

Conclusion

This project has brought together four diverse autobiographical narratives, from long elaborate narratives to short biographical sketches. Yet, their authors were part of one generation of black leaders in Canada West and the United States, and the narratives are more similar than they first appear. Austin Steward and Samuel Ringgold Ward, for example, both attended the Emancipation Day celebrations in Canandaigua, New York, on August 1, 1847. Steward describes that speaking to the large crowd to begin “the exercises [fell to] the Rev. S. R. Ward, who addressed the throne of grace, after which, Mr. Frederick Douglass delivered an oration, in a style of eloquence which only Mr. Douglass himself can equal” (312). Only one day later, on August 2, Thomas Smallwood and Richard Warren participated in the convention in the AME Chapel at Drummondville, Quebec. There, they sat together on the Business and Finance Committees (*Report* 6). While each of their narratives deserved a separate case study, this book has sought to unite them by demonstrating how they each create a form of genealogy out of which emerges a cross-border black community via text.

If the authors were not entire strangers to each other, their narratives, too, can be brought into conversation. All four writers, for example, within the space of a couple of years, produced long narratives that do not easily fit into one genre category. While they are certainly life narratives, they also include travelogues and accounts of abolitionist work in the forms of letters, minutes, or witness accounts. Part of this work consists in exposing the everyday discrimination of black people in Canada West and the United States in several public sectors. Steward names hotels (or, public service), schools (or, education), and the church as such areas (see 320); Ward includes several episodes illustrating discrimination in public services such as hotels and taverns, public transport including steamboats, and education (see 146-49). As a consequence, both Steward and Ward give free Blacks advice on what considerations should guide their life as freemen, such as financial independence and the importance of education

(Steward 333-34), or a professional calling and the avoidance of segregated settlements (Ward 34; 205). They seem to take these lessons from the inspirational figures of their fathers who serve as role models in their respective narratives. Ward honors his father as the black yeoman whom he appears to emulate by moving to Jamaica as a farmer (34), while Steward upholds his father's memory as an upright man and devoted husband (126). Aside from the personal level, Steward's and Ward's narratives also share the appearance of the role model fugitive slave and his pathos-laden appeal to the public. In Steward, Doctor Davis incarnates this figure, whose dramatic appeal to the bystanders after his recapture is Patrick Henry's famous "Give me liberty or death! Or death!" (Steward 143). Ward, in turn, transforms Jerry Henry into a very similar character: Henry's emotional lament is centered on a call for liberty, and he is portrait as a valiant, courageous, and determined fugitive who recalls, indeed, Doctor Davis, who would rather attempt suicide than be returned to slavery.

Steward and Smallwood, too, interconnect in several respects. Both are concerned with their respective reputations and fashion themselves as morally upright men in the face of their enemies. While Smallwood constantly struggles with members of the black community, particularly in Washington, D.C., and feels attacked from all sides, Steward faces opposition from Israel Lewis in Wilberforce. Smallwood tries to maintain his engagement as an Underground Railroad conductor even as he is obsessed with 'traitors' from his own community, just as Steward stands his ground in Wilberforce as long as he can. They both echo David Walker, who is the subtext in Smallwood's narrative and once refused to leave for Canada to protect his life, which turns him into a hero (Garnet qtd. in Smallwood xi). In a similar way, Steward underlines how he remained in Canada West when the conflict with Lewis deteriorated, despite his friends' advice to "flee from the country, which I had labored so hard and so conscientiously to benefit" (237). However, while in these two narratives, much seems to revolve around the authors' public personae and character, both use their position as storytellers to defend the reputation of other people. Smallwood, for example, includes a letter to the *Albany Patriot* that he wrote under his pseudonym "Samuel Weller, Jr.", and in which he renders his point of view on several kidnappings of free Blacks in Washington, D.C. In this way, he can criticize the authorities and the Auxiliary Guard's involvement at the same time that he is able to name the victims in order to make sure the outrage does not go unseen (see 60-63). Steward, too, actively opposes what he feels is a wrongful portrayal of a fugitive's dramatic attempted suicide on a boat, which he witnessed, by writing a counterstatement to a newspaper in New York City (see 250-51).

Siemerling calls Smallwood, Steward, and Ward leading figures contributing to the literary output of what he calls the “Black Canadian Renaissance” (*Reconsidered* 98). Indeed, all four authors in the present book challenge preconceived notions of black writing at mid-nineteenth century in that they do not easily conform to the category “slave narrative” but work with a plethora of genres to create multilayered texts. Ward, for example, is turned into a fugitive as a toddler, when his parents escape slavery, but has no vivid memory of this period himself. Grown up as a free, educated black man, Ward’s point of departure for writing his autobiography might differ from the other three authors. His narrative, for instance, contains no introductory letters by white abolitionists, unlike those by Steward and Warren: Steward receives support from his fellow Rochester businessmen and politicians, whereas Warren can rely on other AME ministers and printers. Ward and Smallwood, on the contrary, lay claim to their own work and writing from the beginning. While the slave narrative provided a powerful and, most importantly, marketable template that certainly made for a convincing tool in the authors’ anti-slavery work, it did not serve the necessity to map the experiences of free and active cross-border individuals. Their stories continued long after emancipation and the arrival on free soil, and their complex narratives bring to life a vibrant borderland along the “fluid frontier”.

All four authors also contribute to ambivalent portrayals of Great Britain and Canada West as spaces which are long free from slavery, resulting into problematic interpretations with regard to (potential) black immigrants. Smallwood, Steward, and Ward largely dismiss criticism of England, particularly, as a former slaveholding nation and rather depict the country as a remorseful convert to the cause of abolitionism. Since Canada West is a stand-in for the British monarchy, it becomes a place where black people can enjoy freedom from oppression. Nevertheless, the authors discussed here establish troublesome relationships between black fugitives or emigrants and their adoptive country. Ward and Smallwood, for example, display a certain class bias when they complain about those black peers they feel “lack energy [and] courage” to bring about substantial change for Blacks (Smallwood 55). Such fellow Blacks, Ward chides, discredit the group as a whole (see Ward 197). For the two authors, fugitives in Canada West are responsible to counteract this image. Together with Steward, they turn Blacks in Canada into a class of survivors who are superior to those who remain in slavery or are unsuccessful in making their escape. In Ward’s opinion, these “vigorous people” form a perfect addition to the prospects that Canada West offers for settlement (155). For Smallwood, these ambitious women and men represent Black yeomen in the Canadian wilds, far from the drudgery of black urban poverty (55-56). Steward openly contrasts Blacks in Canada as a

“hardy, robust class of men” with those who are enslaved in the South as “a class of poor, thriftless, illiterate creatures” (321). These statements speak not least to a gap between black leaders and those who were seeking to shape their daily lives in Canada West.

Although each author evokes a particular form of genealogy, as this book has argued, there is also recognizable overlap. Ward’s underlying project to establish a genealogy of heroic fugitives who find a ground to enjoy the fruits of their heroism in Canada and inspire pride and admiration resonates with Smallwood and Steward. Furthermore, the fact that Steward includes ever so many stories centered on other people in his own is not singular among the four authors. Ward, too, presents readers with a collection of several heterogeneous stories. The anonymous fugitive (170-71), well-known fugitive slave rescue cases (181-82), and other instances either appear like brief vignettes or, sometimes, as more extended accounts. Just like Steward, Ward serves as the mediator and authenticator of these stories who prevents them from being forgotten. At the same time, such stories remind us of the lasting importance of community and the impossibility to shed your background by crossing a border. The individual communities from which these stories emerge remain more powerful, eventually, than national allegiances or nation-states.

This is echoed in the appearance of Black radical, intellectual genealogies, which are not confined to one narrative either. David Walker (mediated through Smallwood’s narrative), Smallwood, and Ward all invoke the necessity of black historiography to create a reliable genealogy *from* black people *for* black people. Henry Highland Garnet, whose biographical sketch of Walker is inserted in Smallwood, claims a place for the late abolitionist in the line of great black men. Walker himself had done the same for Reverend Richard Allen, founder of the AME Church in the United States, in the *Appeal* (see 69-70). From Allen to Walker, Smallwood echoes the call for a black tradition of anti-slavery fighters and great men, not simply by claiming himself a place among their ranks, but by contributing to the establishment of it through his writing. Moreover, when Ward—almost at the end of the 1850s—asks “if we do not vindicate ourselves, who will do it for us?,” he harks back soundly to Walker’s and Smallwood’s assertion of the importance of future black historians to write the history of outstanding black men (270). Ward, too, is already part of this process.

In as much as the four texts in this book speak to each other, they are part of the literature produced in a decade that changed North America. Smallwood, Steward, Ward and Warren all were cross-border individuals who lived lives on both sides of the border between Canada West and the United States, in slavery and freedom, and who contributed to making the “fluid frontier” not least a

creative space in flux. Through their movements, they shaped cross-border relations between black communities, abolitionists, the AME church, and individual families. Their texts reflect how much this decade was changing the dynamics in North America and how black authors who were also activists, preachers, aspiring or established leaders were experimenting with literary forms that would suit their need to express complex cross-border lives. These narratives equally show the challenges and problems that these authors faced, struggling with inner-communal fights as well as threats from outside the black community. They also hint at the fragility of black communities and the strain to maintain their lives while encountering discrimination, on the one hand, but also the pressure to succeed, on the other. It is clear, however, that the community remained the anchor for black individuals crossing the border, and that it took supremacy over the (emerging) nation-state. As such, studying narratives of the “fluid frontier” means questioning the national literary canons as well as narrow academic curricula. However, in times of renewed attention to fugitivity, transnational migratory flows, and forced dispersals of people, these narratives push to the fore and invite us to look back. They reinforce the importance of genealogies, and remind us of the endurance of (black) communities, individual stories, fates, failures, and successes in the face of nation-states who, often enough, threatened their well-being.

