



## “Here on freedom’s soil”: A Welcome to Canada Henry Bibb, ca. 1850

Born enslaved in Kentucky, Henry Bibb escaped to Canada — twice, first in 1837, after which he returned to the South in a failed attempt to free his family and was recaptured, and in 1841 when he settled in Michigan and became active in the abolitionist movement. After the Fugitive Slave Act was passed in 1850, he moved to Canada to avoid recapture and worked to help the thousands of fugitive slaves arriving each year.

In this newspaper account of an anti-slavery meeting in Canada,<sup>1</sup> we read Henry Bibb’s welcome to his fellow fugitives.

Mr. Henry Bibb, a fugitive slave, then offered the following resolution, which was discussed and unanimously adopted by the meeting—

“Resolved, That we hail these fugitives as our fellow countrymen and brethren, and in behalf of the citizens of Canada, we bid them welcome on this soil as freemen, and that we do here in the presence of Him who is no respecter of persons,<sup>2</sup> pledge our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor, if need be, that no fugitive who has or shall hereafter escape from American slavery to us for protection shall ever be taken back into bondage.”

Mr. Bibb then remarked as follows:

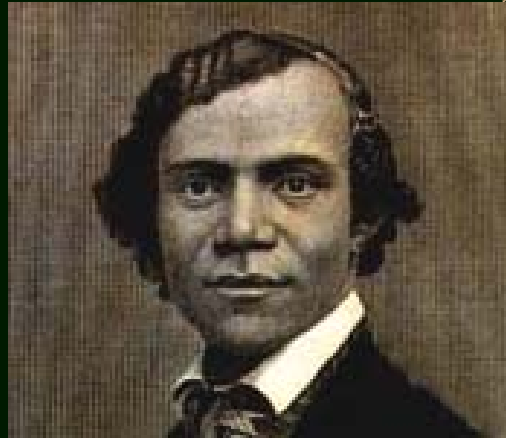
“Dear brethren, we are happy to meet you here on freedom’s soil, we congratulate you, we rejoice with you, and some of us can sympathise with you from experience. I can image that I see you traveling by night through the dark swamps, some with their little children on their backs, and their wives and others by their side, guided by the North star; and in the distance I seem to hear the slaveholder and his bloodhounds. But you are now in Canada, free from American slavery; yes, the very moment you stepped upon these shores you were changed from articles of property to human beings. You are here entitled to all the privileges and immunities of citizens of Canada so long as you obey her laws. All I have to say to you now is go to work, dig for your bread; you have a right to the products of your own labor, you have a right to worship God according to the dictates of your consciences, you have a right to your own wives and children — no man can sell them here on the auction block. Dear friends, you shall ever have our best wishes and prayers that you may be useful and prosperous in the new life before you.”

National Humanities Center, 2007: [nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/](http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/). In the digital collection Black Abolitionist Archive, University of Detroit–Mercy, at [www.dalnet.lib.mi.us/gsd/cgi-bin/library?p=about&c=baa](http://www.dalnet.lib.mi.us/gsd/cgi-bin/library?p=about&c=baa). Permission pending. Two typographical errors corrected. Complete image credits at [nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/imagecredits.htm](http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/imagecredits.htm).

<sup>1</sup> Meeting unidentified in original newspaper clippings collection.

<sup>2</sup> I.e., does not judge people by race, gender, social status, etc.

Univ. of North Carolina Library



Henry Bibb; frontispiece (detail) of *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, 1849

Archives of Ontario



*Voice of the Fugitive*, first black Canadian newspaper, founded & edited by Henry Bibb; edition of 12 March 1851 (detail)

Schomburg Center/NYPL



“The Detroit River, at Detroit, Michigan, in 1850, the favorite place for fugitives to cross into Canada” (detail); source unidentified