A STUDY OF RACE-RELATIONS
BETWEEN BLACKS AND WHITES OVER ISSUES OF SCHOOLING IN
UPPER CANADA, 1840-1860:
WHITE PREJUDICE, BLACK ANTI-SLAVERY AND SCHOOL REFORM

By

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Abstract
Between the years 1840 and 1860, white prejudice played an important role in shaping blacks’ experiences in Upper Canada. This thesis explores and analyzes the history of black anti-slavery, whites’ attitudes toward blacks and the development of mandatory and free public schooling in Upper Canada during the nineteenth century, in order to demonstrate that race-relations between blacks and whites were worst both after 1850 in general, and over issues of schooling in particular.
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I am forever grateful.
May life find you all well.
Alex Vinci
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to
Becky Vinci, Sarah Somerville,
Kate Hartnett and Johanna MacCulloch.
Survivors of this world.
Thank you for your strength.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii

Acknowledgements .............................................................................................................. iii

Dedication ............................................................................................................................... iv

Table of Contents ................................................................................................................ v

CHAPTER ONE: ...................................................................................................................... 1
An Introduction to Black History in Upper Canada, From 1791 to 1860 ............... 1

CHAPTER TWO: ...................................................................................................................... 16
Great Expectations: Blacks, Anti-Slavery and Racial Uplift in the 1850’s ........... 16

CHAPTER THREE: .................................................................................................................. 34
The Attitudes and Responses of White Canadians to Blacks in Upper Canada Between 1800 and 1860 ......................................................................................... 34

CHAPTER FOUR: ..................................................................................................................... 53
Black Schooling in Upper Canada, 1840-1860 ......................................................... 53

CHAPTER FIVE: ....................................................................................................................... 75
“We Must Educate:” Black and White Attitudes to Education and Its’ Impact on Racial Tension Over Issues of Schooling During the 1850’s ......................... 75

CONCLUSION: ......................................................................................................................... 105
A Perfect Storm ..................................................................................................................... 105

BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................................................................................... 110
CHAPTER ONE:

An Introduction to Black History in Upper Canada, From 1791 to 1860

At the turn of the eighteenth century Upper Canada was still a frontier colony—unorganized, uncultivated and under populated. Its inhabitants were socially and politically divided between upper-class British loyalists, many of whom had been in Upper Canada since the American Revolution, and more recent immigrants, largely destitute and uneducated, lured or forced to Canada by the idea of a new start.1 For most immigrants in rural areas life was hard, days consisted of clearing and cultivating land and building homes. Churches and schools were rare—a luxury reserved for the upper classes.2 The colonial government was controlled by a conservative, educated and upper class elite who maintained a hegemonic dominance over Upper Canadian politics until the 1830s when the political climate began to change. But the government was largely ineffectual. Because of the scattered nature of settlement, poor communications and lack of societal infrastructure, the laws and regulations proscribed by the legislature were neither enacted nor enforced in settlement areas.

There was moderate growth in Upper Canada after the conclusion of the War of 1812. Agriculture and fishing became main industries. Trade, commerce and banking began to mature. Newspapers sprang up and as people’s lives eased, they took more interest in the affairs of the state. This growing public interest began to conflict with the

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1 The City of Toronto and the Ontario Black History Society, Black History in Early Ontario. (Toronto, Market Gallery, City of Toronto Archives, February 7-March 15, 1981), 6
2 Audrey N.B Walker, History of Education in Ontario, (M.A. Thesis; Lennoxville, Bishop’s University, 1946), 4
ruling oligarchy.\textsuperscript{3} Political tensions between Conservatives and Reformers erupted with the Rebellion of 1837. The rebellion struck fear into the heart of British officialdom, having revealed Upper Canada as politically vulnerable. This realization strengthened the colonial government’s resolve to keep out influences found threatening. And a distinctive anti-American and anti-republican sentiment became an entrenched part of mainstream political thought in Upper Canada. During the 1830s and 1840s increasing government centralization, secularization and bureaucratization accompanied a growing governmental interest and subsequent involvement in the lives of Upper Canadian settlers. This shift in how the colonial government conducted its business was accompanied by a wave of immigrants from the British Isles flooding into Upper Canadian cities, towns and incorporated villages. And by 1850, Upper Canada was home to a diverse group of settlers, who possessed distinctive reasons and goals for living in the colony. Irish and British immigrants, colonial British officials and numerous religious groups scattered across Upper Canada. And among these groups were black\textsuperscript{4} settlers from the United States.

Thousands of American blacks immigrated to Upper Canada during the first half of the nineteenth century. Once in Canada, the majority of blacks settled in towns and other areas where other blacks were already living. The new arrivals particularly congregated in the border region which acted as a fluid frontier for the Underground Railroad.\textsuperscript{5} Newly arrived blacks were usually met by charitable societies that helped get

\textsuperscript{3} Walker, \textit{History of Education in Ontario}, 12
\textsuperscript{4} I have chosen to utilize a lower-case “b” when using the term “black”. Many scholars of black history capitalize the “b”, however, I feel that doing so unnecessarily distinguishes blacks from the other groups of people this thesis discusses. Because blacks were a diverse group, whose distinctions went well beyond racial uniformity.
\textsuperscript{5} Afua Ava Pamela Cooper, “\textit{Doing Battle in Freedom’s Cause}”: \textit{Henry Bibb, Abolitionism, Race Uplift, and Black Manhood, 1842-1854}, (Ph d., Dissertation; Toronto, University of Toronto, 2000), 4
them on their feet while encouraging them to move inland — the farther from the border, the safer from slave catchers. Blacks also tended to live in the poorest sections of an area and under the poorest of conditions. Life was hard for the new arrivals. Recalled one black settler, “My pay has been little, for our people all start poor, and have to struggle to support themselves.” And not all moved inland. Many remained in the border region, employed in menial, seasonal and manual labor. And not all who came poor remained so either. Many engaged successfully in a variety of trades and professions.

I have been through...Upper...Canada, and I have found the colored people keeping stores, farming, ect., and doing well...I know several colored people who have become wealthy by industry...one who was a fellow servant of mine, now owns two span of horses, and two...fine carriages...Here they have something to do with their money, and put it to a good purpose.

Black settlement in Oro from 1819-1829 exemplifies patterns characteristic of black settlement. It also underscores the position of the colonial government toward blacks during this period. Oro was not a terminus of the Underground Railroad. Rather, black settlement in Oro was part of the government’s scheme to make the area more economically viable. Black settlers, the majority of whom were veterans from the War of 1812, were sold and given land along Wilberforce Street. The settlement was meant to provide food and materials for a nearby military outpost as well as to serve as a bridge to the rest of the colony. For nearly ten years, the official colonial settlement policy of Wilberforce Street was segregation. The colonial government enforced this policy by

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7 Avonie Brown, Links and lineage: The life and work of Mary Ann Shadd in media, a Black feminist analysis, (Ph.D. diss., University of Windsor, 1994), 61
8 Benjamin Drew, A north-side view of slavery, the refugee; or, the narrative of fugitive slaves in Canada related by themselves. with an account of the history and condition of the colored population of upper Canada, (New York, Negro Universities Press, 1968), 40
9 Ibid, 87
deliberately refusing to sell land in the area to whites. Blacks worked as farm hands and performed menial labor for whites living in adjacent areas. Mary O’Brien, wife of a British official overseeing the area, commented that at times she felt like a slave-owner because of the number of blacks she employed on her land. However, by the end of the 1820s the government began selling land to whites, and many blacks sold their properties for a small profit and moved to urban centers like Toronto and Hamilton.

Chatham was another area where blacks settled between 1830 and 1850. Chatham was an area in economic growth during this period and many blacks chose to settle there because of the employment opportunities it provided. Bringing with them skills they learned as slaves or living in the north, many blacks found work as blacksmiths, industrial workers and seasonal laborers. By 1850 there were six established centers of black settlement: Essex County, (Windsor), Kent County, (Chatham), Niagara County, (St. Catharine’s), the London area, including Wilberforce, and Simcoe and Grey Counties, (Collingwood and Owen Sound).

The majority of black settlers lived independently of organized all-black settlements, but not all did. Wilberforce was the first all-black community, established in 1829-30 by a group of blacks escaping racial discrimination in Ohio. Under the leadership of Austin and Benjamin Steward, the Wilberforce settlement lasted six years, although many blacks continued to remain in the area. Wilberforce ultimately came to

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11 French, *Black Settlement in Oro*, 8
13 Landon, “Amherstburg”, 108
14 The City of Toronto, *Black History in Early Ontario*, (1981), 11
an end because of poor community planning, poor leadership and ineffective management. The Dawn settlement in Dresden was founded by Hiram Wilson and Josiah Henson in 1842. The settlement was based on the ideal of cooperation and focused on industrial training and education. Lasting into the 1850s, the community was not without controversy. Both black and white abolitionists alike accused Henson and Wilson of financial mismanagement. The settlement ultimately declined in a sea of financial woes and endless internal quarrels.

The black population of Upper Canada during the nineteenth century was a complex of individuals divided along social, economic and political lines. “Class, color, slave status, gender, and religion were all contested categories.” Blacks were also divided by education, occupation and social status. And blacks who immigrated to Canada before 1850 often held themselves apart from those who immigrated afterwards. The two groups of blacks who came to Canada throughout the nineteenth century were southern fugitives from slavery and free northern blacks. Northern and southern blacks were primarily distinctive in their motivations for immigrating to Canada, and reflected different conceptions of what Canada represented and what they hoped to achieve through migration. However, this distinction wasn’t nearly as significant before 1850 as it would become afterward, mainly because very few northern blacks relocated to Upper Canada during the first half of the nineteenth century.

For most southern slaves, Canada was “as remote...as was the prospect of

16 Linda Bramble, *Black Fugitive Slaves in Early Canada*, (St. Catharine’s, ON., Vanwell Publishing Limited, 1988), 60; For more information on Wilberforce, see;
17 Ibid, 62
freedom.” Yet the myth of Canada as a safe-haven fostered a longing to escape to Canada. Henry Bibb recalled, “I had heard that Canada was a land of liberty, somewhere in the North… over which waved freedom’s flag...[and] upon whose soil there cannot be the footprint of a slave.” He further explained that “every wave of trouble that rolled across my breast, caused me to think more and more about Canada, and liberty.”

Making the decision to escape from slavery usually meant leaving behind everyone and everything one had known. Bibb described the dynamics of the difficult decision to flee for Canada: “I must forsake friends and neighbors, wife and child…to bolt for Liberty…or consent to live and die a slave.” Fugitives also frequently encountered numerous hardships and set-backs along the way. And many made the journey more than once. As a result of the stakes involved, the journey from slavery to freedom embodied strong religious and passionate elements. The Detroit River was the River Jordan, Harriet Tubman was the “Moses of her people”, and the North Star was likened to the biblical star that guided the three wise men to Bethlehem. Accordingly, Canada was the “promised land”, and the journey thereto an “exodus”. To fugitives, however, the freedom at the end of this journey justified the difficulties making it. One black man explained, “When I reached English territory…my shackles were struck off.” Thus southern fugitives from slavery were eager to immigrate to Canada.

20 The City of Toronto, Black History in Early Ontario, (1981), 8
22 Bibb, Life and Adventures, 47
26 Ibid, 95
27 Drew, North-side View, 38
Northern blacks generally were much less driven to relocate to Canada. As many northern blacks were either born free or had been living as freemen for a long time, the novelty of freedom was not the same incentive for northern blacks as it was for southern fugitives from slavery. As a result, northern blacks were much less eager to abandon their lives in the United States — their communities, jobs, homes and social networks. However, increasing racial hostility toward blacks in the United States throughout the 1830s and 1840s forced many American blacks to reconsider relocation to Canada. Canada was thus, less the magnet of freedom it was to fugitives from slavery so much as the United States was a repellant and propelling force. This was the case for the group of free blacks living in Ohio who established the Wilberforce settlement. The Ohio Black Codes, which began to be rigidly enforced during the 1820s, demonstrated the increasingly hostile racial climate of the United States.

[Blacks] required a certificate of freedom from each Negro resident, barred any Negro from employment who could not produce such a certificate (and fined the employer who did employ such illegal Negro), fined anyone caught harbouring a fugitive Negro, authorized the employment of sheriffs to recover fugitive slaves, and (as part of the 1807 enactment) required every Negro upon entering Ohio to post a $500 dollar bond, signed by two white men as security, as a guarantee against his becoming a public charge or nuisance, and denied him the right to testify in court against any white man.29

As a result, a group of blacks from Cincinnati relocated to Upper Canada to found the first all-black settlement in Oro. Thus, emigration to Canada did not necessarily stem from the desire to relocate. Rather, to many northern blacks Canada represented a last ditch attempt at improving their lot in life.

The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 further divided northern and southern blacks. Designed to nullify the political and legal disputes between slave states and free-states

29 William H. Pease, Black Utopia; Negro communal experiments in America, ed., Jane H. Pease, (Madison, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1963), 7
over fugitive slaves, the FSL granted slave catchers permission to re-capture run-away slaves anywhere on American soil. The northern United States, previously a place of refuge for fugitives escaping southern slavery, was no longer secure. As a result, the FSL made “black men aliens in the land of their birth,” and “imperiled his safety and freedom throughout the entire nation.” The FSL didn’t distinguish between fugitives free a long time or freed recently. And free-born blacks and blacks legally freed now feared being kidnapped and sold into slavery. All blacks were suddenly and equally endangered.

There is debate over just how many blacks came to Canada between 1850 and 1860. Estimates range anywhere from 10,000 to 40,000. The character of this emigration was startling and was also drastically different from earlier black immigration. Entire northern black communities relocated and did so rapidly. And the Underground Railroad brought thousands of fugitives from slavery into Upper Canada in a very short period of time. In the span of three months, 1,000 blacks reportedly moved into the central part of Toronto alone. Like black settlers before 1850, the majority of the new black arrivals gravitated toward previously established black communities and their adjacent and surrounding areas. These areas were quickly overwhelmed by the newcomers. And many of the old generation of black settlers were uneasy about how the arrival of large numbers of impoverished blacks would impact Upper Canadian race-

30 Brown, Links and Lineage, 63
31 Voice of the Fugitive, Feb. 12, 1851, (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/vf/reel1/00010-x1-y0-z1-r0)
32 Pease, Black Utopia, 7
33 Olbey, “Unfolded Hands”, 154
34 Hepburn, “Following the North Star”, 106
35 Brown, Links and Lineage, 64
relations.

The colored people who had been long residents in the country...proved themselves worthy citizens...[and felt that] their position in the country would be very much jeopardized by the influx of a large number of refugees from the United States. They felt that all their efforts to attain public sentiment in their favor would prove unavailing.\textsuperscript{38}

As a result of the FSL Canada became a place of newfound hope to American blacks. And while prior to 1850 blacks largely came to Canada on their own account, after 1850, many blacks felt, out of a sense of urgency and self-preservation, that they had no option but to immigrate to Canada. One woman described her experience in coming to Canada:

We were comfortably settled in the States, and were broken up by the fugitive slave law, compelled to leave our home and friends, and to go at later than middle life into a foreign country among strangers.\textsuperscript{39}

And American racism was often the only reason American blacks relocated to Canada after 1850. A black man resettled in Canada during the early 1850’s described his reason for fleeing: “I intended to stay in my native country, but I saw so many mean looking men, that I did not dare to stay.”\textsuperscript{40}

Experiences with slavery and freedom also dictated how different blacks responded to and perceived their new circumstances both before and after 1850. While the majority of blacks who came to Canada encountered prejudice, southern ex-slaves were not as discouraged by it as were northern blacks.\textsuperscript{41} Although most southern fugitives recognized that prejudice existed in Upper Canada, the majority did not see prejudice in Canada as either overwhelming or unavoidable. Most felt they lived well, certainly in comparison with their American experience. “Here’s something I want to say to the colored people in the United States,” a black man living in Upper Canada during the

\textsuperscript{38} The Provincial Freemen, May 5, 1855, (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/browse/pf/reel1/00098)

\textsuperscript{39} Drew, North-Side View, 31

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, 86- 87

\textsuperscript{41} Hildreth Houston Spencer, To Nestle in the Mane of the British Lion: A History of Canadian Black Education, 1820-1870, (Ph d, Northwestern University, 1970), 116
1850’s stated, “you think you are free there, but you are very much mistaken: if you wish to be free men, I hope you will all come to Canada as soon as possible. There is plenty of land here, and schools to educate your children.” And the perception of the freedom to pursue their own lives as they saw fit, impossible in the American south, was embraced as the most important quality of their new lives. Northern blacks, on the other hand, were often disappointed by the racism they encountered. This was perhaps because their main motivation for immigrating to Canada was to live free from the racism and discrimination faced in the United States. They had been led to believe Canada offered such a refuge. Encountering racism in Canada was a letdown.

Black freemen and ex-slaves had a very complex relationship with the United States. Many were deeply attached to the United States because it was their homeland. At the same time, they were repulsed by it. Once settled in Canada, these complexities were revealed in how blacks responded and adapted to their new conditions and home. Some broke all emotional ties with America and saw Canada as a permanent home. Others abandoned their American ties more grudgingly. For these people, enduring American racism had numbed any positive feeling toward the United States:

Now I am a regular Britisher. My American blood has been scourged out of me; I have lost my American tastes; I am an enemy to tyranny.43

Because of the panic caused by the FSL, northern blacks who relocated in Upper Canada often arrived with few possessions or wealth. And thus, life was often more difficult than it had been in the United States.

42 Drew, *North-Side View*, 86-87
43 Ibid, 39
few days, I left for St. Catharine’s, where I have remained ever since.44

Many blacks, however, would rather have suffered in poverty in Canada, than remain in the United States where anti-black sentiment drove public feeling.

I could have one of my children well brought up and taken care of, by some friends in Massachusetts, which would very much relieve me, - but I cannot have my child go there on account of the laws, which would not protect her. This is a hardship: but I had to struggle much harder than at present, I would prefer it to being a slave. Now I can lie down at night in peace, - there I had no peace even at night.

And regardless of how blacks felt about the United States, most concluded they were better off than they had been in the United States.

Rents and provisions are dear here, and it takes all I can earn to support myself. Contrasting my condition here with what it was in New Jersey, I say, that for years after I came here, my mind was continually reverting to my native land. For some ten years, I was in hopes that something might happen, whereby I might safely return to my old home in New Jersey. I watched the newspapers and they told the story. I found that there would be a risk in going back, - and that was confirmed by many of my fellow men.45

And while some blacks believed they would eventually return to the United States, others, despite their longing for home, believed the state of American race-relations meant they would never return. Most who emigrated after 1850 did return, however, when the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1860 offered renewed hope that race-relations would change for the better. Those who emigrated before 1850, however, mostly remained in Canada.46 Thus, the memory of slavery or experiences as freemen in the United States helped shape black experience in Canada.

Prior to 1850, the black population of Upper Canada was a small, un-political and almost invisible minority, and blacks, free and fugitive, trickled into the colony for a variety of reasons and with different goals in mind. Far from geographically united

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44 Drew, North Side-View, 38
45 Ibid, 39; 41
46 Carole Jenson, 'History of the Negro Community in Essex County 1850-1860', (Ph.D. diss., U. of Windsor, 2008), 13
community, blacks were scattered across the colony and lived relatively separate lives, both from each other and from the black anti-slavery movement. Because all American blacks were equally endangered by the FSL, the new law had unifying implications for blacks in Upper Canada. As common ground was laid and for the first time, blacks in Upper Canada engaged in the “institution building process,” of “creating their own ‘…press,…schools, [and] churches’” that constituted the beginning of a black ‘community’. And also for the first time, blacks in Upper Canada produced several black leaders with widespread renown throughout the North American anti-slavery movement.

Mary Ann Shadd and Henry Bibb were the primary black leaders in Upper Canada during the 1850s, and each was editor of a newspaper which served as a platform for their separate views. In a notorious public dispute — Shadd, a free born, educated and well-off black woman who immigrated to Canada before 1850 from the north, and Bibb, an ex-slave, who immigrated to Canada after 1850 with no formal education — struggled over who had the right to speak for the black community. In retrospect, they both did. Each symbolized the differences that divided the black community, and this was likely what fueled their conflict. Bibb complained that Shadd only cared about the interests of

47 Cooper, “Doing Battle in Freedom’s Cause,” 312
free born blacks while Shadd accused Bibb of ignoring the wider black community and only focusing his attention on the fugitive issue. Nineteenth century black-nationalism, which “called for the formation of a collective identity and unity among peoples of African descent and black initiative in community building,” was fundamental to debates within the anti-slavery movement. Black leaders interpreted this nationalism differently. And whether or not blacks should be distinct from, or integrated into white society, or relocate to a place entirely free of whites, was a highly divisive issue in discussion about the future of black people in North America. While Shadd supported the immediate integration of blacks into Upper Canadian society, Bibb supported a more gradual process of integration. Bibb supported black-nationalism that called for a separate black identity within Canada, while Shadd believed blacks should fully assimilate into Upper Canadian society.

Some historians have judged these internal divisions within Upper Canadian black leadership as detrimental to the black cause of anti-slavery and racial equality. Afua-Cooper argues that internal differences in the black community prevented the development of a unified front with which blacks could confront oppressors and assert black rights: “When the differences become destructive then one must pause to wonder.” She further claims that “indeed if the Voice was torched by a black arsonist…then it reveals that blacks allowed differences to destroy their own institutions.” But this argument ignores the humanity of these blacks. It doesn’t account for the diversity of blacks’ experiences and backgrounds, the context of blacks’ oppressed

49 Yee, “Finding a Place,” 3
50 Cooper, “Doing Battle in Freedom’s Cause,” 264
51 Ibid, 381; Some of Bibb’s supporters claimed one of Shadd’s supporters was the arsonist behind the fire that destroyed the office of the Voice in 1853.
status and the impact that status had upon the dynamic and structuring of their community:

The fugitive slaves and free blacks who gathered in these small outposts behaved like many who live in aggrieved and segregated circumstances— they took out their pain and frustration on each other while they remained heavily dependent on their oppressors.52

Moreover, black leaders were also ideologically and culturally distinct from those they claimed to represent. Historically, Upper Canadian black leaders were people who cared about the collective welfare of blacks.53 The oppressed status of blacks meant that those black leaders who fought on their behalf were more than political representatives. Black leaders understood their role as offering guidance to less able blacks on how best to live and fulfill the potential which, black leaders claimed, slavery denied them. Carol B. Conaway describes Mary Ann Shadd as engaged in “rhetorically constructed Africana other-mothering,” which she defined as “oral or written discourse that is intended to nurture educated, protect, socialize and promote individual and group well-being, all of which promotes the welfare and survival of the race.”54 Because of the disenfranchised status of dispossessed blacks, their leaders were typically intellectuals with the ability to communicate with whites. Black spokespersons claimed to speak for all blacks,55 and as such, black leaders often became the link between blacks and the “world”. But black leaders were also an intellectual elite who didn’t necessarily share the cultural values or broad experiences of the largely labouring and uneducated class whom they claimed to represent. This division was exemplified in differing conceptions of emigration from the

53 Olbey, “Unfolded Hands,” 153
55 Olbey, “Unfolded Hands,” 171
United States. While leaders like Shadd believed that “migration to Canada had little to do with escape from struggle and everything to do with gaining a more solid foothold with which to overthrow slavery,”56 most settlers saw their relocation as an act of personal survival and escape from slavery’s net.57

Ultimately, the underlying factor that determined black political and social status in Upper Canada was racism. And post-1850, the burgeoning black community was largely shaped in relation to this prejudice. The public feud between Shadd and Bibb reflected not only a struggle for personal power, but the depth and complexity involved in building an identity under oppressed and strained conditions.

56 Olbey, “Unfolded Hands,” 173
CHAPTER TWO:
Great Expectations: Blacks, Anti-Slavery and Racial Uplift in the 1850’s

During the 1830s, an increase of racist legislation in the United States made emigrationism an issue of concern to American blacks. All black leaders wanted an end to slavery, but they had different conceptions of how best to achieve this goal. Their views on emigrationism were closely connected to the future of American blacks as they envisioned it. Among other things, black leaders disagreed as to whether blacks post-slavery should seek integration into white society, or form their own separate society. Prior to 1830, some black leaders participated in the African Colonization Society which advocated blacks emigrate to pre-planned areas of Africa where they would build their own economy and institutions and live completely free of whites. However, this line of thinking never won much support among abolitionists because it implied that race-relations would never improve in the United States. Most blacks were unwillingly to accept this idea.

In the early 1830s, black leaders began publicly addressing these issues in a series of conventions across the northern United States. The convention movement reflected an ideological and tactical shift in the black anti-slavery movement in the United States. Rather than emigrate elsewhere, black leaders began calling on blacks to stay in their homeland and fight for their rights.¹ This was not always easy, particularly because anti-black activity in America was on the rise. And although black leader’s advocated resistance and most American blacks wanted to stay in the United States, many black

leaders were “practical enough to know that until new political decision were made and new laws passed to protect them, [they] had no choice but to flee the country.” Therefore, some black leaders began advocating that blacks immigrate to Canada as a temporary refuge until the racial situation improved in the United States. Immigration was intended as a last resort. Harriet Tubman later commented: “We would rather stay in our native land, if we could be as free there as we are here [Canada].” But not all black leaders agreed that relocation to Canada was prudent. And these divisions within the black anti-slavery movement over the future of North American blacks were intensified after 1850.

The North American black anti-slavery movement was turned on its head by the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. It crushed any hope for improved race-relations in the United States because it demonstrated white intolerance of blacks and a general unwillingness to assimilate and accept blacks into American society. Black abolitionists were thus forced to reevaluate tactics and convictions held since the early 1830s. Stay and fight was replaced by pack and flight. As a result, a new focus was placed on Canada as both a refuge from American racism and slavery, and as a launching pad for the new anti-slavery movement whose tenets aimed to align the lives of blacks in Upper Canada with the goals of the anti-slavery movement overall. This would prove a complex and difficult task. The FSL cluttered the direction of the anti-slavery movement: “What is the future of the black race on the North American continent?” was “a recurring and painful question” for “black persons- free or self-emancipated”. Emigrationism, segregation versus integration, how blacks should behave and live, and the place of white philanthropy and

2 Simpson, Under the North Star, 132
4 Ibid, 269
5 Voice of the Fugitive, 16 July, 1851, (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/browse/vf/reel1/00037)
black “begging” were among the primary issues of concern to black leaders. And “‘what to do?’” was the most debated question among black leadership during the 1850’s.

As during the 1830s, black leaders responded to the events of 1850 by holding conventions to discuss the future of blacks in North America. However, these conventions contained a very different flavor from the earlier conventions which devoted “their thoughts and energies to the improvement of their condition…in…their native land.” The anti-emigrationism that characterized the anti-slavery movement in the United States before 1850 gave way, as black leaders increasingly accepted emigration from the United States as the only solution to the ‘black question’. But not all black leaders advocated black emigration, and those who did differed on where black relocation should take place. Canada was a primary contender. As a result, the focus and concerns of the anti-slavery movement shifted toward Canada. Mary Ann Shadd staked her entire career on the belief that “Canada would embrace its new Black citizens.” She was perhaps the staunchest advocate for black emigration to Upper Canada, and the most contemptuous of the United States. However, Shadd’s pro-Canadian emigrationism didn’t necessarily mean she had given up on American anti-slavery. She contended that “black men should continue their abolitionist activities [in the United States] but should also encourage free blacks to separate from the land of their oppressors.”

Other black leaders like Martin Delaney rejected both Canada and the United States as viable options for black habitation. For Delaney there could be no co-existence

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9 Hite, “‘Voice of the Fugitive’,” 270
with whites. Holly, co-editor of the *Voice of the Fugitive* in 1852, shared this sentiment. The FSL validated his belief that because of slavery, racism was too deeply entrenched in North America to ever allow for racial equality. He thus advocated that blacks relocate to a place completely free of whites. Delaney and Holly favored the West Indies. Henry Bibb, like Shadd and Ward, initially supported immigration to Canada. But after his experience with Canadian racism and because of the FSL, like Delaney and Holly, Bibb became convinced that “no future existed for free blacks in [North] America.” And blacks had reason to question mass resettlement in Upper Canada. An escalation of prejudice against blacks during the 1850s in Upper Canada called into question the notion of Canada as a black haven and raised a number of problems for pro-Canadian emigrationists.

Disillusionment with Canada’s status as a haven from racial oppression reflected more than just the end of pro-Canadian emigrationism; it also illuminated the underlying identity crises that blacks suffered during this period. Pushed out of their homeland and increasingly “unwelcome guests” in Canada, many blacks moved about in the search of ‘a safe place’ where they could live in peace and security. What William and Jane Pease have called the “dilemma of the Negro, free or slave,” referred to the limbo in which many blacks existed on a day to day basis. Whatever their views on emigrationism, for most blacks “America remained the marker for ‘home’ that was remembered, longed for,

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11 Hite, “Voice of the Fugitive,” 273
12 Yee, “Finding a Place,” 12; Whites’ attitudes to American blacks is discussed in detail in Chapter three of this thesis.
and at the same time, reviled.”15 And many blacks felt safe enough in Canada, but still believed “it necessary…to be on…guard”16 all the time.

The emotional and psychological impact of this “nomadic existence”17 was demonstrated by the migratory patterns of black leaders themselves. Ward believed sincerely in the myth of Canada. Prior to leaving the U.S permanently he wrote to the *Voice of the Fugitive*: “The British government was the most favorable in the civilized world to the people of color and was thereby entitled to…[our] entire confidence.”18 He was even willing to become a British subject.19 When white prejudice in Canada could no longer be ignored, Ward gave up on Canada as his personal homeland and moved on to England. He finally settled in Jamaica. Similar to Ward, Shadd wholeheartedly believed she would settle permanently in Canada. She became a British subject and urged all blacks to do the same. But even Shadd eventually returned to the United States during the American Civil War. Henry Bibb moved to Canada in 1850 with his wife when he lost all hope for the improvement of race-relations in the United States. While he initially viewed Canada as a place where blacks could permanently settle down, near the end of his life he became disillusioned with race-relations in Canada. He increasingly supported the mass resettlement of blacks outside North America. He died in 1854 in Windsor, Ontario. If black leaders were vehement in their opposition to one another, this was perhaps because they had a very personal stake in the emigration debate, as the differences in their own migratory patterns reveal.

However, during the period when Canada was still regarded with hope, black

15 Rhodes, “The Contestation Over National Identity,” 180
16 Drew, *North-side View*, 93
17 Rhodes, “The Contestation Over National Identity,” 180
19 Rhodes, “The Contestation Over National Identity,” 179
leaders in Upper Canada were torn over the ‘black question’ and issues of anti-slavery. The FSL had created a uniquely challenging situation for blacks north of the American border. Thousands of southern fugitives from slavery and free northern blacks fled the United States to Canada in search of safety and security. The arrival of these newcomers created practical and logistical difficulties for the existing black population of Upper Canada. Not only did blacks come in unprecedented numbers, but as a result of the panic spurned by the FSL, the majority of them arrived in need of immediate material aid. And black leaders argued over how best to balance the immediate needs of new black arrivals from the United States with the newly formulated long-term struggle against slavery. Many saw a significant conflict between the two. As a solution, black abolitionists in Upper Canada fell in line with a plan of racial uplift. It was believed racial uplift would meet both the needs of new black arrivals in a way that didn’t conflict with the goals of anti-slavery. This would prove difficult, however, and perhaps too idealistic for the realities of Upper Canada.

The goal of racial uplift was two-fold. For one, it was meant to advance racial equality and integration. The way to achieve this, according to black leaders, was to win the respect of white Canadians. And in order to do so, blacks must encourage whites to overcome their racial prejudices. The only way to change whites’ perception of blacks, black leaders claimed, was to become financially independent of whites, and to adopt white middle-class values. The former, through engaging in agriculture and education and the latter, by adhering to hard work, temperance, ‘morality’ and diligence. Abolitionists believed that financial independence was the key to changing white attitudes. Bibb claimed that agriculture was the only vehicle through which economic independence was
possible. "I am convinced", wrote William King, “that the only way to improve their [blacks] condition, and elevate their character, is to place them on land give them an interest in the soil and provide them with a Christian education.” Racial uplift was thus primarily a program of self-help:

The possibility of final success, when using proper means, the means to be used, the possibility of bringing about the desired ends ourselves, and of waiting for the whites of the country to do so, should be impressed upon the people.

By becoming educated and financially independent, black leaders also claimed that blacks would disprove the claims of pro-slavery advocates that blacks were incapable of surviving without the guidance or control of whites. Black leaders applied a ‘total war’ methodology to further racial uplift. In the November 13, 1851 issue of the Voice, Bibb claimed that every black person was the responsibility of all black people and in return, all black people were the responsibility of every black person. Thus, the way each person lived his or her life was construed as important to achieving communal aims. This sense of black interconnectedness was likely a response to the pressures of the ‘white gaze’; where black leaders felt that “the eyes of the civilized world are looking down upon us to see whether we can take care of ourselves or not.” And through the black media, black leaders attempted to “make known to the world the progress of the negro in Canada, for such knowledge would refute the old arguments about un-fitness of freedom.”

In the Freeman, Mary Ann Shadd repeatedly published accounts of blacks who advanced the

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20 Voice, March 26, 1851, (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/browse/vf/reel1/00017)
21 “William king to clerk of Toronto presbytery 21 June, 1848,” Under a Northern Star; Reverend William King: The Elgin Settlement, Library and Archives Canada, (http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/northern-star/033005-119.01)
23 Ibid, 108
24 Voice, Nov., 19, 1851, (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/browse/vf/reel1/00059)
goals of racial uplift.

It is a well-known fact that previous to the passage of the fugitive slave bill of 1850, the colored people, in general, in the states opposed to emigrating to Canada; this fact the colored people of Canada themselves authenticate. [However] I find it a common expression among the colored people of Canada that Fillmore’s law has done more good than harm, especially to the fugitives, by forcing them out of the free states where they had been remaining, some of them a number of years, in menial occupations, in consequence of prejudice and oppression, into Canada, where they were obliged to engage in honorable and independent pursuits, farms, etc. through which means they have purchased homes and are becoming wealthy and respectable tillers of the soil and manufacturers of the products there from.  

This ‘total war’ meant that blacks in Upper Canada were put under a microscope—analyzed and criticized by both abolitionists and pro-slavery whites in an attempt to extract evidence to support their opposing positions. Any misstep was exploited by pro-slavery whites and prejudiced whites as ‘evidence’ of blacks’ ‘inferiority’. Black leaders were also highly critical of behaviour they considered contrary to the image of the uplifted black settler. Any act that sullied this image was tantamount to treason. Shadd frequently criticized what she considered ‘degenerate’ activity.

Among them [blacks settled in the Refugee Home Society] are a few idle loafers who are too vicious and lazy to work for their bread and seek to obtain it under a false pretense of being fugitive slaves. It would be quell for the character and the comfort of the genuine fugitives if that villainous class were actually caged at home for their crimes as they deserve.  

Moreover, all-black settlements established during the 1840s and 1850s were experiments in racial uplift, “designed to prove that the Negro was fit to be a free man in America.”

The failures and successes of these all-black settlements were co-opted by black leaders for various political and ideological purposes. The inability of these all-black communities to sustain themselves reverberated throughout the black anti-slavery movement. Many black leaders condemned all-black settlements as exacerbating existing prejudice against blacks by portraying blacks as needy, incapable and useless. These

26 The Provincial Freeman, Oct., 13, 1855, (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/browse/pf/reel1/00128)
27 Ibid, May 24, 1856, (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/browse/pf/reel1/00183)
28 Pease, Black Utopia, 160
failures were also said to feed pro-slavery claims that blacks couldn’t survive in freedom.29

Every black ‘success’ was equally scrutinized and utilized by pro-slavery and anti-slavery advocates. Abolitionists used instances of ‘successes’ to discount pro-slavery arguments against the abolishment of slavery. However, in doing so, black leaders often exaggerated how well blacks in Canada were doing compared with the United States.

Our tour satisfies is abundantly that the colored people of Canada are progressing more rapidly than our people in the United states- that the liberty enjoyed here makes different men of those once crushed and dispirited…that along with the other poor classes that come here they improve themselves in wealth and status.30

This type of rhetoric influenced a great number of blacks still living in the United States to relocate to Canada. And black settlers were forced to confront the gap between political rhetoric and the realities of prejudice in Upper Canada. This disparity reflected a willingness of Canadian emigrationists to forgive Canadian prejudice as a residual American influence. This was because Upper Canadian racism potentially undermined pro-Canadian emigrationists’ entire belief system. These advocates claimed that racism in Canada was superficial and believed black settlers would eventually reach the same conclusion. Black settlers were further confused by the contradictory messages of black leaders. “While they [leaders] were advocating integration, their meetings were serving as a clarion call for blacks to join together for mutual help.” And while black leaders wanted blacks “to develop race pride…at the same time [they] wanted to bury the distinctions between the races.”31 As a result of these contradictions, real and imagined, black settlers fell into a tug of war between competing ideologies within their own communal structure. And as a result of all this scrutiny, black settlers were bottlenecked between two opposing

29 Silverman, Unwelcome Guests, 22
30 Freeman, Jan. 11, 1854, (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/browse/pf/ree11/00006)
31 Simpson, Under the North Star, 131
extremes, both of which placed unrealistic expectations upon them and inaccurately represented their lives.

The belief of pro-Canadian emigrationists that Upper Canadian racism was less entrenched than in the United States was the primary reason these leaders chose Canada as the solution to the ‘black question’. As a result, these leaders pushed blacks to disown the United States and to become as ‘British’ as possible.

What are the duties of the colored men in these provinces who have been forced here from American despotism and oppression?...We owe everything to the country of our adoption and nothing to that miserable, contemptible despots and government of the U.S...Colored men should become as thoroughly British as they can.32

This response to Upper Canadian race-relations reflected blacks’ own position within the British-white societal structure. The identity of blacks as a racial group was constructed completely in relation to whiteness. Blacks were themselves part and parcel of white ideology— their own inferior status— a product of the white worldview. Thus, rather than attempt to expose the racial fallacies embedded in the white world-view, black leaders sought to adopt white values as their own. The tenets of racial uplift demonstrate this tendency. “White standards of behavior”33 were perceived by black elites as the opposite to the ‘slave mentality’ and thus, black leaders developed an “ardent desire to conform to white expectations.”34 Doing so served both ideological and practical purposes.

According to many black leaders, adopting white middle classicism would “demonstrate their worthiness...to...their white neighbors that they were entitled to equal treatment.”35 Furthermore, black leaders claimed that “deliberate and partial acculturation was

32 Freemen, March 28, 1857, (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/browse/pf/reel1/00232
33 Jonathan Walton., Blacks in Buxton and Chatham, ONT. 1830-1890; Did the 49th Parallel Make A Difference?, (Ph d, Princeton University, 1979), 61
34 Howard Law, “‘Self Reliance is the True Road to Independence’: Ideology and the Ex-Slaves in Buxton and Chatham,” Ontario History, (77, no. 2:107-121, 1985), 114
35 Ibid, 110
economically advantageous” to blacks.\textsuperscript{36} Thus, in the minds of black leaders, achieving the aims of racial uplift hinged entirely upon the hope that by adapting to white standards of behavior, blacks could win the respect of whites. Fundamental to this notion was the belief that blacks \textit{could} prove themselves to whites— that white hostility toward blacks was superficial enough to be overcome with time. Despite the increased racism of the 1850s, there \textit{was} evidence to support such belief. Blacks who demonstrated ‘white’ values— temperance, hard work and economic self-sufficiency— were frequently praised by whites. Dr. John Rolph, for example, argued that,

\begin{quote}
Those thrive best who purchase land from their savings, and that not in a separate colony, but promiscuously among white settlers, who are ultimately shamed out of their prejudices, by seeing industry, order, sobriety, prudence, frugality, and contentment, where they had been led to anticipate directly the reverse.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

And maybe Rolph was right. In Buxton, over 1,000 whites showed up at a celebration held by the black community. Politician Archie McKellar thanked blacks for settling near Chatham and praised the economic success of the settlement.\textsuperscript{38} This praise was a far cry from the racial hostility voiced by Edwin Larwill who led the opposition to the Buxton settlement only one year earlier. It seems that Buxton proved blacks could win over even the most hostile of whites through their hard-work, determination, economic independence and sobriety.

Because much of white prejudice was seen as rooted in negative stereotypes of slavery, creating and maintaining an image of blacks that counteracted these stereotypes was a primary concern to black leaders. And while black leaders were critical of white

\textsuperscript{36} Law, “Self-reliance is the True Road,” 110
\textsuperscript{38} Victor Ullman, \textit{Look to the North Star; a Life of William King}, (Boston, Beacon Press, 1969), 141-142
prejudice in the black press, they focused on black ‘deficiencies’ as the main obstacle preventing successful integration into society. As a result, many black leaders placed the burden of changing racist attitudes entirely on the shoulders of ordinary black settlers. Samuel Ward criticized black religious practices as too “slave-like”. Jumping, singing and dancing during services, he claimed, would only exacerbate the notion that blacks were ‘too different’ to integrate. Ward believed if blacks wished to be accepted by white congregations, it was precisely these practices blacks would have to change. It never seemed to occur to black leaders that whites needed to change too. However, the whiteness of the world was enormous in the mid-nineteenth century. Changing whites likely seemed a task so far-fetched it didn’t warrant any real consideration in the first place. Thus turning toward whiteness may have seemed the only reasonable and practical solution to blacks’ problems.

The controversy surrounding all-black settlements which emerged during the 1850s reflects the dynamics of black leaders’ attempt to reconcile the goals of anti-slavery with the immediate needs of black settlers. The Elgin Settlement and the Refugee Home Society were the two main all-black settlements organized in Upper Canada after 1850. These settlements were founded with the tenets of racial uplift in mind. These settlements also reflected different views of black-nationalism. Bibb believed in “an independent black nation that would function separately from [white] society.” The Refugee Home Society, which Bibb established in 1851, reflected his beliefs. Meant to “promote unity and cultural strength which would translate into black political and

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39 Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 229
41 Ibid
economic independence,” Bibb claimed that the all-black settlement scheme would transform disenfranchised black settlers into “industry farmers and model citizens.” According to Bibb, the RHS was a training ground for freedom, from which blacks would, if they desired, move into the larger society better equipped to thrive.

The notion of “training” blacks for freedom underscored the Elgin Settlement at Buxton, founded in 1849 by William King. This all-black community promised to unite its members for “protection, companionship, assistance and development.” Intended to allow blacks a “formative period protected from white speculation and scrutiny, with the support of community,” Buxton reflected the black desire to guide their own development. But these hopes were often undermined by the means used to achieve them. William and Jane Pease argued that “by their too frequent use of begging, by their substantial dependence upon charity from friends or well wishers, they compromised, in large measure, the aims which they sought.” Members of these settlements also submitted to regulations which delineated nearly all the activities of their daily lives. And despite the claims of settlement leaders that these communities were stepping stones on the road to integration, in reality, they were “dead-ended in terms of their relative locations, their admission requirements, and the possibilities of later resettlement.”

These contradictions were not lost on black leaders who believed blacks arriving in Canada should ‘sink or swim’ on their own merit. Shadd was outspoken in her

42 Olbey, “Unfolded Hands,” 163
43 Afua A. P. Cooper, "Doing battle in freedom's cause": Henry Bibb, abolitionism, race uplift, and Black manhood, 1842-1854, (Ph. D, University of Toronto, 2000), 9
45 Simpson, Under the North Star, 253
46 Pease, Black Utopia, 161
47 Alexander Nitkin, Negro Colonization as a Response to Racism: A Historical Geography of the South Western Ontario Province, 1830-1860, (M.A, York University, 1973), 225
opposition to all-black settlements although her thinking on the subject was somewhat unclear. She saw Canada as a place where “blacks might assert a powerful national identity and cultivate their talents unfettered by white racism.”48 Yet at the same time Shadd believed that blacks should become a fully assimilated part of the Canadian population. For Shadd, blacks’ national identity would thus derive from solidifying the bonds of the black community by becoming politically and socially united. In line with this thinking, Shadd opposed self-imposed separation, arguing that “black independence and self-reliance could only be guaranteed by [the] full [and immediate] integration into Canadian society.”49

The leaders of all-black settlements claimed their organizations were dedicated to achieving eventual integration. But, Shadd remained unconvinced that blacks needed a holding period of isolation. Her general opposition to all-black settlements was three-tiered. Firstly, she argued that there was an inherent racist notion behind “training fugitives to live in freedom,” because it “implied that blacks needed constant guidance and that they couldn’t compete economically in white society.”50 Secondly, Shadd believed that because “segregation in Canada would be voluntary. A self-imposition,”51 separating blacks from the rest of society conceded to racist ideas and desires. Lastly, Shadd took racial separation to mean that blacks weren’t taking advantage of the legal protection afforded them by the colonial government of Upper Canada.

However, the majority of opposition to all-black settlements was over the issue of ‘begging’. Begging was perceived by many black leaders as in direct conflict with the

48 Hite, “Voice of the Fugitive,” 270
49 Brown, *Links and Lineage*, 61
50 Cooper, “Doing Battle in Freedom’s Cause,” 133
51 Olbey, “Unfolded Hands,” 161
goals of anti-slavery. And criticism of begging was widespread among Upper Canadian blacks, living in all-black settlements or otherwise. Receiving charitable aid was not necessarily opposed by black leaders, and even begging was tolerated if it led to eventual financial independence. The primary argument against begging by all-black communities was how they went about it — by appealing to “compassion, fear, and other emotions in whites, [which] regularly emphasized Negro needs and deficiencies to generate contribution.”

Shadd argued that this kind of begging only supported and exacerbated whites’ notions of blacks as inferior beings. Moreover, black leaders claimed that begging damaged the black image further because it implied that “blacks could not be financially independent.” They argued that this perpetuated the very stereotypes of blacks as indigent, needy and lazy which black leaders so desperately sought to refute. Ironically, Bibb agreed with Shadd on the issue of begging. Bibb claimed that while many blacks had received charity at one time or another, most blacks felt “degraded by the numerous beggars that go forth into the States, begging on their own account and are quite tired of being represented as paupers and dependents.” Shadd also argued that by begging, blacks became corrupted, lazy, and needlessly dependent upon white support to survive. Bibb similarly claimed that for some blacks, groveling became a “handicap to their progress.” He advocated that blacks “must work for their own support.” Samuel Ward concurred: “What the recently arrived fugitives most needs is not land buying societies or old clothes, not any substitute for labor, but stimulation to self

52 Nitkin, Negro Colonization, 232
53 Freemen, March 25, 1854, (http://ink.ourontario.ca/pf/reel1/00007-x1-y0-z1-r0-0-0)
54 Voice, Sept 9, 1852, (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/browse/vf/reel1/00111)
55 Ibid, March 12, 1851, (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/browse/vf/reel1/00015
development.”\textsuperscript{56} He expressed gratefulness to sympathetic whites for their assistance, but was more concerned with the damaging impact he believed a charity of dependence had on the black community:

We wish to be distinctly understood by the benevolent abolitionists…that we feel grateful for what they have honestly done…for the truly needy; but in order to touch the pride and ambition of our people…and to point them to something higher; we find it necessary to hold such things up to ridicule.\textsuperscript{57}

Continuous begging, black leaders argued, also fostered resentment among whites and validated whites prejudices. And there was adequate evidence to support this claim. One white missionary commented:

The greater number…were people of bad character, idle and dissolute…they depended on their agents to raise money from outside sources, rather than learning to use resources at hand.\textsuperscript{58}

A white man in Windsor showed contempt and frustration at the way in which the Refugee Home Society went about its business.

The better portion of the fugitives cannot be induced [sic] to go on the land at all. The measure is unpopular among them, partly because of some odious features in the constitution of the society which restricts them in disposing of the property if they see fit…the whole scheme is destined to prove a magnificent failure. It is another of those bottomless pits which have opened their mouth here on this fugitive mission and swallowed so much of the people’s charitable contribution.\textsuperscript{59}

And black leaders also believed that white philanthropy “implied a paternalistic commitment to the maintenance of white control and black dependence.”\textsuperscript{60} Donald J. Simpson underscored the problematic nature of white charity: “[The] White puts himself in the position of coming in with solutions for all the problems of his poor black brethren.” Yet because of the economic gap between them, it was “hard for it to be

\textsuperscript{56} Freemen, Jan. 11, 1854, (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/pf/reel1/00007-x1-y0-z1-r0-0-0)
\textsuperscript{57} Voice, April 23, 1851, (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/browse/vf/reel1/00022)
\textsuperscript{58} Report of Mr. Prior, agent of the Canada Company, 28 April, 1835, quoted in Silverman, Unwelcome Guests, 30
\textsuperscript{59} Alexander McArthur to George Whipple, 22 Dec, 1852, reprinted in The Liberator, 10 Dec, 1852
\textsuperscript{60} Brown, Links and Lineage, 62
otherwise.” Simpson asks the question of how one person can help another without “destroying him.” This question goes to the heart of the controversy over charity and begging. Blacks who depended on charity, many argued, were too ready to compromise their long term goals in order to satisfy short term needs. But even as many black leaders decried begging, they had no ready solution to the immediate economic need among new arrivals. Begging continued, as did opposition against it.

Despite Shadd’s principled objection to begging and all-black settlements, she was not without sympathy for the Buxton experiment. And this was likely because it echoed her larger goal of achieving racial equality. Buxton, after all, appeared successful “at a time when most people doubted the natural abilities of slaves or freed persons…[and] proved that blacks could develop and progress enormously.”

Furthermore, Buxtonites were determined to survive without the financial support of whites. Thus, Buxton served as the shining example that proved blacks were able to survive on their own in freedom.

Shadd’s acknowledgment of Buxton as a success but condemnation of the Refugee Home Society demonstrates the complex and often contradictory nature of black thinking about their place in Canada. On the one hand, Shadd felt that the “settlements would promote isolation and ignorance.” On the other hand, her “simultaneous promotion of black

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61 Simpson, Under the North Star, P 365
62 The City of Toronto and the Ontario Black History Society, Black History in Early Ontario. (Toronto, Market Gallery, City of Toronto Archives, February 7-March 15, 1981), 13
63 Drew, North-side view, 208
64 Brown, Links and Lineage, 61
settlements and self-reliance...[were] strong signals that she viewed the settlements as temporary until Blacks could successfully integrate themselves into British-Canadian society [at their own pace]."\(^{65}\) Such contradictory views reflect the emotional toll the difficult struggle against racial oppression had on those who engaged it. Roger Hite argues that engaging in problem solving, no matter how realistic a solution may be, “served the symbolic function of allowing escape from the frustrations generated by not finding suitable alternatives to oppressive social and political institutions.”\(^{66}\) Yet whatever comfort these plans may have given to Shadd and the larger black elite, unrealistic expectations placed an enormous amount of pressure upon ordinary black settlers to “achieve”. Their daily lives were mired for evidence of achievement in an ideological war between anti-slavery and pro-slavery advocates.

Regardless of the difficulties ordinary black settlers faced, white prejudice was the most significant factor in shaping their experiences in Upper Canada. Not only did white prejudice shape the agenda of black leaders who fought for control over the lives of black settlers in Upper Canada, but also because blacks suffered discrimination in all walks of life.

\(^{65}\) Yee, “Finding a Place,” 8
\(^{66}\) Hite, “Voice of the Fugitive,” 282
CHAPTER THREE:
The Attitudes and Responses of White Canadians to Blacks in Upper Canada Between 1800 and 1860

“It is not easy to make a definitive statement on the attitude of white Canadians”¹ to American blacks during the nineteenth century. The way in which whites responded to blacks depended upon different variables and circumstances. For one, blacks who immigrated to Canada before 1850 encountered less racial hostility than blacks who arrived afterward. The year 1850 was not a watershed moment in Upper Canadian race-relations, however it reflected the eruption of racial tensions that escalated throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.² Prior to 1850, “prejudice was plainest in the areas where most blacks settled.”³ This tendency was exacerbated by how many and how quickly blacks arrived. The more and the faster blacks settled, the more whites were opposed.⁴

We fear that they are coming rather too fast for the good of the Province. People may talk about the horrors of slavery as much as they choose; but fugitive slaves are by no means a desirable class of immigrants for Canada, especially when they come in large numbers.⁵

During the 1830s, Chatham whites tolerated blacks when they were perceived as ‘trickling’ into the area either individually or in small groups. During the 1840s, however, blacks began ‘flooding’ into Chatham in larger numbers. And blacks were increasingly

³ The City of Toronto and the Ontario Black History Society, *Black History in Early Ontario*, (Toronto, Market Gallery, City of Toronto Archives, February 7-March 15, 1981), 18
⁴ Howard Law, “‘Self Reliance is the True Road to Independence’: Ideology and the Ex-Slaves in Buxton and Chatham,” *Ontario History*, (77, no. 2:107-121, 1985), 108
⁵ *Toronto Colonist*, April 27, 1855
kept out of schools and jobs during the 1840s. It isn’t a coincidence that the growth of the black population was met by an increase in white intolerance. More significant than the rate or density of black settlement was the proximity of black settlement to whites. A comparison of race-relations in Chatham and Buxton illuminate this point. The all-black settlement at Buxton contained a large black population and these black settlers arrived very quickly. Yet beyond Edwin Larwill’s opposition to Buxton in 1849-1850, no further incidents of racial tension were reported. The black population of Chatham was small compared to Buxton. Yet among Chatham whites, there was reportedly but “one feeling, and that is of disgust and hatred, that they, ‘the Negroes,’ should be allowed to settle in any Township where there is a white settlement.” Rev. James Proudfoot commented that “there is not a place in Canada where the whites are more prejudiced against the blacks than Chatham.” It is likely that because of Buxton’s relative isolation its black inhabitants were tolerated. In Chatham, blacks lived alongside whites and this likely accounted for the high level of racist incidents and reported prejudice.

Rural versus urban environments and the socio-economic status and levels of education of whites also impacted how whites responded to blacks. This was largely because rural areas faced more economic hardship than cities. In rural areas blacks were often viewed as economic competition, as opposed to cities where there was greater employment opportunity for both races. More often than not, blacks were victims of incidents of violence or discrimination as a result of economic tensions. Blacks in Oil Springs suffered a violent incident because of their willingness to work for less money

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6 Law, “Self-Reliance is the True Road,” 110
7 Ibid, 117
8 David Christy, Pulpit politics: or Ecclesiastical legislation on slavery, in its Disturbing Influences on the American Union, (Cincinnati, Faran & McLean Publishers, 1862), 197
than whites.

The white people were there, and they had all the work. They charged six shillings for sawing a cord of wood. The colored people went up there from Chatham, and in order to get constant employment, charged only 50 cents a cord. What did the white people do? They raised a mob,went one night and burned every shanty that belonged to a colored person, and drove them off entirely…The parties were arrested and two of them sent to the penitentiary for seven years.  

James C Brown described how whites reacted to his economic success.  

[I had become] an object of jealousy to the white mechanics, because I was more successful in getting jobs. They threatened me, unless I left the neighborhood, to break every bone in my body.  

And the economic tensions of rural and frontier communities fostered the perception that racism was largely a phenomenon of the lower classes. And there is some evidence to suggest that the lower classes were more racially hostile than were the upper classes. A white missionary in London commented that a “deep aversion is felt by the lower classes of …[white] colonists towards the colored population. They say, ‘we mean them no harm, but we don’t want them here’.” Mary O’Brien also indicated that her husband’s status as a colonial official dictated his attitude and treatment of blacks under his charge.  

Mr. O’Brien, whose residence in the West Indies has given him particular sympathy with the race, exultated in the prospect of seeing a negro member of British parliament.  

However, the evidence is far from conclusive. A white teacher observed that “some children of the lower orders don’t mind sitting by them in school; but…[the] others…don’t like it at all.”  

Colonel J. Prince, a member of legislature commented in 1857:  

11 Fred Landon, “The Negro Migration to Canada after the Passing of the Fugitive Slave Act” The Journal of Negro History (5, no. 1:22-36, 1920), 240-241  
12 Mission to the Fugitive Slaves, Annual Report,1853-1854, (London, 1854), 30  
13 Journal of Mary O’Brien, 1828-1838, ed. Audrey Sander Miller, (Toronto, Macmillan of Canada, 1968), 34. (March 7, 1830)  
14 Howe, Refugees from slavery, 41
I believe that…they are looked upon as necessary evils, and only submitted to because white servants are so scarce. But I now deal with these fellows as a body and I pronounce them to be as such the Greatest CURSE ever inflicted upon the two magnificent counties which I…represent…It has been the misfortune of my family to live among these blacks.\(^\text{15}\)

In fact, viscous racism, whether the product of upper or lower class white people, was abnormal. More typically, into the 1850s whites attempted to shield their prejudices behind notions of British egalitarianism. While simultaneously supporting black freedom and sympathetic with anti-slavery, the “gentleman bigot,” \(^\text{16}\) so called by Simpson, “preferred that freedom for blacks did not take place in their own backyard.”\(^\text{17}\) Shaped by nineteenth century notions of British civility and empire, Upper Canadian whites were entrenched within a racist world. As a result, anti-slavery whites, white missionaries and philanthropists and sympathetic whites all possessed underlying racist beliefs and attitudes toward blacks. This was because the very same influences of British egalitarianism that enlisted them in blacks’ cause also contained racially imbedded notions about human beings. Britain was ripe with racist philosophy and literature that justified the British Empire. Scientific racism— a system which classified all things, including human beings— supported the political domination of Anglo-Saxons and their subjugation over people of color.\(^\text{18}\) Thomas Carlyle published a pamphlet titled *Discourse On the Nigger Question* in 1849, England. In it, Carlyle demonstrated a classic British view of blacks as inferior beings. He argued that because blacks’ inferiority was involuntary, blacks should be pitied rather than tormented. He depicted blacks as both

\(^{15}\) Quoted in *The Provincial Freeman*, June 20, 1857 (OurOntario.ca, http://link.ourontario.ca/browse/pf/ree1/00257)

\(^{16}\) Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 243

\(^{17}\) Avonie Brown, *Links and lineage: The life and work of Mary Ann Shadd in media, a Black feminist analysis*, (Ph.D. diss., University of Windsor, 1994), 63

dumb, incapable but harmless.\textsuperscript{19}

These notions shaped the way many white abolitionists, missionaries and philanthropists approached their interactions with blacks. The traditions of the Protestant ethic and British middle-classicism — which contended that in order to overcome the moral, social and economic ills of poverty, the poorer classes should “absorb the virtues of diligence, sobriety, regularity of work, and deference to their employers”\textsuperscript{20} — particularly influenced white missionaries, philanthropists and abolitionists.\textsuperscript{21} William King was a primary example of how this influence worked. The program of racial uplift King imposed upon the black settlers of Buxton was virtually identical to the ideas of the Protestant ethic and British middle-classicism. King advocated that the virtues of diligence, hard work, self-sufficiency and education as the basis for the Elgin Settlement. King managed the daily lives of black Buxtonites with strict regulations and guidelines for behavior and activity.\textsuperscript{22} Howard Law argues that King managed Buxton like a plantation— “a white paternal master…overseeing Blacks.” However, “treating a free man or woman as an inferior was not necessarily hypocritical in King’s mind.”\textsuperscript{23} King was raised in a tradition of British literature, religion and philosophy which saw positions of inferiority and superiority as natural human conditions. These positions of inferiority/superiority, however, required the free will of the parties involved. Slavery


\textsuperscript{20} Law, “Self-Reliance is the True Road,” 112

\textsuperscript{21} White individuals engaged in black causes were frequently missionaries, abolitionists, philanthropists. These categories over-lapped. It was not unusual for a white to consider themselves all three.


\textsuperscript{23} Law, “Self-Reliance is the True Road,” 112; 114
was thus considered immoral because it lacked the liberty of slaves to consent to their position of inferiority. If King did manage Buxton like a plantation, he likely didn’t consider his own authoritativeness as antithetical to his abolitionism.

King was also heavily criticized by his contemporaries. Black leaders criticized the paternalistic character of King’s relationship to the black settlers of Buxton. Regulating and controlling the lives of blacks who had just escaped slavery seemed contradictory, even cruel. However, King’s philosophy, shaped by the British worldview, justified such contradictions. To King’s mind, freedom was more than the possession of physical freedom. Freedom didn’t mean to live as one wanted or chose, but to be diligent, sober and hard-working, and to have the ability to benefit from this hard work. And King imagined black freedom directly in relation to slavery. To his mind, newly freed blacks needed daily guidance in order to successfully adapt to freedom because he believed the conditions of slavery, practically and morally, stunted blacks’ sense of and ability to live in freedom. Thus, King believed that dictating blacks’ lives was a necessary aspect of the transition from slavery to freedom.

The attitudes of most whites not involved in black causes were equally imbedded with racist ideas. Blacks were tolerated so long as they kept to themselves and didn’t attempt to breach the racial boundaries established by whites.

Let the slaves of the United States be free…but let it be in their own country; let us not countenance their further introduction among us; in a word, let the people of the United states bear the burden of their own sins.

Fears of racial-mixing also swept the Upper Canadian public during the 1840s and 1850s. “Imagine,” Edwin Larwill wrote, “our Legislative Hall studded and our principal

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24 Law, “Self-Reliance is the True Road,” 112;113
25 Ibid, 113
26 Chatham Chronicle, Aug. 21, 1849
departments managed by these Ebony men…The pinions of our institutions would be
destroyed.” A racial line was thus drawn across the public and private sphere of Upper
Canadian society, dividing ‘acceptable’ black behavior from that which whites found
‘intrusive’. Only when blacks over-stepped these imposed boundaries were the fallacies
of whites’ egalitarianism exposed.

Though there is no animosity against the colored people in the ordinary out of door
business of life there is a deeply rooted prejudice against admitting them to a footing
of equality in matters of a more strictly social nature.

“From the black man’s perspective,” Geo Sunter of Queen’s Bush explains the
‘gentleman bigot’:

An old base currency in the shape of oracular utterances about blacks…are usually
prefaced with, “I don’t approve of slavery, but,”…But what? “But I would not have
niggers about among white folks: the country is large enough, I would have them
colonized off by themselves; I would have them sent back to their own country
where they be long. I am opposed to amalgamation; I would have a law passed to
prohibit intermarriage with whites. Would you like your sister to marry a nigger?
Would you like a nigger wrench for a wife? Such marriages are unnatural. They are
an inferior race, intermediate between man and monkey; look at their flat feet and
their faces: And how they smell, too; lazy and thievish besides, neither your
woodpile nor hen-roost is safe if they are near. Would not allow my children to play
in the streets with young darkies. Canada would be much better off without
them….There is no getting along with them unless you keep them at a distance, and
down; make them know and keep their places…That, Mr. Editor, is an average
sample by which you may judge of the rest, and of the spirit which dictates it.

Moreover, the socio-economic status and level of education of blacks were very
significant in shaping how whites responded to blacks. In Toronto, for example, blacks
were generally considered the wealthiest and most educated of blacks in Upper Canada.
As a result and whether exaggerated or not, there was a strong perception by both blacks
and whites that Toronto lacked significant racism. Shadd claimed that “here [Toronto]
there is no differences made in public houses, steam boats, railroad cars, schools,

27 Chatham Chronicle, Aug. 21, 1849
28 “Annual Report of the Normal, Model and Common Schools in Upper Canada, 1871” in J. George
Hodgins, Historical and Other Papers and Documents illustrative of the Educational system of Ontario,
1862-1871,(Vol. 6, Toronto, L.K. Cameron, 1912), 215
29 Semi-Weekly Expositor, May 21, 1859
colleges, churches, ministerial platforms and government offices. There is no doubt some prejudice here but those who have it are ashamed to show it." Schools and churches were never segregated. And Toronto was the anti-slavery center of Canada. Toronto blacks were also regarded as the most politically active black community in Upper Canada. The ability to protest peacefully likely fostered this reputation. Poor blacks, uneducated and living in rural areas, provoked whites’ resentment. Mr. Brush, a white man from Brantford complained:

> We have to help a great many of them [blacks]; more than any other class of people we have here…I think the Council have given more to the colored people than to any others.

And whites’ resentment of blacks also transferred to any whites who aided in blacks’ cause. I.J Thompson of Galt urged William King to see to the error of his ways.

> Look first to the destitute emigrants that are amongst us—look at our own poor. For in fact—do for the black population what you will, they are a nuisance wherever they go. No one can trust them they steal and are lazy, in fact you ought and the rest of you turn our attention to something more honorable.

And these blacks were most often victims of the worst of whites’ prejudices. The London Times reported that a group of whites had set fire to some barns owned by blacks. The Voice of the Fugitive reported of a race riot in St. Catharine’s in-where a white mob attacked a parade of black militia and destroyed black property. The Provincial Freemen reported that in Shrewsbury, a black man’s house was “burned by some incendiary to prevent his moving to it and also to intimidate colored people from settling

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32 *Freeman*, June 20, 1857, (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/browse/pf/reel1/00257)
33 Howe, *Refugees From Slavery*, 58
35 *Voice of the Fugitive*, June 17, 1852, (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/browse/vf/reel1/00096)
in this section of the county.”

And yet cities were not devoid of racism. One black woman commented that in Hamilton, “we are called Nigger when we go out in the street.” However, neither blacks nor whites in Hamilton were as well-off or well educated as blacks and whites in Toronto. Perhaps this distinction helps explain the difference in race-relations. Nor were all rural areas exclusively racist. In some frontier regions like Owen Sound, blacks and whites often worked together in the tasks of community building because “they [blacks] were perhaps viewed as a desirable helping hand rather than as a competitor.” The “pain of struggling together to build a new community may have helped to unite them.”

Whites’ racial hostility intensified after 1850. This was because all the factors that impacted how whites responded to blacks beforehand were exacerbated by the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. The FSL spurned the large scale and rapid immigration and settlement of thousands of blacks in need of material assistance in Upper Canada. This situation represented the perfect storm of factors that tended to foster the worst of whites’ prejudices. And the ‘gentleman bigot’ responded accordingly. On the one hand, whites demonstrated a renewed sense of sympathy toward blacks’ plight.

Every recapture of a fugitive slave in some Northern city, produced a wave of frightened and destitute blacks which, after they crossed the border, struck a sympathetic chord in the hearts of many Canadians….public opinion in Canada seems almost universally to have condemned the law. Not one currently available newspaper has a word to say in its favor.

On the other hand, the FSL heightened irrational fears of white society being ‘overrun’ by blacks. Lord Elgin wrote: “We are likely…to be flooded with blackies who are

36 Archives of Ontario [hereafter AO], Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, Rice to Ryerson, Jan 23 1846; Peden to Ryerson, Feb 23, 1846
38 Ontario Black History Society, Black History in Early Ontario, (1981), 20
rushing across the frontier to escape from the bloodhounds whom the Fugitive Slave bill has let loose on their track.”

And by 1860, “the novelty of fugitive slaves had decreased” for whites. “Canadians had simply grown weary of the steady stream of emigrating blacks.” The shift in popular opinion was evidenced by increased anti-black hostility over issues of immigration, settlement and schooling throughout the 1850s. And these issues acted as a prism through which the shifting dynamics of race-relations in Upper Canada between 1840 and 1860 were illuminated.

Many whites possessed a number of fears about blacks underscoring their opposition to black immigration and settlement. The legacy of slavery fed these fears and defined ‘blackness’ long before most whites in Upper Canada ever encountered a black person. The white press was particularly crucial to the dissemination of negative black images and stereotypes. “With few friends in the white press, the fugitive slaves could hope for at best, ambivalence, and at worst, vicious, racist propaganda.” The white press depicted blacks as creatures to be at once, pitied and feared; as impressionable, child-like and timid, but also as dangerous and erratic. And the association of blacks with slavery not only created a sense of inherent black inferiority, but as a result of the conditions of slavery that deprived many blacks of education and ‘moral’ training, blacks were also perceived as engaging in ‘troublesome’ activity and behavior – drinking, gambling and criminality. Thus, when blacks began arriving in Canada from the United States in the

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40 The Elgin-Grey Papers, 1846–1852, edited with notes and appendices by Sir Arthur G. Doughty; published by authority of the Secretary of State under the direction of the Acting Dominion Archivist. (Ottawa, J.O. Patenaude, 1937), 720
41 Brown, Links and Lineage, 64
42 Silverman, Unwelcome Guests, 34
43 Cooper, Afua A. P. Cooper, “Doing Battle in Freedom's Cause”: Henry Bibb, Abolitionism, Race Uplift, and Black Manhood, 1842-1854, (Ph. D, University of Toronto, 2000), 308
early nineteenth century, they confronted an already established prejudice against them. And unfortunately, whites’ early experiences with blacks often served to validate black stereotypes. It is true that many blacks required material assistance upon arrival in Canada as a product of the conditions under which they left the United States. And as a result, whites’ perception of blacks as hopelessly indigent, needy, and incapable of self-sufficiency and thus, burdensome to society, became an entrenched aspect of how whites responded to black immigration and settlement in Upper Canada.

Many whites complained that blacks were “very numerous and troublesome…coming in…from the Slave States…depraved and reckless…almost daily violating the laws and even threatening to put civil authority at defiance.”45 Some whites believed that the settlement of blacks also posed a threat to existing white populations.

An official in Brantford commented:

> It may be readily conceived that the law abiding whites, few in number and helpless, had many trials to bear, in what was a really a turbulent and at times, lawless frontier village.46

As a result, whites across Upper Canada actively voiced their opposition to black immigration and settlement. Anti-black advocates petitioned the government, held town hall meetings, and gave voice to their anti-black views in the white press. Some whites supported restrictions, like poll taxes, to discourage immigration.47

> The sudden introduction of a mass of Black Population, likely to continue without limitation, is a matter so dangerous to the peace and comfort of the inhabitants, that it become necessary to prevent or check, by some prudent restrictions, this


47 Brown, *Links and Lineage*, 65
threatened evil.\textsuperscript{48}

In Chatham, concerned whites petitioned the government to prohibit further black settlement because, they claimed, the “presence of black settlements in the area negatively affected the moral, social and economic conditions of the surrounding communities.”\textsuperscript{49}

Most opposition to black immigration and settlement came from individuals or small groups of protestors. The opposition of Edwin Larwill, however, represented “one of the few instances of highly organized anti-black activity in Canadian history.”\textsuperscript{50}

Larwill’s arrival in Chatham as a public official in 1841 coincided with the increase of black immigration and settlement in Chatham Township. Larwill’s initial concern and alarm ignited into overt and active hostility when William King proposed the establishment of an all-black settlement in Buxton, just a few miles outside of Chatham. He organized town hall meetings, proposed American style ‘black codes’ be passed by the legislature and espoused his racist views in the Chatham Journal.\textsuperscript{51} In an “Appeal to Canadians”, Larwill explained his concerns.

\begin{quote}
Nature…has divided the great family into distinct species for good and wise purposes…several hundreds of Africans into the very heart of their neighborhood, their families interspersing themselves among them, upon every vacant lot of land, their children mingling…to be admitted into…political, but to social privileges? And when we reflect too, that many of them must, from necessity, be the very worst specimens of their neglected race; the fugitives from justice; how much more revolting must the scheme appear.\textsuperscript{52}
\end{quote}

Although Larwill’s opposition was extreme, his sentiment was representative of how many whites felt about black immigration and settlement in Upper Canada. And

\textsuperscript{48} “Colony of Colored People in Canada,” \textit{African Repository and Colonial Journal} , (1830), 27-29
\textsuperscript{49} Brown, \textit{Links and Lineage}, 63
\textsuperscript{50} Simpson, \textit{Under the North Star}, 160
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, 164
unfortunately, public and colonial officials took popular prejudices seriously.

This house has just cause of alarm for the peace and security of the inhabitants of the Western parts of this Province, by reason of the rumored intention, on the part of the Canada Company, of introducing large bodies of Negro settlers into this Province...That the Committee...do bring in a bill...to prevent the introduction of Blacks and Mulattoes into this Province, as settlers participating in all the civil rights of the people of this Province.53

Frequently, whites in positions of power also conceded to negative popular sentiment because there was a very real economic incentive to do so. A missionary working in London reported:

Most white men refuse to leave a house to a colored man and I have heard an instance last week of a white man declaring he would leave his house because a man with black skin happened to be coming next door...the landlord says 'if I admit colored people, the whites will not come'.54

And many whites simply refused to purchase land in close proximity to blacks. This was the case in Dresden.

At present, they are more numerous than the whites, with whom and them a very bad feeling prevails. The district is an extremely fertile one, but in a very backward state. The reason...assigned by the white settlers for this is that respectable people object to settle in consequence of the large negro population.55

In the 1830s, the Canada Company sold land to large numbers of black settlers in frontier regions of the province. Initially, there were few whites habituating these areas. But when Irish immigrants began settling the area during the mid 1830s, they demanded the Canada Company stop selling adjacent land to blacks. As whites had become the majority of the Canada Company’s clientele, the Canada Company complied.56 They justified their compliance by claiming that the Irish were reasonable to not want black neighbors: “The
general bad conduct of the men of color...began to be felt as a serious obstacle to the sale

54 Mission to free colored population in Canada, Occasional paper, V (London, Macintosh Printer, 1856; Gale,http://find.galegroup.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/sas/infomark.do?docType=ECCO&contentSet =ECCO&type=getFullCitation&tabId=T001&prodId=SAS&version=1.0&docLevel=TEXT_GRAPHICS &resultListType=RESULT_LIST&bookId=SASB2581201100&source=library&userGroupName=utoronto _ma), 11; 12
55 Ibid, 13
56 Simpson, Under the North Star, 178
of adjacent lands.”

Yet not all whites were so quick to jump on the racist-bandwagon. Some rented land to blacks despite popular opposition. Others donated land to blacks who couldn’t afford to buy or rent. And still others disagreed with claims that blacks were undesirable neighbors. One politician claimed that “there are not in his Majesty’s dominions a more loyal, honest, industrious, temperate and independent class of citizens than the colored people of Upper Canada.” Mary O’Brien was dismayed at the white hostility blacks encountered in Oro Township:

I am provoked to see that some of our wise members have resoled that the negro settlement is likely to disturb the peace of the neighborhood, but I hope that no notice has been or is likely to be, taken of such nonsense.

And despite the racism American blacks encountered in Upper Canada throughout the nineteenth century, blacks continued to migrate north. There were several reasons why this was the case. For one, prior to 1850 colonial officials had proven themselves a friend to American Blacks. Because of experiences with racism and slavery in the United States, many blacks relocated in Upper Canada were highly anti-American. This immediately endeared blacks to Upper Canadian colonial officials who also disliked the United States. Since the War of Independence, anti-Americanism was an entrenched part of Canadian politics and identity. This sentiment was intensified by the War of 1812. Besides the

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57 Fred Landon, “Amherstburg, Terminus of the Underground Railroad,” *The Journal of Negro History* (10, no. 1, 1-9, 1925), 76
60 *Journal of Mary O’Brien*, (March 7, 1830), 34
impact of military conflict on the growth of anti-Americanism within Upper Canada, the economic success and efficient American government also compared favorably with Upper Canada’s economy and governmental structure. Thus, welcoming American blacks into British territory was a way for Upper Canadian officials to demonstrate their enlightened attitude and moral superiority over the ‘uncivilized barbarism’ of the United States. In 1819, Attorney-General Robinson stated:

Whatever the condition of these Negroes in the country to which they formerly belonged, here they are free. For the enjoyment of all civil rights consequent to a mere residence in the country and among them the right to personal freedom as acknowledged and protected by the laws of England extended to them as well as to all other under His Majesty’s Government in this province.

When Ohio blacks wrote the colonial government requesting permission to settle in Upper Canada, the Lieutenant Governor responded: “Tell the Republicans on your side of the line that we do not judge men by their color. If you wish to come to us, you will be entitled to all the privileges of the rest of his Majesty’s subjects.” Blacks were also welcomed for practical reasons. Upper Canada was a frontier society that required plenty of manual labor and people to populate and cultivate large tracts of uninhabited land. Blacks were willing to engage both and thus, were viewed as an economic asset. And blacks were grateful for the appearance of welcome demonstrated by the colonial government. This was evidenced in nearly homogenous support of the Tories. And this loyalty was not unrecognized by white politicians.

Moreover, blacks living in Upper Canada were granted the legal equality and rights afforded all British subjects. Despite that there were slaves in Upper Canada at one

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62 Martin, “British Officials,” 79
64 Canada Company, 26 April, 1827, quoted in Silverman, Unwelcome Guests, 27
time; slavery was neither institutionalized nor lasting.\(^{66}\) In fact, the colonial government repeatedly demonstrated its’ commitment to anti-slavery. The “champions of anti-slavery were the magistrates.”\(^{67}\) In 1782, the Provisional Peace Agreement following the American War of Independence contained a clause that allowed blacks who lived in Canada for one year to become British subjects. Nearly ten years later in 1791, William Wilberforce ushered the passage of a bill into the British parliament to stop the importation of slaves into the British colonies.\(^{68}\) This was followed by Simcoe’s Law in 1793 which effectively stopped new slaves from being created.\(^{69}\) Slavery was officially abolished in 1833. This history established Canada as a legal protectorate for black rights and freedom, at least in the minds of American blacks.

The myth of Canada as a safe-haven from racial oppression was tested in a series of extradition disputes with the United States over fugitive slaves living in Canada during the 1830’s. And in 1838, Canada officially refused to extradite any fugitives back to the United States.\(^{70}\) The Extradition Law demonstrated to American blacks that Canada was committed to protecting them. Coupled with the official abolishment of slavery in 1833 and the welcoming response to black immigration, by 1850, Canada solidified its’ reputation as a “haven for the hunted.”\(^{71}\)

And if the myth of Canadian race-relations was incentive for blacks to immigrate to Canada, race-relations in the United States were still more compelling in encouraging

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\(^{66}\) The majority of slaves came to Canada with their owners after the American Revolution. In 1759, there were approximately 1,000 black slaves in Canada. A 1791 Act permanently banned the importation of any further slaves in Upper Canada; (Brown, \textit{Links and Lineage}, 56)

\(^{67}\) Silverman, \textit{Unwelcome Guests}, 12

\(^{68}\) Ontario Black History Society, \textit{Black History in Early Ontario}, (1981), 6

\(^{69}\) Jenson, \textit{History of Negro Community in Essex}, 3-4


\(^{71}\) Silverman, \textit{Unwelcome Guests}, 36
blacks to seek relocation. The intensification of anti-black hostility in the United States throughout the 1820s, 30s and 40s led to a wave of black immigration into Upper Canada from roughly 1830 to 1850.\textsuperscript{72} An estimated 10,000 black fugitives and free northern blacks came to Upper Canada during this period.\textsuperscript{73} Anti-black activity in the United States ultimately culminated in the Fugitive Slave Law. And as was discussed in an earlier chapter, the FSL led to the large-scale immigration of American blacks into Upper Canada during the 1850s.

Thus, the myth of Canada as a place of refuge for American blacks, coupled with the racist policies of the United States, caused many American blacks to continue to migrate north in spite of Canadian racism.

However, as white responses to black immigration and settlement demonstrated, there was a wide gap between perception and reality regarding the state and condition of race-relations in Upper Canada. The reason Upper Canada was able to maintain its’ image as a refuge for so many decades was because, while racist practices in Upper Canada were officially frowned upon by the British government, racist attitudes were not. As a result, Upper Canada housed a tradition of racism that “existed….outside the sphere of law.”\textsuperscript{74} Blacks consistently encountered racial hostility, discrimination and exclusion in housing, schooling, hotel accommodations, restaurants, employment and transportation.\textsuperscript{75} Blacks were called names and taunted. Anti-black riots were not

\textsuperscript{72} Brown, \textit{Links and Lineage}, 60
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, 60
\textsuperscript{75} Jason Silverman, “Mary Ann Shadd and the Search for Equality,” in \textit{Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century}, eds., Leon Litwack and August Meier, (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1988), 89
unknown and violent attacks on black persons or property were all too common. Blacks also encountered derogatory beliefs about their mental and physical abilities. These practices, beliefs and behavior created an atmosphere of racial tension and discrimination in Upper Canada similar to that of the United States. And while blacks living in Upper Canada were fully aware of the complexity of Upper Canadian whites’ attitudes toward them, the very existence of laws that gave blacks rights and promised to protect of them, represented a possibility for justice and freedom fundamentally unthinkable in the United States during the nineteenth century.

I feel now like a man, while before I felt more as though I were but a brute. When in the United States, if a white man spoke to me, I would feel frightened, whether I were in the right or wrong; but now it is quite a different thing.- if a white man speaks to me, I can look him right in the eyes- if he were to insult me, I could give him an answer. I have the rights and privileges of any other man.

And this was likely the most significant reason blacks continued to immigrate and settle in Upper Canada, despite the opposition of many whites to their arrival.

In 1863, Samuel Gridley Howe described the complex set of white attitudes that underscored how blacks were received by the white population of Upper Canada.

The Canadians boast that their laws know no difference of color; that they…protect all their rights…The very frequency of the assertion and of the admission, proves that it is not considered a matter of course that simple justice should be done. People do not boast that the law protects white men. The truth of the matter seems to be that as long as the colored people form a very small proportion of the population, and are dependent, they receive protection and favors; but when they increase, and compete with the laboring class for a living; and especially when they begin to aspire to social equality, they cease to be “interesting negroes,” and become “niggers.”

And if blacks experienced significant racial hostility over issues of immigration and settlement, white Upper Canadians reserved their most virulent racial animosity for

76 Shirley Yee, “Gender Ideology and Black Women As Community Builders in Ontario, 1850-70,” *The Canadian Historical Review*, (vol. 75, 1, March 1994), 54
78 Ibid, 86
79 Howe, *Refugees From Slavery*, 49
matters of schooling. Like prejudice in general, racial hostility over issues of schooling also increased after 1850. And black parents throughout the 1840s and 1850s were forced to make difficult decisions regarding the education of their children in a racially hostile environment.
CHAPTER FOUR:
Black Schooling in Upper Canada, 1840-1860

If prejudice played a large role in shaping blacks’ experiences in Upper Canada, then prejudice was the determining issue as regards black schooling. This was clearly evidenced by blacks’ experience with education and schooling between 1840 and 1850.

School reform during the 1840s was plagued by criticism, confusion and opposition by the public. The Common Schools Act of 1850 was the ultimate government response to the critics and problems with 1840’s school legislation. The “modifications and improvements suggested by experience in the provisions of the several schools Acts passed subsequently to 1841” suggest that Ryerson and legislators recognized the need for “compromise and accommodation” to political opposites, local authority, and denominational and ideological differences. This change of heart directly reflected the “decades of learning, not just by local school people, but by the provincial government and its chief superintendent of schools.” The Act was intended to serve as the final word on the school reform period. And Ryerson and his supporters felt it was time to let the dust settle, becoming “advocates of calm.” But the public response was anything but

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1 Ryerson wrote: “The present School Law of 1850, is an improvement and extension of these previous Laws… designed to supply deficiencies, which the progress of the School System rendered necessary,” J. George Hodgins, Historical Educational Papers and Documents of Ontario, 1792-1853 (Vol. 2, Toronto, L.K. Cameron, 1911), 40
3 Susan E. Houston & Allison Prentice, Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth Century Ontario, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1991), 125
4 Ibid, 130
5 “Ryerson’s Statements and Papers in Regard to the School Act of 1850”, in J. George Hodgins, A Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada, From the Passing of the Constitutional Act of 1791, to the Close of the Reverend Doctor Ryerson’s Administration of the Education department in 1876, (Vol. IX, 1850-1851, Toronto, L.K. Cameron, 1902), 181
6 Houston & Prentice, Schooling and Scholars, 137
calm. The Act evoked powerful and often hostile reactions. This was thoroughly evident by the massive amount of incoming and outgoing correspondence between Ryerson’s office and local school officials, judges, lawyers, religious figures and parents. And the most controversial issue surrounding the 1850 Act was the separate schools clause.

The separate schools provision of the 1850 Common Schools Act was worded with deliberate vagueness in order that whites could exclude blacks without the creation of American-style discrimination codes being written into Canada’s law-books. The statute stated:

It shall be the duty of any Municipal Council of any Township, and of the Board of School Trustees of any city, Town or incorporated Village, on the application, in writing, of twelve, or more, resident heads of families, to authorize the establishment of one, or more, Separate schools for Protestants, Roman Catholics, or Coloured people.

This clause, while marking the beginning of legalized separation, was actually the end result of a decade of evolving legislative policies concerning black schooling. The school laws of the 1840s were bittersweet for blacks living in Upper Canada. On the one hand and for the first time in North America, the laws granted blacks the legal right to partake in a public school system. On the other hand, blacks’ rights to schooling were frequently undermined by prejudiced whites who consistently expressed their opposition to integrated schooling through the exclusion of blacks from common schools across the province. Blacks’ difficulties were compounded by the fact that formal schooling and its’ accompanying bureaucracy were new to both the Upper Canadian government and the public at large. As a result, there was neither mechanism available nor the willingness of public officials to uphold blacks’ educational rights. A policy of ‘unofficial exclusion’

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7 Hodgins, *Historical Educational Papers*, (1911), 99
8 J. George Hodgins, *Historical and Other Paper and Documents Illustrative of the Educational System of Ontario, 1853-1868*, (Vol. V, Toronto, L.K Cameron, 1912), 213
9 Canada was divided into Upper and Lower provinces by the Union Act of 1841.
characterized black schooling during this decade.

Ryerson was not unsympathetic to blacks’ difficulties with schooling. However, his original educational vision for Upper Canada would prove incompatible with the realities of racism therein. Ryerson envisioned a free school system, universally accessible regardless of socio-economic class, religious convictions, gender or race. And true to his word, the 1843 Hincks Act unequivocally gave blacks and other minorities the same rights to common schools as everyone else: “It shall not be lawful for…trustees, or for the chief, or other, Superintendent of Common Schools, or for any Teacher to exclude from any common school or from the benefit of education therein, the children of any class or description of persons resident within the School district to which such common school may belong.”

In 1849, however, Ryerson proposed new legislation be introduced “authorizing each District council to establish one or more Schools for the children of Coloured people.” The proposal became law in 1850. It was evident that the separate school clause of 1850 marked a shift in policy toward blacks. The story of how this change evolved over the course of the 1840s helps to explain the eruption of racial tension over schooling during the 1850s.

From 1840 to 1850, it became increasingly clear to blacks living in Upper Canada and to school administrators that educating blacks in the public school system was going to be difficult. Despite its illegality, the prejudice of many white parents and local officials frequently resulted in the exclusion of blacks from common schools. And

10 “An Act for the Establishment and Maintenance of Common Schools in Upper Canada, section 44, clause 7”, in J. George Hodgins, A Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada, From the Passing of the Constitutional Act of 1791, to the Close of the Reverend Doctor Ryerson’s Administration of the Education department in 1876, ( Vol. IV: 1841-1843: Toronto, L.K. Cameron, 1897), 258
because of the newness of school bureaucracy, blacks had little option but to endure discrimination. In a letter to the Hon. W.H Draper in 1847, the London Branch of the Canadian Bible Society described the unhappy situation of blacks in London:

The black people of London are probably about 200, they pay the same school tax...exactly the same as others under...the...law. They have, under it no doubt, an equal right to participate in the blessings of education, but a proud conventional prejudice ingrained on us from the United States...which no legislative enactment can correct, practically, deprives them of all benefits from our public schools. If any black child enters a school, the white children are withdrawn, the teachers are painfully obliged to decline, and the black people, while they acutely feel the anomaly of their painful position, yield to an injustice which they are too weak to regress.¹²

The legislation granting blacks the right to attend common schools was quickly revealed as contrary to popular sentiment. Many white school officials and white parents voiced their opposition to racially mixed schools through numerous complaints and petitions to the Department of Education, and the provincial government. A local school official from Colchester claimed, as many school officials also claimed, that the School Board was pressured to exclude blacks from the common schools on account of the overwhelming prejudice of white parents: “None of the black Schools have been in operation last year. The principal cause, no doubt...the state of feeling among the whites... [that made it] imperative on the council to legally separate the two classes for school purposes.”¹³ In an 1843 petition to Lieutenant Governor Metcalf, the blacks of Hamilton corroborated this claim:

We the people of color in the Town of Hamilton have a right to inform your Excellency of the treatment that we have to undergo. We have paid taxes and we are denied of the public schools, and we have applied to the Board of the Police and there is no steps taken to change this manner of treatment, and this kind of treatment is not in the United States, for the children of color go to the public Schools together with the white children, especially in Philadelphia, and I thought that there was not a man to be known by his color under the British flag, and we left the United States

¹² [AO], J. George Hodgins Fonds, F1207, London Auxiliary Bible Society to William H. Draper, March 27, 1847
¹³ Colchester South Township School Area Board, A Story of Public Schools in Colchester South Township, (Harrow, School Board, 1966), 13
because they were in hopes that prejudice was not in this land, and I came to live under your Government. I am sorry to annoy you by allowing this thing, but we are grieved much, we are imposed on much, and if it please your Excellency to attend to this grievance, if you please Sir. I have left property in the United States and I have bought property in Canada, and all I want is Justice and I will be satisfied. We are called nigger when we go out in the street and sometimes brick bats is sent after us as we pass in the street. We are not all absconders. Now we brought money into this Province and we hope to never leave it, for we hope to enjoy our rights in this Province, and may my God smile upon your public life and guide you into all truth, which is my prayer and God bless the Queen and Royal Family.
The Coloured People of Hamilton\textsuperscript{14}

George Tiffany, head of the Board of Police concluded that “whatever the feeling at present…it would not be advisable to yield to it, but that the law ought to be enforced without distinction of color… If a firm stand be taken at first, the prejudice will soon give way.”\textsuperscript{15} Though many whites in Hamilton continued to disagree with this decision, most did come to accept it.\textsuperscript{16} Unfortunately for blacks living in other parts of the province, the majority of school officials were unwilling to decide against popular sentiment.

Complex motives drove white opposition to integrated schooling. This was demonstrated by the fact that exclusion from common schools only became a factor in black schooling during the 1840s. For one, before 1850 the unorganized state of schooling and the fact that blacks were comparatively few in number and lived together in isolated communities scattered across the colony meant that actively pursuing black separation was largely unnecessary. For another, and as the last chapter explains, whites’

\textsuperscript{14} [AO] Incoming Education Correspondence, Correspondence for 1843, RG 2-12, Petition of the “People of Colour” of Hamilton to the Governor General protesting the practice of segregated schooling for Black children, October 15, 1843, (accessed Jan. 15, 2010, http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/english/on-line-exhibits/black-history/murray-letter.aspx)
prejudices tended to intensify when blacks were perceived as overstepping perceived racial boundaries. The 1841 and 1843 school Acts — which granted blacks the right to partake in the new system of public schooling, which most blacks attempted to do — were perceived as a ‘breach’ of these racial boundaries. And as a result, the racist tendencies of prejudiced whites were provoked into action. White parents were already possessed of prejudice against blacks based on negative stereotypes. Blacks were perceived as sexually threatening, without manners or sense of propriety, immoral, impoverished, uneducated and criminal. However, when blacks remained an isolated and invisible group, they were not considered threatening. When blacks attempted to move from outsiders of society to participants within it— which integrative schooling represented to both blacks and whites —blacks were no longer a ‘pitiable’ group. They became a ‘danger’ in need of defending against.

The popular feeling is by no means averse to educating these people, but it is very strong against mixing them with whites, and if this is insisted upon, it will be attended in this township with breaches of the peace.\(^{17}\)

Blacks were viewed by many white parents as morally threatening to their children. Thus, some white parents were concerned by black parents insistent on “forcing their children”\(^{18}\) into school with whites. This infringed upon the educational rights of whites. And by the end of the 1840s, these opinions and complaints were increasingly accompanied by demand for segregation legislation.

In many places much difficulty is experiences from blacks forcing themselves into the same schools with the white children, and I fear they have been the cause of closing several Schools in the District. I have formed two districts and reported a third for the sanction of the Council, solely for the Negro children of the Township. I cannot see that they have anything to complain of, observation having taught me that their improvement is great in their own schools than when mixed with whites. I have made this statement in the hope that the Council may be induced to memorialize the

\(^{17}\) A Story of Public Schools in Colchester South Township, (1966), 11
\(^{18}\) [AO], Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, Vol. 4, John Cowan (Sandwich) to Rev. McNab, Oct 15, 1845
Isaac Rice observed similar sentiment among whites in Amherstburg, although he expressed his observations in more direct language. He claimed that the local trustees would rather “cut their own children’s heads off and throw them into the roadside ditch” before they would let their children go to “school with niggers.”

Luckily for these trustees, they wouldn’t have to resort to such drastic measures to get what they wanted.

In response to popular opposition to integrated schools, Ryerson and legislators began the process of establishing a legal basis for black separate schools during the second half of the 1840s. In the 1847 School Act, the school boards of cities and towns were extended the right to “establish any kind or description of school they may please,” including, “one or more school for coloured children.” This clause began the method taken by legislators of using deliberately vague language regarding racially separate schools, which would allow whites to exclude blacks from common schools while at the same time preventing anything “insidious” from being admitted into the Statute book.

Despite the intention of the 1847 clause that blacks be provided with a separate school if they were unwanted in common schools, it became clear to Ryerson that blacks weren’t being given schools at all. Yet at the same time, Ryerson believed, white opposition to integrated schooling could not be overcome either. In consequence, and with “extreme pain and regret”, Ryerson proposed a Bill in 1849 which he intended as a reasonable compromise between upholding “the best interests as well as rights of the coloured population.”

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19 “Report of the Superintendent of Education to the Western Council, 1846” in A Story of Public Schools in Colchester South Township, (1966), 10
20 [AO], Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, Rice to Ryerson, Jan 23 1846; Peden to Ryerson, Feb 23, 1846
21 [AO] J. George Hodgins Fonds, F1207, Ryerson to W.H Draper, April 12, 1847, 12
22 Ibid
people on the one hand, while conceding to the “prejudices and feelings of the people” on the other.

The shift in legislative policy regarding black schooling was a reflection of the shift in Ryerson’s own attitude toward education. In 1846, Ryerson wrote that the exclusion of blacks from common schools was “at variance with the letter and spirit of the law, and the principles and spirit of British Institutions, which deprive no human being of any benefit…on account of the colour of his skin.” But considering it was only the very next year that Ryerson granted school boards administrative leeway in excluding blacks, it seems evident that Ryerson became convinced that the letter of the law and the spirit of the law were irreconcilably at odds when it came to the question of black schooling. Thus, by 1850 blacks were accustomed to the illegal and unofficial exclusionary and discriminatory practices of whites. They were not, however, prepared for the legality of such practices the 1850 common schools act provided. Nor were whites. Thus, the 1850s was new territory for both blacks and whites.

The 1850 separate schools clause was a direct result of Ryerson’s experiences over issues of black schooling during the 1840s. He believed that legalizing separate schools would be the most beneficial to blacks in long run, because, unlike in the previous decade, whites could not exclude blacks without providing for their educational needs. But because of his dual desire to maintain the appearance of legislative equality and yet appease white demands for racial separation, Section Nineteen was deliberately vague in language and meaning. It notably failed to specify what colour the residents had

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23 [AO] J. George Hodgins Fonds, F1207, Ryerson to W.H Draper, April 12, 1847, 12
25 [AO] Outgoing Education Correspondence, RG 2-8, Vol. 3, Ryerson to Isaac Rice et al, March 5, 1846
to be requesting separate schools. It was thus unclear exactly what rights blacks and whites possessed regarding education. This lack of clarity fostered a period of confusion for blacks and whites, both of whom were unsure about whether separate schools could be established against the will of blacks, and whether or not blacks could be forced to attend all-black schools. And unfortunately, the ambiguous nature of the clause was only further entrenched by the fact that there was no overarching authority to guide local practices. Both the courts and Ryerson’s office were inconsistent in how they interpreted the clause. And while the meanings of the laws were being sorted out through a process of trial and error, the clause was being used in practice as a tool to exclude blacks from common schools across the Upper Canada.

Blacks and whites bombarded Ryerson’s office with enquiries and complaints regarding the Nineteenth Section of the 1850 Act. Ryerson’s responses only exacerbated confusion. On the one hand, when corresponding with blacks Ryerson agreed with their interpretation that “if they [blacks] do not choose to establish a separate school, they have the same right of access for their children to the common school as the parents of any other children residing in their section.” This was the way in which the separate school clause was being applied to Roman Catholic’s, and Ryerson argued this would be true for blacks as well. This, however, was not the case. In 1856, blacks in Camden claimed they were essentially denied education because they had been excluded from the local

27 [AO], Outgoing Education Correspondence, Letter Book F, RG 2-8-0-6 (17 May, 1851-17 April, 1852) M/S 925-3, Ryerson to RH Anderson et al., Dec 17, 1851
28 Ryerson believed that separate Catholic and black schools would be the exception and not the rule. However, he underestimated the veracity of whites prejudice against blacks. The Roman Catholics were a minority group who demanded separate schools. For blacks, however, it was the majority white population who demanded separate schools and who creatively attempted to force blacks to attend them through discrimination and exclusion. What Simpson calls the “ironic nature” of the separate school law was that it seemed to “uplift one group” and simultaneously “oppress another.”; (Simpson, Under the North Star, 238)
common school and the only separate school available was fifteen miles away.\textsuperscript{29} J. George Hodgins, assistant to the office of the Chief Superintendent, responded on Ryerson’s behalf:

The spirit of the law is to permit separate schools to be established if the persons for whom they are intended wish to have them; not otherwise. Your particular case seems to have been decided by the Court of Queens Bench in Dennis Hill vs. School Trustees in Canada and Zone Hillary 17 Vict.\textsuperscript{30}

On the other hand, in correspondence with white school officials, Ryerson claimed they possessed full discretionary power to “determine the objects of each school and who shall and who shall not attend.”\textsuperscript{31} In 1857, a trustee wrote to Ryerson that

we have lately had a good deal of trouble with our schools and I am directed by the Board of Common Schools Trustees of the town to obtain from you an answer to the following enquiry: Has our Board the right to determine the school which the children of black parents may attend and can the Board prevent such children from attending any Common School in the town other than the one set about by the board for such black children?\textsuperscript{32}

Ryerson replied that the “Board of School Trustees in each city and town have authority to determine the number, the kind and description of schools which shall be established and maintained in such city or town. The boards have therefore unlimited power.”\textsuperscript{33}

Ryerson would cite different sections of the school law to validate the different ways blacks and whites interpreted the law. To one school official Ryerson claimed that white school boards possessed the legal right to segregate according to “the 4\textsuperscript{th} clause of the 24\textsuperscript{th} section of the School Act”\textsuperscript{34} Yet in response to a black father’s petition, Ryerson admitted that “it is true that colored people…may, under the authority of the 19\textsuperscript{th} section

\textsuperscript{29} [AO], Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, vol. 20, William P. Newman to Ryerson, January 13, 1856; Peter B. Smith et al. to Ryerson, 29 June, 1856
\textsuperscript{30}[AO], Outgoing Education Correspondence, Letter Book Q, RG 2-8-0-15 (27 December 1855- 9 February, 1856) M/S 925-8; J. George Hodgins to William Newman, 15 Jan, 1856
\textsuperscript{31}[AO], Outgoing Education Correspondence, Letter Book V, RG 2-8-0-20, (13 May, 1857- 29 August 1857) M/S 925-11, Ryerson to Currie, 16 June, 1857
\textsuperscript{32}[AO], Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, Currie et al., to Ryerson, 4 June, 1857
\textsuperscript{33}[AO], Outgoing Education Correspondence, Letter Book V, RG 2-8-0-20, (13 May, 1857- 29 August 1857) M/S 925-11, Ryerson to Currie, 16 June, 1857
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid
of the school act, establish separate schools but that it’s a matter of choice with themselves.”

Despite the contradictory responses Ryerson submitted publically, privately Ryerson believed exclusion and discrimination was immoral. But the difficult experiences with school legislation during the 1840s likely led Ryerson to conclude that the “prejudice and feelings of the people are stronger than the law.” In response to accusations that the 1850 separate school clause compromised blacks’ rights, Ryerson provided the following explanation for the inclusion of the Nineteenth Section in the 1850 Act.

The Nineteenth Section of the School Act, – authorizing each District Council to establish one or more Schools for the children of Coloured People, – is submitted with extreme pain and regret. I had hoped that the Act of 1847…[would] meet the case of this class of our fellow-subjects; but I was surprised to find…[that blacks were being] taxed for the support of Common Schools…yet their children are excluded from Schools there…I requested…under the authority of the Thirteenth Section, Clause Nine of the School Act [1847 Act], the…Western District Superintendent to aid the Schools of the Coloured People according to the number of their population,— so as to place them upon equal footing with their White neighbours. I have done the same in other Districts… I have exerted all the power that I possessed, and employed all the persuasion I could command; but the prejudice and feelings of the people are stronger than the law… [Thus] there is only a contingent and imperfect mode of doing justice to the Coloured People. I therefore propose the Nineteenth Section of the annexed Draft of Bill to meet their [blacks’] case.

Justice Robinson agreed that separate school legislation had been introduced only “out of deference to prejudice of the white population,” and added, “prejudice, which the

35 [AO], Outgoing Education Correspondence, Letter Book F, RG 2-8-0-6 (17 May, 1851-17 April, 1852) M/S 925-3, Ryerson to RH Anderson et al., Dec 17, 1851.
37 Hon. John Prince of Essex County wrote in a letter to Hincks that the separate school law was an “injustice” and “infringement” of blacks’ rights, (Hodgins, Documentary History, Vol. IX, [1902], 26)
38 Hodgins, Documentary History, (1902), 26
legislature, evidently from the language which they used, disapproved of and regretted.”  

Despite such apologetic explanations, white sympathizers continued to question the morality of the separate school law. In a letter summarized by Hincks and forwarded to Ryerson’s office, an official for the County of Essex reportedly claimed:

They [blacks] complained of it [separate school legislation] as an injustice, and infringement on their rights, and he [Prince] was bound to advocate their cause. Now, he happened to live in the County of Essex where these people are very numerous, and where the strongest prejudices prevail against them—prejudices in which, he thanked God, he never shared. For as long as they were good, loyal, honest and industrious neighbours, and conducted themselves in conformity with the laws, they were enlisted to as much regard as any other people.

Ryerson responded defensively. He claimed that his hands were tied because school legislation necessarily embodied “the public sentiment.” Ryerson’s experiences with lack of public support during the 1840’s likely influenced this belief. In response to an article in *The Globe* in 1858 accusing Ryerson of promoting inequality, he responded rather mechanically: “Whether this is so, or not, I have not advocated any part of the School System as a compromise, but upon the ground of what had been granted by the Legislature in 1841 as a legal right.”

Ryerson’s defensiveness aside, his responses to white school boards implied that he had abandoned his own principle of universality during the 1850s. It is clear that Ryerson and his supporters were truly concerned that the conflict over black schooling had the power to seriously endanger the school system. Ryerson explained in a letter to Hincks that the need for elaboration on the Nineteenth Section of the 1850 Act was

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39 “Re: Dennis Hill v the School Trustees of Camden and Zone,” A digest of all cases decided in the several courts of error and appeal, Queen’s Bench, common pleas, and Chancery, in Upper Canada, eds., Robert Harrison & Henry O’Brien (Vol. II, Toronto, H. Roswell, 1863), 578 (Canadiana.org, accessed on Nov. 15, 2009, [http://openlibrary.org/books/OL23414896M](http://openlibrary.org/books/OL23414896M)), 578
40 Hodgins, *Documentary History* (1902), 26
41 Hodgins, *Historical and Other Papers*, (1912), 79
pursued by the government with an eye to ending the unrest once and for all.

Unfortunately for blacks, this meant conceding to “all that even the ultra advocates of Separate Schools have professed to demand.” Ryerson’s office and members of the legislature attempted to address the “cause of this friction,” and “if possible” resolve the conflicts “without endangering the efficiency, or stability, of the Public School System.” And there certainly was evidence to support their fear of destabilization. The uproar over black schooling had led to the need for two additional pieces of legislation, which directly conflicted with the intent that the 1850 Act would be the final say on school reform, at least for a while. And Ryerson became increasingly frustrated by the conflict created over separate schools.

While, in the course now pursued, the more you concede, the more you contravene the prevalent sentiment of the Country, and the greater injury you are inflicting upon the great body of the parties for whom Separate Schools are professedly demanding and who have not, as far as I am aware, any safe and adequate means of speaking for themselves.

And Ryerson claimed that “if further legislation be called for,” he would “take the…ground…of not providing…Separate Schools at all.”

Houston and Prentice suggest that Ryerson felt personally and professionally threatened after the Cameron School Act of 1849 almost succeeded in un-doing the school system he had built. The Cameron Act likely illustrated to Ryerson the fragility of the school system and the necessity of popular support to the successful

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43 “The chief Superintendent of Education for Upper Canada to the Honorable Inspector General Hincks, Toronto, 6 September, 1854” in Hodgins, Historical Educational Papers, (1911), 103
45 The purpose of the Separate School Amendment Act of 1851 was stated in its opening line: “It is exceeding to remove doubts, which have arisen in regard to certain provisions of the Nineteenth Section of the Upper Canada School Act of 1850.” (Ibid, 101); In 1853 the legislature passed the Supplementary School Act, which also referenced the black separate school question; (Ibid, 101)
46 “The chief Superintendent of Education for Upper Canada to the Honorable Inspector General Hincks, Toronto, 6 September, 1854,” Ibid, 103
47 Ibid, 103
48 Houston & Prentice, Schooling and Scholars, 126
implementation of school legislation. Thus, perhaps the deliberate vagueness of the language in which the Nineteenth Section was written, and the concession to racial prejudice it represented, meant that Ryerson was more concerned about securing the successful implementation of his School Act than with ensuring blacks’ rights.

Like Ryerson’s dualistic response, the courts’ rulings on issues of black schooling only served to complicate tensions between blacks and whites.

There is constant litigation going on with regard to the right of colored persons to send their children to the ordinary common schools, and conflicting legal opinions have been obtained; but the only results so far have been embittered feeling sand deepened prejudices.

Ryerson and white sympathizers encouraged blacks to go to court, and claimed that the courts generally ruled in blacks’ favour. There was some truth to this statement. In 1855, Washington V Trustees of Charlottesville, a black father claimed that the school trustees had attempted to force blacks into separate schools by dividing school districts along racial lines. Gerrymandering was a common tactic utilized by school boards to isolate blacks. In this case, the court ruled the school board had acted illegal and demanded Washington’s son be admitted to the common school. However, the courts were also not opposed to validating the discriminatory practices of school boards. In Dennis Hill V. Camden, 1854, the court ruled that Hill’s “children must attend there [the separate school] or be denied access to education.” Justice Robinson explained: “After the establishment of any separate school in a division, we do not think a choice was
intended by the legislature to be left to the black people within that division to send their children nevertheless to the general common school.”

Whether or not and under what circumstances whites could force blacks into separate schools was a highly contentious and common issue of conflict. And because Ryerson and the courts often contradicted both themselves and each other, confusion and animosity continued.

“Was the legislation permissive or obligatory?” Ryerson’s dualistic responses and the inconsistency of the courts rulings fostered and maintained an environment of ambiguity, in where discrimination and exclusion was neither explicitly condemned nor definitively sanctioned. Thus, the laws would be enacted according to the way different school boards interpreted the provisions of the Nineteenth Section of the School Act. And considering Ryerson’s desire to appease prejudice without ‘tarnishing’ the integrity of Upper Canada’s legislature, this was likely precisely the situation Ryerson intended.

In essence, the 1850 Common Schools Act granted white boards the power to determine on their own how to deal with the black schooling question. And unfortunately for blacks, many whites in Upper Canada during the 1850s were in a particularly intolerant mood.

As was demonstrated in the 1840s, whites’ prejudices were provoked when blacks attempted to integrate into larger society through common schools. The “gentleman bigot” as Simpson called it, was the way in which most whites rectified their own sense

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54 Re: Hill v. Camden and Zone, 578
55 Ryerson advised the white trustees of Windsor that they could legally establish a separate school for blacks in spite of black opposition. But to the School Board of Harwich, Ryerson claimed that a separate school could be built, but that the Board couldn’t force blacks to attend it; ([AO], Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, vol. 26, Clayborn Harris to William Horton, February 15, 1859; “Re: Colored Inhabitants of Windsor”, February 16, 1859; Outgoing Education Correspondence, RG 2–9, vol. 12, Ryerson to W. Horton, February 21, 1859; Ryerson to Rev. A. R. Green, March 10, 1859)
56 Simpson, Under the North Star, 243
57 In 1848, Ryerson explained that he didn’t want the poor image of a few separate schools to tarnish the entire school system; (Hodgins, Historical Educational Papers, [1911], 127)
of “British egalitarianism”⁵⁸ with their aggressive opposition to integrated schooling. Whites tolerated the presence of blacks so long as blacks remained a silent, unobtrusive and small population, pitiable, but certainly not equal. When blacks attempted to assert their educational rights and breached the sphere of acceptable behaviour as mandated by whites, tolerance quickly turned to opposition.⁵⁹ In Sandwich, for example, Benjamin Drew reported:

If a slaveholder were to set foot in the township with any sinister intention, the true sentiments and feelings of the people would manifest themselves in the most decided and unmistakable manner. The people of Sandwich...are ‘awful independent’ and such is their strong old-fashioned English hatred of oppression that the population would rally almost to a man to defend the rights of the humblest black in their midst- even of crazy Jack, the butt of the village boys.⁶⁰

Yet Sandwich blacks suffered among the worst exclusion and discrimination in schooling faced by blacks across the colony. This hypocritical tendency was not lost upon blacks. Geo. Sunter of Queen’s Bush commented: “It is only when we aspire to the freedom of self-government and to the equality which justice awards, that your [whites] turned up noses discover that we smell badly, and [then] your amalgamation horrors commence.”⁶¹

But not all whites shared common prejudices against blacks.

I found some fifty persons settled; many comfortable and doing well, but many suffer a great deal from poverty. I showed them about agriculture and instructed them as far as my limited learning would go. When I came away, many were poor but they were not vicious; I never lived among a more teachable people; I never knew a fight among them or their children. The worst fault was some tendency to slander each other, but they have been instructed by missionaries to read and write.⁶²

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⁵⁸ Kristina McLaren, “‘We had no desire to be set apart’: Forced Segregation of Black Students in Canada West Public Schools and Myth of British Egalitarianism,” in The history of Immigration and racism in Canada: Essential readings, ed. Barrington Walker, (Canada, Marquis Book Printing Inc, 1970), 69-82
⁵⁹ It is a not a coincidence that black separate schools existed in Windsor, Sandwich, Amherstburg, Chatham, Colchester and St. Catharine’s. Not only were these centers of black population, but with the exception of Chatham and St. Catharine’s, these were also centers of habitation for fugitives from slavery, (Simpson, Under the North Star, 366)
⁶⁰ Benjamin Drew, North-side View of Slavery. The Refugee: or the Narrative of Fugitive Slaves in Canada. Related by Themselves, with an Account of the History and Condition of the Colored Population of Upper Canada (1856; Toronto: Coles, 1972), 240
⁶¹ Semi-Weekly Expositor, May 21, 1859
⁶² Drew, North-Side View, 83
The ‘gentleman bigot’ commonly took the ‘separate but equal’ approach to the black schooling question. And many failed to grasp this position as discriminatory. A white teacher in Freelton claimed that he had “never made any distinction between the black pupils in my school and the Whites. The Colored Scholars have the very same privileges and advantages in every respect, and are taught in the same classes...as the Whites.” Yet the same teacher goes on to describe how “the White boys and girls sit on separate benches and the Colored scholars sit on other benches by themselves.” And he congratulated himself for his ‘impartiality’: “Whilst I preside as Master among them no Trustees or any other person or persons shall ever influence me to act partially or unequally towards any of my scholars, be they Black or White.”

And like over issues of black settlement, some whites supported separate schools because they felt it was in the best interests of both blacks and whites. One teacher from London commented that “the coloured children would be better educated and that it would be more conducive to the happiness both of the coloured children and white children if they were in separate schools. The coloured children would not be subjected to so much annoyance.” These white attitudes and beliefs about blacks fostered the vehement opposition to integrated schooling blacks would encounter during the 1850s. And whites employed a variety of discriminatory methods to ensure their opposition yielded results.

White school officials claimed that “the state of feeling among the whites”

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63 [AO], Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, McLaren to Douglas enclosed in Douglas to Ryerson, 3 February, 1856
64 Howe, Refugees From Slavery, 41; There were also blacks who favoured separate schools, and this is discussed in a later portion of this chapter.
65 A Story of Public Schools in Colchester South Township, (1966), 13
meant that racially-mixed common schools were near impossible. On numerous occasions, these officials reported to Ryerson that white prejudice combined with the continued attempts by blacks to attend common schools created an explosive situation, detrimental to proper school functioning. Sometimes, in areas where blacks refused to leave common schools, school officials attempted to appease whites’ prejudices by trying to isolate blacks within the common schools through segregated seating or proposing to erect separate buildings for blacks on school grounds. But these attempts, white school officials claimed, were unsuccessful in placating white parents’ desire for racial separation. School officials thus explained that if blacks continued to be allowed to attend common schools, white parents would “take their children from the school and [the] teacher will not teach the black children, nor be bound to teach at all.” As a result, the school would “stop… at once and thus deprive 50 or 60 children of the opportunity of a school.” They complained in frustration that because of the “demands of a few of the coloured inhabitants,” white children were deprived of their right to education. One school trustee even resigned his position because of the difficulties over schooling caused by racial tension. Duncan Campbell explained:

The white people is entirely opposed to have them [blacks] mixed together and have

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66 The District Superintendent of Malden claimed that a mixed school was simply not possible in his district; ([AO], Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, vol. 21, Samuel Atkin (Malden) to Ryerson, December 29, 1856.

67 “Many of the whites object to having their children sit in the same forms with the colored pupils and some of the lower classes will not send their children to schools where Negroes are admitted.”; (Drew, North-Side View, 103); In Harwich, Hamilton and Flamboro West, blacks were forced to sit apart; ([AO] Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12; vol. 20, James Douglas to Ryerson, February 3, 1856; vol. 25, Jefferson Lightfoot to Ryerson, Oct 5, 1858

68 [AO], Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, vol. 21, Samuel Atkin to Ryerson, December 29, 1856

69 [AO], Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, Vol. 21, Samuel Atkin to Ryerson, 26 Feb., 1857

70 [AO], Incoming Education Correspondence RG 2-12, vol. 21, Samuel Atkin (Malden) to Ryerson, December 29, 1856

71 [AO], Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, vol. 12, George Duck (Chatham) to Ryerson, March 7, 1852
withdrawn their children from the school and the consequence is that out of...fifty pupils...there was only two white children [left] and seven black children.\textsuperscript{72}

It was clear that these school officials believed the intensity of racial tensions over common schools made racially-mixed schooling impossible. As such, separate schools remained the only option for whites who wanted to exclude blacks from common schools.

Different school boards, almost always exclusively white, reacted differently to this recognition. Some established separate schools against the will of local blacks; one Superintendent concluded that racial tensions made it “imperative on the council to legally separate the two classes for school purposes.”\textsuperscript{73} Other school officials were less certain of how to proceed. The Superintendent of Malden District wrote of his predicament to Ryerson:

Everyone wants to keep them separate to themselves…Now the information we want is to know if we can’t prevent them from coming to our school by clause 13 of school act 1850 which says ‘Provided always that this requirement shall not extend to the children of persons on whose behalf a separate schools shall have been established according the 19 section of the Act.’ This we think gives us the right to keep them out. 2\textsuperscript{nd} and if they let their school go down will that oblige us to let them in ours. 3\textsuperscript{rd} let us know what our duty is and what we can do to keep them separate and prevent our - school from being stopped by their pushing themselves on us we hope you will give us an answer as soon as possible before the annual school meeting to each of the above questions as it is of much importance to is.\textsuperscript{74}

Because School Boards could establish separate schools but were generally denied the right to compel blacks to attend them, School Boards were forced to find creative ways to separate blacks. In 1850 the Chatham Township Municipal Council passed a by-law which chopped-up school sections in a way that isolated black neighbourhoods in the

\textsuperscript{72} [AO], Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, vol. 27, Duncan Campbell (Harwich) to Ryerson, March 14, 1862.
\textsuperscript{73} A Story of Public Schools in Colchester South Township, (1966), 13
\textsuperscript{74} [AO], Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, vol. 21, Samuel Atkin (Malden) to Ryerson, December 29, 1856
attempt to force blacks into a single separate school. School Boards also exempted blacks from paying common school taxes so as to justify the exclusion of blacks by taking away blacks’ legal basis for claims of possessing the right to attend the common school. The trustees of Sandwich excluded blacks from attending the common school and exempted most blacks from paying the common school taxes. But not all School Boards were so charitable as to exempt blacks from paying for schools they were precluded from attending. In Chatham, black parents petitioned Ryerson because they were compelled to pay the common schools tax, yet were excluded from the common schools. In his reply to the Chatham district school board, Ryerson responded:

Sir, I have received a letter from a number of colored people in the Town of Chatham complaining that while they are taxed for the erection of a public school house and for the support of the public school, their children are excluded from it. Before giving an official opinion relative to the matter and complaint which has been made to me I wish to hear your explanation on the subject and I will thank you for it at your earliest convenience.

School boards would also circumvent the statute that required them to provide funding for separate schools. In the meantime, blacks were excluded from the common schools or forced to attend make-shift schools often in terrible physical condition. In Windsor, the School Board passed a proposal to build three schools, one for each of Catholics, Protestants and blacks. But for ten years, no black school was ever built. By 1856 both religious schools had been built, but despite there being no school for blacks, blacks were excluded from either of the other schools. There was still no black-use school building in 1858. Instead the trustees appointed an inadequately equipped and small house to serve blacks educational needs.

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75 Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 215
76 Ibid, 287
77 [AO], Outgoing Education Correspondence, Letter Book F, RG 2-8-0-6, M/S 925-3, Ryerson to Chatham Board of School Trustees, Chatham, March 7, 1852
78 Simpson, *Under the North Star*, 306
The house that they have provided for our children I would inform you is about 16 by 24 all told, for girls and boys; and then our children living just at the school house (for whites) would be compelled to come away to this coop...when there are [sic] a pleasant school house with comforts, not near filled up.79

The trustees claimed the schoolhouse was a ‘temporary’ solution while plans for a black school were going forward. But black parents recognized such deception for what it was and continued trying to gain access to the religious schools. In 1859 Clayborn Harris requested permission from the Board of Trustees to allow his child entry into either of the religious schools. His request was rejected on grounds that a new and adequate school would be provided for blacks.80 In 1862 a separate school for blacks was finally built, managed by black trustees under the auspices of the Windsor Board of Education.81

As a result of these exclusionary practices, blacks were often forced to attend schools under extremely poor conditions.82 In Amherstburg, Levi Foster wrote to the School Board in 1856, requesting that his child be admitted to the common school because of the deplorable conditions of the separate school. Benjamin Drew visited the separate school in question, and concurred with Foster’s conclusions.

There was an attendance of twenty-four, - number on the list, thirty. The schoolhouse is a small, low building, and contains neither blackboard nor chair...The whole interior is comfortless and repulsive. The teacher, a black lady, is much troubled by the frequent absences of the pupils, and the miserably tattered and worn out condition of the books. Two inkstands were in use, which, on being nearly inverted, yielded a very bad ink. The teacher appeared to be one of the working sort, disposed to bear up as well as she could under her many discouragements but the whole school adds one more dreary chapter to ‘the pursuit of knowledge under difficulties.’83

Despite deplorable conditions, the school board was un-moved and refused Foster’s child

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79 [AO], Incoming Education Correspondence, Ryerson Papers, Horton to Ryerson, Feb 16, 1859
80 [AO], Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, vol. 26, Clayborn Harris to William Horton, February 16, 1859, enclosed in a letter from Horton to Ryerson, Feb 16, 1859
81 Simpson, Under the North Star, 308
82 In Colchester in Nov, 1864, black parents complained that the trustees had enforced “defacto” segregation by bussing white kids to different schools outside the zone in which they lived. The trustees justified this by claiming that the conditions of the school were unfit for human occupation. However, they forced blacks to continue to attend the rat infested school; (Simpson, Under the North Star, 285)
83 Drew, A North-Side View, 245
entry. And many white school officials claimed that the poor condition of separate schools was through no fault of the Boards’. In Malden Township, one trustee explained to Ryerson that “they [blacks] have numbers and means enough to keep up schools themselves if they would act right.”\textsuperscript{84} However, there was plenty of evidence to the contrary demonstrating that this simply was not the case. A white missionary working in Dresden commented:

> Now and then, a fitful effort is made by the colored people to supply the deficiency, and an apology for a school is carried on for a few weeks, but it soon breaks down for want of funds.\textsuperscript{85}

Moreover, the fact that the Department of Education’s Poor School Fund granted money to separate schools in both Colchester and Amherstburg\textsuperscript{86} demonstrates that for the most part, blacks could not financially maintain good quality schools on their own. And Drew concluded the obvious; that the “principle reason for [the] neglect of common school advantages…is the prejudice of the whites.”\textsuperscript{87}

Ultimately, the courts inconsistencies and Ryerson’s passive position meant that until popular prejudice changed, or officials like Ryerson were willing to stand up for blacks’ rights; blacks were going to have a difficult time educating their children in public schools.

\textsuperscript{84} [AO], Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, vol. 21, Samuel Atkin (Malden) to Ryerson, December 29, 1856
\textsuperscript{85} Mission to the Fugitive Slaves, (1863-4), 12, quoted in Simpson, Under the North Star, 312
\textsuperscript{86} [AO], Outgoing Education Correspondence, RG 2-8, Vol. 19, Ryerson to James Kevill, March 13, 1857; vol. 21, Ryerson to F.G Elliot, December 3, 1857.
\textsuperscript{87} Drew, North-Side View, 103
CHAPTER FIVE:

“We Must Educate:”¹ Black and White Attitudes to Education and Its’ Impact on Racial Tension Over Issues of Schooling During the 1850’s

It is clear that prejudice was the determining factor in shaping blacks’ experience with schooling in Upper Canada between 1840 and 1860. But it is also evident that racial tension over issues of schooling intensified during the 1850s. This was largely because schooling and education was attaining a newly important status for both blacks and whites during the 1850s. As a result, whites were more inclined to exclude blacks from common schools at the same time as blacks were less willing to be excluded. And thus, as the stakes over education heightened, so too did racial tension.

It is not a coincidence that whites, especially in rural districts and smaller centers, began excluding blacks from common schools during the same period that schooling and education began to achieve a newly important status within white Upper Canadian society. School Reformers claimed that by 1850, “a dramatic increase in co-operation and interest of the people at large in the support of the Common Schools” had occurred. Thomas Higginson, the Superintendent of Esquire District, Ottawa reported that “a feeling is…springing up on the part of parents and guardians, and the community generally, that the education of the rising generation is indispensable.” Superintendent Elias of the Colborne District claimed that people under his authority were becoming more aware of the advantages of giving their children the means of obtaining knowledge at any cost.

The public mind, in this respect…has undergone a most salutary change…The

¹ Letter to the Editor, “The Provincial Freeman, May 6, 1854 (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/pf/reel1/00015-x1-y0-z1-r0-0-0)
apathy and carelessness which formerly prevailed have given way to activity and energy; and the prevailing desire now is to extend and advance knowledge, and to instruct and enlighten the rising generation.²

These new attitudes echoed the rhetoric of the School Reformer’s movement. The Reformer’s movement began out of popular criticism circulating across Upper Canada during the 1830s about the poor state of schooling in general, and by an increasing perception that, as a result of poor schooling, Upper Canadian society was degenerate and ‘backwards’. In 1829 the Upper Canadian Assembly published a report on education that summarized the growing list of criticisms, complaints and concerns over issues of schooling. The report denounced the grammar school system as ideologically and financially elitist and exclusive. Trustees were berated as incompetent and corrupt. And the quality and condition of common schools were deemed inadequate to promote ‘proper’ learning. The report called for all around improvement of common schools, better texts and curriculum. Teachers were denounced as too often being of poor character, scarce in quality and quantity, and underpaid.³ In 1835-6, the Assembly produced another report on education. Similar in content to the earlier report, the 1835 report was more proscriptive than critical.

[We] must educate the masses; [education and/or schooling] should be scientific and modern, rather than classical; should equip women for careers; should train all teachers; should see that school boards be elective and representative; should achieve uniformity, by inspectors, of teachers and textbooks, should derive revenue from taxes, should provide for Normal schools and a superintendent of common schools.⁴

² “Annual Report of the Chief SI of Schools for Upper Canada, From August 1845 to August 1846” in J. George Hodgins, Historical and Other Papers and Documents Illustrative of the Educational System of Ontario, 1842-1861, Volume V, (Toronto: L.K Cameron, 1912), 62; One school official of the Midland District described an increased interest in school affairs by parents, (Ibid, 49); Another school official also noted that “a greatly increased interest has been created among the people at large, on the importance…of Common School Instruction.” (Ibid, 48); Ibid, 63; Ibid, 50
And in 1838-9 Lord Durham published an educational survey. The report held that the educational condition of the country at large was deplorable, and should be considered in a system of public instruction, commencing with the Common School and terminating with the University; being connected and harmonious throughout, and equally embracing all classes without respect to religious sect or political party.5

The report also concluded that the Upper and Lower colonies of Canada needed to be unified in order to better manage education.6 This occurred in 1841 with the Union Act. It divided Canada into Upper and Lower provinces, and established a Provincial Superintendent of Schools to oversee and manage the educational progress in each.7

Accompanying critiques of schooling was a general perception that Upper Canada was in a state of political, economic and social instability. Although greatly exaggerated, this perception was not without truth. The slow economic growth of the colony, particularly in comparison with Upper Canada’s American neighbour, fostered a sense of stagnation and perpetual poverty. A growing tide of popular dissatisfaction with the ruling Tory oligarchy and demand for political and governmental reform culminated in rebellion in 1837-8. This created fears that Upper Canadians were un-governable, and that the colonial political structure was all too fragile. There was also an increase of poor immigrants flooding into Upper Canadian cities, living off occasional or seasonal work but largely unemployed, living in slums and creating a feared increase in crime. This coupled with the growing secularization of society which some people believed eroded societal morality, fueled concerns of a ‘social crises’. All of these issues entrenched the notion that Upper Canada was enduring a period of general decay, distress and

6 Walker, “Education in Ontario,” 12
7 Hodgins, Historical and Other Papers, (1912), 1
degeneration.

The Reformers publicly engaged in critical and “over-blown rhetorical”\(^8\) discussion and debate over what they perceived to be the problematic state of Upper Canadian society, its causes and solutions. Their campaign revolved around three central points. Firstly, the Reformers claimed that the political instability and economic stagnation of the colony was the result of widespread criminal and immoral behaviour. Secondly, they claimed that the cause of this degenerate social state was ignorance and poverty. Lastly, they argued that the solution to the latter and thus, the former was compulsory public schooling. They bombarded the press with rhetoric warning of the dangers of ignorance and rejoicing in the wonders of schooling.\(^9\) The greatest concern of the Reformers was “the creation of subjects who were capable of being governed - or of governing themselves,” believing that a system of “state controlled schools…purged of American influences… [was the] cure to the very real ills of their times.”\(^10\) The logic supporting this system of belief was circular. The lack of education was claimed as the cause, the remedial power of education, the solution to all of society’s problems. And Ryerson became the poster-boy for education as the cure-all by the end of the 1830s.

If the Reformers disputed specifics regarding the future of schooling, they all agreed on the need for reform. Their belief in the remedial powers of education was based upon nineteenth century Christian moral-philosophy and a newfound recognition that one’s conditions had environmental causes.

According to Ryerson, the state of society reflected man’s propensity for evil,

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\(^8\) Susan E. Houston & Allison Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth Century Ontario*, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1991), 97

\(^9\) Ibid, 98

\(^10\) Ibid, 100; 105
ignorance and criminality. And he believed that only Christianity could improve man’s earthly condition.\textsuperscript{11} But, in his view, the transformation from this state to “the good” did not occur naturally. It must be taught.\textsuperscript{12} And thus, Christian morality would become a vital part of Ryerson’s educational plans. Ryerson’s thinking also reflected the mid-nineteenth century recognition that social problems had environmental causes.\textsuperscript{13} In Charles Duncombe’s 1836 \textit{Report on the Subject of Education in Upper Canada}, Ryerson directly connected his perception of the idle, dirty, criminal and immoral condition of youth to the poor examples set by parents.

\begin{quote}
[Children] witness at home nothing in the way of example, but what is degrading; early taught to observe intemperance, and to hear obscene and profane language without disgust; obliged to beg, and even encouraged to acts of dishonesty to satisfy the wants induced by the indolence of their parents.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

This was an important aspect of the School Reformers’ thinking. If antisocial behaviour was learned, then the opposite was also true. This revelation was accompanied by a newly formulated relationship between the individual and society.

\begin{quote}
Education is the elevation of a thinking animal into reasoning, active, beneficent and happy intelligence; the culture and ripening of the seeds of reason, judgment, will, and the affections, into a teeming harvest of virtue, enterprise, honour, usefulness and happiness. The object of education, rightly understood is, first, to make youth good men- good members of universal society; secondly, to fit them for usefulness to that particular society of which they constitute an integral part- to form their principles and habits- to develop their talents and dispositions in such a way, as will be most serviceable to the institutions under which they live, and to the interests of the country in which they dwell…Education is a means to an end; and ought, throughout the process of its acquirement, to be connected with the end proposed.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

In this passage, Ryerson clearly recognized that education played a regenerative and healing function in the development of a lasting society.

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{11} Egerton Ryerson, \textit{Report on A System of Public Elementary Instruction For Upper Canada, 1846}, (Montreal, Lovell and Gibson, 1847), 20
\bibitem{12} Ibid, 62
\bibitem{13} Houston & Prentice, \textit{Schooling and Scholars}, 99
\bibitem{15} Egerton Ryerson, “The Kind of Education which Canadian Youths Require; and Hints to Them for Its Attainment.” (Victoria University Archives, 1841), 50d.
\end{thebibliography}
Together, these newfound ideas fostered the view of schooling as a tool of socialization — as a delivery vehicle for state ideology. And this accounts, in large part, for the sudden governmental interest in educational affairs in Upper Canada during the 1840s. Neil McDonald argues that the process of socialization requires two fundamental assumptions about the way in which people learn and integrate into society. Firstly, that children can and do learn the basic values, knowledge and attitudes that will influence their future behaviour as citizens at a young age. Secondly, that political regimes view a child’s socialization as necessary to the survival of political society. Because it is difficult for governments to control the primary agents of socialization, political regimes turn to the school system as their solution. While the power of socialization, McDonald asserts, has become a commonly accepted part of the modern political ideological process, it was a revolutionary notion in the mid-nineteenth century. But Ryerson and the School Reformer’s clearly understood that “the regime that leaves” the process of socialization “to chance, risks social and political chaos.” The then current state of Upper Canadian society demonstrated this point to Reformers like Ryerson.

I cannot but see that the public mind in this country is in a chaotic state, without any controlling current of feeling, or fixed principle of action, in civil affairs; but susceptible, by proper management and instruction, of being cast into any mould of rational opinion and feeling; yet liable, without judicious direction, to fall into a state of “confusion worse confounded.”

Thus, according to Ryerson, education should not only be practical, so as to improve man’s earthly condition, but also be geared toward establishing a mutually beneficial

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17 Ibid, 83
18 Ibid, 81
relationship between the individual and society.

By education, I mean not the mere acquisition of certain arts, or of certain branches of knowledge, but that instruction and discipline which qualify and dispose the subjects of it for their appropriate duties and employments of life, as Christians, as persons of business, and also as members of the civil community in which they live.²⁰

This socializing purpose of education was reflected in the central principles of education underpinning the school reform of the 1840’s. Ryerson outlined these principles in his 1846 Report on the Subject of Education in Upper Canada.

Firstly, education should be universal - accessible and free to everyone regardless of social and economic class, religious convictions, gender or race.²¹ Education, Ryerson claimed, was the “equal right and interest of all classes; and is sanctioned by the authority and example of God Himself.”²² The second principle was that education should be practical.²³ This reflected the lack of bureaucracy and divisions of labour that were essential toward the creation of political and economic stability. “The object of education,” Ryerson stated, “is to prepare men for their duties, and the preparation and disciplining of the mind for the performance of them. What the child needs in the world he should doubtless be taught in school.”²⁴ The third principle was that education should be religious and moral in foundation.²⁵ This reflected Ryerson’s overarching belief that society’s political, social and economic woes were the result of a lack of common morality. Schooling could provide the forum through which ‘proper’ behavioural norms would develop and would bind people in a common social code despite their differences.

²⁰ Ryerson, 1846 Report, 9
²¹ Ibid, 20
²² Egerton Ryerson, “The Principles Inaugural Address; written on the nature and advantages of an English and liberal Education, and delivered at the opening of Victoria College, Toronto, 1842,” (Toronto, By order of the Board of Trustees; printed at the Guardian Office, 1842, University Archives), 15
²³ Ryerson, 1846 Report, 20
²⁵ Ryerson, 1846 Report, 21
The fourth principle was that education should contain basic, elementary knowledge; generally including spelling, reading, writing and arithmetic, and more specifically, geography, history, music and so on.\textsuperscript{26} He asserted that “every topic is practical-connected with the objects, duties, relations and interests of common life,”\textsuperscript{27} and thus important to the creation of good citizens. Lastly, education should promote and emphasize the mental and physical aspects of man’s capabilities.\textsuperscript{28} This meant that there should be schools that focused on different skills and abilities. These principles, along with the issues over society and schooling, would form the basis of the new system of schooling enacted in the 1840s.

During the 1840s, School Reformers worked hard to promote and convince people of their views even as they enacted a series of complimentary school laws. They circled around core talking points, most significantly, the “unspeakable blessings of Education” for both individuals and society. It is clear that School Promoters viewed their own role as to convince people that education was in the best interests, both “present and prospective, of all classes of the community.”\textsuperscript{29}

The rhetoric of the reformers was dramatic. They proposed a new world based on two classes of people: the educated and the uneducated, and painted a picture in where the uneducated would be left behind…to seek education was to seek social advancement [and a place in the new world order]; to neglect it was to tempt personal and familial disaster.\textsuperscript{30}

School Promoters claimed that government-run schooling was a good thing; claiming that the alternative left children vulnerable to a number of negative influences which would, in turn, not only impact the rest of these children’s lives, but the good order of society as

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{26} Ryerson, \textit{1846 Report}, 22-25
\textsuperscript{27} Ryerson, “Improving Man Kind,” 145
\textsuperscript{28} Ryerson, \textit{1846 Report}, 60
\textsuperscript{29} “McNab to Metcalf, 1844 Report of the State of Common Schools in Upper Canada, 1844-45” in Hodgins, \textit{Historical and Other Papers}, (1912), 9; Ibid, 9; Ibid, 10
\textsuperscript{30} Houston & Prentice, \textit{Schooling and Scholars}, 103
\end{footnotesize}
well. Justice Robinson warned of the ‘dangers’ of leaving the education of youth in the hands of potentially unqualified people and claimed that government oversight was the only way to ensure this wouldn’t happen. “Without such a general preparatory system as we see here in operation, the instruction of the great mass of our population would be left in a measure to chance.”

This educational rhetoric worked to alarm people into supporting public schools. For example, the character and quality of teachers, “whose power over Upper Canadian children school reformers at once welcomed and feared” was of fundamental concern to School Promoters.

A good Master ought to be a man who knows much more than he is called upon to teach, that he may teach with intelligence and with taste; who is to live in a humble sphere, and yet have a noble and elevated spirit; that he may preserve that dignity of mind and of deportment, without which he will never obtain the respect and confidence of families; who possesses a rare mixture of gentleness and firmness; for, inferior though he be, in station, to many individuals in the Communities, he ought to be the obsequious servant of none; a man not ignorant of his rights, but thinking much more of his duties; showing to all a good example and serving to all as a counselor; not given to change his condition, but satisfied with his situation, because it gives him the power of doing good.

A good teacher could change lives for the better while the impact of a bad teacher could be exponential. School Promoters also argued that school reform was of the utmost importance because of the ramifications schooling had upon the future of all society. “In civil polity,” Ryerson explained “no principle is more obvious and vital, than that the Interests of the whole society are binding upon each individual member of it.”

In 1844-45 McNab wrote that the “Common School, without any kind of question, is a most interesting institution and one upon which, it must be admitted by all, are suspended issues to the future well-being of individuals, and of the community in general.”

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32 Ryerson, *1846 School Report*, 156
33 Houston & Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars*, 191; Ibid, 101
Robinson reiterated this belief in 1852: “We occupy a peculiar and a somewhat critical position on this Continent, and more than we can foresee many probably depend upon the manner in which our decedents may be able to sustain themselves in it.”

School Promoters also tended to see things in pairs of opposites and attempted to draw a line in the sand between the educated and uneducated. Not only would ignorance breed criminality, but willful ignorance was portrayed as criminal in and of itself.

With everything to urge and to tempt them to the acquisition of knowledge, and everything to aid them in obtaining it, it will be impossible that the people of Canada can do otherwise that feel that, in their case, emphatically, ‘poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction.’

Ryerson reiterated this point, accusing people who resisted school reform as “evidently desire[ous of] untutored ignorance and free barbarism.” But despite the efforts of School Promoters, “not all were swept away by the rhetoric of common school expansion, teacher improvement, or free schools” as the difficulties implementing the laws of the 1840s illuminated.

Entering the decade of school reform, School Promoters immediately recognized that the development of a successful school system also meant engendering the “educational development of the public mind of Upper Canada.” But persistent popular opposition to the idea of ‘free schools’, and the ongoing need to convince people of its underlying purpose, demonstrate just how unfamiliar the Reformers’ notions must have seemed to Upper Canadians during this period. Thus, ‘developing the public educational mind’ meant changing contemporary attitudes and conceptions toward education.

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35 “McNab to Metcalf” in Hodgins, Historical and Other Papers, (1912), 9; “Robinson’s Address,” in Historical Educational Papers, (1911), 35
36 “Robinson’s Address” in Hodgins, Historical Educational Papers, (1911), 35
37 Hodgins, Historical and Other Papers, (1912), 29
38 Houston & Prentice, Schooling and Scholars, 123
39 Hodgins, Historical and Other Papers, (1912), 48
Achieving this, School Reformers would quickly recognize was not only the key to establishing a sustainable and effective school system, but that doing so would be “the most difficult of accomplishments in laying the foundation of a system of universal education.”\(^{40}\) This was clearly evidenced by the general reaction to the early School Acts of 1841 and 1843.

Many local authorities and local populations were highly critical of and perplexed by the new school regulations and machinery, which ultimately amounted to a decrease in local school autonomy. There were numerous ways in which the school laws eroded local control over their schools. The Acts established the practice of taxing local populations to support all the common schools of a given area. This system was meant to alleviate the pressure on individual communities to support their own schools by spreading the financial burden. The issue of ‘free schools’ was also highly contentious because people were generally unaccustomed to the idea of being responsible for the educational welfare of others. This was largely because up until this time, education was considered a private, familial matter. Attitudes toward education were heavily influenced by attitudes toward children. Because of the frontier conditions of life during the early nineteenth century, most people believed children had a responsibility to help the survival of their family through labour.\(^{41}\) And familial educational practices revolved on this belief. Learning was inseparable from labour and labour, including that of children, ensured the continued survival of the family through generations.\(^{42}\) This was a serious point of contention for advocates of educational development throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.

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\(^{40}\) Hodgins, *Historical and Other Papers*, (1912), 48
\(^{41}\) Houston & Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars*, 15
\(^{42}\) Ibid, 17
century. Ryerson recognized that opposition to formal schooling was directly related to the perception of its’ usefulness.

The conviction of the absolute necessity of education…is not so universal in this Country…here, thousands of Parents look upon the sending of their children to school as a loss…and…as an unnecessary oppression.

This meant that apprenticeships, household training and learning the family business were informal but extremely significant forms of education. Thus, the taxation laws proposed a radical shift away from the way many people conceived of education and schooling. Furthermore, the 1841 and 1843 School Acts stipulated that denominational schools were also to receive funding from local taxes, under the auspice of universality.

Tax payers across Upper Canada were outraged at the prospect of their hard-earned money supporting the education of religious minorities and poor people. But people were forced to comply with the new taxation policy because that was the only avenue through which to procure government funding, without which most schools would not survive. However, not all conceded to this coercion. And many common schools closed down in protest to the taxation laws.

Adding insult to injury, not only was forcing taxation on local populations perceived by many as an unnecessary and unfair governmental imposition, but government funding also came with numerous conditions and stipulations parents and

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43 In 1807, Strachan protested that kids were being removed from schools too early in their lives and attended schools too irregularly in order to work in the family business. And in 1812 Strachan complained that parents forced their children to work like slaves at a time when children’s bodies and minds couldn’t handle the rigor. These criticisms were accompanied by a change in attitudes toward children, childhood and youth in general. Philosophers, clergymen and school masters began to talk about the ‘innocence of youth’ and feared the long term impact of overworking kids, (Houston & Prentice, Schooling and Scholars, 15-17).

44 Hodgins, Historical and Other Papers, (1912), 29
45 Houston & Prentice, Schooling and Scholars, 21
46 Hodgins, Historical and Other Papers, (1912), 123
47 Houston & Prentice, Schooling and Scholars, 111
communities often viewed as further infringing on local schooling autonomy. These regulations generally stipulated that all persons regardless of race, gender, religious creed or socio-economic status had the right to attend any common school within their school district. And many communities felt this micro-management took away from the “‘working man’” the control and “dignity of educating his own children.” Furthermore, the Common Schools Act of 1841 removed individual school trustees, authorities of local schools since the first School Act in 1807, with new provincial bodies of administrators assigned to oversee all the schools in one area. And conflict between local populations and new government employees was the cause of much of the unrest that led to the repeal of the new school laws. Many people complained bitterly about provincial school officials, accusing them of corruption, mismanagement and ignorance of local customs. In return, provincial school officials complained that local populations were ignorant, ‘backward’ and un-cooperative. The School Act of 1846, 1847 and 1849 reflected the legislature’s struggle to find an acceptable balance between the local desire for school autonomy with the government’s desire for a central and unified educational system.

Ryerson recognized that the newness and unfamiliarity of reform principles and laws and its’ accompanying bureaucratic machinery would be a source of difficulty, distress and confusion for legislators, school officials and the larger population. And true enough, chaos characterized the school reform of the 1840s. This was evident in the massive amount of incoming and outgoing correspondence of the Department of Education during the 1840s. As a result, by 1845 the Department of Education was

48 Houston & Prentice, Schooling and Scholars, 45
49 Ibid, 121
50 “McNab to Metcalf” in Hodgins, Historical and Other Papers, (1912), 9
51 Ibid, 49
52 Ibid, 24
essentially relegated to the role of mediator and guidance counselor to confused and distressed people as they struggled to make sense of the laws. “This extensive communication with all classes of the population still continues though it may rationally be expected, as intelligence in School matters spreads,” although it was hoped that, as people adjusted and adapted to the changes, “this portion of Office duties w[ould] be greatly diminished.”\(^{53}\) They would not.

By 1850, it became clear that the 1840s had been an unsettling period of legislative trial and error. This was evidenced in the way each new School Act was meant to fix the problems created by previous Acts. The 1841 Common Schools Act, which was found, “on trial, to be imperfect,”\(^ {54}\) directly led to the Hincks Act of 1843. But the Hincks Act was almost immediately rendered ineffective. A Municipal Reform Bill intended to create more effective township and city councils, and upon which the implementation of the School Act relied, failed to pass the legislature.\(^ {55}\) The Hincks Act was thus rendered ineffective. And after the failures of the first two School Acts, legislative activism went on a three year hiatus. During these three years, Ryerson carefully and thoroughly researched and planned for the next step in school reform.\(^ {56}\) He traveled abroad to study the school systems of other countries,\(^ {57}\) and examined the problems that impeded the earlier School Acts. Based on his findings, Draper’s Common Schools Act of 1846 and the 1847 Town and City School Amendment Act were passed by the legislature. These Acts were specifically tailored to placate critics and again solve problems of earlier

\(^{53}\) “McNab to Metcalf” in Hodgins, *Historical and Other Papers*, (1912), 7
\(^{54}\) Ibid, 10
\(^{55}\) Houston & Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars*, 114
\(^{56}\) Hodgins, *Historical Educational Papers*, (1911), 39
\(^{57}\) Ibid, 22
It was almost two years, however, before the familiar critics, whose complaints were never satisfied by Ryerson’s school laws, forced yet another legislative effort, the Cameron Act of 1849. Ideologically and functionally opposite of Ryerson’s 1846-7 School Acts, the Cameron Act led Ryerson to reevaluate the era of school reform that had evolved under his guidance. He concluded that the “uncertainty and perplexity of the public mind in respect to the School Law were peculiarly unfavorable to the interests of the Schools.” And the 1849 Act demonstrated to Ryerson that those on the other side of the ideological line — dividing those who supported public, universal education from those who wanted to retain private and communal control over schools — had to be met head-on. The basis of the entire system he helped build would be destroyed with legislation like the Cameron Act, or the chaos of the 1840s would continue to strangle educational progress. Either way, Ryerson’s system would never get up and running as intended. As a result, Ryerson and his supporters entered preparations for the 1850 Common Schools Act determined to appease and placate the public sentiment while solidifying the place of publicly funded schools. And this would not bode well for blacks during the 1850s.

Difficulties aside, School Reformers were optimistic going into the next decade. The intention of school reform as conceived by the School Reformers was to “transform the character of Canada West, to make the place Christian, productive and safe,” and to ultimately achieve “stable government,” through the production of the “governable

58 Hodgins, Historical Educational Papers, (1911), 21
59 J. George Hodgins, A Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada, From the Passing of the Constitutional Act of 1791, to the Close of the Reverend Doctor Ryerson’s Administration of the Education department in 1876, (Vol. 3, 1848, 1849, Toronto, L.K. Cameron, 1901), 225-250
60 Ibid, 79
61 “McNab to Metcalf” in Hodgins, Historical and Other Papers, (1912), 10
subjects that stable government required." And many supporters of school reform believed that these goals had been met.

The novitiate of doubt, distrust, speculation, crude experiment and legislative change has been past; a broad foundation has been laid; indifference has yield to inquiry; party hostility has dissolved into co-operative unity; the Master is becoming a respectable and respected man; the School had become a leading interest; the resources for its support from local voluntary taxation have doubled; the number of its pupils have more than doubled, the public voice had inscribed “Free to All”. 61

Both historians and his contemporaries alike agreed that Ryerson was in fact “staggeringly successful within the context…of [his] own purposes.” 64 Ryerson, however, remained critical and practical in assessing the educational progress of the 1840s. He reflected: “In the slow and difficult work of developing a Country’s Intellect and training a country’s Heart, an auspicious commencement has been made. But it is only a commencement.” 65

The increased importance of schooling to whites by the end of the 1840s meant that whites were even less sympathetic to the idea of integrated schools going into the next decade. And racial tensions would erupt over issues of schooling during the 1850s because, as whites became more determined than ever to keep blacks out of common schools, a growing number of blacks became equally determined to get into them.

Before 1850, education was important to blacks. But it was clear that during the 1850s, not only had the importance of education greatly increased, but blacks’ attitudes toward education had also taken on new meaning. The logical explanation for this new

62 Houston & Prentice, Schooling and Scholars, 116
63 “Annual Report of the Chief Superintendent, for the Year 1848” in Hodgins, Historical and Other Papers, (1912), 105; One superintendent claimed that as a result of increased experience with educational bureaucracy and a more general public interest in education, the “universal system of taxation” had become “popularly accepted”. The superintendent of Simcoe County similarly reported that “the novelty of such a tax has now worn off” and people had come around to its mutual benefit. (Ibid, 93; 65)
64 Hodgins, Documentary History, (1901), 34; Houston & Prentice, Schooling and Scholars, 115
65 Hodgins, Historical and Other Papers, (1912), 106; This referred to the statistics that demonstrated less than half of all eligible children (100,000 out of 250,000, according to the 1850 Annual Report of Education written by the Chief Superintendent) in Upper Canada attended schools by 1850.
educational outlook was that the rhetoric of racial uplift through education, espoused by Upper Canada’s new black leaders, was making an impact of the black population.

During the 1850s, black leader’s in Upper Canada joined black leaders across North America in a highly rhetorical public campaign to promote the idea of racial uplift to black settlers. Education and integrated schooling were key talking points of education racial uplift rhetoric.

Black leaders promoted the idea that education had immediate and practical benefits for individual blacks. But black leaders also wanted blacks to recognize that the advancement of the individual was inextricably linked to the advancement of the entire black race. Black leaders claimed that the impact of slavery was two-fold; it was the cause of blacks physical and mental ‘backwardness’, and was the cause of pervasive racism against blacks, the latter of which greatly impeded the advancement of the former. Material and physical advancement, black leaders claimed, was the key to eradicating the pervasive racism that rendered blacks unequal among whites. This inequality, black leaders insisted, allowed whites in the United States to justify the continuation of slavery. Thus, black leaders proposed that becoming educated was blacks’ greatest weapon in overcoming the racially-hostile environment in North America. Henry Bibb explained:

We regard the education of colored people in North America as being one of the most important measures connection 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 the power which will enable is to arise from degradation and command respect from the whole civilized world. Without it, we will 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 to endure and still retain their manhood....Show us a community of white people even in a free country where they may posses all the natural advantages of climate and soil that the world was ever blessed with and let there be no schools, no post offices, no newspapers circulated or read, no mental instruction given, orally or otherwise and we could write out the character of that people. They would have a grog shop at almost every public place. They would be ignorant, vicious and licentious. The county jails would seldom be unoccupied by prisoners,
With this passage, an ideology was born. Bibb issued a war-cry with the words: “By it [education] we can be strengthened and elevated. Without it we shall be ignorant, weak and degraded. By it we shall be clothed with the power which will enable is to arise from degradation and command respect from the whole civilized world. Without it, we will ever be imposed upon, oppressed and enslaved.”67 The ideology proposed that blacks were individually engaged in battle daily; the behaviour and actions of each person impacted the overall success of the war against racism and slavery. The dramatic language employed by Bibb served to heighten the stakes involved for ordinary blacks — to forego his warning about the importance of education was to tempt disaster not only for one’s own life and family, but for the entire black race. The way in which adult blacks became eager to learn reflected how this ideology had taken root. Everyone was doing their part to help ‘the cause’. William King described the newfound eagerness with which black adults desired to learn:

It was interesting to see men and women from twenty-five to thirty years of age and some even older who had never tried to learn before, begin with their ABC’s and try to learnt he names of letter and put them together in syllables. All the ones who could not read seemed anxious to learn and applied themselves with diligence, although hey found it a hard task to master the elements of the English tongue. But, by diligence and perseverance, they soon began to make progress.68

Racial uplift was also “deeply rooted in…nineteenth century notions of self-help.”69 This notion drew an ideological line in the sand among the black population of Upper Canada.

66 Voice of the Fugitive, Jan. 15, 1851 (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/vf/reel1/00006-x0-y0-z1-r)
67 Ibid
68 William King, Autobiography of Rev. William King written at intervals during last three years of his life, (Ontario, 1892,), 103-104, Library and Archives Canada, William King Collection, R4402-0-1-E, (http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/northern-star)
Those who worked hard to achieve the goals of racial uplift as espoused by black leaders were praised as ‘part of the future’. Those who were perceived as ‘not trying hard enough’ were ridiculed and portrayed as rogue elements within the ‘new’ black world. It was conform, or be left behind.

Self-help is now becoming the watch word among refugees in Canada. They are not only turning their attention to agricultural pursuits as a legitimate basis of self-support, but to become…supporters of education seems to be among the chief objects of every reflecting mind among our people.70

Becoming educated was considered the key to self-sufficiency. Part of this educational ideology was belief that the poor conditions of blacks’ lives were environmental in cause. This was crucial because it allowed blacks to believe that education really could improve their lives. Education could change the environment. Changing the environment would change destiny. Blacks, Bibb argued, were only at a disadvantage to whites because the “dark prison of mental degradation”71 of slavery was enduring even in freedom. Physically escaping slavery was not sufficient to overcome centuries of educational deprivation. But becoming educated would grant blacks the ability to better themselves and thus, was key if fugitives were to truly overcome the chains of slavery.

If we learn to read that [the Bible] we can then learn to read other books and papers and we should understand the laws of the government under which we live. To do this we should read in order to become wise, intelligent and useful in society. We should at least know how to read and write. When we have learned this we have the best means with which to educate ourselves.72

And there was evidence that blacks were influenced by these ideas. In 1855, Henry Galt surmised:

If the colored people had come into Canada with a knowledge of reading, writing and arithmetic there would be no difference between them and white people…They would have been just as skillful, just as far advanced in art and science as the whites. But they have to contend with the ignorance which slavery had brought upon them.

70 Voice, Feb. 26, 1852, (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/vf/reel1/00071-x0-y0-z1-r0-0-0)
72 Voice, Jan. 15, 1851, (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/vf/reel1/00006-x0-y0-z1-r0-0-0)
Still they are doing well, no one could expect them to do any better. Because blacks had been deprived of experience with ‘freedom’, these skills must then be learned. In this way, education served a very practical function. Self-sufficiency was also considered the most important step in becoming accepted and active participants in society. Thus, education was deemed so valuable by black leaders because it could teach blacks how to achieve both.

A separate and yet interrelated aspect of racial uplift through education was opposition to segregated schooling. Because “education in its broadest sense was viewed as the best answer to the problem of discrimination,” schooling represented the means to achieving racial equality. But this did not only refer to the benefits of becoming educated. And black leaders were as much advocates of integrated schooling as they were of the practical value of education. If white opposition to the mixing of blacks and whites was generally based upon preconceived prejudices, and if a “lack of meaningful contact between blacks and whites” only reinforced whites’ “prejudice and fear,” then integrated schools, in where blacks and whites would gain first-hand experience with each other, thus provided the best opportunity to change whites’ minds about blacks. And some whites also expressed the same belief. “If the black children were universally sent to school,” Buchanon hypothesized, “prejudice would probably die out before many years.”

76 Drew, *North-Side View*, 82
On the most obvious level, many white parents opposed integrated schooling because “children of the Colored people, many of whom have but lately escaped from a state of slavery may be, in respect to morals and habits, unfortunately worse trained than the white children are in general, and that their children might suffer from the effects of bad example.”77 The negative stereotypes about blacks associated with slavery were a common justification for whites’ opposition.78 However, Samuel Gridley Howe proposed that white parents feared more that ‘questionable character’ was that their children would actually learn to accept black children. He explains:

Underlying the great institution of the common school are to primal ideas, one of individual culture, and the other of human brotherhood. In the common school house is held the first gathering of the Demos, in primary assemblage, never to be dissolved, only adjourned from day to day, through all time. The little people trained in the exercise of family love at home, come together in the school-house to enlarge the circle of their affections by loving other children of the greater human family, in its wider home- the world.79

Buchanon, the Superintendent of Hamilton recognized the potential the democratic nature of schooling offered to improve the state of racial tension. “When any new ones [black students] came,” he explained, “I used to go out with them in the playground myself and play with them specially, just to show that I made no distinction whatever and the children made none. I found this plan most healthy in its operation.”80 Thus, perhaps many white parents were less fearful that black children would be a ‘bad influence’ on their own children, more than they worried that their own child might bring a black friend home from school for dinner one night. And it is just this potential, Howe concluded, that

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77 “Re: Dennis Hill v the School Trustees of Camden and Zone,” A digest of all cases decided in the several courts of error and appeal, Queen's Bench, common pleas, and Chancery, in Upper Canada, eds., Robert Harrison & Henry O’Brien (Vol. II, Toronto, H. Rowsell, 1863), 578 (Canadiana.org, accessed on Nov. 15, 2009, http://openlibrary.org/books/OL23414896M)
79 Ibid, 45
80 Ibid, 39
drove so many white parents to so adamantly oppose racially-mixed schooling.

Each party begins to see that the democratic tendency of the common school is to prevent or weaken castes while the inevitable tendency of the separate schools is to create and strengthen them.81

And, as it would turn out, it was precisely that which white parents feared that black leaders were counting on. Integrated schooling, for most black leaders, remained a fundamental step to achieving racial uplift.

The black press and the black church were two primary agents promoting racial uplift. All the articles on education published by Mary Ann Shadd and Henry Bibb, editors of the only black newspapers in Upper Canada, the Voice of the Fugitive and the Provincial Freeman, were directed toward the promotion of racial uplift. The same way that under Ryerson, “all the material put out was meant to supplement and reinforce other material,” these newspapers acted as a “propaganda machine, constructed to reinforce the ideology”82 of racial uplift. The newspapers printed articles that spoke to actions and behaviour that represented or supported the ‘new’ black attitude.

They have a small school house too which they sustain themselves. The Government School House for Colored children, built by American caste and placed in the outskirts of the town by American prejudices, they disdain to occupy. Denied equal school rights by the Government, they scorn the favour which proscribes their equality and dignity. They have braved too much for freedom to consent to the degradation which such a boon implies. A few of them are trying to sustain a select school like independent and public spirited citizens.83

In the Voice, Hiram Wilson discussed the new outlook of the blacks.

I gave the people a lecture on Saturday evening, which was listened to with profound attention. In the course of my remarks, I urged the cause of mental and moral elevation by integrity, temperance, industry, and good economy, and took the liberty to hold up and urge both the support of Your paper as a means of enlightenment. On Sabbath…I had the pleasure of preaching twice in a good old-fashioned school-house, full of earnest listeners. I shall do the best I can to encourage education

81 Howe, Refugees from Slavery, 43
82 Houston & Prentice, Schooling and Scholars, 119
Both newspapers frequently published letters from black settlers who also echoed the sentiments of racial uplift and the importance of education. In 1854, the *Freeman* published a letter from a Mr. Henry Jackson of Simcoe:

> We must educate. It is not enough for us to merely read, write and cipher in the common rudiments. We must dip or pry into the fine arts and science. We must become painters and sculptors and architects. In short, scientific and it must be by our own exertions. When we have ended our collegiate course we are not truly wise but must become so by research afterwards...So as soon as we become educated we will become great. “for knowledge is power” is a phrase quite common yet whenever I repeat it there seems to be rays of lustres emitted and it seems to exhibit new and strange attraction. What wealth is so justly appreciated as that which one gains you the sweat of his own brow? What knowledge is equal to that which one had...by long and contained research? What men have been so great as the self-made man? ‘Lives of great men all remind us; We can make our lives sublime And departing leave behind us Footprints on the sands of time.”

Because many blacks remained illiterate or barely literate, churches also played an important role in disseminating the ideas of racial uplift. And good old fashioned word of mouth was the primary means of spreading the ideas of racial uplift. People formed societies in where they read and discussed the issues illuminated in the media. There were also community events, meetings in where discussion of the ideas promoted by the newspapers took place. Thus, most blacks in Upper Canada were likely well aware of the issues surrounding black education. And the way in which blacks responded to issues of schooling during the 1850s indicate that ordinary blacks found a stake in the ideological war of anti-slavery.

Perhaps the greatest evidence that schooling and education was becoming increasingly revered by blacks in Upper Canada during the 1850s was the fact that, despite the discouragement blacks must have felt in the face of so many obstacles to

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84 “Letter from Hiram Wilson,” *Voice*, Dec. 3, 1851, (OurOntario.ca, [http://ink.ourontario.ca/vf/reel1/00062-x1-y0-z1-r0-0-0](http://ink.ourontario.ca/vf/reel1/00062-x1-y0-z1-r0-0-0))

85 “Letter to the Editor,” *Freeman*, May 6, 1854 (OurOntario.ca, [http://ink.ourontario.ca/pf/reel1/00015-x1-y0-z1-r0-0-0](http://ink.ourontario.ca/pf/reel1/00015-x1-y0-z1-r0-0-0))
becoming educated, they still clearly retained a strong desire to do so. And the newfound significance of education for blacks “alone accounts for the perseverance, the litigation, and the general agitation of blacks over schooling.” Blacks recognized the ambiguously worded separate school clause for what it was — a slippery slope. Blacks in Toronto explained that the separate school clause was “not only detrimental to our elevation, but…the first step towards taking away that equality which the British guarantees to all…her subjects.” And when it became apparent that the separate schools would be used to enforce segregated schooling, black parents across Upper Canada used all the resources in their power to fight the abuse of their rights. Blacks petitioned all the levels of the administrative hierarchy, complaining of unequal treatment and requesting that their children be allowed to attend common schools. When these attempts failed as they most often did, some blacks took school officials to court. And when these attempts also failed which they too most often did, blacks were just as creative in expressing their opposition to the discriminatory and exclusionary practices of white school boards as were the boards themselves in inventing with them. The petition by the black residents of Simcoe County to Ryerson reflects the multiple avenues blacks explored in pursuit of their rights.

We the undersigned inhabitants of color nor Residing in Simcoe and surrounding country…we beg to inform your honor that we have always been deprived of the privilege for many years of sending our children to the common schools. And what reason we cannot tell we have always Been compelled to pay school taxes. We have tried every lawful and civil means to get our children into the common Schools, and as yet have failed in the attempt. We have applied to the trustees time after time, and, year after year and failed in it. We have taken our children in to the schools and desired the teachers to receive and teach them which thing has also been refused.

86 Jason H. Silverman, Unwelcome Guests: Canada West’s Response to American Fugitive Slaves, 1800–1865 (Millwood, N.Y.: Associated Faculty Press, 1985), 145
87 Toronto Globe, June 25, 1850
88 [AO], Incoming Education Correspondence] RG 2-12, Incoming Correspondence to Chief Superintendent of Education from Canada West, M/SS, Petition R. Henderson to E. Ryerson, Dec 12, 1851
Dennis Hill of Dresden petitioned Ryerson complaining about the discriminatory and exclusionary practices of the Dresden trustees.

I have used every respectful effort in my power to have my son, eleven years of age, admitted into the above-named schools, but all to no purpose. They say that I am a Black man and that it would be presumption [sic] to me to contend for my son to go to school among white children. Though, I am among the largest tax payers in the said school system...And to be debarred from my Rights of School Privilege for no other cause than that my skin is a few shades darker than my neighbours, I do think is unfair...Will you be so kind as to instruct me how to proceed, and how I shall arrange matters so as to give my children their education, for I cannot let them grown up in ignorance.  

When Ryerson offered Hill no reply, he took the trustees of Dresden to court. Although he lost the case, his actions indicate that blacks were truly determined not only to educate their children, but to be treated equally. The Provincial Freeman, also reported that blacks in St. Catharine’s boycotted their separate school in protest. Particularly when compared to the lack of response by blacks to exclusion in the 1840s, this surge in aggressiveness signified that a new attitude toward education had come about.

In light of the way blacks responded to exclusion and separate schools, it can hardly be claimed, as some black leaders asserted, that blacks who attended separate schools didn’t fight hard enough in their own defense. Despite that Windsor blacks attended a separate school; they continued attempts to be admitted to the common school. “[W]e as a people,” they stated in a petition to Ryerson in 1859, “shall...stand up for all the rights that the law provides us.” Nor can it be argued that significant numbers of blacks preferred to remain separate. Most blacks who attended separate institutions did so because their newfound desire to become educated directly conflicted with whites’ equal

89 [AO], Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, Vol. 14, Dennis Hill to Egerton Ryerson, November 22, 1852
90 “Rev. J. W. Loguen’s Visit to Canada” in Freeman, May 24, 1856, (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/pf/reel1/00184-x0-y0-z1-r0-0-0)
91 Drew, North-Side View, 288
92 [AO], Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, Vol. 26, Thomas Jones et al. Committee for the Coloured People, Windsor, to Ryerson, March 2, 1850
desire to exclude blacks. Despite that the blacks of Simcoe attended a separate school, they stated unequivocally: “we had no desire to be set apart.” And many other blacks petitioned Ryerson with much the same sentiment.

Yet there was conflict within the black community during the 1850s over blacks who attended separate schools. Black elites were less critical of blacks who attended separate schools if they had, according to the elites’ standards, sufficiently protested and resisted before opting to attend it.

They [blacks] had rather an inferior school in consequence of a few black haters who a few years ago took the advantage of their ignorance, and against the law and usage of the county assigned to them an exclusive school. However they understand their rights better now and the best of all they have the courage to demand them.

Black elites, however, were heavily critical of blacks who opted to open separate schools on their own accord. In response to hearing that some blacks in Windsor requested a separate school, Bibb wrote that the request “was not made by the intelligent portion of the colored population, but by a lot of ignoramuses who were made tools of and who knew not what they were doing.” Drew also criticized those Windsor blacks requesting a separate school and believed that all the people of Windsor would support a common school regardless of race. In fact, blacks in Windsor went an entire decade without a proper school.

This conflict was largely the result of a class divide between urban black elites and poor rural blacks. It is likely that all blacks preferred integrated schooling, but in

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93 [AO], Incoming Education correspondence, RG 2-12, Vol. 11, Inhabitants of color now residing in Simcoe and surrounding county to Ryerson, December 12, 1851
94 Blacks in Chatham wrote Ryerson in 1852 claiming that they had never requested a separate school and that the trustees claimed they could force blacks to attend it. These blacks appealed to Ryerson to overturn this verdict. ([AO], Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, Vol. 12, Committee of the Colored Citizens of Chatham to Ryerson, March 7, 1852).
95 “Rev. J. W. Loguen’s Visit to Canada,” Freeman, May 24, 1856, (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/pf/reel1/00184-x0-y0-z1-r0-0-0)
96 Voice, Jan. 1, 1852, (OurOntario.ca, http://ink.ourontario.ca/vf/reel1/00069-x0-y0-z1-r0-0-0)
97 Simpson, Under the North Star, 308
reality, integrated schools were almost exclusively in major urban centers like Toronto and Hamilton. As described in the last chapter, this was likely because Upper Class whites who tended to live in cities, were considered generally less prejudiced than were lower class whites living in small towns or rural areas. Simpson asks whether or not the absence of separate schools indicates that these larger cities had avoided the “problems of school integration that had to be faced in so many communities?”

In Hamilton’s case, the answer was certainly ‘no’. The Superintendent of Hamilton, Buchanon, indicated that although “the children of black people go to the public schools,” there were still a “great many of the white parents [who] object[ed] to it.” And Buchanon concluded that “if the question was put to vote, the people would vote against having Negroes remain here.” Hamilton’s school officials had established a hard line against white prejudice in the 1840s, when popular opposition to integration was ignored in favour of upholding blacks’ rights. And following in the example set by his predecessors, Buchanon’s own unwillingness to concede to popular prejudice remained the most important obstacle preventing whites from acting upon their long-held prejudices against blacks. But most communities didn’t posses school officials willing to act against the will of their own electorate. In Toronto, it is more difficult to judge the temperature of white prejudice over issues of schooling, because they were never given the chance to rise. Because the neighbourhood within which most blacks in Toronto lived (St. John’s Ward) corresponded to school zones, integrated schooling was never really an issue for Torontians. It is difficult to thus surmise how whites would have reacted had blacks been more dispersed in residential pattern.

98 Simpson, Under the North Star, 208
99 Howe, Refugees from slavery, 36
100 Ibid, 39
It is not a coincidence that nearly all the separate schools that existed in Upper Canada were in rural areas where blacks and whites were generally among the poorest of their respective racial groups. And it was in these areas where blacks faced the worst forms of discrimination, both in schooling and in other areas of social and economic interaction. These discriminatory and exclusionary practices and the general disregard for black schooling demonstrated by School Boards had detrimental consequences for blacks. And in most cases, exclusion from common schools meant that many blacks had to forego schooling altogether. There were very few educational options remaining for blacks who had been excluded from common schools. Separate schooling was one option, but they were problematic for a few reasons. For one, most blacks refused to attend them. Drew claimed:

> The determination of the vast majority of the colored people appears to be that if they cannot send their children to the white common schools, they would prefer being without schools altogether rather than establish separate schools in accordance with the provision of the Common School Act.\(^{101}\)

These blacks had one of two remaining educational options. They could open a private black school managed by individual teachers, as was the case in Windsor and Sandwich. But those who attended confronted similar financial difficulties as blacks in separate schools, and most private schools never lasted more than a few years as a result.\(^{102}\) Blacks could also turn to mission schools. These were often the last resort for blacks who had run out of options. A missionary working in Kent County described the circumstances that led to the erection of the mission school:

> Throughout the county of Kent the colored children are excluded from white schools. In Dresden a few of the better class of colored people have made great efforts to

\(^{101}\) Drew, *North-Side View*, 98

\(^{102}\) Mary Bibb opened a private school in Sandwich in 1851, and Mary Ann Shadd in Windsor, in 1852. (Description of these efforts in an article entitled, “Schools in Canada”, appearing in the *Voice of the Fugitive*, July 18, 1852; Afua A.P. Cooper, *Black Teachers in Canada West, 1850-1870: A history*. [Ph D diss., University of Toronto, 1991], 29-45)
according to drew, “statements have been made that colored people wished for separate schools; some did ask for them and so these have been established although many people prayed against them.”

more likely however, was that blacks who accepted separate schools felt they had no choice. despite the intentions of these black parents, these separate schools were mostly unsustainable. gerrymandering in colchester forced blacks to open multiple separate schools. the district superintendent of colchester township explained how this came about and how blacks were impacted by the board’s actions:

i am sorry to say that none of the black schools have been in operation last year. the principal cause, no doubt, is the extreme weakness of the school sections arising from the circumstance that the black population are spread over the whole inhabited part of the township.

and even when blacks could afford to keep separate schools running, the often extremely poor quality of teaching and physical condition of separate schools were not conducive to meeting even minimal standards for delivering an education of value.

where separate schools exist, the advantage in respect to buildings and teachers, is for the most part on the side of the whites; and unless separate schools are abolished, there is reason to fear that the progress of the black people in education will be very much retarded in the greater part of the province.

it thus seems that while black leaders ridiculed blacks who opted for separate schools and praised those who rejected them, “black…critics of segregated schools…may have been blinded by their idealism to the reality of prejudice in canada west.”

103 mission to the fugitive slaves, (annual report, 1860), 13, quoted in simpson, under the north star, 319
104 drew, north-side view, 219
105 colchester south township school area board, a story of public schools in colchester south township, (harrow, school board, 1966), 8–11
106 ibid, 13
107 drew, north-side view, 225
108 silverman, unwelcome guests, 144
And much like over issues of immigration and settlement, ordinary black settlers were caught between a rock and a hard place. If blacks decided not to go without education and, for lack of a better option, decided to attend separate schools, they were confronted with ridicule and hostility from the leaders of the black community and branded as ‘traitors’ to ‘the cause’. But, if blacks refused to accept separate schools in the name of ‘the cause’, these blacks often went without education and were then also faced the criticism of black leaders who berated them for not embracing the tenets of racial uplift through education.

The conflict over separate schools illuminates just how difficult and complicated schooling was for ordinary blacks during the 1850s. It also reflects the dynamics of the social divisions within the black community between urban, well-off, elite and educated blacks and poor, lower class, uneducated rural blacks. While the former were mostly born free or had lived in freedom for a long time and were thus capable of distancing themselves from negative stereotypes that played such a detrimental role in the lives of many blacks, the latter were almost exclusively recently escaped fugitives from slavery who came to Canada impoverished and who wore the legacy of slavery upon their chests like a yellow Star of David. This gap of understanding that bridged upper from lower class blacks often put unfair pressure upon the lower classes to achieve goals the realities of which the upper classes only considered intellectually.

The interests and motives that drove white opposition to integrated schooling collided with blacks’ newly formulated support of it. The result was a decade of the worst racial tensions between blacks and whites in Upper Canadian history.
CONCLUSION:
A Perfect Storm

Blacks’ experiences in Upper Canada between 1840 and 1860 were largely shaped in relation to the attitudes and responses of white Canadians. And blacks’ experiences with prejudice and whites responses to blacks were highly variant, complex and dynamic. Ultimately, however, if white prejudice played an important role in shaping blacks’ experiences in Upper Canada more generally, then white prejudice was the defining factor in shaping blacks experiences with schooling in particular. And if race-relations were frequently tense before 1850, afterward, racial tension would become the defining characteristic of race-relations between blacks and whites.

William and Jane Pease concluded that the Underground Railroad was, “in fact, the beginning, not the end of the journey from slavery to freedom.” ¹ This was because once in Canada, blacks confronted a situation in where whites’ prejudices greatly impeded blacks’ ability to live freely. This reflects the bitter irony that underscored much of Upper Canada’s positive official policy toward American blacks during the nineteenth century. Blacks were granted legal equality, but this legal status was, too often, rendered ineffective because public white officials were reluctant to uphold blacks’ rights in the face of popular white prejudice. Thus, blacks were caught between the promise of legal freedom on the one hand and the reality of prejudice on the other. And no where was this gap between expectation and reality more pronounced than over issues of schooling.

In 1843 a group of blacks from Hamilton petitioned the Lieutenant Governor

because they were threatened with exclusion from common schools. The decision over whether or not to allow blacks to continue attending common schools or to concede to whites’ opposition to integrated schooling was left in the hands of Hamilton’s Board of Police. George Tiffany was head of the board. He decided against whites and concluded that “if a firm stand be taken at first, the prejudice will soon give way.” 

Although popular opposition to blacks attending common schools did not wane, Hamilton’s school officials continued to refuse to give into it. Unfortunately, blacks living in other parts of the colony were not so lucky to have school officials willing to stand up against popular prejudice. The situation in Hamilton reflects the most problematic aspect blacks would encounter trying to educate their children during the 1840s and 1850s. Because of how the schools laws evolved to grant local authorities the power to manage local schools, the ability of blacks to educate their children was left in the hands of whites who were in large part opposed to integrative schooling.

Whites’ attitudes and responses to blacks throughout the nineteenth century hinged upon whether blacks were perceived as threatening to the ‘sanctity’ of whites’ social and economic sphere. Before the 1840s, blacks were a small and silent population and interaction with whites was largely mediated by whites involved in either anti-slavery or religious missions. As a result, blacks were tolerated. However, during the 1840s the school legislation which permitted blacks to attend schools alongside whites was regarded by many whites as a breach of proscribed racial boundaries. As a result, white opposition to integrated schooling didn’t become an issue of significance for blacks living in Upper Canada until the 1840s. Blacks were excluded from common schools

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across the colony, particularly in rural and small town communities, and this was “perhaps the most important manifestation of color prejudice in the province.” 3 No other issue embodied more racial hostility or active and vehement opposition. And race-relations during the 1840s over issues of schooling would pale in comparison to the eruption of racial tensions that followed the Common Schools Act of 1850.

Racial tensions during the 1850s were exacerbated by Egerton Ryerson’s unwillingness to stand up against racist practices. And by this unwillingness, one can only conclude that Ryerson was more concerned about cementing his school system than he was about upholding the principles which this school system was meant to embody. Ryerson proved ready to sacrifice his personal educational vision in order to ensure his school laws would take hold. He did so with the 1850 Common Schools Act. The school reform of the 1840s was plagued by criticism, conflict and confusion. By decades end, Ryerson became convinced that certain concessions to critics were necessary if he was going to successfully implement his educational agenda. And not only did the 1850 school act reflect his readiness to compromise with anti-black sentiment, but to compromise away his previously steadfast support for a universally inclusive school system. The 1850 School Act enabled whites to legally exclude blacks from common schools. Breaching blacks’ rights to equal educational opportunity was collateral damage in Ryerson’s war to entrench school reform in Upper Canada. And his experience with black schooling during the 1840s led him to conclude, as so many other whites in positions of authority did as well, that white prejudice was simply too strong to successfully thwart. To sell the 1850 legislation — the legal backbone for public

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education in Upper Canada — Ryerson sold out blacks. Black protest was ignored, proving yet again, how powerless blacks really were, despite claims of legal equality.

The 1840s and 1850s was also a period of change for Upper Canadian society. Increased government intervention into private affairs and the centralization and bureaucratic development of the state accompanied the beginning of a compulsory and free system of public schools. And these changes were largely the result of the rhetoric espoused by school Reformers who worked to convince people that education was the key to a better society. And as a result, by decades end, the general public had come to revere education in a newfound way. The 1840s and 1850s was also a period of change for North American blacks. Because of increased racial hostility in the United States, the anti-slavery movement was forced to re-evaluate its tactics and beliefs, held since the early nineteenth century. Racial uplift through education became fundamental to the new direction of anti-slavery, and helped shape the lives of blacks living in Upper Canada. Thus, schooling became a battleground in which the issues of concern to blacks and whites were fought out. As whites began to view education as the key to their children’s future, blacks also began placing their hopes for achieving individual and communal betterment in education. But issues of race turned shared hopes into hostility. The result was that the 1850s witnessed a worsening of race-relations in Upper Canada — most of it fed by conflict over the place of blacks in the schools.

The biggest difference separating the character of race-relations in schooling before and after 1850 was the way in which blacks responded to exclusion. During the 1840s, blacks were much more willing to accept discriminatory schooling practices. This was perhaps partly because blacks believed that prejudice was antithetical with education.
As education became more widespread, prejudice would decline. They were wrong. Also, during the 1840s there was no vehicle through which blacks could voice their concerns which black newspapers during the 1850s did provide. It might also be argued that during the 1840s blacks were simply grateful to receive any education at all. Regardless, exclusion from common schools during the 1840s was a fact of black life. During the 1850s however, blacks fought tooth and nail against those who would exclude them from common schools. And it was precisely this reaction, perhaps unanticipated by whites, which helped fuel the explosion of racial tension that occurred over issues of schooling during the 1850s.

A perfect storm of elements came together during the 1850s to create an uneasy decade of race-relations in Upper Canada, much of it revolving around issues of schooling. The permissibility of the 1850 Common Schools Act, the way Ryerson and the courts were unable or unwilling to uphold blacks’ rights, the general intensification of racial hostility that occurred after 1850 as a result of the Fugitive Slave Law and most significantly, the newly important status education held among both blacks and whites meant that whites were more determined and more able than ever before to exclude blacks from schools, and blacks were less willing to accept exclusionary and discriminatory practices. As a result, the environment of the 1850s shattered the myth of Canada as a black refuge, and, instead, Upper Canada “closely resembled the racial environment that many fugitives hoped, and believed they had escaped.”

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