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Guillaume Teasdale

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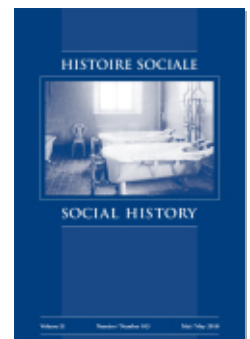
*A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance, and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland* ed. by Karolyn Smardz Frost and Veta Smith Tucker (review)

Guillaume Teasdale

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SMARDZ FROST, Karolyn and Veta SMITH TUCKER, eds. – *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance, and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016. Pp. 286.

Many American historians have studied the Underground Railroad, the migration between the 1810s and 1860s of fugitive slaves from southern to northern States. At this time, the institution of slavery had been declared illegal in most areas of the North and was rapidly vanishing from the northern landscape. However, black historiography in the United States has rarely discussed the history of black settlements in present-day Ontario. As a result, it is still common today for history students in a border city like Detroit to learn little about the cross-border existence of the Underground Railroad. In Canada, historians have always been much more aware of this transnational history. Notwithstanding, there are still important gaps in Canada's black historiography, especially regarding some regions. One of these regions is the Detroit River borderland, where the "boundaries" encompass southeast Michigan and southwest Ontario. The anthology *A Fluid Frontier*, edited by Karolyn Smardz Frost and Veta Smith Tucker, provides a fine assemblage of scholarship that together rejuvenates and moves forward this field of research.

The book is divided into five parts and thirteen chapters. In Part I, "Crossing Boundaries," three chapters—one each by the volume's editors and another by Bryan Prince—examine the transformation, in 1796, of the Detroit River into an international border and the impact of this event on slavery in the Detroit River borderland. Before the creation of the border, American and Upper Canadian authorities had adopted laws to gradually end slavery in the Great Lakes region by prohibiting future importations of slaves—the 1787 Northwest Ordinance in the United States (pertaining to the lands north and west of the Ohio River) and the 1793 *Act Against Slavery* in Upper Canada. In the Detroit River borderland, these laws resulted in many black slaves, who already lived in the area, seeking freedom by crossing the Detroit River. These chapters also document the formation of transnational networks for fugitive slaves trying to reach Upper Canada as well as some attempts by American slave owners to have former slaves extradited back to the United States. In regard to the origins of these fugitive slaves, Karolyn Smardz Frost writes that "Kentucky was, by far, the state from or through which most fugitives came to Upper Canada" (p. 49).

In the three chapters of Part II, "Communal Voices," Irene Moore Davis, Barbara Hughes Smith, and Adrienne Shadd focus on the development of black settlements and religious institutions in southwest Upper Canada and their connections with Detroit during the first half of the nineteenth century. In her chapter, entitled "Canadian Black Settlements in the Detroit River Region," Moore Davis provides a detailed portrait of every black community in Essex County (Amherstburg, Anderdon, Sandwich, Windsor, Gosfield, Colchester, Harrow, Maidstone, etc.). In Part III, "Inspired Transnationalists," three chapters explore transnational black activism in the Detroit River borderland: Afua Cooper's examination of Henry and Mary Bibb's Sandwich-based newspaper *Voice of the Fugitive*; Roy Finkenbine's analysis of the Colored Vigilant Committee of

Detroit—an organization that, following the US *Fugitive Slave Act* of 1850, helped fugitives cross the Detroit River; and Margaret Washington's biographical study of such women activists as Sojourner Truth and Mary Ann Shadd. The following three chapters by Kimberly Simmons and Larry McClellan, Debian Marty, and Carol E. Mull, which make up Part IV, "Resilient Families," discuss the journeys of Black families who escaped slavery in the South and made their way to Michigan. There, these families were forced to cross the Detroit River into Upper Canada/Canada West due to the lack of safety in the North caused by marauding slavecatchers. Part V, "The Trumpet Sounds," includes one chapter, entitled "The Useful Frontier: John Brown's Detroit River Preface to the Harper's Ferry Raid." In this chapter, Louis A. Decaro Jr. sheds light on a little-known episode in the life of the foremost abolitionist. During his youth, John Brown briefly lived in Ohio and even visited Detroit in 1812, where he saw Black slaves being abused by their owners. Decaro describes how this traumatic experience had a profound impact on Brown and how it later led him to become an antislavery freedom fighter. The book concludes with a section by the editors on sources and resources.

*A Fluid Frontier* is a stirring and long-awaited contribution to the history of the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River borderland. It will certainly be of great interest to professors in the United States wishing to further discuss the transnational implications of slavery during the Antebellum era. In Canada, in addition to providing a valuable tool for local history classes at institutions like the University of Windsor and Western University, it will be valuable to professors teaching black history to provide a cross-border perspective.

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STEWART, Geoffrey C. – *Vietnam's Lost Revolution: Ngô Đình Diệm's Failure to Build an Independent Nation, 1955-1963*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 228.

In *Vietnam's Lost Revolution*, Geoffrey Stewart, Assistant Professor of History at the University of Western Ontario, analyzes the Republic of Vietnam's nation-building efforts through its Civic Action Committee between 1955 and 1963. Unlike many other nation-building institutions, the Civil Action Committee worked across ministries, was highly mobile and operated at the village level. Its main purpose was to bring the 'national revolution' directly to the peasantry.

The book's six chapters study this initiative chronologically. The first explores the origins of the Civic Action Committee, which was originally to serve as a local propaganda unit preparing the ground for a 1956 referendum. Once it became clear that the vote would never take place, the Civic Action Committee had new objectives: to improve the peasant's moral and material standards. Chapter two studies the conflicting views exchanged in redefining the Committee's