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A PLACE TO CALL HOME: AFRICAN AMERICAN IMMIGRATION AND THE
AFTERMATH OF THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD 1850-1870

By

John-Michael Markovic

A Major Research Paper
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Department of History
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the Degree of Master of Arts
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2018

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AFTERMATH OF THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD 1850-1870

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September, 18, 2018

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ABSTRACT

With the turn of the 19th century, the United States continued and expanded its persecution of African Americans through the institution of slavery. Many African Americans took it upon themselves to act on their own and flee from slavery in the early 1800s in what was known as the Underground Railroad; however, after the conclusion of the Civil War, a substantial portion decided to return back to the US. Scholars have attempted to explain why these men and women decided to return to the United States despite the experiences they endured. While numerous reasons have been offered, this paper contends that, while other factors played an important role, the African Canadian population primarily returned to the United States because of the repeal of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law and the abolishment of slavery. Using a variety of contemporary sources, census data, individual slave narratives, and modern research, this paper seeks to address the complex factors and reasons that motivated a substantial portion of the African Canadian population to leave Canada and find a future elsewhere. The aftermath of the Underground Railroad does not depict the end of a chapter in history, but rather the continuation of the trials and tribulations that lay ahead for the black population in North America.

DEDICATION

To my mother, father, and brother

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/SYMBOLS

FSA – Fugitive Slave Act

FSL – Fugitive Slave Law

CVC – Detroit Colored Vigilance Committee

UGRR – Underground Railroad

Introduction

The United States faced numerous struggles throughout the 19th century. Social and cultural issues increasingly divided the burgeoning nation along multiple fronts as political issues became increasingly contentious. While many issues burdened the young nation, few issues did as much as the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Even early on, the United States was plagued with disputes on the eventual outcome of the institution of slavery. Attempts to reach compromises, including the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, only further inflamed the situation. While these tensions were brewing in the 19th century, many African Americans – freedom seekers – took it upon themselves to act on their own and flee their predicament from slavery in the early 1800s. Known as the Underground Railroad (UGRR), scores of African Americans escaped bondage and prejudice, moving northward towards free-states and Canada in order to obtain a better life for them and their families.

The UGRR began slowly, starting after the War of 1812, before finally developing into a massive undertaking that ultimately involved approximately 100,000 African Americans leaving their surroundings and travelling hundreds of miles leading to northern cities, including Detroit, Buffalo and Chicago. Thousands of these individuals (a minimum of 9,500 individuals) would go on to cross further north into Canada in order to find freedom. This process continued until the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 and the repeal of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law in 1864. The issue of slavery proved increasingly controversial until it finally culminated into the American Civil War ending in 1865 and with it, the eventual end of the institution of slavery. This turbulent period ended up shaping a significant portion of American life and African American history.

History does not end there, however, as African Americans who fled to Canada continued on with their lives. Eventually, many returned to the United States despite the persecution and discrimination. Scholars have attempted to explain why these men and women decided to return to the United States despite the experiences they endured. Numerous reasons have been offered, including discrimination in Canada, the sluggish economy and poor living and working conditions. All of these reasons no doubt played an important role in encouraging some to return to the US; however, this paper contends that these were not the primary causes. Instead, African Americans primarily returned to the United States because of the conclusion of the threat that had caused them to originally flee. Additionally, although African Americans enjoyed greater rights and freedoms inside Canada than inside the United States, they did not remain in Canada long enough to grow attached to their new country (conversely, old attachments to the United States remained). For many, the repeal of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law opened the door to migration back into the United States where many freedom seekers still had strong ties. This included their families, environment, and way of life. With the end of the Fugitive Slave Law and the addition of their freedom, many were encouraged to return back to the United States and pick up their life again. Although Canada was a refuge for those in need, it was ultimately a temporary one for many.

By immigrating to and emigrating from Canada, these individuals displayed agency in determining the future for themselves and for their families. Throughout this time, blacks in Canada and the United States sought to achieve the best possible outcome and used the border as a tool for their advantage. Individuals who crossed the border found freedom and settled in their new life. After the conclusion of the Civil War and the

demise of the institution of slavery in the United States, a significant number of freedom seekers decided to leave Canada for the United States. Communities in Canada along the border maintained close-knit connections to the African American communities on the other side. This is especially true for the Detroit-Windsor border region and this contributed to the success of the UGRR. Individual accounts by African Americans who came and lived in Canada also demonstrate that their reasons and methods for staying and leaving were quite varied and complex. The aftermath of the UGRR does not depict the end of a chapter in history, but rather the continuation of the trials and tribulations that lay ahead for African Americans.

This paper lists the historiography of the UGRR as a whole before examining the works pertaining to the Detroit River region. The UGRR is analyzed first by detailing the precursory events from the late 1700s with the conclusion of the Jay Treaty and early border crossings and concludes with the 1850s and the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act that led to the ensuing exodus of African Americans into Canada. The paper then examines the Civil War and how wartime activities affected the UGRR. This includes the national policy in the United States regarding slavery and the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law and also the cultural impact as seen with the 1863 Detroit race riot. The final section, The Journey Home, details how many African Americans who escaped to Canada then decided to leave with most of the individuals heading towards the United States while others made their homes elsewhere in Haiti or Liberia.

Historiography

The history of the region and perceptions of Canada's treatment of African Americans has changed over time. In the 1920s, historians mostly viewed Canada's

reputation with distinction. One such scholar, Fred Landon, spoke positively of Canadian involvement noting that “Negroes who fled to Canada were given considerable material aid by the government of Canada and treated with sympathy by its people.”¹ By the 1960s, as social history grew popular, more scholars noted that blacks experienced discrimination after they arrived in Canada. Robin Winks’ work, *The Blacks in Canada*, examined the UGRR and the black experience in Canada and demonstrated how blacks were able to organize and create a life for themselves in their new country; however, Winks also noted that discrimination was commonplace, particularly in the school system.² Winks also examined the departure of African Canadians after the Civil War and estimated that approximately two-thirds of the black population ended up leaving Canada in a “great exodus” – many ostensibly looking for their families.³ Winks balances this assertion by noting that blacks in Canada and in the United States were simultaneously moving away from rural communities to urban environments, increasing city populations.⁴ Winks’ work provides an exhaustive study on the subject, yet a better understanding can be gained by examining more recent research and analyzing their methods. Recent scholarship contends that fewer blacks departed from Canada after the Civil War. In addition, a greater understanding as to the reasons for black migration from Canada can be gained by providing more attention to the potential factors, including the 1857 Depression and the attachment (or lack thereof) that African Canadians felt to their new country.

By the 1990s, scholars such as Sigrid Nicole Gallant expanded their view on the

¹ Fred Landon, "Henry Bibb, a Colonizer," *The Journal of Negro History*, (October 1920): 437.

² Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada, Second Edition*, 2nd. Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, (1997): 366-368.

³ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 289, 494.

⁴ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 494-495.

role that discrimination played. Gallant in her 2001 article, "Perspectives on the Motives for the Migration of African-Americans to and from Ontario, Canada," examined African Canadian history and how government action shaped the future starting with the 1793 Act against Slavery before examining the UGRR and the return home. Gallant argued that the political and legal tools encouraged black migration. Noting that blacks left Canada in substantial numbers, Gallant argued that "Canadians were so prejudiced" that the African Canadian population decided to leave shortly after the Civil War.⁵ While discrimination undoubtedly played a role in the black experience in Canada during the 19th century as research attests, other factors need to be weighed to determine what motivated African Canadians to leave as a whole as many factors were involved. For example, discrimination was one of the main reasons that caused African Americans to flee into Canada. Since US events motivated the migration into Canada, these factors should be considered. This includes the passage and repeal of the Fugitive Slave Act and the abolishment of slavery, which had caused so many African Americans to initially flee into Canada.

Discrimination has proven to be a popular explanation for the departure of African Canadians. Natasha L. Henry, in her 2010 work, *Emancipation Day: Celebrating Freedom in Canada*, offered a detailed study of the Emancipation Day celebrations that took place in Canada throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Henry argued the parades proved to be an important facet of African Canadian life that continued until the end of the Civil War until the decline in parade attendance in the latter half of the 19th century.

⁵ Sigrid Nicole Gallant, "Perspectives on the Motives for the Migration of African-Americans to and from Ontario, Canada: From the Abolition of Slavery in Canada to the Abolition of Slavery in the United States," *The Journal of Negro History*, July 2001: 406.

Following the Civil War, Henry indicated African Americans began returning to the United States in 1865 with the abolishment of slavery.⁶ Although not much is stated beyond African Americans returning to Canada, Henry did propose that the departure of African Americans from British Columbia coincided with an increase of discrimination in the 1870s.⁷ While this offers insight into the black experience in the West and is true for Ontario as well, there are many more factors involved that require a more detailed examination into what motivated African Canadians to leave after the war.

The view that African Canadians departed after the war due to discrimination, however, was challenged by scholars such as Sharon A. Roger Hepburn in her work, “Following the North Star: Canada as a Haven for Nineteenth-Century American Blacks,” in which she examined the UGRR and the discriminatory practices that took place in the United States. Hepburn argued that although blacks experienced real discrimination in Canada, it still provided a safe and tolerant place for African Americans compared to life in the United States – especially after the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act.⁸ This result, Hepburn argued, meant that most African Canadians did not want to leave but rather found their home and sense of belonging in Canada. Additionally, those that did depart did so over the course of years rather than in an immediate mass-migration event.⁹ Indeed, Hepburn examined discrimination in Canada and the United States and noted that it played a significant role in the African Canadian experience; however, it was not a primary factor in convincing them to return to the United States. In

⁶ Natasha L. Henry, *Emancipation Day: Celebrating Freedom in Canada*, Toronto, ON: CAN: Dundurn Group, (2010): 81-82.

⁷ Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 193.

⁸ Also known as the Fugitive Slave Law. Sharon A. Roger Hepburn, "Following the North Star: Canada as a Haven for Nineteenth-Century American Blacks," *Michigan Historical Review*, Fall 1999:103.

⁹ Hepburn, "Following the North Star," 125-126.

a broader sense, this study hopes to expand on this point and examine the other causes that motivated those who did depart.

Another point of contention involves the number of people that entered and left Canada. Whereas Robin Winks argued that approximately two-thirds of African Canadians left in a mass exodus, Michael Wayne in his article, "The Black Population of Canada West on the Eve of the American Civil War: A Reassessment Based on the Manuscript Census of 1861," argued that the number of African Americans returning to the US from Canada was far lower and only a minority of African Canadians chose to leave. Moreover, he examined the composition of the black population in Canada and concluded that the majority, while from the United States, were freeborn rather than runaway slaves. Wayne argued that the number of those returning was fewer and therefore the majority of African Americans found a home and sense of identity in Canada. While the total number of those who left is important to understanding the scope of the departure, we can also gain a broader sense of why African Canadians chose to leave by examining the data including slave narratives. Carmen Poole concurred with Michael Wayne's assessment in her 2015 dissertation, "Conspicuous Peripheries: Black Identity, Memory, and Community in Chatham, ON, 1860-1980" in which she examined the African Canadian population with particular focus on the city of Chatham, Ontario. Poole argued that while the decline of African Canadians in Chatham could be attributed to the Emancipation Proclamation, a similar decline in the 20th century was not.¹⁰ There are inherent difficulties in determining the total number of the black population inside Canada as the numbers fluctuated dramatically. Not only was the number of African

¹⁰ Poole, Carmen. *Conspicuous Peripheries: Black Identity, Memory, and Community in Chatham, ON, 1860-1980*. PhD Thesis, (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2015): 178-179.

Canadians hard to ascertain in contemporary census data, but it was during a time when African Canadians were trying to flee or otherwise remain hidden, which creates further difficulties in determining the final number.

In some cases, the study of black migration into Canada has generally been treated distinctly from black migration leaving Canada following the Civil War. For example, the 2016 collaborative work, *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance, and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland*, revealed much information on the UGRR and the kind of life that African Americans lived once they crossed the border. The information covered is vital to understanding the black experience in Canada and includes the various organizations African Americans and African Canadians created, the number of African Americans that crossed into Canada, and the kind of discrimination that they faced; however, there is limited material on individuals who chose to leave Canada in the latter half of the 19th century. There are some references, though. Some articles noted migration to Liberia while others noted the departure to Haiti, yet those mentioned in the book only number in the hundreds compared to the estimated thousands that chose to return to the United States.¹¹ As a result, this study expands on the information and provides greater focus concerning the events leading up to and after the UGRR with the return of many African Canadians to the United States. Although the UGRR is considered to have ended following the conclusion of the Civil War, the full ending is not presented without addressing the decision by many to stay in Canada and

¹¹ Barbara Hughes Smith, "Worship Way Stations in Detroit," Chap. 5 in *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance, and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland*, edited by Karolyn Smardz Frost and Veta Smith Tucker, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016): 107, 111; Afua Cooper, "Voice of the Fugitive," Chap. 7 in *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance, and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland*, edited by Karolyn Smardz Frost and Veta Smith Tucker, (Wayne State University Press, 2016): 145.

the decision by others to return to the United States.

The Underground Railroad

While slavery was strongly favoured in the southern United States, by the late 1700s the institution was beginning to fall out of favour in the northern states and Canada. By 1787, the Confederation Congress of the United States of America had ratified the Northwest Ordinance, which stated that no new slaves could be introduced to the Northwest Territory (the territory encompassed modern-day Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin).¹² Six years later the government in Upper Canada passed similar legislation known as the 1793 Act against Slavery. In addition to forbidding any new slaves to the region, the Upper Canada bill mandated that the descendants of existing slaves would remain as slaves until the age of twenty-five upon which they would be manumitted.¹³ While this appeared to be a successful compromise between proponents and opponents of the slave trade, African Americans and African Canadians along the border had a different idea. First, these two laws contained weak enforcement measures since they planned to extinguish the institution of slavery within the territories over an extended period of time.¹⁴ Additionally, these laws contained an important loophole for slaves living along the border between the United States and British North America. Since feelings of distrust and animosity were still high between the British and the United States after the American War of Independence (1776-1783), extradition treaties for runaway slaves between Britain (on behalf of British North America) and the United States had not been agreed upon. As a result, although much of the work on the UGRR

¹² Stephen T. Kissel, *Christian Communities: Religion and the Transformation of the Old Northwest*, Dissertation, (Saint Louis University, 2017): 2-3.

¹³ Wigmore, "Before the Railroad," 439, 441.

¹⁴ Wigmore, "Before the Railroad," 444.

was well underway in the 1850s, it arguably started much sooner, particularly in the Detroit River region. This meant that the border presented an opportunity to African Americans and African Canadians. Since both the Northwest Territory and Upper Canada rejected the introduction of new slaves and refused to return existing slaves, blacks on both sides of the border were able to cross into the other territory and would be considered free. This created a viable escape route for many individuals.¹⁵

Territorial changes between the Americans and the British had stirred up legal questions concerning citizenship status and the status of slaves. With the conclusion of the American War of Independence (1776-1783), the British maintained control of the city of Detroit. This changed with the conclusion of the Jay Treaty signed by both countries in 1794. As part of the terms of the treaty, the city of Detroit would be given over to the Americans. In 1796, Detroit formally changed hands and became an American territory. In the same year, the inhabitants of the city were given a choice: those who remained in the city would become American citizens while those who moved to British-controlled territory would remain British subjects. While this would normally provide for smooth transition, the difference between British law and American law became an issue when it came to slavery.

In 1807, the new American court in Detroit, presided over by Chief Justice Augustus B. Woodward, was forced to determine the legal status of the children born to Peter and Hannah Denison, two former African American slaves. The couple's lawyer argued that slavery had been abolished because of Article VI in the 1787 Northwest Ordinance which stated that "[t]here shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in

¹⁵ Wigmore, "Before the Railroad," 439; 447-448.

the said territory, otherwise than in the punishment of crimes whereof the party shall have been duly convicted.”¹⁶ As a result, the couple had appealed to the court to promptly release their four children who were still in bondage.¹⁷ Woodward eventually determined after examining American and British law that only some of the children would be set free. Since two of the children, Elizabeth and Scipio Denison, were born before 1793, they were therefore born under British law prior to the passage of the 1793 Act against Slavery in Upper Canada. As a result, Justice Woodward ruled that they were not entitled to be released from slavery. The judge also ruled that another child, Peter Dennison Jr., would be released from bondage once he reached the age of 25 since he was born after 1793. Despite the ruling, Elizabeth and Scipio Denison determined to take matters in their own hands by crossing the Detroit River, entering Sandwich, Upper Canada. Since there was no extradition between British North America and the United States, they became free individuals in Canada. They remained there until the end of the War of 1812, after which they returned to Michigan where they remained free.¹⁸

Canada was not the only destination for freedom seekers. Although slavery was predominantly an American industry, in the early 19th century there was a smaller slave industry across the Detroit border. Brought over mostly by British loyalists, approximately 500 slaves became a fixture in the Amherstburg region and they desired freedom too.¹⁹ In one notable case, an African Canadian man enslaved to Alexander McKee, a British Indian agent, fled to Detroit in 1805. He later wrote to his former master explaining the circumstances of his departure and informed him that he was now

¹⁶ Wigmore 448; "Northwest Ordinance (1787)," 1787, https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc_large_image.php?flash=false&doc=8, (accessed July 3, 2018).

¹⁷ Wigmore, "Before the Railroad," 448.

¹⁸ Wigmore, "Before the Railroad," 448-449.

¹⁹ Wigmore, "Before the Railroad," 439.

under the care of a judge and was treated well. Despite remaining close to his former master, his letter demonstrated little fear of being captured again.²⁰ Because the Americans were not willing to extradite runaway slaves that came to their territory, African Canadians who crossed the border remained as free subjects in the United States.²¹

While the American government would not return African Canadian slaves under these conditions, the US was deeply interested in signing an extradition treaty with Great Britain for the reciprocal return of all runaway slaves. William Hull, the governor of the newly-created Michigan territory in 1805, quickly set to work attempting to achieve an extradition treaty. Although he spurned the idea of acquiring deserters, he was especially keen on recovering American slaves. Born in 1753, Governor Hull was known for his notable actions and military prowess during the American War of Independence.²² Hull attempted to contact his counterpart immediately across the river in Amherstburg, British military commandant Colonel Jasper Grant. Grant had been assigned a post in Upper Canada in 1800 after being posted in Barbados in the 1790s, where most of his men were fatally stricken with illness.²³ At one point, Governor Hull tried to reach an agreement with Col. Grant, but negotiations fell apart before they even began since both officials insisted on meeting in their own country. This was not too much of a concern for Col. Grant, however, he believed that the issue of slavery was outside of his duties. Efforts

²⁰ Wigmore, "Before the Railroad," 445.

²¹ Wigmore, "Before the Railroad," 447-449.

²² Maria Campbell, James Freeman Clarke, *Revolutionary Services and Civil Life of General William Hull*. D. Appleton & Co., 1848, 2; 18-19.

²³ Phillips, R. B., "Jasper Grant and Edward Walsh: The Gentleman-Soldier as Early Collector of Great Lakes Indian Art," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'Études Canadiennes*, 21(4), 59-60. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.ledproxy2.uwindsor.ca/docview/1300023625?accountid=14789>.

were stymied as neither side was willing to concede.²⁴ By the start of the 19th century, slavery was already in decline in Upper Canada, and by 1833, the British government finally banned the institution of slavery and its practice throughout the empire, including in its North American colonies, thus cementing Canada as a permanent harbour for American slaves seeking freedom.²⁵ As a result, word quickly spread to slaves that Canada was a land of freedom and a beacon of hope.²⁶ Throughout the first half of the 19th century, particularly in the 1840s and 1850s, African American immigration into Canada increased.²⁷

While African Americans and African Canadians had chosen to seek freedom by crossing into the other country, up until this point, traffic had mostly occurred among populations living along the border region. After the War of 1812 between the United States and Britain, many African Americans from Kentucky and Virginia brought back accounts of Canada offering a place of freedom for those who reached her shores. Soon this resulted in many more African Americans from further south choosing freedom.²⁸ As discrimination against African Americans continued to increase throughout the 1830s-1840s in the United States, more African Americans chose Canada as their destination.²⁹ For some African Americans, this meant a peaceful trip across the border. For others, it

²⁴ Wigmore, "Before the Railroad," 447-449.

²⁵ Wigmore, "Before the Railroad," 439; Allen P. Stouffer, *Light of Nature and the Law of God: Antislavery in Ontario, 1833-1877*, Vols. Volume 14 of McGill-Queen's Studies in Ethnic History, McGill-Queen's Press, (1992) 23.

²⁶ 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, Massachusetts: John P. Jewett and Company, 1856): 290; 306-307; Hepburn, "Following the North Star" 124.

²⁷ Robin W. Winks, "Negro School Segregation in Ontario and Nova Scotia," *The Canadian Historical Review*, (1969): 164.

²⁸ Carole Jenson, *History of the Negro Community in Essex County 1850-1860*, PhD Thesis, (Windsor: University of Windsor, 1966): 4-6.

²⁹ Hepburn, "Following the North Star," 98-101.

meant a daring escape from prison.³⁰ In 1833, two freedom seekers, Lucie and Thornton Blackburn, were discovered by slave catchers in Detroit and were promptly arrested until a hearing could be held to establish their innocence. Unable to prove they were free individuals, Lucie and Thornton Blackburn were held until they could be extradited back to Kentucky. The results of the case created a stir within the African American community in Detroit as they understood that this meant the Blackburns would be returned to their masters. During the hearing, African Americans and African Canadians came to the courthouse to protest. A number of African Americans decided to free the Blackburns in a daring escape. They managed to smuggle Lucie Blackburn from prison by swapping clothes and letting a free woman remain in her place. By the time the authorities realized what had happened, Lucie Blackburn was already across the border in Canada. The next day, a crowd of African Americans managed to rush the jail, freeing Thornton Blackburn one hour before his extradition and spirited him across the border to safety.³¹

The American government did not give up seeking an extradition treaty, however. Throughout the early 19th century, the creation of an extradition treaty continued to be a priority for the American government as federal and state governments lobbied Mexico and Canada for new protections to prevent American slaves from escaping.³² Although some extradition treaties were eventually signed between the two countries, the status of

³⁰ 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*, (Winter 2013): 80-81.

³¹ McRae, *Blacks in Detroit, 1736-1833*, 133-134.

³² Bryan Prince, "The Illusion of Safety: Attempts to Extradite Fugitive Slaves from Canada," Chap. 3 in *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance, and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland*, edited by Karolyn Smardz Frost and Veta Smith Tucker, (Detroit: Wayne State Press, 2016): 68-69.

runaway slaves was noticeably missing from the text.³³ Finally in 1842, the United States and Great Britain signed the Webster-Ashburton treaty. Seen widely as a compromise, the text called for an end to the Atlantic Slave Trade. In addition, the United States wholly gave up any and all claims on runaway slaves who reached Canada before 1842. In return, Britain agreed to return runaway slaves if they were indicted for certain crimes, including “murder, or assault with intent to commit murder, or Piracy, or arson, or robbery, or Forgery, or the utterance of forged paper.”³⁴ If an individual was determined to be guilty by the court system in the country he or she was residing in, then the individual could be extradited for the crime. While the treaty enabled some extradition, slaves who arrived on the shores of British soil could not be extradited for merely being a slave. They could, however, be extradited if they committed a crime in the course of their departure. This provided America some form of extradition while also preserving Canada’s status as a safe haven for freedom seekers.³⁵

While these cases demonstrate how freedom seekers along the border managed to find a place of refuge, the number of slaves that sought freedom in Canada was somewhat small (there are numerous reports of several thousand African Americans crossing over from 1776-1840s) compared to immigration in the 1850s.³⁶ This changed with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850.³⁷ Originally intended to be a compromise

³³ Roy Finkenbine, "A Community Militant and Organized: The Colored Vigilant Committee of Detroit," Chap. 8 in *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance, and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016): 155.

³⁴ “The Webster-Ashburton Treaty,” 1842.

³⁵ “The Webster-Ashburton Treaty,” 1842.

³⁶ Estimates suggest 1,000 African Americans crossed between 1776-1793, 3,600 African Americans fought for the British in the War of 1812, and a sharp population increase of 3,000 blacks took place in Canada in the 1830s, suggesting further African American immigration. Sigrid Nicole Gallant 393-395; Hepburn “Following the North Star” 100-101.

³⁷ Also known as the Fugitive Slave Law once enacted.

between the North and the South, the Fugitive Slave Act was passed by Congress to appease slave owners. Slavery was increasingly becoming a contentious issue for Americans; however, the act had a dramatic impact on the North as it proved to be extremely intrusive.³⁸ Created as part of the Compromise of 1850, the Fugitive Slave Law was among four other bills that sought to resolve the slave issue. As more states joined the union, their status as a free or slave state caused much considerable tension for the rest of the country. As part of the compromise, slavery was banned in the District of Columbia and California was admitted into the union as a free state. In return, the Utah and New Mexico territories were given a choice to determine their own fate. Finally, the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793 was updated to give slave catchers more power against runaway slaves.³⁹ This last change affected the balance of power on the slave issue between the North and the South and meant that even free blacks in the North were unsafe. After the Fugitive Slave Act became law, many more African Americans decided to seek refuge in Canada.

The effects of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law were immediate and extreme for African Americans. Slave catchers were allowed to accuse African Americans living in the North of being slaves without providing any evidence. Instead, the burden of proof of status was on the African Americans. In addition, the case did not go to a court; rather, it was adjudicated before a federal commissioner who would decide whether the individual was a slave or free person. If the commissioner ruled that the individual was not a

³⁸ Margaret Washington, "I'm Going Straight to Canada: Women Underground Railroad Activists in the Detroit River Border Zone," Chap. 9 in *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance, and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland*, edited by Karolyn Smardz Frost and Veta Smith Tucker, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016): 166.

³⁹ Jack David Arnold, *The Compromise of 1850: A Burkeian Analysis*, Dissertation, (Illinois: University of Illinois, 1952): 7-8; 10-11.

runaway slave, the commissioner would receive \$5; however, if he ruled that the individual was a slave, then he would receive \$10 as compensation. As a result, commissioners were incentivized to incorrectly label free African Americans as runaway slaves, thus corrupting the legal process in the North. Moreover, private citizens, including white Americans, were required by law to help slave catchers locate missing slaves when ordered. If they refused, then they were at risk of being forced to pay significant fines. As a result, these changes affected life for many white and black Americans in the North, including whites who may have tolerated the southern institution of slavery but did not wish to take part in pro-slave activities. This put many African Americans in danger and forced them to consider moving.⁴⁰

Reaction was swift as thousands of African Americans in Detroit quickly crossed over the border into Canada. As Carmen Poole noted, freeborn African Americans as well as slaves crossed the border into Canada in search of freedom.⁴¹ So strong was the risk of capture and forced servitude in the South under the new Fugitive Slave Law that the threat applied to the free as well as the slave. As a result, many African Americans, although considered freeborn in the United States, chose to flee for safety in Canada. Overall, the estimates for the total amount of African Americans that fled to Canada range from just under 10,000 to 30,000 individuals.⁴² Leaders in the African American community, including William Lambert and George DeBaptiste, attempted to persuade people to remain in Detroit. They argued that the threat was not as dire as it appeared and

⁴⁰ Finkenbine, "A Community Militant and Organized," 159-160.

⁴¹ Poole. *Conspicuous Peripheries*, 62-63.

⁴² Gallant, "Migration of African-Americans," 399; Hepburn "Following the North Star" 106.

that African Americans could weather it together; however, the words had little effect.⁴³ Church attendance began to decline in Detroit after the passage of the law.⁴⁴ It is estimated that more than 5,000 African Americans crossed the Detroit border alone in search for freedom from 1850 until the Civil War.⁴⁵ The majority decided to remain in Detroit; however the character of the Detroit community was changed. Whereas the focus prior to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law was on gaining and preserving rights for African Americans, the focus was now on preserving the integrity of the community and their safety. African American leaders quickly mobilized to hide runaway slaves wherever possible and protect them from capture using all of the resources at their disposal. By the 1850s, the Detroit African American community was well-organized.⁴⁶

Part of the reason behind the success of the UGRR in the Detroit region was the nature of the African American and African Canadian communities on both sides of the border. While the African American community was united in Detroit, the African Canadian community on the other side of the river spanned across several towns, including Windsor, Sandwich, Amherstburg, Chatham, and London, as well as the Buxton, Dawn, and Wilberforce settlements.⁴⁷ This meant that African Canadians were at a disadvantage since it was more difficult to organize across several towns. Its leadership was in desperate need of cohesion in order to produce a unified policy. This problem was mitigated since African American leaders in the Detroit community became leaders in most of the African Canadian communities across the border. This played a significant

⁴³ Finkenbine, "A Community Militant and Organized," 159-161.

⁴⁴ Smith, "Worship Way Stations in Detroit," 110.

⁴⁵ Finkenbine, "A Community Militant and Organized," 160-161.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁴⁷ Canadian Anti-Slavery Baptist Association, "The Constitution, By-Laws, Minutes, Circular Letters, Articles of Faith, And the Covenant, of The Canadian Anti-Slavery Baptist Association," *The Canadian Anti-Slavery Baptist Association*, (Windsor: The Voice of the Fugitive, 1854) 5.

role in how the communities were shaped and functioned.⁴⁸

One way that the African American and African Canadian communities can be seen as a unified entity is through the political organizations that were founded. In both communities, organizations were created, modified, and refined to address the ever-changing needs of the black community. In one notable example, the Detroit Colored Vigilance Committee (CVC) was created in 1842 to advocate for suffrage and education; however, after 1850 with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, it was used to warn African Americans when slave catchers were in the area.⁴⁹ Members of the CVC would threaten slave catchers to dissuade them from achieving their mission, often with great personal risk to their own safety. Despite the risks, the CVC provided a vital role in helping African Americans cross the river safely.⁵⁰

The UGRR would not have been possible without the lack of a strong border. Few border controls existed at this point in time, and in the 1850s border agents were virtually nonexistent. Although taxation on certain items could occur, border controls were not earnestly imposed on either side of the border until the 20th century with professional systems and border agents who queried travellers about their purposes abroad.⁵¹ While a border may be conceptualized as a barrier, the British had converted it into an opportunity for freedom. African Americans and African Canadians could seamlessly cross the border and continue on their daily activities with little difficulty.⁵² Although British North America initially allowed slavery, it fostered a sense of amelioration that

⁴⁸ Frost, "African American and African Canadian Transnationalism," 78-80.

⁴⁹ Carol E. Mull, *The Underground Railroad in Michigan*, (McFarland, 2015) 84-85.

⁵⁰ Finkenbine, "A Community Militant and Organized," 160.

⁵¹ Thomas A. Klug, "Residents by Day, Visitors by Night: The Origins of the Alien Commuter on the U.S.-Canadian Border during the 1920s." *Michigan Historical Review*, (Fall 2008): 77.

⁵² Frost, "African American and African Canadian Transnationalism," 78.

allowed the UGRR to flourish. Starting in the late 18th century, the British Empire had set a course for slavery amelioration, and British North America closely mirrored British policy. In 1791, British conservative politician, William Wilberforce, attempted but failed to successfully pass a bill to abolish slavery entirely. A moderate approach proved more successful: two years later, Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe condemned the institution of slavery as unchristian and helped pass the abolishment of the slave trade. Although some Canadian legislators attempted to resurrect the slave trade in 1798, it proved unsuccessful.⁵³ The British Parliament followed suit shortly thereafter, passing a similar resolution in 1807 that banned the slave trade in Britain and her colonies.⁵⁴ Such a system cemented Upper Canada's newfound freedoms and enabled African Americans to move freely between societies and arguably created a single African American society on both sides of the border.⁵⁵

One such community leader was Madison J. Lightfoot. Lightfoot fled from slavery in Virginia approximately in the 1820s and arrived in Detroit by the 1830s. He became a leader in the African American community and participated in UGRR activities almost immediately.⁵⁶ By 1851, he was made the first minister of the First Sandwich Baptist Church in Upper Canada and commuted to Sandwich, Amherstburg, and Windsor to maintain ties among the various communities.⁵⁷ Other leaders from Detroit which were also active on the Canadian side included C.W. Monroe, George French, and John Martin

⁵³ Patrick Bode, "Simcoe and the Slaves," *Beaver* 73, no. 3 (Jun/Jul 1993): 17.

⁵⁴ Caroline Quarrier Spence, *Ameliorating Empire: Slavery and Protection in the British Colonies, 1783-1865*, (Harvard University, 2014): iii, 3-4; 30-31.

⁵⁵ "An Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade," March 25, 1807.

⁵⁶ Church Intelligence, "Detroit Free Press," (Detroit, MI), Sept. 10, 1871, 3.

⁵⁷ Frost, "African American and African Canadian Transnationalism," 80.

Elder.⁵⁸ Since leaders were able to move freely across both countries and establish communities on both sides of the border, the African American and African Canadian communities along the Detroit River demonstrated the transnationalist aspect of the community as a unified policy was projected.

While the UGRR was progressing, the African communities along the river decided to advocate for their cause through other means. Another event that tied the two communities together was the Emancipation Day parades. Although Emancipation had not yet come for African Americans, it had already come in Canada with the abolishment of slavery in 1833. The parade was held in Detroit and Windsor, along with the surrounding townships. Speeches were held on the need for action against slavery and on how they ought to conduct themselves while festivities were also an important part of the event. In 1852, the Detroit rally was cancelled, so the African American community celebrated it in Windsor. With Henry Bibbs presiding, C.W. Monroe, the minister of the Second Baptist Church in Detroit spoke to the audience and stated that the struggle for African American rights could only be achieved by the community alone and that trust in politicians was not the answer.⁵⁹ Later occurrences well into the 1870s saw Madison Lightfoot preside over the event.⁶⁰ This event was a way to unite the communities and serve as a means to publicly address the need for further action against slavery.

During this time, religion also played a key role in the African American community and the organizations reflected this religious nature when opposing slavery. In the early 1840s, the Amherstburg Association was created to unite black and white

⁵⁸ Church Intelligence, "Detroit Free Press," 3; Jacqueline Tobin, *From Midnight to Dawn : The Last Tracks of the Underground Railroad*, (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2007): 211.

⁵⁹ Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 63.

⁶⁰ Frost, "African American and African Canadian Transnationalism," 85.

churches on both sides of the river in opposition to slavery.⁶¹ Due to internal disputes, however, the association was plagued with infighting as members questioned if some of the groups actually opposed slavery.⁶² This dispute sparked the creation of the Canadian Anti-Slavery Baptist Association in 1854 in Windsor before both organizations reunited as the Amherstburg Anti-Slavery Regular Baptist Association in 1857.⁶³ Another important institution created was the black newspaper, *Voice of the Fugitive*. Created by Henry Bibb in 1851, the *Voice of the Fugitive* was the sole black newspaper in the region. Other newspapers were quite disparaging towards African Americans, so the creation of the press became a very important step towards establishing a voice in the region, and it did so very well.⁶⁴ By 1861, the organizations grew considerably. In 1841, the Amherstburg Association began with 7 churches and 47 members. Only twenty years later, the Association grew to 20 churches and 1,000 members.⁶⁵

The Civil War

In 1861, the American Civil War began. African Canadians felt compelled to sign up to fight for the Union, and a great number of them did so, demonstrating their past connections to the United States and to the African American cause.⁶⁶ The Civil War presented an upheaval in American politics as the grievances that spanned more than a decade between the North and South finally grew into a war. What remains consistent

⁶¹ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada, Second Edition*, 342.

⁶² Adrienne Shadd, "Extending the Right Hand of Fellowship: Sandwich Baptist," Chap. 6 in *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance, and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland*, edited by Karolyn Smardz Frost and Veta Smith Tucker, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016): 126; Winks, *The Blacks in Canada, Second Edition*, 342-344.

⁶³ Shadd, "Extending the Right Hand of Fellowship," 126.

⁶⁴ Finkenbine, "A Community Militant and Organized," 161; Afua Cooper, "Voice of the Fugitive," Chap. 7 in *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance, and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland*, edited by Karolyn Smardz Frost and Veta Smith Tucker, (Wayne State University Press, 2016): 145-146.

⁶⁵ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada, Second Edition*, 342.

⁶⁶ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada, Second Edition*, 152-153.

among those who crossed is that Canada represented a safer community for these individuals – a place where even the Fugitive Slave Law could not directly affect them.

During the Civil War, the Lincoln administration and Congress did much to roll back the oppressive laws on African Americans. On March 13, 1862, Congress countermanded parts of the Fugitive Slave Law by passing an act prohibiting military officers from returning runaway slaves to their masters.⁶⁷ Less than a year later on January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln announced the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared the emancipation of African American slaves in ten states, including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. An exemption was granted in the proclamation to allow West Virginia, parts of Louisiana and Virginia to retain their slaves.⁶⁸ At the time, President Lincoln expressed much concern and fear over the outcome of the proclamation. After conferring with his cabinet, he acknowledged that the action could result in drastic measures, including desertion within the army and possibly even more states switching to the Confederacy.⁶⁹ Some states even expressed a fear of free blacks entering their states; however, the proclamation ultimately succeeded.⁷⁰ By June 28, 1864, the Fugitive Slave Law had finally been repealed. Fourteen years after its passage, the threat of capture and slavery was finally over for most of the African American community.⁷¹

⁶⁷ *An Act to make an additional Article of War*, Congress, March 13, 1862.

⁶⁸ Robert J. Zorick, *A Study of the Union and the Confederate Reactions to the Emancipation Proclamation*, Dissertation, (Montana State University, 1959): 39.

⁶⁹ Zorick, *Reactions to the Emancipation Proclamation*, 45-46.

⁷⁰ Zorick, *Reactions to the Emancipation Proclamation*, 55-57.

⁷¹ King Houston, Jr. Horace, *Catalyst for Antebellum Conflict: The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850*, Dissertation, (Memphis: The University of Memphis, 2009): 1.

Tragically, not everyone shared in the sentiment, including in northern states. Two months after the Emancipation Proclamation, a Detroit African American tavern owner, William Faulkner, was accused of raping 10 year-old Mary Brown and molesting her friend. Although he was only part-African American, he was considered black. He was taken to court where he was convicted and sentenced to life in prison. Many whites were incensed at the situation and began harassing African Americans, blaming the community as a whole for the offense. When Faulkner was being carried out of the courthouse by the Detroit Provost Guard, the crowd began throwing “bricks and paving stones” at him.⁷² The Provost Guard captain, Lieutenant Van Stan, ordered his men to fire a volley upon the crowd using blanks to scare them off. When this did not work, the men loaded their guns with bullets and fired a second volley. This resulted in pandemonium as it fatally struck a passerby, Charles Langer. The mob became furious at the sight of Langer, a white and ethnic German, dead. The crowd grew violent and immediately started looking for ways to take their frustration out.⁷³

The beginning of the Detroit Race Riot of 1863 was underway. Despite years of prejudice and discrimination, this was the first race riot that the city had ever experienced. The mob moved from the court house toward the south end of the city and began targeting black shops and anything of value they could find. Also targeted were the poor black neighborhoods adjacent to the shops. The mobs furiously began burning property and attacking African Americans. One account from an African American, Marcus Dale, described the scene. His home was adjacent to his place of employment – a cooper shop owned by an African American, Whitney Reynolds. The woman and the

⁷² Kunderer, "Racial Rhetoric," 10.

⁷³ Kunderer, "Racial Rhetoric," 10-11.

children hid while Marcus and several other men secured the few firearms they had at their disposal. As the mob came closer, their curses and threats against all African Americans could be heard and it was clear that they would not be pacified. Although the mob attempted to assault Marcus Dale's home, they decided against it when they discovered him armed and willing to defend himself; however, that did not prevent them from damaging the property with bricks and other projectiles. The mob quickly shifted to the cooper shop and set it on fire before turning to other properties.⁷⁴

Thirty or more houses were burned to the ground while two hundred African Americans were displaced. Some fled to the woods while others fled to Canada. Not everyone managed to survive the clashes. One African American, Joshua Boyd, succumbed to his wounds after he was charged on by the angry mob. Others barely escaped the flames; although, they lost all of their belongings. The fire grew so large that it eventually spread over to poorer white neighborhoods. While Detroit did not have a professional police force until 1865, there was a professional firefighting force in the city at the time yet they did not involve themselves in extinguishing the flames. No authorities assisted the African American community.⁷⁵ By the time evening fell, the rioting was over and there was calm in the city again; however, the episode demonstrated that even with the Emancipation Proclamation, civil rights was still far away from becoming a reality. As abolitionists were locked in combat, in part to free African Americans from slavery, African Americans were fleeing to Canada to find refuge from the fires burning

⁷⁴ Joseph Lueck, *"Bullets and Canister First, Blank Cartridges Afterwards:" Hard War and Riot Response on the Union Home Front*, Master of Arts, (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University, 2016): 32-34.

⁷⁵ Lueck, *Hard War and Riot Response*, 35-36.

their homes in Detroit.⁷⁶ Although freedom could sometimes be found in the North, security was still elusive.

The Journey Home

Not all was lost. After the Civil War, many African Canadians began leaving Canada. Already the narrative that Canada had presented a place of refuge for African Americans had been cemented; however, the departure caused many to question why.⁷⁷ Due to different records, scholars today disagree with how many African Canadians left and how many stayed. Estimates of the African Canadian population in the 1850s and 1860s vary significantly. This is partly due to the inaccuracies of contemporary sources and also due to the interpretation of the data. The 1851 census was admittedly very inaccurate and contained little useful information regarding the black population in Canada; however, the 1861 census offers a little bit more. The numbers demonstrate that fewer than 100,000 blacks were in the country, but the numbers vary from there.⁷⁸ Contemporary estimates place the number of African Canadians in the country at approximately 40,000. Scholars today generally agree with that figure, including scholars such as Robin Winks. However, Michael Wayne in his article, "The Black Population of Canada West," argues that such estimates greatly overestimate the black population and that approximately 17,000 African Canadians resided in the country in 1861. Wayne also noted that runaway slaves comprised only 57% of the black population while 43% were already living in the country. What this means, however, is that a significant portion (more than half) had their roots and history in the United States. Scholars, including

⁷⁶ Kunderer, "Racial Rhetoric," 11.

⁷⁷ Hepburn "Following the North Star" 100-101.

⁷⁸ "Fugitive Slaves in Canada Notes." *Wilbur H. Siebert Collection*, Ohio History Connection, 1895.

Michael Wayne and Sigrid Nicole Gallant note, however, that contemporary estimates fluctuated wildly with assessments ranging from 15,000 and 75,000 African Canadians in Canada West.⁷⁹

Given the wide variety of estimates, many interpretations are involved. A 19th century abolitionist, Benjamin Drew, conducted a detailed survey in 1854 of African Canadians in the Essex County region and beyond. Drew's 1854 survey can be compared and contrasted to the 1861 census, and this provides somewhat more flexibility. Drew counted a significant number of African Canadians located in Chatham (800), Amherstburg (400-500), Colchester (450), London (350), Windsor (250), Sandwich (100), and Gosfield (78). In comparison, the 1861 census, seven years later, saw significant black population increases in each town listed here except for Sandwich and Amherstburg which saw a slight decline. In the 1861 census, Chatham's African Canadian population increased to 1,252 while Windsor's population was listed as more than double at 533 and Colchester's African Canadian population increased to 937.⁸⁰ Drew concluded that the number of African Canadians living in Canada at the time totalled 30,000 individuals – approximately within the same range as other contemporary estimates. Michael Wayne criticized Drew's methodology for reaching these numbers.⁸¹ He argued that abolitionists tended to embellish the number of African Canadians to draw attention to the plight of freedom seekers while others argue that the census records were far too low.⁸² Indeed, there appears to be evidence for both sides. The 1861 census record

⁷⁹ 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 Sociale*, 28, no. 56 (1995): 466-467; Gallant, "Migration of African-Americans," 405.

⁸⁰ Wayne, "The Black Population of Canada West," 469.

⁸¹ Wayne, "The Black Population of Canada West," 468.

⁸² Wayne, "The Black Population of Canada West," 467, 471.

suggests only 11,233 African Canadians lived in Canada at the time; however, as Wayne noted, there are actually 17,053 enumerated in the list.⁸³ Census enumerators revised the 1861 number ten years later from 11,233 to 13,566, suggesting that the enumerators understood the 1861 census was inaccurate.⁸⁴ Even then, this number is still considered far too low by contemporary or modern estimates.⁸⁵ As a result, the 1861 census does not offer enough data to arrive to a definitive conclusion.

There was also another difficulty in ascertaining the number of people in Canada as the Freedman's Inquiry Commission explained. The American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission was created in 1863 to determine the condition of the African American population in Canada West (Ontario). This was done to understand the effects and outcome while the war was closing. Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe travelled along with the Secretary of the Commission, Mr. J.M.W. Yerrington, to Canada West to compile a series of reports on the African population.⁸⁶ The Freedman's Inquiry Commission report produced in 1864 determined that the census records were wholly inadequate in that they appeared to routinely underestimate the amount of blacks living in Canada. As the report states:

The inference from these data would be that the colored population is, as was represented to us by Elder Perry and others, about 700. The Census makes it only 472! In Hamilton...the colored population is probably over 500, but the Census makes it only 62! In Toronto, Mr. George A. Barber, Secretary of the Board of School Trustees, furnished us a certified copy of the number of colored residents,

⁸³ *Census of the Canadas. 1860-1861*. Personal Census. Vol. 1 (Quebec, 1863), pp. 78-79; Wayne, "The Black Population of Canada West," 467.

⁸⁴ *Censuses of Canada. 1665 to 1871*. Statistics of Canada. Vol. 1V (Ottawa, 1876), p. 266.

⁸⁵ Wayne, "The Black Population of Canada West," 467.

⁸⁶ S.G. Howe, "The Refugees From Slavery in Canada West: Fugitive Inquiry Commission," (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1864): iii-iv.

amounting to 934, but the Census makes it only 510.⁸⁷

Why was the census insufficient? The Freedmen's report posits that mobility of the African population in Canada could not explain a move of this significance. It had to be instead "that the Census of 1850, and that of 1860 [in Canada West], included some of the colored people in the white column."⁸⁸ The report notes that the Anti-Slavery Society of Toronto placed the number of African Americans in Canada West at 30,000 in 1852. "Intelligent people," the report notes, "estimate the present population at from 20,000 to 30,000." The report's authors, however, conclude that the number of blacks living in Canada West "does not fall short of 15,000 nor exceed 20,000."⁸⁹

Why were the numbers so difficult to determine? The Freedmen's report finds another reason for this. The reason for the disparity in estimates was due to the high mortality rate among African Americans in Canada:

However imperfect these latter estimates may be, it is evident, from the number known to have entered Canada, that the births have never equaled the deaths, and therefore, there has been no natural increase, but on the contrary, a natural loss; and that without constant immigration, the colored population must diminish and soon disappear.⁹⁰

Indeed, if the mortality rate exceeded the birthrate, then that would explain why the total black population in Canada was so unstable and why the numbers fluctuated so much. In addition, the census records were conducted at a time when much of the UGRR was done in secret so as to protect the freedom seekers against slave catchers. Such practices would naturally result in inaccurate records. Perhaps more telling, the 1871 census suggests

⁸⁷ Howe, "Fugitive Inquiry Commission," 16.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Howe, "Fugitive Inquiry Commission," 16.

13,435 African Americans lived in Ontario (previously known as Canada West).⁹¹ This census record is considered far more accurate by scholars, suggesting a significant decline; however, the size of the decline is still disputed.⁹²

This difficulty is to be expected since UGRR activity was meant to be secret. Many individuals who crossed the border did not wish to be known. Indeed, some runaway slaves took on aliases to hide their identity – especially if they were concerned that there was a chance they could be extradited.⁹³ In these cases, individuals who crossed over the border stealthily or who did not wish to be known would be harder to count. They would be more likely to be mobile and less likely to become a part of a community. In addition, although the Freedmen’s report concluded that mobility alone could not explain the large fluctuations in numbers among blacks in Canada, it most likely played a role – especially after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act. Given the upheaval in leaving the United States, many were not bound to any given location and did not wish to be found. As such, attempts to count the African Canadian population during this time were and remain incredibly difficult.

It is also difficult to infer results based on the census alone. John Clarke in his work, *The Ordinary People of Essex*, noted that the total population for Colchester had significantly declined in 1851-1852 with a total population of 1,870 blacks compared to a total population of 2,634 in 1848, only three years earlier. Although Clarke suggests that this could be due to the African American population returning home because the situation in the United States had subsided, this is not likely as the passage of the Fugitive

⁹¹ The province’s name was changed from Canada West to Ontario after 1867.

⁹² Wayne, "The Black Population of Canada West," 470.

⁹³ Prince, "The Illusion of Safety" 75.

Slave Act in 1850 had compelled many more African Americans to immigrate into Canada.⁹⁴

While the census results are difficult to interpret due to the significant gaps that were recognized by even the census enumerators, accounts from individual African Americans who moved can offer a more detailed explanation as to why they may have chosen to leave Canada once the Civil War was conclude These individual accounts can be examined to address the decline of the African Canadian population in Canada. The record is replete with such sources since supporters of the UGRR published many individual accounts in order to gain exposure and sympathy for their experiences and their plight. Some scholars have cautioned the use of contemporary sources as some are known to contain embellishments in order to garner sympathy, particularly when it came to estimating the number of freedom seekers who actively crossed the border. Careful research, however, has helped verify many freedom seeker accounts to be accurate and therefore to be of use.⁹⁵

As historical records demonstrate, family concerns played a constant role in African American migration to Canada and afterwards. For example, Madison J. Lightfoot, who was mentioned earlier, was a community leader in Detroit and in Upper Canada. Records show that he decided to stay in the region, served as a witness in a Supreme Court case in Michigan, and continued to preside over Emancipation Day

⁹⁴ Karolyn Smardz Frost and Veta Tucker Smith, "Inspired Transnationalists," In *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance, and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2016): 133; John Clarke, *The Ordinary People of Essex*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014): 75.

⁹⁵ Hepburn "Following the North Star," 95-96; Frost, "African American and African Canadian Transnationalism, 84-85.

parades in the 1870s.⁹⁶ He briefly departed Canada in 1874 and returned to Culpepper Court House in Virginia where he had been a slave in the 1820s to visit his relatives whom he had not seen since.⁹⁷ Even before slavery was over, familial relations motivated African Americans to change their migration patterns. In 1843, a slave known as Sam fled from his master's establishment in Culpepper County, Virginia to Canada across Lake Erie. He returned across the border, however, only three weeks later since his wife could not be found (she had attempted to depart with him but became separated in the escape). He waited until she could be found and then crossed the border again.⁹⁸

As mentioned earlier, the mortality rate was a significant factor in the population in Upper Canada and it affected many individuals who crossed the border including some who were important pillars of the community. One such person was Henry Bibb. In 1852 he started the *Voice of the Fugitive*, and although the paper went on to become a premiere African Canadian newspaper and source of news for the UGRR, he died only two years later in 1854. As a result, the paper ended and a new African Canadian paper had to continue the work.⁹⁹ Certainly slavery took a considerable toll on one's health.

Some runaway slaves felt the pressures of the economy were a significant factor. Isaac Riley, for instance, was convinced to leave his master and flee to Canada. He reached Windsor, Canada prior to 1849. When he arrived in Windsor, Riley faced difficulties adjusting to his new life. The French population in the region appeared to him

⁹⁶ Frost, "African American and African Canadian Transnationalism," 84-85; George C. Gibbs, Randolph Manning, Thomas McIntyre Cooley, et. al. *Michigan Reports: Cases Decided in the Supreme Court of Michigan*. Vol. 16. (Phelps & Stevens, 1868): 520.

⁹⁷ "Off For Virginia." Detroit: Advertiser & Tribune, April 14, 1874.

⁹⁸ Homer Uri Johnson, *Dixie to Canada, Romances and Realities of the Underground Railroad*. (Buffalo: Charles Wells Moulton, 1894): 124; 130-131.

⁹⁹ Cooper, "Voice of the Fugitive," 144.

to be aloof – perhaps due to the language cultural barriers. While living in Windsor, he crossed the border and worked in Michigan. Riley stated that this was due to the better income he received in the United States; whereas, in Windsor he could only earn a meager two shillings a day or one shilling and sixpence.¹⁰⁰ Despite being offered a home in Michigan, he preferred the safety of Windsor, yet he was willing to risk his freedom by working in Michigan.¹⁰¹ He later moved to St. Catharines where he fared better before moving to the Elgin settlement in Buxton, Ontario in November 1849, and remained there until the 1870s when he left for Nebraska.¹⁰² No reason was stated why he left the Elgin settlement; however, his adult children resided in the United States, which would partially explain his interest in moving.

Indeed, economic woes only made African American migration harder. In 1856, a two year banking crisis in Upper Canada led to two railway companies defaulting on their interest. Attempts by the government to bail them out put the Bank of Upper Canada in a precarious position.¹⁰³ By 1858 Canada was facing an economic depression, which continued into the 1860s. The economic depression hit Toronto especially hard. In 1859, the mayor noted that half of the city's mechanics, labourers, clerks, accounts, and writers were unemployed.¹⁰⁴ By 1862, Lower Canada was faring much better, but Upper Canada was still struggling to maintain economic prosperity. With the onset of the American Civil War, most Canadians had initially hoped that the conflict would result in greater

¹⁰⁰ Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery* 298-300.

¹⁰¹ Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery*, 298-299.

¹⁰² Burton Historical Museum, *Isaac Riley*, (2018): <http://www.buxtonmuseum.com/history/PEOPLE/riley-isaac.html> (accessed July 31, 2018).

¹⁰³ P. A. Baskerville, "The Pet Bank, the Local State and the Imperial Centre, 1850-1864," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'Études Canadiennes* 20, no. 3 (Fall, 1985): 30-32, <https://search-proquest-com.ledproxy2.uwindsor.ca/docview/1300023447>.

¹⁰⁴ Susan Elizabeth Houston, "The Impetus To Reform: Urban Crime, Poverty and Ignorance in Ontario 1850-1875," University of Toronto (Canada), 1974, 256.

economic opportunities, but the war had in fact prolonged the economic hardship. As some wealthier Americans fled up north, the manufacturing industry started to recover and even benefit; however, Canada's agriculture industry was among the worst affected. American currency was no longer valuable inside Canada. Even worse, Canadian prices for agricultural produce and meat were severely depressed as banks restricted loans during the war. The prices were so low that some farmers ended up burning their corn for fuel as the cost to process and transport the crop was more expensive than it was worth. It was in this economic environment that African Americans were entering Canada as they fled persecution from the South. Most African Americans were unable to participate in skilled industries as manufacturing. Instead, many took up farming in settlements, such as Dawn, Buxton, or Wilberforce. With the economic situation impacting agricultural products, such an environment made their crops nearly impossible to sell.¹⁰⁵

In addition to the economic hardship that African Canadians faced, famine was another threat. In 1864, crops suffered a very bad year with little rain in Canada West. While this was serious for white farmers, this undoubtedly was disastrous for African Canadian farmers. Although some places in southwest Ontario, such as Buxton, were described as having rich, fertile soil, others appear to suggest a different story.¹⁰⁶ The American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission described black farms as "generally inferior to the first-class farms of their region in point of cultivation, fences, and stock" but noted

¹⁰⁵ David Fred Hill, *Some Aspects of the Rise of Canadian Nationalism, 1858-1865: A Study of Public Opinion with Special Reference to the Influence of the United States*, Dissertation, (University of Southern California, August 1955): 91-97.

¹⁰⁶ Jason Howard Silverman, *Unwelcome Guests: American Fugitive Slaves in Canada, 1830-1860*, PhD Thesis, (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1981): 269; Fred Landon "Agriculture Among the Negro Refugees in Upper Canada," *The Journal of Negro History*, (July 1936): 311-312; Jenson, *History of the Negro Community* 15-16.

that they were instead “quite equal to the average of second-class farms” of whites.¹⁰⁷ Not only was it difficult to sell the crops during the depression, but the loss of crops meant for sustenance made the situation worse. The additional stress of dealing with famine made it harder. The only consolation was that most African Americans who came to Canada were experienced in agriculture and soil since they came from the Upper South.¹⁰⁸ In other words, African Americans saw some of the worst that Canada had to offer with a depressed economy, famine, and the instability of war in the United States that made the situation in Canada worse. Such a situation would undoubtedly contribute to economic failures and hardships while staying in the North.¹⁰⁹

Sometimes the cause for leaving was the breakup of the community. Such was the case in the Elgin settlement. Established in 1850, the Elgin settlement was the product of Rev. William King, an Irish missionary sent by the Church of Scotland to the United States in 1846. Upon arriving in Louisiana, King married a plantation owner’s daughter. Shortly afterwards, the plantation owner died, and King received 15 slaves as his inheritance. Instead of treating them as slaves, he paid them for their work and brought them to Canada West in 1848. Two years later, the Elgin Settlement was created as a community for African Americans and African Canadians and lasted slightly above twenty years before it closed.¹¹⁰ Shortly after the conclusion of the Civil War, the

¹⁰⁷ Howe, “Fugitive Inquiry Commission,” 65-66.

¹⁰⁸ The Upper South is a fluid geographic and political term that refers to eight states, including Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware and Missouri. It is used in contrast to the Deep South, which was geographically situated below the aforementioned states. See Daniel W. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis*, Chapel Hill: (University of North Carolina Press, 1989): xx. James West Davidson, *Nation of Nations: A Concise Narrative of the American Republic*. Vol. One to (1877): 1996, 326, 344, 397. Landon “Agriculture Among the Negro Refugees,” 304-305; Jason Howard Silverman, *Unwelcome Guests: American Fugitive Slaves in Canada, 1830-1860*, Dissertation, (Lexington, Kentucky : University of Kentucky, 1981): 16.

¹⁰⁹ Hill, *Some Aspects of the Rise of Canadian Nationalism*, 91-97.

¹¹⁰ The slave in Canada [microform] 140-141 https://archive.org/stream/cihm_38982#page/n149/mode/2up

community heard reports of cheap land being offered in the South. The community expressed a desire to move the Elgin settlement back into the United States. When the proposal was examined in detail, however, King discovered that the proposal was not suitable as the land was too limited to transplant the entire community and hostility against blacks was still high. Ultimately, the settlement refused to move, but it did offer any African Canadians who wished to return to do so. Slowly, members of the settlement decided to leave one by one until most of the settlement eventually left.¹¹¹

It's important to note; however, that the Elgin settlement did not break up immediately. In fact, data reveals that the settlement had a population of 752 individuals in 1861. Ten years later in 1871, the population was 667 –an 11% decrease. The results were mirrored in other cities. Carmen Poole noted that in the same decade there was only a 25% reduction in the African Canadian population in the city of Chatham. Similar results were measured in Hamilton with a 29% decrease – a significant decrease, however, not the two-thirds that were initially reported.¹¹² What was telling, however, was the decline in the Elgin settlement continued. By the 1880s, less than half of the settlement remained. One of the issues was the lack of immigration from the United States; the other was the migration from Elgin to the United States.¹¹³ Some members ended up leaving Canada and received an education in the United States. Abraham W. Shadd (not to be confused with his father, Abraham D. Shadd) was born in either Ohio or Pennsylvania in 1844 before his parents moved to the Elgin settlement. He served in the Civil War as a Union soldier before returning to the Elgin settlement. Afterwards, he left

¹¹¹ Sharon A. Roger, ""Slaves No More": A Study of the Buxton Settlement, Upper Canada, 1849-1861." (University of New York, 1995): 396-399.

¹¹² Poole *Conspicuous Peripheries*, 179.

¹¹³ Roger, ""Slaves No More," 402-403.

for Detroit before continuing to Washington D.C., where he received a law degree and practiced law in New Orleans in the 1870s.¹¹⁴ His sister, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, followed in his footsteps by also leaving the Elgin settlement and living in Detroit during the Civil War, before moving to Washington D.C.¹¹⁵

As some scholars have stated, discrimination was an issue in Canada and undoubtedly played a role in the African Canadian experience. Isaac Riley's wife, Catharine Riley, indicated that she did not wish to leave at all and that the treatment she had received while under slavery, although she was not free, was kind. She was convinced by a relative of her master who told her that her children ought to be freed as they may not have a master as kind as hers after the master died. Convinced, she followed her husband to Canada. Once there, she felt that blacks and whites were cold and indifferent unlike those back home, in Missouri. She felt so strongly about this that she noted that had her master come looking for her while she was in this state, she would have gone back willingly. After moving to the Elgin settlement, she finally agreed that living in Canada was much better as her children were being educated.¹¹⁶ In a similar account, although Henry Bibb was satisfied with Canada, his wife, Mary Bibb, a free-born African American teacher, was not. She described the treatment that they received from whites as "withering."¹¹⁷

Further research into discrimination shows that African Canadians did indeed face significant levels of discrimination. Many African Americans and African Canadians at

¹¹⁴ Buxton Historical Museum. *A. W. Shadd*. April 21, 2017. <http://www.buxtonmuseum.com/history/PEOPLE/abram-shadd.html> (accessed July 31, 2018); Roger, "Slaves No More," 399.

¹¹⁵ Washington, "I'm Going Straight to Canada," 178.

¹¹⁶ Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery*, 299; Burton Historical Museum, *Isaac Riley*.

¹¹⁷ Cooper, "Voice of the Fugitive," 144.

this time expressed their desire for the next generation to be educated and called for these principles to be laid out; however, they immediately faced widespread discrimination once inside Canada. Many schools in Canada did not allow black children to partake in lessons. In Chatham, Ontario, the controversy was so strong among white parents that African Canadians did not even feel safe sending their children to school.¹¹⁸ In Amherstburg, one contemporary sensationally claimed that white parents would sooner murder their children rather than allow them to go to schools with African children.¹¹⁹ In Windsor, the school board refused to teach African students. When African Canadian parents sued the school board in 1859 and 1884 respectively, the superintendent claimed that they could not serve African children because it would be unsanitary. Perhaps surprisingly, the courts upheld this reason as valid and ruled in favour of the school board.¹²⁰ Even Rev. J. Hurst noted that his Christian services and Sunday school contained few white people who would attend. He lamented the separation and yearned for a time when racial harmony would occur.¹²¹

By 1867, emotions were running high. That year's race riot in Windsor appears to define the problems facing the African Canadian community at the time. Reporters from the *Detroit Free Press* covered the event. On July 1st, 1867, the town was busy celebrating Confederation Day. Stores closed their businesses for the day and people gathered from multiple towns to attend the celebrations in Windsor. The festivities had begun at 9 a.m. in the morning with a Russian gun salute and firecrackers. In the beginning, spirits were high and people were jubilant. By the afternoon at approximately

¹¹⁸ Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 76.

¹¹⁹ Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 48.

¹²⁰ Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 62.

¹²¹ Fugitive Slave Mission, "Mission to the Colored Population in Canada," *Colonial and Continental Church Society*, (1866): 7.

2 p.m., the horse races had commenced on the Bellevue track. Some time around the second heat, altercations in the crowd began to break out. One individual from out of town, described by reporters from the *Free Press* as one who “appeared thoroughly to understand rough and tumble fighting,” decided to throw a punch at a rather large countryman.¹²² The countryman attempted to fight back, but was promptly attacked by another adversary. Space was given by the crowd for a fight to commence. After three more fights took place, the crowd began what was described as a melee that resulted in black eyes and bloody noses. Despite the violence, the *Free Press* characterized the effects as “no serious damage done.”¹²³ The track was eventually mostly cleared before half past six.¹²⁴

Although the fights subsided, the real violence that day was about to begin. Multiple versions for how the riot began were given, but a somewhat clearer picture can be established. Competitions were part of the Confederation Day celebrations. One prize that was offered that day was a leg of mutton attached to a greased pole. Two contestants, one black and one white, stepped up to a table to compete to win the mutton. Although it was not stated who won, words were exchanged between the winner and the loser and the crowd began to taunt the defeated contestant. At approximately 6 p.m., the two had finished the event when “roughs” (as described by reporters of the *Free Press*) began pushing their way into the fray in search of a fight. It did not take too long before blacks and whites were pitted against each other. As the *Free Press* reported, “blood flowed freely from the innocent and the guilty” as weapons, including “bottles, brickhats, stones,

¹²² Detroit Free Press, “Confederation Day,” 1.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

stakes and even axes” were used in the fray. Even gunshots were said to have been discharged.¹²⁵ Adjutant Guillott was said to be in charge of the security for the parade.¹²⁶ With considerable effort, he managed to control the situation but not until numerous individuals were injured and African Canadian property was burned.¹²⁷ Although reporters blamed the fight on “roughs”, the riot suggests something more significant.¹²⁸ If certain individuals were so opposed to African Canadians as to burn their property, then this certainly could have created a motivation for African Canadians to leave for the United States. At the very least, such actions undoubtedly did not create a welcoming atmosphere. Ultimately, while the government in Canada provided a safe haven from slavery, discrimination still continued. Given the struggles faced in Canada, discrimination could have played a role in convincing African Canadians to return to the United States.¹²⁹

Some blacks expressed a desire to return home even before the war was over. The Freedmen’s Inquiry commissioners argued that many blacks felt that migration into Canada was only temporary. According to the report, if slavery was “utterly abolished in the United States,” then many blacks would return from Canada. In fact, the report states that “[A]mong hundreds who spoke about it, only one dissented from the strong expression of desire to ‘go home.’” Not only did the average individual believe in this, but Rev. Mr. Kinnard, an African American clergyman, was reported to have said, “If

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Most likely this is James Casimer Guillot who was given the rank Adjutant approximately in 1867. He later joined the Essex Fusiliers and retired with the rank of Colonel. See Windsor Public Library. "MS11 - Guillot Family Papers." *Windsor Public Library*. n.d. www.windsorpubliclibrary.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/MS-11.doc (accessed July 6, 2018).

¹²⁷ Munro, “Windsor’s July 1 – 1867 – Race Riot,” 11.

¹²⁸ Detroit Free Press, “Confederation Day,” 1.

¹²⁹ Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 48; 61.

freedom is established in the United States, there will be one great black streak, reaching from here to the uttermost parts of the South.”¹³⁰ Indeed. In 1865, Rev. J. Hurst from England reported that while it would not happen any time soon, “[i]t has been the general opinion that as soon as the South was effectually subdued, slavery partially or wholly abolished, and of course the ‘Fugitive Slave Law’ for ever set aside, that the coloured people would soon leave Canada and settle in the States.”¹³¹ According to some whites in Canada, this was interpreted as a lack of allegiance to Canada and her institutions.¹³²

Another difficulty that African Canadians faced was the assumption by whites that they would return to the United States when the war was over. This belief was not only rooted in Canada, but also overseas, and would impact the black community at the end of the war.¹³³ By 1866, donations to charities supporting African Canadians began to dwindle so significantly that missionaries had to plead for support for their African Canadian friends. One such mission was the Fugitive Slave Mission run by the Colonial and Continental Church Society, a mission organized by the Anglican Church for evangelizing the Canadian population in Ontario, including Toronto, London, Chatham, Windsor, Amherstburg, and Dresden.¹³⁴ The Fugitive Slave Mission was dedicated to uplifting and teaching free African Americans in Canada in religious and physical instruction as well as physical charity. In 1866, the Mission wrote an impassionate plea for more donations and tried to explain that the end of the Civil War and slavery did not

¹³⁰ Quoted in Howe, “Fugitive Inquiry Commission,” 27-28.

¹³¹ Fugitive Slave Mission, “Mission to the Colored Population in Canada,” 12.

¹³² Winks, *The Blacks in Canada, Second Edition*, 143.

¹³³ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada, Second Edition*, 143.

¹³⁴ Anglican Church of Canada, “Colonial and Continental Church Society fonds,” *Anglican Church of Canada*. n.d., <https://www.anglican.ca/archives/holdings/fonds/colonial-and-continental-church-society-fonds/> (accessed May 29, 2018); Fugitive Slave Mission, “Mission to the Colored Population in Canada,” 4, 10, 20.

mean that blacks in Canada were in decent shape:

The Committee of this Mission have [sic] found that there is an impression in England that no further aid is required for the evangelization of the coloured population in Western Canada. This impression seems to have arisen from the fact that American slavery is abolished, and the...Mission, which took its rise from the circumstances and existence of the Fugitive Slave Law, is no longer needed.¹³⁵

Since the Fugitive Slave Law had ended, many whites had assumed that the threat (and therefore, the primary reason) for African American emigration was over and that they would soon return. As the Mission explained, this was not the case. Although arguing incorrectly that the African Canadian population was “likely to remain in the province,” the Mission explained that the work had to continue and passed on reports by Rev. J. Hurst, who was serving as missionary to the African Canadians. Hurst explained that among the various troubles they faced were churches left in state of disrepair and blacks in need of clothing and education – spiritual and physical.¹³⁶ The funding, according to the Mission, was in dire need of expansion.¹³⁷

Many other African Canadians left for different reasons than those listed above. C.W. Monroe left the Detroit region as early as 1859 to become a missionary in Liberia while Bishop James Theodore Holly advocated for African Americans and African Canadians to go to Haiti to support an independent black government. He managed to convince 111 other individuals from both countries to support this mission in 1861.¹³⁸ As a result, not all African Americans or African Canadians were focused on immigration to or from the United States or Canada. Instead, much of the community was very transient and not tied down to any specific region. As a result, monocausal grand narratives may

¹³⁵ Fugitive Slave Mission, "Mission to the Colored Population in Canada," 4.

¹³⁶ Fugitive Slave Mission, "Mission to the Colored Population in Canada," 7-8.

¹³⁷ Fugitive Slave Mission, "Mission to the Colored Population in Canada," 4.

¹³⁸ Smith, "Worship Way Stations in Detroit," 107, 110; Cooper, "Voice of the Fugitive," 145.

not address the entire community; care must be taken to examine the various individual reasons that create the complex African Canadian experience.

While African Americans were still fighting to gain the right to vote, African Canadians already enjoyed this right bestowed upon them as British citizens and property owners; however, life was still not easy.¹³⁹ By the 1870s, many former slaves and African Canadians began leaving for the United States in search of more opportunity. As a result, African Canadians that remained became more apparent as a minority in Canadian towns. This resulted in different treatments across Canada. In Windsor where border activity from Detroit was high, African Americans and Canadians were reported to have complete access to the best hotels and social establishments; however, in Chatham, only one hotel tolerated African Canadians.¹⁴⁰ The discrimination had a profound effect on the morale of African Canadians, particularly in Chatham. The Emancipation Day parades were cancelled in Chatham and in its place was a protest held in 1874 where 2,000 individuals took part. The Emancipation Day parade would eventually resume by 1882; however, the sentiment among many African Canadians had changed with many questioning the purpose of continuing these celebrations.¹⁴¹ Discrimination also occurred in other ways across Canada West with segregated schooling and churches. This would persist for decades (Chatham's public schools were legally integrated in 1893) before being addressed in the middle of the 20th century.¹⁴² Although discrimination persisted, there were many African Canadians who felt it important to continue celebrating the Emancipation Day parades and remembered Canada as a safe haven that provided liberty

¹³⁹ Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 56, 80.

¹⁴⁰ Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 205-206; Winks, *The Blacks in Canada, Second Edition*, 289-290.

¹⁴¹ Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 79-82.

¹⁴² Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 20, 83-84.

to blacks in fear of persecution in the face of tyranny and slavery.¹⁴³

Conclusion

With the turn of the 19th century, African Americans and African Canadians were persecuted and mistreated through the institution of slavery. Despite the injustice, thousands of African Americans and African Canadians managed to find freedom by crossing the border separating British North America and the United States. Since no extradition treaty was in place, freedom seekers were protected once they crossed the border. With the conclusion of the War of 1812, African American soldiers brought back word that there was tolerance in the Northern states and in Canada, sparking the beginnings of the UGRR. Although free and runaway African Americans immigrated into Canada in significant numbers after 1850, many did not remain. Instead, a substantial amount chose to return to the United States after the Civil War. Although the total number of African Canadians that departed after the war is difficult to ascertain, evidence appears to indicate that discrimination, while a factor, was not the main reason that motivated African Canadians to return to the United States. As Sharon A. Hepburn indicated, discrimination was a major factor that convinced African Americans to flee to Canada, especially after the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. When both the institution of slavery and the Act ceased, so did most of the reasons for immigrating to Canada. With the main reasons for escaping to Canada ended, other factors took precedence, including finances, education, family, and persecution. Canada did not always serve these new priorities, and as a result many chose to move elsewhere.

¹⁴³ Henry, *Emancipation Day*, 51, 204.

While the total number of blacks that departed from Canada is disputed, recent scholarship, including from Michael Wayne, Sharon Hepburn, and Carmen Poole, indicates that the departure took place over the course of decades rather than an immediate exodus as proposed by Robin Winks. Moreover, as Sharon Roger and Carmen Poole noted, the lack of constant immigration into Canada proved to be a significant detriment to the growth of African Canadian communities. Despite scholarly disagreement, census records reveal that a significant number of African Americans immigrated to Canada in the 1850s after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act and subsequently left Canada after the Civil War. While some communities experienced a modest but substantial decline in population immediately after the Civil War, the decline continued into the 1880s and eventually broke communities apart, as happened with the Elgin settlement. The full story of the UGRR then is not complete without examining the events that occurred after the Civil War and addressing the demographic shifts that resulted from decisions made by individuals to stay in Canada or return to the United States.

Finally, individual accounts of African Americans provide insight into the various reasons African Canadians chose to leave and demonstrate that a variety of factors played a role. Once in Canada, blacks faced numerous challenges including a depressed economy, famine, discrimination, persecution, and even violence. Even with these hardships, Canada served as a place of refuge and granted them rights that they did not possess in the United States. Once their freedom was secured, African Americans sought to secure the next most important items: liberty, a place to live, security, rights. For most blacks in North America, this was achieved in the United States, although a significant

portion remained in Canada. The African communities on both sides of the Detroit River served as a unified community, which contributed to the success of the UGRR. This proved vital during times of turmoil, including during the 1863 and 1867 race riots in Detroit and Windsor respectively. The aftermath of the UGRR reveals that it did not occur as an isolated event; rather, African Americans and Canadians were committed to a fight for greater social equality that they had begun engaging in decades ago. For many, this struggle would continue in the United States where they would rely on their newfound rights.

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