



Review of:

We Stand on Guard for Thee: Teaching and Learning the African Experience in the War of 1812

Harriet Tubman Institute for Research on the Global Migrations of African Peoples
<http://tubman.info.yorku.ca/educational-resources/war-of-1812/>

When asked to review a website rather than a written text for the 2014 edition of the *Northern Terminus*, I was immediately interested. I am not overly fluent with technology, but I think that this has been an advantage. I have chosen to approach the site as a first time viewer, with no guidance or navigational tips, and have therefore been able to review the material with little bias or assumption, and to experience it for exactly what it is meant to be: a learning tool.

We Stand on Guard for Thee is the collaboration of scholars and students at York University who have compiled significant new research on the Black involvement in the War of 1812. Assisted by other organizations (including contributions from our very own Grey Roots Museum & Archives) the resulting project is an online learning aid accessible to students, scholars, educators and members of the public. The site is part of the Harriet Tubman Institute for Research on the Global Migrations of African Peoples, which is an organized research unit located at York University and part of an international network of research centers dedicated to overcoming inequity and injustice as a result of slavery. The institute's mandate is to promote a "greater understanding of slavery and its legacy" through the collection, research and display of materials from all over the world. The institute takes special care in making their research and documents available and easily accessible to anyone with an interest in learning about the historical and contemporary issues of slavery and racism.

In describing their project, the authors of *We Stand on Guard for Thee* state that “the African Canadian experience in the War of 1812 is a topic lamentably under-represented in scholarly and popular literature.” This is the fourth volume of the *Northern Terminus* Journal that I have worked on, and the same could be said of the topics I have reviewed in all three other projects focusing on various events in African Canadian history. It seems a recurring trend that some of the most significant events in our past have been celebrated, recorded, taught, etc., without due recognition of the often extremely prominent contributions of Black Canadians. And while the efforts of authors and scholars to shed light on these important topics are certainly commendable, this web based teaching tool appears to me as the most valid and what could be the most successful contribution to African Canadian education.

The goal of this project is to assist educators with teaching the topic of slavery and the African Canadian experience, and to “uncover the ‘hidden history’ of Black contribution to the War of 1812.” The militia units comprised of Black soldiers known as the Coloured Corps, consisting of both enslaved and free men and the battles they fought in, the many skilled services that the Coloured Corps provided for the war effort, such as the building and repairing of forts, and the impact of the War on the veterans and their families who were promised land grants and pensions that were largely unfulfilled, are all topics covered by the site in great detail. Offered in both French and English language versions, the website features complete narratives, lesson plans, reports, and augmented reality vignettes, all designed specifically to assist teachers with meeting Ontario curriculum expectations for a number of elementary, middle and high school level courses.

Educators are increasingly recognizing that students succeed through a variety of different teaching strategies, depending on their individual abilities and needs. *We Stand on Guard for Thee* offers a number of instructional techniques for all learning levels. The stories of Black soldiers and their families, such as Daniel Cokely, who was on the first muster roll of the Coloured Corps and a participant in the battle of Queenston Heights, are offered in both written form and voice-recorded narratives. There are also visual aids, such as original historical artwork of the battles and militia units, visual and written details of important regions of the battles and settlements of the Black veterans, primary source documents such as photographs of plaques which remain at important sites and original drawn plans of the forts, and video reenactments of the events. For the educator, the site also includes lesson plans and hands-on classroom activities describing learning objectives, instructional and evaluation strategies, vocabulary and extended activities, instructional media kits, and links to other educational websites for further learning. All of these aspects combine to cover a multitude of learning techniques offered by the project, and enough variety to encourage an interest in students of any age or ability, as well as scholars and members of the general public.

The concept of a web-based teaching tool is perhaps not novel to contemporary students and educators, as the Internet has challenged the place of the library and online learning has become increasingly prevalent. But for those scholars and authors of African Canadian history who have struggled to bring light to the under-represented events of our past and to educate the public, the school curriculum seems like a natural place to begin. As children become more and more fluent with technology, what better channel than the Internet for delivering the information? *We Stand on Guard for Thee* is well-structured and appealing to the eye, flowing between pages easily and creating a pathway of learning that is engaging and even entertaining. The Harriet Tubman Institute's web-based educational forum is an asset for the teaching and learning of African Canadian history and the experience of its peoples; it will hopefully succeed in encouraging a number of similar projects with an aim to increase interest in and knowledge of the significant events of our Black heritage.



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