



# **A Plea for Emigration; or Notes of Canada West**

*Mary Ann Shadd*

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The abolitionist Mary Ann Shadd's pamphlet *A Plea for Emigration; or Notes of Canada West* is, as the title promises, a settler guide designed to inform prospective immigrants of conditions in their proposed new home. But whereas most such works were addressed to potential white emigrants to North America from Britain or continental Europe, Shadd's aimed to entice black Americans to emigrate to Canada. Written in the 1850s, when the Fugitive Slave Act had recently made life even more untenable for free blacks in the United States, Shadd's guide to immigration takes a position on a controversy that divided abolitionists of the period: could emigration to Canada be a viable strategy of opposition to the oppression of blacks in the United States, or would blacks need to remain in the country to assert their claim to equal rights as Americans?

The introduction and background materials included in this volume help to situate Shadd's pamphlet in its political and cultural context, and in the context of Shadd's own remarkable life as an abolitionist, women's rights activist, writer, and educator. Background materials include selections from Frederick Douglass's *Life of an American Slave*, in which he presents a view of emigration to Canada that strongly opposes Shadd's; portions of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act; and relevant selections from *The Provincial Freeman*, Shadd's own abolitionist newspaper.

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