"A Fair Opportunity": The American Abolitionist Movement and Fugitive Settlement Projects in Canada West in the 1850s

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Introduction

In the decades prior to the Civil War, several abolitionist initiatives in Canada West led to the founding of independent black agricultural communities. These initiatives generally functioned by setting up a financial fund to buy plots of land from the Canadian government and reselling those in annual installments to black settlers, who cultivated these lands and built a home on them. This thesis looks at how the three fugitive communities active during the 1850s — the Dawn Settlement, the Elgin Settlement, and the Refugee Home Society's Settlement (**image 1**) — were of importance to the American abolitionist movement. While both fugitives from slavery and blacks who had lived in freedom for a longer time were among the communities' settlers,[1] the projects were especially meant to benefit fugitives from slavery and became known to the general public as fugitive

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[1] For a detailed overview of the numbers and composition of the settlers at the Elgin Settlement, see Peggy Bristow, '"Whatever you raise in the ground you can sell it in Chatham': Black Women in Buxton and Chatham, 1850-65," in *We're rooted here and they can't pull us up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History*, ed. Peggy Bristow (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 83-84; Sharon A. Roger Hepburn, *Crossing the Border: A Free Black Community in Upper Canada* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 83-84 & 91-92.

The Refugee Home Society leased lands exclusively to fugitives from slavery, for which see Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, 2nd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 204-206; "Refugees' Home Society. Constitution and By Laws of the Refugee Home Society," *Voice of the Fugitive* 2, no. 4, February 12, 1852, p1, accessed May 21, 2021, http://ink.ourdigitalworld.org/viewer/cecil/focus/ink/newspapers/vf/reel1/000751-x0-y0-z1-r0-0-0.

Little concrete information is available about the background of the settlers at Dawn, but one report of the Institute suggests that a significant share of its settlers belonged to those "who have been long enough in the province to acquire a little property." This seems logical, given that most settlers at Dawn settled its lands without aid from the Institute. Some of Dawn's settlers possibly came from the black Queen's Bush settlement near Ontario. See *Seventh Annual Report of the Canada Mission* (Rochester, 1844), 4-5, accessed March 24, 2021, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/DS0100225480/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=adb5f5d1&pg=1.

communities.[2] As examples of formerly enslaved African-Americans living in freedom by their own means, the communities offered international and American abolitionists an example with which to counter the racist proslavery argument that African Americans were, by nature, unable to take care of themselves and would become morally depraved and a "burden on society" if left to live in freedom without a master's guiding hand.[3]

Image 1: Locations of the Dawn Settlement, Elgin Settlement and Refugee Home Society's Settlement (which possessed several plots of lands dispersed throughout the province, mostly located "some ten miles north of Amherstburg" (Pease & Pease, 110)) in the province of Canada West.[4]

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[2] Allen P. Stouffer, *Light of Nature and the Law of God: Antislavery in Ontario, 1833-1877* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 98.

[3] Ikuko Asaka, *Tropical Freedom: Climate, Settler Colonialism, and Black Exclusion in the Age of Emancipation* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2017), 5; William H. Pease and Jane Pease, *Black Utopia: Negro Communal Experiments in America* (Madison, WI: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1963), 13; Roger Hepburn, 78; Stouffer, 83.

[4] Jake Coolidge, *Map I.2. Towns and settlements in Upper Canada*, in Asaka, 5.

During the 1850s, the issue of fugitives from slavery had become especially pressing in the United States after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which increased slaveholders' power to capture fugitives[5] and led to an increase in African American migration from the Northern states to Canada, as both African-Americans living in the North and those escaping the South moved there.[6] This thesis looks at how the communities were incorporated in American antislavery campaigning by asking the following question: how were the Canadian fugitive communities portrayed in American abolitionist literature and in what ways did they contribute to the goals of the American abolitionist movement in the 1850s?

The first of the communities studied here is the Dawn settlement near Dresden, which sprang up around the British-American Institute, a manual labor school for blacks established in 1842 by the initiative of a local black convention and the Canada Mission, an organization which founded schools for black Canadians. The Canada Mission was led by the American philanthropist Hiram Wilson and endorsed by the American Anti-Slavery Society.[7] Dawn differed from the two other communities studied here in that it was not planned as a black settlement, but came about more or less spontaneously. At the time, schools in Canada were generally inaccessible to blacks. School boards were legally free to exclude any student they did not want to attend which, in practice, led to racial segregation and prevented many blacks from getting access to schooling at

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[5] R. J. M. Blackett, *The Captive's Quest for Freedom: Fugitive Slaves, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, and the Politics of Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), xii-xiii; Winks, 153.

[6] Asaka, 112; Stanley W. Campbell, *The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1860* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1970), 62-63; Pease & Pease, 7-8.

[7] Hiram Wilson, "Letter from Hiram Wilson," *National Anti-Slavery Standard* 2, no. 5, July 8, 1841, p2, accessed March 25, 2021, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/apps/doc/HX2500276480/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=7b209bc8; Winks, 179-180.

all.[8] Many black Canadians seeking an education came to the British-American Institute, settling near it and forming the Dawn Settlement, which would eventually consist of some 500 families in possession of about 1500 acres of land.[9] The leading representative of the school and community was the fugitive minister Josiah Henson, who became internationally famous when he came to be publicly viewed as the real life inspiration of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom after being mentioned in *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853).[10] The institute was ultimately abanoned in 1868 and its lands sold, the proceeds being used to fund an integrated institute of education in Chatham.[11]

The second settlement studied here is the Elgin settlement, founded in 1849 by the Scottish Presbyterian minister William King. While teaching in Louisiana, King had married into a slaveholding family and had inherited his wife's slaves after her death.[12] The Presbyterian church, however, was against slavery. King ultimately decided to free his slaves and settle them in Canada West. With permission and support from the Presbyterian church and Canadian sponsors,[13] he set up a stockholding company, the Elgin Association, to buy tracts of land and lease these to his former slaves and other blacks who applied[14] with the ultimate aim of ensuring the "moral improvement of the Colored population of Canada."[15] This settlement was variously referred to as the Elgin settlement, as the whole of the land purchase was called, or Buxton, after the village which was

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[8] Pease & Pease, 12.

[9] Winks, 180.

[10] Ibid., 187.

[11] Pease & Pease, 81.

[12] Pease & Pease, 90; Winks, 209.

[13] Stouffer, 90.

[14] Winks, 210.

[15] *Third Annual Report of the Directors of the Elgin Association: Presented at the Annual Meeting, held on the 1st day of September, 1853*, Toronto, 1853, accessed March 16, 2021, https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_00255_2/1?r=0&s=1.

founded in the centre of the purchase.[16] The project proved quite successful and, in 1859, counted some 200 families of together 800 individuals,[17] possessing 9 000 acres of land. The Elgin Settlement also possessed significant industrial and public facilities such as a sawmill, gristmill, potash factory,[18] hotel, post office, bank, two schools and four churches.[19] Eventually, many of Elgin's settlers left for the United States during or shortly after the Civil War and the Association closed down in 1873.[20] The settlement itself was later opened to whites and the town of Buxton has survived to this day.[21]

The third settlement studied here is that of the Refugee Home Society. This society was formed in 1852 by the fusion of an American and a Canadian settlement society, based in Detroit and Sandwich respectively.[22] The Refugee Home Society was strongly inspired by the example of the Elgin Association and specifically sought to provide for the increase in fugitives to Canada after the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act, leasing land exclusively to fugitives from slavery.[23] Unlike the other two settlements, the lands of the Refugee Home Society were not contingent, but

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[16] Samuel J. May, "Letter from Samuel J. May — No. III," *National Anti-Slavery Standard,* rpt. in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* 5, no. 38*,* September 10, 1852, accessed March 22, 2021, link.gale.com/apps/doc/GT3011597710/SAS?u=leiden&sid= SAS&xid=815c21e9; Roger Hepburn 1, fn.2.

[17] Bristow, 90.

[18] Potash is a "silvery-white substance … used for glassmaking and as fertilizer" and is made from the by-products of burned wood (Roger Hepburn, 118-120).

[19] Bristow, 88; Winks, 211.

[20] Winks, 216.

[21] Roger Hepburn, 4; Stouffer, 104.

[22] Pease & Pease, 112.

[23] Pease & Pease, 111-113; *Voice of the Fugitive*, "Refugees' Home Society. Constitution and By Laws."; Winks, 204-206.

dispersed throughout the area of Amherstburg, Sandwich and Windsor.[24] The society's headquarters remained in Detroit, while black abolitionists Henry and Mary Bibb took local leadership of the settlement. Their newspaper, *The Voice of the Fugitive*, became the society's official mouthpiece.[25] The settlement was supported by the American Missionary Association, centered around a mission church and operated two schools. In 1861, some 60 families lived on its lands. Like many of the settlers at Elgin, these would return to the United States when the Civil War broke out.[26]

The three settlement projects were not equally successful and this was reflected by their portrayal in abolitionist literature. By 1850, the British American Institute had acquired a debt of some £7000,-, mostly from the construction of its brickyard, sawmill and gristmill.[27] That same year, Hiram Wilson wrote to the *Liberator* that, while Dawn's mission school was doing well, the institute had "run down" and the sawmill was "out of repair and doing nothing."[28] After funding from Britain dried up around 1850, the Institute's trustees briefly placed it under the oversight of the American Baptist Free Mission Society until John Scoble, an agent of an important sponsor, the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, was appointed manager in 1852. These changes were accompanied by severe infighting and public denouncements among the Institute's managers and trustees.[29] The Refugee Home Society experienced many troubles as well, apparently changing its regulations without the settlers' knowledge[30] and charging them more than they had agreed to,

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[24] Pease & Pease, 114.

[25] Asaka, 119.

[26] Winks, 207-208.

[27] Barker, 56-57; Pease & Pease, 67-69.

[28] Hiram Wilson, "Letter from Hiram Wilson," *Liberator* 20, no. 9, March 1, 1850, accessed March 4, 2021, link.gale.com/apps/doc/GT3005867327/SAS?u=leiden&sid= SAS&xid=1ff6fc46.

[29] Pease & Pease, 67-73; Winks, 200-203.

[30] Drew, 327-328.

leading to costly legal proceedings which often ended in the settlers' favor.[31] The Refugee Home Society especially came under attack from the *Provincial Freeman,* a local newspaper edited by black abolitionist Mary Ann Shadd. Shadd was a strong proponent of black integration and thought the settlements too separatist in nature.[32] In the case of both settlements, the conflicts were partly fought out in the pages of American abolitionist newspapers, where the involved parties published advertisements and letters discrediting each other, making accusations of agents appropriating funds for their own ends[33] or arguing that they harmed the reputation of the communities and its settlers by "begging" for charity, giving the public the idea that blacks were unable to care for themselves.[34] The Elgin Settlement, being free from severe infighting or financial troubles, possessing excellent schools, industry, and public facilities, received much more coverage in abolitionist literature as a positive example of the self-dependence of fugitives than the other two settlements.[35] This does not

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[31] Pease & Pease, 113-114.

[32] Jason H. Silverman, "'Mary Ann Shadd and the Search for Equality," in *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Leon Litwack and August Maier, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 87-103, rpt. in *A Nation of Immigrants: Women, Workers, and Communities in Canadian History, 1840s-1960s*, ed. Franca Iacovetta, Paula Draper and Robert Ventresca (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press), 103-104; Winks, 206-207.

[33] "Josiah Henson. — Caution," *Liberator* 21, no. 5, April 11, 1852, accessed March 4, 2021, link.gale.com/apps/doc/GT3005868198/ SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=3b7312f3; M.A.S.C., "Exposed At Last," *Liberator*, May 22, 1857, accessed March 4, 2021, link.gale.com/apps/doc/GT3005880801/SAS?u=leiden&sid= SAS&xid=1a689bf3.

[34] Pennsylvania Freeman, "The Fugitives and their Need," *National Anti-Slavery Standard* 13, no. 35, January 20, 1853, accessed March 4, 2021, link.gale.com/apps/doc/HX2500221436/ SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=9b6db30e (accessed March 4, 2021); Peter Poyntz, Elisha Robinson & Mary A. Shadd, "No More Begging for Farms or Clothes for Fugitives in Canada," *Liberator,* October 15, 1852, accessed January 7, 2021, link.gale.com/apps/doc/GT3005871719/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=c0df3ac4.

[35] Samuel J. May, "Letter From Rev. S. J. May - No. IV," *Frederick Douglass' Paper* 5, no. 39, September 17, 1852, accessed March 23, 2021, link.gale. com/apps/doc/GT3011597739/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=568d9afb; William C. Nell, "Impressions and Gleanings of Canada West," *Liberator*, December 24, 1858, accessed January 7, 2021, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/apps/doc/GT3005881770/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=fecbf4a8.

mean, however, that Dawn and the Refugee Home Society were completely neglected. Though many of the abolitionists writing on the settlements acknowledged that they did not live up to their expectations, they nevertheless emphasized the potential of the projects and the diligence and determination of its settlers in their efforts to make a living.[36]

Most academic research on the fugitive communities has been done in the field of Canadian studies, with a focus on how the settlers constructed a community life for themselves[37] and the interaction between the settlers and white Canadian society at large.[38] Much of this research has addressed the statements these communities made on the relation of blacks to white society. An early standard on the communities and black Canadian history in general, Robin Winks' *Blacks in Canada* (1971, 2nd ed. 1997), sees the communities primarily as attempts by reformers to have blacks adjust to "the middle-class success ethic" of a "dominant white society," an ethic which revolved around hard work and education. The communities were established to secure this aim, protecting the settlers from white discrimination which would otherwise prevent them from improving themselves.[39] Writing on Elgin, Howard Law argues that its settlers sought "to conform

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[36] "Canada and the Colored People," *Frederick Douglass' Paper,* August 18, 1854, accessed March 4, 2021, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/apps/doc/GT3011599595/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=4911e936; Frederick Douglass, "First of August Celebration at Dawn Settlement, Canada West — Public Meeting at Chatham — Visit to the Elgin Settlement at Buxton," *Frederick Douglass' Paper,* August 11, 1854, accessed March 3, 2021, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/GT3011599551/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=d4588898; Benjamin Drew, *A Northside view of slavery: the refugee, or, The narratives of fugitive slaves in Canada,* Boston, 1856, 309-312 & 323-326, accessed October 24, 2020, https://go-gale-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/ps/i.do?p=SAS&u=leiden&id=GALE|O0100012230&v=2.1&it=r; Josephine S. Griffing, "A Letter from Mrs. Griffing," *Anti-Slavery Bugle,* October 28, 1854, accessed March 5, 2021*,* link.gale.com/apps/doc/GB2500052498/SAS?u= leiden&sid=SAS&xid=65e749c5.

[37] Bristow; Roger Hepburn.

[38] Asaka, 111-139; Winks, 178-232.

[39] Winks, 178.

to certain white standards of behavior."[40] This was in line with the ideology of a "comfortable intellectual elite" of black abolitionists who emphasized moral reform and hard work as "the key to racial improvement and white respect,"[41] seeing agriculture and independence as important means by which to achieve this.[42] Later scholars, however, have offered interpretations of the communities' functions and goals different from them conforming to white middle class ideals. Ikuko Asaka, in her chapter on the Canadian communities in *Tropical Freedom* (2017), argues that the communities promoted black integration by demonstrating the virtues of American white settlerhood, an ideal which was "characterized by patriarchal authority, agricultural productivity, and military service."[43] *Crossing the Border* (2007), Sharon Roger Hepburn's excellent monograph on the Elgin Settlement, sees the community in terms of resistance rather than conformity. Elgin was a means for blacks of creating security, solidarity and economic independence in a society dominated by whites. Roger Hepburn compares the communities to black resistance strategies through migration, which formed "a dual means on minimizing racial oppression and increasing control over their destinies."[44]

Where such studies have studied the statements these communities made about black integration in white society primarily from the context of Canadian society, this thesis seeks to contribute to our understanding of the relation between the communities and the ideas they expressed about emancipation and integration by looking at them through the lens of American

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[40] Howard Law, '"Self-Reliance Is the True Road to Independence': Ideology and the Ex-Slaves in Buxton and Chatham," *Ontario History* 77 (1985):107-121, rpt. in *A Nation of Immigrants: Women, Workers, and Communities in Canadian History, 1840s-1960s*, ed. Franca Iacovetta, Paula Draper and Robert Ventresca (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 86.

[41] Ibid., 92.

[42] Ibid., 93-94.

[43] Asaka, 112-113.

[44] Roger Hepburn, 2-3.

abolitionist literature, studying how they were used there to reflect on society, integration and black citizenship in the United States. The importance of the fugitive communities to the American abolitionist movement has been studied to a much lesser extent, though its exemplary function to the "broader anti-slavery movement" has been widely acknowledged.[45] One work to which it is central, however, is William & Jane Pease's *Black Utopia* (1963), a now somewhat dated but still important work of reference on the communities. *Black Utopia* sees the communities as attempts to answer the question of how to integrate African Americans into American society after Emancipation. The work concludes that these attempts were, ultimately, a failure, as the communities were organized to train "the Negro … to adjust," failing to see that integration could only be achieved by "changing white attitudes as well as black."[46] Pease & Pease even consider the communities' importance to the antislavery movement as peripheral.[47] This, however, downplays the significance they had to the abolitionist movements due to their public renown[48] and the coverage and support they received from the major American abolitionist and even mainstream

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[45] Asaka, 5; Heike Paul, "Out of Chatham: Abolitionism on the Canadian Frontier", *Atlantic Studies* 8, no.2 (2011), 174; Roger Hepburn, 4.

[46] Pease & Pease, 162.

[47] Ibid., 14.

[48] Elgin, especially, received international renown and was visited by many prominent British and American public figures, among whom the Prince of Wales, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Beecher Stowe, who based a character in her novel *Dred* (1857) on William King (Paul, 174; Winks, 180, 187, 216-217). The American Anti-Slavery Society was strongly involved in the Dawn Settlement (William Lloyd Garrison, Samuel May, Jr. & James W. Walker. "Seventeenth Annual Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society." *National Anti-Slavery Standard* 12, no. 51, May 15, 1851, accessed March 4, 2021, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/apps/doc/HX2500222670/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=d578731; Winks, 179-180). The idea for the British-American Institute was also presented at a World Anti-Slavery Convention in London. The leader of the British Anti-Slavery Society, the prominent abolitionist Thomas Clarkson, wrote a letter to the Canadian government in support of the plan (*Seventh Annual Report of the Canada Mission*, 11).

press, either on their own or as part of broader assessments of blacks in Canadian society.[49] This highly visible example is acknowledged in Allen Stouffer's more recent treatment of the Elgin settlement, *Light of Nature and the Law of God: Antislavery in Ontario, 1833-1877* (1992), which emphasizes the community's success in demonstrating to Northern audiences the ability of African Americans to "care for themselves," thereby making a strong antislavery statement.[50]

While both studies have delineated the core functions of the communities in abolitionist literature, their scope remains narrow in view of how the study of American abolitionism has developed during the last few decades. The conception of abolitionism as part of a "bourgeoisie middle class culture" with abolitionists belonging to an elite group of intellectuals "mired in the strictures of middle-class reform and elitism"[51] has come under scrutiny. Modern histories of the abolitionist movement, a central work being Manisha Sinha's *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (2016), have instead brought to light its diversity and the importance of other strands of activism within it, most importantly that of fugitive slaves. Instead of simply seeking to integrate blacks into American society by having them conform to white middle class norms, black abolitionists developed critiques of mainstream American society and American democracy, critiques which strongly influenced the direction of American abolitionism.[52] By sharing their personal experiences to the Northern public through lectures and narratives, Sinha argues, fugitive

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[49] Stouffer, 98-99. The communties were reported on in what were, at the time, America's biggest newspapers, the antislavery *New York Tribune* and the proslavery *New York Herald* ("The Colony at Buxton," *New York Tribune*. November 11, 1857, p6, accessed February 26, 2021, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030213/1857-11-11/ed-1/seq-6/; "Special Report for the New York Herald on the Conditions and Prospects of Negroes in the British Provinces," *New York Herald*, January 5, 1860, p3-5, accessed January 7, 2021, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1860-01-05/ed-1/seq-2/).

[50] Stouffer, 106.

[51] Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 299.

[52] Ibid., 1-2.

slaves played a crucial role in developing and sustaining these societal critiques.[53] In *Tropical Freedom*, Asaka already makes a connection between the "black settler subject"[54] and fugitive slave narratives, arguing that they both demonstrated that the fugitive was a deserving citizen, as he overcame challenges to become free.[55] In this thesis, it is argued that the Canadian fugitive communities constituted a form of fugitive slave abolitionism, a unique way by which fugitives contributed to the abolitionist movement. American abolitionist literature reveals that the communities, instead of simply being seen as a means to "train" African Americans for freedom by encouraging them to conform to norms of white middle class respectability, were one of many key tools fugitives contributed to the black abolitionist critique of both slavery and broader American society. The communities provided a thriving, successful example of black settlers to the public, with the settlers' testimonies being of key importance in sustaining this example.

Recent scholarship on abolitionism has also emphasized the importance of the transnational ties between abolitionists throughout the Atlantic and the international nature of abolitionist campaigns. In the words of Ousmane Power-Greene, "internationalism was crucial for those struggling for black equality during the nineteenth century."[56] One way in which abolitionism was international was that the developments of various black communities throughout the Atlantic had a strong effect upon each other, diasporic comminities shaping "slavery and emancipation, and the possibility of black politics, in the United States," as Van Gosse and Waldstreicher concluded in

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[53] Ibid., 421.

[54] Asaka, 120.

[55] Ibid., 122-123.

[56] Ousmane K. Power-Greene, *Against Wind and Tide: The African American Struggle against the Colonization Movement* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2014), 6.

Revolutions and Reconstructions (2020), a volume on black politics in the nineteenth century.[57] This thesis also demonstrates how the fugitive communities operated firmly within transatlantic networks. This was in one sense directly, as they were planned and sponsored by black and white Canadian, British and American abolitionists, and campaigned for support and contributions in Canada, Britain and the United States, yet also indirectly, as they played an important role in American debates on black emigration and integration. By studying the links between the Canadian communities and American abolitionism, this thesis reveals more about the abolitionist networks linking the border region of Canada and the United States, and the strong impact black communities on each side of the border had on the social position and struggle for equality of black communities on the other side. In doing so, this study demonstrates that the communities formed part of what Oran Kennedy decribes as "a black freedom network" extending across the American-Canadian border.[58] This way, it contributes to the emerging body of scholarship on transnationalism in North American studies, which seeks to expand our expand our understanding of the North American past where many former historical studies have been restricted by a strong national focus.[59]

This study therefore contributes to both frameworks of black internationalism and fugitive slave abolitionism, revealing much about the nature of antebellum American abolitionism. What, if any, ideals of citizenship beside economic self-sufficiency did the communities propagate? How were the communities employed in abolitionist literature to reflect on and criticize race relations in the northern states? What can they tell us about different strategies of combating slavery and racial

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[57] Van Gosse and David Waldstreicher, "Black Politics and U.S. Politics in the Age of Revolution, Reconstructions, and Emancipations," in *Revolutions and Reconstructions: Black Politics in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Van Gosse and David Waldstreicher (Philadelphia, PA: Univeristy of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 19-20.

[58] Oran Patrick Kennedy, "Northward Bound: Slave Refugees and the Pursuit of Freedom in the Northern US and Canada, 1775-1861," Phd. Diss., (Leiden University, 2020), 21.

[59] Ibid.

attitudes in the abolitionist movement? To answer these questions, this study focuses on three aspects central to the way these communities were presented in abolitionist literature. The first chapter focuses on the educational aspects of the communities, looking at their strongly linked focus on education and "moral improvement." How did the educational purposes of the community fit in with the goals of the abolitionist movement? What modes of education did they emphasize and how did these fit with ideas about both slavery and Northern society? The second chapter treats the economic aspects of the communities — a key feature of them was that they demonstrated the capability of African Americans to support themselves. The third and final chapter focuses on how the civic integration of the communities was depicted in abolitionist literature. A central difference between the northern states and Canada in relation to African Americans was that, while there were many instances of informal discrimination, there were no legal restrictions on the civic rights of blacks in Canada.[60] This chapter studies how American abolitionists used the examples of the settlements to reflect on African Americans and citizenship in American society, focusing on debates of migration, integration and separation.

This study is mainly based on depictions of the fugitive settlements in abolitionist newspapers and literature, consisting of eyewitness accounts by correspondents, journalistic reports on the communities, notes of abolitionist conventions, and letters about the settlements visitors and antislavery activists sent in to newspapers. While reasonably small on their own, together, American abolitionist newspapers reached a "combined circulation figure that was higher than that of such better known contemporaries as the *New York Times.*"[61]These newspapers therefore not only offered an important window into the antislavery movement, they were also a potent platform for the

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[60] Pease & Pease, 8.

[61] John W. Blassingame and Mae G. Henderson, *Antislavery Newspapers and Periodicals Volume 2* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980), 11, qtd. in Augusta Rohrbach, ""Truth Stronger and Stranger Than Fiction": Reexamining William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*," *American Literature* 73, no. 4 (2001): 752-763, fn. 16.

antislavery cause. This study incorporates many of the most well-known abolitionist newspapers of the time. The two most prominent among these were William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*, appearing from 1831 to 1865, and *Frederick Douglass' Paper,* appearing from 1851 to 1859.[62] Also used is the *National Anti-Slavery Standard,* the official organ of the American Anti-Slavery Association, which was closely involved with the Dawn settlement.[63] The antislavery *National Era,* published in Washington DC, took a more gradualist approach to abolition, and "managed to achieve rapid success."[64] Also used is the *Voice of the Fugitive*, published in Canada West by Henry Bibb, an African American abolitionist who had relocated to Canada. The *Voice of the Fugitive* was described by Afua Cooper as "the first successful black newspaper in Canada" and was aimed at an international audience, seeking to reach the United States and Great Britain as well.[65] Excerpts from more regionally based newspapers such as Michigan's *Signal of Liberty* and Ohio's *Anti-Slavery Bugle* are also used here. A final key source is Benjamin Drew's collection of interviews with African Americans in Canada, *The Refugee: A North Side View of Slavery* (1856), which was compiled to counter proslavery claims that African-Americans could not thrive in freedom.[66] It devotes extensive attention to the community, its settlers, and their motivations for coming to the communities. Together, these sources offer a comprehensive view on the larger American

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[62] James G. Basker, "American Antislavery Literature, 1688 to 1865: An Introduction", *Études Anglaises* 70, no. 3 (2017), 269-270.

[63] Wilson, "Letter from Hiram Wilson," *National Anti-Slavery Standard*; Winks, 179.

[64] Jarad Krywicki, "'The Soft Answer'": The *National Era*'s Network of Understanding," *American Periodicals* 23, no. 2 (2013): 125.

[65] Afua Cooper, "The *Voice of the Fugitive*: A Transnational Abolitionist Organ," in *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland*, ed. Karolyn Smardz Frost and Veta Smith Tucker (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2016), 136-138.

[66] Drew, v-vi; Sinha, 459.

abolitionist movement and how the communities advanced the antislavery cause and arguments for civic equality of African-Americans in American society.

1. Religion and Education in the Fugitive Communities

The founders of the Canadian communities often framed their projects in terms of "moral enlightment," the christian duty to uplift those who did not have access to education. In the case of fugitives, this was, they held, because they had been made ignorant by slavery. The projects were, in effect, seen as a form of missionary work. The American Canada Mission and American Missionary Association, for example, were key actors in the founding and management of the British-American Institute. The main purpose of the Elgin Settlement was to provide blacks with an environment where they could safely achieve "the means of grace" and "a christian education."[67] The Refugee Home Society's focus on missionary work was less pronounced, but it still made "moral, social, physical and intellectual elevation" one of its key aims and contained a Mission Church, the Sandwich Mission.[68] Key to the communities' work of moral uplift was education. The founding of the British-American Institute and Elgin, in particular, were strongly motivated by the fact that, in most places in Canada, blacks were excluded from public schools. This chapter will first set out how the initiators of the communities viewed the issues of education and "moral elevation" and how they incorporated these in the planning of their communities. Then, it will study how these issues were addressed in American abolitionist literature of the 1850s, which strongly focused on the social and civic functions and implications of black education rather than its

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[67] William King. "Report of the Mission to the Coloured Population," June 1849, William King Fonds: Miscellaneous Personal Manuscripts and Legal Papers, 663-680, 666, accessed March 17, 2021, http://www.slavery.amdigital.co.uk.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/Contents/DocumentDetailsSearch.aspx?documentid=714&prevPos=714&previous=3&vpath=searchresults&searchmode=true&pi=1.

[68] "Report of the Refugee's Home Society," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, October 15, 1852, accessed May 2, 2021, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/apps/doc/GT3011597498/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=64f25f4c; Winks, 207-208.

religious components. How did the educational purposes of the community relate to the broader goals of the abolitionist movement? What modes of education did they emphasize, and how did these relate to abolitionist ideas about slavery and Northern society?

The British-American Institute sprang out of the Canada Mission, an organization which set up schools for black Canadians throughout Canada West.[69] It was founded in 1836 by white abolitionist Hiram Wilson and consisted mostly of graduates from Oberlin college, an activist abolitionist institute of education in Ohio notable for admitting men and women of all races, becoming, in the words of J. Brent Morris, "a beacon for the nation's most progressive students."[70] Wilson and his colleagues observed that there was a strong desire for education among Canadian blacks,[71] but that informal discrimination made it hard, if not impossible, for them to gain access to schooling. "By reasons of prejudice," Wilson noted, "the common schools of the country are not generally open to them and their children."[72] To provide opportunities for education, a black convention held in London, Ontario, in July of 1841, unanimously decided to set up a Manual Labor School, so that blacks could enjoy "the blessings of common school instruction."[73] Hiram Wilson was appointed head of a committee responsible for seeking and buying lands for the school, to be called the "British American Institute of Science and Industry."[74] In November 1842, lands for

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[69] Pease and Pease, 64.

[70] J. Brent Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism: College, Community and the Fight for Freedom and Equality in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 2-3.

[71] Wilson, "Letter from Hiram Wilson," *National Anti-Slavery Standard.*

[72] Hiram Wilson, "Sixth Annual Report of the Canada Missions," *Liberator* 13, no. 11, March 17, 1843, accessed March 24, 2021, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/apps/doc/GT3005852630/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=9fec3ad7.

[73] Wilson, "Letter from Hiram Wilson," *National Anti-Slavery Standard.*

[74] Ibid.

the institute were bought near the Sydenham River.[75] Soon after, a schoolhouse and dormitory were established and the school began practice on December 12th, 1842 with a group of nine students.[76] It was hoped that the institute would partly subserve the Canada Mission by training teachers to fill the Mission's vacancies at its schools in Canada West,[77] with the *Liberator* later reporting that students, as a condition for their admission, were required to teach for some time after graduating.[78]

Around the institute, a settlement soon sprang up. At its founding, the Mission had already reserved some lands for its students, who would "maintain themselves by manual labor upon the land."[79] In addition, soon after the institute's founding, many blacks began to settle near the institute themselves in order to pursue an education. The Mission report of 1844 estimated that some 1,500 acres near the institute had been acquired by black settlers from nearby Queen's Bush,[80] a free black settlement whose settlers were forced to move out during the 1840s as the government sold the deeds to its lands, where the black settlers squatted on, to whites.[81] At its peak in the early 1850s, the Dawn settlement would count some 500 settlers. It received much missionary attention: a

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[75] Hiram Wilson, "For the Friend of Man," *Friend of Man* 6, no. 11, January 11, 1842, accessed March 24, 2021, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/apps/doc/GB2500064882/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=45d28bef.

[76] Wilson, "Sixth Annual Report."

[77] *Seventh Annual Report of the Canada Mission*, 11.

[78] Samuel J. May, "Condition and Prospects of the Fugitives in Canada," *Liberator*, October 10, 1851, accessed December 30, 2020, http://www.slavery.amdigital.co.uk.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/Essays/Essay.aspx?docref=BuxtonEssay&type=search&searchmode=true&searchrequest=1.

[79] "Refugee Slaves in Canada," *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter; Under the Sanction of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society* 4, no. 20, September 20, 1843, accessed March 24, 2021, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/apps/doc/CC1903210541/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=6a01eda6.

[80] *Seventh Annual Report of the Canada Mission*, 4-5.

[81] Gordon S. Barker, "Revisiting 'British Principle Talk': Antebellum Black Expectations and Racism in Early Ontario," in *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, ed. Damian Alan Pargas (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2018), 56.

Baptist and Methodist church were founded the American Missionary Association sent missionaries to teach at Dawn. The institute would also be expanded with a "juvenile division," consisting of at least two primary schools taught by American abolitionists. During the late 1850s, four elementary schools were established.[82]

The Canada Mission particularly aimed to elevate those it considered to be most in need of education and religion: fugitive slaves. While open to all blacks, whites and Native Canadians,[83] the institute was advertised as "especially for the benefit of refugees from American Oppression and Slavery."[84] The "thraldom of slavery," it was held, made someone debased and constituted a "bondage of ignorance and sin." Education, on the other hand, was to the fugitive "the light of knowledge and the lamp of eternal life."[85] The function of the institute, therefore, while "conducted strictly on a manual labor system," was certainly not strictly secular. It aimed to "cultivate the *entire being*, and elicit the fairest and fullest possible developments of the physical, intellectual and moral powers."[86] This missionary effort had strong paternalistic connotations, and at times envisioned its settlers as setting an example for both whites and blacks to be emulated. One of the Mission's annual reports cited a letter from a Hawaiian missionary directed to the institute's pupils, urging them to demonstrate to the world that the Gospel has made them "an industrious, peaceable, law obeying, happy people."[87] The Mission also argued that educating the formerly enslaved might

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[82] Pease & Pease, 65-66.

[83] Wilson, "For the Friend of Man."

[84] "British-American Institute and Canada Mission," *Signal of Liberty* 5, no. 28, p1, November 3, 1845, accessed March 24, 2021, https://aadl.org/signalofliberty/18451103.

[85] Hiram Wilson & Josiah Henson, "Appeal," *Signal of Liberty* 5, no. 28, p1, November 3, 1845, accessed March 24, 2021, https://aadl.org/signalofliberty/18451103.

[86] Wilson, "Sixth Annual Report."

[87] *Seventh Annual Report of the Canada Mission*, 16.

eventually aid the American abolitionist movement. Now already key agents of abolitionism, an education would make fugitives "tenfold more serviceable to the cause of universal freedom."[88]

Similar motives of christian education and moral elevation were central to the founding of the Elgin Settlement. William King presented the initial plans of what would become the Elgin settlement during the Presbyterian Church Synod of 1847, asking for a mission to be established "to improve the religious condition" of the blacks in Canada.[89] "It is our duty as Christians," King argued in one of the plans he submitted to the Presbyterian church, "to educate them not only for time, but for eternity."[90] The Church supported the idea and established a committee to help King with his project. In *The Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record* of January 1849, the committee reported that, given "the peculiar circumstances in which the colored people came into the province, and the debasing influence exerted by Slavery on their character," the mission could only be successful if a settlement was organized exclusively for black families, "placed under careful and judicious supervision."[91] In his report, compiled after visiting black Canadian communities, among wich Queen's Bush,[92] King argued that such a stable, exclusively black settlement was crucial to

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[88] Ibid., 4.

[89] "Prospectus of a Scheme for the Social and Religious Improvement of the Coloured People of Canada", *Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record* 5, no.3, p39-40, January 1849, accessed February 25, 2021, https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_04399_52/2?r=0&s=1.

[90] William King, "Scheme for Improving the Coloured People of Canada," 1848, William King Fonds: Miscellaneous Personal Manuscripts and Legal Papers, 653, accessed March 17, 2021, http://www.slavery.amdigital.co.uk.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/Contents/DocumentDetailsSearch.aspx?documentid=714&prevPos=714&previous=3&vpath=searchresults&searchmode=true&pi=1.

[91] *Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record,* "Prospectus of a Scheme."

[92] William King, "Report of the Mission to the Coloured Population," June 1849, William King Fonds: Miscellaneous Personal Manuscripts and Legal Papers, 663, accessed March 17, 2021, http://www.slavery.amdigital.co.uk.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/Contents/DocumentDetailsSearch.aspx?documentid=714&prevPos=714&previous=3&vpath=searchresults&searchmode=true&pi=1.

missionary work and moral improvement because, when living with whites, "prejudice excludes them in a great measure from the common schools and operates against their advancement."[93] It was also necessary that blacks were in possession of their own lands as they, otherwise, "having nothing but a temporary interest," would not remain in one place long enough to achieve "the means of grace" and, for their children, "a christian education."[94] The committee ultimately presented a proposal of forming a stockholding company to buy the lands necessary for such a project, intending to raise £1000 by selling stock of £10 each.[95] This stockholding company, the Elgin Association, whose board consisted of prominent Canadians,[96] would manage the financial, administrative and day-to-day affairs of the settlement, while a separate organization, the Buxton Mission, would manage matters of religion and education.[97]

While the Canadian Presbyterian Church was the main sponsor and initiator of the Elgin project, church attendance was not mandatory[98] and settlers were free to found churches of their own denomination. Apart from the Presbyterian Buxton Mission, later renamed St. Andrew's, where William King held service,[99] two Baptist churches and one Methodist church were built.[100] Church

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[93] Ibid., 665.

[94] Ibid., 666.

[95] *Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record,* "Prospectus of a Scheme."

[96] Among the members of the board were Skeffinton Connor, professor of law at the University of Toronto, John Fisher, mayor of Hamilton, J. S. Howard, treasurer of Peel and York counties, and Wilson R. Abbott, a wealthy black businessman from Toronto (Roger Hepburn, 48).

[97] Roger Hepburn, 48-49.

[98] Ibid., 144-148.

[99] Ibid., 141.

[100] Ibid., 146.

attendance was often irregular,[101] but the Association noted periods of religious revival during which attendance increased[102] and sabbath was regularly observed.[103] The Elgin Association set strict moral codes of behavior for the settlement, making active efforts to address crime, extramarital affairs, and drunkenness.[104] A particularly noteworthy measure was the Mission's "total abstinence principle"[105] which, outwardly at least, was successfully adhered to.[106] To further ensure that the settlement would set a good example and, perhaps, to assuage the fears of whites living in the neighborhood,[107] King insisted that all applicants provide a certificate of "approved moral character."[108] Only after "the foundations of their community are securely laid, and a strong conservative moral influence is established", King told Samuel J. May, who reported on the

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[101] "Extracts from the Third Annual Report of the Mission to the Coloured Population at Buxton." *Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record* 8, no.9, July 1852, p130, accessed March 20, 2021, https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_04399_94/3?r=0&s=1.

[102] Roger Hepburn, 149-150.

[103] *Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record,* "Extracts."

[104] Pease & Pease, 98; Roger Hepburn, 148-149.

[105] *Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record,* "Extracts."

[106] In the privacy of their homes, however, the settlers did at times enjoy "intoxicating beverages," as can be gleaned from their personal correspondence (Roger Hepburn, 82).

[107] Roger Hepburn, 54.

[108] Drew, 59. The requirement of a moral certificate was somewhat paradoxical given the settlement's aim of moral improvement, as it would seem to admit entry only to those who had already proven to be morally upstanding, as one critic at a hostile white town meeting at Chatham remarked to King (Stouffer, 92). It is not known whether this standard was rigidly applied and was cause to turn away some of the applicants. Many of the settlers were, after all, fugitive slaves, who might not have had the local networks necessary to acquire such certificates (Winks, 218). Roger Hepburn suggests that entrance may have been granted on the basis of personal interviews (67-68), while it could also be that the certificates were granted to the fugitives by abolitionists who helped them escape and may have directed them to Elgin.

community for *Frederick Douglass' Paper* and the *Anti-Slavery Standard,* would it be safe to do away with this requirement.[109]

Like at Dawn, education was central to the Elgin Settlement's mission. A basic education was a necessary precondition for Christianization, as scriptural knowledge was only accessible to those who were able to read. The school at Elgin proved very successful; it taught advanced subjects like Greek, Latin and algebra, counting 150 students in 1854.[110] The Association commented favorably on the students in its Latin class, hoping, like at Dawn, "that some of them may be found qualified for teaching their brethren, or for filling the office of the Christian ministry."[111] King even hoped that some graduates would become missionaries to Africa, for this purpose setting up a society with black abolitionist Martin Delany, but these plans were eventually interrupted by the outbreak of the Civil War.[112] Graduates of the school would go on to become "teachers, ministers, lawyers, and doctors," having continued their studies at institutes of higher education like Oberlin, Toronto University and Knox College.[113] Given this reputation, it is no wonder that the Association observed that many blacks moved to Elgin with the particular "view of getting the benefit of our school."[114] Noteworthy as well was that the school was attended by the children of local whites after the district school closed due to a lack of teachers, at the time providing one of the few examples of a successfully integrated school in North America.[115] Apart

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[109] Samuel J. May, "Letter From Rev. S. J. May — No. IV," *Frederick Douglass' Paper* 5, no. 39, September 17, 1852, accessed March 23, 2021, link.gale. com/apps/doc/GT3011597739/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=568d9afb.

[110] Pease & Pease, 102.

[111] *Third Annual Report of the Directors of the Elgin Association*, 4.

[112] Roger Hepburn, 143.

[113] Ibid., 173-174.

[114] *Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record,* "Extracts."

[115] Roger Hepburn, 159.

from the Mission school, the Elgin settlement operated two Sabbath schools[116] and, by 1857, two primary schools which were incorporated in the Canadian public school system.[117]

At the Refugee Home Society, religion and education were less emphasized by its founders than at Dawn and Buxton, with its prime purpose being that of providing an economical basis for fugitives in the Windsor Amherstburg-area, the part of Canada where they arrived.[118] Nevertheless, religion and education played an important role in the society's aims, which were in this respect very similar to those of Dawn and Elgin. Isaac J. Rice, at the Detroit Convention of 1846 originating one of the RHS's predecessor societies, described its aims as to "secure [for blacks] steady education and better gospel privileges, [they] being here as in the states excluded from white schools and white Temperance Societies."[119] Some key initiators of the Refugee Home Society, furthermore, had strong links with the Canaa Mission — Josiah Henson had presided at the 1850 Sandwich Convention of the Society which would soon merge with the Detroit group,[120] while Rice himself had taught at the Canada Mission's school at Amherstburg, where most of the Refugee Home Society's lands would eventually be located.[121] Central to the community was a Mission Church, the Sandwich Mission, and, like at Elgin, settlers were expected to be strictly temperate.[122] The constitution of the Refugee Home Society made moral improvement one of its two key aims, which were "to obtain permanent homes in Canada; and to promote [the fugitive's] moral, social, physical and intellectual elevation." The constitutions also specified that all the money it earned

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[116] Ibid., 140-141.

[117] Pease & Pease, 102.

[118] Ibid., 109.

[119] Isaac J. Rice, qtd. in Pease & Pease, 109.

[120] Ibid., 111.

[121] *Seventh Annual Report of the Canada Mission*, 7.

[122] Pease & Pease, 110.

from selling lands to fugitives would be "devoted in equal shares to the support of Schools, and the purchase of other lands."[123] When Benjamin Drew visited the settlement, he wrote that a school "was maintained for three fourths of the year."[124] The school was described in the Society's annual report of 1855 as "a large and successful school … kept in flourishing condition," taught for two years by American abolitionist Laura S. Haveland. One schoolhouse was then under construction near the Society's lands at the Puce River, while yet another was planned to be built at Bell River.[125]

At their founding, all three societies had strong missionary motives, seeking to educate those who otherwise had no access to education. This partly served to achieve their spiritual elevation and, ultimately, salvation. In the case of Dawn and Elgin, these schools stimulated the growth of the community because the public school system was, through informal discrimination, often inacessible to blacks. To follow an education, they often had no other choice than to move to the few schools which did offer one. As Dawn and Elgin were affordable options[126] which provided a place to live and an environment which Pease & Pease described as one of "mutual aid,"[127] they were a logical choice for the black Canadians who sought to provide their children with an education. Yet while the initiators of the communities put religious and moral improvement central as the ends of education and settlement, in American abolitionist literature the religious aspects of the communities would often take second place to discussions of its social and civic factors. This is especially noticeable in the discussion of the schools, where much attention is given to how these

[123] *Frederick Douglass' Paper,* "Report of the Refugee's Home Society."

[124] Drew, 323-324.

[125] "The Refugee Home Society," *The Anti-Slavery Bugle,* December 29, 1855, accessed March 5, 2021, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/apps/doc/GB2500055835/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=0170831b.

[126] Public schools also charged attendance fees, which could prove a barrier to education to some. William S. Edwards, black resident of Chatham, told Drew that he could only afford to send one of his five children to the public school (Drew, 330).

[127] Pease & Pease, 16.

were a reaction to white racism, to what the schools in the communities demonstrated about the possibilities of integrated or segregated education and, by extension, the social position of blacks in American society.

That is not to say that aspects of religious and moral elevation are entirely absent in abolitionist literature. When discussing the religious and moral aspects of the communities, it often focused on the settlers' intrinsic morality and religious enthusiasm, which they could readily demonstrate if they could be "delivered" from slavery and placed "in circumstances where they might become what God made them capable of being,"[128] in the words of Samuel J. May, who visited the Elgin settlement for the *Anti-Slavery Standard.* The religion of the settlers is central to May's account. He described the first sight he gets of them as of being in a prayer meeting, led by an aged man, whose "words and … tones were such as 'Uncle Tom' would have uttered," tying the image of the settlers to the stereotype of naive black piety made widely recognizable by Stowe's novel. The congregation invited May to an evening prayer meeting, where he was surprised at the number of people present, especially as some had to walk a distance of three miles to the settlement over roads which "seemed … hardly passable by daylight."[129] A report of the *Toronto Globe*, reprinted in the *National Era,* used imagery very similar to that of May. Here, the "first sounds that greeted our ears" on encountering the settlement, "were those of prayer and praise, a weekly prayer meeting being held in the minister's house … there is generally a good attendance."[130] Apart from emphasizing the innate religious nature of the settlers, religion was also emphasized as an emancipatory force. In *A Northside View of Slavery,* William Henry Bradley at Dawn stated that, ultimately, slavery was wrong, as all men are equal since they "came of the hand of the

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[128] May, "Letter No. III."

[129] Ibid.

[130] "A Visit to the Elgin Settlement," *Toronto Globe,* rpt. in *The National Era*, October 18, 1855, p168, accessed March 5, 2021, link.gale.com/apps/doc/HX2500254590/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=c8f6f977.

Allmighty."[131] The other settler interviewed at Dawn, William A. Hall, said that while enslaved he "had worn out two Testaments," of which he sought "instruction to carry me through life,"[132] standing in sharp contrast with the Canada Mission's conception that fugitives from slavery were, generally, coming from a state of moral and religious darkness.

As particular evidence of the moral, religious nature of blacks, temperance was highlighted by visitors to the settlement. In the 19th century, temperance constituted a key part of moral reform, both among white and black abolitionists.[133] At each community, Benjamin Drew cited settlers on the issue of temperance. At Elgin, "sobriety is so general that no case of drunkenness has occurred."[134] The *Toronto Globe* noted that "The moral condition of Buxton is good. Northing that intoxicates is made or sold on the lands."[135] While there was no formal requirement for temperance at Dawn, William Henry Bradley concluded that it would be a good thing "if there were a law to abolish the use of liquor as a beverage."[136] The state of temperance at the Refugee Home Society was less encouraging, as stated by neighboring black settler Thomas Jones, who claimed that the temperance law made its inhabitants dissatisfied, but that this should not distract from the fact that black settlers were, in general, "temperate and moral."[137] This temperance is linked to both piousness and values of hard work. Samuel J. May, for example, contributed the settlers' "habits of

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[131] Drew, 313.

[132] Ibid., 320.

[133] Sinha, 299-300.

[134] Drew, 25.

[135] *Toronto Globe*, "A Visit to the Elgin Settlement."

[136] Drew, 312.

[137] Ibid., 328.

temperance and general sobriety" to the "spirit of industry and frugality" developed by the self-sufficiency of the black settlers.[138]

In most abolitionist accounts of the communities, however, education is put central. On the one hand, this education is stronly linked to religious development. Frederick Douglass, visiting the Dawn settlement and commenting on a recent change in management after financial troubles, hoped that the settlement would eventually become "the centre of enlightment among the colored population of Canada West."[139] Samuel J. May argued that, while blacks did not need direct financial support as the communities showed that they were able to sustain themselves, the public should donate to "the maintenance of schools and the support of religious teachers." He urged his audience to support teachers like the black abolitionists Mary Ann Shadd and Mary Bibb, who had troubles maintaining their schools.[140] Fugitives who arrived in Canada needed not only land for themselves, but also "the influences of good mental and moral culture," for which purpose schools needed to be established and "ministers of religion" had to be hired.[141] On the other hand, abolitionist literature focuses much more strongly on the social ends and societal implications of the communities than its founders had done. May, while emphasizing the importance of religion, ultimately described the Elgin Settlement as "a social enterprise."[142] In the *Anti-Slavery Standard*,

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[138] May, "Letter No. IV."

[139] Frederick Douglass, "First of August Celebration at Dawn Settlement, Canada West — Public Meeting at Chatham — Visit to the Elgin Settlement at Buxton," *Frederick Douglass' Paper,* August 11, 1854, accessed March 3, 2021, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/GT3011599551/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=d4588898.

[140] May, "Letter No. IV."

[141] May, "Condition and Prospects."

[142] May, "Letter No. IV."

the goals of Elgin were set out as to "educate and instruct [blacks] in freedmen's prerogatives."[143] Benjamin Drew described Elgin as an "experiment" in which William King sought to find out whether blacks could support themselves and "would be capable of making the same progress in education" as European immigrants to Canada.[144]

The settlers interviewed by Drew emphasize a key point of social critique associated with the schools of the communities: they show that blacks are strongly motivated and very capable of following an education, but that they, in American society, are unfairly denied the opportunity to do so. Isaac Riley, along with his family the first to settle at Buxton,[145] explained in interviews with both Drew and May that despite being treated well in slavery, he sought to escape "more than all"[146] because he did not want his children to "grow up in ignorance." After working in Michigan, he eventually moved to King's settlement, commenting that he "got along well," and his children could "get good learning".[147] Mrs. Riley, too, talked about the quality of the school, were advanced subjects such as Latin, Greek, even "music and needlework" were taught, considering her "present condition … far preferable to what it would have been in slavery," where her children would have grown up "in ignorance and darkness."[148] Another settler, Henry Johnson, also came to Buxton to educate his children. While he had been able to support himself fine in his former residence of Massillon, Ohio, his children "were thrust out of the schools, as were all the colored children." His

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[143] "Condition of the Fugitive Slaves in Canada," *National Anti-Slavery Standard* 14, no. 24, November 11, 1853, accessed March 5, 2021, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/apps/doc/HX2500221974/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=604d0748.

[144] Drew, 292.

[145] Roger Hepburn, 78.

[146] May, "Letter No. III."

[147] Drew, 298.

[148] Ibid., 301.

daughter had been doing well, yet was expelled from her school by vote from its trustees — "nothing was the matter only she was black." When his daughter's teacher told him her classmates wanted her to remain, Johnson had to reply that he "could not send her on account of the law."[149] The testimonies of the settlers at Elgin conveyed the message that blacks were able and motivated to be educated and that their exclusion from schools was not the consequence of any unfitness on their part, but of white racism.

The schools at Elgin were also incorporated in debates on whether blacks should found segregated schools in order to pursue an education, or whether this would, in the long-term, only be counter-productive. At Dawn, Drew noted how "the white and colored do not attend the same school."[150] Bradley, at Dawn, commented how prejudice generally moved blacks to establish separate schools, but that others, including himself, were against it, seeing such as "an infringement of their rights."[151] Another concern, as Drew noted about the school system in Windsor, was that separate education would be highly detrimental to its quality.[152] R. Van Branken, at Buxton, was similarly negative about separate schools and commented on the institution in Canada as well as the United States. The schools at Elgin (which had a mixed attendance) were of good quality, but "separate churches work badly for the colored people in the States and in Canada," even though they were often established by blacks themselves.[153] Not all of the settlers were in favor of integrated schooling, however. At Dawn, some settlers viewed the prospect of opening the Institute to whites with anxiety.[154] When Frederick Douglass described his visit to Dawn in 1854, he

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[149] Ibid., 307.

[150] Ibid., 308.

[151] Ibid., 313.

[152] Ibid., 321.

[153] Ibid., 306.

[154] Pease & Pease, 78.

mentioned how J. C. Brown protested manager John Scoble and Josiah Henson's plans to open the institute to whites, fearing that it and the settlement "would be monopolized by English, Scotch and Irish." Douglass, being of the opposite point of view, concluded that Henson's rebuttal of the critiques "was every way, satisfactory," and that "most of the company appeared to regard the controversy as terminating most favorably to the interest of Dawn."[155]

The school at Elgin was related to this topic more than any other school at the communities because it was one of the few schools in Northern America which was more or less successfully integrated. May noted how several of the white farmers in the neighborhood "gladly send their children, the complexion of most of the pupils notwithstanding"[156] and that, eventually, almost half of the students were white. While there was some initial prejudice, May noted how there was "now perfect harmony among the scholars of every complexion."[157] The quality of the school was noted especially — its pupils recited Latin to May, who wrote about one of the girls that he had "never heard a child of her age construe and pase better than she did."[158] The *Toronto Globe* described how its students made progress in Latin and Greek, and that the girls were studying music — "to hear the notes of the piano-forte, under such circumstances, was as pleasing as it was unexpected."[159] William C. Nell, who visited the settlement for the *Liberator* in 1858, even claimed that the white school at Buxton had not closed from a shortage of teachers, but had done so because the quality of Elgin's school proved to be "so much superior," and that the latter school was now "attended indiscriminately by the white children of Buxton."[160]

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[155] Douglass, "First of August Celebration at Dawn."

[156] May, "Letter No. III."

[157] May, "Condition and Prospects."

[158] May, "Letter No. III."

[159] *Toronto Globe*, "A Visit to the Elgin Settlement."

[160] Nell.

This success of the school made Elgin an argument for civic integration of white and blacks despite the settlement itself technically being segregated. The issue came up at a meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in 1854, in a discussion on the Fugitive Slave Law and the settlement of fugitives in Canada. It was discussed whether "it was most expedient for them to settle themselves abroad among the whites, or form exclusive settlements of their own, somewhat on the plan of the Elgin Association." Reverend Dall, a minister from Canada West, replied by giving the example of the Elgin school, stating that, while originally intended specifically for black settlers, the school was of such quality that "the white farmers around petitioned for the privilege of sending their children," with eventually over half of its students being white.[161] There could certainly be some possibility of whites and blacks living together, and white prejudice was not insurmountable. However, this meeting would conclude that it was a moot point after a fiery speech from black abolitionist Charles Lenox Remond. African-Americans had the right to live in the United States, and they and their allies should make a stand against the Fugitive Slave Law in the state of Massachusetts itself, inspiring other states in New England to do the same.[162]

There was, therefore, a marked difference in how the founders of the communities saw the aims of its education and the depictions of its schools in abolitionist literature. Originally, the communities had strong missionary aims, seeking to provide an education for blacks, whether they had recently escaped from slavery or not, hoping to achieve their "religious improvement" and even spiritual salvation. Though American abolitionists, too, highlighted the religious example set by the settlers as an argument that blacks were not inherently inferior to whites, they also used the communities and their relation to education to make the point that African Americans were strongly

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[161] Francis Jackson, James M. W. Yerrington and Samuel J. May, "First of August at Abington," *Liberator,* August 4, 1854, accessed December 30, 2020, http://www.slavery.amdigital.co.uk.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/Essays/Essay.aspx?docref=BuxtonEssay&type=search&searchmode=true&searchrequest=1.

[162] Ibid.

motivated to follow an education and aware of its benefits, but were denied so by unfounded white prejudice. The success of the integrated school at Elgin, furthermore, served the argument that integrated education was possible without any discord between black and white students or a loss of quality of education if only the "experiment" was tried. This focus on education is part of general criticisms of discrimination in Northern society and debates on African Americans as citizens to which the communities, again, provided an efficient example in abolitionist literature, as will be set out in the following two chapters.

2. An Independent Living: Black Landownership and Self-Dependence

The importance of the fugitive communities to African-American claims to citizenship and rebuttal of the racist proslavery argument lay primarily in them providing an example of blacks as self-subsistent, independent landowners. Pease & Pease and Winks saw them as efforts to demonstrate that blacks possessed the qualities idealized in the capitalist "middle-class success ethic,"[163] consisting of the values of hard work, "self-reliance, individualism, and independence"[164] and the American ideal of a "pure" agricultural life based on independent landownership, a "Jeffersonian Arcadianism."[165] Sharon Roger Hepburn similarly argued that property ownership cultivated the inherently middle-class virtues of "responsibility" and "reliability,"[166] while Ikuko Asaka argued that the communities gave blacks legitimacy as American citizens by projecting ideals of masculine white settlerhood on them as they demonstrated the "mental and physical strength" required to become "productive farmers and devoted loyal subjects."[167] Asaka links this to how slave narratives demonstrated that fugitives possessed the ideal qualities of the American settler by showing how he overcame near insurmountable challenges through his courage and resourcefulness.[168] Economic self-dependence indeed stood central to the claims of black citizenship the communities made. After an overview of how agriculture and landownership were incorporated into the communities, this chapter will look at how American abolitionist literature treated these aspects. How was the communities' self-subsistence used to argue for African-American citizenship? To what ideals of

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[163] Winks, 178.

[164] Pease & Pease, 18; Winks, 178.

[165] Ibid., 20.

[166] Roger Hepburn, 45.

[167] Asaka, 113.

[168] Ibid., 122-123

citizenship did they appeal? How was the independent, economic agricultural success of the communities' settlers used to comment on the position of African-Americans in American society?

The founders of the Dawn settlement saw agricultural work as the best way for blacks to make a living and idealized the agrarian way of life. In the Sixth Annual Report of the Canada Mission of 1843, Hiram Wilson noted how many blacks coming to Canada were "forsaking the monied and other occupations of cities and villages, and turning … to the more honorable and useful employments of husbandry."[169] In its report of the following year, the Mission again emphasized how blacks were leaving "the menial and degrading employment of cities and villages" for agricultural occupations. It lauded the black Queen's Bush settlement, where "robust and enterprising axemen of color" were quickly clearing the wilderness, turning it into "a fruitful field." The writer concluded that it was "the wisest course they can pursue, to become the successful cultivators of their own soil."[170] The Canada Mission's notions of menial work in the cities as "degrading" and agricultural work as "more honorable" related to debates on black emancipation by both white and black American abolitionists. Many of them argued that menial labor kept blacks dependent upon the community, seeing the ability to provide for oneself as a precondition of becoming an independent citizen and exercising political rights. They did not consider the occupations of many free Northern blacks — "day laborers, mechanics, waiters, and seamen" — particularly useful or elevating and instead encouraged blacks to learn "useful trades" or become farmers.[171]

These ideas also reflected what Pease & Pease called "a belief in the inherent virtues of the agricultural life" common to 19th century American culture.[172] Agricultural work, in itself, was held

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[169] Wilson, "Sixth Annual Report."

[170] *Seventh Annual Report of the Canada Mission,* 5.

[171] Sinha, 114-115; 323.

[172] Pease & Pease, 20.

to improve one's moral character,[173] and self-subsistent agricultural work formed an important part of the British American Institute's program of education. While education was free, students had to pay "in work" for their lodgings, which cost £ 1,00 per week, earning 5 cents per hour. Through their work, they were being trained "upon a full and practical system of discipline."[174] The Institute had bought 200 acres "of unimproved land" for this purpose.[175] Agriculture was both conceived of as part of the manual education the institute sought to offer its students and as a practical means to sustain the institute. When the harvest failed, it caused the Institute significant trouble. In an 1845 Michigan circular asking for donations, it stated that because of a heavy frost, crops had "come short," and the Institute had to turn away fugitives "for want of a shelter and the means of subsistence." It asked its subscribers to alleviate these shortages, sending both "produce" and "such implements as axes, hoes, &c" to Dawn.[176]

In its public statements, the Canada Mission emphasized the hard work, initiative and self-reliance of its settlers. In an 1847 progress report to the *National Era*, the Mission proudly emphasized that, through improvements, its lands had risen much in value. The institute also stimulated secondary industry, emphasizing that the settlers themselves took the initiative in founding industrial facilities. In the Sixth Annual report, the Mission described how "two enterprising men of color, from North Carolina and Virginia" had started a rope-walk and were manufacturing quality rope "with hemp of their own growing." The Canada Mission saw this project as revolutionary, an example to be followed by African-Americans in the United States, hopefully "introducing a new era among the colored hemp-growers." The settlement was also building a "steam saw mill" financed by Boston abolitionists, with a black millwright from South

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[173] Roger Hepburn, 46.

[174] Wilson, "Sixth Annual Report."

[175] *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter,* "Refugee Slaves in Canada."; Wilson, "Sixth Annual Report."

[176] *Signal of Liberty,* "British-American Institute and Canada Mission."

Carolina as its "designer and master builder" and the boilers being constructed by two black smiths. The British American Institute emphasized, however, that its ultimate focus remained on education. All profits from the saw mill would be "sacredly devoted" to that cause.[177]

Independent black landownership was also important to William King's plans for Elgin. Similar to the Dawn settlement, King saw agricultural work partly as a virtue in itself and partly as a practical means to an end. In a practical sense, it offered fugitives a way to sustain themselves while pursuing an education, protecting them from hostile whites and preventing them from moving away.[178] The "moving habits" of blacks, King argued, were one of the principal reasons why other "efforts … to improve their moral condition" had largely failed.[179] King, however, also saw independent landownership as a value in itself. He sought to make sure that the settlers received no charitable aid, refusing to solicit or accept donations from outsiders[180] and instead asked for loans and investments in the community.[181] While King himself did not make this point explicit in his plans for Elgin, by becoming self-dependent, the settlement would also make a strong statement against racist arguments of black inferiority, something of which those involved in the project were well aware. In a letter to the board of Elgin, cited in its *Second Annual Report*, the settlers discredited rumors about their having trouble working the land and stated that they hoped "to show

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[177] "British-American Institute," *National Era* 1, no. 46, November 18, 1847, accessed March 24, 2021, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/apps/doc/HX2500197365/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=e162dd24.

[178] William King, "Report of the Mission," 665.

[179] Ibid., 665-666.

[180] Roger Hepburn, 70.

[181] Winks, 123-124.

to our enemies that when placed in favorable circumstances we are able and willing to support ourselves."[182]

The Elgin Association was largely succesful in its efforts to promote independent landownership. It bought some 7 800 acres of government lands in the township of Raleigh and sold those to settlers in lots of 50 acres.[183] The settlers paid £ 2,50 per acre, in annual installments, during a period of ten years.[184] By 1851, 230 acres were cleared by 45 settlers, cultivating corn along with wheat and tobacco,[185] by 1856, 1025 acres, with a significant diversification in crops and livestock[186] and by 1860, 1600 acres. The report for that year mentioned that, while crop failures threatened the stability of the settlement, the settlers had managed to pull through by their inventiveness and reliance on secondary industry.[187] Like at Dawn, the settlers at Elgin established industrial facilities making use of local resources. Two former brickmakers took the initiative in establishing a brick factory, which provided bricks for the settlement's hotel, houses, school building, and for external sale.[188] Two other fugitives established a ropewalk, using homegrown

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[182] *Second Annual Report of the Directors of the Elgin Association: Presented at the Annual Meeting, held on the 3rd day of September, 1851* (Toronto, 1851), 11, accessed March 15, 2021, https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_00255_1/1?r=0&s=1.

[183] *Ecclesiastical and Missionary Record,* "Prospectus of a Scheme."; *Second Annual Report of the Directors of the Elgin Association,* 10.

[184] Roger Hepburn, 62-63.

[185] *Second Annual Report of the Directors of the Elgin Association,* 10-11.

[186] *Seventh Annual Report of the Directors of the Elgin Association. Presented at the Annual Meeting held on the Third day of September, 1856* (Toronto, 1856), 3-4, accessed May 20, 2021, https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_00255_6/1?r=0&s=1.

[187] *Tenth/Eleventh Annual Reports of the Elgin Association, for the Years 1859 and 1860* (Toronto, 1861), 3-4, accessed May 20, 2021, https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_00255_9/1?r=0&s=1.

[188] Roger Hepburn, 118.

hemp.[189] From 1857 to the early 1860s, one settler operated a potash factory.[190] The settlement also had “a carpenter and joiners shop and a boot and shoe store” at its village square.[191] Finally, a group of black Canadian and American businessmen established a stock company to invest in Elgin’s industry and provided the settlers with funds to establish a sawmill, corn mill, siding machine and shingle factory. The sawmill would provide a useful source of income, selling lumber mostly to the nearby railroad works.[192] Many of the industrial facilities, however, met with financial difficulties during the late 1850s — in 1857, the sawmill would come under the management of a white scotsman, who also purchased a 50-acre lot in the settlement.[193]

Where the Dawn and Elgin settlements placed education central in the aims of their settlements, the Refugee Home Society explicitly made self-sufficiency and landownership central. In a report of its founding convention in Detroit, on May 21st 1851,[194] it declared as its primary aim to ensure the “elevation and self-support” of fugitives. The convention identified “permanent homes” as “the first necessity of the Refugees in Canada,” which were to be “secured by their becoming owners of the soil.” The Society resolved to do this by buying 50 000 acres of lands in

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[189] Ibid., 117.

[190] Ibid., 120.

[191] *Seventh Annual Report of the Directors of the Elgin Association,* 6.

[192] Roger Hepburn, 119.

[193] Ibid., 123.

[194] “Refugee Home Society,” *Voice of the Fugitive* 1, no. 12, June 1, 1851, p1, accessed May 3, 2021, http://ink.ourdigitalworld.org/viewer/cecil/focus/ink/newspapers/vf/reel1/000301-x0-y0-z1-r0-0-0.

Canada West, which could be gotten from the government at relatively low prices.[195] In the final constitution of the Society, it was decided that land would be sold in portions of 25 acres, to be paid off in ten installments, similar to the plan of Elgin,[196] which was, in fact, at times appealed to by the organizers of the Refugee Home Society as an inspiration for their project and as proof that reselling lands to fugitives was the most effective way to aid them.[197] By the time the RHS published its Third Annual Report in 1855, it had acquired 2,168 acres of lands, dispersed among the townships of Maidstone, Sandwich and Puce River. At that time, eighty families lived on the Society's lands.[198]

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[195] "A Call to the Friends of Humanity in Michigan," *Voice of the Fugitive* 1, no. 12, June 1, 1851, p2, accessed May 3, 2021, http://ink.ourdigitalworld.org/viewer/cecil/focus/ink/newspapers/vf/reel1/000301-x0-y0-z1-r0-0-0. Interestingly enough, the original resolution stated that the deed to the lands would be given not to the settler himself, but to his "wife or family." The deed was elsewhere specified to be "an inalienable inheritance" ("Thirty Thousand Fugitives," *Voice of the Fugitive* 1, no. 17, August 13, 1851, accessed May 3, 2021, http://ink.ourdigitalworld.org/viewer/cecil/focus/ink/newspapers/vf/reel1/000421-x0-y0-z1-r0-0-0). Perhaps the Society had a preference for settlers with a family to support, considering these more responsible and more likely to stay and cultivate the soil. The inheritance clause was likely added to increase the ties of the settlers with their ground even further.

[196] *Voice of the Fugitive*, "Refugees' Home Society. Constitution and By Laws."

[197] See, for example, Samuel J. May's letter to *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. There, he argues that, to accomodate the expected new arrivals of fugitives in Canada after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, the plan adopted by the Elgin Association was "in the main, the most judicious and feasible." May then noted that the Refugee Home Society was already buying lands in Canada West "to be disposed of to colored people, somewhat on the plan adopted by the Elgin Association" (May, "Condition and Prospects"). Another example is a letter C.C. Foote sent to the *Liberator.* There, he argued that readers had surely not forgotten William King and "the success of *his* Refugee Home Society" (C. C. Foote, "The Colored People in Canada — Do They Need Help?," *Liberator,* December 24, 1852, accessed December 30, 2020, http://www.slavery.amdigital.co.uk.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/Essays/Essay.aspx?docref=BuxtonEssay&type=search&searchmode=true&searchrequest=1.)

[198] *Anti-Slavery Bugle,* "The Refugee Home Society."

Five days after the initial convention in Detroit, blacks in Canada West held their own convention in Sandwich to discuss the Detroit-convention and its resolutions. They expressed their approval of the convention working for their "efforts at elevation and self-support" and stated that, in their estimation, four-fifths of Canadian blacks possessed knowledge of agriculture and would be glad to "follow it for their livelihood had they means to get land with."[199] This illustrates another key point of the practical motivations for founding the communities: by offering black settlers the opportunity to buy lands in small portions and having these paid off in annual installments, blacks had the opportunity to acquire lands which were otherwise too expensive. An anonymous "American Missionary" writing to *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, for example, emphasized how "owing to the difficulty of obtaining lands at government prices, in small quantities, many who would gladly become cultivators of the soil have been prevented from doing so." As in the field of education, white Canadian racism very likely disadvantaged blacks in this domain. The missionary, in a paternalistic vein, continues to argue that "many others … have, thro' their ignorance, been cheated by their white neighbors, and lost … the labor of many years." The plan of Elgin was to this missionary primarily a practical "effort to place the purchase of small portions of land within the reach of the industrious portion of the people."[200]

Like at Dawn and Elgin, the Refugee Home Society also considered self-subsistent agricultural work and landownership to be inherently valuable, creating character and emancipating an individual, giving him independence he could not have while performing menial labor. The *Voice of the Fugitive* argued that fugitives "MUST PRODUCE WHAT THEY CONSUME, and become owners

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[199] "Homes for the Refugees in Canada," *Voice of the Fugitive* 1, no. 12, June 1, 1851, accessed May 3, 2021, http://ink.ourdigitalworld.org/viewer/cecil/focus/ink/newspapers/vf/reel1/000301-x0-y0-z1-r0-0-0.

[200] American Missionary, "Canada Mission," *Frederick Douglass' Paper,* November 27, 1851, accessed January 7, 2021, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/apps/doc/GT3015916364/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=f4a9b7d3.

and tillers of the soil on which they live."[201] In a letter to the *Voice*, J.T.H. from Vermont (probably James Theodore Holly), expressed his support for Bibb's "colonization" schemes, arguing that blacks may "lay the foundation of their own future greatness" by settling in "primitive communities," leaving the "drudging employment of menials about the town and cities" behind them.[202] J.L.T., also from Vermont, called working one's own lands "the most healthful and profitable employment that man could be blessed with."[203] In the same issue, when the *Voice* called for a Canadian-American black convention to be held to discuss the condition of African-Americans, it urged them to recognize "the vital importance of our people becoming agriculturists as a means of making themselves independent."[204] The *Voice* was, furthermore, very much aware of how the condition of Canadian fugitives influenced the reputation of blacks in the United States. In an "Address to the Colored Inhabitants of North America," it stated that "every fugitive in Canada is a representative of the millions of our brethren who are still in bondage," and that the whole "civilized world" was looking to see "whether we can take care of ourselves or not" when "under a free government, where we have all our social and political rights, without regard to our color."[205]

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[201] "Thirty Thousand Fugitives," *Voice of the Fugitive* 1, no. 17, August 13, 1851, accessed May 3, 2021, http://ink.ourdigitalworld.org/viewer/cecil/focus/ink/newspapers/vf/reel1/000421-x0-y0-z1-r0-0-0.

[202] J.T.H., "For the Voice of the Fugitive. Voice from the 'Green Mountains.'," *Voice of the Fugitive* 1, no. 12, June 1, 1851, accessed May 3, 2021, http://ink.ourdigitalworld.org/viewer/cecil/focus/ink/newspapers/vf/reel1/000301-x0-y0-z1-r0-0-0.

[203] "In favor of a Convention," *Voice of the Fugitive* 1, no. 17, August 13, 1851, accessed May 3, 2021, http://ink.ourdigitalworld.org/viewer/cecil/focus/ink/newspapers/vf/reel1/000421-x0-y0-z1-r0-0-0.

[204] "Call for a North American Convention," *Voice of the Fugitive* 1, no. 17, August 13, 1851, p4, accessed May 21, 2021, http://ink.ourdigitalworld.org/viewer/cecil/focus/ink/newspapers/vf/reel1/000421-x0-y0-z1-r0-0-0.

[205] "An Address to the Colored Inhabitants of North America," *Voice of the Fugitive* 1, no. 22, October 22, 1851, p1, accessed May 21, 2021, http://ink.ourdigitalworld.org/viewer/cecil/focus/ink/newspapers/vf/reel1/000541-x0-y0-z1-r0-0-0.

This, in essence, summarized why self-dependence and economic success were such an important factor in the image of the Canadian communities: they served as a rebuttal of racist arguments of black inferiority, demonstrated the independence of blacks and, by extension, their claim to American citizenship.

The founders of the communities incorporated agriculture and economic success in their projects in three main ways. One was practical — it allowed their settlers a stable basis of substenance. For the Refugee Home Society, this was key to relieve the presumed poverty of fugitives coming into Canada West. To both Dawn and Elgin, it was subsidiary to their plans of education and christianization. Self-subsistent agriculture enabled the British American Institute to sustain itself and Elgin to perform its mission of education by decreasing the likelihood that its audience would move away. The second key point was that, unlike paid labor in the cities, agriculture stimulated "industrious habits" and independence and was, therefore, key to the societies' missions of social and moral improvement. White and black abolitionists shared these idealized notions of agriculture and saw them as a key path to black emancipation. Through their installment plans, Elgin and the Refugee Home Society made this option possible to fugitives by enabling them to get lands which were too expensive to outright buy. Finally, because of the positive American cultural notions of agriculture, blacks could show an international audience that they were worthy of citizenship, and the falsehood of the proslavery argument of black inferiority, if the communities succeeded. The proponents of the Refugee Home Society made this point most explicit, but Dawn took it into account as well, focusing on the settlers' initiative in establishing industry in its public statements, while at Elgin, this awareness was at least very much present under its settlers.

This exemplary feature stood even more central in American abolitionist literature. Elgin, the settlement least plagued by financial difficulties, was often explicitly portrayed as a practical

test case of the idea that free blacks would be able to support themselves just as well if not better than free whites. Benjamin Drew spoke of "the experiment at Buxton,"[206] where William King, "having full faith in the natural powers, capacity, and capability of the African race, is practically working out his belief, by placing the refugees in circumstances where they may learn self-reliance, and maintain a perfect independence of aid."[207] Seeing how the communities had flourished, Drew concluded that "the colored people and their friends owe a debt of gratitude to Mr. King."[208] William Nell argued that William King, with his Elgin Settlement, was in essence "solving what is yet considered by some a problem, whether the colored people are capable of raising a self-sustaining and progressive race."[209] The *Toronto Globe* stated that Elgin was founded by "several benevolent gentlemen" who thought that "the experiment" of the black man "as a tiller of the soil" had "not been fairly and fully tested," earlier failed efforts having led some to think that "the black man was an intractable sort of being, incapable of improvement under any management."[210]

Accounts of the settlement emphasized that the settlers had achieved their success through their own initiative, without receiving outside aid and, most impressively, had done so from a position of severe poverty. Visiting Elgin in 1852, Samuel May wrote how the "thick, primitive forest" at Buxton had almost been cleared in only three years. The settlers had built substantial houses and most could "raise provisions sufficient for their own families."[211] Benjamin Drew noted that each settler would pay off his land well in time, "for which he will be indebted to his own exertions — since the settlers receive no money, no grants of land, no farming implements —

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[206] Drew, 292.

[207] Ibid., 297.

[208] Ibid., 292.

[209] Nell.

[210] *Toronto Globe*, "A Visit to the Elgin Settlement."

[211] May, "Letter No. IV."

nothing but protection and advice." They were entirely "self-supporting."[212] William Nell similarly described how "most of the fugitives arrived here stripped of every thing but life, and had to work for the money that paid their first instalment … they had every thing to do for themselves, and nothing was given them but a fair opportunity to develop their own resources." With their hard work, they created a flourishing settlement and cultivated "large and profitable crops" on lands which "had been abandoned by white men as unproductive." Nell talked of "the smiling garden patches of the self-emancipated settlers," described how they built brick houses from home-produced bricks and had an "excellent saw mill" and a "pot and pearl ash factory" which sold potash which went for an average of "fifty dollars per barrel." William Nell and the Irish Presbyterian delegation he accompanied were hosted by a settler who had prepared a "bountiful dinner" for fourteen people, every item home-produced, all by "a man who, when an American slave, was deemed unable 'to take care of himself.'"[213]

The depictions of Elgin appealed strongly to the traditional American settler ideal. Drew wrote that the settlers at Elgin were "characterized by a manly, independent air and manner."[214] Isaac Riley told Samuel J. May that his family, in slavery, "did not like to see the fruits of our labor taken by another," preferring the hardships of the settlers' existence to an economically secure life with their master. May concluded that the Rileys "evinced a clear sense of … the true purpose of life," and that the settlers "*for the sake of liberty*, had subjected themselves to the loneliness, the privations, and the severe labors of first settlers in an unbroken forest." Consequently, May further established these settlers' claim to American citizenship by comparing them to the "Pilgrim Fathers of New England." Like those settlers, the settlers of Elgin "had fled … and sought homes in the wilderness, that they might be free … count it all joy to suffer hardships, perils …. if by so suffering

[212] Drew, 292.

[213] Nell.

[214] Drew, 297.

they may secure to themselves and their posterity the boon of freedom."[215] This portrayal of the settlers at Elgin are very similar to those which were portrayed in fugitive slave narratives, as Ikuko Asaka has argued. Both emphasized ideals of American manhood and citizenship centered around "independence," a "love of liberty" and "an ability to surmount obstacles while on a journey."[216] It is this aspect which made the communities such strong examples of fugitive slave abolitionism: by cultivating and clearing their own lands in Canada, the settlers were, within the context of the abolitionist movement, not only working to sustain themselves but engaging in an inherently political activity. In essence, the fugitives at Elgin were engaging in what Manisha Sinha also ascribed to fugitive slave narratives — "a political struggle against slavery and racism, writing direct rebuttals of slaveholder paternalism."[217] Like in these narratives, the testimonies of the fugitives themselves were the key tools used by abolitionist literature to demonstrate the manhood of black settlers.

While the Elgin Settlement played an important role in abolitionist literature as an example of blacks making a succesful living in freedom, the Dawn Settlement and Refugee Home Society, which both struggled with financial difficulties and did not thrive as much as its founders had hoped, received less attention. Nevertheless, when these societies were covered in abolitionist literature, they were still connected to agricultural success and independence. William Nell only briefly described Dawn, but did so in poetic, Arcadian terms, describing how the river Sydenham streamed "like a silver thread among the mills and farms, worked and tilled by colored proprietors."[218] *Frederick Douglass' Paper* also described the Dawn settlement as thriving, where "the colored people … are producers," and that, while the Institute has fallen short of its aims, "the

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[215] May, "Letter No. III."

[216] Asaka, 122.

[217] Sinha, 422.

[218] Nell.

industrious population in the neighborhood, attest the beneficial influence of the Institution."[219] Drew got a very "unfavorable and melancholy impression" of Dawn, where only little of note had been constructed,[220] yet emphasized every black man who had come to Dawn had shown that he was able to "support himself within one week of his arrival," and that the Institute would undoubtedly thrive if enough money was invested in it.[221] While Drew cited the complaints about the Refugee Home Society,[222] he concluded that it was a praiseworthy effort.[223] The settler interviewed at the Society, John Martin, argued that many of its settlers will have "good farms," and denied that they received financial aid.[224] Another visitor to the Refugee Home Society, Josephine S. Griffing, wrote to the *Anti-Slavery Bugle* that she found the "condition of the fugitives … decidedly more comfortable and prosperous" than she had expected, demonstrating "that with very little assistance … they will elevate themselves to positions of equal intelligence, enterprise, and manhood, with their more favored brethren of the white race."[225] The Refugee Home Society itself also presented an ideal of independent, successful settlers to its public. In its *Third Annual Report*, printed in the *Anti-Slavery Bugle,* it emphasized that in clearing and working their lands and building their homes, the settlers had to do everything "by dint of personal toil" and that the first settlers were now "reaping the fruits of these hardships and privations."[226]

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[219] "Canada and the Colored People," *Frederick Douglass' Paper,* August 18, 1854, accessed March 4, 2021, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/apps/doc/GT3011599595/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=4911e936.

[220] Drew, 309.

[221] Ibid., 312.

[222] Ibid., 328.

[223] Ibid., 325.

[224] Ibid., 336.

[225] Josephine S. Griffing, "A Letter from Mrs. Griffing," *The Anti-Slavery Bugle,* October 28, 1854, accessed March 5, 2021, link.gale.com/apps/doc/GB2500052498/SAS?u= leiden&sid=SAS&xid=65e749c5.

[226] *Anti-Slavery Bugle,* "The Refugee Home Society."

However, in demonstrating the independence of former slaves in freedom, all settlements eventually encountered the same problem. The settlement projects were, in essence, philanthropic projects and relied partly on outside financial aid for their subsistence. At times, all of the communities experienced financial setbacks, due to mismanagement, crop failures or broader economic crises, like the Panic of 1857.[227] However, efforts to solicit funds from the public could appear strongly at odds with the communities' example of self-dependence. This was illustrated especially by a debate which was fought out in the pages of the *Liberator* over the Refugee Home Society. The Refugee Home Society often emphasized the fugitives' immediate need for aid in its efforts to collect funds. In an advert in the *Voice of the Fugitive*, it described newly arrived fugitives in Canada as "emphatically paupers and heathen from a Christian land."[228] An advert in the *Liberator* stated that, during the winter, "their sufferings from want of food, clothing, and shelter, have been terrible."[229] These fundraising efforts became a key point of Mary Shadd's criticism of the Refugee Home Society. Mary Shadd was an African-American abolitionist living in Canada who strongly differed in opinion with Bibb about the desirability of separate black settlements (see p69).[230] A Canadian black convention, where Shadd served as secretary, sent resolutions to the *Liberator* which condemned efforts to solicit donations. Such "begging," the convention argued, gave the outside world the idea that fugitives in Canada formed "a class of improvident, thriftless and imbecile paupers." The Refugee Home Society was singled out by name — it was merely an "exceedingly cunning land scheme" which, through its actions, "will materially compromise our

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[227] Winks, 218.

[228] *Voice of the Fugitive*, "Thirty-Thousand Fugitives."

[229] S. J., "Homes for the Refugees," *Liberator*, June 11, 1852, accessed December 30, 2020, link.gale.com/apps/doc/GT3005871061/SAS?u=leiden&sid= SAS&xid=4c914d87.

[230] Silverman, 103-104.

manhood."[231] Henry's wife Mary Bibb reacted to these resolutions by stating that the Refugee Home Society did, in fact, assume the independence of the fugitive. It sought "to procure a small portion of land at government price," which "places every recipient on an independent basis."[232] Later, a convention chaired by Bibb defending the Society argued that, while "the collection and distribution of old clothing should be discouraged, as discreditable to the self-respect of the colored people … the circumstances of many of the colored people in Canada are not such as place them above the need of assistance," emphasizing "the necessity" to help them establish homes and get access to church and schools.[233] The negative views of the Refugee Home Society, however, seem to have been shared by at least some blacks in Canada West. When interviewed by Drew, Thomas Jones, living near the Society's lands, called its settlers "dependent," describing them as "men who expected aid from the other side."[234]

Mary Shadd's criticism that soliciting aid discredited the manhood and independence of blacks in the eyes of the public reflected a broader concern that such strategies played into the proslavery argument. The American abolitionist Laura S. Haviland, who taught the school of the Refugee Home Society, sent a letter to *Frederick Douglass' Paper* on the economic condition of fugitives in Canada in order "to correct that oft repeated assertion … among friends, as well as enemies" that fugitives coming into Canada "are *starving* and *freezing* to death in that colder

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[231] Peter Poyntz, Elisha Robinson and Mary A. Shadd, "No More Begging for Farms or Clothes for Fugitives of Canada," *Liberator,* October 15, 1852, accessed January 7, 2021, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/apps/doc/GT3005871719/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=c0df3ac4.

[232] Mary E. Bibb, "Refugees' Home," *Liberator,* November 12, 1852, accessed January 8, 2020, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/apps/doc/GT3005871523/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=40ae743b.

[233] "Refugees' Home Society," *Liberator,* April 22, 1853, accessed December 30, 2020, http://www.slavery.amdigital.co.uk.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/Essays/Essay.aspx?docref=BuxtonEssay&type=search&searchmode=true&searchrequest=1.

[234] Drew, 328.

climate" and that those "who have left the South, would gladly return to their former protectors, if practicable, etc. etc."[235] This point was also made by a circular of the Canadian Anti-Slavery Society sent to abolitionist newspapers abroad, writing that while some fugitives did have it hard during the winter, this might be expected of all emigrants who arrive somewhere without means of support. Nevertheless, "interested parties have not been slow in exaggerating these privations," painting Canada as "unfit" for black life.[236] Abolitionists feared that depictions of fugitives as suffering helped the proslavery cause by furthering the argument that blacks could not take care of themselves as well as the argument that blacks were constitutionally unfit to survive in colder climates, an argument which was also used to indirectly argue against claims to citizenship for free Northern blacks (see p67-68). Finally, abolitionists were concerned that charity would be abused by profiteers, thereby stigmatizing the entire cause. The "American Missionary" stated that many blacks in Canada West felt that charity was distributed unfairly among the black community and that charities often took large portions of the collected funds for themselves.[237] The convention establishing the Refugee Home Society, too, warned for "irresponsible persons" who were "in the habit of selling" the goods they ostensibly collected for fugitives for their own gain.[238]

The proponents of the settlements were very aware of these negative connotations. They emphasized that their plans did not constitute any form of charity, but were founded on the principle of giving fugitives the opportunity to help themselves. Settler John Martin at the Refugee Home

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[235] L. S. Haviland, "Condition of Fugitives in Canada," *Frederick Douglass' Paper* 8, no. 40, September 29, 1855, accessed March 6, 2021, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/apps/doc/GT3011603647/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=f7e54a01.

[236] M. Willis, Thomas Henning and Andrew Hamilton, "Statement in Regard to the Colored Population of Canada [for circulation abroad.]," *Liberator,* July 30, 1852, accessed December 30, 2020, http://www.slavery.amdigital.co.uk.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/Essays/Essay.aspx?docref=BuxtonEssay&type=search&searchmode=true&searchrequest=1.

[237] American Missionary.

[238] *Voice of the Fugitive,* "A Call to the Friends of Humanity."

Society, interviewed by Drew, made clear that "the people have been told falsehoods about our freezing and suffering" and that, while he had heard about large sums of money being raised for their benefit, the settlers at the RHS had "never received the first red cent."[239] The *Voice of the Fugitive* itself also emphasized that its soliciting funds for fugitives was only for temporary aid and that reports of destitute fugitives in Canada West were exaggerated — all fugitives who could work could get work there, earning "from 50 to 75 cents per day at common labor."[240] The funds the Refugee Home Society collected went towards buying lands, which fugitives had to pay off by themselves. C. C. Foote, addressing the "begging controversy," reminded the readers of the *Liberator* that it is "the best helper of the poor, who puts them in the way of helping themselves! SUCH A HELPER is the Refugee Home Society."[241] Elgin, in particular, was very careful in demonstrating its independence of aid. Drew commented that the Association took explicit care to exclude any kind of donations from coming into the settlement.[242] Settler Henry Johnson, interviewed by Drew, emphasized that the settlers "never begged a meal." If charitable organizations sent any goods or clothing, he should "want it sent back."[243] Samuel May also stated that the Association did "repudiate the giving of anything to healthy and able-bodied men and women." The result of this policy, he wrote, was "to be seen in the spirit of industry and frugality," whih had "begotten or perpetuated habits of temperance and general sobriety."[244] When money was

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[239] Drew, 336.

[240] "Slaves in Canada," *Voice of the Fugitive* 1, no. 17, August 13, 1851, accessed May 28, 2021, http://ink.ourdigitalworld.org/viewer/cecil/focus/ink/newspapers/vf/reel1/000430-x0-y0-z1-r0-0-0.

[241] C. C. Foote, "The Colored People in Canada — Do They Need Help?," *Liberator,* December 24, 1852, accessed December 30, 2020, http://www.slavery.amdigital.co.uk.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/Essays/Essay.aspx?docref=BuxtonEssay&type=search&searchmode=true&searchrequest=1.

[242] Drew, 297.

[243] Ibid., 306.

[244] May, "Letter No. IV."

needed to keep the sawmill at Elgin running, King went to England, asking not for charitable donations, but for "investments." Most of these, however, where never repaid. This didn't lead to any damages — in the words of Roger Hepburn, many investors, in actuality, "looked on the money as a gift rather than a loan."[245]

The fugitive settlements had various motives for basing their settlements on self-subsistent agriculture. To Dawn and Elgin, it was to a large extent subsidiary to their missions of general education and Christianization, helping instill positive virtues and providing the settlers with environments where they could safely make a living. The Refugee Home Society, however, made the exemplary function of self-subsistent agriculture to the American public explicit. This function, proving that blacks could make an independent living, also stood central in American abolitionist literature. As an example of black, self-subsistent agricultural communities, the settlements served the American abolitionist movement by showing that fugitives were very well able to take care of themselves. Both the activities and testimonies of the settlers were crucial in sustaining this function of the fugitive communities, making them examples of what Manisha Sinha has defined as "fugitive slave abolitionism." While it is true that, as earlier studies argued, the communities made an appeal to conventional American ideals to legitimate their arguments against slavery and for black citizenship, the communities were not generally considered as attempts to "train" blacks in freedom. Though many abolitionists involved in the communities held paternalistic assumptions about race and the degrading impact of a life in slavery, as shown in the previous chapter, and argued that fugitives needed paternal guidance to overcome this, other abolitionist writers emphasized that fugitives already possessed the virtues of American citizens but needed a "fair opportunity" to demonstrate them. This argument also laid at the basis of the critiques about campaigns for charity,

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[245] Roger Hepburn, 123-124.

which gave the impression that fugitives were indeed unable to care for themselves after they arrived into Canada, seeming to play into the proslavery argument.

While the example of independent settlers was key to the communities' claims for citizenship, they also became part of other debates about African-Americans and American society. These debates not only centered on countering racist arguments employed to exclude blacks from American society, they also criticized the legal conditions of the free Northern states and addressed *how* African-Americans should relate to American society.

3. The Community Projects and Blacks in American Society: Law, Emigration and Integration

Many abolitionists were well aware of the civic example the communities, and Canadian free blacks in general, could set to the free states. In his 1858 tour of Canada West, William Cooper Nell introduced his report to the *Liberator* with a citation of black abolitionist William Whipper which emphasized "the intimate connection which the settlement of colored emigrants in Canada is likely to produce on the civil and social welfare of those who remain in the States."[246] Nell devoted most of his report to Elgin, describing the excellent quality of its schools and the success of its "self-emancipated settlers." He concluded that African-Americans, who migrated to Canada, where they had the opportunity to improve "their individual fortune," would, by their example "through a reflex influence, promote the elevation of those who remain at home."[247] As described in the previous chapter, ideals of American citizenship were strongly linked to the ideal of the self-dependent settler, with the independent landowner being its archetype. Like Nell, when American abolitionists talked about the "civic" and "social" example of the communities, they mostly related this to the settler's independence and self-sufficiency, demonstrated by their economic success. However, there was yet another important dimension to how the Canadian communities figured in debates about blacks in American society. A crucial precondition for black independence and self-sufficiency in Canada was, ultimately, Canadian law, which, unlike the law of the Northern states, did not make formal distinctions on the basis of race.[248] Furthermore, under Canadian law, anyone who owned or rented "property of a yearly value of $20" and had lived in Canada for three years

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[246] William Whipper, qtd. in Nell.

[247] Nell.

[248] Law, 83; Pease & Pease, 8.

was allowed to vote.[249] Concluding his survey, Nell wrote that Canada was "a land of genuine freedom," and "destined to support an immense population of hardy and happy freemen."[250]

In the eyes of many abolitionists, the legal equality Canada offered to blacks made it inherently more favorable to their social prospects than the free states,[251] despite the prevalence of racism and social discrimination in Canada,[252] of which most abolitionists were well-aware and to which the fugitive communities themselves were in part a reaction. In abolitionist literature, the fugitive communities became a mirror by which to criticize Northern society, an example of how blacks could (or should) function as citizens in a white society and a model of how to integrate African-Americans into American society after emancipation. Especially among black abolitionists, this was still a subject of much contestation, centering on issues of whether African-Americans should seek full integration or establish a separate identity and institutions, and how desirable and practical it was for African-Americans to migrate from the United States. During the 1850s, an emigrationist movement came about which argued that African-Americans should migrate in large

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[249] Roger Hepburn, 22-23; Winks, 214.

[250] Nell.

[251] See, for example, Barker, 46-47.

[252] The first chapter of this essay has already described how blacks in Canada were often excluded from schools. They were also often relegated to unskilled, low-paying jobs, barred from positions where they could compete with whites, and faced general social hostility. Theaters and restaurants were often segregated, and they did were not always treated fairly in Canadian courts. From Winks (1971) onward, scholarship on black Canadian history has renewed attention to these issues, challenging the stereotypical view of 19th-century Canada as a racially tolerant "promised land" for African-American fugitives (see for example "Topic Two. American Blacks in Nineteenth-Century Ontario: Challenging the Stereotypes," in *A Nation of Immigrants: Women, Workers, and Communities in Canadian History, 1840s-1960s*, ed. Franca Iacovetta, Paula Draper and Robert Ventresca (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Maureen Kihika, "Ghosts and Shadows: A History of Racism in Canada," *Canadian Graduate Journal of Sociology and Criminology* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2013), 36-40).

numbers.[253] Having already touched on the links between the communities and discrimination in North American society in the chapters on economic self-subsistence and education and morality, this chapter zooms in on the civic and societal aspects of the communities. How was the example of the communities used in abolitionist rhetoric about African-Americans as American citizens, their legal rights in the United States, and their relation to white American society? How did the communities support abolitionist arguments about integration and Northern society, which arguments did they support, and why?

The founders of the communities strongly tied the purposes of the settlements to legal freedom. One aspect of this freedom was that fugitives were more physically secure in Canada than in the United States, even before the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act. The British American Institute emphasized that, unlike in the United States, blacks were equal before British Canadian law, which protected them from slavery, thereby making Canada a logical place for working towards their advancement. In his "Sixth Annual Report," published in 1843, Hiram Wilson addressed the case of Nelson Hackett,[254] who was extradited from Canada to Arkansas for taking a horse, coat and a gold watch with him during his flight from slavery. Hackett would be the only fugitive ever extradited from Canada to the United States.[255] Wilson argued that, despite this frightening incident, fugitives would still be safe in Canada. While there was prejudice "among the ignorant and vicious … as on your side of the national line," the law was impartial. Because of this, he continued, the Dawn settlement was sure to flourish, under the "protecting and fostering care of a powerful government."[256] When reacting to criticisms that the Dawn institute was unnecessary

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[253] Power-Greene, 127-128.

[254] Wilson, "Sixth Annual Report."

[255] Michael Pierce, "'Adventures. Escape of a Slave': An Account of the Flight of Nelson Hackett, May 27, 1842," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (Summer 2020), 133-134.

[256] Wilson, "Sixth Annual Report."

because higher education was already available to blacks at Oberlin and Oneida in the free states, the Mission replied that many blacks would not feel safe at these institutes, reiterating that there was "no spot in the United States, nor institution of learning, where they can enjoy any protection under the federal constitution for a single moment."[257] Having escaped "the galling yoke of Republican slavery" by moving to Canada, where "the laws make no distinction between the white citizen and his black or colored neighbor," African-Americans could finally hope to become "intelligent and useful members of society."[258] It was, furthermore, not only the law that was more favorable in Canada, the social environment was as well. Though the Mission elsewhere emphasized that there was strong prejudice in Canada, perhaps even as strong as in the free States, African Americans in Canada would "meet with hospitality and encouragement" both from "some of the white inhabitants" and from the many blacks who already lived in Canada.[259]

In the same report, the Mission addressed criticisms that their institute promoted segregation and thereby harmed the abolitionist cause as, by keeping blacks apart from whites, it would "strengthen and perpetuate the now prevalent prejudices of cast and color." The Mission replied that, on the contrary, the Institute was organized to "tend … to the destruction of prejudice."[260] The Mission had an equal number of white and black trustees and would similarly try to employ an equal number of white and black teachers and agents. It was true that the student body was black, but this was because their need for education was most pressing. Dawn was also open to Native Canadians and whites, but these would have to take second and third place until other institutes of education would start to allow black students. So, while it was now necessary to give blacks preference, the Institute would not encourage separation, the founders argued, but rather, by giving

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[257] *Seventh Annual Report of the Canada Mission*, 8.

[258] Ibid., 4-5.

[259] Ibid.

[260] Ibid., 8.

them a chance for education, prove that blacks were equal to whites, and by doing so help counter racism and improve the prospects of integration. In fact, Dawn "has already done much to weaken and destroy the prevailing prejudices in that part of Canada where it is located," demonstrating the "gospel truth" that all men are created equal.[261] However, the Mission ultimately agreed that, ideally, blacks should be accepted in the Canadian public school system. It hoped that blacks, in places where public schools didn't allow them, could move schools to accept them by appealing to the law. They should "stand up, like men, for their legal and constitutional rights, and they will have ample redress."[262] This illustrates a certain paradox to the communities: while they, on one hand, portrayed Canada as a free and tolerant place where blacks had room for self-employment and could appeal to the law for their rights, at the same time, "protective" communities were necessary to protect them from white racism.

The lack of true freedom for blacks in the Northern states also formed an important consideration in William King's plans for Elgin. In his "Scheme for Improving the Coloured People of Canada," drafted in 1848 for the Presbyterian committee to explain his settlement plans, King opened by stating that the migration of blacks to Canada from the Northern States would, in his opinion, only increase in the future. Though nominally free, these states would "not give him the privileges of free citizens; privileges which every man is morally bound, by lawful means to secure to himself and posterity whenever in the Providence of God it is practicable." King, therefore, held that African Americans didn't come to Canada primarily to be protected from re-enslavement, but from an innate moral urge to find freedom, "following a natural impulse for liberty," seeking legal equality and the privileges of citizenship for themselves and their children.[263] However, when they arrived in Canada, King noted, African Americans were still unable to enjoy their freedoms, "owing

[261] Ibid., 9.

[262] Ibid., 6.

[263] King, "Scheme for Improving the Coloured People."

to the prejudice which exists against Coloured persons." To remove this prejudice, fugitives needed to be educated. After all, slavery "has destroyed in a great measure their perception of right and wrong" and therefore they "will become a dangerous and troublesome society" if granted "the full privileges of free citizens" without first being taught "moral and industrious habits."[264] White prejudice, King implied, has its basis in the "excesses" committed by such morally debased fugitives, noting that prejudice primarily existed where blacks "have been permitted to remain in a state of ignorance."[265] To King, therefore, it was not only crucial to educate blacks in order to safeguard their immortal soul, but also to ensure "the good of the state, and the welfare of the community" and, in essence, remove white prejudice by improving the character of blacks.[266] King, in a strong paternalistic vein, held that fugitives had to be educated and develop certain skills before they could function as citizens and responsibly enjoy the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship. An exclusive black settlement, by protecting them from the prejudice which would prevent them from improving if "mixed with the white population,"[267] would enable them to do so. In this sense, William King certainly envisioned his community as a way of preparing blacks for the "full privileges of citizenship," or teach them how to "use" freedom, as Pease & Pease and Winks argue was the main function of the communities.[268]

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[264] Ibid., 652-653.

[265] While there was a widespread preconception, even among some black abolitionists, that fugitives coming into Canada West were vulnerable to resorting to crime, both contemporaneous and contemporary observers have pointed out that the judicial records of Canada West show no significant difference in the amount of crimes committed by blacks and whites relative to their share of the total population (C. C. Foote, "The Colored Refugees in Canada — Are They in a Worse Condition in Canada Than in Slavery?," *New York Herald,* February 6, 1860, p2-3, accessed January 9, 2021, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1860-01-05/ed-1/seq-2/; Law, 96).

[266] King, "Scheme for Improving the Coloured People," 653.

[267] King, "Report of the Mission," 665.

[268] Pease & Pease, 19; Winks, 178.

For the settlement project of the Refugee Home Society, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was the central motivating factor. In a circular reprinted in Michigan newspapers of 1851, where the Michigan predecessor of the Society, founded by white abolitionists,[269] announced a public meeting for adopting a plan to help fugitives in Canada West, it argued that the American public had an obligation to fugitives from slavery. "We, the law makers, of the United States, have been the chief authors of their poverty and degradation." Therefore, they should aid the fugitives "in their struggle to establish homes among strangers, whose laws protect them from the grasp of American slave-hunters." When the convention was held, it was decided to address the issue by buying lands from the Canadian government and resell these to fugitives, as their most pressing need was for "permanent homes."[270] However, at the convention, this plan was not adopted without some criticisms. The *Voice of the Fugitive* noted that one of the attendees argued against the plan and the idea that African-Americans needed to flee the United States, stating that "fugitives were safe in some sections of the U.S." C.C. Foote, however, to the satisfaction of the *Voice*, replied that, given the new Fugitive Slave Act, fugitives could only be free in Canada and that he would recommend all fugitives to immediately find refuge there.[271]

Similar to King, the black abolitionists participating in the project, represented by Bibb's *Voice of the Fugitive*, assumed that there was a risk of fugitives committing crimes in Canada West if they were not provided for and would thereby "bring down the frown of prejudice of an uncharitable world against our entire race." Unlike King, however, they did not ascribe this tendency to any moral defect in the fugitives caused by their experience in slavery, but rather to their economic circumstances. When arriving in Canada West, "in a strange land, uneducated,

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[269] Asaka, 119.

[270] *Voice of the Fugitive,* "A Call to the Friends of Humanity."

[271] "The Refugees Home Society," *Voice of the Fugitive* 1, no. 12, June 1, 1851, p2, accessed May 3, 2021, http://ink.ourdigitalworld.org/viewer/cecil/focus/ink/newspapers/vf/reel1/000310-x0-y0-z1-r0-0-0.

poverty-stricken, out of doors," they would hardly be able to find work and shelter. Having no other way to get by, they might then resort to crime. Again, the Refugee Home Society emphasized that the burden of providing help to these fugitives rested on "the white population of the United States, who have made the laws which have driven us to this point."[272]

The settlement plans ultimately had two things in common in their views on blacks, citizenship and the law. The first was that they held that African Americans would continue to come to Canada to find freedom, both for the reason that state laws prevented them from enjoying the same legal rights as whites in the Northern states and for the reason that the United States did not protect fugitives from being returned to the South. Fugitives came to Canada driven by a natural, moral impulse for freedom, as King emphasized, and for physical security, as emphasized by the Refugee Home Society, which connected its cause explicitly the stricter Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. As the example of Dawn showed, these motives of physical security were a strong concern for abolitionists already before the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, but the law made the issue more pressing as the stream of fugitives to Canada increased.[273] The second commonality was that the initiators of the settlement saw their plans for education and moral improvement of fugitives as a means to lessen racism in Canadian society. Both King and the *Voice of the Fugitive* saw Canadian prejudice as a reaction to criminal activity of blacks, which they respectively ascribed to moral debasement caused by slavery, and to poverty. The solution of removing prejudice was, essentially, conceived of by these communities as improving the moral and economic situation of blacks, which they, however, could only do when given the economic basis which prejudice usually denied them, and access to education. These founding ideas of the communities had their reflection in debates in

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[272] *Voice of the Fugitive,* "Thirty-Thousand Fugitives."

[273] Asaka, 112; Campbell, 62-63; Pease & Pease, 7-8.

American abolitionist literature — they did not only relate to questions of black citizenship in Canadian society, but to those in American society as well.

In American abolitionist literature on the communities, Canadian society is almost unanimously portrayed as a place where blacks can truly be free, standing in sharp contrast even to the free northern states. This is not because Canadians were free from prejudice, but because their law was. Isaac Riley of Elgin left Michigan for Canada because he "did not feel free" there, despite having a well-paying job.[274] Henry Johnson, from Pennsylvania, came to Elgin to educate his children and had come to Canada "for rights, freedom, liberty."[275] John Martin at the Refugee Home Society, who was raised in Tennessee and later fled to Ohio, also moved on to Canada "in order to avoid the oppressive laws of the States."[276] Still, the settlers were very much aware that the prejudice which held them back in the United States was present in Canada as well. Mrs. Riley stated that, when she arrived in Canada, what hurt her most was that the white people, especially the French Canadians, were "cold and indifferent" towards black people. In slaveholding Maryland, where she came from, at least "the white people talk freely to their neighbors' colored people."[277] Van Branken observed how "among some people here, there is as much prejudice as in the States," but noted a central difference between prejudice in the United States and that in Canada. "They cannot carry it out as they do in the states: the law makes the difference."[278] William Henry Bradley at Dawn agreed with this observation, but was pessimistic about the future prospects of blacks in Canada. "Public sentiment will move mountains of laws," he stated, reflecting that societal

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[274] Drew, 298-299.

[275] Ibid., 307.

[276] Ibid., 335.

[277] Ibid., 299-300.

[278] Ibid., 305.

prejudice might eventually cause a change in law, or may render them void in practice.[279] These settlers' testimonies confirmed the ideas that blacks had an innate desire for freedom and that Canada was, because of its legal equality, superior to the free states, despite its societal prejudice. By demonstrating their independence under Canadian law, blacks also showed to the free Northern states that legal obstructions instead of any innate inferiority hindered their societal progress. Lewis Tappan, sending Washington's *National Era* the *Toronto Globe*'s report on Elgin to be reprinted in their columns, saw this as the main lesson which should be taken from that settlement: "Give the colored man the opportunity — remove crushing disabilities — treat him as equal before the law — and he will soon demonstrate his native equality."[280]

The idea that the communities helped remove prejudice against blacks by preventing them from committing crimes, however, was more controversial. Many blacks living near the Refugee Home Society's settlement at Windsor didn't share its founders' conviction that it was necessary to prevent prejudice by lifting fugitives out of poverty. Most of them emphasized that fugitives who came over the border would be able to find work for themselves, aided by blacks who already lived in Canada West. Windsor-resident J. F. White stated that "we have a society here to take care of our brothers when they get here."[281] Thomas Jones even argued that the settlers at the Society's settlement were, in fact, "a bother to society" themselves. The settlement attracted those who were "dependent" on aid while "smart men would not go."[282] Similar to how many observers argued against picturing fugitives as indigent and suffering because it compromised their manhood and independence, they also criticized the idea that the fugitives were so poor that they had no choice

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[279] Ibid., 313.

[280] Lewis Tappan, "The Elgin Settlememt, Canada West," *The National Era* 9, 18 October 1855, p168, accessed March 5, 2021, link.gale.com/apps/doc/HX2500254590/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=c8f6f977.

[281] Drew, 339.

[282] Ibid., 328.

but to turn to crime. When Samuel J. May related the stories he heard of Canada being overrun by "shiftless fugitives" to black Canadians, they replied to him that black crime was practically non-existent in Canada and that "it was the intention and endeavor of the colored population to take care of their own poor."[283] Laura Haviland, too, noticed how, among the 60,000 who came from slavery to Canada, there were "but very few who could be classed among the 'suffering'," and that among the fugitives "there are fewer arrests … than among the whites, according to their numbers."[284]

Similarly, when abolitionist literature discussed the civic importance of the communities, it was not only in terms of them teaching blacks to adapt to white society. Rather, their most important exemplary function was in two central, interrelated debates in the American abolitionist movement, particularly among black abolitionists, about *how* blacks should relate to white society. These were the debates on black emigration and black integration. When William Nell concluded his 1858 tour of Canada West and argued for the benefits of migrating there, he added that this certainly didn't mean that he was in favor of "a general emigration of colored Americans from the states," and that he rejected "the scheme of the American Colonization Society."[285] With this, Nell tied his observations to debates on black colonization, acknowledging that it had made black emigration a sensitive issue. During the early 1850s, the American Colonization Society, which sought to solve racial tensions in the United States by removing blacks to Africa, had gained renewed popularity, possibly related to anxieties about sectional tensions over slavery. Many abolitionists, among whom Douglass and Garrison, for whose *Liberator* Nell was writing, were strongly opposed to this idea, arguing that African-Americans, being born in the United States, had the right to live there and that the colonization schemes only worked against measures to improve

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[283] Samuel J. May, "Letter from Samuel J. May — No. II," *Frederick Douglass' Paper,* August 27, 1852, accessed March 3, 2021, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/GT3011599551/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=d4588898.

[284] Haviland.

[285] Nell.

the social position of African-Americans in the United States.[286] However, after the Fugitive Slave Act was passed and the prospects for integration became dire, a growing number of African-American abolitionists began to seriously consider black emigration.[287] Like Nell, many abolitionists considered Canada as the most logical destination due to its laws and geographic closeness. Samuel May, too, recommended it to "the free and enslaved, who cannot remain longer in our borders" as a much better option than "Liberia or Jamaica."[288]

Henry Bibb was a strong proponent of black emigration to Canada. In *The Voice of the Fugitive* of August 1851, Bibb called for both Canadian and American blacks to repudiate plans for African colonization, encouraging blacks to migrate to Canada and establish themselves as independent, agricultural landowners.[289] At a convention in September, the *Voice* formulated a three-part plan. Firstly, to establish a Canadian home for fugitives from slavery, secondly, to encourage all free blacks to migrate to Canada, and thirdly, to cultivate the soil, "erect mills and manufactories" and finally "proceed to commercial exportation."[290] J.T.H., an anonymous black resident of Vermont writing to the *Voice of the Fugitive* (likely James Theodore Holly), expressed his whole-hearted support for Bibb's plans "for systematic colonization of refugees in Canada West," seeing in it "the most practicable" as well as "most available" plan for emancipating the enslaved, a much better option than the formerly proposed plans for colonizing Africa, Haiti and the West Indies. This was not only due to Canada's closeness to the United States, but also because

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[286] Power-Greene, 95-97.

[287] Power-Greene, 127-128; Silverman, 102.

[288] May, "Letter No. IV."

[289] *Voice of the Fugitive,* "Call for a North American Convention."

[290] "The Voice of the Fugitive of September 24 Contains the Proceeding of a Convention Held at Toronto, Canada, of Which Henry Bibb Was President," *The National Era*, October 9, 1851, p163, accessed March 5, 2021, link.gale.com/apps/doc/HX2500210062/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=5c552867.

Canadian colonization "is an alternative we can adopt ourselves, without having it marked out for us by doubtful philanthropists." J.T.H. happily offered his aid to the project and argued that free African-Americans, too, should move to Canada, settle on farms and found communities to "lay the foundations of their future" and welcome fugitives from slavery, leaving "the drudging employment of menials, about the towns and cities of the free states" behind them.[291]

Others, however, didn't think that emigration in any way addressed the key issues of the reviled African colonization efforts. In the words of Ousmane K. Power-Greene, it still "gave white Americans the impression that the majority of blacks wanted to leave."[292] Such was also the opinion of the black abolitionist Charles Lenox Remond, who spoke out against migration to Canada during a discussion of the Massachussetts Anti-Slavery Convention about whether the Elgin Settlement plan was an effective blueprint for black settlement in Canada West. Remond firmly rejected the idea of both slaves and free blacks moving to Canada, as "he wanted it constantly and plainly before the world, that they had a *right* to stay in this land." Remond also made the point earlier made by settler William Henry Bradley at Dawn: it would only be a matter of time before this prejudice would be codified into law and blacks would be off just as bad in Canada as in the United States.[293]

That the agricultural success of the settlements showed that blacks could make an agricultural living in the climate of Canada also gave them an important part in debates on colonization and emigration. The racial preconception that blacks were biologically better suited to warm climates was often used in favor of colonization plans for the West Indies and Africa. Reacting to a suggestion of black abolitionists William Wells Brown that blacks might best emigrate to the Caribbean, the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* offered moderate support for the plan, arguing that

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[291] J.T.H., "For the Voice of the Fugitive."

[292] Power-Greene, 128.

[293] Jackson, Yerrington and May.

many of the fugitives "would, doubtless, prefer the milder and more congenial climate of the West Indies to the more severe one of Canada if they had the liberty of choice."[294] Two months later, the issue came up again, when the governor general of Canada requested the Canadian Anti-Slavery Society to enquire among the blacks in Canada whether they had a desire to migrate to the West Indies, "particularly to Trinidad, where the demand of labourers is said to be great." The *Anti-Slavery Reporter* reprinted the letter sent by the Anti-Slavery Society in reply, which stated that the blacks of Canada had no desire whatsoever to emigrate to the West Indies, pointing to low wages paid and exploitational work conditions, arguing that such plans were ploys by slaveholder to remove free blacks, the slave's most formidable allies, from Canada and the United States.[295] Commenting on the letter, the *Anti-Slavery Standard* emphasized that, unlike slaveholders, the people of Canada did not want its blacks to migrate, as they were "good settlers, maintaining themselves by honest industry." In fact, "we need only refer to the Elgin Settlement as a proof of what coloured men are capable of accomplishing."[296] Writing to the *Voice of the Fugitive,* J.T.H. argued that the climate of Canada was even preferable to that of the West Indies and Liberia. Where the latter were indesirable because of their "tropical latitudes," in Canada West there was "but a slight variation of climate from that we have all been used to."[297]

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294 "Fugitive Slaves in England," *National Anti-Slavery Standard,* August 7, 1851, p42, accessed March 5, 2021, link.gale.com/apps/doc/HX2500318722/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=63a27e21.

295 "Emigration to the West Indies from Canada and the United States," *National Anti-Slavery Standard* 12, no. 20, October 9, 1851, accessed March 4, 2021, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/apps/doc/HX2500318929/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=45405726.

296 "Emigration to the West Indies," *National Anti-Slavery Standard* 12, no. 20, October 9, 1851, accessed March 4, 2021, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/apps/doc/HX2500318929/SAS?u=leiden&sid=SAS&xid=45405726.

297 J.T.H., "Voice from the 'Green Moutains'."

Linked to the question of whether African-Americans emigrating to Canada were implicitly condoning discrimination in the United States was the issue of *how* blacks settled in Canada. There was a strong debate, especially among black abolitionists, about the extent to which blacks should live apart from whites or strive for integration. An important figure early figure in these debates was the black preacher Levi Woodson, who argued that full integration in white society was an impossibility and that blacks should maintain a separate identity, either by emigrating or forming their own, separate communities.[298] Since the Canadian fugitive communities essentially did both, they played a key role in the debates on integration and segregation. In Canada West, the two opposing views were represented mainly by, on the one side, Henry Bibb and Martin Delany, who argued that full integration was unrealistic and blacks should maintain their own, separate identities, and, on the other side, Mary Ann Shadd, who, in the words of Jason Silverman, thought "that full black equality could ultimately be achieved only by integration with mainstream white society."[299] The Refugee Home Society became a focal point of the contestation between both Bibb and Shadd. In response to Shadd's critique that the Refugee Home Society was too much based on "complexion," Henry's wife Mary Bibb responded that it was simply necessary to set up a land scheme for blacks due to the racism they encountered from white society: "the whites have never any where encountered the same obstacles to self-elevation and wealth as have the colored people, or those identified by birth with the American slave."[300]

The other communities were also linked to these debates. As was discussed earlier (p33), Elgin came up in the 1st of August celebration of the Anti-Slavery Society of Massachusetts when it was asked whether black emigrants to Canada should integrate with white Canadian society or separate themselves from that society. The Canadian Reverend, Dall, argued that "much … was to

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[298] Silverman, 102-103.

[299] Silverman, 103-104; Sinha, 332-333.

[300] Bibb.

be said on both sides" and hoped that the leading abolitionist papers would devote attention to the issue. Dall was of the opinion that such an "exclusive" settlement was certainly not equivalent to separation, as the integrated school at Elgin showed.[301] This matched a general tendency in how the fugitive communities were portrayed in abolitionist literature. While they were technically segregated, most writers portrayed them as removing prejudice and bringing blacks and whites closer together, perhaps even until integration became a viable reality. When Samuel J. May visited Elgin, he emphasized how the settlers "lived peaceably among themselves and peaceably with their neighbors." The white farmers who had first wanted to move away were now "more than willing to remain."[302] In practice, Elgin was indeed not as segregated from its environment as might appear at first sight. Not only did blacks and whites attend church and schools together at Elgin, Roger Hepburn argues that there was also much social and economic contact between the communities and whites who lived nearby, some of them very near or even on the lands of the settlement.[303]

Finally, while the communities figured in debates on emigration and integration, there was little actual attention to the actual civic institutions of the settlements in abolitionist literature, even though they most likely incorporated at least some form of self-government. Drew observed how a "court of arbitration" was set up at Elgin where the settlers amicably resolved issues, and that only five cases were brought before them.[304] He also described how, at the Refugee Home Society, a "True Band," one of several black organizations of mutual support in Canada West,[305] had been formed in cooperation with other people from the area, but does not expand further on the

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[301] Jackson, Yerrington and May.

[302] May, "Letter No. IV."

[303] Roger Hepburn, 65.

[304] Drew, 293.

[305] Bristow, 119.

subject.[306] During his visit to Elgin, Samuel May mentioned how "the Government of Buxton … is in the hands of Committees chosen annually by the people," who successfully looked to it that the laws of the community and the association were not violated. However, May ascribed much of the settlement's self-government to the "personal influence" of William King, "a sort of Patriarch among them," a wise man whose advice the settlers listened to out of gratefulness.[307] Of the capabilities of blacks for independent leadership, he was much less convinced. When discussing Dawn, May suggested it had failed because of the settler's inability to put faith in its black leader, Josiah Henson. Slavery had so accustomed blacks to whites in leading position, while painting blacks as "inferiors, incapable of wise, independent action," he theorized, that blacks might now "unconsciously" consider other blacks incapable of holding positions of authority.[308] For some white abolitionists, patriarchical assumptions about fugitives needing a guiding hand to improve themselves still informed how they thought about blacks taking on the "privileges" of free citizenship, presumptions which may have hindered them in ascribing agency to the black settlers in the management of the communities.

Both Pease & Pease and Winks argued that the communities were used to train blacks to use freedom and get along in society.[309] However, a study of American abolitionist literature does somewhat complicate this picture. Though the founders of the communities thought them necessary to ensure blacks could overcome poverty and the moral debasement of slavery, often advertising themselves in abolitionist literature as addressing these urgent needs of fugitives, many reports of Canada West emphasized how fugitives were able to sustain themselves very soon after arrival and that free Canadian blacks had good social networks to support them. As discussed in the previous

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[306] Drew, 326.

[307] May, "Letter No. IV."

[308] May, "Letter No. II."

[309] Pease & Pease, 19; Winks, 178.

chapters, the benefits of the communities lay chiefly in qualitative education, which was often denied to blacks through Canadian prejudice, and in providing land ownership, which otherwise might be too expensive. Both education and independent agricultural work, many abolitionists agreed, were key tools in ensuring that blacks gained equality and set a civic example by demonstrating that they could be self-sufficient. However, many abolitionists, especially black abolitionists, did not necessarily agree that the communities served to "train" blacks for freedom.

Rather, they presented potential examples of *how* free blacks and whites should live together and had implications to whether free blacks had a place in the United States. In the debates on black emigration, the communities were a favorable alternative against migration to the West-Indies and Caribbean area and formed a potent argument against such efforts, showing that blacks were not constitutionally restricted to thrive only in tropical climates. Canada was also close to the United States, and, most importantly, a project African-Americans "could adopt for themselves." In debates on separation and integration, black abolitionists who sought to promote a separate black identity thought the plan promising — the Refugee Home Society, modeled after Elgin, fit right in with Henry Bibb's plans of black-led initiatives for emigrating to Canada. Integrationists usually rejected the plan, but the Elgin Settlement, of the three settlements the most successful, still offered an alluring example to them. While it was based on segregationist principles, the community functioned well within larger society and even incorporated some integrated institutions, showing that integration was, eventually, a possibility. Finally, the communities illustrated that blacks would prove themselves equal if given the opportunity by favorable laws and an equal social environment, and that, if they did not prove so even in the free states, it was because of the obstructions of both legal and social discrimination.

Conclusion

During the 1850s, three fugitive communities in Canada West sought to improve the situation of Canadian blacks and fugitives from slavery by providing them with access to schools and give them the possibility to work their own lands. These communities were strongly connected to both American and British organizers and sponsors and came to possess a strong exemplary value to the international abolitionist movement. Their exemplary function was studied in this paper by looking at the depiction of the communities in American abolitionist literature, studying them from a transnational perspective where most previous literature on the communities had looked at their functioning in Canadian society. By doing so, this study demonstrated that these communities made an important contribution to the American abolitionist campaign against slavery and for civil rights for African Americans. As this contribution relied on both the deeds and testimonies of its settlers, the fugitive communities, furthermore, formed key examples of fugitive slave abolitionism. By demonstrating these aspects of the communities, this study has contributed to both our understanding of international abolitionist networks and the agency of fugitives in the abolitionist movement and their importance in shaping its aims.

Both Dawn and the Elgin Settlement sought to "morally improve" fugitives by providing them with religion and schools. As racism often prevented blacks in Canada from attending public schools, access to education was, for many blacks, the primary motivation for moving towards Dawn and Elgin. To ensure that the projects had long-term viability and the settlers could afford its education, both projects incorporated agricultural labor as part of their plans. Dawn provided lands for its students to work so they could pay their tuition. The settlement, however, came about primarily by blacks buying land in its environment and settling these themselves. At Elgin, land grants were a central aspect of the settlement plan from the outset as its founder, William King,

considered landownership, next to education, of key importance for the moral improvement of blacks, as, in his view, it would ensure that they would become independent and would stay at Elgin long enough to be effectively educated. The Refugee Home Society, finally, was formed soon after the Fugitive Slave Act was passed to accommodate for an expected increase in the number of fugitives coming to Canada West. Though also conceived of as a missionary effort, its primary concern was to provide for the "temporal welfare" of fugitives and to prevent them from descending into poverty – of the three communities, it had the most charitable connotations. Like Dawn, the Refugee Home Society was a joint venture of white and black abolitionists, the latter represented by Henry Bibb, who used the project in his Voice of the Fugitive as a tool to advance his ideals of black emigration, urging both fugitives and free blacks to move to Canada and found their own societies there, free from legal discrimination in the United States.

In abolitionist literature, key emphasis went to the fact that the communities demonstrated that blacks could be independent landowners. They paid off their installments with relative ease, cleared and cultivated many acres of land and created flourishing communities. This was, of course, a potent example against the racist proslavery argument that blacks were, by nature, dependent and unable to thrive without a "master's guiding hand." This also proved that blacks could be American citizens, as it tied them to ideals of American settlerhood. The communities also offered other examples to abolitionist debates on Northern laws and society. One was that education had been central in the founding of both communities, which fit a key point of contestation in Northern society. Education was a prime means for African Americans to emancipate themselves, but precisely this was denied to them in the Northern free states, as it was, through informal prejudice, in Canada. The communities illustrated that African Americans were strongly motivated to follow an education and aware of its benefits, but were unfairly denied so by white prejudice, which were proven ungrounded. The school at Elgin even showed that integrated education was possible

without any discord between black and white students or loss of quality of education, if only the experiment was tried.

While American abolitionists recognized the exemplary potential of the fugitive communities in combating slavery and inequality in the free states, not all of them necessarily agreed with its founders' ideas that the communities were necessary to prevent fugitives from resorting to crime, either because of their poverty or the moral debasement they had suffered through slavery, thereby forming a negative example of free blacks to white American society. Many abolitionists emphasized to the public that fugitives in Canada West could relatively quickly find jobs to support themselves and could count on support networks from blacks who had already established themselves in Canada West. Instead, when abolitionist literature discussed relations between free blacks and white society, it focused on what the communities could tell about the ways in which free blacks should relate to a white society. Instead of seeing the communities simply as mechanisms to make them conform, they incorporated them in debates about black emigration and integration. Those who thought blacks should maintain a separate identity thought the plans to be positive models. While some integrationists rejected the plans, more moderate integrationists saw the Elgin Settlement as a positive example, as it functioned within in Canadian society at large, maintaining close contact with whites in the neighborhood and, with its school and churches, possessed integrated institutions.

American abolitionist literature, therefore, shows a different interpretation of the communities than those based on studies of the communities in their Canadian context. Pease & Pease and Winks, still the key works of reference on the communities, both argued that they were primarily intended to make blacks conform to white, American middle-class norms of self-sufficiency and that their separatist, or segregationist setup ultimately caused them to fail. It is true that, in American abolitionist literature, the communities' focus on independent landownership and

self-sufficiency was central to their representation, demonstrating blacks' capacity for citizenship and countering proslavery claims of racial inferiority. However, American abolitionists did not unanimously see the communities as entities which "trained" blacks for freedom by teaching them to adapt them to white society. Rather, they played a complex role in debates about how African-Americans should relate to American society, and if they should even try to, rather than starting from the assumption that African-Americans had to learn to conform to a certain ideal. Such debates were not only in line with how African-Americans should integrate into American society after Emancipation, but also with ideas about how free blacks should relate to American society as it was, when a future Emancipation was still far from certain.

Finally, this study shows the crucial importance of transnational ties to the American abolitionist movement. The communities fitted neatly in debates on citizenship in the free Northern states, and demonstrated many similarities between the issues blacks encountered in these states and in Canada, despite the major difference in how blacks were treated under the law. Many of the organizers were American, and even Canadian abolitionists were concerned with the public image of the communities in the United States, sometimes addressing American audiences through American abolitionist newspapers. British organizers and sponsors, too, became strongly involved in the communities, and the Canadian fugitives were also tied to broader black settlement schemes in the British empire, in Jamaica and the West-Indies. These abolitionist projects in West Canada show that the American abolitionist movement did not stand in isolation: to fully understand both the communities and American abolitionism, a transnational perspective is key.

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