# DR. R. J. M. BLACKETT ON HIS BOOK, *SAMUEL RINGGOLD WARD: A LIFE OF STRUGGLE*

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**KYLE ROBERTS:** My name is Kyle Roberts, and I'm the Executive Director of the Congregational Library & Archives. Welcome to today's virtual discussion with Dr. R. J. M. Blackett to celebrate the release of his wonderful new book, *Samuel Ringgold Ward: A Life of Struggle*.

To begin with, I want to acknowledge that the Congregational Library & Archives resides in what is now known as Boston, which is in the Place of the Blue Hills, the homeland of the Massachusett people, whose relationships and connections with the land continue to this day and into the future.

Juneteenth is a federal holiday honoring the emancipation of enslaved African Americans. It commemorates the anniversary of the order proclaiming freedom for enslaved people in Texas on June 19, 1865. That was two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation had freed enslaved people in states like Texas, which had rebelled against the United States. Enslaved people fought hard and at great risk for their emancipation, and we remember them on this day.

For those joining us for the first time, the Congregational Library & Archives is an independent research library. Established in 1853, the CLA's mission is to foster a deeper understanding of the spiritual, intellectual, civic, and cultural relevance and dimensions of the Congregational story and its ongoing relevance in the 21st century.

We do this through free access to our research library of 225,000 books, pamphlets, periodicals and manuscripts, as well as our digital archive, which has more than 100,000 images, many drawn from our New England's Hidden Histories project.

Throughout the year, we offer educational programs and research fellowships for students, scholars, churches, and anyone interested in Congregationalism's influence on the American story. Please do check out our website, congregationallibrary.org to learn more about what we do and for news of forthcoming events.

And please, let me now go ahead and invite our speaker to join us. R. J. M. Blackett is a historian of the abolitionist movement whose books include *The Captive's Quest for Freedom: Fugitive Slaves, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, and the Politics of Slavery*, and *Making Freedom: The Underground Railroad and the Politics of Slavery*. He is Andrew Jackson, Professor of History Emeritus at Vanderbilt University, and lives in Nashville, Tennessee.

And we are so excited, Professor Blackett, it for you to join us today and to hear about a great Congregationalist, as well as a great man of many other talents in history. So I will turn it over to you.

**RICHARD BLACKETT:** Thank you, Kyle. It's a pleasure to be here.

There are four observations about Ward that I want to start with and to build a talk around.

As we look back over many years in the trenches, Frederick Douglass said of Ward, "as an orator and thinker, he was vastly superior, I thought, to any of us. And being perfectly Black of a mixed African descent, the splendors of his intellect went directly to the glory of race. In depth of thought, fluency of speech, readiness of wit, logical exactness, and general intelligence, Samuel R. Ward has left no successor among the colored men amongst us, and it was a sad day for our cause when he was laid low in the soil of a foreign country."

Another contemporary, James McCune, Dr. James McCune Smith, a fellow schoolmate of Ward, said he called him "the ableist thinker on his legs that Anglo Africa has produced, whose power of eloquence, brilliant repartee, and stubborn logic are as well known in England as in the United States."

Ward's cousin, the Rev. Henry Highland Garnet, wondered why someone of such talent as he said, "was never sustained by his people."

And finally, William J. Wilson, who wrote regularly for Frederick Douglass' newspaper and who had worked with Ward, when he heard that Ward was going to England in 1853, thought he was... thought he would have an incredible impact on the struggle to win international support for abolition. But he worried that Ward did not always keep what he called "a proper command of his inner self."

These observations, I think, provide us with some contemporaries' assessments of Ward's talents; the contributions he made to the struggle against the twin evils of slavery and discrimination in the United States, Canada, and Britain; his temperament; and his decision to cut ties with the United States.

Above all else, it is a story of the cost Ward paid for attacking the system.

A Brief Biography. Ward was one of a group of African-American leaders dismissed by Garrisonian Abolitionists as the "Maryland Boys." They included Douglas, Garnet, Pennington, and Ward. All were born slaves on the Eastern shore of Maryland.

Unlike the others, Ward did not know where exactly he was born. In fact, he did not know he was born a slave until he was an adult. His mother kept it a guarded secret until Ward was 24.

We first hear of his birth in the opening lines of his autobiography, published in London in 1855. It may be one of the most cryptic opening lines of a memoir. He says, “I was born on the 17th of November 1817 in that part of the state of Maryland, United States, commonly called the Eastern Shore.”

That does not give the biographer much to go on. I often wonder what the news of his, of his being born a slave had on him. And not unlike Douglass, he rarely made mention of the fact publicly.

In the day after his mother's visit, Ward broke the news in a letter to his confidant, Gerard Smith, in what must... in what must stand as one of the greatest understatements. He had more important news to convey to Smith, such as his continued indebtededness and the need to sell his home to meet his debts. Ward says he suspected he was born a slave. But curiously, I can find only two mentions of it in any of his public statements.

After a brief stay in the Pine Barrens of southern New Jersey following their escape, the family settled in the relative safety of New York City, where Ward attended the African Free School. The school's alumni included some of the leading African-Americans of the antebellum period, including James McCune Smith, who got three degrees from the University of Glasgow, including his medical degree. Alexander Crummell, who, like Smith, was not permitted to enter a college of higher education and so took his degrees from the University of Cambridge. And William Howard Day, who was a graduate of Oberlin.

Ward experienced the full force of American racism when a white mob attacked an anti-slavery meeting he attended in 1834. He resisted, and for that he was arrested and imprisoned. It was a baptism of fire and an introduction to the struggle that would come to dominate his life for the next 20 years.

During the period, he was a prominent figure in multiple battles against discrimination in schools and other forms of segregation, especially in churches, and the struggle to return the vote to Black New Yorkers and in the effort to destroy slavery.

He taught school for a while in Long Island and Newark before moving to Poughkeepsie, New York, where he continued his education with the help of an unnamed tutor.

There in 1839, he faced another crisis of what he called “the Negro hate.” He and his tutor were working to form a literary society. When invitations were sent out, Ward discovered his name was not included. The tutor thought that his inclusion would wreck any hope of attracting the support of whites. Ward was so hurt, he started making plans to leave the country with his wife.

The apprenticeship scheme, which had followed Emancipation in the West Indies had just ended, bringing that final emancipation to the enslaved of the area. And with that, planters were desperate for labor and turned to the United States to fill their needs.

Ward wrote to take up the offer. Friends in the Anti-Slavery Society, however, got wind of his plans, and not wanting to lose such a talent, offered him an agency. Ward accepted and decided to stay, but this was one of many moments in his life when such denials of basic human rights prompted him to consider leaving the country.

It was during a lecture tour of upstate New York that a small congregation in South Butler invited Ward to be their minister, a Black man ministering to a white church. The call was both a tribute and the challenge.

Parts of the North, if not America, took notice. The call also raised Ward's spirits. It was a hopeful sign, but Ward knew the country's eyes were now on him and his small congregation.

By most measures, the years spent there were a success. But more, Ward made little headway attracting any Black residents to the church. It remained a white congregation ministered to by a Black man. More troubling, Ward found it impossible to make ends meet. Debts mounted.

In the end, he left to take up an appointment at a larger white church in Cortland, New York. It did little to improve his finances. Poverty stalked the first and only Black man to minister to white Congregationalists in the 19th century.

Ward spent the better part of the 1840s immersed in the struggle against slavery and the effort to return the vote to Black New Yorkers.

Much of his effort, when sent... was centered on the Liberty Party, the third party formed by abolitionists at the beginning of the 1840s. He became one of the party's leading voices, both as editor and lecturer. He was, as opponents put it, the party's "big gun."

William Wells Brown, no supporter of the party, claimed that Ward lectured in every county in the state and in most of its churches, insistent that no true opponent of slavery could vote for a party that bent its needs to slavery. The Negro had to stand fast against the political forces of slavery and discrimination that dominated both major parties of the time: the Whigs and the Democrats.

It troubled Ward that there were Blacks who voted for the Whigs as the lesser of two evils. It was, he insisted, a wasted vote. He never conceded, however, that a principled vote for the Liberty Party was no less wasted. The party, after all, was swept in the, both presidential elections of 1840 and 1844.

Ward worried that a significant number of Blacks and white abolitionists turned their attention to the Free Soil Party in 1848 as a sort of successor of the Liberty Party. He attended the party's convention in Buffalo, the one mentioned by Douglass, attended by 20,000 on a sweltering hot August day. Ward gave a rousing speech, then promptly left the meeting.

On his return home, he issued what he called an "Address to the 4,000 Colored Voters of the State of New York." It was a scathing attack on the party and those Blacks who supported it. Those who would vote for the Whig ticket was... were acting treasonably, he wrote. Those who promoted the Free Soil Party were "artful demagogues," acting no less treasonable. They should be ignored because the 4,000 Black votes held in their hands the balance of power.

The party, he warned, was not committed to equal rights. Martin Van Buren, its prospective presidential candidate, had consistently opposed the abolition of slavery in Washington, D.C. A vote for Van Buren would be a vote for a, as he called it, “a pro-slavery candidate with a pro-slavery party.”

Rejecting the party's advances was the only way to show the country that the Black men of New York had what he called “too much self-respect to be bribed, cajoled, deterred, or flattered into pro-slavery voting ” His solution: vote only for those who abhorred slavery, advocated for its extinction, and who supported the rights of Blacks to vote. It left Blacks few options, however.

He and Douglass entered a lengthy, sometimes edgy exchange over the merits of the new party. As Douglass eased his way from the Garrisonian rejection of all participation... political participation. Douglass had to admit that Ward had inflicted some of the "most powerful blows," as he said, “ever dealt upon the thick skulls of American prejudice against colored persons.”

While his differences with Douglass never degenerated into insults, Ward could be harsh with other Blacks, especially those in New York City who continued to support the Whigs. He pleaded with them, sometimes berated, even insulted them. Yet they were unmoved.

He despaired they were, as he said, “hirable, and coaxable enough to do the dirty deeds of meanness.” It was reactions like these that led Wilson, William Wilson, to wonder if Ward had control of what he called his inner self.

When he was criticized for lecturing to a segregated audience in Philadelphia, Ward dismissed his critics as "shameless and impudent."

Close friends cross Ward at their peril. When he heard Jermain Loguen had said some unflattering things about him in a letter meant only for the eyes of the recipient, he recalled, it

was not the first time his old friend had used "pen and tongue" in what he called “secretly trying to injure a man. And therefore it is less manly and more base.”

As in the case of his mentor in Poughkeepsie, racial slights drew from Ward... criticism.

While in England, he attended a soiree at Stafford House, the palatial home of the Duchess of Sutherland, at which Elizabeth Greenfield, the Black Swan, the first major Black opera singer, gave a musical recital.

The Duchess was the patron of both Greenfield and Harriet Beecher Stowe, who was then on a tour of England. After the performance, guests toured the house and grounds to the strains of bagpipes.

Ward did not miss the irony of the event. “A strange tableau,” he remembered, “and a sight for sore eyes,” as he wrote, “Stafford House, British nobility, and a Negress.” Stowe was struck by the attention Ward attracted and the ease with which he circulated among the guests. She described him as “a full-blooded African, tall enough for a palm tree," in easy conversations with the aristocracy, "sustaining him modestly, but with self-possession.”

When Ward read a description of the evening in her book “The Sunny Memoirs,” which she published later as an account of her time in Britain, he was unimpressed. It was another example of Ward's pandering to, of... sorry, of whites pandering to Negro hate.

For all her praise of him, Stowe could not bring herself to tell her readers, Ward griped, that she entered the hall on his arms, on the arms of a Black man. Stowe knew that to have done so, Ward argued, would have cut into the sales of her book in the United States. Yet, as Stowe pointed out, Ward was comfortable in the company of whites who showed him respect.

Ward had moved to Peterboro, New York, in the early 1840s because it was known as the most abolitionized community anywhere in New York, influenced by Gerrit Smith, the largest landowner in the state, and the man who became Ward's mentor and supporter. It mattered to Ward that Smith empathized with the struggle of African Americans that he had placed himself, as Ward said, in a Black skin.

When Ward got to London a decade later, he and Stowe and the Stowe family made their home with the Rev. James Sherman, a prominent Congregational minister. To be welcomed into the home of a person who he had only recently met and who insisted he stayed as long as he liked, was more than anything Ward could have anticipated. It was toward a meaningful gesture of friendship and disinterested philanthropy.

The two developed a lasting friendship. Ward described his new friend as a man of "feeling, as well as a man of honor" who "placed at one's disposal whatever he has, whatever he can

do, and rejoices in any sacrifice to accommodate whoever may have the good fortune to be admitted to his intimate acquaintance."

Ward was in England to raise funds for the Canadian Antislavery Society and its work to support the rising number of fugitives who fled there in the wake of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law.

At his first public meeting with the Stowe's Exeter Hall in London was packed to the rafters. Pickpockets had a field day until the police intervened. Ward was the star speaker, the author of "Uncle Tom's" basking modestly in the crowd's adoration.

Ward's speech combined a scathing attack on the American church with personal experiences, including the way he was treated on the British ship on its way to Liverpool. It was a right... a rousing introduction to his mission.

Wherever he went in his two-year stay in Britain, he was warmly received. His presence and eloquence transfixed his listeners. Those who heard him felt compelled to put to paper their experiences, some of which strikes the modern ear as wildly exaggerated, sailing close to racist hyperbole.

One newspaper man in Sligo, Ireland, may have been the most extravagant in his response to Ward's address. Ward, he told readers, was not "a common man. His person and bearings are very striking. His manners are those of a polished gentleman. His vocabulary is copious and well-chosen. His mind is more matter of fact, quite so than imaginative, more of an English than it was usually conceived as the African type."

Another in Ireland, in Dublin, had more to say. That his "voice of thunder, which would be... which would at the head of an advancing column in the battlefield rival the peel of artillery," was "scientifically suppressed to suit his audience."

Many who heard Ward speak thought, as Wendell Phillips, that his "tongue was inspired by oppression."

Those who came to hear him was so impressed by his physique, his size, his height, and his color—what one called his "Herculean frame." A race that produced the likes of Ward and Toussaint Louverture of Haiti, one Irish reporter concluded, ought not to be enslaved.

Douglass, Garnett, McCune Smith, and others who knew and cherished his genius and what he contributed to the cause.

Jane Swisshelm, editor of the *Pittsburgh Sunday... Saturday Visiter*, thought him as "fine a specimen of a Black man that any friend of the race need wish to present as a refutation of all the persons of the inferiority of the African. He is so big, so Black, so evidently at peace with

himself, it's all a shadow of assumption of pomposity that at first glance, one sets him down as a man of well-balanced intellect."

She goes on. He looks so "entirely good humored, yet calm and dignified that we were not surprised to hear it was far more laughter than crying in his audience, and that the keenest edges given to his satire by the pulsing good humor in which it is uttered."

It may be the best description of Ward's power as an orator, of his ability to reach audiences, even in the most... even the most hostile with a mix of humor, passion, and reason. It was what impressed Douglass at the Buffalo meeting of the Free Soil Party, who gathered there, frequently confronted, and sometimes converted hostile audiences.

When Isaac Rynders and his Tammany Hall Rowdies took over a meeting of the American Antislavery Society in New York City in 1851, Ward and Douglass kept them at bay. Rynders insisted that Douglass was not really a Negro. Only, as he said, "half a nigger." Douglass agreed he was the son of a slave owner, which he said, turning to Rynders, "made him half a brother to Mr. Rynders." Douglass then gave way to Ward. Rynders greeted him, "there's a regular Black savage."

What followed was a masterful rebuke. "I care not for my lineage," Ward began, and "ask not whether I am descended from a man or a monkey." One thing he knew: he was a man. And the God who made him intended he should, as he said, "have the rights and perform the duties of a man." He had the "faculty of thought and the capacity of affection and emotion." He had a "human tongue to speak and a human heart to feel."

Ward then drove home this point. He wondered how many white men in the audience had what he called "low receding foreheads, of which you might say of the schoolmaster in Dickens', Nicholas Nickleby, that if you knocked there all day, you'd find nobody at home." The audience roared, and Rynders retreated a little.

Everything Ward said, according to one reporter, "indicated education and culture," the pride he took in his color thrilled the audience. His wit was, as the reporter said, "set off by an intonation which gave the fullest effect of his thoughts." Their white protagonists were "put down, half-covered by a couple of Black noblemen."

This Black nobleman had done everything he knew to improve himself, to then demonstrate he was both educated and cultured. He was an ordained minister, a lecturer of some reputation, a newspaper editor. He was the first Black to be nominated for vice-presidency of a political party. He had toyed with the idea of training to become a lawyer and a doctor.

He had, in other words, done all contemporary America could have expected of one of its citizens.

Yet he could never make ends meet. The wolves were always at his family's door.

He was... He was forced to sell his first house to pay off debts. He pleaded with friends for support. Many of those who subscribed to his newspaper rarely sent in their payments on time. That forced him to go on the road in all manner of weather, lecturing and raising subscriptions. He spent weeks away from home.

“Our debtors,” he wrote in 1849, “won't let us obey the scriptures. We work hard and constantly. And had we received a respectable portion of what we have earned during the last eleven months, we might have been free from debt.” He ended plaintively, “It's hard.”

He moved the newspaper first to Syracuse and then Boston, searching for larger markets. The situation did not improve, as he put it, “after a smattering away on teaching law, medicine, divinity, and public lecturing. And I am neither lawyer, doctor, teacher, divine, or lecturer."

The situation grew progressively worse, so much so that he was forced into debtor's court in Boston.

After a particularly long lecture tour to the west, he and his wife decided that there was little keeping them in the United States. They would seek greater, greener pastures in Canada.

On their way home, an event in Syracuse helped them confirm the decision. Ward was a leading participant in the rescue of Jerry, a fugitive slave from Missouri. The government made it clear that those involved would be prosecuted. A fugitive slave himself, Ward, saw the need to leave the country.

The family settled in Toronto and penury followed him. Pleas to be employed by the American Missionary Association, went largely unanswered.

Again, he went on the road lecturing and raising funds for the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada. His salary was never enough to meet the needs of his family.

He jumped at an offer to become the Society's agent in Britain. The society agreed to cover the family's rent and to provide periodic assistance while he was away. He supplemented his paltry salary with funds raised at a mind-numbing number of lectures. He was... But these barely covered his expenses.

Everyone, including his wife, expected Ward to return at the end of his 18-month agency in Britain. But he was in such demand that he extended his stay twice, at the end of which he announced that he was going to Jamaica. He had been given... he had been given land there by an English supporter who hoped he would attract Black Americans to join him in an agricultural produce project.

Ward, however, had no experience in the management of such projects or even of sustained agricultural labor. Jamaica's economy at the time was in shambles, riven by political tensions between estate owners, and small landholders, and peasants who demanded more land. Cholera and smallpox epidemics had wracked the island in the early years of the 1840s.

So after these problems, Ward left London under a cloud of suspicion.

While he was putting the finishing touches to his *Autobiography*, he borrowed money from an English cheesemaker who was planning to emigrate to Canada with his family. Ward promised to repay the man once he got to Toronto. The Englishman turned up at Ward's apartment to find that Ward was not there, and the family lived in poverty.

Ward was not profligate, nor was he a swindler. But he had been living hand-to-mouth for all his adult life so far, ever since he took up his first teaching job. The situation may have gotten the better of him.

Ward temporarily fell from view in Kingston. The rumor did the rounds that he had been convicted of fraud and sent to the infamous prison on Van Diemen’s Land in present day Tasmania. Old friends would not believe it.

In moving to Jamaica, Ward stepped off the pages of American history. I could find no mention of him in American sources. He lost contact with old friends. When one upstate New York editor sent him an issue of his paper. Ward cherished it for it proved sadly, he was not entirely forgotten.

It would be two years before the family could afford the price of a boat ticket to Kingston. It is not always clear what Ward did to earn a living. He pastored a Baptist church in the capital.

Church politics in Jamaica was nothing if not bizarre. Pastorates in Jamaica, especially those in the large non-denominations change hands with breathtaking frequency. There were Baptist churches associated with English churches, others with local synods, and yet others who were Native Baptists steeped in African traditions. For a while, Ward led a congregation that splintered from the largest Baptist church in the world.

He also got involved in politics that roiled the island, leading to the Morant Bay Rebellion in October 1865. Led by Paul Bogle, a small... a Black small landowner and supported by William Gordon, a colored member of the island Assembly, the rebellion was the most politically consequential event in the years since emancipation. Both Bogle and Gordon were captured and summarily executed.

In a short pamphlet published in early 1866, and in testimony before a commission sent out by the British to investigate the causes of the rebellion, Ward denounced the leaders of the rebellion and supported the bloody reaction of the authorities in crushing the rebels.

His position has continued to confound historians. Here was a proud Black man who made much of his attachment to and support of the rights of his people. A man who in the United States was a driving force in the movement to eliminate slavery and racial discrimination, siding with the colonists in their efforts to deny the rights of Black Jamaicans.

There is no doubt that he was an avid promoter of the cause of the island's Black small land holders and peasants. They were the backbone of the country's economy, he told them frequently, pleading with them to be patient. The island did not rely on the large, absent landowners, he told them, nor their local representatives for its survival. The future lay with those who were the most productive: the Black farmers and settlers.

They were, however, Ward believed, being led astray by Gordon, a mulatto politician. It is the only time in his life that Ward betrayed any animus to mixed race people. In America, he sometimes poked fun at Douglass for being mixed race, but there's no evidence that it ever drifted into hatred. In Jamaica, however, such class and color differences mattered, and Ward may have been exploiting them for his own benefit.

If he was angling for performance from the colonial state, it never came. He taught school, pastored a small congregation outside Kingston, then fell off the pages of history. We have no idea where he died or what became of his family.

Douglass gets the last word. It was a sad day for the cause when Ward, he said, "was laid low in the soil of foreign country." A major advocate for the slave had simply vanished from the pages of history.

In the preface to a reprinting of Ward's autobiography in 17... in 1970, Vincent Harding wondered how to explain why one of the most effective campaigners against slavery, as he wrote, "dropped out of sight into the hills of Jamaica at the height of his manhood powers." Biographers did not end suspended in such uncertainty, but then Ward was no ordinary subject.

Thank you.

**KYLE:** Great. Thank you so much. That was absolutely fascinating.

And so as questions are coming in, Richard, I guess I want to maybe start a little bit with his autobiography. And, you know, so published, 1855, right, in London. And then I think probably out of print for a long time until that 1970 edition.

Is there a reason that his autobiography isn't maybe more of a canonical text these days? I mean, it feels like, I was looking on WorldCat to see if I could find many reprints, you know, since that 1970 one. And there looks like there's, you know, maybe one in 2018 or so. But, is there a reason why maybe it's not taught as much or seen as much as, say, Frederick Douglass' autobiography or other leaders?

**RICHARD:** Yeah. Yeah. I think the answer to that question is that it is not a slave narrative.

**KYLE:** Okay.

**RICHARD:** It's an autobiography of a free man that covers his work and his struggles against slavery and racial discrimination and his work in the United States, Canada, and Britain.

It ends, in fact, in 1855, after it's published and he goes to Jamaica. So it's an account of his life with all the gaps that comes with it... up to 1800... roughly 1859.

So I think it's because it is not a slave narrative that it hasn't become part of the canon, the sort of things that we teach.

But if you want an account of somebody next to, say, Frederick Douglass' autobiography, later biographies, memoirs... I think there are few that surpass it.

But the other thing about the autobiography that struck me as impressive, and it's something that I use to tell my graduate students when they're complaining about, when they are lamenting about writing a dissertation,

Ward wrote a 400-page book without notes in a matter of four months locked up in his hotel room. It shows a kind of dedication and application that I don't understand. It really is. It really is impressive. And I know he didn't take his notes with him. So I have to take him at his word. He did this without his notes. But it shows also a power of recall that Is equally as impressive because there's... he replicates the speech that he gave at that Jerry rescue event in Syracuse in 1851. And I have, I've gone back and looked at the newspaper accounts of his speech, and it's spot on. It's almost identical to the speech that he made. So he had an amazing power of recall. He had amazing both hard work and application.

And I think that's, that all went into producing the autobiography.

**KYLE:** That's great. That's very...

**RICHARD:** I suspect, I suspect that he thought it would make him some money, but I don't think it did.

**KYLE:** Right. The, uh... So, I can think a question that naturally sort of follows from this is from an attendee asking, Can Ward's lectures, speeches, the autobiography be found online?

So, I wonder if you might talk a little bit about how much of Ward you were able to find during the pandemic as you're kind of working on this to find additions and how much of Ward's story is really still in the archives, in the libraries that people have to go visit?

**RICHARD:** Well, when I was working on my, on my first book many, many decades ago, I tracked, I got a lot of his speeches from British newspapers. And working at the same time was a group of historians at Florida State University working with... aided by a number of their graduate students who pulled together what was called the Black Abolitionist Papers, which is an incredible collection.

It is both on microfilm, which is nobody uses anymore. But it's also published in about four or five volumes, and which you can find at most academic libraries. And it's a wonderful source because it has a number of his letters and speeches that have survived. But we have lost much of it.

**KYLE:** Right. And I see we have a comment in here from somebody who's watching that there's some Ward material available at the University of North Carolina site, docsouth.unc.edu. So, excuse me, if people want to check that out.

Another great question in here from Susan Dickson-Smith. She writes, at what point did Ward come in contact with Congregationalism? She's a history grad student studying Black Congregational history in the Northeast, and she found your talk absolutely fascinating. And she can't wait to read the book.

But, you know, so Ward, kind of growing up in Maryland not really a hot spot of Congregationalism.

**RICHARD:** No, no.

**KYLE:** How did he come into that world?

**RICHARD:** I have... I'm... I am sorry to say this to the graduate student. I have no idea.

He is... he becomes, they say he becomes a Congregationalist in 1839 or just before, is what we know. And the churches that he ministered to in upstate New York, in South Butler, which is way up in the north of New York, it's a small Congregationalist church that made up largely of migrants from New England. And the second church that he ministered to in Cortland, New York, is also a Congregationalist church. And both of those churches, the congregations were white.

And so, and so the only Black families, the only Black people in the congregation were Ward and his, and his family.

So it is, it's a curious sort of thing. So I have no, I have no way of knowing why he became a Congregationalist.

I suspect he was influenced by Amos Beman, who is a well-known Black Congregationalist, who, whose church, prominent church in New Haven, and whose, whose papers are at Yale University. But they don't provide too much.

There's also Simeon Jocelyn, who... a white Congregationalist with whom he was very close.

But if we look at his contemporaries at the school which he attended... the African Free School, William Howard Day is A.M.E. Zion. Alexander Cromwell is Episcopalian. Henry Highland Garnet is a Presbyterian, who is his cousin. So I can't, I can't tag any links to early Congregationalists in New York City that would lead me to think that he would he would become a Congregationalist.

So, why people chose what church they belonged to in this generation I think defies historians to come up with a real... an explanation that is... that meets much of the historical problems that we try to resolve. So I have no way of knowing why, why Ward chose to become a Congregationalist.

**KYLE:** There's a few more questions that are sort of in that line about people that he had contact with and maybe, you know, maybe a question for you about how your understanding of the relationship he had with different activists has changed as a result of doing your research.

So, AJ, I'm gonna mispronounce this, Aiseirithe, asks... He says, thank you for this important, valuable work. Did you come across any information about Ward's relationship with Robert Purvis, for example?

**RICHARD:** No, no, because Purvis' headquarters really is in Philadelphia.

**KYLE:** Okay.

**RICHARD:** And Ward, Ward may have... Ward visited Philadelphia a few times, but it's in Philadelphia that he made that terrible error of agreeing to lecture to a segregated audience.

**KYLE:** Right.

**RICHARD:** And got in, and got in, deeply in trouble with his, including Frederick Douglass, who came closest to savaging him in his reports in his newspaper. So no, Ward, Ward tended to, to do... most of his activity happened east of the Alleghenies.

**KYLE:** Right.

**RICHARD:** To put a, to put a kind of geographical limit on it.

**KYLE:** So another person, though, he might have had more interaction with.

Could you talk about Ward's relationship with Mary Ann Shadd, the first Black female newspaper editor in North America? Did they... or did he kind of just hand off the newspaper to her, or do they have a working relationship?

**RICHARD:** It's very brief because the newspaper, the newspaper puts out one issue while he was in Canada, and he was sort of like the figurehead editor.

By this time, Ward is deeply suspicious... Ward, he said he'd been beaten up so badly publishing his own newspaper in New York that he really didn't have... wanted to do anything more with newspaper publishing.

But Mary Ann Shadd persuaded him that he should become involved. So he lent his name as a sort of editor of the newspaper, as he did with William Howard Day's *Aliened American*, which came out, which had a couple issues or so that came out.

But then Ward left for England. He corresponded with Shadd while he was in England, and she was very supportive of him. And she, like Douglass, kept pestering him to return because they said the struggle is on this side of the Atlantic and not in England.

And she was deeply disappointed when Ward decided to go to Jamaica. She thought that was not the place for American freed people to go. They should go, they should come to Canada as far as Shadd is concerned.

So the relationship, the intimacy of the relationship is limited to a very brief period in 1854. And not... although they were on both sides of certain pivotal quarrels, they were on the same side of pivotal quarrels involved in efforts to establish Black settlements in Canada.

But by and large, no, it's very, it's a very limited relationship.

**KYLE:** There's interest here... I think people are maybe sharing the seeming puzzlement that comes at the end of his life.

And so, Kaz Bem, a longtime friend of the Congregational Library asked, Professor Blackett, how would you explain the back of... Ward's backing of the colonial administration in Jamaica?

I wonder if you could talk a little bit more about where he sort of falls at the end of his, of what we know of his life?

**RICHARD:** I, I mean, I struggled with this one because it doesn't square with anything that he has done before.

And I think partly it's that he became deeply distrusted, distrustful of William Gordon, who is one of the leaders of the Morant Day Rebellion. Gordon was a, was a very powerful political figure and landowner, a very prominent man, a very economically well-to-do Jamaican man of mixed race.

His father, Gordon's father, had been a slave holder who had set him up and sort of, to succeed. And Ward, at one point, in a test said that he had met Gordon in London while he was over there, and that, and that Gordon slighted him. And there's nothing that drew the ire of Ward than people slighting him. He would not have it. And therefore, he was not willing to work with anything that Gordon promoted while he was in Jamaica. That's number one.

The second thing is that he thought that Gordon was leading, leading the poor people astray. That this was politically unwise, what they were doing, because as I mentioned in the talk, Ward believed that... firmly believed that the future of the island's economy and its, and its success rested with the small working men of Jamaica. And he kept saying that to them.

He said, it's not the rich landowners that are going to do this because they're squandering their... They are living their ill gotten gains in England, not the merchants of Kingston, but the small landholders. And he says what you have to do is be patient. It will come. And... but by 1865, there were few people who were promoting patience.

So Ward was completely out, out of, out of line with most of the political developments. But why he threw in his lot, why he supported the governor in his reaction to the rebellion, I will never know. It makes, it makes no historical, or logical... No, in no other sense, can I find a way to justify it, to explain it even before I could justify it. I can't explain.

And he stuck, he stuck with the governor, even after the governor was recalled by the British government. And one wonders if he, if he, if he decided that his future was... that he would get, reap some reward for his support of the government. But I don't know.

I really can't tell. And I'm only speculating. And people who have looked at Ward have tried their best to explain it, but they can't really explain it. I mean, it's clear to me that I... not long

after he had moved to Canada, Ward began to see himself and to speak as if he were a British citizen rather than an American.

In fact, the first letter he wrote to Frederick Douglass after he moved to Canada is, he said, Fred, you take America. It's an all... it's a madness. I want nothing to do with it. I am done. Of course, he couldn't be done. He couldn't because the ties are too great. But nonetheless, he started seeing himself as a British citizen.

So when he was discriminated against in the boat trip on a ship owned by a British company crossing the Atlantic to Liverpool, he made a lot of that.

That he... so... So it is possible that by the time he gets to Jamaica, you know, he is... fully sees himself as a British citizen, or as a British subject, I think is the word to use for a non-citizen. So that may have to explain it.

But I am... I am averse to putting all these things together and coming up with a conclusion that would, that would help to explain it. It's a mystery. It's a mystery.

**KYLE:** You know and that's, and, as we know well, that happens. You know, those silences in the archives that either, you know, either he wanted to remain out of the archive and he wanted to preserve that silence or that others decided not to include his voice.

There is a...

**RICHARD:** I must admit, I should add also, that when... what I have discovered, what I think I have discovered, and this is another work that I have done, is when Americans, particularly Black Americans, leave the United States, they walk off the pages of American history.

They are no longer American. America doesn't see them as American. And Ward, I suspect, is one of those.

And, I mean, I have not found a single obituary of Ward. It has haunted me.

I, and I hope... I was hoping when the book... I'm not, hope is the wrong word. I suspected when the book came out I would get some letters saying, or emails saying there's an obituary in the whatever, whatever, gazette.

**KYLE:** Yep.

**RICHARD:** Not a word. And that is a mystery.

So why Ward supported the governor of Jamaica in 1865 is one of the many mysteries that surround his life.

**KYLE:** This next question might be a similar mystery given where it falls.

It's from Daniel Wright, and he asks, is there any record of Ward's reaction to the American Civil War?

**RICHARD:** Not a word.

**KYLE:** Wow.

**RICHARD:** Oh, there's one, there's one, one context in which he criticizes the way that the Jamaican economy is run because it imports everything even from the United States, even as he says it imports stuff that they could grow in Jamaica.

They choose to import it from the United States. And he finds that's totally unacceptable. And he makes one other reference to... in making a comparison to what was going on in Jamaica in 1865 to what was happening in America.

But that, that is, those are only tangential. He does not comment at all because he no longer, he no longer has a newspaper in which he can, he can express his views on things. And the correspondence from him while he was in Jamaica is very, very limited.

**KYLE:** There are far, far too many questions here. So I am going, Richard, I am going to send all these questions to you after the talk. Just so, so I want everybody in the virtual audience to know that you have great questions. We're just running out of time.

Let me just give... offer two things.

One is from Jeff Mason, who is the historian of the United Church of Christ Congregational in Arcade, New Jersey... uh, New York. So Arcade is a rural village about 35 miles south of Buffalo.

And he says several of our pastors in the decades before the Civil War had studied at Oberlin. And some of our members participated in the Underground Railroad. One of our members, Charles Shepherd, was one of the early figures in the Liberty Party, and he was said to be an associate of Rev. Ward. Our church indicates that Ward officiated at a baptism in our church on February 11th, 1844. Does this time period fit in with your research on Ward's travels in western New York?

So maybe a more specific question here.

**RICHARD:** Well, I didn't know about that one. There's one, there's one. That's a very useful bit of information. No, it does. It does.

As I said, the congregation in South Butler, that was his church, is made up, as far as I can gather, much of its membership comes... are migrants from New England. So they have a certain different approach to the...

I mean, it's the only way to explain why they would actually offer Ward to be the, to be the minister of their congregation. And the connection with Oberlin would make sense later on. Because the name, Shepherd, is... or, is a prominent Oberlin name anyway.

**KYLE:** Yeah. Well, I'm gonna send you the rest of these questions. We're at two o'clock now.

People, you know, so everybody in the audience is very excited for this work. I want to remind folks... available now. You can go ahead and order directly from Yale. You can also order it from Amazon, and Barnes & Noble, and your local independent bookseller.

Thank you so much for writing this book. I think it's going to be well used. I know our copy here at the library is already getting dog eared, so.

**RICHARD:** Oh, good.

**KYLE:** Thank you for doing this. And thanks to everybody out there for watching today.

**RICHARD:** It was a pleasure, and thanks for inviting me.