Journal #7

This week we looked at 2 articles about slavery in Upper Canada; Afua Cooper’s “Acts of Resistance: Black Men and Women Engage Slavery in Upper Canada 1793-1803.”1 As well as an internet source through the Archives of Ontario online exhibit called “Enslaved Africans in Upper Canada.” 2 Both of which shed light on the slavery acts that went on in Canada so many years ago. In particularly the 2 sources focus on one African American woman, Chloe Cooley, and her resistance against her Canadian “owner” when trying to sell her to a new “owner” from New York.

Many people to this day don’t realize that Canada took part in the slavery acts that so many of us view as cruel and inhumane. It seems as though, at this time in history, that black lives simply did not matter. “Black skin was equated with slavery. Black skin thus became a badge of enslavement and concomitantly of racial and social inferiority.” 3 “Slavery was a racialized system” 4, and even the children born to these slaves suffered just as their parents did. Cooper writes “Moreover, slavery in the New World was a permanent condition; one was a slave for life. Another cruel feature of the slave system was that it was hereditary.” 5 In other words, if you were born with black skin, you were basically screwed… That is until Chloe Cooley came into the picture and showed clear physical and verbal resistance towards her slave owner, William Vrooman. A white employee of Vrooman’s at the time reports being told that by Vrooman himself that “…he was going to sell his Negro wench to some persons in the States.” 6 He also reported that “… he saw the said Negro girl, tried with a rope… and forced into a boat, and carried it across the river; and delivered to a man upon the bank of the river… and that she screamed violently and made resistance , but was tied in the same manner…” 7 Cooley’s determined acts of resistance and bravery did not go unnoticed.

In 1793, John Simcoe, put forward an act that prohibited the importation of slaves in Upper Canada 8. However, to Simcoes disappointment, this act did not grant freedom to adult slaves. And, after not being freed by the act, many Canadian slaves escaped to the Old Northwest Territories, where slavery had been abolished 9 . Cooper writes “Those who were enslaved in the United States, on “learning that they would not be enslaved north of the American border, soon began to trek to freedom and a greater measure of security in Upper Canada.” This was the beginning of the legendary Underground Railroad.” 9

Chloe Cooley and John Simcoe’s acts, along with the help of countless others, helped put an end the slavery in Upper Canada