

William Howard Day and the Political Complexities of the Underground Railroad

Lecture Thesis:

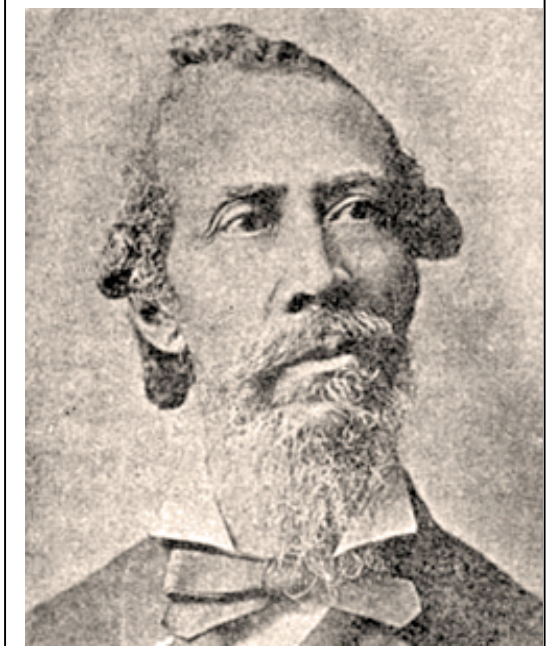
With his extensive background, William Howard Day offers us a chance to evaluate the behavior of America's early civil rights workers. Having lived through three eras, Day made enduring contributions that helped cement America's long-winded civil rights campaign, beginning with the first political movement – the Underground Railroad.

Professor Day's Great Work Gettysburg Star and Sentinel October 5, 1887

Prof. W. Howard Day, D. D., of Harrisburg, delivered an emancipation sermon in the A.M.E. Zion church on last Wednesday evening. He had a good audience, but not as large as his ability and his attainments merit. The doctor is doing a great work in calling the attention of the rising generation of colored people and impressing upon the older ones the great results which followed the immortal proclamation of emancipation of

President Lincoln. He knows whereof he speaks because he lived under the old *regime* and was an actor in the disgraceful and perilous days that preceded the war of rebellion. It is an interesting fact, stated recently in the *Franklin Repository*, that the doctor was the companion of the pioneer and first martyr of the great cause of freedom, John Brown, whom he considers the greatest man the world had ever seen except one, who is greater than all men. And, also, that in a little eight by ten shanty across the Canadian line, he printed, on a hand press, the reading matter that Brown circulated around Harper's Ferry. The doctor is full of interesting reminiscences and thrilling incidents, and we hope he will return at an early day and give our people an opportunity to hear him. His address was enthusiastically praised by all who heard it.

Article Citation: (Harrisburg) Telegraph, October 12, 1887



Wm. Howard Day, 1892

The First Political Movement: The Underground Railroad

The UGRR: A Definition

The Underground Railroad was a very public and organized movement by abolitionists. The significance of the underground is not found by searching for cubbyholes, tunnels and passageways, but rather the term is more metaphorical as Black abolitionists used newspapers to agitate the South about slave escapes. In order to achieve success, between 1831 and 1861 agents formed a "Colored Citizens League," which met annually to plan fundraisers and organize tactics in the freedom struggle. This league, and underground operation, was, in essence, the political arm of the civil rights movement.

SOURCE A: Citation: "TWENTY-SIX SLAVES IN ONE WEEK," (Boston) *The Liberator*, October 14, 1842

"Sam Weller is requested to tell the slaveholders that we passed twenty-six prime slaves to the land of freedom last week, and several more this week thus far. Don't know what the end of the week will foot up. All went by 'the underground railroad.'"

SOURCE B: Citation: "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass," by Frederick Douglass (1845)

"I have never approved of the very public manner in which some of our western friends have conducted what they call the *underground railroad*, but which I think, by their open declarations, has been made most emphatically the *upperground railroad*..."

SOURCE C: Citation: "RUNWAY SLAVES," (Boston) *The Liberator*, December 31, 1847

"The Springfield *Gazette* says that nine runaway slaves, who were the cause of considerable excitement at Mount Holly, N.J., a short time since, when they were delivered up to their masters, are now in Springfield. How they escaped is not stated. They were assisted in their progress to a land of freedom by the proprietors of the underground railroad, in other words, the *secret* efforts of the abolitionists."

SOURCE D: Citation: "Help the Fugitives," (Chatham, CW) *Provincial Freeman*, July 8, 1854

"Fugitives from southern injustice are coming thick and fast. The underground railroad never before did so large a business as it is doing now. The Vigilance Committee have their hands full, and all they want is the pecuniary means to meet the demands made upon them. This is a matter that of course cannot be made the subject of much public remark. A word to the wise is sufficient. The members of the Acting Committee are Wm. Still, 31 N. 5th St; N.W. Depee, 334 South St; Jacob C. White, 100 Old York Road, and Passmore Williamson, S.W. corner of Seventh and Arch streets. Any money placed in the hands of either of these gentlemen, or forwarded to Charles Wise, corner of 5th and Market streets, Treasurer of the Vigilance Committee, will be secure of a faithful and a judicious appropriation."— *Pa Freeman*

SOURCE E: Citation: "Cleveland Vigilance Committee Report" (Rochester) *Frederick Douglass Paper*, 9/8/1854

"The Quarterly Report of the business of the Underground Railroad, from Cleveland, for the past three months, has been such as to increase the confidence of all parties connected therewith. Number of passengers passed over the road, 176; Receipts of the road from all sources, \$309.37; Cash on hand, \$19.30; Monthly subscribers to this Committee since the 9th of May up to the 9th of August. We have paid out fifty-nine dollars and thirty-seven cents, for which we have received the large sum of \$35,000, according to the way the American people buy and sell God's image in the Southern States; and we, therefore, resolve as a Committee of men, never to take down our flag, while the Underground Railroad cars shall move on invisibly, for God is on our side."

Signed in behalf of the
COMMITTEE OF NINE (Wm. Howard Day, Chairman)