

REVIEW OF**HARVEY AMANI WHITFIELD, *NORTH TO BONDAGE: LOYALIST SLAVERY IN THE MARITIMES.*****VANCOUVER: UBC PRESS, 2016.****James H. Morrison**

On 18 March 1898, T. Watson Smith rose before the Nova Scotia Historical Society to deliver part of what was to become Volume X of the society's journal. That issue would be entitled *The Slave in Canada* (1899). Smith's account was a 161-page treatise of what Smith, a Methodist minister, believed had been left out of Canadian history. As he expressed it, "Our historians have almost wholly ignored the existence of slavery in Canada" (1), and later in the volume he observed that the "lives of Canadian slaves were without annals" (81). Smith's overview included the Maritime provinces as well as Upper and Lower Canada.

The next notable publication on Canadian slavery did not occur for sixty years, with the publication of Marcel Trudel's controversial *L'esclavage au Canada francais* (1960), which appeared later in English as *Canada's Forgotten Slaves* (2013). It remains disputed, for, as Trudel diplomatically states, slavery was "a blind spot in the French Canadian psyche" (11). Despite these efforts, there was little follow-up, and one still hears the average Canadian state, "There was no slavery in Canada."

Until recently, the Black history narrative of the Maritimes has been focused on four key elements. Taken chronologically, these are Black Loyalists (1780s), Jamaican Maroons (1790s), Black Refugees (ca. 1816), and Africville (1960s). The rich social, cultural, and political continuity of Black life in Maritime Canada has been largely unexamined. Also omitted and perhaps purposely ignored was the dark heritage of slavery. Fortunately, scholar Harvey Amani Whitfield has brought together a considerable wealth of research that has been carried out over the past twenty-five years. In his *North to Bondage*, he consults widely in primary and secondary sources to examine the practice of slavery in the Maritime colonies (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island), especially the lives of the African-Americans enslaved to White Loyalist slave holders who arrived in the Maritime provinces in the mid-1780s.

From the beginning, Whitfield recognizes the need to use an interdisciplinary approach. In addition to historical documentation, he utilizes the recent archaeological work of Catherine Cottreau-Robins and Heather MacLeod-Leslie (4). Also, he is acutely aware of the role that environmental factors play in the region. One missing element in his approach is folklore, the collections of Black songs and stories by folklorists like Arthur Huff Fauset and Helen Creighton, which could have added to his interdisciplinary approach. For example, the Nova Scotia song "No More Auction Block for Me" and the story "The Runaway Slave" would have been helpful.

The issue of slave statistics has always been a major stumbling block for historians of slavery in the Maritimes. Whitfield addresses this matter directly with a critical examination of the key question of when is a slave a slave. This is important, because slaves were sometimes listed in the documentation as either slave or servant-for-life, the terms used interchangeably. This becomes even more problematic in a flexible colonial Black, White, and Native labour hierarchy that included not just slaves and servants

but also apprentices, indentured and bound servants, as well as redemptioners. There was also the out-migration of slaveowners and their slaves back to the United States or to any of the many British islands in the Atlantic south of the Maritimes. The third issue for consideration was the re-enslavement of free Blacks who had been kidnapped and sold or—in the event of difficult economic straits, like Lydia Jackson (15)—agreed to indenture themselves for a few years. This often turned into a lifetime of slavery. Despite these difficulties, Whitfield does arrive at an overall total of approximately 2,500 slaves, with Nova Scotia having 1,400 to 1,600, New Brunswick having 500 to 700, and perhaps fifty in Prince Edward Island (12).

Overall, Whitfield's approach to the documentation is exemplary for historians, as he wrestles with the inconsistencies and omissions in the records. He also makes a plea for scholars not to be bound by national and international boundaries, as New Brunswick and the Maritimes were a conspicuous part of the Atlantic world and participated actively in what we now call the Black Atlantic. In this regard, rather than a comparison with the Canadas, Whitfield provides an important north/south perspective with a focus on both the American and British Atlantic coastal regions. He notes, for example, Colonel Edward Winslow of Fredericton bringing in a few slaves from New England (68). There were many other such transactions. Nevertheless, he avoids generalizing from his New England sources and applying them to the Maritimes. He outlines the specifics in the Maritime region as he outlines slave work, slave family relations, and slave and owner arrangements, especially when confronted with a larger free Black population that outnumbered the slave population by 2:1. The book also includes several useful charts of slave profiles, slave owner occupations, and the number of slaves each owned. Although not a plantation society, some owners like Dr. Bullen had as many as ten (128–9).

The demise of slavery in Maritime Canada did not occur with a definitive legislative act of emancipation. It was rather a slow process that spread over a fifty-year period. During that half-century, the abolitionist movement in Britain, New England, and Upper Canada sparked anti-slavery legislation. In the Maritimes, however, there was no such legislation, except in one instance at the community level. In 1783, the Quakers of Beaver Harbour, New Brunswick, signed a petition that began, "No Slave Masters Admitted" (93). This community stood alone. In the absence of legislative action, it was left to the colonial court system to struggle with the issue of emancipation. This was carried out in a rather reluctant fashion from the 1790s until about 1820. An example of this piecemeal process is the *Rex v. Jones* case of 1799 in New Brunswick.

Captain Caleb Jones of Nashwaaksis (outside Fredericton) had bought Nancy, a slave in New England, in 1785. She subsequently escaped and, when captured, took her case to court "to procure her liberation" (104). Nancy was defended by New Brunswick solicitor Ward Chipman, a Loyalist strongly opposed to slavery. During the trial, slavery was justified in New Brunswick, as it was within the common law of the colonies. In his rebuttal, Chipman noted that a number of former colonies in the United States no longer had slavery. He also stated that New Brunswick should follow English common law practices, citing the *Somerset v. Stuart* case of 1772 in England that had ruled in favour of the slave James Somerset. During the trial, Chipman corresponded with his fellow Loyalist from New York, Salter Blowers, then Chief Justice of Nova Scotia. Blowers pointed out that his strategy was that of his predecessor, Justice Strange, who engaged in a "judicial war of attrition against slavery" (9).

The result of the trial was that the four judges (all slave owners at one time) were divided evenly over the fact that slavery was not the law in New Brunswick. Nevertheless, this deadlock did not save Nancy. As was the custom in many cases, she was indentured to her original owner for a further fifteen

years. By 1822, New Brunswick claimed there were no longer slaves in the colony (107). Nothing was mentioned of those who were still indentured—in some cases, for life. It is safe to say that in the region, no law was passed or court decision made that proclaimed slavery illegal.

In his final chapter, Whitfield writes of Black and White cooperation; of judges like Thomas Strange and Salter Blowers ruling in favour of slaves; of abolitionist lawyers like Ward Chipman in New Brunswick defending slaves; and of religious ministers, like the Rev. James MacGregor in Nova Scotia, lobbying against the practice. Throughout the book, Whitfield stresses Black agency-like escapes, court challenges, and working understandings with slave owners. He also discusses the various means used to nurture Black communities that were relegated to the margins of mainstream societies.

By the 1820s, slavery had for all intents and purposes disappeared, but racism did not (11). Inequality for all people of colour continued to grow into the twentieth century and beyond. Robyn Maynard's complementary book, *Policing Black Lives: Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present* (2017), decries this situation by connecting slavery with the current welfare and policing practices in Canada. The frequent call for Black reparations today is not just about slavery, then, but about the systemic racism of over two hundred years.

North to Bondage is an excellent starting point for viewing the contours of New Brunswick and Maritime slavery—and what remains to be done. First Nations slavery has yet to be analyzed adequately and we do not have any understanding of nineteenth-century abolitionism in the politics and culture of Black communities. *North to Bondage* should thus serve as a beginning for a larger historical project to understand the presence of slavery in the whole of Canada. This, Whitfield concludes, will “put slavery in its rightful place in the national narrative” (118) so the question “Was there slavery in Canada?” will no longer be asked.

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