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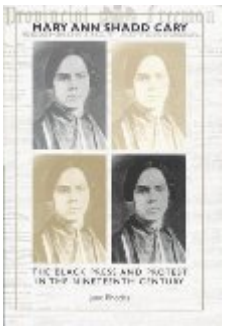

Jane Rhodes. *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998. xviii + 284 pp. $39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-253-33446-6.

Reviewed by Shirley J. Yee

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Until recently, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Black teacher, political activist, journalist, and lawyer, has been one of the least studied Black activists of the nineteenth century. Jane Rhodes's new book on the life of one of the most vocal and controversial Black women abolitionists is a much needed comprehensive biography that builds upon and expands Jim Bearden's and Linda Jean Butler's *Shadd*, published in the late 1970s. The significance of Rhodes's book is that in addition to chronicling Shadd Cary's life, it provides an important window into Black activist politics in the United States and Canada during this period, the uneven development of the Black press, the complicated internal struggles with Black abolitionist leadership circles, the evolution of race relations in Canada, and Shadd Cary's own personal struggles as an educated Black woman to carve out a place for herself and her voice in the male-dominated world of Black abolitionist and emigrationist discourse.

In the Fall of 1851, just before her twenty-eighth birthday, Mary Ann Shadd joined the steady stream of Blacks escaped and freed slaves as well as free-born Blacks who left the United States for Canada during the 1850s. Having abolished slavery in 1833, Canada, as part of the British empire, provided a legal refuge for escaped slaves. Trained as a teacher, Shadd set out as a teacher of fugitive slaves. Her passion for political writing, however, quickly manifested, as evidenced by the publication of her pro-Canadian pamphlet, *Notes on Canada West* in 1852.

Rhodes begins the study by examining Shadd Cary's early life as a free-born Black woman growing up in Wilmington, Delaware and West Chester, Pennsylvania. This section of the book does more than simply fill in the blacks of Shadd Cary's childhood. Rather, it lays the foundation for a more complete understanding of the forces that helped shape the life of this complex and controversial woman. Shadd Cary's family clearly provided her with both material and emotional resources as well as with an activist legacy. Born the eldest of thirteen children to Abraham Doras Shadd, a prosperous boot manufacturer, and Harriet Parnell Shadd, Mary Ann Shadd grew up in relative economic comfort. Her father's regular

participation in local antislavery politics injected Shadd and her siblings with a strong dose of abolitionist fervor. Abraham Shadd was a well-respected member of the Black abolitionist leadership and brought his children into frequent contact with many prominent abolitionists, Black and white.

The larger community into which Shadd Cary grew up also shaped her political views. As Rhodes aptly points out, Shadd Cary encountered multiple layers of racism and sexism in the nonslaveholding northern states in general and the northern free Black community in particular. Within free Black urban society, which had internalized racial hierarchies based upon skin color, Shadd, as a light-skinned and economically privileged Black, was part of the northern free Black elite who owned property and engaged in skilled trades. At the same time, however, Shadd and her family, like other free Blacks, lived in between slavery and freedom, residing within states that sanctioned racial violence, discrimination, and segregation. For example, despite the Shadds' wealth, obtaining a formal education proved especially difficult in Delaware, where Blacks were often excluded from schools. In Pennsylvania, despite a growing anti-Black sentiment, her parents apparently paid for a private education in Quaker schools, which were known for their antislavery politics. It is likely that Shadd's exposure to institutional racism influenced her later rejection of "complexional distinctions" of any kind when she opened her school in Canada (p. 18). As a Black female, Shadd often felt the sting of sexism, which limited her choices in life, such as the pursuit of higher education, economic independence within marriage, and entrance into male-dominated professions. Like many unmarried, educated young women of her generation, Shadd pursued teaching, one of the few legitimate occupations open to women.

Rhodes's study is thorougly researched. The author mines available written sources that enable her to weave together a cohesive narrative of Shadd Cary's life and the world around her. In addition to conducting painstaking research into the state census reports, Rhodes makes careful use of ***The Black Abolitionist Papers***, a collection of writing by Black men and women in connection to the antislavery movement. These papers have provided historians of nineteenth-century African-American history with a wealth of primary source material from Black newspapers, pamphlets, and public and private correspondence.

Rhodes employs her expertise in U.S. journalism to analyze the content of Shadd Cary's newspaper, ***The Provincial Freeman***, as well as other Black newspapers that served as a forum for Black political views. From this analysis, readers learn a great deal about the genealogy of the Black press in the United States and Canada, the underlying, sometimes subtle, sometimes overt, political agendas, and, ultimately, the impact of Black newspapers on the reading public of the time. As Rhodes illustrates, these publication reflect the complex political dynamics that permeated the Black abolitionist community over such issues as emigration, Black nationalism, and strategies and tactics for combating slavery in the United States. Such debates, as evidenced in the feud between Shadd Cary and Henry Bibb, ex-slave and editor of the ***Voice of the Fugitive***, sometimes degenerated into personal attacks.

Throughout the book, Rhodes depicts both the public and private aspects of Shadd Cary's life. The line between public and private often blurred, for she lived a rather unconventional private life for a woman of her generation and upbringing. Her marriage to Thomas F. Cary, a businessman and activist from Toronto, was, perhaps, the clearest marker of her defiance of gender conventions. She lived apart from Cary for much of their four-year marriage in order to operate and raise funds for her newspaper. The arrangement seemed to work, for she apparently maintained a happy relationship with her husband, who visited

as often as he could. Yet, at his death at age thirty-five, when she was pregnant with their second child, Shadd Cary, like many widows, was left in a compromised financial position.

The author argues effectively that despite Shadd Cary's efforts, she could not escape the gender conventions that characterized nineteenth century life. Although much is known about her well-publicized confrontations with prominent Black abolitionist men, less is known about her ongoing struggle to establish herself as a journalist, a profession dominated by men. Rhodes uncovers this dimension of Shadd Cary's professional life, which underscores her continual struggles at the margins of Black leadership circles. For years, she hid the fact that she was the true editor of the ***Freeman***. Samuel Ringgold Ward, a prominent New York minister and editor of the ***Impartial Citizen***, agreed to serve as the "editor."

A final important contribution of this book is its narrative of Shadd Cary's experiences after she returned to the United States in the 1860s. Previous studies of Shadd Cary provided only a cryptic view of this portion of her life. Rhodes constructs a fuller narrative of Shadd Cary's life between the 1860s and her death in 1893, including her efforts to earn a law degree, the continuation of her teaching, and her participation in the temperance and woman suffrage movements.

Rhodes's study of the life and times of Mary Ann Shadd Cary is a valuable contribution to the historical scholarship in the U.S. and Canadian history in general and Black history and women's history in particular.

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