

“We had no desire to be set apart”: Forced Segregation of Black Students in Canada West Public Schools and Myths of British Egalitarianism

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The practice of school segregation in mid-nineteenth-century Canada West defied popular images of the province as a guardian of British moral and egalitarian ideals. African Canadians in Canada West found themselves excluded from public education or forced into segregation, practices that were against the spirit if not the letter of British and Canadian law. Education laws were changed to accommodate racism, while guardians of the education system tolerated illegal discriminatory practices. A number of historians have described the emergence of segregated racial schools in Canada West as a response to requests by black people to be separate; however, historical evidence contradicts this assertion. African Canadians in the mid-nineteenth century fought against segregation and refused to be set apart. Numerous petitions to the Education Department complained of exclusion from common schools and expressed desires for integration, not segregation. When black people did open their own schools, children of all ethnic backgrounds were welcome in these institutions.

La politique de ségrégation scolaire que l'on pratiquait dans l'Ouest canadien du milieu du XIX^e siècle contredit l'image populaire de gardienne des idéaux moraux et égalitaires britanniques que l'on se faisait de la province. Les Afro-Canadiens de l'Ouest canadien étaient privés d'enseignement public ou ségrégués, des pratiques qui allaient à l'encontre de l'esprit sinon de la lettre du droit britannique et canadien. Les lois sur l'enseignement ont été modifiées pour laisser place au racisme, tandis que les gardiens du système d'éducation toléraient des pratiques discriminatoires illicites. De l'avis de certains historiens, l'émergence d'écoles raciales ségréguées dans l'Ouest canadien faisait suite aux demandes des Noirs, désireux d'être séparés. Mais les données historiques contredisent cette affirmation. Les Afro-

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Canadiens du milieu du XIX^e siècle ont combattu la ségrégation et refusé qu'on les sépare. De nombreuses pétitions adressées au ministère de l'Éducation dénonçaient l'exclusion, préconisant l'intégration aux écoles ordinaires. Les écoles des Noirs étaient quant à elles ouvertes aux enfants de tous les horizons ethniques.

THE LEGEND of the Underground Railroad and the image of Canada as a promised land for American slaves have been pervasive in the Canadian imagination. From children's stories to television vignettes, Canada's proud heritage as a refuge for fugitive slaves, culminating in the arrival of up to 40,000 fugitives in Canada, is often told.¹ Little in this popular lore discusses the experiences of these people once they arrived in Canada. The discrimination they faced in their daily lives and their exclusion from social institutions such as churches and schools is for the most part ignored or misrepresented.

One facet of black Canadian history² that has not been well understood is education. When black education is discussed, the emergence of segregated schools is often presented as a response to requests by blacks to be separate. Although contemporary work in the area of African-Canadian history tends to emphasize the racist attitudes that allowed segregation in education, much of the scholarship still points to segregationist tendencies in the black commu-

1 See, for example, *The CRB Foundation Heritage Project: 60th Minute Commemorative Video: The Underground Railroad*, CRB Foundation, 1998, videocassette; *Canada: A People's History*, episode 8, videocassette A, *The Great Enterprise*, prod. and dir. John Williamson, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2001. The black population in the mid-nineteenth century was considerably more diverse than popular estimations suggest, consisting of a mix of fugitive slaves and free immigrants, as well as former Upper Canadian slaves and long-established loyalists who had lived in the province since the late eighteenth century. In 1852 the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada estimated that the black population of Canada West was 30,000. Cited in Benjamin Drew, *A Northside View of Slavery: The Refugee: or the Narrative of Fugitive Slaves in Canada. Related by Themselves, with an Account of the History and Condition of the Colored Population of Upper Canada* (1856; Toronto: Coles, 1972), p. v. In 1855 Samuel Ringgold Ward suggested that there were between 35,000 and 40,000 blacks in the province; see Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro* (London: John Snow, 1855), p. 154. Recently, Michael Wayne has argued that the population has been overestimated and was likely between 22,500 and 23,000 in 1861; see Wayne, "The Black Population of Canada West on the Eve of the American Civil War: A Reassessment Based on the Manuscript Census of 1861", *Histoire sociale/ Social History*, vol. 28, no. 56 (November 1995), p. 470.

2 Following current practice, I use the terms "African Canadian" and "black" interchangeably to refer to the historic community of immigrants of African heritage (the vast majority of whom came from the United States) and their descendants in Canada. See James W. St. G. Walker, "African Canadians", in Paul Robert Magocsi, ed., *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), pp. 139–176. Many of these people were of mixed descent and were identified as "Negroes", "coloured" people, "blacks", or "Africans" in nineteenth-century Canada West. I examine the relationships between these people and the dominant British-Canadian population in Canada West. The term "British Canadian" refers to Canadians of British descent, who arrived directly from the British Isles or who were descended from these emigrants and came to the Quebec colony (and later Upper Canada) via the Thirteen Colonies (later the United States). These people were racialized as "white". On racialization, see Timothy J. Stanley, "Why I Killed Canadian History: Towards an Anti-Racist History in Canada", *Histoire sociale/ Social History*, vol. 33, no. 65 (May 2000), pp. 95–103.

nity with very little evidence to support this assumption.³ A re-examination is warranted of historical evidence surrounding the introduction of the segregated racial schools clause in the *School Act* of 1850 and of historical interpretations regarding separate black education in Canada West. In addressing this question, this study thus speaks directly to the myth of Canada as a haven from racism.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Canada West saw itself as a proud province of the British Empire, in which the rights and privileges of all were guaranteed under the British constitution. Early colonists of British descent strove to re-create Upper Canada's government structures, institutions, and landscape in Britain's image. This rigid adherence to an established sense of identity in the face of a changing environment, combined with a language about cultural purity, has had a significant impact upon relations between British-Canadians and others who were not seen to be of the British race.⁴

British settlers believed that Canada, as part of the British Empire, was a moral example to all nations on earth.⁵ The abolition of slavery was seen as a moral victory for the Empire over the United States, and the fact that thousands of fugitive slaves fled to Canada via the Underground Railroad to live in freedom reinforced a sense of superiority among white citizens whose myths presented Canada as a land of freedom and equal opportunity by virtue of its British character. These stories of our origins continue to influence Canadians' image of ourselves. Popular histories of Ontario have tended to highlight the accomplishments of the British in the formation of this province with little recognition of the indispensable efforts of a diversity of immigrants from around the world. Until only recently, published histories of Ontario began with the settlement of Loyalists in the territory, with few references to Native peoples who made European exploration possible, or to French Canadians who entered the territory almost a century before the arrival of the British.⁶

3 Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, 2nd ed. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997); Walker, "African Canadians", p. 159; Claudette Knight, "Black Parents Speak: Education in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Canada West", *Ontario History*, vol. 89 (December 1997), p. 275; Susan E. Houston and Alison Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); J. Donald Wilson, "The Ryerson Years in Canada West", in J. Donald Wilson, Robert M. Stamp, and Louis Philippe Audet, eds., *Canadian Education: A History* (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), pp. 232–233; Donald G. Simpson, "Negroes in Ontario from Early Times to 1870" (PhD dissertation, University of Western Ontario, 1971).

4 On notions of cultural purity in Canada, see Jennifer Reid, "A Society Made by History": The Mythic Source of Identity in Canada", *Canadian Review of American Studies*, vol. 27 (1997), pp. 1–19.

5 William Westfall suggests that a shared attachment to a British Protestant moral code was the main basis for social stability in Victorian Canada West. Westfall, *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), p. 201.

6 See Gerald M. Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years, 1784–1841* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1963); Ontario Historical Society, *Profiles of a Province: Studies in the History of Ontario. A Collection of Essays Commissioned by the Ontario Historical Society to Commemorate the Centennial of*

These popular histories articulate what it means to be a Canadian for a certain segment of the population. They function as myths in that they describe how contemporary reality has come into being and provide a sense of meaning, orientation, and identity for a people.⁷ As Canadian historian and self-proclaimed myth-maker Arthur Lower suggests, “[H]istory begins in myth.”⁸ Myths in this sense are not fictional tales but stories of origins formulated in relation to reality. Historical narratives claim to have a purely spatial and temporal basis; however, any understanding of human origins is often legitimated by some sense of transcendent power or sacred structure. In nineteenth-century Ontario, for example, the British Empire took on a sacred significance for many who derived their identity from their British heritage. English-Canadian leaders such as John Strachan saw the Empire as an instrument of God and believed that, as part of the Empire, Canada had a significant role to play in making the earth “the garden of the Lord.”⁹ Symbols of Britain such as the monarchy, British law, and British institutions were manifestations of a timeless, transcendent, sacred reality in relation to which many Canadians formulated a sense of who they were.

Canada West modelled its own laws and institutions upon those of Britain. The public education system promoted loyalty to Britain and perpetuated fundamental British-Canadian myths of moral superiority and universality. Egerton Ryerson, the influential superintendent of schools for Canada West from 1844 to 1876, aimed to “devise and develop a system of sound universal education on Christian principles, imbued with a spirit of affectionate loyalty to the Throne and attachment to the unity of the Empire.”¹⁰ In 1847 he discouraged the use of “foreign books” in the schools because they were “both Anti-British and unpatriotic.”¹¹ Instead, he proposed that all Canada West schools

Ontario (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1967). Several histories romanticize the Loyalist heritage of the province. See *Loyal She Remains: A Pictorial History of Ontario* (Toronto: United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada, 1984); Charles J. Humber, ed., *Allegiance: The Ontario Story* (Mississauga, Ont.: Heirloom, 1991).

7 Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), p. 5.

8 Arthur R. M. Lower, cited in Welf H. Heick, ed., *History and Myth: Arthur Lower and the Making of Canadian Nationalism* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1975), p. 1.

9 Westfall, *Two Worlds*, p. 5. According to British missionary Samuel Wilberforce, the British Empire was a gift of God destined to spread across the earth: “what works of God might not be worked through it!” Wilberforce also described the Empire as timeless, in that it would live eternally through the Christian nations it founded and nurtured. See “Sermon by William Wilberforce, ‘The Conditions of Missionary Success’, 1850”, in John Wolffe, ed., *Religion in Victorian Britain*, vol. 5: *Culture and Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 306–307.

10 Address to Lord Dufferin, cited in J. George Hodgins, *Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada, from the Passing of the Constitutional Act of 1791, to the Close of Reverend Doctor Ryerson's Administration of the Education Department in 1876. Volume XXIV: 1872* (Toronto: Warwick and Rutter, 1908), p. 70. Ryerson expressed a similar sentiment in 1846 in his “Report on a System of Public Instruction”; see Hodgins, *Documentary History, Volume VI: 1846* (1899), p. 142.

11 Ryerson to George Hendry, Superintendent of Common Schools for Brock District, February 1, 1847, in Hodgins, *Documentary History, Volume VI: 1846*, p. 284.

begin to use the Irish National Readers, which advocated British loyalism. According to Ryerson, the emerging school system would be “the indirect but powerful instrument of British Constitutional Government”.¹²

Ryerson boasted of the merits of a Christian and moral education to be provided to all Canadians without discrimination. Member of Parliament Malcolm Cameron, who proposed a School Bill in 1849 allowing for segregated schools, nonetheless argued that all men were “free and equal” under the British constitution. Cameron claimed to have “ever advocated the perfect equality of all mankind, and the right of all to every civil and religious privilege without regard to creed or color”.¹³ The lived reality of segregation in public education defied these mythic ideals of egalitarianism and Christian morality associated with a British heritage.

Many African-American immigrants originally looked to Canada as a refuge from the discrimination they faced in the United States. Samuel Ringgold Ward, black leader and proud British gentleman, suggested that “there is no country in the world so much hated by slaveholders, as Canada; nor is there any country so much beloved and sought for, by the slaves ... [because] it is a free country.”¹⁴ According to the North American Convention of Colored Freedmen held September 10, 1851, “[T]he British government was the most favourable in the civilized world to the people of colour and was thereby entitled to the entire confidence of the Convention.”¹⁵ In her plea to American fugitive slaves to immigrate to Canada West, the young Mary Ann Shadd praised the British Empire and asserted, “[T]here is no legal discrimination whatever affecting coloured immigrants in Canada, nor from any cause whatever are their privileges sought to be abridged.”¹⁶

By mid-century, between 20,000 and 40,000 black people had settled among British and French Canadian colonists, primarily in the rural areas of the southwestern and Niagara peninsulas of Canada West.¹⁷ Significant concentrations of African Canadians lived in municipalities along the Detroit River and Lake Erie shores such as Amherstburg, Fort Malden, Sandwich, Anderdon, Maidstone, Mersea, Gosfield Colchester, Harrow, and New Canaan from the early nineteenth century. The southwestern shore of Lake Ontario, including the Niagara region, St. Catharines, and Hamilton, was another important area of settlement for black immigrants. Large numbers of African Canadians had also settled further inland in towns such as London and Brantford, in and around Chatham, and as far north as Oro, on the northern

12 Cited in Clara Thomas, *Ryerson of Upper Canada* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1969), p. 99.

13 Chatham-Kent Black Historical Society, Heritage Room, “Correspondence between the Hon. Malcolm Cameron and the colored stock holders of the Elgin Association”, February 21, 1850.

14 Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro*, p. 158.

15 *Provincial Freeman*, September 10, 1851.

16 Mary Ann Shadd, *A Plea for Emigration Or, Notes of Canada West*, ed. Richard Almonte (1852; Toronto: Mercury, 1998), pp. 29, 74.

17 See note 1 for population estimates.

shore of Lake Simcoe. By 1861 an estimated 40 per cent of Canada West's black population had been born in the province,¹⁸ and, like other Canadians, many African Canadians believed strongly in the egalitarian potential of British law. They thus fought for their rights to equal participation in British-Canadian institutions. The Committee for the Colored People of Windsor asserted in 1859 that, as "Her Majesty's subjects", we "desire to share the common blessings of a Free Government in the education of our rising generation ... according to the established Laws of the country of our adoption and choice".¹⁹

Despite legal prohibition against discrimination based on religion, race, or language, however, many white Canadians opposed the settlement of black people in or near their communities and refused them entry into public schools. Edwin Larwill, school commissioner in Raleigh Township, editor of the *Chatham Journal* and local politician, led a racist movement in Chatham opposing school aid for African Canadians in 1841. In 1848 his anti-black resolution was supported by the Western District Council, which represented the counties of Essex, Kent, and Lambton, the most important areas of black settlement in Canada West.²⁰ A year later Larwill led opposition in and around Chatham to the planned Elgin settlement southwest of the town in Raleigh. He argued, "the Negro is a distinct species of the human family ... far inferior to the European.... Amalgamation is as disgusting to the eye, as it is immoral in its tendencies and all good men will discountenance it."²¹

Walter McCrae, a citizen of Chatham, was present at this meeting. He asserted that the people of the town abhorred slavery and that "every member of the human family is entitled to certain rights and privileges, and nowhere on earth, are they better secured, enjoyed, or more highly valued, than in Canada". At the same time, he argued that "the presence of the Negro among [whites] is an annoyance" and "amalgamation, its necessary and hideous attendant, is an evil which requires to be checked ... [We do not want a] horde of ignorant slaves in the township of Raleigh."²² According to George Duck, chair of the board of school trustees for Chatham, school segregation was supported by the "most respectable" on the board, "whose moderation ... and reasonable view of the question is gratefully acknowledged".²³

18 For an analysis of 1861 census data, see Wayne, "The Black Population of Canada West", p. 473.

19 Archives of Ontario [hereafter AO], Ontario Department of Education, Incoming Correspondence [hereafter Incoming Education Correspondence], RG 2-12, vol. 26, Committee for the Colored People of Windsor to Ryerson, March 2, 1859.

20 "The Western District Council on the Common School Act of 1846" in Hodgins, *Documentary History, Volume VII: 1847, 48* (1900), pp. 123, 124.

21 Cited in Simpson, "Negroes in Ontario", p. 335.

22 McCrae also argued that, when the British Empire abolished slavery, it proved itself as a moral example to all nations on earth. McCrae, "Address to the Inhabitants of Canada", recorded proceedings of "A Public Meeting Being held in Chatham", *Chatham Chronicle*, November 1849 [Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions, #43356].

23 AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, vol. 12, Chair, Board of School Trustees, Chatham to Ryerson, March 30, 1852.

Many Chatham citizens were able to maintain a claim to egalitarian values in the face of their racist practices because black people were presented as morally inferior and thus not subject to the same laws as white people. Across Canada West, white Canadians articulated fears that black children would prove to be a bad moral influence upon their own children if both were allowed to attend the same schools. Giving his opinion on the reasons behind the introduction of the law allowing segregated schools, Chief Justice Beverly Robinson suggested in 1854 that white parents felt “an apprehension that the children of the coloured people, many of whom have but lately escaped from a state of slavery may be, in respect to morals and habits, unfortunately worse trained than the white children are in general, and that their children might suffer from the effects of bad example”.²⁴ White people expressed fears that “African barbarism” might “triumph over Anglo-Saxon civilization” if black children were allowed to attend schools with white children.²⁵ In a similar fashion, white citizens of London expressed their concern in 1861 that blacks were “rude in speech, uncouth in manners and address and untidy in attire”. It was feared that they could have a negative influence upon other children, especially adolescent white girls, if they were to be admitted into the senior classes at London’s Central School.²⁶

Toronto was perhaps the one place where segregation in public education was never the norm. Black doctors graduated from the city’s medical schools and Emaline Shadd, Mary Ann’s sister, received top honours from the Toronto Normal School in 1855.²⁷ Egerton Ryerson attributes this inclusive spirit to the “good sense and Christian and British feeling” of the citizens of Toronto,²⁸ but the reasons for integration in Toronto are perhaps better understood in more practical terms.

According to Daniel G. Hill, author of one of the few studies on Toronto’s black community prior to the late nineteenth century, an affluent population of African Canadians in the city had immigrated over a long period of time and had established a strong infrastructure to support new immigrants. Black immigrants from the United States arrived in a slow and steady migration by mid-century, never by sudden influx, and found work easily in the city’s growing economy.²⁹ Some of Canada’s most vocal anti-slavery activists lived in Toronto and were opposed to racial segregation. George Brown, edi-

24 “Re: *Dennis Hill v. the School Trustees of Camden and Zone*”, *Upper Canada Queen’s Bench Reports*, vol. 11, p. 578 [hereafter *Hill v. Camden and Zone*].

25 AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, vol. 18, Philip Smith to Ryerson, August 1, 1854.

26 *London Free Press*, July 22, 1861.

27 Daniel G. Hill, *The Freedom Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada* (Agincourt, Ont.: Book Society of Canada, 1981), p. 158.

28 AO, Outgoing Education Correspondence, RG 2–8, vol. 7, Ryerson to Dennis Hill, November 30, 1852.

29 Daniel G. Hill, “Negroes in Toronto, 1793–1865”, *Ontario History*, vol. 55, no. 2 (June 1963), pp. 76–84.

tor of the *Globe*, ironically a vehement anti-Catholic as well, had an important influence on preventing the introduction of segregation into the city's institutions.

In spite of Toronto's good record on school integration, racism was not completely absent. As one man reported to the American abolitionist S. G. Howe, "I must say that, leaving the law out of the question, I find that prejudice here is equally strong as on the other side [in the United States]."³⁰ The vast majority of black settlers lived in one section of the city, St. John's Ward.³¹ As a result, policies of school segregation may not have seemed necessary if large numbers of black students were together in the same school section, already separated from white students by virtue of district boundaries. In addition, African Canadians made up only 2 per cent of Toronto's total population in 1854, compared with between 20 to 30 per cent of some towns in the southwestern regions of Canada West;³² it is thus not surprising that issues of segregated schooling were less pronounced in Toronto and more of an issue in communities with larger concentrations of African Canadians.

In most Canada West towns, the majority of white parents as well as school trustees were opposed to integration. If black children were allowed into the schools, they were usually forced to sit on separate benches.³³ More often than not, however, black children were not admitted into publicly funded elementary schools (known as common schools) at all, and little concern was shown for their education. In Amherstburg, it was said the parents of white children would "sooner ... cut their children's heads off and throw them into the road side ditch" than send their children to school with "niggers".³⁴ In 1847 the London Auxiliary Bible Society reported that, in spite of the fact that blacks in London paid the school tax, "[I]f any Coloured child enters a school, the white children are withdrawn, the teachers are painfully obliged to decline, and the Coloured people ... yield to an injustice which they are too weak to redress."³⁵ In towns such as Colchester

30 S. G. Howe, *The Refugees from Slavery in Canada West: Report to the Freedmen's Inquiry Commission* (1864; New York: Arno Press and the *New York Times*, 1969), p. 45.

31 Adrienne Shadd, Afua Cooper, and Karolyn Smardz Frost, *The Underground Railroad: Next Stop, Toronto!* (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2002), p. 33.

32 According to Benjamin Drew, the peak population of blacks in Toronto was 1,000 out of a total population of 47,000 in 1854. In Amherstburg there were approximately 400 to 500 blacks out of a total population of 2,000; in Colchester, 450 blacks out of a total population of 1,500; and in Chatham, 800 blacks out of a total population of 4,000. Drew, *A Northside View of Slavery*, pp. 94, 234, 348, 367.

33 This was common practice in Hamilton and in West Flamboro before black children were excluded from the town's common schools altogether. AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, vol. 4, Patrick Thornton to Alexander McNab, November 26, 1844; vol. 20, James Douglas to Ryerson, February 3, 1856; vol. 25, Jefferson Lightfoot to Ryerson, October 5, 1858.

34 Isaac Rice *et al.* to Egerton Ryerson, cited in Hodgins, *Documentary History, Volume VI: 1846*, p. 294.

35 AO, J. George Hodgins Fonds, F1207, London Auxiliary Bible Society to William H. Draper, March 27, 1847.

and Sandwich, trustees divided school districts to avoid contact between the races.³⁶

These efforts to segregate black students were blatantly against the laws in force prior to 1850. The *School Act* of 1843 clearly states: “it shall not be lawful for such Trustees, or for the Chief, or other, Superintendent of Common Schools, or for any Teacher to exclude from any Common School or from the benefit of education therein, the children of any class or description of persons resident within the School district to which such common school may belong.”³⁷ The Department of Education received several appeals to intervene against segregation, and in response superintendent Egerton Ryerson admitted that exclusion was “at variance with the letter and spirit of the law, and ... with the principles and spirit of British Institutions, which deprive no human being of any benefit ... on account of the colour of his skin”.³⁸ However, Ryerson continued to tolerate illegal discrimination in the schools, claiming there was nothing he could do to stop it.

Prior to Ryerson’s appointment as Superintendent of Education, the Department of Education did intervene in one case and was successful in pressuring trustees to allow black children into common schools. A group of African Canadians from Hamilton petitioned Governor General Sir Charles Metcalfe in 1843 for access to common schools. Metcalfe took an interest in the case and contacted the Assistant Superintendent of Education for Canada West, Robert Murray, instructing him to resolve the problem. As a result of pressure from the higher echelons of government, the Hamilton Board of Police, which was responsible for managing the schools, assured Murray that “it would not be advisable to yield to [prejudice] ... the law ought to be enforced without distinction of colour.”³⁹ The law was enforced.

Although black children were still required to sit on separate benches in many of Hamilton’s common schools and opposition to integration remained strong, there were no further complaints from Hamilton regarding exclusion from the schools. Two of Hamilton’s influential political leaders, member of Parliament Isaac Buchanan and principal Archibald McCullum of Hamilton High School, were sympathetic to the integrationist cause.⁴⁰ The leadership of these men appears to have been an important factor in ensuring that Hamilton schools remained integrated.

36 AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, vol. 4, John Cowan (Sandwich) to Alexander McNab, October 15, 1845; Harrow and Colchester South Township School Area Board, *A Story of Public Schools in Colchester South Township* (Harrow: School Board, 1966), p. 8.

37 *An Act for the Establishment and Maintenance of Common Schools in Upper Canada*, section 44, clause 7, in Hodgins, *Documentary History, Volume IV: 1841–1843* (1897), p. 258.

38 AO, Outgoing Education Correspondence, RG 2–8, vol. 3, Ryerson to Isaac Rice *et al.*, March 5, 1846.

39 AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, vol. 2, Petition of the Coloured Inhabitants of Hamilton to Sir Charles Metcalfe, October 15, 1843; Outgoing Education Correspondence, RG 2–8, vol. 1, Robert Murray to George S. Tiffany, October 19, 1843; Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, vol. 2, Tiffany to Murray, November 9, 1843.

40 Howe, *The Refugees from Slavery*, pp. 42–43.

In other regions of Canada West, school segregation was the norm. Few influential white leaders in the Western and Niagara peninsulas spoke out against the exclusion of African Canadians from common schools. Egerton Ryerson, who replaced Robert Murray as assistant superintendent in 1844, did not effectively intervene in any cases of exclusion. In practice, the provincial Board of Education tolerated and even encouraged segregation after 1844. Ryerson, who advocated a strong central authority in matters of public education, declared himself powerless before local trustees' decisions to exclude blacks from their schools. In response to complaints from London, Ryerson claimed, "I have done what I could to remedy [this problem], but with only partial success. The caste of colour in this case is stronger than the law."⁴¹ There is no evidence in the Department of Education correspondence, however, that Ryerson involved himself in this conflict at all. Alexander McNab, acting superintendent during Ryerson's international educational tour of 1844–1845, went so far as to encourage racially segregated schools when he suggested to a Sandwich trustee in 1845 that segregated districts would be the "remedy of the evil" of blacks' "forcing" themselves into white schools.⁴²

Admission to common schools was an important goal among African Canadians in Canada West. An 1841 report to Lord Sydenham suggested that "the cause of first complaint of our coloured men is the difficulty they experience in procuring admission for their children into common schools".⁴³ Faced with exclusion from the common school in Amherstburg, a group of African Canadians worked with the missionary Isaac Rice to start their own public school, open to students of all backgrounds, in 1846, and the school trustees made numerous appeals for their share of the government grant. African and French Canadian populations of Amherstburg lived in close proximity and were forced to compete for a school in the same district; it would seem that the municipality would not allow for more than one public school aside from the institution already established for white, English-speaking citizens of the town.⁴⁴

Where black children were excluded from public education, black teachers often took the initiative to start their own schools. In Sandwich and Windsor, Mary Bibb and Mary Ann Shadd opened schools for children who did not have access to public education.⁴⁵ While some received a small amount of

41 AO, J. George Hodgins Fonds, F1207, p. 12, Ryerson to W. H. Draper, April 12, 1847.

42 AO, Outgoing Education Correspondence, RG 2–8, vol. 2, Alexander McNab to John Cowan, November 5, 1845.

43 National Archives of Canada, Colonial Office 42/478, Original Correspondence, Secretary of State, Upper Canada: Dispatches, E. de St-Remy to Lord Sydenham, April 5, 1841.

44 AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, vol. 5, Rice *et al.* to Ryerson, January 23, 1846; Peden to Ryerson, February 23, 1846; Outgoing Education Correspondence, RG 2–8, vol. 3, Ryerson to Peden, March 5, 1846.

45 Afua Cooper, "Black Teachers in Canada West, 1850–1870: A History" (MA thesis, University of Toronto, 1991), pp. 29–45, and "Black Women and Work in Nineteenth Century Canada West: Black Woman Teacher Mary Bibb", in Peggy Bristow, ed., *"We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up": Essays in African Canadian Women's History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 143–170.

assistance from American philanthropists, most black teachers in Canada West were poorly paid; their schools were largely under-funded and most were short-lived.⁴⁶

Many African Canadians benefited on a short-term basis from missionary efforts in education. The American Missionary Association sporadically funded schools in the Dawn settlement (British American Institute), St. Catharines, Amherstburg, and some small rural communities in the Amherstburg area during the 1840s and into the 1850s. By 1853, however, this mission, which sought to serve both black and white children, was in decline, with only one school left in operation.⁴⁷ Several black children attended Colonial Church and School Society mission schools in London, Chatham, Hamilton, Amherstburg, and Sandwich during the 1850s, but most of these schools lasted only a few years. In London, the CCSS school actually served a larger number of white students than black.⁴⁸ The Baptist Free Mission also operated a school in Chatham for black students who had been forced to attend segregated schools since 1840.⁴⁹ Some mission schools faced opposition from African Canadian leaders both as a result of the patronizing attitude of some white missionaries and because the schools were thought to promote segregation.⁵⁰

The Buxton mission school, a private institution established at the Elgin settlement for black people at Raleigh by Rev. William King, was open to all children regardless of race. Because the quality of instruction, given by graduates of Knox Presbyterian College in Toronto, was far superior to that of schools in neighbouring Chatham, by 1851 almost all the white students from the common school, run by King's nemesis Edwin Larwill, had joined the black students in Buxton.⁵¹

Indeed, the vast majority of private schools established by or for African Canadians were open to black, white, and aboriginal students who wanted to attend. These schools were often opened as an alternative to the strict segregation imposed in government schools. Mary Bibb, who worked for a government school in Sandwich for a short time, opened a private school in

46 Cooper, "Black Teachers", pp. 64–92.

47 Hildreth Houston Spencer, "To Nestle in the Mane of the British Lion: A History of Canadian Black Education, 1820 to 1870" (PhD dissertation, Northwestern University, 1970), pp. 159–177; William H. Pease and Jane H. Pease, *Black Utopia: Negro Communal Experiments in America* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1963), p. 64.

48 Christopher Bruce Elliott, "Black Education in Canada West: A Parochial Solution to a Secular Problem, Rev. M. M. Dillon and the Colonial Church and School Society" (MA thesis, Wilfrid Laurier University, 1989), pp. 42–47, 80; Spencer, "To Nestle in the Mane of the British Lion", p. 126.

49 Harriett Chatters, "Negro Education in Kent County to 1890" (MA thesis, Howard University, 1956), p. 3; Victor Lauriston, "Early Schools Were Bunched", *Chatham Daily News*, May 1, 1963.

50 The *Provincial Freeman* called for the black population to boycott mission schools in 1854: "Keep your children away from the colored African school and the plan must fail." *Provincial Freeman*, September 16 and 23, 1854.

51 "Schools in Canada", *Voice of the Fugitive*, July 18, 1852; Victor Ullman, *Look to the North Star: A Life of William King* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 148–149.

Windsor that was to be “free to all, irrespective of color”.⁵² By 1855, 7 of her 46 students were white.⁵³ According to Mary Ann Shadd, “[T]he colored common schools have more of a complexional character than the private, which, with no exception I have heard of, are open to all.”⁵⁴ Schools managed by African Canadians were rarely, if ever, exclusive. Instead, the vast majority of black educators in Canada West looked to promote integration.

At the same time as African Canadians sought integrated education, public education officials imposed segregation upon an unwilling black population. By 1850 the Council of Public Instruction had introduced education laws that accommodated racist tendencies. The *School Act* of 1850 added a provision to the already established separate schools clause allowing for separate schools based on race. Section XIX reads: “It shall be the duty of the Municipal Council of any Township, and of the Board of School Trustees of any City, Town or incorporated Village, on the application, in writing, of twelve, or more, resident heads of families, to authorize the establishment of one, or more, Separate schools for Protestants, Roman Catholics, or Coloured people.”⁵⁵

Perhaps because Canada West’s Roman Catholic leaders had traditionally supported separate denominational schools, historians have tended to assume that African Canadians were also of a similar mind regarding separate racial schools. Robin Winks, whose foundational work is a significant resource for an understanding of racism in black education, argues that the black community was divided over the issue of segregation. Although some of his conclusions regarding a segregationist/integrationist dichotomy have been criticized,⁵⁶ his suggestion that certain African Canadians promoted segregated public schooling has not been questioned in historical scholarship. Winks suggests that a significant event highlighting divisions regarding segregation in education was the attempt by the Elgin Association for official incorporation in 1850. This association managed the Elgin settlement at Raleigh, also known as Buxton. According to Winks, the Elgin Association promoted segregation, and this caused much controversy in the black community.⁵⁷ It must be kept in mind, however, that, although the Buxton school was set up primarily for black children who were not welcome in common schools, a significant number of white students also attended classes in Bux-

52 Mary Bibb to Horace Mann, January 20, 1853, cited in Cooper, “Black Teachers”, p. 38.

53 Drew, *A Northside View of Slavery*, pp. 321–322.

54 Shadd, *A Plea for Immigration*, p. 66. Several white students attended the schools at which Shadd taught. Hill, *The Freedom Seekers*, p. 156.

55 J. George Hodgins, *Historical and Other Papers and Documents Illustrative of the Educational System of Ontario, 1853–1868* (Toronto: L. K. Cameron, 1911), p. 213.

56 For example, Afua Cooper argues that historical understandings of Canada’s black community have over-emphasized a segregationist/integrationist dichotomy and, as a result, have misinterpreted certain African-Canadian motivations. Cooper, “‘Doing Battle in Freedom’s Cause’: Henry Bibb, Abolitionism, Race Uplift, and Black Manhood, 1842–1854” (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2000), pp. 22–27.

57 Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, p. 366.

ton. The petition to incorporate the association was made by Skeffington Connor, a white lawyer and member of a racially mixed board. It cannot be concluded, then, that the Elgin Association represented “separatist” tendencies among black people in Canada West.

Some historians, likely influenced by Winks’s assumptions about segregationist tendencies, have suggested that the 1850 provision for separate racial schools was adopted as a result of pressure from black interest groups. Susan Houston and Alison Prentice’s *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth Century Ontario* is the only general history of education to discuss black education in any detail, and the work provides a sympathetic portrayal of the experiences of black students in Ontario schools. Nonetheless, the authors are incorrect in suggesting that the introduction of the segregated school clause of 1850 came at the request of black parents and was against the better judgement of government officials, who preferred integration.⁵⁸ J. Donald Wilson makes a similar argument, although he asserts that Ryerson was ultimately responsible for segregated school legislation.⁵⁹ Houston and Prentice make reference to appeals by black parents that their children be admitted into common schools, as well as to legislative debates concerning black education, but they base their conclusions about black demands for separate education on an article in the *Voice of the Fugitive* by Henry Bibb. Bibb lamented that a request for separate racial schools had been made “not ... by the intelligent portion of the colored population, but by a lot of ignoramuses who were made tools of, and who knew not what they were doing”.⁶⁰ Bibb’s explanations of the history of separate schooling are not entirely accurate,⁶¹ and to base an entire argument on Bibb’s claims, especially without other supporting evidence, places too much weight on his interpretations. Other primary sources cited by Houston and Prentice, Wilson, and Winks include petitions from black people complaining of exclusion and supporting admission into integrated schools. Not one of these petitions requests that the government allow for the establishment of separate schools based on race.

58 Houston and Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars*, pp. 298–300.

59 Wilson, “The Ryerson Years in Canada West”, in Wilson, Stamp, and Audet, eds., *Canadian Education*, p. 232.

60 *Voice of the Fugitive*, January 1, 1852.

61 Bibb suggested that the law allowing for separate schools was requested by some of “the colored people and the Catholics”. While it is true that, after legislation for separate denominational schools was originally introduced in 1841, Catholics in Canada West did lay claim to their right to establish these schools, Protestants were actually the most vocal supporters of the original legislation. See Wilson, “Education in Upper Canada: Sixty years of Change”, in Wilson, Stamp, and Audet, eds., *Canadian Education*, pp. 210–211. While Bibb acknowledged that some black people requested separate schools for whatever reason (perhaps because they “were made tools of”), it does not necessarily follow that the separate racial schools legislation of 1850 was introduced at the request of blacks. As he was incorrect in his assumption about Catholics, perhaps he was also incorrect in assuming that the law regarding separate racial schools came about as a response to black requests.

In contrast, support for separate schools among white leaders was quite strong. The archival records of the Education Department show that white local superintendents, government officials, and missionaries proposed the establishment of separate racial schools. Robert Peden, local superintendent for Amherstburg, felt that the only way to ensure education for black children was to establish school districts “not having a local boundary, and embracing a particular class of persons, such as the coloured people”.⁶² The London Auxiliary Bible Society was of a similar mind with Peden when it appealed for the establishment of separate schools for “coloured children”.⁶³ In 1848 the Western District Council sent a recommendation to Ryerson that the *School Act* be amended to allow for separate racial schools.⁶⁴ Thomas Hawkins, superintendent of Colchester, made the recommendation to the Council because he felt that black children were a burden on the school system and that separate schooling would be the best means of preventing them from “forcing themselves into the same schools with the white children”.⁶⁵

When first confronted with opposition to integration in public schools, Ryerson suggested that a law acknowledging the racist tendencies of Upper Canadians would be “a disgrace to our Legislature”. In his draft of the 1847 School Bill for cities and towns, he allowed trustees a broad base of power to “establish any kind or description of schools they may please”. This vague directive was deliberately left open to interpretation, so that trustees could “establish one or more schools for coloured children. Thus the best interests as well as the rights of the coloured people can be respected and promoted, and nothing insidious be admitted into the Statute book.”⁶⁶

After his tour of the Western District in 1848, Ryerson came to the conclusion that this newly introduced provision did not allow for the education of black children, and so he drafted another “authorizing each District council to establish one or more Schools for the children of Coloured people”.⁶⁷ This proposal became law in the 1850 *School Act*. Ryerson submitted this proposal “with extreme pain and regret”. He claimed to “have exerted all the power that I possessed, and employed all the persuasion I could command, but the prejudices and feelings of the people are stronger than law.”⁶⁸ As evidenced by his responses to appeals by African Canadians against exclusion and his correspondence with local school officials, however, Ryerson, unlike his predecessor Robert Murray, was more inclined to tolerate discrimination than to

62 AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, vol. 5, Peden to Ryerson, February 23, 1846.

63 AO, J. George Hodgins Fonds, F1207, London Auxiliary Bible Society to William H. Draper, March 27, 1847.

64 George Bullock, Warden of Western District Council to Ryerson, February 7, 1848, in Hodgins, *Documentary History, Volume VII: 1847, 48*, p. 124.

65 Harrow and Colchester South Township School Area Board, *A Story of Public Schools*, p. 11.

66 AO, J. George Hodgins Fonds, F1207, p. 12, Ryerson to W. H. Draper, April 12, 1847.

67 Egerton Ryerson, “Explanation of the Provisions of a Proposed School Bill of 1849”, in Hodgins, *Documentary History, Vol. VIII: 1848-49* (1901), p. 91.

68 *Ibid.*

exert any pressure to resolve the issue. As Chief Justice Beverly Robinson remarked in a later Supreme Court ruling regarding the exclusion of black children from common schools, “separate schools for coloured people were authorized ... out of deference to the prejudices of the white population”.⁶⁹

The new *School Act* proved controversial. Many groups, both black and white, expressed their opposition to separate racial education. A petition from Toronto argued that the introduction of the “coloured school” provision would “not only be detrimental to our elevation, but ... the first step toward taking away that equality which the British law guarantees to all Her Majesty’s subjects”.⁷⁰ Citizens of Canada West’s westernmost county, Essex, complained that the separate school provision was an unjust infringement upon their rights and that it was unfair to put the control of black education into the hands of municipalities.⁷¹ Certain teachers’ associations also expressed their disapproval.⁷²

During the 1850s, black parents sent over 20 petitions to the Canada West Education Department complaining of exclusion and requesting admission for their children into common schools.⁷³ A petition from black parents at Simcoe claimed that they had been “deprived of the privilege for many years of sending children to common schools”. Yet they were compelled to pay school taxes.

We have tried every lawful and civil means to get our children into the common schools ... we have applied to the trustees time after time and year after year and failed in it. We have taken our children into the schools and desired the teachers to receive and teach them which thing has also been refused.... [We] voted for the School Trustees together with other persons, and expected our children educated with the white children ... we had no desire to be set apart, nor never had....⁷⁴

Despite claims that the new law would protect black education interests, the vague regulations were open to various interpretations by white trustees; as a result, segregation and the outright denial of education to black children continued. In spite of the fact that their parents’ tax money went to support common schools, black students were denied the same right of access to public education as their white counterparts. The *School Act* of 1850 did not require that the request for separate racial schools come from black parents; thus the

⁶⁹ *Hill v. Camden and Zone*, p. 578.

⁷⁰ *Toronto Globe*, June 25, 1850.

⁷¹ “Objections to the Provision for Separate Schools for Coloured Children”, in Hodgins, *Documentary History, Volume IX: 1850–51* (1902), p. 26.

⁷² Dumfries Teachers’ Association remarks, in Hodgins, *Documentary History, Volume IX: 1850–51*, p. 64.

⁷³ AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12.

⁷⁴ AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, vol. 11, Petition of colored inhabitants of Simcoe, December 12, 1851.

legislation was used as a tool by certain trustees to force black people into segregation against their will.

The Council of Public Instruction (the official name of the Education Department from 1850) encouraged the imposition of segregated school districts during the 1850s, in spite of several complaints of forced segregation from the black population. In response to requests for advice on how best to keep black children out of common schools, Ryerson encouraged trustees to establish segregated school districts. Ryerson wrote to the Chair of the Chatham Board of School Trustees asserting that, although black parents who did not choose to establish a separate school had a right to send their children to a common school,

it does not follow that they have a right to attend any school they may fancy to attend. As the Board of Trustees ... is authorized by law "to determine the number, sites, kind and description of schools which shall be established and maintained" ... trustees may provide teachers and schools specially for the colored portion of the population.⁷⁵

After 1850 African Canadians were refused admission outright to common schools in towns such as Charlotteville (southwest of Hamilton along the Lake Erie shore), Malden, Windsor, and Sandwich, where the people were said to have "a strong old-fashioned English hatred of oppression".⁷⁶ If a black child attempted to join a class, the white students were often taken out of school by their parents, or teachers dismissed their classes.⁷⁷ When certain teachers in Sandwich, Windsor, Charlotteville, and West Flamboro (north of Hamilton), expressed a desire to admit black students, school trustees in these areas threatened to withhold the teachers' salaries or fire them unless they refused admission to black students.⁷⁸

In the Hill case of 1854 the Supreme Court ruled that, if a separate racial school had been established, black students had to attend it, no matter the quality of the school or its distance from home. In 1852 Dennis Hill of Camden Township, northeast of Chatham, wrote to Egerton Ryerson complaining that, although he had paid taxes, his son was excluded from the common

75 AO, Outgoing Education Correspondence, RG 2-8, vol. 6, Ryerson to George Duck, April 7, 1852. Ryerson made a similar recommendation to trustees in St. Catharines; see vol. 19, Ryerson to James S. Currie, June 16, 1857.

76 Simpson, "Negroes in Ontario", pp. 597-598.

77 AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, vol. 21, Samuel Atkin (Malden) to Ryerson, December 29, 1856; vol. 23, Henry Brent *et al.* (Sandwich), to Ryerson, March 9, 1858; vol. 27, Duncan Campbell (Harwich) to Ryerson, March 14, 1862.

78 AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, vol. 4, John Cowan (Sandwich) to McNab, October 5, 1845; *Washington v. the Trustees of School Number 14, in the Township of Charlotteville, Upper Canada Queen's Bench Reports*, vol. 11, pp. 569-573 [hereafter *Washington v. Charlotteville*]; AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, vol. 20, James Douglas (West Flamboro) to Ryerson, February 3, 1856.

school in his section because his “skin is a few shades darker than some of my neighbours”.⁷⁹ In reply, Ryerson remarked, “I cannot express any opinion upon the case which you submit”, but suggested that, if there was no separate school for his son to attend, Hill should prosecute for damages.⁸⁰ Hill did prosecute and his case was heard in the Supreme Court of Upper Canada in 1854.

In 1852 the trustees of Camden had designated the British American Institute, located in the Dawn settlement, a common school “for the exclusive benefit of the coloured population”.⁸¹ The limits of this school section encompassed the entire township and gore of Camden as well as the adjacent township of Zone, a region over 15 miles across. Although the Dawn school was a full four and a half miles away from Dennis Hill’s property, the court ruled that his children must attend there or be denied access to education. In 1856 citizens of Camden complained that their taxes went to common schools in their section while the segregated school was inaccessible at a distance of up to 15 miles away.⁸² Most of the black children of Camden township were effectively denied access to education because the segregated school was too far for them to attend.

Public schools for black children were sorely lacking in public funding, as local trustees were not always forthcoming with their share of government grants. In 1852 the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada reported that teachers at black separate schools were poorly paid and poorly qualified and that the quality of education at these schools was decidedly inferior to that at other common schools.⁸³ On his tour through Canada West in 1855, Benjamin Drew noted the poor quality of black separate schools in the province.⁸⁴

In Windsor no public education was available to African Canadians until 1859, although trustees had passed a by-law in 1854 claiming they would establish a “coloured school”. The construction of this school was delayed, however, until 1862. The temporary accommodation made available in 1858 measured 16 by 24 feet and was intended to accommodate up to 80 school-aged children. Parents likened the school to a “coop”.⁸⁵ In 1856 African Canadians in St. Catharines boycotted their separate school because they felt they were at a disadvantage and intended to claim “their lawful right to

79 AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, vol. 14, Dennis Hill to Egerton Ryerson, November 22, 1852.

80 AO, Outgoing Education Correspondence, RG 2–8, vol. 7. Ryerson to Hill, November 30, 1852.

81 *Hill v. Camden and Zone*, p. 575.

82 AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, vol. 20, William P. Newman to Ryerson, January 13, 1856; Peter B. Smith *et al.* to Ryerson, June 29, 1856.

83 Anti-Slavery Society of Canada, *First Annual Report of the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada* (Toronto, March 24, 1852).

84 Drew, *A Northside View of Slavery*.

85 AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, vol. 26, Clayborn Harris to William Horton, February 16, 1859.

... [send] our children to whatever public school is established in our ward".⁸⁶

When the town of Amherstburg introduced free common schools in 1851, the public school trustees appealed to the people of the town "to take the responsibility of keeping the coloured children from entering any of the schools". A committee of four trustees was appointed to set up a separate school for black children.⁸⁷ Drew remarked in 1856 that the separate school in Amherstburg was "comfortless and repulsive". It had no blackboard or chairs, the two inkstands in use yielded "a very little bad ink", and the readers were "miserably tattered and worn-out".⁸⁸ In declaring his judgement in the Hill case, Chief Justice Robinson observed, "[I]t can hardly be supposed that the Legislature authorized such separate schools under the idea that it would be more beneficial or agreeable to the coloured people to have their children taught separately from whites."⁸⁹

Trustees in other regions altered the boundaries of school districts according to the presence or absence of blacks. According to Rev. David Hotchkiss, working for the AMA in Amherstburg, "the whites will not let the coloured children attend their schools. They [draw] their lines around their districts in a zig zag course so as to throw all the coloured families out."⁹⁰ In Norwich, north of Charlotteville, the black population was denied access to the school they were using in their area after one white family moved in nearby and the school was annexed to a white school section.⁹¹ This gerrymandering of school districts was declared illegal by the Supreme Court in the 1854 case of *Washington v. the Trustees of Charlotteville*. In this case, George Washington paid the school fees and was assessed for repairs of the common school in his section. In 1849 trustees had instructed the local teacher not to admit Washington's son Solomon. Washington appealed to the district superintendent, who in turn appealed to Ryerson. The district and provincial superintendents informed the trustees that their conduct was illegal, but the school administrators of Charlotteville were determined to exclude Mr. Washington's children from the common school whatever the consequences. In 1850 the Municipal Council of Charlotteville redrew the school section boundaries so as to exclude Washington's land from any

86 *Provincial Freeman*, May 24, 1856; AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, vol. 23, Daniel Jones *et al.* to Ryerson, January 24, 1853.

87 AO, Alvin D. McCurdy Papers, F 2076-11-0-1, container 53, Public School Trustees Minutes with reference to King St. School and Coloured School Teachers, April 1, 1851.

88 Drew, *A Northside View of Slavery*, p. 348. As further testament to their destitute situation, schools for blacks in Amherstburg and Colchester received grants from the Education Department's Poor School Fund after petitions to Ryerson. AO, Outgoing Education Correspondence, RG 2-8, vol. 19, Ryerson to James Kevill, March 13, 1857; vol. 21, Ryerson to F. G. Elliot, December 3, 1857.

89 *Hill v. Camden and Zone*, p. 578.

90 AO, AMA manuscripts, F19-F1 S42, 1846-1860, Hotchkiss to Whipple, March 4, 1851.

91 AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, vol. 11, Charles Joiner to Ryerson, January 8, 1852.

school district; however, he continued to be assessed for school taxes. Ryerson did not directly intervene, claiming he “never supposed the trustees would resist the law” and suggesting that Washington take his grievances to court.⁹² The Supreme Court heard Washington’s case in 1854; by this time, his eldest son Solomon had reached the age of 12. The court ruled in Washington’s favour, outlawing the gerrymandering of school districts for the sole purpose of excluding black students.⁹³

This victory was bittersweet for Washington because he received no assistance with his legal expenses and lost his farm in payment of the fees incurred.⁹⁴ The precedent set by this case was only a qualified victory for black education rights because the ruling did not prevent school trustees from creating segregated school sections. It became common practice for trustees to open three different kinds of schools in their districts: one for Protestants, one for Roman Catholics, and one for African Canadians. Schools opened for African Canadians were usually set up and managed by the central board of white trustees and not requested by the parents of black students.⁹⁵

Although much contemporary historical work points out that school segregation was enforced by the white population of Canada West, several established historians have argued that African Canadians favoured segregation out of a desire for “comfort” and “security”,⁹⁶ a “sense of inadequacy”,⁹⁷ or “lack of confidence to compete”⁹⁸ or because they were “unable to do the regular work set by the Education Department”.⁹⁹ These claims regarding black support for segregation fly in the face of all evidence. As countless appeals against separate education illustrate, large numbers of African Canadians found little comfort in segregation. Robin Winks acknowledges that, in most instances, the same texts were used in black separate schools and “examination papers were also creditable”.¹⁰⁰ Thus black students were capable of and did the same work as whites, and assumptions that they could not attain the same standards of education are without foundation.

In addition to unsubstantiated claims about general segregationist tendencies, some historians have made more specific claims regarding the strategic

92 AO, Outgoing Education Correspondence, RG 2–8, vol. 12, Ryerson to J. G. Henton, May 20, 1855.

93 *Washington v. Charlotteville*.

94 AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, vol. 6, William Clarke to Ryerson, June 2, 1849; vol. 18, Philip Smith to Ryerson, August 1, 1854; vol. 19, J. G. Henton to Ryerson, May 25, 1855; Outgoing Education Correspondence, RG 2–8, vol. 4, Ryerson to William Clarke, n.d., 1849; vol. 10, Ryerson to Henton, May 20, 1855.

95 In 1854 the school trustees of Windsor voted to erect three such schools (Simpson, “Negroes in Ontario”, p. 641). Colchester had a similar system in place since 1846 (Harrow and Colchester South Township School Area Board, *A Story of Public Schools*, p. 11).

96 Walker, “African Canadians”, p. 159.

97 Jason H. Silverman, *Unwelcome Guests: Canada West’s Response to American Fugitive Slaves, 1800–1865* (Millwood, N.Y.: Associated Faculty Press, 1985), p. 132.

98 Simpson, “Negroes in Ontario”, p. 493.

99 Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, p. 365.

100 *Ibid.*, n. 5.

support for separate schools among black leaders. In his influential works on African-Canadian history, James W. St. G. Walker asserts that segregation was most certainly not a “black idea”, although several African Canadians accepted segregation in the face of harsh discrimination by white Canadian society, which they had “no inspiration to enter”.¹⁰¹ While African-Canadian history has undoubtedly, and understandably, not been devoid of advocates for racial separation, the historical record shows that the overwhelming trend among blacks in mid-nineteenth-century Canada West favoured integration. In spite of assertions by Walker and others that, in towns such as Windsor, Colchester, and Chatham, “several black communities took immediate advantage of the [1850 *School Act*] to establish separate school districts”,¹⁰² segregated schools in these regions were set up by white trustees in the face of vocal opposition by the black community.¹⁰³

Winks argues that certain black “self-help” organizations, such as the Wilberforce Lyceum Educating Society and the Association for the Education and Elevation of the Coloured People of Canada, fuelled white assumptions that black people could not attain equal standards and that they “preferred separation”.¹⁰⁴ Some of the goals of the Wilberforce Lyceum Educating Society, established in 1850, were “the promotion of the rising generation in education, scientific attainments and other such possessions ... as will promote the furtherance of the true religion of God, politeness and such other genius ... as will entitle us to mix more freely in the great crowd of Her Majesty’s subjects.”¹⁰⁵ As black people were rarely accepted into clubs run by whites, it should not be surprising that some leaders took the initiative to start their own organizations. However, the constitution of the Wilberforce Lyceum Educating Society clearly indicates that it was not segregationist in nature, but instead held integration into Canadian society as an important goal. James

101 James W. St. G. Walker, *A History of Blacks in Canada: A Study Guide for Teachers and Students* (Hull: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1980), pp. 135, 151.

102 Walker, “African Canadians”, p. 159; see also Claudette Knight, “Black Parents Speak: Education in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Canada West”, *Ontario History*, vol. 89 (December 1997), p. 275.

103 No public education was available to blacks in Windsor until 1859, and petitions to Ryerson expressed strong opposition to the establishment of a segregated school. In letters to blacks and whites in Windsor, Ryerson suggested that white trustees should establish separate schools in spite of black opposition. AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, vol. 26, Clayborn Harris to William Horton, February 15, 1859; “Re: Colored Inhabitants of Windsor”, February 16, 1859; Outgoing Education Correspondence, RG 2–9, vol. 12, Ryerson to W. Horton, February 21, 1859; Ryerson to Rev. A. R. Green, March 10, 1859. White trustees in Colchester had set up segregated schools in the 1840s (Harrow and Colchester South Township School Area Board, *A Story of Public Schools*, pp. 8–11); blacks in Chatham wrote Ryerson in 1852 claiming that they had never requested a separate school and appealing for admission into a common school (AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, vol. 12, Committee of the Colored Citizens of Chatham to Ryerson, March 7, 1852).

104 Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, p. 366.

105 *Constitution and By Laws of the Wilberforce Lyceum Educating Society. For Mental and Moral Improvement* (Amherstburg, 1850).

Walker suggests that the Association for the Education and Elevation of the Coloured People of Canada, incorporated in 1859, “defended separate black education”.¹⁰⁶ Yet there is no evidence that the association funded the establishment of or encouraged attendance at separate schools. Instead, the act incorporating this organization indicates its goal to assist black students in attending integrated schools.¹⁰⁷

Winks argues that the preference for segregation was most prevalent among “black leaders in the peninsula of Canada West”.¹⁰⁸ However, the most vocal opponents of segregation were community leaders Mary Ann Shadd and Henry Bibb, whose newspapers were published in the western towns of Chatham and Windsor. Bibb, for example, referred to the “coloured school” as “a mark of prejudice uncalled for by the Government under which we live and which has a tendency to perpetuate that prejudice against color, that has always kept our children under the feet of the whites”.¹⁰⁹ According to H. Ford Douglass, a writer for Shadd’s paper, the *Provincial Freeman*,

Separate colored schools and churches are nuisances that should be abated as soon as possible, they are dark and hateful relics of Yankee Negrophobia, contrary to that healthy, social and political equality recognized by the fundamental principles of British common law, and should never be permitted to take root upon British soil.¹¹⁰

Like Walker and Winks, Donald Simpson and Jason Silverman make important contributions to an understanding of black education in Canada West, and they point to several examples of enforced segregation and discrimination against black students in Canada West schools. However, Simpson and Silverman also make some unsupported claims regarding black parents’ requests for separate schools in certain regions. After having referred to numerous petitions against school segregation in Amherstburg, Simpson claims that there is no way of knowing whether the black citizens of this town wanted separate schools.¹¹¹ In spite of the assertion by African Canadians in Simcoe that “we had no desire to be set apart nor never had”¹¹² and the refusal

106 Walker, “African Canadians”, p. 160.

107 *Act to Incorporate the Association for the Education and Elevation of the Coloured People in Canada, Statutes of Upper Canada* (1859), cap. 124.

108 Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, p. 366.

109 Bibb, “Schools in Canada”, *Voice of the Fugitive*, July 15, 1852.

110 H. F. Douglass, “The Duties of Colored Man in Canada”, *Provincial Freeman*, March 28, 1857.

111 Simpson, “Negroes in Ontario”, p. 576. Simpson refers to Levi Foster’s petition that his children be included in the white-run common school, and cites assertions by both Isaac Rice and district superintendent Robert Peden that black people in Amherstburg were opposed to the establishment of separate schools. See AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, vol. 5, Isaac Rice *et al.* to Ryerson, January 23, 1846; Robert Peden to Ryerson, February 23, 1846.

112 AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, vol. 11, Inhabitants of color now residing in Simcoe and surrounding county to Ryerson, December 12, 1851.

of black parents in Windsor to “yield to prejudice” and establish a separate school,¹¹³ Silverman assumes that the black population of these towns desired separate schools.¹¹⁴

While there is little doubt that some elements of the black population in Canada West had little choice but to accept school segregation, there is no evidence that any blacks in Canada West ever endorsed segregated education. On the contrary, African Canadians in Canada West worked toward integration and were determined to claim their rights to equal access to schooling. A CCSS missionary to Dawn Mills, northeast of Chatham, suggested that black people in his town would “rather be without schools than excluded”.¹¹⁵ In 1859 the Committee for the Colored People of Windsor asserted, “[W]e as a people ... love British Law and will ever defend it, but we shall equally stand up for all the rights that the law provides us.”¹¹⁶ Numerous petitions appealed to education administrators’ “sense of justice and judgment”,¹¹⁷ demanding that they live up to their British-Canadian egalitarian ideals and allow for equal access to education.¹¹⁸ As Dr. A. T. Jones of London declared to S. G. Howe in reaction to the school board’s proposal to open separate schools for black children:

I have eight children, who were all born in this town, — British subjects, as much as the whitest among you; and they don’t believe in anything else but the Queen. Now, instead of leaving these children to grow up with that love of country and the Queen, you are trying to plant within them a hatred for the country; and the day may come when you will hear them saying, “This is the country that disenfranchises us, and deprives us of our rights.”¹¹⁹

As much as black leaders pushed for integration, white trustees proved equally adamant in their opposition to integration. Letters from local trustees to the Council of Public Instruction complained that black parents must not be allowed to “force their children” into classes with the white children because “schools have been broken up”¹²⁰ and “the harmony ... in school

113 AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, vol. 26, “Re. Colored Inhabitants of Windsor”, Clayborn Harris to William Horton, February 15, 1859; Thomas Jones *et al.* Committee for the Colored People, Windsor, to Ryerson, March 2, 1859.

114 Silverman, *Unwelcome Guests*, pp. 134, 138.

115 Colonial Church and School Society, Mission to the Fugitive Slaves, *Annual Report* (1863–1864), pp. 11–12.

116 AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, vol. 26, Jones *et al.* to Ryerson, March 2, 1859.

117 AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, vol. 23, Henry Brent *et al.* (Sandwich) to Ryerson, March 9, 1858.

118 AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, vol. 26, Jones *et al.* to Ryerson, March 2, 1859; vol. 20, Peter B. Smith (Dresden) to Hodgins, June 29, 1856; vol. 23, Henry Brent *et al.* to Ryerson, March 9, 1858; vol. 25, Jefferson Lightfoot (West Flamboro) to Ryerson, October 5, 1858; vol. 26, Clayborn Harris (Windsor) to William Horton, February 16, 1859.

119 Howe, *The Refugees from Slavery*, p. 51–52.

120 AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2–12, vol. 4, John Cowan (Sandwich) to Rev.

matters ... [has been] lost [due to the] demands of a few of the coloured inhabitants".¹²¹ This "harmony" was ensured through a policy of forced segregation that was sanctioned by the Supreme Court of Canada West in 1854.

The majority of black-run schools welcomed a diversity of Canadian children, regardless of heritage and in spite of their meagre funding. Schools established by or for black communities in several towns opened their doors to white children who had no other option for education themselves or whose parents recognized the better calibre of education provided in a few cases by well-educated missionary teachers. The segregated schools imposed by Colchester trustees accepted white students, and eventually many of them served a majority of white children.¹²² Robin Winks points to a similar situation in Brantford, where the level of instruction at the black school was superior to that at the white school. White students began to enrol here until the two schools were eventually integrated.¹²³ The government-imposed separate school in Chatham also accepted the occasional white student.¹²⁴

The fact that African Canadians accepted people of all backgrounds into their schools demonstrates an acceptance of the heterogeneous nature of Canada West society. Those who ran black schools appear to have accepted the refashioning of human identity that becoming Canadian entailed. In contrast, the powers controlling schools in the province showed a strong propensity toward segregation and thus a reluctance to adapt to their newly plural Canadian surroundings. During the mid-nineteenth century, many Canadians did not perceive the contradiction between their British ideals and the lived reality of racial exclusion in the education system, the "powerful instrument of British Constitutional Government". Education administrators espoused a deep desire to refashion Canada West as the British province described in Canadian foundational myths, and the equal participation of black students in the public education system could have been seen as a threat to the maintenance of this religiously secured notion of British purity. At the same time, the ideal of British morality was so pervasive in the consciousness of nineteenth-century Canadians that the discrimination inherent in Canada West's education system was not confronted by its proponents and was allowed to continue virtually undetected.

Although Canadian conceptions of identity have changed significantly since the mid-nineteenth century, contemporary myths continue to perpetuate some of the dominant nineteenth-century perceptions of Canada West as a bastion of morality, freedom, and equality. Popular Canadian mythology emphasizes this country's role as an Underground Railroad destination; yet its history of racism is often ignored. Perhaps the omission of this history of

121 AO, Incoming Education Correspondence, RG 2-12, vol. 12, George Duck (Chatham) to Ryerson, March 7, 1852.

122 Harrow and Colchester South Township School Area Board, *A Story of Public Schools*, p. 12.

123 Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, p. 367.

124 Victor Lauriston, "Chatham Vetoes Co-education in 1856", *London Free Press*, June 3, 1950.

exclusion from popular historical accounts reflects fears that our society's foundational cultural myths might collapse under threat.

Some modern historians seem to reflect the dominant myths of nineteenth-century British Canada West when, contrary to historical evidence, they assert that African Canadians advocated segregated schools and under-emphasize the integrated nature of black-run institutions of the period. Historical evidence confirms that the vast majority of black parents and community leaders worked toward an integrated society in Canada West as they asserted their rights to equal treatment under purportedly egalitarian and morally upright British-Canadian laws and institutions.