

Blacks in 1880s Toronto The Search for Equality

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Article abstract

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Blacks in 1880s Toronto

The Search for Equality

by Colin McFarquhar



By the 1880s, Canada's role as a haven for fugitive slaves had long since passed, as the American Civil War had been over for fifteen years. Toronto had developed a somewhat favorable reputation in the pre-Civil War era, both as a good place for Blacks to settle and as a city with strong anti-slavery sentiments. The Anti-Slavery Society of

Canada had been headquartered there, and George Brown, the founder of the *Globe*, had been a staunch abolitionist. Some Blacks had achieved at least some prosperity, and signs of obvious discrimination, such as forced segregated schools, did not exist in Toronto as they did in so many other parts of what had become Ontario.¹ By the 1880s, however, Blacks

¹ See Adrienne Shadd, Afua Cooper, and Karolyn Smardz Frost, *The Underground Railroad: Next Stop, Toronto* (Toronto, 2002) for a discussion of some early prominent Blacks in Toronto.

Abstract

By the 1880s Toronto had a well established black community. While Africans in Ontario's largest city had achieved a certain amount of political equality, social and economic equality remained elusive. Using a number of examples this article attempts to show how blacks strived for full rights. Albert Jackson's struggles to become a mailman, the attempts of the Fisk Jubilee Singers to be admitted to hotels, and the efforts to prevent Adam Morse from being extradited to the United States were issues that drew attention in Toronto in the 1880s. Blacks ultimately succeeded in these cases both because it was politically expedient and because leaders in the white community wanted the city to have a good reputation and avoid civic embarrassment.

Résumé: La communauté noire de Toronto était déjà bien établie dans les années 1880. Cependant, bien que les Africains vivant dans la plus grande ville ontarienne connaissent un certain degré de parité politique, leur égalité d'un point de vue social ou économique demeurerait conjecturale. Cet article, se basant sur plusieurs exemples, cherche à démontrer la lutte des Noirs pour jouir pleinement de leurs droits. Les difficultés que connut Albert Jackson à devenir facteur, les tentatives du groupe Fisk Jubilee Singers à être admis dans des hôtels, ainsi que les efforts s'opposant à l'expatriation d'Adam Morse vers les États-Unis, sont autant d'incidents qui attirèrent les regards sur Toronto dans les années 1880. Dans ces cas particuliers, les Noirs obtinrent éventuellement gain de cause : cela était plus pratique d'un point de vue politique et les dirigeants de la communauté blanche cherchaient à conserver la bonne réputation de la ville ainsi qu'à éviter tout embarras d'ordre administratif.

had still not achieved full civil rights in Toronto. This paper will demonstrate that while Blacks had achieved a certain amount of political equality, social and economic equality remained elusive.

Scholars, whose work has been quite prolific regarding the experience of Black fugitives in mid-nineteenth century Canada West, have paid less attention to Black-White relations in Ontario during the late 1800s.² Indeed, some of Ontario's Black inhabitants returned to the United States following the Civil War,

and the Black population in the province as a whole, according to census data, fell from 17,053 in 1861 to 12,097 in 1881. The number of Blacks in the City of Toronto also decreased from 987 in 1861 to 593 in 1881.³ Still, by the early 1880s the community had become relatively well established. In fact, only nineteen of the Africans listed in the 1881 census for Toronto had come to Canada in the years after 1865.⁴

Blacks in 1880s Toronto strived for full equality. The degree to which they

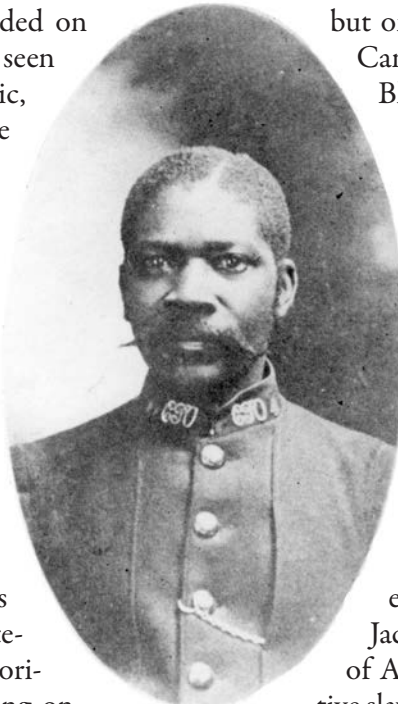
² See for example Alexander Lovell Murray, "Canada and the Anglo-American Anti-Slavery Movement: A Study in International Philanthropy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1960); William and Jane Pease, *Black Utopia: Negro Communal; Experiments in America* (Madison, 1963); Jason Silverman, *Unwelcome Guests: The White Canadian Response to American Fugitive Slaves, 1830-1865* (New York, 1985); and Donald Simpson, "Negroes in Ontario From Early Times to 1870" (Ph.D. diss., University of Western Ontario, 1971).

³ Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Report of the Census of 1881*, vol. 1 (Ottawa, 1882), 296, and Michael Wayne, "The Black Population of Canada West on the Even of the American Civil War," *Social History*, 28:56 (November, 1995), 467. This article notes that, although the published reports for the 1861 census listed only 11,223 Blacks living in Canada West that year, a study of the manuscript census rolls reveals a total of 17,053. The manuscript census also recorded 987 Blacks for the City of Toronto, substantially higher than the published figure.

⁴ Extrapolated from Ontario Archives, *Microfilm of the 1881 Census Rolls*, Toronto.

succeeded largely depended on whether the issue was seen as a political, economic, or social concern. The following examples illustrate the pattern of Black-White relations in Ontario's largest city, and the difficulties Blacks faced.

In an economic sense Blacks in Toronto in the 1880s were clearly confined to certain occupations. Many Black men worked in low-skill occupations such as laboring or white-washing, or in service-oriented jobs such as waiting on tables at restaurants. Blacks in more skilled occupations tended to work as barbers, although some Black men worked as shoemakers, carpenters, plasterers, or painters. African Canadian women, on the other hand, were predominantly laundresses or servants. Black women in more skilled occupations tended to work as dressmakers, tailoresses, cooks, seamstresses, or hairdressers. What is striking, however, is the degree to which people of African descent were excluded from professional, highly skilled, and white-collar occupations. The City of Toronto had a total of 2,363 commercial clerks in 1881



Toronto Reference
Library

but only one clerk was African Canadian. There were no Black agents, accountants, bookkeepers, physicians, or surgeons.⁵

Blacks did not work in certain occupations because White workers often did not want to work with them, or accept them as social equals. This became very clear when Albert Jackson (left) was appointed to be a letter carrier by the federal government in May of 1882.

Jackson was one of the sons of Ann Maria Jackson, a fugitive slave who had fled to Canada from Delaware in 1858. Ann Maria

Jackson escaped to Canada with seven of her children after her husband had passed away. Her husband had died grief-stricken after two of the Jackson's children had been sold away from the plantation on which they lived. Upon arriving in Toronto Jackson worked as a washerwoman and raised her family.⁶

There were no Black letter carriers in Toronto at the time of Albert Jackson's appointment. When Jackson arrived for his first day of work each letter carrier refused to train him. Since no one would show him the rounds Jackson was given

⁵ Extrapolated from Ontario Archives, *Microfilm of the 1881 Census Rolls*, Toronto, and Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Report of the Census of 1881*, vol. 2, 268-315.

⁶ William Still, *The Underground Railroad* (Philadelphia, 1872), 512-14; Shadd, Cooper, and Smardz Frost, *The Underground Railroad*, 75; Karolyn Smardz Frost, *I've Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad*, 302.

an inside job as a hall porter, to replace someone who was ailing, with the hope that this would solve the problem. What resulted instead was a furor, with the Black community insisting that Jackson be given his appointment, and many in the White community arguing that the other letter carriers should not be forced to work with him.

The issue seemed to come to a head when one of the Toronto newspapers, the *Daily Telegram*, discussed the episode, and in its 17 May 1882 headline referred to Jackson as “the objectionable African.”⁷ Black community members responded by writing letters in support of Jackson and in opposition to the White letter carriers. A.A. Russell wrote “it does not seem possible that a party of men could be so unmanly, so unjust, so unprincipled, so niggardly ... to object to any gentleman working amongst them simply on account of colour.”⁸ Charles Johnson, a Methodist minister from Hamilton who published a Black newspaper called *The British Lion*, described the postmen as “cowards” and as being “unworthy the name of Britons” in a letter to the *Globe*.⁹

Black protest did not stop with a few letters to the newspapers. A mass meeting of many of the city’s African community was held at a Richmond Street church on 29 May. Those at the meeting

made it clear they were not satisfied with Jackson’s appointment as hall porter, a job they considered to be “menial.” The fact that the Black community wished to pursue this matter with some degree of aggressiveness was evident when a resolution, stating that the letters written by Johnson and Russell were “too strong and liable to hurt the cause of the colored people,” was defeated. Instead, the meeting denounced the conduct of the letter carriers, and established a five-person committee to examine the matter. Those present at the meeting emphasized that “we do not seek class legislation or desire anything other than in common with other classes of her majesty’s subjects.” The people at the meeting also reached out to the surrounding White community. They resolved “to call most respectfully upon the christian community of Toronto and every right minded man to give us their sympathy and moral support.”¹⁰

The committee appointed a man named G.W. Smith to investigate Jackson’s plight at the post office. Smith, a barber born in West Virginia, had by 1871 established a shop in the Queen’s Hotel that was patronized by many of the city’s elite.¹¹ One of Smith’s tactics was to point out the success Blacks had in a variety of occupations. In a letter to the *Toronto World* he observed that prior

⁷ *Daily Telegram*, 17 May 1882.

⁸ *Daily Telegram*, 20 May 1882.

⁹ *Toronto Globe*, 22 May 1882.

¹⁰ *Toronto World*, 30 May 1882.

¹¹ Barrington Walker, “George Washington Smith,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 15 (Toronto, 2005), 956.



Blacks in Toronto in the 1880s were often confined to low-skill occupations in service-oriented jobs such as this public washroom attendant. City of Toronto Archives, RG8 Series 14, vol. 1, item 90b.

to the Civil War there had been a Black surgeon in Ontario by the name of Dr. Augusta, and that at that time in Toronto there were Black “contractors for building, cabinet makers, blacksmiths and shoemakers.” He concluded his letter by noting that such evidence proved that “we [Africans] are capable of performing under the same circumstances that which any other race of people can perform, and that our race is no more confined to whitewashing than his is to the carrying of the hod [coal scuttle].”¹²

The question of whether Jackson should be allowed to be a mailman be-

came a highly charged issue in Toronto. The matter was discussed prominently in the Toronto newspapers for the next couple of weeks. Besides the contributions of Black writers some White citizens discussed the matter as well. One point that was debated was whether Blacks were inherently inferior to Whites. Scientific racism was a popularly held theory in the late nineteenth century. Many people believed that certain “races” were naturally inferior to other “races,” and that such differences could be explained scientifically. One particularly popular area of study was that of phrenology. This “sci-

¹² *Toronto World*, 30 May 1882.

ence” contended that the measurement of people’s heads could determine their intelligence.

The question of whether Blacks were inferior and had a smaller brain was debated in letters to the *Toronto World*. One regular correspondent was a White citizen named C. Pelham Mulvany. Mulvany was a Church of England clergyman who had been a curate at several Ontario parishes. He moved to Toronto in 1878 and became a writer. Besides his studies of the histories of Peterborough, Brant County, and Toronto he frequently wrote letters to the newspapers.¹³ Mulvany wrote that scientific evidence had proved Black inferiority. He contended that the African brain was much smaller than the European, and that the “Negro facial angle is ‘ape like.’”¹⁴ In another letter Mulvany asserted that he sympathized with the letter carriers and argued “the Negro race, in its native continent, has never originated anything beyond the condition of contented savagery in which it is found to-day. It has never given the world a new idea, a type of architecture, a code of laws, a poem, a religion.”¹⁵ A Black writer, John Jackson, another member of the committee appointed at the 29 May meeting to investigate the Jackson matter, refuted these arguments and replied “brain weight as well as development of

the head and refinement of features in the human family is greatly attributed to culture.” Jackson suggested that if North American Whites gave Blacks equal opportunities they would eventually see Blacks possessing all the attributes that Whites claimed they did not have.¹⁶

The Jackson issue was so contentious that some Black citizens were harassed by Whites on the street, and the *Globe* expressed concern that a race war might occur. In one case, a Black barber on Yonge Street was insulted in his own shop by a man who claimed to be an official in the post office, and therefore felt that he was entitled, in the words of the *Globe*, “to state his opinion on the subject of the appointment of colored men to Government situations.” In another incident, some White hoodlums verbally assaulted two Blacks described as “respectfully dressed coloured folks.” Luckily, the victims chose to ignore their assailants and nothing came of the incident.¹⁷ Another more serious incident occurred when a Black man, walking along a downtown street, was teased by a group of young boys and responded by striking one in the face, and then kicking him while he lay on the ground. An employee of a nearby store intervened and prevented the situation from getting out of control.¹⁸

Newspapers used the opportunity

¹³ Gerald Killan, “Charles Pelham Mulvany,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 11 (Toronto, 1982), 627-28.

¹⁴ *Toronto World*, 31 May 1882.

¹⁵ *Toronto World*, 25 May 1882.

¹⁶ *Toronto World*, 1 June 1882.

¹⁷ *Toronto Globe*, 23 May 1882.

¹⁸ *Evening Telegram*, 18 May 1882.

to write editorials on the Jackson case. Despite the opposition of the letter carriers, the editorials generally supported Jackson. Even the *Daily Telegram*, whose first article on this subject had been entitled “The Objectionable African,” asserted two days later “the objection to the young man on account of his colour is indefensible. Coloured waiters serve meals at hotels, and coloured porters attend the Pullman cars. There is therefore no reason why coloured carriers should not deliver letters.”¹⁹ In fact, as was noted, Africans were very much concentrated in service-oriented occupations, and delivering mail as a service would have appeared a very appropriate occupation for people of African origin. The *Toronto World* noted that “[a] black man ... makes a good citizen, and being a good citizen is as much entitled to a public office as a white man.”²⁰ The *Globe*, a newspaper that had generally taken a supportive view towards Blacks, especially championed Jackson’s cause. Its editorial regretted that “in a community where professedly all enjoy equal rights before the law a body of otherwise intelligent and respectable men should pursue such a contemptible course towards a fellow official because his skin happens to be darker than theirs.”²¹

The newspapers were quick to point out the distinction between public and

private matters. The *Toronto World* argued that “in their social relations the white man is free, if he chooses, to treat the colored man as it pleases him,”²² and the *Daily Telegram* declared that “[i]n private life men may choose their company, and if they do not like to mix with people of another colour they need not. In official life it is different.”²³ Still, despite the apparent support for Albert Jackson in the press, the colour line stood firm, and Jackson was still not allowed to deliver letters.

Ultimately, it was politics that enabled Albert Jackson to become a letter carrier. *The Evening Telegram* noted in a 30 May editorial that

there is at least one time when the assurance is given that coloured people are just as good as people who are white. This is at election time. A coloured man who has a vote is of a great deal more consequence when there is an election in view than a white man who has no vote.²⁴

A federal election campaign was under way at this time, and the Prime Minister, John A. Macdonald, was made aware of the brewing controversy. T.C. Patterson, the Toronto Post Master and a close political ally of Macdonald’s, wrote a letter to the Prime Minister on 30 May where he outlined the situation. The riding of Toronto Centre, contested between the Conservative incumbent Robert Hay

¹⁹ *Daily Telegram*, 19 May 1882.

²⁰ *Toronto World*, 25 May 1882.

²¹ *Toronto Globe*, 23 May 1882.

²² *Toronto World*, 25 May 1882.

²³ *Evening Telegram*, 26 May 1882.

²⁴ *Evening Telegram*, 30 May 1882.

and the Liberal candidate J.D. Edgar, had about sixty African voters, and Patterson accused Edgar of exploiting this incident to gain votes. Patterson told Macdonald that he had done everything he could to prevent the “precipitation of a row here” but told Macdonald that if he was met with a deputation of African voters when he arrived in Toronto he should tell them

Toronto he was greeted by a number of citizens who insisted Jackson be put on the mail route. The Prime Minister, understanding the importance of the Black vote in Hay’s riding, informed the deputation that Jackson would begin delivering mail immediately, an assertion that satisfied those present.²⁶ On 2 June, Jackson was sent out with one of



A Black and White road crew working together on the streets of Toronto. City of Toronto Archives RG8 Series 14, vol. 1, item 23.

the carriers to learn his duties, and according to *The Globe* with “no objection being raised by any of the men.”²⁷ Indeed, the Conservative government used the Jackson episode during the 1882 campaign. The Conservative *Hamilton Spectator* noted that “Jackson was appointed by the Government, and it was the Grit carriers, appointed in Mackenzie’s reign, who refused to associate with him.” In fact, Jackson himself made an affidavit on 10 June 1882 where he stated that he had been appointed by the Macdonald government and had “received the greatest courtesy and consideration from the Government and my official supervisors.”²⁸ Nor was Jackson’s tenure as a mail carrier short lived. He was still listed as a mail carrier in the 1901 census,²⁹ and

that “if there is any delay in giving Jackson a route it is simply owing to the illness of the hall porter.” The controversy was not worth losing votes over, and Patterson concluded his letter by informing Macdonald “the nigger will be carrying letters in a week.”²⁵

Indeed, when Macdonald, came to

²⁵ NAC, Microfilm of John A. Macdonald Papers, vol. 384, part II, pp. 180836-180837 (microfilm reel C-1756).

²⁶ *Evening Telegram*, 31 May 1882.

²⁷ *Toronto Globe*, 3 June 1882.

²⁸ *The Spectator*, 17 June 1882.

²⁹ Ontario Archives, Microfilm of the 1901 Census Rolls, Toronto, Centre District.

apparently continued to deliver mail in Toronto until about 1918.³⁰

Prejudice against people of African descent also made itself apparent in regard to accommodation. Blacks in Toronto in the 1880s often found it difficult to obtain access to higher quality hotels. The Fisk Jubilee Singers, a group of musicians from Nashville, performed throughout North America and around the world. However, when they came to Toronto in September 1881 they were denied access at the better hotels in the city. The Queen's Hotel, the Walker House, the American Hotel, and the Robinson House all refused to accommodate the singers during their visit to Toronto, while the Rossin House would only accept them if they paid an exorbitant price.³¹ These hotels had many Black employees, as Africans often worked as waiters and laundresses, but did not welcome Black guests. This refusal came to the attention of the city's newspapers, and seemed to produce some embarrassment. When it became known that hotels would not accept the singers many prominent citizens offered their homes. The Mayor of Toronto, William McMurrich, who heard about the denied accommodation while traveling to the funeral of the recently assassinated American President James Garfield, offered his home to the singers.³²

Other leading citizens, such as Edward Blake, a leading federal Liberal politician, did the same.³³ With the ensuing publicity the proprietor of the American Hotel, who had been out of town when the singers requested accommodation, telegraphed a withdrawal of the refusal.³⁴ The singers had found a place to stay.

It was not coincidental that it was the mayor and other political figures like Blake who had come to the Jubilee Singers' aid. Blacks had the vote and therefore more political than social equality. But who was to blame for the initial refusal? Newspaper editorials discussed this issue and the hotel proprietors were criticized for their actions. *The Evening News* argued that "if our hotelkeepers are too nice to accept a coloured man's money, why not put over their doors the notice – 'No Africans accommodated!'" The editorial continued "if a black man is good enough to wait upon a table and haul around Caucasian victuals, he is good enough to sit down at the table and eat them."³⁵ The *Globe* also criticized the hotelkeepers "who deliberately made the colour of the singers a ground for declining to accept them as ordinary guests."³⁶ The *Globe* further contended that the discourtesy to which the Jubilee Singers were subjected was caused by nothing but "the narrow

³⁰ Ontario Archives, Daniel Hill Black History Research Collection, Box 4, Toronto Notes (B).

³¹ Andrew Ward, *Dark Midnight When I Rise: The Story of the Jubilee Singers Who Introduced the World to the Music of Black America* (New York, 2000), 387, and *Toronto Globe*, 24 September 1881.

³² *The Evening News*, 26 September 1881.

³³ *Toronto World*, 7 October 1881.

³⁴ *The Evening News*, 26 September 1881.

³⁵ *The Evening News*, 24 September 1881.

³⁶ *Toronto Globe*, 26 September 1881.

prejudices of the management” of those hotels, and optimistically asserted that they “utterly misinterpreted the feelings of the better classes of their guests.”³⁷ The *Toronto World* took a somewhat different perspective. It argued that the criticism directed against the hotelkeepers was misguided and that they were only acting according to business concerns. The newspaper noted that the hotels say “– and they ought to know their business best – that the Canadian hotel public object to stop in the same house with colored people.” The editorial suggested that it was the public, not the hotelkeepers, who were the chief offenders.³⁸ It is difficult to know whether the hotel owners refused Black guests because they held prejudiced feelings or whether they genuinely saw the admission of Black guests as a bad business practice. In any case, Blacks were denied access to quality hotels.

Despite the publicity generated by the Jubilee Singers, Blacks did not find hotels accommodating in subsequent years. In fact, when Charles Johnson, the Black newspaper publisher, tried to gain access to the Queen’s Hotel in 1888 he was refused, and the subsequent comments of the hotel proprietor proved that many believed that, while Africans were acceptable as table waiters, they were not acceptable as dinner guests. Mr. McGaw,

the hotel owner, noted in an interview with the *Toronto Mail* that, in his defense, he constantly employed about thirty Africans at his hotel. McGaw never denied that his hotel did not permit Black guests, but he noted that anyone who required a room and had the necessary money “need not want, as there were dozen of other hotels in the city that would be only too glad to furnish it.”³⁹

Johnson decided to take legal action against the hotel and requested money from the community to support his cause. In fact, he asked the *Hamilton Spectator* to start a subscription to aid him. The newspaper declined, and seemed to believe that his action was a publicity stunt.⁴⁰ Immediately after the incident the newspaper noted that Johnson had struck “a scheme which will not only give him the notoriety he loves, but, possibly the money that does not come amiss to him.”⁴¹ How much money Johnson collected is unclear but at some point he decided not to press charges. The *Spectator* noted in August 1889 that, after beginning the lawsuit and collecting some money, Johnson backed out.⁴²

Even though Blacks were not always accepted at hotels Canada still prided itself on providing a safe haven for African Americans. Prior to the American Civil War there had been several attempts by

³⁷ *Toronto Globe*, 24 September 1881.

³⁸ *Toronto World*, 28 September 1881.

³⁹ *Toronto Mail*, 23 August 1888.

⁴⁰ *Hamilton Spectator*, 6 September 1888.

⁴¹ *Hamilton Daily Spectator*, 23 August 1889.

⁴² *Hamilton Spectator*, 31 August, 1889.

American slaveholders to extradite runaway slaves who had fled to Canada. Most of these attempts had failed. The most high profile had been the attempt to extradite John Anderson in 1860-61. Anderson had killed a slaveholder while successfully escaping from slavery, and after being discovered in Canada the American government attempted to have him returned to the United States. Anderson received considerable support from the Canadian Black community and the press. Ultimately, the extradition attempt failed and Anderson remained in Canada.⁴³

In the late 1800s many Ontarians still saw the province as a safe haven for Blacks fleeing injustice in the United States. In 1888, Adam Morse, a Black man from Georgia, fled to Toronto. Morse had been involved in an altercation with a train conductor in Georgia. Morse's son had been traveling by train and had been hit on the arm three times with a ticket punch by a conductor because he, apparently, was impudent and refused to behave. When he got home, the boy told his parents what had happened. His father, after hearing the story, then went to the conductor's house with the intent, according to his wife, of discussing the matter. An altercation ensued whereupon Morse hit the conductor several times with a stick. Morse was arrested but released on bail. After threats were

made to lynch Morse, he jumped bail and went to Rochester. When police became aware of his location, he left the United States and came to Toronto. On 27 April 1888, the Toronto police received a telegram stating that there was a "warrant and requisition for Adam Morse, alias Spencer H. Haines, colored, aged 35." Morse was arrested, and a Savannah detective came to Toronto with a warrant charging Morse with attempted murder, an extraditable offense.⁴⁴

The case went to Judge Joseph McDougall, who ruled in June of 1888 that Morse should be returned to the United States. The White media sympathized with Morse, and saw him as a victim of racial discrimination in the United States. The *Toronto Evening Telegram* argued that "[h]is crime was that being black he dared to assert his manhood by standing up for his own child against one of the white sovereigns of Georgia." The editorial argued that the Canadian courts should provide the justice that Morse "cannot hope for in that land of the free where the prejudices of the white citizens are a law unto all on the wrong side of the colour line."⁴⁵ Other newspapers echoed these sentiments. The *Globe* feared southern justice and referred to the "chain-gang and bloodhound treatment to which the fugitive will probably be submitted in Georgia."⁴⁶ *Saturday*

⁴³ Shadd, Cooper, and Smardz Frost, *The Underground Railroad*, 55-56.

⁴⁴ Toronto Public Library, Toronto Star Scrapbooks, Toronto Historical Series, vol. 1, 45, and Toronto *Globe*, 16 June 1888.

⁴⁵ *Evening Telegram*, 28 May 1888.

⁴⁶ Toronto *Globe*, 8 June 1888.

Night argued that it was “gratifying to know that he [Morse] will not be surrendered without a further struggle.”⁴⁷ Others in the White community supported Morse. A letter in *The Evening Telegram* from the Women’s Christian Temperance Union rhetorically asked: “Shall we let the name of our one fair and godly city be stained by delivering Morse over to his blood-thirsty persecutors.”⁴⁸ The Black community also gave full support to Morse. Blacks throughout the province became aware of the case, and the Rev. W.J. Butler, pastor of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Chatham, stated that he hoped the case would be contested through the Canadian courts. Butler further noted that the Blacks of Chatham, as well as many Whites, felt very strongly on the subject.⁴⁹

Luckily for Morse’s supporters all was not lost. Morse’s extradition was conditional upon the Savannah detective signing some depositions, which he had left Toronto without doing. Judge McDougall twice set dates for the detective to come to Toronto to deal with this matter, but both times he failed to appear. After the second time, on 22 June 1888, McDougall freed Morse. *The Evening Telegram* cheered, “we are glad that the country that has shielded so many of his race has been the secure retreat of Adam Morse.”⁵⁰

The interracial support for Morse

was evident at the mass meeting held in celebration of his release at the Queen Street Baptist Church. *The Evening Telegram* reported that “two thirds of the crowd were white people” and that “many prominent citizens were in the audience.”⁵¹ Resolutions were passed praising the publisher of the *Telegram*, John Ross Robertson, for the support he had provided, and to the *Globe’s* editor, John Cameron, for offering to pay any amount in the event Morse got bail. The meeting also commended Senator John MacDonald for offering money “towards starting Mr. Morse to life again in this country.”⁵² The White community found it very easy to rally behind Morse because his case reconfirmed that Canada was a safe haven for Blacks wrongly treated in the United States.

This incident does not suggest that Morse’s supporters favoured equality for Blacks. John Ross Robertson, who after this incident hired Morse’s son as a *Telegram* newsboy, held many racist stereotypes concerning Blacks. He often vacationed in the southern states and was fond of jokes that were racially insensitive towards Blacks. Robertson once used his influence to place a Black child in The Hospital for Sick Children, and after the boy’s release the child’s grandmother thanked him. Robertson responded that they would soon “have him eating

⁴⁷ *Saturday Night*, vol. 1, no. 28 (9 June 1888)

⁴⁸ *Evening Telegram*, 26 June 1888.

⁴⁹ *Toronto Globe*, 8 June 1888.

⁵⁰ *Evening Telegram*, 22 June 1888.

⁵¹ *Evening Telegram*, 26 June 1888.

⁵² *Toronto Globe*, 26 June 1888.



The next generation of African Canadians in Toronto carried on the tradition of activism. This Collingwood group is posing in front of the Toronto YW.C.A. Source: Rita Duval Cummings, Library and Archives Canada PA 211247.

chicken and watermelon.” The woman responded that that was the most insulting thing he could say to someone of African origin.⁵³

In conclusion, Blacks did not have full equality in 1880s Toronto. Blacks were concentrated in certain occupations and were often denied access to hotels and restaurants. Africans were very active in trying to achieve full civil rights. It was two members of the Black community, for example, who had approached John Ross Robertson and told him about Adam Morse, and requested his assistance.⁵⁴ It was the Black community that had protested when Albert Jackson was not allowed to become a let-

ter carrier. The White press and leaders in the White community provided assistance when it served their interests, or

when this aid helped to alleviate personal or civic embarrassment. Albert Jackson kept his position as mailman because it was politically expedient for the governing Conservative party. The Fisk Jubilee Singers found a place to stay because they were popular singers, and politicians and an innkeeper provided accommodation in order to avoid bad publicity. Adam Morse was not returned to Georgia because his experience reminded Torontonians of the plight of fugitives on the Underground Railroad who had found a safe haven in Canada. It was only, however, when these issues became political causes and garnered extensive media publicity that they were resolved favourably.

⁵³ Ron Poulton, *The Paper Tyrant: John Ross Robertson of the Toronto Telegram* (Toronto, 1971), 95-96.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*