



Reviews



**Reframing History:  
Insider/Outsider Paradigms in Ten Books about Slavery  
— Paula T. Connolly**

Baxter, Jean Rae. *Freedom Bound*. Vancouver:

Ronsdale, 2012. 256 pp. \$11.95 pb. ISBN 978-1-55380-143-6. Print.

Cooper, Afua. *My Name Is Henry Bibb: A Story of Slavery and Freedom*. Toronto: Kids Can, 2009. 160 pp. \$16.95 hc. ISBN 978-1-55337-813-6. Print.

Cooper, Afua. *My Name Is Phillis Wheatley: A Story of Slavery and Freedom*. Toronto: Kids Can, 2009. 152 pp. \$16.95 hc. ISBN 978-1-55337-812-9. Print.

Gann, Marjorie, and Janet Willen. *Five Thousand Years of Slavery*. Toronto: Tundra, 2011. 168 pp. \$29.99 hc.

ISBN 978-0-88776-914-6. Print.

Granfield, Linda. *Out of Slavery: The Journey to Amazing Grace*. Illus. Janet Wilson. 1997. Toronto: Tundra, 2009. 40 pp. \$17.99 hc. ISBN 978-0-88776-915-3. Print.

Herbstein, Manu. *Brave Music of a Distant Drum*. Markham: Red Deer, 2011. 182 pp. \$12.95 pb. ISBN 978-0-88995-470-0. Print.

Plaxton, Judith. *Morning Star*. Toronto: Second Story, 2011. 281 pp. \$10.95 pb. ISBN 978-1-897187-97-5. Print.

Towell, Ann. *Grease Town*. Toronto: Tundra, 2010. 232 pp. \$19.99 hc. ISBN 978-0-88776-983-2. Print.

Wesley, Gloria Ann. *Chasing Freedom*. Black Point: Roseway, 2011. 231 pp. \$18.95 pb. ISBN 978-1-

55266-423-0. Print.

Wesley, Gloria Ann. *If This Is Freedom*. Black Point: Roseway, 2013. 278 pp. \$19.95 pb. ISBN 978-1-55266-571-8. Print.

Determining how to tell stories of slavery to current young adult readers entails concerns about how to make slavery relevant for those who are not themselves enslaved. While authors during the early nineteenth century had the same concerns when writing to their audiences, twenty-first-century writers face the potential resistance of readers who believe slavery is a long-since-passed event. That is not the case, however, as Marjorie Gann and Janet Willen demonstrate in their study *Five Thousand Years of Slavery*. Moreover, the slavery of earlier centuries in the Americas has not been a closed event inasmuch as repercussions of racial discrimination and conflict have persisted. The ten books reviewed here offer a range of narrative strategies to present issues of slavery to young readers. While they all condemn slavery, they present it through different prisms: adventures stories, dual-perspective narratives, fictionalized autobiographies, non-fiction accounts, and discussions of post-slavery racial exploitation. Narrative decisions—such as

the choice of point-of-view characters or depicted levels of violence—shape these perspectives of slavery fundamentally. What these texts share often, to varying degrees, is a tension between insider/outsider perspectives, whether in dual narratives with conflicting viewpoints or in fictionalized autobiographies where characters authorize their insider experiences of slavery. Such use of insider/outsider perspectives comments on implicitly—and attempts to counter—the contemporary reader’s probable sense of insularity.

Four of the texts—Ann Towell’s *Grease Town*, Jean Rae Baxter’s *Freedom Bound*, Judith Plaxton’s *Morning Star*, and Manu Herbstein’s *Brave Music of a Distant Drum*—present fictional stories of slavery that are structured around representations of insider/outsider experience, setting up a sometimes tenuous balance between those who experience racial exploitation and those who witness it or stand only about its borders. Set in Oil Springs, Ontario, *Grease Town* describes a little-

known race riot that occurred there in March 1863 as a way of exploring the after-effects and, in some ways, the undergirding rationalizations for slavery. The story is told from the point of view of white twelve-year-old Titus Sullivan, who flees the protective custody of his aunt for adventure with the male company of his brother and his Uncle Amos in a “rough and tumble” oil town (43). The place—a “dirty mess that reeks of sulphur and oozes black liquid that everyone says is as precious as gold” (1)—sets the stage for issues of poverty, exploitation, competition, and greed. Questions about inclusivity and segregation are played out in the social miasma of this town, particularly as issues of race come into play.

It is here that Titus meets a black person for the first time—Moses Croucher, a boy of Titus’s age whose father once fled slavery in Mississippi. The two boys become fast friends and, in his association with Moses, Titus witnesses racial discrimination for the first time: at times, Moses is treated cruelly because of his race, and while few in Oil Springs are wealthy, the black workers suffer more than most because they are paid less than white workers and allowed to live only in segregated “shanties” (92). Towell explores elements of the psychological underpinnings of racism as the black population becomes the target of the projected losses, unfulfilled dreams, and frustrations of white inhabitants. Claiming that black workers are taking their jobs, white townspeople are riled into a mob that attacks the black inhabitants, including women and children, and burns

down the shanties in an attempt to drive blacks out of town and (as some whites hope) back to the United States, where they would be returned to slavery. By focusing on this race riot, Towell shows permutations of continuing racial exploitation. As much as Canada was the “promised land” and hope of legal freedom for those escaping slavery, *Grease Town* shows that Canada did not always provide a respite from racism (although the charged mob ringleaders—here and as reported in newspapers at the time—were American citizens). Moreover, as much as the Canadian perspective on slavery in the United States is an outsider perspective, Towell shows how even ostensible “outsiders” are implicated in issues of racial exploitation.

Throughout *Grease Town*, Moses remains largely in the background, functioning often as the protagonist’s supporting character and catalyst to his development. That he occupies much less narrative space and is never as emotionally present as Titus may be a reflection of Towell’s choice of protagonist. At the close of the novel, it is Titus’s traumatic memory of the riot that remains the narrative focal point. The fact that he is traumatized by what he sees—for a time, he is unable to speak—evinces his understanding of his outsider status: he witnesses the violence to others and must finally speak up and testify against it. His empathy, his determination, his understanding of personhood is shaped by the racial violence that he witnesses, and he becomes changed by it, in some sense both recognizing that he is an outsider



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to what Moses experiences yet also losing the insularity that comes with outsider status.

The emotional outsider status of protagonists remains more firmly in place in *Freedom Bound*, the final book in Baxter's trilogy set during the American Revolution. The first two novels in the trilogy, *The Way Lies North* and *Broken Trail*, follow white protagonists as well as the conditions and culture of Native peoples. In *Freedom Bound*, Baxter keeps the focus on her white protagonist against a background of Charleston, South Carolina, with its Revolutionary War setting and its slavery. While readers may assume the title of the book implies a focus on escape from enslavement—and, indeed, some slaves are, in the final pages, evacuated to Nova Scotia—that titular “freedom” is also descriptive of Charlotte, the white eighteen-year-old protagonist who recounts the losses she and her husband have suffered during the war, noting that “[w]e’ve both been hurt, . . . but the end of the war somehow sets us free” (230).

As the novel opens, Charlotte has arrived in Charleston to see her husband, Nick, who serves as a courier and an occasional spy for Royalists. Independent-minded and determined, Charlotte dresses as a Quaker man when her husband is kidnapped by rebels and heads out to the swamp to save him. Briefly aided by an escaping slave, she rescues her husband, finds evidence that will free two slaves named Phoebe and Jammy, uncovers a traitor to the Loyalist cause, stops court proceedings that would likely have sentenced Jammy to death, and then, when Phoebe's master demands the return of Phoebe's child (whom he has fathered) in order to sell him, Charlotte comes up with the idea to smuggle Phoebe and her son out of Charleston.

While the abolitionist and reformist agency of protagonists is more firmly evinced here than in *Grease Town*, the protagonist of *Freedom Bound* does not undergo the traumatically felt revelations experienced

by Titus in Towell's novel; while Titus is, for a time, paralyzed by the dangers that surround him, the older Charlotte is a person of action, heroic from beginning to end. Yet although Charlotte and Nick both say they oppose slavery, condemn the violence and sexual exploitation the enslaved face, and succeed in freeing the slave couple and child they have come to know, at other times their views of slavery are more problematic. When a friend's parents leave for Jamaica taking "their money and valuables, as well as a hundred slaves from their rice plantation," Nick commends them, with the narrator noting that "[h]e saw the wisdom of getting out before he lost everything" (226). In moments such as this, *Freedom Bound* retains the outsider perspective for its protagonists more fully and may comment unintentionally on the limits of empathy for anonymous slaves versus individuals—as Harriet Beecher Stowe had demonstrated with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, one's sympathies may be changed by the difference between the "idea of a fugitive [as] only an idea of the letters that spell the word" and the "real presence of distress" when faced with an actual person (155–56). In novels such as *Freedom Bound*, in which white heroics take centre stage, the enslaved become not merely background characters within the story—although they are that—but also background in the presented framework of slavery itself. They become, in that way, narrative outsiders in stories of slavery where the white hero's freedom and entrapment is central to the point of view of the

text—and, by projected extension, to readers. Slave characters thus function here as a means to highlight white authority—for both cruel masters and ostensibly benevolent yet often self-serving sometimes liberators.

By contrast, Paxton's *Morning Star* presents the insider/outsider perspective through dually told stories, as chapters alternate between the accounts and points of view of two young girls: Flower, who is escaping slavery in the United States with her family in the mid-nineteenth century, hoping to reach freedom in Canada, and Felicia who, as one of the few black students in her eighth-grade class in present-day Canada, must cope with a classmate's racism. The insider/outsider perspective is thus marked here by a difference in chronological time as well as in experience and understanding. Part of the contrast of these stories is that of Flower's dire circumstances with Felicia's more banal worries, as when, early on, she complains because she doesn't know what to wear to her new school (7). As Felicia's story develops, her once slight concerns are compounded by pointed racial attacks, as when classmates make fun of how her "hair is so fuzzy [and k]ind of weird" (19) and when racist images are drawn on Felicia's school project. Rather unbelievably, although Felicia is in the eighth grade, she knows little about slavery and nothing about the Underground Railroad (96–97): when Felicia's mother reveals that their ancestors had once escaped to Canada along the Underground Railroad, Felicia asks, "They took a train?"

(97) Yet, Felicia's historical vacuity is set as the starting point of her discoveries as she researches history, learns more about her family's background, develops a stronger sense of identity, presents a report to her class about the Underground Railroad, and counters the racism she faces from a classmate.

While Felicia's chapters typically offer narrative closure, in Flower's story, chapters end often in the midst of a dangerous moment. The movement between the two evokes a sense of the dangers Flower and her family face, preventing as well an essentialist representation of the two girls—although Felicia encounters racism, it is not on the scale of enslavement. Moreover, Felicia's story provides emotional relief for young readers from the dangers of Flower's journey. Paxton does link current racism to slavery, particularly in her representation of Felicia's nemesis, a classmate whose ancestors once owned slaves on a large plantation in Virginia. Such time-contrast narratives are connected by the ways in which they show contemporary characters' vulnerability by virtue of race, and in this way explore "the legacy of . . . slavery" in a current-day context (Connolly 188). While Felicia's story shows the continued role of racism in current society, narrowing the scope of racism to the descendant of former slave-owners in some ways constricts the realities of racism. Perhaps—one wonders—it's in the blood.

In its depiction of the flight to Canada, *Morning Star* is powerfully told; the journey is marked by continued

dangers as Flower and her family struggle continually against their surroundings, are tracked by dogs, and at one point are recaptured and face possible return to the plantation. In the way common to many young adult and children's books, the young adult becomes the hero, and when recaptured, it is Flower who aids her nearly broken parents and helps them recover. Yet, Paxton avoids the trap of presenting Flower as someone who can rescue people on her own; she and her parents receive the help of a number of people along the way, including an abolitionist who effects their escape from jail. The account of their journey stays true to a sense of the dangers many faced, particularly in its insistence that the journey to Canada was a long and arduous one that by no means was assured of success.

While the alternating storylines allow a shift in vision that helps to mitigate scenes of danger, Paxton reminds readers of the brutality of enslavement and of what Flower and her family may face. Along the way, for example, they meet Samuel, who earlier had been caught attempting to flee; he recounts how upon that return to the plantation, his master had "called everyone together to watch. Then he nailed my ear to a post, drew a knife, and sliced it off" (30). While Paxton depicts such violence, the trajectory of the dual narratives in the novel are nonetheless optimistic. Felicia finds friends who support her and settles in happily to her new school. Flower and her family gain freedom in Canada—so does Samuel.

By contrast, the consistent focus of Manu Herbstein's *Brave Music of a Distant Drum* is the violence of enslavement, and unlike *Morning Star*, it lingers on scenes of brutalization. The story is structured initially as an insider/outsider narrative as the protagonist Ama tells the story of her life to her seemingly privileged but nonetheless enslaved son, who has been educated as a "foster son" of his masters (174). When he visits the mother he knows little about, he agrees to transcribe her story, and in the process of doing so, his initial disbelief about her account of slavery turns to new understanding. In the recounting of her capture and enslavement in Africa and her journey across the Atlantic to the Americas, Ama tells of repeated rapes, some of them in explicit detail; of forced cannibalism as punishment during the Middle Passage following a failed revolt; and of the revenge enacted upon a rapist who is castrated and has his tongue cut out. The novel moves between points of view—most often between Ama telling her story and her son commenting on it—to create a dialogue between believer and non-believer. The graphic nature of Ama's unrelenting descriptions of violence may be too intense for some readers, and the movement between Ama and her son's points of view (unlike in *Morning Star*) does not provide momentary respite from descriptions of violence, since readers realize early on that the son has been duped by his masters.

Not merely a mitigation of the outsider perspective through a developed respect for those who underwent

enslavement, Zacharias—who eventually reclaims the name his mother gave him, Kwame Zumbi—becomes in the end an "insider." Not only does he accept his mother's account of slavery, but, when his masters refuse him the manumission papers he was promised, Kwame realizes he faces a lifetime of slavery to be ordered about at the whim of his master. Moreover, in the face of Ama's story of repeated rapes, the fact that Kwame has a young daughter foretells a dangerous future ahead. For Kwame and his daughter, the narrative arc of *Brave Music of a Distant Drum* moves them *into* slavery, rather than the more frequent narrative arc in fiction that moves characters out of slavery (as in *Morning Star* and *Freedom Bound*).

While these books present fictionalized depictions of slavery, in *Out of Slavery: The Journey to Amazing Grace* (a retitled reprint of *Amazing Grace: The Story of the Hymn*, published in 1997), author Linda Granfield offers a non-fiction biography of slaver-turned-abolitionist John Newton, who penned the now well-known hymn. As she follows Newton's life as captain of ships that transported enslaved Africans, Granfield notes his early religious influences and moral conversion after years in the slave trade. She also acknowledges that there are intriguing questions that are not yet answered, such as why Newton—who prayed for rescue from a storm and saw that rescue as a pivotal moment in his spiritual redemption—continued transporting slaves for nearly six more years before turning to a "more

humane calling" (n. pag.) of religious preaching and abolitionism.


In her two fictionalized biographies, *My Name Is Henry Bibb* and *My Name Is Phillis Wheatley*, Afua Cooper presents fictionalized narratives of actual people. To fill in the lacunae often left in non-fictional recordings of lives such as Granfield's book and to present more developed characters with whom today's readers can identify, Cooper takes kernels of information from the accounts of individual lives, and through invented scenes, dialogue, and character development, she creates a strong sense of both the interior and the physical worlds of Bibb and Wheatley. She creates, in this way, a thoroughly insider perspective to the lives and thoughts of those enslaved.

The subtitle of each book—*A Story of Slavery and Freedom*—makes explicit the narrative arc, although for each, freedom is gained in different ways: Phillis is given freedom from the family that "bought" her (63); Henry escapes, settling finally in Canada. Cooper's first-person account of Henry Bibb focuses on his childhood and fictionalizes scenes that are rooted in the experiences described in his 1849 narrative, *The Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave*, particularly its early chapters. Cooper's imagery and specificity of scene heighten the vividness of Bibb's world to show its "misery" (34) while also showing his resolve. Cooper's first chapter, entitled "Sold Before I Was Born," presents the first-person narrator describing

his mother's toil and exhaustion. Readers learn that these perceptions occur to Bibb from within the womb, providing him his sense of the world he is about to enter as well as establishing his profound sense of agency as he describes how on one morning "I pushed myself into that world" (7). The scene not only situates his resolve and his close connection to his mother, but also it offers a fresh perspective to readers, an inventive way to show the utter infiltration of slavery in a child's life. This is a story not merely about survival in treacherous times but also about one's psychological freedom in the midst of physical enslavement, and how that psychological resistance was translated into physical freedom in Bibb's first successful escape.

Although Wheatley did not write an autobiography, the 1834 publication of a collection of her poems included a memoir of the poet penned by Margaretta Matilda Odell. Often deemed the touchstone biography of Wheatley, this *Memoir and Poems of Phillis Wheatley: A Native African and a Slave* begins by noting that "Phillis Wheatley was a native of Africa; and was brought to this country [the colonies] in the year 1761, and sold as a slave. She was purchased by Mr. John Wheatley" (9). This and other biographies often present Wheatley's story as a rescue narrative, as the Wheatleys buy the thin, sick child newly brought to the colonies, restore her to health, then educate and support her as she writes the poetry that would make her famous. By imagining Phillis Wheatley's life more





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fully, particularly her childhood in Africa and during the Middle Passage, Cooper extends the story many know of the time Phillis spent with the Wheatleys. She also extends in imaginative ways the cultural connections of Wheatley’s life story and poetry. Rather than begin with a rescue narrative, Cooper follows the torturous journey, from the child’s kidnapping in Africa and during the Middle Passage. Through this first-person narrative, Cooper’s Phillis speaks of irreparable loss and longing: “I would not see my mother again. Would never touch her, feel her breath, inhale her smell of musk, watch as she made porridge or dyed cotton indigo. She would never teach me to sing again. I would never bathe with her in the pool along the banks of the Senegal” (39). Once aboard the ship that would take her to the Americas, Phillis recounts how “Africa disappeared from view, became one with the sky, and my heart changed position in my chest” (40). Particularly in descriptions of the Middle Passage—of children crying for their mothers, of forced feedings, suffocating holds, and murder—Cooper reframes the often sanitized version of Wheatley’s early life. The declaration she gives Wheatley—that “I am filled with a grief that will lurk forever beneath my skin” (60)—counters the often serene picture that biographers have cast of Wheatley’s early years as a poet. The poetic resonance of Cooper’s prose also does much to underline the character’s poetic sensibilities.

While the Wheatleys’ contemporaries would find Phillis’s writing remarkable in its own right, they were also impressed because they believed that “Africans were not very intelligent” (72) and that Phillis’s poetic talents were unique among Africans. Cooper connects Wheatley’s poetic talents to her parents and African culture, to suggest that, while her talents were considerable, they were not divorced from her cultural heritage. Phillis recalls how her mother “used to sing

and recite poetry” (13) and how at his loom her father “created a tapestry of stories from our history” (67), telling readers that in Africa “[o]ur people have diverse ways of composing poetry” (14). Cooper also includes excerpts from Wheatley’s poems throughout the fictionalized narrative as comments on Phillis’s life. In such a way, she provides young readers more possible contexts through which to understand the poems. While the novel ends with Phillis Wheatley looking hopefully to her new life, freed by the Wheatleys and marrying John Peters, a local black businessman, as Cooper notes in her epilogue, those hopes were not fulfilled so easily: publishers would not print Wheatley’s second book of poetry, and the “post-Revolutionary period had no place for a Black woman who was intelligent, talented, and educated” (152).

The depiction of post-slavery conditions is also at the heart of *Chasing Freedom* and its sequel, *If This Is Freedom*. Here, Gloria Ann Wesley portrays the life of Sarah and her family, who are given their freedom and provided transport to Canada as repayment for their Loyalist alliances during the Revolutionary War. Both books explore the problems faced by former slaves living in Canada, and in doing so, they allow discussion of how the racial exploitation of slavery was not a closed event. In *Chasing Freedom*, freed slaves find that in Birchtown, their allotted land is unfit for farming, opportunities for employment are few, and racial hierarchies remain firmly in place, particularly between

former masters and slaves. *Chasing Freedom* explores the ramifications of slavery on families, particularly as Sarah’s grandmother Lydia tries to identify and reunite her children who had been taken from her years ago. Lydia’s story is one of sexual exploitation; she was a “breeder” slave used by a white man now managing a store in Birchtown. When Lydia approaches him, wanting to know the whereabouts of their children, the threat she poses in exposing him leads to a plot to have her and other members of her family kidnapped and re-enslaved. They escape that fate, but this remains a dangerous world where certificates of freedom can be stolen or destroyed by slave-catchers in the ready exchange of “freed” blacks for cash. Yet the novel ends with the realization of Sarah’s financial and personal hopes as she opens a tailor’s shop and marries her beloved Thomas.

In the sequel *If This Is Freedom*, Sarah and Thomas are expecting their first baby, but conditions in Birchtown remain near desperate for former slaves. Government provisions due them are not being delivered, Thomas cannot find employment, Sarah’s tailor shop has failed and she has signed on as an indentured servant with the Blyes, a white couple who refuse to pay Sarah her due wages. Like many others in Birchtown, Sarah and Thomas have few opportunities and battle starvation. The theft of bread initiates a spiral of increasing loss, as tenant farming indebts them further to the Blyes, who ultimately take their first-born. When

Thomas leaves to find employment elsewhere, Sarah must deal with increasingly pinched resources and the duplicity of the Blyes on her own. Sarah ultimately recovers her son and once Thomas returns, they leave Birchtown, a place now even more desolate with the exodus of many of its inhabitants for an uncertain future in Sierra Leone. Sarah and her family thus abandon Canada and its broken promises of freedom for Boston and the hope of a new and more prosperous life there. Yet readers know that slavery was then still legal in the United States and would be for over another half century; so the move to Boston, even for legally “free” people, may not be free of trouble.

There is no believer/non-believer duality among central point-of-view characters in Wesley’s two books: even villains know they are exploitative, and Sarah and her family are certainly insiders in their experiences of racial oppression. That insider perspective provides a narrative concentration that heightens the sense of danger they face, unlike novels when outside characters or time periods intrude into accounts of exploitation to provide momentary narrative relief. Moreover, although Wesley offers individual villains, Birchtown and the larger society have their share of those who exploit the town’s now-free black citizens. That sense of wider racial prejudice shows both the social institutionalism and the cultural framework of racism and the fact that it is less likely to allow any sense that racism is confined to a cruel few. In her descriptions of indentured

servitude and tenant farming—as free blacks contracted themselves to whites, often those who once had been their masters—Wesley explores how post-enslavement racism was reinscribed in continuing patterns of economic exploitation, thus opening the chronological parameters of discussions of slavery. This is a world where the

list of injustices continued: beaten for disobedience, forced to serve extended time through false contracts, sentenced to hard labour or shackled in leg irons for neglecting assigned work and even starved for displeasing behavior. Public whippings and hangings were issued for theft of the smallest items like shoes or butter, indentures were being passed on in wills illegally and children stolen. (*Chasing* 62–63)

Including examples from nearly every continent, Gann and Willen show in *Five Thousand Years of Slavery* the pervasiveness of enslavement, and its epigraph from Lincoln—“If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong”—captures aptly the ideology of the study. Richly illustrated and deftly written, *Five Thousand Years of Slavery* is an important study that offers a multi-layered and comprehensive presentation on slavery. Illustrated maps orient readers to locations or trade routes under discussion while main narratives in each chapter detail cultural practices and conditions

of slavery. The chapter on “Ancient Greece and Rome,” for example, recounts the means of acquiring and sometimes releasing slaves, the range of slaves (including gladiators, city slaves, domestic slaves, miners, and those who functioned largely as “a status symbol” [17]), and the logistics of slave sales (unhappy purchasers could return slaves “for a refund” or, if supplied with erroneous information during the purchase, be repaid “twice the price” of the slave [14–15]). Such larger histories are made personal in stories of those who suffered under slavery—in this chapter, including descriptions of the “thirty thousand men and women, weak and strong, [who] slaved in the mine pits” (17), and received—according to a historian of the time—“[n]o leniency or respite of any kind” and were “compelled by blows to persevere in their labors, until through ill-treatment they die[d] in the midst of their tortures” (18).

By way of centre narratives and frequent sidebars (which appear as brief information packets in outside margins), the text moves between close-up and overview descriptions of slavery. Readers learn here of Spartacus and a failed gladiator rebellion and of pirates who captured Julius Caesar. As readers see in later chapters, narratives about individuals range from figures readers may be familiar with—such as Patricius (later known as Saint Patrick)—and people probably otherwise unknown, such as a Congolese boy, Yoka, whose hands were amputated as punishment for not

harvesting a sufficient number of rubber plants (49). Readers learn about Yoka through a photograph and a detailed caption; this and similar photographs demand readers’ attention as enslaved people look directly at the camera and, by extension, at those holding open these pages. However powerful fictionalized stories about slavery may be, *Five Thousand Years of Slavery* shows the power of a non-fictional format to relay the brutality of slavery, particularly in its photographs and first-hand accounts.

In its final chapter, *Five Thousand Years of Slavery* reframes the insider/outsider perspective of slavery as it disrupts the insularity of outsiders by implicating free people, including current readers, as contributors to slavery through their consumerism. Gann and Willen cite examples of current slave labour, from prisoners in Chinese labour camps who “manufacture products like Christmas lights, stuffed animals . . . and gloves that are sold throughout the world, at low prices, to people who are happy to get a ‘bargain’” (148) to slave labourers on the Ivory Coast who harvest cocoa for the world’s chocolate and forced field workers in the United States. Offering young readers several websites about current anti-slavery organizations and suggesting that consumers research the labour that produced the products they buy, *Five Thousand Years of Slavery* shows that slavery is not something that ended a century ago but that continues today. Gann and Willen show as well that slavery is not one country’s problem, but rather the

world's problem. It is *our* problem, and by virtue of its continued existence we are all implicated as potential “insiders,” not in the experience of slavery but in its perpetuation.

As a group, these books show that there is no easy escape from slavery. Those that feature characters who have fled to Canada (as in *Grease Town*, *Chasing Freedom*, and *If This Is Freedom*) show that ostensibly legal emancipation has not necessarily been accompanied by social or economic emancipation, and that the best of hopes—of finding sanctuary and possibilities for a new life of freedom—have been keenly complicated by continued racial conflict and exploitation. Even texts that feature apparently successful escapes—like Bibb's first escape to Canada

in *My Name Is Henry Bibb*—acknowledge, as does Cooper in the epilogue to her novel, that Bibb would return to the United States in an attempt to free his family but be re-enslaved for nearly three years before his final successful escape. What unites these texts generally is their personalization of racial exploitation by offering young readers characters of integrity, passion, and determination. Moreover, these books situate those characters along a spectrum and often in an oppositional framework of insider/outsider knowledge and experience. In doing so, these books—particularly in their use of insider/outsider paradigms—provide rich opportunities for today's young readers to explore their own relationship to both historical and contemporary frameworks of oppression.

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