

“A Microcosm of the General Struggle”: Black Thought and Activism in Montreal, 1960-1969

by

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation is a history of Black radical thought and activism in 1960s Montreal. Montreal played an important role in the development of new tendencies in Black radicalism as a community of expatriate West Indian activists, frustrated at the failures of post-colonial West Indian states to fulfill the promises of independence, influenced by the growing radicalization of the African-American freedom struggle, and reacting to the racism they experienced in Canada, contributed to the development of a distinctly West Indian approach to Black Power and to an intensification of Canadian anti-racist activism.

West Indian intellectuals and activists theorized Canada's relationship with the West Indies as one in which a neoimperial power extracted wealth from, and exercised political control over, the Commonwealth Caribbean. These critiques were a key aspect of the West Indian Black Power movement, which set itself apart from its African-American counterpart by putting relationships between the formerly-colonized nations and the industrialized world, and not domestic relations between Black people and a white power structure, at its core. Montreal was a site for debate over three key intellectual building blocks of West Indian Black Power: Lloyd Best's notion of intellectual freedom, C.L.R. James's revolutionary readings of West Indian history and identity, and Walter Rodney's explorations of African history as a revolutionary tool.

Secure in a national mythology of Canada as nation free of systematic racism, Montrealers often refused to acknowledge the relevance of anti-racist activism to Canada.

Moreover, their responses to political developments in the West Indies and in Africa revealed the extent to which enduring ideas of Blacks as underdeveloped and oftentimes violent subjects—legacies of an imperial history that Canada was actively eschewing as it formed a new national identity—continued to shape Canadians’ understanding of the wider world.

By focusing on Black Power thought and action outside of the African-American context, this dissertation enriches our understanding of Black Power as an inherently transnational phenomenon that drew on a multiplicity of both international and local contexts to advocate for freedom from racism and imperial and neoimperial domination.

## Introduction

Canada's most significant student protest of the 1960s came to an end on 11 February 1969, when the Montreal police broke up a group of protesters who had been occupying the computer center of Sir George Williams University for nearly two weeks. The confrontation between the protesters and police ended in violence and destruction. The computers were destroyed and fire gutted much of the ninth floor of Sir George's downtown Hall Building, causing some two million dollars in damages. At the end of what became known as the "Sir George Williams Affair," the "Computer Center Affair," or the "Anderson Affair," (after the professor at the center of the protest) the police arrested 98 people; 42 were described by the *Montreal Gazette* as Black, and 24 of those as being from the West Indies. Several of the protesters were beaten by police who also taunted them with racial slurs. On the streets below, onlookers chanted "Let the niggers burn."

The occupation of the computer center was a protest against the university's handling of charges of racism against a biology professor named Perry Anderson. Anderson had been accused in the spring semester of 1968 of classroom racism by six Black West Indian students who maintained that he graded Black students more harshly than white students and that he had friendly relationships in the classroom with whites but maintained an aloof attitude towards Blacks. There were also complaints about the quality of his instruction and the number of lectures he had canceled.

The Sir George administration conducted an informal internal investigation, and found no reason to pursue the charges, but failed to notify the students who had lodged the original complaint. By the fall 1968 semester, students began to pressure the administration on the issue. Renewed interest in the racism charges was fueled in great part by the October 1968 Congress of Black Writers, a conference in Montreal that featured, among others, the African-American activist Stokely Carmichael, the Afro-Trinidadian historian and critic C.L.R. James, the Guyanese historian Walter Rodney, and several other luminaries from the world of transnational Black activism. This event is perhaps best remembered for its link to the so-called “Rodney riots,” unrest that broke out in Kingston when the Jamaican government refused to allow Rodney to enter the country en route home from the Congress.

In response to renewed demands from the Black students, Sir George convened a hearing committee to address the Anderson question but the students did not accept its makeup, and eventually walked out on the process and occupied the computer center, demanding a committee that they approved of, as well as consideration for those student activists who had lost classroom and study time while working to resolve the situation. After nearly two weeks, the administration asked the police to clear out the occupiers.

The protest had important effects on racial politics in Canada, drawing attention to a Black population who had long been working to raise awareness of Canada’s generally-unacknowledged racism and acting as a rallying point for young Blacks in Canada who were increasingly drawn to radical approaches to their struggle against racism, informed in large part by African-American Black Power discourse and activism. *Uhuru*, a Montreal newspaper founded in the wake of the crisis at Sir George, called the protest “a microcosm of our general

struggle.”<sup>1</sup>

The Sir George Williams Affair also had important ramifications in the Commonwealth Caribbean, home to the six students who had lodged the original charges against Anderson and to a growing number of Black people in Montreal and the rest of Canada, thanks to a loosening of Canadian immigration restrictions over the course of the 1960s. Young West Indians, dissatisfied with the failures of the first generation of nationalist leaders to deliver on the promises of independence were developing their own approach to Black Power, one that drew on the key theorists of the increasingly radical African-American freedom movement, notably Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael, but that was also grounded in the West Indies’ own history of resistance to slavery and colonial oppression, drawing on a broad variety of regional intellectual, activist and cultural touchstones including C.L.R. James, Jamaican pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey, and Rastafari, the political, spiritual, and cultural movement rooted in an Afrocentric ethos.

When news of the Affair broke in the West Indies, student activists protested in support of their comrades up north, and began to write strident critiques of Canada’s role in the economic marginalization of the West Indies. A little more than a year after the end of the occupation, young people in Port-of-Spain took to the streets in support of ten Trinidadian nationals on trial in Montreal for their alleged role in the destruction of the Sir George Williams computer center, picketing the Canadian High Commission and the local head office of the Royal Bank of Canada, two symbols of Canada’s political and economic role in the extraction of West Indian wealth by the industrialized nations. The protests quickly escalated, bringing together a coalition of students, labor, and eventually elements of the armed forces, very nearly bringing down the government of Eric Williams.

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1 *Uhuru*, February 16, 1970.

This dissertation examines Black activism in Montreal in the 1960s and reactions to that activism with a particular focus on the role that Black activists and intellectuals in the city played in the development of a distinctly West Indian school of Black Power. I trace how Black Canadians, West Indians, Africans, and African-Americans living in and passing through the city theorized and militated against racism and imperialism in Canada, the Commonwealth Caribbean, Africa, and the United States, and how the anti-racist and anti-imperialist conceptions developed in the city contributed to the shaping of the intellectual base of West Indian Black Power. I also examine how Montrealers and other Canadians responded to the anti-racist ideas and activism unfolding around them. Their reactions were often grounded in a disregard for the possibility that anti-racist thought and activism could be of any relevance in Canada, a country that imagined itself to be largely free of structural racism. Canadian reactions to anti-racist thought and activism often revealed a shared fear among Canadians that Black radical thought and activism was, by its very nature, informed by anti-white racism and inherently violent. By tracing the role that West Indians and other Blacks in Canada played in shaping approaches to Black Power that specifically addressed the situations of Blacks in Canada and in the Caribbean, this dissertation ultimately argues that Black Power needs to be understood not simply as an African-American project (albeit one with important international components) but as an intellectual and political phenomenon that unfolded in multiple places and was shaped by both transnational currents and specifically local dynamics.

One of the central debates among Black activists in Canada in the 1960s was over the exact nature of Black Power and its relevance outside of the African-American context in which it was generally understood to have originated and to have the greatest salience. Scholars of

Black Power have addressed the international dimensions of the movement—it would be impossible not to, given how Black Power activists, notably the Black Panther Party, were cognizant of and engaged with the international aspects of the African-American freedom struggle—but have largely put African-American experiences and histories at the focal point of their studies.<sup>2</sup> Recent scholarship is doing more to frame Black Power as a political, cultural and intellectual movement that unfolded in multiple sites across the African diaspora. As Nico Slate argues, the “global history of Black Power ... is the story of many interwoven, at times fraught, and often surprising relationships between Black Power activists and their ideas throughout the world.”<sup>3</sup>

An approach to the study of Black Power that engages with both its transnational and particular local manifestations not only forces us to re-think Black Power as a complex and diverse movement, it also facilitates engaging with the broader stakes of the movement, as activists and intellectuals militated not only against racial discrimination narrowly defined, but against a broad set of issues germane to a variety of international and local contexts. Manthia Diawara sees figures such as the Négritude writers as not just fighting for a narrowly-construed notion of racial justice, but as “part of an international movement which held the promise of

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2 Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, *Black against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (Holt Paperbacks, 2007); Peniel E. Joseph, *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (Routledge, 2006); Peniel E. Joseph, *Stokely: A Life* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2014); John T. McCartney, *Black Power Ideologies: An Essay in African-American Political Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); Cedric Johnson, *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); William L. Van Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (University Of Chicago Press, 1993); Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Komozi Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

3 Nico Slate, “Introduction: The Borders of Black Power,” in *Black Power beyond Borders: The Global Dimensions of the Black Power Movement*, ed. Nico Slate (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1.

universal freedom of workers and colonized people worldwide.”<sup>4</sup> As Paul Gilroy points out, Black radical activists have not only struggled against racism; they also fought against “capitalism, coerced industrialization...[and] the ethnocentrism and European solipsism that these processes help to reproduce.” A fight with such a scope, Gilroy, writes, is best understood in terms of the “inescapable pluralities involved in the movements of black peoples.”<sup>5</sup>

The West Indian Black Power movement is a prime example of how the transnational movement of people and ideas led to activism directed at broad-based social and political change that was rooted in a particular set of local circumstances. West Indian Black Power grew largely out of popular dissatisfaction in West Indian nations’ political and economic situations in the first decade of independence. “A crisis of failed expectations” arose as early optimism about decolonization became anger at the continuing dependency, inequality, and racism faced by the West Indian people. The failure of the leaders of newly-independent states to secure their nations’ political, economic, and cultural sovereignty from the industrialized nations—especially Britain, the United States and Canada—created “a crisis of political legitimacy” that fueled a sense that “conventional politics” were obsolete, creating a desire for revolutionary change.<sup>6</sup> Strongly influenced by the work of the New World Group, an intellectual collective headed by the economist Lloyd Best that was a dominant voice in West Indian radical critique,<sup>7</sup> West Indian

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4 Manthia Diawara, “Act One,” in *Soul: Black Power, Politics, and Pleasure*, ed. Monique Guillory and Richard C. Green (NYU Press, 1998), 289–98.

5 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Harvard University Press, 1993), 30.

6 Kate Quinn, “Introduction: New Perspectives on Black Power in the Caribbean,” in *Black Power in the Caribbean*, ed. Kate Quinn (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 3; Kate Quinn, “Black Power in the Caribbean Context,” in *Black Power in the Caribbean*, ed. Kate Quinn (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 32; Bert J. Thomas, “Caribbean Black Power: From Slogan to Practical Politics,” *Journal of Black Studies* 22, no. 3 (1992): 397.

7 Paul Hébert, “Thought Is Action for Us’: Lloyd Best, New World, and the West Indian Postcolonial Left,” in *A New Insurgency: The Port Huron Statement and Its Time*, ed. Gregory Parker and Howard Brick (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2015); Brian Meeks, Norman Girvan, and Anthony Bogue, “A Caribbean Life—An Interview with Lloyd Best,” in *Caribbean Reasonings: The Thought of New World, The Quest for Decolonisation* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2010), 221–327; Norman

Black Power activists attacked the continued economic domination of the Caribbean by industrialized nations, and the control of local resources by the light-skinned middle classes. Walter Rodney outlined three central tenets of the movement: a break with “white racist” imperialism; the seizure of power by the “black masses”; and a “cultural reconstruction” of the West Indies “in the image of the blacks.”<sup>8</sup> This multifaceted movement involved activists who, reflecting the West Indies’ cultural diversity, engaged with a wide variety of approaches to addressing the issues they confronted, ranging from revolutionary socialism to spiritually-based movements such as Rastafari.<sup>9</sup> With a focus on racism, poverty, and political marginalization, the movement “connected with popular currents and garnered broad, mass support,” and advocated “community-based notions of political participation.”<sup>10</sup>

West Indian Black Power drew extensively on the region’s long history of resistance, especially Rastafari and Garveyism, and took inspiration from the language and symbols of anti-racist struggles from around the globe, notably the African-American struggle, to attack what they saw as the root causes of their own oppression; the political and economic marginalization of the West Indies in their relationship with the industrialized world, and the reproduction of colonial power structures within newly-independent states. as Brian Meeks notes, the phrase “Black Power” gave young West Indians a “a ready-made slogan” with which to articulate their

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Girvan, “New World and Its Critics,” in *Caribbean Reasonings: The Thought of New World, The Quest for Decolonisation*, ed. Brian Meeks and Norman Girvan (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2010), 3–29; David Scott, “Vocation of a Caribbean Intellectual: An Interview with Lloyd Best by David Scott,” *Small Axe* 1, no. 1 (February 1997): 119–39.

8 Walter Rodney, *The Groundings with My Brothers* (London: Bogle-L’Ouverture Press, 1996), 29.

9 William R. Lux, “Black Power in the Caribbean,” *Journal of Black Studies* 3, no. 2 (1972): 207; Brian Meeks, “The Rise and Fall of Caribbean Black Power,” in *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International Since the Age of Revolution*, ed. Michael O. West, William G. Martin, and Fanon Che Wilkins (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 199; Quinn, “Introduction: New Perspectives on Black Power in the Caribbean,” 2; Quinn, “Black Power in the Caribbean Context,” 26–27; Thomas, “Caribbean Black Power: From Slogan to Practical Politics,” 393–395.

10 Meeks, “The Rise and Fall of Caribbean Black Power,” 200–201.

own anti-racist, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist messages.<sup>11</sup> Walter Rodney said that Caribbean radical thinkers saw the anticolonial struggle not simply as a fight for formal political independence but also as a struggle against attempts by Britain, the U.S. and their “neocolonial lackeys” to maintain an economic grip on the region.<sup>12</sup> James Millette sees the West Indies of the late 1960s as being split between the masses who saw independence as “a social process whereby the circumstances of their lives would be decidedly changed for the better” and political actors who treated it as an opportunity to merely replace white officials with black ones without changing the power structure.<sup>13</sup>

Many of these debates, this dissertation argues, played themselves in the space between Canada and the Caribbean, and were profoundly shaped by both events in Montreal and the specific experiences of West Indians living as Black people in Canada. Alongside critiques of Canada’s role in the extraction of wealth from West Indian nations and the continued, racially-based political marginalization of the West Indian people, three ideas that were central to the intellectual foundations of West Indian Black Power were central to debates among West Indian activists in Montreal. The first of these is Lloyd Best’s desire to ground the theory and practice of West Indian radicalism in the specific study of the history, economics, and politics of the Commonwealth Caribbean. For Best, it was impossible to move forward with revolutionary action unless West Indian minds had been thoroughly decolonized. Second is C.L.R. James’s use of history to cast the West Indian people as an inherently revolutionary people. In doing so, James contributed greatly to the grounding West Indian Black Power in an oppositional tradition

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11 Ibid., 198.

12 Walter Rodney, *Walter Rodney Speaks: The Making of an African Intellectual* (Trenton, NJ.: Africa World Press, 1990), 34.

13 James Millette, “Towards the Black Power Revolt of 1970,” in *The Black Power Revolution 1970: A Retrospective*, ed. Selwyn D. Ryan and Taimoon Stewart (St. Augustine, Trinidad: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1995), 69.

dating back to the era of slavery. Finally, Walter Rodney put the detailed study of African history and culture at the center of his revolutionary politics. In doing so, Rodney contributed to the ability of West Indians to root their politics in a distinctly Black ethos and to frame their struggle as part of a global Black struggle.

Montreal's role as a hub of transnational 1960s Black thought and activism has drawn increasing attention from scholars in recent years. Paul Buhle's biography of the Antiguan activist Tim Hector puts the activities of diasporic West Indian intellectuals in the city at the center of his analysis of the Caribbean New Left.<sup>14</sup> Sean Mills argues that Québécois nationalist intellectuals, who saw themselves, in a not-unproblematic way, given Quebec's own colonial domination of First Nations peoples, as victims of colonial oppression, worked to "develop a movement proposing that Quebec join with the nations of the Third World in forming ... 'different social imaginaries and alternative rationalities,'" and drew extensively on the writings of figures such as Stokely Carmichael, Frantz Fanon, the French-Tunisian writer Albert Memmi and Aimé Césaire, as Black activists turned the city into "a major center of Black thought" that was "international in scope" while being "deeply embedded in the lived realities of Montreal."<sup>15</sup>

It is the work of Montreal scholar David Austin that has done the most to reveal how, in Montreal in the 1960s, West Indian students, intellectuals and activists developed a body of critique that drew upon both Caribbean intellectual and political thought, especially that of C.L.R. James, and the experience of being Black in Canada. West Indian and other Black activists in Montreal worked to "exercise an internally generated vision of themselves and their place in the world," and "asserted their right to live a life of freedom." The Canadian state (as

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14 Paul Buhle, *Tim Hector: A Caribbean Radical's Story* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006).

15 Sean Mills, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal* (Montreal, Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 3: 95–96.

well as the American state) took these assertions seriously, taking steps of dubious legality to shut down this intellectual and activist tendency.<sup>16</sup>

As Austin writes, Montreal had “its own expression of Black Power which ... drew inspiration from African American struggles against economic and racial injustice, but was nonetheless native to Canada,” making the city “the most active site of Anglophone Caribbean political activity” in the 1960s.<sup>17</sup> Many leading figures in West Indian political thought and activism spent time in Montreal, often as students before returning to the Caribbean, including Best, Rodney, Robert Hill, who was later involved in Jamaica’s Abeng movement, a radical political collective that published a short-lived newspaper of that same name,<sup>18</sup> the Antiguan political activist Tim Hector,<sup>19</sup> Roosevelt (Rosie) Douglas, an activist from Dominica who briefly served as Prime Minister of that country, and Arnhim Eustace, who was Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Other West Indians who remained in Canada became critical voices and organizers in local and national anti-racist struggles, such as Clarence Bayne, an economist from Trinidad and Dorothy Wills, an educator from Dominica, activists in numerous local and national organizations and founding members of the National Black Coalition of Canada

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16 David Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation: Race, Sex, and Security in Sixties Montreal* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2013) Other works by Austin dealing with West Indian intellectuals and activists in Montreal include: David Austin, “All Roads Led to Montreal: Black Power, the Caribbean, and the Black Radical Tradition in Canada,” *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 4 (2007): 516–39; Alfie Roberts, *A View for Freedom: Alfie Roberts Speaks on the Caribbean, Cricket, Montreal, and C.L.R. James*, ed. David Austin (Montreal: Alfie Roberts Institute, 2005); C.L.R. James, *You Don’t Play With Revolution: The Montreal Lectures of C.L.R. James*, ed. David Austin (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2009).

17 Austin, “All Roads Led to Montreal,” 521; David Austin, “Introduction—In Search of a National Identity: C.L.R. James and the Promise of the Caribbean,” in *You Don’t Play With Revolution: The Montreal Lectures of C.L.R. James*, ed. David Austin (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2009), 11–12.

18 Anita M. Waters, *Race, Class, and Political Symbols: Rastafari and Reggae in Jamaican Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1985); Rupert Lewis, “Learning to Blow the Abeng: A Critical Look at Anti-Establishment Movements of the 1960s and 1970s,” *Small Axe*, no. 1 (February 1997); Robert Hill, “From New World to Abeng: George Beckford and the Horn of Black Power in Jamaica, 1968-1970,” *Small Axe* 11, no. 3 (October 2007): 1–15; Anthony Bogues, “The Abeng Newspaper and the Radical Politics of Postcolonial Blackness,” in *Black Power in the Caribbean*, ed. Kate Quinn (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 76–96.

19 Buhle, *Tim Hector*.

[NBCC] Canada's first national Black organization.

At the center of the community of West Indian intellectual activists that took root in Montreal was C.L.R. James, who played a crucial role in shaping radical critiques that emerged from the Montreal/West Indian nexus. After a difficult experience in 1966 with electoral politics in Trinidad, James spent four months based in Montreal while speaking at various Canadian locales. Young West Indians in Montreal “handed him a lifeline” and “provided him with a platform for his ideas and found in him a ready and willing teacher.” Robert Hill and other West Indians in Montreal formed a “C.L.R James Study Circle” that met regularly with James while he lived in the city. That group evolved into the Caribbean Conference Committee [CCC], whose activities included organizing a series of conferences that brought West Indian writers, thinkers and activists to Montreal from 1965-1967. These meetings were an important site for the development of diasporic West Indian radical critique.<sup>20</sup>

While there is no doubt that West Indian activism in 1960s Montreal was the most visible manifestation of Black activism in the city, other international and Canadian-focused manifestations of Black activism unfolded in Montreal over the course of the decade. In the early half of the decade, African students at McGill University debated the political future of a decolonizing Africa, militated against white-minority rule in South Africa and Rhodesia, and protested against international interference in Congo and the murder of Congolese Prime minister Patrice Lumumba. African-American activists, including Martin Luther King, Stokely Carmichael, James Forman, Ella Collins and Harry Belafonte spoke in Montreal, and Montrealers, working in collaboration with activists from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating

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20 Austin, “Introduction—In Search of a National Identity: C.L.R. James and the Promise of the Caribbean,” 15–16; Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation*, 5–6; Buhle, *Tim Hector*, 135–143.

Committee took to the streets in support of the African-American struggle. And Black people in Montreal, both recent immigrants from the West Indies and Black Montrealers with long histories in the city, actively fought structural racism in Canada, drawing attention to a particularly Canadian brand of racism that often went unacknowledged in a country where the national mythology of the “Star of the North”<sup>21</sup> often precluded any meaningful discussion of white supremacy as a foundational dynamic in Canadian society.

The evasion of meaningful discussion about Canadian racism is a central part of this dissertation. Throughout this project, I argue that as Montrealers responded to critique and activism directed at racism in Canada and throughout the world, an important tension emerged between regular exposure and criticism of Canadian racism at home and abroad (especially in terms of Canada’s relationships with the West Indies) on the one hand and the denial of the existence of structural racism in Canada on the other. The denial of racism in Canada was informed in large part by the “mosaic model” of national belonging, the idea that Canada created space for diversity within a unified national identity. The racism that existed in tension with that model was informed in large part by English Canada’s persistent self-conception as a bearer of British imperial values. With that in mind, local debates about Africa, the West Indies, and anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles were often marked by an infantilizing and paternalist attitude towards Black people and a marked fear of their political activities, especially as Black political thought became more grounded in a Black-centered ethos as opposed to a racially-integrated model of political activism.

Mills and Austin focus on how the Black radical tradition that took shape in Montreal in

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21 Malcolm Foster, “Computer Riot at Concordia: February 11, 1969” (Unpublished manuscript, ca 1979), 148, Concordia University archives.

the 1960s interacted with the most significant radical tendency to emerge in post-war Canada, Québécois nationalism. Given how Québécois nationalists framed their struggle against Anglo-Canadian domination in terms of anticolonial discourse (a key text in this regard is *Nègres blancs d'Amérique*, or *White Niggers of America*, by Pierre Vallières<sup>22</sup>), the connections between the two radical traditions are crucial for understanding the richness of the radical intellectual and activist communities in Montreal in the 1960s. This current project, however, focuses largely on Anglophone Montreal and how English-speaking Montrealers understood and reacted to the expression of Black radical critique and activism in their city.

This focus on English Montreal is because of the overwhelmingly Anglophone context, both local and international within which interactions between Black activists and other Canadians unfolded. The activists who are the subject of this dissertation were largely English speakers, and were actively engaged, on a regular basis, with Montreal's English-language media, both the daily papers and the student press, as they worked to draw attention to and undo racism in Canada. While Québécois nationalists and other Francophone observers followed the American civil rights movement, Black Power and other Black-centered anticolonial political tendencies very closely, and used those bodies of theory as a way to think about their own struggle, there were comparatively few debates about Black rights in Canada, or discussions involving West Indians, African-Americans, Black African students or white African settlers, all key players in this dissertation, that unfolded in Montreal's Francophone press.

Moreover, the larger political frameworks that encouraged the development of a growing West Indian community in Montreal, and which underpinned most of the international issues that

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22 Pierre Vallières, *Nègres blancs d'Amérique, autobiographie précoce d'un "terroriste" québécois* (Montreal: Parti Pris, 1969).

fueled local debate about Black politics abroad, and Canada's relationship with the broader Black world (notably South Africa, Rhodesia, and Canadian relationships with the West Indies) were strongly linked to Canada's history as a part of the British empire and ongoing role in its successor association, the Commonwealth of Nations.

### *Nation, Empire, Commonwealth*

While decolonization is usually thought of as a process that unfolded in Asia, Africa and the West Indies during the late 1950s and into the 1960s, A.G. Hopkins argues that Canada, Australia and New Zealand had their own contemporaneous decolonization moments as they turned away politically, symbolically, and economically from the British empire and embraced new nationalist orientations and identities.<sup>23</sup> In Canada, this disassociation from British imperial identity was rooted in part in events abroad, including the end of formal empire, the Suez crisis, and the Vietnam War, all of which helped to delegitimize the concept of imperial power. Domestically, meanwhile, Quebec's growing national consciousness made an association with the empire politically unacceptable.<sup>24</sup> Yet as Canadians increasingly looked inwards for touchstones with which to define Canadian-ness, as Phillip Buckner writes, most Anglophone Canadians still had close ties to Great Britain and "saw themselves as both British and Canadian,

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23 A. G. Hopkins, "Rethinking Decolonization," *Past & Present* 200, no. 1 (2008): 211–47.

24 Phillip A. Buckner, "Introduction," in *Canada and the British Empire*, ed. Phillip A. Buckner, The Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 18–19; *Canada and the End of Empire* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 2–3; José Eduardo Igartua, *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945-71* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 5; Jeffrey M. Ayres, "National No More: Defining English Canada," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 25, no. 2–3 (1995): 181–201; Hopkins, "Rethinking Decolonization"; Raymond Breton, "The Production and Allocation of Symbolic Resources: An Analysis of the Linguistic and Ethnocultural Fields in Canada," *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne de Sociologie* 21, no. 2 (1984): 123–44.

and they saw the empire as belonging to them as well as to the British.”<sup>25</sup>

The recent work of historian Bill Schwartz provides a useful framework for thinking about how the memory of Canada’s history as a part of the British empire shaped Canadian national identity and Canadian responses to expressions of Black political thought in the 1960s even as the country eschewed identification with its British imperial past in favor of a domestically-rooted identity. Schwartz notes that a fundamental sense of being British was not the exclusive property of metropolitan Britons; in the so-called the “White Commonwealth” nations, a “denial of colonial nationalism in favor of the nationalism of the metropole” persisted well into the twentieth century as “individual nations represented local variants of the larger entity,” and terms such as “the Crown” evoked “wider affiliations, manifest in the providential history of the British.”<sup>26</sup>

Schwartz further argues that race was an important dynamic in the retooling of British identity in the post-imperial era. After Enoch Powell made his notorious “Rivers of Blood” speech in 1968—in which the Tory MP reacted to immigration to the UK and a new Race Relations Bill with a dire warning of racially-motivated social unrest and violence—race in Britain “became speakable in new ways,” as Britons “began to imagine themselves explicitly as white men and as white women.” An influx of immigration from the Commonwealth was seen as a pervasive threat in the domestic, intimate, and sexual spheres. Given this perceived threat to the British nation, a “nominally archaic, colonial vocabulary was called upon to make sense of a peculiarly contemporary domestic situation.”<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, events abroad, notably the situation in Rhodesia, “brought back to life a long historical memory of the virtue of the white empire and

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25 *Canada and the End of Empire*, 3.

26 Bill Schwarz, *The White Man’s World* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 288.

27 For a transcript of Powell’s speech, see: “Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ Speech,” <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html>.

of those who had peopled it.”<sup>28</sup>

The situation Schwartz describes is reminiscent of Canada’s experience in the 1960s. While Canada did not yet know the kind of mass migration of non-whites that came to Great Britain with the Windrush generation soon after the Second World War, the gradual deracialization of immigration policy over the course of the 1960s forced Canada to confront its own racism as struggles against racism in the United States, Britain, and Africa became more intense. Events abroad, including the growing intensity of the struggle against apartheid and white-minority rule in Rhodesia, the threat of political unrest in the West Indies, notably in Jamaica and Guyana, and the increasing violence associated with the African-American struggle just a few miles away from Canadian urban centers, combined with growing political violence in Quebec, where the *Front de libération du Québec* launched a bombing campaign and engaged in other acts of political violence starting in 1963, all gave the racial and political hierarchies of the old empire a certain, often unstated appeal.

Working as a substitute for formal empire, the Commonwealth played an important role in shaping Canadian foreign policy in the 1960s, driving debates about Canada’s role in the West Indies, and shaping Canadian responses to apartheid and Rhodesia’s Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965. The Commonwealth “drew upon notions of racial superiority and racial unity” that were at the heart of imperialism. Even as it contained the possibility of being a multi-racial organization, it was, in its original conception, one that would still be “led by white officers” as a kind of “surrogate for colonial rule.”<sup>29</sup> On the diplomatic stage, the Commonwealth allowed Canada to exercise diplomatic power based on a self-image as a problem-solver working

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28 Schwarz, *The White Man’s World*, 398.

29 Hopkins, “Rethinking Decolonization,” 217; Krishnan Srinivasan, “Nobody’s Commonwealth? The Commonwealth in Britain’s Post-Imperial Adjustment,” *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 44, no. 2 (2006): 257.

to iron out issues within a power bloc, and not between power blocs.<sup>30</sup>

If Canadians are reluctant to acknowledge that their ties to empire played a role in shaping national identity long after they had gained their independence, they are even less inclined to see Canada as a country exercising imperial power in its own right. But, as Todd Gordon argues, Canada's internally-directed imperialism unfolded in dialogue with its external exercise of power. Gordon calls Canada "an imperialist country—not a super-power, but a power that nevertheless benefits from and actively participates in the global system of domination in which the wealth and resources of the Third World are systematically plundered by the capital of the Global North."<sup>31</sup> John Saul writes that Canada's traditional image as "a sensitive and humane 'middle power,' in, but in some vague way not of, the imperial camp" and a "supporter of oppressed peoples everywhere," was "spun almost exclusively out of rhetorical posturings and bore no relationship to the reality of [its] economic, military, and political alignments."<sup>32</sup> Robert Chodos traces the specific ways in which Canadian neoimperialism took shape in the country's relations with the West Indies.<sup>33</sup>

In his analysis of Canadian imperialism, Gordon argues that the predominantly nationalist orientation of the Canadian left, combined with its focus on Canada's subordinate relationship to the United States, has prevented the development of "a systematic analysis of Canadian imperialism"<sup>34</sup> This, however, overlooks the work that West Indian intellectuals and activists,

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30 Carl Watts, "Britain, the Old Commonwealth and the Problem of Rhodesian Independence, 1964–65," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36, no. 1 (2008): 90.

31 Todd Gordon, *Imperialist Canada* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2010).

32 John S. Saul, "Canadian Bank Loans to South Africa," in *Canada, Scandinavia, and Southern Africa*, ed. Douglas George Anglin, Timothy M. Shaw, and Carl Gösta Widstrand (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1978), 28.

33 Robert Chodos, *The Caribbean Connection: The Double-Edged Canadian Presence in the West Indies* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1977).

34 Gordon, *Imperialist Canada*, 9–10.

from college students through the eminent scholar Eric Williams did in the years leading up to the Sir George Williams Affair and especially in the aftermath of that crisis to theorize Canada's relationship with the West Indies as one in which an imperial power of the industrialized world extracted wealth from, and exercised political control over, the nations of the Commonwealth Caribbean. These critiques were a key aspect of the West Indian Black Power movement, which, as this dissertation demonstrates, set itself apart from its African-American counterpart by putting relationships between the formerly-colonized nations and the industrialized world, and not domestic relations between Black people and a white power structure, at the center of its theorizations and actions.

Understood in terms of imperial and neoimperial power, Caribbean immigration to Canada becomes less a story of people moving to a country which welcomes newcomers with opportunity and social mobility and more about an uneven relationship between an industrialized nation with a need for exploitable labor and a region with limited economic opportunity.<sup>35</sup> These dynamics were a crucial dimension of critiques of Canadian racism that increased in intensity over the course of the 1960s, as a growing Black population fed by increased migration from the West Indies and inspired in part by the struggle for Black freedom in the United States worked to

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35 Himani Bannerji, *Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender* (Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., 2000); Agnes Calliste, "Canada's Immigration Policy and Domestic Workers from the Caribbean: The Second Domestic Scheme," *Socialist Studies* 5 (1989): 136–68; Chodos, *The Caribbean Connection: The Double-Edged Canadian Presence in the West Indies*; Cecil Foster, *A Place Called Heaven: The Meaning of Being Black in Canada* (Harper Collins Publishers Canada, Limited, 2002); Gordon, *Imperialist Canada*; Christopher Harris, *The Development of Working-Class Organic Intellectuals in the Canadian Black Left Tradition: Historical Roots and Contemporary Expressions, Future Directions* (University of Toronto, 2011); Ruth Harris, "The Transformation of Canadian Policies and Programs to Recruit Foreign Labor the Case of Caribbean Female Domestic Workers, 1950's - 1980's" (Michigan State University, 1989); *Canada and the End of Empire*; Makeda Silvera, *Silenced: Talks with Working Class Caribbean Women About Their Lives and Struggles as Domestic Workers in Canada*, Second Edition (Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1989); Sheldon Eric Alister Taylor, "'Darkening the Complexion of Canadian Society': Black Activism, Policy-Making and Black Immigration from the Caribbean to Canada, 1940-1960s" (Ph.D., University of Toronto, 1994); Jackie Wilson, "Come, Let Us Reason Together," in *Black Presence in Multi-Ethnic Canada*, ed. Vincent D'Oyley (Vancouver: Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction, University of British Columbia, 1982), 113–32.

draw awareness to and militated against a largely unacknowledged Canadian racism.

### *Race and Racism in Canada*

In 1963 “Maussade,” (a French word meaning “sullen” or “gloomy”) a man identifying as a Black student from abroad, wrote to the *Montreal Star*. His letter spoke to many of the struggles faced by Black people in Montreal and the effects those struggles had on the development of a tendency of Black consciousness rooted in the experience of being Black in Canada. While Maussade came to Canada “with high expectations,” his experience had left him embittered and had given him “something the people of the former French colonies in Africa call ‘Negritude.’” He “came to Canada a man who happened to be black,” he wrote, but learned to be “aware of [his] blackness every waking hour.”<sup>36</sup>

The limited scholarly attention paid to the histories of Black people in Canada reflects a national tendency to marginalize Blackness; in the Canadian national narrative, Black people often appear only as evidence of Canada’s self-image as a nation largely untouched by the systemic racism of its southern neighbor, a key touchstone in Canadian national identity.<sup>37</sup>

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36 Maussade, *Montreal Star*, February 12, 1963.

37 M. Ali, “Second-Generation Youth’s Belief in the Myth of Canadian Multiculturalism,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 40, no. 2 (2008): 89; Stanley R. Barrett, “White Supremacists and Neo-Fascists: Laboratories for the Analysis of Racism in Wider Society,” in *Racism in Canada*, ed. Ormond McKague (Fifth House Publishers, 1991), 85–99; John Boyko, *Last Steps to Freedom: The Evolution of Canadian Racism* (Winnipeg, MB: Watson & Dwyer Pub, 1995); Frederick Ivor Case, *Racism and National Consciousness* (Toronto, Ont: Plowshare Press, 1977); David C. Este, “Black Canadian Historical Writing 1970-2006,” *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 3 (2008): 388–406; Amal I. Madibbo, *Minority Within a Minority: Black Francophone Immigrants and the Dynamics of Power and Resistance* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Color Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870-1955* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Adrienne Shadd, “Institutionalized Racism and Canadian History,” in *Racism in Canada*, ed. Ormond McKague (Fifth House Publishers, 1991), 1–5; Walter Stewart, *But Not in Canada!* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1976); Esmeralda M. A. Thornhill, “So Seldom for Us, So Often Against Us,” *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 3 (2008): 321–37.

Canada's shift to an inward-looking, and not a British-oriented concept of national identity did not mean that whiteness was supplanted as a, if not the, key marker of national belonging. What José Iguarta calls Canada's "new stance as a civic nation ... without ethnic particularities, or the "de-ethnicization' of English Canada" concealed the manner in which power in Canada continued to be distributed along racial lines.<sup>38</sup> Thus, while Canada defined itself as a nation without a racial identity, moments like debates about who should qualify for entry into Canada and have the benefits of citizenship "revealed the ethnic bounds within which Canadian citizenship was constrained" and helped to racialize Canada as a white nation.<sup>39</sup>

As Canada moved away from an identity grounded in membership in the British empire, Canadian identity was predicated on the "mosaic model," a social model first articulated by the sociologist John Murray Gibbon in 1938 that, in contrast to the American "melting pot," was predicated on the idea that Canada allowed people to contribute to and benefit from the collective development of the nation without abandoning their ethnic, racial, or cultural identity.<sup>40</sup> Yet, as the sociologist John Porter argued in his landmark 1965 book *The Vertical Mosaic*, there were crucial gaps between the ideals of the mosaic model and Canada's actual practice of inclusionary values, as the mosaic model valorized safe expressions of "ethnic" identity while keeping power entrenched in the hands of those Canadians descended from WASP elites.<sup>41</sup>

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38 Iguarta, *The Other Quiet Revolution*, 1.

39 *Ibid.*, 1; 61; 103.

40 John Murray Gibbon, *Canadian Mosaic: The Making of a Northern Nation* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1938); Daniel Heath Justice, "Rhetorics of Recognition," *The Kenyon Review*, New Series, 32, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 236–61.

41 Gibbon, *Canadian Mosaic*; Evelyn Kallen, *Ethnicity and Human Rights in Canada*, 2nd ed (Don Mills, Ont: Oxford University Press, 1995), 121–127; John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada*, Studies in the Structure of Power, Decision-Making in Canada, no. 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965).

Holding the country to the promise of the “mosaic model” was the principal idea guiding Canada’s domestically-oriented Black activism throughout much of the 1960s. As Black activists challenged Canada to meet the obligations it had set for itself with the principals of the mosaic, an important obstacle facing them was Canada’s inability to recognize its own racism. The absence of lynching, Jim Crow laws or apartheid (notwithstanding, of course, the apartheid-like conditions endured by First Nations peoples in Canada) made it very easy for Canadians to dismiss incidents of discrimination against Blacks as aberrations or individual moral failings, and not a reflection of structural inequality, thus frustrating the efforts of Black activists who increasingly saw the racism they encountered not as acts of individual discrimination but as a manifestation of the same structural racism that defined life in the Southern states or in South Africa and Rhodesia.

Malinda Smith argues that Canada is able to reconcile the tension between its embrace of “the principle of equality” on one hand and “inequality among diversities” on the other through what she calls a Canadian “race manners” that prohibits discussion of structural racism.<sup>42</sup> Echoing this reading of the dynamics of Canadian racism, Margaret Cannon describes it as being “more genteel than its American and European counterparts.” The subtleness of the expression of Canadian racism—a recurring theme in the histories of the people who worked in the 1960s to draw attention to the discrimination they faced in their daily lives—makes it easy for people to “dismiss racism in Canada, to ignore it, or to forgive it.”<sup>43</sup>

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42 Malinda S. Smith, “Race Matters’ and ‘Race Manners,” in *Reinventing Canada: Politics of the 21st Century*, ed. M. Janine Brodie and Linda Trimble (Toronto: Prentice Hall, 2003), 110; 125.

43 Margaret Cannon, *The Invisible Empire: Racism in Canada* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 1995), 15.

## *Black History in Canada and Montreal*

The journalist Peter Wheeland tells a story about Bobby White, the head of the West End Sports Association, a Montreal organization that serves local Black and other youth. White, whenever asked for a comment on “Montreal’s Black community” would invariably fall back on a favorite line: “There is no black community. There are only black communities.”<sup>44</sup> Montreal’s Black population is made up of diverse groups with distinct histories, including descendants of African-Americans and West Indians who came in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, another wave of West Indians who came starting in 1955 with the development of the Domestic Scheme (a program which encouraged women to come to Canada from the West Indies to Canada to work as housekeepers) and then in the 1960s with the official deracialization of Canadian immigration policy, Haitians who came first in the 1960s and then in larger numbers in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as more recent migrants from Africa. Given the diverse nature of Black identities in Montreal, the historian Dorothy Williams argues that as Blacks in Quebec have not formed a distinct and unified community with a centuries-long history as they have in Ontario or Nova Scotia, a lack of documentary evidence and “numerous discrepancies, inaccuracies and contradictions” in available sources present particular challenges to tracing the historical development of Montreal’s Black communities.<sup>45</sup>

Starting at the end of the nineteenth century, a small but vibrant Black community developed in the neighborhood known as Little Burgundy, nestled between the downtown core and the Lachine Canal, in close proximity to the railroads where most Black men worked.

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44 Peter Wheeland, “Quebec, Ink — Who You Gonna Call?,” *Cult MTL*, September 18, 2012, <http://cultmontreal.com/2012/09/quebec-ink-anglophones-montreal/>.

45 Dorothy W. Williams, *Blacks in Montreal, 1628-1986 : An Urban Demography* (Cowansville, Quebec: Éditions Yvon Blais, 1989).

Population statistics about Blacks in Montreal in the 1960s are fuzzy, but the Black population saw tremendous growth over the course of the decade. According to the 1961 census there were 3481 Black people in Montreal (though a study that same year by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, one that speaks to the discrepancies described by Williams, counted 7000 Blacks in Montreal).<sup>46</sup> The Domestic Scheme and the eventual deracialization of Canadian immigration policies led to a sharp increase in West Indian migration to Canada. By the mid-1960s, there were some 10-15,000 Blacks in Montreal, including about 3000 Black students from abroad.<sup>47</sup>

Charmaine Nelson writes that emerging scholars studying Black Canadian history and culture are likely to become *the* expert in their field simply because there is so much work to be done on the subject.<sup>48</sup> While the historiography of Black Canadians is enjoying a recent expansion, it is a field that is still underdeveloped. A vital missing piece is a synthetic overview that incorporates recent scholarly trends and theoretical frameworks. The only existing comprehensive survey of Black Canadian history, Robin Winks's *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, was published in 1971 (a 1997 second edition adds little new material). Winks tends to frame Canada's Black history as a subset of African-American history and generally fails to engage with Canadian Black politics on its own terms, instead expressing frustration and disappointment when the kind of liberal reformers leading broad-based coalitions and national institutions that were central to the development of the African-American freedom movement fail to appear in the Canadian historical record.<sup>49</sup>

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46 Ibid., 65.

47 Ibid., 65–67.

48 Charmaine A. Nelson, ed., *Ebony Roots, Northern Soil: Perspectives on Blackness in Canada* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010).

49 Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, 2nd ed (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997).

Since the 1990s, diaspora and transnational mobility have dominated much of the scholarship on the histories of African people worldwide, addressing how displaced Africans experienced modernity not in any one national context, but as transnational subjects moving through networks created by the mobility and cultural interconnectivity that defined the modern Black experience.<sup>50</sup> Even though Canada has long been a site of Black transnational mobility, from the slave trade through contemporary migrations from the Caribbean and Africa, it is virtually invisible in much of this scholarship; as the literary critic George Elliott Clarke writes, to read Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* "is to confront, yet again, the blunt irrelevance of Canada in most gestures of diasporic inclusiveness."<sup>51</sup>

Rinaldo Walcott argues that if one is going to "write black Canada," one must look beyond any "explicit national address" and adopt a "deterritorialized strategy that is consciously aware of the ground of the nation from which it speaks."<sup>52</sup> If scholars writing about the "Black Atlantic" have often overlooked Canada, the transnational connections forged by Black people in Canada are becoming more central to recent studies of Black Canadian history and culture, examining the challenges faced by waves of migrants from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries (including, alongside the groups listed above, slaves brought from Africa and their descendants, the "Black Loyalists" in the eighteenth century, African-Americans fleeing slavery in the first half of the nineteenth century, and migrants from Oklahoma in the late nineteenth century) as they struggled against racism and marginalization and created African-Canadian

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50 Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; Robin D. G. Kelley, "'But a Local Phase of a World Problem': Black History's Global Vision, 1883-1950," *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (1999): 1045-77; Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Colonial Discourse & Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 392-403.

51 George Elliott Clarke, *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature* (University of Toronto Press, 2002).

52 Rinaldo Walcott, *Black Like Who? Writing Black Canada*, Second Edition (Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2003).

communities.<sup>53</sup>

Before the 1960s, Montreal had a long if overlooked history as a site of transnational Black activism. This history includes the links forged between American abolitionists and their white and black allies based in Montreal, notably Frederick Douglass, who lived in the city on two separate occasions and worked with abolitionist activists; the city's history as home of one of the longest-running branches of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association [UNIA] (it was at the Montreal branch of the UNIA where Malcolm X's parents met and were introduced to the Garveyite tradition); and its role as a continental railway hub, which provided a space from which the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters attacked racism in both Canada and the U.S.<sup>54</sup>

One issue confronting scholars wanting to study Canadian Black radicalism is its visibility as compared to its African-American counterpart. Seen in terms of Canadian national history, the relatively small number of people involved combined with Canada's race-blindness allow Canada's Black radicalism to be overshadowed by the better-known version that took place south of the forty-ninth parallel. This problem is compounded by the difficulty in discerning a unified national narrative of Canadian Blackness: as scholars have argued, the fragmentary

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53 Afua Cooper, *The Hanging of Angelique: The Untold Story of Canadian Slavery and the Burning of Old Montreal* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007); Daniel Guay, *Les noirs du Québec, 1629-1900* (Montreal: Les éditions du Septentrion, 2004); Frank Mackey, *Black Then: Blacks and Montreal, 1780-1880's* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004); Frank Mackey, *Done With Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840* (McGill-Queens University Press, 2010); R. Bruce Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable: Blacks from Oklahoma Move to the Canadian Prairies in Search of Equality in the Early 20th Century, Only to Find Racism in Their New Home* (Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1997); Frances Henry, *Forgotten Canadians, the Blacks of Nova Scotia*, Canadian Social Problems Series (Don Mills, Ont: Longman Canada, 1973); Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*.

54 Leo W Bertley, "The Universal Negro Improvement Association of Montreal, 1917--1979" (Ph.D., Concordia University, 1980); Jan Carew, "Malcolm X's Mother in Montreal: A Pioneering Educator," in *Re/visiting: Canadian Perspectives on the Education of Africans in the Late 20th Century*, ed. Vincent D'Oyley and Carl James (Captus Press, 1998), 18-24; Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (Viking, 2011); Carla Marano, "'Rising Strongly and Rapidly': The Universal Negro Improvement Association in Canada, 1919-1940," *The Canadian Historical Review* 91, no. 2 (2010): 233-59; Dorothy W. Williams, *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1997).

nature of Canadian Black communities affected the development of black Canadian politics, limiting the possibilities for the emergence of a unitary sense of national racial consciousness.<sup>55</sup>

The absence of a unified Canadian Black political voice with a national reach made the expressions of Black radicalism which emerged in Montreal and other Canadian cities in the 1960s difficult for the Canadian public to read, and these radical actions and discourses were often perceived as misplaced and inappropriate imitations of radical African-American ideology.<sup>56</sup>

Given its close ties to African-American and especially West Indian thought and action, Montreal's expression of Black Power, like other expressions of Black radical politics in the twentieth century, needs to be understood as an inherently transnational moment, but one that was shaped by its specific local dynamics. Scholars have increasingly come to see the African-American civil rights and Black Power movements in terms of the transnational connections they shared with a longer history of anticolonial and anti-racist activism in the Americas, Europe and Africa.<sup>57</sup> As Brent Hayes Edwards writes, the experiences of earlier pan-African figures

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55 Foster, *A Place Called Heaven*; Paula Denise McClain, *Alienation and Resistance: The Political Behavior of Afro-Canadians* (Palo Alto, Calif: R&E Research Associates, 1979); Rinaldo Walcott, "Identity Styles, Mistaken Identities, and the Caribbean in Canada," in *Re/visiting: Canadian Perspectives on the Education of Africans in the Late 20th Century*, ed. Vincent D'Oyley and Carl James (Captus Press, 1998), 316–18; James W. St. G. Walker, *The West Indians in Canada.*, Canada's Ethnic Groups; booklet No. 4 (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1984).

56 Donald H. Clairmont and Dennis William Magill, *Africville: The Life and Death of a Canadian Black Community* (McClelland and Stewart, 1974); Clarke, *Odysseys Home*; Daniel. McNeil, "Afro(Americo)centricity in Black (American) Nova Scotia," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 35, no. 1 (2005): 57–85.

57 Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Harvard University Press, 2003); Kevin K. Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; Kelley, "'But a Local Phase of a World Problem': Black History's Global Vision, 1883-1950"; Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Beacon Press, 2003); Tiffany Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley, "Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World," *African Studies Review* 43, no. 1 (2000): 11–45; Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 2nd ed. (The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*; Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans & Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Cornell University Press, 1997).

including C.L.R. James, Garan Kouyaté, Alain Locke, the Nardal sisters, and Claude McCay reveal how the black struggles of the first half of the twentieth century took place “in the much broader sphere of ‘modern civilization’ as a whole,” as opposed to unfolding in any national context; Kelley argues that movements like Garveyism, pan-Africanism and Black Power need to be evaluated as “hemispheric if not global phenomena.”<sup>58</sup>

### *Gendering Montreal's Debates about Race*

Because of the narrowly-construed and specifically gendered work opportunities available to West Indians and other Black people in Canada through most of the twentieth century—women as domestics and nurses, men in the railroads—much of the scholarship on the modern Black experience in Canada has an inherently gendered dimension, addressing how Black people organized around their gendered roles as they struggled against racism and economic and political marginalization.<sup>59</sup>

With the exception of statements addressing the situation of West Indian domestic workers, there is little in the documentary record that speaks to activism addressing the specific issues facing Black women in Montreal in the 1960s. In their study of the Congress of Black

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58 Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*; Robin D.G. Kelley, “A Poetics of Anticolonialism,” in *Discourse on Colonialism*, by Aimé Césaire (Monthly Review Press, 2001), 23.

59 Agnes Calliste, “Women of Exceptional Merit: Immigration of Caribbean Nurses to Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 6 (1993): 85; Calliste, “Canada’s Immigration Policy and Domestics from the Caribbean: The Second Domestic Scheme.”; Karen Flynn, “‘I’m Glad That Someone Is Telling the Nursing Story,’” *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 3 (2008): 443–60; Karen Flynn, *Moving Beyond Borders: A History of Black Canadian and Caribbean Women in the Diaspora* (University of Toronto Press, 2011); Meredith Gadsby, *Sucking Salt: Caribbean Women Writers, Migration, and Survival* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006); Lawrence Hill, *Women of Vision: The Story of the Canadian Negro Women’s Association, 1951-1976* (Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1996); Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*; Shirley Small and Esmeralda M. A. Thornhill, “HARAMBEC! Quebec Black Women Pulling Together,” *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 3 (2008): 427–42.

Women of Canada, an organization bringing together Black women's groups from across Canada that was officially founded in 1980 but that had its roots in regular meetings dating back to 1973, Shirley Small and Esmeralda Thornhill write that "a comprehensive record of the tradition of Black women organizing and strategizing in Canada, particularly in Quebec, is sadly lacking," even as Black women "have been very busy doing just that."<sup>60</sup>

As Kimberly Springer writes, many Black feminists in the 1960s believed that the African-American Black Power movement's "chief flaw was sexism."<sup>61</sup> Steven Ward points out that starting in the middle of the 1960s, an expressed desire to "reclaim 'black manhood'" as a revolutionary goal left Black women marginalized by the male leadership of African-American Black Power.<sup>62</sup> These dynamics were mirrored as a locally-rooted Black Power movement took shape in Montreal. As David Austin writes, the male-dominated and male-oriented Black activism in Montreal in the 1960s, like its African-American counterpart, left little space in which women, even those that their male colleagues described as "fiercely feminist," could express their political views as women, "[depriving] us of much-needed insight into the inner workings of gender in Canadian-based Caribbean and Black sixties political groupings."<sup>63</sup>

Black women activists and thinkers were integral to the print-culture public sphere debate about race and imperialism in the Montreal press, but one often has to look beyond the front page and the editorial section to find their voices in print. Many of the women who appear in this dissertation, including the Guyanese feminist and political leader Winifred Gaskin, SNCC activist Diane Burrows, African-American figures like Coretta Scott King and Ella Collins, and

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60 Small and Thornhill, "HARAMBEC! Quebec Black Women Pulling Together," 427.

61 Kimberly Springer, "Black Feminists Respond to Black Power Nationalism," in *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, ed. Peniel E. Joseph (Routledge, 2006), 108.

62 Stephen Ward, "The Third World Women's Alliance," in *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, ed. Peniel E. Joseph (Routledge, 2006), 124.

63 Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation*, 81–84.

the South African singer Miriam Makeba often had their stories presented in the newspaper in the so-called “women’s pages,” alongside recipes, household decorating tips, and similar topics. Yet even in this space that could easily be thought of as lacking in political content, women involved in anti-racist projects brought their voices to bear on the issues that concerned them, such as when Gaskin strongly criticized the racial and gendered dynamics of Canadian immigration policy or when Makeba analyzed the dynamics of apartheid as compared to Jim Crow and discussed Rhodesia’s Unilateral Declaration of Independence.<sup>64</sup> In fact, though it appeared on the “women’s page,” Makeba’s analysis of Rhodesia was the only one from a Black African that I could find anywhere in Montreal’s daily press in the aftermath of that event.

By the end of the decade, a particular notion of Black masculinity, one centered on the image of a physically and intellectually imposing and fearless Black man became central to local imaginings of Black Power. Michelle Stephens writes that in the first half of the twentieth century, diasporic West Indian male intellectual activists articulated a Black global political vision that was gendered in particular ways revealing “alternative articulations of black political subjectivity, and, concomitantly, black masculinity.”<sup>65</sup> Many of the activists who appear in this study, such as Stokely Carmichael and Bobby Seale and other members of the Black Panthers, projected a particular vision of Black masculinity that local observers often read as threatening and violent. While rare in the earlier part of the decade, later on, especially after the Sir George Williams Affair, Black activists in Montreal began to increasingly embrace an approach to Black radical politics that valorized strong Black masculinity as a necessary part of the struggle and

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64 Beverley Mitchell, “Guianese Women Take Leading Role in Political Life,” *Montreal Gazette*, July 31, 1962; Ethel Tiffin, “B.G. Women’s Leader Recalls Early Interest in Politics,” *Montreal Star*, July 31, 1962; Zoe Bieler, “Doubts Safety of Return to S. Africa,” *Montreal Star*, November 27, 1963; Zoe Bieler, “African Singer Recalls Visit to Rhodesia,” *Montreal Star*, November 30, 1965.

65 Michelle Ann Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962* (Duke University Press, 2005), 8; 43.

framed inter-racial relationships as a threat to their activism.

### *Sources and Print Culture*

Much of this dissertation draws on newspapers and other print culture. In the 1960s, the Montreal had two major English-language dailies, the *Gazette*, a generally conservative paper, and the liberal-leaning *Star*.<sup>66</sup> In the 1960s, the daily papers were still an important site for the airing of public debate; a 1969 survey found that 90% of Canadian homes received at least one daily paper and 80% of Canadians read at least one newspaper a day, while only 68% watched the television news on a daily basis. As Iguarta writes, “newspapers, and in particular the large-circulation dailies, played a central role in the transformation of representations of national identity in English-speaking Canada.”<sup>67</sup>

While the issue was not absent from the *Gazette*, throughout the 1960s, the *Star* paid considerable attention to the the issue of racism in Montreal, frequently covering events involving Montreal’s Black communities and editorializing against racism. If Black Montrealers wanted to draw attention to a local incident of racism, they would often do so by writing a letter to the *Star*. The *Star* was also listed as a sponsor for several of the events staged by the CCC, revealing a certain institutional affinity for Black activism in the city. As will be seen throughout this project, while public opinion often dismissed Montreal’s Black activism, especially in its more radical manifestations, as an artificial import from the United States, the *Star* was often sympathetic to the Black cause, and its editors could understand the frustration behind the radical

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66 Garth Stevenson, *Community Besieged: The Anglophone Minority and the Politics of Quebec* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999), 51.

67 Iguarta, *The Other Quiet Revolution*, 6.

sentiments behind events like the Congress of Black Writers, even as they preferred to advocate solutions in line with liberal multiculturalism.

Of particular importance to Montreal's print debates about the West Indies during the first half of the decade was the work of Alvin Johnson. Johnson came to Montreal from Jamaica to attend McGill in the 1950s and worked as a reporter at the *Star*, where he wrote extensively on the West Indies and the city's Black communities. Johnson was active in Montreal's Black intellectual scene: he served as president of the education committee of the Negro Community Centre, and was involved with *New World* and the CCC. Johnson and Hugh O'Neale, another West Indian activist, died in a car crash coming back to Montreal after returning some art work to Toronto after the 1966 Conference on West Indian Affairs. I.C. Morrison, head of the Jamaica Association of Montreal, remembered Johnson as "an example to guide others in the fight towards a greater ascendancy of our people everywhere."<sup>68</sup>

The dissertation also draws extensively on pair of print outlets produced by Montreal's Black activist communities. *Expression*, which ran from 1965-1969, was a quarterly produced by the Negro Citizenship Association, an activist group that directed most of its efforts at raising awareness of racism in Montreal and advocating for the implementation of human rights codes in Quebec. *Expression* gave Black activists a forum in which to expose racism, analyze its specific features, and publicize their fights against it. Dorothy Williams argues that *Expression* was not a community paper, because much of its content had a national focus, and sees it as having the air of an intellectual journal produced by and for graduate students.<sup>69</sup> However, an examination of the entire run of the magazine reveals that most of its content was dedicated to issues of direct

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68 Kari Levitt, "The Montreal New World Group," in *Caribbean Reasonings: The Thought of New World, The Quest for Decolonisation*, ed. Brian Meeks and Norman Girvan (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2010), 73; Levitt, *Montreal Star*, November 4, 1966; I.C. Morrison, *Montreal Star*, November 5, 1966.

69 Williams, *The Road to Now*, 103.

relevance to Blacks in Montreal and the rest of Quebec, and, especially in its earlier years, much of its content was written by and directed at middle-class liberal professionals; only at the end of its run in 1969 did *Expression* become more theoretical and radical in content.

In July 1969, *Uhuru* (Swahili for “Freedom”) a newspaper produced by and for Montreal’s Black communities hit the streets; the paper ran until November 1970. *Uhuru* was closely tied to the events at Sir George: the hearings and trials which resulted from the unrest featured prominently in nearly every issue of the paper; it was co-edited by Leroy Butcher, a student from St. Lucia who had been involved in the occupation of Sir George; and several students who had been involved in the occupation were contributors. Much of the radical response to the events at Sir George and the critiques which emerged after those events were printed in *Uhuru*. *Uhuru* had one eye on Canada and another on Black people in the United States, the West Indies and Africa, reporting on political developments of interest worldwide and positioning itself as a voice for the local and national Black population, reporting on local episodes of racism and the academic and athletic achievements of local Black youth and informing people about the resources available to them. The paper also made a few attempts to reach out to Francophone Blacks with French translations of articles.

Another important resource for this project is the student press. Given both the lack of a longstanding and developed Black press in Montreal, and the central role that students, especially Black students from Africa and the West Indies, played in shaping many of the debates that were central to the development of Black radical thought, the campus papers are an indispensable resource for tracing the development of Black critique in Montreal. Both the *McGill Daily* and the Sir George Williams main campus paper, the *Georgian*, were frequent sites

of debate about Black struggles in Canada and abroad.

As Karen Quinn writes, print culture played a key role in activists' work to raise Black consciousness in the Caribbean, "giving voice to the struggle and providing spaces in which the heterogeneous positions of the movement were debated and shaped."<sup>70</sup> In the aftermath of the Rodney riots, a pair of radical newspapers produced by Caribbean activist intellectuals, many of whom had ties Montreal started publishing in the Caribbean. *Abeng* (Kingston), and *Moko* (Port-of-Spain), were important vehicles for critiques of Canada's role in the Caribbean that emerged in the wake of the Sir George Affair.

### *Chapter Outlines*

The first chapter focuses on Black activism in Montreal's local context, examining how a growing West Indian and Black population challenged Montrealers and Canadians to recognize Canada's structural racism and militated for legal mechanisms that would guarantee their equal participation in Canadian society. The chapter concludes with a study of how a memorial rally for Martin Luther King made public a growing radical vision on the part of anti-racist activists in Montreal, creating sharp public debate on the relevance of Black radicalism in Canada. The following chapter examines Montreal's debates about developments in Africa during the first half of the 1960s. African students at McGill actively protested white-minority rule in South Africa, rallied for Patrice Lumumba after the Congolese leader was executed in 1961, and formulated critiques of politics in post-colonial Africa. Meanwhile outside the McGill gates, Montrealers discussing South Africa, Congo, and Rhodesia often expressed the sentiment that Africans were

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<sup>70</sup> Quinn, "Black Power in the Caribbean Context," 36–37.

under-developed, unable to rule themselves, and needing a guiding white hand to establish themselves as independent nations. These racist understandings of Africans revealed the racist and imperial logics at play in Canada.

Chapter Three examines how visits by figures including Martin Luther King and Stokely Carmichael, links between African-American radicalism and Quebec separatism and activism undertaken by Montrealers in support of African-American freedom both forced the city to examine its own racial relations and fueled debate about the meanings of new radical tendencies in the struggle against racism. Chapter Four examines debates about relationships between Canada and the West Indies that unfolded in the Montreal press in the 1960s. As the West Indies moved from colonial rule to independence, Canadians increasingly saw themselves as stewards of the region, and worried about the potential instability and violence that could arise if they failed to meet that responsibility. Meanwhile, West Indians in Montreal became increasingly critical of the relationship between Canada and the Caribbean, attacking both the economic subordination of the West Indies to Canada and the racism that underpinned Canadian immigration laws. These critiques were the seed for the more developed, and more militant critiques of Canada that emerged from West Indian Black Power activists at the close of the decade.

Chapter Five examines the development of the intellectual roots of West Indian Black Power as it took shape in Montreal, focusing on debates that developed in the context of a series of West Indian and Black-oriented conferences held in the city. The final chapter examines the Sir George Williams Affair in both its local and West Indian dimensions. The chapter argues that the actions of the protesters and the debates which grew out of those actions were both the end

product of a decade-long history of mounting frustration on the part of Black people in Montreal to have the racism they lived with recognized and dealt with and growing frustration in the West Indies with the failures of new states to make good on the promises of independence.

## Chapter One

### **“Things Will Get Pretty Warm Up Here”: Black Activism in Montreal, 1959-1968.**

In 1959, a Montreal nursery school told Tom Massiah, a chemist and the son of a Guyanese immigrant, that it would not admit his daughter because she was Black. Massiah wrote to the *Montreal Star* describing the situation, and was flooded with offers of a space from local schools.<sup>1</sup> During the 1960s, Black Montrealers regularly used local print media to publicize the racism they encountered, to theorize its dynamics, and to mobilize resistance against it. This chapter traces Black activism in Montreal and Canada and public reactions to that activism in the years leading up to the emergence of a locally-rooted expression of Black Power theory and action. Building on a local history of activism and the energy and efforts of an influx of West Indian migrants, Blacks in Montreal in the 1960s consistently brought the racism they confronted into the public sphere, complicating commonly-held ideas that Black people and their political issues were invisible in the Canadian public sphere. Black people made their presence known as they challenged Montreal, Quebec and Canada to acknowledge their demands for equality, and in doing so revealed the fragility of the “mosaic model” of Canadian identity and a mythology that framed Canada as a nation free of structural racism. Expressions of Black Power that emerged in 1968 emerged out of a decade-long history of grassroots, student, and institutional activism that first sought to hold Canada to its promise of acceptance and eventually interrogated that promise

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Massiah, *Musings of a Native Son* (Trafford Publishing, 2004), 58–59.

as something that helped to conceal the extent to which Canada was a nation built on structural racism and exclusion.

This chapter begins with an historical account of Black activist groups in Montreal. It then discusses Black Montrealers' attempts to draw attention to the racism they experienced and their efforts to get laws enacted that would undo the effects of racism; these efforts both drew on and challenged concepts that were fundamental to Canadian self-identity. One effect of these attempts was the bringing to light of divides within the Black population, divides based in part on class and historical origin, and in part on strategic questions of how to advance the struggle for racial equality in a Canadian context. The chapter concludes with an examination of debates over the relevance of new radical ideas about race and racism to the local situation, a debate which came to public view at a rally in memory of Martin Luther King in the days after his death.

Many of the claims made by Black activists were based on appeals to the mosaic model of Canadian identity and the notion of the "Just Society." First outlined in 1938 by the Canadian writer John Murray Gibbon, the mosaic model—one held in opposition to the American "melting pot"—is a central facet of Canadian identity, a framework in which "all communities come together under the sign of the maple leaf to share their belief in and support for" Canadian values and institutions while maintaining ties to their cultures of origin.<sup>2</sup> By the 1960s, intellectuals began to challenge the model as one in which the inclusion promised in theory was uneven and incomplete in practice. In 1965, sociologist John Porter's *The Vertical Mosaic* revealed how, within the Canadian mosaic, people of British descent controlled more wealth and power than

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2 John Murray Gibbon, *Canadian Mosaic: The Making of a Northern Nation* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1938); Daniel Heath Justice, "Rhetorics of Recognition," *The Kenyon Review*, New Series, 32, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 239.

outsider groups like First Nations peoples and the descendants of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe.<sup>3</sup> Porter's analysis forced Canadian intellectuals to engage with the gap between the promises of the mosaic model and the actual outcomes experienced by non-WASP Canadians.<sup>4</sup>

Closely related to the mosaic model was Pierre Trudeau's notion of the "Just Society," a vision of Canada the soon-to-be Prime Minister outlined in 1968. The Just Society was one in which personal and political freedoms were guaranteed, where cultural groups would be able to thrive free of oppression, historic inequalities between regions and groups would be overcome, and new knowledge would be applied to the betterment of Canadian society for all.<sup>5</sup>

The mosaic model and the Just Society both theorized inclusion in Canadian society and provided a vocabulary with which to draw attention to the way in which ethnic identity shaped uneven outcomes for groups outside the British-descended elites. Black activists, especially recent arrivals from the West Indies, seized on these concepts first as a way to explain why they should be accorded a place within the Canadian mosaic, and then as a way to point out the gap between the promises of those models and actual practice.

As Black activists used a foundational aspect of Canadian national identity as a way to claim space as equal members of the society, they also appealed to the state to create legal mechanisms to protect their access to that space. Appeals for Quebec to enact a comprehensive human rights code and a commission charged with ensuring its application were a regular theme

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3 Evelyn Kallen, *Ethnicity and Human Rights in Canada*, 2nd ed (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 1995), 121–127; John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada*, Studies in the Structure of Power, Decision-Making in Canada, no. 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965).

4 Fred Poland, "Power Race Holds Hurdles," *Montreal Star*, October 20, 1965; Fred Poland, "'Unqualified' Can Too Often Mean Racially Unacceptable.," *Montreal Star*, October 21, 1965; Fred Poland, "Colour, Racial Bias Studied," *Montreal Star*, October 22, 1965.

5 Pierre Trudeau, *The Essential Trudeau*, ed. Ron Graham (Toronto: Viking, 1990), 18–19.

in debates about racism in Montreal.

Robert Howe and David Johnson write that before the Second World War, Canadians took a *laissez-faire* approach to discrimination, publicly agreeing that it was wrong, but also believing that anti-discrimination legislation would be harmful as it would “involve unwanted state interference with individual freedom, property rights, and the right of contract” and produce the conditions for backlash. Instead, “education and voluntarism” were thought to be the best strategies for fighting discrimination. After the war, however, the fight against fascism and the internment of Japanese Canadians raised awareness of the need for institutional protection of minority rights in Canada.<sup>6</sup>

By the 1950s Canada had repealed most of the laws that enforced racism in the public sphere (with the exception of immigration laws, which were deracialized starting in 1962), but there existed no federal laws that protected people from discrimination in the private sphere. Canada enacted a Bill of Rights in 1960, but as a federal statute, not enshrined in the constitution, it had limited power. Provincial governments tried to fill the gap; as the historian James St. G. Walker notes, these laws all came as the result of grass-roots initiatives. Ontario passed a Fair Employment Practices Act in 1951, and a Fair Accommodations Practices Act in 1954; the Viola Desmond case, involving a young Black woman who, in 1946, refused to leave the white section of a segregated theater, was a driving force behind campaigns to enact fair practices laws in Nova Scotia. In 1955 that province enacted a law protecting people from discrimination in employment and in 1959 a law directed at discrimination in accommodations.<sup>7</sup>

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6 Robert Brian Howe and David Johnson, *Restraining Equality: Human Rights Commissions in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 4–6.

7 James W. St. G. Walker, “Decoding the Rights Revolution: Lessons from the Canadian Experience,” in *Taking Liberties: A History of Human Rights in Canada*, ed. Stephen J. Heathorn and David Goutor (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2013), 44–46.

By 1962, five Canadian provinces had enacted anti-discrimination laws. While these laws could be of limited scope and effect, they did the important work of codifying what counted as discrimination and raising awareness of the issue.<sup>8</sup>

In Quebec at the start of the 1960s, there was little legal protection from racism; during the previous decade, Premier Maurice Duplessis responded to calls for a provincial bill of rights by saying that the Bible was sufficient protection against discrimination. Quebec's first legal protection against racism came in 1963 with an amendment to the Hotels Act that forbid discrimination in the renting of hotel rooms; in 1964 the province passed a law forbidding discrimination in hiring practices. Throughout the decade, Black activists attacked these laws as insufficient and pressured Quebec to adopt a comprehensive set of human rights laws with a commission to enforce them; such a thing did not come into being until the Quebec Charter of Rights and Freedoms was enacted in 1975.<sup>9</sup>

### *Black Activism in Montreal During the Twentieth Century*

Writing about Black organizations in Toronto, the historian Amoaba Gooden describes how the city's West Indian community in the first half of the twentieth century created many organizations dedicated to their social and political needs. By the 1950s, the number of groups coming into being "bordered on the chaotic."<sup>10</sup> Similarly, though small in number, Black Montrealers had many groups dedicated to social and political causes, and West Indian migrants

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8 Howe and Johnson, *Restraining Equality*, 7–10.

9 Dominique Clément, *Canada's Rights Revolution Social Movements and Social Change, 1937-82* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 104; 122.

10 Amoaba Gooden, "Community Organizing by African Caribbean People in Toronto, Ontario," *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 3 (2008): 416.

played a key role in establishing and running these associations. In 1964 sociologist Don Handelman counted twenty-four active local Black associations in Montreal serving a population of a few thousand people; a news report from the same year counts representatives of forty local Black associations attending an event.<sup>11</sup> These groups performed a variety of social and political functions, helping Black Montrealers and their white neighbors with job training, food security and other basic needs, providing forums in which Black Montrealers from diverse backgrounds could meet, and organizing efforts to fight racism. They also staged educational events reflecting local interest in the struggles of marginalized people, including the civil rights campaign in the United States, the anti-apartheid struggle, and Canadian First Nations activism.<sup>12</sup>

Women were important actors in the development of local Black community groups. The Coloured Women's Club of Montreal [CWC] was founded by Black Canadian and African-American women in Montreal as a social service organization and political advocacy group in 1902. Historians put the women of the CWC at the centre of the development of many of Montreal's historic Black organizations, including the local branch of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, Union United Church, and the Negro Community Centre.<sup>13</sup>

The oldest continually-operating Black activist group in Montreal is Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), founded in 1919, two years after Garvey first visited the city. Montreal's UNIA branch grew out of a local chapter of the Association of

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11 Jack Baker, "Negroes Urged to Band Together to War on Discrimination Here," *Montreal Gazette*, October 10, 1964; Don Handelman, "West Indian Associations in Montreal" (M.A., McGill University, 1964), 61.

12 "Apartheid Debate Set for Monday," *Montreal Star*, May 14, 1960; "South African Boycott Seen as Dubious Course," *Montreal Star*, May 17, 1960; "Talks Set on History of Negro," *Montreal Gazette*, February 26, 1965; "U.S. Educator Speaks on Negro Situation," *Montreal Star*, March 17, 1965; "'Indian Power' New Rally Cry," *Montreal Gazette*, February 19, 1968.

13 Shirley Small and Esmeralda M. A. Thornhill, "HARAMBEC! Quebec Black Women Pulling Together," *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 3 (2008): 430; 440, n.11; Dorothy W. Williams, *Blacks in Montreal, 1628-1986: An Urban Demography* (Cowansville, Quebec: Éditions Yvon Blais, 1989), 27.

Universal Loyal Negroes, an organization founded by West Indians in Panama during the First World War and then brought to Montreal by West Indian migrants.<sup>14</sup> Historian Leo Bertley acknowledges difficulties ascertaining membership numbers, but estimates that some 400 Montrealers joined the UNIA in its first year, and some 700 by 1922, a substantial proportion of the city's Black population at the time.<sup>15</sup> The original membership of the Montreal chapter was overwhelmingly West Indian in origin, a fact that Carla Morano attributes to West Indians' higher literacy rates, trades union experience, and more developed pan-African consciousness making them inclined to engage in social activism.<sup>16</sup> The UNIA is an important part of Montreal's history as a site for the manifestation of transnational Black solidarities, providing a framework for the development of diasporic ties, connecting Black people in Montreal to Black people from around the world; African and Caribbean students spoke at meetings, and Kwame Nkrumah addressed the group in 1958.<sup>17</sup> The group also supported African students and some students from the West Indies.<sup>18</sup>

As quickly as it gained popularity, Canadian Garveyism experienced setbacks. By 1924, half of Canada's chapters had closed as less-enthusiastic members left, disillusioned by Garvey's imprisonment. In Montreal, allegations of fiscal improprieties affected membership, and as the Depression disproportionately affected Montreal's Black population, many members left the city looking for work. After 1945, the UNIA fell out of favor as young people saw it as a "club for senior citizens." More importantly, as Bertley argues, Canadian Blacks had a largely

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14 Leo W Bertley, "The Universal Negro Improvement Association of Montreal, 1917--1979" (Ph.D., Concordia University, 1980), 10; 41-42.

15 Ibid., 93-95; 132.

16 Carla Marano, "'Rising Strongly and Rapidly': The Universal Negro Improvement Association in Canada, 1919-1940," *The Canadian Historical Review* 91, no. 2 (2010): 233-59.

17 Bertley, "The Universal Negro Improvement Association of Montreal, 1917--1979," 115-115; 139.

18 Ibid., 244.

integrationist outlook, one in tune with the mosaic model but which conflicted with the UNIA's "race first" stance.<sup>19</sup> In the aftermath of the Sir George Williams Affair, however, the UNIA enjoyed renewed relevance as its facilities became an important meeting point for the Black activist community.

If the UNIA is Montreal's longest-running Black social organization, Union United Church is its most important. In 1907, American-born railway porters, feeling that the local Bethel African Methodist Episcopal church was not meeting their needs, founded the Union Congregational Church of Montreal, which became Union United in 1925. Under the leadership of Reverend Charles Este, an Antiguan who also served as UNIA chaplain, Union United became what historian David Este calls "the most important social welfare institution in the Black community." The church provided social services and promoted community development and leadership. After 1945, Union United began to fight against the colour line; one campaign focused on rules that forbid Black women from working as nurses and teachers.<sup>20</sup>

In response to the decline of the UNIA, in 1927 members of Union United founded the Negro Community Centre [NCC] to "promote racial advancement" and improve conditions for Blacks in Montreal. The NCC's early history reflected divisions between Montreal's Black communities. While recent African-American arrivals, drawing on their experiences with grassroots activism in the U.S., were strong believers in locally-based race advocacy groups, some West Indians feared that the NCC's charitable mission was an admission of Black inferiority. Others worried that a dedicated Black community group would isolate Blacks and hamper integration efforts, and the NCC's reliance on donations from the railroads fueled fears that the

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19 Ibid., 39; 101–111.

20 David C. Este, "The Black Church as a Social Welfare Institution," *Journal of Black Studies* 35, no. 1 (2004): 3–22.

group would prevent Blacks from expanding their job opportunities outside of their traditional positions in that industry.<sup>21</sup>

In 1968, the journalist Boubacar Cone toured the NCC's Coursol Street headquarters and called it "a temple, where one seeks refuge from unemployment, despair and racial prejudice."<sup>22</sup> The NCC ran adult education and job training programs, provided lunches and milk to schoolchildren, ran a day camp, and worked with another local organization, the Montreal Negro Alumni Group (founded in 1953 by Thomas Massiah) to support students and help them transition into working life.<sup>23</sup> They also hosted community meetings and popular educational talks on Black history, politics and culture. In the late 1940s, the NCC expressed a desire "to identify ... with a broader, more democratic spirit and with the Canada-first tradition," without losing its distinct Black identity; by the early 1960s, about 35% of the people served by the NCC were white Montrealers who lived in and around the historically Black neighborhood of Little Burgundy.<sup>24</sup>

While its focus was largely directed towards social concerns, the NCC also engaged in political activism; in the 1940s they pressured local department stores to hire Blacks and campaigned to get them to stop selling "Negro Stripe" brand candy bars.<sup>25</sup> In the early 1960s, the

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21 Dorothy W. Williams, *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1997), 66–67.

22 Boubacar Kone, "Etre Noir a Montreal," *Maclean*, August 1968, 36.

23 "The Negro Community Center in Action" (Negro Community Center, Montreal, January 1960), 4–7, Roy States Collection, McGill University; "Trio Awarded Negro Alumni Bursaries," *Montreal Star*, January 4, 1963; Jean Shaw, "Fosters Negro Education," *Montreal Gazette*, November 6, 1964; "Scholarships Set for Negro Students," *Montreal Star*, October 31, 1964; Norma Kelly, "Group Raises Bursary Funds for Young Negro Students," *Montreal Star*, November 7, 1966; Ron Fanfair, "Guyana's Queen's College Alumni Marks BHM," accessed June 27, 2014, <http://sharenews.com/archives/caribbean-news20090312guyanae28099s-queene28099s-college-alumni-marks-bhm/>.

24 "The Negro Community Center in Action," 4; "Negro Community Centre Offers Multi-Racial, Cultural Experiences," *Montreal Star*, September 27, 1965; Handelman, "West Indian Associations in Montreal," 72; Williams, *The Road to Now*, 66–68.

25 Williams, *The Road to Now*, 85.

NCC tied its social mission to political critiques of the system that created a need for their services. In 1963, president Stanley Clyde announced that the organization would study the link between racism on the job market and Black youth dropping out of school; Clyde argued that the mental health of Black youth was closely tied to their economic independence.<sup>26</sup>

In the 1960s a number of organizations representing people from various West Indian nations emerged, including the Jamaica Association, the Guyanese Association, the Trinidad and Tobago Association and the St. Vincent Association. These groups facilitated social contact and aided members of their respective national communities in Montreal and abroad, helping potential migrants to Canada and providing aid to members who had encountered emergencies.<sup>27</sup> Historian Dorothy Williams argues that the national orientation of these groups made them less relevant to younger West Indian migrants, who tended to be more interested in pursuing a unified Black agenda as opposed to narrowly national concerns.<sup>28</sup> However, the participation of these groups in a parliamentary commission on immigration, where they were pointedly critical of racism in Canadian immigration policy, in debates about Black Power in a Canadian context, and in the founding of the National Black Coalition of Canada reveal that they were an important dimension of organized Black activism.

Finally, the Negro Citizenship Association [NCA] focused its activism on strengthening legal protections for Quebec minority groups. Even though it was a small organization, not counting more than 50 members when Handelman wrote about them in 1964, the group became

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26 Alvin Johnson, "Group to Study Drop-out Problem," *Montreal Star*, September 25, 1963.

27 Hakim Ramjohn, "Letter to Trinidad and Tobago Association (Montreal)," September 19, 1966, MG31 H181 Vol. 4, Library and Archives Canada, Clarence Bayne fonds; Janet Kunc, "Letter to Trinidad and Tobago Association (Montreal)," January 16, 1967, MG31 H181 Vol. 4, Library and Archives Canada, Clarence Bayne fonds; Trinidad and Tobago Association (Montreal), "Meeting of Executive Committee," March 1, 1968, MG31 H181 Vol. 3, Library and Archives Canada, Clarence Bayne fonds.

28 Williams, *The Road to Now*, 104.

a key player in bringing racism to public attention in Montreal in the 1960s and providing a forum in which Montreal's Black population could debate political issues and organize activism. The NCA was founded in Toronto in 1951 as an advocacy group for West Indian migrants, and a Montreal branch became active within two years.<sup>29</sup>

The NCA was largely stagnant through the late 1950s and early 1960s, until, in 1962, a young West Indian university graduate named Richard Leslie graduate joined up. Leslie, who came to Canada from Barbados in 1958 to study accounting at Sir George. Leslie was heavily involved in campus life, serving on the student union and running for president, and serving as editor-in-chief of the *Georgian*.<sup>30</sup> Leslie became president of the NCA in 1963. Soon after, the group drafted a charter pledging to “organize, promote, encourage, and provide facilities for the education, recreation, health, social, civic and economic advancement and general welfare of the coloured population” of Quebec and to advocate for the interests of “coloured immigrants.”<sup>31</sup> Leslie also called for a membership drive to attract middle-class university graduates (in the early part of the decade, membership largely consisted of working-class West Indians, mostly domestics—two-thirds of the members were women—and railway workers) and to open up the association to whites who could make useful contacts and raise the NCA's “status and prestige.”<sup>32</sup>

In the 1960s, Montreal Blacks had a broad variety of groups working on their behalf, groups that built on a history of advocating for both local, and, in the case of the UNIA, international Black interests. Many of the activists involved with these associations were of West

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29 Ibid., 102–103; Handelman, “West Indian Associations in Montreal,” 62–63 While, as noted, Handelman does not name any of the groups he studied, his description of what he calls “the civil rights association” is obviously the NCA.

30 “Five to Contest Two Seats; Seven Students Acclaimed,” *The Georgian*, March 8, 1960; “Leslie Joins SAC Administration,” *Loyola News*, September 20, 1963.

31 Handelman, “West Indian Associations in Montreal,” 117–119.

32 Ibid., 63–64; 120–121.

Indian origin. Over the course of the decade, a growing West Indian population, combined with a growing sense of racial consciousness, fueled grassroots efforts on the part of Black people in Montreal to challenge the racism they encountered. These groups, notably the NCA, played an important role in that process, providing a print culture forum for debates on local, national and international issues, and organizing efforts to get Canada and Quebec to acknowledge their racism and to enact legal measures to fight it.

### *Revealing Canada's Racism*

Black activists and their allies attempting to draw attention to Canadian racism competed with a national myth that Canada was a country free of systematic discrimination. As increased Caribbean immigration and the intensifying African-American struggle drew greater attention to the question of racism, Montreal's Black activists worked to raise awareness of the existence of their communities and to outline the racism they faced, making the question of local racism a regular topic in the daily and student press.

The local press often promoted the idea that Canada was free of racism. In 1965, the *Star* reported that the leader of a medical expedition to Easter Island said that Easter Islanders "all wanted to come to Canada" because the Canadian scientists "accepted and worked with [them] as equals."<sup>33</sup> When Richard Lord, a Black man, was elected vice-president of the Quebec Liberal Party in 1966, his supporters told the press that Quebecers' ability to "vote for the man—regardless of race or color ... could well be held up as an example to other countries in the

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33 D.B. MacFarlane, "Canada Equated with Heaven," *Montreal Star*, June 16, 1965.

world.”<sup>34</sup>

However, alongside these assertions of Canada’s freedom from racism, readers of Montreal’s press were regularly confronted with reports of racial discrimination:

- In 1960, B’nai B’rith organized a panel bringing together Black Montrealers from a variety of backgrounds, including the West Indian diplomat Owen Rowe, William Hill, a “Negro chemist from New York state” who had lived in Montreal for five years, Ann Packwood of the Coloured Women’s Club and E.I Swift, a trade union official; the panelists described their experiences with racism and proposed solutions to the problem. Hill suggested that racism was rooted in economics, arguing that whites were afraid to share economic power.<sup>35</sup>
- In 1961 the Canadian Labour Congress charged the Canadian National Railway with denying Black employees advancement opportunities.<sup>36</sup> A former CNR porter noted that “no Negro porter” had ever been “offered a promotion of any kind,” while “hundreds of [white] dining car employees” had taken office jobs and inspectors’ positions.<sup>37</sup>
- In 1962, the *Star* ran a series of articles on Canadian race relations by S.B. Francis, a Montserratian immigrant to Montreal. Francis quoted a resident of the Halifax community of Africville saying that Blacks in Canada “ain’t living. We’re just existing .... We’re third-class citizens.” Francis warned that a “feeling of living death and tactful rejection,” combined with a growing identification with African-American activism was “creating a restlessness and dissatisfaction among Canadian Negroes.”<sup>38</sup>
- In 1963, the Barbadian-Canadian author Austin Clarke wrote that while he had just become eligible for Canadian citizenship, he refused to apply for it, because to do so would mean “accepting in theory a status that Canada does not intend to give me in practice—because I am a black man.”<sup>39</sup>
- In 1964, city councilor Gerald Charness charged Montreal’s taxi companies with having racist hiring practices. Mayor Jean Drapeau replied that the charges were “unfounded” and that Montreal was “proud of [its] record on discrimination.”<sup>40</sup> Two weeks later, two taxi firms announced that they had hired Black drivers; The NCA’s Richard Leslie called it a step forward, but was troubled that officials had ignored the issue, “preferring the

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34 “Will Study Language Needs,” *Montreal Star*, November 21, 1966.

35 Boyce Richardson, “Racial Discrimination Revealed in Montreal,” *Montreal Star*, March 15, 1960.

36 “Promotion Bias Denied by Railway,” *Montreal Star*, September 23, 1961.

37 “Fair Play,” *Montreal Star*, October 2, 1961.

38 S.B. Francis, “Nova Scotia Takes a Major Step,” *Montreal Star*, November 5, 1962.

39 Austin C. Clarke, “A Black Man Talks about Race Prejudice in White Canada,” *Maclean’s*, April 20, 1963, 18.

40 Fred Bruemmer, “Taxis’ Discrimination Charged by Charness,” *Montreal Star*, January 21, 1964; Bruce Garvey, “Laws Can Halt Segregation, but Only People Can End Discrimination,” *Montreal Gazette*, March 17, 1962.

comforting but illusory belief that [the charges] were unfounded.”<sup>41</sup>

- In 1967 *Canadian Magazine* revealed the racism at play in the Canadian Football League, including the exclusion of Black players, many of whom were American, from social events, limited opportunities in coaching for Blacks, allegations of limits on the number of Black players on a given team, Black players’ challenges finding housing, and segregated rooms on road trips.<sup>42</sup>

Alongside these reports, Black Montrealers wrote numerous letters to newspapers drawing attention to the racism they faced. Many of these letters were from people who identified as being of West Indian origin. “E.B.” accused insurance companies of charging West Indians larger premiums.<sup>43</sup> Barry Danne, a Jamaican-born mechanic, detailed the racism he had encountered on the job market, concluding that West Indian descriptions of Canada as the “Land of Opportunity” were “gimmick and propaganda.”<sup>44</sup> “R.W.,” Letitia McKenzie, and Bill Pollard wrote letters recounting their experiences with racist landlords: “R.W” recounted an apartment building manager telling him that other tenants “would have no negroes” as neighbors; McKenzie, a self-described “Canadian Negro,” wrote that it was “time we stop being complacent and easy-going, and start letting our white neighbors know we deserve better and intend to demand it.”<sup>45</sup>

The experiences of West Indian students in Montreal played an important role in these attempts to raise awareness of local racism. A shared Commonwealth identity, low tuitions, an easing of immigration restrictions, and the promise of a society that would welcome them regardless of the color of their skin attracted increasing numbers of West Indians to Canadian

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41 “Two City Taxi Firms Hire Negro Drivers,” *Montreal Star*, February 5, 1964.

42 Dan Proudfoot, “The Negro in the CFL,” *Canadian Magazine*, November 18, 1967.

43 E.B., *Montreal Star*, October 10, 1963.

44 B.B. Danne, *Montreal Star*, February 8, 1963; Barry Danne, *Montreal Gazette*, April 28, 1964.

45 R.W., *Montreal Star*, January 29, 1964; Letitia McKenzie, *Montreal Star*, July 21, 1964; Bill Pollard, *Montreal Star*, February 26, 1966.

universities in the 1960s. Meanwhile, the role of Canadian universities in training what was often seen as the next generation of independent West Indian leaders reinforced Canada's self-image as a haven from racism and as a force for good in the Caribbean. The campus press and the daily papers presented West Indian students as successful scholars and outstanding members of their university communities, highlighting their academic, athletic and community accomplishments.<sup>46</sup> These portrayals supported the notion that Canada was a place where people could thrive, contribute and prosper regardless of race or origin.

That notion, however, existed in tension with the reality of daily life for West Indians studying in Montreal, which could be marked by loneliness, social alienation, poverty and encounters with systemic discrimination. Canadians were aware that racism on their part risked alienating the future leaders of other nations. In 1960 the *McGill Daily* noted that international students often faced social alienation, and argued that much more needed to be done to reinforce a positive image of Canada as a welcoming society.<sup>47</sup> In 1962, W.C. Buchanan, chair of the Royal Commonwealth Society, told McGill students that the future foreign leaders presently on campus would "run full tilt into the colour bar" during their time in Canada; in response, the *Gazette* urged Canadians to do more to make foreign students welcome in order to ensure international goodwill towards Canada in the future.<sup>48</sup>

A pair of works of short fiction reveal how West Indian students in Canada experienced alienation in their adopted home. In 1961, Sir George student C. Alexander Brown wrote "Exile from a Warm Land," in which a Jamaican studying in Montreal listens to calypso coming from a

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46 "Archibald Brought Soccer to Loyola," *Loyola News*, October 6, 1961; "SUS Candidates 1964-64," *The Georgian*, March 12, 1963; "West Indian Heads SGWU Student Group," *Montreal Star*, March 18, 1964; "W. Indian Wins Prize at SGWU," *Montreal Star*, March 20, 1965.

47 "Welcome to Canada!," *McGill Daily*, October 7, 1960.

48 "Students in Montreal Hurt by Color Bars," *Montreal Gazette*, March 2, 1962; "Afro-Asian Students Need a Welcome," *Montreal Gazette*, March 3, 1962.

neighboring apartment. Broke and cold, he thinks about how he “had not expected to find so many things ugly, so many things unpleasant, painful,” and recalls how in Kingston he knew all his neighbors, but in Montreal, people could live beside each other for years and never know each other’s name.<sup>49</sup> In 1962, the Barbadian-Canadian writer Austin Clarke, who first came to Canada as a university student in 1955 and was a leading force in writing the Black experience into Canadian literature, often focusing on the experiences of West Indians in Toronto, wrote “The End-Up Is the Starting-Out,” a reminiscence in the voice of a Barbadian graduating from the University of Toronto. The protagonist recalls having his grades withheld because he could not pay his fees, leaving him panicked that immigration officials might discover he had flunked without his knowing; he “couldn’t sleep, for fear o’ some RCMP or detective come round and snatch you up ... and land you back in the system what you excape.” Seeing the smiles of graduating students, he notes that they “forget the times o’ foodlessness. The time of looking ‘bout for a nice, decent, cheap room. The hustling behind a casual piece o’ employment.”<sup>50</sup>

Even though many of these students came from the educated West Indian middle classes and thus often saw themselves as, and were expected to become, their nations’ next generation of highly-ranking civil servants, educators and intellectuals, life for the foreign student in Canada was hard: In 1968, Franklyn Harvey, a McGill engineering student from Trinidad and one of the principal activists in the CCC, wrote to his political mentor C.L.R. James, apologizing that he had to write in very small print on the lettergram he was sending, as he could not afford the postage to send a letter in an envelope.<sup>51</sup> Harvey’s message, like Clarke’s and Brown’s stories, reveals the gap between Canada’s self-image as a country where people from the developing

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49 C. Alexander Brown, “Exile from a Warm Land,” *The Georgian*, March 3, 1961.

50 Austin C. Clarke, “The Ending Up Is The Starting-Out,” *Bim* 9, no. 35 (December 1962): 181.

51 Franklyn Harvey, “Letter to C.L.R. James,” May 13, 1968, Folder 43 Box 2, C.L.R. James Collection, University of the West Indies (St. Augustine).

world could thrive and the daily lived experiences of West Indian students.

On top of the challenges that may be seen as part and parcel of foreign student life—money problems, loneliness—West Indian students also frequently encountered racism, something that often surprised them because they had expected Canada to welcome them regardless of their skin colour. Terrence Ballantyne, one of the students at the center of the Sir George Williams affair, recalled choosing to come to Montreal over an American school because he believed that he would have an easier time there as a Black man. Upon arrival, a landlord told him point-blank that he “didn’t rent to niggers.”<sup>52</sup> A pair of controversies that received extensive coverage in the campus press reveal the extent to which Ballantyne’s experience was part of a systemic problem, and not an unfortunate one-off. In 1961, a McGill fraternity refused to rent a room to a Jamaican student, and, according to the West Indian Society, then called campus housing services to request they only refer “Canadians and Americans” looking for rooms.<sup>53</sup> Two weeks later, a day after the *Star* had praised McGill’s climate of “racial harmony,” *Star* journalist and Jamaican-Canadian activist Alvin Johnson revealed that McGill’s housing services allowed landlords to exclude renters on racial grounds.<sup>54</sup> Three years later, after a leasing agent assured a Sir George student that there were “no niggers” in the apartment building he was considering, the *Georgian* sent two Black students to inquire about an apartment. They were quoted a rent of \$115 and told no apartments were available for three months. The paper then sent two white students who were told that an apartment was available immediately for \$110.<sup>55</sup>

Both incidents generated extensive conversation about race relations on campus, often

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52 Interview with Terrence Ballantyne, Port of Spain, February 28, 2013

53 “West Indian Club Accuses,” *McGill Daily*, September 29, 1961.

54 D.B. MacFarlane, “Campus at McGill Provides Model of Racial Harmony,” *Montreal Star*, November 2, 1961; Alvin Johnson, “Overseas Students Can Meet Pitfalls in Securing Rooms,” *Montreal Star*, November 3, 1961.

55 Bryan M. Knight, “Negro Students Meet Discrimination,” *The Georgian*, February 4, 1964.

hinting at a popular denial among students that racism was a serious issue. When one McGill fraternity brother defended the rights of private groups to discriminate, another argued that it was time for Canadian fraternities to end racist policies instituted to conform with their American chapters.<sup>56</sup> One reader excused the McGill's policy of allowing off-campus landlords to discriminate, saying that it would protect Blacks "from being insulted and embarrassed when applying to landlords who will turn them down on the basis of race."<sup>57</sup> At Sir George, a student who applauded the *Georgian's* work in exposing racism noted that most of the students he had heard discussing the story believed the paper had not proven that the incident was not simply an isolated case, and doubted that it reflected a larger pattern of discrimination.<sup>58</sup> A more strident critique came from a student who argued that too much attention was paid to "alleged injustices" committed against "the Negro-Jewish community" and lamenting the fact that voicing "even the mildest anti-Jew and anti-Negro sentiments" on campus was "to invite social ostracism."<sup>59</sup>

Off campus, revelations of racism drew a variety of responses from readers of the daily papers; while some readers were eager to share their outrage, others were inclined to minimize the problem of racism or simply deny its existence. When L.J. Jones wrote to the *Star* in 1963 to discuss the racism he experienced applying for a job at a bakery in the working-class suburb of Verdun, he drew a number of letters of support, some calling for a boycott of the bakery.<sup>60</sup>

Similar revelations drew responses that discounted or minimized the claims that Black people had made. Responding to a Black woman who, after a fruitless job search, argued that Canadian

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56 F.M., "Racial Discrimination: A Fraternity Right?," *McGill Daily*, October 10, 1961; Birks, *McGill Daily*, October 17, 1961.

57 L. Baltas, *Montreal Star*, November 14, 1961.

58 Bertram Manrakhan, *The Georgian*, February 11, 1964; Douglas N. Rishor, *The Georgian*, February 11, 1964.

59 J. Barry Gardner, *The Georgian*, February 11, 1964.

60 L.J. Jones, *Montreal Star*, May 9, 1963; Mrs. Norman Clode, *Montreal Star*, May 15, 1963; Mrs. T. Cole, *Montreal Star*, May 15, 1963; D. Poulson, *Montreal Star*, May 15, 1963; A. Ryerson, *Montreal Star*, May 15, 1963.

whites, like their counterparts in South Africa and the U.S. South, had “taken it upon themselves to persecute us” by denying decent jobs to Blacks, “An Ex-Marylander” replied with advice that minimized the systemic nature of racism and its effects, telling the women that all she had to do was convince racists “that a Negro can be charming, efficient and an asset to the firm.”<sup>61</sup>

Replying to Austin Clarke’s revelation that he would not pursue Canadian citizenship because of the country’s racism, Genevieve Holden wrote about the successful Black people she knew and argued that while there might have been some racist Canadians, “we are not quite so ‘white’ as [Clarke] paints us.”<sup>62</sup>

The tension between two readings of Canadian society—one in which Canada was largely free of racism, one in which racism was endemic—thrived on what observers saw as the particularity subtle way in which Canadian racism was manifest. This subtlety allowed for the denial of racism’s existence, or, at least, facilitated it being dismissed as an individual moral flaw. As early as 1928, analyses of Montreal’s racial dynamics focused on the “subtle” nature of racism in Canada, taking shape as the “silent avoiding of contacts with Blacks as part of the process of preserving the status quo of the Canadian whites.”<sup>63</sup>

Victims of racism in Montreal expressed a continued frustration with how racism manifested itself made addressing it challenging. Black Montrealers recounted how the experience of looking for an apartment revealed how racism was encoded in Canada; instead of being “greeted in the honest Mississippi style” and being told that the landlord did not rent to Blacks, potential renters were “politely informed” that the apartment had been rented (even as the “For Rent” sign remained on display), quoted an unreasonable price, or told that “a few dirty

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61 An Ex-Marylander, *Montreal Star*, April 6, 1960; *ibid.*

62 Genevieve C. Holden, *Maclean’s*, June 1, 1963.

63 W. Israel, *The Montreal Negro Community* (Master’s thesis). Montreal: McGill University, 1928, quoted in: Este, “The Black Church as a Social Welfare Institution,” 9.

tenants will object” to having Black neighbors.<sup>64</sup>

As Canadians hid their racism in subtle social codes, they also minimized it by comparing Canadian racial dynamics to the more virulent and violent racism of their southern neighbor. Anti-racism activists struggled to get Canadians to acknowledge Canadian racism on its own terms as they confronted the argument that an absence of official Jim Crow and lynchings meant there was no racism to speak of in Canada. *Star* reader “Housewife” accused “our Negro community” of “making a mountain out of a molehill,” and pointed out that there was no “K.K.K. in Canada, no Little Rock, no segregated washrooms, no reserved back seats in buses.”<sup>65</sup> In the first issue of *Expression*, Leslie argued that the widespread attention paid by Canadians to the African-American struggle reinforced the notion that Blacks in Canada were fortunate to not be living under Jim Crow.<sup>66</sup> In the following issue, George Springate, a Montreal police officer who later became a member of Quebec’s National Assembly and a citizenship judge, conducted an informal survey of his fellow cops on race relations. A quarter of them thought that Blacks that should live in segregated neighborhoods. Comparing his findings to U.S. survey data from 1951 which showed that 85% of Americans approved of segregated housing, Springate argued that while there was racism in their city, Montrealers might “not feel ashamed” when they compared their situation to that in the U.S.: however, he asked, why should Canadians compare themselves to another country, instead of addressing local issues on their own terms?<sup>67</sup>

Confronted with Canadians’ inability to acknowledge a racism hidden in social codes or their minimizing it by comparing it to the American situation, Black activists appealed to the

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64 Wouter De Wet, “Negro Leaders Seek Quebec Fair Employment Act,” *Montreal Star*, October 27, 1962; “Editorial,” *Expression*, May 1968, 3–4.

65 Housewife, *Montreal Star*, March 31, 1960.

66 Richard E. Leslie, “Editorial,” *Expression*, February 1965, 3–4.

67 George P. Springate, “Housing and Public Accommodations for the Montreal Negro,” *Expression*, July 1965, 16–17.

mosaic model as a way to justify their inclusion in Canadian society, both because the terms of the model meant they were owed that inclusion and because their acceptance would benefit the society a whole. NCA member Harold Potter argued that Blacks were as capable as any other group of fitting into the the Canadian mosaic, citing the international success of Montreal pianist Oscar Peterson, the achievements of local Black doctors and corporate executives, and an increase in interracial marriages as evidence that challenged “the dictum that Negroes form an unassimilable element in the Canadian population.”<sup>68</sup> At a 1963 meeting between representatives of Quebec minority groups and Premier Jean Lesage, Alvin Johnson linked the well-being of particular communities to the well-being of Quebec society, saying that “if a segment of our community is dejected in spirit, it eventually will affect the whole community.”<sup>69</sup> In 1965, the NCA argued that the benefits that Black Canadians accrued from social programs such as unemployment insurance, public education, and family allowances revealed that Black needs were not distinct, but reflected national needs, thereby casting Blackness as a part of a larger Canadian identity.<sup>70</sup>

Black activists in Montreal worked to raise awareness of the racism they encountered and made a claim for a place in the Canadian mosaic, not just for their benefit, but as a way to improve the Canadian society in a broader fashion. A central demand of their activism was advocating for legal mechanisms that would ensure equal access to the promises of the mosaic—full and equal membership in the Canadian society as Black people.

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68 Harold H. Potter, “Negroes in Canada (First of a Two Part Series),” *Expression*, February 1965.

69 Brian Upton, “Quebec Studies Anti-Discrimination Move,” *Montreal Star*, February 5, 1963.

70 Richard Leslie, “The Negro Citizenship Association Inc. Philosophy and Objectives,” *Expression*, February 1965, 4; Potter, “Negroes in Canada (First of a Two Part Series),” 9.

## *Appeals for a Human Rights Commission*

The creation of a dedicated set of human rights laws and a commission to ensure their enforcement was the primary demand of Montreal's Black activists. In 1962, after Nova Scotia incorporated a human rights committee, S.W. Jenkins and C.M. Hogg of the NCA said that their group was pressuring Quebec to enact legislation to protect minorities from housing and employment discrimination based on Nova Scotia's and other provinces' models.<sup>71</sup> In the inaugural issue of *Expression*, Leslie outlined the NCA's four-year plan, the centerpiece of which was getting the provincial government to pass an anti-discrimination law and a human rights act backed up by a commission to ensure their implementation.<sup>72</sup>

On 4 February 1963, Quebec Premier Jean Lesage met delegates from 38 groups representing Quebec's Black, Italian, Greek and other communities to discuss housing and employment discrimination. A brief presented to Lesage revealed that 18% of Montreal landlords admitted that they discriminated against Blacks and that ski resorts in the Laurentian mountains north of Montreal had a worldwide reputation for discriminating against Blacks and Jews; the brief concluded that anti-discrimination laws would help "establish a fair standard of conduct" and "hasten the removal of prejudice and ignorance." Lesage said he was "absolutely against discrimination" and promised to study the issue in Cabinet, but, reflecting the older *laissez-faire* attitude on the subject, said he was hesitant to pass laws that would limit individual liberties.<sup>73</sup>

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71 S.B. Francis, "Legislative Protection Sought," *Montreal Star*, November 6, 1962.

72 Leslie, "The Negro Citizenship Association Inc. Philosophy and Objectives," 4; Leslie, "'Editorial,' *Expression* February 1965," 8-9.

73 "Anti-Discrimination Legislation Sought," *Montreal Star*, January 24, 1963; Upton, "Quebec Studies Anti-Discrimination Move"; Robert McKenzie, "Representation on Discrimination Draws 'Study' Pledge from Lesage," *Montreal Gazette*, February 5, 1963; "Lesage Doute de L'opportunit e D'une Loi Contre La Discrimination Raciale," *Le Devoir*, February 5, 1963.

Stanley Clyke of the NCC later described the meeting with the premier as having produced only “vague promises.”<sup>74</sup>

Quebec tried to meet demands for laws that would guarantee the rights of minorities, but these efforts were roundly criticized for their failure to unambiguously ban discrimination. A month after the February meeting, changes to the Hotels Act were before Quebec’s Legislative Assembly. The *Star* criticized the bill as weak; it banned hotels from refusing guests “without just cause,” but did not specifically address racial or religious discrimination.<sup>75</sup> Forty community groups signed a letter arguing that the law did not protect minorities, and Clyke said the new law would not “satisfy the demands” presented to Lesage.<sup>76</sup> The bill was subsequently revised to specifically prohibit establishments from discriminating based on race, religion or ancestry, a move the *Star* said would “discourage unhealthy attitudes.”<sup>77</sup> Black activist observers were more critical. Richard Leslie pointed out that the bill had serious shortcomings, as while it protected tourists, it did nothing to protect apartment renters in their own city.<sup>78</sup>

In 1964, Lesage announced plans to address workplace discrimination.<sup>79</sup> Again, Black activists criticized the proposed legislation as weak as it was limited to hiring discrimination, did not address address race-based wage inequality, and did not incorporate a human rights commission to ensure its effectiveness.<sup>80</sup> The strengths and shortfalls of the new workplace protections were revealed in short order. On September 2 1964, the day after the new law came

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74 Kone, “Etre Noir a Montreal,” 36.

75 “Opportunity to End Discrimination,” *Montreal Star*, March 7, 1963.

76 “Groups Say Hotel Act Is No Discrimination Bar,” *Montreal Star*, March 8, 1963.

77 “A Firm New Step against Prejudice,” *Montreal Star*, June 28, 1963.

78 Richard Leslie, “Editorial,” *Expression*, July 1965.

79 F.T. Collier, “Province to Outlaw Race Bias,” *Montreal Gazette*, May 4, 1964; “Discrimination Ban Planned,” *Montreal Star*, May 4, 1964.

80 Baker, “Negroes Urged to Band Together to War on Discrimination Here”; Leslie, “‘Editorial,’ *Expression* July 1965.”

into effect, Gloria Baylis, a registered nurse from Barbados, applied for a position as a nurse at Montreal's Queen Elizabeth hotel, but was told that the position had been filled. When Baylis learned that the job was still open and that applications from white nurses were being accepted, she contacted the NCA, who encouraged her to take the matter to court under the new law, marking the first time in Canada that workplace discrimination had been addressed in a criminal court.<sup>81</sup>

*Expression* portrayed Baylis as a Canadian Rosa Parks, describing "one of the most dramatic moments of the trial" as when "Mrs. Baylis stood up in the witness stand and ... said proudly, 'I am a Negro.'"<sup>82</sup> The trial's outcome was less dramatic than *Expression's* description of Baylis's testimony; the court ruled in her favor, imposing a nominal fine of \$25 against the hotel. Crucially, the court avoided addressing institutional racism by blaming the incident on one clerk's attitude and not the company as a whole; moreover, while the ruling established a precedent on workplace discrimination and generated publicity on the issue, it also revealed the weakness of the new law, which only applied to businesses with more than five employees and did not cover discrimination in the hiring of management.<sup>83</sup>

The minimal effects of the Baylis case bolstered arguments that ad-hoc laws were inadequate and that only broadly-based human rights legislation and an accompanying commission would protect Quebec minorities. *Expression* compared the Baylis ruling to a case that had recently unfolded in front of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, a model for what they wanted in Quebec. There, a business found guilty of racism in hiring had to enter into a

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81 William Wardwell, "Nurse Claims Prejudice in Hotel Hiring Policy," *Montreal Star*, May 18, 1965; Russell Gilliece, "Judgment Scheduled Sept. 17," *Montreal Star*, June 16, 1965.

82 Gerald W.F. Charness, "Racial Discrimination in Employment: Canada's First Case," *Expression*, January 1966, 29.

83 "Court Judgment—'Her Majesty, the Queen vs. Hilton Hotel of Canada Limited (Queen Elizabeth Hotel)," *Expression*, January 1966; Charness, "Racial Discrimination in Employment: Canada's First Case."

memorandum of understanding with the commission detailing the steps to be taken to resolve the issue, the plaintiffs were granted the right of first refusal for any relevant job opening, and the company had to make a public declaration that it would adhere to Ontario's human rights code.<sup>84</sup>

In the years following the Baylis case, the NCA continued to advocate for legal protections for minority Quebecers. In January 1966, Leslie assailed a commitment made by Lesage during his Throne Speech to "promote the absorption of immigrants in harmony with the economic and cultural interests of Quebec," as it lacked specific provisions to protect immigrants from discrimination in jobs or housing; in the absence of a human rights commission, Leslie wrote, "immigrants [were] likely to remain in conclaves, culturally, and to some degree economically, unabsorbed."<sup>85</sup> Two months later, opposition leader Daniel Johnson, who would become premier in June, told the NCA that Quebec should enact a provincial bill of rights and outlined a number of policies his Union Nationale party had proposed, including the creation of an ombudsman's office to deal with racist incidents.<sup>86</sup> By 1968, Leslie and the NCA were still working to persuade Quebec to improve anti-discrimination legislation, writing to Johnson, reminding him that the only law that protected minorities from housing discrimination was the Hotels Act, which did not apply to home rentals or sales, and urging him to incorporate housing protection into a broader human rights act.<sup>87</sup>

Quebec's recalcitrance towards enacting legal mechanisms that would protect minority populations was a source of profound frustration for Black activists, and this frustration was a key factor in the movement on the part of Black activists nationwide to create a national

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84 "Memorandum of Agreement Between Waverley Motors Limited and the Ontario Human Rights Commission," *Expression*, January 1966.

85 Richard Leslie, "Editorial," *Expression*, January 1966, 3–4.

86 Dan Foley, "Johnson Calls for Bill of Rights," *Montreal Star*, March 21, 1966.

87 Richard Leslie, "Translation of Text From Negro Citizenship Association to Daniel Johnson, Premier of Quebec," *Expression*, May 1968.

infrastructure that would allow them to speak in a unified voice. The need for an organization that would allow Black people in Canada to speak in a more unified voice was not only rooted in the state's unwillingness to meet their demands; it was also rooted in the need to address important divides between various Black communities in Canada. Debates about racism in Montreal brought to light social divisions within the city's Black population that were rooted in the particular histories of the communities making up that population.

### *Divides*

In the 1960s, Black communities were not only alienated from Canadian society, they were, to a degree, alienated from each other, forming, in the words of Windsor activist Howard McCurdy, "a mosaic all of [their] own."<sup>88</sup> As Montreal's Black activist community was working against racism, some of their Black co-citizens were hesitant to support efforts to reveal Canadian racism, or outright denied its existence. Responding to the 1960 B'nai B'rith panel on race relations, two *Star* readers identifying as Black Montrealers argued that discrimination against individuals did not translate into systemic racism.<sup>89</sup> At a 1962 NCC panel on local race relations, some panelists argued that any discrimination at play in the city was the product of an individual moral failing, not systemic racism, and contended that some Blacks blamed racism for difficulties finding jobs when their own lack of skills was the problem.<sup>90</sup> Some Black Montrealers in turn criticized their compatriots for defending the city's race relations. Allan

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88 Howard McCurdy, "Problems of Involvement in the Canadian Society with Reference to Black People," *Expression*, Winter 1968.

89 R.F., *Montreal Star*, April 19, 1960; A Montreal Negro, *Montreal Star*, April 26, 1960.

90 "La Discrimination Envers Les Noirs Au Canada," *La Presse*, May 18, 1962; "West Indian Panel Studies Discrimination in Canada," *Montreal Star*, May 18, 1962.

Husbands, who identified as “a member of Montreal’s coloured community,” criticized a CBC documentary on Blacks in Montreal for having focused on spokespeople who saw discrimination as a consequence of individual “deportment” and not as an expression of systemic racism, thus highlighting the kinds of arguments “which those who practice discrimination desperately seize to support their untenable position.”<sup>91</sup> S.B. Francis recalled how articles he had written for the *Star* about racism in Canada led to his being “crucified by [his] own ... for not presenting a false and Uncle Tom-ish view of the Negro today.”<sup>92</sup>

Francis also wrote that he had been criticized for not buying into the idea “that everything is sweetness and love between the many different island immigrants now in Canada, and also between the Canadian-born, American-born, and West-Indian born Negro,” maintaining that Blacks in Canada had erected social barriers between themselves based on “color ... academic ability, island prestige, [and] former social standing.”<sup>93</sup> Other voices made similar critiques. In 1960 the West Indian diplomat Owen Rowe called for a united front between West Indians in Canada and Black Canadians, two communities he saw as being alienated from each other.<sup>94</sup> Five years later, the NCA listed as part of its mission the creation of bridges between the city’s various Black communities.<sup>95</sup>

Social divisions within the expatriate West Indian population were a key site of these divides. As Bridget Brereton argues, racial structures created as a legacy of slavery had lasting effects on West Indian social dynamics, creating divides tied to origin, class and skin color that

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91 Allan Husbands, *Montreal Star*, August 11, 1960.

92 S.B. Francis, *Montreal Star*, November 2, 1966; For the original articles, see: Francis, “Nova Scotia Takes a Major Step”; Francis, “Legislative Protection Sought”; S.B. Francis, “Single Voice an Urgent Need,” *Montreal Star*, November 7, 1962; S.B. Francis, “Racial Prejudice Reported on the Rise,” *Montreal Star*, November 8, 1962.

93 Francis, *Montreal Star*, November 2, 1966.

94 Richardson, “Racial Discrimination Revealed in Montreal.”

95 Leslie, “The Negro Citizenship Association Inc. Philosophy and Objectives,” 4.

lasted long after emancipation, with profound effects on the development of Caribbean societies.<sup>96</sup> To a certain degree, these dynamics followed West Indian expatriates to Canada. Sociologist Don Handelman observed how transplanted “West Indian pattern[s] of social stratification” built on occupation and skin color were key to understanding local community dynamics. He found that middle-class students and professionals feared being lumped in with working-class West Indians by white Canadians because of their shared skin color, and thus tended to avoid social interactions with working-class West Indians, especially domestics. Meanwhile, working-class West Indians saw their middle-class compatriots as having “not kept faith with their coloured brothers.”<sup>97</sup> *Expression*’s Louis Lindo argued that the “cultural baggage” of West Indian social divisions stymied the development of Canadian Black identity; he described how one Barbadian migrant, a cousin to the Prime Minister of his home country, was shocked on his arrival in Canada at being identified as a “Negro” and thus “relegated to the lower class of society.”<sup>98</sup>

Another important divide was that between new arrivals from the West Indies and Blacks whose families were historically established in the city. Several observers noted that newcomers from the West Indies tended to see Black Canadians as accepting racism; meanwhile, the new arrivals were seen by older generations as “rocking the boat” and thereby letting their impatience interfere with the progress of racial justice.<sup>99</sup> NCA member Harold Potter, in an article outlining one of NCA’s principal touchstones—that Black people were as able as anyone else to integrate

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96 Bridget Brereton, “Society and Culture in the Caribbean: The British and French West Indies, 1870-1980,” in *The Modern Caribbean*, ed. Franklin Knight and Colin A. Palmer (The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 85–109.

97 Handelman, “West Indian Associations in Montreal,” 19–22; 41–45.

98 Louis Lindo, “The Black Crisis—Canada,” *Expression*, Spring 1969.

99 Handelman, “West Indian Associations in Montreal,” 54–56; Max McMahon, “The Negro in Montreal,” *Montreal Star*, October 28, 1966.

into Canada—qualified his claim by noting it did not necessarily apply to recent West Indian immigrants, whom he portrayed less as potential political allies than as charity cases, calling them “virtually penniless strangers whose only friends or relatives in the city are poor coloured people like themselves,” often lacking in “marketable skills,” unwashed, poorly dressed, and unable to deal with being “thrown among the sharks and barracudas of a great central city.”<sup>100</sup> Meanwhile, Lindo, writing as a new arrival from the West Indies, wrote that the old guard “[didn’t] fight. They have been conditioned to sit back and take it. They just try to get by. They are not ambitious; they live in slums and they don’t try to move out. ... They don’t know how to dress, which we at least can do properly.”<sup>101</sup>

There were also important class divides within Montreal’s Black population. Richard Leslie chastised the city’s Black professional class for “almost without exception, turn[ing] their backs on the Negro population in Montreal.”<sup>102</sup> Keith Hunte, a lecturer in History at the Cave Hill campus of the University of the West Indies, criticized what he called an “I’m alright Jack” class of Black professionals in Montreal who were uninterested in the issues facing “less skilled blacks.” Black community organizations, he argued, needed to challenge the professional classes to “understand that the forces that limit their own social advancement are the same that ensure that black labourers are the last hired and the first laid off.”<sup>103</sup>

Activists saw social divides between and among Black communities as important obstacles in the way of the advancement of a distinctly Canadian anti-racist political project. By 1968, Black activists across Canada, working in locally-oriented formations like the NCA, were

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100 Potter, “Negroes in Canada (First of a Two Part Series)”; Harold H. Potter, “Negroes in Canada (Second of a Two Part Series),” *Expression*, July 1965.

101 Lindo, “The Black Crisis—Canada.”

102 Springate, “Housing and Public Accommodations for the Montreal Negro,” 17.

103 Keith Hunte, “A View of the Negro in Canada,” *Expression*, May 1968, 28.

looking to coordinate their efforts and facilitate the ability of Black groups from across the country to overcome these divisions and speak in a more united voice. A crucial first step towards the consolidation of that voice unfolded in Montreal in October.

### *The Black People in Canada Conference*

S.B. Francis, in his 1962 *Star* series on race in Canada, quoted A.R. Blanchette of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Stanley Clyke of the Negro Community Center suggesting that Montreal's Black communities would benefit from having a unified voice, as there were too many groups working on their behalf.<sup>104</sup> The Conference to Examine the Problems of Involvement in the Canadian Community with Reference to Black Peoples of Canada [hereafter: BPC], held at Sir George 4-6 October 1968 was an important step towards resolving, on a national level, the problem described by Blanchette. Delegates to the BPC spent a weekend debating how to address the racism faced by Black people in Canada, and ultimately resolving to found Canada's first national Black organization, what became the National Black Coalition of Canada.

The BPC was a legacy of the Caribbean Conference Committee [CCC], an intellectual circle that grew out of C.L.R. James's time in Montreal that organized a series of conferences on the West Indies held in Montreal from 1965-1967, called the Conferences on West Indian Affairs. When the CCC broke up in 1967, some members were increasingly committed to exploring Black nationalist thought and action in its international dimensions; this tendency played an

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<sup>104</sup> Francis, "Single Voice an Urgent Need"; Francis, "Racial Prejudice Reported on the Rise."

important part in organizing the Congress of Black Writers in October 1968.<sup>105</sup> Others were more focused on working to improve race relations in Canada by working through institutional means. The BPC was part of that latter tendency, and was organized by Montreal-based Black and West Indian advocacy groups, including the NCA, Montreal's chapter of the New World Group, associations representing Montrealers from Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, St. Lucia, and Guyana, and the Sir George Williams Caribbean Students' Association.<sup>106</sup> The BPC grew out of the 1967 Conference on West Indian Affairs, the theme of which, "The West Indian in Exile," provided an opportunity for West Indians to examine how they contributed to the development of "various national areas of Western Civilization in which [they] have made a temporary or permanent home."<sup>107</sup> The organizers of the BPC saw the 1967 meeting as the moment when "all West Indian Associations and other leading black groups" in Canada "demanded a meaningful say in policy-making," and said that their event reflected "an awakening of the West Indian groups in Canada to the fact that whether they are here as students, domestics or immigrants, their development is greatly affected by the fact that they live within the social, political, and economic framework" of Canada.<sup>108</sup>

The prevailing question delegates to the BPC faced was the development of concrete strategies to challenge Canada's racism. Delegates agreed that the only practical solutions to the discrimination faced by Blacks in Canada would be found by working within Canadian structures to transform the country into one that made a meaningful space within the Canadian mosaic for Blacks and worked to outline the "integrated programs and state policies" that would

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105 A more detailed discussion of the CCC is found in Chapter Five.

106 The Conference Committee, "Conference 68," October 1968, MG31 H181 Vol. 2, Library and Archives Canada, Clarence Bayne fonds On the New World Group, see Chapter Five.

107 Franklyn Harvey, September 29, 1967, MG31 H181 Vol. 3, Library and Archives Canada, Clarence Bayne fonds.

108 The Conference Committee, "Conference 68."

reshape Canadian society so as to allow Blacks to become full members. To do so entailed engaging in practical politics in a unified manner.<sup>109</sup>

Much of the discussion focused on Black alienation, which, organizers wrote, was rooted in the gap between the stated values of the Canadian mosaic and Canada's self-image as a white nation, and could only be overcome "when the black community defines its role in the Canadian mosaic."<sup>110</sup> This alienation took shape both as a sense of disconnection from Canadian identity and in difficulties faced by Blacks in trying to access the material benefits of living in Canada, including basic needs like housing and work.<sup>111</sup>

BPC delegates also critiqued Canada's Black activism, accusing it as having been ineffective at raising awareness or provoking change; they saw previous activist efforts as being marked by a "relative immaturity" and lacking both a developed theoretical framework that could be translated into action and an ability to act in a "self-sufficient" manner.<sup>112</sup> Delegates were also concerned about unity between Canada's Black communities, expressing frustrations at divisions between recent arrivals from the West Indies and Black populations with a longer histories in Canada, which they saw as stymieing the development of a Canadian sense of Black consciousness.<sup>113</sup>

These critiques informed the desire to create a national body to advocate on behalf of Blacks in Canada that would act as a counterweight to the lack of a shared sense of Canadian

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109 Ibid.

110 Ibid.

111 Daniel Hill, *Expression*, Winter 1968; Gus Wedderburn, *Expression*, Winter 1968; Barry Myers, *Expression*, Winter 1968.

112 Anne McLean, Robert Hubsher, and Sharon Levine, "Black Community in Canada Studied," *The Georgian*, October 11, 1968; McCurdy, "Problems of Involvement in the Canadian Society with Reference to Black People"; Myers.

113 Walter Poronovich, "Blacks Agree Canadians Hypocritical," *Montreal Star*, October 7, 1968; McCurdy, "Problems of Involvement in the Canadian Society with Reference to Black People."

Black identity. A strong national voice for Black people in Canada was, delegates agreed, the only way to effectively agitate for the legal mechanisms that would ensure Canadian Blacks had fair access to the benefits of living in Canadian society.<sup>114</sup>

Delegates to the BPC unanimously passed a motion resolving that “[a]ll black organizations that are willing could consider themselves part of a national conference of black organizations and affiliate with this body, which would have headquarters in both Montreal and Toronto.”<sup>115</sup> This the first step in the formation of what became the National Black Coalition of Canada, Canada’s first national Black advocacy group, which officially came into being in 1969. Delegates also passed a resolution demanding that federal and provincial governments dedicate more resources to job training and education for Blacks, and demanded a Royal Commission on Civil Rights in Canada.<sup>116</sup>

The BPC was a key moment in the development of a distinct Canadian Black political identity, growing out of years of effort on the part of Black people in Canada to draw attention to the gap between Canada’s self-image as a welcoming and diverse nation and the lived experiences of Blacks. While the decision to move forward with the formation of national Black political organization was an important development, the criticisms voiced by delegates—both at Canada’s failure to guarantee Black people access to the benefits of Canadian society and at Black organizations for failing to generate the leadership and unity needed to force social change—spoke to a mounting frustration on the part of Black activists after close to a decade of sustained grassroots efforts to get their concerns acknowledged and addressed by the state.

The BPC was not what would be commonly understood as an expression of Black Power;

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114 Frank Collins, *Expression*, Winter 1968; Hill; McLean, Hubsher, and Levine, “Black Community in Canada Studied.”

115 “Conference Resolution,” *Expression*, Winter 1968.

116 McLean, Hubsher, and Levine, “Black Community in Canada Studied.”

the demands put forward by the conference were all firmly grounded in the promises of a liberal state. Yet the *Star* presented the event as a Black Power conference, one marked by the expression of anger towards whites, a tendency which is not apparent in other press accounts or published papers.<sup>117</sup> While a true expression of Black Power with local salience would come the following weekend at the Congress of Black Writers, some Black Canadian thinkers were already thinking about their relationship with Canada in terms that went beyond institutional reform.

### *A Radical Turn.*

In 1967, Irene Kon, a Montreal communist activist, suggested that the city could mark Canada's centennial by taking an interest in its Black population. With an obvious eye on the urban unrest unfolding south of the border, Kon mused that "we could make Montreal into an example of a city that attempts to deal with problems before, rather than after, they explode!"<sup>118</sup> In 1968, a pair of editorials in *Expression* took a surprisingly dire tone, evoking the possibility of a Canadian Notting Hill or Birmingham, and describing possible future uprising in Cote des Neiges—a neighborhood newly popular with Black families—being met with a military response, a situation made "almost inevitable" with "a black ghetto ... being created" as a result of Quebec's failure to enact human rights legislation.<sup>119</sup>

As the African-American freedom struggle became increasingly radicalized and resistance to its demands engendered increasing state violence, and as public debate about

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117 Poronovich, "Blacks Agree Canadians Hypocritical."

118 Irene Kon, *Montreal Star*, August 12, 1967; For Irene Kon, see her obituary, Brenda Branswell, "Larger than Life and a Committed Activist," *Montreal Gazette*, April 4, 2004.

119 "Editorial," 3–5; "Editorial: Black Consciousness," *Expression*, Summer 1968.

Canadian race relations balanced assertions that Canada was relatively free from racism with dire warnings of mass violence, Black people in Canada debated what, if any, relevance new radical tendencies had north of the border. In Montreal, these divides came to public light as young speakers at a memorial rally for Martin Luther King used the event to express their sharp critiques of local racism, using a language not previously heard in the city, one that evoked much of the rhetoric associated with the Black Power movement in the United States. Reactions to these critiques revealed how other voices, equally critical of the Canada's racism, were less eager to embrace a politics that they saw as lacking an organic connection to local dynamics.

The activists we have encountered thus far made claims rooted in terms set forth by the society in which they were striving for recognition and equality, namely the mosaic model of national identity and the discourse of liberal human rights. Throughout the decade, however, other voices analyzed race relations in Canada in more radical terms, seeing race relations in Canada not as a failure of a liberal state to live up to its promises, but as an instance of the exclusionary dynamics foundational to Western society, thereby undoing myths of Canadian racial exceptionalism. In 1963 A.C. Thorn, a regular contributor to debates about racism in the *Star*, wrote about a recent case in which a white Montrealer had been threatened with dismissal from his job if he married his Black girlfriend; Thorn argued that the incident illustrated how Canada was not immune from the white supremacy that underpinned colonialism, a direct challenge to Canadian self-imaginings as a country free of systemic racism.<sup>120</sup> In the wake of the Watts uprising, W.B. Hill, a Black Montrealer, wrote that Blacks in Montreal lived under the same "white-power" domination and experienced the same "derision, abuse, and civil and

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120 A.C. Thorn, *Montreal Star*, December 12, 1963.

economic deprivation” as did people in Watts.<sup>121</sup> In 1968 Rosie Douglas situated the shortcomings of Canada’s “Just Society” in a longer history of Canadian white supremacy dating back to slavery, and troubled the closely-held ideal of Canada as a terminal point for the Underground Railroad with the assertion that “for the white man it was much easier to suppress the black man in Canada without interference than it would have been in the United States.”<sup>122</sup>

Soon after, Clarence Bayne, a Trinidad-born economist who taught at Sir George and was closely involved with a number of Black organizations including the Trinidad and Tobago Association and the NCA, put Canadian race relations into the larger context of the history of Western racial hierarchies. Canadians, Bayne wrote, worked hard to protect the myth that they were “a breed apart from all other whites” and feared drawing attention to their racism would “[affect] their bank books.” Canada was not an exception to the fact that white supremacy was foundational to the Western tradition; instead, things like Canada’s racially-exclusive immigration policies were a manifestation of the same dynamics that underpinned colonialism, Nazism and apartheid.<sup>123</sup>

As some activists continued to make claims for inclusion based on the mosaic model, others saw that model not merely as a way to justify inclusion into Canadian society, but as a means by which to open up possibilities of instituting significant changes to the way that society worked. Bayne argued that Black people should not see the mosaic model as a way to ease their integration into Canadian society, but as a way to change that society into one that would provide Black people with the political power they needed to secure their rights; Blacks “must not ... be lured into a false security” provided by the mosaic model, but “must grow with it, secure our

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121 W.B. Hill, “Letter,” *Montreal Star*, August 31, 1965.

122 Rosie Douglas, “Race Relations in Canada,” *Caribbean International Opinion* 1, no. 1 (October 1968): 34.

123 Clarence Bayne, “The Roots of White Racism -- Part II Canadian Impressions,” *Expression*, Spring 1969.

rights in it and strengthen it.”<sup>124</sup> Other critics, including Don Handelman, the sociologist who had written about West Indian activist groups and Gus Wedderburn, a prominent Nova Scotia Black activist, attacked the mosaic for paying lip service to social inclusion without giving minority groups the political power to ensure their rights, and for failing to go beyond promising narrowly-construed “linguistic and human rights and other super-structural changes” without addressing structural inequality.<sup>125</sup>

Sharp critiques of Canadian racism that were informed in large part by African-American Black Power and West Indian radical analyses that had been taking shape on the campus of Sir George Williams and among the community of mainly West Indian activist intellectuals came to public light when Martin Luther King was assassinated. After King’s murder, Canadians commemorated the man and his work; these memorial gestures revealed a growing diversity of political viewpoints within the Black activist community; while some observers focused on King’s nonviolent principles, newer voices, echoing the pronouncements of figures like Stokely Carmichael in the United States, framed the assassination as a last straw, the consequences of which would include a reckoning of longstanding racial grievances in Canada. In Halifax, Gus Wedderburn eulogized King, reminding his listeners that King “hated no man, envied no man and bore ill in his heart toward no one.”<sup>126</sup> Meanwhile, in Toronto, Ted Watkins, an African-American player for the Canadian Football League’s Hamilton Tiger Cats and the leader of the Toronto Afro-American Progressive Association led a demonstration in memory of King.

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124 Trinidad and Tobago Association (Montreal), “Newsletter,” April 1968, MG31 H181 Vol. 4, Library and Archives Canada, Clarence Bayne fonds.

125 “Comment,” *Expression*, Summer 1968, 24 While this article was published anonymously, the author noted that he had written a recent McGill thesis on West Indian community groups in Montreal. H.A.J. Wedderburn, “From Slavery to the Ghetto: The Story of the Negro in the Maritimes,” *Expression*, Spring 1969; Douglas, “Race Relations in Canada.”

126 “Reactions to Murder Continue,” *Montreal Gazette*, April 8, 1968.

Watkins warned reporters that “if things get hot down there [in the U.S.], then things will get pretty warm up here.”<sup>127</sup>

Montrealers’ suggestions for commemorating King tied him to the the internationalist spirit the city had embraced during the previous summer, when it hosted the World’s Fair (known colloquially as “Expo’67”) and to the city’s reputation as a racially progressive haven. Rabbi Nathan Kobs proposed dedicating a pavilion at the Expo fairgrounds (which remained active in various forms after 1967) to King and his ideals.<sup>128</sup> One *Star* reader evoked Expo 67’s international spirit, Montreal’s role in Jackie Robinson’s career (Robinson broke the professional baseball color barrier playing in for the Montreal Royals, the Brooklyn Dodger’s farm team in 1946) and the city’s reputation for its “sense of fair play” in a letter proposing the creation of a scholarship in King’s name to benefit local Black and First Nations youth.<sup>129</sup>

Yet while plans to commemorate King allowed some Montrealers to affirm their belief that “fair play” defined race relations in Montreal, a growing contingent of young Black activists, many of them West Indian students, used King’s death to open up discussion about local racism in a public manner. On 7 April, in what the *Star* called “possibly the largest ever massing of black citizens of Montreal,” somewhere between 600 and 800 people gathered at Sir George and marched to Place du Canada, where the crowd swelled to about 2000 people, about three-quarters of whom were Black. The rally, which was originally scheduled for the previous day but moved so it would coincide with events taking place in the U.S., was organized by students from McGill and Sir George; Rosie Douglas was, according to the *Star*, the “chief organizer.”<sup>130</sup>

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127 “Toronto Mourns King,” *Montreal Gazette*, April 9, 1968.

128 Rabbi Nathan Kops, *Montreal Star*, April 12, 1968.

129 Sydney Kom, *Montreal Star*, April 13, 1968.

130 Dick MacDonald, “Negro Rally Asks ‘True Justice,’” *Montreal Star*, April 8, 1968; “City’s Negroes Planning March,” *Montreal Gazette*, April 6, 1968.

This was Rosie Douglas's debut as a leading voice for Montreal's Black and West Indian activist community. Douglas, whose father owned a coconut plantation in Dominica, came to Canada in the early 1960s first to study agriculture at the University of Guelph and then, against his father's wishes, political science at Sir George. To say Douglas's political development was complex would be an understatement. At Guelph, he was closely involved with the Conservative Party and developed a personal relationship with Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, who reportedly approached him to run for Parliament and become Canada's first Black MP.<sup>131</sup> Douglas was also closely involved with student politics in at Sir George, serving as president of the West Indian Students Association, and was active in the CCC. When the CCC dissolved in 1967, Douglas was part of a radical tendency that went on to organize the Congress of Black Writers the following year.<sup>132</sup> A few months later, Douglas was at the center of the movement that developed around protests against Sir George's handling of accusations of racism against Perry Anderson.<sup>133</sup> He served three years for his alleged role in the destruction of the Sir George computer centre, and was deported back to Dominica, where he remained politically active. He served less than a year as Prime Minister of Dominica before dying in 2000.

Except for the fact that many of them were in French, many of the signs seen at the King rally would not have been out of place at a similar event in the States. They encompassed a variety of messages ranging from echoes of the civil rights movement ("Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere"; "Somewhere I heard about freedom") to Black Power-inspired critiques of white society ("Violence—Does the white power structure leave us any choice?"; "*A bas le racism blanc*"; "*Vive le pouvoir noir*").<sup>134</sup> The placards exposed the contested nature of

131 Eric Siblin, "Rosie the Red Stops Smashing the State," *Saturday Night* 115, no. 5 (May 27, 2000): 27–34.

132 See Chapter Five.

133 See Chapter Six.

134 Bill Bantey, "Montreal Mourned and Cried with Black and White Together," *Montreal Gazette*, April 8, 1968;

local Black communities' involvement with new approaches to Black liberation. While older people wanted "prayers and appropriate speeches," students wanted to protest "the society which had killed King." The two groups compromised, staging an event that featured both prayer and posters of Malcolm X, which, Sir George sociology professor Pat Pajonas wrote, "[satisfied] no one completely."<sup>135</sup>

The rally was not just a memorial for King, but an opportunity for Black activists in Montreal to draw mass attention to their cause. Beverley Walker, an activist and music teacher at the NCC originally from the Bronx, criticized Montreal's Black communities for their historic "apathy," and praised the crowd for finally having "come together in solidarity."<sup>136</sup> Douglas said that Blacks had been exploited in Canada for 400 years and that 1968 was the year "to put an end to the discrimination, the exploitation, the degradation." He issued a warning to Pierre Trudeau, who had been selected as Liberal Party leader and Prime Minister just the day before, that Canadian policy "from now on ... must be compatible with the interests of the black man." Adopting a tone unprecedented in Canada, Douglas asked the crowd if they were ready to die for the cause of Black liberation. Another speaker warned "the French" that "the game [was] over" and that Blacks would no longer accept unfair treatment; there were also statements about local racism in housing and employment.<sup>137</sup>

The rally provoked a strong reaction from Black activists who had been advocating for institutional changes as a way to advance the anti-racist cause. Clarence Bayne used an editorial in the Trinidad and Tobago Association newsletter to accuse unnamed radicals of "[threatening] a bewildered audience with a Detroit-like summer in Montreal." Bayne saw the pronouncements

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MacDonald, "Negro Rally Asks 'True Justice.'"

135 Pat Pajonas, "All the World Knows the Score ... but No Man Can Find the War," *Direction One*, March 1969.

136 MacDonald, "Negro Rally Asks 'True Justice.'"

137 Bantey, "Montreal Mourned and Cried with Black and White Together."

of Douglas and others at the rally as an echo of critiques of the NCA coming from West Indian activists whom he framed as dilettantes with little knowledge of local issues. These “new so-called leaders,” who had arrived “not more than 5 years ago,” Bayne wrote, were uncritically spouting Black nationalist rhetoric without theorizing its relevance to the local situation. Bayne defended the NCA as a movement grounded in local realities; while some activists saw Blacks who had not “read Fanon, or sat at the feet of Rap Brown or Stokely Carmichael,” as “Toms,” the NCA “[identified] with the international struggle for liberation of the black man” but strove to maintain its intellectual and political independence, preferring to selectively draw on various currents of the international Black struggle in order to inform “intelligent applications to the problem in its immediate environment.”<sup>138</sup> In a similar vein, *Expression* called for activism rooted in an informed engagement with local concerns. While the “black awakening” taking place in Montreal was inspired by the emergence of “black-dominated nations” in the international public sphere and the development of a global concept of citizenship that transformed distant causes into local concerns, Black people in Canada needed to ground their activism in its Canadian specifics. *Expression* warned against the temptation to “import the slogans and tactics of the American struggle” to address local issues.<sup>139</sup>

These appeals for analyses of and action against Canadian racism grounded in its specific historical and political dynamics reflected an important tendency in West Indian New Left thought, one that is explained in depth in Chapter Five, but may be quickly understood in terms of a tendency to see intellectual decolonization—a break from using the intellectual precepts imposed by the colonial experience—as a necessary precondition for free political action.

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138 Trinidad and Tobago Association (Montreal), “Newsletter,” 1968, MG31 H181 Vol. 4, Library and Archives Canada, Clarence Bayne fonds.

139 “Editorial: Black Consciousness,” 4.

Political action that was informed through a theoretical approach derived from other contexts risked being ineffective at best, and reactionary at worst.

Reading Bayne's critique on its own, it would be easy to frame it as expressing aversion to radical analysis as such. But recall it was Bayne who framed Canadian racism as embodying the same dynamics that underpinned Nazism and apartheid. There were, in 1960s Montreal, competing radical tendencies, and even though the NCA and *Expression* largely sought to work within institutional structures, their political strategizing should not be read as a denial of the validity of radical critique, even if, as Bayne maintained, some activists saw the work of such actors as out-of-step with the rapidly changing times. To a certain extent, given Porter's framing of the mosaic as a tool of exclusion and of perpetuation of WASP power, asking Canada to accept Black people and grant them equal access to the promises of Canadian liberal society was a deeply radical critique, even if an emerging cohort of activists did not see it as such.

Black Montrealers created a vibrant infrastructure of community organizations to advance their social and political interests. An influx of immigrants from the West Indies energized local activism against racism, and the city's Black activists increasingly worked with the press to challenge Montreal, Quebec, and Canada to acknowledge the racism they experienced, a racism that was obscured both by distinct social codes and through comparison with the more virulent, violent, and public racism of the United States. As Black Montrealers and their allies drew attention to the racism they lived with, they challenged the idea that Canada was a haven for racism, a myth that allowed discrimination to be dismissed as an individual moral failing, and not a structural element of Canadian society. By the autumn of 1968, two distinct schools of Black activism were at play in Montreal; one that drew extensively on revolutionary

transnational Black radical theory, and one that sought to root itself solidly in the specifics of the Canadian experience to advocate for profound political and social change in a Canadian context.

## Chapter Two

### **“Why Not a Band of White Supremacy across Africa?”: Montreal Debates Africa from Sharpeville to the UDI.**

In 1959, Simson Najovits, a Sir George Williams University student, described his encounter with African nationalists at Speakers' Corner in London. Najovits wrote that instead of the communist label with which they were often tagged, African anti-colonial leaders were best understood as fascists who believed that their co-citizens were incompetents who “must for the ‘common good’ be controlled and manipulated by an elite.” These future leaders were going to impose “a corrupt, unjust system” on their countries, where the only future for whites was “massacres and lynching and concentration camps.”<sup>1</sup> Seven years later, Ahmed Mohiddin, a Kenyan political science graduate student at McGill, examined the changes that Uganda had made to its education system since independence, drawing attention to “the damage inflicted on the Africans by more than 70 years of colonialism” and detailing the efforts that would have to be made by Africans and the international community to undo that damage.<sup>2</sup>

These two student-penned analyses speak to the breadth of attitudes about Africa which found expression in Montreal in the 1960s, from strong critiques of colonial rule to the fear that the absence of European control would predicate a continent-wide slide into barbarism. As African nations gained independence and the struggles against white-minority rule in southern

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1 Simson J. Najovits, “Orators Corner and Black Africa,” *The Georgian*, October 5, 1959 Najovits later became an executive at Radio-France International.

2 Ahmed Mohiddin, “Education in Uganda,” *McGill Daily*, March 11, 1966.

Africa intensified, Montrealers, including African students from the city's universities, white émigrés who had left Africa, either in protest against white minority rule or out of fear it coming to an end, people with personal and business connections to Africa, and readers writing to Montreal from Africa debated the course and implications of African decolonization. Drawing on a cosmopolitan set of participants, these debates highlighted both strong commitments to liberation and racist and imperialist discourses portraying Black people as underdeveloped and violent.

During the 1960s, African students in Montreal criticized white rule and the emerging neocolonial order with analyses rooted in pan-African intellectual traditions. Their progressive voices were joined by opponents of southern Africa's white-supremacist regimes, including former white settlers who had emigrated to Canada to protest state racism. Other voices, including Montrealers with connections to southern African settler regimes, shared Najovits's pessimism about the prospects for an independent Africa. This pessimism was often rooted in racist ideas about Africans being either insufficiently developed to govern themselves or tropes about African savagery. As African struggles against white supremacy in South Africa and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) intensified, the imagined threat of white genocide loomed large in some analyses. However, the lines between racism and opposition to legalized white supremacy were ambiguous; opposition to white minority rule often coexisted with the notion that Africans were not ready for self-rule.

This chapter looks at how Montrealers debated developments in Africa in the first half of the 1960s. Three events—the 1960 Sharpeville massacre and the resulting heightened international attention given to apartheid, the Congo crisis that same year, and Rhodesia's 1965

declaration of independence to preserve white-minority rule—kept African affairs as a main topic of discussion in Montreal’s student and daily papers. I analyze those debates to reveal the extent to which racist and imperialist understandings of Africa and Africans were central to Canadian understandings of events in Africa, even among avowedly anti-racist liberals and even as Canada disavowed its imperialist history. While Canadians largely opposed legalized racism, they were also ignorant of how central opposition to racism and imperialism was to African political identity.<sup>3</sup> As Montrealers discussed African events, they revealed the extent to which their understandings of the actions of Black people fighting against oppression were often informed by racist and imperialist imaginings of an “underdeveloped” and violent people, imaginings that existed in tension with a Canadian national self-image based in large part on an aversion to racism.

Debates about Africa were also strongly shaped by Canada’s commitment to the Commonwealth as it transformed from an association of white dominions to a racially-diverse group of independent nations. As a middle power eager to make its voice heard on the international stage, Canada saw the Commonwealth as a way to independently exercise diplomatic power. This was especially true in the context of apartheid South Africa. After the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, Canada scored a major foreign policy coup by working against the other white-majority Commonwealth nations in a campaign to oust South Africa from the Commonwealth.

In 1960, political scientist Douglas Anglin described Canadian policy on Africa as “inadequate and incoherent.”<sup>4</sup> Up until then, Canada’s historical involvement with Africa was

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3 Peter J. Henshaw, “Zimbabwe and Canada: Historical Struggle Meets Historical Vacuum,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 41, no. 3 (2007): 511–512; Douglas G. Anglin, “Canada and Apartheid,” *International Journal* 15 (1960): 135.

4 Quoted in R. O. Matthews, “Africa in Canadian Affairs,” *International Journal* 26, no. 1 (1970): 122.

minimal: Canada fought in the Boer War and maintained trade ties with South Africa, and there were limited Canadian business interests scattered around the continent.<sup>5</sup> Ottawa assumed that the imperial powers were responsible for governing their African territories and preparing them for independence, but by 1960, decolonization and crises in Congo and South Africa, combined with Cold War realities forced Canada to take more developed positions on Africa.<sup>6</sup> There were also domestic factors at play, as Quebec nationalism forced Ottawa to establish stronger relationships with Francophone Africa to counter Quebec's efforts to create an independent international presence.<sup>7</sup> Finally, although Africa was less important to Canadian investors than other regions, economic demands shaped Canada's relationships with Africa, notably the need to protect Canadian capital while crafting a response to apartheid.

Three cases were important in revealing how Montrealers thought about Africa during the first half of the 1960s: the Sharpeville massacre and the intensification of the struggle against apartheid; the crisis following the independence of Congo and the murder of Patrice Lumumba; and Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence. This chapter discusses all three, but begins with a look at how debates about Africa more generally revealed how Canada's self-image as a country free of structural racism existed in tension with profoundly racist ideas about Africans.

### *Debating Race and Africa*

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On 18 October 1960, *Montreal Star* editor George Ferguson spoke to a local literary

5 Ibid., 149.

6 Ibid., 122; 127; Robert O. Matthews, "Canada's Relations with Africa," *International Journal* 30, no. 3 (1975): 538–9; Linda Freeman, "Canada and Africa in the 1970s," *International Journal* 35, no. 4 (1980): 794.

7 Matthews, "Canada's Relations with Africa," 540–541.

group on race and the Commonwealth. Ferguson attacked apartheid for its potential to destroy the Commonwealth, but also criticized the political development of independent African nations, arguing that while Canada had maintained the “happy evolution of the old 18th century empire,” it was unclear if African and Asian nations had “either the tradition or maturity” to make the Westminster system work.<sup>8</sup> Ferguson’s comments revealed the centrality of imperialist conceptions of Africa not only to supporters of Africa’s racist regimes, but also to many anti-racist liberals. This pessimism, rooted in the belief that Africans were insufficiently developed to govern themselves, was a common theme in debates about Africa. As Portugal considered granting a degree of autonomy to its African colonies in 1961, the *Star* noted that the intended beneficiaries of this liberalization were lacked the “political maturity that must accompany” self-government. Given the gap between the “zeal” of anti-colonial activists and the slow pace of reform, the “seething continent of Africa” would be unable to follow Brazil in becoming “a monument to the mother country’s language and Christian culture.”<sup>9</sup> An exception to this skepticism was the *Star*’s take on the independence of Nigeria in 1960, which expressed hope that the newly-independent country would be successful, but any optimism the paper expressed had little to do with the Nigerian people as much as the country’s “impressive corps” of European-trained leaders.<sup>10</sup>

Analyses that perpetuated the idea that Africans were insufficiently civilized to govern themselves were reflected by the reading public. R.B. Allum, who claimed to “know Africa quite well,” wrote that independence had robbed Africans of much of the “liberty, law, economic stability, social progress, and happiness” than they had gained under colonial rule. Independent

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8 “Racial Issues Destroy Close-Knit Association,” *Montreal Star*, October 19, 1960.

9 “The Portuguese in Africa,” *Montreal Star*, March 22, 1961.

10 “Nigeria’s Independence,” *McGill Daily*, September 30, 1960.

Africa had “largely gone back to the rule of the jungle,” with “black savages” committing “bestiality” against whites.<sup>11</sup> In 1964, *Star* reader Brian Burton argued that “getting rid of white supremacy and colonialism” had “landed both the Africans and [the Western powers] in a FIRST CLASS MESS.”<sup>12</sup> Two years later, after the *Star* ran a favorable review of Donald Barnett and Karari Njama’s *Mau Mau from Within*, Victor Michelson, a recent émigré to Montreal from Kenya, called reviewer Boyce Richardson an “an apologist” for “a foul and filthy cult in which cannibalism reigned supreme.”<sup>13</sup>

These letters drew replies challenging the basic assumption that Africans were unready to govern themselves. Readers questioned the need for Africans to be tutored on the path to independence, the benefits of colonial rule for the colonized, and the relevance of Western political concepts to Africa. In response to Ferguson’s comments on Africans’ ability to adopt to the Westminster system, “Kaka Ghaniensis, African Democrat” argued that Africans were developing political systems that would work for them, an “Africocracy” in which the people supported their leaders and their voices were heard.<sup>14</sup> “R.H.,” who had made several trips to Mozambique, called Portuguese colonialism “nothing but a sweat-shop for the Lisbon regime” and “a disgrace to the Western world.”<sup>15</sup> In response to the *Star*’s criticism of Kenya’s move to one-party rule, Ndema Udolobi wrote that the stance “would surprise few Africans,” as it was “typical of the paternalistic attitude of many” in the West; the desire to shoehorn African states into Western political models ran contrary to African communal values and undermined states’

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11 R.B. Allum, *Montreal Star*, May 10, 1963.

12 Brian M. Burton, *Montreal Star*, January 7, 1965.

13 Boyce Richardson, “A Definition of the Mau Mau Revolt,” *Montreal Star*, November 10, 1966; Victor D. Michelson, *Montreal Star*, November 16, 1966 Michelson discussed his emigration to Montreal in a subsequent letter to the *Gazette*. see: Victor D. Michelson, *Montreal Gazette*, January 4, 1967.

14 Kaka Ghaniensis, *Montreal Star*, October 26, 1960.

15 R.H., *Montreal Star*, May 16, 1963.

efforts to improve the lives of their citizens.<sup>16</sup>

As Montreal debated Africans' ability to govern themselves, Canada's role in Africa became a topic of increasing importance. Discussions about Canadian relations with Africa revealed how many Canadians saw their country as being particularly suited to assist in the continent's development. While some voices pointed to Canada's bilingualism as an advantage in dealing with the continent,<sup>17</sup> another part of Canada's national character made Canada the ideal country to undertake African development efforts: a supposed lack of an imperialist history. Speaking in Montreal in 1961, Reverend James Robinson, an African-American activist who advocated for African independence, noted that because Africans saw Canada with less suspicion than they did the U.S., Canada could play an important role in assisting African nations.<sup>18</sup> In 1962, Loyola College in suburban Montreal West founded an Institute of African Studies. Donald Savage, the head of the institute, told reporters that Montreal was a good choice for such a project, because while "similar American efforts ... would have political implications," "Canadians [were] readily received in Africa since our own history is one of non-colonialism."<sup>19</sup> Two years later, Peter Gutkind, a McGill anthropologist, argued that Canada had "no history of imperialism which might cause the Africans to be suspicious of Canada's intentions."<sup>20</sup>

Yet as Canada's imperial history was disregarded as it was presented as a potential partner for African nations, Montrealers drew parallels between Africa's anti-imperial struggles and Québécois struggles against Anglo-Canadian domination, seeing both as examples of the

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16 "New Democracy: One-Party State," *Montreal Star*, November 12, 1964; Ndema Udolobi, *Montreal Star*, November 21, 1964.

17 Leo Ryan, "Historic Foundation Launched," *Montreal Star*, June 29, 1962.

18 Francis Allen, "N.Y. Clergyman Brands Negro Rioters 'Nazis,'" *Montreal Star*, February 16, 1961.

19 "History Department Blooms: African Institute Initiated," *Loyola News*, October 19, 1962; Walter Poronovich, "Loyola College Will Establish First African Studies Institute," *Montreal Star*, October 18, 1962.

20 Raymond Heard, "Canada Can Help African Nations," *Montreal Star*, January 3, 1964.

dangers of anti-imperialist political activism. Sean Mills has shown how Québécois nationalists used Afrocentric thought as a framework for understanding their anticolonial struggle.<sup>21</sup> As they did so, conservative voices compared Quebec's own political violence to violence in southern Africa, harnessing fears of Black violence against whites in Africa to demonize Quebec separatism. In 1968, D'Arcy Richardson argued against sanctioning Rhodesia for its oppressive laws, writing that the country should be free to take care of its "terrorists" as it saw fit; nobody would think that the international community should have a voice in how Quebec dealt with its own bomb-planting "terrorists."<sup>22</sup> Rodney Whittall mused that a separate Quebec might treat its English-speaking population in a manner similar to the that experienced by Asians in Kenya.<sup>23</sup> L.E. Wolhuter, a white South African living in Montreal, argued that the anti-apartheid movement shared the extremism of elements of Quebec's nationalist movement that were using violence to advance their agenda.<sup>24</sup>

Montreal's debates about Africa were shaped by Canada's own imperial preconceptions, notably a profound racism that informed analyses of Africa and its people, but which existed in tension with justifications for increased involvement in Africa based on an assumed absence of a Canadian imperialist attitude. The following section discusses how African students in Montreal challenged those ideas and the opposition they encountered.

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21 Sean Mills, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal* (Montreal, Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).

22 D'Arcy Richardson, "Letter," *Montreal Star*, March 17, 1968.

23 Rodney H. Whittall, "Letter," *Montreal Star*, June 6, 1968.

24 L.E. Wolhuter, *Montreal Star*, April 23, 1965.

## *Africa at McGill*

During the 1960s, the presence of African students at McGill made the campus an important site of debate and activism about Africa. Often working through McGill's African Students' Association [ASA], African students attacked racism and imperialism, questioned the first generation of independent African leaders, interrogated the relationship between newly-independent states and foreign capital, and challenged the application of Western political frameworks to Africa, revealing one part of Montreal's history as a site for the development of Black radical thought.

It is not easy to ascertain how many African students were in Montreal in the 1960s; one report noted that there were 170 Africans at Canadian universities in 1961, and 500 more applicants in 1962.<sup>25</sup> Even with these small numbers, African students in Montreal brought their insights about Africa into the public sphere, participating in debates and activism and educating people in their host city about African affairs. In 1964 Ahmed Mohiddin wrote that, on top of the daily strains of university life, African students had to deal with their home countries being “grossly misrepresented” by the Canadian media’s “affected, undifferentiated and biased view” of Africa. Thus, African student groups worked to present “African life in all its ramifications—social, political, cultural, philosophical, and the problems involved in the nations-building effort.”<sup>26</sup> Raising awareness of Africa was a central part of the mission statements of two organizations founded in 1962 that united African students in Canada, the All-African Students Association of Canada and *l'Association des étudiants africaines à Québec*, which joined

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25 Ryan, “Historic Foundation Launched.”

26 Ahmed Mohiddin, *Montreal Star*, December 4, 1964.

already-existing African students' associations at both McGill and Université de Montreal as forums for African students.<sup>27</sup>

There is little to suggest that African students in Montreal in the 1960s developed lasting relationships with the city's Black community, but there were some connections of note. Tam David-West, a Nigerian student and president of the ASA contributed to *Expression*, Montreal's only Black periodical at the time.<sup>28</sup> An important link between African students and Montreal's Black community was fostered by the local chapter of the UNIA. Montreal's UNIA chapter provided scholarships to African students, helping the Garveyites remain relevant as their membership dwindled in the post-war years. Funding African students was in line with Garveyite values of self-reliance; the recipients were expected to return home to aid in national development in line with the Garveyite ideal of "the betterment of our people at home and abroad."<sup>29</sup>

One of the students to get support from the UNIA was Simon Gichuru, who returned to Kenya in 1968 to work in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and later at Kenya's U.S. embassy.<sup>30</sup> Other African students at McGill became involved in political and intellectual circles in Africa after their time in Montreal. Ahmed Mohiddin wrote an influential study of African socialism.<sup>31</sup> Tam-David West returned to Nigeria, and after working as a virologist at the University of Ibadan, joined the government where he held a number of cabinet posts.<sup>32</sup> He is

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27 "African Students Organize," *McGill Daily*, February 14, 1962; Yao Paul Assogba, "Histoire de L'association Des Etudiants Africains a Quebec," *Echo d'Afrique*, November 1973.

28 Tam S. David-West, "The Problems of African Independence," *Expression*, April 1966.

29 Leo W Bertley, "The Universal Negro Improvement Association of Montreal, 1917--1979" (Ph.D., Concordia University, 1980), 248-251.

30 *Ibid.*, 254.

31 Ahmed Mohiddin, *African Socialism in Two Countries* (London : Totowa, N.J: Croom Helm ; Barnes & Noble, 1981).

32 "How David-West Was Jailed, Freed," accessed December 17, 2013, <http://nationalmirroronline.net/new/how-david-west-was-jailed-freed/>.

still an active critic of the Nigerian government.<sup>33</sup> Ifegwu Eke was Nigeria's commissioner for education and information minister for the breakaway Biafran republic.<sup>34</sup> Godfried Agama became leader of Ghana's opposition in 1969 and then deputy leader of the opposition in the Justice Party under Joe Appiah in 1970.<sup>35</sup>

African students had ties with Montreal's Black communities through the UNIA, but any involvement they had with Montreal's Black population beyond that remains obscure. While West Indian students in Montreal were prominent voices in campaigns to reveal the racism experienced by Black people in the city and in activism to combat that racism, for the most part, African students were silent on the question of Canadian racism. One exception in the published record is an interview that ran in the *McGill Daily* in 1960 with Ifegwu Eke and Godfried Agama, who discussed their experiences as Africans in Canada. The pair criticized Canadians for not having "the faintest knowledge" of where foreign students came from and the press for giving inaccurate information about Africa and engaging in a tendency to paint Africans as uncivilized and violent. Eke also commented on racism in Canada, saying that he believed that more Canadian students, "particularly girls," wanted to establish connections with African students, but were leery of how their parents and the wider society would react.<sup>36</sup>

While African students were less inclined to involve themselves in critiques of Canadian racial politics, they were strongly critical of political developments in their home countries. During the first half of the 1960s McGill's African students participated in forums with visiting officials from African nations, where they discussed the transition from imperial rule to

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33 Tam David-West, "More Thieves in Govt than Saints," accessed December 17, 2013, <http://www.punchng.com/news/more-thieves-in-govt-than-saints-david-west/>.

34 Renata Adler, "Letter from Biafra," *The New Yorker*, October 4, 1969, 86.

35 Dr Obed Yao Asamoah, *The Political History of Ghana (1950-2013)* (Author House, 2014).

36 "Africans Claim Public Misinformed," *McGill Daily*, December 2, 1960.

independence, development, sovereignty, and the political models best suited to African states. These encounters provided a forum in which the students expressed their visions of a post-colonial Africa. These encounters revealed the extent to which students became increasingly skeptical about the applicability of Western political theory to African situations, wary of the relationship between the West and Africa, and critical of their national leaders.

On 21 October 1960, Kenyan legislator Onyango Ayodo spoke at McGill's School of Social Work. His speech revealed how the paternalism of imperial rule could be reproduced by the first generation of independent African leaders; the best course for Africa's development, he argued, was one based on the knowledge gained by Western-educated Africans, as they had "learned to respect European ideals, and to desire progress."<sup>37</sup> Earlier in the decade, discussions of African politics at McGill echoed Ayodo's valorization of Western models. Shortly before Ayodo's visit, McGill hosted a weekend of events in honor of Nigerian independence that was marked by expressions of paternalism towards Africans and the valorization of Western development models as the only viable path for Africa. At a ball featuring a performance by the musician Babatunde Olatunji, the British High Commissioner to Canada set the stage for a celebration of Nigeria's independence by announcing that "England, as a mother, is proud of its child Nigeria, which has now come of age."<sup>38</sup> Students and professors echoed the High Commissioner's paternalism and focused on the need for Nigeria to adopt Western development models. Nigerian graduate student Samuel Okorie said that in the quest for "justice, peace, equality and freedom," Nigeria would "put into practice her training in British pragmatism." Agronomist Paul Abadom said that Nigeria could only attain prosperity by shedding

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37 "Africa to Be Neutral," *McGill Daily*, October 24, 1960.

38 "Nigeria Honoured," *McGill Daily*, October 1, 1960.

“superstition and primitive methods of agriculture.” One student challenged the idea that Western development models were Africa’s best hope; John Ekpenyong’s presentation traced how Western “commerce, religion and civilization” had undermined African society and values.<sup>39</sup>

In short time, analyses like Ekpenyong’s became standard for McGill’s African students, as they sought to theorize African politics outside of the conceptual limitations imposed by Western-centered analyses. In January 1962, the ASA’s annual “Africa Week” united African students and visiting officials. The meetings revealed the extent to which the students embraced pan-African and anti-imperialist thought. During a 1962 debate on the question “What Kind of Democracy Can Succeed in Africa,” ASA president Ifegwu Eke argued that Western parliamentary democracy was impractical for Africa, which needed a political model based on African values. Criticizing the limitations that Western political theory, notably the communist/democratic binary, placed on Africa’s political development, Eke said it was more important that a state reflected popular will than that it fell on the correct side of that divide.<sup>40</sup> At a mock parliament the same year, Okorie and a student named Emmanuel Omenukor debated the role of foreign investment in limiting the sovereignty of African states.<sup>41</sup> In 1966, David-West, writing in *Expression*, noted his frustration with Canadian analyses that did not transcend Western frameworks and engage Africa on its own terms, arguing that African states needed to develop their own political cultures, regardless of how they fit into Western political taxonomies, be it was a one-party state, a no-party state, or some other form: echoing Kaka Ghanienisis, he argued that left to themselves, Africans would develop a type of “Applied Democracy,” or, what he termed “Afrocracy.” David-West also warned *Expression*’s readers about the potential for

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39 “Economic Growth Forms Basis of Speeches on Nigerian State,” *McGill Daily*, October 1, 1960.

40 Carlo Miller, “Democracy in Africa Debated by Student-Professor Panel,” *McGill Daily*, January 25, 1962.

41 Noel Roy, “African Model Parliament Presents Declaration of National Policy,” *McGill Daily*, January 29, 1962.

foreign aid and investment to undermine the sovereignty of African nations.<sup>42</sup>

McGill's African students also had pointed criticisms of the political direction of independent African states. In 1965 Mohiddin wrote about the failure of Africa's leaders to deliver on the promises of independence. He criticized them for relying on Western capital, for having a Western cultural orientation, and for failing to effectively oppose white minority rule in Rhodesia. He was especially appalled that Tanganyika's (now Tanzania) Julius Nyerere had relied on British military aid in the face of an attempted coup, a move he believed would serve those who believed that Africans still need guidance "like children."<sup>43</sup> A few months later, Gichuru strongly criticized African leaders who used their positions for personal gain while urging collective sacrifice in the name of socialist solidarity.<sup>44</sup>

African students at McGill faced a variety of attitudes about their home continent on campus. Throughout the 1960s, the *Daily* generally embraced an anti-colonialist position, running editorials critical of apartheid and white minority rule in Rhodesia and providing a forum for African students to publicize their progressive opinions. The paper was also, however, occasionally a venue for racist critiques of anti-colonialism. In October 1965, as Ian Smith was in London to discuss Rhodesian independence, the *Daily* argued that the stakes of the negotiations included not only the fate of Rhodesia, but the potential creation of "a solid belt of white supremacy" linking Portugal's colonies to South Africa.<sup>45</sup> Sara Collinson, who said she came from a "white colonialist" African family, replied with the question: "why not a 'band of

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42 David-West, "The Problems of African Independence."

43 Ahmed Mohiddin, "African Leadership Vacuum," *McGill Daily*, November 26, 1965; On the Tanganyika army uprising, see: Timothy Parsons, *The 1964 Army Mutinies and the Making of Modern East Africa* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003).

44 Simon M. Gichuru, *McGill Daily*, January 31, 1966; Bertley, "The Universal Negro Improvement Association of Montreal, 1917--1979," 254.

45 "Mr. Smith in London," *McGill Daily*, October 5, 1965.

white supremacy' across Africa?" To Collinson, Africans were "illiterate, uneducated, primitive" and unable to govern "in a modern-day civilization."<sup>46</sup> When David-West replied that, in contrast to Collinson's racism, African liberation movements were not anti-white,<sup>47</sup> a student named J. Sievers argued that David-West's portrayal of African anti-colonial movements overlooked the "African 'hospitality'" experienced by Europeans during the decolonization of Algeria and the Congo.<sup>48</sup>

Comments such as those by Collinson and Sievers were rare in the *Daily*. Outside the McGill gates, however, Montrealers displayed a wider scope of opinions about Africa and Africans. While many participants in print debates about developments on the continent were supporters of anti-racist and anti-colonialist struggles, many openly expressed racism towards Africans as they reacted to those struggles.

### *Canada and Apartheid*

In 1910, Canada's delegate to the inauguration of the Union of South Africa's Parliament proclaimed: "*Le negre! Voila le deconcertant, l'insoluble probleme pour l'avenir.*" Race and empire dominated interactions between Canada and South Africa. When the diplomat made his prescient comment, Canada had only recently fought in its first overseas war, contributing to the campaign to, as one historian describes the Boer War, "force the Afrikaners into the Empire allegedly in defence of civil rights" (those of British settlers in Afrikaner-majority territories); fifty years later, Canada led the charge to remove South Africa from the Commonwealth, this

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46 Sara Collinson, *McGill Daily*, October 7, 1965.

47 Tam S. David-West, *McGill Daily*, October 14, 1965.

48 J. Sievers, *McGill Daily*, October 20, 1965.

time in the name of the rights of the Black majority.<sup>49</sup>

On 21 March 1960 police in the South African township of Sharpeville fired on Blacks protesting pass laws, killing 69 people. At that moment, the anti-apartheid struggle became a “global preoccupation.”<sup>50</sup> The moral outrage created by the massacre made it “virtually impossible for the international community to give any further moral leeway to the apartheid system,” as South Africa’s Commonwealth ties no longer insulated it from international scorn.<sup>51</sup> As in much of the world, Canadian public opposition to apartheid was sharply pronounced, and Canadians, consistent with their self-image as champions of international justice, see themselves as having been key actors in the global anti-apartheid movement. Central to the myth of Canada as an anti-apartheid leader are the actions of two Conservative prime ministers, John Diefenbaker and Brian Mulroney. Diefenbaker’s 1961 break with the white-majority Commonwealth nations to expel South Africa from the Commonwealth is remembered as one of Canada’s “proudest moments.”<sup>52</sup> In the 1980s, Mulroney opposed the Reagan and Thatcher governments to support sanctions against South Africa.<sup>53</sup>

The principled positions of Diefenbaker and Mulroney allow Canadians tell themselves that their country was on the right side of history, but obscure the broader dimensions of the relationship between Canada and apartheid-era South Africa. Canada’s record on apartheid was

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49 Brian Douglas Tennyson, *Canadian Relations with South Africa: A Diplomatic History* (Washington, D.C: University Press of America, 1982), xii–xiv.

50 Tom Lodge, *Sharpeville: An Apartheid Massacre and Its Consequences*, *The Making of the Modern World* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 234.

51 Philip H. Frankel, *An Ordinary Atrocity: Sharpeville and Its Massacre* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2001), 5–6.

52 Joan Fairweather, “Canadian Solidarity with South Africa’s Liberation Struggle,” in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, vol. 3, part 2: International Solidarity (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2004), 825.

53 “Canada and Nelson Mandela: The Story behind the Myth,” *The Globe and Mail*, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/second-reading/canada-and-nelson-mandela-the-story-behind-the-myth/article1314284/>; Linda Freeman, *The Ambiguous Champion: Canada and South Africa in the Trudeau and Mulroney Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

“complex, ambiguous and contradictory.”<sup>54</sup> It advocated anti-racism, but also protected an economic, military and diplomatic partnership with the apartheid state.<sup>55</sup> While the stands made by the two Tory PMs are lauded, Canadians are less likely to recall things like the 1922 letter from Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King to Jan Smuts, his South African counterpart, lauding the “special bond” between the two countries or the friendly relationship between Canada and South Africa following the 1948 election of the Afrikaner National Party.<sup>56</sup> After 1948, Canada took a weak position on apartheid, rarely supporting early UN resolutions condemning it.<sup>57</sup> Even in the immediate aftermath of Sharpeville, Canadian leaders failed to articulate a clear position. Diefenbaker’s first reactions to the massacre reveal a deep-seated ambivalence on his part. He said that he “deplored the loss of life and racist policies in South Africa,” but also argued that he could see “no purpose” in lodging an official protest, and asserted that trade with South Africa should continue unimpeded.<sup>58</sup>

It was the Commonwealth that forced Diefenbaker to move past his ambivalence and take a strong stand. Sharpeville came in the wake of Harold Macmillan’s “Wind of Change” speech, an acknowledgement that the Commonwealth was now a multi-racial organization in which the nations of the old white Commonwealth were no longer dominant.<sup>59</sup> A week after Sharpeville, the *Gazette* argued that the Commonwealth’s increasingly diverse membership made it the ideal forum for addressing apartheid; South African violence to perpetuate old ideals of a “white

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54 Freeman, *The Ambiguous Champion*, 5.

55 Peter Henshaw, “Canada and the ‘South African Disputes’ at the United Nations, 1946-1961,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 33, no. 1 (January 1, 1999): 4–8; 25–26.

56 Fairweather, “Canadian Solidarity with South Africa’s Liberation Struggle,” 825–826; Henshaw, “Canada and the ‘South African Disputes’ at the United Nations, 1946-1961,” 18.

57 Anglin, “Canada and Apartheid,” 122–123.

58 Fairweather, “Canadian Solidarity with South Africa’s Liberation Struggle,” 827; Lodge, *Sharpeville*, 173.

59 Saul Dubow, “Macmillan, Verwoerd and the 1960 ‘Wind of Change’ Speech,” in *The Wind of Change: Harold Macmillan and British Decolonization*, ed. Larry Butler and S. E. Stockwell, Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies Series (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 21.

Commonwealth” was incompatible with the organization’s new face.<sup>60</sup> Diefenbaker realized that, with so many member nations in Africa, the West Indies and Asia, the Commonwealth could not survive with South Africa on board, and at the 1961 Commonwealth conference, he broke with the white-majority nations and led a drive by African and Asian members to expel South Africa.<sup>61</sup> Yet even after the expulsion, Canada maintained its ambiguity towards apartheid. In 1963, Canada joined the UN’s unanimous condemnation of apartheid, and prevented Ford Canada from selling trucks to the South African army; at the same time, it refused to support demands to expel South Africa from the UN, and non-military trade with the apartheid state continued apace.<sup>62</sup>

As was Canada’s official policy, Canadian popular opinion on apartheid was complicated. In 1960 Douglas Anglin outlined a dichotomy between Canada’s official ambiguity and what he saw as solid popular opposition to apartheid.<sup>63</sup> A reading of the public debates which unfolded in Montreal after Sharpeville reveals that Anglin was optimistic about Canadian public opinion. Opposition to apartheid competed with support for apartheid rooted in racist positions ranging from the belief that imperial rule would eventually “civilize” the “natives” to fear and hatred of Black people. Canadian opinions on apartheid were shaped in part by Canada’s history as a destination for immigrants. Liberal South African whites who had emigrated in protest of apartheid were a driving force in anti-apartheid activism, and many Canadian anti-apartheid activists migrants from various nations who had survived political oppression in their home countries.<sup>64</sup> That said, South African émigrés in Canada embraced a spectrum of views, from the belief that Africans were incapable of governing themselves and sympathy for settler perceptions

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60 “Hate or Friendship?,” *Montreal Gazette*, March 30, 1960.

61 Lodge, *Sharpeville*, 173–174.

62 John Hilliker and Institute of Public Administration of Canada, *Canada’s Department of External Affairs*, Canadian Public Administration Series (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990), 330.

63 Anglin, “Canada and Apartheid,” 122.

64 Fairweather, “Canadian Solidarity with South Africa’s Liberation Struggle,” 889–890.

that they were at risk of racial genocide to support for African freedom, though this support was itself sometimes tempered by paternalism towards Africans. Recent arrivals from southern Africa who supported apartheid found support for their racist views in newspaper letter pages. Much of the scholarship on the history of international anti-apartheid activism focuses on the role of expatriate South Africans in the struggle against apartheid;<sup>65</sup> in order to paint a complete picture of the discourses about race and empire in circulation in 1960s Montreal, the voices of people who came out in support of the apartheid regime, or who had ambiguous and contradictory positions need to be taken into account.

The stories of two South African academics whose opposition to apartheid led them to settle in Canada reveal the spectrum of political positions that liberal South African émigrés embraced. In 1961, John Shingler, a white South African and the former president of the National Union of South African Students left South Africa to study political science at Yale. Shingler had no idea if he would return home; he was a committed anti-apartheid activist, two of his activist friends had been jailed for their work, and with no desire to join them, he decided he would rather challenge the regime as an exile.<sup>66</sup> In 1965, Shingler came to Montreal on a speaking tour; he called for a boycott of South African goods and for Canadian universities to establish scholarships for Black South Africans to come to Canada “to get the kind of education they need to be of service to their people in their struggle against racial discrimination.”<sup>67</sup> Shingler eventually found a job teaching at McGill and settled in Montreal, remaining active not only in the anti-apartheid struggle, but in local civil liberties issues through the Civil Liberties

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65 Christabel Gurney, “‘A Great Cause’: The Origins of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, June 1959-March 1960,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26, no. 1 (2000): 123–44.

66 “A South African’s View of Apartheid,” *The Georgian*, February 9, 1965.

67 “Student Attacks Apartheid,” *McGill Daily*, February 10, 1965; “Apartheid Solution Sought,” *Loyola News*, February 12, 1965.

Action Committee [CLAC], an organization he founded in 1968 that, among other things, worked on behalf of Walter Rodney when he was expelled from Jamaica.<sup>68</sup>

The historian Arthur Keppel-Jones was another South African academic who could not tolerate apartheid. He left South Africa after the results of the 1953 election convinced him that there was no hope of ending apartheid. He returned to South Africa before finding permanent employment at Queen's University in Kingston in 1959 after a series of repressive new laws convinced him to make a final break with his home country.<sup>69</sup> Keppel-Jones was attracted to Canada in large part because of its position as “a loyal dominion of the British Commonwealth,” where he could retain his allegiance to the Crown and maintain an identity as “British of the diaspora.”<sup>70</sup> Canada also appealed to Keppel-Jones's liberalism. He was drawn to what he saw as a lack strict social divides and believed that Canada maintained “an economic basis for this social unity.”<sup>71</sup>

However, Keppel-Jones's writing from before his migration to Canada reveals the extent to which a racist paternalism towards Blacks co-existed with opposition to apartheid. In one pamphlet, he called for equality between South Africa's various national and racial groups; however, his notion of “equality” was based on the idea that Blacks needed to be “civilized” before they could participate fully in society.<sup>72</sup> In another pamphlet, he argued that “a common standard of civilization,” and not “race, language or national tradition” should determine who would belong to “the privileged enfranchised class,” and that “a sharp dividing line based on

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68 John Shingler, *Expression*, Winter 1968; John Shingler, Interview with John Shingler, August 1, 2012 For the Rodney case, see Chapter IV.

69 Arthur Keppel-Jones, *A Patriot in Search of a Country* (Kamloops [British Columbia]: Printed by the University College of the Caribook Print Services, 2003), 280; 311–312.

70 *Ibid.*, 290.

71 *Ibid.*, 298.

72 Arthur Keppel-Jones, *Friends or Foes? A Point of View and a Programme for Racial Harmony in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1950).

education and measurable standard of living” be drawn between those “non-Europeans” who would enjoy the full set of rights and responsibilities of citizenship from those who were as yet unable to “pass these tests.” Keppel-Jones believed that South Africa, if it followed this vision, might “save white civilization” by showing how membership was not contingent on whiteness.<sup>73</sup> Keppel-Jones did not address those pamphlets in his autobiography, written in 2003, either to justify those beliefs or to disavow them.

After Sharpeville, numerous letters appeared in Montreal’s papers condemning the apartheid state, some calling for a boycott of the South African regime.<sup>74</sup> The city’s Black activist community also expressed their outrage. The ASA passed a resolution condemning South Africa.<sup>75</sup> On 16 May, a panel including Iris McCracken of the Negro Community Centre discussed the options available to Canadian opponents of apartheid.<sup>76</sup> Montreal’s UNIA chapter sent messages of protest to the head of the Commonwealth, the UN Secretary-General, John F. Kennedy, and the Prime Ministers of Canada and India, and sent out nation-wide press releases calling for demonstrations.<sup>77</sup>

Sharpeville brought people into the streets in protest. In Sydney, protests brought hundreds of people into violent conflict with police. In London, 15,000 people protested in Trafalgar Square.<sup>78</sup> While Canada experienced nothing on a similar scale, Montreal students protested the massacre, first at a pair of protests in Ottawa, and then in Montreal. In Ottawa on

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73 Arthur Keppel-Jones, *Race or Civilisation?: Who Is Destroying Civilization in South Africa?* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1951), 10–11.

74 Joseph Flamer, *Montreal Gazette*, April 13, 1960; Joseph Flamer, *Montreal Star*, April 13, 1960; A.E.M., *Montreal Star*, April 19, 1960; Charles W. MacDonald, *Montreal Star*, April 27, 1960; G.A. Goodwin, *Montreal Gazette*, April 25, 1960.

75 “McGill Group Condemns South Africa,” *Montreal Star*, March 23, 1960.

76 “Apartheid Can Produce Only Violent Explosion in Africa,” *Montreal Gazette*, May 17, 1960; “South African Boycott Seen as Dubious Course,” *Montreal Star*, May 17, 1960

77 Bertley, “The Universal Negro Improvement Association of Montreal, 1917--1979,” 176–177; 181–182.

78 Lodge, *Sharpeville*, 173;236–237.

26 March, a hundred students laid a wreath in memory of the victims at Sharpeville at the Boer War memorial, a centrally-located site that tied Canada to South Africa, and then marched to the South African High Commission to deliver a letter of protest that the High Commissioner refused to accept, saying that his country did not accept external criticisms of its affairs.<sup>79</sup> The next day about 30 students from Montreal's Collège St. Laurent, bearing placards reading "*Cessez de tuer les Noirs*," joined Ottawa students at a vigil on Parliament Hill.<sup>80</sup> On 29 March in Montreal, students from Université de Montreal, McGill and Sir George marched from McGill to Windsor Station to send a telegram of protest to Diefenbaker.<sup>81</sup>

South Africa's potential expulsion from the Commonwealth sparked debate among opponents and supporters of apartheid. The *Gazette*, which had framed the Commonwealth as an ideal international forum for anti-apartheid efforts, argued that expulsion risked isolating South Africa's Blacks and creating a hardening of attitudes.<sup>82</sup> Others opposed expulsion not on strategic grounds, but because they supported the apartheid regime to one degree or another. E.C. Eril dismissed proponents of expulsion as people who were "currently engaged in an 'African binge,'" and not serious political actors.<sup>83</sup> R.D. Ralfe, a Toronto resident who traveled regularly to South Africa, argued that expulsion not only risked undermining any changes in attitude on the part of white South Africans, but that apartheid's opponents had to understand that Black South Africans were "very primitive" and that the whites who had built the country deserved a "compromise solution" that would allow them to hold on to the wealth they had created.<sup>84</sup>

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79 "Manifestations Contre l'Union Sud-Africaine," *La Presse*, March 28, 1960; "Ambassador Refuses to Accept Students' Note," *Montreal Star*, March 26, 1960.

80 "Manifestations Contre l'Union Sud-Africaine"; "Students Protest Apartheid," *Montreal Star*, March 28, 1960.

81 Tony Raspa, "Students Hold March in Protest," *Montreal Star*, March 29, 1960; Herbert Lampert, "Students Protest to PM," *Montreal Gazette*, March 29, 1960.

82 "Triumph or Tragic Failure," *Montreal Gazette*, March 17, 1961.

83 E.C. Eril, *Montreal Star*, December 10, 1960.

84 R.D. Ralfe, *Montreal Star*, February 9, 1961.

Ralfe's letter was part of a pronounced racist trend in letters to the papers. As some Montrealers condemned South Africa in print and on the streets, the increased attention created by Sharpeville opened up a space for expressions of support for apartheid. Letters applauding South Africa as a civilizing force on a dark continent appeared regularly during the first half of the 1960s. Responding to the protests after Sharpeville, readers chastised the media for not covering the violence perpetrated against white South Africans by "Negro mobs," arguing that whites were "fighting for survival," even after having "done some splendid work to uplift the Negro."<sup>85</sup>

The presence of white South African voices in the Montreal media drove local debate on apartheid. In October 1964, C.A.W. Manning, a South African professor of international relations at the University of London, criticized a *Star* editorial attacking South Africa's 90-Day Act, which allowed for the detention of any person for three months without trial. Manning argued that the act was a reasonable response to the "organized lawlessness" of the anti-apartheid movement.<sup>86</sup> Manning had already told a Montreal audience the previous December that apartheid was an attempt "to bring about a reasonable and peaceful solution" to a "pathological situation."<sup>87</sup> Manning's assertions drew responses from South African émigré Anne Hope, who attacked his defense of the law as something that "cannot be accepted by humane people," and detailed the abuses that took place under the law; Manning argued that South Africa's critics seemed to feel that "sabotage, if aimed at the South African government, ought not to be

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85 Jonathan Anderson, *Montreal Gazette*, April 13, 1960; Archibald Harshaw, *Montreal Star*, November 21, 1961; Archibald Harshaw, *Montreal Star*, September 30, 1963.

86 "Jail without Trial in South Africa," *Montreal Star*, October 20, 1964; C.A.W. Manning, *Montreal Star*, October 22, 1964.

87 Walter Poronovich, "South Africa's Apartheid Strongly Defended by Expert," *Montreal Star*, December 19, 1963.

condemned,” thereby portraying apartheid’s opponents as common vandals.<sup>88</sup>

On 3 April, Royal Bank of Canada vice-president C.B. Neapole complained that the *Star*’s coverage of South Africa was skewed in favor of Blacks.<sup>89</sup> While complaints that the *Star* was biased in favor of South African Blacks were a recurring theme, in September 1965 anti-apartheid activists targeted the paper for its support of the South African regime. On 17 September, Conrad Winn, chair of McGill’s chapter of the Canadian Union of Students [CUS], wrote the *Star* to protest posters promoting South African tourism on the paper’s building.<sup>90</sup> Replies to Winn revealed the scope of understandings of apartheid and race circulating in Montreal. While Anne Hope had strongly attacked apartheid, her response to Winn revealed a more complex position in which tropes about what South Africa’s Blacks had planned for the country’s whites came into play. Hope criticized the students for not understanding what she saw as a justifiable fear on the part of South African whites that they might, as her own former “black servant” had once told her, “drown in [their] own blood.”<sup>91</sup> H.R. Montgomery, a recent visitor to South Africa, argued that the students, who had bolstered their argument with a detailed statistical analysis of the effects of apartheid, did not understand the situation in “an African context” which took into account the allegedly worse situation faced by Blacks in countries neighboring South Africa.<sup>92</sup> One response to Winn revealed the base racism that was in play in many local responses to apartheid. F.S. Bolton wrote that students were “developing into a group of Negrophiles,” aided “by their present-day copying of the sensual, ritual dancing of the

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88 Anne Hope, *Montreal Star*, October 27, 1964; Anne Hope, *Montreal Star*, November 7, 1964; C.A.W. Manning, *Montreal Star*, November 4, 1964.

89 C.B. Neapole, *Montreal Star*, April 3, 1965.

90 Conrad Winn, *Montreal Star*, September 17, 1965.

91 Anne Hope, *Montreal Star*, September 22, 1965.

92 H.R. Montgomery, *Montreal Star*, September 24, 1965.

jungle.”<sup>93</sup>

The tension between Hope’s opposition to apartheid and her plea for empathy for whites’ fears that they were the potential victims of mass Black violence appeared several times in discussions about South Africa. A week after Sharpeville, Jean-Louis Gagnon, a commentator for the French-language radio station CKAC, urged Diefenbaker to take a strong stance against South Africa and called for a peaceful downfall of the apartheid regime, as this was the only way to prevent the likely extermination of the white minority at the hands of a black mob.<sup>94</sup> On 24 September 1960, the *Star Weekend Magazine* printed an article by Ian Todd, a journalist who had left South Africa to live in Canada. While Todd deplored apartheid and called for Blacks to be “given equal opportunities,” his fear of Black violence was obvious. He described the townships as packed with “primitive, frustrated souls,” and recalled an incident in which he got a flat tire while on a family outing. The farmer who owned the land neighboring the road drove Todd into town to get a spare, leaving Todd’s wife and children with the Black workers he was transporting. Even though the men were deemed trustworthy by the farmer, and unlikely to commit harmful acts on their employer’s land, where they would be the obvious culprits, Todd took a rifle out of the trunk of the car so his wife could protect herself from them.<sup>95</sup>

The complexities of Canadian understandings of race, African identity and apartheid came to the fore in an important piece of reportage which appeared in 1961. Sydney Williams, a black Canadian originally from St. Kitts and a founding member of the Canadian Society for the Advancement of Coloured People, traveled to South Africa and wrote a seven-part series on his

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93 Andrew Linder, *Montreal Star*, September 28, 1965; M. Segal, *Montreal Star*, September 28, 1965; F.S. Bolton, *Montreal Star*, September 24, 1965.

94 Jean-Louis Gagnon, “La Resistance Viendra a Bout de L’apartheid,” *La Presse*, March 30, 1960.

95 Ian Todd, “Why I Left South Africa,” *Montreal Star Weekend Magazine*, September 24, 1960.

experiences for the *Star*, part of which ran in the African-American monthly *Negro Digest*.<sup>96</sup> Statements Williams had made in support of apartheid led South Africa to believe that he might “be molded into an advocate of the country’s racial program” and a Black spokesman for apartheid; he came to South Africa believing that apartheid “had some virtues,” in that it could educate “the natives” and allow them to develop their own communities with a degree of self-rule. Williams argued that “one can hardly resist the government’s proposals for the gradual development of the native peoples,” a group of whom he described at one point as “bare-breasted, squatting on the floor, jabbering.”<sup>97</sup>

When Williams arrived in South Africa, his nationality gave him a sense of distance between himself as a Black man and the realities of apartheid. When a train conductor told Williams that he could not sit in a whites-only car, he refused to move, telling the conductor that he was from Canada, where he could sit where he pleased, and he expected the same treatment in South Africa as it “was a Commonwealth country.” After his discovery that Commonwealth citizenship did not protect him from apartheid, Williams began to realize that there were not, as he had believed, “two sides to the apartheid issue.”<sup>98</sup> Williams later took unaccompanied visits to the townships, in violation of the terms of his visit, in order to see what the government did want not a potential Black spokesman for apartheid to see. He was appalled at the conditions he witnessed: poor sanitation, substandard housing, crumbling infrastructure, rampant violence and prostitution.<sup>99</sup> Williams realized that apartheid was “a betrayal of the very principles it professes to espouse,” not a way to educate Africans and prepare them for self-rule, but to perpetuate the

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96 Sydney Williams, “The South African Underground,” *Negro Digest*, March 1962.

97 Sydney Williams, “Tragedy Predicted for South Africans,” *Montreal Star*, April 12, 1961; Sydney Williams, “Native Townships Bleak Living Spots,” *Montreal Star*, April 14, 1961; Sydney Williams, “Primitive Methods in Native College,” *Montreal Star*, April 17, 1961.

98 Williams, “Tragedy Predicted for South Africans.”

99 Sydney Williams, “‘Unofficial’ Visits to Native Districts,” *Montreal Star*, April 15, 1961.

existence of a pool of cheap, Black labor.<sup>100</sup>

Williams painted a bleak picture of South Africa's future, warning that protests would become increasingly violent, as "history has shown that repression ends in horror, bloodshed, [and] viscous hatreds."<sup>101</sup> His forecast of worsening violence was confirmed when he made contact with the "well-armed leaders of a Communist-backed conspiracy to force out the whites." While Williams did not approve of the intentions of these rebels, and believed that they did not represent the wishes of most Black South Africans, he urged the *Star*'s readers to see that their existence revealed "the ends to which a desperate, beset, and hopeless people can be driven."<sup>102</sup> In Williams's view, the only alternative to an armed communist uprising was for Western nations to convince South Africa to create an open society. Williams argued that because Blacks saw Canada as "their champion"—his visit overlapped with South Africa's expulsion from the Commonwealth—Canadians were "in a position to make history for mankind's good."<sup>103</sup>

While Williams urged Canada to take the lead in the international fight against apartheid as the "champion" of South Africa's Blacks, Canada's own white supremacy figured into debates on the topic. Letters that ran in the *Star* after South Africa's ejection from the Commonwealth attacked Canada for protesting racism abroad and ignoring it at home. "Let's Be Fair" asked how Diefenbaker could say "racism never" when it was impossible for Jews and Blacks to join prestigious Ottawa country clubs.<sup>104</sup> A 1961 *McGill Daily* op-ed criticized the hypocrisy inherent in official Canadian opposition to apartheid given Canada's own racist immigration policies and

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100 Ibid.; Williams, "Primitive Methods in Native College."

101 Williams, "Tragedy Predicted for South Africans"; Williams, "Native Townships Bleak Living Spots."

102 Sydney Williams, "Red Backed Natives Arming for Battle," *Montreal Star*, April 13, 1961.

103 Sydney Williams, "Afro-Asian Anger Speeds Showdown," *Montreal Star*, April 19, 1961.

104 Let's Be Fair, *Montreal Star*, March 27, 1961.

the wide support they enjoyed.<sup>105</sup> Reacting to a student-led anti-apartheid campaign, A. de C. Gilmour wondered why the students planned to protest apartheid but did not show equal concern for Canada's First Nations people.<sup>106</sup>

Unlike the previous examples, de Gilmour's letter reads less as a good-faith criticism of Canada's hypocritical official stance on racism and a call to expand anti-racist activism onto the home front and more as a sarcastic attempt to delegitimize Canadian anti-apartheid activism. Similarly delegitimizing criticisms of the gap between Canadian opposition to apartheid and its own racist practices also came from whites in Africa. In the wake of the expulsion, reports on racist incidents in Canada and Canadian restrictions on non-white immigration featured prominently in the South African press; one South African newspaper commented that they "[understood] the feelings of Canadians who do not wish to create a color problem for themselves," but that they hoped to not be criticized "for trying to cope with a similar problem."<sup>107</sup> "Briton," writing from Swaziland, asked why Diefenbaker showed so much sympathy for Black South Africans when Canada made it difficult for Africans to immigrate and oppressed its own "Red Indians."<sup>108</sup>

### *The Congo Crisis*

In 1964, *Star* reader J. Benton wrote that the West, which had erred in "granting 'independence' to their colonies" needed to "[go] all out" in support of Moises Tshombe, the

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105 "Holier than Thou," *McGill Daily*, October 11, 1961.

106 "CUS Attacks Racism in South Africa," *McGill Daily*, September 23, 1964; A. de C. Gilmour, *Montreal Star*, October 6, 1964.

107 Wouter De Wet, "South Africa's Critical Eye," *Montreal Star*, August 9, 1961.

108 Briton, *Montreal Star*, March 28, 1961.

leader of the breakaway Congolese province of Katanga, in order to preserve “what remains of Western civilization in southern Africa.”<sup>109</sup> The Congo crisis represented a second moment when African politics opened up a space for Montrealers to engage in activism and debate about race and imperialism in Africa.

On 30 June 1960 Congo gained independence from Belgium; Joseph Kasavubu was the president of the new republic, and Patrice Lumumba the prime minister. A week later, Congolese troops mutinied against the Belgian officers who had remained in command, and unrest spread into the civilian population. When Tshombe announced that the mineral-rich Katanga province was seceding, Belgium sent troops to protect white settlers, sparking fears of reconquest; with growing unrest and fears of an international conflict, the UN dispatched a peacekeeping force. International outrage at the situation in Congo came to a head in February 1961, when it was announced that Lumumba, who had been arrested by the country’s new leader, Mobutu Sese Seko after a coup the previous September, had been executed.<sup>110</sup>

Canada—reluctantly at first—participated in ONUC, the UN’s Congo peacekeeping mission. Canada’s interest in the Congo was rooted largely in Cold War dynamics. Congo was one of Canada’s chief competitors in the global uranium trade, Belgium’s involvement in Congo affected its ability to uphold its NATO commitments, and Canada wanted to play a role in preventing the Soviets from filling a potential Congolese power vacuum, thus protecting a strategically important country from communist subversion.<sup>111</sup> Finally, peacekeeping served Canada’s middle-power desires to maintain the credibility of the UN and to promote its own

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109 J. Benton, *Montreal Star*, December 23, 1964.

110 On the death of Lumumba, see: Ludo de Witte, *The Assassination of Lumumba* (New York: Verso, 2001).

111 Sean M. Maloney, *Canada and UN Peacekeeping: Cold War by Other Means, 1945-1970* (St. Catherine’s, Ont: Vanwell Pub, 2002), 104–105; 120–121.

image as a force for good in international politics.<sup>112</sup>

When Lumumba was arrested, *Star* reader Rene Lupien asked if Canadians were not “betraying [them]selves as a nation” by not protesting on his behalf.<sup>113</sup> Those protests came, but only after Lumumba’s death. On February 14, the ASA held an emergency meeting, where they condemned Belgium and the UN for having “contributed to this savagery,” and “African upstarts” Tshombe, Kasavubu and Mobutu for having “allowed themselves to be used as colonial stooges.” They declared 15 February “Lumumba Mourning Day” and announced that a protest would be held at the university gates.<sup>114</sup> The ASA’s action was praised by association vice-president Steve Makinwa as “a sign that for the first time that Africans are united.” The meeting revealed the students’ frustration with events in Congo and with foreign encroachment in Africa more generally. Nigerian graduate student Samuel Okori suggested drafting letters to African leaders calling for the creation of an African Liberation Army, and some students debated whether or not communism was irrelevant to the crisis or germane as “another form of interference” in African affairs.<sup>115</sup>

The Africans’ protest was part of an international outpouring of rage at Lumumba’s murder; there were demonstrations across Europe and Africa and in Chicago, Washington, and New York, where African-American activists including Maya Angelou picketed the UN and disrupted the General Assembly; 41 people were injured in the protest.<sup>116</sup> As demonstrators gathered at the UN, Montreal’s African students boycotted class and took to the streets. Some

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112 Ibid., 127.

113 Rene Lupien, *Montreal Star*, December 9, 1960.

114 “African Students’ Statement,” *McGill Daily*, February 15, 1961.

115 Garth Stevenson, “Lumumba’s Death Protested,” *McGill Daily*, February 15, 1961.

116 Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (Viking, 2011), 189; James Hunter Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961*, The John Hope Franklin Series in African American History and Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 233–234.

150 African students from McGill and Université de Montreal, along with students from Barbados and Pakistan, representatives from the UNIA and a handful of white supporters, bearing signs reading “Belgium Saboteur of Independence,” “*Lumumba est plus fort dans le mort que vivant*,” and “Lumumba: Abe Lincoln of the Congo” marched to the American and Belgian consulates, where they delivered letters condemning “the eternal forces that have contributed to this savagery and the attitude of foreign nations who ... made possible the assassination of a great national leader.”<sup>117</sup> Officials at both consulates expressed confusion at why they had been targeted for protest, and denied that their respective nations were responsible for Lumumba’s death.<sup>118</sup>

As with Sharpeville, the Congo crisis opened up a space in which Africans were framed as incapable of self-government because of their inadequate development, a situation sometimes blamed on Belgium’s failure to fulfill its imperial obligations. The *Star* argued that Belgium had failed to teach the Congolese people how to secure “the amenities of civilization,” allowing “the African” to “[revert] at the first opportunities to the outlook of his ancestors.” The paper also called for a violent response to unrest, as there was no replacement for “Napoleon’s prescription for a mob—the whiff of grapeshot.”<sup>119</sup> Indictments of Belgium were accompanied by cartoons which infantilized the Congolese people, depicting Congo as Black man wearing a diaper and standing in a pair of over-sized shoes or as a rifle-wielding baby knocking over a stroller labeled “independence.”<sup>120</sup> An alleged failure to develop the Congolese people came up in a debate held

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117 D.B. MacFarlane, “Marching African Students Protest Death of Lumumba,” *Montreal Star*, February 15, 1961; “Journée de Deuil et Manifestation,” *La Presse*, February 14, 1961; “Aroused Students,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 16, 1961; *La Presse*, February 15, 1961; “Colonialism Condemned,” *McGill Daily*, February 16, 1961; Herbert Lampert, “Students Told Public Support Needed to Aid UN in Congo,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 16, 1961.

118 Lampert, “Students Told Public Support Needed to Aid UN in Congo.”

119 “The Ancient Rhythms,” *Montreal Star*, July 12, 1960.

120 Don Hesse, “Not Ready for Those Shoes,” *Montreal Star*, July 15, 1960; “Problem Child,” *Montreal Star*, July

at McGill after Lumumba's death. Thomas Hodgkin, a Marxist historian of Africa, argued that the Congolese "were not ready to enjoy the liberties of freedom," having lacked "opportunities to have responsibilities." Samuel Okorie and another student replied that Belgium was responsible for the crisis, not because it had failed to prepare the Congolese people for independence, but because the experience of "man's inhumanity to man" under Belgian rule left them "full of hatred."<sup>121</sup>

Responses to the pro-Lumumba protests revealed the local popularity of ideas about African violence and underdevelopment. These responses also often depoliticized the protesters, calling them uninformed about Africa and blind imitators of protests elsewhere. One *Star* reader asked why the African students, who knew "African tribesmen and their spears only from a very safe TV screen or newspaper" did not address Lumumba's alleged responsibility "for the murder and suffering of thousands of white and coloured men, women and children."<sup>122</sup> *Gazette* journalist Drummond Burgess used the international reaction to Lumumba's death to argue that African leaders shared a "bitter hatred" for the West over the "outrages and indignities, real or imaginary," that their nations had suffered under colonialism, a hatred compounded by the fact that Africans had "no relevant history" outside of the colonial experience upon which to build a nation. Lumumba, unlike other African leaders, had been unable to make the necessary compromise between "inveighing against colonialism" and being able to "welcome its fruits."<sup>123</sup> "Let's Be Reasonable" argued that the protesters were merely "aping demonstrations abroad," notably the "shocking display by Negroes" at the UN, and reminded the African students that as

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23, 1960.

121 "Unified Congo Difficult," *McGill Daily*, February 27, 1961.

122 "Letter," *Montreal Star*, February 21, 1961.

123 Drummond Burgess, "What Lumumba Stood for," *Montreal Gazette*, February 23, 1961.

“guests of the Canadian government” they should conduct themselves accordingly.<sup>124</sup>

The UN protest was a flash point for expressions of unease at international Black political expression. When African-American activist Reverend James Robinson spoke in Montreal the day after the demonstration, he called the protesters “anti-white, anti-Jewish, anti-everything” fanatics who “could be compared closely to the Nazis.”<sup>125</sup> Robinson’s portrayal of international Black radicalism as a racist threat was echoed in a *Star Weekend* feature on the changing makeup of the UN. Peter Trueman used an image of a pro-Lumumba protester in the General Assembly to illustrate how the West would soon be “pitted against a monster the UN was supposed to eliminate—racial intolerance,” an intolerance rooted in the fact that, with decolonization, the UN’s numerical majority was “placed in the hands of the coloured races,” making it “a breeding ground for ... intolerance of white by black, of black by white.”<sup>126</sup> Trueman’s analysis of the political effects of the darkening of the UN was foreshadowed in a letter by F. Chevalier, who asked the *Star* why the UN had sent troops to preserve Congo’s unity when their time would have been better served “defending Goa” against Indian “aggression” or “protecting French nationals in Algeria.” The UN, Chevalier wrote, was “curiously absent when Western interests [were] threatened.”<sup>127</sup>

### *Rhodesia*

The third African crisis of the 1960s to engender prolonged debate in the Montreal press was the struggle against white-majority rule in Rhodesia. On 11 November 1965, after two years

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124 Let’s Be Reasonable, *McGill Daily*, February 21, 1961.

125 Allen, “N.Y. Clergyman Brands Negro Rioters ‘Nazis.’”

126 Peter Trueman, “Black vs. White at the U.N.,” *Montreal Star Weekend Magazine*, September 15, 1962, 8.

127 F. Chevalier, *Montreal Star*, August 27, 1962.

of failed negotiations with Britain over the question of majority rule following the dissolution of the Rhodesian Federation, Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith made a Unilateral Declaration of Independence [UDI] in order to preserve white-minority rule. As in the cases of apartheid and Congo, Canada saw the crisis through the lens of middle-power priorities, especially the role of the Commonwealth as a forum for the exercise of its influence, and Montreal's reactions to the Rhodesia crisis were shaped by the presence of African students and supporters of white minority rule.

Matthews writes that, unlike in other African crises of the 1960s, where a mix of factors complicated the ability of the state to formulate a cohesive policy, Canadian policy towards Rhodesia was "straight-forward and unequivocal," as Canada had no relationship with the Smith regime to consider.<sup>128</sup> Canadian opposition to UDI was driven in large part by its strong investment in the Commonwealth and concerns that the issue was, like apartheid, an existential threat to the organization, dividing not only new members from the "Old Commonwealth," but dividing the white-majority Commonwealth nations. In contrast to Australia and New Zealand, who largely supported the European settlers, Canadian politicians generally supported "the aspirations of Africans in Rhodesia."<sup>129</sup> Thus, Rhodesia was a focal point of mid-1960s Commonwealth conferences, meetings that were dominated by anxieties that a failure to come to an agreement on Rhodesia would lead to the Commonwealth's demise. Canada played a key role in shaping Commonwealth positions on Rhodesia, and historians have credited Diefenbaker's

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128 Matthews, "Canada's Relations with Africa," 543.

129 Frank R. Hayes, "Canada, the Commonwealth, and the Rhodesian Issue," in *An Acceptance of Paradox: Essays on Canadian Diplomacy in Honour of John W. Holmes*, ed. Kim Richard Nossal, Contemporary Affairs 49 (Toronto: Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1982), 142; Carl Watts, "'Moments of Tension and Drama': The Rhodesian Problem at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meetings, 1964-65," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 8, no. 1 (2007); Carl Watts, "Britain, the Old Commonwealth and the Problem of Rhodesian Independence, 1964-65," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36, no. 1 (2008): 75-99.

successor Lester Pearson with brokering agreements that allowed the Commonwealth to overcome internal divides caused by Rhodesia.

At the 1964 Commonwealth meeting, Pearson proposed that the organization make racial equality an official Commonwealth tenet and then apply that standard to Rhodesia, preventing independence without majority rule; this proposal was embraced by all member states except Australia, which was just beginning to soften the “White Australia” policy.<sup>130</sup> The Commonwealth leadership met twice in 1966, in a special session in Lagos in January to discuss UDI, and again at a regular session in London in November. In Lagos, African leaders called for strong measures against Rhodesia, including the use of force, while the British were only willing to endorse voluntary sanctions. This split between the formerly-colonized nations and Britain was repeated in London, where African, Asian, and West Indian nations called for compulsory sanctions and an armed intervention; Harold Wilson was committed to a negotiated settlement.<sup>131</sup> Pearson rejected military intervention, but supported a constitutional conference, the release of political prisoners, the repeal of racist laws, universal enfranchisement, and giving independence to a representative government. These specific goals were in opposition to a vaguer British position, which called for “unimpeded progress towards majority rule” without describing how to get there.<sup>132</sup> With the Commonwealth threatening to fracture, Pearson mediated a compromise which called for mandatory economic sanctions, aid for easing the transition to independence, and a promise from Wilson that Britain would only support independence with a full franchise. This allowed the Commonwealth to maintain unity.<sup>133</sup>

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130 Hayes, “Canada, the Commonwealth, and the Rhodesian Issue,” 143–145; Watts, “‘Moments of Tension and Drama.’”

131 Hilliker and Institute of Public Administration of Canada, *Canada’s Department of External Affairs*, 283.

132 Hayes, “Canada, the Commonwealth, and the Rhodesian Issue,” 148–151; Watts, “‘Moments of Tension and Drama.’”

133 Hayes, “Canada, the Commonwealth, and the Rhodesian Issue,” 156–157; Hilliker and Institute of Public

As they did following Sharpeville and the murder of Lumumba, Montreal students protested UDI. However, the demonstration, which was organized by McGill's Rhodesian Coordinating Committee [RCC], was sparsely attended, drawing about a quarter of the expected turnout. On 15 November 1965, less than sixty students marched to Montreal's Boer War memorial in Dominion Square to protest UDI and urge Canada to take a strong stand against Rhodesia; according to the *Daily*, "very few Africans" participated in the march.<sup>134</sup> The low attendance and the lack of African students was a result of a lack of support from the ASA, which, in the years since it showed unity in the face of crises like Sharpeville and Congo had become fractured. The previous day, Tam David-West, president of the ASA, announced that the group's leadership did not have a mandate from members to take part in a protest; moreover, he believed that any local demonstration would fall on deaf ears given that there was "no British legation in Montreal" and that Canadians were largely indifferent to the issue. Instead of demonstrating, the ASA sent a telegram of protest to the British government.<sup>135</sup>

African students were critical of David-West's decision to preclude the ASA from participating in the protest and unfavorably compared his leadership to African political leadership. Ahmed Mohiddin wrote that like Africa's leaders, the ASA excelled at "telling people what we have done and what we will do—but in fact, do nothing enduring."<sup>136</sup> J.S. Gundara wrote that the poor turnout "[reflected] poorly" on the ASA's "cohesiveness," called David-West's remarks about Canadian apathy "cynical and condescending," and wrote that Africans "[needed] leaders with a sense of responsibility, personal commitment and a willingness to work

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Administration of Canada, *Canada's Department of External Affairs*, 284.

134 David Chenoweth, "57 March in Rhodesian Protest," *McGill Daily*, November 16, 1965; Grant Johnston, "Protest over Rhodesia Fizzles," *Montreal Gazette*, November 16, 1965.

135 "African Students to Demonstrate Unofficially," *McGill Daily*, November 15, 1965.

136 Mohiddin, "African Leadership Vacuum."

and change things,” not “leaders who are not willing to take action.”<sup>137</sup>

Off campus, as with South Africa and Congo, responses to Rhodesia’s UDI revealed the ease with which Canadian racism and paternalism towards Africans could make itself plain. Pavle Ostovic, who assured readers he had “no racial or religious prejudice,” argued that an “intelligent primitive” would keep the “reactions” of a primitive no matter what education he or she received; therefore, another “30 to 50 years ... under intensive training” would be required before Rhodesia’s majority would be ready to vote. Canada, therefore, should not be “the standard bearer of ideals which are not in harmony with reality.”<sup>138</sup> Other readers attacked the “social standards” and alleged promiscuity of Black Rhodesians, portrayed African and Asian states as anti-white and bent on “bludgeoning [the] small, peaceful and prosperous” country of Rhodesia, argued that Rhodesia’s opponents failed to understand the level of investment required, at white expense, to bring Rhodesia’s “power- hungry nationalists” to a level of development necessary for self-rule, sided with white Rhodesians who faced “the complete loss of the results of a lifetime of sacrifice and hardship,” and suggested that people visit Africa to witness the “actual living conditions” of whites who had remained in Kenya and Zambia.<sup>139</sup>

Responding to one reader’s defense of white minority rule rooted in the property rights of settlers, readers noted the tension inherent in evoking ideas ostensibly foundational to Western notions of civilization like property in defense of an inherently illiberal regime.<sup>140</sup> Anthropologist Peter Gutkind called Rhodesia’s treatment of Africans “racialism in its naked form,” and argued that the Smith regime’s racism was not exceptional, but foundational to Western values.<sup>141</sup>

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137 J.S. Gundara, *McGill Daily*, November 17, 1965.

138 Pavle Ostovic, *Montreal Star*, August 19, 1966.

139 Keith R. Earls, *Montreal Star*, November 29, 1966; Keith R. Earls, *Montreal Star*, December 15, 1966; N.C. Girard-Hopwood, *Montreal Gazette*, March 13, 1967; Edna Whittall, *Montreal Star*, November 24, 1965.

140 D.H. Tyrell, *Montreal Star*, October 23, 1965.

141 Peter C.W. Gutkind, “Letter,” *Montreal Star*, November 17, 1965.

R.W.G. Bryant, a Université de Montreal professor of Urban Studies, countered property-rights based arguments for white rule with the argument that Rhodesian majority rule was a question of human rights, and not property rights.<sup>142</sup> P. Lowensteyn outlined the history of British rule in Rhodesia, revealing how liberal ideas about property rights were meaningless in the context of armed force, economic coercion, and a political system which guaranteed that “the future of the native people would only be one of manual labor.”<sup>143</sup>

Yet, as in the case with South Africa, within liberal opposition to white-minority rule could be found the racism at play in popular analyses of Africa. *Star* reader J. Douglas Jameson decried the Smith regime and argued that “all human beings have an enormous potential,” while noting that the British had established the colony by taking advantage of the “primitive simplicity of the people of Africa.”<sup>144</sup> The *Star*’s Boyce Richardson attacked as “arrogant” the idea that Europeans had created Rhodesia’s wealth, but maintained that Europeans were “clearly ... better farmers than the Africans,” who managed their production “unimaginatively” and were “anxious to grope their way out of a primitive tribal present.”<sup>145</sup>

In October 1965, the *Star* ran an anonymous letter from a Rhodesian writer who argued that a recent editorial broadcast on CBC’s international service urging Rhodesian liberal whites to speak out against the Smith regime overlooked the small size of the white opposition to Smith, and the effects of Rhodesia’s restrictions on free expression on the ability of opponents to speak out.<sup>146</sup> The anonymous letter is remarkable because it is one of the few interventions from a Rhodesian or Rhodesian expatriate siding against Smith’s regime to appear in the Montreal press.

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142 R.W.G. Bryant, *Montreal Star*, November 17, 1965.

143 P. Lowensteyn, *Montreal Star*, October 30, 1965.

144 J. Douglas Jameson, *Montreal Star*, November 10, 1965.

145 Boyce Richardson, “Negro Toil Ignored by Whites,” *Montreal Star*, November 3, 1965.

146 Name Withheld, *Montreal Star*, October 26, 1965.

Typically, people with connections to Africa's settler regimes used debates about UDI to advance imperialist and racist framings of Africans. White settlers writing from Africa or former white settlers now in Canada argued that if Blacks wanted to take part in ruling Rhodesia, they would have to be "prepared to raise themselves to the present standard of western civilization," criticized the international opponents of the Smith regime for forcing Rhodesia "to accept as equals those who are demonstrably lower in the scale of evolution and development," and maintained that Black Rhodesians were "still close to the jungle" with "a long way yet to travel on the road to civilization."<sup>147</sup>

While supporters of white-majority rule with ties to Africa were fairly regular participants in the Montreal press, with the exception of African students at McGill, very few black African voices were featured in local coverage and debates about Rhodesia. Soon after the UDI, the South African singer Miriam Makeba was performing in Montreal. In the only daily newspaper story to feature the opinion of a Black African in the immediate aftermath of the UDI that I was able to find, Makeba told the *Star* about the racism that she had experienced during a visit to Rhodesia and expressed her doubts that sanctions were an effective means to fight the Smith regime.<sup>148</sup>

An examination of debates about Africa reveals the extent to which Canada's disavowal of an imperial past (and present) existed in tension with the easy way in which racist and imperialist framings of Africa and Africans circulated in Montreal's papers of record. Yet while memorials to the African dimensions of Canada's imperialist past—the Boer War—figured prominently in two protests against white supremacy in Africa, public debate about that white

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147 Paul M.T. White, *Montreal Gazette*, February 11, 1966; Stewart E. Aitken-Cade, *Montreal Star*, March 21, 1966; Michelson, January 4, 1967.

148 Zoe Bieler, "African Singer Recalls Visit to Rhodesia," *Montreal Star*, November 30, 1965.

supremacy was largely silent on the question of empire (except to remind readers that Canada had no imperial ambitions, and had a past free of the taint of imperialism) and Canada's role in it, even as many Canadians were unhesitant to couch their analyses of situations in Africa in imperialist language, even as they expressed good-faith critiques about the injustices being perpetrated against African people. The tension between a widespread disavowal of racism in Canada and the popularity and persistence of racist and imperialist attitudes towards the African people and their struggle for freedom from colonial and neocolonial domination was an important dynamic shaping approaches to Black Power that emerged later in the decade as West Indian and other Black activists in the city latched on to the expression of racist and imperialist attitudes towards Blacks as a central part of their critiques of Canada's relationship with the Third World, notably the Commonwealth Caribbean.

African students in Montreal took to the streets in protest of developments in Africa, and were vocal in their critiques of those developments. For the most part, however, their voices were largely unacknowledged beyond the gates of McGill University. Nonetheless, the debates they took part in provide a window into the development of campus attitudes towards Black struggles worldwide. Read alongside campus debates about Black struggles in Montreal, in the United States, and in the West Indies taking place concurrently and afterwards, the writings and activism of African student help reveal part of the richness and intellectual complexity of Black thought in Montreal in the 1960s, as much as some reactions to their work reveals the persistence of racist and imperialist reaction on the part of many Canadians.

In the subsequent chapters, we will see that debates about the West Indies during decolonization and the early post-colonial era which unfolded in Montreal were much more

likely to be shaped by the voices of Black people than were similar debates about Africa, in large part because, while students played a key role in that process as well, a West Indian community taking root in the city brought their voices into the general public sphere in a way that African students did not, and, at the end of the day, Canada had a much larger stake in the West Indies than it did in Africa.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **“If They Could See This in Jackson, Mississippi!”: Montreal and the African-American Freedom Movement, 1962-1968.**

This chapter examines Montreal’s engagement with the African-American freedom movement in the years leading up to the Congress of Black Writers in 1968. Starting with Martin Luther King’s 1962 visit to Montreal, I explore how encounters between Montreal and the African-American freedom movement, through visits to the city by prominent and grassroots African-American activists and local activism on behalf of that movement opened up discussion about local racism, helped to complicate what were often negative perceptions of Black radicalism held by Montreal opinion-makers and the readers of the press, and brought into public view the links that Québécois nationalists were making between Quebec nationalism and the African-American freedom struggle.

Visits to Montreal by African-American activists sometimes reinforced local mythologies that presented Canada as a society free of racism, and allowed Canadians, even those committed to the idea of anti-racism, to frame racism as a problem that was only relevant south of the border. However, these encounters were also likely to engender intense local debate about the racism experienced by Black people in Canada. While these debates did not translate into mass protest, Montrealers and other Canadians did take to the streets in support of the African-American cause. In doing so, they revealed the extent to which African-American activist groups, particularly the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, worked to

internationalize the African-American freedom movement.

While the work of nonviolent activists like King was universally praised in the Montreal press, Malcolm X in particular, and Black Power in general (a movement for which Stokely Carmichael often served the role of a convenient stand-in), were highly contested, sometimes understood as manifestations of destructive, violent, anti-white racism, and sometimes understood as a logical and reasonable outcome of a history of oppression. Generally speaking, the closer the contact that Montrealers had with the more radical dimensions of the African-American freedom movement, the more likely they were to take a nuanced stance. That said, the Michele Duclos case, which brought violent direct action on the part of Black nationalists and Quebec separatists together into a single narrative, was latched onto as an element in a decade-long tendency to create fear around the question of Black political activism.

Other, less-spectacular instances encounters between African-American Black Power and Montreal, notably Carmichael's 1967 visit to the city, where the young activist was first encountered by his fellow Trinidadian radical C.L.R. James, reveal Montreal's role as a site for transnational Black encounters. They also show how two radical tendencies often thought of as national in scope—the African-American struggle for freedom and Québécois nationalism—shared notable international dimensions.

### *African-American Activists and Local Debates About Racism*

During the 1960s, a number of prominent African-American activists visited Montreal for speaking engagements. Encounters with these activists sometimes provided Montrealers with an

opportunity to reinforce Canada's national self-image as a country free of structural racism with the moral imprimatur of a prominent Black American voice. Jackie Robinson broke professional baseball's colour bar in Montreal in 1946 with the Brooklyn Dodgers' farm club, the Montreal Royals, becoming a local hero in the process of leading the Royals to the minor-league championship.<sup>1</sup> When Robinson returned in 1964 for a speaking engagement, the former baseball great—who appeared under military guard because of recent Front de Liberation Québécois [FLQ] bombings that were part of increasing direct action aimed at securing Quebec independence—praised Montreal for being “in the forefront of the fight against extremism” and said that Montreal's young people “could set a good example” for American youth. Robinson commented on a recent incident in which hate literature had been sent to students at McGill University, saying he trusted Montrealers to treat the material “with the contempt it deserves,” but would be less confident if such material had “been sent to students in certain parts of the United States.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet while Montrealers could latch on to African-American praise for local racial dynamics as evidence of Canada's freedom from racism, encounters with African-American activism could also provoke attempts to interrogate Canada's myth of racial inclusion. On 14 March 1962, Martin Luther King visited Montreal and spoke to a capacity crowd at Temple Emmanuel. King linked the civil rights movement to the survival of American democracy and decolonization to the end of America's legalized racism, saying that “the Asians and Africans ... cannot respect a nation which subjects a segment of its population to indignities such as segregation.”<sup>3</sup> King's lecture did not spark local debate about the African-American struggle,

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1 Dorothy Williams, “The Jackie Robinson Myth: Social Mobility and Race in Montreal, 1920-1960” (Concordia University, 1999).

2 Francis Allen, “Former Baseball Player Makes Plea for Racial Tolerance,” *Montreal Star*, February 3, 1964.

3 Bruce Garvey, “Segregation a Threat to West, U.S. Integration Crusader Warns,” *Montreal Gazette*, March 15,

but it did open up discussion about racism in Canada. A few days after the lecture, *Gazette* reporter Bruce Garvey wrote a series of articles on race relations in Montreal. Introducing the series, he recounted how Montrealers sitting “in the comfortable immunity of being Canadian” had listened to Rabbi Harry Stern introduce King with a reminder that “there was segregation here in Montreal, not only between black and white but for our own Jewish people.”<sup>4</sup>

According to Garvey, there were some fifty Black people at King’s lecture, “most of them Canadian citizens.” He noted that, unlike African-Americans, as Canadians, they were unlikely to experience racist violence; instead, they had to deal with employment and housing discrimination. Garvey detailed the racism experienced by Black Montrealers and discussed how Montreal’s changing demographics—notably the increasing number of West Indians in the city—were driving a greater awareness of anti-Black racism, echoing King’s warning to Montrealers that they must be “vigilant, ever vigilant” as a growing Black population risked forcing Canadian racism “out of its present subtlety and into the open,” as he had observed during a recent visit to the U.K.<sup>5</sup>

Garvey’s reports painted an grim picture of race relations in Montreal—one that, as we saw in Chapter I, became more common in analyses of the city’s race relations over the course of the decade. Selvin Jenkins, president of the Montreal Negro Citizenship Association [NCA], said he had never encountered racism until he came to Montreal from the West Indies.<sup>6</sup> Three West Indian students, including Richard Leslie, who would replace Jenkins as head of the NCA, described the racism they had encountered in the workplace.<sup>7</sup> An unnamed West Indian student

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1962; Alvin Johnson, “Negro Leader Seeking ‘Second Emancipation,’” *Montreal Star*, March 15, 1962.

4 Bruce Garvey, “Laws Can Halt Segregation, but Only People Can End Discrimination,” *Montreal Gazette*, March 17, 1962.

5 Ibid.

6 Bruce Garvey, “‘That Filthy Word’ Learned Here,” *Montreal Gazette*, March 17, 1962.

7 “Students’ Plea Sad, Puzzled,” *Montreal Gazette*, March 17, 1962.

told Garvey that “the only thing that [restricted] the extent of the colour bar” in Montreal was the small size of the Black population; if that population were larger, “there’d be race riots.”<sup>8</sup>

Similar interrogations of Montreal and Canada’s race relations were revealed in other media encounters with African-American activism. In 1963, the *Gazette* reported that Gloria Richardson, a prominent civil rights activist from Cambridge, Massachusetts, had said that she wanted to live in a country like Canada, where she had visited and “found virtually no discrimination,” and had her “first experience of being perfectly normal and human ... as if a big burden was lifted off [her] shoulders.”<sup>9</sup> Montrealer C. Izeard replied to the article arguing that discrimination “flows from coast to coast in Canada,” where there is “refusal to rent to mixed couples, and refusal of jobs.” In Amherst, Nova Scotia, Izeard revealed, “I could not get my haircut or my shoes shined.”<sup>10</sup> Around the same time, John Griffin, author of *Black Like Me*, appeared on a talk show hosted by the journalist and popular historian Pierre Berton. *Star* reader Val Ford noted that while Berton’s “indignation and angry condemnation” at the racism Griffin experienced as he posed as a Black man echoed the way most Canadians thought about American racism, that anger existed in tension with a widespread ignorance of Canada’s own racism, even if it was “not as acute” as its American version.<sup>11</sup> In 1964, Albert Porter and Allan Ward, activists and professors at Tennessee’s Lane College, spoke in Montreal on racism in Canada and the U.S. Their talk challenged the idea that the U.S.-Canadian border was a firewall against racism, arguing that the social and economic links between the two countries allowed

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8 Bruce Garvey, “Mockery Made Daily of Equality Claim,” *Montreal Gazette*, March 17, 1962; “Students’ Plea Sad, Puzzled.”

9 “Negro Lauds Life in ‘Free’ Canada,” *Montreal Gazette*, July 18, 1963; On Richardson, see: Anita K. Foeman, “Gloria Richardson: Breaking the Mold,” *Journal of Black Studies* 26, no. 5 (May 1, 1996): 604–15; Sandra Y. Millner, “Recasting Civil Rights Leadership: Gloria Richardson and the Cambridge Movement,” *Journal of Black Studies* 26, no. 6 (July 1, 1996): 668–87.

10 C. Izeard, *Montreal Gazette*, July 23, 1963.

11 Val Ford, *Montreal Star*, June 27, 1963.

American racial dynamics to unfold in a Canadian context. They maintained that Blacks in Canada experienced racism “in all aspects of life in a subtle, underhand manner,” that Canadian establishments would often “not cater to Negroes for fear of offending” white American tourists, and that Canadian whites traveling South were likely to embrace Southern attitudes about race.<sup>12</sup>

During the first half of the 1960s, the racism experienced by Black Montrealers was a regular topic in the daily press, in the student papers, and in *Expression*, the city’s only Black periodical of the time. Coverage of visits by African-American activists helped further open up the discussion of local racism, helping local print culture become an important platform for the development of a distinctly local understanding of and approach to anti-racist activism. Yet, this increased awareness of and commentary about anti-Black racism in Canada did not translate into any sort of mass protest movement. Canadians were, however, becoming increasingly involved in protest in support of the cause of African-American freedom.

### *Protests in Support of the African-American Struggle*

As Montrealers and other Canadians examined Canada's racism through a lens provided by their encounters with the African-American freedom movement, they took to the streets to support that movement, sometimes risking arrest and bodily harm in the process. The most prominent instance of this was a series of protests that took place in support of the 1965 Selma-to-Montgomery march. Leading up to that moment, Canadian students worked in support of SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, to raise funds and awareness of the African-American freedom struggle. Like other encounters with the African-American freedom

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<sup>12</sup> Walter Poronovich, “Professors Present Views on Racial Inequality in U.S.,” *Montreal Star*, April 27, 1964.

movement, these efforts forced Canadians to confront domestic racial dynamics. They also gave Anglophone Montreal a window into how Québécois nationalists were creating links between their political work and the Black freedom struggle, and revealed how African-American activists used international connections as a means by which to build momentum for their campaign.

In 1964, the *Star Weekend Magazine* published an article by Madeleine Sherwood, a Montreal-born actor, recounting her experiences—including jail time—working for the Congress for Racial Equality [CORE] in Alabama. Sherwood discussed CORE’s organizational methods and gave a moving account of the violence that anti-racist activists encountered in the U.S. South. Her article also spoke to the gap between Canadians’ awareness of U.S. racism and of the racial dynamics of their own country. Sherwood, who was white, recalled growing up in Montreal with no awareness of a Black presence in the city; she had no Black classmates, and there were no Black families in her neighborhood, as, at the time, the Black population was largely confined to its historic home in the Little Burgundy area. Her time in the South led her to see that people from Northern states who were “horrified at the idea of kids from Harlem attending their kids’ schools” and her lack of exposure to Black people in Montreal were both manifestations of the same often-unacknowledged racism that dictated what spaces Black people could legitimately occupy.<sup>13</sup>

As Sherwood’s memoir hit the stands, Montrealers and other Canadians were becoming increasingly involved in supporting the African-American cause. Students organized events featuring African-American activists, and people took to the streets in support of pivotal events

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13 Madeleine Sherwood, “My Crime Was to Take Five Steps on a ‘Freedom Walk,’” *Montreal Star Weekend Magazine*, May 9, 1964.

in the African-American freedom struggle, coordinating their efforts with American activists.

Canadian activism in support of the African-American struggle was facilitated by links between the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [SNCC] and Canadian university students. The historian Wesley Hogan describes a “North-South network” that coalesced around college students from northern states who traveled south to participate in anti-racist activism with SNCC and CORE and then brought that activist spirit back to northern college campuses, where they then militated against racism in northern town.<sup>14</sup> Canadian activism on behalf of SNCC may be seen as a cross-border extension of that dynamic; SNCC not only motivated American anti-racism activists to bring the struggle back home to northern states, it, like other African-American activist tendencies, also had an eye on the international dimensions of the Black struggle. As Kevin Gaines points out, African-American expatriates were drawn to the possibilities offered by independent Ghana, and while there, developed critiques of American liberalism that would have been much more difficult to express in the United States.<sup>15</sup> Fanon Che Wilkins writes that SNCC, the “most conspicuous national student organization” in the Black freedom struggle was, from the outset, engaged not only in working for freedom for African-Americans, but for Black people worldwide, notably in Africa.<sup>16</sup>

Somewhere in between activists bringing the lessons they learned in the South back to their northern U.S. campuses and trips to Guinea and Ghana by SNCC members and other African-American activists lay the links created between SNCC and activism in Montreal and

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14 Wesley Hogan, “How Democracy Travels: SNCC, Swarthmore Students, and the Growth of the Student Movement in the North, 1961-1964,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 126, no. 3 (July 1, 2002): 437–70.

15 Kevin K. Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

16 Fanon Che Wilkins, “The Making of Black Internationalists: SNCC and Africa before the Launching of Black Power, 1960-1965,” *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 4 (October 1, 2007): 467–90.

elsewhere in Canada in support of the African-American cause. Proximity made for easy interaction between African-American activists and their Canadian supporters and, in the case of Montreal, the unique circumstances of the Quebec national liberation movement, with its affinity for anticolonial discourse, added a particular flavor to the interaction.

In 1963, the first Canadian chapter of the Friends of SNCC was formed at the University of Western Ontario.<sup>17</sup> Two years later, a branch was formed at McGill; their first project was to collect funds and books for Freedom Schools in the South.<sup>18</sup> The Canadian movement was founded by Diane Burrows, a graduate of the University of Toronto who, after spending a year working at a girls' school in Jamaica with Canadian University Service Overseas, an organization similar to the Peace Corps, spent a summer in Biloxi mobilizing white Mississippians behind the civil rights movement. Burrows saw the African-America freedom struggle as an issue with universal relevance; she believed "discrimination [was] a world affair," and it was impossible to "circumscribe a human problem" into national frameworks.<sup>19</sup> Burrows spoke extensively in Canada in support of SNCC and organized eight chapters of the Canadian Friends of SNCC.<sup>20</sup>

In January 1965, Burrows brought the SNCC Freedom Singers to Montreal for fund-raising concerts at McGill and the Université de Montreal. The group was given an official welcome at city hall, where one member exclaimed "If they could see this in Jackson, Mississippi!" as he signed Montreal's Golden Book.<sup>21</sup> Coverage of the reception described SNCC's work for readers who were unfamiliar with the organization; Burrows outlined the

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17 "Snick in Canada," *The Georgian*, October 30, 1963.

18 Susan Parkou, *Montreal Star*, June 4, 1965.

19 Joyce Goodman, "Dedicated Civil Rights Worker back to Canada to Enlist Help," *Montreal Star*, December 11, 1964; Jean Sharp, "Worked on Civil Rights," *Montreal Gazette*, December 15, 1964.

20 Parkou.

21 "Visiting Singers Note Contrast," *Montreal Star*, January 29, 1965.

stakes of SNCC's work, telling reporters that African-Americans contesting voting restrictions "lose their jobs, their houses are burned, their children are beaten." The paper also alluded to the transnational dimensions of SNCC's activism, recounting how the Freedom Singers' popular song "Oginga Odinga" was inspired by the experience of the Kenyan nationalist leader's visit to Atlanta on a SNCC-sponsored visit, and quoting one of the singers, Marshall Jones, saying that racism was "not a Negro problem or even a U.S. problem. It's a world problem." While the Freedom Singers were well-received, their fund-raising gigs were less successful; at McGill, Burrows had to plead for more contributions after the show raised only \$175.<sup>22</sup>

Coverage of the Freedom Singers' visit revealed how some of the civil rights movement's local allies thought about African-American activism as it took a more radical turn. In a review of the concert, Dusty Vineberg noted that one of the event's organizers alluded to a generational divide among Black activists; he thought that the singers—whom he referred to as "boys"—had developed "the sort of cynical attitude towards Negro leaders that soldiers entertain for generals." Yet while the organizer was struck by SNCC's position towards the old guard, Vineberg depoliticized the work of the singing group, portraying them as high-minded moral actors, not as part of a movement whose activism was deeply theorized. The Freedom Singers "[were not] ... highly articulate idealists"; they "[had] few theories and no weapons but courage," she wrote. "That"—and presumably not a developed and potentially alienating political position—"makes their commitment more extraordinary," she concluded.<sup>23</sup>

On 18 March 1965, Ralph Garber, Assistant Dean of Social Work at Rutgers University, addressed the Negro Community Centre [NCC]. Garber, who was born in Montreal, said that the

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<sup>22</sup> Dusty Vineberg, "The Battle Songs of Negroes' Struggle," *Montreal Star*, February 6, 1965.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

ongoing Selma-to-Montgomery march marked a crucial shift in African-Americans' struggle for equality, as Blacks had taken ownership of the fight while continuing to work with a broad coalition of allies. "As long as the Negro had to fight the civil rights war alone," Garber said, "the war did not have much chance for success .... But until the Negro started to fight his own battles, there was no chance whatsoever."<sup>24</sup> Besides marking a shift in the dynamics of the African-American struggle, the Selma-to-Montgomery march also marked a crucial shift in Canadians' support for the cause of African-American freedom, bringing thousands of people into the streets in an unprecedented show of support for the Black American cause.

As Garber spoke at the NCC, uptown from the NCC's Coursol Street building Montreal peace activists were in touch with SNCC activists in Selma, who had urged them to get Canadians into the streets in support of the Alabama marchers. On 14 March, some 5000 Ottawa residents demonstrated in support of the Selma-to-Montgomery march in that city's largest protest in recent memory. The event, which Diane Burrows organized, featured a statement from Prime Minister Lester Pearson deploring racial violence in the South and honoring those fighting racism in Alabama and elsewhere, and NDP leader Tommy Douglas criticized the U.S. for fighting for freedom in Vietnam when it could not ensure the freedom of its own citizens.<sup>25</sup> Two days later, a demonstration at the American consulate in Toronto in support of the Alabama marchers ended in violence: a woman suffered head injuries when police threw her off the consulate stairs, and Doug Williams, a Black high school student, was kicked by a police officer. Fred Meely, a SNCC activist in Montgomery, briefed his colleagues on the events in Toronto, reporting that mounted police "charged into the demonstrators, trampling and beating them with

24 "Talks Set on History of Negro," *Montreal Gazette*, February 26, 1965; "March Is Dramatic Change in Negro's Fight—Garber," *Montreal Gazette*, March 22, 1965; Richard Splane, "Dr. Ralph Garber (Canada), President 1988 - 1996," *Social Work & Society*, 2008, <http://www.socwork.net/sws/article/view/106>.

25 Pierre O'Neil, "Ottawa: Manifestation de 5,000 Personnes En Faveur Des Noirs," *La Presse*, March 15, 1965.

clubs.”<sup>26</sup>

On the day of the Ottawa protest, Montreal peace activists began a vigil in front of the American consulate.<sup>27</sup> The following day, two SNCC activists, Lafayette Surney and Prathia Hall, addressed 300 students at Sir George. Surney, who described himself as “a tired warrior,” and Hall came to Montreal after appearing in Toronto and Ottawa. They were filling in for the scheduled speaker, John Lewis, who was recovering from the skull fracture he had incurred on Bloody Sunday.<sup>28</sup> As students listened in what *La Presse* described as “religious silence,” Surney told them that the struggle was not simply for civil rights, but was a question of human rights. Hall then described the violence faced by Blacks attempting to vote, and called for Lyndon Johnson to revoke the Congressional representation of states that did not guarantee voting rights. One student made a statement advocating violent tactics in the struggle, but Hall shot the idea down, saying it would just engender retaliation.<sup>29</sup>

Two days later, some 2000 people gathered at McGill to hear Surney speak. He took the opportunity to thank Canadians for their support, telling his audience that a Washington source had told him that the embarrassment caused by the ongoing Canadian demonstrations had been a factor in prompting the Johnson administration to begin the process of creating the Voting Rights Act. Surney then credited “the concern shown by Canadians,” with giving him the strength to “go back to Selma and put [his] life on the line.”<sup>30</sup> After Surney spoke, 500 students marched to the U.S. consulate where they were joined by a thousand other “rabble-rousers” from local

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26 “Students Thrown by Police,” *Montreal Star*, March 16, 1965.

27 “Student Protest Planned,” *Montreal Gazette*, March 16, 1965.

28 Dusty Vineberg, “McGill Students Urge U.S. Troops for Selma,” *Montreal Star*, March 17, 1965; Bryan Goodyer, “Truncheons Fall in Alabama,” *Montreal Gazette*, March 16, 1965.

29 “Des Etudiants de Montreal Signent Une Petition Sur Les Droits Civils,” *La Presse*, March 16, 1965.

30 Vineberg, “McGill Students Urge U.S. Troops for Selma.”

activist groups.<sup>31</sup> At the consulate, the students delivered a letter signed by the McGill Friends of SNCC and various student groups urging Johnson to protect African-Americans trying to register to vote.<sup>32</sup>

Montreal's protests continued the following week. On 21 March, 1200 people walked to the top of Mount Royal to rally in solidarity with the Alabama marchers.<sup>33</sup> On 23 March, more than 2000 protesters joined the ongoing vigil at the consulate; the protest was organized by l'Union generale d'etudiants de Quebec (UGEQ), the province-wide university students' union, in their first instance of engaging in activism in support of an international issue. James Forman of SNCC addressed the rally. The protest revealed the affinity between Quebec nationalism and the African-American freedom struggle as the protesters sang freedom songs translated into French ("We Shall Overcome" became "*Oui nous allons vaincre*").

Forman delivered his remarks in French, a move greatly appreciated by a crowd that counted a large separatist contingent; as he spoke, a collection was taken for SNCC by two Black students carrying a basket emblazoned with the *fleur de lys*, Quebec's national symbol. Forman repeated an idea that had become common in local discussions of the African-American movement, evoking its universal aspirations by saying that the struggle at hand was not just for the rights of Blacks, but for all people facing discrimination. He spoke about Canada's historical role as a refuge from slavery, reinforcing a particular Canadian self-image but not addressing either a more complicated history of the Black experience in Canada or ongoing efforts to raise awareness of Canadian racism. Like Surney the week before, Forman also argued that Canadian

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31 "1,500 March in Montreal," *Montreal Star*, March 16, 1965; Vineberg, "McGill Students Urge U.S. Troops for Selma"; Walter Poronovich, "Consulate Picketed All Night, Three Leftists Continue Vigil," *Montreal Star*, March 17, 1965.

32 Vineberg, "McGill Students Urge U.S. Troops for Selma"; "An Open Letter to President Johnson," *Montreal Star*, March 17, 1965.

33 "1,200 March in Montreal for Equality," *Montreal Gazette*, March 22, 1965.

pressure could help force change in the United States. Jacques Desjardins, the head of UGEQ, met with consular officials and delivered another letter for Johnson, expressing Quebec students' "profound indignation at the violent events that have been perpetrated on people who desire their liberty in your country."<sup>34</sup>

*Gazette* reader Charles Khan wrote approvingly that the protests revealed that African-Americans were "not alone in fighting for these rights."<sup>35</sup> Yet while Surney and Forman told Montrealers that their activism had important effects in the U.S., local critics argued that the protests were ineffective, and that Alabamans had the "right to pursue [their] own business" without foreign interference.<sup>36</sup> Debates about the protests also revealed how some Montrealers had limited awareness of Southern realities. W.F. Shaw, echoing readers who had empathized with white settler fears of violent retribution from Africans, argued that Canadians did not understand how southern whites were "motivated by fear ... of coloured domination through numerical majority," and should thus not "comment on the morality" of white responses to Black activism. Revealing a shocking ignorance of conditions in the South, Shaw feared that Canadian demonstrations might provoke a white Southern reaction that would go beyond the "legal authority" within which Southern whites usually acted, and called for university administrators, the police, and the courts to rein in "fanatical protesters," whom he likened to the KKK.<sup>37</sup>

Responding to criticisms that Canadian students were sticking their nose where it did not belong by protesting the internal affairs of a sovereign nation, McGill Student Society president

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34 "Students Rally for Selma," *McGill Daily*, March 22, 1965; "Students, Separatists Protest US Racism," *Montreal Star*, March 24, 1965; Gilles Gariépy, "1,500 Etudiants Protestent Contre Les 'Actes de Barbarie' de Selma," *La Presse*, March 24, 1965; "Plusieurs Milliers D'étudiants Manifestent Leur Appui Aux Noirs Americains a Montreal," *Le Devoir*, March 24, 1965; "Demonstrating Students Sing French 'We Shall Overcome,'" *Montreal Gazette*, March 25, 1965.

35 Charles R. Kahn, *Montreal Gazette*, March 30, 1965.

36 Andrew McGilvray, *Montreal Star*, March 19, 1965; Ernest Neuheimer, *Montreal Star*, March 23, 1965.

37 W.F. Shaw M.D., *Montreal Gazette*, March 23, 1965.

Saeed Mirza noted that he had received telegrams from Selma expressing thanks for the Montreal protests, and wrote that whether in Alabama or South Africa, “our obligation as human beings does not lie in maintaining silence when our fellow-men are dying under the clubs of racist demagogues.”<sup>38</sup> Yet while Mizra appealed to the universal aspirations of anti-racist activism, other voices asked if, in the light of Canada’s own race issues, a focus on Selma did not obscure what was happening closer to home. In a November 1965 interview with the *Georgian*, a Black student named Norman Cook, who would later participate in the Congress of Black Writers and the occupation of Sir George maintained that Canadians’ lack of awareness of their own racism existed in tension with concern about racism in the United States: he saw the protests in support of the Selma-to-Montgomery march as something that happened “for the U.S. South, but not for Canada.”<sup>39</sup> Cook’s critiques echoed a *Star* editorial that came out the previous year in response to widespread Canadian “fascination” with the passage of the Civil Rights Act, which the *Star* argued was motivated in part by guilt at how Canadians treated not only the “tiny Negro minority,” but “many other minorities and sub-minorities.”<sup>40</sup>

Canadian students and other activists were eager to support the African-American freedom struggle, and their organizing efforts drew on the work of people like Diane Burrows who went South to support the cause and brought the organizing skills they developed there back with them. Meanwhile, SNCC activists strengthened links between their home activist

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38 McGilvray; Neuheimer; Saeed Mirza, *Montreal Star*, March 26, 1965.

39 “The Negro in Canada...,” *The Georgian*, November 16, 1965 In a subsequent letter to the paper, Cook wrote that parts of his comments had been taken out of context and promised a clarification in the near future. To the best of my knowledge, such a clarification never appeared. According to David Austin, Cook was strongly critical of some of the anti-white sentiment that emerged at the Congress of Black Writers, so it may well be that some of the more militant statements attributed to Cook by the *Georgian* may have been over-stated by the paper. For more on Cook, see: David Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation: Race, Sex, and Security in Sixties Montreal* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2013), 115; 124; 144–147.

40 “The New Epoch in Civil Rights,” *Montreal Star*, July 7, 1964.

communities and their supporters in Canada, and in doing so, allowed young Québécois nationalists to take part in a movement from which they had drawn significant inspiration. Reactions to local activism in support of the African-American cause allowed Montreal activists to frame their work in terms of a universal striving for liberation, but this tendency existed in tension with a demand for greater attention to be paid to local racism.

The international dimensions of African-American radicalism, and the links—both real and sometimes imagined—between that radicalism and Québécois nationalism were also revealed the interaction between Malcolm X’s Organization of African-American Unity and events in Montreal.

#### *Malcolm X and the OAAU in Montreal*

In 1962, C.M. Hogg, an executive member of Montreal’s Negro Citizenship Association, told the *Star* that Black Canadians did not put much stock in the ideas expounded by Malcolm X or the Nation of Islam, which he maintained had “a tendency to detract from the progress so greatly desired by the Canadian Negro.”<sup>41</sup> While he was alive, any commentary that appeared in the Montreal press about Malcolm X or the Nation of Islam [NOI] followed a pattern of associating the man and his “fanatical” and “secretive” movement with violence and racism.<sup>42</sup> As Malcolm X became more prominent following his break with the NOI and his trips to Africa and the Middle East, he received limited local attention, still framing him as a “racial extremist”

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41 S.B. Francis, “Legislative Protection Sought,” *Montreal Star*, November 6, 1962.

42 Ed Hadley, “Black Muslim Sect Grows Stronger,” *Montreal Star*, August 25, 1962; Marquis Childs, “Black Muslim Influence on Rise,” *Montreal Star*, May 21, 1963; Lewis Chester, “A City of Rage Echoes in Harlem,” *Montreal Star*, July 21, 1964; “Bystanders Watch Beating,” *Montreal Star*, June 15, 1964; Junius Griffin, “Harlem’s New Killers,” *Montreal Star*, May 4, 1964.

who advocated violence and threatened Martin Luther King's work. One headline called Malcolm X's successor group, the Organization of Afro-American Unity [OAAU], his "own anti-white sect."<sup>43</sup>

When Malcolm X was murdered on 21 February 1965, his death became an opening for further attacks on radical approaches to Black liberation in the Montreal press. The *Gazette* reminded readers that Malcolm X's name was "almost synonymous with hatred of the white race."<sup>44</sup> The *Star* argued that "black nationalism [did] a great disservice to the civil rights movement" and that the "Black Muslim Movement" thrived on "engendering hatred between white and black." In contrast to King's approach, which "makes love its base and nonviolence its creed," the "Black Muslims have taken on more and more the character of a Fascist movement."<sup>45</sup>

Events with a local dimension which took place close to Malcolm X's death allowed the press to further associate him with violence and, furthermore, to link that connection to Quebec separatism. In 1964, a Black nationalist from New York named Robert Collier traveled to Cuba as part of a Progressive Labor Party-sponsored trip.<sup>46</sup> There he met Michele Saulnier, a Montreal teacher and activist with the *Front du Liberation du Québec*, [FLQ], the militant Quebec nationalist group that engaged in violent direct action including bombings and, in 1970, the kidnapping and murder of a Quebec cabinet member and the abduction of a British trade delegate.

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43 "Malcolm X Forming Own Anti-White Sect," *Montreal Star*, March 9, 1964; Raymond Heard, "The Selma Choice: Violence or Not," *Montreal Star*, February 6, 1965; Bernard Kaplan, "Embassy Pressure Blocks Malcolm X," *Montreal Star*, February 16, 1965; For the life of Malcolm X, see: Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley*, 1987; Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (Viking, 2011).

44 "Malcolm Character Shaped by Violence," *Montreal Gazette*, February 22, 1965.

45 "The Black Muslims and Their Aims," *Montreal Star*, February 23, 1965.

46 Robert Carl Cohen, *Black Crusader: A Biography of Robert Franklin Williams* (Radical Books, 2008), 335.

Saulnier and Collier discussed their common political interests, and when Collier returned to New York, inspired by the FLQ's activities, he founded the Black Liberation Front [BLF], and hatched a plan to bomb the Statue of Liberty, the Liberty Bell, and the Washington Monument. Collier asked Saulnier to use her FLQ links to procure explosives, and in February 1965, went to Montreal to get the dynamite. There, Saulnier introduced Collier to Michele Duclos, a Montreal television personality and the secretary of Pierre Bourgault, the head of the *Rassemblement pour l'indépendance nationale* [RIN], a Quebec sovereigntist group. Duclos was interested in forging links between Black nationalists and *indépendantistes*, and agreed to help transport the dynamite to New York. Duclos and Saulnier were under police observation, and Duclos, Collier and other BLF members were arrested in New York on 16 February; Saulnier was arrested in Montreal soon after.<sup>47</sup>

Rumors of a plan larger than that which actually existed circulated in the Montreal papers: reports claimed that the plot took shape at a meeting in northern Quebec involving some twenty "terrorists," including African-American activist Robert Williams, then living in exile in Cuba.<sup>48</sup> When Malcolm X died five days after Duclos's arrest, the press speculated on links between his murder, the BLF and the FLQ. After the bombing of the Nation of Islam's Mosque No. 7, Malcolm X's former Harlem headquarters, *Gazette* columnist Gerald FitzGerald wrote that it was rumored that the bomb came from Montreal and repeated the assertion that Williams crafted the BLF plot. FitzGerald used these rumors to cast Black radicalism as a racist movement and an international security threat. Williams, he noted, "operates from Cuba," and he

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47 Michael McLoughlin, *Last Stop, Paris: The Assassination of Mario Bachand and the Death of the FLQ* (Toronto: Penguin, 1998), 47–52. When not appearing on local TV, Duclos worked at rental car counter at the Montreal airport where she would often get into heated arguments with co-workers about Quebec politics, notably my mother. Hi Mom!

48 On Robert Williams, see: Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

“communicates with his [American] followers by devious means.” Williams’ agents were “suspected of being ready to carry out further terrorist acts to dramatize their hatred of all non-Negroes.” and were “coached by extremist groups here [in Montreal] in terrorist tactics.”<sup>49</sup>

Rumor and scaremongering aside, the Duclos affair allowed for English Montreal to read about links Québécois nationalists were drawing between international Black activism and their own activism, links that largely went unmentioned in the Anglo media. The *Star Weekend Magazine* quoted Pierre Bourgault saying that some Quebec nationalists believed they should be pursuing alliances with African-Americans “because they suffer much, much more than French-Canadians.” Bourgault called the plot’s targets—the Statue of Liberty, the Liberty Bell, and the Washington Monument—“symbols of a freedom that doesn’t exist,” and maintained that if he were Black he “would have blown them up long ago.”<sup>50</sup>

Remarkably, given the fear of what Malcolm X represented to many Montreal observers, including supposed links between the activism he represented and local instances of political violence, positive portrayals of the man and his legacy began to appear in the local press soon after his death. On 3 March, media critic Pat Pearce reviewed an interview Malcolm X had given with Pierre Berton shortly before his death. The interview focused largely on Malcolm X’s rejection of both NOI’s theology and its commitment to the establishment of a separate Black state; he also discussed in a very broad way the role of violence in the protection of African-American interests.<sup>51</sup> The Berton interview revealed what was for Pearce a hitherto-unseen side

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49 Gerald FitzGerald, “On and off the Record,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 26, 1965.

50 James Quig, “The Plot That Rocked a Nation,” *Montreal Star Weekend Magazine*, July 3, 1965, Bourgault made similar comments about blowing up the monuments in “Si Michelle Duclos Est Coupable, Elle Sera Expulse Du RIN...,” *Le Devoir*, February 23, 1965.

51 Transcriptions of the interview are available on a number of websites, including: “The Pierre Berton Interview,” *Malcolm-X*, accessed February 13, 2013, <http://themaalcolm-x.wordpress.com/malcolm-x-quotes/the-pierre-ber-ton-interview/>; “Malcolm X - Documents > the Pierre Berton Interview,” accessed March 3, 2015, [http://www.malcolm-x.org/docs/int\\_pbtert.htm](http://www.malcolm-x.org/docs/int_pbtert.htm).

of Malcolm X, showing him as a man of “quiet speech and literate expression,” and not an advocate of “violent solutions.”<sup>52</sup>

The review foreshadowed more nuanced understandings of Malcolm X’s legacy that appeared in the local press over the following year. These reports revealed how direct encounters with activists complicated negative perceptions of Black radicalism that were largely based on observation from afar. While the *Star* had taken an unfavorable position on Malcolm X’s approach during his lifetime, framing it as antithetical to liberal antiracism, in the year following Malcolm X’s death, the paper ran two stories on OAAU activists that undid the idea that his philosophy was exclusionary and violent by focusing on how community development and nonaggression were central to the work of the people and organizations he inspired.

In June 1966, the *Star* profiled Yussuf Naim Kly, the OAAU’s Montreal representative.<sup>53</sup> Kly, originally from South Carolina, came to Montreal to study at McGill’s School of Islamic Studies. Dedicating himself to “fight against the apartheid state in the U.S. South” as a political exile, Kly asked Malcolm X to make him the leader of the Montreal International Branch of the OAAU.<sup>54</sup> He eventually earned a doctorate in Political Science from Université Laval in Quebec City, and went on to become a human rights scholar and activist.<sup>55</sup> Kly does not show up anywhere else in press coverage of Black activism in Montreal, nor does he seem to have contributed to *Expression*, *Uhuru* or any other publications associated with Black activist groups in the city; however, an FBI briefing on the activities of the OAAU mentions a “Brother Clyde,” who was most probably Kly, at the Montreal branch of the organization being in contact with

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52 Pat Pearce, “Malcolm X Riddle Unravelling a Bit,” *Montreal Star*, March 3, 1965.

53 Wouter De Wet, “Fights to Abolish ‘Negro,’” *Montreal Star*, June 16, 1966 The *Star* gave his name as Nai’im Yussuf K’ly’: his own books change the order of his names and eschew the apostrophes.

54 Yussuf Naim Kly, ed., *The Black Book, the True Political Philosophy of Malcolm X (El Hajj Malik El Shabazz)* (Atlanta, Ga. ; Ottawa, Ont: Clarity Press, 1986), 1.

55 “Chicago2012-Kly,” accessed February 13, 2013, <http://www.ihraam.org/Documents/Chicago2012-kly.html>.

Anne Cools, who was closely involved with the C.L.R. James Study Circle and the Caribbean Conference Committee in Montreal and also took part in the occupation of Sir George Williams.<sup>56</sup>

Kly described his role with the OAAU as one of raising local awareness of the organization and of African-American life; he hoped to open a Black community centre with a library and record collection, a project that does not seem to have come to fruition. Kly warned against confusing the OAAU with the NOI, pointing out that while the OAAU's leadership was Black, membership was open to all. He emphasized the OAAU's nonviolence, noting that should someone approach him "with violent ideas" his response would be to ask them "why they wanted to resort to violence, and what they hoped to gain"; in Kly's experience, "often they change their minds upon reflection."<sup>57</sup>

In September, Ella Collins, Malcolm X's sister and the head of the OAAU, spoke at Montreal's UNIA hall. Collins described "Project I," an OAAU plan to promote the economic, cultural and moral development of black communities. Reporters quoted her making strong statements about the relationship between violence and race in America, arguing that America only accepted violence perpetrated by whites, whether in Alabama, Congo or Vietnam. She also challenged the value of civil rights legislation, noting that since America's racial issues were not rooted in the law, legal solutions were impossible—one dimension of Project I was to "stop the riots, sit-ins, march-ins wade-ins, lay-ins" and channel those efforts into "building for ourselves."<sup>58</sup> In contrast with its historical position on Malcolm X, the *Star* reported favorably on

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56 Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Organization of African-American Unity*.100-442235, Section 6, n.d. Thanks to Garrett Felber for sharing this document with me.

57 De Wet, "Fights to Abolish 'Negro.'"

58 Walter Poronovich, "Sister Carries on Malcolm X's Work," *Montreal Star*, September 19, 1966; Michele Rivet, "Pour Les Noirs, Je Mettrai En Oeuvre La Doctrine de Malcolm X," *La Presse*, September 19, 1966.

Collins, noting that her message “was not so much anti-white” as a plan “for self-  
emancipation.”<sup>59</sup> The French press, however, took a less-positive view, maintaining that Malcolm  
X remained “*un partisan de la violence*” (a turn of phrase that foreshadows later descriptions of  
Stokely Carmichael as an “apostle of violence” by Montreal’s chief of police) after he broke with  
the NOI.<sup>60</sup>

While African-American radicalism was often framed as violent and anti-white, there was  
room in Montreal’s public sphere for more nuanced understandings. Local engagements with  
activists like Kly and Collins helped open that space. Coverage of those two figures came as  
Black Power was gaining increased attention in the press. Local debates about Black Power  
revealed that Montrealers could adopt nuanced positions on Black radicalism as they drew on  
local realities and on encounters with black activists to create understandings of Black Power  
that often challenged dominant understandings of the phenomenon.

### *Debating Black Power*

In 1965, the *McGill Daily* reviewed a production of two plays by LeRoi Jones (Amiri  
Baraka), *The Slave* and *The Toilet*. While the review praised Jones as a playwright and a political  
messenger, it also likened his prose to rape, and compared whites who attended his plays to rape  
victims who enjoyed being raped.<sup>61</sup> In 1967, in a preview of an upcoming visit by Stokely  
Carmichael, Sir George student Doug Hutchings argued that Black Power was a vanguard  
movement that would eventually open its doors to whites and become “the mass party of the

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59 Poronovich, “Sister Carries on Malcolm X’s Work.”

60 Rivet, “Pour Les Noirs, Je Mettrai En Oeuvre La Doctrine de Malcolm X.”

61 Anne Beatts, “LeRoi Jones: 2 New Plays,” *McGill Daily*, February 12, 1965.

left.” “Black Power,” he concluded, “will become class power.”<sup>62</sup>

The *Daily*'s use of violent sexual imagery and the threat of Black male sexuality to frame Black radicalism as dangerous and alienating, and Hutchings's valorization of Black Power as a force that would deliver liberation to all regardless of race represent two ends of a spectrum of how new Black radical currents were understood by Montreal students. Analyses which tried to contextualize Black Power in terms of broader political and social dynamics competed with portrayals of the movement that saw racial uprisings in Watts and elsewhere as signs there were barbarians at the gates of liberal society. In the years leading up to the emergence of a local Black Power movement, Montrealers' understanding of the ideology was shaped in great part by a sense that Black Power was ambiguous and confounded attempts to, as one local Black writer put it, “define it, label it, and file it.”<sup>63</sup>

In February 1967, the *Daily* published part of Carmichael's essay “Towards Black Liberation,” including a line about the “‘Get Whitey’ sensationalism” that dominated coverage of Black Power.<sup>64</sup> In November, Pierre Berton had James Forman on his talk show; the topic they discussed was “Is Black Power Violent?”<sup>65</sup> Media analyses of Black Power, like the question Berton asked, often embraced “Get Whitey” sensationalism, working from assumptions that Black Power was theoretically empty, violent, racist, and a threat to the gains of the civil rights movement. The *Star*'s Raymond Heard mused that Carmichael and his supporters (“whose slogan this summer has been Burn, Baby, Burn”) were thrilled at the potential failure of the Civil Rights Act, as that would strengthen their support; he blamed the bill's possible failure on “white backlash” against activists like Carmichael, arguing that the bill enjoyed mass support “when Dr.

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62 Doug Hutchings, “Black Power--or Responsibility?,” *The Georgian*, February 24, 1967.

63 Carl Taylor, “Some Reflections on ‘Black Power,’” *Expression*, August 1966.

64 Stokely Carmichael, “Toward Black Liberation,” *McGill Daily*, February 23, 1967.

65 *The Georgian*, November 17, 1967.

Martin Luther King and his supporters, white and black, were singing ‘We Shall Overcome,’”<sup>66</sup> A few months later, Heard wrote that Black Power lacked the “broad consensus” of the civil rights movement, and had succeeded in fostering white backlash and the viability of George Wallace’s campaign.<sup>67</sup> In July, the *Star* reprinted a column by the American journalist Joseph Kraft that completely depoliticized recent uprisings and blamed African-Americans for the living conditions they were rebelling against, arguing that “hoodlum elements” were “chiefly responsible for the riots” that “[undid] the best-meant programs for improving the quality of Negro life.” These elements, “by forcing the white exodus, make the ghetto the ghetto.”<sup>68</sup>

As was the case in the responses to unrest in Rhodesia and South Africa that we saw in Chapter Two, local reactions to the intensification of the African-American struggle sometimes revealed deep-seated racism of the basest kind, often drawing on framings of Blacks as violent and uncivilized. Responding to uprisings in Washington D.C. in 1966, Vern Stevenson, who identified himself as an American living in Montreal, described “thousands of rioting Negroes [cutting] a swath of terror among white citizens,” argued that a “minority group” would never “obtain general acceptance” until they had, “by long years of exemplary conduct ... earned the respect ... of the majority.”<sup>69</sup> Stevenson later decried the “mongrelization of the two races” that King and other civil rights activists were forcing on America, called the civil rights movement “subversive” and claimed that equal rights for Blacks “is not and never will be the will of [a] majority,” that “must and will be served.”<sup>70</sup> Phyllis Mass, who had earlier written to the *Gazette* criticizing Stevenson for his attacks on the civil rights movement, argued that “the good that was

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66 Raymond Heard, “‘White Backlash’ Stalling Civil Rights Bill,” *Montreal Star*, September 12, 1966.

67 Raymond Heard, “New Mood of Negro Militancy,” *Montreal Star*, May 5, 1967.

68 Joseph Kraft, “Ghetto Lawlessness and the Policeman,” *Montreal Star*, July 28, 1967.

69 Vern Stevenson, *Montreal Gazette*, May 12, 1966.

70 Vern Stevenson, *Montreal Gazette*, May 26, 1966.

wrought by great men like Dr. Martin Luther King” was being undone “by fanatical extremists like Stokely Carmichael.” She believed that the “near and far future were looking very bright for the Negro people of North America” until activists like Carmichael “got themselves a podium and began spouting hate and anger, stirring up all the fears, frustrations and hurts that the Negro people had managed to suppress and control as all worthy civilized people must do.”<sup>71</sup>

There were some voices in the daily papers who could take a nuanced view of Black Power. In one column, Heard, who was repeatedly critical of the ideology, conceded that Black Power had emerged out of legit grievances on the part of African-Americans, noting that figures like Carmichael and Floyd McKissick were responding to the failure of civil rights gains to create economic equality.<sup>72</sup> Pat Pearce’s review of a *Today Show* report on Black Power noted that while the movement “suggests violence,” its actual goal was “a fair share of economic and political power.”<sup>73</sup> In an op-ed about the imprisonment of H. Rap Brown, the *Star* acknowledged a perceived tendency of Black Power to alienate whites and articulated a strong preference for King’s approach, but concluded that while Brown’s ideas were “often as disturbing to blacks as to whites,” what was “even more disturbing” was “the society that has produced this man.”<sup>74</sup> The *Star* might not have liked Brown’s ideas, but it could not dismiss them as empty rhetoric.

Montreal’s Black activist community was often supportive of Black Power as a political movement. From its debut, *Expression* analyzed Black Power as potential energizer for a stagnant campaign for equality, as a movement rooted in African-Americans’ economic and political frustrations, as a critique of the failures of American democracy, and as something that anti-racist activists could not simply dismiss as senseless violence or criminality. The first issue

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71 Phyliss Mass, *Montreal Gazette*, May 17, 1966; *ibid.*

72 Raymond Heard, “Mounting Negro Militancy,” *Montreal Star*, July 8, 1966.

73 Pat Pearce, “NBC Connects with Black Power,” *Montreal Star*, July 27, 1966.

74 “Patience Runs out,” *Montreal Star*, August 22, 1967.

of *Expression* reprinted an essay by the Canadian journalist and public intellectual Gerard Pelletier, who framed the progression from civil rights to Black Power as a move from activism rooted in moralism to an implicitly political discourse, concluding that Malcolm X's critiques of economic inequality had the potential to re-energize a campaign for equality that was moving at a frustratingly slow pace.<sup>75</sup> Carl Taylor, a Barbadian Montrealer and the former president of the Sir George West Indian Society saw an increased focus on economic inequality as a sign that African-Americans knew that "the contract is not meaningful to those who are excluded from its 'universality.'" Taylor saw a contradiction at play in liberals' valorization of the role of nonviolence in the Black freedom struggle, as it "demand[ed] an extraordinary amount of patience and discipline" and "complete faith, far beyond that of the average citizen, in the fundamental goodness of society," but, given its failure to bring about fundamental change, reinforced stereotypical "expectations of the negro" as docile and compliant.<sup>76</sup> Even when confronted with violent uprisings in American cities, *Expression* maintained a reasoned appreciation of the underlying dynamics of those actions, calling the Watts uprising an example of a "violence of despair" that would probably only worsen "if the situation is not ameliorated," and calling uprisings in Watts, Detroit, and Newark not "racial wars in the sense of black versus white," but rather "the anguish of a suppressed people crying out for redress of their grievances."<sup>77</sup>

The student papers echoed *Expression*'s framing of Black Power as the logical outcome of the failure of America to enact its foundational promises of liberty and equality. On the eve of Stokely Carmichael's first visit to Montreal in 1967, Université de Montréal's campus newspaper,

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75 Gerard Pelletier, "Evolution de La Lutte Des Noirs Aux E.U.," *Expression*, February 1965, 26–27.

76 Taylor, "Some Reflections on 'Black Power.'"

77 Richard E. Leslie, "Editorial," *Expression*, July 1965; George Richardson, "Immigration and Race," *Expression*, May 1968.

*Quartier Latin*, ran an essay by Pierre Renaud which framed Black Power as a “result of the failure of integration” and an acknowledgement that for Blacks, “the American dream ... is only a dream.”<sup>78</sup> After the theologian James Luther Adams gave a talk critical of Black Power at Sir George Williams, criticizing the ideology as a having reactionary potential and urging African-Americans to work within existing legal and political structures, the *Georgian* responded that Black Power worked from the assumption that American law was incapable of remedying racism as it had never recognized Blacks as Americans. The paper argued that “Black Power [had] declared its goals,” and that it was up to the white power structure to decide how those goals would be met. As peaceful means had not worked, violence was one of the few options that remained: “whether or not it will have to be used depends on those who are in authority, and they have never been black.”<sup>79</sup>

These more sympathetic views were echoed by some readers of the daily papers. L. Carmichael implored Montrealers not to dismiss Black Power “extremists” who “rebel against a corrupt rottenness ... in the only way that they have found to have any effect.” To understand support for Black Power, Carmichael wrote, “one must look beyond the violence to the cause,” namely an environment “which completely and absolutely negates civilization.”<sup>80</sup> One reader argued that the tear gas used on Black protesters would be more useful if it were “sprayed on those senators, representatives, governors and all those individuals who refuse to yield to those demands of justice and equality for which the Negro is asking.”<sup>81</sup> Others questioned analyses that presented Black Power as racist and that failed to engage with its social critiques. Black Power

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78 Pierre Renaud, “Stokeley (sic) Carmichael Au Debat-Midi,” *Quartier Latin*, February 16, 1967.

79 Glenn Morton, “Adams: ‘Civil Disobedience Misused,’” *The Georgian*, November 1, 1968; Sheldon Kirshner, “Tell It like It Is—Stokely,” *The Georgian*, February 28, 1967.

80 L. Carmichael, *Montreal Star*, August 12, 1967.

81 Raymond Flournoy, *Montreal Star*, August 23, 1967.

was not “apartheid in reverse,” but a philosophy grounded in a critique of a “fraudulent and corrupt” American democracy; racialized economic injustice was an issue that “[could] not be resolved without seriously threatening the power structure.”<sup>82</sup> Montrealers also saw Black Power as a critique of a consumer society that excluded blacks from its benefits, calling the “‘Burn, baby, burn’ of the outcast Negro” a protest against “the ‘Buy now—pay later’ plans of his white masters.”<sup>83</sup>

*“I Don’t Speak White Either”: Stokely Carmichael’s 1967 Visit*

Stokely Carmichael’s appearance at the 1968 Congress of Black Writers was the highlight of the event. However, the Congress represents only part of Montreal’s encounter with the Black radical leader. Carmichael also made an appearance in Montreal in February 1967, while he was still involved with SNCC, giving three lectures and appearing on CBC television.<sup>84</sup>

As the public face of Black Power, Carmichael’s appearance in Montreal was eagerly anticipated; leading up to his arrival, campus newspapers ran several articles previewing his talks. *Quartier Latin*, the Université de Montréal student paper, ran a pair of articles before Carmichael’s appearance that revealed a strong curiosity about Black Power among activist-minded students and a desire on their part to link the Black Power movement to their own local political concerns. Pierre Renaud speculated that, like Québécois nationalism, Black Power was best understood not as a unified ideology, but a movement that encompassed a number of

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82 Gerald Cooper, *Montreal Star*, April 22, 1967; Richard Gallagher, *Montreal Star*, August 8, 1967.

83 Harry Wagschal, *Montreal Star*, August 3, 1967; Aldan Kierans, *Montreal Star*, August 9, 1967.

84 “Black Power Advocate to Address Student Body,” *McGill Daily*, January 27, 1967; Nick Auf der Maur, “Carmichael Draws Big Crowds during Local Campus Talks,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 25, 1967; Mona Forrest, “Awaits White Awareness,” *The Georgian*, February 28, 1967.

tendencies, including the desire for economic and political control to be achieved through legal and constitutional methods. This desire to work within established structures, however, provoked white fear and backlash, creating a second tendency, the need for armed self-defense. Renaud concluded by expressing his hope that Carmichael would “clarify ... and define ‘black nationalism’ ... in terms of its short- and long-term objectives,” as even the definition of the term was “more or less contradictory.”<sup>85</sup>

If students at l’Université de Montréal were curious about the potential links between Black Power and their own nationalist theories, Carmichael’s opening comments must have earned him a healthy measure of adulation. Carmichael began his talk in front of some 800 people by apologizing for not being able to address the crowd in French, but pointed out that, while he did not speak French, like them, he also did not “speak white.” The phrase “speak white” was a common slur used by Anglophone Montrealers against Francophones to demand that they speak English; the phrase was later immortalized by the Quebec nationalist poet Michèle Lalonde.<sup>86</sup>

This was not the only moment when Carmichael expressed an awareness of the particular stakes of the Québécois nationalist movement. Carmichael later corresponded with the Québécois nationalist thinkers and activists Pierre Vallières and Charles Gagnon, who were both arrested for illegal entry into the United States in 1966 after traveling to New York to develop contact between their nationalist movement and the Black Power movement; Carmichael sent them a note of support in early 1968 as their trial began. The pair replied after the assassination of Martin Luther King with a note calling for “Black Americans and the white Niggers of

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85 Renaud, “Stokeley (sic) Carmichael Au Debat-Midi.”

86 Pierre Renaud, “Vers La Liberation Des Noirs,” *Quartier Latin*, March 2, 1967; Auf der Maur, “Carmichael Draws Big Crowds during Local Campus Talks.”

Quebec” to join forces to bring down an imperialist and capitalist Quebec.<sup>87</sup> David Austin warns against reading too much into the exchange in terms of Carmichael’s affinity for Québécois nationalism, pointing out that Carmichael avoided making the kind of direct links between Black radicalism and Québécois nationalism that Vallières had done, for example, in his seminal text *Negres blancs d’amerique*, translated into English as *White Niggers of America*.<sup>88</sup> Nonetheless, the connections that Carmichael made with Québécois nationalism reveal how events in Montreal were woven into a broader radical tradition.

Carmichael’s talks outlined the basic tenets of Black Power, both in terms of its American dimensions and its relationships with the wider world. Carmichael discussed the need for African-Americans to have a common history and identity so that they might define themselves in a country where “whites have defined even how we are to fight the war against them,” and outlined how his approach to activism was focused on gaining political power. He was critical of activism that sought to integrate white institutions, a strategy which he said reinforced the idea that there was nothing of value in Black culture, obscured the material effects of racism, and only benefited those who embraced white middle-class values.<sup>89</sup> He also tied Black Power to anti-imperial struggles in Vietnam and elsewhere, calling the conscription of African-Americans to fight in Vietnam part of a plan of “black urban renewal,” and arguing that America was “on a path to controlling the non-white areas of the world.”<sup>90</sup> Carmichael also wove Canadian interests

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87 Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation*, 65–66; Sean Mills, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal* (Montreal, Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 80–81; Michèle Lalonde, *Speak White* (Montréal: L’Hexagone, 1974).

88 Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation*, 81; Pierre Vallières, *Nègres Blancs d’Amérique: Autobiographie Précoce D’un “Terroriste” Québécois*, Cahiers Libres 149-150 (Paris: F. Maspero, 1969).

89 “Targets Applaud His Attack,” *Montreal Star*, February 24, 1967; S. Robertson Gage, “Stokely Puts down Whitey,” *McGill Daily*, February 24, 1967; Auf der Maur, “Carmichael Draws Big Crowds during Local Campus Talks”; Renaud, “Vers La Liberation Des Noirs.”

90 “Targets Applaud His Attack”; Nick Auf der Maur, “Black Power Call Heard at U of M,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 24, 1967; Forrest, “Awaits White Awareness”; Renaud, “Vers La Liberation Des Noirs.”

into his talks beyond the “speak white” comment, pointing out that 60% of Canadian industry was controlled by U.S. capital; when asked how Canadian Blacks could aid SNCC, he said that they needed to protect their cultural identity and to organize themselves, “no matter how small a part of the community they formed.”<sup>91</sup>

Montreal’s role as a site for encounters between Black activists was revealed not only in Carmichael’s advice to Canadian Blacks, but in the criticisms and kudos he received from members of his listening audience. The Université de Montreal talk was interrupted by a what *Quartier Latin* called “noisy intervention” by Hassan Elsayeed, a Harlem lawyer who had come up from New York to hear Carmichael speak. Elsayeed criticized Carmichael for what he saw as his tendency to engage in a level of political discourse that was abstract to the marginalized people for whom he claimed to be speaking, and for what he saw as a general anti-democratic or demagogic tendency amongst African-American leaders. Elsayeed, who attributed the development of his political consciousness to his conversion to Islam, told *Quartier Latin* that Black consciousness needed to come from the grassroots, starting with educating people at the fringes of society and addressing their concrete problems; only after that was accomplished would it makes sense to talk about socialism and imperialism. For that to work, Elsayeed said, African-Americans needed community-based leaders like Malcolm X, not “Negro kings” and sell-outs like King and Carmichael.<sup>92</sup>

If Elsayeed was critical of Carmichael’s leadership role, another man was both impressed with Carmichael’s appearance in Montreal and eager to counsel him on how to best fulfill that role. It was on this visit that C.L.R. James first heard Carmichael speak. Around this time, James

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91 Renaud, “Vers La Liberation Des Noirs.”

92 Pierre Renaud, “En Marge Du Debat-Midi Sur Le Black Power,” *Quartier Latin*, March 7, 1967.

was frustrated with the African-American freedom movement. He saw an important gap between, on the one hand, the fact that Black workers were “the most disciplined and advanced in the world” and on the other in what he saw as a lack of advanced “political and historical thinking” within the movement; “there are no political ideas there with which you can wrestle,” he maintained. James argued that the African American movement produced “remarkable individuals,” but “[did] not have an organized social attitude towards the world.”<sup>93</sup>

If there was one “remarkable individual” the African-American movement had produced, for James, it was Carmichael. James was struck by his fellow Trinidadian revolutionary and, after hearing him speak in Montreal, wrote him to share his critiques of new trends in African-American activism. In his letter, James told Carmichael that, at the age of only twenty-four, he was the intellectual and political heir to a West Indian radical tradition that counted figures such as Marcus Garvey, Aimé Césaire, George Padmore, Frantz Fanon, and James himself. James told the younger man that there were “grave weaknesses” in the African-American movement, and that African-American activists needed to do more to theorize their struggle, “so large and far-reaching a struggle needed to know where it was, where it had come from and where it was going.” Carmichael—who, in his autobiography credited James’s *The Black Jacobins* as a critical text in his political development—apparently replied in agreement, and the elder activist maintained that had heard in more recent talks from Carmichael “a scope and a depth and range of political understanding that astonishes me.”<sup>94</sup>

Two weeks after Carmichael’s visit, Renaud wrote that even though groups like SNCC and CORE were not clearly socialist, their activism was “in the interest of all, white and non-

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93 Boyce Richardson, “Cricket and Revolution,” *Montreal Star*, June 22, 1968.

94 C.L.R. James, “Black Power,” in *Spheres of Existence: Selected Writings* (Westport, CN: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1980), 221–36.

white, who struggle against the status quo.”<sup>95</sup> If Carmichael’s message was “in the interest of all,” some observers were frustrated at how local interest in anti-racist activism apparently stopped on the southern side of the U.S.-Canadian border. Carmichael’s 1967 appearances opened up space for criticisms of the gap between enthusiasm for him and his message and awareness of Canadian racism. Certainly, while *Quartier Latin* used Carmichael’s visit to explore parallels between Black nationalism and Québécois nationalism, it did not take the opportunity to say anything about relationships between white and non-white Québécois. David Tarlo of the McGill Friends of SNCC said that Carmichael must have found Montrealers’ enthusiasm “frustrating”; his audiences, which were largely white, were enthusiastic, but their enthusiasm did not translate into an acknowledgement of their own racism or any commitment to action against it. Attitudes towards Carmichael’s “people,” Tarlo argued, “remain[ed] the same; bigoted.”<sup>96</sup> The *Georgian*’s Allen Marks argued that it was easy for Montreal liberals to support Carmichael as he addressed racism in the U.S., as their own privileged position was not at stake; the reception that Carmichael enjoyed in Montreal would have been far less likely to occur with a predominantly white American audience, who would be asked to make real sacrifices.<sup>97</sup>

Carmichael’s visit was Montreal’s most intensely-covered encounter with transnational Black activism until the October 1968 Congress of Black Writers. In between those events, a number of African-American activists came to the city and presented a broad variety of perspectives on the Black freedom movement.

Montrealers who were interested in the African-American cause but were put off by Carmichael’s radical bent could, instead of hearing him speak at Sir George, go hear Coretta

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95 Pierre Renaud, “Les Noirs Américains et La Révolution Mondiale,” *Quartier Latin*, March 7, 1967.

96 Auf der Maur, “Carmichael Draws Big Crowds during Local Campus Talks.”

97 Allan Marks, “Liberalism: The Subtle Danger,” *The Georgian*, October 11, 1967.

Scott King speak at the annual meeting of the Montreal Presbyterial United Church Women. Coverage of King's visit focused on her musical career and her Freedom Concerts, a musical and spoken-word presentation based on the history of the civil rights movement, as well as her husband's work and the intersection between the Kings' activism and their family life. She said that her only political regret was that she had never been jailed; going to prison for the struggle was "a badge of honor," but her husband felt that she "should stay home and take care of the children" when he had to go to jail. She also noted that raising a family was "very difficult" given her husband's frequent absences, and, chillingly, she acknowledged that her children could be left orphaned because of their parents' activism.<sup>98</sup>

During his visit to Expo '67, Harry Belafonte, who performed regularly for Montreal audiences in the 1960s, foregrounded the economic dimensions of Black activism, telling reporters that while Black Power was "a cry both for political and economic power," he believed that "the problem is more economic," and that a regular salary paid to "every Negro 'man of the house' would do more to solve racial strife" than any policy outlined in the recently-announced Kerner Commission's report. Belafonte also praised Carmichael for being "deadly serious in his aims and unmindful of the personal risk involved in his position" as he discussed the darkest aspects of the African-American freedom movement, telling reporters that he had established a fund for the children of prominent activists, notably those of Martin Luther King, in the event of their death.<sup>99</sup>

On a return visit a year later, Belafonte noted that the intensifying nature of racial conflict in America and the murders of King and Robert Kennedy had forced him to change parts of his

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98 Diane Turner, "For Civil Rights, Going to Jail Is 'a Badge of Honor,'" *Montreal Gazette*, February 24, 1967;

Doris Giller, "Her Involvement Not Planned, Says Mrs. Martin Luther King," *Montreal Star*, February 24, 1967.

99 Beverley Mitchell, "'Regular Pay Cheques Might Solve U.S. Racial Tensions,'" *Montreal Star*, August 1, 1967.

act, as the dark national mood had made certain jokes impossible to pull off. However, he told reporters, the diminished intensity of the Canadian scene allowed him to make jokes in Canada that he could not in the States.<sup>100</sup> While Canada's "diminished intensity" may have allowed Belafonte to interject a certain amount of lightness into his act, it did not necessarily protect him from portrayals that indulged in the very racism against which he fought. Charles Lazarus of the *Star*, who interviewed Belafonte, noted that while Belafonte was "articulate," he was put off by the singer's references to Camus and Sartre, which, to him, sounded as though Belafonte was trying to show that a Black man could sound erudite.<sup>101</sup>

In November 1967, Montrealers heard three prominent Black activists give very different readings of what was needed to bring racial justice to America. On 14 November, Julian Bond, the SNCC co-founder and member of the Georgia State house, framed Black Power not merely as a movement to help African-Americans, but one with the potential to improve the lives of all marginalized Americans, regardless of race. While Bond discussed the need for Black Americans to maintain their political independence and "never forget race consciousness" if they wanted to improve their situation, he also argued that Black Power aimed to remake American society to benefit not only Blacks, but also poor whites, who were, he maintained, "the most neglected segment" of the American populace, as they had nobody working on their behalf.<sup>102</sup> The following day, civil rights leader Bayard Rustin appeared in Montreal at a meeting of the Union of Hebrew Congregations. While Bond had asserted that while he believed in nonviolence, he also believed that "disruptive action" was necessary "to secure change," Rustin argued for an institutionally-based approach to securing justice for African-Americans, one that took shape

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100 "Riots, Racism Reactions Discussed by Belafonte," *Montreal Star*, July 23, 1968.

101 Charles Lazarus, "Belafonte Speaking Loud and Clear," *Montreal Star*, July 27, 1968.

102 "Civil Rights Leader Feels U.S. Negroes Worse, Not Better, off," *Montreal Star*, November 15, 1967; Judi Seidman, "Julian Bond Discusses Black Problems in US," *McGill Daily*, November 15, 1967.

within “the social and economic system of the United States.”<sup>103</sup> Meanwhile, A. Phillip Randolph, in town for an arbitration hearing between the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the Canadian Pacific Railway, told reporters that he believed Black Power “contained overtones of racism,” and was astonished that African-Americans, after a century of fighting for integration, would entertain what he saw as a separatist ideology.<sup>104</sup>

The most radical African-American activist to visit Montreal before the Congress was Paul Boutelle, Vice-Presidential candidate for the Socialist Workers’ Party. In September 1967 Boutelle spoke in Montreal on “how the envisaged Trotskyite society can be achieved.” Expressing ideas about the relationship between race and class that were never mentioned in the local papers before the Congress of Black Writers, Boutelle told reporters that “the capitalist system” and “all of its supporters” “need[ed] to be destroyed,” even if that meant “all white people.” He also warned that “future racial disturbances ... [would] make the Civil War look like child’s play.”<sup>105</sup> Boutelle returned to Montreal in February, where he told the Sir George Young Socialists that he suspected that he was under surveillance by Canadian state security, as immigration officials were so up-to-date on his itinerary that they knew about a talk he was scheduled to give in Ottawa, while Boutelle was informed of the engagement only after his arrival in Montreal.<sup>106</sup> Boutelle said that he had “little use for King and his non-violence,” which “appealed to the moral sensibility of the whites.” He also denied that African-Americans “were out to ‘get Whitey,’” pointing out that if that were the case, there there would be many more

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103 “Race Issue Seen Tearing the U.S. Apart,” *Montreal Star*, November 16, 1967.

104 “White Supremacist Ousted Seen for Southern U.S.,” *Montreal Gazette*, November 15, 1967.

105 Hal Winter, “Bloodshed Ahead for U.S.,” *Montreal Star*, September 15, 1967.

106 For Canadian state security and Black radicalism, see: Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation*; Steve Hewitt, *Spying 101: The RCMP’s Secret Activities at Canadian Universities, 1917-1997*, First Edition edition (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2002).

white victims in recent uprisings, where 140 blacks had died for every 4 or 5 whites.<sup>107</sup>

Black Power was sometimes celebrated, sometimes vilified, sometimes depoliticized, and sometimes completely misunderstood by Montrealers in the years leading up to the emergence of a locally-rooted tendency of the ideology. Depictions of Black Power as violent and exclusionary were contested not only by members of the Black community and students, but also by media commentators and the readers of the daily press. If some Montrealers believed that Stokely Carmichael was a dangerous and violent racist who threatened to undo the gains of Martin Luther King and the old guard of the civil rights movement, many saw him as the spokesman for a movement that was not only a logical outcome of the failure of American society to address the demands of its Black citizens, but a necessary step on the road to meaningful and broad-based social and political change.

The idea that the African-American struggle had universal dimensions was expressed by Canadian activists and by Black American visitors to the city. However, as the organizers who brought Carmichael to Montreal pointed out, Canadian engagement with the “universal” dimensions of the African-American struggle did not always extend to encompass an awareness of racism in Canada. That said, a constant theme emerging from public reactions on the part of some observers to the visits of figures such as King and Carmichael was that their message was relevant to Canadians and Montrealers not because of a vague notion of universal justice, but because the racism confronting Blacks in Canada and Montreal was inseparable from the more immediate concerns of African-American activists.

An important element in the shaping of these understandings of the shifting nature of African-American activism was Montrealers’ own direct engagement with the struggle.

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<sup>107</sup> Wouter De Wet, “Negro Leader Hits ‘75 Rich Americans,’” *Montreal Star*, February 1, 1968.

Montrealers were participants in direct action in support of the civil rights movement and frequent interlocutors with both prominent and grassroots African-American activists. These engagements focused the city's attention on African-American activism and allowed some Montrealers to develop nuanced understandings of the progress of the African-American freedom struggle, a process facilitated by encounters with activists like Yussuf Naim Kly. These encounters also reveal the transnational nature of the African-American freedom struggle through moments including the alliances formed between African-Americans and their Canadian allies and the encounter between Carmichael and C.L.R. James, and remind us of Montreal's role as a site for the development of transnational black activism, a role for which the city would soon become better-known after the Congress of Black Writers and the Sir George Williams Affair.

However, nuanced views of the meaning of Black Power were easier to maintain so long as it remained perceived as a foreign phenomenon of limited relevance to Canadians. By 1968, that perception was becoming outdated, and as Black activists in Canada began to increasingly embrace Black Power, public opinion about Black Power became more entrenched and less open to sophisticated analyses.

## Chapter Four

### “Sympathy, Paternalism and Bossism”: Canada, Montreal and the West Indies, 1960-1968

In 1959, the Barbadian diplomat Owen Rowe addressed the Negro Citizenship Association [NCA], an organization that worked to raise awareness of and combat anti-Black discrimination in Montreal. While Rowe had mild critiques of Canadian immigration policy, he made it clear that West Indians saw Canada as “a potent force for good” in the Caribbean.<sup>1</sup>

Six years later, the Caribbean Conference Committee [CCC], an intellectual collective comprised mostly of West Indian expatriates in Montreal, responded to a request from St. Lucia for Canada to play a larger role in the defense of the Caribbean. The CCC expressed its strong disapproval of any plan that increased Canada’s power in the West Indies, arguing that Canada could find ways to assist Caribbean states without “inviting another colonial power into the area.”<sup>2</sup>

These two moments outline the contours of public debate about West Indian/Canadian relations that unfolded in Montreal in the 1960s. Canada could be portrayed as a friend and a partner to the West Indian people or an imperial power perpetuating a legacy of colonial domination over the Anglophone Caribbean. Regular visits to Canada by West Indian leaders, the interest taken in the region by journalists and readers of the daily press, and the writing and

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1 “Post-Graduate Jobs Here Would Help West Indians,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 26, 1959.

2 Conference Committee of the Conference on West Indian Affairs, “Press Release,” 1965, MG31 H181 Vol. 2 Folder 14, Library and Archives Canada, Clarence Bayne fonds The CCC is discussed in detail in the following chapter.

activism of a growing number of West Indian students and other migrants to the city made relations between Canada and the Commonwealth Caribbean a regular topic of public debate in Montreal's daily and campus newspapers and in West Indian journals. West Indian and Canadian establishment figures, journalists and interested observers including academics, students and the general public on the one hand praised Canadian aid to the Caribbean and advocated for Canada to do more to meet its obligations in what was increasingly thought of as its "natural" sphere of influence while on the other hand dealing in growing criticisms of Canada's role in the West Indies by attacking exploitative economic relations, restrictive immigration regulations and the racism experienced by West Indians in Canada.

This chapter examines how participants in public conversations about the West Indies and West Indian-Canadian relationships framed the region, its people, and its developmental needs and debated Canada's role in the region in terms of aid, trade, and immigration. Debates about Canada's relationship with the West Indies in the years after decolonization contained the seeds for the Black Power-inspired critiques that emerged after the uprising at Sir George Williams University. These critiques focused on what radical thinkers argued forcefully was Canada's political and economic domination of the Commonwealth Caribbean, framing Canada as a racist and imperialist power, oppressing Blacks while extracting wealth from the West Indies, keeping the region mired in poverty and exercising political control over a class of puppet intermediary West Indian leaders. This chapter sets the stage for later explorations of West Indian radical critique by revealing the extent to which imperialist and racist views of the West Indies were at play in Canadian discussions of the region's needs as it moved from colonial rule to independence and how West Indian critics in Montreal began to contest those views, laying the

groundwork for critiques that would emerge more forcefully, and more publicly, after the Sir George Williams Affair.

In 1962, the Federation of the West Indies collapsed. Founded in 1958, the internally self-governing body, made up of ten of Great Britain's Caribbean possessions (Guyana and Bermuda were not included) was intended as a way to manage the transition of Britain's Caribbean possessions from colonial rule to independence as a federated body. West Indian leaders could not overcome a number of internal tensions, many of which centered on Jamaican and Trinidadian fears that, as the largest economies in the Federation, they would be unfairly subject to influxes of unemployed people looking for opportunities (especially in Trinidad's growing oil sector), or that (especially in the Jamaican case) they would be saddled with disproportionately high financial obligations to the federal body. In 1962, Jamaica held a referendum on continued membership in the Federation and opted for independence. As Eric Williams put it, "ten minus one leaves none," and Jamaica's departure effectively killed the federation. Williams led Trinidad to independence soon afterward.<sup>3</sup>

A term often used for the remaining members of the Federation was "the Little Eight," and their situation was often described as being "left adrift" by the effective dissolution of the federal body. The small size of West Indian economies, and the sense that they were in a perilous and uncertain situation were key themes in analyses of the region's economy, making development aid the single most important question in relationships between the West Indies and Canada.

West Indian leaders regularly approached Canada for financial aid, but they did not do so

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3 Patsy Lewis, *Surviving Small Size: Regional Integration in Caribbean Ministates* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2002); Colin A Palmer, *Eric Williams & the Making of the Modern Caribbean* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), Chapter Two.

in an uncritical manner. In 1964, Trinidad's Eric Williams likened aid to small countries to a noose around their necks. Two years earlier, Williams had put the need for Trinidad to be "equipped' with the material sources" it needed to ensure the country met its potential at the centre of negotiations over the "golden handshake" package offered by Britain to colonies on their independence. In a jab that he would echo when talking about Canadian aid, Williams reminded the British that there was a historical reason that Trinidad "[did] not now possess all we now require to play our part" as a Commonwealth partner.<sup>4</sup> Williams, deeply schooled in the history of colonial extraction from the West Indies by the industrialized powers, was, like the leaders of the West Indies in general, caught between a rock and a hard place, needing the aid that countries like Canada could provide but cognizant that such aid often came with strings attached that would undercut economic sovereignty. Williams and other leaders were thus forced to walk a tightrope between asking for more Canadian aid and criticizing the ways in which that aid limited the independent economic development of their nations.

While some West Indian leaders tried to walk a difficult line on the aid question, many Canadian observers acting as advocates for the West Indies urged Canada to meet its obligations to the region by sending more aid. While West Indian radical critique of the 1960s valorized political, economic and intellectual freedom above all else, the driving assumption in Canada behind debates about relationships between Canada and the West Indies relations was that, as Britain loosened its control of the West Indies, Canada, as the industrialized Commonwealth power in the Americas and with a long history of exchange with the region, would assume a paternalistic responsibility for the development of the Anglophone Caribbean. Canadian advocates for an increased commitment to the West Indies consistently appealed to Canada's

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<sup>4</sup> Palmer, *Eric Williams & the Making of the Modern Caribbean*, 33; 140.

“natural” duty to the region to ask for more aid and better trading conditions.

West Indian radical critiques of Canada were also grounded in an emerging sense of racial consciousness. As we saw in Chapter One, West Indian activists in Montreal played a key role in grassroots campaigns to create awareness among Canadians about the structural racism they faced and in advocating for policy reforms to address that racism. As they called attention to the racism Canada practiced at home, West Indian activists also drew attention to the role racism played in shaping Canadian policy towards the West Indies, namely in the realm of immigration. Faced with mass unemployment, West Indian states sought outlets for people who could not find work; racially-based Canadian restrictions on immigration were a formidable barrier to West Indian migration northwards. West Indian activists thus worked to shame Canada for allowing racism to stand in the way of its meeting its obligations to the West Indies. By putting Canadian racism at the center of immigration debates, these activists contributed to the development of later Black Power-inspired critiques of Canada’s role in the West Indies.

Debates about immigration policy were also a site where the gendered dynamics of Canadian/West Indian relations were most prominent, as the Domestic Scheme, a plan that encouraged West Indian women to come to Canada to work as housekeepers was a key site for criticisms of Canadian policy and social dynamics.

This chapter also examines how Canadian debates about the West Indies often hinged on fears about instability in the region. Appeals for more and better Canadian aid to the West Indies were sometimes driven by warnings that a failure to promote the development of the West Indies risked promoting widespread communist- or racially-inspired unrest. This fear of Black violence and instability, a consistent theme in local analyses of Black Power in the United States and of

developments in Africa would be clearly echoed in Canadian responses to the emergence of a locally-rooted expression of Black Power and in the aftermath of the Sir George Williams Affair at the end of the decade.

The history of the movement of people and capital between Canada and the West Indies reveals the role of empire in shaping the relationship between the two. In 1795, the British deported Jamaican Maroons, who had taken arms against slavery, to Nova Scotia; Canadian missionaries were present in the West Indies from the middle of the nineteenth century; Canadian banks began doing business in the region at the end of that century. By the dawn of the twentieth century, the West Indies were a preferred target for Canadian capital, including banking, insurance, electricity and the railroads.<sup>5</sup>

Writing in 1977, the journalist Robert Chodos—who had covered the Congress of Black Writers as a student writing for the *McGill Daily* a decade earlier—was reluctant to call Canada an imperial power, but noted that its engagements with the West Indies have always been shaped by the formal imperial structures of the British empire or the imperialism practiced by the United States through the agency of Canadian subsidiaries of U.S. multinationals.<sup>6</sup> Chodos traced how Canada, through aid, tourism, banking, and other economic activities helped to keep the West Indies in a dependent position, arguing that Canadians harbor “a touchingly romantic and often dangerously naive view of their own role in the Caribbean.”<sup>7</sup> In arguing that Canada played a role in keeping the West Indies in a submissive position in regards to the industrialized world, Chodos was not saying anything new. He was merely repeating what the West Indians he had interacted with a decade earlier at McGill had been saying for years, but saying it this time in the

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5 Robert Chodos, *The Caribbean Connection: The Double-Edged Canadian Presence in the West Indies* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1977), 64–66.

6 *Ibid.*, 78–79.

7 *Ibid.*, 22.

more legitimizing format of a hardbound book from a Canadian publisher, and not in a Black Power newspaper or a flier handed out on campus: Canada exercised an imperial-like power over the West Indies, extracting wealth while regulating the movement of West Indian people on patriarchal and white supremacist logics.

A key element in the creation and maintenance of the imperial and neoimperial power at play in the relationship between Canada and the West Indies is development discourse.

Anthropologist Arturo Escobar writes that development was the “central stake in discussions on Asia, Africa and Latin America” from the 1950s through the 1970s, even among critics of the development model, who framed their interventions as alternative types of “development.”<sup>8</sup> In Foucauldian terms, development discourse creates a particular type of Third World subject requiring a particular type of intervention.<sup>9</sup> This is a historical extension of imperial power, reflecting the process described by Frantz Fanon in *Wretched of the Earth* or by Edward Said in *Orientalism*, in which the racialized and colonized subject, through acts of seeing and the deployment of imperial knowledge, is created by the colonizer.<sup>10</sup> As Escobar writes, “reality” becomes “colonized by the development discourse.”<sup>11</sup> Development discourse thus creates the underdeveloped subject and particular solutions to that subject’s situation. The activist and writer Gustavo Esteva argues that development discourse forces its targets “to see themselves as underdeveloped, with the whole burden of connotations that this carries,” including limiting the range of imaginable objectives, undermining confidence in self and culture, and the belief that a

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8 Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton Studies in Culture/power/history (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 5.

9 Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Vintage, 1977); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction* (Vintage, 1981).

10 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage, 1979).

11 Escobar, *Encountering Development*, 5–7.

people's affairs require "management from the top down." Development discourse, Estava concludes, "converts participation into a manipulative trick to involve people in struggles for getting what the powerful want to impose on them."<sup>12</sup>

As Canadians and West Indians debated their political and economic relationships, they recreated a particular type of West Indian subject. As was the case with Canadian debates about Africa during decolonization and the intensification of struggles against white-minority rule, Canadian understandings of the West Indies drew on the racist assumptions of colonialism and neocolonialism, in this case creating a framework in which West Indian people and their nations became lazy, unintelligent child-like figures who needed Canada's help to become fully-grown, functional adults.

The stakes of a failure to bring underdeveloped West Indians into adulthood were nothing short of a potential threat of hemispheric proportions. As observers encouraged Canada to meet its obligations to the West Indies, they drew on fears that a failure to successfully enact development in the West Indies would end in violent unrest—most often imagined as a Castroite revolution, sometimes as an extended race riot—spreading across a region seen as a bulwark against Latin American instability. Fears of widespread political unrest drew on anxieties about the intertwined problems of overpopulation and unemployment. If sufficient work could not be found for West Indian people, either through the economic development of their own countries—funded in part by Canadian aid—or through increased opportunity for migration northward, disaster might ensue.

However, unlike in the case of Africa, where a lack of sustained contact between most

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<sup>12</sup> Gustavo Estava, "Development," in *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, ed. Wolfgang Sachs (London: Zed Books, 2010), 7–8.

Canadians and African people facilitated the othering of the latter, Canadian understandings of West Indians were complicated by cultural and political affinities rooted in a history of exchange between Canada and the West Indies and shaped by the experiences of Canadian snowbirds, a growing number of West Indians living in Canada, and a shared Commonwealth identity. The tension between racism against Black West Indians and an affinity for fellow Commonwealth Americans—which itself acted as a shield Canada could use to deflect charges of racism—was an important contradiction in debates about Canadian immigration policies towards West Indians.

These debates were a crucial source of tension in relationships between Canada and the West Indies in the 1960s. West Indian leaders and West Indian and other Black community groups in Canada pressured Canada to lower immigration barriers and used critiques of Canadian immigration policy as key evidence in their argument that Canada was a structurally racist society. West Indian leaders, anxious to find an outlet for surplus labor, and West Indians in Montreal, eager to challenge the racism that manifested itself in Canadian restrictions on immigration from the West Indies, pressed the Canadian government at every chance to open its doors to West Indians.

### *Representing the West Indies*

In 1966, the *Star's Weekend Magazine* argued that the biggest problem facing West Indians was “their inability to support themselves.”<sup>13</sup> Two weeks earlier, I. Norman Smith, editor of the *Ottawa Journal*, told a Montreal audience that overpopulation and unemployment risked

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<sup>13</sup> Philip Smith, “Tourist Paradise for Canadians,” *Montreal Star Weekend Magazine*, March 14, 1966.

making what he called the “Friendly Isles” a distinctly unfriendly place.<sup>14</sup> During the 1960s, two themes were consistent in Canadian analyses of the West Indies; paternalism, and fear of regional political unrest.

Canadian understandings of West Indians were contradictory. A shared Commonwealth heritage and the experiences of Canadian tourists shaped portrayals of West Indians as educated people with the potential to become exemplary citizens. The economist D.G. Fraser called Canadians and West Indians “the same kind of people,” whose shared language and political culture that made them “Commonwealth partners” and “brothers in the Americas.”<sup>15</sup> While on vacation in Barbados, *Star* columnist Leslie Roberts called Barbadians “an orderly, law-abiding, well-educated people” who would bring “beneficial effects for Canada.”<sup>16</sup>

This view of the West Indian people was not necessarily consistently-held for all of the region. Roberts’s portrayal of Barbadians as a potential “model minority” for Canada was likely at least to some degree informed by that nation’s reputation for cultural conservatism, including a tendency to valorize thrift and stability.<sup>17</sup> Other islands did not necessarily fare as well when described by the Montreal papers. In 1966, the *Star* ran an analysis by the African-American journalist Carl Rowan who wrote that visitors to Jamaica were “blissfully unaware” that “the island was ‘Latin American,’” by which he meant violent, at risk of anti-Americanism, and unstable.<sup>18</sup>

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14 “Indies Outlook--Stormy Weather,” *Montreal Gazette*, March 1, 1966.

15 D.G.L. Fraser, “Canada’s Role in the West Indies,” *Behind the Headlines* XXIII, no. 33 (January 1964): 15.

16 Leslie Roberts, “Between Ourselves,” *Montreal Star*, January 22, 1967.

17 Robert Buddan, *Foundations of Caribbean Politics* (Arawak Publications, 2001), 42–53; Linden Lewis, “The Contestation of Race in Barbadian Society and the Camouflage of Conservatism,” in *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader*, ed. Brian Meeks and Folke Lindahl (University of the West Indies Press, 2001), 144–95; William F. S. Miles, *Scars of Partition: Postcolonial Legacies in French and British Borderlands* (University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 118–119.

18 Carl T. Rowan, “Beneath Jamaica’s Sunny Surface,” *Montreal Star*, January 8, 1966.

Favorable portrayals of the West Indies and their people competed with a strong sense of paternalism that manifested itself in framings of West Indian countries as humorous attempts at statehood and policy proposals that literally portrayed those states as children. Speaking in Montreal in 1965, the Barbadian novelist George Lamming noted that “certain Western countries” saw West Indians as “children playing with fire” who “had to be protected from themselves.”<sup>19</sup> Less than a year later, *The Star*’s Boyce Richardson, a frequent commenter on West Indian affairs, covering a news conference announcing a new tourist development in St. Kitts, called it “irresistibly comic” that the island participated in an international forum with “the full panoply of a modern state.”<sup>20</sup> The infantilization of West Indian nations permeated a pair of policy proposals that literally compared those nations to children. In 1962, J. Ralph Bourassa, president of West Indies Plantations, a Canadian development company, called for Canadian provinces to each “adopt” one of the “Little Eight” islands “orphaned” by the collapse of the Federation of the West Indies; five years later, NDP leader Tommy Douglas made a similar proposal about Canada “adopting” West Indian nations. Douglas’s comment, coming from a man who is arguably the most prominent left-wing political leader in Canadian history, demonstrates how a particular understanding of the West Indies was pervasive in Canadian political culture.<sup>21</sup>

Paternalistic portrayals of the West Indian people were accompanied by racial stereotyping of West Indians as lazy, unintelligent and happy-go-lucky. In 1962 S.B. Francis, a Montserratian who emigrated to Canada in 1941, wrote a series of articles for the *Star* on the West Indies and West Indian/Canadian relationships. Francis observed that while West Indians had “a singular belief in, and respect for, Canada,” they were frequently stung by the racism they

19 George Lamming, “The West Indian People,” *New World Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (Croptime 1966): 64.

20 Boyce Richardson, “St. Kitt’s Big Dream,” *Montreal Star*, June 13, 1966.

21 “Canada Urged to Aid West Indies Islands,” *Montreal Star*, December 7, 1962; “Caribbean ‘Adoption’ Is Urged,” *Montreal Star*, March 20, 1967.

encountered from Canadian tourists; he quoted a Canadian hotelier in Antigua who called the “natives” intellectually “lazy” and said he thought they “[blamed] their shortcomings on their color.”<sup>22</sup> In 1968, Canadian University Service Overseas (an organization similar to the Peace Corps) volunteers told the *Star* that their experiences in Barbados and St. Lucia helped to undo “misconceptions in Canada about ... the characteristics of West Indians.” The students arrived believing that West Indians lived in “primitive conditions in native shacks,” and were surprised to see that “all the modern amenities were available” to them. But racist preconceptions held firm: the students noted that West Indians were “less inhibited than Canadians,” loved to “dance and sing whenever the mood strikes them,” and although “competent,” could not work unsupervised.<sup>23</sup>

Alongside shaping Canadian representations of the West Indian people, paternalism and racism shaped understandings of the political leadership of independent West Indian states. The *Star*’s coverage of a 1960 visit to Montreal by Jack Dear, a St. Lucian lawyer and journalist, presented him as the ideal West Indian leader, given his British education and membership in the “professional class.”<sup>24</sup> Other leaders fell short of that mark in Canadian eyes. In 1963 the *Star* argued that by putting the West Indies under Crown Colony status after emancipation, Britain stymied the development of mature political leadership, opening the door for “firebrands” like Guyana’s Cheddi Jagan.<sup>25</sup> When the Federation of the West Indies collapsed, the *Star* noted that a new federation would require “a new generation of political leaders of broader horizons” than those currently in place.<sup>26</sup> The racism underpinning these analyses was made plain in Dr. J.C.

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22 S.B. Francis, “The ‘Little Eight’ Ponder Future,” *Montreal Star*, September 4, 1962; S.B. Francis, “Montserrat ‘a Dictatorship Set-Up,’” *Montreal Star*, September 5, 1962.

23 “CUSO Workers Find Life so Different in West Indies,” *Montreal Star Weekend Magazine*, November 13, 1968.

24 Tony Raspa, “West Indies Federation Solid Group Says Lawyer,” *Montreal Star*, August 24, 1960.

25 “Britain’s Dilemma in the Caribbean,” *Montreal Star*, July 3, 1963.

26 “Caribbean Quest,” *Montreal Star*, January 7, 1966.

Luke's 1969 letter to the *Gazette*, which echoed many similar screeds about Africans that appeared in the local papers during the 1960s; West Indian politicians lacked "the efficiency ... of the white expert" and were going to become "actual dictators."<sup>27</sup>

West Indian voters, notably Jamaicans, were presented as being no more savvy than their leaders. In his *Star* series on the region, S.B. Francis, revealing some of the classism that occasionally emerged in debates within Montreal's West Indian expatriate community, wrote strongly against the racism Canadians directed at West Indians but maintained a sense of distance from the West Indian masses, painting West Indians on the eve of decolonization as politically naïve. He portrayed the Jamaican people on the eve of independence as simple-minded, writing that they believed that with independence they would get "everything for nothing."<sup>28</sup> In 1966, during a "state of emergency" declared in Kingston following violence rooted in labor disputes and an upcoming election, the *Star* described the affected residents as "an unsophisticated electorate," who could be "temporarily swayed by demagogy."<sup>29</sup>

Portrayals of West Indian leaders as "firebrands" and potential dictators and their people as a naive mob played into fears that the Commonwealth islands would cease to be a bulwark against political instability in the greater Caribbean. As Alvin Johnson noted in 1961, the Commonwealth islands were potential stabilizers in a region "noted for its turbulence."<sup>30</sup> Yet as the travel pages sold Caribbean beaches to winter-weary Canadians, editorials warned of communist revolution and racial uprisings. In 1961, a *Star* columnist characterized the West

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27 Dr. J.C. Luke, *Montreal Gazette*, May 2, 1969.

28 S.B. Francis, "Danger Signals Noted in Jamaica," *Montreal Star*, September 7, 1962.

29 Raymond Sharpe, "Jamaica Sees Violence," *Montreal Star*, October 8, 1966; On the 1966 State of Emergency, see: Terry Lacey, *Violence and Politics in Jamaica, 1960-70: Internal Security in a Developing Country* (Manchester University Press, 1977), 87-94; Amanda Sives, *Elections, Violence and the Democratic Process in Jamaica 1944-2007* (Kingston Jamaica ; Miami: Ian Randle Publishers, 2010), 68-77.

30 Alvin Johnson, "West Indies Federation's Setback," *Montreal Star*, September 21, 1961.

Indies as a region marked by the poverty and illiteracy which bred communism.<sup>31</sup> S.B. Francis wrote that Canadians needed to learn about “the problems ... beyond the resort areas,” describing a vast undercurrent of “fear and frustration, ignorance, avarice and the creeping cancer of insular dictatorship” that “threaten[ed] to erupt in a gigantic explosion between the classes and between the races.”<sup>32</sup> Journalist Robert Hanson noted that the islands were “vulnerable to exploitation by communism now existing on the periphery” of the Commonwealth Caribbean.<sup>33</sup>

Anxiety about mass uprisings in the West Indies was also fueled by fears that Caribbean economies could not support an unchecked population growth that would create masses of unemployed people. After Trinidad’s Eric Williams won elections in 1961, Johnson noted that overpopulation and unemployment would challenge his ability to create a “viable national economy.”<sup>34</sup> In 1966, the *Star* blamed the failure of a Jamaican public housing plan in part on “an ever-increasing birthrate.”<sup>35</sup> A year later, when Jamaican PM Donald Sangster died in a Montreal hospital, the *Star* expressed fears that his death would aggravate tensions as a “population explosion” fed the “poverty and deplorable housing conditions [that made] life almost unbearable,” potentially “[creating] conditions of violence which could prove difficult to restrain.”<sup>36</sup>

In the minds of many observers, no leader represented a greater threat to Caribbean

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31 David Legate, “New Caribbean Nation Is Going to Need Help,” *Montreal Star*, July 6, 1961.

32 Francis, “The ‘Little Eight’ Ponder Future.”

33 Robert C. Hanson, “A Lot of Questions Remain Unanswered,” *Montreal Star*, October 30, 1963.

34 Alvin Johnson, “Williams: Man of the Hour,” *Montreal Star*, December 8, 1961.

35 Sharpe, “Jamaica Sees Violence.”

36 “Sir Donald Sangster,” *Montreal Star*, April 12, 1967 Sangster was flown to Montreal to be treated at the Montreal Neurological Institute, one of the world’s leading neurological hospitals, after suffering a brain hemorrhage, and died some two weeks later. The choice of Montreal as a site to treat the ailing PM speaks to the closeness of the ties created between Jamaica and Canada through the Commonwealth as much as it does “the Neuro’s” (as the institution is colloquially known to Montrealers) reputation.

stability than Guyana's Cheddi Jagan, who made several visits to Montreal in the 1960s. Jagan and his leftist People's Progressive Party [PPP] were a thorn in the side of the Western powers, who feared that an independent Guyana under PPP rule could hasten communist expansion in the Caribbean basin. Starting in 1962, the United States, through the auspices of the CIA and working in collaboration with the British, undermined Jagan's government, first by infiltrating trades unions to promote social unrest in 1962 and 1963 and then collaborating with the British to throw the 1964 elections in favor of a coalition between Forbes Burnham's People's National Congress [PNC] and Peter D'Aguilar's United Force—a fact that Jagan would repeatedly use as a launching-pad for criticisms of the neocolonial system, especially after the CIA's involvement in Guyana was made public in 1967.<sup>37</sup>

Jagan was cagey about his political orientation when dealing with the Montreal press, sometimes saying he was unwilling to label himself as a “Marxist” or as a “democrat,” sometimes advocating a Cuban-style planned economy.<sup>38</sup> The press, however, rarely missed a chance to present Jagan as a dangerous revolutionary and a threat to regional stability. Following unrest in Georgetown in 1962 that broke out after the introduction of a new budget that increased taxes on consumer goods (unrest that, it was later revealed, owed some inspiration to CIA activities), the *Gazette* suggested that plans for Guyanese independence warranted

reconsideration, arguing that while Jagan had contemplated asking for British help to quell the

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37 Cary Fraser, *Ambivalent Anti-Colonialism: The United States and the Genesis of West Indian Independence, 1940-1964*, Contributions in Latin American Studies no.3 (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1994), 169–202; Cheddi Jagan, *The Struggles of the PPP for Guyana's Independence* (Demerara: People's Progressive Party, 1966), 33–38; Colin A. Palmer, *Cheddi Jagan and the Politics of Power: British Guiana's Struggle for Independence* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 241–291; Stephen G. Rabe, *U.S. Intervention in British Guiana: A Cold War Story*, The New Cold War History (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 124–138; Neil Sheehan, “C.I.A. Men Aided Strikes in Guiana against Dr. Jagan,” *New York Times*, February 22, 1967; “How the CIA Got Rid of Jagan,” *Sunday Times*, April 16, 1967; “MacMillan, Sandys Backed CIA's Anti-Jagan Plot,” *Sunday Times*, April 23, 1967.

38 Alvin Johnson, “British Guiana Needs \$500 Million in Aid,” *Montreal Star*, October 18, 1961; Al Palmer, “‘Take Help Wherever We Can,’ Says Jagan of British Guyana,” *Montreal Gazette*, October 18, 1961.

uprising, as a “Marxist” running a future independent state, he may “have looked to Cuba instead.”<sup>39</sup> In 1966, the *Gazette* alleged that PPP officials met regularly with East German agents who were funding “an indoctrination college” in Guyana.<sup>40</sup> Interviewed in Montreal, PNC leader (and the beneficiary of CIA interference) Forbes Burnham said that PPP members had admitted to being trained by Cuba in “sabotage and violence.”<sup>41</sup>

Jagan’s regular appearances in Montreal took criticisms of neocolonialism off of the pages of the student and radical press and into the daily papers. During an extended visit to Montreal in October 1965, Jagan called for the termination of American leases on military bases in Guyana, told reporters that American repression of leftist movements in South America only served to “prevent social progress” and “encourage the growth of Communism,” and told students that the U.S. was “public enemy number one of the world,” and that the only way for developing nations to break out of the “viscous circle” of dependency and extraction was to “nationalize basic enterprises.”<sup>42</sup> Jagan also addressed an anti-Vietnam war rally in Dominion Square, where his unfortunate comparisons between the United States and Nazi Germany overshadowed more pointed comments about how U.S. aid practices “equated freedom and democracy with the private enterprise system.” Jagan also used the opportunity to decry CIA activity in Guyana, making allegations that would not be confirmed for another 18 months.<sup>43</sup>

Jagan’s words resonated with students: the *McGill Daily*, in an editorial that revealed how

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39 “A Marxist Struggles with the People,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 19, 1962; A good description of the uprising is found in: Peter Simms, *Trouble in Guyana: An Account of People, Personalities and Politics as They Were in British Guiana* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966).

40 “Communist Spectre Hangs over Guyana,” *Montreal Gazette*, January 31, 1966.

41 Wouter De Wet, “‘I’m No Dictator’--Burnham,” *Montreal Star*, July 14, 1966.

42 Wouter De Wet, “U.S. Snub Angers Dr. Jagan,” *Montreal Star*, October 8, 1965; Susan Boyaner, “America Worlds’ Enemy, Jagan Tells Students,” *The Georgian*, October 15, 1965; David Tafler, “British Guiana May Be next Trouble Spot, Jagans (sic) Warns,” *Montreal Gazette*, October 9, 1965; “Jagan Describes U.S. ‘No. 1 Public Enemy,’” *Montreal Star*, October 14, 1965.

43 “Jagan Flays U.S. Policies at Student Viet Nam Protest Day Demonstration,” *Montreal Star*, October 16, 1965.

Canadian students were tuned in early on to emerging New Left critiques of American foreign policy, argued that Jagan was “right not to trust the United States” as “the evidence shows that even statements by the most liberal US officials are a tissue of lies,” and that an “inevitable social revolution” in Latin America would be “directed not only against the present rulers but against the US.”<sup>44</sup>

In November 1967, after the CIA’s role in Guyana had been made public, Jagan returned to Montreal, where he used the revelations about the West’s role in his political downfall as the basis for a wide-ranging attack on neocolonialism. Jagan told audiences that it was “impossible to dissociate” Third World poverty from imperialism, that Castro provided Guyana with a potential model of how to “create internal strength,” and that U.S. intervention in Latin America was no different from the war in Vietnam.<sup>45</sup> He also argued that the only way for developing countries to ensure their sovereignty was to “re-orient their entire economic structures” away from the West as Tanzania, Guinea and Mali had done.<sup>46</sup> During his visit, the *Georgian* ran a Liberation News Service article calling Guyana under Burnham “a model ... of neo-colonialism” and accusing Burnham of inviting the U.S., Britain, and Canada “to expand their exploitation of the nation’s natural and human resources.” The article detailed how Guyana “brazenly advertise[d]” its “chief attraction to investors,” namely “modified slave labour,” earning wages of \$2/day, tax exemptions, “land give-aways,” and the absence of restrictions on profit repatriation as selling-points for multinationals looking for investment opportunities.<sup>47</sup> After the article ran, some 300 Sir George students listened as Jagan used it to attack Burnham and the CIA. The *Georgian* noted that Jagan’s remarks were warmly received, “particularly by those

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44 “The Seeds of Destruction,” *McGill Daily*, October 13, 1965.

45 Joanne Davidson, “Third World Problems Linked with Imperialism,” *McGill Daily*, November 22, 1967.

46 Wouter De Wet, “Jagan Writes off Neutrality,” *Montreal Star*, November 22, 1967.

47 “Guyana Not for Sale--It’s Sold,” *The Georgian*, November 21, 1967.

students from developing countries.”<sup>48</sup>

Given the negative attention paid to Jagan and the generalized fear of a communist uprising in the West Indies, West Indian leaders often tried to present their nations as safe destinations for Canadian travelers and capital, and not potential communist breeding grounds. In 1963 Barbadian PM Errol Barrow reassured Montreal reporters asking about recent unrest in Haiti that there was no communist threat in Barbados.<sup>49</sup> Paul Southwell, chief minister of St. Kitts, noted that capital invested in the West Indies was safe due to the region’s “atmosphere of law—one of the benefits of colonialism.”<sup>50</sup> Jamaican PM Donald Sangster told the *Star* that “Castro’s agents [had] made almost no effort to fish politically in Jamaica’s troubled waters,” because “every Jamaican is a capitalist at heart.”<sup>51</sup>

Canadian portrayals of the West Indies, West Indians and their leaders were shaped by a shared Commonwealth affinity, by racism, and by fear of regional political unrest. Whether seeing the region as a potential source of assimilable immigrants, or as looming threat to hemispheric stability, one idea about the West Indies was widely shared by Canadian commentators in the 1960s. Marked by poverty, underdevelopment and unemployment, the West Indies were a problem, and, more and more so, they were Canada’s problem. There were two solutions at play to that problem, aid, and increased West Indian migration to Canada.

### *Aid and Responsibility*

In 1964, Ontario Premier John Robarts told reporters covering his meeting with British

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48 Doug Hutchings, “Jagan Denounces the CIA,” *The Georgian*, November 24, 1967.

49 Andrew Salwyn, “Barbados Premier Here for an Informal Visit,” *Montreal Star*, May 9, 1963.

50 Alvin Johnson, “UN Assistance Policy Scored by Visiting West Indian,” *Montreal Star*, July 13, 1964.

51 Rowan, “Beneath Jamaica’s Sunny Surface.”

PM Alec Douglas-Home that Douglas-Home was “pleased” to hear about increased trade between Canada and the West Indies, “because, of course, the West Indies is Great Britain’s responsibility.”<sup>52</sup> By that time, however, the idea that the Caribbean was Britain’s responsibility was losing place to the idea that Canada had a “natural” duty to the region. Canadian paternalism towards the West Indies was reflected in persistent claims that as the British ceded control over West Indians, they became Canada’s responsibility.

A pair of conferences bringing together West Indian leaders and Canadian politicians, scholars and other interested parties drew increased attention to and played an important role in shaping debate about Canada’s responsibilities to the region. The first was the “Commonwealth Partners in the West Indies” conference, held at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton in October 1963. This was followed by the Commonwealth Caribbean-Canada Conference, held in Ottawa in 1966. Both conferences were preceded by the publication of economic studies addressing West Indian development issues and Canada’s role therein. The 1963 conference was informed by a report on the future of the eastern Caribbean by the economist Carleen O’Loughlin, while the Ottawa meeting drew extensively on the “Tripartite Report,” a study of the region’s development potential commissioned by the governments of the U.S., the UK, and Canada.<sup>53</sup>

The reports contributed to a discursive framework in which West Indians were needy subjects requiring specific types of interventions involving massive amounts of foreign aid and the imposition of particular economic plans, with Canada in the role of provider. O’Loughlin

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52 “Canadian Businessmen Move into West Indies,” *Montreal Star*, June 3, 1964.

53 Carleen O’Loughlin, *A Survey of Economic Potential and Capital Needs of the Leeward Islands, Windward Islands, and Barbados* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1963); Tripartite Economic Survey of the Eastern Caribbean, *Report of the Tripartite Economic Survey of the Eastern Caribbean, January -April 1966* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1967).

concluded that the Eastern Caribbean region needed some \$200 million in aid over the next decade.<sup>54</sup> The *Star*'s Boyce Richardson wrote that without such aid, the region faced becoming "malnourished, underemployed and overpopulated to an intolerable degree."<sup>55</sup> The Tripartite Report took a grim view of West Indian economic possibilities, concluding that, given unsustainable population growth and poor markets for sugar and bananas, the region needed to focus on tourism complemented by import substitution to produce the goods to supply that industry. Richardson again criticized this study for not drawing greater attention to social issues such as lack of access to education and health care, and sub-par housing, sewage, and water facilities. Even with those shortcomings, he called it a "shocking document" that revealed "the desperate inadequacy" of regional living conditions. He hoped that it would encourage "young Canadians" to take up the cause of aiding West Indian development.<sup>56</sup>

Canada began sending aid, some \$10 million annually, to the West Indies Federation in 1958, and continued to aid individual territories after the collapse of the Federation in 1962. At the 1966 Ottawa conference, Canada committed itself to \$65 million in regional aid over the next five years, much of it, as the Tripartite Report suggested, earmarked to support the development of a tourism-based economy.<sup>57</sup> By the end of the decade and into the 1970s, Canada was the second-largest aid provider to the Commonwealth Caribbean after Great Britain, supplying some twenty per cent of the aid flowing to the Anglophone Caribbean. At the same time, however, aid to the West Indies became much less of a priority to Canada as the 1960s progressed. According to the political scientist Glyn Berry, this was due to a number of factors including the exit of

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54 O'Loughlin, *A Survey of Economic Potential and Capital Needs of the Leeward Islands, Windward Islands, and Barbados*, 1–4.

55 Boyce Richardson, "The Caribbean's Challenge to Canada," *Montreal Star*, September 12, 1963.

56 Boyce Richardson, "Caribbean Challenge for Canada," *Montreal Star*, June 30, 1966.

57 Glyn R. Berry, "The West Indies in Canadian External Relations: Present Trends and Future Prospects," *Canadian Public Policy / Analyse de Politiques* 3, no. 1 (January 1, 1977): 57.

political figures like Prime Minister Lester Pearson, External Affairs Minister Paul Martin and other Canadian leaders who had a strong interest in the West Indies, and the decolonization of Africa, which “generated intense pressures for a measure of geographic redistribution” of Canada’s aid budget. Thus, aid to Commonwealth and Francophone Africa grew, but aid to the West Indies did not keep pace.<sup>58</sup> The relatively static level of Canadian aid to the West Indies was a key sticking point in debates about relationships between the two.

Canadian commentators framed the West Indies as Canada’s “natural” responsibility, and drew on both a sense of familial obligation and fears of U.S. expansionism to argue that Canada had to do more to meet the expectations being placed on it by the international community. These arguments also spoke to a middle-power nation’s desire to step out of the shadow of the larger powers and make its mark in the world, much as Canada had in the expulsion of South Africa from the Commonwealth. The *Star* consistently called for Canada to use the “weapons” of “trade and aid” “to fill the gap” as Britain “loosen[ed] her hold” on the region, arguing that “island leaders want to be able to look to Ottawa” for advice and aid, even as Canadians were oblivious to “the reliance they are placing on us to help them.”<sup>59</sup> If Canada did not become more involved in the region, the *Star* warned, the U.S. would, which would disappoint “relatives who have made it clear they want to be able to look to Canada rather than the United States” for assistance.<sup>60</sup> Calls for Canada to “to claim the stake which is naturally ours” and “assume more responsibility in the international field” appealed to a sense that Canada was failing to meet its aspirations to be a “a country of consequence” by accepting “staunch international

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58 *Ibid.*, 57–58.

59 “Mr. Barrow’s Quest,” *Montreal Star*, May 13, 1963; “Diplomats to Discuss Caribbean Trade,” *Montreal Star*, July 5, 1966; “Looking South,” *Montreal Star*, July 6, 1966.

60 “Caribbean Seminar,” *Montreal Star*, October 25, 1963; Leslie Roberts, “Is Canada Missing the Bus (or Boat) in Barbados?,” *Montreal Star*, January 30, 1965.

responsibilities,” as the “senior Commonwealth partner” in the Americas<sup>61</sup>

Alongside appeals to family ties and a desire to step up on the world stage, appeals for Canada to get more involved in the West Indies, as did calls for Canada to get more involved in Africa, drew on a national self-image as a country free of a legacy of imperialism. In 1962, Charles Espinet, editor of Trinidad’s *Guardian*, told Montrealers that Canadian involvement in Trinidad “would be free from ‘big power politics.’”<sup>62</sup> Before the 1966 Ottawa conference, Irving Brecher, director of McGill’s Centre for Developing Area Studies, noted Canada’s image as a “middle power with no colonial axe to grind.”<sup>63</sup> In 1968, Gerald Regan, leader of the Nova Scotia Liberal Party, told a Montreal audience that Canadian aid to the West Indies was “less suspect and more palatable” to West Indians than U.S. aid, and that Canada’s alleged hesitancy to do more in the region was rooted in a reluctance to be seen as an imperial power. While disavowing Canadian imperialism, he suggested that the Canadian dollar become the West Indian currency.<sup>64</sup>

Calls for Canada to live up to its Caribbean duties were also fed by fears of instability. In 1961, the *Star* quoted an unnamed Barbadian politician’s warning that that West Indian social peace was threatened by “ill-concealed resentment” at perceived low levels of Canadian aid.<sup>65</sup> “Kis-Ka-Dee,” a Guyanese Montrealer, wrote that Canada should send more aid to Guyana, to prevent communist states from filling an potential aid gap.<sup>66</sup> E.L. Cozier, a Barbadian publisher, said that Canada must take a lead in helping the West Indies, lest the islands “go Communist.”<sup>67</sup>

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61 “A Caribbean Dream and Canada’s Role,” *Montreal Star*, July 16, 1963; Roberts, “Between Ourselves”; Robert C. Hanson, “Canada’s Caribbean Role,” February 15, 1968.

62 Alvin Johnson, “Trinidad Enjoying Trade Expansion,” *Montreal Star*, September 13, 1962.

63 Irving Brecher, “Foreign Aid an Orphan to Canada,” *Montreal Star*, September 19, 1966.

64 “Canada Should Help Caribbean,” *Montreal Star*, April 26, 1968.

65 Legate, “New Caribbean Nation Is Going to Need Help.”

66 Kis-Ka-Dee, *Montreal Star*, July 18, 1961.

67 Smith, “Tourist Paradise for Canadians,” 3.

The 1967 secessionist crisis in Anguilla was a moment when those fears of instability were brought to the fore and focused Canadian attention on an opportunity to fulfill its responsibilities to the region.<sup>68</sup> When Boyce Richardson wrote that the crisis presented an opportunity for Canada to exercise its diplomatic muscle in the region, *Star* reader Franklin Weaver commended him for highlighting “a wonderful opportunity Canada has ... to live up to the expectations held up to her by the struggling people” of the West Indies.<sup>69</sup> Two years later, when tensions escalated into armed conflict, the *Star* noted that the “Anguilla mess” was a chance for “the friendly voice of Canada” to take up the “deeper involvement both London and Washington” wanted it to.<sup>70</sup>

Discussions about Canada’s role in the West Indies also encompassed the possibility of a political association between Commonwealth Caribbean states and Canada, or the outright absorption of West Indian nations by Canada. The idea was not new; in the 1880s, shareholders in a Canadian bank with operations in the West Indies suggested a union between Canada and the West Indies, and in 1911 there was a campaign to have Canada annex the Bahamas. Besides the objections of the British Colonial Office, these plans were stymied in part by Canadian reluctance to take on important numbers of Black citizens.<sup>71</sup> Many observers advocated for a formal association between Canada and the Commonwealth Caribbean, be that an economic partnership or Canada’s outright absorption of some of the islands, notably the Eastern Caribbean territories that were left adrift when the Federation of the West Indies collapsed.<sup>72</sup> Deward le Blanc, chief minister of Dominica, revealed that he had written to Canadian PM John

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68 Colville L. Petty and Nat Hodge, *Anguilla’s Battle for Freedom, 1967-1969* (The Valley, Anguilla: PETNAT, 2010).

69 Boyce Richardson, “The Mess in Anguilla,” *Montreal Star*, June 30, 1967; Franklin Weaver, “Letter,” *Montreal Star*, July 3, 1967.

70 “The Anguilla Mess,” *Montreal Star*, March 17, 1969.

71 Chodos, *The Caribbean Connection: The Double-Edged Canadian Presence in the West Indies*, 67–68.

72 Alvin Johnson, “Economic Union with Canada Possible,” *Montreal Star*, December 30, 1961; Alvin Johnson, “‘Little Eight’ Study Merger in the Caribbean,” *Montreal Star*, May 5, 1962.

Diefenbaker to inquire about Dominica becoming a Canadian province; John Compton, Chief Minister of St. Lucia, discussing the possibilities for a more pronounced Canadian political role in his country, appealed to the history of Canadian political rule in St. Lucia, reminding a reporter that the island was once governed from Quebec.<sup>73</sup>

Echoing calls for Canadian aid to act as a bulwark against increased U.S. influence in the region and fears of increased Cuban influence, a union between Canada and the West Indies was presented as a barrier to the expansion of other regional spheres of influence. In January 1962 *Star* reader “S.C.” suggested that Canada should absorb the former British colonies, and thus beat the U.S., Cuba or Venezuela to the punch.<sup>74</sup> Months later, Percy Arnold of the Commonwealth Writers of Britain suggested that the time had come for Britain to give the West Indies to Canada, “before Canada is handed over to the U.S.”<sup>75</sup>

Yet with all these arguments being made in favor of Canada taking a leading role in West Indian development, West Indian leaders and their Canadian advocates were persistently disappointed with Canada’s commitment. The 1963 conference dashed hopes that Canada would give West Indian leaders the kind of aid amounts they were after. Journalist Robert Hanson noted that the proceedings revealed that while the West Indies needed Canadian help, “public and political apathy” kept a major intervention off the table.<sup>76</sup> Barbadian PM Errol Barrow voiced strong disappointment, accusing Canada of having “failed very miserably to recognize that the West Indies is part of the Commonwealth.”<sup>77</sup> Reflecting on Barrow’s “uncomfortably strong” comments, Alvin Johnson called it “unfortunate” that negative feelings about Canada could

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73 Smith, “Tourist Paradise for Canadians,” 5.

74 S.C., *Montreal Star*, January 29, 1962.

75 “Canada-West Indies Merger Plan Suggested,” *Montreal Star*, April 12, 1962.

76 Robert C. Hanson, “What Should We Do in the West Indies?,” *Montreal Star*, October 29, 1963.

77 Alvin Johnson, “Barbados Premier Dismayed with Canada’s Caribbean Role,” *Montreal Star*, October 28, 1963.

fester in the West Indies, for even if Canada had let the region down, “nowhere in the world is the Canadian image as fresh.”<sup>78</sup>

Barrow framed his criticism as a matter between Commonwealth equals, not as a question of Canada failing to meet a parental obligation. But given how Canadian aid to the West Indies was consistently framed as a family obligation that Canada was failing to meet, and a missed opportunity for Canada to act as a nation of consequence on the international stage, it is not surprising that advocates for an increased Canadian presence in the West Indies framed moments like Barrow’s comments, which resonated for years, as a moment in which Canada had been shamed. In 1965 the *Star* recalled how Barrow had expressed “dismay and despondency” two years prior, and noted that Canada was still failing the West Indies.<sup>79</sup> In 1968, after Hugh Shearer criticized Canada for its lack of support, the *Star*, supporting the Jamaican leader, noted that it had been five years since a “Caribbean leader told us off so bluntly.”<sup>80</sup>

### *Criticizing Aid and Trade*

West Indian expressions of thanks for Canadian assistance were a common feature in the Montreal papers. In the early part of the decade, the *Star* ran several stories about a research campus that McGill University maintained in Barbados. Ivan Smith, the Barbadian director of the campus, praised the “fundamental knowledge” coming from its work, pointing to the “immediate practical benefits” that Barbadian fisherman and sugar cane farmers gained from McGill’s involvement.<sup>81</sup> In April 1962, Errol Barrow suggested that these research activities,

78 Alvin Johnson, “West Indies Express Frustration,” *Montreal Star*, October 29, 1963.

79 “The West Indies—Our Neglected Sphere,” *Montreal Star*, March 15, 1965.

80 “Caribbean Despair,” *Montreal Star*, September 11, 1968.

81 D.B. MacFarlane, “McGill Research Paying off,” *Montreal Star*, March 15, 1961.

combined with the many Barbadians studying in Canada, revealed how Barbados “look[ed] to Canada to assist us in our endeavors.”<sup>82</sup> Donald Duncan, a Jamaican dentistry student at McGill, praised McGill’s “important contribution” to the West Indies, which he saw as “a very acceptable form of international aid” in that it allowed West Indians “to utilize our own enterprise in a manner in which we see fit.”<sup>83</sup> L.H. Facey and Trevor Brown, Jamaican education students at McGill, told the *Star* that McGill’s 250 West Indian students gave Canada a leading role “in the educational development of the West Indies.”<sup>84</sup>

That said, as the decade wore on and Canadians and West Indians urged Canada to do more to aid the Commonwealth Caribbean, a growing chorus of voices critiqued foreign aid and trade as factors contributing to regional dependency. Repeated calls for a greater Canadian involvement in the West Indies and regular expressions of thanks to Canada insulated readers from growing critiques of Canadian aid and trade coming from West Indians. West Indian activist-intellectuals in Montreal were strongly invested in the question of the economic sovereignty of the Caribbean, and strongly critical of economic models that they saw as having the potential to undermine that sovereignty. Alfie Roberts, a Vincentian studying in Canada and a member of the CCC, replying to a Canadian interlocutor, argued that Vincentians needed “genuine, pure and unadulterated assistance,” and not the “sympathy, paternalism and bossism” that came with Northern attempts to help the West Indies.<sup>85</sup> His fellow Vincentian Kerwyn Morris, studying biology at Sir George, and a future senior civil servant in his home county’s fisheries office, reacted to plans for Canada to take a larger military role in the West Indies by attacking Canadian race relations and calling for the Caribbean to free itself from Canadian

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82 D.B. MacFarlane, “Barbados Invites Canadian Teachers,” *Montreal Star*, April 7, 1962.

83 D.B. MacFarlane, “McGill Held in Esteem by Jamaican Student,” *Montreal Star*, September 7, 1961.

84 “West Indians Praise Academic Link with McGill University,” *Montreal Star*, August 31, 1966.

85 Alfie Roberts, “Why We Must Think for Ourselves,” *Flambeau*, November 1966, 1–7.

economic control, pointing to the “appalling” living conditions of Canada’s First Nations people as evidence of Canada’s racist character and arguing that West Indian states would never gain economic sovereignty as long as they focused on pursuing trade with Canada, “as some Canadian businessmen and West Indians who should know better would have it.”<sup>86</sup>

While not exclusively so, the great majority of the appeals for Canada to live up to its “responsibilities” to the West Indies came not from West Indian voices, but from Canadian ones. West Indian leaders often took a far nuanced approach to the aid question, looking for the kind of help that would allow their nations ultimately to prosper independently, but with an emphasis on the need for independence.

No leader was more vocal, in or out of office, about the need for aid to not be a force undermining economic sovereignty than Cheddi Jagan. In 1961 Jagan was in Montreal, trying to secure half a billion dollars in aid for Guyana. Jagan called Western aid “a form of imperialism” which “hardly contributed to the development of a country,” and maintained that he would only take funds that came with no conditions.<sup>87</sup> As the decade progressed, other leaders echoed Jagan’s attitude. His rival, PNC leader Forbes Burnham, could be equally critical of aid. In May 1967, the *New Nation*, the PNC’s outlet, rapped Canada in a front-page editorial for the conditions attached to the aid it sent Guyana, claiming that the strings attached led “more thinking people” to ask “whether Guyana is becoming a colony of Canada.”<sup>88</sup> Ironically, the *Star*’s response to *New Nation* used those criticisms to argue for greater Canadian involvement in the region, focusing not on the role of aid in maintaining an uneven power balance, but on Canada’s failure to meet expectations as a donor nation.<sup>89</sup> In Montreal four months later,

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86 Kerwyn L. Morris, “Independence, Unity and Non-Alignment--The Only Hope,” *Flambeau*, July 1966.

87 “British Guiana Needs Funds,” *Montreal Star*, October 17, 1961.

88 “Canada’s Guyana Aid Rapped,” *Montreal Star*, March 7, 1967.

89 “Aid--at a Price,” *Montreal Star*, March 9, 1967.

Burnham called Canadian aid to Guyana “a return in kind of what ... you have stolen from us.”<sup>90</sup> In linking aid to reparations for imperial extraction, Burnham echoed a statement made by Trinidad’s Eric Williams at McGill in 1964, in which, drawing on one of the central arguments of *Capitalism and Slavery*, that wealth extracted from the West Indies funded the industrial development of Europe, he appealed for the West Indies to be compensated for the contributions of “West Indian labour ... climate and soil” to the development of “the now-developed countries.”<sup>91</sup>

As critics and regional leaders challenged Canada to come up with aid models that would promote, and not hamper West Indian economic sovereignty, they also challenged terms of trade that kept the Caribbean in economic servitude to the industrialized world, asking for fair prices for the commodities they shipped northward. Sugar prices were an important site for debate about Canadian trade practices that were detrimental to West Indian economies, in part because Canada paid world market prices for the commodity, which was “below actual production costs,” while the U.S. and Britain paid above market price. Leaders including Errol Barrow of Barbados and Jamaica’s Hugh Shearer argued forcefully that it was unfair of Canada to pay low prices for sugar, especially as prices for West Indian staples that came from Canada, notably wheat and cod.<sup>92</sup>

Alongside trade in commodities, tourism figured strongly in debates about the economic future of the West Indies. Documents like the Tripartite Report gave tourism a central role in the economic development of the West Indies, and the most common context for the West Indies to

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90 Robert Stall, “Guyana PM Scores Developed Countries,” *Montreal Star*, July 12, 1967.

91 Alvin Johnson, “Trinidad Fears Loss of Preferential Trade,” *Montreal Star*, April 23, 1964; Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

92 Smith, “Tourist Paradise for Canadians”; “Jamaican PM Just Wants ‘Respectable Trade Terms,’” *Montreal Star*, August 2, 1967.

appear in the press, of course, was in the weekly travel sections. But critiques in those same newspapers, in West Indian journals, and in the student press singled out tourism for failing to improve West Indians' living conditions and for providing Canadians with a false understanding of West Indian realities. In his series for the *Star* on the West Indies, S.B. Francis criticized West Indian leaders for leading their people "down a deceptive path" focused on developing tourism instead of production to meet local needs.<sup>93</sup> The *Star*'s Boyce Richardson argued that tourism could not support the West Indies, asking if "ostentatiously free-spending luxury" was really the answer to poverty, and noting that "even successful tourist schemes and industrial development" did not necessarily meet "the real social needs of the people," especially given how "tourism generates as many imports as it does exports."<sup>94</sup>

Critics attacked tourism not only for its economic effects, but also for the way in which it worked to shape Canadian perceptions of West Indians and their situation, obscuring poverty and helping to create the image of the West Indian as generous and kind, regardless of his or her economic situation. They also used tourism as a way to highlight the hypocrisy of race relations in Canada. As the *Weekend Magazine* pointed out, Canadian snowbirds in Antigua probably had no idea that in many of the island's residents only had running water for an hour each day, so as to ensure that hotels would not encounter shortages.<sup>95</sup> Yet, even with this reality, as Alfie Roberts wrote, West Indians would "give away our last asset to live up to the tradition that we are a nice, friendly and simple people," a phenomenon that played itself out in the race between Caribbean territories to attract tourists at the lowest possible cost while still being unable to enter the U.S.,

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93 Francis, "The 'Little Eight' Ponder Future."

94 Richardson, "Caribbean Challenge for Canada"; Richardson, "St. Kitt's Big Dream"; Boyce Richardson, "Development Blueprint," *Montreal Star*, July 5, 1966.

95 Smith, "Tourist Paradise for Canadians," 7.

Britain, and Canada freely and being “treated like dogs” if they managed to get there.<sup>96</sup> The comparison of the experiences of Canadian tourists to that of West Indian migrants was consistently harnessed by critics like R.L. Stewart, a Jamaican living in Montreal who wrote to the *Star* about racism in the rental market. Stewart noted that while Canadians got the “red carpet” treatment in Jamaica, West Indians in Canada were “left to the mercy of society to humiliate us.”<sup>97</sup>

No matter how their citizens were being treated in Canada, West Indian leaders and their local supporters consistently pressured the Canadian government to liberalize immigration codes that, for all intents and purposes, were designed to keep Black people out of the country.

### *Immigration*

In 1961 Great Britain introduced the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, which ended the automatic right of people from the Commonwealth to settle in the United Kingdom in favor of a system in which limited numbers of people would be eligible to immigrate on condition they were granted an employment permit from the state. In an editorial about the new policy, the *Star* pointed out that Canada’s immigration policy was “so restrictive” that Canadians were in no position to criticize the new British rules.<sup>98</sup> In fact, for most of the twentieth century, West Indians and other Blacks were, for the most part, with the exception of cases like students on temporary visas, officially barred from immigrating to Canada. A 1911 Order-in-Council banned West Indian migrants on the grounds that their tropical origins made them unfit for northern

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96 Roberts, “Why We Must Think for Ourselves,” 2.

97 L. Stewart, *Montreal Star*, April 15, 1964 For similar, see: ; Rev. Harold Jackman, *Montreal Star*, June 11, 1968; Rosie Douglas, *The Georgian*, February 25, 1966.

98 “Commonwealth and Immigration,” *Montreal Star*, November 3, 1961.

climes.<sup>99</sup>

In the decades following the Second World War, a booming Canadian economy created intense demands for labor, and Canada had to compete with the United States and other industrialized nations like Australia for labor from abroad. Moreover, the relatively porous border with the U.S. made it hard for Canada to hold on to immigrants. Nonetheless, Canada was very slow to liberalize immigration codes that had been in effect since early in the century, partly out of fears the economic good times would not last, but also out of a desire to not make any “fundamental alteration in the character of [the] population.” Thus, most immigrants to Canada came from “traditional” European sources.<sup>100</sup> In 1953, the “climate unsuitability” clause was dropped from Canada’s immigration codes, but three years later the Minister of Immigration asserted that Canada would continue to limit non-white immigration.<sup>101</sup> While a slowdown in the economy lowered pressures on immigration policy, as the historian Harold Troper argues, by the early 1960s Canada “backed into a non-racist immigration policy,” and was motivated to open its doors to non-whites not in order to attract those immigrants for their own sake but in order to “improve Canada’s international image” and create an immigration policy that was in lines with domestic human rights norms.<sup>102</sup>

In 1955 Canada enacted the first policy designed to attract Black immigrants to the country, the Domestic Immigration Service Agreement. Known colloquially as the “Domestic Scheme,” the new plan was enacted in response to West Indian pressure on Canada to “liberalize its discriminatory immigration policy” and Canada’s desire to maintain “preferential investment

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99 “Editorial,” *Expression*, February 1967.

100 Harold Troper, “Canada’s Immigration Policy since 1945,” *International Journal* 48, no. 2 (April 1, 1993): 255–260.

101 Dorothy W. Williams, *Blacks in Montreal, 1628-1986 : An Urban Demography* (Cowansville, Quebec: Éditions Yvon Blais, 1989), 61.

102 Troper, “Canada’s Immigration Policy since 1945,” 266.

and trade” relationships with the West Indies.<sup>103</sup> Taking advantage of a growing Canadian demand for cheap domestic labor, the plan allowed West Indian women, and only women, to come to Canada to work as domestics for a year before being free to take other work and sponsor family members to join them. Some 3000 West Indian women came to Canada under the Domestic Scheme, half of them to Montreal, where they and the family members they sponsored sparked the expansion of a vibrant Black population.<sup>104</sup>

Historian Agnes Calliste argues that while the Domestic Scheme made it easier for some West Indians to come to Canada, in doing so it did not reflect a liberalization of Canadian immigration policy. Instead, it revealed how racism, patriarchy and economic exploitation defined relationships between Canada and the West Indies.<sup>105</sup> These dynamics were evident in the centrality of domestic work to the policy. The condition of domestic labor applied regardless of a woman’s qualifications, and many highly-trained workers and professionals spent valuable time doing menial work in order to gain access to Canadian immigrant status. West Indian officials, eager to make their region look good, selected a high proportion of educated women for the scheme; according to one study, only 12% of women who came to Montreal under the plan had ever worked as domestics.<sup>106</sup>

Yet, even as educated and skilled women were strongly represented in the ranks of West Indians taking advantage of the Domestic Scheme, when they got to Canada, these women found themselves marginalized because of the stigma attached to their status as domestic workers. As

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103 Agnes Calliste, “Canada’s Immigration Policy and Domestics from the Caribbean: The Second Domestic Scheme.,” *Socialist Studies* 5 (1989): 136; Williams, *Blacks in Montreal, 1628-1986*, 74.

104 Don Handelman, “West Indian Associations in Montreal” (M.A., McGill University, 1964), 25–26; Williams, *Blacks in Montreal, 1628-1986*, 63–64.

105 Calliste, “Canada’s Immigration Policy and Domestics from the Caribbean: The Second Domestic Scheme.,” 136.

106 *Ibid.*, 148–149.

the historian Karen Flynn writes of West Indian domestic workers in Toronto, they “most likely experienced more isolation ... and greater marginalization” not only from whites, but also from other West Indians and other Black people, living as “‘outsiders’ among the ‘outsiders.’” In contrast, the nurses that are the subject of Flynn’s study were far more likely to be asked to participate in events staged by Black student and community groups because of their status as skilled workers.<sup>107</sup> In 1969, an unnamed West Indian woman working as a domestic told *Expression* that the only West Indian men available for dating were students, who tended look down upon the domestic workers as “house mechanics.”<sup>108</sup>

Because of the specifically gendered dynamics of the Domestic Scheme, debates about immigration were a rare site for public discussion of the specific issues facing Black women in Montreal. The lion’s share of activism and awareness-raising undertaken to address the specific issues confronting of Black women in Montreal addressed the situation of domestic workers. The Domestic Scheme was roundly criticized by West Indians and West Indian expatriates in Canada. One Guyanese barrister was quoted as calling the plan “a prostitution of West Indian citizenship.”<sup>109</sup> Winifred Gaskin, an activist with Guyana’s PNC, and a founding member of the party who had a history of feminist activism dating back to the 1940s, told the *Star* that the “girls” who came to Canada on the plan were lonely, had a hard time meeting Black men, and felt rejected because they had few opportunities outside work to interact with Canadians.<sup>110</sup> Barbara Jones, a Jamaican-born geneticist, poet and performer living in Montreal, echoed

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107 Karen Flynn, *Moving Beyond Borders: A History of Black Canadian and Caribbean Women in the Diaspora* (University of Toronto Press, 2011), 190–191.

108 Louis Lindo, “The Black Crisis—Canada,” *Expression*, Spring 1969, 6.

109 Legate, “New Caribbean Nation Is Going to Need Help.”

110 Ethel Tiffin, “B.G. Women’s Leader Recalls Early Interest in Politics,” *Montreal Star*, July 31, 1962; “Winifred Gaskin – An Early Guyanese Politician – Part 1,” *Stabroek News*, accessed April 3, 2015, <http://www.stabroeknews.com/2009/features/12/03/winifred-gaskin-an-early-guyanese-politician/>.

Gaskin's sentiments, saying that the absence of West Indian men in Canada made it difficult for West Indian women to integrate into Canadian society. She also noted that while the majority of Black women in Montreal had a college degree, they had to live with people assuming they were domestics because of the color of their skin.<sup>111</sup>

"Waiting for the Postman to Knock," a short story by the Barbadian-Canadian novelist Austin Clarke, addressed the poverty and isolation that defined life in Canada for many of these women, as well as the perhaps unreasonable expectations of what kind of opportunity awaited West Indian women who took part in the Scheme. Enid, a Barbadian woman who came to Canada as a domestic, describes her hardships: unpaid bills, loneliness, relatives in Barbados asking her for money she does not have. Her isolation is so intense that even her fellow West Indian domestics call her a "disgrace" for needing to borrow money from her employer. Enid concludes that "in Canada, a woman does everything for herself; and if she can't, she lies and waits until God sends someone."<sup>112</sup> Clarke also wrote about how the gendered dimensions of Canadian immigration law affected West Indian men in Canada, noting that many West Indian men, including himself, had only been able to secure immigrant status by marrying Canadian women.<sup>113</sup>

In 1960, Canada took the first steps toward opening up its borders to West Indian immigrants regardless of gender, instituting a plan that allowed about 1000 skilled workers from the West Indies to come to Canada each year.<sup>114</sup> In 1962, in response to Britain's narrowing of

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111 Susan Purcell, "Her Tiresome Battle: To Defeat Bigotry She Finds Here," *Montreal Star*, October 2, 1968 The opposite side of the coin is the Black man traveling on a Canadian train while on vacation with his family being treated as a porter by other passengers, as Lyne Bynoe, who grew up in Montreal and was active in the Black political scene at the end of the decade, recounted in conversation with me in Port of Spain.

112 Austin C. Clarke, "Waiting for the Postman to Knock," *Bim* 10, no. 39 (December 1964): 159-70.

113 Austin C. Clarke, "A Black Man Talks about Race Prejudice in White Canada," *Maclean's*, April 20, 1963, 18; 55-58.

114 Williams, *Blacks in Montreal, 1628-1986*, 62.

immigration regulations, Canada began to deracialize its immigration rules, creating a system that awarded “points” to potential immigrants based largely on their education and work skills; the plan was fully implemented in 1967.<sup>115</sup> The new policy, building on the catalyst of the Domestic Scheme, led to a rapid growth in Canada’s and Montreal’s West Indian population: between 1905 and 1955, some 3400 West Indians settled in Canada; from 1961-65 11,835 West Indians migrated to Canada, many of them opting for Montreal.<sup>116</sup>

The *Star* quickly made an argument that became central to critiques of the new policy: while ostensibly color-blind, the new regime favored applicants from industrialized nations who were more likely to have the education and skills that would earn them sufficient “points” to gain immigrant status than were most potential West Indian migrants. West Indians wanting to come to Canada could find that the new “grueling tests” might keep them out as easily as the “evasive tactics” of the old system, which, the *Star* noted sarcastically, also “had nothing to do with” race.<sup>117</sup> Critics also noted that by failing to facilitate mass migration from the West Indies, Canada was failing in its obligation to aid West Indian development. As the economist D.B. Fraser wrote, if Canada did not open its doors to West Indians, then any claim it made to be a “concerned partner in West Indian development cannot be taken seriously.”<sup>118</sup>

West Indian activists in Montreal worked to raise awareness of the shortfalls of the new deracialized policy, drawing attention to what they argued was *de facto* racism in the high barriers it put in front of the largely unskilled West Indians who would most benefit from a move to Canada, and attacking Canada for how the new policy affected the West Indian nations that

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115 Ibid.; Frances Henry, *The Caribbean Diaspora in Toronto: Learning to Live with Racism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 27.

116 Williams, *Blacks in Montreal, 1628-1986*, 62.

117 “No Color Bar!,” *Montreal Star*, January 22, 1962.

118 Fraser, “Canada’s Role in the West Indies.”

relied so heavily on Canada. The CCC wrote a policy brief for the 1966 Ottawa conference in favor of liberalized immigration codes that argued that “a serious social problem could arise” in the West Indies if nothing was done to provide an outlet for growing numbers of unemployed and made pointed accusations that “biased, covertly prejudiced” Canadian officials were approving the entry of unskilled Europeans while denying entry to West Indians, concluding that “a deliberate bias exists toward admitting more *White Skinned Europeans* to Canada, skilled or unskilled, and keeping *Black Skinned* people out, admitting only the very skilled.”<sup>119</sup> On 24 February 1967—the same day that Stokely Carmichael spoke at Sir George<sup>120</sup>—representatives of the NCA and two expatriate groups, the Jamaica Association and the Trinidad and Tobago Association, told a parliamentary committee that Canada had historically “[pursued] a policy of racial discrimination in immigration” and that restricting immigration from the West Indies to skilled workers when the region needed an outlet for unskilled labor was no less racist than the previous regime. Evoking Canada’s “special duty” to the West Indies and echoing the NCA’s perpetual calls for improved human rights codes, the organizations proposed that Canada could best fulfill its obligation to the West Indies by enshrining an anti-discrimination clause into a new immigration code, and creating immigration offices in the West Indies to facilitate migration northward.<sup>121</sup>

West Indian politicians joined in on attacks on Canadian policies that kept out the people who could most benefit from new opportunities abroad. After the 1963 Fredericton conference, Barrow argued forcefully that a colour bar persisted in Canada, noting that of 75,000 recent

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119 Conference Committee on West Indian Affairs, “Policy Proposals for Caribbean Development,” 1966, 9–11, MG31 H181 Vol. 2 Folder 17, Library and Archives Canada, Clarence Bayne fonds.

120 See Chapter Three.

121 “Immigration Policy Scored by Negro Groups,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 25, 1967; “La Politique Canadienne D’immigration Defavorise-T-Elle Les ‘Non-Blancs’?,” *Le Devoir*, February 27, 1967.

immigrants to Canada (mostly from Europe) only 1500 came from the West Indies.<sup>122</sup> Three years later at the Ottawa conference, Canadian Manpower Minister Jean Marchand argued that there was “no racial discrimination in Canadian immigration policy,” but maintained that “surplus workers” from the West Indies were “not likely to have any easier time finding jobs in Canada” than they were in the Caribbean. One conference participant replied that the West Indian people were “highly adaptable,” and that overpopulation and unemployment were a potential source of regional instability; Errol Barrow pointed to the need for a “free interchange of people” between Canada and the West Indies.<sup>123</sup> Eric Williams, using remarkably harsh terms and calling on his intellectual grounding in anti-colonialist scholarship, called the obstacles faced by prospective West Indian migrants a manifestation of Canadian hypocrisy and racism, noted the tension between Canada’s condemnation of white rule in Rhodesia and its barring of West Indians “on colour grounds,” and charged Canada with having benefited from plantation slavery but wanting nothing to do with free West Indians.<sup>124</sup>

West Indian officials, as had the CCC, appealed to Canada’s investment in West Indian development and social peace as they advocated for more open immigration rules. A spokesman from a West Indian delegation to the Ottawa conference was disappointed that the meeting did not produce proposals to ease immigration restrictions, arguing that without an outlet, “population and unemployment could lead to instability in the islands.”<sup>125</sup> Other critics like Forbes Burnham and Eric Williams focused on how the new law not only restricted unskilled West Indian workers, it stymied West Indian development by attracting skilled workers to

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122 Johnson, “Barbados Premier Dismayed with Canada’s Caribbean Role”; Hanson, “A Lot of Questions Remain Unanswered.”

123 James Stewart, “Caribbean Migrants Get Loans,” *Montreal Star*, July 7, 1966; “Canada-Caribbean Pact Eliminates Sugar Duty,” *Montreal Star*, July 8, 1966; De Wet, “‘I’m No Dictator’--Burnham.”

124 Smith, “Tourist Paradise for Canadians,” 2–3.

125 “Canada-Caribbean Pact Eliminates Sugar Duty”; Stewart, “Caribbean Migrants Get Loans.”

Canada, robbing West Indian nations of the people they needed most.<sup>126</sup>

In 1963, *Star* reader R.B. Allum, in a letter extolling the benefits of colonial rule in Africa, noted that Canada was “a white man’s country” that had avoided racial conflict largely by barring Blacks from entering, “even British subjects from Jamaica.”<sup>127</sup> While Allum’s comments represented a base racism that many Canadians would have denied in public, debates about immigration forced Canada to confront the gap between its self-image as a nation free of structural racism and the realities of life in Canada for Black people; as the economist D.B. Fraser pointed out, while increased West Indian immigration would have little effect on Canada’s economy, the “social problem” it would create would be “major,” both in terms of the hardships migrants would face and in terms of how their presence would “challenge the abilities and the conscience of Canada.”<sup>128</sup>

The prospect of increased migration from the West Indies fueled Canadian anxiety about racial unrest. Canadians looked to increasing racial disturbances in the United States with trepidation, with some observers warning that if Canada’s racial climate did not improve, local versions of Watts, Detroit or Newark might unfold. Many of these observers noted that it was only the relatively small size of Canada’s Black population that kept such a thing from happening. Thus, increased immigration from the West Indies was sometimes seen as potentially opening the door to social unrest. That said, it seems that racial tensions in Great Britain, and not the United States, may have done more to feed unease at the prospect of increased West Indian migration. The *Star* noted that should Canada ease immigration restrictions, it might face “a color problem ... similar to that in Britain, which has allowed large-scale immigration of

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126 Stall, “Guyana PM Scores Developed Countries”; Smith, “Tourist Paradise for Canadians.”

127 R.B. Allum, *Montreal Star*, May 10, 1963.

128 Fraser, “Canada’s Role in the West Indies,” 19.

coloured people.”<sup>129</sup> The CCC accused Canada of limiting West Indian migration out of fear that the British situation would repeat itself, but saw any potential issues as avoidable. The group pointed out that fears of racial unrest failed to take into account that Britain had experienced a sharp increase in West Indian immigration without enacting policies to ease the resulting social tensions. Canada, on the other hand, could take advantage of what the CCC maintained was a growing tendency towards acceptance and institute mechanisms that would ease tensions arising from increased migration.<sup>130</sup>

Canadian debates about the West Indies and its relationship with Canada were permeated by imperialist and racist understandings of the region and its people. West Indian leaders seeking aid as equal Commonwealth partners were often drowned out by Canadian advocates for increased Canadian involvement in the region that framed the West Indies in paternalistic tones that left little room to discuss independent models of economic development. West Indians in Montreal latched onto immigration as a way to talk about both a Canadian failure to provide West Indians with what many thought they needed most—a chance to take advantage of the opportunities Canada provided—and as a way to talk about how racism shaped Canadian policy-making. Advocacy on behalf of the women involved in the Domestic Scheme revealed the gendered dynamics of Canada’s exclusionary policies.

Critiques by West Indians in Montreal of aid, development and immigration were part of a larger tendency in West Indian thought that put the relationship between the formerly-colonized nations and the industrialized world at the center of a critique of racism that was developing among students and other West Indians in the city. It is to those developments we now turn.

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129 “Diplomats to Discuss Caribbean Trade.”

130 Conference Committee on West Indian Affairs, “Policy Proposals for Caribbean Development.”

## Chapter Five

### **“Those of You Who are White Can Listen, But I’m Talking to the Blacks”: Formulating Montreal’s Black Power Moment, 1960-1968.**

Beginning in 1965, Montreal played host to a number of conferences at which West Indian, Black Canadian and African-American activist intellectuals articulated an evolving theorization of Black radical thought and practice. From 1965 to 1967, the Caribbean Conference Committee, a Montreal-based intellectual collective made up principally of West Indians studying in Montreal that grew out of a study circle organized with C.L.R. James during his time in the city staged three Conferences on West Indian Affairs. These events allowed young West Indian thinkers and activists to discuss West Indian politics, history and culture as the region moved from colonial rule to independence. They may be seen as a conscious attempt on the part of a generation of activists to re-imagine a unified Caribbean in the wake of the dissolution of the Federation of the West Indies, and to theorize what potential shape West Indian identity might take by drawing on a sustained study of the region’s history and cultures. The final edition of the CCC conferences, titled “The West Indian in Exile,” was focused on West Indians living abroad, and revealed an increasing intellectual and political commitment on the part of West Indians living in Canada to their situation in their adoptive home, a tendency that was solidified with the October 1968 Black People in Canada conference [BPC].<sup>1</sup>

A week after the BPC was the Congress of Black Writers, which, like the BPC, grew out

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1 For the BPC, see Chapter One.

of the work of the CCC, which had folded after the 1967 meeting. The Congress brought crucial figures in the development of twentieth-century African diasporic thought and activism, including C.L.R. James, Stokely Carmichael, Lloyd Best and Walter Rodney to McGill University for a meeting that was a key moment in the development of Black Power as an international phenomenon. The event is possibly best remembered for what happened when Rodney tried to return to Jamaica, where he was teaching at the University of the West Indies; the Jamaican government refused him entry, sparking protests, violence and destruction in Kingston. This unrest, known as the “Rodney riots,” was the moment when the West Indian public became aware of a locally-rooted iteration of Black Power, leading to debate about the ideology’s relevance in the West Indian context.

Two events held after the Congress, a “Teach-In Against Racism” and the Hemispheric Conference to End the War in Vietnam, which a contingent from the Black Panther Party helped transform into an extended analysis of American racism and imperialism, extended Montreal’s role as a site for debate about new tendencies in Black radical thought.

This chapter traces how Black activists in Montreal articulated new approaches to Black liberation, drawing on intellectual currents from both the West Indies and the United States and from the specific experiences of Black people in Canada. The focus is largely on two inter-related questions: how did Black thinkers in Montreal outline the relationship between theory and political activism, and how did they use history as a means by which situate West Indian and Black identity as a base from which to attack structural exclusion and inequality? The tension between theory and action was an important dynamic, as the question of intellectual

decolonization as a necessary condition for meaningful political action was central to many analyses. Activist-intellectuals like C.L.R. James and Walter Rodney grounded their appeals for intellectual decolonization in analyses that revealed how Africans and displaced Africans in the West Indies were the creators of both societies where modern Blacks could find cultural roots outside of Eurocentric frameworks and of revolutionary traditions that could inform contemporary action.

The chapter also examines local reactions to the increasingly radical tenor of the ideas expressed by Black activists and intellectuals in Montreal. As we saw in Chapter One, reactions to the rally held to memorialize Martin Luther King generated sharp responses both from parts of Montreal's Black activist community and from the city more generally, as many people rejected attempts on the parts of figures like Rosie Douglas to apply the language of Black Power to the local context. This tendency continued in the fall of 1968, as the radical tenor of the Congress and the Hemispheric Conference generated sharp debate among Black activists and other Montrealers. Many of the ideas expressed at these events rejected inter-racial alliances and instead rooted the struggle against racism in a distinctly Black political and intellectual ethos. This created a strong sense of alienation among people who could not understand how ideas seen largely as an import from the United States were relevant in the Canadian context. This alienation was translated into fear, as the press played up provocative, spectacular and theatrical statements on the part of Black activists to feed the idea that Black radicalism was inherently violent and anti-white.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the growing radicalization of Montreal's

Black activist community was translated into two key changes in that community's intellectual infrastructure, leading to the end of *Expression's* attempts to provide the city's Black communities with a dedicated print outlet and the founding of Canada's first Black Studies program.

As the Congress and later the Panthers' role at the Hemispheric Conference played a key role in raising Canadians' awareness of Black Power as something that had a relevance beyond the American inner city, in doing so these events reinforced the image of Black Power as a strongly male ideology, embodied in the images of men like Stokely Carmichael and Bobby Seale. This masculinist image played an important role in depictions of those events that fed into fear-mongering of angry Black men as a violent threat to the social order. Press descriptions of both the Congress and the Hemispheric Conference focused on the image of Black men, either wearing "African garb" or dressed in the quasi-military Panther uniform, menacingly blocking white people from participating in events.

While one of the central issues concerning West Indian women in Canada, the Domestic Scheme, was an occasional touchstone at some of the meetings described below, including in Barbara Jones's presentation at the "Teach-In Against Racism" and at a presentation at Sir George Williams by Black Panther T.D. Pawley shortly thereafter, the meetings covered in this chapter were intensely male-centered. David Austin notes in his analysis of the Congress of Black Writers that there was "a glaring omission" from the program, in that "women activists and writers were conspicuously absent," though, he notes, people who attended the Congress recall women playing important roles in the debates and conversations that did not make it into

the documentary memory of the event. Austin frames this omission as part of a both larger tendency in which women's contributions to the development of Black radicalism have been the object of historical amnesia and as a reflection of "wider society's patriarchal values." He also sees a tendency on the part of male activists to obscure the role and concerns of women in their movement as part of a "defensive stance of black men asserting their humanity in a society that has historically devalued it," and notes that woman activists were and continue to be "[invested] in the 'Black Man's Burden,'" needing to defend Black men against racism as they confronted and confront racial exclusion in feminist movements.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Intellectual Roots of Black Power in the West Indies and Canada*

The central question in 1960s West Indian radical thought in the 1960s was sovereignty, not only in terms of political rule, but in the economic, intellectual and cultural spheres. The decolonization of Black minds was a fundamental part of the the struggle against racism and colonial and neocolonial domination.

To trace how sovereignty was central to progressive West Indian 1960s thought, the work of the New World Group, a pioneering intellectual collective that, under the leadership of the Trinidadian economist Lloyd Best, had a profound impact on Caribbean intellectual production is key. Besides playing a dominant role in the development of Caribbean radical critique, New World and Best had strong ties to the burgeoning West Indian intellectual community in

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<sup>2</sup> David Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation: Race, Sex, and Security in Sixties Montreal* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2013), 120–125.

Montreal, and Best's contributions to debates about the role of the intellectual in political activism played a key role in shaping debates about the relationship between theory and action.

New World grew out of meetings between students and faculty on the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies in the early 1960s—as an undergraduate, Walter Rodney was a member of the discussion group that spawned the organization. Their mission was to understand the West Indian past and present in order to shape a democratic and egalitarian vision of its future; members analyzed the dynamics underpinning West Indian political marginalization, economic underdevelopment, and poverty, and theorized alternatives to neocolonialism, acting as, in the words of the economist and New World member Norman Girvan, a “form of resistance ... to Eurocentric thinking.”<sup>3</sup> Besides Best, New World counted among its members influential thinkers including the economists Girvan and George Beckford, and the historian James Millette.

In the spirit of Marcus Garvey's appeal to Black people to “emancipate [themselves] from mental slavery,” New World's conception of sovereignty extended to the realm of epistemology.<sup>4</sup> Epistemic sovereignty—the freedom to think outside the structures imposed by metropolitan power—was a precondition for what the anthropologist David Scott calls “the interrogation *from within* of the meaning of Caribbean sovereignty,” meaning examining the history and the present conditions of the West Indian people on their own terms, free from structures and constraints imposed by foreign influences, in order to create an intellectual space from which the West Indian people could decide what independence would mean.<sup>5</sup> New World's

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3 Norman Girvan, “New World and Its Critics,” in *Caribbean Reasonings: The Thought of New World, The Quest for Decolonisation*, ed. Brian Meeks and Norman Girvan (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2010), 8–9.

4 Marcus Garvey, “The Work That Has Been Done,” in *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, Volume VII.*, ed. Robert A. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 791.

5 David Scott, “Vocation of a Caribbean Intellectual: An Interview with Lloyd Best by David Scott,” *Small Axe* 1,

founding assumption was that no political, economic, or social vision of the West Indian future was appropriate without grounding in a detailed study of region on its own terms, not through the conceptual lenses inherited from an imperial past.

New World's approach drew extensively on a radical decentering of the history of Western civilization pioneered by figures such as Eric Williams and C.L.R. James, who in landmark works such as *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944) and *The Black Jacobins* (1938) framed the West Indian people as a dynamic force in the development of modernity.<sup>6</sup> The desire to develop a progressive mode of analysis that put West Indian people and their ideas at the center of any study of the region reflected Best's conviction that radical intellectualism did not require allegiance to existing ideologies but rather developed organically as the response to the particular challenges facing a people. Best saw New World's work as something that grew out of "a sustained application of thought to the matters that concern [West Indians] deeply."<sup>7</sup>

A key element of Best's rejection of alien epistemologies was a refusal to uncritically accept modes of analysis developed in resistance to European capitalism, as these often assumed that the social categories created by European capitalism, notably that of class, provided a universal analytic lens. Best thus rejected Marxism as a system of thought based on analyses that were not germane to the West Indian context. Many of the thinkers examined in the present chapter did not follow Best to this conclusion, and instead worked to reconcile Marxist modes of analysis with the particulars of West Indian history. In doing so, they shared with Best a key

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no. 1 (February 1997): 119.

6 C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage, 1989); Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

7 "Editorial," *New World Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (Croptime 1966): np.

assumption; specific economic systems gave birth to specific formations of “group solidarity and group interest.” In the West Indies, Black dispossession was the ultimate legacy of the plantation economy, and thus race and racism had to be at the center of any analysis of the region.<sup>8</sup>

Best, who was in Montreal in 1966-67 and occasionally afterwards, played a key role in shaping Black intellectualism in the city; as Austin notes, “the history of Caribbean intellectual life ... in Montreal would have been very different” without the presence of Best and Kari Levitt, a Canadian economist with whom Best collaborated to develop the “plantation model,” a *longue-durée* historical analysis of West Indian development.<sup>9</sup> Levitt’s collaboration with Best led to the formation of a Montreal chapter of New World, made up largely of West Indian students at McGill, which served as a meeting point for discussion of West Indian affairs. The Montreal chapter saw its work as making up “part of the larger movement towards the building of ... a free, democratic and truly indigenous Caribbean society” through fostering “a continuous process of self-education among Caribbean peoples,” which was a prerequisite for “any real, lasting and meaningful change.”<sup>10</sup>

The historian Bert Thomas describes the New World Group as more of a regional

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8 Lloyd Best, “Independent Thought and Caribbean Freedom,” *New World Quarterly* 3, no. 4 (Cropover 1967): 21–22; Lloyd Best, “Race, Class, and Ethnicity in a Caribbean Interpretation” (Third Annual Jagan Lecture, York University, Toronto, 2001), <http://www.yorku.ca/ce/lac/abstracts.htm#Best>; Brian Meeks, Norman Girvan, and Anthony Bogue, “A Caribbean Life—An Interview with Lloyd Best,” in *Caribbean Reasonings: The Thought of New World, The Quest for Decolonisation* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2010), 283–286; Norman Girvan, “Caribbean Dependency Thought Revisited,” *Canadian Journal of Development Studies/Revue Canadienne D’études Du Développement* 27, no. 3 (September 2006): 337; Scott, “Vocation of a Caribbean Intellectual: An Interview with Lloyd Best by David Scott,” 134.

9 Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation*, 33–34; Lloyd Best and Kari Levitt, *Essays on the Theory of Plantation Economy: A Historical and Institutional Approach to Caribbean Economic Development* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2009).

10 “Some Thoughts on the Structure of the NWG -- Montreal,” n/d, MG31 H181 Vol. 2 Folder 15, Library and Archives Canada, Clarence Bayne fonds.

conscience than a political actor.<sup>11</sup> Echoing this sentiment, Levitt maintains that the Montreal chapter was “somewhat marginal to the radical currents” in the city’s West Indian student community, and sees it as having “an intellectual rather than an activist character.”<sup>12</sup> That said, Montreal’s radical West Indian thinkers played a key role in debate about the question of intellectual activity and political activity in the New World Group, and this debate would carry over to more general discussions of the need for theory rooted in detailed study of local phenomena as a necessary precursor to political action.

New World’s focus on epistemic sovereignty, their decentering of Eurocentric analyses, and their desire to affirm the ability and desire of the West Indian people to chart their own course draw attention to the role of the intellectual in the decolonizing world. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon argued that nations emerging from colonial rule faced political turmoil in part because their intelligentsia was alienated from popular intellectual currents, while emerging national elites inherited economies that had developed outside of their control and did not understand how those economies worked. Independence failed to bring about fundamental change as the national bourgeoisie, out of touch with the masses, positioned itself as an intermediary for foreign capital. Newly independent nations thus remained focused on extracting primary resources for the benefit of the metropole.<sup>13</sup>

Fanon contrasted the behavior of the colonized bourgeoisie with the stance taken by what he called “an authentic national bourgeoisie,” meaning those intellectuals who turned their backs

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11 Bert J. Thomas, “Caribbean Black Power: From Slogan to Practical Politics,” *Journal of Black Studies* 22, no. 3 (1992): 393–394.

12 Kari Levitt, “The Montreal New World Group,” in *Caribbean Reasonings: The Thought of New World, The Quest for Decolonisation*, ed. Brian Meeks and Norman Girvan (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2010), 70–76.

13 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 97–101.

on the roles that the colonizers had planned for them in order to be in close touch with the people, so that they may learn from the masses while passing on “intellectual and technical capital.”<sup>14</sup> Those intellectuals, Fanon wrote, had the potential to “[open] up the future,” “spurring [the people] into action and fostering hope.”<sup>15</sup> Read through the lens of Fanon’s critiques of post-colonial intellectuals, the work of New World, the CCC, and other West Indian and Black intellectuals in the latter half of the 1960s can be understood as a self-conscious attempt on the part of an educated class to create, from the ground up, a new intellectual tradition. This tradition, much of it rooted in the work of previous generations of West Indian thinkers and based on a detailed study of West Indian history, economy, society and culture, was to be a bulwark against the reproduction of imperial modes of analysis that supported an economy predicated on extraction and exploitation.

### *West Indian Student Critiques Before the CCC*

Canada’s role in providing access to higher education to young West Indians was an important dimension of its developmental mission in the Commonwealth Caribbean. At the same time, in the early 1960s, Montreal’s campuses took on a critical role as a site for the development of critique of West Indian politics. The earliest local roots of what became the intellectual foundations of West Indian Black Power can be traced to the work of West Indian student activists in the years before the formation of the CCC and the first of the Conferences on

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14 Ibid., 99.

15 Ibid., 167.

Caribbean Affairs in 1965.

Sociologist Don Handelman observed that one of Montreal's West Indian student groups struggled to get students interested "in activities other than social ones."<sup>16</sup> The frustrations accompanying these efforts were no doubt tied to the fact that students leading those groups often saw themselves as the future leaders of their countries and thus having the responsibility to promote a sense of unity and purpose among their expatriate colleagues. Sir George student Gaston Franklyn wrote that West Indians studying abroad "[held] the fate" of a "new nation" in their hands.<sup>17</sup> Members of Montreal's chapter of the New World Group, many of whom were students, saw themselves, "divorced from the day-to-day pressures" of Caribbean life, as having "more opportunity to make a unique contribution" to the political development of the Caribbean. Even if they could not "speak to ... parlour keepers and cane farmers," on a daily basis, they "[had] the advantage of greater experience, more resources and less diffused community."<sup>18</sup>

The idea of a unified Caribbean nation was a key touchstone for the West Indian left in the 1960s, especially for those activists influenced by C.L.R. James. James likened the 1962 end of the Federation of the West Indies to the death of a nation and reasoned that a united West Indies was the only "progressive alternative to the colonial status quo."<sup>19</sup> During his 1966 Canadian sojourn, James predicted that a new federation incorporating the English-, Dutch- and French-speaking islands would emerge within a decade and praised the great enthusiasm he saw among younger West Indians for such a union.<sup>20</sup> West Indian students in Montreal were

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16 Don Handelman, "West Indian Associations in Montreal" (M.A., McGill University, 1964), 83.

17 Gaston Franklyn, "In Transition," *The Georgian*, February 23, 1960.

18 "Some Thoughts on the Structure of the NWG -- Montreal."

19 Aaron Kamugisha, "The Life and Death of a Nation: The Mood on Immigration in Barbados," *Caribbean Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (June 1, 2011): 118.

20 Wouter De Wet, "New Caribbean Union Predicted," *Montreal Star*, December 7, 1966.

especially committed to fostering a sense of West Indian identity in the wake of the dissolution of the Federation, hoping to take advantage of opportunities for contact between people from various nations that were easier to stage in a West Indian student group in Canada than they were back home, expressing frustration with colleagues who failed to take advantage of the opportunity to make contact with “brothers from the different islands,” whom they accused of imitating political leaders back home whose insularity and inability to commit to the broader picture undermined the Federation.<sup>21</sup>

The historian Overand Padmore blames the death of the Federation on the “myopia and opportunism of political leaders.”<sup>22</sup> West Indian activist students in Montreal would have been inclined to agree. Sir George student George Richardson wrote that after three years of political union, a single West Indian nationality had yet to emerge as “petty jealousies and ... insularity” worked against the development of a regional sense of racial harmony.<sup>23</sup> ‘Siah, another Sir George student, criticized Jamaican leaders for not putting their reluctance about the project on the table when the Federation was being planned, writing they had displayed “a lack of political foresight and maturity.”<sup>24</sup>

As they criticized West Indian leaders for allowing the dream of a politically-unified Commonwealth Caribbean to fall apart, West Indian students in Montreal also had an eye on how political independence would translate into better lives for the West Indian people. They sought to historicize contemporary regional poverty in a history of imperial misrule, and situated the

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21 Franklyn, “In Transition”; Wilma Agustin, “Federation,” *The Georgian*, February 2, 1960.

22 Overand R. Padmore, “Federation: The Demise of an Idea,” *Social and Economic Studies* 48, no. 4 (December 1, 1999): 61.

23 George Richardson, “Building a West Indian Nation,” *The Georgian*, February 28, 1961 See also: .

24 ‘Siah, “West Indian Dilemma,” *The Georgian*, October 17, 1961.

political discontent of the West Indian people in the failure of new nationalist leaders to deliver on the promises of independence and to make meaningful connections with the people they represented. Sir George student Neville Ross argued that Caribbean poverty was the product of the region's history of needing to import basic goods and a failure of colonial rule to promote economic sovereignty.<sup>25</sup> In a review of Daniel Guerin's *The West Indies and Their Future*, Alvin Johnson praised Guerin for forcing his readers to engage with the histories behind West Indian poverty, as "too often the symptoms have been tackled and the disease left intact," noting that contemporary regional poverty reflected, as Eric Williams had shown in *Capitalism and Slavery*, how "abolition freed the slaves physically but not spiritually."<sup>26</sup> Johnson also argued that there was a growing disillusionment among West Indians who were asking how independence would translate into improved living conditions, growing frustrated with the endurance of rigid social structures after independence, and wondering if they even had a stake in their new states.<sup>27</sup>

In the early part of the 1960s, West Indian students in Montreal were eager to theorize a unified Commonwealth Caribbean, and, seeing themselves as the future leaders of the region, strove to encourage connections between West Indians from different locales as a step towards creating that unity. The failure of their leaders to deliver on the project of a politically-unified West Indies was a major disappointment to them, and they, early on in the game, were willing to both criticize what they saw as the shortcomings of their political leadership and historicize regional issues in terms of the legacy of colonialism. Those tendencies would continue in the

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25 Neville Ross, "Trinidad—Life on the Isle of the Humming Bird," *The Georgian*, November 2, 1960.

26 Alvin Johnson, "A Serious Approach to West Indies' Problems," *Montreal Star*, February 24, 1962; Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*.

27 Alvin Johnson, "Trinidad a Sovereign State," *Montreal Star*, August 29, 1962; Alvin Johnson, "Indecision Besets Fledgling Jamaica," *Montreal Star*, August 6, 1963.

work of other West Indians in the city over the course of the decade.

### *The Conferences on West Indian Affairs*

The first Conference on West Indian Affairs, titled “Shaping the Future of the West Indies,” took place at the University of Montreal on 8-9 October 1965, and was attended by people from across the West Indian diaspora in Canada and the United States.<sup>28</sup> The conference was one of three annual meetings organized by the Caribbean Conference Committee [CCC], a group founded by West Indians in Montreal including Robert Hill, Alvin Johnson, Rosie Douglas and Franklyn Harvey; the group originally took the name of the Conference Committee on West Indian Affairs, and grew out of the C.L.R. James Study Circle, an intellectual collective that grew around the Trinidadian scholar in 1966, when he spent some three months in Montreal in 1966-1967 after his failed political campaign in Trinidad.<sup>29</sup> The CCC was strongly invested in West Indian unity after the collapse of the Federation of the West Indies. A paper written by Alfie Roberts and Franklyn Harvey framed the work of the CCC as helping to undo the splintering of the West Indian people and a growing sense of individualism coming to the fore after independence—forces that worked against the development of a common front ground in shared historical experiences.<sup>30</sup> Paul Buhle describes the CCC as playing a key role in the revival of “a

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28 The Conference Committee, “Conference 68,” October 1968, MG31 H181 Vol. 2, Library and Archives Canada, Clarence Bayne fonds.

29 C.L.R. James, *You Don't Play With Revolution: The Montreal Lectures of C.L.R. James*, ed. David Austin (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2009), 1–26; Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation*, 5–6.

30 Franklyn Harvey and Alfie Roberts, “Some Ideas on the West Indian Affairs Conference and the Conference Committee,” July 31, 1966, MG31 H181 Vol. 2 Folder 12, Library and Archives Canada, Clarence Bayne fonds.

Pan-Caribbeanism that had so lapsed among island leaders as to become a dead letter.”<sup>31</sup> They were also strongly invested in the conditions facing a growing Black population in Canada. David Austin puts the group at the center of a revitalization of “a Canadian dimension” of Black radicalism, arguing the group’s close relationship with James provided a forum for a “passing of the torch” to a new generation of activists who would play a crucial role in the mobilization of Black people in Canada.<sup>32</sup>

The CCC reflected the belief on the part of many West Indians in Canada, notably students, that they had a privileged position from which to analyze the histories and current events of their home countries. The conferences provided a forum for these young thinkers to express their visions of the societies they saw themselves as being called upon to build. The Barbados *Daily News* quoted Robert Hill describing the 1965 meeting as an attempt to strengthen the commitment of West Indians abroad to the region, “helping to prepare ourselves for the day when we shall be called upon to play our part.”<sup>33</sup> A 1965 conference paper argued that West Indians in the diaspora had a distance that allowed them to cast a critical eye on the region, and framed the conference as an important part of that process.<sup>34</sup>

*New World Quarterly*, the New World group’s principal outlet and a vital source for tracing the development of progressive Caribbean critique in the 1960s, linked the 1965 conference to its own debut as twin signs of a “permanent restlessness of spirit” among West Indians, one that drove a critical examination of their society and its foundational assumptions,

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31 Paul Buhle, *Tim Hector: A Caribbean Radical’s Story* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), 138.

32 Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation*, 78.

33 Rupert Hoyte, “Plans for WI Students International Underway,” *Daily News*, August 26, 1965.

34 “Political Changes in the West Indies,” 1965, 12–13, MG31 H181 Vol. 2 Folder 14, Library and Archives Canada, Clarence Bayne fonds.

allowing a “people who have never really had a real examination of what [they] are” to debate the issues their nations faced on their own terms.<sup>35</sup> Although institutionally distinct from New World, much like that group, the CCC’s conferences provided a forum for the theorization, as the West Indies emerged from colonial rule, of where the Caribbean people had come from, and where they might go. The opening address of the 1966 conference argued that West Indians had been historically alienated from the societies in which they lived, and had been left unable to analyze their situation on their terms. “For the first time,” it was West Indians who were “thinking seriously” about the region as opposed to the past when “the thinking about ourselves was done by others”<sup>36</sup> The closing remarks of that conference stressed that unity and independence were necessary to West Indian sovereignty, arguing that the “harsh fact” facing the West Indian people was that their “survival and freedom depend on [their] independent activity as a united people.”<sup>37</sup>

Two texts from the 1966 conference reveal how progressive West Indian thinkers in the 1960s theorized the relationship between Black and West Indian identity, culture and history and radical political action. C.L.R. James’s keynote address linked slave resistance and the Haitian revolution to the relationship between the contemporary independent West Indian state and its citizens to craft a *longue-duree* analysis of the West Indians as an inherently revolutionary people. Lloyd Best used his time at the meeting to address mounting tensions from within the organization to take New World into an activist direction, a move he disfavored on the grounds

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35 “Shaping the Future of the West Indies,” *New World Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (Croptime 1966): 59–61.

36 “Opening Speech,” October 1966, MG31 H181 Vol. 2 Folder 14, Library and Archives Canada, Clarence Bayne fonds.

37 “Chairman’s Statement,” October 1966, MG31 H181 Vol. 2 Folder 14, Library and Archives Canada, Clarence Bayne fonds.

that insufficient work had been done in theorizing West Indian society in its correct historical, cultural and economic contexts.

In his 1966 presentation, titled “The Making of the Caribbean People,” James examined West Indian identity in its historical and contemporary contexts, arguing that West Indians were a dynamic, modern, and revolutionary people. James put the Middle Passage at the center of his analysis of West Indian revolutionary character; Africans brought to the Caribbean became “an entirely new social and historical category,” whose identity was shaped by “one dominant fact ... the desire—sometimes expressed, sometimes unexpressed ... for liberty [and] ... ridding oneself of the particular burden which is the special inheritance of the black skin.” This is what made the West Indian people “the most rebellious people in history.”<sup>38</sup> James rooted this rebelliousness in a history of resistance to oppression. Describing the victory of the slaves of Saint Domingue over Napoleon’s forces, he claimed them as the ancestors of all West Indians. “These are my people,” he said. “They are your too, if you want.” He then told his audience that the political acuity of West Indians, their ability to “build a new life with what they gathered” had a history going back to Africa: “We brought ourselves,” he said, “we had not come with nothing.”<sup>39</sup>

James blamed what he saw as significant damage to West Indians’ political consciousness on the failure of the metropole to grant independence to West Indians at the first expressions of modern West Indian nationalism. By delaying independence “for forty years, the imperialist governments poisoned and corrupted [West Indians’] self-confidence and political dynamic,” “miseducating” them and undermining their ability to “[make] the Caribbean people what our history and our

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38 C.L.R. James, “The Making of the Caribbean People,” in *You Don’t Play With Revolution: The Montreal Lectures of C.L.R. James*, ed. David Austin (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2009), 32–33.

39 *Ibid.*, 45.

achievements had made possible, and for which we were ready.” And yet, he concluded, drawing on a list of names ranging from Frantz Fanon to Marcus Garvey to Aimé Césaire to (most especially) the cricketer Garfield Sobers, West Indians had, despite their colonial “miseducation,” done things “without which it is impossible to write the history ... of Western Civilization.”<sup>40</sup>

James saw the West Indian people as inherently revolutionary, but acknowledged that by being deprived of the freedom to know themselves and their nations on their own terms, they would have to struggle to meet their potential. Lloyd Best also argued for strong links between a people’s knowledge of their histories, their cultures, and their nations on the effectiveness of political action. Best’s contribution to the 1966 conference, “Independent Thought and Caribbean Freedom” was, in part, his response to pressure, much of it coming from the group’s Montreal chapter, to take *New World* in a more activist direction. Alfie Roberts and Tim Hector had been advocating for *New World* to, in Best’s words, “[go] out to the people, what I call agitation.” Best rejected what he saw as a valorization of action for its own sake because—much as with Fanon’s analysis of the “authentic” intellectual, intimately in touch with popular intellectual currents—he did not see a divide between “the people” and intellectuals.<sup>41</sup>

Best’s refusal to see the masses as standing apart from intellectuals but instead as both the

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40 *Ibid.*, 48–49.

41 Meeks, Girvan, and Bagues, “A Caribbean Life—An Interview with Lloyd Best,” 278–279 The argument also evokes Gramsci’s notion of the “organic intellectual,” but this raises the very problem at the heart of Best’s project: understanding West Indian thought, history and culture on its own terms, and not through the lenses provided by Eurocentric traditions. Moreover, Gramsci’s comments on the potential role of African-American intellectuals in the development of “backward masses in Africa” and his apparent dismissal of “traditional intellectuals” in Central and South America draw attention to the suitability of Gramscian analyses in the West Indian context in particular, and outside of Gramsci’s European context in general; Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, Reprint edition (New York: International Publishers Co, 1971), 21–22.

subjects and creators of knowledge about the West Indies reflected his vision of a politics built on a sustained study of local history, society and culture. He believed that more work needed to be done on that project before concrete action could be taken on New World's ideas. Best urged young West Indian intellectuals to develop "the intellectual capital goods" that were necessary for meaningful political action. Without a strong theoretical base built on local realities, activists would be unable to dismantle the "intellectual, philosophical, and psychological foundation of current politics" and thus risked reproducing those politics. To create the necessary epistemological basis for independence, Best argued, was a task significant enough in scope and importance to keep West Indian activist intellectuals occupied. "Thought," Best argued, "is the action for us."<sup>42</sup>

Best was not, however, arguing for ivory-tower intellectual pursuit as a substitute for political action. He understood that there was "a sense in which we cannot escape taking the power," as "the youngish men of today will, as a class, be holding responsibility tomorrow." He outlined a political vision of what those "youngish men" intended to do with power once they achieved it: "reorganize the economy, integrate the region, open the way to popular participation, [and] call a new world into existence."<sup>43</sup> Yet to get there, Best maintained, a clean and definitive break from imperial rule required "patient and purposeful building which each of us undertakes in the personal sphere" and then, with "time and many rounds of fresh initiative," it would become possible to "transform an individual breakaway into a social movement." Without that transformation—a process that began with the decolonization of the mind—a new generation of

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42 Best, "Independent Thought and Caribbean Freedom," 29.

43 *Ibid.*, 31.

leaders would “succeed only in convincing others that we are just looking for office.”<sup>44</sup>

By grounding West Indian revolutionary identity in the specifics of the West Indian masses’ history of resistance to slavery and colonialism, and tracing that dynamic through contemporary issues, James reminded young West Indian activists that they were building on a particular history of resistance with specific roots in the Caribbean experience. Likewise, by urging those same activists to ground their politics in the study of West Indian history, economics and culture, Best made the freedom of the mind a necessary precondition for meaningful revolutionary action. Both of these thinkers would return to these themes at the Congress two years later.

By 1967-1968, an increasingly radical tenor could be discerned among politically-active West Indians in Montreal. West Indian students at Sir George were taking steps to make their voices heard by West Indian political leaders, not as a generation of senior civil servants and parliamentarians in waiting, but as voices of opposition to politicians from whom they increasingly felt were not representing their interests. In February 1968, the Sir George Caribbean Students Society wrote to Eric Williams of Trinidad, Vere Bird of Antigua, and R.M. Cato of St. Vincent, protesting restrictions that had been placed on the political activities of Stokely Carmichael, who had been banned from entering Trinidad and Cheddi Jagan, who had been prohibited from holding public meetings in Antigua and St. Vincent. In similarly-worded letters, they told the leaders of the three countries that their actions, coming as “the countries of the Third World are engaged in a great struggle against oppression and exploitation, when the populations of our countries need all the education and enlightenment they can get” revealed

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 32.

what the students called “reactionary and obscuritanist tendencies,” on the part of West Indian leaders.<sup>45</sup> Though West Indian students in Montreal had a long history of questioning their political leaders back home, these letters reveal how their critiques were becoming increasingly grounded in anti-neocolonial language and frameworks.

Written a few months earlier, a document prepared by Franklyn Harvey following the 1967 conference, co-signed by Alfie Roberts, Tim Hector, and Rosie Douglas, reveals fractures that had developed in the CCC, which were based in part in disagreement over the question of how to best direct efforts to effect political change for Black people. Harvey described a movement divided into “two contending and opposite forces.” As he described it, on one hand were local West Indian community associations who, according to Harvey, sought to monopolize control over the conferences; these were the people who would go on to stage the BPC and attempt to craft a way to work for change within the Canadian political system. On the other was a camp who were more interested in advancing a Black nationalist agenda in a West Indian context, and wanted to see the activities of the CCC expand “by its *own free development*” into a “Caribbean International Organization” that would find its first expression at a proposed “All-Caribbean International Conference Congress” to take place in Guyana in June 1968.<sup>46</sup> The Guyana meeting never materialized, though organizers drafted a tentative schedule that had the thirtieth anniversary of the 1937-38 West Indian labor uprisings as a central theme.<sup>47</sup> Besides the tensions described by Harvey, as Austin points out, by then much of original leadership had

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45 February 5, 1968, HA1001, HA1001, Caribbean Students Association Papers.

46 David Austin, “All Roads Led to Montreal: Black Power, the Caribbean, and the Black Radical Tradition in Canada,” *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 4 (2007): 521.

47 “Programme: All-Caribbean Conference” in “Caribbean Conference Bulletin,” September 1967, 6–8, Box 6 Folder 43, C.L.R. James Collection, University of the West Indies (St. Augustine).

finished their studies in Canada and returned to the West Indies, further weakening the group.<sup>48</sup>

The CCC thus fell apart after the 1967 conference, leading to the split that produced the BPC and ultimately the National Black Coalition of Canada on the one hand, and the organization of the Congress of Black Writers on the other.

Another formation to emerge from the breakup of the CCC was the Caribbean Nation Publishing Committee, a group that counted many members of the CCC. The group produced a single issue of *Caribbean International Opinion*, a journal launched to coincide with the Congress of Black Writers, that featured articles by a number of West Indian intellectuals in Montreal, including Arnim Eustace, Tim Hector, Alfie Roberts and Rosie Douglas. It also featured three pieces from James: two reprints (“Negroes and American Democracy,” and an excerpt from *The Invading Socialist Society* titled “A Brief Popular Outline of Political Economy,”) and a new piece, “State Capitalism and the French Revolutionary Tradition,” an analysis of May 1968 uprising in France.<sup>49</sup>

Austin describes *Caribbean International Opinion* as a “Marxist complement to the growing sense of black nationalism” expressed at the Congress.<sup>50</sup> While the journal revealed the extent to which many Montreal-based West Indian intellectuals were immersed in Marxist thought (the journal counts several epigraphs by Marx and Engels) it also demonstrates how those thinkers were reading Marxism against West Indian history in order to theorize the specific challenges faced by the West Indian people. Many of the contributions revealed the influence of

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48 Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation*, 6;98.

49 C.L.R. James, “Negroes and American Democracy,” *Caribbean International Opinion* 1, no. 1 (October 1968): 23–26; C.L.R. James, “A Brief Popular Outline of Political Economy,” *Caribbean International Opinion* 1, no. 1 (October 1968): 50–55; C.L.R. James, “State Capitalism and the French Revolutionary Tradition,” *Caribbean International Opinion* 1, no. 1 (October 1968): 69–70.

50 Austin, “All Roads Led to Montreal,” 520.

thinkers like Eric Williams, James and Best to craft histories that put the West Indies and its popular masses at the center of their analyses. M.A. Farray wrote a history of capital that focused on how “the commercial capital accumulated through New World colonization [gave] the capitalist bourgeoisie the incentive to transform to manufacturing with emphasis on industry instead of on commerce,” marking “new stage in capitalist development.”<sup>51</sup> Roberts contributed a study of how sugar production in the Caribbean created a revolutionary class of Black workers.<sup>52</sup> Eustace wrote an extended critique of West Indian development planning in which he argued that independence had failed to bring meaningful change to economic relationships between the West Indies and the industrialized world, and that “armed struggle [was] the only way” to bring about national liberation.<sup>53</sup> While not addressing the West Indies, Franklyn Harvey’s analysis of the French uprising of 1968 emphasized its spontaneous and anti-vanguardist nature, concluding, in a mode showing the influence of James, that the lesson to be drawn from the movement was that it was time “to look for the independent activities of the working-class, to recognise in those activities the new society, the new social form and to propagandise and agitate for it.”<sup>54</sup>

While plans for a pan-Caribbean conference in Guyana never materialized, the event that was staged as a result of the fracturing of the CCC had a similar transnational scope. However, while West Indian thinkers were prominently represented, it was the return of Stokely Carmichael, West Indian by birth, but now the most prominent African-American activist, that

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51 M.A. Farray, “The Historical Development of Capitalism and Its Effects on the New and Afro-Asian Worlds,” *Caribbean International Opinion*, October 1968, 1–10.

52 Alfie Roberts, “The Sugar Industry and Revolution in the Caribbean,” *Caribbean International Opinion* 1, no. 1 (October 1968): 38–49.

53 Arnim Eustace, “On the Economism of the ‘Movement ... as the West Indian Society for the Study of Social Issues,’” *Caribbean International Opinion* 1, no. 1 (October 1968): 26–31.

54 Franklyn Harvey, “French Revolution ’68,” *Caribbean International Opinion* 1, no. 1 (October 1968): 10–23.

dominated the proceedings. Many of the themes that had been present in the work of the CCC were central to the Congress of Black Writers, notably the need for intellectual decolonization and the need to root present-day political activity in the histories of West Indian, African and other Black people as told on their own terms.

### *The Congress of Black Writers*

The Congress of Black Writers, themed “The Dynamics of Black Liberation,” was held at McGill University on 11-14 October 1968. The Congress drew activists from the West Indies, the United States, Great Britain and Canada to discuss struggles against racism, capitalism and imperialism. The Congress was organized by largely by Black students in Montreal as well as other people with ties to the CCC. Rosie Douglas was one the chief organizers and acted as spokesman for the event. The event was originally conceived by a Trinidadian living in Montreal named Raymond Watts, who, along with his fellow Trinidadian expat Walter Look-Lai, envisioned a meeting of Black writers in Montreal along the lines of the 1956 (Paris) and 1959 (Rome) Congresses of Negro Writers and Artists.<sup>55</sup>

Those previous meetings share with the Congress an impressive scope of presenters from across the African diaspora (though it should be noted that while the program for the Montreal event lists several organizers from Africa, it lists no African speakers, while the 1950s events counted several contributors from the continent). They differ from the Congress of Black Writers in that their focus, officially at least, was much more on the cultural dimensions of the Black

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<sup>55</sup> Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation*, 100–101.

experience, with the “political discussions taking place away from the public platform,” while the Montreal event wore its radical politics on its sleeve from its inception.<sup>56</sup> The Congress can also be seen as a Canadian and West Indian dimension of what Komozi Woodard calls the Modern Black Convention Movement, a framework encompassing a number of conferences organized by African-American activists from the late 1960s through the early 1970s. Woodard sees these meetings as “an essential part of the Black Power movement,” in that they provided a forum for the articulation of African-American cultural nationalist idea.<sup>57</sup>

Besides bringing together Black thinkers from a variety of locales, as in the case of the earlier work of the CCC, the Congress was the site for intergenerational meetings between those thinkers and activists, putting Stokely Carmichael, Walter Rodney and Robert Hill alongside key forbears in the development of Black radicalism such as C.L.R. James and Richard Moore, an activist with the African Blood Brotherhood.<sup>58</sup> Other speakers included Lloyd Best, SNCC activist James Forman, the sociologist Harry Edwards, Trinidadian-British activists Darcus Howe and Michael X and Jamaican attorney Richard Small. Other prominent figures who had expressed an interest in attending included Muhammad Ali and H. Rap Brown. According to Douglas, both wanted to attend, but were unable to—Brown was incarcerated, while Ali was on bail pending his case regarding his refusal to submit to the draft.<sup>59</sup> Eldridge Cleaver and Amiri Baraka, who had reportedly been scheduled to attend, were also prevented from leaving the U.S.

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56 David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Biography* (London ; New York: Verso, 2012), 276–289; 368–372.

57 Komozi Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), xiv; 1–3.

58 Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation*, 22; On the African Blood Brotherhood, see: Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1998).

59 Brian McKenna, “Black Writers in Angry Mood,” *Montreal Star*, October 13, 1968.

because of legal complications.<sup>60</sup>

The *McGill Daily*, under the headline “Black Power Is Coming,” reported that the Congress would bring Carmichael, Cleaver and Baraka to McGill, where they would fill the campus “with the impolite phraseology of Black Powerism.”<sup>61</sup> The Congress had important effects on popular understandings of Black Power in Canada and in the West Indies, raising popular awareness that the ideology was not confined to the United States and, thanks to reporting that focused on spectacular statements from figures like Carmichael (“Get all the guns you can.”<sup>62</sup>) and Walter Rodney (“Every white man is an enemy until he has proved otherwise.”<sup>63</sup>) fueling anxiety about Black radicalism as an inherently violent and/or racist movement.

Beyond feeding into the kind of fears outlined in the *Daily*’s preview, the Congress represented a key moment in the political and intellectual development of Black Power as a transnational phenomenon and “signaling a distinct shift towards Black Power among people of African descent within the Black Canadian diaspora.”<sup>64</sup> Moreover, the event provided an opportunity for Black thinkers to share ideas about how their current struggles fit into a longer historical arc of Black resistance. Congress delegates, notably Rodney and James, set new currents in Black radical thought into a history that extended beyond the immediate concerns of

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60 “Cleaver Ain’t Coming,” *McGill Daily*, October 1, 1968; “McGill to Host Black Writers Conference,” *The Georgian*, October 8, 1968.

61 “Black Power Is Coming,” *McGill Daily*, September 27, 1968.

62 Phillip Winslow, “‘We’ve Got to Get Guns’--Carmichael,” *Montreal Gazette*, October 15, 1968.

63 “Bewildered White Delegates Confront Hostility at Black Writers’ Congress,” *Montreal Star*, October 15, 1968; Wouter De Wet, “Rodney Denies He’s a Racist,” *Montreal Star*, October 17, 1968; Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation*, 113 As Austin notes, while Rodney made that claim, it was framed in the context of a need to talk to Blacks in order to formulate a self-directed plan for liberation.

64 Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation*, 100.

the largely urban African-Americans with whom the term “Black Power” was popularly associated, into an historical arc of Black resistance dating back to slavery, and ultimately to Africa.

Carmichael’s appearance was the highlight of the event and his comments about violent revolution and similar statements from delegates to the event provided ample fodder for headlines such as “We’ve got to get guns,” “Black writers in angry mood” and “Stokely preaches violent revolution.”<sup>65</sup> Peniel Joseph describes Carmichael’s speech as “an electrifying keynote” that “announced Canada as a headquarters for Black Power radicalism and politicized a new generation of Afro-Canadian and Caribbean militants.”<sup>66</sup> Michael Thelwell recalled listening to Carmichael and finding found himself “close to tears and shouting with an intensity of feeling every bit the equal” of the “younger students” in the crowd.<sup>67</sup> Lloyd Best, who had pointed criticisms of much of the proceedings, praised Carmichael’s “moral cogency” and the “force of his statement.”<sup>68</sup>

There is no doubt that Carmichael’s appearance was a crucial moment not only at the Congress but in Montreal’s history as a site for Black radical expression. He drew on Fanon to analyze the effects of colonization on the sense of identity of the colonized, arguing that racism and colonialism not only underpinned slavery and police violence, but also undermined Blacks’ values, culture, language self-confidence and sense of identity.<sup>69</sup> He also called on Blacks to

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65 Winslow, “‘We’ve Got to Get Guns’—Carmichael”; McKenna, “Black Writers in Angry Mood”; Mike Boone, “Stokely Preaches Violent Revolution,” *McGill Daily*, October 15, 1968.

66 Peniel E. Joseph, *Stokely: A Life* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2014), 273.

67 Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation*, 18.

68 Lloyd Best, *The Afro-American Condition*, Tapia Booklet no.11 (Tunapuna, Trinidad and Tobago: Tapia House, 1969), 2.

69 James Lawler and Dave Crevier, “Get All the Guns You Can. We Believe in Equality—Stokely Carmichael,” *Loyola News*, October 18, 1968; “Carmichael Fires up Black Writers,” *Montreal Star*, October 15, 1968; “Black

ground their regaining of what colonialism, racism and slavery had taken from them in the study of their histories as a basis for political unification, calling for Black ownership of the writing of Black histories and political thought, saying that Blacks could not “let white people interpret our struggle for us.”<sup>70</sup>

That said, while there is no doubt that the impressive list of attendees and the presence of an energized crowd inspired Carmichael, there is little in the contemporary coverage of his speech, which, between the daily papers and the student press, contained substantial extracts, or in subsequent scholarship, to suggest that Carmichael’s speech could not have been given on just about any college campus on a speaking tour. While he touched on many of the themes that West Indian and Black Canadians had been formulating approaches to over previous years, by all accounts it would be hard to claim Carmichael was in dialogue in a sustained and specific fashion with political and intellectual developments in Montreal; this stands in sharp contrast with his appearances a year earlier, where he began with a pointed nod to Quebec nationalism, spoke about Canada’s relationship with American capital, and gave advice on how Canadian Blacks could contribute to the larger Black struggle; moreover, he had in the interim corresponded with important figures in the Québécois nationalist movement after the assassination of Martin Luther King. Perhaps the deeply international makeup of the speakers’ line-up led him to craft his address in broader terms.

Organizers had conceived of the event with the Canadian dimensions of anti-racist activism in mind, but in a way that tied the Canadian struggle to the one south of the border.

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Writers’ Call for Action,” *The Georgian*, October 25, 1968.

70 “Black Writers’ Call for Action”; Lawler and Crevier, “Get All the Guns You Can. We Believe in Equality—Stokely Carmichael.”

Douglas described the Congress as an opportunity for Blacks in Canada to coordinate with African-Americans and work out “where we can go from here” in terms of applying new ideas to the struggle against Canadian racism.<sup>71</sup> An awareness of the Canadian dimensions of the Black struggle did not translate, however, to a strong Canadian presence in the program. Rocky Jones, a Nova Scotia-based activist, was the only Canadian to address the Congress. The *Star* credited (perhaps “blamed” would be more apt) Jones with setting the tone for a weekend of violent discourse with his remark that established elites would never “allow a non-violent minority to take over.” Jones also told the crowd: “those of you who are white can listen, but I’m talking to the blacks,” a comment that fed into critiques that Black radicals were turning their backs on white supporters, if not engaging in racism of their own.<sup>72</sup> While Jones’s observations about violence were noteworthy in a Canadian setting, where racial uprisings were largely understood as things that happened someplace else, his remarks about the intended audience for his remarks showed how the Congress was the site for the expression of a body of political thought that was grounded in Black experiences and that rejected the idea that it was necessary to formulate theory that was acceptable to white allies.

Congress organizers intended the event to allow delegates to explore the epistemological dimensions of Black liberation, evaluate how white supremacy had shaped the production of knowledge by and about Black people, and theorize the rectification of that legacy as step towards political action. It was billed as “an attempt” to engage with “a history which we have been taught to forget.” Given that “modern white oppression” justified itself by “resorting to

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71 “Negro ‘Liberation’ Drive Here Forecast,” *Montreal Gazette*, October 11, 1968.

72 McKenna, “Black Writers in Angry Mood.”

arrogant claims of inherent superiority” and “[denigrating] the cultural and historical achievements of the oppressed peoples,” the only way to gain “genuine freedom” required liberating Blacks “from the false and distorted image of themselves” imposed by “centuries of cultural enslavement by the white man.”<sup>73</sup> Contributions from two participants, Rodney and James, and the post-Congress reflections of Lloyd Best reveal how a growing sense of Black and African consciousness shaped West Indian resistance to post-colonial states that had failed to liberate their people from the effects of racism and economic marginalization, and revived debates about the question of the relationship between theorization and political action.

Walter Rodney gave two talks at the Congress and a third after his expulsion from Jamaica that were reproduced in *The Groundings with My Brothers*, the key text in the West Indian Black Power movement. In “Statement of the Jamaican Situation,” written in collaboration with Robert Hill, Rodney outlined how, even as Jamaica’s elites propagated the “myth of a harmonious, multi-racial society,” the country’s Black masses were economically marginalized in favor of the lighter-skinned middle classes who had seized the political initiative during the 1938 labor uprisings and lived with “the whole repressive machinery of the State [being] brought down on them.”<sup>74</sup> While Rodney and Hill saw Jamaica as ruled by a political class that perpetuated the racism and inequality of colonialism, they saw in Rastafari, the influence of American Black Power, a growing popular interest in African culture, workers organizing independently of the traditional unions and Black youth becoming politically active

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73 “Congress of Black Writers: Towards the Second Emancipation, the Dynamics of Black Liberation,” 1968, Box 8 Folder 220, C.L.R. James Collection, University of the West Indies (St. Augustine).

74 Walter Rodney, *The Groundings with My Brothers* (London: Bogle-L’Ouverture Press, 1996), 12–13; For the 1930s uprisings in the West Indies, see: Ken Post, *Arise Ye Starvelings: The Jamaican Labour Rebellion of 1938 and Its Aftermath* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978).

outside of the country's two established political parties "the beginnings of resistance to the violence of our oppressors."<sup>75</sup>

In his main address, "African History in the Service of Black Liberation," Rodney expanded his analysis of how popular consciousness of Africa as a source of cultural and political identity, as manifest in Rastafari and a growing awareness of Africa among politically-active youth, was a key aspect of resistance to racial oppression. He also addressed the epistemological dimensions of Black consciousness, discussing the use of "historical knowledge as a weapon" in the struggle for Black freedom and equality.

Confronted with base racism, Rodney argued, Blacks were "forced into proving [their] humanity," and thus appealed to Africa's history, namely the great empires like Ghana and Kush, to show that they were as capable as whites of developing advanced societies. This, however, reinforced Eurocentric values, which used one element of European development—the modern state—as a "universal yardstick" by which to measure other societies. To counter this, Rodney proposed a re-thinking of African historiography, eschewing the state as the hallmark of civilizational achievement in favor of a focus on the "stateless societies" in which millions of Africans outside of the great empires had lived. Such a move would not only bring to light the social values of hospitality, respect for the aged, law, public order and "tolerance of human frailty" that Rodney argued those societies embodied, it would also allow Blacks to identify with Africa with pride on terms not dictated by racist scholarship. Undoing the false and racist conceptions of Africa inculcated by white supremacist education, Rodney argued, was "the main

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<sup>75</sup> Rodney, *The Groundings with My Brothers*, 14–15.

revolutionary function of African history.”<sup>76</sup>

While “African History in the Service of Revolution” puts the production of knowledge at the center of revolutionary activity, the essay stands in contrast with Lloyd Best’s admonition at the 1966 conference, where he argued that intellectuals needed to focus on developing a comprehensive body of theoretically-sound knowledge before becoming involved in activist politics. Rodney called for there to be “no false distinctions between reflection and action.” “The conquest of power” was the “immediate goal,” and, with “the African population at home and abroad ... already in combat on a number of fronts,” Rodney advised that “the struggle will not wait until the re-education of the mass of black people reaches an advanced stage.”<sup>77</sup>

C.L.R. James’s surviving contribution to the Congress, “The Haitian Revolution and the History of Slave Revolt” paints a portrait of Africans in Africa and the New World as an inherently revolutionary people, tracing a common thread of Black revolutionary action from St. Domingue through the American Civil War, the Cuban revolution and ending with the Mau Mau uprising. James concluded that it was impossible to understand the Haitian revolution and other New World slave uprisings without “[understanding what was taking place in Africa many years afterwards.”<sup>78</sup> James also explored the unfulfilled democratic potential of the West Indies, contrasting a vision of the region that counted “20,000 leaders ready” among the popular masses with that of elites who had “a false idea” about the capabilities of the West Indian people.<sup>79</sup> “The Haitian Revolution and the History of Slave Revolt” is a companion to “The Making of the

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76 Walter Rodney, “African History in the Service of Black Revolution,” in *The Groundings with My Brothers* (London: Bogle-L’Ouverture Press, 1996), 51–56.

77 Rodney, *The Groundings with My Brothers*, 51–52.

78 C.L.R. James, “The Haitian Revolution in the Making of the Modern World,” in *You Don’t Play With Revolution: The Montreal Lectures of C.L.R. James*, ed. David Austin (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2009), 65.

79 *Ibid.*, 58.

Caribbean People,” in that it brings to light the central role of revolutionary thought and practice in West Indian history and identity; in both talks, James argued that there was a profound gap between the character of the West Indian people and the image of those people held by metropolitan officials and local elites, who were blind to the modern and revolutionary dimensions of West Indian identity.

During the Congress, James expanded on his views of the historical continuity of Black revolution in an interview with the *McGill Reporter*. Asked about the effects of the independence of African states and continuing anti-colonial struggles in Africa on Black people in the Americas, James framed those phenomena as “part of an immense change in the whole social structure that exists in the world at the present time,” one that may be called “Black Power here ... independence here, freedom, democratic rights there.” Echoing Rodney’s analysis that put Africa at the center of New World Black political culture, James concluded that “black people in America and in the Caribbean must look upon the African revolt as a symbol of what is likely to take place everywhere and to which we are closely allied.”<sup>80</sup>

Lloyd Best wrote an analysis of the Congress in which he expanded on critiques he had made at the event; the document was published in pamphlet form as “The Afro-American Condition” and also reproduced in *Expression*.<sup>81</sup> Best was frustrated at what he saw as a valorization of political action at the expense of theorized engagement, a position that was not popular with some attendees, who, according to the *Star*, shouted Best down and called him an “Uncle Tom.”<sup>82</sup>

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80 Michael Smith, “C.L.R. James: You Don’t Play with Revolution,” *McGill Reporter*, November 4, 1968.

81 Best, *The Afro-American Condition*; Lloyd Best, “Two Views of the Conference of Black Writers, Pt. I,” *Expression*, Winter 1968.

82 Boyce Richardson, “Blacks Seeking Solidarity,” *Montreal Star*, October 17, 1968.

Best criticized what he saw as a lack of intellectual depth of much of the proceedings of the Congress and a failure on the part of many of the West Indian speakers to ground their political theorization in local realities, calling it “a pity” that West Indian activists ended to “[substitute] rhetoric on the metropolitan stage for concrete commitment to some place for which [they] ought to assume responsibility.”<sup>83</sup> These speakers, he argued, failed to engage with the historical and cultural specifics of the West Indian situation, instead tending to focus on “the immediate needs and narrow concerns of the blacks in the United States,” which risked creating from the condition of African Americans a “spurious universalism.”<sup>84</sup> These “spurious universalisms,” it may be noted, are the same ones Best warned against when talking about Marxism as something grounded in European realities and not necessarily applicable beyond that context.

Best not only urged a sustained engagement with the societies and cultures that participants were targeting for revolutionary change, but called for an interrogation of the categories that underlie the division of the world along lines derived through imperial knowledge. Best argued that by valorizing Africa without analyzing the continent in terms of its varied histories and cultures was to miss the point about what was entailed in “an authentic decolonisation,” which required first “a disavowal of ... crude formulations” like “Africa.” The only reason to see Africa as a unified whole was imperialistic in nature, “to provide a rationalisation of rapine and plunder throughout the continent.” Instead of embracing an uniformed notion of “Africa,” Best reasoned, a “constructive attack on the European

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83 Best, *The Afro-American Condition*, 5.

84 *Ibid.*, 3.

philosophical hegemony” required addressing “differentiations which acknowledge the individuality of particular men and particular cultures” by undoing categories that were “scarcely more than divisions of the world into we and they.”<sup>85</sup>

With that in mind, Best had critical praise for Rodney’s “African History in the Service of Revolution.” Best wondered if Rodney’s argument that the interpretation of history “must be directed solely towards freeing and mobilising black minds” risked falling into the kind of trap Rodney was arguing against. By seeing history as something to be harnessed “in the service of a single group in the quest for power,” Rodney risked “[capitulating] to the false standards” of Eurocentric thought” by “encouraging the use of phony two-sector models of Cowboys and Indians, of developed guys and under-developed guys.”<sup>86</sup>

Yet while Best was doubtful of the value of Rodney’s “glorification of ‘action,’” he ultimately saw the younger scholar’s work on African cultures and histories, namely his desire to move African historiography away from a focus on those societies which most closely resembled Eurocentric notions of the state, as an important step towards dealing with what he saw as a shortfall in James’s analysis. James, Best wrote, seemed “unduly anxious” to prove that Blacks had brought something foundational to the development of New World culture with them into slavery. Best saw that as a “defensive approach” that was justified “only if one yields to the ludicrous notion that the Europeans alone brought significant cultural assets to the New World.” The germane question was “what blacks actually came,” and what did they bring with them. By introducing his audience to a more complex analysis of Africa that was rooted in specific cultural

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85 Ibid., 4–5.

86 Ibid., 4.

groupings, Rodney “showed the value of specific research.”<sup>87</sup>

While the vast majority of the discussion at the Congress was directed at questions outside of Canada, the proceedings initiated intense public debate about race relations in the Canadian context, much of it focused on Congress delegates’ tendency to focus on and promote the distinctly Black dimensions of anti-racist activism in terms crafted for a Black audience, and not an interracial alliance. Some commentators saw this tendency as exclusionary, if not “racist,” and irrelevant to Canada. By grounding a politics of resistance in Black identity, much of the discourse to emerge from the Congress forced white anti-racist liberals to confront analyses and proposed plans of action that left little, if any, room for their input or contribution. Sir George sociology professor Pat Pajonas noted that many white attendees “previously unfamiliar with black history or the rhetoric of ‘the movement’” were left “stunned or in tears” by the experience of listening to speeches that either left no space for their contributions, or antagonized them.<sup>88</sup> (As an example of the latter, Ted Joans recited a poem: “Eeny Meany Miny Moe/Catch a whitey by the throat/If he hollers/Cut it.”)<sup>89</sup>

Much of this critique of a Black-centered political ethos was sparked by the exclusion of white participants from select sessions. Following a lunchtime reading by Joans, what the *Star* described as a “radical anti-white faction” called for the expulsion of whites from the event. When one organizer declared that such a course “would not be proper,” Joans led a breakaway group, reportedly numbering some 200-300 delegates, to another room for a Blacks-only session. The *Star*’s description of what followed played on the trope of the physically threatening Black

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87 Ibid., 5–6.

88 Pat Pajonas, “‘All the World Knows the Score...but No Man Can Find the War,’” *Direction One*, March 1969.

89 Richardson, “Blacks Seeking Solidarity.”

man, noting that delegates, “some of them in African garb, formed a barrier at the door and would not let any whites in.”<sup>90</sup>

After the Congress, Douglas framed the breakaway sessions as a chance for Black activists to debate issues on their own terms, without having to justify those terms to people who did not live the effects of racism. The organizers had originally “had reservations about including whites” in the Congress as they were unsure how African-American participants, who had to “[confront] white racists—with police brutality, beating, tear gas—every day,” would react to a white presence at an event intended for the discussion of Black liberation. Douglas argued that the presence of white people forced speakers to “waste a lot of time” having to “justify the need for black liberation,” and saw the Black caucuses as a necessary compromise.<sup>91</sup>

Local reactions to the Congress were mixed; while some Montrealers understood the black-centered discourse to emerge from the Congress as part of a reaction to racism and a reasoned part of the development of anti-racist activism, a sense of fear and dismissal permeated many responses to the Congress. *Expression*'s Winston Franco suggested that most Montreal Blacks found the Congress to be a positive experience, as it gave them “a clearer understanding of their identity,” and “a feeling of pride ... in their blackness, and the solidarity” rooted in the awareness that their struggles were part of a global phenomenon.<sup>92</sup>

Other Black activists in Montreal rejected much of the Congress's radical message, but maintained that media coverage of the event was unfairly sensational and detracted from other activist tendencies. In a joint letter, local Black and West Indian groups including the Negro

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90 “Whites Spark Walkout at Writers' Conference,” *Montreal Star*, October 15, 1968.

91 Rosie Douglas, Rita Sherman, and Robert Chodos, “No Time for Coalitions,” *McGill Daily*, October 21, 1968.

92 Winston Franco, “Two Views of the Conference of Black Writers, Pt. II,” *Expression*, Winter 1968.

Community Centre, the Negro Alumni Group, the Jamaica Association of Montreal, and the Trinidad and Tobago Association—groups who were closely involved with the BPC the weekend before and had committed to creating the infrastructure for a unified Black political voice—sharply criticized “inflammatory statements” that had emerged over the weekend and urged activists to embrace “co-existence,” “respect,” “understanding,” instead of “[emulating] the fascist elements of white society by advocating violence in Canada.” While they tried to distance themselves from the Congress’s radicalism, they also criticized sensationalist coverage of the event, expressing their regrets that the papers had given ample negative coverage to the Congress while overlooking the work that had been done at the BPC the previous weekend.<sup>93</sup>

The Black organizations’ letter provided ammunition for liberal-minded commentators who acknowledged that racism was a problem in Canada but who rejected Black Power as irrelevant in the Canadian context. The *Gazette* conceded that “the Negro community has legitimate complaints,” but, citing the letter, maintained that Blacks in Montreal believed “that progress can best be made ... in co-operation with the white community through legal processes.” The paper was relieved that “Negro citizens of Montreal, who do not share the American militants’ attitudes or the background which produced them, have no wish to share, either, the atmosphere of racial tension they are creating in the United States.”<sup>94</sup> This framing of who counted as “Negro citizens of Montreal,” counting those invested in reform but rejecting more radical voices as outsiders, no matter the extent to which those outsiders’ ideas resonated with an important contingent of the local Black population, reinforced the idea that Black

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93 Negro Community Centre, Inc. et al., *Montreal Star*, October 18, 1968; “Les Noirs Du Canada et La Violence,” *Le Devoir*, October 28, 1968; “Black Groups Here Reject Violence for Civil Rights,” *Montreal Star*, October 18, 1968; “City Blacks Decry Violence,” *Montreal Gazette*, October 18, 1968.

94 “Rejecting Violence,” *Montreal Gazette*, October 21, 1968.

radicalism was irrelevant to Canadians, and would be echoed months later in analyses which framed the protest as Sir George as the work of foreigners and not rooted in local realities. Readers echoed these critiques, framing the Congress as racist, violent and inherently un-Canadian. The *Star* ran letters that compared Carmichael to Hitler and Black radicals to the KKK, that argued that “progressive white Canadians” should reject speakers “well known for their blind hate for all whites” and accusing Congress participants of trying to “ape ... the leading nationalist and racist madmen who have gained control of so many countries in the world.”<sup>95</sup>

Other journalists and readers took a broader view. The *Star*'s Boyce Richardson was turned off by what he saw as a “peevisish anti-white tension” permeating the event, but urged readers to “thrust these reservations aside” and recognize that Black Power had a solidarity-building element and the potential “to break a system which still enslaves” Blacks.<sup>96</sup> McGill student Rita Sherman was originally put off by the messages she heard at the Congress, but recognized that whites had to “give up organizing someone else and concentrate on organizing ourselves.”<sup>97</sup> Most notably, the *Star* ran an editorial arguing that the tenor of the Congress had to be seen as “another step in the long search for pride.” While the ultimate goal was “coexistence,” “things may have to get worse before they get better.”<sup>98</sup> The variety of local reactions to the Congress, ranging from outright rejection of its validity to a cautious embrace of the necessity of potentially-alienating radical critique, reveal the extent to which Montrealers could maintain a

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95 Pierre Bourgoin, *Montreal Star*, October 19, 1968; L. Benn, *Montreal Star*, October 25, 1968; Nathan Gans, *Montreal Star*, October 19, 1968.

96 Richardson, “Blacks Seeking Solidarity.”

97 Rita Sherman, “We Have to Start Somewhere,” *McGill Daily*, October 21, 1968.

98 “The Record Speaks,” *Montreal Star*, October 16, 1968.

nuanced understanding of Black radical thought—something that became less the case in the aftermath of the Sir George Affair.

If the *Star* maintained that things could get worse before they got better, in Jamaica, at least, things got worse soon after the Congress, as the expulsion of Walter Rodney upon his return from Montreal provided an unexpected and violent coda to the Congress, one that played out in Kingston and in Canada.

### *The Rodney Ban*

When Walter Rodney flew back to Jamaica after the Congress, Jamaica refused him entry. Rodney returned to Montreal, where Canadian officials gave him time to sort out his situation.<sup>99</sup> Jamaican PM Hugh Shearer avowed that the ban had been motivated by the scholar's alleged implication in anti-state activities and that there was no connection between Rodney's ban and his appearance at the Congress. Rodney countered that while the Congress might not have been the reason behind the ban, it was "the final excuse for the government."<sup>100</sup>

Rodney's banning provoked angry protests in Kingston, as both students and the Rastafari, whom Rodney had been teaching in informal settings known as "groundings" since arriving in Kingston in January 1968, took to the streets in support of him; one account describes students marching on downtown Kingston from the Mona campus in their academic

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99 De Wet, "Rodney Denies He's a Racist."

100 "Rodney's Extension as Visitor Assured," *Montreal Star*, November 5, 1968; De Wet, "Rodney Denies He's a Racist"; Rupert Lewis, "Walter Rodney: 1968 Revisited," *Social and Economic Studies* 43, no. 3 (September 1994): 7 Lewis writes that no evidence has emerged linking Rodney to plans to overthrow the Jamaican state.

robes, “led by the radical ‘New World’ group of lecturers.”<sup>101</sup> Foreshadowing the centrality of the Port-of-Spain office of the Royal Bank of Canada as an early site for the protests that grew into the 1970 revolution in Trinidad, protesters vandalized a number of foreign-owned Kingston businesses, including Canadian banks. A million pounds’ worth of damages were incurred, and three people were shot by police, two of whom died.<sup>102</sup> As Rupert Lewis writes, the protests, dubbed the “Rodney riots,” were the moment when a West Indian school of Black Power activism came into popular awareness in the West Indies, marking “a new phase of regional radicalism” in which the influences of African-American radical thought on young West Indians was made apparent.<sup>103</sup>

Montreal activists militated on behalf of Rodney. John Shingler’s (the South African activist we encountered in Chapter Two) Civil Liberties Action Committee invoked “Canada’s traditional role as a country which welcomes those suffering from political persecution” as grounds for Canada to give Rodney asylum.<sup>104</sup> On 18 October, a rally organized by the Sir George and McGill Caribbean students’ associations featured speeches by Rodney, C.L.R. James, Rosie Douglas, and Robert Hill.<sup>105</sup> Hill, Rodney and James framed the Kingston uprising as an expression of a larger popular revolutionary sentiment among West Indians and linked the repression of the Kingston protesters to a longer history of state violence. Hill drew on the theme of the Congress to interpret the actions in Kingston, saying that protests in support of Rodney

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101 Ikael Tafari, *Rastafari In Transition* (Chicago: Research Associates School Times Publications/Frontline Distribution Int’l, 2001), 28.

102 Terry Lacey, *Violence and Politics in Jamaica, 1960-70: Internal Security in a Developing Country* (Manchester University Press, 1977), 94–100.

103 Lewis, “Walter Rodney: 1968 Revisited,” 52.

104 “Rodney’s Extension as Visitor Assured.”

105 Wouter De Wet, “City Rally Will Hit W.I. Ban,” *Montreal Star*, October 18, 1968.

revealed that “the dialectics of black liberation are now in motion.” Rodney argued that the Kingston uprising was not a student revolt, but a “revolutionary manifestation of social malaise.” Linking that revolutionary sentiment to one from earlier in Jamaica’s history, Rodney, quoting Paul Bogle, the leader of Jamaica’s 1865 Morant Bay uprising, urged his audience to “remember your color and cleave to your black brother” and to reject the “West Indian black bourgeois establishment.”<sup>106</sup>

James argued that Rodney’s expulsion revealed the extent to which West Indian leaders saw in Black-centered epistemologies, such as Rodney’s groundings, a threat to political stability, as they were “frightened” at the prospect of the people engaging with “the history of Black people and the strife that [they] had met.”<sup>107</sup> James saw the violent response to the pro-Rodney demonstrations as a manifestation of a disconnect between the West Indies’ political leadership and the people. Referring to critiques he had made in 1962 in *Party Politics in the West Indies*, where, as Fanon had written the year before in *Wretched of the Earth*, he had argued that politicians needed to be in touch with the political and intellectual ideas of the popular masses, or risk disaster, James warned that if leaders “did not govern properly,” and “let a new people, formerly slaves, realize that independence must mean something to them,” then “as sure as day” those leaders would learn that they would “have to shoot them down.”<sup>108</sup>

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106 Robert Wallace, “Local Rally Supports Jamaican Students,” *McGill Daily*, October 21, 1968; On the Morant Bay Rebellion, see: Don Robotham, “*The Notorious Riot*”: *The Socio-Economic and Political Base of Paul Bogle’s Revolt*, Working Paper / Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, no. 28 (Mona, Kingston, Jamaica: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of West Indies, 1981); Gad J. Heuman, *The Killing Time: The Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994).

107 C.L.R. James, “On the Banning of Walter Rodney from Jamaica,” in *You Don’t Play With Revolution: The Montreal Lectures of C.L.R. James*, ed. ` Austin (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2009), 301–302.

108 James, “On the Banning of Walter Rodney from Jamaica”; C. L. R. James, *Party Politics in the West Indies ; Formerly PNM Go Forward* (San Juan, Trinidad: Printed for C.L.R. James by Velic Enterprises, 1962).

On October 21, some 50 people from Montreal and Toronto protested at Jamaica's High Commission in Ottawa in support of Rodney and the Kingston protesters. Again speakers tied Rodney's situation to broader critiques of Jamaican politics. Douglas told reporters that Rodney's expulsion had "put a match to existing social unrest" in Jamaica, producing "a crack in the system," that activists had to "do everything possible to widen." Douglas saw the Congress as part of that process, as the networks created by the event were "now being used to mobilize support behind the West Indian blacks."<sup>109</sup> Rodney used the protest not to plead his own case, but to use it to open up criticism of the Jamaican state. When the High Commissioner read a statement from Shearer claiming that Rodney had been expelled "because of his dangerous and subversive activities," Rodney replied that Jamaica could not accuse him "of being anti-Jamaican" given that the country's leaders had "sold the land to companies from England, the U.S. and Canada."<sup>110</sup>

Back in Montreal, the Jamaica Association, one of the groups that signed the letter condemning aspects of the Congress, supported the decision to expel Rodney and used the expulsion as a way to further distance itself from Black Power as it had been defined at the Congress. The association expressed its support for the ban and tried to reclaim the term "Black Power," saying it was committed to a version of the ideology that was rooted in "dignity and not violence." Further reinforcing the position of those who saw Black power as a dangerous ideology, the association's president, I.C. Morrison, distanced the group from "Black Power as an organization," characterizing it as a "racist movement."<sup>111</sup>

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109 Robert Wallace, "Jamaica Bars Rodney," *McGill Daily*, October 18, 1968.

110 "Jamaicans Protest Rodney's Expulsion," *Montreal Gazette*, October 22, 1968; "Rodney Expulsion Protested in Ottawa," *Montreal Star*, October 22, 1968.

111 "Jamaican Group Here Backs Rodney Ouster," *Montreal Gazette*, October 25, 1968.

### *The Teach-In and the Hemispheric Conference*

After the Congress, two other conferences focused Montreal's attention on the struggle against racism in its Canadian and international dimensions. At McGill, a "Teach-In Against Racism" brought together political figures, scholars and activists including Floyd McKissick of the Congress of Racial Equality [CORE], English literature professor Andress Taylor from Federal City College, the historian Arvarh Strickland, McGill geneticist Barbara Jones, Trinidadian-British activist Darcus Howe, journalist Laurier Lapierre, theologian Harvey Cox, who in 1957 facilitated contact between Martin Luther King and his longtime associate James Lawson,<sup>112</sup> and NDP MP David Lewis to discuss racism. A week later, Montreal played host to the Hemispheric Conference to End the War in Vietnam. The event was chaired by Laurier LaPierre; delegates included Salvador Allende, Cheddi Jagan, and representatives from North Vietnam, including minister of culture Hoan Minh Giam.<sup>113</sup> While not intended as a conference about race, the anti-war conference was attended by activists interested in discussing not only Vietnam, but (largely American) imperialist aggression more generally; chief among these was Bobby Seale, accompanied by several members of the Black Panther Party. Their voices made the event one in which the links between domestic racism in America and foreign aggression were front-and-center.

Unlike the Congress, which had featured limited discussion of race relations in Canada,

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112 Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 204.

113 "Racial Wrangle Poses Threat," *Montreal Gazette*, November 30, 1968; Phillip Winslow, "Factionalism of the Political Left Displayed at Vietnam Conference," *Montreal Gazette*, December 5, 1968; "Jagan Will Attend Anti-War Conference," *The Advocate-News*, October 16, 1968; Wouter De Wet, "Lone Dissenter Mars Viet War Protest," *Montreal Star*, November 29, 1968.

the Teach-In directly confronted the question, with delegates addressing Canadian racism on a number of distinct fronts. Barbara Jones compared the Domestic Scheme to slavery, and used her own story—a Black woman holding a Ph.D. from Cornell coming to Montreal only to get offers of poorly-paying jobs and have a landlord increase the quoted price on an apartment when he saw she was Black—to attack Canada’s exceptionalist self-image as a racism-free society. Jones argued that if Canadians wanted to achieve the “Just Society,” they “[would] have to stop pretending that they are different from Americans; for indeed they are not and the problems are the same.”<sup>114</sup> Floyd McKissick compared First Nations reservations to “concentration camps” and predicted that Canada would soon face a revolutionary “Red Power” movement. David Lewis echoed McKissick’s warning, saying that unrest among First Nations communities was “in part” a reaction “to the degradation in which we’ve placed them.”<sup>115</sup> Laurier Lapierre accused McGill of “fostering an inclination towards racism” by tolerating its expression on campus and by practicing it through the absence of Jews on its Board of Governors, toleration of discrimination in campus housing, and the earmarking of scholarships for WASPs, all of which helped ensure that McGill produced a class of people who kept Quebec safe for Anglophone industrial elites.<sup>116</sup>

Some measure of the relationship between Black activism and feminism in 1960s Montreal might be gleaned through Jones’s work. While I was unable to locate any of Jones’s writing outside of a single poem, some of her performances and speeches were covered in the

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114 Brian Tannenbaum, “Teach-in Should Not End,” *McGill Daily*, November 22, 1968; “Montreal Charged with Racism,” *Montreal Star*, November 22, 1968.

115 Dusty Vineberg, “‘You’re Not Honest with Indians’!,” *Montreal Star*, November 22, 1968; Tannenbaum, “Teach-in Should Not End”; “Fight against Racism Urged,” *Montreal Gazette*, November 20, 1968.

116 “McGill Inclined to Racism,” *Montreal Star*, November 20, 1968.

press. As an activist, Jones addressed the situation of West Indian domestic workers and other Black women in Canada, telling one reporter that if she “seem[ed] uptight, “it was because she was “sensitive on behalf of hundreds of domestics.” She described one of the most frustrating aspects of being a Black woman in Montreal, the experience of having a university degree, but having to live with people seeing her and “tab her as a housemaid.”<sup>117</sup>

The *Star*’s review of Jones’s 1968 play “Uptight, or Black Women Speak Out” revealed a potential glimpse of frustration with the existence of a Black-centered feminist project that addressed racism as well as sexism—though it should be noted the review was written not by a feminist activist, but by *Star* reporter Boyce Richardson. The brief review hinted at the content of the play, revealing that the opening sequence addressed rape and violence against women. From there however, Richardson criticized Jones for not “speaking about women in general,” but “speaking more about black, and black in general,” even though “in the province of Quebec, all women need to speak out, for their status is worse here than anywhere else in Canada.”<sup>118</sup>

The Teach-In provided participants with an opportunity to interrogate the meaning of Black Power as delegates presented readings of new tendencies in Black radical thought and action that seemed calculated to ease the anxieties that had been expressed by some liberal whites and Black community groups after the Congress. Harvey Cox, challenging ongoing reactions to the Congress that discounted Black Power as violent and racist, said that figures like H. Rap Brown, Stokely Carmichael, and Eldridge Cleaver embodied a “new confidence” that undid the idea that “black was something to be ashamed of.” He also argued that Blacks were

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117 Susan Purcell, “Her Tiresome Battle: To Defeat Bigotry She Finds Here,” *Montreal Star*, October 2, 1968 The specific question of West Indian women working as domestics in Canada, one of the central questions in debates about Canada’s immigration policy towards the West Indies, is discussed in Chapter Four. .

118 Boyce Richardson, “‘Uptight’ about the Black Bourgeoisie,” *Montreal Star*, October 11, 1968.

now more, and not less, open to the idea of working with “fellow revolutionaries, even though they be white.”<sup>119</sup> Arvarh Strickland also focused on inter-racial activism, expressing his pleasure with white students following the lead of Black students into youth activism.<sup>120</sup>

Other delegates were less eager to bridge any gap between Black radicals and white liberals. Andress Taylor countered that interracial alliances were impossible as long as white liberals accepted Blacks as individuals but rejected racially-based claims for restitution or could not get past the misperception that Black Power meant “reverse segregation.”<sup>121</sup> Darcus Howe called for the “total separation of black and white within the United States,” with Blacks being given control of the economic infrastructure they had created. Howe unfortunately injected a problematic note into his criticism of white exploitation of Black labor, reportedly accusing Jews of taking a pronounced role in that process.<sup>122</sup> The *Star*, echoing ongoing critiques of the tenor of the Congress, described Howe’s presentation as “chilling,” noting that the “self-styled black revolutionary” had “predicted black revolution all over the world within five to 10 years, with Afro-America as the starting point.”<sup>123</sup>

The sense of fear permeating the *Star*’s report on Howe echoed statements made by Montreal officials in the weeks between the Congress and the two subsequent gatherings. Montreal police chief Jean-Paul Gilbert urged immigration officials to prevent “agitators known all over the world as fomentors of rebellion and revolution” from entering Canada, as these “apostles of violence” threatened the social order. While Gilbert attacked radical activism in

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119 Brian McKenna, “U.S. ‘Pathologically Racist,’” *Montreal Star*, November 21, 1968.

120 Tannenbaum, “Teach-in Should Not End.”

121 Jack Lazarovic, “Teach-in on Racism Commences,” *McGill Daily*, November 19, 1968; “White Help Not Needed by Blacks,” *Montreal Gazette*, November 19, 1968.

122 David Turoff, “McKissick Decries Depth of Racism,” *McGill Daily*, November 22, 1968.

123 Vineberg, “‘You’re Not Honest with Indians’!”

broad terms, Stokely Carmichael was the only “agitator” he mentioned by name, revealing the extent to which a specifically Black radical tendency was feared by state officials.<sup>124</sup> This was not the first time that local authorities had expressed unease at the prospect of people associated with Black Power and other radical movements visiting the city. In August, the president of the Montreal Police Brotherhood told a gathering of police associations that radical figures were coming to Montreal to to plan “bloody riots.”<sup>125</sup> Days earlier, Miriam Makeba, en route to Montreal for a concert, was repeatedly questioned by border guards about whether or not her husband Stokely Carmichael would be meeting her in Montreal.<sup>126</sup>

Gilbert’s fear-mongering was criticized from both inside and outside the Black activist community. Congress organizers Rosie Douglas and Phillippe Filsaimé accused Gilbert of preparing the Canadian public for police brutality that would be directed against Blacks.<sup>127</sup> The *Star* saw “a curious illogic” in Gilbert’s fear of activists given the lack of official concern on display during Enoch Powell’s visit earlier in the year. The paper criticized City Hall for being too wrapped up in unfounded concerns about law and order at the expense of social issues including the living conditions of First Nations people (no mention was made of the living conditions of Blacks.)<sup>128</sup> At the Teach-In, David Lewis was asked about keeping Carmichael out of Canada. He replied: “I would want to hear him, and I think all Canadians should.”<sup>129</sup>

It wasn’t the presence of Carmichael, but the rumored presence of another controversial

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124 “Black Writers Fear Montreal Police Are ‘Preparing Public’ for Brutality to Come,” *Montreal Star*, November 12, 1968; “Gilbert Stand on Foreigners under Attack,” *Montreal Gazette*, November 10, 1968; For state security and Black radicalism in Canada, see Chapter VII, “Fear of a Black Planet,” in Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation*.

125 Larry Conroy, “Fear of Student Riots Just ‘Panic Talk,’” *Montreal Star*, August 23, 1968.

126 Dick MacDonald, “Miriam Grilled at Border,” *Montreal Star*, August 19, 1968.

127 “Black Writers Fear Montreal Police Are ‘Preparing Public’ for Brutality to Come.”

128 “Justice Necessary for ‘Law and Order,’” *Montreal Star*, November 19, 1968.

129 “Gilbert Stand on Foreigners under Attack.”

Black American activist that set the stage for the Hemispheric Conference to become site for the expression of Black Power. The day before the conference opened, Sir George education professor Chet Davis led a group of students to the U.S. consulate in Montreal to protest the issuing of a fugitive warrant for Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver, who had jumped bail on charges related to an ambush of police officers in Oakland.<sup>130</sup> Rumors circulated that Cleaver was hiding out in Montreal; California police said they had “reliable information” that Cleaver was there, contacted Canadian officials for help in finding him, and issued a warrant for Irving Sarnoff, a California anti-war activist, on suspicion that he had helped smuggle Cleaver into Canada while en route to the Hemispheric Conference.<sup>131</sup> Black Panthers who were in Montreal for the conference told reporters they were “skeptical” that Cleaver was in Montreal, “as that would be the first place police were likely to look for him,” a statement that revealed the centrality of Montreal to international Black Power organizing in the wake of the Congress of Black Writers.<sup>132</sup>

As Black radical thought and activism shaped official fears surrounding the Hemispheric Conference, they also shaped the event’s dynamics, as younger activists, including a contingent made up of Bobby Seale and more than twenty members of the Black Panther Party, who saw the struggle against U.S. racism as inseparable from Vietnam, clashed with an older generation of peace activists who were more narrowly focused on the war.

The conference began with the proposed agenda being set aside in favor of a reading of a

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130 “Cleaver Warrant Protested,” *Montreal Star*, November 28, 1968; “Solidarity with Cleaver Expressed by Blacks,” *The Georgian*, November 29, 1968.

131 “Black Panther Fugitive Sought in Montreal,” *Montreal Gazette*, November 30, 1968; “Warrant out for Sarnoff,” *Montreal Star*, December 2, 1968.

132 “Delegates Doubt Cleaver in City,” *Montreal Star*, November 30, 1968.

statement by the Panthers, who said that their purpose was to engage in “a reaffirmation of our commitment to concrete support of the heroic struggles of the Vietnamese people and of all People’s Liberation Struggles,” and “not to hear vague resolutions passed in support of world peace.” The Panthers called for the focus of the event to be “changed from supporting world peace to supporting Third-World Liberation Struggles,” and for the conference to be re-titled the “Hemispheric Conference to Defeat American Imperialism” (that resolution failed). “Brother Zeke,” a Panther from Baltimore, was elected chair of the conference, and new sessions covering “The Continuing Struggle of Black, Brown, and Yellow People for Survival,” and “U.S. Counterinsurgency Techniques Used in Vietnam and Their Relevance to All Liberation Struggles in the Third-World” were added to the agenda.<sup>133</sup> Another added session, “Racism in the U.S.A. as a Threat to World Peace” had an epistemological dimension, as participants reportedly criticized the education system for teaching history that supported the political needs of the state and concluded that the histories of Black people should be written by Blacks and not “white scholars who know little of the truth.”<sup>134</sup> Meanwhile, delegates who tried to put the question of Soviet domination of eastern Europe on the table under the rubric of “imperialism”—a move that was predictably opposed by Viet Cong and other leftist factions—were stymied by Panthers who blocked them from taking the podium.<sup>135</sup>

The highlight of the Hemispheric Conference was Bobby Seale’s address, in which the Panther leader focused on the history of the Panthers and outlined their Ten Point Platform. In

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133 Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, *Black against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 309–310.

134 “Link of Racism--Capitalism Hand-in-Hand Say Conferees,” *Montreal Gazette*, December 1, 1968.

135 Winslow, “Factionalism of the Political Left Displayed at Vietnam Conference”; “Racial Wrangle Poses Threat”; “Invasion Dissenters Forced to Back down,” *Montreal Star*, December 2, 1968; Andy Gollner, “Reflections on the Hemispheric Conference,” *Loyola News*, December 6, 1968.

describing the historical roots of the Panthers, Seale described how Huey Newton traced parallels between growing police activity in African-American neighborhoods and the “escalation of forces and bombings and murderous genocidal war against people in Vietnam,” and argued forcefully that American aggression abroad was inseparable from American aggression against its own Black population: “be we Afro-Americans, be we from Latin America ... be we in Africa, Asia, what have you ... we’re telling the pig forces to move out of our community. Because they occupy our community like a foreign troop occupies territory.”<sup>136</sup>

The Panthers’ presence at the conference generated a broad variety of reactions from organizers and the media. Some mainstream journalists wrote favorably about their actions, crediting them for working to expand the scope and effectiveness of radical critique, for having played a key role in “establish[ing] bonds of unity” between opposed camps of anti-war activists, for creating a new political vocabulary, and for helping to move conference participants beyond “empty words and pious expressions of solidarity” to commit to “a united struggle against a common enemy.”<sup>137</sup>

Yet while *The Black Panther*, the party’s newspaper, claimed that “literally no one objected to the Panthers’ leadership of the conference,” their actions in fact drew sharp critiques from within the peace activist community and beyond.<sup>138</sup> The Panthers’ decision to physically obstruct rival factions from taking the podium became a focal point for critics. Edward Sloane, one of the organizers, accused them of “challenging the democracy of the conference,” while

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136 Bobby Seale, “Complete Text of Bobby Seale’s Address,” *The Black Panther*, December 21, 1968.

137 Winslow, “Factionalism of the Political Left Displayed at Vietnam Conference”; Brian McKenna, “Turbulence Surfaces,” *Montreal Star*, November 30, 1968; Jacques Larue-Langlois, “La Signification Positive de La Conference ‘Hemispherique,’” *Le Devoir*, December 14, 1968.

138 Raymond Lewis, “Montreal: Bobby Seale—Panthers Take Control,” *The Black Panther*, December 21, 1968.

Minister Douglas Pilkey of St. James United, the church that hosted the event, mused that while a “peace conference” was going on, the Panthers did not “seem to be talking too much about peace.”<sup>139</sup> While McKenna had praised the Panthers’ political skills, he also reproduced an essentializing fear of Black violence embodied in the Panthers, writing that “creeping through a South American jungle at night and meeting the cat the black militant party is named for would be a less chilling experience” than dealing with them—a characterization the Panthers proudly reproduced in their newspaper.<sup>140</sup>

Predictably, some readers wrote to the dailies to protest the Panthers’ actions, echoing previous critiques of the Congress that framed Black radicalism as racist and having nothing short of genocidal intentions towards white people. Readers called the event a “Communist chorus” uniting “well-intentioned but naive thinkers,” “draft-dodgers, Communists, [Quebec] separatists, Viet Cong, and copped-out, fouled-up students” who failed to “raise their voices in protest of those black racists ... who loudly advocate the death and destruction of all white men.”<sup>141</sup>

The Hemispheric Conference was not Montreal’s last encounter with the Panthers leading up to the crisis at Sir George. On 12 December, T.D. Pawley, a Black Panther from Boston, spoke to students at Sir George. Pawley had recently visited Nova Scotia in order to prepare a report on conditions for Blacks in the province for Stokely Carmichael; while there, he and other Panthers, along with Douglas, helped with the mobilization of local Black activists, and were

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139 “This Is a PEACE Conference,” *Montreal Star*, November 30, 1968.

140 Brian McKenna, “Panther Power Prevails,” *Montreal Star*, December 2, 1968; Lewis, “Montreal: Bobby Seale-- Panthers Take Control.”

141 Mrs. William Balkan, *Montreal Gazette*, December 4, 1968; P. Clarke, *Montreal Gazette*, December 22, 1968.

arrested on charges of “loitering and inciting violence.”<sup>142</sup>

Pawley had a detailed understanding of the issues that were germane to Black struggles in Canada. Unlike Seale’s speech at the Hemispheric Conference or many of the talks at the Congress, which were, for all the vitriol they drew from Montrealers, not really directed at local concerns, Pawley’s presentation seems to have been specifically tailored to address issues in the local context. As opposed to those voices who had previously uncritically praised Canada as a society free of racism, Pawley argued that Canada had the potential to become an advocate for oppressed people worldwide, but to do so needed to overcome its provincial relationship with the United States. He also pointedly criticized Canada’s self-image as a “Just Society” with specific reference to ongoing debates about racism in Canada, including Gilbert’s comments about “apostles of violence,” and the way that that Domestic Scheme had forced West Indian women with education and skills to work as maids.<sup>143</sup>

As had happened after the Congress and the Hemispheric Conference, coverage of Pawley’s appearance allowed the press to engage in fear-mongering about Black activism. While the papers gave ample room to Pawley’s pointed and well-informed criticisms of race relations in Canada, readers were still left with the impression that he represented a dangerous and irrational tendency. The *Star* gave its article a sub-headline proclaiming “Whites don’t belong in Black community” and a closing line quoted Pawley’s answer to a question about the Panthers’ future

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142 Jennifer B. Smith, *An International History of the Black Panther Party* (New York: Garland, 1999), 97–99;

“Black Militant from Quebec Jailed in N.S.,” *Montreal Gazette*, December 1, 1968; Dick MacDonald,

“Canada’s Negroes Face Hidden Prejudice, Apathy,” *Montreal Star*, December 13, 1968.

143 “Canada as World Ombudsman Role Urged by Black Panther,” *Montreal Gazette*, December 13, 1968; “‘You’re Racists at Heart,’ Panther Tells Students,” *Montreal Star*, December 13, 1968; John Soosar, “Cool It Baby...and in Nova Scotia That May Have Happened,” *Montreal Gazette*, December 23, 1968.

strategy: “You think I'm going to tell you how I intend to attack you?”<sup>144</sup>

### *Aftermath*

Two weeks after the Hemispheric Conference, the *Star*'s Wouter de Wet argued that recent incidents, including the Hemispheric Conference, the firing of a radio host after Black activists protested racist remarks he had made, and a sit-in in the office of the chair of the biology department at Sir George by Black students protesting the handling of charges of racism against a professor (the first mention of the charges against Perry Anderson, the professor at the center of the occupation of the university, who went unnamed in the article) to argue that there was a new “Black mood in Montreal.” The pattern of media framings of Black radicalism as a violent phenomenon repeated itself in De Wet's report, which noted that only the relatively small size of the city's Black population prevented “a riot on the scale of Watts or Detroit” from breaking out.<sup>145</sup> Henry Langdon, the Canadian commissioner of the UNIA, wrote that de Wet “hit the nail on the head” with his analysis of how Blacks were “affected by a system based on exploitation much as that which influenced the slave trade.”<sup>146</sup>

The new “Black mood” developing in Montreal had important consequences for the existing Black activist infrastructure. By 1968, *Expression* was in trouble. While it might seem that a growing interest in anti-racist activism would mean a circulation boom for a city's only Black periodical, *Expression* was having difficulties finding a dedicated readership and

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144 “‘You're Racists at Heart,' Panther Tells Students.”

145 Wouter De Wet, “The Black Mood in Montreal,” *Montreal Star*, December 14, 1968.

146 Henry J. Langdon, *Montreal Star*, December 21, 1968.

establishing itself as a print voice for Blacks in Montreal and struggled to find its niche in a rapidly-changing political and intellectual landscape. Its largely reformist and integrationist viewpoint did not resonate with a young activist community that was becoming increasingly invested in Black nationalist thinking.<sup>147</sup>

Carl Taylor, former head of the Sir George West Indian Student's Association, took over as *Expression's* editor with the Winter 1968 issue. With the Congress of Black Writers fresh in local memories and the Anderson situation creating increased frustration for Black students, Taylor drafted a policy statement that reflected changes in that journal's mission. Taylor, drawing on the work of Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan, wanted *Expression* to adopt a more activist position, moving away from being a "cold medium" documenting the "hopes, fears and aspirations of [a] growing black community" to a "hot medium" more concerned with "effect." Taylor's policy statement clearly reveals the influence of debates that had unfolded in previous years within Montreal's West Indian activist community about the relationship between intellectual pursuit and political activity, positioning *Expression's* chief role as "[providing] the concrete analysis on which the formulation of action and strategy can be based."<sup>148</sup>

With the exception of some mimeographed "Special Bulletins" that came out as the Sir George crisis unfolded, *Expression* only printed one issue after that crisis before folding in 1969. But in its final issues, the journal revealed how Black activists in Montreal were seeing Canadian racism as something that called for radical political solutions, and not simple reform. A 1968 editorial drew on Canada's treatment of First Nations peoples to argue that "the balance is

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147 F.C. Sealy, "Report of Meeting with Editorial Board of Expression," April 19, 1968, MG31 H181 Vol. 3, Library and Archives Canada, Clarence Bayne fonds.

148 Carl Taylor, "Editorial Policy Statement," December 18, 1968, MG31 H181 Vol. 3, Library and Archives Canada, Clarence Bayne fonds.

heavily weighted towards” to believing that Canadians were racist.<sup>149</sup> In 1969, *Expression* ran an article by Clarence Bayne in which he pointedly attacked portrayals of Canada as a nation that was free of structural racism, drawing on his experience with Canadian mission teachers during his childhood in Trinidad (who taught him that Africans “boiled white missionaries in large cauldrons”), the racism of Canadian immigration policies (which continued to place obstacles in front of West Indian immigrants even after deracialization) and the daily experiences of Blacks to show how white supremacy was deeply woven into Canadian culture and history.<sup>150</sup>

*Expression*’s final issue contained an editorial that sought to resolve tensions between calls for a Black-centered politics and criticisms that such a politics had the potential to isolate Blacks from political power, especially in the Canadian context, where numbers made independent Black action problematic. Faced with “the blind emotionalism and racist reaction of many Canadians to the events” at Sir George, there were, understandably, calls for “a movement of black people, by black people, for black people.” *Expression* feared that such movements risked becoming “the prisons of black men,” and urged Black activists to concentrate on developing strategies to work “towards shaping a greater humanity for all men.” Canadian racism, the editorial concluded, would only end with wholesale changes to economic and social structures—a far cry from the journal’s traditional calls for human rights codes and committees.<sup>151</sup>

While the new “Black mood” did not help *Expression* become a viable voice for Montreal’s Black communities, it contributed to what could have been crucial part of the

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149 “Editorial: Black Consciousness,” *Expression*, Summer 1968, 5.

150 Clarence Bayne, “The Roots of White Racism,” *Expression*, Winter 1968; Clarence Bayne, “The Roots of White Racism -- Part II Canadian Impressions,” *Expression*, Spring 1969.

151 “Editorial: Black Organizations of Black People, by Black People, for Black People,” *Expression*, Spring 1969.

development of a distinctly Canadian manifestation of Black Studies, with the institution of a Black Studies program at Sir George Williams University. While the program was short-lived, mostly because of the effects of the Anderson affair, its planning reveals how Black students sought to embed the political and epistemological currents that had taken shape in Montreal since the first Conference on West Indian Affairs into an institutional setting.

Beginning in 1968, some two hundred U.S. college campuses experienced protests demanding they incorporate Black Studies into their curriculum, increase Black enrollment, hire more Black faculty, and make the academy and relevant to the lives of African-Americans and their communities.<sup>152</sup> During the 1968 fall semester, working with Chet Davis, the professor who had organized the march in solidarity with Eldridge Cleaver, a group of Black students at Sir George formed a Black Students Association with the goal of creating Canada's first Black Studies program. Though it did not refer to Lloyd Best or New World by name, their funding request echoed Best's key position, that anti-racist activism was ineffective without a theoretical grounding in contemporary and historical Black experiences. The students, working from the premise "that Black history, thought, and works are as much the heritage of the world as they are of Black People," sought to "uncover the hidden portion of [their] life and heritage" for their "mutual development, enlightenment and liberation." A Black Studies program would "eliminate the crippling fears and inferiority complexes among Black Peoples and to create in them a genuine sense of community and individual pride" that would facilitate effective community development.<sup>153</sup>

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152 Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Fabio Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

153 "Declaration of Proposed Program of Black Studies," n.d., MG31 H181 Vol. 2 Folder 13, Library and Archives

The program began as an informal one, not for credit, featuring talks by academics, writers, activists and musicians including: James Turner, a professor of sociology at Northwestern who founded the Africana Studies and Research Center at Cornell; the economist and author of *The Case for Black Separatism* Robert Browne; Lerone Bennett Jr. senior editor of *Ebony* and author of *The New Negro Mood* and *Before the Mayflower*; historian Sterling Stuckey; Charles Hamilton, the political scientist and co-author with Stokely Carmichael of *Black Power*; the poets LeRoi Jones, Gwendolyn Brooks, Don Lee and Bob Hamilton; the musician Archie Shepp; and athletes Tommy Smith and John Carlos, who had recently become icons for the Black Power movement with their raised-fist protest at the Olympics.<sup>154</sup>

A proposed curriculum for a formal academic program revealed the breadth and depth of these students' engagement with Black thought. A course on "The Literature of Negritude" featured works by, among others, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Gwendolyn Brooks, Leroi Jones, W.E.B. DuBois, Alain Locke, Léopold Senghor, Aime Césaire, St. Claire Drake, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin. A course on "Great Men and Women of Colour" covered a long list of figures from Africa and its diaspora, including Sundiata, Mansa Musa, Shaka, Toussaint L'Ouverture, Martin Delaney, Edward Blyden, J.E. Casley-Halford, Harriett Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Sékou Touré, John Chilembwe, Marcus Garvey, Kwame Nkrumah, Frantz Fanon, Stokely Carmichael, and James Forman. Other courses included "Black Journalism: From Abolitionist Papers to the Present," "The African in the Caribbean and South America," "The African in North America," "The Histories of the Modern Black Movements,"

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Canada, Clarence Bayne fonds.  
154 Ibid.

and courses in various Black expressive cultures and languages. The political goals of the program were made evident in a proposed course in the “Psychology and Strategy of Oppression and Resistance.” The program did not have a specific course on Blacks in Canada, but did include one on “Racism in North America: Pathology Within and Without the Ghetto” that ranged “from Watts to Halifax.”<sup>155</sup>

The timing of the launch of the program could not have been worse, as events on campus made a Black-oriented speaker series an inviable proposition. In January 1969, as tensions over the charges against Perry Anderson were peaking, the Black Studies program hosted its first speakers. A Black Studies talk scheduled for 7 February, a week after the start of the occupation of the computer center, was canceled.<sup>156</sup> No further events were held. Phillip Griffin, co-chair of the Black Students Association, expressed his frustration with the failure of the program to draw substantial support. He noted that white students were especially conspicuous by their absence: in his words, whites at Sir George did not “give a good DAMN” about the issues facing Blacks.<sup>157</sup> While Griffin was probably correct that white apathy played a role in the poor turn-outs, the fact that the talks took place in the days leading up to the occupation of the computer center meant that the attention of Black students who would presumably have attended was taken up by the many hearings and rallies surrounding the developing crisis, undermining any potential success the program might have had.

Beginning with the work of West Indian students in the early years of the 1960s, Black activists in Montreal crafted a body of radical critique that was foundational to distinctly West

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155 Phil Griffin, “Black Students’ Association Initiates Studies Program,” *The Georgian*, December 11, 1968.

156 *The Georgian*, February 7, 1969.

157 Philip Griffin, “What Happens to a Dream Deferred,” *The Georgian*, January 28, 1969.

Indian and Black Canadian expressions of Black Power. West Indian thinkers grounded critiques of continuing political and economic inequality in a longer history of Black and Caribbean resistance to slavery and colonialism, and worked to understand the past, present, and potential future of the West Indies in terms dictated by themselves, and not by Eurocentric scholarship.

While earlier manifestations of this intellectual work, notably the CCC's conferences, were limited in impact to a tight-knit community of activist intellectuals and did not contribute in a significant manner to debate in the general public sphere, the events of the fall of 1968 brought to public light the intellectual and political evolution of Black activism in Montreal, a process that had taken shape over the course of the decade in events planned by the CCC, in the pages of *Expression*, in grassroots attempts to use the press to shed light on the racism faced by Blacks in the city and in the political and intellectual activities of West Indians and other Blacks on college campuses. Reactions to those events revealed that many Montrealers saw expressions of Black radicalism as irrelevant to the local context and the a potential source of social unrest and violence, though significant contingent of voices was able to see beyond fear-mongering and misplaced accusations of "reverse racism" and understand the need for Black-centered political thought on its own terms.

One could only imagine that, had the charges against Perry Anderson been dealt with the previous spring, when they had first come to light, the legacy of the Congress of Black Writers and the longer history of Black radical intellectual critique that had led up to that event might have included the successful implementation of the first Black Studies program in Canada. Instead, the Congress would be blamed as a precursor for Canada's most significant student

uprising, an event that had serious repercussions for Blacks in Canada and for the development of radical politics in the West Indies. It is to that uprising we now turn.

## Chapter 6

### The New Doomsday Politics: The Sir George Williams Affair

On 11 February 1969, Montreal police entered Sir George Williams University's Hall Building to dislodge protesters who had been occupying the university's computer centre and faculty lounge for close to two weeks. In the chaos that ensued, fire broke out in the computer lab, causing some \$2 million in damages. Ninety-eight were people arrested that day, seven of whom were minors and 60 were women; 42 were described by the *Gazette* as Black, and 24 of those as belonging to "various West Indian nationalities."

What became known as the "Sir George Williams Affair," the "Computer Centre Affair," or the "Anderson Affair" was a protest against the university's handling of allegations of racism against Biology professor Perry Anderson, who was accused, among other things, of giving lower grades to Black students. Race and racism permeated the events of 11 February; as smoke billowed from the windows of the Hall Building, onlookers gathered on Boulevard de Maisonneuve chanted "Send them back to Madagascar!" and "Let the niggers burn!" When the students who were arrested were brought to the Montreal courthouse for their arraignment, they were greeted by supporters bearing a placard which read "Montreal-Alabama."<sup>1</sup>

*Uhuru*, a Montreal Black community paper founded in the aftermath of the crisis, asserted that the protest's "ramifications [ran] much deeper than that of any other student protest, [and were] being deeply felt throughout Canada and the West Indies." *Uhuru* called the protest a

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1 Norman Williams, "Grant Seven Bail," *Montreal Star*, February 19, 1969; "37 Students Get Bailed out," *McGill Daily*, February 20, 1969.

“stance made by the students for the dignity of all black people, [an] assertion of blackness” that had led to “the emergence of revolutionary leaders and groups throughout the Caribbean.” Given that “the enemy” faced by the students in Montreal was the same one faced by their compatriots in the West Indies, notably the members of Sir George’s board of governors who were “shareholders in large corporations that exploit the Caribbean people,” the Sir George Williams affair was, in the words of *Uhuru*, “a microcosm of our general struggle.”<sup>2</sup> In the West Indies, activists used the event to open discussions about neoimperialism and dependency. In the weeks after 11 February, a Caribbean tour by Canada’s Governor-General Roland Michner was interrupted by protests at several stops that, like the Rodney uprising, fed public debate about increasing dissatisfaction with the political status quo and race consciousness on the part of Caribbean youth. A year after the end of the occupation, protests in Port-of-Spain in support of Trinidadian students on trial in Montreal for their alleged role in the protest became the opening moves in the 1970 Black Power revolution, an uprising led by students and workers that nearly ended up with the downfall of Eric Williams’s government.

This chapter examines how allegations of racism against a university professor led to an explosion of debate and action in both Canada and the Caribbean, and frames that debate and action in the context of a decade’s worth of Black activism and intellectual production in Montreal. In the wake of the crisis, there was a sharpening of an already radicalized approach on the part of Black activists in Montreal, one that led to both expressions of unity and a renewed commitment to exploring Black Power’s relevance in Canada on the one hand and a need on the part of some activists to draw distance between themselves and the actions of radical students on the other. This chapter also explores how reactions to the protest drew on what had become by

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2 *Uhuru*, February 16, 1970.

1969 a standard set of discourses about the irrelevance of anti-racist activity in a Canada allegedly free of racism and racist and paternalist portrayals of West Indians in particular and Blacks in general on the part of white Canadians. The Sir George Williams Affair was a culminating moment in both 1960s Black radicalism in Montreal (with important echoes in the Caribbean) and in Canadian denials, and expressions of, a racism rooted in large part in its own imperial dynamics.

Writing soon after the crisis, the historian Robin Winks called the protest an act of “thoughtless, needless and frustrated” destruction.<sup>3</sup> More recent scholarship has moved past condemnation to set the event as a critical moment in Canadian and West Indian history. Sir George marked a critical moment in the development of Black consciousness in Montreal, in Canada, and in the West Indies. Dennis Forsythe, who edited *Let the Niggers Burn*, a collection of essays about the protest and its wider ramifications, may have been overstating the case when he wrote that the event “shook the West Indies, ruffled the world, and boomeranged black consciousness one step further towards a consolidation called ‘Peoplehood,’” but his hyperbole speaks to how the people involved in and affected by the event saw it, even if it did not quite translate into the kind of world-shaking impact he described.<sup>4</sup> Historian Dorothy Williams calls the protest “the culmination of years of black expression and grassroots activity in Canada,”

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3 Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, 2nd ed (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), 478 Other early accounts of the Sir George Williams Affair include: ; Dorothy Eber, *The Computer Centre Party: Canada Meets Black Power* (Montreal: Tundra Books, 1969); Dennis Forsythe, ed., *Let the Niggers Burn! The Sir George Williams University Affair and Its Caribbean Aftermath* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1971); P. Kiven Tunteng, “Racism and the Montreal Computer Incident of 1969,” *Race & Class* 14, no. 3 (1973): Let the Niggers Burn is a collection of essays on the crisis and related issues by some of the protesters and their supporters, and is invaluable for seeing how Black activists in Montreal set the event in a broader context, from their personal experiences with racism to the political economy of Canadian extraction from the West Indies. Eber’s book is a good account of the uprising, but is not a scholarly study. Tunteng gives a general overview of how the crisis intersected with Canadian denials of racism and argues that the crisis spiraled out of control because of an inability to take such charges at face value.

4 Forsythe, *Let the Niggers Burn! The Sir George Williams University Affair and Its Caribbean Aftermath*, 3.

seeing the “long-term benefit” of the incident for Montreal’s Black community in how it created “a convergence of goals” among activists.<sup>5</sup> Sean Mills frames the protest not only as a key moment in the development of Black radical politics, but as one that had important effects in changing how white Anglophone and Francophone Canadian and Québécois activists thought about their political work.<sup>6</sup> Valerie Belgrave, who participated in the occupation, writes that Sir George was a “catalyst for the raising of consciousness and the consequent political action of the masses” in Trinidad.<sup>7</sup> David Austin argues that conflicting memories and interpretations of the crisis—key dimensions of which, such as Anderson’s attitudes about race and who exactly was responsible for the destruction of the computer centre have never been satisfactorily resolved—reveal the complexities and “underlying assumptions” race and racism in Canada.<sup>8</sup>

The occupation of Sir George took place as college campuses across the United States were confronting similar tactics being deployed by African-American students and activists who were demanding structural changes to American educational institutions, including the creation of Black Studies programs, increased Black presence on faculties, and a stronger commitment on

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5 Dorothy W. Williams, *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1997), 118; 122.

6 Sean Mills, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal* (Montreal, Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 105–107.

7 Valerie Belgrave, “The Sir George Williams Affair,” in *The Black Power Revolution 1970: A Retrospective*, ed. Selwyn D Ryan and Taimoon Stewart (St. Augustine, Trinidad: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1995), 119–31.

8 David Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation: Race, Sex, and Security in Sixties Montreal* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2013), 130–156 Anderson vehemently denied the charges, but admitted he had “failed to communicate with [his] black students” and thus “lost their confidence.” (see: “The Forgotten Man,” *Time*, February 21, 1969) His denials were later supported by two West Indian former colleagues, Joseph MacKenzie and Roderick Singh, who both discounted any possibility that Anderson was a racist. Singh, a biologist at the University of Western Ontario who had known Anderson for more than five years, wrote that “as a member of the ‘black’ race” he believed that the charges were false. (See: Roderick P. Singh, “Letter to Douglas B. Clarke,” December 20, 1968, HA277, Concordia University archives.) Others, including students who filed the original complaint against Anderson, have maintained their conviction that they were the victims of racism in Anderson’s classroom, and that the destruction of the computer center was the work of agents provocateurs working with the police. (See: Renée Morel, *Crisis at Sir George*, Turning Points of History, 1999.)

the part of universities to meeting the social needs of African-American communities.<sup>9</sup> Like their American counterparts, the students occupying the computer lab were informed by new currents in Black thought and by the intersection of their struggle against racism with the dynamics of international politics. However, the circumstances of this uprising set it apart from African-American campus activism, in part because the demands made by the protesters at Sir George differed in scope from those of their African-American comrades. The protesters in Montreal were not seeking structural changes to the education system, but maintained a narrow focus on the university's handling of a single case of racism. At the same time, especially in the aftermath of the uprising, West Indian and Black Canadian activists and intellectuals addressed a set of larger stakes that grew out of the protest. These stakes were grounded in the specific dynamics of Canadian racism, in relationships between Canada and the West Indies, and in the continuing frustrations of young West Indians with the shortcomings of independence. In the eyes of many Black activists, the Sir George Williams Affair was about not only Perry Anderson's alleged racism, but what Rosie Douglas called Canada's practice of "a racist culture at home and an imperialist policy beyond her border." Events in Montreal, Douglas concluded, needed to be understood not simply as a charge against one professor, but as "a challenge to institutionalised racism and Canadian Imperialism," forces which had developed in sync with Europe's own imperialism.<sup>10</sup> The Sir George Affair made clear the extent to which it was difficult, if not impossible, to isolate critiques of racism in Canada from critiques of Canada's role in the continued poverty and political marginalization of the West Indian people. Much as Bobby Seale

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9 On the movement for Black Studies and associated demands, see: Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Fabio Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

10 Rosie Douglas, "Canadian Racism and Sir-George," *Uhuru*, February 2, 1970.

had argued at the Hemispheric Conference months before that police violence in American ghettos had the same roots as American war-making in Vietnam, West Indian and Black Canadian critics used the Sir George Williams Affair to embed local racism in a broader imperialist tendency.

On 11 February, as the police prepared to close in on them, the protesters tossed thousands upon thousands of computer punch-cards and printouts from the windows of the ninth floor of the Hall Building, covering a substantial part of a city block in an ankle-deep snowfall of paper. The protest was visually stunning, and both literally and symbolically, made what one reporter later called “Canada’s Black fact” visible in an unprecedented manner.<sup>11</sup> The Sir George Affair led to renewed debate about Canadian racism, but, as many Canadian reactions to the protest revealed, the fact that the protest was largely identified with West Indian students and used the vocabulary of Black Power, an ideology largely thought to be a uniquely African-American phenomenon, made it easy for Canadians to discount allegations of systemic racism directed against them as irrelevant. As had reactions to other instances of protest against racism dating back to activism sparked by the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, the Sir George Williams Affair also allowed for denials of racism in Canada to be accompanied by base expressions of the racism that was being denied. Other reactions perpetuated the fear-mongering of Black violence that came to light in 1965 after the arrest of Michele Duclos and was a principal dimension of responses to the Congress and the appearance of the Black Panthers in Montreal soon afterwards.

Reactions to the protest also brought to light important fissures within the community of progressive academics. Leftist professors at Sir George, including the noted historian Eugene Genovese, were quick to discount the expression of Black Power that they encountered as

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<sup>11</sup> James Eayrs, “Canada’s Own Black Fact,” *Montreal Star*, February 17, 1969.

theoretically empty, if not nihilistic. These Marxist professors, however, much like those Canadians who rejected accusations of racism coming from “foreigners” and rooted in the outsider ideology of Black Power, failed to engage, or even acknowledge, the rich body of West Indian and other Black thought that informed the broad stakes of the protest.

Much of the criticism that emerged from the Affair drew on the intellectual work that had been done in contexts like the New World Group, the Conferences on West Indian Affairs, and the Congress of Black Writers. During and after the crisis, Black activists in Montreal renewed debates about how to organize and militate in a more independent manner, and how to make Black Power more relevant in a Canadian context. Meanwhile, they, and their activist and intellectual counterparts in the West Indies drew on events in Montreal in discussions about how independence had failed to bring a meaningful sovereignty to the West Indies, attacking Canadian extraction from the region and the perceived unwillingness or inability of their leaders to make a stand against a racist and imperialist Canada. West Indian activists also latched on to the crisis in Montreal as a means by which to turn theory into action, starting with protesting the appearance of Canada’s governor-general in the West Indies soon after the end of the occupation and culminating in the 1970 uprising in Trinidad.

Locally, an important legacy of the Sir George Williams Affair was *Uhuru* (Swahili for “Freedom”) a newspaper produced by and for Montreal’s Black communities. *Uhuru* was closely tied to the events at Sir George: the hearings and trials which resulted from the unrest featured prominently in nearly every issue of the paper; it was co-edited by Leroy Butcher, a student from St. Lucia who had been involved in the occupation, and several of the students who had been involved in the protest contributed to the paper. *Uhuru* had one eye on Canada and another on

Black people in the United States, the West Indies and Africa, reporting on political developments of interest worldwide and positioning itself as a voice for the local and national Black population, reporting on on local episodes of racism and the academic and athletic achievements of local Black youth and informing people about the resources available to them. The paper also made a few attempts to reach out to Francophone Blacks with French translations of articles.

### *Sir George Williams University*

In 1964, the *Montreal Star Weekend Magazine* ran a feature on Sir George, highlighting its mission of providing higher education to “just about anyone who wants it” and its popularity with students from the West Indies.<sup>12</sup> This popularity was due not only to the school’s affordable tuition, but also to its reputation in the West Indies as being “far freer from colour prejudice” than any British or American university.”<sup>13</sup> By the middle of the decade, Sir George was experiencing remarkable growth in enrollment; the Hall Building, thirteen stories high and occupying a city block in the downtown core, symbolized the institution’s shift from a small college housed in a YMCA building, focused largely on providing working people with a post-secondary education, to a major Canadian university. In his thesis on the occupation, Keith Pruden argues that this sudden growth was a crucial factor in the escalation of the crisis, as the informal and open style of communication that worked in a small college was not suited for a

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12 “Montreal’s Concrete Campus,” *Montreal Star Weekend Magazine*, November 28, 1964 In 1974, Sir George merged with Loyola College, a Jesuit institution in suburban Montreal West, to become Concordia University.

13 Malcolm Foster, “Computer Riot at Concordia: February 11, 1969” (Unpublished manuscript, ca 1979), 23, Concordia University archives.

large bureaucratic institution.<sup>14</sup>

By 1968, West Indian and other Black students at Sir George were increasingly involved in public debate and activism, participating in the Congress of Black Writers, creating a Black Studies program, and marching in support of Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver after a warrant was issued for his arrest. In October 1968, the Caribbean Students' Society [CSS], Sir George's largest student association, was denied sufficient office space. The dispute brought to light the political issues the CSS saw as part of its mandate; addressing a public meeting about the situation, Kelvin Robinson, a CSS member who later became a de facto spokesperson for the occupation, pointed out that the CSS was "not a social club," but "a social, political, and cultural society geared towards solving the problems of foreign students in a foreign land."<sup>15</sup> In the lead-up to the occupations, activist-minded Sir George students closely followed the Black freedom struggle in its local and international dimensions. The *Georgian* covered events like the Congress, and ran writings by and about key figures in international Black Power including Cleaver, Kwame Nkrumah, Stokely Carmichael, and Huey Newton.<sup>16</sup>

History professor Stephen Scheinberg wrote that before the crisis, most of the "radical faculty" viewed a growing racial consciousness on campus "without disquiet," seeing it as a sign of "self-confidence" that they expected to lead to an African-American style campaign for Black Studies programs.<sup>17</sup> Other faculty were less optimistic about the mood among Black

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14 Keith Pruden, "The Georgian Spirit in Crisis: The Causes of the Computer Centre Riot." (M.A., Concordia University, 2004).

15 "Office Allocations Hit by Caribbean Students," *The Georgian*, October 8, 1968.

16 Gabor Mate, "The Meaning of Black Power," *The Georgian*, October 13, 1967; "Huey Newton Is Black...," *The Georgian*, January 8, 1968; Henry Tarvainen, "No Vietnamese Ever Called Me Nigger and Neither Did Anyone Else...," *The Georgian*, January 30, 1968; Kwame Nkrumah, "The Spectre of Black Power," *The Georgian*, February 15, 1968; "Students Protest Regents' Action on Panther Lecture," *The Georgian*, September 27, 1968; Eldridge Cleaver, "'Stick 'Em up Motherfucker. We Want What's Ours.,'" *The Georgian*, January 21, 1969.

17 Stephen Scheinberg, "Untitled Manuscript" n.d., 5, HA235/P-032, Concordia University archives.

students and other campus radicals. English professor Malcolm Foster, whose unpublished memoir of the crisis provides a valuable look at the institutional dynamics of the university's handling of the affair, ominously recalled "clusters of black students keeping to themselves in a corner of the Hall Building."<sup>18</sup> His colleague Neal Compton saw campus activists as self-segregated and drawn to a "new doomsday politics" of "confrontations, slogans, put-ons" and the threat of "physical force."<sup>19</sup> Complaints against Professor Perry Anderson would see those new politics put into action.

### *The Anderson Crisis*

In April 1968, six West Indian students complained to Sir George's administration that biology professor Perry Anderson was grading them more harshly than their white classmates. Six of seven black students in Anderson's zoology class had failed, and the word on campus was that Anderson never gave a Black student a grade higher than C. The students also claimed that Anderson was friendly towards his white students, often on a first-name basis, but aloof in his dealings with Blacks, whom he would address by "Mister" and "Miss." Finally, they charged that Anderson was an incompetent teacher and had canceled many lectures. Complaints that Anderson was a racist circulated months before the charges were brought to the administration; Foster wrote that Clarence Bayne heard that Anderson was racist "several times" in late 1967.<sup>20</sup>

After a series of informal meetings the university decided that there was insufficient evidence with which to pursue formal charges against Anderson, but the students were never

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18 Foster, "Computer Riot at Concordia: February 11, 1969," 13-14.

19 Neil Compton, "Three Solitudes," *Statement*, February 10, 1969.

20 Foster, "Computer Riot at Concordia: February 11, 1969," 147.

advised of the supposed resolution of the matter. In the fall 1968 semester, bolstered by the radical sentiments of the Congress of Black Writers, Black students at Sir George renewed their efforts to have the university address the issue. There were tendentious meetings between the administration and the students; the university convened a hearing committee, but the students refused to recognize a committee of which they had no say about the membership.

On 29 January, student frustration over the university's unwillingness to meet their demands for a new hearing committee reached a head and the Black students and their allies occupied the computer center on the ninth floor of the Hall Building, demanding a new committee and considerations for the students who had lost class time while working to resolve the situation. On 5 February, a group made up primarily of white supporters, many of them associated with campus Marxist and Maoist movements, occupied the seventh-floor faculty lounge in solidarity. On 10 February, a settlement appeared to be in place, but for reasons that were never clear, the deal either fell through, or, what the Black students thought was a deal was in fact only a proposal; some accounts blame the collapse on the faculty union rejecting a settlement. Either way, the administration reached its breaking point, and asked the police to clear the occupation.

The occupation ended with a shocking display of police violence that went largely unreported then and is still unacknowledged in public memory, which focuses overwhelmingly on the material damages related to the protest. Occupiers told Foster that when they learned the police were coming, they made no plans to actively resist; instead they would lie down and force the police to carry them out. The first encounter with the police was low-key; the police spoke calmly with students, who surrendered some fire axes that were in the room.<sup>21</sup> When the cops

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21 Ibid., 198–199.

returned, they were prepared for violence. Officers who did not have nightsticks armed themselves with chair legs, and many removed their badges.<sup>22</sup>

The police brutalized the protesters. Some of the violence was documented in a letter written by Joey Jagan, son of the Guyanese politician Cheddi Jagan and one of the arrestees. Jagan described how protesters were insulted with racial epithets, beaten, kicked, forced to lie on broken glass, and threatened with guns; one woman had her face burned with cigarettes.<sup>23</sup> Other accounts reveal that the police added insult to injury by targeting arrested women with graphic sexual insults.<sup>24</sup>

Widespread disapproval of the damage done to the Hall Building obscured discussion of police misconduct. Officials praised for the police for acting “strictly according to ‘the book.’”<sup>25</sup> As reporters overlooked police brutality, they also largely overlooked the racist chanting from onlookers. The *Star* and the *Gazette* both reported that the crowd chanted “burn, burn,” leaving out the racial epithet widely reported in other sources.<sup>26</sup>

From early on in the occupation, the protesters and their supporters linked their cause to a broader critique of racism at Sir George and in Canada more generally. The *Georgian* argued that Canadians needed to understand that “Blacks [were] becoming increasingly conscious of the racial problems that exist in this country,” that there was little point in going after one professor

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22 Ibid., 201;209.

23 “Called ‘Nigger’ by Canadian Police in Montreal Fracas,” *The Mirror*, March 2, 1969.

24 “Immoral White Racist Canadian Police Beat, Terrorise, Insult Our Black Brothers and Sisters.,” *Abeng*, March 8, 1969; “Racial Inquisition Claimed at Trial of Students in Canada,” *Public Opinion*, March 1969; “‘Congratulations on Your Restraint,’” *Direction One*, March 1969.

25 “Police Deserve Praise,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 14, 1969; “Praise Flows in for Riot Squad,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 14, 1969; Gerard Vallières, “Police Stayed Cool in Chaos,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 12, 1969; Brian Stewart, “End of a Wild Student Outburst,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 12, 1969; Larry Conroy, “Gilbert Praises Force,” *Montreal Star*, February 12, 1969.

26 “Police Rout SGWU Militants,” *Montreal Star*, February 11, 1969; “Rioters at SGWU Jailed,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 12, 1969.

if the “inherently racist society” he represented went unchallenged.<sup>27</sup> The larger stakes attached to the protest were most clearly expressed in “the Black *Georgian*,” a special edition of the campus newspaper that was published on the eve of the occupation after the *Georgian* turned its facilities over to the BSA in response to the students losing “all faith in the outside press.”<sup>28</sup> The Black *Georgian* featured background information and updates on the protest, letters of support, a statement of position from the Black students, and selections that tied the protest to the Black radical tradition, including Claude McKay’s 1919 poem “If We Must Die” and a reprint of an editorial from the *Dalhousie Gazette* that framed the fight against racism in Canada in terms of Marcus Garvey’s call to “disregard all national boundaries” and “make contact with Africans everywhere.”<sup>29</sup> One commentary asked what activists could do with the Anderson question: the response, “from a Black perspective,” was: “the sky’s the limit,” especially as “the eyes of the nation, in fact those of the greater part of the world” were focused on Montreal.<sup>30</sup> Phillip Griffin wrote a poignant reflection on how the crisis fit into his experience as a Black man living in Montreal. He recounted how, “like most blacks entering Canada,” he saw it as “a sanctuary” from racism until he tried to find an apartment and, being turned down as a potential renter, ended up in a neighborhood he described as an all-Black “colony.” Evoking W.E.B. DuBois, he wrote that Blacks were so alienated from Canada that they were “not even a problem—yet.”<sup>31</sup>

As the protesters framed their action in terms of the fight against racism in Canada, they also connected what they were doing to Black struggles outside of Canada, After seizing the

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27 “Racism Charges Face Biology Professor,” *The Georgian*, January 7, 1969; “Seven Months Later,” *The Georgian*, January 7, 1969.

28 Foster, “Computer Riot at Concordia: February 11, 1969,” 89; David A. Bowman, “Note,” *The Georgian*, January 28, 1969.

29 Claude McKay, “If We Must Die,” *The Georgian*, January 28, 1969; “The Nature of Our Struggle,” *The Georgian*, January 28, 1969.

30 “The Game Nears the End,” *The Georgian*, January 28, 1969.

31 Philip Griffin, “What Happens to a Dream Deferred,” *The Georgian*, January 28, 1969.

computer center, the protesters pledged solidarity “with the struggles of black people everywhere for we are historically linked in the struggle to give birth to the new Society that is making its way out of the womb of the old.”<sup>32</sup> At a rally before the takeover of the faculty lounge, Rocky Jones framed the protest as part of a “world-wide struggle for justice.”<sup>33</sup> At the same rally, Rosie Douglas criticized Canadian PM Pierre Trudeau for his failure to take a strong stand on Rhodesia at a recent Commonwealth First Ministers’ meeting.<sup>34</sup> Presumably to signal allegiance to, or the inspiration of, African-American Black Power, Kelvin Robinson took the name “Brother Rap Brown” during the occupation, and Kennedy Fredericks, another prominent student voice, took the name “Omowale,” a Yoruba honorific that had been bestowed on Malcolm X.<sup>35</sup>

### *Backlash*

After 11 February, the protesters came in for widespread public condemnation. Both the *Star* and the *Gazette* ran supplementary letters-to-the-editor pages to handle the flood of angry mail they received, and Sir George received dozens of letters of protest from the university community, alumni, Montrealers and interested parties from across Canada and the United States.<sup>36</sup> Many writers objected to the protest on the grounds of “law and order,” and focused their remarks on the monetary value of the damages, and not on the alleged racism the students had been protesting.

For supporters of the Black students, the focus of reactions on the monetary value of the

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32 “Black Student Statement,” *The Georgian*, January 31, 1969.

33 Jill Ross, “Students Occupy Faculty Club,” *The Georgian*, February 6, 1969.

34 Norman Williams and Harold Poitras, “SGWU Accused All out on Bail,” *Montreal Star*, March 21, 1969.

35 Foster, “Computer Riot at Concordia: February 11, 1969,” 91.

36 See the folder “Correspondence re: Events of Feb. 11, 1969,” HA1567, Concordia University Archives.

damages spoke to a greater value being placed on material goods than on the humanity of the protesters. The West German activist Karl-Dietrich Wolff said that people were “upset because their god, property had been violated.”<sup>37</sup> NDP MP Ed Broadbent expressed his disappointment in coverage that focused on the damages, and not on “past violence to people because of the colour of their skin.”<sup>38</sup> Clarence Bayne wrote that the public supported the racism expressed by the students who chanted “let the niggers burn” by raising the importance of property “beyond that of human dignity.”<sup>39</sup> Roland Wills, a Nigerian-born Quantitative Methods professor as Sir George, said that a focus on property instead of human lives reflected a “dehumanized” society.<sup>40</sup> More than a year after the crisis, an *Uhuru* contributor wrote that there was “more concern over the fate of a machine” than there was for “the damage done to the dignities of some Black human beings.”<sup>41</sup>

When critics of the protest expressly addressed racism, they often denied the possibility of its existence on campus or in the larger society. The novelist Hugh MacLennan wrote that since Canada “only to a small degree ... [suffered] from a black-white confrontation,” “psychiatry would be a more useful guide than political science” for understanding 11 February.<sup>42</sup> People argued that it was “preposterous” to think that foreign students had faced discrimination, that charges of racism were being “invented ... behind the protection of a bitter attitude and a coloured coat”; that “self-styled spokesmen for the entire Black community” were “[screaming] ‘racism’” because they had failed a class or were trying “to cover up their

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37 Brian McKenna, “Loyola Students Let off Steam as German Activist Speaks out,” *Montreal Star*, February 13, 1969.

38 John Gray, “SGWU Riot Probe Refused,” *Montreal Star*, March 8, 1969.

39 Clarence Bayne, “‘Let the Niggers Burn! Let the Damn Students Rot!’,” *Statement*, February 19, 1969.

40 Peter Desbarats, “Sir George Williams: A Dossier,” *Monday Morning*, March 1969.

41 Maurice Tremblay, “The Facts of Blackness,” *Uhuru*, June 1, 1970.

42 Hugh MacLennan, *Montreal Star*, February 25, 1969.

deficiencies by the cry of racial or religious prejudice”; and that as Canada was not built on slavery, Canadians owed nothing to Blacks.<sup>43</sup>

The protest sparked a public airing of Canadian racist attitudes towards West Indians, notably stereotypes of West Indians as boisterous and carefree. Sir George French Professor Albert Jordan said that the university initially did not take the students seriously since West Indians were “more expansive” than Canadians and often used language that was “very picturesque ... [and] frequently obscene.”<sup>44</sup> The trope of the “carefree West Indian” figured largely in a CBC television report on the occupation. A camera crew took 15 hours of film of the students in the computer centre, but the network only broadcast a clip of protesters letting off steam “calypso singing and dancing.” This appalled the students, who argued it made the protest “look like a rollicking West Indian carnival, rather than the serious affair that it was.”<sup>45</sup> One student charged the media with “[exhibiting] blacks ... [as] ‘happy-go-lucky’ people totally incapable of any serious actions.”<sup>46</sup>

### *Explaining the Crisis*

An unwillingness to acknowledge that Black people in Canada could have legitimate grievances about racism permeated explanations of the Sir George Williams Affair. Observers tried to discount the broader stakes of the protest by framing it as part of a general student

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43 C.H. Arles, *Montreal Star*, February 3, 1969; Andrew Boghen, *The Georgian*, January 17, 1969; Alan Fletcher, *The Georgian*, January 10, 1969; J.A. Fredrickson, *Montreal Star*, February 14, 1969; L.F. Thomay, *Montreal Gazette*, February 18, 1969.

44 Untitled document, nd, HA1567/Correspondence and Information of attacks on SGW University 1969, Concordia University archives; Frances Henry, “Letter to Michael Marsden,” February 13, 1969, HA277, Concordia University archives.

45 Foster, “Computer Riot at Concordia: February 11, 1969,” 152.

46 “A Return to the Colonial Tradition,” *Direction One*, March 1969.

movement with no specifically local dimensions, as a weak imitation of African-American activism, or as the work of sometimes-mysterious alien agents. Meanwhile, the West Indian origins of the students who had lodged the complaint against Anderson were latched onto by nativist and white-supremacist elements to fuel calls for the expulsion of ungrateful guests.

This tendency to dismiss the validity of Black understandings of Canadian racial dynamics came to the fore in a debate between Sir George faculty members. On February 10, Clarence Bayne and Chet Davis wrote a series of questions about Sir George's relationship with Montreal's Black communities, focused on what they saw as the university's failure to adapt to a growing Black population. Could Sir George acknowledge Canada's racism? How would it contribute to the development of a "just society" that "considers the needs of *all* racial and ethnic groups?" Could it "encourage the development of a Black point of view" and see the need for Blacks to independently define themselves and their relationship to Canada?<sup>47</sup>

In their reply to Bayne and Davis, Professors David Sheps (English) and John Laffey (History) denied that Black students faced particular challenges at the university, arguing that Sir George needed a broad commitment to the needs of minority groups in general. "English-Canadians, French-Canadians, Indians, Eskimos, Chinese, Japanese, Italians, Greeks, Jews, Ukrainians, Hungarians," all had distinct situations, and, "in the Canadian context, [the needs of] other groups must take precedence" over those of Blacks. The pair accused Bayne and Davis, by focusing on the Black struggle, as seeing "Canadian history and society" as "replicas of the United States." McGill's Dean of Law, Maxwell Cohen echoed Sheps and Laffey's framing of the crisis as a "replica" of American events, arguing that unlike in the U.S., where Black Power developed out of "a critical mass of real and imagined grievances," Canadian Black activists

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<sup>47</sup> Chet Davis and Clarence Bayne, "Questions That Must Be Asked," *Statement*, February 10, 1969.

lacked a suitable catalyst to justify action, and had a rationale that was “more artificial” than an American movement that gave Canadian “their models and often their leadership.”<sup>48</sup>

The inability to acknowledge that Canadian racism was a legitimate stake in the protest was also revealed in analyses that framed the occupation in terms of general student rebellion, with little or no mention of the specific issue of racism that drove the activists.<sup>49</sup> *Star* journalist Stanley Cohen wrote that the Sir George crisis was “essentially not different” from other campus protests across Canada and the U.S., blurring together a myriad of causes, from campus disputes to racism to anti-war activism, driving those protests. Cohen, quoting the anthropologist Margaret Mead, argued that “it would be a mistake to attribute what is going on to local conditions,” when campus uprisings were ubiquitous.<sup>50</sup> Editorial cartoons echoed the blurring of the lines between the specifics of Sir George and campus uprisings in general, generally depicting the protesters as white hippies, and not more apt caricatures like dashiki-clad Black radicals or beret-wearing Panthers.<sup>51</sup>

Recalling the rumors and fear-mongering about Black terrorism that had followed the Duclos case and the assassination of Malcolm X or the official concern about Black activists as “apostles of violence” that emerged after the Congress, U.S.-centric explanations of the occupation were buttressed by rumors and conspiracy theories that framed it as the work of foreign agitators who had latched onto a local cause.<sup>52</sup> *Star* columnist Bruce Taylor reported

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48 Maxwell Cohen, “Dissent and Violence in the Social Order,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 11, 1969.

49 “Where Is the Moderate Majority?,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 20, 1969; “When Universities Cease to Function,” *Montreal Star*, February 11, 1969.

50 Stanley M. Cohen, “Tidal Wave of Dissent,” *Montreal Star*, February 18, 1969.

51 Ed McNally, “I Think They Should Give All of Us Better Marks,” *Montreal Star*, February 3, 1969; Ed McNally, “I Wrote My Old Man That I Was Majoring in Student Activism,” *Montreal Star*, February 11, 1969.

52 Bruce Taylor, “Montreal Days and Nights,” *Montreal Star*, February 12, 1969; Bruce Taylor, “Montreal Days and Nights,” *Montreal Star*, February 13, 1969; Gerald FitzGerald, “On and off the Record,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 13, 1969.

hearing that Eldridge Cleaver was in Montreal to support the occupation.<sup>53</sup> Foster recalled hearing that “hundreds of carloads” of Black activists were converging on Montreal from New York, and that the destruction of the computer center had been planned at a 1968 Black Power conference in Philadelphia.<sup>54</sup>

As Montrealers rushed to blame outside agitators for the events at Sir George, the Congress of Black Writers came under renewed scrutiny. The Congress is part of the story of the Sir George Affair, in that it acted as a mobilizing factor for students frustrated that the complaint against Anderson had, in their view, been left unresolved, that it spoke to the radicalization of Black activism in Montreal more generally. After February 11, the Congress, and, to a lesser extent, the Hemispheric Conference, came in for particular scrutiny, not as events that contributed to a rising Black consciousness among local activists, but as fronts for planning a violent uprising at Sir George. On 24 February, *The Paper*, a conservative campus newspaper that once referred to the Black students as “a precious minority ... run amuk,” asked if the Congress was “a cover for Carmichael and his aides to work for violence in Montreal?”<sup>55</sup> Vernon Eccles, the Trinidad-born former president of Sir George’s Undergraduate Society, blamed the Congress and the Hemispheric Conference for bringing “Black Power representatives” to Montreal who transformed the Anderson case from “an internal matter,” to one that “outside groups” found useful “in serving their own purposes.”<sup>56</sup>

The desire to frame the protest as the work of foreign actors reached to the highest levels of state. After the occupation, MPs from both sides of the Commons, including Prime Minister

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53 Bruce Taylor, “Montreal Days and Nights,” *Montreal Star*, January 31, 1969.

54 Foster, “Computer Riot at Concordia: February 11, 1969,” 120–121.

55 “Law and Order,” *The Paper*, March 10, 1969; “Untitled,” *The Paper*, February 24, 1969.

56 Vernon Eccles, “Letter to Lionel Chetwynd,” nd, HA1567/Computer Centre Legal Correspondence 1970, Concordia University archives.

Trudeau, said that Canada needed to examine the role of “outside agitators” in fomenting student unrest; former PM John Diefenbaker asked the Commons why figures like Stokely Carmichael were permitted to enter Canada when they had made public commitments to lawlessness.<sup>57</sup> Conservative MP Eldon Woolliams called for an inquiry into why Canada allowed “a large percentage of foreigners to come into Canada—especially from the United States—and cause trouble in our universities.”<sup>58</sup> In May, speaking before the Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs, W.H. Kelley, the RCMP’s Deputy Commissioner for Operations, linked campus disturbances, including Sir George, to visits from foreign activists. Responding to a question from Lincoln Alexander, Canada’s first Black MP, about “militant Black Power in Canada,” Kelley warned that the American Black Power movement was working to expand into Canada and had “direct contact with certain people in Canada.”<sup>59</sup>

Many observers turned their attention from the imagined possibility that the protest was the work of foreign conspirators to the foreign origins of the students who had lodged the complaint against Anderson and many of their allies. On 24 December, in one of the first public mentions of the case, CFCF-TV news editor Bert Canning framed Anderson’s accusers not as the possible victims of racism, but as foreign guests taking advantage of Canada’s goodwill, calling for them to be deported if the charges proved false.<sup>60</sup> Many people echoed Canning’s call to deport the protesters, revealing a nativist attitude towards West Indian migrants. One group of

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57 Robert Stall, “‘Maoists Caused Violence,’” *Montreal Star*, February 15, 1969.

58 Arthur Blakely, “Student Aliens Checked,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 14, 1969.

59 Eber, *The Computer Centre Party*, 283–284; “Campus Unrest Laid to Visitors,” *Montreal Star*, May 7, 1969; “University Unrest Tied to Visits by Militants,” *Montreal Gazette*, May 7, 1969.

60 The editorial is not available, but several replies to it describe its general argument in a similar manner. Leroi Butcher, “The Anderson Affair,” in *Let the Niggers Burn! The Sir George Williams University Affair and Its Caribbean Aftermath*. (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1971), 83; Griffin, “What Happens to a Dream Deferred”; Carl Orton, “A Letter to Bert Cannings,” *The Georgian*, January 28, 1969; Kevin Quinn, “The Computer Nightmare: Then and Now. An Interview with Don McKay,” *The Georgian*, March 7, 1975.

students threatened to report any non-Canadians involved with the occupation to immigration officials.<sup>61</sup> *Star* readers called the protesters “foreigners who abused the hospitality of this country” who should be “sent back where they came from,” as Canadians did not “want that caliber of person in our midst.”<sup>62</sup> Ian Murphy, a Sir George alum and a “former West Indian” sent a telegram to Clarke supporting the “prosecution and deportation” of the protesters.<sup>63</sup>

A Sir George report on the crisis noted that Canning’s editorial, which came when the situation was largely unknown outside Black activist circles, “aroused the ire of the complainants and their supporters.”<sup>64</sup> Black students saw Canning’s comments as an expression of Canada’s racism and a symbol of the alienation that West Indians felt in a country they sought to call home; they criticized Canning for “relegating non-whites to the status of scroungers,” and saw the editorial as a symbol of how Blacks in Canada were so socially alienated that they were “not even considered as a minority group,” but rather “an alien.”<sup>65</sup>

Some of the expressions of racism that came to the fore in the wake of 11 February were linked to Canada’s white supremacy movement. Ernst Zundel is a notorious German-Canadian anti-semitic activist who published several texts that are central to the Holocaust denial movement, and who served time in both Canada and Germany on hate-crimes-related charges.<sup>66</sup> In 1969, Zundel (then “Zeundel”) was Sir George student and a contributor to *The Paper*. Zundel blamed the crisis on Canada’s elites for allowing Blacks to come to Canada; “time-honoured traditions” of Canada as “an ‘all-white society’” were “recklessly thrown overboard” out of guilt

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61 Marc-Andre Cedam and et.al., *The Georgian*, February 4, 1969.

62 W. Keough, *Montreal Star*, February 7, 1969; Joy Daley, George Jacobson *Montreal Star*, February 14, 1969.

63 Ian D. Murphy, “Telegram to D.B. Clarke,” February 13, 1969, HA1567/Correspondence re: Events of Feb. 11, 1969, Concordia University archives.

64 Michael Sheldon, “Untitled Report” (Sir George Williams University, 1969), 14, Concordia University archives.

65 Orton, “A Letter to Bert Cannings”; Griffin, “What Happens to a Dream Deferred.”

66 “Ernst Zundel | Southern Poverty Law Center,” accessed February 7, 2015, <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-files/profiles/ernst-zundel>.

for the region's underdevelopment.<sup>67</sup> One man sent Sir George principal D.B. Clarke a copy of *On Target*, a newsletter linked with the far-right anti-semitic Canadian League of Rights, suggesting that the Sir George library might subscribe to the paper "to keep better informed with truth."<sup>68</sup>

Claims that Canadian racism had little if anything to do with the Anderson situation drew sharp responses. *Direction One*, a radical student paper, saw scapegoating of "outside agitators" as a reflection of the inability to see that "the people of Montreal can and will stand up to their oppressors and eliminate the problems they face."<sup>69</sup> Journalist Laurier Lapierre, a participant in the Hemispheric Conference and the Teach-In, countered Max Cohen's comments about the "artificial" and "imported" character of the uprising with reference to an *Expression* editorial on Canada's racism, linking the occupation to local concerns.<sup>70</sup> Political scientist James Eayrs linked Sir George to American events without losing sight of local context. Eayrs wrote that while "the smoke from Sir George ... was not the same smoke that hung over the ghettos of Watts and Washington and Detroit," "the fire from which it rose feeds on the same tinder and is fanned by the same prevailing winds," a structural racism which he outlined in its specifically Canadian manifestations.<sup>71</sup>

Eayrs concluded with a note that African-American activism had made an indifferent Canadian public aware of the hitherto "invisible" "Black fact in Canada," a comment that must have stung when read by local activists who had been working to make Canada's "Black fact"

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67 Ernest Zeundel, "Politics Past Present and Future," *The Paper*, February 24, 1969.

68 P.F. Mac Kenzie, "Letter to D.B. Clarke," February 16, 1969, HA1567/Correspondence re: Events of Feb. 11, 1969, Concordia University archives.

69 "Professional Press Distortion of the 'Sir George Affair,'" *Direction One*, March 1969, Concordia University archives.

70 Laurier Lapierre, "Student Revolt: Is It Made in Canada?," *Montreal Star*, March 30, 1969.

71 Eayrs, "Canada's Own Black Fact."

“visible” for several years.<sup>72</sup> Building on the initiative of the students who occupied the computer center, members of Montreal’s Black activist community framed the occupation as part of a larger struggle against racism in Canada, especially after 11 February, when for all intents and purposes the charges against Anderson were off the table, expanding their critiques to address issues distinct from, though linked to, racism on a Canadian college campus.

### *Sir George and Black Activism in Montreal*

While the students who charged Anderson initially had strong support from Montreal’s Black activist community, in the aftermath of February 11, widespread disgust with the destruction of the computer center meant that activists and associations who preferred to work within institutional frameworks—especially those who had only recently committed to creating Canada’s first national Black activist group—needed to distance themselves from the protest to maintain their credibility. In the post-11 February environment, the sometimes-fractured nature of Black activism in Montreal and Canada was sharply revealed. Yet, as it revealed divisions with the city’s Black activist community, the crisis also was a rallying point for calls for unity and for the promotion of a more independent activist approach.

At the outset of the protest, Canadian Black activists, both those committed to working within institutional means and those committed to working outside the system, seemed unanimous in their support for a resolution to the complaints against Anderson. Richard Leslie lent the NCA’s support to demands for a fair hearing and urged the university to counter-act

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72 Ibid.

“malicious” anti-Black messages circulating in the media.<sup>73</sup> Stanley Chiwaro, President of the CSS, and LeRoy Butcher and Philip Griffin, co-chairs of the BSA wrote in support of the protest, and McGill’s West Indian Society offered “any assistance necessary for the ever-evasive Black Justice.” Letters also came from Jules Oliver and Rocky Jones—who had appeared at the Congress—of the Black United Front in Halifax, who condemned Sir George for “[protecting] a white racist ... who will only brainwash the brothers and sisters and perpetuate a suppressive system,” and the Afro-American Progressive Society of Toronto (whose leader, Ted Watkins, had predicted increased racial violence in Canada in the wake of Martin Luther King’s assassination), who were “prepared to come to the assistance of our brothers and sisters,” and willing to “use any means necessary to secure freedom.”<sup>74</sup>

A week after the occupation ended, a meeting of over 300 people at Montreal’s UNIA hall revealed some of the tensions rooted in different concepts of how to address the crisis. According to the *Gazette*, Kendall Smith, a Harlem-based activist and preacher who came to Montreal to support African-American students who were detained on 11 February, and Chet Davis, the Sir George professor who had led the march on the U.S. consulate in support of Eldridge Cleaver both urged a militant response. Moderate activists, reportedly, urged restraint.<sup>75</sup>

These more moderate voices were echoed in responses from an older generation of activists. Reverend Charles Este of Union United compared the occupation’s outcome to how “we old-timers ... were able to victoriously fight racial battles fiercer than today—but without vengeance, animosity and ill-will.”<sup>76</sup> Montreal’s UNIA chapter head Henry Langdon, responding

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73 Richard Leslie, “Letter to D.B. Clarke,” January 22, 1969, HA1567/Correspondence re: Events of Feb. 11, 1969, Concordia University archives.

74 “Black Students’ Position Draws Widespread Support,” *The Georgian*, January 28, 1969.

75 “U.S. Activists Call for Militancy,” *Montreal Gazette*, February 19, 1969.

76 Charles H. Este, *Montreal Star*, February 15, 1969.

to a historical account of Canadian racism and resistance to it written by Wouter de Wet after 11 February, wrote the *Gazette* to congratulate De Wet for his work. Langdon, no doubt conscious of explanations of the crisis that linked Black activists to radical critiques of Canada, noted that de Wet gave “conclusive proof of the black man’s loyalty” to Canada, thereby distancing “loyal” Blacks from the protest.<sup>77</sup>

Alongside divides between generations of activists, divides within the younger generation of Black activists in Montreal had profound effects on those who had decided that the occupation was a poor tactical move. While few of the protesters might have expected an “old-timer” like Este to lend his support, these young people found themselves in a double-bind, rejected by the occupation’s supporters for a perceived lack of loyalty to the race and rejected by whites who saw them as guilty by association because of the color of their skin. A.R. Ali described the difficult position in which he and other West Indians who opposed the occupation found themselves; fellow West Indians called them “racists, uncle tomists, opportunists, boot-lickers, [and] stooges of the administration,” and whites called them “dirty niggers, revolutionary pigs who should be deported, [and] ingrates.”<sup>78</sup>

Activists who had committed themselves at the BPC to working within institutional structures to fight racism in Canada found themselves performing a balancing act, in which they distanced themselves from the destruction of the computer centre, but criticized the racism that permeated the event and harnessed the crisis to reinforce their calls for institutional structures

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77 Henry J. Langdon, *Montreal Star*, March 13, 1969; Wouter De Wet, “Our Blacks -- a Sad but Proud People,” *Montreal Star*, March 8, 1969; Wouter De Wet, “Heroes Inspired Uphill Struggle,” *Montreal Star*, March 8, 1969.

78 A.R. Ali, “The Price of Courage to Disagree,” *The Georgian*, February 19, 1969; A.R. Ali may be Rafeek Ali, a Sir George student who addressed the BPC. In a separate interview, Rafeek Ali echoed many of these sentiments. see: Peter Moon and Peter McAuliffe, “Canada’s Worst Student Riot,” *Canadian Magazine*, April 5, 1969.

with which to fight racism. Windsor activist and BPC keynote speaker Howard McCurdy wrote that whites in Montreal “ought to be undergoing an agony of conscience in respect to [their] treatment of Blacks,” but criticized protesters “who would make a racial war over every racial hurt ... who regard confrontation as the principle mode of solving problems rather than a last resort,” and then criticized Quebec for having “consistently ignored the need for effective Human Rights Legislation.”<sup>79</sup> *Expression* noted that the taunts heard outside the Hall Building revealed “a clear appreciation of the Canadian mind,” but foresaw the possibility that Canadians could recognize their racism, “and from this awareness provide the instruments—legal, educational and others” with which to fight it.<sup>80</sup> Richard Leslie blamed the university for lacking mechanisms to handle the accusation, which was yet more evidence of the need for a human rights code and tribunal.<sup>81</sup> These criticisms resonated with the Sir George administration. Before the release of a final report absolving Anderson, the university named McCurdy, along with Daniel Hill and Harold Potter, all of whom took part in the BPC, as potential members of a potential (and ultimately unneeded) appeal committee.<sup>82</sup>

As had the Congress, Sir George had an important impact on some Black activists’ thinking about inter-racial alliances. Early in the occupation, the protesters drew attention to the inter-racial makeup of their forces, noting that “the occupiers are fairly evenly distributed among racial lines” and that “black-white unity and an anti-administration position has been emphasized.”<sup>83</sup> Douglas, who had expressed doubts about the viability of Black-white alliances during the Congress, was grateful for the work of whites taking part in the occupation, saying

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79 Howard McCurdy, March 31, 1969, MG31 H181 Vol. 3, Library and Archives Canada, Clarence Bayne fonds.

80 “Canadian Liberalism: Fact or Fiction,” *Expression*, Winter 1968, 5–6.

81 Richard Leslie, “The Anti-Black Backlash--Montreal’s Grim Fact of Life,” *Montreal Star*, March 11, 1969.

82 Sheldon, “Memo to John O’Brien,” May 28, 1969, HA1567/Anderson Hearing and Appeal (events after Feb. 11, 1969), Concordia University archives.

83 “Occupation Continues,” *The Georgian*, January 31, 1969.

they were “not doing a favor to black students, but a favor to humanity.”<sup>84</sup>

After 11 February, some parts of Montreal’s Black activist community were less interested in talking about Black/white collaboration, and more interested in working in an independent mode. NCA president Dorothy Wills wrote that Black Montrealers needed to “educate each other,” “prepare [themselves] to take leadership roles in diverse areas,” and stop taking “handouts from the white man” or allowing whites to hold positions of authority in Black groups.<sup>85</sup> One edition of *Bulletin*, a newsletter published by a group called the February 11<sup>th</sup> Defence Committee, included a self-criticism of Black activism in Montreal charging that Black activists in Montreal “[failed] to object to white-inspired ideas.”<sup>86</sup> Others were cautious about moving away from cross-racial alliances. Referring to a call in *Bulletin* for “a movement of black people, by black people, for black people,” *Expression* warned that “all-black organizations” would not “be able to do it alone in the Canadian situation.” Given their particular circumstances, Blacks in Canada had to think tactically: while solidarity was necessary, “Black people doing their ‘own thing’” was not a viable approach; it was, in fact, “the formula for total destruction.”<sup>87</sup>

Debates about the relevance of cross-racial alliances in the wake of the events of 11 February were linked to debates about the relevance of Black Power in Canada. Richard Lord, the Black vice-president of the Quebec Liberal Party called Black Power activists publicity seekers, terrorists and racists who did “nothing to better conditions” of Black communities.<sup>88</sup>

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84 Victor Steinberg, “SGWU Students Hit Faculty Club,” *Montreal Star*, February 5, 1969; Eber, *The Computer Centre Party*, 138.

85 Dorothy Wills, April 6, 1969, HA43/Black Community, Solicitations, 1969-1971, Concordia University archives.

86 The February 11th Defense Committee, “Bullet In,” No Date, no. 6.

87 “Editorial: Black Organizations of Black People, by Black People, for Black People,” *Expression*, Spring 1969, 1;4.

88 “Black Power Method Rapped by City Negro,” *Montreal Gazette*, March 24, 1969.

Wills responded that racism was “integral” to Canadian society, and not “perpetuated” by “sensation seekers,” as Lord claimed. She countered his reading of Black Power as terroristic, framing it as the desire to “redefine human relationships so that blacks and whites will act freely in a liberated and humane environment.” What was needed from a leader like Lord, she wrote, was a vision of how to “reduce the discrimination suffered by black people ... in Quebec so that there will be no need for black people to be driven to violence out of bitter despair.”<sup>89</sup> *Uhuru*’s editors saw their engagement with Black Power as separating them from those in the city’s West Indian community whom the paper called a “neocolonialist” “Black Bourgeoisie” who engaged in mainstream politics using “the tactics and organizational forms of the British, Canadians and Americans who are the masters of their butts.”<sup>90</sup>

### *Gendered Responses to Sir George*

On 1 March, Arnim Eustace, a former member of the Caribbean Conference Committee, wrote a letter to a Vincentian newspaper praising the actions of the Sir George protesters, saying they were heroes for standing up to the university. They had, Eustace wrote, “[chosen] to be MEN, not ‘nice niggers.’”<sup>91</sup> Eustace’s portrayal of the protests as an explicitly male action foreshadowed the emergence in Montreal’s Black radical discourse of a strongly gendered and sexualized approach to talking about Black Power and Black revolutionary identity. While the erasure of women’s voices in Montreal Black activist circles was a longstanding phenomenon, as seen, for example, in the lack of womens’ voices at the Congress, the fact that women were so

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89 Dorothy Wills, *Montreal Gazette*, April 18, 1969.

90 Leon Jacobs, “What Unity??? Tighten-Up,” *Uhuru*, June 22, 1970.

91 Arnim Eustace, *The Vincentian*, March 1, 1969.

involved in the occupation makes an overlooking of their work more pointed. While Eustace thought of the protesters as “men,” Bukka Rennie, one of the activists at the center of the occupation, recalled how women played a key role in the protest.<sup>92</sup> As we have seen, women were targeted for particular abuse by the police, and in fact a full one-third of the people arrested on 11 February were women.

In the aftermath of 11 February, there was an important shift in the gendering of discourse about Black identity and Black revolution, namely, criticisms of white women—and Black men’s potential relationships with them—that had not previously appeared anywhere in the documentary record circulated in publications with direct links to the Sir George Affair, revealing a new tendency in the gendered dynamics of Black Power activism. David Austin notes that among some parts of Black activist circles in Montreal, white women were seen as a potential distraction and “source of division,” and were thus sometimes discouraged from getting close to Black men.<sup>93</sup>

The tendency to frame interracial relationships as a negative force in the development of Black consciousness clearly came to the fore after the occupation. The February 11<sup>th</sup> Defence Committee, a group made up of Sir George students and other Black activists, published a number of fliers under the title of “Bulletin,” (sometimes styled “Bullet In”) that updated readers on the legal proceedings of the people arrested after the occupation and other commentary on the Black struggle in Canada. One copy had an epigraph that read: “The greatest problem which faces the black revolution is the political retardation of black men by their association with white women.” The same flier featured a “Letter from Black Sister in Toronto” who expressed her

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92 Michael West, “Origins Of The February Revolution...40 Years Later,” *The Lloyd Best Institute of the West Indies*, February 28, 2010, <http://www.lloydbestinstitute.org/2010/02/origins-of-the-february-revolution-40-years-later/>.

93 Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation*, 124.

anger at inter-racial dating,” and an article which described white women as being able to “confuse” Black men, and then pointed out that even though “our enemies are White People,” some members of the Black community “still want to get married to the enemy.”<sup>94</sup> Similar critiques appeared in *Uhuru*. In a letter to advice columnist “Dear Sister” “Thomas White” described being refused membership in a “revolutionary Black group” because of his white girlfriend. “Dear Sister” told “Thomas White” that “proud Black men have proud Black girlfriends” and counseled him to read Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* as a way to help “move from negro naiveté to Blackness.” Given that this letter appeared in the first issue of the paper—and the obvious dig implied in the writer’s name—there’s little doubt that this letter was manufactured by *Uhuru*’s editors to draw attention to an issue about which they concerned.<sup>95</sup>

The Sir George Williams Affair had a complicated set of effects on Black activists in Montreal, sharpening radical critique and escalating assertions of independence to previously unseen levels; these escalations, sometimes couched in language about “enemies” were not seen as helpful by some activist tendencies who tried to find away to disavow an intensified radical spirit while maintaining a critical position towards Canadian racism.

Meanwhile, old-guard leftists on campus saw the protest over Anderson as a clear breaking point in relationships between Marxist and Black radical tendencies.

### *Left Critiques*

Vivian Carson, a former editor of the *Georgian*, called the occupation “a good

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94 The February 11th Defense Committee, “Bullet In.”

95 “Dear Sister,” *Uhuru*, July 4, 1969.

revolutionary tactic,” but one lacking “a truly revolutionary cause,” as “the revolution is not to be found” in university grades.<sup>96</sup> After 11 February, Marxist activists and academics, some whom had initially supported the occupation, sharply criticized the protest, characterizing the Black students as politically naïve and nihilist. With the disdain they showed for race-based political activism, Foster wrote, these leftists “ended up sounding like a ‘Rednecks for Wallace’ rally.”<sup>97</sup>

At the center of Marxist critiques of the protest was the American historian of slavery Eugene Genovese, who took an appointment at Sir George in 1968. Genovese made a few public statements about Black Power in the months before the crisis. In September, he expressed fears that Black Power contained the seeds for reactionary politics, in that Black Power leadership might be convinced to support the suppression of anti-colonial movements in Asia, Latin America and Africa in exchange for “[having] their lot at home improved,” a reading that overlooked the links that Black Power made between the United States’ domestic racism and its foreign aggression—the central message that the Black panthers brought to the Hemispheric Conference.<sup>98</sup> Speaking to the *Gazette*’s Phil Winslow after the Congress, however, Genovese put radical Blacks at the forefront of revolutionary activism, arguing that a viable Black-white leftist alliance could only happen once white leftists accepted Black demands for full control of their communities and acknowledged the racism in their own ranks.<sup>99</sup> Sir George forced Genovese to modify his position on what was required for a working inter-racial alliance, as he would put the onus on Blacks to prove their radical *bona fides*.

Because of his work as a historian of Black America, Sir George turned to Genovese for

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96 Vivian Carson, “Letter,” *The Georgian*, February 26, 1969.

97 Foster, “Computer Riot at Concordia: February 11, 1969,” 236.

98 “Extend Black Power Abroad,” *Montreal Star*, September 9, 1968.

99 Phillip Winslow, “These Militant Black Writers Spurn White, Western Society,” *Montreal Gazette*, October 18, 1968.

“expert” advice on how to deal with the Black students, a move criticized both by faculty and students.<sup>100</sup> Students derided faculty who “[prided] themselves on being ‘experts on black people,’” and who thought “they were able to determine the feelings of [a] people” that they had “dehumanized,” and criticized Genovese and his colleagues for not understanding Canadian racism, noting that many of the professors were Americans who thought “in American categories and [were] trying to solve American problems.”<sup>101</sup> Professor Roland Wills wondered how faculty could “be knowledgeable about black affairs” what they did not “even *know* the black students!”<sup>102</sup>

In March, Genovese and some colleagues wrote an essay critiquing the occupation through their Marxist lens. The professors had “no intention of intruding ... into the internal affairs of the black movement,” but maintained that they could not accept Black radicalism until its leaders “speak as radicals, define their position in relation to those reactionary blacks who are their temporary allies, and enter into ideological discussions with us.” They criticized Black Power for being theoretically empty and having nationalist tendencies that left it prone to reaction, calling the protesters “mythmakers” who had filled a “theoretical vacuum” in contemporary anti-racist activism, and argued that ideological rifts in African national movements and in the African-American liberation movement, and the support given to Nixon by some CORE activists revealed how nationalism could turn a radical critique into reaction. They also expressed their confusion as to why Blacks in Canada, given the small numbers of indigenous Blacks and the large role played by foreign students in the movement, would be drawn to Black nationalism.<sup>103</sup> In 1971, Genovese dedicated his book *In Red and Black* to Sir

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100 Foster, “Computer Riot at Concordia: February 11, 1969,” 33.

101 “A Return to the Colonial Tradition”; “The Academic Contract,” *Direction One*, March 1969.

102 Desbarats, “Sir George Williams: A Dossier”; Foster, “Computer Riot at Concordia: February 11, 1969,” 237.

103 Eugene D. Genovese et al., “University Must Be Maintained as Center of Free Thought,” *The Georgian*,

George professors who had “said no to the demagogic manipulation of the oppression suffered by black people, and no to reactionary nihilism masquerading as revolutionary action.”<sup>104</sup>

Genovese was not the only leftist to see Black radicalism as theoretically empty in the wake of Sir George. In March, Carey McWilliams, editor of *The Nation*, wrote to Sir George History professor Stephen Scheinberg to discuss a possible article about the occupation. Their conversation and Scheinberg’s unpublished manuscript revealed how leftists on the faculty saw Black Power as an unsophisticated political tendency; Scheinberg told McWilliams that he welcomed the opportunity to offer “a radical alternative” to what he and his colleagues saw as “an infantile nihilism” on display at Sir George.<sup>105</sup> Scheinberg’s manuscript focused on what he saw as the protesters’ political naiveté, criticizing their grounding in “those vague fantasies of Guevara, Fanon, Cohn-Bendit, and Huey Newton,” thinkers he characterized as “on the threshold of consciousness,” and seeing in a positive reaction to a Black Power ideas expressed at a campus event how “a good many of our students, black and white, could be very gullible indeed.”<sup>106</sup>

Like those who denied the relevance of any sort of structural racism to the protest, these Marxist critiques, many of them coming from American-born academics with no real connection to either local Black communities or West Indian concerns, overlooked the experience of racism shared by West Indian students and Black people with a longer history in Canada and the extent to which their activism was rooted not in Eurocentric Marxist theory, but in specifically West Indian and other transnational Black critiques. In the days and months after 11 February, relieved

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March 12, 1969.

104 Eugene D Genovese, *In Red and Black: Marxian Explorations in Southern and Afro-American History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1971), lviii.

105 Carey McWilliams, March 13, 1969, HA235/P-032, Concordia University archives; Stephen Scheinberg, March 18, 1969, HA235/P-032, Concordia University archives.

106 Scheinberg, “Untitled Manuscript,” 4.

of the tactical need to maintain their focus on the actions of the Sir George administration, the protesters and their allies turned their attention to analyzing and criticizing Canada's role in the economic marginalization of the West Indies and West Indian leaders' complicity in that process.

### *Sir George in the West Indies*

After 11 February, West Indian and other Black activists in Canada and in the Caribbean increasingly used the Sir George Williams Affair as a way to open up discussion about Canada's relationship with the Caribbean, a topic that had not received a tremendous amount of space in public debate during the protest and occupation, but was a central concern for West Indian activist-intellectuals.

The Sir George Williams Affair intersected with growing discontent and rebelliousness among young people in the West Indies where, especially since the "Rodney riots" the previous autumn, Black Power had been an important topic of public debate. Frustrated with the Caribbean's continued economic dependency and their own sense of alienation from the political system, activist students made Canada's extractive relationship with the West Indies a key issue in West Indian their responses to events in Montreal. Soon after the occupation ended, a goodwill tour of the West Indies by Canada's Governor-General, Roland Michner, became a flashpoint for young West Indians seeking to show support for the students arrested in Montreal. The largest of these protests took place in Port-of-Spain; these were an important moment in the development of an alliance between workers and students which played a key part in the 1970 Black Power revolution.

Canadian and West Indian leaders were acutely aware that the arrest of dozens of West

Indian students at a protest that caused millions of dollars' worth of damage to a university might have wide-ranging implications for relationships between Canada and the Caribbean. On 25 February, Clarence Bayne led a delegation of activists meeting External Affairs Minister Mitchell Sharp to discuss the possible fates of West Indian students detained on 11 February; Sharp extended the meeting well past its scheduled time because he was "very concerned about any possible repercussions there might be in respect to our relations with the British West Indies."<sup>107</sup> In the wake of the occupation, West Indian leaders and opinion-makers went into damage-control mode, eager to smooth any ruffled feathers in Canada caused by the actions of West Indian protesters. Bermudan premier Henry Tucker expressed fears that a backlash against West Indians might lead to the banning of foreign students from Canada<sup>108</sup> Eastern Caribbean Commissioner Novelle Richards wrote to Sir George principal D.B. Clarke to express his regret for what had happened, to assure him that the governments he represented held Sir George "in high esteem," and to express his hope that the incident would not impair future good relations between the Eastern Caribbean and the university.<sup>109</sup> Georgetown, Guyana's *Weekend Post* expressed its concern that the crisis might lead Canada to limit the admission of West Indian students or cut aid to the University of Guyana.<sup>110</sup>

Meanwhile, West Indian radicals in Montreal and in the Caribbean used the Affair as a means by which to open up criticism of Canada for maintaining a predatory relationship with the

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107 "'Calm Justice' Asked in SGWU Trials," *Montreal Gazette*, February 25, 1969; "Black Professor Fears Backlash," *Montreal Star*, February 25, 1969; Robert Stall, "Riot Worries Sharp," *Montreal Star*, February 27, 1969.

108 Jill Millikin, "Bermuda Ex-PM Concerned Canada Will Exclude Blacks," *Montreal Gazette*, February 18, 1969; Dave McFarlane, "Bermuda Anxious over SGWU Row," *Montreal Star*, February 18, 1969; "Arrested Students Are Suspended," *The Advocate-News*, February 19, 1969.

109 Novelle Richards, "Letter to D.B. Clarke," February 13, 1969, HA1567/Correspondence re: Events of Feb. 11, 1969, Concordia University archives.

110 "Students' Oyster," *Weekend Post*, February 16, 1969.

West Indies. Their critiques targeted many of the issues that had circulated in debates about West Indian/Canadian relations over the course of the decade, including the effects of the Domestic Scheme, unfair trading practices, and an aid regime that stymied the development of West Indian economic sovereignty. Crucially, these critiques of Canada's relationship with the West Indies were all framed as reflections of the same racism that shaped life for Black people in Canada. Calvin Alleyne, Secretary of Barbados's opposition People's Progressive Movement, wrote that grants to West Indian students amounted to little when compared to the benefits that West Indians brought to Canada; the "thousands of [West Indian] girls" paying for a Canadian education by working as domestics were just one way in which Canada benefited "from cheap West Indian labour."<sup>111</sup> Two newspapers that began publishing in the wake of the Rodney crisis in Jamaica, Trinidad's *Moko* and Jamaica's *Abeng*, sharply attacked Canada along similar lines.<sup>112</sup> *Moko* charged that Canada had "shown little genuine goodwill towards our people for the last fifty years." Canadian aid was "paltry compensation for the millions, which Canada has extracted, and continues to extract," from the region. The paper also noted that while West Indians saw Canada as a "haven" from racism, Blacks in Nova Scotia lived in conditions that were worse than those in Harlem or the U.S. South.<sup>113</sup> *Abeng* called Jamaica's "relations with Canada" as "good only for Canada, not us," noting that while Canadian aid to the West Indies was less than the region's trade deficit with Canada.<sup>114</sup>

Former members of the CCC worked to raise Caribbean awareness of the situation in

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111 Calvin Alleyne, *The Advocate-News*, March 1, 1969.

112 Anthony Bogues, "The Abeng Newspaper and the Radical Politics of Postcolonial Blackness," in *Black Power in the Caribbean*, ed. Kate Quinn (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 76–96; Robert Hill, "From New World to Abeng: George Beckford and the Horn of Black Power in Jamaica, 1968-1970," *Small Axe* 11, no. 3 (October 2007): 1–15; Rupert Lewis, "Learning to Blow the Abeng: A Critical Look at Anti-Establishment Movements of the 1960s and 1970s," *Small Axe*, no. 1 (February 1997).

113 "Mokojumbie," *Moko*, February 28, 1969; "Mokojumbie," *Moko*, March 14, 1969, no. 10 edition.

114 "Canada's White Lies," *Abeng*, March 15, 1969.

Montreal. The *Antigua Star* reported that Alfie Roberts cabled Tim Hector from Montreal to brief him on fund-raising efforts to defray the legal fees incurred by the protesters. Hector told the paper that although none of their co-citizens were arrested on 11 February, Antiguan should “make the greatest possible effort to assist fellow West Indians in grave difficulties,” and that he was going to “urge the local Afro Caribbean movement and the graduates’ society to petition the local government” for financial assistance.<sup>115</sup> Arnim Eustace wrote the *Vincentian* from Windsor, Ontario, arguing that it was crucial for “our people at home” to understand that the crisis unfolded in a society that was “basically racist.” Eustace argued that February 11 was not a story of violence or destruction, but a question of “dignity,” in which the students had a choice between “[licking] the boots of the professor,” or fighting for their rights.<sup>116</sup>

Soon after 11 February, two of the occupiers of the computer center, Pat Townsend and Terrence Ballantyne (one of the students who lodged the complaint against Anderson), went on a West Indian speaking tour to raise awareness of what had happened and to raise money for the defense of the people arrested. They discussed prominent racist incidents that had taken place during their time in Canada, including the Nova Scotia cemetery incident, the Baylis case, the Domestic Scheme, and employment and housing discrimination faced by West Indian students in Canada; they also described the racism and police brutality that marked the end of the occupation, all in an attempt to urge West Indians to undertake a “serious reconsidering” of the idea that Canada was a “refuge” for Black people.<sup>117</sup>

The evidence that the pair provided facilitated analyses that framed the conditions faced

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115 “WI Students in Canada Seek Our Aid,” *Antigua Star*, March 5, 1969.

116 Eustace.

117 February 11th Student Defense Committee, “WI Students Explain to Us,” *Antigua Star*, March 15, 1969; “Discrimination in Canada?,” *The Nation*, February 28, 1969; “\$106,000 Legal Aid for Eight in Canada,” *Express*, February 22, 1969; “‘Destruction Only Started When the Police Moved in,’” *Express*, February 23, 1969.

by West Indians in Canada as part and parcel of the same problems faced by West Indians at home. After Ballantyne and Townsend spoke at the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies in Jamaica, the political scientist Trevor Munroe, a member of the New World Group, linked Canadian racism to West Indian poverty, telling the crowd that the racism experienced by West Indians living abroad had its roots in their being “forced out of these territories because there aren’t sufficient means for education or livelihood.”<sup>118</sup> *Uhuru* and *Abeng* echoed the links Munroe made between Canadian racism and West Indian poverty in a joint editorial calling the idea that West Indians went to Canada because of a lack of racism there “a lot of pigshit”; West Indians were not heading north “out of any desire to participate in Canadian nation building,” but “to flee the stifling oppressive conditions” at home.<sup>119</sup>

Canadian corporations, notably the aluminum and banking industries, came in for sharp criticism from West Indian radicals after 11 February. Responding to a report of a 6% increase in regional GDP, Delisle Worrell of the Montreal New World Group argued that this new wealth did not increase living standards for the people, but went to Canada’s aluminum giant Alcan, “the old-style plantocracy and merchant class,” and “foreign banking and insurance” companies.<sup>120</sup> *Moko* vilified two Canadian aluminum firms, Alcan and Demba, for their role in the promotion of “race, class and caste discrimination in the West Indies,” calling the companies a “new set of white slave masters.”<sup>121</sup> Geddes Granger (now Makandal Daaga) one of the student leaders of the 1970 uprising in Trinidad, observed that foreign capital created a system in Trinidad in which “an ostensibly ‘black’ government” did not represent the interests of the people but “[strove] to

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118 Transcript of Pat Townsend, Terrence Ballantyne and Trevor Munroe at the University of the West Indies, 20 February 1969. Author’s personal collection, with thanks to Professor Rupert Lewis for allowing me to copy it.

119 K. Benson, “Caribbean Exiles Assist Struggle,” *Uhuru*, August 18, 1969.

120 Delisle Worrell, “Neo-Colonialism and Economic Exploitation,” *Uhuru*, April 13, 1970.

121 “Mokojumbie,” March 14, 1969.

perpetuate ... a system which serves to provide huge profits for the neo-colonialist foreign firms like the Royal Bank of Canada, [and] Alcan.”<sup>122</sup>

Observers linked the Canadian corporations that profited from Canada’s relationship with the West Indies back to Sir George, noting that the university’s Board of Governors counted men who controlled important Canadian interests in the Caribbean including the president of Marigot Investments, which had extensive holdings in the region, Allen Bronfman of Seagram distillery, producers of rum in the West Indies, and R.E. Powell, the honorary president of Alcan, the aluminum company that extracted significant wealth from Jamaica and Guyana.<sup>123</sup> Not only did these men “effectively control the means of production,” and “play direct roles in the oppression of the Caribbean people,” they kept compliant Caribbean governments from exposing Canadian racism by pressuring them to deny mounting demands to ask the Canadian government to conduct an official inquiry into the affair.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, there was a strong fear among activists that connections between the Board and the corporate establishment would have repercussions for those awaiting trial for the events of 11 February, especially once it was revealed that an attorney suggested by the Eastern Caribbean Trade Commissioner to represent the students was also retained by Marigot.<sup>125</sup>

As Canada was presented as a vampiric power in the West Indies, regional leaders were harshly criticized for allowing Canada to dominate the region’s economy and for putting relations with Canada ahead of local interests as they responded to the events in Montreal.

*Vincentian* reader Bert John noted that local governments seemed incapable of confronting

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122 Edmund Michael, “Interview with Dave & Geddes,” *Uhuru*, March 2, 1970.

123 Douglas, “Canadian Racism and Sir-George.”

124 Rosie Douglas, “Solidarity Day against Canadian Racism and beyond,” *Uhuru*, March 23, 1970.

125 W.R.L. Friday, “‘Revolt’ Students Feel Let down,” *Trinidad Guardian*, November 9, 1969; “To the Premiers of the Eastern Caribbean,” *Uhuru*, March 2, 1970.

Canada, even “in the face of obvious ills on the part of that government.”<sup>126</sup> Carl Lumumba, a former Sir George student born in Barbados and living in Montreal, wrote that West Indian governments’ responses to the crisis “[revealed] the mode of operation of neo-colonialism. That is, the use of the ‘native’ puppet intermediary.”<sup>127</sup> M.J. St. B. Sylvester, a Grenadian *Uhuru* reader, chastised the Grenadian government for being “too busy doing business with ... white Canadians” to help the “victims of Sir George Williams University’s insult to black people.”<sup>128</sup> W.R.L. Friday—who in 1972 became Grenada’s Minister of Education—echoed Sylvester’s charge, attacking Premier Eric Gairy for “[fluttering] about Canada helping Canadian companies sell Grenada’s land” instead of helping his countrymen in Montreal.<sup>129</sup>

Aid, always a central concern in Canadian/West Indian relationships, became a target for radical critics who saw West Indian leaders as being unwilling to challenge Canada on racism out of fear that such a challenge would threaten aid flows. W.R.L. Friday accused West Indian governments of treating the racial aspects of the protest “with an intolerable ‘hush, hush’” in order to protect the money flow from Canada.<sup>130</sup> When Jamaica’s Solicitor General came to Montreal to work out a plea agreement for Jamaican defendants, Rosie Douglas painted the move as an example of a state cooperating “with Canadian racists to exploit their own people in an effort to continue to serve their white imperialist masters.”<sup>131</sup> Douglas argued that the neocolonial nature of the relationship between Canada and the West Indies was revealed not only by the way in which Caribbean leaders had “expressed full confidence in Canadian justice,” but

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126 Bert John, *The Vincentian*, April 12, 1969.

127 Carl Lumumba, “The West Indies and the Sir George Williams Affair: An Assessment,” in *Let the Niggers Burn! The Sir George Williams University Affair and Its Caribbean Aftermath.*, ed. Dennis Forsythe (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1971), 184.

128 M.J. St. B. Sylvester, *Uhuru*, August 18, 1969.

129 Friday, “‘Revolt’ Students Feel Let down.”

130 Ibid.

131 Rosie Douglas, “Jamaican Government Attempts to Destroy Black Solidarity,” *Uhuru*, September 29, 1969.

also in their desire to insulate themselves from charges of complicity by seeking “a commitment [from Canada] that nothing about racism should be mentioned in court.”<sup>132</sup>

At Townsend and Ballantyne’s Mona speech, Munroe called on UWI students to picket Canadian businesses, to demonstrate that the trial of the people arrested on 11 February would have “implications for the Canadian economy in terms of major investments ... in the West Indies.” While there appear to have been no pickets at Canadian businesses in Kingston in the days that followed, the visit of Canadian Governor-General Roland Michner in the following weeks provided the protests Munroe was hoping for.

When Michner arrived in the West Indies, the press treated his appearance with all of the adulation and deference due a visiting monarch—the coverage underscored emerging critiques of Canada as an imperial power in the region. In Barbados, the *Advocate-News* ran a special three-page section providing stories on this “man of wide knowledge,” and his wife, “a scholar and musician”<sup>133</sup> Even the *Vanguard*, Trinidad’s Oil Workers’ Trades Union [OWTU] newspaper, which, since the Rodney ban, had been regularly featuring reprints of radical texts from figures such as Malcolm X, James Boggs, and Kwame Nkrumah, ran a “Special Canada Supplement” to mark the Governor-General’s visit.<sup>134</sup>

Some West Indian observers used Michner’s visit to express their hopes that the events in Montreal would not threaten West Indian relationships with Canada. The *Gleaner* called Michner’s visit a “timely reminder of the long and friendly relations with our great northern neighbour,” relations which included Jamaicans’ “meaningful contributions” to Canadian society, and Canada’s role in providing Jamaicans with access to higher education.<sup>135</sup> Vernon Jamadar,

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132 Douglas, “Canadian Racism and Sir-George.”

133 *The Advocate-News*, February 21, 1969.

134 “Special Canada Supplement,” *The Vanguard*, February 1969.

135 “Welcome,” *The Daily Gleaner*, February 12, 1969.

leader of Trinidad's opposition Democratic Labour Party, speaking after Michner was greeted by demonstrators at the St. Augustine campus of the University of the West Indies, noted that Canada "would never permit injustices to impede its march towards a world free of discrimination," and that Trinidadians would "allow nothing to tarnish our long-standing friendship or to colour unjustly our opinion of her wonderful people."<sup>136</sup> The president of the undergraduate guild of the Cave Hill campus of the University of the West Indies tried to strike a tone that revealed student unease with the situation in Montreal without attacking Michner or Canada, noting the debt owed Canada by West Indian students for access to universities, but also expressing hope "that our brothers get a fair trial."<sup>137</sup>

Michner was greeted with small protests in Jamaica and Guyana.<sup>138</sup> The largest protest to greet Michner happened took place at St. Augustine on 26 February, where what had been intended as a peaceful demonstration in support of the Montreal arrestees escalated into a major protest which prevented Michner from visiting the university. When asked by reporters why the protesting students had not allowed Michner to enter the campus, Geddes Granger said that the students had been particularly inspired by the recent visit of "Canadian students who had come down to Trinidad to explain what had happened," referring in all likelihood to Ballantyne and Townsend.<sup>139</sup> The *Guardian*, again putting the valorization of Canada in the West Indies in the spotlight, criticized the students for jeopardizing "the exemplary relations between Canada and Trinidad and Tobago," and, in a jab at the perceived hypocrisy of protesting against a nation that

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136 "Canada—One of the Truly Just Nations," *The Advocate-News*, February 27, 1969.

137 "Speech by the President of the Guild of Undergraduates (Mr. Darlington-Smith) on the Occasion of the Visit of the Governor General of Canada, the Rt. Honourable Roland Michner, C.C., C.D., to the College of Arts and Sciences, Cave Hill, on Tuesday, 25th February, 1969.," February 25, 1969, HA43/Photocopy of Articles on Riots in Universities, 1969., Concordia University archives.

138 *Le Devoir*, February 27, 1969; "PYO Pickets Can. High Com. to Protest Student Arrests," *The Mirror*, February 18, 1969.

139 Ewart Rouse and Noel John, "Michner Meets 'Lock out' at UWI," *Trinidad Guardian*, February 27, 1969.

was seen as a benefactor to West Indians, ran a cartoon depicting students picketing “Canada House,” a dormitory built with Canadian funding.<sup>140</sup>

The protest was a critical moment in the development of radical political activism in Trinidad. It raised public awareness of racially-oriented student activism, much as the “Rodney riots” had done in Jamaica. Moreover, it facilitated the development of a relationship between workers and students, setting the stage for activism culminating in the 1970 revolution. The first meeting of the National Joint Action Committee (NJAC), the student group at the heart of the 1970 uprising, took place on the same day as the St. Augustine protest; the OWTU sent two representatives to the demonstration. From the beginning, Khafra Kambon (then Dave Darbeau) of NJAC writes, the protesters saw events in Montreal “within the context of wider themes which included imperialism, with special reference to the operations of Canadian companies in Trinidad and racism, at home and abroad.”<sup>141</sup> Kambon recalls that he and Geddes Granger met with George Weekes, head of the OWTU to solicit help raising money for those jailed in Montreal; Weekes gave his support to the cause, and thought that students were doing important political work in Trinidad.<sup>142</sup> Soon thereafter, Weekes called out of the occupation “yet another outrage in the history of Black Struggle for human dignity and social justice,” pledging the OWTU’s support for the students and warning Sir George principal D.B. Clarke that “the breath of discontent now fluttering through the corridors of your autocratic tradition will swell into the fury of a racial whirlwind and your once seemingly impregnable fortress of imperialist tyranny will be swept away for all time.”<sup>143</sup>

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140 “Students Searching for a Cause,” *Trinidad Guardian*, February 28, 1969.

141 Khafra Kambon, *For Bread Justice and Freedom: A Political Biography of George Weekes* (London: New Beacon Books, 1988), 192–193.

142 *Ibid.*, 192.

143 George Weekes, “Letter to D.B. Clarke,” February 15, 1969, HA1567/Correspondence re: Events of Feb. 11, 1969, Concordia University archives.

## *Aftermath*

The Sir George Williams Affair had enduring effects in Canada and the West Indies. In Trinidad and Tobago in April 1970, demonstrations in support of Trinidadian nationals on trial for the events of 11 February targeted the Canadian High Commission and the head office of the Royal Bank of Canada in Port-of-Spain. While the legal fate of the Trinidadian students brought people into the streets, the accumulated frustrations of workers and students with Eric Williams' government drove an uprising that very nearly ended up in the overthrow of the Trinidadian state.<sup>144</sup>

Back in Montreal, Anderson was absolved of all charges against him. The complainants refused to take part in a hearing, leaving the committee with little evidence with which to move forward. According to the committee's final report, while it was true that "with one exception, black West Indian students did not in fact receive a grade higher than C in Professor Anderson's, class" and "black West Indian students did perform more poorly as a group than other students in the 1967-68 class of Biology 431 conducted by Professor Anderson," there was "no evidence to suggest that this was because of discriminatory marking on Professor Anderson's part." In the committee's ruling, "testimony, course records, statistical studies and regrading of papers all suggested that he did not discriminate in his grading."<sup>145</sup>

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144 Brian Meeks, *Radical Caribbean: From Black Power to Abu Bakr* (Barbados: The Press University of the West Indies, 1996); Colin A Palmer, *Eric Williams & the Making of the Modern Caribbean* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 287–303; Raoul Pantin, *Black Power Day: The 1970 February Revolution : A Reporter's Story* (Santa Cruz, Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies: Hatuey Productions, 1990); Selwyn D. Ryan and Taimoon Stewart, eds., *The Black Power Revolution 1970: A Retrospective* (St. Augustine, Trinidad: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1995); Elizabeth Cadiz Topp et al., *'70, Remembering a Revolution* (Trinidad and Tobago? A. de Verteuil?, 2011).

145 *Report of the Committee to Investigate a Charge of Racism Against Professor Perry Anderson* (Montreal: Sir George Williams University, June 30, 1969), 9, HA1567/Anderson Hearing and Appeal (events after Feb. 11, 1969), Concordia University archives.

Sir George made some efforts to address some race-related issues beyond the specifics of the Anderson situation that protesters had drawn attention to. University administrators held discussions on how racism made it difficult for Black students to find part-time and summer employment, and they acknowledged that West Indian students often felt alienated and the university needed to do more to ease their transition into Canadian life. Most importantly, the university needed to understand West Indian culture and raise faculty awareness of West Indian viewpoints and attitudes.<sup>146</sup>

Other elements of the university community were reticent to use the crisis as an opening for addressing racial issues. The History department's curriculum committee, at a meeting to discuss a tentative introductory course in Black history, reacted in a strongly negative way. Among the objections raised were that the university "should not give the impression of yielding to pressure, especially to a group that uses violent means," that such a course would become a "myth reinforcing affair," and that the inevitable "suggestion that it would be desirable to find a black instructor" would constitute "inverse prejudice."<sup>147</sup>

The Sir George Williams Affair brought to light longstanding frustrations about racism and neoimperialism that Black Canadian and West Indian thinkers had been theorizing in Montreal over the course of the 1960s. The body of theory that informed the critiques and actions of the Sir George protesters and their supporters in Canada and in the Caribbean was influenced by Black Power as an African-American body of praxis, but was firmly grounded in the the specific dynamics of a West Indian/Canadian political and intellectual nexus and in the specific experiences of West Indians and Black Canadians confronting, as Douglas wrote, Canada's

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146 "Problems Likely to Be Encountered by Student Minority Groups in General and West Indians in Particular..."  
nd, HA43/Black Community, Solicitations, 1969-1971, Concordia University archives.

147 Michel Despland, "Letter to John O'Brien," July 30, 1969, HA43/Black Community, Solicitations, 1969-1971, Concordia University archives.

“racist culture at home” and its “imperialist policy” abroad. Writing about the protests and the larger stakes which it took on brings to light how Black Power thought and activism developed as transnational phenomena. In doing so, it forces us to engage with the specific but deeply intertwined histories of Black experiences in Canada and in the Caribbean, enriching and complicating an understanding of 1960s-era Black radicalism.

## Conclusion

Nine months after the end of the occupation of Sir George and almost exactly a year after the BPC and the Congress, two events, one held in Montreal and one held in Toronto but drawing on events that had unfolded in Montreal, again drew attention to Montreal's role as the site for the development of Black radical critique and action.

On the weekend of 17-19 October 1969, as the cases of the people arrested following the occupation at Sir George wound their way through the courts, the annual conference of the African Studies Association [ASA] was held in Montreal. The meeting was disrupted by a group of activists calling themselves the "Black Caucus." The Black Caucus accused the ASA of failing to study Africa outside of its "colonial heritage," condemning the "academic colonialism" of the ASA and its failure to produce scholarship relevant "to the interests and needs of black people."<sup>1</sup> The actions of the Black Caucus grew out of events at the previous ASA meeting in Los Angeles, where activists had demanded that the ASA "render itself more relevant and competent to deal with the challenging times and conditions of black people" worldwide and demanded that the ASA have an increased Black membership and become proactive in fighting American ignorance of and racism towards Black people. In January 1969, a breakaway association called the African Heritage Studies Association [AHSA], under the leadership of the historian John Henrik Clarke came into being. The AHSA's goals included fostering the development of Africanist scholarship

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1 "Black Caucus Statements," *Africa Today* 16, no. 5/6 *The Crisis in African Studies* (December 1969): 18–19.

“along Afro-centric lines.”<sup>2</sup> Like the Congress of Black Writers, the ASA meeting represented an encounter between Black activists and intellectuals spread across the globe; a declaration of support for the actions of the Black Caucus was read by the *négritude* poet Léon Damas and signed by, among others, Damas, the Nigerien intellectual Abdou Moumouni, Ali Mazrui, and Samir Amin.<sup>3</sup>

At the Montreal meeting, the Black Caucus—according to *La Presse*, supported by a Black Panther “commando” squad, although that claim appears nowhere else—demanded that “changes be made in the ideological and structural bases” of the ASA, including: an undoing of an “ideological framework” that “perpetuates colonialism and neocolonialism”; amendments to “constitutional procedures” that produced a white Board of Directors, specifically demanding a new Board comprised of “six Africans and six Europeans”; facilitating the participation of African scholars in ASA activities; and changes in how the ASA funded research to allow for more Black input.<sup>4</sup> The ASA Executive proposed a compromise that would see only three of twelve seats reserved for Black members; the Black Caucus rejected the offer and asked for a general vote, in which the Caucus’s demands were narrowly rejected. At this point, in a move reminiscent of the Blacks-only breakaway sessions held at the Congress, Black panelists had already agreed to present their papers only to Black attendees.<sup>5</sup> After the failed vote, the AHSA

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2 Herschelle Sullivan Challenor, “No Longer At Ease: Confrontation at the 12th Annual African Studies Association Meeting at Montreal,” *Africa Today* 16, no. 5/6 *The Crisis in African Studies* (December 1969): 4; John Henrick Clarke and Nicholas D.U. Onyewu, “African Heritage Association Report,” *Africa Today* 16, no. 5/6, *The Crisis in African Studies* (December 1969): 24.

3 Challenor, “No Longer At Ease: Confrontation at the 12th Annual African Studies Association Meeting at Montreal,” 4;7n.5.

4 Normand Theriault and Jean-Paul Brousseau, “Un Congres D’africanistes Tourne Au Duel Noir - Blanc,” *La Presse*, October 18, 1969; “Black Caucus Statements”; Challenor, “No Longer At Ease: Confrontation at the 12th Annual African Studies Association Meeting at Montreal,” 5.

5 Challenor, “No Longer At Ease: Confrontation at the 12th Annual African Studies Association Meeting at Montreal,” 5.

split from the ASA , a fracture that lasted twenty years.<sup>6</sup>

The 1969 conference forced Africanist scholars to address the racial dynamics of their work. James Turner (the first speaker in the aborted Black Studies program at Sir George) and Rukudzo Murapa described the racialized power dynamics at play in Africanist scholarship. Their argument echoed parts of what Walter Rodney had said at the Congress the previous year, focusing in part on how the work of Black scholars writing about Africa was evaluated from “the throne of white academe,” which had resulted in “a legacy of misinformation and distorted concepts about Africa.”<sup>7</sup> Chike Onwualchi, who had also spoken at a Sir George Black Studies event, used a plenary session to denounce any sort of Africanist scholarship in which Africans were presented as objects of study and not historical agents and deprived of their “fundamental humanity.”<sup>8</sup>

Conference participants framed the actions of the Black Caucus in the context of a longer history of the exclusion of Blacks from the scholarly study of Africa. As Turner and Murapa pointed out, dating back to the work of W.E.B. DuBois and Carter Woodson, “race men” were never thought to be able to be objective about Black history; moreover, a sense prevailed among white academics that Black people in the New World were alienated from their African identities and thus had no particular authority on the continent.<sup>9</sup> Jerry Gershenhorn framed the actions of the Black Caucus in terms of a struggle on the part of Black intellectuals, dating back to the end of the Second World War, for “access to funding and influence in African Studies,” which, he

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6 Jerry Gershenhorn, “‘Not an Academic Affair’: African American Scholars and the Development of African Studies Programs in the United States, 1942-1960,” *The Journal of African American History* 94, no. 1 (2009): 44.

7 James Turner and Rukudzo Murapa, “Africa: Conflict in Black and White,” *Africa Today* 16, no. 5/6, *The Crisis in African Studies* (December 1969): 13–14.

8 Theriault and Brousseau, “Un Congres D’africanistes Tourne Au Duel Noir - Blanc.”

9 Turner and Murapa, “Africa: Conflict in Black and White.”

noted, was an intellectual enterprise shaped by both racism and American geopolitical needs.<sup>10</sup>

The debate generated by the Black Caucus thus had stakes beyond the immediate concern of the production of knowledge about Africa to encompass the political and social struggles of people of colour worldwide. As John Henrik Clarke wrote, the Black Caucus was not only interested in the question of “who will interpret African history,” but also in “the restoration of the cultural, economic, and political life of African people everywhere.”<sup>11</sup>

Delegates to the ASA saw the disruption as a manifestation of deep dissatisfaction among Black people worldwide at their state of affairs at the end of a decade marked both by the promises of independence and the intensification of violence, political exclusion, and economic marginalization directed at Black people. Immanuel Wallerstein argued that the “crisis of the ASA” was “a pale reflection of a far more fundamental discombobulation of the modern world.”<sup>12</sup> They also saw it as evidence of a profound need to reevaluate the role that the production of knowledge played in the project of liberation. Fred Burke wrote that the protest reflected the “rapidly changing values and conditions” of the times, and acknowledged that “the beautiful faith that unfettered, unmolested scholarship automatically contributed to the welfare of the species is dying,” and that the “legitimacy of the enterprise” needed to be “defined in socially relevant terms.”<sup>13</sup>

Of particular note in the Black Caucus’s demands was their inclusion of the situation of Black people in Montreal. The Caucus made a declaration of “[unconditional] support” for “black brothers and sisters who are presently being held as political prisoners ... as a result of

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10 Gershonhorn, “Not an Academic Affair,” 45.

11 Quoted in *ibid.*, 44.

12 Immanuel Wallerstein, “Africa, America and the Africanists,” *Africa Today* 16, no. 5/6, *The Crisis in African Studies* (December 1969): 12–13.

13 Fred G. Burke, “The Meaning of Montreal,” *Africa Today* 16, no. 5/6 *The Crisis in African Studies* (December 1969): 8–9.

their stand taken against blatant racism practiced against them by a white professor at Sir George Williams University,” and criticized the conference for failing to engage with “the serious problems confronting those black people and the black community in general in Montreal.” They demanded “that the ASA give financial support to the African students of Sir George Williams University ... who are now political prisoners of a colonialist government, and that the ASA make a strong public statement indicating its abhorrence of the situation.”<sup>14</sup>

Surprisingly, given how much attention the occupation of Sir George had drawn to Black radicalism in Montreal, the press gave little coverage to the ASA meeting. Less surprisingly, what coverage there was portrayed the actions of the Black Caucus as a violent threat to the established order. The *Gazette*'s Louis Dudek framed the actions in the most violent context at hand, comparing the disruption of an academic conference with an episode of mass violence that Montreal had experienced a few weeks earlier, during the so-called “Murray Hill riots,” when a police strike combined with protests by taxi drivers ended up in a 16-hour-long orgy of looting and violence remembered as “Black Tuesday.” In Dudek's view, like the looters that had taken to the streets that night, Black activists had taken “the road that leads to tyranny, not to freedom.”<sup>15</sup>

Even more so than in the case of the Congress of Black Writers, which had organic roots to Montreal's Black activist community (as it was the organizational networks and infrastructure that had been created by Black activists in Montreal which made that event germane to the city more than what was said from the podium) even as its scope was decidedly broader than the specifics of the issues facing Blacks in Montreal or Canada, the 1969 ASA would most likely have unfolded in the same manner no matter where it was held. The inclusion of demands related

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14 “Black Caucus Statements.”

15 Louis Dudek, “An Abbreviated African Survey,” *Montreal Gazette*, October 25, 1969.

to those accused of destroying the computer center, however, is a fascinating gap in the record; was this merely a courtesy nod to local dynamics on the part of visiting activists, or does it speak to a more pronounced collaboration between the Black Caucus? *Uhuru*'s coverage of the conflict makes no mention of anyone from the Montreal Black activist community being in contact with the ASA protesters, making it seem less likely that any meaningful collaboration took place.<sup>16</sup>

Even if the organizers of the disruption of the ASA had only superficial contact with Montreal's Black activist community, their argument that the production of knowledge about Black people was inseparable from the liberation of Black people reflects one of the central ideas at the heart of the intellectual base of the expression of Black Power that took root in the Caribbean/Canadian nexus. Over the course of the 1960s, the Black activists in Montreal, including members of the CCC and New World, C.L.R. James, Lloyd Best, and Walter Rodney the student activists who crafted the outline of Canada's first Black Studies program and activist intellectuals writing in the wake of the Sir George Williams Affair interrogated the relationship between the production of knowledge by and about Black people and the struggle for Black equality. The necessity of knowledge crafted outside of the precepts imposed by imperialist and racist logics as a base for effective and meaningful political action is one of the key lessons of this project.

In the same issue in which *Uhuru* covered the ASA, the paper also covered the founding meeting in Toronto of the National Black Coalition of Canada [NBCC], Canada's first national Black action group, the genesis of which had taken place almost exactly a year earlier at the BPC meeting in Montreal. The meeting was marked by a sharp sense of dismay and anger on the part of a cohort made up largely, though not exclusively, of West Indian activists at the realization

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<sup>16</sup> Gordon, "Confrontation at Queen 'E' Hotel ASA vs AHA," *Uhuru*, October 27, 1969.

that the legal and political fallout resulting from the Sir George Affair was not included on the meeting's agenda. Soon after the end of the occupation, many Black activists in Montreal recognized that any reminder of the destruction of the computer center was toxic and would undo any goodwill they enjoyed, and they thus sought to disassociate themselves from the entire affair. With that realization, in many ways, in spite of all of its roots in the specific dynamics of race relations in Canada, the Sir George Williams affair became a West Indian story, as activists in the Caribbean or with ties to the Caribbean played the largest role in using the events at Sir George as a basis for the development of political critiques of Canada, often focused on its relationship with the Caribbean. Meanwhile, many Black Canadians and West Indian migrants who were committing to life in Canada—people like Richard Leslie and Clarence Bayne—were more inclined to try to put the episode behind them.

The NBCC brought together Black activist groups from across Canada under an umbrella in order to help create a unified political voice. But some observers at the NBCC's founding meeting saw the nascent group, which had received a \$3000 grant from the Canadian federal government, not as a project of unification, but as part of a centuries-long tendency on the part of Canada to “divide and rule” Black people; the seed grant, to them, was part of a ploy on the part of the Canadian state to bury the Sir George issue.<sup>17</sup> While these activists—who were mostly, but not exclusively West Indian—presented themselves as embodying a true radical vision, the people working to found the NBCC accused West Indian students of being a “transient group” who were not really committed to working for meaningful change in Canada, arguing that long after the students had returned to the West Indies, activists committed to the NBCC would “be left here to pick up the pieces” and would “continue to work within the present North American

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<sup>17</sup> “Report on Canadian Conference Committee,” *Uhuru*, October 27, 1969.

system.”<sup>18</sup> Dorothy Wills, one of the founding officers of the NBCC, accused the “dissidents” of causing divisions themselves by making their issue—Sir George—the only issue that could be relevant to Black people.<sup>19</sup> *Umoja*, the BPCCC’s paper, in an article probably written by either Wills or Bayne, called the dissidents “revolutionary Toms.”<sup>20</sup>

Nearly half a century later, this internecine conflict hides an important fact. Both parties to the conflict over the place of the injustice of Sir George in a new Black Canadian movement tried to frame their side as the authentically radical one. But any movement for Black equality in Canada, a country deeply imbricated in racist and imperialist power, but largely unable to see that about itself, is an inherently radical project, whether it seeks to work within state structures or outside of them. Throughout the 1960s, Black intellectuals and activists in Montreal theorized the struggle against racism in terms of the specific dynamics of how Canada treated Black people both within its borders, and, through its imperialist or neo-imperialist exercise of power, abroad, largely in the Anglophone Caribbean. They worked to get Canadians to recognize their racism and to get the country to institute new structures that would fight it.

As struggles against racism both at home and abroad became more intense, Canadians often reacted by discounting the efforts of these activists as irrelevant to Canada, or, in the case of struggles elsewhere in the Commonwealth, reverting to racist understandings of Blacks as violent, underdeveloped, and requiring further inculcation of “civilizing values” before they were ready to join the community of nations as equal partners. These imperial imaginings were often only superficially hidden by a national self image, embodied by the mosaic model of Canada as the “Star of the North,” a country that welcomed all and allowed all to contribute in their own

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18 Ibid.

19 Dorothy Wills, “Sister Wills Strikes out at Distortion of Facts by Uhuru in Letter to Editor,” *Umoja*, October 30, 1969.

20 “Revolutionary Toms Fail to Stop Blacks from Forming National Black Coalition,” *Umoja*, October 30, 1969.

particular way.

Two of the defining moments in the expression of a distinctly West Indian approach to Black Power—the “Rodney riots” and the 1970 Black Power revolution in Trinidad and Tobago—were closely tied to events in Montreal. Moreover Black Power activists from several West Indian territories put events in Montreal at the center of their analyses of the defining issue of the West Indian Black Power movement, the continuing exploitation of the Commonwealth Caribbean and its people by the industrialized world.

In tracing how a school of Black Power critique and activism developed out of the specific experiences of West Indians and other Black people in Canada, this dissertation has contributed to scholarship that expands our understanding of Black Power as a distinctly African-American phenomenon to one that frames the ideology as one that was inherently transnational and that takes into account how Black people outside of the United States adapted the ideals at the core of Black Power theory to address their own specific struggles. The activities of West Indians and other Black people in Canada were one part of a much broader tendency in Black radical intellectual and political work that unfolded during the turbulent decade of the 1960s. In this case, the specific shapes that Canadian racism took, combined with its particular relationship with the West Indies—both of which may be seen as enduring legacies of the country’s largely unacknowledged imperial history—contributed to the development of an approach to Black Power that stood apart from African-American history and culture while sharing common concerns and theoretical outlooks. In order to gain a thorough understanding of where Black Power came from and what its political and intellectual effects were, historians need to further interrogate the movement in its specific local manifestations, but always with an eye firmly on

the international movement of people and ideas that shaped those developments.

Robert Hill writes that it was in Canada that an emerging cohort of activists and intellectuals from across the Caribbean came to see themselves as Caribbean people.<sup>21</sup> Many of the ideas and actions described in this study were grounded in a unified West Indian identity that had lost its political being with the collapse of the Federation of the West Indies. That said, the formal independence of individual Caribbean states drew young politically minded West Indians away from regional politics towards more narrowly focused nationalist frameworks.<sup>22</sup> One area for future historical research is the role of the people and ideas that took shape in the Caribbean/Canadian nexus in the shaping of the politics of individual West Indian territories during the 1970s and 1980s.

Those stories, however, would ultimately have to focus on the frustration and disappointment about the inability of grassroots West Indian radical political movements to overcome external pressures that worked against their principal goal of creating polities that were free of the economic extraction and racially-based denial of equality and opportunity that were legacies of imperial rule. During the 1970s, many West Indian states, especially Jamaica under Michael Manley, directed their energies towards protecting national sovereignty, alleviating poverty, and eliminating racism, all ideas that were central to the intellectuals and activists at the core of the present study. In the 1980s these priorities were replaced by market liberalization, debt repayment, and the undoing of the social safety net.<sup>23</sup> The popular West

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21 Robert Hill, "Preface," in *You Don't Play With Revolution: The Montreal Lectures of C.L.R. James*, ed. David Austin (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2009), xiii – xvi.

22 David Scott, "Vocation of a Caribbean Intellectual: An Interview with Lloyd Best by David Scott," *Small Axe* 1, no. 1 (February 1997): 138.

23 Michael Witter and Louis Lindsay, "Introduction," in *The Critical Tradition of Caribbean Political Economy: The Legacy of George Beckford*, ed. Kari Levitt and Michael Witter (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 1996), xxii.

Indian political radicalism that came into public consciousness after the Rodney ban in October 1968 and that fueled the 1970 Black Power uprising in Trinidad in 1970 was ultimately short-lived; the assassination of Rodney in June 1980 and the electoral defeat of Michael Manley a few months later marked the start of a decline for West Indian radicalism that culminated with the collapse of the Grenada revolution in 1983.<sup>24</sup>

Two moments from more recent history speak to the continued relevance of the intellectual work undertaken by West Indian and other Black thinkers and activists in Canada in the 1960s. In September 2009, Canadian PM Stephen Harper, speaking at a meeting of the G20 in Pittsburgh, said that Canadians had “no history of colonialism” and had “all of the things that people admire about the great powers but none of the things that threaten or bother them.”<sup>25</sup>

While Canada has made important steps in implementing the legal protections from racism sought by Black activists in the 1960s, the perseverance of the mythology of Canada as a nation that stands outside the dynamics of imperialism, as seen in an official statement like Harper’s—one that directly mirrors claims made in the 1960s about Canada’s relationships with African and West Indian nations—speaks to how firmly Canada’s myth of exceptionalism is grounded in the country’s political psyche and thus to the continued relevance of critiques leveled at Canada by West Indian radical activist intellectuals in the wake of the Sir George Williams Affair.

Harper’s comment demonstrates that Canada still needs to come to terms with claims made by West Indians and other Black Canadians during the 1960s. Eight years before Harper disavowed the idea that Canada had an imperialist history to confront, Lloyd Best, speaking in

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24 Brian Meeks, “Introduction: Remembering New World,” in *Caribbean Reasonings: The Thought of New World, The Quest for Decolonisation*, ed. Brian Meeks and Norman Girvan (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2010), xii–xiii.

25 Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, Indigenous Americas (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 105–106.

Toronto, discussed the continued relevance of 1960s West Indian radical thought in the era of neoliberalism and globalization. Best maintained that West Indians, as they had done forty years earlier, needed to theorize their political and economic situations in terms of a basis “derived organically from Caribbean history and set in Caribbean institutions and culture.” While he was speaking specifically about the legacy of New World Group, it would be only a small stretch to extend his analysis to encompass the 1960s West Indian radical tradition more generally; that legacy was, Best maintained, a new generation of West Indians who reject “the idea that the Caribbean is not its own first world but somebody else’s third,” and who sees themselves as “the subject and makers of history, not the object and takers.”<sup>26</sup>

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26 Lloyd Best, “Race, Class, and Ethnicity in a Caribbean Interpretation” (Third Annual Jagan Lecture, York University, Toronto, 2001), 2–3, <http://www.yorku.ca/erlac/abstracts.htm#Best>.

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*Le Devoir* (Montreal)  
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*Express* (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad)  
*Expression* (Montreal)  
*The Georgian* (Sir George Williams University, Montreal)  
*The Globe and Mail* (Toronto)  
*Guardian* (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago)  
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