



IKUKO ASAKA

Tropical Freedom

Climate, Settler Colonialism, and Black
Exclusion in the Age of Emancipation

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TROPICAL FREEDOM

CLIMATE, SETTLER COLONIALISM,
AND BLACK EXCLUSION IN
THE AGE OF EMANCIPATION



Ikuko Asaka

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NOTE ON TERMS

Canada refers to both the Province of Upper Canada, which existed from 1791 to 1841, and Canada West, a new designation given to Upper Canada when the colonies of Upper Canada and Lower Canada united to form the Province of Canada in 1841. Upper Canada (and later Canada West) included what is now southern Ontario, a region surrounded by the Detroit River and Lakes Huron, Erie, and Ontario, and the place in Canada where most formerly enslaved people and free black migrants settled.

People of African descent living in the United States are referred to as *African Americans* or *black Americans*. Their counterparts in Canada are called *African Canadians* or *black Canadians*. Nativity is not a primary element in the definition of the terms. I refer to those who were born in the United States but identified themselves as British colonial subjects in Canada as *African Canadians* or *black Canadians*. When discussing the subjection of both African and Canadian Americans to common patterns of racial control operating across the Canada-U.S. border, I use the term *African North Americans* to mark their shared experience.

The term *free blacks* indicates people of African descent who were living in freedom, regardless of their legal status. It encompasses those who fled from bondage, those who were born free, and those who gained freedom by means sanctioned by their owners. I use the terms *freed*, *emancipated*, and *formerly enslaved* to refer to those who experienced bondage and to emphasize the conditions, experiences, and viewpoints rooted in their liberation from enslavement. I use the term *legally free* when I am contrasting legally sanctioned status with the status of others who liberated themselves by processes that

were not authorized by law. Finally, I avoid using the term *fugitive slaves* to describe those who emancipated themselves by fleeing from slavery. In consideration of their desire to shed the degrading status of slave, I refer to them as *self-emancipated people* and *former-slave refugees, runaways, or escapees*, except when I quote or paraphrase contemporary statements that used *fugitive slaves*.

INTRODUCTION

In her 1852 pamphlet advocating African American emigration to Canada, the free black journalist Mary Ann Shadd gave a brief but revealing history lesson on the extensive scope of the African diaspora in the Western Hemisphere. Along with noting many advantages of leaving the United States, Shadd deployed the history of the forced transatlantic dispersal to counter what was then the prevailing argument in Britain and the United States—that people of African descent were more productive workers in the tropics than they were in cold climates. In rejecting the notion that black bodies could thrive only in tropical locales, Shadd cited the transatlantic slave trade, which scattered Africans and their descendants over a wide range of latitudes from “great heat” to “severe cold” and led to “the varied experience of coloured persons in America . . . whether as whalemens in the northern seas, as settlers in the British provinces (far north of the United States), or in the West Indies.”¹

The history of the formation of the African diaspora served Shadd’s fight against climatic determinism, providing empirical proof that the black body was capable of withstanding various types of labor across the spectrum of temperatures. Sharing Shadd’s frustration about racial essentialism, Henry Bibb, a self-emancipated newspaper editor living in Canada, noted sarcastically that when “negro slavery” had been legal in the province, “there was no complaint about the climate’s being too cold for the colored people.”²

Free black residents in Canada were not the only ones who invoked the transatlantic dispersal of human chattel when refuting charges of climatic unfitness. In the midst of the Civil War, Frederick Douglass cited the slave trade to make his point against a proposal by the Lincoln administration to move southern freed people to Central America. Douglass noted that human trafficking across the ocean had placed people of African origin and ancestry in “nearly all the extremes of heat and cold, and other vicissitudes of climate.” This, he reasoned, demonstrated that they “can live any where in common with other men” and that “neither the direct force of public law, nor the indirect but equally certain force of political theories should be wielded for his removal from the land of his birth.” Like Shadd and Bibb, Douglass converted the legacy of the forced migration into a political tool to prove that “if any people can ever become acclimatized, I think the negro can claim to be so in this country.”³

The above critiques represent one strand of black intellectual thought that evolved in response to the narrow parameters of black freedom set by various groups in the United States and the British Empire. In both places, during the decades between the American Revolution and the end of the Civil War, a person’s achievement of liberty did not automatically translate into his or her enjoyment of freedom of residence. People of African descent in the United States and British North America faced a series of regulatory measures and ideological justifications that restricted where they could live in freedom and what types of labor they could perform. Integral to these interventions was the association between blackness and physical aptitude for labor in a tropical climate.

As Bibb astutely observed, climatic determinism did not hinder the establishment of slavery in so-called temperate regions. The institution existed, albeit on a relatively small scale, in what is now Canada until the early nineteenth century. Colonies such as Nova Scotia, Upper Canada, Prince Edward Island, and Lower Canada all permitted human bondage.⁴ The New England and Middle Atlantic colonies, which would institute emancipation in one form or another after independence, also allowed the use of enslaved labor in a variety of trades.⁵ As the numbers of free blacks multiplied in British North America and the United States, however, a multitude of actors in both locales set out to regulate the location of the growing populations.

The efforts to manage black freedom on each side of the border were based on historically contingent and nationally distinct ideas and practices, but they shared a certain pattern: they entailed the imagining and pursuit of a racially demarcated Atlantic space in which places of black and white freedom were geographically segmented according to a racial taxonomy of climate. These

mappings identified certain places as sites for the emancipated to enjoy their freedom, while simultaneously they designated other places for the advancement of white people, associating the former with a tropical climate and the latter with a temperate one. In this formulation, freedom figured as a geographic condition marked by racial difference and climatic character. This conceptualization of freedom, with its recourse to race-based environmental essentialism, ensconced questions of belonging within a realm of the body and nature. Importantly, as with other symbols of blackness and whiteness, the labels of *tropical* and *temperate* were not applied in any fixed way. The definition of a place's climatic character was in flux and subject to political contingency.

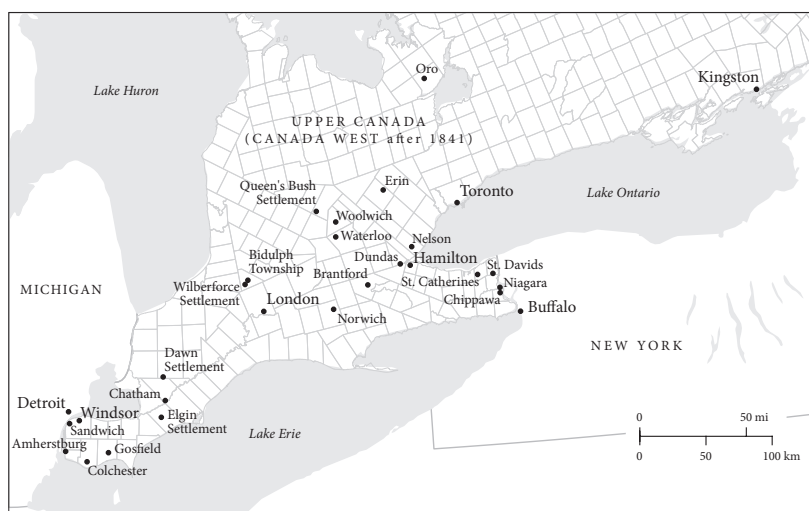
Tropical Freedom demonstrates how these patterned dynamics shaped a series of emancipations in North America that generated significant numbers of U.S. and U.S.-origin free blacks. The book examines the British wartime emancipations during the American Revolution and the War of 1812, the postrevolutionary freeing of slaves in the United States, self-emancipation in Canada after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire, and steps toward abolition in the United States. Each of these processes—some of which were more long-term than others—was accompanied by organized attempts to engage the newly freed population (and their descendants, in some cases) to labor in particular economic relations in the tropics, including such diverse projects as freehold and tenant farming in Sierra Leone, independent land-owning in Trinidad and Liberia, and plantation labor in the Caribbean and Central America. In all cases efforts to remove freed blacks to the tropics simultaneously entailed a designation of “temperate” places in which whites should enjoy their freedom.

The trajectories of these processes were not uniform, however. Each case was marked by political and economic specificities. And in all cases, black removal to the tropics was never a foregone conclusion. Yet the core principle underlying black displacement—conceiving of freedom as a racially segregated condition distinguished by a distinct climatic feature—became so entrenched in North America that by the time of the Civil War, Republicans who opposed the overseas relocation of emancipated people embraced the tenet of tropical freedom and applied it to a domestic space. They framed the South as a domestic tropical region within which the emancipated people would be contained, far from the temperate northern states.

Another focus of the book is black responses to the geographic orders of freedom. Negotiating, disrupting, and countering controls over their location became an enduring strain of political activism among U.S. and U.S.-origin free



MAP I.1 Free territories and black emigration destinations. Drawn by Jake Coolidge.



MAP 1.2 Towns and settlements in Upper Canada. Drawn by Jake Coolidge.

people in the United States and British North America. They manufactured an assortment of cultural ammunition—some shared, some unique to each place—as they sought to set their own terms of belonging in their respective societies. What emerged in the process were alternative visions of black freedom that articulated aspirations for economic independence and complex understandings of the relationship between race, place, and labor. Such contests and negotiations resulted in an African diaspora characteristic of the era of emancipation and distinct to North America, one that was conditioned by the racialization of freedom but imbued with quests for truly emancipatory futures. The members of this diaspora formed a collective transnational subject bound by corresponding, if not identical, experiences, which warrants their having the common designation of *African North Americans*.

Through an analysis of the geographic demarcations of freedom, *Tropical Freedom* argues that such exclusionary ideas and practices were intimately intertwined with the processes of settler colonial formation in the United States and British North America. The combination of rapidly growing free black populations and a heightened desire for indigenous expropriation led the architects of the U.S. and British empires to employ tropical removal projects in service of white settler colonial rule. In each process of emancipation examined in the book the promotion of black removal came to accompany the drawing of racial boundaries around the landed yeoman status, a settler

colonial privilege championed in both empires as an economic condition and a guarantee of political liberty.⁶ To keep white monopoly on this particular status became an abiding imperative among politicians, officials, and social reformers on both sides of the Canada-U.S. border in the first half of the nineteenth century, as an unprecedented growth in the numbers of free blacks coincided with an unwavering desire for colonial settlement in both the United States and British North America. These agents of empire believed that settler expansion was a white-only undertaking and limited entitlement to former indigenous lands to whites through the symbolic and physical placing of black freedom in tropical regions.

Even though most of the removal projects bore little fruit, the principle behind them—that blacks must be excluded from settler privileges—often produced material effects in North America. African Americans and African Canadians were marginalized in their respective settler colonial states in concrete ways. The determination that the Northwest should contain only white settlers, an imperative often intertwined with the desire to relocate free blacks to Liberia, led to the prohibition or restriction of African-American migration into the region. The tenet of white-only settlement was transplanted to the Pacific West by migrants from the Northwest and materialized in measures that banned or restricted free blacks from entering the region or owning land there. In British North America, black residents suffered unequal distributions of land, had limited access to public education, and faced official and de facto curtailments of their political rights. Part of the rationale for these measures was the idea that free blacks in the empire belonged in its tropical colonies.

Recognizing these racial inequalities and geographic stratification directs us to a central aspect of the history of the African diaspora. As the cultural geographer Katherine McKittrick puts it, “the history of black subjects in the diaspora is a geographic story.”⁷ Whether in Bolivia, the United States, or Canada, members of the African diaspora have countered and negotiated “geographic distributions and interactions [that] are racially, sexually and economically hierarchical.”⁸ One facet of such geographic domination is the “naturalization of identity and place,” a process that involves the reading and inscribing of bodies in racial, gendered, and sexual terms in ways that define and reinforce regulatory norms of where certain body types naturally belong.⁹

Performing the work of naturalizing was part of racial conduct entrenched in the centuries-long development of plantation economies in the Americas. From the sixteenth century on, the twin evolution of the plantation complex and European empire building exemplified what Tony Ballantyne and

Antoinette Burton call the empire's "*self-consciously* spatializing project." In this project geography played a paramount role in "the creation and maintenance of social, political, and cultural relations" in a way that placed subjugated territories and peoples in hierarchical strata.¹⁰ Integral to the case of space making analyzed in this book is the geographic concept of tropicality as a transnationally operative tool of empire. Postulating that "the contrast between the temperate and the tropical is one of the most enduring themes in the history of global imaginings," tropicality scholars have brought to light the contingent and contested nature of the category of the tropical as well as its historical use as a signifier of otherness in diverse colonial and imperial schemes.¹¹ As European expansion unfolded, expedient definitions of the tropical produced historically specific geographies that structured particular designs of conquest, settlement, and exploitation.

In the Atlantic world, the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, French, and British "development of plantation economies, worked by forced labor," rested on and contributed to racialized delineations of temperate and tropical zones, with the latter figuring as an environment most suited for black agricultural labor.¹² After trying different labor arrangements, Europeans had come to believe that Africans and people of African descent were especially suited to cultivating plantation crops in the tropics. The association of plantation labor, blackness, and the tropics thus became the triangular foundation of the transatlantic slave trade and racial slavery in the Americas.¹³ As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, these taxonomies did not automatically dictate the management of free labor in the British Empire or in the United States, but they gradually became integral to such projects in the early nineteenth century. Consequently, this book is a study of how tropicality became a discourse of freedom.

In tracing the evolution of the tropicality discourse, this book fills chronological gaps in existing histories of racialized climatic geographies of labor. Scholars of the British Empire have pointed out that "racially based socioecological ascriptions" born in the context of New World slavery went on to organize the postemancipation imperial rearrangement of free labor.¹⁴ Seymour Drescher has brought into focus "the racialization of labor and migration" in the mid-nineteenth-century empire in which "tropical agriculture was an economic activity with images of racialized disease, death, domination and capitalist expansion," while European workers were placed in "temperate zones" outside of "the plantation tropics."¹⁵ Historians of race in the United States have also claimed that climatic idioms played a vital role in the designing

of labor during the era of overseas imperialism.¹⁶ As Daniel Bender and Jana Lipman observe, “U.S. imperial labor practices” were informed by racialized tropical-temperate distinctions that assigned nonwhite bodies to tropical plantation economies.¹⁷

Adopting a broader perspective, others highlight a transnational racial order at work in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that divided the world into nonwhite tropical and white temperate zones. Such global mapping was a mechanism of Western colonial pursuits in tropical lands, as demonstrated by Dane Kennedy, but it also involved a white settler colonial dynamic, according to Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, in which “white men claimed a special right to lands in the ‘temperate zone,’ claims made against their Indigenous inhabitants and all those peoples they would designate as ‘non-white.’”¹⁸ This book suggests that the recourse to climatic determinism in these patterned configurations of race and free labor did not happen in a vacuum but can be traced back to an earlier period.

In addition to climatic tropes, another set of idioms constituted discourses related to black tropical removal: the language of normative gender and sexual relations. This language came to play a role against the backdrop of the importance of the rhetoric of intimacy in British North American frontier politics and in U.S. republican ideology. White colonists in Canada painted fugitive slaves as unwilling and incapable of racially endogamous reproduction and familial relationships, which rendered them a threat to the white settler colonial order and made them candidates for Caribbean emigration. In the United States the trope of the family was often invoked by supporters of Liberian colonization to deny free black Americans’ aptitude for citizenship in the United States, at a time when the connection between the familial and the political was becoming tightened in republican discourse. Viewed in this way, African North Americans were targets of “the management of imperial rule” that unfolded in “intimate domains” of “sex, sentiment, domestic arrangement, and child rearing.”¹⁹ As in other cases in which languages and practices of intimacy were marshaled to impose white settler rule—such as indigenous land divestiture and Asian immigration restrictions—free black intimate relationships served as the locus of reifying geographic definitions that drew racial boundaries around settler North America.²⁰

As an exploration of different instances of emancipation over time, this work does not offer a fixed-point observation of one society’s social and economic reconfiguration after slavery. Rather, it demonstrates how a series of emancipations in the United States and British North America displayed

comparable patterns of racial ordering. The main objectives of the book are to bring to light the intersectionality of settler colonialism and black dislocation and illuminate how this dynamic was intrinsic to different processes of emancipation across borders. Showing the transnational operation of this particular system of hierarchy foregrounds a hitherto unexamined mode of colonial and imperial formation that characterized Anglo-American North America in the era of emancipation.

FREE MONARCHICAL AND UNFREE REPUBLICAN EMPIRES

While bringing into relief transnationally operative patterns, this work also illuminates each empire's particular colonial systems and labor models that were designed and realized through a shared logic of climatic racial mapping. Britain's engagements with free black populations in North America were characterized and informed by its shift to a free empire racially divided into white settler societies and nonwhite extractive colonies. Grounded in a pre-existing strain of emancipation thought, a racially organized imperial space developed in the course of two wartime emancipations: one during the American Revolution, which generated freed people commonly called the black loyalists, and the other during the War of 1812, which sparked another surge of emancipated people, the so-called black refugees of the War of 1812.²¹

Although undertaken with the prospect of owning land and as a result of personal and communal decision making, the travels of black loyalists to Sierra Leone from London and Nova Scotia set the stage for a racialized geography of free labor encompassing the metropole, Nova Scotia, and Sierra Leone. When the War of 1812 brought about another wave of freed people, who traveled from the United States to Nova Scotia and London, official efforts were made to send these people to Trinidad and Sierra Leone with the explicit aim of retaining the whiteness of the colony and the metropole. By 1815 philanthropists, settlers, and government administrators had defined the urban economy of the metropole, landed settlement in Nova Scotia, and migration from the former to the latter as exclusive domains of a class of British subjects considered fit for temperate climates—that is, those in the racial category interchangeably referred to as *white* or *European*. However, still in flux was the type of free labor assigned to black refugees who were to migrate to the empire's tropical colonies. While Sierra Leone had built its agricultural production on black dependent laborers by the 1810s, the Trinidad government offered newcomers from Nova Scotia the opportunity to own land—an

arrangement it abandoned when imperial abolition incentivized the colonial elites to import cheap labor for the plantations.

After slavery in the empire was abolished, imperial space became more racially demarcated and the location of free blacks was further controlled. The doctrine of a racially organized empire informed the experience of another significant group of free blacks in British North America: self-emancipated people who had fled from the United States to Canada. Although slave escapes after imperial emancipation induced abolitionist alliances dedicated to black advancement in Canada, such radical visions were soon overtaken by a drive to order freedom geographically by race. By the middle of the 1840s, a renewed push for colonial settlement of Upper Canada and West Indian planters' demand for estate workers had combined to inspire a diverse array of metropolitan and colonial sectors to pursue the relocation of self-emancipated people from Canada to the Caribbean plantations, considered to be a natural environment for black agricultural labor.

Britons' application of this racial doctrine did not stop with free black populations in Canada; the belief in black tropical suitability extended to free African Americans. West Indian agents saw value in what they deemed common attributes between the two groups of African North Americans: Anglophone, Christian, and physically able to meet the demands of tropical labor, a set of traits thought to be more important than any political and cultural differences between the two groups. Such recruitment efforts brought free African North Americans into the larger global history of postemancipation nonwhite labor mobilization, along with workers from East India, China, and Sierra Leone. Britain's enthusiasm for former slaves persisted into the Civil War, when the British pursued another opportunity to obtain potential plantation hands. The planters turned their attention to so-called contrabands, or formerly enslaved people who fled across Union lines and found themselves greeted by the Lincoln administration's desire to remove them to tropical locations, including the British Caribbean.

Lincoln's promotion of black colonization doubled as a settler colonial measure much like the British schemes of free black removal. The fusing of black relocation and white settler politics was first set in motion when newly independent republicans encountered the British discourse on Sierra Leone and, in particular, its association of black freedom and tropical Africa. This encounter provided a powerful framing device for the way white Americans approached the growing free black populations in their midst, while allowing them to diverge from the British in postulating distinct labor and imperial models.

Initially, the idea that blacks could become landowners in the Atlantic tropics was not limited to the United States. Sierra Leone was originally established with that goal. However, black tropical landholding soon became a distinctly American institution not only because Sierra Leone quickly discarded it, but also because this model became closely bound up with the conception of Liberia as “the embodiment of U.S. republican ideals.” As noted by Brandon Mills, replicating U.S. political values in an independent African republic was the cardinal principle of Liberian colonization for many supporters of the venture.²² To replicate the yeoman republic, its proponents envisioned a black “colony of prosperous freeholders” and put Liberia on a path toward independence, although it departed from colonial governance slowly, much to the black settlers’ frustration.²³

The U.S. vision of an independent African nation involved another divergence from Britain: the two countries treated their black-majority colonies differently. Britain locked Sierra Leone (and later the British Caribbean) into “economic entities” with a dependent, landless nonwhite majority placed under imperial guardianship, which made Britain what Jack Greene calls an “exclusionary empire” distinguished by unequal political liberty in and between settler and nonsettler colonies.²⁴ In the United States the possibility of Liberia’s joining the Union as a state was precluded from the start because the principle of equal incorporation into the aggrandizing republican empire assumed the white identity of its citizenry. This protocol, codified in the Northwest Ordinance, provided for “a minimal threshold of whiteness” (a white male population of five thousand) as the basic condition for entering the republic.²⁵

By the 1830s a notable segment of supporters of Liberian colonization had linked black Americans’ rise to landed settlers in Africa to the goal of establishing what William Freehling has called “an empire of liberty for white farmers.”²⁶ In this model, sites of republican yeomanry were racially separated—whites in the continental United States and blacks in the tropical settler colony of Liberia. What made this white settler paradigm distinct from Britain’s was its enmeshment with the conflict with those seeking to expand slavery. As Peter Kastor observes, that conflict was fundamentally settler colonial in that it was a struggle between “proslavery advocates [who] saw a renewed future for the peculiar institution in the West” and “free soil advocates [who] created their own portrait of landscape for white families freed from the economic inequalities created by slavery”—and, I would add, from the bastardization of labor in the continental empire’s metropolitan

center.²⁷ In the United States the imperative of populating the country's expanding territory with white settlers was greatly complicated by the question of whether the white settlers were allowed to own slaves.

The projected exclusion of black freedom from continental free soil continued to cast a long shadow on debates about the future of freed people during the Civil War, when emancipation loomed as a realistic prospect. With mounting numbers of escapees crossing Union lines, the Lincoln administration envisioned plantation colonies in the Caribbean Basin for the freed people at the same time that it passed the Homestead Act of 1862, which granted tracts of land to U.S. citizens and those legally qualified to become citizens—a category from which African Americans were excluded. The plans for black plantation labor were a harbinger of the nation's eventual adoption of systems of extractive labor in the aftermath of abolition. During Reconstruction, the triangular conjunction of the tropics, black freedom, and landless, dependent agricultural labor ultimately took root in the South as the region was transformed into a domestic tropical space characterized by its disfranchised and exploitable black-majority labor force.

FIGHTING THE HIERARCHIES OF FREEDOM

These distinct but overlapping racial hierarchies would have never taken shape without enslaved people's steadfast pursuit of deliverance from bondage. Regulations on free blacks were repeatedly imposed only because enslaved people steadily ran away to spaces whose laws, temporary or permanent, banned the enslavement of people within their bounds. Some of these people attained freedom by crossing military lines to a place where their slave status could be annulled, while others moved to a foreign territory where slavery was illegal. The implementation of these legal and executive measures, however, never automatically led to undisturbed enjoyment of freedom but required formerly enslaved people's strenuous efforts to mobilize political forces to secure and maintain a boundary between free and unfree spaces.

The most illustrative example of such a fight was that of formerly enslaved refugees who worked tirelessly with their allies to make the Canada-U.S. border a political shield against the intrusive hands of U.S. slavery. Black activism in Canada was almost always a joint venture between self-emancipated people and legally free blacks who identified with the self-emancipated by claiming common victimization at the hands of the U.S. slavery regime. These

two groups joined forces to secure the freedom of runaways, because entering Canada did not by itself guarantee annulment of slave owners' claim to their slaves' bodies and labor. Until the middle of the 1840s, former-slave refugees faced a real danger of extradition because the border did not protect them from legal quests to reinstate their slave status. Therefore, contrary to common scholarly wisdom that presupposes Britain's unwavering readiness to defend fugitives, cross-border runaways and their defenders had to press for governmental protection against U.S. intrusions.

In demanding metropolitan and colonial involvement, self-emancipated people's most ingenious politics of identity came when they associated themselves with a category of freed people already existing in British political discourse. They identified themselves with a group most symbolic of the glorious imperial emancipation—the West Indian freed people—a move that helped put the self-emancipated in Canada on the agenda of British abolitionism. African Canadians' identity politics, in turn, encouraged African Americans to distinguish their freedom from that of the Canadians, as delimited by territorial boundaries and defined by distinct sets of political ideals and cultural beliefs. Witnessing self-emancipated people's ardent expressions of British identity compelled African Americans in the northern states to represent the Canadian freed people as foreign others, against whom they would protect the republic if necessary and in contrast to whom they accentuated their American identity.

This marked a dramatic shift from the way the northern black community had used Canadian former-slave refugees in its protest culture: in the late 1830s the political value of the refugee population lay in their symbolic function as a racial archetype that demonstrated blacks' capacity for freedom, a capacity that came to be considered inherent in any population in the African diaspora. Rather than embodying nationally distinct characteristics, formerly enslaved people in Canada had personified a universal blackness possessed of the basic traits of the Western free subject: political loyalty, industry, monogamy, and Christian faith. Collectively, these examples reveal the great degree to which U.S. and Canadian black thinkers relied on diasporic groups as objects of identification or juxtaposition in articulating a blackness that suited their political goals. Here, in other words, African descent was considered an effective register of meaning in the constitution of free black subjectivities.

While African Americans and African Canadians pursued inclusion in their respective polities, British and U.S. whites increasingly combined both

groups into mere physical embodiments of a constellation of racial traits deemed inherent in the black body. Hence, even though their goal was to achieve an equitable place in their own political communities, the two groups were compelled to oppose, negotiate, and resignify transnationally operative discourses of blackness. One such discourse involved the accusations of black sexual and gender deviancy that both groups encountered. Accused of racial mixing by Canadian frontier settlers, self-emancipated and legally free migrants from the United States fashioned an identity as a racial group that reproduced endogamous family units and thus posed no threat to the integrity of the white settler body. Correspondingly, free African Americans claimed to have an ability to practice proper familial norms within the United States in opposition to white assertions that black domesticity was possible only in tropical Africa.

Both groups also countered climatic determinism. Against this imperial tradition, black theorists in Canada and the United States together exemplified what Britt Rusert calls “alternative histories of racial science.”²⁸ They formulated radical geographies that mapped free blacks’ unlimited access to temperate locations—whether in Canada, the U.S. North, or other constructed temperate places—by destabilizing the essentialist conceptions about the relationship between the black body and the tropics. Some redefined the physical capacity of the black race, while others went so far as to rework racial categories altogether by constructing a new race that obliterated the black-white distinction.

Free black populations in Canada and the United States also took aim at the white identity of the colonial settler by using a cultural strategy that reflected the highly mobile world in which both populations lived—a world cut across by transatlantic colonial emigrations, transcontinental settler expansions, and fugitive slave escapes. In this milieu, African North Americans engaged spatial movement in ways that helped them integrate into their respective empires. These engagements reflected what geographers describe as spatial movement’s cultural function—that of producing meanings and reifying differences. Calling this aspect of motion “mobility,” scholars have foregrounded mobility’s operation as “a rich terrain from which narratives—and, indeed, ideologies—can be, and have been, constructed.”²⁹ Through the representation of one’s movement from or to a given place, they argue, we elaborate how the moving subject is related to the place and articulate ideas about differences that underlie the subject’s specific relation to the place. In this way, representations of movements can serve as loci of signification for all sorts of differences, including those related to race, gender, and sexuality. And

if mobility works as a way to conceive and produce differences, then it is also a site of contestation over the meanings associated with them.

Experiencing and witnessing the intensifying and widespread animus toward free blacks in both Canada and the United States, some African Canadians unsurprisingly did not see much hope in the emancipatory possibilities of the Civil War. They considered equality in North America a mere fantasy, fearing that the continent as a whole was a site of white advancement in the Anglo-American racial geography of freedom. Indeed, the Union policy of emancipation with colonization plagued black Americans in the U.S. North, vindicating black Canadians' concern that potential abolition in the United States was just another case of emancipation in North America in which the freed people were subjected to racial determinism and pressures to relocate. Alarmed, black abolitionists in the North protested Lincoln's colonization schemes, but in doing so they were forced to walk a fine line between refuting the essentialist notion of black natural belonging in the tropics and advocating that freed people be retained as an agricultural labor force in the South, a region many Republicans deemed tropical.

EMANCIPATION, DISPLACEMENT, AND SETTLER COLONIALISM

By tracing the evolution of transnationally shared mechanisms of regulating black freedom to the late eighteenth century, this book complicates the prevailing geographic and chronological frame within which scholars have examined the intertwined histories of British and U.S. freedom regimes. The traditional paradigm has viewed the scope and structure of black freedom in nation-centered terms until U.S. universal emancipation. The abolition of southern slavery then becomes the principal theme of comparative and transnational studies of free labor systems in the United States and the British Empire.³⁰ This partial lack of a transnational perspective is largely a result of a popular antebellum view of the United States and the British Empire as contrasting sites of slavery and freedom. In the aftermath of British abolition, an influential antislavery discourse emerged in the Atlantic world that condemned the slaveholding republic in contrast to the free monarchy. Exemplified by the expression "the English are our friends," British emancipation served as an abolitionist weapon against the American cruelty that continued to permit human bondage.³¹

Within this highly politicized dyad, current scholarly analyses of the antebellum African American experience have rarely looked into the racial logic

underlying the meaning and praxis of freedom in both the British Empire and the United States. Nor have they adequately examined free African North Americans' critical stance toward the racialized structures of freedom. Emphasis tends to be placed on Canada's role as an asylum for freedom seekers on the Underground Railroad, and African American abolitionists' embrace of the British and denunciation of U.S. slavery in contrast to West Indian emancipation.³² The focus on the freedom-slavery dualism has also generated works that ascribe the distinctiveness of African American freedom to its existence within a slave republic, implicitly and explicitly emphasizing its peculiarity in juxtaposition to black freedom in postemancipation societies.³³

This book, in contrast, foregrounds patterned dynamics of stratifying freedom at work in both the slave republic and the free monarchy. These dynamics also complicate our understanding of the Atlantic world during the era of emancipation. Studies of the formation of hierarchies in connection with the rising tide of black liberation in the Atlantic world have mainly stressed the asymmetrical experiences of slavery and freedom. Such a world, demarcated into patches of free and unfree territory, entailed an imagined community of what Matthew Guterl describes as "a pan-American slave-holding class" that bound together the U.S. South and Latin America.³⁴ According to Sue Peabody and Keila Grinberg, this coexistence of slavery and freedom generated relations and processes that were "both hierarchical and highly mobile"—hierarchical because of the discrepancies of experience between those who remained enslaved and those who attained freedom by moving to a free territory.³⁵ What coincided with such uneven conditions was another kind of hierarchy, one embedded in freedom. As people who were enslaved in various locations found their way to liberation in the intricate Atlantic world, by the middle of the nineteenth century African North Americans had become cognizant of racial segmentations of freedom within the space of the Atlantic. And they defied and negotiated these hierarchies through intellectual work and by more implicit acts of negation.

What drove and shaped the racial geographies of freedom was a settler colonial impulse. The recognition of this fact joins together historical themes pursued separately in most scholarship. This book illuminates the long-neglected intersection between what Richard Follett, Eric Foner, and Walter Johnson call the "ingrained *patterns* of behavior and racial thought" that informed "the range and latitude of black freedom in the age of emancipation" and what Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis refer to as the "historical *patterns*

of societal development and state formation” that constituted “the concepts of ‘(white) settler society’ and ‘settler colony’ . . . [as] historical constructs.”³⁶

More specifically, acknowledging the intersections between black freedom and settler colonialism resituates African Americans in discussions of U.S. settler dynamics, which have mostly approached “blacks’ relationship with their colonizers” primarily as that of an “enslaved labor force” on the soil taken from indigenous populations.³⁷ As noted by David Roediger and Elizabeth Esch, a rich body of literature has placed slavery firmly within “the context of the dispossession of indigenous people by settler colonialism.”³⁸ Nevertheless, the emphasis on slavery has tended to divert attention from the centrality of displacement in black-white relationships. More recently, however, theoretical and historical explorations of Liberian colonization have viewed it as one kind of settler colonial modality—that of “ultimately ‘cleansing’ the settler body politic of its (indigenous and exogenous) alterities”—and pointed to Liberian colonization’s instrumentality in the project of white settler profiteering.³⁹ As illuminating as these expositions are, they provide only snapshots of a geographically broader and chronologically longer history in which Liberian colonization was embedded.

Similarly, little attention has been paid to the intersection of settler colonialism and free black removal in the field of African Canadian history. The existing literature on attempts to relocate self-emancipated people to the British Caribbean has not connected the schemes to imperatives of white settler colonialism. Nor has it investigated the languages that underpinned black exclusion from Canada’s settler polity or recognized the transnational operation of the underlying racial logic of tropical black freedom.⁴⁰

In U.S. historiography in particular, recognizing the existence of a settler colonial factor in black removal projects contributes to a recent effort to explain the sustained popularity of black colonization up to the end of the Civil War. Foner has observed that the Liberian scheme was “a political movement, an ideology, and a program that enjoyed remarkably broad support before and during the Civil War.”⁴¹ David Brion Davis calls for an investigation into the public acceptance of colonization in the antebellum era, since “historians have never really explained why the coupling of emancipation and colonization appealed to leading American statesmen from Jefferson to Lincoln.”⁴² By showing how colonization supporters bundled their ventures with the imperative of expanding a white-only yeomanry, this book demonstrates that colonization was appealing partly because of its essential role in forming and articulating a core tenet of the U.S. continental empire.

Importantly, in thinking about freedom and settler colonialism, one should keep in mind that aspirations for landholding by the emancipated were “premised on earlier and continuing modes of colonization of Indigenous peoples.” Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua make this point by poignantly asking: “Out of whose land would the ‘40 acres’ be carved?” The ideal of “black land rights” was, in essence, predicated on indigenous peoples’ “free[ing] up” of land for settlement.⁴³ To foreground that dynamic, this book heeds Lawrence’s and Dua’s call to take note of “how the lands settled by people of color were removed from the control of *specific* Indigenous nations” and does so by naming the specific groups that had occupied the lands before the new black inhabitants.⁴⁴

OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS

This book has two major focuses, examining both racialized geographic organizations of freedom and free black people’s own understandings of belonging. These themes are investigated through specific instances of emancipation in North America, each explored chronologically in the chapters. Chapter 1 concerns people who became free under British and U.S. rule during the American Revolution and the War of 1812. It demonstrates how ideas and practices surrounding these peoples resulted in the conception of freedom as a race-specific geographic condition marked by a tropical or temperate climate. By 1830 such racial distinctions had come to undergird white settler projects in both Britain and the United States.

This emerging mode of mapping freedom, however, initially held little sway when another group of U.S.-origin enslaved people began emancipating themselves in conspicuous numbers in British North America. Chapter 2 looks at former-slave fugitives who escaped to Canada in the aftermath of British imperial abolition. It highlights how formerly enslaved people and their allies in Canada and free African Americans in the U.S. North saw each other’s freedom as two distinct states of being, each characterized by a unique political ideology and contoured by territorial boundaries. Such constructions helped give rise to a British abolitionist discourse that acknowledged the former-slave refugees in Canada as a specific group of black colonial subjects, an acknowledgment that accompanied the designation of Canada as their rightful site of belonging.

Chapter 3 demonstrates that by the middle of the 1840s an array of British imperial agents—metropolitan abolitionists, Canadian colonial settlers, and