

Black settlers in Upper Canada and their involvement in the War of 1812

- Before the war (1790s) Upper Canada was filled with racial stress. Lieutenant Governor Simcoe was an Abolitionist (against the practice of owning slaves), but the white colonists of the region did not agree with him.
- Many members of the Legislative Council and Assembly (appointed and elected government) were slave owners – they resisted any attempts by Simcoe to outlaw the practice.
- Even Joseph Brant was a slave holder (Sophia Pooley). Simcoe's successor (Lieutenant Governor Peter Russell – who owned land in Flamborough) was also a slave holder.
- However, the king's representative (the Lieutenant Governor) was much more powerful then, and could pass laws with or without popular consent.
- Upper Canadians were shocked when Chloë Cooley, an enslaved girl from Queenstown, was beaten and bound by her owner and sold to an American. Brought before Upper Canada's Executive Council 21 March 1793, English law made prosecution impossible. The incident convinced Lieutenant Governor Simcoe that the abolition of slavery was necessary.¹
- In July 1793, Simcoe passed a complicated law that would phase-out slavery in Upper Canada. Aspects of the law included:
 - He didn't free anyone who was already a slave in Upper Canada.
 - Forbade any new slaves being brought into the province
 - Any child born to a slave would be freed once they achieved their 25th birthday
 - No one was allowed to sell slaves who were going to be given their freedom at the age of 25.
- After Simcoe passed this law, any American slaves that entered Upper Canada were immediately free.
- However, in 1794, based on their military service in the war between Great Britain and America, 19 free Blacks in the Niagara area petitioned Governor Simcoe for a grant of land to establish an all-Black settlement. The petition was rejected. In 1819 the government established Oro Settlement near Barrie.²

¹ Historica Canada. (2018). Black History Timeline. [online] Available at: <http://www.blackhistorycanada.ca/timeline.php?id=1700> [Accessed 5 Apr. 2018].

² Ibid.

- At the same time the United States of America was having its own struggles with slavery. Each American state saw itself as a separate nation entitled to its own laws and army.
- Essentially, America was split into two parts: The Northern states which viewed slavery as unnecessary for the economy, and the Southern States which disagreed.
- When war was declared against the United States in 1812, 30 of the 100 free black men in Upper Canada joined the Coloured Corps (militia).
- The main reason that so many Black People rallied to the Crown was because they knew what might happen if the colony was conquered by a country where slavery was far more entrenched than it was in British North America.
- Furthermore, free Black Settlers were in little danger of being cast back into slavery in Upper Canada.
- The Coloured Corps was based in Fort George near Niagara-On-The-Lake.

