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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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THE USE OF SYMBOLS ON THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD: AN INTERPRETATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The Underground Railroad was not underground, and it was not a railroad. According to legend, it got its name around 1831 when a slave named Tice Davids escaped from Kentucky to the free state of Ohio. His owner searched a long time, but never found him. The owner finally gave up, saying the slave must have escaped on "an underground road." The objective of this paper is to emphasize the use of symbols as means of communication to help runaways travel to Canada or elsewhere for freedom. Because of the nature of the topic, historicism appears to be the most appropriate theory applied. As a matter of fact, the Underground Railroad was made up of more than 3,200 people: blacks, whites, and American Indians. They offered food, shelter, and money to runaways. The Underground Railroad was used most from 1830 to 1860. It helped tens of thousands of slaves escape. Some went to the Northern states or to Canada. Others fled south to Mexico and the Caribbean. Because secrecy was very important on the Underground Railroad, it had its own secret language. Runaway slaves were called passengers, packages, or freight. The people leading slaves to freedom were conductors. Slaves were hidden in homes called stations, which were run by stationmasters. Anyone providing money or goods to help the railroad was called a stockholder. The conductors often used their own homes as stations. These stations were ten to twenty miles apart. The slaves were hidden in secret rooms in the attic or cellar. Sometimes hiding spaces were built inside fake cupboards. Other homes had bookcases that hid the stairs to the cellar. Outside, haystacks were used to cover up tunnels that took runaways to secret places. Barns often had false floors with some space below for a person to hide. Different signals let runaways know which houses were part of the Underground Railroad. Often, lighted candles or lanterns were used to mark stations. White bricks at the top of a chimney also meant a house was safe. When a slave arrived at a station, he could identify himself by giving a special knock, hooting like an owl, or using a password he had learned from a conductor. As an illegal system, the most suitable tools used were quilts, disguise and other sign language to challenge slave masters and slave catchers. In 1863, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. This document freed the slaves in the rebelling Southern states. The Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolishes slavery in the United States. The Underground Railroad died.

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INTRODUCTION

There were two paths from slavery to freedom in colonial and antebellum America: one legal and the other illegal. An African American could be born free, but under American law, an enslaved African American was property and could legally become free only by virtue of an emancipatory act initiated by his or her owner or through government action. However, relatively few white Americans were inclined to emancipate their bond-persons, and statewide emancipation occurred only in the northern states between 1777 and roughly 1820. For the vast majority of African Americans, the path to legal freedom was blocked by the determination of white Americans to preserve and profit from the institution of slavery. The illegal path to freedom forked into two principal branches: flight or revolt. Revolt, while common and significant in the Caribbean and Brazil, was seldom the chosen path in North America.

Slave revolts were successful only when Africans had sufficiently large population majorities to offset superior European weaponry and where subsequent formation of slaves and flight to maroon societies in remote areas was feasible. These conditions rarely existed in colonial and antebellum America, where enslaved African Americans were a distinct minority in most regions. Consequently, slave revolt was a spectacular but ultimately suicidal strategy for challenging slavery, and as the regions east of the Mississippi River became more densely settled, maroon societies formed only in backcountry areas such as the Great Dismal Swamp and Florida. On the other hand, the sheer size of the United States and its eventual division into free and slave zones after the American Revolution made escape a viable, although still dangerous, alternative for those African Americans moved to translate their yearning for freedom into concrete action. The objective of this paper is to investigate the Underground Railroad system with focus on the use of symbols as means of communication to help runaways on their way to freedom. The metaphorical

language was unknown to slave masters and slave catchers but easily communicative for both runaways and their helpers. Symbols used were related to railroad vocals, agricultural terms, quilts with geometric drawings, songs and any other tools used on this figurative railroad. In fact, the Underground Railroad is the term for the informal system and network of individuals who aided slaves fleeing from slavery, offering them shelter, food, money, transportation, and protection along their way to the Northern states and Canada. It operated between 1800 and 1860, and its activities were generally kept secret because such activities were illegal. Historicism is the theory used to investigate this secret and illegal system which proved useful up to the American Civil war and the thirteenth amendment ratified on December 18, 1865 that abolished legalized slavery throughout the United States of America. The results of the investigations are important. Estimates of how many fleeing slaves it assisted range between 50,000 and 100,000. The Underground Railroad covered a lot of territories. It reached from Maine to Kansas, developed below the Mason-Dixon Line in the District of Columbia, which became an active though perilous location, and extended even into the Deep South along the Mississippi River. It had multiple manifestations: isolated Good Samaritans helping those in need; daring "slave stealers" defying death to invade the South; steadfast conductors working carefully with comrades to protect their passengers; well-knit organizations whose connections reached hundreds of miles. The Underground Railroad was a metaphor for hope, freedom, and goodwill. Slaves were seldom submissive. They had been escaping bondage since the founding of the American colonies. As early as 1688 the Germantown Friends Meeting in northern Philadelphia made the first public condemnation of slavery, citing the Bible: (Deut. 23: 15–16). This early assault on slavery by Quakers put them in a leadership role that continued until Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. As the young nation expanded west-ward in the early 1800s, slave escapes assumed a new regional configuration that persisted through the antebellum period. Four broad zones of fugitive slave activity emerged, each with its characteristic patterns, challenges, possibilities and limitations:

- The border region east of the Appalachians, with escape routes leading to the mid-Atlantic and New England states or, ultimately, to eastern Canada;
- The border region west of the Appalachians along the Ohio River, with escape routes leading to the mid- western free territories or states or, ultimately, to western Canada (across from Detroit or Cleveland);
- The border west of the Mississippi River, with escape routes leading sometimes into the Ohio River border region or farther west or into Mexico; and
- The southern interior, in which most escapes were temporary acts of resistance, though some escape routes led to the eastern or western border zones - or farther south to Florida or the Caribbean in the early years.

Given the location of the vast majority of enslaved African Americans, the border zones immediately east and west of the Appalachians witnessed the heaviest fugitive slave traffic by far. As slave population and cotton cultivation shifted steadily to the southwest after 1815, escape from Kentucky became more common and escape through Kentucky became the best option available to fugitives from Tennessee, Alabama and other southern states. Thus, Kentucky became central to the history of slave escapes by virtue of its place in the physical and political geography of the young United States. For the same reasons, Kentucky and the states along its northern border became central to the Underground Railroad- and the Ohio River became a veritable River Jordan, the "Dark Line" between slavery and nominal freedom. Walks at night following instructions of helpers, rest in day time in hidden places offered by agents, disguise when necessary, crossing rivers, traveling on real trains and other techniques helped slaves to join Canada or other places to get free. Symbols were the compass used to be successful on the Underground Railroad.

Definition and Naming of the Underground Railroad: The Underground Railroad was not a real railroad. The term was used by abolitionists as a metaphor to describe their activities in assisting escaping slaves. It referred to the system of secret routes and safe houses by which escaped slaves made their way north to freedom. This railroad terminology included "stations" or "stops," houses in which sympathizers took in fugitives temporarily, "stationmasters" or the selfless people who took them in and "conductors" who risked their own lives in transporting runaways from one point to the next. "Cargo" was the human "freight" that risked all for their very freedom. The Underground Railroad involved many people of good will, all willing to take risks, including Blacks, Whites and Native Americans. These courageous people provided shelter, food, clothing and secrecy to assist escaping slaves. Sometimes "conductors" drove wagons, carriages or carts with slaves hidden in false compartments. At other times, fugitives were disguised as the slaves driving their "owners," who in reality were Underground Railroad workers. Sometimes they were dressed in fancy clothing, women dressed up as men and men as women, and those who were light-skinned disguised themselves as white people or even slave owners. There were numerous cases of fugitives hiding in crates and being shipped north by rail, such as Henry "Box" Brown who acquired his middle name as a result of having escaped this way. A number of people risked their lives by making trips into the south to emancipate loved ones from the jaws of slavery. In short, thousands of Black men, women and children escaped slavery in the United States and fled to Canada, aided by "conductors" of the Underground Railroad. There were no real conductors, and there was no true railroad. The railroad and the conductors were simply metaphors for a complex, highly secretive system by which sympathetic people -White and Black - helped fugitive slaves to escape and avoid being recaptured on their long, dangerous run north to Canada.

The name "Underground Railroad" itself is enigmatic. Nobody can say with certainty its origin. There is no surprise about this because the whole system was based on informal and secret actions and activities. It is not known when and where the name "Underground Railroad" came to be applied to these secret trails. According to Dr. Robert C. Smedley on pages the designation came into use among slave-hunters in the neighborhood of Columbia soon after the Quakers in southeastern Pennsylvania began their concerted action in harboring and forwarding fugitives. The pursuers seem to have had little difficulty in tracking slaves as far as Colombia, but beyond that point all trace of them was generally lost. All the various methods of detection customary in such case were resorted to, but failed to bring the runaways to view. The mystery enshrouding these disappearances completely bewildered and baffled the slave owners and their agents, who thought there must be an Underground Railroad somewhere. In fact, Railroads were not known neither in England nor the United States until about 1830, so that the word "railroad" could scarcely have received its figurative application as early as Mr. Smedley implies. Associate Professor of European history in Ohio State University

Siebert H. Wilbur has provided an account of the origin of the "Underground Railroad" in 1898 in his book entitled: *The Underground Railroad, From Slavery to Freedom*. The account is from Honorable Rush R. Sloane of Sandusky in Ohio. His account concerns Tice Davids:

In the year 1831, a fugitive named Tice Davids came over the line and lived just back of Sandusky. He had come direct from Ripley, Ohio, where he crossed the Ohio River. . . .

"When he was running away, his master, a Kentuckian, was in close pursuit and pressing him so hard that when the Ohio River was reached he had no alternative but to jump in and swim across. It took his master some time to secure a skiff, in which he and his aid followed the swimming fugitive, keeping him in sight until he had landed. Once on shore, however, the master could not find him. No one had seen him; and after a long . . . search the disappointed slave-master went into Ripley, and when inquired of as to what had become of his slave, said . . . he

thought 'the nigger must have gone off on an underground road.' The story was repeated with a good deal of amusement, and this incident gave the name to the line. First the 'Underground Road,' afterwards 'Underground Railroad.' '' (Siebert H. W., 1898, P. 45)

This version is perhaps the best since it is known through history that by 1831 there were plenty of "underground" roads along the Ohio River with "stations," "conductors," and "stationmasters," as means of conveyance. The evolution here concerns the use of "road", then "railroad". Since steam locomotion was a new form of transportation, the name

"Underground Railroad" caught on and was used by abolitionists as an allegory to describe their activities in helping runaways. Whatever the manner and date of its suggestion, the designation was generally accepted as an appropriate title for mysterious means of transportation fugitives to Canada.

The Routes of the Underground Railroad: The routes of the Underground Railroad are impossible to trace back, the system was informal and clandestine. Speculations go towards all directions but the truth related to the very beginning and the routes followed are still under investigation. Some historical facts and testimonies help to identify some routes. What is easy to say regards Canada's position about slave trade in the eighteenth century. In Canada, the Emancipation Law of 1793 had ended the slave trade and limited the terms of contracts slaves could serve. Once United States soldiers returned from the War of 1812, fought partly on Canadian territory, they spread the word that Canada had abolished slavery and would harbor fugitives. Slaves started to make their way north simply because Canada was a safe refuge. Escaped slaves discovered many routes across a variety of terrain, through fields, valleys, and mountain slopes. They went from one state to another and were welcomed in a wide range of homes. The path they chose was not always the most direct, but it was usually one that offered protection. Ohio played a key role in the process to freedom. Its geographic location accounted for the state's role as the center of Underground Railroad activity. As a free state, Ohio bordered two slave states: Kentucky and Virginia. Southern slaves who did head north discovered multiple crossing points along the Ohio River it slowed down any pursuing slave catchers. North of the Ohio River were Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. By 1818, each was a free state, where slavery was not allowed. In Ohio, families helped fugitives make their way to Canada. Once fugitives reached the towns bordering Lake Erie they found "conductors" to take them on board and bring them across the lake to Canada. In fact, Ohio had a long shoreline along Lake Erie. Fugitives who wanted to go to Canada could travel overland or sail across the lake into Ontario. The history of Ohio and the types of people living there have favored the free flow of runaways.

Ohio was the first state from the Old Northwest Territories to join the Union in 1803. Free blacks and Quakers settled in Ohio. So did a variety of abolitionists and free blacks who were eager to help enslaved people win their freedom. Farther west of Ohio, escape routes through Indiana and Illinois was active. Fugitives who reached Indiana passed through Michigan, and then into Canada; those who made it to Illinois escaped by land into Wisconsin or by boat across Lake Michigan. One of the longest lines on the Underground Railroad took escaped slaves through Iowa. In the East, one early line took passengers in a direct route from Washington to New York City and then to Albany. From there many escaped slaves went on to Canada through Syracuse and Rochester. Alternatively, fugitives made their way from Albany into the New England states and on to Canada. Others traveled north by ship along the Atlantic coast to New Haven, New Bedford, Boston, or Portland. From there they caught up with various land routes; many followed the Connecticut River Valley north to Vermont. From Boston some lines led through New Hampshire while others followed the coast of Maine. Those who reached Portland by ship found several families who opened up their homes. The Southern state most active in the Underground Railroad was North Carolina. Quakers who lived in Guilford County in the western part of the state joined the Underground Railroad as

did Quakers in Hertford and Bertie counties, close to the coast. The town of Winton in Hertford County became a headquarters for the Underground Railroad. Fugitives would go by boat down the Chowan River to Albemarle Sound and then up the coast.

Slaves in Georgia and the Carolinas did not always head north; sometimes they escaped to Southern Florida where they were taken in by the Seminole, an American Indian Tribe. Fugitives from the Deep South also sought better opportunities out west, some ending up as far away as Mexico.

In *Encyclopedia of the Underground Railroad* (2006), J. Blaine Hudson identifies four broad zones of slave escapes were active:

- The region east of the Appalachians, with escape routes leading to the mid- Atlantic and New England states or, ultimately, to eastern Canada;
- the region west of the Appalachians along the Ohio River, with escape routes leading to the Midwestern free territories or states or, ultimately, to western Canada (across from Detroit or Cleveland);
- the west side of the Mississippi River, with escape routes leading sometimes into the Ohio River border region or farther west or into Mexico; and
- the southern interior in which most escapes were temporary acts of resistance, still with some escape routes leading to the eastern or western border zones—or farther south to Florida or the Caribbean in the early years. (*Encyclopedia of the Underground Railroad*, p.383)

In fact there is no agreement about the number of routes to freedom. Some historians identify five main routes. Branches of the first route united in western Tennessee and then branched out into Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. The second main route went up through Baltimore, Maryland, one branch leading to an area north of Buffalo in the west, and a second branch leading to Montpelier in the east. The third route had its roots in Georgia and Florida and went south to the Everglades and to Cuba. The fourth route was by sea. It left the coast near Savannah, Charleston, and the southern part of North Carolina and went by sea to New York, Boston, and Portland, Maine. The fifth route began near Dallas in Texas and headed south toward Mexico. In short, fugitives struck out in every direction. Desperate to escape, they headed wherever they hoped to find a secure home. Their destination did not have to offer much in the way of material goods. The end of the Underground Railroad line represented freedom, and for that, fugitive slaves were willing to make great sacrifices, face difficult challenges, and take enormous risks. In sum, fugitives followed five routes.

People, Techniques and Codes of the Underground Railroad: By the time the Underground Railroad was named (1831), only a few older African Americans were still held as slaves in the northern United States. The first step was making the decision to flee. Most often the fugitive was a lone male. The Christmas season was a popular time to escape. During that time of year, masters often gave enslaved workers permission to visit relatives on nearby plantations. The slaves carried special passes that allowed them to travel. Whites would not have been surprised to see one or two slaves walking on a country road. Some fugitives ran off without passes, hoping they would not be caught. Others stole passes or created forgeries that looked like real passes. Before leaving, the runaways gathered what food they could. Most traveled very lightly, with little more than the clothes they wore. Once on the road, they sometimes stole food from farms or received food from African Americans they met along the way. Fugitives sought shelter in barns or simply slept in fields or forests, usually during the day. They traveled by night, when they would be harder to detect. Many enslaved people never heard about the Underground Railroad before they got out for freedom pursue.

People: The Underground Railroad started slowly at the local level, developing networks that expanded regionally, and eventually reached out across states and into Canada. Beginning with

individualized efforts to aid fugitive slaves around the time of the American Revolution, it came to involve generations of some families and made continual progress that led to the Civil War. It reached to Montreal in the north, Mexico in the south, Nova Scotia in the east, and Kansas in the west, and included people from all segments of society, though most were evangelical whites, free blacks, Native Americans and Quakers. On the very stage of the Underground Railroad, runaways played the key roles. Everything was organized around them.

Runaways: As early as the 16th century, western European nations constructed a uniform slavery system in the western Hemisphere. This process was composed mainly of people of African origins. Through the notorious slave trade, Africans were dispersed and forced to labor on sugar, tobacco and rice plantations throughout the Americas and Caribbean. In the 1600s and 1700s, slave labor played a vital role in the history of the British North American colonies. Beginning with Massachusetts and Virginia colonies in 1641 and 1660 respectively, slavery was legalized and regarded as essential to the colonial economy. Slave resistance occurred wherever bondage existed. The brutality of involuntary servitude and the desire for freedom inspired most bondsmen to rebel against their conditions. Bondsmen consistently used flight as a form of resistance. Escapes occurred as early as the 1500s when African captives arrived in the Spanish colonies. In Spanish North America, some bondsmen escaped and took refuge with Native American groups who welcomed the runaways as members of their communities. Others absconded into unclaimed territories and secluded areas and formed maroon or free societies there. Later, maroon settlements were primarily found in the Great Dismal Swamp in North Carolina and Virginia, the bayous of Louisiana, and the mountainous regions of Kentucky and Tennessee. These communities usually offered shelter to thousands of fellow refugees. In the early 1700s, hundreds of enslaved Africans and Native Americans sought refuge in Spanish Florida which accorded them liberty. This act indeed posed a threat to White settlers in nearby British, French, Danish, and Dutch territories. African runaways often lived and intermarried with Native American groups such as the Creeks and Muscogee who provided them protection. Eventually this group of peoples became known as the "Seminoles" (a Native American word meaning runaway). Hundreds of African refugees from the Carolinas and Georgia customarily sought asylum with the Seminoles and freed African communities such as the Garcia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose (Fort Mose) and the Negro Fort (Fort Gadsden). In short, cruel treatment, severe and unjustified punishment, abuse, and overwork were also reasons for some to leave slavery.

Slave masters: They owned slaves. The power of the master was absolute in order to render the submission of the slave perfect. They used their position to exploit slaves: female slaves were sexually abused, they were submitted to cruelty of all types. Slaves were sold, killed, whipped, starved by their masters. They hired slave catchers to bring slaves back when they ran away. A slave's owner, called "the master" or "the mistress," made all the decisions that controlled that slave's life. Because slaves were "owned" by someone else, they couldn't own anything themselves, everything a slave had belonged to the master or mistress. Slaves were dependent on their owners for food, clothes, and shelter. The owner decided where a slave could go, the work the slave had to do, what he or she ate and wore, what a slave could say, whether or not the slave would be sold off, what he or she was allowed to learn, and how a slave was punished. Slaves did not control their own lives. They were sharply against both the actions of the runaways and the activities of the Underground Railroad agents. They were protected by slave laws.

Slave catchers: In the United States a slave catchers were white colonists employed to track down and return escaped slaves to their enslavers. These groups consisted of both planters and colonists who owned no slaves, and were paid by planters to search for escaped slaves. Slaveowners hired people who made a living catching fugitive slaves. Since these slave catchers charged by the day and mile, many of them would travel long distances to hunt for fugitives. Slave

catchers often used tracking dogs to sniff out their targets; these were called "negro dogs," and, though they could be of multiple breeds, they were typically bloodhounds for their ability to discern human scent over great distances, even days later. Their extraordinarily keen sense of smell is combined with a strong and tenacious tracking instinct to track runaways.

Conductors: Conductors and stationmasters were white and black people who came from all walks of life. Some were wagon drivers who were willing to shuttle fugitives, or steamboat workers who were able to smuggle runaways aboard ship. Others were farmers whose rural homes lay along a northward Underground Railroad route. Many of the people who helped runaways were simply sympathetic strangers who were willing to give a runaway a meal, point out directions, or not alert the sheriff when they discovered a fleeing slave sleeping in a barn. A great number of Underground Railroad conductors and stationmasters were women. Most lawmen and slave catchers thought women were not clever enough or bold enough to help fugitives. Their prejudice helped women such as Laura Haviland, Harriet Tubman, and Lucretia Mott avoid arrest. Certain religious groups, such as the Quakers and the Presbyterians, actively organized relief and safe houses for runaways. During a 1688 Quaker meeting, members spoke out against slavery. By 1761 Quakers declared that no slave owner could remain in the Religious Society of Friends. The Mount Zion United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C., ran an Underground Railroad station, hiding fugitive slaves in the burial vault of their African American cemetery. Presbyterians were also against human bondage. Jewish members of the Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, also sheltered fugitives. So many known and unknown people played important roles to facilitate access to Free States. It is impossible to name them all because the Underground Railroad was a secret organization.

Techniques used by the actors of the Underground Railroad: To help keep the people and places of the Underground Railroad secret, people often spoke or wrote using code words, which were copied from real train travel. Fugitive slaves were called "passengers," "travelers," "baggage," or "cargo." Sometimes, male fugitives were called "packages of hardware" and women were called "dry goods." "Conductors" were those who guided runaways to freedom. People who mapped out "routes," "arranged passage," and made sure the way was safe were called "agents." Cities or towns where fugitive slaves could get help along the way were called "terminals." Many well-traveled terminals had their own code names. Sandusky, Ohio, on the shore of Lake Erie, was called "Hope," for example. Safe houses, where runaways were sheltered, were called "stations." A person who owned or operated a safe house was called a "stationmaster." "Brakemen" helped fugitives start new lives in Northern states and in Canada. Underground Railroad workers were seen as lawbreaking troublemakers. Many Americans thought slavery was wrong.

Underground Railroad Code Phrases: Working in or traveling the Underground Railroad was illegal. Escaping slaves and those who helped them were at constant risk of being caught. One way to hide what they were doing was to use code words and phrases when talking or sending messages. The exact number and names of the Underground Railroad or phrases used is unknown. The following example are mentioned for illustrative purpose:

I have noticed that it is quite difficult or impossible to classify the codes because they originated from all aspects of life. Some biblical, railroad, agrarian and meteorological terms are dominant. In fact, the South was typically agrarian and railroad terms were terms in vogue.

Other Underground Railroad Techniques: Underground Railroad actors used various methods to play their freedom games. They used:

Disguise: Disguises were also used to confuse pursuers. Occasionally, fugitives were disguised as the slaves driving their "owners," who in reality were Underground Railroad workers.

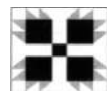
CODES	MEANING
The Wind Blows from the South Today	An alert to Underground Railroad workers that runaway slaves are in the local area
When the Sun Comes Back and the First Quail Calls	A reminder that early spring is a good time of year to escape, because fugitives could travel north before it became cold in winter
The Riverbank Makes a Mighty Good Road	A reminder that bloodhounds can't follow scent through the water
The Dead Trees Will Show You the Way	A reminder that moss grows on the cooler north side of dead trees and can point the way northward
It's a Friend with Friends	A password used by an Underground Railroad conductor arriving at an Underground Railroad safe house with a group of fugitives
The Friend of a Friend Sent Me	A password used by a fugitive traveling without a conductor to signal an Underground Railroad stationmaster that he or she was sent by the Underground Railroad.
Steal Away, Steal Away , Steal Away to Jesus	A way to let other slaves know that an escape attempt is coming up
The Train Is Off the Track	An alert that trouble has been encountered while transporting a runaway
Lost a Passenger	A term used to signal that a runaway slave has been recaptured
Baggage	Escaping fugitive or runaway slaves
Brakeman	A person who helps fugitive slaves find work and homes once they are in free states or in Canada
Cargo	One or more fugitive or runaway slaves
Conductor	A person who guides slaves along their journey to freedom or who gives slaves directions on how to escape
Forwarding	Transporting fugitive slaves from station to station
Freedom Line	An escaped slave's route of travel
Freedom Train	The Underground Railroad
Heaven	Canada
Hope	Sandusky, Ohio
Judgment Day	The day or time of escape
Load of Potatoes	A wagon full of fugitive slaves who are hidden under farm produce such as hay or potatoes
Moses	Harriet Tubman
Operator	An Underground Railroad worker
Parcel or Package	A fugitive or runaway slave who is traveling along the Underground Railroad
Passenger	A fugitive or runaway slave who is traveling along the Underground Railroad
Promised Land	Canada, or sometimes the North
Route	The escape route used by one or more runaways or fugitives
Shepherd	A person who escorts escaping slaves
Shipment	Arriving fugitive slaves
Station	A safe place where fugitives are sheltered
Stationmaster	A person who runs a safe house
Stockholder	A person who donates money, clothing, or food to the Underground Railroad
Terminal	A stop such as a town or a city on the Underground Railroad
Traveler	An escaping fugitive or runaway slave
Agent	A person who plots the course and makes arrangements for escaping fugitive slaves
Drinking Gourd	The Big Dipper star grouping, which points to the North Star

Sometimes they were dressed in fancy clothing, women dressed up as men and men as women, and those who were light-skinned disguised themselves as white people or even slave owners. Husband and wife fugitives, William and Ellen Craft, were able to win their freedom by disguising themselves as slave and master because of Ellen's light skin and male costume. Disguise, of course, was a common device of runaways. One ingenious mulatto even disguised himself by blacking his face and having his hair curled. There were numerous cases of fugitives hiding in crates and being shipped north by rail, such as Henry "Box" Brown who acquired his middle name as a result of having escaped this way. A number of people risked their lives by making trips into the south to emancipate loved ones from the jaws of slavery. Quakers sometimes disguised both male and female fugitives in skirts and deep bonnets to transport them through proslavery neighborhoods.

Use of quilts: Fugitives who traveled with the help of Underground Railroad conductors and agents were often given names or descriptions of stations and told to memorize the information. But it was up often up the runaways to find that station and figure out if it was safe to approach it. There was always the possibility of being watched. Some fugitives were instructed to make a bird call, use a special knock, or ask for a particular person as a way to identify themselves as passengers on the Underground Railroad. Many simply borrowed the Quaker introduction of "I'm a friend with friends." But knocking on a station door was always risky. Many stationmasters used signals to let fugitive slaves know it was safe to approach. Some, like the Rankins, left a lamp lit in a window when no slave catchers were prowling around. Other stationmasters hung lanterns or handkerchiefs on gates and statues, put special quilts out on clotheslines, or moved a stone from one end of the porch to the other to signal slaves on the run. Runaways were often told what to look for before being conducted on to their next station.

Quilts are homemade blankets made from pieced together scraps of fabric. Quilt makers often stitch together small triangles and squares of fabric into a repeated pattern called a "quilt block." The completed blocks are then sewn together to make the decorative top of a quilt. Some quilt makers used their sewing skills to help runaway slaves during Underground Railroad times. Like lanterns, painted chimneys, and other items, quilts were used as safe-house signals. A quilt hung in the front yard often meant that it was safe to approach an Underground Railroad station. But a quilt hung out back meant that danger was near. The block patterns themselves of some quilts passed on a message or reminder to fleeing slaves. Some showed flying geese, which slaves could follow northward in the spring, or sailing ships that crossed Lake Erie to Canada. Other quilts featured symbols of the Underground Railroad, such as the North Star or crossroads. Here is a list of some frequently used quilt patterns:

Bear's Paw



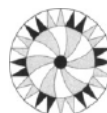
Because the bears lived in the mountains and knew their way around, their tracks served as road maps enabling the fugitives to navigate their way through the mountains

Monkey Wrench



Monkey Wrench indicates that the slaves were to gather all the tools they might need on the journey to freedom. Tools meant: something with which to build shelters, compasses for determining direction, or tools to serve as weapons for defending themselves

Wagon Wheel Variation



This was the second pattern to be displayed, which signaled the slaves to pack all the things that would go in a wagon or that would be used during their journey. This was a signal for the slaves to think about what essentials they needed to survive the trip.

Wagon Wheel/ Carpenter's Wheel



This was a signal to the slaves to pack the items that were needed for travel by wagon or that could be used while traveling. It could also mean to pack the provisions necessary for survival, as if packing a wagon for a long journey, or to actually load the wagon in preparation for escape. Some records indicate that this symbol meant a wagon with compartments in which slaves could hide.

Bear's Paw



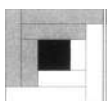
This code meant to follow a mountain trail, out of view, and then follow an actual bear's trail, which would lead to water and food.

Crossroads



Once through the mountains, slaves were to travel to the crossroads. The main crossroad was Cleveland, Ohio. Any quilt hung before this one would have given directions to Ohio.

Log Cabin



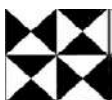
This symbol was used in a quilt or drawn on the ground to indicate that it was necessary to seek shelter. It also meant that a person was safe to speak with. Some sources even say it indicated a safe house along the Underground Railroad.

Shoofly



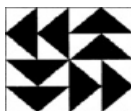
This was a symbol that identified a person who could guide slaves and help them escape along the Underground Railroad.

Bow Tie (also known as Hourglass)



This was a symbol indicating that it was necessary to travel in disguise or to change from the clothing of a slave to that of a person of higher status.

Flying Geese



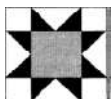
This pattern told the slaves to follow migrating geese north towards Canada and to freedom. This pattern was used as directions as well as the best season for slaves to escape. Geese fly north in the spring and summer. Flying geese pointed to the direction, north, for the slaves to move. Also, geese would have to stop at waterways along their journey in order to rest and eat. Slaves were to take their cues on direction, timing and behavior from the migrating geese.

Drunkard's Path



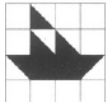
It encouraged the slaves to follow a zigzag path similar to the staggering gait of a drunk. This was a clear warning for the slaves to move in a staggering fashion so as to elude any following slave hunters. It was suggested that slaves even double back to elude their pursuers.

Star/Evening Star/North Star



This instructed the slaves to follow the North Star to Canada and to freedom

Sailboat



It indicates the availability of a sailboat for slaves who could walk through town undetected to ship waiting to take them across the great lakes to Canada. Sailors were there to help cross the river and enter Canada.

Tumbling Blocks or Boxes



This was a symbol indicating that it was time for slaves to pack up and go because a conductor was in the area.

codes were passed down the same way. Quilts slung over a fence or windowsill, seemingly to air, passed on the necessary information to slaves. As quilts hung out to air were a common sight on a plantation, neither the plantation owner nor the overseer would notice anything suspicious.

Songs: Runaway slaves heading toward freedom in Canada sometimes sang songs that contained coded messages, like the song that Harriet Tubman sang to her master's house slaves to let them know that she was fleeing slavery. Exhausted fugitives also sang songs to lift their spirits and remind them of why they were struggling to be free. The song "I'm on My Way to Canada" was sung to the tune of "Oh Susannah," a popular Southern song that includes the lyrics "Oh, Susannah, now don't you cry for me. For I've come from Alabama with a banjo on my knee." Gather up some friends or family and sing along. The fleeing group usually hid in the woods during the day, often while Harriet went to look for food. She signaled whether it was safe or not by singing. If the hiding runaway slaves heard Harriet singing a sad song in the distance, they knew to stay hid and quiet. If they heard a joyful song, they knew they were safe—and that Harriet was on her way back to them. Slaves learned how to find and follow the North Star by hearing songs such as "Follow the Drinking Gourd." "Drinking Gourd" is another name for the Big Dipper, the group of stars that points to the North Star.

CONCLUSION

The Underground Railroad was perhaps the most dramatic protest action against slavery in United States history. The operations of clandestine escape networks began in the 1500s, and was later connected with organized abolitionist activity of the 1800s. Neither an "underground" nor a "railroad," this informal system arose as a loosely constructed network of escape routes that originated in the South, intertwined throughout the North, and eventually ended in Canada. Escape routes were not just restricted to the North, but also extended into western territories, Mexico, and the Caribbean. From 1830 to 1865, the Underground Railroad reached its peak as abolitionists and sympathizers who condemned human bondage aided large numbers of bondsmen to freedom. They not only called for slavery destruction, but also acted to assist its victims. Although the Underground Railroad is linked with abolitionism of the antebellum period, it stands out primarily for its amorphous nature and mysterious character. Unlike other organized activities of the abolition movement that primarily denounced human bondage, the Underground Railroad secretly resisted slavery by abetting runaways to freedom. It confronted human bondage without any direct demands or intended violence; yet, its efforts played a prominent role in the destruction of the institution of slavery. The work of the underground was so effective that its action intimidated slave owners. Most regarded the underground as "organized theft" and a threat to their livelihood. The most intriguing feature of the Underground Railroad was its lack of formal organization. Its existence often relied on concerted efforts of cooperating individuals of various ethnic and religious groups who helped bondsmen escape from slavery.

To add to its mysterious doings, accounts are scarce for individuals who actually participated in its activities. Usually agents hid or destroyed their personal journals to protect themselves and the runaways. Only recently researchers have learned of the work rendered by courageous agents such as David Ruggles, Calvin Fairbank, Josiah Henson, and Erastus Hussey. The identity of others who also contributed to this effort will never be fully recognized. Though scholars estimate that Underground Railroad conductors assisted thousands of refugees, the total number of runaways whom they aided to freedom will never be known simply because of the movement's secrecy. Conductors usually did not attempt to record these figures, and those who did only calculated the number of runaways whom they personally helped. Moreover, these estimations should consider that some runaways never took part in the underground system and therefore used other creative methods to attain liberty. The shortage of evidence indicates that scholars probably will never fully learn the real significance of the

Most quilt patterns had their roots in African traditions the slaves brought with them to North America when they were captured and forced to leave their homeland. The Africans' method of recording their history and stories was by committing them to memory and passing them on orally to following generations. Quilt patterns as

Underground Railroad. Indeed, the few journals that have survived over the years suggest that the true heroes of the underground were not the abolitionists or sympathizers, but those runaway bondsmen who were willing to risk their lives to gain freedom.

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