

Summer 2005

# Canadian Background of Black Mainers

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# THE GRIOT

Preserving  
African American  
History in Maine

University of Southern Maine

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## African American Collection of Maine

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## From the Editor's Desk



I was fortunate enough to have spent the recent spring break with my family and friends in Ontario, Canada. "Going home" has always been a sweet experience for me. My heart actually races when I cross the Peace Bridge in upstate New York or land at Toronto's Pearson Airport. The English and French "Welcome to Canada/Bienvenue au Canada" signs emblazoned with huge, red maple leaves are beautiful sights. Once over the border, the speed limit is posted in kilometers and all roads lead to Tim Hortons. O Canada!

But I can't lie. This sweet nostalgia is tempered by the realization that things have changed. Places have changed, family has changed, friends have changed. One notable improvement, however, is the increased attention given to Black

Canadian (African-Canadian) history and culture in the press. Things have changed significantly in the almost 14 years since I lived in Ontario.

In celebration of what it means to go home, this issue of the *Griot* focuses on Black Canada: the Canadian background of Black Mainers, a featured book on Black Canadian women, and recent publications in Black Canadian history and culture. Of note is John Cooper's children's book on Olympic medalist Ray Lewis. I had the pleasure of meeting Lewis in the summer of 1992, when I interviewed him for my master's thesis. Ray Lewis died in 2003 at the age of 93, two years after receiving Canada's highest honor, the Governor General's Order of Canada.

—Maureen Elgersman Lee, *associate professor of history and faculty scholar for the African American Collection of Maine at USM*

### A Place in Time:

## The Canadian Background of Black Mainers

What do the American Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Underground Railroad all have in common? They all expanded Canada's Black population in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Other means have included nativity and slavery, as well as Caribbean and African migrations. During the eras of both the American Revolution and the War of 1812, Blacks moved to colonial Canada as British Loyalists—whether as human property or as free people of color. In place by the 1830s, but achieving peak volume during mid century, the Underground Railroad assisted Blacks in reaching freedom in Canada by conducting them to temporary refuges known as stations. Other Blacks also made it to Canada without such assistance.<sup>1</sup>

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Blacks from New Brunswick and Nova Scotia migrated to Maine in significant numbers. Of Maine's larger cities, Bangor had the clearest Canadian imprint. Turn-of-the-century Bangor witnessed an unprecedented influx of Blacks from places like Fredericton, Woodstock, Kingsclear, and Gagetown, New Brunswick. Migrants with surnames like Leek, Dymond, Heughan, Peters, O'Ree, Payne, and McCarty relocated or established families in the area. By 1930, the last year for which the United States government has released a manuscript census, Canadians accounted for approximately 95 percent of all non-U.S.-born Blacks living in the Queen City. In Portland, the imprint was slightly different. As a group, Canadian-born Blacks seem to have been less visible, and more reported their birthplace as Nova Scotia.<sup>2</sup>

*continued*



Enola Heughan, ca. late 1800s.  
Photographer: Frank Weston,  
Bangor. [Gerald E. Talbot  
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## Recent Publications

The following books were reviewed recently in *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, the journal of the Canadian Ethnic Studies Association (CESA), and may be of interest to readers of the *Griot*. The reviews may be reviewed in their entirety by choosing the 'Journal' option at the CESA Web site, [www.ucalgary.ca/CESA](http://www.ucalgary.ca/CESA).

Yvonne Bobb-Smith. *I Know Who I Am: A Caribbean Woman's Identity in Canada*. Toronto: Women's Press, 2003. [Reviewed by Camille Isaacs, University of Calgary.]

Yvonne Bobb-Smith's recent book on home, identity, migration, racism, sexism, and other related topics weaves her voice with those of more than forty other Caribbean Canadian women who live primarily in the greater Toronto area.

George Elliott Clarke. *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. [Reviewed by Camille Isaacs, University of Calgary.]

Clarke, a prolific writer and award-winning professor at the University of Toronto, uses his three-part book to map African-Canadian literature as distinct from Euro-Canadian and African-American literary traditions.

John Cooper. *Rapid Ray: The Story of Ray Lewis*. Toronto: Tundra Books, 2002. [Reviewed by Corey Coates, University of Calgary.]

In a children's version of his 1999 biography, *Shadow Running: Ray Lewis*, Canadian Railway porter and Olympic athlete, Cooper tells the bittersweet life story of the late Ray Lewis. A native of Hamilton, Ontario, Lewis worked on the Canadian railroad; he is better known, however, for medaling in the 1932 Olympics and for receiving the Governor-General's highest distinction, the Order of Canada, in 2001.

Jennifer Kelly. *Borrowed Identities*. New York: Peter Lang, 2004. [Reviewed by Pramod Nayar, University of Hyderabad.]

Based on Alberta research, Kelly attempts to negotiate the terrain of Black identity formation in Canada, a complex process drawn heavily from the consumption of African-American culture, but also shaped by Canadian and Caribbean cultural forms.

## The Canadian Background of Black Mainers

*continued*

Canadian roots continue to be a source of both pride and fraternity for Black Mainers. Such genealogical lines, which also stretch across the United States, the Caribbean, and Africa, illustrate the complex influences in Maine's Black history and culture.

### Notes

1. Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, 2d ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 142-177; William Spray, *The Blacks in New Brunswick* (Fredericton: Brunswick Press, 1972), 16-17.
2. Randall Kenan, *Walking on Water: Black American Lives at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 80, 91-92; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Twelfth (1900), Thirteenth (1910), and Fifteenth (1930) Censuses of the United States (microfilm), Maine State Archives, Augusta.

## In Review

Rella Braithwaite and Tessa Benn-Ireland. *Some Black Women: Profiles of Black Women in Canada*. Toronto: Sister Vision, Black Women and Women of Colour Press, 1993.

Rella Braithwaite and Tessa Benn-Ireland's 1993 book, *Some Black Women*, introduces the reader to more than 80 African-Canadian women, past and present, over its first two chapters. The women include Rose Fortune, Halifax, Nova Scotia's self-appointed nineteenth-century police woman and Barbados-born Anne Cools, the first Black appointed to the Canadian Senate. *Some Black Women* also briefly sketches Black women's club activity, primarily in Toronto, Montreal, and Halifax. It includes Montreal's Coloured Women's Club (1902), Halifax's Women of the Well (1914), and the Congress of Black Women (1973). But that is only the first three chapters.

The balance of the book is a valuable, highly readable primer on the history of Canada's Black churches, media, organizations, and landmarks. Although somewhat flawed, Braithwaite and Benn-Ireland's timeline of "quick facts" includes the 1967 organization of the Toronto-based carnival known as Caribana, the 1969 creation of the National Black Coalition of Canada, and Lincoln M. Alexander's highly celebrated 1985 appointment as Ontario's first Black lieutenant governor.

While heavily focused on African-Canadian history in central and eastern Canada, at the virtually exclusion of the western provinces, *Some Black Women* is useful in introducing readers to the depth and breadth of Black women's history in Canada.