
by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

“Doing Battle in Freedom’s Cause” is about the life and work of Henry Bibb, Black abolitionist and civil rights advocate, in the United States and Canada, from 1842 to 1854. It examines Bibb’s activism as an antislavery lecturer and writer, his role as a convention leader, his participation in political abolition, and his work on the Underground Railroad. Bibb’s founding of the Refugee Home Society, and the Voice of the Fugitive, Canada’s first Black newspaper is also explored. A central theme of my analysis is the role of women in Bibb’s life. In addition, this dissertation engages with the question of Black manhood and masculinity. This work builds on the recently emerged scholarship on Black abolitionism. This new scholarship seeks to highlight the profound impact that the Black abolitionists made on the antislavery movement. As I researched Bibb’s life, and engaged with some primary sources, I became dissatisfied with the state of the history of African Canadian abolitionism, and the existing literature on Bibb.

“Doing Battle in Freedom’s Cause” is an original contribution to the scholarship on North American Black history and abolitionism, and seeks to restore Bibb to his rightful position as a foremost champion of Black freedom. It
breaks new ground in several salient ways. A separatist/integrationist framework has characterized much of the history of African-Canadian abolitionism. This framework has been used uncritically in much of the exploration of Bibb’s life. This focus has served to distort and undermine Bibb’s achievements. I have critiqued this interpretation and suggested new ways of looking at the ideology and philosophy that informed Bibb’s thought and action and those of other Black abolitionists in North America, especially Canada. I have also proposed that a transborder perspective be applied to the study of Bibb’s life. Bibb lived in both the United States and Canada at different periods of his life, and went back and forth across the Canadian/American border in his antislavery work and uplift activities. His commitment to Black liberation did not stop at either side of the border. The nation-state (whether Canada or the United States) therefore proves inadequate as an analytical category for the study of the life of this abolitionist. Bibb’s own transnational identity draws attention to the transnational subjectivities of his fellow border-crossing African Americans.
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DEDICATION

I Dedicate this study to the memory of my father, Edward Samuel Cooper, my first history teacher.
A note on terminology

The word Black is always capitalized unless I am using a quote in which it is not. Canada West is used interchangeably with Upper Canada and Ontario. The province was named Upper Canada in 1791 when it was carved out of old Quebec which became Lower Canada. Upper Canada was changed to Canada West in 1841 when Lower and Upper Canada became the “United Province of Canada”; Lower Canada was renamed Canada East. In 1867, at the time of the confederation of the older colonies, Canada West was renamed Ontario. Lower Canada once again took the name Quebec.
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Read! (Iqraa).

Read! in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, who created humans from a clot of blood. Read! for they Lord is most bountiful who taught humans the use of the pen; taught them what they knew not.

Surah Iqraa (chap. 96, verses 1-5) Holy Qu’ran.
Chapter 1.

**UNSILENCING THE PAST**

*Henry Bibb in History: A Discussion on Sources and Interpretation*

Henry Walton Bibb was born in 1815 in Oldham County, Kentucky to a slave woman, Mildred Jackson, and James Bibb, a white man and member of a slaveholding family. As was the custom and law in New World slavery, children born to slave women inherited the status of their mothers. Born a slave, Bibb grew up in and lived within that institution for the first 27 years of his life. Ownership by a succession of slaveholders punctuated Bibb’s enslavement. Like most enslaved African Americans, his tenure in slavery was marked by grief and loss. At a young age, for example, he experienced the breakup of his natal family as several of his brothers were sold away from the family.

At age 18 he married a slave named Malinda. Later on, the couple produced two children, the first of whom, Mary Frances, survived infancy. With the birth of his first child, Bibb vowed to escape from slavery, as he could no longer bear to witness the abuse of Mary Frances and her mother by their slaveowners. In a series of escape bids, sometimes with his marital family, sometimes not, Bibb attempted to flee slavery, but was recaptured several times. Finally, in December 1841, he permanently left his slave life behind. But he paid a high price. He lost his wife and child; he never saw them again. Bibb would grieve for his lost wife and child for the rest of his life.

Arriving in Detroit in January 1842, Bibb entered the antislavery crusade
and began to hone his skills as an abolitionist lecturer and agitator. It was in
Detroit that he began his rise to prominence as an abolitionist orator. While in
Detroit, Bibb frequently crossed over into Canada West (later Ontario) in his role
as an Underground Railroad agent, escorting runaway slaves. Bibb also joined
the Black Convention movement and become a vocal participant and leader.

By 1848 Bibb had risen to national fame as an abolitionist lecturer. His
agitation focused not only on the abolition of slavery, but also on race uplift and
the empowerment of free Blacks. He toured the Mid-west, the North, and the
North-east calling for the end of slavery, and for civil and human rights for free
Blacks. He was employed by various abolitionist organizations, including the
Michigan State Anti-Slavery Society, the Liberty party, the American Missionary
Association and the Female Emancipation Society of Massachusetts. Having
given up on ever reuniting with Malinda, his slave wife, Bibb, in 1848, married
Quaker schoolteacher and reform activist Mary Miles of Rhode Island. In 1849,
he published his autobiography, *The Narrative and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An
American Slave*.

Bibb ended his antislavery career in Canada West. He arrived in
November 1850. With seemingly boundless energy, he continued to agitate on
behalf of the abused Black masses. His commitment to Black uplift and the
abolition of American slavery led him to publish a newspaper, the *Voice of the
Fugitive*, which became the mouthpiece of a beleaguered community, to play an
active role in the establishment of a land settlement scheme for new Black
Canadians, and to create churches, schools, and temperance societies for his fellow Blacks. He also helped organize the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada, and the Windsor Anti-Slavery Society. Bibb was also a leading player in the Emancipation Day celebrations in the province.

Bibb died in 1854 at the age of 39 in Windsor, Canada West where he was buried. Overcoming serious hurdles in his life, Bibb made an inspired commitment to a cause which was critical for the liberation of African Americans. In the twelve years that Bibb worked as abolitionist leader and race man, he remained committed to “do battle in freedom’s cause.”

My study of Henry Bibb and his life and activism offers a thorough and complex portrait of the man. In fact, it is the first full-length study of this outstanding abolitionist. Though the main focus will be on Bibb’s abolitionism, I offer extensive discussions of Bibb’s life in slavery, not surprising given that slavery informed his entire life and was the raison d’être for his involvement in the Black freedom struggle. Furthermore, an analysis of the impact of slavery on Bibb’s life is especially pertinent to an understanding of Bibb’s relationships with some of the key women in his life.

This study is not a play-by-play description of Bibb’s life from birth to death. It offers an examination of his life and work for the years of his involvement in abolition. Thus it begins in 1842, the year Bibb escaped permanently from slavery, and ends in 1854, the year he died. An important contribution of this biography of Bibb is its treatment of Bibb as a “transborder”
subject living and working in two different countries on the same continent; it thereby brings into broad relief issues of continentalism and pan-Americanism among Black abolitionists. Cross-border in scope, this study considers the role and function of the Windsor/Detroit frontier in the life of Bibb (and hundreds of African Americans/Canadians) whether in Michigan or Ontario. Indeed, my research leads me to the conclusion that the border acted as a "fluid frontier" for people on both sides of the river.²

My study of Bibb further illumines the long neglected study of Black abolitionism in Canada. Despite its importance in mid-nineteenth century Canada, only a few have bothered to look closely at this subject. Available sources make it possible to write a whole book on the impact of the *Voice of the Fugitive* on Canadian abolitionism, Black life, and also the Black press in Canada. A full-length examination can also be done of the 1851 Toronto Convention.³ In addition to shedding light on Canadian and American abolitionism, Bibb's life functions as a prism for the larger historical questions of Black settlement in Ontario, patterns of prejudice, the development of Black institutions, Black leadership, the meanings of race and gender, and the manner in which national, racial and other identities evolved among and were reconstituted by Blacks.

As this biography documents, Bibb's personal life was marked by a great deal of tragedy. The separation from his wife and child, and his subsequent discovery of his wife's concubinage in the household of a planter, almost shattered him. Yet he survived. The recent historiography on American slavery has been dominated by the concept of agency. Keen to show that the enslaved were not atomized beings who surrendered to their abject condition, scholars
have argued that slaves “resisted” and constructed, as much as it was possible, autonomous lives for themselves. I accept this argument but stress that it is equally important to remember that enslaved people suffered intensely from the terrors of slavery. If they survived and resisted it was at a cost. They endured agony as they witnessed their limbs, families, lives, spirits, and souls broken by the institution of slavery. I contend that the tragedy, pain, degradation, and psychic torture endured by enslaved people must be brought back into the study of the enslaved. Bibb’s life in enslavement can be described as a crucible of grief and torment. Although this biography deals mainly with Bibb as abolitionist, it also brings to the fore the anguish and distress he suffered due to the grim realities of his enslavement.

Bibb was born in slavery and at his death slavery was still a strong institution in the land of his birth. This fact of slavery shaped his life and work, and that of other abolitionists. At the time of his final escape, and for the next 18 years, antislavery would become, and remain, the predominant reform issue before the American public. In Canada and the United States, Bibb was bolstered by and drew his inspiration from his own people; people who like him experienced the tyranny of white racism. This context is crucial in examining his life as is the role of his Black co-abolitionists.

Bibb, like other Black abolitionists already mentioned, also interacted with white abolitionists. This interaction led sometimes to longstanding friendships and cooperation; other times, to conflicts and hostilities between both parties. The issue of control was paramount in the white/Black abolitionist relationships. Whites controlled the official abolitionist movement and sought to shape it according to their vision. If Blacks disagreed with this vision they could ‘get into trouble’ with these whites. Bibb maneuvered himself in the world of
white abolitionism while all the time trying to steer an independent course.

In the ten chapters which comprise this study, I hope to delineate and explore the depth and magnitude of Bibb’s involvement in abolition and race reform. By doing so, I intend to restore Bibb to his rightful place as a leading American and Canadian human rights worker, and unsilence important aspects of his history. This introduction, which is also chapter one, delineates the sources for studying Bibb’s life, and the various interpretations put forward by historians of his life. It introduces the main arguments of the thesis, and more importantly, it challenges the dominant interpretations of Black abolitionism in Canada. It also situates the study in several historiographic frameworks, including Canadian, abolitionist, slavery, Atlantic, North American, and African diasporic. Chapter two explores Bibb’s role and contribution to antislavery as a lecturer. It discusses the role of literacy and coming to “voice” for Black abolitionists, and the question of authority within the larger abolitionist community. I argue that Bibb’s rise from unlettered slave to literate and articulate free person formed a central part in the construction of his (free) manhood as he reinvented himself from slave to free person. Included in this chapter is a discussion of Bibb as a lecturer for the “Bible for the Slave Crusade,” an American Missionary Association initiative. It also probes Bibb’s and other Black abolitionists’ religious philosophy, and discusses religion as an important tenet of race uplift.

Chapter three explores Bibb’s activism as an antislavery writer. Writing for ex-slaves and Blacks in general was a liberatory act, and by it they sought to reshape their identities, and refute racist stereotypes. Here I focus on Bibb’s autobiography, which, in my opinion, should be counted as important literature made all the more significant because it was written by an ex-slave.

Chapter four discusses Bibb’s “other activisms”—his work as an
Underground Railroad agent, his role as a convention leader, and his efforts as a political abolitionist. Here I refute the notion that the boundary between Ontario (the Detroit River, in this case) and the United States (Michigan) was fixed. I show how Bibb crossed and re-crossed the Detroit River escorting runaways in Ontario, and became a leader there even though he lived in Michigan at the time. Bibb’s crossing of boundaries is indicative of the many boundaries crossed by African Americans who became Canadians. By crossing the border into Canada, many African Americans crossed not only national and class boundaries, but also transgressed racial ones as well, as many, upon entering Canada, passed for white. The Detroit River represented a border where issues of identity, race, gender, and nation were contested. Bibb’s activism as Underground Railroad agent epitomized these contestations. Similarly, I argue that the Black conventions in which Bibb participated were political and gendered spaces where issues of gender, masculinity, race and politics were interrogated. Within these conventions, Bibb helped to construct discourses of nation, homeland, and a Black diaspora (though it was not named diaspora) as he and others sought to find a place where Blacks could live fully as humans.

In analyzing Bibb’s efforts in political abolition, I argue that Black reformers like Bibb sought a new power base in party politics as they witnessed with alarm the growth of proslavery agitation, and the strengthening of slavery. Political abolition gave them the opportunity to stretch the limits of and redefine their activism. Though political abolition created a schism in the antislavery
community, many Black and white reformers nonetheless saw it as a vital and superior alternative to moral suasion. To illustrate my points, I examine campaigning efforts done on behalf of Liberty and Free Soil parties. Abolitionists like Bibb were willing to use “whatever means necessary” in their struggle for Black liberation and power.

Chapter five functions as a bridge in the study. I have chosen not to tell Bibb’s story in a purely chronological manner, but instead, I structure the “story” by using a flexible chronological and thematic format. The year 1850, however, stands as a watershed year in Bibb’s life, and this deserves considerable attention. During this year, he acquired a new address in a foreign country, although he kept his old Detroit address. I probe the meaning of Bibb’s move to Ontario. Against the backdrop of the history of the province’s Black population, I show that contrary to popular belief, Bibb was not a fugitive slave fleeing the Fugitive Slave Law when he settled in Canada West. He entered the British colony as a self-conscious abolitionist prepared to ‘lead’ the hundreds of fugitives who had and were still crossing the border in response to the FSL. In addition, Bibb also saw himself as a leader of the freeborn Blacks who were also arriving from the United States, and of the resident Blacks who had deep roots in the province.

Chapter six explores Bibb’s involvement with the Refugee Home Society. Here I begin with a re-examination of this organization and the controversy its establishment engendered in the Ontario Black community. This chapter shows that far from being a “segregated colony” the RHS villages were conceived as
settlements where Blacks could reclaim their "manhood" by becoming industrious farmers and model citizens. I argue that Bibb's rhetoric regarding the RHS was conceived in classic nineteenth-century formulations of self-help and the virtues of rural life.

Bibb's newspaper, the *Voice of the Fugitive*, is the focus of chapter seven. Here, I describe the role and importance of the Black and abolitionist press of the nineteenth century, and delineate the significance of the *Voice of the Fugitive* in Ontario's Black community and the African American community of Michigan. This chapter offers an analysis of Henry Bibb as father and founder of the African Canadian Press, and Mary Bibb as a foremother of African Canadian journalism. In addition, it highlights the contributions of Theodore Holly to the *Voice*, and Canadian abolitionism.

Throughout this dissertation, I have used gender as a significant category of historical analysis. While a focus of earlier chapters is on the construction of Black masculinity, chapter eight is devoted to some of main women in Bibb's life and to gender relations. Bibb's mother, his two wives, and his daughter, were central figures in his life. Their lives and bodies became sites where issues of womanhood, identity, sexuality, and motherhood within the context of slavery and freedom were played out. Issues of Black manhood are also pertinent to this chapter. Finally, chapter nine looks at Bibb's death and legacy; it discusses the trajectory of abolitionism and reform in his life, and the meaning of Black abolitionism in Canada.
Sources on Bibb

Bibb left a permanent mark on the age in which he lived. He was one of the most well-known and active Black abolitionists in the United States and Canada, yet no full-length study of his life and work is available. The works on Bibb have failed to grasp the complexity of his life. As a result, Bibb’s contributions to abolitionism and Black emancipation, his achievements, and his legacy still remain largely unknown. His role as an important antislavery activist and his reputation as one of the most strident and militant abolitionist orators have almost been forgotten. It is not that sources for Bibb’s life are not available; in fact, the sources are diverse and plentiful. The following discussion will explore some of the key sources I used in writing Bibb’s biography. It also examines the various interpretations of Bibb provided by his contemporaries and subsequent scholars. I also intend to interrogate a disturbing silencing surrounding the history of Bibb, especially in Ontario. Ending that silence offers a significant contribution to the emerging field of Afro-Ontario history.

There is no collection of “Bibb papers.” Bibb died at age 39, and his early death, in all likelihood, prevented him from collecting and organizing his papers for posterity. His newspaper office was also burnt down, and many of his documents and books were likely destroyed. Fortunately, his was a very visible career. His engagement with the print world of antislavery, and relationships with some of abolition’s luminaries means that Bibb left a trail of evidence about his
life and work. I turn first to the primary sources. The text that is most indispensably for understanding Bibb’s early life, especially for the period before 1850, is Bibb’s autobiography *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave*, published in 1849. It offers critical insights on Bibb’s personal and private life. In this text Bibb relates his early life experiences as a slave, and of slave life in general, his marriage to Malinda, the birth of his two daughters, his various escape attempts, tenure under several masters, the separation from his wife and family through sale, his final escape from slavery, and the beginning of his career as an abolitionist lecturer. From this source we learn about aspects of Bibb’s natal and marital family life, as well as the history of slavery and the domestic slave trade. Bibb also informs us of his second marriage to fellow antislavery worker, Mary Miles.  

Newspapers are also paramount in detailing Bibb’s life in both the United States and Canada. Through his voluminous correspondence to several abolitionist journals in the United States, we are able to plot the trajectory of his career. Bibb was a regular contributor to the *Emancipator*, organ of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, and the principal journal devoted to political abolition. His name regularly dotted the pages of the *Signal of Liberty*, the organ of the Michigan State Anti-Slavery Society. Other journals to which Bibb also contributed include the *Palladium of Liberty*, the *Western Citizen*, (which serialized the story of Bibb’s life in slavery), *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, the *Liberty Standard*, the *North Star*, the *Free Soil*
Republican, the Anti-Slavery Bugle, and his own newspaper, the Voice of the Fugitive, which was published in Ontario from 1851-1853.

The main form of his correspondence with these journals, with the exception of the Voice, is that of letters. These letters detail Bibb’s work on the lecture circuit; in fact, we can plot his movement on his lecture tours from one corner of the United States to another by looking at the addresses from which his letters were sent. Bibb also informed the readers of the condition of life for free Blacks wherever he was, the state of antislavery in the country, his work on the Underground Railroad, how the fugitives and free persons in Ontario were adjusting to life there, and the customs that these Blacks, especially the fugitives, created once they arrived in Canada.

Of course, the letters to antislavery newspapers were intended for public reading. Bibb also wrote other kinds of letters, mainly to abolitionist colleagues, which were not necessarily intended for publication. These letters shed further light on his life. He corresponded with abolitionist luminaries such as Samuel Ringgold Ward, Lewis Tappan, James Birney, Gerrit Smith, and Martin Delany. He also wrote to four of his former masters, William and Silas Gatewood, Daniel Lane, and Albert Sibley. In a letter written to Bibb, Smith confessed that Bibb’s life story touched him. Bibb kept up an active correspondence with Tappan as treasurer of the American Missionary Association. From Tappan we learn that Bibb “swelled” his heart “with the deepest hatred of slavery,” thus attesting to Bibb’s skill as a speaker. Tappan played an important role in Bibb’s life as the
latter matured as an abolitionist. Tappan was an executive in both the AMA and the American Foreign and Anti-Slavery Society, and these two organizations in their abolitionist work drew on the energies of Bibb. Bibb became the AMA’s chief fundraising agent and lecturer in its “Bible for the Slave Campaign.” He also lectured for the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. The latter organization subsidized the publication of his autobiography. The correspondence between Bibb and Tappan form part of the AMA archives, which are a crucial source for any study of the history of Black abolitionism. James Pennington, Bibb, Mary Ann Shadd, Samuel Ringgold Ward, Henry Highland Garnet, and other important Black abolitionists all at some point in their careers worked with or for the AMA. After American slavery ended, the AMA still continued its efforts on behalf of the Black population. These archives are a rich source of history for Blacks in both the United States and Canada.\(^\text{13}\)

Although important, these letters do not offer us an open window on Bibb’s personal life. He presents himself and is presented very much as a public person. No journal or diary written by him, which might have broadened our perspective, has come to light.\(^\text{14}\) The most important personal record left to us is his autobiography but this narrative ends in 1849. In his autobiography, Bibb states that he and his fiancée Mary Miles corresponded with each other during the year they were engaged (1847-48), but these letters have not come to light, if indeed they are still extant.

In a lurid epistle written to her sister in 1853, Mary Miles Bibb’s teaching
assistant, Matilda E. Nichols, presents a very unflattering picture of Mary Bibb and by implication, Henry Bibb. According to Nichols, Mrs. Bibb accused her of having an affair with her husband and threatened to kill her. According to Nichols both she and Bibb denied the accusation, but Mrs. Bibb would not be placated. The letter suggests that contrary to the public image that the Bibbs presented to the world, in their personal life, at least during the period that Nichols resided with them, things were not going smoothly. As a piece of historical evidence, Nichols letter, though intriguing, offers a limited reading on Bibb’s private life in Canada.

This lack of sources on a subject’s personal life is one of the shortcomings that scholars sometimes encounter in their investigations of the lives of public persons, especially if those persons live in a past century and/or belong to a minority group. Aspects of Bibb’s personal life can still be reconstructed, especially for the time he and Mary Miles lived and worked together. The ‘abolitionist couple’ par excellence, they established several projects and institutions for the benefit of the Black community in Canada West.

If Bibb’s narrative is the foremost document for gaining insights into his early and private life, the Voice is the premier text for understanding the last years of Bibb’s life, his activism in Ontario, and his social and political thought.

In November 1850, Bibb moved permanently to Canada West. He arrived in Sandwich, Ontario, in November with his wife Mary, and mother Mildred. Soon after securing a place to live, the ever energetic Bibb began publishing the Voice
of the Fugitive. The first issue rolled off the press on 1 January 1851. This was Ontario’s first sustained Black newspaper.\textsuperscript{16}

The \textit{Voice}, abolitionist and emigrationist in focus, addressed and assessed the needs of the Black community. Its editorials and columns regularly condemned slavery and the injustices of “American democracy,” and urged American Blacks, slave and free, to migrate to Canada. The \textit{Voice} gave advice on various matters to Canadian Blacks, and promoted education, temperance, land ownership and agricultural pursuits. The \textit{Voice} provided its readers with information on antislavery activities in the U.S. and Canada and had agents in several states in the North. It was a well-distributed paper and reached a wide audience in Canada and the U.S. It is the principal source of Bibb’s life in Canada.

Bibb lived and worked in Canada from 1850 to 1854. The census of 1851 for Sandwich verifies his presence in the village and lists his occupation as “editor.” Bibb died in Canada in 1854 and his will is copied on microfilm at the Archives of Ontario in Toronto. An examination of his will provides a much-needed insight into his personal life. Bibb desired to establish Canada as a haven for oppressed American Blacks and to enable them, once in Canada, to become independent, mainly as farmers. He saw agriculture as the basis for Black empowerment, independence, pride and self-esteem. For Bibb, Black land-ownership and agricultural pursuit would also lay the foundation for the restoration of Black “manhood.” Thus, in November 1851, he joined with fellow
Black activist George Cary, white philanthropists from Michigan, and his wife Mary to purchase 2000 acres of land in the Windsor area and establish the Refugee Home Society. This land settlement scheme was designed to settle former slaves on the land and to help them become farmers and land-owners. The operations of the RHS and Bibb’s involvement have been documented in an unpublished dissertation by Peter Carlesimo. This is the most comprehensive treatment of the RHS and is critical for understanding Bibb’s involvement with the RHS.\textsuperscript{17}

Another important source on Bibb are the letters written by Mary Ann Shadd to the AMA. Shadd, Bibb’s friend-turned-nemesis, harangued Bibb and assaulted his character in a vicious feud that took place between the two from 1852 to 1854. That feud created divisions within the Black community. Shadd’s letters alert us to the fact that differences between Black abolitionists did have internecine implications.\textsuperscript{18}

In the three decades before 1860 Black Americans regularly held conventions at the state and national level to assess the condition of Black life and to make recommendations for its improvement. During the 1840s and 1850s, Henry Bibb was a regular attendant at these meetings. An active participant, he sometimes chaired and sat on committees. In Canada, he called and organized three conventions: the Sandwich Convention, held at Sandwich in November 1850; the North American Convention which met at Toronto in September 1851; and the Amherstburg convention which met at Amherstburg in 1853. Bibb’s
leadership was salient in all three Canadian conventions. The latter two were staunchly emigrationist in focus, and moved emigration from a sideline issue in the abolitionist debates to centre stage. At the North American and Amherstburg conventions, Bibb urged African Americans, slave and free, to leave the United States and settle in Canada. Jamaica was put forward as a second choice. What became clear at these two conventions was the Pan-Africanist vision and the diasporic sensibility exhibited by Bibb and some of the delegates. For example, at the instigation of Bibb and Theodore Holly, the North American and West India League was formed at the North American convention. This League was designed to bring Blacks in the New World African diaspora under one umbrella. After the Toronto convention Bibb emerged as the leading abolitionist emigrationist in North America. The Toronto convention marked a watershed in Bibb’s activism and in Black Canadian history.

Howard Bell has published Minutes of the Proceedings of National Conventions, 1830-1864, and Philip Foner and George Walker have edited the Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, 1840-1865. Both publications detail the importance of the conventions described above and underscore Bibb’s participation at some of these meetings. The proceedings of the Sandwich convention can be gleaned from the 1 January 1851 issue of the Voice of the Fugitive. Proceedings of the North American and the Amherstburg Conventions have been published in Peter C. Ripley’s Black Abolitionist Papers, Vol. 2, and the Voice, 24 September 1851. Such sources reveal much about antislavery,
emigration, and race improvement. Special mention must be made of the Black Abolitionist Papers, an absolutely fundamental source not only of Bibb’s life but also that of numerous other Black abolitionists. Hundreds of documents written by African American abolitionists have now been preserved on 17 reels of microfilm.20 The editors of this collection have also published select material drawn from the reels in five volumes of printed texts, also called the Black Abolitionist Papers. I have used both versions of the BAP to gain access to several documents written by Henry Bibb.

Several publications written by Bibb’s contemporaries function as sources for his history. Martin Delany, Bibb’s colleague and friend, in his book The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People, wrote a short biography of Bibb. Delany described Bibb’s work as an antislavery activist and his labours on behalf of the Canadian Black community. He described Bibb as an “eloquent speaker,” and praised his talents. William Wells Brown, in The Black Man, is equally laudatory in his biography of Bibb.21

Let us now turn our attention to some of the main secondary sources which deal with Henry Bibb. Floyd J. Miller, in the Search for a Black Nationality, discusses Bibb’s career as a lecturer and emigrationist. He articulates well Bibb’s ideology as an emigrationist and highlights the fact that Bibb’s change from an “Americanist” to an emigrationist came only after 1850 with the implementation of the Fugitive Slave Law. In response, Bibb, like many American Blacks, despaired that African Americans would ever find equality,
justice, and freedom in the Republic. Dwight Dumond’s *Anti-Slavery* casts Bibb in the role of leader of the Black community in Ontario; Jane and William Pease in their numerous publications on abolitionism, but particularly in *They Who Would be Free*, and *Black Utopia*, discuss Bibb in his role as abolitionist orator and Canadian Black leader; and Roger Hite’s article “Voice of a Fugitive” looks at Bibb as newspaper editor and race leader. Both Stephen Butterfield in *Black Autobiography* and William Andrews in *To Tell a Free Story* give a close reading of Bibb’s autobiography. Andrews, in particular, casts Bibb in the role of an Odysseus, the questing hero, [the intrepid slave] who finally overcame American slavery; however, unlike the historical Odysseus, Bibb lost his Penelope. David Katzman’s *Before the Ghetto, Blacks in Nineteenth-Century Detroit*, includes an extended biography of Bibb, and praises his work in the Detroit Black community and in the Michigan antislavery crusade. Katzman sees Bibb as a committed, energetic, and persuasive abolitionist who was “influential in unifying Black abolitionist efforts” in Michigan. Before the Ghetto is invaluable source on Bibb’s years in Michigan. In an article on Mary Miles Bibb, I also provide details about Bibb and the various projects the couple founded.

Bibb entered the antislavery crusade as a “political” abolitionist. He also became the principal Black lecturer for the Liberty party. This party has the distinction of being the first antislavery political party in the United States; its mandate was the immediate abolition of slavery through the use of the vote. In 1844, the second time that the Liberty party fielded candidates for the
presidential election, Bibb took the stump for the party, campaigning and lecturing throughout Michigan, Ohio, New York, and New England. Though the Liberty party failed to win the election, it made a good showing. Bibb continued supporting the Liberty party until 1848 when it went into decline with the rise of the Free Soil party. The Free Soil party was a “compromise” party. This meant that it did not call for the abolition of slavery but only that slavery should not be expanded to the newly acquired territories. The Free Soilers wanted these new lands to be colonized by “free” labour. Because of its partial antislavery leaning, Bibb gave half-hearted support to the Free Soil party.25

Bibb’s involvement in both parties can be assessed by looking at his letters to various newspapers, and at his editorials in his own paper. Charles H. Wesley’s discussion of Blacks in antislavery political parties provides a historical account of the involvement of Bibb and other leading Black abolitionists in the Free Soil and Liberty parties. Wesley argues since the “abolition” parties were white-dominated, Bibb and other Black antislavery activists sought to create an independent space for themselves.26

In an influential article Fred Landon, a Canadian historian and one of the country’s chief chroniclers of the Ontario Black experience, attempts to unify the threads of Bibb’s activism in Ontario and the United States, particularly the former place. Landon provides an excellent panoramic view of Bibb’s life. Two other works on Canadian history discuss Bibb at length, Robin Winks’ The Blacks in Canada and Daniel G. Hill’s The Freedom Seekers. While the
multidimensional nature of Bibb’s activism is explored by Winks, Hill chooses to
give a rather partisan view of Bibb’s association with the RHS. 27

Narratives of other ex-slaves also provide a context and background for
Bibb’s life. These include Wells Brown’s Narrative of William Wells Brown, a
Fugitive Slave, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, and Incidents in the
Life of a Slave Girl by Harriet Jacobs. All are valuable and provide a United
States context for Bibb’s narrative. Josiah Henson’s Autobiography provides rich
details on Black life in Ontario. Another contemporary of Bibb and also a former
slave, the antislavery orator and intellectual Reverend Samuel Ringgold Ward,
lived for a while in Ontario and was active in the Black community and the Anti-
Slavery Society of Canada. Ward was also a regular contributor to the Voice.
From his autobiography, Samuel Ringgold Ward, His Anti-Slavery Labours we
can extract a history of the Ontario Bibb lived in. Aspects of Bibb’s life have also
appeared on reel. A National Film Board of Canada film aptly titled Voice of the
Fugitive highlights Bibb’s life as newspaper editor, Canadian Underground
Railroad agent, and uplift leader. 28

Henry Bibb in History

Bibb’s activism and role in the Black freedom struggle have been
subjected to various interpretations; there has also been a host of
misinterpretations, misunderstandings, and silencing. To date, most
commentators have focused on either his American or his Canadian years. Either
focus has led to a partial understanding of his life, and in some instances,
misinterpretation. In what follows, I shall discuss how Bibb and his activism have been viewed by contemporary and modern day historians and observers. Bibb’s antislavery and race uplift work have been placed on a spectrum bordered by two dominant poles of interpretations. Bibb is presented either as a committed abolitionist activist and viable race leader or as a leader who advocated racial segregation. Various contemporaries of Bibb, including Wells Brown, Delany, poet and abolitionist, John Greenleaf Whittier, Tappan, Michael Willis and Thomas Henning, officers of the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada, offer the first interpretation. Historians such as Benjamin Quarles, Fred Landon and Jason Silverman cast Bibb in the role of experienced and concerned leader who brings settlers into the province to “colonize” it. Landon celebrates Bibb’s efforts on behalf on the Liberty party in 1844, and suggests that the party owed much of its success to Bibb’s efforts. Silverman, who analyzes Bibb’s work as newspaper editor, portrays Bibbs as an uncompromising defender of Black civil rights.

The casting of Bibb in the role of “separatist” can be traced to the writings and agitation of Bibb’s contemporary Mary Ann Shadd, a former colleague of Bibb. Shadd fiercely opposed the RHS (to which Bibb was highly committed) mainly on the ground that it was opened only to ex-slaves. She felt that membership criteria for the RHS discriminated against free-born people like herself. Shadd argued that the RHS relied on “begging” or donations to finance its land acquisitions, and that it isolated the ex-slaves from the wider society. Shadd’s disagreement turned into a feud with Bibb, and she began to accuse him
and other RHS officers of fraud. Yet as will be later shown, Shadd’s opposition
was opportunistic and probably reflected in part her jealousy of Bibb’s
popularity.

Of interest is that none of Bibb’s contemporaries, from Frederick Douglass
who urged him and Shadd to “stop fighting” to Bibb’s cohorts in the ASSC, ever
shared Shadd’s views. The assault she launched against Bibb did not prejudice
his contemporaries’ views of him. For modern scholars this has not been the
case. Daniel Hill’s discussion of Bibb is libellous, fraught with errors, and hence
untrustworthy. Putting Shadd on a pedestal, above the fray she helped initiate,
Hill repeats her accusations and minimizes Bibb’s role as Canada West’s
foremost abolitionist of his time. For Hill, Bibb is the bad guy who collects
money on behalf of the fugitives, pockets the money, and then isolates the
ignorant fugitives on freeholds in the forests. Hill is the writer responsible for
advancing and pushing the view that Bibb was a separatist while Shadd was
instead an integrationist and assimilationist. Jane and William Pease’s *Black
Utopia* merely repeats Shadd’s charges and offers no analysis. Robin Winks
offers a more balanced view of Bibb but is still influenced by the separatist
theory.

Roger Hite’s work on Bibb is exemplary. This work represents a first-time
scholarly analysis of aspects of Bibb’s political philosophy, the importance of his
newspaper the *Voice of the Fugitive*, and Bibb’s centrality to the emigration
debate. Yet even Hite sees Bibb as a separatist simply because Bibb urged his
fellow African Americans to “separate” from the United States. This misinterpretation of Bibb looms largest in the popular mind, but the academic community is not exempt from the temptation of this vulgar portrait. Let us interrogate it.

Since this portrait sprang from Bibb’s involvement with the RHS, we must begin there. The RHS was not an organization of segregation. It was not a colony where Blacks would live separate from whites and other Blacks, as in the case of the Buxton settlement (officially known as the Elgin colony). Lots were not purchased contiguously, but interspersed within settlements. Bibb never advocated segregation but instead insisted that the fugitives own their own land. It is ludicrous to view the selling of land only to ex-slaves as Black separatism. It is akin to viewing John Talbott’s action of settling only white British settlers on government land as white separatism. Peter Carlesimo has tried to debunk this view of Bibb in his dissertation, but this work remains unpublished and read mainly by a small group of specialists. Although essential for any scholarly treatment of Black Ontario, too few historians and other scholars in the field have given Carlesimo’s work the attention it deserves.

Upon entering Ontario, Bibb found a society structured along caste lines where race was the central denominator. Whites had gone the route of racial segregation. They barred Blacks from schools, churches and temperance societies, thus forcing Blacks to set up their own. Nevertheless, a reformer like Bibb was still in favour of Blacks fighting the system by refusing to set up
segregated schools. He called a group of Black parents keen to set up their own school “ignoramuses” who were not of “the intelligent portion of the coloured population.” Such comments both betray his elitism and reveal his commitment to integration. An appreciation of Bibb’s ideology on the future of the race requires a reading of his editorials and they clearly show that Bibb was as “integrationist” as anyone else. His interaction with white abolitionists also reveals his commitment to what can be called integration politics. He operated comfortably within biracial organizations such as the Canadian Anti-Slavery Society which he co-founded, the AMA, for which he was an agent and lecturer, and the Liberty Party.

My research shows the folly of using the dichotomous concepts of separatist and integrationist to describe Black leaders of the nineteenth century and even the twentieth century. Black abolitionists and their world view were vastly more dynamic and sophisticated. These reformers changed, grew, matured, and as they did so, they disowned and embraced various ideologies and strategies for emancipation. A reformer who today is dubbed a separatist can tomorrow advocate “integration.” Sterling Stuckey makes this point well in his discussion of Martin Delany and Frederick Douglass. Douglass traditionally has been described as an assimilationist, and Delany a nationalist separatist. But Stuckey notes that Delany had assimilationist qualities and Douglass, likewise, had nationalist ones. In fact, Delany began his abolitionist career subscribing to the Americanist position. By the early 1850s he began to advocate emigration. One
has to look closely at the trajectory of abolitionism and race struggles in the lives of both men before one can adequately assess their political views and activism. As Stuckey suggests, shifts in ideological stances taken by Black abolitionists challenge the separatist/integrationist dichotomy as a useful framework within which to analyze Black abolitionist thought. In the case of Henry Bibb, it is useless.

By contrast, Bibb’s interpretation of his own life, in his autobiography and other writings, is valid. In these works, Bibb presented himself as a self-made man, a fighter who took the blows of American racism, but who nonetheless made it “against all odds.” He escaped slavery on his own, acquired literacy skills, contributed to literature, and propelled himself through his oratory into the limelight. He saw himself as a model of self-empowerment, and as one who embodied the “manhood” that became central to his social and political rhetoric. His portrayal of himself is of a man who loved Black people, and was outraged by the violence committed against them. His love and his outrage motivated him to do battle on their (and his) behalf. In none of his writings did Bibb advocate segregation or separatism. He sought to put what he considered the needs of the Black masses at the top of his reform agenda. Having grasped the debilitating and demoralizing effects that American slavery and racism and Canadian racism had on Black people, Bibb understood that if Blacks were to withstand these attacks, they had to put “race first” and strive for racial and self-empowerment. Whites for centuries—even antislavery ones—had been putting race first. No one dubbed
them "separatist."

Why Biography

My interest in Henry Bibb came about as a result of the research I was doing on Black teachers in Canada West. One of the teachers that I focused on was Bibb's wife, Mary Bibb. Bibb himself was also a Sunday school teacher. Though I lamented the fact that Mary Bibb was relatively unknown despite her prominence in the mid-nineteenth-century Black community in Ontario, and blamed such neglect on racism and sexism, I also realized that Bibb himself was also largely ignored by historians. Even as I "recovered" Mary Bibb, her husband remained submerged. My interest in Henry Bibb deepened as I researched the nineteenth century Black communities of Windsor and Amherstburg for my doctoral thesis. As I visited the area, and also Detroit, I came to realize the important role that Bibb had played in the Black communities on both sides of the river. Bibb loomed large in my further investigations. His leadership role spilled into several areas: religion, education, journalism, agriculture, and temperance, just to name a few. In the Detroit River district he was the axis upon which abolitionist and uplift activities rotated. In short, he was Canada West's and Michigan's number one Black citizen.

My research took me on a path of discovery, and in response I decided to shift my focus to the life and work of Henry Bibb. I journeyed into abolitionism on both sides of the border, I read voraciously on the reform movements of the nineteenth century, slavery—both the northern and southern varieties, and on
proslavery ideologies, the Northern Black communities, and Ontario history at mid-century. I also researched the history of Blacks in New France, Upper Canada and Nova Scotia. In so doing, I learned more about the complexities of Canadian slavery and felt yet more frustrated that many historians still fail to see it as a subject worthy of scholarly attention. As I learned more about Henry Bibb, I was particularly dismayed by how “hidden from history” this formidable historical figure remains. It was equally alarming to discover how the few writers who chose to pay any attention to his activism misinterpreted his actions. The feud between him and Mary Ann Shadd loomed large in these narratives, with Bibb getting the ‘rotten end of the stick.’ What is unfortunate is that it is the opinion of these writers that dominate any discussion on Bibb’s work in Canada. Bibb’s career was multi-layered and varied, yet it is the “feud” that is often highlighted. This serves to distort his many contributions to Black freedom, and, indeed, to largely silence his many important contributions, particularly during his Ontario years.

This distortion has even held sway in the popular mind. For example, at a recent Black history month celebration in Ottawa, a group of middle school students did a performance of “Black Heroes.” One of the “heroes” was Mary Ann Shadd. The actor stated that Miss Shadd “was the first Black person anywhere in North America to start a newspaper.” I was flabergasted. At the end of the performance, I commended the teacher for her hard work with the students and took her email address. I later told her, via email, that Samuel
Cornish and John B. Russwurm were the first Blacks to begin a newspaper “anywhere in North America.” I also informed her that in the case of Canada, Henry Bibb was the first person to edit and publish a “Black” newspaper.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, in his insightful study *Silencing the Past*, has shown how historians, sometimes consciously, have chosen to ‘cover up’ important historical facts, events, and personages, because of their own prejudice. Trouillot highlights the treatment of the Haitian Revolution and Colonel Jean-Baptiste San Souci, a Black rebel chief in the Revolution, as two salient examples of conscious and deliberate historical silencing by Western historians. Trouillot explains that for the French slaveholders in San Domingue, the revolution was simply “unthinkable.” They had long been stating, despite the numerous Caribbean slave revolts and rumours of revolts, that the slave was content. When the revolution succeeded, slaveholders and history writers responded by declaring it “impossible.” The most radical revolution of the eighteenth century therefore entered Western historiography as a “non-event.” This trend has continued up to modern times. In the case of Henry Bibb in Ontario history, a similar trend is occurring. This dissertation offers a necessary corrective to this distortion, by departing from the usual analysis to the “feud” and by offering a more thorough critique of the actions of Mary Ann Shadd. As such it breaks new grounds in African Canadian history.

And did I dump Mary Bibb in favour of a man? My response to this question, posed by colleagues, friends and even myself, is that I did not choose
Henry Bibb, but rather, he chose me. A further answer is that I have paid serious attention to the women in Bibb’s life. In the chapter on the *Voice of the Fugitive*, Mary Bibb’s pivotal role is acknowledged. And in the chapter on the women in Bibb’s life, I highlight his first wife Malinda, their daughter Mary Frances, and explores issues of femininity, masculinity, women in slavery, and Black women in reform. A feminist analysis can also be brought to bear on Bibb’s life. Even if this is men’s history, we must remember that men’s history cannot be done well without women’s history. As historians have demonstrated, both femininity and masculinity are constructed in relation to each other, and take shape within specific historical contexts.37

Biography emerged as the most suitable form of writing this history. Feminist historians have made effective use of this genre, bringing to the fore the life of our submerged foremothers.38 What are the benefits of using this method? Biography allows for a close ‘reading’ of the subject and also provides a framework for interpreting and analyzing particular historical experiences. As Barbara Tuchman states, biography showcases “a prism of history” which “encompasses the “universal in the particular.””39 Scholars of abolition have also favoured this method as a way to bring to the historical stage Black abolitionists, both well-known and unknown.

Henry Garnet, for example, appears in several published full-length biographies, the first being Earl Ofari’s “*Let Your Motto be Resistance.*” Garnet was perhaps the nineteenth century’s most gifted and prominent orator
Alexander Crummell certainly thought so) but this important reform activist has
been understudied. Crummell’s political thought is explored in Gregory Rigsby’s
*Alexander Crummell.* Samuel Ringgold Ward’s Christian philosophy is stressed
by Ronald Burke in his book on Ward. William Farrison, the foremost scholar of
William Wells Brown has written extensively on the subject. James Pennington,
fugitive slave turned Congregational minister, is featured in Herman Thomas’
*James W.C. Pennington.* Richard Blackett in his *Beating Against the Barriers*
offers an extensive treatment of Pennington and also of William Howard Day,
Ellen and William Craft, John Sella Martin and Robert Campbell. Blackett’s
work is particularly important for delineating the transatlantic and international
nature of Black abolitionism. The abolitionism of Charles B. Ray, Theodore
Wright, James McCune Smith, James Forten, Charles Lenox Remond, David
Ruggles, and others still awaits detailed work. The reform activism of these men,
however, is given some treatment in works such as Quarles’ *Black Abolitionists*
and Ripley’s *Black Abolitionist Papers.* Though escaped slave and hunted
fugitive Shadrach Minkins was not an active abolitionist in the way that we
understand the term, his life—his flight from slavery, his fugitive slave trial in
Boston, and his removal to Montreal—is the subject of Gary Collison’s *Shadrach
Minkins.* Minkins did not belong to an elite group of Black abolitionists and did
not move in their circles, but instead represented the ordinary man and woman
who “agitated at the ground level” but remained historically obscure. Frederick
Douglass is the subject of several biographies including Benjamin Quarles’
*Frederick Douglass* and Maria Deidrich’s *Love Across Color Lines*. For the longest time scholars took him to be the *only* Black abolitionist. Still, Douglass was the premier nineteenth-century Black abolitionist and as such deserves the attention given him.49

Mention must be made of Wells Brown’s important and pioneering book *The Black Man*. Wells Brown wrote this book to “vindicate” the race, and it must be counted as one of the earliest attempts to write Black history through biography. In *The Black Man* Wells Brown provides biographical sketches of 57 Black “achievers,” many of whom were leading abolitionists. The overwhelming majority of Wells Brown’s subjects were male and African American, though he discussed the lives of a few African American women, as well as Caribbean reformers and revolutionaries.

Official Black abolitionism was primarily a male preserve and discourse. The few public women abolitionists who entered this realm strove to ensure that they would not be silenced. They worked to ensure that Black abolitionism as they understood it would become more representative and multi-dimensional. The heterogeneous background of these women also demonstrates the diverse streams from which Black abolitionism sprang.

Sixty three years after the publication of William Wells Brown’s *Black Man*, Hallie Q. Brown, in anticipating the interest of the modern scholars in the lives of nineteenth century abolitionist Black women, published her *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction*. Here she provides biographical
sketches of Black women “pioneers,” whom she hoped would serve as inspiring role models to Black youths. But the more well-known of Hallie Brown’s subjects had to wait for several decades before anyone wrote full-length studies of their life and work. One of the two most famous nineteenth century Black women abolitionists, Harriet Tubman, still awaits a scholarly biography. Carlton Mabee has written an insightful biography of the other most well-known Black woman abolitionist, Sojourner Truth. Mabee’s biography is important because he was the first scholar to question the manner in which white feminists (both contemporary and subsequent scholars) represented and positioned Truth’s words. Mabee’s re-interpretation of Truth is timely. Building on Mabee’s insights, Nell Irvin Painter produced new and exciting work on Truth. Marilyn Richardson shines much needed light on the work of Maria Stewart. Stewart, an ardent abolitionist, was the first woman to lecture publicly in the United States, and the first Black woman to publish political speeches and essays. Melba Boyd’s Discarded Legacy investigates the “poetics and politics” of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper’s life, while Jane Rhodes examines the life of Mary Ann Shadd Cary in a recent book. Susan Paul, Anna Murray Douglass, (first wife of Frederck Douglass), Charlotte Forten, Harriet Purvis, Sarah Mapps Douglass, antislavery lecturer, Sarah Parker Remond, and several other female abolitionists make an appearance in Dorothy Sterling’s We Are Your Sisters. Black women started the first female antislavery society in the United States. By printing the constitution of the society, and the names of the founders, Sterling restores these
early abolitionists to history and posterity. Shirley Yee’s publication, *Black Women Abolitionists* is a collective biography of some of the main female actors, including Anna Murray Douglass. Maria Diedrich’s, *Love Across Color Lines* also provides an extensive analysis of Murray Douglass’ reform activism and relationship with husband Frederick. Richard Blackett also offers an important discussion of Ellen Craft in *Beating Against the Barriers*. What is useful about these biographies of Black women abolitionists is that they continue to enlarge our understanding of Black abolitionism.42

A study of Bibb and abolitionism has taught me several things, one being the need to see Black abolitionism not as a movement isolated within the confines of the United States, but as an international and diasporic movement. Bibb was Pan-American, Pan-African, and an internationalist in his vision and rhetoric. My research enabled me to discover the movement and migrations of African Canadians to other parts of North America, to Africa, to the Caribbean, and to Europe. What these discoveries alerted me to was that this study cannot simply be contextualized in the matrix of Canadian history but must also be grounded in African Diasporic history, continental North American history, and Atlantic history.

I wrote this thesis during a time when the concept that race is a socially constructed category ‘created and articulated through language to produce meaning’ gained currency in Academy. This insight is crucial to understanding Henry Bibb. His father was white, his mother was mulatto, and in American
racial parlance he was an octroon. Since he had more than ‘one drop’ so he was a socially a “Negro” even if biologically or genetically he had more “white” blood than “Black.” Yet Bibb lived a “Black” life. He had no choice. He was born a slave and his life was informed by Black cultural norms. He married women who like himself were very light-skinned but who were defined by society as “Black.” Perhaps of greater importance is the fact that though Bibb could pass, he vehemently chose not to. He campaigned against slavery and American racism as a Black agitator, and his lifelong concern was the emancipation of the downtrodden Black masses. Bibb saw himself as Black, defined himself as Black, and was viewed by white society as Black. He did not wish it to be otherwise.

Several writers have spoken of the process of writing biography and identifying with their subject. These writers also note that it was equally important to distance themselves, at some point, from their subject. As a Black woman writing a biography of a socially- and self-defined Black man, I have approached this writing from a somewhat “insider” position. My lived experiences as a member of the oppressed group to which Bibb belonged allowed me an “empathetic” entry into the “text” of Bibb’s life. Yet time, space, gender, and social and political contexts provided distance. Bibb performed on a nineteenth century stage, in the drama that was abolition, he was male; I am female, living and writing at the beginning of the twenty-first century.
Notes

1 I owe this title to Michel-Rolph Trouillot and his *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).


4 A Representative example is John Blassingame's *Slave Community; Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

5 Frederick Douglass is a good example of a Black abolitionist who experienced the negative and the positive in his interaction with white abolitionists. Douglass started his career as the "favoured" son of the white abolitionists of Boston, who, later as Douglass became more independent, became alarmed at this development. They then sought to exercise more of their control in his life. Douglass rebelled, and these whites led by W.L. Garrison launched a vicious attack on him, his work, and his reputation. See Benjamin Quarles, “The Breach Between Douglass and Garrison,” *Journal of Negro History*, 23 (April 1938) 144-154.

6 This is not to say that there was not a Black abolitionism; there was. But the mainstream, national antislavery societies, even though Blacks participated in them, were white-controlled. For example, the two national antislavery bodies (after 1840) had only a few Blacks on their executive committees. State antislavery bodies also had the same arrangement. Black abolitionists had to move away from these white-dominated bodies in order to establish their independence. In some instances, some Black abolitionists (David Ruggles and his cohorts in New York City is an example) never joined white movements, but continued to maintain a distinct Black abolitionism. Jane and William Pease and other scholars have identified at least seven different kinds of abolitionism. There was a Black abolitionism, a white one, political abolitionism, the moral suasion variety, Methodist abolitionism, Quaker abolitionism, and others. Jane and William Pease. *They Who Would Be Free*, 3-17; Ripley, *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 2: 1-67.

White and Black reformers published antislavery or abolitionist newspapers. See Chapter two for more details on Bibb’s contribution to antislavery newspapers.

For one example see the *Emancipator*, 17 Feb. 1847.

Martin Delany and Samuel Ward were Black; the others were white. All made significant contributions to antislavery. Delany is first and foremost remembered as the “father of Black Nationalism.” A physician by training, he edited and published the *Mystery* from his home in Pittsburgh. Ward was an uncompromising preacher who was active in antislavery in New York state, Canada, and Britain; Tappan was a New England millionaire silk merchant who became president of the American and Foreign Anti-slavery Society, and treasurer of the American Missionary Association. He devoted much of his wealth to funding the abolitionist crusade; Smith was a New York philanthropist who like Tappan, gave much money to antislavery. He went on to co-found the Liberty party in 1840. Birney, originally from Kentucky, was a wealthy and influential slaveholder. He converted to abolitionism, freed his slaves, and fled to Ohio where he began publishing the *Philanthropist*, an abolitionist weekly. Birney relocated to Michigan where in 1840 he ran as the Liberty party presidential candidate in the presidential election. Tappan, Ward, and Delany corresponded with Bibb before and after 1850, while the Bibb’s correspondence to Birney occurred before 1850, the year Bibb migrated to Canada. Betty L. Fladeland, *James Gillespie Birney: Slaveholder to Abolitionist* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1955); Dorothy Sterling, *The Making of an Afro-American, Martin Robinson Delany, 1812-1885* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996); Samuel Ringgold Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro: His Anti-Slavery Labours in the United States, Canada, and England* (Reprint, Nendeln, Switzerland: Kraus, 1970); Betram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Cleveland: Western Reserve University Press, 1969). This biography seems written with the intent to diminish Tappan; for a more favourable view see Clara Merritt DeBoer, “Be Jubilant My Feet,” *African American Abolitionists in the American Missionary Association, 1839-1861* (New York: Garland, 1994) 29-33. On Smith see *Dictionary of American Biography*, ed. Dumas Malone, (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1935) 270-71; Lawrence J. Friedman, “The Gerrit Smith Circle: Abolitionism in the Burned-Over District,” *Civil War History* 26, 1 (1980) 18-38.


Bibb’s correspondence with Tappan are in the AMA archives, Fisk University, and the Amistad Research Center, New Orleans.

Unlike their white counterpart, nineteenth-century Black activists, male and female presented themselves in very public ways. The private or personal was seen as something that should remain private and personal. There was a fear in exposing the private. For Black activists were battling not only racism and slavery but also an assaulting sexual stereotype. Blacks aspired to be respectable and confiding to diaries, if come to light, could damage their respectability and encourage racist whites to further assault their character. Philadelphia abolitionist Charlotte Forten is an exception to this. She kept a diary for much of the second half of the nineteenth century. Brenda Stevenson, ed. *Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimke* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).
15 Matilda E. Nichols to Harriet Fuller, 15 July 1853; Fuller to George Whipple, 18 July 1853, American Missionary Society, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans.


18 Mary Ann Shadd to George Whipple, 28 Dec. 1852, AMA-ARC.


20 Microfilmed by the Microfilming Corporation of America (1981).


24 Political abolition the dominant antislavery strategy used by the majority of Black abolitionists after 1840. The swing to this method of activism came about because many abolitionists felt that moral suasion (convincing Americans of the evils of slavery and hence the need for its abolition through the use of the written and spoken word) by itself was no longer an effective strategy. Many abolitionists, especially those from the west, turned to politics to bring about the end of slavery. They were called "political" abolitionists. James Brewer Stewart, Holy Warriors, The Abolitionists and American Slavery (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976) chaps. 4, 5; Dumond, AntiSlavery; BAP, 3: 23-29.

25 Theodore C. Smith's The Liberty and Free Soil Parties (New York, 1897) is still a good source on these two parties.


31 Roger W. Hite, "Voice of A Fugitive."

32 See for example Jane Rhodes work on Mary Ann Shadd Cary. In discussing the RHS, Rhodes completely ignores Carlesimo's work. A reading of his work would have prevented her from making some of the errors she made with regards to the RHS. Rhodes, Mary Ann Shadd Cary.

33 Voice, 1 Jan. 1832. Also cited in Susan E. Houston and Alison Prentice, Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) 298-299.


35 See Bibb's preface in his "Narrative" in Puttin' On Ole Massa, 62-63.


Chapter 2.

If I had a thousand tongues, I could find useful employment for them all.  
*Henry Bibb, The Emancipator, 21 April 1847.*

Henry Bibb is a bright, mild looking, gentlemanly *sort of man, about 34 years of age, not more African than European in his lineage, and in fact, doubtless, having some of the finest Kentucky blood in his veins.*  
*Anti-Slavery Bugle, 3 Nov. 1849.*

In personal appearance he was tall and slim, a pleasing countenance, half white, hair brown, eyes gray, and possessed a musical voice, and a wonderful power of delivery.  
*No one who heard Mr. Bibb, in the years 1847, ‘8, and ‘9, can forget the deep impression that he left behind him. His natural eloquence and his songs enchained an audience as long as the speaker wanted them.*  
*William Wells Brown, 1863.*

**HENRY BIBB AS AN ANTISLAVERY LECTURER, 1842-1850**

Bibb became part of active antislavery circles upon his arrival in Michigan in 1842. Detroit was to serve as his base. Between 1842, when Bibb arrived in Detroit after his final escape from slavery, and in 1850 when he left Michigan and settled in Sandwich, Canada West, he was actively involved in the abolitionist movement in Michigan, the North-east, the Mid-west, and elsewhere in the country. These years witnessed Bibb’s maturation as an abolitionist and in this period, he moved from the sidelines to become a “professional fugitive” or career abolitionist, establishing his reputation as a renowned abolitionist orator. One of the most effective strategies deployed by Bibb to bring his abolitionist message to the American public was the lecture platform.
In January 1842, when Bibb arrived in Detroit, it was home to a few hundred Blacks. The city itself had a population of 8,000 people out of a total state population of about 200,000. In total, the Black population of the state numbered just under 2,000 with Detroit having the largest number. The city was a thriving centre and capital of the state. It had a well-stocked reading room with “one hundred papers, foreign and American, besides ten or twelve American and British periodicals.” Apart from having the largest number of Blacks in the state, Detroit also had another advantage—a crucial one for those with Black freedom on their minds—it was situated right across the river from Canada. Every fugitive knew that the moment she stepped on Canadian soil, she would be free. Detroit therefore was one of the most suitable places for an ex-slave like Bibb to make his home. For numerous American runaway slaves, and also free Blacks, this city served as a frontier, in both a physical and symbolic sense, between freedom and bondage.

Detroit in 1842 had also become the centre of abolitionism in the state. This was due to a conscious decision made by the state anti-slavery society in 1837. Members and officers of the Michigan State Anti-Slavery Society felt that since most prospective settlers passed through Detroit on their way into the interior their “first impressions of Michigan were to a great degree associated with what [they] saw and heard in Detroit.” Thus, an antislavery feeling could be injected into the new arrivals if Detroit were won over. Though it was a struggle for antislavery organizers to “win over” Detroit, by the time of Bibb’s arrival, it could be said that they had achieved some success.
The infusion of abolitionist sentiment in Detroit and Michigan was the work of various antislavery bodies at the state and local levels. The first antislavery organization in Michigan had been formed in 1832 in the village of Adrian which was at that time called Logan. A group of Loganites, primarily Quakers, led by Elizabeth Chandler, founded the Logan Anti-Slavery Society. After this date, other local antislavery groups proliferated, especially in southern Michigan. Finally, in 1836, a year before Michigan entered the Union, the Michigan State Anti-Slavery Society was formed. It became an auxiliary of the American Anti-Slavery Society, the national body, and endorsed the AASS's philosophical concept and practice of moral suasion as the only route for the immediate abolition of slavery. The people who organized the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833 had invoked moral suasion as the chief means by which to end slavery. This meant persuading Americans, through the use of the word (press, pulpit, petitions, pamphlet), that slavery was a sin and must be got rid of. By this method, it was hoped, the conscience of Americans would be awakened and they would rise up and force their rulers to end slavery. Moral suasionists, though calling for the immediate abolition of slavery, believed that slavery should be ended only by non-violent means.

However, by the latter years of the 1830s not all abolitionists were of the same mind. A growing number had serious questions about moral suasion as the only means by which to end slavery. Moral suasion was simply not as effective as they had hoped. After a decade of moral agitation (even though numerous antislavery societies had been formed and thousands converted to abolitionism) the conscience of the public was not
sufficiently stirred. Abolitionists watched with horror as slavery and the domestic slave trade expanded in the United States. This was due to the "stranglehold" that the southern slave power had over Congress and the federal government. In addition, there was the increasing violation of the civil rights of abolitionists. "They had been excluded from the South by mob violence and criminal law. Their publications had been excluded from the South by the intimidation of the Post Office Department into compliance with local police regulations. Their petitions to Congress had been rejected, and all discussion of the subject [of slavery] in Congress had been interdicted," notes abolition scholar Dwight Dumond. Many abolitionists thus concluded that other strategies, including political action, were needed.

Therefore, in April 1840, a group of politically minded abolitionists met in Albany, New York under the leadership of Gerrit Smith and made history by forming the first distinct antislavery political party in the United States, the Liberty party. The party’s platform rested on the immediate abolition of slavery in the United States through the ballot. One other significant event was to occur. One month after the formation of the Liberty party there was a split in the national antislavery body, the AASS. The dissenting group, led by Lewis Tappan, comprising mainly of New Yorkers and clerics, formed the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, and many of its supporters advocated political action. The old guard, led by William Lloyd Garrison, continued under the old name, and was still dominated by New Englanders.

These developments were bound to affect the antislavery movement everywhere.
In Michigan, the MSASS withdrew its membership from the AASS and became an affiliate of the AFASS. Political action was now to be the main pursuit of antislavery workers in this state. In fact, some of the chief ideologues and zealots of the Liberty party came from Michigan. In 1841 the MSASS started publishing the *Signal of Liberty*, an abolitionist weekly which was to serve as the official voice of both the society and the Michigan wing of the Liberty Party. Thus, when Bibb arrived in Michigan, unsure, alone, and friendless, not only was abolitionist sentiment in the state already widespread, but political action was now the driving force behind that sentiment. The advocacy and support of political action by the chief antislavery advocates in Michigan would have a direct influence on the type of abolitionist career Bibb embarked upon.

The Detroit Black community had heterogeneous origins. According to David Katzman, historian of nineteenth-century Black Detroit, the majority of Detroit’s Blacks at that time “were descended from free Negro migrants from the urban Virginia centers of Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Petersburg. Mechanics and tradesmen, they had migrated to Michigan in the late 1830s and 1840s in order to escape the tightening enforcement of the black codes of Virginia.” Fugitive slaves from the South were also present. Many Blacks came from other places in the Midwest, the South, and the West Indies. Of course, there were also Detroit-born Blacks, who practised a variety of occupations. Many worked as hairdressers, cooks, domestics, restaurant owners, boatmen, and established themselves in other fields. In this community, Bibb found a
place for himself. One of the first things he did was to acquire some schooling. Blacks, slave and free, hungered for an education. Obtaining schooling for most was almost an impossibility given the proscriptions against schooling, of whatever type, for Blacks in both the North and South. Still, many saw school learning as the means by which they would gain equality in American society. Bibb would later write in the first copy of the *Voice of the Fugitive* that “education was one of the most important measures connected with the destiny” of Blacks in North America, because by it they could be “strengthened and elevated.” Bibb studied with Rev. Monroe, pastor of the Second (Black) Baptist Church but was forced to quit after three weeks because he ran out of funds. Yet, in this short time, he felt that he had greatly improved his literacy skills. For Bibb, like many ex-slaves, one of the chief purposes of acquiring literacy was to be able to read the Bible and by doing so practise the “true” Christianity, unlike the “hypocritical” version practised by the slaveholders. Linking literacy with Bible reading would become a central feature of Bibb’s uplift philosophy.

How did he support himself during his early period in Detroit? From his autobiography we learn that he became skilled in several occupations during his days in slavery. He worked in a slaughterhouse, knew the “trades” of a general labourer, and had some culinary abilities. He no doubt practiced some of these crafts in order to make a living when he arrived in Detroit, but was not successful because his slave past continued to haunt him. He tells us he went from job to job, and could not settle down at any permanent employment as his mind was not at rest, due to the separation from his
wife and child. Bibb’s presence in the Black community is first recorded in his attendance at and participation in the Michigan Convention of Colored Citizens held in Detroit in October 1843. Called by prominent Detroit Blacks and leaders of the Detroit Colored Vigilant Committee, William Lambert and Rev. Monroe, Blacks of Michigan met in the Second Baptist Church to discuss the “political condition” of the (free) Black population of the state, and to “adopt measures for the improvement of the same.” The chief grievance of the delegates was the disfranchisement of Blacks by the state legislature. Though they were tax-payers, they could not vote, nor did they enjoy other crucial civil rights.

Just twenty months out of slavery, Bibb made his presence felt at this meeting. As a Detroit delegate, he served on the business committee, proposed a motion to examine the credentials of the delegates, and in line with the anti-colonization thinking of many public Black abolitionists at the time, placed an anti-colonizationist resolution on the floor. This was a direct reaction to the American Colonization Society’s efforts to send free Blacks to West Africa. Many Black and white abolitionists saw this strategy as a racist move, designed to rid the country of “unwanted Blacks” while at the same time strengthening the proslavery forces in their oppression of the enslaved. Bibb’s resolution was adopted.

Perhaps it was at this convention that Bibb decided to enter public life and advance the cause of freedom for his enslaved brethren. For him, like most Black abolitionists, this decision was not an abstract one but based upon an experience in
blood, brutality, and heartbreak. Bibb had lost his wife and child to slavery; he was separated from his mothers and brothers and did not know if he would ever again set eyes on any member of his family. A year later, in 1844, Bibb’s presence in the history of Michigan and the antislavery movement became more forceful. He started a correspondence with his former master, William Gatewood, in the spring and around this same time began his career as a lecturer for the state antislavery society, and speaker for the Liberty Party.26

Bibb as Orator 27

Bibb began publicly telling the story of his slave experience in the Spring of 1844 in southern Michigan. When he began his public lecturing career, white antislavery crusaders were more than ready to hear (and sponsor) a fugitive slave acquainted with the “evils” of slavery tell his story. In 1841, after hearing ex-slave Frederick Douglass speak at an abolitionist meeting and being vastly impressed, John A. Collins, general agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, persuaded Douglass to become a lecturing agent for the society. Douglass was reluctant at first but later agreed and was hired for a sum of $450 per annum.28 Collins later wrote to W.L. Garrison and commented that “the public have itching ears to hear a colored man speak, and particularly a slave. Multitudes will flock to hear one of his class.”29 Douglass did more that meet the highest expectations of his sponsors.

Fugitive slaves turned abolitionist speakers gave a new impulse to the fight against slavery. One of the criticisms constantly hurled at white abolitionists by their
proslavery detractors was that they knew nothing about slavery and so should shut up about it. But fugitive slaves who had directly experienced slavery spoke with authority. Whites lukewarm to the cause of abolition took notice when ex-slaves spoke because these speakers “could convey the atmosphere of chains, whips, bloodhounds....” From their “insider position,” the ex-slave speakers gave a new epistemological direction to the abolitionist crusade. The public entry of fugitive slaves into the ranks of abolitionist speakers also came at a time when the national antislavery society was split apart due to internecine fighting causing the movement to flounder. Given the potential for a crisis, the movement needed a new direction. The fugitive slave speakers, many of whom evolved into gifted orators, provided a new focus. Noted historian Benjamin Quarles states that former slave speakers “proved a godsend to the cause.” Another chronicler of antislavery observes that the fugitive slave speakers “made perhaps the most effective black contribution to the crusade against slavery.” And Larry Gara tells us that, though “their number was always small, their influence was not.”

When Bibb entered the ranks of the professional fugitives as lecturer he was two years out of slavery. His sponsors must have seen him as a very authentic voice for the crusade of abolition. Bibb, as lecturer, would join the ranks of a formidable cadre of former slaves turned speakers—Jermain Loguen, Moses Roper, William Wells Brown, Henry ‘Box’ Brown, Frederick Douglass, James W.C. Pennington, Henry Highland Garnet, Samuel Ringgold Ward, Josiah Henson, William and Ellen Craft, Sojourner Truth, and others. Before the entry of the fugitive slave speakers to the antislavery
crusade, the Black contribution was made by free Blacks such as Charles Lenox Remond, William Cooper Nell, and Robert Purvis. Frances Ellen Watkins and Sarah Remond, free women of colour, soon joined these free Black males on the lecture circuit. These free Blacks served as members, supporters, and lecturing agents for various antislavery societies, especially those in Pennsylvania and New England. Sometimes ex-slaves joined free Blacks on the abolitionist lecture circuit and made a “dual impact” on audiences at abolitionist meetings.

But why did Michigan antislavery groups choose Bibb to lecture for them? There must have been dozens of interesting fugitives, just like Bibb, living in Detroit and other centres. Bibb’s story was common enough to be the lot of many fugitives. Perhaps, the answer lay in Bibb’s participation at the Colored Convention, which brought him to the attention of people like the Liberty Party abolitionists. Also, unlike many fugitives, Bibb was not hiding the fact that he was an escaped slave. Bibb could afford to do this because, though he had escaped from slavery, he had no owner or master looking for him. Therefore, in Michigan he could with relative ease, make known his situation to those willing to hear.

And Bibb was bright, intrepid, and determined. It had to take one with intense focus and a single-mindedness to make repeated escape attempts against horrendous odds. Bibb had an interesting story, but he also had a keen intelligence. Both features made him attractive to antislavery groups. In addition, like the national antislavery movement, the Michigan wing also needed a new impetus. For Bibb to have been hired
as an antislavery speaker by Michigan antislavery groups meant that he must have already acquired some skills (and reputation) as a speaker. Historian Philip Foner informs us, many ex-slaves (including those lacking formal education) and free Blacks "developed the fundamentals of public speaking" at self-improvement societies organized by Blacks themselves. Archivist Dorothy Porter chronicles the work that Black literary societies and self-improvement groups have done in developing leadership skills in Blacks. Benjamin Quarles emphasizes that these Black self-improvement societies served as a springboard for Blacks entering the public realm.35

Much of the activities of these self-improvement societies in the Black community were sponsored or generated by the Black churches. Katzman tells us that in 1843 the Colored Vigilant Committee of Detroit inventoried the Black community and "found a young men's society, a debating club, a reading room, a library, and a temperance society, all of them meeting in churches." The churches ran Sunday schools and women's benevolent associations. In total, "there were about twenty known benevolent and improvement societies," or "about one for every ten black adults."36 It is likely that Bibb participated in these debating and literary societies of the town, and possibly used the library and reading room. In this way not only would he sharpen his public presentation abilities but add to his education. Like many professional fugitives, he was largely self-educated.

In addition to excellent speaking abilities, the ex-slave also required a riveting story. And Bibb had such a tale. His story was drama personified. Set in "miserable
slavery, "his account was an odyssey of anguish, heartbreak, loss, grief, betrayal, but ultimately triumph. Bibb’s story had plots similar to the literature nineteenth-century readers were familiar with: “classics” like the Pilgrim’s Progress, the Odyssey, Orpheus and Eurydice, Hamlet, and the Indian captivity narratives popular at the time. Bibb’s narrative therefore had all the “right ingredients” that would “hold” an audience. Armed with a story set in the “torture chamber of the south,” he used his voice to advance the cause of his enslaved brothers and sisters, to utter against the lie of the slaveholder that the slaves were treated well, were happy with their lot, and loved their owners. By becoming an abolitionist lecturer, Bibb also refuted the proslavery ideology that the slave (or Black person) was an inferior being with little or no intellectual capabilities.

There were several current oratorical modes and styles that likely influenced Bibb as a speaker. Many Black speakers—slaves, ex-slaves, and the free—would be exposed to the Black church and their preachers. By the end of the Civil War two distinct Black preaching traditions could be discerned. The first, from the “plantation school of Christianity,” emphasized a dialogical relationship between preacher and audience. The audience’s response would form a central part of the preaching. The preacher drew on drama, chant, song, shout and other rhetorical strategies to preach the word. African cultural elements influenced this tradition. The other tradition centred around “sober” preaching and a stern protestantism. “Ecstatic,” “irrational,” “African” worship was denounced, and a “calm,” and “sober” manner was encouraged. The preacher who
subscribed to this tradition had to show that he was a rational person, and he would excoriate members of his tradition for “shouting” and “jumping.” Here the model for worship was Europe, not Africa. Preachers of this ilk tended to be trained at a seminary. This type of preaching tradition is best exemplified in the work of the Reverend Daniel Payne, luminary of the African Methodist Episcopal Church; Payne campaigned to make his Church free from the “irrationalities” of Africa. Both these traditions emphasized mastery of the word. Both traditions also owed much to the African background of Black Americans.

The preaching tradition that emerged from African American culture “had its genesis in an oral tradition” in Africa. A good memory was developed and held in high esteem in such a context. Theologian Olin Moyd notes that the Black preachers were “successors to the griots and storytellers of their African ancestors,” and that “for our African ancestors, storytelling was the equivalent of a Western fine art.” West African griots (or djelis as they are called in the Malinke language) elevated the Word to high art. These wordsmiths, called “guardians” and “masters” of the Word, were orators par excellence: their words could cause the triumph and glory of those they supported, or the defeat and ignominy of those they frowned upon. On the American plantation, the Black preacher and others (storytellers, for example) became the new masters and guardians of the Word. In exploring the idea that the griots could be the spiritual ancestors of the Black preacher, historian Michael Gomez notes:
The *griots* and their progeny would have certainly been involved in the fashioning of folklore in America, but would have also taken advantage of the opportunities presented by Christianity...to learn new words and master their delivery. Black preachers, as was true of the griot, established reputations based upon their ability to tell and retell "the story." That is, the telling became the vehicle of transformation, renewal, and reimagination. In order to facilitate the telling of the message, the black preacher... developed a unique style of delivery, a kind of "sing-song" sermon that was part speech, part exhortation, part ballad, all performance. The lyrical, indeed musical, quality of the traditional black preacher's style is proverbial, and is another indication of griot origin, as the latter often told his stories through song and by way of musical accompaniment.41

If we accept Gomez's assertion of the link between the griot and the Black preacher, then it is no wonder that some of most skillful Black orators, past and present, preachers: Samuel Ringgold Ward, Henry Garnet, Sojourner Truth, Martin Luther King, Al Hajj Malik Shabazz (Malcolm X), Jesse Jackson, and Louis Farrakhan. Farrakhan and Shabazz are located in the Muslim tradition, but this tradition in the United States has been heavily influenced by Black Christianity.

While enslaved, Bibb no doubt heard and *listened* to Black (and white) preachers. We know that he was a practising Christian and, while a slave, one of his few joys was to attend religious services. He was punished for this. Once he was beaten nearly half dead by Deacon Whitfield for attending a camp meeting without the Deacon's permission. In his teenage years in Kentucky, he attended a Sabbath school taught by a poor white woman. At this school, they not only learnt Bible stories, but the rudiments of literacy. Although Bibb does not go into details about African or folk
culture on the plantation, he nonetheless was influenced by it, as evidenced by his penchant for singing religious and other kinds of songs at the beginning or close of his lectures.\(^{42}\)

In freedom, he listened to Black preachers. In his early days in Detroit he was Revered Monroe’s protégé and attended Monroe’s church. Later, Bibb worked closely with Garnet, Ward, James Pennington, and Amos and Jehiel Beman, Black preachers and gifted antislavery orators.\(^{43}\) Even before Bibb emerged on the antislavery stage, he heard and experienced both traditions of Black preaching and was already acquainted with “good and fine speech.”

Of course, not all Black abolitionist speakers were preachers. But most, if not all, came from a Christian tradition, one rooted in African cultural norms. As his autobiography shows, the Bible exerted an influence on Bibb’s oratorical style. Bibb would intersperse his own story of slavery with stories from the Bible, especially the Old Testament: the South was Egypt, the land of bondage; Pharaoh, the cruel slaveholder, and the Hebrew children were personified as the modern day enslaved African Americans.

Another influence on Bibb’s oratory may possible have been *The Columbian Orator*. This book, first published by Caleb Bingham in 1797, went through some 23 editions and became the Bible of orators and would-be orators. In fact, Bingham wrote it with the objective of positively influencing the minds of schoolboys. *The Columbian Orator* contains oratorical gems from speakers as diverse and removed from each other
in time and space as Philo, George Washington, Socrates, an “Indian Chief,” Lord Mansfield, John Milton, Cicero, Napoleon Bonaparte, and others known for the gift of gab. As a boy, Frederick Douglass read the *Columbian Orator* and it had a profound impact on him. He practised before real and imaginary audiences with speeches from the *Columbian Orator* in his mouth.

Bingham knew that oratory was learnt, so he gave specific instructions for good speaking. “He drew upon the ancients to demonstrate a variety of techniques that made for effective oratory.” He wrote about effective pronunciation, the use of gesture, voice, and tone. In “Some Practical Rules For The Voice And Gesture” Bingham advises:

> In narration, the voice ought to be raised to somewhat a higher pitch. Matters of fact should be related in a very plain and distinct manner, with a proper stress and emphasis laid upon each circumstance, accompanied with a suitable address and motions of the body to engage the attention of the hearers. For there is a certain grace in telling a story, by which those who are masters of it, seldom fail to recommend themselves in conversation.

In “consideration of particular expressions,” he wrote:

> Even in those sentences, which are expressed in the most even and sedate manner, there is often one or more words which require an emphasis, and distinction of the voice. Pronouns are often of this kind; as, *this* is the man. And such are many words that denote the circumstances and qualities of things. Such as heighten or magnify the idea of a thing to which they are joined, elevate the voice; as, *noble, admirable, majestic, greatly*, and the like. On the contrary, those which lessen the idea, or debase it, depress the voice, or at least protract the tone; of which sort are the words, *little, mean, poorly, contemptibly*, with many others.
Whether or not he had used the *Columbian Orator* as teacher and guide, or taken his models from Black Christianity, Bibb gave his first lecture against American slavery in the village of Adrian, in Lenawee County, May 1844.48 The choice of Adrian was no accident. It was at Adrian that the first antislavery society in the state was founded. Elizabeth Chandler, as mentioned, took a leadership role in this. Adrian was also home to Laura Haviland, a prominent community member and a founding member of the society.49 Haviland would also later become an agent in the Michigan Underground Railroad, and found the Raisin Institute, a manual training school which opened its doors to Black students.50 We do not know whether for this first lecture Bibb was hired by the local antislavery societies or was an independent,51 only that he was “inspired” to speak out against slavery by “antislavery friends.” As he recalled “The first time that I ever spoke before a public audience, was to give a narration of my own sufferings and adventures connected with slavery. I commenced in the village of Adrian, state of Michigan, May 1844.”52

At Adrian, Bibb simply gave “a narration of his sufferings and adventures.” He was asked only to tell his story. That he developed as a prominent speaker must mean that he at some point began devoting his energies to learning and practising oratory. By the end of the 1840s Bibb was a well-known and respected abolitionist lecturer. He had grown from simply giving “a narration” of his story to possessing “a musical voice, and a wonderful power of delivery.” In six years Bibb moved from being the plantation
escapee to an urbane and gifted speaker.

Speaking and lecturing empowered the ex-slave speakers in much the same way that their engagement in writing and literature did. Most scholars now agree that ex-slaves founded the African American literary tradition; in a similar manner, they left their mark on African American and American oratorical traditions. The received wisdom at the time ex-slaves began lecturing for abolition was that Blacks were naturally inferior and imbecilic; their “lying nature” was part of that stereotype. Therefore, when Black men and women took to the stage and spoke out against American slavery and for Black freedom, and were believed, they were subverting and undermining in very salient ways, systems and customs that had degraded them and their fellows. It must have been tremendously self-affirming for these people, constructed as the lowest of the low, to speak before an audience and condemn American slavery and even the American Republic. That is one of the reasons that abolitionism was such a subversive and revolutionary movement. Proslavery forces understood this. And this helps to explain their regular attacks and mobbing of abolitionist lecturers. Some white American Northerners found it difficult to stomach the sight of Black men and women on stage condemning a system that for over two hundred years had privileged whites and repressed Blacks.

Bibb did not need to be pushed to speak out against slavery, his outrage against slavery and what it did to him and his kin acted as a propeller. He was “prompted by a sense of duty to my enslaved countrymen...especially when I remember that slavery
robbed me of my freedom—deprived me of an education—banished me from my native state, and robbed me of my family. If we can judge Bibb’s speech from his writing, we can assume that his speech was forceful, direct, and strident. In the above passage, he conveys, by his choice of verbs, the relentless cruelty of American slavery. First it robbed, next it deprived, and then it banished the slave—literally and symbolically—from himself and his family.

Bibb does not state if he was paid for his labours. Oftentimes abolitionists speakers were paid little or nothing for their efforts, and they had to depend upon a collection taken up after their lectures, for a stipend. Some speakers were lucky enough to be contracted agents of antislavery groups, and hence were assured of a salary, but this was not always the case. Judging from Bibb’s statements his motive for “speaking out” was not monetary.

After the Adrian lecture, Bibb travelled to Ohio in the company of Samuel Brooks and Amos Dresser, two white abolitionists, “lecturing upon the subject of American slavery.” At the town of Steubenville, after having tremendous difficulties in finding a venue to hold a meeting, Bibb and his two companions gave a few lectures in the public market place but were forced to adjourn the meeting because a proslavery mob came and broke it up. The speakers fled to the house of the “only abolitionist” in the town, followed by the mob that stayed outside “yelling like tigers.”

Quarles notes that “blacks abolitionists had to have two essential qualities: the will to activism and a full readiness to risk personal assault.” Mobs and mob violence
were part and parcel of the abolitionist crusade. Proslavery sympathizers made it a habit to attend antislavery meetings to heckle, stone, jeer, beat the speakers, and break up the meetings. Amos Dresser was mobbed out of Tennessee for distributing Bibles; Theodore Weld was stoned in Ohio; W.L. Garrison was dragged through the streets of Boston by anti-abolitionists; Frederick Douglass was beaten into unconsciousness by an Indiana mob in 1845; and newspaper editor Elijah Lovejoy paid the final price in 1841 when an Illinois mob burned down his press and shot him to death. While many white antislavery activists were subject to mob attack, Black abolitionists suffered far more abuse. As Philip Foner observes, the Black agent was the first to be singled out by hoodlums as many northern whites felt that “being Black they had no right to criticize white southerners.”

In the fall of 1844 Bibb travelled with Seymour B. Treadwell for several months throughout Michigan giving antislavery lectures. They held their meetings in a section of the state where “abolitionists were few and far between.” Bibb describes the work they did and some of the conditions they endured as travelling lecturers.

Our meetings were generally appointed in small log cabins, school houses, among the farmers, which were some times crowded full; and where they had no horse teams, it was often the case that here would be four or five ox teams come, loaded down with men, and women and children, to attend our meetings.

But the people were generally poor, and in many places not able to give us a decent night’s lodging. We most generally carried with us a few pounds of candles of light up the houses wherein we held our meetings after night; for in many places, they had neither candles nor candlesticks. After [the] meeting was out, we have frequently gone from three to eight miles to get
lodging, through the dark forest, where there was scarcely any road for a wagon to run on.

I have traveled for miles over swamps, where the roads were covered with logs, without any dirt over them, which has sometimes shook and jostled the wagon to pieces, where we could find no shop or any place to mend it. We would have to tie it up with bark, or take the lines to tie it with, and lead the horse by the bridle. At other times we were in mud up to the hubs of the wheels. 65

Treadwell would become Bibb’s travelling and lecturing companion on and off for the next two years, and Bibb notes that both of them during these two years converted many to abolitionism. 66

Bibb’s star as an antislavery lecturer began to shine in Michigan and neighbouring states. The story he told of his time in slavery and the loss of his family became known to many in abolitionist circles including James Birney, former corresponding secretary of the American Anti-Slavery Society, Liberty Party presidential candidate, and Michigan resident. Birney heard Bibb lecture in February 1845. Bibb was at that time a travelling lecturer throughout Michigan and was making known his slavery experiences. Birney apparently doubted the veracity of Bibb’s story and threatened to “expose” Bibb if his story was not corroborated. Bibb wrote to Birney, defended himself and his story, and declared with zest against the “hypocritical” Christianity of the southern slaveholders, one of whom, a “professor” of religion, separated Bibb and his wife. It was that “professor,” Bibb declared, that had his wife and child “clanking their chains in slavery.” Declaring the truthfulness of his story, Bibb
ended by stating: "I may be denounced and called an emposter [sic] because I am of the despised [sic] race. Yet I hope [sic] that I shall be able to prove to the world that I have told the truth and I will be herd [sic] for my people."67

Bibb knew that it was because he was a member of the "despised" race that his truthfulness was questioned; were he a white male who claimed to have had "adventures among the Indians," his story would in all probability be believed.68 Bibb took steps to "prove himself to the world" by submitting himself the following spring to an examination and interrogation of his story by the Detroit Liberty Association. The Association set up a truth committee to authenticate Bibb's story.69 This committee sent letters across the United States and to Canada, to slaveholders, slavecatchers, jailers, missionaries, and to abolitionists (all white of course), who knew Bibb in slavery and freedom.70 Bibb had nothing to fear from the slaveholding men to whom the Liberty Association directed its inquiries. These men—William and Silas Gatewood, and Daniel Lane—had long sold Bibb to other slaveholders.71 Bibb's last owner, a half-white, half-Cherokee master, had died shortly before Bibb made his escape.72

Responses came back in the affirmative. Bibb was real and his story true. The Liberty Association could breathe a sigh of relief and say of the responses: "their testimony is most harmonious and conclusive." The committee then wrote its own findings and conclusion, all of which lauded Bibb, and asked none other than the eminent Detroit Judge, Judge Wilkins, to commend and recommend Bibb and his story.
Robert Stepto asserts that whites could submit the Black narrator to such stringent examinations because of "cultural disease." He comments:

While we are impressed by the efforts of the Detroit Liberty Association's members to conduct an investigation of Bibb's tale, issue a report, and lend their names to the guarantee, we are still far more overwhelmed by the examples of the cultural disease with which they wrestle than by their desire to find a cure. That disease is, of course, cultural myopia, the badge and sore bestowed upon every nation mindlessly heedful of race ritual instead of morality: Henry Bibb is alive and well in Detroit, but by what miraculous stroke will he, as a man, be able to cast his shadow on this soil?

Steptoe notes that the Liberty Association's efforts help to explain "why a prevailing metaphor in Afro-American letters is, in varying configurations, one of invisibility and translucence." Birney as a former slaveholder must have been familiar with many of the aspects of slavery that Bibb described, so it is puzzling why he doubted Bibb's story.

White antislavery workers were ever mindful of their proslavery enemies who used every opportunity to attack them. White abolitionists felt that every aspect of their propaganda must be factual so that their enemies could not say they did not know what they were talking about. The concern for "authenticity" led Birney to attack Bibb. Birney's sensitivity to suspected falsehood was "rooted in history." In 1838, while on the executive of the American Anti-Slavery Society Birney, along with Lewis Tappan, endorsed and supported the publication of a slave narrative written by James Williams, a purported fugitive slave. After the book was published it was discovered that Williams had never been in slavery. Williams in the meantime skipped town and fled to England.
An embarrassed Birney (with Tappan) issued a signed retraction of Williams’ narrative. Even though Birney, a former slaveholder, noted that everything in the book about slavery was true, the book was instantly withdrawn. The incident occurred in Boston.⁷⁴

In Michigan, seven years later, Bibb had become a “star” fugitive and Birney had taken up residence in that state. His attack on Bibb was probably meant to scare him into silence and flight. But, as it turned out, Bibb was not an impostor. He sent a strongly worded and sarcastic letter to Birney. Prior to Bibb’s rise on the Michigan antislavery lecturing circuit, only white male abolitionists like Seymour Treadwell and Amos Dresser lectured for antislavery organizations in the state. Bibb’s appearance and fame perhaps disconcerted Birney who was accustomed to hearing only white men lecture on the slave question. This incident demonstrates the power that white men, abolitionists or otherwise, had in determining whether a slave’s story be told or not, and their control of the abolitionist movement. The efforts of the Association and Birney, while having the “objective” of finding the “truth,” had the potential to compromise Bibb’s tongue and mute his voice. It also very much underscores Steptoe’s observation of Bibb’s invisibility. This desire of whites to control, direct, and influence the Black voice becomes even more apparent in the production and publication of the Black autobiographical narrative.

Passing the test of truthfulness was something that was rarely demanded of white lecturers and writers. Racism birthed a “cultural disease” which demanded that whites succumb to one of the stereotypes they created of Blacks: Blacks were liars so their
words had to be checked time and time again. The denial of Black truthfulness, in the case of Bibb, was shared, ironically, by proslavery activists and antislavery workers.\textsuperscript{75}

The Liberty Association set itself up as a midwife that could either give birth and life to Bibb’s narrative or strangle it. The Association, along with other groups like the MSASS, had given Bibb “permission” to open his mouth and tell his story; at the drop of a hat, these white abolitionists could reverse their position and cut out his tongue. The ex-slave lecturer thus placed under the gaze by his white sponsors struggled to exercise authority over his own story and voice. Bibb knew that his story was true and that he would lose nothing if he submitted himself to an examination. Conscious of the power that white men had, he acquiesced. Birney apparently was satisfied with the results of the Liberty Association’s investigation of Bibb’s life history. Later on, Bibb and Birney must have established some kind of working relationship because in July of the following year we find Bibb and other Black Detroiter writing to Birney about schooling for Blacks in the city of Detroit. In this letter Bibb reveals his activism in the Black community and it is apparent in this community he has taken up a leadership role.\textsuperscript{76}

With the stamp of approval from the Detroit Liberty Association, and free from the fetter of doubt, in 1845, according to Bibb, he was officially hired as an antislavery lecturer by the MSASS. Apparently, a deal was worked out between Bibb and the society in which the society would restore to him his wife and child “if they were living,
and could be reached by human agency,” and Bibb would lecture throughout the state for free. A letter in the Signal by officers of the state society outlines the proposal and also sheds much light on the nature of Bibb’s employment (he was an unpaid employee), his “efficiency” as a speaker, his total devotion to antislavery, and the strategy to abolitionize Michigan through his lectures.

To Liberty Friends:-- In the Signal of the 28th inst. is a report from the undersigned respecting Henry Bibb. His narrative always excites deep sympathy for himself and favorable bias for the cause, which seeks to abolish the evils he so powerfully portrays. Friends and foes attest his efficiency. Mr. Bibb has labored much in lecturing, yet has collected but a bare pittance. He has received from Ohio lucrative offers, but we have prevailed on him to remain in this State. We think that a strong obligation rests on the friends in this state to sustain Mr. Bibb, and restore to him his wife and child. Under the expectation that Michigan will yield to these claims; will support their laborer, and re-unite the long severed ties of husband and wife, parent and child, Mr. Bibb will lecture through the whole state. Our object is to prepare friends for the visit of Mr. Bibb, and to suggest an effective mode of operations for the whole state....The hope of this reunion will nerve the heart and body of Mr. Bibb to re-doubled effort in a cause otherwise dear to him. And as he will devote his whole time systematically to the anti-slavery cause, he must depend on friends for the means of livelihood. We bespeak for him your hospitality, and such pecuniary contributions as you can afford, trusting that the latter may be sufficient to enable him to keep the field.

A.L. Porter
C.H. Stewart
Silas M. Holmes

Detroit, April 22, 1845

The fact that the state antislavery society had chosen Bibb as its premier agent was of utmost importance. Bibb was to become the axis upon which Michigan abolitionism
would spin. In regard to recovering Malinda and Mary Frances to Bibb, the MSASS was not successful. Letters were sent “to every Quarter” seeking information about Malinda; two men were even sent south by the society to find her, but to no avail. Bibb despaired.78

Later, (in the winter of 1845) he himself went south to find his family but discovered his wife living as the mistress of her new master. Heartbroken, Bibb gave up all hopes of reuniting with Malinda.79 The knowledge of his wife’s condition ‘motivated’ Bibb to throw himself fully into abolitionist work.80 Beginning in 1846, Bibb decided to spread his wings. He left Michigan and the Mid-west, and journeyed to New England where he embarked on a lecturing tour.81

It appears that when Bibb began his New England tour in 1846, he was no longer sponsored by the MSASS. Between that time (1846) and 1850, he worked as an independent agent, travelling Michigan and the Mid-west, touring New York and New England; but Michigan remained his base.82

As Bibb’s reputation as a skilled antislavery orator grew, requests for him to speak multiplied. So swamped was he by these request in New England that he wrote to the Emancipator, “If I had a thousand tongues, I could find useful employment for them all.”83 For most of 1847 Bibb tramped across New England lecturing on American slavery. Writing from New Hampshire about what appears to have been a Liberty Party lecture, he enthusiastically informs the readers of the Emancipator of his work in that state, the activities of women antislavery activists, and the state of abolitionism there. He
wrote: “I spoke to crowded houses almost at every place, and was kindly received as a
man and a brother by the friends of humanity.”

Bibb then relates an incident with the post-master at Plymouth. This incident
reveals that abolitionist speakers were opposed almost at every turn from those who
believed their actions undermined the status quo.

But it was a little too near the State election for our democratic
friends to listen to the story of my wrongs. I commenced at
Concord and Plymouth. When I arrived at the latter, I was
insulted and abused by the democratic Postmaster, for
enquiring of him for a letter at the Post Office. His reply, when
I asked him if there was a letter for me was, “You have come here
to try to break down the Democratic party, and you had better be
off.” Said I to him, I have come here as a slave to tell the people
of my wrongs. Will you not come out and hear me? “No. Who
got you to come here just before the election?”

Fortunately, however, the sentiment of the post-master, Bibb explained, was “by no
means the general feeling upon this subject, in New Hampshire.” In commenting on the
“strong hold” that “our cause” had “upon the hearts of the more thinking part of the
community in N.H.,” he also highlighted women’s support: “There are thousands of
Anti-Slavery men there, and double the number of women.”

Bibb traversed most of the western and northern states in his attempts to
abolitionize the residents. Bibb’s letter to Martin Delany and Frederick Douglass
regarding his lecturing tour of western New York highlights the commitment of the grass
roots people whose aid made the abolitionist movement possible. The letter also reveals
that through their unheralded efforts, “practical” abolitionists (like Weir and Harris) did
much work at the ground level to advance the cause of Black freedom. The epistle also
foregrounds the cooperation among frontline abolitionists.

Since I entered the borders of the Empire State, up to this period, judging from what I have seen, the cause of freedom has been moving forward with signal success. The willingness to hear, and the interest manifested on the part of the common people, has been far greater than I expected. I commenced in Buffalo, where I found both the white and colored populations awake to the cause of humanity. The latter numerously attended all my meetings, and gave willing aid to the cause. The noble-hearted George Weir, Jr., D. Harris, and many others are doing much for the moral and religious elevation of our people.

When I arrived at Syracuse, I found the long- tried and faithful friend of the slave, the Rev. Samuel J. May, who received me, though a stranger, as a friend and brother; and by his aid and co-operation in a series of meetings, we made church ring with the appeals of our enslaved countrymen.  

Bibb as abolitionist lecturer accomplished the tasks set out for him by groups that hired him as an agent. As lecturer, he raised money for the society; he helped to form societies if none existed; he gave first-hand accounts of the evil and horrors of the slave system and “stirred the conscience” of the audience, thus converting many to the cause. To reach as many people as possible he travelled to numerous villages, towns, cities, and states, thereby illustrating his commitment to the emancipation of his enslaved fellows, and the uplift of free Blacks like himself. 

That Bibb was an able speaker was not in doubt. His contemporaries attest to his talents in that regard. W.L. Garrison ranked Bibb, Wells Brown and Douglass “with the ablest speakers in the movement, and ‘the best qualified to address the public on the subject of slavery.’” Lewis Tappan discovered Bibb’s skills as a speaker in Brooklyn in 1847, and “found it impossible to listen to Bibb without feeling his heart swell with the
deepest hatred of slavery.” Martin Delany also described Bibb as an “eloquent speaker.” Period newspapers rave about his eloquence, and John Blassingame reports that Bibb “joined Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown as one of the most effective antislavery speakers.” Blassingame continues, “A master of humor and pathos, Bibb impressed on his audiences all of the contradictions inherent in slavery. In one report of a lecture he gave, a journalist declared that the audience “cheered, clapped, stamped, laughed, and wept in turns.” Bibb could make his audience cry and laugh within moments of each other. People cried as he conjured up the image of Deacon Whitfield, his Louisiana master, whipping his almost nude wife as she begged the slaveholder not to separate the family. The Palladium of Liberty describes the effect Bibb had on his audience in this regard.

He then gave an outline of his own experience with the system of slavery. The separation of him from his wife, is certainly beyond all circumstances of the kind we have heard of in the whole course of our life....She clung to his neck until she seemed as tho’ her heart would break, then both him and his wife fell to their knees, and prayed that he would keep or sell them both together, but his master refused, and tore her from his bosom...but she clung to her husband’s neck, until her master dragged her from him, and applied the cowhide at the same time. Mr. Bibb states that until he was out of hearing, his wife was still screaming.... It is not in the power of language to describe the sensation of the audience...As he pronounced these works, the coldest hearts were warmed, and every eye gave a tear. We are certain Mr. Bibb will make abolitionists wherever he goes. At the close of his discourse he sung what is called... “a plantation song.”

At a Liberty party lecture at Hallowell, Massachusetts, Bibb used humour when he told the audience that “the American people have robbed me of my rights, my friends, and
three-fourths of my colour." Again, at a mass anti-colonization meeting in New York City in 1849, in a speech laced with parody and satire, Bibb used humour to reveal the untenable and racist proposition and position of the American Colonization Society in its bid to rid the United States of free Blacks. Bibb's articulation of his biracial heritage would find resonance in late twentieth-century racial discourse.

What would they do with such men as myself? I am neither of the one nor the other race. If they act strictly according to the declaration put forth by the Society, that every man should be colonized in his land, I do not know whether I should be sent to Africa, to England, Ireland or, to Scotland. (Laughter). It is so too with most of my hearers. And on the other hand if men were to be enslaved who have a drop of African blood flowing in their veins, I should think we would be very apt to seize hold of some of our greatest statesmen who pass for white. (Applause).

Another feature of Bibb's presentation was his singing. Typically, he sang at the start or end of his lecture. The song could be "the slave's lament" (sometimes called the "mother's lament"), a song purportedly sung by slaves about to be sold, the "the Fugitive's triumph," or "Africa's lament." His singing was heartfelt, full of "pathos," and often had a deep emotional impact on his audiences. Quarles states that at a church in Blackiston, Massachusetts, Bibb ended his lecture with the singing of songs, and "the entire audience stood up, signifying their desire to hear him again." Though we do not have a recording of his voice, Wells Brown informs us that Bibb had a "musical" voice. As Bibb's talents as a speaker improved and his reputation as an effective speaker grew he joined the select rank of "Negro orators."
It would be instructive to compare Bibb’s style with that of Ellen Craft, a fugitive slave woman who looked white. During her speaking tours in the North and Britain, she elicited tremendous sympathy. How could one so white be enslaved, her audience wondered out aloud. Implicit in this is the racism of the audience, for it was just as horrible that dark-skinned people were enslaved. Henry Bibb had more white blood than Black. On more than one occasion in his escape attempts he was able to pass for white. One can only speculate how the mainly white audience reacted to Bibb’s physical appearance. Did his “whiteness” elicit more sympathy from his mainly white audiences? We have two descriptions of Bibb, one from the Anti-Slavery Bugle, and the other from William Wells Brown. Both descriptions stress his white heritage. The Bugle’s report, for example, described Bibb’s “whiteness” before it went on to talk about his narrative. Perhaps some members of the audience reacted as did some students in a history lecture I gave at an Ontario university. When I placed a copy of Bibb’s photograph on the overhead machine, there were audible gasps from the students. Many had expected to see a dark-looking man, a “real” Negro. Bibb’s countenance confused them, and led us into a lively discussion of the complexities of American slavery and the meaning of race.

In addition to lecturing for the Michigan State and other antislavery societies, Bibb also lectured under the auspices of the Michigan Liberty Party. He campaigned for it in the 1844 presidential election and kept up his Liberty Party activities for another four years. It would appear that Bibb simultaneously worked for the Michigan Liberty party and the state antislavery society. It did not appear to be a conflict of interest. The
state antislavery society endorsed political abolition when the national antislavery body split in two through its endorsement for and support of the Liberty Party. It also used its organ the *Signal of Liberty* as the official organ of the Michigan Liberty Party. In fact, some of the main propagandists of the Michigan Liberty Party, people like A.L. Porter and Theodore Foster, were officers of the MSASS. Thus, Bibb’s duties as lecturer for the MSASS and the Liberty Party must have overlapped at times.

The Detroit wing of Liberty Party activities was organized by the Liberty Association of that town. It was this group that examined Henry Bibb’s narrative and declared its veracity. Bibb, also gave some of his earliest antislavery lectures before this association. Bibb, in a letter to the *Signal*, lists his reason for supporting the Liberty Party. Outlining the the desire of free African Americans for the franchise, Bibb focuses on the theme of white northern racism and concomitantly Black civil rights. Though northern Blacks like those in Michigan were “free,” because of racist laws they were unable to vote. He also enthusiastically commits himself to political action as the surest means to end slavery. This letter to the *Signal* highlights Bibb’s mission to end slavery and racial oppression and bring about a just society.

Dear friends of the Liberty Party of Michigan, though this is my native country, I am a disfranchised man in your State, because my complexion is not quite as light as some others, yet my sympathies have ever been decidedly with the Liberty party. And for the following reasons, namely: as far as I understand the position of the party, it has thought more of the head of a man that his hat, and more of his body that his coat, and for this reason have regarded this party as almost the only hope of delivering 3,000,000 of my long degraded brethren from American
bondage. The party has united in trying to elevate the oppressed colored race, from goods and chattels, four footed beasts and creeping things, and place them where God designed man should stand, on one common platform....

LECTURING FOR GOD

Go forth ye Colporteurs with Christ in your heart,
Exploring plantations and visiting marts,
Relying on God, whose omnipotence saves,
With prayers for the master and bibles for the slaves.

At the centre of Bibb’s religious philosophy was the Bible and the reading of it. For much of his life as a public abolitionist he supported a project which had the potential to undermine slavery in the United States—the Bible for The Slave Crusade. This project, initiated by the AFASS through the AMA, aimed at giving the Bible to every Black and slave family in the United States. Bibb gave the movement a tremendous boost when he became its principal fundraiser and agent. Christianity as a tool of liberation was an important tenet of Bibb’s abolitionist philosophy, and the BFS crusade revealed the link between religion, literacy, and emancipation in Bibb’s religious thought. To understand why Bibb whole-heartedly embraced the BFS, and countered the controversy it engendered in abolitionist circles, it is necessary to discuss religion among the enslaved and free Blacks in antebellum United States.

As Albert Raboteau notes, by 1850 Christianity permeated Black life and culture in the South. Christian doctrines, norms, and vision of life had become familiar to most slaves, all the more so as the population became creolized. As a consequence, according
to Robateau, this meant that the African elements and influence had diminished. Sylvia Frey and Betty Woods, however, present an alternate view. They contend that the African gods did not "die," but took on new life as the Africans and their African Americans descendants consciously Africanized the Christian God and the Christian religion. As part of the strategy to exercise full control over the slave population, masters and other whites sought to stamp out all vestiges of the slaves' African heritage and culture. Most slaves who wanted a religious life could not practise the religions they or their forebears brought from Africa. The only alternative was Christianity. When white preacher Benjamin Fawcett addressed a group of Black Christians in Virginia, he exhorted them to "Rejoice and be exceeding glad that you are delivered from the frauds of Mohamet, or Pagan Darkness, and Worship of Daemons; and are not now taught to place your Dependence upon those other dead men, whom the Papists impiously worship, to the Neglect and Dishonour of Jesus Christ...." Even Christianity was offered grudgingly and in a severely truncated form, but enslaved Africans took it and reshaped it to suit their needs and experience, and in so doing created a distinct brand of Christianity.

Scholars of the history of Black Christianity in the U.S. have divided the development in three phases: the first from 1750-90; the second from 1790-1830; and the third from 1830-60. A series of religious revivals called the (first) Great Awakening ushered in the first phase of Black Christianity. Led by the dissenting sects—mainly the Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists, the Great Awakening was
revolutionary and democratic in its content and scope. It had as its objective to bring the gospel to all regardless of social class, rank, generational difference, race, and gender. The revivalists preached a revolutionary gospel which reverberated in the ears of the Black listeners. The core of their message was that all were equal in God’s sight, that God was no “respecter of persons,” and that God, not man, was the Lord of the world. It was the first time many of the Black listeners heard of equality in religion, and in response, tens of thousands converted, including numerous enslaved persons. Since the objective of the revivals was to bring as many souls as possible to God, no one could object to slaves responding positively to the message and converting to Christianity. This first effort at mass proselytization of the Black and enslaved populace was very successful as witnessed by the many who converted.\textsuperscript{106}

The Methodists in particular were very successful among the slave and free Black populations, and part of their success must be attributed to their antislavery gospel. From the start, Methodists preached that slavery was evil and immoral and thus unchristian. They urged masters to emancipate their slaves and to support their slaves in getting the gospel. In its early period, the Methodist church even expelled slaveholders who were church members. Like the Quakers, they did not want the “stain of slavery” to soil their faith.\textsuperscript{107}

During the second phase (1790-1830), religion among the slaves continued to grow but two alarming trends also became apparent. Planters now became vehemently opposed to their slaves being Christianized. They felt that “the hearing of the gospel
required time that could be economically productive; and slaves gathered together in religious assemblies might become conscious of their own strength and plot insurrections under cover of religious instructions. The Vesey uprising of 1822 confirmed planter suspicion that a religious slave was a dangerous slave. The antislavery attitude of the Protestant churches, especially the Methodists, began to weaken due to pressure from influential slaveholders and the desire of these religious denominations to become "respectable." By 1816 the Methodists were in full retreat on the slavery question. Donald G Mathews notes that the key reason for the Methodist retreat was that for much of their existence the Methodists were despised. Now as important men and women joined their denomination, they saw the acceptance, respectability and popularity that they craved becoming realized. It was hard to be antislavery in the South. Choosing popularity over purity, the Methodists accommodated themselves to Southern norms and conventions. Nonetheless, proselytization among the Black masses continued, but the intent was now to make the enslaved more obedient to their masters. Black membership, slave and free, in the Methodist and Baptist churches soared. Of great significance was the rise of the independent Black churches during this phase.

During the third phase (1830-1860), planters, urged on by missionaries, began to rethink their position on religion for the slaves. Now convinced that slaves without religion were even more dangerous than those who had it, they began to encourage the proselytization of their slaves. The Nat Turner uprising of 1831 in Virginia had much to do with this change of heart. Missionaries, legislators, and other maintainers of the
system felt that Blacks who were not Christianized could be easily swayed by “demagogues” like Turner. The best way to offset this would be to thoroughly Christianize the Blacks so they would become more obedient and less susceptible to “poisonous” influences. Planters agreed—but only on one condition—that Christianity for the slaves be used as a means of social control. It was during this period too that the Southern church embraced the proslavery argument that slavery was a positive good and used biblical passages to justify enslavement.¹¹²

Even though during this period Christianity grew among the enslaved population, it proceeded as a “managed affair.” With the spectre of the Turner uprising fresh in their minds, and rumours of revolt constantly assaulting their ears, slaveholders who were also the legislators passed laws prohibiting the slave preacher from preaching, enacted legislations which prohibited Blacks (even free Blacks) from meeting in assemblies, and launched a campaign through repressive legislations and whippings to ensure that Blacks obey the law. While planters encouraged Methodist and other white missionaries to spread the word, the Black independent churches in the South came under attack. Black churches now had to have white pastors and white boards of supervisors. And if they did not comply they would be closed. The message seemed to be that if Blacks were to become Christians it would be on the white man’s terms.¹¹³

Of course, enslaved Africans who accepted Christianity had their own vision of what it should be and mean. They intuitively knew that the white version offered them was “tainted.” Blacks had enough Bible-learning to see their experience depicted in the
Bible. Theologian Cain H. Felder argues that in the Bible Blacks found "the ancient symbols of their predicament, namely the saga of the Egyptian bondage, the devastation of the Assyrian invasions, the exportation into Babylonian captivity, and the bedevilment by principalities and powers of the present age." He could also have added the intense identification that Blacks had with Jesus Christ as preacher of love, suffering martyr, and triumphant king. In the Bible, the suffering Hebrew children, often enslaved, and very much despised, were avenged and saved by God. In the New Testament Jesus was a revolutionary "who liberated the oppressed...and...attacked the socio-religious establishment of his day." The Bible thus provided for the slaves a context in which to view their own oppression. Here, the oppressed, the enslaved, the poor, meek and lowly were always vindicated. God was therefore on the side of the slaves, and they were His/Her/Its chosen people. This vision of themselves as God's elect who would be free became part of their identity. The Bible also showed that no matter how long it took, God's people were always liberated.

Influenced by the Bible, enslaved Africans fashioned from it not only an ideology of resistance, but also a theology of liberation. These themes of resistance and liberation came to be central features of slave/Black religious thought.

Blacks defied white proscriptions and developed their own worship and vision of their religious life. Out of the sight of planters and other hostile whites they met in woods, forests, swamps, or someone's homes to hold secret religious meetings. Whites also made it a crime for slaves to meet by themselves in religious gatherings, but slaves
persisted nonetheless. One scholar notes that even slaves caught singing and praying in their own homes were liable to be whipped.\textsuperscript{117} Henry Bibb told of the difficulties he and other slaves encountered in trying to lead a religious life on slave plantations. In one instance he was "flogged almost to death." He was punished with chains around his neck and ankles for attending a religious meeting without his master’s permission.\textsuperscript{118} One reason for such persistence is that their secret meetings despite the dangers, offered them hope, provided consolation, and strengthened their faith to "carry on" in a system which brutalized and humiliated them. There also emerged a clear distinction between the religion of the enslaved and the religion of the master; both groups were aware of it. For many Blacks, slave and free, the Bible and its teachings were interpreted as emancipatory, and many acted on this perception.

Given this understanding of Black Christianity, Bibb’s Bible for the slave project makes sense. Bibb himself had a strong Christian belief. He states that he became "religiously inclined" when he was about 18 years of age.\textsuperscript{119} So serious did he take this new change in his life that he told his sweetheart Malinda that he could only commit to her if she respected his conversion. Malinda’s response was that not only did she respect her lover’s profession of faith but that she too intended to make the saviour her Lord in but a short time.\textsuperscript{120} Bibb soon became a card carrying Methodist.\textsuperscript{121}

As mentioned, the Methodists were among the first groups to proselytize Blacks, enslaved and free. Methodism in states such as Kentucky, Georgia, and South Carolina was the most popular form of religion among enslaved Blacks. Sometimes, a slaveholder
would be a deacon or reader in his church and would have baptized all the slaves on his plantation in his denomination. This gave rise to the paradox of slave and master belonging to the same denomination and congregation. In the case of Bibb, he and one of his former masters, Albert Sibley, belonged to the same congregation.122

Bibb tells us that as soon as he was able to read and write, one of the first acts he carried out was to read the Holy Scriptures. When he became a career abolitionist he advocated that slaves be given the Bible, because he saw the liberatory power of religion. Bibb linked the Bible and literacy to an “enlightened” Christianity. In describing (favourably) a religious meeting that he attended while a slave in Louisiana he noted that “although our exercises were not conducted in accordance with an enlightened Christianity; for we had no Bible—no intelligent leader—but a conscience, prompted by our own reason, constrained to worship God the Creator of all things.”123

To give the Bible to the American slave, Bibb became the chief agent for the BFS, which was sponsored by the AMA, the clerical arm of the AFASS. Both groups were centered around the person of Lewis Tappan and a cohort of evangelical-minded abolitionists of both races. As practising Christians, fired by evangelical zeal, the Tappanites soon formed the American Missionary Society whose mandate was to spread the gospel and education not only among the poor and downtrodden (mainly Africans and First Nations people) in the United States, but in foreign places such as Canada, the West Indies, and as faraway as the Sandwich Islands and Thailand. The American Missionary Society incorporated the Union Missionary Society, an organ that was
formed by Black clerical abolitionists, to help the Amistad captives in the United States and Sierra Leone. The visibility, activity, and organizational capability of the Black clergy ensured that several of its members sat on the executive of the AMA at its formation.\textsuperscript{124} Likewise, with the previous formation of the AFASS several Black abolitionist clerics also sat on the executive or held positions of responsibility.\textsuperscript{125} Blacks in important positions were rare in integrated reform circles in the United States. Black abolitionists among the Tappanites always held important positions. (Could it be because the Tappanites took Christ’s teachings seriously?) Congregationalism was the religion of choice for many Tappanites. Among the Congregationalists, each member was his own pastor, and hence encouraged to develop a personal relationship with God without the mediation of a priest or pastor. This “religious democracy,” I believe, was also at the base of the of the AMA’s thought and action to give the Bible to the slave.\textsuperscript{126}

The BFS must be understood within the general context of the evangelical fervour which pervaded American society in much of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{127} There was a general sense that society had become corrupt and immoral. The capitalist transformation of society helped to trigger this feeling. Paul Goodman notes that “many Protestants...were deeply troubled by what they saw as the dark consequences of the market revolution: secularism, excesses of consumption, the love of luxury and material display, the growth of poverty, inequality...the increase in intemperance, criminality, and prostitution, and the commercialization of sex that all were concomitant with the growth of cities and slums and large underclass populations.” Goodman notes that for
many of the people who shared those beliefs, it was slavery “not the capitalist
transformation of the cities...that seemed to sum up and exemplify this long list of
ills....”128 Many who felt that way believed that God was dissatisfied with the nation and
Armageddon was near at hand. This feeling intensified as the Northern and Southern
sectors of the nation moved farther and farther apart.129 The solution to the impending
crisis, many felt, lay in going back to God and living his Word. The desire was to reform
society. At every level of society people turned to (the Christian) religion. This
culminated in the second great awakening. Part of the attempt to ‘tune into God’s word’
was to read the Bible and practise the teachings of Jesus.

The American Bible Society was an organization which came to maturity amid
this atmosphere of religious fervour. Founded by evangelical whites to help reform
society, its mandate was to give a copy of the Bible to every American family. By 1840
it had distributed over six million Bibles.130 Theoretically, “every American family”
included slave families, but the ABS left the work of Bible distribution in the South to
slaveholders. The result was predictable: slaves families were not given the Bible.131 In
fact, in Kentucky, one of the slaveholder agents for the ABS was none other than Albert
Sibley, Bibb’s former master. The Tappanites and other abolitionists criticized the ABS
for its ‘weak’ position on slavery and its refusal to commit to giving the Bible to the
slave. Predictably, they viewed the ABS as a proslavery organization.132 The AMA’s
Bible for the Slave Crusade arose partially as a result of the ABS’ failure to give the
Bible to Black southern families.133
The first hint that we have that Bibb was interested in giving Bibles to slaves is in a letter he sent to the *Emancipator*, the leading political antislavery newspaper, edited by none other than Joshua Leavitt, in 1847. The letter relates Bibb’s attendance at the annual meeting of the AASS in New York City. At this meeting Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass proposed a resolution condemning the AMA’s project to send a copy of the Bible to every Black family in the United States. Garrison and his supporters also cast doubts on the abolitionism of the AMA. Garrison felt that the move was a “proslavery move to screen the churches”; Douglass felt that giving the Bible to the slave was “folly” since the slaves could not read and he questioned whether masters would even permit their slaves to peruse the Bible. Bibb rose up and defended the BFS crusade; his was the lone voice of dissent. He states that the resolution was “incompatible with religion, justice, and genuine abolitionism...” He also thought that the resolution was a “proslavery” one. Bibb defended the BFS project. He saw the Bible as a means to free the slaves because once the slaves have the Bible “and be taught to read it, there would be no power enough in all the South to hold them in bondage.”

This debate highlights the animosity and philosophical differences between the Garrisonians and the Tappanites. With each side ridiculously accusing the other of being “proslavery,” none was able to listen to the other and critically examine the views put forth. This discussion on the Bible issue between Black abolitionists was to continue with Bibb leading the charge for the Tappanites, and Douglass defending the Garrisonian position. At a debate in May 1849, Bibb and Garnet debated Douglass at New York’s
Zion Baptist Church. Douglass condemned the Bible for the Slave Campaign and urged the predominantly Black audience not to give a cent to it. "In response, Garnet questioned Douglass' religious orthodoxy as a follower of Garrison and the meeting then deteriorated into a shouting match that lasted another hour and a half." After describing this turmoil, the reporter of...

Yet, the issue that Douglass raised about literacy among slaves was an important one. However, two years later at the AFASS' annual meeting Henry Bibb informed the gathering that on every plantation in the South there was at least one Black person who could read, if not write. This view accords well with current research on slave literacy. Beginning with Carter G. Woodson's pioneering work, scholars of slavery have discovered that in spite of whites' refusal to have slaves obtain schooling, slaves often learnt literacy and numeracy skills in secret schools held by literate Blacks and whites themselves. Ironically, as Bibb himself notes, the white children of slaveholders often taught slaves how to read and write. Frederick Douglass tells us that his teacher was his own mistress! He did not share this crucial bit of information when he derided the BFS campaign.

In spite of the controversy in the abolitionist ranks about the BFS campaign, Bibb immersed himself in it. In February 1849, he embarked on lecturing tours in New York and the North-east exhorting audiences to contribute to the crusade. In a letter to
the AMA's executive committee Bibb reveals that he viewed the BFS and religion as a whole, as part of the antislavery agitation. He also notes that members of the public (northern whites) "are more ready to hear upon this branch of the subject than upon the naked question of slavery, a blessed door at last seems to be opening for the suffering bondsman." Bibb set the terms of his agency: he would be authorized to collects funds for the Association; he would receive a percentage of money collected; and he would report to the Association "as often as may be practicable." His reports to the Association would be published. A month later he was retained by the AMA as a BFS agent.

Bibb used the BFS tours as a revolutionary strategy. He realized that while people, especially northern whites, found it difficult to listen to Black or white abolitionists criticizing white southerners for their slaveholding practices, many of them could stomach the criticisms if were couched within the framework of religion. Given the evangelical fervour at the time among northerners, who would deny that giving slaves access to God's word was a bad thing? By using the BFS lectures, Bibb hoped to attract a wider audience and convert unbelievers to the cause. Bibb's strategy reveals that he was a "shrewd tactician in antislavery reform."

Thus began Bibb's work on behalf of promoting literacy, religion, and Bible reading among slaves and Blacks in general. Once hired, he toured New York and New Jersey speaking in churches and collecting money, which the Association would use to purchase Bibles. Bibb wrote Tappan describing his lecturing and fundraising activities on behalf of the ex-slaves and free Blacks; he also sent the money raised and wrote
down meticulously how much money he raised and how many Bibles he distributed.\textsuperscript{142} The following letter to Tappan sheds much light on this aspect on Bibb's lecturing and fundraising tours for the BFS.

To the Treasurer of the American Antislavery Missionary Association

Sir, I submit the following report as a brief account of my labors in the object of giving the Bible to the slave.

1. Jersey City, Feb. 25\textsuperscript{th}. Lectured in the first Wesleyan Church at which time a collection [sic] amounting to $7,00 was obtained for the above object.

2. Brooklyn, Feb. 26\textsuperscript{th}. Lectured in High Street Colored M.E. Church and also obtained the sum of $2,50.

3. New York City, March 4\textsuperscript{th}. Lectured in First Wesleyan Church on King St. to a very interesting audience and received a collection [sic] of fifteen of sixteen dollars, at which time the Rev. Dennis Harris, said the amount should be $80,00, the balance of which he paid himself.

4. Jersey City, March 11\textsuperscript{th}. Lectured in the Union Baptist Church, to a crowded house where I received $44,30 for the same object. Received a donation by two friends to the enslaved, $3,00. Received a contribution of $2,00 by Mrs. Howe [?] of Jersey City.

The whole amount which I collected [sic] up to this date, is $138,80, from which I have taken thirty percentage, leaving a balance of $97,55.

The prospects are quite as bright as I could expect under the circumstances. I feel that my labor will be blessed under God, in preaching repentance to the master, and the Bible for the Slaves. Sir with much respect "I remember those in bonds as bound with them."\textsuperscript{143}

Bibb continued his activities for the rest of the Spring.\textsuperscript{144}

While Bibb's efforts pinpointed Northern Blacks, the AMA had Bible agents in the South, including Kentucky, Bibb's native state. The leading Bible missionary in Kentucky was the Reverend John Fee, a native Kentuckian, who beginning in 1848 distributed Bibles to the slaves until 1859.\textsuperscript{145} This activity was not without danger.
Earlier in 1835 Amos Dresser, who later became Bibb's colleague, was tarred and feathered and whipped in Tennessee for selling Bibles and giving religious tracts to slaves and Blacks.\(^{146}\)

We need not wonder why Bibb and his AMA cohorts were so zealous in promoting the Bible and Bible reading. Such a project lies at the very heart of Christian doctrine as espoused by the apostles. In Matthew 28: 19 believers are exhorted to preach and spread the teachings of Jesus everywhere. Thus, for Bibb, promoting the Bible was carrying out this apostolic injunction. He could not do less as a practising Christian. On the other hand, the BFS campaign had a strong antislavery propaganda appeal and gave Bibb and Leavitt "the opportunity to convince northerners of the depraved nature of an institution that denied its victims even the comforts of reading the scriptures."\(^{147}\) And perhaps, more importantly, the Bible played a decisive part in Bibb's freedom plan for enslaved African Americans.

At the AFASS' meeting in June 1849, Bibb expresses his belief about the Bible as an antislavery document and its universality:

Resolved, that the Bible is entirely opposed to slavery, and that its Divine Author intended it for universal circulation and perusal, we recommend to all friends of the anti-slavery cause to aid the American Missionary Association in its successful efforts to distribute copies of the Holy Scriptures among the slave population of the slave states.\(^{148}\)

In the spring of 1850 Bibb toured the New England states on behalf of the BFS, but as a letter to Lewis Tappan makes clear, he also "succeed very well" in selling his
own book. I can begin to see my way clear."  

Because many professional abolitionists had few sources of income, those like Bibb who were authors used the antislavery lecture circuit to sell their books and earn needed income. Bibb informs Tappan that he would remain in Boston and that Tappan should forward his letters to Bibb's Boston address. Bibb continued lecturing and touring for the AMA until the fall of 1850 when he, his wife, and his mother left the United States and relocated in Sandwich, Canada West. The first recorded letter we have of Bibb written from Canada was to the AMA executive. From the letter we know that Bibb took the Bible for the Slave crusade to "the refugees from southern slavery who are so rapidly settling in Canada." Bibb noted that "This class of person are almost entirely destitute of this most important of all books." He then asked the Association to send "a lot of Bibles and Testaments to this place, they would be very acceptable—and would be profitably distributed among the fugitives."  

Apparently Tappan suggested to Bibb that he make a united application with the AMA missionary at Amherstburg, David Hotchiss, for Bibles to the American Bible Society. Bibb concurred. Yet, almost nine months later we find Bibb writing in the pages of the Voice,  

Several months ago we made an application to the American Missionary Association for a donation of Bibles and testaments for our destitute brethren in Canada who have not the means of supplying themselves with the Word of Life. Sometime after, we received a visit from Rev. Calvin Durfee, of Boston, Mass., who brought with him
a note of recommendation from Lewis Tappan, Esq., of New York. The request had been granted by the American Bible Society, and that the Bible would be speedily forwarded. He also offered to transmit to us a quantity of Sabbath School books, with Temperance Tracts, etc. We gave him a list of what we needed, with our address; but this has been the last of it. Several months have elapsed, and we have not seen or heard anything more of the Bibles which were promised us. Shall we not have them? Or shall we ask in vain for the Holy Bible, as does the poor slave on the Southern plantations? Will some one from the American Missionary Association in New York, go again to the American Bible Society in our behalf, for the Bibles they promised us? Perhaps they have forgotten us.\textsuperscript{153}

We do not know whether or not the American Bible Society sent the Bibles to Bibb in Canada. But he and his wife Mary continued their efforts in the Sunday school movement, and were also in contact with Christian abolitionists in Michigan who also supplied Christian texts to the Bibbs for their religious work among Blacks in Essex County.

Henry Bibb was the most vocal Black advocate of giving the Bible to the American slave. He visualized that once slaves read the message for themselves, a mental liberation would occur which ultimately would lead to a physical liberation and the downfall of slavery. He linked religion to letters to liberation. Bibb’s theology and discourse were revolutionary. He shared with other Black abolitionists, most notably Henry Garnet, that the central message of the Christian gospel was that of liberation.

Travelling across the country enabled Bibb to make contacts with Black and white abolitionists. This movement kept him abreast of the latest in antislavery
publications and propaganda. He also kept in touch with the diverse Black communities in Michigan and beyond and came to know some of their leaders on an intimate level. As a traveller he increased his geographical knowledge of the state and country, something denied to slaves.\textsuperscript{154}

As Bibb matured as an abolitionist orator, he began to broaden the scope of his subjects. It was no longer satisfying to speak only about his life in slavery. Bibb tackled diverse topics such as colonization, Black Christianity, and party politics. Other Black abolitionists were also of the same mind. Their interests were vast and diverse; this enabled them to speak on a wide variety on subjects. Alexander Crummell lectured on "Africa and her peoples," Frances Ellen Watkins Harper spoke on the American Constitution, Frederick Douglass expounded on women's rights, and Henry Garnet internationalized the Black struggle by addressing conditions in Jamaica, past and present.\textsuperscript{155} That some antislavery whites could view this 'independence' of Black abolitionists, especially exslaves, with dismay is certain. W.L. Garrison and some of his white supporters viewed with increasing alarm Frederick Douglass' sophistication as a speaker. They felt that he should appear "less learned" if the story of his life was to be believed. Black ex-slave speakers were not to display high intellect or a philosophical turn of mind, but merely give a "narration" of their life in slavery. Despite of the racism of white antislavery workers and others, Black abolitionist speakers pressed on and spoke on whatever issue that concerned them as humans. By so doing they declared their independence.\textsuperscript{156}
Henry Bibb was one of the ablest and most effective antislavery workers in the United States. In Michigan and elsewhere, not only was he “influential in unifying...abolitionist efforts,”¹⁵⁷ but through his labours he helped to abolitionize the country.¹⁵⁸ Within antislavery he developed into a gifted orator, and became a sought-after speaker. By choosing the lecture platform as one of his strategies for bringing about the downfall of slavery, he was able to make a vital contribution to the cause of Black freedom in America. He was motivated by the desire to end slavery and racial oppression and sought through his work to bring about a society based on racial equality and freedom. At the end of the day, Bibb could honestly say that, his heart had indited a good matter, and he had used his tongue and his pen to bring that matter before many audiences,¹⁵⁹ members of which he made sympathetic to the cause of abolition.
Notes


3 David M. Katzman informs us that Detroit's Blacks “comprised the largest single group of blacks...of the state's black population in 1850.” *Before The Ghetto, Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973) 13.


10 Though published a hundred years ago Theodore C. Smith's *The Liberty and Free Soil Parties* (New York, 1897) offers a very solid discussion on the formation of the Liberty party and the reasons behind this action; see chapters 3, 4, and 5. Other Liberty party founders included William Goodell, Myron Holley (who gave his talents, time, and money to the Liberty cause), and Alvan Stewart. For a discussion on Smith and his New York cohorts see Allan M. Kraut, “The Forgotten Reformers: A Profile of Third Party Abolitionists in Antebellum New York,” in Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman, eds. *Antislavery Reconsidered, New Perspectives on the Abolitionists* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979) 119-145.

11 Lewis Tappan gathered a group of men around him who, like himself, were evangelical minded. Many were clergies. Their religious bent made them inclined, like the Garrisonians, to disavow politics which they believed had a corrupting influence. Yet many white and black clergy men who were Tappanites became zealous advocates of political action. The abolitionism that arose after 1840 was complex and had many shades. Apart from Garrisonian and Tappanite abolitionism, there was the distinct political abolitionism centered around men like Gerrit Smith and James Birney; a definite black abolitionism emerged as blacks sought to establish their independence from their white colleagues; there was a Quaker abolitionism, a Methodist and Presbyterian abolitionism, etc.,. Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and

12 The Garrisonian moral suasionists believed politics to be "corrupt," and that those who participated in it would become "soiled." Yet the New Englanders could not stop the juggernaut that was political abolitionism. In fact, some scholars argue that due to the schism within the AASS, the abolitionist torchlight passed from the east to the west, "west of the Hudson." Dumond's Antislavery, chap. 36, emphasizes the growing importance of the west, also Black Abolitionist Papers, Vol. 3, 27. For two discussions on the division within the AASS see, Krabor, Means and Ends in American Abolitionism, and Wyatt-Brown, Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War.


15 The Signal of Liberty was preceded by the Michigan Freeman which was previously edited by Treadwell. Kephart, "A Pioneer Michigan Abolitionist," 35; "Antislavery Publishing in Michigan," 222-23.

16 The majority of the leading Black abolitionists supported political action (and also the AFASS). Significantly, they, like the white "political" activists came from the west. Henry Highland Garnet. Samuel Ringgold Ward and Theodore Wright were New Yorkers; William Lambert and George DeBaptiste were Detroiter. Bibb, therefore, by being a western fugitive perhaps absorbed political action as if by osmosis. C. Peter Ripley, ed. The Black Abolitionist Papers, Vol. 3, 22-23.

17 Katzman, Before the Ghetto, 12-15.


19 Voice of the Fugitive, 1 January 1851, Sandwich, Ontario.

20 The Reverend William C. Monroe was one of the leaders in the Detroit Black community. In 1841 he became the teacher at the Black school which was housed in the Second Baptist Church. Monroe was a Michigan delegate at the National Black convention held in Buffalo, New York in April 1843, and called

21 Details of Bibb’s life are taken from his autobiography Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave Written by himself. Narrative is reprinted in Gilbert Osofsky, Puttin’ on Ole Massa, the Slave Narratives of Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown, and Solomon Northup (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) 154. By the time of Bibb’s arrival in Detroit education had become universal and public. This meant that citizens were taxed for its provision. Yet in Michigan, and several other free states, Blacks bore a great injustice in their pursuit of knowledge. Even though they were taxed they were denied access to the public school; they therefore resorted to founding and maintaining separate schools. Often these facilities were inferior and limited. In Detroit, at the time of Bibb’s arrival, the Black community was keeping a school at the Second Baptist Church. It was this school that Rev. Monroe taught. Katzman, Before the Ghetto, 23. Caroline W. Thrun’s, “School Segregation in Michigan,” Michigan History, 38 (March 1954) looks at legislative discrimination in education against people of colour. See also Woodson, Education of the Negro Prior to 1861.

22 Bibb became an agent for the American Missionary Association in their “Bible for The Slave” campaign. This campaign was headed up by Joshua Leavitt (editor of the Emancipator and AMA stalwart) and Lewis Tappan. The Emancipator, 2 June 1847; Bibb to AMA executive, 14 Feb., 1849, (AMA collection, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans); Bibb to Tappan, 4 March 1850 (AMA-ARC); Bibb to AMA executive, 4 Dec., 1850 (AMA-ARC).

23 Osofsky, Puttin’ On Ole Massa, 154. A subsequent chapter will deal with the despair and distress Bibb and his family endured due to separation by sale.

24 Many Blacks from southern and border states migrated to Michigan fleeing oppressive Black codes in their home states; but Michigan was no paradise for Black people. This state enacted restrictive black codes, had its share of race riots, co-operated at times, with slave catchers in returning fugitives to their master, and practised school, church, residential, and employment segregation. Blacks were also denied the vote. On Bibb’s role in the Colored Convention see Black State Conventions, 180-197; on the oppressive conditions Blacks endured in Michigan see, Katzman, Before the Ghetto, 6-14, 22-35;


26 Osofsky, Puttin On Ole Massa, 155-156.


30 Foner, History of Black Americans, 457.


32 Quarles, Black Abolitionists, 58-63; Foner, History of Black Americans, 458-460.

33 Foner, History of Black Americans, 410, 455, 464-66, 475-76.

34 However, as professor Richard Blackett observes, Bibb was still legally a slave, and therefore, could still be apprehended by state or federal authorities. My thanks to professor Blackett for his insight.


36 Katzman, Before the Ghetto, 22.

37 Bibb’s story can be read in his autobiography Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave Written by himself (New York, 1849), reprinted in Osofsky’s Puttin’ On Ole Massa. Yuval Taylor has also included Bibb’s autobiography in I Was Born a Slave, An Anthology of Classic Slave Narratives, Vol. 2 (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999). There are also striking similarities between the stories in the slave narratives and those of world epics, in particular African epics, where the hero or heroine battles adverse forces to ultimately emerge victorious. See Clyde W. Ford, The Hero With an African Face: Mythic Wisdom of Traditional Africa (New York: Bantam Books, 1999).

38 The proslavery argument was a powerful justification for holding Blacks in slavery. Developed by intellectuals, politicians, and slaveholders alike it exerted a strong force in 19th-century American life. Drew Gilpin Faust, ed. The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), and John David Smith. “A Different View of Slavery: Black Historians Attack the Proslavery Argument, 1890-1920,” Journal of Negro History 65 (Fall 1980) 298-311 can be read for an examination and analysis of the proslavery argument.


The influence of Protestant evangelical tradition of hymn singing should also not be overlooked.


Ibid., xv.

Ibid., xix.

Ibid., 20, 21.

Osofsky, *Puttin’ On Ole Massa*, 156.


Haviland, *Woman’s Life-work*, 34.

By this time, a second antislavery body, the Lenawee County Antislavery Society had been founded in Lenawee County. Ndukwu, “Antislavery in Michigan,” 25.

Osofsky, *Puttin’ On Ole Massa*, 156.


Osofsky, *Puttin’ On Ole Massa*, 156.

Black abolitionists’ income from lectures was often sporadic and uncertain. Families of speakers could be in severe need as a result. Fortunately, for Bibb, he was (technically) single. Shirley Yee tells us that Elizabeth Remond and her abolitionist lecturer husband, Charles Lenox Remond, “found themselves dependent on the assistance of Wendell Phillips for material necessities, such as clothing and rent. Charles’s income was meager and sporadic....Their financial troubles strained their marriage....” Shirley Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists, A Study in Activism, 1828-1860* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992) 32; see also Foner, *History of Black Americans*, 465.

Osofsky, *Puttin’ On Ole Massa*, 156. Black abolitionist speakers, at least at the beginning stage of their
tenure with white dominated antislavery societies, often travelled with white antislavery agents from the sponsoring societies. Both the black and white speaker lectured. Amos Dresser who was one of the lane rebels, "went to Nashville to sell Bibles, was seized by a mob on July 11, 1835, publicly whipped and expelled from the community. Dumond, Antislavery, 205.

59 Osofsky, Puttin On Ole Massa, 156-57.

60 Quarles, Black Abolitionists, 57.


63 Foner, History of Black Americans, 465.

64 Seymour Boughton Treadwell, a New Yorker, came to Michigan at the request of the MSASS in 1839, as a paid agent, to “lecture on slavery.” Treadwell also became editor of the society’s organ, the Michigan Freeman, from 1839 to 1840. A strong supporter of political abolitionism he was instrumental in getting the the MSASS to approve plans for an independent political action. This was done through the formation of the Michigan Liberty party.”Antislavery in Michigan,” 70.

65 Osofsky, Puttin "On Ole Massa, 157-58.

66 The Signal, 3 October 1846; see also the issues for 13 June and 18 July for information on Bibb’s travels with Treadwell.

67 The letters written to the Signal, and the North Star, show better spelling than this letter to Birney. Birney’s letter was written in 1845, and the other two in 1846 and 1848 respectively. That Bibb had acquired advance writing skills by 1846 is plausible and hence became a better speller by that time. But there is also another discrepancy. The letter to Gatewood is good in so far as grammar and spelling is concerned and this was written in 1844. One explanation could be that the editors of Bibb’s Narrative in which the letter was reprinted “cleaned” it up before publishing it. The editors of the North Star and Signal could have done the same thing if it was necessary. Bibb’s letter to Birney, dated 25 Feb. 1845 is printed in Dumond’s Letters of James Gillespie Birney 2: 928.

68 Andrews observes that white autobiographers did not have to undergo such big brother treatment in the telling of their stories, that is because their audience was composed of their peers who automatically assumed that their story was true. The same was not true for Blacks. A dominant stereotype in the United States of Black people was that they could not be trusted, were liars, etc. Their audience, composed mainly of whites, was not their peers. Andrews, To Tell a Free Story, 2-5.

69 Headed by H. Hallock, this association represented the Detroit Wing of the Liberty party. Some of its members were also members of the Michigan State Anti-Slavery Society which employed Bibb. Bibb oftentimes lectured on American slavery before the Liberty Association. John Blassingame, Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews and Autobiographies (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977) 514.
But though it seemed that Bibb had nothing to fear from his former masters, there was a “price” was on his head. Yet even this did not seem to disturb him, given the manner he taunted two of his former owners, Silas Gatewood and Daniel Lane, in an “open” letter to them.

But I am informed that there is a reward offered in Kentucky for my head, simply because I am here exposing slaveholding religion and manstealing; but I think it very doubtful whether you will have the pleasure of seeing my head again in your manstealing state before slavery is abolished, which cannot be far off, judging from the signs of the times; for we are already engaged in a second revolutionary struggle against American tyranny. . . . National Anti-Slavery Standard, 29 March 1849.

Robert Burns Stepto, “I Rose and Found My Voice: Narration, Authentication, and Authorial Control in Four Slave Narratives,” From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narratives (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979). In a letter to Bibb from Gerrit Smith shortly after reading the Narrative Smith wrote: ...What a horrible thing slavery is in the light of your Narrative! And your Narrative is true; for I know you to be a man of integrity.” This may sound like “high praise” but it is unlikely Smith would have said this to a white autobiogapher. The North Star, 17 July 1849.


Andrews, To Tell a Free Story, 1-7.

Bibb to Birney, 26 July 1846, BAP reel 5.

Osofsky, Puttin’ On Ole Massa, 160-61. The signers of the letters were members of the MSASS’ executive and the Detroit Liberty Association.

Ibid., 161-162.

Ibid., 162-63.

Osofsky, Puttin’ on Ole Massa, 163. William L. Andrews argues that Bibb could not enjoy total freedom until he knew Malinda’s fate. Only then could his mind be at rest. Only then would he be totally free because the past would be was no longer tugging at his sleeve. Discovering the fate of Malinda brought a much needed closure to an aspect of his life. This discovery “severs Bibb’s binding link to the past and makes it possible for him to become, for the first time in his life, a completely free man.”
Andrews further argue that Bibb perhaps was the more representative fugitive (speaker) unlike Douglass or Wells Brown, who fled from the South without looking back. Most fugitive slave speakers had kin in slavery and constantly worried over and tried to free them. William L. Andrews, To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press) 156, 157. For professional fugitives working to free family members in slavery see Black Abolitionists, 59-61; R.J.M. Blackett, Beating Against the Barriers, Biographical Essays in Nineteenth-Century Afro-American History (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), see chap. one on escaped slave Rev. J.W.C. Pennington; on Lunsford Lane who freed his son from slavery see, Liberty Standard, 10 Feb., 1848. Bibb's reaction his loss of Malinda is given a more detailed treatment in chapter 3.

81 Ososky, Puttin' 'On Ole Massa, 163.

82 For some details of Bibb's 1846-67 tour of New England, see his 21 August 1847 letter to the Signal.

83 The Emancipator, 21 April 1847.

84 Ibid., 24 March 1847.

85 Ibid., 24 March 1847. For another letter recounting the importance of the female presence in antislavery, this time in Vermont, see Bibb's letter to the Emancipator, 17 Feb. 1847.

86 North Star, 16 Feb. 1849.

87 Ibid., 17 Feb., 24 March, 21 April 1847; the Signal, 13 June 1846


90 Palladium of Liberty, 14 August 1844.

91 Liberty Standard, 10 Feb., 1848.


93 See Palladium of Liberty, 14 August 1844; Anti-Slavery Bugle, 24 April 1846; The Signal, 13 June 1846; Liberty Standard, 10 Feb., 1848.

94 Quarles, The Black Abolitionists, 62.

95 Carter G. Woodson, Negro Orators and their Orations; Blassingame, Dictionary of American Negro Biography, 44; Liberty Standard, 10 Feb., 1848. Emancipator, 17 may 1849.
Blackett, *Beating Against the Barriers*, 95-98.

In fact some of the stalwarts of the MSASS, people like A.L. Porter were also Liberty party men. Theodore Foster, editor of the Signal and MSASS officer, was at one time, one of the secretaries of the Michigan Liberty party. Kephart, "Michigan AntiSlavery Publishing," 227.


The *Signal*, 23 May 1846.


Mentioned must be made of the work of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (the SPG) the missionary arm of the colonial Anglican church among the enslaved population. Beginning in 1701, the SPG began its missionary work among the slave population in the South, and other parts of the 13 colonies. However, the SPG was not successful in its efforts due to planter opposition and lack of financial resources. As the first group to consciously engage in proselytizing the enslaved population, the SPG can therefore be seen as the vanguard of the missionary groups who laboured among the Black population. Carter G. Woodson, *Education of the Negro Prior to 1861* (Washington D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1919) 18-50; Frey & Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, 63-79.


Mathews revealed the predicament of the Methodists when he stated that “they wanted to oppose slavery while avoiding social ostracism.” Slavery and Methodism, 18.

The retreat of the Methodists was also economic. Many planters financially supported the missionaries. They Methodist preachers must have therefore felt that they ‘could not bite the hand that fed them.’ Ibid., 23-24, 30-61.


Osofsky, Puttin’ On Ole Massa, 130.

Bibb does not state specifically if he experienced conversion. In the Black church (and some white ones) conversion was a prerequisite for church membership. Conversion was a spiritual awakening in which the convert becomes ‘saved’ by Jesus Christ whom s/he accepts as her/his ‘Lord and Master.’ Conversion usually entails for the convert the beginning of a new life in Jesus, and turning away from the ‘sins of the world.’ As Albert J. Robateau notes “conversion represented not just a change in behavior, but metanoia, a change of heart, a transformation in consciousness—a radical reorientation of personality....” in Clifton H. Johnson, ed. God Struck Me Dead, Voices of Ex-Slaves (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1993) xx.

Osofsky, Puttin’ On Ole Massa, 76-77.

The vast majority of enslaved people in the United States were Methodists of Baptists. Whites also belonged to these two major denominations. Thus it was not uncommon for slaves to belong in the same congregation as their masters. At least two of Bibb’s masters, messieurs Gatewood and Sibley, were Methodist men, and Sibley belonged in the same congregation as Bibb and his family. Osofsky, Puttin’ On Ole Massa, 56; Robateau, Slave Religion, 315-317; ‘Letter of my Old Master,’ Bibb to Albert G. Sibley, Voice of the Fugitive, 23 Sept., 4 Nov. 1852.


Osofsky, Puttin’ On Ole Massa, 123.
Charles B. Ray, Theodore Wright, Samuel Ward, and James Pennington were the first four African Americans to sit on the AMA executive; they were later joined by Samuel E. Cornish, Henry Garnet, and Amos N. Freeman. Clara Merritt DeBoer, Be Jubilant My Feet: African American Abolitionists in the American Missionary Association 1839-1861 (New York: Garland, 1994) 16.


The use of the masculine gender is deliberate. It was men who were active as office holders in these organizations. Official abolitionism was still by and large a male endeavour. Sexist behaviour, which manifested in the debate over whether women should hold public office in the AASS, was also at the root at the split in the AASS in 1840.

The First Great Awakening did not ‘end’, but culminated in a second awakening by the third decade of the 19th century.


The sectional crisis was nowhere better illustrated that in the schisms which rocked the churches by mid-century. In 1844, because of the slavery issue, the Methodists split into a Southern and Northern branch; in 1845 the Baptist followed suit. The Northern branches of the churches felt that they could not compromised on the slavery issue any longer and did not want to associate with brethrens who did. The Southerners had shaped Christianity to accommodate slavery and would not retreat from their position.


Free Soil Republican, 24 May 1849.

Wosh, Spreading the Word, 148-149.

Obviously this was not very realistic. Slavemaster Christians were not about to give Bibles to slaves. By attempting to do so Henry Bibb, the AMA, and the ABS were not only bucking social conventions but throwing fuel on the fire.

This discussion highlights the animosity between the AASS and AFASS; each calling the motives and actions of the other ‘proslavery’ and accusing each other of not being ‘genuine’ abolitionists.

Enancipator, 2 June 1847.

The wish expressed by the Ram's Horn reporter is decidedly a Garrisonian one. McKivigan, “The Gospel Will Burst The Bonds,” 63-64. Garnet and Samuel Ward also debated Charles L. Reason, a prominent New York Garrisonian, on the Bible issue, in May 1849.

The Free Soil Republican, 24 May 1849.

Woodson, Education of the Negro, 205-228.

139 Implied in Bibb’s observation is that whites found giving Bibles to slaves more palatable than perhaps granting them their freedom; the Garrisonians perhaps touch on something when they saw the BFS as a ‘smokescreen’ for slavery. Letter to Executive committee, American Missionary Society, 14 Feb. 1949. AMA-ARC.

140 Bibb to AMA executive, 16 March 1849.


142 Of course, Bibb did this work in the free states thus, his constituencies were free Blacks, many of whom had fled slavery. Bibb to Lewis Tappan, 16 April 1849, BAP, reel 5; 4 March, 8 March, 6 May 1850 BAP, reel 6.

143 Bibb to Tappan, 16 March 1849.

144 Henry Bibb to Lewis Tappan, 21 April 1849. AMA-ARC.


146 Dwight L. Dumond, AntiSlavery, 205.


148 Anti-Slavery Reporter, 2 July 1849.

149 Bibb to Tappan, 4 March 1850. AMA-ARC.


151 Bibb to AMA executive, 14 Dec. 1850, AMA-ARC

152 Bibb to AMA executive, 14 April 1851, AMA-ARC.

153 Voice, 13 August 1851.

154 The Signal, 18 July 1846, 21 August 1747; Liberty Standard, 10 Feb., 1848, North Star, 1 Sept., 1848; Henry Bibb to Gerrit Smith, 30 Dec., 1848; Henry Bibb to Lewis Tappan, 4 March 1850.

155 Wilson Jeremiah Moses, ed. Destiny and Race, Selected Writings, 1840-1898; Alexander Crummell (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992) 61-67; Frances Smith Foster, ed. A Brighter Day


157 Katzman, Before the Ghetto, 1

158 See for example the Emancipator, 17 Feb. 1847.

159 Here I am borrowing from the first verse of Psalm 45: “My heart is inditing a good matter...My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.”
Chapter 3.

*My heart is inditing a good matter.... My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.* (Psalm 45, verse: 1)

"WRITTEN BY HIMSELF": BIBB’S LITERARY CONTRIBUTIONS TO ANTISLAVERY

In a 1975 discussion on the use of documents written by slaves and ex-slaves, slave scholar John Blassingame argued for their value as evidence in the writing of history. Since Blassingame wrote his appeal much use has been made of the written records left behind by ex-slaves and other Blacks. These records have become a veritable gold mine for scholars of antebellum United States, and of Canada. Ex-slave authors who were active abolitionists were perhaps the most visible of this group of Black writers.

Former-slaves-turned abolitionists used the written word as one of the chief means by which to bring the antislavery message to the public. They wrote letters to abolitionist journals and newspapers, to friends, coworkers, and former masters, and they also wrote and published sermons, addresses, commentaries, speeches, travel books, plays, novels, petitions, and books on Black history. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, some of the professional fugitives wrote autobiographical narratives.

Ex-slaves’ writings were often direct extensions of their speech. These written narratives were often a compilation of the stories told by professional fugitives at antislavery meetings. The writings thus contain a high degree of orality. They were also
polemical, and like the lectures, their chief purpose was to sway minds toward the abolitionist cause. In this chapter I will discuss two of the forms that Bibb’s writing took: letters written by him and his autobiographical narrative. Bibb also wrote two history books and a song book, but these appear not to be extant. Bibb also edited and published his own newspaper, the *Voice of the Fugitive*, and the articles and editorials written by him form another dimension of his writing. An analysis of the *Voice* is done in a later chapter devoted to this newspaper.

Abolitionists have left behind hundreds of letters. Historian Carter G. Woodson has remarked that letters provide valuable insight into the minds of the Black men and women who wrote them. But apart from their psychological value, letters written by ex-slaves also provide information on the activities in which these former slaves were involved. Henry Bibb, like his cohorts, wrote numerous letters to various persons and organizations for a variety of reasons. His letters, in addition to being direct communication, also served as addresses, exhortations, and polemics. From 1844 to 1854 Bibb wrote dozens of letters which can simultaneously be read as history, autobiography, and collective biography.

The first recorded instance we have of a letter written by Bibb is one sent to a former master, William Gatewood. What was the intent behind Bibb writing his “old master?” Ripley also noted that these letters “provided an effective counterpoint to proslavery propaganda.” Blassingame remarks: “often taking a belligerent or philosophical tone, the fugitives’ letters were attempts to show the contradictions
between bondage and freedom." Bis initiuated contact with Gatewood by sending him, in pamphlet form, the proceedings of the October 1843 convention of the free colored people of Michigan. To Bibb's surprise, Gatewood responded and sent him information about his mother, whom he had left behind in slavery, and the economic climate in Kentucky, and he asked Bibb to greet two of his former slaves, King and Jack!

Bibb promptly replied to Gatewood, told him he "forgave" him, asked to be remembered to his mother and friends, and informed Gatewood that King and Jack "are in Canada West." Bibb must have taken great pleasure in informing the slaveholder that his two former slaves were beyond his reach. Even though Bibb stated in the first part of the letter, "I can freely forgive you," he raged at Gatewood for the cruel treatment he and his natal family received at the hands of the slave master and his wife:

To be compelled to stand by and see you whip and slash my wife without mercy, when I could afford her no protection, not even by offering myself to suffer the lash in her place, was more than I felt it to be the duty of a slave husband to endure, while the way was open to Canada. My infant child was also frequently flogged by Mrs. Gatewood, for crying until its skin was bruised literally purple. This kind of treatment was what drove me from home And family, to seek a better home for them.... I subscribe myself a friend of the oppressed, and Liberty forever.8

By writing his former master, Bibb began the journey of engaging in a process of mental and psychological emancipation. Gatewood had physically battered Bibb and his family, and perhaps, he had sexually abused his wife as well. These assaults lowered Bibb's self-esteem and made him feel powerless. In writing to Gatewood and stating his mind he
was, as Ripley suggested, engaging in a psychological reorientation of himself. And, as he was now beyond Gatewood’s reach, the slaveholder could no longer harm him, and he could tell him exactly how he felt, something that was unthinkable in slavery. By writing to Gatewood Bibb also engaged in an act of great literary, personal and political importance. Enslaved persons were forbidden to learn to read and write, and here was a man, still legally a slave, engaging in an illegal act. By identifying himself as “one who writes,” Bibb, as Blassingame proposes, challenged and subverted a central aspect of the proslavery argument—that Blacks were too stupid to acquire literacy skills. These points surely could not have been lost on Gatewood.

But it is to the newspapers—antislavery journals—that one must turn in order to gain access to the many letters written by professional fugitives like Bibb. From 1846 onward Bibb penned letters and addresses to various abolitionist journals. He wrote on a wide variety of subjects, including Black conventions, abolitionist conventions, political parties, and his work among fugitive slaves. But one theme remained constant: that American slavery was evil and should be abolished, and racial oppression eradicated. Letters became a principal vehicle by which reformers expressed their views and thoughts on strategies for freedom. Abolitionist journals were the main platforms that letter-writers had for sharing their thoughts with the public. Bibb was a regular writer to a number of antislavery journals that operated across the country. These include the *Signal of Liberty*, the *Palladium of Liberty*, the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, the *North Star*, the *Emancipator*, and Frederick Douglass’ *Paper*. 
Because Bibb began his antislavery career in Michigan by working for organizations connected to the *Signal*, he was a regular contributor to that paper and was well-acquainted with two of its editors—Seymour B. Treadwell, who was his travelling companion on his Michigan tours, and Theodore Foster. In addition, Bibb had an enduring relationship with another paper—the *Emancipator*. Both he and the editor of the *Emancipator*, Joshua Leavitt, worked in the Bible for the Slave crusade, and both men were ardent political abolitionists. Beginning in 1847, Bibb started his long relationship with the *Emancipator*.

A 30 June 1846 letter to the *Signal* is typical of the many he wrote to that paper informing its readers of his participation at antislavery conferences around the country. In a letter titled "Hurrah For Chicago," Bibb lauds Chicago for its fight for Black freedom:

We attended the great Western Antislavery Convention,\(^\text{12}\) held in Chicago on the 24\(^{\text{th}}\), 25\(^{\text{th}}\), and 26\(^{\text{th}}\) of June where we assembled to deliberate on the evils of American slavery, without regard to rank, color, creed or party....The Chicago friends are going ahead holding meetings every week, and talking about nothing but liberty. They have the best Liberty choir we have heard sing. The young ladies and gentlemen are not afraid [n]or ashamed to talk upon the abolition of slavery....

In conclusion, I can say that I never attended a Convention before in my life, that I regretted to leave as much as I did that. I had the honor conferred on me, to speak several times during its protracted sessions, and although it was to a large and mixed multitude of thousands, yet good order prevailed during the meeting. The interest of the Convention rose higher and higher... and the last night of the Convention I addressed a crowded audience in the Presbyterian Church, until I was obliged to leave at 10 o’clock, at the ringing of the
steamboat SH on which we took passage over the lake....

Letters to newspapers also related the experience of fugitive slaves hunted by slaveholders and professional slave catchers. The Crosswaite [or Crosswhite] case, which became a cause celebre in Michigan, was one such story and provided Bibb with a topic to write about. He comments to Douglass and Delany, editors of the *North Star*:

One of the important law-suits has been going on in this city during the last three weeks, which has ever been brought before the people of this state, in relation to the capture of fugitives from southern slavery. It is not yet decided, and will not be perhaps for several days to come. We are not lawing against Kentucky alone, but against the combined powers of slavery. Detroit river is the line between us and Canada, and it is also the great depot of the Northern underground railroad; and if the slaveholders are encouraged with a verdict in this case, they will doubtless make this point their slave-hunting ground....

Adam Crosswaite is a bright mulatto man, about forty-five years of age, and his wife is about fifty. The slaveholders have stated under oath, in this court, that the above family was the property of Francis Giltner, of Carroll County, Kentucky, and that they are runaway slaves....

Ever true to the cause of Freedom,

H. Bibb.

Being a runaway slave himself, Bibb, no doubt, was personally interested in this case.

Adam Crosswaite and his family were Kentucky runaways who had settled in Calhoun County, Michigan. In January 1847, Francis Troutman, nephew of their former owner, Francis Giltner, discovered them. Giltner had sent Troutman and a gang of slave catchers to apprehend the Crosswaite family. Troutman was successful, but only temporarily, as Calhoun County abolitionists rescued the family and spirited them away to Canada. In
June 1848 Troutman filed action against some of the rescuers. In November of the same year the jury returned in favour of Troutman who was awarded $1,926 in damages. The defendants also had to pay the court costs.

Not all of Bibb’s letters were written to newspapers. He also wrote personal letters to coworkers and to other reform activists whenever the need arose. Bibb had cause to write to James Birney as the latter questioned the truthfulness of the story Bibb was telling on the lecture circuit. Bibb wrote to Birney in defence of himself, his story, and his race.¹⁶

In 1848 Bibb wrote Gerrit Smith, thanking him for the 40 acres of land Smith had given him. Smith, a New York philanthropist, abolitionist, and veritable “friend of the Blacks,” gave much of his wealth to support the antislavery movement. In 1846 he began giving thousands of acres to Black families so that Black male heads of households would have the property qualification in order to vote. New York State had effectively disfranchised Blacks by imposing a restrictive property qualification and Smith hoped that by helping Blacks to become property owners, he could counter the discriminatory measure. Naturally, he hoped, if Black males were given the franchise, they would vote for the party to which he belonged, the Liberty Party.¹⁷

From this letter we also learn that Bibb’s mother was now living with him, he having arranged for her rescue from the South, that he was writing his autobiography and was now engaged in antislavery work in Massachusetts. One curious thing emerges from the letter. Bibb tells Smith that he is writing his autobiography in which he will tell the
tale of his wife and child suffering in slavery. It is understandable that Bibb would want to tell the world how slavery destroyed his family and the lives of its members. But by this time, he was married to Mary Miles of Boston; she was now his wife, yet he makes no mention of her. The letter was written from Boston:

30 Dec. 1848
Boston,

My Esteemed friend and fellow laborer in the cause of freedom for three millions of our brethren with whom I am identified by birth and affliction, externally and internally. Believe me Sir when I say that I was not a little surprised to receive a deed from you through your friend Mr. Sewell, Esq. For 40 acres of land as a donation. For this will you please accept my greatful [sic] thanks and may the blessings of the Lord be ever upon you and yours. Surely you must have been directed by the hand of an [ever-ruling?] providence for to you I am almost an intier [sic]stranger but I am poor and needy. I have but very little of this world’s goods, neither do I expect to have, for the cause in which I have engaged, is not the road to wealth nor[sic] honor, And in it I expect to spend and be spent, “God being my helper.” It requires but little to support me and my dear mother who has but a short time since got out of the jaws of slavery by my aid. This constitutes my family at the present time.

Bibb’s statement regarding his family is strange. He was at this time married to Mary Miles. I am surmising that Bibb hid the fact of his marriage since “purist” abolitionists, especially the white ones, wanted the Black abolitionists whom they helped to live up to a certain “moral standard.” That Bibb still had a wife in slavery, even though she was living in concubinage with her master, and that he had married another
woman, legally this time, would not have sat well with some white abolitionists. William and Jane Pease note that some of the Boston Brahmins, upon discovering Bibb’s marriage to Miles, warned him not to travel to England because he had committed “bigamy.” British white abolitionists also expected their Black counterparts to lead “respectable” lives. When Wells Brown travelled to England his white sponsors, imbued with Victorian morals, became uneasy when they discovered that he had separated from his wife.19

Bibb continues:

I have also received the letter which you forwarded me concerning my going to England. This was also very unexpected....But to it I would cheerfully...respond if I had the ability to do so, because the plan which [unreadable] set forth by that day meets my intier [sic] approbation. It points to a great commercial reform in the old country and to a great national reform in slaveholding America. But in this country where slavery is sanctioned by the Church, and protected by law, I think that I can accomplish more by laboring to establish an antislavery religion, and to repeal the slave law.

Going across the Atlantic to Europe, especially to Britain, had become a rite of passage for Black (and white) abolitionists. Those who took the trip expanded their perspective and boosted their career. By the time Bibb wrote this letter to Smith, slavery had been abolished in the British Empire for over 10 years, and British abolitionists, having known victory, turned with renewed zest to attacking American slavery and supporting American abolitionists. British abolitionists also came to visit and lecture in the United States, and they formed associations with the main national antislavery bodies in the
U.S. The transatlantic alliance between American and British abolitionism strengthened American abolitionism and enabled it to have an international impact.  

Pease and Pease state that in 1850 Bibb was “warned” away from Britain. Yet here in this letter, it seems that it was Bibb himself who made a personal decision not to go to Britain as he feels he can do more for his people by staying in the United States. Richard Blackett also states that even though Frederick Douglass encouraged Bibb to travel to Britain and recommended him to British abolitionists Bibb decided not to go to Britain. Perhaps the Boston Brahmins had less influence on Bibb’s decision than Pease and Pease would like to think.

In this letter to Smith, Bibb also related that even though he was no longer with his slave wife and daughter, thoughts of them were still uppermost in his mind. He was writing his narrative, but it was also their narrative. This tells us that although he was married to Mary Miles at this time, his slave wife Malinda still cast a shadow over his life:

I am now laboring to publish the narrative of my life, and of my bereaved wife and child who are still left to linger out their days in hopeless bondage. I have no means of doing this myself, but the work is thought to be so worthy of aid, and so well calculated without note or comment to push forward the Anti-Slavery cause that I doubt not that I shall get help. It will cost probably from $3 to $3.50 to get it out. After I get this out if providence should open the way for my passage to England, I will go trusting in the Arm that guided Moses and the Children of Israel through the
Red Sea to a bloodless victory over slavery. But before going
would you be so kind as to help me to some information upon
the free labor system. You can address me at the
Emancipation office. Please aid me if you can to undo
the heavy burdens and to let the oppressed go free, for
which I ever pray.

I subscribe myself your for the oppressed.

Henry Bibb.

Around this time Bibb joined Joshua Leavitt’s Bible for Slave crusade and
became one of the chief fundraisers for this American Missionary Association sponsored
activity. He thus began a correspondence with Lewis Tappan of the AMA and the
American Foreign and Anti-Slavery. From 1848 to 1851 Bibb wrote Tappan describing
his lecturing and fundraising activities on behalf of the ex-slaves and free Blacks; he also
sent the money raised and wrote down meticulously how much money he raised and how
many Bibles he distributed. The following letter to Tappan sheds much light on this
aspect on Bibb’s activities.

To the Treasurer of the American Antislavery Missionary Society,

Sir, I submit the following report as a brief account of my labors
in behalf of giving the Bible to the American slaves during
the present month.
Newark, state of N.J., March 18th, collected [sic] in the
Plain St. church, $5.78.
Newark, March 18th, collected [sic] in the Free Church
$33.81.

Paterson, March 25th, collection [sic] in the . . . M.E. Church...
$7.99
Paterson, March 25th, collected [sic] in the Free Church $5.49.

Bibb notes that he had not “been able to do much during the past month—but I
feel satisfied that we shall succeed." In a 4 March 1850 letter to Tappan, Bibb discusses his fundraising and lecture tour in New England for the BFS. This letter highlights the "trials and triumphs" of such an undertaking. Bibb writes from Lowell, Massachusetts:

My dear friend....From the kind recommendations which you gave me to your friends at Northam[pton], I was well received. I had no meeting for the Bible cause, I could not get a meeting house to hold it in. I informed some of our friends that I should present that cause of which they would get me a meeting house. They tried to get one but the proprietor of the house excused themselves by saying that their lamps were out of order, and the Bible agent had just taken a collection [sic] in the other church. I had the honor to address two large meetings in their town hall upon the naked question of slavery, which was well received. But the matter being very strong, I did not reach the ears of those whom I mostly desired to address. I have spoken before large and interesting meetings since I came to New England, in all of which I have called attention to the American Missionary Society, and its intention of giving the Bible to the slave, and many have promised to forward ...contributions to the Society. I have not lectured exclusively upon that subject until last night here in Lowell in a proslavery church at which time I took up a collection [sic]. I shall do the same again tonight at the Freewill Baptist Church.

By being part of the BFS campaign Bibb becomes a sort of missionary to his Black sisters and brothers, and a voice of morality to white audiences. His involvement in the BFS also reveals his religious bent and gives an insight into his religious philosophy. This missionary work prefigures his religious work in Canada between 1850-1854. These letters bear witness to the fact that "race matters." Whether it was agitating against the barbarity of the slave system and prejudice in the North against

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1 The name is actually the American Missionary Association
Blacks, or giving "Bibles to slaves," race had become the central focus of Bibb's life.

In one of his many letters to the Emancipator, Bibb reveals the significance of women to the cause of abolition. Antislavery women organized fairs, signed petitions, sponsored lectures, employed lecturers, and engaged in a host of other activities designed to bring about the downfall of slavery. Women have now been recognized as the "foot soldiers" of the abolition crusade, and scholars have begun to document and analyze the centrality of women to the antislavery movement. Bibb's letter gives a first-hand account of the use of fairs by female activists to further the cause:

The cause of Liberty in New England is onward, the anti-slavery ladies of Mass. Are awake to the cries of the oppressed. God has given them hearts to feel and hands to work, and they are busily engaged day and night working for the slave in our country. They intend holding a great Liberty fair in the city of Boston, some time during the present winter for the purpose of aiding in the great work of emancipation. It is expected to be one of the best fairs they have ever held.

The female Emancipation Society of Mass. have [sic] employed me as the representative of the three millions of whom they seek to deliver from bondage and unutterable despair. They have authorized me to bring the matter before the people, and to solicit aid for their proposed fair....

But time and paper would fail me, to give a free report of my labors and success in my agency. Suffice it to say that our cause is onward! Our friends are coming up to the contest with new and increased energy, to do battle in freedom's cause....

The six letters considered above are but samples of the numerous letters Bibb wrote to various persons and organization. These letters speak triumphantly of the rise of one slave from illiteracy to literacy, which corresponds with his flight from slavery to
freedom; from object to subject; and from self-negation to self-affirmation. At the same time, the letters reveal that Bibb did not have much formal education (as he himself states in his autobiography). There are spelling errors in many of the letters, as illustrated in those written to Smith and Tappan. The letters to newspapers appear to be “cleaned up” by the editors before publication. Nonetheless, the spelling and grammatical errors do not reduce the significance of Bibb’s literary achievement.

If we are to take to heart Woodson’s observation that personal letters written to and from Blacks provide insight in the unconscious of the sender then we have no access to Bibb’s mind because no personal letter from him, or to him, has come to light. But we need not despair because the absence of personal letters still provide a kind of utterance. On the other hand, since opposing slavery became Bibb’s life it can be argued that his public writings reflected major themes and currents in most aspects of his life, and formed part of the larger “public mind” of Black abolitionists. These letters show the professional fugitive as someone who created a very public persona and fashioned his identity around such an image.  

Bibb’s letters were a form of public exhortation. They were meant to inform, to convert, to defend, and to do battle. But it is Bibb’s published autobiography, The Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, which became his most significant literary weapon in the fight against slavery. It is also from this piece of work that we see Bibb at his most private and personal, and thus gain an insight into his “private mind.”
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVE

Ex-slave autobiographies had a decidedly polemical function. One reviewer of Bibb's narrative saw it as potentially having an enormous influence in "abolitionizing" the country. There was therefore an overt political aim in the writing and publication of ex-slaves' narratives. Black authors eagerly used their writing to attack the institution of slavery.

The act of recording one's voice in print was of critical importance to ex-slave authors. Writing for Blacks and ex-slaves meant that they were challenging in a major way the entire western ideological and philosophical assumptions regarding Black people. We associate the Enlightenment with the concept of "liberalism" which was articulated in notions of "equal rights, autonomy, and freedom of men." But what is not so widely known is that the articulation of these notions "took place simultaneously with the massacre, expropriation, and subjection to hereditary slavery of men [sic] at least apparently human." Immanuel Kant, father of the modern concept of race, for example, proposed a racial hierarchy, based on skin colour, of the known peoples of the world with "whites" at the top, and Africans and Amerindians at the bottom. In this hierarchical world conceptualized by Kant, only Europeans could lay claim to full personhood and humanity. Because nonwhites were theorized and constructed as "wild beasts," "savage" and "barbarians," supporters of the European colonizing and imperializing projects, including Enlightenment intellectuals, justified these ventures which led to the enslavement and genocide of millions of people in the Americas, Africa,
and Asia. For the philosopher Charles Mills, the genocide carried out by the Nazis under the Third Reich against Jews, Gypsies, and others, had intellectual foundation in the thought of some of Europe’s most celebrated thinkers, Kant being a principal one.

…I’m not saying that Kant would have endorsed genocide. But the embarrassing fact for the white West (which doubtless explains its concealment) is that their most important moral theorist of the past three hundred years is also the foundational theorist in the modern period of the division between persons and subpersons, upon which Nazi theory would later draw. Modern moral theory and modern racial theory have the same father.

The leading Enlightenment thinkers in Western Europe and North America held that Black people, by virtue of possessing a “Black” body, were ignorant and unintelligent. In other words, because of “race”, Blacks were deemed as “naturally” inferior. Their state of being meant that they could not “master the arts and sciences.” They therefore could not develop literature. Georg Hegel, for example, whose philosophy has informed much of the epistemological and ontological discourses in the Western academy, in his Philosophy of History “took the absence of writing among Blacks as the sign of their innate inferiority.” Why was writing and, concomitantly, the production of literature so important to constructions of Black inferiority? Beginning with Descartes, “reason was privileged over all other human characteristics, and writing was taken to be the visible sign of reason.” Since Blacks were without reason, so the argument went, they could never be fully human, and therefore they could never be “men

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2 The emphasis is Mills'
of letters.” Those who lacked reason were placed (by Kant and others) on the “lower end of the chain” of humanity. The most fitting station for such “subspecies” was slavery. In North America, Thomas Jefferson, a founding father of the American Republic, shared the views of Kant, Hegel, John Locke, David Hume, Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and others, with regards to the ability of Black people.\textsuperscript{40} Jefferson elaborated on these ideas in his \textit{Notes on Virginia}. Thus Enlightenment thinkers on both sides of the Atlantic created, articulated, and mounted a defence of slavery, one that was based on the “natural inferiority of Black people.”

In the United States, in spite of people like Jefferson, proslavery forces were relatively quiet from the period after the Revolutionary War to 1820. However, in the three decades before the Civil War, they rose in aggressive defence of their cherished institution of slavery, as it came under attack from abolitionist forces. Proslavery intellectuals, like their Enlightenment forebears, used the argument of the innate inferiority of Blacks as justification for their enslavement of Africans. The central tenet of their argument was that slavery was a “positive good” for the enslaved. Crudely put, the positive good theory argued that slavery functioned as a system of social security and “civilization” for enslaved Blacks. These Blacks, the argument contend, were content within such a system.\textsuperscript{41}

Proslavery arguments, based on Black inferiority and “difference,” were repeatedly used by white Americans, in and outside officialdom, to deny Black people civil and human rights. In 1857, Judge Taney, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, in
handing down his decision in the Dred Scott case, stated with regards to the status of
slaves and Blacks that:

...history shows they have, for more than a century, before
been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and unfit
associates for the white race, either socially or politically;
and had no rights which white men were bound to respect;
and the black man might be reduced to slavery, bought and
sold, and treated as an ordinary piece of merchandise. This
opinion, at the time, [of the writing of the Constitution] was
fixed and universal with the civilized portion of the white
race. It was regarded as an axiom in morals, which no one
thought of disputing, and every one habitually acted upon
it, without doubting for a moment the correctness of the opinion.42

Slavery, its association with Blacks, and the accompanying racism, in Judge Taney’s
mind, had become “commonsense” knowledge. This knowledge, as Taney so rightly
asserted, was written into and sanctioned by the American Constitution.43

Black authors were very much aware of the proslavery debates and their
implications. Blacks, then, in taking up the pen to write their stories, challenged the
prevailing racial constructions and stereotypes and sought both to shape public
discourses on the Black and slave question and to refashion a new identity for
themselves, collectively and individually. By engaging in the act of thinking, recording,
and organizing, the ex-slave became a full human, a thinking person, a “man,”44 a “man
of letters.” That is why it was so important for authors like Bibb to append to the title of
their books, “Written by Himself.” This was a device to show and prove to the world,
especially the traducers of Black people, that the Black/slave is a thinking being, one
who can express his own thoughts and write them down himself. That is why, all kinds
of Black writing, even an “apolitical” poem about nature, was a highly charged political act.

Ex-slave authors, through the act of writing, were also claiming their own voice to tell their stories. In so doing, they became the authority in that telling. Whenever Black abolitionists produced literature or took the stage to lecture, they were creating new epistemologies and alternative and oppositional discourses to the ones produced by whites. The fact that Black/ex-slave abolitionists came from the context of an oppressive environment, and experienced racism, whether individual or systemic, infused the writings and lecturing of black abolitionists with a powerful authority. For over two centuries, others had spoken for them, and about them, and constructed dubious and damning discourses about them, which not only denied them their humanity, but also made them invisible. In the 1830s, ’40s, and 50s, former slave speakers and writers echoed time and time again, the first words that in 1827 graced the opening page of *Freedom’s Journal*: “We wish to plead our cause; for too long others have spoken for us.” Ex-slave authors, by writing and publishing their autobiographies, were laying claim to their own voice and their humanity, and a fully embodied self.45

Writing for the ex-slave authors was a celebration of their triumph over adversity. Bibb, for example, had little formal education, and yet he was able to write his book *himself*, and get it published. This was no small feat. Surely, this could not be lost on the proslavery forces that were advocating that Blacks lacked intelligence. The slave narrator and his narrative disproved all of this in a very startling manner. First, the writer made
his way to freedom against all odds; thus disproving that he was content with slavery. In most instances, he learned to read and write with little or no help and wrote his autobiography. His whole existence as a writer and abolitionist activist disproved that slavery was the natural state for Blacks.\textsuperscript{16} William Katz fully understands the antislavery impulse of the slave narratives when he declares that the slave narrative "was a declaration of independence and personal worth and a fiery blast at slave holders."\textsuperscript{47}

Writing for the ex-slaves was instrumental in the authors’ creating a new vision and alternative epistemologies, not only for themselves, but for the entire country.

Stephen Butterfield in \textit{Black Autobiography in America} comments that the slave narrators "won their way to freedom past slave catchers and patrol teams, and then wrote as a means of fighting back against their enemies."\textsuperscript{48} And William L. Andrews asserts: "For the Afro-American and his white sponsors, autobiography answered a felt need for a rhetorical mode that would conduct the battle against racism and slavery on grounds other than those already occupied by pro- and antislavery polemics."\textsuperscript{49} And Frances Smith Foster expands the objective of the ex-slave narrator by adding the centrality of self:

Slave Narratives are the personal accounts by black slaves and exslaves of their experiences in slavery and of their efforts to obtain freedom. Written after the physical escape had been accomplished and the narrators were manumitted or fugitive slaves, these narratives were retrospective endeavors which helped the narrators define, even create, their identities as they attempted to relate the patterns and implications of their slavery experiences. More important, the narratives soon became the attempts of black slaves and exslaves to alter
and, eventually, to abolish an institution which was increasingly vital to the continued prosperity of their white audience.\textsuperscript{50}

The importance of the slaves' narratives to Black liberation, Black selfhood, the Black community, and the abolitionist movement cannot be overstated.

Between 1760 and 1860 over 100 slave narratives were written by ex-slaves. These stories detail the lives of former slaves and how they survived, and escaped from, slavery. By doing so they sought to inform their audience of "the inhuman and immoral characteristics of slavery."\textsuperscript{51} Their ultimate aim was to influence enough minds in white America on the evils of the slave system, and by doing so eventually bring about the downfall of slavery.\textsuperscript{52}

Most of the slave narrators had left slavery behind at some point. They were either emancipated by masters or bought their own freedom; the majority "stole themselves," that is, ran away from slavery. During the 'period of crisis,' from 1830 to 1860 (this refers to the time when slavery came "under increasing attack from the North and the outside world"\textsuperscript{53}), a profusion of slave narratives was written and published.\textsuperscript{54} This was mainly a result of the expansion of the abolitionist movement and the fact that white antislavery workers and organizations recognized the great effect and influence that the narratives could have on swaying public opinion toward abolitionism.\textsuperscript{55}

Bibb published his narrative in 1849 with support from the American and Foreign and Anti-Slavery Society. But the story was not new; he had already told some
parts of it to thousands of people, on the platforms at antislavery meetings. A few
newspapers also had begun to print the story of his enslavement that Bibb told to
audiences on his lecturing tours. The need to have one's story written down became
extremely important as more and more people converted to abolitionism, and desired to
hear first-hand accounts of slavery. Butterfield notes "the market grew for their [the
slaves'] testimony as the question of slavery set the nation's political climate on fire." Thus, as the demand for the slave speaker grew it became necessary to publish his or her
story so that "thousands could sit in their living room" and hear the slave speak from the
pages of the narrative. Bibb's written word must therefore be juxtaposed against his
spoken word. He travelled and spoke out against slavery, while he simultaneously wrote;
his lecturing and writing were intertwined. William Andrews' insights into the training
ground that lecturing provided for writing captures well the creative tension between
lecturing and writing in the career of the Black abolitionists:

In their role as preachers from the antislavery pulpit, slave narrators gained valuable training for their literary
careers. The major slave narratives of the 1840s were produced by seasoned veterans of the abolitionist lecture
circuit...Frederick Douglass spent more than four years on the abolitionist platform under the auspices of Garrison's
American Anti-Slavery Society before that organization published his narrative in 1845. William Wells Brown had been employed
as a lecturing agent for the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society for four years before he ventured to write his
autobiography. Henry Bibb served an even longer apprenticeship in the Midwest and Middle Atlantic states before he saw his
narrative into print in 1849. As these famous fugitives repeated their life stories to curious white audiences from Maine to
Michigan, they had numerous chances to polish their narratives
Bibb’s work and the narratives of the other ex-slave writers, therefore, functioned as a kind of “talking book,” a representative of the narrator’s voice. The narratives also provide needed income for ex-slave speakers as many of them had no steady source of income.

Lucius C. Matlack, Bibb’s editor, introduces Bibb’s narrative and gives Bibb support in his fight against slavery. Matlack hopes that the narrative would be an instrument in the great work of emancipation. He calls slavery the “enemy” of literature and goes on to describe the slave narratives as “profound in argument, sublime in poetry, and thrilling in narrative.” Matlack feels that the outpourings of the slaves’ stories will ultimately destroy slavery. He states:

Startling incidents, authenticated, far excelling fiction in their touching pathos, from the pen of self-emancipated slaves, do now exhibit slavery in such revolting aspects as to secure the execrations of all good men and become a monument more enduring than marble, in testimony strong as sacred writ against it....Of the last named is the narrative of the life of Henry Bibb.

According to Robert Stepto, the tenor of Matlack’s introduction is really to “guarantee the truth of a tale and, by extension, the existence of a man calling himself Henry Bibb.” Matlack’s introduction, according to Stepto, was written to encourage white America’s credulity: “their acceptance not so much of the former slave’s escape and newfound freedom, but of his literacy.” In Bibb’s narrative the authenticating strategy is extended from Matlack’s introduction to testimonials (written by whites).
verifying Bibb’s existence and his story. Almost all the slave narratives in book form have some kind of authenticating documents prefixed (or postfixed) to the actual story. Literary scholars have noted that the purpose of these testimonials was to ensure the existence and truthfulness of the narrator. The Black autobiographer was not free to tell his story unless whites “introduced” it. The letters of testimony that formed part of the introduction for Bibb’s narrative were occasioned by the Birney challenge which prompted the Detroit Liberty Association to investigate Bibb’s background. This was in 1845. Knowing that testimonials formed part of the narrative, Bibb and his editor used the Liberty Association’s authenticating letters in his book. Agreeing with Robert Steptoe on how whites, in this case sympathetic abolitionists, invisibilized the slave narrator by taking strong measures to prove his existence and the veracity of his story through the use of testimonials, James Olney concludes: “of course the argument of the slave narratives is that events narrated are factual and truthful and that they all really happened to the narrator, but this is a second-stage argument; prior to the claim of truthfulness is the simple, existential claim: ‘I exist.’ Photographs, portraits, signatures, authenticating letters all make the same claim: ‘this man exists.’ Only then can the narrative begin.”

Did Bibb really feel his voice was compromised through the elaborate strategy of authentication? Or did he believe that it was in his best interest to have the testimonials attached to the narrative? The fugitive narrators knew that to get their works into print they had to satisfy their white patrons and sponsors. And they also were acutely aware
that it was important to get their work to the public. Bearing this in mind, the narrator may not have "agonized" too much over having their voice "introduced." William Andrews prefers to see the use of the authenticating documents by Bibb in a more positive light than some other literary critics like Stepto and Olney, and he even feels that Bibb consciously manipulated the use of these testimonials. In discussing the 1845 Detroit Liberty Association's investigation of Bibb and the production of the testimonials, Andrews sees the use of authentication by Bibb as politic. "Four years later, when Bibb put his story into print, he capitalized on the committee's investigation by having it featured prominently in the introduction to his Narrative as an authenticating document. Thus Bibb tried to turn abolitionist suspicion to his rhetorical advantage even as he acquiesced in the power of white men like Birney and the Detroit Committee to decide whether he would be heard at all."

The thorough authenticating strategies that Black writers were subjected to had a long history. As early as 1773, Phillis Wheatley, the African American poet, had to undergo "examinations" by white men, in order to prove that she was the author of her poems, before her poetry book could be published. This occurred in stages. John Wheatley, owner of Phillis, sent her manuscript along with an affidavit to the publisher explaining "the circumstances and scope of Phillis's formal education." Wheatley was one of the several Black children on both sides of the Atlantic who were tutored by whites as part of an experiment to see whether Blacks could indeed master the arts and science as well as whites. Wheatley's book was published; but before it was presented
to the public, she

had to submit to the examination of eighteen of the “most respectable Characters in Boston, that none might have the least ground for disputing their original.” Their affidavit along with that of John Wheatley and of the publisher served as an introduction [to the book] when it was published in 1773. And even with all this, the Countess of Huntingdon [Wheatley’s British sponsor] requested that distribution be delayed until a picture of the author could be included in order that the least lingering doubt might be assuaged.69

The words of Blacks were questioned, and were even doubted, unless whites verified them. Because Blacks had been constructed, from even before the Enlightenment, as “lying creatures” and “dumb brutes,” their word, spoken or written, it was felt, could not be trusted. With the intensification of American slavery after 1790, and concomitantly, the rise of scientific racism, which was codified in law, enslaved persons were seen as even more “depraved” and “lying” than those Blacks who lived in enslavement prior to the rise of scientific racism. Ex-slave authors then stepped into the realm of letters overshadowed by several disparaging stereotypes, an important one being their “untruthfulness.”

Charles Ball, who wrote the Narrative of Charles Ball, one of the earlier slave narratives, was held under the gaze by both proslavery whites who tried to discredit his book, and by antislavery whites who subjected him to an intense examination in order to authenticate his story. Raymond Hedin, in summing up the dilemma of the slave narrator caught between proslavery and antislavery forces, notes the restraining effect this had on the voice of the narrator.
The nineteenth-century slave narrative was perhaps the most vulnerable literary genre this country has seen. The slave narratives were weapons in the battle against slavery, and consequently they were prime targets as well. Ironically, northern anti-slavery editors and pro-slavery southerners combined forces in a certain sense to keep the slave narrators in their place. The southerners did this by attacking the narrators whenever possible on the issue of factual accuracy and reliable character; the northerners did it by accepting those criteria as crucial to the narratives' legitimacy. The effect was to establish restrictions that no slave narrator could afford to ignore; to do so would be to risk southern attack and northern refusal to publish.  

The very real and fundamental powerlessness of Blacks in society contributed to this state of affairs. Most Blacks were enslaved, and the few hundred thousand free Blacks lived lives circumscribed by repressive laws and customs. Blacks owned no publishing houses or major newspapers or journals. Potential authors therefore had very limited means for getting their work in print. Those who had the courage, confidence, zeal, and talent to write, depended on the largesse and goodwill of whites to get their work published. By this very fact their work would be compromised. Yet, in spite of the control influential whites exerted over the production of the slave narrative, the ex-slave authors were not dissuaded from their project. They tried as much as possible to "inscribe their voices in the written word."  

In order to "inscribe" his voice in his own story and take back authorial control, Bibb, in a short preface written by himself, completely ignores the letters of commendation and recommendation. Not once does he refer to them. He apologizes for his limitations in grammar and the "belle lettres," and astonishes readers by informing them that the reason for his limitations was because he received only three weeks of
formal schooling. Then he goes on to answer the anticipated question of "why I have written this work....?"

My answer is, that in no place have I given orally the detail of my narrative; and some of the most interesting events of my life have never reached the public ear. Moreover, it was at the request of many friends of down-trodden humanity, that I have undertaken to write the following sketch, that light and truth might be spread on the sin and evils of slavery as far as possible. I also wanted to leave my humble testimony on record against this man-destroying system, to be read by succeeding generations when my body shall lie mouldering in the dust.

Having introduced himself to the audience, Bibb goes on to tell his story, the story that made him devote his life to abolitionism.

From Bibb's narrative we learn of his early life in slavery in Kentucky, his parentage, the culture of slavery and the fact that from an early age he began his career in running away. Bibb tells the reader that as a child he was not brought up but "flogged" up. From the time he was "young and small" Bibb was hired out to various masters from whom he occasionally ran away because of ill-treatment. By age 18, Bibb had learnt of Canada and set his sights on going there. But he fell in love with a slave by the name of Malinda, they married, had a daughter whom they named Mary Frances, and Bibb briefly put freedom from his mind. The cruel treatment he and his family received from Gatewood, their owner, caused the lamp of freedom to be rekindled in Bibb's heart and in December of 1837 he made his escape from Kentucky to Essex County, Upper Canada. He later backtracked to Cincinnati, Ohio, where he lived and worked in the free Black community until the spring of 1838, when he travelled to Kentucky to fetch his
wife and child. He was reunited with his mother, wife and child and made plans for his
daughter and wife to join him in Cincinnati. He returned to Ohio and waited six months,
in vain, for Malinda. Against the better judgement of his friends in Ohio, Bibb journeyed
again to Kentucky to fetch Malinda and their daughter. This was not to be. Bibb was
betrayed by Black traitors who turned him over to his master. This marked the beginning
of a series of escapes, recaptures and flights in his life. Finally, he and his family were
sold away to Louisiana to a sadistic planter. This planter later sold Bibb to gamblers,
thus separating him permanently from his family. While “on the road” the gamblers sold
Bibb to an “Indian” slaveholder who took Bibb to live with him and his family in Indian
territory west of Mississippi. Bibb worked as the valet of his new owner, who soon
succumbed to ill-health and died. Bibb quickly made his escape shortly after the death of
his owner. He finally and successfully escaped from slavery, making his way from
Indian territory and arriving in Detroit, Michigan in January, 1842. In his odyssey Bibb
escaped six times and served a total of eight masters.

William Andrews sees Bibb’s story as a kind of “road narrative” because the bulk
of it details Bibb’s life in flight. This is a valid observation. But I am suggesting that
Bibb’s chronicle was also a love story, and the essence of it was his love for his wife and
daughter. Mary Ellen Doyle states, and I agree, that the rendering of Bibb’s experience
was “largely in terms of his marital relations.” Bibb’s raison d’etre for returning time
and again to the “southern prisonhouse” was to free his wife and daughter. Hedin nicely
encapsulates what for him is the “primary impulse” of Bibb’s story: “Bibb’s narrative is
explicitly the story of the psychological and emotional anguish that characterized his entire adult life as a slave, the anguish he felt because of the conflict between his love for his enslaved family and his desire for freedom….⁷⁸ Even when Bibb made his final escape to Detroit, he could not rest until he discovered the fate of Malinda and Mary Frances. Four years later he journeyed south to find them. Bibb lived an existentialist crisis in the absence of his family. Though Bibb is the author of his tale, by his rendering it largely in terms of his relations with his wife and child, it also becomes their story. By focussing the lens on Malinda and Mary Frances and seeing how their husband and father pined after them, we get an intimate view of Bibb, one that is lacking in his letters.⁷⁹

Perhaps this was why Bibb found it necessary not to mention the existence of his second wife, Mary Miles, to some of his abolitionist colleagues like Gerrit Smith. Bibb was writing and lecturing about what slavery stole from him—his wife and child. With the loss of Malinda and child, his story contained a vital ingredient for making it more heartfelt. By foregrounding Malinda and Mary Frances, Bibb could make the “evil” of slavery palpable to his audiences. Slavery was a destroyer and corrupter of marital and familial relationships.⁸⁰ So how could Bibb then give a main role to Mary Miles, his second and free wife, and their marriage? This marriage had the potential of reducing the impact of his narrative and subverting it. Nonetheless, because Bibb centres his discourse around his enslaved family, his narrative is rendered unique among the slaves’ autobiographies.⁸¹
**Narrative of Henry Bibb**, in addition, has the advantage of being history, collective biography, and literature. In this text, Bibb gives a vivid description of life in slave prisons, of slave coffles, instruments for punishments, of the slave markets in the deep South and Upper South, of life in a chain gang, slavery among the Cherokees, of the culture of slaves on the plantation, and of the culture of slaveholders. What is also unusual about Bibb’s story is that he experienced slavery at its highest and lowest rungs: he worked as a common labourer in the cotton field and as a personal body servant to two sets of slaveholders. His enslavement also occurred in both the Upper and Lower South. One theme, however, that remains constant in Bibb’s story is the South as infidel and the slaveholders as hypocritical Christians. Like most of his fellow professional fugitives he denounces the “fake” “Christian” slaveholders and their “false” Christianity. Bibb does not have to look too far for an example of a “fake Christian” slaveholder; he had one in the form of his most brutal master—Deacon Whitfield of Claiborne Parish, Louisiana.

Whitfield was the perverse slaveholder who insisted that Bibb whip a naked slave girl; who kept his slaves ignorant; who put Bibb under the punishment of 500 lashes; and who sold Bibb away from Malinda and Mary Frances. When Malinda protested, Whitfield applied the lash to her. As Malinda pleaded with Whitfield not to separate her from her family, he began to whip her. Bibb’s description of the parting scene between himself and his wife has become a classic piece of literature in African American autobiography. This was the scene that caused members of antislavery audiences to cry
whenever Bibb related his story:

When the dear woman saw there was no hope for us, and that we should soon be separated forever, in the name of Deacon Whitfield, and American slavery to meet no more as husband and wife, parent and child—the last and loudest appeal was made on our knees. We appealed to the God of justice and to the sacred ties of humanity; but this was all in vain. The louder we prayed the harder he whipped, amidst the most heart-rending shrieks from the poor slave mother and child. As little Frances stood by, sobbing at the abuse inflicted on her mother.

This was the last time the family Bibb would see each other. What galled Bibb so much about Deacon Whitfield and his treatment of Bibb and his family and the other slaves was not so much that Whitfield was a slaveholder, but a Christian slaveholder, a man ordained as deacon in the Baptist Church. For Bibb, Whitfield was “one of the basest hypocrites that I ever saw,” he was “more like what people call the devil, than he was like a deacon.”

The ultimate goal of the escaped slave is to reach the “North.” He cannot rest until he is in a free (northern) state. His flight from slavery to freedom is also a flight from South to North. In the North he attains physical and psychological freedom and can begin to build his life as a free person. He can also begin the remake of his identity as a literate person and consciously begin to speak out against slavery. In the North the ex-slave recreates himself in the “likeness” of freedom. Thus, flight to the North, though a physical reality, is also metaphorically speaking a movement from orality to literacy, from unconsciousness to consciousness, and of transformation from brute to human.
Bibb begins such a process even before he reaches the North. His life on the road after he flees from Indian territory suggests that the transformation was already in progress. Once he is in a free state, however, he begins to take more conscious steps to bring into being (keeping in mind the limitations imposed on free Blacks in the North) the new life he envisioned for himself. In the North (Detroit) he goes to school, establishes links with the Baptist church, begins to take an active part in the affairs of the Black community, and thereby engages in an intellectual orientation of himself. Yet, in one regard, he is not totally free. Apart from encountering the prejudices meted out to Black people in the North, Bibb is heart-broken. Malinda and Mary Frances are still on his mind, and he cannot rest, cannot be at peace until he discovers their fate. Bibb then stumbles from job to job, unable to hold one permanently because “I was not settled in mind about the condition of my bereaved family.”

As discussed in the previous chapter, in the winter of 1845 Bibb once again ventures south to get news of Malinda. He discovers that Malinda is living as the concubine of a planter to whom Whitfield had sold her for that purpose. This came as a “death blow” to Bibb’s "hopes and pleasant dreams" and he concludes that Malinda was "theoretically and practically dead" to him as a wife. After coming to terms with the situation the grief-stricken Bibb returns to Detroit to plan his life without Malinda. His despair acts as a strong motivator in committing him totally to abolitionism. He notes: “Finding myself thus isolated in this peculiarly unnatural state I resolved, in 1846, to spend my days traveling, to advance the anti-slavery cause. I spent the summer in
Michigan, but in the subsequent fall I took a trip to new England, where I spent the winter. And there I found a kind reception wherever I traveled among the friends of freedom.186

Finally, Bibb is able to rest having known the fate of Malinda. Not a happy rest but one which comes when an issue is resolved. With this knowledge, Bibb is finally free. He can "go on with his life." In June 1848 Bibb marries Mary Miles, a free woman from Boston, and a fellow antislavery worker. He had met her at the American Anti-Slavery Society's annual meeting in New York City in 1847.87

Bibb's Narrative was tremendously successful. It became an instant best-seller and "went through three American editions in 1849 and 1850." It received excellent reviews in some of the leading antislavery papers; these include the New York Evangelist, the North Star, the New York Tribune, the Liberator, the True Wesleyan, and the Anti-Slavery Bugle.88 The reviewer in Bugle stated:

The Fugitive Slave literature is destined to be a powerful lever. We know the most profound conviction of its potency. We see in it the easy and infallible means of abolitionizing the free States. Argument provokes argument, reason is met with sophistry. But the narratives of slaves go right to the hearts of men. We defy any man to think with patience or tolerance of slavery after reading Bibb's narrative, unless he is one of those infidels to nature, who float on the race as monsters, from it, and not of it.

Henry Bibb is a bright, mild looking, gentlemanly sort of man, about 34 years of age, not more African than European in his lineage, and in fact, doubtless, having some of the finest Kentucky blood in his veins. He early began, while being used as the tool of Kentucky luxury, to educate himself in the science of running away....

The reviewer showed his concern for the narrative's 'truthfulness' by stating that it was
"an unvarnished tale...written with perfect artlessness...." He ended his review by
forcefully stating why slavery must be abolished: it was incompatible with Christianity
and civilization:

One conclusion forced upon the philosophical reader of such
narratives of runaway slaves is this, that however tolerable
chattel slavery may be as an institution for savage and barbarous
life, when you bring it into the purlieus of civilization and Christianity,
it becomes unspeakably iniquitous and intolerable. If Mr. Calhoun99
really means to uphold slavery, he must—there is no help for it—
abolish Christianity, printing, art, science, and take his patriarchs
back to the standard of Central Africa, or the days of Shem,
Ham and Japhet.90

Bibb’s Narrative stands as one of his most important pieces of writing. Heartfelt and
stirring, it became a critical antislavery document in the battle for Black freedom. In
writing his story, Bibb declared himself free and sought the freedom of his fellows.
William Andrews provides clear insight on this matter: “[Black] autobiographers
demonstrate...that they regard the writing of autobiography as in some ways uniquely
self-liberating, the final, climactic act in the drama of their lifelong quests for freedom.
Such narratives provide important insights into the kinds of freedom their writers hoped
to enact for themselves through their literary efforts.”91

Bibb’s narrative is regarded as one of the premier slave autobiographies and
remains a lucid and strident testimony against what Bibb himself describes as the “man-
destroying system,” slavery. But perhaps, more importantly, it is still read close to 150
years after its publication, gratifying Bibb’s desire that his work be read by “succeeding
generations” long after his body turned to dust.

In 1849 Bibb published two accounts having to do with slave insurrections. Both histories were taken from contemporary accounts and compiled by Bibb. The first account, *A Conspiracy of the Blacks at Charleston, S.C., in 1822* detailed the South Carolina free Black/slave plot led by Denmark Vesey. The second, *Slave Insurrection in Southampton County, Va., Headed by Nat Turner* narrated the Nat Turner revolt of 1831. Both histories were published in 1849, the same year Bibb published his autobiography. In 1850 Bibb reissued these accounts and added to it *an interesting letter from a fugitive slave to his old master.* This was indeed a letter Bibb had written to two of his ex-masters, Silas Gatewood and Daniel Lane. It is significant that the histories Bibb chose to write about were revolts—the most important ones in nineteenth-century United States. These accounts and the choice of genre reveal that Bibb had moved from simply telling his story, the story of his “life and adventures,” and had widened his literary repertoire. In addition, they highlight Bibb’s commitment to the Black liberation cause. He chose topics and heroes that explored and embodied the theme of Black empowerment. Vesey and Turner, for Bibb, were correct models of Black manhood. By choosing to take up arms against whites, these two heroes moved from being ‘cringing,’ docile boys to courageous and fierce men. Both Turner and Vesey were liberationists who sought the destruction of white rule and the end of Black enslavement and degradation. Clearly Bibb saw both men as role models, their actions as correct, and viewed himself as heir to the legacy left by Vesey and Turner.
True to Bibb’s musical abilities—he often sang at the beginning and close of his lectures—he also published *a collection of songs for the times* in 1850. Songs such as “Set the Captive Free,” and the “Bereaved Mother” were included in this collection of songs.94 While living in Ontario, he reissued the song book under the title *The Anti-Slavery Harp.*95 In a 3 June 1852 insert in the *Voice of the Fugitive* Bibb alerts the public of the *Harp* and its availability.

The Anti-Slavery Harp—This is the title of a little work just published by H. Bibb, at Windsor, Canada West. It is a compilation of the most interesting anti-slavery songs for the times. Any person who will forward to our address at Detroit, Michigan, or Windsor, Canada West, $1 in advance, we will forward to their order ten copies of this work free of postage, or 100 copies for six dollars.96

In 1849 and 1850 Bibb wrote and compiled four books: his autobiography, two history books, and a song book. We can deduce from these activities that Bibb had found his voice and had embarked on a period of great creativity. He had become a prolific creator of literature. His next major literary venture would be the production and editorship of his own paper the *Voice of the Fugitive* which he began publishing in Canada West in January 1851.
Notes.


5 Blassingame, *Slave Testimony*, 4-5.


7 Ibid., 156.

8 Ibid. Bibb also wrote to Daniel Lane, Silas Gatewood, and Albert Sibley all former masters. See *BAP*: 2, 121-129; *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 29 March 1849.


10 For some examples of Bibb’s letters to abolitionist journals see *Signal of Liberty*, 3 October 1846, 21 August, 1847; *The Emancipator*, 21 April 1847; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, 13 January 1848; *the North Star*, 1 September, 15 December 1848; *the Free Soil Republican*, 10 May 1849.

11 Bibb attended this meeting with Treadwell.

12 John H. Yzenbaard, “The Crosswhite Case,” *Michigan History*, 53 (Summer 1969) 131-43. Kentucky slave catchers were particularly active in Michigan as many runaways from the former state made
latter their home. Michigan, because of its very northern location, was ideally suited as a preferred habitation site for escaped slaves from the Blue grass state. Both Ohio and Indiana were free states but they bordered on slave states, which made them in the mind of many fugitives unsafe places. Many escapees, coming from Kentucky and other slave states thus passed through Indiana and Ohio into Michigan which was home to several UGRR terminii which originated in those states. Benjamin C. Wilson, “Kentucky Kidnappers, Fugitives, and Abolitionists in Antebellum Cass County, Michigan,” *Michigan History* 60 (1976) 339-58.

15 There is some contradiction between Bibb’s letter and Yzenbaard’s findings. Bibb’s letter was printed *North Star*, 15 Dec. 1848, but was written by Bibb on the 6th Dec. In it Bibb gives the impression that the case was still going on and was not yet decided. But Yzenbaard states in his articles that the case was wrapped up in November. Bibb in his letter notes that Crosswaite came back from Canada to testify in the case and after his testimony the “colored citizens rushed him back to Canada,” but Yzenbaard informs us that Crosswaite never returned to Michigan after he was rescued from his captors.

16 See the discussion on the Birney challenge in chapter two.

17 Gerrit Smith inherited a vast estate which comprised thousands and thousands of acres of land in upstate New York from his former slaveholding father. Smith, who was one of the leaders of the Liberty Party gave over 3000 acres of this land to free Blacks in New York state and elsewhere so that they could qualify to meet the discriminatory property requirement for the franchise as racist property and financial requirements were placed on free Blacks in New York. By enfranchising more Blacks in the North Smith hoped to gain more votes for his party. Phyllis F. Field, *The Politics of Race in New York: The Struggle for Black Suffrage in the Civil War Era* (Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 1982); “An Address by Theodore S. Wright, Charles B. Ray, and James McCune Smith to the Three Thousand Colored Citizens of New York, who are the owners of...land...given to them by Gerrit Smith”; and letter from G. Smith to Wright *et al*, *Liberty Press*, 9 Sept. 1846; Zita Dyson, “Gerrit Smith’s Efforts in Behalf of the Negroes in New York;” *Journal of Negro History* 3. 4 (1918) 354-359; “Gerrit Smith,” *Dictionary of American Biography*, (New York, 1935) Vol. 9. 270-271.

18 Bibb to Gerrit Smith. Dec. 1848. Taken from reel 5 of the BAP microfilms.


21 Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall*, 143.

Like the boycott of goods produced by the Apartheid regime in South Africa by anti-Apartheid activists over 150 years later, many abolitionists tried to avoid the purchase of goods made by slave labor and buy only those produced by free labor. The boycott of slave produced commodities started as early as the late 18th century by the Quakers of Philadelphia. By 1831 they had a Free Produce Society organized. Black abolitionists William Whipper and Jacob C. White Sr. operated Free Produce stores in Philadelphia. Henry Highland Garnet and Frances Watkins Harper travelled in the U.S. and Britain speaking for the Free Produce cause. Jacob C. White Jr., a teenager, wrote an essay on the Free Produce Movement. The White [Quaker] abolitionist Lucretia Mott always travelled with a small container of sugar produced by free labour. Of all the white abolitionists she came to be identified with the Free Produce movement. This movement seems to have been a North and North-east effort as it never caught on in the Mid-west where Bibb's career began. *BAP*, 4: 137-38; Otelia Cromwell, *Lucretia Mott* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1958), see especially chapter six, "Social Reform."

Joshua Leavitt, a white abolitionist was a strong Tappanite and editor of the *Emancipator*. An ardent Christian he oversaw and led the "Bible for Slave" campaign. Leavitt was also one of the founders of the Liberty party. Hugh Davis, *Joshua Leavitt, Evangelical Abolitionist* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990). *BAP*, 3: 461.

The American Missionary Society was formed in 1846 by a group of Congregationalist abolitionists. It incorporated its forerunner, the Union Missionary Society which was founded by James W. C. Pennington. The AMA's mandate was to bring the gospel to and promote education among ethnic minorities in the U.S. and elsewhere. However, the AMA made its greatest contribution to the Black cause (in the United States and Canada) before and after the civil war. The executive committee of the Association included several Black ministers Pennington and Charles B. Ray among them. DeBoer, *Be Jubilant My Feet*; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Cleveland: Western Reserve University Press, 1969), 287-309; W. Augustus Low, ed. *Encyclopedia of Black America* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981) 101-103.

Of course, Bibb did this work in the free states thus, his constituencies were free Blacks, many of whom had fled slavery. Bibb to Lewis Tappan, 16 March, 21 April 1849, *BAP*, reel 5; 4 March, 8 March, 6 May 1850 *BAP*, reel 6.

Bibb to Tappan, 21 April 1849; see also his 16 March 1849 letter to Tappan.

In Canada, Bibb helped build churches, taught Sunday schools, and continued giving the Bible to the slave.


According to the *BAP*'s microfilm catalogue of Bibb's correspondence, over 40 letters written by Bibb to various persons and groups are extant.

The issue of the private life of the professional fugitive is briefly dealt with in my introductory chapter. Rafiq Zafar in a lucid discussion on Frederick Douglass notes how fugitive slave speakers mask their
personal selves and lives. She states that this was as a direct response to the desires of white abolitionist who sponsored many of the Black abolitionists. Rafia Zafar, "Franklinian Douglass: The Afro-American as Representative Man," Frederick Douglass, New Literary and Historical Essays, Eric J. Sundquist, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 99-117.

33 My thesis is that we can discover glues to Bibb's "private mind" by reading and analyzing his narrative. It is in this text that he is most revealing. This should not come as a surprise, while the narrative is a blast against slavery, it is also a love chant, a grieving for the loss of his family. Brokenheartedness in humans tends to show us at our most vulnerable and as a result we cast away many of "our pretensions."


37 Mills, Racial Contract, 72.


42 Walther Ehrlich, They Have No Rights, Dred Scott's Struggle for Freedom (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1979) 142.

43 There is no space here to go into the question of whether or not the American Constitution was a proslavery document, or that the United States was conceived as a racialized polity. Suffice it to say, that the framers of the Constitution inserted several clauses which covered ownership of slaves, slave insurrections, and the return of fugitive slaves. It is now common knowledge that when the founding fathers declared that "all men are created equal" they were not thinking of Black and Amerindian peoples who, after all, using Enlightenment logic, were sub-persons, nor were they thinking of white women. For one discussion on the American Constitution as a proslavery document, and the Republic as a white supremacist one see, Charles W. Mills, Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) 167-200.

44 The "manhood" question was crucial to the issue of Black identity during the antebellum period; both male and female Black abolitionists engaged the manhood question in their speeches and writings. R.J.

45 A parallel development was occurring in Native American communities. Christianized Natives (mainly Methodists) were also writing their autobiographies and telling their stories from a Native perspective. Their stories, like that of their African American counterparts, 'ruptured' conventional knowledge about the subaltern. See Karim M. Tiro, "Denominated 'Savage': Methodism, Writing, and Identity in the Works of William Apess, A Pequot," *American Quarterly* 48 4 (1996) 653-679.

46 Larry Gara forcefully argues this point in his article "The Professional Fugitive in the Abolition Movement."


55 Nichols, "Who Read the Slave Narratives?" 149. The slave narratives were popular forms of literature, so popular in fact that some of them outsold many of the works of the leading New England literary lights. The narratives by Josiah Henson, J.W.C Pennington, W.W. Brown, Moses Roper, and Frederick Douglass outsold works by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau. Lucinda H. Mackethan "Metaphors of Mastery in the Slave Narratives," in John Sekora, ed. *Art of the Slave Narrative, Original Essays in Criticism and Theory*, (Macomb: University of Western Illinois Press, 1982) 55-69.

56 *Emancipator*, 17 May 1849.


58 Many of these exslave speakers were professional fugitives in the true sense of the word, that is, working for the movement was their only job. Speakers like Bibb, Box Brown, Wells Brown and Douglass, and Truth devoted their whole lives to antislavery. Others like Ward, Garnet, Pennington,
McCune Smith had other jobs. Of the latter group, the first three were ordained ministers and had congregations which paid them a salary, and McCune Smith was a medical doctor. The income from sales of the narratives were much appreciated by the professional fugitives; and the books readily became best-sellers.

59 Andrews, To Tell a Free Story, 100.

60 I have borrowed the term “talking book” from Gates, who borrowed it from Black 18th-century autobiographers, though both he and the autobiographers used it in a very different way than I. Gates & Andrews, Pioneers of the Black Atlantic, 3-4.

61 Matlack was a New York editor, author, Methodist minister, and abolitionist. His church deprived him of his license to preach because of his abolitionist activism. Matlack wrote several books including The antislavery Struggle and Triumph in the Methodist Church (1881, Reprint; New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969).

62 Ososky, Puttin' On Ole Massa, 53.

63 Ibid.


68 Other Blacks included “Francis Williams, a Jamaican who took the B.A. at Cambridge before 1750; Jacobus Captein, who earned several degrees in Holland; Anton Wilhelm Amo, who took the doctorate in Philosophy at Halle, Germany; and Ignatius Sancho, who published a volume of letters in 1782. Their published writings, in Latin Dutch, German, and English, were scrutinized and employed by both sides in the slavery debates.” Gates and Andrews, Pioneers of the Black Atlantic, 2.

69 Foster, Written By Herself, 18.


75 Bibb notes that this part-Cherokee owner was his most humane master and that if he were to remain in slavery he'd "rather be a slave to an Indian, than to a white man, from the experience I have had with both." Osofsky, *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 141. R. Halliburton Jr. examines the ownership of Black slaves by Cherokee Indian in *Red Over Black, Black Slavery among the Cherokee Indians* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977), see especially chapters 1-6. William Loren Katz examines the Black presence in the peopling of the American West in *The Black West* (New York: Touchstone, 1996). See also James F. Brooks, "Confounding the Color Line: Indian-Black Relations in Historical and Anthropological Perspectives," and Circe Sturm, "Blood Politics, Racial Classification and Cherokee National Identity—the Trials and Tribulations of the Cherokee Freedmen," *American Indian Quarterly* 22, 1 & 2; (Winter/Spring 1998) 125-133, 230-258.

76 It is important to realize and remember that Bibb escaped to the North through his own courage, fortitude, skills, daring, and desire. He does not mention any assistance from any group or groups connected to the underground Railroad. Other professional fugitives like Josiah Henson and Wells Brown also make a point of this. This issue will be further discussed in chapter 4.


78 Hedin, "Muffled Voices," 137.

79 The bulk of the slave narrative were written by men (only 12% by women) and the men in the story are presented as heroic figures who overcame all odds and gained freedom. Their womenfolk remain shadowy. It is therefore a man's story. However, in Bibb's narrative, even though he is the hero, he is not an individualistic hero. He has connections and these connections bind him to slavery. These connections are his womenfolk, his wife, daughter, and to a lesser degree, his mother. By placing his story under the rubric of his familial relations, the story of Bibb's womenfolk begins to emerge. This is rare in the rendering of the slave narrative.

80 I will be discussing this more in the chapter entitled "The Women in Bibb's Life."

81 Wells Brown's narrative centres on his life on a riverboat, and Douglass' autobiography (at least the first one) revolves around life on the slave plantation and in Baltimore. None of these men give us any view of the important women in their lives. We know for example, that the free Black, Anna Murray, Douglass' first wife, risked her freedom to ensure Douglass' yet he mentions her only once or twice in his book. His story is one of individualism par excellence, and thus does not situate him in any marital or familial context. *To Tell A Free Story*, 152-57.


83 The importance of literacy in the construction of a new identity for the slave turned free person cannot be overstated. Davis and Gates note: "Almost all of the narratives refer to literacy in three ways: they
recount vividly scenes of instruction in which the narrator learned to read and then to write; they underscore polemical admonishments against statutes forbidding literacy training among black slaves; and they are prefaced by ironic apologia, in which the black author transform the convention of the author's confession of the faults of his tale, by interweaving into this statement strident denunciation of the system that limited the development of his capacities....Reading and writing was no mean thing in the life of the slave. Learning to read and write meant that this person of African descent took one giant step up the great chain of Being; the 'thing' became a human being.” Slave's Narrative, xxviii, xxix. Not all former slaves turned professional abolitionists learnt to read and write, Sojourner Truth was one major exception. Though she had ample opportunities to acquire literacy she chose not to. Perhaps female former slaves constructed their new identities in a different way from men. For an examination of this see, Joanne M. Braxton, Black Women Writing Autobiography. A Tradition Within a Tradition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989) 72-79.

84 Osofsky, Puttin' On Ole Massa, 154.

85 Ibid., 162-63.

86 Ibid., 163.

87 Andrews notes that Bibb finds peace and a sense of permanence only when he marries a free woman, Mary Miles. “This replacement of the slave woman by the antislavery lady completes Henry Bibb’s psychological reorientation in the world of freedom.” To Tell a Free Story, 157-58.


89 Calhoun was a prominent southern slaveholder and politician, and one of the nation’s premier defenders of slavery. In 1836 he introduced the infamous “gag rule” in the U.S. Congress. This act, in violation of the first amendment, denied the hearing of antislavery petitions in the house. Calhoun also introduced legislation empowering the post office not to process abolitionist correspondence. In 1846, while he was secretary of state, he supported the introduction of slavery into Texas when it joined the Union. Calhoun was one of the proslavery ideologue who helped popularize the positive good theory of slavery. John Niven, John C. Calhoun and the Price of Union, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); Jenkins. Pro-Slavery Thought, 80-81.

90 Bugle, 3 November 1849. The last comments is suggesting polygamy and the sexual use of slave women by southern white men, many of whom kept a veritable harem on their plantations. Perhaps, without being aware of it the reviewer condemns the patriarchal system that brutalizes Black women and men sexually and otherwise.

91 Andrews, To Tell a Free Story, xi.

92 These publications are on microfiche at several university libraries in the United States, including that of the University of Central Oklahoma under the heading “Slave Insurrection in Southampton County, Va., Headed by Nat Turner, With an Interesting Letter From a Fugitive Slave to His Old Master: Also a Collection of Songs for the Time. Compiled and Published by Henry Bibb.” The Wesleyan Book Room (New York City) was the publisher.

This *Collection* formed part of the 1850 re-issuing of *Slave Insurrection*.


William Wells Brown, Bibb’s colleague and fellow antislavery activist published a song book also called the *Anti-Slavery Harp*. We can assume that Wells Brown had available to him the same repertoire of abolitionist songs that Bibb had, and some of the songs in Wells Brown’s *Harp* are the same or similar to the ones in Bibb’s version. William W. Brown, *The Anti-Slavery Harp, A Collection of Songs* (Switzerland: Kraus-Thomson, 1971).
Chapter 4.

*Remember those in bonds as bound with them.*
*Henry Bibb, et al., 1851.*

**OTHER KINDS OF ACTIVISM: BIBB AS UNDERGROUND RAILROAD AGENT, CONVENTION ACTIVIST AND POLITICAL ABOLITIONIST**

Perhaps the first time Bibb consciously engaged in Underground Railroad work was in his jail cell in his hometown of Bedford. Daniel Lane, the slavecatcher and slave dealer, imprisoned him in jail after recapturing him on one of his escape attempts. Two slaves, King and Jack, who belonged to William Gatewood, Bibb’s master, visited Bibb in jail. He promptly told them how to get to Canada. Shortly after, King and Jack made a successful escape. Once Bibb himself arrived in Detroit, he became active in the Underground Railroad. Detroit was the perfect spot for such an activity; it was located just across the river from the Canadian province of Ontario. Bibb was also knowledgeable about the western district of Ontario having lived there briefly, and as a Detroit resident regularly crossed the river into Ontario. Helping runaway slaves to get to the northern states and Canada was undertaken as duty by many professional fugitives. Jermain Loguen and Samuel Ringgold Ward did fugitive assistance work at Syracuse, Lewis Hayden was instrumental in such work in Boston, and Frederick Douglass did similarly accordingly in Rochester.

Larry Gara, Benjamin Quarles, James Walker, and other historians have informed us that it was the free Blacks themselves, through the use of vigilance committees, or
individual efforts, that provided the most assistance to the fleeing slave. These fugitive aid groups constituted an important part of the UGRR. The New York vigilance committee, the Boston and the Philadelphia committees, especially the latter, under the direction of free Black William Still, gained prominence because of the aid they gave to escapees. This revelation stands in stark contrast to the traditional picture of the helpers on the UGRR who are pictured as white (usually Quakers). Wilbur H. Siebert, prominent historian and mythmaker of the UGRR, is one of the "legend makers" responsible for the "white helpers only" view of the UGRR. In a 1923 article, Siebert lists Quakers, Scotch Covenanters, Wesleyan Methodists as some of the chief conductors on the Michigan Railroad. He gives little or no attention to the Black helpers. According to Gara "it was known for the Negroes of some northern cities to arrange for their own fugitive aid without consulting the antislavery people." Iacovetta et al also critique the over-emphasis on the white helpers in the UGRR literature. They note that this view "falsely downplays the courageous role that African-Americans, including ex-slaves like Harriet Tubman, played in maintaining escape routes." In fact, among (white) antislavery people it was common knowledge that it was mainly the Blacks themselves that managed UGRR work.

When Bibb arrived in Michigan, he came into a state that was decidedly antislavery and where committed whites and free Blacks gave help in various ways to the runaway slave. Though Gara insists that no organized national structure existed to
help the fleeing slave, and that the UGRR was more myth than reality, he does concede that there were regional or local structures, even if these were loosely organized.\textsuperscript{11} “Lines” or “routes” ran through many free states and along these routes fugitives were able to make successful escapes. In Michigan such lines were particularly busy.\textsuperscript{12} Many of the lines that ran through Michigan actually began south of this state, in Illinois, Indiana and Ohio. A line ran from Chicago to Cassopolis where it connected with lines from Kentucky and Indiana. From Cassopolis, the line carried on to Detroit. Another important line began in Toledo, Ohio, ran to Adrian, then on to Ann Arbor or Ypsilanti. From these places the line terminated in Detroit. Another well-known line ran from Cassopolis to Schoolcraft to Battle Creek. Water routes played significant parts in the escape drama of the slaves. Routes ran across lakes Michigan and Huron to Detroit. And across Lake Erie, from Sandusky and Cleveland, to Detroit.\textsuperscript{13}

Once arriving in Detroit the fugitives could either settle there or move on to Canada. A vast majority chose the latter option. Part of Detroit’s importance for the fleeing bondsperson lay in the fact that it was one of the main northern terminals on the UGRR. It had the largest number of Blacks in Michigan and this made it feasible to quickly mobilize Blacks for causes devoted to Black freedom. Detroit’s significance in the UGRR cannot be overstated. Wilbur Siebert acknowledges this: “Among the many terminals of the Underground system along the southern shores of the Great Lakes and along the Detroit and Huron rivers, it is improbable that any of them sent more fugitives
into Canada than did the City of Detroit."

The city’s Blacks had a few organizations formed specifically to assist fugitive slaves. Katherine Dupre Lumpkin tells of a secret organization in Detroit which acted “in behalf of escaped slaves.” Known by various names—African-American Mysteries, Order of Men of Oppression, and Order of Emigration—this organization was composed of free Detroit Blacks which included Henry Bibb, William Lambert, George de Baptiste and other Black abolitionists. Members had to be initiated into this group in order to partake in its activities, the chief of which was to help escaped slave to freedom.\(^{15}\)

The Detroit’s Colored Vigilant Committee, as the name implies, was also one of the watchdog organizations dedicated to protecting fugitive slaves, guarding the limited freedom of the free Black population, and agitating for an expansion of this freedom. It is not known if Bibb was a part of the Detroit’s Vigilant Committee as his name does not appear on their 1843 report.\(^{16}\) The twin mandate of the Detroit Committee was in line with the broad-based nature of the vigilance committees that were established in the country. C.P. Ripley notes that “as vigilance committees developed, they addressed the broad goals of black abolitionism. While assisting fugitives, they also organized petition campaigns for black suffrage, opposed Jim Crow restrictions, and fought for passage of personal liberty laws.”\(^{17}\) However, with specific regard to fugitive work, the Detroit Colored vigilant Committee “served as a link in the underground railroad...systematically directing fugitives to black settlements in Canada West.”\(^{18}\) The
Committee also “promoted temperance and established schools, debating clubs, reading rooms, and literary societies.” The vigilant committee of Detroit provided crucial help to runaway slaves in Michigan because runaways were regularly threatened with re-enslavement by their also vigilant former masters.

If Bibb was not active in the Detroit Colored Vigilant Committee he exerted himself on behalf of the Detroit Fugitives Association whose main work was to help the fugitives with resources needed to keep mind, soul and body together while on the run. Thus the Fugitives Association gave food, clothing, money, jobs, and direction to runaways. In addition, medical assistance was often paid for by the Fugitive Association. In the early 1850s this Detroit group was also instrumental in providing financial aid to fugitives in Canada to buy tracts of land in Windsor, Ontario. The Association also helped them settle in Michigan or Canada, if it so thought fit. It would appear that Bibb, like several other Detroit Black abolitionists, made up the membership in the various groups formed to help fugitives. This was in keeping with the multifaceted role played by Blacks and the various institutions they founded.

One of the stories that have survived about the Underground Railroad is that due to its secret nature, not many records were kept by its operators. The reasoning behind this was that they were breaking the law, and if found out, could face severe repercussions. But the reality was that some operators like Thomas Garrett and the indomitable William Still kept records on over 1000 fugitives that they assisted. Henry
Bibb also has left behind some record of his activities on the UGRR. He, however, wrote from the vantage point of being in a state relatively sympathetic to the fugitive, and occasionally he wrote from Canada, a runaway haven. We get insights in his activities from a 5 May 1847 letter to the aptly named abolitionist newspaper the *Emancipator*.

> It gives me great pleasure to take by the hand so many of my fellow countrymen from the Southern prison house. Almost everyday we have an arrival. How strange it is that men, women and children are willing to suffer from exposure and hunger, and run the risk of being seized by bloodhounds, or of death by torture, for the sake of Liberty!  

Once it was decided by the Detroit UGRR workers to send the runaways onto Canada, Bibb oftentimes accompanied them into the "province of freedom." In the summer of 1847, at a celebration in Windsor at which Black and white Detroiter crossed the river into Windsor to "welcome" some fugitives to Canada, Henry Bibb spoke:

> Dear brethren, we are happy to meet you here on freedom's soil, we congratulate you, we rejoice with you, and some of us can sympathise with you from experience. I can imagine that I see you traveling by night through the dark swamps, some with their little children on their backs, and their wives and others by their side, guided by the North star; and in the distance I seem to hear the slaveholder and his bloodhounds. But you are now in Canada, free from American slavery; yes the very moment you stept upon these shores you were changed from articles of property to human beings.

What is clear from the above statement is that Bibb was active in the Black communities on both sides of the border, travelling back and forth between Ontario and Michigan in his role as agent of the UGRR, and abolitionist propagandist. He was an appropriate
spokesman for the fugitives as he was a runaway himself and was able to empathize in a very real and personal way with them. In the latter speech he invoked the stereotypical scenario on the UGRR with the fleeing slave hiding in swamps, pursued by bloodhounds. Yet he did have a similar experience with his wife and daughter when they ran away from Deacon Whitfield's. His activity on the Canadian side of the border also prefigured his future work in Canada (after 1850) as abolitionist in self-imposed exile and community leader.

Bibb, in giving us information on his UGRR work, also provides insights into the mind of the slave as they sought to fashion a new identity for themselves once in freedom. The *Emancipator* reports:

> The Baptist brethren there, as well as in the city of Detroit, have adopted a maxim which I believe to be compatible with Christianity, and one which I hope will be carried out by all Christian churches. Whenever a Christian slave escapes from slavery, to where he can unite with a church of his own faith and order, having been baptized by a slaveholding minister, they do not acknowledge it to be done according to the command of God, so they re-baptize them. Let this be carried out by all who believe in Anti-Slavery gospel, but more especially by the people of color.²⁵

Bibb also did UGRR work outside the state of Michigan. Between 1846 to 1848, he travelled extensively in Massachusetts and New England, and according to Siebert engaged in UGRR work while there.²⁶ Bibb reached the pinnacle of his UGRR work as Black leader in Canada. In 1850, at the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act, Bibb and his wife Mary migrated to Canada. In their adopted country they used their home as a
fugitives' refuge and developed programs specifically for the welfare of the fugitives.

The Black Convention Movement began as an anti-colonization activity in 1817 and by the 1830s had evolved into a national movement which aimed at bettering the condition of life for free Blacks, and the immediate abolition of slavery. Paul Goodman credits the rise of immediatism in the antislavery movement to the influence of the early Black convention leaders who vigourously opposed colonization. According to Goodman "free blacks convinced a small but prophetic vanguard of white men and women to repudiate colonization and embrace immediate emancipation and racial equality. By virtue of their personal example and through the power of their argument, they created the modern biracial abolitionist movement." Given the significance of the anti-colonizationist movement in antislavery, Goodman therefore credits this movement and the Black activists who commenced it as "the starters" of the abolitionist movement in the United States.

Philip Foner, however, notes that the goal of the Black convention was simply to establish the security and elevation of the American Black people. Beginning in 1830 and continuing on a regular basis after this date, Blacks met in national conventions to discuss issues affecting the race. From 1840 onward meetings at the state and regional levels became widespread. The Black convention was wholly a Black autonomous and independent creation. Black men (and sometimes women) came together in these
meetings to think, ponder, strategize, and organize on issues regarding Black civil rights. Howard Bell in discussing the enthusiasm with which Blacks entered the Convention movement notes that "it is in the record of these state and national assemblies that their thoughts, their ambitions, and their actions are best portrayed." 31

In October 1843, in the city of Detroit Henry Bibb attended his first Black convention, the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Michigan. The call for the convention was issued by leaders of the Detroit Colored Vigilant Committee, William Lambert and Reverend W.C. Monroe, and publicized in the Signal of Liberty and the Detroit Daily Advertiser. 32 The delegates met at the Second Baptist Church on Fort Street to discuss the political condition of the (free) Blacks living in the state and to "adopt measures for the improvement of the same." 33 Though issues such as the abolition of slavery, amelioration of the condition of free Blacks, education, colonization, promotion of agriculture, mechanical arts, and temperance were addressed by the convention, its main grievance was the disfranchisement of Michigan’s Black population. 34 This issue of suffrage for the free Black population of Michigan was a crucial one and was quickly raised at the convention:

Resolved, that as a State Convention, we will exert our influence to the utmost, for the immediate abolition of American slavery, and the improvement of the condition of our colored people throughout the Union.
Resolved, That we believe State Conventions, composed of colored people who are deprived of their political rights, may do much towards ameliorating our own condition, and extending the blessings of liberty to our Southern brethren,
Who are the victims of American slavery.

...Resolved, That the colored citizens in every part of this State, be requested and urged to petition the legislature of this State, year after year, until they extend to us those political rights and privileges which as American citizens we have a right to demand at their hands.\(^\text{35}\)

Bibb, just twenty months out of slavery, made his presence felt at this meeting. He was one of the delegates from Detroit, served on the business committee, proposed a motion to examine the credentials of the delegates\(^\text{36}\) and in line with the anti-colonization thinking of most Black abolitionists at the time, placed the following resolution on the floor:

Resolved, that we, the colored citizens of Michigan, be united in sentiment and action and never to consent to emigrate or be colonized from this, our native soil, while there exists one drop of African blood in bondage in these United States.\(^\text{37}\)

The resolution was adopted. Even though, many years later Bibb would advocate emigration, this statement illustrates the feeling of free Blacks they were “bound together” with the slaves and would never desert their fellow slaves to be colonized in Africa, or elsewhere as desired by the American Colonization Society.\(^\text{38}\)

This state convention must have had an impact on Bibb and, perhaps, influenced in some ways his decision to become an abolitionist worker. For it was here at this meeting, just fresh out of slavery that Bibb made, in a manner of speaking, his “first public appearance.” He spoke, he participated, he assisted. The convention can be seen as a launching pad for Bibb’s future career as abolitionist speaker, because in less than a
year he was touring Michigan and Ohio giving antislavery lectures.\textsuperscript{39} Conventions therefore can be seen as training centres for Blacks who had the potential to be public servants. That such an environment existed for Blacks was significant in light of the fact that in the larger society Blacks were barred from participating in public meetings.

After 1843, and as he became a prominent abolitionist, Bibb became an influential and active participant at the various state and national Black conventions held during the 1840s and 1850s. In 1848 he was one of the Michigan delegates at the National Colored Convention in Cleveland, Ohio, and prior to the meeting informed antislavery workers of its happening in abolitionist journals.

Rally! Rally! Ye colored Americans, if possible from the four corners of the American Union to do battle in Freedom’s cause. For the day is at hand when the great National Convention of Colored freemen from all parts of the country and British America, will take place in the city of Cleveland, Ohio, on 6\textsuperscript{th} September next.

Bibb then links the Black struggle in America to international freedom struggles, notably in France and Ireland.

Ireland is now making a mighty struggle for human liberty and equal rights, and slave-holding France has set us a noble example by breaking chains, dethroning tyrants, and proclaiming liberty to her crushed thousands of enslaved Africans and now Liberty and Fraternity is her motto....

In consideration of the above acts colored freemen of America has the time not come when we should begin to act unitedly upon the all-important subject of human freedom and self-elevation? Or shall we be silent and dumb upon the subject, when we can all see the great lamps of universal liberty lighting the whole world and the wheels of emancipation sailing upon the Atlantic,
with a rapidity which would crush a proslavery world if it stood in the way?[^40]

At the actual conference in Cleveland the delegates addressed the issue of race elevation, the question of suffrage, ways to help their slave brethren, the role of the antislavery political parties and whether or not they should support the Free Soil Party.[^41] The woman question also came up for debate. The conventions though called “Black” or “Colored” were really forums for Black males who purported to represent everyone in the race. For them, the convention was still a male-dominated site, where men met and deliberated upon questions affecting the race, and sought ways to vindicate their “manhood.” This male only scenario was in keeping with nineteenth century gender conventions premised upon separate spheres for the sexes. The notion and practice of the public domain belonging to men also had resonance in the free Black community. This, in addition to the fact that among the free Black population there were more literate males than females, meant that men would be at the (public) forefront of the struggle for justice.

It was only natural that the Black conventions would become site for contestations around gender struggles and representation. Almost every issue which affected the well-being of the Black family and community was discussed and analyzed at these conferences; and women’s attendance at these meetings was expanding, but women were not delegates. This situation changed in 1848 at this conference. A resolution was proposed making all women present in the convention delegates with the
full rights of delegates. This was carried "with three cheers for woman's rights." To solidify their enthusiasm for women's rights the delegates declared "Whereas, we fully believe in the equality of the sexes, and therefore, resolved, that we hereby invite females hereafter to take part in our deliberations." It is to the credit of the men of this conference that women were welcomed and "encouraged" to speak. One Mrs. Sanford took the invitation and addressed the convention. In her speech she advised that the elective franchise be also given to women. After her speech the Convention passed a vote of thanks to Mrs. Sanford.

Black men in public life, much more than their white male colleagues, supported women's rights and feminist actions. In fact, whereas white women feminist activists suffered the heckles of white men in their organizing, they could expect public and continued support from Black men. At the Seneca Falls Convention, held in the same year as the Ohio National Convention of Colored Freemen, Frederick Douglass travelled to Seneca Falls to support the women, and made declarations in support of women's rights. Douglass became one of the 19th century's most ardent supporter of women's rights. Charles Lenox Remond, William Wells Brown, Alexander Crummell, and others were also "feminist" men. James O. Horton has pointed out that free Blacks did subscribe to the notion of respectability and separate spheres, but the economic circumstances of Black life dictated that women share the economic burdens of the family. As a result, gender roles in the Black community were more fluid that in white
This is in direct contrast to the image of twentieth century Black men as super-patriarchs who would suppress any notion of autonomy in Black women. This image was of course created by white opponents in their quest to defame Black men and Black people as a whole. Yet history shows otherwise. That this history is known by only a few specialists is a glaring example of what Trouillot calls “silencing the past.”

Bibb played a prominent role at the Ohio convention. He served on the business and organization committees, addressed several issues, placed resolutions on the floor, encouraged the support of political abolitionism through the Free Soil party and vigorously defended political abolition in opposition to Frederick Douglass who still wanted to stick solely to moral suasion. The convention ended with a national central committee being struck for the next national convention. Henry Bibb was on this central committee. In March 1850 Bibb was a leader at the Michigan Colored Citizen’s convention at Marshall; the delegates chose Bibb to represent Michigan’s Blacks at the state constitutional convention which had met to bring forth a new constitution. Bibb addressed the state’s legislators and advocated “equal rights and enfranchisement” for the Blacks of Michigan.

The Black Convention Movement took on a new urgency after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act. Prior to 1850 a large majority of Black abolitionists saw their fight as being within the borders of the United States, and felt that they would achieve some
success. After that date they began to despair. The feeling became widespread among
them that Blacks would never find freedom and achieve equality with whites in the
United States. They gave up hope. Many staunch anti-emigrationists like Frederick
Douglass even considered moving to Haiti. Thousands of freeborn Blacks and fugitives
who had been living in the North for some time left for Canada or England, their faith in
the U.S. shattered. The tone of the convention shifted from “working within the United
States” to “the search for a place” where Blacks could achieve self-realization. Henry
Bibb, Martin Delany and Robert Campbell48 emerged as the chief advocates of this
militant emigrationism and all three eventually left the United States in order to find a
suitable place.49 Bibb went to Canada and became a strong advocate of Canadian
emigration. In addition, he proposed that places like Jamaica and Haiti were also suitable
destinations.50 Thus the conventions that took place in the decade of the 1850s were
staunchly emigrationist in tone. In Canada in 1851 and 1853 Bibb sponsored two
conventions that dealt with a number of issues, the most prominent being emigration.

Bibb saw and used the convention movement as another way to advance Black
freedom and in this context readily gave of his time and talents. At conventions he joined
with other black men, and sometimes women, to formulate plans to better the lives of
Blacks, both slave and free. It was not always smooth running. He fought with other
convention leaders, opposed them, debated with them but in the end worked for the
objective of freeing the slave and making better the life of the Blacks in the North.
The convention movement can be used to gauge Bibb’s evolution as an abolitionist. At his first convention in Detroit, though he ably participated he had not yet made a strong presence in Michigan and elsewhere. But by the time of the Ohio convention in 1848 and subsequent meetings, at both the state and national levels, he was playing leadership roles. By 1848, Bibb had become an influential convention leader and antislavery activist. Bibb’s changing position on the emigration issue is also reflected in the convention movement. In 1843 he was an “Americanist,” committed to “fighting it out” on his native soil. But seven years later, due to the ramifications of the oppressive Fugitive Slave Law, Bibb changed his position and became a very vocal emigrationist. He himself became a symbol of emigration due to his flight into Canada, in 1850, from the land of “bondage, whips, and chains.”

In Canada, or more specifically Canada West, Bibb became the planner of three conventions. The first, the Sandwich Convention held in November 1850, was called by Bibb to propose housing solutions for the burgeoning Black population. The Refugee Home Society emerged from this convention. The second convention, which was to be the most significant of the conventions, the North American Convention of Colored People, was held at Toronto in September 1851. Emigration to Canada emerged as the main agenda item in this convention. And the third, the Amherstburg Convention held in June 1853, broadened the emigration debate. Therefore, for the first years of his life in Canada, Bibb consistently called and hosted one convention annually or bi-annually.
Given the significance of the North American Convention, let us now turn our attention to it.

The North American Convention of Colored People, September 1851

September 1851 marked a historic moment in the annals of Canadian and North American Black abolitionism. Between the 11th and the 13th of that month Henry Bibb called and chaired the North American Convention of Colored People. What makes the Toronto convention significant was that for the first time, major Black abolitionists met to seriously consider the emigration question, though they also engaged other issues affecting North American Blacks. That the convention was called the North American, and not the Toronto or the Canada West convention, reflects the pan-American and diasporic vision and consciousness of Bibb. He realized that in several critical areas Blacks across the continent faced similar problems for which similar solutions must be found. He demonstrated an awareness that within the multiplicity of the North American Black experience there was a unifying thread. The meeting was held at the St. Lawrence Hall in the centre of the city and brought together 53 delegates from across North America and at least one from the Caribbean. The delegates from Canada were in the majority, making up at least two-thirds of the participants. Not all the delegates were Black; a few whites, sympathetic to the Black cause, also attended. And though there were only 53 delegates, dozens of other abolitionists, observers, and sympathizers
converged at the St. Lawrence Hall and on the city. Though Toronto buzzed with excitement, one of the main supporters and architects of the Convention, Theodore Holly, was unable to attend. However, he would still make his presence felt at the meeting.

Toronto was a well-chosen site for Convention. Inland, and far away enough from the border, it was a relatively safe spot for a meeting where not a few fugitives were to converge. Toronto had other attributes. By 1851, it had passed from its frontier stage and had matured into a brash and confident city. It was the capital and main commercial centre of the province, and with a population of well over 30,000, it was set to exercise domination over its hinterland.51

According to the 1851 census, after breaking down the returns into the usual Anglo-Celtic, French, and American populations, only 515 residents remained as “others.”52 We know that a sizeable portion of this group, if not the majority, was Black. In 1837, Toronto had a substantial Black population comprising at least 50 families. In 1854, when Benjamin Drew toured Toronto, he listed the Black population at being about 1000.53 Given the usual undercounting of Blacks in the census, we can assume that by the date of the Convention, well over 500 Black residents made Toronto their home. The population continued rising, especially after 1850, given the FSL crisis. Toronto thus had a relatively strong Black presence, with voting potential, as George Brown, liberal politician, and friend of the Blacks, discovered. Black folks in Toronto practised a
variety of trades. They were also engaged in businesses, and the service industry, and a few followed professions such as medicine and the ministry.54

Toronto as the seat of the province also developed a dependable transportation system with steamers, stages, and steamboats going to and from the city. With regular schedules and reasonable prices, travel was made possible. In fact, two Toronto Blacks owned transportation systems. James Mink, of Loyalist stock, ran a livery stable within the city and a coach to Kingston, and Thornton Blackburn, a famous Kentucky ex-slave owned and operated a cab company within the city itself. To add to the water and road systems of transportation, the railroads began to revolutionize travel within British North America. Starting in 1850, railroad magnates and the government began to build lines to connect Toronto to its northern and western hinterland.55

Henry Bibb may have chosen Toronto for another significant reason. It was the headquarters of the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada which was founded in February 1851. Its executive boasted luminaries from the province’s abolitionist communities. Rev. Michael Willis of Knox College became its president, George Brown of the Globe was a founding member, and three of its 14 vice-presidents were Black men: Henry Bibb of Windsor, A. Beckford Jones of London, and Wilson Abbott of Toronto. The ASSC had a double mandate: to bring about the downfall of slavery through public education, and to aid the fugitives who were daily arriving in the city.56 Soon after its formation, it quickly implemented the first part of its mandate. Leading the charge was George
Brown, member of the ASSC, editor of the province’s leading newspaper, the *Globe*, and an abolitionist. Brown, through the pages of the *Globe*, and his work within the ASSC, agitated against slavery, supported immediate abolition, and defended the Black fugitives.57

As part of its public education campaign, the ASSC, just after its formation, and prior to the Convention, sponsored a series of “great anti-slavery lectures” at the St. Lawrence Hall. Among the lecturers were stalwarts like Frederick Douglass and Samuel J. May of the United States, and George Thompson of Britain.58 The ASSC also organized aid for the refugees. Women of the Toronto middle class, mainly relatives of the members of the ASSC, organized the “Ladies Association in Aid of the Coloured Fugitives,” as an auxiliary of the ASSC. The Ladies Association gave help to hundreds of destitute fugitives.59

Bibb must have been well-aware that the lectures that the ASSC organized would in all likelihood “prime” Toronto for his Convention. These lectures were given in April of ’51, and hundreds went out to hear them. Bibb may have felt that Torontonians were, therefore, already mobilized and ready to hear more on the question of Black oppression and emancipation. The ASSC also had a good relationship with Bibb and the *Voice of the Fugitive*. The ASSC would also develop a sustained relationship with Samuel Ward who attended the Convention. In November 1851, upon settling in Toronto, Ward joined the ASSC and became its principal travelling lecturer and fundraiser. Jermain Loguen,
noted Syracuse Black abolitionist also lectured for the ASSC.\textsuperscript{60}

Toronto was prepared for the Convention. In the 6 September issue, the \textit{Globe} announced:

A great North American Convention of colored people is appointed to meet in this city on the 11\textsuperscript{th}, 12\textsuperscript{th}, and 13\textsuperscript{th} inst. Numerous and efficient delegates are expected to be present from the West and also from the Northern states. One important subject of deliberation will be the question of colonization which has been touched on in our columns lately in several letters.\textsuperscript{61}

Bibb had been planning the convention for some time and had discussed it in the pages of his paper. Even before he settled in Canada, he had been advocating emigration to Canada, but when he took up residence here, he gave Canadian emigration his full support. What is uncanny is that Theodore Holly in Vermont also had very similar ideas and when he began corresponding with Bibb in June 1851, and continued to do so throughout July and August, both men enthusiastically discussed and analyzed their views, especially in regard to emigration. Like Bibb, Holly felt that all free American Black people should emigrate to the provinces of Canada, especially Canada West.\textsuperscript{62}

In the 21 May 1851 issue of the \textit{Voice of the Fugitive}, Bibb published the convention call. He followed up with a similar notice in the 30 July issue. The response to Bibb's call was encouraging. Just a month prior to the meeting, Bibb published several dozen names in the \textit{Voice}. Prominent men such as Lewis Clark of Boston, and others not so well-known such as Peter Payner of Sandwich, pledged their attendance to the meeting. Bibb then wrote: "Shall we not be well represented in the Great North
American Convention of Colored people, at Toronto, C.W., on the 11th, 12th, and 13th, of September next? It will doubtless be one of the largest and most important conventions of colored men that ever convened on the American continent.\footnote{63}

In the 27 August issue, Bibb also discussed the impending convention. And not only were potential delegates responding to the call, but abolitionists such as Hiram Wilson, AMA missionary of St. Catharines, William King, Buxton’s patriarch, also wrote letters of support to Bibb.\footnote{64} Thus the 1851 convention reflected a year of planning and agitation on Bibb’s part. In the afternoon of the 11th, with Bibb in chair, the convention got down to business. The first resolutions that were placed on the floor dealt with ramifications of the FSL and the need for emigration.

1. Resolved, that the infamous fugitive slave enactment of the American government—whether constitutional or unconstitutional, is an insult to God, and an outrage upon humanity, not to be endured by any people; we therefore entreat our brethren of the northern and southern states to come out from under the jurisdiction of those wicked laws—from the power of a Government whose tender mercies, toward the colored people, are cruel.

2. Resolved, that we feel truly grateful, as a people, to her Britannic Majesty’s just and powerful Government, for the protection afforded us; and are fully persuaded from the known fertility of the soil, and salubrity of climate of the milder regions of Canada West, that this is, by far, the most desirable place of resort for colored people, to be found on the American Continent.

3. Resolved, that we warmly recommend to colored settlers in Canada, to use all diligence in obtaining possession of uncultivated lands, for the laudable purpose of making themselves and their offspring independent tillers of a free soil.\footnote{65}
Although these resolutions were adopted, this did not happen without an engaging and controversial debate. Martin Delany of Pittsburg, William Topp and Payton Harris from New York, and Henry Stanton of Ohio all opposed the first resolution. Not every delegate felt that emigration for Blacks was the best option. They registered their protest:

> Whereas, the convention, in adopting the first resolution, inviting the colored people to leave the northern part of the United States, has done so contrary to the desires and wishes of those of us, from the states, who believe it to be impolitic and contrary to our professed policy in opposing the infamous fugitive slave laws, and schemes of American colonization, therefore we do hereby enter our solemn disapprobation and protest against this part of the said resolution. 

This dissatisfaction that the four delegates expressed reflected the rift between those who advocated emigration and those who did not. In 1851, not all the Black abolitionists were of the same mind. Those in the opposing camp often linked emigration to African colonization, which in their minds meant abandoning the slave. Hear Holly, a staunch emigrationist, in an epistle to Bibb, deliberate on the reason for rejection of emigration by some Black abolitionists:

> The word emigration, or colonization grates harshly on the ears of the most of our people. The very pronunciation of it has the talismanic effect of raising all the feelings of scorn, indignation and contempt, that two hundred years of oppressive suffering has nurtured in out bosoms for those who dare to propose such a thing, whilst three million of our brethren cannot share in the enterprise.

Holly then connects the Black “horror of emigration” to the efforts exerted by the
American Colonization Society to rid the Republic of free Blacks by sending them to Africa. Free Blacks saw through the smokescreen of the ACS as a move to ‘deport’ them from their native land and break their connection with their enslaved sisters and brothers. This would give the slaveholders more opportunities to oppress even more the enslaved. That was the reason many Blacks rejected emigration; for them it meant removal to Africa. But Holly notes that now “after 30 years of persistence in holding fast to our ramparts, notwithstanding the shower of oppressive laws, the long siege of starvation from profitable employment and the pestilential miasma of social prejudice,” it was time for free Blacks to reconsider their opposition to emigration. Many Blacks, for example, had gone to Liberia and, free from American racism, had made important contributions to nation building in that country. Canadian colonization was also a godsend. Because of the positive features of Canada, Holly encouraged African Americans to leave the U.S. and relocate to Canada. Canada was not West Africa; it was close to the U.S. From Canada, free Blacks could easily support their enslaved brethren and agitate on their behalf.

For many Black abolitionists, ex-slaves and free Blacks, discussing whether or not one should emigrate was academic. Black oppression at white hands, sanctioned by Church and State, had grown increasingly violent, especially after 1850. And for those fleeing slavery, it was unwise for them to remain in the United States. Therefore, many African Americans had no choice but to leave their native land. Jermain Loguen, fleeing
from the law, settled for a while in St. Catharines; likewise, Samuel Ward fled to Montreal and then Toronto in 1851, fearing arrest. Both Loguen and Ward had assisted in the William "Jerry" McHenry rescue. McHenry was a fugitive slave living in Syracuse, when he was apprehended and arrested by federal marshals. Ward and Loguen were among the many that rescued Jerry and prevented him from being taken South. An odious feature of the FSL was the provision which empowered its enforcers to arrest and penalize any who hindered a federal agent from arresting a fugitive. The Bibbs settled in Sandwich, and William Wells Brown, and Ellen and William Craft chose England. Harriet Tubman, though she ventured into the South to "set the captives free," had St. Catharines as her base. For ordinary Blacks like William Parker, Shadrach Minkins, and William "Jerry" McHenry himself, who were escapees from slavery, and Susannah Maxwell, a free Black from Pennsylvania, deliberations on whether to migrate or not were academic. Slave catchers and law enforcement officers were on their trail. They fled to Canada.

Black abolitionists like Bibb (and Holly) opposed African colonization but saw Canadian emigration as a wonderful compromise. Bibb also endorsed The British West Indies, and Central America as second options. Interestingly, Martin Delany, one of the delegates who opposed the emigration resolution, would himself in a few short years not only disavow his "Americanist" position, and come out in full support of Canadian colonization, but would become one of the chief advocates of African emigration.
Delany expressed his change of view in *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered* which he published in 1852. Delany too would leave the United States in disgust and settle in Canada West in 1854. These later actions of Delany would vindicate the position of Bibb’s, and the rest of the non-opposing delegates.

On the second day of the convention, the delegates, perhaps to solidify the previous resolution on emigration, and to underscore the centrality of emigration to their rhetoric, posed another resolution on the matter: “Resolved, that the convention recommend to the colored people of the U.S. of America, to emigrate to the Canadas instead of going to Africa or the West India Islands, that they, by so doing, may be better able to assist their brethren, who are daily flying from American slavery.” The delegates also articulated the premises upon which Blacks would be elevated: monetary saving, temperance, trades, education, and of course, emigration.

Throughout the deliberations two other critical issues were placed on the agenda, and resolutions formed forthwith. The first had to do with the issue of whether Canadian Blacks should opt for separate institutions:

Resolved, that in the opinion of this convention, the establishment of exclusive churches and schools for colored people, contributes greatly towards the promotion of prejudice, heretofore unknown in the Canadas, and we do hereby recommend that all such organizations be abandoned as speedily as may be practicable.

This position of the Convention revealed its class bias. The delegates positioned
themselves as the “talented tenth” who knew what was best for the race. They blamed the masses of Blacks as architects of their own misery. People like Bibb must have known that, by and large, a majority of Blacks did not want to set up separate institutions but were forced into doing so by whites who did not want any kind of “integration.” Whites simply denied Blacks basic human rights by barring them from white churches, schools, hotels, restaurants, temperance societies, and the like. And the delegates were simply wrong that prejudice was “unknown in the Canadas” before Blacks set up separate institutions. Indeed, other than the legally guaranteed right to vote, Canadian Blacks were socially, economically, and politically, second class citizens. As several historians have revealed, white Canadian racism against Black people had a long history, and was very much a fact of Canadian life, decades before the Fugitive Slave Act became law. Nonetheless, the resolution revealed that Bibb and the rest of the delegates opposed “caste” institutions.

The next agenda item that garnered much attention was Holly’s and James Taylor’s plan for a Black coalition. Theodore Holly, as mentioned, did not make it to the meeting. Nonetheless, he was present in spirit and word. Holly and another Vermonter James Taylor developed a plan for an organization called the North American League of Colored People. The League would function as an umbrella group for North American Black people under which they would collectively advance their cause. The two Vermonters envisioned the League as a “permanent organization, which would be based
in Canada West and designed to aid fugitives, to encourage immigration from the free states to Canada, and to help establish blacks in farming.” Holly sent his report to J.T. Fisher, vice-president of the Convention, who read it on the last day. 76 “The meeting expanded Holly’s [and Taylor’s] program by authorizing the league to raise funds to purchase and distribute land and agricultural implements.” 77 This plan, which was also promoted and endorsed by Bibb, reflected these abolitionists’ Pan-African concerns. 78 Pan-Africanism, a “kindred ideology” of Black nationalism, is defined here broadly as “a movement to develop sentiments of unity among peoples of African descent throughout the world and advance the supposedly similar interests of these diverse peoples, regardless of where they may live.” 79

Throughout the course of the convention, Bibb gave speeches and used his power, privilege, and prestige as chair and president to draft and guide resolutions, lead discussions, and keep the meeting on track. Finally, to wrap up the proceedings, Henry Bibb, J.T. Fisher, and James D. Tinsley 80 addressed the delegates. These three men were authorized by the delegates to “draw up an address as emanating from this convention, and embodying in its spirit the sentiments embraced in the various resolutions which have been adopted....” The three men were enjoined to be the “committee of revision and publication.” 81 Summarizing the themes of the convention, the “Address to the Colored Inhabitants of North America” blasted slavery and the American government, spoke eloquently of common destiny of the enslaved and free Blacks, called for the
breaking down of the slave system through "self-emancipation," highlighted the "historic" role of free Blacks as race uplifters, advocated Canadian emigration, and exhorted all Blacks to unite. Given the fact that slavery had such an impact on the lives of all Blacks, it was central to the discourse of the address. The "Address" stands as one of the most eloquent piece of writing and oratory Bibb created or co-created.

First Bibb et al. thanked Great Britain and Canada for the "rights and privileges" Blacks currently enjoyed in Canada. Asking rhetorically "...was ever any class or portion of the human family so persecuted and oppressed as the colored inhabitants of the United States of America?" they then assailed the American Republic, the American Constitution, and American slavery. The Constitution, for example, was a "political and practical falsehood." It promised life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to all but denied these benefits to three and a half million that the American government held in bondage. The lie of the Constitution is nowhere made plainer than on the 4th day of July when it is clearly revealed to African Americans as "base hypocrisy." Fisher, Tinsley, and Bibb then linked the common degradation of all Blacks and stated that slavery determined the status and treatment of free Blacks. They argued that as long as slavery lasted free Blacks would not be truly free. Calling for Black unity, which the speakers saw as a vital prerequisite in order to defeat of the "beast," the speakers exhorted:

We have, therefore, all one common interest at stake, which is the abolition of slavery and the mutual improvement of our people. Let us then be united in sentiment and in action upon this work until it is accomplished. It is emphatically
a moral duty which requires at our hand—He requires that
we should “remember those in bonds as bound with them,”
and we shall yet to come to that point. Too long, brethren,
have we been conniving at our own oppression, by leaving
the work which we should have done in the hands of others.82

...We are led to believe that the abolition of American slavery
is now in the hands of the people of color in North America.

The speakers sanguinely expressed the view that free Blacks would form a vanguard of
race elevators, or as W.E.B. Dubois would have it, a talented tenth. They declared: “We
believe as long as American slavery exists, an impetus will be given to the exertions of
the liberated few which will cause them to rise in general intelligence, and enable them
to realize a like elevation for the whole race.”83

The speakers then deliberated whether or not slavery should be abolished by
revolutionary means. Juxtaposing three and a half million slaves against 250,000
slaveholders, they asked: “Should the slaves rise to a man, and demand their freedom at
the hands of their oppressors...how long would slavery last? It would be abolished in
even less than a single day, were it not that the strong arm of the whole American
Government is under a pledge to keep the slave in his chains.” Yet the speakers
cautioned the slave not to use physical force to effect their freedom “not only because of
the improbability of your success against the government of the United States in such a
contest, but because it is contrary to the will of God....” That the slaves were to use
moral and not “carnal” means to effect their freedom, underlines the speakers’ (partial)
commitment to “non-violence.”
The speakers then showed their disregard for the status quo, and their belief in the "immorality" of slavery by calling for the "self-emancipation": that is for the slaves to run away. The enslaved must also use all in their powers to prevent recapture. In this regard, Bibb and his cohorts endorsed violence. "Self-preservation is the first impulse of nature, and if there is any cause in which a person can be justified in shedding blood it must be when it is shed in the defence of Liberty." They next advised the fleeing fugitives not to stop running until they reach Canada or the British West Indies, "where the soil is untainted with human slavery, and where the fugitive is protected in the enjoyment of liberty by one of the most powerful governments on the globe."84

Bibb and his cohorts expanded Holly’s North American League to include the British West Indies. Such an umbrella organization, the speakers reasoned, would furnish much needed support for the elevation of the race. One objective of this expanded league would be to purchase land in Jamaica and Canada and establish farms "as may be practicable for the purpose of encouraging industry among refugees from American slavery, and other persons of color who may be disposed to become owners and tillers of the soil." This agricultural league, like the Refugee Home Society that Bibb himself was currently involved in, reflected the delegates' vision that agriculture was to be one of the bases for race uplift. Finally, Bibb, Fisher, and Tinsley spoke on the importance of education to the Black community and the need for Blacks to obtain it.85

Thus ended the North American Convention. The crowning achievement of this
convention was that it moved emigration from being a sideline issue among Black (and white abolitionists) to centre stage. By this action emigration lost much of its disrepute and became a respectable, if not controversial discussion subject. The North American Convention also helped to removed the stain that for several decades had dogged the emigration issue. The turn-out was impressive; 53 registered delegates, some of whom were prominent abolitionists, answered the convention's call. For three days in Toronto, delegates, even when they differed in opinion, supported each other. The Convention represented an excellent case for Black co-operation. Take for example, Holly's report. Holly could not make it to the meeting but he sent his report to J.T. Fisher who read it. The plan Holly outlined was one of the more critical agenda items. Another example of Black co-operation is that though Delany opposed the emigrationist sentiment of Bibb and the majority of the delegates, he nonetheless remained an agent for Bibb's newspaper. However, the deliberations of the convention clearly revealed that the convention started and ended as a male discourse.

If women were at the convention, their presence was not recorded. But women, over the course of the convention movement, attended these meetings even though rarely, until 1854, as conscious and invited delegates. In 1848, as mentioned, women were "welcomed" as delegates, and one even rose and addressed the meeting. But the 'revolution' that occurred in Ohio in 1848 seemed not to have affected the Toronto meeting. Interested women may not have felt confident enough to come as delegates if
they were not specifically invited. According to Jane Rhodes, Mary Ann Shadd was present at the North American Convention. She attended with her father, Abraham Shadd, who came as an observer from Delaware. Mary Bibb, wife of Henry Bibb, might also have been in attendance. As a public abolitionist she was used to attending these types of meeting. She was in attendance of the 1847 American Anti-Slavery Society's annual meeting in New York City, had attended several Liberty Party and Free Soil conventions, and we know that she served as one of the vice-presidents at the Ohio Emigration Convention of 1854, called by Martin Delany.

The lack of female representation at the Toronto 1851 convention revealed that Black abolitionists subscribed to the separate spheres ideology. As mentioned, until 1854, the Convention movement was male-dominated. It would not be until the last quarter of the nineteenth century that Black women would begin consciously organizing as women in their own clubs and conventions. It would appear that when Bibb and the other abolitionists used terms such as “manhood” they purported to be speaking of the “whole race” which included women and men, but they really meant men. That is why women were invisible, even when they were present, at some of these meetings.

Even when delegates proposed hopeful measures, they did not seem to realize that some of these measures impacted women differently than men. Take the issue of self-emancipation. Fewer women than men sought to escape from slavery; in fact, the ratio was one to three. Women had less geographical knowledge than men, usually had
children, who would impede their travel, and tended to be less literate than men. These were crucial obstacles for women trying to run away from slavery. The tragic case of Margaret Garner is an excellent example of a slave woman whose escape attempt was compromised by her having young children.89

On the other hand though, the North American Convention, like the other Black conventions, must be seen in a critical light; it must also be viewed by us as an achievement. Blacks in North America, notwithstanding the optimistic appraisal the delegates at Toronto gave to Canada, lived in a very hostile and violent environment. Meeting in spaces like conventions, they were able to find support and succour among themselves, if only for a few days, and they devised ways to improve their lives. When they left these meetings, they journeyed to the home communities where they implemented some of the proposed resolutions. The ideas for the Refugee Home Society were first articulated at the Sandwich Convention; the RHS became a reality.90 The Canada Mill and Mercantile Company, built in the village of Buxton, was founded as a result of one of the resolutions at the North American Convention.91 The CMMC consisted of a sawmill, a grist mill, and a country store. Through the sale of shares Blacks themselves raised the initial capitalization of four thousand dollars to begin the CMMC.92 The executive board of the CMMC was composed of a group of well-known and activist abolitionists. John M. Tinsley became the president of the Company, while Thorton Blackbrun served as vice-president. Wilson Ruffin Abbott and J.T. Fisher took
on the roles of treasurer and secretary respectively. The CMMC became a very successful business. From the two mills African Canadians produced "logs, lumber, brick, and pearl ash" in abundance. This was solely a Black initiative and managed by Black men, though whites such as Reverend King and George Brown sat on the board of directors. The CMMC was a stellar example of Black empowerment, independence, self-help, thrift, and uplift as articulated by Bibb and the other delegates at the North American Convention. The Black conventions functioned as matrices from which important Black institutions sprang.

As the official abolition movement became splintered into various camps, and Blacks in the movement became more independent in their action and thought, many Black abolitionists began to advocate political abolition. They had seen that after decades of moral suasion slavery had become even more entrenched. The idea that the conscience of people (most specifically white people) could be stirred into feeling sympathy for the slaves, which as a result would lead to their agitating for the slaves' freedom, was no longer convincing to many Black abolitionists. Martin Delany, for one, felt that "sympathy" as an antislavery sentiment, from whites to Blacks, would not work because anti-Black racism was too ingrained in the mind of white America. Most whites would find it difficult to sympathize with Blacks and hence clamour for slavery's end. Moral suasion, therefore, as antislavery strategy was not working as fast as the abolitionists had
hoped. One alternative that abolitionists conceived of was political abolition.

Thus in April 1840 the Liberty Party was born. Its leaders sprang immediately into action. They decided to contest the next presidential election and nominated James G. Birney and Thomas Earle for president and vice-president. The party platform was for the immediate abolition of slavery and Birney announced that “the grant of the elective franchise to the colored people” was a primary goal of the Liberty party. The Party made history as the nation’s first antislavery political party. It lost the 1840 election, as was expected, but placed political abolition on the agenda and had issued a definite challenge to the moral suasionists.

The formation of the Liberty Party dramatically reflected the split in the national antislavery movement. The moral suasionists continued on with Garrison under the banner of the AASS, but the splinter group, the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, was led by men who were some of the main promoters of the Liberty Party. The feud among the white leaders spilled over into Black abolitionist circles causing African American abolitionists to choose sides. Some, like Remond, Brown, and Douglass, remained with Garrison and the Boston group. But the majority, which included Henry Highland Garnet, Charles B. Ray, Theodore Wright, and Samuel Ringgold Ward, abandoned Garrisonianism with its emphasis on moral suasion and supported political action and the Liberty Party. A few sought to support both sides but discovered “there was no middle ground.” Political action was now to be the driving force behind the
antislavery impulse. The formation of the Liberty Party (and the AFASS) also signalled the movement in abolitionist dynamism from the east (Boston and new England) to the west ("of the Hudson") as some of the chief ideologues, Black and white, of the party came from the west.\textsuperscript{101} As a rule, the majority of the leading Black abolitionists supported political abolition under the auspices of the Liberty Party.\textsuperscript{102}

It was into this milieu of a divided national antislavery movement, a milieu in which political action was supersed ing moral suasion, that Bibb stepped in 1842. Michigan was already a bastion of the Liberty Party and the state anti-slavery society, and its organ, the \textit{Signal of Liberty}, endorsed and campaigned for the Liberty Party. In fact, Theodore Foster, S.B. Treadwell, and Guy Beckley, who were all connected to the \textit{Signal} and the MSASS, were some of Michigan's main Liberty Party organizers; in 1840 Thomas McGee, president of the MSASS, joined the Liberty Party. And the first presidential candidate of the party, Kentuckian James Birney, had settled in Michigan.\textsuperscript{103}

In 1845 Bibb began lecturing on antislavery throughout Michigan and Ohio as an employee of the MSASS. In 1844 he took the field for the Liberty Party, campaigning on its behalf, and continued speaking for the party until 1846. Thus in his entry into the public abolition movement Bibb immediately came under the influence of political abolition and advocated it. Some of Detroit's Black leaders such as William Lambert and William C. Monroe, were Liberty Party men and in Bibb's early days as abolitionist speaker served as his mentors.\textsuperscript{104} Detroit also had a Liberty Association which was
composed of mainly men of the MSASS. Thus by being in Michigan, Bibb was at the centre of political abolition.

The Liberty Party did not win the 1844 election but it made its strongest showing that year. Fred Landon notes that Bibb in his campaigns for the Liberty Party in 1844 was engaged in a bitter (political) contest. For the Liberty Party had emerged as a third party to the chagrin of the Whigs.

The Whigs pointed out that they were standing out against the annexation of Texas, a slave empire in itself, and that votes for a third party would but pave the way for a Democratic victory. This is exactly what happened. In Michigan the Liberty Party polled six and a half per cent of the votes, but even this added to the Whig vote would not have brought victory.

However, in 1848 a split occurred in the party, with some of the original supporters joining forces with dissidents from both the Whig and Democratic parties and forming the Free Soil Party. The dissidents from the two main national parties were dissatisfied with the manner in which their parties were bowing to proslavery forces and wanted to be involved in an antislavery political movement. The Liberty men on their part felt that their idea had more of a chance of coming to fruition if they joined forces with mainstream political people. Thus, at a convention in the summer of 1848, the Free Soil Party came into being and put forward a platform of “Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labor and Free Men.” The new party nominated Martin Van Buren as its presidential candidate for the upcoming elections.
Many Black leaders and ordinary Blacks were reluctant at first to endorse the Free Soil Party due to the racism of some of its organizers, especially those from the wing of the Democrats. The Free Soil Party was only anxious that slavery not be extended in any new territories or states; it was not against existing slavery nor was it for civil rights for Blacks. “But it was the only party with prominent leadership that was willing to espouse some kind of antislavery sentiments.” And that is why leaders like Bibb, Garnet, and Ward attended the Free Soil Party convention and gave it critical support.

The *Detroit Free Press* recorded Bibb’s presence and participation at the 1848 Free Soil convention in an article entitled “Who spoke for Michigan?” The *Free Press* noted that “Mr. Bibb, a fugitive slave, then took the stand and spoke for “free soil and free men.” After giving a brief history of Bibb’s life as a fugitive, the *Free Press* noted that Bibb “took up his residence in Detroit, where General Cass lived.” According to the *Free Press*, Bibb met Cass and thought he would support Black enfranchisement. But Bibb learned otherwise when he attempted to vote in Detroit.

He had the honor to be personally acquainted with him, [Cass] and as much as he had said about him, he felt some pride in the matter. Last fall he attempted to vote, but was repulsed from the polls on account of his color. An attempt was made a short time since to make suffrage universal in Michigan: and in furtherance of this purpose he called upon Gen. Cass, and asked him to sign the petition for universal suffrage, which he declined. He asked him if he was not favorable to the principle, And he replied that he was not at liberty to act, if he so chooses, in favor of freedom...
This report is instructive for it showed that Bibb engaged in civil disobedience by attempting to vote and in line with the 1843 resolution of the Michigan Colored Convention, he had vigorously agitated by way of petition to gain the franchise for Michigan Blacks. This report also shows how critical the issue of the suffrage was for free (male) Blacks and their expectation that antislavery parties, in this case, the Free Soil Party would support suffrage for free Blacks. Though Van Buren did not win the election, the Free Soilers did very well for a new party, receiving 291,678 votes out of the 2,882,120 polled, and five Free Soilers were elected to Congress. According to Philip Foner, enfranchised Blacks voted overwhelmingly for the Free Soil Party, especially in Massachusetts. The success at the Free Soilers at the polls placed antislavery as the main issue on the American political agenda. Bibb was part of that history making.
Notes


9 For example see the letter of James Birney to Lewis Tappan, 27 Feb. 1837, in which the former told the latter that UGRR matters in Ohio “are almost uniformly managed by the colored people. I know nothing of them generally till they are past.” Dwight L. Dumond, ed. *Letters of James Gillespie Birney* (2 vols., New York, 1938), I, 376.

10 See Laura Haviland’s *A Woman’s Life-Work* (Chicago: C.V. Waite, 1887) chapters 2, 3, 5, 6. for Black/white UGRR co-operation in Michigan, especially the southern portion.


12 Gara has argued convincingly that a national UGRR organization did not exist. At the same time, however, some kind of UGRR network was in operation; this system provided aid to some runaway slaves. My focus is on a particular Black abolitionist and his efforts to help runaways. These efforts were
part and parcel of a larger endeavour of Black Detroit and Michigan abolitionists who organized themselves in a society to help fugitive slaves.

13 Siebert, “Underground Railroad in Michigan,” 12; Underground Railroad, 134-149 for lines within Michigan and the Mid-west and their terminii in Canada.


15 Katherine Dupre Lumpkin, “‘The General Plan was Freedom:’ A Negro Secret Order on the Underground Railroad,” Phylon, 28 (Spring, 1967) 63-77.


18 BAP, 3: 397.

19 Ibid., 39.

20 The Detroit Committee re-organized itself around the Nelson Hackett affair. Hackett was an Arkansas fugitive who had escaped to Chatham, Ontario in 1841. He was tracked down by his owner who managed to get him extradited, by permission of Canada’s governor-general, Sir Charles Bagot, to the United States in February 1842. Hackett was lodged in the Detroit jail and the city’s Blacks and the Michigan Anti-Slavery Society rallied around him. However, he was returned to slavery in Arkansas. Roman J. Zorn, “An Arkansas Fugitive Slave Incident and Its International Repercussions,” American Historical Quarterly, 16 (Summer 1957) 139-49.

21 Gara, Liberty Line, 96, 98, 105; Still, Underground Railroad.

22 The Emancipator, 5 May 1847. There is no address for this letter but judging from Bibb’s letter to Theodore Forster of the Signal, dated 21 August 1847, in which he summarized his New England tour. It appears that Bibb was still in New England when he wrote this letter to the Emancipator, which could mean that he did do UGRR work, according to Siebert, while in New England. See Siebert’s Underground Railroad, 441.

23 Emancipator, 11 August 1847.

24 Bibb did have this experience in the Red River swamps when he ran away from Deacon Whitfield, and the latter pursued him with bloodhounds. Bibb, “Narrative” in Osofsky’s Puttin’ On Ole Massa, 123-129.

25 The Emancipator, 15 Sept. 1847.

26 Siebert in Underground Railroad, 441, lists Bibb as being an UGRR agent working in Essex county, Massachusetts. But Siebert is perhaps confusing Essex, Mass., with Essex, Ontario where Bibb became
active and influential as a UGRR worker.


30 Bell, Negro Convention Movement, chapters 4, 5.

31 Ibid., 1. The conventions of the 1840s and 1850s can be seen as a western phenomenon as it was mainly western men of the political action camp that called and dominated these meetings. The prominent conventions too were held in the west. Negro Convention Movement, 100.

32 Foner, Black State Conventions, 181-82.

33 Ibid., 182.

34 Ibid., 181-94. Black people were disfranchised in most of the "free" states. In New York they were restricted by property and financial limitation; only in new England, with the exception of Connecticut could Blacks exercise the vote and even in those places many feared to exercise the franchise due to mob violence. Charles H. Wesley, "Participation of Negroes in Anti-slavery Political Parties," Journal of Negro History, 29 (June 1944) 32-74.

35 Foner, Black State Conventions, 187, 188.

36 Ibid., 183-84.

37 Ibid., 188.


39 In 1851 and 1853 Bibb called his own conventions in Toronto and Amherstburg respectively.

40 Bibb to Frederick Douglass and Martin Delany, North Star, 23 August 1848.

41 Many of the black leaders were ambivalent toward the Free Soil Party because it was not against slavery per se but against the extension of slavery. Wesley, "Negroes in Anti-slavery Political Parties," 54.

43 "Proceedings of Colored Convention," 17. By 1854 women were participating as delegates in the conventions; in that year at Delany’s National Emigration Convention held in Ohio, fully one third of the body were women. This included Mary Bibb, widow of Henry Bibb, who came from Canada as a delegate. According to Miller she was the only woman that "was widely known." At an 1856 emigration convention held again in Cleveland Mary Bibb and Mary Shadd of Ontario served on the publications board which had the responsibility of producing the African-American Quarterly Repository. Shadd who had been a staunch advocate of Canadian emigration now seems to have become interested in African emigration. In fact, her Provincial Freeman, was designated as the official organ for the Delany emigrationists. The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Emigration and Colonization, 1787-1863 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975) 145, 166.

Scholars such as James Oliver Horton have pointed out that although free Blacks did subscribe to the notion of respectability and separate spheres, because of the economic circumstance of Black life which dictated that women share the economic burdens of the family, gender roles in the Black community were more fluid than in white society. J.O. Horton, “Freedom’s Yoke: Gender Conventions among Free Blacks,” in Free People of Color, Inside the African American Community, (Washington D.C: Smithsonian Press, 1993) 98-120.


45 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Silencing The Past, Power and the Production of History (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).


47 Katzman, Before the Ghetto, 39. Although Michigarians appeared to have been zealous in helping runaway slaves they were not so enthusiastic in regard to granting civil rights to the free Black population of the state. In 1850, at the state convention, the legislators, enacted a new constitution and voted to continue the disfranchisement of the Black residents. It was at this convention that Bibb spoke.

48 Robert Campbell (1829-1884), of mixed African and European ancestry was born in Jamaica, where he was trained as a teacher. He settled with his family in Central America and then New York where he worked in a printer’s office. In 1855 he began his tenure as an instructor at the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia. Campbell, frustrated at the treatment of Blacks in America, became an ardent champion of African emigration. In 1858 he joined Delany and travelled with him to Nigeria where they secured land for settlement. He then settled in Lagos with his family and remained there for the rest of his life. In Lagos, Campbell published a weekly called the Anglo-African and took an active part in the educational, economic, and cultural life of the city. Campbell is biographed in R.J.M. Blackett, Beating Against the Barriers, Biographical Essays in Nineteenth-Century Afro-American History (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991) 139-182; C. Peter Ripley, ed. Black Abolitionist Papers, Vol. 4. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986) 354-355.

Martin Delany, "father of Black Nationalism" was born free in Virginia in 1812. His family later moved to Pennsylvania, and at age 19 he began attending an African high school in Pittsburgh. It was
here, in Pittsburgh, that he began his apprenticeship with a local doctor. He remained there, became active in the UGRR, founded and edited an abolitionist weekly, the *Mystery* in 1843. Six years later Delany closed his paper and became co-editor with F. Douglass at the *North Star*. In spite of students’ protest at Harvard where Delany enrolled to study medicine in 1850, he managed to stay for one term before he was dismissed. Notwithstanding Harvard’s racism, he eventually became a fully fledged physician. Fed up with white racism Delany began advocating emigration to Central and South America and the West Indies. His thoughts and ideas culminated in the 1854 emigration convention in Cleveland, Ohio. In 1856 Delany moved to Chatham, Ontario where he set up a successful medical practice and became one of the leading lights in the Black community. He remained in Chatham officially until 1864. In the year he removed to Chatham he began focussing on Africa as the favoured place from African American emigration, and went there with Campbell between 1858-60, and acquired land for settlement among the Yorubas of Nigeria. The civil war interrupted Delany’s emigration plans, and he became a recruiting agent for the Union army and was appointed the first Black officer with a Black regiment. After the war ended Delany continued his work with the Black masses through the Freedmen’s Bureau. In the late 1870s he began working again on emigration, this time to Liberia. Delany became one of the United States’ first Black person of letters. In 1852 he wrote *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*, in which he outlined his ideas on emigration, Black elevation, and Black nationalism. In 1859 he wrote a novel, *Blake: or The Huts of America*. He died in 1885. Frank A. Rollin, *Life and Public Services of Martin R. Delany*, (Boston, 1868); Victor Ullman, *Martin R. Delany: The Beginnings of Black Nationalism* (Boston, 1971); *BAP*, Vol. 2, 397-98.


50 See *Voice of the Fugitive*, 3 December 1851.


54 Hill, “Negroes in Toronto,” 76, 80.


Ontario). The Anti-Slavery Society of Upper Canada led the way, but it collapsed in 1837. It would take the FSL to once again bring about organized antislavery in the Canadian provinces. On the Upper Canada Society see, Stouffer, Light of Nature, chapters 2, 3, and 4.

57 George Brown is a historical figure in Canadian abolitionism. Brown emigrated from Scotland with his father Peter Brown and established the Globe. A fighting editor, he used his paper as the mouthpiece for the Reform Party—a party that challenged the old oligarchy. He became a reform member of parliament and was important in bringing about the Confederation Act (The BNA Act) of 1867, which gave birth to the country of Canada. In Toronto, the Black voters continually voted for Brown and his reform party. On Brown see J.M.S. Careless, Brown of the Globe. Vol. 1 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1959).


60 Voice, 12 March, 8 Oct. 5, 19, Nov. 1851; Stouffer, Light of Nature, 121.

61 W.H. Landon, a Jamaican living in Woodstock, Ontario, wrote several letters to the Globe throughout 1851 promoting Jamaica as a favoured emigration spots for the Black refugees in Canada. Globe, 4 Sept. 1851.

62 For example see, J. Theodore Holly to Henry Bibb, Voice of the Fugitive, 2 July 1851.

63 Voice, 13 August 1851.

64 Ibid., 27 August 1851.

65 The Proceedings of the North American Convention are printed in the Voice, 24 September 1851. The BAP 2, 149-169 has also reprinted the proceedings.

66 William Topp was a leader in Albany's Black community. A tailor by trade, he supported women's rights, integrated education, and political action. Payton Harris was a prominent Buffalo abolitionist who was active in the convention movement. He remained a staunch anti-emigrationist throughout. Like Topp, he too was a tailor. Henry Stanton was a Toledo barber. He was selected by Toledo Blacks to represent them at the North American Convention. BAP 2, 162-163.

67 Voice, 24 Sept. 1851

68 Floyd J. Miller, The Search for a Black Nationality, Black Emigration and Colonization, 1787-1863 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975)

69 Voice, 2 July 1851.

70 Loguen was an African Methodist Episcopal Zion minister, and prominent UGRR agent; Ward was a Congregational pastor. Wells Brown, William and Helen Craft, and Harriet Tubman were famous abolitionists. On Loguen and Ward see, BAP 2, 198-199, 292-293; on the Crafts and Wells Brown see,

71 Shadrach Minkins, a fugitive slave while working in Boston, was seized by federal marshals and arrested. He was rescued by abolitionists who spirited him away to Montreal. Lewis Hayden, a noted fugitive living in Boston, was also arrested for this part in the Shadrach rescue. Hayden was later released. William Parker, a Maryland runaway, while living as a free man in Pennsylvania killed his former owner. The owner, in the company of federal marshals discovered Parker at his Pennsylvania home. They attacked Parker who defended himself. Susannah Maxwell, was a Pennsylvania free Black who fled to Canada when her village was invaded by kidnappers who wanted to kidnap free Blacks and sell them into slavery. Gary Collison, Shadrach Minkins, From fugitive Slave to citizen (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997); Voice, 12 March 1851; On McHenry see, BAP 2, 180. Jonathan Katz, Resistance at Christiana, The Fugitive Slave Rebellion, Christiana, Pennsylvania (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1974). Susannah Maxwell, who lived to be 117 has been biographed by Afua Cooper in Dictionary of Canadian Biography Vol. 15. This volume will be published in the year 2001.

72 Meaning Canada West and Canada East, later to be called Ontario and Quebec.

73 Voice 24 Sept. 1851.

74 Ibid.


76 J.T. Fisher, an important figure in the Toronto Black community, was a saloon-keeper. He believed in Black self-help through entrepreneurship and landownership. He was an agent for the Voice of the Fugitive. BAP 2, 157.

77 Ibid., 149.

78 Of course, the term was not used until the 20th century.


80 James Tinsley was also a prominent Toronto resident. He had escaped from slavery in Virginia. Leaving Canada in 1852, he went to work in the Australian goldfields. Ibid., 158

81 Ibid., 155-156.

82 Voice, 22 Oct. 1851.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.


On the difficulties women faced in trying to escape from slavery see Adrienne Shadd, “‘The Lord seemed to say “Go”’: Women on the Underground Railroad Movement,” in Peggy Bristow et al *We’re Rooted Here and They Can’t Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women’s History* (Reprint, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) 41-68.

The RHS is discussed in detail in Chapter six.

My sincerest thanks to Karolyn E. Smardz, an authority on another famous Kentucky fugitive, Thornton Blackburn, for her information of the Canada Mill and Mercantile Company and Blackburn’s role in it. Smardz, excavated the Thornton and Lucie Blackburn house in Toronto and detailed the experience in Karolyn Smardz, *et al.* “Thornton Blackburn House Site – AjGu – 16, Archaeological Site Report, unpublished manuscript,” Archaeological Resource Centre, Toronto Board of Education, p. 55ff. This report also has information about the CMCC.


*Voice*, 6 May 1852. Wilson Ruffin Abbott was a successful Toronto businessman, stockholder of the Elgin Association, and later Buxton resident. See Ripley, BAP 2: 303-304. On Fisher and Tinsley see notes 76 and 80, and on Blackburn see notes 55 and 91.

Ullman, *North Star*, 137.

*Voice*, 6 May 1852.


Wesley, “Negroes in Anti-Slavery Political Parties”, 39. For the full details of the party’s platform see Thomas Hudson Mckee, *The National Conventions and Platforms of all Political Parties*, (New York:
White abolitionist leaders such as James Birney, Gerrit Smith, Salmon P. Chase, and Myron Holley were western men. In the case of Black abolitionists the western dominance was even more obvious with Bibb, Lambert, Garnet, Mercer Langston, Delany, and Ward coming from the west. Dumond, Antislavery, 298; BAP, Vol. 3, 23.


Frederick J. Blue, The Free Soilers, Third Party Politics, 1848-54, (Urbana: University to Illinois Press, 1973) chapters 2, 3. A group of Liberty men, which included Samuel Ward and Henry Garnet, with Gerrit Smith broke away in 1847 and called itself the National Liberty Party. This group refused to build a coalition with the Free Soilers. In 1855, at a three day convention presided over by Dr. James McCune Smith, a Black physician from New York, the NLP changed its name to the Radical Abolition Party. It soldiered on until 1860. Wesley, “Negroes in Anti-Slavery Political Parties,” 51.

Dumond see this new force as “an expansion of the Liberty Party under a new name,” as opposed to the absorption of the party by the Free Soilers. Antislavery, 304.

Free Soilers, 118-120.
Cass, a Michigianian, was nominated in May 1848 by the Democratic party for president. Cass was a proslaveryite and the nomination was made to acquiesce to southern demands. Foner, *History of Black Americans*, 550.

*Detroit Free Press*, 15 August 1848.

Foner, *History of Black Americans*, 554; see also Wesley's "Negroes in Anti-Slavery Political Parties," 57.

Bibb continued to give critical support to the Free Soil Party even while living in Canada. *The Voice*, 9 Sept. 1852.
Chapter 5.

_Friend and brother, fare thee well!
Thou hast bound us with a spell,
Hearts that are with pity swell
For the injured slave._

_Go thy embassy fulfil,
Touch each tender chord with skill,
God and man will bless thee still,
Pleading for the slave._

_Farewell poem to Henry Bibb by Mrs. Spence of Salem, Michigan_

**CANADA WEST, THE NEW MISSION GROUND: THE SETTING**

If one stands on the bank on the Detroit River in the historic town of Sandwich and looks across the river onto the opposite shore, one's eyes fall directly on the city of Detroit, Bibb's former place of residence. Sandwich, which in 1935 was incorporated into the city of Windsor, shares a long and turbulent history with Detroit. The Detroit River stands between them, and often this river determined how fate would deal with these two places, which at the beginning of their written history were regarded as twin villages. When Bibb arrived in Sandwich in 1850 there was easy communication across the river between the two towns as a ferry service regularly plied the route.

Henry Bibb's choice of Sandwich as home seems to have been deliberate. Several reasons can be posited for Bibb's choosing Sandwich to settle. First, he was familiar with the Canadian side of the Detroit River as he visited there occasionally, especially in his role as fugitive slave escort; second, Sandwich had a thriving Black population and was the capital of Essex County; and the third and perhaps most important reason was
Sandwich's proximity to Detroit and Michigan. The fact that Bibb remained in a border town and did not go inland suggests that proximity to Michigan and the United States may have been a key factor in his choosing a border town in which to settle. It seems that he wanted to keep in close touch with his American brethren and still be a part of the activities of the Black community in Detroit and Michigan.

Why did Bibb move to Canada? Ostensibly it was because of the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act through Congress and its effect on the Black population of the United States. The law gave slave owners the right and power to track down their escaped slaves and return them to slavery. Free Blacks were also at risk as kidnapping of these persons by slave catchers and purported slave catchers could and did take place. Thus, no Black person was safe from the law. Bibb was an escaped slave; he made his final escape in 1841, but when he crossed into Canada to settle, he was not fleeing a pursuing owner, and there was no immediate threat to his safety. His last owner, a man from the Cherokee nation, had died in 1841 and it was unlikely that his widow was looking for Bibb. Bibb had engaged in public antislavery for almost ten years without having fear, or so it seemed, of being caught by any of his previous owners. He even wrote occasionally to a few of them. However, as mentioned, Bibb was legally still a slave and this made him vulnerable to being apprehended.

Bibb moved to Canada mainly because he was outraged at the FSL. He felt that the American government had betrayed all Blacks. The FSL demonstrated, in the eyes of Bibb, that the Republic was morally bankrupt and totally degenerate. Under the conditions of persecution generated by the FSL, Bibb felt that his Black brothers and
sisters could never hope to achieve any kind of meaningful freedom in the United States. Bibb, like several of his colleagues, felt that the only option opened to free Blacks was to “separate” from the United States. Canada, because of its closeness to the U.S., was the best place to go. From Canada Black abolitionists could still venture into the U.S. and keep an eye on their enslaved “kith and kin,” and agitate on their behalf.

Bibb could have gone to Haiti, Jamaica, Central America, Mexico, or West Africa, but he chose Canada because he felt that he had a special call to work there on behalf of the fleeing fugitive. The Black community in Canada was expanding in dramatic proportions because of the FSL, and in the eyes of Bibb and his wife Mary, intelligent leadership was needed to lead and guide this community. That Bibb felt his main reason for going to Canada was to help the burgeoning refugee community was made clear in a letter written by Mrs. Bibb to Gerrit Smith in which she states that the couple saw Canada as their [new] field of mission. And to underscore the ‘rightness’ of their decision, she informs Smith that “there are hundreds of slaves coming here daily.”

Thus, Bibb’s departure from Michigan and arrival in Ontario were both a beginning and an end, but also a continuation, as he saw it, in his struggle for Black freedom in North America. Elsa Barkley Brown, in analyzing African American women’s quilting, notes that the beginning and end of many designs are hard to find because the women quilt in ‘polyrhythm’, thus setting up a structure where the beginning could be the end and vice versa. Bibb’s work on the Detroit frontier has that quality of simultaneous beginning and end. His cross-border activities provide an excellent example of the unifying efforts of abolitionist undertakings in the region.
Sandwich and Essex, because of their border status, bore witness to, and participated in, significant historical events. Given the strategic location of this region a brief accounting of its history is essential. Essex began its history as a part of the Detroit River district. This district included the area on both banks of the river and adjacent areas. This meant that areas in what is today Canada and the United States were regarded, in the past, as being one historical and geographical entity. Because of its frontier status, this district has been a cultural crossroad where nations, empires, races, and cultures met, interacted, fought, lived and died.⁷

Home to the “Council of the Three Fires,” which was composed of the nations of the Ottawa, Ojibway, and Pottowatami, this area was also home, hunting ground, and meeting place for thousands of years for other First Nations of the region. By the middle of the 17th century French explorers, fur traders, and missionaries were ranging in the area exploring, trading and preaching. The French were the first Europeans to establish themselves in the district, but by 1760 both the Americans and the British had become significant forces in the region. In the midst of all these groups were an increasing number of Africans who occupied a tenuous middle ground.⁸ In 1701, Cadillac gave historic anchorage to the towns of Sandwich and Detroit when he founded the town of Detroit as a fur-trading centre—the westernmost post on the St. Lawrence fur-trading empire. But Cadillac wanted Detroit to be more than just a fur-trading post. He wanted it to be also an agricultural community and set about making farming important to the village. Detroit eventually became the seat of the French government in the west—that vast area west of Montreal extending to the Ohio River valley. Detroit was also to have a military purpose. Its strategic location on the Detroit River gave it easy access to the
Great Lakes basin and the waters of the southern rivers; it was to serve as the main line of communication between east and west and the base from which western exploration would take place. The dream of the French of establishing a mighty empire south of the Ohio to the Gulf of Mexico was to take place from Detroit.\(^9\)

Some success in the military design was achieved as fur-traders explored and traded west and south and in the process established settlements south and west of the Ohio. The community of farmers and fur traders in Detroit grew and by the middle of the century extended itself to the south bank of the river, in the village of Sandwich, then called Assumption, in the future province of Upper Canada. Soon after, settlement began to spread along the entire south bank. From the river Canard in the south, to Lake St. Clair in the north, French farms and villages dotted the landscape.\(^10\) The seat of government, however, remained at Detroit.

Sandwich took its original name from the religious parish of Assumption, a mission post begun in 1748 by Father Richarde for the Huron Indians. The Hurons found a reservation within the parish. Under the French regime Sandwich achieved distinction in two areas: it became the first settled area of Europeans west of Montreal, and also the first place west of Montreal where a religious parish was established. At the end of French rule in 1760 in North America, which came with the defeat of France by Britain, both regions on either side of the Detroit River were ruled by the same administration, with officials domiciled in Detroit. Both sides were, for all intents and purposes, Canadian.\(^11\)

This arrangement did not change under British rule. The ‘west’ was still conceived of as that area west of Montreal (or Kingston) which comprised all of the
future Upper Canada and much of Michigan and Ohio. The British, once they took up official position in the west, chose Detroit as their seat of administration. The American Revolutionary War changed all of this. Britain lost the war and in the treaty of Paris in 1783 gave away much western land to the Americans. The official who negotiated on behalf of Britain felt that these lands were "useless" and ceded "all of its [British Canadian] fur-trading posts on the Great Lakes, all of its territory north of the Ohio, and west of the head-waters of the Mississippi, all of the Detroit river district west, and one half of the lakes and rivers which comprised the drainage system of this Canadian country."¹² The treaty made the middle of the Detroit River part of the international boundary. Because of this treaty, the south bank of the river would become Canadian, while the north bank would be American. The British, however, managed to hold on to Detroit and parts of the Ohio River valley until 1796. This anomaly was not rectified until 1794 with the Jay's Treaty. An important provision of this treaty ensured that the Americans would confirm their title to western lands—lands ceded to them in 1783 under the Peace of Paris.¹³ Of course, this notion of 'British' and 'American' lands is Eurocentric and reflective of the settler concept of North American history. The First Nations of the Great Lakes region were not part of the various treaty makings, and therefore did not see these treaties as legitimate. When the First Nations of the area began to feel the impact of the Peace of Paris and the Jay's Treaty, they voiced their outrage at British betrayal. They complained that this act of ceding Aboriginal lands to the Americans "was an act of treachery and cruelty that only Christians could be capable of."¹⁴

The new international boundary and the ratification of Jay's Treaty shattered the
historical, political and administrative unity of the district. The north bank of the river was confirmed as American, and the south bank British. Jay’s treaty led to a rapid movement of British officials, settlers, and fur-traders across the Detroit River to settle on the Canadian bank. Several towns including Sandwich came about because of this exodus. Peter Russell, the then administrator of Upper Canada, established Sandwich on lands he bought from the Huron, Chippewa, Ottawas, and Pottowamis. This land comprised the bulk of the former Huron Church reserve in the parish of Assumption. In fact, many of these First Nations were forced to sign treaties under pressure from white settlers to give up their lands; in this instance most of these settlers were Loyalists.

In the new town of Sandwich, the British Canadians built a jail, a courthouse, and a registry. Sandwich was proclaimed capital of the newly named Western district (which comprised the counties of Essex, Kent and Lambton) and William Dummer Powell, a Loyalist, was appointed as the first judge of the district. Thus, Sandwich became the first area in the British province of Upper Canada where civil rule was established. This was the beginning of the rise of Sandwich.

Sandwich’s border status continued to play a part in its destiny in the War of 1812. The British chose Sandwich as their western headquarters during this war and pitched their first tents here. From Sandwich the British Canadian army sailed across the river to wage successful battles against the Americans. Fourteen months after the war commenced, Sandwich changed hands and became American as the British, fleeing the American advance, retreated to Chatham. The treaty of Ghent, signed on Christmas Eve, 1814, ended the war and restored Sandwich to Canadian hands. Sandwich then began its existence as a village in the throes of colonial and imperial activities. Though it changed
hands from time to time its history, its growth and its development embodied that of the province. Sandwich was the "founding town" of Upper Canada. Starting as an outpost of French civilization in the west, it came into prominence during the era of British rule.

Sandwich and the Detroit River district experienced the tensions of war between Britain and France, wars between Britain and the United States, and more wars between the United States and the western First Nations. The latter situation was to remain the longest. It can safely be said that from 1783 to 1867 the border region between Canada and the United States remained in a permanent state of tension. In 1812 and 1837 American forces attacked Canada. In the decades of the 1840s and 50s hot words were exchanged between the two powers as fugitive slaves from the republic sought refuge in the latter country, and the American government demanded that "criminal" fugitives be extradited. And in 1866 Irish nationalists, the Fenians, crossed into Canada from the United States and attacked the former country.

When Bibb, his wife, and his mother arrived in Sandwich they arrived into an area which had a long and tumultuous history, one in which there was a long-standing hostility toward the United States. Sandwich, by sitting on the border between Canada and the United States, was part of a physical and conceptual frontier across which ranged peoples of different races, languages, cultures, and ethnicities. These factors gave the border region a porous nature in spite of the hostilities between the two sovereign states (Canada and the United States). This is exemplified in the movement of Black Americans across the border into Canada in their quest for freedom. I am calling this border a "fluid frontier" in reference not only to its watery nature, but also to its
metaphorical quality therewith emphasizing the shifting and multiple identities of the Black North Americans who crossed and re-crossed it.\textsuperscript{19}

**THE BLACK PRESENCE IN THE EARLY HISTORY OF SANDWICH AND ESSEX**

Essex County, sitting on the same latitude as Rome and northern California, is the most southerly of all the counties in the province of Ontario and anywhere in Canada. It thus enjoys a mild climate and is blessed with relatively fertile soil. From the days of its beginning as an agricultural settlement it has prided itself on being a rich agricultural area.\textsuperscript{20} Essex is a county surrounded by water. Bounded on the North by Lakes St. Clair and Huron, on the west by the Detroit River, and on the south by Lake Erie, it has been carved into a peninsula by its position between these waters. It is truly a county of the Great Lakes. On the other side of Essex’s western and southern borders—the Detroit River and Lake Erie—is the United States. These waterways have enabled thousands of Blacks to come into the country from the American Midwest, and the mild climate of Essex seduced many to remain at the border instead of going inland.

In regard to the early history of Blacks in the Detroit River district, historian Laurence Grant notes that “hundreds of Black slaves helped Cadillac to found the town of Detroit.”\textsuperscript{21} Presumably some of these slaves came with Cadillac from Montreal and others he bought from Native traders in the Michigan and Ohio regions. Lajeunesse notes “that slavery was quite common along the Detroit river in the eighteenth century.” In the four censuses of Detroit taken between 1750 and 1782, families on the south shore of the river (the side that became Canadian) held Black slaves. One prominent French family that eventually became respected Loyalists was the Baby family. The Babys were
first domiciled in Detroit. Suzanne Baby and her husband Jacques, active fur traders and business people, owned 17 slaves, ten of whom were Africans. With the Conquest, the Baby clan became loyal British subjects, and when the Americans took over Detroit in 1796, the majority of family members moved over to Sandwich with their slaves, servants, and business.22 From the Catholic church records at Assumption (Sandwich) we also find accounts for “Les negres.”23 Thus from censuses, colonial documents, church and family records we learn that some of the first Blacks in Sandwich and Essex were slaves.

The closing of the American revolutionary war witnessed the increase of the Black population of Essex. Many prominent Loyalists brought their slaves with them into Canada. Colonel Matthew Elliot brought over 50 with him to Amherstburg and Sandwich. Other prominent Loyalists, such as James Baby and Alexander McKee, were also slave owners. In fact, in the early British period most of the slaves in Upper Canada belonged to United Empire Loyalists.24 But an increasingly free Black element was added to this population. This element was composed mainly of disbanded soldiers from British and the colonial Canadian regiments. These men, because of their contribution to the British cause during the war and their status as Loyalists, were granted land in Essex on which to settle. Many had their families with them.25

The War of 1812 led to an increment in this population as word got back to the young United States that Blacks were welcomed in Canada (or Ontario). At the close of the war in 1815 more and more African Americans began to move into Canada. According to James Birney, by 1817 more than 1000 African Americans had entered Ontario from Ohio.26 Many were encouraged to do so by lieutenant-governor Maitland.
Maitland needed settlers to people the thinly populated province; and he needed able-bodied men to serve in the defence of the province. As part of his strategy, Maitland settled Black war veterans on land in the Georgian Bay area; these veterans helped to build the Penetanguishene road. Maitland’s open support for fugitives running from the United States angered the government of that country and led to tension between Britain and the United States over the extradition of fugitive slaves. The post-war situation represented the first major wave of Blacks to arrive and settle in Essex and Ontario.\textsuperscript{27}

A free Black community began to take shape in Essex and the Western district of Ontario after the War of 1812; the Black emigrants, some of whom were runaways from American slavery, seemed to have been well received in the province. Towns and villages like Sandwich, Amherstburg, Colchester, and Chatham became sanctuaries for many of these African Americans. By 1835, when Scottish farmer and traveller Patrick Shirreff visited Canada, he noted that Essex and other areas of the Western district had sizeable Black populations and that many had settled on farms. Regarding the Black presence in Colchester and Amherstburg, Shirreff noted:

> In both townships there are a good many people of colour, who generally rent the farms on which they reside, or obtain so many years’ possession, on condition of clearing a certain extent of wood. A considerable quantity of tobacco is grown here, chiefly by the black population.\textsuperscript{28}

Modern historians of the Detroit River district are also in accord with Shirreff on the role the Black settlers have played in building the tobacco industry in Ontario.\textsuperscript{29} The Black population continued to grow through natural increase and immigration so that by 1850, when the second phase of emigration from the United States started, the African American cum Canadian community of Essex and Ontario was firmly established in the
province. During the second era of Black American emigration, the African American community began to experience a variety of racisms. One historian attributes this to three main reasons: an increase in their population, the arrival of the more assimilable Irish who could do the “black” work, thus the labour of Blacks was no longer needed, and the transition of the province from frontier to mature stage. The latter development meant that Black labour was no longer needed to cut down trees, build roads and clear forests, and if they things needed to be done, the Irish would do them.30

While these reasons are plausible, they do not hold up under close scrutiny. Black people in the province, even before they became numerically significant, experienced overt and covert racism. As early as 1828 a group of African petitioners from Ancaster appealed to the then government to assist them in building a school for their children as whites had barred the Black children from attending the common school in the village.31 In 1835 Shirreff related that children belonging to Israel Williams, an African who lived on the banks of Lake St. Clair, were kicked out of the local school by the teacher.32 By this time, many Blacks who were native born or immigrants were worshipping in separate churches.33 In 1837 brawls erupted on the Welland canal between Black soldiers and Irish workers. The Irish workers felt outraged and insulted that Black men had ordered them to keep the peace.34 Thus, from the early period of Black emigration into the province, whites were hostile and racist toward Blacks.

A dominance/subjugation theoretical model has rarely been used to write about and contextualize African Canadian history. Such a theory would enable us to see Canadian racism not as an “aberration.”35 Black people first arrived in this country as colonial and subjugated people—they were captives who would be enslaved. It must be
remembered that the First Nations also suffered from slavery at the hands of Europeans and their own groups, but by the end of the eighteenth century in what would become Canada, slavery as an institution became associated with people of African heritage. Oftentimes, the Black was a slave, and the slave was a Black; slavery became the social marker of Black people. Enslaved Blacks, most of whom remained slaves for life, as bonded persons, shared the low status associated with the institution across the Americas. In Canada, enslaved Black people, as a group, were economically, socially, and politically marginalized. Their descendants who would be “free” would also inherit these disadvantages.36

By the time of the Conquest, and certainly by the end of the War of 1812, Europeans in Canada were the dominant group. And even though at the end of the Seven Years War, the French “lost out” to the British, both groups went on to construct settler societies based on their interests. In the end, the First Nations were the biggest losers and they lost land, languages, peoples, and culture; in some instances, whole nations were made extinct because of European aggression.37

The mindset of Europeans, as they stole continents from the First Nations, was that these lands belonged to them by “manifest destiny.” Armed with such a belief, they sought to imprint these lands with their own thoughts, ideas, customs, institutions, and people, and redefine the role and status of the people with whom they came in contact. And as colonialism and colonization expanded, Europeans began to identify people by “race”. As mentioned, in an earlier discussion, they constructed a racial hierarchy with “whites” at the top, as the real human beings; those unfortunate not to be white and European were relegated to sub-human status at the bottom of the hierarchy.38 In
Canada, the First Nations, after they outlived their ‘usefulness’ by the end of the 18th century, were viewed by the colonial state, as white settlement expanded, as ‘undesirables who must be got rid of.’ With respect to Black Canadians, they would be tolerated for their labour, and nothing more. They would always experience subaltern status. Because of their “blackness” they would and could never assimilate into [white] civil society. So though the causes for white hostility that Winks posited on the surface may appear “true,” the evolution of the Canadian colonial state, and the psycho-social economic thought of Europeans and Euro-Canadians must be examined to understand the nature of Black subordination, and conversely, white domination. When the Black population remains small and is in many ways overwhelmed by white society, whites do not usually perceive the small number as a threat. But when this Black population begins to grow, whether by natural increase or by migration, whites raise an alarm: “the hordes are at the gates,” “our customs will be compromised,” “our women are vulnerable,” etc. A sizeable Black population (this is true for any other racialized group—Asians in British Columbia, for example) has the potential to challenge white hegemony, and cast off white control and domination. Whether they do this is irrelevant to whites; the idea that they can is what is so frightening.

But if prejudice and discrimination against Africans by whites increased as the Black population grew one could also ascribe this trend to the corresponding increase of the European population as more and more settlers poured into the province and the country during the decades of the 1830s and 40s. During this period tens of thousands of emigrants from Europe, especially the British Isles arrived in Ontario; there was also a migration of white people from the United States after the War of 1812. Thus, the reason
for white racism against African Ontarians lay not so much in the fact that Black immigration had increased but also in the fact that *white* immigration burgeoned. These Europeans and Americans coming into the county and province brought with them their ancient prejudices and racist behaviour. They had come from countries and empires where African peoples were seen as second class, barbarians, not quite human, and therefore not worthy of equality with white people.\(^{41}\)

Hostilities by whites towards Blacks and the continual increase in the Black population led Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur in 1840 to worry that increased Black immigration would lead to racial problems. This kind of thinking was simplistic. It was a “blame the victim approach” to the problem. Arthur failed to interrogate the status quo, an integral part of which was white supremacy and with it white racism.\(^{42}\) Arthur believed that “if only the Blacks would stop coming the problem would be solved.” There seemed not to have been a questioning of white attitudes or a commitment to treat each emigrant equally.\(^{43}\)

But Blacks kept coming, and Canada, having an international image to protect as rescuer of the poor fugitive slave from Republican oppression, could not turn back the African American at the border.\(^{44}\) Blacks coming in from the United States crossed the Detroit River, lakes Huron and Erie and poured into Essex and other areas of the Western District. By 1860 African Americans and their children had established themselves in every single township and county in Ontario, but their numbers were greatest in Essex County.

Beginning in 1850 the second wave of Black emigration from the United States began. The preferred country of destination was Canada. Again, Ontario received the
largest share of emigrants and Essex, being right on the fluid frontier, received a large number of these emigrants. Beginning in September of 1850, the same month when the Fugitive Slave bill became law, and occasioned by this law, a veritable exodus of Blacks began to take place. Whole communities in the northern states became deserted as a result of Black flight; churches lost their entire membership; families were broken. The emigrants went to places like the West Indies, Mexico, Britain, West Africa, but most trekked north to Canada. Some saw themselves as exiles, waiting for the right conditions to return; others shook the dust from their feet once they crossed the border and embraced their new country and its monarch, and decided they were fully “British”; still others wavered between both sentiments. Between 1850 and 1860 thousands of African Americans made Ontario their home.

The first years were probably the most crucial for many of these emigrants, especially for the ones who had to flee overnight. They came with little or nothing. On entering the province they needed assistance. Essex’s border towns like Windsor, Sandwich, and Amherstburgh could be said to be under a state of emergency as more and more emigrants arrived and strained the resources of the settled Black community. This is not to present the view that the Black community was impoverished and “deprived”; hundreds of Black families had settled in the region prior to 1850 and done well for themselves. But the flight created by the FSL did occasion an emergency situation at the border counties, and hundreds arrived destitute. People had to be housed, fed, clothed and provided for in other ways. It was into this milieu that Henry Bibb stepped.

Bibb arrived to be a voice for the “voiceless” fugitive and to lead and uplift the
race. He arrived armed with ready-made ideas on how to implement his strategies. As would be articulated in the Convention of 1851, Black uplift would be premised on thrift, sobriety, hard work, agriculture, education, and emigration. Blacks were to strive for self-sufficiency: Bibb believed they should grow their own food, make their own clothing, and run their own businesses. Bibb then set out, with the aid and support of like minds, to create organizations dedicated to Black regeneration. The Refugee Home Society was brought into being to lay the foundation for Black “elevation through agriculture.” Bibb also founded the *Voice of the Fugitive*, Canada’s first Black newspaper, to “plead our cause.” (In creating the *Voice*, Bibb manifested one of his central tenets—that of Black entrepreneurship). And he set out founding schools, churches, and temperance societies.

In his efforts at Black uplift, he was at all times aided by his wife and partner, and fellow-abolitionist, Mary Miles Bibb. The following two chapters—six and seven—chart Bibb’s work as agriculture advocate and newspaper founder and publisher. Chapter eight illuminates the relationships he had with the women that mattered most in his life.
Notes

1 Voice of the Fugitive, 21 April 1851.

2 Sandwich, now incorporated as part of the City of Windsor, has been designated a “historic” town.

3 For details of the Fugitive Slave Law and its ramifications see Herbert Aptheker, Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States From Colonial Times to the Founding of the NAACP, (New York: Citadel Press, 1951) 229.

4 See Bibb’s article in the Voice, 26 Feb. 1851 on President Fillmore’s declaration on enforcing the Fugitive Slave Law.


7 The Detroit River district has been both frontier and border. Though some theorists have given different meanings to ‘frontier,’ ‘boundary,’ and ‘border,’ for this paper, the terms are used interchangeably as I believe that the Detroit border region has embodied all three meanings. Malcolm Anderson describes ‘frontier’ as “the precise line at which jurisdictions meet, usually demarcated and controlled by customs, police, and military personnel.” “The term ‘border’ can be applied to a zone, usually a narrow one, or it can be the line of demarcation....” “The word ‘boundary’ is always used to refer to the line of delimitation or demarcation and is thus the narrowest of the three terms.” Anderson, Territory and State Formation in the Modern World (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 1996) 9; see also Thomas M. Wilson & Hastings Donnan, eds. Border Identities, Nation and State at International Frontiers (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 9-11, 25-26; Jeremy Adelman & Stephen Aron, “From Borderland to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History,” American Historical Review 104, 3 (1999) 814-841.

8 Though historians have failed to deal with the place and role of Africans in the early history of the Great Lakes region, Blacks have nonetheless occupied an intriguing place in this history. Here they have been slaves, fur traders, free persons, adopted members of some First Nations, chiefs of some of these Nations, and refugees. The early history of Africans in the Great Lakes region, especially the lower portion, remains to be written.


10 See “Settlers Come To The South Shore” in Lajeunesse, Windsor Border Region, 42-77.


12 Cowan, Detroit River District, 91. Even though the United States received a windfall, Benjamin Franklin, the negotiator for the Republic, wanted all of Canada including Nova Scotia!


16 John Steckley, *Beyond Their Years, five Native Women's Stories* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 199) 199-203.

17 Cowan, *Detroit River District*, 179-81.

18 *Ibid.*, 188.

19 For example, see the discussion “Borders and ethnicity” in Wilson & Donnan, *Border Identities*, 12-17.

20 Cowan, *Detroit River District*, 44.

21 Laurence Grant, curator of the Francois Baby House in Windsor, mounted an exhibition on women in the Detroit River region in 1993. He discusses the experience in “‘Her Stories’: Working with a Community Advisory Board on a Women’s History Exhibition at a Canadian Municipal Museum,” *Gender and History*, 6, #3 (Nov. 1994) 415.


34 Winks, Blacks in Canada, 152.

35 A “feel good” type of history stressing the achievements of Black “heroes”, and underplaying white racism, has characterized much of the writing of Black Canadian history. Fred Landon has utilized extensively this model. Daniel Hill, too, has stressed this approach. In his zeal to have Blacks assimilate, he has not so subtly suggested that Blacks would (or should?) intermarry in order to achieve assimilation. Robin Winks, has utilized an alternative, but also popular, approach to Black history. In his comprehensive history of Black Canadians, Winks came close to blaming Blacks themselves for the oppression they suffered at white hands. Frances Henry in her Caribbean Diaspora also blamed the Black victims for their victimization. These types of approaches reflect the general refusal of practitioners of Canadian history, even feminist writers, with their emphasis on male domination, to use a theoretical model which foregrounds the racist and oppressive nature of the Canadian colonial state and the nation state in its treatment of racial minorities. Landon’s articles on Ontario Black history are too numerous to mention; mention of two will suffice. “Canada’s Part in Freeing the Slave,” OH 17 (1919) 74-84; “Social Conditions Among the Negroes in Upper Canada Before 1865,” OH 22 (1925) 144-161. Ontario History has also published a bibliography of Landon’s work. See, Hilary Bates, “A Bibliography of Fred Landon,” OH 62, 1 (1979) 5-16. Winks, Blacks in Canada; Hill, “Negroes in Toronto, 1793-1865” O H 55 (1963) 91. Frances Henry, The Caribbean Diaspora in Toronto, Learning to Live with Racism (Toronto: UTP, 1994) see the preface. For a discussion on the lack of an “interrogative” approach to the writing of Canadian Black history see, Peggy Bristow et al, We’re Rooted Here and They Can’t Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women’s History (1994; rpt, Toronto: UTP, 1999) 4-7. To date, Native historians, and or, historians of Native history, have been at the forefront of re-visioning Canadian history as a history of colonization. For a view of Canadian history which foregrounds oppressive colonization see, Emma LaRocque, “The Colonization of a Native Woman Scholar,” in Christine Miller and Patricia Chuchryk, Women of the First Nations: Power, Wisdom, and Strength (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1996) 11-18; Mel Watkins, Dene Nation, the Colony Within (Toronto: UTP, 1977).


39 See Steckley’s, Beyond Their Years, 199-302, for discussion on the Wyandot woman, Mary McKee and the removal of the Wyandot people from Southern Ontario, Michigan, and Ohio to Kansas and Oklahoma.


43 Perhaps that would be asking too much of an imperial government that only a few years earlier had abolished slavery in its colonies. English and British people during the 19th century grew up on notions of their own superiority over the darker races. Some of the most virulent racists in Canada were not native born but were emigrants from the British Isles. Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power, Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1868-1914* (Toronto: UTP, 1970); Robert Ross, ed. *Racism and Colonialism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982).

44 When many African Americans were asked in 1855 by a Boston journalists why they came and remained in Canada, all replied unequivocally that it was because of the protection they received under “British law.” The respondents felt that apart from this, the conditions of discrimination that they experienced in Ontario were similar to the ones they experienced in the northern states. Benjamin Drew, *Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada* (1856; rpt, Toronto: Coles, 1972).

45 Kent, Lincoln, Lambton, and Middlesex counties also received substantial amounts of African American emigrants.

During the 1850s as African Americans secured their persons due to the Fugitive Slave Law many fled to border northern states. The three states that received the most were Ohio, Michigan, and Illinois. These states were chosen according to Canadian historian Fred Landon, because they provided easy access to Canada by way of the Great Lakes. Fred Landon, “The Anti-Slavery Society of Canada,” *OH,* 48 (1956) 125-126.


47 The jury is still out on how many African Americans arrived from the United States to Canada, and how many Blacks lived in Ontario by 1860. Figures range from 20,000 to 75,000. Many historians agree that the latter figure is grossly inflated. They based their conclusion on the fact that the slave states lost about 50,000 slaves to flight from 1800 to 1860. And of course all did not seek refuge in Canada. We are also not sure if these figures include all Blacks in the province, those who emigrated here, as well as those who were born here. Fred Landon states that by 1860 the Black population in Canada had reached 40,000 with between 15,000-20,000 coming during the fifties. However, he does not specify if Nova Scotia and the rest of the Maritimes are included in “Canada,” or he is just talking about Ontario and Quebec (Upper and Lower Canada). Winks provides a lucid discussion on the ticklish problem of the Black population of Canada and Ontario during this time. Michael Wayne, an Americanist at the University of Toronto, has looked at the figures for the African population in the 1851 and 1861 censuses of Ontario and making allowances for under-representation by the enumerators concludes that the Black population of Ontario by the end of ’61 was more like 13,000. Landon, “Anti-Slavery Society of Canada,” 126; Winks, *Blacks in Canada,* 233-34; Michael Wayne, “The Myth of the Fugitive Slave: The Black Population of Canada West on the Eve of the American Civil War,” *L’Histoire Sociale/Social History* 56 (1995). 465-485.
Chapter 6.

Agriculture, the Foundation to our Elevation.
H. Bibb, Voice of the Fugitive, 9 April 1851.

LAND OWNERSHIP AND RACE UPLIFT: THE REFUGEE HOME SOCIETY

When Henry Bibb settled in Sandwich he threw himself into organizing and implementing a land settlement scheme for landless Ontario Blacks. From his efforts evolved the Refugee Home Society. The RHS, in terms of its objective and praxis, was not novel, for before its manifestation, at least three Black communes had been established in Ontario, and several Black colonies also had been founded in the United States.¹

The RHS officially came into being at a meeting in Farmington, Michigan, in May of 1851.² Black and white abolitionists from Ontario and Michigan met to discuss how best to help the hundreds of refugees who had come (and were still coming) from the United States into Ontario, and settling along the Detroit River frontier. This mass migration, as mentioned, was engendered by the Fugitive Slave Act.

But the RHS was not built on a tabula rasa. A local Black initiative had sprung up in Sandwich in 1846 with the intent of purchasing land and settling landless Blacks. Known as the Sandwich Mission and led by a local pastor, the Reverend T. Willis, with support from missionary Isaac Rice, the Detroit antislavery notable, Charles Stewart, Hamilton Hill of Oberlin College, and Lewis Tappan of New York, the Sandwich Mission had a plan to

form a new Negro settlement, provide homes and cheap land for the Negroes, solicit aid from friends
of the Negro in the United States and England, provide care for the sick, the aged, and the newly arrived fugitive.\(^3\)

The Reverend Willis, as purchasing agent for the Mission, selected for settlement 10,000 acres of land north of Amherstburg costing $1.50-$2.00 an acre. The Mission intended to divide the land into ten-acre lots and resell them to the Black settlers for “three dollars on taking possession, and then six dollars the two subsequent years.”

Settlers would have a deed after this time. Land was reserved for a school and a church.\(^4\)

The need arose from the substantial migration of Blacks, from both slave and free backgrounds, who were coming into the province. The Detroit River district, as a border region, felt the most pressure from the migration of these Blacks. Though Ontario beckoned as a land of the free from the beginning of the century, Blacks as a group on entering Canada encountered racial discrimination from whites. Whites excluded Blacks from (white) churches, schools and even temperance societies. Though many of the incoming Blacks were able to purchase land and farms, or set themselves up in various trades, others were landless and had no choice but to work as labourers for others or on leased land to support themselves. White missionary and teacher Isaac Rice, who believed that there were about three to four thousand Blacks working as labourers or leasers in the Amherstburg corridor, felt this was ‘folly.’ The best way out for Blacks was to buy and own land, Rice thought. The idea was not only to get land and houses for Blacks but also “to secure steady education and better gospel privileges, being here as in the states excluded from white schools and white Temperance societies.”\(^5\)
By 1851, it appeared that about 1,200 acres of land had been bought and occupied by both settlers whom the Mission supported and by independent Blacks. One might argue that the Mission had a top-down approach to aiding Black families who were not consulted as to what they wanted. Leadership, Black or white, assumed they knew what the ordinary people wanted and the best way to get it. At the same time, Rice and Willis and others who worked among Blacks had good insights as to some of their needs.

Though the Mission did purchase hundreds of acres and settle several families, its objective of purchasing 10,000 acres of land and attracting numerous settlers did not materialize. But with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law a dramatic increase in Black migration across the border occurred. With this migration came the need, from the top and the bottom, “for further organized action on behalf” of the Black migrants, many of whom had arrived destitute.⁶

On 11 November 1850, less than two weeks after arriving in the province, Henry Bibb called a convention at Sandwich.⁷ The delegates then formed the Fugitive Union Society which had as its objective “to enable every fugitive from slavery, if possible, to become an owner and tiller of the soil, and so promote the cause of temperance and education among our people; and that any person who does not sell or use intoxicating drinks as a beverage, and who bears a good moral character, may become a member of this Society.”⁸ Several well-known personalities of the Canada West Black community were elected officers of the Society for one year. Josiah Henson became President, Henry Bibb, Recording Secretary, and Henry Brent, Secretary.⁹
The FUS aimed to buy thirty thousand acres of land, which it would then sell to the refugees at cost. The FUS then outlined its vision for the land settlement scheme. Each person or family could not buy more than 25 acres of land; one third of the money paid would be set aside for education and the rest used for further land purchase. Other resolutions pertaining to the security and uplift of Black life were aired. A report was to be circulated to the free Black population of the United States urging them to emigrate to Canada, where they would be recognized “as men.” The Society appointed vigilance committees in Chatham, Amherstburg, and Sandwich. The *Voice of the Fugitive* also had its genesis at this convention. “Resolved, That we make immediate effort to have a newspaper established in our midst, which shall be the advocate of the colored people in Canada West.” Not every delegate at the meeting agreed to all the propositions. Ezekiel Cooper, for example, was opposed to having adherence to temperance as a prerequisite for membership. But the tenor of the meeting was against his position, and temperance was included “as a test for membership.”

Why did the delegates feel that land was the answer to the problem of the refugee? Henry Bibb noted that the bulk of the refugees understood agricultural pursuits, as they had worked in slavery as farmers on Southern plantations, and that many also had northern agricultural experience. Bibb felt that with a little assistance these persons could establish themselves as farmers in the province. His statement, which became a rallying cry for the later Refugee Home Society, that “agriculture is the most certain road to independence and self-elevation” formed the centre of his and his cohorts’ philosophy regarding the best method for Blacks to achieve independence: it
was to be through ownership of land. This was in keeping with the general belief among many Black abolitionists in North America that land ownership was the key to Black independence. In the Black conventions of 1840 and 1844, delegates called upon Blacks to become ‘possessors of the soil.’ The FUS was grounded within a similar philosophical context. Bibb would work tirelessly for the next four years to achieve his aim of Black independence through land ownership.

The FUS was formed at a critical juncture in the history of Blacks in the Western District of the province. The imperative behind its formation was the effect of the Fugitive Slave Law on the Black population as a whole in much of the United States. This law pushed many of those who came from the U.S. into Canada. As might be expected, many arrived in utter destitution. Who would help them? How would they get work? How would they be able to purchase the land they wanted? How would they find housing? How would they be educated? These questions and others were uppermost in the minds of Bibb and the officers of the FUS. This issue of housing was especially pertinent. Many fugitives, upon arriving in Windsor, had to be housed in the old military barracks. These structures were built during the War of 1812, and therefore were not in the best condition, nor were they the ideal habitation for the new immigrants. Before many of these immigrants could ‘join’ the rest of society, they had to be assisted in important ways. Shelter, food, and clothing topped the list of priorities and were of paramount importance.

Henry Bibb was the guiding spirit behind the FUS. It was he who made the resolution for the formation of the society, and he submitted “a set of propositions as the
basis of the society.” The central tenets of FUS philosophy—landownership, education, and temperance—were his propositions. He also took a very important position on the executive as recording secretary. Though the FUS’ mandate, vision, objective, and ambition were grander and larger than the Sandwich Mission, it built upon what was left of the Sandwich Mission, in philosophy, if not in actuality. The FUS arose because there was an urgent need for an organized effort to help the many destitute Blacks arriving in the province. Though the central mission of the FUS was to enable fugitive Blacks to become land owners, it also sought to solidify, secure, and enlarge the Black community by advocating emigration of free Blacks from the United States to Canada, the founding of vigilance committees, and the setting up of a newspaper.

The Sandwich meeting was called the “Convention of the People of Color.” If whites and other non-Blacks were in attendance, their presence was not mentioned. It therefore would appear the FUS was a Black initiative with support from Blacks on both sides of the border. And even though it was a convention of ‘people of color,’ all the ‘people’ were men. If Black women were there, again like white men, their presence was not noted. This all-male meeting was in keeping with the patriarchal ideology and gender conventions of the day. Yet less than four years later, leaders like Martin Delaney would issue his convention calls with clear statements about the inclusion and involvement of women.

The FUS adjourned and set 1 August 1851 as its next meeting date. In the meantime it appointed Israel Campbell as an agent to collect funds. He travelled to the Midwest for such a purpose. Bibb threw himself wholeheartedly into his new
undertaking. In his paper, he lauded the ‘superiority’ of the land in Canada West, especially its southernmost portion, and the area’s favourable climate. Broadcasting his call for emigration to Canada West or Ontario, in an article he declared that many Blacks from the United States had written informing him that they planned to come and settle in Canada West.

Development of the FUS

In the 26 March 1851 issue of the *Voice of the Fugitive* Bibb opened with part one of a three-part editorial entitled “What Do the Fugitives in Canada Stand Mostly in Need of?” In this editorial Bibb articulates his thoughts on the FUS and outlines his plans. This editorial is a follow-up of the November 1850 Sandwich Convention report as it deals with the same theme. However, in this case, Bibb opens with a strong anti-begging stance. He thanks the ‘antislavery friends’ who had been helping the fleeing fugitives with their donations of food and clothing but notes: “if we would be men and command respect among men, we must strike for something higher than sympathy and perpetual beggary. *We must produce what we consume.*” The article then goes to say that Black people can only elevate themselves by working for themselves and not depending on others for handouts. Bibb states that in general the fugitives do not need food and clothing. He then goes on to define the ‘real’ needs of the fugitives: land and education. If they had land they could raise what they needed to eat and wear (and not depend on white handouts); and with land they would have the means to educate their children.

Bibb then outlines his plan for raising the money to purchase land for the fugitives. He proposes collecting $40,000 to purchase 20,000 acres of land. The best way
to acquire the necessary funds, Bibb suggests, was by selling stocks: 4000 shares could be sold for $10 each. In this regard, Bibb emulated the Rev. King who used the stock system to raise money to purchase land for his Buxton colony. Bibb instructs all those who might be interested in the venture and willing to aid the fugitive to send their donations to William Harned of the American Foreign and Anti-Slavery Society at his office in New York city or to the Voice's office at Sandwich. In his conclusion Bibb explains why this was the time to 'seize the moment' and support the FUS. The Fugitive Slave Law made the time an opportune one to put before the public the issue of the FUS; the British government was extending its kindness to fugitives in bidding them welcome to the province and offering them shelter; British soil was the only place in North America where the fugitive and other Blacks were free from kidnapping. Finally, Bibb sums up why in his estimation it was crucial that the fugitives acquire land:

because it is the best way to encourage industry among this class, to put a stop to so much begging, and to provide means of self-support. While we must admit that there are many among us who are poor and needy objects of charity, which is caused by slavery, we must strive to have as little of it as possible.

This editorial is both an appeal to the public that asks for their support, a denunciation of begging, and a call for Black self-reliance and self-determination. The language is strident and forceful and captures well the nineteenth century Black rhetoric of race uplift. It also reveals Black leaders' sensitivity to the "begging" issue. Since the early 1830s, some Black leaders had engaged in fund-raising efforts—dubbed 'begging'—to help struggling communities and institutions. This method had many opponents who believed that Blacks could and should get by without 'charity,'
especially from whites.\textsuperscript{19} Leaders, like Bibb, were very aware that they were watched by both proslavery and antislavery whites to see whether or not Blacks in freedom could fend for themselves. Thus, in Bibb’s mind if Blacks continued to depend on white handouts, then their detractors would think they were not capable of self-elevation. That without the help of whites (whether the slaveholder, or the antislavery friend) they could not stand up. Bibb was saying that Blacks could help themselves without depending on white charity and the best way to do that, while at the same time refuting racist ideology, was for Blacks themselves to engage in self-elevation by becoming landowners and farmers. Land ownership was to be the great panacea for Black degradation. It is ironic that Bibb, who opposed begging so much and actively promoted Black self-help, would later be wrongfully charged and vilified by Mary Ann Shadd and Samuel Ringgold Ward for begging.

Even though Bibb’s formulations and proposals to help the fugitives were top down and as such could be described as elitist, in many ways he was ahead of his time. He helped lay the foundation for key concepts of Black Nationalist thought of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Marcus Garvey, who in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century became the best-known advocate of Black self-help, urged Blacks in the Americas to set up their own stores, farms, and businesses. In this way they could support each other and not have to depend on whites for their sustenance. In this way they could enrich their communities. He even went so far as to establish a Black shipping line whereby Black-produced goods could be shipped from any point in the Americas to any other. Garvey inspired millions of Black to set up businesses and engage in self-elevation. He spawned many disciples and followers who
expounded, modified, and carried out his self-help philosophy. The Honourable Elijah Muhammad, Malik Shabazz (Malcolm X), Louis Farrakhan (in fact the Garvey theory of self-help is one of the major tenets of Nation of Islam rhetoric and praxis) are just a few of the leaders who carried on Garvey's work. Henry Bibb in the mid-nineteenth century had already hammered out a plan for Black independence.

To gather support for his land settlement ideas Bibb embarked on a lecture tour of Canada West during March 1851. Emphasizing the theme of Black self-help through landownership Bibb chose as his topic “Agriculture as The Most Certain Road to Independence.” He spoke at Malden, Buxton, Dawn Mills, and London. This lecture tour reveals the strong commitment Bibb felt to his idea of Black self-help and his firm belief that landownership was the answer. It also shows his devotion to the abolitionist cause and Black freedom in North America. This tour, along with Bibb’s work as editor, point to what can be described as a sense of duty and obligation Bibb felt for the Black freedom struggle.

In the second part of the discussion of the needs of the fugitives which Bibb published in the 9 April 1851 issue of the Voice, he opens with a passionate plea for Canadian emigration. He notes that America represses all its Black people, slave and free, and that Black people have no protection in the Republic. “Why then are the people of color in North America not more respected and elevated than they are?” “Is it because we are black?” Bibb asks rhetorically. He answers: “no—judging from what we have seen on Southern plantations, four fifths of which are literally stocked with mulatto slaves most of whom are fathered by their masters.” Bibb then describes the barbarity
of American slavery and implies that it is under this institution that Blacks lose their self-respect and become degraded. Then in true Bibbian fashion he contrasts the United States with Canada and insists that it is only in Canada that Blacks can come into true self-respect.

On the other hand, we deem it almost an insult to intelligence to say that education with honesty and preserving labor, will elevate any class of men in a country like Canada, surrounded with beautiful lakes and rivers of navigable water, with a mild and healthy climate, with a rich and congenial soil to agricultural pursuits—protected with good and wholesome laws, which operate alike upon all men without regard to color of their skin.

Bibb again notes that agriculture is the “foundation of our elevation” and urges Blacks to get land. “We can do nothing without it,” he cries. He stresses the permanence of land, and the impermanence of clothing, money, and provisions. Bibb concludes with a blast against begging. “Was ever wilful ignorance respected by true intelligence? Was ever a class of beggars elevated to terms of social equality with those from whom they begged? If our people must beg, we hope they may beg for something that is permanent.” Simply put, begging promotes inequality; landholding encourages social equality.

The tenor of this editorial stresses Bibb’s philosophy of land acquisition for Black elevation. Bibb also seems to feel that Blacks could get by without white help. It appears that many Black leaders including Bibb himself felt that they were constantly under the white gaze, that Black actions were always watched and judged by whites and thus Blacks, especially the deprived fugitives, always had to give a stellar performance. This expectation that both Black leaders and white abolitionists had for the refugees was
very unfair. Bibb himself in numerous articles in the *Voice* notes that since the passage of the FSL more and more destitute Blacks were coming into Canada West. These people were in need. The abolitionist resources of Canada West and Michigan were strained at the seams in trying to help these emigrants. Black fugitives were expected, upon their immediate arrival in Canada West, to act like model citizens, something not always required of the new European immigrant. For many refugees their first needs were basic ones: food, clothing, and shelter. Bibb realized this but felt himself constantly watched by whites. He knew that Blacks had to prove themselves, and so he felt that the best way to do so was to become landowners and respectable farmers. His blasts against begging were meant to be read by both Blacks and whites. These ‘blasts’ would inform whites that Black leadership did not support Black dependence upon whites, but encouraged Black self help; for Blacks, these appeals would serve as a ‘call to manhood.’

In part three of the editorial on the needs of the fugitives Bibb outlines how the RHS plans would be implemented. As with the two former pieces he takes issue with begging, but this time he directly addresses white abolitionists and ‘friends of the Blacks.’ This final part of the editorial witnesses an evolution in FUS thought and rhetoric:

In resuming our subject, we wish to be distinctly understood by the benevolent abolitionists in the states, who have so liberally contributed food and clothing for the relief of suffering humanity here, that we feel grateful for what they have honestly done; and we are sorry that the circumstances in which we are placed, make it necessary that our articles on this subject should have the least appearance of
ingratitude for past favors conferred upon the truly needy; but in order to touch the pride and ambition or our people—to arouse them from this crouching, crawling, dependent, begging disposition which they brought from slavery, and to something higher; we find it necessary to hold up such things to ridicule.23

He notes that the previous fall, the FSL did cause panic and need among the fleeing fugitive but now (in April 1851) the acute need had passed. He thanks the whites for the barrels of food and clothing but notes that there is "no suffering worth speaking of." He also castigates those Blacks "who falsely represented themselves by saying that they were suffering for food and clothing..."24 Some Blacks had simply become used to white charity and refused to work. They instead wanted to continue to depend on white handouts, Bibb opines. He states that he saw able-bodied men who remained idle because they knew they could get white charity.25

It was not that Bibb was against begging per se. But he felt that if Blacks were to beg for something, let it not be old clothes and food but for something permanent—land. On the other hand, if whites truly wanted to assist Blacks, giving old clothes and rotten food was not the answer. This was a stop-gap measure. They had to give something that would last. Whites had the guilt of slavery on their shoulders; they had to make amends. Bibb intones: "is it asking too much of those who have helped to make the laws which have degraded us, now to give something to elevate us?"26

Bibb clearly realized that most Blacks, free, enslaved, or 'just out of freedom,' given their poor economic circumstance, would find it very difficult to purchase land worth $40,000. Whites had to help. Whites—whether antislavery or proslavery—were
responsible for the oppression of Black people. Whites of all stripes benefitted from Black oppression. Since they were all responsible they could make amends not by sending impermanent material to Blacks, but by helping Blacks gain something permanent—land. Here Bibb was articulating the idea of reparation. Whites owed Blacks so much. Helping Blacks purchase land would count as part of the payback. This idea of reparation would gain force and momentum in the late 20th century with Black intellectuals, politicians, and laypersons calling for reparations for slavery and colonialism.27

Bibb also discusses the plight of the fleeing fugitives, many of whom he notes were captured by licensed slave hunters authorised by the FSL, and returned to slavery. Those who made it to Canada needed support. For Bibb the best remedy for Black ‘idleness’, misguided white charity, and the ‘fugitive at the door’ was Black land ownership. Building on previous sections of the editorial he details how this can be brought about as effectively and speedily as possible.

We suggest the purchase of 20,000 acres of land here, in the most southern part of Canada, where every inch of timber, or bushel of ashes there from can be sold for cash. 2d. That said land should not be purchased in all one block, but scattered about in different settlements. 3d. That said land should not be divided into larger tracts than twenty-five-acre lot. 4th. That when deeded it should be done so as to secure it to the wife and children. 5th. That they should never have a deed for it until paid for. 6th. That an effort should be made to raise a fund of 40,000 with which to pay for the land. 7th. That it should be held in trust by proper persons for the benefit of this people, and be sold out to them at cost, under certain conditions. 8th. That these conditions should be appropriated for the support of schools among them. That is the way that the subject lies in our mind, while there is room for improvement.28
Thus Bibb's land settlement policy took into account the needs of the most vulnerable: women and children. The policy was not designed to have Blacks living together in a commune, apart from other Blacks and the white community, as suggested by some scholars, but the idea was that land would be purchased anywhere it could be found. This was unlike the Buxton (Elgin) settlement founded by William King; at Buxton, Blacks lived in an all-Black village.\textsuperscript{29} The land policy Bibb outlined was essentially a flexible one and subject to changes as time went on. In this article Bibb also further modifies the method by which the land could be purchased. The land could be divided up into parcels and financed by the sale of stocks of 800 shares at five dollars cash, or 400 shares at ten dollars each. Bibb also notes that as soon as the society received $2,000 it would commence buying land. The society would not wait until it had in hand all of the $20,000.

In May, this undertaking to assist fugitives in Canada West to own land took on a new dimension. At the meeting to the Michigan Anti-Slavery Society held on the 21 May at Detroit, members of the MASS had assistance to the fugitives as an important agenda item. At this meeting these antislavery workers formed the Refugee Home Society. The \textit{Voice} informs its readers that “We attended the state convention in Detroit on the 21\textsuperscript{st} where the...society was organized for the purpose of trying to purchase 50,000 acres of land for the fugitive slaves in Canada to settle upon.” Bibb also adds a cautionary note: “God Speed the society in its noble undertaking. May it become auxiliary to societies which have been organized for the same object and work with them in union until the object is obtained.”\textsuperscript{30}
Canada West had representation at this meeting as members of the FUS attended. Judging from Bibb’s report it would appear that Bibb desired that a new organization to aid the fugitives not be formed because the FUS already existed. Bibb hoped that the RHS would be an auxiliary to the FUS. However, the two groups remained distinct and appointed their own officers. The RHS had Nathan Stone as president, A.L. Power, vice-president, E.P. Benham, secretary, and Horace Hallock, treasurer. The FUS had Henry Bibb as secretary, Josiah Henson, president, George Williams, vice-president, and Henry Brent, treasurer.

What emerged from this meeting were two groups with similar aims. One was based in Canada West, the other in Michigan. One was predominantly white, and the other overwhelmingly Black. It is not known whether the FUS agreed with the RHS’ proposal to buy the 50,000 acres of land. Obviously Bibb had his misgivings about the RHS. He thought that it should be an auxiliary to the FUS, and he noted that the meeting “was not very numerously attended,” and that “their plans were not so well matured as they should have been....” On the other hand, he agreed that the delegates were some of the “truest friends of the cause....”

Nonetheless, at this meeting Bibb outlined the purpose, function, strategies, and operation of the land settlement project he was involved with. For example, he proposed “granting five acres to each settler free of cost with an option to purchase the adjoining twenty acres.” What becomes apparent at this meeting is that it was Henry Bibb who had the idea and plans for the land settlement scheme for landless refugee Blacks.
RHS used the plans and ideas that Bibb had hammered out for the FUS. The FUS’ project, at a later date, would be wholeheartedly taken up by the RHS.

The convention authorized “Henry Bibb, Rev. C.C. Foote and Rev. A.N. McConoughey to draw up a constitution.” Bibb continued broadcasting his ideas and plans on the land colonization scheme in the pages of the Voice. The emphasis still remained on making Blacks independent farmers, and temperance and education were cornerstone tenets in the thoughts of Bibb and his supporters. The Voice, which by this time had become the unofficial organ of the RHS and FUS, also gave intricate details on the stock system through which the land would be purchased.

Why were there two groups co-ordinating the land settlement project? Was the FUS simply a mirror of the RHS or vice versa? Both groups had similar aims, although the FUS wanted to buy 20,000 acres and the RHS 50,000. Since the land was to be purchased in Ontario and not Michigan, it seems probable that the backers of the project empowered the FUS to co-ordinate the Canadian side of things—finding the land, purchasing it, and so on—while the RHS would provide the financial base. Two of the persons authorized to draw up a constitution at this first meeting of the RHS were Canadian workers, people who had already thought seriously about land for the refugees. They would be the ideal ones to hammer out a pertinent constitution.

As the RHS project took off, two prominent New Yorkers, William Allen and Lewis Tappan, came out publicly in support of the scheme. Allen, professor of languages at New York Central College, wrote to Bibb saying “I like much the idea of self-help which you are endeavoring to press upon our people. That idea, and that alone, worked
out, is to be our salvation....Your plan, i.e., the purchasing of twenty thousand acres of land in Canada for the fugitives to settle upon is worthy of you. The manner in which you propose to raise the money also is such as no one will object to. Put me down for one share of the stock in your “bank of charity....” Lewis Tappan wrote to Bibb stating that he [Bibb] and the project could “calculate on aid from this quarter.” But the strongest support, in word and deed, came from the young and enthusiastic Theodore Holly who would later become a co-editor of the Voice. Holly, writing from Vermont, gave himself “wholeheartedly to the project.”

Dear Sir:

....Your plans meet my hearty approbation, and I give my adhesion to it, as an humble supporter of the same. And I design hereafter to give testimony in deed as well as in profession. I think it has now become the duty of the whole free colored population of the United States, to support your project as the most practicable one ever presented for their consideration, and the most available for the speedy emancipation of our enslaved brethren. We should regard you and those that immediately surround you in the noble project, as the head and centre of all our future efforts.

Holly also opined that the “central authority of the colored people of the United States, is in your asylum.” He remarked upon the three other colonization schemes that were proposed to the Black American public but maintained that Canada West, with its climate similar to that of the northern states and its proximity to the States, made it the ideal choice for emigration. From Canada, American Blacks could put more pressure on the American government to free the slaves. Holly, with great drama, wrote: “therefore
we should vigorously pursue this project, and swarm in a ceaseless tide to Canada West, and hang like an ominous black cloud over this guilty nation, until the precipitated occurrence of providential circumstances—the terrible thunderbolts of Omnipotent judgement hurled from the hand of Jehovah, shall scale the Alleghany summits, and reverberate through the valley of the Mississippi, breaking every chain and letting the oppressed go free." Holly ended his epistle by choosing Bibb as his 'leader.'

I submit myself to the leadership you have so worthily assumed, and I doubt not but that in proportion, as the knowledge of your project becomes disseminated, it will enlist firm supporters for you, from amongst the earnest portion of our people throughout the country in work and deed....

Others, such as William Jarvis, John Calkins, and Samuel Ward, came out in full support of the project. Ironically, Ward, who initially was one the chief proponents of the RHS, would later become one of its main detractors.

The stock system which Allen so heartily committed himself to was not working as fast as the RHS’ and FUS’ promoters would have liked. In July 1851 the groups had only $256 either in cash or kind. They then authorized the Reverend C.C. Foote to act as the lone collecting agent in New York and New England. It was one of the resolutions published in the 13 August issue of the Voice. And it was the beginning of the 'begging system' about which Bibb and his cohorts would come under so much fire by their detractors. This fund-raising strategy paid off quickly. In October 1851 the Voice published Foote’s progress report, which showed that Foote collected $1,083.39 in cash and $484.75 in pledges. "This sum of $1, 578.14 collected in one month, was nearly
fives times more than had been able to be collected, in the previous six months. The name of every person who donated cash or pledged was printed in the *Voice*.

In his next report, Foote revealed that he had collected several hundred dollars. Writing from Genesee County in New York, he closed his report describing his activities and including the sad news of his wife’s impending death.

My labors for the Society, in New York are now closed. I have secured the services of our true and tried brethren, S.T. Judson, of Rochester, and E.M.K. Glenn, of Macedonia, to visit that part of the State unvisited by myself. S.W. Pierson, of Churchville, is also aiding us for a brief space. James Bin, of Illinois, has promised to labor for us in the northern part of that State. There are two agents now laboring, I believe, in Ohio—E.P. Benham, and A.P. McConoughay. When I shall visit New England is known only to God. For the past two weeks, I have been ministering by (in all human probability) the death-bed of my most excellent wife. Her powers are well nigh exhausted, and soon—but I forbear. I hope you will not fail to send a copy of the “Voice,” containing this Report, to all named under “Pledges,” and a few numbers to myself.

The agency system was proving itself a success. Judson, Glenn, plus S.W. Pierson were officially commissioned to work in New York, thus giving Foote the time to devote himself solely to New England. And as mentioned by Foote, the officials of the RHS and FUS authorized Benham and McConoughey to work in Ohio and James Bin in Illinois.

Agents meticulously listed the names of supporters and the amount they gave and conscientiously sent their reports to the *Voice* or to Horace Hallock, treasurer of the RHS, who then forwarded them to Bibb. What we glean from this is the conscious effort
of the agents and executives to be accountable. Bolstered by the success of the agency system, the Society decided to make its first purchase. Nathan Power, a Michigan trustee, reveals in the *Voice*

We have just drawn up an order of $610 on our worthy and responsible treasurer, Horace Hallock. This is to purchase 200 acres of land that will settle eight families according to the design of the Home Society, namely to give five acres to actual settlers, and sell twenty adjoining it at cost, by paying, say, $10 down, and the balance to remain without interest for six years, to be paid in annual payments, one-third of which is to be applied to educational purposes, and two-thirds for a further purchase of land for the new comers....

Thine in behalf of the Oppressed,
Nathan Power

In November 1851 The Society, through Henry Bibb and George Cary, Canadian trustees, made its first purchase in Sandwich township—200 acres of land from one Lucy Bouchette. The purchase cost $610. A group of Detroit men, led by the RHS’ president Nathan Stone, and invited by Bibb, came over and inspected the land. They gave it their approval. As stated by Power this tract of land would settle eight families.

Bibb in the *Voice* waxes poetic about the tract:

The Refugee Home Society has just purchased a beautiful tract of unimproved Canada land, for the benefit of the homeless refugees in this section of the province. The land is to be divided into 25 acre lots for actual settlers. It is known to be well stocked with good marketable timber, and that wood will command a liberal on the land if chopped and corded. For particulars, those who are interested can address H. Bibb....
At the 29 January 1852 meeting held in Farmington, Michigan, the FUS and RHS officers and trustees appointed a new committee to draft another constitution and its bylaws. It is not known whether Bibb and company had drafted or even aired an original proposed constitution. At this meeting too Mary E. Bibb, wife of Henry Bibb, was elected corresponding secretary. It was the first time that a woman became officially involved in the group. Henry Bibb was appointed to the board of trust and the executive, while Nathan Stone was elected president and A.L. Power and E.P. Benham continued on as vice-president and secretary. Bibb and J.F. Dolbeare were commissioned to go to the West to collect funds. And the *Voice of the Fugitive* was acclaimed as the official organ of the Society.

It was at this meeting that the two groups—the FUS and the RHS—merged, or rather, the RHS swallowed up the FUS. The name for this new union was the RHS. The officers and trustees of both groups simply formalized what had become evident to all. By this time it had become clear to everyone that the FUS had *become* the RHS. Prior to this date, whenever Henry Bibb wrote of the project, he described it as something started by the “friends of humanity” in Michigan, and not a project that was initiated by Upper Canadians. From the Canadian side Henry and Mary Bibb assumed local leadership of the society.

In February the *Voice* published the group’s first constitution. The last part of the preamble of the constitution reveals that the RHS meant to “enforce sobriety, industry, and stability in the settlements.”

This Society would therefore represent to the refugees
from Southern slavery, who are now in Canada destitute of homes, or who may hereafter come, being desirous of building themselves up in Canada, on an agricultural basis, and who do not buy, sell or use intoxicating drinks as a beverage, shall, by making proper application to this Society, and complying with its Constitution and By laws, be put into possession of 25 acres of farming land, and their children shall enjoy the blessings of education perpetually.\textsuperscript{32}

The temperance requirement was quite stringent. Potential Black settlers now had to prove their social acceptability and respectability by abstaining from alcohol. The formulators of the constitution seemed, however, to be aware that alcohol could be and was used for medicinal purposes, since they appeared to be against the use of alcohol “as a beverage.”\textsuperscript{33} Several important by-laws were written into the constitution. Of great importance was the provision made against fraud, “or possible accusations by outsiders”.\textsuperscript{44} Every cheque or money order required the signatures of three executive officers. Provisions were made for education, a land clearance policy was articulated, and requirements put in place for the type of house to be built—houses could contain no fewer than two rooms, and chimneys had to be built of brick or stone. Deeds were also to be made out to the women and children. This was to ensure the protection of women and children, in the event of the death of a husband and father. In such an event, the land would legally go to his wife and children. Widows, men with children, the aged, and infirm were to receive more than the usual five acres free of charge.\textsuperscript{55} Disputes among settlers were to be settled by an arbitration board drawn from the RHS. And potential settlers had to make a ten-percent down payment. Some of these policies were borrowed from the sister colonies of Dawn and Buxton. The amount of land the Society wanted to
purchase was the very ambitious amount of 50,000 acres. With the projected land cost of $2 per acre, the cost for the intended land purchase increased from $40,000 to $100,000.56

The constitution also contained three resolutions that would be the source of much acrimony between the RHS and its detractors. These pertain to the land clearance time, the transferral of land, and eligibility for land. An earlier resolution regarding land clearance gave the settlers three years to clear five acres of land; now the land clearance time went down from three to two years. The reversion clause stated that sale or transferral of land could be made only to heirs or to members of the immediate family; and only actual refugees from southern slavery were eligible to purchase land from the RHS.57

In August, the convention met in Detroit and revised and approved the constitution. The revisions made were to “create more favourable conditions for the settler.”58 The ten-percent down payment was eliminated; payment could take up to 10 years; the clearance time for the first five acres was returned to three years from two; the allotted amount of money for education was raised from one-third to a half; and perhaps due to criticism from Samuel Ward, the non-transferral clause was modified to make the transfer or sale of land possible without restrictions, but only after 15 years from the purchase date.59 The anti-fraud measure was strengthened to require not three but six signing officers.60 Finally, what Carlesimo calls “a unique office of auditor” was also created “to check on the financial affairs of the Executive Committee.” One E.C. Walker assumed the position of auditor.61 At this August meeting Henry Bibb took over the
position of corresponding secretary from his wife, Mary. Her name does not appear as either trustee or executive. Her sojourn on the executive was brief. Perhaps Mrs. Bibb, who at this time was engaged in managing and teaching a school in Sandwich, could not take on any more duties. Or, perhaps the ‘male environment’ of the RHS had made her uncomfortable, and hence she quit.

At this meeting Lewis Tappan became a member of the executive council, and J.F. Dolbeare, Foote, and Benham were authorized to continue collecting funds. The society reported that it had $3,033.25 in the bank. Only two residents of Canada—Bibb and George Cary sat on the new executive. The rest of the officers were Americans drawn mainly from Detroit and its hinterland. Given the predominance of the Detroiter, it would appear that it was they who were ‘running the show.’ That the majority of the people from whom the RHS had collected, and intended to collect, money, lived in the United States, could account for why the bulk of the officers were American. The Michigan group also had more resources than the earlier Ontario group which founded the FUS. The FUS officers must have realized also that the target group for their fundraising campaign was across the border. Yet, in spite of the predominance of the Detroit group, it is the name of Henry Bibb, perhaps due to the fact that he was editor of the Voice and the chief ideologue of the movement, that posterity most closely identifies with the RHS.

Finally, a time limit was imposed on the existence of the RHS. It was to continue for as long as slavery existed in the United States. This underscored the Society’s commitment to refugees from slavery. (But the RHS still committed itself to aiding the
refugees and their children even after slavery ended). Carlesimo notes: "With the cessation of that institution, the Society would then appropriate all property in its possession at the time, for educational purposes among the refugees."²⁶²

From these revisions, measures, and new resolutions it appears that the RHS was trying its best to accommodate the needs of the settlers and respond to its critics. It was a flexible organization. Members were not ‘set in their ways’ but tried to be sensitive to the settlers and accountable to both the settlers and the general public. By August 1854 the RHS had acquired 1,696 acres of land and contracted for more than 200 additional acres. By this time the Society had settled about 200 people on the land. The RHS was not conceived as the ‘classic commune’ in which the settlement was separate from the general society. Land was bought where it could be found, which was mainly in the areas east and south of Windsor.

That half of its funds be used for educational purposes highlights the RHS’ commitment in providing education for the refugees and their children. In 1850, the Ontario legislature passed a separate school act. This piece of legislation had the effect of denying education to many Black children, especially those in the southern and western portion of the province. Whites interpreted the act to mean that Blacks must set up their own schools and chased Black children from many public schools. These children were left without schooling. Black parents, teachers, other adults, and white philanthropists shouldered the tasks of providing schools, teachers, and other educational resources for Black children.²³ Given the lack of educational opportunities available for the Black population, the RHS deemed it critical that schooling be provided as soon as
possible for the refugee children.

In 1852, the RHS carried out part of its educational mandate by opening a school in one of its villages. In this same year, Laura Haviland, a seasoned schoolteacher and school founder, and a woman with impeccable abolitionist credentials, was invited from Michigan by Bibb and others to open a school on RHS property for the children of the settlers. Haviland opened school in the fall of 1852 in the Puce district. At least two more schools were later founded in other RHS villages. To its credit, in 1861, the RHS also supported the Chatham school operated by Amelia Freeman and Mary Shadd, who had become Mrs. Cary by this time.

RHS’ Detractors and the Bibb-Shadd Controversy

Perhaps Henry Bibb had hoped that the RHS would have been his crowning achievement. However, opposition came from a faction headed by Mary Ann Shadd, an aspiring leader, and Samuel Ringgold Ward, an established abolitionist leader. The first hint of disapproval of the RHS and its policies came from the pen of Shadd in a pro-emigration publication entitled A Plea for Emigration to Canada West. In Plea Miss Shadd opposed the RHS on the following grounds: individual supervision of resident agents; begging for money to buy land; and the clause which made only fugitives from slavery eligible for land purchase. Regarding the latter, she felt that it would cause friction and factionalism between persons of freeborn origin and those of slave origin.

Shadd’s arguments were either misinformed or misplaced. For the RHS had no provisions for resident agents. A resident agent was someone who lived among the
refugees and ‘supervised’ them. This was very much the case at the Buxton settlement where its founder, the Reverend William King, lived within the settlement and supervised and ‘ruled’ over the Black inhabitants, most of them ex-slaves. It was indeed patriarchal and based on the assumption that the ex-slaves had to be gradually brought into ‘civilization.’ King, a white presbyterian minister of Scottish origin and a former slaveholder, apparently did not think ‘his’ settlers could make it on their own, without his guidance, advice, and supervision. The RHS, on the other hand, did not have the institution of resident agent. Potential setters simply could buy their land and go off and live their lives free from the patriarchal gaze. The fact of the RHS not being a compact settlement also militated against the practice of having a resident agent. Shadd’s concern about ‘begging’ must also be challenged since she herself was at the moment begging funds from a predominantly white philanthropic organization (the American Missionary Association) to support her school. Was her critique of the RHS rooted in self-interest? At any rate, she failed to realize that many Blacks, as evidenced by the eventual demise of her school, did not have the material means to support community efforts. Most startling is Shadd’s concern that the RHS was open only to fugitives.

Why should this have bothered her? It was with the fugitives that the RHS was primarily concerned because they had the greatest need. They needed more help than freeborn persons. While one recognizes that the latter group also gave up a lot to emigrate to Canada, a large portion of the fugitive population, as Carlesimo notes, ‘left the States with only the clothes on their back.’ The haste in which many left their homes, owing to the rapidity in which the FSL was enacted, meant that they were unable to
settle their business in a proper way and travel with some tangible material possessions.

Shadd's view that the eligibility clause would cause friction among Blacks perhaps points to the friction she herself as a freeborn Black person was stirring up over an effort designed for the benefit of Blacks from a slave background. It also points to the lack of faith and goodwill Shadd had in her fellow-Blacks, and the internalized racism many Blacks suffered after living so long in a white supremacist society.

It is instructive to note that *Plea*, Shadd's first literary effort in regard to the RHS was marred by inaccuracies and distortions. Shadd was a Windsor resident and schoolteacher at the time she published *Plea*, and she was in a position to gain the correct information. Shadd was also in the (secret) pay of the AMA and was a colleague of Bibb. Given these connections, her response is curious, and perhaps suggests that in order to state her case she was willing to discard the truth.

Furthermore, Shadd was involved in public antislavery. She, along with Henry Bibb, Mary Bibb, and others, in the fall of 1852 founded the Anti-Slavery Society of Windsor. She and Mr. Bibb sat on its executive. Both were working together in antislavery. Although the *Plea* suggested otherwise, it contained half-truths, personal opinions, and distortions, and revealed that she did not have any firm ideas as to the goals of the RHS. One can only conclude that the relationship between Shadd and Bibb, even while they sat on the executive of the ASSW, had turned sour. 68

But *Plea* was only the first shot into the war against the RHS. Shadd, with the aid of Ward, organized public meetings in Windsor against the RHS in the fall of '52, and in January 1853. Bibb in the *Voice* responded thus:
There has been some feeble opposition shown to the Society, in Windsor, only by a set of half-cracked, hot-headed individuals, who have had the vanity to think that because the Society would not show the same favours to those who have been free all their lives, that they do to the fugitives from slavery, that they could call a meeting to break up the Refugee's Home. Oh! what folly is this? It is true that they did succeed in getting up a public meeting under a delusive plea, and then took advantage of the ignorance of two or three individuals who acted as officers of the meeting, including the projector of the scheme, and what made the whole thing perfectly ridiculous, neither the Chairman or the Secretary could read, write, or even answer a single question asked them intelligibly. 69

Without calling names, Bibb points out Shadd as the instigator of the meeting, a meeting whose main theme was its opposition to the RHS eligibility clause. Shadd had opposed the Society from its inception because of this clause which gave priority to refugees from slavery. Shadd went around Windsor, and organized people, who according to Bibb were 'ignorant and uneducated,' to agitate against the RHS. By organizing public meetings against the Society, Shadd not only initiated a feud with Bibb but declared open war against the RHS. Her motives are suspect. What is clear is that it was not the fugitives she had at heart.

Shadd chose another channel in which to fight her war against Bibb and the Society. She began writing to supporters of the RHS and those organizations which promoted it. By this time her open hostility to Bibb and the RHS was clear. In a bitter letter to George Whipple of the AMA, Shadd declared that no one reads Bibb's paper, denounced the RHS, and accused Bibb of stealing the funds collected. She charged some of the Detroit men like Hallock with using the funds for their own affairs, and questioned the abolitionism of the RHS officers and trustees. Shadd stated that she was presenting
the “facts” to Whipple. The letter, laced with invectives, relies on informants to make its case. Miss Shadd, more than once, stated to Whipple that ‘so and so told me,’ or ‘I was told by so and so.’ The letter was not only an attack on Bibb’s and the other officers’ reputations but was also fraught with contradictions and inconsistencies. For example, Shadd charged Bibb with stealing the funds, then stated that Bibb printed in the Voice all the receipts of the amount of money collected. Another example of this contradiction lies in the following lines:

Henry Bibb denied ever having received “one shilling” for the fugitives when talking to them, although dollars have been acknowledged through the Voice as having been sent for that purpose. It may be asked why publish and then deny the receipts?  

Without meaning to, Shadd contradicted herself and exonerated Bibb. The money collected for the fugitives by the RHS were not personal gifts for Bibb and others. The publication of the receipts was a declaration of innocence by Bibb and the other officers and was meant to ensure that fraud could not be committed. Shadd conveniently missed the point. She also forgot to tell Whipple that Bibb had no access to the money, which when collected was lodged in the Detroit Savings Bank.

Having identified Bibb as the chief money grabber, she went on to say that the Detroit men wanted to throw Bibb out of the RHS and make it their own. With Bibb out of the way, they could loot the RHS treasury. Because Bibb realised they wanted to throw him out, he “threatened to blow up the whole scheme.” Shadd then attacked the RHS settlers by casting aspersions on their character. They were not men of “good character” like those at the Buxton settlement, she charged. According to her, the RHS
residents were the "worst sort" of settlers; they steal and were "shiftless, drink whiskey, and borrow from their neighbors." Commenting on the potential enfranchisement of the RHS male settlers, she further declared: "It [the vote] arrays the whites against the blacks, because of the superior political privileges sought to be given to ignorant men, by which in petty elections, black men may control, when the provisions made by Government affect all alike." Remarkably, Shadd is asserting that given the 'critical mass' of Black [men] that would settle at the Home, the power they would exercise at elections would disfranchise whites. Shadd's fear of Black men exercising their franchise is reminiscent of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's statement about the brutishness and ignorance of Black men, and the possible decline of American civilization when the 15th amendment which gave Black men in the United States the vote was passed. Shadd's attack on the Black settlers in this way must have come as a surprise to contemporary observers. Here was a Black woman, 'a friend of the fugitive' speaking so ill of the fugitives, her own 'kith and kin.' It could well have been Edwin Larwill. It would seem that as a freeborn person, and one who had certain class privileges because of her origins, Mary Shadd used her internalized racism to attack the most vulnerable in the Black population. Her attack, in part, might also reflect her concern that as an abolitionist she had to convince whites to support the cause. Nevertheless, it appears that her concern was more for freeborn Black people.

Temperance was one of the criteria for membership in the RHS. This was an

- Shadd's emphasis. The racism and classism of some Black abolitionists against their own people is an issue that scholars have kept hidden and have refused to engage. Jane Rhodes for one, in her biography of Mary Ann Shadd,
issue that Ezekiel Cooper fought Bibb and others on, as he did not believe that
membership in the 'cold water army' should be a feature of RHS policy. Shadd's
presentation of the settlers as drunks does not fit in with either the philosophy of the
Society or of the observations of contemporary observers of the settlers.\textsuperscript{73} For example,
Benjamin Drew, who toured the RHS settlements, states that temperance was practised
in these places.\textsuperscript{74} Temperance, as practice and philosophy, was articulated by Ontario’s
Black leadership and ordinary Blacks. Together, they set up and joined temperance
societies. Bibb himself founded a temperance society in Windsor.\textsuperscript{75}

Laura Haviland’s opinion and observations of the Home settlers are positive. And
Haviland had no particular axe to grind. Haviland’s picture of the settlers differs
markedly from Shadd’s. Whereas for Shadd, the Home’s colonists are ‘riff-raffs,’ for
Haviland they are hardworking and industrious:

\begin{quote}
  The settlers had built for themselves log houses, and
cleared from one to five acres each on their heavily
timbered land, and raised corn, potatoes, and other
garden vegetables. A few had put in two and three
acres of wheat, and were doing well for their first year.\textsuperscript{76}
\end{quote}

Haviland presents the settlers not only as hardworking, but also as eager to
improve their material condition. Haviland’s description of the settler-refugees also
provides good insights into their community and aspirations.

\begin{quote}
  They made great effort to improve their homes by taking
trees from their woods to the saw-mills to be cut up into
boards for better floors than split logs, and for partitions to
make their little houses more comfortable. Perhaps their
improvements could not find better expression than the
\end{quote}

uncritically subscribes to the hero-worship model. Such an approach gives us a partial picture of the subject.
In a telling line in the letter to Whipple, Shadd states what perhaps was the crux of her contention with the Society. She notes that because of the RHS' fund-raising efforts, "funds are diverted from efficient missionary organizations." The allocation of severely limited resources was at the heart of Shadd's disagreement with the RHS. Shadd feared that the RHS would 'eat up' all the available resources. Scholars have missed this point and instead have framed the disagreement between Shadd and Bibb within the segregation/assimilation framework. Within the Black communities of Ontario, at mid-century, were several competing interests that agitated for, and depended on, aid from philanthropic organizations and individuals. Competition between these needy groups was only natural. Those who did not receive aid, or as much as they thought they should, often denounced recipients who received generous donations. Shadd looked around and saw the RHS 'juggernaut' controlling the 'donations field' while she struggled for money to keep her school open. "Not fair, not fair," she thought.

The situation at the Dawn colony, headed by Josiah Henson, is instructive. In 1850, William Newman, a Black abolitionist Baptist minister, who was also associated with Dawn, began fighting with Henson and also with white missionary Hiram Wilson. Dawn had received money from various sources in the United States and Britain. Newman then broke with Henson, and journeyed to Britain to do his own fundraising. While in Britain, he denounced Henson to some of Henson's supporters. Meanwhile,
Henson arrived in Britain, only to find his activities circumscribed and held under suspicion by the very groups that had previously supported him. This was as a result of Newman’s ‘advertisements.’ This was just another example of the many quarrels that plagued the leadership of Canada West’s Blacks. At stake in these quarrels were accessibility to resources and the question of ‘who will lead.’ It is impossible to review the Dawn and RHS controversies without being struck by their racial politics. In both instances, Blacks were at each other’s throats, fighting over resources controlled by whites, and complaining to these very whites that the rival party was ‘no good.’

Oppression, Black poverty, and subordination produced a ‘crab in the barrel’ mentality among Blacks.

It is not known how Whipple responded or if he did. But it is important to examine some of Shadd’s charges. By September 1852 when the amended RHS constitution was in place, only one officer, C.C. Foote, was commissioned to collect funds. Thus Bibb was not an agent of the Society. Furthermore, every cent collected from every citizen in United States or Canada had to be accounted for by the executive and the auditor. The names of donors and the amount they gave were published in the Voice, as Shadd herself confirmed. Donors were also sent receipts and a copy of the paper in which their names were published. The fact that six officers had to sign before money could be withdrawn from the bank, and the fact that the auditor had to account for every cent collected did not figure in Shadd’s accounting of the ‘facts’ to Whipple.

In countering Shadd’s accusations it is instructive to look at the men who made up the executive of the RHS. From Bibb to Tappan, each one had solid abolitionist
credentials. What is crucial to point out is that for three years Bibb worked as an agent for the AMA in its ‘Bible for the Slave’ campaign and was not once accused by Tappan, Leavitt, or any other executive member of theft. And even if that had occurred, and the AMA had dispensed with his services but kept quiet on the issue, would Tappan and the AMA continue to work with Bibb on other important ventures—ventures that included the collection of money?

Lewis Tappan was a millionaire philanthropist and co-founder and leader of the AMA. Tappan also served for a very long time as AMA treasurer. For Tappan to be accused by Shadd of not having true abolitionist principles and of theft is astonishing. Horace Hallock, RHS officer and treasurer, whom she names as taking the money to conduct his business affairs in Detroit, was a veteran Underground Railroad assistant. Hallock worked with Laura Haviland in escorting dozens of runaway slaves to Canada, co-founded the Detroit Liberty Association, and continued to risk his freedom by escorting fugitives (The FSL made it a crime to assist runaways).\textsuperscript{31} Hallock also was a co-founder of the Michigan Anti-Slavery Society and became its treasurer. Carlesimo also notes that in 1847 Hallock ran unsuccessfully for Lt. Governor of Michigan under the auspices of the National Abolition Party. Later he was to serve as a vice-president of the American Missionary Association. Surely if Hallock had a predilection for theft it would have been revealed when he was treasurer for the MASS. And if he had “got up” the RHS deliberately to exploit the fugitives, as Shadd accuses, then he could have done the same thing as member and officer of the various antislavery groups he was involved with.
Shadd also seemed not to be aware of an important point regarding inter-racial conventions in biracial organizations. The RHS was a racially mixed group, but it was dominated by white men. In such a setting, given the racial conventions of the time, white men would never allow Black men to have access to funds. Just as the Detroit Liberty Association investigated Bibb’s narrative (most of the leading slave narratives had to be authenticated by whites), philanthropic whites who worked closely with Blacks would ensure that Blacks who had any dealing with money be held very accountable. In short, there was no way Bibb could steal the RHS funds.82

Shadd’s misplaced attack on these men divided the Black communities in the Detroit River border region.83 Missing from her critiques of the RHS was any mention of aid to the fugitives by this group, of the pressure that the people of this border region experienced as a result of the influx of Blacks who were fleeing the FSL. Nowhere did she note that RHS activists daily escorted fugitives into Ontario, provided immediate relief and founded schools to educate the refugees and their children. Nowhere did she mention that the RHS was “got up” to help these new immigrants.84

Shadd also opposed what she claimed was the “exclusive character” of the RHS. Yet from the constitution and the land purchases she would have learned that the RHS was not interested in forming a compact community and so land was not purchased contiguously, but bought wherever it could be found. The Home’s policy was integration, not segregation. By contrast, the Buxton colony was a Black colony. It had some of the same policies considered stringent and ‘unfair’ by Shadd, yet not once did she mouth a grumble against Dr. King. Why was this? Dr. King was a sacred cow.
Theodore Holly, in defending the RHS and noting its accomplishments, provides critical insights into the attitude and behaviour of Shadd toward Buxton and Dr. King. Without saying it, Holly points to the internalized racism of Shadd, who gleefully attacked Black efforts but who was afraid to attack white-led enterprises even when these suffered from the same alleged weaknesses as the Black undertakings. Holly’s comments also reveal Shadd’s desire for leadership, and the ‘crab in the barrel’ mentality that could produce such a desire.

I predicate this opinion upon the success that has attended a similar movement conducted by Mr. King at Buxton, and against which some of the same objections can be urged as against the Refugees’ Home Society. But any one who publicly opposed the Elgin Association know that it will be at the hazard of his or her standing for common sense, in estimation of the anti-slavery public, especially in Canada.85

Did Shadd not dare attack Dr. King and Buxton because King was a white man? Hardly, for she eagerly lambasted the Reverend Foote; and her attacks on white male members of the RHS and AMA also became features of her journalism. Shadd dared not throw stones at King because King had immense stature and prestige in the Canadian community. He was wealthy, connected to the upper echelons of society, well-connected to the Canadian Presbyterian Church, and friend to the executive of the ASSC. In short, King was untouchable. And Shadd knew it. To attack him would spell for her personal and professional ruin. Even when King was accused of begging in Britain for the fugitives, and keeping the money for himself, Shadd’s paper, the Provincial Freeman, was mum. It took a mainstream paper to provide information on the controversy around King and the alleged misuse of funds for the fugitives.86 The British begging tours of the
Reverend King underscored the fact that Blacks were not the only ones who had to publically fund-raise. As the nineteenth century unfolded with its proliferation of good causes, whites too had to turn to public welfare to secure financial assistance. Egerton Ryerson, Methodist minister, principal of Victoria College, and School Superintendent of Canada West for many years in the nineteenth century, engaged in begging to fund his various causes. Begging has continued unabated in the 21st century. In our period (year 2000), corporations ask for and receive millions of dollars from the government in corporate ‘handouts’; universities embark on annual begging campaigns, unabashedly asking their former students and others to ‘contribute.’ Begging has never been as respectable as it is now.

But though Shadd took shots at white RHS officers like Foote and Hallock (but not Tappan, who supported her school for two years), she reserved her venom for Henry Bibb, whom she perceived as the achilles' heel of the organization. Was it because he was Black, and perhaps, in her mind, inconsequential? This would not be the first time that a so-called Black “leader” would use her or his personal difference to create a split in an oppressed and marginalized Black community. Furthermore, Shadd’s desire to undermine Bibb meant that she showed little empathy or sympathy for the fugitives.87

Black marxist and nationalist thinkers, and also those influenced by Frantz Fanon’s theoretical propositions on the psyche of the colonized, might call the mentality Shadd displayed in her fight with Bibb a colonized one. Psychotherapists would call it internalized racism. In the history of New World slavery, white slaveholders would oftentimes learn of slave plots from the slaves themselves. The betraying slave identified
with the master to the point that s/he would tell the master of a plan to bring about her/his own liberation! I contend that racist ideology and class considerations worked to influence Shadd to attack Bibb the way a hound terrorizes a fox.⁹⁸

This is not to say that there should not have been differences of opinion within the Black community. That would be denying the diversity and humanity of the people who made it up. The fact that Shadd, a free-born person, and Ward, a longtime slavery escapee, objected to the ideals of the RHS point to such a diversity. But when the differences become destructive then one must pause to wonder. Robin Winks put it down to revenge and embarrassment on Shadd's part. In discussing the split between Shadd and Bibb, Winks notes Shadd’s ‘public posturing’ and adds that she “…resented any evidence of dependency upon whites, denounced begging in all its forms as materially compromising our manhood, by representing us as objects of charity.”⁹⁹

At the same time, however, as Winks also observes, Shadd was collecting money from the AMA for her Windsor school and also charging her students a tuition fee. Henry Bibb publicized in his paper the fact of her receiving aid from the AMA.⁹⁰ In response, the AMA “cut her off.”⁹¹ Without the support of the AMA “the financial base for her school was thrown into chaos and was forced to close.”⁹² Shadd took no responsibility for the situation but blamed Bibb for the collapse of the school and accused him of trying to ruin her and her school. Bibb protested his innocence but Shadd did not change her position.

To be fair, Shadd no doubt felt extremely insecure financially. Having a steady and stable income was particularly crucial for women stepping into the world of paid
employment in the nineteenth century. For Black women it was even more so. Salaries for teachers were certainly not princely, and the fact that Shadd’s school was a private one, and also financially unstable, made the question of income for her even more pressing. This was perhaps why she hid from both the parents and the AMA that both were supporting her school. Yet, she played the hypocrite. It would have been better for her if she had kept quiet on the issue of white philanthropy toward Black people than issue public proclamations against it, while privately benefitting from such philanthropy. My research suggests that Shadd was angry and jealous that the RHS was collecting funds that potentially could be used to support ‘true causes’ such as hers. Shadd’s attack on Bibb and the RHS was rooted in self-interest. In the midst Shadd’s attacks against the RHS and Bibb, Bibb’s paper was burnt down by arsonists. Though Bibb tried, he was unable to revive his precious Voice. It never occurred to Shadd to wonder why Bibb never used the money she accused him of stealing to revive his paper. The torching and demise of the Voice would have a negative effect on the fortunes of the RHS and Bibb’s reputation.

The factionalism that Shadd prophesied would come about between fugitive slaves and freeborn Blacks due to the eligibility clause did come about. But it was a factionalism that Shadd deliberately initiated. In the abolitionist communities in Canada and the United States people became aware of the conflict between Shadd, Ward, and Bibb. But Shadd still lacked a powerful tool to draw public opinion behind her, and Bibb and the RHS continued to have the support and confidence of leading abolitionists on both sides of the border. In a letter to the Liberator, Missionary Hiram Wilson of St.
Catharine declared that “I know the leading men who are engaged in this truly humane and philanthropic movement....” Wilson added that “there is no cause presented to the Christian public more worthy of patronage and sympathy; home and foreign mission not excepted.”

Dismissing Shadd’s (and Ward’s) allegations, Thomas Henning, secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada, wrote that “from a careful examination of all the public documents, I believe these charges are the result of erroneous judgement; if not, of prejudice or jealousy.”

And finally, Benjamin Drew declares: “the Refugees’ Home Society, its officers and agents, possess the entire confidence of the American public: at least that portion which sympathizes with the wandering outcasts from the United States.” And as late as 1861, George Whipple toured the RHS and noted its progress. He stated that more people would have settled upon RHS land, “but for the opposition raised against the Society. This has been caused mainly by the designing and the wicked....” Whipple, diplomatically, refused to name who these persons were, but readers of the Missionary, familiar with the protracted war Ward and Shadd initiated against the Home, knew exactly to whom he referred.

But it was not until Ward and Shadd launched the Provincial Freeman that a concerted assault upon Bibb and the RHS was initiated. The Freeman proved to be the tool needed to discredit Bibb and the RHS by creating public dissent and shaping and controlling public opinion. The attackers launched a full-scale war not only against Bibb and other RHS officers, namely C.C. Foote, but also against the RHS settlers—the
fugitives from slavery. The *Freeman* seems to have been launched with the sole intention of opposing the RHS. Its opening pages and editorial concentrated on the RHS. Subsequent issues had the same or similar objectives until its demise in 1857. The deliberate and concerted manner in which the *Freeman* attacked the RHS supports the conclusion that Shadd and the Freeman became obsessed with destroying the RHS.

It was the first editor, an ex-slave himself, the Reverend Samuel Ringgold Ward, who in Syracuse had his own newspaper, spearheaded the attack in the *Freeman*. Ward, as noted earlier, was a staunch supporter of the Society until August 1852 and a close friend of Bibb. However, it seemed that when he joined forces with Shadd to found the *Freeman*, he had a change of heart.100 In the first issue of the *Freeman* Ward published a letter he wrote opposing the RHS. Beginning the letter by innocently declaring that he has nothing personal against Henry and Mary Bibb and C.C. Foote but opposed their “official acts,” Ward took issue with the RHS on several counts. Availability of land to the refugees was Ward’s first concern. In his estimation, the government offered a better deal to prospective buyers: 100 acres with a $16 downpayment. 100 acres he felt was sufficient to start a viable farm. He felt that the 25 acres that the RHS offered was inadequate for the settler to begin a successful farm. Secondly, he opposed the land alienation clause which prohibited the owner from selling the land until it was paid for. Ward sees this as “confining.” And lastly, Ward opposed the RHS on the grounds that it misrepresented the condition of the fugitives as downtrodden and destitute.

I object to the Refugees’ Home Society because it misrepresents, through its agent, the condition of the Blacks in Canada. To go into no specifications, the fact that it sends
an agent to the United States to beg money to buy land for them, is of itself a misrepresentation that they cannot acquire such money for themselves. While the truth is that as soon as fugitives come here, they can get work at fair wages, and so can lay by enough to buy land for themselves, needing aid only, allow me to repeat, NEEDING AID ONLY upon their immediate arrival, until they can get work which in no instance that I know is longer than three days!

Ward’s conclusion that the RHS’ acreage was inadequate for the needs of the fugitives and that the government’s offer of 100 acres was sufficient must be seen as an exercise in reality denial. How many fugitives fresh from fleeing the FSL could immediately find the $16 required by the government for a downpayment? As Carlesimo notes, most fugitive families upon arrival had to find food, clothes, and shelter for themselves and their families. Whatever monies they had would naturally be spent on these necessities.

Ward’s assertion that jobs ‘are available and at fair wages, and so the fugitives could work hard, save their wages and purchase land,’ does not hold up under close scrutiny. A large majority of Blacks in the Western district at least were renters. Most Blacks (or whites for that matter) did not receive high wages at the jobs they worked. And many of the jobs they worked—labouring, lumbering, domestic—were being taken over by the incoming Irish who proved to be the sternest competitors of Blacks. Needless to say, an air of hostility arose between both Blacks and the Irish.

The RHS knew that most families could not immediately afford a downpayment and so it eliminated the downpayment clause. Ward omitted this information in his letter. Evidently, it never occurred to Ward that just as 25 acres might be too small for a
fugitive family, 100 acres might also be too large. The issue of land clearance is a case in point. The government through the Canada Land Company required that the settler clear five acres of land every year. That would be strenuous for a poor settler family. The RHS, on the other hand, more sensitive to the needs of the settler, required the clearance of only five acre within three years. The government’s land purchasing policies seem more attuned to the needs of a rising yeoman class, not the fugitives that the RHS aimed for. And that is why settlers on the RHS were limited to being fugitives only. Though many free Blacks were in similar conditions as the fugitives, a substantial number arrived with sufficient capital to immediately purchase land and begin life under favourable conditions. A large portion of the fugitive community, however, arrived with very limited resources.

Ward also strongly objected to the land alienation clause. The reason the RHS gave for this was that it was a measure to protect the settlers from dishonest land speculators. What would be the point of assisting families to become independent through landholding only to have them lose the very basis of their independence? Of course, this desire to ‘protect’ the fugitives smacks of paternalism. Settlers must have been able to defend themselves against unscrupulous speculators. Having land ‘in the family’ for a number of years also ensured family and community stability. That seemed to be more central to the RHS than the need to ‘protect’ the settlers. This clause which Ward objected to so much was also in place at the Elgin settlement led by Dr. King. And King felt such a measure was necessary to protect the fugitives. Yet neither Ward nor his colleague Shadd ever thought of taking issue with the Dr. King and his committee for
Ward's declaration that the RHS misrepresented the conditions of the fugitives and that the fugitives needed only assistance for three days is specious. Even Ward, ensconced in Toronto, must have known that it took more than three days to get a fleeing fugitive on his/her feet. Was Ward merely being a Pollyanna or did he deliberately blind his eyes to reality? Ward who wrote to Bibb in 1852 on the problem of "Canadian Negro Hate" knew the difficulties many Blacks faced in getting land, renting houses, going to school and church, and finding jobs. In Toronto, an auxiliary of the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada, the Ladies' Association for the Relief of Destitute Colored Fugitives, had assisted and was assisting hundreds of incoming fugitives. Ward knew this. One can only conclude that his distortions of facts and inversion of truth were simply self-serving, produced only so he could make his point.

C.C. Foote, the chief RHS fundraising agent, responded to Ward's attack. Castigating Ward for the "epithets" he used to abuse the RHS and its officers, namely himself and Bibb, Foote turned to the question of the 'misrepresentation of the fugitives' condition and the three day assistance.'

Lastly, do these people need aid at all? On the shores of Canada are constantly emerging the poor, shattered broken remnants of families, men, women, and children escaped by miraculous providence from the black ocean depths of slavery...not a shilling in their pockets, nor garments that deserve the name,—strangers in a strange land.

And these are the people that "need aid at the longest but three days!!!" Was there ever a viler statement that that? Have not
justice and meanness changed sides.\textsuperscript{105}

Foote attributes Ward’s change of heart toward the RHS to his association with Shadd, and sees Shadd’s attacks as personal. Foote also suggested that Ward was jealous that it was Bibb and not he who originated the plan for the RHS.

That some Black people had to ask for charity caused Shadd and Ward (and Bibb) to react irrationally to the begging question. But as I have stated elsewhere, this reaction was rooted in self-interest, for both begged for their respective causes when necessary. Begging they felt made the Blacks look ‘bad,’ which in their minds supported the stereotype of Black laziness. Ward and Shadd, like Bibb and his supporters, but for different reasons, were fuelled by what I term ‘middle class-ism.’ Such a philosophy dictated that Blacks no matter how destitute should ‘pick themselves up and elevate themselves like men, so that whites could respect them.’\textsuperscript{106} The act of agents soliciting monies for the ‘poor refugees of Canada’ smeared the Black image that these leaders were tying to construct—that of a ‘strong,’ independent and self-reliant person.\textsuperscript{107}

The fact of the matter is that as contemporary observers, both white and Black, noted in the first year following the Fugitive Slave Act, there was a veritable rush of fugitives across the Detroit frontier into Ontario. The Windsor-Amherstburg corridor took the majority of these people. While the bulk of these refugees may have been living as free persons in the Northern states, and had brought some material possessions, a large number fled the states with literally the clothes on their backs. The diversity of the movement deserves more attention. The Blacks from the free states who crossed into Canada (especially Ontario) included groups of parishioners from the Methodist Church
In Buffalo and the Colored Baptist Church in Detroit; and the minister and the entire
congregation of Colored Baptist Church in Rochester, New York, left the States for
Canada.108

Two weeks after President Fillmore signed the Fugitive Slave Bill a Pittsburg
dispatch to the Liberator stated that most of the waiters working in the hotels had fled to
Canada. “They went in large bodies, armes with pistols and bowie knives, determined to
die rather than being captured.” In addition, the members of “the Negro community near
Sandy Lake in northwestern Pennsylvania, many of whom had farms partly paid for,
sold out or gave away their property and went in a body to Canada.”109 What is clear
from the above is the diversity of people that fled, and that group flight was not
uncommon. Also worth stressing is the rapidity which many of the refugees left the
Northern states. Many departed without being able to make proper arrangements
regarding property, family and financial resources, with the result that the resources of
the South-western portion of Canada West would be strained to the limit. Border towns
had to deal with hungry and ill-equipped numerous refugees in search of work. People
who had children were of course hit hardest by the emergency engendered by the FSL.
Lord Elgin, Governor-General of Canada, watched with alarm, influenced by racial
prejudice, this activity at the border and commented: “we are likely to be flooded with
blackies who are rushing across the frontier to escape from the bloodhounds whom the
Fugitive slave bill has let loose on their track.”110

In spite of the disparaging term that Elgin used to describe African Americans,
his comment indicated that people of all levels of society realized the implications of the
FSL, and that those who worked with the fugitives knew that their situation at times was desperate. No matter how much middle-class Blacks wanted to show Black ‘independence’ and ‘self-reliance,’ it did not square with the current reality. Fleeing, desperate refugees in need, who had to depend on the welfare of others, ought not to have been made to feel ashamed. Black leaders like Shadd and Ward, and their supporters, who tellingly were of freeborn origin seemed more concerned of what whites thought, and the image Blacks created in white minds, than for the fugitives themselves.111 In this context, Shadd and Ward deserve criticism for their vicious attacks against the RHS. A class divide was definitely at work in the Black communities of Ontario at mid-century, and at its centre was hostility against newly escaped fugitives from some influential freeborn persons, or those long free. Some Black leaders, like Shadd and Ward, used the politics of respectability to lash out against the ex-slave immigrants, and thus were guilty of victim-blaming.112

Though Bibb lent his voice to his own defence and that of the RHS against the charges of Shadd and Ward, it was Theodore Holly and Charles Foote who strenuously defended the RHS. They noted that the opposition represented only a small group of people, none of whom were refugees. They listed the names of the well-known (white) men who supported the RHS, and Holly in particular noted that the RHS brought order to the begging system, as the Society made it “honest and effective.” Holly further stated that the rules of the Society compelled settlers to rely on themselves rather than on the charity of others, and supported the practice of the RHS focus on fugitives. Significantly,
he stated that no one was compelled to join the Society, people did so out of their free
will.\textsuperscript{113}

Mary Ann Shadd, Samuel Ringgold Ward, and the \textit{Provincial Freeman} soon
revealed that it was not that they were against the begging of funds in the name of the
fugitives, but what they took issue with was who the beggars were. For this faction, it
was not okay for the RHS to collect funds, but fine for the Anti-slavery Society of
Canada to do so. In 1851 Ward became a paid agent of this organization. He lectured
throughout the province collecting funds for the Society. In 1854 Ward continued his
touring activities for the ASSC. The \textit{Freeman} in a bold face display of double standard
trumpeted in an article entitled “Fugitive Slaves in Canada”:

\begin{quote}
A Degree of attention has of late been directed to the condition
of the Fugitive Slaves resident in Canada, but comparatively
little information concerning them has reached the public.\textsuperscript{114}
The presence in this country of Rev. Samuel Ringgold Ward,
who has been delgated by the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada
to make the case of these refugees more generally known,
has caused a number of gentlemen to form a committee,
for the purpose of raising a fund to afford them temporary
relief on their arrival in Canada, from the scene of their bondage...

Being strangers, destitute of the commonest necessaries,
and in some instances, suffering from temporary illness and over
fatigue, they require a helping hand. The Anti-Slavery Society
of Canada, and a Ladies Society at Toronto, provide these Refugees
with food, clothing, tools or whatever they require, until they
can procure employment and can support themselves. This
necessarily entails a very considerable expenditure, which these
societies are not in a position to meet to the extent to which
their aid is needed.\textsuperscript{115}
\end{quote}

Such reasoning was wrong-headed and hypocritical. Ward was ‘righteously
indignant’ in March 1853, when he wrote that the RHS was misrepresenting the fugitives
by stating they were destitute. But a year later he was saying the same thing. Only now he was working for the ASSC. Begging had become legitimate because he was doing it, with the support of the Freeman. By its double standard, the Shadd-Ward faction created a destructive rift in the Black community and Black leadership in Canada, and parts of the United States, which would continue for a long time. The discord they, especially Shadd, sowed in the community did more harm than good to the fugitives they claimed to be concerned about.

The first issue of the Freeman published an attack on the RHS settlers in the form of a letter from a "trustworthy colored lady." It read:

I Spent the new year in sight of the Refugees Home...
I went on the land and talked to the settlers and during a meeting before quite a congregation, read the Constitution of the Society to several of them...and the astonishing fact was that it had never been read to them as it is not printed by the honest, merchants, priests, and gentlemen of Detroit. How many do you think live thereon? Just seven families, and altogether one dozen lots have not been taken. The settlers are the worst descriptions of persons with few exceptions. Three out of seven families have Irish wives, and men and women drink whiskey, steal and idle, borrow from their neighbors, (fugitives who own land bought from others) and otherwise annoy the settlers. In stopping for a visit with a fugitive who had 120 acres of land paid for lives in a house 40x25. I never saw greater evidence of comfort anywhere than I did in that home. This is but one in a dozen, to be found within a mile or two. These men laughed at the begging, and wish the friends would open their ears. They also lament their vicinity to the Refugee's Home."

Who was this "trustworthy colored woman?" This woman was so interested in the affairs of the RHS settlers that she went to their village, read the constitution to them, and then
turned on the settlers by calling them the ‘worst sort’, commented on intermarriage among them, and then described their ‘immoral’ character. As Carlesimo suggests, one of the very few women who would take the time out to travel the distance from Windsor to the RHS settlement in Puce village was Miss Shadd herself, or someone from her camp. At any rate, as Carlesimo recognized, “a vested interest wrote the letter.”

I contend that Shadd wrote the letter, and that it should not be read as an objective account of the RHS settlers. If we compare this letter to the one Shadd wrote to Whipple fifteen months before, we see that the sentences on the character of the settlers are almost exactly the same. What is instructive is the letter writer’s comment on the “Irish wives.” For if it was Shadd who was this “trustworthy colored lady” then the racist commentary on the Irish wives suggests that her professed integrationist philosophy was a mask. Again, a comparison with the Buxton colony is instructive. The Freeman blames the RHS for exactly what it supports in the Buxton colony. This settlement ‘boasted’ 40 white wives; Shadd never mentions this in her articles or letters. These examples lead me to conclude that Shadd’s attack on the RHS was personal, and that this very mischievous and highly inflammatory letter must have come as a blow to Bibb and the RHS supporters and to the settlers of the colony.

Shadd and Ward now had free rein in shaping the Black public opinion. The Voice of the Fugitive was torched by arsonists, thus leaving the Freeman as the only Black newspaper. Since the Freeman came into being largely to destroy the RHS, its depiction of the Society was consistently negative. The RHS tried to defend itself by sending epistles to papers like the Liberator, and Michigan’s True Wesleyan. Although
prominent abolitionists such as Lewis Tappan, Frederick Douglass, and the Reverend Michael Willis of Canada still supported the RHS. Carlesimo speculates that the attacks by the Shadd camp led to a slowing down of the rate of settlement on RHS property. Their actions may have had the desired effect of keeping some potential settlers away, and tainting the reputation of the Society and its officers. In commenting on the role the 

*Freeman* had in shaping public opinion, Carlesimo notes that Black public opinion began to shift towards the Shadd faction after the demise of the *Voice*. Acknowledging the power and influence of the press, he writes that “the inadvertent surrender” of the *Voice* “not only permitted the opposition to choose the type of news that reached the readers’ eyes, but it also allowed them to determine the interpretation of this news. Consequently the only news regarding the society which were printed in its columns was all negative...”

Still, while Bibb lived, the Shadd camp could not achieve total victory. Even with the demise of the *Voice*, Bibb had enough clout, reputation, and prestige to rally support behind the RHS. Indeed, during Bibb’s lifetime the RHS was vindicated in a very surprising manner. An ordained minister, Samuel Ringgold Ward fell a victim to the notion of karma implied in the psalmic statement that “whosoever diggeth a pit for his brother shall fall in it,” a verse with which he must have been very familiar. As a lecturer for the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada, Ward toured Canada West at least twice and soon accepted an agency from the Society to tour Britain and collect funds. In other words, to beg. Ward’s romance with the ASSC was shortlived because he absconded with two-thirds of the money collected, swindled a British merchant, and left Britain for
Jamaica where he took up a pastorate. Ward never returned to Canada, but continued living and working in Jamaica where he died. As might be expected, Shadd and the Freeman, perhaps too embarrassed, never mentioned the matter.\textsuperscript{120}

Shadd too fell into the pit she dug for Bibb, though, fortunately for her, Henry Bibb did not live to witness her 'disgrace.' Carlesimo perceptively sums up not only Shadd's 'fall from grace' but provides crucial insights as to why 'begging' was necessary. As he notes, the "best example why begging was necessary was provided by Mary Ann Shadd Cary herself" who in 1861 "reverted to begging to help support the new school she opened in Michigan." He adds, "but nevertheless Mrs. Cary who had authored so much criticism over the begging controversy, in turn was denounced at a meeting in Chatham on 27 December, 1862. The story printed in the Globe, 'Reported a mass meeting in Chatham protesting against persons "begging" for refugees and institutions. M.A.S.C. was named and denounced for begging on behalf of a mission school.'\textsuperscript{121}

Shadd's hypocrisy had come full circle. For much of the 1850s she attacked the AMA and blasted white philanthropy. Denounced by the Chathamites, she begged and received assistance from the AMA in 1861-62. This organization, without rancour or bad feelings, placed her again on its subsidy list. This was the woman who questioned the abolitionism of the AMA. Shadd's appeal to the AMA and their positive response belied her 1853 assertion that the AMA frowned on Black freedom of thought.\textsuperscript{122} But even more disturbing is that subsequent scholars such as Daniel G. Hill and Jane and William Pease failed to note that by 1861 the RHS was giving Shadd $150 a year for the her
school! Shadd begged money from the RHS when her school was in financial distress, and the RHS was willing to ‘forget the past’ and support her. This was the woman who for ten years attacked the RHS, charged its officers with fraud and dishonesty, and called on the Black and white population not to support it. But when it no longer made good sense to attack the Society and its leaders, she backed off because she wanted to get some of the money she accused the officers of stealing.  

Ironically, by the early 1860s, when Shadd was placed again on the AMA payroll, it was C.C. Foote, whom she had earlier alienated, who was now the AMA vice-president for the Michigan and Ontario region. The relationship appears to have been strained, which led Shadd on several occasions to appeal directly to Lewis Tappan for aid. But Foote, to his credit, regularly recommended Shadd’s school as a needy school.  

Shadd’s acceptance of money from the AMA and the RHS points to the economic and social reality of Black people in the province. Though there were clear cases of Black wealth and success (John Walls, an RHS settler is one example), the majority of Blacks had a hard time making it. Even with her middle-class credentials, Shadd too found it difficult to maintain this second school, started by her sister-in-law Amelia Freeman. Though she claimed in her letters to the AMA that she and Freeman had over 60 pupils, she also noted that many were not forthcoming in paying their fees. The Black population of Chatham could not maintain sufficiently one of its Black private schools. The school that Shadd Cary was involved with could not sustain itself without financial support from philanthropic societies like the RHS, AMA, and the Colonial Church and School Society (the CCSS). Shadd, as teacher and chief
fundraiser for the Freeman school, had to resort to what they had so blasted for a long
time—begging. Shadd Cary herself wrote in a letter to George Whipple, while on a fund-
raising tour in Hamilton, “I am obliged to resort to collections here which are very
tardy.”128 She would later be castigated by Black Chathamites for her ‘begging’
practices. So, Shadd perhaps had to swallow her pride, put away her personal dislike of
men in the RHS and AMA, and appeal to them for money to help run the Freeman
school. Shadd was a pragmatist and she faced the economic and social realities of her
situation head-on. She was not about to make the poverty of her fellow Blacks deprive
her of an income.129

The accusations of the Shadd-Ward camp against Bibb and the RHS were to
reverberate through the ages damaging the reputation of Bibb and the officers of the
RHS. The first published scholarly work to veer in this direction is Black Utopia, written
by William and Jane H. Pease. In this book is a chapter on the RHS. Black Utopia is
disappointing because it does not live up to the previous well-researched and analytic
works of this scholarly couple.130 The research on the RHS is poor and shoddy and the
analysis borders on racism. The Peases convey the impression that the RHS ‘did not
work’ because a Black person (Bibb) was at the helm. Pease and Pease accept at face
value Shadd’s accusations of theft and dishonesty regarding Bibb and the Society. They
offer no critical analysis, but reduce the squabble led by Shadd to a leadership conflict
between those of moderate and Garrisonian abolitionist tendencies! This makes no sense
since Ward, for example, was definitely a political Christian abolitionist of the Tappanite
variety; Shadd could be termed a Garrisonian; and Bibb, like Ward, was a political
abolitionist. He and Ward ideologically were political abolitionists, and yet in the RHS controversy they were on opposing sides. In trying to put forward the factions’ abolitionist philosophy as a chief reason for the strife, Pease and Pease reveal their lack of understanding of the issue.

Robin Winks offers a more rigorous critique of the RHS controversy, but his conclusion that the RHS “was destroyed by factionalism” is dubious. For one thing, the Society was not destroyed—Shadd and her camp attacked it but it outlived her attacks, and even gave her money to run her Chatham school. Winks also notes “in the welter of accusation and counteraccusation that followed, the truth cannot be recaptured.” On the contrary, critical clues lie in Shadd’s, Ward’s, and the Freeman’s statements, and in the evidence that records the running of the RHS, its constitution, and its executive. Another telling exercise would be to examine the settlers of the Home. Winks also declares that during this debate Bibb “turned against begging.” But this happened earlier, in 1851, in several articles and editorials, even before there was an RHS strife. All Black leaders opposed begging. But they all agreed that if the ‘fugitives must beg let it be for something permanent,’ showing that they all supported begging ‘under certain circumstances.’ Such an undertaking would reveal that the settlers, contrary to Shadd’s allegations, were not riff-raff but model citizens who contributed to Essex’s economic development through their agricultural pursuits. In fact one writer of Essex history praised the RHS settlers for bringing much-needed American money into Essex through the sale of wheat, tobacco, and the like to the American market.

In his book The Freedom-Seekers, Daniel G. Hill, a Canadian sociologist, placed
himself firmly within the Shadd-Ward camp. Like others, he compromised his work by too easily accepting Shadd’s unproved claims. The book as a whole is fraught with errors pertaining to Black Canadian history, but in regards to the RHS, Hill is more concerned with placing the actors in the categories of villains and heroes, than in engaging in any kind of critical analysis. Shadd is portrayed as the ‘anti-begging champion,’ while Bibb is the ‘defrauder.’ Hill seems unaware that Shadd herself was denounced for begging by the people of Chatham, and he excuses her for not informing the parents of her students that she was receiving aid from the AMA.135

What has occurred because of this scholarship is that the reputation of Henry Bibb has become tainted and sullied. By contrast, the biographies of Mary Ann Shadd, including the recent one by Jane Rhodes, are exercises in hagiography and beatification. Although Rhodes at certain points acknowledges that Shadd could be truly self-righteous, she portrays her as a ‘strong, Black woman, the first woman to publish a newspaper in Canada, and an abolitionist schoolteacher.’ And in analyzing the quarrel between Shadd and Bibb, Rhodes casts Shadd in the role of victim. Scholars, especially feminist ones, in their understandable zeal to reclaim one of their foremothers, one who made history as the first female to publish a Canadian paper, have chosen to ignore some of her more unsavoury traits. Evidence has shown that Shadd was fractious, arrogant, elitist, and insecure, had a penchant for starting quarrels, and was ‘blessed’ with a persecution mentality.136 Shadd has been re-invented as either the ‘pristine’ one, or the ‘teflon woman.’137 The end result of this kind of construction is that Shadd as a historical personage is presented as a one-dimensional character. Anxious to portray Shadd as the
‘champion of integration’ and begging’s most active opponent, writers like Hill have a ‘convenient amnesia’ when it comes to some of Shadd’s more ‘unvirtuous’ activities. They forget that Shadd supported the segregated colony of Buxton, that she received aid from the RHS and the AMA, and in addition, was publicly denounced for her begging. Such scholarship produces a villain and hero category in which to place characters.

Needless to say, Shadd emerges as the hero, while Bibb is cast as the villain. An active mythmaking around the person, character, and history of Mary Shadd Cary has taken place in Afro-Ontario history.

Black History Month is the time when we are most bombarded by this kind of celebratory history. But while it is good and right to take our heroes from the shadows of history, the focus on heroes methodologically ‘flattens’ out the character of these ‘stalwarts.’ In addition, this approach tends to distort the history of the community from which these persons spring. History is far more complex and contradictory that this. The recent revelation that Thomas Jefferson had an affair with his slave Sally Hemmings, and produced children (or at least one child) sent shockwaves through (white) America. Many whites argued that this disclosure has tainted the reputation of Jefferson. For how could Jefferson, as liberty seeker, founding father, and statesman have done such an ‘ungentlemanly’ thing? Yet what this discovery underscores is Jefferson’s complexity and humanity. Many of the writers of Black Ontario history need to take lessons from the Jefferson/Hemming affair.
Conclusion

Eight miles east of Windsor, on the Puce Road in Maidstone township is the John Walls Historic Site and Underground Railroad Museum. This museum rests on property formerly owned by John Freeman Walls and his wife, a North Carolina white woman, Mary King Walls. John Walls was a runaway slave from North Carolina. After the death of his master, Walls and his master’s widow, Jane, fell in love. Knowing their love could not flourish in North Carolina, the couple made their way to Ontario in 1845. When the RHS was established, the couple bought land from the Society and began a new life. John Walls was successful as a farmer. He bought more land from the RHS until he increased his landholdings to 200 acres. Walls became one of Essex’s most successful farmers, and today his name is known in the folklore of the area. His descendants, led by Bryan Walls, have refurbished Walls’s original log cabin, constructed other buildings on the property and turned the place into a museum. Today when one visits the site, a whole ‘underground railroad’ scene is enacted. A tour-guide or ‘railroad captain’ leads the visitors—who are now transformed into runaway slaves—through a wooded area. From loudspeakers come the simulated sounds of dogs barking. We are told that the slavehunters are following us with their dogs, and are advised to hide beneath thick bushes. When it is safe, our guide signals for us to ‘move on.’ We cross a bridge, beneath which runs a (real) river. On the other side of the bridge is ‘Canada.’ With the sounds of hounds following us, our guide gleefully announces we are in the promised land, we are now free and safe. The visitors/escapees cheer.

The Walls family has taken the myths and stories of the UGRR and turned them
into popular history. From May to October every year, hundreds of visitors from across North America become more exposed to the Canadian version of the UGRR through visits like the one to the Walls site. After landing in Canada, our guide takes us to an information centre where we are told the history of the Walls family, how John purchased the land, and of how the RHS and Henry Bibb made it possible. Henry Bibb and the RHS figure prominently in the story of John Freeman Walls and his success.

John Walls, through the efforts of his descendants, have become known to us. His story is the subject of a book and a video. From all evidence Walls was a model Home settler. But the Walls family was not the only one that the RHS gave a start and helped. Carlesimo in his research on the RHS in the early 1970s interviewed several descendants of some of the original RHS settlers. These descendants repeated some of their family lore to Carlesimo and told of the how the Home aided their families in important ways: the Home built schools, temperance societies, churches, and provided two cemeteries. Two of the RHS’ schools eventually became ‘public’ schools and served the needs of the community well into the twentieth century.¹⁴⁰ In fact, Bryan E. Walls stated that as a child, he attended the “same one room schoolhouse” built by the first settlers of the Home.¹⁴¹ Though Bibb died in 1854, and the operations of the Home ceased in 1876, his name is still remembered by these twentieth-century descendants of the original settlers as the man who made ‘it happen.’ The current members of the Walls family and the other descendants of the original RHS settlers are in accord that the RHS was a success.

Not so with historians. Pease and Pease, the editors of the Black Abolitionist
Papers Vol. 2, Winks, and even Carlesimo have judged that the organization was a ‘failure’ because it did not realize its original objective of purchasing 50,000 acres, but bought less than 4,000. With the exception of Carlesimo, all asserted that the RHS was ‘destroyed by factionalism’ by 1854. The latter statement is simply wrong, because as discussed in the body of this work the RHS thrived until 1876, so this point need not detain us here. Let us address the ‘failure’ of the RHS. The standard used by the settlers themselves and their descendants to judge failure and success are clearly different from those used by historians. The aim of purchasing 50,000 acres and raising $100,000 was clearly overly ambitious—perhaps unrealistic. Yet the RHS did raise money, buy land, and settle some 60 families. I would assert that that was an achievement. Conceivably, if Bibb had lived, more families would have bought land, but this is speculation. Perhaps what the experiments of the RHS, the Buxton (Elgin) colony, Dawn, and the Wilberforce settlement illustrate is that most Blacks who became landowners were able and willing to purchase their own land in whatever part of the province they chose. By this act, they demonstrated that they did not need help from these housing and land projects. Though Henry and Mary Bibb, the Michigan abolitionist, William King, and others, devised strategies to enable the fugitives to own land, most fugitives went their own way and worked out their destinies themselves, without the aid of ‘leaders,’ Black or white. Another issue to consider why some Blacks were not attracted to these land projects is that these schemes had agriculture as their raison d’etre. To qualify as a land buyer one had to be interested in becoming a farmer. Many fugitives were not attracted to agriculture, but desired urban opportunities. Therefore, these persons would not consider
projects like the Home as a housing option.¹⁴⁴

This having been said, these organizations must be commended for the help they gave to those who came to them for it. Henry Bibb, before he died, utilized the RHS to empower dozens of refugees like Walls and others. Through his vision, he provided them with the foundation for their independence, elevation, and self-reliance. The RHS had another critical value and function. It became a strong antislavery symbol and represented the “hope of black progress.”¹⁴⁵ When a slave such as RHS settlers Lewis Jackson or John Walls escaped to Canada and became a landowner, they sent a strong blast to the institution of slavery itself and to slaveholders. Institutions like the RHS helped undermine slavery.
Notes


2 In the nineteenth-century literature, the RHS is commonly referred to as either the 'Refugee's Home Society or the Refugees' Home Society. However, in the 20th century literature, it is termed the Refugee Home Society. It is this term that will be used throughout this paper.

3 Pease & Pease *Black Utopia*, 109. Lewis Tappan was well-placed to solicit aid from both the U.S., and Britain. As one of the chief officers of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, he was in communication with the British counterpart of the AFASS, the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. The BFASS and AFASS at Tappan’s urgings aided several abolitionist ventures in Ontario. For Tappan’s links with the BFASS see, A.H. Abel, *A Sidelight on Anglo-American Relations 1839-1858* (Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1927); Anthony J. Barker, *Captain Charles Stuart, Anglo-American Abolitionist* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986).


5 Pease & Pease, *Black Utopia*, 110


7 The FUS was formed at the Convention of the People of Color which met in Sandwich on 11 Nov. 1850. A report of this meeting was published as “Fugitive Slaves in Canada West,” in the *Voice of the Fugitive*, 1 Jan. 1851.


9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 *Ibid.* By the mid-1850 temperance, as another reform movement, had swept North America. Activists blamed alcohol for the abandonment of families by men, wife assault, and the general degradation of society. Temperance was to cure all of this and more. People of all classes, creed, and race took out membership in the 'cold water army.' Among Blacks, like whites, allegiance to temperance signified middle class respectability and good moral character. Henry Bibb himself was also a temperance activist and toured much of Southwestern Ontario advocating temperance and convening temperance meetings. *Voice*, 26 March 1851; Janet Noel, *Canada Dry: Temperance Crusades Before Confederation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995)

12 See details of the Sandwich Convention, *Voice*, 1 Jan. 1851.

13 Earl Ofari, *Let Your Motto Be Resistance, "The Life and Thought of Henry Highland Garnet*, (Boston:
Beacon Press, 1972) 18, 21.

14 Israel Campbell, a Chatham farmer, was also a prominent antislavery activist and Black civil rights advocate in Canada and the United States. Ripley, BAP, Vol. 2, 164-65.

15 The names Ontario, Canada West, and sometimes Upper Canada will be used interchangeably. However, preference will be given to ‘Ontario.’

16 Voice, 12 March 1851.

17 At the Sandwich Convention delegates decided to purchase 30,000 acres of land. The amount of acreage varied as both the FUS and the RHS developed.

18 Winks, Blacks in Canada, 156-61, 179-80, 224-227.

19 This debate about Blacks receiving charity from whites was to continue well into the 20th century. American Black leaders like W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington realized that given the economic deprivation of the Black masses, many Black institutions could not make it without financial assistance from whites. Yet financial help from whites was often double-edged. One reason that Du Bois (who has been simplistically dubbed an “integrationist”) left the NAACP, an organization he co-founded, was “because the organization rejected his proposals for strengthening institutions within the black community even in the context imposed by segregation.” Adolph L. Reed Jr., W.E.B. Du Bois and American Political Thought (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 4.


22 Bibb used the “four-fifth” percentage for rhetorical effect. Most of the enslaved Africans were not mulattoes. According to Wilma King, by 1860, 12.55% of the Black population (including the free Black portion) was mulatto, with 7.70% in the South. The enslaved population hovered around three and a half million. King, Stolen Childhood, Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) 110.

23 Voice, 23 April 1851.

24 Ibid. Ironically, when Mary Ann Shadd and Samuel Ringgold Ward attacked Bibb and the RHS, misrepresenting the condition of the Black population would be one of their charges against him.

25 Voice, 23 April 1851.

26 Ibid.

27 The Abuja Proclamation, A declaration of the first Abuja Pan-African Conference on Reparations

28 Voice, 23 April 1851.


30 Voice, 4 June 1851.


32 Josiah Henson, with his family, escaped from slavery in Maryland in 1830. He relocated to Dawn, Ontario where he helped to set up the British American Institute for the educational of Black youths. Henson became an influential Black leader in Canada, and the patriarch of the Dawn Black community. He is also remembered in history as the model for Uncle Tom in Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin. In 1849 Henson published his autobiography The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave. Now an Inhabitant of Canada (Boston: Author D. Phelps, 1849). Henson updated and re-issued his autobiography several times after this date. One version, published in 1877, is An Autobiography of Rev. Josiah Henson (Reprint, Reading Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969) with an introduction by Robin Winks. George Williams, originally from Virginia, resettled in Ontario during the 1830s. He became a prominent Sandwich resident and antislavery worker. He helped to establish the Fugitive Union Society, and later played a leading role in the Refugee Home Society. Ripley, BAP, Vol. 2, 72. Henry Brent escaped from slavery in Virginia in 1834, and resettled in Sandwich, Ontario where he involved himself in abolitionist work. He was active in the Sandwich Mission and the Refugee Home Society. For Brent's story see Drew's Narrative of Fugitive Slaves in Canada, 344-46.

33 Voice, 4 June 1851.


35 Henry Bibb as originator of the RHS idea and plan is well documented in Fred Landon, "Henry Bibb, a Colonizer, Journal of Negro History 5 (1920) 22-36.


37 Ibid., 1 June 1851. Professor Allen was one of the first persons to pledge monies to the RHS. In addition to the $10 cash he sent to Bibb with his letter, he pledged $100 to the project. See Voice 30 July 1851. Allen was an African American professor at New York Central College. The school had an integrated faculty and student body. Allen taught Rhetoric, Greek, and Literature. Despite the school's integrationist policies, Allen was forced out and had to flee the country when he married one of his white students. For Allen's biography see Richard Blackett, "William G. Allen, the Forgotten Professor," Civil War History 26, 1 (1980) 39-52.

38 Voice, 1 June 1851.
Holly, a Vermont abolitionist and emigrationist, moved to Sandwich and became co-editor and co-proprietor of the *Voice*. Soon becoming disillusioned with Canada, Holly began to support and advocate Haitian emigrate. He later moved to Haiti where he became an Episcopalian bishop. Holly remained in Haiti where he died in 1911. Holly’s work with the *Voice* is dealt with in the chapter on the *Voice of the Fugitive*. Holly is biographed in David M. Dean’s, *Defender of the Race: James Theodore Holly, Black Nationalist Bishop* (Boston: Lambeth Press, 1978); Ripley, BAP, Vol. 2 141-42.

*Voice*, 1 June 1851.

For Calkins support see the Ibid., 7 March 1851; Jarvis’, 7 May 1851; and Ward’s, 19 Nov. 1851, 11 March 1852.

The Reverend Charles Curtis Foote was a white congregational missionary who worked among the white and Black populations of Michigan and Southern Ontario. An abolitionist leader in the Midwest and Ontario, he worked also as an Underground Railroad agent. Foote who was one of the earliest officers of the Refugee Home Society, became one of its staunchest supporters and defenders. It was he who led the defence of the RHS when it was attacked by Mary Ann Shadd and Samuel Ringgold Ward. In the early 1860s Foote became a vice-president of the American Missionary Association. See Carelsimo, “Refugee Home Society,” 23.


This must be Rev. A.N. or (A.W.) McConoughey who was listed in the *Voice*, 9 Sept. 1852, along with Foote as the RHS’ sole agents. Foote in this letter must have spelt his name incorrectly.


See for example, the Ibid., 18 Nov. 1851, 3 Dec. 1851, 26 Feb. 1852, 8 April 1852, and 22 April 1852.

*Voice*, 19 Nov. 1851.


J.F. Dolbeare worked in the Michigan Underground Railroad escorting numerous fugitives to Ontario. In addition, he served as a trustee at Laura Haviland’s integrated Raisin Institute, and as an agent for Bibb’s *Voice of the Fugitive*. See the list of the names of agents, page one of most issues.


*Voice*, 12 Feb. 1852.

The legislators who passed the “Maine Law” (in 1851, the state of Maine passed a law restricting the sale of alcohol, making Maine the first place in North America to pass such a law) also recognized that “alcohol is necessary, for medicine and in the arts....” *Ibid*, 29 Jan. 1852.


Ward, who was at the September meeting, strongly objected to the land transferral clause, which limited sale or transfer of land only to heirs or immediate family members. See Ward’s letter in the Provincial Freeman, 24 March 1853.

Voice, 25 August 1852.


Ibid., 18.


For Laura Haviland’s work in Ontario among the refugees see, A Woman’s Life-Work: Labors and Experiences (Chicago: C.V. Waite, 1887) 192-210.

Mary Shadd married Thomas Cary in 1856. On the RHS support to the Freeman/Cary school see, Mary Shadd Cary to George Whipple, 26 August 1862 (AMA-ARC); American Missionary, (March 1861) 55.


The most definitive source on the Buxton colony and William King’s life is Victor Ullman’s Look to the North Star; A Life of William King (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

Information on the Anti-Slavery Society of Windsor can be gleaned from the Voice, 21 Oct. 1852.

Ibid., 21 Oct. 1852.

Shadd to Whipple, 28 Dec. 1852, (AMA-ARC).


Edwin Larwill was a white politician who supported white supremacy. He called for the deportation of all “Africans” from Ontario, noting that Blacks were “ignorant monkeys.” Larwill led the opposition against the founding of the Elgin settlement. Interestingly, the Black citizens of Southwestern Ontario did become a critical mass at the polls and helped to defeat Larwill in his re-election bid for his Kent county seat in 1857. Ripley, BA Ps. Vol. 2, 231.

Shadd, without realizing it, was verbalizing the proslavery ideology that Blacks were generally idle.
thriftless, and prone to drunkenness. Racist whites also had the same opinion of Blacks who became free.


75 *Voice*, 1 Jan. 12 March 1851.

76 Haviland, *Woman’s Life-Work*, 192.


78 The degree to which Black leaders could access to white-controlled resources, has tended to cause conflict among them. This has been the case for both the 19th and 20th centuries. The fact that whites held the purse strings, and Blacks had to come begging underscored the painful subordination of Blacks in society premised upon white control and domination of most of the resources in society. According to one scholar, this issue was paramount in dividing Booker T. Washington from William Du Bois. “Du Bois’s conflict with Washington should be considered in the context of competition for access to...white patronage. The famous controversy derive[d] largely from the fact that Washington has established monopoly over access to patronage sources. Although they were clearly in programmatic competition and articulated sharply different visions of blacks’ place in American Civic life, their conflict did not grow from deep philosophical differences about internal organization of the black population.” Reed, *W.E.B. Du Bois*, 60. Marcus Garvey, who founded and led the greatest mass movement of Black people in history—the Universal Negro Improvement Association—broke this dependence of white patronage. “He was exceedingly disturbed that black leadership depended so heavily on white philanthropy—an intolerable paradox....He characterized such leaders as DuBois...as ‘weak-kneed and cringing...sycophant to the white man.’” After World War I to much of the 1920s, Garvey appealed to the Black masses and got them to donate their own money for their own uplift. C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* (3rd edition, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1994) 54, 60. See also Rupert Lewis, *Marcus Garvey, Anti-Colonial Champion* (London: Karia Press, 1987); Robert Hill, *Marcus Garvey* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) 9 volumes.

79 This issue will be discussed subsequently.


82 Issues of sex and gender could well be pertinent here. Mary Shadd, who had always been a recipient of white/abolitionist philanthropy, never served as a fundraising agent for any organization (except her own—the *Provincial Freeman*). Most of Blacks who served as agents for abolitionist and philanthropic societies were men. Few women served as agents. Shadd, therefore, might not have been aware of the race rituals involved in such a relationship between white men in executive position, and Black men as employees.

83 One of Shadd’s followers knifed and killed one of the people in Bibb’s camp. More on this in the following chapter.


Winks, Blacks in Canada, 206-207.

See Bibb’s report on the Shadd school, Voice, 15 July 1852.


In a previous work I examined the issue of income for Black 19th century Ontario teachers. Afua A.P. Cooper, “Black Teachers in Canada West, 1850-1870: A History” (M.A., University of Toronto, 1991).

The metaphor of the Voice of the Fugitive as Bibb’s literal voice is clear. When his paper declined, he lost an effective vehicle and voice to defend himself against the Shadd/Ward faction.

In Bibb’s “last will and testimony,” Mary Bibb, executor of the estate revealed that Bibb owed over forty pounds to various persons in Ontario and Michigan. He had borrowed this money to help keep his paper going during its lifetime. Such a revelation once again weakens Shadd’s charges against Bibb, for if he was so ‘rich,’ why did he have to borrow money from various persons to run his papers, and when the office of the Voice was destroyed, why did not Bibb use his great wealth to resurrect the paper? “Last Will and Testimony of Henry Bibb,” Probate Court of Sandwich, Essex County, 24 August 1854. Microfilmed at the Archives of Ontario.


Toronto Globe, 2 Nov. 1852.

Drew, Narratives of Fugitive Slaves, 325.

American Missionary (March 1861) 54. Shadd was by this time, again, in the good graces of the AMA; the organization was supporting the Chatham school with she was associated.

Foote attributes Ward’s change of heart to Shadd’s machinations. He casts Shadd in the role of Eve who tempted Adam. Whatever the case, Shadd wanted to have a newspaper but had no experience in that
regard. Ward had published his own paper in the States. Ward, perhaps desiring to have again a vehicle by which to air his views, agreed to help Shadd with the paper, and became the founder and first editor of the Freeman. It appears certain that Ward's opposition to the RHS began when he started his association with Shadd. For Foote's comments see the Freeman, 24 March 1854.

101 Freeman, 24 March 1853.

102 Peter Carlesimo's "Refugee Home Society" is the most authoritative, and only comprehensive, work on the RHS and Bibb's involvement with it. Carlesimo devotes a lengthy portion of his study to examining Shadd's and Ward's charges, and refuting them. In researching the RHS, I owe much to Mr. Carlesimo's investigation.

103 Winks, Blacks in Canada, 144.

104 Ward to Bibb, Voice, 4 Nov. 1852.

105 Freeman, 24 March 1853.

106 Class has rarely been used as an analytical tool in the writing of Black Canadian history. Race has played such a critical role in this history that scholars, have been seduced by the "metalanguage of race" in the construction of African Canadian history. It is now evident that gender, class, and sexuality give important meanings to race. These variables are now emerging as important categories of analysis in Canadian Black women's history. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "Afro-American Women and the Metalanguage of Race," Signs 17 (Winter 1992) 251-74; Carol B. Duncan, "Dey Give Me a House to Gather in the Children": Mothers and Daughters in the Spiritual Baptist Church," Canadian Woman Studies 18, 2&3 (1998) 128-131; Afua Cooper, "Constructing Black Women's Historical Knowledge, Atlantis, A Women's Studies Journal 25, 1 (Fall 2000) 39-50.


108 Pease & Pease, Black Utopia, 8.

109 Fred Landon, 'The Negro Migration of Canada after the Passing of the Fugitive Slave Act,' Journal of Negro History 5 (1920) 24-25.


111 William Newman, "Can the Fugitive Slaves Take Care of Themselves," the Freeman, 6 May 1854.


113 Pease & Pease, Black Utopia, 119-120.

114 Here the Freeman is deliberately ignoring and dismissing the work done by the Voice for over two
years in publicizing the condition of the ex-slaves who fled to the province. The Freeman denial of Bibb’s work is just another example of its ‘lapses in memory.’

115 Freeman, 24 June 1854.

116 Ibid., 24 March 1853.


122 When the AMA sent Miss Martin, a white missionary, to work among Blacks in Essex, Shadd stated that Miss Martin would not have any problems with the Association because she was white, implying that the AMA did not take kindly to Black freedom of thought. Shadd implied that it was because she was independent minded why the AMA dismissed her. Not once did she take responsibility for the fact that her dismissal stemmed from her duping of the Association. See “Is Miss Martin White,” the Freeman, 24 June 1854. Two years earlier Shadd was full of praise for the missionary effort in Ontario. Writing as one on the payroll of the AMA Shadd notes: “The missionary strength, at present, consists of but six preachers—active and efficient gentlemen, all of them, self-sacrificing in the last degree; and several women engaged in teaching, under the same auspices. Much, privation, suffering, opposition, and sorrow await the missionary in that field.” A Plea For Emigration, 16.

123 M.A.S[hadd] Cary to Whipple, 21 July 1862, 7 May 1864, AMA-ARC.


125 The school in question has often been viewed as one started by Shadd. However, it was founded and operated by Amelia Freeman, Shadd’s sister-in-law. Shadd was one of the teachers at the school and fund-raised on behalf of the school. Cooper, “Black Teachers in Canada West,” 65-68.

126 M.A.S. Cary to Whipple, 14 March 1860, AMA-ARC.

127 The CCSS was the missionary arm of the Anglican Church. With support from Britain, this organization sent missionary teachers to Canada West to open schools for Black children. However, once in Canada, the CCSS reconsidered its objectives and founded integrated schools, but continuing working among the fugitive population. For more discussion on the CCSS’ work among Ontario’s Blacks at midcentury see Afua A.P. Cooper’s Masters’ thesis, op cit. For CCSS’ support of the Freeman/Shadd Cary school see M.A.S. Cary to Whipple, 29 Jan. 1861. AMA-ARC.

128 M.A.S. Cary to Whipple, 17 Nov. 1862, AMA-ARC.
While I am contending that in the early years following the FSL there was a genuine need among the refugees as many arrived destitute, this need was ever present until the outbreak of the Civil War, when fugitive emigration to Canada evaporated. The destitute of many black emigrants made begging imperative. George Whipple of the AMA in January 1861, toured some of the black settlements of southwestern Ontario. A few weeks later he summarized the findings of his tour in a report to the American Missionary. Whipple outlined the necessity for begging. "It can be readily seen that men with families, as most of these settlers have, going into Canada destitute of means to pay for a night's lodging, or buy a loaf of bread, or an axe to work with, and surrounded by those were but lately in the same condition, must find it extremely difficult to sustain their families, clear off any number of acres of heavily timbered land, and make even the smallest annual payment for their farms....If anything is needed to increase their claim upon us, it may be found in the fact that they are thrown into this suffering condition by their efforts to escape from the evils brought upon them by a life long oppression in our country. It should not be taught derogatory to men thus circumstanced, that they are willing to receive as charity from friends, the clothing and bedding they need on their arrival in Canada, or that which they need for a longer time, to prepare their children for school. Aid of this kind, for the newly arrived fugitive in Canada, especially those who are sick and suffering, from the long and severe exposures to which they have been subjected, and to clothe their children suitably for school, will long be needed, and should be supplied with a liberal hand." American Missionary, March 1861, 54-55. And though I express the view that border towns bore the brunt of the crisis, inland towns like Toronto were existed in a 'state of emergency' from the enactment of the Fugitive Slave bill. So great was the need in Toronto, that the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada opened an office for refugee aid in 1855. Ian C. Pemberton, "The Anti-Slavery Society of Canada," Master's Thesis (University of Toronto, 1967) 76.

Pease & Pease, Black Utopia, 109-122.

Most of the prominent black abolitionists during this period could be described as 'political' abolitionists. That is, those who felt that the 'moral suasion' philosophy espoused by W.L. Garrison and the American Anti-Slavery Society had not being an effective method in bringing about the emancipation of the enslaved people. These activists felt that one of the most effective ways to do so, was by the ballot, hence the formation of political parties devoted to end slavery. See this discussion on my chapter as 'Bibb as Antislavery Lecturer.'

Winks, Blacks in Canada, 206.

Ibid., 207.


Shadd also started a quarrel with the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada over money. She had asked asked the ASSC for financial support for her paper, but the support never materialized. When she heard that the ASSC had instead chosen to support Frederick Douglass and his paper, she flew into a rage and initiated a long and bitter quarrel with the ASSC.

Rosemary Sadlier's work is one good example of this. Sadlier also parrots Shadd's allegations regarding the RHS in her book Mary Ann Shadd: Publisher, Editor, Teacher, Lawyer, Suffragette (Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1995). Sadlier's book on Shadd is part of the corpus of uncritical works on
Michael Dyson, in his recent biography of Martin Luther King, notes that one of his objectives in researching and writing the book was to ‘humanize’ King and rescue him and his image from the ‘sanitization’ currently taking place. Dyson states that King was a rhetorical warrior who was deeply committed to Black liberation. King fearlessly challenged America’s racist system, attacked the military and capitalist establishments, and spoke out against the global march of capital and its destructive impact of most of the world’s population. Yet today, various groups including the media, right-wing politicians have constructed an image of King as a ‘simple liberal Black leader who wanted Blacks and whites to get along.’ Because of political and ideological reasons, these groups prefer to promote King as an ‘integrationist’ and not the fierce and uncompromising warrior that he was. Dyson, *I May Not Get There with You: The True Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: The Free Press, 2000).

John Freeman Walls’ story is told by his descendant Dr. Bryan E. Walls, a Windsor dentist, in *The Road That Led to Somewhere, A Documented Novel about the Underground Railroad* (Windsor, Ont.: Olive Publishing, 1980).


Walls, *Road That Led to Somewhere*, see section titled “About the Author”; there is no pagination for this section.


Pease and Pease in *Black Utopia* examines these four colonization schemes. With the exception of King’s settlement of Buxton, the Peases’ discussion of the other three is highly derogatory. The Peases infer that because Black men were in charge of the RHS, Dawn, and Wilberforce, it ‘failed’; whereas, Buxton succeeded because, Rev. King, a white minister with the ‘rights skills and talents’ was at its helm. There is no discussion about King’s paternalism or the many sources of help that he had at his disposal. The Peases’ treatment of the Buxton settlement reads more like a praise poem to William King than a scholarly study. For a more favourable view of the RHS, Dawn, and Wilberforce, see Ripley, *BAP* 2: 12-15.


Ripley, *BAP* 2: 12.
Chapter 7.

_We need a printing press—for the press is the vehicle of thought—the ruler of opinion. We need a press, that we may be independent of those who have always oppressed us. We need a press that we may hang our banners on the outer wall, that all who pass by may read why we struggle, and what we struggle for._

*Voice of the Fugitive, 1 Jan. 1851.*

**THE VOICE OF THE FUGITIVE AND THE BEGINNING OF THE AFRICAN CANADIAN PRESS**

Of all the undertakings we associate with Henry Bibb, the *Voice of the Fugitive*, the newspaper he founded, edited, and published, is the one he is most remembered for. Without a doubt, the *Voice* was Bibb’s crowning achievement. His founding of the *Voice* placed him in the ranks of the notable “firsts” in Canada, for the paper has the distinction of being the first sustained Black newspaper in the country.\(^1\) As the founder of the Black press in Ontario and Canada, he left a lasting impression on Canadian journalism as a whole and the African Canadian press in particular. This chapter focuses on the *Voice of the Fugitive*, its role in the North American and Canadian Black community, its place in the Black press, and its place in Canadian and American Black history. The following discussion will address the founding of the *Voice*, the significance of Bibb to Black Canadian journalism, the paper’s journalistic platform, and the role of Mary Bibb and Theodore Holly in the shaping of the *Voice*.

The founding of the *Voice* marked a watershed in African Canadian and Ontario history, for it signalled that the Black community had started to see itself in a very self-
conscious manner. While Bibb pioneered the Black press in Canada, he had a foundation upon which to build because there was an already established tradition of Black and abolitionist journalism in the United States. Samuel Cornish and John Russworm laid the foundations for a Black press in North America with the publication in 1827 of the New York-based *Freedom’s Journal*. Russworm and Cornish as Black reformers-turned-editors, used the press to air their views, present their grievances and ideas, and those of the Black community, and to instruct their fellow Blacks in uplift lessons, and respond to, and refute white verbal attacks on Blacks. Indeed, both the *Freedom Journal* (which later evolved into the *Rights For All*) and the *Ram’s Horn*, which followed, came about because some editors of white-run New York newspapers had launched verbal abuse on the city’s and state’s Black communities and denied New York’s Black residents space in the respective papers to respond.²

By the time Bibb himself began publishing his own paper, several Black abolitionists had already forayed into the world of newspaper publishing: S.R. Ward published the *Impartial Citizen*, Henry Garnet came out with the *Clarion* and *National Watchman*, Theodore Wright published the *Colored American*, and Frederick Douglass edited and published the *North Star*, and *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*.³ Bibb himself had had prior experience in dealing with abolitionist and Black journals as he was a regular contributor to the *Signal of Liberty*, the *Emancipator*, the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, and the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, between 1846 to 1851.⁴

When Bibb came over to Ontario, then, he already had journalistic experience. Douglas Fetherling, commenting on the expansion of the newspaper business in Canada,
states that the period in which Bibb established his paper—the middle decades of the nineteenth century—was the era of the "great proliferation" of newspapers in Central Canada, including those established by distinct ethnic groups. Bibb launched the *Voice* as part of his community-building program, since there were no newspapers serving the Black community, and he used it as a critical weapon in his struggle for Black freedom.

Most of the white media reported the news on Blacks in a pejorative manner and constructed a negative image of Blacks. They also opposed Black migration to the province. Blacks as a whole were therefore left without a voice and an effective tool with which to shape and create favourable images of themselves. Bibb determined that the *Voice* would help rectify the situation.

The *Voice of the Fugitive* originated at the Sandwich Colored Convention of November 1850. Echoing Russwurm and Cornish who in 1827, at the launch of *Freedom's Journal*, stated that "We wish to plead our cause," and that for "too long others have spoken for us," the delegates at this convention, led by Bibb, spoke passionately about the founding of a press in Canada. The following resolution indicates that the delegates understood the power of the press.

*Whereas*, We as a people, have a great work to accomplish and we have no instrument that we can use with more effect than the public press—as we struggle against opinions, our warfare lies in the field of thought, embodying ourselves to field, we need a printing press—for the press is the vehicle of thought—the ruler of opinions. We need a press, that we may be independent of those who have always oppressed us—we need a press that we may hang our banners on the outer wall, that all who pass by may read why we struggle, and what we struggle for.

*Resolved*, That we make immediate effort to have a
newspaper established in our midst, which shall be the advocate of the colored people of Canada West. 9

As if to underscore their lack of a press, the delegates then voted to have the proceedings of the meeting presented to the editor of the Essex County Freeman for publication. In this same month, Mary Bibb, “recognizing that black Canadians alone could not sustain the publication,”10 began using her network of antislavery friends in the United States, to gain subscribers for the paper. Writing to Gerrit Smith, she requested, “Will you aid us by sending as many subscribers as convenience will permit,” because “there are hundreds of Slaves coming here daily....”11 Along with her letter, she sent a copy of the prospectus to Smith.

The vision for the paper was expansive. The Voice was designed not only for North American readers, but also for Europeans and had a long-term objective of evolving from a bi-monthly to a weekly publication. It was to cost one dollar a year. Calling on supporters to become subscribers, agents, and donors, Bibb advised that U.S. writers send their letters to Detroit, and those from Canada and England to Sandwich. On 1 January 1851 the first issue rolled off the press. Its objectives and journalistic platform were clearly articulated.

We expect, with the aid of good Providence, to advocate the cause of human liberty in the true meaning of that term. We shall advocate the immediate and unconditional abolition of chattel slavery everywhere, but especially on the American soil. We shall also persuade, as far as it may be practicable, every oppressed person of color in the United States to settle in Canada, where the laws make no distinction among men, based on complexion, and upon whose soil “no slave can breathe.” We shall advocate the claims of the American slave to the Bible, from whom it has ever been withheld. We shall advocate the cause of temperance and moral reform generally. The cause of
education shall have a prominent space in our columns. We shall advocate the claims of agricultural pursuits among our people, as being the most certain road to independence and self-respect.¹²

The *Voice* also opposed the annexation of Canada to the United States, and it sought to devote itself to being the voice of both the refugee fleeing slavery and of the free Black emigrants. It also committed itself to speak on diverse subjects.

We shall...endeavor¹³ to lay before our readers the true condition of our people in Canada, of their hopes and prospects for the future—and while we intend this to be a mouth piece for the refugees in Canada...yet we mean to speak out our sentiments as a *freeman* upon all subjects that come within our sphere....

The abolition of slavery, emigration of free Blacks to Canada, religion, temperance, education, and agriculture all figured prominently as part of Bibb’s elevation platform and journalistic goals. The *Voice* also intended to convey “the editor’s concern with the issues of the early 1850s, [especially those which pertain to Blacks] particularly the arrival and condition of fugitive slaves and the proslavery American policies that drove blacks to Canada.”¹⁴

The *Voice*’s logo, one that was used by several Ontario newspapers, was the crest of the British Crown—two animals—one a lion, the other a unicorn, surrounding a shield.¹⁵ This logo symbolized Bibb’s and other Blacks’ commitment and loyalty to Canada and ‘all things British.’ It also signified that Blacks found rest ‘beneath the feet of the British Lion.’ On the shield was the motto, written in Latin, and reflecting the religiosity of the editor: “He is the Freeman whom the truth makes free, and all are Slaves beside.” The motto resonates with the intertwining of the themes of slavery and
freedom, themes pertinent to the establishment of the *Voice*.

The paper began life auspiciously. It listed 28 agents, Black and white, in different parts of the United States and Canada. They included well-known activists in the Black freedom struggle such as Martin Delany in Pittsburgh, J.T. Fisher in Toronto, Charles Langston of Columbus, Ohio, and from New York, the editor of Bibb’s autobiography, Lucius Matlack. Bibb also had distributors across the Atlantic in the persons of Henry H. Garnet, Josiah Henson, and James Pennington, who were circulating the paper in Britain. Lesser-known personalities included James E. Grant, a Chatham schoolteacher, and a John Miles, possibly a relative of Mary Bibb, of Albany, New York.16

Reasons for the Founding of the *Voice*

The *Voice* was established with the twin aim of agitating for the immediate abolition of slavery and for organizing uplift in the Black communities. This was in keeping with the general objectives of the early Black press as Frankie Hutton, historian of the antebellum Black press noted. Douglass’ *North Star* was billed as an antislavery journal, but “its messages were concerned with a variety of topics, many focusing on the uplift of free blacks to their rightful status.”17 Black editors strove for both emancipation of their enslaved fellows and the elevation of the free Blacks like themselves. “Uplift and emancipation were often seen as the opposite sides of the same coin.”18 In fact, one commentator on the Black press, Martin Dann, has theorized that these papers were not written for the slave population but for the ex-slaves and free Black citizens largely in
Northern states, who were becoming upwardly mobile.19

Bibb came into Ontario with a very clear aim of leading the Black community, at least that of the southwestern portion of the province. The Black population there was rapidly expanding because of the Fugitive Slave law. Friends and foes of Blacks were interested in knowing how they were doing in Canada, and a newspaper was the best way to disseminate such information. The Black people needed also to know what was going on in the rest of the world, especially in the United States and Canada. Fugitives now living as free persons in the province, and the people of freeborn origin needed "uplift" guidance, or so Black editors thought. Black leaders felt that the masses had to be instructed in things like moral reform and how to educate and elevate themselves. And as Hutton notes, Black editors consciously saw themselves, given their strategic positioning, as the leaders in the best position to instruct their fellows in uplift.20

The founding of the Voice was also in response to a very real need in the community given that Blacks were under attack from the white news media. Even though the British government had offered Canada as a haven for the fleeing fugitive, white public opinion—in high and low places—generally opposed the Black presence and the continued Black migration. While many white Canadians, many of them recent emigrants from Britain, could tolerate the few thousand 'indigenous' Blacks scattered across the Canadas and the eastern colonies, they found the mass migration of American Blacks into the country was harder to swallow. Governor-General Elgin captured this sense of alarm in a letter to one of his colleagues, where he wrote that because of the FSL
Canada would likely “be flooded with blackies….” White men and women also feared that an increase in the Black population could lead to “amalgamation” or the dilution [read impurity/pollution] of white “blood.” Implicit in this kind of thinking was the white fear that Black men would want to bed white women. Hear one such view: “…we commiserate the white denizens of Canada on the prospect of having their country overrun, and their whole society deteriorated by sable runaways of every degree.”

Black migration would lead to a destruction of white society and civilization, or so the thinking went. The attitude of many white Canadians toward Blacks had been informed by their imperial and colonial experiences as British subjects and citizens. From this context evolved a white perception which saw Black people as second-class humans; in fact, white citizens often relegated Blacks to sub-human categories. In addition, at the same time that many American Blacks sought to emigrate to Canada, Britain was still a slaveholding kingdom; and the colonies that eventually came to make up a large part of Canada had since the beginning of their early written history practised Black and Native slavery. So there was an already established tradition of expressions of Black inferiority/white superiority in the British Empire, which gave white Canadians a context in which to form and develop negative attitudes toward Black people. Being neighbours to another set of whites, who held Blacks in bondage, also helped white Canadians shape and articulate their anti-Black racial attitudes and assumptions.

Even though, a ‘tame’ kind of anti-Americanism fuelled Canadian reception
toward the so-called fugitive Black, this did not mean that these Canadians were pro-
Black. They managed to espouse anti-Americanism and afrophobia at the same time. It
was the white press that led the assault in “Canadian Negro hate,” as Samuel Ringgold
Ward termed it. In several white newspapers, Blacks were presented as undesirable
settlers. They were described as rapists, criminals, and lunatics. Even their humanity was
questioned when one politician called us orangutans. Therefore, when Bibb, and others,
noted at the Sandwich convention, that “we struggle against opinion,” and “we need a
press, that we may be independent of those who have always oppressed us,” they were
very much aware that newspapers were formulators of public opinions, and that the
white papers used their power to verbally abuse Black people, to create false images
about them, and in so doing contribute in a very real way to their continued oppression.
These verbal abuses sometimes were translated into physical assaults, as whites
sometimes attacked Blacks, beat them up, and destroyed their homes and properties.

Historian Jason Silverman comments on the afrophobia prevalent in nineteenth-
century Ontario white newspapers. “As a vehicle of public opinion,” he astutely
observes, “newspapers were quickly employed by Canadian whites for catharsis; that is,
in lieu of an illegal physical attack, it was much easier and convenient, not to mention
legal, to launch a written assault upon the black fugitives.” Silverman continues:
“Letters, editorials, and advertisements all revealed a blatant and burgeoning
negrophobia on the part of white Canadians.” He concludes that “the more readily
apparent the fugitives became in Canadian society, the more intense and vehement the
anti-black sentiment became in the white press....with few friends in the white press, the fugitive slaves could hope for at best, ambivalence, and at worst, vicious racist propaganda.\textsuperscript{30}

Examples of this “vicious racist propaganda” came from the pen of one “W.C.,” who during 1851-52 was a regular contributor to (perhaps even the editor of) the \textit{Canada Oak}. W.C. commented that the Black immigrant was “a sensual animal out to defile the fragile flower of white womanhood.”\textsuperscript{31} Clearly W.C. was concerned with miscegenation and invoked the stereotype of the Black male as a rapist out to deflower the vulnerable, white woman. The sexual terrain as the site where whites, males in particular, were to play out their racial tensions regarding Black people, in particular Black men, would be used over and over again by Canadian whites in their verbal assaults on Black people.\textsuperscript{32}

The Hamilton \textit{Spectator} between 1851-53 cast Blacks in the role of criminal, and argued that slavery was “the best thing for them.” Meanwhile, in 1851, the Toronto \textit{Colonist} called for a poll tax to be imposed on all Blacks.\textsuperscript{33} Edwin Larwill, a British emigrant, self-defined afrophobe and white supremacist, soon joined the anti-Black crusade. Larwill, whom Jane and William Pease describe as “violently and actively anti-Negro,” as a member of the Canada West legislature led the opposition to the founding of the Elgin settlement and called for the deportation of all “Africans” to the United States.\textsuperscript{34} After his unsuccessful campaign against the founding of Elgin, Larwill turned his attention to the Blacks in the Windsor border region. He did so by way of the Amherstburg \textit{Courier}. As with many prominent haters of Black people, Larwill’s chief concern seems to have been that the emigration of Black people to Ontario would result
in racial mixing, or “amalgamation.” The Voice in its inaugural issue took up the cudgels against Larwill and “Canadian Negro hate.”

The Amherstburg Courier, of Dec. 7th, contains two slanderous communications against the character of the people of color who are settling in Canada. One of the writers signs his name Edwin Larwill, while the other is a little too modest to plank down his name under such a compilation of base slander and falsehood.... These writers first attempt to excite a public prejudice against the settlement of colored people, and their ground of complaint is that we are an inferior race, and that we are ignorant, idle, &c. &c. But to cap the climax, they seem to be awfully afraid, that if the colored people should be allowed to settle in Canada, that the result will be that an amalgamation must take place; they will marry with the whites, and both races will be degraded, and what then? Nothing short of a slave holding philosopher could tell what would be the result.

Rhetorically, Bibb asked why whites would want to marry Blacks about whom “they have already said were ignorant, idle, vicious, and degraded.” “Indeed,” he adds, “we think it would be paying their daughters a very poor compliment to suppose such a thing if the colored people were half as worthless as these writers have represented them.”

Larwill, who seemed determine to make a career as a traducer of Black people, was also ensconced in the editor’s chair at the Chatham Journal and he used his position to mount further attacks on the Black population. As the Journal’s editor, his diatribe was not new; but it showed the extent of his depravity and his hatred of Black people, whom he placed in a sub-human category—the link between the orangutan and the monkey.

White lawyer, politician, British emigrant, and land baron, Colonel John Prince,
though initially (supposedly) sympathetic to the Black migrants, also joined the afrophobia crusade. By 1857, Prince was saying that Blacks were “extremely demoralized, repaying with ingratitude, with pilfering, theft and other vices and crimes the kindness they have received....” Prince advocated the removal of Blacks from white society. However, perhaps knowing how ridiculous and possibly ‘unBritish’ it would sound to call for mass deportation of Blacks to the United States, Prince suggested that all Blacks be sent to an isolated place—such as the Manitoulin Islands. The hostile attitude on the part of the white media toward Black people led Silverman to conclude that “the fugitives were assailed in this manner from virtually every white newspaper in Canada West.” These anti-Black views were not held by a few ‘crackpots’ or ‘ignorant’ whites but by influential and powerful people. People like Larwill, Prince, and W.C., as members of a political, social, journalistic, and economic elite, represented “a...fundamental and dangerous mentality permeating white Canadian society.”

The Black settler—whether a fleeing fugitive from slavery, a freeborn person escaping proscriptive Black laws, or the person who had escaped slavery but was living in freedom for a long time—must have been perturbed and angry at the pro-Southern and pro-planter bias that the white editors and the contributors displayed in their papers. Those Black people who were born in the province or who had family roots going back several generations must have been particularly perturbed. Furthermore, they lacked an appropriate vehicle of response. There is no indication that the editors of the papers allowed any letters of response from Blacks, though it is certain that Blacks themselves penned letters of rebuttal to newspapers. Generally speaking, as Silverman observes,
“black appeals for justice went unheeded in the white Canadian press.”

Anti-black statements continued unabated, and the white readership quickly endorsed the opinions of prejudiced reporters and editors. As justifiable black dissatisfaction towards the white press increased in fervour, the fugitive blacks assumed the initiative themselves, by their creation of a viable and vocal Black Canadian press.⁴⁰

The *Voice* emerged out of this context of white hostility and assaults. It arose out of the need of a people to defend themselves against vituperative attacks from hostile white neighbours. This had been the case with the *Ram’s Horn*. The birth of this paper came about because once again a prominent New York newspaper, the *Sun*, initiated a series of attacks against the city’s Black community. When Willis Hodges, the future owner of the *Ram’s Horn*, wrote a letter to the paper countering the attack, the editor sent the letter back to Hodges saying the pages of the *Sun* were meant for white men. Hodges then teamed up with Thomas Van Rasselaer to found the *Ram’s Horn*.⁴¹

Of crucial importance was that Bibb realized that it was not Blacks themselves who were creating images of themselves. Instead, as he put it, “we struggle against opinions.” That Blacks were not in charge of shaping and creating their own public identity, and of fostering positive images of themselves was the major reason behind the creation of an alternative to the white press and opinion. A Black newspaper marked an important step in Black consciousness. With it Blacks would build and create healthy images of themselves, and also wage war against oppressive opinions. With a press, they would decide and determine how they would perceive themselves and be perceived by others.
While oppression clearly provided a context for the founding of Black newspapers, it was not the only impetus. As more and more Blacks in free communities became increasingly literate, a collective effort (bolstered by lack of positive representation in the white press) demanded that Blacks establish their own press. The Black press, like the schools, churches, and temperance societies that Blacks founded, were part of the institution-building process that Black people engendered as they became a ‘community.’

The name for the paper that Bibb chose is telling: *Voice of the Fugitive*. He identified with the fugitives, being, technically, one himself. This paper was to express the thoughts of the fugitives, to give them a voice. As the editors of the *Black Abolitionists Papers* observe, “the *Voice* conveyed the editor’s concern with the issues of the early 1850s, particularly the arrival and condition of fugitive slaves and the proslavery American policies that drove blacks to Canada.” Bibb also gave equal space and recognition to those Blacks of freeborn origin. Indeed, his wife and press assistant, Mary Miles, was a free-born woman. But the drama in the decade of the 50s was not centred on free Blacks—though any issue that affected the slave population also affected them. The issue that threatened to divide the American nation was slavery, and the frequent escape of slaves was what propelled the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave bill. It was these runaways who were fleeing slavery, pursued by federal marshals and slave catchers, who left the homes with nothing in their flight, and who needed the most assistance once they arrived in Canada. The fugitive component of the population, even
in a free Canada, needed the most help as they had the least resources. Bibb recognized this. As we know, Bibb had a special bond to the enslaved and knew slavery intimately. He therefore had a special feeling of empathy toward runaways and took every opportunity afforded him to assist them in constructing a new life as "refugees" and "fugitives" in a new country.44

Still, as Bernell Tripp, notes even though most of the Black newspaper publishers and editors sorrowed for and agitated on behalf of the slaves, they recognized that it was the free people, many of whom lived in the nominally free states and Canada, who read their papers. Many of the issues that the editors dealt with, such as education and temperance, were aimed at free persons. Although these editors would have loved to spread temperance and education among the enslaved, they wisely recognized that this goal was beyond their grasp. Editors like Bibb therefore agitated on behalf of the enslaved and preached uplift to the free. Theirs was a double mission. As Frankie Hutton notes, these editors preached to a "rather beleaguered, free people striving for vindication, uplift, and...for acceptance."45

As the Voice entered its third year, Bibb changed the name to Voice of the Fugitive and Canadian Independent. The paper was published under this name until its office was burnt down in October 1853. The Canadian Independent component of the name points to Bibb’s awareness and recognition that even though the majority of Blacks came from the United States, Canada was now their home and it was important that “our conditions in Canada might be better understood by the whole civilized
Journalistic Platform

In the founding of the Voice, Bibb was propelled by a sense of history, and purpose. He clearly saw the paper as a weapon to be used in the struggle for Black freedom and human rights. To better understand these thoughts, it is necessary to examine the content of the paper from its editorials to the most mundane advertisements. The editorials reflected the paper’s major themes of abolitionism and uplift. Editorials condemned slavery, slave-catching activities, the pro-slavery policies of the American government, and reported on slave catching cases that rocked the American nation such as the Jerry rescue and the Shadrack Minkins case. “The Christiana Hero is in Canada” was an editorial that informed readers that William Parker, the fugitive slave whose defence of himself and other fugitives in Pennsylvania led to the death of his former master, Edward Gorsuch, was now living in Canada West. Parker was a guest at Bibb’s residence for a few days before he settled in Buxton. The Voice reported on the Underground Railroad activities and gave notice of recently arrived fugitives, three of whom turned out to be Bibb’s own brothers. Bibb also used the pages of the Voice to write letters to his old masters. He wrote to Albert Sibley and Daniel Lane and denounced both as unChristian villains. When Madison Garrison, a slave trader who had sold Bibb and his first wife into slavery, died, Bibb relayed the news in the paper under the heading “Another Soul Driver Gone.”

The Voice had a vision of how Blacks should behave once living as free people: obtain education, adhere to temperance, become landowners, and practise Christianity.
The editor devoted large spaces to temperance, education, and, of course, agriculture. Education was the means by which Blacks would “be strengthened and elevated,” and agriculture “was the most certain road to independence and self-respect.” The *Voice* was also unapologetically emigrationist. Bibb was a strident supporter of emigration to Canada, and used the columns of the *Voice* to advocate and trumpet it. In a bold appeal to all African Americans, Bibb told them to migrate to Canada as they would never be free in the United States. Canada was the favoured place for emigration, though Jamaica ran a close second. Haitian emigration was promoted in the later years. At the North American Convention of Black people held in Toronto September 1851, the theme was Canadian emigration. Bibb also attacked Canadian racism head on by writing editorials on “Colorphobia,” and serializing in three parts Ringgold Ward’s “Canadian Negro Hate.” Emancipation Day celebrations on 1 August were also reported in the paper.

Blacks attained visibility in the columns of the *Voice* in a way that they never figured in the white media. Reports on marriages, births, deaths, parties, festivals, and church affairs filled its pages. Black achievement in education, law, agriculture, and religion was a cause for celebration. It also covered women’s antislavery conventions. Poems advocating equal rights for women, reports on women’s dress (the new “bloomer”), and women doing “non-traditional” work were published. The *Voice* also broadcasted the call for women’s antislavery conventions, and reported on the proceedings.

A host of other miscellaneous articles and reports fill the paper. Like all newspapers of the period, editors relied on such items as fillers—to fill out columns that
could not be fully filled with news and opinions. The subjects of these articles ranged from “What Will Ruin Children,” to the benefits of hydropathy, to reports on the reduction of the French army, the proceedings of the Canadian parliament, to discussions on free trade between Canada and the United States, and to the migration of Black Michigamians to California. Particular attention was paid to giving out advice and news on Canadian agriculture and resources. For example, information on the price, location, and quality of “Canada lands” was sprinkled liberally in issues of the *Voice*. Advice on how to grow wheat, potatoes, and flax was also given; the market for Canadian produce was publicized, and the *Voice* regularly gave notice on where jobs could be found.\(^5^2\) In spite of the “colorphobia” that Bibb found in Canada West, he constantly sang the praises of the province, often describing it as the best location for human settlement.\(^5^3\) Finally, advertisements figured as an important part of the *Voice*’s content. Let us now examine in detail the six editorial platforms from which the *Voice* spoke.

**Abolitionism**

Perhaps no issue grabbed the attention of the public, both antislavery and proslavery, as did the hunt and capture of alleged fugitive slaves. On the 15 February 1851, Shadrach Minkins (or Wilkins), an escaped slave who had been living in Boston as a free man, was apprehended by federal marshals bent on enforcing the FSL. Minkins was rescued by Black antislavery activists and spirited away to Montreal.\(^5^4\) The Shadrach affair “was the first organized challenge to the Fugitive Slave Law.”\(^5^5\) The American government quickly responded to this “lawlessness” by issuing a proclamation ordering the arrest of all who were involved in the rescue. The 26 February 1851
editorial of the *Voice* dealt with Fillmore's proclamation. Bibb took issue with the American government's enforcement of the FSL. Indeed he compared Fillmore's decision to "carry out, by force of arms, the fugitive law, as he therein gives instructions to the various military bodies in the vicinity to assist in the recapture of the said slave, who had been set at liberty by the populace; and all persons who lent their assistance in effecting the escape, are to be 'immediately arrested and prosecuted according to the law,'" with the despotism of Russia and Austria. He defends the acts of the rescuers, analyzes the paradox of the epithet "lawless" used to describe the rescuers, and predicts that the enforcement of the FSL would lead to the dissolution of the Union:

In the proclamation the persons of color are alluded to as chiefly composing the "lawless" mob. We admit the lawlessness of our people—they are outlaws—the only way in which the law recognizes them is in punishment; they are beyond the pale of its protection, consequently they cannot be censured for opposing its execution. On a whole, we are rather rejoiced than sad at the issue of this proclamation, for it will have the effect of bringing matters to a crisis more speedily.

The Shadrach affair would not go away. The *Voice*'s editorial for 12 March 1851 revealed that weeks after the rescue, Boston was still buzzing with the excitement of it. "We learn from the Boston papers that great excitement prevails in that city growing out of the escape of Shadrach, who slipped through the fingers of Boston souldrivers, and escaped to Canada where they dare not come in pursuit." The Shadrach affair revealed the vulnerability of those runaways who had been living in the North for a while, the commitment of the federal government to enforce the FSL, and the equal commitment of antislavery forces, particularly Blacks, to challenge and fight the government in that
regard.

If the Shadrach affair lay bare the “despotism” of the American government in enforcing the FSL and pandering to slaveholders, the Christiana Resistance or “Riot” revealed the deep fissures between proslavery and antislavery forces and the length both sides would go to stick fast to their respective positions. No group recognized this better than Black editors. In September 1851, a slave-catching posse composed of federal marshals and a Maryland slaveowner, Edward Gorsuch, raided the settlement of Christiana in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. This posse was bent on recovering four of Gorsuch’s slaves who had fled his ownership several years earlier. The runaways, forewarned of the approach of the slavecatchers, prepared themselves with guns, knives, and farming tools. They secreted themselves in the home of William Parker, one of Gorsuch’s slaves and the leader of the antislavery forces. On the morning of 15 September both groups faced each other. Gorsuch “commanded” his slaves to return with him. They of course refused. The federal marshal, feeling a great unease, called a retreat. Despite the warnings of the marshal, Gorsuch refused to budge. It has been said that he stated he would rather die than leave his “property” behind. The runaways also determined to die rather than be re-enslaved. A melee ensued in which Gorsuch was pounded in the head by Parker. Gorsuch fell into a stupor, and at this point, the Black women of Christiana “put an end to him.” The rest of the slave catching posse beat a hasty retreat.58

The Christiana resistance sent shock waves throughout the country. Blacks had killed a white man. Fugitive slaves had defied a slaveowner and the government. From
the position of the proslavery forces, the country had been thrown into chaos. From the perspective of the abolitionist forces, the Christiana affair dramatically underscored the intransigence of the proslavery forces, including the government, and the determination of fugitives to give their life, or take the life of another, if necessary, rather than give up their freedom.59

The courts naturally took the side of the government, and the Christiana resisters were found guilty of “aggravated riot and murder.” It is important to note that some whites were also tried as “resisters.” However, William Parker and a few others never made it to trial because a few days after the resistance, Parker and others fled to Canada West. Parker “stumbled” around in Kingston and Toronto for a few months going from odd job to odd job, grieving for his wife and child whom he was forced to leave behind. Friendless and lonely, he was soon assisted by the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada. The Society, under its president, Michael Willis, sponsored Parker as a resident at the Elgin settlement by paying the down payment for the land. Both Parker and the Society felt that it was better for him to leave Toronto, as jobs were scarce there town, and Buxton offered better prospects.60 In Buxton, Parker could take up his old occupation of farming. In June 1852, on his way to Buxton, Parker stopped for a few days in Windsor in June 1852 where he stayed as a guest of the Bibbs. Henry Bibb collected a “purse” for Parker and introduced him to abolitionists on both sides of the Detroit River. If the citizens had not heard about the Christiana Resistance from either the white Canadian media, or the American press of all stripes, then they got more than ample knowledge of it when Bibb used the Resistance as the subject of his editorial on 3 June 1852. William
Parker, though despised by the American government and proslavery forces, was hailed as a hero by Blacks and abolitionists. Because of his bravery at Christiana, he gained immense stature. For one of such fame to come and settle in Canada West was a boon to the Black and abolitionist communities. Bibb compared Parker to the great African and Haitian heroes, Hannibal and Toussaint L’Ouverture, and the ‘father’ of American ‘freedom,’ George Washington. With great irony, Bibb also compared the Christiana Resistance to the American Revolution where Americans “patriots” faced British “tyrants.”

[William Parker] is said to have carried out the sublime idea, that “resistance to tyrants is obedience to God.” Suppose he is guilty of the charge, under the circumstances of the case, will any patriotic philanthropist blame him? We say no. If we had thousands of such colored men scattered over the nominally free States, the Fugitive Slave Bill would soon become a dead letter. This man, in our estimation, deserves the admiration of a Hannibal, a Toussaint L’Ouverture, or a George Washington. A nobler defence was never made in behalf of liberty on the plains of Lexington, Concord, or Bunker Hill than was put forth by William Parker at Christiana. We bid him with his family, and all others, from that hypocritical Republic welcome to this our gracious land of adoption, where no slavehunter dare to step his feet in search for a slave.61

The Voice antislavery stance was not restricted to issuing editorials on the drama of slave escapes. It constantly reported the arrival of fugitives, and, noting that free Blacks themselves were also “slaves” in the United States, made much of the arrival of free people also. “A family of the name of Cooper has also arrived in this village from VT., who are settling down here.”62 In a news item titled “Still They Come,” the Voice nicely incapsulates the entry into Canada West of both escapees from slavery and free Blacks from the nominally free states. “Almost every day we have men arriving here
from the land of Slavery, and many of our oppressed brethren are moving in from the northern and western states buying lands and settleing [sic] in Canada. The attention given to free persons underlines the paper’s commitment also to free persons of colour and to Bibb’s emigrationist program. In the following quote, one gets a glimpse of an aspect of Bibb’s nationalist vision. He clearly saw that for the entire race to advance, free Blacks and those of slave origin must unite and work together. He also understood that even though free Blacks faced oppression in the States, their oppression was not as great as that of those in bondage. He realized that both the individual and community would gain from the skills that free Blacks had to offer:

Numbers of free colored people are arriving in Canada from Pennsylvania, Maryland, the District of Columbia, Ohio, and Indiana. 16 passed by Windsor to Chatham on the 7th inst. and 20 on the 8th inst. And the cry is still they come.

We are really much gratified to see the free colored of the States, casting their lot in with their fugitive brethren here in Canada. They are needed to lend a hand to advance our interests and position in Canada, especially as they have had the opportunities for literary and pecuniary advantages that our more unfortunate brethren have not; and those two qualifications would not be amiss here at the present time, for the community, nor the individuals who possess them.

Henry Bibb also organized and kept abreast of planned antislavery meetings in the Canadas. In a report titled “Great Anti-Slavery Meeting in Canada,” Bibb informed his readers of the meeting held in February 1851 by the future leaders of the Canadian Anti-Slavery Society at Toronto’s city hall. Bibb was one of the founding members to this group and sat on its executive board. The bulk of the piece is lifted from the Globe but Bibb inserted his own preamble: “Down with the bloody system! [slavery] bring down
the execration of the whole civilized world against it, and the work is done!” Bibb himself helped organize three antislavery conventions in Canada West: the Sandwich Convention of 1850, the North American Convention held in Toronto, in September 1851, and the Amherstburg Convention of June 1853. At the Toronto convention, Bibb gave the keynote address, and as Roger Hite perceptively declares, this convention “was the first in Bibb’s plan to create an international organization of Black people.” Addressing themselves to the theme question “What is the future of the black race on the North American Continent?” delegates, under Bibb’s leadership, saw agriculture as the remedy for Black degradation. At the Amherstburg meeting the emigration of Blacks from the United States took centre stage and became the central issue for the delegates. These two meetings were landmark events in Bibb’s antislavery activities and in the evolution of his abolitionist and nationalist rhetoric.

Temperance

Temperance was a central component of the uplift agenda and most reformers of the nineteenth century embraced it. Reformers like Bibb felt that alcohol was the true cause of the destruction of society’s morals, the cause of crime, and family breakdown, and expended much energy in promoting temperance. A drunkard and one who constantly ‘imbibed’ harmed not only his family and society, but sinned against God’s law also. “Intemperance is a great and fearful evil involving every crime against God and man....” Upon arrival in Sandwich, Bibb continued with the temperance work begun in his Michigan days. In fact, advocates from both the Sandwich/Windsor area and Detroit often attended each other’s temperance meetings. In the first issue of the Voice,
the proceedings of a December meeting of the Temperance Society of Sandwich, which was a Black organization, were recorded. It noted that “a large meeting of the colored inhabitants of Sandwich assembled in the stone barracks, to appoint officers for their Temperance Society…. and that following the reading of “the temperance pledge...animating addresses were...delivered by Messrs. Bibb, Brown, Bullard, Ward, and others.” Several people afterwards, “signed the pledge..." the following persons were...elected [as] officers of the society:—Robert Ward, president; Wm. Harrison, vice-president; and H. Bibb, secretary.” And “the following resolutions were then offered by Mr. H. Bibb, which were adopted by the society”:

*Resolved*, That we believe that two-thirds of the crimes committed, and the suffering that we have witnessed among our people, have grown out of the practice of intemperance.

*Resolved*, That this society will meet on the first Monday evening in every month, to labor for the advancement of temperance....

Authur Williams, Secretary."

The Temperance Society of Sandwich advertised its festival where “plenty of good cold water and lemonade” would be served. Invitations were extended to Detroit activists to join in the celebration.

For most Black reformers and white missionaries who worked among Ontario’s Black population, temperance took on almost the same urgency as the immediate abolition of slavery, and reformers consciously strove to root out intemperance wherever it could be found among the free Black population. As Jan Noel observes, “In mid-nineteenth-century Canada, Britain, and the United States, temperance, abolitionism, the
universal education of the poor, and sometimes free trade tended to be supported by the same group of liberal-to-radical Protestants, often members of sects such as the Quakers or groups which had experienced religious revivals." In the Black community of Essex and neighbouring counties, temperance meetings were common among reformers, and even children were encouraged to ‘take the pledge.’ Missionary E.E. Kirkland, writing from New Canaan, informed Bibb that “nearly all the [Black] people of this settlement abstain entirely from the use of intoxicating drinks. He noted that even the children had signed the temperance pledge and were fervent in their devotion to the cause.”

The *Voice* used its pages to actively support temperance.

We have attended two temperance meetings this week, one in the New Canaan Settlement, and one in Sandwich. We had the pleasure of finding almost every man, woman, and child in the New Canaan settlement devotedly attached to the temperance society, and the cheering response which they gave to our sentiments in meeting, was an ample reward for our visit to them….The cause here is onward. No rumseller can live in this vicinity by the patronage of colored people. He would soon be starved out as poor as a rat on a sand bar.

So seriously did the *Voice* take temperance that it advertised for a full-time temperance worker to crusade ‘in the field.’ One such advertisement, “Able Advocate of Temperance Wanted,” stressed the role of temperance in the campaign to raise “the moral elevation of the refugee slaves in Canada….” Noting the need for “an efficient travelling temperance lecturer and agent,” the ad explained:

not that the colored people are more intemperate than others, for there is great need of such labor here among
all classes; so much so, that we believe intemperance to be one of the greatest obstructions here to our elevation. We will take the responsibility of saying that if an experienced laborer in this reform would come well recommended to us, and will take the field under our direction, we will hold ourselves responsible for his being liberally sustained for two or three months.

We have reason to believe that the friends of humanity will support us in advocating this cause.\textsuperscript{74}

Significantly, Bibb and the reformers of the Refugee Home Society made adherence to temperance a criterion for membership in the Society. The urgency with which Bibb and others approached temperance gives one the impression that Blacks, or the Black refugees at least, were great imbibers of alcohol. Bibb believed "intemperance to be one of the greatest obstructions" to Black progress and stated that drunkenness was responsible for much of the sufferings of Blacks. I do not know how Bibb came to this conclusion. He knew that Black behaviour was watched and that the slightest mistakes Blacks made, if known by whites, would be attributed to their 'base character.' A Black drunkard would be used by whites to represent the entire race, likewise a Black murderer. The discomfort of being under the white gaze must have prompted Bibb to make his assertions. Tamari Kitossa's observation on this point is pertinent: "The Africans who came to Canada had much to prove. Against stereotyped images of being indolent, sexually and substance intemperate...many applied themselves to virtues of frugality, hard work, and above all, temperance."\textsuperscript{75}

In addition, temperance as a moral issue swept North American society during this period and Black reformers like their white counterparts felt "old man rum" was destroying the moral fibre of society.\textsuperscript{76} Therefore, Blacks were doubly motivated to be
temperate. Being under the white gaze, they had to prove that they were respectable and sober citizens; and the powerful temperance pulse that was throbbing in the wider society also served as motivator. Bibb at some level may also have felt that the ex-slaves had a weakness for alcohol. Having experienced slavery, he relates in his narrative that on weekends slaveholders deliberately got Blacks to drink alcohol to the point of forcing it on them. Bibb's analysis was that slaveholders purposely got their slaves drunk in order to render the slaves more harmless, and, in so doing made, them forget their oppression. Bibb's experience on the plantation must have figured prominently in his campaign to make temperance a cornerstone of the lives of the refugees who settled in the province.

Frankie Hutton argues that even though there is no empirical evidence to show that Blacks as a whole were intemperate, Blacks nonetheless took up the temperance sword, in conjunction with the rest of white society, simply because they saw this as a vehicle toward respectability. Blacks, as perhaps the most degraded group in society, saw temperance as a way to assimilate, and get into the good graces of whites. While Hutton may well be correct, what must be borne in mind is that temperance became one of the more significant reform issues of the nineteenth century. Middle-class people took it up and hoped to use it to reform society. In joining the temperance movement, free Blacks, many of whom were also middle class (or aspired to its rank), were simply doing what others of their class were doing. And this act superceded race. This was the case for both Canada and the United States. Black editors like Bibb became leaders in the temperance crusade as they enjoined their fellows to become teetotallers. Hutton notes
that "messages of temperance were a staple in the push of the black press for good health and conduct." 79

On the other hand race was very much a factor in the temperance movement. Most white temperance groups refused to admit Blacks and Blacks founded their own associations. The Voice, in an article titled "Skin Deep Temperance," blasted the national division of the American Sons of Temperance (United States) for their refusal to admit Black people as members. The article notes that some of the members of this national body were even slaveholders. 80 In Ontario, certainly in Essex, Blacks had their own societies, the white French had their own, and the white Britons likewise. 81 A racialized temperance movement reflected not only the racial segregation in society but also the fact that adoption of temperate habits by Blacks did not overcome racial prejudice. Kitossa has delineated how the white women organizers of the Women Christian Temperance Movement in Canada excluded Black women and used racialized language when describing the "evils" of intemperance on Canadian society. 82 Class was also an important component in the temperance program. One temperance scholar remarked that even when working people joined the movement, those of the middle class still did not find them more respectable. 83

Despite racism in the movement, Blacks pressed on, as indicated from the columns of the Voice. They attacked alcohol (and at times tobacco smoking) with as much fervour as they did slavery. An advertisement by the [Black] Detroit Sons of Temperance association reinforces the commitment many Blacks in the Windsor border region had toward temperance:
Sons of Temperance Confectionary Saloon
Benjamin Lee—would inform the inhabitants of Detroit and vicinity, that he has opened a new confectionary saloon on Jefferson Avenue…where he will be happy to see his friends. He will keep on hand a large supply of Steamed Refined Molasses Candy and other confectionary…"84

Henry Bibb, and other reform-minded persons also supported legislation to ban the selling of alcohol in the province. Like other reformers in Canada they watched with interest the debate on temperance in the Canadian parliament. Says Bibb to his readers: “There is an effort being made to pass the Maine Law85 through the Canadian parliament.”86 Henry Bibb no doubt hoped that the “Maine Law” would be passed in the United Provinces of Canada.

Education and Schools

We regard the education of colored people in North America as being one of the most important measures connected with the destiny of our race. By it we can be strengthened and elevated—without it we shall be ignorant, weak, and degraded. By it we shall be clothed with a power which will enable us to rise from degradation and command respect from the whole civilized world: without it, we shall ever be imposed upon, oppressed and enslaved; not that we are more stupid than others would be under the same circumstances, indeed very few races of men have the corporal ability to survive, under the same physical and mental depression that the colored race have endured, and still retain their manhood.87

So began Bibb’s editorial for the second issue of the Voice. In this editorial, Bibb articulated what he believed to be the meaning of education for North America’s Blacks: elevation from degradation. The fact that he addressed his remarks to Canadian and American Blacks, and not just to either group, reflected his growing supra-border and diasporic consciousness. Bibb continued by noting the harsh conditions of life for the
enslaved and commended their resilience. He then contrasted their condition with that of free poor whites who are left without the ‘benefits of civilization.’ Bibb concluded that these whites would become ‘immensely degraded, decadent, and vicious.’ In conclusion, Bibb exhorted his fellow Blacks to empower themselves by gaining an education.

But we now speak especially to our fugitive brethren. We frequently hear persons say that they are too far advanced in life to learn to read and write. To all such we say, be not discouraged. We think there are but very few who could not be taught to read the Bible, if they would commence and persevere. If we learn to read that, we can the learn to read other books and papers, and we should understand the laws of the Government under which we live.88

Education was promoted with unabated zeal in the columns of the Voice. Given that educational opportunities were severely restricted for free Blacks in the North and South, and prohibited to the overwhelming majority of slaves, Bibb like other Black abolitionists, believed that once in freedom, in a locale where they were no restrictions on education, Blacks should try with all their might to obtain it. The Black reformers thought that education was the “key to all human progress,” and had great faith in it. They felt that with this great “key” Blacks could open any door they wanted. Education was to be the great leveller, the object that would help to banish racism and colour prejudice. In Bibb’s theory of Black education, education was intimately linked to freedom. A free person must become a literate person. Again, Jan Noel provides insight: “Education was another vital component of Protestant freedom. Universal education would liberate men and women from the shackles of ages past, giving them the knowledge and the skills to make intelligent choices in life.”89 With this in mind, one
then understands that Bibb’s and the *Voice’s* vision on education was very broad: education would not only aid Blacks, but all of humanity.

The *Voice of the Fugitive* therefore advocated education in the context of ideas about universal education that were sweeping much of the Western world at that time. In both Canada East and West, beginning in the 1840s, legislation was passed promoting universal education. Canada West had a superintendent of education in the person of Egerton Ryerson, an energetic and reform-minded Methodist minister. Ryerson shaped the education office in Toronto into an organ that would be responsible for building schools and sending teachers into every ‘nook and cranny’ of the province. Around him he gathered a cadre of men whose task it was to make every child in Canada West educated and literate.  

Ryerson’s vision faltered, however, when it came to the education of Black children. He was unable to stem the tide of prejudice that Black children and their parents encountered in their “search for knowledge.” Blacks in Canada West had varied access to education. In Toronto and other towns and hamlets in the east, Black children were able to attend schools with white children, not so in the western and southern portion of the province. In these places school segregation was the order to the day; and the majority of Blacks lived in this part of the province. The 1850 Separate School Act passed in the Ontario legislature, gave racialized and religious groups the right to set up their own schools. This Act served to legitimize what had been happening for a few decades. Essex County, where the Bibbs resided, was one of the regions in which segregated schooling was the norm. An insidious result of the practice of separate
schooling was that many Black children were left without education, as whites barred them from the common schools. Whites insisted that they would not send their children to school with Black pupils, and pointed to the 1850 Common School Act as the basis for their intransigence. Blacks could and should set up their own schools, whites maintained.

Blacks responded to this form of oppression by setting up their own schools, and sometimes taking corporations to court for denying their children an education. However, many times the Black schools failed because of the need for sufficient resources to carry the project forward. Yet the majority of Black children in the Southwestern portion of the province who received some schooling did so through the efforts of Black teachers and parents who founded and managed schools. Missionary organizations like the Free Baptist Mission, the American Missionary Association, and the Colonial School and Church Society also operated schools for Black children.

Undoubtedly, the Bibbs were disappointed at the manner in which their adopted country articulated its position on education for Black children. And yet Henry Bibb, in particular, remained optimistic ‘that all would be well,’ and kept urging the Black settler to “get an education.” Bibb, as previously illustrated, did not only talk about the need for Blacks to acquire an education, but took practical measures in that regard. Bibb was instrumental in founding two schools for Black children (and adults) in Essex County.

The Voice kept its readers abreast of the state of education in the province, and in particular, education for Blacks. Interested persons, several of whom were teachers, also sent in reports on their schools. But the editor of the Voice not only reported the news of
Black education, he regularly theorized on the meaning of education for Blacks as a whole.\textsuperscript{94} In its inaugural issue, the \textit{Voice} included a report titled “Schools for Colored People in Canada.” This piece is a valuable compendium of facts regarding teachers and students, and sheds much light on the sorry state of Black education in the province. This report not only highlighted Black education in the region but also the many women teachers labouring to educate Black children in the Essex region.\textsuperscript{95} In Sandwich, where the Bibbs had settled, there were no schools. Mrs. Bibb took the initiative and pioneered a school in that township. As the \textit{Voice} reported, she began “with 25 pupils at her residence, with the hope that some more suitable place will be provided, and means for carrying on the school properly.” It continued, “Nearly double this number of children would be glad to attend this school, but for want of the necessary provisions they cannot attend. We hope to be able to give more light upon this subject hereafter.”\textsuperscript{96}

Mary Bibb herself contributed articles to the \textit{Voice} on schools, schooling, and education. In the following piece she describes the challenges she faced in the school she founded:

\begin{quote}
The school in this place has increased from twelve to forty-six, notwithstanding the embarrassing circumstances under which it started, namely, a dark ill-ventilated room, uncomfortable seats, want of desks, books and all sorts of school apparatus. I would mention with gratitude the assistance from friends in Lenewee county, Michigan, through the agency of J.F. Dolbear, which enabled me to procure\textsuperscript{97} a black board and the few books with which we commenced. He has the united thanks of all connected with the school for his timely visit....
\end{quote}

Mrs. Bibb then reports on the progress of her pupils “many of whom, six weeks ago,
could not tell one letter from another, can now spell intelligibly in Town's Spelling-book, and read any of the exercises contained therein."

James E. Grant, a Chatham teacher, also sent a letter, encyclopedic in nature, to the *Voice*, giving minute details regarding social conditions in Chatham, and detailing his work at the Chatham separate school.

The colored population here numbers near seven hundred individuals, large and small, and three places of public worship, one Episcopal Methodist; two Baptist, having a total of two hundred and seventeen members. Two schools, one a government school, established some twelve years since, the other Free Mission, started last summer, and taught by Miss Huntingdon. The government school, here, numbered in 1848, forty-nine scholars, the first years I took charge of the school, in 49, seventy-six, in 50, ninety-one, as follows: Grammar 7, History and Geography 9, Writing and Arithmetic 33, Reading and Spelling 42 scholars, Males 45, Females 46....We were obliged to (during the winter) send some 15 small scholars to my house, for instruction by my wife."

Bibb himself, in an "exploring" tour of the province, reported on the state of education for Black children in the towns and villages he visited. In "Schools in Canada," in addition to giving the usual details about teacher, school, and student, Bibb discussed the virtues of education: "to elevate and improve properly the condition of the colored population in North America, and especially the fugitives in Canada, who have been driven hither by the inhuman laws of the United States...." and "to make us intelligent, respectable, and law-abiding subjects under Her Majesty's dominion, we must adopt this as our platform; and without which we are constantly liable to be imposed upon by the more highly favored classes."
It was also very frustrating for Bibb and the *Voice* to witness the "caste" education to which many of the province's Black children were subjected, and so, while advocating and promoting education, the *Voice* decried the discrimination Black people faced in their "pursuit for knowledge":

> At Chatham they have a large school consisting of from 60 to 80 scholars. But unfortunately it is just like it is at Windsor, a *colored school*—a mark of prejudice uncalled for by the Government under which we live and which has a tendency to perpetuate the prejudice against color, that has always kept our children under the feet of whites. The only difference between these schools is, that the one at Chatham is supported by the Baptist Free Mission Society, while the one at Windsor is supported by the American Missionary Association.\(^{102}\)

Bibb's vision (and that of his wife) was that Black children should be able to attend school in integrated facilities. In his mind, the reality of *colored* or *caste* schools rendered insecure the Canadian haven.

The *Voice*, in detailing Black education, provides posterity with an excellent reading on how the Black community drew on its resources to build educational institutions. From these reports and editorials we also are provided with an excellent insight into Bibb's philosophy and ideology of education and his vision for an educated Black citizenry. In encouraging its readers to 'go to some great thing' the *Voice* not only reported on the local situation but on the American and international scenes as well. It reported on the state of Black education in states like New York, higher education for Blacks in New England, and how Black Jamaicans were advancing in their educational pursuits. The oft-quoted editorial that Bibb wrote in the second issue of the paper on
education sums up his, his wife's, and their supporters' view on the significance of education for Black people.\textsuperscript{103}

\textbf{Religion}

Bibb stated that one of the reasons he chose to add “Canadian Independent” to name of the \textit{Voice of the Fugitive} was because he was independent from all religious and political sects. Though a Methodist, Bibb frequently attended the Baptist church with which he had close ties. His religious orientation was ecumenical. The overall religious position that the \textit{Voice} promoted was Christianity, a sober (naturally Protestant) Christianity. Again, adherence to Christian values and tenets was a sign of assimilation and respectability. No ‘loud African Christianity’ for the \textit{Voice}, and others like Ward, and Mary Bibb, whose influence on the paper was substantial; Mrs. Bibb, though she later converted to Methodism, was of Quaker origin, a sect known for its sober religion. Through its pages, the \textit{Voice} sought to socialize Blacks into adopting Anglo-Saxon norms of Christianity. Bibb carried his ‘Bible for the Slaves’ crusade into Ontario and agitated for Bibles for the ex-fugitives. He and his wife conducted Sunday schools and received and distributed Bibles.\textsuperscript{104} They supported the missionary objectives and efforts of the American Missionary Association and the Free Baptist Mission.

Religion was discussed also at a theoretical level. In joining the discussion on religion and slavery in the United States, the \textit{Voice} asked if the Methodist Episcopal Church of the North was Pro-slavery. It provided an answer:

Both the Northern and Southern divisions have the same discipline; both cherish slaveholders in their bosom; both have slave-holding preachers; the church north has \textit{ordained}
a slaveholder since the south separated, knowing him to be such, and both practically disregard the sentiment of Wesley, their illustrious founder, that Slavery is the sum of all villainies.\textsuperscript{105}

The \textit{Voice} also reported on local church matters. In the same manner it detailed the formation of an educational culture in the province, it also described the evolution of a Black church culture. In a report to the “Christian Public,” the \textit{Voice} informed this public of the fact that the African Methodist Episcopal church in Sandwich had procured a lot for a church building.\textsuperscript{106}

\textbf{Agriculture}

As detailed in my chapter on the Refugee Home Society, Bibb saw agriculture, like education, as playing a decisive role in Black elevation. On this basis, he urged all Blacks to become landowners. In a series of essays titled “What Do the Fugitives Stand Mostly in Need Of?” he articulated his vision of a free Black citizenry which was landowning and produced what they consumed.\textsuperscript{107} When Holly came to the \textit{Voice} as co-editor, he not only supported Bibb’s agricultural vision but added another dimension to it. Holly had in mind the formation of a North American and West Indian League where Blacks would buy land in Jamaica and Canada, grow their own food, trade with each other, and in so doing provide a stiff challenge to American grown crops, many of which were slave grown. By establishing their own economic base Blacks in the Americas would be free from white power and become the architects of their own destiny.

Whether it was to be the RHS or the NAWIL, the \textit{Voice} hammered out a policy of Black independence through agriculture. The \textit{Voice} also enabled Bibb to promote agriculture among the fugitives. Bibb toured the province lecturing on “agriculture as the
key to our elevation," and published editorials and articles on the significance of agriculture to Black progress. Of importance was that the paper became the official organ of the Refugee Home Society and the North American West Indian League.

**Emigration**

Roger Hite sees Bibb's emigration position as central to Bibb's editorials in the *Voice.* Even before Bibb settled permanently in Canada, he saw it as the promised land. And as soon as he became a Canadian resident he began to trumpet, through the pages of his paper, Canadian emigration. As indicated by the themes of the conventions that Bibb called, he, Holly, and others, saw Canada as the best place for North American Blacks. The delegates at the Amherstburg Convention endorsed revolution as a tool to end slavery and bring about Black liberation. Yet, they felt it was not feasible because of the balance of power in the States—whites controlled the means of repression; therefore, Blacks would surely lose if they engaged in revolution. The only other liberatory alternative Blacks had opened to them was emigration. Notwithstanding the "colorphobia" that Blacks encountered here, the *Voice* consistently presented Canada as the best place for emigration "because it is the most convenient refuge for the American slave; and in fact the only spot on the American continent upon which the hunted fugitive can find a protection by law for his liberty." Also, Canada, Bibb claimed "is known to be one of the best agricultural countries on this continent, or at least a large portion of it...." Promoting the virtues of Canada, Bibb continued: "She can now boast of being one of the best wheat growing countries in America—with beautiful forests of the
most valuable timber—and inexhaustible mines of lead, iron, coal, copper; with some of the best harbors and fisheries in the known world."

And, on Jamaica, Bibb rhapsodized, and called for a Black colonization scheme:

Their principal crops are sugar, cotton, rice, tobacco, coffee, ginger and indigo, which are the commercial products of all tropical climates. In Jamaica they have perpetual summer...and it is not an uncommon thing for persons to raise two and three crops in one year from the same field of land. Its climate is known to be mild and genial, and from its commercial, agricultural, and geographical position, Jamaica might with propriety be called the Italy of the Western World.

Bibb then called on his fellow Blacks to open their eyes to the true freedom that Jamaica offered.

And shall we, as colored Americans...shut our eyes against Jamaica with all her natural advantages and rich treasures of undeveloped wealth which is now offered to us, say that we will be content to be hewers of wood and drawers of water for the white man; or shall we burst the chains of indolence, which have so long bound us, and take possession of these new fields of enterprise?

Several Black abolitionists, including Martin Delany and Theodore Holly, who served as subscription agents for the Voice, and who would eventually emerge as leading emigrationists, influenced Bibb’s emigrationist stance. But it was Holly who was to have the most influence. Holly as junior editor of the Voice broadened the Voice’s emigrationist platform by making Haiti central to the debates on emigration. Haiti stood as a beacon of light for Blacks in the Western hemisphere, if not the entire world. This
republic had a stellar and vibrant history that had inspired Black nationalists and abolitionists since the beginning of its revolution. In 1792, the enslaved population of the French slave colony of St. Domingue, as Haiti was then called, rose in revolution and overthrew their white oppressors. Though the “armies of the world” came to Haiti to take it back in the name of slavery and white supremacy, they failed. The Black Haitians successfully defeated these European armies and established Haiti as a Free Republic. The Black Revolutionists under Henri Dessalines, recognizing the importance of symbols in revolution, changed the (French colonial) name of the country from St. Domingue and renamed it Haiti, in memory and honour of the country’s first inhabitants, the Tainos who had called that place “Haiti.”

By the end of 1852, the Voice was advocating emigration to Canada, Haiti, and the British West Indies, but it remained firm in its opposition to African emigration. When some Maryland African Americans were considering emigration to Liberia, the Voice noted that they had the right idea but the wrong place:

If those leaders really wish to prevent the practical portion of our people rushing pell-mell into the velvet arms of African Colonization, they must fall in with the enterprize we are endeavoring to propagate, and direct their attention to the Canadas, and the West Indies, or Central America, if they think best. We however think that Canada is the most eligible place for the mass of colored people to migrate to.

We trust some means will be adopted to divert the attention of our brethren in Baltimore from graves in Africa, to comfortable homes in the salubrious and highly fertile regions of Canada West.114

The quotation shows the disdain that the editors had for the white-dominated
African Colonization Society, and their belief that “Africa was a graveyard.” In their minds, Africa seemed to be a single country, with not much to offer. Many Blacks, of all social classes, saw the African continent much in the same way that most whites saw it: a place lacking civilization, waiting for Christian uplift. Some scholars have remarked that many Black leaders did not see an inconsistency in the projects for Black liberation in North America, and their view of the homeland of Blacks, Africa, as a “barbarous” place waiting for the civilizing hand of Christianity to redeem it. Many African-Americans, who considered African emigration, felt that because they were the ‘children of Africa’ they should lead the charge in its uplift.115

Another point to consider regarding the Voice’s contempt for African emigration was that the editors, in their zeal to promote Canada and other points in the Americas, refused to contemplate any other options. Holly and Bibb had a Pan-African perspective in regard to the progress and elevation of the race. Their Pan-Africanism was expressed as part and parcel of their Pan-American ideal. The future of the race was to be in the Western world, not across the Atlantic on the African continent. Their emigrationist viewpoints clearly articulated this vision.116

Emigration was decidedly tied up with agriculture. Once the emigrants arrived to say, Canada West, their chosen occupation should be agriculture. This was the vision Bibb had for the new settlers. He did not seem to ever consider that the settlers or their children would want to settle in urban areas or engage in non-agricultural pursuits.

The Voice of the Fugitive in promoting emigration went against the grain.
Emigration was anathema in American abolitionism. Black and white abolitionists from so-called Garrisonians to political abolitionists disavowed it. One main opponent to emigration in Black mainstream abolitionism was Frederick Douglass. In the pages of his two papers, he decried all those who favoured emigration, and portrayed it as a proslavery plot to rid the United States of free Blacks. The eminent physician James McCune Smith was also against emigration. He derided those who even "thought" about the question. Even those who promoted Canadian emigration were thought to be "abandoning the cause." When Bibb spoke in favour of Canadian emigration at a New York meeting in 1849, Charles Lenox Remond opposed him, and placed Canadian emigration in the same category as African and West Indian emigration. All forms of emigration, opponents believed, would have the same effects: ridding the United States of its free Black population, and with this population gone, slaveholders would gleefully tighten their control on the slaves. Black American leaders who objected to emigration did not make a distinction between those African Americans who voluntarily chose emigration, and those who were influenced to do so by the African Colonization Society. These leaders were engaging in reality denial. All around them, hundreds of Blacks fled yearly to Canada and other places, as the American Republic determined to crush Black people beneath its oppressive heel. For the mass of Black people, slave and free, who journeyed to Canada, this debate was academic. Emigration was the only alternative they felt they had in their desire to lead a life better than the one they had in
the United States. Even a leader like Ward was against emigration and came to Canada out of absolute necessity: he was fleeing from American law, as he had helped a fugitive slave, James McHenry, in his escape bid. When prominent abolitionists like Bibb (and later Delany) settled in Canada, it no doubt boosted the ideas of those who supported emigration.

When the *Voice* took up the emigration cry and made emigration (to Canada) part of its editorial platform, and when it promoted at least two emigrationist conventions, this aspect of antislavery agitation was given a tremendous boost. American abolitionists were now forced to take emigration seriously. They gave it a grudging nod. The *Voice* was then responsible for making emigration central to mainstream North American Black abolitionism, and for making Canada "a centerpiece in the emigration debate...." Bibb and Holly dominated the emigrationist debate in the early 1850s in much the same way Martin Delany would come to dominate it after 1854.

**Abolitionists and the Voice**

The *Voice* saw itself as a forum for Black and abolitionist correspondence. It offered itself as a platform where Blacks themselves could meet, talk, exchange views, give information, debate with each other, and make plans. This section will now examine Black and abolitionist correspondence in the pages of the *Voice of the Fugitive*.

Bibb sustained relationships with several of the public Black abolitionists of the day, not only in North America but also in Britain. Bibb maintained contact with Martin Delany, Henry Garnet, Frederick Douglass, Isaac Henson, Josiah Henson, William
Allen, William Still, James Pennington, S.R. Ward, W.P. Newman, Jermain Loguen, and Amos and Jehiel Beman. Having such a slew of contacts enabled the *Voice* to reach a wide audience in the United States and Britain. James Pennington, Henry Garnet, and Isaac J. Henson acted as agents for the *Voice* in Britain. In 1851, calling himself 'a refugee in England,' Isaac Henson wrote to Bibb:

My Dear Bro. Bibb:
I take great pleasure in perusing your excellent paper 'The Voice of the Fugitive.' It ably vindicates a cause which has been too long neglected in Canada. I rejoice that it has been taken up by one who is capable of representing the true condition of those who have been degraded for so many generations, and many of whom have found their way to the 'land of the brave and home of the slave.' We have reason to thank God that Canada exists, where men cannot breathe as slave, for there they are known as freemen. Though refugees may suffer sometimes for those means that give comfort to the body, yet they can and do say they are free, and would rather suffer a short time, than suffer their whole time in slavery.

Sir, I most heartily concur with you in regard to the means for the elevation of our brethren in Canada, many of whom have been driven there by that infamous slave-catching bill, the equal of which surpasses all human reason to depict.

Let the *Voice* speak as a mighty trumpet—let the sound reach across the Atlantic Ocean that Britain may hear the wrongs of those refugees who have nobly pledged their all to the support of the Government. I, too, love to hear the sound in Europe.¹²²

Writing from New Haven, Connecticut, the Rev. Amos G. Beman discussed the effects of the FSL on the North American Black community and congratulated Bibb on the commencement of the *Voice*.¹²³

... it is most fortunate, that you have established a Press in their midst, which will make their true condition known, and pour in their bosom streams of light and love to encourage them in the pursuit of those plans upon which alone their moral elevation and
Prosperity can be secured.\textsuperscript{124}

The pages of the *Voice* provided space for Black (and white) abolitionists to air their concerns, give advice on uplift and other topics, speak about the plight of Black people, slave and free in North America and around the world, and give details about the progress of the antislavery movement in their vicinity. In Canada West, Samuel Ringgold Ward was a regular correspondent to the *Voice*, before he and its editor parted ways. Ward wrote a series of essays, serialized in the *Voice* as “Canadian Negro Hate.”\textsuperscript{125} And toward the end of 1851, when he toured southern Ontario, as an agent for the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada, Ward sent a blow-by-blow description of his tour to the *Voice*. Ward’s narrative of his tour provides good insights into the prejudice of Ontario whites toward Blacks, the abolitionist cause, and the life of Black Ontarians. It also unwittingly underscores the class differences and tensions among Blacks themselves, between moral crusaders like Ward, and ordinary Blacks. For example, in his description of the Toronto AME church Ward derided the ‘too African style’ of its pastor.

...Should you listen to his disgusting, abusive, indolent language, and witness his semi-theatrical gestures, and should you see a large number of colored people of this city, if not the majority of them, seemingly approving, if not admiring it, you would join me in saying that such things bedarken our prospects. Such is the actual state of things in Toronto.\textsuperscript{126}

Ward’s letter to Bibb illustrates a nascent class conflict grounded in religious orientation, between different sections of the Black community. Ward, who was a ‘stern’
Protestant of the Presbyterian variety, had no time and use for 'ecstatic' or 'charismatic' Christianity. The kind of 'jumping and shouting' he witnessed at the AME church in Toronto reminded him too much of 'slave' culture—something Blacks must forget if they wanted to make 'progress' and assimilate in white society.\(^{127}\) Putting Ward's embarrassment at the actions of his fellow Black Christians aside, his description of his tour is useful. Other abolitionists wrote Bibb. For instance, the indomitable William Still, wrote from Philadelphia complementing Bibb on the *Voice*, and discussed with him issues such as colonization, emigration, the role of the anti-slavery press, the progress of Philadelphia's Colored Mechanics' Institute and the vigilance committee of Black Philadelphia.

We have not had any more fugitive cases in Philadelphia since I last wrote to you, but we are at this moment watching the kidnappers, with whom it is reported we are shortly to have a combat; indeed we are now all the while on the look-out of them.\(^{128}\)

Still, as one of the premier Black Underground Railroad agents, also inquired about the best route to travel to Canada and the condition of the Blacks in Ontario.\(^{129}\)

Theodore Holly, in youthful enthusiasm, wrote from Vermont to the *Voice*'s editor commending him for his work in abolitionism, and acknowledging Bibb as his "leader." The Reverend Newman, who was ensconced at the Dawn settlement in Dresden, wrote in order to "clarify," and others like M. Delany, and Jermain W. Loguen wrote from the United States.\(^{130}\) White abolitionists also contributed to the columns of the *Voice*. From his base in St. Catharines, missionary and educator Hiram Wilson wrote to Bibb on a variety of topics which included the "horrible system of slavery,"
colonization, allegiance to Britain, education for Black children, the formation of the
‘fugitive Slaves’ Friend Society,’ religion, and temperance. William King, the
patriarch of Buxton, wrote to Bibb congratulating him on the soon-to-be Toronto
Convention. In addition, Michigan abolitionists, Bibb’s colleagues and associates,
were regular contributors to the columns of the Voice.

Whereas abolitionist men of both races dominated the discourse on abolitionism
and wrote regularly to the paper, women who consciously identified themselves as
abolitionists also wrote the editor of the Voice. The women of the Female Anti-Slavery
Society of Grand Prairie, Michigan, told Bibb about their work on behalf of the
Canadian refugees. The women of the Anti-Slavery Sewing Circle of Cincinnati
informed the readers of the Voice of their 1851 antislavery convention and their on-
going work, which included agitating and organizing sewing circles on behalf of the
fugitives. Deborah Van Broekhoven notes that many women became politically
conscious within these supposedly innocuous sewing circles. As they knitted and
sewed, an appointed reader often read the latest in antislavery literature such as
Theodore Weld’s Slavery as It Is. The circles therefore took on clear political overtones.
The fact that women were sewing for fugitives made their work subversive and radical.
The Cincinnati women, supposedly an all-white group, also gave financial assistance
to the Voice, which they recognized was financially burdened.

Dear Sir. At a late meeting of the Board of Managers
of the Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Sewing Society of this city,
an ardent wish was expressed that
your paper, “Voice of the Fugitive” should be placed pecuniarily, upon such a basis as to relieve you of
a part of the burden now resting upon you, and remove
all fear of the necessity of its suspension, and it was voted to appropriate fifty dollars of the funds of the society to that object, provided such other assistance is procured as is necessary to place the paper on the desired basis.

Whenever, therefore, it is in your power to inform us that such is the fact in regard to it, we will remit to your order the sum above named.

May heaven abundantly succeed your labors in the cause of the oppressed.

Mary M. Guild.  
Sec. Ladies Anti-Slavery Society.

The *Voice* also broadcasted the uplift work of the women of Essex. At a “Donation Party” two of Essex’s leading Black females showed their mettle as uplift apostles. By recording the activities of these women, the *Voice* revealed the importance of Black women to community building and organizing.

An interesting Donation Party was held in the old Barracks at Windsor, by the colored population, for the erection of a Church and Schoolhouse. There was quite a large gathering, and the ladies deserve much credit for the manner in which they conducted the supper.

The announcement that Miss Mary Ann Shadd, a lady of high literary attainments, would address the meeting on the subject of education, doubtless brought out many who otherwise would not have attended.

The entertainment was highly interesting, at the close of which, Mrs. M.E. Bibb proposed the formation of a Mutual improvement Society … They agreed to meet on every Thursday evening, to read, converse, or hear addresses from members of the society for intellectual improvement.

The Black women of Essex also showed their commitment to community building and abolitionism at an Emancipation Day celebration in Sandwich. A few women, led by Mary Bibb, were the “managers” of this event. The *Voice* announced in the “First of August” article that after the speeches, singing, and marching, “Dinner will be furnished by the Ladies for twenty-five cents per ticket. Refreshments may be had during the day
and supper in the evening. The proceeds will be appropriated towards erecting a Baptist Church.\textsuperscript{\textit{141}}

In addition, the paper provided space for ordinary men and women who may not have publicly identified themselves as abolitionists. Schoolteachers James Underwood of Amherstburg informed the editor of his efforts to establish an “improvement society” in that village. James E. Grant of Chatham wrote to Bibb telling him of this school in Chatham, and of the state of Black education there. Having read of the arrival of Bibb’s brothers in Canada, Patience Brayton of Smithfield, Rhode Island, wrote Bibb to “give you and your mother my appreciation of your joy in that happy meeting.” She added warmly, that “I hope you will all prosper and enjoy the company of each other unmolested through life....”\textsuperscript{\textit{142}}

Blacks, then, gained a sense of themselves and a sense of pride as they had a paper to call their own. The paper provided a forum in which Blacks from across Canada and the U. S. could converse and communicate with each other, and it satisfied their desire for news. Noting the importance of the contributors to the Voice, Bibb thanked some of them: “We feel truly grateful to J.T. Fisher of Toronto, C.W., Wm. Still of Philadelphia, Pa. Theodore Holly of Burlington, Vt. Rev. A. G. Beman of New Haven, Ct....and other friends of our cause, for their valuable and highly interesting contributions to the columns of our little sheet....”\textsuperscript{\textit{143}}

Mary Bibb: Canada’s First Newspaper Female Publisher?

Two persons were instrumental in aiding the production and publication of the
Voice, and shaping its editorial policies: these persons were Mary Bibb and James Theodore Holly. Let us now examine their vital and lasting contributions to the Voice of the Fugitive.

If Henry Bibb is the "father" of African Canadian journalism, one could argue that Mary Bibb is the "mother" of the Black press in Canada. She is this country's first woman editor and publisher, and can be credited as being the first newspaper-woman in the Canadas. Not only did she write feature articles for the Voice of the Fugitive, but when her husband was on the lecture circuit during parts of 1851 she edited the paper and oversaw its production.

Though Henry Bibb undoubtedly told his friends and supporters of his plans to start a paper, the first recorded information we have in this regard came from Mary Bibb. In a November 1850 letter she wrote to Gerrit Smith, she noted her husband's (their?) plans to start the paper, asked for subscribers, told Smith of the daily arrivals of refugees at the Sandwich border, and informed him of her plans to begin a school. She also sent a copy of the paper's prospectus to Smith.

From its inception, Mary Bibb was at the forefront of the Voice. And it is not strange that she was having graduated from the Lexington Normal school in Massachusetts. She was a trained teacher with above-average literacy skills. According to C. Peter Ripley, "the contrast between [Mr.] Bibb's private correspondence and the paper's polished style suggests that his well-educated wife, Mary E. Bibb, had a good deal to do with the paper's style and content." This is very plausible. As an abolitionist, a schoolteacher, and a firm believer in the cause for which the Voice was
established, Mary supported the editorial direction of the paper and her husband's projects, which also were her projects. For example, she gave vocal support to the RHS, wrote articles for American newspapers on the topic, and publicly defended the Voice's support of the RHS.\textsuperscript{148}

For most of the summer and early fall of 1851 Henry Bibb travelled the lecture circuit in parts of Ontario and the United States. In addition to looking after her school, Mary Bibb edited and published the newspaper.\textsuperscript{149} While on his Southern Ontario tour Bibb sent in articles on the living standards of Blacks in various towns and villages and detailed descriptions of the schooling for Blacks in these places, or the lack thereof.\textsuperscript{150} In July 1851, he also attended the Christian Anti-Slavery Convention in Chicago where he spoke. He later toured Wisconsin.\textsuperscript{151}

Occasionally Mary Bibb signed her name to specific articles. In an article titled "Schools," Mary Bibb reported on her work as a schoolteacher and founder, the progress of the students, and the struggles both parties were undergoing. She calls for a redefinition of the word 'hero' by calling attention to the resilience of ordinary people, her students and their parents, who were 'making a way out of no way.' These people, in her view, suffered doubly: first from "republican oppression," and then from Canada's "cold and desolation." Her language is forceful and energetic and is underlined by the bitterness she feels about the treatment of Blacks in the United States and Canada:

\begin{quote}
The Learned Blacksmith is regarded as the wonder of the age.\textsuperscript{152} Truly, he is a hero! What shall we say of men, and women too, who have spent a life in slavery, enduring the separation from loved ones, who having escaped to the nominally free states, in pursuit of freedom, found a prejudice equally withering.\textsuperscript{153}
\end{quote}
Overcoming all this, and feeling that they were men among men, standing upon free soil, awoke only to hear the sound of Mason's infamous fugitive slave bill.

What shall we say of those who have again taken their lives in their hands and escaped to this desolate, cold country, where they are again strangers in a strange land, who, having endured all this, together with the cares of a family on the one hand and pressing want on the other? Is not the person who can improve under such circumstances a hero, even according to Thomas Carlyle's own showing? Many of these support themselves by their own industry, improving all their time to a good advantage.

In this article Mary also calls attention to her religious work, noting that:

We commenced a Sunday-school four weeks ago; present, thirty-six; there are now forty-four members, and much interest is manifested both by parents and children, some coming even in inclement weather the distance of two and three miles. We are entirely destitute of bibles, there being but four testaments in the school, one of these minus several chapters.

Mr. Coe, of ----, brought 100 volumes for the Sunday-school library, of these I put into the hands of Coleman Freeman fifty volumes for the Windsor Sabbath school. Many of the scholars commit whole chapters to memory every week.

She also ran her own ads in the paper. When she gave up her first school in April 1852, and began working from her home as a seamstress, she put an ad in the paper informing "the ladies of Windsor, and Sandwich and vicinity, that she has the newest Eastern and Parisian fashions for dress sacque and visitte." Mrs. Bibb ran the ad from July to December in each issue of the paper, and it sheds light on the varied occupational pursuits of Black abolitionist women and of free women in general in nineteenth-century society. Even genteel women took in dressmaking. In fact, knowledge of the use of the needle was instrumental in the education of free women of all races and classes in 19th century North America. It would be part of their home education, and part of the
curriculum in academies. Mary Bibb, growing up as a Yankee Quakerwoman in Rhode Island, would have been taught seamstressings. Such a skill came in handy during hard times, when teaching jobs petered out, and when the husband's income was not enough to carry the household. In giving up the school, Mrs. Bibb did not, and could not, wait to sit at home and depend on her husband's income. Black editors did not make profits from their newspapers. Many Black male abolitionists who devoted all their energy and time to antislavery oftentimes faced dire economic straits. Their families suffered as a result. Shirley Yee has shown how this fact had a negative impact on several abolitionist families. Luckily for Mary Bibb, she turned to her dressmaking skills to gain an income, using what Philomena Chioma Steady calls "survival strategies." According to Steady, these strategies are intrinsic to the culture of African and African descended women. In all likelihood, Mary Bibb was successful in her dressmaking business because after the death of her husband in 1854, she opened a "fancy ladies store" in Windsor.

Mary Bibb broadened the content and scope of the paper. The "Donation Party" and "First of August" articles were likely written by her. Being style and fashion conscious, she included in the paper inserts on women's fashion. The Voice approved of the new trend in women's clothing—the much-scandalized bloomer, or "turkish" pant. The following piece, lifted from a Syracuse newspaper, was most likely approved by Mrs. Bibb for inclusion in the paper. "Several ladies appeared in the streets yesterday with dresses of a very laconic pattern, and pantaloons a la Turk. The new style looks decidedly tidy and neat, and imparts to the wearer quite a sprightly and youthful
appearance." And in the same issue, the *Voice* included a piece taken from the *Joliet Signal* which likewise discussed the "bloomer".

Someone at the *Voice* must have approved of the new reform in dress for the paper to be advocating it. Mary Bibb most likely was that person. That is not to say that the editor would not endorse the new trend in women's wear, as research has shown that Black editors, most of whom were male, and abolitionists supported women's rights.

Other articles promoting women's emancipation frequently appeared in the paper.

A Female Teamster—There is a young woman living with her brother near Detroit, Michigan, who takes care of a span of horses, and draws cordwood to that city every day, for a livelihood. Her brother allows her $16 per month. She is not very masculine in appearance, and is about sixteen years of age. Let any young lady, who is in favor of woman's rights, find moral courage to beat that if she can. Poems advocating and supporting women's struggles were also published in the paper.

In addition to publishing poems and letters, written by women, and reports supporting women's liberation, the *Voice* also printed notices of women's antislavery meetings and conventions. These organizations often sent in their reports to the paper. The reports often reveal the militancy of these groups, as exemplified in the Massachusetts Female Emancipation Committee's unequivocal stance on the Fugitive Slave Law.

At a special meeting of the Massachusetts Female Emancipation Committee, held Nov. 2d, 1850, the following resolutions were unanimously adopted:

*Whereas*, the laws recently enacted for the return of the fugitive slaves to their masters, are not only insulting to our common humanity, but at variance with divine legislation.
Therefore, Resolved, that notwithstanding the penalties of fine and imprisonment, we consider it the duty of every good citizen to assist the fugitives in his escape; and we will therefore, do all in our power to aid him in eluding the grasp of the oppressor.  

Mary Bibb, in running a newspaper, teaching school, organizing the emancipation day celebration, and labouring in various uplift and community causes, took ill in late summer, 1851. Her husband had to cut short his American lecture tour to return to Canada and attend to the health of his wife, and the newspaper.

We have just returned from Wisconsin and Illinois, where we have spent several weeks in laboring for the advancement of our cause; and where we would have remained a longer time had it been consistent with the health of our family. Mrs. Bibb, who has been engaged for several months in teaching a school for the refugees' children, in Sandwich, Canada West, kindly undertook the supervision of our business in connection with her school during our absence, which was more than she could accomplish, and doubtless one cause of her illness. She was for several days after our arrival confined to her bed with scorching fever, which is broken, thank Heaven! and she is now convalescent.

Mary Bibb was the first Black woman in North America to be associated with a newspaper. Conceived as an abolitionist journal, the Voice dealt with the woman question as part of its abolitionist and uplift platform. There was not a feminist platform even though the paper was published within the context of an incipient women's rights movement. Like most of the reform journals of the day, the Voice saw its abolitionism as covering both men and women. It would be asking too much, given the time, for the Voice to take a publicly feminist stance. Very few newspapers did at the time. Even the Provincial Freeman, which for most of its life had a woman editor, subsumed the
woman question under the rubric of abolitionism, though at times, the editor, Mary Shadd, wrote articles supporting women's rights. However, the fact that one of the co-founders of the Voice was a woman was enough of a feminist statement.

James Theodore Holly

In June 1852 Bibb secured the services and talents of a young and enthusiastic Vermonter, (James) Theodore Holly. Holly became co-editor and co-proprietor of the Voice, a position he held until the Voice was torched in October 1853. Holly expanded the editorial direction of the paper in its stance on emigration by making Haiti central to the debate.

Descended from generations of free Blacks, Holly was born in Washington, D.C., in 1829 to James Overton Holly and Jane Butler Holly. Despite the hostile proscriptions against Blacks in the capital city, Holly and his brother, Joseph, managed to secure both a liberal arts education and a 'practical' education. In the former regard, the Holly boys were educated by Haitian missionaries and African American teachers, and in the latter, by their father, who taught them the trade of boot and shoe-making.

In 1844, influenced by the worsening hostilities against Black people in Washington D.C., the elder James Holly, "to be relieved of some of the disabilities free colored men labor under in the South," moved his family to Brooklyn, New York. And yet, in New York Blacks fared perhaps not much better than those in Washington, D.C., as their presence there was resented by both the older white immigrants and the incoming Irish. As in D.C., hostile laws were enacted against African Americans. In Brooklyn, Theodore and Joseph continued their education, with Theodore travelling
three miles every evening to Manhattan to study with Father Felix Varela, a Spanish priest. With Varela he studied mathematics and classics. Both he and his brother also apprenticed with their father in his shoe shop.\textsuperscript{168}

Theodore Holly supplemented his studies by reading everything he could put his hands on. In 1846, he also finished up his apprenticeship with his father and worked in the shoe-shop for a year. In 1848 he met Lewis Tappan, who was so impressed by Holly’s learning and intelligence that he hired him to work as a clerk in the American Missionary Association’s office. Meanwhile, Joseph Holly began subscribing to Frederick Douglass’ \textit{North Star}, and he wrote several letters to the editor on the question of Black emancipation. Through his involvement with the \textit{North Star}, Joseph Holly consciously entered public antislavery. Likewise, his younger brother, Theodore, began thinking about Black liberation—but with a difference. Theodore began dreaming of emigrating from the United States. Like his brother, he too began to theorize on the meaning and implications of Black oppression and strategies to overcome it. Theodore Holly, like his father and brother, became a ‘race’ man as he viewed and experienced the oppression of his fellow Blacks.\textsuperscript{169}

After spending a few years in New York, the elder James Holly died of consumption. Jane Holly soon moved the family (consisting of three children—Joseph, James, and Cecilia) to Burlington, Vermont, a state known for its enlightened social environment. Jane moved to Vermont for primarily two reasons: the worsening racial environment in New York due to the implementation of the Fugitive Slave Act, and the opportunity Vermont offered as both a place where the laws “made no distinction with
regard to color,” and as a ‘health’ spot. Brooklyn was congested; it had open sewers and other manifestations of poor sanitation. Vermont, a state with “more cows than people,” had beautiful mountains, rivers, and lakes, with plenty of healthy and fresh air.170

In Vermont the family thrived. The two boys worked at the trade their father taught them and continued their voracious reading. Both became caught up in the Liberian colonization movement promoted by the American Colonization Society, with Theodore supporting emigration, believing that only through emigration could American Blacks become truly emancipated. Joseph, on the other hand, vehemently opposed it, stating that the United States was the land of their birth. Both debated the pros and cons of emigration to Liberia before Burlington audiences. Theodore even wrote to the secretary of the ACS asking to be given support to be trained as a medical doctor and then sent to Liberia.171

Sometime in 1851 James came across the Voice of the Fugitive. He was pleasantly surprised to read that Bibb shared some of his emigrationist views. In fact, in Canada, Bibb was busily promoting Canadian emigration by calling on all free Blacks in the U.S. to leave that place and relocate to Canada. In May 1851, Holly wrote to Bibb, applauded him on his efforts, and requested that Bibb now see him as a “voluntary correspondent.” Holly, in reviewing Bibb’s Canadian emigrationist/agricultural program, believed it offered more hope to American Blacks “languishing...under republican despotism” than did Liberian colonization, and he pledged his support of Canada. Holly also predicted that the slaves would gain their freedom through bloodshed. He wrote that the American Union would dissolve through war and violence, and remarked that given the “hardness
of heart" of the American people, the shedding of blood for the freedom of the slave was inevitable.\textsuperscript{172}

Again in June, Holly wrote to Bibb discussing the plight of his fellow Blacks and the virtues of emigration. Holly, now like Bibb, began to see Canada (or at least Canada West) as the centre of hope and freedom for American Blacks. He also noted that living in agricultural communities could advance the cause of the race.

Let it be an understood matter from now and henceforth, that the central authority of the colored people of the United States, is in your asylum of the refugee, and that hereafter it is to be the grand rallying point of all our efforts. I have long been impressed with the necessity of some project to withdraw our people from the drudging employment of menials, about the town and cities of the free states, and to locate them in a primitive community, where they might lay the foundation of their own future greatness, and at the same time afford a hospitable home to the escaping bondmen.\textsuperscript{173}

Holly then compares Canadian emigration with Haitian, West Indian, and Liberian colonization, the three other schemes pressing upon the Black imagination, disavows them because of their distance from the United States, and speaks heartily in favour of the Canadian scheme. Canada, he argues, is ideal because of its closeness to the Republic to the south.

But happily the question of Canadian colonization presents itself to us, divested of all these objections. It is on the North American continent, in close proximity to the United States, and convenient to the North-western slave states. There is but a slight variation of climate from that we have all been used to. The project is an alternative we can spontaneously adopt ourselves, without having it marked our for
us by doubtful philanthropists.\textsuperscript{174} Therefore we should vigorously pursue this project, and swarm in a ceaseless tide to Canada West.\textsuperscript{175}

Holly saw not only Canada West as the centre of the continental Black freedom movement, but also Henry Bibb, given his strategic position and his ideas and plans, as the natural leader of such a movement. In his zeal, Holly proclaimed to Bibb: “I submit myself to the leadership you have so worthily assumed....”\textsuperscript{176} In Burlington and the rest of Vermont, Holly promoted Bibb’s Fugitive Union Society, and later the Refugee Home Society, to the state’s free Black communities. But that state’s free Blacks, perhaps because of the liberal laws they lived under in Vermont, opposed, or were uninterested in, emigration. Opposition to Holly’s emigrationist ideas manifested itself right in the Holly household with brother Joseph, its leader.

Undaunted, Holly continued his work in support of Canadian emigration, and throughout the summer of ’51 penned several long epistles on emigration and African Americans to the \textit{Voice}.\textsuperscript{177} In these letters, Holly began also to support the idea of a National Black Convention for Toronto. Therefore, when the \textit{Voice} issued a call for the North American Convention to be held in Toronto of September 1851, Holly was one of the ‘callers,’ and chief ideologues. Holly did not attend the meeting due to lack of funds, but that did not prevent him from contributing. He mailed his proposals (which were co-written by James L. Taylor, another Black Vermonter). Holly’s main contribution was his plan for a North American and West Indian Agricultural Union. This league would be centred in Canada West and would act as a unifying body for Black efforts in much of the Americas.\textsuperscript{178} J.T. Fisher read Holly’s proposal to the delegates at the convention.
We recommend a thorough reorganization of the free people of color, and their friends in the States, in Canada, in the West Indies, and in England, to facilitate the escape of refugees from American slavery, and also to advance their social, moral, political, and intellectual improvement.

For carrying out the above...your Committee would strongly recommend the formation of a great agricultural League of our people of the United States, the British American provinces and the West Indies.... One prominent object should be to purchase large tracts of land in Canada and Jamaica, with agricultural implements, and to establish farms throughout those colonies, as far as may be practicable for the purpose of encouraging industry among refugees from American slavery, and other persons of color who may be disposed to become owners and tillers of the soil.179

This “League” illustrates very well how emigration was inextricably linked with agriculture in the mind of Holly and the supporters of the League. Holly’s League had far-reaching implications. Like the antislavery ‘free produce movement’ in the United States, it also had an objective of bringing down slavery through the boycott of slave-produced goods.180 Holly thought that in Canada and the West Indies Blacks could cooperatively purchase land, grow their own food and crops. These crops could then enter in direct competition with Southern-grown crops and those of the “racially intolerant North.” Holly thought that this plan, when put in place, could effectively cripple the American economy and bring about the downfall of slavery. The convention ended, but work was to be carried out. Holly and Bibb (through correspondence) wrote the constitution of the North American League, a preview of which appeared in the 26 February 1852 issue of the Voice.

David M. Dean surmises that Holly’s plan “marked an unmistakable break with
previous antislavery programs." Holly’s League proposed a situation where Blacks would live under their own government, elevate themselves through their own efforts, and take pro-active measures to end American slavery by controlling the antislavery movement. Holly’s League raised the level of discussion of Black emigration and colonization. Even Bibb’s RHS did not have Blacks living under a “self-regulatory government.” In Holly’s League, Blacks would be the architects and maintainers of their own independence. For him, it was simply not enough that Blacks should go and live anywhere, they should emigrate but at the same time be in control of their destiny by setting up their own government, economy, social, military, and religious structures. In short, Holly was calling for the establishment of a Black nation. Holly’s League brings into sharp relief his nationalistic and Pan-Africanist ideals and motives, his race consciousness and uplift strategies.

Even at this stage, Holly and Bibb had not met each other, yet each was impressed with the other: Bibb, by Holly’s “diligence and zeal,” and Holly, by Bibb’s commitment to the race. They both shared similar views on Black progress. It was through the Voice and Henry Bibb that Holly came into prominence in the North American Free Black community. Though he was absent at the Toronto Convention, his contributions propelled him into prominence in the North American abolitionist community. His reputation as a “defender of the race” began at this meeting. Young, zealous, energetic, with a burning passion for his people, Holly seized the opportunity the Voice offered and was able to articulate, develop and refine his ideas about the destiny of the “Africo-American race.” Vermont had grown too small for Holly. He was brimming with
ideas and he wanted them manifested. Vermont was not the place for his program. He was still in search of a place. Canada beckoned.

In early 1852, Bibb announced that Holly would be the paper's corresponding editor and travelling agent. Bibb then commissioned Holly to tour the East and Northeast, speaking on the virtues of Canadian emigration, and "to enlist new subscribers for the \textit{Voice}...." After a six-week tour of five states, Holly and his wife, Charlotte Ann Gordon, of Burlington, Vermont, arrived in Windsor, Canada West in June 1852. Windsor was also the new home of the \textit{Voice} and the Bibbs. \footnote{In the 17 June issue of the \textit{Voice}, the editor announced that Holly would now be co-editor and co-proprietor.} Ever in search for a place, Holly now made Canada his home.

At this point, Bibb and Holly finally met. Having been admirers of each other for over a year, this meeting was more like a meeting of minds. Both men would support each other in their journalistic goals and plans for Black uplift. In Holly, Bibb found a friend and ready supporter; in Bibb, Holly found a mentor and friend. The \textit{Voice} announced the Hollys' arrival to Canada West. After noting the work Holly had previously done in support of the \textit{Voice}, Bibb reports that Holly "is much gratified with the prospects of this place, intends settling down here, and will be associated with us hereafter as assistant editor and proprietor."\footnote{No sooner than Holly was installed as co-editor, Bibb went off on an American antislavery tour, and Holly assumed responsibility for the \textit{Voice}.} Although he had no prior experience as a journalist, Holly confidently assumed the editor's chair in Bibb's absence and performed to Bibb's satisfaction. He also
became a father. Shortly after their arrival in Windsor, his wife gave birth to a baby
girl.\textsuperscript{186} As the junior editor of the \textit{Voice}, Holly threw himself into his work. He worked
feverishly to get the North American League, now called "American and West Indies
League," underway. The first auxiliary was formed in Windsor.\textsuperscript{187} Yet it seemed that the
League was stillborn, as Holly became caught up in Bibb's Refugee Home Society and
began working to promote it.

In many respects, the Society had similar aims as the League. Both were
underscored by an agricultural impetus, both sought to assist the Blacks gain
independence; in short, both had the elevation of African North Americans as their
central aim. Perhaps, given the similarity of both projects, Holly did not mind giving up
his League. Or, perhaps, he saw the RHS as doing the work of the League. Holly also
became caught up in the controversy that surrounded the RHS and became one of its
strongest defenders.\textsuperscript{188}

Holly thrived in his post as editor. For several periods during 1852 Bibb was
away on the lecture circuit and so Holly oversaw the production of the paper and wrote
the paper's editorials. David Dean remarks that Holly, "proud of his literary
achievements," sent copies of the \textit{Voice} to his brother Joseph who was now labouring as
Frederick Douglass' right-hand man over in Rochester, New York. Holly was enjoying
his job as editor and the prestige it brought in the Black community.\textsuperscript{189}

Holly also had to learn the printing trade as the \textit{Voice} also functioned as a
printing press for the people of the peninsula. Its ads promised patrons "to execute every
description of work in their line with accuracy, neatness and dispatch. Books, pamphlets,
circulars, Handbills, &c., at Detroit's prices. Handbills stuck off in one hour's notice. H. Bibb, J.T. Holly. This information alerts us to the varied occupations that abolitionist editors had. In addition to editing, most had careers as lecturers and writers; some were full-time pastors, medical doctors, college professors, schoolteachers, and others like Bibb and Holly were, in addition, printers. Douglas Fetherling, in his study of the Canadian press, also noted that early Canadian editors were also medical doctors, politicians, postmasters, and shop-keepers. Very few could make a living as a full-time newspaper editor.

Holly liked Windsor. He praised it as "beautiful, high and healthy... an important place for trade and traffic..." He still continued promoting Canadian emigration, but to his dismay, found Canada not to be free from the "odor of the filthy stench of prejudice." Articles written by Bibb on "colorphobia" in Canada, and Ward on "Canadian Negro Hate," must have impressed on Holly the feeling that Canada like the United States could never be home to the Africo-American race. Yet Holly did not back down from defending the Black community against white attack. According to Dean, he "was ready to attack editorially any white man or organization that discriminated against blacks." The Voice, with Holly as co-editor, continued to battle newspapers like the Amherstburg Courier and the Canada Oak, organs dedicated to keeping Canada white.

Perhaps it was his disappointment with Canada that led Holly to begin seriously advocating Haitian emigration. Since his early teenage days Holly had come to believe that American Blacks would never attain complete freedom and liberty in the land of their birth, but could only thrive in a place where they were in full charge of their lives.
He now felt that Haiti was such a place. A Roman Catholic, Holly had met Haitian missionaries while living in Washington D.C. From these priests he learned of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) and the emancipation of the slaves. Holly was impressed with the tenacity of the Haitian people in overcoming slavery, and the brilliance of the Black generals like Toussaint L'Overture, Henri Christophe, and Henri Dessalines. Haiti began to occupy a special place in Holly’s youthful imagination.  

Though Canadian emigration was still trumpeted by Bibb and others (including Holly), the spotlight was now on Haiti. Throughout 1852 and much of 1853 Holly as junior editor expanded the Voice’s editorial position on emigration by writing editorials and articles on Haiti and Haitian emigration. In an editorial titled “Hayti” Holly gave account of the crowning of Faustin Solouque, who became emperor of the Republic. He also provided a history of the country from its revolutionary days, and blasted the United States for refusing to recognize Haiti.  

Holly’s promotion of Haiti as ‘the place’ was given full expression at the Amherstburg convention of June 1853. The Amherstburg Convention of June 1853 called by Holly and Bibb was decidedly emigrationist in stamp. It was at this meeting that Haitian emigration took centrestage. Holly of course, was its promoter. Says Dean: “after paying lip service to emigration to Canada, Holly advanced the option of emigration to the West Indies in general and Haiti in particular.”  

It was during his Canadian years as editor at the Voice that Holly’s views on Black separation from whites, and Haiti as the promised land, crystallized. Dean remarks that Holly “maintained that the Negro must separate himself completely from his white
antagonists. And in Holly’s view, Haiti was the logical place to accomplish this segregation.196 Holly felt that Blacks could not thrive under white rule, no matter how benevolent. As his experience of Black oppression deepened, he became more radical in this call for a separate Black identity and nationality.197 From 1852 onward Holly used the columns of the Voice to promote Haitian emigration. He would eventually succeed. In 1855 he went on an “exploring mission” to Haiti. It was Holly’s intention to lead a colony of American/Canadian Blacks to settle in Haiti. He spoke to members of the government (including the emperor) about his emigration plans. The emperor supported Holly’s plans by promising subsidies in the form of free passage and land grants to the prospective immigrants. In 1861, after several setbacks, Holly led his first group of emigrants, including his marital family, to Haiti. Some of the ‘colonizers’ came from the areas surrounding Windsor and others from Connecticut.

Holly was to remain in Haiti where he would be consecrated Episcopalian bishop. Despite facing numerous obstacles, distress and heartbreak by witnessing the death of his wife and members of his colony, and experiencing military coups and counter coups, Holly never gave up on Haiti. Throughout his life he defended it and worked for its progress. To the detractors of Haiti (both Black and white) who stated that the early death of the colonists reflected the unhealthy conditions of Haiti, Holly in his rebuttal told them that more Blacks—slave and free—died in the United States from slavery, mob violence, terror, and diseases. When Holly died in Haiti in 1911, he had founded schools, theological colleges, churches and health clinics.198

As co-editor of the Voice, Holly was accorded the prestige that came with such a
position. As a journalist, he also became a spokesperson and leader of and for the Black community. Subscribing to an uplift program, he became active in community affairs in Windsor and Detroit. He founded a debating society in Windsor, and joined the Black freemasons in Detroit. Influenced by William Monroe (Bibb’s former teacher) who pastored an all-Black Episcopalian congregation in Detroit, Holly converted to Episcopalianism shortly after his arrival in Windsor. In 1855, in Detroit, at Monroe’s church, he was ordained a deacon. In addition, Holly became active in the Windsor Anti-Slavery Society and Emancipation Day events.

In January 1853, the Voice of the Fugitive entered its third year of uninterrupted publication, no mean feat for a Black newspaper. Such papers did not usually survive beyond their first year. Holly, in his hard work and enthusiasm, played a part in the survival of the Voice. So one can imagine the consternation that Holly and his mentor must have felt when Samuel Ward and Mary Shadd decided in the early months of 1853 to found a newspaper. Black newspapers had a hard time surviving. Most lamented the lack of subscribers and their editors tended to heap scorn on their fellow Blacks for now subscribing to an organ founded for their “elevation.” Editors like Bibb tramped around North America seeking subscribers. Shadd’s and Ward’s decision sprang from their desire to combat the Refugee Home Society, and counteract the Voice, the official organ of the RHS. Ward stated that he had no desire to start another paper but was approached by Miss Shadd. He also announced that the paper would continue publishing if it obtained “enough subscribers.” The first issue of their paper, the Provincial Freeman, in March 1853 elicited a hostile reaction from segments of
Windsor's Black community.

With more than 150 years hindsight, it seems that Ward and Shadd were intent on deliberately provoking Holly, Bibb, the *Voice*, and the RHS. The *Freeman* was published in Windsor, home of the *Voice*. One need ask why would these reformers decide to found their paper in a town with another Black newspaper that was struggling to survive. Even though Blacks were proud of having their own paper, the fact of the *Voice*’s editors constantly appealing for subscribers and support and publicly embarrassing delinquent subscribers suggests that the paper constantly had financial problems. Whatever support the *Voice* enjoyed in Windsor and environs, the *Freeman* could take away, its editors feared. Realistically speaking, Windsor was too small to support two Black newspapers.

Holly did not take the publication of the *Freeman* lying down. With Bibb, he organized a protest meeting in Windsor in response to the *Freeman*’s first issue. This meeting “defended the Refugee Home Society, endorsed...the *Voice of the Fugitive*, argued that there was no need for a rival black newspaper in Canada West, and condemned the factionalism generated by Samuel Ringgold Ward and his allies.”

Seeing the irony in the *Freeman*’s motto “Union is Strength” and the disunity that the paper’s founding was causing in Windsor’s Black community, the meeting

Resolved, That as we believe “Union is strength,” and that it is the only way for our elevation, we do not sympathise and have not participated in the discussions, strife, and personal envy that has been fomented, by a faction in the village of Windsor, under the cover of opposition to the Refugees’ Home Society, and we therefore deprecate and condemn their proceedings as highly injurious to our cause....
Resolved, That the *Voice of the Fugitive*, was the first standard unfurled on the free soil of Canada, especially devoted to the anti-slavery cause, at that trying hour, when the atrocious fugitive slave bill was scattering confusion and dismay over the colored population of the United States; and that it is in charge of a noble and well tried Refugee from American slavery, and that it has been a faithful exponent and monitor of their interests, and it is therefore worthy of the support of the colored people and their friends.

Getting to the crux of the matter, the meeting moved:

Resolved, That as the *Voice* is not as extensively patronised as its merits demand, there is no necessity for another paper devoted to the interests of the colored people of Canada, and therefore the rival paper about being established to supercede, or divide the interests of the *Voice*, especially as it is the creation of the factionists alluded to above, is unworthy of the support of the well wishers of our race.

The conveners of the meeting then sent copies of the proceedings to various papers, including the *Liberator, F. Douglass' Paper*, and the *Telegraph and Temperance*.

Perhaps due to the opposition launched by Holly and others, or the fact that it did not obtain enough subscribers, the *Freeman* did not publish a second issue. Conceivably, its editor realized that Windsor could not support two papers and that the *Voice* had the support of most of the Blacks behind it. The *Freeman*, however, was reactivated exactly one year later, but this time in Toronto. By this time the *Voice* was no more, having been burnt down by alleged arsonists.

The fact that the *Freeman* had to wait a full year to begin regular publication after the torching and demise of the *Voice* lends credence to Peter Carlesimo's contention that Canada West could not support two Black newspapers at the same time. The evolution of the *Voice* and the *Freeman* suggests that Black subscribers could only support one
newspaper at a time. In Canada West, the support base for Black newspapers was weak, which was why Mary Bibb sent to Gerrit Smith for subscribers and Bibb and Holly went on tours to solicit subscribers. The editors of the Voice knew of the economic weakness of Canada West’s Black community; the editor and supporters of the Freeman discovered it.  

The Freeman did not print a second issue from Windsor, but its appearance caused a violent rupture in the local community. At a meeting of Holly’s debating club in March 1853, a young debater, William Burton, was knifed to death by James Tyner, allegedly a Freeman supporter. The Voice called it a “deed of blood” and charged and denounced the editor of the Freeman and his supporters for encouraging the “ghastly deed,” and for inciting disruption in the Windsor community. The Freeman, in responding to the Voice’s charges, absolved itself from all responsibility for the murder. Yet, James Tyner was one of the signers of the minutes of a public meeting called by Shadd. The purpose of this meeting was to oppose the RHS. One could assume that Tyner, who was already hostile to the Voice and its editors, attended Holly’s debating club simply to cause provocation. This murder no doubt created a fissure in the community, left a very bad taste in the mouths of all Blacks, and widened the chasm between the Holly/Bibb camp and the Ward/Shadd faction. So hostile were these forces to each other that when the Voice was burnt down in October of the same year, Bibb strongly believed that it was his enemies who committed the “dastardly act.” Was he referring to the founders and backers of the Provincial Freeman?

The demise of the Voice in 1853 marked a turning point in Holly’s life. Left
without a job, and growing uneasy with “Canadian Negro Hate,” he moved to Buffalo, where he became the principal of that town’s only Black school. He had to have a source of steady income because by this time his family was growing. In July of 1854 Holly returned to Windsor to visit a sick and ailing Bibb. While attending the Emancipation Day celebration on 1 August, Holly and the celebrants received the news of Bibb’s death. Celebrations were halted and Holly was asked “to eulogize” Bibb. Holly remained in Windsor after Bibb’s death, helped Mary Bibb to organize the funeral and to “settle her husband’s private affairs.” He then left Windsor with Mrs. Bibb and a large group from Detroit, including William Monroe, and William Lambert, and travelled post haste to the National Emigration Convention in Cleveland, Ohio. Martin Delany called this meeting.

From October 1853 when Holly inadvertently lost his job at the Voice, he threw himself wholeheartedly into the emigrationist campaign and became one of its chief propagandists and ideologues. After the Voice, he would no longer involve himself, or be associated with, any other newspaper. It was Henry Bibb and the Voice of the Fugitive that gave Holly his start as a Black leader and helped establish his reputation as a thinker and strategist. Holly admired Bibb, supported his various uplift causes which were similar to his, and threw himself in his work as associate editor of the Voice. Bibb, grateful for the support he received from Holly, gave him full reign at the paper. Did these two men ever quarrel? If they did, they did not make it known to the public. Holly for his part publicly defended Bibb and his endeavours. His care and compassion for Henry and Mary Bibb at the time of Henry’s sickness and subsequent death
demonstrated that Holly held Mr. Bibb in high esteem. David Dean summarizes how Henry Bibb and the *Voice* affected Holly. "The association with Bibb and the *Voice* had been helpful to young Holly, giving him a chance to speak before large audiences, to discipline his rambling writing style, to learn the printing trade, and, most of all, to win a growing reputation among the free blacks of Canada and Northern United States."²¹²

Holly’s contribution to the *Voice* can be said to be his unwavering commitment to emigration, particularly Haitian emigration, and the editorial direction in which he steered the *Voice* on this matter. He also enlarged the *Voice*’s international and (Black) hemispheric direction by bringing in discussions that pertained to Haiti and the British West Indies. Without Holly, for example, many readers of the *Voice* would not become familiar with either Haitian history or contemporary issues pertaining to that country. His radical stance on Black separatism also gave the *Voice* a Black nationalistic flavour. He gained subscribers for the *Voice*, in Vermont and several other eastern states, and in so doing helped to prevent the paper from an early grave. As co-editor, Holly freed up Bibb’s time by enabling him to continue with his work as an anti-slavery lecturer. Holly’s contributions to the *Voice* must be seen in the larger context of Black upliftment; his work, all aspects of his work, were for the benefit of his fellow Blacks.

The Fluid Frontier

A reading of even a few issues of the *Voice of the Fugitive* underscores the cultural, geographic, and historical unity of the Detroit River region, encapsulated into what I have termed the “fluid frontier.” In fact, Bibb conceived of the *Voice* as a mouthpiece for the Canadian Black community and the communities of the Canada
West/Michigan border zone. This is made plain in his statement that the *Voice* “…can be used as a local medium for Michigan as well as for Canada, it being right on the border of the state.”\(^{213}\) Detroiters and those on the Canadian side of the river visited each other, often going to church and attending festive occasions such as marriages on both banks of the river. For example, in its 17 June 1852 issue the *Voice* announced the wedding of one “J.P. Struthers to Eliza Haggerty, both of Windsor, C.W.” The happy couple was married in Detroit, Michigan. Bibb himself represents the concept and reality of the fluid frontier very well. He had two addresses, one in Sandwich, the other in Detroit, and circulated his paper in both communities. Throughout 1851 this “refugee from slavery” toured and lectured in the United States several times. He did so not only in border towns like Buffalo and Detroit, but in inland cities like Chicago and Milwaukee.\(^{214}\)

A reading of the advertisements in the *Voice* lends support to my fluid frontier thesis. Though the ads are not extensive, most of them for all of 1851 and the first quarter of 1852 are from Detroiters or business people from elsewhere Michigan. This indicates that the people on both sides of the border saw themselves as ‘one.’ Also it shows the American support Bibb received for his paper. The Detroit community was the one that Bibb came from into Canada West. He had a solid backing from that community, especially its abolitionist sector, and had a following there. Black and small newspapers usually operated at a loss. Advertisements were and are the key for a newspaper to be financially successful. From the small amount of ads that the *Voice* received, it is clear that income from this source, for the paper, was very limited. Both Black and white people used the columns of the *Voice* to tell the public about their
Hallock and Raymond told of their “ready made clothing”; A. Derrick, his (or her) tailoring establishment; and the Sons of Temperance advertised their Detroit “confectionary saloon.” Bibb advertised several “anti-slavery books,” including his own narrative; Mrs. Alexander broadcasted the benefits of her boarding house; one T. Johnson, a barber, offered “shaving, hair-dressing and bathing,” W.F. Parker informed the public that he has “fitted up an Eating House, where every delicacy can be furnished in better style than at any other establishment....” With the exception of Bibb, all these advertisers were from Michigan. From the Canada West end, Mary Bibb advertised her dressmaking business; Charles Baby and John O'Connor, their law practice; D. Vogelsang and J. Haggerty, their saddle business, and J. McCrae of Windsor advertised his assortment of ‘dry goods’ which included “groceries, hardware, crockery, stationery, boots and shoes, ready-made clothing, drugs, patent, medicines, etc.” Levi Foster, a successful Amherstburg businessman throughout most of the Voice's life, ran adverts of his hotel and stage-coach line. Some of the names are known. Hallock and Raymond were Michigan abolitionists and associates of Bibb. As reformers, striving for an anti-racist vision, they would support the Voice. Mrs. Alexander is most probably Black; it is very unlikely that a white female innkeeper, given the racial politics of the day, would want Blacks to sojourn at her establishment. The Sons of Temperance saloon is probably a Black saloon, since the temperance movement was structured along racial and class lines. The hairdressing and bathing business was in all likelihood Black, since Black men dominated the hairdressing business at that time. Baby and O'Connor were
established white lawyers from Sandwich. Charles Baby was a scion of the famous Baby family, a French Canadian family with deep roots in both Ontario and Michigan. The Baby family in Sandwich was known as a liberal family with abolitionist leanings. Levi Foster was an Amherstburg Black resident who was also subscription agent for the *Voice of the Fugitive.*

The ads in the paper are not extensive; they take up one and a half columns. They are also very eclectic. What is noticeable is that as 1852 progressed, more and more Canadians began advertising in the paper. This could mean that the *Voice* became more acquainted with the Canadian businesses as Bibb became more familiar with his adopted country. It could also mean that the paper had achieved a certain stability and status in Canada West and therefore was in a better position to attract Canadian advertisers.

**The Evolution of the Voice of the Fugitive**

In April 1852, the *Voice* and the Bibbs changed address; they moved from Sandwich to Windsor. The move was in anticipation of the arrival of the railway in Windsor. As the railway system extended across the province, the western line—the Great Western Railway—was to terminate in Windsor, on the banks of the Canadian side of the Detroit River. Windsor had won the location site for the railway over Sandwich, the county seat, and Amherstburg, another favoured spot. Lying directly opposite to Detroit, Windsor was strategically placed as the natural choice for the railway, as from Windsor, via ferry, the Michigan Central would take up where the Great Western Railway left off. The Bibbs joined the growing movement of Essex residents who changed addresses in anticipation that the railway would lead to the social, cultural,
and economic dominance of Windsor over the rest of Essex’s main towns.

The *Voice* waxed poetic about Windsor. It stated that jobs were available there with the Grand Western providing a large percentage of it. The paper also announced that Windsor was blessed with “natural waterways” and it had an efficient ferry system. It, too, reported that land was available in its environs. Lying across the river from Detroit, Windsor was also the first point of entry for many fugitives arriving from Detroit. As mentioned, Bibb often went to the Windsor wharf to greet fugitives and interview them. It was here that he had the good fortune to greet his own brothers.219

The *Voice* thrived in Windsor. It was here that Holly took up his residency as co-editor of the paper. By the end of 1852 the *Voice* had served the Black Canadian community well. It had a wide readership due to the hard work of its editors and subscription agents. “As a result, the *Voice* obtained the widest [sic] readership of the two black newspapers published in the province during the 1850s. Within the first year, the *Voice* boasted one thousand subscribers. It was widely quoted in the northern abolitionist press.”220

In spite of its success, the *Voice* was often in debt. There were never enough subscribers, and many of these were often delinquent. As the *Voice* neared the end of its second year of operation it put out an “appeal” to its readers. In this appeal, the *Voice* chronicled its history and purpose, related its future intentions, and entreated the public to support it.

“*Appeal*”

We have been under the scrutinizing eye of the
respective anti-slavery societies and journals in the United States, Canada and England, who have been faithful to rebuke us if we had tarried from the fight. But there has been a dissatisfaction expressed however, about the paper’s not being published weekly and made larger. This could not have been done with the limited number of subscribers which we had without almost impoverishing ourselves....We have concluded however to make it larger, and to issue it weekly from the first of January next—the particulars of which we shall lay before our readers before that time in a prospectus, for this object we most earnestly though respectfully appeal to the friends of our cause to lend us their aid—by getting new subscribers—donations and paying up in advance.

Bernell Tripp has documented the struggles most of the Black antislavery journals endured due to lack of finances. There were never enough subscribers to offset the cost of running a paper, and many papers were forced to close after a few years (or months) of publication. Even the most resilient of these journals, Frederick Douglass’ Paper, had to be supported by friends in Britain and the United States. Douglass had a whole cadre of supporters in the form of abolitionist women who held many bazaars and fairs to raise money for the paper. The pecuniary situation of the Voice, at the close of its second year of publication, simply reflected the general state of Black antislavery publishing.

In the last issue of the Voice for 1852 the editors informed the public that the name of the paper would be changed to “Voice of the Fugitive and Canadian Independent.” The editors themselves note that they wish to stay clear of religious or political sects, hence the word ‘Independent.’ Yet the word ‘Canadian’ is intriguing because its shows that Bibb and Holly (or Bibb, at least) felt themselves to be firmly planted on Canadian soil, and that the paper was a Canadian paper appealing to Canadian residents. In the same issue the paper announced:
This is our last issue for 1852. When this number shall have gone forth to its readers, the *Voice of the Fugitive*, will have pursued its legitimate work bearing its testimony against American slavery in all its forms, with the united voice of thousands of self-emancipated slaves for the past two years. We have endeavoured according to the best of our ability to exalt the standard of temperance, education, industry and self-respect—while we have rebuked and reproved those among us who have stood in the way of our advancement. In pursuing this course we have necessarily aroused the prejudice and repellant feelings of the ignorant, jealous and vicious amongst our own people—our readers must be the judges of whether we have done our or not.\(^{225}\)

The editors then enumerated some of the ways that paper contributed to the well-being of the Black community continently.\(^{226}\)

That the *Voice* was going into its third year, despite the obstacles it faced as a small paper, was no mean feat. It was rare for most nineteenth-century Black papers, Canadian or American, to survive beyond their first year. Though the *Voice* was plagued by insufficient funds and constantly had to appeal to ‘friends’ across the continent for financial support, it still managed to struggle through into a third volume. The editors had a right to congratulate themselves and their efforts.

For most of 1853, the *Voice of the Fugitive and Canadian Independent* continued its role as leader in the uplift mission and abolitionist struggle.\(^{227}\) It also remained the official organ of the RHS and therefore defended and supported the Society. It was in this year that the RHS opponents became more vociferous in their attack on the Society, the *Voice*, and anything associated with Henry Bibb. The murder of William Burton by James Tyner, a member of the Shadd-Ward alliance, must have proven to Henry Bibb that the controversy was not a simple matter. The murder also must have served as a
watershed in the history of the paper. Yet the paper’s editors continued to see themselves in a self-conscious way as leaders: leaders who had the right motives, and who were trying to do the right thing.

In October 1853 the office of the *Voice* was burnt down. Bibb sent out an ‘extra’ sheet informing the North American press, and the paper’s readers of the misfortune.

The 28 October issue of Boston’s *Liberator* reported:

> On Sunday night, Oct. 9th, about 12 o’ clock, the office of the *Voice of the Fugitive*, in Windsor C.W., with all its contents, was consumed by fire, together with several other apartments occupied by families in an adjoining building.

> Mr. Bibb gives his reasons for believing the fire to be the work of an incendiary, and then adds,--

> The *Voice of the Fugitive*, has been cloven down and partially silenced by the hand of an incendiary, we have reason to believe: and the loss to us has truly been a great one.

> They have destroyed for us in one night more than all we have accumulated by arduous labor and economy during the last three years.

> The great question with us now is, not whether we shall suspend the publication of our little sheet or not for the future—for upon this point our mind is fully made up.

> We shall go forth in the name of outraged humanity, firmly relying on the promises of God and the justice of our cause for success.

> Our first object in sending forth this Extra sheet is to inform our patrons that the *Voice of the Fugitive and Canadian Independent* is not dead, though crippled, but just as soon as we can repair the breach a little, we assure our readers that the Fugitives in Canada shall be heard from, again, through this paper, regularly.

Bibb then appeals to subscribers to pay up.
Another important object is to inform our friends who are in debt for the paper, that we greatly need the money. They must know that if ever we needed our pay for the paper it must be now, in our distress from this fire. We hope that they will not wait to be waited upon by agents, but send in their subscriptions by letter: and not only so, we hope that they will get others to subscribe for the paper and send in their pay, which will greatly aid the cause of humanity; as well as enable us to give them a more interesting paper.228

The burning of the Voice must have been a great blow to Bibb, Holly, Mrs. Bibb and their supporters. It was also a great loss to the Black community. For almost three years the Voice had been the clarion for a beleaguered community. It had made Black people visible, defended their rights, championed the cause of the enslaved, fought Canadian and American racists, and beginning with Henry Bibb, sought to put forth a program for Black elevation, progress, and independence.

When Bibb said it was an arsonist that destroyed the Voice, whom did he have in mind? At the time of the burning Henry Bibb and other RHS persons were still involved in a running battle with the Shadd-Ward group. Bibb and Holly spent much time in holding meetings to counter the ones held by this faction and used their paper to refute charges and innuendoes. The Voice, as mouthpiece for the RHS and Bibb and Holly’s land settlement programs, had enemies, very public enemies who worked for the destabilization of the RHS and who must have wished the demise of the Voice. It was well understood at the time that whosoever had access to the press had access to power, if even in a limited way.229 The opponents of the RHS were frustrated that they did not have the kind of access Bibb had to power, and by extension, public opinion. Even if they held public meetings and wrote to influential persons, their words did not go as far
as those of one who owned a newspaper. The power and influence that Bibb exerted as a result of his ownership of the *Voice* was therefore highly resented by his enemies.\(^{230}\) It can be confidently assumed that the RHS controversy destroyed the *Voice of the Fugitive*.

Bibb certainly must have had Mary Ann Shadd, Samuel Ward, and others in mind when he stated that his office was torched by an incendiary. Bibb must have thought that if one of their supporters could murder one of his, then it was very likely that one of their henchmen could torch his paper. Ward and Shadd had tried to start a paper in early 1853 and had failed. Essex County’s Black community was too poor to support two community papers; and whatever support its members could give, they gave to the *Voice*. As long as the *Voice* was standing, Bibb’s enemies must have thought they did not stand a chance of swaying the minds of the Black people of the peninsula toward their cause. One can assume that with the burning of the *Voice*, the rift between both camps widened as rumours went back and forth.

Indeed, if the *Voice* was torched by a Black arsonist (or arsonists), then it reveals that Blacks allowed differences to destroy their own institutions. The paper could also have been torched by white racists. There were enough whites, powerful and not, who were hostile toward Black people, and who resented Black people having a voice in the form of a newspaper. W.C., for one, lived either in Sandwich or vicinity and opposed the *Voice of the Fugitive*; Edwin Larwill opposed the paper also. There were numerous unnamed whites that hated Black people and wished them and their institutions erased from the landscape of Canada West.\(^{231}\)
The burning of newspapers or other forms of destruction were common forms of revenge used by those who disagreed with the editors or publishers. In Toronto for example, in 1826, publisher William Lyon Mackenzie had his types thrown into the lake and his office destroyed by Tory ruffians. A Kingston, Ontario, publisher also had his dog killed and his newspaper office destroyed by Tory sympathizers. Both he and Mackenzie supported the Reform party.  

Bibb planned to resurrect the paper, and the information he sent to the Liberator was sent as part of the Voice of the Fugitive, Extra, which indicates that Bibb was making sure that he would not be silenced. According to John O’Farrell, after the fire, “Bibb published a one-page newsletter until his death at Windsor on 1 Aug. 1854.” This could very well be the Extra. The loss of the Voice was great indeed. All the printing equipment was destroyed. Bibb not only used this equipment to publish his paper, but also to do printing jobs, which meant that Bibb lost another source of income. One can imagine that back issues for the paper, especially those for 1853, were also destroyed. Bibb’s personal correspondence and other papers were most likely consumed by the flames. Bibb wrote, in addition to his autobiography, two books on American slave conspiracies and a collection of antislavery songs, titled the Anti-Slavery Harp. One wonders if copies of these publications were in the office when it burned to the ground. It is no small wonder, therefore, that no cache of “Bibb’s Papers” exists.  

The fire was not a minor affair. Other buildings were also burnt and several families were left homeless. From all indications, Bibb never restored the paper to its original status and grandeur. A one-page sheet just did not “cut it” in the same way a
four-page paper did. And yet Bibb hoped to revive the paper to its former status, but he was unable to before his death. The *Voice of the Fugitive and Canadian Independent* did not, like the phoenix, rise from its own ashes. What rose instead was Mary Shadd’s *Provincial Freeman*. The demise of the *Voice* led to the life of the *Freeman*. For it was only after the *Voice* died that the *Freeman* was able to successfully establish itself. In the evolution of the Black press in nineteenth-century Ontario, the Black population revealed that it was able to support, rather half-heartedly, only one paper.

**Accomplishments and Achievements of the Voice**

One commentator on the nineteenth-century Canadian Black press declares that it was “an integral part and a valuable record of black Canadian life.”²³⁴ Yet, the Black press was more than this. Henry Bibb and the *Voice of the Fugitive* laid the foundation for the development of a Black press in Canada. As such he is “special to the history of the Black press in this country.”²³⁵ His pioneering efforts lasted for almost three years and served as an invaluable resource for the burgeoning Black community. The creation of the *Voice* led to a self-conscious effort on the part of Blacks to create history as subjects. The editor and the others who contributed to the paper created positive and encouraging images of Black people in the pages of the paper. Bibb was a visionary. He realized that if Black people were to have any control over their lives in a hostile environment then they needed to have their own press. Like Russworm and Cornish before him, he understood the power of the press in image creation and in shaping public opinion.
For posterity, Bibb has left an unshakeable legacy. Today, in almost every major Canadian city, there is at least one Black newspaper. The current Black newspapers perform similar roles to the *Voice*. Though slavery is no more, these newspapers still carry out an uplift function and also seek to create favourable images of African Canadians. One of the salient issues today for Blacks in Canada is the way we are presented in the white media. Blacks are stereotyped as criminals, welfare bums, illegal immigrants, outsiders, and 'undesirables.' Even those, like athlete Ben Johnson, who achieved national and international prominence, are savagely cut down when they do 'wrong.' Some white newspaper editors seem to take pleasure in abusing and assaulting particular Black communities like the Jamaican and Somali. Therefore, in many respects, the environment that many African Canadians live in today is still hostile and withering. The oppression of Black people in Canada still continues, and Black editors of today, like their predecessor Henry Bibb, are using their newspapers in the struggle for Black emancipation. On the other hand today's Black newspapers functioned not only in response to white racism; they highlight Black achievements and issues of significance internal to the community. Like Bibb, Black editors today have made their papers a *voice* for a beleaguered people.
Notes


4 See chapter 3 which details Bibb’s contributions as an antislavery writer.


8 The use of the term Canada in this regard is technically correct. In 1851, ‘Canada’ was made up of two provinces—Canada West (later named Ontario) and Canada East (Quebec). These two provinces were united in 1840, and called the “United Province of Canada.” The maritime colonies of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island, were—colonies of Britain. It was only in 1867 when Canada East and Canada West united with the maritime colonies to become Canada that the concept and reality of Canada as a nation took hold. For this discussion the terms Canada West and Ontario will be used interchangeably.

9 *Voice of the Fugitive*, 1 Jan. 1851, Sandwich, Canada West.


11 *Ibid.*, Mary Bibb to Gerrit Smith, 8 Nov. 1850. The letter is taken from the Gerrit Smith Papers, University of Syracuse.

12 *Voice*, 1 January 1851.

13 Both American and British Canadian spellings were used by the *Voice*.


15 See for example, the *Hamilton Gazette*, 22 Nov. 1855.

16 *Voice*, 1 Jan., March 1851. Mary Bibb’s birth name is Miles. She taught school for a while in Albany, New York.


See J.T. Fisher’s article on the agricultural union in the *Voice*, 3 Dec. 1851.


Stouffer, “A Restless Child of Change and Accident.”


The St. Catharines race riot is one cogent example. On 28 June 1852, whites became incensed at the parade of Black militia men. The whites organized themselves into a white mob and attacked these men. The rioters then rushed to the Black section of the town where they destroyed homes and properties. *Voice*, 16 July 1852. Samuel Ward to the editor of the Toronto *Globe*, 27 July 1852.

Silverman, “‘We Shall Be Heard!’” 54.

Ibid., 55. See also the *Voice*, 18 Nov. 1852.

Prominent suffragist activist Dr. Ella Synge, in opposing Black emigration to the Prairies in the early 1900s remarked: “The finger of fate is pointing to the lynch law which will be the ultimate result, as sure as we allow such people to settle among us.” Colin A. Thomson, *Black in Deep Snow: Black Pioneers in Canada* (Don Mills: J.M. Dent, 1979) 81-82. Emily Murphy, another famous Canadian feminist, wrote a novel called the *Black Candle* (Toronto: Thomas Allen Publisher, 1922). The *Black Candle* revealed itself as a text in which the author, concerned with the ‘purity of the Anglo-Saxon race’ expressed her tensions regarding the ‘clear and present danger’ of Black and Chinese men to white women. Though this book is, purportedly, about the evils of opium smoking, most of the pictorial representations are of African Canadian men (not Chinese) in bed with ‘fallen’ white women.

Silverman, “‘We Shall be Heard!’” 55-56.

35 *Voice*, 1 Jan. 1851.

36 Silverman, "'We Shall be Heard!'" 57. Larwill also used the Essex *Advocate* to inveigh against the Black settlers. See the *Voice*, 26 Feb. 1851.

37 Silverman, "'We Shall be Heard!'" 57-58. Prince was 'sympathetic' when it suited him, which was usually around election time. He was never really a friend of the Blacks. Prince did not wish to associate with Blacks and in 1852, purchased land to separate himself from them. See also R. Alan Douglas, *John Prince, 1796-1870*, (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1980) 117, 156-157.


39 Silverman, "'We Shall be Heard!'" 60.


41 See note 3.


43 The first Fugitive Slave Act was passed in 1793. This Act empowered slaveholders to pursue their human property; the second Act of 1850 aggressively enforced the 1793 Act by putting at the disposal of slaveholders the coercive mechanisms of the Federal Government—federal marshals would now assist slaveholders in the capture of runaway slaves. Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969) 143-44. See also *Voice*, 26 Feb. 1851.

44 When did the "refugees" and "fugitives" cease being those things while living in a free country? I find these labels problematic because these terms denote transience, and a large number of these people came to Canada to settle permanently. Contemporary whites, seeing these immigrants through the lens of "fugitives" and "refugees" also refused to see them as permanent settlers, even when they had children and built new lives. Even the children were seen as transients. Historians have also used the paradigm of "fugitive" to describe the Black population, seemingly ignoring the thousands of free-born Blacks who settled, or were born, in the province. Fortunately, Michael Wayne in a recent paper revealed to us that most of the Blacks who came into the province at mid-century were either free born, or had lived in the Northern states, in freedom, for a great number of years. This is not to deny that 'real' fugitives, those running directly from slavery, or those from the North who feared being discovered, were not coming into the province. Of course they did. All my observations are made from the advantage of hindsight. In 1851 when Bibb started his paper, and was the most prominent Black leader in the Michigan/Ontario peninsula, dozens of Black people fleeing the FSL crossed the Detroit River daily into Ontario. Bibb was a witness to this—more than that, he as Underground Railroad agent assisted many of these people in their crossings. Still, given the context, these contentious terms are probably the most useful ones as even freeborn persons were "fugitives" from American racism. Michael Wayne, "The Black Population of Canada West on the Eve of the American Civil War, A Reassessment," *Histoire Sociale-Social History* 28 (1995) 465-85; reprinted in Franca Iacovetta *et al., A Nation of Immigrants, Women, Workers, and Communities in Canadian History, 1840s-1960s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998) 58-82.


46 *Voice*, 16 Dec. 1852.

48 Voice, 22 Sept. 1852.

49 Voice, 26 Feb. 1851.

50 Ibid., 19 Nov., 3, 17 Dec. 1851.

51 Ibid., 30 July, 13 August 1851.

52 Ibid., 26 Feb. 12 March, 23 April, 7 May, 4 June, 18 June, 16 July, 19 Nov. 1851; 3 June, 17 June, 21 Oct. 4 Nov. 1852.

53 Bibb’s wife, Mary, did not seem as enthusiastic as her husband about the virtues of the province. See her letter in the paper, 26 Feb. 1851.

54 The life of Shadrach Minkins is covered in Gary Collison’s Shadrach Minkins From Fugitive Slave to Citizen (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1997).

55 Ripley, BAP, 2:130.

56 Voice, 26 Feb. 1851. Several members of the Boston Vigilance committee, including ex-fugitive Lewis Hayden and lawyer Robert Morris were arrested. Hayden eventually fled to Sandwich, Canada West. Voice, 12 March 1851.

57 Ibid., 26 Feb. 1851.

58 The incident at Christiana, Parker’s role, and his subsequent flight to Canada, are covered in Jonathan Katz’s Resistance at Christiana.

59 Ibid., 137-243.

60 Ibid., 268-70.

61 Several fugitive extradition cases in Canada proved Bibb wrong. Blacks could be accused of murder, theft and other crimes by their owners and other whites, who then demanded their extradition. In 1842, exslave Nelson Hackett, while living in Chatham, Canada West, was charged with theft by his master who had pursued him to Canada. Hackett was then extradited to Arkansas and returned to slavery. Two of the most famous extradition cases are those of Jesse Happy and John Anderson. Both men had killed their masters in their escape attempts. Both men fortunately escaped extradition. See Roman J. Zorn, “Criminal Extradition Menaces the Canadian Haven For Fugitive Slaves, 1841-1861,” CHR 38, 3 (1957). 284-294.

62 It is possible that this family followed J. Theodore Holly and his family from Vermont. This could indicate that not all Black Vermonters were satisfied with the conditions in that state. Voice, 17 June 1852.

63 Ibid., 17 June 1852.

64 Ibid, 12 March 1851.


67 The Toronto convention is examined in the chapter 4. Due to time and space constraints, I have chosen not to examine in detail the Amherstburg meeting. However, Roger Hite, op cit, has analyzed in-depth these two meetings, and in doing so provided a crucial reading of Bibb’s nationalistic-emigrationist thought.

68 ‘Taking the pledge’ meant that people signed their names to a pledge stating that they would abstain from alcohol, tobacco, and other kinds of addictive substances. After taking the pledge, they were then given a temperance certificate. Noel, Canada Dry, 39.

69 Voice, 1 Jan. 1851.

70 Ibid., 12 March 1851.

71 Jan Noel, Canada Dry: Temperance Crusades Before Confederation (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) 84.


73 Ibid., 29 Jan. 1851.

74 Ibid., 19 Nov. 1851.


76 Interestingly, much of this rum came from the West Indies. Cheryl Krasnick Warsh remarking on the importance of alcohol to early Canadian colonial society, suggests that “...much of Canada was built on Jamaican rum and local whisky.” See her essay “‘John Barleycorn Must Die”: An Introduction to the Social History of Alcohol,” in Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, ed. Drink in Canada: Historical Essays (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993) 4.


78 Noel, Canada Dry.


80 Voice, 18 June 1851.

81 Jan Noel neglected to look at the Blacks in the temperance movement in pre-Confederation Canada; however, she diligently examined the British and French involvement. See Noel’s Canada Dry.

Krasnick Warsh notes that often class prejudices "hardened" as more and more working class persons joined the movement. In North America this became even more pronounced "as church and reform leaders no longer controlled the movement they had initiated." It is curious that Krasnick Warsh did not look at race, considering how racialized the movement became by the mid-nineteenth century. "John Barelycorn," 19.

In 1851, the state of Maine was the first jurisdiction in North America to pass a law restricting the sale of alcohol. "Select" men were permitted to sell alcohol, and mainly to practitioners of medicine, as the Maine legislature recognized that "alcohol is necessary, for medicine and in the arts.... No one else is to sell. Liquor is outlawed, wherever found, it may be destroyed. Officers can search stores, vessels and all public conveyances, and destroy without compunction...." Ibid, 29 Jan. 1852. On the American temperance movement see Ian R. Tyrell, Sobering Up: From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America, 1800-1860 (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1979). For a discussion of the Maine Law see 252-289.

Black parents and educators regularly wrote to Ryerson seeking advice how to handle the expulsion of their children from the common schools. Ryerson, in sympathy with the parent, but realizing that he could not change customary practices, often advised Black parents to sue. Dennis Hill, a Kent County farmer, was the first Black parent to legally challenge the discriminatory practices accorded Black children. Ripley, BAP, 2: 243-44; H.W. Arthurs, "Civil Liberties—Public Schools—Segregation of Negro Students," Canadian Bar Review 41 (Sept. 1963) 453-57; Claudette Knight, "Black Parents Speak: Education in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Upper Canada," OH 89, 4 (Dec. 1997) 269-284.


See the discussion in the previous chapter on Bibb's involvement with schools for the Refugee Home Society. Bibb also taught Sunday schools. Voice, 26 Feb. 1851.

We know of several such schools within sixty miles of this place, several of which are supported partly by the government—but still there is need of more. Hundreds of children are growing up in ignorance, where there is no
school. At Malden there is a very large and well conducted school under the instruction of Mrs. Coywood. There are several schools in that vicinity for colored children, one is taught by Miss Jane Buckner, also one by Miss Turner. There is an interesting school about ten miles from Malden under the supervision of Rev. Kirkland, in the settlement which is called New Canaan. Miss Lyons is now teaching the school. In the township of Windsor we have no school, but there is great need of one. Seven miles above Windsor, there is quite a settlement of colored people who need a school, but have none.

96 Ibid., 1 Jan. 1851.

97 The Bibbs were colleagues with (white) abolitionists from Lenewee County, Michigan. Some of these people were Dolbeare himself, and Laura Haviland. Both were also involved with the Refugee Home Society—Dolbeare as officer and Haviland as schoolteacher.

98 Ibid., 26 Feb. 1851.

99 James E. Grant to Henry Bibb, Voice, 23 April 1851.

100 Ibid. 16 July 1852.

101 Ibid., 17 June 1852.

102 Ibid., 15 July 1852

103 Ibid., 15 Jan. 1851.

104 Ibid., 18 June 1851.

105 Ibid.

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid., 26 March, 9 April, 23 April 1851.


109 At an anti-colonization meeting held in New York City in the Spring of 1849, Bibb, as one of the invited speakers, in opposition to Liberian colonization remarked: “There is a colony just across our northern boundary, a colony more congenial to our health and prosperity that that of Liberia. It is just across the borders of Michigan in the British possessions, a colony where coloured people, slaves more especially, may go without the large expenditure required to colonize them in Africa.” Mass Meeting of the Coloured Citizens of the City of New York, National Anti-Slavery, 3 May 1849.

110 Bibb’s editorial for the 21 May 1851 issue of the Voice was titled “Colorphobia in Canada.”

111 Voice, 3 Dec. 1851.

112 Ibid.


To date, Roger Hite’s work on Bibb is the only examination available on any aspect of Bibb’s nationalist theory. Hite, “Voice of a Fugitive,” Op cit, 269-285.

Miller, Black Nationality, 110-127.

Ibid., 138-140; see also the resolutions of the Colored People of Trenton, New Jersey, Pennsylvania Freeman, 10 April 1851.


Miller’s, Search For a Black Nationality is the definitive work on Black emigration.

Ripley, BAP, 2: 32.

Isaac Henson—most likely the son of Josiah Henson—lived in London for over 15 years. He attended college there and was ordained as a Wesleyan minister. Josiah Henson, An Autobiography of the Reverend Josiah Henson (1881; reprint, introduction by Robin Winks, Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969) 143.


Voice, 21 May 1851.

Ibid., 9 Sept. 21 Oct. 4 Nov. 1852.

Ibid., Ward to Bibb, 17 Dec. 1851.

Historian Sterling Stuckey, has convincingly shown that when Africans accepted Christianity, what occurred was not a ‘Christianization of African religions but an Africanization of Christianity.’ Africans brought a distinctive religious ethos and worldview to Christianity. They infused this new religion with the “shouts,” a unique style of singing, praising and preaching. Dancing, and jumping in the air were common actions contemporary observers viewed at Black religious worship. Many Black abolitionists like Ward, were clergymen, and they made up an elite that advocated a Christianity premised on ‘sober’ Anglo-Saxon values. They felt that in order for Blacks to assimilate, they had to throw away ‘negative’ aspects of their slave culture, aspects such as the one Ward described—ecstatic worship. Sterling Stuckey, Slave
Culture: Nationalism Theory and the Foundations of Black America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) 3-97, 193-244. Michael Gomez has built on Stuckey's work to show how the Black antebellum and post-bellum religious and political elite, in its desire to assimilate into white America gave up slave religion and tried to become Anglo-Saxon Christians. But that was not enough. They then sought to beat out this aspect of slave culture out of their poorer and slave brethren. Gomez asserts that present day class conflicts between Blacks in the United States can be traced to this intriguing phenomenon. Michael Gomez, Exchanging our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) 219-243.

128 Voice, 21 May 1851. See also 9 April 1851.

129 Ibid, 1 Jan. 1852.

130 Ibid, 9 April 1851, 1 June 1851, 29 July 1852, 9 Sept. 1852.

131 Ibid., 26 Feb., 27 Aug. 1851, 6 May 1852.

132 Ibid., 27 Aug. 1851.

133 Ibid., 18 June 1851; 17 June, 16 July 1852.

134 The Cincinnati group organized because of the destitution of runaway slaves who arrived in Ohio from Kentucky and other slave states. These runaways often arrive with just the clothes on their backs. Levi Coffin states with regard to a fugitive family that arrived in Cincinnati from Kentucky, but which was en route to Canada: "The ladies' Anti-Slavery Sewing Society fitted out the family with the necessary clothing...." Coffin, Reminiscences of Levi Coffin (Cincinnati: Western Tract Society, 1876) 316.


136 Linda Bailey, reference librarian at the Cincinnati Historical Society, assumed that all the women of the Cincinnati Anti-Slavery Sewing Circle were white. Personal correspondence with Ms. Bailey.

137 Ibid, 26 Feb. 1851.

138 Mary M. Guild, a member of a prominent Cincinnati family, was one of the "benevolent ladies" of Cincinnati who "organized an Anti-Slavery Sewing Society, to provide suitable clothing for the fugitives." Charles Greve, Centennial History of Cincinnati. Wilbur Siebert also mentions the Cincinnati Sewing Cricle, See his The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom (London: Macmillan, 1898) 77. My thanks to Linda Bailey, reference librarian of the Cincinnati Historical Society for leading me to the information on Mary M. Guild.

139 Voice, 3 June 1852.

140 Ibid., 19 Nov. 1851.

141 Ibid., 30 July 1851.

142 Ibid., 18 Nov. 1852.

143 Ibid., 18 Nov. 1851.
public money is almost nothing, schooling (This included religious schooling) became necessary resources. Mrs. Bibb, the need for Black children to be educated. Most of the Black students who went to great lengths to chase them from the public schools. Bibb’s school arose in response to the need for Black children to be educated. Most of the Black separate school in the province arose because of racist whites who did not want Black children to attend school with their children. Separate schooling (This included religious schooling) became enshrined in law with the implementation of Ontario’s separate school act of 1850. Even with vocal support from the government Black schools lacked the necessary resources. Mrs. Bibb, writing to the Anti-Slavery Bugle, describes the ‘sufferance’ under which Blacks lived; she also remarks on ethnic, racial, and religious intolerance in the Essex area. “The public money is almost entirely under the control of the French, and they are Catholics; consequently nothing can exceed their bitterness to the colored people because they are protestants.” 154

Mary Bibb to Gerritt Smith, 8 Nov. 1850. Ripley, BAP, 2: 108.

Ripley, BAP, 2: 108; see also 111.

Anti-Slavery Bugle, 12 April, 4 Oct. 1851; Liberator, 12 Nov. 1852;

Voice, 27 Aug. 1851

Ibid, 10 Sept. 1851.

Voice, 30 July 1851.

Mrs. Bibb must have been referring to Dr. James W.C. Pennington, an escaped slave turned abolitionist. Pennington learned the trade of smith while in slavery and practised it both in slavery and freedom. A man of exceptional ability, Pennington took private lessons and was eventually ordained a Presbyterian minister. The University of Heidelberg, Germany, awarded Pennington an honorary doctorate in theology, when he toured that country in 1849. It was Pennington who spearheaded the rescue and defence of the Amistad captives with the formation of the Fugitive Union Society. Pennington’s accomplishments, given the disadvantages he endured in slavery and freedom, caused a stir in both Europe and the United States. For works on Pennington see, Pennington’s narrative The Fugitive Blacksmith: or, Events in the History of James W.C. Pennington, 1849; reprinted in William Loren Katz, Flight From the Devil: Six Slaves Narratives (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1996) 37-104; R. J. M. Blackett, “James W.C. Pennington: A Life of Christian Zeal,” in Beating Against the Barriers: Biographical Essays in Nineteenth-Century Afro-American History (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1986) 1-86.

Mary Bibb was challenging Thomas Carlyle’s notion of “hero.” Carlyle, a writer, felt that the true hero of the age was the “man of letter.” Bibb in calling for a redefinition of hero, is insisting that the Black children and adults who learnt their letters, are doubly heroic, given the extreme oppression they lived under for most of their lives. Pennington, an escaped slave, represents this kind of heroism. Carlyle, who hated Black people, and felt that they were naturally inferior would be surprised at the progress disadvantaged Blacks were making in Mrs. Bibb’s school. See note 151 and 154.

Mrs. Bibb not only had the weather in mind, but also the hostile reception Black students faced from whites who went to great lengths to chase them from the public schools. Bibb’s school arose in response to the need for Black children to be educated. Most of the Black separate school in the province arose because of racist whites who did not want Black children to attend school with their children. Separate schooling (This included religious schooling) became enshrined in law with the implementation of Ontario’s separate school act of 1850. Even with vocal support from the government Black schools lacked the necessary resources. Mrs. Bibb, writing to the Anti-Slavery Bugle, describes the ‘sufferance’ under which Blacks lived; she also remarks on ethnic, racial, and religious intolerance in the Essex area. “The public money is almost entirely under the control of the French, and they are Catholics; consequently nothing can exceed their bitterness to the colored people because they are protestants.” ASB, 12 April 1851. Afua A.P. Cooper, “Black Teachers in Canada West, 1850-1870: A History,” (M.A. thesis,

153 British writer, Thomas Carlyle, was also an influential afrophobe who circulated the view that West Indian emancipation was a mistake as the freed slaves reverted to ‘African barbarism,’ spent all their time in hammocks ‘lolling’ under the pumpkin vine. Carlyle enunciated these views in his “Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question” published in 1849. To correct the “mistake” of emancipation, Carlyle called for the reinstatement of slavery. Blacks in North America were well aware of Carlyle’s assertion and made rebuttals. Catherine Hall, White, Male, and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History (England: Polity Press, 1992) 264-289.

156 M.E. Bibb, Voice, 26 Feb. 1851.

157 See Afua Cooper, “Black Women and Work.”


When women started wearing the bloomer conservative men (and women) felt that this new mode of dressing would lead to family breakdown, increased sexuality for women and other social ‘ills.’ Middle class women who discarded or attempted to discard the stays, hoops, and corsets for clothing that gave them more mobility and flexibility did not know that their choice would cause some much ruckus. It was feminist abolitionist Amelia Bloomer, inspired by the discussions that emanated from the Seneca Falls Women’s Rights Convention, who started wearing the “oriental trousers with a very short tunic.” This was her contribution to the dress reform. This style of dress was immediately called the “bloomer” after Amelia. Lee Hall, Common Thread: A Parade of American Clothing (Boston: Little Brown, 1992) 79.

161 Voice, 7 May 1851.

162 Ibid., 29 Jan. 1852.

163 Ibid., 16 July 1851.

164 Ibid., 15 Jan. 1851.

165 Ibid., 13 August 1851. For Mrs. Bibb’s role in the Emancipation Day preparation, see “First of August,” Voice 30 July 1851.

166 Provincial Freeman, 30 June 1855.

167 David M. Dean’s Defender of the Race: James Theodore Holly, Black Nationalist and Bishop (Boston, Mass.: 1979) is still the most complete biographical study of Holly.

168 Ibid., 4-5.

169 Ibid., 5-8.

170 Ibid., 5.
Holly no doubt is referring to the promoters of the Liberian scheme, members of the American Colonization Society, many of whom were racists who simply wanted to rid the United States of free Blacks by shipping them off to Africa. The ACS’ leadership role in the Liberian movement dissuaded many emigrationist Blacks from even thinking about Liberia as an alternative. On several aspects of the debate among Black leaders regarding Liberian colonization see Miller, Search for a Black Nationality, 43-51, 54-90.

For a complete reading of Holly’s proposal see, the Voice, 24 Sept. 1851. See also 22 Oct. 1851.

Quarles, Black Abolitionist, 74-76.

Dean, Defender of the Race, 11.

Beginning in his 7 May 1851 letter to the Voice, Holly began to use the term “Africo-American” to describe Blacks in the United States. Holly therefore took the level of discussion around Black identity one step farther by naturally liking American Blacks to Africa. With hindsight, one can say that he anticipated the current usage of the term “African American.” Stuckey Slave Culture, 193-244, examines the “Names Controversy” among antebellum American Blacks.

When it was discovered that Windsor, not Amherstburg or Sandwich, was to be the stop for the Western Railway, many Sandwich residents, including the Bibbs moved to Windsor to be able to take advantage of the opportunities the railroad would offer. The coming of the railroad to Windsor in January 1854 marked the sustained development of that village.

Ibid. This insert also supports my thesis that Bibb was not a “real” fugitive. He was not, as commonly assumed, running away from the long arms of the Fugitive Slave Law. Bibb crossed and recrossed the American/Canadian border whenever he needed to.

Dean, Defender of the Race, 15.
190 *Voice*, 17 June 1852.


194 *Voice*, 17 June 1852.

195 Dean, *Defender of the Race*, 16.

196 Dean, *Defender of the Race*, 16.


199 Miller, *Search for a Black Nationality*, 161; *Voice*, 12 August 1852.


202 The *Provincial Freeman*, 24 March 1853.

203 *Voice*, 21 May, 4 June 1851; 26 July 1852.


205 *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 8 April 1853. The proceedings were also published in the *Voice*.

206 Peter Carlesimo. "Refugee Home Society."


208 *Provincial Freeman*, 24 March 1853.

209 *Liberator*, 4 March 1853.
The Cleveland Convention following upon the Amherstburg convention also had emigration as its central theme. Holly was one of the secretaries of the meeting, and also appointed a "commissioner" to investigate Haitian emigration. This was also the first Black Convention that made a conscious effort to "welcome" women and their participation. Fully one-third of the delegates were women. Mary Bibb served as a vice-president, and also on the "committee of credentials." *Proceedings of the National Emigration Convention of Colored People held at Cleveland, Ohio, the 24th, 25th, and 26th of August 1854* (Pittsburgh: A.A. Anderson, 1854); Miller, *Search for a Black Nationality*, 145.

In January 1854, the first train stopped in Windsor. This event inaugurated direct rail service between this part of Canada and the East; both areas were isolated from each other during winter months as the waterways, traditional travel routes, were under ice. The coming of the railway to Windsor also establish year-round rail communication between Southwestern Ontario and the United States. Neil F. Morrison, *Garden Gateway to Canada: One Hundred Years of Windsor and Essex, 1854-1954* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1954) 30-33.

Fetherling informs us that it was not until the second half of the 19th century that dailies became viable in Canada. The population of even large town, and certainly villages and hamlets, was much too small to support dailies. Most Canadian newspapers operated bi-monthly, tri-weekly, weekly, or even seasonally. To the South, many of the abolitionist and Blacks newspapers were published weekly or bi-monthly. *Rise of the Canadian Newspaper*, 25-26.

Most archival copies of the *Voice* have only the 1851 and 1852 run. But the paper was also published for most of 1853. It was only recently the copies for the 1853 volume have been discovered at Cornell University. Unfortunately, I have not been able to access the 1853 run.

From the *Voice of the Fugitive ‘Extra’*, sent to the *Liberator* 28 Oct. 1853.

Shadd, well aware of the power of the *Voice*, and the way it shaped public opinion, desired intensely a public voice to counter Bibb and his paper. The founding of the *Provincial Freeman* was done in rivalry to Bibb, and to give Shadd the voice she sought. Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary*, 56-57.

Rhodes remarked on Shadd’s frustration at not having being able to influence public opinion against Bibb. *Ibid.*


Frankie Hutton in *The Early Black Press*, 5, makes this point with regard to Russwurm and Cornish, *Freedom’s Journal* editors.

Chapter 8.

She is to me the Kindest Companion
Henry Bibb, 1849

THE WOMEN IN HENRY BIBB'S LIFE

Four women played critical roles in Henry Bibb’s personal and public life—his mother, Milldred Jackson, his wives, Malinda Bibb and Mary Miles, and his daughter, Mary Frances. A fifth woman, Matilda Nichols, a schoolteacher and assistant of Mary Miles, may have been a one-time mistress. The women in Bibb’s life affected his self-esteem and self-concept in salient ways, and enabled him to fashion a multi-layered identity, as husband, father, caring son, and abolitionist activist. His mother, Milldred Jackson, was enslaved and, as was the case for many slaves, was his only parent and as such, provided early guidance and care. His first wife, Malinda, was also an enslaved woman, and the mother of his daughter, Mary Frances. His relationship with Malinda and their daughter ended in loss and sorrow. His second wife, Mary, was a well-educated freeborn woman; she also became his public partner and ally in several and varied antislavery ventures. Mary Miles, in more ways than one, symbolized his freedom, and the attainment of his manhood. In contrast, his relationships with his mother, his first wife, and his daughter were born and shaped in the context of enslavement which was articulated within a patriarchal white supremacist system.

This chapter examines these women’s lives and their relationships with Bibb. Central to this discussion will be analyses of the construction of Black womanhood and manhood by Blacks themselves and by their white oppressors during and after
enslavement. Thus, issues of sexual and physical abuse of Blacks under slavery, attacks on the Black family, the importance of family bonds to the enslaved, and the resilience of the Black family receive attention. I will also probe aspects of free Black women’s lives by examining the presence of Mary Miles in Bibb’s life. The sources for this chapter are mainly literary and come from Bibb’s writings, or writings about him. The section on Mary Miles is supported by letters and articles written by her, and official documents which pertain directly to her life.

Milldred Jackson

I remember being torn from a dear and affectionate mother; I saw her tears and heard her groans; I remember all the particulars. From a little boy up I have remembered my mother; I remember what the prayers of my dear mother were: I have heard her pray for me; for she was a good Christian woman before I was born; and I thank God that I was born of a good Christian mother, a mother whose prayers fell on my ears. Of all earthly blessings there is none can approach to a good mother. I remember her entreaties; I remember her prayers to God for me. Blessed is the child, son or daughter, that has the prayers of a mother. I remember well the feeling that those prayers wrought upon my heart, though I was but a boy. Josiah Henson, 1881.

I Shall forgive the white South much in its final judgement day: I shall forgive its slavery, for slavery is a world-old habit; I shall forgive its fighting for a well-lost cause, and for remembering that struggle with tender tears; I shall forgive its so-called “pride of race,” the passion of its hot blood, and even its dear, old, laughable strutting and posing; but one thing I shall never forgive, neither in this world nor the world to come: its wanton and continued and persistent insulting of black womanhood which it sought and seeks to prostitute to its lust. W.E.B. DuBois, 1920.

These two quotations bring into sharp relief Black motherhood and womanhood. The first, a poignant tribute to his mother by ex-fugitive Josiah Henson, and the second, a
condemnation of the old white South for its treatment of Black women by scholar and activist W.E.B. Du Bois. Henry Bibb’s mother, Milldred Jackson, a slave woman, and mother of seven sons, six of whom were fathered by different white men, embodied aspects of these two visions of womanhood.

David White of Shelby County, Kentucky, owned Milldred Jackson long before Henry, her first child, was born. It is Bibb himself who introduces her in his narrative, and by so doing relates her victimization and abuse, her violated womanhood and compromised motherhood as a Black slave woman:

My mother was known by the name of Milldred Jackson. She is the mother of seven slaves only, all being sons, of whom I am the eldest. She was also so fortunate or unfortunate, as to have some of what is called the slaveholding blood in her veins. I know not how much; but not enough to prevent her children though fathered by slaveholders, from being bought and sold in the slave markets of the South. Jackson, probably a mulatto, gave birth to children by slaveholders but was not spared the pain of having her children enslaved and sold away from her. She experienced one of the cruelest ironies of the system: her children, though fathered by white free men, were still enslaved and at times sold off like animals. She recognized, just as her son did, that her womb was used by the maintainers of slavery, as a piece of economic machinery.

One of her principal functions as a slave woman was to produce children for her master, thereby enriching him. In fact, producing children was a ‘requirement’ for the slave woman. That her master might be the father of her children was of no importance and little consequence. The economic logic of slavery cared not who fathered slave children. Black women must have been aware that by replenishing the slave labour force they
helped maintain the very system that brutalized them. Legal scholar Dorothy Roberts, in analyzing the oppressive impact of slavery on Black reproduction, remarks: “Here lies one of slavery’s most odious features: it forced its victims to perpetuate the very institution that subjugated them by bearing children who were born the property of their masters.”\(^5\) The control that slaveholders and other whites had over the procreative capacities of Black people, especially women, was a central underpinning of Black subjugation.\(^6\) Sexual exploitation and abuse of Black women were an integral part of slaveholding society. White men, planter and non-planter, bedded and impregnated slave and Black women with impunity. Slave women, by virtue of their gender, race, and status, experienced multiple jeopardies.\(^7\)

That Milldred Jackson gave birth to six children, possibly in quick succession (her seventh son was for Robert Jackson, a free Black man whom she married), signified that she was a “good breeder.” Her fertility, over which she exercised little control, was a boost for her owners. Being forced to breed child after child in quick succession signified slave women’s lack of reproductive freedom.\(^8\) In much of pre-colonial Africa, women practised the spacing of children, and birth control, through extended breastfeeding. This led to children being born about every three years as sex was prohibited during the period of breastfeeding.\(^9\) Among the WoDaabe, for instance, strict taboos governed sexual relations between pregnant and lactating women and their husbands.\(^10\) Perhaps, the imposition of sexual taboo upon couples with new children could be one of the reasons polygyny was instituted among many African nations.

In plantation America, enslaved mothers did not have the privilege of adhering to
sexual taboo after the birth of a child. Perhaps most mothers practised breast-feeding, but one cannot tell how effective a form of birth control this was, as slave women’s nutrition tended to be very poor. Also, if the woman was married (to a Black or slave man), chances are he was not practising sexual abstinence. And if she was routinely bedded by white men, as was the case for Milldred Jackson, she would have little autonomy over her reproductive decision.

For most of her child-bearing life, Milldred Jackson’s body was “wantonly insulted” by slave holding men. Men who ensured that she would live a burdensome life as a “single” mother by denying her children a father. Forcing Black women to breed, or turning them into sexual animals, then abandoning them, and then enslaving and even selling their children delineated the appalling violence done to slave women by white men, and the system of racialized and gendered slavery that they instituted. As a slave child, Bibb well understood how it was “almost impossible for slaves to give a correct account of their male parentage.” He wrote, “that my mother informed me that my father’s name was JAMES BIBB. He was doubtless one of the present BIBB family of Kentucky; but I have no recollection of him at all, for he died before my recollection.”

George P. Rawick in his discussion on the Black family notes that there were many types of family arrangements: these included the nuclear family, the extended family, and the single mother family. In several family configurations Rawick notes the presence of a father or father figure and also the importance of male kinship. He credits enslaved Blacks for maintaining diverse family structures in spite of a slavery system which by and large had the Black family under siege. He cautions us not to see the
“slave family” as a monolithic structure but to recognize and note its variety. The fact that toward the end of slavery there were over three million enslaved persons meant that the Black family would be heterogeneous in its formation. Herbert Gutman similarly documented that many slave families were headed by both parents, and that men as fathers and husbands were integral to their families.

Though scholars like Rawick, Gutman, and John Blassingame have laid to rest the myth of the “matriarchal” slave family by revealing the presence and importance of fathers to their families, it remains a significant fact that many slave children were deprived of, and often did not know, their fathers. If the father was a white man and, or a slaveholder, paternity and fatherhood would be a non-issue. If the father was Black or enslaved, his wife and children could be sold away from him, or vice versa, thereby thwarting their efforts to be responsible and caring fathers. Bibb was among those many slaves who did not know their fathers and were raised by their mothers. Many slaves also did know their fathers and lived with them. Harriet Tubman was raised by both parents, and her father was instrumental in providing her with a practical education. Josiah Henson lived with his father until the latter was sold away. Henson himself, during his marriage, lived in a nuclear family setting with his wife and children. James Pennington’s father also helped raise him, and Venture Smith supported a family consisting of his wife and children. Yet Bibb’s lack of a father and a patriline was a critical feature of the slave experience. Even if fathers were present, as was the case for Henson, their place in their children’s life could be very tenuous. Slave fathers were routinely removed from their families at the whim of
slaveholders. Many slave mothers were thus left to fend as “single mothers.” The strain that this placed on slave mothers was tremendous. Numerous slave mothers were robbed of husbands and fathers for their children, denied crucial familial support, and at the same time, sexually brutalized by those who denied them a decent family life. Such callous treatment of slave women led an enraged Dubois to condemn the South and inspired Bibb to exclaim that in slavery “female virtue is trampled in the dust with impunity....”

Jackson, as woman and mother, introduced her son, Henry, to the vagaries of Black womanhood and motherhood, and their economic and sexual vulnerability under slavery. Jackson also introduced her son to the ordeal that was slavery. Bibb was taken from his mother at an early age and hired out by his owners to various slaveholders. He notes: “The first time I was separated from my mother, I was young and small... I was taken away from my mother, and hired out to labor for various persons, eight or ten years in succession....” Therefore, beginning very early in Henry’s life, the relationship between mother and child and vice versa was undermined by periods of servitude that Bibb endured as a young child. Jackson’s parental authority over her child was therefore diminished. Peggy Cooper Davis notes that this severing of familial links between mother and child was deliberately intended to undermine the slave family and subjugate its members.

To the extent that the system of slave subordination worked according to its design, the values of the enslaved were not nurtured within an intimate, familial community structured by its adult members, but inscribed by authoritarian decree. The slaveholding class imposed values upon the enslaved and
assumed the power to own and to socialize slave children; the
moral voice of the slave was silenced in two ways. First, parents
were prohibited from teaching freely chosen values to their
children. Second, slave children were denied both the moral
and social heritage of their families and the freedom to develop
values in the more flexible and intimate environment
of family.\textsuperscript{25}

For most slave children, childhood was not a period of ‘innocence and joy’ but of
hardship and stress, as they began physical toil at an early age. Like the adult slaves, they
were not spared the whip. Slave children were often beaten and abused by slaveholders
who did not see them as \textit{children} but as slaves and therefore subject to the rigours of
slavery. Bibb, who was repeatedly whipped as a young boy, remarks with stinging
sarcasm that he was not “raised up” but \textit{flogged} up.\textsuperscript{26} In the instances of his beatings, his
mother could do little to protect him. In many instances, she was not even in the same
locale as he.

Dorothy Burnham states that “children of the slave community in the U.S. were
victimized as no other group of children in our history has ever been. The quality of their
lives was determined in every respect by those who profited from their enslavement.”\textsuperscript{27}
She goes on to add that slave children were often deprived of food, clothing, shelter, and
love, and the fact that many were put out to work early exacerbated these ills.\textsuperscript{28} Bibb, as
a very youthful worker, suffered from these deprivations. Bibb recounts that during
periods of his hire, while away from his mother, he was often hungry, cold, and ill-clad.
Undoubtedly, he was neither nurtured nor loved.\textsuperscript{29}

Jackson, as much as she could, provided her son with stability and care in his
early life. Later on, when Bibb reached adulthood, she would advise him on love and
marriage. Wilma King’s description of slave mothers’ responsibilities aptly summarizes Jackson’s position.

Slave parents had unusually heavy responsibilities. They had to ensure that they survived and, at the same time, that their children survived. All too often, these responsibilities fell disproportionately upon slave mothers, who provided the initial nurturing and were the basic anchor for young children. Mothers played major roles in helping their children adjust to work, understand plantation authority, and meet the tragedies and traumas of slavery.30

Bibb does not say whether or not his mother lived with any extended family members. There is no mention of a grandmother, grandfather, aunt or cousins, though they possibly could be present. If Jackson lived alone with her sons, her family type would represent one of the various family arrangements current within the slave community. At the same time, Jackson and her children were part of a slave community in which members established strong links with one another, and which developed its own cultural and religious traditions.31 For example, Bibb relates how he used Afro-based folk tradition in his courting practices and in his attempts to resist his master.32

Milldred Jackson would have loved to “suffer” with her children “till death,” but this was not to be. After one Albert Sibley became her new owner, he moved to Missouri taking five of Jackson’s sons with him. Before his departure, he sold her and her youngest child to one George Ray of Bedford, Kentucky. Sibley, once in Missouri, sold two of Jackson’s sons to other slaveholders.33 Sibley, in his move to Missouri, destroyed vestiges of Jackson’s family life, and broke the bonds of motherhood she had with her sons by depriving her of her children and her children of their mother.34 Milldred
Jackson was robbed of her children through separation and sale.\(^{35}\)

During the course of her life as a bonded woman, Jackson changed owners several times but ended her childbearing with Albert Sibley. While a slave of Sibley, she married a free Black man, Robert Jackson, who worked on a riverboat.\(^{36}\) He was in the process of buying his wife when he was seriously injured on the boat. He soon died as a result. He had paid Sibley a total of $165.00 for Jackson out of a full payment of $300.00. After his death, a sympathetic neighbour offered to pay the rest of the money for Jackson’s freedom, but Sibley refused. He pocketed Mr. Jackson’s $165.00 and sold his wife to George Ray. Jackson gained her freedom after working for Ray as a cook in a hotel for six years. As for her youngest child, Ray sold him to a slave trader. Jackson did not know where he was taken.\(^{37}\)

Jackson suffered heartbreak, woes, and sorrows. She gave birth to a succession of sons who were not only fatherless but soon rendered motherless. Her husband died in an accident, and her only remaining son was sold away from her. After working for six years in a hotel over a “burning stove,” Jackson’s health deteriorated. At this point her owner manumitted her. But by this time she was aging, sickly, and he had no further use for her. It was a common strategy for owners to emancipate old and weak slaves, after taking their best years. By emancipating them, planters were freed from providing any kind of care for these ex-slaves.\(^{38}\) Bibb comments that when his mother was manumitted, her health was “completely broken.” In a letter to Sibley, Bibb relates his mother’s sad story and lashes out at Sibley for his heartlessness.

...Allow me to call your attention, to your treatment of
my poor mother, soon after the death of her husband. My step-father as you well know was free born, and had labored several years previous to his death, to ransom my mother—you had sold her to him for the sum of $300, $165 of which he had paid you and taken your receipts for the same, previous to his death. But alas—he got seriously injured by an explosion on board of a steamboat, which hurried him into a premature grave. Mother had given birth to her youngest child after the better half of the purchase money was paid for her ransom, which entitled the child to its liberty as well as the mother: and a gentleman by the name of Robert English, kindly offered to pay you the balance of mother and child’s ransom price, which was about $135 and to allow her a chance to earn the money and pay him back; but you refused to accept the money, and told mother that if she would work on for you as she had done for two years longer that you would set them at liberty. But after she had labored for you faithfully for about three years from that date, you then sold her and her youngest child to George Ray, of Bedford, Ky., who kept her toiling over a burning stove, as chief cook in a public hotel for nearly six years before she was released; at the expiration of which time her constitution was completely broken, so it was a gain to emancipate her and not a loss to her owner. Her youngest child... was then sold away to a “soul driver,” and we know not where he is.39

After the death of her husband and Sibley’s refusal to let English pay the rest of the ‘freedom fee,’ Mildred Jackson must have lived in dread of her continual enslavement and fear that her only child would be sold away from her. Her worst fears came to pass. Sibley betrayed her, not once but twice: he reneged on his obligation to free her and then sold away her youngest and only remaining child. Milldred Jackson as woman and mother experienced the full spectrum of slavery’s tribulations. As woman, as slave, as a person, Jackson was completely objectified by those who owned her.

When Jackson was manumitted, Bibb was living in freedom. After receiving
word from his mother as to her condition, he paid a white man to bring her from Kentucky to Boston where he was residing. He demonstrated his care, concern and love for his mother by this action. Knowing that, even though she was manumitted, she had little help, was alone, childless, and vulnerable, he rescued her. He knew her sufferings and was empathetic and sympathetic. He was also outraged at the treatment she received at the hand of Sibley and other slaveholders. When in November 1850, Bibb left the United States for Canada he brought his mother along with him. I would contend that when Bibb rescued his mother from Kentucky, it was not only her health that was broken; her heart was also shattered. Historians have failed to portray the profound grief and despair enslaved persons experienced as a result of the breakup of their families. We have left it to the novelists to plumb the psychological, emotional, and spiritual depth of the sorrow slaves endured at the loss of their children and families.

From Bibb’s narrative, and letters to Sibley, we get a rough outline of Milldred Jackson’s profile. Jackson’s situation typified that of many slave mothers who lost their children through sale, who bore children for planters and other white men, but whose children were enslaved by their own father. Though she later married a free man, the misfortune that occurred in their lives ensured that the child Jackson bore him ended up a slave. Fortunately, there was a silver lining to Jackson’s dark cloud. When she relocated with Bibb to Ontario, she had the great fortune to meet and live with three of her sons—Granville, Lewis, and John—who had escaped from Sibley and another slaveholder in Missouri. The family reunion that occurred in Windsor was a chance one. Neither the three escapees nor Bibb and Jackson knew the whereabouts of each other. Bibb, as was
his habit, had gone down to the docks to meet and interview refugees coming off the ferry from Detroit. To his amazement, he met his three brothers. Bibb took them to his mother who was astonished but overjoyed at the encounter. Her guardian angel had worked overtime.

Milldred Jackson established her own hearth in Windsor and again lived with her three runaway sons. Joyfully, she must have taken this opportunity to reconstitute her family. She also took in John Anderson, another Missourian escapee. Later they found out that Anderson had killed his owner in his escape bid. Anderson would be later tried in Toronto as the American government clamoured for his extradition. He was eventually released and Toronto abolitionists sent him on to England. Jackson was one of the co-founders of the Windsor Anti-Slavery Society, and though there is no evidence, more than likely she helped the fugitives in their efforts to settle in their new land. She also must have given moral support to Henry’s efforts on behalf of Essex’s Blacks.

Jackson never saw again three of her sons. But it was extraordinary that four—Henry, Granville, Lewis, and John—were ‘recovered’ to her. Undoubtedly, most members of slave families who were sold away from each other never saw one other again. Jackson experienced the severing of her family and lived to see it partially restored. Given the corrosive effect slavery had on the Black family, she must have seen this as a blessing.

__Malinda Bibb__

_The painful, patient, and silent told of mothers to gain a fee simple title to the bodies of their_
daughters, the despairing fight, as an entrapped tigress, to keep hallowed their own persons, would furnish material for epics. Anna Julia Cooper, 1893

Malinda Bibb stands at the centre of Bibb’s autobiography Narratives of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, and for years after she and Bibb were forcibly separated, she remained the ‘mistress’ of his heart. After Bibb permanently and successfully escaped slavery in 1842, he grieved for another six years over the loss of his wife and child. He had fled slavery but Malinda and their daughter, Mary Frances, remained enslaved. His loss was more than he could bear. While in freedom, he never stopped thinking about his family, and so he began searching for his wife and child. Finally, he discovered Malinda to be living as a planter’s concubine. At this point, Bibb realized that he had lost Malinda “forever” and gave up all hope of ever reuniting with his marital family. He also vowed to devote his energies totally to the antislavery crusade which became a part of his life during the past few years. The loss of Malinda pushed Bibb to fight against a system that had wrecked his family life.

From Bibb’s own accounting in his narrative he loved Malinda very much. She was beautiful and desired by several slave men in her town. But she fell in love with Bibb and they eventually married. Though Bibb does not give Malinda’s age at the time of their marriage, he notes the he was only 18. Since Malinda was a young woman, we can assume that she was in Bibb’s age group. Bibb had already at this age carved out a “runaway career” for himself, having since the age of 8 engaged in several temporary escape ventures. Before he fell in love with Malinda, he had decided to flee permanently to Canada, and attain the “object which I held paramount to all others.” But his love
for her was so overpowering that he was now willing to trade "the quest of freedom for
the love of a woman." Like a siren, Malinda enchanted him with her song, and caused
him to forget his yearning for physical freedom, for a while, at least. Hear Bibb tell the
beginning of his relationship with Malinda.

...when I arrived at the age of eighteen, which was
in the year of 1833, it was my lot to be introduced to
the favor of a mulatto slave named Malinda,
who lived in Oldham county, Kentucky, about
four miles from the residence of my owner.
Malinda was a medium sized girl, graceful in
her walk, of an extraordinary make, and active
in business. Her skin was of smooth texture, red
cheeks, with dark and penetrating eyes. She
moved in the highest circle of slaves, and free
people of color. She was also one of the best
singers I ever heard, and was much esteemed by
all who knew her, for her benevolence, talent,
and industry. In fact, I considered Malinda to
be equalled by few, and surpassed by none,
for the above qualities, all things considered.

One can just imagine Bibb flushed with youthful infatuation, totally smitten with
Malinda. Maria Diedrich, in assessing the impact Malinda had on Bibb, cogently notes
that for Bibb, Malinda "becomes the incarnation of the ideal woman, in whom physical,
intellectual and physical beauty are ideally joined." Diedrich continues: "In this girl
physical attractiveness, diligence, kind-heartedness and social responsibility form a
harmonious whole...." Malinda was also clearly industrious, and class conscious; she
after all "moved in the highest circle of slaves." Bibb fell in love with Malinda, and to
his delight, she with him also:

The first two or three visits that I paid to this dear
girl, I had no intention or courting or marrying her, for I was aware that such a step would greatly obstruct my way to the land of liberty. I only visited Malinda because I liked her company....But in spite of myself, before I was aware of it, I was deeply in love; and what made this passion so effectual and almost irresistible [sic], I became satisfied that it was reciprocal.51

There were those like Bibb’s mother who opposed the marriage. She thought that her son was too young for marriage, and that marrying would only involve him “in trouble and difficulty.” Milldred Jackson knew that her son would not be allowed to assume full responsibilities as husband and father. She knew that Malinda, as a slave woman and Bibb’s wife could be molested by white men, and that Bibb would be powerless to defend her. If he were to do so, he could lose his life as a result. Jackson realized only too well that as a slave husband Bibb would not be able to exercise fully his manhood.52

On the other hand, others like William Gatewood, Malinda’s owner, was in favour of the marriage. Says Bibb: “Malinda’s master was very much in favor of the match, but entirely upon selfish principles. When I went to ask his permission to marry Malinda, his answer was in the affirmative with but one condition, which I consider too vulgar to be written in this book.”53 Two issues are of importance here. Without the consent of Malinda’s owner the marriage would probably not have taken place. Though Malinda had a mother, the slaveholder was the ultimate authority, his authority superseded that of slave parents toward their children. In almost every aspect of the life of the enslaved, the slaveholder had full control. The second issue is Gatewood’s reaction to Bibb’s marriage proposal. What did Gatewood say that was “too vulgar” for Bibb to write down? Almost
undoubtedly, I believe it had to do with sex, or the master's imposition of his sexual desires in the marriage bed of the slaves. Perhaps Gatewood agreed because he saw the potential children that could issue from the marriage. These children would not belong to Bibb and Malinda, or to Bibb's owner, but to Gatewood. The marriage of this couple would lead to the increase of his economic assets and therefore his wealth through their production of more slaves.

Kentucky became known as a state noted for its slave breeding. One contemporary commentator notes that in that state “slaveholders encourage marriage among their slaves, that they may increase their stock for the market...” Slaveholders desired monogamous unions for their slaves, because monogamy, in their view, was an a priori condition for stable unions. From such unions, if the couples were fertile, children would issue. Paradoxically, slaveholders regularly broke up, on a whim, the unions they encouraged.

Bibb and Malinda married during the Christmas holidays of 1833. They “jumped the broom.” At a Faneuil Hall lecture in Boston, Bibb, in detailing his life under slavery, draws attention to the marriage ritual of “jumping the broom” that he and other slaves engaged in. The Boston Daily Mail reports:

The parties to be united, go to one of the largest rooms in the “Negro Quarters,” and join hands, and the slaves and sometimes their masters attend as witnesses of the ceremony. Two hold up a long broom before the bride and bridegroom and when the words are pronounced making them man and wife, they jump over the broomstick to show their consent and willingness to be thus united.

Even though both parties knew that in the eyes of whites their marriage was not
“legal,” they believed that they were truly married and that the marriage was “honorable before God, and the bed undefiled.” The latter aspect would become central to Malinda and Henry Bibb as they sought to live as a married couple. Marriage brought happiness to the couple. Bibb, reminiscing about the period shortly after their marriage remarks: “I often look back to that period even now as one of the happy seasons of my life; notwithstanding all the contaminating and heart-rending features with which the horrid system of slavery is marked...yet I still look to that season with sweet remembrance and pleasure.” And “Malinda was...an affectionate wife.”

Soon after Bibb’s marriage, however, he faced a family separation as his current master, Albert Sibley, sold his farm and moved to Missouri taking five of Bibb’s brothers with him and separating them from their mother and wives. He did not take Bibb with him, for two reasons: Bibb pleaded with him to let him remain in Kentucky because of Malinda; and Sibley feared that Bibb would again embark on his escape career and flee from him at the first chance. Sibley consented to Bibb’s pleas and sold Bibb to his brother, John, who lived within seven miles of Malinda, and her owner William Gatewood.

With the permission of both his and Malinda’s owners, Bibb like many slave husbands who had married “abroad,” visited Malinda on weekends. He would arrive at the Gatewood farm on Saturday night and returned to his plantation on Monday morning. Bibb, like many “abroad” husbands, faced the whip if they did not return to their plantation before sunrise on Monday morning. Fearing that Bibb would prove to be an unsuitable and unhappy slave on account of his wife being on another plantation,
John Sibley sold Bibb to Malinda’s owner, William Gatewood. But though Bibb was finally united with his wife, he was not happy. Living with Malinda put him in full view of the daily verbal, physical and likely sexual abuse she received from Mr Gatewood.

And he could not do anything about it:

...to live where I must be eye witness to her insults, scourgings and abuses, such as are common to be inflicted upon slaves, was more than I could bear. If my wife must be exposed to the insults and licentious passions of wicked slavedrivers and overseers; if she must bear the stripes of the lash laid on by an unmerciful tyrant; if this is to be done with impunity, which is frequently done by slaveholders and their abettors, Heaven forbid that I should be compelled to witness the sight.

John Blassingame remarks that when a slave husband lived on the same plantation with his mate, he could rarely escape frequent demonstrations of his powerlessness....

The most serious impediment to the man’s acquisition of status in his family was his inability to protect his wife from the sexual advances of whites and the physical abuse of his master.  

Daniel Black in his discussion of manhood and the enslaved male articulates well the “emasculcation” that happened to Black men on the plantation. The ability to defend one’s relations and provide for one’s self and family underpinned notions of husbandhood and fatherhood in precolonial Africa; these concepts gave meaning to manhood in that milieu. Enslavement annihilated the role that Black men had as husbands, fathers, and defender of family and community. This process of undermining Black manhood began with the capture of Africans, was reinforced on the slave ship during the Middle Passage, and was finally revealed in full barbarity in the horrorland of
plantation America. Because they were slaves their status as husbands had no meaning to their owners. Gatewood, for example, could molest Malinda, and Bibb could not utter a word in her defence. He had to watch her humiliation and swallow it. Gatewood by stripping Malinda naked and beating her, not only humiliated and degraded her, he mocked and taunted Bibb. In Gatewood’s eye, Malinda had no ownership of her life or body. Likewise, Bibb as a husband had no claim to his wife. He could not protect or defend her. Gatewood, in essence, told Bibb that he was a husband only in name.

Witnessing Malinda’s abuse and humiliation, Bibb was forced to confront his own powerlessness and the negation of his manhood. He was completely humiliated. Black noted that Bibb’s “perception of himself is so damaged that he has difficulty facing himself. Certainly his impotence is not his own fault; yet the insult this crime leveled upon his manhood leaves him wishing that he had heeded his mother’s advice and remained single for life.”

As mentioned, a central notion of the West African conception of manhood was the defence of women. This was also among the first aspects of manhood that white men in nineteenth-century United States constructed for themselves. Slavery ensured that Bibb and other slave men could not live up to the standards of manhood whether the model was African or Euro-American. Slavery ensured that slave men became embodiments of rage, humiliation, melancholy, and vulnerability. Gatewood’s abuse of Malinda, as a model for the violence committed on the persons and psyches of Black women, reverberates throughout Bibb’s narrative:

On this same plantation I was compelled to see my
wife shamefully scourged and abused by her master; and the manner in which this was done, was so violently and inhumanly committed upon the person of a female, that I despair in finding decent language to describe the bloody act of cruelty. ...

Though Malinda was beaten several times, one incident stands out clearly in Bibb’s mind. In describing the incident, he tells us of Gatewood’s depravity, Malinda’s pain and anguish, and his rage. He narrates this particular event to a Faneuil Hall audience and also reveals that it was a milestone in his life as a slave, because after this beating of Malinda, he decided to make a rendezvous with freedom. Bibb recounts that sometime during the summer of 1847 he and Malinda were weeding a cabbage patch. A very drunk Gatewood, on examining the patch, stated that it was not weeded properly. He blamed Malinda for it. Malinda apologized and begged his pardon. The slave master responded by procuring a whip and a piece of rope. Malinda asked for clemency but to no avail. Gatewood then “seized her, stripped off her clothes, tied her hands, threw the rope over the limb of an apple tree which stood near, drew her up, and scourged her most severely until blood trickled down her back and formed a puddle under her feet.” At the start of the whipping, Bibb implored Gatewood to beat him instead of Malinda. But this only “enraged the master more and he told the husband to hold his tongue or he would flog him too.” Murderous thoughts then entered Bibb’s mind. He decided he would take a nearby hoe and kill Gatewood. But almost immediately, he banished the thought from his mind as he knew what the outcome would be if he harmed or killed Gatewood. Bibb decided that he could take no more of slavery. Either he would become a murderer or a murder victim, or escape the great “torture chamber” that was slavery. He made up his
mind to escape from slavery in order to keep his sanity.\(^6\)

This scene clearly delineates the abuse of the slave woman, the woman’s lack of defence—she could not defend herself, nor could her husband—and the powerlessness and rage Black men experienced in having to watch family members viciously “scourged” by whites. To add insult to the injury of being beaten, Malinda was stripped naked. This was a common act employed by slaveholders in disciplining their slaves, especially female slaves. Slaveholders and overseers seemed to get a perverse pleasure from stripping female slaves naked and whipping them. The sexual connotations are clear. This was also both sexual and physical abuse, which must have had tremendous psychological impact on the beaten and the observing slave. Bibb notes one impact such abuse had on him: it ‘blasted all his pleasure.’\(^7\)

For the slave system to work its maintainers had to terrorize the enslaved by using physical and psychological violence in order for the enslaved to surrender totally. The whipping of slaves, both female and male, was used by masters and owners to degrade and subdue their slaves and break their spirit. Whipping was carried out to ensure that the slaves would “stand in fear” of their masters.\(^8\) The use of the whip by whites upon Black bodies was not only for physical correction, but was also deliberately used to instill terror and fear within the minds and souls of the enslaved. The effects of this form of ‘psychic’ terror, to this day, can never be measured or realized.\(^9\)

Caroline Hunter, a former Virginia slave, in describing the whippings slaves families endured, brings to the fore the absolute power owners had over the slave family and the consequences of such power. In the face of brutal beatings from owners, slave
mothers and fathers could do little to protect themselves, their spouses, or their children from sadistic whites.

During slavery it seemed lak yo’ chillun b’long to ev’rybody but you. Many a day my ole mama has stood an’ watched massa beat her chillun ‘till dey bled an’ she couldn’ open her mouf. Dey didn’ only beat us, but dey useta strap my mama to a bench or box an’ beat her wid a wooden paddle73 while she was naked.74

William Wells Brown in his narrative recalls the beating his mother endured for arriving late one morning to the field. He notes the effect it had on him:

I heard her voice, and knew it, and jumped out of my bunk, and went to the door. Though the field was some distance from the house, I could hear every crack of the whip, and every groan and cry of my poor mother. I remained at the door, not daring to venture any further. The cold chills ran over me, and I wept aloud.75

Malinda’s status as chattel is fully pronounced in the awful whippings Gatewood inflicted upon her; Bibb’s helplessness in having to watch Malinda being maltreated, in an “indecent” manner, is loudly proclaimed to himself, Malinda, and the world.76 It was this helplessness and powerlessness that motivated many male slaves to run away from slavery. One Virginia ex-slave decided, like Bibb, to escape to Canada because it was hard for him to see his family “in want and abused when he was not at liberty to aid or protect them.”77 This idea of protecting and defending their families was always uppermost in the mind of slave husbands and fathers. That they could not fulfill their wish was no fault of their own.
Yet the slave system did not totally subdue Blacks or make them stand in total fear of whites. Enslaved people fought back, sometimes in very dramatic and violent ways. Solomon Northup, for example, snatched the whip from the slaveholder who intended to beat him and beat the slaveholder to a pulp. Northup knew the punishment for a slave who physically attacked a white was certain death, yet his rage overcame him and made him forget the consequences of his striking a white person. In this instance of ‘insanity,’ he demonstrated his physical prowess in his defence. This was something denied to Black men and women under enslavement. The case of young Richard also illustrates that enslaved persons sometimes retaliated against abusive owners. Richard, a Kentucky, slave became so enraged at being flogged by his mistress, Caroline Turner, a woman known state-wide for her extreme violence toward her bonded servants, that he seized the whip from her and strangled her. Richard fled the area but was soon recaptured. He was later hanged. Many slave parents successfully defended their children from the lash; there were also instances of enslaved husbands who beat, maimed, and killed white men, in defence of their wives from physical and sexual abuse; and bonded women at times were able to fight off abusive white men. The various slave revolts and uprisings that occurred all across the Americas, in which Blacks killed and attacked whites, meant that the enslaved did not totally accept white supremacy or Black inferiority. When slaves ‘pulled foot’ and ran away from their degradation, they proclaimed by this act that they were not completely subjugated. They were asserting their personhood and some autonomy.

As Black manhood was distorted, disguised, and confused by enslavement, Black
womanhood also suffered a severe blow. Central to the African concept of womanhood was the idea and practice of motherhood. Such a function was highly esteemed in Africa, and women, like men, were expected to marry upon reaching the ‘right’ age. In marriage, women were expected to be faithful to their husbands, and adultery was considered a serious crime. Married women were expected to procreate. Children were highly desired and seen as “wealth” or “blessings from God.” Relationships between mothers and children were very close, often superseding those between wife and husband. Mothers trained their children, in the case of their daughters on how to conduct themselves as children, women, and wives. Women also exerted full control over the domestic domain. Within the African context, motherhood was a woman’s primary role.

Of course, under slavery this was drastically modified. For one thing, in the early stages of slavery, it was the slave woman’s productive capacity that slave owners desired. Later, her reproductive capability too was appreciated. However, in all stages of slavery’s evolution, women’s productive capacity was greatly valued and took precedence over her reproductive role; women were first and foremost appreciated as units as labour. The slave woman’s function as a labourer was to be primary to the conception of womanhood that whites constructed for her. Motherhood was to be secondary. For one, when women birthed children they did not own them, and rarely could protect them from abuse. Even if their children remained with them until they attained adulthood, slave mothers’ authority as parents was usurped by slaveholders. The question of fidelity to husbands was a moot point, as slaveholders and other white men regularly raped and impregnated married slave women. Many slave wives watched
themselves giving birth to children that were not fathered by their husbands. Neither they nor their husbands could voice their objections. Male and female slaveholders blamed the Black woman for her victimization. They alleged that the slave woman was promiscuous and hence responsible for the outrages white men committed against her. The womanhood that whites invented was the Black woman couched in terms of villification and disdain. Like her male partner, the Black woman was seen as a beast and sexual animal. According to whites, the Black and slave woman could withstand hard labour and pain, and was loose, immoral, and promiscuous. The rape of Black women by white men, which began on the slave ships, also points to how Black womanhood was distorted under slavery. In Africa, rape, like adultery, was a very serious crime, one penalty for which was death. In the Western hemisphere, the rape of Black women by men of the ruling race continued without punishment for the offender long after the end of slavery.

Yet, despite the afflicting circumstances of slavery, enslaved women (and men) tried to fashion an alternative construct and conception of womanhood from that of the slaveholders'. Though they knew that their motherhood was not esteemed by whites, they themselves held it in high regard. Slave women loved and protected their children as best as they could, even children born as a result of coerced sex with white men. And women were central to the slave family and community.

This is not to negate the fact that many enslaved fathers deeply loved their children, strove to mind their children, spend time with them, and provide for them. For example, Venture Smith laboured his whole life to buy his children from slavery and
then educate them. Josiah Henson fled slavery with his children and managed to send one of his daughters to Oberlin College. And Henry Bibb himself was devoted to his daughter Mary Frances. But that which enslaved people feared most—separation—was too often the lot for slave families.

On Gatewood’s estate Malinda gave birth to a female child. Bibb and Malinda named the child Mary Frances. Mother and father were happy with the birth of the child. But it was a happiness tempered by anguish for they knew that the child did not belong to them. Though Bibb loved his daughter dearly, he voiced his pain at fathering a slave child. It is his voice which speaks throughout the narrative, but we can surmise that Malinda too was anguished, not at bringing a child into the world, but a child that was a slave.

Little Mary Frances was a pretty child; she was quiet, playful, bright, and interesting. She had a keen black eye, and the very image of her mother was stamped upon her cheek; but I could not look upon the dear child without being filled with sorrow and fearful apprehensions, of being separated by slaveholders, because she was a slave, regarded as property. And unfortunately, for me, I am the father of a slave....

Mary Frances, like her parents, was destined to experience physical abuse. The fact that she was an infant did not prevent the slaveholders from beating her. Malinda and her husband both worked in the field and had no one to look after the child while they were gone. They had no choice but to leave the child with Mrs. Gatewood. The slave mistress, as childminder, abused little Mary Frances by continually slapping the child across her face: “Her little face was bruised black with the whole print of Mrs.
Gatewood's hand. This print was plainly to be seen for eight days after it was done.\textsuperscript{90}

Though in his narrative Bibb lashes out against the slave system and Mr. and Mrs. Gatewood, he realizes he is powerless against it. He could offer protection to neither Malinda nor Mary Frances. Malinda must have echoed her husband's lament:

But oh! this darling child was a slave; born of a slave mother. Who can imagine what could be the feelings of a father and mother, when looking upon their infant child whipped and tortured with impunity, and they placed in a situation where they could afford it no protection. But we were all claimed and held as property; the mother and father were slaves!\textsuperscript{91}

The feelings of distress, rage, impotence, vulnerability and uselessness are evident in Bibb's words. His correct view that Mary Frances was born of a slave mother sealed her doom, because under American slavery, children born to slave mothers inherited their mothers' status.\textsuperscript{92} Still, he infers that the beating of Mary Frances was hard, naturally for Malinda. Daniel Black remarks that because Bibb could not protect his infant child from abuse, his role as father was nullified. Likewise, Malinda's role as mother was negated.\textsuperscript{93} She, like her husband, must have been distressed at bringing slave children into the world. Bibb's and Malinda's experience of family life under slavery, though individualized, is representative of the slave community as a whole. The slave family was a vulnerable institution.

The beating of Mary Frances as a baby and Caroline Hunter's observation that masters routinely physically abused slave children, and the slave parents' inability to intervene on the child's behalf, highlight the vulnerability of slave children: because of their strength and size, they could not defend themselves; and their parents had to think
twice before attempting to defend them. The disadvantageous position of slave children, the inability of their parents to defend them, and the abuse, stress, and trauma children and parents suffered under enslavement, have led some scholars to conclude that the slave family suffered "soul murder" during slavery. Wilma King in her discussion of slave children asserts that they were traumatized by enslavement. Living lives of insecurity in which they were deprived of adequate food, clothing, and love led among other things to a loss of self-esteem and self-worth. Children became "indelibly scarred" by the slave system. Clinical psychologist A.C. Jones notes Black parents knew that "of all the damages inflicted by slavery, the blatant disregard of the psychological and physical welfare of children was the most odious." And yet, as Nell Irvin Painter has pointed out, one can peruse the literature on child abuse in North America without coming across mention of the abuse of slave children, even though many psychologists and therapists appropriate the language of slavery to describe child sexual and physical abuse.

The sight of his wife and child being abused filled Bibb with sorrow and despair. He states: "My happiness or pleasure was then all blasted; for it was sometimes a pleasure to be with my little family even in slavery. I love them as my wife and child."

Henry Bibb despaired at his status as slave father and husband. He despaired at the status of his daughter as slave, and of his wife as slave. He became fearful that Mary Frances would be sold away from her parents; he began to feel apprehensive that he and Malinda would be separated through sale. He felt that there was only one remedy for his fear and apprehension.
In December 1837, during the Christmas break, when the likelihood of his absence would not be readily noted, Bibb escaped to Cincinnati, Ohio. He later made his way to Canada. Six months later, having established connections along the escape route, Bibb backtracked to Kentucky to liberate Malinda and Mary Frances. He was not to succeed. Bibb was recaptured and he, his wife, and child were jailed in a Louisville, Kentucky prison. Gatewood sold all three to a slave trader by the name of Madison Garrison. In prison, Malinda, Henry, and Mary Frances endured a nightmarish experience. For Malinda, sexual and physical assaults on her person by white men and slaveholders continued unabated. Malinda and their child were separated from Bibb. Garrison took Malinda "to a private house where he kept female slaves for the basest purposes. It was a resort for slave trading profligates and soul drivers, who were interested in the same business." Garrison perhaps intended to sell Malinda in the "fancy girl" trade, an aspect of the internal slave trade specifically designed for the sale of extremely light-skinned slave women and girls "for the exclusive purpose of prostitution and concubinage." Garrison, by taking Malinda to a brothel with the intent to prostitute her, demonstrated his power over and disregard for her, her well-being, her marriage, and her family. Garrison himself attempted to rape Malinda but she "repeled" him. For some time he continued to attack her, and she continued to resist him. Enraged at her "disobedience," he whipped her until her "garments were stained with blood." To punish her, he sent Mary Frances to another part of town and threatened Malinda with the sale of her daughter.

Some historians have theorized that slavery was analagous to war. In some
instances, a protracted war. In slavery as in war, there were victors and victims, captives and captors. In war, too, conquerors often used rape to terrorize and subjugate the conquered population. The recent war in Bosnia demonstrates that fact; in this instance the victorious Serbian soldiers raped conquered Bosnian women and men; very young children were also sexually attacked.\textsuperscript{103} Such was the case in slavery. Rape was used by slaveholders to frighten and dominate the enslaved, especially the females. It was an instrument used with regularity to ensure the submission of women. As Valethia Watkins concludes: "Rape was a vile tool of political oppression, economic exploitation, and terrorism used freely to dominate African people." Moreover, she adds, "the selling of children away from their African mothers punished both mother and child….In many ways it [rape] was a petty act of revenge, reprehensible beyond retaliation when one weighs the magnitude of human suffering it caused."\textsuperscript{104} Rape committed by white men on the bodies of Black women functioned not only to secure the submission of these women, but their men as well.

For both Black women and men, this type of terror began its full manifestation on the slave ship during the Middle Passage journey. During this harrowing journey, women, unlike men, were rarely chained, and neither did they travel in the bottom of the ship. Instead, they made the voyage on the quarterdeck where they were "[m]ore easily accessible to the criminal whims and sexual desires of the seamen, and few attempts were made to keep the crew members of the slave ships from molesting African women."\textsuperscript{105} Oladauh Equiano, a Nigerian African, who was captured as a young boy, and who endured and survived the middle passage, states that on the ship on which he was
held captive, women were routinely raped; even girls as young as ten were subject to this kind of violence. He notes that Black men, in chains, were forced to watch this outrage committed on their daughters, sisters, and wives and they were unable to do anything about it. Many women, traumatized by their degradation, reacted to it by jumping overboard and thus ended their lives. The psychological effect of this and other kinds of brutality experienced by Blacks and slaves can never be fully measured or realized.

After Garrison took Malinda's child away from her, he sent her back to prison with Bibb. Bibb writes that Malinda entered his jail cell “shrieking and sobbing.” Malinda, who had lost her child, was also physically and sexually molested and hysterical; she undoubtedly was traumatized. Bibb records her words: “Oh! my dear little child is gone? What shall I do? my child is gone.” Malinda’s distress at losing her daughter was more than she could bear. For his part, Bibb noted his uselessness as father and husband—he could do nothing to protect, save, and defend Mary Frances and Malinda. Slavery had stolen his rights as husband and father. It also had trampled on Malinda’s rights as wife and mother.

It is in their jail cell that Malinda relates her story of sorrow to her husband. She tells him she “repeled and resisted” Garrison. But we can only take Malinda’s word for it. If Garrison and the other “profligates” had succeeded in raping her, would she have told her husband? Knowing the grief and rage that such knowledge would engender in Bibb, and the clear knowledge of his powerlessness, Malinda may have chosen not to tell her husband about what really occurred in the brothel. Slave men have been known to kill white men who sexually molested their womenfolk. Malinda could have harboured
such fear and chosen not to tell her husband the full story of the manner in which
Garrison degraded her. But we will never know. It would have been astounding if
Malinda was able to ward off several white men intent on raping her.

To Malinda’s and Bibb’s joy, Garrison decided not to sell their daughter. That
Garrison ended up not selling Mary Frances might mean that he “got his way” with
Malinda, and decided to spare her child. Nonetheless, Mary Frances was reunited with
her parents shortly before Garrison set out with Bibb, Malinda, and a host of other slaves
for New Orleans. In New Orleans, the Bibb family was sold to a Baptist deacon named
Whitfield. Luckily for the family, all the members were sold together, but this was
because no one wanted to buy Bibb. Potential buyers thought he looked “too intelligent.”
For some, he was “too white,” while others suspected that he was a seasoned runaway.
Some buyers also suspected that he could read and write. These “defects” made Bibb
unattractive to several prospective buyers. Finally, Deacon Whitfield purchased all
three. Whitfield had a plantation in the Red River district bordering Louisiana and
Arkansas. Bibb thought that Whitfield was “the most sadistic owner” he ever had.
According to Bibb, Whitfield’s brutality was unmatched. Whitfield too was in the habit
of tying up his female slaves, stripping them naked and beating them.

Whitfield’s plantation, as described by Bibb, was hell on earth. The deacon fed
his slaves inadequately, when they were sick he called no doctor, and whipped them at
the slightest offence. At Whitfield’s plantation, Malinda, who suffered from ill-health
since she arrived, gave birth to another child. But this child died soon after birth. Bibb
recounted this tragedy.
My wife was very sick while we were both living at the Deacon. We expected every day would be her last. While she was sick, we lost our second child, and I was compelled to dig my own child’s grave and bury it myself without even a box to put it in.112

Malinda worked in the field, and it is unlikely, given Bibb’s description of Whitfield’s character, that while sick and pregnant, Whitfield gave Malinda a break from field labour. Pregnant enslaved women still had to perform hard physical work. This often led to miscarriages, still-births, low birth weight babies, and babies dying soon after birth. Pregnant women, like most slave women, tended to be malnourished, but this factor was exacerbated for pregnant women given their special needs. Few planters paid attention to the special needs of pregnant women. Pre-natal care as we now understand it was almost nonexistent for bonded women. And these women returned to their work soon after giving birth. There was no post-natal care for these women. Children who were born alive also, given the early return of their mothers to work, did not receive adequate post-natal attention. The vagaries of childbirth for most 19th-century women were therefore exacerbated for enslaved women. Many were ill during and after pregnancy. Not a few died. In addition, the infant mortality rate was high.113

The effect the death and gross burial of their child must have had on Bibb’s and Malinda’s minds can only be imagined. He and Malinda had to bury their child as if she were a “dumb beast” without a coffin or a prayer. The denial of their child’s humanity by Whitfield and the slave system was not lost on Bibb or Malinda. In spite of Engerman’s and Fogel’s assertion that American slavery was mild, and that the slaves were generally
well-fed and cared for, the hundreds of slave narratives that survive tell a different story. As many slave autobiographers relate, enslaved people were often sick, malnourished, physically abused, and depressed. Malinda's and Bibb's story counters that of Fogel and Engerman. Celia's story of sexual abuse and despair provides a necessary corrective.

At Whitfield's farm Bibb ran away three times, the second time with his wife and child. That Malinda chose to run with Bibb this second time is worth noting. We now know that most fugitives were men, roughly between the age of 17-40. Women, due to pregnancy, child-rearing, and lack of geographic knowledge, were less likely to engage in flight. But Malinda chose to run with her husband because she was distressed at the thought that Bibb was to be given 500 lashes for a previous escape attempt. According to Bibb, he conferred with Malinda and they made the decision to run together:

So we started off with our child that night, and made our way down to the Red River swamps among the buzzing insects and wild beasts of the forest. We wandered about in the wilderness for eight to ten days before we were apprehended, striving to make our way from slavery; but it was all in vain.

The Bibb family was recaptured. Bibb was lashed and paddled almost to death. Whitfield, in order to terrorize the rest of his slaves and humiliate Bibb completely, made Bibb's punishment very public. All of the enslaved population was called out to watch Bibb being flogged. Bibb suffered a public assault on his limbs, life, and dignity, and was made to serve as an "example" to his fellow slaves. One historian notes that this public defamation of slave husbands like Bibb, who tried to make life better for their families, caused many other bonded men to reject marriage and to seek self-affirmation.
through flight. Bibb, in relating his story, notes the grief and anguish of his womenfolk who were “standing by weeping.” In this instance, Bibb could not help himself; and neither could Malinda nor Mary Frances.

While I suffered under this dreadful torture, I prayed, wept, and implored mercy at the hand of slavery, but found none. After I was marked from my neck to my heels, the Deacon took the gory lash, and said he thought there was a spot on my back where he could put a few more. He wanted to give me something to remember him by, he said.... After I was flogged almost to death in this way, a paddle was brought forward and eight or ten blows given me with it, which was far worse than the lash. My wounds were then washed with salt brine, after which I was let up.

Wilma King notes that slave children experienced loss of self-esteem at having to watch their parents being abused. “Whether they rebelled or retreated, children were indelibly scarred by seeing parents whipped.” No doubt, Mary Frances was adversely affected by having to watch her father brutally punished. Slave wives, like Malinda, watching such a spectacle must have felt their own weakness and powerlessness.

Bibb’s punishment was so severe that he was unable to work for several days after the whipping. His pride and dignity were further compromised by his having to wear an iron collar with a bell around his neck, and at nights, sleep with his feet in the stocks. A bell ringing around his neck whenever he moved served to underscore his utter humiliation and impotence. He does not say if Malinda was punished for running away. From his accounting, it seems that deacon Whitfield wanted to make an example of him. However, as soon as another opportunity arose, he ran again. Yet again, he was recaptured. The deacon now determined to get rid of Bibb. A slave who had a penchant for running away was not a good slave. He was a bad example to other slaves; he put
notions of freedom in their minds. Clearly, the slave system was not successful with Bibb. It failed to make him "stand in fear" of it.

Whitfield’s revenge was to sell Bibb but not with Malinda. To rub salt in the wound, Whitfield sold Bibb while he was labouring in the field. A group of gamblers rode up and Whitfield made the transaction then and there. When Bibb requested that he be allowed to say goodbye to his family, the deacon refused.

After they had purchased me, I asked the privilege of going to the house to take leave of my family before I left, which was granted by the sportsmen. But the Deacon said I should never again set my foot inside of his yard; and advised the sportsmen not to take the irons from my neck until they had sold me; that if they gave me the least chance I would run away from them, as I did from him. So I was compelled to mount a horse.... never to meet my family in this life.\textsuperscript{123}

What Bibb feared most had come to pass. He was separated from Malinda and their child. Bibb travelled with the gamblers into Texas, attended races with them, and served them as a body servant.\textsuperscript{124} Bibb explains the gamblers treated him well, gave him lots to eat and even gave him money for waiting on them. Bibb states that he got into their "good graces" and soon implored them to call on Whitfield and persuade him to sell to them Malinda and Mary Frances. The gamblers consented and rode with Bibb to deacon Whitfield.

Whitfield was incensed that Bibb came back and insisted that he be removed from his yard. The sportsmen explained the object of their visit. Malinda who was working in the house heard her husband's voice and rushed out to see him:

....my poor bereaved wife, who never expected to see me
again in this life, spied me and came rushing to me through the crowd, throwing her arms about my neck exclaiming in the most sympathetic tones, 'oh! My dear husband! I never expected to see you again.' The poor woman was bathed with tears of sorrow and grief. But no sooner had she reached me, than the Deacon peremptorily commanded her to go to her work. This she did not obey, but prayed that her master would not separate us again, as she was there alone, far from friends and relations whom she would never meet again. And now to take away her husband, her last and only true friend would be like taking her life.125

This passage provides a good insight into how separation affected the enslaved and their reaction to it. Wilma King notes that "the emotional cost of family separations was high regardless of the reasons and the ages of those involved."126 Though we never hear directly Malinda’s and Mary Frances’ voice, because Bibb is the narrator, both mother and child, like their husband and father must have been very anguished at the separation. As slave spouses, Henry and Malinda Bibb had been through the ‘hell fire’ of slavery. The distressing experiences they shared and endured did much to cement their love and affection for each other, as much as the positive ones they shared. They gave life to two children and watched one die. The bonds between them were very strong. Separation naturally would devastate them. Deborah Gray White tells us that "when slave owners separated slave spouses, women took it just as hard as men."127 Malinda revealed this when she cried out to Whitfield that she was alone (and lonely) without her husband, without friends or relations. As Brenda Stevenson observes, the "individual slave survival was almost synonymous with family and community support."128 Separation through sale was a primary cause of distress among slave families. As in this case, wives
were separated from husbands and children from parents. Both husband and wife faced a life of grief and loneliness when this occurred. Children lost their parents, sometimes never to see them again “in this life.” When families were broken up, emotional sustenance, as Malinda’s actions well articulated, was lost and the members lost their anchor. Malinda and Henry Bibb experienced the full realization that as slaves their marriage had no sanctity and as such their family could be broken up at any time by their owners.

But neither Malinda’s tears nor the appeal of the gamblers softened Whitfield’s heart. He took the lash to Malinda and began to curse her and Bibb. The gamblers intervened and begged him to desist from beating Malinda, that they would pay him a thousand dollars for her and Mary Frances. But the gamblers’ words fell on deaf ears as Whitfield continued to whip Malinda. This scene as described by Bibb has become a classic scene in the literature of the slave narrative. Contemporaries state that when Bibb lectured in the free states and described this scene he moved his audience to tears. Malinda and Bibb sank to their knees and begged Whitfield not to break up their family, but the deacon hardened his heart to their entreaties and continued to apply the lash to Malinda who uttered “heart-rending shrieks.” Meanwhile, Mary Frances “stood by, sobbing at the abuse inflicted on her mother....” With Whitfield striking a prostrate Malinda, and Mary Frances hysterical, Bibb departed deacon Whitfield’s estate. The parting scene would be forever imprinted on his mind.

As we left the plantation, as far as we could see and hear, the Deacon was still laying on the gory lash, trying to prevent poor Malinda from
weeping over the loss of her departed husband, who was then, by the hellish laws of slavery, to her, theoretically and practically dead....This occurred in December, 1840. I have never seen Malinda, since that period. I never expect to see her again.129

And he never did. Like the many thousands of slave families affected by separation, Malinda’s and Henry’s was to suffer a similar fate: They were to be permanently separated.

The forced separation of slave couples...had the most devastating impact on slave marriages. Large numbers of loving commitments ended in this manner. When slaveholders separated husbands and wives by long distances, it was almost impossible for these couples to retain close ties to one another.130

The love story that blossomed on Master Gatewood’s plantation turned into a story of sorrow on deacon Whitfield’s estate. But this was not the end of it. Henry Bibb made his final escape from slavery in the winter of 1841 and arrived in Detroit in January 1842. Malinda remained at deacon Whitfield’s. And yet in Detroit Bibb could not rejoice in his freedom. He had gained his freedom but at a cost. In Detroit, he discovered that though his body was free his mind was not. It remained in slavery with his family. His grief at losing his family made him unable to ‘hold down’ jobs:

My occupation varied according to circumstances, as I was not settled in mind about the condition of my bereaved family for several years, and could not settle myself down at any permanent business. I saw occasionally, fugitives from Kentucky, some of whom I knew, but none of them were my relatives; none could give me the information which I desired most.131
Bibb’s situation underscores one historian’s comment that: “Separations created physical voids and left deep emotional scars. By any standard, splitting families apart was one of the harshest aspects of bondage.” In freedom, Bibb was an “emotional wreck.” He displayed what psychologists now call post-traumatic stress. The term has been “employed to describe the experiences and psychiatric symptoms of individuals exposed to extraordinary traumatic experiences.” A.C. Jones theorizes that “[u]tilizing current diagnostic criteria, many victims of slavery would undoubtedly qualify for a diagnosis of post traumatic stress syndrome.” Jones is telling us that if Bibb were alive today and living in our society we would advise him to go see a psychiatrist or therapist, and counsel him to stay with his therapist as long as it takes to get over his grief.

Twice in three years, Henry Bibb lost members of his families. First, he lost five of his brothers who were taken to Missouri by their owner, and in a more devastating blow he lost his wife and child. This was enough to devastate even the strongest man or woman. His loss manifested itself through grief and depression. But what of Malinda and Mary Frances? They too must have despaired at the breaking apart of their family. They too must have suffered post-traumatic stress. Sorrowed over the loss of her husband, Malinda now had the task of comforting her daughter, of trying to build back Mary Frances’ shattered self-esteem and mend her broken heart. And Malinda had to comfort her own self.

And yet the love that Bibb had for his family strengthened his resolve to once again rescue his family from slavery. He spent four years in Michigan grieving over his family. The fact that he spent four years without contracting another relationship
underscores his affection for Malinda. However, in 1846, against the advice of his friends, he went back to Kentucky, to inquire about his family. There he gathered intelligence that his wife “was living in a state of adultery with her master, and had been for the last three years.” According to Bibb, it was Malinda herself who sent back news to her mother in Kentucky about her situation. She relayed to her mother that after Whitfield sold her husband to the gamblers, he then sold her to a French planter from Mississippi for the purpose of concubinage, at a very “high price.” This piece of information, Bibb wrote, “was a death blow to all my hopes and pleasant plans.” Slavery had despoiled his marriage; slavery had despoiled his family.

His mother, with whom he was briefly reunited, counselled him to forget Malinda as it “was no use for me to run any more risks, or to grieve myself any more about her.” Bibb then made up his mind to forget Malinda and leave her in “the hands of an all-wise Providence.”

As she was then living with another man, I could no longer regard her as my wife. After all the sacrifices, sufferings, and risks which I had run, striving to rescue her from the grasp of slavery; every prospect and hope was cut off. She has ever since been regarded as theoretically and practically dead to me as a wife, for she was living in a state of adultery, according to the law of God and man.

Did Bibb’s decision to forget Malinda, mean that he also wished not to remember Mary Frances? Given his situation, he had no other choice. Even though Bibb must have known that Malinda had little or no say in her fate, he seems to have blamed her. ‘After all that I’ve done for her, how could she do this to me?’ seems to be his cry. The
different fates of Henry and Malinda highlight Deborah G. White's point that men and women experience slavery differently. Malinda's fate as a concubine and Bibb's reaction enable us to see how gender and sexuality must become critical tools of analysis when assessing the slave past. Sexual abuse and exploitation were daily features of life for slave women, even those who, like Malinda, had a slave husband. Male slaveholders used Black women's bodies and sexuality in any way they chose. Black women had little control over their bodies; white men, married or not, constantly used slave women as concubines. Concubinage, one slave scholar states, "was a built-in subculture within the slaveholder's world." Against their will, many slave women were raped, bedded, and impregnated by men of the ruling race, who used concubinage and other forms of sexual exploitation to establish their sexual and racial hegemony. The fate of Malinda also highlights the issue of forced union that became a feature of slave life. Slaveholders often coerced male and female slaves into new relationships soon after the departure of a partner. This blatant disregard for the slave family and marriage by slaveholders had grievous repercussions on the overall well being of the Black family.

Firmly convinced that the relationship between him and Malinda was over, and that they would never see each other again, Bibb felt free to throw himself wholeheartedly into the antislavery crusade. Since 1844, he had been campaigning against slavery. He continued his work for various abolitionist societies in Michigan and travelled and lectured in that state and Ohio in 1846. He later toured New England, where he "found a kind reception wherever I traveled among the friends of freedom."

Even in the heady excitement of abolitionism, however, Bibb could not forget
Malinda. How could he, when lecture after lecture, he recounted his ordeal in slavery and the loss of his family? As mentioned, the parting scene between him and Malinda became a staple in abolitionist literature. Antislavery journals printed and reprinted Bibb’s ordeal. Even if he wanted to forget Malinda he was not allowed to. She, like the ghost of Beloved haunting Sethe, continued to shadow him.  

While traveling about this way among strangers, I was sometimes sick, with no permanent home, or bosom friend to sympathise or take that care of me which an affectionate wife would.  

One could also infer from the above statement that in addition to this grief, Bibb was also experiencing sexual deprivation and emotional loss. Like many people suffering from broken-heartedness, Bibb came up with the idea that the only way to assuage his grief would be to find another partner. “So I conceived the idea that it would be better for me to change my position, provided that I should find a suitable person.” In the summer of 1847, Bibb met Mary Miles at an antislavery meeting in New York City. Miles was a freeborn Black Quaker school teacher from Rhode Island. They began a correspondence, and a year later they married in Dayton Ohio, where Miles was teaching at the time.  

Marrying a freeborn person meant the marriage would be recognized and respected as a legal bond. This had a tremendous impact on Bibb. He states emphatically that they “were joined in holy wedlock. Not in slaveholding style, which is a mere farce, without the sanction of law or gospel; but in accordance with the laws of God and our country.” Bibb goes on to discuss how slavery forces slaves into adultery.
In slavery, he writes, the sacred marriage bed of the enslaved is not sacred, and slavery plunders the rights of the husband and father, especially those of the husband. He rejoices in the fact that his marriage to a free woman liberates him from such injustices. "But thanks be to God, I am now free from the hand of the cruel oppressor, no more to be plundered of my dearest rights; the wife of my bosom, and my poor unoffending offspring." He could now love Mary Miles as he chose and not live in terror and fear of the consequence of his love. Miles was a free woman. If they had children, the children would be free. The statements also suggest that even in his new life, Bibb still cared for Malinda and Mary Frances. He would always remember them. Bibb realized fully that enslavement robbed him of his patriarchal rights; rights celebrated by men in a male dominated society. In such a society, Black and slave men were not considered complete men.

It seems clear that Bibb married Miles because he had lost Malinda. The second time around he chose a free woman to marry. And yet, even as he concludes his narrative which ends with his second marriage some of his final comments are reserved for Malinda.

Of Malinda I will only add a word in conclusion. The relation once subsisting between us, to which I clung, hoping against hope, for years, after we were torn asunder, not having been sanctioned by any loyal power, cannot be cancelled by a legal process. voluntarily assumed without law mutually, it was by her relinquished years ago without my knowledge, as before named; during which time I was making every effort to secure her restoration. And it was not until after living alone in the world for more than eight years without a companion known in law
Significantly, Bibb unfairly blames Malinda for the dissolution of their marriage. It seems he expected marital fidelity from Malinda, even after years of separation. This is curious given that he was well aware of the sexual exploitation of slave women, and the condition under which Malinda became a concubine. He knew that Malinda was powerless against the slave system. He knew from experience that Black lives and families were jeopardized. He, himself, was an offspring of forced sex. His mother bore six sons for six different white men. So why did Bibb write this? I believe that this 'public declaration' against Malinda was done for the benefits of the white abolitionists in whose circles Bibb was now moving. White abolitionists in their 'high' morality, white-skin privilege, and free status frowned on Bibb's second marriage. Some felt he had committed bigamy since he left a wife in slavery. On the other hand, Bibb's stance is also typical of the behaviour of abused persons: by blaming the victim for the crime, he shows that in some way he has internalized the victimizer's view of the situation. It also reflected his patriarchal anguish. By attempting to "restore" her, Bibb reveals his anxieties about the loss of his rights as husband and lover. Malinda had become the fallen woman in need of restoration.

All we know of Malinda is what Bibb tells us in his narrative and newspaper accounts. We come to know about her and her plight from Bibb's perspective. Malinda, Bibb states, told her mother that her planter-lover paid a high price for her, and "used her well." Did Malinda resign herself to her fate and feel some relief in feeling that her life could be worse? Probably she was happy to leave the household of the sadistic and cruel
deacon Whitfield. Did her new master sell her again? Malinda likely thought fondly of Bibb, and wondered what became of him. Mary Frances too must have remembered her father. It is quite possible that Malinda knew of Bibb’s rise in abolitionism. As an active abolitionist, Bibb was able to rescue his mother from Kentucky. Bibb’s mother was at times in touch with Malinda’s mother. It is therefore quite possible that through the mother-connection, Malinda heard news of Bibb. But we do not know whether she ever contacted him or how she lived out the rest of her years.

Malinda exits from Bibb’s life when he discovers her as a concubine. Her fate is like that of thousands of slave women who lost their husbands through sale, those who became concubines to white men, and those who disappear from history. However the evidence concerning Malinda suggests that when Bibb left slavery, he continued to carry her in his heart. She may well have been the love of his life.

Postscript: What of Mary Frances?

When a child of four or five, Mary Frances watched deacon Whitfield whip her mother, and like the young William Wells Brown she “wept aloud.” This scene must have remained forever imprinted in her mind. Having to watch both parents degraded, and especially witnessing her mother abused, most surely must have traumatized Mary Frances. One can only imagine the hurt, sadness, pain, and sorrow she endured after this event. I am putting forward the hypothesis that Mary Frances became and grew up a sad child. The awful experiences she endured as a young child—slavery, abuse, and separation of her family—no doubt left an indelible mark on her life.

When Bibb made his final flight from slavery in 1841, Mary Frances was about
four years old. At the time of Bibb's discovery of Malinda's liaison with the Mississippi planter, Mary Frances would have been about eight or nine years old. She would still have some memory of her father. At the outbreak of the Civil War, she would have been around 27 or so. If she had not gained her freedom before then, or had died, she would have spent all that time in slavery.

Her mother in becoming mistress to a planter introduced Mary Frances to a new step-parent. It makes no sense at this stage to speculate as to what kind of parent he was to her, if he indeed acted like a parent. What one can speculate on is the fate of this child. Mary Frances was born to parents who were mulattoes. The fact that her father had more white blood than black blood in him enabled him in more than one instance in his escape ventures to pass for white. The New Orleans slave market experience in which prospective buyers refused to buy him because he looked too white revealed his fluid racial identity. Given the racial heritage of her parents, Mary Frances no doubt was extremely light-skinned and very likely had "white" features. Indeed, she may have passed for white even more easily than her father.

She lived in the deep-south with her mother, in an area known for its tradition of white planters taking near-white Black girls as mistresses and concubines. In some areas these near-white slave girls were prepared for the fancy girl trade at an early age; Mary Frances may have been sold into this trade and like her mother become the concubine of some wealthy planter. That Mary Frances had more European blood that African blood made her a prime candidate for the fancy girl trade.151
When Bibb died in 1854 Mary Frances was about 18. She could already have been a mother by this age, and Bibb, a grandfather. But all ties between father and daughter were severed when the former found out that Mary Frances’ mother, his wife, was a white man’s concubine. Though Malinda would be familiar with the details of her daughter’s life, such details would be lost forever to Bibb. Slavery broke the bonds of love between father and daughter. Heartbreaking as it was, Bibb accepted that Mary Frances and her history would be lost to him. Perhaps they are lost to us, too.

**Mary Miles**

_In the month of May, 1847, I attended the anti-slavery anniversary in the city of New York, where I had the good fortune to be introduced to the favor of a Miss Mary E. Miles, of Boston; a lady whom I had frequently heard very highly spoken of, for her activity and devotion to the anti-slavery cause, as well as her talents and learning, and benevolence in the cause of reforms, generally._ Henry Bibb, _Narrative,_ 1849.\(^{152}\)

If Malinda was the slave wife, Mary Miles was literally and figuratively the free wife. Mary Miles was a Yankee Black woman born to generations of free Blacks. She was an only child and had the benefits of a good education, something denied to most people of her race and sex. She came of age in Boston and moved in the circles of the time’s most renowned abolitionists of both races and sexes. In her milieu she would have known William Cooper Nell, the Black activist who led the charge against Boston’s segregated school system. Powerful white men like Horace Mann and Samuel J. May mentored her. She corresponded with Lucretia Mott. For a Black woman, she occupied a relatively

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* This term surely is loaded with contradictions.
privileged space.\textsuperscript{153}

Through the mentorship of May and Mann, Miles attended the Lexington Normal School in Massachusetts during the period 1842-44. Though the institution was not officially a racially integrated one, "Samuel J. May obtained a state Board approval for her admittance without much friction."\textsuperscript{154} Having graduated with a teaching certificate, Miles found employment in a Boston primary school.\textsuperscript{155} From Boston, Miles moved in November, 1845 to Albany, New York where she taught at the colored school. The \textit{Albany Patriot} in detailing information about the Albany school system records Miles' presence in the city. "These facts thus briefly stated do not include the Wilberforce school for colored children, which is instructed by Miss Mary Miles, and is regarded as quite equal to any one in the city."\textsuperscript{156} She remained in Albany until 1847; in that same year she relocated to the Hiram S. Gilmore High School for Black students in Cincinnati, Ohio.\textsuperscript{157}

Mary Miles was well-known in the reform circles of the east and north-east and apparently highly regarded. Martin Delany in \textit{The Condition} describes her as "a very talented young lady and successful teacher."\textsuperscript{158} When Miles met Henry Bibb in 1847 at the annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in New York, she had been a teacher for three years. In these years, she taught in Boston, Albany, New York, and Cincinnati. Her itinerant teaching life was conditioned by job availability for Black women teachers. Nonetheless, teaching gave Miles the opportunity to be her own woman, to make her own money, and support herself. Her meeting Bibb at an abolitionist meeting was auspicious. Both were ardent abolitionists, and Bibb had
already established a reputation for himself as a leading abolitionist lecturer and one
constantly in demand. Miles and Bibb corresponded for a year, after which they
discovered they had ‘much in common.’ In June 1848 they were married in Ohio, where
Mary Miles was teaching at the time. In tender and endearing terms Bibb’s comments on
being enjoined in matrimony with Miles:

...in June 1848, we had the happiness to be
joined in holy wedlock. Not in slave-
holding style, which is a mere farce, without
the sanction of law or gospel; but in
accordance with the laws of God and our
country. My beloved wife is a bosom
friend, a help-meet, a loving companion
in all the social, moral, and religious
relations of life.

Bibb, drawing on personal experiences, then contrasts a slave marriage with a legal one
by stressing the loss of patriarchal rights suffered by slave men, and the sexual violation
suffered by slave women at the hands of white men:

She is to me what a poor slave’s wife can
never be to her husband while in the
condition of a slave; for she can not be
true to her husband contrary to the will
of her master. She can neither be pure nor
virtuous, contrary to the will of her master.
She dare not refuse to be reduced to a state
of adultery at the will of her master; from
the fact that the slaveholding law, customs
and teachings are against the poor slave.159

Mary Miles as a free woman and wife would be to Bibb what Malinda, as slave woman
and wife, could never be. Miles thus came to symbolize Bibb’s freedom and a restoration
of his “manhood” rights. This was not lost on Bibb. If the couple were to have children,
they would not have to live in constant fear that the children would be sold away from them, or they from their children. Freedom meant that the family would enjoy security and protection. After they married, Mary Miles continued teaching in Cincinnati, and Bibb continued with his speaking and writing. He moved between Detroit, Ohio, and Boston, with the latter place his base, in the years 1848-50. During these two years Bibb made extensive tours of the New England states. In 1849, he published his autobiography, which provided an added motive for him to tour. Sometime between 1849-50, Bibb arranged for his mother to be taken from Kentucky to live with him in Boston.

The Bibbs' lifestyle and marital arrangement were unorthodox and defied the dominant (middle class) gender conventions of the day. Yet, in the context of Black racial oppression and the oppositional discourse of race uplift that Blacks themselves constructed to fight this oppression, it was necessary, even vital, that a woman as educated as Miles Bibb continue to teach and help in the upliftment of her race. She continued to live her life the way she had before marriage; and Bibb continued to do the same.

It was only when the couple moved to Ontario in November of 1850 that they began living together for long periods of time. It was also in Ontario that Miles Bibb’s life with Henry Bibb took on a very public nature. One historian has argued that in Canada Bibb found his “life’s work.” It was here that he launched several ventures for which he is remembered, and his name is more often associated with Canada than with the United States. It can also be said that Mrs. Bibb too found her life’s work in Canada
as she spent the majority of her working years here devoted to Black uplift.

Her move to Ontario was just as self-conscious as her husband’s. As I mentioned previously, Bibb did not flee to Canada because a slave catcher was on his heels. He came out of protest. Mary Miles as a free woman did not have to come to Canada either. But like the thousands of her “nominally” free sisters and brothers who left the United States for elsewhere due to worsening conditions for free Blacks, she chose, along with her husband, to come to the Canadian province of Ontario, or Canada West as it was then called.

She saw Canada as her “chosen field.” The hundreds of escaped slaves who were arriving at the various points along the Canada/U.S. border needed help and assistance. Mary Miles Bibb came to Ontario to labour among the fugitives as an uplift worker and apostle. She joined her husband in starting several and various uplift ventures in the province. She started a school in her home for Black children, cofounded the Windsor Anti-Slavery Association, and lent her weight and name to the Refugee Home Society; Miles Bibb also founded a literary club in Windsor, wrote articles for the *Voice of the Fugitive* and sometimes was its editor and publisher. Both wife and husband were ardent emigrationists, and both promoted Black emigration from the United States. She also organized a host of other community events like fund raising dinners and ‘mental improvement’ events to raise funds for the building of the Sandwich Baptist church.

Mary Bibb’s name became linked with her husband’s not simply because she was his wife, but because of the very public nature of the work they did; work they did
together during the time they were married. She expanded the ‘helpmate’s’ role by choosing to be her husband’s colleague. Theodore Weld and Angelina Grimke Weld also led a very public life together, given that both worked for the same cause. Yet few other abolitionist men had their wives in the public view. William Wells Brown’s marriage was destroyed because of his constant departure from home and the strain this put on his family life. Henry Garnet’s wife Julia assisted him in his church and school, but her role was a supporting one, while Frederick Douglass kept his wife Anna safely in the background. Until recently, the women who were married to prominent abolitionist, Black or white, remained in historical obscurity.165

By contrast, Mary led a very public life, as an abolitionist and reformer in her own right and as wife of a prominent abolitionist crusader. Before she met Henry, she was already known in the reform circles in the eastern and north-eastern cities. After marriage to Bibb, she did not disappear into the shadows. That not much has been known about her until recently has more to do with the construction of North American history than with her record of activism.

Mary Bibb’s greatest contribution to the Black freedom struggle was her teaching. For over 23 years she taught school in Ontario, and she also did so for nearly eight years in the United States. She founded at least three schools in Ontario and ran and managed them through all kinds of adversity.166 Miles Bibb was strident in her opposition against slavery and racial prejudice. She did not think Canada was a “haven,” given the racism Black children and adults endured here. She spoke out publicly against it. Miles Bibb was at the centre of the expressions of racial hostility against Blacks.
When Black children were chased from the common schools of the Windsor area, Mrs. Bibb responded to such outrage by setting up her own school. Because of her vision, scores of Black children received schooling in the province. Her accomplishments in founding schools, churches, reform associations, and a housing scheme for her African brothers and sisters point to the tenacity and courage of nineteenth-century Black women in their war against white domination and violence. Mary Bibb exemplified what W.E.B. Du Bois in his stirring tribute to Black women called an “efficient womanhood.”

In the early 1850s, the Bibbs were Black abolition’s most well-known and celebrated couple. Privately, however, as suggested by a letter written by Matilda Nichols to her sister, Harriet Fuller, all was not well between the Bibbs. Nichols was Mary Bibb’s teaching assistant for the Bibb school in Windsor. In the Spring of 1853, Mary Bibb herself went to Oberlin College to find an assistant for her school. The principal of the Ladies’ Department, Mrs. Dascomb, recommended Nichols. Once Mrs. Bibb secured Nichols, she wrote to George Whipple of the American Missionary Association seeking assistance for her. Nichols was not only to teach in the day school, but also to help in the Sunday school. Going to Canada to teach seemed to have been something of a family tradition for the Nichols. Her sister had previously taught in St. Catharines and had boarded at the home of missionary Hiram Wilson. Fuller forwarded the letter (as a way of pre-empting Mary Bibb) to George Whipple, field secretary of the American Missionary Association. In a tone bordering on the hysterical Nichols confides to her sister:

Mrs. Bibb threatened to kill me...She will
destroy my character, she accused me of having children before I went to Oberlin, of having a bad name. Don't say anything to Mrs. Dascomb, unless Mrs. Bibb writes to her, and then you may tell her all about it.

Nichols notes why Mrs. Bibb went 'crazy':

I wrote a note to Mr. Bibb telling him I wanted to talk to him, for I know that she watched him as a cat would a mouse, and I did not want anything except to have him tell me what to do, as I knew he would be a friend...this note was in my dress pocket that I [sic] had on...as soon as I got in bed...she searched the pocket. She says she is going to take it to Oberlin, and they do not know anything about the circumstance. 169

After instructing her sister that she may “burn up” the letter after reading it, Nichols goes on to say: “Mrs. Bibb calls her husband a nasty infernal devil.”

The letter reveals that not only was Nichols panic-stricken, but that all was not well in the Bibbs’ household. It dramatically underscores some very private aspects of the interpersonal relationships within an abolitionist couple. Nichols paints a picture of Mary Bibb as a very jealous woman, one who “watched her husband as a cat would a mouse.” Yet Nichols does not say exactly why Mrs. Bibb “watched” her husband, or why she wrote a note to Henry. She does not say what the reason was for the discord between her and Mary Bibb. Did Mrs. Bibb feel that Nichols was having an affair with her husband? Given the cloak-and-dagger story Nichols told to her sister, there could be only one reason for Mrs. Bibb’s behaviour: she suspected her husband was having an affair with Nichols.

Either Nichols was very naïve or manipulative. Why would she choose to
complain to and ask advise from Bibb, the very husband of the woman she was complaining about? She said Mr. Bibb would be a “friend.” A “friend” against the woman who was his wife? If Nichols is correct, then relations in the Bibb household must have been very strained. If Nichols was indeed Bibb’s mistress then she had to come up with a defence. One such strategy would be to defame her lover’s wife. We cannot verify whether or not Nichols had an affair with Bibb. Nichols lived in the same house with the couple and worked as Mrs. Bibb’s teaching assistant. They therefore had close personal and professional relationships. Nichols said Mrs. Bibb based her accusations on a note she found in Nichols’ pocket; the note was meant for Mr. Bibb. At the discovery of the note, Mrs. Bibb flew in a “rage” and threatened to “kill” both Nichols and Bibb. Nichols states to her sister that the note was “harmless.”

But if the note was harmless, would Mrs. Bibb fly into such a rage? It may well be that Nichols “doth protest too much,” painting Mary Bibb as jealous, domineering, and dominating, and Henry Bibb as unhappy. If an affair did occur, it could be because Henry Bibb felt that the younger Nichols was more malleable. Mrs. Bibb was at the forefront of the abolitionist and uplift crusade. Was Bibb jealous of her? Did he want to discipline her? Or did Nichols (my first suspicion) remind him of Malinda? Yet would Henry Bibb risk his reputation as a leading abolitionist, and Ontario’s premier Black citizen to engage in an affair with Nichols? If there was an affair between Matilda Nichols and Henry Bibb, it ended when Mary Bibb discovered it, and Nichols beat a hasty retreat from Windsor.

Nichols’ letter reveals that all was never well among abolitionists themselves.
Abolitionists, like other 19th century public persons, tried to cover their personal lives with a blanket. Very little has been written about their private lives. It was not that these people lacked personal lives, but the idea of private life conjured up not only images of family (especially women and children) but also of scandal, dirt, and sex—untouchables topics for morally conscious reformers. Oftentimes, when the private life of abolitionist men was supposedly exposed, the revelation involved sex and scandal. Take, for example, Frederick Douglass, who kept a very low profile on his wife and family. Yet when white British abolitionist Julia Griffith came to work as Douglass’ office assistant, rumours of their alleged affair spread quickly in the abolitionist community. William Lloyd Garrison, Douglass’ mentor-turned-nemesis, was only too happy to broadcast that Griffith was breaking up Douglass’ marriage, and that Douglass was an adulterer. If there was any truth in the allegations, Douglass never admitted it. Given this scandal, no wonder public figures of the 19th century did not wish their private lives to come under public scrutiny.170

Mary and Henry Bibb did not have children. This could have been a source of discontent for the couple. Bibb, now living in freedom, more than likely wanted children. He must have thought constantly about his daughter, how if alive, she must have grown, and the kind of woman she was growing into. He knew that it was because of slavery he lost his only child.

Mary Miles Bibb helped Henry Bibb in several ways. Perhaps having a freeborn wife with connections helped Bibb in his public life as an abolitionist. Miles seemed the perfect match for someone like Bibb. She was a well-qualified schoolteacher, whose
“accomplishments” were always commented on by her contemporaries. She used her many talents and skills in setting up schools with her husband, helped him edit his paper, and engaged in other ventures that called for her varied expertise. This is not to say she was responsible for Bibb’s success as an abolitionist. Bibb had achieved success long before he met Mary Miles. For six years before he met her he had established himself and his reputation as a professional fugitive abolitionist. Her public role in his life can best be understood in the context of their Canadian years. Though they had separate lives—Mrs. Bibb, for example, ran her school, and Bibb continued with this lecturing—their lives were so intertwined in many respects, both supported the same ventures; they were not only husband and wife, but also colleagues.

When Bibb died on 1 August 1854, he had been married for six years. In those six years he worked tirelessly with Miles in activities devoted to the cause of Black freedom. However, the death of Bibb did not slow down his widow or dim her commitments. Immediately after burying her husband, she travelled to the National Emigration Convention in Cleveland, Ohio where she served as one of the vice-presidents. She continued to run her school; by this time she had opened and was teaching an integrated school in Windsor. She continued her association with the RHS, and later married Isaac Cary, an emigrationist abolitionist. In the early 1860s Mary Miles opened a ladies fashion store in Windsor. In 1873 she would move back to the United States with Cary. Four years later she died. Childless, and without siblings, she left her estate to children’s and women’s organizations.

Mary Bibb’s life story has long been subsumed under her husband’s. Until
recently, writers of abolitionist history have favoured telling men’s stories, especially those of white men. The abolitionist movement was led by men though new research is showing that women were the “foot-soldiers.” However, until recently, women’s participation has been covered over by record keepers and writers of history. Mary Bibb’s life became totally identified with her husband’s. One sharp example of this is that historians, including myself, still refer to her as Mary “Bibb” even though a few years after Bibb’s death she married Isaac Cary. Wells Brown visited the ex-Mrs. Bibb in 1861. The statement he made regarding her illustrates this point. “Mrs. Cary is better known as the beautiful and accomplished Mary E. Miles, afterward, Mrs. Henry Bibb. Her labors during the lifetime of Mr. Bibb, in connection with him, for the fugitives, and her exertions since, are too well known for me to make mention of them here…” In attempting to highlight her ‘accomplishments,’ Wells Brown actually covered them up, and minimized her presence as a historical actor. One result of her partnership with Bibb is that her history has been subsumed under his even though she lived a long and noteworthy life. And although she was a well-known abolitionist in her own right, only recently has there been an attempt to examine her life and work.

James Horton notes that no matter how independent or independent-minded Black women were, the gender conventions of the day demanded that they be subordinated to men. He blames Black male editors for exhorting women to assume a subordinate position. Paradoxically, these same editors were the ones to urge women to engage in uplift activities for the “good of the race.” But engaging in uplift activities demanded that women step outside the boundaries of their homes, and participate in
public life. Yet even while participating in public life, women had to know who was 'the
man.' Black men lived in a society which denied them manhood and male
prerogatives. The expression of their manhood was contingent on Black women's
subordination. All this, of course, was articulated within, and fashioned by, a white
supremacist society with its stereotypes of Black men and women.

The sexist and racist construction of history also has meant that Black women
have been written out of it. During the nineteenth, and for most of the twentieth century,
most women and all racial minorities, were not deemed worthy of historical inquiry.
Black people as a whole have been victimized by this approach to history and
epistemology. With the rise of a field called "Black history" in the United States, the
focus has either been on a "genderless" category or on men. It continued that way until
very recently a few scholars, primarily Black women, challenged this approach and
began to consciously write and theorize about Black women's history. In Canada, the
Black historical presence has yet to be acknowledged by many of those who create
knowledge about Canadian history. Women like Mary Bibb have been made a historical
fatality as a result.177

Mary Miles had a notable life. Though she lived in societies in which her life was
structured along race and gender lines, she managed to obtain a high level of education
and supported herself as a single woman and in marriage. Her class position, supported
by her natural abilities, allowed her to do this. We do not know if her childlessness was a
source of anguish for her and her husband, but she certainly must have pondered it.
Nineteenth-century society saw motherhood as the quintessential role for women. And
though Black women combined motherhood with other roles, motherhood remained a central role for free Black women. Slave women, as revealed by scholars, also valued motherhood.\textsuperscript{178} Motherhood was tied up with one’s womanhood. Despite her many accomplishments, did Mary Bibb see herself as a failed woman because she did not have children? She lived her life close to children. She taught them for 32 years of her life, and when she died she left a large portion of her estate to them.\textsuperscript{179}

After Henry Bibb’s death in 1854, Mary lived for another 23 years working as a teacher and businesswoman, and she continued to support reform causes. Four years after her return to the United States she died. When she moved back to the States, her life had come full circle. Born in Rhode Island and raised up in that state and in Massachusetts, she thought of herself as a “Yankee” woman. Yet racial oppression forced her from the land of her birth. She relocated to Canada with her famous abolitionist husband Henry Bibb, but discovered in Canada, that though slavery was absent, racism against Black people was not. Mary Bibb worked to ameliorate the conditions for Blacks in Essex County and the rest of Ontario. Her contemporaries always noted that she was devoted to reform, and they were correct. She spent her entire adult life trying to change society for the better, especially bettering the lives of Black citizens.

Of course, other women played roles in Henry Bibb’s life, especially his public life. Most of these women belonged to the “silent army of abolition.” Revisionist historians are now revealing that women provided the “bread and butter of abolition.” They founded hundreds of abolitionist societies, gathered petitions, organized bazaars,
sponsored speakers, and generally helped in the campaign. These women are just beginning to get their due from historians. Laura Haviland was one such woman who helped Bibb. Belonging to various antislavery societies in Michigan, she also served as an Underground Railroad leader. Haviland was not only instrumental in helping fugitives, she opened a manual school, the Raisin Institute, which from its inception was inter-racial. Haviland was also a founder and leader of the antislavery society in her home-town of Logan. The Logan society was one of the first antislavery groups to sponsor and promote Henry Bibb as a speaker. Bibb collaborated with Haviland in several ventures, and when he organized the Refugee Home Society, he asked Haviland to become the teacher of its first school. She complied. Haviland helped Bibb realize his goals and projects.\textsuperscript{180}

Bibb, while travelling in New England, observed the numerical superiority and significance of women in the abolitionist struggle. Writing to the editor of the \textit{Emancipator}, Joshua Leavitt, he states: “There are thousands of Anti-Slavery men here, and double the number of women.” He based this observation on the vast number of women who turned out to hear him speak, who organized abolitionist societies in New England, and who raised funds for him. One of his New England tours was sponsored by the Massachusetts Female Emancipation Society.\textsuperscript{181} The women of the Anti-Slavery Sewing Circle of Cincinnati also helped Bibb in his public life. As discussed in the previous chapter, the women of this group raised funds for the \textit{Voice of the Fugitive} and saved it more than once from an early grave.\textsuperscript{182}

Henry Bibb moved in a public world defined by men. Yet this world was shaped
to a large degree by his involvement with the women in his life, mainly his wives, daughter, and mother. His mother raised him and told him who he was; his wives enlarged his world, his daughter showed him his limitations and vulnerability as a slave father. Abolitionist women, Black and white, also helped give Bibb's world form and substance.
Notes

1 Bibb used two l’s to spell his mother’s first name. I have followed suit.


6 Ibid., 23-24.

7 Valethia Watkins correctly notes that one’s gender cannot be separated from one’s race, class or sexuality. All these identities are “locked” in one body and experienced simultaneously. Unfortunately, as Watkins points out, there’s not a word in the English language which describes this inseparability of identities. All women and men embody various and several combinations of identities. Watkins, “Womanism and Black Feminism, Issues in the Manipulation of African Historiography,” eds. Jacob Carruthers & Leon Harris, African World History Project, the Preliminary Challenge (Los Angeles: Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations, 1997). 271

8 Slaveholders sometimes forced women into sexual intercourse with slave men and vice versa; if either party refused they could be punished. Slaveowners too, placed a high premium on fertile women, especially according to Herbert Gutman, after the abolition of the American slave trade in 1808. Herbert Gutman, The Black Family in Slavery and in Freedom, 1750-1925 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976) 75-85; Roberts, Killing the Black Body, 24.


13 Roberts in Killing the Black Body, 22-55, illuminates this point.

14 Osofsky, Puttin’ On Ole Massa, 64.

15 George P. Rawick, From Sunup to Sundown, The Making of the Black Community (Connecticut:


19 Gutman states: “Reproducing the labor force required only the simple biological dyad, “mother and child.” The social dyads “husband and wife,” and “father and child” were not essential. Neither was the completed nuclear family.” On the other hand, as Gutman himself notes, some slaveholders encouraged the formation of nuclear families. Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 79. Elizabeth, mother of William Wells Brown, suffered the same fate as Mildred Jackson. She had seven ‘fatherless’ children. Some of the fathers, like Brown’s father, were white men and slaveholders. “Narrative of William Wells Brown” in Ososky, Puttin’ On Ole Massa, 179-180.


22 Voice of the Fugitive, 2 Dec. 1852.

23 Enslaved youths were often hired out. In the case of Kentucky where there was a “surplus” of slaves in the antebellum era, this practice was quite common. Bibb does not say if his other brothers were also hired out.

24 Ososky, Puttin’ On Ole Massa, 64-65.


26 Ososky, Puttin’ On Ole Massa, 64.


28 Ibid., 77-79.

29 Ososky, Puttin’ On Ole Massa, 64-65.

31 Blassingame, *Slave Community.*

32 Osofsky, *Puttin' On Ole Massa,* 70-73.

33 As the soil of the older slave states such as Maryland, Virginia, and Kentucky became exhausted, agricultural production expanded up in newly acquired states such as Missouri and Texas. Agricultural expansion was also pioneered in established slave states like Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama. These developments led to a great demand for slaves in the Lower South; the Upper South responded by a massive exportation of bonded people from within their border to satisfy the needs of the developing frontier. The state of Missouri was a chief importer of slaves from the Upper South, especially from Kentucky. During the decade of 1830-40, the latter state reputedly sold over 4000 slaves annually to Missouri and other southerly and southwesterly states. Frederic Bancroft, *Slave-Trading in the Old South* (New York: Ungar Publishing, 1931) 120-144, 388-392.

34 In 1852 Henry Bibb wrote a series of letters to Albert Sibley, his "old master." In these letters, Bibb not only castigated Sibley for robbing his mother of her children, but questioned Sibley's Christian ethic. From these letters we also learn much of Bibb's and Jackson's family history and arrangement. Henry Bibb to Albert Sibley, *Voice of the Fugitive,* 23 Sept. 7 Oct. 4 Nov. 1852, 2. Dec. 1852.

35 Some slave scholars have noted that slave boys were more likely to be sold away from their mothers than slave girls. For example, Wilma King and Deborah Gray White posit that slave owners were more inclined to sell men separately. Claire Robertson, on the other hand, has done research which indicates that girls as much as boys were sold away from their mothers, and female bonding between mother and daughter rarely influenced the slaveowners in their decision on how the family would be broken up and separated through sale. In fact, according to Robertson, "There is some evidence that women may have been sold more frequently than men, despite assumptions in the literature that men were sold more frequently and willingly by masters...." Wilma King, "‘Suffer With Them Till Death’ Slave Women and Their Children in Nineteenth-Century America’; Claire Robertson, “Africa in the Americas? Slavery and Women, the family, and the Gender Division of Labor,” in David B. Gaspar & Darlene C. Hine eds. *More Than Chattel,* 147, 13-14; Gray White, *Ar ’n’ I a Woman?* 71.

36 It is likely that Mildred's last name was not Jackson until she married Robert Jackson, but Bibb does not give her last name before her marriage. Also it is not known what kind of marriage Mildred and Robert had. With Mildred being a slave, quite possibly, it was common-law marriage.

37 *Voice,* 4 Nov. 1852.


39 *Voice,* 4 Nov. 1852.


42 Voice, 22 Sept. 1852.


44 Voice, 18 Nov. 1852.


47 Gray White, *Ar'n't I A Woman?* 146.


49 Osofsky, *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 74-75.

50 Maria Deidrich, "'My Love is Black as Yours is Fair': Premarital Love and Sexuality in the Antebellum Slave Narrative," *Phylon* 47, 3 (1986) 240.

51 Osofsky, *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 75.

52 Ibid., 78.

53 Ibid., 79.


56 Boston was the centre of abolitionism in the North-east. Fanueil Hall, once the focal point for Boston's town meetings, became a main venue for abolitionist agitation. Lecturing at Fanueil Hall was a must for prominent abolitionists like Bibb while on their antislavery lecture tours.

57 Boston *Daily Mail* in the *Western Citizen*, 21 Dec. 1847.


59 Ibid.,

60 Ibid., 80.

61 The phenomenon of the "abroad husband" was a feature of slave life. These husbands, living on neighbouring or distant plantations, apart from their wives, often visited on weekends or sometimes during week nights. Gray White, *Ar'n't I A Woman?* 76, 152-53.


See Bibb's narrative in *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, also Solomon Northup's in the same publication.

*Blassingame, Op cit*., 81.

*Western Citizen*, 21 Dec. 1847.


Edouard Glissant used the term "psychic torture" to describe the kind of degradation that Blacks suffered under the hands of whites in the new world. Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse, Selected Essays* (trans. J. Michael Dash; Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989).

The paddle was another instrument of torture slaveholders used to "discipline" slaves. Henry Bibb informs us that "the object of using the paddle in the place of a lash was, to conceal the marks which would be made by the flogging." He describes the paddle: "The paddle is made of a piece of hickory timber, about one inch thick, three inches in width, about eighteen inches in length. The part which is applied to the flesh is bored full of quarter inch auger holes, and every time this is applied to the flesh of the victim, the blood gushes through the holes of the paddle, or a blister makes its appearance. The persons who are thus flogged, are always stripped naked, and their hands tied together. They are then bent over double, their knees are forced between their elbows, and a stick is put through between the elbows and the bend of the legs, in order to hold the victim in that position, while the paddle is applied to those parts of the body which would not likely to by seen by those who wanted to buy slaves." Osofsky, *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 115.


77 Stevenson, “Distress and Discord,” 120.


81 I fully recognize the diversity of Africa’s precolonial cultures. But the desirability of children among married couples, the role of men and women within marriages, and the concepts of womanhood and manhood were similar among many groups and nations all over the continent. This includes imperial states, “tribal” units, acephalous societies, Islamic and Christian polities. Heinrich Loth, Woman in Ancient Africa (trans. Sheila Marnie; Westport, Conn.: Lawrence Hill, 1987); Gray White, Ar’n’t I A Woman? 66.

82 King, Stolen Childhood, 109-110; Black, Black Manhood, 112, Gray White, Ar’n’t I a Woman? 66-67.

83 In Ar’n’t I A Woman? Deborah G. White analyzes some of the crushing stereotypes that whites hoisted onto Black women, and used in their construction of Black female identity. See chapter one “Jezebel and Mammy,” 27-61; also Barbara Bush, Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838 (Kingston, Jamaica: Heinemann, 1990) 13-22


85 Ar’n’t I a Woman? 119-141

86 Ibid., 119-141.

87 “Narrative of the Life and Adventure of Venture…” in Bontemps, Five Black Lives, 3-34; Henson, An Autobiography, op cit, 143.

88 Osofsky, Puttin’ On Ole Massa, 81.

89 Large plantations often had nurseries for babies and young children. Elderly, infirmed, and sometimes teenagers were the babysitters. King, Stolen Chilhdood, 13-14.

90 Osofsky, Puttin’ On Ole Massa, 80.

91 Ibid., 80-81.


93 Black Manhood, 121.

94 Painter, “Soul Murder and Slavery.”


Gray White, *Ar ’n’ I a Woman?* 37. For an extended discussion of the fancy girl trade see Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South*, 327-334.

Ososfksy, *Puttin’ On Ole Massa*, 112.

King, *Stolen Childhood*, 91.


Gray White, *Ar ’n’ I a Woman?* 63.

*Cited in Daniel Black, Black Manhood, 47-48.*

*Ibid.* It was easier for women to commit suicide than men. Men were usually chained below deck “like books on a shelf,” and they came up from only for meals and ‘exercise.’ Women, on the other hand, were rarely chained and therefore had more mobility. The irrational fear of Black men by white men surely must have started on the slave ship. Black men were kept in chains because their captors feared their physical prowess. By holding them captives they robbed them of their humanity and their manhood. It is crucial to bear in mind that most Africans came from societies in which suicide was taboo. Victims of suicide were not given a proper burial. In some societies, their bodies were simply thrown into the “evil forest” for crows and other animals to feed on. Yet, the fact that Africans resorted readily to suicide on slave ships points to the severe psychological dislocation that occurred within them during their captivity. Black, *Black Manhood*, 43-62; Daniel P. Mannix, *Black Cargoes; A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1518-1865* (New York: Viking Books, 1962) Basil Davidson, *Black Mother, Africa and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (London: Penguin, 1980); Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1958); Judith Gleason, *Agotime, Her Legend* (New York: Grossman, 1970).

Ososfksy, *Puttin’ On Ole Massa*, 111.

The interstate slave trade breathed new life into the slave system as hundreds of thousands of bonded people from the Upper South were sold farther south or to the new western states. ‘Incorrigible’ slaves like Bibb were prime candidates to be sold to the Lower South. Slaveholders had a propensity to sell mothers together with their children, and males separately. That Bibb was sold together with his wife and child was due to Bibb’s plea to “soul driver” Daniel Lane to sell them together. On the interstate trade see

110 Osofsky, *Puttin’ On Ole Massa*, 113-117.

111 For Bibb’s and Malinda life on Whitfield’s plantation see *Ibid.*, 109-140.


113 King, *Stolen Childhood*, 4-6, 9-10; Blassingame, *Slave Community*, 181; Gray White, *Ar’n’t I A Woman*, 111-113.

114 Robert Fogel & Stanley Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little Brown, 1974). Fogel and Engerman have been severely criticized for their interpretation of slave life. One critic asserts that they made it appear as if slaves benefitted from the system. This reviewer accused Fogel and Engerman of reviving Ulrich Phillips argument that slavery was a benevolent institution in which the masters “took care” of a “backward” race. See J. William Harris, *Society and Culture in the Slave South* (London: Routledge, 1992) 4.


116 Gray White, *Ar’n’t I A Woman?* 69-75; Adrienne Shadd, “‘The Lord Seemed to say ‘Go’: Women and the Underground Railroad Movement,” in Bristow, *We’re Rooted Here*, 41-68.

117 Osofsky, *Puttin’ On Ole Massa*, 125.

118 Gray White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman?* 146-47.


121 King, *Stolen Childhood*, 97-98.

122 Osofsky, *Puttin’ On Ole Massa*, 130.


124 Bibb’s adventures and life as a slave clearly reveal the different occupations that enslaved persons engaged in. Plantation owners and agriculturalists were not the only groups of persons who owned and used slaves. As Bibb’s employment by the gamblers attest, enslaved Americans were employed in a variety of non-agricultural pursuits. James E. New ton, & Ronald L. Lewis, *The Other Slaves, mechanics, artisans, and craftsmen* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1978); Robert S. Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South* (New York: Oxford, 1970); Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities, The South, 1820-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).


126 King, *Stolen Childhood*, 107.
Gray White, *Ar 'n 't I A Woman?* 148.

Stevenson, “Distress and Discord,” 105.

Osofsky, *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 138-39

Stevenson, “Distress and Discord,” 123.


King, *Stolen Childhood*, 99.


In “Soul Murder and Slavery,” Painter urges historians and other scholars to take into account the terrible psychical, emotional, and psychological effect slavery had on the lives of the enslaved.

William Wells Brown recounts personal stories of masters forcing slaves to marry soon after their partners were sold into the domestic trade. The productivity of slaves, especially female slaves, was a top priority for slaveholders. Slaveholders, by forcing their slaves to marry soon after separation, displayed their lack of respect for the slave relationships and feelings. Through this method, enslaved males and females were coerced into bigamy. On the other hand, this would not be seen as bigamy by masters as slave marriages had no legal status. Malinda is described by Bibb as beautiful and a *mulatto*. These factors undoubtedly made her a prime candidate for the fancy girl trade. Whitfield who sold Malinda into concubinage was perhaps influenced to do so by her youth and her colour, and the high price that he would get for her. For Wells Brown Statements see Osofsky, *Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 214; for Bibb’s see the *Western Citizen*, 21 Dec. 1847.

*Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 162.


Catherine Clinton, “‘Southern Dishonor’: Flesh, Blood, Race, and Bondage,” in Carol Bleser, *op cit*, 66.


*Puttin' On Ole Massa*, 163.

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*.


In our times, victims of sexual and child abuse are also usually blamed for the assaults inflicted upon them.

Bibb undoubtedly sorrowed over Malinda, but one cannot help but wonder at his attempts to blame her for the end of their marriage. Quite possibly, Bibb's editor Lucius Matlack 'refined' Bibb's words to make them sound the way they do. The narratives were meant, after all, for a predominantly white audience who would probably be queasy about Bibb's "bigamy." If Matlack changed the meaning of Bibb's words he, perhaps, wanted to save Bibb from the North's moral judgement. On editors changing and compromising the voice of Black narrators see, James Olney, "'I was Born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature," in Charles T. Davis & Henry Louis Gates Jr., eds. The Slave's Narrative (New York: Oxford, 1985) 164-166.

In some countries like Brazil, Cuba, and some states in Europe, Mary Frances would be viewed as a white person, unless she publicly declared otherwise. Carl N. Degler, Neither Black nor White, Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States (New York: Macmillan, 1971).

Bibb, "Narrative," in Osofsky, Puttin' On Ole Massa, 163-164.


Correspondence from Carlton Mabee to Afua Cooper, April 1990. Mabee takes the quote from W. Freeman Galpin, "God's Chore Boy; Samuel Joseph May," unpublished manuscript in May's Papers at the Syracuse University Archives.


Albany Patriot, Vol. 6, 30 Dec. 1846.

Cooper, "The Search for Mary Bibb."

Martin Delany, The Condition, 132.


By the middle decades of the 19th century, teaching was one of the very few paid employment options available to North American women. Free Black women, with fewer resources than white women, and whose gender was constrained and structured by racial considerations, embraced teaching as a way to support themselves and uplift the race. Linda Perkins, "Black Women and Race Uplift Prior to Emancipation," in Filomina Chioma Steady, The Black Woman Cross-Culturally (Mass.: Schenkman


162 See her letter to Gerrit Smith, 8 Nov. 1950.

163 Ibid.,

164 Voice, 30 July, 19 Nov. 1851.


166 The only biography to date on Mary Bibb and one which details her teaching accomplishments is Afua P. Cooper, “Black Women and Work” in Bristow op cit.

167 The phrase is taken from Du Bois’ essay, “The Damnation of Women,” in Darkwater. 173.

168 Mary Bibb to George Whipple, 22 May 1853. American Missionary Archives, AMA-ARC. Matilda E. Nichols is listed in the General Catalogue of Oberlin College for the periods 1851-52, 1853-54, and 1863-64. She is noted to be from Dover, Ohio.

169 Matilda Nichols to Harriet Fuller, 11 July 1853; Harriet Fuller to George Whipple, 15 July 1853. AMA-ARC.

170 Maria Deidrich’s, Love Across Color Lines, Otillie Assing and Frederick Douglass (New York: Hill & Wang, 1999) details the romantic relationship Douglass had with another white woman, Otillie Assing. However, Deidrich also examines Douglass’ relationship with Julia Griffith. See pages xxiii-xxiv, 86, 179-185.


172 Afua Cooper, “Black Women and Work”; see also Mary E. Cary’s obituary, New York Tribune, 9 August 1877.

173 Though her primary unit of analysis is white women, despite the picture of Black woman abolitionist Frances Watkins Harper on the cover of her book, Julie Roy Jeffrey notes this fact in The Great Silent Arm of Abolitionism, Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Nancy Hewitt, op cit; Henry Bibb, to Joshua Leavitt, the Emancipator, 24 March 1847.


177 See introduction of We're Rooted Here.

178 Deborah Gray White, Ar'n't I a Woman?


181 The Emancipator 24 March 1847.

182 Voice, 3 June 1852.
Chapter 9.

Resolved, That the emancipated bondmen from American slavery, and the free colored emigrants now in Canada, have lost their chief pillar, and one of their most brilliant advocates. Liberator, 11 August 1854.

AFTERWORD: AUGUST FIRST FAREWELL

On 1 August 1854 Henry Bibb died after an illness. He was 39 years old. When an adult dies at what we think is an ‘early’ age, we tend to lament that he or she ‘was too young’ to die. In the Black communities in North America, people are still outraged not only that Malik Shabazz and Martin Luther King, Jr., were assassinated, but also that they ‘were so young’ when they were cut down. Bibb died after a bout with “fever” at 3 a.m on 1 August. I would not lament his short life because it is not so much the length of one’s life that is significant, but what one does with that life. What did Bibb feel on his deathbed? That he had not finished his life’s work? Or that he had done what he could do and was ready to hear the blessing ‘oh thou good and faithful servant, enter into my gates?’ Bibb had accepted his mortality, because in April 1854, he made his “last will and testament” and appointed his wife executor. Theodore Holly witnessed the deed.1 Four months later, Bibb passed away.

Dying on August First seemed almost planned. Because if there was ever a good day for an ex-slave to die, August First was that day. Britain liberated her slaves on this day in 1833, and since that time, on the anniversary of this ‘blessed event,’ Blacks all over North America and the British West Indies celebrated. In the early 1850s, Bibb himself organized several Emancipation Day celebrations
in Ontario. August First had huge symbolic meaning for Blacks in the Western Hemisphere, for it meant that hundreds of thousands of their fellow enslaved had broken the bonds of slavery. American Blacks in particular drew inspiration from the day and hoped that the more than three million of their enslaved kith and kin would one day, like their British Empire ‘cousins,’ ‘break their chains and let freedom fly.’ August First, in contrast to “slaveholding America’s Fourth of July,” was, for members of the Black American diaspora in Canada, their national holiday.² It was on this day that Bibb’s spirit attained liberation from his ailing and ravaged body.

The Emancipation Day events for the Windsor/Detroit area had already been planned. Essex County’s Blacks were to join with Detroiter to have a pleasure cruise on the Detroit River. By dawn, news of Bibb’s death echoed around Windsor and across the river to Detroit. As the sun rose in the sky the celebrants gathered on the river’s banks to board the ferry. Perhaps the ferry picked up the Detroit group first, then crossed the river to allow the Windsorites to embark. It would not be a day of mourning. Bibb would not have wanted that. The celebration had to go on. On board, Bibb’s long-time friend and colleague, George de Baptiste, broke the news of Bibb’s death to those assembled. But in all likelihood, they already knew. de Baptiste then “suggested that the excursion party organize themselves into a meeting to express their sentiments in relation to this melancholy event.” William Monroe chaired the meeting, and Theodore Holly acted as secretary. Monroe expressed “the tremendous loss we all had experienced in having the manly voice of so noble a champion as Henry Bibb
closed in death....” Acting as if the meeting was a convention, William Lambert, de Baptiste, and one Peter Thomas were appointed on to a committee to draft a series of resolutions.

Whereas, We have heard of the melancholy decease of Henry Bibb, which occurred at 3 o’clock this (Tuesday) morning, at his late residence in Windsor, C.W.; therefore,

Resolved, That in his death, freedom has lost one of its noblest champions, and humanity one of its brightest ornaments.

Resolved, That we recognize in our deceased companion, a true friend and brother, and one who stands among the first on the page of history as the elevator of his race.

Resolved, That the emancipated bondmen from American slavery, and the free colored emigrants now in Canada, have lost their chief pillar, and one of their most brilliant advocates.

The party praised Bibb for his work on Canadian emigration and noted that it was through his “indefatigable labors” that Canada was gaining a world-wide reputation as a haven for the oppressed. While they mourned Bibb’s “grand and sublime life” they considered it fitting that this life “should come to a close on this eventful day.” They sent their sympathies and regrets to Bibb’s widow, his mother, and his brothers, but added: “we would comfort them with the recollection of the imperishable legacy that his enduring fame bequeaths to them.” The party then called on Holly to deliver “an eulogium” on Bibb’s life, “at his earliest convenience.” After the speeches and resolutions, the celebrants agreed to present copies of the resolutions to Bibb’s widow and other relatives, and publish them in the Detroit papers, and the antislavery journals “throughout the United States and Canada.”

As news of Bibb’s death circulated in the Black and abolitionist communities, eulogies were published in several papers. At the National
Emigration Convention held in Cleveland, Ohio, on 24 August, Martin Delany declared that in [Bibb’s] death, 

the slave has lost a faithful friend and untiring advocate—our cause a great and good man, and ourselves a warm-hearted friend and much esteemed brother. And we respectfully offer our tenderest condolence to his beloved and heart-stricken widow; aged, devoted and afflicted Christian mother: assuring them that their irreparable loss, is his infinite and eternal gain.4

A year later, Boston abolitionist Benjamin Drew visited Windsor, paid Mary Bibb a visit and called her husband a “dear lamented.”5 The Black freedom struggle was to miss one of its most ardent champions.

Indeed, Bibb’s accomplishments are what must be highlighted, not the short span of his life. Bibb was a self-made man. He declared war on the slave system, emerged from the war with some battle scars, but, more importantly, with some victories. He lost Malinda and Mary Frances, but he gained his freedom, and with it a sense of himself and his manhood. Born a slave, he took his destiny in his own hands and fashioned for himself a new identity as a free man. By taking his freedom, he became as much as it was possible the architect of his own life.

Bibb rose from obscurity and anonymity to become one of abolition’s most well-known and ardent activists. His story was extraordinary, if only because the David Whites, Albert Sibleys, William Gatewoods, Madison Garrisons, and the entire slave system meant for him to be nothing more than a brute beast, destined to live out his life as a hewer of wood and drawer of water. But Bibb dared to defy them and lived to tell the tale. As an abolitionist orator in
the U.S., he traversed most of the so-called free states speaking to thousands of people relating the sorrow that was slavery. When he spoke, he spoke not only for himself but for his mother Milldred, his several brothers, his wife and daughter, Malinda and Mary Frances, and for the more than three million of his sisters of brothers “clanking their chains” in Southern slavery.

Through the genre of autobiography, Bibb also made his mark on American literature while at the same time using this medium to challenge racism and bigotry in the land of his birth. His many letters to abolitionist newspapers also chronicle his emergence as a writer, and his commitment to Black freedom. His work in the convention movement, the Underground Railroad, and in political abolition helped bring about the downfall of American slavery. In Canada West, he embarked on a new phase of his antislavery career. In this province, with the help of his many friends, colleagues, and his wife Mary Miles, he put into place several ventures designed to assist the fleeing fugitive and the free Black person: The Refugee Home Society, The Canadian and Windsor Anti-Slavery Societies, various temperance associations, the Sandwich Baptist Church, Emancipation Day celebrations, and his crowning achievement, the *Voice of the Fugitive*. In Ontario, Bibb also became the leading spokesperson for Black emigration from the United States. In Canada, his adopted country, he continued with his lecturing schedules, speaking to Ontario audiences on abolition and Black uplift, and often crossed the Detroit and Niagara Rivers into the ‘republic of oppression’ to continue speaking for Black freedom.
I have also sought to demonstrate the complexities of Bibb’s activism by addressing the varied nature of his work. I have also attempted to rupture the conventional knowledge and interpretation of Bibb’s work and the nature of Black abolitionism in Canada West by showing that the integration/segregation framework is invalid when theorizing Black activism, and that Bibb did not conceive of himself or his politics in such a dichotomous manner. I have revealed that Bibb and his cohorts in Canada West combined political action with moral suasion in their quest for effective strategies for abolition.

This biography of Henry Bibb adopts a transborder approach to a Black abolitionist whose life, politics, and activism must be understood within a North American context. Of critical importance, Bibb’s work exemplifies the interracial co-operation between Black and white abolitionists in the United States and Canada. This was extremely significant in an age when Blacks and whites lived apart from each other, and when most whites seemed intent on curtailing the limited freedoms Blacks enjoyed. Bibb’s employment by white antislavery societies is exemplary of this effort. Both parties benefited, but the larger goal was to further the agitation against slavery. Another salient example of interracial effort that marked Bibb’s activism is the Refugee Home Society. Founded by white and Black abolitionists from Canada West and Michigan, the RHS exemplified not only interracial co-operation but also a cross-border effort. Bibb worked with Michigan abolitionists like Nathan Stone, Laura Haviland, and others from the Michigan State Anti-Slavery Society to make the RHS a reality. Though the RHS was primarily a land settlement initiative, it had education for
the refugees as one of its main objectives, and Haviland, a seasoned schoolteacher, school founder, and tried and true abolitionist, became the RHS' first schoolteacher.

Bibb's activism must be couched in the abolitionist movement. This was the most radical reform movement of the nineteenth century, and it gave birth to a cadre of Black men and women who committed themselves to do battle in freedom's cause. Some of these activists, like Bibb, were runaway slaves. They brought a vibrant impetus to the movement for abolition and they were some of the fiercest and most uncompromising agitators. For Bibb, campaigning on the antislavery circuit was tremendously empowering. Slavery had tested his mettle, antislavery gave him the voice he needed to cry out against the "wicked institution."

In Canada, the land of the free, Bibb continued his agitation against the 'injustice of caste institution' and racial bigotry. The *Voice of the Fugitive* led the charge against such wrongs, and for Black liberation. A promoter of Canada, Bibb was not blinded to the 'prejudice against colour' in the country. At the same time, Canada gave him the opportunity to put many of his ideas for Black emancipation into action.

Bibb appeared to have unbounded energy. So driven was he to do his part for the destruction of American slavery, and the uplift of his race, that his mind was always at work, seeking creative ways in which to carry out his aims. What becomes obvious as one examines Bibb's life and work is his love for his kith and kin, for Black people. Blacks, whether they were enslaved, newly freed,
runaway slave, or freeborn stood at the centre of Bibb’s redemptive discourse. From Kentucky to Louisiana to Michigan to New York and New England, and finally to Canada West Bibb has left a remarkable legacy.
Notes


3 All quotes regarding the are from the Liberator, 11 August 1854.

4 Proceedings from the National Emigration Convention, Cleveland, Ohio, August 1854.

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SETTLEMENT AND LAND POLICY

4: Upper Canada about 1841
Essex County, Identification Map.

1. Albertville
2. Albuna
3. Amherstburg
4. Arner
5. Belle River
6. Blytheswood
7. Colchester
8. Comber
9. cottam
10. Deerbrook
11. East Windsor
12. Edgar
13. Elford
14. Elmstead
15. Emeryville
16. Essex (Centre)
17. Gesto
18. Goldsmith
19. Gordon
20. Harrow
21. Hillman
22. Kingsville
23. La Salle
24. Leamington
25. Maidstone
26. McGregor
27. New Canaan
28. North Ridge
29. Oldcastle
30. Ojibway
31. Olinda
32. Olexy
33. Pelee Island
34. Puce
35. Pike Creek
36. Pointe aux Roches
   (Stoney Point)
37. River Canard
38. Riverside
39. Roseland
40. Ruscomb
41. Ruthven
42. St. Clair Beach
43. St. Clair Siding
44. St. Joachim
45. Sandwich
46. South Woodslee
47. Staples
48. Strangfield
49. Tecumseh
50. Union
51. Vereker
52. Walkerville
53. Windville
54. Windsor
55. Woodslee
The Right Reverend James T. Holly. Courtesy of The Archives of the Episcopal Church, USA.
SCHOOLS.

No doubt it will be interesting to many to hear something respecting schools in this part of the province. The day school in this place has increased from twelve to forty-six, notwithstanding the embarrassing circumstances under which it started, namely, a dark ill-ventilated room, uncomfortable seats, want of desks, books and all sorts of school apparatus. I would mention with gratitude the assistance from friends in Lenawee county, Michigan, through the agency of J. F. Doolhear, which enabled me to procure a black board and the few books with which we commenced. Here the united thanks of all connected with the school for his timely visit; many of whom six weeks ago, could not tell one letter from another, can now spell intelligently in Town’s Spelling-book, and read any of the exercises contained therein. This may seem strange to many, but not to one at all acquainted with physiology. It is an accredited fact that persons whose physical system is well developed, learn much faster than those whose mental capacities are over-taxed at an earlier age.

The Learned Blacksmith is regarded as the wonder of the age. Truly, he is a hero! What shall we say of men, and women too, who have spent a life in slavery, enduring the separation from loved ones, who, having escaped to the nominally free State, in pursuit of freedom, found prejudice equally withering. Overcoming all this, and feeling that they were men among men, standing upon free soil, awoke only to hear the sound of Mason’s interminable fugitive bill.

What shall we say of those who have again taken their lives in their hands and escaped to this desolate, cold country, where they are again strangers in a strange land, who, having endured all this, together with the cares of a family on the one hand and pressing want on the other! Is not the person who can improve under such circumstances a hero, even according to Thomas Carlyle’s own showing? Many of these support themselves by their own industry, improving all their time to good advantage.

Are such persons worthy! Is it not doing good to help such to possess so great a treasure as education? The friends in the States would render these people a great good by turning their attention more to schools. To do anything the teachers should be such as know what material they have to operate upon; and, knowing this, they should have something wherewith to work—the sympathy of friends and an assurance of being sustained—otherwise there cannot be good schools in Canada.

We acknowledge with gratitude the books presented by Mr. Cook, of Adrian, who is a young man, and has done much for Canada, and mission. They certainly were a God-send.

We commenced Sunday-school four weeks ago; present, thirty-six; there are now forty-four members, and much interest is manifested both by parents and children, some coming even in inclement weather the distance of two and three miles. We are entirely destitute of bibles, there being but four Testaments in the school, none of these being minus several chapters.

Mr. Coe, of ——, brought 100 volumes for the Sunday-school library, of these I put into the hands of Coleman Freeman fifty volumes for the Windsor Sabbath-school. Many of the scholars commit whole chapters to memory every week.

M. E. Biss.
FIRST OF AUGUST

The friends of freedom in Sandwich will celebrate the abolition of chattel slavery in the British West Indies, in A.D. 1837, at the Stone Barracks, where there will be speaking, singing, etc.,. Several distinguished speakers from abroad are expected, among whom are Sameul R. Ward, of Boston, Mr. Johnson of Ohio, J.T. Fisher of Toronto, George Cary of Dawn Mill. A general invitation is hereby extended to all person friendly to the cause.

Dinner will be furnished by the ladies for twenty-five cents per ticket. Refreshments may be had during the day and supper in the evening. The proceeds will be appropriated towards erecting a Baptist church.

Managers
Mrs. Bibb
  "  Robert Hawkins
  "  Henry Turner
  "  Henry East
  "  Robert Ward
  "  Dennis Hoover
  "  Charles Brown
  "  Henry Brent

Voice of the Fugitive, 30 July 1851
Delegates to the North American Convention asked black abolitionists Henry Bibb, John T. Fisher, and James D. Tinsley to "draw up an address as emanating from this convention, and embodying the spirit and sentiment embraced in the various resolutions...and...be a committee of revision and publication." The committee consisted of a former slave-turned-newspaper-editor (Bibb), a Toronto saloonkeeper and militant black activist (Fisher), and a fugitive slave who would leave Canada West for the Australian goldfields within the year (Tinsley). They issued an aggressive assault upon American slavery, an eloquent brief for emigration, and an ambitious call to action for blacks on the North American continent. Their "Address to the Colored Inhabitants of North America" conveyed the energy and passion of the North American Convention. VF, 22 October 1851.

AN ADDRESS TO THE
Colored Inhabitants of North America

DEAR BRETHREN:
The Committee appointed to prepare this Address, would most respectfully, earnestly, but very briefly call your attention to several topics, which to them appear of the most vital importance to the general well-being of our people.

In the first place let it be borne in mind that we are an oppressed and much degraded people; not in Canada, thank Heaven! nor by the laws of Great Britain, for under this government we have no reason to complain, as here, and here only, we participate in all the rights and privileges which other men enjoy. But, on the other hand, was ever any class or portion of the human family so persecuted and oppressed as the colored inhabitants of the United States of America? Nearly the entire population of our people in that country are held and treated as slaves by Church and State, notwithstanding that they proclaim theoretically to the world—and even keep the proclamation standing at the head of their national text book—that "all men are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, and that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

This political or practical falsehood looks well on paper, and strikes harmoniously on the American ear, especially on the 4th day of July; but it sounds like base hypocrisy to every colored American who knows that under the same government three millions and a half of his race are tyrannically robbed of their manhood. While this is the case, those who are nominally free will be little better off, in point of fact, than those who are actually slaves; for let it be remembered, that there can be no real freedom in the land while the great body of our people are held in slavery. We have, therefore, all one common interest at stake, which is the abolition of slavery and the mutual improvement of our people. Let us then be united in sentiment and in action upon this work until it is accomplished. It is emphatically a moral duty which God requires of us and—He requires that we should "remember those in bonds as bound with them," and we shall have yet to come to that point. Too long, brethren, have we been conniving at our own oppression, by leaving the work which we should have done in the hands of others; by not giving our testimony at all proper times, and under all favorable circumstances, against slavery; by not doing our part in sustaining either the pulpit or the press which have faithfully vindicated our cause before the public; by not giving countenance to anti-slavery meetings, and by throwing off responsibilities which rightfully belonged to us; by imitating our oppressors in vanity and extravagance in dress, &c., which is unbecoming and impracticable; and finally, by neglecting to educate ourselves and children, which is the most essential step to our moral and intellectual advancement. Only let this effectually be done, and our great object is more than half accomplished.

With the map and the history of human bondage before us, we are led to believe that the abolition of American slavery is now in the hands of the people of color in North America. Not that we would have the true-hearted abolitionists, who have stood by us in the darkest hours of adversity, to cease their efforts until the work is done; but we should be found standing in the front ranks of the battle, until our kinsmen, according to the flesh are disenthralled. Men who have had to contend against "fearful odds," and who have received succour in the hour of peril, should certainly be the first to fly to the rescue when the oppressed and the afflicted are crying out for deliverance.

The history of the oppressed in all ages of the world, plainly shows that they have emerged from degradation to social and political equality with their oppressors, only in proportion to their own exertions in their own cause. In the emphatic language of the poet—

Know ye not, hereditary bondsmen?
He that would be free, himself must strike the blow.

We have dwelt much on the subject of American slavery because we consider it a matter of the greatest importance. It is the great stumbling-block in the way of our social and political advancement, and it is also the main key which locks the door against our general improvement. But not-
withstanding, we believe as long as American slavery exists, an impetus will be given to the exertions of the liberated few which will cause them to rise in general intelligence, and enable them to realize a like elevation for the whole race.

We have already said that the destiny of slavery is in the hands of our people in North America, and the time has now fully come when we should apply the remedy: but let us first look and calculate what is our relative strength in the United States; and secondly, see how we can most effectually bring it to bear on the great objects which we have in view.

In the northern and southern states there are about 700,000 free people of color. In the southern states there are about 3,500,000 slaves, while the slaveholders number about 2,500,000. Should the slaves rise to a man, and demand their freedom at the hands of their oppressors, and say that they would no longer work without wages—that they would no longer suffer their wives and children to be lacerated by cruel slave-drivers, or allow them to be sold apart as cattle in the market, how long would slavery last? It would be abolished in even less than a single day, were it not that the strong arm of the whole American Government is under a pledge to keep the slave in chains. Three millions and a half of men, armed with the righteous cause of freedom, and the God of Justice on their side, against two hundred and fifty thousand tyrants, could sweep them like chaff before the wind. It is the knowledge of this fact that causes the slaveholders and their supporters to dread the increase of the free people of color—that induces state after state to pass laws prohibiting their settlement—that causes them to interpose with the private right of individuals to emancipate their slaves—and that systematically organizes plans for transporting men from the land of their nativity to Liberia. But we have great reason to thank God that notwithstanding the gross ignorance of our people, very few of them can be gulled into that scheme of prejudice and deception. We know that the great battle between freedom and slavery is to be fought on this continent and not in Africa. Our oppressors seek to divide our forces by inducing the most energetic of our brethren, by deceptive premises, to embark for a distant shore. We wish our friends to understand this trick of the slaveholders, as we disapprove of the scheme in toto.

If we are asked, then, where shall we go, or what is to be the remedy—whether it is to be moral or physical force? We say to our brethren, be patient, enter into no conspiracies for the shedding of human blood, not only because of the improbability of your success against the government of the United States in such a contest, but because it is contrary to the will of God; because we believe that there is a better way; because we know that we have truth and justice on our side, and “the weapons of our warfare should not be carnal, but mighty, through God, to the pulling down of the strong holds” of human bondage; and we shall pursue a course that will secure the approbation of Him who is greater than all that can be against us. We give our unqualified verdict in favor of self-emancipation, for we have authority from the Inspired Volume, which says, “If ye are persecuted in one city, flee away to another.” We believe it to be an indispensable duty that every “hereditary bondman” owes to himself, first to run away from slavery, and to carry off with him whatever may be necessary to effect his escape.

2nd. That he should go with a determination never to be re-captured and carried back into bondage alive. If the man of blood is on his trail, let the fugitive exert himself to the utmost in baffling the skill of the hunter—if his efforts prove fruitless, then, we say, let him stand at bay and boldly face his pursuers, for it would be more glorious for such an one to die in defence of his own liberty, than to be carried back into perpetual slavery. Self-preservation is the first impulse of nature, and if there is any cause in which a person can be justified in shedding blood it must be when it is shed in the defence of Liberty.

3rd. It is inexpedient in the extreme for such persons to stop short of Canada or the West Indies, where the soil is untainted with human slavery, and where the fugitive is protected in the enjoyment of liberty by one of the most powerful governments on the globe.

4th. We recommend a thorough reorganization of the free people of color, and their friends in the States, in Canada, in the West Indies, and in England, to facilitate the escape of refugees from American slavery, and also to advance their social, moral, political, and intellectual improvement.

As we regard education as being one of the most important items connected with our destiny, and as it is more dreaded by the slaveholders than bowie-knives or pistols, we therefore recommend, that there should be no time nor opportunity lost in educating the people of color. Let there be put into the hands of the refugee, as soon as he crosses Mason and Dixon's Line, the Spelling Book. Teach him to read and write intelligibly, and the slaveholder won't have him on his plantation among his slaves. It is emphatically the most effectual protection to personal or political liberty with which the human family can be armed.

For the carrying out of the above, and other kindred objects connected with our destiny, your Committee would strongly recommend the formation of a great Agricultural League of our people of the United States, the British American Provinces and the West Indies. We suggest that such an organization should be linked together with capital, which would not only give it a power and influence which would be felt by the community at large, but enable it to accomplish something for the elevation of our race. One prominent object should be to purchase large tracts of land in Canada and Jamaica, with agricultural implements, and to establish farms throughout those colonies, as far as it may be practicable for the
purpose of encouraging industry among refugees from American slavery, and other persons of color who may be disposed to become owners and tillers of the soil.

In order to become members of such an association, and to raise the necessary means to carry on such an enterprise, let the initiation fee be $3, and the stock be divided into shares of $50 each, to be paid in ten annual installments, and the money to be deposited in the Bank of Upper Canada, subject to the order of an Executive Committee of the Association. Such an organization would give a new impulse to the Underground Railroad, and give profitable employment to thousands of colored persons who never aspire higher than to be hewers of wood and drawers of water for the white man.

Let one thousand out of the thirty thousand refugees in Canada, unite with such an Association, within one year from this day, and it will give us a fund of $5,000 capital to commence with.

Let the state of New York, with her 60,000 free colored inhabitants, unite with us by adding 2000 members within one year, and we should have $10,000 to work with, and so could other states do likewise. How much this would gladden the fugitive's heart to hear of such an organization located in Canada; and what man of color will say that this is not a desirable object? Who among us will pretend to say that it is impracticable? Who will say that we have not the ability to carry it out? Where there is a will there is a way.

We cannot close without referring to the Refugee's Home Society in Michigan, which is now making an effort in connection with the Fugitives' Union Society, of Sandwich, Canada West, for the purpose of settling fugitives in Canada on land. They are aiming to purchase 50,000 acres of land to be divided into 25 acre lots, to be sold to actual settlers at cost, &c. Their object is a noble one, and they are succeeding well. Too much praise cannot be awarded to them for what they are doing for the fugitive.

In conclusion, brethren, let us remember the great responsibility that rests upon the free people of color. Every refugee in Canada is a representative of the millions of our brethren who are still held in bondage; and the eye of the civilized world is looking down upon us to see whether we can take care of ourselves or not. If our conduct is moral and upright, in spite of all the bad training we have had, it will reflect credit on ourselves, and encourage our friends in what they are doing for our elevation. But if, on the other hand, it should be seen, that under a free Government, where we have all our political and social rights, without regard to our color, and where we are permitted to sit under the sanctuary of God, "where there is none daring to molest us or make us afraid," and where we are supported by the prayers and sympathies of all good men, we should prove ourselves to be incapable of self-government, it would bring down reproach and disgrace upon the whole race with which we are connected, and would be used as an argument against emancipation. The slaveholders' predictions would be pronounced true, and society would consider the whole of us unfit for the enjoyment of liberty. How important it is, then, that we should each and all feel our responsibility and conduct ourselves accordingly.

Voice of the Fugitive (Windsor, Canada West), 22 October 1851.

1. The committee quotes from the Declaration of Independence.

2. For many antebellum free blacks, Fourth of July celebrations symbolized the hypocrisy of slaveholding America's professions of liberty and equality. A large number of northern blacks instead observed the First of August—the anniversary of West Indian emancipation. Black leaders registered their objection to black Fourth of July celebrations in 1834 when a national black convention went on record opposing the practice. Quailes, Black Abolitionists, 119–23.

3. Bibb, Fisher, and Tinsley paraphrase a line from Lord Byron's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, canto 2, stanza 76:

Hereditary bondmen! Know ye not
Who would be free themselves must strike the blow?
By their right arms the conquest must be wrought?


4. Bibb refers to the movement in the southern states to tighten munition regulations and to restrict the freedom of free blacks. The southern states permitted unrestricted slave manumission practices during the decades immediately following the Revolution; by the mid-1830s, however, most required slave owners to obtain judicial or legislative permission to free slaves and required those freed to leave the state. Even those states that did not restrict an owner's right of manumission stipulated that freed blacks either migrate or risk deportation or reenslavement. In Berlin, Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South (New York, N.Y., 1974), 139 – 39.

5. The Mason and Dixon Line, the symbolic border between the North and South, originated as a line surveyed in 1763 and 1767 by Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon to settle boundary differences between Pennsylvania and Maryland. In the antebellum era it was understood to be the dividing line between slave and free territory and was the actual boundary separating Pennsylvania from Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia. CWI, 516.

6. Bibb, Fisher, and Tinsley refer to the North American League, the creation of black abolitionist James Theodore Holly, which was envisioned as a "central authority" to coordinate black political and social actions in North America. Holly hoped it would "mold the destiny of the whole Afro-American race." He called for a convention to implement his plan in a series of letters published by Henry Bibb in the Voice of the Fugitive during June and July 1851. With Bibb's assistance, the resulting North American Convention convened in Toronto from 11– 13 September. Although Holly was unable to attend the gathering, he coauthored a letter to the convention (with James L. Taylor) that outlined the primary objectives of the proposed league: to provide aid to fugitive slaves upon their arrival in Address by Henry Bibb, John T. Fisher, and James D. Tinsley 175
Canada West, to promote free black immigration into the province, and to establish a black agricultural presence in Canada West with an eye toward future commercial endeavors. The convention adopted Holly's proposal and wrote a constitution for the new league that included support for West Indian immigration and called for the sale of shares in the league in order to finance black land purchases. Despite Holly and Ribb's support, the new North American League never really functioned. Miller, Search for Black Nationality, 110–12.

7. The Bank of Upper Canada received its charter in 1821. The government owned one-fourth of the bank's stock, and the remainder was controlled by a group of York Conservatives led by John Strachan. Initially, the bank thrived, but it was severely weakened by the depression of 1857 and finally closed its doors in 1866. G. P. de F. Glazebrook, The Story of Toronto (Toronto, 1971), 36–57, 109.

8. The underground railroad describes antebellum networks of sympathetic free blacks, Quakers, and other abolitionists that assisted fugitive slaves as they escaped to northern cities and Canada. Abolitionist and southern propagandists frequently mythologized these networks as highly complex secret organizations, but they were often haphazard, localized, and semipublic in nature. Few conductors went south to entice slaves away from their masters, as southerners charged, but rather, most gave assistance (shelter, transportation, and money) to fugitives that came to them voluntarily. Major routes went through Cincinnati and Philadelphia, which were primary centers of organized fugitive assistance, in no small measure because of the active free black communities there. Following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, fear of slave catchers led to the development of "vigilance committees" to protect and assist escaped slaves in many northern cities. Larry Gara, The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad (Lexington, Ky., 1967).

9. The Fugitive Union Society was a forerunner of the Refugee Home Society.
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