REVIEW OF
HARVEY AMANI WHITFIELD, *BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF ENSLAVED BLACK PEOPLE IN THE MARITIMES*.
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G. Patrick O'Brien

For nearly a quarter century, Harvey Amani Whitfield has been a leading researcher of the free and enslaved Black people who lived and laboured in what are now New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. In *Blacks on the Border: The Black Refugees in British North America, 1815-1860* (2006) and *North to Bondage: Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes* (2016), he explored the movement of diverse people of the Black Atlantic, both free and enslaved, to the Maritimes, white colonists' attempts to continue Black subjugation, and the creation of Afro-Canadian communities throughout late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century Nova Scotia. In each of these studies, Whitfield showcased his exceptional ability to sift through an array of sources, meticulously piecing together the fragmentary evidence that documents the lives of enslaved people in the region to create arguments that have become foundational to the field. In one sense, the 1,465 entries that make up the *Biographical Dictionary of Enslaved Black People in the Maritimes* represent not only "the most complete listing of enslaved Black people in the Maritimes to date," but also the culmination of decades of research (li).

But to reduce Whitfield's most recent publication to a list of enslaved people he uncovered during his research would be to overlook the work's grander significance. More than a list of names and descriptions, Whitfield's work is, as Donald Wright notes in the Foreword, "a moral project" that, in Whitfield's words, "Bears witness to [enslaved people's] existence" and "affirm[s] the notion that all of these slaves were unique individuals, despite the efforts of their owners and the wider British Atlantic world to dehumanize them" (xiv, xxiii). Whitfield's study is a deeply humanizing endeavour. Moreso than similar works, Whitfield's *Biographical Dictionary of Enslaved Black People in the Maritimes* restores slavery to the history of pre-Confederation Atlantic Canada while also decentering whiteness in the process to highlight the unique experiences of enslaved people throughout the region.

In an opening preface that explores the history of Black slavery in the Maritimes, Whitfield provides important context for the diverse lives he outlines and uses examples from the entries to flesh out the realities of slavery in the Maritimes. Perhaps most importantly, Whitfield uses this section to situate slavery in the Maritimes firmly within the study of slavery across the broader British Atlantic. Like their counterparts throughout the British Empire, enslaved people in the Maritimes came from diverse backgrounds. For example, before being bought by Louisbourg merchant Pierre Augruax, an enslaved woman named Moll had lived and worked in colonial New England (128). An enslaved man named Cato had travelled much farther. Loyalist John Bridgewater recorded in the Book of Negroes that he had "bought him 18 years ago out of a Guinea Ship at New York," before he brought him to the Maritimes in 1783 (38). A bill of sale from Yarmouth highlighted that a seven-year-old boy named Jack was a native of Nova Scotia born to parents who, as his owner noted, were "both my sole property" (93).

If enslaved people resembled their counterparts in the British Atlantic, so too did their owners. Like other slave owners, slavers in the Maritimes also maintained strong economic and personal connections with others across the Atlantic world, which they used to force compliance. Although Lydia

Jackson had settled among other free Black settlers at Manchester (Guysborough Township), she was forced to sell herself into what she believed would be a short indenture, only to be sold again as a slave to Dr. Bulman, who not only beat her, but as John Clarkson noted, also "planned on selling her to some planter in the West Indies" (93-94). According to a complaint filed by Mertilla Dixon, her employer "threatened to ship her to the West Indies, and there dispose of her as a Slave" (62). A survey of the biographies collected by Whitfield further underscores that slavery in the Maritimes "must be understood as part of several overlapping systems of Black labour exploitation throughout the British world" (xxviii).

While slavery in the Maritimes was intimately connected with other regions of the British Atlantic, Whitfield is careful to highlight the distinct characteristics that set slavery within the greater North American northeast apart from other areas of the empire. Similar to slavery in New England, slaveholding in both New Brunswick and Nova Scotia "cut across white society from the likes of Lieutenant-Governor John Wentworth to cabinet maker William Black" (xxxv). Enslaved people in the Maritimes worked in a variety of occupations and lived in close proximity to their owners in what historians have called "family slavery" or "intimate slavery" but which Whitfield suggests might be more accurately described as "close-quarters slavery" (xxxix). The duality of this form of slavery is one of the more salient characteristics found in the biographical entries.

In some instances, close-quarters slavery created bonds that while "always tainted by the coercion of slavery," resembled kinship, which enslaved people could work to their advantage (xxxix). Upon her death around 1815, the widow Sarah Cory of Queens County, New Brunswick directed that her "servant girl [Dorothy] with all her Children to be free from slavery with her bed and [bedding]" (63). In other cases, slave owners attempted to use their intimate knowledge of their property to retain their power. When Sam ran away in 1817, his owner placed an ad in the *New Brunswick Gazette* describing his appearance and noting that he was "quick spoken, [and] attempts to play the VIOLIN," demonstrating that he could use his familiarity with Sam's personal characteristics to aid in his capture (166). Close quarters also meant that enslaved people were subject to the constant threat of violence. In 1759, Malachy Slater complained that an enslaved man named Jack was an "Idle, deceitfull, villain" and regularly beat him with a whip or stick (91). Collectively, the biographical entries demonstrate that "the intimate interactions between Maritime slaves and slave owners were contradictory and ran the gamut from expressions and acts of true affection and kindness to violent and sadistic outbursts" (xxxviii).

Whitfield's entries also demonstrate the many challenges of studying slavery in the Maritimes. One of the most jarring aspects of the work are the nearly 430 entries—representing men, women, and children—that have no name attached, underscoring both the violence of the archive and the dehumanizing nature of slavery in the colonies. These nameless entries also point to a methodological issue. As Whitfield notes, "It is possible that some of [the unnamed people] have been counted twice. It is also possible that many enslaved people are forever lost to history because a bill of sale was not preserved or an individual slave did not get baptized or become the subject of a runaway slave advertisement" (lii). The challenge of documenting enslaved people in the Maritimes is exacerbated by a dearth of sources. Whitfield makes use of an impressive variety of what is available, including The Book of Negroes, runaway advertisements, probate records, petitions, and legal records; however, he emphasizes that there is far less documentation of enslaved people in the Maritimes—especially sources that capture the voices of the enslaved—than in other parts of the British Empire. The often-fluid boundary between slavery and freedom in the Maritimes also complicates the study. Only the government in Prince Edward Island ever passed legislation recognizing slavery. Many of the entries

show that labels of "free," "slave," and "servant" were not only ambiguous, but also constantly in flux. Perhaps one of the examples that best illustrates this point is the case of Statia, who according to a complex New Brunswick Supreme Court case, had been brought to the colony as a slave, had been freed by order of Governor Carleton, and lived as a free person alongside her husband, only to be "forcibly seized" by Joseph Clarke and kept as a slave (87). The family absconded from bondage in 1792 but were recaptured. In 1805, anti-slavery attorney Samuel Denny Street attempted to free Statia's son, Richard Hopefield Jr., by filing a writ of *habeas corpus* against his owner Stair Agnew, arguing that because the younger Hopefield had been born to a free father, he too was free. Ultimately, the court ruled in Agnew's favour. Although free Black people, like the Hopefields, could and did pushback against their continued subjugation, either by running away or through the courts, the threat of re-enslavement meant that Black people in the Maritimes were never entirely free.

Despite these many challenges, Whitfield has compiled a truly extraordinary work. Summarizing his experience combing through the entries, Wright makes a powerfully astute observation, "Reading the individual entries is a strangely moving experience: This is all we will ever know about the 1,465 men, women, and children who were enslaved in the Maritimes" (xiii). The more time I spent with the biographical entries, the more I came to appreciate Wright's insight. Reading through both the named and unnamed individuals enslaved throughout the Maritimes reveals the distinct patterns that defined slavery in the region and the insidious social, legal, and economic underpinnings that allowed it to flourish. Scholarly and popular audiences alike will find it impossible to read through the entries without an emotional reaction.

But I also want to quibble with the second half of Wright's assertion: I do not believe this is all we will ever know about enslaved people in the Maritimes. Whitfield's work, as remarkably thorough as it is, represents only a starting point. As he notes, "My purpose is to encourage historians to take these names and study them further so that scholars can create a repository of knowledge about enslaved Black people in the Maritimes and how they were connected to the wider Black Atlantic" (xii). The *Biographical Dictionary of Enslaved Black People in the Maritimes* has opened the door for scholars to answer the many questions Whitfield has helped illuminate. Thus, Whitfield's crowning achievement lies not only in capturing the lives and experiences of otherwise marginalized people, especially in New Brunswick, but also in providing an entry point for generations of scholars seeking to further our understanding of slavery and the individuals who were ensnared by it.

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G. Patrick O'Brien is an Assistant Teaching Professor of History at the University of Tampa.