HISTORICAL ISSUES AROUND BLACK IMMIGRATION TO CANADA AND HOW THEY HAVE AFFECTED THE BLACK COMMUNITY

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Is the issue of immigration and integration historically different for the Black community as opposed to other immigrant groups? And what issues were confronted in each of the four main phases of Black immigration to Canada beginning in the 18th century: the late 1700s influx of people when free Blacks emigrated from the U.S. as part of the wave of Loyalists in response to the American Revolution; the northward movement of runaway slaves during the U.S. Civil War; the arrival of peoples from the French and English Caribbean between the early 1960s and the late 1990s; and the increased immigration of French and English-speaking Africans at the turn of this century?

THE BLACK LOYALISTS (1783 – 1800)

The first major influx of Blacks to Canada was after the American Revolutionary War. More than 3,000 Blacks immigrated to Canada "under the Lion's Paw" following the British exit from the 13 colonies beginning around 1783. As the revolution began in the late 1770s, the British were badly outnumbered and in desperation promised freedom to any slave who fought the Americans on their behalf. The response was overwhelming, and over 30,000 slaves joined them. They worked as soldiers, labourers, pilots, cooks and musicians, and they were a major part of the British war effort.

As documented at the Canadian history portal blackloyalist.com:

> "In 1775 Lord Dunmore, the Royal Governor of Virginia, was in a desperate position. Several hundred armed rebels controlled the streets and fields of Virginia. Dunmore had been forced to flee the capital of Williamsburg for the safety of the naval town of Norfolk. Indesperation, Dunmore issued a proclamation calling on all able

bodied men to assist him in the defense of the colony, including the slaves of rebels. These Blacks were promised their freedom in exchange for service in the Army. This was controversial at the time, especially among Loyalist slave holders who had feared a mass slave rebellion. Some thought Dunmore had gone mad. Still, this strategy was extremely successful. Within a month Dunmore had raised 800 soldiers. Lord Dunmore's Proclamation was the first mass emancipation of slaves in American history, and as such it deserves to be remembered as an important moment in history."

The British began to see the value of this policy as economic warfare. Encouraging slaves to flee would weaken the plantation economy that supported the rebels, and southern landowners would be forced to use their men to guard slaves instead of fighting the British. In 1779, Sir Henry Clinton issued the Philipsburg Proclamation, which expanded Dunmore's Proclamation to include any rebel slave who could escape, ready to serve for the British or not, anywhere in the colonies.

Following the end of hostilities, the British were forced to guarantee the protection of the more than 30,000 former slaves and Black freemen who joined their cause. Not being able to do so in any significant manner in the colonies, the Black Loyalists — as they were called — were promised Certificates of Freedom, 40 acres of land and opportunity in Canada amidst a society of like-minded British subjects. As such, the British brought some 3,000 Blacks to Nova Scotia from North Carolina in 1783.

However, upon their arrival, they learned a different reality than what had been promised. Essentially they never received their land. They were so dependent upon British supplies that they worked like slaves as indentured servants to make a living. They were never treated equally and were in many cases cheated out of land and supplies by British land agents, forcing the Black population to become cheap labourers. In the end, most chose to go to the West African country of Sierra Leone, led by people like Boston King, who had convinced them more opportunity was to be found back in Africa.

PRE AND POST AMERICAN CIVIL WAR (1790 – 1910)

Many people believe that Blacks are recent arrivals to Canada, when in reality nothing could be further from the truth. Since the arrival of the first slave ships at Jamestown Virginia in 1619, Blacks have found their way to Canada either as slaves, fugitive run-aways or as free persons seeking opportunity and freedom. By 1900 Black settlement spanned the country from British Columbia through to Nova Scotia, with a preponderance of those settling in Southern Ontario.

In mid-19th-century Ontario, many found the opportunity they were looking for as a variety of settlements friendly to Blacks flourished there, including the Wilberforce Settlement north of London, the Elgin Settlement at Buxton, the Oro Settlement above Lake Simcoe and the Refugee Home Society near Windsor. These settlements were largely in rural regions as many of the escaped slaves had a desire to own their own farms and had the requisite farming skills to be successful. Still others found employment, opened businesses and established deep community roots in the heart of the city, particularly in the City of Toronto.

At one time, Toronto was home to some 3,000 Blacks residents, which benefitted from waves of immigration after 1833, when the British Empire abolished slavery, and again after 1850, when the U.S. passed the Fugitive Slave Act. This law allowed slave-owners the right to recapture fugitive slaves, even in slave-free states in the North. Blacks also sought their freedom through the Underground Railroad, the network of secret safehouses that led escaping slaves to Canada. Movement along the Underground Railroad began as early as 1790, but really began to flourish under the efforts of abolitionists from about 1830 until the end of the U.S. Civil War in 1865.

Clearly, the newly arrived Blacks found conditions more to their liking than the Black Loyalists had during their arrival in the latter part 18th century in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Although there was some resistance to their presence, Blacks found they were welcome in many of the aforementioned communities, as well as in Saint Catharines, Ont., where the renowned freedom fighter Harriet Tubman lived while on "America's Most Wanted List" for 15 years as a leading "Conductor" on the Underground Railroad.

ORDER-IN-COUNCIL P.C. 1911-1324 — THE PROPOSED BAN ON BLACK IMMIGRATION TO CANADA

Order-in-Council P.C. 1324 was approved on August 12, 1911 by the cabinet of Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier. The purpose of the order was to ban Black persons from entering Canada for a period of one year because, it read, "the Negro race… is deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada."

Following the end of the U.S. Civil War, many Blacks had already left Canada to return to the United States. As with our American counterparts, Canadians looked to the West to further develop the country, and to do so they recruited farmers to work the land, a settlement movement that dispossessed First Nations of territory they had occupied for millennia. Both the Canadian and U.S. governments promoted mass migration and settlement of the West.

Many of those pushing westward to find suitable land were former slaves, and they were among the pioneers who made the West an agricultural powerhouse. However, many in the U.S. did not find conditions to their liking, as the so-called "Jim Crow" laws, enforcing segregation and other restrictions, were passed to prevent Blacks from gaining access to land, to voting and/or owning property of any kind. However, Blacks gradually became aware that Canada had no such laws in place and began to look northward for opportunity in the late 19th and early 20th century.

As the influx of Blacks began to take hold because of the Canadian government's offers of cheap land and fast-track immigration for certified farmers, some citizens of Alberta began to become wary of their Black neighbours. In fact, in 1905, some constituents petitioned their member of Parliament, Minister of the Interior Frank Oliver, to bar Blacks from Canada because of "the serious menace to the future welfare of a large portion of western Canada, by reason of the alarming influx of Negro settlers," as documented by Historica Canada.

The Canadian government encouraged a great wave of western colonization and immigration

during the this era. However, a number of exclusionary immigration policies were in place during this period (such as the Chinese Head Tax), most of which were developed in response to prejudiced public opinion. In addition, the interior ministry (in charge of immigration) prioritized incoming groups by ethnicity, and in descending preference. On top of the list were the British and Americans, followed by northern and central Europeans. Jews, people from Asia, Roma people and Black persons were at the bottom of the list.

Thus the infamous Order-in-Council P.C. 1911-1324 was approved by cabinet but never presented to the House of Commons to be enacted into law. Although the law never passed, the Canadian government applied what one might call "disinformation tactics" that discouraged many Blacks from entering Canada. In fact, officials began to restrict access to immigration information and subjected Blacks to rigged medical exams at the border to discourage them. They sent official agents into Oklahoma to dissuade Blacks from coming by telling them that the racism in Canada was as bad as that in the U.S. and that the cold weather would be harmful to their health.

Despite these racist tactics, many Blacks did come to Alberta and settled in and around Edmonton from approximately 1905 through 1912. One such settlement, Amber Valley, is the subject of a special attention — including a documentary film — because it was the last community resulting from that wave of immigration. In many cases, the dissuasion tactics of the government worked and the normal pattern of waves of immigration from the same populations ceased, but not before there were Black settlements in Junkins, Campsie and Keystone in Alberta (now Wildwood, Barrhead and Breton respectively), and two settlements in Saskatchewan: Eldon and Maidstone.

The racist immigration policies and tactics of the Canadian government lasted until the early 1960s and the next great wave of Black immigration to Canada.

THE PROMISE OF IMMIGRATION (1950 – 1990)

Although the 20th century did not start off with a bang for Black immigrants — who were still largely barred from entering Canada, even after a new *Immigration Act* was implemented — things got much better in the latter half. In 1960, then-prime minister John Diefenbaker introduced a Bill of Rights that led two years later to a new Immigration Bill being introduced in the House of Commons. The bill largely removed all previous discriminatory elements based on race or ethnic origin. However, European immigrants still enjoyed a wider range of opportunities for family repatriation than non-Europeans.

By 1970, Asians and Blacks accounted for 25 per cent of all immigrants to Canada. Over the next few years, there were many changes to the country's policies — not the least of which were the Multiculturalism Act of 1972 and the Immigration Settlement and Adaptation Program of 1974. These policies made Canada more appealing to newcomers, and the third wave of immigrants from English- and French-speaking Caribbean nations began.

This wave was initiated by the dissolution of the British Empire and the emergence of the idea of the Commonwealth, which encouraged Caribbean

Blacks to emigrate to Canada. Statistics Canada shows that by the mid-1960s, there were 15,000 Blacks of Caribbean heritage living in Toronto. Since then, hundreds of thousands of Blacks have come from that part of the world to Canada; by the year 2000, more than 600,000 blacks lived in this country. Predictably, Black Canadian immigrants have settled in provinces that best match the language of their country of origin; as such, as of 2001, 90 per cent of immigrants of Haitian origin lived in Québec, while 85 per cent of those of Jamaican origin lived in Ontario.

Interestingly enough, about 30 per cent of Black Canadians have Jamaican heritage, and another 32 per cent have roots elsewhere in the Caribbean or Bermuda. Youth is served well, as 60 per cent of all Black Canadians are under the age of 35. Ontario is home to 57 per cent of Black Canadians, while 97 per cent of Black Canadians live in urban areas. Black women in Canada outnumber black men by 32,000. According to the 2011 census, nearly one million Black Canadians — 945,665 people — classified themselves as having African/Caribbean heritage. Clearly, the population has dramatically changed in the last 50 years due to the more inclusive immigration policies of the last half of the 20th century.

The Black community represents approximately 2.9 per cent of the Canadian population, and amongst them are the diverse representations of the African diaspora — of which there are nearly 300,000 citizens as of 2007. The African-Canadian community is mainly found in British Columbia, Ontario, Québec and Alberta. Those with African roots are the most predominant recent group of Blacks to immigrate to Canada, and mainly come from Somali, South Africa, Ghana and Ethiopia.

THE COMMUNITY TODAY

Regardless of our origins, or whether our ancestors came here in the 18th, 19th, 20th or 21st centuries, we all face the same issues today. The issue of racism still plagues our legacy as it did our forefathers. Our community still is underrepresented within Canadian institutions, the civil service and among elected officials. We are 50 per cent more likely to be unemployed, particularly amongst those under 35 years of age, and are overrepresented in the social service and penal systems.. Statistics indicate that 41 per cent of the children and youth in the care of the Children's Aid Society of Toronto are Black. Yet only 8.2 per cent of Toronto's population under the age of 18 is Black.

The promises of immigration don't always come true — that you will find a better life in another community, or that existing populations will be welcoming to your presence. The challenges seem to be the same whether in 1783 or 2017.