

LOCAL STUDIES AND LARGER ISSUES: THE CASE OF SARA BAGBY

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Historians, especially American historians, increasingly bemoan the discipline's overspecialization and lack of relevance to the wider discipline, which they contend has caused a decline in synthetic history and a rise of specialized history.¹ A 1993 survey of American historians revealed that 86 percent of the respondents agreed that "[h]istory should help us identify diverse cultural experience," but 83 percent concurred that "[h]istory should help us identify common patterns of experience." Clearly many historians believed that "specialized history" was important, but that it still must be placed within a framework. In this same survey historians complained about the loss of narrative history, that is the failure of historians to tell a good story.² Historians are rewarded with tenure and prestigious professorships on the basis of specialized research and writing. Some of these works connect local issues to larger issues and events, but broad syntheses analyzing major themes over extended time periods are often derided as trite or oversimplified. Only established historians, those who already hold distinguished professorships or are professors emeriti, can write synthetic works and have them widely read and criticized.³

The trend toward overspecialization is reinforced by the way most historians teach historical research and writing. They encourage students to undertake narrowly focused projects. Yet, to develop synthetic skills a specialized project must be placed in a larger context that clarifies larger events or issues. The project then becomes more relevant and the student less narrowly focused and more accustomed to writing a generalized, synthetic study.

In helping students to develop local studies that address larger issues, instructors have two tasks. One is to help them identify topics that can be researched with existing materials. Second, instructors must assist students with a series of questions that will lead them to develop a thesis and argument that not only answers a question but also connects the findings from local to national or international events or issues. Usually

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²David Thelen, "The Practice of American History," *Journal of American History* 81 (1994): 937-38, 942.

³*Ibid.*, 939-40.

the availability of primary sources immediately limits what topics can be adequately researched. Instructors should identify the available sources, then suggest general topics, perhaps related to one group or a specific time period or event. Ideally, the instructor should select a period or event that is related to well-known national or international events or themes. For example, students may seek to study a major issue such as "How did the Civil War alter American society"? These students could be steered toward local sources that create a portrait of their county or town in the five or ten years immediately following the war. Instructors may accept a local study as the final product, which would satisfy the goal of exposing students to primary sources, but accepting this product would not encourage students to stretch their analytical thinking skills to synthesize information and make connections between local and larger issues. Instructors should require students to take their local studies and compare/contrast them with secondary sources that analyze the same period and/or theme. Students should not only develop a thesis and argument about their local study, but also must ask questions about how it relates to national or international events. Instructors can help this process by posing a series of questions: does this town reflect the general trend? Why or why not? Do the town's various groups (racial, ethnic, gender) all experience similar changes within the town, and does this reflect national change? Again, why or why not? Can we view changes in the United States in isolation or are other nations in the 1860s and 1870s experiencing similar phenomena?

There are many excellent works by noted historians that demonstrate how various local materials can illuminate larger issues. Early local studies relied on diaries, census data, letters, and memoirs. More recently, historians influenced by anthropologists and the fine arts have used more creative cultural sources such as tombstones, architecture, art, inheritance inventories, posters, banners, and literature. One of the first studies to evaluate election returns to discover how ethnicity affected elections was Lee Benson's *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*. A classic study that uses a diary supplemented with medical literature, town records, account books, and tax rolls, to paint a picture of early national life is Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*. For a study that shows how newspapers, literature, and broadsides can be employed, Mary Ryan's *A Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865*, should be consulted. Ryan studies one New York town to explain how the middle class formed in antebellum America, and what role the family played in that formation. More recently, Walter Johnson's *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* weaves together letters, plantation records, newspapers, legal transcripts,

census data, and journals from New Orleans to create a richly textured analysis of slaves, slavery, the slave trade, and slave masters in America.⁴

Researching and writing a local study connected to larger issues requires a significant commitment of time. Instructors should not expect students to prepare such a paper in a six- or nine-week period. Instructors will need to orchestrate this project in segments, perhaps requiring the information for the local study as a first phase, with the final larger paper being completed by the end of the semester or academic year. The dividends from connecting local to larger issues are many. First, students become familiar with both primary and secondary sources. Second, students become more analytical by using their local material and then connecting it to a larger theme and/or period. Third, they must synthesize their ideas and support them with historical evidence. By implementing this approach, we may train young historians to comprehend events as part of a larger process.

Identifying local events that can serve as a springboard to larger issues is often a matter of studying newspapers at an auspicious time and selecting a seemingly isolated event to study. In January, 1861, the nation witnessed a steady stream of secession conventions in the southern states. Cleveland, Ohio, seemed far removed from the secession frenzy, yet the case of Sara Lucy Bagby, which captured headlines in all the Cleveland papers, illuminates key aspects of gender, racial relations, nineteenth-century politics, and the origins of the Civil War. Bagby was a fugitive slave captured in Cleveland in January 1861 and returned to her master, William A. Goshorn, in Wheeling, Virginia. Without context this incident is one of many antebellum fugitive slave stories in which a slave is returned to her owners through the federal court system as required by the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. But Bagby's saga can tell us much more if placed in the context of time, place, politics, gender, and race.

First, consider gender, for Bagby experienced both strong support, and possibly betrayal, from other women. At the time of her capture, Bagby was twenty-four years old and pregnant; she claimed to have secretly married another fugitive slave, William

⁴Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Knopf, 1990); Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

Washington of Wheeling, who had escaped to Cleveland and then to Canada.⁵ Arriving in Cleveland in October, 1860, Bagby became acquainted with William E. Ambush, the African-American chairman of Cleveland's Fugitive Aid Society. Over the next three months, Ambush found Bagby employment as a domestic in three homes, including that of A.G. Riddle, a Republican congressman-elect.⁶ Undoubtedly, through Ambush she became acquainted with other members of Cleveland's black community as her subsequent arrest and confinement in jail triggered a significant response from that community. As she waited in the county jail before a writ of *habeas corpus* hearing, a large crowd, including many women, gathered in the yard to protest her trial and perhaps rescue her from captivity.⁷ A reporter characterized these women as "loud in their threats and [they] expressed great contempt for the black men folk for their masterly inactivity."⁸ Moved by Bagby's youth, pregnancy, and plight, black women struggled to free her. One woman carried several flatirons secreted in her skirts, prepared to use force or create a diversion to allow Bagby to escape.⁹ Because of the large unruly crowd, Bagby did not appear at this first hearing, when mostly women filled the courtroom. The judge deferred ruling on the writ for two more days.¹⁰

At the second writ hearing, again large crowds gathered. Because authorities anticipated difficulties, extra deputies kept the onlookers away from the jail and courthouse. Nevertheless, when the judge ruled that Bagby could not be confined to a state jail and the United States marshal took her to appear before a United States

⁵William Cheek and Aimee Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom, 1829-1865* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 373; *Liberator* (Boston), March 8, 1861; *Anti-Slavery Bugle* (Salem, Ohio), February 23, 1861; *Cleveland Morning Leader*, January 21, 1861; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, January 24, 1861 in *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, January 26, 1861; *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 23, 1861; *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (New York), February 16, 1861. Some early newspaper accounts such as the *Leader's* account on January 21, 1861 identified Bagby as unmarried. A later report from the January 24, 1861 *Plain Dealer* states she was married in secret to William Washington, another slave in Wheeling.

⁶Cheek and Cheek, 373; *Cleveland Morning Leader*, January 21, 1861; John E. Vacha, "The Case of Sara Lucy Bagby: A Late Gesture," *Ohio History* 76 (1967): 224; *Cleveland Herald*, January 19, 1861 in *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, January 21, 1861.

⁷*Cleveland Plain Dealer*, January 21, 1861; *Cleveland Herald*, January 21, 1861 in *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, January 23, 1861.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Cleveland Herald*, January 21, 1861 in *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, January 23, 1861.

Commissioner, the crowd rushed the marshal and his deputies.¹¹ African-American women led the charge, but deputies pushed them back. At the courthouse, one black woman grabbed Bagby's dress and tried to pull her away from her captors.¹² Other African-American women attempted to divert the United States marshal by throwing snuff into his face, and still another black woman threw red pepper into the eyes of deputies. Authorities arrested these women.¹³ These acts demonstrate the strength of black women's bonds, the link between slave and free, and the willingness of black women, who could expect no deference to their sex from white officials, to politicize their actions. Women moved into the public sphere at great personal risk.

Other black women took a less forceful path either to support Bagby or possibly to betray her. In the courtroom, few blacks attended the second writ of *habeas corpus* hearing, but one reporter noted the presence of only two African Americans—Mr. and Mrs. William E. Ambush. Ambush had not only given Bagby shelter in his home, and found her employment, but had also rushed to her aid after her capture by requesting the writ to free her.¹⁴ His presence in the courtroom is understandable, but his wife's presence suggests her attachment to Bagby, her desire to ensure fair treatment of another woman, or perhaps a gesture of support for her husband. Eventually, when the court ruled that Bagby was a fugitive and remanded her to the custody of her master, other women, including at least one African American, and possibly many white women, criticized the Republicans and the *Cleveland Leader* for failing to secure her freedom. These "thirty women of Ohio" wrote to the *Leader's* editor enclosing thirty pieces of silver, referring to them as "Judas's Reward." They included two poems, one, perhaps both, written by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, a well-known African-American abolitionist speaker.¹⁵ In her closing stanza she condemned the unholy trade of preserving the Union at the expense of a human soul:

¹¹Ibid.; *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, February 16, 1861; *Cleveland Leader*, January 22, 1861.

¹²*Cleveland Plain Dealer*, January 21, 1861. Other papers, the *Cleveland Leader*, January 22, 1861, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, February 16, 1861 and the *Cleveland Herald*, January 21, 1861 in *Cincinnati Daily Commercial* of January 23, 1861, note the rushes were made by a black mob, but do not specifically identify the participants as women.

¹³*Cleveland Herald*, January 21, 1861 in *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, January 23, 1861; *Cleveland Leader*, January 22, 1861; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, January 21, 1861.

¹⁴*Cleveland Leader*, January 21 and 22, 1861; *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 23, 1861; *Cleveland Herald*, January 21, 1861 in *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, January 23, 1861.

¹⁵The poem and "almoner" to the *Cleveland Leader's* editors are in the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 23, 1861.

And your guilty, sin-cursed Union,
Shall be shaken to the base,
Till ye learn that simple Justice
Is the right of every race.¹⁶

Yet while women chastised the politicians, something black men did not do, accusations arose that a black woman had notified William Goshorn of Bagby's location. Soon after Bagby's capture rumors circulated that African Americans, possibly George or Frances Graves, relatives of Bagby, had written Goshorn about Bagby.¹⁷ William Goshorn, however, publicly refuted such allegations in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*.¹⁸ More likely, someone (possibly white) who met Bagby at one of her places of employment informed Goshorn of her presence.

Second, the incident reveals a complex interplay of intra- and inter-racial relations. Two groups of blacks and whites emerge. On the one hand are those law-abiding citizens of both colors who urged moderation. During the writ of *habeas corpus* hearing, presiding Judge D.R. Tilden pleaded, "I enjoin it upon all, and especially upon these colored persons, that they wait for the sure and certain relief which law can afford and I hope that they will do their duty and remain quiet."¹⁹ In fact, William Ambush, African-American activist and Fugitive Aid Society chairman, Bagby's ardent supporter, published a notice in the Cleveland papers pledging the loyalty of Cleveland's African-American population to the law and promising that no attempts to rescue her would be made.²⁰ This action by Ambush is at odds with the account written years later by African-American John Malvin, an alleged eyewitness, who claims that Ambush had an altercation with Bagby's master in the courtroom.²¹ This encounter is probably fabricated, as no newspaper correspondent reported this meeting, a lurid detail that the nineteenth-century press would hardly omit. While Ambush and leading whites pleaded for restraint and obedience to the law, other

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷*Cleveland Herald*, January 19, 1861 in *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, January 21, 1861; *Cleveland Leader*, January 21, 1861; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, January 22, 1861.

¹⁸*Cleveland Plain Dealer*, January 22, 1861.

¹⁹*Cleveland Leader*, January 21, 1861; paraphrase of this quote is also in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* January 21, 1861.

²⁰*Cleveland Leader*, January 22, 1861.

²¹John Malvin, *North Into Freedom*, edited with an introduction by Allan Peskin (Cleveland: Western Reserve University, 1966; Cleveland: The Western Reserve Historical Society, 1996), 81; Vacha, 227.

African Americans took a more militant stance. Blacks dominated the crowds gathered outside the court during Bagby's hearings and tried to grab her away from the authorities each time she moved between the court and jail.²² Some whites, believing that most blacks would uphold the law, downplayed this African-American behavior by claiming that those blacks arrested during the melee were "strangers in Cleveland," and that none of them could be considered "respectable colored people."²³ In fact a number of blacks, perhaps as many as sixty, came from Oberlin, thirty miles away, to attend the hearings and possibly attempt a rescue. Several of the agitators were arrested for attempting to impede the movement of Bagby from jail to court.²⁴ According to newspaper accounts, some whites showed sympathy for the black populace by characterizing the white deputies as "roughs" and stating that "many of these [deputies] seemed only to consider the complexion before striking [blows]."²⁵ Still other evidence of whites' sympathy came from Bagby's jailer, who suggested that Cleveland's citizens purchase her freedom. He offered \$100 to that end.²⁶

While some whites expressed sympathy for Bagby and both blacks and whites pleaded for obedience to the law, others of both races responded more aggressively to Bagby's impending return. A large biracial crowd gathered to protest Bagby's departure, but authorities foiled this protest by taking Bagby to a different station.²⁷ Some blacks, however, assembled elsewhere to attempt a rescue. A Cleveland African-American doctor, R.B. Leach, and Charles Langston, an African American and leading member of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society, joined together to plan Bagby's rescue.²⁸ Under the leadership of John Langston, Charles's brother, a group of blacks,

²²*Cleveland Leader*, January 22, 1861; *Cleveland Herald* January 19, 1861 in *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, January 21, 1861; *Cleveland Herald*, January 21, 1861 in *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, January 23, 1861; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, January 21, 1861; *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 23, 1861.

²³*Cleveland Leader*, January 22, 1861.

²⁴*Cleveland Herald*, January 21, 1861 in *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, January 23, 1861; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, January 21 and 22, 1861; *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 23, 1861; Cheek and Cheek, 373.

²⁵*Cleveland Leader*, January 22, 1861. The same sentiment, although not the identical quote, can also be found in the *Liberator*, March 8, 1861 and the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 23, 1861.

²⁶*Cleveland Herald*, January 23, 1861 in *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, January 25, 1861; *Cleveland Leader*, January 24, 1861; *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 2, 1861.

²⁷*Cleveland Leader*, January 25, 1861; *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 2, 1861; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, January 24, 1861 in *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, January 26, 1861.

²⁸*Cleveland Democrat*, date unknown, and *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, date unknown in *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, February 16, 1861.

variously estimated from forty to "over a hundred," gathered at Lima, probably present-day Limaville, a remote railway station on the line between Cleveland and Wheeling.²⁹ Armed with clubs, knives, pistols, and other weapons, these men lined either side of the rails awaiting Bagby's train.³⁰ At an earlier stop, William J. Whipper (black) and W.A. Tyler (white), boarded Bagby's train. Tyler carried concealed pistols and Whipper possessed a long iron bar, the perfect instrument for uncoupling rail cars. The train's conductor aborted this attempted rescue by failing to stop at Lima, and the authorities arrested Tyler and Whipper.³¹ African Americans, not whites, initiated these attempts, with Tyler the exception. African Americans, including the Langston brothers, risked both their liberty and their lives as they sought to free Bagby from armed deputies. This endeavor reflected blacks' group militancy, but blacks also protested as individuals. A lone black waiter at Cleveland's Weddell House refused to serve Bagby's master—a gesture that cost him his job.³² Bagby's case demonstrates the complexity of racial relations—sympathy from whites in their effort to purchase her freedom, condemnation of the deputy "roughs," and even the willingness to allow black crowds to gather and demonstrate during the trial. Yet the case also reveals complex relations among African Americans. Clearly the black community was not monolithic.

Bagby's case also sheds light on nineteenth-century politics and the coming of the Civil War. The setting and timing make this fugitive slave case a particularly crucial one. Antebellum Cleveland and the Western Reserve, especially Oberlin, were

²⁹*Cleveland Plain Dealer*, January 25, 1861; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, January 24, 1861 in *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, January 26, 1861; *Cleveland Leader*, January 25, 1861; the *Leader* article is reprinted in the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 2, 1861; *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, January 25, 1861. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* puts the "mob" at forty, the *Leader* at over 100. The attempted rescue took place at Lima, Ohio. This, however, is not present-day Lima. The articles trace the route, which indicates that the Lima referred to is probably present-day Limaville.

³⁰*National Anti-Slavery Standard*, February 16, 1861; *Cleveland Leader*, January 25, 1861; the *Leader* article is reprinted in the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 2, 1861; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, January 24, 1861 in *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, January 26, 1861.

³¹*Cleveland Plain Dealer*, January 24, 1861 in *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, January 26, 1861; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, January 25, 1861; *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, February 16, 1861; *Cleveland Leader*, January 25, 1861; the *Leader* article is reprinted in the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 2, 1861; Cheek and Cheek, 374.

³²*Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 23, 1861; *Liberator*, March 8, 1861; *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, January 26, 1861.

well known nationally as centers of abolitionist and Republican party sentiment.³³ By January 1861, when Bagby's case came to trial, five states had seceded from the Union.³⁴ Southern border states, especially those adjoining the seceded states, waited anxiously to see if others would join the secessionist movement. Bagby's case then became a test of the respect of Northerners, Republicans, and abolitionists for the Fugitive Slave Law and loyalty to the union despite their hatred of slavery.

That the proceeding was viewed as a test case is unquestioned. Bagby's master, William Goshorn, through his lawyer acknowledged that the trial would "test whether our [Cleveland's] declamations of being law-abiding citizens are true, and are really meant."³⁵ Furthermore, when Ohio's citizens offered to purchase Bagby's freedom, the judge noted that the masters, William and his father John Goshorn, would not take money: "These men want to know if the people will enforce the laws—they care nothing about the \$600 or \$800 [Bagby's value]."³⁶ Later the Goshorns said they would accept money for Bagby's purchase, \$1200, but only after they won the case and she was returned to slavery.³⁷

After the judge declared Bagby a fugitive slave and ordered her return to Virginia, John Goshorn exclaimed: "The South has been looking for such a case as this. I have no office to gain—I want to save the Union." He thanked Cleveland's residents for their hospitality and unstinting support.³⁸ At the trial's end, Bagby's Republican attorneys proposed and passed a resolution that no one interfere with

³³Vacha, 222–23; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 109; *Liberator*, March 8, 1861; *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 2 and 23, 1861; *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, February 16, 1861. The U.S. Commissioner, Bushnell White, at Bagby's trial characterized the area as a "hot bed" of abolitionism, *Cleveland Leader*, January 22, 1861; *Cleveland Leader*, January 21, 1861 in *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 2, 1861. The Western Reserve is the northeast quarter of Ohio claimed by Connecticut during the colonial period.

³⁴James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 235.

³⁵*Cleveland Leader*, January 24, 1861; *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 23, 1861; *Liberator*, March 8, 1861.

³⁶*Liberator*, March 8, 1861; *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 23, 1861.

³⁷*Cleveland Herald*, January 21, 1861 in *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, January 23, 1861; *Cleveland Leader*, January 21, 1861 in *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 2, 1861.

³⁸*Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 23, 1861; *Liberator*, March 8, 1861; *Cleveland Leader*, January 24, 1861 (this version writes "serve the Union" rather than "save the Union"); *Cleveland Herald*, January 21, 1861 in *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, January 23, 1861; *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, January 26, 1861.

Bagby's return.³⁹ The radical Republican paper, Cleveland's *Leader*, praised the city's citizens for their forbearance and noted that "[t]he test question has been tried and the law has been submitted to. We have done our share."⁴⁰ In contrast, abolitionist papers such as Ohio's *Anti-Slavery Bugle* and national weeklies, *The Liberator* and the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, denounced the actions of Ohio's Republicans, excoriating them for not making a more vigorous defense challenging the Fugitive Slave Law's validity.⁴¹ Other national papers, including the New York *Tribune* (Republican) and the Boston *Congregationalist* presented different viewpoints. The *Tribune* praised Bagby's expected return to slavery, whereas the *Congregationalist* printed a letter from a Cleveland resident who condemned the entire affair.⁴² The Wheeling *Intelligencer* characterized the incident as a demonstration of the North's commitment to continue slavery where it then existed. The paper reprinted all the remarks by Bagby's lawyers promising strict adherence to the law, and the Goshorns' thanks to Cleveland's citizens and the United States marshal.⁴³ Subsequently, Wheeling's mayor, on behalf of the town council, wrote the United States marshal on February 15, 1861 thanking him and noting "[t]he firm support given you by the citizens of Cleveland ... in the enforcement of a law objected to by many of the people of the North, is an evidence of a determination to secure to their Southern brethren their just rights under the Constitution ... and will not, [sic] fail to go far towards procuring a speedy ... settlement of the questions now ... threatening the destruction of the Union."⁴⁴

Of course, Bagby's case, while a microcosm of antebellum political, racial, and gender issues, did not halt the steady march of southern states to secession. But perhaps Bagby's return south did at least temporarily dissuade Virginia from

³⁹*Cleveland Herald*, January 23, 1861; *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, January 25, 1861; *Cleveland Leader*, January 24, 1861; *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 23, 1861; *Liberator*, March 8, 1861.

⁴⁰*Cleveland Leader*, January 24, 1861 in *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 2, 1861.

⁴¹*Liberator*, March 8, 1861; *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, February 16, 1861; *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 2 and 23, 1861.

⁴²Correspondence to the *New York Tribune*, date unknown, correspondence to *Boston Congregationalist*, date unknown, in *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, February 16, 1861.

⁴³*Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, January 23, 25 and 26, 1861.

⁴⁴Vacha, 230; *Liberator*, March 15, 1861.

seceding.⁴⁵ Most important, the case demonstrates how a minor local event can shed light on a major national issue. For six days in January Cleveland played host to a dramatic event—an effort to prove the North's and South's commitment to the Union. Here local citizens were striving to resolve national problems by respecting the law, even if it meant compromise with the slaveholding system they detested. Simultaneously, the incident showed the resistance of African Americans, especially women, to a law that buttressed slavery, a system that degraded blacks, free and slave.

If a student had put together these basic facts, the instructor should have the student explore one of the questions described. For example, the political issue, while easily connected to national events, requires more study. Nineteenth-century newspapers are excellent sources of political sentiment because editorial comment abounds. Students must recognize, however, that most nineteenth-century newspapers supported a specific political party so editorials frequently reflected party positions or the views of specific candidates. Papers often stated their political preference on the masthead or revealed their positions in their editorials. Secondary works will aid students in determining the political slants of nineteenth-century papers. To tie the Bagby incident to regional or national concerns, the student must look at multiple papers from other cities and states. Students should seek out papers in each city that represent different political viewpoints.

At the undergraduate level, students are quite capable of connecting local issues to larger concepts. For example, the United States Military Academy requires its history majors to complete a senior thesis. In the first semester of their senior year they read specialized secondary works to acquire context for a thesis. During the second semester they research and write their project. One of my students began a study of women wage-earners in the late nineteenth-century. She posited that women, as members of the Knights of Labor auxiliaries, had as much of a labor consciousness as their male counterparts. As she examined the topic, it became apparent that she needed a specific case study to prove or disprove her hypothesis. She chose to examine her home town, Rochester, New York. By using Rochester newspapers, the Terrance Powderly Papers, and the Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Knights of Labor, she demonstrated a nascent labor-consciousness among women that closely paralleled men's demands and concerns. The local study enabled her to grasp the major issues and concerns of laboring women and contrast them with the national and men's labor movement. What remains to be done is to study how this consciousness evolved, whether there is a distinct difference between women's and

⁴⁵The case's role in delaying Virginia's decision for secession must be tentative until further research is completed. As the Goshorns lived in Virginia's western counties, the state's most pro-Union area, it seems possible that the Bagby case reinforced this sentiment. Increased Union support complicated efforts to rally secessionist sentiment, perhaps contributing to the state's delay in seceding until President Abraham Lincoln issued his call for troops after batteries fired on Fort Sumter.

men's interests, and whether Rochester is typical or atypical of the nineteenth-century women's labor movement. Using her senior thesis as a writing sample for her application, the student is now pursuing the answers to these questions as part of her graduate program.

Only by setting local studies within a macro-framework can historians encourage the next generation to write synthetic history, or at least write history connected to a greater whole. By training undergraduates and graduates to find the major themes that underlie local studies and by teaching students to cast those themes within a narrative framework, teachers will inspire neophyte historians to ask and answer important questions that illuminate and connect the discipline's multiple fields. Perhaps as a by-product the historical discipline will once again value synthesis and reward those scholars who undertake such work.

As for Sara Lucy Bagby, undoubtedly from her perspective, her return to slavery was not an ideal resolution of her case, nor did her re-enslavement persuade Southerners or Northerners that both sides would respect the Fugitive Slave Law. The Civil War began despite the efforts of Cleveland's and Wheeling's citizens. Ultimately the war, partially precipitated by the North's and South's conflicting views of fugitive slave law enforcement, resulted in slavery's end. In Bagby's case, she fled to Union lines and in 1863, with the aid of the ever-supporting W.E. Ambush, she returned to Cleveland and was honored with a "Grand Jubilee."⁴⁶

⁴⁶Check and Check, 375; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, May 4, 1863.