THE UNCERTAINTIES OF LIFE IN CANADA: A COMPARISON OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES AT WILBERFORCE AND BUXTON IN ONTARIO, CANADA FROM 1820-1872

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This paper addresses two important black settlements in Ontario, Canada. Wilberforce and Elgin, why one failed and one succeeded. My research shows that the Wilberforce settlement failed because of the impact that the enforcement of Ohio slave laws had on the slaves’ decision to flee Cincinnati hastily. Also, the timing of the Wilberforce settlers’ flight into Canada, their lack of leadership, lack of job skills and education, the specific location of their settlement in Canada, and their inability to switch from single-crop farming to subsistence farming are some of the factors that affected Wilberforce’s ability to thrive in Canada.

The Elgin settlement succeeded because of the leadership qualities of Reverend William King, his organizational skills, his contacts in Canada that assisted him in purchasing land that would benefit his former slaves and the impact the Canadian Railway Company had on providing jobs for the Elgin settlers. King had a paternalistic relationship with his ex-slaves and this led to an orderly departure and arrival from the United States to Canada that helped the Elgin settlers become more accepted into Canadian society.

I utilized primary sources such as letters and memoirs from both settlements which contributed significantly to my understanding of Wilberforce’s and Elgin’s past. The William King Collection from the National Archives of Canada provided insight into the Elgin settlement’s ability to thrive in Canada. It is a wonderful primary source set on the organizational style of King and how he taught the former slaves to survive and prosper in Canada. Austin Steward, Twenty-Two as a Slave and Forty Years a Freeman (1857) provided
insight on being a slave and freeman and what impact Steward’s leadership had on the Wilberforce settlement.

A number of variables led Wilberforce and Elgin in opposite directions which capitulated into each settlement taking a different trajectory. The implications of each settlement’s place in history has had a profound affect upon the continuation of their legacies. Lessons learned from the past can greatly reduced the same mistakes from occurring in the future.
To my son Jordan, and my mother, Kathye

Thank you for your patience.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I. THE MIGRATION OF AFRICAN AMERICANS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN NORTH AMERICA</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II. ELGIN: MOST SUCCESSFUL SLAVE SETTLEMENT</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN THE HISTORY OF CANADA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III. WILBERFORCE: THE FORGOTTEN SETTLEMENT</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV. CROSS COMPARISON OF THE WILBERFORCE AND ELGIN SETTLEMENT</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Elgin Settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Buxton Mission and Elgin Settlement Plaque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Original Elgin House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>S.S. #13 Schoolhouse, 1861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>S.S. #13 Schoolhouse, Class Picture, 1910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bush Farm near Chatham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Royal Exchange Hotel, Oakville Historical Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>King Street, Chatham Twp., Kent, Ontario, Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Buxton Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Buxton Blacksmith Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Buxton Post Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>William King’s Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Isaac Riley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Wilberforce Settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Austin Steward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Levi Coffin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>The Wilberforce Settlement Plaque</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

The 19th century Canadian settlements of Wilberforce and Elgin were formed out of a desire of American blacks to experience freedom and escape the horrors of slavery. Slavery had been prevalent throughout the United States until the 1860s, while in Canada it had been abolished by the early 1800s. Each settlement would embark upon different trajectories leading to long-standing negative consequences for Wilberforce and a successful historical legacy for Elgin. The former slaves were willing to sacrifice everything including traveling through hostile terrain to seek freedom without animosity from their neighbors in a country that would accept them as freemen. In their search for a utopia, both settlements thought incorrectly that the British colony of Upper Canada would become that place. Soon, one settlement would face the harsh reality that Canada was anything but a welcoming country, while the other settlement with the right leadership would go on to become a successful settlement that has survived down to the 21st century.

These chapters explore the challenges, cultural divides, successes and failures of Wilberforce and Elgin. It will explain some of the intrinsic and extrinsic factors affecting Wilberforce’s inability to thrive in Canada, while Elgin would surpass all expectations and flourish in the new environment. Some of the issues such as leadership qualities within each settlement greatly impacted the outcomes of each settlement. Other elements also proved to be detrimental or beneficial to the existence of Wilberforce and Elgin. By comparing these settlements, my work gives us a compelling picture of the African-American experience in North America, and allows us to examine the differences between societies in the United States and Canada.
There were, for instance, numerous components that led to Wilberforce’s demise including the lack of organization, education and manual skills and the constant infighting among its leaders. Additionally, the lack of manual skills would hamper the settlers’ ability to clear property which was purchased for them from the Canada Company in order to build their own homes. The manual skills were needed to help the settlers’ survive the harsh winters in Canada. Furthermore, the Black Codes of 1804 and 1807 implemented in Cincinnati, Ohio undermined the former slaves’ ability to earn monies in preparation for their travel to Canada. The laws were passed to prevent slaves’ from escaping the plantations and fleeing to the north, making it easier for the slaveholders’ to apprehend their runaway slaves and return them back to their plantations.

Elgin, on the other hand was nearly the opposite of Wilberforce. The settlement was well organized, educated and well trained in the construction trade industry. Elgin’s leader, Reverend William King was a white Presbyterian minister from Nova Scotia. He married Mary Mourning Phares in 1841. From his marriage, King became a slave owner and managed his wife’s property called the Feliciana Parishes. As time went on, his conscience bothered him due to his abolitionist beliefs. Revered King abhorred every aspect of slavery and the violence that was inflicted upon the slaves. The annual rapes that occurred throughout Feliciana and New Orleans only further hardened King’s attitude toward slavery.

After the death of his wife, son and daughter, one would think that King’s grief would overtake him. To the contrary, his faith was a huge factor in keeping King focused on the larger mission of freeing his slaves’ he had inherited after the death of his wife, and lead them to freedom. He worked quickly, developing plans that were well thought out and concise with his

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2 Ibid, 38.
philosophy that no man should be enslaved. With King’s exceptional organizational skills, education, his personal connections to powerful individuals and due to his whiteness, he understood the challenges the slaves would face in Canada if they were not educated and adequately trained in the manual skills industry. The latter was extremely important if the slaves wanted to thrive in the harshness of the Canadian weather, needing the skills to clear the land to build homes, schools and a church which was paramount to King in providing a sense of belonging and cohesiveness within the community.

King taught his slaves subjects such as reading, writing, and mathematics skills required to conduct business transactions in Canada. Having an educated settlement was paramount to succeeding in Canada and King aptly taught his slaves the importance of acquiring an education as a tool in the assimilation into Canadian society. King well understood that if these slaves were to have any hope of succeeding in Canada, they would need all tools available to them to shine as a beacon of light when compared to other settlements in Canada. These were some of the differences between Elgin and Wilberforce that allowed Elgin to flourish while Wilberforce languished and ultimately hasten the death of a colony relegated to a footnote in the annals of history.

Some of the primary sources used here are letters and memoirs from both settlements which contributed significantly to the understanding of Wilberforce and Elgin’s past. The William King Collection from the National Archives of Canada provides insight into Elgin’s ability to thrive in Canada. It is a useful primary source set on the organizational style of King and how he taught his former slaves’ to survive and prosper in Canada. Austin Steward, Twenty-Two Years as a Slave and Forty Years a Freeman (2002), provides insight into being a slave and freeman and what impact Steward’s leadership had on the Wilberforce settlement. Robin W.
Winks’ edited collection, *Four Fugitive Slave Narratives* (1969), includes testimony about the racial inequality that the slaves’ faced during their time in Canada.

Victor Ullman’s, *Look to the North Side: A Life of William King* (1969), showed the dramatic steps Revered King took to ensure that his ex-slaves experienced the freedom they rightfully deserved. Benjamin Drew’s 1856 work, *A North-Side View of Slavery: The Refugee*, discusses the problems that the ex-slaves encountered living in Upper Canada.

James H. Silverman, *Unwelcome Guests: Canada West’s Response to American Fugitives Slaves, 1800-1865* (1985), writes about the social and economic history of Wilberforce and Elgin. This monograph aided me in my research by examining and dispelling common misconceptions that Canada was a welcoming place for blacks. Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, (1997), talks about the source of strengths blacks drew upon during their residency in Canada from 1628 to the 1960s. The settlers’ life and social patterns of blacks residing in Elgin emphasized the settlers’ capabilities to assimilate into Canadian society.


My research builds upon Tobin’s work by examining the challenges each settlement faced both in the United States and Canada. The problems that plagued blacks during the 19th century are some of the same issues that affect the African-American community today. In lieu of the recent climate regarding immigration, history reminds us of the stark differences in which the United States and Canada approaches solutions in response toward people of color.
CHAPTER I. THE MIGRATION OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN NORTH AMERICA

African Americans founded the Wilberforce and Elgin settlements in Ontario, Canada, in 1829 and 1848 respectively. Wilberforce was located in Biddulph Township of Detroit, Michigan. Once the emigrants crossed Lake Erie and traveled along the Thames River near London, Ontario “they traveled 35 miles through heavy forest at Port Stanley, Ontario to reach Biddulph Township.” The Elgin settlement which was founded near the shores of Lake Erie in a town called Buxton. Buxton was located in the Township of Raleigh, County of Kent in Upper Canada. Today, the Elgin settlement is near Chatham, Ontario six miles southwest of present-day Toronto. These settlements were very different from one another. The Buxton community, which was also known as the Elgin settlement, would be much more successful than the Wilberforce settlement.

The Wilberforce community was founded near London, Ontario in 1829. Most of the people in Wilberforce had fled Cincinnati, Ohio in a mass exodus. They went seeking freedom and relief from the violent mobs that often confronted them in Cincinnati as well as in northern Kentucky. During this time period, the south’s economy relied heavily on slave labor. The north’s economy relied on small independent farms and growing industry and did not use a slave workforce. Consequently, most northern states had passed anti-slavery laws that permitted blacks, who were able to reach the north, freedom from enslavement. This soon was seen as a problem for white northerners as blacks headed up from the south in increasing numbers. Even though Ohio had abolished slavery in 1802, additional laws passed in 1804 and 1807 were implemented to stem the number of blacks entering the state.  

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1807 “had to provide a bond of $500 within twenty days of his arrival, as a surety of his good behavior.” As resentment increased, violence grew against blacks residing in Cincinnati. Mobs took to the streets attacking blacks. One of the worst incidents occurred in 1830 when a “white mob stalked the Negro section of the city for three days and Rioting followed.” This left blacks little alternative but to migrate to Upper Canada, even if it involved traveling through difficult terrain and settling in a country with harsher weather than the United States. The final number of those that left Cincinnati for Canada was estimated to be between 800 to 900 people. Right from the start, it was not as well-organized as the Elgin settlement.

Elgin succeeded in large measure because Elgin was created in a systematic and organized manner by its founder Reverend William King. Before moving fugitive slaves to Canada, King, a white Presbyterian minister from Nova Scotia took up residence in Natchez “Under-the-Hill” Louisiana who became a slaveholder when he married Mary Mourning Phares from Louisiana in 1837, devised a plan to ensure that once his ex-slaves were in Canada, they would be productive and able to survive on their own. He did not want any of the new residents to be a burden on the Canadian government or its citizens. King traveled to Toronto and received assurances from the Presbyterian Synod in Canada that they would pledge monies to finance the Elgin settlement by purchasing land outright for the new residents. This arrangement led to the creation of the Elgin Association, founded solely to purchase land for the settlers to live on. The Elgin Association purchased forty-three hundred acres of land for King’s ex-slaves and anyone else that met the requirements to reside in the settlement there. King became the official leader of the Elgin settlement. In November 1849, he traveled to what is now Ontario,

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6 Ibid, 155.
7 Austin Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave and Forty Years a Freeman*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 86-87.
Canada and brought with him fifteen former slaves of his deceased wife. Once King and the ex-slaves arrived in Canada, they founded the Elgin settlement.

The Wilberforce settlement failed while the Elgin settlement succeeded. Why did Wilberforce fail and Elgin succeed? What led to the demise of the Wilberforce community? Was it doomed to fail from the start? How could the Elgin community thrive despite opposition from Canadians who felt that having another slave settlement in Canada would disrupt their lives and consequently become a burden to the government? To find answers to these and other questions, it is important to understand why and how these fugitives from the United States, some slave and some free, chose to migrate to Canada, a country that for many would prove to be more hostile than welcoming. This thesis will show that the timing of the Wilberforce settlers’ flight into Canada, their lack of leadership, job skills and education, the specific location of their settlement in Canada, and their inability to switch from single-crop farming to profitable farming are the major factors that affected the ability of their settlement to thrive in Ontario. In contrast, Elgin flourished and became the most successful settlement of its kind in Canada.

Factors that led to the successful establishment of the Elgin community included the leadership and organizational skills of its founder, Reverend William King, the job and social skills of the former slaves who settled there, and the quality of the education that they received during their stay in Canada. All of these contributed to Elgin becoming a highly organized and prosperous community. Reverend King, who was white, played an important role in the successful establishment of Elgin. Because of his standing within wealthy circles and connections to wealthy friends, Elgin was financially stable and became prosperous as well as profitable.

Clear differences between the two settlements that would eventually lead to their failure or success can be seen right from the start. The people who founded Wilberforce fled the United
States quickly. They were frightened by threatened implementation of Ohio Black Codes and decided to flee Cincinnati hastily. Their lack of planning for their settlement would have a devastating impact on its future chances for success. Additionally, beyond the timing of the Wilberforce settlers’ flight into Canada, the refugees from Cincinnati brought few skills with them that would help them survive in their fledgling community in Ontario. In the end, their settlement would not be able to overcome their initial lack of planning and their inability to develop the many skills necessary to survive in Canada.

Up until the mid 19th century, the migratory patterns of slaves traveling up to the north had been few; however, after the routes to Mexico had essentially been abolished with the admission of Texas in the Union, along with increasingly brutal acts on the part of the slave owners, African Americans began to plot their escape to the north where freedom was possible. The slaves had heard that freedom would be available to all of them once they had crossed the Ohio River. This was due to slavery’s abolition north of the Ohio River in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. If they could make it across the river, to Cincinnati for example, they would be free. Once they arrived in a city such as Cincinnati, they could stay there or continue their travels into Ontario where slavery was largely outlawed since 1791. Ohio was important as a dropping off point to freedom. The slaves were not free unless they made it across the Ohio River. From that point onward, the slaves could migrate further up north along the eastern seaboard or into Canada.

The impact of Ohio’s Black Codes on the people who fled from Cincinnati to Wilberforce cannot be overestimated. Ohio made every effort to support national laws on fugitive slaves. The state assembly fully “supported the federal Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, which made it a misdemeanor for anyone to interfere with a lawful owner capturing and
removing a runaway slave.”\textsuperscript{9} This act put the full weight of the federal government behind the efforts of slave owners to recapture their slaves and force them back into slavery.\textsuperscript{10} After the U.S. Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, as well as the Fugitive Act of 1850, Ohio passed similar laws in 1803 and 1850 to support the federal statutes that required runaway slaves to be handed over to their slave owners. All of these federal and state laws had a lasting effect upon African Americans in Ohio. Even though slavery was outlawed according to the state constitution, state legislators fully supported the many slave masters who came looking for their runaway slaves in Ohio. Thus while slaves might consider themselves free after crossing the Ohio River, the state of Ohio was anything but a haven to them. It was basically impossible for runaway slaves to stay and live safely in Ohio.\textsuperscript{11}

Ohio went a step further by establishing the Black Codes in 1804. These laws were meant to control the residency of blacks and mulattoes within Ohio’s borders. They could not reside in Ohio unless they produced papers proving they were freed slaves and not runaways. These documents had to be signed by the local Clerk of Court with a fixed seal showing their authenticity. The requirement for a fixed seal made it practically impossible to forge this type of document and so made it extremely difficult for runaway slaves to reside in Ohio. This provision of the Ohio Black Codes also made it easier for slave owners to recapture their slaves and force them back into servitude.\textsuperscript{12}

Several other facets of the Black Codes or Black Laws as they were also known led to the eventual departure of hundreds of fugitive and free slaves from the early 1800s to the 1820s. These included the requirement that blacks register their names and the names of their children

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid, 158.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, 157.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 49.
in order to receive certificates just so they could reside in the State of Ohio. Furthermore to hinder blacks from finding employment opportunities, no one could hire blacks unless they had a certificate showing rightful residency in Ohio. If any Ohioan disobeyed the law, they would be fined between ten to fifty dollars; the actual amount a person had to pay would be left up solely to the courts. Additionally, blacks or anyone of biracial origin would be fined fifty cents a day for the time of their illegal employment. A person could also be fined for providing shelter to runaway slaves. The fine could be anywhere from ten to fifty dollars.\textsuperscript{13}

Another provision of the Black Laws/Codes stated that after residing in Ohio for period of two years, blacks had to reimburse the Clerk of Court in the amount of “twelve and an half cents.”\textsuperscript{14} After paying the sum, the black person received a certificate allowing him or her to stay in Ohio. Also, whites could own blacks and mulattoes if they presented certificates showing blacks and mulattoes with certificates giving whites legal rights to ownership of slaves. Finally, if an individual was caught harboring any blacks or mulattoes not legally documented to reside in Ohio, they would have faced penalties “on conviction thereof before any court having cognizance of the same forfeit and pay the sum of one thousand dollars, one-half to the use of the informer and the other half to the use of the state, to be recovered by action of debit qui tam, or indictment and shall moreover be liable to the action of the party injured.”\textsuperscript{15}

Why did African Americans, both slave and free, choose to move to Canada prior to the Civil War? The answer to this question is more complex than we will probably ever know. But a good place to start is in the laws and attitudes of white Americans. From the time African Americans were first enslaved in the Chesapeake during the 17\textsuperscript{th} century until they were finally

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 1.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 2.
set free from forced servitude during the Civil War, they faced a wall of prejudice that no actions on their part seemed able to overcome. Whites treated them with brutality, doubted their inherent talents, and enjoyed huge profits by buying and selling them. For many white Americans, the mere thought of a black person living freely in society set off a panic. Every time they saw a black face, it was as if they looked into the unknown. It was a mystery they had no desire to understand.

In finding the answer to why African Americans, slave and free, chose Canada as their new home, more must be considered than just location. There had been other escape routes to freedom available to slaves. Florida and Texas were the nearest refuges for some runaways. It should be noted that Florida was an especially welcoming refuge when it was under Spanish rule. Texas later provided another escape route for the slaves because of its proximity to Mexico where slavery had been outlawed following the nation’s independence from Spain. However, as slavery played an increasingly important role in the economy of the South, slave owners did their best to shutdown these escape routes and so protect their financial interests.

Obviously, there must have been great apprehension among the “blacks, men and women of African descent who were born free or who had served, earned purchased, or escaped their way to freedom” as to whether they should stay in the northern states or head to Canada. Fear of reprisals from their former slave owners along with the threat of trumped up charges, the lack of equality regarding housing, jobs and education, and the enforcement of Ohio’s Black Codes compelled many blacks to press onward into the province of Ontario, Canada. There, many of their hopes of experiencing limitless opportunities for equality, freedom, and the pursuit of

18 Tobin, From Midnight to Dawn, 1.
happiness would be made real for the thousands of African Americans, both slave and free, who would call Canada home.\textsuperscript{19}

It is important to note that several major events, wars and policies impacted the migration of blacks into Canada. These were the American Revolution, the War of 1812, and finally, the Civil War. The period from 1775 to 1865 provides the background for the migration of blacks into Upper Canada.\textsuperscript{20} The British took possession of all “territorial claims in North America” including Canada at the end of the French and Indian War.\textsuperscript{21} Twelve years later, they fought for control of the continent again in the American Revolution. Because of a severe lack of manpower, the British offered freedom to blacks who decided to fight alongside them in the revolution. Lord Dunmore, the Royal Governor of Virginia, promised blacks who had been enslaved by whites in his colony that King George III would guarantee their freedom if only they joined the Loyalists.\textsuperscript{22} Huge numbers of blacks took Lord Dunmore up on his offer. The hope of freedom left slave owners in Virginia with a shortage of workers. This mass exodus of African Americans angered Virginians. To counteract Lord Dunmore’s offer, whites resorted to intimidation and violence against blacks.

At the end of the American Revolution, the British tried to make good on their promise of freedom to blacks. However, the Americans balked at Britain’s insistence that black Loyalist soldiers be set free.\textsuperscript{23} Many blacks had moved with other white Loyalists to Nova Scotia and decided to stay there. Some moved to the northern states where slavery was slowly being outlawed. Others moved to the West Indies.\textsuperscript{24} Still most blacks chose to stay close to their

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 2.
\textsuperscript{20} Moore, “A Sociological Analysis of the Negro in Canada,” 32.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 32.
\textsuperscript{22} Tobin, \textit{From Midnight to Dawn}, 1.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, 2.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, 3.
relatives in the southern states. The British paid the American slave owners for some of the
slaves they had lost due to the war. They also gave “certificates of freedom” to blacks which
provided proof of their “hard fought freedom.” These certificates afforded them protection
under the British Crown from any attempt by Americans to kidnap and sell them back into
slavery.

The certificates were necessary because the Americans were incensed at the British for
robbing them of their slaves by not returning them to their rightful owners. Thomas Jefferson
went so far as to “accuse the British of making off with over three thousand blacks, against the
protest of the Americans.” The British counteracted Jefferson by holding up their end of the
bargain and freeing blacks that fought alongside them. The British claimed that “every slave like
every horse, which escaped or strayed from with the American lines, and came into the
possession of the British army, became by the laws and rights of war, British property….”

The War of 1812 provided the next influx of blacks into Canada. Once again, hundreds
of blacks who were already living in Canada fought alongside the British against the Americans.
They were allowed to carry guns and use weapons, unlike blacks back in the United States who
were not allowed at this time to carry guns. Many other blacks fought with the United States.
They were especially important in naval battles. For example, a substantial portion of the sailors
of Oliver Hazard Perry were either free blacks or runaway slaves. When the war was over,
stories of the brave feats of African American soldiers and sailors spread throughout black
communities. Descriptions of the freedom available in Canada also came back from slaves who
had gone into Ontario to fight the British with their masters, especially the Kentucky militia. All
these stories developed a burning desire among slaves living throughout the south to exchange

25 Tobin, 3.
26 Ibid, 3.
oppression for the opportunity to live in Canada and experience the freedom that up until then and decades leading to it, they could only dream about.\textsuperscript{28}

The Civil War would be the final catalyst that brought an influx of blacks into Canada. The United States for the first time in history would find itself divided within its own borders. The institution of slavery would challenge the resolve of a country that had once defeated the powerful British Empire. Now, Americans would face the real possibility of having their country permanently fractured. The very existence of the United States would hinge on the outcome of this struggle. If the south won the Civil War, the institution of slavery would probably be maintained. However, if the north defeated the south, slavery might well be ended. As the Civil War approached, southerners fought more desperately than ever to protect slavery by enforcing the Fugitive Slave Laws that been enacted to curtail the flight of slaves into northern states and Ontario. As mentioned earlier, these laws stated that “every colored man was to give bonds of $500 not to become a town charge, and to find bonds for his heirs. No one could employ a colored man or colored woman to do any kind of labor under penalty of $100.”\textsuperscript{29}

Despite the growing attempts of slave holders to recapture slaves who headed north, African Americans headed north and on into Canada along a series of trails nicknamed the Underground Railroad.

Much has been written on slaves journeying northward seeking freedom in Ohio on up to Canada; however, there is another story about individuals of long ago who through sheer grit and determination set on a path to seek, reach, and taste the freedom that had alluded them for so long. This forgotten part of our history, the “Southern Passage to Florida” should never be

\textsuperscript{28} Moore, “A Sociological Analysis of the Negro in Canada,” 39.

forgotten. Why should we remember this Southern Passage? Because, out of this history, leaders would come and go, but the legacy these men and women left behind would become a catalyst for the more famous Underground Railroad, a part of our history that would have a profound impact upon the United States and the world right down to our day.”

More than three centuries before the Underground Railroad was established, slaves had first risked their lives in search of freedom by escaping to Florida. Why would the slaves want to go to Florida? This question must be answered to understand the “forgotten route to freedom in Florida.” The slaves had some understanding that life would be different and probably better for them in Florida than in the English colonies or later the United States. This possibility gave the slaves a reason to seek freedom from the savagery of slavery. The first road to freedom began in 1526 when the Spanish founded but soon abandoned their settlement at San Miguel del Gualdope (which is now in the state of Georgia) after an Indian revolt. African slaves living at the time in the Spanish settlement in Georgia clearly saw that the Indians were a powerful force to be reckoned with and that they could provide them a refuge from the Spanish. Later, after the Spanish had founded their permanent settlement of St. Augustine in Florida in 1565, slaves in the town found ways to run away to the nearest tribe. This was a tribe known as the Ays who lived on Florida’s swampy Atlantic coast just south of St. Augustine. From the 1500s onward until the 1800s, the southward route into the swamps provided a road map to freedom for desperate slaves seeking relief from the institution of slavery.

From the late 1500s until the 1819, when the United States conquered Florida, blacks experienced freedom and prosperity, and enjoyed and maintained family ties and friendships without the threat of punishment during their residency in Spanish Florida. They purchased land

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31 Blight, The Underground Railroad, 117-118.
and built their own homes, learned new skills and became prosperous tradesmen. Their children were educated, and from these children, community leaders and outstanding citizens were born. All of the things listed above blacks were able to accomplish because the Spanish government never viewed “slavery as a society, but viewed a society with slaves.” That distinction between a slave society and a society with slaves along with the royal proclamation issued by Charles II on November 7, 1693 provided a future in which blacks could integrate and become part of a society where they would be protected from the brutal slave system that stripped them of whatever dignity and self-worth they had left.

After Florida became an American territory, African Americans had to seek freedom from the abuses of slavery by migrating northward. Some thought if they made it to the northern states, where slavery was outlawed, then all their dreams of freedom would be easily fulfilled. These men, women and children, both slave and free, sought an existence in which the playing field would be leveled and blacks could enjoy true freedom. The freedom to work and earn their own money, purchase and build on their own land, enjoy the fruits of their labor, and lastly to have their children educated in a system that would afford their children the experience of learning were the same as any other American. Sadly, these dreams were quickly dashed as they realized the hostilities they were facing from white northerners. They understood that racism was problematic in the north as it was in the south. Even though much of the north had abolished the institution of slavery, there were states in the north such as New York that continued various forms of slavery. Consequently, both slave and freemen knew that their northern venture must include moving north into Canada. Only in Canada could former slaves experience true freedom or so they thought from the ravages of an institution that had relegated a segment of society to what amounted to sub-human existence.

32 Ibid, 119.
The racial hostilities that were commonplace throughout white America in the decades before the Civil War, both in the north as well as the south, served as the major catalyst for blacks to flee to Canada. In a world where even a legal marriage was forbidden between slaves, the only asylum seemed to be in Canada where marriage and all the other rights that come naturally to the citizens of a nation were afforded to blacks as well as whites.\textsuperscript{33} The surest way north to Canada was along the hidden paths of the Underground Railroad. The significance of the Underground Railroad in aiding and abetting fugitive slaves to safe houses underscored the dangerous journey many took to experience freedom. The long and often dangerous trek to freedom would bring out the tenacity that many slaves had cultivated as they fine-tuned their escape plans deep into northern states and Canadian provinces. All aspects of the Underground Railroad were extremely dangerous. But to escape from imprisonment in a system that offered little hope beyond endless toil, broken families, and a shortened lifespan, “slaves were willing to risk their lives to gain their freedom.” \textsuperscript{34}

It was a dangerous trip north for many reasons, most especially because great power had been placed in the hands of masters to recapture runaway slaves. As mentioned, in 1793 and 1850, the United States passed Fugitive Slave Laws allowing slave owners to apprehend any slave that escaped from their plantations and punish anyone who dared to help the runaways. Furthermore, to discourage slaves from escaping, states like Ohio passed additional laws “forbidding the aiding and harboring of slaves.”\textsuperscript{35} However, these laws in some cases had the reverse effect. They infuriated many northerners’ blacks and whites, who considered them unjust. They inspired these same individuals to help establish and maintain the Underground

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, 8.
Railroad as a haven for slaves fleeing the south and seeking freedom and protection from their
slave owners in the northern states and Canada. The more determined the slaves owners were to
apprehend runaway slaves, the more determined were many northerners – condemned as
Abolitionists by the South – in assisting runaway slaves in any way possible to fulfill their
promise to assure that all those seeking freedom would have that right.\textsuperscript{36}

The southerners did everything in their power to stop slaves from running away along the
Underground Railroad. They used a method called “patrolling” in which white men were
employed at the federal and local level to patrol secluded rural areas to quell potential uprisings
by slaves.\textsuperscript{37} The “reign of terror” inflicted upon the slaves from patrollers ranged from severe
intimidation to brutality. There were no limitations on the level of brutality that the patrollers
would use to rein in slaves that were deemed a threat to their slave owners. Attacks on the wives
and daughters of slaves occurred daily as patrollers had no restrictions placed upon them as to
what they could and would do. A patroller in Virginia recounted what his job as a patroller
entailed:

\begin{quote}
“\textquoteleft\textquoteleft It was part of my business to arrest all slaves and free persons of color who
collected in crowds at night, and lock them up … I did this without any warrant
and at my own discretion. Next day they are examined and punished. The
punishment is flogging. I am one of the men who flog them. They get not
exceeding thirty-nine lashes. I am paid fifty cents for every Negro I arrest and
fifty cents more if I flog him. I have flogged hundreds. I am often employed by
private persons to pursue fugitive slaves. I never refuse a good job of that
kind.\textquoteright\textquoteright”\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

With no controls in place, the patrollers would treat slaves with contempt, taking items
such as money, tools, and food from them. Furthermore, male slaves were forced to watch or

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid, 8.
\textsuperscript{37} R. Conrad Stein, \textit{Escaping Slavery on the Underground Railroad} (Berkeley Heights: Enslow Publishing, 2008),
56.
\textsuperscript{38} Fergus M. Bordewich, \textit{Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of America} (New
listen while their wives and daughters were being sexually assaulted. This reign of terror inflicted upon slaves and freemen alike would hasten the slaves desire to escape to the north and continue upward into Canada, hoping for a complete reprieve from the savagery of slavery.\textsuperscript{39}

Once again it is important to mention that at first the slaves thought of the north as a haven, a place where they would finally enjoy freedom and never fear being kidnapped in the middle of the night and forced back into a life of slavery. However, the north did not prove to be the blessing that the fugitive slaves had assumed it was. The fact that some areas of the north, like southern Illinois, were largely occupied by southern white transplants left many in the fugitive slave quarters uneasy and rightfully so. The rewards for northerners, not just southern transplants, to help in capturing runaways were so lucrative that many joined in the hunt for slaves along the Underground Railroad. Most especially, the Black Codes of Ohio encouraged whites to pursue fugitives’ slaves that had fled to the north. These laws gave additional support to federal laws which already prohibited the harboring of runaway slaves. This was perhaps the main reason why many slaves came first to Ohio but then continued their trek into Upper and Lower Canada now Ontario and Quebec where slavery was abolished in 1833.\textsuperscript{40} John Graves Simcoe was the first lieutenant governor of Upper Canada. He was the first British governor to restrict slavery. The new law was created on July 9, 1793. The full name of the law was “An Act to prevent the further introduction of Slaves and to limit the Term of Contracts for Servitude.”\textsuperscript{41} Under the Simcoe Act, children of slaves would become free when they reached age 25.\textsuperscript{42} The Government of Lower Canada said that slavery could not exist in the colony.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, 110.
\textsuperscript{40} www.CanadaChannel.ca/slavery/index.php/3_slavery_in_Lower_and_Upper_Canada
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, 1.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, 1.
After 1829, slavery was illegal in Lower Canada. Once on Canadian soil, there would be no fear that the Canadian or British government would send fugitive slaves back to the United States to face imprisonment and/or death at the hands of slave owners.

During their time in the northern states, fugitive slaves lived in constant fear of reprisals from their former slave owners. Runaway slaves soon realized that the protection they thought existed in the north was just a fantasy. Actually, northern Black Codes were created to enhance the chances that fugitive slaves would be captured and returned to their former owners or sold back into slavery. The latter was especially troubling since a large number of African Americans were born in the north to parents who had fled from the south and now resided in northern states as free people. In fact, the Black Codes in Ohio were specifically created to stem the tide of fugitive slaves migrating to the north and to allow for easier apprehension of runaway slaves by making it a crime to leave the plantations and migrate to northern states. “Jim Crow” or segregationist laws and “suspicion or hatred existed almost everywhere in the northern parts of the United States outside of antislavery circles and in some cases certainly within them as well.”

If runaways decided to remain in northern states, they stayed “at their own risk and in general against the advice of their helpers.” Many runaways soon grew weary of constantly being vigilant to avoid being captured by slave owners so as not to be sent back into slavery. Relief would only come for them if they headed even farther north into Canada.

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43 Ibid, 1-2
44 Coffin and Still, Fleeing for Freedom, 3.
Because of the huge influx of runaway slaves escaping to and through the north, southerners felt compelled to exercise what they felt was their constitutional right to pursue, apprehend and enslave all runaway slaves and free blacks alike. The south was determined to hold the north accountable if it (the north) insisted on harboring fugitive slaves. To guarantee that the north would comply with the south’s demands, federal and state laws were implemented that made it much more difficult for “Abolitionists” to harbor runaway slaves. By making it a crime to assist any and all blacks running from slavery, many whites ran the chance of being prosecuted and imprisoned. Laws also tied the capture of runaway slaves to their automatic return to their masters. Pennsylvania passed a law on March 25, 1826 providing an “issuance by courts of record of the Commonwealth of certificates or warrants of removal for Negroes or mulattoes, claimed to be fugitives from labor.”\textsuperscript{47} A law enacted by the legislature of Ohio, on February 26, 1839, “mandated that any justice of the peace, judge of a court of record, or mayor should authorize the arrest of a person claimed as a fugitive slave on the affidavit of the claimant or his agent, and that the judge of a court of record before whom the fugitive was brought should grant a certificate of removal upon the presentation of satisfactory proof.”\textsuperscript{48}

These new laws were in keeping with the Black Codes that had been in effect in many northern states for most of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. For example, on January 25, 1807, the state of Ohio had enacted several laws Ohio to limit blacks’ civil rights. These laws required “that no black or mulatto person or persons shall hereafter be permitted to be sworn or give evidence in any court of record, or elsewhere, in the state, in any cause depending or matter of controversy, where either party to the same is a white person.”\textsuperscript{49} With various pro-slavery laws now being added to the books throughout the northern states, runaways as well as free blacks felt compelled to find

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, 237.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid, 238.
\textsuperscript{49} Middleton, \textit{The Black Laws}, 1.
solace in an environment free from the reins of slavery. They sought a place where all people, regardless of the color of their skin, could live peacefully without the threat of enslavement, a system in which blacks wanted no part of for they had known it all too well. Instead they longed for a place in which their families would remain intact and their children could receive a quality education and have a better life than their parents or grandparents before them.

The laws that were passed had a lasting effect upon African Americans, both fugitives and free. This was especially true in the State of Ohio and the city of Cincinnati. The reign of terror that was commonplace in Cincinnati left many blacks and mulattoes scared and confused. With their future looking ever bleak, Canada became the destination of choice for blacks hoping for a chance at real freedom. As Nikki Taylor states in Frontiers of Freedom:

“In the face of the violent denial of social, political, and economic freedom in Cincinnati, this community had a vista of hope that freedom was obtainable elsewhere. “Through land ownership, education, moral development, social and legal equality, and suffrage, these colonists—even if briefly, even if slightly—tasted freedom.”

Beyond the impact of the Black Codes on the people who fled Ohio for Wilberforce so quickly, it should be mentioned that many settlers in Wilberforce were merely biding their time until they could return to the United States. Most of the Wilberforce settlers, unable to survive on their own in Canada, returned to America even before the Civil War had started. Most of the remaining Elgin settlers came back to the United States after the conclusion of the Civil War. They were convinced that life would be better for them since the U.S. Constitution now guaranteed them citizenship, hopefully with all of its privileges. In the end, the many African-Americans who remained at the Elgin settlement had a profound effect on the future of Afro-Canadians. Many became accomplished citizens in their new nation, despite facing racial prejudice just as common in Canada as it had been in the United States.

50 Taylor, Frontiers of Freedom, 79.
CHAPTER II. ELGIN MOST SUCCESSFUL SLAVE SETTLEMENT IN THE HISTORY OF CANADA

The Elgin settlement was officially created on November 28, 1849 in Buxton, Ontario. It was the idea of a Presbyterian minister, Reverend William King. The idea of owning slaves was repulsive to the young minister and had brought King to a crossroad that conflicted with his religious beliefs. It was a moral dilemma that he faced and one would set King off on a course that would be groundbreaking and historic.

The Elgin settlement began with an idea, a conviction of a minister who was vehemently opposed to slavery at every level. King, wanted to free the slaves he had inherited after the death of his father-in-law. It had been said that King inherited the fourteen slaves after his wife died, but that was not true. After his wife died, the slaves remained the property of King’s father-in-law. Only after King’s father-in-law died did he inherit the fourteen slaves which had belonged to his wife. Reverend King understood the politics of slavery and he wanted out of Louisiana. He knew that as long as his slaves remained in the United States, they would never have the freedom to live as ordinary citizens since slavery was the law of the land. From King’s desire to totally free his slaves and have them live in a free country, he went on a quest in search of a country that could and would provide the proper atmosphere for his slaves to succeed at the level they needed to be in order to prosper.\footnote{Daniel G. Hill, \textit{The Freedom-Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada.} (Agincourt: The Book Society of Canada Limited, 1981), 76.} This is the beginning of what would become known as the Buxton Mission and Elgin settlement.

Reverend King had a vision that once slaves were free, they could live like all other people, contributing to their communities in a positive and productive manner while at the same time and becoming enmeshed into Canadian society. He thought he could show Canadians that
these former slaves could succeed if afforded the same opportunities as white Canadians had. If King introduced the former slaves into their community, the ex-slaves could be productive and contribute to Canadian society in a manner in which Canadians would embrace. All these former slaves ever wanted were just to be accepted in their new community and to work and live in peace with their families.

Reverend King’s vision required time, patience and money, three factors for which Reverend King had plenty of help from his friends in Canada. The Toronto Synod of the Presbyterian Church set up the Elgin Association to purchase land for the slaves to build homes, schools, and businesses. King had important connections to Canadians in high positions who could scout for property and make payments on the land in preparation of King and his former slaves’ arrival to Chatham, Ontario. But, it cannot be stressed enough the importance of King’s leadership skills in ensuring the safe arrival of former slaves in their new country and the progressive success their settlement had.

Figure 1. Elgin Settlement www.historicplaces.ca
The problems that the former slaves faced would have surely seemed overwhelming if not impossible. Former slaves usually faced a new beginning with uncertainty and a future with no hope. However, that was not the case for these ex-slaves. Reverend King’s plan included stipulations for slaves if they were to be a part of the Elgin settlement. First and foremost, moral, religious and family standards were an absolute must. If the new settlers could not follow the moral code that had been established by Reverend King, then they could not become members of the Elgin settlement and Buxton Mission. Additionally, it was a part of King’s philosophy to enmesh oneself into Canadian society. King insisted that the ex-slaves learn to adapt and embrace Canadian culture. Second, a formal education would be required for all members of the Elgin settlement. This formal education included the studying of grammar, geography, reading and writing. Eventually, Greek, Latin and algebra were added to the curriculum. Furthermore, training in the industrial trades was required so the ex-slaves could learn how to build homes, schools, businesses and pave the way for roads. However, the main emphasis was on the ex-

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slaves receiving a formal education and just not on a trade-base curriculum only. According to Victor Ullman in *Look to the North Star*, he noted:

The Buxton schools differed from any others in another respect. With very few exceptions, such as Oberlin and Prudence Crandall’s school in Canterbury, Connecticut, which whites burned down, education of Negroes had the single goal of vocational training. Nowhere else, in Canada, the United States or in England, had the antislavery societies, the interested churches or the Quakers established Negro schools to prepare pupils for a standard classical education.

To King this was tacit admission that Negroes were to be forever condemned to work of the hands, that work of the mind and spirit was beyond their potentiality. Therefore, it would follow, God had placed on this earth a people distinctive not only in the color of their skin but had molded them with definite limitations in their capacity to think and to possess faith. This he could not accept.

He had listened to that thesis before. In Edinburgh the Tories had declared that God, in His infinite wisdom, had ordained a lesser manhood to the residents of West Port so that they would assume a modest but rightful place in the social order. It was so ordained, and all who protested the ignorance, degeneration, and poverty of West Port were uttering blasphemy. In Louisiana, during long hours of discussion concerning the divine purpose of slavery, exactly the same arguments were repeated.

Therefore, his own “City of God” was to be a demonstration of the intellectual as well as the economic capacities of the Negroes. With their own land, they were freed from economic bondage. With their own church, they were freed from spiritual poverty. With equal intellectual opportunity, they would be completely free. The formula he propounded was not new in his day and age, but his faith in the capacity of the Negro to take full advantage of it was revolutionary.

While all the arguments concerning the mental capacities of the Negroes were almost a daily debate, and even the Boston Abolitionists expressed their doubts, King simply went ahead and proved his belief.53

All of these factors would play an integral role in Elgin’s success. These principles and the leadership, vision, determination and conviction of Reverend King are what set Elgin apart from its sister settlement, Wilberforce.

The timeframe in which King and his slaves left Louisiana for Canada was important because they did not enter Canada unprepared. King had important allies working on his behalf.

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and because of these important connections, he was prepared to execute his plan to free his
slaves from the horrible existence and ravages of slavery. After careful planning, it was time for
King to embark for Canada for good, bringing with him men, women and children willing to risk
everything to live a life of freedom and be respected without consideration of one’s race or
ethnicity.

In May of 1848, Reverend King purchased a ticket for himself from Louisiana to
Cincinnati on a steamer. He had brought his slaves along with him hidden “bedded down on the
foredeck” of the steamer. King and his fourteen slaves were well on their way to Cincinnati
and from Cincinnati to Canada to start a new life, something that could only be dreamed of but
never experience. King lived up to his obligation and his word by promising to free his slaves no
matter what it may have cost him. He deeply felt that slavery was inhumane and unjust and that
no human should ever live in bondage.

As the Buxton Mission began to take shape, named after Thomas Fowell Buxton a
philanthropist in Ontario, this led to the “incorporation of the Elgin Association in 1850.” Once
King and the emancipated slaves arrived in Ontario, a committee was established to give
instructions on how houses were to be built according to codes that were created to ensure homes
met the approval of the committee and community at large. Both a public school and Sunday
school were established as well as a court of arbitration to review and settle all disputes or
concerns the new residents would have. In Wilbur Siebert’s book, *Underground Railroad From
Slavery to Freedom*, building codes were strictly enforced when it came to building log homes
for the ex-slaves. He notes:

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No houses inferior to the model of a small log house prescribed by the improvement committee were to be erected, although settlers were permitted to build as much better as they chose. The dimensions of the model house were twenty-four by eighteen feet, and twelve feet height.56

It is noteworthy that when King left Louisiana, he had fourteen slaves; his family had a farm in Delta, Ohio which is where he picked up the fifteenth slave. There while on his visit to his family farm, King informed the slaves that they were finally free. He then proposed to his former slaves that if they were to remain on the family farm during the winter, go to school and learn certain trades (farming and carpentry) that would be necessary for them to succeed in Canada; he would come back for them in the spring and take them to Canada where they could start anew and live freely without the threat of being enslaved.57

Figure 3. Original Elgin House [www.buxtonarchaeologicalsurvey.blogspot.com](http://www.buxtonarchaeologicalsurvey.blogspot.com)

56 Ibid, 208.
As Elgin took shape, it was transformed into a vital community that contributed greatly to Canadian society. The settlement’s reputation grew as the members increased. Visitors such as Frederick Douglass and Dr. Elias Howe were impressed by how people who were formerly enslaved with no legal rights or freedom transformed themselves into productive citizens. These former slaves proved that they could govern themselves and function appropriately in a viable community outside of the confines of slavery.
The fifteen ex-slaves that Revered King brought to Buxton arrived in December, 1849. According to the third annual report from the directors of the Elgin Association, it stated:

The number of families of colored persons settled on the lands of the association up to August 1, 1852, is 75 – and the number of inhabitants 400. By these settlers not fewer than 50 houses have been erected. Besides the regular occupants, about 25 families of colored people, attracted by the advantages of the settlement, have purchased lands in its immediate proximity. Including these 100 colored families, about 500 individuals are now comfortably settled on their own property in that district.⁵⁸

Elgin was now a fully functional community with roads, school and church, and homes. The men learned skills that they could market for their employment. Furthermore, the men at Elgin built their homes according to specific instructions. The homes could be built bigger than the original estimates but could not be built smaller than what was required. Benjamin Drew *A North-Side View of Slavery: The Refugee* wrote:

The houses in the settlement are built of logs, after a mode; prescribed by the Improvement Committee. The model was 18 feet by 24, and 12 feet in height, with a gallery running the whole length of the front. While no house was allowed to go up inferior to the model, the settlers were allowed to build as much better as they pleased.⁵⁹

King had fulfilled his vision of having former slaves free to live out their dreams. They could live their lives in freedom with their families and the right to live in their own homes. Furthermore, they would give birth to their children and never have to worry about their children being sold into slavery again. Additionally, their children would be educated, able to engage in meaningful employment which would reap financial rewards. The positive reinforcement that the Elgin settlement received from the Trustees of the Toronto Synod was perhaps overwhelming.

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⁵⁹ Ibid, 293.
to Revered King, but nevertheless rewarding. Elgin had become King’s version of the “City Upon A Hill.”\(^{60}\)

King instilled morals, family and religious values in the men, women and children that came to live at the Buxton Mission. He constantly stressed the importance of not begging and eating from the bread of laziness, not wanting to be a failure in Canada. The fifteen former slaves never forgot what King said and they used his words to excel at things mandatory or voluntary.

There were too many eyes watching and wanted to see the former slaves fail, such as Edwin Larwill, a man born in England who eventually moved to Canada in 1841.\(^{61}\) Larwill was a tinsmith shop owner and a Councillar in Raleigh Township where he tried to use his influence to rally his constituents in forbidding the formation of the Buxton Mission. Larwill was vehemently opposed to King bringing in former slaves and settling in Chatham. King had taken the necessary steps in securing the property for the former slaves to live on. However, Larwill would not have any party of former slaves living anywhere in and around Chatham. As Revered King tried to reason with Larwill to no avail, Larwill went on a letter writing campaign as well as holding meetings and participating in petition drives determined to rid Chatham of blacks that he deemed uneducated and inferior to whites. In fact, Larwill became so enraged with King and his former slaves, the Sherriff had no other option but to inform King that threats had been made against his life and that he should proceed with extreme caution. At the final meeting held at the Royal Exchange Hotel with Chatham residents present, King spoke convincingly explaining that the slaves would be no threat to the community. Suspecting that ill harm would come to King, several black men who had been present in the audience formed a

\(^{60}\) www.mtholyoke.edu  
protective barrier around King as he headed back to his hotel. Larwill indeed was behind the threats and had in fact formed a “vigilante committee backed by most of Chatham’s citizens.”

As Larwill continued to spin out of control, he had succeeded temporarily. He got the Western District Council to approve a petition for a protest. However, in the end, the residents of Chatham saw clearly that Larwill was an extremist and they soon lost interest in his cause. Eventually the settlement took shape on November 28, 1849, when King and his fifteen ex-slaves moved in and officially formed the Buxton Mission and Elgin settlement.

Figure 6. Bush Farm near Chatham www.warmuseum.ca

62 Ibid, 79.
Timing was highly valued in the formation of the Buxton Mission and Elgin settlements. Other settlements came and went, Wilberforce and Dawn just to name a few. The settlements failed miserably and left a bitter taste and a lot of anxiety among white Canadians. After King approached and received permission from the Toronto Synod, both the Synod and King proceeded cautiously in establishing Buxton and Elgin. Elgin would in fact be the last ex-slave settlement to form in Canada.

With all major obstacles settled including the dispute with Edwin Larwill, the Mission, Settlement and its residents could finally breathe a sign of relieved knowing that they would be able to build a life there in Chatham. Their children would be free to learn and acquire the necessary education and skills that would help them succeed in this foreign country on foreign soil. This small group of former slaves and their leader, Reverend King, would have the opportunity to show and prove to white Canadians that blacks could prosper and excel at anything if given the opportunity.
The proud heritage of the Elgin settlers was noticed by nearly everyone. The type of people that King brought to Buxton showed a gritty determination in surviving and prospering in Canada. This was the attitude that King wanted and did see in his former slaves; having a work ethic that was sorely missing in Wilberforce and engaging in an education/skills type secular format that not only lifted these men, women and children out of abject poverty but made some financially successful. A number of these settlers opened up businesses and engaged in business dealings with white Canadians. King’s settlers embraced their new country and the Canadian way of life with a fierceness which was exactly what King had expected out of his settlers. It is worth noting in Victor Ullman’s *Look to the North Star*, that King demanded his settlers to do everything they could do qualify and exercise their right to citizenship. King knew very well that political activism was a necessary ingredient to guarantee his settlers continued right for their businesses to retain profitability, continue prospering and growing in strength as a community. Ullman notes:

The achievement of economic independence, freedom form ignorance, and of Christianity as a faith, not a label-these would have no real meaning without the dynamics of citizenship that they generated. What kind of social beings emerged from slavery after reaching Buxton?

King nurtured and demanded of his people a brand of citizenship that set a pattern and was copied by the surrounding whites. He began early in 1850 when he called one of the numerous “town meetings” for the express purpose of establishing the structure of self-government.

In Upper Canada, he explained, the Negro had every right accorded to white citizens. They had all the protection of the laws of the Province. They could hire lawyers and go to court with the assurance of equal judicial treatment. They had the right of petition to all branches of government for redress of injustices. The laws of the Province, and more important, the enforcement of those laws, was color blind.63

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King understood that it was vital to the well-being of everyone who resided in Buxton that they exercise their right to petition to the Canadian government and to vote. These actions would be become pivotal in ensuring equality of all individuals residing at the Buxton Mission and those who had become part of the Elgin settlement. The cohesiveness and coherent plan of King taught his settlers that self-reliance was importance in dispelling all false assumptions that Canadians had about blacks and their perceived lack of intelligence.

Ultimately the timing of the implementation of this settlement was vital to its success. King’s plans to start this colony in Canada was well thought out and executed. Unlike Wilberforce, that lacked a cohesive plan and organize plan to move its settlers to Canada, King was absolutely brilliant in his methodical approach to starting up this fledgling settlement. Other factors played an inherent role in the success of Elgin; however, no one could underestimate the sheer determination and passion that Revered King had in seeing his dream comes true. He saw firsthand and experienced it personally a black-led settlement that was fully functional and self-reliant with its members depending on each other, on their education, employment skills, and hard work and not a burden to the Canadian government or Canadian people. This building plan shows that King and the settlers were hard at work in establishing their place in Canada.
Figure 8. King Street., Chatham Twp., Kent, Ontario, Canada
http://www.frenchfamilyassoc.com/

The Buxton Mission was established by the Presbyterian Church with Rev. William King as its leader. It was situated at the centre of the settlement near William King’s home. It had a mission church and a school. In 1858 the mission was dismantled because the former fugitives were then self supporting.

Figure 9. Buxton Mission www.buxtonchurch.com
The Buxton Blacksmith Shop

Figure 10. Buxton Blacksmith Shop www.buxtonchurch.com

The Buxton Post Office was located in what is now South Buxton, near Rev. King’s home

Figure 11. Buxton Post Office. www.buxtonchurch.com
The Elgin settlers built a blacksmith shop, post office and Reverend King’s home. The evidence is overwhelming in supporting King’s theory that if blacks were given the same opportunities afforded to whites they could also succeed at the same level as white Canadians. The blacks were hugely successful in finding their niche being productive not lazy as so many white Canadians had assumed, taking care of their families and being law-abiding citizens with moral, religious and family values enhanced the prosperity of the Buxton community.

The Elgin settlement flourished because of the paternalistic actions of its main leader, Reverend King. He had a particular fondness for his former slaves and treated them more like equals than subordinates. The organizational assistance that King received also played a major role in the success of Elgin. At every level, from the beginning stages to the final draft, the
Toronto Synod and King laid out in remarkable detail and precision the foundation in which the Buxton Mission and Elgin settlement would be founded upon. King’s friends and associates from his ministry also were instrumental in the formation of the mission and settlement. With the assistance of the Toronto Synod, a company was created to legally purchase land solely for the former slaves. Property was bought and monies were made available to the Buxton Mission to ensure a smooth transition upon the arrival of the settlers. These and as well as other factors played an integral role in ensuring that Elgin would not fall victim to disarray and a lack of leadership like Wilberforce. King’s gritty actions and fierce determination guaranteed Elgin would not only survive but could be touted as the most successful slave settlement in Canada’s history. It cannot be emphasized enough how important organizational planning, revisions, implementation and incorporating a stock company to legally oversee the financial acquisitions of the land for the settlers played in giving hope to a destitute people. A people once thought to be doomed to live a life enslaved, now had the opportunity to live a life of freedom.

As for as King being the apparent leader of the Buxton Mission and Elgin settlement, there were other settlers who played a pivotal role in the success of Elgin. Most people had assumed that the fifteen settlers King had brought to Canada were the first settlers to be a part of the Elgin settlement; however that was not the case. A former slave by the name of Isaac Riley had heard that King had received approval to open the Buxton Mission and Elgin settlement in Chatham, Ontario. Riley who had learned to read also saw a “copy of King’s prospectus” and
decided to travel accompanied by his wife and four children to Chatham.\textsuperscript{64}

![Isaac Riley](www.Canadachannel.ca)

Figure 13. Isaac Riley www.Canadachannel.ca

Riley came from the state of Missouri and had resided in Perry County. During his time in Missouri, from Riley’s own admissions, he never experienced the ravages of slavery like his other brethren had experienced. The separations of families and savage beatings so common to other slaves were uncommon to Riley and his family. However, this did not stop Riley’s burning desire to see his own children free without being hired out and separated from himself and his wife. He noted:

\textsuperscript{64} Daniel G. Hill, \textit{Freedom-Seekers}, 82.
After I had a son, it grieved me to see some small boys in the neighborhood, who were hired out to work twenty miles from their home. I looked at my boy, and thought if he remained, he would have to leave us in the same way and grow up ignorant. It appeared to me cruel to keep him ignorant.65

The fact that families were sold individually tugged at Riley’s heart. Those facts lead Riley to escape with his family to Canada via Michigan. He resided at the St. Catherine’s complex when he heard of King’s intentions to form another settlement. Once there, he and his family prospered and he eventually became a major force in paving the way for other settlers to come to Elgin.

Mrs. Riley was born in Missouri also. Her youth considering she was born into slavery, according to her own personal account, “was kind.”66 She had heard of the horrors of slavery. However, by her accounts, her owner was not harsh toward her and her mother. The owner taught her how to read, but he never taught her how to write. She was also allowed to venture from her master’s residence at times unaccompanied. Furthermore, she and her mother were never beaten like so many other slaves. She notes:

I never knew anything about places they call “the quarters,” in my life. I could not go when I pleased, nor come when I pleased, but was sometimes allowed to go without a pass ten or twelve miles from home. I was never stopped on my way by patrols-never heard about such things where I was raised.67

It was not until Mrs. Riley arrived in Canada that she saw the brutal results of slavery. The scars on the backs of former slaves and their distant and reluctant attitudes to connect to one another were not because of both the mental and physical effects slavery had on them. The life that Mrs. Riley grew up under was an illusion as she stared at the faces of the downtrodden and saw those who had been subjected to the brutality of slavery. This was not the life she wanted for her children. After much thought and prayer, she was glad she made the trek to Canada with her

65Benjamin Drew, A North-Side View of Slavery, 298.
66Ibid, 299.
67Ibid, 299.
husband and children. Once there, she knew her children would never have to face the horrors of
slavery.

It is important to note that several men took on the leadership role to assist King in
managing the Elgin settlement. These men were not part of the original slaves who came along
with King from Louisiana and Ohio. Isaac Riley, R. Van Braken and Henry Johnson to name a
few were already in Canada when King arrived with his fifteen ex-slaves. As the Elgin
settlement was being established did these men move in and became part of the Buxton Mission
and Elgin settlement. In Jacqueline Tobin’s *From Midnight To Dawn*, the original settlers of the
Buxton Mission and Elgin settlements:

1. Talbert, the twenty-year old bought by King to help him run his school
2. Fanny, included with King’s purchase of land near his father-in-law
3. Peter, Fanny’s eight-year-old-son
4. Molly, also included with King’s land purchase
5. Sarah, Molly’s eight-year-old daughter
6. Jacob, twenty-two, purchased by King to help run the farm with Talbert
7. Amelia, seven, included in Mary King’s wedding dowry
8. Eliza, thirty, Amelia’s mother, also included in the dowry
9. Ben, inherited from King’s father-in-law’s estate
10. Emaline, same inheritance
11. Robin, same
12. Ise, same
13. Stephen, same
14. Harriet, same
15. Solomon, Harriet’s son, purchased at her request by King

R. Van Braken was another person who came on his own to live at the Elgin settlement.
He was born and raised in New York. He suffered from the injustices due to the color of his skin
and the texture of his hair. He was a proud man and always behaved honorably, acutely aware
that at any moment, he could disgrace his family and race. Whatever Braken did, he did it with
integrity. However, as a man with integrity, he wanted to be respected but, society would not

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68 Jacqueline Tobin, *From Midnight To Dawn: The Last Tracks of the Underground Railroad*. (Doubleday: New
York, 2007), 147.
allowed men of color to be held in high esteem or be respected; or were they ever treated
humanely let alone with dignity and respect, not even in New York State.69

The move to Canada was not a difficult decision for Braken. A proud man, he wanted
the opportunity to live a totally free life in a country that he had assumed would have limitless
opportunities for people like him. Once in Canada, he bought and worked the land making it
both productive and financially rewarding. The observations he noted once he arrived in Canada
were startling. His comments show the conflict white Canadians had once blacks moved across
the border into their country. He noted:

Among some people here, there is as much prejudice as in the states, but they
cannot carry it out as they do in the States; the law makes the difference.70

Braken never liked the separating of people based on their skin color. This was common
behavior throughout the United States and even in Canada. The settlers preferred to worship
among their own and not worship with white Canadians. He noted that separation of the race
was bad overall for both sides. He further notes:

The separate schools and churches work badly for colored people in the states and
in Canada. In Rochester, New York, it injured them very much, although the
separate school was petitioned for by a portion of the colored people themselves.
In Cleveland, Ohio, they have separate churches, but no separate school. In
Chatham, the separate school was by request of themselves.71

Henry Johnson was another leader at the Buxton Mission. A former Pennsylvanian, he
had been in Canada for several years before Reverend King arrived. Johnson purchased and
owned one hundred acres of land and while at Buxton, he became a prosperous landowner. He
enjoyed living at the Buxton Mission and being a part of the Elgin settlement. During his tenure
at Buxton, the settlers were industrious and hard working. Johnson and others refused to accept

69 Ibid, 305.
70 Ibid, 305.
71 Ibid, 306.
handouts or charity from white Canadians. If people brought food, clothes and other items to assist the settlers, these were promptly refused. Johnson believed that my accepting charitable goods made people lazy. He had witnessed the laziness of settlers at Amherstburg. He did not want any of the controversy that followed Wilberforce or Amherstburg. Therefore, Johnson continually stressed to the settlers for a need to be self-sufficient and industrious.

At one time, Johnson resided in Massillon, Ohio. There, his children attended school. His daughter in particular was doing exceedingly well and the white residents started to take note of his daughter’s intelligence. Those in the community that did not believe that a black student could be extremely intelligent felt it was time to have her expelled from school. Some residents put pressure on the school and teacher to permanently expel Johnson’s daughter. Even though the teacher felt this action was unfair, she did go ahead and remove Johnson’s daughter from school. However, the classmates of Johnson’s daughter organized and signed a petition to have her returned to class. The teacher as well wanted her back in the classroom. Unfortunately, the law in Ohio at that time prevented black children from attending school. For that reason, Johnson moved his family to Canada and joined the Buxton Mission so that his children could receive a quality education.

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72 Ibid, 306.
CHAPTER III. WILBERFORCE THE FORGOTTEN SETTLEMENT

The Wilberforce Settlement has long been the forgotten settlement. Questions historians should ask are; why did the Wilberforce Settlement fail? What were the mechanics behind the failure of this settlement? Did the timing of the slaves’ fleeing Cincinnati affect the outcome of the settlement? Finally, did the former slaves’ expectations and lack of preparedness doom their chances of finding success in Canada?

I argue in this thesis that the Wilberforce Settlement failed due to the impact the implementation and enforcement the Black Laws had on the African Americans. This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity of a better life quickly overwhelmed free persons of color for several generations upon arrival in Cincinnati. The euphoric feelings the former slaves might have felt quickly dissipated. By 1807, the enactment of the Ohio Black Codes had turned the slaves’ dreams of freedom into a nightmarish experience. But even with such laws, the proximity of the Ohio River separating a slave state (Kentucky) from a free state (Ohio), the Cincinnati area became a major destination for slaves seeking freedom. Cincinnati would become the drop off destination for many slaves fleeing the south. Hence, the black population grew to well over 3000 due to the massive influx of blacks entering Cincinnati from states such as Georgia, Arkansas, Mississippi, Florida, Texas, Louisiana and North and South Carolina by
After the passage of new Black Codes in 1804 and 1807, African Americans in Ohio increasingly found it difficult to find work. Various forms of discriminatory practices such as paying exorbitant registration fees in order to work, and having the proper identification to qualify for work, were used against them. This left many blacks unemployed and angry. Some had longed for the days when they could return back to their former slave owners and plantations. Some had reasoned that while being enslaved, at least they had food, shelter and did not have to fend for themselves; maybe their masters were not so bad after all or perhaps: living as free persons turned out to be much harder than they imagined. According to Nikki Taylor in *Frontiers of Freedom*,

“While Cincinnati blossomed as a city; its growth directly corresponded to the rise of racism against blacks. Instead of reaping the rewards of Cincinnati’s economic

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prosperity – as did other citizens – African Americans met with political, social, legal, and economic oppression and repression. Just as the growth of the city shaped the black experience, Cincinnati’s rise as a major urban center cannot be understood without acknowledging how African Americans contributed to it and how they were oppressed by it."76

As hostilities rose and violence increased against blacks, black leaders like J.C. Brown, Austin Steward, Nathaniel Paul and Isaac Riley decided to leave Cincinnati for the new, harsh and relatively unsettled wilderness here; while the environment of Upper Canada was certainly more challenging than southern Ohio, it was not quite Siberia-esque in Upper Canada.77

These African Americans’ dreams of a better life for themselves and their families without being subjected to racism, inequality, and discrimination were never fulfilled. Being unprepared to flee Cincinnati hastily, the sojourners were ill-prepared to journey into Upper Canada. Their lack of relevant skills and education prevented them from surviving in the new environment. Furthermore, some of the men from Cincinnati that would become leaders of the settlement were just as ill-prepared to lead the former slaves into a foreign county; for they too did not know much if anything about Canada. The inability or lack of necessary skills required to survive the settlement process in Canada handicapped the sojourners. Also, there was more than just weather to contend with – they had to build houses, break ground for farms, purchase tools and equipment, preserve food. In addition, their inability and lack of relevant skills in switching from a single-crop farming system to subsistence farming affected Wilberforce’s ability to thrive.

Thanks to the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, Ohio and the other states formed from the Old Northwest had prohibited slavery. As residents in a free state, many blacks had assumed incorrectly that opportunities would abound for them. Cincinnati, being located on the Ohio

76 Taylor, Frontiers of Freedom, 29.
77Ibid, 28.
River, had canals and industry throughout the city. Jobs were plentiful and there was a need for workers in the factories. However, racism blunted opportunities blacks thought they had when crossing the Ohio River into Cincinnati. Soon, realization set in that the North was a hostile place, not the inviting utopia once believed. Cincinnati emerged as a place of racial intolerance, rather than opportunity. With no means to take care of their basic needs, blacks struggled to fit in within social and economic structures in this hostile city. Additionally, racial tensions were further increased because the Irish were competing for jobs and living quarters and this led to skirmishes between the blacks and Irish.78

The vast majority of blacks in Cincinnati consisted of single mothers and children. The Ohio Codes made it nearly impossible for blacks to find work. Families headed by females were not infrequently or sometimes taken in by male headed families. This put a strain on the men, particularly with almost no opportunities to work due to the existence the Black Codes. An exchange took place between James C. Brown and the Mayor regarding the hardship brought on by the Black Codes, in which Brown implored, “now that they have deprived us of work, who is going to beg for these people in order to keep them alive? The Mayor responded, they were taking steps to have the law repealed, and wished me to stay any action about sending people to Canada.”79

Because of the increase in hostilities blacks faced in Cincinnati, a reasonable alternative was to leave for Canada. This led to the creation of Wilberforce, a settlement which consisted mainly of blacks migrating from Cincinnati. The travels were brutal at times and some, who could not withstand the cold, decided that it was to their best interest to turn back and return to

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79 Frost, Walls, Neary, Armstrong, Four Fugitive Slave Narratives, 171-172.
Cincinnati. However, for the rest, they braved the elements and continued onward to face an uncertain future in a foreign land, Upper Canada.\textsuperscript{80}

Austin Steward was one of the original organizers of the Wilberforce community, however, he did not lead journeys from Cincinnati; he traveled to Wilberforce from Rochester, New York. He would be thrust forward as the primary leader. Others such as Reverend Nathaniel Paul and Israel Lewis would go on to disgrace the Wilberforce Colony by purportedly embezzling funds that were raised and given to them in behalf of the colony. These funds were to assist the colony financially in their migration to Canada.

Steward originally was a grocer in Rochester, New York. It is important to note that he had spent twenty two years in slavery before being freed. He played an important role in the early formation of the Wilberforce settlement and throughout Wilberforce’s existence, Steward offered financial assistance and whatever advice needed in hopes that this fledgling settlement would survive its beginning.

Figure 15. Austin Steward [www.docsouth.unc.com](http://www.docsouth.unc.com)

Steward’s time as a slave was difficult. He recalled times when the slaves had to be in the field by sunrise, working till sunset. The work was extremely hard and always physical. He noted the scars on fellow slaves:

“Capt. H. employed an overseer, whose business it was to look after each slave in the field and see that he performed his task. The overseer always went around with a whip about nine feet long, made of the toughest kind of cowhide, the but-end of which was loaded with lead, and was about four or five inches in circumference running to a point at the opposite extremity. This made a dreadful instrument of torture, and when in the hands of a cruel overseer, it was truly fearful and with it, the skin of a horse could be cut through. Hence, it was not uncommon to see the slaves with their backs mangled in a horrible manner. Our overseer, armed with his cowhide, and with a large bull-dog behind him, followed the slaves all day; and, if one of them fell for any cause, this cruel weapon was applied with terrible force. He would strike the dog one blow and the slave another, in order to keep the former from tearing the delinquent slave in pieces; - such was the ferocity of his canine attendant.”

The horrors of slavery left an indelible mark on this former slave. With the lessons he learned as a slave, he would try to lead a settlement consisting of emigrants from Ohio to Canada in search of genuine freedom. However, the lack of necessary knowledge and cohesiveness that plagued this community until its demise affected his relationship with Paul and Riley for the rest of his life.

Steward had enjoyed a somewhat prosperous life in Rochester, New York. He had established a meat market which serviced the black community. He had carved out a comfortable niche and had risen in stature in Rochester. He was looked upon by other blacks as the person who turned his salvaged from slavery into one in which he had succeeded and prospered. In New York, blacks did enjoy some freedoms: “The state legislature in New York enacted into law in 1788 that prevented the sale of human cargo on after June 1, 1785. The law gave freedom to all slaves’ if their previous slave owners disregarded the law. Additionally, the legislature passed another law, *Fish v. Fisher* that allowed former slaves that who were brought

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81 Austin Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave and Forty Years a Freeman* (Syracuse University Press, 2002), 3.
to New York after 1785 to be hired by another man. These types of hires were viewed as an evasion of the law and considered an attempt to sell slaves."\(^{82}\)

Steward noted that while blacks had some experience with freedom in New York, this was rarely the case in Cincinnati, Ohio. Ohio had implemented Black Codes in 1804 and 1807 requiring African Americans to carry with them a certificate stating they were free. Steward was one of the leaders to devise a plan to travel into Canadian territory in search of land and freedom. The decision was made to form a settlement in Upper Canada. A committee was founded in Rochester, New York and immediately Israel Lewis was appointed as the contact person.

Israel Lewis and his wife were former slaves from the south.\(^{83}\) He lacked a formal education and when he and his wife came to Cincinnati, he tried to start a new life of freedom. However, he struggled to find adequate work.\(^{84}\) Lewis had no prior knowledge on how to organize and lead the former slaves that had arrived in Cincinnati. Nevertheless, he became one of the founders of the Wilberforce Colony. He would eventually become the land agent seeking funds from outside sources to secure monies for the settlers in their long and treacherous journey to Upper Canada. Due to Lewis’ lack of business skills and education, he unfortunately did not negotiate the paperwork properly. This led Steward and the settlers encountering problems after arriving in Canada. He did not secure the title to the land from the Canada Company. This caused difficulties for Steward because the Canada Company was uncooperative when Steward tried to fix the problems. However, Steward stayed on the land and cultivated it despite objections from the Canada Company.\(^{85}\) In Nikki Taylor’s book, “Frontiers of Freedom,” she noted that, “There was a striking difference between the Cincinnati group and blacks from other

\(^{82}\)Ibid, 55-63.
\(^{83}\)Ibid, 140.
\(^{84}\)Taylor, 69.
\(^{85}\)Hill, 68-69.
places. Most of the latter had been leaders in free black communities in the United States before migrating. Austin Steward and Reverend Nathaniel Paul were respected leaders in their communities. On the other hand, Israel Lewis and James C. Brown were not able to meet the expectations that Steward and white abolitionists expected of them.

Lewis traveled to Canada in 1829 and met representatives of the Canada Company where he expressed interest in purchasing land in Biddulph Township in Upper Canada. It should be noted that after Lewis made the deal to secure land, he was to head back to Rochester and report his findings to the Committee. Meanwhile, Steward had appointed managers and agents to oversee the families that had arrived in Biddulph Township. Additional funds were sorely needed for basic repairs and upkeep of the various properties. However, the tensions between Steward, Lewis and Reverend Nathaniel Paul had become apparent. Monies were raised so that Israel Lewis could travel within the United States to solicit funds for the settlers as well as for Reverend Paul to travel to England to acquire monies to pay the settlers travel expenses to Canada. According to Steward, the funds were not to be used to care for the settlers. Paul had made it seem that the settlement was in dire need and was destitute. The settlement never received any money from Reverend Paul or Israel Lewis. Any funds that both collected were used for personal reasons. Suits and countersuits were filed against all three men, and each also filed against the others. The funds were never recovered but hurt and anger lingered on indefinitely. The trust Steward had built with Lewis and Paul was shattered. The men never saw each other again.

Another leader, James C. Brown was born in Frederick County, Virginia. His father was white and his mother was biracial. Early on in Brown’s life, he and his brother and sister were

86 Taylor, 74.
87 Ibid, 114-120.
88 Ibid, 91.
separated from their mother. She was sold to a slave owner only known by the initial “B” in Kentucky. James and his siblings remained with the original owner known by the initial “N” but we now know he was Squire Neal of Shelby, Kentucky.\(^{89}\) While other slaves were being brutally mistreated, Brown on the other hand was treated well by all standards considering he was also a slave. The main reason he was not subjected to the brutality that was so often a way of life for slaves was that he had been involved in an ongoing sexual relationship with his Aunt (father’s sister) who was white. This was not at all uncommon during slavery and in particular in the South.\(^{90}\)

Captain George Smith employed Brown when he was fifteen years of age to work for his Company. James and other crew members journeyed with Smith to Tippecanoe, working until they were able to gain their freedom. He was employed as a fifer. Eventually, he acquired his freedom only by paying “N” 1800 dollars because of money he saved after his father and stepmother had hired him out for six years.\(^{91}\)

After his freedom, Brown moved to Louisville, Kentucky where he made a living working as a brick mason. Problems ensued; white laborers did not like the fact that a black man was earned substantial wages as a skilled laborer. The threats and taunts against Brown continued until he decided to leave for Texas in 1819.\(^{92}\) While in Texas, Brown wanted to find a place to be totally free. After speaking with Stratford Gowen, a personal friend of Brown and Benjamin Lundy, a Quaker abolitionist, they advised him that Texas was never going to be a state where slaves could live free. Gowen and Lundy recommended that he leave Texas. He did


\(^{90}\) www.wishc.mnsi.net/heritageroom/JCBrown.net

\(^{91}\) Frost, Walls, Neary, Armstrong, *Four Fugitive Slave Narratives*, 168.

\(^{92}\) Wishc.mnsi.net/heritageroom/JCBrown
so and moved back to Kentucky where he lived briefly, and then he decided to move his family to Cincinnati. 93

The Ohio Black Codes made it difficult for Brown to keep working or find employment or find adequate housing for himself and his family. The laws put the black community into a crisis. They did not know what to do. Brown contacted Sir John Colborne, Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada about Canada offering sanctuary for blacks from Cincinnati. 94 After speaking with Colborne, Brown organized and became President of the Colonization Society. Brown sent two individuals to Toronto, Upper Canada to meet with Colborne. A letter accompanied these individuals asking for consideration in allowing blacks to take up residency in Canada. Sir John Colborne wrote back to Brown stating that blacks would be welcome to Canada. Colborne advised Brown, “To move into Canada with your wives and children, if you choose to do so; and that so long as we remained true and loyal subjects, you should have every privilege extended to you and others that is enjoyed by any of her majesty’s subjects, no distinction being made on account of color.” 95

After Lewis’ travels to Canada, Steward wrote a report to the committee, the preamble of which stated:

Whereas, The city of Cincinnati has again become the scene of another dreadful mob and bloodshed, where nothing but terror and confusion reigned for a number of hours together.

And Whereas, Our brethren and fellow citizens were left exposed to the fury of an ungovernable mob, made up of the base, the ignorant, and vile, the very dregs of society; and probably led on by slaveholders, who of all men are the most execrable; while boasting of liberty, he tramples on the dearest rights of men and is the greatest robber of it on earth.

Resolved, That we depreciate an appeal to arms by any class of our fellow citizens, except in extreme cases and we think that such a case has been presented in the late outrage at Cincinnati.

93 Ibid, 169.
94 www.wishc.mnsi.net/heritageroom/JCBrown.net
95 Ibid, 171.
Resolved, That when a class of men so for forget the duty they owe to God, their fellow men, and their country, as to trample under their feet the very laws they have made, and are in duty bound to obey and execute, we believe it to be the duty of our brethren and fellow citizens, to protect their lives against such lawless mobs; and if in the conflict any of the mob crats perish, every good citizen should say Amen.

Resolved, That we do truly sympathize with the friends of God’s poor. The friends of the oppressed throughout this boasted land of liberty, in the losses they have sustained in consequence of the mob.

Resolved, That we believe the time is not far distant, when the Queen City of the West shall be redeemed from the hateful influence of the slaveholder; redeemed from that cruel prejudice of caste which hangs like a mill-stone around the neck of our people; redeemed from all those unequal laws, which have a tendency to make the strong stronger and the weak weaker; redeemed from their false-hearted friends, whose sarcastic smile is more to be feared than the frowns of an open enemy.

Resolved, That the untiring exertions of our friends, and the indefatigable industry of our brethren, are sure guarantees that the State of Ohio will not long be what she now is, - a hissing and by-word on account of her iniquitous laws; but that she will rise above every narrow minded prejudice, and raise up her sable sons and daughters and place them on an equality with the rest of her citizens.

Resolved, That we deeply deplore the loss our friends have sustained in the destruction of their printing press in Cincinnati.

Resolved, That we as an oppressed people, feel it our duty to give our undivided support to the press and the laborers in our cause.”

The responsibility to secure land in Canada rested with Israel Lewis. After choosing plots of land in Biddulph Township of Upper Canada, the effort was on for the removal of many blacks from Cincinnati to Upper Canada. Steward was thrilled that things were taking shape for the establishment of a colony in Canada. He left Rochester immediately to visit the colony and see firsthand how the settlement was developing into a community that all blacks could be proud of.

Upon arriving, it was decided that the colony would be called Wilberforce after William Wilberforce, British politician, philanthropist and leader of the movement to abolish the slave
trade. The property was located in Kent County known as Lucan today. Steward noted that Wilberforce was surrounded by people from Ireland and Wales. It had originally been reported that over 3000 blacks left Cincinnati to settle there. However, during 1829-1830 around 460 blacks left, but, only six families settled in the township called Biddulph in Upper Canada.96

James C. Brown, one of the earlier leaders in Cincinnati, encouraged blacks to leave Ohio. He traveled to Canada in the fall of 1829. When Brown arrived in Canada, only five to six families had made the journey to Canada with Brown. Eventually, fifteen or more families would make the trek to Canada looking to start a brand new life in a free country. Also, Steward went to see the conditions of black living in Canada for himself.

In the meantime, Israel Lewis had returned to the United States and made the claim that blacks had been living under poor conditions. Steward disputed Israel’s report and decided to move in May 1831 to Biddulph Township in order to assist in building a community in which blacks would feel safe and prosper.97 After arriving in Canada, Steward noticed that the town and land were in poor condition. He notes: “The Township was one unbroken wilderness when purchased for the colony, and of course the land must be cleared of the heavy timber before crops could be planted and fenced. There was a great deal of destitution and suffering before their harvest could ripen after the land was prepared for the seed.”98

Despite the conditions of Biddulph Township, Steward was excited that with the proper foundation, Wilberforce would be successful and a model community for all other colonies to follow and for the world to see, in particular the United States. He described it this way:

“In Wilberforce there were no white inhabitants; the land appeared leveled and handsome, with but one stream of any magnitude running through it; this was the

98 Steward, *Twenty-Two Years as a Slave*, 88.
Oxsable, which was dry during a part of the year. All was one vast forest of heavy timber that would compare well with that of Western New York. Beech, maple, ash, elm, oak, whitewood, bass, balm of gilead. The soil was good for corn, wheat, rye, oats, and most kinds of the grain and vegetables raised in New York, and was a superior grazing country perhaps thirty dwellings, and two hundred inhabitants; a court-house and jail all under one roof, built of stone and plaster; small doors and windows in the style of some of the old English castles. London was built in the forks of between the east and west branches of the river Thames; hence, you would hear people speak of “going to the forks,” instead of the village; it is about two hundred miles from Buffalo, and the nearest port between the two is Port Stanley, thirty miles from London.”

It is interesting to note that as violence increased, so did the numbers of blacks into Canada. Fifteen hundred blacks fled Cincinnati at this time. According to Taylor in *Frontiers of Freedom*, not all blacks went to Canada. Some sought help from neighboring communities, while others traveled further north to be closer to relatives and friends. Still others decided to risk everything they owned to experience freedom in a country that might be willing to embrace them.

Regardless of the dangers heading into Canada, these small bands of emigrants were determined to leave the United States for a better life. Taylor noted that not only could many blacks not afford to travel to Canada, but they had no means to finance the purchase of land. The families that did travel to Canada were emigrants that had the financial means to make the journey to Canada and the ability to establish residency. The facts that these emigrants pooled their money together and traveled in groups help them survive as they entered this foreign land: “Their was a moving community, forged in Cincinnati by people who believed in a vision of freedom and who transported both this vision and their community to Canada.”

Owning their own land meant everything to these emigrants; this would equate to complete freedom. They could not feel completely free unless they owned property on which to

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100 Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 64.
101 Ibid, 65.
build their own homes and schools. By possessing land, this would mean employment opportunities for emigrants. It would provide a way to fulfill their vision of a community coming together to build a city, a city that would prosper and become part of the larger community of white Canadians. Blacks from Cincinnati were anxious to experience freedom and to show Canadians that they could live and function within societal norms as a community, one that would thrive and succeed.

As blacks arrived at Wilberforce, they had happily looked forward to establishing their own businesses, schools, ownership of their homes and becoming prosperous landowners. With a lack of educational and employment skills, the settlers did not have the knowledge or capability necessary to build and act upon their vision of having a prospering community. They wanted to become a part of a society in which they would be welcomed. Canada seemed to be that place, a land of freedom and relief from the horrors of slavery and unjust laws for free blacks. Many in the Wilberforce settlement never wanted to return to the United States. The pains of slavery along with the problems of trying to live as a free person only encouraged division amongst those within the Wilberforce community and as a consequence, they lost sight of remaining vigilant. What the former slaves feared most of all was the possibility that they could be captured and enslaved once more.

The blacks who formed Wilberforce had assumed incorrectly that white Canadians would receive them with open arms. On contrary, as more blacks migrated to Upper Canada, many white Canadians became increasingly alarmed and hostile. The influx of blacks, mainly from Cincinnati, caused many Canadians to rethink their willingness to invite, assist and allow these foreigners to integrate into their communities. Ironically, as the number of blacks rose, even the original settlers to Wilberforce immediately sought to control the number of blacks entering
Canada. As Robin Winks states in *Blacks in Canada*, “The spectre of blacks swarming began to be taken seriously by many Canadians. Prejudice rose as the number of Negroes expanded; earlier Negro arrivals anticipated this and hope to forestall discrimination by slowing the threatening flood to a trickle. The result was a division in Negro ranks, exacerbated by sectarian controversies that helped confirm Canadians belief that the Negroes were incapable of self-leadership and cooperative action.”

Many of the first arrivals at Wilberforce in fact embraced the same ideology as their slave masters in the South and persecutors back in Cincinnati. While blacks lamented the treatment they had been subjected to in the states, they adopted many similar attitudes and policies once they arrived in Canada. Even though blacks had been exposed to racism, blacks at Wilberforce enforced their own brand of racist behavior on newly arrived blacks in hopes that this would garnish favor in the eyes of white Canadians. In the final analysis, this behavior further caused apprehension among white Canadians and that indeed it was a mistake to allow blacks into Canada. The longer blacks stayed, the more anxious and racist white Canadians became.

In Upper Canada, the land purchase was to be complete by the time blacks arrived. However, that was contingent on whether the emigrants had enough money to purchase the land. Israel Lewis and Thomas Cresap were chosen to look for and purchase land from the Canada Company. Both men were to bring back the decision from the Canada Company hopefully with positive results to the President of Wilberforce, James C. Brown.

Lewis and Cresap surveyed land near Lake Huron. The Canada Company wanted to sell as much land as possible. Here lies the dilemma that had occurred with the Cincinnati group. The Canada Company was willing to sell 4,000 acres to the Cincinnati group for 6,000 dollars.

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103 Ibid, 143-144.
But, when Lewis and Cresap went to Canada, they had no funds to purchase the land or even put a down payment on the land. They had assumed the city of Cincinnati would fund the purchase of the land. They assumed that the white people of Cincinnati wanted them gone and so would pay for their removal to Canada. In reality, Cincinnati had no funds to purchase land in Canada. The city government refused to provide funds for the settlers to leave. Cincinnati would not go along with this decision in part because they would be losing a vulnerable workforce upon which the city depended. In addition, many of those whites demanding that blacks leave Cincinnati were not necessarily willing to pay for relocation; they would be satisfied with blacks simply being gone.\textsuperscript{104}

The problem of no money to buy land would in fact impede the formation of Wilberforce to the point that it never became a viable settlement in Canada. Without the resources to buy land or build homes, the future was indeed bleak for blacks that wanted a new life in Canada. Only by the kindness of Ohio and Indiana Quakers would black Cincinnatians make the journey to Canada.

The major obstacle for Wilberforce was that Israel Lewis and Thomas Cresap had promised payment to the Canada Company for the land. They promised that blacks from Cincinnati would have the funds available for down payment on the land that had been set aside by the Canada Company. As it turned out, blacks never did have the money available to purchase land in Canada. In fact, only fifteen families had arrived in Biddulph Township, not the large number of blacks that were expected to make the journey to Canada. The Canada Company which had expected payment refused to hand over additional land to the settlers. This led to further hostilities between the Canada Company and the settlers. Due to a lack of adequate land, the settlers could not grow and prosper without having additional space. As more settlers

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid, 156.
arrived in Biddulph Township, living quarters became cramped and living conditions deteriorated rapidly because of a lack of living space and loss of availability of land. After hearing about the situation in Canada, “Quakers from Ohio and Indiana, heard of the settlers plight, sent agent Frederick Stover who purchased 800 acres which is equivalent to 325 ha from the Canada Company and in return, the Quakers turnover tracts of land to the settlers.”¹⁰⁵ This alleviated some of the overcrowding and blacks had more land to build houses and a school. Had it not been for the Quakers, Wilberforce would have probably closed sooner than it did.

When the fugitives arrived into Canada, they lacked proper clothing to protect themselves from the cold weather which was hasher than expected. Food was scarce and the fugitives did not have the hunting skills necessary to feed their families. Many families were ill-prepared to handle the rigors of living in such a country with harsh weather conditions. Levi Coffin, a well-known abolitionist, had visited the Wilberforce settlers before they journeyed to Canada and in his own words described them as “poor, destitute, ignorant, suffering from all the evil influences

¹⁰⁵ Winks, Freedom Seekers, 67-71
of slavery.”¹⁰⁶ Coffin saw firsthand the problems of these settlers.

Figure 16. Levi Coffin www.quakersintheworld.org

They had almost no or little prior knowledge of how to survive on their own outside of the slavery system. Even after they had fled to Ohio, many blacks lacked the skills or educational know how to live independently of their slave owners. However, given the slightest opportunity, many blacks quickly learned how to live and prosper outside the confines of institutional slavery. With meager possessions, Wilberforce settlers began to rely heavily on the Canadian Government for assistance. This did not sit well with white Canadians. Their attitudes became more hostile when they had perceived the settlers as merely beggars and not wanting to work on behalf of their families.

The large exodus from Cincinnati, Ohio and influx of blacks into Upper Canada was not well organized. Because of increased violence against blacks in Cincinnati, this hastened the

exodus of blacks leaving them to flee quickly without enough food, clothing or monies to sustain them upon arrival into Canada. With no job prospects on the horizon and a lack of proper housing, Wilberforce seemed doomed for failure long before it was ever established. Some have long argued such as Tobin that Wilberforce should have succeeded. However, given the circumstances in which blacks left Cincinnati, it had become obvious that the Wilberforce settlers lacked all the proper skills necessary for survival in a foreign land. The blacks that formed the Wilberforce settlement in Canada had expected help from the Canadian government. This expectation raised alarm bells amongst Canadians. The assumption that Canadians should in part attend to the settlers’ basic needs unsettled many Canadians throughout Upper Canada. The lack of an education, employment skills and social and moral attitudes further accelerated the demise of Wilberforce.

More importantly, the lack of leadership within the Wilberforce community played an integral role in the crumbling of the settlement. The constant bickering and infighting among the leaders within the Wilberforce community only led to further splintering within the community. The blacks had gone from one precarious situation to another in which their presence was neither welcomed nor tolerated by the surrounding community. The seeming unwillingness of the Wilberforce settlers to embrace Canadian values was viewed by many Canadians as a rejection of the core values that many Canadians felt made them different from their neighbors to the south. Slavery had been abolished in Canada and some Canadians tried to help blacks as they entered their country. However, there was a limit to Canadian patience and many Canadians were not thrilled to see blacks come to their homeland. In fact, racism was prevalent throughout Canada. On the surface, Canada may have appeared to be a welcoming refuge for blacks. However, in reality, Canada was not the utopia blacks had dreamed of. According to Jason
Silverman in *Unwelcome Guest*, Sir John Colborne, lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada, and Canadians had concluded “the sudden introduction of a mass black population, likely to continue without limitation is a matter so dangerous to the peace and comfort of the inhabitants, that it becomes necessary to prevent or check by some prudent restrictions, this threatened evil.”\(^{107}\) Colborne was not alone in concluding that blacks would become a burden to Canadian society. White Canadians overwhelmingly claimed that the environment was not conducive to black inhabitation and that they would be better served by remaining in the United States. Canadians felt that this was more favorable to former slaves both free and fugitive. However, it was about race with the Canadians and their fears towards the settlers migrating to their country.

As Winks states, “the resulting settlement was poorly launched and managed. A few Negroes arrived as early as October 1829, to settle near Lucan, the chosen site, well in advance of the final negotiations. The prospect of restored racial harmony in Cincinnati cut the migration to well under a third of the anticipated three thousand, and not more than half of these dispersed into Upper Canada.”\(^{108}\)

No longer able to function on their own, most of the settlers returned to the United States. Irish immigrants moved in took over the land and ask the Canada Company not to sell additional land to the black settlers.\(^{109}\) The failure of Wilberforce would give credence to the racism of many white Canadians and cement in their minds that experimenting in slave settlements and providing access to the same basic rights as Canadians was a lesson in futility that did not produce positive results for either white Canadians or black emigrants. The settlers’ inability to adapt to the Canadian way of life and challenges with learning how to live independently on their own did not bode well with the Canadians. Wilberforce’s expectations of

\(^{107}\) Ibid, 28.
\(^{109}\) Tobin, *From Midnight to Dawn*, 17.
the Canadian Government, the Canada Company, and the Canadian people to care for them exacerbated their relationship with the Canadians. This utter failure of integration drove members of the Wilberforce settlement out of Canada and back to the United States where living conditions boarded on savagery. Eventually, the Wilberforce settlers have disappeared and largely been relegated to a footnote in history.

Canadians had expected a cohesive unified settlement to be established on Canadian soil. The Canada Company had provided tracts of land with potential job opportunities available for blacks. Many in Canada had assumed incorrectly that blacks from Cincinnati would embrace Canadian lifestyles with ease. This, however, would not be the case and in fact fell apart because of the nature in which blacks had to flee Cincinnati, due to increased violence. Violence had increased to dangerous levels and this meant that blacks had to prepare their exit from Ohio in a disorderly fashion. Whites had attacked blacks and beaten them severely. Many homes of African Americans had been burned. Blacks also were not allowed to walk on the same sidewalks with whites. So, blacks left en masse crossing dangerous territory and fleeing for their safety. Due to the hastened exit from Ohio, black leaders in Cincinnati could not formulate a cohesive plan for the group’s arrival into Upper Canada. As blacks fled for their lives and in fear of being recaptured, an influx of blacks into a foreign land with no prior knowledge of this new country had a negative impact on its survival and ultimately leads to its demise.

As for the case of Brown, he moved to Toronto in 1839; however, his wife was miserable living in Canada and preferred living in the United States. Brown moved back to Kentucky where he was promptly arrested for helping blacks cross into Canada. After a tenuous legal battle, he was finally freed and he and his wife and children moved back to Cincinnati. His wife though, was still afraid for her husband’s safety because of the ongoing harassment her husband

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received. She had seen her husband endure so much that she knew she had made a mistake in her desire to return to the United States. Observing the mistreatment of blacks once again and the toll it took on her husband, she finally realized that Canada was a better place to live and raise their children than in the United States. Brown moved his family back to Upper Canada, first to Dawn, and then to Chatham in 1849. Once he arrived in Chatham, Brown realized that laborers were almost nonexistent and therefore went out searching for black laborers or black men he could train and teach to be masons and bricklayers. The community started coming together, with houses and gardens, a school and a church.\textsuperscript{111} In his own words, Brown realized that if his children were to live free and have the opportunity to be educated, then Canada would become the place his children could realize their dreams:

“Our children growing up in this country and not having the fear of any white man, and being taught to read and write, will grow up entirely different from their fathers – of more benefit to themselves, of more benefit to the government, and will be more able to set good example to the rising generation. Intelligent parents will raise up intelligent children.

Slavery disarms a man of virtue, - of everything; it prevents his being a man. Anticipation is what we live for, - it makes us anxious to improve ourselves and our children; but the setting of the sun, or the passage of some law to curtail what little of privilege he possesses. The effects of slavery are perceptible here in our courts. I have seen fugitives, brought as witnesses, afraid to testify against a white woman. This is a part of the horrid effects of slavery. The younger ones are better than this. They grow up without slavish fear; they know nothing about it.”\textsuperscript{112}

Brown’s greatest legacy was his ability to take risks even if it meant endangering himself for the sake of human dignity and the right to exercise freedom. This is what made James C. Brown a powerful man in his own right. Tireless and fearless effort he put into ensuring that blacks received the equality they so rightfully deserved. Even though he may not had been

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid, 173.
\textsuperscript{112} Frost, Walls, Neary, Armstrong, \textit{Four Fugitive Slave Narratives}, 173-174.
subjected to the horrendous beatings or maltreatment that so many slaves endured, he felt and shared their pain and because of this, he fought fearlessly for the basic rights of blacks. 

In all, approximately 1,000 blacks eventually made it to Biddulph Township even though many moved on to other areas in Canada. Of the approximately 1,000 blacks who left Cincinnati, only 200 remained behind and became part of the Wilberforce settlement. It reached its peak of 200 settlers in 1830 and then quickly declined until the 1850s when it was no longer a viable settlement.\textsuperscript{113}

Wilberforce did not succeed largely because of the impact that enforcement of the Black Codes had upon them, which deprived the former slaves’ of the ability to organize in an orderly exit from Ohio into Canada. Additionally, the timing of the emigrants’ flight into Canada was mishandled by their leaders who were completely unprepared to lead the former slaves into a foreign country. The lack of necessary skills, education, and the location of where the former slaves settled were all instrumental in leading up to the demise of Wilberforce. Even though other groups of blacks traveled and created settlements in other parts of Canada; Wilberforce served as the catalyst of Canadian distrust and hostilities.\textsuperscript{114}

It is important to understand the problems that plagued Wilberforce in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century are the same problems that affect large numbers of African-Americans today. There are lessons to be learned from the past. My project shows the importance of education and job skills for success in a given community, and when these are denied to a particular group, adversity is the result. To be fair to the Wilberforce settlers, the deck was stacked against them from the beginning.

\textsuperscript{113} Silverman, \textit{Unwelcomed Guests}, 29. 
By telling the story of the Wilberforce Settlement, a viable dialogue can be opened in which Americans and Canadians across the spectrum can encourage a positive exchange of ideas. It is vital to discuss all of the issues that the Wilberforce settlers encountered as they tried to normalize their lives after living in slavery for generations. This conversation can keep a forgotten history alive by addressing issues that continue to plague communities of color in the twenty-first century.

Figure 17. The Wilberforce Settlement Plaque [link](http://www.waymarking.com)
CHAPTER IV. CROSS COMPARISON OF THE WILBERFORCE AND ELGIN SETTLEMENTS

As Africans were brought from their native continent and transplanted onto foreign soil, a hostile country awaited them, not only hostile but violent and unwelcoming. Upon their arrival, the Africans were immediately forced into slavery and it was at this point that slavery began within the United States. As slavery progressed, the inhumane treatment of these individuals would provide a mirror into these people. Men, women and children’s lives and would serve as a powerful memory forever etched in the minds of the foreigners and the details of the treatment they would succumb to. The horrors of slavery would give birth to a burning desire within the individual, to seek freedom and refuge at all cost regardless of the consequences. Though peace was unattainable from a country that had never intended to treat the slaves equally; they hungered for acceptance and place they could call home. They had never even known that the United States existed and to be taken from their native land and to be cut off from their history was traumatizing to these people. The hostile environment they encountered stripped the Africans of their dignity and self-worth. For the next hundred or so years, the desire to be free would lay the groundwork and lead to a blueprint toward the road to freedom.

In time, as the divisions between the northern and southern regions of the United States escalated regarding slavery, with the south relying upon slave labor and the north becoming more industrialized, the road to freedom became apparent as the north entered into a trajectory enabling slaves to live as freemen. This would prove to be the catalyst that the slaves needed to set in motion a chance to seek freedom at all cost even if it meant death.

As the slaves attempted to escape to the north from the brutality of their southern slave owners, they quickly discovered that the north was not as welcoming for those longing for
freedom. The slaves that had fled to Ohio, upon arrival, found that in 1750, Ohio had passed fugitive slave laws that placed undue hardships on the slaves that had fled from the south to Ohio. This law made it easier for slaveholders to reclaim runaway slaves and return the slaves back to their previous owners.

After reaching the north, the fugitive slaves had to move onward into Upper Canada. Once there, the slaves figured they could experience the freedom they had longed for. The fugitive slaves would travel into Canada creating settlements throughout Northern Canada. Canada presented its own unique problems to the settlers by not being very welcoming either. Due to the Canadians’ uneasiness with large numbers of slaves entering their country, they soon gave way to resisting and displaying outward hostility toward the former slaves.

The Wilberforce Settlement was the first settlement to be established in Canada. As the first settlement, its role became crucial in determining whether or not settlement could succeed in Canada. The Canadian Government along with its people wanted Wilberforce to assimilate into their society. However, many Canadians expected Blacks to fail and when they did, Blacks were blamed for failing.

The reasons the Wilberforce Settlement failed were due in part to the harsh Canadian winters that the settlers were not accustomed to. The weather was frigid and the settlers were not prepared to live out in the wilderness because they lacked proper food, clothing, and unsuitable housing. Also, the settlers did not know how to grow crops for the region which caused many to go hungry. Furthermore, they were not trained on how to cut lumber and build houses for themselves. Other roadblocks for Wilberforce were that the settlers’ seemed to have an unwillingness to assimilate and accept the customs and norms of the Canadian people and also the settlers’ reluctance to sustain themselves by seeking work. The settlers’ stay in Canada
proved to be short and tenuous at best. Wilberforce’s inability to thrive socially or economically because of a lack of skills and education prevented the settlement from surviving in Canada. After their brief stay in Canada, the settlement was disbanded and the settlers returned to the United States.

The Buxton Settlement became an example of a model settlement. From its inception, Buxton incorporated the norms of the Canadian people, from Canadians’ point of view. Its leader, Reverend William King, taught and trained his fifteen former slaves to work, and learn the skills necessary to make the land productive for the settlers’ and their families. The manual skills and education that Buxton brought to Canada would become a shining example for all to witness when it came to the ability of former slaves to become more accepted into Canadian society. Because of the success of the Buxton Settlement, it has left an enduring legacy in Canada down to our very day. Unfortunately, after the Civil War ended, most of the Buxton settlers went back to the United States. However, a small group of descendants from the original Buxton settlers’ remain in Canada. Even though the settlement ended in 1863 in Chatham Ontario; that is where the descendants of the Buxton settlers still reside. The Buxton Museum was dedicated to honor and preserve the legacy of the Buxton Settlement.115

Buxton was in stark contrast to Wilberforce and was highly successful as a result. From the beginning of its inception, Buxton’s leader, Reverend William King planned and received support from associates in Canada. He laid out the foundation of the settlement and because of his due diligence, Buxton prospered. After the death of his wife, Reverend King cultivated a fondness for the former slaves that he had inherited from his wife’s estate. He never condoned slavery and was always an outspoken advocate against it. Because of his deeply held religious

beliefs, Revered King felt he had a moral obligation to treat his slaves humanely. Likewise, the slaves trusted King and he likewise trusted them. Additionally, factors such as organization, discipline, education and having strong religious beliefs were all important components that galvanized both King and his former slaves to succeed and prove to the world that if given the same opportunities as whites, blacks live could at a level never seen before. The divergent road the Elgin settlement embarked upon would have a lasting influence on the Canadian Government and its’ people long after these settlers passed on.

As King traveled to Canada to purchase land for his former slaves’, he approached the Presbyterian Synod regarding land purchases. The Synod along with King created the “Elgin Association” strictly to look for and purchase property for the settlers’. What set the structure of the Elgin Settlement apart from the Wilberforce Settlement was the support Revered King garnered from the Synod and others within the community. Wilberforce relied completely on the generosity of the Canadians. Instead, Kings relied on his connections and friendships he had established long ago while traveling from his homeland of Scotland through Canada. The people that remained his friends for life would play a pivotal role in assisting and guaranteeing Elgin’s success. With the right planning, implementation, financial and public support, from his friends and the community, Elgin would prosper and thrive unlike Wilberforce.

With the support of the Synod along with the formation of the “Elgin Association,” King was left to find and purchase property for his settlers’. He looked throughout Upper Canada until he found land outside of Windsor suitable for habitation. He also asked and received monies from the Elgin Association to purchase 4300 acres of land that would be divided into tracts inside the township of Raleigh. King worked diligently overseeing every step in the

creation of Elgin. He did not want a repeat of what had happened with the Wilberforce Settlement. All was going according to plan, with the Elgin Association, Synod and the formation of a committee to oversee the finances of the Settlement. However, King hit a snag from those in the community that was opposed to the settlers locating in their community. White Canadians were concerned that what King was bringing to the community was another failed settlement similar to Wilberforce. Canadians feared moral depravity, excessive drinking, revelers and settlers’ inability to live independently. Importantly, the most single factor that drove many in the community to oppose the formation of the Elgin Settlement was the fear that the settlers would become a drain on Canadian resources and eventually become a burden to the community. This did not deter King from realizing his dream of establishing a Utopia type of settlement in Canada.\footnote{Ibid, 122-123.}

With a sound plan in place, Revered King and the Elgin Association finalized and purchased land for the settlers to live on. The settlers would purchase from the Association and live on 50 acre tracts, establishing land ownership. King felt that if the settlers owned their own land, it would promote a sense of pride and belonging, further encouraging and accelerating the assimilation into Canadian society.

Unlike Wilberforce, in which the settlers’ lacked an education, the Elgin settlers’ placed a high priority on education. Second, the Elgin settlers’ would become land owners and build homes on the land they owned. Third, religion played a huge role in the lives of the settlers’ and became the cornerstone of the Elgin Settlement. There would be not a substitute or lack of religion on the grounds of Elgin. King had instilled in his former slaves a strong sense that religion was vital in their lives and that once in Canada, a church and school would be built for worship and educating children.
The superior organizational skills of Revered King along with his connections all but guaranteed Elgin would be successful. The settlers’ themselves by having a desire to be free and live their lives in peace, sensed that King was leading them to a place where they could co-exist with whites. The settlers learned to work and live in harmony with their neighbors, in part because King kept solid control over the settlement and demanded that people conform to his rules. Additionally, by having the slaves’ exercise their economic and political might, the settlers would become a force in which the local and national government would have to acknowledge a new group of people with political clout. King’s dream became a reality and a testament to the extraordinary convictions King held in believing that if the playing field is leveled, his former slaves could succeed in living a prosperous life in Canada.\(^\text{118}\)

The failures of the Wilberforce Settlement were plentiful. There were no specific leader(s) to take charge of the settlement. James C. Brown became the de-facto leader. Unfortunately, Brown did not have the knowledge, foresight or connections that Revered King had to help build a successful settlement. Furthermore, Brown was undermined by Israel Lewis and Thomas Cresap. The infighting between the members caused dissention and chaos from the beginning of Wilberforce’s creation.\(^\text{119}\)

As stated before, the eventual collapse of Wilberforce was due to a lack of organization amongst the settlement’s leaders. Brown, Austin Steward, Israel Lewis and Nathaniel Paul never tried to enforce the importance to its members of becoming self-sufficient and not relying on the Canadian government or its citizens to take care of them indefinitely. Wilberforce developed and demanded that the Canadian government take care of their basic needs. With no education

\(^{118}\) Silverman, *Unwelcomed Guests*, 71.

\(^{119}\) Tobin, *From Midnight to Dawn*, 12.
or manual skills to build homes, work the land or handle financial matters, Wilberforce and its leaders sealed the fate of Wilberforce settlement’s demise.

Hiram Wilson, after visiting Wilberforce concluded that the settlers’ should have never gone to Canada. He noted:

“That the true friends of colored Americans may not be forever gullied and deceived by Colonization humbugs…permit me to state that the Wilberforce colony is a miserable concern…There are not more than 18 or 20 families there. Some of them are wretchedly poor-others in a more thriving condition but all much the worse for the begging campaigns of (agent) Israel Lewis and others. Had they been taught as in other parts of the province to sustain themselves by their own industry, instead of looking for foreign aid, their condition would be much better than it is.”

This was the crux of the matter that Wilson hit upon, that the leaders were not organized, and the settlers were not educated or trained in skills that would have made them employable and capable of building homes, schools and establishing businesses. All of these factors were vital in order for the settlement to become self-reliant and successful on their own without complete government oversight. Due to a lack of business expertise, the leaders of the Wilberforce settlement were incapable of managing funds collected to assist the settlement financially. Furthermore, compounding Wilberforce’s, financial problems was the fact that Reverend Nathaniel Paul and Israel Lewis had embezzled monies that were collected to assist the settlement in its development; this had a profound effect on the sustainability of Wilberforce.

The ill-fated settlement faced a racially charged atmosphere among white Canadians further destabilizing the settlement. White Canadians resented to having to offer assistance to blacks’ that were never welcomed to Canada in the first place. Even though the disadvantages that blacks suffered should have drawn sympathy from white Canadians, the opposite reaction occurred. The negative reception from white Canadians was overwhelmingly hostile. There

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121 Ibid, 30-31.
were other variables in play causing the adverse reaction toward these settlers’ from the Canadians. One factor that incited an increase of hatred toward the Wilberforce settlers’ was due to the “anti-American sentiment.”

Canadian abolitionists had spread the mistreatment of slaves’ throughout Canada and for that reason Canadians were willing to give blacks a chance to make their home in Canada. However, with all the problems that Wilberforce created and encountered upon their arrival in Canada, white Canadians did not embrace or welcome blacks.

The Canada Company played a large role in the demise of Wilberforce. The Company had made arrangements to sale land to the Wilberforce settlement as soon as they arrived in Upper Canada. However, the company reneged on the original contract and reduced the acreage of land promised to the settlers. One reason for this action taken by the Canada Company was because of opposition from the white community in Biddulph Township. Also, there was an influx of Irish settlers that had moved into the township and the Irish wanted to utilize the land once promised to Wilberforce. As the financial arrangements were being made for Wilberforce to pay the Canada Company, the settlement could not come up with the monies to purchase the original acreage of land as stated in the contract. There was complaining and infighting within the settlement.

Quite a number of settlers were disillusioned from the infighting. Eventually, some of the settlers decided to move to Oro. The Canada Company had originally agreed to sell blacks 1600 ha in the amount of $600 which had to be paid by November, 1830. Unable to

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122 Ibid, 35.
123 Ibid, 43.
124 Tobin, *From Midnight to Dawn*, 17.
come up with the funds, the Canada Company refused to sell anymore land to the Wilberforce settlement which further exacerbated problems within the settlement.126

Two important characters associated with the Wilberforce settlement clearly damaged the settlement permanently. Israel Lewis had solicited in excess of $700, unfortunately, he kept the money. Secondly, Reverend Nathaniel Paul was given POA and sent to England to gather financial assistance and for the settlement this too did not work out as expected. Paul had risen close to $8000, but, he had claimed the settlement owed him $7000 for expenses he supposedly incurred while in England. Furthermore, to exacerbate the situation, Paul informed Austin Steward, who was the President of Wilberforce after James C. Brown stepped down, that the colony owed him another $50 a month during the time he spent in England. This amount added an additional $1800 to the $7000 that Paul kept.127

In addition to the many failures that led to Wilberforce demise, not enough families made the move the Canada to support the start-up of the settlement, prejudiced attitudes from white Canadians, embezzlement of monies from some of the leaders, refusal of the Canada Company to sell more land to the settlers, influx of Irish settlers in Biddulph Township. This allowed the Irish to purchase land once promised contractually to the Wilberforce settlers. Eventually, the Irish uprooted most of the settlers in Biddulph Township (Lucan). Ultimately, the settlers decided it was not worth the hassle to fight the Canadian government, Canada Company or the Irish for the land they thought was theirs. They had no desire to remain in Canada and departed shortly thereafter back to the United States. This effectively ended Wilberforce’s time in

126 Ibid, 67-68.
Only Paul Butler remained in Wilberforce and to this day, descendents of Butler still reside in what was once known as Wilberforce now called Lucan-Biddulph Township.

The establishment of Wilberforce in Upper Canada created hostilities within the white community in Ontario. During the existence of Wilberforce the settlement lacked a cohesive plan in establishing a prosperous community within the Canadian countryside. Having no workable skills or education, the settlers were unable or refused to learn skills that would have been an asset in producing productive citizens. As the settlers lingered in Canada without any meaningful employment and reliance on the Canadian people, hostilities increased to the point that it was becoming increasingly dangerous for the settlers to remain in Canada. Unfortunately, the settlers’ behavior solidified the racist attitudes exhibited by the white Canadians toward the settlers and this reaction led to Canadians wanting the settlers to leave their country.

The vision that Canadians had of blacks would further exacerbate feelings toward Revered King’s former slaves when they arrived in Canada. Prior to King’s sojourners arriving in Chatham, Ontario, King did his due diligence in checking out the territory in which his sojourners would resettle. King enjoyed the people of Chatham and they reciprocated the same to King. However, once word got out that King was resettling additional blacks from the United States; white Canadians resented him and even avoided having any dealings with King. Fortunately, this did not deter King from his task of bringing his former slaves to Canada and assisting them in starting a new life away from the slave driven United States.129

Race always played a pivotal role in both settlements. Wilberforce being the first settlement in Canada set the tone in regards to how white Canadians would receive other settlements. As Wilberforce struggled, King felt that Elgin could and would change the

128 Ibid, 71.
129 Silverman, Unwelcome Guest, 63-63.
trajectory and change the attitudes of Canadians towards blacks. By changing the discourse of negativity into one of positivity and acceptance, King would accomplish his mission by demonstrating if given opportunities to succeed, blacks could prosper in developing a black settlement that would debunk all the myths long held by Canadians. When Benjamin Drew traveled to Chatham to observe the Elgin settlement, he was amazed at how capable the settlers had become, he noted:

“The settlers at Buxton are characterized by a manly, independent air and manner. Most of them came into the province stripped of everything but life. They have purchased homes for themselves, paid the price demanded by the government, erected their own buildings and supported their own families by their own industry; receiving no aid whatever from any kind from coming into the settlement. Mr. King having full faith in the natural powers capacity, and capabilities 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: trusting, under god, on their own right arm.”

The point had been made that blacks could be self-sufficient and capable of making their own decisions thereby controlling their own destiny.\textsuperscript{131}

One major distinction that affected the outcomes of Wilberforce and Elgin was that Elgin male blacks had to meet the same requirements as white Canadian males regarding laws and regulations in Canada. This was remarkable considering in the United States, blacks were not allowed to vote. The Canadian province did provide equality regarding the right to vote for all males at the age of 21 years. This was vital for the Elgin sojourners’ in controlling their own destinies and that of their families. Wilberforce did not vote because they either did not meet the requirements to vote or residency rules which permitted residents to vote. By not having a say in their local government, Wilberforce was left helpless. In seeing the success white Canadians had in denying Wilberforce settlers from voting, white Canadians seized on the opportunity to deny

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid, 124-125.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid, 125.
the Elgin sojourners’ their right to vote in the province upcoming elections. The difference between the Wilberforce settlers’ and the Elgin sojourners’ is that Elgin fought back. Elgin promptly got a judge to restore their right to vote. They were well-versed in their rights and they fought to exercise their dutiful right to participate in local elections.\footnote{Sharon A. Roger Hepburn, \textit{Crossing the Border: A Free Black Community in Canada} (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1966), 23.}

Sojourners’ received justice in Canada, much more than they would have received in the United States. The fact that the sojourners’ in Chatham fought for what they believed was their right to vote, the sojourners had in essence assimilated into Canadian society and had become a part of a social fabric in which they would eventually go on to survive and flourish.\footnote{Ibid, 23-24.}

As both settlements experienced racism both in the United States and Canada, their experiences differ in that Wilberforce was affected by the negative attitudes that racism exerted on its victims’. Racism creates mental weaknesses in their victims’ which can cripple a victim’s ability to rise from the ashes to succeed in life.\footnote{Joseph Mensah, \textit{Black Canadians: History, Experiences, Social Conditions} (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2002), 39.} Wilberforce knew no other way but, to rely on the Canadian government and its citizens which led to wide-spread resentment among Canadians. On the other hand, sojourners from Elgin were well educated and understood their legal rights and appropriately exercise their rights when needed. Armed with the knowledge of how their local government worked, the ability to work and earn a decent income and have their children adequately educated fundamentally changed the outcome of Elgin. Under the tutelage of Revered King, Elgin succeeded in becoming the Buxton Mission, community specifically started by and for black emigrants in Upper Canada. Wilberforce did not have the leadership that Elgin had and this contributed to either the downfall or success of each settlement.\footnote{Ibid, 39-40.}
The role of religion played an integral part in the Elgin settlement founding principles. King being a Presbyterian minister, implored his sojourners’ to exercise faith in the Almighty God, not to engage in the excess of sins and forego the behavior manifested by revelers. King was an upright and moral man and he expected his sojourners’ to exhibit like behavior. On the other hand, Wilberforce was the complete opposite of Elgin, the settlers’ did not practice religion and that Canadians looked down on this. King understood that whites both in the United States and particularly Canada considered blacks to be “bestial and brutish.” Wilberforce fed into this scenario of animalistic behavior. Unfortunately, this gave the impression that all blacks behaved as animals and therefore should be treated accordingly. Furthermore, giving Canadians the impression that blacks were not capable of assimilating into Canadian society was that Africans were Muslims. Christianity was the major religion throughout North America and Christianity was considered superior to Islam and it would be the responsibility of Christians to convert the “savages” into Christians. King’s sojourners embraced Christianity and lived their lives accordingly. This promoted cohesiveness within the Elgin community promoting continuity and a sense of belonging. Wilberforce brought none of these traits to Canada.

In today’s society, blacks in America are still looked down upon and viewed by whites and other members of society as lazy and unintelligent. Though conditions have improved, far too many blacks still depend in large numbers upon government assistance. Clearly, there are factors that are out of the control of blacks such as systemic racism and injustice through the judicial system. However, there are things that blacks in America can do to soften the blows of injustice as racism works its way through societal changes. As each generation becomes tolerate

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137 Ibid, 16.
138 Ibid, 15-16.
of the other, blacks should focus on the importance of acquiring an education, providing a stable home life for their children, reduce the use of drugs and alcohol, participate in their local and state governments, embrace one’s ethnicity but, assimilate into American society and embrace its values and encourage their children to get in touch with their spirituality. By embracing these factors, blacks can continue to contribute to the success of not only their community but the country at large. Each race that has immigrated to America has contributed something to America’s identity, academically and culturally. Blacks, Irish, Italians, Indians, Jews, Africans and Arabs have pursued the American Dream of free expression and peacefully live out and fulfill their dreams. Instead, Wilberforce left a legacy of poverty and perpetual distress.

Elgin’s legacy was the opposite of Wilberforce. The sojourners journeyed into a foreign country and though not an easy journey or transition, the sojourners brimmed with knowledge and a desire to be free while embracing the Canadian way. They learn to adapt and adjust all that there was to learn about their new homeland. They built their homes and schools for their children to learn in. They started businesses which became successful. They entered into business dealings with white Canadians. Importantly, the men from Elgin exercised their right to vote and participated in their province government. This is the legacy Elgin left behind for their descendants. Though most of the sojourners left Elgin at the conclusion of the Civil War, a remnant of them remained and continued to enjoy the freedom and lifestyle that only one can dream of. A number of African-Americans have improved their lives dramatically by improving their standard of living since the passage of the Civil Rights Bill of 1965. It continues to be a struggle for many blacks to break from a cycle of poverty and to enter the middle class and go beyond. Afro-Canadians have fared better because of the equality of Canadians laws which balanced the treatment of most Canadians. Afro-Canadians enjoy a progressive governmental
agenda that encourages the acceptance of people regardless of their race, gender, religion, or ethnicity. It is much easier to assimilate into Canadian society than it is in America. Canada has never been a Utopia. However, Canadians are more welcoming than Americans. In lieu of recent elections in both countries, one country divides its citizens by race and religion whereas; the other country encourages and welcomes refugees regardless of their race or religion. This too is part of Elgin’s legacy to the many Afro-Canadians that have come after it.

It is interesting to note that at one time America opened its doors to the poor, hopeless, and those seeking to start anew. How times have changed, where Canada is now seen as the welcoming country and the United States, the isolationist country retreading from the international stage. Both settlements are intertwined at various times in history and had embarked upon different trajectories. Wilberforce became an abject failure, Elgin a success. The causes that led to the demise and triumphant of each settlement can teach us lessons in determination, discipline and the desire to belong.
CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION

The importance of the slave settlements has not all been lost to obscurity. The legacies that Wilberforce and Elgin left behind remind us of the struggles blacks endured in the United States and Canada. Throughout their travels and adversities, blacks rose to conquer their own fears and as the Wilberforce settlers unfortunately did not triumph. They did try, though, so we could say that they drew upon whatever strength they had to try to succeed, ultimately receiving the final victory of living their lives as they chose, controlling their own destiny and experiencing freedom.

Wilberforce proved to have many challenges that in the end doomed its ability to thrive in Canada. Despite all of the assistance given to Wilberforce, the inability of residents to form a lasting community - one that could have been a shining example to the world in which blacks could have lived independently on their own - only reinforced the idea to whites in Canada and in the United States alike that blacks could not function intelligently without being under the authority of whites. The contrast between the failure of Wilberforce and the immense success of Elgin proved that each settlement would diverge onto different trajectories in creating their legacies. Elgin was proof, too, that Blacks were expected to be under the authority of whites, as King was white and very much in charge.

The variables that are involved require insight into the inadequacies of Wilberforce and its leader, James C. Brown. Wilberforce can be compared with the foresight of Elgin’s leader, Revered William King and his ability to harness his energies into organizing his sojourners into a prosperous community, a community that would go on to survive through the 21st century. With the proper training and guidance, Elgin stood out as the shining star among all other settlements. In what was once thought of as unthinkable, Revered King turned his group of former slaves into
model citizens of Canada. Through perseverance, dedication and hard work, Elgin’s success could be contributed to King’s ability to educate and train his sojourners into prosperous land owners. According to Ullman, King noted:

“From that time forward all opposition both to me and the coloured people ceased. They were now clothed with political power and rising fast both in a social and moral point of view.”

As Ullman mentioned, King knew that the sojourners were becoming aware of their role within the Canadian political system and had begun to view it as key to controlling their own destiny within the country. The Buxton Mission was known as the “Negro Capital” in Kent County. Additionally, Buxton was one of the most integrated regions in Canada. Here lies the obvious difference between Wilberforce and Elgin. Members within the Elgin settlement were allowed to control their own futures by building a community that embraced the Canadian social structure. Also, by maintaining moral standards, Canadians accepted the Elgin settlers to the point that the Buxton Mission School became integrated. By being politically savvy and maintaining their religious beliefs and aspiring to be viewed as socially acceptable throughout all of Kent County, the sojourners shinned as proof that if provided the opportunity to be liberated, blacks could succeed by controlling their own lives and contribute to Canada’s economy.

This is the significance of my research in demonstrating that if given the same opportunities as whites, blacks could flourish and be successful without relying on the Canadian government and its people for assistance. The Wilberforce community’s lack of discipline, morals and inept leadership doomed the settlement. Elgin on the other hand, with the proper

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140 Ibid, 194.
guidance of Revered King, embraced Canada’s way of life and quickly assimilated; forging a life only Canadians would understand that meshed with mainstream Canadian society.

Throughout my research, I have concluded that the variables that affected each settlement for better or worse are the same ones that continue to plague African-Americans today. Afro-Canadians have stood up to the challenge of racism and have understood the importance of acquiring an education, accepting the importance of hard work and adapting to the morals and principals of their homeland. These have proven to be the key components to the success of Afro-Canadians. Furthermore, the ability and willingness of white Canadians to confront and come to grips with their own racism has helped Canada, to embrace diversity. America, to this very day, is still plagued with systemic racism and until Americans come to terms with how to deal productively with eliminating racism, modern-day Wilberforce colonies (black communities) will continue to struggle within the United States. By refusing to acknowledge America’s legacy regarding racism and our inability to understand each other cultures, America will continue to repeat its ugly history of inequality and bigotry. Although far from perfect, America should look to Canada as an example on how to embrace multiculturalism.

The ultimate legacy Wilberforce and Elgin left behind affected African-Americans and Afro-Canadians in a uniquely different manner. After the settlers from Wilberforce left Canada, they returned to the United States disillusioned and dejected. They returned back to a life of meager means and to the only lifestyle they knew existed, a life of dependency. Wilberforce has had a profound impact upon African-Americans down to the 21st Century.

In today’s society, blacks in America are still looked down upon and viewed by whites and other members of society as lazy and unintelligent. Though conditions have improved, far too many blacks still depend in large numbers upon government assistance. Clearly, there are
factors that are out of the control of blacks such as systemic racism and injustice through the judicial system. However, there are things that blacks in America can do to soften the blows of injustice as racism works its way through societal changes. As each generation becomes tolerant of the other, blacks should focus on the importance of acquiring an education, providing a stable home life for their children, reduce the use of drugs and alcohol, participate in their local and state governments, embrace one’s ethnicity but, assimilate into American society and embrace its values and encourage their children to get in touch with their spirituality. By embracing these factors, blacks can continue to contribute to the success of not only their community but the country at large.
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