“Canada—the Promised Land”

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(Undergraduate)

Canada was a Promised Land to thousands of fleeing black slaves during the antebellum years in the history of the United States. Estimates of the number of blacks who reached freedom in Canada vary greatly, from 40,000 (realistic) to 100,000 (inflated). Canada represented to them a beacon of hope, a promise of refuge, and a haven from slavery where they could pursue their lives unhindered. This essay will explore why Canada became slave-free so early, and how the complex interaction of the British slave trade and European policy resulted in the unusual predicament of a French influenced country under British control becoming a refuge for black fugitive slaves from the United States. The turbulent history of slavery in Canada will be explored, along with the plight of the poor African Americans who fled to Canada. Their history would not be complete without a look into the effectiveness of the Underground Railway, a system created by Northern abolitionists to transport fugitive slaves to Canada. Finally, I will examine if Canada really was the Promised Land for those blacks who successfully arrived, for often blacks only considered Africa and the Holy land of Israel to be their vision of what a promised land could be. While Canada may not have been the most ideal location for black freedom, the prohibition on slavery did make Canada a safe haven for black fugitive slaves.

It is pertinent first to look at European policies surrounding slavery, particularly those of the British and French, to decipher why slavery came to North America. Previously, in the middle ages, Western Europe had outlawed slavery and adopted a feudal system of serfdom. Still, European governments continued to endorse slavery in the colonies, where labor was needed for profit. The British had held since the Cartwright decision of 1569, in the time of Elizabeth I, that "England was too pure an air for slaves to breathe in,"[1] while the general French population had a widely held a conviction that slavery did not exist.

Regardless of these popular convictions, slavery was highly profitable, and although slavery was nonexistent in Europe, both the French and the English unashamedly used black slave labor in their colonies for profit.[2] The French advocated colonial slavery, particularly in the Caribbean, and most notably in Saint-Domingue (present day Haiti). Likewise, England may have been "too pure" for slaves, but the colonies certainly were not. Slaves were very profitable. English muskets, gunpowder and copper were transported to the African West Coast in trade for enslaved Africans; the slaves were then sold to the Caribbean or American mainland. Profits were used to purchase

[1] "slavery" *Encyclopædia Britannica* <http://www.britannica.com>

[2] Marc Bloch, *Slavery and Serfdom in the Middle Ages*, (Berkeley: California University, 1975): 67-91.

tobacco, sugar or rum, to be transported by the same ships back to England. The largest slave trading company was the London-based "Royal African Company." By 1730, England totally dominated North American slave trade.[3]

Canada had originally been colonized by the French, who established themselves around Quebec and Montreal with the aim of exploiting the fur trade and good fishing along the St. Lawrence River. Canada did not have a large number of slaves under French rule, as the fur trade and fishing industries by which Canada yielded profit were not slave-driven industries. As there was little value for slaves, the principals of slavery failed to become established and accepted, and people intentionally encouraged slaves to leave their masters. In Quebec, on April 13, 1709, Jacques Raudot issued a decree, *with Respect to Negroes and the Savages Known as Panis*, observing that keeping Pani (Pawnee Indian) slaves had become difficult as non-slave holders encouraged the Panis to escape. The decree specifically states that slaves "almost always leave their Masters, claiming that there are no slaves in France."[4] The decree goes on to confirm that slavery did indeed exist in the colony, and that a fifty-pound fine would be levied on anyone inciting slaves to leave their Masters.[5] In 1763, after the French and Indian war, the Treaty of Paris resulted in all of "New France"(Canada) falling to British hands. All of French North America east of the Mississippi was ceded to Britain.[6] At the end of French Regime in 1763, there were about 3500 slaves in New France, of which perhaps 1100 were blacks, the rest being Panis. Canada never had a pretense towards slavery and Canadian slaves tended to be Pani, rather than black. From the outset of its colonization, the Canadians set a precedent of inciting slaves to flee their masters. This perpetuated the general assumption that Canada did not condone slavery, in the same way as there were no slaves in France.

After the Treaty of Paris (1763), when the British annexed Canada, the British upheld existing French slavery laws, readily recognizing slavery in French colonies. The Treaty of Paris Articles of Capitulation state specifically:

> The negroes and panis / of both sexes shall remain, in their quality of slaves, in the possession of the French and Canadians to whom they belong; they shall be at liberty to keep them in their service in the colony, or to sell them; and they may also continue to bring them up in the Roman

[3] Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, (Wisconsin: Wisconsin University, 1969): 127-145.
[4] "Some Missing Pages"*Québec Eng. Schools Network* <http://www.qesn.meq.gouv.qc.ca/mpages>: Unit 1, Page 3.
[5] Ibid.
[6] J.M Roberts, *History of the World*, (New York: Oxford, 1993): 517.

religion.—Granted, except those "who shall have been made prisoners."[7]

Not only did the British initially uphold slavery in Canada, they encouraged it, and under British control slavery became more established then it had been under the French. In November 1763, General James Murray, the First British Governor of Quebec, wrote to a friend in New York:

> I must earnestly entreat your assistance, without servants nothing can be done. Had I the inclination to employ soldiers, which is not the case, they would disappoint me, and Canadians will work for nobody but themselves. Black slaves are certainly the only people to be depended upon... You may buy for each a clean young wife, who can work and do the female offices about a farm... I shall begrudge no price...[8]

Murray's quote speaks of concern among the British that Canadians were not a solid labor force. Canadians, being a recently conquered French-speaking colony, would not readily work for the British. Governor Murray could rely only on black slaves, and asked his friend to buy some in New York. With the arrival of more slaves also came slave resistance, the most dramatic being that of Marie-Joseph Angelique, the slave of a wealthy Montreal merchant. On April 17, 1734, once learning she was to be sold, Marie-Joseph covered her escape by setting fire to her owner's house. The fire destroyed forty six buildings. In June of 1734 she was captured, tortured, paraded through the streets, then hanged and her body burned.[9] Such examples of slave insurrection reveal Canadian conditions as indisposed towards slavery. While the British were encouraging slavery in Canada, Canadian slaves were escaping from their masters and fleeing to the United States, particularly Ohio, where they found freedom. One such example is James Ford Martin, who was held by the Indians as a slave, and sold to a cruel British officer, from whom he escaped and fled to Cleveland.[10] The cold Canadian climate was unsuited to the slave industry, and the people weren't interested and thwarted its laws. Furthermore, Canadian industries such as hunting and fishing were not slave-based industries, despite European attempts to make them slave-driven.

In order to understand the reasons for the failure of Canadian slavery, it is useful to reflect on a region where slavery was successful. Unlike Canada, the Southern British American colonies were more fertile for slavery, enjoying a warm climate and 200–290 frost-free days per year, coupled with abundant rainfall. If an adequate and permanent labor supply could be found, then tobacco, rice, sugarcane, and cotton could be grown plentifully. Britain began selling African slaves

[7] "Some Missing Pages" Unit 2, Page 2.
[8] "Some Missing Pages" Unit 2, Page 3.
[9] "Some Missing Pages" Unit 1, Page 6.
[10] Wilbur H Siebert, *the Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom*, (Stratford: Ayer, 2000): 190.

to their Southern colonists, and these colonists found that profit generated by cotton plantations justified the investment in slave labor. A system of plantation slavery evolved. In South Carolina of 1700, there were probably no more than 2,500 blacks. By 1765 there were 80,000–90,000, with blacks outnumbering whites by 2 to 1. Similarly, Virginia in 1670 had a slave population of about 2000, but by 1775 (on the eve of the United States War of Independence), this number had reached 150,000. Under British rule, the South became wholly reliant on plantation slavery for its economy.[11]

Once Britain had conquered "New France" in the French and Indian war and the French threat of invasion had been removed, it was a mere fourteen years until the established and prosperous thirteen colonies federated themselves against Britain in the United States War of Independence (1775). Canada stayed loyal to Britain as there was still a substantial British presence in Canada after the French wars. Furthermore, the Canadians were predominantly French speakers. The federation of United States largely absolved Britain from much of the burdens of overwhelming slavery and soon thereafter the abolitionist movement in Britain gained influence. Interestingly, the French, close allies with the young United States, reestablished slavery in 1801 under Napoleon.[12]

The campaign in Britain to abolish slavery began in the 1760s, supported by both black and white abolitionists and spearheaded by the prominent British politician, William Wilberforce. Abolition of the Slave Trade Act was passed on 25th March 1807, outlawing slave trade within the British Empire, after which any British captain who was caught transporting slaves was fined £100 for every slave found on board. This did not stop the British slave trade as slave-ships in danger of being captured simply ordered the slaves to be thrown into the sea. In 1827, Britain declared slave trading piracy, and punishable by death.[13]

Canadians maintained a stance against slavery and the Provence of Upper Canada was the first to take the initiative on its restriction. In 1793, the first parliament of Upper Canada enacted a law against importation of slaves, and included a clause freeing the children of slaves at age twenty-five, beginning the gradual emancipation in Upper Canada. Judicial action also terminated slavery in Lower Canada, through a series of three fugitive slave cases between February 1798 and

[11] "United States" *Encyclopædia Britannica* <http://www.britannica.com>
[12] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *The Fruits of Merchant Capital*, (U.S.A: Oxford, 1983): 404.
[13] Philip D Curtin. *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, (Wisconsin: Wisconsin University, 1969): 231-232.

February 1800, in each case the court ordered the discharge of a fugitive slave from confinement.[14] An 1803 court decision held that slavery in Lower Canada was inconsistent with British law. These court decisions effectively caused slavery to cease in Lower Canada as early as 1803, long before official abolishment of slavery by Britain. Canada began to assume its almost mythical image as the land of freedom in the eyes of enslaved blacks.[15]

Slaves did begin to find their way to Canada before 1800, but information in regard to Canada as a place of refuge was scarcely common knowledge before 1812. In 1812, Britain was fighting for survival in Europe against France, who was led by the highly successful Napoleon. The United States realized that British resources had to be committed to the European theater and deemed it an ideal time to declare war on British owned Canada.[16] American soldiers fighting in Canada returned from the War with news of the Canadian willingness to defend the rights of self-emancipated slaves.[17]

The rumor spread amongst the slaves of the Southern states that far away, under the north star, there was a land where the law declared all men free and equal and where the people respected the law, and the government, if need be, enforced it. By 1815, fugitives were crossing the Western Reserve in Ohio. After the discovery of Canada by colored refugees, it was not long before some of them, returning for families and friends, substantially confirmed such rumors. In 1828, the United States Secretary of State declared the escape of slaves to British territory a "growing evil," and proposed extradition. England steadfastly refused on the grounds that British government could not, "with respect to the British possessions where slavery is not admitted, depart from the principle recognized by the British courts that every man is free who reaches British ground."[18]

On August 24th 1833, the Slavery Abolition Act was passed declaring all slaves in British colonies emancipated; slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire. Accordingly, Britain became a determined abolitionist power, using the Royal Navy to stop ships suspected of transporting slaves to the New World. Britain paid millions of dollars in reparations to its existing slave holders,[19] though should the thirteen American colonies have remained loyal to Britain, it is

[14] Wilbur H Siebert, 191.
[15] J. Blaine Hudson, *Fugitive Slaves and the Underground Railroad*, (North Carolina: McFarland, 2002): 53.
[16] Tom Dalgliesh, *War of 1812*, (USA: Columbia, 1993): Historical Commentary 8.
[17] Wilbur H Siebert, 27.
[18] Wilbur H Siebert, 192.
[19] J.M Roberts, 631.

doubtful whether such an act would have been passed. Regardless, the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act meant that every man was officially free who reached British ground, and this declaration established Canada as a real and attainable destination, for fugitive slaves who sought freedom from bondage in the United States.

In 1793, the United States Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Acts. These provided that runaway slaves who escaped from one state into another or into a federal territory should be seized and returned. A second set of acts passed in 1850, maintained that fugitives were not permitted a trial by jury, nor could they testify on their own. Federal marshals who refused to enforce this law were inflicted with heavy penalties and penalties were also imposed on individuals who helped fugitive slaves. These new Fugitive Slave laws brought the North face to face with slavery nationalized.[20] Fugitive slaves were no longer safe in Northern states and Canada became the only safe destination for fugitive slaves. As early as 1810, dissatisfaction with the Fugitive Slave Law took the form of systematic assistance being rendered to black slaves escaping from the South—such assistance became known as the Underground Railroad.[21]

The Underground Railroad was the popular name for the process of receiving fugitive slaves, hiding them overnight and then conducting them to the next station en route to Canada. the Underground Railway was neither underground nor a railroad, but was so named as all activity was carried out in secret using darkness or disguise, and because railway terms were used in reference to the conduct of the system. Routes were known as "lines," stopping places were "stations," those who aided along the way were "conductors," and their charges were known as "packages" or "freight." The network of routes extended in all directions throughout fourteen Northern states and, finally, to the Promised Land of Canada.

Presence of the Underground Railway had a decidedly disturbing effect on Southern slavery, instigating fears that owning such property was a risky investment. Southern complaint had a tendency to inflate the reputed number of slaves escaping, and the South demanded stricter control, prompting the strict Fugitive Slave act of 1850. The North responded by dramatically increasing efficiency along the Underground Railroad, and some states enacted personal-liberty laws in an attempt to hamper the execution of federal law. Such laws were among the grievances officially referred to by South Carolina as justification for secession from the Union in December

[20] Wilbur H Siebert, 322.
[21] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, 356-58.

1860. Activity of the Underground Railroad—reputed or real—had value apart from the practical objective of aiding fugitive slaves fleeing to Canada. It has been suggested that the existence of the Underground Railroad was one of the greatest forces that brought on the American Civil War.[22]

The most famous conductor of the Underground Railroad was Harriet Tubman. Born a slave in Maryland about 1823, she ran away at about age twenty-five, leaving parents, brothers and sisters behind. Two of her brothers started out with her but went back in fear. Perhaps to prevent this from happening again, she always carried a pistol on her forays and if a fugitive slave in her party faltered, she would draw her gun and proclaim, "You'll be free or die!" Strength to go on was always forthcoming. On one foray, a slave was so frightened he refused to speak. During the train crossing from Buffalo he would not even look out the window. But, on arrival in Canada, he would not cease shouting for joy, to which Tubman exclaimed, "You old fool, you! You might at least have looked at Niagara Falls on the way to freedom!" Without work in Canada, Tubman prayed, cooked and begged for her refugees all winter, then in spring went south again to free more. Tubman conducted nineteen increasingly dangerous forays into Maryland, and with her extraordinary courage, ingenuity, persistence, and iron discipline, upwards of 300 fugitive slaves, including her aged parents, reached freedom in Canada. Babies were carried by Tubman herself, keeping them drugged with paregoric.[23] Tubman was idealized as a "Moses," the redeemer of an enslaved people from the Egypt-land of the South. Rewards offered by slave holders for her capture eventually totaled $40,000.[24]

The hated Fugitive Slave law of 1850 occasioned, in the spring of 1852, the production of the famous antislavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Firsthand knowledge of the Underground Railroad made this book possible for Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe while she was living in Cincinnati, Ohio. Stowe declared *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to be "a collection and arrangement of real incidents,—of actions really performed, of words and expressions really uttered,—grouped together with reference to a general result."[25] One such instance immortalized in her book was the "fictionalized" but very real escape of Eliza Harris. Harris, with her baby son, crossed the Ohio River in winter, jumping from ice flow to ice flow. After the ordeal, Harris was conveyed via the

[22] Larry Gara. *The Liberty Line*, (Lexington: Kentucky, 1996): 114.
[23] Earl Conrad. *Harriet Tubman*, (Washington: Associated Publishers, 1943): 56-67.
[24] Otey Scruggs, "Meaning of Harriet Tubman," *Articles on American Slavery*, (U.S.A: Finkelman, 1989): 354.
[25] Wilbur H Siebert, 322.

Underground Railway to Canada, where she is known to have settled in western Canada.[26] Her Walnut Hills house became a station on the Underground Railroad. Stowe's novel awakened the consciences of freemen to the sin of slavery. Fugitive slaves at last had found a champion whose touching words carried their plight to the multitudes. Success of the book was immediate. Three thousand copies were sold on the first day of publication, and more than three hundred thousand in the United States within the year.

The immediate effect of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a vast political renewal on the question of slavery.[27] Abraham Lincoln, on meeting Stowe, is said to have greeted her with the words, "So you're the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war," acknowledging the indirect but very real contribution her book had in commencing the American Civil War.[28] Queen Victoria of England, one of the most long-standing and powerful monarchs of her time, read Stowe's novels and became an ardent admirer, admitting that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had caused her to weep. The Queen wished to meet Stowe and arranged an "accidental" encounter with her on the platform of a small English railroad station.[29] Soon after the publication of Stowe's book, the U.S. statesman Charles Sumner began his movement in the Senate to secure the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law, presenting, in May, 1852, a memorial from the Society of Friends in New England. His repeated and continuous determination to repeal the oppressive laws eventually saw successful issue in 1864.[30]

The myth of the "contented slave" was essential to the preservation of the South's "peculiar institution," which the white South supported on the grounds of Biblical sanction, economic justification, the supposed racial inferiority of blacks, and the necessity for a well-ordered society. They created a myth of the childlike, imprudent Negro, who required constant supervision.[31] A popular slave song *I'm on my way to Canada*, undermines such myths of the contented slave:

I'm on my way to Canada,
That cold and dreary land;

[26] John P Parker, *His Promised Land*, Ed. Sprague, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996): 126.
[27] Wilbur H Siebert, 323.
[28] Joan D Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe - A life*, (New York: Oxford, 1994): vii.
[29] Noel B Gerson, *Harriet Beecher Stowe - A Biography*, (New York: Praeger, 1976): 108-111.
[30] Wilbur H Siebert, 322.
[31] Otey Scruggs, 363.

The sad effects of slavery
I can no longer stand

I've served my master all my days,
Without a dime's reward;
And now I'm forced to run away,
Too flee the lash abroad.

Farewell, old master, don't think hard of me,
I'm on my way to Canada, where all the slaves are free...

Oh, I heard Queen Victoria say,
That if we would forsake
Our native land of slavery,
And come across the lake;

That she was standing on the shore,
With arms extended wide,
To give us all a peaceful home
Beyond the rolling tide.[32]

The cold Canadian climate was never suited to slave industry, and it comes as no surprise that the climate was unsuited to the fugitive slave emigrants, who tended to see Canada as somewhat "cold and dreary." Also illustrated in this poem is that for the blacks, freedom was associated directly with a benevolent Queen Victoria, ruler of Britain. She was the great upholder of freedom and antislavery and stood as an icon for abolitionism in Canada.

Negro spirituals, the religious songs of the slave culture, were used by slaves as an outlet for release of emotions and frustrations since all other means of expression were prohibited. Songs mentioning Canada, such as *I'm on my way to Canada,* were atypical, and such open talk of freedom was liable to get a slave into trouble. Instead, at the heart of most slave songs, the slaves regularly and repeatedly identified themselves with the suffering of ancient Israelites in Egyptian bondage.[33] In Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* when Eliza escapes across the Ohio River, the slave Sam conveys her escape by stating, "Wal, she's clar 'cross Jordan. As a body may say, in the land o' Canaan."[34] In this way, Sam confirms that Eliza is free, and he makes the Ohio river synonymous with the river Jordan and the North with the land of Canaan.

Slave songs were imbued with biblical parallels. The well known verse, *Let My People Go* (LOA, 2:786), also known as *Go Down, Moses,* was adopted as a Negro spiritual.

[32] Earl Conrad, 82.
[33] Mason Lowance, Jr., "Spirituals" [from class notes], 400.
[34] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* (New York: Penguin, 1852):133.

Go down, Moses
Way down in Egyptland
Tell Ol' Pharaoh
To let my people go[35]

There was a conviction that God would somehow provide deliverance, and the suffering of the Israelites' and their deliverance from Egypt was perceived as a foreshadowing of God's salvation of the southern slaves from their merciless ordeal.[36] Usually, there was a Mosaic leader depicted leading the slaves into a Promised Land and Harriet Tubman was sometimes seen as such a returned Moses.

Larry Gara, an authority on slavery and the Underground Railroad, in his book *The Liberty Line,* points out that:

> It is Canada which is most frequently mentioned as the [Underground Railway] road's terminus, and popular folk singers assume that to the slaves the North or Canada was obviously the Promised Land. The most scholarly study of slave songs, however, reveals that though the desire to escape was a major theme of the songs, Canaan, the New Jerusalem, or the Promised Land was most often Africa rather than the North or Canada.[37]

Gara clarifies that although the fugitive slaves' destination was often the North or Canada, this destination was not envisioned as the promised land per se. Rather, their ideal Promised Land was the Holy Land or Africa. But, these perceived promised lands where not feasible, as they were oceans away. Oscar Hammerstein's well known song "Ol' Man River," from the play *Show Boat,* voices the sentiment well with the lyrics,"Take me away from the Mississippi, take me away from the white man boss... show me that man called the River Jordan, for that's the old man that I long to cross." Religious sentiment crystalized Jordan as a symbol of freedom from slavery. Similarly, Stowe echoes a conviction for an African Promised Land through Eliza's husband George. Once George is a free man, having lived in Canada for a number of years, and even moved to France, he becomes determined to move to Liberia in Africa. George states, "The desire and yearning of my soul is for African *nationality*... On the shores of Africa I see a republic...there it is my wish to go, and find myself a people... Liberia."[38] George wants his own nation, his own people, his own country. Canada to George remains a country dominated by whites.

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[35] Patricia C McKissack, *Christmas in the Big House, Christmas in the Quarters*, (New York: Scholastic, 2002): 17.
[36] Mason Lowance, Jr., "The Slave Narrative in American Literature," *African American Writers,* Ed. Baechler, (New York: Charles Scriber, 1991):396.
[37] Larry Gara, 8.
[38] Harriet Beecher Stowe, 609.

Few legends in American history have gained as much universal acceptance as the Underground Railroad, and although it was a reality, much material relating to it belongs to the realm of folklore rather than history. The significance of the Underground Railroad was intentionally magnified as a means to agitate the South. The legend is of intrepid abolitionists sending multitudes of fugitives over a well-organized transportation system, fugitives usually hotly pursued by slave hunters; nearly always their capture was eluded due to the ingenuity of brave conductors. The legend holds the hero as clearly the abolitionist, and one is given the feeling that without abolitionist aid, few, if any slaves could have found their way to Canada.[39]

Although a mass of articles and reminiscences have emphasized the importance of abolitionist aid to fugitive slaves, in most cases it was the slaves themselves who planned and carried out their runs for freedom. Many slaves knew nothing of abolitionist assistance, and very few had accurate information. It is unlikely that such knowledge prompted the majority of slave escapes. Aid fugitives did receive tended to be sporadic, and sometimes came from unlikely sources. Even Negroes in the northern states were unaware of abolitionist aid. Knowledge of the North Star and Canada was the main vehicle for slave escape. With the aid of the North Star alone, one group of thirteen traveled for three weeks to escape.[40]

Former slaves who wrote their own memoirs reveal the Underground Railway not as the well-organized and mysterious institution of the legend, but a loose connection of havens. Usually, it was only after the most difficult part of the journey that the traditional Underground Railroad provided transportation.[41] Former slaves remember escapes as important, but atypical events—rare victories against the massive formidable institution of the South. Most did not risk escape, for failure threatened terrible punishment and sale. All escapes were dangerous and many of the dangers long lasting. The fugitive slave James Campbell recalled the fate of an unlucky fugitive who was whipped nearly to death, "took any such notion out of my head." However, when another fellow slave, Henry Jones, did escape, and was never caught, Campbell added that all left behind were "powerful glad."[42]

Relatively few enslaved Negroes escaped, as they were dependent for the most part on their own resources. It was the gifted and highly intelligent slave who enjoyed semi-freedom as a hired

[39] Larry Gara, 2-7.
[40] Larry Gara, 42-46.
[41] Larry Gara, 61.
[42] J. Blaine Hudson, 52.

laborer and, having more freedom of movement, was better qualified than most to put into action a plan of escape. In their dash for freedom, the greatest number used water transportation. Some stole skiffs and canoes, and some were taken across to Canada by ferry operators. Steamships provided excellent opportunities. Light colored slaves could pass as passengers, others stowed away in the numerous holes and crannies.[43]

Assuming that they could not expect any help, careful plans were made for journeys. In some instances, slaves from several plantations worked out escape plans together, finding courage in religious gatherings. Negro camp meetings often encouraged running away. A Missouri slave woman contemplating escape for several years finally left for Canada with her husband and son after such a camp meeting. Many fleeing slaves did not trust others, not even their own families. Those who had attempted escape several times before succeeding often learned from bitter experience it was best to keep plans to themselves. When William Wells Brown escaped in the winter of 1834, he traveled at night, slept in barns, and stole corn and food from fields along his way. Brown supposed every person his enemy, because he "was afraid to appeal to any one, even for a little food, to keep body and soul together... I had long since made up my mind not to trust myself in the hands of any man, white or colored."[44] Although Brown received some help from Ohio abolitionists, he wrote a letter to an abolitionist newspaper in 1855 saying, "When I escaped, there was no Underground Railroad. The North Star was, in many instances, the only friend that the weary and footsore fugitive found on his pilgrimage."[45]

When away from home, slaves were required to carry passes from their masters, and free Negroes had to have papers which described them clearly. The use of stolen, borrowed, rented, or forged passes or free papers was common among fugitives. A few slaves wrote their own papers, but they usually obtained them from others. Literate slaves, free Negroes, and whites wrote out passes, legal papers, and free papers for fugitives. Fees for such services varied up to twenty-five dollars. The English traveler Joseph Sturge believed some white Southerners lived by the manufacture of forged papers. Early in his life, the eminent human-rights leader Frederick Douglass, borrowed a sailor's protection papers which he used in an attempted escape. Later he returned the papers to their owner. Douglass published his own antislavery newspaper called the

[43] Larry Gara, 42-68.
[44] Larry Gara, 45.
[45] Ibid.

North Star, from 1847 to 1860, and went on to become the first black citizen to hold high rank in the U.S. government.[46] As the name of his paper implies, the North star was vital to a slaves journey to freedom. The North Star was sometimes referred to allegorically as the star of Bethlehem because they were both associated with guiding enslaved people to freedom.

An Illinois abolitionist claimed that assistance was more often than not a matter of a fugitive inquiring for "certain persons to whom he had been directed by someone on the way." After giving the fugitives "something to eat, perhaps to wear, occasionally a shilling or two bits," he would send them along the way, with instructions to follow the North Star until reaching the residence of another friend. At the start of their flight, a Georgetown slave family of father, mother, and four children got information about the way to Canada, and transportation aid from a friendly Quaker, who took them fifty miles in a wagon at night, hid them out for a day, and then carried them an additional fifty miles. Unable to help them further, the Quaker told them to find their way following the North Star. J. W. Loguen, who, with another slave, ran away from Tennessee around 1835, found an abolitionist after reaching Ohio. The two were discouraged when they realized that they would have to "track their way from point to point, and from abolitionist to abolitionist, by aid of the Star, through the dreary wilderness to Canada."[47]

The fugitive slave in flight often found that Southern whites were not always interested in capturing them, nor did they consistently refuse to aid them. Many Southerners were reluctant or indifferent about returning runaway slaves. When a Maryland railroad agent was involved in court action for selling tickets to a number of fugitive slaves, he said it was not his business to inquire whether the customers of the road were slave or free. A very aged former slave put his finger on the matter when he remarked, "They was all kinds of white folks, just like they is now... Devils and good people walking in the road at the same time, and nobody could tell one from t'other."[48]

In December 1860, the month in which South Carolina chose to withdraw from the Union, the arrest of a runaway negro in Canada gave rise to an extradition case that became a cause of controversy. In 1853, the negro William Anderson, had been caught without a pass in Missouri, and had stabbed to death the man that tried to capture him. In 1860, he was recognized by a slave-catcher and arrested on the charge of murder.[49] Three judges heard his case and one of them was

[46] Larry Gara, 47-52.
[47] Larry Gara, 59-60.
[48] Larry Gara, 57-58.
[49] Wilbur H Siebert, 352.

Sir John Beverley Robinson, the Chief Justice of Upper Canada. The judges disagreed, but two of the three declared that Anderson should be returned to the United States. In court, the Ashburton Treaty was raised—a treaty that defined many outstanding questions in the relations between British North America and the United States. This treaty had an extradition clause. Any person having committed murder in either territory, and having sought refuge in the other, should be given up if the crime against him would be recognized as murder in the country where he had sought refuge.[50]

Many in Montreal, in particular the Mayor, did not believe that Anderson should be sent back. Sentiment in Montreal turned profoundly against slavery as runaway slaves began reaching the city. The slave's appalling injuries and harrowing stories destroyed any attempt to represent slavery as a mild and justified institution. A fugitive slave by the name of Lavinia Bell, made her way to Montreal. When interviewed, she told her story, that she had been born in Washington of free parents, but was stolen as a child and taken to Texas, where she was sold to a slave owner and brought up as a "show girl." At about fifteen years of age, she was sent into the cotton fields to work with the other slaves. It was then that her torments began. She tried to escape again and again, but was always captured, brought back, and tortured. When she arrived in Montreal in 1861, a doctor named John Reddy was called to attend to her. On January 28, Dr. Reddy gave his report:

> I was requested by Mr. Cook to call and see a Negro woman who had arrived the previous day in Montreal, he telling me she was very ill from injuries she had received while a slave. On visiting the woman, she complained of severe pain in her right side, cause as she said, by a violent wrench which she had received at the hands of her owners. On making examination I found her body very much distorted, her spine curbed towards the right side and the ribs forced completely in the same direction, having a very bulged appearance. I also found the following marks of ill treatment on her person. A 'V-shaped' piece had been slit out of each ear; there was a depression on the right parietal bone where it had been fractured and is now very tender to the touch; the corresponding spot on the opposite side had a large scar uncovered by hair; there is large deep scar, 3 1/2 inches long on the left side of the lower jaw; several of her teeth are broken out; the back of her left hand has been branded with a heated flatiron; the little finger of her right hand, with a portion of the bone that it connected with, has been cut off; the abdomen bears the mark of a large letter 4 inches long in one way and 2 1/2 inches in another, also branded with a hot-iron; her ankles are scarred, and the soles of her feet are all covered with little round marks apparently inflicted with some sharp instruments which she accounts for by her stating that she was obliged to walk over hackles used for hackling flax; her back and person are literally covered all over with scars and marks now healed, evidently produced by the lash. Altogether she presents a most pitiable appearance.[51]

[50] "Some Missing Pages" Unit 3, Page 10.
[51] Ibid.

Such a description by Dr. Reddy made horribly real to the people of Montreal the plight of a fugitive slave. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* seemed moderate in comparison to this matter-of-fact medical report on Lavinia Bell. A writ of habeas corpus was issued in Canada by a Canadian judge, and the case of John Anderson was taken to another Canadian court, the Court of Common Pleas. Three judges began to review his case, and Anderson was freed, largely due to sympathies generated by cases such as Lavinia Bell and growing support in Canada for escaped slaves.[52]

Fugitive slaves who succeeded in making their way to Canada quickly found that their difficulties were not at an end. The Canadian Promised Land proved sometimes to be a harsh and difficult environment for the free Negro—however freedom had been obtained. Work was hard to come by, and former slaves encountered racial prejudice. But, the Canadian government did not officially sanction discrimination against the newcomers. Negroes, on occasion, were treated differently from the whites in churches, in steamboats, and in hotels. A Toronto newspaper editorial in 1851 indicated that some Canadians wanted restrictive immigration, "Already we have far greater number of negroes in the province than the good of the country requires. We abhor slavery, but patriotism induces us to exclaim against having our country overrun by blacks."[53]

Descriptions of the lot of Canadian Negro refugees vary. The Cincinnati abolitionist Levi Coffin visited Canada and found many of the former slaves more comfortably situated than he had expected, but later commented that the climate was unfavorable and that "there was much destitution and suffering among those who had recently come in." After six years in Canada, one fugitive wrote his master that he would return if money were sent to him, and a few did go back when their passages were sent. The vast majority of former slaves however, were not inclined to return to bondage.[54]

The attitude of the Canadian government towards fugitive slaves was always one of welcome and protection. No obstruction was put in the way of their settling in the Dominion. In the matter of the acquisition of land no discrimination was made. These "unpromising purchasers" were encouraged to take up government land. In 1844, Levi Coffin found that "land had been easily obtained and many had availed themselves of this advantage to secure comfortable homesteads. Government land had been divided up into fifty-acre lots, which they could buy for two dollars an

[52] Ibid.
[53] Larry Gara, 66-68.
[54] Larry Gara, 67.

acre, and have ten years in which to pay for it."[55]

Canada incorporated by an act of Parliament a settlement in Upper Canada for the purpose of settling colored families upon crown or clergy reserve lands in the township of Raleigh. This settlement was a plan devised by Reverend William King and received the support of the Governor-General, the Lord of Elgin, and was called the Elgin settlement. When Dr Joseph Howe, the Canadian statesman and newspaper publisher, visited the Elgin, with the express purpose of reviewing its progress, he reported that "most interesting of all are the inhabitants. Twenty years ago most of them were slaves, who owned nothing, not even their children. Now they own themselves; they own their houses and farms; and they have their wives and children about them. They are enfranchised citizens of a government which protects their rights."[56] Some blacks established in Canada not only survived, but even thrived. They contributed actively to the advancement of Canada through the publication of newspapers and other creative and entrepreneurial endeavors. Due to the remarkable progress made by Negro refugees, Canadian government maintained a favorable attitude towards them to the end of the long period of immigration. After prolonged investigation by Dr. Howe the Canadian authorities became established in the view that the refugees "promote the industrial and material interests of the country and are valuable citizens."[57]

Canada became a refuge for fugitive slaves, and the Underground Railway become a symbol of the abolitionist fight against slavery and the transportation link to Canada. As long as slaves successfully fled the South for Canada, pressure was brought upon on the slave-reliant Southern states. For decades before and after the American Civil War, which ended slavery, Canada offered blacks freedoms that had been unknown to them since their enslavement in Africa. In Canada, the enterprising black carved for himself a comfortable niche, free from the oppressive bondage found in the United States. While Canada may not have been a Biblical Jerusalem or the African homeland, it was the most obtainable Promised Land that Blacks could hope to have.

[55] Wilbur H Siebert, 202.
[56] Wilbur H Siebert, 202-08.
[57] Wilbur H Siebert, 234.

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