

The Underground Railroad: Next Stop, Toronto! Edited by Adrienne Shadd, Afua Cooper, and Karolyn Smardz Frost

Deirdre McCorkindale

Volume 114, numéro 2, fall 2022

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1092225ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1092225ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

McCorkindale, D. (2022). Compte rendu de [*The Underground Railroad: Next Stop, Toronto!* Edited by Adrienne Shadd, Afua Cooper, and Karolyn Smardz Frost]. *Ontario History*, 114(2), 265–267. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1092225ar>

ness of the environmental impacts of mining in the 1970s, and to contrast the massive greening project in Sudbury with the lack of action in Serpent River.

Where the book excels is in highlighting how communities such as SRFN were forced to become actors of their own destiny, threatening or taking direct action to trigger any kind of meaningful government responses to their concerns. When tensions mount between Indigenous communities and developers or industries, the public may wonder why opportunities for jobs and financial benefits are sometimes met with fierce resistance. What is often missing in public discourse is the real work that communities must undertake for their voices to be heard, efforts that often come with significant financial and human costs.

In Chapter 6, Leddy strips away stereotypical assumptions that Indigenous communities are against economic development and aptly highlights the colonial mindset that remains pervasive in contemporary economic development planning and decision-making.

This book is a must read for anyone working with Indigenous communities in Ontario. It sheds important light on how Indigenous communities suffer even greater losses than non-Indigenous communities when promises of economic development opportunities fall flat. It also serves as a helpful reminder of the burden and distrust that communities like SRFN carry with them into future endeavours.

Lori Hallock

The Underground Railroad *Next Stop, Toronto!*

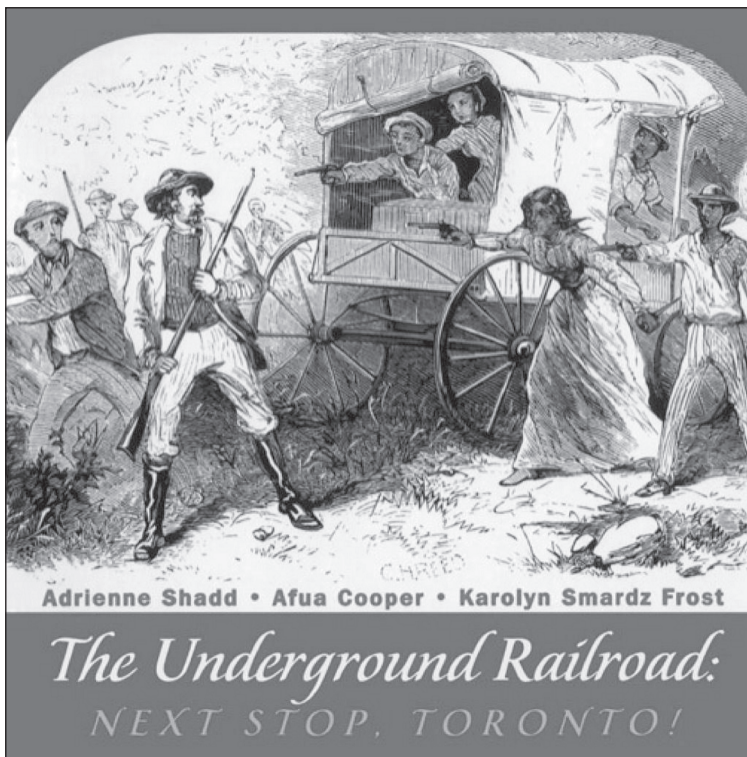
Edited by Adrienne Shadd, Afua Cooper, and Karolyn Smardz Frost

Toronto, Ontario. Dundurn Press, 2nd ed. 2022. 145 pages. \$19.99 Softcover. 8.99 e-pub. ISBN 978-1459748965. (<https://www.dundurn.com/>)

The Underground Railroad is a subject that has captured the hearts and minds of people since the nineteenth century. The particular story of enslaved people making their way north and settling in the province of Ontario remains an often-cited period in Canadian history. The new edition of *The Underground Railroad: Next Stop, Toronto!* (originally published in 2002), demonstrates how the Underground Railroad has retained its potency as a popular topic in Canadian history. However, discussions of the Underground Railroad in Canada have historically tended to focus on the journeys of enslaved people to freedom, with little exploration of the subsequent

realities of Black Canadian life in Ontario. While scholarship of Black Canadian experiences has broadened in scope over the last twenty years, the Underground Railroad as a subject still carries with it a focus on Canada as a destination rather than as a lived reality for Black settlers. Disrupting this narrative is why a new edition of *The Underground Railroad: Next Stop, Toronto!* is crucial to telling the story of Black Canadians.

In *The Underground Railroad: Next Stop, Toronto!* historians Adrienne Shadd, Afua Cooper, and Karolyn Smardz Frost explore the history of Black settlement in the city of Toronto. As the introduction



asserts, Toronto is not always perceived to be a major terminus on the Underground Railroad, and yet there was—and continues to be—significant Black settlement in the city. This settlement demonstrates the importance of Toronto in nineteenth-century Black Canadian history. The previous edition of the book from 2002 highlighted the history of Black people in Toronto, telling some of their stories. In the twenty years since its publication there are even more stories that have been uncovered and their inclusion in this new volume provides some useful amplification of these valuable historical findings.

The Underground Railroad: Next Stop, Toronto! begins its introduction with an important statement which is sometimes lost in Underground Railroad discourse: namely, that “Slavery Existed in North America,” which serves to high-

light Canada’s own, often overlooked, involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. The text then goes on to provide a very brief overview of the history of enslavement on the continent. This overview provides clear context for both the starting point of journeys from the United States and the significance of the destination of Toronto for many of the Black settlers upon whom the book focuses. With that context in mind, the authors are clear

to note that while the majority of Black settlement by the 1850s consisted of immigrants seeking freedom from slavery in the American South, there were Black people in Toronto who were the descendants of British and Loyalist settlers, Black Loyalists, immigrants from the West Indies, along with educated and propertied free Black families from the United States. This cross section of people speaks to the sources of such diversity of Black experiences in Toronto.

The book is then broken into twelve chapters which are centred on a particular topic including “Blacks in Early Toronto,” “Life in the City,” “The World of Children,” and “Political Life.” Each of these sections provides overviews of their given subject matter, but also insert the stories of specific settlers and institutions as brief case studies, and include images from valu-

able primary sources such as newspaper excerpts, photographs, illustrations, and objects found at archeological sites. Chapter Seven, "The World of Children," tackles the often under-examined subject of Black childhood in nineteenth-century Toronto. The chapter discusses the issues of child mortality, child labour, and the history of Toronto's schools that were open to Black students and White students alike. This section also provides short discussions of the lives of notable Black Torontonians children, such as Albert Lafferty's accomplishments at the Upper Canada College boy's school. Intermingled with this overview are photographs of children's toys, a Black caricature depicting a shoe shine boy, and an 1898 photograph of Victoria Industrial School. The combination of an overview of Black childhood in Toronto with names and accomplishments of Black children, along with the visual markers of work, play, and schooling make the short chapter an engaging read.

Due to its brevity and quick pace the book, by necessity, does not delve into the depth which some curious readers might hope for. However, the book aids the desire to explore the topic of Black history even further through the inclusion of two chapters at the end of the book entitled "How Do we Know? History" and the new addition of the chapter "How Do We Know? Archeology." "How Do We Know? History" (entitled "How Do We Know?" in the previous edition) explains where to look for Black history resources, naming archival materials, directories,

websites, and newspapers. "How do we Know? Archeology" demonstrates how our knowledge of Black settlement can be expanded through archeology, utilizing examples from digs such as the Blackburn site in 1985 and adding the more recent Courthouse site in 2015. The inclusion of actionable guidelines for how this history can be explored, coupled with further reading suggestions geared toward both adult and young readers alike provide the foundations and the tools for all readers to expand their knowledge beyond the contents of the book.

The Underground Railroad: Next Stop, Toronto! makes the nineteenth-century Black history of Toronto particularly accessible as an introductory text. The volume provides a good base for understanding Black settlement in Toronto, choosing to cover a multitude of topics concisely; however, the book also provides snapshots of the people who called the city home, along with visual examples of their presence shown throughout, which speaks to the multitude of ways in which history can be explored and interpreted. The history found in *The Underground Railroad: Next Stop, Toronto!* maintains a good balance of both the general and the specifics of Toronto Black history, making it an excellent resource for those interested in beginning to explore Ontario's Black history, and Toronto's Black history in particular.

Deirdre McCorkindale
Assistant Professor, Department of History,
University of Guelph