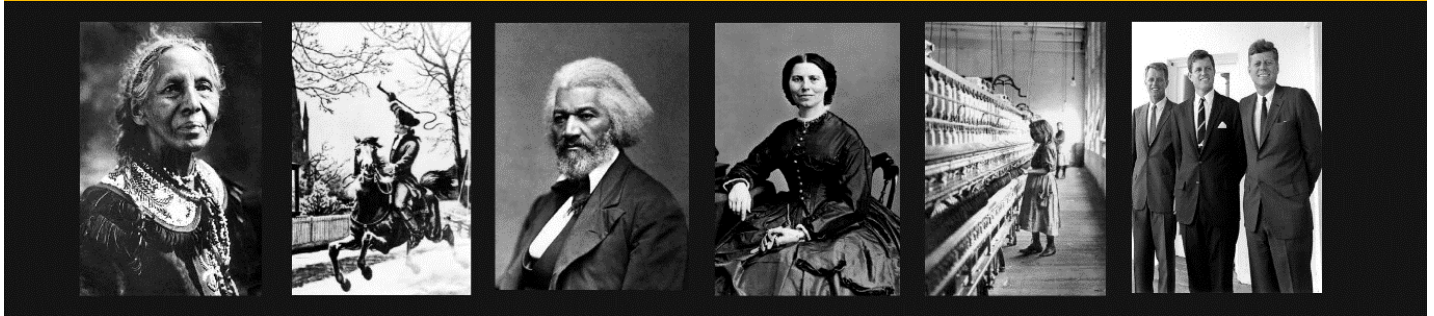


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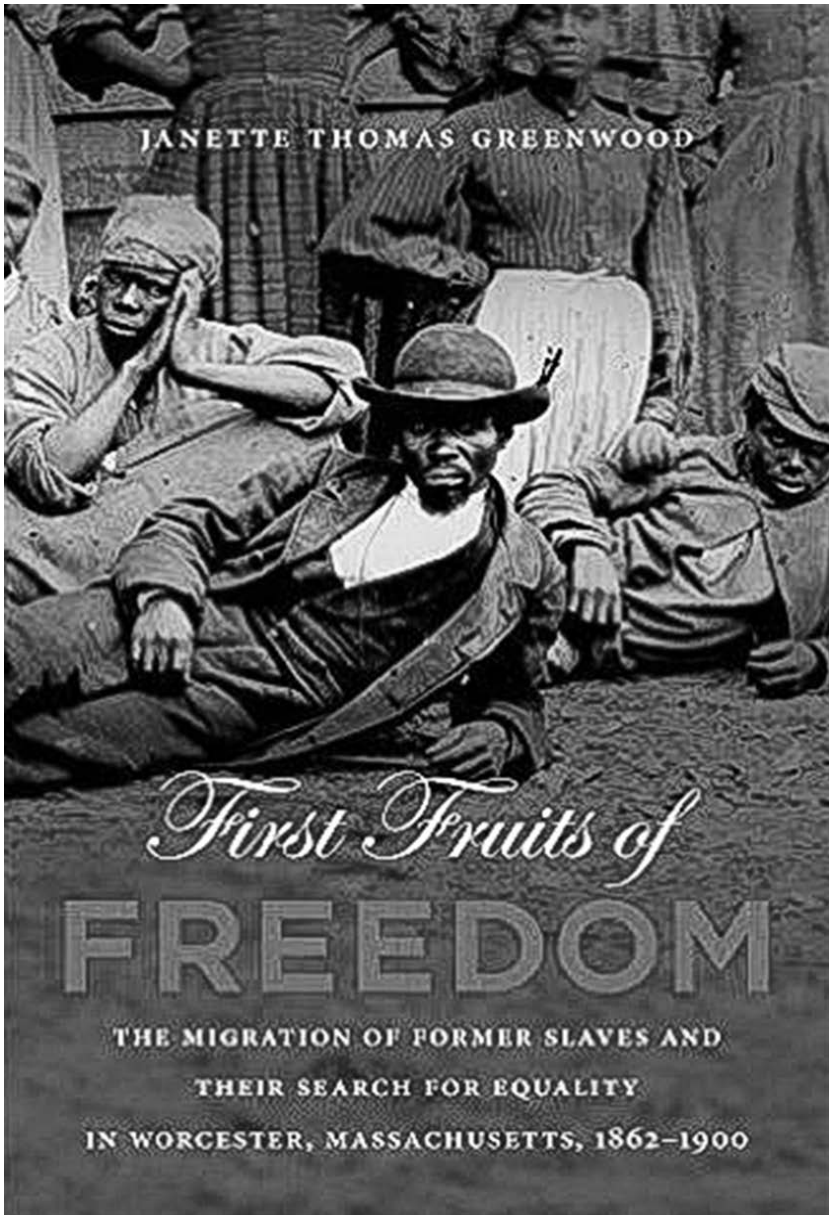


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EDITOR'S CHOICE

**The Migration of Former Slaves
to Worcester:
Hopes and Dreams Deferred, 1862–1900**

JANETTE THOMAS GREENWOOD



INTRODUCTION: *The Historical Journal of Massachusetts is proud to select as our Editor's Choice Award for this issue Janette Thomas Greenwood's magisterial First Fruits of Freedom: The Migration of Former Slaves and Their Search for Equality in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1862–1900. A moving narrative that offers a rare glimpse into the lives of African American men, women, and children on the cusp of freedom, First Fruits of Freedom chronicles one of the first collective migrations of blacks from the South to the North during and after the Civil War.*

Greenwood relates the history of a network forged between Worcester County and eastern North Carolina as a result of Worcester regiments taking control of northeastern North Carolina during the war. White soldiers from Worcester, a hotbed of abolitionism, protected refugee slaves, set up schools for them, and led them north at war's end. White

patrons and a supportive black community helped many migrants fulfill their aspirations for complete emancipation and facilitated the arrival of additional family members and friends. Migrants established a small black community in Worcester with a distinctive southern flavor.

But even in the North, white sympathy did not continue after the Civil War. Despite their many efforts, black “Worcesterites” were generally disappointed in their hopes for full-fledged citizenship, reflecting the larger national trajectory of Reconstruction and its aftermath.¹

Historian Elizabeth Pleck describes the work as, “A remarkable work of historical scholarship that tells an incredibly moving and often tragic human story.” Sydney Nathans writes that, “Greenwood peoples her story with those who embodied the freedom struggles of the second half of the nineteenth century. Her literary skill and human empathy bring us to know and care about her subjects.”² Janette Thomas Greenwood is a professor of history at Clark University. She is author of Bittersweet Legacy: The Black and White “Better Classes” in Charlotte, 1850–1910 (1991).

* * * * *

In June 1862, amidst news from the Civil War battlefield, the *Worcester Daily Spy* announced the “arrival of a ‘Contraband’”—a slave who had absconded to the safety of Union lines in search of freedom. The refugee had just come from New Bern, North Carolina, where he had “rendered important service to Gen. Burnside, in the capacity of pilot.” In return for his aid, “he was sent north with his wife and child,” bearing “recommendations from officers high in rank.” The newspaper editor appealed to readers to consider hiring him, as “such a man certainly deserves immediate employment here—a chance for honest labor, which is all he wants.”¹

The arrival of the escaped bondsman and his family to Worcester marked the beginning of a small but steady stream of contrabands and then emancipated slaves to Worcester County, Massachusetts, during and immediately following the Civil War. The contraband’s story contains several clues about the origin and nature of this development. Southern black migration to central Massachusetts from the 1860s on was rooted in the experience of the Civil War, first and foremost in relationships built between northern white soldiers and the southern blacks they encountered during the conflict. Fugitives and white soldiers, sharing the experience of the war, forged strong personal bonds that led former slaves to accompany the veterans north to their homes. Missionary teachers from Worcester,

following in the paths of county regiments, reinforced military networks of migration, bringing additional freedpeople north with them after their service in the South. Personally sponsored and highly localized, this wartime journey established southern black migration networks to Worcester County evident through the turn of the twentieth century, as migrants brought family and friends north. A third, less personalized network, the Freedmen's Bureau, helped place additional former slaves in Worcester by finding them employment. Seeking a more complete freedom in the North, these men and women were, in the words of Chaplain Horace James, who played a key role in facilitating the migration from eastern North Carolina, "the Children of this Revolution, the promising first fruits of the war."²

As the "contraband's" story from 1862 suggests, Civil War-era migration was profoundly different from the massive Great Migration of the twentieth century, with its own unique context, internal dynamic, and networks. Yet this earlier migration has only begun to be studied on its own terms. The Great Migration dominates the literature and, consequently, our understanding of black migration. Great Migration studies generally treat the Civil War-era movements in a cursory way, as mere prologue to the much larger Great Migration. While the Great Migration drew millions of people north, the Civil War-era migration, by contrast, drew approximately 80,000 blacks to free states in the North and West by 1870. Yet, as historian Michael P. Johnson notes, this migration, while much smaller in scale than the Great Migration, constituted "the largest voluntary interstate migration of African Americans in the first century of the nation's history."³

But beyond this demographic fact, this migration, a product of the Civil War, emancipation, and Reconstruction, constitutes the powerful story of former slaves who went north, initially with white patrons, believing that "free New England" and Massachusetts provided the most fertile soil for seeding a new life for themselves and their children. Some of them, especially the first wave of migrants, would, indeed, find their hopes fulfilled in the North, as they established new lives with the aid of "benevolent sympathizers," as one fugitive slave to the city explained. But even the antislavery hotbed of Worcester—like the rest of the nation—eventually reneged on the promises made to African Americans during Reconstruction. Despite noble efforts, Southern migrants and their children would be frustrated in their attempts to prod white citizens to live up to promises made to black Americans after emancipation.⁴

Worcester County, Massachusetts, provides an outstanding context for telling this dramatic story and for weaving together several strands of the emancipation story usually treated separately: abolitionism; the story

of Northern white soldiers who helped liberate slaves and the missionary teachers who educated them; and accounts of emancipated slaves claiming their freedom in the chaos of war and shaping their own freedom. Moreover, two additional underexamined narratives—the role of an activist black community in aiding the settlement of ex-slaves and the subsequent chain migration from the South in the wake of contraband migrants—also become clear in the Worcester example.

With a deep abolitionist tradition, Worcester County had long been in the forefront of antislavery activities that bonded both white and black activists as crusaders against slavery. By the mid-1850s, the city had gained a reputation of being far more radical than its more celebrated counterpart, Boston, roughly forty miles to the east. Worcester prided itself, in the aftermath of the Fugitive Slave Law, as being “Canada to the Slave,” in the words of the city’s fiery radical abolitionist minister, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and the city continued to act as a refuge for former slaves during and after the Civil War.⁵

In the first two years of the Civil War, Worcester County raised several regiments made up of white men from the county and contributed fifteen soldiers to the famous 54th Massachusetts. Among the most prominent of the white regiments were the 15th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry and the 25th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, both three-year regiments. The 15th spent most of the war engaged in the bloody, protracted campaigns fought in Virginia and Maryland. The 25th was part of the Burnside Expedition that successfully invaded and controlled much of northeastern North Carolina, including New Bern in the spring of 1862. Under the direction of Chaplain Horace James, the 25th spearheaded efforts not only in protecting refugee slaves from their former masters but also set up schools to educate them. James, later appointed Superintendent of Negro Affairs in eastern North Carolina, played an especially important part in facilitating migration, as he forged strong links between New Bern and Worcester.

Missionary teachers and ministers from Worcester County, many recruited by James, enthusiastically followed in the paths of local units serving in the South. Because of the long-term presence of the 25th Massachusetts in New Bern, young men and women eager to teach former slaves flocked to eastern North Carolina. Others established and taught in freedpeople’s schools in southeastern Virginia, also in proximity to Worcester County soldiers.

Black migration networks to Worcester County mirrored the specific path its troops and missionaries trod. Runaway slaves from northern Virginia and from northeastern North Carolina all sought refuge and freedom with the county’s regiments during the war. Like the contraband family in 1862,

they made their way north during and immediately following the war in the company of local soldiers and teachers, paving the way for future migrants from these specific Southern locales. Additional migrants came after the war under the auspices of the Freedmen's Bureau, which found them employment in Worcester. Between 1862 and 1870 alone, approximately 370 Southern blacks—the overwhelming number from North Carolina and Virginia—migrated to the county, significantly augmenting its African American population and nearly doubling the city's small black community. Civil War-era migrants established patterns of chain migration in which they rapidly facilitated the arrival of additional family members and friends. Moreover, they helped create a migration tradition of men and women from Virginia and eastern North Carolina that lasted at least through the century. By 1900, well over a thousand Southerners, mostly North Carolinians and Virginians, migrated to Worcester County, helping to nearly triple its "colored" population while enlarging that of the city of Worcester nearly five-fold, giving it a decidedly Southern cast.⁶

An examination of Civil War-era migration not only sheds light on the bonds of war created between Southern blacks and Northern white soldiers and teachers but also demonstrates how their interactions profoundly shaped each other. Wartime experiences left deep and lasting impressions that went far beyond the exigencies of war.

In addition, Worcester County's Civil War-era migration affords a rare glimpse into the lives and strategies of black men, women, and children on the cusp of freedom. Their stories not only reveal the significant contributions that they made to the Union war effort but also show how former slaves negotiated a new world of freedom, the tactics they employed, and the decisions they made to ensure their liberty and that of family and friends whom they subsequently brought north.

Black migration to Worcester in this period also provides a rich case study of a tiny but highly organized and politically active Northern black community that played a crucial role in settling Southern migrants. Black Worcesterites, in many cases, former slaves themselves who had sought refuge in the city before the Civil War, found migrants housing and employment and helped integrate them into a supportive community. Complemented by a solid infrastructure of antislavery and freedmen's relief organizations, the support of patrons—both black and white—eased the transition of former slaves to a more complete freedom in the North. The interest of sympathetic blacks and whites extended beyond the emancipation of Southern blacks to the era of freedom.

Finally, this migration story mirrors the larger national story of Reconstruction's broken promises. Even in Worcester, with its deep abolitionist tradition, the sympathy of Worcester whites did not extend beyond the Civil War-era abolitionist generation. Just as the nation quickly wearied of the "negro problem" and the ideal of equality for all faded from the national agenda with the passing of the "radical generation," sympathy for Southern black refugees diminished in Worcester. Especially for those who came north without white patronage, the city and county provided few opportunities for economic advancement, with an unofficial color bar in industry. Reflecting the national trajectory of Reconstruction and its aftermath, "benevolent sympathizers" became fewer in number. In Worcester, as nationally, African Americans found their hopes of full-fledged citizenship dashed, their dream deferred for another century.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN MIGRATIONS NORTH

Outside of studies of Kansas "Exodusters" [i.e., African Americans who migrated to Kansas after the Civil War in what was called the "Great Exodus"], the Civil War and Reconstruction eras' black migration has received only minimal attention from historians until recently and the Midwest has garnered the most attention. Elizabeth Pleck's *Black Migration and Poverty, Boston 1865–1900* (1979), is one of the few book-length, in-depth studies of Civil War-era migration to New England. While examining the role of the Freedmen's Bureau in facilitating the migration of Southern blacks to post-Civil War Boston, Pleck's study makes no mention of military or missionary sponsorship and is ultimately less interested in migration and its consequences than in examining "the impact of the city and racial poverty" on Boston's blacks. Other historians, including William Cohen, Carol Faulkner, and Robert Harrison, have more broadly explored the organized group relocation of freedpeople to the North by the Freedmen's Bureau and relief organizations.⁷

Building on V. Jacque Voegeli's *Free But Not Equal: The Midwest and the Negro During the Civil War* (1967), recent scholarship has focused on the Midwest, where the majority of black migrants headed. Michael P. Johnson and Leslie A. Schwalm have both examined Civil War-era migration to that region. Schwalm's groundbreaking, book-length study, *Emancipation's Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (2009) deftly weaves the story of Civil War-era black migration to a vigorous public discourse on race and politics and teases out the ways that this migration extended the consequences of emancipation beyond the South.⁸

Schwalm's study of the upper Midwest greatly broadens our understanding of the Civil War-era migration and Reconstruction in the North. Yet the migration experience and Reconstruction in New England differed significantly from that of the Midwest, even as it shared some common ground. As Schwalm carefully delineates, regional history, geography, and national events all shaped the reception of black migrants in the Upper Midwest. The same is true for New England. In the Upper Midwest, as Schwalm shows, "a legacy of bondage" and a tradition of white supremacy—evident in the presence of slavery, exclusionary laws prohibiting black migration, black codes, and violence—all shaped what Schwalm has characterized as "white hostility" to black migrants.

By contrast, residents of New England—Massachusetts and Worcester in particular—had long prided themselves on their liberal race relations and their aid in providing refuge for runaway slaves. Even though, as historian Joan Pope Melish has shown, the narrative of "free New England" was largely mythical as it erased the region's own slave past, it was a powerful story nevertheless, one that informed the behavior of Worcester troops, as they marched south and liberated slaves and the decisions of scores of preachers and teachers to go south from Worcester to teach the newly emancipated. Moreover, as the home of their liberators and teachers, Massachusetts loomed large as a symbol of freedom in the eyes of ex-slaves who accompanied soldiers and teachers home in the first wave of Civil War migration. Finally, the antislavery heritage of the region, state, and city deeply affected the way that the community received former slaves who made Worcester their home.

Worcester's tiny, but highly activist, black community also played a crucial role. Unlike the Midwest, where even established black communities often responded to migrants with hostility, in Worcester the city's blacks and white abolitionists served as patrons to migrants. Having forged bonds with the white abolitionists in the 1850s, in response to the Fugitive Slave Law, they stood shoulder to shoulder first to defend the free soil of Massachusetts before the war and then to ease former slaves into a new life in the North during and after the war. Their alliance and cooperation would prove vital to the successful settlement of former slaves in the city.⁹

Geography also played a part in shaping the contrasting migration experiences in the upper Midwest and New England. With its close physical proximity to slave states and with the Mississippi River providing a natural conduit, the upper Midwest became a magnet for thousands of fugitive and emancipated slaves who made their way to Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Whereas Union soldiers and officers there, as in Worcester, provided one avenue for migration as they returned with former slaves or

made arrangements for their relocation with friends or family members, “self-liberation,” in the midst of wartime chaos, as Schwalm argues, served as a second primary pathway to freedom. In addition, organized, government-sponsored relocation efforts transported hundreds of blacks, mostly women and children, from overcrowded Mississippi Valley contraband camps to the upper Midwest. The large scale of migration set off fears of black inundation and the loss of white privilege among white midwesterners. It also fostered resentment of the federal government, leading to the politicization of the migration issue in the Midwest, where it became a “vigorously debated matter of public policy.” Between 1860 and 1870, over 6,000 black migrants streamed into the upper Midwest, with Wisconsin’s black population increasing by 80%, Minnesota’s by 193%, and Iowa’s by 439%.¹⁰

By contrast, Civil War–era black migrants to New England faced a longer, more difficult journey from South to North, one that often required the aid of patrons. As a result, they came in much smaller numbers. Unlike midwestern migrants, Worcester’s first wave of migrants tended to arrive individually, in the company of returning soldiers and teachers. Worcester and Massachusetts received contrabands in small numbers, compared with the Midwest, and most came through personal sponsorship. Only after the war, for a brief period, did former slaves arrive through government sponsorship (the Freedmen’s Bureau), and then only in small numbers. From 1860 to 1870, Massachusetts experienced only a 45% net increase in its black population, from 9,602 to 13,947, the largest of any New England state. At the same time, Worcester’s black population doubled, from 272 to 524 in the city, and from 769 to 1,136 in the county.¹¹

The small scale of the migration and the fact that the first migrants arrived largely through personal sponsorship likely tamped the fears of those who worried, as many white Massachusetts residents clearly did, that emancipation would unleash a disruptive mass migration of blacks. Like their midwestern counterparts, many whites in the Bay State feared throngs of blacks streaming into their state as a result of emancipation; they were not immune to the same race-based concerns. For a brief moment, in the fall of 1862, controversy raged when the army requested the relocation of several thousand impoverished contrabands to the Bay State. Notably, abolitionist Republican governor John Andrew, with overwhelming public support, rejected the request. Slamming the door on the mass relocation of former slaves to Massachusetts extinguished the controversy for the most part—unlike the Midwest, where government-sponsored mass relocation efforts stoked the fires of white hostility—leaving space in cities such as Worcester to accept small numbers of contrabands without a harsh backlash. While

occasional violence flared, the first generation of black migrants to Worcester generally found a receptive community.¹²

Despite regional differences, in many ways migrants to New England and the Midwest shared common ground. Catalyzed by the Civil War and shaped by the experience of emancipation, migration represented the deeply felt desire of former slaves to forge and define freedom on their own terms. Creating new lives in the North, migrants in both places established vibrant communities brimming with churches, clubs, and organizations reflecting a rich civic life. And even though Worcester's Civil War-era migrants initially enjoyed the support of a generally sympathetic community and did not experience the hostility suffered by their midwestern counterparts and patrons, they soon found that white sympathy and support faded with the passing of the abolitionist generation. The advantages enjoyed by the first generation of migrants did not continue. As the descendants of white abolitionists ignored their historical heritage, migrants to Worcester, like those in the Midwest, soon faced unofficial Jim Crow and a color bar in local industry that relegated them to low-paying jobs. Compared with European ethnic groups that flourished in the city, Worcester's black community languished, small and resource-poor.¹³

Like their brothers and sisters in the Midwest, black migrants and their children responded with political and social activism in asserting their civil rights. Fighting for respect and the Radical Republican vision of equality promised them after emancipation, Southern migrants and their children shaped a politics and community in Worcester informed by their Southern roots. As Southern migrants continued to flow to the city in the era of Jim Crow, they built and nourished their own cultural enclave within the city's small African American community. Drawn together by the profound historical experience of slavery and emancipation, family ties, and a shared Southern culture, they established a distinctive neighborhood, centered on their own Southern-style Baptist church and celebrated and cultivated an identity apart from the older established community—even as they participated in common community events and social organizations. In the process, they infused the city's small black community with a distinctive Southern flavor. In the end, though, the dreams of migrants and their children for full-fledged citizenship and equal opportunity would be dashed as white Worcester, like much of the rest of the North, chose white supremacy over equality and conveniently forgot the promises of Reconstruction.¹⁴

MICROHISTORY: ONE CITY

Choosing the parameters of any historical study has obvious trade-offs. As a microhistory, this study contains many limitations. But a tight focus on one



Robert Morse Family, North Brookfield c. 1895

Virginian Robert Morse (standing) was another Southern migrant who established an independent life in neighboring North Brookfield. Most notably, Morse rose to distinction in a nearly all-white town with no separate black community or organizations (unlike Worcester), yet he played an active role—even rising to positions of leadership—in the town's most important community institutions. After working as a servant, Morse found work as a fireman in a shoe factory. He purchased a home after marrying fellow Virginian Frances Williams where they raised three children. According to the local newspaper, at his death Morse “was respected by everyone.” He was a deacon in the Union Congregational Church and an honorary member of local Post 51 of the Grand Army of the Republic. From the collections of the Worcester Historical Museum, Worcester, Massachusetts.

northern city has enabled me to tease out details of the migration dynamic that would have been nearly impossible to detect with a wider aperture. Using a powerful lens on a small place has also allowed me to see personal relationships at the heart of the migration story and to trace individuals and families in greater depth. Focusing on Worcester has allowed me, to use Charles Joyner's apt and elegant phrase, "to ask big questions in small places." At the very least, by studying one place in great detail I hope I have opened another window on this understudied phase of black migration and have encouraged further research elsewhere. Finally, in exploring the detailed story of Worcester's sponsored migration, I hope I have presented a story that complements and complicates the narrative of midwestern migration.

As a community study, this study begs an important question: how representative is this story? A city with a deep abolitionist tradition, Worcester was probably more liberal than most Northern cities of the era. The 25th Massachusetts Regiment, which played a key role in the migration, also was not "typical," being made up largely of middle-class men with some exposure to antislavery and unusual in its sympathy to runaway slaves. Other historians have painted a far darker portrait of the interactions between Yankee soldiers and the contrabands in the South. Rather than the tales of benevolence that dot the landscape of the Worcester story, these narratives emphasize overt racism and violence between Northern soldiers and the Southern blacks they encountered.¹⁵

What is more fruitful, I believe, is to move beyond the question of "typicality" and instead look at Worcester as a revealing study of a community's transition from an antislavery hotbed to a refuge for freedpeople to a community that ultimately abandoned that mission. Despite its tight focus, this study reveals a great deal about race and power in the late nineteenth century, about the deep desire for self-determination among those liberated from slavery and their struggle—and that of their children—to attain "full manhood and womanhood." It also reveals a worsening racial climate nationally and the consequences of the passing of the white abolitionist generation in the North, and the subsequent generation's rejection of its heritage. Worcester was a small stage on which the larger national drama over the meaning of freedom played out.

This study also raises a second obvious question. Was the migration dynamic that brought Southern blacks to Worcester replicated elsewhere? I think it is likely that similar migration networks existed, especially in other parts of New England and northern towns and cities with a similar antislavery tradition. Both historians Voegeli and Schwalm note "pockets" of sympathy in the upper Midwest, in Quaker settlements and antislavery

Ohio towns, such as Oberlin. The 1870 census of the United States cites a significant jump in the “colored” population in the decade of the Civil War; the North’s black population grew by 50% overall in the 1860s, as Michael Johnson notes, “more than three times faster than it had grown in the 1850s.” In Massachusetts, as noted, it grew by roughly 45%. The remaining New England states also showed considerable gains, especially Vermont (over 30%); Rhode Island (26%); and Maine (21%). Several urban studies that cover this period point out a significant Southern black migration north following the Civil War, but most attribute it to racial oppression, the crop-lien system, or crop failures and do not explore networks of migration. Perhaps on closer examination, personal networks, built on military and missionary networks, might be revealed.¹⁶

I have been deeply influenced by Eric Foner’s monumental work, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877*, especially his challenge to historians to learn more about how Reconstruction shaped the North. This study, a modest effort in that direction, reveals not only the ways that Southern migrants shaped and transformed New England, but also the meaning of freedom in post–Civil War America, proved to be highly contested even in “free New England.”

Excerpted with permission of the University of North Carolina Press from Janette Thomas Greenwood’s *First Fruits of Freedom: The Migration of Former Slaves and Their Search for Equality in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1862–1900* (2009). Excerpted from the Introduction, pages 1–10. This book can be ordered from www.uncpress.unc.edu.

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Notes

1. The book description in these three paragraphs was taken from the book jacket. Janette Thomas Greenwood, *First Fruits of Freedom: The Migration of Former Slaves and Their Search for Equality in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1862–1900* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009).
2. Elizabeth Pleck’s and Sydney Nathan’s reviews, quoted from the book jacket.

3. "Arrival of a Contraband," *Worcester Daily Spy*, 28 June 1862.
4. "Letter from Chaplain James," *The Congregationalist*, 10 October 1862.
5. Michael P. Johnson, "Out of Egypt: The Migration of Former Slaves to the Midwest during the 1860s in Comparative Perspective," in *Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of Black People in Diaspora* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 228. For two classic studies of the Great Migration, see Florette Henri, *Black Migration: Movement North, 1900–1920* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1975); and Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, Negro New York, 1890–1930* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966). Clyde Vernon Kiser's *Sea Island to City: A Study of St. Helena Islanders in Harlem and Other Urban Centers* (New York, 1932) briefly examines the post–Civil War migration of a small number of Sea Islanders to the North, connecting the migration to the Civil War experience. Seth Scheiner, *Negro Mecca: A History of the Negro in New York City, 1865–1920* (New York: New York University Press, 1965), discusses the migration from the South Atlantic states that increased the city's black population by nearly 27% between 1865 and 1870 and 54% between 1870 and 1880 without much attention to Civil War–era migration networks. James Grossman's *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Albert Broussard's *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900–1954* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993); Quintard Taylor's *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994); and Lillian Serece Williams's *Strangers in the Land of Paradise: The Creation of African American Community, Buffalo, New York, 1900–1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), all include minimal discussions of pre-1900 migrations. For an excellent overview of the historiography of black migration, see Joe William Trotter, "Black Migration in Historical Perspective: A Review of the Literature," in *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender*, ed. Joe William Trotter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 13–17; see also Lillian Serece Williams, *Strangers in the Land of Paradise*, xii–xiv.
6. Isaac Mason, *Life of Isaac Mason as a Slave* (Worcester: n.p., 1893), 66.
7. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Massachusetts in Mourning! A Sermon, Preached in Worcester, on June 4, 1854* (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1854), 14.
8. I arrived at overall migrant numbers by combining census information with birth, marriage, and death records for the city of Worcester. These numbers are conservative, most certainly an underestimate. Worcester County people of color, like their counterparts elsewhere in the United States, were regularly undercounted in nineteenth-century censuses. Historians estimate, for example, that the 1880 census undercounted black Americans by 9%. Elizabeth Pleck estimates that Boston's blacks, in the same period as this study, were undercounted by as much as 33%. See Elizabeth Pleck, *Black Migration and Poverty: Boston 1865–1900* (New York: Academic Press, 1979), 215. Vital statistics for Worcester from 1860 to 1900 include many names of African Americans not included in any census records, suggesting a significant

undercount. For more on census undercounting, see Miriam L. King and Dianna L. Magnuson, "Perspectives on Historical U.S. Census Undercounts," *Social Science History* 19 (Winter 1995): 455–66; and Richard A. Steckel, "The Quality of Census Data for Historical Inquiry: A Research Agenda," *Social Science History* 15 (Winter 1991): 579–99. For a specific discussion of the problems implicit in determining migration statistics, see "Appendix A: About Migration Statistics" in William Cohen, *At Freedom's Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control, 1861–1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 299–300.

9. Nell Irvin Painter's *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: Knopf, 1977) still stands as the key study of the Kansas migration. One of many studies from the 1960s and 1970s that sought the origins of black poverty, Pleck's book argues that "in the short run, the move from the South to the North strengthened traditional slave folkways, but in the long run residence in the city gave blacks access to the American Dream without the economic progress that was supposed to go with it." Differing in important ways from historians such as Stephan Thernstrom, Pleck nevertheless concluded that "the nineteenth-century city was destructive," as black migrants could not overcome barriers of "exclusion and unsuccessful competition" placed by employers, white workers, and unions (Pleck, *Black Migration and Poverty*, 3–11). See Cohen, *At Freedom's Edge*; Carol Faulkner, *Women's Radical Reconstruction: The Freedmen's Aid Movement* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Robert Harrison, "Welfare and Employment Policies of the Freedmen's Bureau in the District of Columbia," *Journal of Southern History* 72 (2006): 75–110.

10. V. Jacque Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal: The Midwest and the Negro during the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Johnson, "Out of Egypt"; Leslie A. Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

11. Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora*, 15–23, 26; Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780–1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), xiii–xiv.

12. Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora*, 44–45.

13. *Ninth Census of the United States: The Statistics of the Population of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872). Between 1860 and 1870, for example, Vermont's black population increased by 30%, Rhode Island's by 26%, and Maine's by 21%. Both Johnson and Schwalm note the difficulty of estimating numbers of migrants. Johnson points out the southern migrants "more than doubled the black population" in the Midwest between 1860 and 1870. See Johnson, "Out of Egypt," 228; Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora*, 45; and Leslie A. Schwalm, "'Overrun with Free Negroes': Emancipation and Wartime Migration in the Upper Midwest," *Civil War History* 50 (2004): 152.

14. V. Jacque Voegeli, "A Rejected Alternative: Union Policy and the Relocation of Southern 'Contrabands' at the Dawn of Emancipation," *Journal of Southern History* 49 (November 2003): 765–89.

15. Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora*, 157–74, 137–43.

16. *Ibid.*, 175–80.

17. Both Willie Lee Rose, in her landmark study, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), and Leslie A. Schwalm, in *A Hard Fight for We: Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), cite numerous examples of cruelty and abuse. Rose emphasized the “demoralizing influence” on blacks in the Sea Islands of Union soldiers who regularly pillaged the countryside of scarce resources and regularly engaged in drunken, violent attacks on blacks, beat men, and attempted to rape women. See Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 64–65, 177, 240–41. Schwalm (*Hard Fight for We*, 102) echoes Rose’s depictions of the abuse of blacks at the hands of Union soldiers in the Sea Islands.

18. Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal*, 2–3; Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora* 29, 31–32; Johnson, “Out of Egypt,” 228; *Ninth Census of the United States: Population*. For example, Taylor, *Forging of a Black Community*, notes a post–Civil War black migration to Seattle as a result of oppression in the South but does not explore migration networks. Similarly, Scheiner’s *Negro Mecca* attributes a 27% increase in New York’s black population between 1865 and 1870 and a 54% increase between 1870 and 1880 to economic and social problems in the postwar South but does not explore migration networks.



Community in Microcosm

James Johnson, a coachman, had deep family roots in Worcester County. He was of African American and Nipmuc Indian descent. His wife, Jennie, was a more recent Civil War migrant from Charleston, South Carolina. This photograph testifies to community building among older families of dual heritage with recent Southern migrants. Photograph by William Bullard (c. 1900). Courtesy of Frank Morrill.

Afterword

JANETTE THOMAS GREENWOOD

Over two years ago, just as I was ready to leave the study of Worcester's black Southern migrants behind to embark upon a new project, I received a mysterious e-mail. The sender explained that he had some "old photographs of black people in Worcester" and asked if I would be interested in seeing them. Initially, I'm embarrassed to say, I didn't follow up. Overwhelmed by final exams, I made a mental note to myself to respond after I finished my grading. But then the holidays came along and the e-mail disappeared from both my inbox and my memory. Fortunately, the sender was a persistent fellow and followed up with another e-mail. This time I answered and made of point of seeing what he had. Am I ever glad I did.

Frank Morrill, the mysterious e-mailer, shared with me his collection of over 5,000 pristine glass negatives taken by photographer William Bullard between 1897 and 1917. A retired history teacher and collector, Frank had published several books featuring Bullard's street scenes and cityscapes. His young granddaughter, Hannah, working with him on another book, drew his attention to a glass negative that looked different from the others. Holding it up to the light, Frank immediately recognized it as a woman of color. His curiosity piqued, he began to sort through thousands of glass negatives and soon found well over 200 images of people of color. Sensing that he had come across something special, Frank asked his neighbor, Jim Moran of the American Antiquarian Society, whom he might contact about the glass plates. Luckily for me, Jim knew about *First Fruits of Freedom* and suggested my name.

Sitting at Frank's computer in January 2014 and paging through the scanned glass negatives, I was astonished not only by their beauty but also by the powerful ways that people chose to represent themselves. Families, children, and individuals were proudly posed on front porches and backyards, often in their Sunday best. At the same time, these photos captured a powerful sense of everyday lives as well as the sense of a dynamic community, including church groups, fraternal orders, proud Spanish-American War veterans, and men at work. I was completely entranced by these images, my adrenaline pumping as I sensed that I was looking at a genuine historical treasure.

But it got even better. Frank told me that he possessed the photographer's logbook. Moreover, he had cracked the photographer's code: a tiny number

scratched with a pin on the corner of each glass negative connected the numbers with names in the logbook. As I furiously leafed through the logbook, I immediately recognized names of people and families that I had written about in *First Fruits of Freedom*. I was thrilled beyond words to see the William Beckton family as well as the grandson of Susie Waples Mero, both early “contraband” migrants from New Bern, North Carolina.

Needless to say, when I could manage to form words through my exhilaration, I expressed my immense interest in doing more research on these images and how valuable I thought this collection was. Immediately it became clear to Frank and me that we shared the same passion and vision for these photos: to share them with the public and to use them to tell the story of these remarkable men and women who had been previously lost to history.

As we delved deeper into the collection, several things soon became clear. First, we could find no other comparable photo collection of people of color from this era in which an overwhelming majority could be identified. Second, most of the people of color photographed by Bullard, in addition to those whose names I immediately recognized, were southern migrants or the children and grandchildren of migrants. North Carolinians and Virginians are well represented in the collection. But a considerable number hailed from Camden, South Carolina, a group I did not address in *First Fruits*. Subsequent research on the Camden migrants also revealed a direct Civil War connection, similar to the North Carolina and Virginia migrants. The first Camden family migrated to Worcester under the auspices of a Worcester Baptist minister who arrived in South Carolina in 1863 to aid the contrabands of war. Third, many of the people we assumed were African Americans were of both African American and Native American (Nipmuc) descent. This insight revealed community building among older families of dual heritage with recent Southern migrants, a dimension of the migration story of which I was unaware when I wrote *First Fruits*. These photos began opening new facets to a story I thought I already knew so well.

Additional research also revealed the complexity of the Beaver Brook neighborhood, where most of the photos were taken. Not only did former slaves, their children and grandchildren reside there, among white neighbors like Bullard, but Beaver Brook also was home to black Vermonters who came to Worcester through their service with the Massachusetts 54th; migrants from other New England states; and a handful of residents from the Caribbean. Bullard’s photographs document the creation of a complex, yet ordinary, turn-of-the-century American community. Predating the World War I “Great Migration,” these photos portray a moment seldom stressed in the historical narrative, of hope, aspiration, and success. These photos replace stereotypical notions of poverty and

dysfunction with vivid images of pride, accomplishment, and respectability.

One of the many great joys of this project has been meeting with the descendants of Bullard's subjects. The photos have connected us with family members around the country. It has been a thrill to share the collection with them. They have graciously shared information about their ancestors and stories about the Beaver Brook community and have enriched this project immensely. (For more on our research and family meetings, see our blog, <https://worcesterpeopleofcolorphotoproject.wordpress.com>.)

In October 2017, the Worcester Art Museum will feature the Bullard photographs in an exhibit, *William Bullard: Re-imagining an American Community of Color, 1897–1917*. These dramatic and revealing photographs will, I believe, not only recognize William Bullard's superb photography but also greatly enhance and expand the post-Civil War migration story that I told in *First Fruits of Freedom*. Notions of identity and self-representation, the importance of family and community life, and claims to full citizenship (often invisible in traditional archival sources) are all evident in the Bullard photos. I feel incredibly grateful for the opportunity to build on my research for *First Fruits of Freedom* and take it in new directions. And I have learned to always answer my e-mail. You never know what treasures await you in your inbox.