, "My heart then leaped for joy."¹⁷⁵

Freedom seekers from the Mid- and Lower South also sought refuge across the Mason-Dixon line, especially in port cities like Philadelphia. In 1852, David Holmes of Mecklenburg County, Virginia ran away upon learning that his enslaver planned to sell him. When asked why he escaped northward, he claimed, "I wanted

¹⁷³ Mason, *Slavery and Politics*, 110; Margaret H. Bacon, *But One Race: The Life of Robert Purvis* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), 17; Statistics taken from Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 71-72, 137-139, 213; Richard Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 16-18; Gary B. Nash, *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 147; Switala, *Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania*, 141; Nilgun Anadolu Okur, "Underground Railroad in Philadelphia, 1830-1860," *Journal of Black Studies* 25, no. 5 (1995), 537.

¹⁷⁴ "100 Dolls. Reward," *Genius of Liberty*, Jun. 27, 1826; "SIX CENTS REWARD," *Sun*, Aug. 28, 1839;

¹⁷⁵ Blassingame (ed.), *Slave Testimony*, 416-418, 423-426; Henry 'Box' Brown, *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown, Written by Himself* (Manchester: Lee & Glynn, 1851), 40-60, accessed Apr. 8, 2019. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/brownbox/brownbox.html>.

to go towards Canada, I didn't know much about the way, but I went by the North Star." Holmes added that he had heard about Canada's reputation "from an old man, a slave, who had gone off a good many times; but he never had the luck to get right away." The journey proved perilous for Holmes, who had to contend with patrols, dogs, and a lack of knowledge about how to reach the North. With little food and water, Holmes also risked hunger, thirst, and sickness. Eventually, he met with an African American man who agreed to ferry him across the Potomac River. After crossing into Pennsylvania, Holmes came across UGRR activists who "called themselves abolitionists." They placed him in a wagon and transported him further north for several days. Holmes later met up with a free African American man "who told us we had best soon clear out; ever so many runaways had been taken from there of late, and sent back." Holmes eventually arrived in Buffalo, where he crossed into Canada via steamboat.¹⁷⁶

Philadelphia's status as a beacon of liberty was well-known among enslaved communities in the Mid- and Lower South. James Williams was forcibly removed to Alabama via the interregional slave trade. Upon learning that he was to receive 250 lashes, Williams resolved to escape to the North. His journey took him through Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland. Upon reaching Carlisle, Pennsylvania, he met some free African Americans, one of whom "took me in a wagon, and carried me some distance on my way to Harrisburg, where he said I should meet with friends. He told me [Williams] that I had better go directly to Philadelphia, as there would be less danger of my being discovered and retaken there than in the country, and there were a great many persons there who would exert themselves to secure me from the slaveholders." Williams traveled to the city, where he was "visited by a large number of the Abolitionists, and friends of the colored people[.]"¹⁷⁷

Given the distance, freedom seekers from the Mid- and Lower South often escaped via seafaring vessels on the Atlantic coast. Norfolk, Wilmington, and Savannah became important gateways to Philadelphia and other northern ports. Smaller port towns along the Eastern Seaboard also attracted freedom seekers that sought to escape aboard seafaring vessels. Across the South, writes David S. Cecelski, black watermen were "the most critical link in this oceangoing route to freedom[.]" They secreted freedom seekers on board their ships and ensured their safe passage to northern cities. In a small number of cases, white sailors and ship captains also aided freedom seekers aboard ships. Yet slave refugees had to be careful when sneaking aboard coastal ships. "Inspectors," writes Cecelski, "searched many seagoing vessels

¹⁷⁶ Blassingame (ed.), *Slave Testimony*, 295-302.

¹⁷⁷ James Williams, *Narrative of James Williams, an American Slave, Who Was for Several Years a Driver on a Cotton Plantation in Alabama* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838), 98-99 (quotes), accessed Jun. 1, 2019. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/williams/williams.html>.

and, at points, regularly fumigated ships to drive hidden runaways up onto the deck. The chance of betrayal or discovery always existed, and an extraordinarily high proportion of fugitives never reached a wharf.”¹⁷⁸

Maritime escapes were also highlighted in newspaper advertisements and reports. In 1829, Charles R. Yancey of Chapel Hill, North Carolina placed a notice for Samuel, a self-emancipated freedom seeker. “I am apprehensive,” he wrote, “that he is endeavoring to get to Philadelphia or New York. Captains of vessels will do well to recollect the severity of the law upon this subject.” Other self-emancipators detailed their escapes aboard seafaring vessels in their memoirs. In 1849, Thomas H. Jones struck a deal with a ship captain in Wilmington, North Carolina to provide his wife and children with safe passage to New York City. He had learned that his family was about to be sold. Jones later escaped via the coastal maritime routes to New York City, where he reunited with his family. He recalled, “It was a moment of joy too deep and holy for and holy for any attempt to paint it.” In response to the threat of slave catchers, Jones was compelled to escape to St. John in New Brunswick, Canada. He wrote, “I have found a home of refuge, full of true, warm, generous Christians, whose hearts, abounding with the love of God, are full of sympathy for the slave[.]”¹⁷⁹ While some ship captains and boatmen were motivated by humanitarian beliefs, others held “mercenary motives,” writes Fergus Bordewich. Akin to smugglers, sailors and captains conspired with enslaved people to secretly transport freedom seekers in return for profit. Coastal vessels became “piece[s] of free territory that suddenly came within the physical reach of restive slaves.”¹⁸⁰

While freedom-seeking men possessed more opportunities to sneak aboard steamboats and ships, some female refugees also managed to secure passage to the North. Harriet Jacobs’ escape was one of the most daring and widely publicized examples. Born in Edenton, North Carolina, Jacobs suffered years of physical and sexual abuse from her enslaver, Dr. James Norcom, which resulted in the birth of a child. In 1835, Jacobs escaped and hid in her grandmother’s attic for the next seven years. Finally, an opportunity emerged; smuggling herself aboard a ship, Jacobs made her way to Philadelphia and later traveled by train to New York City.¹⁸¹ Likewise, William and Ellen Craft, a married couple from Macon, Georgia, also escaped via the coastal maritime routes to Philadelphia. Ellen, a lighter-skinned woman, disguised herself as a male enslaver and pretended that William was her servant. The couple

¹⁷⁸ Cecelski, *The Waterman’s Song*, 123 (first quote), 125 (second quote).

¹⁷⁹ “30 DOLLARS REWARD;” *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Weekly Advertiser*, Jan. 9, 1829; Thomas H. Jones, *The Experience of Thomas H. Jones, Who Was a Slave for Forty-Three Years. Written by a Friend, As Related To Him By Brother Jones* (Boston: Bazin & Chandler, 1862), 36, 46-47, accessed May 18, 2020. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jones/jones.html>; Ripley et. al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 133-134.

¹⁸⁰ Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan*, 272-274.

¹⁸¹ Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Written by Herself* (Boston: Published for the Author, 1861), accessed Feb. 8, 2019. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html>.

traveled to Savannah, Georgia via train (approximately 200 miles), from whence they took a steamboat to Charleston, South Carolina, and another to Philadelphia.¹⁸²

New York City was another primary destination for slave refugees in the Mid-Atlantic region. With its numerous land and maritime connections, freedom seekers could reach the city on foot, by horse and carriage, by train, by boat, or other means of transportation. New York mostly welcomed self-emancipators from the Upper South. Over the antebellum era, thousands of freedom-seeking men, women, and children either sought permanent refuge in the city or journeyed onward to more secure regions. In response to cruel treatment from his enslaver, Leonard Black fled from Maryland across the Mason-Dixon line in 1837. He traveled through Pennsylvania and New Jersey, enduring physical hardships and the threat of recapture along the way. Eventually, he made it to New York City, where he managed to secure passage aboard a ship to Boston.¹⁸³

Compared to southeastern and south-central Pennsylvania, fewer freedom seekers escaped to Bedford, Somerset, Fayette, Washington, and Greene Counties in southwestern Pennsylvania. Charles Garlick, a self-emancipator Shinnston, West Virginia made his way northward through the region in 1843. He recalled, “The underground railroad was brought into use wherever practicable, there being occasional stations where I was assisted to elude my pursuers and sent ahead when safety was assured.” Garlick journeyed through Uniontown and Greentown, where he remained a few days before traveling onward to Pittsburgh by horseback. He journeyed onward to New Castle and subsequently Trumbull County, Ohio. Garlick soon heard that “some southerners, presumably in search of runaway slaves, were in the vicinity,” and continued onward through northeast Ohio. He eventually resettled in Upper Canada.¹⁸⁴

In 1820, the *Genius of Liberty* published a notice James Tate, whose enslaver believed that “he has shaped his course towards the western parts of Pennsylvania, where he will endeavour [sic] to pass for a free man.” A young but rapidly growing city, Pittsburgh was an appealing destination for freedom seekers. By 1850, almost 2,000 African Americans lived and worked in the city. William J. Switala writes that Pittsburgh “was a natural junction for fugitives trying to escape bondage, as it was

¹⁸² William and Ellen Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, the Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery* (London: William Tweedie, 1860), accessed Feb. 8, 2019.

<https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/craft/craft.html>.

¹⁸³ Leonard Black, *The Life and Sufferings of Leonard Black, a Fugitive from Slavery. Written by Himself* (New Bedford, MA: Benjamin Lindsey, 1847), accessed May 20, 2020.

<https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/black/black.html>.

¹⁸⁴ Charles A. Garlick, *Life, Including His Escape and Struggle for Liberty of Charles A. Garlick, Born a Slave in Old Virginia, Who Secured His Freedom by Running Away from His Master's Farm in 1843* (Jefferson, OH: J.A. Howells and Co., 1902), 5-13, accessed Apr. 20, 2020.

<https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/garlick/garlick.html>.

located at the confluence of the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio Rivers; was on several rail lines; and had numerous roads leading in and out.”¹⁸⁵

Letters from white abolitionists and their descendants offer glimpses into western Pennsylvania’s UGRR networks. In December 1895, John Rouse wrote to Wilbur H. Siebert, “I lived close to the Mason-Dixon line in Bedford County, Pa., on a farm called the Bear Tract Station. The fugitives would come there from Cumberland, Md.” In one instance, he recalled the arrival of a freedom seeker named Jacob Dicken “who belonged to a man named Willeby, who had sold Dicken, and had the money for him.” Rouse and his associates forged freedom papers for Dicken and later “took him up on the mountain, and put him on the right road.” Over the antebellum period, Rouse aided other slave refugees from Maryland and Virginia. Meanwhile, Joseph S. White of New Castle wrote, “I would say that every county of western Pennsylvania had its branch railroad, or rather branches, for mostly there were several routes.” On one occasion, White claimed that ten freedom seekers from Virginia “came by way of Uniontown, Fayette County... to Pittsburgh, then by Butler County, to New Castle[.]”¹⁸⁶

Geographic factors explain why freedom seekers were less inclined to take this route. Southwestern Pennsylvania’s mountainous terrain proved challenging to navigate. Furthermore, most African American communities were located in southeastern and south-central Pennsylvania. Nevertheless, some self-emancipators made their way north via western Pennsylvania. In 1850, the *Huntingdon Journal* reported that ten freedom seekers from Virginia “lost their way on the ridge of the Alleghenies, eight miles east of [Bedford, Pennsylvania]. They were discovered last Monday and attacked by Pennsylvania men; one of them was mortally wounded, and another dangerously so.” Additionally, as Matthew Pinsker writes, “there were fewer free black residents, fewer white abolitionists, and fewer organized vigilance committees,” and that enslaved African Americans in the Appalachian Upper South “were less likely to be urban or literate, and thus less likely to run away.”¹⁸⁷ In 1850, the *Philadelphia Press* reported that ten self-emancipators “ran away from the vicinity of Pruntytown, [present-day West Virginia], last week... the negroes were overtaken in Fayette [C]ounty, Pa., where a desperate fight took place, and the owners and other

¹⁸⁵ “\$30 Reward,” *Genius of Liberty*, Oct. 10, 1820; Richard J. M. Blackett, “Freedom, or the Martyr’s Grave”: Black Pittsburgh’s Aid to the Fugitive Slave,” *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 61, no. 2 (1978), 117-118; Switala, *Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania*, 81.

¹⁸⁶ John W. Rouse letter to Wilbur H. Siebert, Dec. 23, 1895. WHSC. MSS116AV BOX63 F03 042. OHC, accessed May 2, 2020. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/21624/rec/152>; Joseph S. White letter to Wilbur H. Siebert, January 1897. WHSC. MSS116AV BOX64 F05 018. OHC, accessed May 2, 2020. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/20363/rec/50>.

¹⁸⁷ “Slaves Recaptured,” *Huntingdon Journal*, Oct. 15, 1850; Matthew Pinsker, “Vigilance in Pennsylvania: Underground Railroad Activities in the Keystone State, 1837-1861,” Report Presented at the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Annual Conference on Black History, Harrisburg, 2000, 85.

pursuing were beaten back.”¹⁸⁸ Freedom seekers that escaped via western Pennsylvania often continued onward to the former Northwest Territory. In 1807, the *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette* printed an advertisement for a self-emancipator named Gilbert from Ann Arundel County, Maryland. His enslaver claimed, “it is supposed is making his way to the Ohio, in order to go down the river, as he has a wife belonging to Mr. William Johnson, who is now moved out to Kentucky with his family to settle in that country.”¹⁸⁹ While most freedom seekers escaped with minimal or no external assistance, many were aided by UGRR activists and vigilance committees.

Vigilance Committees and the UGRR in Philadelphia, New York City, and Beyond

By the 1830s, African Americans and white abolitionists had established more sophisticated UGRR networks and societies in the Mason-Dixon borderland. This was perhaps best symbolized by the formation of vigilance committees which, in the words of Jesse Olsavsky, were clandestine organizations that “illegally aided hundreds of fugitive slaves in their exodus from slavery.” Vigilance committees in Philadelphia, New York City, and elsewhere recorded the names, physical details, and biographical information of hundreds of freedom seekers they aided to the North and Canada. Indeed, without these secretive organizations, it is likely that countless self-emancipated refugees, and particularly freedom-seeking families, would likely never have escaped from the South.¹⁹⁰

Philadelphia was home to one of the strongest UGRR communities in the country. The Vigilant Association of Philadelphia formed the backbone of the city’s network. Founded in August 1837, it played a vital role in helping free African Americans and self-emancipated refugees. Beverly C. Tomek writes that the organization “offered fugitives boarding, clothing, medical attention, legal counsel, and guidance farther north... Most of these fugitives were from Virginia and Maryland, and most went to Canada via New York.”¹⁹¹ Robert Purvis, the President of the Vigilant Association, was an instrumental figure in the society’s early years. A

¹⁸⁸ “FIGHT WITH RUNAWAY NEGROES,” *Press* (Philadelphia, PA), Nov. 10, 1858. For more on the UGRR in Western Pennsylvania, see W. Thomas Mainwaring, *Abandoned Tracks: The Underground Railroad in Washington County, Pennsylvania* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018).

¹⁸⁹ “One Hundred Dollars Reward,” *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette*, May 19, 1807.

¹⁹⁰ Jesse Olsavsky, “Runaway Slaves, Vigilance Committees, and the Pedagogy of Revolutionary Abolitionism, 1835-1863,” in Marcus Rediker, Titas Chakraborty, and Matthias van Rossum (eds.), *A Global History of Runaways: Workers, Mobility, and Capitalism, 1600-1850* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019), 216.

¹⁹¹ Beverly C. Tomek, “Vigilance Committees,” *PhiladelphiaEncyclopedia.org*, accessed Mar. 12, 2019. <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/vigilance-committees/>.

secret room in the basement of his Philadelphia home was used to hide freedom seekers. Other members included James McCrummell, James Needham, and Jacob C. White. African American and white women abolitionists also played a vital role in the city's UGRR operations. In July 1838, activists established the Female Vigilant Association, which managed fundraising activities and organized anti-slavery fairs. Yet women were also instrumental in aiding freedom seekers directly. Purvis wrote to Wilbur H. Siebert in 1895, "A great number (of helpers were) here – the most efficient persons were women agents who brought the slaves. One was a black woman, the other a mulatto. Boats plying between the South and Philadelphia brought in (runaways)... Of the hundreds of slaves who passed through [sic] the hands of the Vigilance Committee we never lost a one."¹⁹²

Vigilant Committee records illustrate the importance of the organization to the city's UGRR network. Between May 1839 and March 1840, the Vigilance Committee documented sixty-two cases involving freedom seekers, most of whom escaped from Maryland and Virginia. Most entries included only brief facts, including the number of self-emancipators, place of origin, and destination. Specific details, such as names and physical descriptions, were generally omitted. While most entries were for individual newcomers or small groups of two or three, some detailed the arrival of freedom-seeking family units. The entry for November 5, 1839 reads, "Eight persons from [Virginia], a very interesting Family, sent to Canada accompanied by the agent." The Vigilant Association experienced significant strain and hostility from locals. In 1842, a white mob attacked Purvis' home, leading him to relocate from the city. "With Purvis gone," writes Beverly Tomek, "the committee essentially ceased to function."¹⁹³ Despite this, the UGRR remained an active movement in Philadelphia. On September 26, 1842, abolitionist Joshua Coffin wrote, "There are now 31 persons here, men, women, and children, who are on their way to Canada & will start tomorrow morning."¹⁹⁴

During the 1850s, Philadelphia's Vigilance Committee was revived by free black abolitionist William Still. Born in New Jersey, Still dedicated his life to aiding

¹⁹² Tomek, "Vigilance Committees"; "Robert Purvis (1810-1898), *BlackPast.org*, Accessed Mar. 13, 2019. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/purvis-robert-1810-1898/>; Robert Purvis to Wilbur H. Siebert, Dec. 23, 1895. WHSC, MSS116AV BOX65 F01 033. OHC, accessed Sep. 1, 2018. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/24819/rec/9>. For more on the life and work of Robert Purvis, see Bacon, *But One Race*. For an excellent assessment of women's activism within northern vigilance committees, see Jesse Olsavsky, "Women, vigilance committees, and the rise of militant abolitionism, 1835-1859," *Slavery & Abolition* 39, no. 2 (2018), 357-382.

¹⁹³ Minutes of the Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia, Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia Records (Collection 1121). Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, PA. For more on the Philadelphia Vigilant Committee, see Joseph A. Boromé, "The Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 92 (1968), 320-351.

¹⁹⁴ Coffin, Joshua, and Maria West Chapman. "Letter from Joshua Coffin, Philadelphia, [Pennsylvania], to Maria West Chapman, 1842 Sept[ember] 26." Correspondence. Sep. 26, 1842. *Digital Commonwealth*, accessed Jun. 3, 2020. <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:2z111138j>.

freedom seekers to the North and Canada. He recorded the names, profiles, and motivations of hundreds of slave refugees, as well as the routes they took. Most arrived at his Philadelphia office on foot from the Upper South. Yet others arrived by stagecoach, train, or boat. In 1854, Solomon Brow and William B. White escaped to Philadelphia aboard the steamboat *City of Richmond*, which regularly traveled between northern and southern port cities. Likewise, Clarissa Davis from Portsmouth, Virginia managed to sneak aboard a ship at night while dressed in male attire. Commenting on the arrival of six freedom seekers from Baltimore, Still described the city as “one of the most difficult places in the South for even free colored people to get away from, much more for slaves. The rule forbade any colored person leaving there by rail road [sic] or steamboat.”¹⁹⁵

Still’s records illustrate the complex relationship between kinship ties and self-emancipation. In many instances, mothers fled to the city with their children. On July 20, 1853, Still recorded the arrival of Charlotte Harris from Wilmington, Delaware, who “brought with her a son... nine years of age and a younger one... 10 [months] old.” By contrast, Still only recorded a handful of self-emancipated fathers arriving with their children or two-parent family units in his records. On March 31, 1853, he recorded the arrival of James Gibbs and his two sons from Greensburg, Maryland. One year later, Stephen Amos and his wife Harriet (alias Henry Johnson and Mary Jane Johnson) fled from Baltimore to Philadelphia with their four children.¹⁹⁶ Still’s records also demonstrate that freedom seekers were often forced to escape without enslaved parents, spouses, and children. On October 25, 1853, Still noted that Nelson Harris, who escaped from Richmond, “left a wife; Rosanna; a son John Henry & a daughter Evelina. Nelson was induced to fly for his liberty through the fear of being sold[.]” Likewise, William Davis of Portsmouth, Virginia, was forced to leave behind “a wife, Catherine, a daughter Louisa... and a Son [William]” when his enslaver “threatened to sell him[.]”¹⁹⁷

In short, Philadelphia’s African American and white abolitionist community offered slave refugees protection from re-enslavement. However, the city’s proximity to the Mason-Dixon line meant that self-emancipators were not completely secure. Enslavers and kidnappers regularly searched for freedom seekers in Philadelphia (for more on recaption and kidnapping, see Chapter Four). Reports of kidnappings in the city, or from nearby towns and settlements, convinced many freedom seekers that they needed to move farther north. In March 1844, the *Philadelphia Times* reported

¹⁹⁵ Jeffrey, *Abolitionists Remember*, 61-62; Feb. 13, 1854, Apr. 23, 1854, and May 22, 1854 in William Still, Journal C of Station No. 2 of the Underground Railroad, 1852-1857. PAS Paper Series V – Miscellaneous, Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, Section 5. PAS Paper Series 5.48. Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, PA.; Still, *The Underground Rail Road*, 136. The group of six is also mentioned in Apr. 19, 1853 in Still, Journal C.

¹⁹⁶ Still, Journal C, Mar. 31, 1863, Jul. 20, 1853, May 12, 1854.

¹⁹⁷ Still, Journal C, Oct. 25, 1853, Dec. 15, 1854.

on the kidnapping of a “stout athletic colored man, known as “Big Ben,” who has resided for the past, ten or twelve years near Forresstville, Bucks County, Pa., was taken by several persons on Friday last, as a runaway slave from one on them a planter in Virginia, from whom it seems he had escaped some twelve years earlier.” Ninety miles north of Philadelphia, New York City was a popular destination for slave refugees. In 1810, more than 7,000 free African Americans lived and worked in the city, a number which grew steadily over the antebellum era. Philadelphia abolitionists regularly forwarded freedom seekers to New York City.¹⁹⁸

After leaving Philadelphia, many freedom seekers journeyed to New York City. Aside from its significant black population, the city also offered an abundance of socio-economic opportunities. Furthermore, New York’s UGRR network became increasingly active and organized. In 1835, free African American activist David Ruggles founded the New York City Committee of Vigilance. He wrote in the *Liberator*, “We must no longer depend on the interposition of the Manumission or Anti-Slavery Societies, in the hope of peaceable and just protection... We must look to our own safety[.]” Ruggles and the New York Vigilance Committee (NYVC) sheltered freedom seekers and protected free blacks from kidnapping. While the NYVC was an officially biracial organization, Eric Foner writes that “most of those who attended its meetings and took part in its activities were black New Yorkers.”¹⁹⁹

Two years after its formation, the *New York Evangelist* reported on its annual meeting at the AME Episcopal Zion Church. Attendee William Johnston declared, “There are multitudes of fugitive slaves who take refuge here,” and asserted that the organization aimed “to throw a shield of protection around the fireside of the free colored man, and to aid the poor fugitive slave in escaping to a land of freedom[.]” Yet the NYVC soon experienced financial difficulties, which were compounded by schisms among its leadership. Ruggles’ openly confrontational style had always proven too radical for some members of New York’s black leadership. The NYVC was eventually disbanded in 1846 and absorbed into the New York State Vigilance Committee.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ “FRACAS – RUNAWAY SLAVE RECAPTURED,” *Philadelphia Times*, reprinted in *Daily Morning Post*, Mar. 30, 1844; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 56, 74.

¹⁹⁹ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 210; “KIDNAPPING IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK,” *Liberator*, Aug. 6, 1836; Graham Russell Gao Hodges, *David Ruggles: A Radical Black Abolitionist and the Underground Railroad in New York City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 88; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 3: The United States, 1830-1846*, 177-179; Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 65. For more on David Ruggles and the New York Vigilance Committee, see Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 63-90; Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan*, 171-176, 185-186; Hodges, *Root & Branch*, 245-251.

²⁰⁰ “NEW YORK VIGILANCE COMMITTEE,” *New York Evangelist*, May 20, 1837; Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, Ch. 3. Other meetings of the New York Vigilance Committee are detailed in New York Committee of Vigilance. The first annual report of the New York Committee of Vigilance for the year 1837; together with important facts relative to their proceedings. New York, 1837. Slavery and Anti-Slavery. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 2 Apr. 2019.

As was the case in Philadelphia, New York City's UGRR network was revitalized in the 1850s. According to Foner, the city "consolidated its position as a crucial hub in a complex set of networks that stretched along the metropolitan corridor of the East Coast[.]" Black and white abolitionists in New York City set about revitalizing the city's freedom network. White abolitionist attorney and editor Sydney Howard Gay became an instrumental figure. Self-emancipators regularly sought assistance from his office. Alongside other well-known activists, including free black activist Louis Napoleon, Gay assisted slave refugees from New York City to more secure regions, namely Upstate New York, New England, and even Canada. Between 1855 and 1856, Gay recorded the arrival of 214 freedom seekers at his New York City office. 137 were men, 44 were women, and 29 were children (four were not specified). Roughly 160 came from Maryland and Virginia, while only 10 were from Washington and 19 from North Carolina.²⁰¹

Gay's journal offers excellent insight into the profiles of freedom seekers in the city, the nature of self-emancipation, and the various escape networks and routes to freedom. As Foner notes, popular understandings of self-emancipation typically involve "lone fugitives." However, Gay's records reveal that countless groups passed through New York City. On May 15, 1856, Bill Henry Mason and William Chambers, both from Georgetown Roads, Maryland, escaped to Philadelphia with three other unnamed freedom seekers. The men "Walked to Mt. Pleasant, [and] took [the] cars, were questioned but not stopped. Went to Wilmington, [and] thence to [Philadelphia]." Still forwarded the trio to New York City. On October 3, 1855, he recorded the arrival of Sam Turner and Wesley Jones from Chestertown, Maryland "with seven others, among whom two were women[.]" The group "made their way by night to Wilmington, Del[aware] where they found friends," before being forwarded to New York.²⁰²

Freedom-seeking couples, including spouses, appear regularly among Gay's entries. On December 5, 1855, Jacob and Cornelia Hall arrived at his office. Gay wrote, "Jacob had been promised his freedom at 21 by his mistress, but she dying before that time, he was taken by [Col. William] Hutchins [and] held as a slave. Cornelia was about to be sold but not liking her proposed new master, determined to

²⁰¹ Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 150; Don Papson and Tom Calarco, *Secret Lives of the Underground Railroad in New York City: Sydney Howard Gay, Louis Napoleon, and the Record of Fugitives*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2015), 13-31, 81, 89-117. For an excellent assessment of Louis Napoleon's activism in New York City, see Sarah Levine-Gronningsater, "Delivering Freedom: Gradual Emancipation, Black Legal Culture, and the Origins of Sectional Crisis in New York, 1759-1870," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2014), Ch. 6.

²⁰² Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 205; Gay, Sydney Howard, 1814-1888, "Record of Fugitives. Book 2, page [13]," *Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions*, accessed May 10, 2020, <https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/fugitives/item/8911>; "Record of Fugitives. Book 1, page [14]," *Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions*, accessed Jun. 16, 2020, <https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/fugitives/item/8860>.

cleave to her husband.” One night, Jacob stole one of Hutchins’ horses and “drove about 15 or 18 miles to New Market, then turned [the] horses loose, to find their way back if they could.” From there, the couple traveled onward to Little York, Pennsylvania, where they met a white man who “took them to [the] colored church, [and] there they fell among friends.” During this time, Jacob “drove a horse on [the] Canal from Millersburg to Wrightsville,” while Cornelia stayed at Millersburg.²⁰³

Nuclear family units (i.e. two parents and children) appear less frequently in Gay’s journals. Perhaps this speaks to the structure of enslaved families in the Upper South. On April 7, 1856, Otho Taylor, his wife, and their two children arrived at Gay’s New York City office in search of assistance. The family lived across two farmsteads near Clear Spring, Maryland, “seven miles from [the Pennsylvania] Line” when they decided to escape from their enslaver. “There were eight together in the company,” wrote Gay, “who filled two carriages. When near Chambersburg, one of [the] carriages broke down. Otho put his wife [and] one child on [the] horse, and his brother took [the] others.” Fortunately, they managed to repair the carriage and continued onward to New York City, from whence they traveled to Canada.²⁰⁴

Meanwhile, single-parent units, typically mothers and children, were more common. On March 27, 1856, Gay recorded the arrival of Isaiah Robinson and a group of freedom seekers, most of whom came from Norfolk, Virginia. Gay wrote, “He with seven others, five of whom were from Norfolk, his sister [and] three children being four, were taken on board a [schooner] to Wilmington, [Delaware].” Robinson’s sister, Rebecca Jones, was among the group; she escaped with her three children. According to Gay, “two of her brothers, [and] a sister were sold, [and] she had reason to suppose that she [and] her children would follow.” Similarly, Caroline Taylor and her two daughters escaped with the group. The entry states, “Her husband is a free man, now at sea, in the US Steamer Saranac... Many of her master’s relatives having died last year of yellow fever, he determined to sell his slaves, which Caroline determined that, so far as the other children were concerned, he should not.”²⁰⁵

Rather than escape together, freedom-seeking families often fled from the South in stages. Husbands, wives, and other relatives often staggered their escapes, with the plan of reuniting at a later time. On November 17, 1855, Catherine Pitts

²⁰³ Gay, Sydney Howard, 1814-1888, “Record of Fugitives. Book 1, page [27],” *Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions*, accessed Jun. 16, 2020, <https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/fugitives/item/8873>.

²⁰⁴ Gay, Sydney Howard, 1814-1888, “Record of Fugitives. Book 2, page [4],” *Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions*, accessed Jun. 16, 2020, <https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/fugitives/item/8902>.

²⁰⁵ Gay, Sydney Howard, 1814-1888, “Record of Fugitives. Book 1, page [43],” *Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions*, accessed Jun. 16, 2020, <https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/fugitives/item/8889>; “Record of Fugitives. Book 2, page [2],” *Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions*, accessed Jun. 16, 2020, <https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/fugitives/item/8900>.

arrived with “an infant in arms.” Originally from Maryland, Pitts managed to escape with help from her husband, whom Gay noted “took them in a wagon to Baltimore Hundred [Del.], thence she walked some distance, [and] finally got to [Philadelphia] by steam boat.” Gay arranged for Pitts to be sent onward to Syracuse and noted that she expected her husband and brother “to follow her with a child she left behind.” Other entries also referred to self-emancipators who sought to reunite with family members elsewhere. The previously mentioned Samuel Hill who escaped to Gay’s office reportedly had “a brother at St. Catherine’s [sic] Canada, who ran away a year ago, [and] whom he wishes to join.” Likewise, Laura Lewis, who escaped from her enslaver in Baltimore, informed Gay that she planned to meet four others in St. Catharines.²⁰⁶

Some freedom seekers signaled their intention to rescue family members. On April 11, 1856, Charles Carter of Richmond, Virginia made his way to New York City. Gay recorded that he “has a wife at Alexandria [and] four children...whom he was allowed to go [and] see occasionally.” Carter decided to escape after learning that his enslaver, “thinking that this very habit of going to Alexandria might lead [Charles] to acquire a taste for travelling [sic], had determined to sell him[.]” Carter fled to Washington where he stayed hidden for the winter, before making his way to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and later New York City, from whence he was sent to New Bedford, Massachusetts. Gay noted that Carter “is determined to get his wife [and] children somehow.” Similarly, on September 1, 1856, Gay documented the arrival of Benjamin Wilson, alias Samuel Thornton. Wilson “left a wife [and] two children from whom he thinks of returning.” Otho Taylor returned to the South “to bring away his parents [and] brother [and] sister, but did not succeed. They had been promised their freedom [and] preferred to remain till [the] time was up.”²⁰⁷

Although many self-emancipators remained in New York, others journeyed onward to New England. New Haven, Providence, Newport, Worcester, New Bedford, and Boston received countless slave refugees. In 1850, about 2,000 African Americans officially resided in Boston. Meanwhile, in 1853, roughly 1,600 people of

²⁰⁶ Gay, Sydney Howard, 1814-1888, “Record of Fugitives. Book 1, page [19],” *Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions*, accessed Jun. 16, 2020, <https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/fugitives/item/8865>; “Record of Fugitives. Book 1, page [9],” *Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions*, accessed Jun. 16, 2020, <https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/fugitives/item/8855>; “Record of Fugitives. Book 2, page [7],” *Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions*, accessed Jun. 16, 2020, <https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/fugitives/item/8905>.

²⁰⁷ Gay, Sydney Howard, 1814-1888, “Record of Fugitives. Book 2, page [6],” *Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions*, accessed Jun. 16, 2020, <https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/fugitives/item/8904>; “Record of Fugitives. Book 2, page [7],” *Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions*, accessed Jun. 16, 2020, https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/fugitives/record_fugitives/book2/page7; “Record of Fugitives. Book 2, page [33],” *Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions*, accessed Jun. 16, 2020, <https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/fugitives/item/8931>.

color resided in New Bedford. Newspapers in New England regularly documented the arrival of freedom seekers from the South. In December 1855, the *Huntingdon Journal* reported sixteen freedom seekers arrived in New Bedford.²⁰⁸

The Boston Vigilance Committee (BVC) was arguably the most influential of these organizations in New England. It received freedom seekers in the Bay City and forwarded some to the Canadian Maritimes, Lower Canada, and Upper Canada.²⁰⁹ In 1854, Francis Jackson wrote Theodore Parker that he found a list with “the names of 230 fugitive slaves which have been assisted by the [Boston] vigilance committee” over the previous four years. Meanwhile, vigilance committees were also formed in other towns and villages in Massachusetts, such as Millbury and Harwich. In 1851, William Henry Fish of Milford wrote to Samuel J. May that the local vigilance committee was active in the region.²¹⁰

Other freedom seekers headed from New York City towards central and Upstate New York. UGRR networks between the regions ensured the safe transportation of slave refugees. In Pleasantville, Westchester County, two Quakers (James and Joseph Pierce) received many freedom seekers. One abolitionist recalled that “Brother Joseph’s house... [is] one known to fugitives, and many within a year have been refreshed with bread & cheese... & sometimes assisted in the darkness of the night with a conveyance to another friend who in turn shall aid him[.]”²¹¹ Albany,

²⁰⁸ Kathryn Grover, *The Fugitive’s Gibraltar: Escaping Slaves and Abolitionism in New Bedford, Massachusetts* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 56; “Fugitive Slaves,” *Huntingdon Journal*, Dec. 5, 1855.

²⁰⁹ “Fugitive Slaves aided by the Vigilance Committee since the Passage of the Fugitive Slave Bill, 1850,” Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society Records, 1850-1858. New York Historical Society. Digital version accessed Sep. 1, 2019. <http://digitalcollections.nyhistory.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A142855#page/1/mode/2up>. For the BVC’s membership list, see Austin Bearse, *Reminiscences of Fugitive-Slave Law Days in Boston* (Boston, MA: Warren Richardson, 1880), 3-6, accessed May 20, 2020. <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=mayantislavery&cc=mayantislavery&idno=12851220&q1=underground+railroad&view=image&seq=1&size=100>. Bearse details interracial abolitionist and UGRR activism in Boston. In particular, he notes the escape of slave refugees to Boston (and his role in assisting them) via coastal maritime routes (see pp. 8-12).

²¹⁰ Jackson, Francis, and Theodore Parker. “Letter from Francis Jackson to Theodore Parker, 1854 June 11.” Correspondence. Jun. 11, 1854. *Digital Commonwealth*, accessed Jun. 2, 2020. <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:2z111b07d>. For the Millbury and Harwich vigilance committee membership lists, see Parker, Theodore, and Millbury (Mass.) Citizens. “Letter from Citizens of Millbury [Mass.] to Theodore Parker, July 1/18[54].” Correspondence. Jul. 1, 1854. *Digital Commonwealth*, accessed Jun. 3, 2020. <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:6w925c20t>; Parker, Theodore, and Harwich (Mass.) Citizens. “Letter from Citizens of Harwich [Mass.] to Theodore Parker, Aug. 17, 1854.” Correspondence. Aug. 17, 1854. *Digital Commonwealth*, accessed Jun. 3, 2020. <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:6w925c23n>; Fish, William H. (William Henry), and Jr. Samuel May. “Letter from William Henry Fish, Milford, [Massachusetts], to Samuel May, [18]51 July 7.” Correspondence. Jul. 7, 1851. *Digital Commonwealth*, accessed Jun. 3, 2020. <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:2z110n72d>.

²¹¹ Snodgrass, *Underground Railroad*, 415; Pierce, A. Letter from A. Pierce to Thomas Howland, April 10, 1838. *Howland Family Papers (MS 923)*. Special Collections and University Archives, University of

Utica, Troy, Syracuse, Auburn, Buffalo, and Rochester also had sizable black and white abolitionist communities. In 1850, more than 1,000 African Americans were recorded in Albany and 549 resided in Rochester. 150 black residents were also documented in surrounding Monroe County. Frederick Douglass, Samuel J. May, and Jermain Wesley Loguen were among the leading figures in Upstate New York's UGRR.²¹² Newspaper accounts detail the escape of freedom seekers to the region. In 1850, the Mississippi *Organizer* reported that sixteen refugees passed through Utica aboard "a boat for Canada... They were well armed, and determined to fight to the last minute." Ten years later, the *Keowee Courier* reported on the escape of John Niles from South Carolina to Rochester. After a brief stay, he crossed into Canada to reunite with his parents.²¹³

Vigilance committees operated in towns and cities across Upstate New York. The Albany Vigilance Committee (AVC) was integral to assisting freedom seekers. Abolitionist and Baptist minister Abel Brown claimed that the organization "often found themselves in personal contest with slaveholders and their abettors[.]" The AVC's first annual report claimed that "no less than 350 fugitives had been aided to a place of safety by the Committee, at an expense of more than one thousand dollars." In 1844, members of the committee were instrumental in assisting William Johnson, a self-emancipator from Missouri, and his family to Canada. The *Fremont Journal* later reported that "287 fugitive slaves passed through the city of Albany, en route to Canada" between September 1855 and July 1856.²¹⁴

Like other vigilance committees, the AVC was an interracial organization. Stephen Myers, a formerly enslaved black activist, even served as the AVC's president at one stage. In 1858, he wrote in a letter, "Durring [sic] the last 18 months we hav [sic] had more fugitives than we hav [sic] had in former times[.]" Three years

Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. Amherst, MA, accessed Jun. 5, 2020.

<https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums923-b01-f19-i002>. For more on the UGRR in central and Upstate New York (as well as New Jersey), see William J. Switala, *Underground Railroad in New Jersey and New York* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2006).

²¹² Switala, *Underground Railroad in New Jersey and New York*, 89-90; Dann J. Broyld, "'Over the Way': On the Border of Canada before the Civil War," in Paul Lovejoy and Vanessa S. Oliveira (eds.), *Slavery, Memory, Citizenship*, 110. For population statistics for central and western New York, see Switala, *Underground Railroad in New Jersey and New York*, 110, 128. For more on the transnational black freedom network in the Niagara River borderland, with particular emphasis on black communities in Rochester and St. Catharines, see Dann J. Broyld, "The 'Dark Sheep' of the Atlantic World: Following the Transnational Trail of Blacks to Canada," in Benjamin Talton and Quincy T. Mills (eds.), *Black Subjects in Africa and Its Diasporas: Race and Gender in Research and Writing* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 95-108.

²¹³ "FUGITIVE SLAVES," *Organizer* (Oxford, MS), Nov. 9, 1850; "THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD," *Keowee Courier* (Pickens Court House, SC), Jan. 21, 1860.

²¹⁴ C.S. Brown, *Memoir of Rev. Abel Brown, By His Companion, C.S. Brown* (Worcester, MA: Published by the Author, 1849), 128 (first quote), 150 (second quote); "FATE OF A RETAKEN FUGITIVE SLAVE," *Voice of Freedom* (Montpellier, VT), Mar. 14, 1844; "The underground railroad..." *Fremont Journal* (Fremont, OH), Nov. 7, 1856; Ripley et. al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 4: The United States, 1847-1858*, 407-410.

later, Myers wrote in the *Pine and Palm* that freedom seekers “are sent to me by the Underground Railroad... and in many cases they come poorly clad[.]” Slave refugees arrived at his Albany office “every few days” and were typically forwarded to Canada. Myers claimed to have directed 654 refugees (men, women, and children) to Canada over the previous eight years.²¹⁵ Vigilance committees and anti-slavery societies elsewhere in western and Upstate New York aided freedom seekers to Canada. In Syracuse, the Fugitive Aid Society was founded in 1857 to provide food, shelter, and transportation to black refugees.²¹⁶

Freedom seekers often settled in towns and cities across Upstate New York. Yet some believed that only Canada guaranteed true freedom and security. Canadian-bound refugees typically crossed into British North America via Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, or the Niagara River. Anti-slavery societies documented cases of freedom seekers escaping to Canada via the Niagara borderland. In its third annual report, the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) noted that a freedom-seeking family from Georgia had recently secured passage aboard the steamboat *Henry Clay* in Buffalo. It claimed that the “powerful current of the Niagara swept the boat rapidly into deep water, beyond the reach of tyranny... the man with his wife and children, were all safe on British soil, protected by British laws!!”²¹⁷

Women’s organizations also played an important role in aiding freedom seekers *en route* to Canada. Rochester Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society (RLASS) kept various letters that detailed the arrival and departure of numerous self-emancipated refugees. Frederick Douglass wrote several letters to white abolitionist Maria G. Porter of Rochester over the 1850s. One dated February 22 (year unknown) stated, “I have a poor fugitive at my office on his way to Canada – without money. I have assisted him as well as I can but am compelled to call upon you for two dollars.” In another letter, dated March 27 (year unknown), Douglass requested one dollar “to pay for the board of a fugitive[.]”²¹⁸

Abolitionists in the Niagara borderland maintained lines of communication with activists elsewhere. Moses Anderson, a black activist in Greencastle, Pennsylvania, wrote to Porter in 1853, “we hear almost weekly of some one escaping

²¹⁵ Stephen Myers, “ABOUT THE U.G.R.R.,” *Pine and Palm* (Boston, MA), Jun. 29, 1861.

²¹⁶ Milton C. Sernett, *North Star Country: Upstate New York and the Crusade for African American Freedom* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002); “AFRICAN AID SOCIETY,” *Auburn Daily Advertiser*, reprinted in *Liberator*, May 1, 1857. Members of the FAS included Samuel J. May and Jermain W. Loguen.

²¹⁷ American Anti-Slavery Society. *Third Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society; with the Speeches Delivered at the Anniversary Meeting, held in the City of New York, on the 10th May, 1836, and the Minutes of the Meetings of the Society for Business* (New York, NY: William S. Dorr, 1836), 19-20, accessed May 28, 2020. <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=mayantisavery&cc=mayantisavery&idno=02817310&q1=Canada&view=image&seq=1&size=100>.

²¹⁸ Frederick Douglass to Maria G. Porter, Feb. 22, [year unknown]; Mar. 27 [year unknown]. Rochester Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society Records. Box 1. WLC, UM. Ann Arbor, Michigan.

from the jaws of slavery to the land of freedom though they are watched by the pro Slavery party and their accomplices[.]” Three-and-a-half years later, black abolitionist William J. Watkins wrote, “from Dec. 15th [1856] to Aug. 9th [1857], I passed 59 fugitives to Canada, as follows. [Six] to Toronto, and 53 to Suspension Bridge, St. Catharines, Hamilton, &c.”²¹⁹ One letter noted the work of freedom seekers, such as Harriet Tubman. In November 1856, William E. Abbot, who served as treasurer of the FAS in Syracuse, directly referenced Tubman’s activism in another letter:

The woman who accompanies the party on their way to Freedom is well known to us for her untiring devotion to the cause of the enslaved. She is herself an escaped bondwoman and this second company she has brought forth out of the land of servitude at great risk to herself. It has been our custom to forward all directly on to the [Niagara Falls Suspension] Bridge. But now our funds fail us & are obliged to send them forward to different half way houses that are on their route.²²⁰

Activists also liberated enslaved people that were brought by their enslavers to the border zone. In 1846, Cecelia Jane Reynolds, an enslaved girl from Louisville, Kentucky, was taken by her enslavers to the Cataract House at Niagara Falls. Upon discovering this, black waiters at the hotel made arrangements for Reynolds to sail across the river on a rowboat. While her enslavers were away, she secreted herself across the Niagara River. After reaching Canada, she traveled to St. Catharines and later settled in Toronto.²²¹ Other reports illustrate the efforts of UGRR activists to assist enslaved people brought to the Falls. The *Detroit Free Press* noted that “an attempt was made by colored persons residing at Niagara Falls, to kidnap some colored servants of Southerners, visiting at the Falls, and they so far succeeded as to get them away from their masters and conceal them.” Meanwhile, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* reported that an enslaved woman at the hotel “stated that she was wretched beyond description of the cruel treatment of her master and mistress. She wished them to convey her to *the Canada side*, where she would be protected by *British laws*.”²²²

²¹⁹ Moses Anderson ALS to Maria G. Porter, December 12, 1853; William J. Watkins to Mrs. Armstrong, Aug. 1857. Rochester Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society Records. Box 1. WLC, UM. Ann Arbor, Michigan; Blackett, *Captive’s Quest for Freedom*, 460.

²²⁰ W. E. Abbott to Maria G. Porter, Nov. 29, 1856. Rochester Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society Records. Box 1. WLC, UM. Ann Arbor, Michigan. Abbott letter also quoted in Sernett, *North Star Country*, 190.

²²¹ For more on the escape and life of Cecelia Jane Reynolds, see Smardz Frost, *Steal Away Home*, esp. Ch. 2.

²²² “AFFRAY AT THE FALLS,” *Detroit Free Press*, Jul. 14, 1847; “Riot at Niagara – Colony of Coloured People at Queen’s Bush, Canada,” *NASS*, Jul. 29, 1847.

Steamboats in the transnational border zone provided safe passage for other freedom seekers. Jacob D. Green, a freedom seeker from Kentucky, fled to Lewiston where he “was placed on board a steamboat called Chief Justice Robinson... Three hours after starting, I was in Toronto... where I lived for three years and sang my, song of deliverance.” Others employed more drastic methods. In 1853, Ben Hockley, a freedom seeker from Tennessee, fled to Lewiston, New York, where he “lashed himself to a gate, and launched forth upon the Niagara River, in hopes that he should make his way to the Canada shore.” He was spotted by passengers aboard the *Chief Justice John Robinson* to Canada.²²³ The *Toronto Leader* published a much more extravagant account of the case. It claimed that Hockley first sought passage aboard a ship from Oswego, New York, but accidentally stowed aboard a ship heading to Youngstown, Ohio. He quickly fled to the Niagara borderland, where he floated on the lake aboard a gate. This particular account is unverified, however.²²⁴ The next section will focus on slave refugee migration and UGRR networks in the former Northwest Territory.

Across these Bloody Rivers: Freedom Seekers and UGRR Networks in the Ohio River and Mississippi River Borderlands

Born in Madison County, Kentucky, Lewis Garrard Clarke experienced the horrors of slavery first hand. As a child, he was routinely beaten and whipped by his enslaver. Moreover, his mother and siblings were sold to the Lower South. Upon learning that his enslaver planned to sell him, Clarke decided to escape to the North. He fled to Lexington and took shelter with his brother Cyrus. Escape posed innumerable challenges (“both of us were very ignorant of the roads,” he recalled), but his desire to run away could not be quelled. “Monday morning, bright and early,” Clarke wrote, “I set my face in good earnest toward the Ohio River, determined to see and tread the north bank of it, or die in the attempt. I said to myself, one of two things, FREEDOM or DEATH.” Clark later resettled in Upper Canada.²²⁵

²²³ Jacob D. Green, *Narrative of the Life of J. D. Green, a Runaway Slave, from Kentucky, Containing an Account of His Three Escapes, in 1839, 1846, and 1848* (Huddersfield: Henry Fielding, 1864), 73; DARING ATTEMPT AND SUCCESSFUL ESCAPE OF A SLAVE – ANOTHER BOLD STROKE FOR FREEDOM,” *NASS*, Aug. 20, 1853.

²²⁴ “REMARKABLE ESCAPE OF A NEGRO SLAVE TO CANADA,” *Toronto Leader*, reprinted in *Kalida Venture* (Kalida, OH), Aug. 19, 1853.

²²⁵ Lewis G. Clarke, *Narrative of the Sufferings of Lewis Clarke, During a Captivity of More Than Twenty-Five Years, Among the Algerines of Kentucky, One of the So Called Christian States of America* (Boston: David H. Ela, 1845), 34, accessed Feb. 1, 2019. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/clarke/clarke.html>. Clarke’s narrative is also briefly touched upon in Hahn, *Political Worlds*, 1-2.

Stacey Robertson writes that the former Northwest Territory “served as a route toward free Canada for thousands of fugitive slaves.” Like the Mason-Dixon line, the Ohio and Mississippi River borderlands symbolized the geographical border between slavery and freedom. Henry Bibb recalled “standing on the Ohio River bluff, looking over on a free State, and as far north as my eyes could see. I have eagerly gazed upon the blue sky of the free North, which at times constrained me to cry out from the depths of my soul, Oh! Canada, sweet land of rest – Oh! When shall I get there?”²²⁶ Enslaved people in western Virginia, Kentucky, and Missouri employed similar strategies to their counterparts in the Chesapeake and Tidewater. Most notably, freedom seekers typically fled to African American communities and settlements, where they sought to pass as free people of color. UGRR activists also assisted self-emancipators during their escapes but, compared to the Mid-Atlantic and New England, escape networks were less organized in the ‘Old Northwest.’²²⁷



Figure 6: Map of UGRR Routes in the Old Northwest

Source: Wikimedia Commons, accessed Jan. 30, 2020.

**<https://nl.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bestand:Undergroundrailroadsmall2.jpg>.
Originally from Siebert, *The Underground Railroad*.**

²²⁶ Stacey Robertson, *Hearts Beating for Liberty: Women Abolitionists in the Old Northwest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 164; Bibb, *Narrative*, 29.

²²⁷ For more on slave refugees and black freedom networks in the Ohio River borderland, see Griffler, *Front Line of Freedom*; Harrold, *Border War*; Darrel E. Bigham, *On Jordan's Banks: Emancipation and Its Aftermath in the Ohio River Valley* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2006); Matthew Salafia, "Searching for Slavery: Fugitive Slaves in the Ohio River Valley Borderland," *Ohio Valley History* 8, no. 4 (2008), 38-63; Salafia, *Slavery's Borderland*.

Most freedom seekers in the former Northwest Territory escaped from Virginia, Kentucky, and Missouri. Slavery in Kentucky and Missouri was not dissimilar from its counterparts in Virginia or Maryland. Enslavers in both states typically held no more than a handful of enslaved people who labored predominantly on rural labor camps. Tobacco, hemp, corn, and other grains were grown on farms in each state. Tobacco cultivation in Kentucky, notes Nikki Taylor, was second only to Virginia. In Kentucky, enslaved African Americans were concentrated in the Bluegrass region in the state's central and northern counties. Henderson, Union, Meade, and Jefferson Counties possessed significant enslaved populations. Moreover, Louisville and Lexington, the two largest urban centers, also boasted large enslaved populations. In Missouri, enslaved African Americans mostly resided in the region known as 'Little Dixie,' a series of counties in the upper half of the state along the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. St. Louis, the largest city in the region, also boasted a large enslaved population.²²⁸

Kentucky and Missouri were not widely settled by white Euro-Americans until the early nineteenth century. In 1790, Kentucky's white population stood at just over 60,000. Thirty years later, it had risen to 435,000. Likewise, Missouri's population grew significantly after statehood. Between 1820 and 1861, writes Diane Mutti Burke, "more than a quarter of a million free people from the Upper South, many of them small slaveholders, migrated to Missouri[.]" Many settlers had become "increasingly dissatisfied with their economic circumstances and reasoned that they could improve their prospects in the West." In 1790, almost 12,000 enslaved people officially resided in Kentucky. By 1860, the figure had grown to roughly 225,000. In Missouri, the enslaved population rose from about 10,000 in 1820 to almost 115,000 forty years later.²²⁹

Forced westward migration was a profoundly traumatizing experience for enslaved men, women, and children. Francis Frederick from Fauquier County, Virginia, recalled his experience being part of "a sorrowful cavalcade... the sobbing women, wailing children, and men whose stony looks expressed nothing but despair; torn forever from their kindred[.]" The group traveled across the Allegheny Mountains to Wheeling, Virginia, from whence they traveled by boat to Kentucky. Enslaved African Americans in both states remained subject to brutal working

²²⁸ Luke Harlow, *Religion, Race, and the Making of Confederate Kentucky, 1830-1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 6; Nikki M. Taylor, *Driven Toward Madness: The Fugitive Slave Margaret Garner and Tragedy on the Ohio* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2016), 25; Bigham, *Jordan's Banks*, 13-15; Diane Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 27.

²²⁹ Lowell H. Harrison, *The Antislavery Movement in Kentucky* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1978), 2; Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 24-25, 27.

conditions and cruel treatment. Freedom seekers launched daring bids for liberty by crossing the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers into Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois.²³⁰



Figure 7: View of the Ohio River seen from below Cincinnati.

Source: Ohio River View Print. Ohio River Images Collection, SC 808. OHC, accessed Jan. 22, 2020.

<https://cdm16007.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p267401coll32/id/13080>.

Newspapers in the Old Northwest published escaped slave advertisements. In 1804, the *Indiana Gazette* published a notice for “a young negro fellow named, JOE,” who escaped across the Ohio River to Indiana. Meanwhile, in October 1818, James Matson of Bourbon County, Kentucky, reported that a “runaway negro man named JOSHUA, of a mulatto complexion, near six feet high, raw boned and tolerably well made,” had escaped. Matson suspected that Joshua “has fled to the state of Ohio, Indiana, or Illinois, in company with a family by the name of Carpenter[.]” In 1805, David Jewel of Louisville posted a notice in the *Indiana Gazette* for three freedom seekers, “Two of which are men & the other a woman,” who sought to reach Ohio passing as free African Americans. In 1818, A. Hugonin of Louisville reported

²³⁰ Marion B. Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky: From Slavery to Segregation, 1760-1891* (Frankfort, KY: Kentucky Historical Society, 2003), 1; Francis Frederick, *Autobiography of Rev. Francis Frederick, of Virginia* (Baltimore: J. W. Woods Printer, 1869), 8-9, accessed May 1, 2019. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/frederick/frederick.html>; Frederick’s life and escape from enslavement can also be found in Francis Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky; or, Fifty Years of Slavery in the Southern States of America* (London: Wertheim, MacIntosh, and Hunt, 1863), accessed May 1, 2019. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/fedric/fedric.html>.

the escape of an enslaved couple, Stafford and Betty, who had likely headed “out of state.”²³¹ Over time, more notices appeared in newspapers for female freedom seekers. In June 1850, \$75 was offered for “a dark colored NEGRO GIRL named Julia” if captured “out of the State.” On some occasions, men and women fled across the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers with their children. In 1853, a notice appeared in the *Daily Courier* for Henry Morehead and his wife, Mary, who fled with their three children, aged four, two-and-a-half, and seven months respectively. Some advertisements state the intent of freedom seekers to reach Canada. In 1854, the *Louisville Daily Courier* claimed that a freedom seeker named “LILA or DELILA ALLENSWORTH,” who was “supposed to be assisted in making her way to Canada.”²³²

While most freedom seekers came from the Upper South, smaller numbers managed to escape from the Mid- and Lower South. Tennessee enslavers often published escaped slave notices for slave refugees that fled to Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. In March 1820, David Dunn reported that two men, John and Joe, who were likely “about Nashville, if not on their way to the free states, as Joe had once before made the attempt to get to the state of Ohio, and was taken up in Kentucky.” Later that year, a Nashville enslaver reported the escape of two men, Davy and Clem, with the former reportedly escaping “on horseback.” Some North Carolina enslavers also reported that freedom seekers had likely fled to the Old Northwest. In 1809, the *Raleigh Star* published a notice for a self-emancipator named Davy, whose enslaver wrote, “He can write, and perhaps has procured a free pass – I am apprehensive he has attempted to get to the State of Ohio, where he has once been.” In 1839, the *Charlotte Journal* printed an advertisement for the forty-year-old Robbin, whose enslaver suspected, “it is probably he will make for Ohio or Indiana.”²³³

Fewer notices were placed by Lower South enslavers. In 1822, the *Mobile Commercial Register* printed an advertisement for George W. Harvy [sic] and a woman named Polly from Montgomery County. It claimed that they would “no doubt travel as man and wife, as they lived in that way for several months,” and that Polly, having stolen men’s clothing, “will doubtless attempt to travel in the character of a man... They will undoubtedly endeavor to reach the free States of the Ohio river, or

²³¹ “Twenty Dollars Reward,” *Indiana Gazette*, Sep. 18, 1804; “FIFTY DOLLARS REWARD,” *Western Sun & General Advertiser*, Apr. 3, 1819; “30 Dollars Reward,” *Indiana Gazette*, Apr. 10, 1805; “100 DOLLARS REWARD,” *Western Sun & General Advertiser*, Feb. 20, 1819.

²³² “\$75 REWARD,” *Louisville Daily Courier*, Jun. 19, 1850; “\$500 REWARD,” *Louisville Daily Courier*, Dec. 13, 1853; “\$200 REWARD,” *Louisville Daily Courier*, May 31, 1854.

²³³ “RUNAWAY,” *Nashville Gazette*, Apr. 15, 1820; “\$500 REWARD,” For Davy and Clem,” *Nashville Gazette*, Aug. 10, 1820. Advertisements located ‘Freedom on the Move’ Database, *FreedomontheMove.org*, accessed Mar. 5, 2019. <https://app.freedomontheMove.org/search?limit=12&page=1&q=Ohio>; “50 Dollars Reward,” (*Raleigh, NC*) *Star*, Jul. 20, 1809; “\$100 Reward,” *Charlotte Journal*, Oct. 25, 1839. Advertisements located in ‘N. C. Runaway Slave Advertisements’ Database, accessed Mar. 5, 2019. <http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/search/collection/RAS/searchterm/Ohio/order/nosort>.

some of the Spanish Territories.” In October 1823, M. C. Moorman of Limestone County, Alabama offered \$150 “for apprehending THREE NEGRO SLAVES, if taken in the States of Illinois or Ohio, or if taken in the States of Kentucky or Tennessee[.]”²³⁴ Likewise, few narratives or autobiographies detail the escape of slave refugees from the Lower South to the Old Northwest. John Brown escaped from the Mississippi River valley to St. Louis, where he crossed into Illinois and made his way through Indiana and Michigan. He later crossed into Canada and traveled to Great Britain.²³⁵

The Ohio River was a long, porous border that became the primary crossing point for freedom seekers escaping to the Old Northwest. Over the antebellum period, southern Ohio witnessed the arrival of thousands of slave refugees from Kentucky, Virginia, and elsewhere. Across the borderland, writes Ann Hagedorn, self-emancipators crossed at “Cincinnati, New Richmond, Moscow, Manchester, Portsmouth, Ironton, Gallipolis, Point Pleasant, and Marietta, among others.” Cincinnati, the sixth-largest city by population in the antebellum United States, it was the largest urban center in the former Northwest Territory. In 1820, just over 400 African Americans resided in the Queen City. Thirty years later, however, the figure had risen to 3,000. Nikki Taylor writes that Cincinnati blacks “regularly provided assistance to runaways.” Additionally, white abolitionists in the city aided refugees from the South. Refugees in the city typically sought to pass as free people of color. In Cincinnati’s dockyards and wharves, self-emancipators posed as free black laborers.²³⁶

Kentucky enslavers often bemoaned the fact that freedom seekers regularly escaped to Cincinnati. Escaped slave notices regularly listed the Queen City as a likely destination for slave refugees. In July 1819, John Puckett of Salem in Livingston County reported the escape of an enslaved man named Thornton, who would “aim either towards Cincinnati, Ohio, or possibly to cross the Wabash [River] into Illinois.” In 1831, Garland Tate of Louisville posted a notice for Sam Arthur, a twenty-six-year-old self-emancipator, who originally “came from Campbell [C]ounty, Virginia; and will probably aim for Cincinnati.” Many freedom seekers

²³⁴ “250 DOLLARS REWARD,” *Mobile Commercial Register*, Aug. 8, 1822; “ONE HUNDRED & FIFTY DOLLARS,” *Huntsville Weekly Democrat*, Oct. 28, 1823. Located via ‘Freedom on the Move’ Database, accessed Mar. 5, 2019.

<https://app.freedomonthemove.org/search?format=list&limit=12&page=1&q=Ohio>.

²³⁵ John Brown, *Slave Life in Georgia: A Narrative of the Life, Sufferings, and Escape of John Brown, a Fugitive Slave, Now in England*. Edited by L.A. Chamerovzow (London: British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1855), accessed May 25, 2020. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/jbrown/jbrown.html>.

²³⁶ Ann Hagedorn, *Beyond the River: The Untold Stories of the Heroes of the Underground Railroad* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 41; Taylor, *Driven Toward Madness*, 58-59; Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 22, 28-29, 51; Joe William Trotter, Jr., *River Jordan: African American Urban Life in the Ohio Valley* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 26-27; Blackett, *Captive’s Quest for Freedom*, 222. According to Taylor, Germans comprised the largest immigrant group in antebellum Cincinnati.

took refuge with family members in the city. In 1853, the *Louisville Daily Courier* reported that twenty-one-year-old Derias would “endeavor to reach Cincinnati, as he has a brother living there.”²³⁷

Other historical records illustrate Cincinnati’s reputation as a beacon of liberty for self-emancipators in the borderland. On April 29, 1824, William Buckner of Paris, Kentucky wrote to his brother Thomas regarding the escape of a twenty-year-old enslaved man. On Easter Saturday, William claimed that “one of my negroes left home to go on a visit as I understood in the neighborhood... but after a constant and diligent search in all the neighboring country, I have become satisfied that he has gone, not to return, and my explanation is that he has made for the state of Ohio[.]” Buckner offered \$100 for the freedom seekers if taken within twenty miles of Paris, and \$200 if taken out of state. He requested that friends in Covington, Newport, and Cincinnati offer assistance in recapturing the self-emancipator, suggested informing ferrymen about the freedom seeker, and even bribing African Americans in Cincinnati for information. Buckner added that the man “has travelled [sic] with me frequently, and consequently would be able to make his way, better than common negroes[.]”²³⁸

Enslavers were not the only ones to document Cincinnati’s position as a gateway for freedom seekers. Free African Americans also documented their efforts in aiding freedom seekers to Cincinnati. John Malvin, a free black activist who briefly lived in the Queen City, recalled helping freedom seekers from Kentucky across the Ohio River. On one occasion, Malvin aided an enslaved woman named Susan Hall and her son. One evening, he crossed the river and met the freedom seekers. After finding a small boat, the group sailed back to the Ohio shoreline. Malvin recalled, “I found shelter in a safe place in Cincinnati for the woman and child... I then sent her to Canada, where she married a man named McKinney, and raised a family.” After Hall’s enslavers learned of her escape, they notified Cincinnati’s police force, and “the city was thrown into great commotion[.]” By this stage, however, Hall and her son were already gone.²³⁹

Self-emancipated refugees also noted that they escaped to the North and Canada via Cincinnati. Amy Clark from Bath County, Kentucky fled to the Queen City upon learning that her enslaver planned to sell her to his son-in-law. After being taken to Maysville, she secreted herself aboard a steamboat heading to Cincinnati,

²³⁷ “\$100 reward!,” *Indiana Gazette* (Vincennes, IN), Jul. 17, 1819; “Twenty-five Dollars Reward,” *Louisville Daily Journal*, Jan. 5, 1831; “\$100 REWARD,” *Louisville Daily Courier*, Sep. 14, 1853.

²³⁸ William Buckner to Thomas Buckner, 29 April 1824. Folder 6, Buckner Family Papers, 1784-1991. Mss. A B925 2-19. FHS. Louisville, Kentucky. Also see Salafia, *Slavery’s Borderland*, 129.

²³⁹ John Malvin, *Autobiography of John Malvin: A Narrative, Containing An Authentic Account of His Fifty Years’ Struggle in the State of Ohio in Behalf of the American Slave, and the Equal Rights of All Men Before the Law Without Reference to Race or Color: Forty-Seven Years of Said Time Being Expended in the City of Cleveland* (Cleveland: Leader Printing Co., 1879), 14-15.

where she stayed with local abolitionists. Clark recalled that she remained in the city for “about five years.” During this time, she and her husband Joseph Barber, a UGRR activist, provided shelter to other freedom seekers. Clark claimed that they “kept the fugitives up stairs [sic], and he... would take ‘em on to Lebanon among the Quakers.” After leaving Cincinnati, Clark traveled onward to Windsor, Upper Canada, where she remained the rest of her life.²⁴⁰

Likewise, Thomas Johnson detailed his escape to the Queen City. After his enslaver’s death, Johnson remained on the farmstead with his enslaver’s wife. He told Benjamin Drew, “I used to take a great deal of care of the place, seeing the farming operations, and have been to Cincinnati to sell produce. The people all considered me trustworthy and honorable, and some of the white people said I could make greater crops than they could.” Johnson had a family in Kentucky, and his wife “wished to leave for Canada, with the three youngest children.” Not long after, Johnson decided to follow his wife and children to Canada. After absconding to the woods with “thirty-five dollars in [his] pocket,” he waited until nightfall when he “crossed the river to Cincinnati.” He wrote to his enslaver, promising to return if he could purchase his liberty. After she responded “promising a great many things,” Johnson decided that he “might as well go on to Canada. I aimed for Toronto, but on my way fell in with a man on board the boat, who knew where my wife and children lived in Malden. I went there and joined them: and since that time, three others of my children have made their escape and are here.”²⁴¹

Johnson’s testimony reveals that enslaved African Americans were quite familiar with Cincinnati. Joseph Sanford of Kentucky recalled that he was regularly sent to the city by his enslaver. Originally from Virginia, Sanford was removed to the Bluegrass State at ten years of age. Eventually, he was transferred to “a most cruel man.” But Sanford was generally considered trustworthy. “There was a great many who had a high regard for me,” he recalled; “I was respected by everybody – could be trusted, no matter with what. I used to do [the enslaver’s] marketing, going to Cincinnati, sell his butter, flax-seed, potatoes, apples, peaches, yarn – every thing – and took every copper home.” For enslaved people, the hiring system created an opportunity to enhance their spatial awareness and social network. “I wanted to be free,” he recalled, “but was afraid to undertake it; for I thought if I were taken and carried back, it would be a great disgrace to me, as I was always trusted.” By improving his knowledge of Cincinnati, Sanford greatly reduced the odds of recapture. Sanford later learned that his enslaver “was going to take away our holidays – we all resolved to break and run away, hit or miss, live or die. There were thirteen of us started away in company – not all from his place.”

²⁴⁰ Amy Clark interview. WHSC. MSS116AV BOX55 06OH 045. OHC, accessed May 2, 2020. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/3914/rec/327>.

²⁴¹ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 379-381.



Figure 8: Map of Cincinnati, Covington and Newport, 1866

Source: “Cincinnati, Covington and Newport Map/” MAP VFM0426-4; 917.7178 C49w1 1866. OHC, accessed Jan. 20, 2020. <https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p267401coll32/id/17334/>.

The group made their way to Covington, just across the Ohio River from Cincinnati. Sanford noted that “the garrison were up, beating their drums,” but he remained confident that they would make it to the North. “We divided at the last toll-gate,” he remembered; “Some going through the gate and myself and little Henry going round. We then found a skiff and oars and crossed the Ohio into Cincinnati. I was so afraid I’d see somebody that knew me, I knew not what to do.” They stayed in the city for about two weeks and journeyed northward to Michigan, where they crossed into Canada. John Hatfield, another member of the group, stated that he assisted another enslaved woman to the city via steamboat and that she “had got to a friend’s house in the city... I went there and told the friend; he thought she was safe.” He recalled, “I came into this country on account of the oppressive laws of the United States. I have as good friends in the United States, colored and white, as ever a man had... but the laws were against me.”²⁴²

Cincinnati’s steamboat trade, and its growing links to ports in the Ohio River borderland, offered enslaved people new opportunities to escape. As was the case elsewhere, male self-emancipators found it easier to secure passage aboard steamboats. Yet, some enslaved women also managed to sneak aboard vessels. In March 1833, Cave Johnson of Boone County, Kentucky claimed that a ‘mulatto’

²⁴² Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 358-365.

woman named Harriet, who had been hired out by her enslaver Polly W. Johnson, escaped aboard a steamboat to Cincinnati. The captain, a man named Anderson, apologized to Johnson over the incident. He claimed that “the woman told him that she was a free woman.”²⁴³ Moreover, the Ohio River, Mississippi River, and other national steamboat traders enabled freedom seekers from the Middle and Lower South to reach Cincinnati. John Warren from Wilson County, Tennessee recalled escaping to Memphis on foot with forged passes, before he managed to get “hired on a boat bound to Cincinnati. I saw the sign “Cincinnati,” and went aboard: sailed that evening, and got safely to Cincinnati in five days. I stopped there two or three days, and then left for Canada.”²⁴⁴ Other records highlight Cincinnati’s reputation as a beacon for freedom seekers. E.S. Abdy’s journal from 1834 claimed, “A great many slaves – no less, probably, than 300 every year, pass through Cincinnati on their way to Canada.” The report noted that free African Americans in the city “give them an asylum, and speed them on their road to the British provinces... The process of self-emancipation is, in fact, going on very largely[.]”²⁴⁵

By the 1850s, newspapers regularly reported on the escape of enslaved men and women to the Queen City. The *Cincinnati Columbian* wrote in 1855, “The travel over the underground railroad for the past few days has been... unusually active, and no fewer than seven lots of runaway slaves have arrived at this terminus within a week.” Most were from Kentucky, although the “sixth lot was composed of two middle-aged, stout men, who had come on foot from Louisiana to this place, sleeping by day, and walking toward the North star at night.” The two men were “sent over the underground railroad to Canada.” Two years later, the *Pittsburgh Daily Gazette and Advertiser* claimed that a “STAMPEDE of slaves from the plantation of Mr. D. S. Dillon, in Bourbon county, took place last week... Three men and two women fled, and were pursued 25 miles, but they escaped to the Underground Railroad in Cincinnati.” In May 1858, the *Cincinnati Gazette* wrote, “During the last three weeks more than twenty runaways have passed through this city *en route* for Canada,” and that one of them “was so *white* in features as well color, that he traveled through Kentucky and crossed the river unsuspected.” Southern enslavers and politicians continued to lament the escape of enslaved people via the Ohio River borderland. In 1859, Thomas Bullitt of Louisville wrote, “They have been running off from the southern part of the state recently.”²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Deposition by Cave Johnson. Guthrie-Caperton Family Papers, 1780-1939. Folder 88. Mss. A G984 84, 88. FHS. Louisville, KY.

²⁴⁴ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 183-185.

²⁴⁵ E.S. Abdy, *Journal of a Residence and Tour in the United States of North America, From April, 1833, to October, 1834* (London: John Murray, 1835), 23, accessed May 1, 2020. <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.28464/1?r=0&s=1>.

²⁴⁶ “RUNAWAY SLAVES – THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD,” *Cincinnati Columbian*, Jan. 29, 1855, reprinted in *Agitator*, Feb. 8, 1855; “A STAMPEDE of slaves...,” *Pittsburgh Daily Gazette and Advertiser*, Oct. 12, 1857; “CAN’T STOP THEM,” *Cincinnati Gazette*, May 25, 1858, reprinted in ASB,

Josiah Henson was one of the most well-known freedom seekers to escape from the South via Cincinnati. Born in Charles County, Maryland, Henson was later forcibly migrated by his enslaver to Daviess County, Kentucky. Along the way, free black activists attempted to liberate Henson. “At Cincinnati,” he recalled, “... the colored people gathered around us, and urged us with much importunity to remain with them; told us it was folly to go on; and in short used all the arguments now so familiar to induce slaves to quit their masters.” But Henson refused to escape and negotiated an arrangement with Riley to purchase his freedom. Upon learning that Riley planned to renege on the agreement and sell him, Henson and his family resolved to escape. They crossed the Ohio River into southern Indiana, from whence they traveled to Cincinnati. Two weeks later, the family eventually reached Cincinnati, where “we were kindly received and entertained for several days,” before heading to Canada.²⁴⁷

Similarly, Edward Moxley from Boone County, Kentucky, and his freedom-seeking family members did not stay in the city for long. During an interview at his home in Sandwich, Upper Canada in 1895, Moxley recalled, “My father was a free man in Cincinnati. He bought his-self [sic]... We took de [sic] boat and come up to Cincinnati and shive [sic] de [sic] boat adrift and all walked up... We had a wagon in Cincinnati, and kep [sic] a going right for Dayton.” The group journeyed onward to Xenia with help from African Americans in the region. They ultimately made their way to Sandusky where they secured passage aboard a steamboat to Detroit before crossing into Canada. Likewise, Anthony Bingeys escaped with several family members from Newport, Kentucky to Cincinnati. In the Queen City, the group were aided by a free black man named James Williams, who “bought a team of horses and a wagon with their money and drove them within 30 miles of Sandusky[.]” Bingeys and his family later relocated to Upper Canada.²⁴⁸

African Americans were not the only UGRR activists in the region. Cincinnati was also home to a prominent white abolitionist community. James Birney was one of Cincinnati’s most prominent abolitionists. In 1836, he founded *The Philanthropist*, one of the most popular anti-slavery newspapers in the Old Northwest. Meanwhile, Quakers Levi and Catherine Coffin moved to Cincinnati in 1847. Before this, the couple had assisted freedom seekers in Newport, southern Indiana. “When we moved to Cincinnati,” Levi Coffin recalled in his *Reminiscences*,

May 29, 1858; Letter from Thomas W. Bullitt, 28 August 1859. Bullitt Family Papers Oxmoor Collection, 1683-2003. Box 33, Folder 297. Mss./A/B937c. FHS. Louisville, KY.

²⁴⁷ Josiah Henson, *The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, as Narrated by Himself* (Boston: Arthur D. Phelps, 1849), 1-4, 21-24, 33-35, 48-52, accessed May 1, 2019. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/henson49/henson49.html>.

²⁴⁸ Edward Moxley Interview, Jul. 31, 1895. WHSC. MSS116AV BOX55 06OH 036. OHC, accessed May 1, 2020. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/4064>; Anthony Bingeys Recollections of the Underground Railroad, July 31, 1895. WHSC. MSS116AV BOX67 02CAN 016. OHC, accessed May 1, 2020. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/28122/rec/73>.

“... my wife and I thought that perhaps our work in Underground Railroad matters was done, as we had been in active service more than twenty years.” Little did he know, they would remain important players in the black freedom network.²⁴⁹

In his autobiography, Coffin describes his role in aiding freedom seekers from the Upper South. “There seemed to be a continued increase of runaways,” he noted, “and hardly a fugitive came to the city without applying to us for assistance.” Coffin described various incidents involving the sheltering and rescue of freedom seekers in Cincinnati. He wrote, “Our house was large and well adapted for secreting fugitives.” Coffin detailed one incident involving “a slave girl who ran away from Covington, came to our house, and my wife let her assist the cook in the kitchen, until a suitable opportunity for her escape to Canada should arrive.” In another case, Coffin described the arrival of twenty-eight refugees via Lawrenceburg, Indiana – “twenty miles below Cincinnati.” He claimed that they were guided to the city by “a white man” who, although originally from Virginia, “hated slavery.” Other passages in Coffin’s autobiography discuss the arrival of a “slave family of ten, consisting of a man and his wife, and their eight children” from Kentucky, as well as a “husband and wife, [who] belonged to a man who lived ten or twelve miles from Cincinnati.”²⁵⁰

Louisville was prominent another gateway for freedom seekers in the Ohio River borderland. J. Blaine Hudson writes that it was “the only major city in a largely rural state and as the only major city between Baltimore and St. Louis on the “slave side” of the border.” Between 1830 and 1860, the city’s free black population grew from just over 200 to 2,000. Unlike Cincinnati, however, most African Americans in Louisville were enslaved. Over 5,400 enslaved African Americans were recorded in the city in 1850. In 1836, the *Louisville Daily Journal* published a notice for Nancy, who supposedly fled to neighboring Charlestown, Indiana.²⁵¹ Meanwhile, the Louisville Mayor’s Court records for the period June 22, 1831, to April 5, 1832 shed light on the city’s diverse black population. Among the men and women listed throughout the records were free people of color and enslaved people in the city, as well as hired out enslaved men and women from neighboring counties. The sheer

²⁴⁹ Salafia, *Slavery’s Borderland*, 199-203; Levi Coffin, *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, the Reputed President of the Underground Railroad; Being a Brief History of the Labors of a Lifetime in Behalf of the Slave, with the Stories of Numerous Fugitives, Who Gained Their Freedom Through His Instrumentality, and Many Other Incidents* (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1880), 297. For more on the life and activism of James G. Birney, see William Birney, *Sketch of the Life of James G. Birney* (Chicago, IL: National Christian Association, 1884), accessed May 25, 2020.

<http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=mayantislavery&cc=mayantislavery&idno=17865107&q1=underground+railroad&view=image&seq=1&size=100>.

²⁵⁰ Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 299 (first quote), 301 (second quote), 302 (third quote), 304 (fourth quote), 312 (fifth quote), 318 (sixth quote).

²⁵¹ Hudson, *Fugitive Slaves*, 29; Bigham, *On Jordan’s Banks*, 15; “The Free Black Community of Louisville,” *112louisville.edu*, accessed Mar. 5, 2019, <https://louisville.edu/freedompark/historical-obelisks/the-free-black-community-of-louisville>; “\$50 REWARD,” *Louisville Daily Journal*, Jun. 24, 1836.

number of African Americans in the city, and their wide range of legal statuses, provided slave refugees with anonymity and protection. Of course, self-emancipators needed to remain careful; city police and slave catchers in Louisville were always looking for freedom seekers. Lurking among the crowds, freedom seekers sought to fly under the radar and escape unnoticed.²⁵²

Like Cincinnati, Louisville's role in the Ohio River steamboat trade provided freedom seekers with opportunities to escape to Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Newspaper notices illustrate that southern enslavers believed that self-emancipators had escaped aboard steamboats and other vessels. In 1834, the *Vincennes Gazette* printed an advertisement for two women who escaped aboard a steamboat to Shawneetown, Illinois. It stated, "It is supposed they have pass papers, and will attempt to escape to Canada, either through Illinois or Indiana." Meanwhile, in 1850, J. H. Owen of Louisville placed a notice for Lewis, who had previously been "hired as a fireman or second cook on many of the principal steamboats running from Louisville, Ky., to New Orleans, and is well known by a large majority of steamboatmen on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers."²⁵³

Other newspaper notices detail how self-emancipators escaped to the Old Northwest via steamboats. In 1816, Montgomery Bell of Dickson County, Tennessee, placed an advertisement in the *Western Sun* for a self-emancipator named Buck, who worked "as a hand" aboard a barge which traveled along the Ohio River. While docked at Louisville in 1813, Buck allegedly "unshipped himself and travelled [sic] by land in company with a man that lived at that time 15 miles from Brownsville, Pa., as far as Chillicothe [Ohio]." Bell believed that Buck subsequently went "to Pittsburgh, or some part of the State of Pennsylvania or the State of Ohio or perhaps the adjacent territories." Meanwhile, in November 1836, Nashville enslaver Thomas Eastland posted in the *Louisville Daily Journal* for a freedom-seeking couple, a "mulatto" man named Alexander and his wife Rebecca, who escaped aboard the steamboat *Indian* to Louisville. Eastland firmly believed that the pair had "no doubt made for Canada."²⁵⁴

Elsewhere, freedom seekers escaped to the Old Northwest via southern Illinois. Andrew Jackson, a self-emancipator from Bowling Green, Kentucky, resolved to escape northward in the 1840s to escape permanently from bondage. He recalled in his memoir, "I heard a great many things about the Northern States, and some things not at all favorable to my welfare... But I made up my mind that if I could learn the way, I would try it." When the opportunity arose, Jackson collected

²⁵² Louisville (Ky.) Mayor's Court. Record book, 1831-1832. 1 volume. Mss. BL L888h. FHS. Louisville, KY.

²⁵³ "\$200 REWARD," *Louisville Daily Courier*, Apr. 13, 1850; "50 DOLLARS REWARD," *Vincennes Gazette*, Jan. 4, 1834.

²⁵⁴ Hudson, *Fugitive Slaves*, 65; "300 Dollars Reward," *Western Sun*, Jul. 20, 1816; "250 DOLLARS REWARD," *Louisville Daily Journal*, Nov. 8, 1836.

some supplies and fled into the nearby woods. He continued to journey on foot, traveling mostly at night and remaining in the woods to avoid being seen. Jackson eventually reached “a place called Baker’s old Ferry, where I crossed into Illinois, in the county of Gallatin, and began to feel secure.”²⁵⁵

Farther west, self-emancipated refugees from Missouri escaped to the former Northwest Territory via the Upper Mississippi River borderland. St. Louis was a popular gateway for freedom seekers in the region. “The flow of enslaved and free people of color in and out of the city,” writes Kelly M. Kennington, “along with St. Louis’ close proximity to Illinois and its location on the banks of the Mississippi River, contributed to its attractiveness for potential runaway slaves.” In 1850, approximately 2,000 free blacks lived in the city. By the 1850s, notes Richard Blackett, escaped slave advertisements “blanketed their local newspapers with announcements of escape[.]” In 1851, M. W. Flournoy of Lafayette County, Missouri, placed an advertisement in the *Missouri Courier* for a self-emancipator named Lewis. Flournoy offered “One hundred dollars [was awarded] if taken in St. Louis” and \$300 if taken out of state.²⁵⁶

Aside from St. Louis, freedom seekers from Missouri and elsewhere crossed the Upper Mississippi River at other points. Quincy, Illinois was another popular crossing point for freedom seekers. Thomas J. Moore, a UGRR activist in the region, wrote to abolitionist Theodore Parker in 1855 that the “principal underground Rail Road [sic] from Missouri to Canada, through this state, commences at Quincy and terminates at Chicago. And I think no slave has ever been recaptured on the route, though many violent efforts have been made.” About forty years later, W.H. Collins recalled that black refugees “were concealed in the Town, till the pursuers crossed the river. They then were taken to Mendon, thence to Plymouth or Round Prairie, thence to Galesburgh [sic], thence to Princeton[.] Ottawa and Chicago[.]”²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ Andrew Jackson, *Narrative and Writings of Andrew Jackson, of Kentucky; Containing an Account of His Birth, and Twenty-Six Years of His Life While a Slave; Five Years of Freedom, Together with Anecdotes Relating to Slavery; Journal of One Year’s Travels; Sketches, etc. Narrated by Himself; Written by a Friend* (Syracuse, NY: Daily and Weekly Star Office, 1847), 9 (first quote), 17 (second quote), accessed May 20, 2020. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/jacksona/jacksona.html>.

²⁵⁶ Kelly M. Kennington, *In the Shadow of Dred Scott: St. Louis Freedom Seekers and the Legal Culture of Slavery in Antebellum America* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2017), 107 (quote), 197; Blackett, *Captive’s Quest for Freedom*, 142-143; Frazier, *Runaway and Freed Missouri Slaves*, 100; “African-American Life in St. Louis,” NPS.gov, accessed Jan. 17, 2019. <https://www.nps.gov/jeff/learn/historyculture/african-american-life-in-saint-louis-1804-through-1865.htm>; Blackett, *Captive’s Quest for Freedom*, 141; “\$300 Reward,” *Missouri Courier*, Sep. 4, 1851. For an excellent assessment of freedom seekers in Missouri, see Frazier, *Runaway and Freed Missouri Slaves*, 87-105.

²⁵⁷ Thomas J. Moore to Theodore Parker, Feb. 6, 1855. Theodore Parker Papers P-175. Reel 3, Vol. 9. MHS. Boston, MA; W.H. Collins letter to Wilbur H. Siebert, Jan. 13, 1896. WHSC. MSS116AV BOX41 01IL 030. OHC, accessed Jun. 1, 2020. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/10307/rec/2>.

Chicago was a popular destination for freedom seekers. Aside from its free black and white abolitionist populations, the Windy City served as a gateway to Michigan and Upper Canada. In 1850, the *Chicago Democrat* reported that a freedom seeker from Missouri escaped to Quincy where they purportedly took “the underground track for Chicago[.]” Eleven years later, the *Ohio Democratic Press* (relaying news from Chicago) claimed that 160 freedom seekers “left this city last night for Canada, via the Michigan and Southern Road. It is estimated that over 1000 fugitives have arrived in this city since last fall[.]”²⁵⁸ In southwestern Illinois, freedom seekers took shelter in the forests and caves of Shawnee National Forest. Madison Frederick, a formerly enslaved person from Commerce, Missouri (roughly 130 miles south of St. Louis.), remembered that his grandfather used to abscond to the woods “an’ stay for days at a time... But one time he ran away – crossed the [Mississippi] rivuh ovah heah [here] an’ went up tuh Canada.”²⁵⁹ Meanwhile, many freedom seekers sought to cross the Mississippi River aboard steamboats. Thomas C. Buchanan notes that the Mississippi River trade “created a mobile class of slaves and free blacks that moved with ease through the economic arteries of the southern economy.”²⁶⁰

William Wells Brown is perhaps the most well-known self-emancipator to have escaped via the Upper Mississippi borderland. He was hired out to work in several occupations, including working as a waiter on a steamboat. Later, Brown was hired out to work for “a slave-dealer named Walker,” during which time he journeyed several times to New Orleans. On New Year’s Day 1834, Brown secured passage aboard a steamboat to Cincinnati. He was aided by a white Quaker named Wells Brown. Brown made his way to Cleveland “where he found he could remain comparatively safe from the pursuit of the man-stealer.”²⁶¹ Yet securing passage aboard steamboats in St. Louis risked raising suspicion among whites. Freedom seekers thus came up with other ways to cross the Mississippi. In September 1848, the *St. Louis Union* reported that a male freedom seeker seen in the city “took [to] the water and swam the Mississippi” upon being set upon by an officer. “When he reached the Illinois shore,” claimed the *Union*, “he turned, and seeing no one in

²⁵⁸ “A Fugitive Escaped,” *Chicago Democrat*, reprinted in *Jeffersonian Republican* (Charlottesville, VA), Nov. 7, 1850; “Fugitive Slaves Leaving for Canada,” *Democratic Press* (Eaton, OH), Apr. 11, 1861.

²⁵⁹ Interview with Madison Frederick Ross ex-slave Commerce. FWP, *Slave Narrative Project*, Vol. 10, *Missouri*, Abbot-Younger, 1936. Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn100/>;

“Underground Railroad: Shawnee National Forest,” *fs.usda.gov*, accessed Feb. 11, 2019. <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/shawnee/recarea/?recid=81899>.

²⁶⁰ Thomas C. Buchanan, “Rascals on the Antebellum Mississippi: African American Steamboat Workers and the St. Louis Hanging of 1841,” *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 4 (2001), 798, 808.

²⁶¹ William W. Brown, *Three Years in Europe; or, Places I Have Seen and People I Have Met* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1852), ix-xvii, accessed Apr. 12, 2019. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/brown52/brown52.html>.

pursuit, sat down upon a log and viewed, with apparent satisfaction, the barrier he had placed between himself and his pursuer.”²⁶²

African American Settlements and Abolitionist Networks in the Old Northwest

Across the Ohio and Mississippi River borderlands, African Americans and white abolitionists maintained interracial UGRR networks which aided self-emancipators from the South. In 1838, the *Warsaw Patriot* reported that “some abolitionists from Cincinnati had visited the negroes in the fields, and induced them to enter into an agreement that they would run away from their masters... the abolitionists promising to receive them on the other side of the river, and send them to Canada.” On one occasion, six self-emancipators supposedly escaped from somewhere between Florence and Covington and made their way across the river to Canada. Others were prevented from escaping after their plan was unearthed. “The wicked machinations of the Abolitionists [sic],” claimed the *Patriot*, “have in this instance been defeated; but this defeat will not discourage them – it will but stimulate them to renewed exertions, and more desperate attempts.” Reflecting the sentiment of many Kentucky whites, the newspaper stressed the threat posed by northern UGRR networks. “If one of them gets across the river and reaches Cincinnati,” it contended, “it is impossible to recover him. The Abolitionists [sic] there have every convenience for sending him to Canada.”²⁶³

Across the Ohio River borderland, black activists and white abolitionists managed UGRR networks which aided slave refugees. In many places, these networks were characterized by forms of interracial cooperation. Black activists collaborated with white abolitionists to assist freedom seekers. At Ripley, Ohio, John Rankin, a white Presbyterian minister from Tennessee, and the formerly enslaved John Parker aided freedom seekers across the Ohio River. Under the cover of night, Parker would row his boat across the river to bring slave refugees to the Ohio shoreline. Parker and Rankin dispatched freedom seekers to UGRR agents elsewhere. In 1848, the *Maysville Eagle* reported, “we learn from a gentleman in Ripley that six slaves crossed the Ohio and were secreted in or near that place, and that the Abolitionists were in readiness to receive thirty-six more, whom they were every moment expecting.” In 1852, the *Louisville Daily Courier* reported on a ‘stampede’

²⁶² “A GOOD SWIMMER,” *St. Louis Union*, Sep. 27, 1848, reprinted in *Buffalo Commercial*, Oct. 9, 1848. For the more detailed account of Brown’s life and escape, see William W. Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown, A Fugitive Slave. Written by Himself* (Boston: Published at the Anti-Slavery Office, 1847), accessed Apr. 9, 2019. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/brown47/brown47.html>.

²⁶³ “ALARMING,” *Warsaw Patriot*, Nov. 2, 1838, reprinted in *Indiana American*, Nov. 23, 1838.

of thirty-one freedom seekers from Augusta and Dover, who “were traced to Ripley on the river, and were pursued by their owners and others from this side.” Southern whites were outraged by the supposed inaction of the Ohio authorities, which the newspaper called “very reprehensible.”²⁶⁴

Testimonies from self-emancipators and UGRR activists highlight the role of escape networks in and around Ripley. Arnold Gragston, an enslaved man from Maysville, Kentucky, aided countless self-emancipators across the Ohio River to Ripley. Mobility was crucial to Gragston’s activism; he stated, “It was ‘cause he used to let me go around in the day and night so much that I came to be the one who carried the runnin’ away slaves over the river.” Gragston recalled his first passenger, an enslaved woman on a neighboring farm. After some hesitation, he agreed to assist the woman in her escape. He recalled, “I don’t know how I ever rowed the boat across the river the current was strong and I was trembling. I couldn’t see a thing there in the dark, but I felt the girl’s eyes.” Over subsequent years, Gragston helped more freedom seekers on the respective journeys across the Ohio River. “I soon found myself goin’ back across the river, with two or three people,” he remembered, “and sometimes a whole boatload... I used to make three or four trips a month.” Once in Ripley, Gragston claimed that slave refugees were aided by Rankin and his associates. From there, many self-emancipators “went on North to other parts of Ohio, or to New York, Chicago or Canada[.]”²⁶⁵

Aside from individual activists, anti-slavery organizations in the area also assisted freedom seekers. In 1835, the Ripley Anti-Slavery Society was established to campaign for the abolition of slavery in the United States. John Rankin was appointed secretary of the organization, while others in the region quickly became members. The following year, the Gilead Anti-Slavery Society was founded in Clermont County, Ohio. John Rankin was among its members and delivered an address “upon the subject of slavery” before the society adopted its constitution. The society supported “the entire abolition of slavery in the United States” and committed itself “to elevate the character and condition of the coloured people by encouraging their intellectual [,] moral and religious improvement.” Although it did not outright

²⁶⁴ Hagedorn, *Beyond the River*, 14-15, 32-34, 57, 231-237; Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan*, 346; “ATTEMPTED ESCAPE OF NEGROES,” *Maysville Eagle*, reprinted in *Louisville Daily Courier*, Aug. 10, 1848; “SLAVE STAMPEDE,” *Louisville Daily Courier*, Oct. 4, 1852. For John Rankin’s Autobiography, see Autobiography of John Rankin. Rankin-Parker Collection (Folder 2). Rare Book, Manuscript and Special Collections Library, Duke University Libraries. Durham, NC. [Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice](#). Adam Matthew Digital. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 10 May 2018. For John Parker’s unpublished autobiography, see John Parker’s Story. Rankin-Parker Collection (Folder 3). Rare Book, Manuscript and Special Collections Library, Duke University Libraries. Durham, NC. [Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice](#). Adam Matthew Digital. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 10 May 2018. Rankin and Parker each detail their involvement with the UGRR in Ripley.

²⁶⁵ Interview with Arnold Gragston. *FWP: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 3, Florida, Anderson-Wilson with combined interviews of others*. 1936. Manuscript/Mixed Materials. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn030/>.

declare its involvement in the regional UGRR, John Rankin's involvement suggests that its members were at least amenable to his cause.²⁶⁶ Farther east, freedom seekers from Kentucky, Virginia, and elsewhere crossed into Ohio at other points. Writing in 1894, Gabe Johnson of Lawrence County recalled that refugees regularly crossed the Ohio River at Ironton, Burlington, Guyandotte, and Gallipolis among other locales.²⁶⁷

Activists and abolitionist organizations operated elsewhere in the Ohio River borderland. George DeBaptiste, a free-born black Virginian, was involved with the rescues of hundreds of freedom seekers at Madison, Indiana. Like Parker, DeBaptiste sailed men and women across the Ohio River. Likewise, Elijah Anderson, a free black blacksmith in Madison, also assisted freedom seekers to Levi Coffin's home in Newport, Indiana. While most freedom seekers escaped without direct assistance from the formal UGRR, the contributions of agents and conductors proved invaluable to many freedom seekers. Madison soon became home to a significant anti-slavery population over the antebellum period. In 1839, activists in Jefferson County, Indiana founded the Neel's Creek Anti-Slavery Society, an auxiliary to the Indiana Anti-Slavery Society. Members of the society resolved that "slavery is a great moral, political, and social evil," and called the interregional slave trade "a heinous crime – an entire subversion of all human rights, and a direct contradiction of the Declaration of Independence of our beloved country[.]"²⁶⁸

Black settlements proved the central focus of the Old Northwest's UGRR. As free-born and manumitted blacks moved to Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois over the antebellum period, they established rural communities in each state. One recent study claims that over 300 black farming settlements across the former Northwest Territory.²⁶⁹ According to Cheryl Janifer LaRoche, black rural communities were "conduits for escape before the Civil War... [and] were positioned to offer sanctuary to anyone able enough to escape from slavery." The Gist settlements of Brown County, Ohio, became a beacon of freedom for slave refugees. Settled by freed blacks from Virginia, it soon attracted self-emancipators from the Upper South. Likewise, Poke Patch, a farming settlement near Ironton, received self-emancipators over the antebellum period. "During [its] early existence," writes LaRoche, "... the sole purpose of the tiny community may have been to harbor escapees as they moved northward along the Underground Railroad." In Orange County, Indiana, the Lick

²⁶⁶ Ripley Anti-Slavery Society Minutes, 1835-1848. VOL 444. OHC, accessed Jun. 8, 2019. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p267401coll32/id/4800/rec/90>; Gilead Anti-Slavery Society of Clermont County Minutes, 1836-1838. VFM 4655. OHC, accessed Jun. 8, 2019. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p267401coll32/id/3190/rec/62>.

²⁶⁷ Gabe N. Johnson's interview, Sept. 30, 1894. WHSC. MSS116AV BOX 57 08OH 028. OHC, accessed May 27, 2020. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/6587/rec/51>.

²⁶⁸ Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan*, 202-205; Minute Book of the Neel's Creek Anti-Slavery Society, 1839-1845. ISL. Indianapolis, Indiana.

²⁶⁹ Figure taken from Anna-Lisa Cox, *The Bone and Sinew of the Land: America's Forgotten Black Pioneers & the Struggle for Equality* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2018).

Creek settlement was founded near Paoli (fifty miles northwest of Louisville). By 1860, over 250 African Americans lived in the settlement.²⁷⁰ Elsewhere, Keith Griffler writes that the Cabin Creek settlement in Randolph County, Indiana was a “fugitive-dominated African American community” which sheltered countless freedom seekers. Jacob Cummings, a freedom seeker from Kentucky, recalled taking refuge at Cabin Creek for almost six months before making his way onward to Cass County, Michigan.²⁷¹

The Rocky Fork settlement (near Alton, Illinois) was another primary destination for freedom seekers, particularly from Missouri. In September 1852, eight self-emancipators escaped from St. Genevieve, Missouri to the settlement. Unfortunately, they were captured shortly afterward. Others escaped Miller Grove, an African American settlement just outside Shawneetown, Illinois. Henry Goings recalled stopping at “a colored boarding house” in Shawneetown during his escape (although he did not stay for long for fear of being caught). He secreted himself aboard an Ohio River steamboat to Portsmouth, Ohio, from whence he traveled north to Canada. Aside from the black community itself, freedom seekers took refuge in the natural landscape to remain hidden. Sand Cave in Shawneetown National Forest, notes LaRoche, “provided refuge near Miller Grove” to refugees from Missouri, Kentucky, and elsewhere.²⁷² Brooklyn, Illinois was another prominent site of refuge for African American freedom seekers. Situated just opposite St. Louis, the rural black community regularly attracted self-emancipated refugees from Missouri and elsewhere.²⁷³

Aside from free black communities, some slave refugees received assistance from white abolitionists in central Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. In Randolph County, Illinois, white activists aided freedom seekers from the Upper South. William Hayes, a Reformed Presbyterian farmer who moved to southwestern Illinois in lands and opportunities, was a prominent UGRR activist in the region. In 1842, Hayes received

²⁷⁰ LaRoche, *Free Black Communities*, 2 (first quote), 57-70, 71-83 (second quote on pg. 74); Griffler, *Front Line of Freedom*, 93; Hagedorn, *Beyond the River*, 13; Blackett, *Captive's Quest for Freedom*, 224; “Lick Creek African American Settlement,” [fs.usda.gov](https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/hoosier/specialplaces/?cid=fsbdev3_017495), accessed Feb. 22, 2019. https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/hoosier/specialplaces/?cid=fsbdev3_017495; “Poke Patch Settlement,” [OhioHistoryCentral.org](http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org), accessed Feb. 22, 2019. http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Poke_Patch_Settlement.

²⁷¹ Keith Griffler, “Beyond the Quest for the ‘Real Eliza Harris’: Fugitive Slave Women in the Ohio Valley,” *Ohio Valley History* 3, no. 2 (2003), 8; Jacob Cummings Interview. WHSC. MSS116AV BOX44 F03 009. OHC, accessed May 27, 2020. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/11411/rec/6>.

²⁷² Henry Goings, et. al., *Rambles of a Runaway Slave from Southern Slavery* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 43-45; Blackett, *Captive's Quest for Freedom*, 137-139, 152; LaRoche, *Free Black Communities*, 35-37. For more on the Rocky Fork settlement, see LaRoche, *Free Black Communities*, 21-42. For the Miller Grove settlement, see LaRoche, *Free Black Communities*, 43-56, 92.

²⁷³ For more on Brooklyn, Illinois, see Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua, *America's First Black Town: Brooklyn, Illinois, 1830-1915* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 31-49.

a group of freedom seekers who had escaped from their enslaver (Andrew Borders) and transported them further north via steamboat. Borders subsequently took Hayes to court for his role in the escape. Borders appealed for financial compensation (\$2,500). The Illinois Supreme Court eventually ruled in Borders' favor in 1844, although Hayes was not required to pay the complete sum. The legal suit cost the UGRR activist a great deal financially in the end, but he continued to assist slave refugees until he died in 1849.²⁷⁴

After escaping to the Old Northwest, freedom seekers often sought to build distance between themselves and the Upper South. From the Ohio River borderland, freedom seekers often made their way northward. R.G. Corwin claimed that UGRR stations existed in Lebanon, Springboro, Loveland, Harveysburg, Waynesville, Xenia, and Dayton. Writing to Siebert in 1892, Warner M. Bateman claimed that father's home in Springboro was "at times, and perhaps generally, one of the stations of the underground railroad[.]" Similarly, Elizabeth Nicholson, daughter of UGRR activists Valentine and Jane Nicholson, told Siebert that her parents were activists in Harveysburg. She claimed that Levi Coffin in Cincinnati regularly sent freedom seekers "up to their case, [where] the slaves would generally remain concealed during the day, and the next morning they would be taken up to Green Plains," a Quaker settlement in Greene County. Later, freedom seekers would be sent onward to Ohio's Western Reserve. Others took different routes and traveled onward to Sandusky or Toledo.²⁷⁵

Columbus, Ohio (a relatively small city at the time) was home to an early freedom network. John T. Ward recalled that Shepherd Alexander, a local black leader, "had a team which we used in conveying." He listed other UGRR activists in the city, including James Poindexter, David Jenkins, and Thomas Washington. Ward also noted that there were UGRR activists in Chillicothe, Worthington, and other nearby towns and villages. Edward L. Sebring of Worthington informed Siebert of his involvement in central Ohio's UGRR. He told Siebert, "In 1856 I was called upon to escort three colored persons to Ozam Gardner's. I went all seasons of the year. I suppose I went twenty times with colored men, and sometimes I had one and sometimes I had ten." Sebring also documented activists in nearby Columbus and

²⁷⁴ For more on William Hayes, see Carol Pirtle, "A Flight to Freedom: A True Story of the Underground Railroad in Illinois," *Ohio Valley History* 3, no. 1 (2003), 3-16; Calarco, *People of the Underground Railroad*, 158-159.

²⁷⁵ R.G. Corwin letter to Wilbur H. Siebert, Sept. 11, 1895. WHSC. MSS116AV BOX59 11OH 016, accessed May 27, 2020. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/8009/rec/28>; Warner M. Bateman to Wilbur H. Siebert, Sept. 1, 1892. WHSC. MSS116AV BOX54 03OH 044, accessed May 27, 2020. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/2442/rec/8>; Elizabeth Nicholson letter to Wilbur H. Siebert, June 9, 1892. WHSC. MSS116AV BOX59 11OH 020, accessed May 27, 2020. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/8445/rec/4>.

Clintonville. Meanwhile, Samuel Chamberlain detailed UGRR stations in Reynoldsburg and Granville, Ohio.²⁷⁶

Freedom seekers also made their way north via southeastern Ohio. Eliakim Moore described various UGRR operations in Athens and Meigs Counties, Ohio. “There were some very active men in Rutland,” he noted; “All along the Meigs County border the fugitives came, all headed for Zanesville, Ohio. They came from New Albany and from Rutland, a noted point.” Moore claimed that freedom seekers also fled across the river near Athens, Ohio, and “make for the Sunday Creek Valley towards Zanesville.” Similarly, Peter Smith described a freedom network that ran along the Muskingum River. UGRR activists operated in Pennsville, Malta, Deavertown, and Zanesville. Hudson Champlain Ward also detailed the growing traffic of freedom seekers on this route. While living at Zanesville, he recalled that refugees “came from as far as [North] Carolina. Came sometimes from Gallipolis, sometimes from Pomeroy and through Deavertown[.]” One activist at Deavertown, Benjamin Graham, “used to help the fugitives; he and others there used to get some colored man to carry them in a covered wagon, bring them to the Putnam side.”²⁷⁷

Peter Stokes’ letters to Siebert yield insight into the experience of freedom seekers. Stokes and nine others (his brother, two sisters, and six children) resolved to escape from Bracken County, Kentucky. “On Sunday night,” he recalled, “we started across the River in 2 small boats and turned ‘em both adrift, and then set out for Felicity [between Ripley and Cincinnati],” where they knew an acquaintance. Upon arrival, the group found that “Kentuckians had surrounded the place, and we couldn’t get there.” Stokes’ group was hidden in a barn on the Ohio River called “Canada.” After two weeks, they moved onward through Clermont County until they reached Cadiz, where they met “a colored man by the name of Brown.” About one-and-a-half weeks later, the group was taken to Cleveland, and from there went to Detroit. They subsequently crossed the Detroit River into Windsor.²⁷⁸

Meanwhile, Elias Tetrick, a Methodist minister at Winterset in Guernsey County, Ohio, recalled his involvement in the regional UGRR between 1847 and

²⁷⁶ John T. Ward interview, Jun. 15, 1892. WHSC, MSS116AV BOX55 05OH 016. OHC, accessed May 27, 2020. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/3647/rec/2>; Edward L. Sebring account of Jason Bull. WHSC, MSS116AV BOX55 05OH 040, accessed May 27, 2020. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/3718/rec/52>; Samuel Chamberlain account of abolitionist activities, Apr. 18, 1892. WHSC, MSS116AV BOX55 05OH 051, accessed May 27, 2020. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/3645/rec/45>.

²⁷⁷ Eliakim H. Moore interview by Wilbur Siebert, Mar. 9, 1892. WHSC, MSS116AV BOX53 01OH 067. OHC, accessed May 1, 2020. <https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/1510>; Peter Smith letter, Dec. 3, 1895. WHSC, MSS116AV BOX59 10OH 007, accessed May 27, 2020. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/7673/rec/24>; Hudson Champlain Ward recollections of the Underground Railroad. WHSC, MSS116AV BOX59 10OH 006, accessed May 27, 2020. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/7843/rec/41>.

²⁷⁸ Peter Stokes interview with Wilbur H. Siebert, August 3, 1895. WHSC, MSS116AV BOX 54 03OH 027. OHC, accessed May 1, 2020. <https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/3037>.

1865. “One load I took,” he claimed, “had eighty-six men and two women all armed. The women had their bowie knives in their sleeves and the men revolvers. I delivered them at New Cornerstown. It was liberty or death with them. Sometimes they’d be covered with a blanket or quilt.”²⁷⁹

Daniel Howell Hise, a white abolitionist in Salem, recorded the arrival of freedom seekers at his home. On April 8, 1849, he noted the arrival of “seven fugitive slaves, (by way of the Underground Railroad) from Wheeling, [West Virginia].” On April 22, he noted that he “met some fugitives” while traveling to Woodland, Ohio. In December 1850, Hise recalled that four freedom seekers (three from Virginia, one from New Orleans) arrived in Salem. Meanwhile, the following September, he documented the arrival of three self-emancipators from Parkersburg, Virginia, one of whom “was well armed with [a] stock knife and [a] brace of pistols.” On March 24, 1852, another UGRR conductor “got my carriage yesterday to take a fugitive slave out to another station; she hailed from Wheeling.”²⁸⁰ Elsewhere, John Ratliff claimed that UGRR agents in Cincinnati cooperated with activists in southern and central Indiana. He wrote that Coffin and others directed freedom seekers to Wayne County and Grant County, Indiana. Ratliff believed that most were sent to Michigan. He added that Battle Creek, Michigan was “a comparatively safe retreat for the flying fugitive.”²⁸¹

African Americans and white abolitionists were not the only ones involved in the Old Northwest’s freedom networks. Tiya Miles and Roy E. Finkenbine recently demonstrated that freedom seekers sought refuge with indigenous communities in the Old Northwest (primarily in a region commonly referred to as ‘Indian Country’). After escaping from the South, an unknown number of African American refugees took refuge with the Wyandots, Shawnees, Ottawa, and other indigenous peoples. Unfortunately, there are only scant references to self-emancipators seeking sanctuary with indigenous groups in historical records. Josiah Henson briefly mentions receiving assistance from “Indians” during his escape. Nonetheless, it remains clear that they performed an important role in forging freedom networks in ‘Indian Country’ and provided assistance to southern black refugees. Diane Miller describes a ‘tri-racial’ UGRR in the region.²⁸²

²⁷⁹ Elias Tetrack Interview by Wilbur H. Siebert, n.d. WHSC, MSS116AV Box 55, vol. 5.OHC, accessed May 1, 2020. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p267401coll32/id/1826/rec/111>.

²⁸⁰ Daniel Howell Hise excerpted diary, 1848-1862. WHSC. MSS116AV BOX61 14OH 036. OHC, accessed May 1, 2020. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/5695>.

²⁸¹ John Ratliff letter to Wilbur H. Siebert, March 22, 1896. WHSC. MSS116AV BOX43 02IN 084. OHC, accessed May 27, 2020. <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/siebert/id/26126/rec/50>.

²⁸² Roy E. Finkenbine, “The Underground Railroad in ‘Indian Country,’” in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, 70-92; Miles, *Dawn of Detroit*, 53; Henson, *Life of Josiah Henson*, 54-55; Diane Miller, “Wyandot, Shawnee, and African American Resistance to Slavery in Ohio and Kansas,” (PhD diss., University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2019), Ch. 3.

Freedom seekers often sought refuge in regions with strong anti-slavery sentiments. Ohio's Western Reserve was perhaps the most well-known abolitionist bastion in the former Northwest Territory. Over the antebellum period, it became home to prominent abolitionists and African American communities, most notably Oberlin (discussed later). Meanwhile, other slave refugees traveled to Cleveland, a relatively small yet growing city in the Old Northwest. By 1860, about 800 African Americans lived in the city. Free black activists in the city, such as John Malvin, were integral to the city's UGRR network. Slave refugees heading to Upper Canada often traveled to the province via Cleveland. The city's rail and maritime routes enabled self-emancipators to travel to Canada more quickly. In 1854, the *Cleveland Herald* noted that six freedom seekers in the city "immediately took the Canada train." Two years later, the *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer* claimed that "some seventy-five fugitives have passed through the city during the last six or eight weeks. They were from Kentucky, Virginia, Georgia, and South Carolina."²⁸³

Michigan was an appealing destination for slave refugees. Aside from its geographical distance from the Upper South, as well as its proximity to Upper Canada, the state was home to burgeoning African American and white abolitionist communities. The Wolverine State, notes Roy Finkbine, "acquired a reputation among antebellum Americans – black and white, slave and free – as a beacon of liberty on the Great Lakes." Over time, black activists and white abolitionists forged important UGRR networks for freedom seekers. Finkbine adds that the state soon became "a hotbed of antislavery organizing and political opposition to the extension of slavery into the new territories of the American West." Michigan's black population grew more slowly than Ohio's or Indiana's. In 1840, only 707 black people were officially recorded in the entire state. Ten years later, the total number had risen to 2,583. Roughly half of Michigan's black population lived in either Wayne County (mostly in Detroit) or rural Cass County.²⁸⁴

²⁸³ Kenneth L. Kusmer, "African Americans," *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, accessed, Jan. 15, 2019. <https://case.edu/ech/articles/a/african-americans>; "Malvin, John," *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, accessed, Jan. 15, 2019. <https://case.edu/ech/articles/m/malvin-john>; "Six colored passengers...", *Cleveland Herald*, Mar. 6, 1854, reprinted in (Pittsburgh, PA) *Daily Morning Post*, Mar. 23, 1854; "We learn from..." *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, Dec. 12, 1856.

²⁸⁴ Roy E. Finkbine, "A Beacon of Liberty on the Great Lakes: Race, Slavery, and the Law in Antebellum Michigan," in Paul Finkelman and Martin J. Hershock (eds.), *The History of Michigan Law* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006), 83 (first and second quotes), 85.

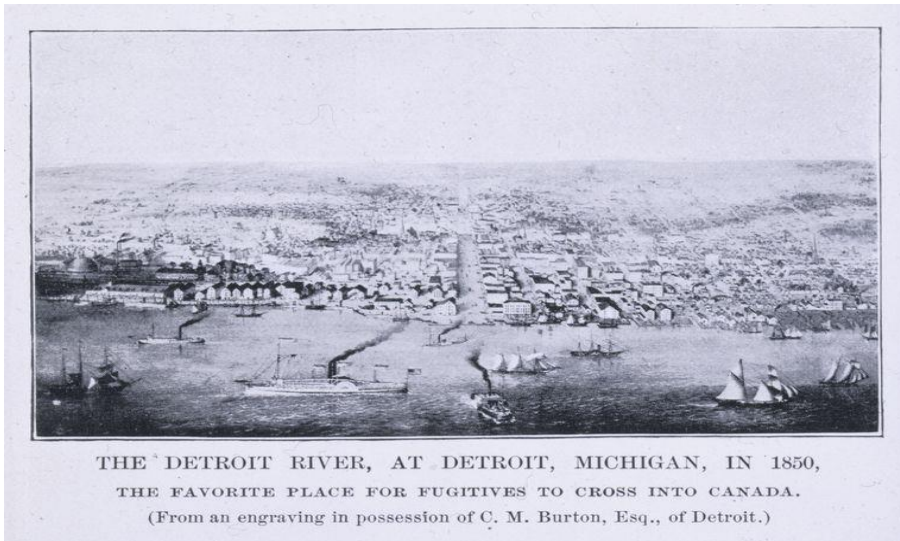


Figure 9: Detroit River, c. 1850

Source: “The Detroit River, at Detroit, Michigan, in 1850, the favorite place for fugitives to cross into Canada. (From an engraving in possession of C.M. Burton, Esq., of Detroit.” Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division. NYPL Digital Collections, accessed January 21, 2020. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47dc-5238-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>.

Detroit was one of the most popular transnational gateways for slave refugees heading to Canada. One traveler, J.G. Kohl, recalled in 1861, “At Detroit the immigration of black fugitives is more numerous than at Niagara... Thousands are said to have passed that way during these few years past.”²⁸⁵ Self-emancipators from Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, and elsewhere in the South made their way to Detroit on foot, by horseback, and aboard steamboats. In early November 1859, the *St. Louis News* reported that the “Negro exodus from Missouri continues... Last Friday there arrived in Detroit, Michigan, bound for Canada, twenty-six negroes all the way from Missouri, having been carried through by the agents of the Underground Railroad.”²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ J.G. Kohl, *Travels in Canada, and through the states of New York and Pennsylvania*. Vol. 2 (London: G. Manwaring, 1861), 170, accessed May 28, 2020. <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.36889/1?r=0&s=1>.

²⁸⁶ “Twenty-six Missouri Negroes Arrived in Canada,” *St. Louis News*, reprinted in *Press and Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Nov. 11, 1859.

Aside from its location, Detroit's growing African American population undoubtedly contributed to its appeal for freedom seekers. By 1840, almost 200 African Americans officially resided in Detroit. African Americans formed protective societies to assist and defend self-emancipated refugees. Free black activist William Lambert and others formed Detroit's Colored Vigilant Committee (CVC) in 1842, which shielded free African Americans and aided freedom seekers into Upper Canada. On January 10, 1843, William Lambert proclaimed at Detroit City Hall that the CVC was founded, "to lay the foundation for the triumph of the just principles of liberty, and the right of all men to enjoy an equal protection, under the government in which they live[.]"²⁸⁷

CVC members played crucial roles in assisting freedom seekers. George DeBaptiste transported freedom seekers to Canada aboard his ship the *T. Whitney*. Meanwhile, Madison J. Lightfoot and William C. Munroe, two prominent members of Detroit's Second Baptist Church, also assisted freedom seekers in the city. As Barbara Hughes Smith notes, black churches in Detroit "formed essential links in the chain that provided safe haven and assistance to refugees from bondage throughout the antebellum period."²⁸⁸ The Detroit River border zone became a widely used transnational gateway for African American refugees heading to Canada. In 1851, the *Kentucky Tribune* claimed that a freedom-seeking mother escaped across the river with her eight children. In 1859, the *Detroit Advertiser* reported that 75 refugees "arrived in Canada by one train, from the interior of Tennessee. This is probably the largest that ever escaped in one company." It added that the UGRR "was never before doing so flourishing a business."²⁸⁹

By setting foot on Canadian soil, slave refugees understood that they could obtain formal freedom. Some freedom seekers framed crossing the river as a religious experience. Richard Warren, a self-emancipator who escaped from Tennessee to Detroit in 1845, wrote in his autobiography, "When I arrived in the city of Detroit I had to stand and wonder at the goodness of the Lord, who had brought me through the dark and angry waters, and bid me to look upon the soil upon which I could tread

²⁸⁷ Herb Boyd, *Black Detroit: A People's History of Self-Determination* (New York: Amistad, 2017), 21-42; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: Vol. 3: The United States, 1830-1846*, 398.

²⁸⁸ Roy Finkenbine, "A Community Militant and Organized: The Colored Vigilant Committee of Detroit," in Smardz Frost and Tucker (eds.), *A Fluid Frontier*, 154-164; Smardz Frost, "African American and African Canadian Transnationalism," 78-88; Barbara Hughes Smith, "Worship Way Stations in Detroit," in Smardz Frost and Tucker (eds.), *A Fluid Frontier*, 115. For more on the Detroit River border zone's UGRR Network (especially the role of women activists), see Margaret Washington, "'I Am Going Straight for Canada': Women Underground Railroad Activists in the Detroit River Border Zone," in Smardz Frost and Tucker (eds.), *A Fluid Frontier*, 165-184.

²⁸⁹ "FUGITIVE SLAVES," *Kentucky Tribune*, Apr. 1, 1851; "Great Stampede of Slaves," *Detroit Advertiser*, reprinted in *Jeffersonian* (Stroudsburg, PA), May 19, 1859..

a free man. I thought I should never sufficiently praise him for the wonderful love and kindness to me, in bringing me from bondage to liberty.”²⁹⁰

Elsewhere in Michigan, Ypsilanti saw the arrival of numerous freedom seekers from the South. “For at least a decade,” writes Carol Mull, “the city had a growing black population and an active network helping freedom seekers.” Cass County became a popular destination for manumitted and slave refugees. In 1849, the *Detroit Free Press* reported that fifty black migrants passed through Indiana *en route* to southwestern Michigan. The group, which was comprised of forty freed blacks and ten self-emancipators, had sent agents to the region in search of a suitable place for settlement. By 1860, approximately 600 African Americans resided in the region (although the real figure was likely higher). Geographical proximity and local freedom networks enabled freedom seekers in southwestern Michigan to escape to Canada quickly if threatened with recapture. In 1857, the *Detroit Tribune* reported that detectives arrived in Ann Arbor in search of freedom seekers. In response, local black activists quickly placed them on “cars on the Underground Railroad.”²⁹¹

Born into a Quaker family, Laura Smith Haviland was among the most well-known women abolitionists in the state. In 1829, she and her husband Charles moved to Raisin, Lenawee County where they purchased lands in the Michigan wilderness and established a farm. According to Stacey Robertson, “Haviland cooperated with her African American neighbors and friends to house and hide fugitives as well as to ensure their long-term safety.” Laura and Charles “employed escapees and free blacks” on their farm and admitted African Americans to the Raisin Institute. Haviland and other female abolitionists established anti-slavery societies and organized fairs and meetings across the state. Women abolitionists, argues Stacey Robertson, “found that contact with slave men, women, and children was a transformative experience. Housing, feeding, and communicating with those who had experienced chattel slavery awakened women to the real-life horror of the institution.”²⁹²

Haviland’s memoir *A Woman’s Life-Work* offers an invaluable glimpse into black freedom networks in the Old Northwest. During a visit to Cincinnati, Haviland recalled, “at early dawn, nine slaves crossed the [Ohio] river, and were conducted to one of our friends on Walnut Hills for safety, until arrangements could be made to forward them to Victoria’s domain.” According to Haviland, the group was

²⁹⁰ Richard Warren, *Narrative of the Life and Sufferings of Rev. Richard Warren, (A Fugitive Slave) written by himself* (Hamilton: Printed at the Christian Advocate Book and Job Office, 1856), 14, accessed May 5, 2020. <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.50755/1?r=0&s=1>.

²⁹¹ Mull, *The Underground Railroad in Michigan*, 25, 136; Grace Shackman, *Ann Arbor Observed: Selections from Then and Now* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 186-188; Cox, *The Bone and Sinew of the Land*, 191 (second quote); “Immigration of Colored Persons to Michigan,” *Detroit Free Press*, Dec. 7, 1849; “FUGITIVE SLAVE CASE AT ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN,” *Detroit Tribune*, Dec. 1, 1857, reprinted in *Agitator*, Dec. 10, 1857.

²⁹² Robertson, *Hearts Beating for Liberty*, 167.

comprised of two families that fled across the Ohio River upon learning that “there was a prospect before them of being taken down the river... They had with them their five little folks, that seemed as full of fear as their trembling parents.” Haviland and the others met with William Beard, a “well-known Quaker conductor,” who agreed to transport the family in his wagon. A few weeks later, she learned that the family had arrived safely in Canada.²⁹³

Haviland wrote that a local committee informed her of “two young men just arrived, who were secreted in the basement of Zion Baptist Church (colored).” The two freedom seekers, James and George, had escaped from their enslaver who lived “only twenty-five miles from the [Ohio] river[.]” Haviland and the others quickly arranged for their transportation out of Cincinnati. “I took their measures,” she remembered, “to procure for each a Summer suit, and went to our store of new and second-hand clothing, at Levi Coffin’s, where anti-slavery women met tri-monthly, to spend a day in making and repairing clothing for fugitive slaves.” Haviland directed the pair to “a safer hiding-place, until a way opened for them to go to a Friends’ settlement, about eighty miles distant[.]” At this stage, Haviland claims that George returned to Kentucky to rescue his wife, Liz. He pretended that he was ‘sick of freedom’ and called abolitionists “the greates’ [sic] rascals I ever seen” to convince his enslaver to take him back. One night, George gained permission from his enslaver to visit Liz, who lived on a neighboring farmstead. “The plan,” recalled Haviland, “laid in his midnight visit was to start after sundown, and go until dark in the direction of the place each had their permission to go, and then go for the Licking River... He was to secure the first skiff with oars he could find to aid them down the river with all possible speed to the Ohio.” George and Liz eventually found the skiff and set about rowing to the Ohio River. Along the way, they were questioned by white men on the Licking River shoreline but managed to evade them. They subsequently reached the Zion Baptist Church in Cincinnati, where it was decided that they would travel with Haviland to Michigan.²⁹⁴

The escape of John Little and his wife illustrates the added mobility afforded by steamboats. Having fled from North Carolina to Chicago, they subsequently headed to Detroit via steamboat, where they crossed into Canada. Six months later, they decided to resettle in the Queen’s Bush, where they hoped to obtain lands. They “went to Buffalo – thence to Black Rock [New York] – thence to St. Catharines.” In September 1852, the *Sandusky Commercial* reported, “Our city has been thrown into intense excitement last evening,” it claimed, “by an attempt to arrest two negro men,

²⁹³ Laura S. Haviland, *A Woman’s Life-Work, Labors and Experiences of* (Cincinnati: Waldron and Stowe, 1882), 111-112. ‘Victoria’s domain’ refers to Queen Victoria.

²⁹⁴ Haviland, *A Woman’s Life-Work*, 112-121. For more on the contributions of women abolitionists to the UGRR and nineteenth-century abolitionist movement in North America, see Julie Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

two negro women, and several children, on board the Arrow, and the moment of her departure for Detroit.” Later, the *Buffalo Commercial* claimed, “at Sandusky about thirty [freedom seekers] reached there and crossed into Canada. On his way to Malden, the captain of the steamer informed him that over 200 had crossed between those two points. At another point on the lake, eighteen embarked on one boat on a certain night, and during the last week over forty crossed from Cleveland.”²⁹⁵ Josiah Henson also recalled escaping to Canada aboard a steamboat at Sandusky, Ohio. He met a ship captain who “sympathized with [him]... and offered to take me and my family to Buffalo[.]” The family sailed to Buffalo, before crossing the Niagara River. Henson recalled, “my first impulse was to throw myself on the ground, and giving way to the riotous exultation of my feelings, to execute sundry antics which excited the astonishment of those who were looking on.”²⁹⁶

Some freedom seekers that escaped to Canada wrote to their former enslavers. On June 28, 1835, Zephaniah Franklin wrote to his former enslaver Adam Beatty of Washington, Kentucky: “here I am now at my own disposal and in the full free enjoyment of free Exercise of my talents whatever they may be, no more shall I fear nor feel the sharp Lash, no more shall I be afraid of the frown and displeasure of my Tyrant Master[.]”²⁹⁷ On January 13, 1854, James Johnson, who escaped from Louisville to Chatham, Upper Canada, wrote to his former enslaver, “I have made Sure my escape out of the house of bondage and arrive[d] safe in [C]anada... I like this pleasant place very much, and now I can Say that I am free in the land of liberty.” Interestingly, Johnson claimed that his enslavers were not the reason behind his escape. Rather, he showed some affection toward his former ‘masters.’ He wrote, “if I never see you again in this world I pray I meet you in heaven[.]”²⁹⁸

Some refugees in Canada placed ‘information wanted’ notices in newspapers. In April 1855, Charles Fisher of Toronto published a notice in the *Provincial Freeman* to “receive any information” regarding any of his enslaved family. Meanwhile, John and Emaline Hall of St. Catharines sought information on her brother, William Buck, who “was recently in the State of Indiana, on his way to Canada West, and it is presumed that he has reached the province.”²⁹⁹ In 1854, Robert Brown, who escaped from Frankfort, Kentucky, wrote to his wife Millie (which was sent to his former enslaver), “I am now living in Chatham [,] Canada West and I am

²⁹⁵ Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery*, 215-216; “THE MANHUNTERS BAFFLED,” (Sandusky, OH) *Sandusky Commercial Register*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Nov. 5, 1852; “RUNAWAY SLAVES,” *Buffalo Commercial*, Dec. 2, 1852.

²⁹⁶ Henson, *Life of Josiah Henson*, 48-59.

²⁹⁷ Letter from Zephaniah Franklin to Adam Beatty, 28 June 1835. Beatty-Quisenberry Family Papers, 1796-1962. Box 2, Folder 12. Mss./A/B369. FHS. Louisville, KY.

²⁹⁸ Letter from James Johnson, Fugitive Slaves in Chatham, Canada West, to his Former Master, Jan. 13, 1854. Gorin Family Papers, 1780-1991. Folder 1. Mss. A G669 1-20. FHS. Louisville, KY.

²⁹⁹ Charles Fisher, “Information Wanted,” *PF*, Apr. 21, 1855; John Hall, “Information Wanted,” *PF*, Apr. 21, 1854.

doing very well and enjoying excellent Health.” Brown inquired if it was possible to purchase his wife’s freedom for \$750.³⁰⁰ In the Canadian Maritimes, Thomas H. Jones sought to raise funds to free his son in North Carolina. In 1859, Jackson Whitney in Sandwich wrote to his former enslaver William Riley; “There is only one thing to prevent me being entirely happy here,” he wrote, “and that is the want of my dear wife and children, and *you* to see us enjoying ourselves here together.”³⁰¹

Conclusion

Slave refugees availed of various escape routes to the North and Canada. While those in the Mason-Dixon borderland and the Atlantic coast typically aimed for the northern Mid-Atlantic states and New England, self-emancipators in Kentucky and Missouri escaped predominantly via the Old Northwest. Freedom seekers fled to African American communities and settlements with the aim of passing as free people of color. Urban centers like Philadelphia, New York City, Boston, and Cincinnati were popular destinations for freedom seekers given their free black populations, transportation links, and socio-economic opportunities. But self-emancipators fled to virtually every town, city, and rural community with sizable African American populations. While most slave refugees remained in the northern US, thousands journeyed onward to Canada (either directly from the South or following a brief stay in the North).

African Americans, Quakers, white abolitionists, and even indigenous peoples formed an interracial network that assisted freedom seekers in the North and Canada. UGRR networks on the Eastern Seaboard were more organized than their counterparts in the Old Northwest, but it is clear that black freedom networks were largely a series of loosely-structured, overlapping networks. Furthermore, this chapter illustrates that family ties and kinship networks were an integral facet of escape to the North and Canada. While previous histories depict self-emancipation as an overwhelmingly individual and solitary act, abolitionist records reveal that various types of family units – couples, single-parent families, two-parent families, and extended families – fled from the South together. Part II of this study (*Forging Freedom*) will examine the experiences of slave refugees in the northern US and Canada. Chapter Three will focus on the efforts of slave refugees to acquire land, labor, and access to education.

³⁰⁰ Brown, Robert (a runaway slave). To “Millie,” but sent to “Mr. Lander” Brown, Frankfort, Ky., Dated Chatham [Canada] March 8th, 1854. Orlando Brown Papers. Folder 38. MSS. A B879/38. FHS. Louisville, Kentucky.

³⁰¹ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 212-214, 406-407.

Part II: Forging Freedom

Chapter Three

“Self-Reliance is the True Road to Independence”³⁰²: Freedom Seekers and the Pursuit of Land, Labor, and Education

I was in the midst of an ocean of my fellow-men, and yet a perfect stranger to every one [sic]. I was without home, without acquaintance, without money, without credit, without work... In such an extremity, a man has something beside his new-born freedom of which to think. While wandering about the streets of New York, and lodging at least one night among the barrels on one of the wharves, I was indeed free – free from slavery, but free from food and shelter as well.

- Frederick Douglass³⁰³

After escaping from bondage, slave refugees set about establishing new lives in the North and Canada. As Frederick Douglass’ testimony implies, however, this was far from easy. With little money, few resources, and potentially no social connections, most freedom seekers had to start anew. They had to obtain housing and employment, as well as integrate into northern black communities. Across the ‘free’ states and Canadian provinces, self-emancipated people settled in a variety of locales. On the one hand, growing urban centers – such as New York City, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and Toronto – became magnets for freedom seekers. Others established rural settlements and farming communities. The promise of land-ownership was an appealing prospect for formerly enslaved people; not only was it potentially a means of becoming truly self-sufficient, but it also symbolized their claims to personhood. Each region offered its own set of opportunities and challenges. Urban centers presented the greatest array of jobs for self-emancipated newcomers. In northern and Canadian towns and cities, urban refugees found work in shipyards, docks, markets, hotels, factories, and other sites of black labor. Yet urban life was also marked by

³⁰² Chapter title taken from the masthead of the African Canadian newspaper *Provincial Freeman* (discussed further in Chapter Five).

³⁰³ Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself. His Early Life as a Slave, His Escape from Bondage, and His Complete History to the Present Time, Including His Connection with the Anti-Slavery Movement; His Labors in Great Britain as well as His Own Country; His Experience in the Conduct of an Influential Newspaper; His Connection with the Underground Railroad; His Relations with John Brown and the Harper’s Ferry Raid; His Recruiting the 54th and 55th Mass. Colored Regiments; His Interviews with Presidents Lincoln and Johnson; His Appointment by Gen. Grant to Accompany the Santo Domingo Commission – Also a Seat in the Council of the District of Columbia; His Appointment as United States Marshal by President R.B. Hayes; Also His Appointment to Be Recorder of Deeds in Washington by President J.A. Garfield; with Many Other Interesting and Important Events of His Most Eventful Life; With an Introduction by Mr. George L. Ruffin, of Boston* (Boston: De Wolfe, Fiske & Co., 1882), 252-253, accessed Feb. 10, 2020. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/doug192/doug192.html>.

poverty, illness, and homeless. While many found employment, other free and self-emancipated African Americans could not obtain work. Some were required to seek assistance from almshouses and benevolent societies. Additionally, racial prejudice was commonplace in major urban centers, particularly as European immigrants increasingly migrated to North American towns and cities. Elsewhere, slave refugees sought to become independent farmers in the rural North and Canada. In some instances, rural settlements were predicated by a lack of major urban centers (particularly in the Canadian province and the former Northwest Territory). For some, it was an active choice. Becoming self-sufficient land-owners was the ultimate goal. Yet even in rural areas, slave refugees and free blacks encountered poverty, racism, and other hardships.

Apart from jobs and land-ownership, slave refugees and free blacks sought access to schools and colleges. Education was viewed by many as the primary means of self-improvement and communal advancement. Across the North and Canada, slave refugees and free blacks petitioned for equal access to common schools. In Upper Canada, black activists and white abolitionists founded a series of utopian communities that aimed to combine the central tenets of land ownership and education. For the most part, these transnational endeavors were short-lived and met with criticism from whites. This chapter explores slave refugee settlement patterns across the northern US and Canada. It seeks to uncover why freedom seekers settled in certain places and analyze their respective advantages and disadvantages. It addresses the distinction between urban and rural settlement throughout the North and Canada. What were the advantages of settling in towns and cities over rural communities? Conversely, why did some refugees seek to establish independent rural settlements? Lastly, this chapter reconsiders the ‘success’ rate of utopian settlements. Previous studies claim these ventures were ultimately failures because they each only survived for relatively short periods. This chapter breaks from previous studies by arguing that these settlements were not abject failures. Although most were short-lived ventures, they provided slave refugees with unprecedented opportunities to practice land-ownership and gain an education. In many respects, these settlements were truly ground-breaking.

Overall, the Canadian provinces offered more opportunities for slave refugees to procure lands and establish independent settlements than the northern US. This was largely due to the differences between formal and semi-formal freedom. As self-emancipated people in the North were still legally regarded as ‘fugitives,’ they sought to retain a low-profile by integrating into pre-existing free black communities. Without proof of legal status, they were generally unable to purchase property or work in certain professions. This was not the case in British North America, where self-emancipators shed their status as human ‘property’ upon setting foot on Canadian soil. At the same time, slave refugees in the northern states and Canada also

encountered similar difficulties regarding poverty and racism. Furthermore, for most refugees in Canada, land ownership and education were financially beyond their reach. As a result, the experiences of many blacks in Canada was not entirely different from their counterparts in the North. Nevertheless, the right to property, lands, and education, which were afforded by formal freedom, remained highly significant.

Community, Labor, and Poverty in the Antebellum North

Towns and cities became magnets for free people of color and self-emancipated refugees in the northern US. On the Eastern Seaboard, freedom seekers from Virginia, Maryland, and elsewhere fled to Philadelphia, New York City, Boston, and other towns and cities in the Mid-Atlantic states and New England. Taking advantage of their sizable African American populations, self-emancipators hoped to pass for free people of color among the bustling crowds. Similarly, in the Old Northwest, freedom seekers from the Upper South and beyond fled to Cincinnati and other urban centers to hide among each locale's black communities. Many subsequently journeyed onward to Canada to begin their new lives under the lion's paw.

Regardless of their legal status, African Americans typically occupied the bottom rung of society. Most black men and women held low-wage, temporary jobs across the northern states. Bruce Levine argues that they "supplied a disproportionate share of the North's heavy, low-paid, and menial labor" in the decades following the first emancipation.³⁰⁴ Black men typically worked in docks, ports, factories, and other menial occupations. Meanwhile, women were normally employed in domestic occupations. Most African Americans in Boston, New York City, and Philadelphia lived in relative poverty, earning just enough to support themselves and their families. For slave refugees, establishing new lives in unfamiliar urban settings was very challenging. At times, African American men and women were compelled to solicit aid from almshouses and other external sources. Additionally, slave refugees (alongside legally free blacks) faced growing racial prejudice and sporadic violence. White Euro-Americans and European immigrants regularly directed their anger and frustration at African-descended people, attacking their communities and business. While some fled in response to terror attacks, most stood their ground and steadfastly refused to leave their homes.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁴ Bruce Levine, *Half Slave and Half Free: The Roots of the Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 60.

³⁰⁵ Suggested readings for black urban life in the northeastern US include Nash, *Forging Freedom*; Hodges, *Root & Branch*; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*; White, *Somewhat More Independent*; Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*; James O. 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). For the foremost study on African American women in the urban northeast, see Erica Armstrong

Philadelphia, New York City, and Boston were home to some of the most diverse black communities on the continent. Free-born, manumitted, and self-emancipated African Americans resided in each city, as well as black immigrants and refugees from the Caribbean. Within each city, African Americans clustered around a handful of wards and neighborhoods. In Boston, most blacks resided in the neighborhood of Beacon Hill (located in the city's Sixth Ward). Gary Collison writes, "Southac [present-day Phillips] and Belknap Streets, were populated almost exclusively by blacks." Prominent freedom seekers, including Lewis and Harriet Hayden, settled in Beacon Hill and became active members of the city's abolitionist network. In New York City, African Americans began to congregate over various wards and neighborhoods in the decades following the state's 1799 gradual abolition act. According to Leslie M. Harris, most African Americans initially resided in Manhattan's Fifth and Sixth Wards. "Settling below Houston Street, from the Hudson River to the East River," she notes, "newly free blacks rented and sometimes bought homes and established churches." Over time, African Americans resided predominantly in western Manhattan's Sixth Ward.³⁰⁶

Patterns of spatial segregation varied from place to place. According to Leonard Curry, Boston was "the most thoroughly segregated city in the nation in its residential patterns." Other free black communities were not completely segregated from whites, even if they clustered together. They often lived relatively close to Euro-Americans and European immigrants, most notably Irish and German newcomers. The most famous example was the Five Points in New York City which, from the 1840s onward, was occupied by African Americans and Irish newcomers. As Leslie Harris notes, "The Irish increasingly "whitened" residential and social spaces previously designated as good enough only for blacks." Philadelphia also witnessed a similar pattern of spatial segregation. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, free African Americans increasingly moved into South Philadelphia.³⁰⁷

While most self-emancipated and legally free blacks in urban centers could not afford to purchase lands, a small number experimented with land ownership. Leslie Harris writes that Seneca Village symbolized "the largest group of black landholdings in Manhattan." Led by free African American Andrew Williams,

Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011). For the most comprehensive overview of anti-abolition mobs and terror attacks on northern black communities, see Leonard L. Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

³⁰⁶ Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 3; Kantrowitz, *More than Freedom*, 17; Gary Collison, *Shadrach Minkins: From Fugitive Slave to Citizen* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 64; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 74-75.

³⁰⁷ Leonard P. Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 24; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 250; Murray Dubin, *South Philadelphia: Mummies, Memories, and the Melrose Diner* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996) 65.

prospective African American landowners began establishing homes and businesses in the area near Central Park. Similarly, African Americans on Staten Island established the Sandy Ground settlement, while free black Brooklynites bought lands and founded Weeksville in the late 1830s. Just over one decade later, it was among the country's largest free black communities.³⁰⁸

The free black populations of Boston, New York City, and Philadelphia rose sharply after the gradual abolition of slavery across the North. However, African American residents of Boston, New York City, and Philadelphia remained a minority in each city. In 1850, African Americans in Boston represented less than two percent of the total population. In New York City and Philadelphia, the proportion of free blacks was generally higher. African Americans in Philadelphia represented almost ten percent of the total population in 1820, but this fell to about four percent by the eve of the Civil War. Over time, white Euro-Americans and European immigrants competed with African Americans for cheap labor in northern cities. As the industrial revolution took hold across the North, towns, and cities became a magnet for black men and women.³⁰⁹ Northern cities were exciting places for freedom seekers. For men like Shadrach Minkins, who escaped from Norfolk, Virginia to Boston, this was certainly true. Gary Collison writes, "Boston was in many ways the antithesis of the South city Minkins had left. Boston was the financial, political, social, and cultural hub of the surging new industrial economy."³¹⁰

With its bustling streets, busy docks and harbors, businesses and factories, and railroad and transportation networks, Boston was a city in motion. The same was true for New York City and Philadelphia. As the industrial revolution took hold, these cities consolidated their status as two of the country's largest metropolitan areas. The influx of free and self-emancipated African Americans, Irish, and German immigrants added to the cultural diversity and economic prosperity of northern cities. "In 1850," writes Collison, "foreign-born persons and their children accounted for roughly 45 percent of all Bostonians; by 1855, they would account for over 50 percent." Similar waves of African American, German, and Irish newcomers (as well as others) transformed New York City and Philadelphia.³¹¹

³⁰⁸ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 74-75; Craig Steven Wilder, *In the Company of Black Men: The African Influence on African American Culture in New York City* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 101-102; Donna Lee, "On Visionary Soil, the Dreams Turn Real," *New York Times*, Nov. 7, 2008. <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/09/nyregion/thecity/09sand.html>. Accessed May 7, 2019; Cassandra Zens, "Weeksville, New York (1838-)," *BlackPast.org*, Oct. 14, 2010. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/weeksville-new-york-1838/>. Accessed Sep. 17, 2019.

³⁰⁹ Collison, *Shadrach Minkins*, 62; Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 2; Andrew Diemer, "Free Black Communities," *Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia*, accessed Sep. 17, 2019. <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/free-black-communities/>.

³¹⁰ Collison, *Shadrach Minkins*, 61.

³¹¹ Collison, *Shadrach Minkins*, 61.

Freedom seekers in northern cities often lived in cramped, destitute conditions. Many were required to share rooms and other accommodations with other free people of color and slave refugees. Young, single men “typically became boarders in black households,” notes Collison, “or found lodging in one of several roominghouses catering to blacks, particularly seamen.” Moreover, black families in Boston opened their doors to slave refugees and free blacks in search of accommodation. According to Collison, “Steep rents and extremely limited housing choices compelled many black families to take in boarders to meet ends meet.” Additionally, African Americans also transformed other spaces, such as cellars and basements, into temporary housing. Black Philadelphians faced similar conditions. As noted by Gary Nash, growing numbers of poorer and working-class African Americans “lived in densely packed alleys and courtyards scattered through the city and adjoining districts[.]” Most black newcomers over the 1820s lived in “tenements and shanties” in South Philadelphia. At the same time, the antebellum period saw the emergence of a free black middle-class. But most remained part of the working class (if not unemployed or homeless).³¹² Slave refugees took refuge with other self-emancipators and legally free blacks. Collison notes that Shadrach Minkins “may have found shelter among the many Virginia blacks who had come to the city before him.” Similarly, slave refugees in New York City and Philadelphia typically sought refuge with other African Americans.³¹³

Of course, survival in northern cities required earning a wage. Soon after arrival, freedom seekers set about finding jobs to support themselves. As Gary Nash notes, African Americans in Philadelphia, as well as other northern cities, suffered from greater economic hardship after the War of 1812. “The most severe depression in Philadelphia’s history,” Nash notes, “threw as much as one-third of the labor force out of work.” African Americans suffered disproportionately from this economic downturn. The loss of jobs and the decline in wages led to a rise in black poverty throughout northern cities. In response, black men and women increasingly turned to various forms of poor relief, including almshouses and soup kitchens. At the same time, early waves of Irish and German immigrants began displacing working-class African Americans in factories, harbors, and other sites of working-class labor. Black Philadelphians were “largely excluded from the industrializing textile, shoe, and metal sectors of the economy.” Despite its hardships, slave refugees preferred living in northern cities to the horrors of southern slavery.³¹⁴

The primary obstacles for slave refugees and legally free blacks were primarily structural. Most forms of employment in urban centers discriminated against African Americans. James and Lois Horton write that “racially restricted

³¹² Collison, *Shadrach Minkins*, 64; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 248.

³¹³ Collison, *Shadrach Minkins*, 64-65; Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 6.

³¹⁴ Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 214-217, 246.

system of employment practically guaranteed that many free blacks would become poor, dependent and, perhaps, criminal.” Consequently, most African Americans occupied low-wage, unskilled positions. Professional occupations in antebellum urban centers were typically divided based on gender. Black men worked as day laborers, draymen, carters, waiters, servants, cooks, dock workers, boatmen, and sailors. A small number worked as carpenters, blacksmiths, shopkeepers, tailors, and barbers. Meanwhile, women worked in domestic occupations, including domestic laborers, servants, hairdressers, sewers, and seamstresses. More often than not, black women earned significantly less than black men, which was already significantly less than whites.³¹⁵

Autobiographies and testimonies refer to the types of occupations taken up by slave refugees. William Craft recalled, “We finally, as I have stated, settled at Boston, where we remained nearly two years, I employed as a cabinet-maker and furniture broker, and my wife [Ellen] at her needle[.]” In Boston, Moses Grandy “went to work at sawing wood, sawing with the whip-saw, laboring in the coal yards, loading and unloading vessels, &c.” At other times, Grandy worked aboard various ships. He recalled, “I went [on] a voyage to St. John’s in Porto Rico [sic], with Captain Cobb, in the schooner, *New Packet*... I went [on] several other voyages, and particularly two to the Mediterranean” According to Collison, black seamen “accounted for almost one-quarter of all working black males” in Boston. Similarly, Nash notes that maritime work among black men “continued to be a mainstay.” Across the Northeast, slave refugees and free blacks worked in various maritime industries. In New Bedford, Massachusetts, for instance, 154 African American whalers were recorded in 1850.³¹⁶

Other historical records shed light on the forms of employment taken up by slave refugees and legally free blacks in northern cities. Anti-slavery records, for example, also describe the occupations taken up by free people of color and slave refugees in the urban Northeast. In 1838, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society’s Committee to Visit the Colored People compiled a census of black families in Philadelphia. A cursory glance reveals that black men were most commonly employed as laborers, porters, waiters, carters, coachmen, boatmen, sailors, and cooks. The previous year, over 350 black men were involved in harbor, maritime and seafaring enterprises. Only a small proportion worked as blacksmiths, barbers, carpenters, shoe and boot makers, grocers, bakers, preachers, cabinet makers, physicians, dentists, tailors, musicians, and school teachers. Black women worked as

³¹⁵ Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 110, 114-117. For more on black labor in northeastern cities, see Kantrowitz, *More than Freedom*, 20; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 79-81.

³¹⁶ Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, 86; Moses Grandy, *Narrative of the Life of Moses; Late a Slave in the United States of America* (London: C. Gilpin, 5, Bishopsgate-street, 1843), 41-42, accessed Jun. 8, 2019. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/grandy/grandy.html>; Collison, *Shadrach Minkins*, 67; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 251; Grover, *The Fugitive’s Gibraltar*, 56.

whitewashers, sewers, dressmakers, cooks, day workers, and service jobs were the most common professions listed in the census. Others were registered as shopkeepers, nurses, grocers, and teachers.³¹⁷

City directories also offer valuable insight into black employment in northern cities. Longworth's 1840 directory for New York City, for example, details numerous black residents, including porter Alexander William, oysterman William Allen, and hairdresser Samuel Benben. Later directories provide more details on African American residents in New York City. John Doggett, Jr.'s 1851 street directory offers excellent insight into the occupations of black New Yorkers, especially those in the Five Points. On Anthony Street (present-day Worth Street), Doggett recorded numerous African American men and women. These included washer Sarah Smith, whitewasher Stephen Horseman, laborer William Brown, mariner George Brown, and others whose professions are not listed. Likewise, African Americans in Arch Place worked as coachmen, mariners, coopers, and laborers, among other occupations. Black men and women on Attorney Street worked in similar unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. Meanwhile, some African Americans held other occupations. For instance, Daniel Lane of Broome Street was listed as a musician, highlighting the contribution of black New Yorkers to the city's cultural life. But most African Americans held menial labor and unskilled jobs.³¹⁸

Poverty was widespread in urban black communities. Each year, slave refugees and free African Americans sought relief from municipal almshouses which, notes Mara Kaktins, "offered food, shelter, clothing, and medical care to the poorest and most vulnerable, often in exchange for hard labor and forfeiture of freedom." Nonetheless, most almshouses were overcrowded, unsanitary, and lacking in resources. "Mismanagement, corruption, and an ever-growing indigent population created an almost constant need for more money." Almshouse administrators even indentured children to raise funds. Through this system, many children were torn from their families, never to be seen again.³¹⁹ According to Jane Dabel, "blacks in the almshouse in New York just about equaled the proportion of the population, but by 1843 the proportion of blacks in the almshouse was 50 percent larger than their proportion in the overall population." Six years later, African Americans comprised

³¹⁷ Committee to visit the Colored People. Census Facts Collected by Benjamin C. Bacon and Charles Gardener, 1838, vol. 1-5. PAS Papers Series 5.6. HSP. PAS Papers accessed via [Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice](#). Adam Matthew Digital. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 2 Mar. 2019; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 251-252.

³¹⁸ Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy, The NYPL. "New York City directory" NYPL Digital Collections. Accessed September 18, 2019. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/17e3e2c0-8a22-0136-1f25-4949c287a53f>. 56, 58, 83; Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy, NYPL. "Doggett's New York City street directory for 1851" NYPL Digital Collections. Accessed September 18, 2019. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/83d239c0-436c-0137-7c12-47556b15bdb0>. 16-18, 79.

³¹⁹ Mara Kaktins, "Almshouses (Poorhouses)," *Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia*, accessed May 8, 2019. <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/almshouses-poorhouses/>.

almost one-fifth of New York City's almshouse residents, even though free people of color represented less than ten percent of the city's total population.³²⁰

Most admission books did not distinguish between free African Americans and slave refugees. Yet there were some exceptions. The record keepers at the Danvers Alms House in Peabody, Massachusetts (fifteen miles northwest of Boston) recorded the arrival of several presumed self-emancipators. On June 21, 1852, thirty-year-old "Colerd [sic] Fugitive" James Smith from South Carolina was committed to the Danvers Alms House. In August 1854, two presumed freedom seekers (George William and John Collins) were admitted. The final freedom seeker registered at the Danvers Alms House was George Vannen from Virginia in March 1858, who arrived in Massachusetts aboard a ship. The register notes that he was "going to Lowell."³²¹ African Americans and white abolitionists established benevolent organizations to assist free blacks and slave refugees, particularly women and children. In 1787, Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and other religious leaders in Philadelphia created the Free African Society (FAS), a nondenominational association which provided funds and donations for recently freed blacks and their descendants. Shirley Yee argues that the FAS "served as a catalyst for the establishment of other black mutual aid societies in the city during the mid-nineteenth century[.]" In 1808, the New York African Society for Mutual Relief (NYASMR) was founded to assist black women and children in the city.³²²

In 1836, Anna and Hannah Shotwell, and Mary Murray founded the Colored Orphan Asylum in New York City. "The unostentatious and self-denying labors of the managers of this asylum," wrote the *National Era*, "have been for years unremitted and unfaltering; and we sincerely rejoice in the measure of success manifested in their present report."³²³ Many children in the Asylum were born to manumitted and illegally self-liberated African Americans. Eight-year-old Jacob

³²⁰ Jane E. Dabel, *A Respectable Woman: The Public Roles of African American Women in 19th Century New York* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 60.

³²¹ See entries for James Smith, Jun. 21, 1852; George William, Aug. 1, 1854; John Collins, Aug. 24, 1854; and George Vannen, Mar. 13, 1858. Register of Paupers at Danvers Alms House (Peabody, Mass.). Ms. N-2-3285. MHS. Boston, MA.

³²² Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 82-88; Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 5-8; Shirley Yee, "Free African Society of Philadelphia (1787-?)," *BlackPast.org*, Feb. 10, 2011. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/free-african-society-philadelphia-1787/>. Accessed May 9, 2019 (quote); Shirley Yee, "The New York African Society for Mutual Relief (1808-1860)," *BlackPast.org*, Jan. 22, 2011. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/new-york-african-society-mutual-relief-1808-1860/>. Accessed May 9, 2019. For more on the FAS, see Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 139-144.

³²³ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 144-149; Euell A. Nielsen, "The Colored Orphans Asylum of New York (1836-1946)," *BlackPast.org*, Nov. 11, 2017. <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/institutions-global-african-history/colored-orphans-asylum-new-york-1836-1946/>. Accessed May 9, 2019; "NEW YORK COLORED ORPHAN ASYLUM," *NE*, Jan. 21, 1847; "COLORED ORPHAN ASYLUM," *Liberator*, Dec. 23, 1853.

Becket Lee was admitted in 1837. His mother “died of cholera in New York in 1833” and that his father “was a fugitive slave from Virginia and was apprehended by his master in New York and carried back to slavery.” Meanwhile, Jeremiah and Adeline Rawle were “the children of Minerva Rawle, a slave in the state of Virginia, who were liberated under the will of her master... together with about forty others, who removed to New York in the autumn of 1837.” At the time of their arrival, Minerva and her children were “in destitute circumstances at the time of their arrival, and the children... were with the consent of their mother brought there, not long after their arrival.” Their father was “believed to still be living in slavery in Virginia.”³²⁴ Leslie Harris writes that the Asylum was generally “a more stable option” than alternative institutions. Conditions were better than most almshouses, with food and clothes provided regularly. Sickness and death also posed serious threats to the Asylum’s residents. Physician James MacDonald’s report from 1839 states that a twelve-month-old child named Sidney Johnson died at the Asylum. Moreover, hundreds of children were indentured out by the managers to white families and businesses.³²⁵

Across the Old Northwest, black urban communities experienced a similar array of opportunities and challenges. Cincinnati’s African American community quickly became the largest in the whole region. The steamboat trade opened the city to settlers from the Eastern Seaboard and linked its economy to other port cities, such as Pittsburgh, Natchez, and New Orleans. By the 1820s, manufacturing and industry had grown exponentially. Factories, businesses, and shops were established across the city. Cincinnati became a chief exporter of pork. Each year, businesses and traders exported tens of thousands of pork barrels and millions of pounds of lard, ham, and bacon. As Nikki Taylor writes, “it was still easier for blacks to get jobs in Cincinnati than in smaller towns, where job opportunities were few to none.”³²⁶

Cincinnati’s total population jumped from 10,283 to 161,044 between 1819 and 1860. Each year, African Americans comprised between two and five percent of inhabitants. The one major exception occurred between 1826 and 1829 when Cincinnati’s black population rose unexpectedly from just under 700 to over 2,000.³²⁷ Freedom seekers found work in the city’s port and thriving steamboat trade, which regularly employed black men as sailors, dockers, and stewards. Elsewhere, African

³²⁴ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 156-157; Records of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans. Series III: Admission Records, 1837-1937, vol. 23. NYHS Digital Collection, accessed Mar. 10, 2019. <http://digitalcollections.nyhistory.org/islandora/object/islandora%3A154815#page/1/mode/2up>.

³²⁵ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 161-163, 165-166; James MacDonald, “COLORED ORPHAN’S ASYLUM,” CA, Jan. 26, 1839.

³²⁶ Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 14-19, 83 (quote).

³²⁷ Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 19-20, 28-29, 33.

American men were employed as cooks, porters, waiters, carters, and day laborers, while women worked in more domestic occupations.³²⁸

Slave refugees and free blacks were mostly confined to Cincinnati's First and Fourth wards. In 1830, 429 black residents were recorded in each ward. At the same time, seventy-five blacks lived in the Second Ward, one hundred and ten in the Third Ward, and forty-seven in the Fifth Ward. While most were free-born, a significant number of Cincinnati blacks were once enslaved. They retained kinship ties with enslaved loved ones in the South and hoped to either purchase their freedom or rescue them.³²⁹ African Americans often shared residential spaces with German and Irish immigrants. "Living and working in such close proximity," writes Nikki Taylor, "it is highly likely that Irish and black workers frequented the same taverns, grog shops, and brothels."³³⁰

Newspaper reports illustrate the living and working conditions of Cincinnati's black communities. In 1850, the *Cincinnati Chronicle & Atlas* reported on the capture of an alleged freedom seeker named George Jackson "has resided here some three or four years. He worked as a barber at Cousin's on Water street [sic], between Walnut and Main. He had also been employed at La Belle Restaurat [sic], on Broadway."³³¹ Following his visit to Cincinnati in 1850, Frederick Douglass expressed his admiration for African Americans in the Queen City. He declared, "There are, in Cincinnati, enterprising and successful merchants, whose honesty, manliness and business talents command the respect of business men, not only of Cincinnati, but of New York, Boston, and even of Baltimore."³³²

Yet unemployment remained a persistent problem for African Americans in Cincinnati. Their heavy reliance on temporary or seasonal positions left many vulnerable to prolonged periods of economic insecurity. Poor relief for black residents was a controversial subject among Cincinnati whites, many of whom believed that people of color should be excluded from relief funds and relief organizations. Impoverished blacks struggled to obtain donations and were admitted to inferior institutions. "The indigent colored people," wrote the *Anti-Slavery Bugle* in 1852, "... have for a dozen years been provided for by the township Trustees in the building formerly used for those sick with contagious diseases, and called "the

³²⁸ Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 25, 28-29; Nancy Bertaux, "Structural Economic Chance and Occupational Decline among Black Workers in Nineteenth-Century Cincinnati," in Horton (ed.), *Race and the City*, 132-134.

³²⁹ Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 51, 54, 81-83.

³³⁰ Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 22-26 (quote on pg. 26).

³³¹ "Runaway Negro Captured – Great Excitement," *Cincinnati Chronicle & Atlas*, reprinted in (Camden, SC) *Camden Journal*, Jun. 14, 1850; "Comment (by the Memphis Enquirer, a Whig paper)," *Camden Journal*, Jun. 14, 1850. George Jackson's story is also detailed in McDaniel, *Sweet Taste of Liberty*, 62.

³³² Frederick Douglass, "Character and Condition of the Colored People of Cincinnati," *NS*, reprinted in *ASB*, Aug. 10, 1850.

old Pest house.”³³³ Other cities in the former Northwest Territory saw their respective populations rise, but at a lower rate than Cincinnati’s growth. In 1825, about 500 people officially resided in Cleveland. By 1860, over 43,000 people lived in the city. “It was comparable in size to Milwaukee and Detroit,” writes Michael J. McTighe, “but well behind Cincinnati and Chicago among Western cities.” As each city grew, free and self-emancipated African Americans migrated to each urban center in the Old Northwest in search of socio-economic prosperity and, in the case of the latter, free black communities.³³⁴

Slave refugees and legally free African Americans were not limited to urban centers in the Old Northwest, however. As discussed in Chapter One, free blacks founded farming settlements across the region. Some were settled by freed and self-purchased African Americans predominantly from the Upper South. Formerly enslaved people from Virginia, Kentucky, Maryland, and North Carolina resettled in various settlements across the Old Northwest. Between 1807 and 1823, for instance, nineteen formerly enslaved people from present-day West Virginia and Kentucky relocated to Champaign County, Ohio, including a man named Lewis, who was previously enslaved in Shelby County, Kentucky. Greene, Clarke, Montgomery, and Logan Counties also witnessed the arrival of freed blacks from the South. Meanwhile, other settlements were established by free-born African Americans from the East Coast and the South, who sought to acquire lands of their own to escape urban poverty and racial prejudice. For many African American leaders, land ownership was directly intertwined with the black freedom movement.³³⁵

Frontier life contrasted sharply with urban centers. On the Beech and Roberts settlements in Indiana, Stephen Vincent writes that black newcomers shared the largely uncleared forest with an “abundance of animal life... Foxes and wolves, panther and bear, deer and opossums, raccoons and muskrats, turkeys and pheasant, passenger pigeons and quail – all made their homes’ amidst the pioneers’ crude log cabins.” African American pioneers essentially built new lives for themselves from

³³³ Douglass, “Character and Condition of the Colored People of Cincinnati,”; “Letter from Cincinnati,” *ASB*, Sep. 11, 1852; Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 36-38, 101.

³³⁴ Michael J. McTighe, *A Measure of Success: Protestants and Public Culture in Antebellum Cleveland* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 14-15; “Timeline,” *Case.edu*, accessed Sep. 16, 2019. <https://case.edu/ech/timeline>.

³³⁵ Cox, *Bone and Sinew*, xi-xvi. Cox’s research is indispensable to historians of black settlements in the former Northwest Territory but her definition of ‘settlement’ is quite broad. As stipulated in her list of farming communities, the smallest black settlements are defined as those “with at least one African American farmer owning less than two hundred acres or with property valued at less than \$2,000.” This is arguably an overly generous definition of ‘settlement.’ For other suggested reasons on African American farming communities in the former Northwest Territory, see William Loren Katz, *Black Pioneers: An Untold Story* (New York: Atheneum Books, 1999); and Stephen A. Vincent, *Southern Seed, Northern Soil: African American Farm Communities in the Midwest, 1765-1900* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999). Katz’s book provides a general overview of rural and urban African American settlement in the former Northwest Territory. Meanwhile, Vincent’s book focuses on the Beech and Roberts settlements in Rush County and Hamilton County, Indiana respectively.

scratch with limited lands and few resources. Southern enslavers did not provide freed and self-purchased men and women with the tools to become successful cultivators of the land. Likewise, free people of color also possessed little in the way of economic capital or experience in land ownership. Life in farming settlements was generally characterized by poverty and uncertainty. In summary, African American settlers, with some external assistance from white abolitionists and benevolent societies, established moderately successful (if typically short-lived) rural farming communities throughout the Old Northwest.³³⁶

Unfortunately, relatively few historical records detail black farming settlements in the former Northwest Territory, namely deeds of emancipation, 'negro' and 'mulatto' registers for each county, census records, and land grants, pertain exclusively to manumitted, self-purchased, or free-born African Americans and yield no information on self-liberated people. This does not suggest that freedom seekers did not live and work in the rural former Northwest Territory, however. As was the case elsewhere, refugees in these locales likely avoided enumeration in official records. With little-to-no financial capital and a strong desire to preserve their anonymity, self-emancipators in rural Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois almost certainly occupied low-wage, agricultural or menial positions for as long as they resided in black farming communities. According to Vincent, most freedom seekers did not stay at the Beech and Roberts settlements for long. Land ownership was thus never on the cards for freedom seekers in the region, who were more concerned with guaranteeing security from re-enslavement or escaping to Upper Canada.³³⁷

Rural whites in the Old Northwest were generally hostile toward black farming communities, however. In 1846, residents of Mercer County, Ohio, were alarmed by the arrival of almost 400 freed African Americans from Virginia. A group of black settlers from Shelby County, Kentucky had recently migrated to the area and planned to form an independent rural community. "The negroes were met by an armed body of men while on the way to the place of their destination," claimed the *Cincinnati Commercial*, "and threats of violence were made." Fortunately, no attack took place and the black newcomers were reportedly "amongst their colored brethren in the black settlement." In response, black newcomers often established their settlements in isolated parts or near sympathetic whites, namely abolitionists and Quakers. Black pioneers in the Roberts and Beech settlement made sure to establish their settlements near sympathetic Quakers and white abolitionists.³³⁸ Across the

³³⁶ Vincent, *Southern Seed, Northern Soil*, 46.

³³⁷ Vincent, *Southern Seed, Northern Soil*, 65.

³³⁸ "RANDOLPH'S MANUMITTED SLAVES," *ASR*, Dec. 1, 1846; "RANDOLPH'S NEGROES," *Cincinnati Commercial*, reprinted in *Indiana State Sentinel*, Aug. 1, 1846; Vincent, *Southern Seed, Northern Soil*, 63-64. For more on the arrival of freed people in Mercer County, Ohio, see Frank F. Mathias, "John Randolph's Freedmen: The Thwarting of a Will," *Journal of Southern History* 39, no. 2 (1973), 263-272.

North, black communities were regularly subject to discrimination and violent attacks. Moreover, anti-black mob violence and domestic terror attacks became almost routine from the late 1820s onward. The next section will examine white supremacy and racial violence in the antebellum North.

White Supremacy and Racial Violence in the Antebellum North

As the free African American population of the northern US rose in the decades after abolition, northern whites expressed concern and hostility toward the idea of black settlement. Particularly in the Old Northwest, many subscribed to the notion that the United States was a ‘white man’s republic’ and advocated for the removal of African-descended people (see Chapter Five). In response to growing white racial anxieties, northern lawmakers proposed measures to limit or prohibit black settlement. In 1821, Massachusetts’ legislature formed a committee to, in the words of James O. Horton and Lois E. Horton, “investigate the possibility of prohibiting blacks from migrating to the Commonwealth because they were believed to be dangerous to order and a burden to public charity.” Ten years later, Franklin Vansant of Philadelphia introduced a bill to the Pennsylvania General Assembly which sought “to prohibit [sic] the emigration of negroes and mulattoes in this commonwealth.” In particular, Vansant warned against an overwhelming tide of enslaved men and women from neighboring Virginia and Maryland pouring across the Mason-Dixon line. Yet neither state passed such restrictive measures. None of the other northern Mid-Atlantic or New England states restricted African American settlement.³³⁹

The states of the former Northwest Territory were different matters entirely, however. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, whites in the Old Northwest were gravely concerned by the prospect of black settlement. Most white newcomers came from Virginia, Kentucky, and North Carolina. Others came later from the Mid-Atlantic and New England (the latter settled predominantly in the Western Reserve in northeast Ohio) but most held strong anti-black prejudices. State and territorial legislators were gravely concerned about the prospect of black settlement. “Bordering the slave states of Kentucky and Virginia,” Stephen Middleton writes, “Ohio was accessible to free black migration and to runaway slaves from the other southern states, most frequently North Carolina and Tennessee.” Additionally, African

³³⁹ Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 102; Vansant quoted in Eric Ledell Smith, “The End of Black Voting Rights in Pennsylvania: African Americans and the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 65, no. 3 (1998), 282.

Americans from New England and the northern Mid-Atlantic states looked westward for available lands.³⁴⁰

State governments in the Old Northwest passed measures designed to limit black settlement within their borders. Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois enacted the so-called 'Black Laws' to prohibit African Americans settlers. In 1804, Ohio's General Assembly passed 'An act to regulate black and mulatto persons,' which mandated that African Americans must provide proof of their legally free status to their county clerk. African American settlers were also obliged to pay a registration fee of twelve-and-a-half cents. Furthermore, Ohio's Black Laws stripped African Americans of civil and political rights, namely the right to vote, sit on juries, or testify against whites. Three years later, Ohio strengthened its Black Laws by requiring black newcomers to pay a \$500 bond to settle in the state. Indiana and Illinois followed suit over the coming decades. Indiana's 1816 constitution reiterated the state's commitment to anti-slavery and 'free soil' policies but ignored black civil and political rights. From 1831, African American residents were required to post \$500 to guarantee good behavior. Similarly, Illinois adopted Black Codes which aimed to limit African American settlement.³⁴¹

Despite these measures, free and self-emancipated African Americans flowed into Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. The black population of the Old Northwest grew much more rapidly than in New England or the northern Mid-Atlantic states. Ohio witnessed the largest rise of any state in the region. In 1800, 337 black residents were recorded in the state. Forty years later, over 17,000 African Americans officially resided in Ohio. Meanwhile, more than 7,000 were recorded in Indiana, and just under 40,000 officially resided in Illinois. These figures likely underestimate each state's antebellum black population, however, as freedom seekers usually avoided being recorded in US census records to preserve their anonymity.³⁴² Racial tensions boiled over into mob violence with frightening regularity. In October 1824, writes Christy-Clark Pujara, "white Rhode Islanders destroyed nearly all the homes in the predominantly African American neighborhood of Hardscrabble." Seven years later, the black community of Snowtown, Providence was attacked by whites for four days, resulting in the state militia being called in to quell the violence.³⁴³

³⁴⁰ Stephen Middleton, *The Black Laws: Race and the Legal Process in Early Ohio* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005), 44, 47 (quote).

³⁴¹ Middleton, *The Black Laws*, 48-50, 59; "Being Black in Indiana," *IN.gov*, accessed May 13, 2019. <https://www.in.gov/history/2548.htm>; Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 102-103.

³⁴² Middleton, *The Black Laws*, 60; David Lodge, "Ohio as a Non-Slave State," *ShelbyCountyHistory.org*, accessed May 13, 2019. <https://www.shelbycountyhistory.org/schs/blackhistory/ohioasanonslave.htm>. Population statistics taken from Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 104. The specific estimates are: Ohio – 17,345; Indiana – 7,168; and Illinois – 3,929. Additionally, 707 African Americans officially resided in Michigan in 1840.

³⁴³ Gigantino II, *Ragged Road to Abolition*, 208; Clark-Pujara, *Dark Work*, 101-109.

The Lower North witnessed the most incidents of anti-black mob violence. New York City and Philadelphia witnessed several instances of terror attacks on black communities. In July 1834, white New Yorkers launched a series of attacks against African Americans in the city. The *Liberator* reported, “the vengeance of the mob appeared to be directed entirely against blacks; whenever a colored person appeared, it was a signal of combat, fight, and riot.” The following month, white mobs attacked African Americans in Philadelphia. The *New York Evangelist* claimed, “it is supposed that four or five hundred persons were engaged in the conflict. The mob then marched down South [street], through the various streets, Bedford, Mary and others, in which the blacks are chiefly congregated, committing the violence of every kind.”³⁴⁴ Other incidents of racially motivated violence took place in Philadelphia over the 1830s and early 1840s. On May 17, 1838, white mobs attacked black communities and businesses in the city. In the evening, arsonists burned down Pennsylvania Hall and other important sites for black activists and white abolitionists. Four years later, white mobs attacked African Americans near Lombard and Sixth Streets, who were celebrating the eighth anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies (discussed in Chapter Five). The clashes lasted three days and led to the destruction of a black Presbyterian church.³⁴⁵

³⁴⁴ “RIOTS IN NEW-YORK,” *Liberator*, Jul. 12, 1834; “A REAL ROW,” *New York Journal of Commerce*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Jul. 12, 1834; Lewis Tappan, “RIOT AT CHATHAM-STREET CHAPEL,” *New York Journal of Commerce*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Jul. 12, 1834; “DREADFUL RIOTS,” *Emancipator*, Jul. 15, 1834; “HAVE IT AS YOU PLEASE,” *Emancipator*, Jul. 15, 1834; “RIOTS CONTINUED,” *Liberator*, Jul. 19, 1834; “CONTINUED RIOTS!,” *Liberator*, Jul. 19, 1834; “THE RIOTS IN New-York,” *Liberator*, Jul. 26, 1834; “THE GRAND INSTIGATORS OF THE NEW-YORK RIOTS,” *Liberator*, Jul. 26, 1834; “MORE MOBS,” *New York Evangelist*, reprinted in *Emancipator*, Aug. 26, 1834; “The Riot at Newark,” *Liberator*, Jul. 19, 1834; Patrick Grubbs, “Riots (1830s and 1840s),” [Philadelphiaencyclopedia.org](https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/riots-1830s-and-1840s/), accessed May 10, 2019. <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/riots-1830s-and-1840s/>. Horton quoted in Gigantino II, *Ragged Road to Abolition*, 210. For more on the 1834 Philadelphia attacks, see John Runcie, “‘Hunting the Nigs’ in Philadelphia: The Race Riot of August 1834,” *Pennsylvania History* 39 (1972), 187-218.

³⁴⁵ Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation*, 277-278; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 277-288; Grubbs, “Riots (1830s and 1840s),”; Williams, *I Freed Myself*, 32; Beverly C. Tomek, “Pennsylvania Hall,” [Philadelphiaencyclopedia.org](https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/pennsylvania-hall/), accessed May 10, 2019. <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/pennsylvania-hall/>.



Figure 10: Pennsylvania Hall Fire, 1838.

Source: John T. Bowen & J.C. Wild, *Destruction by Fire of Pennsylvania Hall, the new building of the Abolition Society, on the night of the 17th May* (Philadelphia: Published by J.T. Bowen, 94 Walnut Street, and sold by George and Cately, 95 Chestnut Street, May). Photograph. Retrieved from LOC, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2014645336/>.

Cincinnati witnessed some of the worst cases of racial violence in the Old Northwest. In the Queen City, tensions between African Americans and whites in the city were exacerbated following the rapid growth of Cincinnati's black population. In 1827, white petitioners in the city's First Ward complained about the poor state of African American housing in the area, which was a thinly veiled attempt to remove black settlers. The city council rejected the petition, stating, "We cannot drive the black population from the city in the summary way of pulling down the houses over their heads." Council members belonged to the business and merchant class, which relied on black labor.³⁴⁶ The first wave of violence took place in the summer of 1829. Between 15-22 August, white mobs of several hundred whites attacked African American homes, institutions, and businesses in the Fourth Ward. Most whites came

³⁴⁶ Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 50-62 (quote on pg. 55).

from working-class backgrounds, although merchants and businessmen also participated in the violence. City officials did little to quell the mob and the police offered African Americans little protection. The 1829 attacks convinced Cincinnati blacks that they would never be entirely safe in the city. In response, many African Americans resolved to leave the city and search for liberty and autonomy in Upper Canada (discussed later in this chapter)³⁴⁷

In 1836, anti-black mobs burned down the offices of abolitionist James G. Birney's newspaper *The Philanthropist* and destroyed their printing presses. The mobs also attacked and killed several African Americans in the First and Fourth Wards. The incident was reported with grave concern in anti-slavery newspapers across the North. The *New York Evangelist* called the riots "among the most alarming signs of general anarchy that we have yet witnessed." Five years later, anti-black attacks broke out in Cincinnati once more. The *Cincinnati Gazette* wrote that the city was "in a most alarming condition. . . almost entirely at the mercy of a lawless mob, ranging in number from two to fifteen hundred." The violent episode allegedly began after an initial clash between "a party of Irishmen, and some negroes, in which blows were exchanged, and other weapons, if not fire-arms, used." The *Colored American* asserted that the police "were slower to move than they should have been," and that many African Americans were later "taken by the city authorities, and locked up in jail and elsewhere, for protection from the mob."³⁴⁸

African American and white opposition to the Black Laws eventually had some effect. In 1849, Ohio's General Assembly partially repealed the state's Black Laws. Most notably, the state legislature abolished the bond requirement for African American settlers in the state. Reforms to black education were also adopted. In March 1849, the *North Star* declared the repeal "a great triumph – a victory of humanity over oppression – a victory worth all the efforts of the friends of freedom in Ohio." African Americans and white abolitionists saw the moment as a major turning point. "The spirit of freedom," proclaimed the *North Star*, "will not thus be

³⁴⁷ Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 63-64; Nikki Taylor, "Reconsidering the "Forced" Exodus of 1829: Free Black Emigration from Cincinnati, Ohio to Wilberforce, Canada," *Journal of African American History* 87, no. 3 (2002), 290-292.

³⁴⁸ Douglas Edelstein, "Cincinnati Race Riots (1836)," *BlackPast.org*, Mar. 1, 2018. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/cincinnati-race-riots-1836/>. Accessed May 15, 2019; "THE CINCINNATI RIOTS," *New York Evangelist*, Aug. 20, 1836; "Riot and Mobs, Confusion and Politics," *Cincinnati Gazette*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Sep. 17, 1841; "RIOT AT CINCINNATI," *Liberator*, Sep. 17, 1841; "The Cincinnati Riot," *Liberator*, Sep. 17, 1841; "The Mob," *Liberator*, Sep. 17, 1841; "THE CINCINNATI RIOT," *CA*, Sep. 18, 1841; "The Riot in Cincinnati," *Liberator*, Oct. 15, 1841. For more on the 1829, 1836, and 1841 Cincinnati 'riots,' see Cox, *Bone and Sinew*, 99-131; Leonard L. Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing*, 122-129; Bridget Ford, *Bonds of Union: Religion, Race, and Politics in a Civil War Borderland* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 96-99; William F. Check and Aimee Lee Check, "John Mercer Langston and the Cincinnati Riot of 1841," in Taylor, Jr. (ed.), *Race and the City*, 29-69.

smothered.”³⁴⁹ At the same time, Indiana and Illinois’ state governments reinforced their laws against African American settlement. In 1851, Indiana’s legislature approved Article 13 of its new state constitution. It read, “No negro or mulatto shall come into or settle in the State.” African Americans and white abolitionists mobilized quickly against Article 13. An anonymous author wrote in the *Plymouth Pilot* that the clause was “directly opposed to those republican principles which we profess to cherish.” Similarly, J. Y. Hoover of Jay County, Indiana, proclaimed that the new state constitution “renders it just to class Indiana henceforth with the slave states.” The *Pennsylvania Freeman* called Article 13 “a monstrous invasion of natural justice and the professed principles of our government[.]” In 1853, Illinois’ General Assembly prohibited blacks from staying in the state for more than ten days.³⁵⁰

Exclusionary policies in the Old Northwest were largely ineffective, however. As Richard Blackett notes, the Indiana constitution became unenforceable. Although several men and women of color were accused of violating Article 13, only one was ever found guilty. Arthur Barkshire was convicted of illegally bringing his wife Elizabeth Keith, an Ohio resident, into the state. The court ruled that Indiana’s constitution sanctioned her removal from the state “as speedily as possible” and refused to recognize their marriage. In another instance, John P. Brown of Ohio was seized while visiting Fort Wayne, Indiana, and charged with violating Indiana’s constitution. Given his skin complexion, however, the prosecution was unable to adequately prove that Brown was either a ‘negro’ or ‘mulatto.’ However, the case was subsequently dismissed.³⁵¹

Generally, African Americans continued to ignore the Black Laws’ registration requirements. In June 1853, the Terre Haute *Wabash Express* stated that most African Americans in Vigo County, Indiana “*refuse* [original italic] to comply with the law. We believe that there is no penalty for said refusal.” Ultimately, the refusal of black residents in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois to register with county clerks was critical for freedom seekers, who sought to remain virtually hidden in plain sight. Amid the largely unregistered black communities, it became almost impossible for

³⁴⁹ Middleton, *The Black Laws*, 152-153; “Correction – The Ohio Black Laws are repealed,” *NS*, Mar. 2, 1849.

³⁵⁰ James H. Madison, *Hoosiers: A New History of Indiana* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014), 144-145; “Indiana Constitution,” *ASB*, Jul. 12, 1851; “OUR NEW CONSTITUTION,” (Plymouth, IN) *Plymouth Pilot*, Jul. 16, 1851; J. Y. Hoover, “THE DEGRADATION OF INDIANA,” *ASB*, Sep. 20, 1851; “Enslavement or Banishment,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Sep. 11, 1851; James P. Jones, “Black Jack”: *John A. Logan and Southern Illinois in the Civil War Era* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), 17-18.

³⁵¹ Blackett, *Captive’s Quest for Freedom*, 105; Stephen Middleton, *The Black Laws in the Old Northwest: A Documentary History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 263.

white authorities to distinguish illegally self-emancipated refugees from legally free African Americans.³⁵²

Northern newspapers, mostly those with pro-slavery sympathies, claimed that African American refugees and migrants in Upper Canada were impoverished and indolent. The *Cincinnati Commercial* claimed in 1853 that black newcomers in the province were “regarded as a great drawback upon the prosperity of that country, and that its rapid increase by emigration is productive of evils which loudly demand a prompt and efficient remedy.” Three years later, the *Evansville Daily Journal* even claimed that there was a “movement on foot in Canada... to prohibit blacks coming into the Province; and by which fugitive slaves may be sent back to the United States.” It added that the “worthless black population is retarding the settlement and improvement of the country.” Of course, the motivations behind these articles must be considered. Editors and politicians in the Old Northwest, wary of free African Americans and freedom seekers entering the region, attempted to stoke fears among white readers by portraying Canada as a disastrous example of black settlement.³⁵³ The next section of this chapter will focus on black refugee settlements in Canada between the American Revolutionary War and the US Civil War. Given that black refugee migration to the formed occurred earlier, the following section will first explore settlement patterns in the Canadian Maritimes before shifting attention to Upper Canada.

Slave Refugees in the Canadian Maritimes

Upon arrival in the Canadian Maritimes, slave refugee newcomers sought to obtain lands for farming and settlement, “for without it no true independence was believed possible.”³⁵⁴ By acquiring cultivable acres, black newcomers hoped to become autonomous, self-sufficient subjects. To support themselves and their families, it was crucial to find ways to generate a sustainable income, food supplies, and other resources. Furthermore, land ownership in itself symbolized independence. Although their parcels were small, holding cultivable lands reaffirmed the inherent personhood of formerly enslaved African Americans. Nevertheless, black newcomers soon learned that life in the Maritimes was a far cry from what had been promised.

³⁵² Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 51; Madison, *Hoosiers*, 146-147; “Registry of Blacks,” (Terre Haute, IN) *Wabash Express*, Jun. 15, 1853.

³⁵³ *Cincinnati Commercial* quoted in “African Colonization – Ohio on the Right Track at Last,” *Wabash Express*, Feb. 2, 1853; “A movement is on foot in Canada...,” *Evansville Daily Journal*, Nov. 12, 1856.

³⁵⁴ Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 18.



Figure 11: Map of Canadian Maritime Provinces

Source: “A New Map of Nova Scotia, compiled... for the Historical & Statistical Account of Nova Scotia.” 1829. Map Collection. NSARM neg. N-10, 007. NSA, accessed Jan. 29, 2020, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=99>.

The influx of thousands of Loyalist refugees overwhelmed the provincial governments. Many newcomers faced long delays in receiving lands and provisions. In 1784, Governor John Parr noted, “Discontent and uneasiness have arisen in several of the New Settlements now forming in this Province because they have not hitherto received Grants for the Lands which have been assigned to them.” Loyalists petitioned the provincial government for lands, resources, and other forms of assistance. In 1786, New Jersey Loyalist Abraham Parsell wrote that he had “suffered much during the later war & Rebellion [,] that he had a wife and three children, and is endeavouring [sic] to settle at Lunenburg.”³⁵⁵ Despite these challenges, Loyalist newcomers established settlements across the peninsula. Shelburne, the port of entry for many refugees, was envisioned as an economic powerhouse to compete with major port cities in New England, such as Boston. Thousands of Loyalists settled in the burgeoning port town and established new homesteads, communities, and

³⁵⁵ Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 18-21 (Parr quote on page 20); “Nova Scotia Land Papers 1765-1800,” NSA, accessed Apr. 8, 2020, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/landpapers/archives.asp?ID=878&Doc=memorial>. Also see Neil MacKinnon, *This Unfriendly Soil: The Loyalist Experience in Nova Scotia, 1783-1791*, (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1986), 50.

livelihoods. Others settled in Halifax, Annapolis Royal, Saint John, and other locales throughout the Maritime provinces. Nevertheless, Loyalist refugees in these settlements continued to experience problems with claiming land and provisions. In Shelburne, some Loyalists had to wait for three years or longer to receive their land grants.³⁵⁶ Meanwhile, slave refugees struggled to obtain lands and form settlements in the early years. Racial prejudice among provincial officials meant that white Loyalist refugees were prioritized over their black counterparts. If they found it difficult to obtain land grants, black newcomers found it significantly harder. “It seemed inevitable,” claims Neil MacKinnon, “that where so many were demanding so much from so few, and where white settlers often waited years for their land, black settlers would wait much longer for much less.”³⁵⁷

Black newcomers in southwestern Nova Scotia founded Birchtown, a separate community on the outskirts of Shelburne. In 1784, roughly 1,500 blacks were recorded in Birchtown. However, the majority of black settlers in Birchtown were denied land grants. Of the 649 black men in Birchtown, only 184 received land. According to Walker, the “fortunate third had to wait two more years after their white colleagues were satisfied, and when their grants were finalised [sic] in 1788, they averaged only 34 acres.” The land at Birchtown was hardly ideal. A mixture of swampy and craggy lands, small-scale farming proved a challenging endeavor for most Birchtown settlers. In November 1787, Stephen Blucke noted that 179 lots of land had been surveyed and distributed to Birchtown settlers. Black families were assigned approximately forty acres, while single men received twenty. By contrast, white Loyalists regularly received over 100 acres each.³⁵⁸ Birchtown suffered from intense poverty over its lifetime. Economic activity in the region was generally restricted to white Loyalist settlements and port towns, such as Halifax and Shelburne. Facing deprivation and starvation, slave refugee settlers were forced to seek work elsewhere, namely Shelburne. Most held unskilled, low-wage occupations in the young settlement. Black men typically worked menial jobs and earned barely enough to support themselves. Others, including women and children, worked as domestics for white Loyalists.³⁵⁹

Black and white Loyalist refugees also settled in towns and villages in Annapolis County. Around 211 people were officially recorded at Digby in June 1784, including sixty-nine black refugees. Most settled in Brindley Town, which lay

³⁵⁶ Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 23; MacKinnon, *This Unfriendly Soil*, 37-38.

³⁵⁷ Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 18.

³⁵⁸ Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 21-23 (quote on 23); MacKinnon, *This Unfriendly Soil*, 50; “Bill to provincial government for surveying Birchtown,” MG 100, vol. 256, no. 30 (microfilm no. 21819). NSA, accessed Jan. 10, 2019. <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=38>.

³⁵⁹ Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 23-24; Channon Oyeniran, “Black Loyalists in British North America,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.ca, Mar. 25, 2019. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/black-loyalists-in-british-north-america>.

just under two miles from Digby. Sixty-five free black families were recorded in the settlement. Brindley Town became the second largest black community on the peninsula. In Annapolis County, black refugees had more reason to feel optimistic. Walker writes that the region “offered better prospects for agriculture. Good sandy soil was present around the town itself and along the banks of the Annapolis River.”³⁶⁰ Most black refugees in Annapolis County did not receive any lands for settlement, however. In August 1784, Thomas Peters and Murphy Steel petitioned for land on behalf of Digby settlers. They wrote, “when we first inlisted [sic] & swore we were promised that we should have land & provitions [sic] ... which we have not received[.]” Overall, only seventy-six acres were awarded to refugees in the region.³⁶¹

Farther east, African American refugees settled in Halifax, the largest city in the peninsula. In 1791, 472 blacks were recorded in the city, comprising just under ten percent of the population. Many resolved to settle in Halifax “rather than face the risks of pioneer life in uncertain country.” Most barely lived about the poverty line, forced to rely on low-wage, unskilled jobs. Those who were unable to find work often indentured themselves out to whites in Halifax. Living conditions in the city were also generally poor for African American refugees. Moreover, the lack of adequate housing meant that black newcomers often resided in makeshift accommodation, which increased the risk of disease.³⁶²

Eleven miles east of Halifax, Preston became home to about 150 black families. Preston was comparatively less segregated; several white Loyalists took up lands in the settlement. The region, notes Walker, was suitable for “small-farm produce such as vegetables and poultry, [and] the lakes, rivers and coasts nearby offered excellent opportunities for fishing[.]” The abundance of timber presented settlers with an invaluable resource for sale and trade. Yet only half of the African American refugees in Preston received any lands from the provincial government. Their lots were also about one-quarter the size of those given to whites. Nevertheless, the blacks of Preston fared better than their counterparts in Birchtown and Brindley Town.³⁶³

On the eastern tip of Nova Scotia, Tricadie was settled by slave refugees. Thomas Brownspriggs, a prominent leader of the black settlers at Tricadie, petitioned for roughly 3,000 acres of land to be distributed among seventy-four black families. Surprisingly, the provincial government granted Brownspriggs’ request and each

³⁶⁰ Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 24; “Brindley Town,” *BlackLoyalist.com*, accessed Apr. 21, 2019, <http://blackloyalist.com/cdc/communities/brindley.htm>.

³⁶¹ Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 24-27; “Petition on behalf of the Black Pioneers,” Commissioner of Public Records, RG 1, vol. 359, no. 65 (microfilm no. 15428). NSA, accessed Nov. 30, 2019, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africans/archives.asp?ID=32>.

³⁶² Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 30 (first quote), 45-46.

³⁶³ Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 28-30; “Preston,” *BlackLoyalist.com*, accessed Apr. 21, 2019, <http://blackloyalist.com/cdc/communities/preston.htm>.

family received approximately forty acres each. Nevertheless, black land ownership in Tricadie suffered several setbacks. As Walker notes, the small size of the holdings “was un-economical, and hence some of them [black Loyalists] moved away to seek a livelihood elsewhere.” Elsewhere, black refugee settlers struggled to obtain lands from the provincial government. At Manchester, Thomas Richardson and Peter French petitioned the Nova Scotia Assembly on behalf of black settlers who had “never got no Lands not even Town lotts [sic]” over the past two years.³⁶⁴

Slave refugees also settled in other provinces within the Maritimes. In New Brunswick, black refugees encountered similar challenges. A lack of lands and resources greatly constrained the ability of African American newcomers to support themselves. A self-emancipator from Virginia, Moses Simpson, sailed with the Loyalists from New York City to Saint John, New Brunswick in 1783. Two years later, he was granted a small plot on Great George Street in Saint John. In 1787, Simpson and several other black newcomers petitioned for 1,000 acres about fourteen miles from Saint John. They claimed they had not received any land, supplies, or provisions since their arrival. In 1788, Simpson received a small lot in present-day Fredericton. By 1802, he and thirty others shared fifty-six acres.³⁶⁵

Life in the Canadian Maritimes proved tough for most slave refugee newcomers. According to Walker, they “had no choice but to grasp at any opportunity, however unfair, to keep themselves alive.” At best, they could find work in low-wage trades but this provided hardly enough income to support their families. A small number translated previously learned skills to their new environment. Some slave refugees became carpenters, sailors, fishers, tailors, blacksmiths, bakers, shoemakers, sawyers, barbers, weavers, and coopers. But this was not the case for most black newcomers. To support themselves and their families, they had to contemplate arrangements which brought their newfound liberty into question.³⁶⁶

Across the Maritimes, slave refugees entered into unfavorable arrangements with white Loyalists. In Birchtown, Digby, and other settlements, many African American refugees became sharecroppers, a system which “tied the tenant to the land of another and to the landowner himself.” In essence, black settlers lived and worked on the property of white landowners in exchange for a share of their income. Sharecropping essentially precluded social mobility or economic advancement, and barely provided black tenants with enough to survive. Furthermore, indentured

³⁶⁴ Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 27-28; “Land petition from black settlers of Manchester,” Commissioner of Crown Lands, RG 20, series A, vol. 17 (1786) (microfilm 15691). NSA, accessed Nov. 30, 2019, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanans/archives.asp?ID=36>.

³⁶⁵ For the most detailed overview of Moses Simpson’s petitions for land, see *New Brunswick Loyalist Journeys*, accessed Apr. 22, 2019, <https://unbgis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=074bbc635b0b464e94f72ffc2b4bda6a>. For more on black Loyalist refugees in New Brunswick, see W. A. Spray, *The Blacks in New Brunswick* (Fredericton, NB: Brunswick Press, 1972).

³⁶⁶ Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 45-48; Spray, *Blacks in New Brunswick*, 33.

servitude remained commonplace in the Canadian Maritimes. Robin Winks notes that 198 white families within the vicinity of Birchtown “employed or owned 396 servants[.]” Men, women, and children were indentured to white settlers, including former enslavers.³⁶⁷

At the same time, the newfound liberty of slave refugees was not guaranteed. Several cases illustrate the precarious nature of black freedom in the Maritimes. In 1791, a Loyalist enslaver at Argyle, Nova Scotia named Jesse sought to re-enslave a woman named Mary Postell and her children. Postell escaped from her South Carolina enslaver to Charleston, where the Loyalists issued her with a certificate of freedom. However, Postell’s certificate was taken by an officer who checked her legal papers. She subsequently traveled with her children to Florida to work as a servant for Jesse Gray. Postell journeyed to Nova Scotia with him after the war but absconded to Birchtown shortly after their arrival. After her recapture, Gray attempted to sell Postell and her children to another Loyalist enslaver. Postell and two residents of Birchtown testified before the Nova Scotia courts that she and her children were legally free. Although Gray claimed legal ownership, he could not produce a receipt or bill of sale to corroborate his claim. The Loyalist judges ultimately sided with Gray and sanctioned the re-enslavement of Postell and her daughter.³⁶⁸

That same year, Lydia Jackson of Manchester was kidnapped and sold into slavery. Abolitionist John Clarkson claimed that Jackson was “in great distress having been left by her husband” when she was taken in by Henry Hedley. After seven days, Hedley “required her to either pay him for her board or bind herself to him for seven years; she was unable to pay him and refused to be bound[.]” Jackson agreed to a one-year term of indenture. Yet Hedley deceived Jackson and extended the term of her indenture to thirty-nine years without her knowledge. Hedley subsequently sold Jackson for twenty pounds. Upon learning of Bulman’s intention to sell her to the West Indies, Jackson fled to Halifax where she met Clarkson.³⁶⁹

Apart from socio-economic concerns, slave refugees in the Maritimes encountered other challenges. Most notably, anti-black prejudice and racial discrimination were also commonplace throughout the Canadian Maritimes. Despite its reputation as a sanctuary for people of African descent, white Loyalists and others throughout the provinces were generally unwelcoming, and sometimes hostile,

³⁶⁷ Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 46 (first quote); Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, 38 (second quote), 47.

³⁶⁸ For the indictment of Jesse Gray, see Shelburne County Court of General Sessions of the Peace. RG 60, Shelburne County, vol. 1, file 49-4. NSA, accessed Nov. 30, 2019, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=46>. For the most complete account of the Mary Postell case, see Carole Watterson Troxler, “Re-enslavement of Black Loyalists: Mary Postell in South Carolina, East Florida, and Nova Scotia,” *Acadiensis* 37, no. 2 (2008), 70-85.

³⁶⁹ “John Clarkson’s account of the story of Lydia Jackson,” John Clarkson, NSA. MG 1, vol. 219 pp. 197-201; published in *Clarkson’s Mission to America, 1791-1792*, 89-90 (Public Archives of Nova Scotia Publication no. 11, 1971) (F90/N85/Ar2P no. 11), accessed Mar. 18, 2020, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=45>; Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 50-51.

toward the slave refugee population. While it mostly took the form of everyday verbal abuse and discriminatory policies, it sometimes spilled over into violence. On July 25, 1784, white mobs attacked blacks in Birchtown to drive them out of the region. David George, a black preacher in Shelburne, described the scenes in his memoir: “Several of the black people has houses upon my lot, but forty (40) or fifty (50) disbanded soldiers were employed, who came with the tackle of ships, and turned my dwelling house, and every one of their houses, quite over, and the meeting house they would have burned down, had not the ringleader of the mob himself prevented it.” The following day, a group of disbanded white Loyalists beat George with sticks “and drove me into the swamp.”³⁷⁰

Dismayed with their impoverished condition and systemic racial prejudice, about 1,200 black refugees emigrated from the Canadian Maritimes to Sierra Leone in 1792. The Sierra Leone Company promised that free black settlers would receive “not less than TWENTY ACRES of LAND for himself; TEN for his Wife, and FIVE for every child[.]” The government was overwhelmed by the black Loyalist response to their appeal. In December 1791, an agent for the Sierra Leone Company, wrote that the number of prospective free black settlers “far exceeded” his expectations. Several prominent leaders, including Boston King, left Nova Scotia with their families and, in some cases, their congregations. Aboard fifteen ships, the black Loyalists left their temporary home in search of a better sanctuary. Nonetheless, most African American refugees remained in the Maritime provinces.³⁷¹

As discussed in Chapter One, the War of 1812 spurred another wave of slave refugee migration to the Maritimes. Most arrived in a near destitute condition. “The Black Refugees,” notes Harvey Amani Whitfield, “arrived on the shores of Nova Scotia in need of medical attention, food, and shelter after their lengthy voyage up the Atlantic from the southern United States.” Over 800 men, women, and children were quarantined on Melville Island in Halifax, a former prisoner-of-war camp. Although the Black Refugees were provided with food and drink, blankets, clothing, and medical treatment, conditions on Melville Island were harsh. A return from 1815 reveals that 160 out of 375 documented men, women, and children arrived in family units.³⁷²

³⁷⁰ Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 48. For a transcription of David George’s memoir, see “AN ACCOUNT OF LIFE OF Mr. David George from S. L. A. Given by himself,” *blackloyalist.com*, accessed Sep. 16, 2019, http://blackloyalist.com/cdc/documents/diaries/george_a_life.htm.

³⁷¹ “Advertisement for the settlement of black Nova Scotians in Sierra Leone,” Commissioner of Public Records, NSA, RG 1, vol. 419, no. 1 (microfilm no. 15460), accessed Nov. 30, 2018, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africans/archives.asp?ID=44>, (first quote); “Letter From Michael Wallace concerning the number of black people interested in leaving for Sierra Leone,” Commissioner of Public Records, NSA, RG 1, vol. 419, no. 10 (microfilm no. 15460), accessed Nov. 30, 2019, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africans/archives.asp?ID=48>, (second quote); Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*, 148-151.

³⁷² Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 49-51 (quote on 49); “Contract between Lewis DeMolitor and the collector of customs for the port of Halifax to supply provisions for black refugees,” Commissioner of

Black Refugee newcomers mostly settled in the Halifax area. Officially, 924 were recorded in Preston, while 504 officially resided at the Hammonds Plains settlement. "Former Chesapeake slaves," writes Alan Taylor, "tended to settle at Preston, while former Georgians prevailed at Hammonds Plains, although each township had a minority of refugees from the other region of origin." Black Refugees were also recorded in other settlements in the peninsula. A Return from March 1815 stated that 684 African American refugees resettled in Halifax, Windsor Road, Dartmouth, Preston, and Porter's Lake. A report from the end of that same year claims that 72 Black Refugees resided on the Windsor Road. Meanwhile, twenty-three refugees were recorded at the North West Arm of Halifax Harbor in November. Dartmouth and Preston's combined total was about 270.³⁷³

Roughly 500 of the Black Refugees were resettled in New Brunswick.³⁷⁴ Refugee settlers struggled with the climate and natural terrain. Consequently, they sought to obtain provisions and lands to alleviate their condition. In February 1817, William Hood and forty other refugees in Saint John petitioned the Nova Scotia House of Assembly for additional resources. The petition stated that the refugees had "already consumed the rewards of the last summer's labour [sic] and not now being able to find employment they are reduced to great necessity and distress at this inclement season of the year, and at a period when provisions and fuel are at an enormously high price." The petitioners noted that they "are in great want of clothing, that which they now have being the last they received from [the] government and being nearly worn out, and they being without any means of obtaining a fresh supply." Furthermore, they signaled their "great gratitude [for] the allotment of land that has been made for them... near Loch Lomond which they wish to profit by [sic] settling and cultivating the same as early in the ensuing spring... but in their present destitute

Public Records, RG 1, vol. 420, no. 17 (microfilm 15464). NSA, accessed Oct. 28, 2018, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=77>; "Return of black people at Halifax arrived from the Chesapeake," Commissioner of Public Records, Nova Scotia Archives, RG 1, vol. 305, no. 7 (microfilm no. 15387), NSA, accessed Oct. 28, 2018, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=73>.

³⁷³ Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 52; Taylor, *The Internal Enemy*, 369-370; "Return of black persons lately brought to the province from the United States...", Commissioner of Public Records, RG 1, vol. 411, no. 78 (microfilm no. 15457). NSA, accessed Oct. 28, 2018, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=75>; "Return of black people at Halifax arrived from the Chesapeake,"; "List of Blacks recently brought from the United States of America and settled on the Windsor Road," Commissioner of Public Records, RG 1, vol. 420. No. 133 (microfilm no. 15464). NSA, accessed Oct. 28, 2018, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=74>; "Names of men of colour who are settled upon lands conveyed to them by Henry H. Cogswell... at the Head of the North West Arm," Commissioner of Public Records, RG 1, vol. 420. No. 93 (microfilm no. 15464). NSA, accessed Oct. 28, 2018, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=79>; "Report of lands cleared by the people of colour in the settlement of Preston...", Commissioner of Public Records, RG 1, vol. 421, no. 3 (microfilm no. 15464). NSA, accessed Oct. 28, 2018, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=81>.

³⁷⁴ W. A. Spray, "The Settlement of the Black Refugees in New Brunswick 1815-1836," *Acadiensis* 6, no. 2 (1997), 64-66.

state it will be impossible for them to do this or even to get their allotment of land surveyed without some aid being extended to them[.]” One year later, Ward Chipman, who played an important role in the abolition of slavery in the province, and John Robinson petitioned for funds to compensate the deputy-surveyor for his work at Loch Lomond.³⁷⁵

Black Refugees struggled with unemployment, poverty, and sickness. Aside from their lack of capital, systemic prejudice ensured that they would remain rooted at the bottom of society. Harvey Whitfield writes that most officials believed that slave refugees “should not be independent landowning farmers but rather should work for the local white population as servants or laborers for hire.” Aside from systemic prejudice, the Black Refugees’ arrival in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick coincided with “a serious economic recession” following the War of 1812, and the influx of European immigrants, who competed with slave refugees for unskilled labor. In the words of Judith Fingard, slave refugees “became a special class of permanent poor in town and suburb, as well as the meanest of the urban laborers.”³⁷⁶

Some whites sought to take advantage of cheap black labor. William McLaughlin, a “weaver by trade,” requested permission to employ Black Refugee women in 1836. He claimed, “the black women are generally good spinners and that if he had the means to procure wool, that many who are now in a state would thus be enabled to procure a livelihood.” McLaughlin was interested in taking advantage of the high demand for wool in Canada and the United States. He stated that “wool is from time to time brought from the Country and is in Halifax purchased in large quantities and exported to the states.” McLaughlin estimated that he could “manufacture between three & four thousand yards of cloth in a year.”³⁷⁷

Poverty and prejudice were not the only issues that plagued Black Refugee communities in the Maritimes. Sickness and disease were common problems for slave refugees across the region. In 1816, Dr. Samuel Head wrote to Charles Morris, a member of the Nova Scotia Council, on the conditions at Preston. He claimed that many people were sick, including one woman who was “nearly exhausted from

³⁷⁵ Spray, “The Settlement of the Black Refugees in New Brunswick,” 69; Petition of several black people asking aid to assist them in forming a settlement at Loch Lomond, Saint John County. 14 Feb. 1817, p. 15. Legislative Assembly: Sessional Records (RS24). S25-P20. Microfilm F16735. PANB, accessed May 30, 2019, <https://archives.gnb.ca/Search/RS24/DocumentViewer.aspx?culture=en-CA&record=2684>; Petition of Ward Chipman and John Robinson praying for a grant to allow them to remunerate the Deputy-Surveyor for surveying at Loch Lomond for the settlement of black refugees. 21 Feb. 1818, p. 46. Legislative Assembly: Sessional Records (RS24). S26-P29. Microfilm F16746. PANB, accessed May 30, 2019, <https://archives.gnb.ca/Search/RS24/DocumentViewer.aspx?culture=en-CA&record=3017>.

³⁷⁶ Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 49; Judith Fingard, “The Relief of the Unemployed Poor in Saint John, Halifax, and St. John’s, 1815-1860,” *Acadiensis* 5, no. 1 (1975), 32.

³⁷⁷ “Memorial of William McLaughlin of Preston,” Nova Scotia House of Assembly – Assembly petitions series, RG 5, series P, vol. 52, no. 45 (microfilm no. 9798). NSA, accessed Nov. 4, 2018. <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africans/archives.asp?ID=109>.

inflammation of her lungs... I think there is a very small chance of her surviving[.]” The Preston settlers were also supposedly not “accustomed to a climate so severe as this” and lacked adequate clothing. Homes in Preston were “made of green materials, & neither proof against the wet or cold, & having no cellars under them, & some ever no floors[.]” Another report described most houses in Preston as huts, while a plan of the Preston settlement from later that year claimed that the land was “rough and rocky for cultivation.”³⁷⁸ In 1826, a scarlet fever epidemic tore through Hammonds Plains and killed dozens of settlers. A report claimed that “most of these huts have found fever or the remaining effects of it: evidently increased by the want of clothing, Bedding, nourishment and medicine.” The report added that “very few have any other food than potatoes which in the present year are of an inferior quality; and some families are even destitute of these, and live by begging a single meal from their poor neighbours [sic]. Their want of clothing is equally distressing - many are without a blanket – some have scarcely a covering of rags for their bones[.]”³⁷⁹

Across the Maritimes, Black Refugees had to contend with pervasive racial prejudice. In 1815, Peleg Wiswall of Annapolis County introduced a motion into the Nova Scotia House of Representatives which stated, “we observe with concern, and alarm, the frequent arrival in this Province of Bodies of Negroes, and Mulattoes, of whom many have already become [burdensome] to the Public... the proportion of Africans already in this country is productive of many inconveniences[.]” Meanwhile Lord Dalhousie, the Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia, believed that the Black Refugees were “slaves by habit and education.” Over time, some expressed interest in leaving the Maritimes entirely. An 1820 return of Hammonds Plains reveals that some families considered emigrating from Nova Scotia to Trinidad. Indeed, Walker notes that Trinidad passed “special laws to encourage black immigration, sending envoys to Nova Scotia, promising free houses on half-acre plots and promising wages of 4 [shillings] to 5 [shillings] a day plus provisions, even offering assistance in the establishment of churches and schools.”³⁸⁰

³⁷⁸ “Dr. Head’s report respecting black families settled at Preston,” Commissioner of Public Records, RG 1, vol. 419, no. 47 (microfilm no. 15460). NSA, accessed Nov. 4, 2018, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=80>; “Report of lands cleared by the people of colour in the settlement of Preston...,” “Plot plan of lands at Preston,” Commissioner of Public Records, RG 1, vol. 419, no. 29. NSA, accessed Nov. 4, 2018, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=82>.

³⁷⁹ “Government report concerning the scarlet fever outbreak in Hammonds Plains during the fall of 1826 and winter of 1827,” Commissioner of Public Records, RG 1, vol. 422, no. 35 (microfilm no. 15463). NSA, accessed Nov. 4, 2018, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=95>.

³⁸⁰ “Address of the House of Assembly to Lieutenant Governor Sherbrooke opposing black refugee immigration,” *Journal of the House of Assembly* 1815, p. 107 (microfilm no. 3528). NSA, accessed Nov. 7, 2018, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=76>; “Letter From Lord Dalhousie to Earl Bathurst about the black refugees,” Commissioner of Public Records, RG 1, vol. 112, pp. 6-9 (microfilm no. 15262). NSA, accessed Nov. 7, 2018, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=83>; “Return of the black American refugees residing at Hammonds Plains,” Commissioner of Public Records, RG 1, vol. 422, no. 19 (microfilm no.

Black Refugees continued to petition for lands into the following decade. In 1821, Levin Winder of Preston, “a sober [,] decent [sic] industrious man” applied for 150 acres. His petition stated, “owing to the difficulty there was in finding a shelter for himself and family, in the year 1815 he [accepted] the offer of Government and sat himself on a lot of land on which he now finds, owing to its limited size and sterile quality[,] he cannot make a living for himself and his family.” Similarly, Gabriel Hall of Preston, “a refugee man of colour [sic],” petitioned for twenty-five acres of land. His petition stated, “he is twenty one years of age and expects shortly to have a wife. That he has no means of making a living but by husbandry[.]” Although Hall’s petition was initially approved, the lands were never distributed.³⁸¹

Refugee settlers sought assistance with other matters. “One of the greatest needs of the black settlers,” writes Spray, “was a mill to grind their oats, buckwheat, barley and rye.” In 1828, the refugees near Loch Lomond, New Brunswick petitioned the Lieutenant Governor for assistance with the erection of an oat mill. By this stage, over forty people resided in the settlement, “the majority of whom are industriously inclined, and are earnestly striving to make themselves independent[.]” They alleged that their portable mill had broken due to “continued use... and want of proper skill on the part of your Petitioners to keep it in repair... and were it even in order now [sic] its capacity would be quite inadequate to the wants of the settlement.” Furthermore, the petitioners claimed that a new mill, “would have the happiest effect for the Black settlement, and would truly make it a land of pure delight and flowing milk and honey[.]”³⁸²

Over time, Maritime officials grew increasingly frustrated by the financial support directed toward slave refugee settlers. In 1826, the Justices of the Peace for the City and County of Saint John petitioned the Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick for financial assistance. They insisted that “these black refugees ought not to be chargeable upon any particular Town or Parish, and especially upon the Parish of Portland, where the Poor rates are much heavier than in any other part of the Province, and that from the peculiar circumstances attending their settlement in this Province, they have an irresistible [sic] claim on its Government for support.” Two years later, the Overseers of the Poor in Portland petitioned the House of Assembly

15463). NSA, accessed Nov. 7, 2018, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=86>; Walker, *Black Loyalists*, 394.

³⁸¹ “Memorial of Levin Winder,” Commissioner of Crown Lands, RG 20, series A, vol. 85 (1821) (microfilm no. 15733). NSA, accessed Nov. 7, 2018, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=88>; “Memorial of Gabriel Hall of Preston,” Commissioner of Crown Lands, RG 20, Series A., vol. 90 (1824) (microfilm 15737). NSA, accessed Nov. 7, 2018, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=93>.

³⁸² Spray, “The Settlement of Black Refugees,” 76-77; Petition of the “Colored Population” of Loch Lomond, Saint John County, praying aid to build an oat mill. 10 Mar. 1828, p. 74. Legislative Assembly: Sessional Records (RS24). S36-P146. Microfilm F17183. PANB, accessed May 30, 2019, <https://archives.gnb.ca/Search/RS24/DocumentViewer.aspx?culture=en-CA&record=6784>.

additional aid for the Loch Lomond settlers.³⁸³ As mentioned earlier, the next section will shift focus to slave refugee settlement in Upper Canada.

“as thick as blackbirds in a corn-field”: African American Refugees in Upper Canada

On the eve of the US Civil War, thousands of African American refugees settled in Upper Canada. The American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission (AFIC) sanctioned a report on the condition of slave refugees in Upper Canada. Samuel Gridley Howe journeyed to the province to, in the words of Matthew Furrow, “study how the black population there, which he assumed comprised mostly runaway slaves from the United States, was coping with freedom and equality under the law.”³⁸⁴ Over two trips, Howe interviewed African Americans and white abolitionist missionaries in the Niagara and Detroit River borderlands, the Greater Toronto Area, and Central Ontario. One correspondent, American abolitionist Hiram Wilson, reported that African Americans in the province “consist of two classes. 1st Refugees directly from Slavery. 2nd political refugees from oppressive laws and mob violence in Free states.” Wilson estimated that seven-eighths of slave refugees were self-emancipated people “who have shown great zeal and energy in escaping from the most terrible energy that ever afflicted the human race.” Wilson noted that refugees faced numerous challenges, most notably poverty and racial prejudice, particularly in rural areas. He wrote, “They are found in almost every part of Canada West, industriously employed in a great variety of occupations and rendering entire satisfaction to their employers.”³⁸⁵

Such positive reports from Upper Canada belied the widely held belief among white Southerners (and indeed, white Northerners) that African-descended people were incapable of becoming self-sufficient. US enslavers regularly lied to

³⁸³ Petition and account of the Justices of the Peace for the City and County of Saint John praying reimbursement for the Parish of Portland for supporting black refugees in 1825. 24 Jan. 1826, p. 14. Legislative Assembly: Sessional Records (RS24). S34-P10. Microfilm F17170. PANB, accessed May 30, 2019. <https://archives.gnb.ca/Search/RS24/DocumentViewer.aspx?culture=en-CA&record=5926>; Petition of the Overseers of the Poor for Portland, Saint John County, praying aid for the support of black refugees. 22 Feb. 1828, p. 29. Legislative Assembly: Sessional Records (RS24). S36-P-39. Microfilm F17182. PANB, accessed May 30, 2019, <https://archives.gnb.ca/Search/RS24/DocumentViewer.aspx?culture=en-CA&record=6830>.

³⁸⁴ Matthew Furrow, “Samuel Gridley Howe, the Black Population of Canada West, and the Racial Ideology of the “Blueprint for Radical Reconstruction,” *Journal of American History* 97, no. 2 (2010), 352-354.

³⁸⁵ Wilson, Hiram, 1803-1864. Letter to the Commission, St. Catharines, Canada, 1863 Dec. 10. United States. American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission records, 1862-1864. MS Am 702 (122). Houghton Library, Harvard University. Cambridge, MA, accessed Oct. 31, 2019, [https://iif.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:431380001\\$1i](https://iif.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:431380001$1i).

enslaved people about Canada's climate and socio-economic prospects. As increasing numbers of freedom seekers fled to Upper Canada, southern whites regularly claimed that the province was virtually uninhabitable.³⁸⁶ Furthermore, newspapers throughout the South published disparaging reports on black refugees in the province. In 1856, for example, the *Fayetteville Observer* claimed that a correspondent had recently encountered a young slave refugee in Toronto. It claimed that the 16 or 17-year-old boy was "standing bareheaded, barefoot – in short, without any other clothing than a shirt and pantaloons." Canadian philanthropists, the *Observer* claimed, "took no more notice of him than if he had been a dog." Four years later, the *Abbeville Banner* reported that black Canadian settlements were "abject," and that "crime and degradation are the chief characteristics of these deluded victims of abolition humanitarianism." The *Alexandria Gazette*, meanwhile, alleged that a self-emancipator from Maryland wrote to his former enslaver asking "to come on and bring him home, as he was tired of his 'freedom' there [Canada]."³⁸⁷

Pro-slavery sympathizing northern newspapers also printed negative accounts of black refugees in Upper Canada. In 1830, the *Ohio Republican* asserted that Africa "seems to be the only place where this degraded class of our population can be permitted to pursue... life, liberty, and happiness[.]" Similarly, in 1859, the *Cleveland Democrat* claimed that sixteen southern black refugees returned from the province to the United States after "Becoming weary of Canadian freedom... and of nearly being starved to death[.]" Some newspapers (particularly in the Old Northwest) warned of impending 'invasions' of their states, similar to Upper Canada. In 1860, the Ohio-based *Ashland Union* claimed that slave refugees in Upper Canada were "a poor, miserable, degraded, half starved set. They have been sent there by the Abolitionists of the North, in order to place them beyond the reach of their Southern owners. The Canadians are getting tired of them; they are opposed to any more coming, and threaten to expell [sic] those that are already there." It added that self-emancipators had recently "taken up their abode in Ohio, and already the black [sic] in Canada are emigrating to this State."³⁸⁸

³⁸⁶ For more on southern enslavers' false claims regarding Canada, see Dann J. Broyld, "Fannin' Flies and Tellin' Lies: Black Runaways and American Tales of Life in British Canada before the Civil War," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 44, no. 2 (2014), 169-186.

³⁸⁷ "UNDERGROUND RAILROAD," *Fayetteville Observer* (Fayetteville, NC), Sep. 4, 1856; "FREE NEGROES IN CANADA," *Abbeville Banner* (Abbeville, SC), Jan. 19, 1860; "A gentleman from Calvert County..." *Alexandria Gazette*, Dec. 23, 1858.

³⁸⁸ "Negro settlement in Canada," *Ohio Republican*, reprinted in *Western Sun & General Advertiser*, May 1, 1830; "EXTENSIVE ARRIVAL OF BLACKS FROM CANADA, EN ROUTE TO THE SOUTH – SIXTEEN FUGITIVE SLAVES ON THE BACK TRACK," *Cleveland Democrat*, reprinted in *Delaware Gazette* (Delaware, NY), Jul. 27, 1859; "NEGRO INVASION OF OHIO," *Ashland Union* (Ashland, OH), Oct. 31, 1860. For examples of newspaper articles on 'failed' black settlement, alleged riots and 'disturbances' in Upper Canada, and attempts to remove slave refugees, see "THE CANADIANS AND THEIR FREE NEGRO POPULATION," *Nashville Union and American*, Sep. 17, 1857; "THE CANADIANS AND THEIR FREE NEGRO POPULATION," *Plattsburgh Republican* (Plattsburgh, NY), Sep. 19, 1857; "The Hon. Colonel Prince..." *Alexandria Gazette*, Sep. 27, 1858; "RUNAWAY NEGROES

African American, African Canadian, and white abolitionist newspapers refuted these negative portrayals of Upper Canadian refugee communities. The *Advocate* claimed in 1855 that most self-emancipators in the province “are represented as industrious, moderately enterprising, and decidedly thriving in their circumstances.” It acknowledged that there was “room for a wide variety of character, conduct, and condition” in refugee communities but was generally satisfied with their progress. Five years later, the *Liberator* wrote, “The condition of the colored race in Canada, as a whole... is favorable to their capability to support themselves by their own unaided efforts, free from the tyranny of the white man.” While the newspaper acknowledged that poverty was a concern in some instances, it also noted that many refugees “establish themselves in farming and trading, and support themselves and their families in comfort[.]” In 1860, the *Tiffin Weekly Democrat* dismissed reports of black disturbances in the province as simply “a fight which took place among a few white and colored schoolboys[.]” A few weeks later, the *Union County Star and Lewisburg Chronicle* dismissed reports of “negro riots” in Upper Canada as “pure fabrications[.]”³⁸⁹

The total number of African American refugees that migrated to Upper Canada remains somewhat unclear. Indeed, estimates have fluctuated substantially over time. In 1837, the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) estimated that 10,000 people of African descent resided in the province, most of whom were self-emancipated refugees. Nine years later, William Lloyd Garrison proclaimed that 15,000 had migrated to Canada, “and they are multiplying every day[.]” In 1852, the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* estimated that between 25,000 and 35,000 people of African descent lived in the province.³⁹⁰ Frank Severance’s *Old Trails on the Niagara*

IN CANADA,” *New Orleans Daily Crescent* (New Orleans, LA), Sep. 2, 1859; “A MOVEMENT AGAINST NEGROES IN CANADA,” *North Carolina Standard*, Jan. 18, 1860; “NEGRO OUTRAGE IN CANADA WEST,” *Evening Star*, Jan. 20, 1860; “THE NEGRO DISTURBANCES IN CANADA,” *Daily Exchange* (Baltimore, MD), Jan. 27, 1860; “The Fugitive Slaves in Canada,” *Daily Democrat and News* (Davenport, IA), Jan. 28, 1860; “Disturbances in Canada,” *Newbern Weekly Press* (Newbern, NC), Jan. 31, 1860; “TRACTS FOR THE PEOPLE,” *Cadiz Democratic Sentinel*, Feb. 1, 1860; “Free Negroes North and South,” *Semi-Weekly Mississippian* (Jackson, MS), Apr. 24, 1860.

³⁸⁹ “FUGITIVE SLAVES IN CANADA,” *Advocate* (Buffalo, NY), Sep. 13, 1855; “THE RUNAWAY SLAVES,” *Liberator*, Feb. 3, 1860; “The Reported Negro Excitement in Canada a Humburg,” *Tiffin Weekly Democrat* (Tiffin, OH), Feb. 3, 1860; “Negroes in Canada – and Free Negroes Generally,” *St. Louis Herald*, reprinted in *Spirit of Democracy* (Woodsfield, OH), Feb. 8, 1860; “The reports of negro riots...,” *Union County Star and Lewisburg Chronicle* (Lewisburg, PA), Feb. 17, 1860.

³⁹⁰ American Anti-Slavery Society, *Fourth Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society, with the Speeches Delivered at the Anniversary Meeting Held in the City of New York, on the 9th May, 1837, and the Minutes of the Meetings of the Society for Business* (New York, NY: William S. Dorr, 1837), 34, accessed May 28, 2020. <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=mayantislaavery&cc=mayantislaavery&idno=02817510&q1=Canada&view=image&seq=1&size=100>; William Lloyd Garrison, *American Slavery. Address on the Subject of American Slavery, and the Progress of the Cause of Freedom throughout the World. Delivered in the National Hall, Holborn, on Wednesday Evening, September 2, 1846* (London: Richard Kinder, 1846), 18, accessed May 25, 2020. <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer->

Frontier (1899) notes that some early reports place the number of blacks in Upper Canada as high as 75,000. Severance added that “it is probably within the fact to say that more than 50,000 crossed to Upper Canada, nearly all from points on Lake Erie, the Detroit and Niagara Rivers.” By the mid-twentieth century, historians incorporated these estimates into their own studies, placing the total number closer to 40,000. More recently, Michael Wayne placed the actual figure closer to 20,000.³⁹¹



Figure 12: Map of Upper Canada, 1835

Source: A Map of the Province of Upper Canada describing all the New Settlements, Townships, etc. with the Counties adjacent from Quebec to Lake Huron, accessed May 20, 2020.

<https://mdl.library.utoronto.ca/collections/scanned-maps/map-province-upper-canada-describing-all-new-settlements-townships-etc>.

[idx?c=mayantisavery;cc=mayantisavery;idno=10841913;q1=Canada;view=image;seq=1;size=100;page=root](https://mdl.library.utoronto.ca/collections/scanned-maps/map-province-upper-canada-describing-all-new-settlements-townships-etc); “THE REFUGEES IN CANADA,” *ASR*, Jan. 1, 1852.

³⁹¹ Frank H. Severance, *Old Trails on the Niagara Frontier* (Buffalo, NY: Matthews-Northup, 1899), 231-232, accessed May 28, 2020. <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.13523/1?r=0&s=1>; Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 240; Michael Wayne, “The Black Population of Canada West on the Eve of the American Civil War: A Reassessment Based on the Manuscript Census of 1861,” *Histoire Social/Social History* 28, no. 56 (1995), 470.

The availability of fertile lands at relatively affordable prices was Upper Canada's primary appeal. Various diaries, travelogues, and reports highlighted this desire to populate Upper Canada. In 1794, John Cosens Ogden praised Upper Canada's lands and early settlements. He noted that the province was "well adapted for raising wheat, Indian corn, and other summer grain; flax... succeeds remarkably well, and the face of the country yields grass in abundance[.]"³⁹² In 1820, Adam Hodgson recalled during his trip across the province, "The lands which the Government is at present distributing in Upper Canada lie parallel to the St. Lawrence [River] and the [Great] Lakes, and constitute a range of townships in the rear of those already granted... Land offices are established in ten different districts... but their power is restricted to grant a hundred acres." Hodgson that Upper Canada's soil was "generally extremely good, and the climate, with the exception of a long and severe winter, unobjectionable[.]"³⁹³

The first slave refugee settlements were founded in the years after the Revolutionary War. Richard Pierpoint, a Bundu-born soldier who fought for the British, received 200 acres in Grantham Township near St. Catharines. He and other blacks who served in Loyalist ranks believed that they would receive Canadian land grants upon the war's conclusion. Yet despite earlier assurances, African and African American newcomers were denied equal access to Upper Canadian lands. In 1794, Pierpoint and eighteen others submitted the 'Petition of Free Negroes' to Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe, which requested adjacent lands to assist with community formation, as well as the chance to "give assistance (in work) to those amongst them who may most want it." They indicated their preference for living separately from white settlers, perhaps to escape racial prejudice, and concluded, "your Petitioners hope their behaviour [sic] will be such as to shew [sic], that Negroes are capable of being industrious, and in loyalty to the Crown they are not deficient." However, Upper Canada's Executive Council turned down the petition.³⁹⁴

³⁹² John Cosens Ogden, *A Tour through Upper and Lower Canada By a Citizen of the United States. Containing, A View of the present State of Religion, Learning, Commerce, Agriculture, Colonization, Customs and Manners, among the English, French, and Indian Settlements* (Litchfield, CT: Printed at Litchfield (according to Act of Congress, 1799), 103, accessed May 17, 2020.
<https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.20852/1?r=0&s=1>.

³⁹³ Adam Hodgson, *Remarks During a Journey through North America in the Years 1819, 1820, and 1821, in a series of letters; with an appendix, containing an account of several of the Indian Tribes, and the principal missionary stations, &c., also, a letter to M. Jean Baptiste Say, on the comparative expense of free and slave labour* (New York: Samuel Writing, 1823), 9-10, 15, 17, accessed May 7, 2020,
<https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.35775/1?r=0&s=1>.

³⁹⁴ David Meyler and Peter Meyler, *A Stolen Life: Searching for Richard Pierpoint* (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 1999). 12, 69-70, 73; Zach Parroit, "Richard Pierpoint," *CanadianEncyclopedia.ca*, Oct. 6, 2016; Steve Pitt, "Richard Pierpoint: A Very Canadian Hero," (Toronto) *Star*, Feb. 7, 2012; <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/richard-pierpoint>, accessed May 23, 2019; 1794 Land Petition of Free Negroes. RG 1, L3, vol. 196. LAC, microfilm C-2022, accessed Mar. 21, 2019.
<http://tubman.info.yorku.ca/educational-resources/war-of-1812/richard-pierpoint/documents/>.

The War of 1812 also provided black servicemen in British ranks to claim land grants in Upper Canada. During the war, Pierpoint and others formed a black company in the Niagara region to defend the province. The 1st Lincoln Militia (later rebranded the 'Coloured Corps,') was composed of little over fifty men. The company served in several prominent battles. Most notably, black soldiers repelled US forces at the Battle of Queenstown Heights in 1812. Pierpoint and the other company members endured much hardship during the war. Four black soldiers were killed during the Battle of Fort George, and others suffered from sickness and poor health due to the generally harsh conditions. Nevertheless, they persisted in their efforts to defend Canada against the United States.³⁹⁵

After the conflict, veterans petitioned for lands to establish homes and communities. In November 1818, Charles Faulkner of Niagara appealed to the provincial legislature for "that quantity of land which is usually allocated to soldiers." Two months later, Samuel Edmonds, a black resident of York and "Native of the United States of America," who served for the British stated that he and other black veterans had been denied lands "on the same footing as other Discharged Soldiers[.]" Other black veterans, including Jonathan Butler, Woodford Mills, John Call, and John Jackson, also petitioned the government for assistance. Greater access to lands was central to their demands. Butler's petition stated that he was a "farmer of the township of Toronto in the Home District... [who] is desirous of obtaining more wild lands and has never obtained any lands or grants of Lands whatsoever from the Crown."³⁹⁶

On April 26, 1819, Upper Canada's Executive Council approved the opening of lands for black settlement in Oro Township. Black settlers typically received smaller lots than whites (only 100 acres compared to at least 200 acres) and were restricted to less favorable plots. Furthermore, Oro Township's distance from most population centers made it difficult for black newcomers to reach the allocated lands. In 1819, Charles Faulkner wrote to Lieutenant Governor Sir Peregrine

³⁹⁵ Gareth Newfield, "The Coloured Corps: Black Canadians and the War of 1812," *The Canadian Encyclopedia.ca*, Mar. 31, 2011. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/the-coloured-corps-african-canadians-and-the-war-of-1812>; "Coloured Corps," *Harriet Tubman Institute*, accessed Dec. 11, 2018. <http://tubman.info.yorku.ca/educational-resources/war-of-1812/richard-pierpoint/coloured-corps/>. For more on Richard Pierpoint and the Coloured Corps, see Steve Pitt, *To Stand and To Fight: Richard Pierpoint and the Coloured Corps of Upper Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2008); Gareth Newfield, "Upper Canada's Black Defenders? Re-evaluating the War of 1812 Coloured Corps," *Canadian Military History* 18, no. 3 (2015), 31-40.

³⁹⁶ Newfield, "Upper Canada's Black Defenders?" 38-39; Petition of Charles Faulkner, Nov. 4, 1818. RG 1, L3 vol. 189A. LAC, microfilm C-1896, accessed Mar. 21, 2019. <http://tubman.info.yorku.ca/educational-resources/war-of-1812/post-war-aftermath/oro-settlement/documents/>; Petition of Samuel Edmonds, January 18, 1819. RG 1, L3, vol. 177A. LAC, microfilm C-1888, accessed Mar. 21, 2019. <http://tubman.info.yorku.ca/educational-resources/war-of-1812/richard-pierpoint/coloured-corps/documents/>. For more on the list of various petitions mentioned, see Via "Related Documents/Les documents connexes," *Harriet Tubman Institute*, accessed Dec. 11, 2018. <http://tubman.info.yorku.ca/educational-resources/war-of-1812/post-war-aftermath/oro-settlement/documents/>.

Maitland, “there are many disadvantages which prevent us from getting to that place,” and requested lands “contiguous to the main road leading from Burlington to Lake Huron... on which to establish a settlement of Colored People.”³⁹⁷ Over subsequent years, black settlers soon founded the Wilberforce Street settlement in Oro Township. Twenty-three Orders in Council were issued, which awarded land grants to “a disparate group, mostly labourers [sic] who had emigrated from the United States.” Eleven of those who received land grants served in the War of 1812. Daniel Cokely, a veteran of the Colored Corps, received a land grant in 1825. Most petitioners had to wait for many years to receive their lots. In 1816, Humphrey Waters petitioned for lands as compensation for destroyed crops and property during the recent conflict. Eventually, he was awarded a grant in Oro Township, although he did not assume these lands himself.³⁹⁸

During the late 1820s, another wave of African American refugees bolstered Oro Township’s black population. Numerous refugee families began the process of clearing the Canadian wilderness, establishing farmsteads, and forming communities in Oro Township. Scottish traveler John Galt visited the region and wrote that there were “settled several negro families... I went into a cottage pleasantly situated on a rising ground, and found it inhabited by a crow-like flock of negro children; the mother was busy with them, and the father, a good-natured looking fellow, told me that they were very comfortable, but had not yet made great progress in clearing the land[.]”³⁹⁹ Although the Wilberforce Street settlement held some early promise, it quickly fell into decline. A lack of socio-economic opportunities, geographical isolation, and a lack of infrastructure ultimately hampered Oro’s potential growth. In 1831, the Wilberforce Street settlement was opened to whites, which coincided with an increase in land prices and racial hostility. Increasing numbers of black residents

³⁹⁷ Meyler and Meyler, *A Stolen Life*, 101; Silverman, *Unwelcome Guests*, 24-25; Council Minutes April 26, 1819. RG 1, L1, vol. 29, LAC, microfilm C-103, accessed Mar. 21, 2019.

<http://tubman.info.yorku.ca/educational-resources/war-of-1812/post-war-aftermath/oro-settlement/documents/>; Land grant notices for Albert, Edmonds, Butler, and Faulkner, April 26, 1819. RG 1, L1, vol. 29, LAC, microfilm C-103, accessed Mar. 21, 2019.

<http://tubman.info.yorku.ca/educational-resources/war-of-1812/post-war-aftermath/oro-settlement/documents/>; Faulkner to Maitland, 1819. RG 1, L3, vol. 190, LAC, microfilm C-1897, accessed Mar. 21, 2019. <http://tubman.info.yorku.ca/educational-resources/war-of-1812/post-war-aftermath/oro-settlement/documents/>.

³⁹⁸ “The Black Settlement in Oro Township,” *Simcoe.ca*, accessed Dec. 11, 2018. <https://www.simcoe.ca/Archives/Pages/black.aspx> (quote); “Daniel Cokely,” *HarrietTubmanInstitute*, accessed Dec. 11, 2018. <http://tubman.info.yorku.ca/educational-resources/war-of-1812/richard-pierpoint/coloured-corps/daniel-cokely/>; Petition of Daniel Cokely, 1825. RG 1, L3, vol. 106, LAC, microfilm C-1724. Via “Related Documents/Les documents connexes,” *HarrietTubmanInstitute*, accessed Dec. 11, 2018. <http://tubman.info.yorku.ca/educational-resources/war-of-1812/richard-pierpoint/coloured-corps/daniel-cokely/documents/>; “James & Humphrey Waters,” *HarrietTubmanInstitute*, accessed Dec. 11, 2018. <http://tubman.info.yorku.ca/educational-resources/war-of-1812/richard-pierpoint/coloured-corps/james-humphrey-waters/>.

³⁹⁹ John Galt, *The Autobiography of John Galt* (Philadelphia, PA: Key and Biddle, 1833), 63.

opted to leave for other settlements, where socio-economic opportunities were markedly better.⁴⁰⁰

Cincinnati refugees also procured lands in Upper Canada. Following the Cincinnati riots of 1829, African Americans in the Queen City expressed a greater desire to emigrate. Two representatives, Israel Lewis and Thomas Crissup, were dispatched to negotiate the procurement of lands with the provincial government. Lieutenant Governor John Colborne reportedly told them, "Tell the Republicans on your side of the line that we royalists do not know men by their color. Should you come to us you will be entitled to all the privileges of the rest of His Majesty's subjects."⁴⁰¹ They negotiated the purchase of 4,000 acres near Lucan in Biddulph Township (roughly twenty miles north of London). Crissup and Lewis solicited the necessary funds without any success. Soon after, Ohio Quakers agreed to contribute funds to the burgeoning settlement. African Americans from Ohio began making their way towards Upper Canada. British abolitionist Charles Stuart claimed that approximately 1,100 journeyed to the province. Since then, other reports have either increased and reduced this total figure.⁴⁰²

This migration sparked concern among Upper Canadian whites. Resolutions against the arrival of black newcomers were introduced into the province's House of Assembly, one of which stated that "the sudden introduction of a mass of Black Population, likely to continue without limitation, is a matter so dangerous to the peace and comfort of the inhabitants, that it now becomes necessary to prevent or check[.]" American Abolitionist Benjamin Lundy recalled that Canadian politicians "requested the Governor to apply to the British Parliament, for the future prohibition of such

⁴⁰⁰ "Black Settlement in Oro Township," *Simcoe.ca*; Brown-Kubisch, *The Queen's Bush Settlement*, 26. For more on the Wilberforce Street Settlement, see Gary E. French, *Men of Colour: An Historical Account of the Black Settlement on Wilberforce Street in Oro Township, Simcoe County, Ontario, 1819-1949* (Stroud, ON: Kaste Books, 1978). For more on the AME Church in the settlement, see Tim Crawford (ed.), *The Oro African Church: A History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Edgar, Ontario, Canada* (Oro, ON: The Township of Oro-Medonte, 1999).

⁴⁰¹ Quote taken from Ohio Anti-Slavery Society, *Condition of the People of Color in the State of Ohio. With Interesting Anecdotes* (Boston, MA: Isaac Knapp, 1839), 7, accessed May 20, 2020. <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=mayantisavery&cc=mayantisavery&idno=11842808&q1=Canada&view=image&seq=1&size=100>.

⁴⁰² Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 67; Charles Stuart, *Remarks on the Colony of Liberia and the American Colonization Society: With Some Account of the Settlement of Coloured People, at Wilberforce, Upper Canada* (London: J. Messeder, 1832), 9; "COLONY OF BLACKS," *Cincinnati Gazette*, reprinted in *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Jul. 1, 1830. For key readings on the Wilberforce Settlement, see Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 65-80; Taylor, "Reconsidering the 'Forced' Exodus."; Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 153-162; Marilyn Bailly, "From Cincinnati, Ohio to Wilberforce, Canada: A Note on Antebellum Colonization," *Journal of Negro History* 58, no. 4 (1973), 427-440; Fred Landon, "The History of the Wilberforce Refugee Colony in Middlesex County," *London & Middlesex Historical Society* 19 (1918), 30-44," in Carolyn Smardz Frost, Bryan Walls, Hillay Bates Neary, and Frederick H. Armstrong (eds.), *Ontario's African-Canadian Heritage: Collected Writings by Fred Landon, 1918-1967* (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2009), 75-94.

emigration.” These attempts ultimately failed, however, and the African American refugees were permitted to settle in the province.⁴⁰³

By 1831, the settlement was up and running, although it was hampered by several issues from the outset. For starters, only a small minority of the Cincinnati refugees made it to Wilberforce. Many integrated into towns and settlements in northern Ohio, while those that took the ferry from Sandusky to Port Stanley were deterred by the thirty-five-mile trek through uncleared forests. Nevertheless, many African American newcomers pushed on to Wilberforce. “Land ownership,” notes Nikki Taylor, “was the key to real freedom for these settlers.” In June, a meeting of African American leaders in Philadelphia urged “different Societies engaged in the Canadian Settlement... to persevere in their praiseworthy and philanthropic undertaking; firmly believing, that, at a future period, their labours [sic] will be crowned with success.” The primary address of the convention claimed that 2,000 refugees “have left the soil of their birth, crossed the lines, and laid the foundation for a structure which promises to prove an asylum for the coloured populations of these United States.”⁴⁰⁴

The settlement boasted some attractive features, most notably its cultivable lands. In 1832, the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* wrote, “It is covered with a heavy growth of timber, consisting of oak, poplar, bass... with some cherry and walnut; and along the streams may be seen a portion of elm and sycamore.” Wilberforce’s soil was “extremely fertile. All kinds of grain, &c., produced north of the Carolinas, succeed well here.” Moreover, the abundance of fauna offered black refugee newcomers other sources of food and resources. Many settlers began hunting and selling animal skins and fur to traders. “The forest,” wrote Austin Steward, “abounded with deer, wolves, bears, and other wild animals.” There were also nearby limestone quarries and streams with fresh water.⁴⁰⁵

Wilberforce’s leaders set about promoting the settlement and its early achievements. In particular, they described the resilience and ingenuity of the black settlers. Austin Steward, a formerly enslaved black abolitionist and president of the

⁴⁰³ “From the National Gazette,” *Indiana Palladium*, Apr. 10, 1830; Benjamin Lundy, *The Life, Travels and Opinions of Benjamin Lundy, Including His Journey to Texas and Mexico; with a Sketch of Contemporary Events, and a Notice of the Revolution in Hayti* (Philadelphia: William D. Parrish, 1847), 240.

⁴⁰⁴ Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 65-67; Convention of the People of Color, First Annual (1831: Philadelphia, PA), “Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the People of Colour, held by adjutments in the city of Philadelphia, from the sixth to the eleventh of June, inclusive, 1831.” *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/72>.

⁴⁰⁵ “WILBERFORCE SETTLEMENT,” *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, reprinted in *Liberator*, May 12, 1832; Austin Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave, and Forty Years a Freeman; Embracing a Correspondence of Several Years, While President of Wilberforce Colony, London, Canada West* (Rochester: William Alling, Exchange Street, 1857), 194, accessed Sep. 10, 2018. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/steward/steward.html>.

settlement, recalled that there were “some fourteen or fifteen families, and numbered over fifty persons in all” by 1831. In another letter, Steward claimed that the Wilberforce settlers “have erected for our accommodations comfortable log buildings,” as well as a sabbath school. Additionally, they built three sawmills and erected a grist mill. At its height, Wilberforce comprised a few hundred black settlers. A correspondent for the *Rochester Observer*, for instance, wrote, “I was much pleased to observe the exertions making among them to rise above prejudice and slavery... [and] I am of the opinion that this colony will ere long, convince the enemies of the African race, of having spoken wrong concerning them.”⁴⁰⁶

Despite its early promise, the Wilberforce settlement soon fell into decline. Fundraising campaigns in the United States and Great Britain failed to generate the necessary income to support Wilberforce. Moreover, the personal rift between Israel Lewis and the board of managers quickly publicized and undermined Wilberforce’s credibility. Steward and his supporters accused Lewis of embezzling funds and warned people against giving him donations. New York abolitionist Arthur Tappan claimed that Lewis “obtained in this city, at different times, upwards of Fifteen Hundred Dollars... of which money he has paid over short of One Hundred Dollars, and gives no account of the funds collected by him.” Likewise, the Michigan Anti-Slavery Society disapproved of Lewis’ management and recommended that allies “withhold all contributions from the society under existing circumstances.” Ultimately, Wilberforce’s board of managers severed all ties with Lewis, and the settlement continued to decline. Over the 1840s, black settlers were supplanted by European immigrants.⁴⁰⁷

What happened to the Wilberforce settlers? Some moved to the ‘Queen’s Bush,’ a region of uncleared wilderness in central Ontario (roughly present-day Waterloo and Wellington Counties). Linda Kubisch-Brown writes that the Queen’s Bush “comprised an area eight by twelve miles.” By the mid-1840s, the region’s black community was highly diverse, comprised of self-emancipated refugees from enslavement, self-purchased, freed, and free-born blacks. At its peak, more than 1,500 blacks resided in the Queen’s Bush.⁴⁰⁸ The new settlers cleared the forests, built

⁴⁰⁶ Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 68; Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave*, 182; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP*: vol. 2: *Canada, 1830-1865*, 47-49; “IMPROVEMENTS AMONG COLORED PEOPLE,” *Rochester Observer*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Nov. 5, 1831.

⁴⁰⁷ Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 75-79; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP*: vol. 2: *Canada, 1830-1865*, 57-58, 63; Arthur Tappan, “CAUTION TO THE PUBLIC,” *Liberator*, Mar. 9, 1833; Michigan State Anti-Slavery Society, *Report of the Meeting of the Michigan State Anti-Slavery Society June 28th, 1837, Being the First Annual Meeting, Adjourned from June 1st, 1837* (Detroit, MI: Geo. L. Whitney, 1837), 9, accessed May 28, 2020. <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=mayantislaavery&cc=mayantislaavery&idno=04820111&q1=Canada&view=image&seq=1&size=100>.

⁴⁰⁸ Linda Kubisch-Brown, *The Queen’s Bush Settlement: Black Pioneers, 1839-1865* (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2004), 52-53. For more on the Queen’s Bush, see Natasha L. Henry, *Emancipation Day: Celebrating Freedom in Canada* (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2010), 156-158.

homes, and established farmsteads with limited resources on unfamiliar terrain. William Jackson, who traveled to the Queen's Bush in 1846, told Drew, "We went four and a half miles beyond the other farms, to Castenogo, where he cleared up and had a farm; for years scarcely any white people came in, but fugitive slaves came in, in great numbers, and cleared the land." Similarly, Thomas L. Wood Knox from Pennsylvania, noted "Most of the colored people living here are doing as well, if not better, than one could reasonably expect. Most of the grown people among them are fugitive slaves." John Francis, a self-emancipator from Virginia, claimed that the settlers were "doing pretty well – they have many drawbacks: as they can keep no books nor accounts, they are liable to be over-reached – and are overreached sometimes."⁴⁰⁹

From the outset, the Queen's Bush settlers exhibited an independent, industrious spirit. John Little recalled that he and his wife built "a little log hut amid the snow" and cleared the lands. He cultivated a range of vegetables and grains, and also owned pigs, horses, and oxen. He claimed to have raised "several hundred of bushels of wheat last year, two hundred bushels of potatoes, one hundred bushels of peas, two hundred and fifty bushels of oats, and ten tons of hay[.]" His unnamed wife's testimony illustrates that black women played an integral role in establishing farms. She claimed, "I could hand an axe, or hoe, or any thing [sic]. I felt proud to be able to do it – to help get cleared up, so that we could have a home, and plenty to live on. I now enjoy my life very well – I have nothing to complain of."⁴¹⁰

Nevertheless, the Queen's Bush was soon beset by legal and financial problems. Most newcomers established their farms on Clergy Reserves, which had not been aside for black settlement. Upper Canada's Governor General eventually agreed to allow the settlers to procure their lands but set payment terms which most could not afford. Consequently, settlers began to leave the Queen's Bush for nearby locales. Thomas Knox noted, "Many have removed to Owen's Sound and other places," while William Jackson told Drew, "A great many who sold out went to Mr. King's settlement [discussed later], and to Owen Sound."⁴¹¹

The Western District (present-day Essex and Chatham-Kent Counties) saw the greatest influx of African American refugees. In particular, the black populations of Essex and Chatham-Kent grew exponentially. By 1851, African-descended people comprised roughly eleven percent of Essex County's total population. Almost 2,400 people of African descent were recorded in the 1861 census, although the true figure was likely higher. In Windsor, Benjamin Drew estimated that there were "fifty families of colored people, some of whom entertain as boarders a number of fugitives

⁴⁰⁹ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 189, 191, 195-197.

⁴¹⁰ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 215-219, 233.

⁴¹¹ Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 156; Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 190, 191.

from bondage.” Meanwhile, about twenty-one black families lived in nearby Sandwich. Farther south, Amherstburg was another prominent haven for freedom seekers. James Bryce Brown recalled that Amherstburg was “a town famed as the great landing-place and asylum for runaway slaves from the adjacent states.” He noted that many refugees were “engaged in growing and preparing tobacco for the Montreal market; and have a church and school-house in the small but pleasantly situated town.” Likewise, English emigrant Joseph Pickering recalled that there were “some hundreds of these people settled at Sandwich and Amherstburg, who are formed into a volunteer militia corps, and trained to arms.”⁴¹²

Slave refugees also documented the region’s early black communities. Henry Goings wrote that Amherstburg’s black community was “doing well” settled in the town for a short time before moving farther inland. Meanwhile, William Troy provides excellent insight into Essex County’s refugee community. He became a pastor in Amherstburg before



Figure 13: Slave refugees in Windsor, n.d.

Source: A group of refugee settlers, of Windsor, Ontario. Mrs. Anne Mary Jane Hunt, Mansfield Smith, Mrs. Lucinda Seymour, Henry Stevenson, Bush Johnson. (From a recent photograph). From the Schomburg Photographs and Prints Division (Slavery – Fugitive Slaves). SC-CN-93-0229. Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice. Adam Matthew Digital. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 11 Nov., 2019.

⁴¹² Irene Moore Davis, “Canadian Black Settlements in the Detroit River Region,” in Smardz Frost and Tucket (eds.), *A Fluid Frontier*, 83-86, 92-94; Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 321; James Bryce Brown, *Views of Canada and the Colonists: Embracing the Experience of a Residence; Views of the Present State, Progress, and Prospects of the Colony; with Detailed and Practical Information for Intending Emigrants* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1844), 18-19; Pickering, Joseph. Emigration, or no emigration: being the narrative of the author, (an English farmer) from the year 1824 to 1830; during which time he traversed the United States of America, and the British province of Canada, with a view to settle as an emigrant: containing observations on the manners and customs – the soil and climate of the countries; and a comparative statement on the advantages and disadvantages offered in the United States and Canada: thus enabling persons to form a judgement on the propriety of emigrating. London, 1830. Slavery and Anti-Slavery. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 10 June 2020, 65.

moving to Windsor, where his congregation was “composed chiefly of fugitive slaves.” Troy claimed that about 3,000 people lived in Windsor, of whom “eight hundred are coloured settlers from various portions of the Southern States of America... In Sandwich there are about five hundred fugitive slaves. Adjacent to both these towns are large numbers of fugitives, mostly engaged in farming.” Others worked as “carpenters and joiners, bricklayers, masons, plasterers, and boot and shoe makers.” Troy’s account presents a highly industrious spirit to the black refugee settlers in Windsor, Sandwich, and Amherstburg. However, he also wrote that the refugee communities had “much to contend with from the prejudices of the white people, which may be considered as a result of the influence of their contact with Yankees.” Despite this, he acknowledged that racial prejudice was “being removed slowly, but is being removed: it is not as strong as it has been. Yet it is very powerful.”⁴¹³

Slave refugees worked predominantly in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations, such as day laborers, barbers, shoemakers, carpenters, blacksmiths, cooks, and waiters. Spencer Jackson of George Street, Amherstburg was recorded as a laborer in the 1861 census and a list of ‘colored’ citizens in 1866. Meanwhile, George Crawford worked as a carpenter in the town, and David Smith as a barber. Others worked as sailors and dockworkers in the Detroit River and Lake Erie commercial trades. Washington and Luther Bush, James Case, George Cooper, and John Green were all listed as sailors in the 1866 assessment rolls.⁴¹⁴ Similarly, Henry Goings worked aboard steamboats on the River Thames.⁴¹⁵ Trade between farmers, merchants, and businesses in Essex County and Detroit created a thriving regional economy. Henry Bibb claimed, “Our stores and shops here are thronged with customers... many come from Detroit here to trade... our docks are so frequently crowded with steamboats and sailing vessels loading and unloading, that there is scarcely room for the ferry boats to land.” The *Voice of the Fugitive* mentioned that “a colored friend of ours to-day cross on the ferry boat with almost 200 dozen of eggs,

⁴¹³ Goings, et. al., *Rambles of a Runaway Slave*, 41; William Troy, *Hair-Breadth Escapes from Slavery to Freedom* (Manchester: W. Bremner, 11, Market Street, and 15, Piccadilly, 1861), 7-9, accessed Mar. 20, 2019. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/troy/troy.html#p100>. Troy’s *Hair-Breadth Escapes* are also discussed in Gordon S. Barker, “Revisiting “British Principle” Talk” Antebellum Black Expectations and Racism in Early Ontario,” in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves*, 34-69.

⁴¹⁴ ‘Spencer Jackson,’ Census of the Canadas, 1861, Essex County, Canada West. MS C-1019-1020. Item Number: 1997653. LAC, accessed Jul. 1, 2019. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1861/Pages/item.aspx?itemid=1997653>; ‘George Crawford,’ Census of the Canadas, 1861, Essex County, Canada West. LAC, microfilm C-1019-1020. Item Number: 1033147. Accessed via: <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1861/Pages/item.aspx?itemid=1033147>; ‘David Smith,’ Census of the Canadas, 1861, Essex County, Canada West. LAC, microfilm C-1019-1020. Item Number: 1033021. Accessed via: <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1861/Pages/item.aspx?itemid=1033021>; “A’burg Colored Citizens – 1866,” Alvin McCurdy Fonds. F 2076 3. LAC, MS 1167. AO. Toronto. Unfortunately, there is no way to determine if these individuals were self-liberated refugees or legally free people of color using these sources alone.

⁴¹⁵ Goings, et. al., *Rambles of a Runaway Slave*, 48.

six or eight turkeys with chickens and butter[.]” In 1859, the *Cleveland Morning Leader* reported, “At Windsor I made the acquaintance of many [blacks] who had “emigrated” from various parts of the South, and I was much gratified to find so many who had once toiled without remuneration, now hard at work for their wives and little ones, owning a good property and continually accumulating.” Among them was a refugee from Kentucky who “has now three pretty little houses and lots[.]”⁴¹⁶

Elsewhere, about 350 black residents resided in Anderson, and about 450 in Colchester, and 78 in Gosfield. Refugee communities were also documented in Fort Erie, Malden, New Canaan, Tilbury, Lakeshore, Rochester, Little River, Puce, Leamington, and Harrow. Southwestern Ontario’s soil was rich and fertile – very suitable for small-scale farming. Henry Bibb’s *Voice of the Fugitive* claimed that there were “about 6000 acres of Canada Company land for sale... [the] price of which is from \$2 to \$2.50 per acre.” Those who grew hemp and flax were often able “to reap an abundant harvest[.]” Irene Moore Davis writes that other black farmers grew a range of crops, including “tobacco, wheat, corn, oats, potatoes, sweet potatoes, and a variety of other vegetables and fruits, and raised livestock and poultry.” The lands at Malden, wrote the *Voice*, were covered with “hickory, black walnut, white oak, &c., in abundance... and the tallest blue grass we have ever seen.” Another traveler noted, “The soil at Malden seems superior to that of Colchester and improves, on approaching Amherstburg, to the finest quality... a considerable amount of tobacco is here grown, chiefly by the black population.”⁴¹⁷

Essex County’s black communities were diverse, transnational bodies, composed of slave refugees, free African Americans, African Canadians, and others. Genealogical records highlight the transnational nature of black Canadian communities in the region. Samuel Gabriel Clingman, an enslaved African American from Kentucky, escaped to Canada in the early 1820s. About twenty-five years later, his son also fled from Kentucky with his wife and their three children. The family resettled in Colchester, where they had eight more children. Similarly, Washington and Jemima Hurst, a formerly enslaved couple reportedly from Virginia, were recorded in Colchester with their seven children. Ten years later, Washington Hurst owned twenty-four acres, all of which were employed for cultivation.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁶ “Progress of Improvement in Windsor,” *VF*, Jun. 3, 1852; “CANADA CORRESPONDENCE,” *CML*, Dec. 7, 1859.

⁴¹⁷ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 367, 378; “HEMP AND FLAX GROWING,” *VF*, Mar. 12, 1851; Davis, “Canadian Black Settlements,” 83-84, 96; “Agricultural Resources,” *VF*, Jun. 17, 1852; Patrick Sheriff, *A Tour Through North America; Together with a Comprehensive View of the Canadas and United States. As Adapted for Agricultural Emigration* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1835), 207.

⁴¹⁸ “Clingman Family,” amherstburgfreedom.org, accessed Jun. 5, 2019.

<https://amherstburgfreedom.org/clingman-family/>; “Hurst Family (Washington), amherstburgfreedom.org, accessed Jun. 5, 2019. <https://amherstburgfreedom.org/hurst-family-washington/>.

In Upper Canada, slave refugees managed to attain a modicum of independence. George Williams of Sandwich told Drew, “I work at whitewashing, etc. I rent a house and own a small piece of land. The colored men here are getting a living.” James Smith of Amherstburg claimed, “I am doing tolerably well in Canada, and am getting a very comfortable living. I own a lot of land worth about two hundred dollars, and have other property. I keep a grocery, and sell to all who will buy, without distinction of color.” Robert Nelson of Colchester claimed, “I can raise corn sixty or seventy bushels to the acre, as good corn as ever was raised in the South.”⁴¹⁹

Nevertheless, poverty remained a pervasive issue for black refugee communities in Essex. Jermain W. Loguen’s narrative claims that the recently arrived freedom seekers were unable to find employment in Windsor, which compelled him to journey farther inland. Meanwhile, Robert Nelson recalled, “The prejudice is higher here in this place than in any part of Canada. It arises from a wish to keep the colored people so that they can get their labor.” He noted the existence of “begging agencies” which raised donations for blacks in Essex County. Local activists founded organizations designed to aid slave refugees in the Western District. Benjamin Drew referenced the local ‘True Band,’ society, a ‘self-help’ relief agency that sought to disperse funds among the black refugees and aid newcomers in finding homes, land, and jobs. Adrienne Shadd writes True Bands grew in popularity and spread to other refugee communities.⁴²⁰

Black activists and white abolitionists promoted affordable land distribution schemes to slave refugees. The Refugee Home Society (RHS) was the most notable attempt to provide lands for freedom seekers in Essex. Led by Michigan abolitionists, its central purpose was “to assist the refugees from American slavery; to obtain permanent homes in Canada; and to promote their moral, social, physical and intellectual elevation.” RHS sponsors purchased 2,000 acres around Sandwich and Maidstone. Refugees could buy twenty-five acre lots via multi-annual repayments. Henry Bibb was chosen to manage the RHS. In 1852, his newspaper, the *Voice of the Fugitive*, reported that “twelve worthy settlers” had already bought lands under the RHS banner and were “now slaying down the tall forest and converting it into

⁴¹⁹ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 343, 353, 370.

⁴²⁰ Jermain W. Loguen, *The Rev. J.W. Loguen as a Slave and a Freeman* (Syracuse, NY: J.G.K. Truair & co, 1859), 338, accessed Jun. 20, 2019. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/loguen/loguen.html>; Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 371-372. Adrienne Shadd, “Extending the Right Hand of Fellowship: Sandwich Baptist Church, Amherstburg First Baptist, and the Amherstburg Baptist Association,” in Smardz and Frost (eds.), *A Fluid Frontier*, 127. For more on black Canadian settlements in Essex County, see Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 271-314. The ‘begging’ question remained a contentious issue among black abolitionists in Upper Canada. See Michael F. Hembree, “The Question of Begging: Fugitive Slave Relief in Canada, 1830-1865,” *Civil War History* 37, no. 4 (1991), 314-327.

cordwood... All the persons can now for the first time in their lives say that they are landholders in a free country.”⁴²¹

The RHS lands, Bibb claimed, were “well timbered with white oak, beech, white ash, black ash, hickory, basswood, &c. The soil is of black sandy loam, with clay bottom, and is well adapted for the growing of wheat, corn, potatoes, and all kinds of products that will grow in the State of Ohio or Michigan.” Other RHS agents praised Bibb’s leadership and affirmed the new land-owning scheme’s value to black refugees in Upper Canada. Rev. Charles C. Foote declared, “Too much praise cannot be awarded to them for what they are doing for the fugitive.” The RHS’ reports were highly positive about the settlers’ progress. The Third Annual Report from 1855 that most families on RHS were “in possession of improved homes, pleasant gardens, growing orchards and increasing stock.”⁴²²

The RHS was also met with criticism, however. Samuel Ringgold Ward insisted that there was “no need of any other land-buying or land-selling organizations in Canada, for Fugitives or others, than those provided by our laws... my mind is that the Fugitives who choose to be farmers, can find abundant facilities for acquisition of land in Canada without the aid of the Society in question.” Likewise, James Theodore Holly criticized the RHS as “a continuation of the disgraceful begging system” which “discourages self-reliance on the part of the fugitives.” Mary Ann Shadd Cary, a free-born black activist, accused Bibb of deliberately misappropriating funds and, in a letter to William Lloyd Garrison, wrote that RHS settlers were “begging for money and clothes[.]” In response, Bibb dismissed these criticisms and claimed that the Windsor protestors were “*only* by a set of half cracked, hot headed individuals[.]”⁴²³

In the end, sustained criticism of the RHS, as well as Henry Bibb’s death in 1854, proved fatal to the RHS. Testimonies from refugee settlers were decidedly mixed. Thomas Jones claimed that the settlers were “not doing very well... Some dissatisfaction exists because there has been an advance made of four shillings an acre for surveying, although the land had been surveyed once. The refugees all

⁴²¹ “Refugees’ Home Society,” VF, Aug. 12, 1852; “REPORT OF THE REFUGEE’S HOME SOCIETY,” FDP, Oct. 15, 1852; “The Refugee’s Home,” VF, Oct. 21, 1852; Kerry Walters, *The Underground Railroad: A Reference Guide* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2012), 174-175.

⁴²² “Land for the Refugee’s Home,” VF, Dec. 16, 1852; C.C. Foote, “The Colored People in Canada – Do They Need Help?,” *Liberator*, Dec. 24, 1852; “THE REFUGEE HOME SOCIETY,” ASB, Dec. 29, 1855.

⁴²³ “TRAVELING AGENTS FOR THE FUGITIVES HOME SOCIETY IN MICH.,” VF, Jun. 18, 1851; S. R. Ward, “The Fugitives and Their Needs,” NASS, Jan. 20, 1853; J. Theodore Holly, “Refugees’ Home Society,” *Liberator*, Mar. 4, 1853; Cary, Mary Ann Shadd, and William Lloyd Garrison. “Letter from Mary Ann Shadd, Windsor [Ontario], to William Lloyd Garrison, 1852 Oct[ober] 5.” Correspondence. October 5, 1852. *Digital Commonwealth*, accessed Jun. 3, 2020. <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:2v23x214t>; Jane Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 41-42, 61-62; Washington, “‘I Am Going Straight for Canada’” in Smardz Frost and Tucker (eds.), *A Fluid Frontier*, 175.

refused to pay it.” He added that the RHS Constitution had been amended without the settlers’ consent, resulting in much less favorable terms for them. “They were to clear up the five acres in three years,” he noted; “They have altered the constitution bringing it down to two years.” Overall, those who remained on RHS lands had begun “to think ‘t is a humbug.”⁴²⁴

While many newspaper articles stress the progress made by slave refugee settlers, others highlight the challenges which they faced. The *Cadiz Democratic Sentinel* reported that communities in Anderson, Sandwich, Malden, and Colchester were “small, and invariably sunk into poverty.” White Canadians, it added, opposed the arrival of African American refugees because “it depresses the value of their property, diminishes their personal comfort and safety [,] and destroys the peace and good order of the community.” Freedom seekers, wrote the *Sentinel*, “go into Canada as beggars, and the mass of them commit larceny and lay in jail until they become lowered and debased, and ready for worse crimes.” The newspaper’s aim becomes readily apparent in another section, in which it asks readers if they were “willing to have the value of their lands depreciated, and to subject their crops and stock to constant depredations by inviting here the same class of neighbors that at present deplete who Canadian townships of their sheep?”⁴²⁵

Chatham-Kent was another popular destination for African American refugees. Indeed, the *Cincinnati Daily Press* called Chatham “the headquarters of the negro race in Canada[.]”⁴²⁶ Historians have long noted Chatham-Kent’s prominence as a center for slave refugees in Upper Canada. Kate Clifford Larson writes, “Chatham and nearby communities had larger and more well-established black fugitive communities”⁴²⁷ John Little, a formerly enslaved resident of the town, claimed, “the fugitives are as thick as blackbirds in a corn-field.” After visiting Chatham, Benjamin Drew estimated that 800 black residents lived and worked in the region (approximately one-third of the total population). “At every turn,” he wrote, “he [visitors] meets members of the African race, single or in groups; he sees them building and painting houses, working in mills, engaged in every handicraft employment: here he notices a street occupied by colored shopkeepers and clerks, working in mills, engaged in every handicraft employment: here he notices a street occupied by colored shopkeepers and clerks[.]” By 1861, more than 1,200 black people were recorded in Chatham.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁴ Walter, *Underground Railroad*, 114; Drew, *North Side View of Slavery*, 327-328 (Jones quotes).

⁴²⁵ “TRACTS FOR THE PEOPLE,” (Cadiz, OH) *Cadiz Democratic Sentinel*, Feb. 1, 1860.

⁴²⁶ “FUGITIVE SLAVES IN CANADA,” *Cincinnati Daily Press* (Cincinnati, OH), Feb. 28, 1861.

⁴²⁷ Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 117.

⁴²⁸ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 234; Howard Law, “‘Self-Reliance is the True Road to Independence’: Ideology and Ex-Slaves in Buxton and Chatham,” in Ventresca, Draper, and Iacovetta (eds.), *A Nation of Immigrants*, 83. Paul Heicke, “Out of Chatham: Abolitionism on the Canadian frontier,” *Atlantic Studies* 8, no. 2 (2011), 169. For more on black settlement in Chatham, see Simpson,

Abolitionists and newspaper reports discuss the condition of slave refugees in Chatham-Kent. Samuel J. May wrote, "Chatham is the asylum of about five hundred colored people, nearly all of them fugitives from our country" He noted that they worked as "carpenters, blacksmiths, cabinet makers, shoemakers, &c., without let or hindrance." Testimonies from black refugees in the region also shed light on their condition in the region. Edward Hicks stated, "I have been here about six years. I like Canada well – I am satisfied with it. I have gotten a little property together, worth some two thousand dollars." Thomas Hedgebeth, who escaped from North Carolina, declared, "I like the country, the soil, as well as any country I ever saw. I like the laws, which leave a man as much freedom as a man can have[.]"⁴²⁹ At the same time, black refugees encountered various obstacles in Chatham-Kent. Samuel Ringgold Ward wrote, "there is not a town in Canada, in which the feeling against Negroes is stronger than in Chatham. Most of the white settlers in Chatham were low, degraded persons, in early and former life. They are the Negro-haters."⁴³⁰

Slave refugees also established their homes and communities across the Niagara River borderland. St. Catharines was home to hundreds of slave refugees. Rev. Alexander Hemsley, a self-emancipator from Maryland, told Drew, "When I reached St. Catharines I was enfeebled in health... I rented a house, and with another man took five acres of cleared land, and got along with it very well. We did not get enough from this to support us; but I got work at half a dollar or seventy-five cents a day and board myself." Hotels and steamboats regularly employed black waiters, servants, and workers. William Grose claimed that he worked in the Clifton House, one of the most popular hotels in the region. Yet small numbers worked in semi-skilled and skilled professions. William Johnson recalled, "I have been about among the colored people in St. Catharines considerably, and have found them industrious and frugal."⁴³¹

In 1853, the *Provincial Freeman* informed readers that the "prejudice against our people, was not so strong, so prevalent nor so unprovoked as we had thought, from what we had heard." It added that black residents were "not the poorest in the town, by a good deal. Many of them own little houses and lots, and enjoy a comfortable maintenance." As an example, the *Freeman* insisted that John W. Lindsay, a self-emancipator from Tennessee, and James Harris "live as comfortably as any one [sic] needs to live. Each of them has a good team, and they are making as rapid progress, in worldly wealth, as the majority of their white fellow-subjects." The 'Negro Village' (a large black community) was far from the "mud-hole" which they

Under the North Star, 314-317; Jonathan W. Walton, "Blacks in Buxton and Chatham, Ontario, 1830-1990: Did the 49th Parallel Make a Difference (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1979).

⁴²⁹ Samuel J. May, "LETTER FROM SAMUEL J. MAY. – NO. II," *FDP*, Aug. 27, 1852; Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 269, 279.

⁴³⁰ Ward, *Autobiography*, 201.

⁴³¹ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 30, 39, 44.

expected; “The site is good, the property valuable, the part of the town respectable, and whites live in the most immediate vicinity.”⁴³²

Other testimonies illustrate the prominence of prejudice and poverty in the Niagara River borderland. John W. Lindsay stated, “I find the prejudice here the same as in the States. I don’t find any difference at all. In fact, as far as prejudice goes, the slaveholders have not so much absolute prejudice as the people here – not half.” Lindsay detailed tensions between black settlers and European immigrants. “The Irish,” he alleged, “are getting so, down at the docks, where the colored men may do a few hours’ work, once in a while, loading & unloading, that they want to run them off the docks.” Similarly, one ‘Mrs. Ellis’ claimed, “Rents and provisions are dear here, and it takes all I can earn to support myself and children.” Black newcomers settled in nearby towns and communities, such as Niagara-on-the-Lake, Niagara Falls, Drummondville, Fort Erie, and Port Stanley. William Kirby’s *Annals of Niagara* from 1896 notes that “between four and five hundred blacks had settled” in Niagara, and that a “portion of the town was called Negro Town from so many of that class living in that quarter. They were quiet, peaceable and industrious, most loyal and grateful to the British Government, which protected them in their self-acquired freedom.”⁴³³

Situated on the northern shores of Lake Ontario, Toronto had one of the largest black populations in the province. In 1802, eighteen free people of color were documented in the city minutes. Of course, enslaved and indentured blacks also resided in the city around this time.⁴³⁴ Over the nineteenth century, Toronto experienced rapid growth and socio-economic development (although it remained smaller than most major cities in the northern states). Aside from white settlers, Toronto also became home to a rising black population. Diaries, travelogues, and newspaper reports shed light on Toronto’s black community. In 1846, James Taylor noted that the city was “composed of people from all nations, but principally from the shores of Ireland... A few hundreds of the coloured tribe constituted part of the last census... the generality of them appear to be a very industrious and sober race, very orderly in their conduct, and their dress on a Sabbath is of a neat and becoming

⁴³² “A Recent Tour,” *PF*, Mar. 24, 1854. For more on St. Catharines black community and transnational antislavery operations in the Niagara borderland, see Clinton, *Harriet Tubman*; Broyld, “‘Over the Way’”; and Dann J. Broyld, “The ‘Dark Sheep’ of the Atlantic World: Following the Transnational Trail of Blacks to Canada,” in Benjamin Talton and Quincy T. Mills (eds.), *Black Subjects in Africa and Its Diasporas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 95-108.

⁴³³ Blassingame (ed.), *Slave Testimony*, 397, 404-405; Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 86-87; William Kirby, *Annals of Niagara* (Welland, ON: Tribune, 1896), 230, accessed May 27, 2020.

<https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.09996/241?r=0&s=1>. ‘Negro Town’ is also referenced in Severance, *Old Trails on the Niagara Frontier*, 234. For more on other black refugee settlements in the Niagara border zone, see Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 384-395.

⁴³⁴ “York, Upper Canada Minutes of town meetings and lists of inhabitants, July 17, 1797 – January 6, 1823,” *TPL Virtual Exhibits*, accessed Feb. 15, 2020, <http://omeka.tplcs.ca/virtual-exhibits/exhibits/show/freedom-city/item/141>.

description[.]” Many black residents were recently arrived settlers from the United States who had “spent part of their lives in slavery[.]”⁴³⁵

As newcomers settled in Toronto, the city quickly became a bustling metropolis. Indeed, Taylor was impressed by the speed and scale of the city’s development. “The streets,” he recalled, “they are planking and macadamizing, improving the side walks [sic], and making deep drains, which are strongly arched over with bricks, and rapidly progressing. . . The numerous improvements, in addition to the immense building speculations, gives life and activity to the appearance of the City of Toronto.”⁴³⁶ Other travelers also documented Toronto’s economic growth. Henry A. Murray noticed that the city was “prettily situated, and looks flourishing and prosperous; the way in which property is increasing in value here is wonderful[.]” Toronto’s status as a port city on Lake Ontario undoubtedly contributed to its socio-economic growth. As Murray wrote, Toronto’s geographical location meant that it was “admirably adapted for a great commercial city[.]”⁴³⁷

For slave refugees, Toronto must have been an exciting city filled with social and economic promise. Walter Hawkins experiences resembled that of newly arrived refugees in the city. Born enslaved in Georgetown, Maryland, Hawkins escaped from the South upon learning that he was to be sold following the death of his enslaver. During this time, he worked as a waiter in Buffalo, New York, and later as a farmer and grocer in New Bedford, Massachusetts. In response to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Hawkins resolved to migrate to Upper Canada. His memoir notes that he “had come to Toronto a perfect stranger, and nearly penniless, so that it took all he could earn to build up his home[.]” Hawkins later became a preacher and journeyed throughout the province.⁴³⁸

By 1850, roughly 47,000 people lived in Toronto. The *Friends’ Intelligencer* estimated that between 1,200 and 1,600 people of African descent resided in the city. Drew noted that most blacks lived “in the north-western section of the city. Their houses resemble those of the same class of persons in St. Catharines[.]” St. John’s Ward popular among black refugees, as well as European immigrants. According to Drew, black Torontonians “own the houses in which they dwell, and some have acquired valuable estates.” Robert Belt claimed, “I got work soon after my arrival

⁴³⁵ James Taylor, *Narrative of a Voyage to, and Travels in, Upper Canada: With Accounts of the Customs, Character, and Dialect of the Country: Also, Remarks on Emigration, Agriculture, &c.* (Hull: John Nicholson, 48, Lowgate, 1846), 18.

⁴³⁶ Taylor, *Narrative*, 22-23.

⁴³⁷ Henry A. Murray, *Lands of the Slave and the Free: Or, Cuba, the United States, and Canada* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1855), 87, accessed May 21, 2020. <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.39363>.

⁴³⁸ S.J. Celestine Edwards, *From Slavery to a Bishopric, or, The Life of Bishop Walter Hawkins of the British Methodist Episcopal Church Canada* (London: John Kensit, 1891), 129, accessed May 29, 2020. https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/edwardsc/edwards.html?fbclid=IwAR1-vlhxCJ2qlrtNiNbQDSBbyG4Mqc3tnLLGEzO5_FQRuiuthBXg9rVWc74#Edwards86.

here, which was quite recent: since I have been here, I have prospered well.” Likewise, William Howard declared, “Canada is the best place that ever I saw: I can make more money here than anywhere else I know of. The colored people, taken as a whole, are as industrious as any people you will find.”⁴³⁹

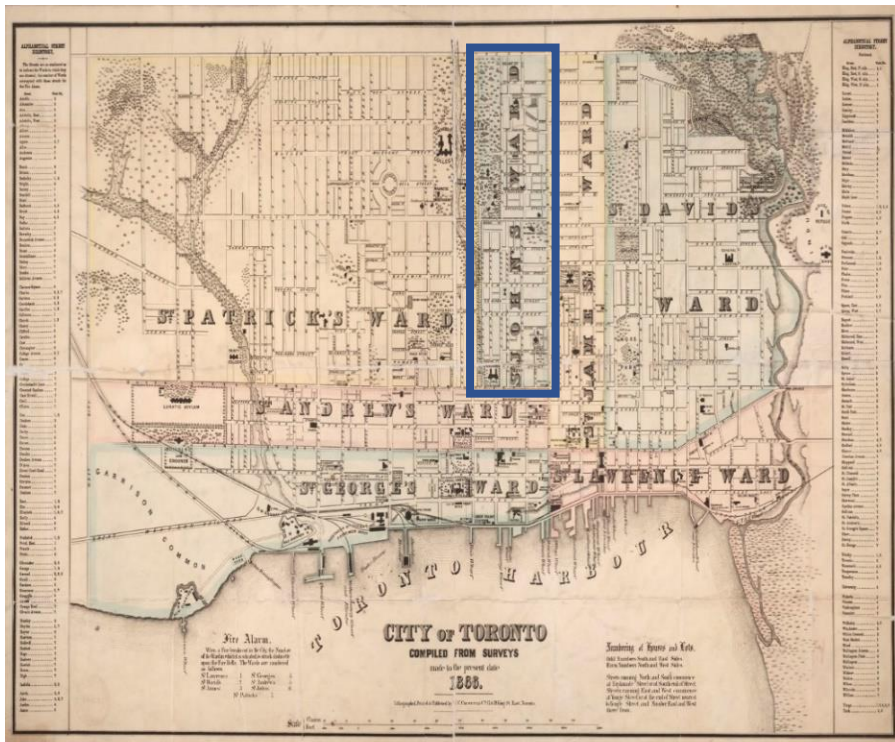


Figure 14: Map of Toronto, 1866. St. John's Ward highlighted.

Source: “City of Toronto compiled from surveys made to the present date 1866,” *TPL Virtual Exhibits*, accessed January 22, 2020, <http://omeka.tplcs.ca/virtual-exhibits/exhibits/show/freedom-city/item/156>.

Black activists and white abolitionists spoke highly of the condition and work ethic of Toronto's black community. Drew claimed black men and women in the city were “on the whole, remarkably industrious. Their condition is such as to

⁴³⁹ Karolyn Smardz Frost, “A Fresh Start: Black Toronto in the 19th Century,” in John Lorinc, Michael McClelland, Ellen Scheinberg and Tatum Taylor (eds.), *The Ward: The Life and Loss of Toronto's First Immigrant Neighbourhood* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2015); 66-68; “THE NEGROES OF TORONTO,” *Friends' Intelligencer*, Oct. 31, 1857; Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 94, 112-113; Collison, *Shadrach Minkins*, 172; Shadd, Cooper, and Frost (eds.), *Underground Railroad: Next Stop, Toronto!*, 33-35.

gratify the philanthropist, and to afford encouragement to the friends of emancipation everywhere.”⁴⁴⁰ Most worked in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations. Some managed to establish thriving businesses and work in skilled professions. Thornton and Lucie Blackburn, self-emancipators from Kentucky, escaped to Upper Canada and started the city’s first taxi cab company.⁴⁴¹ The 1846-47 and 1850-51 city directories document black laborers, cooks, dyers, tobacconists, fishmongers, plasterers, waiters, rope makers, barbers, grocers, tailors, whitewashers, carpenters, bricklayers, hatters, ministers, steamboat workers. In the 1850-51 directory, one Benjamin Holmes is listed as a waiter aboard the steamboat *City of Toronto*, while Henry Jones worked aboard the steamboat *America*. As was the case in industrialized northern cities, Toronto’s harbor, markets, and factories were increasingly populated by black laborers. On Yonge Street, Toronto’s longest and busiest street, slave refugees were a common presence. At its foot lay factories,” writes Karolyn Smardz Frost, “where white men worked alongside skilled African American tradesmen[.]”⁴⁴²

That being said, others were concerned about reports of poverty in Toronto’s black communities. In 1852, Samuel J. May wrote to abolitionists Charles and Caroline Wells Healey Dall about reports he had received “from several of the fugitives in Canada West, representing that they are in a very suffering condition and begging for aid from us.” In response, May and others sought to determine “whether there are in Toronto and vicinity, cases of suffering among the fugitives, which are not met & cannot be, by the charity of those around, or by employment furnished to such as are able to work.” According to May, he had received letters from two refugees in nearby Hamilton “representing themselves as extremely needy.”⁴⁴³ Slave refugees in Toronto faced various hardships. Much of this mirrored the development of urban centers in the northern US. According to Karolyn Smardz Frost, the “employment prospects” of African-descended people “took a turn for the worse when Irish immigrants began arriving in their thousands.” Unskilled black workers competed with European newcomers for low-wage jobs. Moreover, most black

⁴⁴⁰ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 94.

⁴⁴¹ For more on Thornton and Lucie Blackburn, see Smardz Frost, *I’ve Got a Home in Glory Land*.

⁴⁴² Brown’s *Toronto City and Home District Directory, 1846-7. Containing the Names, Professions, and Addresses of the Householders in the City of Toronto, Alphabetically Arranged; the Names of Landholders in the Home District, by Townships, Stating the Concessions and Numbers of their Respective Lots; Together with a Large Amount of General Information* (Toronto: George Brown, 1846); J. Armstrong (ed.), *Roswell’s City of Toronto and County of York Directory, for 1850-1; Being the 14th & 15th Years of the Reign of Her Majesty Queen Victoria, Containing an Alphabetical List of the Inhabitant Householders and Others in the City of Toronto and Village of Yorkville; also an Alphabetical List of the Inhabitant Householders and Landholders in the County of York; with a Large Amount of General Information* (Toronto: Henry Roswell, 1850), 62, “Digital Toronto City Directories,” *Toronto Public Library*, accessed May 1, 2019. <https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/history-genealogy/lh-digital-city-directories.jsp>; Smardz Frost, *Steal Away Home*, 52.

⁴⁴³ Samuel J. May to Charles Henry Appleton Dall and Caroline Wells Healey Dall, Jan. 24, 1852. Caroline Wells Healey Dall Papers, 1811-1917. Ms. N-1083. P-323. Reel 2, Box 2, Folder 2. MHS. Boston, MA.

residents in Toronto had to contend with poverty and illness. In the 1840s, a typhus epidemic ravaged much of the city, particularly affecting its poorer residents.⁴⁴⁴

In central Ontario, slave refugees settled in a range of urban and rural locales. "Hamilton," writes Adrienne Shadd, "had become a bustling town, and fugitive slaves and free Blacks were increasingly taking advantage of the opportunities it offered." Drew claimed that 274 black people resided in the city in 1854, most of whom resided in the same ward. He noted that they were "good mechanics, and good "subjects" in the English sense of the word." Self-emancipator R.S.W. Sorrick recalled that blacks in Hamilton were "not in a very good condition, when I first came here, although some were wealthy."⁴⁴⁵ London was another popular destination for freedom seekers. James Bryce Brown estimated that approximately 300 black men and women (223 men and 77 women) lived in London, most of whom were "from the United States, and a considerable portion of them liberated or runaway slaves[.]" Brown added that most black settlers in London had "little or no opportunities of gaining the first elements of education or correct moral training, the greater part of these people find only employment of the most inferior kind."⁴⁴⁶

In his study, Drew estimated that 350 blacks lived in the town. Nelson Moss claimed, "There are a large majority here who are industrious; a few are wealthy; a good many are well off... Nearly all the grown colored people have been slaves." While most worked low-wage jobs, some obtained lands and became farmers. Lewis C. Chambers stated, "I rent a farm of fifty acres at London, and pay \$150 a year for it. Last year, I had 350 bushels of wheat, 150 bushels of oats, and 100 bushels of peas. I own a house on that place[.]" Alfred T. Jones, who owned an apothecary store, claimed that black residents were "employed in this city in almost all the mechanic arts; also in grocery and provision stores, etc. Many are succeeding well, are buying houses, speculating in lands, and some are living on the interest of their money." Black refugee communities were also established in nearby Ingersoll, Soho, Norwich, Tillsonburg, Simcoe, and St. Thomas.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁴ Smardz Frost, *Steal Away Home*, 66.

⁴⁴⁵ Adrienne Shadd, *The Journey from Tollgate to Parkway: African Canadians in Hamilton* (Toronto: National Heritage Books, 2010), 96; Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 118-120.

⁴⁴⁶ Brown, *Views of Canada and the Colonists*, 12-13.

⁴⁴⁷ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 147, 152; Blassingame (ed.), *Slave Testimony*, 413; Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 372-383.

Black Elevation, Education, and Utopian Communities in the Northern US and Canada

Land and labor were not the sole concerns of freedom seekers in the northern US and British Canada. Black activists and white abolitionists believed that education was vital to black elevation. Without access to schools, colleges, and other educational initiatives, slave refugees understood that they would always remain at a socio-economic disadvantage. Alongside free blacks and white abolitionists, they campaigned for equal access to public education and, in some instances, founded new schools and biracial manual labor colleges. In general, slave refugees in Canada had greater access to schools and colleges than their US counterparts. However, most found it difficult to avail of educational opportunities due to poverty and racial prejudice. This section will examine efforts to promote black education in the northern US, the Canadian Maritimes, and Upper Canada.

Across the northern US, campaigns for black education gained new significance in the early 1830s. Hillary Moss notes this period witnessed “the birth of public education” in the United States. Common schools were founded across the country to provide children “from disparate social, religious, and economic backgrounds with a common set of values and experiences.”⁴⁴⁸ Across the North, growing numbers of white children were enrolled in common schools. Meanwhile, black people were systematically excluded from public schools. In response, African Americans moved quickly to campaign for equal access to common schools and educational initiatives. A small number of schools opened their doors to black students. In 1827, reformers in New Haven, Connecticut founded the African Improvement Society (AIS) which aimed to promote the “moral, intellectual, and religious condition” of African Americans. In Cincinnati, black residents founded the School Fund Institute in 1837 with the aim of opening schools for students of color. According to Nikki Taylor, it received enough funds to open four schools in Ohio for approximately two years. Nevertheless, common schools across the North generally remained off-limits for most black students.⁴⁴⁹

Furthermore, colleges, manual labor schools, and universities in the North generally denied access to black students. Beginning in the late 1820s, African Americans and white abolitionists spearheaded efforts to create new colleges for black students. The Oneida Institute in Whitestown, New York (northeast of Utica)

⁴⁴⁸ Hilary J. Moss, *Schooling Citizens: The Struggle for African American Education in Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 3

⁴⁴⁹ Moss, *Schooling Citizens*, 3-5, 21 (quote); Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 108. The School Fund Institute schools were located in Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, and Springfield respectively. For newspaper reports on the School Fund Institute, see “Schools,” *CA*, Oct. 19, 1839; “SCHOOL FUND INSTITUTE,” *Philanthropist*, Oct. 22, 1839.

was the first interracial manual labor school in the United States. Founded in 1827, it was built on a 115-acre tract of land. “For nearly twenty years,” writes Paul Goodman, “Oneida stood as a pioneer in manual laborism.” Male and female students from various socio-economic backgrounds were able to enroll at the school during its lifetime. In exchange for teaching, books, room, and board, students performed manual labor for the institute. The school and surrounding settlement “became a hotbed of abolition, [and] opened its doors to blacks[.]”⁴⁵⁰ Over time, Oneida was praised in the abolitionist press. In 1843, the *Emancipator* reported that it “appears to be in a very promising state, and only needs the funds it deserves, in order to realize the highest hopes of its founders.” It praised the manual labor system and claimed that it improved the academic, moral, and spiritual well-being of all students at Oneida. The Boston *Abolitionist* noted that faculty and students at Oneida had formed an anti-slavery society. While most students of color were free-born or manumitted, Jermain Wesley Loguen, a self-emancipator from Tennessee, was among the most well-known students at the institute. During his final year, Loguen even opened a school in Utica for African American students.⁴⁵¹

In 1833, white abolitionists established Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio. Based on a similar model to Oneida, Oberlin represented an early model of interracial education in the antebellum North. Its early leadership and student body came predominantly from the Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati. After its trustees banned any debates on anti-slavery matters, several students (dubbed the ‘Lane Rebels’) left the seminary and founded a utopian settlement in Oberlin. The first black students at the college, writes John Frederick Bell, “studied in the preparatory department, since secondary schooling was unavailable, unaffordable, or off limits in their hometown.” The first African American bachelor’s student, George Boyer Vashon, was admitted in 1840. He later became a prominent civil rights activist. Others graduated with bachelor’s degrees and other certificates in the following decades. At first, some white students at Oberlin College were largely opposed to the admission of black students. But this sentiment faded over time.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵⁰ Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 229; Paul Goodman, “The Manual Labor Movement and the Origins of Abolitionism,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 13, no. 3 (1993), 355, 362, 365 (quotes).

⁴⁵¹ “ONEIDA INSTITUTE,” *Emancipator*, Sep. 23, 1834; “ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY IN ONEIDA INSTITUTE,” *Abolitionist* (Boston, MA), Aug. 1, 1833; Milton Sernett, *Abolition’s Ax: Beriah Green, Oneida Institute, and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 59.

⁴⁵² Goodman, “The Manual Labor Movement,” 355-356; “Oberlin History,” *Oberlin.edu*, accessed Oct. 28, 2019. <https://www.oberlin.edu/about-oberlin/oberlin-history>; John Frederick Bell, “Confronting Colorism: Interracial Abolition and the Consequences of Complexion,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 39, no. 2 (2019), 245-247; “George B. Vashon,” *BlackPast.org*, accessed Oct. 28, 2019. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/vashon-george-b-1824-1878/>; “Circular of Oberlin College,” *OE*, Nov. 20, 1850. Cally L. Waite, “The Segregation of Black Students at Oberlin College after Reconstruction,” *History of Education Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (2001), 344-364; J. Brent Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism: College, Community, and the Fight for Freedom and Equality in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Kabria Baumgartner, “Building the Future: White Women, Black Education, and Civic Inclusion in Antebellum Ohio,”

Oberlin grew steadily over the years. In 1836, the *Zion's Watchman* wrote that the college "has now about three hundred students... Freedom is discussion if allowed, and in the Oberlin College the benefits of education are bestowed without distinction of color." Just over four years later, the *Philanthropist* claimed Oberlin was "in a very flourishing condition" and praised the efforts of its faculty. Over subsequent decades, Oberlin relied heavily on donations from anti-slavery societies and activists in North America and Great Britain. In 1845, for instance, the *Oberlin Evangelist* published a report on donations to the "colored school" in Oberlin. Ultimately, students of color never comprised more than five percent of the student body, most of whom were free-born blacks. Anthony Burns (discussed in Chapter Four) was the only notable slave refugee to attend Oberlin.⁴⁵³

In many northern locales, women were at the forefront of the movement for black education. In 1837, Laura Haviland Smith, Elizabeth Margaret Chandler, and other female reformers established the Raisin Institute in Lenawee County, Michigan. The school followed Oberlin's manual labor system and admitted students without distinction of race or sex. It was also a vital UGRR stop in the region. Manisha Sinha notes that teachers and students at the school were "known for sheltering fugitive slaves[.]" Levi Coffin recalled that a self-emancipator from Kentucky named John White escaped across the Ohio River and made his way north through Indiana and Michigan. "He finally started toward Canada," wrote Coffin, "stopping on the way at the Raisin Institute... a school open to all, irrespective of color, where he met that noted abolitionist and noble-hearted woman, Laura S. Haviland, having been directed to her by me."⁴⁵⁴

Elsewhere, African Americans and white abolitionists founded schools in black farming communities in the Old Northwest. In 1835, Quaker Augustus Wattles (a Lane Rebel) founded the African American farming community of Carthagena in Mercer County, Ohio. Not long after, he opened the Emlen Institute, a manual labor school based on the Oberlin model. By 1840, roughly fifty students were enrolled at the school. From early on, Wattles sought to recruit teachers to work at the Emlen Institute and other schools in the region. In an 1837 letter to Henry Cowles at Oberlin, Wattles asked for "three young men to teach colored school" in Sidney and

Journal of the Early Republic 37, no. 1 (2017), 117-145; Gary Kornblith and Carol Lasser, *Elusive Utopia: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Oberlin, Ohio* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2018).

⁴⁵³ "OBERLIN INSTITUTE," ZW, Oct. 12, 1836; "OBERLIN COLLEGE INSTITUTE," *Philanthropist*, Jan. 13, 1841; "DONATIONS TO THE OBERLIN COLORED SCHOOL," OE, Feb. 12, 1845; Waite, "The Segregation of Black Students at Oberlin College after Reconstruction," 347.

⁴⁵⁴ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 398; Robertson, *Hearts Beating for Liberty*, 167; Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 216-217. For more on the contributions of African American and white women to black education, see Baumgartner, "Building the Future"; Kabria Baumgartner, "Love and Justice: African American Women, Education, and Protest in Antebellum New England," *Journal of Social History* 52, no. 3 (2019), 652-676.

Zanesville, Ohio, as well as Rush County, Indiana. The Emlen Institute received tremendous acclaim in abolitionist newspapers. The *Massachusetts Abolitionist* praised Wattles' efforts "in promoting education among the people of color, and in inducing and assisting them to turn their attention to the cultivation of land[.]" The school enjoyed some success but was forced to close in the 1840s due to financial difficulties.⁴⁵⁵

In the Cabin Creek settlement, Quakers and other reformers founded schools for black students. Minutes from a meeting of the Cabin Creek Anti-Slavery Friends in 1847 claim, "one school taught for the term of three months under the direction of the monthly meeting, 174 children of a suitable age and in the practice more or less of attending school. None growing up without education." Other entries in the society minutes note that black students at the Cabin Creek settlement received good schooling. Moreover, debates were held over boycotting goods produced by enslaved people and other anti-slavery activities. In nearby Wayne County, the Economy Anti-Slavery Society also promoted African American education and elevation. In 1840, it resolved to provide students with books, school teachers, and other resources.⁴⁵⁶

In 1846, white abolitionists established the Union Literary Institute (ULI). A manual labor school in a black settlement, it promoted the academic, moral, and religious elevation of African Americans. Ebenezer Tucker, the ULI's first teacher, wrote in the *National Era*, "Two hundred acres of good land belonging to the institution, and a boarding-house sufficient for forty students of both sexes, and a large and commodious seminary building, have been erected on the premises." The ULI had a biracial board of managers, with African Americans comprising four of the thirteen members. The institute received positive reviews in the abolitionist press. In 1849, however, the *Non-Slaveholder* claimed that the school was "burdened with a debt of several hundred dollars, unavoidably incurred in erecting the building, and that aid is greatly needed for their completion, and also to furnish the school with books and philosophical apparatus, and to extend its benefits to the poorest class of colored children." Yet the newspaper commended the ULI for its work in promoting

⁴⁵⁵ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 242-243, 357; Virginia Evans McCormick, *Educational Architecture in Ohio: From One-Room Schools and Carnegie Libraries to Community Education Villages* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2001), 18; Augustus Wattles to Henry Cowles, Sep. 14, 1837. Robert S. Fletcher Papers, RG 30/24. Box 4, Folder 12. OCA. Oberlin; "THE COLORED PEOPLE OF OHIO," *Massachusetts Abolitionist*, Nov. 26, 1840. For more on Carthage and the Emlen Institute, see Jill E. Rowe, *Invisible in Plain Sight: Self-Determination Strategies of Free Blacks in the Old Northwest* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2017), 69-80. For more positive assessments of Carthage and the Emlen Institute, see "A Colored Settlement," *Liberator*, Jan. 1, 1841; "AUGUSTUS WATTLES AGAIN," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Dec. 29, 1841; "COLORED SETTLEMENT," *Liberator*, Dec. 12, 1845.

⁴⁵⁶ Cabin Creek Society of Anti-Slavery Friends, vol. 1. BV 0401a-d. HIS. Indianapolis, IN; Economy Anti-Slavery Society Records, 1840. SC 0021. IHS. Indianapolis, IN.

black education. The school's first annual report claimed that 137 students were enrolled at the school, 97 of whom were black.⁴⁵⁷

The ULI's first annual report detailed the school's activities and progress. It claimed that a "large amount of labor has been performed on the farm by the students... in chopping wood, burning it into charcoal, digging ditches, &c." Yet it is clear that there was trouble behind the scenes. The ULI's 1850 annual report claimed that the school's board of managers "experience great difficulty in sustaining the school in this early stage of its existence, with the low charge for boarding and tuition[.]" Other newspapers published optimistic reports regarding the ULI's future. The *Oberlin Evangelist* wrote that it "has done nobly for the outcast race thus far, few schools of equal means having done so much and none perhaps more."⁴⁵⁸

At least one freedom seeker was documented at the ULI. Levi Coffin noted that he directed a freedom seeker named Jane to William Beard, an "active agent for the Underground Railroad, who lived in Union County, Indiana, and he took her to a colored school in Randolph County, called the Union Literary Institute, and there left her to attend the school." Jane later migrated to Upper Canada. The ULI eventually fell into decline as African Americans sought opportunities elsewhere. Overall, slave refugees and free blacks managed to attend some schools or colleges in the northern US, but the overwhelming majority were legally excluded. Free people of color had better opportunities to avail of public and private education given their legal status, but even then most were unable to receive any formal education. At the same time, these early efforts soon became the model for interracial schools elsewhere, most notably in Canada.⁴⁵⁹

In the Canadian Maritimes, schools were also established in slave refugee communities. Yet they faced numerous obstacles, most notably a lack of financial resources, books, teachers, and other materials. In 1820, James Bell submitted a petition to the provincial government for funds to continue teaching in Preston. Signed by thirty heads of households, it stated that refugee parents "wish to have their Children instructed and being in [a] state of great indigence are incapable of suporting [sic] a school master." Roughly six years later, black settlers of Hammonds Plains petitioned the lieutenant governor of the province for funds and supplies to erect "a place of worship of God but that owing to most of them being burdened with large families, they are unable to contribute as much as they would willingly do, to effect so desirable an object." In turn, the lieutenant governor requested the opinion of the

⁴⁵⁷ Ebenezer Tucker, "UNION LITERARY INSTITUTE," *National Era*, Aug. 24, 1848; "THE UNION LITERARY INSTITUTE, INDIANA," (Philadelphia) *Non-Slaveholder*, Oct. 1, 1849; "ANNUAL REPORT OF THE UNION LITERARY INSTITUTE, INDIANA," *Non-Slaveholder*, Feb. 1, 1850.

⁴⁵⁸ "ANNUAL REPORT OF THE UNION LITERARY INSTITUTE, INDIANA," *Non-Slaveholder*, Feb. 1, 1850; "Union Literary Institute," *OE*, May 11, 1853.

⁴⁵⁹ Coffin, *Reminiscences*, 333.

Bishop of Nova Scotia, who advised against supporting the settlers because they may not belong to the Church of England.⁴⁶⁰

Schools in Maritime refugee settlements focused on basic academics, namely reading, writings, and mathematics. Having been deprived of these essential skills, African American parents greatly desired to see their children avoid the same fate. Boys and girls were admitted, although the former was more represented than the latter. An 1828 return of a Preston school reveals that sixteen out of 117 students were white. Churches and schools often acted in concert to promote their interrelated goals. In February 1834, Richard Preston and other members of Halifax's African Baptist Church appealed for additional funds to hire a school teacher. Four years later, a report from schools in Digby showed that forty-two students were enrolled at the African School in Grand Joggins.⁴⁶¹

Yet the most extensive initiatives to promote black education in British North America took place in Upper Canada. African-descended people in the province struggled to obtain an education, even though common schools in the province were nominally open to all students. "Practically," wrote Samuel Gridley Howe, "... there is a distinction of color, and negroes do not have equal advantage from public instruction with whites."⁴⁶² As they became a greater presence in the province, slave refugees and free black migrants set about challenging segregation in common schools. In 1828, refugees in Ancaster and Hamilton petitioned the Lieutenant Governor for equal access to common schools. Fourteen years later, blacks in London and Wilberforce claimed that they were unable to send their children to the local school due to prevailing racial prejudice and discrimination. The following year, an anonymous slave refugee wrote to Governor-General Sir Charles T. Metcalfe, "I thought that there was not a man to be known by his colour under the

⁴⁶⁰ "Preston schoolmaster's petition for a salary," Commissioner of Public Records. RG 1, vol. 422, no. 22 (microfilm no. 15463). NSA, accessed Aug. 10, 2019.

<https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=87>; "Petition of black residents of Hammonds Plains for assistance to build a church," Commissioner of Public Records. RG 1, vol. 422, no. 33 (microfilm no. 15463). NSA, accessed Aug. 10, 2019.

<https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=94>.

⁴⁶¹ "Half-yearly return of the school kept at Preston from 1st June to 1st day of November 1828," RG 14, vol. 23, no. 82 (1828) (microfilm no. 21877). NSA, accessed Aug. 10, 2019.

<https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=97>; "Return of schools in the County of Digby for the year ended the 30th Nov. 1838," RG 14, vol. 12, no. 73 (1838) (microfilm no. 21875). NSA, accessed Aug. 10, 2019. <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=110>; "Petition of Richard Preston for money to pay for a teacher," Nova Scotia House of Assembly – Assembly Petitions Series. RG 5, Series P, vol. 72, no. 44 (microfilm no. 9957). NSA, accessed Aug. 10, 2019. <https://novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/archives.asp?ID=105>.

⁴⁶² Howe, *Refugees from Slavery*, 50. William H. Pease and Jane Pease first branded nineteenth-century black settlements in the United States and Canada as 'utopian' experiments. See William H. Pease and Jane Pease, *Black Utopia: Negro Communal Experiments in America* (Madison, WI: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1961).

British flag[.]” The Governor-General’s office ordered the police board to desegregate the common schools.⁴⁶³

Black education in common schools remained an important issue over the following decades. In 1850, the Upper Canadian government approved a new Common School Act, which effectively segregated public schools in the province. Two years later, Dennis Hill of Kent County petitioned to send his son to the nearby common school. Yet Chief Justice Beverly Robinson ruled that students of color had to attend separate schools if they existed. For black refugees, the lack of schools, tuition rates, and discrimination hindered their efforts to promote black education.⁴⁶⁴ Upper Canadian whites generally opposed the racial integration of common schools. In 1854, the *St. Catharines Journal* reported that black parents tried to send their children to a recently opened school. It claimed, “that owing to the colored people crowding their children into this school-house, we were on the eve of a tumult... There is no contending against the laws of nature and the colored people must duly educate their children in the way the law provides.”⁴⁶⁵

News of school desegregation campaigns in Upper Canada filtered to parts of the United States. In 1860, the *Dayton Daily Empire* claimed that African American refugees had taken over schools in Chatham. It stated that black settlers “declare that as they are in the majority, they will have things their own way; and the people there are too weak to prevent it.” Furthermore, it made the erroneous allegation that the British government “favors the negroes, and declines to interfere... At several other points in Canada, the negroes have taken public affairs into their own hands.” The central goal of this editorial, as well as others, was to rally northern whites against permitting black students in common schools at home.⁴⁶⁶

African Americans, African Canadians, and white abolitionists attempted to fill the void by opening schools for black refugees. The Colonial Church and School Society (CCSS) operated schools in the town for students of color. The society’s 1856 report, “Excellent schools upon a scriptural basis have been established in London, C. W.; and these are likely to produce lasting benefits, not alone to the coloured race, but the whole population of the Western District of the Province.” Three years later, the CCSS’ reported that the mission “is still progressing favorably.” The report insisted that the Mission’s efforts “proved the feasibility of educating together white and colored children without reference to their origin or complexion.” One

⁴⁶³ Shadd, *The Journey from Tollgate to Parkway*, 18; Power and Butler, *Slavery and Freedom in Niagara*, 58; Petition of the Coloured men heads of families to Sir Charles Bagot G.C.B. Governor General of British North America. Dated: London, C.W., 10th October 1842. Fred Landon Fonds, Box B4220, Folder 18. DBW, UWO. London, Canada; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 97-98.

⁴⁶⁴ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 243-244.

⁴⁶⁵ Shadd, *The Journey from Tollgate to Parkway*, 116; “SCHOOLS – THE COLORED POPULATION,” *St. Catharines Journal*, Jan. 8, 1854.

⁴⁶⁶ “PRACTICAL ABOLITIONISM,” *Dayton Daily Empire* (Dayton, OH), Jan. 20, 1860.

missionary in London, whose letters feature in the 1859 report, claimed that “the number of colored children [in schools] has been for some time past steadily increasing.” Not only was attendance allegedly more consistent, but “many fresh names” had been added to the enrollment list. Yet the nature of seasonal agricultural work, a lack of adequate resources, and poor weather (particularly during the winter months) meant that many refugee children were unable to attend.⁴⁶⁷

The American Missionary Association (AMA) sponsored initiatives to educate slave refugees in Upper Canada. Black women played a particularly important role in educating black refugee children. Shirley J. Yee writes that education “was central to the community work of many black women.”⁴⁶⁸ Mary Ann Shadd Cary, a free-born black activist from Delaware, founded a school in Windsor for refugee children. Shadd was soon involved in a public feud with Henry and Mary Bibb, however, who endorsed separate schools for black students. Shadd believed that separate schools were tantamount to self-segregation.⁴⁶⁹

In 1851, she wrote to the AMA Secretary Rev. George Whipple, “Whatever excuse may be offered in the states for exclusive institutions, I am convinced that in this country, and in this particular region... none could be offered with a shadow of reason, and with this conviction, I opened [a] school here with the condition of admission to children of all complexion.”⁴⁷⁰ The AMA eventually severed ties with Shadd, likely as a consequence of her feud with Henry and Mary Bibb. Furthermore, as Adrienne Shadd writes, her dispute with the organization’s male leadership “overstepped the bounds of accepted female behaviour [sic] of the time.” Shadd continued to teach in Upper Canada without the AMA’s official backing.⁴⁷¹

In the Queen’s Bush, abolitionist missionaries taught black refugee students. In 1846, Fidelia Coburn opened the Mount Pleasant Mission School. She noted in an earlier letter that “the soil [in the Queen’s Bush] is of the very best quality,” but added

⁴⁶⁷ Mission to Fugitive Slaves in Canada. Mission to the fugitive slaves in Canada: West London branch of the Colonial Church and School Society. London, [1856?], 4. *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 8 Oct. 2019; Mission to the Fugitive Slaves in Canada, and Colonial Church and School Society. *Report for the Year 1858-9* (London: Serjeant’s Inn, Fleet Street, 1859), 10 (first quote), 12 (second quote), 14-15 (third and fourth quotes), accessed May 12, 2020.

<https://www.loc.gov/item/87659235/>. By this stage, the CCSS’ operations had also expanded to Chatham, Amherstburg, and other parts of Upper Canada. For more on the origins and activities of Rev. Dillon and the CCSS, see Nina Reid-Maroney, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson and African Canadian History, 1868-1967* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2013), 36-38; see Asaka, “Our Brethren in the West Indies,” 231-234.

⁴⁶⁸ Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 62. For more on Mary Bibb and her teaching efforts, see Afua Cooper, “Black Women and Work in Nineteenth Century Canada West: Black Woman Teacher Mary Bibb,” in Peggy Bristow (ed.), *We’re Rooted Here and They Can’t Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women’s History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

⁴⁶⁹ Shadd, *The Journey from Tollgate to Parkway*, 124.

⁴⁷⁰ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 184-185.

⁴⁷¹ Shadd, *The Journey from Tollgate to Parkway*, 124-125.

that “the cause of education must be advanced – this, and nothing but *this* will elevate, or essentially benefit them.” Soon enough, dozens of refugee students enrolled in the Mount Pleasant Mission. Students learned basic spelling, reading, writing, mathematics, and geography among other subjects. Coburn and the other missionaries, notes Brown-Kubisch, imbued the values of “hard work, self-reliance, temperance and moral improvement.”⁴⁷² The Mount Pleasant missionaries worked with few resources and relied on donations. In 1848, Coburn wrote, “we have had to labor destitute of means, which has increased the burden exceedingly.” The following June, her husband (also a missionary teacher) admitted that the Mount Pleasant School would likely “be broken up. The difficulties in the way of the colored people becoming proprietors of their own soil... prematurely blasted our prospects.” Despite their efforts, the Mount Pleasant School was eventually forced to close its doors.⁴⁷³

Chatham-Kent witnessed the most expansive black educational initiatives. After graduating from Oberlin College, Hiram Wilson traveled to Upper Canada “to determine the needs of its black population.” He concluded that self-emancipators in the province lacked adequate opportunities to secure an education. Wilson first considered establishing a school in Essex County. In a letter to Henry Cowles, Wilson noted that the soil around Amherstburg “is level, well timbered, well watered, & rich & productive as the sun ever shun upon.” He later met with Josiah Henson, and the pair resolved to open an interracial college in the Western District. Wilson believed that the proposed school would have a positive impact on racial relations in the province. He wrote, “prejudice against color will be completely destroyed & a bright example will be given to the world of a community differing in complexion but harmonizing in the great object of human existence.”⁴⁷⁴ Wilson informed others of his intention to open an interracial school in the province. In 1839, he wrote to abolitionist Amos A. Phelps, “We hope to have a school established in which the whites & colored youth & children may mingle on equal terms though most of the scholars will doubtley [sic] be colored.”⁴⁷⁵ Three years later, Wilson and Henson

⁴⁷² Brown-Kubisch, *The Queen's Bush*, 79; Fidelia Coburn, “Letter from Miss F. Coburn,” *Zion's Advocate*, reprinted in *Liberty Standard*, Apr. 7, 1845.

⁴⁷³ Brooks, F.C. *Letters: October 8, 1848 to George Whipple; Waterloo, Wellington District, Canada*. October 8, 1848. MS AMA Archives, 1839-1882 F1-47. F1-47. Amistad Research Center at Tulane University. *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 22 Mar. 2020; Brooks, J.C. *Letters: Jun 12, 1849 to Whipple; Waterloo, Wellington District, Canada*. June 12, 1849. MS AMA Archives, 1839-1882 F1-68. F1-68. Amistad Research Center at Tulane University. *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 22 Mar. 2020.

⁴⁷⁴ Hiram Wilson to Henry Cowles, Jan. 2, 1837. Robert S. Fletcher Papers, RG 30/24. Box 4, Folder 18. OCA. Oberlin, OH; Morris, *Oberlin*, 84.

⁴⁷⁵ Wilson, Hiram, and Amos A. (Amos Augustus) Phelps. “Letter from Hiram Wilson, Toronto, [Ontario], to Amos Augustus Phelps, 1839 Aug[ust] 19.” Correspondence. Aug. 19, 1839. *Digital Commonwealth*, accessed Jun. 2, 2019. <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:2v23xs33c?view=commonwealth%3A2v23xs35x>

opened the British American Institute (BAI), a manual labor school in the Dawn Settlement.⁴⁷⁶

Numerous factors suggested that the BAI and Dawn could succeed. Situated on the Sydenham River, the region's soil and climate were considered excellent for settlement. Henson claimed that it "was covered with a beautiful forest of noble trees of various kinds. Our people were accustomed to cut them down and burn them on the ground, simply to get rid of them." Wilson claimed the climate was "mild and perfectly healthy," and the land was "moderately undulating and extremely fertile, covered principally with sugar maple and black walnut."⁴⁷⁷ Refugee settlers erected log houses, established farmsteads, and even built a grist mill. In 1843, Wilson wrote in the Canada Mission's Sixth Annual Report, "There are now twelve acres cleared and mostly under good fence, three-dwelling-houses up and occupied, as also a school-house of a story and a half[.]" One year later, the Canada Mission expressed "undoubted confidence" in Wilson and declared, "We think it the wisest course they can pursue, to become the successful cultivators of their own soil[.]"⁴⁷⁸

Nina Reid-Maroney writes that Wilson and Henson "enjoyed early success" with the BAI. Unsurprisingly, the school was modeled on other manual labor schools (especially Oberlin) in the northern US. Students at the BAI were educated in "agricultural methods, mechanical skills, and domestic arts, in addition to receiving a thorough and useful education." In 1845, Oberlin graduate William Newman claimed that new students were enrolling at the school every day. Furthermore, abolitionist teachers and missionaries made their way to Dawn to teach black refugee students. Roughly forty-three "college scholars" taught at the school during the first five years of its existence, at least three of whom "lost their lives to the fierce Canadian frontier elements."⁴⁷⁹ Anti-slavery supporters of Wilson and Henson sent donations and resources to ensure the BAI's survival. In 1840, the *Massachusetts*

⁴⁷⁶ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 178. For a recent biography on Josiah Henson and his involvement with the Dawn Settlement, see Jared A. Brock, *The Road to Dawn: Josiah Henson and the Story that Sparked the Civil War* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2018).

⁴⁷⁷ Marie Carter, "Reimagining the Dawn Settlement," in Boulou Ebanga de B'éri, Nina Reid-Maroney, and Handel Kashope Wright (eds.), *The Promised Land: History and Historiography of the Black Experience in Chatham-Kent's Settlements and Beyond* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 185-189; Josiah Henson, *An Autobiography of the Rev. Josiah Henson ("Uncle Tom"). From 1789 to 1881. With a Preface by Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Introductory Notes by George Sturge, S. Morley, Esq., M. P., Wendell Phillips, and John G. Whittier. Edited by John Lobb, F. R. G. S. Revised and Enlarged.* (London: Ontario: Schuyler, Smith, & Co., 1881). 127, accessed Jun. 12, 2019. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/henson81/henson81.html>; Hiram Wilson, "HIRAM WILSON'S SETTLEMENT FOR COLORED PEOPLE IN CANADA," *Friend of Man*, reprinted in *NASS*, Mar. 24, 1842.

⁴⁷⁸ Hiram Wilson, "Sixth Annual Reports of the Canada Mission," *Liberator*, Mar. 17, 1843; Canada Mission. *Seventh annual report of the Canada Mission*. Rochester, 1844. *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 27 May 2019, 5.

⁴⁷⁹ Reid-Maroney, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson*, 21 (first quote), 22; Morris, *Oberlin*, 84 (second quote), 85.

Abolitionist noted that their agent sent \$150 to Wilson “for the Canada schools.” Meanwhile, Drew claimed that three hundred and fifty pounds was raised in England “mostly among Quakers” in 1840. Wilson even traveled to Great Britain to raise funds for the school and settlement. In 1843, Wilson attended the General Anti-Slavery Convention in London. He spoke on the BAI’s behalf and solicited friends and allies for donations.⁴⁸⁰

Despite its early promise, the BAI struggled financially. At various times, Wilson and Henson were unable to compensate abolitionist missionaries for their work at the school. In 1844, Wilson acknowledged that “several colored brethren at Oberlin” had not been paid for their work at the BAI. “I am resolved,” he wrote, “however that these young men who were seen in Canada teaching the last winter shall be paid to the better for the most timing as soon as in my power to do so.”⁴⁸¹ Two years later, Wilson recommended that donations made to the BAI ought to be “divided among such colored brethren in Oberlin ... till they are reasonably compensated. They have complained bitterly of me as I have been informed & I am determined to hush such complaints if it strips me as naked as when I came into the world to do it.” Nevertheless Wilson insisted that the BAI “must be sustained & our means are so limited that we are necessarily involved much of the time.”⁴⁸²

Anti-slavery newspapers published positive reports of the BAI and Dawn. In 1843, the *Liberator* claimed, “It is a fortunate circumstance for the poor panting fugitives, that they can find such a friend [Wilson] to sympathize with them on their arrival in Canada, and to give them all needful advice and as much succor as his limited means will allow.” Four years later, the *Detroit Free Press* reported that “there is a flourishing colony of blacks” at Dawn, and noted that most were “fugitives from the south, and accessions are constantly being made to their number by new arrivals of slaves.”⁴⁸³ The *National Era* published one report which claimed that African American refugee settlers were thriving at Dawn. Meanwhile, abolitionist allies defended Wilson and Henson against charges of mismanagement. William Newman wrote in the *Evangelist*, “I am perfectly satisfied that he [Wilson] has carefully entered on his journal all the receipts of money, clothing, &c., as far as

⁴⁸⁰ “CANADA SCHOOLS,” *Massachusetts Abolitionist*, Jun. 11, 2840; Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 309; General Anti-Slavery Convention (2nd: 1843: London, England). Proceedings of the General anti-Slavery Convention called by the Committee of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society and held in London from... June 13th to... June 20th, 1843. London, [1843]. Slavery and Anti-Slavery. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. Jun. 1, 2020, 286-287.

⁴⁸¹ Letter from Hiram Wilson to Hamilton Hill, August 1844. Obtained via “Hamilton Hill, August 1844,” *Letters of Hiram Wilson*, accessed Sep. 24, 2019.

<https://hiramwilson.wordpress.com/2013/03/28/hamilton-hill-august-1844/>.

⁴⁸² Letter from Hiram Wilson to Hamilton Hill, Feb. 26, 1845. Obtained via “Hamilton Hill, February 26 1845,” *Letters of Hiram Wilson*, accessed Sep. 24, 2019.

<https://hiramwilson.wordpress.com/2013/03/28/dawn-mills-february-26-1845/>.

⁴⁸³ “The Star-Led Fugitives,” *Liberator*, Mar. 17, 1843; “COLONY OF 20,000 BLACKS IN CANADA,” *Detroit Free Press*, Dec. 11, 1847.

possible, while being so much from home; and that during his absence, his wife has faithfully done the same.”⁴⁸⁴

Behind the scenes, however, the BAI’s struggles only worsened. In May 1848, Wilson wrote to AMA Secretary George Whipple, “Last year I was obliged to sell my house & have no conveyance... the present year I have been spared the painful necessity of selling my house & ground but am still in debt.” A couple of months later, he acknowledged that prominent abolitionists, including Lewis Tappan, opposed his leadership. He responded, “So long as his [Tappan’s] ear is open to the misrepresentation of disaffected persons from Canada & consequently his mind prejudiced he will probably not be satisfied without a visit to the asylum of the sable refugees.”⁴⁸⁵ Some anti-slavery newspapers began to question Wilson and Henson’s management. Frederick Douglass’ *North Star* urged Wilson to account for \$20,000 which had supposedly gone missing. At the same time, others reaffirmed their faith in Wilson and Henson. Congregational minister John Roaf wrote in 1849, “I regard him [Wilson] as an upright, disinterested, laborious friend of the colored race; as well as a devout follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁴⁸⁶

Eventually, tensions between Wilson, Henson, and the BAI Board of Managers boiled over. Dissatisfied with their leadership, the board pushed for Wilson and Henson’s resignation in 1849. Wilson and his wife relocated to St. Catharines, where they continued to teach and preach. In December 1850, he wrote to George Whipple, “My conviction is that the change of my location is for the best.” In another letter, he was more candid about his experiences at Dawn. He told Whipple, “I have entirely abandoned the hope of bringing pass any considerable amount of good for the refugee and their children, through a manual Labor Institute [sic].”⁴⁸⁷ Wilson and Henson’s reputations never fully recovered in some circles. In 1852, William Wells Brown attended one of Henson’s lectures. He recalled, “All who know anything of

⁴⁸⁴ “BRITISH AMERICAN INSTITUTE,” *NE*, Nov. 18, 1847; W. P. Newman, “THE COLORED PEOPLE, AND THE CANADIAN SCHOOLS,” *OE*, Dec. 20, 1843.

⁴⁸⁵ “No Account of the \$20,000 at Dawn,” *NS*, Mar. 2, 1849; “Notice,” *NS*, Apr. 27, 1849.

⁴⁸⁶ Allen P. Stouffer, *The Light of Nature and the Law of God: Antislavery in Ontario, 1833-1877* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 69; “Hiram Wilson, “DAWN MILLS, CANADA WEST, MARCH 25, 1848,” *Liberator*, Apr. 7, 1848; Letter from Hiram Wilson to Rev. George Whipple, May 1, 1848. Obtained via “Brother Whipple,” *Letters of Hiram Wilson*, accessed Sep. 24, 2019. <https://hiramwilson.wordpress.com/2013/03/28/dawn-mills-may-1-1848/>; Letter from Hiram Wilson to Rev. George Whipple, Jul. 19, 1848. Obtained via “Brother Whipple, July 19, 1848,” *Letters of Hiram Wilson*, accessed Sep. 24, 2019. <https://hiramwilson.wordpress.com/2013/03/28/boston-july-19-1848/>.

⁴⁸⁷ Letter from Hiram Wilson to Rev. George Whipple, Dec. 16, 1850. Accessed via “Brother Whipple, December 16 1850,” *Letters of Hiram Wilson*, accessed Sep. 24, 2019. <https://hiramwilson.wordpress.com/2013/04/04/brother-whipple-december-16-1850/>; Letter from Hiram Wilson to Rev. George Whipple, July 4, 1850. Obtained via “Brother Whipple, July 4, 1850,” *Letters from Hiram Wilson*, accessed Sep. 24, 1850. <https://hiramwilson.wordpress.com/2013/03/28/darow-hills-july-4-1850/>.

the Dawn School, know very well that Father Henson's connection with it, as financier, has been anything but satisfactory to the fugitives and their friends."⁴⁸⁸

Although Wilson and Henson departed, the settlement carried on. Following his visit to Dawn, Samuel Ringgold Ward noted that settlers had begun leaving for other locales. He called "the general, almost universal, want of energy and enterprise among the young people" as the most disappointing facet of the settlement. At the same time, Ward called Dawn "a very successful settlement... [which] speaks well for the energy, perseverance, and economy of the settlers."⁴⁸⁹ Many refugees remained at Dawn for years to come and continued to raise farms, educate themselves, and support their community. In 1851, the *Voice of the Fugitive* reported that those who stayed "are not half so numerous as at Chatham, but more independent, more hospitable, and more intelligent... Almost every man cultivates the soil and produces from it what he consumes[.]" Two years later, the *Frederick Douglass' Paper* claimed that the Dawn Settlement's debt had been paid off entirely and predicted "brighter days" for the settlement. However, Dawn was unable to recover and blacks gradually departed the settlement for more prosperous regions.⁴⁹⁰

Around the time of Wilson and Henson's resignations, Rev. William King established a similar utopian community at Buxton (just south of Chatham). Working alongside the Toronto-based Elgin Association, King acquired Clergy Reserve lands in Raleigh Township. In a petition dated February 1849, white residents of the Western District appealed to the provincial government to block King's proposed settlement for slave refugees. They claimed that "such a settlement in any part of this District would be highly deleterious to the morals and social condition of the present and future inhabitants of this District, as well as to its prosperity in every other respect." Hundreds of white residents in Raleigh Township and the Western District, including prominent racist politician Edwin Larwill, signed the petition.⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁸ William Wells Brown, "BRITISH AND AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR THE EDUCATION OF FUGITIVE SLAVES AND INDIANS," *FDP*, Jun. 24, 1852.

⁴⁸⁹ Ward, *Autobiography*, 196-199.

⁴⁹⁰ "DAWN MILLS," *VF*, Apr. 9, 1851; "Dawn Mills, Canada West," *FDP*, Jan. 14, 1853.

⁴⁹¹ Peggy Bristow, "'Whatever you raise in the ground you can sell it in Chatham': Black Women in Buxton and Chatham, 1850-65," in Peggy Bristow (ed.) *"We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Up": Essays in African Canadian Women's History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 75-78; Buxton Mission and Elgin Settlement Papers, R4402-5-0-E, 698-699, 701-703. LAC. *Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice*. Adam Matthew Digital. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 4 Jun. 2019. For more on William King and the Elgin Settlement, see Sharon A. Roger Hepburn, *Crossing the Border: A Free Black Community in Upper Canada* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Sharon A. Roger Hepburn, "Following the North Star: Canada as a Haven for Nineteenth-Century American Blacks," *Michigan Historical Review* 25, no. 2 (1999), 91-126; Sharon A. Roger Hepburn. "Crossing the Border from Slavery to Freedom: The Building of a Community at Buxton, Upper Canada," *American Nineteenth Century History* 3, no. 2 (2002), 25-68; Victor Ullman, *Look to the North Star: A Life of William King* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969); and Catherine Slaney, *Family Secrets: Crossing the Colour Line* (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2003), 31-;43; For more on the black settlers at Buxton, see Law, "Self-Reliance is the True Road to Independence." For more on white opposition to the Elgin Settlement,

In August, Larwill and his supporters convened at Chatham's Royal Exchange Hotel. The *Kent Advertiser* noted that King "attempted to several times to address the meeting, but owing to the noises made by the crowd below, he was obligated to forbear until many influential persons on the balcony solicited the crowd below[.]" The Toronto *Examiner* reported that Chatham whites were "alarmed at the probable increase of [black refugees]." African Canadian activists and white abolitionists lambasted Larwill and those in attendance. The Toronto *Globe* later criticized "the gross partiality of the Chairman, the intemperance of the speakers, and the behavior of the crowd."⁴⁹² These efforts ultimately failed, however, and King pushed ahead with his plans.

The Elgin Settlement was founded not long after. Its constitution declared, "The object of this society shall be to improve the racial and moral condition of the coloured population of Canada. To induce them to settle in rural districts... to educate their children, and generally to protect their rights, and advance their interests." King served as the Managing Director of the Elgin Settlement.⁴⁹³ He claimed that Canada was "the only place on this side of the Atlantic where a coloured man can enjoy freedom; the free states of the union do not afford this privilege[.]" African Americans in the United States, King noted, lacked the "privileges of free citizens," which not only protected people from enslavement but also permitted them to purchase lands and attend schools. "The land is good," King added, "but owing to the prejudice which exists against coloured persons they do not enjoy its benefits... This prejudice will remain as long as they continue in ignorance." This shaped his belief that schools and lands would improve their condition and bring an end to racial prejudice in the province. King concluded, "There is only one way in which the feelings against them can be removed, and that is by giving the young a Christian education."⁴⁹⁴

Colchester resident Robert Lachlan appealed to the provincial legislature in 1850 against "the great influx of fugitive slaves, of the worst character, from the neighbouring [sic] American states[.]" Lachlan claimed that the expansion of Essex County's black population prevented "the introduction of a far more congenial class of agricultural labourers [sic] from the Mother Country[.]" Moreover, he claimed that

see William H. Pease and Jane H. Pease, "Opposition to the Founding of the Elgin Settlement," *Canadian Historical Review* 38, no. 3 (1957), 202-218.

⁴⁹² "PUBLIC MEETING," *Kent Advertiser*, Aug. 23, 1849; "THE COLOURED SETTLEMENT IN KENT," *Globe* (Toronto), Aug. 25, 1849; "COLONIZATION OF THE COLOURED RACE – IN THE SETTLED TOWNSHIPS," *Examiner* (Toronto), Aug. 29, 1849.

⁴⁹³ Constitution of the Elgin Settlement, Buxton Mission and Elgin Settlement Papers, R4402-5-0-E, 636. LAC. *Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice*. Adam Matthew Digital. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 4 Jun. 2019; Ikuko Asaka, "Exiles in America: Canadian Anti-Black Racism and the Meaning of Nation in the Age of the 1848 Revolutions," in Stewart and Marks (eds.), *Race and Nation*, 59-61.

⁴⁹⁴ Rev. William King, "Scheme for Improving the Coloured People of Canada." Buxton Mission and Elgin Settlement Papers, R4402-5-0-E, 651-653. LAC. *Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice*. Adam Matthew Digital. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 4 Jun. 2019.

refugee settlers had “a very demoralizing influence, from the fearful amount of crime observed to be committed by them, compared with the great bulk of the inhabitants.” Lachlan criticized the Elgin Association, which he dubbed “an ill-advised though philanthropic society,” which stood for “the far more obnoxious and objectionable purpose of establishing Negro colonies in the very midst of a British population[.]” Lachlan believed that the growing number of black refugees compelled whites “to abandon *British* soil, and seek a livelihood in the neighboring American states – to the great detriment of a remote and thinly settled part of the Province[.]”⁴⁹⁵

According to Drew, the Elgin Settlement encompassed “nine thousand acres of land, - a tract some six miles in length, by three in breadth, - and is situated between the Great Western Railway and Lake Erie; its boundary being about a mile and one fourth from [Lake Erie’s] shore.” Abolitionist Samuel J. May noted that the lands were divided into fifty-acre plots and “offered for sale to colored persons of approved moral character, who will become settlers upon their lots.” He was impressed by the “wholesome spirit of industry and enterprise throughout the settlement.” Living conditions at Buxton were basic but largely satisfactory. Most homes were “built of logs... the model was 18 feet by 24, and 12 feet in height, with a gallery running the whole length of the front.” Settlers benefited from the fertile soil, which was “best adapted for the culture of wheat; but it also produces corn, tobacco, and hemp[.]” The Elgin settlers also erected a grist mill and brickyard.⁴⁹⁶

Slave refugees were among the first to populate the Elgin Settlement. Isaac Riley, a freedom seeker who escaped from Missouri, with his wife Catherine and their five children. Isaac Riley is the first name recorded in the settlement’s Register of Lands. Catherine recalled, “We came up here before it was surveyed, and Mr. Riley helped with the surveyors. He took one hundred acres of land, and we are all contented.” King also referred to Riley in his autobiography, noting that he came to Buxton with his family “to be near the school and church, to give his children a good education.” Free-born and freed blacks were also among the Buxton settlers. R. Van Branken was born free in New York and immigrated to Canada to escape racial prejudice. “I have four acres and a half of land here,” he told Drew, “and a fifty-acre wood-lot on the fourteenth concession, and can make a good living here.”⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁵ Robert Lachlan, *Petition of Robert Lachlan, of Colchester, Essex, in the Province of Canada, Esquire: Printed by order of the Legislative Assembly* (Toronto: Lovell and Gibson, 1850). <https://static.torontopubliclibrary.ca/da/pdfs/37131055434948d.pdf>, accessed Feb. 14, 2020.

⁴⁹⁶ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 291-293; Samuel J. May, “Condition and Prospect of the Fugitives in Canada,” *FDP*, reprinted in *ASB*, Oct. 4, 1851.

⁴⁹⁷ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 298, 300, 305-306; Register of Lands, Buxton Mission and Elgin Settlement Papers, R4402-5-0-E, 763, 765. LAC. *Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice*. Adam Matthew Digital. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 4 Jun. 2019; Manuscript Autobiography of Rev. William King, 1892. R4402-3-7-E, 284. LAC. *Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice*. Adam Matthew Digital. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 30. Sep. 2019; “Isaac Riley, Early Settler of Buxton,” *Buxtonmuseum.com*, accessed Sep. 27, 2019. <http://www.buxtonmuseum.com/history/PEOPLE/riley-isaac.html>.

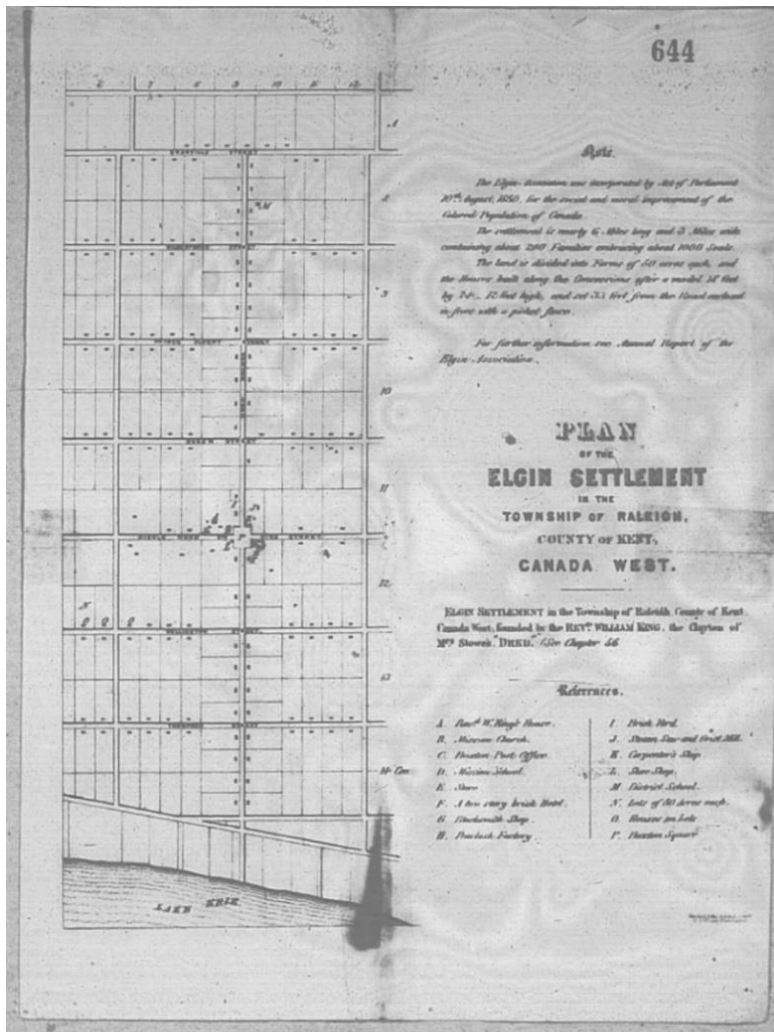


Figure 15: Plan of the Elgin Settlement

Source: Plan of the Elgin Settlement in the Township of Raleigh, County of Kent, Canada West. Buxton Mission and Elgin Settlement Papers, 644. LAC. R4402-5-0-E. Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice. Adam Matthew Digital. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 11 Nov. 2019.

Early evaluations of the settlement were quite positive. The American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society's thirteenth annual report noted that "the number of families of colored persons settled on the lands of the Association is increased, while

progress has been made in education and religion.”⁴⁹⁸ Drew claimed that the refugee settlers “have purchased homes for themselves, paid the price demanded by government, erected their own buildings, and supported their own families by their own industry[.]” Samuel Ringgold Ward spoke highly of the Buxton settlers’ “most commendable progress.” Six years after the Elgin Settlement’s founding, the black settlers at Buxton had erected “comfortable houses, of the primitive description; clearings growing more and more extensive, good crops, a fair proportion of stock, and as many signs of present comfort and future prosperity as any settlement of the same age in Canada.” He also noted that the “physical and intellectual development of the settlers, along with their high-toned moral character, already makes the settlement a model one.”⁴⁹⁹

Various reports praised the Elgin settlers for their industry and ingenuity. The *Frederick Douglass’s Paper* wrote, “Rich fields of corn, of grass, and grain, are here springing up... In one direction you may see the colored farmer behind *his* plough – in another leveling the forest – in another erecting his cottage – in another making brick – and in another thrashing out his grain.” The Buxton settlers supposedly bore themselves “like free men and women.” King was praised by the abolitionist press. The *Frederick Douglass’s Paper* described him as a “most sensible, industrious, enterprising and competent gentleman,” and insisted that he was “just the man for the place, and that he shared the love and respect of all around him.”⁵⁰⁰

Like Dawn, education was a central objective of the Elgin Settlement. In 1853, King recalled that most newcomers “were formerly slaves in the United States... The children, like the parents, were left to grow up in ignorance and vice – no person to take them to Sabbath School – no kind teacher to tell them about Christ, and the way of salvation.” King quickly set about erecting churches, day schools, sabbath schools for the settlement. From the outset, churches were extremely popular among the Buxton settlers. In 1851, King claimed that the average attendance “has been steady and on the increase, varying from 100 to 150, according to the state of the roads.” He added that the black congregants “hear the word with attention, and for some months past, especially in the Bible-class there appears a spirit of earnest inquiry among some of its members, which, we trust, is a token for good[.]”⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁸ American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, *The Thirteenth Annual Report of the American & Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. Presented at New-York, May 11, 1853; with the Addresses and Resolutions* (New York, NY: American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1853), 173-174, accessed May 28, 2020. <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=mayantislaavery&cc=mayantislaavery&idno=02818209&q1=Canada&view=image&seq=1&size=100>.

⁴⁹⁹ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 297; Ward, *Autobiography*, 212, 214.

⁵⁰⁰ “The Elgin Settlement at Buxton, Canada West,” *FDP*, Aug. 25, 1854.

⁵⁰¹ “Buxton Mission,” *EMR*, Apr. 1853; “Report of the Mission of the Coloured Population,” *EMR*, Jul. 1851, Fred Landon Fonds, Box B4220, Folder 6A. DBW, UWO. London, CA.

Sharon Roger Hepburn writes that the Buxton Mission “imparted a common school education for intellectual betterment[.]” Following his visit to Buxton, black abolitionist William Cooper Nell recalled that the Elgin school “has become so much superior to the one which was mostly attended by white children of Buxton, that the latter has been discontinued, and the school at the Elgin Settlement is attended not only by the children of the settlers, but also indiscriminately by the white children of Buxton.” In response to growing numbers, more missionaries were dispatched to teach at the settlement. King recalled that, in 1855, “a female teacher was added, for the purpose of giving instructions in sewing, and some of the useful branches of female education.” About fifty-three students attended the Sabbath school, and the settlement’s third annual report stated that church “is attended from 100 to 140 persons; and the desire for the administration of the word and ordinances seems to be on the increase.”⁵⁰² Alex McLachlan, who taught at Buxton in 1850 and 1851, called King’s mission “a most interesting one.” He had mixed opinions of the Buxton settlers; “the colored man,” he claimed, “is just as deceitful & desperately wicked as that of the white man.” Nevertheless, McLachlan also acknowledged that “the colored man has a heart to feel, that sin is a burden to[o]heavy for him to bear – He has a soul that cannot die[.]”⁵⁰³

African Americans and white abolitionists supported the Buxton mission from its inception. In 1850, Pittsburgh blacks sent a church bell (called the ‘Liberty Bell’) for the settlement’s church. They wrote, “We sincerely hope that by your industry and good conduct you will put to silence those who speak evil of you, and show yourselves worthy of the respect and confidence of the members of the “Elgin Association,” who have nobly advanced your cause.” The Buxton settlers responded, “We are delighted at all times to hear from the friends that we have left in a land of pretended freedom, and although separated in body, we are present with you in spirit[.]” Women abolitionists in the Pittsburgh area also sent books and maps to the Elgin Settlement.⁵⁰⁴ By 1854, almost 150 students were enrolled in the Elgin school. Meanwhile, the settlement’s fifth annual report claimed, “the residents in the northern part of the settlement, anxious that their children should receive education, have erected a neat school-house at their own expense, with a view of getting a teacher for it, at least six months in the year.” Several Buxton settlers discussed the Elgin Settlement’s educational advantages for black newcomers. Isaac Riley told Drew, “I

⁵⁰² Hepburn, *Crossing the Border*, 164; William C. Nell, “Impressions and Gleanings of Canada West,” *Liberator*, Dec. 24, 1858; Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 293-294; “Buxton Mission,” *EMR*, Nov. 1856. Fred Landon Fonds, Box B4220, Folder 6A. DBW, UWO. London, CA.

⁵⁰³ Letter from Alex McLachlan to Rev. Alexander Gale, Apr. 4, 1851. Rev. William King Correspondence, R4402-4-9-E, 540. LAC. *Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice*. Adam Matthew Digital. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 4 Jun. 2019.

⁵⁰⁴ Hepburn, *Crossing the Border*, 91; “Letter to the Settlers at Raleigh, from the Coloured Inhabitants of Pittsburgh, Penn.,” *EMR*, Feb. 1851. Fred Landon Fonds, Box B4220, Folder 6A. DBW, UWO. London, CA.

came here, and have got along well. My children can get good learning here.” His wife noted that two of their children attend the school, where the oldest “studies Latin and Greek.” She added that they “have good schools here – music and needlework are taught.” Similarly, Henry Johnson declared, “I left the States for Canada, for rights, freedom, liberty. I came to Buxton to educate my children.”⁵⁰⁵

Numerous settlers spoke highly of their experiences in Buxton. Harry Thomas stated, “I am now hiring a piece of land in Buxton. My calculation is, if I live, to own a farm if I can. My health is good, and the climate agrees with me – and it does with colored men generally.” Mary Jane Robinson, who went with her husband to Buxton, sought to convince her friend Sarah Ann Harris to join them. The couple “purchased a farm of fifty acres, with nine acres cut down and one all cleared... I raised a fine sight of tobacco. We had turnips as big as the crown of your husband’s hat, and cabbage as large as a water-pail... Whatever you raise in the ground, you can sell it in Chatham, six miles from here.” Newspaper reports emphasized the autonomy and enterprise of the Elgin settlers. “Every man,” wrote the *Provincial Freeman*, “helps himself in Buxton, and every man’s neighbor helps him to do so... Every man buys his land and pays for it[.]”⁵⁰⁶

That being said, the Elgin settlers endured many challenges and hardships. Poor infrastructure reduced their Buxton to trade with farmers and merchants elsewhere. This greatly reduced the opportunities for settlers to sell their crops, foods, and other products. Several factors, including climate and disease, also negatively impacted the annual output of black farmers at Buxton. For example, King noted in 1858 that the previous year “was one of severe trial to the settlers. The wheat crop which promised fair for an abundant harvest, was entirely cut off by the weevil and rust.” Moreover, the corn yield was also greatly reduced because it “was late in planting, and did not mature before frost. When gathered although appearing sound, much of it rotted afterwards.” The 1861 census officially lists almost 700 settlers in the Elgin Settlement.⁵⁰⁷

To raise funds, King and others embarked upon various fundraising campaigns. In the late 1850s, King traveled to the British Isles on a fundraising campaign. During a meeting in Edinburgh, he described the horrors of US slavery before extolling the virtues of the Elgin Settlement. At a second meeting, King noted that “the church and school buildings were all of a temporary kind, and would require

⁵⁰⁵ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 295-296, 298, 300, 307.

⁵⁰⁶ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 306; Mary Jane Robinson, “LETTER FROM CANADA,” NASS, Jan. 6, 1855; “Rev. Wm. King – The Buxton Settlement,” *PF*, Apr. 15, 1854; Stouffer, *Light of Nature*, 102-104.

⁵⁰⁷ “The Eighth Annual Report of the Buxton Mission, Presented at the Meeting of the Synod in Hamilton, June 21st, 1858,” *EMR*, Aug. 1858. Fred Landon Fonds, Box B4220, Folder 6A. DBW, UWO. London, CA; 1861 census figure taken from Hepburn, *Crossing the Border*, 214n18.

to be replaced by others of a more substantial and permanent nature.”⁵⁰⁸ King addressed other anti-slavery audiences in Scotland, Ireland, and England. In August 1859, he spoke at the Athenaeum in Cork, Ireland. Apart from public meetings and speeches, King appealed for donations to the Elgin Settlement from friends and allies across the British Isles. In the Belfast *Banner of Ulster*, for instance, King solicited books and funds for the Buxton schools and library.⁵⁰⁹

Yet the challenges of rural settlement and growing socio-economic opportunities elsewhere ultimately took their toll. An 1866 report noted, “The zeal and enthusiasm with which many at first entered upon their arduous and hopeful task, gave way for a time before the continuance of severe labor, unaccompanied by present requital, these persons leaving their farms and going elsewhere to seek employment[.]”⁵¹⁰ Although many refugees left Buxton, others remained. In 1872, the *Chatham Tri-Weekly Planet* reported on a meeting of approximately two hundred electors in Raleigh, the vast majority of whom “were coloured electors resident on lots purchased from the Elgin Association[.]” In 1884, the *Detroit Free Press* noted that “the educational and municipal affairs of the settlement have been merged in the common institutions of the county, and the association... has ceased to be[.]”⁵¹¹

Conclusion

Across the northern US and Canada, slave refugees encountered a range of new social environments. From urban centers to rural farming communities, freedom seekers integrated into a wide variety of places and, in some instances, established new settlements. Cities and towns offered a greater abundance of low-wage jobs and boasted sizable free black communities. New York City, Philadelphia, Boston, and

⁵⁰⁸ For reports on the meetings at Queen Street Hall in Edinburgh, see “FUGITIVE SLAVES IN CANADA,” *Daily Scotsman* (Edinburgh, UK), Nov. 17, 1859; “FUGITIVE SLAVES IN CANADA,” *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, Nov. 17, 1859; “FUGITIVE SLAVES IN CANADA,” *Witness* (Edinburgh, UK), Nov. 19, 1859; “THE ELGIN SETTLEMENT, CANADA,” *Witness*, Nov. 30, 1859 (quote). Newspapers obtained in William King Fonds; Printed Material Relating to Slavery. R4402-6-2-E, LAC. Accessed via [Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice](#).

⁵⁰⁹ “THE COLOURED POPULATION IN CANADA. ELGIN SETTLEMENT,” *Southern Reporter and Cork Daily Commercial Courier* (Cork, IRL), Aug. 23, 1859; “FUGITIVE SLAVES – MEETING AT THE ATHENAEUM,” *Constitution or Cork Advertiser* (Cork, IRL), Aug. 25, 1859; “FUGITIVE SLAVE,” *Banner of Ulster* (Belfast, UK), Sep. 8, 1859. Newspaper articles found in William King Collection. R44202-0-1-E, LAC. Digitized copies accessed May 27, 2020. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/history-ethnic-cultural/under-northern-star/Pages/king-newspapers.aspx>.

⁵¹⁰ A.M. Harris, *A Sketch of the Buxton Mission and Elgin Settlement, Raleigh, Canada West* (Birmingham: J.S. Wilson, 1866), 9, accessed May 5, 2020. <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.23368/1?r=0&s=1>.

⁵¹¹ “MEETING IN RALEIGH,” *Chatham Tri-Weekly Planet*, Aug. 2, 1872; “MRS. STOWE’S ‘CLAYTON’” *Detroit Free Press*, Feb. 3, 1884.

Cincinnati became beacons for self-emancipated refugees who sought work and shelter. Urban slave refugees typically lived in poverty and faced racial prejudice, but the promise of temporary and semi-permanent employment proved quite appealing. The northern US was a superior site for freedom seekers hoping to integrate into urban environments. Compared to Canada, its towns and cities were more industrialized and offered improved socio-economic opportunities.

Furthermore, slave refugees soon learned that Canada offered its own set of advantages. Most notably, land ownership was (at least theoretically) a more feasible prospect in the Maritimes and Upper Canada. This stemmed from the fact that British North America was a space of formal freedom. Upon reaching Canadian soil, slave refugees were recognized as people, not property. In the Maritimes and Upper Canada, slave refugees set out to establish farms and independent communities of their own. However, poverty and racial prejudice among Canadian white officials often meant that black refugees were resigned to smaller plots of poorer lands (if they received any at all). Moreover, Canadian whites often responded to black settlers with prejudice and hostility. Nevertheless, African American newcomers established farmsteads and new communities across Canada and gained experience with land ownership for the first time in their lives.

Finally, slave refugees had better access to educational initiatives in Canada. Unlike the northern US, African-descended people in British North America were officially able to gain access to common schools. Of course, the reality was more ambiguous. Even if they could afford to enroll themselves or their children in schools, white Canadians often resisted attempts at racial integration. Consequently, black refugees in British North America were often unable to attend schools, even if there were no legal barriers. Yet abolitionist missionaries opened new schools for slave refugees and founded utopian settlements across the province. The goal of these communities was to promote black elevation and interracial harmony in British North America. These settlements were met with resistance from whites in the northern US and Canadians. Despite this, they made invaluable contributions to the promotion of black settlement, education, and elevation.

Apart from land, labor, and education, African American refugees held other concerns and faced other challenges to their newfound liberty. Most notably, self-emancipated men, women, and children (as well as legally free people of color) lived under the risk of recapture and kidnapping. Southern enslavers, slave catchers, and state and federal officials engaged in the business of recapturing self-emancipators in the North and Canada. The next chapter will examine one of the most significant threats to slave refugees: re-enslavement.

Chapter Four

Kidnapping, Rendition, and Extradition: Resisting Re-enslavement in the Northern US and Canada

Mr. Stevenson... pleas [sic] sir give my love to my aunt Dinah Caty and Jane bennet tell them I say they must not come to the States but stay in the land of freedom... for the law is so [now] all through the united States that the slave holders can take their slaves where ever they can find them and since that law passed here has bin [sic] several collard [sic] people taken some of wich [sic] was borned [sic] free but they had not their free papers... no collard [sic] person is safte [sic] in any part of the States my advice to all collard [sic] people to stay in canada wither [sic] they are free or fugatives [sic].

- S. Wickham [Oswego] to D.B. Stevenson, Oct. 12, 1850⁵¹²

After escaping from the South, slave refugees faced another major obstacle: the threat of recapture and re-enslavement. The above letter, written by S. Wickham of Oswego, New York, illustrates one of the starkest contrasts between freedom in the northern US and Canada. In the North, slave refugees were subject to re-enslavement under the Fugitive Slave Acts.⁵¹³ Setting foot on northern soil did not automatically confer formal freedom upon self-emancipated refugees. Under US federal law, they were regarded as ‘fugitives from justice’ and could be legally reclaimed by their enslavers. Aside from formal recaption, free African Americans faced the threat of illegal kidnapping. Human trafficking rings were highly organized in parts of the North, especially in the borderlands. According to Jonathan Daniel Wells, the second slavery and interregional slave trade “created a profitable opening for whites looking to abduct free blacks and sell them into bondage.” Northern free soil was thus a fluid, contested concept which was regularly threatened by enslavers, bounty hunters, and kidnappers.⁵¹⁴

In Canada, meanwhile, slave refugees were largely shielded from re-enslavement. From the late eighteenth century onward, the British and Canadian governments refused to return freedom seekers. All efforts to negotiate an extradition treaty between the United States and Great Britain ended in failure. In response,

⁵¹² Correspondence for 1850, letter from S. Wickham to D.B. Stevenson, Oct. 12, 1850. D.B. Stevenson fonds. F 4999 MU 2885. AO. Toronto. Transcribed letter found here: http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/en/explore/online/black_history/wickham-letter.aspx, accessed Jan. 20, 2020.

⁵¹³ Hereafter written as ‘FSA 1793’ and ‘FSA 1850’ respectively.

⁵¹⁴ Jonathan Daniel Wells, *Blind No More: African American Resistance, Free-Soil Politics, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2019), 19.

southern enslavers changed tactics and began petitioning for the return of ‘criminals’ or ‘offenders.’ Apart from one notorious case, this strategy was ineffective. Free Soil in Canada was substantively different from its counterpart in the northern states. Derived from Lord Mansfield’s ruling in *Somerset v. Stewart* (1772), it determined that slavery could be only be enforced by positive law and that enslaved people were legally freed upon setting foot in Great Britain. Over time, however, the *Somerset* ruling increasingly shaped debates over slave refugee recapture, rendition, and ‘free soil’ in the North. Joseph T. Murphy argues the *Somerset* decision “entered into the common law on both sides of the Atlantic, becoming a background assumption in most northern states after the Revolution.”⁵¹⁵

This chapter examines the threat of re-enslavement to slave refugees in the northern US and Canada. How secure were self-emancipators in each region? What were the main threats to slave refugees? How effective were the federal Fugitive Slave Acts? And in what ways did African Americans, African Canadians, and white abolitionists resist the re-enslavement of self-emancipators? This chapter illustrates that formal freedom in Canada offered greater levels of security from re-enslavement than semi-formal freedom in the northern US. Refugees in Canada understood that southern enslavers held no legal basis to demand their extradition and re-enslavement. Furthermore, the few recorded attempts to seize self-emancipators and free blacks from Canada were met with extreme resistance from local communities. At the same time, African Americans in the northern US enjoyed some legal protections. On the contrary, recapturing slave refugees and kidnapping free blacks was met with legal and extra-legal resistance from African Americans, white abolitionists, and others. For starters, northern cities and state governments enacted ‘personal liberty laws’ which limited the ability of southern enslavers to reclaim self-emancipators. Northern state governments enacted these measures in response to African American and white abolitionist activism, as well as growing concerns among northern whites regarding the influence of southern enslavers and slave catchers over local and national politics.⁵¹⁶

More significantly, African Americans and white abolitionists effectively transformed parts of the North into sanctuary spaces through civil disobedience and active resistance to recaption and re-enslavement (particularly after the passage of the

⁵¹⁵ Berlin, *The Long Emancipation*, 57; Joseph T. Murphy, “The British Example: West Indian Emancipation, the Freedom Principle, and the Rise of Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1833-1843,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 8, no. 4 (2018), 621. For more on the *Somerset* ruling and the origins of British ‘free soil,’ see Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 78, 96-98; and Blackburn, *American Crucible*, 125-126; Van Gosse, “‘As a Nation, the English Are Our Friends’: The Emergence of African American Politics in the British Atlantic World, 1772-1861,” *American Historical Review* 113, no. 4 (2008), 1003-1028.

⁵¹⁶ Most recently, Calvin Schermerhorn drew comparison between antebellum personal liberty laws and sanctuary city and state laws today. See Schermerhorn, *Unrequited Toil*.

FSA 1850). In several high-profile cases, black and white activists forcibly resisted efforts to return freedom seekers to the South. They rushed courthouses, jails, and government buildings to liberate slave refugees, and even engaged in violent (and occasionally fatal) forms of resistance against enslavers, slave catchers, and even federal officials. Growing tensions between Northern and Southerners over the 'fugitive slave issue' reflected the rapidly brewing sectional tensions that led to the Civil War. Given the greater prominence of the 'fugitive slave issue' in the northern US, this chapter will devote most of its attention to this region. Indeed, the North proved the primary battleground over the recaption and rendition of freedom seekers. By contrast, only a small number of cases involved freedom seekers in Canada.

Recaption, Kidnapping, and Self-Defense Organizations in the Northern US

The emergence of 'free' soil after the Revolutionary War presented problems for southern enslavers in the early republic. Although the US Constitution recognized black enslavement, the so-called fugitive slave clause (Article 4, Section 2, Clause 3) was effectively silent regarding the procedures for the recapture of freedom seekers from the northern states. This led to several disputes between the 'free' and 'slave' states over the rendition issue.⁵¹⁷ In 1791, matters came to a head between Pennsylvania and Virginia over the kidnapping of John Davis, who had obtained his legal freedom under Pennsylvania's Gradual Abolition Act (1780). Under this law, enslavers were legally required to register enslaved people in Pennsylvania with the state government or risk losing their human 'property.' As his Virginia enslaver did not register him with the state, John Davis was subsequently emancipated. Davis' enslaver hired three Virginians to abduct the formerly enslaved man and bring him back to Virginia. The incident sparked outrage north of the Mason-Dixon Line. Pennsylvania Governor Thomas Mifflin demanded the extradition of the three men to stand trial on kidnapping charges. However, Virginia Governor Beverly Randolph refused to grant this request, insisting that the men were merely reclaiming a self-emancipator. Eventually, the federal government stepped in to resolve the dispute.⁵¹⁸

Signed into law by President George Washington, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 was designed to resolve the issue. Under the law, southern whites could travel

⁵¹⁷ Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 38-39.

⁵¹⁸ Paul Finkelman, "The Kidnapping of John Davis and the Adoption of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793," *Journal of Southern History* 56, no. 3 (1990), 397-422; Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 38-39; Stephen Lubet, *Fugitive Justice: Runaways, Rescuers, and Slavery on Trial* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2012), 20-22; Paul Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders: Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson*, 2nd ed. (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2001), 81-104.

to the northern states, seize an alleged freedom seeker, and take them before a judge or magistrate to request their rendition. If satisfied, the judge or magistrate would issue a certificate endorsing the rendition. Anyone found guilty of assisting slave refugees was also subject to prosecution and a hefty fine (up to \$5,000). African Americans and white abolitionists were horrified by the law's implications for their liberty. Northern whites, far from supporters of abolitionism, were concerned by the law's implications for state sovereignty.⁵¹⁹ Despite the federal government's intervention, however, slave refugee renditions remained a predominantly interstate matter. As Eric Foner writes, the FSA 1793 "put the onus on the owner to track down and apprehend the fugitive, frequently a difficult and expensive process." Perhaps more significantly, northern police officers and other officials were not required to assist with the recapture of freedom seekers. Southern enslavers pressed the federal government to strengthen protections for the recapture of self-emancipated refugees. In 1818, the US Congress drafted a bill requiring state officers to participate in the arrest of freedom seekers. However, it was rejected and the FSA 1793 remained the primary statute governing the recapture of freedom seekers.⁵²⁰

Aside from formal rendition, the slave refugee recapture and the FSA 1793 posed other threats to African Americans throughout the North. Most notably, federal law increased the risk of kidnapping and illegal enslavement. Southern enslavers and kidnappers regularly seized free blacks and sold them into slavery. "By the second decade of the nineteenth century," writes Ira Berlin, "kidnappers displayed little shame about what had become simply another business, carried on openly with few checks." Kidnapping was particularly prevalent in the Mason-Dixon and Ohio River borderlands in the early republic. Bounty hunters also roamed the streets of northern towns and cities, such as Philadelphia and New York City, as well as other northern locales in search of unassuming black men, women, and children. Over time, human trafficking became a hugely lucrative business for kidnappers, largely due to the second slavery. In 1817, Jesse Torrey wrote, "it is the *uncontrolled slave trade*... which gives facility to the extensive and increasing practice of kidnapping."⁵²¹

Northern state governments passed laws to prevent the kidnapping of free African Americans. Vermont, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania enacted

⁵¹⁹ Harrold, *Border War*, 73.

⁵²⁰ Harold, *Border War*, 23-25; Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 39; H. Robert Baker, "A Brief History of Sanctuary Cities," *TropicsOfMeta.com*, Feb. 2, 2017, <https://tropicsofmeta.com/2017/02/02/a-brief-history-of-sanctuary-cities/>. Accessed Nov. 13, 2018.

⁵²¹ Berlin, *The Long Emancipation*, 76; Harrold, *Border War*, 30; Smith, *On the Edge of Freedom*; 20; David Fiske, *Solomon Northup's Kindred: The Kidnapping of Free Citizens before the Civil War* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2016), 14, 41; Jesse Torrey, *A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery, in the United States: with Reflections of the Practicability of Restoring the Moral Right of the Slave, without Impairing the Legal Privileges of the Possessor: and a Project of Colonial Asylum for Free Persons of Colour including Memoirs of Facts on the Interior Traffic in Slaves, and on Kidnapping* (Philadelphia: Published by the Author, 1817), 31.

their laws in the late eighteenth century. Other northern states acted more slowly. In 1813, the New York General Assembly passed 'An Act to Prevent the Kidnapping of Free People of Colour,' which made it illegal to "seize and forcibly confine, or inveigle, or kidnap, any negro, mulatto, mestee, or other person of colour, not being a slave, with intent to send him out of state against his will." Three years later, Indiana's General Assembly passed an "Act to Prevent Manstealing," which required captors to secure a warrant and mandated that only a local sheriff or constable could arrest alleged self-emancipators. In 1820, Pennsylvania enacted a stricter anti-kidnapping law that carried a fine of between \$500 and \$1,000 or several years of hard labor. In 1824, Indiana passed a Fugitive Slave Act which formalized procedures for the recapture of slave refugees. Claimants were legally required to obtain a warrant from a county clerk. Similarly, Pennsylvania's Fugitive Slave Act of 1826 carried significant fines and jail time for illegal kidnapping.⁵²²

Southern enslavers and politicians condemned northern anti-kidnapping laws. Between 1816 and 1822, the Maryland General Assembly approved five resolutions that criticized the state of Pennsylvania for obstructing the recovery of freedom seekers. Similarly, the Kentucky General Assembly called for Governor Gabriel Slaughter to discuss with Indiana Governor Jonathan Jennings "the difficulty said to be experienced by our citizens in reclaiming their slaves, who escaped in your state." In 1822, Kentucky's General Assembly urged their northern neighbors to amend their laws "in relation to the people of colour, and to slaves who may come among them, escaping from their owners, so to frame the laws of the respective states, as will, in a great degree, if not entirely, obviate the inconveniences which now exist."⁵²³

Kidnapping remained prevalent across the 'free' states, particularly in the North-South border zones. Abolitionist organizations documented several cases of black men, women, and children being seized by bounty hunters and illegally sold into southern slavery. In June 1811, the PAS recorded the kidnapping of a nine-year-old "Mulatto Boy by the name of Peter Reuben Francis Johnson" in Philadelphia by a white man named T.I. Johnson. During a trip to Philadelphia, Moses hired Johnson to assist him with various matters. He tricked the young boy by asking for his help to pick cherries in neighboring New Jersey. Once on the boat, however, Johnson soon learned that it was heading directly to Baltimore. Upon arrival, he was sold to a local

⁵²² Wilson, *Freedom at Risk*, 67-68; Fiske, *Solomon Northup's Kindred*, 25-26; Harrold, *Border War*, 26; Salafia, *Slavery's Borderland*, 139; Newman, *Transformation of American Abolitionism*, 40-44; Diemer, *Politics of Black Citizenship*, 51-52; Salafia, *Slavery's Borderland*, 154-156; "Indiana and Fugitive Slave Laws," *IN.gov*, accessed Oct. 17, 2018. <https://www.in.gov/history/3117.htm>; Smith, "On the Edge of Freedom," 31. For more on northern opposition to kidnapping, see Mason, *Slavery and Politics*, 130-145.

⁵²³ Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom*, 45-46; Salafia, *Slavery's Borderland*, 139-140; Harrold, *Border War*, 26-27; "1822 Kentucky Resolution to Neighboring States," *images.indianahistory.org*, accessed Jul. 3, 2018. <http://images.indianahistory.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/V0002/id/1478/rec/1>.

trader in the city for \$250. The PAS mobilized quickly and soon discovered Johnson's whereabouts in Baltimore. The boy was subsequently liberated and returned to his home in Philadelphia. Moses was convicted for his role in the kidnapping.⁵²⁴ In 1817, the *New York Gazette* reported that a man from Georgia named Thompson "was convicted at the last session of kidnapping several negroes[.]" About three years later, John Read, a freedom seeker who fled from Baltimore to Kennett Township, Pennsylvania, was attacked at his home by his former enslaver, Samuel Griffith, and his former overseer. Read killed the two men in self-defense and was subsequently remanded by the authorities. White Marylanders demanded that Read be tried for murder. However, the jury acquitted Read of Griffith's murder and charged him with manslaughter in Shipley's case. Maryland's General Assembly continued to demand Read's rendition but the original decision was never overturned.⁵²⁵

Meanwhile, several cases brought Kentucky enslavers and authorities across the Old Northwest (but especially in the Ohio River borderland) into conflict over the recapture of freedom seekers. Isaac Crosby, a self-emancipator from Jefferson County, Kentucky, faced the real threat of re-enslavement when, in November 1818, two southern agents attempted to seize the man in Clark County, Indiana, and take him across the Ohio River. Crosby had taken up residence at the home of General Bartholomew in Charlestown and both men resisted the two captors. Crosby's enslaver, Squire Brooks, arrived at the scene with a warrant from the Knox County Circuit Court, but Bartholomew refused to surrender the freedom seeker. The outcome of this case is unknown, although it is likely that Crosby was taken back to Kentucky. The justice of the peace in Jeffersonville was indicted with removing Crosby "forcibly out of state." The Crosby case illustrated the uncertainty and confusion surrounding Indiana's rendition and recaption procedures. Matthew Salafia argues, "Everyone involved knew that the meaning of the law depended on who enforced it, and they tried to manipulate the legal system to further their own ends."⁵²⁶

Over time, African American and white abolitionist newspapers published various articles on kidnapping to raise awareness of the threat posed to northern black communities. In 1832, the *Liberator* asserted, "Hundreds of our free citizens have been stolen and sold as slaves in the southern markets. As long as slavery is tolerated, no laws against kidnapping, however severe, will entirely suppress this robbery." A few months later, the newspaper claimed that two African American men were "kidnapped in Philadelphia, gagged, and put into the hold of a sloop, from which they made their escape. A mulatto boy was also kidnapped and sold." In Boston, a man named George Farrar was "kidnapped by a Capt. Snow, and sold to Woolfolk in

⁵²⁴ Acting Committee Minute Book, vol. 4, 1810-1822. PAS Papers Series 1.5. HSP. PAS Papers accessed via *Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice*, 1490-2007. Adam Matthew Digital.

⁵²⁵ "Kidnapping," *New York Gazette*, reprinted in *Western Sun*, Sep. 27, 1817; Diemer, *Politics of Black Citizenship*, 52; Harrold, *Border War*, 28.

⁵²⁶ Salafia, *Slavery's Borderland*, 140-141.

Baltimore.” In another instance, an “attempt [was] made by a mob of blacks in New York to rescue two colored men who were seized as runaway slaves.” Carol Wilson writes that kidnapping was widespread “partly because of the potential for great profits from a successful kidnapping and sale of a free black into slavery, which made kidnappers willing to take the risk.” Human trafficking evolved into a lucrative business, which was dubbed by some as the ‘Reverse Underground Railroad.’⁵²⁷

Organized kidnapping gangs soon emerged in parts of the North. The Cannon-Johnson gang, for instance, abducted countless African Americans in the Mason-Dixon borderland. Its most famous member was Lucretia “Patty” Cannon, who alongside her husband orchestrated the abduction of African Americans. Philadelphia Mayor Joseph Watson wrote in the *African Observer*, “In the summer of 1825, a number of free coloured children were suddenly missed from the city of Philadelphia and its suburbs... the conclusion became general that some unusually successful and extensive plan of kidnapping, had been practised [sic] upon them[.]” The report claimed that the Cannon-Johnson gang was responsible for the kidnappings and that the children were sold into slavery. In 1829, Patty Cannon was arrested for the murder of three young black children.⁵²⁸

More than any other group, black children were especially vulnerable to kidnapping. Stephen Crew notes that “a ring of kidnappers operated in Philadelphia luring African American children onto boats along the Delaware River and then transporting them south, where they were sold into slavery.”⁵²⁹ In 1828, the New York *Spectator* reported that Andrew O’Conner was arrested by the police in the city because he had “attempted to take a little coloured boy, under the pretext that he had run off from Newark... it is believed that a number of colored children have recently

⁵²⁷ Z. Z., “Judge Thatcher’s Charge,” *Liberator*, Sep. 22, 1832; “Look on This Picture!,” *Liberator*, Dec. 29, 1832; Blackett, *Captive’s Quest for Freedom*, 375-376; Carol Wilson, *Freedom at Risk: The Kidnapping of Free Blacks in America, 1780-1865* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1994), 9. For more on kidnapping, human trafficking, and the Reverse UGRR (particularly in the Mason-Dixon borderland), see Julie Winch, “Philadelphia and the Other Underground Railroad,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 111, no. 1 (1987), 3-25; Farrow, Lang, and Frank, *Complicity*, 139-154; Milt Diggins, *Stealing Freedom Along the Mason-Dixon Line: Thomas McCreary, the Notorious Slave Catcher from Maryland* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 2015); Lucy Maddox, *The Parker Sisters: A Border Kidnapping* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016); Richard Bell, “Counterfeit Kin: Kidnappers of Color, the Reverse Underground Railroad, and the Origins of Practical Abolition,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 38, no. 2 (2009), 199-203; and Richard Bell, *Stolen: Five Free Boys Kidnapped into Slavery and Their Astonishing Odyssey Home* (New York: 37INK, 2019). For an excellent study of kidnapping and human trafficking in the Ohio River borderland, see W. Caleb McDaniel, *Sweet Taste of Liberty: A True Story of Slavery and Restitution in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁵²⁸ Wilson, *Freedom at Risk*, 19-39; Richard Bell, “‘Thence to Patty Cannon’s’: gender, family, and the reverse Underground Railroad,” *Slavery & Abolition* 37, no. 4 (2016), 661-679; Gigantino II, *Ragged Road to Abolition*, 168-69; Joseph Watson, “KIDNAPPING,” *African Observer*, May 1, 1827; “Narrative of Lydia Smith,” *African Observer*, May 1, 1827.

⁵²⁹ Stephen Crew. “‘When the Victims of Oppression Stand Up Manfully for themselves’: The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 and the Role of African Americans in Obstructing Its Enforcement,” in Finkelman (ed.), *Congress and the Crisis of the 1850s*, 124.

been kidnapped, and taken from the city.” In 1840, Virginia kidnappers Dickinson Shearer and E. M. Turner abducted a young boy named Sidney Orrison Francis from Massachusetts. The *Pennsylvania Freeman* claimed that they “decoyed the boy from his parents... took him to Hartford, went on board a steamboat to New York, thence to Philadelphia, and thence to Fredericksburg.”⁵³⁰ Farther north, African Americans were also at risk of kidnapping or recapture in New England and western New York. Yet the greater geographical distance from the Upper South, as well as the more fervent anti-slavery populations of both regions, made it more difficult terrain for bounty hunters. In 1834, one newspaper reported on the arrest of a black man in Albany “on a charge of being a slave. While in the hands of an officer, he was rescued by a party of 100 blacks, placed in a carriage and driven out of town.”⁵³¹

Kidnappings were also reported in the Ohio River borderland. In February 1820, the *Western Sun & General Advertiser* reported that “five ruffians armed with swords and pistols, and... crossed the Ohio on the ice in pursuit of a negro who has resided in [Vincennes, Indiana] for five years past[.]” The kidnappers lured their victim to the Ohio River where “they forcibly seized him in open day-light and in defiance of a few citizens whom his cries brought to the spot, they hurried him off[.]”⁵³² Likewise, southern whites often crossed the Mississippi River and orchestrated kidnappings in southern Illinois. John Hart Crenshaw, an infamous kidnapper in Shawneetown, Illinois, was involved in several abduction cases. “His career as a kidnapper,” writes J. Blaine Hudson, “was long, lucrative, and bloodstained.” Crenshaw’s home came to be known as the ‘Old Slave House.’⁵³³

Slave refugees were fully aware of the risks in the Old Northwest, particularly in the immediate Ohio and Mississippi River border zones. J.H. Banks, a freedom seeker from Alabama, recalled that the region was “inhabited a good deal by Kentuckians and Tennesseans, or settlers from those States, who watch for and catch escaping slaves, mainly to get rewards offered for them[.]”⁵³⁴ Kidnappings increasingly frayed relations between the northern and southern states in the region. In 1826, the *Indiana Palladium* reported that a group of men from Kentucky seized Andrew Shield in Lawrenceburg, Indiana. Fortunately, Shields managed to escape and secure protection from the authorities. For the *Palladium*, the issue was primarily about state sovereignty and due process (not necessarily African American equality). It wrote, “our laws define the mode of reclaiming slaves, which is simple and easy to

⁵³⁰ “Kidnapping,” *Spectator* (New York, NY), reprinted in *Freedom’s Journal*, Aug. 8, 1828;

“KIDNAPPING IN MASSACHUSETTS,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Feb. 6, 1840.

⁵³¹ “Rescue of a Slave,” *New York Commercial Advertiser*, reprinted in *Canadian Emigrant and Western District Advertiser*, May 24, 1834.

⁵³² “KIDNAPPING,” *Western Sun & General Advertiser*, Feb. 19, 1820.

⁵³³ Hudson, *Encyclopedia of the Underground Railroad*, 74;

⁵³⁴ James W.C. Pennington, *A Narrative of the Life of J.H. Banks, an Escaped Slave, from the Cotton State, Alabama, in America* (Liverpool: M. Rourke, 1861), 77, accessed May 28, 2020.

<https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/penning/penning.html>.

understand; and any person who shall take any human being out of the state, by force or otherwise, without conforming to them, ought to suffer to the extent of the law for kidnapping.”⁵³⁵

In New York City, police officers and city officials founded a ‘Kidnapping Club.’ Members of the notorious organization included police constables Tobias Boudinot and Daniel Nash, as well as City Recorder Richard Riker. The Kidnapping Club quickly rose in infamy among African Americans and white abolitionists in the city. The *Emancipator* described Boudinot as “the leader of the band of human hyenas, or slave-catchers, who prowl about this city[.]”⁵³⁶ Several episodes highlight the threat posed by the Kidnapping Club. In 1834, young Henry Scott was sitting in his class at the African Free School when Virginia enslaver Richard Haxall arrived with a police officer. Haxall claimed that Henry had illegally escaped to New York and, with the officer’s assistance, forcibly dragged the boy out of the school. Although Haxall lacked the paperwork to prove Scott’s enslaved status, Riker sent the boy to jail until the documents could be procured. Editorials condemned Haxall, Riker, and the officer for their involvement in the illegal seizure of Henry and called for supporters to protest. An anonymous author wrote in the *Emancipator* that New York City was “infested with a gang of *man-stealers*,” which sought to “bind [Henry] with the galling chains of slavery!” African Americans and white abolitionists staged protests in New York City to demand Henry’s release. Eventually, Riker succumbed to the public outrage and released Scott.⁵³⁷

Nonetheless, the Kidnapping Club continued to operate in the city. In March 1837, George Thompson was seized at his home around midnight by Nash, Boudinot, and other kidnapers. The *New York Commercial Advertiser* reported that the “armed banditti... employed a *decoy* colored man to ask shelter of [Thompson]... The poor man left his bed to see what could be done, when the ruffians, who lay concealed, rushed in and secured him, presented a pistol at his head, and after other outrages, bore him from his desolate wife and children.” Recorder Riker ruled that Thompson was a self-emancipator from Virginia and ordered his removal to the state.⁵³⁸ African Americans and white abolitionists in New York City fought the Kidnapping Club through newspaper editorials and public protests. They sought to raise awareness of

⁵³⁵ “Dark Business,” *Indiana Palladium*, reprinted in *Public Ledger*, Jul. 15, 1826;

⁵³⁶ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 208; Hodges, *David Ruggles*, 114, 127; Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 52, 68-69; Alexander, *African or American?*, 89-90; Pennington, *Fugitive Blacksmith*, 50-51; “TOBIAS BOUDINOT,” *Emancipator*, reprinted in *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Apr. 2, 1840. For more on the New York Kidnapping Club, see Jonathan Daniel Wells, *The Kidnapping Club: Wall Street, Slavery, and Resistance on the Eve of the Civil War* (New York, NY: Bold Type Books, 2020).

⁵³⁷ Plutarch, “Boy Stealing!” *Emancipator*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Apr. 5, 1834; Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 61; Anna Mae Duane, *Educated for Freedom: The Incredible Story of Two Fugitive Schoolboys who Grew Up to Change a Nation* (New York: NYU Press, 2020), 46.

⁵³⁸ “SLAVE TRADE IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK,” *New York Commercial Advertiser*, reprinted in *Liberator*, May 5, 1837; SLAVE CASE – NO. 3,” *CA*, May 9, 1840.

its illegal operations among free blacks and white abolitionists, and spur activists to resist its efforts at every turn. Elizur Wright, Jr.'s 'Chronicles of Kidnapping in New York' were published in the *Emancipator* and *Anti-Slavery Record*. These chronicles highlighted episodes of kidnapping in the city. "At this moment," Wright wrote in June 1834, "there are *eleven* persons confined in the city prison as slaves... They are thrust into cells about 7 feet by 3 1/2, with no light but that which straggles through a grating in the door." In one case, Wright recounted the dramatic kidnapping of Francis Smith, an alleged self-emancipator from Virginia. On June 19, Smith was ambushed by several men as he attempted to board a New Haven steamboat. A skirmish ensued, and Smith fled the scene, only to be stopped by local businessmen who had been "completely deceived by the crafty kidnappers" into thinking that he was a self-emancipator. Smith was beaten and taken to a New York City jail. While visiting Smith in jail, Wright recalled that his "tears were mingling freely with the blood that trickled down from the barbarous cuts." In 1836, David Ruggles informed readers, "we are all liable: your wives and children are at the mercy of merciless kidnappers. We have no protection in law, because the legislators withhold justice... we must look to our own safety and protection from kidnappers!"⁵³⁹

Furthermore, African American and white activists founded self-defense organizations to protect themselves from kidnappers. Most of these organizations first emerged in the 1820s. In 1827, Philadelphia blacks founded the Protecting Society of Philadelphia. Secretary John Allen wrote in the *Freedom's Journal*, "Of the many evils to which we as fallible creatures are liable, none is more to be dreaded and execrated than the system of kidnapping free persons of Colour, which had been carried on even in this city by a set of unprincipled men, for some years past." As mentioned in Chapter Two, David Ruggles and others established the New York Vigilance Committee (NYVC) which, aside from aiding slave refugees, also protected free blacks from human trafficking and illegal enslavement. Eric Foner writes that the NYVC "forced the interconnected issues of kidnapping and fugitive slaves into the larger public sphere." At its first annual meeting, delegates resolved to prevent the city from becoming a "SLAVEHOLDER'S HUNTING GROUND."⁵⁴⁰ Ruggles even called out members of the Kidnapping Club in newspaper editorials.

⁵³⁹ Elizur Wright, Jr., "Chronicles of Kidnapping in New-York," *Emancipator*, reprinted in *American Anti-Slavery Reporter*, Jun. 1, 1834; Elizur Wright, Jr., "Chronicles of Kidnapping in New-York," *Emancipator*, Jul. 7, 1834; David Ruggles, "KIDNAPPING IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK," *Sun* (Baltimore, MD), reprinted in *National Enquirer: And Constitutional Advocate of Universal Liberty*, Aug. 3, 1836; Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 60-61.

⁵⁴⁰ Hutton, *Early Black Press in America*, 151; John Allen, "Notice," *Freedom's Journal*, Aug. 8, 1828; Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 61-64; Hodges, *David Ruggles*, 88-89; New York Vigilance Committee. The first annual report of the New York Committee of Vigilance for the year 1837: together with important facts relative to their proceedings. New York, 1837. Slavery and Anti-Slavery. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 29 July 2019, 81-82; "THE NEW-YORK VIGILANCE COMMITTEE," *New York Evangelist*, Mar. 4, 1837. For more on the Protecting Society, see Bacon, *Freedom's Journal*, 238.

He wrote in the *Zion's Watchman*, "You are doubtless aware that there is an organized party of men in this city, whose business it is to catch its inhabitants, and send them to the South... Boudinot is the president, and Nash the general agent, who has been prowling through the South, from state to state[.]" The NYVC continued to organize anti-kidnapping meetings in the city and encouraged African Americans to resist human traffickers.⁵⁴¹

The NYVC also funded and supported legal suits involving kidnapping victims. One such case involved William Dixon. On April 4, 1837, Dixon was seized by kidnappers and charged with being a fugitive from Virginia. Dixon was subsequently taken to Bridewell Prison in City Hall Park. The trial commenced the following week and witnesses provided testimonies for both sides. More than 1,000 African Americans gathered outside the courthouse to protest Dixon's arrest. After some deliberation, the magistrate sided with the bounty hunters and ordered his rendition to Virginia. As Dixon was led out of the courthouse, the black crowd attempted to force his release. He was handed a knife and quickly fled the scene. Dixon was caught shortly after but successfully sued for his freedom later that year.⁵⁴²

Despite its activism, the NYVC only managed to exert limited influence over court cases and legal proceedings. As noted by Foner, "once authorities brought an individual to court as an alleged fugitive, he was almost certain to be remanded to slavery." In October, a self-emancipator from Maryland named Henry Metscher was arrested by Nash and Boudinot. A New York City attorney claimed that Metscher was arrested "without any process, and on the pretence [sic] that Metscher had been stealing." The charges were soon dropped and Metscher was detained for being a supposed self-emancipator. Ruggles sought to raise awareness of Metscher's arrest and insisted that it "merit[ed] the marked attention of every member of the Vigilance Committee." Eventually, a city magistrate ordered Metscher's rendition to Maryland. In response, the *Philanthropist* declared sarcastically, "Truly, this must be the freest as well as the most enlightened and consistent nation on earth."⁵⁴³

In September 1837, Ruggles detailed a "strange occurrence" in which a "very respectable looking woman with two little children, were brought from

⁵⁴¹ David Ruggles, "NEW YORK COMMITTEE OF VIGILANCE," *ZW*, Nov. 18, 1837; Hodges, *David Ruggles*, 89, 93.

⁵⁴² Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 70-71; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 210-211; Marjorie Waters, "Before Solomon Northup: Fighting Slave Catchers in New York," *HistoryNewsNetwork.org*, accessed Oct. 18, 2013. <https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/153653>. Accessed Oct. 16, 2018. For a selection of articles on the William Dixon case, see "TREMENDOUS RIOT IN THE PARK – Rescue and Recapture of the Slave Dixon," *Liberator*, Apr. 21, 1837; "HORRID OUTRAGE IN NEW YORK," *Liberator*, Apr. 21, 1837; H. C. Wright, "KIDNAPPING IN NEW-YORK," *Liberator*, Apr. 21, 1837; "THE KIDNAPPING CASE," *ZW*, Apr. 29, 1837; "DIXON'S CASE," *New York Sun*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Jun. 30, 1837.

⁵⁴³ Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 71-72; David Ruggles, "NEW YORK COMMITTEE OF VIGILANCE," *ZW*, Nov. 18, 1837; "Case of Henry," *Philanthropist*, Nov. 21, 1837; H. Dresser, "SLAVE CASE – NO. 2," *CA*, Apr. 18, 1840.

Brooklyn and incarcerated in our city prison, where I am informed they remained till four or five o'clock the next morning, when they were taken from thence, and carried off to the South, it is believed, as slaves." Meanwhile, a woman known as 'Mrs. Barker' of Mulberry Street was "seized, and dragged from her home and fireside" by Nash and another kidnapper and held in Bridewell Prison. "Every colored person," contended Ruggles, "who is supposed to be a stranger in this city, without friends, is liable to be taken up by these desperados who infest the country and falsely charged with owing service or labor to some man-thief, and carried off to the South."⁵⁴⁴

Beyond New York City, kidnapping remained a greater threat to African Americans closer to the Upper South. In 1836, Severn Martin, a freedom seeker from Virginia, was apprehended in Burlington, New Jersey. "The case was an aggravated one," wrote the *National Enquirer*, "and the sympathy of the good citizens of Burlington was deeply felt, and strongly expressed." The *Philadelphia Enquirer* claimed, "his captors exhibited the fell spirit of demons, in his treatment... [Martin] was beaten severely with a heavy stick, on the head and in the face; and, while he was suffering from the wounds inflicted, the monsters of slavite [sic] depravity performed the operation of PULLING OUT HIS GRAY HAIRS!!!" Local activists launched a brief rescue attempt which was sadly repelled. Fortunately, Martin's friends later raised \$800 and purchased his freedom.⁵⁴⁵

The Vigilant Association of Philadelphia also protected African Americans from kidnappers. Police officers in the city engaged in kidnapping free blacks and selling them into slavery. George F. Alberti, a former constable in Philadelphia, was among the most notorious human traffickers in the region. Carol Wilson notes that enslavers "hired him to recover their fugitive slaves, but he often went beyond the spirit of the law."⁵⁴⁶ Alberti's operations were well-known among African Americans and white abolitionists alike in Philadelphia, southeastern Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. In the late 1830s, black and white activists alike renewed their calls for stronger protections against illegal abduction and recaption. "Trial by jury," declared the *National Enquirer*, "is the birth-right of Americans... Yet so it is, citizens of Pennsylvania can be torn from families, kindred, friends, property, and all that is near and dear to them in life, and dragged into perpetual bondage without being condemned to that dreadful punishment by the verdict of twelve honest men of their county." It joked ironically that in the supposed land of liberty, "the rights of property are more sacredly guarded," and lambasted the Pennsylvania General Assembly for failing to take action to defend the rights of its citizens.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁴ David Ruggles, "NEW YORK COMMITTEE OF VIGILANCE," ZW, Nov. 18, 1837.

⁵⁴⁵ "CASE OF SEVERN MARTIN," *National Enquirer*, Aug. 24, 1836; "The slave case," *Philadelphia Enquirer*, reprinted in *Friend of Man*, Sep. 8, 1836; Gigantino II, *Ragged Road to Abolition*, 218-219.

⁵⁴⁶ Wilson, *Freedom at Risk*, 50.

⁵⁴⁷ "TRIAL BY JURY," *National Enquirer*, Mar. 4, 1837.

In the Old Northwest, kidnapping rings threatened African Americans. In 1834, *The Emancipator* reported on the abduction of a “colored man by the name of Henry” in Mount Pleasant, Ohio. It claimed that he “had been a slave in South Carolina” who was taken by his enslaver’s daughter to Pennsylvania. Enraged, Henry’s enslaver “sent his son to reclaim him.” At Wheeling, the son hired four men to help him with the kidnapping. The report claimed that the men “came upon Henry while at work in the field, seized, and proceeded to bind him.” One of the men place a loaded gun in Henry’s mouth to keep him quiet. Fortunately for Henry, nearby residents quickly learned of what was happening “and came to his relief.” The kidnappers were forced to abort their plan and flee for safety.⁵⁴⁸

Four years later, members of a black family in Delaware County, Ohio were seized by southern kidnappers. “There were five,” the newspaper claimed, “two men, the mullato [sic] wife of one of them and two children, all smart.” They were enslaved in Kentucky before they “turned their backs on the land of violence and bondage – upon our American Egypt, and crossed the Ohio River, never to them half so beautiful before.” After their escape, a local resident was hired to retrieve the family from their new home. He managed to apprehend the woman and her children, “and in a moment of time [they were] borne away. Her shrieks piercing the air, became most terrific.” Others chased the kidnapper through the night but with no success. *The Philanthropist* lamented that Ohio had become “a mere race-ground between the slave states and Canada... [which] has no sovereignty, no independence, such as southrons [sic] claim and enjoy. She is but a kind of hand-maid to the South and wishing to do her duties well, she loves and serves and obey.”⁵⁴⁹

Southern enslavers, slave catchers, and kidnappers prowled the streets of borderland villages, towns, and cities in search of potential victims. Urban African American communities, such as Cincinnati’s, were constantly at risk of human trafficking. Situated on the Ohio River, kidnappers could quickly spirit abducted people to neighboring Kentucky and sell them into slavery. In 1837, two Cincinnati police officers assisted a group of Kentucky kidnappers, “who had neither a certificate nor a warrant, break into the home of a “respectable” black man and seize a black woman.” Other cases took place close to free black communities elsewhere in the borderlands. Eliza Jane Johnson, a resident of Ripley, Ohio, was seized by a group of southern whites and imprisoned in a Kentucky jail for five months. One of her kidnappers, the son of a Kentucky High Sheriff, alleged that she was a self-emancipator from Kentucky but possessed no evidence to corroborate his claim. Eliza was eventually released and her kidnappers were tried in Ohio.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁸ J. Loughhead, “KIDNAPPING IN OHIO,” *Emancipator*, Dec. 2, 1834.

⁵⁴⁹ “MORE KIDNAPPING IN OHIO,” *Philanthropist*, Nov. 27, 1838.

⁵⁵⁰ Harrold, *Border War*, 58-59 (first quote); Griffler, *Front Line of Freedom*, 19; Middleton, *The Black Laws*, 96-97; Snodgrass, *Underground Railroad*, 292.

Aside from African Americans, white abolitionists in the North-South borderlands were also at risk of abduction. In 1838, John B. Mahan was seized by southern whites and stood trial in Mason County, Kentucky, for assisting two self-emancipated refugees. The *Signal of Liberty* reported that Kentucky Governor James Clark “made a requisition upon the Governor of Ohio to deliver up the said Mahan, as a fugitive from justice, notwithstanding said Mahan had not been within the jurisdiction of the court in nineteen and a half years.” Ohio’s Governor Joseph Vance granted the request and Mahan was removed from the state. “It is lamentable,” wrote the *Christian Watchman*, “that a subject so closely connected with the dearest human rights, should become the victim of forgery and political chicanery.”⁵⁵¹

Shortly after, Governor Clark dispatched representatives to Ohio to reach a new settlement over slave refugee renditions. In 1839, the Ohio General Assembly approved a new Fugitive Slave Law which, in the words of Stanley Harrold, “assured [Kentucky] masters... that Ohio sheriffs and constables would ‘seize and arrest’ individuals claimed as slaves.” The new law also denied jury trials to freedom seekers and introduced stringent penalties on anyone found guilty of aiding self-emancipators from the South. Ohio’s Fugitive Slave Law signified an effort to reduce interstate tensions over slave refugee renditions. African Americans and white abolitionists chastised the state government for seemingly bowing to pro-slavery interests. Cincinnati abolitionist Gamaliel Bailey concluded, “There is not a free state... that has sunk so low.”⁵⁵²

Although Ohio’s Fugitive Slave Law received bipartisan support, critics believed it signified a violation of state sovereignty and infringement of their free soil principles. Over the coming decades, northern anti-slavery activists increasingly embraced ‘states’ rights’ as a means of defending free soil. By the Civil War Era, state sovereignty was deeply intertwined with anti-slavery, free soil politics.⁵⁵³ The next section will examine how northern state activists, through their legislatures, courts, and other arenas, sought to curtail slavery’s extraterritorial influence and preserve free soil.

⁵⁵¹ Hagedorn, *Beyond the River*, 153-179; *Signal of Liberty*, Aug. 4, 1841 (quote). For more newspaper articles on the Mahan case, see “Case of Rev. John B. Mahan,” *Christian Watchman*, Nov. 16, 1838; “Trial of the Rev. John B. Mahan,” *Philanthropist*, Dec. 4, 1838; “Case of John B. Mahan,” *Liberator*, Nov. 22, 1839; “Case of Rev. John B. Mahan,” “Case of John B. Mahan,” “The Mahan Case,” *National Gazette*, Jun. 15, 1841. For another contemporary assessment of Mahan’s trial, see Joseph B. Reid, *Trial of Rev. John B. Mahan, for Felony: in the Mason Circuit Court of Kentucky: Commencing on Tuesday, the 13th, and Terminating on Monday the 19th of November, 1838* (Cincinnati: Samuel A. Alley, 1838).

⁵⁵² Harrold, *Border War*, 85; Gamaliel Bailey to Joshua R. Giddings, Feb. 12, 1839. Joshua R. Giddings and George Washington Julian Papers. MSS22756. Library of Congress. Washington, D.C.

⁵⁵³ For more on states’ rights and northern anti-slavery politics (especially with regards to the Republican Party), see Michael E. Woods, “‘Tell Us Something about States’ Rights’: Northern Republicans, States’ Rights, and the Coming of the Civil War,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 7, no. 2 (2017), 242-268. For more on slavery’s extraterritoriality, see Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*.

Making a 'Free' North: Personal Liberty Laws, Court Cases, and Limiting Slavery's Extraterritoriality, 1826-1850

The northern US represented a complex, patchwork terrain of laws and judicial rulings on slavery. Situated within the federal system, each state was responsible for governing black enslavement within their respective jurisdictions. Beginning in the 1820s, however, northern state governments acted almost concurrently to challenge slavery's extraterritoriality. State legislatures enacted stronger personal liberty laws, which were designed to preserve state sovereignty and protect African Americans from kidnapping. Additionally, northern courts became an important battleground over slave refugee renditions. African Americans and white anti-slavery lawyers led freedom suits to protect freedom seekers from re-enslavement. Joseph T. Murphy argues that two issues dominated early debates over slave refugees in the North: interstate comity and "the states' obligations under the federal Fugitive Slave Law."⁵⁵⁴ These measures were integral to developing a free-soil, anti-slavery consciousness among northern whites. "Taken together," notes Foner, "these legal developments placed new obstacles in the path of slaveholders seeking to retrieve fugitive slaves or retain ownership of slaves they brought into the North."⁵⁵⁵

Personal liberty laws represented the most obvious legal challenge to slavery's extraterritoriality. In 1826, the Pennsylvania General Assembly enacted a new personal liberty law which, in the words of H. Robert Baker, "established procedures for a summary hearing to determine status, gave alleged fugitives the time necessary to prove their freedom, and authorized Pennsylvania justices to issue warrants for arrest."⁵⁵⁶ Southern whites were displeased by the law. One Maryland enslaver complained that the new law made it "virtually impossible" to reclaim slave refugees in the state. Two years later, New York outlawed private recaption and, according to Don Fehrenbacher, "established a recovery procedure that involved state

⁵⁵⁴ Joseph T. Murphy, "Neither a Slave nor a King: The Antislavery Project and the Origins of the American Sectional Crisis, 1820 to 1848," (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2016), 184-185.

⁵⁵⁵ Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 111. For the most comprehensive study on personal liberty laws, see Thomas D. Morris, *Free Men All: The Personal Liberty Laws of the North, 1780-1861* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

⁵⁵⁶ William R. Leslie, "The Constitutional Significance of Indiana's Statute of 1824 on Fugitives from Labor," *Journal of Southern History* 13, no. 3 (1947), 338-339; H. Robert Baker, "A Better Story in *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*," *Journal of Supreme Court History* 39, no. 2 (2014), 176. H. Robert Baker, "The Fugitive Slave Clause and the Antebellum Constitution," *Law and History Review* 30, no. 4 (2012), 1150 (Baker quote). The full title of the Pennsylvania law was, 'An Act to give effect to the provisions of the constitution of the United States, relative to fugitives from labor, for the protection of free people of color, and to prevent kidnapping.' For more on Pennsylvania's 1826 act, see William R. Leslie, "The Pennsylvania Fugitive Slave Act of 1826," *Journal of Southern History* 18, no. 4 (1952), 429-445; Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic*, 215.

officials in the apprehension of runaways, as well as in the judicial disposal of their cases.”⁵⁵⁷

Aside from lawmakers, anti-slavery lawyers and judges were also integral to embedding ‘free’ soil across the northern US. Through their efforts, writes Eric Foner, “the Somerset principle slowly came to be recognized in northern courts.”⁵⁵⁸ In 1833, Mary Martin of New York City (formerly of New Orleans) claimed that a black man named Jack had escaped from her years earlier. She obtained a writ and Jack was subsequently taken before the Recorder. Jack maintained his innocence, maintaining that he was a free black man from the West Indies. However, the Recorder ruled against Jack and ordered that he be returned to the South. Mary Martin subsequently received a writ to take Jack out of state. In response, Jack’s legal team successfully petitioned for a writ *de homine replegiando*, which guaranteed him the right to a further hearing. Eventually, the case reached the ranks of the New York Supreme Court.⁵⁵⁹ Unfortunately for Jack, Judge Samuel Nelson upheld the original ruling, claiming that all parties had followed proper procedures. Jack was subsequently removed out of state.⁵⁶⁰

Further court cases entrenched the *Somerset* principle in northern legal systems. In August 1836, Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw of the Massachusetts Supreme Court established a precedent that enshrined the freedom principle in state law. Earlier that year, Mary Aves Slater traveled to Boston with an enslaved girl named Med. The Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society soon learned of the girl’s presence in the city and set out to investigate the matter. Members of the organization quickly obtained a writ of *habeas corpus* for Med to prevent her removal from the state, and the case soon reached the state Supreme Court. Shaw ruled that Med was entitled to her legal freedom because she had been brought voluntarily to a free state. The case of *Commonwealth v. Aves*, claims Paul Finkelman, “proved to be a powerful antislavery precedent.”⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁷ Maryland enslaver quoted in Harrold, *Border War*, 75; Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic*, 216.

⁵⁵⁸ Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010), 45.

⁵⁵⁹ The writ *de homine replegiando* was an old common law legal device which guaranteed freedom seekers the right to a jury trial. Anti-slavery lawyers employed it in a similar way to *habeas corpus*, with the goal of delaying the rendition of slave refugees to the South and creating another opportunity to appeal for their liberty. The writ *de homine replegiando* was also applied in the aforementioned case involving Dixon. See Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 51-52, 71.

⁵⁶⁰ “CASE OF A RUNAWAY SLAVE,” *New York Journal of Commerce*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Sep. 7, 1833 “THE DECISION OF JUDGE NELSON,” *Emancipator*, Dec. 2, 1834. For more on the case of Jack, see S. Charles Bolton, *Fugitivism: Escaping Slavery in the Lower Mississippi Valley, 1820-1860* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2019), 212-214.

⁵⁶¹ Paul Finkelman, “*Commonwealth v. Aves* (1836),” in Peter Hinks and John McKivigan (eds.), *Abolition and Antislavery: A Historical Encyclopedia of the American Mosaic* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2015), 87.

Over the next two decades, northern courts issued various rulings which reinforced northern ‘free’ soil and incorporated the *Somerset* principle into their respective legal systems. In 1837, the Connecticut Supreme Court adopted the *Somerset* principle in the case of *Jackson v. Bulloch*. Nancy Jackson, an enslaved woman from Georgia, sued for her liberty after being taken by her enslaver to Hartford, Connecticut. James Mars recalled the case in his memoirs. He wrote that Chief Justice Thomas Williams proclaimed “that slavery was tolerated in some of the States, but it was not now in this state; we all liked to be free. This girl would like to be free; he said she should be free – the law of the State made her free, when brought here by her master.”⁵⁶²

In 1841, the Ohio Supreme Court ruled on the transit issue in the case of *State v. Farr*. Two years earlier, abolitionists from Clinton County, Ohio, were convicted for rescuing a group of enslaved people who were voluntarily brought to the state by their enslavers. However, the convictions were overturned when the Ohio Supreme Court reviewed the case. The justices determined that enslaved African Americans “became free when brought to this State by his master, since the Constitution and the act of Congress, under which alone the state of slavery subsists in Ohio, applies to *fugitives* only.” The landmark decision sent shockwaves across the North. *The Philanthropist* called it “one of the most important judicial decisions ever made[.]”⁵⁶³

Southern enslavers who wished to travel with, or recapture, enslaved people in the North were incensed by what they perceived as a breach of their constitutional rights. In 1837, Baltimore attorney Edward Prigg and three associates traveled to York County, Pennsylvania to recapture Margaret Morgan, who had escaped five years earlier. After the group seized Morgan and returned south, Pennsylvania Governor Joseph Ritner requested the extradition of the four men. After much interstate wrangling, Prigg was eventually extradited, tried, and convicted for kidnapping. The case was eventually taken to the US Supreme Court on appeal. In *Prigg v. Pennsylvania* (1842), Pennsylvania’s Supreme Court ruled that the state’s personal liberty law was unconstitutional.⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶² “SLAVE CASE IN CONNECTICUT,” *Emancipator*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Jul. 7, 1837; James Mars, *Life of James Mars, a Slave Born and Sold in Connecticut. Written by Himself* (Hartford, CT: Case, Lockwood & Co., 1868), 35, accessed Jun. 10, 2020, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/mars/mars.html>; Finkelman, *An Imperfect Union*, 127-130.

⁵⁶³ Finkelman, *An Imperfect Union*, 164-166 (quote, pg. 165); “THE DECISION OF THE SUPREME COURT,” *Philanthropist*, Jun. 30, 1841. For more on *State v. Farr*, see Middleton, *The Black Laws*, 177-178; Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 140.

⁵⁶⁴ Harrold, *Border War*, 75-77; Morris, *Free Men All*, 94; Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic*, 219-223. For more on the *Prigg* ruling, see Paul Finkelman, “*Prigg v. Pennsylvania* and Northern State Courts: Anti-Slavery Use of a Pro-Slavery Decision,” *Civil War History* 25, no. 1 (1979), 5-35; Leslie F. Goldstein, “A “Triumph of Freedom” After All? *Prigg v. Pennsylvania* Re-examined,” *Law and History Review* 29, no. 3 (2011), 763-796; Patricia A. Reid, “Margaret Morgan’s Story: A Threshold between Slavery and Freedom, 1820-1842,” *Slavery and Abolition* 33, no. 3 (2012), 359-380; Eric W. Plaag,

However, the *Prigg* verdict had some unexpected consequences for southern enslavers and slave catchers. Manisha Sinha explains that the court's verdict created "a wide loophole for northern non-cooperation." The Supreme Court ruled that the federal government was responsible for the recaption of self-emancipated refugees. Justice Story affirmed, "The states cannot, therefore, be compelled to enforce [the FSA]; and it might well be deemed an unconstitutional exercise of power of interpretation, to insist that the states are bound to carry into effect the duties of the national government, nowhere delegated or intrusted [sic] to them by the Constitution." Northern authorities were not required to enforce the FSA but "may, if they so choose, exercise that authority, unless prohibited by state legislation."⁵⁶⁵

Following the *Prigg* ruling, northern lawmakers passed legislation that fully embodied the idea of non-cooperation. In 1843, Massachusetts' state legislature passed the so-called 'Latimer Law' (named after the freedom seeker George Latimer, who was arrested and jailed in Boston). The *Liberator* claimed that the Bay City was "made the slavehunting ground of the South, and thus does the city consent to aid and abet the vilest of kidnappers!" Latimer's allies assembled at Belknap Street Church to protest his arrest. After sensing the level of hostility, Latimer's enslaver agreed to permit Boston abolitionists to purchase the freedom seeker's liberty.⁵⁶⁶

The Latimer Law prohibited the use of state jails for the detention of slave refugees and forbade state officials from engaging in their recapture. The events surrounding Latimer's escape from bondage incensed southern whites. In Norfolk, Virginia (where Latimer was born), at a town hall meeting, attendees maintained that the Constitution upheld their right to recapture slave refugees and urged the US Congress to protect southern enslavers from the "habitual violations of their rights."⁵⁶⁷ Maine swiftly passed a law that prohibited the use of state jails for holding freedom seekers. Likewise, Vermont's state legislature passed a law which stated,

"'Let the Constitution Perish': *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*, Joseph Story, and the Flawed Doctrine of Historical Necessity," *Slavery & Abolition* 25, no. 3 (2004), 76-101.

⁵⁶⁵ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 390; Story quoted in Finkelman, "*Prigg v. Pennsylvania*," 14, 15

⁵⁶⁶ "Case of George Latimer – Boston Slavehunting Ground – Outrageous Conduct of the City Marshal and City Police," *Liberator*, Oct. 28, 1842 (quote). For more articles on the Latimer case, see "Our Condition as a People," *Liberator*, Nov. 4, 1842; "Great Public Meeting," *Liberator*, Oct. 28, 1842; "George Latimer," *Christian Recorder*, Nov. 9, 1842; H. Robert Baker, "Personal Liberty Laws," [essentialcivilwarcurriculum.com](http://www.essentialcivilwarcurriculum.com), accessed Jul. 5, 2017.

<http://www.essentialcivilwarcurriculum.com/personal-liberty-laws.html>; Harrold, *Border War*, 222-223.

⁵⁶⁷ Norfolk, *Proceedings of the Citizens of the Borough of Norfolk, on the Boston Outrage, in the Case of the Runaway Slave George Latimer* (Norfolk: T.G. Broughton & son, 1843), 3, 5 (quote), accessed May 12, 2020. <https://www.loc.gov/item/46038561/>; Lubet, *Fugitive Justice*, 34; Paul Finkelman, "*Prigg v. Pennsylvania* and Northern State Courts: Anti-Slavery Use of a Pro-Slavery Decision," in John R. McKivigan (ed.), *Abolitionism and American Law* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 215; Schermerhorn, *Unrequited Toil*, 175.

“no sheriff, jailor, or other officer or citizen of Vermont, shall seize, detain or imprison any person claimed as a slave.”⁵⁶⁸

Northern state governors also took action to limit slavery’s extraterritorial influence. In 1839, New York Governor William Seward became embroiled in an interstate dispute with Virginia over the extradition of three black sailors (Peter Johnson, Isaac Gansey, and Edward Smith) who were accused of transporting freedom seekers from Norfolk, Virginia. Virginia’s state government petitioned to have the men extradited to stand trial. Seward refused to surrender the men on the basis that their crime was not recognized under New York law. Seward rejected interstate comity over the return of self-emancipators on a states’ rights argument. Over the next few years, Seward approved several laws designed to provide slave refugees with additional protections. One such law, notes Leslie Harris, provided refugees with the right to a trial by jury, “taking the power to return blacks to slavery out of the hands of proslavery individuals like Richard Riker.” African Americans and white abolitionists celebrated this new law as a major victory for their cause. The *Friend of Man*, for instance, called it “too notoriously necessary to be disputed any longer[.]” Seward repeatedly defended his refusal to extradite the three men. In 1841, he wrote in the *Colored American* that the right to trial by jury “is invaluable as a protection of personal liberty[.]”⁵⁶⁹

Freedom suits remained a powerful tool for freedom seekers and anti-slavery lawyers. As *Somerset* became more entrenched in northern legal systems, and state governments enacted various personal liberty and non-cooperation laws, self-emancipated refugees availed of new opportunities to claim their liberty. In 1840, the *Harrisonian* detailed a case involving Aryannah Pendleton, an enslaved girl from Richmond. After traveling with her enslaver to New York City a few years prior, Aryannah “found means, prompted by the love of Liberty, of escaping to Hartford [Connecticut], and from there to Hampton, where she has resided about three years past[.]” After Price’s son attempted to recapture Aryannah, her allies secured a writ of *habeas corpus* and the case was taken to trial. During the proceedings, Aryannah claimed that her mother “was a free citizen of the West Indies, but when young, was stolen, brought to Virginia, and forcibly held as a slave[.]” Price disputed the charges of illegal enslavement but, when denied the right to obtain evidence from Richmond, was forced to drop the case. Aryannah was subsequently released and awarded her legal freedom.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁸ “FUGITIVE SLAVES,” *Detroit Free Press*, Apr. 4, 1843; “FUGITIVE SLAVES,” *Detroit Free Press*, Nov. 18, 1843.

⁵⁶⁹ “Virginia,” *Niles’ National Register*, Feb. 13, 1841; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 215; “JURY TRIAL,” *Friend of Man*, reprinted in *Cradle of Liberty*, May 30, 1840; William H. Seward, “MESSAGE TO THE LEGISLATURE,” CA, Apr. 17, 1841. Also see Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 78.

⁵⁷⁰ “Slave Case,” *Harrisonian* (Brooklyn, CT), reprinted in NASS, Oct. 15, 1840.

Lucy Faggins was soon involved in a similar freedom suit. In 1841, she was voluntarily taken by her Virginia enslaver Henry Ludlam to New Bedford, Massachusetts. William Cooper Nell recalled in the *Liberator*, “some of the vigilant friends of liberty soon ascertained that Lucy was held as a slave, contrary to the statute provision of the old Bay State; and further learned from her own lips.” Ludlam attempted to prevent Faggins from contacting free blacks in New Bedford. Activists secured a writ of *habeas corpus* for Faggins and had her removed from Ludlam’s house. Faggins was subsequently taken to Boston where Justice Samuel Sumner Wilde ruled that she was entitled to her legal freedom.⁵⁷¹

The following year, a southern enslaver named Newcomb traveled to the Bay State with an enslaved woman named Sarah. The *Liberator* noted that Newcomb attempted to exploit the woman’s family ties to guarantee her obedience. He claimed that “if she left him, he would sell her child on his return to Mississippi[.]” Sarah “turned a deaf ear” to the cries of Boston abolitionists to claim her freedom under Massachusetts state law. At Worcester, however, she changed her mind, fled from her enslaver, and took refuge with “a colored friend by the name of Roberts[.]” Newcomb traveled to Northampton and obtained a warrant for Sarah’s arrest. He returned to Worcester and, with assistance from a local sheriff, seized both Sarah and Roberts. Local abolitionists followed the group to Northampton to defend them. During the proceedings, the court informed Sarah that she was “at liberty to speak for herself; to remain here, and be protected in her rights; or return again to slavery. She promptly replied, that she preferred to remain, and the Court declared her free.”⁵⁷²

The case of George Kirk in 1846 was among the most notable freedom suits. Abolitionist Isaac Hopper recalled that Kirk had “secreted himself aboard a vessel” from Savannah to New York City. Upon arrival, he was discovered by the ship’s crew and (after a brief fracas) placed in manacles. An unnamed black man informed UGRR agents and Vigilance Committee members (including Louis Napoleon), who leaped into action. They successfully petitioned Judge John W. Edmonds for a writ of *habeas corpus*, which ensured that Kirk would remain in the state. The ship’s captain appealed the decision but was unsuccessful. During the following trial, Kirk’s legal counsel (led by attorney John Jay) mostly based its argument on the *Somerset* principle. Citing *Commonwealth v. Aves*, the defense argued that Kirk was beyond the jurisdiction of Georgia law and, “as he [the captain] voluntarily brought the negro to this port, it was the act of the principal, and the negro was *ipso facto* free.” Edmonds agreed and Kirk was freed.⁵⁷³

⁵⁷¹ W.C.N., “Case of Lucy Faggins,” *Liberator*, Jul. 16, 1841; Grover, *Fugitive’s Gibraltar*, 160-165.

⁵⁷² “The Slave Case in Northampton,” *Liberator*, Sep. 23, 1842.

⁵⁷³ “An Interesting and Important Fugitive-Slave Case,” *NASS*, Oct. 29, 1846; “The Slave Case – The Fugitive Freed!” *NASS*, Nov. 5, 1846; Isaac T. Hopper to Sarah Hopper Palmer, Oct. 31, 1846. Isaac T. Hopper Papers. RG5 115. Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College. Swarthmore, PA. http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/HC_QuakSlav/id/7974/rec/14, accessed

Six years later, the case of *Lemmon v. New York* reinforced the *Somerset* principle in the state's legal system. Jonathan and Juliette Lemmon traveled from Norfolk, Virginia to New York City with eight enslaved people (two women and six children). Black abolitionist Louis Napoleon soon learned of their presence in the city and quickly obtained a writ of *habeas corpus* to free the enslaved people. Judge Paine ruled that the women and children were entitled to their liberty having been voluntarily taken to a 'free' state. The *Lemmon* decision sparked jubilation among African Americans and white abolitionists. The *New York Tribune* reported, "New York is not yet a slave State; let us be thankful for that. A slaveholder who sees fit to bring his human chattels here, must get them away by craft, or force, if at all; there is no law to help him., and those who are chattels are free from the moment at which (unless as fugitives) the feet press our soil."⁵⁷⁴

Anti-slavery lawyers elsewhere sought to entrench the *Somerset* principle in their legal systems. In 1844, New Jersey amended its constitution to read that "All men are free by nature and independent, and have certain natural and unalienable rights, among which are those of enjoying and defending life and liberty[.]" Abolitionists argued that enslaved people were thus entitled to their legal freedom. The following year, in the cases of *State v. Van Buren* and *State v. Post*, anti-slavery lawyers challenged slavery's legality in New Jersey. Alvan Stewart cited the *Somerset* and *Aves* rulings to argue that slavery was incompatible with the new constitutional amendment. Slavery, he asserted, "can only exist by force of positive law." Stewart maintained that no New Jersey statutes enforced black enslavement and that it was based largely on customs and traditions. Stewart's arguments were rejected by the New Jersey Supreme Court. Chief Justice Nevius argued that various laws from the colonial era onward sanction black enslavement in New Jersey. Although slavery remained legal in the Garden State, it is evident that anti-slavery activists saw new opportunities to challenge its legality.⁵⁷⁵

Feb. 29, 2020; *Supplement to the New York legal observer, containing the report of the case in the matter of George Kirk, a fugitive slave, heard before the Hon. J.W. Edmonds, circuit judge: also the argument of John Jay, of counsel for the slave* (New York: Legal Observer Office, 1847), 458, accessed Jun. 1, 2020. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/llst.074/?sp=5>. For more on the case of George Kirk, see Hodges, *Root and Branch*, 247-248.

⁵⁷⁴ Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 140-142; Blackett, *Captive's Quest for Freedom*, 386-388; "NEW YORK A FREE STATE," *New York Tribune*, reprinted in *NE*, Nov. 25, 1852. For more newspaper accounts of the *Lemmon* case, see "INTERESTING AND IMPORTANT SLAVE CASE IN NEW YORK," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Nov. 11, 1852; "ALLEGED SLAVE CASE," *FDP*, Nov. 12, 1854; "SHALL NEW YORK BE A SLAVE-MART?" *NE*, Nov. 18, 1852; "THE NEW YORK SLAVE CASE FREEDOM TRIUMPHANT," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Nov. 18, 1852; "SLAVE CASE," *New York Journal of Commerce*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Nov. 19, 1852; "Interesting and Important Slave Case in New York," *ASB*, Nov. 20, 1852.

⁵⁷⁵ Stewart, Alvan, and New Jersey. Supreme Court. *A legal argument before the Supreme Court of the state of New Jersey: at the May term, at Trenton, for the deliverance of four thousand persons from bondage* (New York: Finch & Weed, 1845), 6. Pdf. <https://www.loc.gov/item/11012752/>; Daniel R. Ernst, "Legal Positivism, Abolitionist Litigation, and the New Jersey Slave Case of 1845," *Law and*

In 1837, Matilda Lawrence was arrested by John W. Riley in Cincinnati. James Birney and other activists in the city sprang into action to protect her. They successfully petitioned the Court of Common Pleas in Hamilton County for a writ of habeas corpus. Ohio abolitionist Salmon P. Chase agreed to lead Matilda's defense. During the trial, he noted that many "seem to feel something of a personal interest in its event: some, as if their own liberty were at stake: others, as if their own rights of property were in peril." His argument was built on the notion that Matilda's arrest "was illegal – Because the act of congress concerning fugitives from labor, authorizes no arrest by any officer, and of course no warrant of arrest." Chase added that "no act of congress could authorize the issuing of such processes... In their respective spheres of action, the government of the United States, and the several State governments are entirely distinct and independent. Neither can control or regulate the action of the other." In the end, the court sided against Matilda and she was re-enslaved in the South.⁵⁷⁶

The case of David and Lucy Powell reflected the changing tide across the Old Northwest. In 1847, the couple escaped with their four children from Kentucky to Cassopolis, Michigan. Two years later, a group of Kentucky kidnappers arrived at their home and seized Lucy and three of her children. Friends immediately sent word ahead to allies farther south. After learning of the kidnappers' presence on the outskirts of South Bend, Indiana, anti-slavery activists obtained a writ of *habeas corpus* for the mother and children. The kidnappers were met by local authorities and taken into custody. On the same day, a local magistrate ruled that the Kentuckians had not obtained a certificate of removal for the freedom seekers before seizing them. Skirmishes erupted between the kidnappers and the anti-slavery allies in South Bend. Eventually, however, Lucy and her children were released and returned to their Michigan home.⁵⁷⁷ Farther west, the Upper Mississippi River borderland was a flashpoint for freedom suits and court challenges. Enslaved and free African

History Review 4, no. 2 (1986), 350 (Stewart quote); Gigantino II, *Ragged Road to Abolition*, 230-232; "The New Jersey Slave Case," *Liberty Standard*, Jul. 24, 1845; "NEW-JERSEY A SLAVE STATE," *Liberator*, Jul. 25, 1845.

⁵⁷⁶ Chase, Salmon P. (Salmon Portland). Speech of Salmon P. Chase in the case of the colored woman, Matilda: who was brought before the Court of Common Pleas of Hamilton County, Ohio, by writ of habeas corpus, March 11, 1837. Cincinnati, 1837. *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 10 June 2020, 7-11. For more on the Matilda Lawrence case, see Middleton, *The Black Laws*, 112-113; Patricia Hagler Minter, "'The State of Slavery': *Somerset*, *The Slave*, *Grace*, and the Rise of Pro-Slavery and Anti-Slavery Constitutionalism in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World," *Slavery & Abolition* 36, no. 4 (2015), 608-610. In her article, Minter draws a direct link between Chase's line of argument and the *Somerset* principle.

⁵⁷⁷ Churchill, *The Underground Railroad and the Geography of Violence*; 110-111; *The South Bend Fugitive Slave Case: Involving the Right to a Writ of Habeas Corpus* (New York, NY: Anti-Slavery Office, 1851). Pdf. <https://www.loc.gov/item/10034367/>.

Americans, as well as white abolitionists, petitioned St. Louis courts for their legal freedom having resided in, or traveled through, a northern state.⁵⁷⁸

Personal liberty laws, judicial rulings, and freedom suits certainly limited slavery's extraterritorial influence. Yet enslavers and kidnappers continued their operations throughout the North. In 1835, James Williams was reportedly abducted near his home in Middletown, Pennsylvania. Five years later, James Turner of Reading was seized "as a fugitive from service" and brought before the local justice. The *Reading Journal* wrote that Turner "was not taken without considerable resistance – having inflicted a severe blow on the face of one of the assailants." Likewise, the *Philanthropist* reported that "the court-house was filled to overflowing." The defense called upon free black Jacob Ross, who insisted that "he had known [Turner] for upwards of five years[.]" The presiding judge determined that there was insufficient evidence to prove that Turner had escaped from Maryland, and he was subsequently released. In 1845, Catherine 'Kitty' Payne, a freedom seeker from Virginia, was seized in Gettysburg by kidnappers, including her former enslaver's nephew, alongside three of her four children and taken back to Virginia. Yet Payne and her children were eventually released by the state's Supreme Court.⁵⁷⁹

Over time, African Americans and white activists formed more self-defense organizations to resist enslavers, slave catchers, and kidnappers. In Gettysburg, the Slave's Refuge Society was founded by local black activists in 1841 to "assist such of our brethren as shall come among us for the purpose of liberating themselves, and to raise all the means in our power... to give liberty to our brethren groaning under the tyrannical yoke of oppression."⁵⁸⁰ Similarly, African Americans in Lancaster tried to rescue self-emancipator Asa Stanton after he was seized by William Hobbs of Frederick County, Maryland. Unfortunately, the crowd was repelled by the local police, and Stanton was taken back to Maryland.⁵⁸¹ In 1849, a young boy named Henry Lee Brown was abducted at Downingtown in Chester County, Pennsylvania. The PAS worked with local blacks to secure the conviction of Thomas McCreary, the infamous kidnapper from Elkton, Maryland. Although he evaded extradition in this

⁵⁷⁸ For more on St. Louis freedom suits, see Kennington, *In the Shadow of Dred Scott*; Loren Schweninger, *Appealing for Liberty: Freedom Suits in the South* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁵⁷⁹ "Kidnapping in Pennsylvania," *US Gazette*, reprinted in *New England Spectator*, Apr. 15, 1835; "The Slave Case," *Reading Journal* (Reading, PA), reprinted in *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Mar. 5, 1840; "SLAVE CASE IN READING," *Philanthropist*, Mar. 24, 1840; Smith, *On the Edge of Freedom*, 97-105; Stephen L. Longenecker, *Gettysburg Religion: Refinement, Diversity, and Race in the Antebellum and Civil War Border North* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 32; "KIDNAPPING IN PENNSYLVANIA," *British Foreign and Anti-Slavery Reporter*, Dec. 10, 1845; "Mrs. Kitty Paine," *Fall River Weekly News*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Oct. 9, 1846.

⁵⁸⁰ Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom*, 129-130 (quote).

⁵⁸¹ "FUGITIVE SLAVE IN PENNSYLVANIA – IMPORTANT DECISION," *Niles' National Register*, Aug. 23, 1845.

instance, he was later prosecuted for the kidnapping of two women, Elizabeth and Rachel Parker, also from Chester County.⁵⁸²

In 1846, a freedom seeker named George escaped from New Orleans to Boston via the coastal maritime routes. The ship's captain, James Hannum, managed to secure George and place him aboard a southern-bound vessel. Meanwhile, abolitionists in the city launched a failed rescue attempt and even secured a writ of *habeas corpus*. But it was too late. The *Liberator* wrote, "The slave having reached the sanctuary of Massachusetts Bay, was as free as the captain who kidnapped him, in the eye of our law[.]"⁵⁸³ Activists in Boston immediately protested George's re-enslavement. In September, a meeting took place at Faneuil Hall where abolitionists and others voiced their opposition to the kidnapping. They resolved, "We therefore call upon our fellow-citizens – upon all the inhabitants of the Free States, to give us their sympathy and aid. Upon you it depends to say whether your soil shall be longer used as a human hunting-ground; upon you it depends to say whether the North shall any longer be a party to human slavery."⁵⁸⁴

That same year, Jeremiah Phinney of Columbus, Ohio was abducted by Alexander Forbes and Jacob Armitage, and forcibly removed from the state. The *Dayton Journal and Advertiser* wrote, "The great mass of people of Ohio... are not willing to see the majesty of their own laws insulted, and the rights of men in their midst trampled in the dust." Facing pressure to act, Ohio Governor Mordecai Bartley formally demanded the arrest of Forbes and Armitage on kidnapping charges. In the ensuing trial, Phinney's defense team argued that slavery was "strictly local, and confined within the territorial limits of the State where it is sanctioned, and cannot follow the fugitive beyond those limits, except by positive law, binding on both sides of the line." The presiding judge ruled in Forbes and Armitage's favor.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸² Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and African American Pamphlet Collection. *Five Years' abstract of transactions of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, and for Improving the Condition of the African Race* (Philadelphia, PA: Printed at Merrihew & Thompson's Steam Power Book and Job Office, 1853), 5. Pdf. <https://www.loc.gov/item/92838814/>. For more on Thomas McCreary and Elizabeth and Rachel Parker, see "CASE OF ELIZABETH PARKER," *Harrisburgh Telegraph*, reprinted in *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Apr. 15, 1852; "GOV. LOWE AND McCREARY, CHIEF MAGISTRATE AND ARCH-KIDNAPPER, OF MD.," *NE*, Jun. 30, 1853; "KIDNAPPING OF RACHEL PARKER," *Liberator*, Feb. 4, 1853; Blackett, *Captive's Quest for Freedom*, 294-301; Diggins, *Stealing Freedom Along the Mason-Dixon Line*.

⁵⁸³ "KIDNAPPING IN BOSTON," *Liberator*, Sep. 18, 1846. Other descriptions of the Boston kidnapping can be found in James W. Hannum, "The Fugitive Slave Case," *NASS*, Oct. 8, 1846; "A SLAVE CASE," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Oct. 8, 1846.

⁵⁸⁴ Boston (Mass.). Citizens. Address of the committee appointed by a public meeting, held at Faneuil Hall, September 24, 1846: for the purpose of considering the recent case of kidnapping from our soil, and of taking measures to prevent the recurrence of similar outrages. Boston, 1846. *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 8 June 2020, 4-5.

⁵⁸⁵ Middleton, *The Black Laws*, 190-195 (quote from *Dayton Journal and Advertiser* on page 192); Finkelman, *An Imperfect Union*, 172-175; Tom Calarco, *Search for the Underground Railroad in South-Central Ohio* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2018), 110. For newspaper articles on the Jeremiah

White abolitionists also remained the target of southern enslavers. In 1842, John Van Zandt stood trial for aiding freedom seekers. A resident of Hamilton County, he encountered a group of nine self-emancipators about twelve miles north of the Ohio River and offered to conceal the group in his wagon. Van Zandt was stopped by a group of kidnappers, who discovered the freedom seekers hiding in the wagon. One of them, a man named Andrew, successfully fled from the scene; the remaining eight were taken back to Kentucky. Wharton Jones, the Kentucky enslaver from whom the self-emancipators had escaped, sued Van Zandt for damages. The court ruled against the abolitionist, however, and ordered him to pay damages to Wharton. Eventually, the case reached the US Supreme Court. Salmon P. Chase agreed to defend Van Zandt in the subsequent trial. He argued that Van Zandt believed that the group in question were freedom seekers but “had no notice whatever... that the negroes had been held to service or labor in Kentucky under the laws thereof, and had escaped from that state into Ohio.” Chief Justice Taney ruled against Van Zandt and ordered him to pay damages. He died later that year.⁵⁸⁶

The *Van Zandt* ruling had implications for legal suits elsewhere. In 1847, Maryland enslaver Mary W. Oliver sued Daniel Kaufman of Boiling Springs, Cumberland County for assisting thirteen freedom seekers to the North. Like the *Van Zandt* case, Kaufman’s legal team argued that the abolitionist did not actively assist the slave refugees but rather simply provided them with food, water, and shelter. Furthermore, as the *North Star* claimed, anti-slavery activists claimed that “the fugitives were free the moment when they touched the soil of Pennsylvania.” Kaufman’s defense incorrectly argued that the *Van Zandt* case ruled “that is a slave escape[s] to a free State, he is free according to the principles of common law[.]” The

Phinney case, see “THE KIDNAPPING CASE – PUBLIC MEETING,” *Cleveland Herald*, Apr. 6, 1846; “Much feeling exists...” *Detroit Free Press*, Apr. 7, 1846; “Kidnapping,” *Ohio State Journal*, reprinted in (Richmond, IN) *Richmond Palladium*, Apr. 7, 1846; “Kidnapping! – Daring Outrage!,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Apr. 9, 1846; “The recent kidnapping case at Columbus,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Apr. 9, 1846; “THE KIDNAPPED MAN FOUND,” *Cincinnati Herald*, reprinted in *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Apr. 16, 1846; “THE KIDNAPPING CASE,” *US Gazette*, reprinted in *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Apr. 23, 1846; “The Kidnapping Case – Decision of Kentucky,” *Weekly Ohio State Journal*, Apr. 22, 1846; “The Kidnappers set at Liberty,” *Liberator*, May 1, 1846; “One of the scamps...” *Detroit Free Press*, May 11, 1846; “While the persons...” *Detroit Free Press*, Sep. 23, 1846. For a contemporary assessment of the Phinney trial, see William Johnston, *The State of Ohio vs. Forbes and Armitage: arrested upon the requisition of the government of Ohio, on charge of kidnapping Jerry Phinney, and tried before the Franklin Circuit Court of Kentucky*, April 10, 1846. [Frankfort, Ky.?], [1846?]. *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 29 Nov. 2018.

⁵⁸⁶ Finkelman, *Slavery in the Courtroom*, 70-75; Helen Tutcliff Catterall (ed.), *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro*, Vol. 5 (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution, 1937), 7-9; Chase, Salmon P. (Salmon Portland). *Reclamation of fugitives from service: an argument for the defendant, submitted to the Supreme Court of the United States, at the December term, 1846, in the case of Wharton Jones vs. John Vanzandt*. Cincinnati, 1847. *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. Jun. 10, 2020, 7. “The Van Zandt Case,” *NE*, Mar. 18, 1847; “THE VAN ZANDT CASE,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Mar. 25, 1847; “THE FUGITIVE SLAVE CASE,” *Liberator*, Apr. 2, 1847; “DOWN WITH THE UNION!,” *Liberator*, Apr. 9, 1847; “JOHN VAN ZANDT,” *NASS*, May 13, 1847.

Cumberland County Circuit Court ordered Kaufman to pay \$2,000 in damages. The case was reviewed by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court on appeal, which ruled that the case lay beyond the state's jurisdiction. In 1852, a federal court in Philadelphia ordered Kaufman to pay damages to Oliver. Justice Grier, who presided over the hearing, took direct aim at the *Somerset* principle. "Lord Mansfield has said some pretty things," he declared, "... But they will perhaps be found, by examination of later cases, to be classed with rhetorical flourishes rather than legal dogmas." African Americans and white abolitionists were greatly dismayed and angered. The *Pennsylvania Freeman*, for instance, dubbed the ruling "an unrighteous verdict."⁵⁸⁷

In the Upper Mississippi River borderland, kidnappers continued to foray into Illinois. In 1845, the *Chicago Western Citizen* reported that "a gang of kidnappers" seized two free blacks in southern Illinois, one of whom was subsequently put up for sale in Missouri. Three years later, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* claimed that three freedom seekers from St. Louis "were overtaken by their pursuers, and after stout resistance, in which knives and pistols were used freely on both sides, were captured and taken back." Similarly, in 1848, the *Springfield Sangamo Journal* claimed that three black boys in Hamilton County, Illinois "were kidnapped from their homes[.]" The newspaper stated, "The kidnapping gang is regularly organized, and is increasing. The members are well known, but they cannot be punished, on account of the disqualification of negroes as witnesses."⁵⁸⁸

The threat of kidnapping and recapture compelled many slave refugees to head for Canada. In July 1842, Caroline Quarlls secured passage aboard a steamboat from St. Louis to neighboring Alton, Illinois by passing as a white woman and subsequently made her to Milwaukee, Wisconsin aboard a stagecoach. During this time, Quarlls' enslaver placed a bounty on her head; slave catchers pursued the freedom seeker through Illinois to Wisconsin. Fortunately, she was shielded by African Americans and white abolitionists who came up with a plan to remove Quarlls to Canada. Several weeks after her arrival, abolitionist Lyman Goodknow transported Quarlls in his buggy. The pair traveled south around Chicago, through northwestern Indiana and Michigan until they reached Detroit. Quarlls boarded the ferry and crossed the Detroit River into Canada.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁷ Smith, *On the Edge of Freedom*, 111-114; "Important Slave Case," *Natchez Semi-Weekly Courier*, Dec. 12, 1848; "Slave Case in the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania," *NS*, Jul. 13, 1849; "AN UNRIGHTEOUS VERDICT," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Nov. 11, 1852; "A REBUKE MORE THAN MERITED," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Nov. 25, 1852 (Grier quote). Kaufman is occasionally spelled 'Kauffman' in primary and secondary sources.

⁵⁸⁸ *Western Citizen* quoted in M. Scott Heerman, "Deep River: Slavery, Empire, and Emancipation in the Mississippi River Valley, 1730-1860" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2013), 195; "More Kidnapping in Illinois," *NASS*, Mar. 16, 1848; "KIDNAPPING," *Sangamo Journal* (Springfield, IL), Dec. 20, 1848. For more kidnapping and rendition episodes in Illinois, see Heerman, "'Reducing Free Men to Slavery.'"

⁵⁸⁹ For more on Caroline Quarlls, see Kimberly Simmons and Larry McClellan, "Bridging Rivers: Caroline Quarlls' Remarkable Journey," in Smardz Frost and Tucker (eds.), *A Fluid Frontier*, 187-198.

Adam and Sarah Crosswhite escaped to Canada under similar circumstances. In 1843, the couple escaped from Kentucky with their children and settled in Marshall, Michigan – a small, rural community with prominent African American and abolitionist communities. For several years, the Crosswhites lived in relative security. Eventually, their former enslaver, Francis Giltner, learned of the Crosswhites' whereabouts. At the end of 1846, Giltner requested that his nephew, Francis Troutman, to find and retrieve the Crosswhites. In January 1847, Troutman returned to Michigan with Giltner's son and a gang of slave catchers. They attempted to arrest the family but encountered severe difficulties after neighbors alerted others in the town. Hundreds of local whites and African Americans had gathered outside the Crosswhites' home and demanded their release. Local banker Charles T. Gorham sought an explanation from all parties. Troutman argued that they were acting within their rights as spelled out under the FSA. In turn, the Crosswhites filed charges against the group for trespassing and assault. Shortly thereafter, the deputy sheriff arrested Troutman and his associates, who were subsequently taken before a local judge. The Crosswhites subsequently fled to Detroit by train, where they crossed into Upper Canada.⁵⁹⁰

Northern whites increasingly came to embrace anti-slavery, free soil principles. Meanwhile, enslavers increasingly appealed to the federal government for further action. In 1848, the Virginia General Assembly outright accused the northern states of denying their right of recaption. The report alleged that the northern states had "commenced a war of legislation against the owners of fugitive slaves, seeking to recapture them beyond the frontiers... Fugitive slaves were harbored and protected; vexatious suits and prosecutions were instituted against the owner or his agent, resulting sometimes in imprisonment for want of bail[.]" The report even claimed that "irresponsible mobs" were permitted to run riot by northern state authorities.⁵⁹¹ For enslavers, stronger federal legislation on the recapture of slave refugees was a necessary remedy. The next section examines the impact of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 on the recapture and rendition of slave refugees from the northern US.

⁵⁹⁰ "THE HARBINGER – SLAVE CASE IN MARSHALL, MICH. – LIBERTY PAPERS – PEACE AND WAR MEN," *NE*, Mar. 11, 1847; Gerrit Smith, "THE CROSSWHITE CASE," *Model Worker*, reprinted in *NS*, Apr. 7, 1849; For more on the Crosswhites' journey to freedom, see Debian Marty, "One More River to Cross: The Crosswhites' Escapes from Slavery," in Smardz Frost and Tucker (eds), *A Fluid Frontier*, 199-214.

⁵⁹¹ Virginia. General Assembly. House of Delegates. Report of the select committee appointed under a resolution of the House: to enquire into the existing legislation of Congress upon the subject of fugitive slaves, and to suggest such additional legislation as may be proper. [Richmond], 1848. *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 13 June 2020, 9.

The Fugitive Slave Law and Its Victims

The US-Mexican War presented southern whites with an opportunity to strengthen federal legislation on the recapture of self-emancipators in the North. The Compromise of 1850 was a legislative package designed to preserve sectional harmony following the acquisition of western territories from Mexico. One of its most significant features was the FSA 1850. The new law, writes Eric Foner, “embodied the most robust expansion of federal authority over the states, and over individual Americans, of the antebellum era[.]”⁵⁹² Rendition hearings were previously devolved to individual states and presided over by judges. Jury trials for slave refugees were also permitted under northern law. Under the new statute, the quasi-judicial office of federal commissioner was created to oversee federal rendition hearings. Although officially neutral parties, commissioners received \$10 if they ruled in favor of southern enslavers, but only \$5 if they ruled in favor of black defendants. Furthermore, US marshals, state authorities, and even private citizens could be called upon to assist with the apprehension of freedom seekers. Scott Basinger writes that the US Congress engaged in ‘deck-stacking’ to protect southern enslavers’ interests.⁵⁹³ In essence, the FSA 1850 was a repudiation of the *Somerset* principle and the notion that northern state governments could supersede the US Congress on matters relating to slavery.

The FSA 1850 sparked protests and waves of unrest across the North. Black activists and white abolitionists staged protests, held meetings, and printed editorials on the matter. In New York City, writes Crew, “fifteen hundred people gathered in the Zion Chapel in protest and signed two petitions condemning [the FSA].” Similarly, a meeting of the Fox River Congregational Union in Plainfield, Illinois, resolved that the FSA contravened “the law of Nature and the law of God, it is at once VOID, and unworthy of the sacred name of LAW.”⁵⁹⁴ Meanwhile, in November 1851, Samuel J. May of Syracuse told William Lloyd Garrison, “The Union will not be dissolved much more than it is now dissolved – and the Fugitive Slave Law will not be, for it cannot be, generally enforced.”⁵⁹⁵ The following September, Theodore

⁵⁹² Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 125.

⁵⁹³ Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic*, 231-232; Scott J. Basinger, “Regulating Slavery: Deck-Stacking and Credible Commitment in the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850,” *Journal of Law, Economics, & Organization* 19, no. 2 (2003), 307-342. For more on the operations of the FSA 1850, see Matthew Pinsker, “After 1850: Reassessing the Impact of the Fugitive Slave Law,” in Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves*, 93-115.

⁵⁹⁴ Crew, “When the Victims of Oppression,” 132; Blackett, *Captive’s Quest for Freedom*, 18; “Plainfield, Illinois,” *NE*, Mar. 20, 1851.

⁵⁹⁵ May, Samuel J. (Samuel Joseph), and William Lloyd Garrison. “Letter from Samuel Joseph May, Syracuse [N.Y.], to William Lloyd Garrison, Nov[ember] 23, 1851.” Correspondence. Nov. 23, 1851. *Digital Commonwealth*, accessed Jun 3, 2020. <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:5h73zw85v>.

Parker wrote, “the present government of the United States – I mean the men who enacted the Fugitive Slave bill and seek to execute it – have not only therein violated the constitution of the United States, but have also violated the constitution of the Universe[.]” The FSA symbolized the growing threat posed by the ‘Slave Power’ at the federal level. In 1853, Parker wrote to Samuel J. May, “Just now Slavery is the favorite institution of the American Government; it yields to nothing; all gives way to that.”⁵⁹⁶

In light of the new FSA, African Americans and white abolitionists revived vigilance committees and established new self-defense organizations. In 1850, Chicago blacks established the Liberty Association, which sought to protect self-emancipated and free people of color in the city. In Chadron, Ohio, a group known as the Chadron Fugitive Guards pledged themselves to resist all officers and marshals who dared enter their communities in search of self-emancipators. In Columbus, Ohio, John Mercer Langston advocated for the formation of a vigilance committee in the state capital. Similarly, the *Ashtabula Sentinel* recommended that African Americans “arm themselves, and associate together for mutual protection... let them not fail to slay any man who shall attempt to re-enslave them.” The newspaper contended, “It is probably necessary that blood should flow, in order to arouse the people to the enormous crimes enjoined by this barbarous law.”⁵⁹⁷

City and municipal governments across the North denounced the FSA 1850. Chicago’s city council proclaimed that the FSA was “revolting to our moral sense, and an outrage upon our feelings of justice and humanity, because it disregards all the securities which the Constitution and laws have thrown around personal liberty,” and advised police officers to disregard the statute. Senator Stephen Douglas, a leading proponent of the FSA, responded, “I have yet to learn that a subordinate municipal corporation is licensed to raise the standard of rebellion, and throw off the authority of the Federal Government, at pleasure!” One month later, Vermont passed a ‘Habeas Corpus law’ which, in the words of Horace K. Houston, Jr., “made the despised federal law virtually impossible to enforce within the state’s borders.” Attorneys in Vermont could petition for a writ of *habeas corpus* for anyone “arrested, claimed, or imprisoned as a fugitive slave.” In December, the *National Era* stated that

⁵⁹⁶ Theodore Parker to Samuel J. May, 25 Sep. 1852. Theodore Parker Papers P-175. Reel 2, Vol. 5. MHS. Boston, MA; Theodore Parker to Samuel J. May, 23 Sep. 1853. Theodore Parker Papers P-175. Reel 2, Vol. 5. MHS. Boston, MA. For more on the abolitionist development of ‘higher law’ as justification for opposing the FSA 1850, see Peter Wirzbicki, “Black Intellectuals, White Abolitionists, and Revolutionary Transcendentalists: Creating the Radical Intellectual Tradition in Antebellum Boston” (PhD diss., New York University, 2012).

⁵⁹⁷ Blackett, *Captive’s Quest for Freedom*, 17-19, 163; Paul Finkelman, “Fugitive Slave Law of 1850,” *Encyclopedia.ChicagoHistory.org*, accessed Oct. 22, 2018. <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1430.html>; “The Fugitive Slave Law,” *Ashtabula Sentinel*, reprinted in *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Dec. 19, 1850. For more on African American resistance to the FSA 1850, see Williams, *I Freed Myself*, 40-44.

the law represented “a firm, discreet attempt on the part of a Sovereign State to secure to all its inhabitants the benefits of the *habeas corpus* – a writ which the Federal Constitution declares, shall not be suspended.”⁵⁹⁸

The FSA’s impact was felt almost immediately across the North. In September 1850, James Hamlet of New York City became the first person to be re-enslaved under the new law. A porter by trade, he was arrested by two US marshals and quickly brought before Commissioner Alexander Gardiner. After a short hearing, Gardiner ruled that Hamlet had escaped from Mary Brown of Baltimore. Gardiner ruled that Hamlet was to be returned to the South and re-enslaved. Across the city, black activists and white abolitionists staged demonstrations to protest Hamlet’s rendition. On October 1, a meeting was held at the Zion Chapel on Church Street, which was reportedly “crowded to excess, two thirds of those present being women of color.” William Powell cried, “Shall the blood-thirsty slaveholder be permitted by this unrighteous law to come into our domicils [sic], or workshops, or the places where we labor, and carry off our wives and children, our fathers and mothers, and ourselves, without a struggle[.]” The meeting’s organizers sent a letter to Mayor Caleb Smith Woodhull “to ascertain what protection, we, the free colored people, may expect under the operation of the Fugitive Slave Law.” Fortunately, Hamlet’s re-enslavement was only temporary. Isaac Hopper wrote that “Eight hundred dollars was made up by some benevolent individuals in this City which was applied to the purchase of James Hamlet’s liberty and he has been restored to his wife and family, to the rejoicing of many.” In response to the Hamlet affair, black activists formed the Committee of Thirteen, which aimed to protect African Americans in the city.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁸ American Foreign and Anti-Slavery Society. The Fugitive slave bill: Its history and unconstitutionality: with an account of the seizure and enslavement of James Hamlet, and his subsequent restoration to liberty. 3rd ed. New-York, 1850. Slavery and Anti-Slavery. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 11 July 2018. Pg. 17; “The Common Council of Chicago and the Fugitive Slave Law,” *Liberator*, Jan. 3, 1851; Blackett, *Captive’s Quest for Freedom*, 23, 163; Finkelman, “Fugitive Slave Law of 1850”; Douglas, Stephen Arnold. Speech of Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, on the ‘measures of adjustment’: delivered in the City Hall, Chicago. October 23, 1850. Washington [D.C.], 1851. Slavery and Anti-Slavery. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 28 Oct. 2018, 13-14; James A. Kraehenbruehl, “Lessons from the Past” How the Antebellum Fugitive Slave Debate Informs State Enforcement of Federal Immigration Law,” *University of Chicago Law Review* 78, no. 4 (2011), 1472; Horace K. Houston, Jr., “Another Nullification Crisis: Vermont’s 1850 Habeas Corpus Law,” *New England Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (2004), 252, 261-262; “Habeas Corpus Act in Vermont,” *Emancipator & Republican*, Dec. 12, 1850; “VERMONT versus THE FUGITIVE LAW,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Dec. 19, 1850; “The Law of Vermont Providing for the Writ of Habeas Corpus,” *NE*, Dec. 26, 1850; “The Habeas Corpus in Vermont,” *NE*, Jan. 23, 1851.

⁵⁹⁹ Blackett, *Captive’s Quest for Freedom*, 377-381; Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 126-127; May, Samuel. The fugitive slave law, and its victims. New York, 1856. Slavery and Anti-Slavery. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 2 Oct. 2018. Pg. 7-8; “The First Blood,” *NASS*, Oct. 3, 1850; “Meeting of the Colored Population – Their Denunciations of the Fugitive Slave Bill,” *NASS*, Oct. 10, 1850; Letter from Isaac T. Hopper to Samuel Wilbur regarding James Hamlet and the Fugitive Slave Act, Oct. 9, 1850. Syracuse University Libraries Special Collections Online. Syracuse, NY, accessed Jun. 16, 2020. https://scrconline.syr.edu/xtf/view?docId=metsmods/hopper_i.3419.metsmods.xml;query=fugitive%20slave;brand=scrc&searchURL=%3Fbrand%3Dscrc%26repository%3Dscrc%26keyword%3Dfugitive%252

Two months later, Henry Long, a waiter at the Pacific Hotel, was arrested under the FSA. Commissioner Charles M. Hall presided over the case which ended with Long being returned to Richmond and sold at auction. Southern whites praised Commissioner Hall's verdict. The *Natchez Courier*, for example, stated, "What we have a right to expect is the prompt rendition of slaves under the law... The case proves that in New York at least these expectations will be realized." Conversely, African Americans and white abolitionists lamented the decision to return Long to the South.⁶⁰⁰ Not long after, freedom seeker James Bolding was arrested in Poughkeepsie by US Marshal Henry Talmadge, who took him to New York City because, as reported by the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, "here the result of the case could be calculated with some certainty." Bolding was taken before Commissioner Brigham but the trial was briefly postponed because a judge issued a writ of *habeas corpus*. Yet the writ ultimately failed due to a technicality and Bolding was ordered back to the South by another commissioner. African Americans and white abolitionists secured enough funds to purchase Bolding's freedom and he returned to his family in Poughkeepsie, New York.⁶⁰¹

Aside from US marshals, corrupt police officers and city officials engaged in the recapture of slave refugees. "The arrest of Horace Preston in April 1852," writes Richard Blackett, "showed a remarkable level of collusion between the owner, city police officers, and lawyer for the claimant." The *New York Tribune* stated that Preston was seized "by a member of the Sixth Ward Police, named James Martin; the arrest was made on an utterly frivolous pretext. It was charged that he had committed a larceny [sic] – that the witness against him would be forthcoming." Preston was

0slave%26text-exclude%3Dmarcel%26text-exclude%3Dplastics%26. For more newspaper articles related to the Hamlet case, see "Slave Catching in New York," *Emancipator & Republican*, Oct. 3, 1850; "First Case under the Fugitive Slave Bill," *NS*, Oct. 3, 1850; "The Beginning of the End," *Liberator*, Oct. 4, 1850; "Slave Catching in New York – First Case under the Law," *New York Tribune*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Oct. 4, 1850; "First Case under the Fugitive Slave Bill," *NE*, Oct. 10, 1850; "Great Mass Meeting in the Park," *NASS*, Oct. 10, 1850; "Great Meeting to Repudiate the Fugitive Law," *New York Tribune*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Oct. 18, 1850; "Meetings of Colored Citizens of New York," *NS*, Oct. 24, 1850. For court documents on the Hamlet case, see MS Records of the Clerk of the Court, 1746-1932, and of the U.S. Commissioners, 1837-1860, of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. National Archives. [Slavery and Anti-Slavery](#). Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 10 Jun. 2020, 1175-1179.

⁶⁰⁰ "THE NEW YORK FUGITIVE CASE," *Natchez Courier*, Feb. 4, 1851 (quote); For more on the Long case, see "The Fugitive Slave Case," *NE*, Jan. 2, 1851; "The Case of Henry Long," *NE*, Jan. 9, 1851; "New York Slave Case," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Jan. 9, 1851; "The Long Slave Case," *NASS*, Jan. 9, 1851; "The Chivalry in their Glory," *New York Evening Post*, reprinted in *ASB*, Feb. 1, 1851; Blackett, *Captive's Quest for Freedom*, 380-384.

⁶⁰¹ "This Hunt Up In This City!," *NASS*, Aug. 28, 1851; "John Bolding," *NASS*, Sep. 4, 1851; "The New York Slave Case," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Sep. 4, 1851; "The Fugitive Slave Law Ripening," *New York Evening Post*, reprinted in *NE*, Sep. 4, 1851; "The Case of John Bolding," *FDP*, Sep. 4, 1851; "The Poughkeepsie Slave Case," *New York Evening Post*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Sep. 12, 1851; "John Bolding," *ASB*, Sep. 13, 1851; "Case of John M. Bolding," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Nov. 20, 1851; "Bolding A Free Man," *Liberator*, Nov. 21, 1851; Blackett, *Captive's Quest for Freedom*, 62-63, 69, 71-72.

later moved to the “lock-up of the Sixth Ward Station in the lower part of the Tombs” and was denied legal counsel. While imprisoned, however, the larceny charges were dropped and instead Preston was accused of being a fugitive. Preston was brought before Commissioner George Morton “in an out-of-the-way place, near the United States’ Court Rooms,” where he was denied counsel. Morton ruled against Preston, who was swiftly taken to Maryland. The *Tribune* proclaimed, “What a mockery upon the solemn ministries of the law[.]”⁶⁰²

One of the most highly publicized New York City rendition cases involved Stephen Pembroke (brother of James W.C. Pennington), who escaped from Washington County, Maryland, with his two sons, Robert and Jacob, in 1854. The freedom seekers traveled to Philadelphia and then New York City, where, as Pembroke later recalled, “we were violently arrested, secured, and taken back to the South.” Shortly after their escape, Pembroke’s enslaver, Jacob H. Grove, filed a petition with the US District Court in Maryland for his arrest. Later, another Washington County enslaver filed a petition for Pembroke’s sons. Before being removed to Maryland, the three men were brought before a federal commissioner in New York City. Pembroke recounted, “I was treated in a bad manner. I had no legal counsel, and did not know what the law was.” After a brief hearing, the federal commissioner ruled in the enslavers’ favor and ordered Pembroke’s rendition to Maryland. Later, black New Yorkers raised \$1,000 to purchase Stephen’s freedom but his sons were sold to the Lower South. Stephen returned to New York and devoted himself to the abolitionist cause.⁶⁰³

Southeastern Pennsylvania witnessed several federal rendition hearings over the decade. In October 1850, Commissioner Richard McAllister ordered the removal of two freedom seekers, Samuel Wilson, and George Brocks to Virginia. The following year, McAllister oversaw the rendition of seven more freedom seekers. Of course, federal marshals had to contend with each state’s laws regarding the recapture

⁶⁰² Blackett, *Captive’s Quest for Freedom*, 382; “New York Slave-Catchers,” *New York Tribune*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Apr. 9, 1852; “The Slave Case,” *New York Journal of Commerce*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Apr. 9, 1852; “The Late Slave Case,” *New York Tribune*, reprinted in *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Apr. 8, 1852; Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 133-134; The Horace Preston case garnered widespread coverage in the abolitionist press. For some examples, see “A Scene in a Commissioner’s Court,” *ASB*, Apr. 17, 1852; “Case of Horace Preston,” *New York Tribune*, reprinted in *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Apr. 22, 1852; “Horace Preston,” *NASS*, Apr. 15, 1852;

⁶⁰³ Blassingame (ed.), *Slave Testimony*, 167 (Pembroke quotes); Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 169-170, 173; Alexander, *African or American?*, 124-125; Blackett, *Captive’s Quest for Freedom*, 273-274; “In the Matter of the Petition of Jacob H. Grove: Petition of Jacob H. Grove, 05/25/1854” and “In the Matter of the Petition of David Smith: Petition of David Smith, 05/24/1854,” US Circuit Court for the Southern District of New York, RG 21, Records of District Courts of the United States, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Also see, “Fugitive Slave Case: Stephen Pembroke,” *Archives.gov*, accessed Oct. 11, 2018. <https://www.archives.gov/nyc/exhibit/stephen-pembroke.html>; “Three Fugitive Slaves Arrested in New York and Given Up to their Owners,” *Liberator*, Jun. 2, 1854; “Story of Stephen Pembroke,” *FDP*, Aug. 4, 1854. In the *Liberator*’s report, Stephen Pembroke and his children have the surname ‘Pennington.’

of slave refugees. In 1851, one self-emancipator had to be held “in the garret” of a local hotel because Pennsylvania law prohibited jails from being used for this purpose. In 1852, the *Harrisburg Standard* reported on a local “Man-Hunt” during which “a colored man by the name of James Phillips, who has resided here for the last fourteen years, was arrested as a fugitive slave[.]” The *Harrisburg Telegraph* claimed that Phillips was “knocked down... by one of the officers of Commissioner M[c]Allister, who approached him under a feigned proffer of a shake of the hand; and before he could recover from the blow, he was secured by the other gang of official kidnappers present, and hurried off to M[c]Allister’s office, where he underwent the sham or pretence [sic] of a trial, which lasted several hours[.]” Following the “farcical” trial, McAllister ordered Phillips’ return to Virginia.⁶⁰⁴

In Philadelphia, Commissioner Edward D. Ingraham oversaw numerous rendition hearings and regularly sided with southern enslavers. In January 1851, Stephen Bennet was arrested in Columbia, Lancaster County, and taken to Philadelphia, where he was brought before Ingraham. Although a writ of *habeas corpus* was obtained from the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, Bennett was ordered South. Fortunately, friends and allies in Pennsylvania later purchased his freedom for \$350. Six months later, Daniel Hawkins of Columbia was arrested and taken before Edward Ingraham, who ordered his rendition to Baltimore. In October, Deputy Marshal Henry H. Kline brought Henry Pogue before Ingraham. He contended that Pogue had escaped from his enslaver in Cecil County, Maryland, to the Northern Liberties in Philadelphia. Once again, Ingraham approved the rendition. In early 1853, the *Wilmington Journal* reported that Charles Wesley, “was brought before the US Commissioner for a hearing... Failing to establish anything adverse to the claim of his master, which was clearly proven, he was delivered up; and placed in the hands of the US Marshal, to be conveyed to his owner.”⁶⁰⁵

Slave catchers, kidnappers, and police officers in the Mason-Dixon borderland sought to exploit the FSA for financial gain. In December 1850, George F. Alberti and two accomplices seized Adam Gibson without a warrant and forced him to Commissioner Ingraham’s office at gunpoint. The men alleged that Gibson was a self-emancipator from Cecil County, Maryland. Although Alberti and his men

⁶⁰⁴ Blackett, *Making Freedom*, 35- 37; Blackett, *Captive’s Quest for Freedom*, 53-54; “The Man-Hunt in Pennsylvania,” *Harrisburg Standard*, reprinted in *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Jun. 3, 1852; “ANOTHER FUGITIVE SLAVE CASE,” *Advocate* (Buffalo, NY), Aug. 21, 1851; “Another Slave Case,” *Harrisburg Telegraph*, reprinted in *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Jun. 3, 1852.

⁶⁰⁵ “Another Victim!,” *Portland Inquirer*, Jan. 30, 1851; “The Man-Hunt,” *NASS*, Jan. 30, 1851; “New Fugitive Slave Law,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Jan. 30, 1851; “The Fugitive Slave Case in Philadelphia,” *ASB*, Feb. 8, 1851; “Fugitive Slave Case,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Jul. 24, 1851; “More Slave-Hunting in Philadelphia,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Jul. 28, 1853; “Seizure of Another Victim,” *Rhode Island Freeman*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Aug. 5, 1851; “From Philadelphia,” *Indiana State Sentinel*, Oct. 30, 1851; “Another Fugitive Slave Case,” *Bulletin*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Nov. 1, 1851; “FUGITIVE SLAVE DELIVERED UP,” *Wilmington Journal*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Feb. 18, 1853.

presented no evidence to corroborate their story, Ingraham remanded Gibson under the FSA. African Americans and white abolitionists gathered at the courthouse to protest Gibson's arrest. The *Standard* claimed, "Police Marshal Keyser's strong posse preserved the peace, and prevented any attempt at rescue." Ultimately, Ingraham dismissed their claims and ordered the defendant's removal from the state. Later, Maryland enslaver William S. Knight informed the authorities that Gibson was the wrong man. He was subsequently released and returned to Philadelphia. Meanwhile, Alberti and others were later tried and convicted for kidnapping.⁶⁰⁶

While most rendition cases involved male freedom seekers, women were also threatened with re-enslavement under the FSA. In 1851, Euphemia Williams was arrested in Philadelphia and "brought before US Commissioner Ingraham, upon a charge of being a fugitive from labor." It was alleged that Williams was a self-emancipator named 'Mahala' who had escaped from Worcester County, Maryland twenty years earlier. Williams was later released from custody after it was proven that she was a free woman. In response, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* claimed that the case "reveals the iniquity of the Fugitive Slave Law in a striking manner." Commissioners McAllister, Ingraham, and others evoked serious anger among African Americans, white abolitionists, and even northern whites. In October, a report from the meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society of Pennsylvania stated that they "have rendered their names pre-eminently infamous, by the indecent readiness with which they have performed the odious function of their office. Destitute of moral sense, and devoid of all proper feeling of shame, they have made themselves the [Judas] Iscariots of their day and generation."⁶⁰⁷

Farther north, New England witnessed several rendition cases over the early 1850s. In Boston, several high-profile episodes took place in the first half of the decade. Thomas Sims, a freedom seeker from Georgia, was arrested on April 3, 1851,

⁶⁰⁶ Blackett, *Captive's Quest for Freedom*, 54-56; James Mott, "Interesting Slave Case," *Liberator*, Mar. 22, 1839; "Another Fugitive Slave Case in Philadelphia," *NASS*, Dec. 26, 1850; Carol Wilson, *Freedom At Risk*, 52-53; "Kidnapping in Philadelphia," *NASS*, Jan. 2, 1851; "Commissioner Ingraham," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Jan. 2, 1851; "Is It Ignorance or Falsehood," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Jan. 2, 1851; "Not the Right Man," *NE*, Jan. 2, 1851; "Slave Cases," *NE*, Jan. 2, 1851; "Capture of a Fugitive Slave in Philadelphia," *Liberator*, Jan. 3, 1851; "Discharged," *Natchez Courier*, Jan. 7, 1851; "The Conspiracy Case," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Jan. 9, 1851; "Case of Adam Gibson," *Liberator*, Jan. 17, 1851; Pinsker, "After 1850," 102; Lubet, *Fugitive Justice*, 56-57; Farrow, Lang, and Frank, *Complicity*, 152; Nat Brandt and Yanna Brandt, *In the Shadow of the Civil War: Passmore Williamson and the Rescue of Jane Johnson* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 66; "Anniversary Meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society of Pennsylvania, at Westchester," *New York Herald*, reprinted in *NASS*, Oct. 16, 1851. For more on the trial and conviction of George F. Alberti, see Peter A. Browne, *A Review of the Trial, Conviction, and Sentence, of George F. Alberti, for Kidnapping* (Philadelphia: No Publisher, 1851), accessed May 11, 2020. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2001615798/>.

⁶⁰⁷ "Another Important Slave Case," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Feb. 13, 1851 (first quote); "Another Slave-Hunt in Philadelphia," *NASS*, Feb. 13, 1851; Samuel J. May, *The Fugitive Slave Law and Its Victims* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1861), 14; Charlene Mires, *Independence Hall in American Memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 96..

by City Marshal Francis Tukey, and police officers Asa O. Butman and Alfred Sleeper. The three men drummed up phony charges of disorderly conduct and theft of a watch. The presiding commissioner ordered Sims removal to Georgia. According to Stephen Puleo, over 100 police officers “armed with double-edged Roman swords” ensured Sims’ removal to Boston harbor, where he was placed on a ship to the South. The *Portland Inquirer* described Butman as “the staunchest hound for the operation of running down the fugitive.” In August 1852, an author stated in the *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* that Francis Tukey “made himself extra officious in the kidnapping of poor Simms [sic]. He knew he was acting illegally; yet he did it to please his masters... the Southern Cottonocracy.” Further rendition hearings took place in the Bay City over the next few years. However, as will be shown later, these were met with significant resistance.⁶⁰⁸

The Old Northwest was not exempt from the FSA’s influence. Cincinnati, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Chicago, and other locales witnessed several landmark slave refugee rendition hearings. One of the most notable trials involved John Freeman, a black man in Indianapolis. Freeman worked as a painter and eventually accumulated enough funds to purchase four acres of land. In June 1853, he was arrested in the city acting under the FSA. Missouri enslaver Pleasant Ellington claimed that Freeman had escaped from his service. The *Indiana Free Democrat* wrote, “The manner of Freeman’s arrest and the insolence of the claimant had no tendency to prevent excitement. The cowardly officers who arrested him, did so by resorting, as usual in such cases, to falsehood and deception.”⁶⁰⁹ The case was soon brought before Commissioner Squire Sullivan. Freeman’s legal team petitioned successfully petitioned for a writ of *habeas corpus* for Freeman and requested additional time to build their case. In response, Sullivan gave the men nine weeks to prepare. Furthermore, friends of Freeman petitioned Sullivan for Freeman’s release on bail. For nine weeks, Freeman sat in his jail cell, waiting as his legal team set about preparing his defense. Commissioner Sullivan ultimately sided with Freeman and

⁶⁰⁸ Gordon S. Barker, *Fugitive Slaves and the Unfinished American Revolution: Eight Cases, 1848-1856* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2013), 56-57; Blackett, *Captive’s Quest for Freedom*, 413; Stephen Puleo, *A City So Grand: The Rise of an American Metropolis, Boston 1850-1900* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 16; “Man-Stealing in Boston,” *Portland Inquirer* (Portland, ME), Apr. 10, 1851; N. N., “The Story of A Tool,” *FDP*, Aug. 6, 1852.

⁶⁰⁹ “The Case of John Freeman,” *Indiana Free Democrat*, reprinted in *NE*, Jul. 14, 1853. For more on the Freeman case, see Melissa Burlock, “9 Weeks a Fugitive Slave: The 1853 Fugitive Slave Case of Mr. John Freeman,” *Hoosier State Chronicles*, Jul. 22, 2014. <https://blog.newspapers.library.in.gov/in-print-and-on-the-map-articles-in-the-indiana-digital-historic-newspaper-database-and-corresponding-historical-markers-2/>; Blackett, *Captive’s Quest for Freedom*, 211-215. Also see Chris Walker, “The Fugitive Slave Case of John Freeman and its Influence on Indiana Politics,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 114, no. 1 (2018), 1-38.

ordered his release. The case illustrated the vulnerable position of African Americans in the former Northwest Territory, even those from middle-class backgrounds.⁶¹⁰

In August 1853, George Washington McQuerry, a freedom seeker from Kentucky, was arrested by US Marshals at his home in Piqua, Ohio, and brought before Judge John McClean in Cincinnati. The *Evansville Daily Journal* reported, "The colored people assembled in large numbers around the Galt House where the fugitive was guarded by the US Deputy Marshal and a posse of police." McQuerry's defense team was led by James G. Birney and John Joliffe. Ultimately, Justice McClean ruled against McQuerry's and sanctioned his removal from the state. The *Frederick Douglass' Paper* claimed that McClean "talks like a counsel for the claimant, more than like a just, learned, and impartial judge."⁶¹¹ In March 1855, Rosetta Armstead was being transported from Kentucky to Virginia by her enslaver's agent, Jones Miller, when their boat docked in Cincinnati. Unable to travel via the river due to heavy ice, Miller resolved to complete the journey by train. In the meantime, Cincinnati blacks alerted friends in Columbus to their imminent arrival. Anti-slavery lawyers obtained a writ of *habeas corpus* for Armstead from the Franklin County Probate Court. Judge William Jamison ruled that Armstead was

⁶¹⁰ There is a wealth of newspaper accounts on John Freeman case. See "A fugitive slave case is on at Indianapolis," (Terre Haute) *Wabash Express*, Jun. 29, 1853; "The Indianapolis fugitive slave case," *Daily State Sentinel*, Jun. 29, 1853; "Fugitive Slave Case," (Indiana) *Weekly Reveille*, Jun. 30, 1853; "THE DIFFERENCE," *Daily State Sentinel*, Jun. 30, 1853; "The Fugitive Slave Case at Indianapolis," *Terre-Haute Journal*, Jul. 1, 1853; "Fugitive Slave Case," *Wabash Courier*, Jul. 2, 1853; "A fugitive slave case," *Prairie Chieftain* (Monticello, IN), Jul. 7, 1853; "Fire in the Rear," *Daily State Sentinel*, Jul. 16, 1853; "An Interesting Case," *NE*, Jul. 21, 1853 "FUGITIVE SLAVE CASE AT INDIANAPOLIS," *Wabash Express*, Jul. 27, 1853; "An Affecting Scene," *Weekly Reveille*, Aug. 4, 1853; "The Fugitive Slave Case," *Plymouth Banner*, Aug. 4, 1853; "Fugitive Slave Case at Indianapolis," *Terre-Haute Journal*, Aug. 5, 1853; "RELEASE OF FREEMAN," *Daily State Sentinel*, Aug. 19, 1853; "The Indiana Slave Case," *Daily Cleveland Herald*, Sep. 1, 1853; "Freeman Released," *Crawfordsville Weekly Journal*, Sep. 1, 1853; "FREEMAN RELEASED," *Wabash Courier*, Sep. 3, 1853; "The fugitive slave case," (Indiana) *Weekly Reveille*, Sep. 8, 1853; "Freeman is Free," *Indiana American* (Brookville, IN), Sep. 9, 1853; "Statement," *Crawfordsville Weekly Journal*, Jan. 19, 1854; "John Freeman," *Liberator*, Apr. 14, 1854; "FREEMAN CASE," *Wabash Courier*, May 13, 1854; "John Freeman, An Alleged Fugitive," *Friends' Review*, Jun. 10, 1854.

⁶¹¹ Middleton, "Fugitive Slave Crisis in Cincinnati," 27-28; Catterall, *Judicial Cases*, 15; "Cincinnati, Aug. 16, P. M.," *Evansville Daily Journal*, Aug. 19, 1853 (quote); "Washington McQuerry Handed over to the Tormentors by Judge McClean," *FDP*, Aug. 26, 1853 (quote). For more contemporary newspaper accounts of the McQuerry Case, see "Fugitive Slave Case," *Daily State Sentinel*, Aug. 20, 1853; "Fugitive Slave Case," *Daily State Sentinel*, Aug. 23, 1853; "ANOTHER FUGITIVE CASE," *NE*, Aug. 25, 1853; "Accursed Be the Union!," *Liberator*, Aug. 26, 1853; "Fugitive Slave at Cincinnati," *Indiana American*, Aug. 26, 1853; "Judge McLean's Opinion," *ASB*, Aug. 27, 1853; "JUDGE MCLEAN'S DECISION," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Sep. 1, 1853; "Decision of Judge McClean," *FDP*, Sep. 2, 1853; "Fugitive Slave Case at Cincinnati," *Plymouth Banner*, Sep. 8, 1853; "The Fugitive Slave Bill at the South," *FDP*, Dec. 30, 1853; "Underground Railroad," *Cincinnati Unionist*, reprinted in *ASR*, May 1, 1854.

entitled to her freedom having been brought to a free state. Given her age, she was placed under the guardianship of Ohio abolitionist Lewis G. Van Slyke.⁶¹²

Armstead's enslaver traveled to Cincinnati and secured a warrant for her arrest. Shortly after, she was arrested in Columbus as a fugitive. The *Frederick Douglass' Paper* reported that she was "pounced upon by two ruffians, or rather three, including the United States Commissioner of Cincinnati... and hurried into the jaws of slavery." Fortunately, Van Slyke obtained another writ, and Armstead was freed. After the trial, Armstead moved to New England. The Armstead episode inflamed sectional tensions and exacerbated concerns over state sovereignty. "The seizure of the girl by the Marshal," claimed the *Ohio State Journal*, "... brings up the question of jurisdiction between the U. States and the State of Ohio... the point we wish to bring to the consideration of the People of Ohio is this: Whether they can, or will, submit to have the decisions of the State Courts trodden under foot by officers of the United States." Likewise, the *National Era* declared, "It is high time that Ohio, like Michigan, Vermont, and Connecticut, should guard the rights of her inhabitants by a Personal Liberty Law, and make provision for the punishment of kidnapping, whether attempted by constable or marshal."⁶¹³

The case of Margaret Garner was one of the most notorious cases carried out under the new FSA. In January 1856, Garner escaped from Boone County, Kentucky, with her husband and children to Cincinnati. After the family was discovered by a group of southern whites and federal marshals, Garner killed her two-year-old daughter rather than see her returned to slavery. She was charged with murder by the Cincinnati police, but Kentucky and federal officials sought her rendition under the FSA. Garner was taken before Commissioner Pendery, who ruled

⁶¹² Lily Birkhimer, "The Rosetta Armstead Case: A Fight for Freedom," last modified Feb. 12, 2016. <http://www.ohiohistoryhost.org/ohiomemory/archives/2628>; May, *The Fugitive Slave Law and Its Victims*, 43-44; Blackett, *Captive's Quest for Freedom*, 247-248; Hudson, *Fugitive Slaves*, 141-143.

⁶¹³ "The Columbus Slave Case," *FDP*, Mar. 30, 1855; "State Rights," *Ohio State Journal*, Apr. 4, 1855; "Conflict of Principles," *NE*, Apr. 5, 1855. For more newspaper articles on the Rosetta Armstead case, see "The Rosetta Case," *Ohio State Journal*, Apr. 4, 1855; "The Slave Rosetta Discharged by Judge Parker," *Ohio State Journal*, Apr. 4, 1855; "Decision of Judge Parker in the Case of Rosetta Armstead," *Cincinnati Gazette*, Mar. 31, 1855, reprinted in *Ohio State Journal*, Apr. 4, 1855; "ROSETTA AGAIN ARRESTED," *ASB*, Mar. 31, 1855; "The case of Rosetta Armstead..." *Fremont Journal*, Mar. 30, 1851; "THE SLAVE ROSETTA," *Belmont Chronicle* (St. Clairsville, OH), Apr. 5, 1855; "Cincinnati, April 2," *Advocate* (Buffalo, NY), Apr. 5, 1855; "The Rosetta Case," *Carroll Free Press*, Apr. 5, 1855; "The Rosetta Slave Case," *Fremont Journal*, Apr. 6, 1855; "CASE OF ROSETTA ON A WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS," *Cincinnati Gazette*, reprinted in *ASB*, Apr. 7, 1855; "Rosetta Armstead Free," *Carroll Free Press*, Apr. 12, 1855; "Alleged Contempt of the U.S. Marshal," *McArthur Democrat* (McArthur, OH), Apr. 13, 1855; "Habeas Corpus for Rosetta – The U.S. Marshal Refuses to Produce the Body – Committed for Contempt!" *Spirit of the Times* (Ironton, OH), Apr. 17, 1855; "THE ROSETTA CASE – HER DISCHARGE BY COMMISSIONER PENDERY," *Western Reserve Chronicle and Weekly Transcript of the Times* (Warren, OH), Apr. 18, 1855; "Good for Rosetta," *Ohio State Journal*, reprinted in *Liberator*, May 4, 1855; "Rosetta Armstead..." *NASS*, May 5, 1855; "Presentation of a Silver Pitcher," *ASB*, Aug. 4, 1855; "The Slave Cases – Interesting Items," *NE*, Apr. 12, 1855; Blackett, *Captive's Quest for Freedom*, 247-248.



Figure 16: Margaret Garner Arrest

Source: "The Modern Medea – the story of Margaret Garner [Margaret Garner, a slave who escaped from Kentucky to Ohio; her 4 children, 2 of which she killed so they would not have to endure slavery, lying dead on the floor; and 4 men who pursued her]. 1867." Library of Congress (Washington, DC). LC-USZ62-84545. Accessed Jan. 15, 2020. <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/99614263/>.

against Garner and ordered that she be removed to Kentucky. The ruling was widely condemned by African Americans and white abolitionists throughout the North. Henry C. Wright claimed that Ohio "has acquiesced in the surrender of Margaret Garner and her children to slavery. The Constitution and laws and Union demanded it, and the heart of the people sanctioned it. If that heart had been sound and true to its own ideal of right, it would have rallied around her and rescued her."⁶¹⁴

Sara Lucy Bagby was the last slave refugee tried under the FSA. Born in Virginia, she fled from her enslaver to Cleveland in late 1860, where she took refuge among the city's black community. Three months later, Bagby was arrested and committed to the local jail. A local judge, D.R. Tilden, issued a writ of *habeas corpus* for Bagby and she was subsequently released. Not long after, Bagby was taken before

⁶¹⁴ Harrold, *Border War*, 156-157; Henry C. Wright, "Letter from Henry C. Wright," *Liberator*, Apr. 11, 1856; "THE CASE OF MARGARET GARNER," *Cincinnati Gazette*, reprinted in NASS, Apr. 26, 1856. For more on the Garner case, see Taylor, *Driven Toward Madness*; Weisenburger, *Modern Medea*; and Frederickson and Walters (eds.), *Gendered Resistance*.

Commissioner White, who ordered Bagby's rendition to Wheeling. She was guided through the city under heavy guard, notes Richard Blackett, in case anyone attempted to rescue the freedom seeker. African Americans and white abolitionists were outraged by Bagby's rendition. "Southern fury still burns," wrote the *Liberator*, "and the North shrinks before it."⁶¹⁵

Although the FSA 1850 initially seemed like a success, its long-term impact was limited for several reasons. First, those who were re-enslaved under the federal statute represented but a very small proportion of the thousands of slave refugees in the North. Indeed, Richard Blackett writes, "When measured by how effective it was in returning runaways, the law left a great deal to be desired." Additionally, the FSA failed to deter enslaved people from escaping to the North. Foner estimates that over 1,000 slave refugees passed through New York City in the 1850s. Newspapers continued to report the arrival of freedom seekers over the decade. "Many slaves in Hampshire [C]ounty, Va.," claimed the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* in October 1851, "are making the present a season of "grand rush" towards Pennsylvania for what they term *freedom*["]." In July 1853, the *Cincinnati Courier* reported that ten freedom seekers escaped from Newport, Kentucky, to neighboring Cincinnati with assistance from free people of color.⁶¹⁶

Enforcement of the FSA was also hindered by the refusal of northern police officers, state officials, and militia to engage in the recapture of freedom seekers. In December 1854, the *Liberator* reported that a federal marshal in Chicago "endeavored to summon the *posse comitatus*" to arrest seventeen freedom seekers from Missouri. "The military companies were ordered out," the newspaper claimed, "but only one responded to the order." Eventually, the freedom seekers made their way from Chicago to Canada. In January 1855, several militia members in Illinois voiced their opposition to the federal law. In the *Chicago Tribune*, one member of the Chicago Militia stated, "I have no patience with men who will so prostitute the high calling of a soldier, as to lend themselves to capturing persons fleeing from slavery... When I took the arms of a soldier, it was not to do such dishonorable business as negro hunting – it was not that I might be made a bloodhound. And before I will submit to degradation, I will lay down my arms."⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁵ "ARREST OF A FUGITIVE SLAVE IN CLEVELAND," *ASB*, Jan. 16, 1861; "The Human Sacrifice!," *Liberator*, Mar. 8, 1861; Blackett, *Captive's Quest for Freedom*, 263-265.

⁶¹⁶ Blackett, *Captives Quest for Freedom*, 40; Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 150; "Runaways," *NASS*, Oct. 16, 1851; "ESCAPE OF SLAVES," *Cincinnati Courier*, reprinted in *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Jul. 7, 1853; Blackett, *Captive's Quest for Freedom*, 314-315. In his classic study, Stanley W. Campbell places the total number of self-emancipators returned under the FSA 1850 at 332. See Stanley W. Campbell, *The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 1970.

⁶¹⁷ "Slave Excitement – Military Called Out," *Liberator*, Dec. 15, 1854; "THE CHICAGO MILITIA," *Chicago Tribune*, reprinted in *ASB*, Jan. 6, 1855.

Roughly 125 federal rendition hearings took place between 1850 and 1861, a relatively small number considering the number of freedom seekers that escaped to the northern US and Canada over the period. On average, eleven hearings were held each year, but most took place in the first half of the decade. According to Steven Lubet, roughly twenty-five percent of all documented rendition hearings under the FSA were held in the fifteen months after its passage, making it “the single most active year for fugitive renditions during the entire decade before the Civil War.”⁶¹⁸ Moreover, only a handful of abolitionists were tried under the FSA. In 1852, Calvin Fairbank was arrested and charged with aiding a self-emancipator named Tamar. He received a fifteen-year prison sentence. Two years later, Delia Webster was arrested in Madison, Indiana, for assisting black freedom seekers from Kentucky. Webster was later cleared of all charges and released from custody. Frederick Douglass, Samuel Ringgold Ward, William Still, David Ruggles, Harriet Tubman, and countless prominent figures evaded arrest.⁶¹⁹ “In some parts of the North,” writes Eric Foner, “the Fugitive Slave Law quickly became unenforceable.” In 1861, the *Chicago Times* reported that it “was impossible to execute the Fugitive Slave Law. Fugitives were protected, and welcomed with unseemly warmth[.]”⁶²⁰ Aside from the refusal of northern whites, police officers, city councils, and judges to comply with the law, direct (and violent) acts of anti-slavery violence explains the FSA 1850’s limitations. The next section will examine extra-legal resistance and anti-slavery violence.

Rescues, Anti-Slavery Violence, and Extra-Legal Resistance to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850

By the 1850s, African Americans and white abolitionists displayed a greater willingness to resist southern enslavers, slave catchers, and even federal marshals by force. African Americans and white activists rushed courthouses, jails, and even federal commissioners’ offices to rescue captured freedom seekers. In some cases, they even resorted to killing enslavers and slave catchers in self-defense. Slave refugee rescues were most commonplace and widely publicized in the decade before the Civil War. Robert Churchill argues that rescues were “a relatively rare phenomenon prior to the 1840s[.]”⁶²¹ The passage of the FSA was a watershed

⁶¹⁸ Pinsker, “After 1850”; Lubet, *Fugitive Justice*, 157.

⁶¹⁹ Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 396-399.

⁶²⁰ Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, 130; “The Negro Exodus,” *Chicago Times*, reprinted in *Joliet Signal* (Joliet, IL), Apr. 16, 1861.

⁶²¹ Robert H. Churchill, “Fugitive Slave Rescues in the North: Toward a Geography of Antislavery Violence,” *Ohio Valley History* 14, no. 2 (2014), 55. For more on anti-slavery violence in the antebellum North, see Robert H. Churchill, “When the Slave Catchers Came to Town: Cultures of Violence along

moment in this regard. “The law,” contends Kellie Carter Jackson, “did something quite remarkable for the abolitionist movement, and in particular, African Americans: it made violence a necessary alternative.”⁶²² African Americans and white abolitionists employed civil disobedience and anti-slavery violence to protect slave refugees. Anti-slavery violence transformed parts of the North into virtually impenetrable terrain. While the North-South borderlands were more favorable territory for enslavers, black and white abolitionists in these locales also mounted forms of violent, extra-legal resistance.⁶²³

The Christiana Resistance (also known as the Christiana ‘Riot’) is one of the most documented cases. In 1849, four freedom seekers escaped from Maryland to Christiana, Pennsylvania. Two years later, enslaver Edward Gorsuch and an armed gang arrived in Christiana with a warrant to procure his formerly enslaved people. Gorsuch learned that the self-emancipators were hiding on the residence of local black farmer William Parker and promptly made their way there. Parker and almost forty other African Americans assembled and resolved to resist the enslavers by force. As soon as Gorsuch and his mob arrived, alongside a federal marshal, Parker and the others leaped into action. Armed and ready to fight, they rushed Gorsuch’s group with the intent of forcing them out of town. Gorsuch was murdered amidst the fray. Parker and his family fled the scene and escaped to Canada.⁶²⁴

In the aftermath, African Americans and white abolitionists voiced their support for the rescuers. Theodore Parker wrote, “I am deeply rejoiced at the fact that the Negroes shot down the kidnappers at Christiana, and wish they had done so in Boston and every where [sic] else.”⁶²⁵ The *Anti-Slavery Bugle* claimed that the four

the Underground Railroad,” *Journal of American History* 105, no. 3 (2018), 514-537; and Churchill, *The Underground Railroad and the Geography of Violence*.

⁶²² Kellie Carter Jackson, *Force and Freedom: Black Abolitionists and the Politics of Violence* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 49.

⁶²³ Churchill distinguishes between “three different regions” in the geopolitical landscape of antislavery violence: the ‘borderlands’; the ‘Contested North’; and the ‘Free Soil North.’ In the borderlands, Churchill argues that “slave catchers freely acted according to southern norms of pro-slavery violence, and most white residents and local officials accepted these norms.” Meanwhile, the Free Soil North (namely the Upper North) “comprised a distinctive free soil region marked by consistent and collective resistance to the recovery of fugitive slaves.” Lastly, the Contested North represented “a broad middle-ground” in which resistance to recapturing freedom seekers “lacked the consistency, publicity, and political resonance that characterized resistance in the free soil region.” Although it is a useful distinction between different regions, this dissertation disagrees with the term ‘Free Soil North’ as officially the whole North was officially ‘free’ soil. See Churchill, “Fugitive Slave Rescues in the North,” 56-60; Churchill, “When the Slave Catchers Came to Town.”

⁶²⁴ Jackson, *Force and Freedom*, 54-58; Lubet, *Fugitive Justice*, 51-65; Don Papson and Tom Calarco, *Secret Lives of the Underground Railroad in New York City: Sydney Howard Gay, Louis Napoleon, and the Record of Fugitives* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2015), 79-81; “Christiana Hero is in Canada,” *VF*, reprinted in *FDP*, Jun. 14, 1852. For a comprehensive history of the Christiana Riot, see Thomas P. Slaughter, *Bloody Dawn: The Christiana Riot and Racial Violence in the Antebellum North* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁶²⁵ Theodore Parker to Samuel J. May, 2 Oct. 1851. Theodore Parker Papers. Reel 2, Vol. 6. MHS. Boston, MA.

men simply “defended themselves like *men*,” and stated, “Here are slave hunters from the South; they beat about in free settlements; insult colored men, men who are free; and if the slave hunters kill any blacks, no commitments follow, no United States troops are ordered out to keep order, no Commissioners and Marshals come to the rescue[.]” White Southerners were incensed and demanded the conviction of every activist involved in the Christiana Resistance. The *Baltimore Sun* wrote “It is an outrage of no ordinary character, and one that has filled our community with a melancholy gloom. The law of the land... has been wantonly and openly violated, and the death of one, if not more of the best citizens of Maryland, has been the consequence.”⁶²⁶

Pennsylvania Governor William F. Johnson sought to defuse the situation. He assured southern whites that Gorsuch’s killers “will be punished in its severest penalty by the law of Pennsylvania... The people of [Lancaster County] are men of peace and good order... They will detect, as they have done in this case, and arrest and punish, all who violate the laws of the land.” Forty-one activists were indicted for treason. Yet only Castner Hanway, a white miller, stood trial for his role in the affair. African Americans and white abolitionists voiced their support for the Christiana heroes. Isaac T. Hopper claimed that the accused men were merely acting in self-defense. “It is a lamentable state of things,” he wrote, “when we see men who are intelligent, and good citizens in their private relations, ready to cry out against another class of their fellow-citizens and denounce them as traitors, murderous and felons, to gratify political ambition.”⁶²⁷

Maryland’s Attorney General Robert J. Brent was greatly dismayed by what he perceived as anti-southern bias. He claimed that the prosecution experienced “great difficulty, because from the most satisfactory information in our power, we believed that a large majority of the appearing jurors were unfavourable [sic] to a conviction[.]” Brent called the outcome of the Hanway case a “monstrous verdict, full of lies and calumny towards the dead[.]” He urged the Maryland General Assembly to take “further action... to arrest this legalized butchery of our innocent

⁶²⁶ “Treason – The Slave Act – The Army,” *ASB*, Sep. 20, 1851. For more reports on the Christiana Riot, see “New Man-Hunting Atrocities at Harrisburg,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Oct. 2, 1851; “GREAT RIOT: Awful Loss of Life in an Attempt to Capture Fugitive Slaves,” *Sun*, Sep. 13, 1851;

⁶²⁷ William F. Johnson, “The Riot at Christiana,” *Liberator*, Sep. 26, 1851; Lubet, *Fugitive Justice*, 52; “The Pennsylvania Riot – Was It Treason,” House Divided: The Civil War Research Engine at Dickinson College, <http://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/1734>. Accessed Jul. 17, 2018. For a thorough analysis of the Christiana treason trials, see Lubet, *Fugitive Justice*, 66-139. Also see Hanway, Castner. A history of the trial of Castner Hanway and others for treason: at Philadelphia in November, 1851: with an introduction upon the history of the slave question. Philadelphia, 1852. *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 17 July 2018.

citizens, who are invited by the General Government, to cross State lines, in pursuit of their property.”⁶²⁸



Figure 17: Illustration of the Christiana Resistance, September 1851

Source: Still, *Underground Rail Road*, 350. Obtained via Library Company of Philadelphia, accessed Jan. 31, 2020.

<https://digital.librarycompany.org/islandora/object/Islandora%3A2824>.

In September 1853, A similar episode occurred in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Three federal marshals arrested Bill Thomas, a self-emancipator from Virginia who worked at the Phoenix Hotel. Thomas defended himself with a fork and branding knife and fled the scene to the Susquehanna River. The officers fired into the Susquehanna to scare him out. Around the same time, a group of residents assembled at the scene to challenge the marshals. In the end, Thomas evaded being captured by traveling up the river. The *New York Tribune* proclaimed, “You cannot overstate the barbarity of the scene, the excitement of the people or the Ferocity of the slave catchers[.]” Local activists initiated a legal suit against the US Marshals. However, Justice Robert Grier cleared the officers of all charges. In June 1854, *Christian Advocate* declared, “The whole affair has done more toward making that

⁶²⁸ Maryland. Attorney General’s Office. Report of Attorney General Brent to His Excellency Gov. Lowe in relation to the Christiana treason trials: in the Circuit Court of the United States held at Philadelphia. Annapolis [Md.], 1852. *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 17 July 2018. Pp. 4-5, 17-18.

law odious, and stirring up an anti-slavery feeling in this section of Pennsylvania, than all the abolition demonstrations there have ever done.”⁶²⁹

New England saw several rescues over the decade. Few locales resisted the FSA more than Boston. In February 1851, Shadrach Minkins was apprehended by federal marshals under the new statute. African Americans and white abolitionists in the city were shocked and appalled. Jonathan Daniel Wells writes that “Word of Shadrach’s seizure crashed upon the shores of Boston’s black community.”⁶³⁰ African Americans and white abolitionists quickly mobilized to liberate him. His defense team petitioned for a writ of *habeas corpus* which was swiftly rejected. As the case headed to trial, Lewis Hayden and his associates formulated a plan to liberate Minkins. During the proceedings, they stormed the courtroom, wrested Minkins from his captors, and fled the scene. Minkins was concealed in the city as police officers sought his whereabouts. UGRR agents managed to secure Minkins’ passage to Montreal, Lower Canada.⁶³¹

Three years later, Anthony Burns was arrested in the city under the FSA and secured in the courthouse. The *Liberator* wrote that a mass gathering at Faneuil Hall “was filled to overflowing, with the people of Boston and its vicinity, to consider what steps should be taken to save Massachusetts from the disgrace of having a man who claimed the protection of her laws, taken by violence from her metropolis, and consigned to perpetual slavery.” The crowd chanted “Fight, fight!” throughout the evening. Delegates at the meeting resolved, “That the time has come to declare and to demonstrate the fact, that no slaveholder can carry his prey from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.” Emphasizing their sense of Christian duty, they proclaimed, “it is the will of God that every man should be free; we will as God wills; God’s will be done.”⁶³²

⁶²⁹ William C. Kasthaus, ““In Immortal Splendor””: Wilkes-Barre’s Fugitive Slave Case of 1853,” *Pennsylvania Heritage* (2008), 24-31; Harrold, *Border War*, 147-148; “A Scene of Cruelty and Bloodshed,” *New York Tribune*, reprinted in *Hillsdale Standard*, Sep. 20, 1853; “THE WILKESBARRE SLAVE CASE,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Oct. 13, 1853; “Wilkesbarre Slave Case,” *New York Tribune*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Oct. 14, 1853; J. Mitchell, “THE WILKESBARRE CASE – THE TESTIMONY,” *Daily Register*, reprinted in *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Oct. 20, 1853; “Judicial Decorum and Impartiality,” *Liberator*, Oct. 21, 1853; “Judicial Diabolism,” *Liberator*, Oct. 22, 1853; “The Wilkesbarre Outrage,” *New York Evening Post*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Oct. 28, 1853; “The Wilkesbarre Tragedy – Judge Grier’s Opinion,” *Carson League*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Nov. 4, 1853; “The Wilkesbarre Slave Case,” *Liberator*, Nov. 4, 1853; “SPROUTINGS OF GRIER SEED,” *Non-Slaveholder*, Dec. 9, 1853; “THE WILKESBARRE FUGITIVE SLAVE CASE,” *Philadelphia Register*, reprinted in *ASB*, Feb. 25, 1854; “STATE RIGHTS,” *ASB*, Dec. 23, 1854; George Peck, “LETTER FROM DR. PECK,” *ASB*, Jun. 10, 1854.

⁶³⁰ Wells, *Blind No More*, 98.

⁶³¹ For the most comprehensive account of Shadrach Minkins’ life, arrest, and escape, see Collison, *Shadrach Minkins*; Kantrowitz, *More than Freedom*, 184-215; Bearse, *Reminiscences* (this source also covers other prominent slave refugee rescues in Boston during the 1850s).

⁶³² “THE SLAVE POWER IN BOSTON,” *Rhode Island Freeman*, Jun. 2, 1854; “GREAT MEETING IN FANUEIL HALL,” *Liberator*, Jun. 2, 1854.

Boston was a city on edge during the Burns' rendition hearings. The federal government took action to prevent the outbreak of anti-slavery violence. Most notably, US troops were stationed around the courthouse to ensure that the rendition hearing went ahead without incident. Tracy Patch Cheever recalled that "a crowd of people, including negroes, negro wenches and red-hot abolitionists, had been gathered around the Court House... The general feeling of Boston citizens is a strong desire that he may escape from his master & the officers, and reach Canada[.]" At one stage, an armed group led by Lewis Hayden rushed the courthouse and attempted to liberate Burns. The group was repelled by federal troops and the hearings went ahead.⁶³³

For many, the Burns hearings were a sham. African Americans and white abolitionists believed that the outcome had been decided in advance. Mary E. Blanchard noted that a "steamer was in readiness at L wharf... and gave General Edmands discretionary powers to keep the peace of the city." Soldiers lined the streets between the courthouse and the harbor, and preparations were made for Burns to be escorted by troops to the ship. Commissioner Edward Loring ruled against Burns and ordered his removal from the state. The *Liberator* accused Loring of "devilish intent" and "unmitigated scoundrelism." Black activists and white abolitionists in the Bay City voiced their anger over the ruling. Meanwhile, thirty female abolitionists in Woburn, Massachusetts compared Commissioner Loring to Judas Iscariot. "In imitation of the arch apostate," they claimed, "you have sold Christ in the person of Anthony Burns." Despite some efforts to obstruct the process, Burns was placed aboard a ship in Boston harbor and taken back to Virginia. Fortunately, abolitionists in Boston raised the funds to purchase Burns' liberty later.⁶³⁴

The Burns episode illustrates the fragility of black freedom in New England. At the same time, the staunch resistance to his rendition illustrates the challenges of recapturing self-emancipators in the Boston area. Theodore Parker wrote in a letter that nine alleged self-emancipators were arrested in Cincinnati "with no opposition." Similarly, blacks in New York City were "carried off with no stir or tumult." In Boston, meanwhile, it required "all the Bullies in the city, all the Soldiers, and all the United States troops in New England and New York to do it." Parker concluded that

⁶³³ Entry for May 30, 1854. Tracy Patch Cheever Journal, 1851-1855. Ms. N-2138. MHS. Boston, MA.

⁶³⁴ "Letter from Mary E. Blanchard to Benjamin Seaver, 4 June 1854," *Masshist.org*, accessed Jun. 10, 2020. <https://www.masshist.org/database/1999?ft=Boston%20Abolitionists,%201831-1865&from=/features/boston-abolitionists/resisting-fugitive-slave-law&noalt=1>; "GREAT EXCITEMENT IN BOSTON," *Telegraph*, reprinted in *FDP*, Jun. 2, 1854; "A crowd of from 500 to 800 persons..." *ASB*, Jun. 3, 1854; "DECISION OF COMMISSIONER LORING," *Liberator*, Jun. 9, 1854; "THE DEED OF INFAMY CONSUMMATED," *Liberator*, Jun. 9, 1854; "FROM THE WOMEN OF WOBURN," *Liberator*, Jun. 9, 1854. For more on the Anthony Burns case, see Gordon S. Barker, *The Imperfect Revolution: Anthony Burns and the Landscape of Race in Antebellum America* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2010).

Boston was “far ahead of all the other great towns in America; a few years hence it will be impossible to execute the fugitive slave bill[.]”⁶³⁵

The rescue of Joshua Glover was among the most consequential of the decade. Glover, a self-emancipator from St. Louis, was seized by his former enslaver and federal marshals in Racine, Wisconsin. He was taken to Milwaukee and detained in the courthouse jail. Abolitionist Sherman Booth rallied thousands of supporters to demand Glover’s release. Members of the crowd later stormed the courthouse jail and freed Glover from his cell. Arrangements were made to transport Glover to Canada.⁶³⁶ Commissioner Winfield Smith ordered the arrest of individuals involved in the rescue. Not long after, the Wisconsin Supreme Court granted Booth a writ of *habeas corpus*. Going even further, Associate Justice Abram Smith ruled that the FSA 1850 was unconstitutional. Gordon Barker writes that the court based its verdict on the “doctrine of state sovereignty” and the “state’s sovereign right of self-defense.” In response, US Marshal Ableman, who was involved in Glover’s arrest, petitioned the United States’ Supreme Court to rectify the matter. The anti-slavery *Milwaukee Free Democrat* claimed the Wisconsin court had “the power to protect the Liberty of the citizen against the operation of the unconstitutional enactment called the Fugitive Slave [A]ct[.]” In *Ableman v. Booth* (1858), the US Supreme Court ruled that individual states did not possess the authority to invalidate federal laws.⁶³⁷

The Wisconsin Supreme Court’s nullification, in the words of Jonathan Daniel Wells, “thundered across the nation.”⁶³⁸ Between 1854 and 1858, Connecticut, Vermont, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, and New Hampshire approved measures to guarantee self-emancipators the right to a jury trial and *habeas corpus*, as well as preventing city and state officers from participating in the recapture of slave refugees. “In Vermont and Massachusetts,” asserted the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, “the Fugitive Slave law has been virtually nullified by State laws.” In 1856, anti-slavery politicians in Ohio introduced several bills to the General Assembly which sought to bar state law enforcement and citizens from engaging in arrests and prohibit the use of state jails. The new wave of personal liberty laws demonstrates that the FSA 1850 brewed sectional tensions throughout the North.⁶³⁹

⁶³⁵ Theodore Parker to Samuel P. Andrews, 18 Jun. 1854. Theodore Parker Papers P-175. Reel 1, Vol. 3. MHS. Boston, MA.

⁶³⁶ H. Robert Baker, *The Rescue of Joshua Glover: A Fugitive Slave, the Constitution, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006), 1-26; Barker, *Fugitive Slaves*, 118-135. See also Ruby West Jackson and Walter T. McDonald, *Finding Freedom: The Untold Story of Joshua Glover, Runaway Slave* (Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2007).

⁶³⁷ Barker, *Fugitive Slaves*, 133; “Slave-Catching Vs. State Sovereignty,” *Milwaukee Free Democrat*, Feb. 9, 1857, reprinted in *NASS*, Feb. 21, 1857; “Ableman v. Booth, 62 US 506 (1858),” *Justia.com*, accessed Oct. 10, 2018. <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/62/506/>.

⁶³⁸ Wells, *Blind No More*, 105.

⁶³⁹ “The Case of Woody – Slave Stealing,” *NASS*, Apr. 19, 1856; “Anti-Slavery Legislation in Ohio,” *NASS*, Apr. 19, 1856; “A Personal Liberty Law, Similar to that Existing in Massachusetts, Has Been Enacted by the Legislature of Wisconsin,” *NASS*, Feb. 28, 1857; “PERSONAL LIBERTY BILL,” *ASB*,

However, the implementation of new personal liberty laws in the North was rather inconsistent. New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania did not pass personal liberty bills during the decade. Furthermore, states which enacted new statutes, namely those in New England, witnessed few slave refugee renditions from the mid-1850s. Other factors played a large role than personal liberty laws. The costs associated with recapturing self-emancipators, particularly from further away locales, became “prohibitively expensive” for enslavers. “By forcing the owner of fugitive slaves to resort to federal processes under the Fugitive Slave Law,” writes Stanley Campbell, “the costs of rendition increased considerably.”⁶⁴⁰

Upstate New York witnessed several rescues over the decade. In August 1851, Daniel Davis, a freedom seeker from Louisville, who worked as a cook on the Lake Erie steamboat *Buckeye State*, was seized by and taken before Commissioner Henry K. Smith, who ordered his rendition to Kentucky. An interracial crowd gathered outside his office, determined to secure Davis’ release. Judge Alfred Conkling issued a writ of *habeas corpus* and Davis was released. He quickly crossed the Niagara River into Canada.⁶⁴¹

Two months later, the ‘Jerry Rescue’ took place in Syracuse, New York. William Henry, a self-emancipator from Missouri who went by ‘Jerry,’ was arrested and taken before the presiding commissioner. Word of Henry’s arrest spread like wildfire throughout the region. Hundreds of activists quickly surrounded the Syracuse jail and removed Henry from his cell. He was concealed in the city for several days before being spirited onward to Oswego, where he gained passage aboard a steamboat to Canada. Twenty-six of the rescuers stood trial for their involvement in the rescue, but only one man (African American Enoch Reed) was convicted. Not long after, Samuel Ringgold Ward fled to Upper Canada to avoid arrest for his involvement in the rescue.⁶⁴²

Mar. 7, 1857; “Personal Liberty Law of Wisconsin,” *NASS*, Mar. 14, 1857; “The Wisconsin Personal Liberty Law,” *NASS*, Mar. 14, 1857; Norman L. Rosenberg, “Personal Liberty Laws and Sectional Crisis: 1850-1861,” *Civil War History* 17, no. 1 (1971), 25; H. Robert Baker, “Personal Liberty Laws,” *EssentialCivilWarCurriculum.com*, accessed Oct. 9, 2018, <http://www.essentialcivilwarcurriculum.com/personal-liberty-laws.html>; Campbell, *The Slave Catchers*, 170-186.

⁶⁴⁰ Campbell, *The Slave Catchers*, 184-185.

⁶⁴¹ Blackett, *Captive’s Quest for Freedom*, 60-62, 362-363; Bruce Fisher, *Borderland: Essays from the US – Canadian Divide* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 50; “DISCHARGE OF THE SLAVE DANIEL DAVIS,” *Liberator*, Sep. 5, 1851; “JUDGE CONKLIN’S DECISION,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Sep. 11, 1851; “THE PREMATURE EXULTATION AND WASTED COMPLIMENTS,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Sep. 11, 1851; “A SENSIBLE LETTER FROM THE SLAVE DANIEL,” *Liberator*, Sep. 12, 1851; “More Victims of the Man-hunt,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Sep. 25, 1851.

⁶⁴² Jayme A. Sokolow, “The Jerry McHenry Rescue and the Growth of Northern Antislavery Sentiment during the 1850s,” *Journal of American Studies* 16, no. 3 (1982), 429-430; Jackson, *Force and Freedom*, 61-66. For more on the ‘Jerry Rescue,’ see Angela F. Murphy, *The Jerry Rescue: The Fugitive Slave Law, Northern Rights, and the American Sectional Crisis* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015); Barker, *Unfinished Revolution*, 96-118.

Abolitionists and African Americans praised the rescuers in letters, speeches, and newspaper editorials. Samuel J. May declared, “The citizens of Syracuse and of Onondaga County did not... violate the law; they set at naught an unrighteous, cruel edict; they trampled upon tyranny.” Likewise, Theodore Parker claimed, “Since the Battle of Lexington and Declaration of Independence, few events have taken place in America which better deserve commemoration.”⁶⁴³ In 1853, the *Daily Evening Star* reported on a ‘riot’ at Niagara Falls after “southern officials” attempted to arrest “a negro waiter charged with murder.” African Americans and white abolitionists in the vicinity claimed that this was a thinly veiled attempt to enslave the man. The report claimed that 300 African Americans “collected and fought the officers.” As the fracas ensued, the unnamed waiter was spirited across the Niagara River.⁶⁴⁴

In the Ohio and Mississippi River borderlands, African Americans and white abolitionists engaged in rescues and anti-slavery violence. The case of Addison White highlights the willingness of black and white abolitionists to resist enslavers, kidnappers, and US marshals. In 1856, White escaped from Fleming County, Kentucky across the Ohio River. Traveling north, he took shelter on a farm in Mechanicsburg, Ohio (just west of Columbus). The following year, White’s enslaver, alongside a group of Kentucky whites and US marshals, arrived at the farm to arrest the self-emancipator. Local blacks and white abolitionists, armed with various kinds of weaponry, descended upon White’s location, ready to engage in battle if necessary. Several activists were subsequently arrested and detained in nearby Springfield. All charges were soon dropped and they were released. Other residents struck an agreement with White’s enslaver to purchase his liberty.⁶⁴⁵

The Great Lakes region saw various slave refugee rescues over this period. In 1852, the *Sandusky Register* reported, “Our city was thrown into intense excitement last evening by an attempt to arrest two negro men, two negro women, and several children, aboard the steamboat *Arrow*, at the moment of her departure for Detroit.” Abolitionist lawyer Rush R. Sloane of Sandusky led the group’s defense. Sloane later recalled that the following events took place during the trial: “I then spoke to the parties who had employed me: “Colored citizens, I see no authority to detain your friends.” At that moment, someone near the door cried out, “Hustle them out,” and immediately the crowd and negroes were out of the building, and no doubt soon the blacks were over “Jordan.” Sloane was tried in Columbus and fined approximately \$4,000 for his role in the escape. He inquired, “And what is my

⁶⁴³ Samuel J. May, *Speech of Rev. Samuel J. May, to the Convention of Citizens, of Onondaga County* (Syracuse, NY: Agan and Summers, 1851), 18; Theodore Parker to Samuel J. May, 23 Sep. 1853. Theodore Parker Papers. MHS. Boston, MA.

⁶⁴⁴ “A Fight with Negroes,” *Daily Evening Star* (Washington, DC), Aug. 19, 1853.

⁶⁴⁵ Blackett, *Captive’s Quest for Freedom*, 255-256; Prince, Benjamin Franklin. *The rescue case of 1857*. Columbus, 1907. *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 8 June 2020.

offense!” questioned Sloane; “Only acting in the ordinary duties of my profession!... Oh! [W]hen will our people awake to a realizing scene of the *bondage* in which the whole North are now fettered[.]” Other rescues took place in the Sandusky area. In 1858, one newspaper reported that a federal marshal from Cincinnati captured “a colored waiter at the St. Lawrence Hotel[.]” Not long after, however, a “vast crowd of citizens collected and rescued the darkey, who took flight to parts unknown.”⁶⁴⁶

The Oberlin-Wellington Rescue was the most famous act of extra-legal resistance in Ohio’s Western Reserve. In September 1858, John Price was seized by Deputy US Marshal Jacob K. Lowe, Deputy Sheriff Samuel Davis, and two Kentucky slave catchers in Oberlin. They took Price to nearby Wellington, where they checked into the Wadsworth Hotel. Oberlin residents rallied others to rescue Price. By about three o’clock, hundreds of Price’s supporters, many of whom were armed, assembled outside the Wadsworth Hotel and demanded his release. Members of the crowd subsequently rushed the hotel and freed Price. He was taken to Oberlin before being sent onward to Canada.⁶⁴⁷ Thirty-seven rescuers were indicted by a federal grand jury but only Charles Henry Langston and Simeon Bushnell stood trial.⁶⁴⁸

Langston pleaded with the jury, “if your brother, if your friend, if your wife, if your child, had been seized by men who claimed them as fugitives... you would call in your neighbors and friends, and would ask them to say with you that these your friends *could not* be taken into slavery.” Langston was sentenced to twenty days in jail, while Bushnell received a sixty-day sentence. Joshua Giddings wrote, “Their error consisted in sparing the lives of the slave-catchers. Those pirates should have been delivered over to the colored men, and consigned to the doom of pirates which should have been speedily executed.”⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁶ Rush R. Sloane, “LIBERTY IN OHIO!,” *American Jubilee* (New York City, NY), Jan. 1, 1855; “Case of R. W. Sloane,” *ASB*, Dec. 30, 1854; “Sandusky Aroused – Fugitive Slave Case – Relief Meeting,” *FDP*, Jan. 5, 1855; “A Case of Great Hardship,” *Liberator*, Feb. 16, 1855; “Rush R. Sloane,” *ASB*, Apr. 7, 1855; Blackett, *Captive’s Quest for Freedom*, 227-229; “Slave Excitement in Sandusky City,” *Milan Free Press*, reprinted in *Holmes County Republican* (Millersburg, OH), May 27, 1858.

⁶⁴⁷ Paul Finkelman, “A Political Show Trial in the Northern District: The Oberlin-Wellington Fugitive Slave Rescue Case,” in Paul Finkelman and Roberta S. Alexander (eds.), *Justice and Legal Change on the Shores of Lake Erie: A History of the United States District Court for the Northern District of Ohio* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012), 37-43; Harrold, *Border War*, 180-181; May, *The Fugitive Slave Law and Its Victims*, 103-107.

⁶⁴⁸ “THE SIEGE OF OBERLIN!,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, reprinted in *CML*, Dec. 8, 1838; “The Trial of the Thirty-Seven,” *OE*, Mar. 16, 1859; “The Trial of the Thirty-Seven,” *OE*, Apr. 13, 1859; “The Oberlin-Wellington Rescue Case,” *OE*, Apr. 27, 1859; Nate Christensen, “Oberlin-Wellington Rescue,” *BlackPast.org*, accessed Jul. 23, 2018. <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/oberlin-wellington-rescue-1858>.

⁶⁴⁹ Dee (ed.), *Ohio’s War*, 25; “UNITED STATES COURT. Trial of the Wellington Slave Rescue Case,” *CML*, Apr. 6, 9, 14, 15, 16, May 11, 1859; “Habeas Corpus Case – Supreme Court,” *CML*, Apr. 25, 1859; “The Oberlin Rescuers Sentenced,” *Rochester Democrat*, reprinted in *CML*, May 10, 1859; “The Rescue Cases,” *Sandusky Register*, reprinted in *CML*, May 10, 1859; “Oberlin-Wellington Rescue Case,” *ohiohistorycenter.org*, accessed Jul. 19, 2018. http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Oberlin-Wellington_Rescue_Case; “An Account of the Trials of Simeon Bushnell and Charles Langston by the Oberlin-Wellington Rescuers,” www2.oberlin.edu, accessed Jul. 23, 2018.

In July, the rescuers were released from jail and met with a grand reception and celebrations upon their return to Oberlin. Although the rescuers were free, so, too, were the kidnappers. The *Anti-Slavery Bugle* declared that the kidnappers' release "inflicts indelible disgrace upon the State, by proclaiming in unmistakable terms that, in Ohio, kidnappers can purchase immunity from punishment[.]" Likewise, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* wrote that the decision "virtually leaves Ohio under the feet of the Slave Oligarchy."⁶⁵⁰

In 1860, John Hossack and other activists in Ottawa, Illinois liberated Jim Gray, a self-emancipator from Missouri. Following his arrest, Gray was held in a local jail until he could receive a hearing. Robert Churchill writes that an anti-slavery mob "sprang into action, mobbing the jailer, stripping Gray from his custody, and carrying him to a waiting carriage which started off amid general cheering." Hossack was tried for violating the FSA 1850. He was found guilty but ultimately only received a \$100 fine and served a ten-day jail sentence. During the trial, Hossack declared, "I am found guilty of a violation of the Fugitive Slave Law, and it may appear strange to your Honor that I have no sense of guilt."⁶⁵¹

Anti-slavery violence proved vital to transforming parts of the North into spaces of relative security for freedom seekers. While legal and judicial measures were crucial to the development of semi-formal liberty in the northern US, rescues and extra-legal resistance were required when all else failed.⁶⁵² In Canada, slave refugees also held concerns about extradition and kidnapping.

Extradition and Kidnapping in British Canada

Unlike the northern US, British Canada lay beyond the jurisdiction of the FSA 1793 and 1850. As each of the provinces gradually adopted anti-slavery, free soil

http://www2.oberlin.edu/external/EOG/Oberlin-Wellington_Rescue/trial_account.htm; "Our Oberlin Friends in Jail," *OE*, May 25, 1859; "Letter from Hon. J. R. Giddings," *Liberator*, May 27, 1859.

⁶⁵⁰ "The Oberlin Rescuers," *NASS*, Jul. 9, 1857; "Cleveland, July 6," *Charleston Mercury*, Jul. 9, 1859; "Release of the Oberlin Rescuers," *Cleveland Leader*, Jul. 7, reprinted in *NASS*, Jul. 16; "Compounding of Felony," *ASB*, Jul. 16, 1859; "Release of the Ohio Rescuers," *Liberator*, Jul. 22, 1859; "The released Oberlin Rescuers...", *Vermont Chronicle*, Jul. 19, 1859; Henry C. Wright, "Release of the Ohio Rescuers by the Same Power that Imprisoned them," *Liberator*, Jul. 22, 1859; "Bushnell at Home," *Cleveland Leader*, Jul. 13, 1859, reprinted in *Liberator*, Jul. 22, 1859; "The Oberlin Rescuers at Home," *Cleveland Leader*, Jul. 13, 1859, reprinted in *Liberator*, Jul. 22, 1859; "How It Was Done," *NASS*, Jul. 30, 1859.

⁶⁵¹ Churchill, *The Underground Railroad and Geography of Violence*, 203-204; "REFUGE OF OPPRESSION," *Liberator*, Oct. 19, 1860; "SELECTIONS," *Liberator*, Oct. 19, 1860 (Hossack quote); J.G. Mott, "IMPRISONMENT OF JOHN HOSSACK," *Liberator*, Oct. 19, 1860; "THE RECENT SLAVE CASE IN ILLINOIS," *Liberator*, Oct. 26, 1860.

⁶⁵² The slave refugee rescues described in this chapter are far from exhaustive. Across the North, African Americans and white abolitionists launched countless rescues and acts of anti-slavery violence to protect freedom seekers from re-enslavement. For more examples, see Blackett, *Captives Quest for Freedom*; Churchill, *The Underground Railroad and the Geography of Violence*.

principles, southern enslavers were left with no legal means of recapturing self-emancipated refugees. After the Revolutionary War, southern enslavers urged the US government to formally negotiate an extradition treaty with Great Britain. Their efforts were generally unsuccessful, however. Over time, enslavers employed other strategies for trying to extradite slave refugees from Canada. Most notably, they started to petition for the return of ‘criminals’ rather than self-emancipators. Furthermore, in some instances, enslavers and bounty hunters attempted to kidnap slave refugees from Canada and take them back to the United States.

The first efforts to negotiate the return of slave refugees began shortly after the Revolutionary War. Article 7 of the Treaty of Paris contained an amendment that prohibited “carrying away any Negroes or other property of the American inhabitants.” Nonetheless, the Loyalists departed the United States with thousands of self-liberated refugees from slavery. US politicians, many of whom were enslavers themselves, sought redress from the British for defying the treaty. Nothing came of these efforts, however. In 1794, President Washington tasked Chief Justice John Jay with traveling to London to reach an agreement over compensation for the loss of enslaved people. But Jay soon discovered that the British would not yield on the issue. Signed in November 1794, the resultant ‘Jay Treaty’ made no mention of the return of formerly enslaved African Americans to the United States, or of compensation to US enslavers.⁶⁵³

Twenty years later, the War of 1812 reignited diplomatic tensions between the United States and Great Britain. Following the escape of thousands of enslaved African Americans to British lines, US diplomats sought the return of self-emancipated people once more. Article 1 of the Treaty of Ghent (1814) read: “All territory, places, and possessions whatsoever, taken by either party from the other during the war. . . shall be restored without delay, and without causing any destruction or carrying away any of the artillery or other public property. . . or any slaves or other private property.” Diplomats became embroiled in protracted negotiations with the British government. Secretary of State James Monroe told John Quincy Adams, the US Ambassador in London, to push the issue. After several years, Great Britain agreed to provide over one million dollars in compensation.⁶⁵⁴

Southern whites continued to petition the federal government to secure an extradition agreement with Great Britain. In 1819, Tennessee enslavers urged Secretary of State John Quincy Adams to reach an agreement with the British government over the return of slave refugees. They claimed that numerous freedom seekers had recently escaped to Canada. In a letter to the British chargé d’affaires,

⁶⁵³ Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic*, 91-93. For more on diplomatic tensions in the Revolutionary Era, see Arnett G. Lindsay, “Diplomatic Relations between the United States and Great Britain Bearing on the Return of Negro Slaves, 1783-1828,” *Journal of Negro History* 5, no. 4 (1920), 391-419.

⁶⁵⁴ Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic*, 93-98.

Gibbs Crawford Antrobus, Adams claimed that several freedom seekers “ran off last fall from their owners in the State of Tennessee and have taken refuge in Malden in Upper Canada. The owners are anxious to know if any arrangement can be made by which permission could be obtained for them to go to Canada and reobtain possession of their property.” Adams was careful to describe self-emancipators as ‘property’ rather than people. Antrobus declined Adams’ request, noting that “the Negroes have, by their residence in Canada, become free, whatever may have been their former condition in this country, and should any attempt be made to infringe upon this right of freedom, these Negroes would have it in their power to compel the interference of the courts of law for their protection[.]” Upper Canada’s Attorney General John Beverly Robinson drafted the text. In short, Antrobus, Robinson, and the British government upheld the *Somerset* principle for slave refugees in Canada.⁶⁵⁵

In 1826, Secretary of State Henry Clay urged Ambassador Albert Gallatin to raise the issue with British officials. Gallatin proposed “a mutual exchange of criminals,” whereby the US government would return British sailors for slave refugees in Canada. Once again, however, these appeals fell on deaf ears. British officials understood that self-emancipators in Canada were not criminals, at least not under English law. In short, the *Somerset* principle remained the law of the land for Canada.⁶⁵⁶ Pro-slavery politicians in the United States expressed frustration with the British government’s refusal to consider extraditing slave refugees. In 1828, the House of Representatives requested that President John Quincy Adams “open a negotiation with the British Government in the view to obtain an arrangement whereby fugitive slaves who have taken refuge in the Canadian provinces... may be surrendered... to their masters, up on their making satisfactory proof of their ownership of said slaves.” Despite some attempts to reopen diplomatic channels, the British government refused to countenance any proposals which included the extradition of slave refugees from Canada.⁶⁵⁷

The US government continued to seek an agreement with Great Britain. On August 12, 1829, Secretary of State Martin Van Buren wrote, “whether it is probable

⁶⁵⁵ Adams and Antrobus quotes taken from Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic*, 102.

⁶⁵⁶ *The Slaveholding Republic*, 102-103 (quote); Prince, “The Illusion of Safety,” 68; Also see Harriet C. Frazier, *Runaway and Freed Missouri Slaves and Those who Helped Them, 1763-1865* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2004), 107-108.

⁶⁵⁷ Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States, 1827-1828. May 9, 1828. LOC. American Memory. A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: US Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774-1875, accessed May 17, 2020. http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?hlaw:1::/temp/~ammem_Zhyf::; Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic*, 103. For more on diplomatic negotiations over slave refugees in the 1820s, see *Headlands in the Life of Henry Clay: no. 1, from 1797 to 1827* (Boston, MA: Leavitt and Alden, 1831), 7-8, accessed May 25, 2020. <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=mayantislaavery&cc=mayantislaavery&idno=07838309&q1=Canada&view=image&seq=1&size=100>; American State Papers, Foreign Relations: Vol. 6. LOC. American Memory. A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: US Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774-1875, accessed May 17, 2020. [https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/hlaw:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(sp0062\)\):#0060007](https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/hlaw:@field(DOCID+@lit(sp0062)):#0060007).

any arrangement will be entered into between the United States and Great Britain, by which the surrender of fugitive slaves from the territories of the former; taking refuge in the neighbouring [sic] Provinces of the latter, may be provided for, I can only state, that from the entire failure of the repeated efforts which were made by the late Administration of this Government to effect that object... is a little doubtful." Van Buren's choice of language is quite revealing; by noting that freedom seekers were "taking refuge" in the Canadian provinces, it is a subtle admission regarding slavery's brutality. Rather than being 'stolen' away by a foreign aggressor, freedom seekers in Canada had actively 'taken' refuge themselves.⁶⁵⁸ The British government's commitment to upholding *Somerset* enhanced Great Britain's reputation among African Americans, African Canadians, and white abolitionists. On these negotiations, Samuel Gridley Howe wrote that "the Monarchy rebuked the Republic; spurned the proposal of a mutual betrayal of exiles, and assured the sanctity of Canadian asylum to fugitive slaves."⁶⁵⁹

Although US officials failed to negotiate a formal treaty with the British, southern enslavers petitioned the Upper Canadian government for the extradition of freedom seekers. In each case, noted the London *Spectator*, southern enslavers employed the same strategy: "against every refugee in Canada charges of robbery, or even murder in the American sense, may be trumped up, in order to recover the value and property in escaped slaves." In 1833, Upper Canada's legislature enacted the Fugitive Offenders Act, which provided for the extradition of individuals charged with "Murder, Forgery, Larceny or other crime." Over the following decades, southern enslavers changed tack and began to petition for the return of criminals rather than slave refugees.⁶⁶⁰

The case of Thornton and Lucie Blackburn was the first to be heard under the Fugitive Offenders Act. The couple escaped from Louisville to Detroit and took refuge in the city's free black community. About two years later, they were apprehended by authorities in Detroit and placed in jail. Judge Henry Chipman ordered the couple's rendition to Kentucky. Black activists and white abolitionists in the Detroit River borderland devised a plan to rescue the couple. On June 16, 1833, Lucie Blackburn was visited by two women, Caroline French and Tabitha Lightfoot. Caroline swapped clothing with Lucie and stayed behind in the cell. Lucie subsequently left the jail and, disguised as Caroline, boarded a ferry to cross the Detroit River. The following day, as the sheriff took Thornton from his cell, an armed,

⁶⁵⁸ Martin Van Buren to W. T. Barry, 12 August 1829. Pirtle-Rogers Family Papers, 1797-1875. Mss. A P672a 5. FHS. Louisville, Kentucky.

⁶⁵⁹ Howe, *The Refugees from Slavery in Canada West*, 14.

⁶⁶⁰ "Canadian Extraditions," *Spectator*, Jan. 5, 1861. Full title of the statute: An Act to Provide for the Apprehending of Fugitive Offenders from Foreign Countries, and Delivering Them Up to Justice (1833). See Prince, "The Illusion of Safety," 69-71. Also, David Murray, *Colonial Justice: Justice, Morality, and Crime in the Niagara District, 1791-1849* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 118.

biracial mob approached the Detroit jail and demanded Thornton's release. Karolyn Smardz Frost claims that a member of the crowd threw a handgun to Thornton, which he fired into the air. Amid the chaos, Thornton's rescuers spirited Thornton across the Detroit River to Upper Canada.⁶⁶¹

Michigan Governor Stevens T. Mason subsequently demanded the couple's extradition. Mason focused solely on the Detroit riot and did not mention that Thornton and Lucie were refugees from slavery. In response, Upper Canada's Attorney General Robert S. Jameson advised the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir John Colborne, that Thornton and Lucie Blackburn would face re-enslavement if extradited to the United States. In June 1833, Thornton Blackburn appealed to the Lieutenant-Governor for protection. He was "convinced the object of the Party is to have him and his wife carried back to Hopeless Slavery[.]" Black activists in the Detroit River borderland also submitted a petition to Colborne to convince him to reject Mason's request. After careful consideration, the Lieutenant-Governor refused to sanction the extradition request and the Blackburns were freed.⁶⁶²

Horse theft became a central issue in future extradition cases. In 1834, Governor Mason requested the extradition of Abraham Johnson, a freedom seeker from Virginia, who was accused of stealing his enslaver's horse. Yet Upper Canada's Executive Council refused to sanction the extradition once again.⁶⁶³ Three years later, Solomon Moseby and Jesse Happy were at the center of two separate, yet interrelated, extradition cases. In 1837, both freedom seekers were accused of stealing horses from their enslavers during their escapes from Kentucky to the Niagara River borderland. While Happy left his enslaver's horse behind and informed his owner, Moseby sold his horse for money before crossing into the province.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶¹ Frost, "Forging Transnational Networks for Freedom," in Frost and Tucker (eds.), *A Fluid Frontier*, 53-58. For the most comprehensive history of Thornton and Lucie Blackburn, see Frost, *I've Got a Home in Glory Land*.

⁶⁶² "The Opinion of the Attorney-General and Documents respecting the 1st Requisition of Fugitives from the Michigan Territory," *State Submissions to the Executive Council of Upper Canada*. RG1 E3, vol. 73, Reel C-1199, 13-17. LAC, accessed Oct. 21, 2020. https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c1199/1072?r=0&s=5; "The Petition of Madison Mason, Lewis Austin, Prince Williams, Peter Sands, and Alexander Butler" *State Submissions to the Executive Council of Upper Canada*. RG1 E3, vol. 73, Reel C-1199, 24-25. LAC, accessed Oct. 21, 2020. https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c1199/1085?r=0&s=6. The men behind this petition were among the group that rescued Thornton Blackburn in Detroit. For Thornton Blackburn's petition to Sir John Colborne, see "The Petition of Thornton Blackburn in behalf of himself, and his Wife Ruth Blackburn both People of Colour, at present confined in the Gaol of Sandwich, Western District," *State Submissions to the Executive Council of Upper Canada*. RG1 E3, vol. 73, Reel C-1199, 90-93. LAC, accessed Oct. 21, 2020. https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c1199/1155?r=0&s=6.
⁶⁶³ "Requisition of Steven J. Mason, Acting Governor of the Territory of Michigan for the delivery of Abraham Johnson, a fugitive slave," *State Submission to the Executive Council of Upper Canada*. RG1 E3, vol. 49, Reel C-1196, 42. LAC, accessed Oct. 21, 2020. https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c1196/67?r=0&s=6.

⁶⁶⁴ Prince, "The Illusion of Safety," 69-71; Bradley Miller, *Borderline Crime: Fugitive Criminals and the Challenge of the Border, 1819-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 118; For more on the Jesse Happy and Solomon Moseby cases, see Jason Silverman, "Kentucky, Canada, and Extradition: The

David Castleman, Moseby's former enslaver, journeyed to the Niagara borderland to recapture the self-emancipator. Fully aware that he would be unable to remove Moseby from the province by force, he sought to take advantage of the Fugitive Offenders Act. He presented local officials with evidence that Moseby had been found guilty by a Kentucky jury, as well as an extradition request from the state governor. After reviewing the case, Upper Canada's Attorney General determined that there was "sufficient proof" of Moseby's guilt and recommended that the Lieutenant-Governor "deliver him up upon the request made by the Governor of the State referred to." Based upon this recommendation, Upper Canada's Executive Council sanctioned Moseby's extradition to the United States.⁶⁶⁵

African Canadians, African American refugees, and white abolitionists rushed to Moseby's defense. A member of Moseby's legal team, Alexander Stewart, argued that it was an incorrect implementation of the Fugitive Offenders Act, which was reserved for the "heinous crimes of Arson, Murder & Rape of white women[.]" He also cast doubt on Castleman's true motives, claiming that it was "a mere pretext to obtain his servitude in vile bondage[.]" He insisted that Castleman would not travel roughly 1,500 miles "at an expense of at least \$400 to bring to Justice a Slave charged with stealing a horse of only the value of \$150." Southern enslavers, Stewart argued, had become "increasingly alarmed" by the number of freedom seekers seeking asylum in Upper Canada. He warned the Executive Council that the Fugitive Offenders Act "offers a practical opportunity of gratifying their cupidity."⁶⁶⁶

African Canadians and African Americans in the Niagara borderland also petitioned the Lieutenant-Governor to reverse the decision. They stated that Moseby had "availed himself of the protection of the British Laws in Canada to retain the Freedom that he had now acquired, and for which he had long and ardently long wished." They appealed to the Lieutenant-Governor to see through "the fraudulent

Jesse Happy Case," *Filson Club History Quarterly* 54 (1980), 50-60; see Janet Carnochan, *A Slave Rescue in Niagara, Sixty Years Ago* (Niagara, ON: Times Book and Job Print, 1897), 11-18; David Murray, "Hands Across the Border: The Abortive Extradition of Solomon Moseby," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 3, no. 2 (2000), 187-209; Nina Halty, "From Slaves to Subjects: Forging Freedom in the Canadian Legal System," (MA thesis: Florida Atlantic University, 2017).

⁶⁶⁵ "Complaint of David Castleman, Fayette, KY, to Daniel McDougal, High Constable, Niagara District," Sep. 2, 1837. *State Submissions to the Executive Council of Upper Canada*, RG1 E3, vol. 49, Reel C-1196, 222-225. LAC, accessed Oct. 21, 2020.

https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c1196/273?r=0&s=5; "Letter from C.A. Hagerman to Sir Francis Bond Head," Sep. 6, 1837. *State Submissions to the Executive Council of Upper Canada*, RG1 E3, vol. 49, Reel C-1196, 216. LAC, accessed Oct. 21, 2020.

https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c1196/267?r=0&s=5; "Report on the Requisition & Documents for the Surrender of Solomon Moseby, a Fugitive from the State of Kentucky charged with Horse Stealing," Sep. 7, 1837. *State Submissions to the Executive Council of Upper Canada*, RG1 E3, vol. 49, Reel C-1196, 218. LAC, accessed Oct. 21, 2020.

https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c1196/268?r=3&s=5.

⁶⁶⁶ "Letter from Alexander Stewart to John Joseph," Sep. 5, 1837. *State Submissions to the Executive Council of Upper Canada*, RG1 E3, vol. 49, Reel C-1196, 219-221. LAC, accessed Oct. 21, 2020. https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c1196/270?r=0&s=5.

artifice which Slaveholders are in the Habit of employing to repossess thousands of Slaves who have once gained a Sanctuary of Freedom within the British dominions.” They asserted that Castleman sought to impose the “Laws of a Foreign Country” in Upper Canada and was merely employing the charge of horse stealing as “a mere pretense to secure him across the line of demarcation, and from under the protection of the British Laws and institution[,] and the moment he lands on the other side of the Niagara river the charge of Horse-Stealing would be withdrawn, and him dragg [sic] off once more to irremidiable [sic] Slavery.”⁶⁶⁷ The petitioners reiterated that Moseby “is now a freeman by the constitutional laws of Great Britain and that should he be given up, he will inevitably go back to Slavery.” They also warned that it would set “a precedent whereby no runaway Slave will either now or henceforth be safe in a British Colony.”⁶⁶⁸

Black activists and white abolitionists prepared to resist all efforts to forcibly remove Moseby to the United States. Tensions in the town, particularly in the vicinity around the local jail, reached an almost fever pitch. Anna Brownell Jameson recalled that the case “excited a strong interest among the whites, while the coloured population, consisting... chiefly [of] refugees from the States, were half frantic with excitement. They loudly and openly declared that they would peril their lives to prevent his being carried again across the frontiers, and surrendered to the vengeance of his angry master.”⁶⁶⁹ Meanwhile, the *Niagara Reporter* stated that “a more motley assemblage never was seen in our recollection, about a hundred coloured people and forty or fifty of them females drawn up in a battle array at the Gaol [sic] gates ready to seize the man[.]”⁶⁷⁰

Eventually, members of the crowd stormed the jail to liberate Moseby. The Niagara police and soldiers (who had been called in to ensure Moseby’s extradition went ahead) opened fire on the crowd, killing two and wounding one. The *Michigan Observer* reported that “five colored men” were killed at the scene during the ‘Niagara Slaughter.’⁶⁷¹ Accounts of the events in Niagara varied. The *St. Catharine’s Journal* blamed the black protestors for the violence, claiming that their actions

⁶⁶⁷ “Copy of the Petition of the Coloured Inhabitants of the Town and Township of Niagara on behalf of Solomon Moseby, the Fugitive Slave,” Sep. 2, 1837. *State Submissions to the Executive Council of Upper Canada*, RG1 E3, vol. 49, Reel C-1196, 225-228. LAC, accessed Oct. 21, 2020. https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c1196/277?r=0&s=5.

⁶⁶⁸ “Copy of the Petition of the Inhabitants of the Town of Niagara respecting Solomon Moseby the fugitive Slave,” Sep. 2, 1837. *State Submissions to the Executive Council of Upper Canada*, RG1 E3, vol. 49, Reel C-1996, 229-232. LAC, accessed Oct. 21, 2020.

https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c1196/282?r=0&s=5. Also see “THE PETITION OF THE INHABITANTS OF THE TOWN OF NIAGARA,” *Patriot* (Toronto, ON), Sep. 22, 1837.

⁶⁶⁹ Anna Brownell Jameson, *Sketches in Canada, and Rambles Among the Red Men*. New Edition (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1852), 56-57

⁶⁷⁰ “THE SLAVE CASE,” *Niagara Reporter*, reprinted in *Patriot* (Toronto, ON), Sep. 22, 1837.

⁶⁷¹ Jameson, *Sketches in Canada*, 56-57; “THE NIAGARA SLAUGHTER,” *Michigan Observer*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Nov. 3, 1837.

displayed contempt for “the laws and ordinances of the country which affords an asylum for the oppressed of their race.”⁶⁷² However, the *Niagara Reporter* alleged that the soldiers stationed around the jail were responsible for the chaotic scenes. Amid the confusion, Moseby escaped from the Niagara jail and made his way to Toronto. After a short stay in the city, he took refuge in England.⁶⁷³

Following the Moseby and Happy extradition cases, slave refugees in Upper Canada reaffirmed their claims to British subjecthood. Ikuko Asaka notes that, in 1839, black activists met in London to “draft a petition... [which] requested that the British government protect self-emancipated people from cross-border pursuit by United States authorities and ensure their social and intellectual advancement in Canada[.]” The petitioners insisted that, as “subjects of the British Monarch” they were entitled to the same protections as white Canadians. Slave refugees “had to actively solicit the metropole’s support by fashioning themselves as British emancipated subjects deserving of the empire’s protection and tutelage.”⁶⁷⁴

Despite this early resistance, the fear of slave refugee extradition never truly dissipated. The Nelson Hackett case illustrates the threat posed to self-emancipated refugees in Canada. Before his escape in 1841, Hackett stole a horse, a hat and overcoat, and a gold watch from his enslaver Alfred Wallace. These last details were crucial; whereas the Happy and Moseby cases demonstrated that horse theft was accepted as a means of escaping from slavery, stealing other items, and committing other crimes placed freedom seekers at risk of extradition under the Fugitive Offenders Act. Hackett’s enslaver traveled to Upper Canada later that year and managed to locate him in Chatham. After notifying the authorities, Hackett was arrested and taken to the local jail in Sandwich.⁶⁷⁵ In September, the Acting Governor of Michigan requested Hackett’s extradition based on the claim that he was “guilty of the crime of larceny.” Around this time, the Governor of Arkansas, as well as juries and judges in Washington County, appealed for Hackett’s extradition to the United States to stand trial.⁶⁷⁶

Hackett petitioned Governor-General Lord Sydenham for his release. He accused his enslaver of lying, having first charged him with “having stolen goods in [his] possession,” but later changed his story and claimed that Hackett had

⁶⁷² *St. Catharine’s Journal* quoted in Halty, “From Slaves to Subjects,” 86.

⁶⁷³ “THE SLAVE CASE,” *Niagara Reporter*, reprinted in *Patriot* (Toronto, ON), Sep. 22, 1837.

⁶⁷⁴ Asaka, “‘Our Brethren in the West Indies,’ 219-220 (first quote), 223 (second quote).

⁶⁷⁵ Prince, “The Illusion of Safety,” 71-72; For more on the Hackett case, see Roman J. Zorn, “An Arkansas Fugitive Slave Incident and Its International Repercussions,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (1957), 139-149.

⁶⁷⁶ James Wright Gordon, Acting Governor of Michigan, to the Right Hon. Lord Sydenham, Governor-General of British North America, Sep. 18, 1841 in *Copies of a Despatch [sic] from the Governor-General of Canada to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, of the 20th January last, relative to the Surrender of Nelson Hackett, a Person of Colour [sic], on the Demand of the Authorities of the United States, as a Fugitive from Justice* (London: House of Commons, 1842), 2, accessed May 5, 2020. https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.9_01694/2?r=0&s=1.

“committed a rape, but did not attempt to make any proof thereof.” In December, Upper Canadian officials approved Hackett’s extradition. One month later, Sir Charles Bagot (Lord Sydenham’s successor as Governor-General) stated that there was “no doubt of the guilt of this individual, the stolen property having been found on him on his arrival in the province; nor could it be said that this property had been taken solely to assist him in escaping from slavery, and not with a felonious intent.” Upper Canada’s Executive Council agreed with Bagot and ordered his extradition. Hackett was subsequently returned to Arkansas and later sold to Texas.⁶⁷⁷

African Americans, African Canadians, and white abolitionists in North America and Great Britain were outraged. The *Western Herald* claimed that everything surrounding the extradition “was done so quietly, that we knew nothing of it until some weeks after, and sickness drove the matter from our mind.” In 1842, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* claimed that it set “a most dangerous and alarming precedent[.]” The newspaper questioned, “Can the Governor be ignorant that a charge of theft, true or untrue, is one of the most common tricks whereby slaveholders seek to regain their slaves?” Similarly, Lewis Tappan wrote, “Nothing has occurred so alarming to fugitives from slavery, as the act of Sir Charles Bagot, in surrendering poor Nelson to the tender mercies of the South.” In Hamilton, roughly 178 black residents sent a petition to Canadian politician Sir Allen McNab which stated, “One of our number, Nelson Hackett, has been taken from Sandwich, by night, and given up to the injustice of slave claimers.” Hackett’s extradition was even discussed in the UK House of Commons, although nothing could be done to spare him from re-enslavement.⁶⁷⁸

Around this time, the United States and Great Britain negotiated the Webster-Ashburton Treaty. Extradition was one of the key issues addressed within its terms. Article 10 specified that individuals could be extradited for “the crime of murder, or assault with intent to commit murder, or piracy, or arson, or robbery, or forgery, or the utterance of forged paper.” The treaty itself included no specific provision for the extradition of slave refugees from Canada. Yet this did little to allay the concerns of African Americans, African Canadians, and white abolitionists. In light of the Happy, Moseby, and Hackett cases, they were fully aware of the threat

⁶⁷⁷ Ripley, *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 84-85; The Right Hon. Sir C. Bagot to Lord Stanley, 20 Jan. 1842; Report of a Committee of the Executive Council in *Copies of a Despatch* [sic] *from the Governor-General of Canada*, 1, 8.

⁶⁷⁸ “We beg to add...” *Western Herald*, Jun. 30, 1842; “The Governor of Canada,” *NASS*, Apr. 21, 1842; Lewis Tappan, “Nelson Hackett,” *NASS*, Sep. 1, 1842; “CASE OF NELSON HACKETT,” *Emancipator*, reprinted in *NASS*, Oct. 20, 1842. For more articles on the Nelson Hackett case, see “SURRENDER OF RUN-AWAY SLAVES,” *Alexandria Gazette*, Jul. 30, 1842; “NELSON HACKETT,” *NASS*, Aug. 4, 1842; “NELSON HACKETT,” *NASS*, Sep. 1, 1842; “CASE OF NELSON HACKETT,” *American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter*, reprinted in *NASS*, Sep. 1, 1842; “REFUGE OF OPPRESSION,” *Liberator*, Feb. 24, 1843; “FUGITIVE SLAVES IN UPPER CANADA,” *British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter*, Mar. 8, 1843.

which extradition posed to slave refugees in Canada. Thomas Clarkson warned, “if the treaty takes in the slave population, then the slave owners, encouraged by the case of Nelson Hackett, and having *now* a *legal right* to make claims, which they had not before, will pester our government in Canada with *thousands* of applications[.]” Hackett’s supporters questioned the legality of his extradition. Lord Ashburton, who negotiated the treaty, told abolitionist Lewis Tappan, “Had he only taken the horse... he would not probably have been surrendered, for you know the horse was necessary for his escape.”⁶⁷⁹

The last slave refugee extradition case took place on the eve of the US Civil War. In 1853, John Anderson (formerly ‘Jack Burton’) absconded from his Missouri enslaver. Three days into his escape, Anderson was discovered by white farmer Seneca Diggs. A melee ensued between the two men and Anderson fatally stabbed Diggs in self-defense. He subsequently fled across the Mississippi River to Illinois and made his way to Chicago. He continued northward and eventually crossed the Detroit River into Upper Canada. The following year, Missouri’s Governor petitioned the provincial government for Anderson’s extradition. Yet the request had seemingly little impact. For six years, he lived in a state of relative security. No attempts were made to arrest or extradite him during this period. In late 1860, however, Anderson was arrested near Brantford and placed in a local jail.⁶⁸⁰

Anderson maintained that “by the British law he is entitled to be free there, and the evidence shows that he only used such force as was necessary to maintain that freedom there[.]” The Anderson case caused an enormous stir in Washington, Toronto, and London. US diplomats and politicians petitioned the British and Canadian governments for Anderson’s speedy extradition. In October 1860, Secretary of State Lewis Cass formally requested Anderson’s return to the United States. Two months later, the Canadian Court of Queen’s Bench approved Anderson’s extradition under the Webster-Ashburton Treaty. The justices’ rulings highlight the tensions between protecting Canada’s free-soil policy and abiding by the treaty’s terms. Justice Burns, for instance, wrote, “It is true the moment a slave

⁶⁷⁹ Prince, “The Illusion of Safety,” 71; Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic*, 108-109; Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 172-173; Thomas Clarkson, “ASHBURTON TREATY: THE TENTH ARTICLE,” *British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter*, Nov. 2, 1842; Lewis Tappan, “Interview with Lord Ashburton,” *Liberator*, Sep. 16, 1842; “THE ASHBURTON TREATY – ARTICLE 10,” *Vermont Freeman*, Dec. 10, 1842. For a transcription of the Webster-Ashburton Treaty, see No Author, *Treaty Between Her Majesty and The United States of America. Signed at Washington, August 9, 1842. Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty* (London: Published by His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1843), accessed May 5, 2020.

<https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.49873/2?r=0&s=1>. The treaty derived its name from its two signatories, US Secretary of State Daniel Webster and Alexander Baring (Lord Ashburton).

⁶⁸⁰ Prince, “The Illusion of Safety,” 75-76; Frazier, *Runaway and Freed Missouri Slaves*, 112-113. For more on the John Anderson case, see Patrick Brode, *The Odyssey of John Anderson* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989); and Robert C. Reinders, “The John Anderson Case, 1860-1: A Study in Anglo-Canadian Imperial Relations,” *Canadian Historical Review* 56, no. 4 (1975), 393-415.

puts his foot upon Canadian soil he is free, but the British Government never contemplated that he should also be free from the charges of murder, piracy, or arson, though the crime was committed in the endeavour [sic] to obtain freedom.” The Anderson case received significant coverage in US, Canadian, and British newspapers.⁶⁸¹

On December 19, 1860, Anderson’s supporters met at St. Andrew’s Hall, Toronto to voice their outrage. Attendees approved resolutions that claimed that Upper Canada would be “polluted with slavery” if the extradition went ahead.⁶⁸² The following month, Gerrit Smith delivered a scathing indictment of the Anderson ruling in Toronto. Among other things, he accused the Court of the Queen’s Bench of hypocrisy. “Had he [Anderson] been pursued here,” Smith proclaimed, “as he was in Missouri, by half a dozen men avowing their purpose to kidnap him and reduce him to slavery, and had he turned and killed one of them, your Courts, instead of convicting him, would have honored him; and had he turned and killed them all, then all your Courts would have joined all your people in exalting him to a very high place in the heaven of British heroes.” Smith urged the British government to overrule Anderson’s extradition, stating, “If Great Britain did in the Treaty bind herself to conform the action of her Courts to the law of American slavery, then she did bring upon her fame a disgrace which all the blood of her most

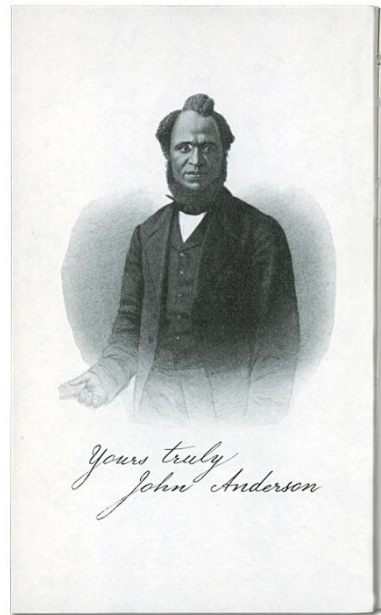


Figure 18: John Anderson

Source: Portrait of John Anderson. E 450 A54-T9. AO, Toronto, accessed Jan. 8, 2020. Obtained via: http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/en/explore/online/black_history/big/big_12_john_anderson.aspx.

⁶⁸¹ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 430-433; Lewis Cass to Douglas Irvine, Oct. 2, 1860; and Judgment of Mr. Justice Burns in *Correspondence Respecting the Case of the Fugitive Slave, Anderson. Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1861), 33, 47, accessed May 6, 2020.

https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.9_01812/5?r=0&s=1. For articles on the Anderson extradition case, see “THE EXTRADITION CASE IN CANADA,” *Advocate* (Buffalo, NY), Dec. 27, 1860; “EXTRADITION OF FUGITIVE SLAVES IN CANADA,” *ASB*, Jan. 5, 1861; “Canada Extradition Case,” *ASB*, Jan. 19, 1861; “FUGITIVE SLAVE EXTRADITION CASE,” *ASR*, Feb. 1, 1861; “The Story of John Anderson,” (Toronto) *Globe*, reprinted in *NASS*, Mar. 2, 1861; “THE FUGITIVE ANDERSON’S HISTORY,” *ASR*, May 1, 1861; Ripley, *BAP: Vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 430-433.

⁶⁸² Harper Twelvetees (ed.), *The Story of the Life of John Anderson, The Fugitive Slave* (London: William Tweedie, 1863), 49.

brilliant victory is insufficient to wash out.” From a legal standpoint, Smith argued that it was impossible to argue that the treaty applied to slave refugees given that “its two Articles, immediately preceding the Extradition Article, provide for the suppression of the slave-trade. A very incongruous group would be the three Articles, if the third should be found to make provision in behalf of slavery.”⁶⁸³

Abolitionists in the British Isles also denounced the planned extradition. In February 1861, the *Christian Reformer* issued a scathing critique of the court’s ruling. It declared, “English law has been now made to serve the purposes of American lawlessness.” Meanwhile, Great Britain’s Ambassador to the US, Lord Lyons, wrote to Foreign Secretary Lord John Russell, “When I despatched [sic] the requisition for the surrender to Canada, I was not aware that John Anderson had been a slave, or that there were any peculiar circumstances in the case.” The Court of the Queen’s Bench in England attempted to intervene in the matter by issuing a writ of *habeas corpus* for Anderson (a move which was criticized in Upper Canadian legal circles as a violation of sovereignty). At the same time, supporters of Anderson argued that the writ was designed to preserve formal free soil and British liberty. It proved unnecessary in the end, however. The Toronto Court of Common Pleas reversed the original ruling on a technicality.⁶⁸⁴

African Americans, African Canadians, and white abolitionists were elated. The Toronto *Globe* responded with a mixture of joy and relief. The editors wrote, “we deeply regret that Anderson’s discharge has not been ordered on broader and nobler grounds; but at least we can heartily rejoice that the poor fugitive to our shores who dared to strike a freeman’s blow for liberty, will not be surrendered by Canadian hands to be burnt at the stake by exulting traffickers in human blood!” In July 1861, Anderson addressed 6,000 people at Exeter Hall in London. “I thank God,” he said, “that I have had the fear of God in my soul, otherwise I should never have made my escape. I was very sorry to slay the man – I did not believe he was dead till they came to swear against me.” At an Emancipation Day celebration in London, he reiterated

⁶⁸³ Gerrit Smith. *Sermons and Speeches of Gerrit Smith*. New York, 1861, 140, 143. *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 5 June 2020. For more on Gerrit Smith’s address in Toronto, see G.W.P., “GERRIT SMITH AT TORONTO,” NASS, Feb. 2, 1861.

⁶⁸⁴ “PARLIAMENTARY RECORD. HOUSE OF COMMONS,” ASR, Mar. 1, 1861; *Can England Protect Fugitive Slaves? From the Christian Reformer for February, 1861* (London: C. Green, 1861), 1, accessed May 28, 2020. <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.55451/5?r=0&s=1>; Lord Lyons to Lord John Russell, Apr. 8, 1861. *Correspondence Respecting the Case of the Fugitive Slave, Anderson*, 46; “THE ENGLISH WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS,” *Upper Canada Law Journal and Municipal Local Court’s Gazette* (Toronto, ON), vol. 6, Mar. 1861, 53-59; “THE HABEAS CORPUS IN ANDERSON’S CASE,” *Upper Canada Law Journal and Municipal Local Court’s Gazette* vol. 8, Apr. 1861, 90; “THE LATE SIR JOHN B. ROBINSON, BARONET,” *Upper Canada Law Journal and Municipal Local Court’s Gazette* vol. 9, Mar. 1863, 63.

“how grateful he was for the kindness of the British people, and how happy he felt to be among them.”⁶⁸⁵

Southern enslavers did not cease their efforts to negotiate an extradition treaty for slave refugees in Canada. In January 1860, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* reported that Maryland’s Senate “has passed a resolution instructing the members of Congress from that State to call upon the President for the negotiation of a treaty with Great Britain for the restitution of the ten thousand runaway slaves now located in Canada.” Yet the British government rejected these appeals out of hand.⁶⁸⁶

A small number of kidnapping attempts were also documented in Upper Canada. Fred Landon wrote that kidnappings “took place occasionally at Windsor, Niagara, and other border points, some of these of the boldest character and in utter defiance of Canadian law.”⁶⁸⁷ William Lyon Mackenzie recalled two episodes during his visit to the province. The first incident involved “a poor black girl, who had escaped from the whip-lash to this side [of] the water, was seized on Sunday, near Queenstown, in broad daylight, between eleven and noon, by two hired scoundrels, who hauled and pulled her through that village[.]” Mackenzie claimed that the kidnappers alleged that the woman “had stolen five hundred dollars[.]” The Queenstown residents “stood by... and allowed the poor African to be placed by main force on board the ferry-boat which was to carry her back into slavery of a far worse nature than she had formerly experienced.”⁶⁸⁸

In April 1828, James Smith was, “seized a few nights ago in his bed, by a band of slave-holding ruffians from the south, and conveyed across the Niagara River gagged and pinioned. He was kept concealed near Lewiston in some old barrack, while his Virginia master, whom he recognised [sic], was making arrangements for proceeding onwards with his captive[.]” Smith managed to escape from his captors one night and “after lying concealed for forty-eight hours without fire or food, actually swam the Niagara [R]iver in the night, and thus secured his retreat.”⁶⁸⁹ From the 1830s, a handful of abduction attempts took place in Upper Canada. As the province’s black population rose, and the Canadian and British governments became

⁶⁸⁵ “THE DISCHARGE OF ANDERSON,” *Globe* (Toronto, ON), reprinted in NASS, Mar. 2, 1861; Jeannine Marie DeLombard, “Making Waves on the Black Atlantic: The Case of John Anderson,” *Slavery & Abolition* 33, no. 2 (2012), 192; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol 4: The British Isles: 1830-1865*, 494-495 (Anderson quote); “The Anniversary of Negro Emancipation,” NASS, Aug. 24, 1861; Finkelman, “International Extradition,” 770-778.

⁶⁸⁶ “The Senate of Maryland...” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Jan. 24, 1860. Also reported in “The Senate of Maryland...” *Dayton Daily Empire*, Jan. 30, 1860.

⁶⁸⁷ Fred Landon, “Fugitive Slaves in London before 1860,” in Frost et al. (eds.), *Ontario’s African-Canadian Heritage*, 140; Shadd, “Women and the Underground Railroad Movement,” in Bristow (ed.), *We’re Rooted Here*, 58.

⁶⁸⁸ William L. Mackenzie, *Sketches of Canada and the United States* (London: Effingham Wilson, Royal Exchange, 1833), 21-22, accessed May 6, 2020. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/lhbtn.10564/?st=gallery>.

⁶⁸⁹ Mackenzie, *Sketches of Canada and the United States*, 22-23. Smith’s kidnapping is also described in William Renwick Riddell, “Interesting Notes on Great Britain and Canada with Respect to the Negro,” *Journal of Negro History* 13, no. 2 (1928), 194-195.

more committed to free-soil policies, southern whites avoided venturing across the US – Canadian borderlands respectively in search of freedom seekers. In August 1843, the *Buffalo Daily Gazette* reported that slave catchers traveled to Sandwich “in pursuit off [sic] two runaway slaves but were met by a mob o[f] armed runaway negroes and severely beaten, being forced to return without their property.”⁶⁹⁰

Upper Canadian blacks remained vigilant about kidnappings in the province. In December 1851, the *Democratic Sentinel and Harrison County Farmer* claimed that one “Judge Jones, of Louisiana, and a gentleman of Detroit, were assailed by an armed mob of negroes in Chatham, Canada, a few days since, without any provocation whatever.”⁶⁹¹ In 1856, Daniel Hotchkiss claimed that a black man had recently been abducted and returned to the United States “under the pretence [sic] that he was a fugitive from justice.” One year later, John W. Wells and T. G. James of Nashville, journeyed to Chatham to capture “a smart, colored lad named Joseph Alexander[.]” A large crowd assembled outside the Royal Exchange Hotel and demanded that the kidnappers leave town.⁶⁹²

Two years later, W. R. Merwin kidnapped a black boy named Sylvanus Demarest in London. Merwin placed Demarest onto a train to forcibly remove him from Upper Canada. At Chatham, between 100 and 150 black activists assembled at the train station to await their arrival. Seven members of the Chatham Vigilance Committee were arrested for their involvement but all charges were soon dropped. While the rescue was praised by black activists and white abolitionists, southern whites were highly critical. The North Carolina *Western Democrat* claimed that Demarest did not wish to be rescued by the crowd. The newspaper stated that he “was taken out, crying, and endeavoring to cling to his master, and borne away by the crowd.”⁶⁹³ Of course, these allegations were completely unfounded. By most accounts, Demarest was relieved to retain his formal freedom in Canada.

⁶⁹⁰ “Two southern gentlemen...” *Buffalo Daily Gazette*, Aug. 19, 1843.

⁶⁹¹ “Judge Jones, of Louisiana...” *Democratic Sentinel and Harrison County Farmer* (Cadiz, OH), Dec. 17, 1851.

⁶⁹² “KIDNAPPING IN CANADA,” *NASS*, Apr. 5, 1856; “SLAVE-CATCHERS IN CANADA,” *Chatham Planet*, Aug. 5, 1857, reprinted in *ASB*, Aug. 22, 1857.

⁶⁹³ “NEGRO BOY TAKEN FROM HIS MASTER IN CANADA,” *Western Democrat* (Charlotte, NC), Oct. 12, 1858 (quote). For more reports on the Sylvanus Demarest case, see “The Slave Case – Merwin’s Story,” *Chatham Tri-Weekly Planet* (Chatham, ON), Oct. 4, 1858; “Negro Excitement in Canada,” *Wilmington Journal* (Wilmington, NC), Oct. 8, 1858; “A NEGRO BOY TAKEN FROM HIS MASTER IN CANADA,” *NASS*, Oct. 9, 1858; “ABDUCTION OF A NEGRO BOY,” *Ashtabula Weekly Telegraph*, Oct. 9, 1858; “THE CHATHAM (C.W.) NEGRO RIOT,” *Westfield Republican* (Westfield, NY), Oct. 13, 1858; “THE CANADA SLAVE CASE,” *ASB*, Oct. 16, 1858; “THE CANADA RESCUE,” *NASS*, Oct. 30, 1858; Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary*, 132; Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 75, 95; Natasha L. Henry, “Fugitive Slave Act of 1850,” *TheCanadianEncyclopedia.ca*, Feb. 10, 2015. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/fugitive-slave-act-of-1850>. Accessed Oct. 31, 2018; Natasha L. Henry, “Underground Railroad,” *TheCanadianEncyclopedia.ca*, Feb. 7, 2006. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/underground-railroad>. Accessed Oct. 31, 2018; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 392-393.

Conclusion

The threats of kidnapping and re-enslavement loomed over slave refugees in the northern US and Canada. Under US federal law, namely the federal Fugitive Slave Acts, southern enslavers were legally entitled to recapture freedom seekers in the ‘free’ states. That being said, various factors limited their ability to re-enslave self-emancipated people in the North. Most notably, personal liberty laws, judicial rulings, and acts of extra-legal civil disobedience transformed parts of the northern states into *de facto* spaces of refuge. New England, Upstate New York, and Ohio’s Western Reserve were among the safest regions for self-emancipated refugees. Nonetheless, the threats of kidnapping, recapture, and re-enslavement never completely dissipated.

Meanwhile, slave refugees in Canada were more secure from re-enslavement. Beyond the jurisdiction of the Fugitive Slave Acts, southern enslavers held no legal means of reclaiming self-emancipated people in British North America. US diplomats initiated several attempts to negotiate a slave refugee extradition agreement with Great Britain. Over time, southern enslavers and state governments embraced alternative strategies to secure the extradition of self-emancipated refugees in Canada. By petitioning for criminals rather than slave refugees, they sought to exploit legal loopholes to re-enslave self-emancipated blacks. Apart from one case, this strategy was almost entirely unsuccessful. Nelson Hackett was ultimately the only refugee to be extradited to the United States in the antebellum era. Moreover, the handful of kidnapping attempts were met with staunch resistance from black and white activists in Canada.

This chapter illustrates that formal freedom in British North America offered greater legal protections to slave refugees than semi-formal freedom in the northern US. But this should not suggest that freedom seekers in the North had no legal or extra-legal defenses whatsoever. It is fair to suggest that the northern US was a space of semi-formal or incomplete free soil, while Canada was a site of formal or complete free soil. Chapter Five will switch focus to the political mobilization of slave refugees. In particular, it will examine their involvement in the transnational abolitionist movement, campaigns for equal rights and citizenship, and emigration.

Chapter Five

Abolitionism, Citizenship, and Emigration: The Political Mobilization of Slave Refugees

On March 6, 1857, the US Supreme Court issued one of the most infamous rulings in its history. The case involved Dred Scott, an enslaved man from Missouri who sued for his liberty. Scott's legal team insisted that Dred and his wife, Harriet, were both entitled to their freedom because they had previously resided in Illinois and Wisconsin. Although Scott lost the first suit in 1847, a St. Louis jury sided with him three years later. However, the Missouri Supreme Court overturned the St. Louis courts' decision in 1852. The case was taken up by the US Supreme Court which, in *Dred Scott v. John F. A. Sandford*, ruled against Scott. Going even further, however, it also ruled that African Americans held no claims to US citizenship.⁶⁹⁴ Chief Justice Roger B. Taney wrote, "We think that they are not, and that they are not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word "citizens" in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides for and secures to citizens of the United States." The Supreme Court essentially affirmed that the United States was essentially a *Herrenvolk* republic, in which only white Euro-Americans could become citizens.⁶⁹⁵

Understandably, African Americans, African Canadians, and white abolitionists were appalled by the *Dredd Scott* ruling. The *Anti-Slavery Bugle* stated, "The Federal Court declares that the laws of Missouri prevail in Illinois, no matter what the Constitution and laws of the latter may be." Some newspapers opted for passionate, fiery language. A letter in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* declared, "the Supreme Court of the United States has washed its hands in the blood of Dred Scott and his family, and in millions yet unborn[.]"⁶⁹⁶ The Supreme Court's decision energized advocates of black emigration schemes. Mary Ann Shadd Cary urged African American men and women to join her and thousands more in British North America. "Your national ship is rotten and sinking," she proclaimed, "why not leave it?" Similarly, her brother Isaac D. Shadd wrote in the *Provincial Freeman*:

⁶⁹⁴ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 170-174. For the most authoritative analysis of the Dred Scott decision, see Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Dred Scott Case: Its Significance in American Law and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

⁶⁹⁵ *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 US 393 (1856), US Supreme Court, accessed Apr. 8, 2019. <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/60/393/>. For more on the antebellum United States as a *Herrenvolk* democracy, see David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991; reprinted 1992), 172; Christopher Malone, *Between Freedom and Bondage: Race, Party and Voting Rights in the Antebellum North* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 57.

⁶⁹⁶ "THE DRED SCOTT CASE," ASB, Mar. 14, 1857; Rook, "COLOURPHOBIA IN BOSTON," NASS, Mar. 21, 1857.

Who are American citizens among the masses of colored Northern state men? There are none according to the lately declared meaning of the Constitution. We are of opinion that people proscribed in their native land, denied the rights of citizenship, without claim to government protection, must feel to be but little superior in condition to the slave, and according to the "Fugitive Slave Law" they are all as liable to arrest... The Canadas have been reputed by the people of the States to be but a suitable refuge for the fugitive; but permit us to say, that these fugitives are men! [M]any of them acknowledged British subjects, and those that are not, in due time will be.⁶⁹⁷

Mary Ann Shadd Cary, argues Jane Rhodes, "embraced Canadian citizenship, arguing that British North America offered great potential as a new black homeland that symbolically repudiated the United States while offering material refuge." Shadd pledged her loyalty and devotion to Queen Victoria and urged black men and women to follow her example. She embraced British customs, celebrated the abolition of slavery in the West Indies, and encouraged men and women to serve the Crown. While slave refugees fled from bondage, free African Americans "emigrated as an act of disidentification with the United States."⁶⁹⁸

The relationship between citizenship, race, and slavery in North America was sharply contested. In the United States, African Americans were afforded significantly fewer rights and protections than whites. Linda Kerber argues that there was no such thing as a truly "free black" in the antebellum era. "Before the Civil War," she writes, "free African American men could not serve in the militia or carry the mail. 'Free' blacks were forbidden to move into some states, and slave states often required emancipated slaves to move out of state and never return." The right to vote, own property, and myriad other liberties were denied to black men and women.⁶⁹⁹ For slave refugees, the situation was even more precarious. Officially considered chattel under federal law, they were not even fully regarded as people. For black abolitionists, the abolitionist movement was not solely about eradicating slavery; it was equally about eliminating prejudice and racial discrimination in the North.

⁶⁹⁷ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 371-372.

⁶⁹⁸ Jane Rhodes, "The Contestation over National Identity: Nineteenth-Century Black Americans in Canada," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 30, no. 2 (2000), 180-181.

⁶⁹⁹ Linda K. Kerber, "The Meanings of Citizenship," *Journal of American History* 84, no. 3 (1997), 842.

In Canada, meanwhile, self-emancipated refugees and free African American newcomers also sought access to equal citizenship.⁷⁰⁰ William Grose of St. Catharines told Benjamin Drew, “I am a true British subject, and I have a vote every year as much as any other man.” Similarly, Alexander Hamilton of London declared, “I am naturalized here, and have all the rights and privileges of a British subject.” Rev. Alexander Hemsley affirmed, “Now I am a regular Britisher. My American blood has been scourged out of me; I have lost my American tastes; I am an enemy to tyranny.” That being said, most freedom seekers opted to remain in the northern US than immigrate to Canada. Rather than seek British subjecthood, they opted to remain in the North and fight for unqualified US citizenship.⁷⁰¹

On paper, the northern states and Canada were dramatically different societies. Across the North, black people were largely denied the right to vote, barred from testifying in court, banned from using public transportation and accommodation, and disqualified from public office. African Americans organized protests and campaigned for equality.⁷⁰² Meanwhile, black refugees in Canada could vote, testify in court, use public transportation. In reality, African Americans and African Canadians people faced similar challenges, including discrimination, segregation, and inferior treatment, and occasionally acts of violence.⁷⁰³ This chapter examines the political mobilization of slave refugees in the North and Canada. What roles did slave refugees perform in the North American abolitionist movement? How

⁷⁰⁰ For the sake of ease, ‘citizenship’ and ‘subjecthood’ will be used interchangeably throughout this chapter. The author acknowledges that the two concepts technically differ in some regards (such as notions of identity). However, given that most discussions of both focus on a broadly similar array of rights, privileges and protections, they will be treated as largely identical concepts.

⁷⁰¹ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 39, 86, 179; For more on African American refugees conceiving themselves as British subjects, see Dann J. Broyle, “Justice was Refused Me, I Resolved to Free Myself”: John W. Lindsay Finding Elements of American Freedom in British Canada, 1805-1876,” *Ontario History* 109, no. 1 (2017).

⁷⁰² One of the best appraisals of African American political activism in the antebellum North remains Leon Litwack’s *North of Slavery*, esp. Ch. 3. Since then, many key works have greatly expanded our understanding of black political activism and racial discriminations in the ‘free’ states. Patrick Rael’s *Black Identity & Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002) is the best recent study on African American activism in the antebellum North. For other recent works, see Patrick Rael, “Free Black Activism in the Antebellum North,” *History Teacher* 39, no. 2 (2006), 215-253; James Brewer Stewart, “Modernizing “Difference”: The Political Meanings of Color in the Free States, 1776-1840,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 19, no. 4 (1999), 691-712; Julie Winch, *Philadelphia’s Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988); Kantrowitz, *More than Freedom*; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*; Hodges, *Root & Branch*; Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*; Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*; Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, esp. Ch. 7.

⁷⁰³ Surprisingly, there are only a handful of scholarly works dedicated to black political mobilization and abolitionism in British Canada. See Stouffer, *Light of Nature*; Robin W. Winks, “‘A Sacred Animosity’: Abolitionism in Canada,” in Martin B. Duberman (ed.), *The Antislavery Vanguard: New Essays on the Abolitionists* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 301-342; Paul, “Out of Chatham.” The main works on black Canadian historiography also contain sections on black activism in British North America. See Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*; Silverman, *Unwelcome Guests*; and Henry, *Emancipation Day*.

did refugees campaign for equal citizenship? Manisha Sinha writes that slave refugees advanced a new form of black politics in North America: “fugitive slave abolitionism.” Self-emancipators like Frederick Douglass, James W.C. Pennington, Samuel Ringgold Ward, Henry Bibb, and Harriet Tubman became some of the most influential figures in the nineteenth-century anti-slavery movement. Since the 1960s, historians have published important studies on black abolitionism. Yet few studies have focused exclusively on the contributions of slave refugees to this movement.⁷⁰⁴ Self-emancipators published autobiographies and memoirs, established newspapers and wrote novels, held leadership positions in anti-slavery societies, organized public festivals, and addressed interracial audiences. They captivated northern and Canadian audiences with their stories of enslavement and self-emancipation.

Furthermore, slave refugees in the northern US and Canada were also central to militant abolitionism. They engaged in violent insurrections to forcibly eradicate the institution of slavery. John Brown’s raid at Harper’s Ferry featured a mix of free-born and freed blacks, as well as slave refugees in the United States and Canada. Aside from abolitionism, slave refugees performed critical roles in other political campaigns. Most notably, they campaigned alongside free blacks and white abolitionists against segregation, prejudice, and discrimination. Moreover, they encouraged supporters to engage with electoral politics and throw their support behind abolitionist parties. In this regard, slave refugees pushed the abolitionist movement in an overtly political direction.

Lastly, slave refugees became involved in two other interrelated issues: opposition to colonization and voluntary emigration. White Quakers and enslavers believed that free blacks were incapable of living freely alongside Euro-American and European whites. “Colonizationists,” argues Paul Goodman, “formally conceptualized the American republic in racial terms and offered a program for purifying the nation, North and South.” African Americans and African Canadians opposed such proposals and asserted their claims to equal citizenship.⁷⁰⁵ By the

⁷⁰⁴ Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause* (for ‘Fugitive Slave Abolitionism,’ see Ch. 13). For more on the historiography of black abolitionism, see Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*; John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Hodges, *David Ruggles*. The best scholarly work of black women’s abolitionism is Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1992); Manisha Sinha, “Coming of Age: The Historiography of Black Abolitionism,” in Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John Stauffer (eds.), *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering the History of American Abolitionism* (New York: New Press, 2006), 23-38.

⁷⁰⁵ Paul Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 19. For more on colonization and its opponents, see Philip J. Stradenraus, *The African Colonization Movement: 1616-1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); Floyd J. Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Emigration and Colonization, 1787-1861* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975); Douglas Egerton, “Its Origins is Not a Little Curious: A New Look at the American Colonization Society,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 5, no. 4 (1985), 263-280; Beverly C. Tomek, *Colonization and Its Discontents: Emancipation, Emigration, and Antislavery in Antebellum Pennsylvania* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Ousmane K. Power-Greene, *Against Wind*

1850s, however, some free blacks and slave refugees came to endorse immigration to Mexico, the Caribbean, and West Africa. Martha S. Jones writes, “The line between emigration and colonization was real, distinguishing self-determination from compulsion.” Disillusioned with their prospects in North America, many set their sights on beacons of liberty elsewhere. The British West Indies, Central and South America, and West Africa were considered the most viable alternatives. This chapter illustrates how slave refugees, working alongside legally free people of color, were integral to black emigration schemes in the northern US and Canada. Consequently, they promoted Pan-African identities and helped to solidify what Paul Gilroy termed the Black Atlantic.⁷⁰⁶

“What Shall we do with the free people of color?” African American and White Abolitionist Opposition to Colonization

Colonization was first conceived alongside manumission and gradual abolition. White Southerners (as well as northern whites) believed that free African Americans were incapable of living alongside them. Many began to formulate schemes by which African-descended people would be expelled from the continent. In his *Thoughts on the Colonization of Free Blacks*, Rev. Robert Finley asked, “What shall we do with the free people of color?... *the gradual separation of the black from the white population.*” In 1816, Finley and others founded the American Colonization Society (ACS). Its aim was “to promote and execute a plan for colonizing (with their consent) the free people of color, residing in our country, in Africa, or such other place as Congress shall deem most expedient.” Between 1820 and 1834, the ACS funded the forced removal of more than 4,000 African Americans⁷⁰⁷

and Tide: *The African American Struggle against the Colonization Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Matthew Spooner, “‘I Know This Scheme is from God’: Toward a Reconstruction of the Origins of the American Colonization Society,” *Slavery & Abolition* 35, no. 4 (2014), 559-574.

⁷⁰⁶ Martha S. Jones, *Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Rights in Antebellum America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 38; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Rhodes, “The Contestation over National Identity,” 175. Further readings on black nationalism and emigration schemes include Miller, *Search for Black Nationality*; Winch, *Philadelphia’s Black Elite*, Chapters 2 and 3; Chris Dixon, *African America and Haiti: Emigration and Black Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000); Sara Fanning, *Caribbean Crossing: African Americans and the Haitian Emigration Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2015); Elena K. Abbot, “Beacons of Liberty: Free-Soil Havens and the American Anti-Slavery Movement, 1813-1863,” (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2017).

⁷⁰⁷ Finley quoted in Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 163, 164; American Colonization Society, The first annual report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color of the United States: and the proceedings of the Society for their annual meeting in the city of Washington, on the first day of January, 1818. Washington City [i.e., Washington, D.C.], 1818. Slavery and Anti-Slavery. Gale. Universiteit

Before this, some African Americans had experimented with emigration schemes to West Africa. In 1811, Paul Cuffe, a black ship captain, sailed to Sierra Leone to join the black Nova Scotians. Over the 1820s, some black activists promoted emigration from North America to Liberia. John Brown Russwurm, a Jamaica-born abolitionist, advocated Liberian emigration schemes. In 1829, he moved to Liberia and encouraged others to join him. He wrote, "I long to see young men, who are now wasting their best days in the United States, flocking to this land as the last asylum to the unfortunate." Black newcomers faced many hardships in Liberia, including hunger, illness, and early death.⁷⁰⁸

African Americans opposed the forced emigration schemes spearheaded by the ACS. In May 1831, representatives met at the African Union Methodist Church in Wilmington, Delaware, to voice their opposition to the ACS. They resolved, "We are natives of the United States; our ancestors were brought to this country by means over which they had no control; we have our attachments to the soil, and we feel that we have rights in common with other Americans... Africa is neither our nation nor home[.]" Similarly, the *Christian Register* contended, "If the blacks choose to prefer America to Africa, is it humane or Christian to attempt to expel them, either by open violence or by the force of opinion?"⁷⁰⁹ The most widely publicized essay against the ACS was David Walker's *Appeal to the Coloured [sic] Citizens of the World*. He argued that remaining in the United States "is as much ours as it is the whites, whether they will admit it now or not[.]" Walker's *Appeal* was met with hostility among southern whites. The *Liberator* wrote, "a better promoter of insurrection was never sent forth to an oppressed people."⁷¹⁰

Leiden/LUMC. 8 Aug. 2018. Pg. 2; Wilson Jeremiah Moses (ed.), *Liberian Dreams: Back-to-Africa Narratives from the 1850s* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), xxi-xxii; Felix Brenton, "American Colonization Society," *BlackPast.org*, Dec. 30, 2008.

<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/american-colonization-society-1816-1964/>.

Accessed Jun. 12, 2019. For more on the ACS and abolitionist response, see George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), Ch. 1.

⁷⁰⁸ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 161-162, 167; Sandra Sandiford Young, "John Brown Russwurm's Dilemma: Citizenship or Emigration?" in McCarthy and Stauffer (eds.), *Prophets of Protest*, 90; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 3: The United States, 1830-1846*, 72.

⁷⁰⁹ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 3: The United States, 1830-1846*, 103; "COLONIZATION OF THE FREE BLACKS," *Christian Register*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Mar. 4, 1831.

⁷¹⁰ David Walker, "ADDRESS, Delivered before the General Colored Association at Boston, by David Walker." *Freedom's Journal*, Dec. 20, 1828; David Walker, *Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in particular, and very expressly, to those of the United States of America, written in Boston, State of Massachusetts, September 28, 1829*, 3rd ed. (Boston: David Walker, 1830), 62, accessed Apr. 8, 2019.

<https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/walker/walker.html>; "WALKER'S PAMPHLET," *Liberator*, Jan. 1, 1831.

For more on David Walker, see Peter P. Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); Gosse, "'As a Nation, the English Are Our Friends,' 1003-1028.

Black opposition to colonization shaped white abolitionist views of the ACS. In 1832, William Lloyd Garrison published his *Thoughts on African Colonization*, which rebuked the ACS and its members' claims. He challenged negative stereotypes regarding free people of color. "In Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New-York, and other places," Garrison wrote, "there are several colored persons whose individual property is worth from ten thousand to one hundred thousand dollars; and in all those cities, there are primary and high schools for the education of the colored population – flourishing churches of various denominations – and numerous societies for mutual assistance and improvement[.]”⁷¹¹ By the 1830s, white abolitionists came to understand that the ACS was not truly an anti-slavery organization. On the contrary, abolitionists increasingly believed that colonization bolstered US slavery. Garrison's *Liberator* summarized the abolitionist criticism:

The Colonization Society is for delaying restitution to the slaves for years – for an indefinite and distant period. The Anti-Slavery Society is for having justice done at once to the slaves. The former insists upon a gradual, the latter upon an instantaneous abolition of slavery. The former is the apologist and ally of southern kidnappers. The latter holds no fellowship with them, but faithfully exposes their guilt. The former insists upon a removal of the colored population to Africa, as the only condition of their freedom. The latter claims for them the protection of law as American citizens.⁷¹²

Through their opposition to the ACS, black men and women had not only convinced white abolitionists that they should remain in the United States, but that they were also entitled to the same civil liberties and legal protections. "Had it not been for free blacks such as William Watkins and David Walker," argues Ousmane Power-Greene, "William Lloyd Garrison might have continued to hold colonization sympathies[.]”⁷¹³ Opposition to the ACS marked the beginning of the 'second wave' of abolitionism. This new wave differed from its predecessor in several respects. For starters, free blacks and slave refugees assumed leadership positions within second wave societies and organizations. Furthermore, second wave abolitionism was more transnational in scope. Slave refugees and free blacks in Canada formed anti-slavery

⁷¹¹ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 214-221; Garrison, William Lloyd. Thoughts on African colonization, or, An impartial exhibition of the doctrines, principles and purposes of the American Colonization Society, together with the resolutions, addresses, and remonstrances of the free people of color by Wm. Lloyd Garrison. Boston, 1832. *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 12 June 2019. Pg. 133.

⁷¹² "A Strange Question," *Liberator*, Dec. 15, 1832.

⁷¹³ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 241; Power-Greene, *Against Wind and Tide*, 48.

societies, staged meetings and protests, and published newspapers in conjunction with white abolitionists in Canada. Working across borders, US and Canadian activists forged a transnational immediatist movement.

Second Wave Abolitionism and Slave Refugee Activism

Beginning in the early 1830s, new anti-slavery organizations were established across the northern US and Canada. In 1832, abolitionists in Boston founded the New England Anti-Slavery Society (NEASS) at the Belknap Street African Baptist Church. William Lloyd Garrison, Samuel J. May, Theodore Weld, and Arthur Tappan attended its first annual meeting. The following year, New York abolitionists founded the New York Anti-Slavery Society (NYASS). A couple of months later, abolitionists met in Philadelphia to establish the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS). In 1835, the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society (OASS) held its first convention in Putnam, Ohio.⁷¹⁴ Women abolitionists also formed separate societies across the North. In 1833, they founded the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Philadelphia (FASSP). The following year, women abolitionists founded the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS). In Henry County, Indiana, female activists established the Henry County Female Anti-Slavery Society in 1841. Its constitution emphasized the duty of “Christian women” to campaign against the institution of slavery and aid African-descended people.⁷¹⁵

African Americans also established separate abolitionist organizations. In May 1834, black activists in Newark, New Jersey, established the Colored Anti-Slavery Society of Newark (CASSN). It aimed “to endeavor by all honest means sanctioned by law, humanity and religion, to collect funds, to aid the American Anti-Slavery Society, to effect the immediate abolition of slavery in the United States, to improve the character of us the free people of color, to inform and correct public opinion in relation to our situation and rights, and to obtain for us, equal civil and

⁷¹⁴ Richard Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 107; Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 23-24; Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 223-227; New England Anti-Slavery Society. Board of Managers. First annual report of the Board of Managers of the New England Anti-Slavery Society: presented Jan. 9, 1833: with an appendix. Boston, 1833. Slavery and Anti-Slavery. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 26 Sept. 2018. pp. 5-6; Anti-Slavery Convention (1833: Philadelphia, Pa.). Proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Convention: assembled at Philadelphia. December 4, 5, and 6, 1833. New York, 1833. Slavery and Anti-Slavery. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 26 Sept. 2018; Ohio Anti-Slavery Convention (1835: Putnam). Report on the condition of the people of color in the state of Ohio: from the proceedings of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Convention, held at Putnam, on the 22d, 23d, and 24th of April. 1835. [Ohio?], [1835?]. Slavery and Anti-Slavery. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 26 Sept. 2018.

⁷¹⁵ Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism*, 120-122; Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 25-27; Records of the Henry County Female Anti-Slavery Society, 1841-1849. L211. ISL. Indianapolis, Indiana.

religious privileges with white inhabitants of the land.” Elsewhere, African Americans founded their independent anti-slavery organizations. The rise of immediate abolitionism was a significant step for black activism across the North. In 1839, Charles B. Ray praised the ascendancy of the interracial immediatism; “Without the abolition movement,” he asserted, “our colored citizens would have dragged out an intolerable existence of, at least, fifty more years, without energy, efficiency or elevation... ‘ABOLITION’ has awoke this dispirited people to the dignity of manhood and to the energy and enterprize [sic] of freemen.”⁷¹⁶

Slave refugees and legally free blacks became prominent figures within anti-slavery organizations, although they rarely assumed leadership positions. Frederick Douglass was a close friend of William Lloyd Garrison and other white abolitionists in the North. Others, such as Samuel Ringgold Ward, Henry Bibb, and William Wells Brown, also joined second wave anti-slavery organizations. Formerly enslaved men and women, writes Benjamin Quarles, “proved a godsend to the [abolitionist] cause.” Schisms within US abolitionism, namely between the more radical ‘Garrisonians’ and conservative activists, ultimately led to the collapse of the national movement in the early 1840s. Nevertheless, free blacks and slave refugees from enslavement remained important figures in the abolitionist movement.⁷¹⁷

Abolitionist organizations were also established in Canada, although the anti-slavery movement took longer to get off the ground. In 1827, black activists in Windsor founded one of Upper Canada’s first anti-slavery societies. It quickly fell into obscurity, however. About ten years later, Methodist minister Ephraim Evans established the Upper Canada Anti-Slavery Society (UCASS) in Toronto. Article 2 of the UCASS Constitution stated that its main objectives were “the entire abolition of slavery throughout the world; the removal of existing prejudice against the people of color; and the elevation of their character and condition, by promoting their mental and religious improvement.” Members reaffirmed their British subjecthood and fidelity to the Crown, as well as their objection to black enslavement on religious grounds. “It grew to claim 106 members,” notes Robin Winks, “but did not last out the decade.”⁷¹⁸

The FSA 1850 inspired a new wave of Canadian abolitionism and anti-slavery societies. On February 26, 1851, abolitionists founded the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada (ASSC) in Toronto. Its executive committee included George Brown, editor of the *Toronto Globe*, Henry Bibb, and black businessman Wilson Anderson Ruffin. The ASSC Constitution stated: “The passage of the atrocious

⁷¹⁶ Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 28-31; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 3: The United States, 1830-1846*, 132-135 (first quote), 311-313 (second quote).

⁷¹⁷ Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 56-67 (quote on 61).

⁷¹⁸ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 253-254; Stouffer, *Light of Nature*, 108. For the UCASS Constitution, see Thomas Price, *Slavery in America: with of the present state of slavery and the slave trade throughout the world*. London, 1837, 208. *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 8 June 2020.

Fugitive Slave Bill gave a new impulse to the friends of justice, and of the sympathy of the oppressed. It seemed impossible to witness the arrival, in Canada, of so many sufferers under the law, without being convinced of the duty of crying aloud to our neighbours [sic] across the Line[.]" The ASSC's primary objective was "to aid in the extinction of Slavery all over the world, by means exclusively lawful and peaceable, moral and religious, by tracts, newspapers, lectures, and correspondence, and by manifesting sympathy with the houseless and homeless victims of Slavery flying to our soil."⁷¹⁹ News of ASSC meetings gradually trickled down to the US South, exacerbating concerns among enslavers. In October 1851, the Louisiana *Planters' Banner* wrote that anti-slavery conventions and meetings in Toronto openly disavowed the FSA 1850 and urged "runaway negroes to escape into Canada, where they intend providing means to enable them to settle there."⁷²⁰

Meanwhile, abolitionists across North America and the British Isles praised the ASSC's work. In April, abolitionist George W. Putnam wrote to William Lloyd Garrison that meetings in Toronto "have done great good" for the Canadian abolitionist movement.⁷²¹ Meanwhile, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* wrote, "If the members of the Society are disposed to extend the helping hand to the flying bondman, their friends on the other side of the line will keep them busy." Speaking at an anti-slavery meeting in Toronto, British abolitionist George Thompson contrasted Canada's 'free' soil with US slavery. "America," he claimed, "seems to have no actuating principle but slavery, no God but slavery. At the South, the soil is monopolized by it... Every portion of the population is under its direct and absolute influence." Thompson urged supporters to aid "the refugees from the house of American bondage," and promote the cause of abolitionism. He declared, "the time shall come when, from sea to sea, and from the Arctic regions to Panama, this soil shall be sacred to freedom."⁷²²

At its height, roughly 200 people belonged to the ASSC. Local chapters were established across Upper Canada. Women abolitionists also formed auxiliary organizations in the province. The Toronto Ladies' Association (TLA), for instance,

⁷¹⁹ Nathan Barker, "Anti-Slavery Society of Canada," *TheCanadianEncyclopedia.ca*, Feb. 13, 2018. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/anti-slavery-society-of-canada>. Accessed Sep. 2, 2018; *Constitution and By-Laws of the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada* (Toronto: George Brown, "Globe" Office, 1851), 3-5. Obtained via: https://archive.org/details/cihm_67288/page/n7, accessed Apr. 20, 2019. For more on the CASS, see Fred Landon, "The Anti-Slavery Society of Canada," *Journal of Negro History* 4, no. 1 (1919), 33-40; Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 254-262; Stouffer, *Light of Nature*, 215.

⁷²⁰ "Movements of Abolitionists," *Planters' Banner* (Franklin, LA), Oct. 11, 1851.

⁷²¹ Putnam, George W., and William Lloyd Garrison. "Letter from George W. Putnam, Toronto [Ontario], to William Lloyd Garrison, 1851 April 13th." Correspondence. April 13, 1851. *Digital Commonwealth*, accessed Jun 3, 2020.

<https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:2v23wx41q>.

⁷²² "ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY IN CANADA," *NASS*, Mar. 6, 1851; "SPEECH OF GEORGE THOMPSON, M. P., AT TORONTO," *Toronto Patriot*, reprinted in *Liberator*, May 16, 1851.

assisted slave refugees in the city. Over the decade, ASSC meetings were staged across Upper Canada. In June 1854, the *Frederick Douglass' Paper* reported that the annual ASSC meeting “was a highly interesting and satisfactory demonstration.” Canadian, US, and British abolitionists attended the meeting, including Samuel Ward and John Scoble.⁷²³ The ASSC continued to operate over the 1850s, although the relative scarcity of newspaper articles after 1855 suggests that the organization had already fallen into decline. Nonetheless, the ASSC continued to organize meetings into the following decade. In February 1863, abolitionist George Brown addressed an ASSC meeting in Toronto. In his speech, Brown praised President Abraham Lincoln and called for a Union victory in the Civil War.⁷²⁴

Other abolitionist societies were established across Upper Canada over the decade. In Windsor, black and white activists founded the Anti-Slavery Society of Windsor (ASSW) in October 1852. Its mission was “the abolition of chattle [sic] Slavery, and the elevation of the colored population of North America[.]” Henry Bibb became the ASSW’s first president, while Mary Bibb and Mary Ann Shadd Cary were also members. Little is ultimately known about the ASSW’s activities or lifespan.⁷²⁵ Working in tandem with free blacks and white abolitionists, slave refugees were vital to the anti-slavery movement. The next section will examine the core tenets of ‘fugitive slave abolitionism.’

Fugitive Slave Abolitionism: Literary Culture, Oratory, and Transnational Militancy

Slave refugees made an invaluable contribution to the North American abolitionist movement. Freedom narratives, memoirs, and autobiographies were among their most significant contributions. Frederick Douglass, Samuel Ringgold Ward, Josiah Henson, Henry Bibb, Lewis Clarke, William Wells Brown, James Pennington, Henry

⁷²³ *First Annual Report Presented to the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada by its Executive Committee, March 24th, 1852* (Toronto: Brown’s Printing Establishment, King Street East, 1852). Accessed via Barker, “Anti-Slavery Society of Canada,”; “CANADA ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY,” *FDP*, Jun. 30, 1854 (quote). For more articles on the ASSC, its agents and meetings, see “UPPER CANADA – ANNIVERSARY OF THE ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY,” *ASR*, May 1, 1852; “Anti-Slavery Anniversary,” *Globe*, reprinted in *FDP*, Apr. 8, 1853; “SAMUEL R. WARD, OF CANADA,” *ASR*, Jun. 1, 1853; “FUGITIVE SLAVES IN CANADA,” *ASR*, Jul. 1, 1853; “FUGITIVE SLAVES IN CANADA,” *British Banner*, reprinted in *FDP*, Apr. 21, 1854; Barker, “Anti-Slavery Society of Canada”; For more on Samuel Ringgold Ward and the ASSC, see Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary*, 59-60.

⁷²⁴ Brown, George. *The American war and slavery: speech of the Hon. George Brown at the anniversary meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada: held at Toronto on Wednesday, February 3, 1863*, 4. Manchester [England], 1863. *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*. Gale. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC. 8 June 2020.

⁷²⁵ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 222-223; Stouffer, *Light of Nature*, 122-123; Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary*, 64; Tarah Brookfield, *Our Voices Must Be Heard: Women and the Vote in Ontario* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018), 29-31.

'Box' Brown, and William Grimes all published popular memoirs. "By the late 1840s," notes Ezra Greenspan, "fugitive-slave narratives were so numerous that they were becoming identifiable as a common body of writing[.]" White abolitionists understood that the testimonies of formerly enslaved people would benefit the anti-slavery cause and quickly published their stories.⁷²⁶ Freedom narratives were the most important forms of abolitionist literature. "Presenting improbable and daring stories of escape," writes Sinha, "they captured the public imagination and showcased both the ingenuity of self-emancipated slaves... and the abolitionist underground."⁷²⁷

Other slave refugees published novels to convert northern and Canadian whites to the abolitionist cause. William Wells Brown published *Clotel* in 1853, which told the story of two fictional enslaved daughters of Thomas Jefferson (which undoubtedly drew inspiration from the life of Sally Hemmings). Frederick Douglass published *The Heroic Slave*, a fictional work based on Madison Washington and the *Creole* revolt. Through these writings, black authors transformed popular perceptions of freedom seekers. "The heroes and heroines of these books," notes Manisha Sinha, "were rebels and fugitives, characters who challenged the military might and political power of the slaveholding republic."⁷²⁸

Slave refugees were also instrumental in the formation of an independent African American and African Canadian press. Founded in 1827, the New York City *Freedom's Journal* was the first black newspaper in North America. John Russwurm and Samuel Cornish set out the newspaper's purpose in its first issue: "The civil rights of a people being of the greatest value, it shall ever be our duty to vindicate our brethren, (who are qualified by the laws of the different states) the expediency of using their elective franchise; and of making an independent use of the same." For its brief two-year history, the newspaper informed readers on social and political developments. As Timothy Patrick McCarthy argues, the *Freedom's Journal* "continued the trend among African Americans of moving away from explicitly oral

⁷²⁶ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 423; Ezra Greenspan, *William Wells Brown: An African American Life* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 150. Numerous works have examined the impact of freedom narratives and autobiographies from formerly enslaved African Americans. See Jeannine Marie DeLombard, *Slavery on Trial: Law, Abolitionism, and Print Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); James Olney, "'I was Born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and Literature," *Callaloo* 20 (1984), 46-73; Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates (eds.), *The Slave's Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Michael A. Chaney, *Fugitive Vision: Slave Image and Black Identity in Antebellum Narrative* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008); Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise (eds.) *The Long Walk to Freedom: Runaway Slave Narratives* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013). In recent years, historians and literary scholars have directed greater attention to the transnational and transatlantic impact of freedom narratives, autobiographies, and memoirs in British Canada. See Nancy Kang, "'As if I had entered a Paradise': Fugitive Slave Narratives and Cross-Border Literary History," *African American Review* 39, no. 3 (2005), 431-457; Nelle Sawallisch, *Fugitive Borders: Black Canadian Cross-Border Literature at Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2019).

⁷²⁷ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 423, 436 (quote).

⁷²⁸ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 441-451 (quote on 450).

modes of expression toward a growing reliance on print culture as a site of political discourse.” Over time, black activists founded other black newspapers across the North. Frederick Douglass founded several newspapers, such as the *Frederick Douglass Paper* and *North Star*.⁷²⁹

In Canada, slave refugees were instrumental in the formation of an independent African Canadian press. In 1851, Henry Bibb founded the *Voice of the Fugitive* in Sandwich. “We need a press,” he asserted, “that we may be independent of those who have always oppressed us – we need a press that we may hang our banners on the outer wall, that all who pass by may read why we struggle, and what we struggle for.”⁷³⁰ Bibb quickly established close relationships with African American leaders and white abolitionists in the Detroit River borderland and beyond, including Frederick Douglass, Samuel Ringgold Ward, and William Still. Isaac Henson, the presumed son of Josiah Henson, declared, “Let the *Voice* speak as a mighty trumpet – let the sound reach across the Atlantic Ocean that Britain may hear the wrongs of those refugees who have nobly pledged their all to the support of the Government.” Black activists saw the value of an African Canadian press to the abolitionist movement. “What we do here,” wrote Samuel Ringgold Ward, “must exert a most powerful influence upon our cause in the United States.”⁷³¹

Two years later, Mary Ann Shadd Cary founded the *Provincial Freeman*. Based in Windsor, Shadd’s newspaper supported the immediate abolition of slavery, promoted racial equality and black elevation, advocated immigration to Canada, and staunchly opposed the ACS. In March 1853, she claimed that some whites in Upper Canada “look upon it [colonization] with considerable favor. Such do not know how much is done to promote colonization by the disparagement of the black man, and by a denial of his rights[.]” While the *Voice* dedicated much of its attention to land-ownership schemes and the condition of black refugees, the *Provincial Freeman*,

⁷²⁹ “To Our Patriots,” *Freedom’s Journal*, Mar. 16, 1827 (first quote); Jacqueline Bacon, *Freedom’s Journal: The First African-American Newspaper* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 13, 37; Timothy Patrick McCarthy, “‘To Plead Our Own Cause’: Black Print Culture and the Origins of American Abolitionism,” in McCarthy and Stauffer (eds.), *Prophets of Protest*, 117 (second quote); Frankie Hutton, *The Early Black Press in America, 1827-1860* (Westport, BT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 4-9; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 3: The United States, 1848-1846*, 216. For more on the *Freedom’s Journal*, see Jacqueline Bacon, “The History of Freedom’s Journal: A Study in Empowerment and Community,” *Journal of African American History* 88, no. 2 (2003), 163-181; Jacqueline Bacon, “‘Acting as Freemen’: Rhetoric, Race, and Reform in the Debate over Colonization in *Freedom’s Journal*, 1827-1828,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 93, no. 1 (2007), 58-83.

⁷³⁰ Afua Cooper, “The *Voice of the Fugitive*: A Transnational Abolitionist Organ,” in Smardz Frost and Tucker (eds.), *A Fluid Frontier*, 135-152 (*Voice* quoted on 135). For more on Henry Bibb and *Voice of the Fugitive*, see Afua A. P. Cooper, “‘Doing Battle in Freedom’s Cause’: Henry Bibb, Abolitionism, Race Uplift, and Black Manhood, 1842-1854,” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2000); Susan M. Stanton, “*Voice of the Fugitive*: Henry Bibb and ‘Racial Uplift’ in Canada West, 1851-1852,” (MA thesis: University of Victoria, 2001).

⁷³¹ Isaac Henson quoted in Cooper, “*Voice of the Fugitive*,” 140-141; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 182.

argues Jason Silverman, “focused especially on problems of racial discrimination and segregation.” Ultimately, Shadd was unable to raise sufficient funds to sustain the *Provincial Freeman*. She closed the newspaper in 1857, only four years after it was founded. Yet its legacy endured for much longer.⁷³²

Black newspapers challenged the racial stereotypes that were pervasive in the white Canadian press. In 1856, the *London Free Press* claimed that “a fugitive from slavery, named Henry DeVault, is at present confined in the City prison on suspicion of having murdered one of his children, a lad of six years of age... it is feared that one of the most cold blooded murders which has ever been committed in Western Canada will be brought to light.” The *Free Press* directly attributed DeVault’s supposedly violent conduct to his own experiences with slavery. The newspaper alleged that “the child was lashed, face downwards, to a bench and flogged severely whilst in that position, and on several occasions the lad was observed with his hands encased in an apparatus which is termed in the Southern States a “Yoke,” and is used there to prevent slaves from running away.”⁷³³

Similarly, the *British Whig* reprinted a report which detailed the assault of an eighteen-year-old white woman by a black man in Colchester, “a few miles from Malden, and close to the negro town of New Canaan[.]” It alleged that the unnamed woman “was knocked down in the woods by the negro, and when found, after he had left with her, was insensible and hardly possessed of life.” An armed mob was raised to pursue Williams, who allegedly fled to Belle River on a stolen horse where he secured passage aboard the Great Western Railway. The *Whig* closed with a warning: “These outrages now so frequent in Western Canada, are the natural results of the encouragement given to the escaped slaves. Slavery is a great social evil, but there is no reason why Canada should suffer.”⁷³⁴

Similar reports of black criminality in Canada trickled down to US newspapers, especially in the southern states. In 1859, the Baltimore *Daily Exchange* reported on the hanging of two alleged self-emancipators in Brantford. The two men were “convicted of murder” and reportedly admitted to committing the crime. The *Exchange* added that the sympathy of white Canadians to slave refugees was “fast

⁷³² Cooper, “Voice of the Fugitive,” 143-145; Jason H. Silverman, “Mary Ann Shadd and the Search for Equality,” in Litwack and Meier (eds.), *Black Leaders*, 94; “Colonization,” *PF*, Mar. 24, 1853; Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary*; Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1997), 87-100. For more on Mary Ann Shadd Cary, see Erica Armstrong Dunbar, “Writing for True Womanhood: African-American Women’s Writings and the Antislavery Struggle,” in Kathryn Kish Sklar and James Brewer Stewart (eds.), *Women’s Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 308-310; Jane Rhodes, “At the Boundaries of Abolitionism, Feminism, and Black Nationalism: The Activism of Mary Ann Shadd Cary,” in Sklar and Stewart (eds.), *Women’s Rights*, Ch. 17.

⁷³³ “Supposed Murder – Inhuman Conduct of a Negro,” *London Free Press*, reprinted in *St. Catharines Constitutional*, May 19, 1856.

⁷³⁴ “DIABOLICAL OUTRAGE BY A NEGRO ON A YOUNG WHITE GIRL,” *Detroit Free Press*, reprinted in *British Whig*, Apr. 2, 1860.

wearing out.” Similarly, the *Wyandot Pioneer* claimed that blacks in Upper Canada were “very insolent and overbearing to the White Canadians[.]” It cited a reported stabbing in Windsor as evidence of local unrest caused by black refugees in the province.⁷³⁵

Henry Bibb, Samuel Ringgold Ward, and Mary Ann Shadd Cary challenged anti-black prejudice and racism in mainstream Canadian newspapers. In 1851, Bibb called anti-black prejudice “The most obnoxious and fatal disease has made its way into this province... Its allies are mostly among the lowest class of white people, who are used as mere stepping stones or political hobbies for the most refined and enlightened to ride into office upon.” Similarly, Samuel Ringgold Ward wrote that ‘Canadian Negro Hate’ was “a poor, pitiable, brainless, long eared [sic] imitation of Yankeeism[.]” In 1856, Shadd rebuked the claims of the *Western Planet* that people of African descent were inherently predisposed to drunkenness and misbehavior. “The colored people, she wrote, “are not *wild* Indians, neither do they drink more whiskey than their white friends hereabouts.”⁷³⁶

Furthermore, slave refugees became renowned orators in the northern US and Canada. Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, James W. C. Pennington, Lewis Hayden, Henry Bibb, Samuel Ringgold Ward, and Ellen and William Craft engaged in speaking tours throughout the northern US, Canada, and the British Isles. Frederick Douglass was one of the most recognizable black figures in North America in large part due to his oratory.⁷³⁷ Freedom seekers addressed anti-slavery societies, churches, and festivals. They spoke on a wide range of topics, including slavery, colonization and emigration, racial prejudice and discrimination, UGRR, vigilance committee, and the FSA. Frederick Douglass’ first address in New Bedford was on colonization and citizenship. “We are *American citizens*,” he declared, “born with natural inherent, just and inalienable rights.” Douglass and his fellow self-emancipated abolitionist orators would deliver countless speeches, remarks, and addresses. Seeing Douglass speak, writes David Blight, became “an American cultural phenomenon.”⁷³⁸

In February 1844, the *Herald of Freedom* reported on a lecture delivered by Frederick Douglass before “a crowded court-house” in Concord, New Hampshire. Douglass lambasted Christian churches and other sources for upholding US slavery. “Your religion,” he declared, “justifies our tyrants, and you are yourselves our enslavers. I see my enslavers here in Concord, and before my eyes, if any are here who countenance the church and the religion of your country.” Later that evening, he

⁷³⁵ “HANGING OF TWO FUGITIVE SLAVES IN CANADA,” *Daily Exchange* (Baltimore, MD), Jun. 13, 1859; “The negroes over in Canada...” *Wyandot Pioneer* (Sandusky, OH), Feb. 11, 1859.

⁷³⁶ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 136-137 (Bibb quotes), 224-226 (Ward quotes), 343 (Shadd quote).

⁷³⁷ For more slave refugee orators, see Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, Ch. 13.

⁷³⁸ Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 97-98, 102 (Douglass quote on pg. 98).

delivered another well-attended speech in the area. The *Herald* wrote “There was great oratory in his speech, but more of dignity and earnestness than what we call eloquence. He was not up as a speaker, performing. He was an insurgent slave, taking hold on the right of speech, and charging on his tyrants the bondage of his race.”⁷³⁹ Douglass fully understood the power of his oratory. In October 1850, he wrote to Amy Kirby Post of Rochester, “I spoke in this city [Worcester, Massachusetts] last night at Brinley Hall, before the audience assembled at [the] antislavery fair... The audience was large – and listened with earnest attention.” He added that the FSA 1850 “has made a deep sensation here – and it is universally determined that no slave shall be taken from Worcester.”⁷⁴⁰

Slave refugees regularly addressed black conventions and meetings staged across the North. Conventions were held in New York, Philadelphia, New Haven, Buffalo, Syracuse, Rochester, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, and elsewhere. Furthermore, black conventions acquired a transnational character, as meetings were held in towns and cities in Upper Canada, including Toronto, Chatham, Drummondville, and Amherstburg. Stephen Kantrowitz notes that these conventions “sought to foster understanding, trust, and collective action among the nation’s free black communities.” Slave refugee orators tackled various subjects, including slavery, racial discrimination, equal citizenship, and the FSA. In July 1851, at the

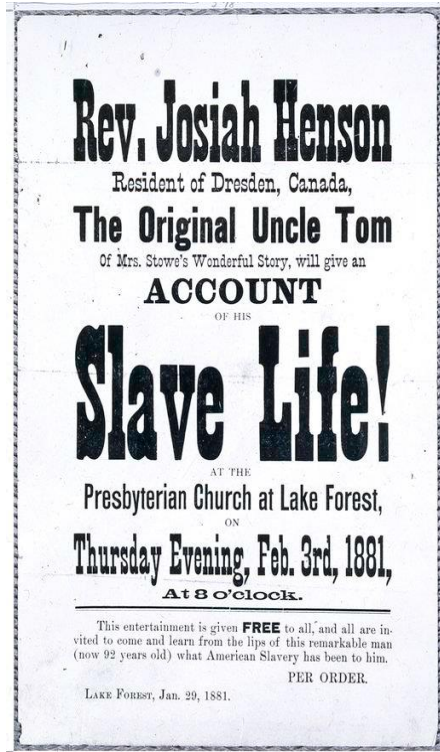


Figure 19: Poster for Josiah Henson lecture in Lake Forest

Source: “Josiah Henson speaking engagement.” Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographs and Prints Division. NYPL Digital Collections, accessed January 21, 2020. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47db-bbfe-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>.

⁷³⁹ “Frederick Douglass in Concord, N. H.,” *Herald of Freedom*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Feb. 23, 1844.

⁷⁴⁰ Douglass, Frederick. “Douglass, Frederick. Letter to Amy Kirby Post,” *RBSCP Exhibits*, accessed Jun. 15, 2020, <https://rbscpexhibits.lib.rochester.edu/viewer/3153>.

national convention in Rochester, Douglass proclaimed, “We ask that the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, that legislative monster of modern times, by whose atrocious provisions the writ of “habeas corpus,” “the right of trial by jury,” have been virtually abolished, shall be repealed.”⁷⁴¹

Slave refugees were leading speakers at black Canadian conventions. On August 2, 1847, Josiah Henson and Thomas Smallwood attended the black convention in Drummondville. Members of the convention reaffirmed “their belief that frauds have been practised [sic] upon the People of Colour [sic] in Canada, in regard to monies, clothing, and other articles given by friends in the United States and elsewhere for our benefit.”⁷⁴² In the Detroit and Niagara River borderlands, anti-slavery meetings were transnational affairs. African American, African Canadian, and white abolitionists from either side of the international boundaries addressed these meetings. On March 13, 1846, an anti-slavery meeting took place at the Union Chapel in Amherstburg. Attendees included Henry Bibb and Lewis Richardson, a fellow self-emancipator from Kentucky. Richardson stated, “It has been said by some, that Clay’s slaves had rather live with him than be free, but I had rather this day, have a millstone tied to my neck, and be sunk to the bottom of [the] Detroit [R]iver, than go back to Ashland and be his slave for life” Richardson demonstrated his gratitude and loyalty to Great Britain and the Crown. He told his audience, “on yonder side of [the] Detroit [R]iver, I was recognized as property; but on this side I am on free soil. Hail, Britannia! Shame, America!”⁷⁴³

In 1851, the North American Convention of Colored People was staged at St. Lawrence Hall in Toronto. Henry Bibb, Josiah Henson, Hiram Wilson, Thomas Smallwood, Israel Campbell, J. C. Brown, and Martin R. Delaney were among those in attendance. Delegates expressed their gratitude to the British government “for the protection afforded us; and are fully persuaded from the known fertility of the soil, and salubrity of climate of the milder regions of Canada West, that this is, by far, the most desirable place of resort for colored people, to be found on the American continent.” The North American Convention was widely publicized in black and white abolitionist newspapers. In *Voice of the Fugitive*, for instance, Henry Bibb, John T. Fisher, and James D. Tinsley declared, “let it be borne in mind that we are an oppressed and much degraded people; not in Canada, thank Heaven! Nor by the laws

⁷⁴¹ Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 300; Kantrowitz, *More than Freedom*, 142-143; John Ernest, *A Nation Within a Nation: Organizing African-American Communities Before the Civil War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2011), 107-108; “Proceedings of the Colored national convention, held in Rochester, July 6th, 7th, and 8th, 1853.” *ColoredConventions.org*, accessed Aug. 28, 2018, <http://coloredconventions.org/items/show/458>; Kantrowitz, *More than Freedom*, 143. For a list of black conventions, visit *ColoredConventions.org*, <http://coloredconventions.org/conventions>.

⁷⁴² Convention of the Colored Population (1847: Drummondville, QC), “Reports of the Convention of the Colored Population, Held at Drummondville, Aug., 1847.,” *ColoredConventions.org*, accessed Aug. 29, 2018, <http://coloredconventions.org/items/show/451>.

⁷⁴³ Ripley, et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 101-103, 223.

of Great Britain, for under this government we have no reason to complain, as here, and here only, we participate in all the rights and privileges which other men enjoy.⁷⁴⁴

Additionally, slave refugees and legally free black activists organized various festivals and celebrations to fully illustrate their claims to British subjecthood. On May 13, 1854, the *Provincial Freeman* reported on preparations “to celebrate Her Majesty’s birthday in a manner more in keeping with the growing greatness of the Province... We hope the colored citizens of Toronto and other places, will give evidence of their respect for the great occasion[.]” In 1856, the *Provincial Freeman* declared that Queen Victoria’s birthday “embodies the idea of the broad and generous measure of freedom, guaranteed to every class of persons, who desire to take up residence on British ground, colored Americans included, who were made to bend to the force of superior numbers, only in the land of their birth.”⁷⁴⁵

Emancipation Day (or August First) was the most important celebration of black freedom in North America. Following the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies, commemorations and festivals were staged every year in early August across the northern US and Canadian provinces. Initially, however, Emancipation Day celebrations were not embraced immediately by black activists. African American and African Canadian leaders recognized that the Slavery Abolition Act initially freed few enslaved people. Nevertheless, the public celebration gained support among African American and African Canadian communities over time. Jeffrey Kerr-Ritchie argues that Emancipation Day festivals “illustrated how people of African descent constructed popular meanings of cultural identity around liberty and selfhood in opposition to prevalent structures of racial domination and subordination.”⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴⁴ North American Convention (1851: Toronto, Canada), “Proceedings for the North American Convention held in Toronto, Canada, 1851,” *ColoredConventions.org*, accessed Aug. 29, 2018, <http://coloredconventions.org/items/show/324>; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 170-173.

⁷⁴⁵ “The Queen’s Birthday,” *PF*, May 13, 1854; “The Twenty-fourth of May,” *PF*, May 17, 1856.

⁷⁴⁶ Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Meaning and Memory in African American Emancipation Celebrations* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 54-55; Jeffrey Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First: Emancipation Day in the Black Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 6, 49-50, 120. Today, there is a rich and varied library on nineteenth-century Emancipation Day celebrations in the northern US and Canada. See Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 116-142; Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 54-96; Mitch Kachun, “Antebellum African Americans, Public Commemoration, and the Haitian Revolution: A Problem of Historical Mythmaking,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 26, no. 2 (2006), 249-273; Shane White, “‘It was a proud day’: African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741-1834,” *Journal of American History* 81 (1994), 13-50; John T. McKivigan and Jason H. Silverman, “Monarchical Liberty and Republican Slavery: West Indies Emancipation Celebrations in Upstate New York and Canada West,” *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 10 (1986), 7-18; Rael, *Black Identity*, 54-81.; Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First*, 49-145; W. Caleb McDaniel, “The Fourth and the First: Abolitionist Holidays, Respectability, and Radical Interracial Reform,” *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2005), 129-151; Edward B. Rugemer, “The Problem of Emancipation: The United States and Britain’s Abolition of Slavery,” (PhD diss: Boston College, 2005), Ch. 8; Julie Roy Jeffrey, “‘No Occurrence in Human History is More Deserving of Commemoration than This’: Abolitionist Celebrations of Freedom,” in McCarthy and Stauffer (eds.),

The nature of these festivals changed significantly over the antebellum period. Emancipation Day celebrations evolved “from a politics of controlled respectability in black churches to more militant spectacles of public politics exemplified by outdoor parades, street marches, fiery speeches, and the rise of armed militias,” writes Jeffrey Kerr-Ritchie. Early celebrations were often small-scale events organized by local black communities. Over time, however, Emancipation Day gatherings were well-attended by African Americans, African Canadians, and white abolitionists. In 1838, for example, between 100 and 150 people attended the annual commemoration in Deerfield, Massachusetts.⁷⁴⁷

In Canada, Emancipation Day was an opportunity for African American refugees to demonstrate their loyalty to the Crown and reaffirm their claims to British subjecthood. Moreover, it served as an opportunity to contrast the virtues of British liberty with American slavery. In August 1842, blacks in Chatham-Kent assembled at the Militia Parade Grounds in Chatham. Josiah Jones, a Tennessee-born farmer, stated, “I am very much gratified to see so many of our friends assembled together, to celebrate this great, and glorious days of liberty on which the shackles of slavery fell from so many of our Brethren... the British Government emptied their Coffers of Twenty millions of Pounds, of her precious gold and silver, to redeem them from their distressed condition.” He added that enslaved people “are not asleep, they are known by all there to be true British subjects and all of the most loyal kind.”⁷⁴⁸

Newspaper accounts emphasized the festive yet respectable nature of Emancipation Day celebrations, with particular attention given to speeches, sermons, music, and dancing. In 1839, Jehu Jones attended Toronto’s annual celebration alongside other prominent abolitionists. Religious sermons were delivered on the morning of August First. Rev. William Miller of Philadelphia “addressed the Throne of Grace, in behalf of Victoria, her Britannic Majesty, the Royal family and the British nation; his subject was sublime, full of thrilling interest, not only to the loyal subjects of Toronto, but to Britons every where[.]” After the service, Jones and the others “marched to the Commercial [H]otel, Front Street, where the rooms were handsomely decorated, with evergreens and the British flag, beautifully unfurled, in token of the protection to the oppressed.” Jones also attended “a tea party” with a women’s group on Elizabeth Street.⁷⁴⁹ Overall, Jones was struck by the sheer abundance of opportunities to participate in civic, political, and military life. He

200-219; Natasha Henry, *Emancipation Day: Celebrating Freedom in Canada* (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2010); Amber Bailey, “Days of Jubilee: Emancipation Day Celebrations in Chicago, 1853 to 1877,” *Journal of Illinois States Historical Society* 109, no. 4 (2016), 353-373; Dann J. Broyld, “‘A Success in Every Particular’: British August First Celebrations in Canada and America and the Black Quest for Unblemished Commemorations, While Critiquing July Fourth, 1834-1861,” *American Review of Canadian Studies* 47, no. 4 (2017), 335-356.

⁷⁴⁷ Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First*, 8 (quote), 55-58.

⁷⁴⁸ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 95.

⁷⁴⁹ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 76-77.

recounted, “There is a regiment composed entirely of colored men – the commissioned officers are white. I have seen several of the members in this city... [and] Great confidence is reposed in this regiment, and they have the most important post, in consequence of their acknowledged loyalty to the British Crown.... here every social and domestic comfort can be enjoyed irrespective of complexion.”⁷⁵⁰

Other black activists and white abolitionists described joyful but reverential Emancipation Day festivals. In 1851, the *Voice of the Fugitive* described the various activities and events at Sandwich’s Emancipation Day celebrations. It reported, “a splendid dinner was served up at half-past one o’clock, to which the meeting adjourned for refreshments... A very long procession was formed and marched through the streets, with appropriate banners, after a delightful brass band to the steamboat Alliance, which was literally crowded with passengers to and from Detroit, who attended the celebration.” In 1857, the *Provincial Freeman* reported that Emancipation Day in Chatham “was celebrated... with great spirit.” Martin R. Delaney and William H. Day delivered speeches “after which the Bazaar held by the Victoria Society in the Town Hall and the Fair of Donation for the B.M.E. Church held in the basement of the Baptist Church were well patronized.”⁷⁵¹

Queen Victoria and the British government were regularly the subjects of praise at August First celebrations. During the 1854 celebrations at Toronto’s Government Grounds, white attorney George Dupont (on behalf of the city’s black leaders) delivered an “Address to the Queen.” He proclaimed, “Our hearts are wholly your Majesty’s; and if the time should ever come when your Majesty might need our aid, our lives would be as they are, *at your service*.” Dupont added that it must be “a proud reflection... to your Majesty, to know that the moment the poor crushed slave sets foot upon any part of your *mighty* dominions, his chains fall from him – he feels himself a man, and can look up.” Black leaders in Toronto also voiced their support for the British in the Crimean War. They wrote, “we beg your Gracious Majesty to believe we yet thank the Most High that he has granted us the privilege of teaching our little ones to join us in praying that the God of battle may give victory to your Majesty’s arms.”⁷⁵²

In the Canadian Maritimes, black activists staged public celebrations to demonstrate their fidelity to the Crown. In 1838, members of the African Friendly Society (AFS) marched alongside whites in Halifax to celebrate Queen Victoria’s coronation. “In celebrating the coronation of Queen Victoria,” writes Whitfield, “the Refugees tied themselves closely to Britain and in the process sharply demarcated the border between free Nova Scotia and the slaveholding United States.”⁷⁵³ The African

⁷⁵⁰ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 77-83. Jones discusses the ‘Coloured Corps’ in his letter (discussed later in this chapter).

⁷⁵¹ “Another Glorious Anniversary,” *VF*, Aug. 13, 1851; “The First of August...,” *PF*, Aug. 15, 1857.

⁷⁵² Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 295-296.

⁷⁵³ Sutherland, “Race Relations in Halifax,” 38; Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 101-102.

Abolition Society (AAS) was primarily responsible for organizing Halifax's Emancipation Day celebrations. Harvey Amani Whitfield writes that the festivities "provided an outlet for cultural expressions that formed the bedrock of the Refugees' identity." Emancipation Day helped black Nova Scotians to strengthen social bonds, criticize racial discrimination, and assert their demands for unqualified subjecthood. August First rituals, argues Natasha Henry, became "a way for new arrivals to establish a connection with other people of African origin across the British Empire and to see themselves as subjects of the Crown and free people."⁷⁵⁴

In 1847, the AAS August First celebrations included "a military band, [while] those assembled paraded through the streets of Halifax carrying banners praising 'freedom and British liberty.'" They marched to Government House, home of Lieutenant-Governor John Wentworth, where several speakers addressed the crowd. Everyone subsequently headed to a "festive grove" at the North Farm (which belonged to the lieutenant-governor).⁷⁵⁵ Five years later, celebrants marched to the African Baptist Church where they attended a religious service. "The band of the 97th regiment," notes Natasha Henry, "led the large numbers of gatherers through the main streets of Halifax, and then continued onward to the Belmont estate for various festivities." In 1855, the *British Colonist* reported on an 'Abolitionist Celebration' in Halifax. Those in attendance toasted Africa ("the land of our Fathers"), Queen Victoria ("Long may she reign over a free and generous nation") and British soldiers involved in the Crimean War ("May the strong hand of kind Providence assist them to subdue their enemy, and speedily restore peace to the nations").⁷⁵⁶

Across the northern US, orators used their Emancipation Day speeches to challenge the belief that the United States was founded on the principles of liberty and equality for all. In 1851, Wendell Phillips addressed the Emancipation Day gathering in Worcester, Massachusetts. "It is astonishing," he proclaimed, "that an American should have the face to celebrate the 4th of July... we have so forgotten the lessons of that day."⁷⁵⁷ For African Americans and white abolitionists, August First served as an important counterpoint to July Fourth, the traditional national holiday in the United States. Frederick Douglass' 'What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?' speech at Corinthian Hall, Rochester in 1852 is the most well-known critique of the July Fourth holiday. Douglass proclaimed, "This Fourth of July is *yours*, not *mine*. You may rejoice, I must mourn." In the words of Benjamin Quarles, "having no fourth of July the black man did the next best thing – he celebrated August 1."⁷⁵⁸

⁷⁵⁴ Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 173-174; Whitfield, "The Development of Black Refugee Identity in Nova Scotia," 22-23.

⁷⁵⁵ Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 176-177 (quote).

⁷⁵⁶ Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 178; "Abolitionist Celebration," *British Colonist*, Aug. 4, 1855.

⁷⁵⁷ "WENDELL PHILLIPS," VF, Aug. 27, 1851.

⁷⁵⁸ Broyld, "'A Success in Every Particular,'" 338 (Douglass quote); Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 123. For more on the relationship between African Americans and the Fourth of July, see Quarles, *Black*

In 1849, the *Pittsburgh Daily Post* reported that African American residents planned to celebrate August First, which “has been sneeringly termed by some as the ‘negro fourth of July.’ It brought some of them liberty, and we are rejoiced to see them celebrate the day.” Five years later, at the Emancipation Day celebrations in Columbus, Ohio, the *Columbus Elevator* claimed that a choir “composed about equally of both sexes” performed a song which “purported to be an invitation from Queen Victoria to the colored people of the United States, to fly from servitude into Canada.”⁷⁵⁹

Far from strictly social, cultural, and religious celebrations, August First festivals were unmistakably political. “West Indian Emancipation celebrations,” argues Kerr-Ritchie, “served as a nexus for both the self-defense of fugitive slaves as well as physical resistance against the institution of American slavery.” During the 1851 and 1853 August First festivals in New Bedford, Massachusetts, speakers and attendees debated the aforementioned Shadrach Minkins case with intense interest. Abolitionists delivered impassioned speeches about slavery, inequality, and racial prejudice in the United States. At the 1849 Worcester, Massachusetts commemoration, Theodore Parker proclaimed, “Slavery, then, is the national sin... Here let us all repent us of slavery. Let us repent of our coldness in this anti-slavery enterprise.”⁷⁶⁰

Furthermore, some slave refugees endorsed violence and participated in armed insurrections to eradicate the institution of slavery. The most notable of these revolutionaries were Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner who planned three separate uprisings in Virginia and Charleston, South Carolina respectively.⁷⁶¹ These early insurrections inspired the growth of militant abolitionism over the antebellum period. Few people symbolized this radicalization more than John Brown. Originally from Connecticut, he moved to the Kansas Territory with his family, where he became involved in a conflict between free-soilers and pro-slavery sympathizers (commonly referred to as ‘Bleeding Kansas’). In May 1856, Brown

Abolitionists, 119-121; see Leonard I. Sweet, “The Fourth of July and African Americans in the Nineteenth Century: Northern Leadership Opinion Within the Context of the Black Experience,” *Journal of Negro History* 61, no. 3 (1976), 256-275; McDaniel, “The Fourth and the First.”

⁷⁵⁹ “Celebration,” *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, Aug. 1, 1849; “Emancipation Celebration,” *Columbus Elevator*, reprinted in *FDP*, Aug. 18, 1854.

⁷⁶⁰ Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First*, 91, 112 (first quote) – 113; Theodore Parker, “Speech of Theodore Parker,” *Liberator*, Aug. 17, 1849 (second quote).

⁷⁶¹ For more on the Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner rebellions, see Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943); Stephen B. Oates, *The Fires of Jubilee: Nat Turner’s Fierce Rebellion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975); Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel’s Rebellion: The Virginia Conspiracies of 1800 and 1822* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Douglas R. Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free: The Lives of Denmark Vesey* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).

participated in the Pottawatomie massacre, which resulted in the deaths of five pro-slavery men. Over the next three years, Brown made plans for an armed rebellion.⁷⁶²

Brown traveled across the northern states and Canada to gain support for his uprising. Abolitionists were rather divided over Brown. William Lloyd Garrison criticized the violent actions in Kansas. Thomas Wentworth Higginson supported Brown's defense against "the armed aggressions of the Missourians." African Americans and African Canadians were generally more receptive to Brown's message of violent rebellion. Douglass, Tubman, and other black abolitionists refused to participate in Brown's insurrection but they offered him funds. John Anthony Copeland, an African American resident of Oberlin, is the most well-known of Brown's black followers. Lewis Sheridan Leary and Shields Green, both refugees from enslavement, also joined Brown.⁷⁶³

In May 1858, Brown arrived in Chatham to solicit support for his planned rebellion. Osborne Perry Anderson, an Oberlin College graduate, later recalled, "Wherever [Brown] went around, although an entire stranger, he made a profound impression upon those who saw or became acquainted with him." Moreover, he recalled that Brown "realized and enforced the doctrine of destroying the tree that bringeth forth corrupt fruit. Slavery was to him the corrupt tree, and the duty of every Christian man was to strike down slavery, and to commit its fragments to the flames." A small number of Chatham residents, including Anderson, signed up for the insurrection.⁷⁶⁴ Over the coming year, the abolitionist planned his uprising.

On October 16, 1859, Brown and his twenty-one followers attacked the arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. However, the insurrection was swiftly quelled by US Marines and most of the rebels were arrested, charged with treason, and hanged.

⁷⁶² Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 543-549. For more on John Brown, the Harpers Ferry Insurrection, and the rise of militant abolitionism, see John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), David S. Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).

⁷⁶³ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 548-552 (Wentworth quote on 548). For more on Brown's insurrection and African American involvement, see Daina Raimy Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2017), 119-121; Hannah Geffert (with Jean Libby), "Regional Black Involvement in John Brown's Raid on Harper's Ferry," in McCarthy and Stauffer (eds.), *Prophets of Protest*, 165-182; Steven Lubet, *The "Colored Hero" of Harpers Ferry: John Anthony Copeland and the War Against Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); and Eugene L. Meyer, *Five for Freedom: The African American Soldiers in John Brown's Army* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2018).

⁷⁶⁴ The Convention (1858: Chatham, ON), "Minutes from the Harpers Ferry Convention at Chatham, Canada West, 1858, p. 10," [ColoredConventions.org](http://coloredconventions.org/items/show/427), accessed Aug. 31, 2018, <http://coloredconventions.org/items/show/427>; Fred Landon, "Canadian Negroes and the John Brown Raid," *Journal of Negro History* 6, no. 2 (1921), 174; Osborne P. Anderson, *A Narrative of Events at Harpers Ferry; with Incidents Prior and Subsequent to its Capture by Captain Brown and His Men* (Boston: Printed for the Author, 1861), 9 (first quote), 10 (second quote); Ariana Westbrook, "Anderson, Osborne P. (1830-1872)," *BlackPast.org*, accessed Aug. 31, 2018, <http://blackpast.org/aah/anderson-osborne-p-1830-1872>.

John A. Copeland wrote to family and friends in Oberlin from his prison cell over the weeks before his execution. Copeland urged his parents to remember that he fought “for a holy cause[.]”⁷⁶⁵

John Brown’s rebellion exacerbated sectional tensions between the northern and southern states and strained diplomatic tensions between the United States, Canada, and Great Britain. Southern whites were outraged by the events at Harpers Ferry and tied the insurrection to the Canadian and British governments. In particular, they blamed both governments for shielding those involved with the uprising. The North Carolina *Western Democrat* declared, “We have a right to demand of the British government that the good neighborhood of her Canadian provinces shall be maintained. We should demand that it should cease to be the hot-bed of conspiracies against the Constitution and Union of the States, and the refuge of stolen negroes and of traitors and murderers of the people of the States.” Moreover, it acknowledged that Brown “held his treasonable convention at Chatham” and that the “most active agents in forming the plan for the late invasion of Virginia were English abolitionists[.]” The *Democrat* also criticized the Canadian and British governments for reportedly harboring individuals implicated in the insurrection. It closed with one clear demand: “All this should be stopped.”⁷⁶⁶

African Americans, African Canadians, and white abolitionists voiced their support for Brown and the other insurrectionists. In November 1859, African Americans and white abolitionists met in Natick, Massachusetts and adopted the following resolution: “Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God; therefore... it is the right and duty of the slaves to resist their masters, and the right and duty of the people of the North [t]o incite them to resistance, and to aid them in it.” Henry Clarke Wright called Brown, “the defender of liberty, the assailant of slavery, and the friend of the slave, [who] will live and be with us, to inspire us, to incite us, to spur us up and lead us on to a still closer and more resolute and deadly assault upon slaveholding.” In the US-Canadian border zones, black and white abolitionists praised Brown for his moral courage. In 1859, William Lambert declared at a meeting in the Detroit Second Baptist Church, “we hold the name of the Old Capt. John Brown in the most sacred remembrance as the first disinterested martyr for our liberty[.]” Speaking in Toronto, Osborne Anderson called Brown an “apostle of liberty.”⁷⁶⁷

⁷⁶⁵ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP*: vol. 5: *The United States, 1859-1865*, 45.

⁷⁶⁶ “CANADA,” *Western Democrat*, Dec. 24, 1859.

⁷⁶⁷ Henry Clarke Wright, *The Natick Resolution; or, Resistance to Slaveholders: The Right and Duty of Southern Slaves and Northern Freeman* (Boston: Printed for the Author, 1859), 2, 5; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP*: vol. 5: *The United States, 1859-1865*, 53; “Chatham Convention,” [buxtonmuseum.com](http://buxtonmuseum.com/history/1-set-CHATHAM-convention.html), accessed Aug. 31, 2018, <http://buxtonmuseum.com/history/1-set-CHATHAM-convention.html>; Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 552-561; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP*: vol. 2: *Canada, 1830-1865*, 425-427; For more on the Chatham convention, John Brown, Osborne P. Anderson, and the Chatham convention, see Steven Lubet, *The ‘Colored Hero’ of Harpers Ferry: John Anthony Copeland and the War Against Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 125-143.

Slave Refugees and Electoral Politics

Slave refugees in the North and Canada were highly engaged in other political campaigns. Across each region, they campaigned against segregation, racial prejudice, and discrimination. Slave refugees spoke of extending the right to vote to black people (including women), challenged racial prejudice and segregation, and campaigned for the abolition of discriminatory state laws. While blacks in Canada generally exercised more rights than their northern counterparts, they still routinely faced racial prejudice and discrimination. Consequently, slave refugees spearheaded campaigns for civil rights and equal citizenship in both the northern US and Canada. Across the North, African Americans were systematically stripped of the electoral franchise. In 1821, New York's new state constitution effectively restricted suffrage to white men by introducing a property qualification that most African Americans could not meet. Sixteen years later, Pennsylvania amended its constitution to strip African Americans of the right to vote. Black activists throughout the state campaigned against disfranchisement. Charles W. Gardner and Frederick A. Hinton submitted a petition on behalf of Philadelphia's African American population which stated that the move "would be a violation of the immutable principles of right, and justice, written on the hearts of all men; and at a war with the living, and revolution principle, 'that all men are created equal.'" In 1838, Robert Purvis published his *Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens*, which argued against stripping black men of the right to vote. Nevertheless, the constitutional amendment was soon ratified by the white Pennsylvania voters.⁷⁶⁸

In 1837, black New Yorkers petitioned the state legislature for equal suffrage. They claimed that the restriction of voting rights to white men was morally wrong "because it deprives men of prerogatives to which they are justly entitled" and against the nation's founding principles. The New York voting rights petition was introduced alongside calls for the right to a jury trial for alleged freedom seekers, as well as demands "for the more *effectual abolition of slavery* in this State."⁷⁶⁹ In various speeches and writings, slave refugees called for state governments to abolish

⁷⁶⁸ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 3: The United States, 1830-1846*, 252-253; Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 167-169; Paul J. Polgar, "'Whenever They Judge It Expedient': The Politics of Partisanship and Free Black Voting Rights in Early National New York," *American Nineteenth Century History* 12, no. 1 (2011), 1-23; "EQUAL RIGHTS," *Liberator*, Jul. 28, 1837; David Reader, "Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens," *Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia*, accessed Oct. 3, 2019. <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/appeal-of-forty-thousand-citizens/>. For more on black disfranchisement in Pennsylvania, see Eric Ledell Smith, "The End of Black Voting Rights in Pennsylvania: African Americans and the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention 1837-1838," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 65, no. 3 (1988), 279-299.

⁷⁶⁹ "PETITION FOR EQUAL SUFFRAGE," *Friend of Man*, Jan. 26, 1837; "RECEPTION OF OUR PETITIONS," *Albany Daily Advertiser*, reprinted in *CA*, Mar. 11, 1837 (quote); "LEGISLATURE OF NEW-YORK," *New York Evangelist*, Mar. 25, 1837.

discriminatory legislation and extend the franchise to African Americans. Furthermore, Frederick Douglass' various newspapers published editorials and articles on the campaigns for universal suffrage in New York and elsewhere. In November 1849, the *North Star* published an editorial from 'J. C.' in Brooklyn (likely J. W. C. Pennington), who called for the abolition of the \$250 property qualification. "The odious clause," he wrote, "... degrades our manhood and belittles our more favored fellow citizens... Proscribed New Yorkers arise from your slumber!"⁷⁷⁰

Furthermore, slave refugees joined campaigns for women's suffrage. In July 1848, Frederick Douglass and others attended the Women's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, New York, where he was among the signatories to the Declaration of Sentiments, which promoted full equality for women. Douglass subsequently wrote in the *North Star*, "All that distinguishes man as an intelligent and accountable being, is equally true of woman; and if that government only is just which governs by free consent of the governed, there can be no reason in the world for denying to woman the exercise of the elective franchise, or a hand in making and administering the laws of the land. Our doctrine is that 'right is of no sex.'"⁷⁷¹

Aside from equal voting rights, slave refugees and free blacks campaigned against segregation and discrimination. In 1838, Samuel Cornish wrote, "Now is the time for abolitionists to gird up the loins of their minds for a conflict with prejudice against color... the real battleground between liberty and slavery is prejudice against color." Self-emancipators and free African Americans even criticized white abolitionists for not doing enough to promote racial equality. Samuel Ringgold Ward claimed, "Abolitionists have not so much regard for the rights of colored men as they think they have. When the press, speech, and others of *their own rights* were jeopardized by the spirit of slaveocracy, they raised their united voice, as men should, in self-defence [sic]. But now, when their own rights are somewhat secure, they appear to cease to feel identified with us."⁷⁷²

Slave refugees and free blacks challenged segregation through acts of civil disobedience. Activists focused on discriminatory laws that prohibited African Americans from using public transportation, dining in restaurants and taverns, and sharing public spaces. In Boston, Frederick Douglass and others openly defied state laws against riding in streetcars. He recalled, "The custom of providing separate cars for the accommodation of colored travelers, was established on nearly all the railroads of New England, a dozen years ago... I made it a rule to seat myself in the cars for the accommodation of passengers generally... I was often dragged out of my seat,

⁷⁷⁰ "Away with the \$250 Suffrage! – Equal Rights, and Nothing Less!" *NS*, Nov. 2, 1849.

⁷⁷¹ "The Rights of Women," *NS*, Jul. 28, 1848; For more on the relationship between slave refugee abolitionists and women's rights activists, see Jones, *All Bound Up Together*, 59-85.

⁷⁷² Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 3: The United States, 1830-1846*, 265-266 (Cornish quote), 341 (Ward quote).

beaten, and severely bruised, by conductors and brakemen.” Over the next two decades, the resistance of African Americans and white abolitionists led to the desegregation of the state’s streetcars.⁷⁷³

Nothing provoked more fury from northern blacks than the FSA 1850, the Kansas Nebraska-Act of 1854, and the Dred Scott decision. On March 25, 1850, African Americans and white abolitionists in Boston gathered at Faneuil Hall to demonstrate their resistance. Samuel Ringgold Ward claimed that Senator Daniel Webster, who supported the FSA, had “deserted the cause of freedom[.]” In October, Philadelphia blacks claimed that the federal statute was “so wicked, so atrocious, so utterly at variance with the principles of the Constitution; so subversive of the objects of all law, the protection of the lives, liberty, and property of the governed; so repugnant to the highest attributes of God, justice and mercy; and so horribly cruel in its clearly expressed mode of operation[.]” In January 1851, African Americans met in Columbus, Ohio to protest the FSA.⁷⁷⁴

One of the most famous anti-FSA meetings took place at Cazenovia, New York (roughly 20 miles southeast of Syracuse), when black and white abolitionists met on August 21-22, before the bill officially became law. The *National Anti-Slavery Standard* reported, “It seems to have been well attended, chiefly by the Gerrit Smith class of Abolitionists[.]” Slave



Figure 20: Fugitive Slave Law Convention, Cazenovia, New York. Frederick Douglass is seated on the right-hand side of the table.

Source: “Fugitive Slave Law Convention, Cazenovia, New York,” *Online Exhibitions*, accessed Jan. 31, 2020, <http://www.virginiamemory.com/online-exhibitions/items/show/366>.

⁷⁷³ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 399. For more on African American protests against streetcar segregation, see Blair L. M. Kelley, *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy v. Ferguson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

⁷⁷⁴ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 4: The United States, 1847-1858*, 48-41 (Ward quotes), 68-69 (Philadelphia resolutions), 73.

refugee activists were among the convention's most prominent delegates. Frederick Douglass acted as president, while Samuel Ringgold Ward was nominated as one of the meeting's vice-presidents. The *Standard* reported that one of the addresses adopted by the convention was "to the Slaves of the South from the fugitives at the North." It claimed that the Cazenovia convention was (at least in part) "a meeting of Runaway Slaves," which offered its support to enslaved African Americans. Furthermore, they issued their support for freedom seekers in their efforts to reach the northern US and Canada by any means necessary. "We cannot furnish you with weapons," stated the address, "... but if you can get them, take them, and, before you go back into bondage, use them, if you are obliged to take life." At the same time, the conventioners admitted that some parts of the North, such as Justice McLean's district in Cincinnati, were not safe for freedom seekers. They recommended heading for New York as, in their view, it was "the safest place[.]"⁷⁷⁵

Four years later, the Kansas-Nebraska Act effectively nullified the Missouri Compromise and threatened the expansion of black enslavement into the western territories. Black activists immediately set about discrediting the new law. In 1854, William J. Watkins wrote in the *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, "This Nebraska swindle has set the mind of the North at work, and judging from the accounts of meetings held throughout the free States, denouncing the Bill and its advocates...we rather think, that, upon the whole, God is making the wrath of man to praise him[.]"⁷⁷⁶

Slave refugees and free blacks also mobilized quickly against the Dred Scott ruling. In May 1857, approximately 2,000 African Americans and white abolitionists attended the annual AASS meeting, where they displayed their opposition to the Dred Scott decision. Robert Purvis told his audience, "the Government of the United States... is one of the basest, meanest, most atrocious despotisms that ever saw the face of the sun." In February 1858, abolitionists in Boston held a meeting at the Joy Street Church. Lewis Hayden, William Cooper Nell, and Samuel J. May condemned the ruling. In June, activists in New Bedford condemned the Supreme Court's decision urged supporters to "use all honorable means to induce that interchange of harmonious action which is so indispensable to the promotion and establishment of our national rights as natives of the United States of America."⁷⁷⁷ By contrast, Canada's legal systems were officially 'color-blind.' In 1838, leading figures of Toronto's black community, including Stephen Dutton, William Augustus, George Brown, Richard Burke, Matthew B. Truss, George Williams, George Wilkinson,

⁷⁷⁵ Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 501-502; "Fugitive Slave Convention at Cazenovia," NASS, Aug. 29, 1850.

⁷⁷⁶ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 4: The United States, 1847-1858*, 207-208. For more on the Kansas-Nebraska Act, see McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, Ch. 4.

⁷⁷⁷ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 4: The United States, 1847-1858*, 362-364 (Purvis quote), 391-393 (New Bedford resolution); "MEETING OF THE COLORED CITIZENS OF BOSTON," *Liberator*, Feb. 26, 1858.

William Hickman, and Samuel Thompson met at the home of abolitionist William Osborn. They resolved:

we express the universal feeling of our coloured [sic] brethren throughout this Province when we state our perfect contentment with our political condition, living, as we do, under the influence of free and equal laws, which recognize no distinction of colour in the protection which they afford and the privileges which they confer; and that we distinctly contradict all statements to the contrary which have been industriously circulated in the States, by slaveholders and others of a kindred spirit, for the purpose of creating a belief that a coloured people are unprepared for freedom, and that our emigration to this country has effected no real improvement in our circumstances.⁷⁷⁸

In 1858, Joseph Williams wrote that Upper Canada was “the land of the free” and claimed that freedom seekers “have found an asylum in Canada. The land is consecrated to freedom; here all, no matter from whence they come, no matter what the color of their skin, are free, and fully protected in all the rights and privileges of freemen.” The intentions of these authors were clear; they wished to shine a light on slavery and racial discrimination in the United States and promote Canada as an alternative space of refuge for people of African descent. Furthermore, Williams added that, in Canada, black men possess “all the rights of citizenship, and [are] respected just in proportion to the amount of intelligence and moral worthy [they] may possess.” By contrast, racism in the United States “must forever keep them [African Americans] down.”⁷⁷⁹

In reality, segregation and racial prejudice were facts of life in Canada. Blacks were routinely prohibited from sharing public spaces with whites, from staying in hotels, or from using public transportation. Peter Gallego, a black theology student in Toronto, recounted his experiences with racial discrimination following a tour of Upper Canada. “The steam-boat, the stage-coach, and the inn,” stated Gallego,

⁷⁷⁸ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 68-73 (quote on 69). More details on the listed member of Toronto’s black community can be found on pp.70-73. Needless to say, Toronto’s black community contained free-born, freed, and illegally self-emancipated people from the United States and British Canada. Hickman, a black barber in Toronto, was a veteran of the Revolutionary War and War of 1812 respectively. Truss was a bootmaker from Staunton, Virginia, while George Williams was born enslaved in Fairfax County, Virginia. After purchasing his freedom, Williams became a farmer in Ohio before immigrating to Upper Canada in response to the state’s rejuvenation of the notorious Black Laws.

⁷⁷⁹ Joseph J.E. Williams, *The Principles of American Slavery: An Interesting and Authentic Pamphlet, Giving a Full and Satisfactory Description of the Principles of the Slave Code of the South, with the Morals and Improvements of the Colored People of Canada, of the Elgin Association* (Hamilton, ON: Printed at the Christian Advocate Office. 1858), 17-18, accessed May 28, 2020. <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.63245/1?r=0&s=1>.

“deny to us the freedom of British subjects, and dedicate themselves as the sanctuaries of American prejudice.” Aboard the steamboat *Britannia*, Gallego was requested by a waiter to leave his dinner table. Gallego insisted that he would not move “but upon violence being used” and was promptly allowed to remain seated. In Hamilton, Gallego sought passage aboard a coach to Brantford but was informed that the white passengers “had clubbed together and refused to ride with me in the stage[.]”⁷⁸⁰

While waiting for his breakfast one morning at the Mansion House Hotel in London, a “ruffianly, blustering-looking fellow” approached him. The man pulled Gallego’s chair from under him and threw him to the floor. The man stated “that he did not allow “niggers” any such privilege in his house[.]” Gallego was “seized by the bar-keeper and some of the boarders, and dragged out into the street.” He was convicted of assault and “sentenced to pay a fine of five pounds, or be imprisoned for a month.” Unable to pay, Gallego “was cast into jail,” for over a week before another judge ordered his release “American prejudice” he declared, “had arrived at such a pitch in this country, that we cannot but avail ourselves of every possible means for its suppression.” At the same time, he reaffirmed his preference for British liberty to American servitude.⁷⁸¹

Other slave refugees in Canada described their encounters with racial prejudice and discrimination. Horace Hawkins claimed that black people “cannot get accommodated at any of the hotels in Canada or any line of railroad or public travel... the root of the prejudice is to be found in the fact that the colored people came here very rapidly, & the whites got the impression that the colored people would become a majority in the Western county.” In 1836, the *Canadian Emigrant* reported, “It seems that two Negroes entered a tavern and without permission began playing dominoes... [the tavernkeeper] ordered them instantly to leave the room which they did but at the same time threatening revenge.” After the black men returned, the tavern owner brought out a “strong horsewhip” and forced them out.⁷⁸²

Likewise, black Canadian and white anti-slavery newspapers documented cases of racial discrimination. In August 1855, the *Globe* reported that a black Toronto minister and his family were denied equal treatment aboard a steamboat. “[H]aving paid the full fare between Chatham and Toronto,” it stated, “they were about to enter the Saloons to which they supposed they were entitled; when to their surprise, they were told ‘the colored persons were not allowed to enter there.’” Similarly, Samuel Ringgold Ward recalled in *Voice of the Fugitive*: “As an instance

⁷⁸⁰ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 87-88

⁷⁸¹ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 88-91.

⁷⁸² Blassingame (ed.), *Slave Testimony*, 443-444 (Hawkins quote); (Sandwich) *Canadian Emigrant* quoted in Julia Roberts, *In Mixed Company: Taverns and Public Life in Upper Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 109. For more on race relations and segregation in Upper Canadian taverns and other public spaces, see Julia Roberts, “‘A Mixed Assemblage of Persons’: Race and Tavern Space in Upper Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* 77, no. 2 (1996), 267-283.

of Canadian Negro hate, I took passage to-day, at Lachine, for Kingston. I could get a cabin passage, on the steamer *St. Lawrence*... Mr. Kelly, the Purser, declared that there was no room for me. There were half-a-dozen state-room keys, uncalled for, in the office at the time.”⁷⁸³

Racial prejudice occasionally boiled over into anti-black violence. On June 28, 1852, members of the ‘Coloured Company’ in St. Catharines were jeered and assaulted by local whites. A black man named Harris was also assaulted by local whites close to parade grounds. Friends and acquaintances of Harris tracked the supposed attacker to a tavern, where a brawl broke out between the various groups. Following false reports that some unknown black men had killed two firefighters, members of the fire brigade attacked black homes and businesses. Samuel Ringgold Ward set about correcting false reporting on the violence in St. Catharines. He claimed in the *Globe* that the white soldiers started the incidents by throwing “the most disgusting and filthy substances upon the blacks,” and that Harris had been attacked “without provocation[.]” Ward claimed that the tavern fighters “gave up the clubs with which they were defending themselves against superior number of whites, while the latter continued their assault upon the former.”⁷⁸⁴

Black Canadian activists utilized several strategies to combat racial prejudice. First, they petitioned city and provincial governments to tackle cases of discrimination. In July 1840, Wilson Ruffin Abbot and others submitted a petition to Toronto Mayor John Powell regarding blackface minstrelsy in the city. It stated that they “have remarked with sorrow that the American Actors whom from time to time visit this City, invariably select for performance plays and characters which by turning into ridicule and holding up to contempt the coloured population cause them much heart-burning and lead occasionally to violence[.]” The following year, twenty-nine black petitioners appealed to the mayor’s office to prohibit blackface minstrels from performing in the city. They objected that white performers “endeavour [sic] to make the Coloured man appear ridiculous and contemptible in the eyes of their audience.” In July 1843, Toronto’s city council banned entertainers from performing “acts that would be insulting to ‘the gentlemen of colour’ of the city.”⁷⁸⁵

⁷⁸³ “The Rights of Coloured People,” *Globe*, reprinted in *PF*, Sep. 29, 1855; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP*: vol. 2: *Canada, 1830-1865*, 177-179 (Ward quote).

⁷⁸⁴ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP*: vol. 2: *Canada, 1830-1865*, 215; “A correspondent of the Tribune...,” *NASS*, reprinted in *VF*, Jul. 29, 1852; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP*: vol. 2: *Canada, 1830-1865*, 215-216 (Ward quotes).

⁷⁸⁵ Karolyn Smardz Frost, “Resisting Stereotypes: African Torontonians Protest Minstrelsy,” in Holly Martelle, Michael McClelland, Tatum Taylor, and John Lorinc (eds.), *The Ward Uncovered: The Archaeology of Everyday Life* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2018), 152-153; Petition from people of colour residing in the City of Toronto to His Worship the Mayor of Toronto, October 14, 1841. City of Toronto Archives. Series 1081, Item 785. Via: “Black History in Toronto,” *Toronto.ca*, accessed Jul. 3, 2019. <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accountability-operations-customer-service/access-city-information-or-records/city-of-toronto-archives/using-the-archives/research-by-topic/black-history-in-toronto/>.

Blackface minstrelsy remained popular throughout British North America, however. In 1846, the *Pennsylvania Freeman* claimed, “In one of the towns of Canada, the civil authorities forbade the Ethiopian Minstrels to hold their concerts, assigning as a reason, that such exhibitions tended to degrade the colored population...Such exhibitions may be “sport” to the audiences of white people, but they are ‘death’ to a sensitive colored man.” The prohibition on blackface minstrelsy was soon overturned, however, and racist acts continued to perform across the provinces. In 1856, black Torontonians submitted another petition to outlaw blackface minstrelsy. Although the city council accepted the petition once again, it ultimately failed to outlaw blackface minstrelsy. Over subsequent decades, minstrel shows were performed and elsewhere in British Canada.⁷⁸⁶

On other occasions, slave refugees and free blacks staged strikes and protests. In 1854, black waiters at two hotels in St. Catharines (the American Hotel and the St. Catharines House) protested the prohibition of black travelers aboard both hotel’s stagecoaches. On August 12, they held a meeting at the Methodist Chapel on North Street “to take action against the cruel prejudices which deny to coloured persons, however respectable, the use of public conveyances to and from the Railroad station and the steamboat.” Several waiters spoke out against the managers of both hotels. ‘Mr. Morris’ of the St. Catharines House proclaimed that he “could endure such outrages no longer; and



Figure 21: Poster for a blackface minstrel show at the Adelaide Street theater in Toronto, 1858

Source: “Fun for the Millions,” *TPL Virtual Exhibits*, accessed January 22, 2020, <http://omeka.tplcs.ca/virtual-exhibits/exhibits/show/freedom-city/item/160>.

⁷⁸⁶ “Caricatures,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Feb. 19, 1846; Smardz Frost, “Resisting Stereotypes,” 153.

made a stirring appeal to all present to respect themselves, and their rights as a people, and submit no longer to such degrading treatment.” Eventually, both hotels bowed to the pressure and reversed their policies.⁷⁸⁷ For southern whites, this episode was a demonstration of black unrest in British Canada. The *Thibodaux Minerva* chastised the black protestors in St. Catharines, declaring, “Sensible negroes do not expect to be treated by *white* men as equals. They know that God has established a radical difference between the two races – that he has erected an insurmountable barrier to divide and keep them distinct.”⁷⁸⁸

Aside from petitions and protests, slave refugees and free blacks were also deeply involved with electoral party politics. In the northern US, this meant throwing their weight behind abolitionist and anti-slavery parties. Founded in 1839, the Liberty Party was the first abolitionist political party. At its first national convention, delegates nominated James G. Birney as their candidate for the upcoming presidential election. Initially, the Liberty Party did not advocate the immediate abolition of black enslavement. Rather, most members merely sought to prevent the expansion of slavery into the western territories. Birney received just over 6,000 votes in the 1840 election but stood again four years later when he received roughly 62,000.⁷⁸⁹

Slave refugees and free blacks threw their weight behind the Liberty Party and its candidates. In 1843, Henry Johnson of New Bedford wrote to *Liberty Standard* editor Austin Wiley, “I have been, and still remain, an uncompromising advocate of the Liberty [P]arty principles, believing it the duty of every true friend of liberty, and particularly every man of color, to do the same.” That same year, the black convention in Buffalo endorsed a resolution which read, “the two great political parties, must of course be pro slavery [sic], while they rule, and slavery exists; and therefore we recommend our brethren, who are qualified to vote, to give their suffrage to the Liberty Party, which has the abolition of slavery for its main object.” Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown asserted “that they were opposed to that party – some of them said that they were opposed to all parties, believed them verily and necessarily corrupt[.]”⁷⁹⁰

⁷⁸⁷ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 297-299.

⁷⁸⁸ “DARKIES IN THE CANADAS,” *Thibodaux Minerva* (Thibodaux, LA), Sep. 2, 1854.

⁷⁸⁹ “Liberty Party,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed Jun. 23, 2019.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Liberty-Party>; Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 463-466. For more on the Liberty Party, see Reinhard O. Johnson, *The Liberty Party, 1840-1848: Antislavery Third-Party Politics in the United States* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2009); James B. Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976); 95-118; Michael D. Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes: Gender and American Antislavery Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), Ch. 1; Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots of Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), Ch. 1; Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, 154-159; Omar H. Ali, *In the Balance of Power: Independent Black Politics and Third Party Movements in the United States* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008), 27-44.

⁷⁹⁰ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 3: The United States, 1830-1846*, 413 (Johnson quote); National Convention of Colored Citizens (1843: Buffalo, NY), “Minutes of the National Convention of Colored Citizens; Held at Buffalo; on the 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th of August, 1843; for the purpose of

White abolitionists, such as Gerrit Smith, feared that African Americans in New York would support the Whigs over the Liberty Party. In response, black leaders in New York City wrote to Smith in 1845, “the alterations which are popular with the parties, do not include the removal of the property qualification now required of colored citizens to enable them to vote... if a direct use of the Liberty vote in this State in the manner herein proposed can be secured... most of the opposition to an extension of the suffrage will be broken down[.]” In 1848, Samuel Ringgold Ward “was nominated for a seat in the New York legislature by a Liberty [P]arty convention at Cortland, New York[.]” He stressed his support for the immediate abolition of slavery, the establishment of good foreign relations with Haiti, and “the restoration of [voting rights] to the 40,000 citizens now unjustly deprived of it, at the earliest practical period.”⁷⁹¹

Geopolitical upheavals (most notably the US-Mexican War) contributed to the collapse of the ‘second party system’ and the rise of new anti-slavery parties. In August 1848, the Free Soil Party was established by a coalition of Whigs, Democrats, and abolitionists in Buffalo, New York. In 1846, US Congressman David Wilmot introduced a proviso that aimed to prohibit black enslavement in the western territories. After the New York Democratic Party refused to endorse Wilmot’s proviso, anti-slavery Democrats joined anti-slavery Whigs to form the new party. The 1848 party convention in Buffalo established its platform, “Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labour [sic], and Free Men.”⁷⁹²

The Free Soil Party stood on a moderate anti-slavery platform. By confining slavery to the South, Free Soil representatives believed that it would lead to the institution’s inevitable decline. Furthermore, while some leaders campaigned for racial equality, the Free Soil Party did not officially sanction equal rights or black citizenship. This was largely due to the diverse background and beliefs of its founding members and an attempt to maintain a broad coalition of northern white voters, most of whom supported the proposed ban on black enslavement in the territories but opposed equal citizenship. “Free soil,” argues Sinha, “was the lowest common denominator of antislavery, designed to appeal to the widest constituency.”⁷⁹³

The Free Soil Party platform divided black activists. On the one hand, it represented another realistic effort to confine slavery to the South. Yet its platform stopped short of calling for immediate abolitionism and many of its members held

considering their moral and political condition as American citizens,” *ColoredConventions.org*, accessed July 10, 2019, <http://coloredconventions.org/items/show/278>; Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 467-468.

⁷⁹¹ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 3: The United States, 1830-1846*, 468-469 (letter to Smith); Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 4: The United States, 1847-1858*, 27-30 (Ward quote).

⁷⁹² Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 478-483; Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 119-123; Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, 123-143, 159-163; “The Convention at Buffalo,” *NASS*, Aug. 17, 1848. For more on the Free Soil Party, see Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes*, Ch. 2; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, Chs. 7 & 8.

⁷⁹³ Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 482-484 (quote on 483).

anti-black prejudices. Frederick Douglass was perhaps the most prominent black delegate of the 1848 Buffalo convention. In August 1848, his *North Star* newspaper stated, “We may stand off and act the part of fault-finders – pick flaws in the Free Soil platform... Or we may consign ourselves to oblivion... remain silent as if we were speechless, and let things take their own course, and thus morally to commit suicide.” However, Samuel Ringgold Ward declared, “the Platform of the Buffalo Convention does NOT include the Equal and Inalienable Rights of ALL MEN.” Ward asserted that many of its members were “as ready to rob black men of their rights now as ever they were.”⁷⁹⁴

In September 1848, some African Americans at the national convention in Cleveland signaled their support for the Free Soil Party, while others steadfastly refused to throw their weight behind it. After some time, supporters of the Free Soil movement passed the following resolution: “That while we heartily engage in recommending to our people the Free Soil movement, and the support of the Buffalo convention, nevertheless we claim and are determined to maintain the higher standard and more liberal views which have heretofore characterized us as abolitionists.” The resolution’s phrasing highlights the rifts within the black abolitionist movement, as well as the reluctance of black supporters to embrace the Free Soil platform.⁷⁹⁵

The Republican Party was the most significant anti-slavery political party to emerge in the antebellum North. Founded in 1854, the new organization arose in response to the Kansas-Nebraska controversy and the impending threat of slavery’s extension into the western territories. Whigs, anti-slavery Democrats, and other free-soilers come together to establish the party. The new organization did not formally support immediate emancipation, however; but it quickly gained support from political abolitionists. Within a couple of years, the Republican Party had become the dominant force in northern politics.⁷⁹⁶

African American leaders were divided over whether to support the Republicans. At the 1858 Suffrage Convention in Troy, delegates recommended that “the eleven thousand colored voters of this State to concentrate their strength upon the Republican ticket for Governor[.]” Garnet and his supporters denounced this resolution. Garrison’s *Liberator* reported, “we have known him for a long time, and

⁷⁹⁴ Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 484-486; Ali, *In the Balance of Power*, 44-47 Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 119-121, 145-146; “Free Soil Movement,” *NS*, Aug. 18, 1848; S. R. Ward, “ADDRESS,” *NS*, Sep. 1, 1848.

⁷⁹⁵ Colored National Convention (1848: Cleveland, OH), “Report of the proceedings of the Colored National Convention held at Cleveland, Ohio, on Wednesday, September 6, 1848.” [ColoredConventions.org](http://coloredconventions.org/items/show/280), accessed Jun. 24, 2019. <http://coloredconventions.org/items/show/280>.

⁷⁹⁶ Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 497-499. For key readings on the Republican Party, see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, esp. Ch. 5. For more on the collapse of the Whigs and end of the Second Party System, see Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

know that he has no confidence in the Republican party – that he has no sympathy with their principles, politics or actions.” At the 1858 Cincinnati convention, William Watkins declared that “the Democratic party was the great foe to the colored man; the Republicans of New York had done something for the colored man, and he verily believed, would do more.” By contrast, Peter H. Clark “did not consider his rights any safer with the Republicans than with the Democrats.”⁷⁹⁷

In Canada, meanwhile, slave refugees were also actively engaged in electoral politics. Many spoke highly of possessing the franchise and linked it directly to their claims for equal subjecthood. William Grose claimed, “I am a true British subject, and I have a vote every year as much as any other man.” Samuel Ringgold Ward called the electoral franchise “most sacred” of rights. Henry Bibb cited the ability to vote as symbolic of Canadian liberty: “There the elective franchise is theirs and they may in a few years, if industrious and persevering in the acquisition of knowledge, send one of their own number to represent them in the Provincial Parliament.” Most Canadian blacks supported the Conservatives, the traditional party of Empire. William P. Newman wrote, “the Conservative party is the *Constitutional* party of our much envied country – it is *true* to the general interest, and *loyal* to the Crown.” Support for Tory candidates remained a potent symbol of African American refugee commitment to the British Crown. Over time, black voters demonstrated a willingness to support alternative parties, so long as they remained loyal to Great Britain. One unnamed author wrote in the *Provincial Freeman*, “the colored people should not hesitate a moment in their choice but take side with that party which is most steadfast in British principles[.]”⁷⁹⁸

Several restrictions constrained the black Canadian electorate, however. First, black women were excluded from the franchise. Moreover, the right to vote was limited to naturalized subjects who owned taxable property. As Natasha L. Henry notes, “most colonies or provinces required eligible voters to own property or have a taxable net worth – a practice that excluded poor people, the working class and many racialized minorities.” Furthermore, Canadian whites made numerous efforts to stymie the black vote. In 1848, whites in Colchester attempted to prevent local black male voters from participating in the election of parish and township officers. Three years later, Gosfield whites attempted to prevent black voters from entering local

⁷⁹⁷ Suffrage Convention of the Colored Citizens of New York (1858: Troy, NY), “Suffrage Convention of the Colored Citizens of New York, Troy, September 14, 1858.,” *ColoredConventions.org*, accessed June 25, 2019, <http://coloredconventions.org/items/show/239>; Convention of the Colored Men of Ohio (1858: Cincinnati, OH), “Proceedings of a Convention of the Colored Men of Ohio, Held in the City of Cincinnati, on the 23d, 24th, 25th, an 26th days of November, 1858.,” *ColoredConventions.org*, accessed June 25th, 2019, <http://coloredconventions.org/items/show/254>.

⁷⁹⁸ Drew, *North-Side View of Slavery*, 86 (Grose quote); Henry, “Black Voting Rights in Canada” (Ward quote); “Advice,” *VF*, Mar. 12, 1851 (Bibb quote); Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 322-324 (Newman quote); “No. III,” *PF*, Apr. 21, 1855.

polling stations. They were later admitted after a local judge upheld their right to vote.⁷⁹⁹

On several occasions, black voters in Canada used the franchise to effect real change. In 1854, Edwin Larwill was elected to the Legislative Assembly as the Conservative candidate for Kent County. Back leaders campaigned heavily against Larwill and urged voters to vote for his opponent, Archibald McKellar. In May, the *Provincial Freeman* warned readers, “Do not vote for Larwill! Vote for no man opposed to you! – Persuade your neighbors to vote for a gentleman, a man who does not hate colored people, not your enemy.” Two months later, the newspaper added, “Who has done more to poison the minds of the people of Kent against you than the same Mr. Larwill? Who has counselled [sic] ignorant black men in school matters, and aided stupidity to fetter the minds of your children for the last eight years equal to this would-be member?” Yet his strategy worked and Larwill was elected.⁸⁰⁰

Black activists vowed to remove Larwill from office. In May 1856, the *Provincial Freeman* claimed that Larwill delivered speeches in the Legislative Assembly regarding persistent racial inequality in the province. He called upon the Governor-General to approve to compile returns of black people “in the Penitentiary, Lunatic Asylum, or other Public Institutions,” as well as those in “Military or Civil employment[.]” He implored the provincial government to examine “their continued absence from the Jury Lists’ and why, and wherefore, with equal property and intelligence, they are debarred from the exercise of those Civil Rights which their pale brethren possess.” Larwill likely understood that black voters posed a threat to his re-election bid and sought to placate their interests. In 1857, Larwill lost his seat to Reform Party candidate Archibald McKellar.⁸⁰¹

Black voters were also instrumental in removing Colonel John Prince from office. In 1856, Prince contended that blacks were “extremely demoralized, repaying with ingratitude, with pilfering, theft, and other vices and crimes,” and suggested that they be sent to “some sort of Liberia or Botany Bay to live in a colony by themselves.” Black leaders denounced “the foul imputations contained in his speech, as a base slander of our character as citizens, calculated to foster prejudices against us and to degrade us,” and pledged to “resist by every means in our power, any invasion of our

⁷⁹⁹ Hepburn, *Crossing the Border*, 22-23, 57; Natasha L. Henry, “Black Voting Rights in Canada,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.ca, accessed Sep. 11, 2019, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/black-voting-rights>.

⁸⁰⁰ “The Representation of Kent,” *PF*, May 6, 1854; “The Coming Elections,” *PF*, Jul. 8, 1854; Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 80; Hepburn, *Crossing the Border*, 22; *Look to the North Star*, 85. The *Western Planet* covered the electoral race between Edwin Larwill and Archibald McKellar over several issues. For examples, see “Mr. McKellar, a Candidate for Kent,” *Western Planet*, Jul. 12, 1854; “Mr. Larwill’s Manifesto,” *Western Planet*, Jul. 12, 1854; “The Election,” *Western Planet*, Jul. 26, 1854. The *Western Planet* signaled its preference for McKellar over Larwill, and noted that it would have formally supported him had he entered the race sooner.

⁸⁰¹ “Mr. Larwill in the Assembly,” *PF*, May 24, 1856.

rights as citizens.”⁸⁰² In 1857, Prince claimed that black refugees in Canada were “rogues and thieves, and a graceless, worthless, thriftless, lying set of vagabonds.” That same year, the *Preble County Democrat* reprinted one of his speeches in which he recommended sending refugees to “one of the Manitoulin Islands, or somewhere else, where the whites would not suffer from contact with them.”⁸⁰³ Prince promoted policies that were designed to reduce the number of African American refugee settlers in the province. In 1858, the *St. Catharines Journal* reported that he proposed introducing a new tax on blacks in the province. He claimed that the “black people who infested the land were the greatest curse to the Province,” and claimed that whites in Kent County were “compelled to leave their beautiful farms, because of the pestilential, swarthy swarms.” Prince was removed from office a few years later.⁸⁰⁴ In 1859, Abraham D. Shadd (Mary Ann Shadd Cary’s father) became the first black man to hold public office in Upper Canada. One newspaper noted that he was “triumphantly elected, beating his opponent, a white man, by a handsome majority.”⁸⁰⁵

As they became a more significant force in Upper Canadian politics, black refugees displayed a greater willingness to stray from the Tories and support Reform Party candidates. Speaking in Toronto, William J. Watkins told his audience, “we earnestly recommend our brethren throughout the Province to give the Reform party, in the present contest, and in all future contests, which they believe to be right, their united votes and their active co-operation.” The *Globe* added that Watkins “went on to refer to the many acts of corruption of the present Government in Canada,” such as the Anderson extradition case. When Watkins called for them to vote for Reform candidates, the crowd chanted, “We will; we will.” Calls for black voters to make their voices heard at the ballot box continued into the following decade and beyond. In 1861, the *True Royalist*, a Windsor-based pro-British, abolitionist newspaper, proclaimed, “Our colored voters have a great work to perform, and if they will only

⁸⁰² Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 174, 214; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 382-385.

⁸⁰³ “RE-OPENING OF THE SLAVE TRADE. &c.,” *Richmond Enquirer*, Jul. 28, 1857 (first quote); “Unpopularity of Fugitive Slaves in Canada,” *Preble County Democrat* (Eaton, OH), Jun. 25, 1857.

⁸⁰⁴ “LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL. THE PEOPLE OF COLOUR,” *St. Catharine’s Journal*, Jun. 10, 1858; Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 174, 214.

⁸⁰⁵ “The Detroit Tribune says...” *Marshall County Democrat* (Plymouth, IN), Jan. 27, 1859; Henry, “Black Voting in Canada,”; Gail Arlene Ito, “Abraham Doras Shadd (1801-1882),” *BlackPast.org*, Feb. 24, 2009. <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/shadd-abraham-doras-1801-1882/>. Accessed Jun. 20, 2019. For more newspaper coverage on the controversy surrounding Col. John Prince, see “THE NEGROES IN CANADA INDIGNANT AGAINST COL. PRINCE – THAT GENTLEMAN’S OPINION OF THE AFRICAN RACE,” *Detroit Free Press*, reprinted in *Washington Union* (Washington, DC), Jul. 9, 1857; and “Colored Citizens in Canada,” *Weekly Portage Sentinel* (Ravenna, OH), Jul. 16, 1857; “COMMOTION AMONG THE COLORED PEOPLE OF CANADA,” *Montreal Gazette*, reprinted in *Preble County Democrat* (Eaton, OH), Jul. 30, 1857.

be true to the British Government, they will be true to themselves and posterity... Support no party that will not do their duty to all men.”⁸⁰⁶

In the Maritimes, black voters “waged several campaigns to claim contested public space and make a push for equal citizenship through political involvement.” As Upper Canadian counterparts, blacks in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were inclined to support the Tories. Yet, they were also increasingly willing to throw their support behind other candidates if it served their interests. In May 1847, Reformers and Tories staged rallies to gain the support of black voters. At the Reformers’ meeting, black farmers declared that they “value too highly our rights as British subjects, and particularly the Elective franchise, to barter away our independence, believing that those who would buy a Constituency would sell a Country.” Tories and Reformers sought to outbid each other to convince black voters. According to Whitfield, “The choice between the two parties was particularly difficult for the local black community because each party made a strong case for the black vote.”⁸⁰⁷

Devotion, Loyalty, and Military Service

Military service was another form of illustrating claims to citizenship or subjecthood. Across the North and Canada, slave refugees and free blacks established militia companies as a means of defending their communities and symbolizing their devotion to the United States and Great Britain respectively. In 1848, black Brooklynites founded the Hannibal Guards, a “group of young men training as a military unit.” According to the *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, they took part in the 1851 Emancipation Day celebrations “between the villages of Weeksville and Corsville.” “It was a fine morning,” claimed the report. As the Rev. Peter Garder rose to speak, “the noise of the drum, and the shrill sound of music announced the approach of Capt. Hackins, at the head of the Hannibal Guards. The company was taken by surprise. They marched up directly opposite the speaker’s stand, and there rested for orders, which were soon given, to march round the ground.”⁸⁰⁸

⁸⁰⁶ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 443-444; “POLITICAL PROVINCIAL,” *True Royalist*, Jun. 21, 1861.

⁸⁰⁷ Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*, 100-108 (quote); Henry, “Black Voting Rights in Canada”; J. Murray Beck, “Joseph Howe,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia.ca*, Mar. 4, 2015; <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/joseph-howe>. Accessed Sep. 12 2018, Daniel Sutherland, “Race Relations in Halifax, Nova Scotia, During the Mid-Victorian Quest for Reform,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 7, no. 1 (1996), 35-54. For more on Black Refugee citizenship, see Harvey Amani Whitfield, “The Development of Black Refugee Identity in Nova Scotia, 1813-1850,” *Left History* 10, no. 2 (2005), 9-30.

⁸⁰⁸ Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, “Rehearsal for War: Black Militias in the Atlantic World,” *Slavery & Abolition* 26, no. 1 (2005) 10-12 (list of black militia companies on pg. 12), Wellman, *Brooklyn’s Promised Land*, 74 (first quote); George W. Clark, “LETTER FROM OBSERVER,” *FDP*, Sep. 4, 1851.

Other black militia companies soon followed. Led by Charles Lennox Remond and Robert Morris, sixty-two African Americans in Boston petitioned the state legislature for the creation of an independent black militia in 1852. Massachusetts lawmakers rejected the petition, however, but this did not deter black activists in Boston. In early 1853, they appealed once more to the state legislature. William Watkins insisted that the petitioners were “law-abiding, tax-paying, liberty-loving, NATIVE-BORN, AMERICAN CITIZENS[.]” Yet the petition was denied once again.⁸⁰⁹ In 1855, Boston blacks founded the Massasoit Guard. Robert Morris wrote in the *Boston Evening Telegraph*, “All the members of this corps are young men of respectability, and law-abiding citizens.” Two years later, the Liberty Guards were established in the city. At the 1858 New Bedford celebrations, the Guards “turned out twenty-five muskets, and were accompanied by the Malden Brass Band[.]” In 1855, the *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* reported that “a company of colored men organized as a militia in Providence, [Rhode Island], and the Legislature has granted them the use of the State arms.” Meanwhile, African Americans established the “Attucks Blues” and “made their first parade in Cincinnati, Ohio, on Wednesday of last week. They are said to be well drilled, well uniformed, and well officered.” By the end of the Civil War, more than two dozen black militia companies existed throughout the northern states.⁸¹⁰

Militia companies became a permanent fixture of Emancipation Day celebrations. In 1856, William Cooper Nell took notes on the various August First festivities. “Passing through Pittsburgh,” he recalled, “I became acquainted with several intelligent and enterprising colored citizens. They, also, were expecting a grand celebration on the 1st, in which the parade of a newly-organized colored military company was to be a leading feature.” In 1855, Frederick Douglass wrote of the Emancipation Day celebration in New Bedford, “I never saw colored soldier[s] before, and before I saw them I had serious doubts of the wisdom of their coming out

⁸⁰⁹ “BREVITIES,” *ASB*, May 22, 1852; Watkins quoted in Kerr-Ritchie, “Rehearsal for War,” 10. Original quotation from William J. Watkins, *Our Rights as Men: An Address Delivered in Boston, before the Legislative Committee on the Militia, February 24, 1853* (Boston: Benjamin R. Roberts, 1853). Also see Christian G. Samito, *Becoming American Under Fire: Irish Americans, African Americans, and the Politics of Citizenship During the Civil War Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 22-23.

⁸¹⁰ “COLORED MILITIA,” *FDP*, Aug. 3, 1855 (third quote); “NEW COLORED MILITIA COMPANY,” *Boston Evening Telegraph*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Aug. 17, 1855; Robert Morris, “THE MASSOIT GUARDS,” *Boston Evening Telegraph*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Sep. 14, 1855 (Morris quote); “FIRST PUBLIC PARADE OF THE LIBERTY GUARD,” *Boston Herald*, reprinted in *Liberator*, Nov. 27, 1857; “ANNIVERSARY OF BRITISH WEST INDIA EMANCIPATION,” *Liberator*, Aug. 13, 1858 (second quote); Kerr-Ritchie, “Rehearsal for War,” 11; Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 91, 120-121; Kantrowitz, *More than Freedom*, 215-219; James O. Horton and Lois E. Horton, “The Affirmation of Manhood: Black Garrisonians in Antebellum Boston,” in Donald M. Jacobs (ed.), *Courage and Conscience: Black & White Abolitionists in Boston* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 149-150.

on that day... But the companies quite surpassed me by their soldierly bearing, and compelled my admiration[.]”⁸¹¹

Slave refugees also demonstrated their claims to equal subjecthood through military service. Adrienne Shadd writes that “allegiance to the British government was about much more than preventing a rebel takeover... It was also about proving their bravery and worth to their fellow citizens, who did not always regard them as equal.”⁸¹² In 1837, the Scottish-born journalist and reformer William Lyon Mackenzie spearheaded a rebellion against the Upper Canadian government. Self-emancipators were wary of this uprising. They feared that it would undermine their perceived fidelity to the British Crown and, in the words of abolitionist Harriet Martineau, they dreaded “the barest mention of the annexation of Canada to the United States.”⁸¹³ For slave refugees, a successful rebellion against the Tory dominance and British influence in Canada symbolized a significant threat to their interests. Over the 1830s, there was a noticeable rise in anti-monarchical, pro-republican sentiment across the Canadian provinces. The *Newfoundland Patriot*, for instance, published an article in 1836 which explained their long-term desire to “shake off the cursed incubus of Tory domination[.]”⁸¹⁴ Reformers favored a more democratic, republican model (similar to the US) for Canadian governance. The annexation of Canada by the United States was not an outlandish prospect for black refugees. They fought to preserve British laws and interests in North America, which they knew was crucial to defending their formal liberty.

Hundreds of black men (African Canadians and African American refugees) enlisted to quell the rebellion. In his autobiography, Jermain Wesley Loguen wrote that self-emancipators could not stand by “when the success of the invaders would break the only arm interposed for their security, and destroy the only asylum for African freedom in North America.” Loguen added that these “able-bodied and daring refugees are the most reliable fortress of national strength on the Canadian frontiers; and ere [sic] it is scaled by slave-holders or their abettors[.]”⁸¹⁵ Canadian officials praised the contribution of black servicemen to their military cause. Lieutenant-Governor Sir Francis Bond Head noted that black soldiers fought to “defend the glorious institutions of Great Britain.” Mackenzie bemoaned that “nearly all of them are opposed to every species of reform in the civil institutions of the colony – they are so extravagantly loyal to the Executive that to the utmost of their

⁸¹¹ “FIRST OF AUGUST IN SALEM, OHIO,” *Liberator*, Aug. 15, 1856; Kerr-Ritchie, “Rehearsal for War,” 17-18; Kachun, *First Martyr of Liberty*, 55.

⁸¹² Shadd, *The Journey from Tollgate to Parkway*, 104- 106 (quote on 106).

⁸¹³ Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel, Volume 1* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 244.

⁸¹⁴ “From the Newfoundland Patriot,” *Newfoundland Patriot*, reprinted in *Correspondent and Advocate* (Toronto, ON), Nov. 9, 1836.

⁸¹⁵ Loguen, *The Rev. J.W. Loguen*, 344.

power they uphold all abuses of the government and support those who profit by them.”⁸¹⁶

Black servicemen also assumed leadership positions within military companies. Josiah Henson recalled, “I was appointed a captain of the 2nd Essex Company of Coloured Volunteers... My company held Fort Maldon [sic] from Christmas till the following May, and also took the schooner Ann [sic] and captured all it carried, which were three hundred arms, two cannons, musketry, and provisions for the rebel troops.” These military companies were a tremendous source of pride for African Canadians. Austin Steward later recalled, “It was common, in passing through the streets of Hamilton, to meet every few rods, a colored man in uniform, with a sword at his side, marching about in all the military pomp allowed only to white men in this *free republic*.” Under the leadership of William Allen, the Hamilton corps became highly distinguished among the city’s black community. In the coming decades, orators and writers sought to preserve the legacy of black participation during the rebellion. In 1851, Paola Brown wrote in an address intended for the people of Hamilton, “I shall never forget 1836 and 1837: every colored man, as soon as he heard the Canadas were to be invaded, fled to arms... I say to our Canadian friends, fear not, we can work and make good soldiers too, in times of troubles or war.”⁸¹⁷

Black militiamen cleared the wilderness to make way for the ‘Cuyoga Road’ between Drummondville and Simcoe. Shadd wrote that they “had to fashion their own living accommodations alongside the construction route, since they were so far from any settlements.” The harsh conditions were understandably difficult and took an enormous toll on the black corps. African Americans and African Canadians increasingly linked military service with claims to equal subjecthood. In 1855 or 1856, Philadelphia-born Robert Jones founded the Queen’s Victoria Rifle Guards, a black militia company in Hamilton. He wrote to William Still, “I thought I would try to do something for their elevation as a nation, to place them in the proper position to stand where they ought to stand. In order to do this, I have undertaken to get up a

⁸¹⁶ Kerr-Ritchie, “Rehearsal for War,” 9-10. For more on black participation in the Upper Canadian Rebellion, see Fred Landon, “Canadian Negroes and the Rebellion of 1837,” *Journal of Negro History* 7, no. 4 (1922), 377-379; Wayne Edward Kelly, “Race and Segregation in the Upper Canada Militia,” *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 78, no. 316 (2000), 264-277.

⁸¹⁷ Natasha L. Henry, *Talking About Freedom: Celebrating Emancipation Day in Canada* (Toronto: Natural Heritage, 2012), 53-54; Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 151; “Rebellions of 1837,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.ca, accessed Sep. 3, 2018, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/rebellions-of-1837>; Shadd, *The Journey from Tollgate to Parkway*, 107-108; Josiah Henson, *Uncle Tom’s Story of His Life. An Autobiography of the Rev. Josiah Henson (Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s “Uncle Tom”). From 1789 to 1876. With a Preface by Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe, and an Introductory Note by George Sturge, and S. Morley, Esq., M. P.* (London: Christian Age Office, 1876), 176, accessed Mar. 20, 2019, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/henson/henson.html>; Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave*, 300; Paola Brown, *Address Intended to be Delivered in the City Hall, Hamilton, February 7, 1851, on the Subject of Slavery* (Hamilton, ON Printed for the Author, 1851), 28, accessed Jun. 15, 2020, <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.49632/1?r=0&s=1>.

military company amongst them.” Hezekiah Hill, a self-emancipator from Virginia, became Ensign of the company.⁸¹⁸

The Crimean War provided another opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to the British Empire. On June 16, 1855, the *Provincial Freeman* stated, “The colored people of Canada are right on the war question. Their experience of tyrants is too thorough, not to feel, that with a power so determined to disregard the rights of other sovereignties, and people, as Russia, there must be prompt and decisive action... no men are more willing to do their mite [sic] for the discomfiture of the common enemy... than the colored men of Canada.” One week later, a meeting of blacks in Chatham resolved:

we, the Colored people of Kent County... feeling indebted to Her Most Gracious Majesty, and Her Government, make known our willingness and determination to assist in arresting the usurpations of Russia or any other power... [and] after having been subjected to the iniquitous system of Yankee oppression, and having the privilege of a home on British Territory extended to us, in common with all others of Her adopted subjects, the duty devolves upon us to aid in any and every case where we would be in any way serviceable.⁸¹⁹

Alternative Beacons of Freedom: Black Emigration from North America

The status of African Americans and African Canadians was not fully settled by the Civil War Era. In the late 1840s and 1850s, the ACS experienced a resurgence. This led to the forced removal of thousands of black people from the United States. Between 1848 and 1854, over 4,000 African Americans were deported to Liberia. William Lloyd Garrison asserted that the organization “vilifies and persecutes the free people of color, and prevents as far as possible their moral and social elevation in the United States.” In 1851, blacks in Albany met to protest the “two great questions”: the FSA and “the coercive and barbarous Colonization Scheme.” The following year, African Americans in New Bedford, Massachusetts resolved, “in

⁸¹⁸ Shadd, *The Journey from Tollgate to Parkway*, 109 (quote) -111; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 345.

⁸¹⁹ “The Colored Men of Canada and the Eastern War,” *PF*, Jun. 16, 1855; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 321.

whatever light we view the Colonization Society, we discover nothing in it but terror, prejudice and oppression[.]”⁸²⁰

Around this time, slave refugees and free black leaders launched new emigration schemes to the Caribbean, Central and South America, and West Africa. Disillusioned with the rising tide of anti-black racism, some concluded that black people could never be truly free in North America. For many, mass emigration from the United States risked bolstering colonization. Even Frederick Douglass refused to endorse the mass migration of African Americans to Canada.⁸²¹ Yet African Americans and African Canadians were willing to consider emigration schemes. In August 1851, African Americans in Indianapolis resolved “should the laws of the state become so oppressive as to be intolerable, they would recommend their people to emigrate to Canada, Jamaica, or elsewhere, in preference to Liberia[.]” Other possible destinations included “Mexico, New Granada, and Central America: but Canada is generally regarded as the most eligible, on account of its accessibility.” The Indianapolis delegates also reaffirmed African Americans “have a right to remain, if they choose, in the United States, the land of their nativity; and it accordingly recommends them to stay here, and strive for their moral, social, political, and intellectual elevation.”⁸²²

From the early national period, emigrationists established organizations to promote various schemes that encouraged black migration to Haiti, the British West Indies, and West Africa. In 1818, African Americans in New York City founded the Haytian [sic] Emigration Society. It attracted many prominent supporters, including Samuel Cornish. Thousands of African Americans left North America. According to Ousmane Power-Greene, Haiti “continued to inspire black Americans, encouraging some free blacks in the North to join Haitian emigration societies as a sign of solidarity, while others went ahead and packed up their belongings and emigrated there.” By the 1830s, the Haitian emigration movement, and similar schemes to the

⁸²⁰ Power-Greene, *Against Wind and Tide*, 96-98, 119; William Lloyd Garrison, “The Colonization Conspiracy,” *Liberator*, Jun. 18, 1847; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 4: The United States, 1847-1858*, 113-115.

⁸²¹ Power-Greene, *Against Wind and Tide*, 129-130; Shirley J. Yee, “Finding a Place: Mary Ann Shadd Cary and the Dilemma of Black Migration to Canada, 1850-1870,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 18, no. 3 (1997), 3. For more on black emigration schemes from North America to Haiti, the British West Indies, and West Africa, see Power-Greene, *Against the Wind and Tides*, 17-45; Sara C. Fanning, “The Roots of Early Black Nationalism: Northern African Americans’ Invocations of Haiti in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *Slavery & Abolition* 28, no. 1 (2007), 61-85; Chris Dixon, “An Ambivalent Black Nationalism: Haiti, Africa, and Antebellum African-American Emigrations,” *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 10, no. 2 (1991), 10-25; Abbot, “Beacons of Liberty.”

⁸²² “Convention at Indianapolis,” *VF*, Aug. 27, 1851. The Republic of New Granada comprised present-day Colombia and Panama, and parts of Peru, Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua. It was formally established in 1831.

West Indies and West Africa, soon fell out of favor.⁸²³ However, this would not spell the end of black emigration from North American to the Caribbean.

Over the antebellum period, Upper Canada was the preferred destination outside the United States among black activists and white abolitionists. In her circular *A Plea for Emigration* (1852), Mary Ann Shadd Cary praised the province's "salubrious and eminently healthy climate." As Ikuko Asaka notes, Shadd rebuked popular claims that African-descended people "were more productive workers in the tropics than they were in cold climates." Jobs in the province were supposedly more abundant; "there is much to do," Shadd insisted, "and comparatively few for the work. The numerous towns and villages springing up, and the great demand for timber and agricultural products, make labor of every kind plenty." Furthermore, Shadd argued that Canada's place in the British Empire was crucial. Shadd wrote in the *Provincial Freeman*, "You cannot be a whole African Nation here brethren, but you can be *part* of the Colored British nation. This nation knows no one color above another, but being composed of all colors, is evidently a *colored* nation."⁸²⁴

Shadd was less optimistic about other potential sites of black liberty. She acknowledged that "agents have been sent particularly from Jamaica and Trinidad, from time to time, to confer with [African Americans] on the subject." Her primary concern was that the proposed schemes would solely benefit white planters (by supplying them with cheap black labor). Yet black migrants in the British West Indies would still be eligible for subjecthood.⁸²⁵ Mexico was a less appealing option, however. Despite its geographical proximity and "the known hostility of Mexicans to the institution of slavery," Shadd claimed that Mexico did not offer "the features, in the main, that the States of South America do." She added that "the spirit of democracy has never so thoroughly pervaded that country." Furthermore, Shadd argued that "the Roman Catholic church is in undisputed supremacy, and the Pope is to them the ultimatum." Shadd concluded, "Let Mexico, at present, take care of herself... and let our emigrants so *abolitionize* and strengthen neighboring positions as to promote the prosperity and harmony of the whole."⁸²⁶

Initially, Martin R. Delany championed Upper Canada as a destination for black refugees. He argued that it was "equal to any portion of the Northern States. The climate being milder than that of the Northern portions of New York, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, or any of the States bordering on the lakes, [and] the soil

⁸²³ Power-Greene, *Against Wind and Tide*, 17-18, 130; Leslie M. Alexander, *African or American? Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 40, 43; Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 191-196.

⁸²⁴ Mary Ann Shadd Cary, *A Plea for Emigration; or, Notes of Canada West, in its Moral, Social, and Political Aspect: with Suggestions Respecting Mexico, W. Indies and Vancouver Island, for the Information of Colored Emigrants* (Detroit: Published by George W. Pattison, 1852), 6, 15-16, 30-31; Asaka, *Tropical Freedom*, 1; "A Word about, and to Emigrationists," *PF*, Apr. 15, 1854.

⁸²⁵ Shadd, *A Plea for Emigration*, 36-37.

⁸²⁶ Shadd, *A Plea for Emigration*, 40-42.

is prolific in productions of every description.” Unlike Shadd, however, Delaney believed that the United States would eventually annex Canada. “The odious infamous fugitive slave law,” he wrote, “will then be in full force with all its terrors[.]” Delany encouraged African Americans to seek refuge in Canada for the time being; “we say, until we have a more preferable place – go on to Canada. Freedom, always; liberty any place and ever – before slavery.”⁸²⁷

Delaney came to favor emigration schemes to Latin America. He wrote, “In the productions of grains, fruits, and vegetables, Central and South America are also prolific; and the best herds are here raised.” Delany asserted that the independent nations of Central and South America had never institutionalized “an inequality on account of race or color, and any prohibition of rights, has generally been to the white, and not to the colored races.” He pointed to Nicaragua and New Grenada as possible spaces of liberty beyond the continent. “To remain here in North America,” he wrote, “and be crushed to the earth in vassalage and degradation, we never will.”⁸²⁸ Meanwhile, black abolitionist James T. Holly argued that other destinations were less suitable because “the distance of these locations from our enslaved brethren still clanking their chains, and their topical latitudes, are insurmountable objections to the free colored people of the United States.” At the 1851 North American Convention, delegates recommended that African Americans, “emigrate to the Canadas instead of going to Africa or the West India Islands, that they, by doing so, may be better able to assist their brethren who are daily dying from American slavery.” The delegates declared that the British government was “the most favorable in the civilized world to the people of color, and is therefore entitled to our entire confidence.”⁸²⁹

Legally free black men and women are most often associated with voluntary emigration schemes from North America. Yet slave refugees were also intricately involved in emigration schemes. Henry Bibb contended, “We say Canada first because it is the most convenient refuge for the American slave.” Yet Bibb also examined potential sites outside North America. For instance, he briefly considered emigration schemes to Jamaica. Bibb claimed that it was “owned and governed chiefly by the colored population, many of whom were held and worked there not longer than 14 years ago as slaves,” and insisted that it was “a great commercial and agricultural enterprize [sic], possessing, in itself the elements for breaking down the system of American slavery.”⁸³⁰

⁸²⁷ Martin Robinson Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (Philadelphia: Published by the Author, 1852), 173-177.

⁸²⁸ Delany, *Condition, Elevation, Emigration*, 178-181, 188-189.

⁸²⁹ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 138-139 (Holly quote); North American Convention (1851: Toronto, Canada), “Proceedings for the North American Convention held in Toronto, Canada, 1851,” *ColoredConventions.org*, accessed June 27th, 2019, <http://coloredconventions.org/items/show/324>.

⁸³⁰ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 200-201.

On June 17, 1853, black men and women met at the First Baptist Church in Amherstburg, Canada, claimed the meeting's Committee on Emigration, was the first "Asylum of the Refugees from American Slavery." After Canada, the committee resolved that the British West Indies was a suitable destination for African-descended people. "Jamaica, is probably the most important of all the Islands," stated the report. Furthermore, the committee noted that there was already "an Agent in New York City setting before our people the advantages of that Island." It added that an African American agent from South Carolina named J. Wesley Harrison "has been there for two years, and has made himself acquainted with the advantages and resources of the Island; and from his knowledge of his own people in the States he knows Jamaica is a good place for their development."⁸³¹

The rise in emigration sentiment culminated in the August 1854 National Emigration Convention of Colored People. Held in Cleveland, Ohio, it attracted emigrationists from across the northern US and Canada, including James T. Holly and Martin R. Delaney. Other black abolitionists, such as William M. Lambert, John Malvin, and Mary Bibb, also attended the convention. For three days, delegates discussed the prospects of black emigration. During the proceedings, Delaney presented a report titled 'Political Destines of the Colored Race,' which was passed unanimously by the convention. Delaney challenged the "false impression" that black people could secure equal citizenship in North America. He insisted that African-descended people could never be part of the "ruling element," even if they possessed the right to vote. "The liberty of no man is secure," Delaney proclaimed, "who controls not his political destiny." He believed that emigration was the only "remedy" for black people. Delaney stated his belief that Canada offered a satisfactory "temporary relief, especially to the fleeing fugitive," but reiterated that it was not a "permanent" refuge. He resolved, "The West Indies, Central and South America, are the countries of choice[.]"⁸³²

Four years later, Henry Highland Garnet founded the African Civilization Society (AfCS) to promote emigration from North America to Liberia, which he claimed was "admirably situated in the highway trade for Central Africa, and can produce cotton, indigo, rice, sugar... [and] the introduction of civilization and lawful commerce, will elevate the nations of Africa[.]"⁸³³ James T. Holly came to embrace

⁸³¹ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 270-274.

⁸³² National Emigration Convention of Colored People (1854: Cleveland, OH), "Proceedings of the National Emigration Convention of Colored People Held at Cleveland, Ohio, on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, The 24th, 25th, and 26th of August, 1854," 33-43. *Colored Conventions Project Digital Records*, accessed Oct. 20, 2020. <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/314>. Delaney viewed Canada as a temporary destination due primarily to his belief that it would eventually be annexed by the United States. Meanwhile, Central and South America (with the exception of Brazil) were countries that had either abolished black enslavement or did not hold strong anti-black sentiments.

⁸³³ Duane, *Educated for Freedom*, 160-162; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 5: The United States, 1859-1865*, 3-14; "African Civilization Society of Canada," *PF*, Jan. 29, 1859.

Haiti as a site for African American and African Canadian resettlement. In his essay *Thoughts on Hayti*, he claimed, “whatsoever is to be the future of the descendants of Africa, Hayti certainly holds the most important relation to that destiny.” Around the same time, Martin Delaney switched his focus from Latin America to the Niger Valley.⁸³⁴

During a fundraising tour of the British Isles, Delany addressed an audience at Glasgow City Hall in October 1860. He praised the Niger Valley’s climate, soil, and people, and argued that the new settlers would create an alternative cotton market. “Supposing a war was to break out between this country and America, which was not improbable,” he asked rhetorically, “or supposing a movement like that of John Brown’s to be successful, what was to become of three-fourths of the British people depending on cotton manufacturers?” In 1861, Delany wrote to James T. Holly, “My duty and destiny are in Africa, the great and glorious (even with its defects) land of your and my ancestry. I cannot, I *will not* desert her for all things else in this world[.]”⁸³⁵

Black residents in Chatham-Kent explored the possibility of emigrating from Upper Canada to West Africa. In October 1860, William King wrote to Scottish abolitionist David Livingstone, “a number of the adult population who have been accustomed to raise cotton and sugar in the states, and who are well acquainted with the cultivation of those products, would like to go to Africa to raise cotton provided a suitable place could be obtained for that purpose[.]” Livingstone replied, “I cannot give you the encouragement you desire in reference to coloured people coming from Canada to Africa to cultivate cotton and sugar. Some of them carry a prejudice against colour wherever they go and although many are no doubt superior to that silly nonsense I would prevent that cordial intercourse with their less enlightened African brethren[.]” Livingstone believed that black refugee settlers from North America’s “healthy climate” were liable to become sick in West Africa and thus held “serious doubts as to the propriety of recommending those who have escaped from slavery trying to emigrate to Africa.”⁸³⁶

White abolitionist James Redpath founded the Haytian Emigration Bureau. His book *A Guide To Hayti* presented the black republic as a viable site for African

⁸³⁴ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 1: The British Isles, 1830-1865*, 477. For more on Garner, Holly, and Delany’s emigration schemes to the Niger Valley, see Miller, *Search for Black Nationality*; Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 167-168; R. J. M Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 175-178.

⁸³⁵ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 1: The British Isles, 1830-1865*, 488-490; Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 437-438.

⁸³⁶ Stouffer, *Light of Nature*, 97; William King to David Livingston, Sep. 17, 1860. Rev. William King Correspondence, R4402-4-9-E, 562-565. LAC. *Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice*. Adam Matthew Digital. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC; David Livingston to William King, Feb. 16, 1861. Rev. William King Correspondence, R4402-4-9-E, 566-569. LAC. *Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice*. Adam Matthew Digital. Universiteit Leiden/LUMC.

American and African Canadian resettlement. Haitian emigration societies were soon established in Toronto, Chatham, and St. Catharines. George Cary (Mary Ann Shadd Cary's brother-in-law) stated, "Most of us have comfortable homes in [Canada], where the laws are equal; but we have a damning prejudice to contend against... It is preventative to a just and equal administration of the British Constitution... many are talking about leaving[.]" Cary was optimistic about the prospects of Haitian emigration schemes, writing, "I think there will be quite an emigration from this Western section of Canada[.]"⁸³⁷

William Wells Brown was also a prominent spokesman for the Bureau. He met with audiences across the Western District eager to learn more about Haiti. Some Colchester farmers, for instance, were "anxious to make their homes in Hayti [sic], for the benefit of their children." In Toronto, he met "seventy-five in number, and I must confess that a nobler looking set of men and women I never beheld – all going to Hayti with the determination to commence the culture of cotton." Brown's visit to the province reaffirmed his emigrationist stance. "The more I see of Canada," he wrote, "the more I am convinced of the deep-rooted hatred to the negro, here." Mary Ann Shadd Cary claimed that Haiti was "unhealthy and unchristian, that it did not compare with the Canadas[.]" She wrote in the *Weekly Anglo-African*, "A few have gone to Hayti [sic], a few more will go; a few will go to Jamaica; already some have written back from Hayti who are who are not too well pleased; some more await further advice."⁸³⁸

The US Civil War dampened enthusiasm for emigration schemes. Slave refugees and free blacks returned from Canada to enlist in the Union Army. Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Martin Delaney, Osborne P. Anderson, and other black leaders recruited black soldiers. After President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863, black residents in Toronto resolved: "Our hearts hail with pleasure and delight... and although that edict does not at present break the clamps of every fetter in that land, still we ardently hope that ere the conflict is ended, its effects will give liberty to every slave." At the same time, the delegates affirmed, "We rejoice that we are subjects of Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen, and that we live under a flag that has 'braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze.'"⁸³⁹

⁸³⁷ James Redpath (ed.), *A Guide to Hayti* (Boston: Haytian Bureau of Emigration, 221 Washington Street, 1861); Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP*: vol. 2: *Canada, 1830-1865*, 449-451.

⁸³⁸ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP*: vol. 2: *Canada, 1830-1865*, 438, 452-457, 458-459, 479-482; Mary Ann Shadd Cary, "HAYTIAN EMIGRATION," *Weekly Anglo-African*, Sep. 28, 1861.

⁸³⁹ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP*: vol. 2: *Canada, 1830-1865*, 513-514, 520. For more on African Canadian involvement in the US Civil War, see Gosse, "As a Nation, the English Are Our Friends," 1023; Bryan Prince, *My Brother's Keeper: African Canadians and the American Civil War* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2015); Richard M. Reid, *African Canadians in Union Blue: Volunteering for the Cause in the Civil War* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2015). Gosse, Prince, and Reid estimate that over 1,000 black enlistees in the Union Army were either born in British North America, or had escaped to Canada before the Civil War.

Other free blacks and slave refugees in Canada expressed similar support for the Union cause, even if they recognized that it was far from perfect. In a letter to William Still, Sarah A. Lester of Victoria, Vancouver Island noted acknowledged President Lincoln was inspired to issue the Proclamation by “motives of policy rather than conviction of duty,” and that “the faults of the North are glaring.” Nevertheless, She declared, “Take up arms for the North and sustain the President... I certainly think we will be fools if we do not use every means to secure a more auspicious future.”⁸⁴⁰

Conclusion

Across the North and Canada, slave refugees were instrumental in campaigns for abolitionism and equal citizenship. Individuals like Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Samuel Ringgold Ward, and Henry Bibb breathed new life into the transnational movement through their unique stain of ‘fugitive slave abolitionism.’ Indeed, the involvement of black refugees was the main highlight of antebellum campaigns against slavery. As displayed by the response to John Brown’s failed insurrection, slave refugees and free blacks were also more willing than most white abolitionists to accept armed uprisings to bring about the end of slavery.

Furthermore, self-emancipated refugees collaborated with free blacks to challenge racial discrimination and pushed the abolitionist movement into local and national politics. Slave refugees and free African Americans were among the most vocal proponents of northern abolitionist and anti-slavery parties. That being said, black abolitionists continued to hold reservations over national politics. Meanwhile, slave refugees became a political force in parts of Upper Canada and the Canadian Maritimes. Initially, they threw their support behind Conservative candidates as a sign of allegiance and loyalty to the British Crown. Over time, however, they were increasingly willing to support Reform candidates who were more sympathetic to their aims and objectives. In particular, black voters were influential in ousting racist Tory candidates from office.

Several prominent slave refugee activists, alongside free African Americans and African Canadians, also promoted emigration from North America to West Africa, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. Liberia, Haiti, Jamaica, and the Bahamas, Mexico, and other landscapes were promoted by African American and African Canadian activists, and slave refugees across the North and Canada displayed at least some interest in emigration schemes. Yet most self-liberated people preferred to remain in North America and continue the fight for abolitionism and equal citizenship.

⁸⁴⁰ Ripley et al. (eds.), *BAP: vol. 2: Canada, 1830-1865*, 516-517.

Conclusions

Many Shades of Liberty: Slave Refugees and the Pursuit of Freedom and Equality

Between the American Revolution and the US Civil War, the northern US and British Canada emerged as beacons of liberty for African American freedom seekers. Tens of thousands of self-emancipated refugees - men, women, and children - fled from the US South in search of freedom. However, they encountered different obstacles and opportunities in each space of liberty. *Northward Bound* illustrates that 'freedom' for slave refugees varied significantly throughout eighteenth and nineteenth-century North America. By examining their experiences in the northern US and Canada, it demonstrates that freedom seekers in the North lived in a state of semi-formal freedom, while self-liberated people in Canada could obtain formal liberty. Far from a singular, static concept, freedom for African-descended people exhibited many shades across the continent.

For slave refugees, semi-formal freedom in the northern states was ambiguous. Under federal law, self-emancipators from the South remained subject to recapture and re-enslavement. Yet northern state laws, as well as the activism of African Americans and white abolitionists, defended them against the threat of slave catchers and federal marshals. By contrast, slave refugees in Canada lived in a state of formal liberty. Aside from a few exceptions, the vast majority were secure from extradition and re-enslavement in the United States. Additionally, formal liberty in British North America offered other advantages to freedom seekers. Most notably, land ownership, educational opportunities, the electoral franchise, civil rights, and equal citizenship were more realistic prospects in Canada. Slave refugees in the North were still regarded as 'chattel' property under US federal law. This limited the opportunities available to freedom seekers in the North. Meanwhile, self-emancipators who fled to British lines in wartime, or escaped to British North America over the antebellum period, were recognized as legally free people as soon as they set foot on Canadian soil.

Nevertheless, while tens of thousands of slave refugees migrated to British North America, most opted to remain in the northern US. How can we explain this development? If given the choice between formal freedom in Canada and semi-formal freedom in the North, why would most freedom seekers choose the latter? Why would many self-emancipators remain in the Lower North, or even in places like the Lake Erie border zone or New England, when they could potentially attain greater rights and protections in the Canadian provinces? And vice versa, what were the motivations and concerns for freedom seekers who migrated to Canada? Considering that most remained in the northern US, why did tens of thousands decide

to seek refuge in British North America? Was it solely for land ownership, improved rights and legal protections, or were other factors at play?

For wartime refugees, the choice was largely beyond their control. Freedom seekers that fled to British lines during the American Revolutionary War and War of 1812 had little say in their final destination. Most refugees ended up in the Canadian Maritimes, which the British government hoped to build into a thriving region. A smaller number of freedom seekers were taken to Upper and Lower Canada, as well as other British imperial territories. For these men, women, and children, fleeing to the enemy of their enslavers presented the best hope for claiming their freedom. The distinction between various shades of liberty, whether it be ‘semi-formal’ or ‘formal,’ was either irrelevant or insignificant. Wartime freedom seekers quickly determined that the real choice was largely between liberty and enslavement. As the geopolitical landscape of freedom fluctuated in wartime, self-emancipated refugees took whatever opportunities they could to escape.

Furthermore, *Northward Bound* illustrates that family and kinship networks were key motivations for freedom seekers to escape in the Revolutionary War and War of 1812. Far from solely individual endeavors, self-emancipated men and women employed tactics and strategies designed not only to liberate themselves but also their parents, spouses, children, and other relatives. Cassandra Pybus, Alan Taylor, and others have highlighted the role of kinship networks in patterns of escape during the Revolutionary War and War of 1812.⁸⁴¹ During each conflict, the British realized that enslaved people were reluctant to escape from their US enslavers without their families. The British government thus had to offer asylum to freedom-seeking women, children, and others who did not directly serve in the armed forces.

Meanwhile, the nature of self-emancipation and escape changed over the antebellum period. As the second slavery expanded in the Lower South and Southwest, and the northern states and British Canada abolished black enslavement within their borders, increasing numbers of black freedom seekers escaped to the North and Canada in search of liberty. Most slave refugees that fled northward came from the Upper South. Others traveled greater distances, either overland or via river and coastal passages. The Mason-Dixon, Ohio River, and Mississippi River border regions were the most popular routes taken by freedom seekers. Most sought shelter in free African American communities. White abolitionists, anti-slavery societies, and vigilance committees also played important roles in assisting slave refugees. Geography certainly influenced self-emancipation and escape from the South. Given the regional differences, the nature of escape varied across the ‘free’ states. Whereas freedom seekers primarily escaped via the Metropolitan Corridor in the Mason-Dixon borderland, while those in the Old Northwest relied more heavily on African

⁸⁴¹ Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*; Taylor, *Internal Enemy*.

American farming settlements. Yet white abolitionists and interracial UGRR networks were certainly prevalent (although less developed) in the Old Northwest.

Contrary to earlier studies, *Northward Bound* demonstrates that family and kinship networks were key motivations behind escape to the North and Canada over the antebellum period. This study highlights the role of freedom-seeking women, children, and others in the 'free' states and Canada. Historians like Stephanie Camp, argue that kinship networks often deterred enslaved women from seeking permanent liberty in the North or Canada.⁸⁴² This study also demonstrates that numerous freedom-seeking women fled from the South specifically to protect their families. Far from individual or isolated acts, self-emancipation was often a family endeavor. As the records of William Still, Sydney Howard Gay, and others recognize, various types of freedom-seeking families fled northward to escape from slavery together. While some fled in complete family units, most staggered their escapes in patterns that resembled chain migration. Moreover, other freedom seekers strove to rescue enslaved family members after escaping from the South.

Having escaped from the South, slave refugees had to determine what to do next. Should they remain where they were, head to New England or the Lake Erie border zone, or even emigrate from the United States entirely? Thousands decided to seek refuge in Canada from the moment they escaped. As long as slavery existed in the United States, they believed that black people could not attain true freedom in the North. Most headed to British North America alone or with assistance from abolitionists and UGRR activists. In many cases, family ties the primary factor that inspired self-emancipators to emigrate. Others like Adam Crosswhite and his family, Samuel Ringgold Ward, and Thornton and Lucie Blackburn fled to Canada in response to the threat of re-enslavement. For many freedom seekers, escaping to Canada was an *ad hoc* decision. It was spontaneous, necessary, and came with great emotional anguish (particularly the loss of enslaved family members and loved ones).

Yet most freedom seekers remained in the northern US rather than heading to Canada. Why did most refugees from slavery stay in the North? Many freedom seekers followed family members to various locations in the 'free' states. Others hoped to stay relatively close to enslaved family members in the Upper South with the aim of purchasing their liberty or rescuing them. Additionally, most self-emancipators were simply unable to make the journey to Canada. Without the aid of UGRR networks, freedom seekers typically had to find employment and housing quickly. Furthermore, slave refugees were typically drawn to African American communities in the North, which offered varying degrees of security and protection. Rural black settlements across the North also appealed to self-emancipators for similar reasons. Within the crowd, they could pass as legally free people of color.

⁸⁴² Camp, *Closer to Freedom*.

The northern US offered socio-economic advantages to slave refugees. In particular, urban centers across the North were simply more developed than their Canadian contemporaries. New York City, Philadelphia, Boston, and Cincinnati (and other urban centers) were much more developed than Toronto, Halifax, and other towns and cities in the Canadian provinces. For freedom seekers, one of the primary concerns was making a living to support themselves and their families. With their low-wage jobs and significant free black populations, slave refugees often determined that there were better socio-economic opportunities in the North. At the same time, freedom seekers encountered challenges and obstacles in the 'free' states. Most refugees lived in poverty and faced anti-black hostility and violence from northern whites. Racial prejudice often spilled over into violence against northern black communities. Nonetheless, freedom seekers considered these circumstances preferable to enslavement.

In the Canadian Maritimes and Upper Canada, slave refugees established brand new settlements and integrated into existing towns and cities. Like their US counterparts, they mostly lived in poverty and endured racial discrimination from white Canadians and European newcomers. Officially, slave refugees in Canada possessed better socio-economic rights than their northern counterparts. First, they could purchase lands of their own in British North America. Across each region, self-emancipated newcomers founded rural farming settlements. While most proved short-lived, their brief existence was a testament to the resilience of freedom seekers, as well as the greater rights and opportunities afforded by formal liberty. Furthermore, black refugees in British North America had greater access to schools and colleges, although racial prejudice and poverty prevented many from gaining an education. Black activists and white abolitionist missionaries founded utopian settlements in Upper Canada for the elevation of slave refugees.⁸⁴³

Additionally, slave refugees were mostly concerned about the threat of recapture and re-enslavement. Beyond the jurisdiction of the US federal law (namely the Fugitive Slave Acts), self-emancipators in Canada were almost entirely secure from re-enslavement. By contrast, the northern states remained subject to federal law, which preserved southern enslavers' right of recaption. Bearing this in mind, one might assume that most freedom seekers would head to Canada. Yet this was not strictly the case. Considering the added security afforded by British and Canadian law, why did most refugees decide against migrating to Canada?

First, various regions in the North were relatively secure terrain for freedom seekers. In numerous instances, it was very difficult to recapture slave refugees who

⁸⁴³ As noted earlier, this study contradicts earlier assessments (namely those from Robin Winks and Donald G. Simpson) that independent black settlement schemes, such as Wilberforce and Dawn, were unmitigated disasters. See Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*; Simpson, *Under the North Star*. While there is a tendency to claim that only the Elgin settlement was successful, this dissertation contends that each black settlement proved useful experiments in black land ownership and education.

fled beyond the immediate North-South border zones. For instance, New England, Upstate New York, and Ohio's Western Reserve were each hostile terrain for southern enslavers, slave catchers, and federal marshals. Given their geographical distance and anti-slavery populations, enslavers faced an uphill battle in trying to reclaim self-emancipated men and women. Even in the Lower North, where enslavers enjoyed more success in recapturing self-emancipators, free blacks and white abolitionists often came to their defense. Episodes like the Christiana Resistance highlight the significant challenges which southern whites increasingly faced when trying to recapture slave refugees.

Aside from civil disobedience and physical resistance, freedom seekers understood that northern state laws (namely personal liberty laws and anti-kidnapping statutes), as well as court rulings, provided slave refugees with important rights and protections, such as a right to a jury trial. While the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 provoked an enormous outcry among African Americans and northern whites, it contributed to the recapture of only a very small proportion of slave refugees in the northern US. Although semi-formal liberty in the 'free' states was less secure than formal liberty in Canada, freedom seekers benefited from conflicts and ambiguities between state and federal laws. Ultimately, many parts of the North did not become the 'slave-hunting grounds' that many feared.

Finally, slave refugees in the northern US and Canada were motivated by campaigns for abolitionism, civil rights, and equal citizenship or subjecthood. Once again, British North America was theoretically a more appealing destination for self-emancipators and free people of color. After escaping to Canada, African American newcomers could become naturalized British subjects with (at least officially) most of the same rights and privileges as white Canadians. As the Canadian provinces were officially 'color-blind,' black men could vote, sit on juries, hold some public offices, serve in militia companies, and attend the same public spaces as whites. By contrast, African Americans in the northern US were denied equal rights and were excluded from citizenship. Why would slave refugees remain in the North if they could potentially avail of improved rights and equal subjecthood?

Slave refugees across the northern US were politically active. Self-emancipators like Frederick Douglass, Samuel Ringgold Ward, William Wells Brown, and many others became prominent orators, writers, editors, and political campaigners. Alongside free-born and freed black abolitionists, slave refugees transformed the abolitionist movement into a more progressive, interracial campaign against slavery. Furthermore, slave refugees pushed abolitionists into electoral politics. Through their activism, they helped to legitimize early anti-slavery parties, such as the Liberty Party and the Republican Party. Slave refugee abolitionists were involved in campaigns against segregation, disfranchisement, and racial discrimination in the North.

Slave refugees held important positions in Canadian anti-slavery societies and were instrumental in establishing an independent African Canadian press. The *Voice of the Fugitive* and the *Provincial Freeman* were among the most significant transnational black newspapers in North America. Furthermore, slave refugees across Canada exercised their right to vote to remove racist politicians from office and replace them with more favorable candidates. The cases of Edwin Larwill and Colonel John Prince illustrate the influence of a mobilized black electorate. Over time, Tories and Reformers across British North America increasingly appealed to black refugee voters.

Perceptions of national identity among slave refugees varied between Canada and the northern US. Self-emancipators in Canada embraced British subjecthood, as exhibited by their various acts of loyalty to the Crown. Self-emancipators like Henry Bibb, as well as free-born black activists like Mary Ann Shadd Cary, hoped to inculcate a sense of British identity among African Canadian communities. Meanwhile, freedom seekers in the North conceived of themselves as Americans who were duly entitled to all the liberties and protections afforded by the Constitution. Slave refugees in the North thus conceived their position as a stepping stone toward formal freedom, which could only come about only through the abolition of slavery and African American citizenship.

With its free black communities, UGRR and anti-slavery networks, socio-economic opportunities, and relative security against re-enslavement, many self-emancipators decided to remain in the North. By campaigning for abolitionism and equal citizenship, they sought to push the United States toward formal freedom. Yet for those who sought greater security or civil and political liberties, Canada was not far away. Should they wish, or if necessary, slave refugees could seek formal liberty under the lion's paw. Canada served as a relief valve for many freedom seekers. For others, it was the only destination. As long as slavery existed in the United States, many believed that African Americans could never be truly free.

The US Civil War precipitated events that would lead to slavery's ultimate extinction in North America. Throughout the conflict, African American refugees fled *en masse* toward Union lines in daring bids for liberty.⁸⁴⁴ On January 1, 1863, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation which formally linked the Union cause to the eradication of slavery. After the rebel states were defeated, slavery was formally abolished. Ratified in 1865, the 13th Amendment outlawed black enslavement in the United States. During Reconstruction, formerly enslaved African Americans

⁸⁴⁴ For more on slave refugees during the US Civil War, see Cooper, "'Lord, until I reach my home'; Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*; Manning, *Troubled Refuge*.

gradually made the transition out of human bondage. Yet the postbellum South was hardly a welcoming place for freedpeople.⁸⁴⁵

Over the next few years, African Americans would continue their campaigns for formal freedom, equal citizenship, and racial justice. For many, the most immediate concern was locating lost family members and loved ones. Slave refugees in the North and Canada either returned to the South or sought information on the whereabouts of lost family. They published Information Wanted advertisements in US and Canadian newspapers with the hope of finding their loved ones. In 1866, Lewis Wade placed a notice in the *Christian Recorder* for his wife Lucy and their three children. He supposedly “left them in 1850, they then being in Rockbridge [C]ounty, Virginia. He belonged to Wm. Thompson, while his wife and children belonged to James Watts.” A resident of Chatham, Wade implored anyone who had information regarding his family to contact him.⁸⁴⁶

Three years later, the *Ottumwa Courier* published an advertisement for Harry Bowen, who reportedly “escaped from his master, Jerry Wayland, near St. Francisville, [Missouri], about New Year’s night 1859. It is supposed that he went to Chicago, and from there to Canada, but has not been heard from since his escape, notwithstanding the three hundred dollars in specie offered to the man hunters to capture him.” His brother Charles placed the notice and was “anxious to hear from him[.]” Information wanted advertisements were not strictly a Reconstruction phenomenon. In 1888, the *Christian Recorder* reported that a woman named Dulcina Hall was searching for her father Isaac Tolson who left her “many years ago” and had reportedly escaped to Canada.⁸⁴⁷

Against all odds, some formerly enslaved people managed to find their loved ones. In 1867, the *Highland Weekly News* published a remarkable case of two long lost brothers. It included the following description of their meeting:

[they] met in the streets of Cincinnati, last Sunday, after a separation of sixty years. Their names are Joshua and Solomon

⁸⁴⁵ Bruce Levine, *The Fall of the House of Dixie: The Civil War and the Social Revolution that Transformed the South* (New York: Random House, 2014), 124-125, 287.

⁸⁴⁶ “Lewis Wade searching for family,” Information Wanted Ad, *The Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia, PA), July 14th, 1866, *Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery*, accessed August 30, 2019, <https://informationwanted.org/items/show/215>.

⁸⁴⁷ “Charles Owens searching for his brother, Harry Bowen,” Information Wanted Ad, *Ottumwa Courier* (Ottumwa, IA), January 14th, 1869, *Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery*, accessed August 30, 2019, <https://informationwanted.org/items/show/3576>; “Dulcina Hall,” Information Wanted Ads, *The Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia, PA), February 9th, 1888, *Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery*, accessed August 30, 2019, <https://informationwanted.org/items/show/868>. For an excellent study of family reunification and information wanted ads, see Heather Andrea Williams, *Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012). For an excellent database of information wanted ads, see Villanova University’s *Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery*. Obtained via: <https://informationwanted.org/>.

Collins. They were both formerly slaves in Fleming [C]ounty, Virginia. Joshua bought his freedom in 1849, and removed to Cincinnati, where he has since resided. Solomon ran away from his master, then living in Kentucky, in 1837, and made his way safely to Canada. The meeting was purely accidental, and, of course, was enjoyed by the two old men. Joshua is eighty-two years old, and Solomon over sixty.⁸⁴⁸

After the Civil War, many African American refugees returned to the United States.⁸⁴⁹ For some, it was part of their efforts to reunite with lost family members. For others, it was a matter of returning home. Canada was an invaluable space of refuge for freedom seekers, but for some, it was a temporary sanctuary. Yet many remained and formed the bedrock of Canada's black population. Across North America, black men and women sustained their campaigns for liberty and equality.

⁸⁴⁸ "Two brothers, Joshua Collins and Solomon Collins, meet in Cincinnati after decades-long separation," Other (Newspaper Article), *Highland Weekly News* (Hillsboro, OH), October 17th, 1867, *Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery*, accessed August 30, 2019, <https://informationwanted.org/items/show/3255>.

⁸⁴⁹ For more on this reverse migration, see Adam Arenson, "Experience Rather than Imagination: Researching the Return Migration of African North Americans during the American Civil War and Reconstruction," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 32, no. 2 (2013), 73-77.

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Summary

Between the American Revolutionary War and US Civil War (roughly 1775-1861), thousands of slave refugees fled from the US South to the northern states and Canada. From the late eighteenth century, these regions gradually abolished slavery within their respective jurisdictions. Meanwhile, black enslavement rapidly expanded across the Lower South and Southwest during the antebellum period. Over time, freedom seekers (particularly in the Upper South) increasingly fled to ‘free soil’ spaces in North America, most notably the northern US and Canada. Most self-emancipators made the journey without external assistance, whereas others were aided by free black communities and white abolitionists across the North (often referred to as the Underground Railroad). After escaping from the South, most refugees remained in the northern states. Yet tens of thousands of freedom seekers opted to emigrate from the United States entirely and seek sanctuary in Canada, primarily in southwestern Ontario and the Maritime provinces.

Northward Bound examines the northward migrations of African American slave refugees to the northern states and Canada. Over five chapters, it analyzes the motivations and methods behind self-emancipation and the various challenges which slave refugees encountered in each region. Part I (“Escaping Bondage”) is comprised of two chapters that focus on the evolving landscape of slavery and freedom in North America, the shifting nature of self-emancipation, and the development of black freedom networks in the northern US and Canada. Chapter One explores self-emancipation and freedom seekers during the Revolutionary War and War of 1812 respectively, the abolition of slavery in the northern states and Canada, and the emergence of the second slavery in the US South. Chapter Two examines slave refugee migration to the northern states and Canada during the antebellum era. It analyzes the routes and strategies employed by freedom seekers across the North, the challenges of escape, and the scope and activism of Underground Railroad networks.

Part II (“Forging Freedom”) shifts focus to the experiences, opportunities, and challenges which self-emancipators encountered in the North and Canada. Chapter Three focuses on slave refugee settlement processes and efforts to obtain lands, labor, and education – all three of which were considered integral to autonomy and elevation. Contrary to their romanticized portrayals as spaces of sanctuary, slave refugees were met with open hostility from white Northerners and Canadians. Meanwhile, Chapter Four focuses on the threats of kidnapping and recapture. Slave refugees in the northern states were subject to re-enslavement under US federal law, most notably the Fugitive Slave Acts of 1793 and 1850. At the same time, black activists, white abolitionists, and northern lawmakers fought against the efforts of southern enslavers and slave catchers to abduct black people with impunity. In Canada, slave refugees generally enjoyed greater protections from re-enslavement.

However, several extradition cases and attempted kidnappings illustrate the threats posed to refugees in British North America. Lastly, Chapter Five examines the political mobilization of slave refugees in the northern US and Canada. In particular, it explores their contributions to the transnational abolitionist movement and their campaigns for equal rights and citizenship. This chapter illustrates that slave refugees were at the heart of political campaigns in the northern states and Canada.

Northward Bound is a comparative, transnational study that offers several important contributions to the historiography of slavery and emancipation in North America. First, it complicates the traditional image of slave refugee migration on the continent, one which emphasizes the northward flight of southern black refugees to the northern states and Canada. This dissertation demonstrates that this pattern of escape was only truly cemented in the early nineteenth century, following the emergence of “free soil” spaces in the North and Canada, as well as the rapid expansion of slavery in the Lower South and Southwest. Before this, freedom seekers ran in various directions across the continent, including within the northern states and even from Canada to the United States. During wartime, self-emancipators also fled to British lines to secure their freedom. By the antebellum era, however, slave refugees increasingly looked toward the northern states and Canada as potential spaces of sanctuary.

Northward Bound also re-examines the primary motivations behind escape from slavery and the various routes which freedom seekers took to the northern states and Canada. This study argues that the threat of sale and forced migration was often the primary reason behind self-emancipation (particularly for enslaved people in the Upper South). It was often the final straw or “tipping point” for enslaved men and women across the region. The rapid expansion of slavery in the Lower South and Southwest contributed to the interregional trade in enslaved people. Upper South enslavers increasingly sold enslaved men and women to these regions in exchange for profit. Threatened with permanent separation from family and loved ones, freedom seekers resolved to escape to the North and Canada. Other factors, such as cruel treatment and a lifelong desire to be free, certainly shaped the decision of many slave refugees. Yet the prospect of imminent sale and permanent separation often represented the most immediate threat to enslaved people and thus served as the primary basis of their decision to escape.

Several factors determined when and how slave refugees escaped, and how they reached the northern states and Canada. Mobility, geography, and social networks were the most significant influences. Young, fit enslaved men were more likely to escape than women, children, and the elderly. With greater knowledge of their surroundings and wider spheres of movement, they often possessed a better understanding of when and how to escape. At the same time, refugee women, children, and others also managed to escape from the South despite their limited

mobility, geographical knowledge, and social networks. Enslaved people from the Upper South comprised the bulk of slave refugees in the northern states and Canada. Others traveled from farther away but the greater distance certainly hampered their ability to reach the northern states and Canada.

Freedom seekers from Maryland and Virginia were more likely to escape via the Mason-Dixon borderland, whereas enslaved people in Kentucky and Missouri typically escaped via the Ohio and Mississippi River borderlands. While many fled on foot, others traveled by horseback, steamboat, ship, train, and other modes of transportation. Passing for legally free people of color was the most common strategy for freedom seekers. Across the northern states, slave refugees took shelter among free African American communities. Others were aided by white abolitionists and Quakers, indigenous groups, and biracial vigilance committees, and the Underground Railroad. The most extensive and well-organized escape networks existed in the Mid-Atlantic borderland and New England, but those in the “Old Northwest” also became increasingly developed over time.

One of this dissertation’s most valuable contributions focuses on the relationship between self-emancipation, northward migration, and family. Contrary to most previous historical studies, which typically emphasize individual acts of self-emancipation, *Northward Bound* demonstrates that kinship networks shaped numerous escapes from the South. Refugee families took various shapes and employed various strategies to reach the northern states and Canada. In many instances, families avoided escaping together but instead staggered their escapes. These patterns of escape often resembled chain migration, where freedom seekers followed loved ones to specific destinations. Abolitionist records, such as those from William Still and Sydney Howard Gay, illustrate the centrality of kinship networks to numerous escapes from the South. Consequently, *Northward Bound* reframes historical understandings of self-emancipation and escape to the northern states and Canada.

Furthermore, building upon Damian Pargas’ new typology of freedom, this dissertation contends that slave refugees in the northern states lived in a state of *quasi* or “semi-formal” freedom, whereas their counterparts in Canada were able to attain “formal freedom.” Slave refugees in the northern states were considered fugitives from justice under US federal law. Consequently, most self-emancipated people in the North lived in a fluid, liminal state between slavery and formal freedom. In this sense, refugees throughout the region lived on the margins of free black communities. Slave refugees typically held low-wage jobs, were unable to legally purchase lands or attend schools, were met with racial prejudice and discrimination, were subject to recapture and re-enslavement, and (like free African Americans) were barred from equal citizenship. In this regard, their status is comparable to other marginalized groups in historical and contemporary societies, such as undocumented people. Yet

freedom seekers in the northern states enjoyed some invaluable social and legal protections. In particular, African Americans and white abolitionists, as well as northern lawmakers, resisted the efforts of southern enslavers, slave catchers, and kidnappers to recapture slave refugees in the North. While northern freedom was incomplete, it was infinitely preferable to southern slavery and offered a basis for future advancement.

Slave refugees in Canada encountered similar challenges to their northern counterparts, yet also availed of the greater rights and opportunities which came with formal freedom. Most notably, self-emancipators in Canada were officially able to purchase lands and attend schools. Moreover, having reached British Canadian soil, slave refugees were generally secure from recapture and re-enslavement. Lastly, they were eligible for various civil and political rights which came with British subjecthood, namely the right to vote, sit on juries, and serve in militia companies. However, life in Canada was far from idyllic. Poverty, racial prejudice, and systemic discrimination were facts of life in British North America. Additionally, while most were secure from re-enslavement, various episodes highlight the continuous efforts of southern enslavers and kidnappers to recapture self-emancipated people in the Canadian provinces. Despite its reputation, Canada was hardly a “Canaan land” for black refugees. Yet the rights and privileges which came with formal freedom nonetheless offered formerly enslaved people with the opportunity to build new, better lives for themselves.

Northward Bound challenges several assumptions regarding the experiences of slave refugees in the northern states and Canada. First, it demonstrates that, despite the array of hardships and difficulties, slave refugees were hardworking and industrious. Although many of their settlements were relatively short-lived, they exhibited a real desire to purchase lands, acquire work, gain an education, and generally improve their condition. Far from indolent, most exhibited a spirit of self-reliance. Across the northern states, freedom seekers availed of whatever jobs and opportunities they could find in rural and urban settings. Towns and cities, such as Philadelphia, New York, and Cincinnati, offered the greatest prospects for temporary and short-term wage labor. Most remained on the fringes of northern free black communities, not seeking to bring attention to themselves. While most lived in poverty, some attained varying levels of success. Nevertheless, northern poverty was infinitely preferable to slavery.

In Canada, slave refugees were able to purchase lands, attend schools, and seek employment without the threat of recapture. Like their counterparts in the northern states, most lived in relative poverty and struggled against the backdrop of racial prejudice. Discriminatory policies and a lack of resources prevented many slave refugees from becoming landowners. Many settlements proved short-lived and refugee newcomers regularly found it hard to procure lands in desirable locations or

for affordable prices. Historians have tended to emphasize the failures of many refugee settlements in the Canadian Maritimes and southwestern Ontario. Yet many could be considered at least partially successful considering the circumstances. At the very least, they offered slave refugees their first tastes of land ownership, employment, education, and autonomy.

Moreover, this dissertation illustrates how African Americans, white abolitionists, lawmakers, judges, and other figures resisted the attempts of southern enslavers and slave catchers. As mentioned earlier, freedom seekers in the northern states were subject to recapture under US federal law. Indeed, legally free African Americans were also regularly kidnapped across the North and sold into slavery. Black and white activists employed a mixture of legal and extra-legal methods to protect slave refugees from re-enslavement and circumscribe slavery's influence across the region. So-called "Personal liberty laws," freedom suits, and other efforts to enshrine the *Somerset* principle in northern state laws limited southern enslavers' right of recaption. Aside from legal channels, black and white activists throughout the northern states increasingly employed forms of extra-legal (and occasionally violent) resistance to protect slave refugees. Various episodes highlight the challenges which southern enslavers faced when attempting to re-enslave freedom seekers. Overall, while federal law upheld southern enslavers' right of recaption, the active resistance of black and white activists throughout the northern states offered significant forms of protection to slave refugees. The contradictions between state and federal law, as well as the extra-legal challenges of African Americans and white abolitionists, formed the bedrock of semi-formal freedom.

Beyond the jurisdiction of US federal law, slave refugees in Canada enjoyed greater protections from recapture. Indeed, the British and Canadian governments generally refused to sanction the extradition of refugees to the United States. According to British and Canadian law, enslaved people were recognized as legally free people the moment that they set foot on "British" soil. Numerous US efforts to negotiate an extradition agreement over slave refugees with the British government failed. In this regard, Canada was a more secure space of sanctuary for slave refugees. At the same time, several extradition cases from the late 1820s onward highlight the potential threat still posed by southern enslavers. Rather than seek the extradition of slave refugees, they instead embraced a new strategy: petitioning for the return of "criminals" to stand trial in the United States. Charged with other crimes, several refugees were threatened with extradition. One such case even resulted in the re-enslavement of Nelson Hackett, a self-emancipator from Arkansas. Some kidnapping attempts also highlight how the porous US-Canadian borders could be exploited by white Southerners. These efforts were met with staunch resistance from black and white activists. Despite these threats, Canada generally remained a much more secure space of sanctuary for slave refugees.

Finally, *Northward Bound* demonstrates that slave refugees in the northern US and Canada were politically active figures in the transnational abolitionist movement, as well as campaigns for equal citizenship. Building upon the works of Manisha Sinha and other scholars, this dissertation argues that self-emancipators played crucial roles in social and political movements, with the most obvious example being the campaign to abolish slavery in the United States and elsewhere. Through their literary writings and autobiographies, oratory, and other methods, slave refugee activists forged a unique strain of abolitionism – one which drew heavily upon their personal experiences with slavery. Slave refugees like Frederick Douglass, Henry Bibb, Samuel Ringgold Ward, and Harriet Tubman became increasingly recognizable figures within US and Canadian abolitionist circles. Slave refugees were also involved in campaigns for equal rights and citizenship in the northern states and Canada. Segregation, discrimination, and racial prejudice were the primary concerns of black activists. In the northern states, slave refugees campaigned alongside free blacks and white abolitionists to receive equal rights and privileges. Canadian refugees performed similar actions but also utilized their right to vote to promote their interests and remove racist politicians from office. Slave refugees were also at the heart of debates over emigration in the northern states and Canada.

Samenvatting

Tussen de Amerikaanse Onafhankelijkheidsoorlog en de Amerikaanse Burgeroorlog (ca. 1775-1861) vluchtten duizenden mensen uit de slavernij in het zuiden van de Verenigde Staten naar de noordelijke staten en Canada. Vanaf het einde van de achttiende eeuw hadden deze gebieden de slavernij geleidelijk afgeschaft. Ondertussen intensiverde de zwarte slavernij juist in de “Lower South” en “Southwest”. Met name in de “Upper South” vluchtten tot slaaf gemaakten steeds vaker naar “vrije grond” (“free soil”), gebieden in Noord-Amerika, met name de noordelijke staten en Canada waar slavernij niet was toegestaan. Deze zogeheten “zelf-emancipaotren” (“self-emancipators”) maakten de reis zonder hulp van buitenaf. Anderen werden juist geholpen door vrije zwarte gemeenschappen en witte abolitionisten in het Noorden (vaak aangeduid als de Underground Railroad). De meeste vluchtelingen bleven na hun ontsnapping uit het Zuiden in de noordelijke staten van de VS. Tienduizenden vrijheidszoekers (“freedom seekers”) kozen er echter voor om volledig te emigreren en zochten hun toevluchtsoord in Canada, met name in het zuidwesten van Ontario en in de maritieme provincies (Nova Scotia en New Brunswick).

Northward Bound onderzoekt de noordelijke migraties van Afro-Amerikaanse vluchtelingen naar de noordelijke staten en Canada. In vijf

hoofdstukken worden de beweegredenen en methoden van zelf-emancipatie en ontsnapping onderzocht, alsmede de verschillende uitdagingen waarmee vluchtelingen in verschillende regio's werden geconfronteerd. Deel I ("Escaping Bondage") bestaat uit twee hoofdstukken die zich richten op ontwikkelingen in het landschap van de slavernij in Noord-Amerika, de veranderende mogelijkheden tot zelf-emancipatie en de ontwikkeling van zwarte vrijheidsnetwerken in de noordelijke VS en Canada. Hoofdstuk 1 onderzoekt zelf-emancipatie en vrijheidszoekers tijdens respectievelijk de Amerikaanse Onafhankelijkheidsoorlog en de Oorlog van 1812, de afschaffing van de slavernij in de noordelijke staten en Canada, en de opkomst van de zogeheten "Tweede Slavernij" ("Second Slavery") in het Zuiden. Hoofdstuk 2 behandelt de migratie van vluchtelingen naar de noordelijke staten en Canada tot de Amerikaanse Burgeroorlog. Het analyseert de routes en strategieën die werden gebruikt door vrijheidszoekers in het Noorden, de moeilijkheden rondom ontsnapping en de reikwijdte van de Underground Railroad.

Deel II ("Forging Freedom") focust op de ervaringen en kansen van zelf-emancipatoren in het Noorden en Canada en de obstakels op hun weg. Hoofdstuk 3 concentreert zich op de vestiging van vluchtelingen en de inspanningen om toegang te krijgen tot land, arbeid en onderwijs - die alle drie als noodzakelijk werden geacht voor autonomie en verheffing. In tegenstelling tot hun geromantiseerde voorstellingen werden vluchtelingen meestal openlijk vijandig ontvangen door witte noorderlingen en Canadezen. Hoofdstuk 4 richt zich op het gevaar van ontvoering en gevangenneming. Vluchtelingen in de noordelijke staten konden legaal opnieuw tot slaaf gemaakt worden door de federale wetgeving van de VS, met name de Fugitive Slave Acts van 1793 en 1850. Tegelijkertijd vochten zwarte activisten, witte abolitionisten en noordelijke wetgevers tegen de zuidelijke slavenhouders en slavenvangers die zwarte mensen straffeloos ontvoerden. In Canada genoten vluchtelingen over het algemeen meer bescherming tegen pogingen hen opnieuw tot slaaf te maken ("re-enslavement"). Verschillende uitleveringszaken en pogingen tot ontvoering illustreren echter dat vluchtelingen in Brits Noord-Amerika desalniettemin gevaar liepen. Hoofdstuk 5 behandelt tenslotte de politieke mobilisatie van vluchtelingen in de noordelijke Verenigde Staten en Canada. Het onderzoekt in het bijzonder de bijdrage van vluchtelingen uit de slavernij aan de transnationale abolitionistische beweging en hun campagnes voor gelijke rechten en burgerschap. Het hoofdstuk illustreert dat deze vluchtelingen de kern vormden van politieke campagnes in de noordelijke staten en Canada.

Northward Bound is een vergelijkende, transnationale studie die verschillende belangrijke bijdragen levert aan de geschiedschrijving van slavernij en emancipatie in Noord-Amerika. Ten eerste compliceert deze studie het traditionele beeld van de migratie van vluchtelingen uit de slavernij op het continent, dat de noordwaartse vlucht van zuidelijke zwarte vluchtelingen naar de noordelijke staten

en Canada benadrukt. Dit proefschrift laat zien dat dit ontsnappingspatroon pas vaste vorm aannam in het begin van de negentiende eeuw, na de opkomst van “vrije grond” gebieden in het Noorden en Canada, en na de snelle uitbreiding van de slavernij in het diepe zuiden en zuidwesten van de VS. Vóór deze periode trokken vrijheidszoekers in verschillende richtingen over het continent, ook binnen de noordelijke staten. Sommigen trokken zelfs van Canada naar de Verenigde Staten. In oorlogstijd vluchtten slaven ook naar de Britse linies in de hoop hun vrijheid veilig te stellen. Tijdens het antebellum (1800-1861) richtten vluchtelingen zich echter steeds meer op de noordelijke staten en Canada als potentiële toevluchtsoorden.

Northward Bound onderzoekt ook de primaire beweegredenen achter ontsnapping uit de slavernij en de verschillende routes die vrijheidszoekers namen naar de noordelijke staten en Canada. Deze studie stelt dat gedwongen migratie en het risico verkocht te worden vaak de belangrijkste redenen waren voor zelf-emanipatie (met name voor tot slaaf gemaakte mensen in de “Upper South”). Dit was vaak de druppel die de emmer deed overlopen voor tot slaaf gemaakte mannen en vrouwen. De snelle uitbreiding van de slavernij in de “Lower South” en “Southwest” droeg bij aan de opkomst van interregionale handel in tot slaaf gemaakte mensen. Slavenhouders verkochten in toenemende mate tot slaaf gemaakte mannen en vrouwen aan deze regio's. Het vooruitzicht van permanente scheiding van familie en geliefden deed veel vrijheidszoekers besluiten te vluchten naar het Noorden en Canada. Hoewel andere factoren, zoals wrede behandeling en het eeuwige verlangen om vrij te zijn, ook een rol speelden, was het vooruitzicht van verkoop en permanente scheiding vaak de meest onmiddellijke bedreiging en daarmee de primaire reden om te ontsnappen.

Verschillende factoren bepaalden wanneer en hoe vluchtelingen ontsnapten, en de manier waarop ze de noordelijke staten en Canada bereikten. Mobiliteit, geografie en sociale netwerken waren bepalend. Jonge, lichamelijk fitte tot slaaf gemaakte mannen vluchtten vaker dan vrouwen, kinderen en ouderen. Mannen waren doorgaans ook als slaaf al mobieler en hadden daardoor meer kennis van hun omgeving. Hierdoor wisten ze beter hoe en wanneer ze konden ontsnappen. Desalniettemin wisten ook vrouwelijke vluchtelingen en kinderen uit het Zuiden te ontsnappen, ondanks hun beperkte mobiliteit, geografische kennis en sociale netwerken. Tot slaaf gemaakte mensen uit de “Upper South” vormden de grootste groep vluchtelingen in de noordelijke staten en Canada. Anderen reisden van verder weg, maar de grotere afstand vormde een significante belemmering.

Vrijheidszoekers uit Maryland en Virginia ontsnapten vaker via het grensgebied Mason-Dixon, terwijl tot slaaf gemaakte mensen in Kentucky en Missouri doorgaans ontsnapten via de Ohio en de Mississippi. Terwijl velen te voet vluchtten, reisden anderen o.a. te paard, per stoomboot, per schip en per trein. De meeste vrijheidszoekers deden de meeste vluchtelingen zich voor als legaal vrije

mensen van kleur. In de noordelijke staten zochten vluchtelingen hun toevlucht bij vrije Afrikaans-Amerikaanse gemeenschappen. Anderen werden bijgestaan door witte abolitionisten en quakers, inheemse groepen, gemengde “vigilance committees” en de Underground Railroad. De meest uitgebreide en goed georganiseerde ontsnapingsnetwerken bestonden in het Mid-Atlantische grensgebied en New England, maar die in de “Old Northwest” raakten in de loop van de tijd ook steeds beter ontwikkeld.

Dit proefschrift levert belangrijk inzicht in de relatie tussen zelf-emancipatie, migratie naar het Noorden en het gezin. In tegenstelling tot de meeste eerdere historische studies, die doorgaans de nadruk leggen op individuele daden van zelf-emancipatie, wijst *Northward Bound* op het belang van verwantschapsnetwerken, die talrijke ontsnapingen uit het Zuiden mogelijk maakten. Vluchtelingenfamilies namen verschillende vormen aan en ze pasten verschillende strategieën toe om de noordelijke staten en Canada te bereiken. In veel gevallen ontsnapten familieleden bewust niet tegelijkertijd. Ontsnappingspatronen leken vaak op kettingmigratie, waarbij vrijheidszoekers dierbaren volgden naar specifieke bestemmingen. Abolitionistische verslagen, zoals die van William Still en Sydney Howard Gay illustreren de centrale positie van familienetwerken bij talloze ontsnapingen uit het Zuiden. Bijgevolg geeft *Northward Bound* historische opvattingen over zelf-emancipatie en ontsnapping naar de noordelijke staten en Canada opnieuw vorm.

Voortbouwend op Damian Pargas' nieuwe typologie van vrijheid stelt dit proefschrift dat vluchtelingen in de noordelijke staten *quasi* of “semi-formeel” vrij konden worden, terwijl hun tegenhangers in Canada in staat waren om ook “formele” vrijheid te bereiken. Vluchtelingen in de noordelijke staten werden volgens de Amerikaanse federale wetgeving beschouwd als (criminele) voortvluchtigen. Als gevolg hiervan leefden de meeste zelf-geëmancipeerde mensen in het Noorden in een schemergebied tussen slavernij en formele vrijheid. In die zin leefden vluchtelingen in de hele regio aan de rand van vrije zwarte gemeenschappen. Ze hadden meestal laagbetaalde banen, waren niet in staat legaal land te kopen of naar school te gaan en werden geconfronteerd met racisme en discriminatie. Bovendien liepen ze het risico opnieuw gevangen en tot slaaf gemaakt te worden. Ook waren ze (net als vrije Afro-Amerikanen) van gelijk burgerschap uitgesloten. In dit opzicht is hun status vergelijkbaar met andere gemarginaliseerde groepen in historische en hedendaagse samenlevingen, zoals mensen zonder papieren. Tegelijkertijd konden vluchtelingen in de noordelijke staten op een zekere sociale en wettelijke bescherming rekenen, voornamelijk van Afro-Amerikanen, witte abolitionisten en sommige noordelijke wetgevers. Al met al was de noordelijke vrijheid onvolledig, maar duidelijk te verkiezen boven de zuidelijke slavernij. Het bood een basis voor toekomstige vooruitgang.

Slavenvluchtelingen in Canada hadden soortgelijke uitdagingen, maar hadden meer rechten en kansen die de formele vrijheid met zich meebracht. Met name de zelf-emanipatoren in Canada konden officieel land kopen en naar school gaan. Bovendien waren vluchtelingen die Brits-Canadese bodem hadden bereikt over het algemeen veilig van slavenhouders en slavenvangers. Ten slotte kwamen ze als Britse onderdanen in aanmerking voor verschillende burgerrechten en politieke rechten, namelijk het recht om te stemmen, zitting te nemen in jury's en te dienen in milities. Het leven in Canada was echter verre van idyllisch. Armoede, racisme en systemische discriminatie waren aan de orde van de dag. En hoewel de meesten definitief niet meer tot slaaf gemaakt konden worden bleven zuidelijke slavenhouders en ontvoerders pogingen doen zelf-geëmancipeerde mensen in de Canadese provincies te pakken. Ondanks zijn reputatie was Canada nauwelijks een "Kanaän" voor zwarte vluchtelingen. Toch boden de rechten en privileges die met de formele vrijheid gepaard gingen, voorheen tot slaaf gemaakte mensen de kans om een nieuw, beter leven voor zichzelf op te bouwen.

Northward Bound betwist verschillende veronderstellingen met betrekking tot de ervaringen van vluchtelingen uit de slavernij in de noordelijke staten en Canada. Ten eerste toont het proefschrift aan dat vluchtelingen, ondanks de vele ontberingen en moeilijkheden, ijverig waren. Hoewel veel van hen relatief kort op een plek bleven toonden ze een oprecht verlangen om land te kopen, te werken, een opleiding te volgen en hun algemene toestand te verbeteren. De meesten vertoonden een geest van zelfredzaamheid. In de noordelijke staten maakten vrijheidszoekers gebruik van alle banen en kansen die ze konden vinden in landelijke en stedelijke omgevingen. Steden zoals Philadelphia, New York en Cincinnati boden de meeste vooruitzichten voor tijdelijke loonarbeid. De meeste vluchtelingen bleven aan de rand van de vrije zwarte gemeenschappen in het Noorden en probeerden onder de radar te blijven. Terwijl de meesten in armoede leefden, bereikten sommigen een zekere mate van succes. Noordelijke armoede was in ieder geval duidelijk te verkiezen boven slavernij.

In Canada konden voormalige slaven land kopen, naar school gaan en werk zoeken zonder het risico weer gepakt te worden. Net als hun tegenhangers in de noordelijke staten, leefden de meesten in relatieve armoede en worstelden ze met racisme. Discriminerend beleid en een gebrek aan middelen verhinderden vaak dat vluchtelingen landeigenaar werden. Veel nederzettingen bleken van korte duur en nieuwkomers vonden het vaak moeilijk om land te kopen op gewenste locaties of tegen betaalbare prijzen. Historici hebben de neiging om het falen van veel vluchtelingennederzettingen in de Canadese Maritieme provincies en het zuidwesten van Ontario te benadrukken. Toch zouden velen gezien de omstandigheden op zijn minst gedeeltelijk succesvol kunnen worden geacht. Ze boden voormalige slaven hun eerste ervaring met grondbezit, werkgelegenheid, onderwijs en autonomie.

Bovendien illustreert dit proefschrift hoe Afro-Amerikanen, witte abolitionisten, wetgevers, rechters en andere mensen zich verzetten tegen zuidelijke slavenhandelaars en slavenvangers. Zoals eerder vermeld liepen vrijheidszoekers in de noordelijke staten het risico weer gevangen genomen te worden onder de federale wetgeving van de VS. Ook vrije Afro-Amerikanen werden regelmatig in het Noorden ontvoerd en als slaaf verkocht. Zwarte en witte activisten gebruikten een mix van legale en extralegale methoden om slavenvluchtelingen te beschermen tegen “her-slavernij” en om de invloed van slavernij in de hele regio te beperken. Zogenaamde “persoonlijke vrijheidswetten,” (“personal liberty laws”) gerechtelijke vrijheidsprocessen (“freedom suits”) en andere pogingen om het *Somerset*-principe in de wetten van de noordelijke staten vast te leggen beperkten het recht op herovering van zuidelijke slaven. Afgezien van legale middelen gebruikten zwarte en witte activisten in de noordelijke staten in toenemende mate vormen van extralegaal (en soms gewelddadig) verzet om vluchtelingen te beschermen. Verschillende casussen belichten de uitdagingen waarmee slavenhouders werden geconfronteerd bij het opnieuw tot slaaf maken van vrijheidszoekers. Hoewel de federale wet het recht op herovering van zuidelijke slaven handhaafde, bood het actieve verzet van zwarte en witte activisten in de noordelijke staten bescherming. De tegenstrijdigheden tussen staats- en federale wetgeving, evenals de extralegale uitdagingen van Afro-Amerikanen en witte abolitionisten, vormden de basis van semi-formele vrijheid.

Buiten de jurisdictie van de federale wetgeving van de VS genoten slavenvluchtelingen in Canada meer bescherming tegen voormalige slavenhouders. De Britse en Canadese autoriteiten weigerden over het algemeen vluchtelingen aan de Verenigde Staten uit te leveren. Volgens de Britse en Canadese wet werden tot slaaf gemaakte mensen erkend als legaal vrije mensen zodra ze voet hadden gezet op Britse bodem. Talrijke Amerikaanse pogingen om met de Britse regering te onderhandelen over een uitleveringsovereenkomst voor vluchtelingen uit de slavernij zijn mislukt. In dit opzicht was Canada een veiliger toevluchtsoord. Tegelijkertijd benadrukken verschillende uitleveringszaken vanaf eind jaren 1820 een aanhoudende potentiële dreiging. In plaats van de uitlevering van vluchtelingen te verlangen pasten slavenhouders een nieuwe strategie toe: een verzoekschrift indienen voor de terugkeer van “criminelen” om terecht te staan in de Verenigde Staten. Beschuldigd van andere misdrijven werden verschillende vluchtelingen met uitlevering bedreigd. Een van die gevallen resulteerde zelfs in het opnieuw tot slaaf maken van Nelson Hackett, een zelf-emanipator uit Arkansas. Sommige ontvoeringspogingen laten ook zien hoe de poreuze VS-Canadese grenzen konden worden uitgebuit door witte zuiderlingen. Deze inspanningen stuitten op fervent verzet van zwarte en witte activisten. Ondanks deze bedreigingen bleef Canada over het algemeen een veel veiliger toevluchtsoord voor vluchtelingen.

Ten slotte toont *Northward Bound* aan dat vluchtelingen uit de slavernij in de noordelijke staten van de VS en Canada politiek actieve figuren waren in de transnationale abolitionistische beweging en in campagnes voor gelijk burgerschap. Voortbouwend op het werk van Manisha Sinha en andere academici stelt dit proefschrift dat zelf-emancipatoren een cruciale rol speelden in sociale en politieke bewegingen, met als meest voor de hand liggende voorbeeld de campagne om de slavernij in de Verenigde Staten en elders volledig af te schaffen. Door middel van hun literaire geschriften en autobiografieën, oratorium en andere methoden, smeedden vluchtelingen als activisten een unieke vorm van abolitionisme - een die zwaar putte uit hun persoonlijke ervaringen met slavernij. Vluchtelingen zoals Frederick Douglass, Henry Bibb, Samuel Ringgold Ward en Harriet Tubman werden steeds herkenbaardere figuren binnen Amerikaanse en Canadese abolitionistische kringen. Vluchtelingen waren ook betrokken bij campagnes voor gelijke rechten en burgerschap in de noordelijke staten en Canada. Segregatie, discriminatie en racisme waren de belangrijkste zorgen van zwarte activisten. In de noordelijke staten voerden vluchtelingen samen met vrije zwarten en witte abolitionisten campagne om gelijke rechten en privileges te krijgen. Canadese vluchtelingen voerden soortgelijke acties uit, maar maakten ook gebruik van hun stemrecht om hun belangen te behartigen en racistische politici uit hun ambt te verwijderen. Vluchtelingen stonden ook centraal in de debatten over emigratie in de noordelijke staten en Canada.

Curriculum Vitae

Oran Patrick Kennedy was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland on 28 July 1991. He earned his BA in Modern History and Politics with First Class Honors from Queen's University Belfast in July 2014. During his undergraduate studies, he spent one year studying at the College of Wooster, Ohio under the British Council's Study USA Programme. In December 2015, he earned his MA in US History with Distinction from Queen's University Belfast. In September 2015, Oran began his PhD at Leiden University. Under the NWO Vidi Project *Beacons of Freedom: Slave Refugees in North America, 1800-1860*, he completed his dissertation under the supervision of Prof. Damian Alan Pargas and Dr. Irial Glynn.

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