The Underground Railroad in Indiana

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A few months ago, in the fall of 2016, a story came out in the newspapers, on television, and on Facebook about a long sealed and abandoned "mystery" tunnel found on the south side of Fort Wayne. Uncovered while the City was demolishing a historic house, the enigma was found when a backhoe broke through the stone arches of an underground tunnel. Located under an old house, filled with rubble, and well-crafted with stone walls, the tunnel was a total mystery. No one at the City knew what it was, so they called in the State Historic Preservation office, and tried to find out what it was. Old atlases were consulted, dusty histories from the 19th century were unearthed, and local history groups like the History Center and ARCH were asked what they might know. TV cameras showed up, neighbors "rubber-necked" at the site, and everyone began to speculate as to what the tunnel was. The quote in the news from one neighbor seemed to sum up popular opinion. "I hear that it was part of the Underground Railroad" was the opinion. In actuality, it turns out that, no, it wasn't the Underground Railroad. Instead, a long defunct pre-Civil War brewery had once been located on the site and this had been their storage and cooling cellar for kegs of beer.

This small incident exemplifies three enduring truths and myths about the Underground Railroad. To begin with, the Underground Railroad was neither underground nor a railroad. No literal trains picked up runaway slaves and led them underground. The phrase "underground railroad" was first used in an 1831 newspaper article describing the disappearance of fugitive slaves "as if they had boarded an underground railroad and vanished". It was always a metaphor for the vast and long-running conspiracy of civil disobedience and conscientious

objection to slavery.[1] Only after the widespread expansion of railroads in the 1820s and 1830s could such a metaphor even be made. Anticipating and inspiring later protest movements, the Underground Railroad and the Abolition movement dates, not from just the pre-Civil War era, but from the earliest days of the Republic. Even George Washington complained in 1786 about a "society of Quakers" who had helped one of his slaves escape.[2] Largely clandestine but, in some places an open secret, the Underground Railroad was part of the century-long march towards the demise of legal slavery in the United States.[3] This after all was mass civil disobedience, the deliberate and premeditated breaking of the law.

Second it remains one of America's most ubiquitous and romantic historic folktales. Who here has not heard of a house in one of our hometowns that was reputed to be a stop on the Underground Railroad? In the image of popular culture, the Underground Railroad conjures up images of hidden trapdoors, farm carts with false bottoms and the courageous and righteous Underground railroad "conductor" leading slaves to Freedom. Conner Prairie, the living history museum in Indianapolis even leads an emotionally straining night-time event for elementary school children that involves first-person interpreters dramatizing the Underground Railroad. Conductors assist, "slaves" are emotionally conditioned and encounter a variety of threats and assistance. In the field of historic preservation, sometimes it seems as if the owners of almost every pre-Civil War house claim that they have heard that their house was an

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[2] http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2944.html Accessed 1/28/2017

[3] Ira Berlin, *The Long Emancipation: The Demise of Slavery in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015) pg. 1.

Underground Railroad stop. Vast, ephemeral and hidden, the Underground Railroad, even to this day remains poorly documented. Successful law-breakers rarely leave conclusive clues and diaries to document criminal activity. The few documents and primary source materials that we do have pale in comparison to the size of the actual network.

And lastly, the enduring effect and *raison d'etre* of the Underground Railroad remains part of our society today. It split our major religious denominations into northern and southern branches; it ended one of our major political parties and ruptured the other. The Abolition movement and the Underground Railroad were formed because people, both black and white, believed that slavery and inequality were a moral wrong that must be eradicated. They believed that the promise of "Liberty and Justice for all" meant regardless of skin color. They hoped, as Martin Luther King would declaim from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1963, that one day people would be judged on the content of their character and not the color of their skin. They believed that our great and bloody national Civil War, along with the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution eliminated legal slavery. But while slavery is illegal, inequality remains a persistent and divisive fissure, both in Indiana and America.

Legal Underpinnings of Slavery

No discussion of the Underground Railroad can begin without a look at slavery in America. Described by William Faulkner, and later Barack Obama, as a manifestation of "America's Original Sin", slavery and inequality has defined much of America's history and

continues to influence our present and future. Both qualitative and quantitative measures show an enduring inequality between black and white that remains to this day. From the 2016 Electoral College victory of Donald Trump, to the fact that African-Americans are six times more likely to be incarcerated than whites, to a staggering difference in household wealth (with median black household wealth at $11,000 and falling, and median white household wealth at $142,000 and barely rising), slavery and it's consequences continue to influence Indiana and the United States.[4]

At the founding of our Republic, America was a land not yet split between free states and slave states, or as Abraham Lincoln said "a house divided". Slavery was legal and practiced in colonies both North and South. Inspired by a shortage of labor, the earliest American colonists imported African slaves to assist in the laborious tasks of a subsistence economy.[5] Due to a number of factors including geography, climate, shortage of currency and religious traditions, slavery was never as large nor as widespread in the North as it was in the South, with total Northern slaves comprising roughly 20% of the aggregate colonial slave population.[6] Slavery in the North, as in the middle border states like Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland was based on economics, and slaves were regarded as "sub-human" property. Slave labor, unlike hired free labor, was a controllable cost center. As the Northern colonies' population

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[4] http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/12/racial-wealth-gaps-great-recession/ Accessed 1/28/2017. http://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/ Accessed 1/28/2017

[5] Arthur Zilversmit, the first emancipation:the abolition of slavery in the North (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), pg. 7.

[6] Ibid., pp. 8-11.

increased through immigration, increasing the availability of free labor and decreasing the price of that labor, slavery became less of economic necessity, and increasingly a moral abhorrence.[7]

A continuing intellectual dissonance in the North stemmed from the religious-based colonization of individual colonies. From Puritans in Massachusetts, to Quakers in Pennsylvania, these religious minorities began settlement in North America as a way to avoid religious intolerance and persecution in Europe. Their faith was essential to their communal cohesion and their own self-worth. Basic Christian concepts like the Golden Rule, the Biblical encouragement to propagate the Gospel, and the Ten Commandments' argument against adultery caused these deeply slave owners much spiritual turmoil. Spreading the Gospel and increasing the faithful to a slave community created fellow believers. It was difficult to reconcile slaves sub-human legal status with brothers of faith. The slave masters' continuing physical actions against the commandment to "do unto others as you would have done to you" conflicted deeply with Scriptural teachings. The ability of slave masters to rip asunder Christian marriages between slaves through the sale of individual husband or wife conflicted with Scripture and with the slave masters' perceived right of the free disposition of property.[8]

Gradual abolition began in the North through three movements in the first half of the Eighteenth Century. The first was Britain's movement towards legal abolition and the abolishment of the Atlantic slave trade, the second the American colonies drift towards

[7] Ibid., pp. 30-52.
[8] Ibid., 24-31; 53-57.

revolution and the Rights of Man, and the third the institutional movement of various religious denominations, beginning with the Quakers, towards active abolition based on moral grounds. As these three movements collided before and after the American Revolution, the Northern colonies (and then states) began to gradually abolish the legal underpinnnings of slavery in each colony.[9] By 1830, the US slave population numbered over two million and less than one percent were in the North.[10]

In the South, the plantation economy, the cash crops of rice, indigo and above all cotton, made the demand for cheap labor provided by slaves remain extraordinarily high. By 1860, historian and Yale Professor David Blight notes that “slaves as an asset were worth more than all of America’s manufacturing, all of the railroads, all of the productive capacity of the United States put together”. In today’s number the value of slaves in 1860 as a financial asset would be $75 Billion dollars.[11] This economic dependence on slavery led to the continuation and expansion of slavery in the South.

During and after the American Revolution the question of what to do legally about slavery created argument and spurred fierce debate amongst our Founding Fathers. In the end, as Lincoln said later, they created “a House divided” with some slave states, some free and others status yet to be determined. Even in the construction of our Constitution, slavery had implications, especially in the “three-fifths” clause, whereby slaves counted as three-fifths of a

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[9] Ibid., pp. 53-55.
[10] Ibid., pg. 222
[11] http://oyc.yale.edu/transcript/543/hist-119#print Accessed 1/28/2017

human for dividing the Electoral College and the House of Representatives. The fact that our popular vote and Electoral College vote had different winners in 2016 is thus due in some small part to a more than 200-year old compromise over slavery. Four of our first five Presidents, natives of slave-rich Virginia, were helped by the Electoral College strength that the three-fifths rule provided. The 1793 Fugitive Slave Act established the right of a slave-owner to recover a fugitive slave. The burden of capture and presentation before a local court was on the slave-owner and led to the creation of a system of for-hire slave catchers and bounty hunters. Sometimes free blacks were ensnared in this net to be transported south into slavery. The 2014 film "*12 Years a Slave*" is the true account of one such free black man, Solomon Northup. In response, Northern states enacted personal liberty laws that required slave-catchers to prove in court that the accused was indeed a slave.

In Indiana, as in all of the states of the Northwest Territories, slavery was prohibited by the 1787 Northwest Ordinance. This made the Ohio River a visible, tangible border between slave and free territory. Indiana (at least while a state of the Union) has always been free territory. Indiana's 1816 Constitution further prohibited slavery within the state, and made clear that slaves crossing into the state were free.[12] Existing slavery within Indiana remained legal until the 1820 *Polly vs. Hyacinth Lasselle* case.[13]

[12] Angela M. Quinn, The Underground Railroad and the Antislavery Movement in Fort Wayne and Allen County, Indiana. (Fort Wayne: ARCH, Inc., 2001), pg. 2.
[13] Ibid., pg. 5.

However, Indiana was not uniformly anti-slavery. In fact, Indiana's settlement patterns almost guaranteed differences between neighbors regarding the slavery question. To a large extent, the state was settled by three disparate groups at three different times from three different cultural hearths. The origins, architecture, and traditions of the three groups still define our state today. Indiana's first white settlers came from the upland south, from Virginia through Kentucky and across the Ohio River. Because the land to the north was owned by the Myaamia, they largely settled to the south of what is now I-70. Even today, Hoosiers will tell you that the South begins at I-70. As the Myaamia lands were taken by treaty in the 1820s and 1830s, central and northern Indiana opened up and was populated by settlers of Germanic heritage coming west from Pennsylvania and Ohio. The third group of settlers came into the northern quarter of the state in the 1830s and 1840s, again as the Myaamia relinquished their homeland. These settlers were largely of the New England cultural hearth coming across upstate New York on the Erie Canal. Southern Indiana was thus culturally closer to the slave-holding states across the Ohio River.

Indiana's legal system, while abolishing slavery was still not friendly to African-Americans. They were not allowed to vote, attend public school, serve in the militia, or testify in court against a white person.[14] In 1831, Indiana's legal discouragement of Black settlement was manifested in a law that required Black settlers to post a $500 bond so that they would not become a burden on the public and to serve as a guarantee of good behavior.[15]

[14] http://www.in.gov/history/2548.htm, accessed 2/11/17
[15] Ibid.

In 1850 through 1852, the top was sealed on the metaphorical pressure cooker of slavery, both in Indiana and nationally, by three events. The pressure that would build up would lead to the Civil War. In 1850, the Congress divided the spoils of territory acquired in the Mexican-American War and as part of the Great Compromise came up with a new Fugitive Slave Act. This draconian law mandated that state officials themselves were held responsible if an alleged runaway slave was not arrested and returned to their purported master. (In modern dollars this would amount to a roughly $30,000 fine). Slaves themselves were not allowed to testify on their own behalf.[16] Individuals were also held liable for illegally providing food, shelter or assistance to a runaway slave. This 1850 law galvanized northern opposition to slavery by requiring active participation in the process of slave catching. No longer could someone be a bystander – they were forced to choose a side.

Section One of Article Thirteen of Indiana's 1851 Constitution reads as follows; *No negro or mulatto shall come into or settle in the State, after the adoption of this Constitution.* Section Two of the same Article forbids contracts with or employment of any Negro or Mulatto. Section Three provides that any fines collected for violations under this Article be set aside to provide funds to resettle Negroes, Mulattos and their descendants out of Indiana "should they be disposed to emigrate".[17] Between the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and Indiana's 1851 Constitution, the criminalization of the Underground Railroad was complete. It is from this

[16] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fugitive_Slave_Act_of_1850. Accessed 2/11/17.
[17] http://www.in.gov/history/2858.htm. Accessed 2/11/17

point that records regarding the Underground Railroad become scarce as documentary and incriminating evidence was destroyed.

In 1852, the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published. Authored by dedicated Abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe, the melodramatic novel quickly became the second highest selling book of the century, outstripped only by the Bible.[18] The vivid portrayal of the horrors of slavery brought a distant topic home for many northern readers. Characters like Simon Legree remain synonymous with greed, and Uncle Tom, initially conceived as an exemplar of Christian persistence, has now become an epithet for a black sell-out to white culture.

I'll cover one final legal underpinning before talking about history. The *Dred Scott* decision of the Supreme Court in 1857 has been widely derided by legal scholars as one of the worst decisions in the Court's history. Holding that negroes could not be a citizen of the United States and thus had no standing in Court, the decision hardened the antithetical slavery positions of both North and South leading to the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860. Opinions in landmark cases up to the present time, usually written in dissent, such as *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, *Brown vs. Board of Education*, and even *Obergefell vs. Hodges*, continue to reference *Dred Scott*.

[18] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncle_Tom's_Cabin. Accessed 2/12/17

The Underground Railroad in Indiana

The Underground Railroad has a privileged place in America's collective psyche and memory. Depending on when the story is told and by whom it is told it, has become a founding myth for disparate elements of our history. From films of the 1970s like *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* and *Roots*, to the *Amistad* in the 1990s, 2014's *12 Years a Slave* and this year's *Underground* and *Birth of a Nation,* the Underground Railroad continues to pull at potent heartstrings. Because the story of the Underground Railroad, in Indiana and nationally, is composed of a mixture of statistical, extrapolated, anecdotal and secondary sources, the story continues to evolve. Historiography about the Underground Railroad falls into four historical "buckets" that reflect broader currents in our interpretation of history. The earliest scholarship, in the post-Civil War era of the 1880s through the 1910s was written as the active participants were in the twilight of their lives. A second wave stormed the academic scene in the 1950s through 1970s as revisionist African-American, feminist and common-man historiography began to come out of universities. In the 1980s through the 2000s local histories and historians came to the fore, and the fourth stage has only just begun to emerge, as the internet and big data have allowed researchers to investigate and aggregate without being bound by physical proximity. So how we look at the Underground Railroad in Indiana is very much a function of our own vantage point in time and temperament. As Ira Berlin, author of *The Long Emancipation: The Demise of Slavery in the United States* writes, "History is not about

the past; it is about arguments we have about the past. And because it is about arguments that we have, it is about us."[19]

Immediately after the Civil War, Professor Wilbur Siebert of Ohio State University became the leading authority on the Underground Railroad. Gathering first-person reminiscences after the War, he established a baseline for the Underground Railroad narrative. His excellent and well-researched works reflects the bias of the time and emphasizes the "Great Man of History" fallacies common to other histories of the period. These included Frederick Douglas, Harriet Tubman and John Rankin, but the one closest to us was Levi Coffin. His emphasis on Hoosier Levi Coffin, the "President of the Underground Railroad" reflects only one view of the story and typifies the scholarship of this first period. Born to Quaker parents in North Carolina in 1798, Levi Coffin like many Quakers from that state left in 1826 for Indiana. (Quakers left the South in large numbers during the period as a result of the denomination's increasing abhorrence of slavery – many of them came to the newly opened lands of Indiana). Coffin was a Quaker, and Quakers indeed had an early and prominent role in Abolition, but other denominations were active participants as well. Appalled by the first-hand horrors of slavery and with a moral certainty that abolition was more important than the law, Coffin began to be an active participant in the North Carolina Underground Railroad, starting at the age of 15. From his home in Fountain City from 1839-1847, he, his wife Catherine, their children and their extended network of relatives and fellow Quakers formed a network that

[19] Ira Berlin, The Long Emancipation: The Demise of Slavery in the United States (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015) pg. 1.

helped an estimated 2,000 slaves to freedom.[20] Coffin's network typifies the method of the Underground Railroad in Indiana. Composed of relatives, business associates and fellow congregants, these networks operated as a series of small, barely connected confederations. Information, because of the possibility of arrest, fines and imprisonment was shared only amongst those that were most trusted. Those in other networks were sometimes vaguely aware of other networks but by-and-large they operated independently. Siebert describes part of Coffin's "Mississinewa" route in his landmark study *The Underground Railroad: From Slavery to Freedom;*

> "Mr. Hayward writes: My cousin, Maurice Place, often brought carriage loads of colored people from North Manchester, Wabash Co., to my father's house, six miles west of Manchester on the Rochester road. We would keep them until sometime in the night; then my father would go with them to Avery Brace's three miles north, through the woods. He took them seven miles further to Chauncey Hurlburts in Kosciusko Co. They (the Hurlburts) took them twelve miles further to Warsaw, to a man by the name of Gordon, and he took them to Dr. Matchett's in Elkhart Co., not far from Goshen. There were friends there to help them to Michigan."[21]

You can hear that the route was full of multiple stops, night-time journeys, different modes of transportation – a harrowing journey might last for weeks. The "Mississenewa" route was only one of several that Coffin used. Another ran through Fort Wayne and then either to

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[20] http://www.in.gov/dnr/historic/files/coffin.pdf. Accessed 2/7/17

[21] Wilbur Siebert, The Underground Railroad: From Slavery to Freedom (New York:Russell and Russell, 1898) pp. 15-16.

Angola or down the Maumee. Coffin's house in Fountain City has been described as the "Grand Central Station" of the Underground Railroad. This is a bit hyperbolic, due to the decentralized nature of the Underground Railroad, even though the documentary evidence does show Coffin with a leading role. In addition to helping slaves escape, Coffin also operated a business that boycotted slave-produced goods, selling only items produced by "free" labor. Coffin later moved to Cincinnati where he assumed a leading role in that cities' abolitionist network.

Beginning after World War II, and increasingly into the 1960s and 1970s, historians began to delve into an area of Underground Railroad research that had been secondary to Siebert's work. Focusing on stories of women, the common man and particularly the black common man, these histories added new interpretation and scholarship to the Underground Railroad canon. Inspired by the Civil Rights Movement, feminist and black nationalist movements and a feeling that ordinary people's stories had been subsumed and buried by establishment historians, these scholars found undocumented settlements and untold stories. Using documents like the decennial census, church and school registers and oral histories, historians pieced together compelling narratives. A good local example is the story of the free black settlement of Cabin Creek. Located near Farmland and Muncie, the rural settlement persists into the twenty-first century.[22] Unlike the many African-Americans who escaped from slavery into the relative anonymity of growing industrial cities like Detroit, Chicago and Fort Wayne, a few families persisted in agriculture, like at Cabin Creek. Many of the families of the

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[22] Penny Ralston, *The Cabin Creek Settlement: The Historical Study of a Black Community in Randolph County, Indiana.* (Unpublished Thesis, Ball State University, Muncie, IN, 1971) pp.3-6.

settlement originated from Guilford County, North Carolina where they had been freed by largely Quaker masters. These free blacks settled near their former Quaker masters in Indiana, who both assisted and protected the community when necessary. Cabin Creek was also a stop on the Underground Railroad. Unlike most stops, however, Cabin Creek carried on openly. The community was close-knit and banded together in the face of slave-hunters.[23] Establishing farms, two churches and the Union Literary Institute, the Cabin Creek community became a haven for free blacks and those escaping from slavery. The Union Literary Institute, a small brick building, is today an active preservation effort.

Fellow Questor and local historian Angie Quinn is an exemplar of the local history movement of the 2000s. Inspired by the wealth of genealogical resources, historic newspapers and oral histories from the New Deal, local historians reexamined in depth the local participants of the Underground Railroad. Her 2001 study on the Underground Railroad and Abolition in Allen County contains the local stories of Alexander Rankin, Charles Beecher and Judge Lindley Ninde. Fort Wayne's most prominent Abolitionists were not only Quakers like Coffin and Ninde but Presbyterians like Beecher and Rankin. Foremost among the Quakers involved in the Underground Railroad in Fort Wayne was Judge Lindley Ninde. Ninde's participation in the Underground Railroad was well-documented. Ninde and his wife, Beulah Puckett Ninde were related to Levi Coffin by marriage. Beulah's mother was Levi Coffin's sister. Escaping slaves came north through Pennville in Jay County to the Ninde's in Fort Wayne and thence north to Angola, Fremont and Michigan. One of the most memorable descriptions in Angie's book

[23] Ibid., pp. 49-51.

describes an escaped slave's chances of capture after reaching the Ninde's; "it was said that if a slave got that far, the devil himself couldn't get him."[24] Ninde also used his professional position as a Judge to frustrate the legal efforts to bring slaves from Indiana back into bondage.

Fort Wayne's Presbyterian community likewise had a prominent role in the Abolition movement and Underground Railroad. As a quick aside before talking about his brother Alexander, I'd like to mention the Rev. John Rankin, one of the nation's most recognized Abolitionists. John Rankin's house is situated on a high bluff above the Ohio River at the town of Ripley. When the way was clear a light would be lit to signal that it was safe to cross the river to freedom. His house, like the Allen County Courthouse and the Akima Pinsiwa Awiiki (or Chief Richardville House for those non-Myaamia speakers among us) has been recognized with our country's highest historic designation, National Historic Landmark. [25] Associated with his extraordinarily prominent brother John Rankin of Ripley, Ohio was the Rev. Alexander T. Rankin. Minister of Fort Wayne's First Presbyterian Church (located at the site of what is now the United Way). Rankin was a fearless, fiery orator as a quote from congregant Hugh McCulloch demonstrates;

> "He … is composed of the right kind of material for an abolitionist. Uncommonly fearless in expressing his sentiments, with a mind deeply imbued with the great principles of natural equality and civil liberty, he will be, I think at all times, the prompt, decided and fearless champion of the oppressed and advocate of the slaves."[26]

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[24] Quinn, pg. 68
[25] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Rankin_(abolitionist). Accessed 2/20/17
[26] Quinn, pg. 45

His house at 818 Lafayette is now the office for ARCH. During the restoration of the building numerous unexplained basement cavities and plastered-over closets were uncovered. Rankin was forced to leave Fort Wayne in 1843 after public threats against his safety were published in the newspaper. Rankin subsequently continued his Abolitionist work in Kansas and upstate New York, where some of his papers ended up in the library of Frederick Douglass.

The other sibling of extraordinarily famous Abolitionists was the head of the Second Presbyterian Church, succeeding Rankin as the Presbyterian Church split between New and Old Schools. Rev. Charles Beecher, was the brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe (the author of Uncle Tom's Cabin) and of abolitionist minister Henry Ward Beecher. Charles Beecher's stories of his experience as a clerk in New Orleans formed the inspiration for his sister's portrayal of Simon Legree. Coming to Fort Wayne in 1844, Beecher led the church until 1850 when he left for Newark New Jersey to head the Free Presbyterian Church.[27]

As the creative disruption caused by the internet continues in history as in business, a new era of scholarship is beginning to emerge. Aided by an unprecedented digital outpouring of original material and long-neglected or out-of-print reminiscences, historians are beginning again to reexamine the Underground Railroad. In this they are aided by tools unimagined by earlier historians and only now beginning to be used. As crowd-sourced genealogy sites like Ancestry.com, Boolean searches of digital copies of historic newspapers and instant translation available on every computer begin to be common, historians are entering a new era. Using big

[27] Quinn, pp. 49-51

data and DNA matching we may be able to trace the exact descendants of those untold thousands of slaves that escaped over the Underground Railroad in Indiana. Telling those stories and tracing those strands will bring us even closer to a new understanding of the true legacy of the Underground Railroad in Indiana.

Until that happens, what today is the legacy of that Underground Railroad? As a nation we regularly encounter social protest on both sides of the political aisle – this is a legacy of the Abolitionists and the Underground Railroad. As Americans, we feel we have a right and moral obligation to stand up for what we believe in, another lasting legacy. We are a nation that prides ourselves in being a moral beacon like John Rankin's light in Ripley, Ohio – or as former President Reagan said in his farewell address a "shining city on a hill". We aspire to the words of Jefferson's preamble to the Declaration of Independence that we are a nation that holds these truths to be self-evident; "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness." But we also must deal with a darker, less shining legacy – that not all feel equally welcome at America's table. We deal with a truth of actual widespread statistical inequality between races, as well as the perception of many African-Americans that the deck is stacked against them. This too is a lasting legacy of America's long struggle with slavery.

The Underground Railroad, in Indiana as well as nationally, does indeed represent the story of courageous black Americans refusing to be held in bondage, as well as moral Americans of all colors refusing to accept a national horror. It is an accomplishment that we should be

proud of; that men and women of conscience said “this is not right and I will work to end it.” They asked; “If all men are equal in the laws of man and the sight of God, how can we not assist our brothers yearning to be free?” If we were asked that same question today, what would our answer be?

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