

New book on first black woman journalist in U.S. traces the black press and protest in the 19th century

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Editor's Note: Story Idea for Black History Month

Media Contact: Dolores Davies, (619) 534-5994 or ddavies@ucsd.edu NEW BOOK ON FIRST BLACK WOMAN JOURNALIST IN U.S. TRACES THE BLACK PRESS AND PROTEST IN THE 19TH CENTURY

A new biography on the life and times of Mary Ann Shadd Cary, the first black woman to edit and publish a newspaper in North America, tells the remarkable story of how a courageous, outspoken 19th century black woman used the press and public speaking to fight slavery and oppression in the U.S. and Canada.

"Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the 19th Century," (Indiana University Press) by Jane Rhodes, a professor of ethnic studies at the University of California, San Diego follows the bold trajectory of Shadd Cary, who was a leader and active participant in many of the social and political movements that shaped the 19th century, including abolition, black emigration and nationalism, women's rights, and temperance.

Generally considered to be the first black woman journalist in U.S. history, Shadd Cary was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, N.Y. last summer.

According to Rhodes, a former journalist who teaches about race, gender and media history, Shadd Cary was part of the small black elite who used their education and limited freedoms to fight for the end of slavery and racial oppression. She was also an ambitious adventurer who emigrated to Canada in the 1850s where she taught the children of fugitive slaves and founded her newspaper, the Provincial Freeman.

During the Civil War, she recruited black troops for the Union Army and in the midst of Reconstruction, she entered law school at middle-age to become the second black woman attorney in the nation. A vociferous advocate for women's place in the black public sphere as well as in national politics, Shadd Cary battled with her male contemporaries over the right to have an authoritative voice and insisted on a role in black community politics both before and after the Civil War.

Rhodes' biography is the first book to be written about Shadd Cary in more than two decades. And, while she was clearly an exceptional figure in African American history and women's rights, she is difficult to place as an historical subject, said Rhodes, because she does not fit our expectations of what a radical abolitionist, feminist, or black nationalist should be.

"She consistently defied the conventions and strategies of the movements in which she was involved," said Rhodes. "From her upbringing in an activist family and vantage point as a teacher in embattled all-black schools, she developed a powerful commitment to the cause of black liberation and empowerment. But, she was equally critical of the social and political practices she observed in black communities."

Although Shadd Cary has been accorded folk hero status in Canada, where she is recognized as a pioneer for her role in building black communities in that country, she has never received the recognition that she is due in the U.S., said Rhodes. With the publication of her new biography, Rhodes is hopeful that Shadd Cary will get some of

the recognition that she deserves in the U.S., where she returned to live, teach, and fight for the rights of African Americans and women after the Civil War.

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