

C. Peter Ripley, ed. *The Black Abolitionist Papers. Vol. I: The British Isles, 1830-1865.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985) xxx, 609 pp., \$40.00.

From 1830 until 1865, hundreds of American, Canadian, and West Indian blacks went to the British Isles and became active in the antislavery movement, which in 1833 reached a peak there with abolition of slavery in the Empire but was only beginning to gain momentum in the United States. They represented the full spectrum of free or fugitive Western Hemisphere blacks: some were well-known antislavery speakers and writers such as Frederick Douglass and Martin Delany; others were originally unknowns such as John Andrew Jackson, who spoke in "the peculiar broken dialect of the negro," and John Brown, whose language was "of the rudest but most impressive character." A few, as for example William Nixon, resorted to fraud and were imprisoned, or, like Alexander Duval, were reduced to begging in the streets of London. Several were women, most notably Ellen Craft and Sarah Remond.

Speaking in public, publishing books and pamphlets and writing for newspapers, and collecting money and goods for causes as varied as founding settlements in Canada, supporting black schools and newspapers, and buying the freedom of relatives, these energetic and ingenious people come to be known collectively as the Black Abolitionists. From diverse backgrounds and with no central organization, they nevertheless successfully pursued the common goal of persuading "the British public to place its moral [and financial] support behind the crusade to end American slavery."

The story of these courageous people is now generally available in the first volume of a projected five-volume documentary series on the black abolitionists in Britain, Canada, and the United States. This massive project, centered at Florida State University under the skilled direction of C. Peter Ripley, began in 1976 and resulted in the collection of 14,000 letters, speeches, essays, books and pamphlets, editorials, and other writings from depositories in England, Scotland, Ireland, Canada, and the United States. In 1981-84 these were issued on microfilm, from which the ninety-six selective but representative items in this volume were drawn. Most are previously unpublished.

But these are not merely dry "documents" destined to languish unread, but vivid glimpses into the lives and aspirations of a long generation of blacks on the firing-line of the abolitionist movement. It is easy to understand why an overflow crowd in Warrington "cheered and approved resolutions thanking [Sarah] Remond and denouncing slavery as anti-Christian," and why Tom Wilson's account of his escape from slavery through alligator-infested swamps was published widely in British newspapers. The editorial statement on method, thirty-five page introduction, and extensive headnotes and footnotes contribute additional detail and color to the volume.

Vol. II, *Canada, 1830-1865*, has now appeared and will in due time be reviewed in this journal. As the complete series appears, we will gain increasing appreciation of the Black Abolitionists as they worked toward that day, as J.W.C. Pennington said in Glasgow in 1850, when "Jehovah hath triumphed, his people are free!"

—Orville W. Taylor
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