

But One Race: The Life of Robert Purvis. By MARGARET HOPE BACON. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007. xi, 279 pp. Ancestral chart, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.)

With emancipation scholars looking north (New York) and south (Haiti) of abolitionist Pennsylvania, Margaret Hope Bacon's wonderful biography of Robert Purvis is most welcome. One of the leading, though underrated, reformers of the nineteenth-century, Purvis (1810–98) dedicated his long life to achieving black equality. Though born free in South Carolina to an English father and a mixed-race mother, he remained in Pennsylvania for nearly seven decades after moving there as a teenager in the 1820s. Despite the fact that the Quaker state's gradual abolition law had existed nearly as long as American independence, the meaning of emancipation remained a hotly debated issue. As Bacon shows in a fast-paced and enjoyable narrative, Purvis was a consistent voice of black freedom, assuming the mantle of protest established by the postrevolutionary generation of African American leaders that included his father-in-law, the famed sailmaker James Forten. In short, this is no mere biography of a neglected reformer but a study of northern postemancipation society leading up to the Civil War era. It should not be overlooked.

Although Purvis was light-skinned, educated, and wealthy—easily able to “pass” in white society—he always identified himself as “black.” And black Pennsylvanians were increasingly marginalized in antebellum culture, no matter their elite status. Long before southern society created segregated schools and streetcars, free blacks faced such discrimination in the Quaker state. White northerners feared that which Purvis so desperately desired: civic integration. Purvis's credo was a classic form of antebellum abolitionism: both the Bible and the Declaration of Independence sanctioned racial equality. Pennsylvania's 1780 Gradual Abolition Act and Constitution of 1790 buttressed Purvis's activism. While the former had drained slavery in the Quaker state and made Pennsylvania a shining “contrast to the ‘deserted halls, dilapidated lands and meager populations’ of the slave states,” the latter guaranteed equality to all citizens regardless of race (p. 55).

Most white Pennsylvanians disagreed with Purvis, often violently so. His family witnessed several race riots (those of 1842 may have compelled Purvis and his wife, female abolitionist Harriet Purvis, to move to Byberry, twelve miles from Philadelphia). White officials also used political oppression. Perhaps the most infamous example came in 1838, when the state's new constitution disfranchised the entire free black population. Bacon covers this topic cogently but well, illustrating that by the 1830s white and black visions of democracy clashed head on. Purvis's pamphlet *Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens* (1838) served as the signature defense of black voting rights in northern culture. The *Appeal* also battled colonizationist claims that America was a white republic. For Purvis,

America was blacks' "native country" (p. 62). Despite his heroic efforts, disfranchisement occurred and Purvis himself would not vote (again) until the 1870s!

Purvis further made his reputation on the Underground Railroad. Bacon's book is particularly strong when focusing on runaway slaves along the Pennsylvania borderland. Purvis took special note of fugitives during the 1830s, when he formed the Vigilant Committee to aid kidnapped free blacks as well as runaways. After operating successfully for several years, and helping several hundred people of color, the group lagged. The federal fugitive slave act of 1850 revived the organization. Purvis aided the soon-to-be famous—Harriet Jacobs and Henry "Box" Brown—as well as the not-so-well-known. Fugitives compelled Purvis to reassess self-defense tactics. Until the 1850s, he was a devout Garrisonian, believing deeply in moral suasion and nonresistance. By the Civil War, however, he saw the limits of such doctrinaire commitments and broke from Garrison.

Purvis's understanding of racial reform also shifted. Though initially opposed to orthodox "race thinking" among black abolitionists—such as Henry Highland Garnet, who believed that African Americans must remain autonomous of paternalist white reformers—the deteriorating racial climate in Pennsylvania made him see black autonomy as a necessary corollary to interracial abolitionism.

No mere regional reformer, Purvis became a mainstay of the national anti-slavery movement, the growing women's rights struggle, and several charitable causes. Purvis attended every one of the American Antislavery Society's annual meetings, save one, and was one of the most consistent advocates of women's right to vote. He became a recruiter of black troops in the Civil War, a trustee of the Freedman's Bank during Reconstruction, and a visionary of equal citizenship until his dying day. He may have been a more important day-to-day abolitionist than Garrison. Bacon attributes Purvis's marginalization in abolitionist studies partly to the man himself—he was just so modest! With this book, Purvis is no longer one of abolition's "unsung heroes" (p. 1).

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Hinsonville, A Community at the Crossroads: The Story of a Nineteenth-Century African-American Village. By MARIANNE H. RUSSO and PAUL A. RUSSO. (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2005. xiii, 198 pp. Illustrations, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.50.)

Hinsonville, A Community at the Crossroads successfully chronicles the origins, impact, and activities of a vibrant village of black denizens situated in the southeastern part of Chester County, Pennsylvania. For forty years, between 1829 and 1869, black transient workers, entrepreneurs, and landowners there cre-