

The Black Prairies: History, Subjectivity, Writing

by

Karina Joan Vernon

B.A., Simon Fraser University, 1995

M.A., Simon Fraser University, 2000

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

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in the Department of English

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## ABSTRACT

### Supervisory Committee

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This dissertation contributes to the fields of Canadian literature and black cultural studies in Canada a new regional archive of literature, the black prairie archive. It unearths and brings critical attention, for the first time, to the unknown history and cultural production of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century black pioneer writers on the Canadian prairies, and connects this historical literature to the work of contemporary black prairie authors. The black prairie archive thus brings together one hundred and thirty five years of black writing on the prairies, from 1873-2008.

Theorized in terms of what Pierre Nora calls a *lieu de mémoire*, or a site of memory, the black prairie archive operates as a site of collective black-inflected memory on the prairies. It retrieves memory of a repressed but important black history and culture and brings it into consciousness of the present historical moment. In its ability to remember what has been repressed and forgotten, the archive functions as a literary counterhistory, calling attention to the aggressive exclusions and erasures involved in the historical, social, critical, and legal construction of the prairies as an ideological—not a geographic—space in relation to race.

In addition to bringing a new regional black literature to light, this study offers the black prairie archive as a discursive formation that points to a new methodology, a methodology capable of addressing the limits of certain critical debates in Canada. Specifically, it offers a strategy for theorizing black belonging and territoriality in terms other than the problematic metaphors of black indigeneity; for reading the regional particularities of black prairie literature and subjectivity; and for overcoming the impasse at the centre of black Canadian cultural studies, represented by the debate between Rinaldo Walcott and George Elliott Clarke, regarding which model, the archival or diasporic, best articulates the space of black Canada. The black prairie archive demonstrates how, like diaspora, the archive can become a critical, activist, anti-national strategy for recovering repressed black histories, literatures, and presences.

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*To black prairie writers:  
past, present, and future*

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE BLACK PRAIRIES: HISTORY, SUBJECTIVITY, WRITING

Without memory can there be history?

—Marlene NourbeSe Philip, *She Tries Her  
Tongue: Her Silence Softly Breaks* (1989)



Figure 1. John Ware and Family (Mildred, Robert, and Nettie)  
on their ranch at Sheep Creek, ca. 1896 (courtesy of the Glenbow Museum.)<sup>1</sup>

“Have you heard of John Ware?” This is the question I was asked most frequently during the course of researching and writing this dissertation. It seemed that as soon I revealed to archivists, librarians, or new acquaintances I met at conferences and parties that I was constructing a literary archive of black prairie writing, from the nineteenth-

century pioneers to contemporary writers, I was asked if I already knew about the black cowboy, John Ware.

What is it about the memory of this nineteenth-century black cowboy that has proved so enduring? Whereas, I have observed, few people are aware of any black writers whose life and work is connected to the ideological, social, cultural, political, and critical construct known as the Canadian prairies, I am amazed by how many are already familiar with the legend of Alberta's black cowboy, John Ware. Why is it that the memory of this particular figure endures where the remainder of the prairies' black history and cultural production seems to have been collectively forgotten?

The answer to this question is complex, and it is, in part, what this dissertation seeks to find out. That the 188 year-long history of black people on the prairies, together with the legacy of their cultural production, has been collectively forgotten— or, from a psychoanalytical perspective, repressed—in the region's historical and cultural imaginaries, is one of this study's abiding concerns. It provides the impetus for assembling this regional black literary archive, an archive which I theorize as a site of and for collective black-inflected memory.

Paradoxically, the processes of forgetting are the same ones that produce the enduring memory of John Ware. The public memorial of Ware that stands today at Dinosaur Provincial Park in southern Alberta and the Park's companion website provide a case in point. By the late 1950s the log cabin Ware built on the banks of the Sheep Creek, on his ranch in southern Alberta, was badly deteriorated and in need of restoration. The local Kinsmen Club took on the restoration project, but instead of leaving the cabin in its original location, where it might have served as a site-marker for a

historically important black space, and as a reminder of the racial diversity of the prairie frontier, the Club uprooted Ware's cabin and moved it forty-eight kilometers northeast to a new site inside the boundaries of Dinosaur Provincial Park. The cabin has remained at the Park ever since, and that is where many tourists first learn about the famously strong black cowboy who reputedly invented the sport of steer wrestling, discovered the Turner Valley gas fields, rode against the 1885 Métis and First Nations uprisings, and earned the Blackfoot name "Matoxy Six Apee Quin," "Bad Black White Man."

As a way of remembering John Ware, though, this memorial only forgets. Dinosaur Provincial Park's interpretative material does not contextualize Ware's presence in southern Alberta within the wider black history of the prairies. Nor does it mention the black fur traders, interpreters, cowboys, ranchers, and labourers who were on the prairies during the nineteenth century, both before and during the same time as Ware, nor the black farmers, homesteaders, business-owners and what I call "points-system settlers," who came after him, in the twentieth century. Because of the cabin's proximity to the dinosaur museum, and because of the absence of other historicizing material, Ware's black presence on the prairies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries seems intelligible only within the Park's dominant narrative, which is a narrative of extinction. As Michelle Henning's *Museums, Media and Cultural Theory* (2006) notes, when objects enter the space of the museum the museum itself "becomes the frame which endows its contents with significance" (7). Ware's cabin becomes a curiosity, another relic that might have been unearthed from the nearby hills, along with the fossilized remains of extinct dinosaur species.

The Park's new web site explicitly situates Ware within a narrative of burial and extinction.<sup>2</sup> Their "History" web page is dedicated to answering the question, "Who was John Ware?" and features an interactive timeline which, extraordinarily, begins at a point 75 million years ago, during the age of the dinosaurs. The next date on the timeline is 65 million years ago, when "The dinosaurs die out following an unknown event." After that, the timeline moves up to 8000 years ago, when "Prehistoric man lives in the region and hunts bison, which are numerous." The timeline then jumps an astonishing 6100 years, to 1882, when "John Ware, a slave from the Deep South, moves to the area to homestead and soon rises to fame due to his exceptional equestrian talents." Situating Ware along this geologic timeline, next to "prehistoric man," not only evokes terrible stereotypical images of blackness as racially "primitive," it collapses Ware into the Park's larger geological narrative of extinction, and buries the black prairie history that Ware was a part of.<sup>3</sup> But the prairies' black history is one that stretches back at least to 1820 (Carter and Akili 5), and which continues, in new and vital forms, until today.

Although the burial of black history that takes place at Dinosaur Provincial Park is particularly dramatic, it is not all that unusual. When J.M. Bumstead's *The Peoples of Canada: A Post-Confederation History* (1992), a text commonly used in university history classes, mentions only "two major strands of early black immigration to Canada, the Loyalists in Nova Scotia and the Underground Railway in southwestern Ontario" (338), it represses the history of two important streams of black migration to the Canadian west: the movement of 600 black Californians, *en masse*, to British Columbia in 1858 (Killian 147); and the migration of over sixteen hundred black pioneers to the Canadian prairies between 1905-1912. Such erasures of western Canadian and prairie

history from the nation's official histories are unsettlingly common. Gerald Friesen's *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (1984) devotes an entire chapter to the subject of immigrant ethnic communities on the prairies during the period of 1870-1940. But while Friesen examines Mennonite, Chinese, Jewish, Icelandic, Russian, and Eastern European histories, he completely neglects the prairies' black history, though several all-black communities were founded on the prairies during the time he examines.

It is not only in official historiographies that the black presence on the prairies is marginalized or entirely repressed; it is also excluded from the region's cultural self-representations. Few of the anthologies that seek to regionalize literature from the prairies include writing by contemporary black authors, and none includes archival black writing. Neither Robert Kroetsch's *Sundogs: Stories From Saskatchewan* (1980) nor Birk Sproxton's *Trace: Prairie Writers on Writing* (1986) anthologizes any black writers. Nor do more recent anthologies: Mark Duncan's *Section Lines: A Manitoba Anthology* (1988), Wayne Tefs, Geoffrey Ursell and Aritha Van Herk's *Due West: 30 Great Stories from Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba* (1996), Birk Sproxton's *Great Stories From the Prairies* (2000), and Larry Warwaruk's *Sundog Highway: Writing from Saskatchewan* (2000) all omit the work of black writers. An exception is *Post-Prairie: An Anthology of New Poetry* (2005) edited by Jon Paul Fiorentino and Robert Kroetsch. Unlike other regional anthologies, the professed aim of *Post-Prairie* is to examine how new prairie poets "*unwrite* the prairie" (9; my emphasis), and significantly, the editors include the work of two contemporary black prairie poets, Ian Samuels and Suzette Mayr.

Similarly, the first volume of George Melnyk's *Literary History of Alberta: From Writing-on-Stone to World War Two* (1998) does not attempt to include any of the

archival black writers of Alberta, though he does mention the work of Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance, but not that Long Lance was part black. The second volume of his literary history of Alberta, *From the End of the War to the End of the Century* (2000), includes three of the prairies' best known black writers: Suzette Mayr, Claire Harris, and Cheryl Foggo. But, partly because this literary history only goes up to 1997, it leaves out most of the contemporary established black-Albertan writers, as well as the lesser-known ones. But, as Alison Calder notes in her review of Melnyk's *Literary History*, questions about how Alberta's strong black and ethnic presence transforms our notions of Alberta's literary identity are not central to Melnyk's project: "One thing the catalogue does show is Alberta's increasing multiculturalism, and one wonders how this new cultural mix can fit into any conception of 'the Alberta identity'" (240). Of course, as this dissertation hopes to reveal, the "cultural mix" on the prairies is far from being a new, late-century phenomenon, as Calder implies it is, and we need new literary histories that can demonstrate this.

Even the scholarship that we would expect to investigate what appears to be a collective historical amnesia regarding the black presence on the prairies continues to ignore black prairie history and black prairie writers. Though, historically, the aspirations of postcolonial criticism included, among other things, recovering the lost histories, "voices," epistemologies, archives, and cultural traditions that have been written out of official histories, postcolonial criticism as it has been practiced by Canadian scholars has yet to recover the repressed black history and literary culture of the prairies. It is true that this identification I am making between postcolonial criticism and recovery work has been complicated and critiqued, most notably and controversially by Gayatri Spivak.

Whereas, at least initially, many understood postcolonial thought to be a project of recovering the systems of thought and traditions that Western modernity and imperialism had repressed, traduced, or mistranslated, Spivak declared in *The Postcolonial Critic* (1990) that the task of the postcolonial intellectual is not to recover signs of self-representation or of “the disenfranchised speaking for themselves” (56). To Spivak, the task of postcolonial work is not to address victimage “by the assertion of identity” but to tamper “with the authority of Europe’s story-lines” by “reversing, displacing and seizing the apparatus of value-coding” (“Inventing” 210). But what are the consequences of *not* recovering and excavating repressed and buried histories, epistemologies and cultural forms, such as those of the black prairies, “by the assertion of identity”? According to Benita Parry, “One such outcome is to disregard the importance to once or still dominated populations of recognizing the continuities and persistence of indigenous temporalities within transformed and plural cultural formations, or of recovering the evidence and traces of resistance to colonialism” (11). In the case of the black prairies, the consequences of not recovering the buried archive and of not asserting the existence—however tentatively or temporarily—of a black prairie identity are unacceptable, for this would mean the continued silence of this region, the permanent loss of a wealth of history, memory, and knowledge, and, ultimately, a capitulation to the powers of regions and nations to aggressively exclude and erase entire peoples from memory and consciousness.

Donna Bennett’s essay “English Canada’s Postcolonial Complexities” (1994) examines the postcolonial dynamics of Canadian regionalism, but what she treats as “postcolonial” is the relationship of Canadian regions to a dominant center (177) and not

how regions themselves gain identity by suppressing racial histories and racial differences internal to them. And although Christian Riegel and Herb Wyile's *A Sense of Place: Re-Evaluating Regionalism in Canadian and American Writing* (1997) does develop an arguably more "postcolonial" critique than Bennett's argument of regional discourses as ideological dominants that serve "particular class, race, and gender interests" (Davey 16), their collection of essays does not undertake the work of excavating a repressed prairie blackness.

Surprisingly, even scholars in black Canadian cultural studies, an interdisciplinary field that explicitly aims to both recover and theorize the repressed black histories, geographies, and cultures of Canada, continually overlook the unique black history and literary culture of the prairies. None of the essays and books that have become cornerstones of black cultural studies in Canada considers the prairies as a site of inquiry for black studies. Katherine McKittrick's essay "'Their Blood is There, and They Can't Throw It Out': Honouring Black Canadian Geographies" (2002) ironically negates the prairies even while identifying the ways other historically black places, such as Africville, Nova Scotia, and Negro Creek Road in Holland Township, Ontario, have been repressed as black spaces. McKittrick maps out the "conversations that crisscross black Canadian spaces, such as exchanges between recent and older black communities, or dialogue between Windsor, Ontario; Halifax, Nova Scotia; Owen Sound, Ontario; Vancouver, British Columbia; and Toronto, Ontario" (31). Yet "black conversations" that have taken place and continue to take place in Edmonton, Athabasca, High River, North Battleford, Calgary, Regina, Saskatoon, Lloydminster, Winnipeg, and in the communities settled by the black pioneers—Amber Valley, Brooks, Junkins (Wildwood), Clyde,

Campsie, Keystone, Maidstone, Rosetown, Eldon, Turtleford County, and the Swan River Valley—remain unrecorded and unacknowledged in McKittrick’s essay.

McKittrick and Clyde Woods’ recently published collaborative effort, *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (2007), an important analysis of the creation, preservation, and reclamation of racialized black space in Canada and throughout the black diaspora, also overlooks the prairies,<sup>4</sup> even though their approach to diaspora would enable a consideration of the prairies as a black diasporic space. Following Carole Boyce Davies and Babacar M’Bow (2007), McKittrick and Woods define the term “diaspora” in relation to blacks as referring to:

The dispersal of Africans through *voluntary* migration (pre-Columbian Atlantic and Indian Ocean trade and exploratory journeys), *forced* migrations (Indian Ocean transatlantic and trans-Saharan slavery over at least four centuries in the modern period), and *induced* migrations (the more recent dispersal of African peoples based on world economic imbalances in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries). These migrations have resulted in the relocation and redefinition of African peoples in a range of international locations. (14)

One of these locations is the Canadian prairies. The prairies have been the site of two important waves of black migration, both the result of the *forced* and *induced* dispersals of African people throughout the “New World.” The first occurred between 1905 and 1912, when 1,650 African-American homesteaders, primarily from Oklahoma but also from Kansas, Texas, and Mississippi, moved north to the Canadian prairies in pursuit of

free government land and freedom from racial persecution. The second wave, at its height between the mid-1950s and the 1980s but continuing on into the present, was instigated by changes to federal immigration policy and the introduction of the points system, which allowed a new stream of “points system settlers” from Africa, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America to settle on the prairies. These migrations have created a unique and important black diaspora on the prairies, one that, as I demonstrate in detail, is profoundly inflected by its prairie location.

In some ways the absence of the black prairies from McKittrick and Woods’ critical anthology is not surprising, since it is also absent from most diasporic readings of black Canada. Rinaldo Walcott’s seminal *Black Like Who?* (1997), a study which pioneered a strategy for reading, as he puts it, “the place of black Canadas in contemporary discourses of black diaspora(s) and the black Atlantic” (17), also never mentions the prairies. In fact, *Black Like Who?* restricts its analysis of black Canadian culture almost entirely to writers, filmmakers, and musicians who live and work in Toronto. Walcott essentially metonymizes black Canada, making Toronto a part standing for the whole, even though he concludes *Black Like Who?* by stating that “The project for black Canadian artists and critics is to articulate a grammar of black that is located within Canada’s various regions, both urban and rural” (148).

Three years later, Walcott’s edited volume, *Rude: Contemporary Black Canadian Cultural Criticism* (2000), once again neglects the black history and cultural production of the prairies. When David Sealy’s essay, “‘Canadianizing’ Blackness: Resisting the Political,” recounts some of the history of Canada’s anti-black racism that he argues informs current race relations, he says nothing about the history of anti-black racism on

the prairies, even though, as I argue in the first and fourth chapters, events on the prairies changed the nation's federal immigration policy toward blacks right up until the 1960s. Sealy draws examples only from Nova Scotia, Québec, and Ontario, leaving the impression that either few black people live on the prairies or that anti-black racism has never been a problem there.

The perception that Sealy's essay inadvertently confirms, that only scant numbers of black people actually live in the prairie provinces, is one of the reasons the prairies have not, until now, become a more important site of critical inquiry for black studies. Lorris Elliott, one of the pioneers of black Canadian cultural studies, writes about encountering this perception when attempting to gather writing from the prairies for his anthology and bibliography of black literature in Canada in the early and mid-1980s. "One other problem which I had encountered early in my preparation was the belief expressed by some of my generally trustworthy colleagues that there was no significant Black population west of Toronto or east of Montreal (except for Halifax in the latter case)" ("Black Writing in Canada: The Problems of Anthologizing and Documenting" 725).<sup>5</sup> The dominant perception of the prairies, supported by the region's own historical and cultural-self representations, is that it is a white cowboy country, homogeneous, and unraced. It will surprise many to learn that, according to the 2001 Census of Canada population statistics, the most recent figures available, Alberta alone has a black population nearly *double* that of Nova Scotia.<sup>6</sup> Together with Saskatchewan and Manitoba, the black population of the prairies is, at the very least, 39,190 as of 2001, making the prairies the *second* most densely populated black region in the nation.<sup>7</sup>

The actual numbers of people on the prairies who identify as “black” is likely even higher than these 2001 census Canada figures indicate. In 1997 James L. Torczyner examined the 1991 census data and discovered that 43% of black Canadians did not self-identify as black (qtd. in Clarke, *Odysseys* 280). According to his analysis, black immigrants from majority black nations in the Caribbean and Africa identified themselves as “British,” “French,” “Barbadian,” “Ethiopian,” “Ghanaian,” “Haitian,” “Somali,” and so on, leading to a serious undercounting of black Canadians.

The problems of defining and empirically measuring the “black” population in Canada serve as a reminder that blackness is a slippery category. I agree with Stuart Hall when he emphasizes “the extraordinary diversity of subject positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category ‘black’; that is, the recognition that ‘black’ is essentially a politically and culturally *constructed* category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in Nature” (“New Ethnicities” 254). Furthermore, I understand blackness to be a *historically-specific* category, the meaning of which has never been stable on the prairies. Black people on the prairies have been “Negroes” in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, “Ethiopians” in the 1920s and ’30s, “Coloured” in the ’50s, “Black” in the 1960s, ’70s, and beyond, and “African-Canadians” at the turn of the twenty-first century; often they have identified—and have been identified with—several of these subject categories simultaneously. At times blackness has been an insidious discourse “thrust upon” (Clarke, *Odysseys* 16) the interpellated subject; at other times black identity has been a liberatory act of self-relation (Fuss 2), marked by a desire for and identification with (Butler, *Gender Trouble*) revolutionary forms of blackness.

Throughout this dissertation I use the contemporary term “black”—small “b”—the term I am most comfortable with, for writers of the present as well those of the past, even though I recognize that writers of the past may not have self-identified in this way. But as the African-American writer and critic Samuel R. Delaney points out, “the small ‘b’ on ‘black’ is a very significant letter.” It is “an attempt to ironize and detranscendentalize the whole concept of race, to tender it provisional and contingent, a significance that many young people today, white and black, who lackadaisically capitalize it, have lost track of” (392). This dissertation acknowledges the importance of continually rendering the concept of race provisional, contingent, and historical, even while positing “blackness” as a strategic essentialism which enables me to archive and analyze the black literature of the prairies.

More so than the work of other critics in black Canadian cultural studies, George Elliott Clarke’s scholarship gestures toward the existence of an important black history and culture on the prairies worthy of investigation, though it is not a project Clarke himself fully undertakes. Clarke alludes to the ways the history of black pioneers in Canada differs from “the shoot-’em-up role of U.S. ‘Buffalo Soldiers’” in “Embarkation: Discovering African–Canadian Literature” (11), the introductory essay to his *Odysseys Home: Mapping African Canadian Literature* (2002). This large and important study, based on extensive excavations of archives and texts, also includes one essay on what he calls “Western Canadian” black writers, “Canadian Biraciality and Its ‘Zebra’ Poetics,” and a book review of one contemporary black Albertan writer, Cheryl Foggo (“Growing Up Black in Alberta”). His “African Canadiana: A Selected Bibliography of Literature by African-Canadian Authors, 1795-2001, in English, French and Translation,” which

concludes *Odysseys Home*, canonizes some of the texts written by black authors on the prairies, but it leaves out most of the archival, self-published, unpublished, obscure published material, and ephemera, though he often includes such material from other regions.<sup>8</sup> Most of the black prairie archive, including the first document written by a black author on the prairies, the first novel, all the letters, amateur histories, biographies and diaries, a recipe book, photographs, oral interviews, essays, and ephemera, are missing from Clarke's bibliography. They are excluded, despite Clarke's statement of bibliographic principles that would seem to justify their inclusion:

A literature is, *at least in part*, what its authors wish it to be, and for some time, African Canadians thought it more important to author slave narratives and histories, and to compile hymnals, than to publish plays and poems. This feature of the canon must be investigated and theorized, not categorically dismissed. Even contemporary African-Canadian "creative" writers utilize forms such as autobiography, history, anthologies, studies, and compilations of essays and interviews. ... For this reason, I have included "non-literary" works, many of them historical, in the bibliography that follows. (327)

To date, there have been no anthologies of "black prairie" writing published akin to other regional studies of black culture in Canada: Liz Cromwell's *One Out of Many: A Collection of Writings by 21 Black Women in Ontario* (1975), Clarke's *Fire on the Water* (1991, 1992), his two-volume collection of "Africadian" (black Nova Scotian) writing, and Wayne Compton's *Bluesprint: Black British Columbian Literature and Orature*

(2001). The pervasive exclusion of the prairies' black history, geographies, and cultural production from the nation's official histories, cultural self-representations, postcolonial criticism, and black cultural criticism, means the prairies remain a silent zone that demands to be theorized.

## **I. COLLECTION AND RECOLLECTION**

More important than recalling the ways that the black presence on the prairies has been marginalized and repressed in Canadian discourses—be they literary, postcolonial or national—is to devise a means by which this presence, history, and culture can be effectively recovered and brought into the consciousness of the present moment. As Walter Benjamin warns in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” “Every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably” (*Illuminations* 255). One of the problems with the current debates in Canadian literary, postcolonial, regional, and black cultural studies, as I see them, is that they are not informed by or grounded in the rich black history and culture of the prairies. For instance, the debate that currently occupies a central place in black studies in Canada, between Clarke and Walcott, which I revisit in detail below, about whether black Canada is best understood and theorized in terms of a cultural nationalist model or a diaspora model is one that is lacking in historical dimension and context because it hasn't been thought through the unique black history and culture of the prairies. What is needed is a way to think, in a sustained fashion, both historically and methodologically, with and through the black prairies.

How is the repressed black presence, history, and culture of the prairies to be retrieved and made part of the present moment? How is the region and the nation's collective historical amnesia to be addressed? In an effort to recover what has been repressed and forgotten, I turned to archival research. Clarke argues in his *Introduction to Eyeing the North Star: Directions in African-Canadian Literature* (1997) that “because African-Canadian history is ignored in Canada, African-Canadian writers are forced to act as historians” (xx); we might also note that because black archives are ignored in Canada, black scholars are forced to act as archivists.

I scoured the dusty shelves and plumbed the holdings of provincial and city archives, museums and historical societies across the prairies for any material produced by black people that I could find.<sup>9</sup> Though at the outset of my research I was aware of a good number of contemporary, “second wave” writers—Suzette Mayr, Ian Samuels, Claire Harris, Archie Crail, Tololwa Mollel, Nigel Darbasie, Trevor Lawrence, Minister Faust, Esi Edugyan, Kaie Kellough, Selwyn Davis, and Troy Burle Bailey—whose work is connected to the prairies, either because they currently live and write there, or because they have spent some time on the prairies, I was less certain that I would find archival material produced by the first wave of black pioneers and their descendants. Hadn't Lorris Elliott observed, in his introduction to his pioneering *Literary Writing by Blacks in Canada: A Preliminary Survey* (1988), that “there is no real evidence of extensive literary writing by Blacks in Canada before the 1970s” (4)? Though Clarke notes that neither Elliott's anthology nor his *Bibliography of Literary Writings by Blacks in Canada* (1986), considers historical material (*Odysseys*, 326), I wondered if perhaps, in the case of the prairies, there was little historical material to be found. The pioneers who arrived on the

Canadian prairies at the turn of the century undertook the formidable task of clearing the land, largely by hand—with only an axe and a grub hoe—in preparation for farming. Would they have been too preoccupied by this all-consuming task to write? And since the pioneers were only four decades<sup>10</sup> removed from slavery in the United States, would they have been literate?<sup>11</sup>

Ultimately, I found Lorris Elliott's observation that there is little writing by blacks in Canada before the 1970s not to hold true for the prairies. This dissertation brings to light—and to consciousness—for the first time the archival writing produced by the prairies' black pioneers. Together with the work of contemporary, second-wave writers, this constitutes a significant new regional literary archive that spans one hundred and thirty five years of writing, from 1873-2008. The texts I have unearthed and analyze here re-place blackness into the prairie imaginary by recording and remembering what has long been forgotten: the 188-year presence of blacks on the prairies; the history of the Oklahoma migration; the 1912 Federal Order-in-Council that barred blacks from entering Canada entirely; the force of western Canadians' anti-black racism; the remarkable imaginative and intellectual lives of ordinary pioneers; the dynamic forms of black subjectivity invented on the prairies; and, most crucially, the historical, cultural, legal, and political *production* of the prairies, as a an ideological—not a geographic—space, in relation to race. Whereas regional critics of the 1970s<sup>12</sup> relied on a certain fetishized topography—flat, untreed—to stabilize and naturalize “the prairies” both as a geographic designation and as a literary-critical term, the black prairie archive retains consciousness of the manifestly racial ideologies that have worked historically to produce the prairies as a social space. Thus I work with an understanding of the prairies not as a natural

geographic location, but as an ideological and “ideational space,” which geographer Nicholas Entrikin defines as a field “in which individual and collective identities are worked out” (1). That is why this study does not extend its focus to the black literatures of the American west, even though the high-plains grasslands—the geographic terrain previous generations of regionalist critics equated with “the prairies”—don’t end at the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel; as an ideational space, the American west differs considerably.<sup>13</sup> For its ability to remember what has been forgotten, the black prairie archive is, at least as I understand it, an archive of collective black-inflected memory.

When I say that the black prairie archive constitutes an archive of collective, black-inflected memory, I am not invoking the notion of some mystical or racial group mind, what Clarke derisively calls a “scholarly voodoo” (“Borden’s Tightrope Time” *Odyseys* 83); it is not “black” magic. But if we recall that voodoo (or Vodou), a syncretic West African-derived spiritual system practiced in Haiti, is, in part, an oral tradition that preserves and carries genealogy, history, and fables to succeeding generations (Michel and Fleurant 1951), we come closer to what my sense of collective memory is. Drawing from the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, as well as the work of French historian Pierre Nora and that of American scholars Genevieve Fabré and Robert O’Meally, I work with a concept of memory as a socially constructed phenomenon. As Halbwachs specifies in *On Collective Memory* (1950): “While collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember” (48). This understanding of collective memory as an interplay between individual and collective memories is also found in Nora’s idea of the *lieu de mémoire*. In his work on the construction of the French past in

the run up the 1989 bicentennial of the French Revolution, Nora analyzes the means by which the nation-state appropriated and reworked historical symbols toward creating a master nationalist narrative. He focused on the ways *lieux de mémoire*, roughly translated as “realms of memory” or “sites of memory,” such as emblems, symbols, and monuments could, in the process of historical commemoration, become appropriated as sites for collective, national memory. More recently, Fabré and O’Meally appropriate and rework the notion of the *lieu de mémoire* in order to articulate the phenomenon of a counter-hegemonic African-American collective memory. In the introduction to their anthology *History, Memory and African-American Culture* (1994) they argue that the phenomenon of collective “black” memory occurs when,

Whether deliberately or not, individual or group memory selects certain landmarks of the past—places, artworks, dates; persons public or private, well known or obscure, real or imagined—and invests them with symbolic or political significance. Thus a *lieux de mémoire* may be a historical or legendary event or figure, a book or an era, a place or an idea. (7)

I would like to think of the black prairie archive in this sense, a counter-hegemonic *lieu de mémoire*, an archive that is the site of and for black-inflected memory on the prairies. It is a site invested with the collective personal and historical memories of generations of black writers on the prairies.

As an archive of collective memory, the black prairie archive has the power to call attention to and examine the elisions and aporias of dominant cultural and historical

inscriptions of the prairies. But, significantly, the archive is not immune to elisions and aporias of its own. It would be epistemologically naïve to think that total recall of the prairies' black history is possible, or that a comprehensive or complete archive can be compiled. Though I have endeavored to retrieve as much archival material as survives, as I discuss in the second chapter, there remain considerable gaps. For example, the library William Beal assembled in the wilderness in Manitoba appears only as a memory, or trace, while other material remains out of reach, in basements and attics of black families across the prairies. The recall power of the archive is also limited—or perhaps it is simply complicated—by the textuality of its documents. As Nancy J. Peterson notes in her *Against Amnesia: Contemporary Women Writers and the Crises of Historical Memory* (2001), the project of constructing a literary history that contests the erasures of dominant accounts—what have come to be known as counterhistories—is complicated today by the insights of poststructuralist theory concerning access to the past. The poststructuralist notion that histories and other narratives do not offer unmediated access to the past, but only recourse to texts about the past, means we cannot regard literary documents, nor archives as such, as an uncomplicated “corrective” history that neatly “fills in” what dominant histories leave out.<sup>14</sup>

Like all literature, the writing of black prairie people is marked by the material, psychological, political, cultural, and ideological contexts of its making. Sylvester Long Lance's *Autobiography*, a text I analyze in the first chapter, is an excellent case in point. Written in Calgary in 1927, *The Autobiography* presents itself as an authentic recounting of the author's Blackfoot Indian childhood. But as Donald B. Smith has recently discovered (1999), Long Lance was in fact a race passer: he was born Sylvester Long in

North Carolina to mixed-blood parents, and, in the context of the segregated south at the time, Long and his family were classified, and indeed lived, as “colored.” Rather than dismissing this text simply as a “fraud” autobiography in light of Smith’s discoveries, I find that it is precisely in the text’s self-conscious construction of a non-black autobiographical subject that Long Lance’s book is most revealing, and in fact most troubling, in relation to dominant historical and cultural accounts of the prairies. That Long Lance was not able to “out” himself as a “colored” person, nor write as a “colored” author during his time on the prairies between 1919 and 1927, speaks volumes about the historical repression of blackness, on both individual and collective levels, that enabled the prairies to be constructed—mythically, psychically, culturally, politically, and discursively—as a “white man’s country.”

In calling attention to the limits and complexities of archival and historical documentation and knowledge, I am not necessarily suggesting that knowledge of the past can only ever be contingent and uncertain. What I am suggesting, however, is that the black prairie archive is more than a “corrective” history—though it is certainly that too—or an “alternative,” raced, representation of the prairies. As Homi Bhabha argues in *The Location of Culture* (1994), the point of postcolonial historiography in general, and of postcolonial recovery projects such as this in particular, is not to write counterhistories that simply engage in a dialectical process with hegemonic representations of the nation (or regions). Nor is it to provide the nation with a supplementary, minority archive. Rather, it is to destabilize the very grounds on which such histories are written, and regional and national identities get produced—by absenting certain histories and subjectivities (152-7). Thus, throughout this study, I employ the black prairie archive

*methodologically* more than dialectically, to write a different kind of history of the prairies, one which relies on the at times ephemeral archival documents, memories, literature, and orature of writers who, as black farmers and settlers, may never have thought of themselves as writers or historians—or even as “prairie” people. But as Ann Cvetkovich reminds us in *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures* (2003), when dominant cultures fail to chronicle the lives of minorities, it is oftentimes the ephemeral documents of ordinary people that bear the burden of remembering.

I also turn to the archive methodologically rather than dialectically to infuse current debates in black Canadian cultural studies with the history and context of the prairies that has, until now, been missing. In what follows, I reconstruct the history of one of the central debates of black Canadian cultural studies, between Clarke and Walcott, in order to offer some strategies for overcoming the impasse of their critical debate; to situate myself and this project within the context of black Canadian cultural studies; to further clarify the methodological parameters of my study; and to put to work the new materials and methodologies offered by the black prairie archive.

## **II. BLACK CANADIAN CULTURAL STUDIES: BETWEEN THE DIASPORIC AND NATIONAL DEBATES**

The debate between two of black Canada’s best-known critics, Clarke and Walcott, has long occupied a central place in black studies in Canada, though in many respects it has failed to come to what Gayatri Spivak terms a “productive crisis” (*Outside* 53) that

would reinvigorate and revitalize the field. Since the publication of Walcott's *Black Like Who?* in 1997—or, more precisely, since the publication of Clarke's responses to *Black Like Who?*, beginning in 1997<sup>15</sup>—black Canadian cultural studies has been split into two “schools” of thought concerning the implications of reading black Canada as a diasporic space rather than a cultural nation, a project begun by Walcott's book.

The first “school,” associated with Clarke's work, rejects Paul Gilroy's diasporic black Atlantic model as a viable paradigm for reading black Canada. A self-described cultural nationalist,<sup>16</sup> Clarke objects to the erasure of Canada in Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), an account of the intercultural, transnational “structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering” that Gilroy calls the black Atlantic (*Black Atlantic* 3), and “the blunt irrelevance of Canada to most gestures of diasporic inclusiveness” (*Odysseys* 8). Clarke regards Gilroy's black Atlantic formulation as a problematic “decentering of African-American culture [that] is intended to shift attention to the Caribbean-British contributions of Pan-African culture” (*Odysseys* 82), a shift that, in Clarke's view, only further displaces black Canada. Most importantly, Clarke takes issue with Gilroy's anti-essentialist, trans-nationalist reading of diasporic black culture because, as he argues, it leaves little room for a nuanced analysis of black particularities, specifically the ways black subjectivity and culture are inflected by the national, the regional, and the local (*Odysseys* 82-3).

I don't think Clarke is entirely wrong about Gilroy. For Gilroy, as for many of the early originators of diasporic discourse, like Rey Chow and Stuart Hall, “diaspora” is, in part, a figurative concept and can be invoked “heuristically” (*Black Atlantic* 3) in order to “disrupt contemporary nation-focused cultural debates” (15).<sup>17</sup> But Gilroy's figure of the

black Atlantic, which takes “the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean, as a central organizing symbol” (4), is curiously homogenizing and totalizing of black cultural particularities and identities, and too “oceanic” (McKittrick and Woods 5) to adequately read the particularities of local diasporic cultures, like those of the prairies. To my mind, Gilroy privileges deterritorialization as a process and problematically disarticulates it from reterritorialization, without taking into account how, in addition to being restless and migratory, diasporas are profoundly inflected in particular and unique ways by local matters and cultural expressions.

Unfortunately, the concept of territorialization seems to have become anathema to many diaspora theorists, who equate territoriality with “the normative practice of staking a claim to place” (McKittrick and Woods 5). But as Todd May rightly points out, territoriality, as Gilles Deleuze theorizes it, “is not all bad; it is a necessary moment of things. Territory needs to be marked out: statements need to be made, identities need to be constituted, people have to live somewhere. [...] Territorialization is not the enemy to be overcome. Or rather, it only becomes the enemy when we become blind to deterritorialization” (138). Throughout this dissertation I rely on this key Deleuzian understanding of territorialization as “a necessary moment of things,” a landing that does not negate diaspora’s other important meanings, particularly its anti-national criticality, and does not foreclose the possibilities of future deterritorializations. As my third chapter on Cheryl Foggo’s novel *Pourin’ Down Rain* (1990) and the Black Pioneer Descendants Society’s recipe book, *A Little Taste of Soul* (2005) demonstrates, the territoriality of black people on the prairies, particularly for the second, third and fourth generations, is

bound up with, but also complicated by, the flux between deterritorialization and reterritorialization that I argue constitutes the dynamic nature of diasporic location on the prairies. Far from reproducing “the normative practice of staking a claim to place” (McKittrick and Woods 5), theorizing long-standing prairie blackness as territorial puts us in touch not only with the dynamics of diaspora, but also, crucially, with the colonial politics of the territory. Deleuze’s term encourages us to explicitly address the historical relationship between black settlers, the land, and First Nations, and to theorize forms of black belonging to the prairies that do not negate or ignore First Nations’ presence and belonging.

Though I agree with Clarke about the limits of certain highly deterritorializing diaspora models for reading locally- and regionally-inflected forms of blackness, I do not necessarily agree with how he responds to Gilroy. Instead of working with a diasporic framework that would understand blackness as exceeding and deconstructing the boundaries of the nation, Clarke focuses on claiming a place for blackness *within* Canada. He argues that it is only by doing so that one can address the primary problem facing black Canadians, which is erasure. As he puts it, “The sumptuous dilemma of African-Canadian literature is that it is caught between two national(ist) pincer movements of exclusion” (*Odysseys* 36): on the one hand, “[t]he perpetual, white denial of Canada’s own history of slavery, segregation, and anti-black discrimination [which] accents black invisibility” (“Contesting” 35); and, on the other hand, the erasure of black Canada by African America, which sees “Canadian blackness as a lighter—and lesser—shade of its own” (26). In an effort to address this ongoing erasure, and in order to claim a place for

blackness within the nation, Clarke focuses on excavating and archiving black Canada's literatures, and on reading them for their regional and national inflections.

But how does Clarke configure region and nation in relation to blackness? Clark deals with this question explicitly in his now canonical essay, "Contesting a Model Blackness: A Meditation on African-Canadian African Americanism, or the Structures of African Canadianité." In theorizing the concept of "African-Canadianité"—his "Canadianization" of Edouard Glissant's philosophy of Antillanité, or, the ongoing search for a Caribbean identity—Clarke begins with W.E.B. Du Bois's 1903 formulation of "double consciousness," which, he reasons, "applies meaningfully to us, for we also exhibit a divided being. Tussling with our 'double consciousness,' African Canadians question whether the 'Canadian' half of the epithet 'African Canadian' is merely a convenience referring to our geographic residency, or whether it hints at an identity. Is it possible to think of the hyphen that floats in between 'African' and 'Canadian' as an ampersand, or is it really a double-edged minus sign? Is an African Canadian always more black than Canadian?" (40). Clarke concludes: "the African-Canadian consciousness is not simply dualistic. We are divided severally; we are not just black and Canadian but also adherents to a region, speakers of an official language (either English or French), disciples of heterogeneous faiths, and related to a particular ethnicity (or national group), all of which shape our identities" (40). Key for me in this passage is Clarke's use of the word "adherents." He imagines black subjects in Canada "adhering" to regional and national affiliations, rather than disturbing the normativity of these political, social, cultural, critical, and ideological formations—the very same formations, Clarke's work protests, which continually deny and denigrate blackness.

Clarke's ongoing work on Africadia, or African-Nova Scotian literary culture, represents his effort to write black people back into Nova Scotia's historical and geographical consciousness. Yet it is apparent, even in his neologism that fuses the words "Africa" with "Acadia," that the relation of blackness to region and nation that he proposes is one in which black Canadians are sutured to normative regional and national formations. Clarke contends that it is impossible to divorce the concept of Africadia and its literary archive from nationalist thought. In an interview with Maureen Moynagh, he asserts that "any art work which is going to talk about the experience of Africadians as being a distinctive experience is engaging in a nationalist program" (88). "[Y]ou need to have a certain amount of nationalism," Clarke argues, "to exist as a distinctive group" (89). Even as Clarke rehearses the ways in which the nation-state has historically excised blackness from its national narratives, barred it from its central spaces of power, and produced it as a denigrated foreignness, Clarke's Africadia is itself delineated in the terms of this dominant, nationalist discourse. Africadia, for instance, is imagined as possessing a kind of cultural essence: its writers must "domesticat[e], conserv[e], and nationaliz[e] [...] foreign influences" (Moynagh 89). Already we see the production of the "foreign" as soon as a nationalist program is adopted. But using the nation as a metaphor for recovering lost histories and constructing a regional literary black archive necessarily re-awakens Benedict Anderson's critiques in *Imagined Communities* (1983) about the limited and closed constitution of national communities. If Africadia's writers must "domesticate" and "nationalize" "foreign influences," must the Africadian archive, like the nation-space, be "pure"?

At the end of “Contesting a Model Blackness,” after a long and considered analysis of the ways black writers in Canada articulate a fraught sense of belonging to a nation which continually rejects blackness, Clarke nevertheless insists: “Although the existence of an ‘African-Canadian people’ cannot be unproblematically asserted, readings of the literature suggest that no alternative is viable, for African-Canadian writers understand themselves to be Canadian” (60).

But black studies in Canada *has* found another viable alternative. The second “school” of black Canadian cultural criticism, associated with Walcott’s work, adapts Paul Gilroy’s black Atlantic model to the Canadian situation, emphasizing the ways blackness disturbs national narratives by both figuratively and literally exceeding the limits of the nation. Walcott advocates the adoption of a “diaspora sensibility” when considering the relation of blackness to nation because, he writes:

The terms of belonging within a context of diaspora sensibilities are fluid; they continually make and remake themselves within the contexts of specific nations. Diaspora sensibilities resurrect all that communities and nations destroy, foreclose and prohibit in their dominating narratives of collective belonging. Diaspora sensibilities are methods for overcoming the problem of locating oneself solely within national boundaries. (“Introduction to the Second Edition” 22)

Because diaspora sensibilities provide Walcott with “methods for overcoming the problem of locating oneself solely within national boundaries,” he rejects Clarke’s methodologies, including, significantly, his archival method. Walcott understands Clarke’s Africadian archive and his *Bibliography of Literature by African-Canadian authors* as a “regressive localism.” He dismisses the archive, *tout court*, as a “melancholic

cataloguing,” that, as a historical corrective, “offers no consolation because it only goes missing again” (22). Walcott believes that Clarke offers this archive as a supplement to the nation that restores blackness to its rightful place inside of Canada, but argues that the nation is never rehabilitated by these archives. Black people continue to be “more than any others [...] written out and written into our nations conditionally” (23). But diaspora sensibilities “do something to that writing that is active and resistant” (23), according to Walcott. Rather than seeking to rehabilitate the nation, then, diaspora sensibilities “speak to the nations’ limitations and demand nations be remade in a constant and restless ethical search for home” (23). But dismissing the archival method as regressively local and melancholic, as Walcott does, seems a dangerously dehistoricising move, one that does nothing to address the nation’s historical amnesia when it comes to black history.

On the question of which model to adopt, the diasporic or the national, when reading black Canada, many scholars in the field have “sided,” in one way or another, with the positions represented by Clarke and Walcott—though not all critics fit neatly into either “school.”<sup>18</sup> Clarke and Walcott continue to debate their positions today,<sup>19</sup> but the extent to which the conversation has long reached a critical impasse, rather than becoming a departure point for alternative methodologies, can be seen in Clarke’s essay “Treason of the Black Intellectuals?” (1998), an essay in which he takes issue with Walcott’s critique of Canada in general, and of his critiques of writer André Alexis’s nationalism in particular. Dramatically, the essay accuses various intellectuals, but primarily Walcott, of treason. Clarke argues that Walcott’s thesis in *Black Like Who?*, “that blackness cannot constitute Canadian-ness in contemporary nation-state narratives” and that “Black Canadian is a counter-narrative or utterance that calls into question the

very conditions of nation-bound identity at the same time as national discourses attempt to render blackness outside the nation” (120) is so untenable that even Walcott himself has difficulty supporting it. Clarke argues that in *Black Like Who?* Walcott’s arguments slip and double back on themselves, and that Walcott unwittingly ends up adopting a position very close to Clarke’s own. Clarke writes:

Rinaldo Walcott broadsides Alexis for de-emphasizing blackness and luxuriates in Pan-Canadianism. Nevertheless, Walcott himself obeys a shibboleth of liberalism: “Nation-centred discourse can only be a trap that prohibits black folks from sharing ‘common feeling,’ especially when common actions and practices of domination seem to present themselves time and again in different spaces/ places/ nations” (136). Against big nation chauvinism—in this case, Alexis’s version of Canada’s—Walcott would like to set a catholic Pan-Africanism. Even so, Walcott weirdly—painfully—ends up back-tracking toward Alexis’s position, proclaiming that ‘thinking carefully about a *Canadian* grammar for black might help us to avoid the painful and disappointing moments of an essentialized blackness.’ (139; Clarke’s italics)

But Clarke mis-represents Walcott. The quotation from *Black Like Who?* continues thus:

A discourse and grammar for blackness in Canada can be located at the interstices of various histories of migration. The history of ex-slaves in what is now called Canada—black loyalists both slave and free; fugitive slaves from the U.S.; pre and post-emancipation Caribbean migrants; late nineteenth century and early

twentieth century migrants—constitutes a discontinuous history of black migration to Canada. (139-40)

Walcott argues that the ways through which blackness interrupts Canadianness can invent a black “Canadian” grammar. Walcott never advocates for the kind of black cultural nationalism that Clarke would like to see. It is perhaps for this reason that Clarke, hauntingly, adopts the voice of the nation-state itself to accuse Walcott of “treason”:

Perversely, by stooping to an unexamined, *très facile* black nationalism and Pan-Africanism, to support his reading of certain African-Canadian writers *into* or *out of* an African (or black) aesthetic, which is, treacherously (perhaps just lazily), never defined, Walcott is the capital candidate for the charge of treason. (188)

But black Canada, as both Clarke and Walcott acknowledge, is large, diverse, complex, and contradictory. It can never be summed up and represented by any one particular scholarly model. Though both Clarke and Walcott made major contributions to black Canadian cultural studies, theorizing black Canada must be thought of as a *collective*, not an individual, project. There are aspects of *both* the diasporic and national/archival approaches that are valuable; in fact, both are necessary for theorizing the heterogeneity and complexity of the black prairies and its archive. One of the strategies I offer in this dissertation as a way of overcoming the opposition between Clarke and Walcott is to bring the archival model together with the diasporic model. I consider the archival work of the pioneer, first-wave writers in this dissertation together with that of the second wave—the reason why my study encompasses such a broad time-span, from 1873-2008—for two reasons: like Clarke, I recognize the need for excavating

and archiving a historic black literature in order to address the historical and ongoing erasure of blackness in both the regional and national imaginaries; as well, I recognize the need to contextualize and historicize contemporary black writers within the long black history of the prairies so that their work, and their blackness itself, is not understood only as a new or recent phenomenon on the prairies. But, like Walcott, I believe that strategies of activist anti-nationalist resistance are equally necessary to adequately understand the black history, literature, and subjectivities of the prairies. It is my contention that archives, like diaspora discourses, can become such an activist strategy. Archives help reclaim black presences that have been erased and forgotten. And they can do so not in order to rehabilitate the nation and region but to help to deconstruct them. The black prairie archive challenges the identity and stability of the prairies as a region by calling attention to the aggressive exclusions, erasures, and myths involved in its official histories, cultural self-representations, and regional self-identity. The archive also challenges the naturalized boundedness of this region by emphasizing the interconnectedness of this and “other” regions. The archive should serve as a device for remembering and perceiving, from a bibliographic point of view, the cultural exchanges that have taken place, and continue to take place, on the prairies both between the first and second waves of migration—a phenomenon we will see clearly in my discussion of Esi Edugyan’s novel *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* (2004) in the fourth chapter—as well as with black communities across the black diaspora. Thus, although I make a certain claim here for writers on the basis of their having lived at some point in the ideational space of the prairies, I recognize that many of them “belong” as much to other overlapping regional, geographic, ideational, and archival spaces. (Mixed-race author

Suzette Mayr, for example, has been claimed by the diasporic German Canadian canon of literature; Claire Harris by a Trinidadian Canadian canon; Leona Risby by a black British Columbian canon).<sup>20</sup> Rather than reifying the prairies as a stable, bordered region, I hope the black prairie archive can heighten consciousness of the ways this social and ideological space is involved in dynamic interchange with diasporic routes and black communities—and that it has done so for nearly 200 years.

Because I do not see the black prairie archive as a self-contained and bordered cultural-national phenomenon, its materials should not be understood as the expression of a pure, regional, black cultural essence. I offer here, then, a way of reading through the archive by tracing the threads of some of its common themes and concerns: history, subjectivity, and writing; migration, relocation, reterritorialization and arrival; memory and forgetting; the interrelationship of race and region; and belonging. Yet I by no means wish to suggest that these issues represent the core of some definable black prairie cultural essence. My focus on these issues represents my attempt to delimit some of what I discern to be the salient issues and problematics presented by the task of unearthing and theorizing this archive for the first time. It does not necessarily indicate that “the black prairies” is something that needs to be articulated, either now, or in the future, as a cultural, racial, historical or regional essence.

Thus, my chapters do not define or outline the black prairies and its archive as an essence; rather they explore and articulate some of the implications—historical and methodological—of unearthing and archiving a regional black literature in Canada for the first time. Chapter 1 focuses on my discovered historiography of the first wave of black migration to the prairies. It relies on critical histories, particularly Robin Winks’

*The Blacks in Canada* (1997), Howard Palmer's *Patterns of Prejudice* (1982), R. Bruce Shepard's *Deemed Unsuitable* (1997), Colin A. Thomson's *Blacks in Deep Snow* (1979), and Bill Waiser's *Saskatchewan: A New History* (2006); but it also incorporates the writing and collective memories of the black pioneer writers themselves. This chapter uses this "new" critical history to deconstruct the prairies as a social and ideological topography in relation to race, and to historically contextualize Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance's *Long Lance: The Autobiography of a Blackfoot Indian Chief*. I argue that the repression of blackness that this "fraud" autobiography enacts is not idiosyncratic, but in fact mirrors, and is a result of, the wider repression of blackness that occurred on the prairies after the Oklahoma migration, and which has been absolutely central to the construction of the prairies' social imaginary with respect to race.

Chapter 2 analyzes the workings of the archive's black-inflected memory by considering the archival work of three black pioneers. I explore the memory of the library William Beal, a black pioneer and intellectual, assembled in the wilderness in Manitoba, as well as his photographs and memoir, which record the pioneer history of the Swan River Valley. I analyze a political speech written in 1905 by Alfred Schmitz Shadd, a black pioneer in Saskatchewan, which records his hopes and dreams for the future of the province, and I analyze my transcription of Ellis Hooks's orature, a black pioneer in Alberta. This chapter considers a sampling of different discoveries from the archive and demonstrates that, while memory of the Oklahoma migration was in the process of becoming repressed on the prairies, the pioneers found effective ways of recording and preserving their own histories for the future.

Chapter 3 examines the cultural production of a few of the territorialized generations of black prairie writers—writers who are descendants of the first wave of black migration to the prairies. Here I offer a detailed analysis of the difficulties and problems involved with theorizing long-standing blackness in Canada in terms of indigenizing metaphors, as scholars in black Canadian cultural studies still do. As well, I suggest some of the ways in which black Canadian cultural studies can begin aligning itself more closely with the decolonizing imperatives of Indigenous cultural studies, an alliance that can help us move toward a more responsible, and more truly postcolonial, criticism.

Chapter 4 analyzes the more recent, post-1950s wave of migration to the prairies. This chapter is concerned with the ways writing of this second wave articulates a more recent diasporic experience, and figures the prairies in dynamic interconnection with diasporic routes and black communities. Here I briefly examine the work of Ian Samuels and Claire Harris for the way it troubles the imagined boundedness of the prairies and deconstructs the false binary opposition between the local and the global. I follow this discussion with a more detailed examination of Esi Edugyan's *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne*, a second-wave novel that enacts an imaginative return to the site of first-wave pioneer history. I suggest that this novel offers a strategy for overcoming the opposition between Clarke and Walcott, by “diasporizing” the prairies black archive. My study includes an appendix, a chronological bibliography of materials in the black prairie archive for the years 1873-2008. It represents different kinds of cultural production—the literature, orature, archival photographs, correspondence, archival collections, and ephemera by black prairie people that I have been able to find—and includes the

locations of original archival material, as well as archival accession or call numbers. To date, the bibliography contains a total of 103 entries.

Rather than offering a survey of the entire black prairie archive, this dissertation offers a detailed analysis of nine texts, as well as some briefer glimpses into the black pioneers' orature. In addition to selecting texts for the historical memory they preserve and methodologies they offer, I have chosen the texts I examine here for their generic and gender diversity: I look at autobiography, orature, memoir, recipes, poetry, and fiction, and I have tried to consider the work of both men and women writers equally. But because I am only able to explore a small slice—approximately one tenth—of the archive's total materials, it is essential to emphasize that I cannot offer this study as a comprehensive, let alone definitive, analysis of the black prairie archive. The archive is so large and diverse, and its history so little known, that I have done scarcely more than put down some preliminary markers for more detailed future investigations. My concerns are mostly with recovery, with bringing the archive into the light, and with suggesting how it might serve methodologically to repair the collective amnesia about black prairie history, subjectivities, and writing, and to reinvigorate contemporary critical debates, particularly those in black Canadian cultural studies. Along the same lines, my conclusions about and analysis of the archive are strictly provisional. There are also, of necessity, many obvious omissions. I regret that I have not written about Dan Williams, the first black writer on the prairies, and I have written less than I would have liked about the prairies' contemporary writers, but they are better known than the pioneers, if not as widely read as they should be. A fuller understanding of the archive in terms of other regional black archives in Canada, the United States, the Caribbean and Britain; in

terms of recent postcolonial and diaspora criticism; in terms of the wide body of scholarship on the politics of memory and memorialization, and in terms of area studies, is a task—and a collective one at that—for the future.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Photograph of Ware courtesy of the Glenbow Museum and Archives. Call number NA-263-1.

<sup>2</sup> <<http://tprc.alberta.ca/parks/dinosaur/history.asp>>

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of the discourses that construct blackness as racially primitive, see Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), especially the chapter "The Fact of Blackness."

<sup>4</sup> The anthology includes an essay on Africville, Nova Scotia, and one on black British Columbia, but no essayist considers the prairies. McKittrick and Woods acknowledge in their introduction that "the articles and thoughts included here are certainly limited, and by no means cover a cohesive genealogy of black geographies and black geographic thought" (6).

<sup>5</sup> Elliott continues:

Since I had attended U.B.C., I knew that this was not true of Vancouver and Winnipeg; but I thought it to be true of the other provinces. This eventually turned out to be untrue of other places like Edmonton and Calgary. In fact, one of my best sources turned out to be Phil Fraser of Edmonton, who had won cinematic acclaim and awards for his film, 'Don't Shoot the Teacher'" ("Black Writing in Canada: The Problems of Anthologizing and Documenting" 725).

<sup>6</sup> The number of black people residing in Alberta is 31,390 as compared with 19,670 in Nova Scotia.

<sup>7</sup> If we define "Central Canada" in terms of populist understandings of Canadian regionalism, as a regional space that is contiguous with the provincial boundaries of Ontario and Quebec, then this "region" has a combined black population of just over half a million (563, 290), as of 2001, making this the first most densely populated "black region" in Canada. If we define the prairies in a similar way, meaning Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, this region, with 39,190 black residents, comes second. If we understand British Columbia to be a region on its own, then it comes third, with 25, 465 black inhabitants. And if we take "Atlantic Canada" to be comprised of the provinces located on the Atlantic coast—New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador—the black population of this region is 24, 730, making it the second-to-last densely populated black space in Canada, after the Arctic (Nunavut, Northwest Territories, and the Yukon), which has a black presence of 360 people, according to the 2001 Canada Census.

By calculating the black population in each of these "regions" I do not mean to confirm these already ossified regionalisms, nor do I mean to play a numbers game that implies that where the black population is smaller it is somehow less important (or conversely, where it is larger it is more important). I only mean to map the extent to

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which regional discourses, like those of the prairies, can conceal such significant black presences.

<sup>8</sup> Clarke includes, for instance, a compilation of hymns assembled in Nova Scotia by F.R. Langford (387), self-published poetry manuscripts by the Québécois poet Lincoln D. Leslie (388), and unpublished poetry from Toronto poet Jay Pitter (404).

<sup>9</sup> The research I conducted between 2003 and 2005 to excavate the black prairie archive consisted of searching the holdings of all the provincial and city archives, museums, historical societies and libraries in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, for literature and orature produced by people who were both conscious and unconscious of themselves as “black writers” and as “prairie” people.

I visited the city of Edmonton archive in person, as well as the Provincial Archive of Alberta and the Glenbow Museum and Archives. Several on-line databases assisted my search for writing produced by black people on the prairies. The Saskatchewan and Manitoba Archives Information Network (SAIN/ MAIN), a database networking all the public archives in both of those provinces, including the University of Manitoba and University of Saskatchewan Special Collections, were extraordinarily useful. I also searched library databases: the database of the Regional Automation Consortium (TRAC), a partnership of four regional library systems in Alberta, and similar systems in Saskatchewan and Manitoba (Gateway in Saskatchewan and MAPLIN in Manitoba).

The search terms I tried when researching in the above archives and databases included, first, racial designations: “blacks,” “African Canadians,” “Africans,” “black settlers,” “black farmers,” “black pioneers,” “coloured,” “Negroes,” and “Ethiopians” (a designation some black pioneers preferred in the 1920s). Second, I searched the names of important black settlements on the prairies: “Amber Valley,” “Maidstone,” “Keystone,” “Breton,” “Wildwood” and “Campsie.” Since many of the pioneers came via Oklahoma, I also searched “Oklahoma.” Finally, as I became familiar with the names of the prairies’ pioneer families, I searched family surnames: “Ware,” “Lewis,” “Edwards,” “Hooks,” “Carter,” “Ford,” “Melton” and “Mapp.”

After I had plumbed the holdings of the prairies’ public, official sites of memory, provincial and city archives, I turned to smaller historical societies and grassroots community organizations. I corresponded with archivists at the Breton and District Historical Museum (Alberta), the Carrot River Valley Museum (Saskatchewan), and the Swan Valley Historical Museum (Manitoba). I contacted the Black Coalition of Canada (Edmonton Chapter), the Black Pioneers Descendants Society (Edmonton) and the Black History Month Celebration Committee (Winnipeg) for information about archival material that might still be held in private, family, collections.

<sup>10</sup> The pioneers who began arriving on the Canadian prairies in 1905 were only 42 years removed from the date of Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863. Emancipation came as a reality in Texas and Oklahoma—where many of the pioneers were from—after news of the collapse of the Confederacy, on June 19, 1865. (“Juneteenth” is still celebrated in those states.)

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<sup>11</sup> In *Self-Taught: African-American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (2005) Heather Andrea Williams notes that, although anti-literacy laws became more entrenched in the south after 1831, the year Nat Turner, an educated slave, led a murderous slave rebellion, anti-literacy statutes date back to a century before the uprising. Throughout this time, however, many African-Americans contested their objectification by acquiring that knowledge which was forbidden to them. See, for instance, Frederick Douglass's *Narrative in the life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845), and Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861).

<sup>12</sup> Laurie Ricou, Dick Harrison and John Moss each relied on an idea of the prairies as a natural terrain whose forbidding landscape, its flatness and treelessness, held the power to shape the imagination and determine a prairie people's character. Significantly, the "authentic" prairie subject that emerged from this criticism was rarely gendered, never raced, and definitely not black. See Ricou's *Vertical Man/ Horizontal World* (1973), Harrison's *Unnamed Country* (1977) and Moss's *Patterns of Isolation in English Canadian Fiction* (1974).

<sup>13</sup> For instance, blackness has not been as repressed in the American west as compared with the Canadian prairies. There is a considerable amount of scholarship analyzing the American west as an ideational space in relation to blackness going back to the early 1970s. See Blake Allmendinger's *Imagining the African-American West* (2005), Monroe Lee Billington and Roger D. Hardaway's *African-Americans on the Western Frontier* (1998), William Loren Katz's *The Black West* (1971; 1999), and Katz's *Black Pioneers: The Untold Story* (1999).

<sup>14</sup> See Roland Barthes' "The Discourse of History," for a deconstruction of the ontological status of historical "facts." Barthes argues, for instance: "It turns out that the only feature which distinguishes historical discourse from other kinds is a paradox: the 'fact' can only exist linguistically, as a term in a discourse, yet we behave as if it were a simple reproduction of something on another plane of existence altogether, some extra-structural 'reality'" (153).

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, George Elliott Clarke's "Honouring-African Canadian Geography," in the 1997 issue of *Border/Lines* and his review of *Rude*, entitled "No Respect," in *Canadian Literature* 74 (Autumn 2002).

<sup>16</sup> In delimiting his approach to African Canadian writing in the introductory essay to his *Odysseys Home*, Clarke claims nationalist George Grant as an intellectual mentor: "My foundational philosophical reference is the Canadian 'Red Tory' writer George Grant (1918-1988), whose romantic adoration of Canadian sovereignty and nationalism, *Lament for a Nation* (1965), has helped shape my thinking about cultural particularity. Grant's defense of 'local cultures' supports, then, my defenses of the existence of Africville, Nova Scotia [...] and Africadian literature" ("Embarkation" 13).

<sup>17</sup> In his essay "Postcolonial Diasporas" (2006) David Chariandy notes that, like Gilroy, Rey Chow, drawing upon the work of Michel de Certeau, sees diaspora as a "tactic" of

intervention, a “para-site” on existing institutional structures and critical strategies (*Writing Diaspora*). And Stuart Hall admits that he uses the term “diaspora” metaphorically not literally: “[D]iaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, even if it means pushing other people into the sea. This is the old, the imperialising, the hegemonising, form of ‘ethnicity’ ... (“Cultural Identity and Diaspora” 402 quoted in Chariandy n.p.).

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Godard’s “Writing Resistance: Black Women’s Writing in Canada” in *Intersexions: Issues of Race and Gender in Canadian Women’s Writing* takes a materialist feminist perspective that doesn’t fit neatly into either “school.” She sites neither Clarke nor Walcott, though it must be noted that this essay was anthologized in 1996, a year before *Black Like Who?* was published. But those who take a diasporic approach include Diana Brydon (“Detour Canada: Rerouting the Black Atlantic” [2001]; “Black Canadas: Rethinking Canadian and Diasporic Cultural Studies” [2001]), David Sealy, Peter Hudson, David Chariandy, whose review of Walcott’s *Rude* (“Rude Necessity”) praised Walcott for “understand[ing] Black culture in Canada not through officially sanctioned Canadian frameworks but against the ‘circuitous routes of Black diasporic cultures,’” and Leslie Sanders (though her collaborative editorial “Women and the Black Diaspora” in *Canadian Women’s Studies* [2004] is at the same time critical of the concept of diaspora, which she argues “has been implicitly and explicitly concerned with male experience” 3). Critics who are more closely associated with Clarke’s cultural nationalist “school” include the novelist and critic André Alexis, who, in his 1995 article “Borrowed Blackness,” lamented that black Canadian literature is not more explicitly nationalist in its address: “there’s an absence I feel at the heart of much black Canadian art. I miss hearing black Canadians speak *from* Canada” (20). Another critic whose nationalism Clarke sanctions is the writer Cecil Foster. In “Treason of the Black Intellectuals?” Clarke quotes Foster’s *A Place Called Heaven: The Meaning of Being Black in Canada* (1996) in which the author considers how to strengthen pan-Canadian black culture. How, Foster wonders, can African Canadians “have a community without their own heroes and myths, when they must borrow from other societies?” (19).

<sup>19</sup> The two clashed vehemently, for instance, at the 2004 CACLALS conference in Winnipeg.

<sup>20</sup> See the way Heinz Antor et al., *Refractions of Germany in Canadian Literature and Culture* (2005) position Mayr as a “German-Canadian writer,” and see, too, I. Cudjoe’s *Caribbean Women Writers* (1990) and the *Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse* (1986) for discussions of Claire Harris as a “Trinidadian writer.” Also, the orature of one of the pioneers, Leona Risby, which I include in my archive because she was born and raised in Alberta, is also included in *Opening Doors: Vancouver’s East End* (1979). In fact, her orature was collected by the editors of *Opening Doors*, Daphne Marlatt and Carole Itter) because, as an adult, Risby lived in Vancouver. Her orature is also included in Wayne Compton’s *Bluesprint: Black British Columbian Literature and Orature*.

**CHAPTER 1**

**CHIEF BUFFALO CHILD LONG LANCE  
AND THE HISTORY OF THE OKLAHOMA MIGRATION**

No better opportunity affords itself to the agricultural Negro than in Western Canada [...] The one salvation of the Negro is to migrate to a section where he can be a component part in building up an undeveloped country under favorable conditions, there is no question to the fact, that it was largely the Negro labour that built up the Southland.

*The Gazetteer and Guide*, Pittsburgh,  
Pennsylvania, April 25, 1903

Mythologies or national stories are about a nation's origins and history. They enable citizens to think of themselves as part of a community, defining who belongs and who does not belong to the nation. The story of the land as shared and developed by enterprising settlers is manifestly a racial story.

Sherene H. Razack, *Race, Space and the  
Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society* (2)

When *Long Lance: The Autobiography of a Blackfoot Indian Chief* was published in New York in 1928, the international press made its aboriginal author a major celebrity. According to the book's foreword, Long Lance was already an astonishingly accomplished figure. He was a graduate of the American Carlisle Indian school, a presidential appointee to West Point,<sup>1</sup> a Captain in the Canadian army, a decorated war hero, a Chief of the Blackfoot nation, and a distinguished journalist. *The Autobiography*, heralded by the press as "a gorgeous saga of the Indian race" and by anthropologists as an "unusually faithful account" (Smith 206-7), quickly became an international best-seller, and it made its author the most famous Indian of his time.



Figure 2. Portrait of Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance, ca.1930-1  
(courtesy of the Glenbow Museum.)<sup>2</sup>

But as University of Calgary historian Donald B. Smith discovered (1982; 1999), Long Lance was an imposter. In reality he was Sylvester Long, born not into the Blood nation in southern Alberta as he claimed, but in the American South to “mixed blood” parents who had themselves been born into slavery. In the “one drop” logic of racial discourses in the American South, both Sylvester Long and his family were classified as “colored,” despite their claims to mixed white and Native ancestry. As Gayle Wald explains in her study of race-passing in the American context, *Crossing the Line: Racial Passing in Twentieth-Century U.S. Literature and Culture* (2000), the “one drop rule,” codified in the years following Reconstruction after the American Civil War, designated as “black” any person seen as possessing a single “drop” of “black blood,” as determined by ancestry extending back (in theory at least) an indeterminate number of generations (Wald 11). While Long-Lance’s mother was recognized as having both white and Croatan Indian ancestry, his father, much darker than his mother, was believed to be part

black (Smith 22). The binary logic of such race-thinking left no grey-area for people of mixed-race. The Longs were simply and arbitrarily classified as black. Thus, in the segregated South, the Long family lived as black. Sylvester's father worked as a long-time manager of the old all-Negro balcony at the theatre (Smith 13), and the Long children attended the Depot Street School for Negroes even though the family lived very close to the West End School (32-3), a school for whites.

As Long's biographer reveals, in order to pursue a better education than was available in Winston-Salem's segregated schools, Long, assisted by his family, embellished the extent of his Indian ancestry to gain admittance to the famous Carlisle Indian Residential school. There he "passed"<sup>3</sup> as an Eastern Cherokee, but since he knew neither the language nor customs of this nation, the Native student body suspected him of imposture (50). Long went on to attend St. John's Military academy and, subsequently, West Point, though he never graduated. Instead, in 1916, Long boarded a train for Montreal and enlisted with the Canadian army. When he was discharged in 1919 he asked that his point of discharge be the last Canadian province to be settled—Alberta. Long Lance spent the next decade of his life on the prairies, between Calgary, Banff, Regina, and Winnipeg. Though on first arrival Long—who was now calling himself Sylvester Chahuska Long Lance—identified his birthplace as East Cherokee, in Alberta he further embellished his Indian persona. He claimed as his birthplace Oklahoma,<sup>4</sup> some fifteen hundred miles away from North Carolina. Then, after working on assignment for the *Calgary Herald* on the Blood Reserve, Long Lance again reidentified himself, this time as Blackfoot. When Sylvester Long penned his *Autobiography* in Alberta in the summer of 1927, he did so as a "full-blooded Indian," Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance of Calgary.

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Of the handful of articles and essays that have been published to date on Long Lance, none is written by Canadian scholars and none explores what his story reveals about the complex racial politics of the Canadian prairies during the 1920s.<sup>5</sup> Long Lance's life-story, his film work, and *Autobiography* are not included in George Elliot Clarke's "Selected Bibliography," even though Clarke claims other writers on the strength of a few years' residency in Canada and with similarly mixed ancestry. Yet, as I hope to demonstrate, Long Lance's story has much to say about the racial climate of the prairies during the 1920s. That Long Lance was not able to acknowledge his blackness during his time on the prairies, and that the first full-length book written on the prairies by a black author was undertaken by one whose blackness had to be as disavowed as it is in Long Lance's "autobiography" indicates the degree to which blackness has been repressed in the prairie imaginary. This chapter considers the theoretical and political implications suggested by this text about passing, racialization, and the racism of the early twentieth century. I suggest that Long finds in "noble savage" discourses—as problematic as these are—strategies for articulating a raced subjectivity that in the context of the prairies in the 1920s were the only available discourse offering any liberatory potential. I consider how Long Lance's *Autobiography* challenges inherited notions of passing—Long Lance passes for Native, rather than white—and what this move tells us not only about the low status of blackness on the prairies, but also about the complex process by which other racialized minorities both identified with and exploited First Nations' identities in the early part of the twentieth century. Finally, this chapter considers the implications of

claiming Long Lance, as I do, as a meaningful figure in the black history of the prairies, as an important contributor to the archive of black prairie literature and orature.

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Long Lance's biographer, Donald B. Smith, speculates that the reason Long Lance chose Calgary as his point of discharge in 1919 was that:

Alberta seemed ideal for Long Lance, removed as it was in time and distance from his true origins and all that he was trying to deny and escape.

Long Lance had no doubt read reports in Canadian newspapers of the continuing racial strife in the United States. Thirty-eight African Americans were lynched in 1917 when he was fighting in Europe. Fifty-eight more were hanged in 1918 when the Great War ended. Seventy African Americans were lynched in 1919, the year Long Lance arrived in Canada. (80)

Alberta, Smith writes, was "far from the racial strife of the American South and far from questions about his racial origin. In Alberta he would start all over. Again" (80). But this interpretation of Long Lance's decision to relocate in Alberta dehistoricizes Alberta politics and ignores the fact that in 1919, following the migration of hundreds of black settlers to the Canadian prairies, Alberta was in fact a hot bed of anti-black sentiment. The fact that Smith, a professor of Canadian history, can overlook the entire context of anti-black racism on the prairies which shaped Long Lance's personal story as well as his "autobiography" reveals how deeply repressed this history remains.

To better understand Long Lance's unusual "autobiography" and the reasons why he was unable to "out" himself as a black person on the prairies during the 1920s, I must pause to reconstruct the cultural context into which Long Lance arrived and thus turn to several critical histories, Robin Winks' *The Blacks in Canada: A History*,<sup>6</sup> Howard Palmer's *Patterns of Prejudice* (1982), R. Bruce Shepard's *Deemed Unsuitable* (1997), Kent Utendale's unpublished doctoral thesis, "Race Relations in Canada's Midwest: A Study of The Immigration, Integration and Assimilation of Black Minority Groups" (1985), and Bill Waiser's *Saskatchewan: A New History* (2005). Each of these histories contests the problematic but prevalent view that the prairies have historically never been a black space, and that anti-black racism has never been a problem there. By documenting the history of intense anti-black racism on the prairies, and the ways this racism helped to determine federal immigration policy in relation to blacks, these histories establish how the prairies have been constructed—politically, culturally, and mythologically—as a "white man's country."

Though these critical histories are invaluable correctives to the official narratives which neglect the black history of the prairies, or present sanitized versions of this history, for the most part they are written without reference to any of the black pioneers' community histories, memoirs, and orature. This leaves the impression that black people have not responded to their experiences on the prairies by writing or story-telling, that they have not told their own stories in their own voices, or that they are not aware of their own history. This is not the case. Wherever possible, as I reconstruct the history of the first wave of migration, I incorporate the memories, insights, and anecdotes recorded by the black pioneers and their descendants. Velma Carter's *The Window of Our*

*Memories* (1981) and the *Maidstone Mirror's North of the Gully* (1981), both collections of pioneer orature, as well as Gwen Hooks' memoir *Keystone Legacy: Recollections of a Black Pioneer* (1997), are key here. This pioneer work acts as a historical corrective on at least two fronts. It challenges the dominant historical accounts of the prairies in relation to race, and it demonstrates the ways that black prairie writers and orators have carefully preserved the memory and history of their own people, even at a time when it seemed that that history was important to no one but themselves.

### **I. THE OKLAHOMAN MIGRATION AND CANADIAN PRAIRIE RACISM**

Between 1897 and 1912, a conjunction of historical events conspired to bring large numbers of black American pioneers to the Canadian prairies. According to Winks, in 1897 the Canadian government began a second intensive immigration campaign, this one aimed at attracting American farmers to help “settle” (that is to say, colonize) the Canadian west. The first campaign had been directed to farmers in central and eastern Europe. Sir Clifford Sifton had famously proclaimed to a Toronto audience in 1895 that the “preferred” type of immigrant was the “stalwart peasant in a sheepskin coat, born on the soil, whose forefathers have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and a half-dozen children, is good quality” (Waiser 66). Sifton opened immigration agencies in over twenty-one American cities and took out advertisements in American newspapers that proclaimed the freedom and order that American settlers would enjoy in Canada (*Mirror* 358). The advertisements also “stressed the healthful climate of western Canada, praised Americans as vigorous, resourceful and law-abiding—in every sense desirable—

and offered welcome to all who would come” (Winks 300-1). Because Sifton’s recruitment of immigrants mentioned no restrictions, and since the *Saint Paul Broadax*, a black newspaper, in 1901 ran articles in which the premier of Manitoba extended cordial invitations to all readers, black Americans assumed that they were welcome (Winks 301).

At the same time as the Canadian government was soliciting Americans to settle the prairies, the Indian Territory of Oklahoma was coming into statehood. As an Indian Territory, Oklahoma had been administered by the federal government and was less subject to discriminatory legislation than its neighbouring states. But with the coming of statehood in 1908, its legislature passed a series of increasingly restrictive racial laws that denied black Oklahomans the vote, codified segregation through new Jim Crow laws, and allowed Oklahoma to pass under the dominance of the Ku Klux Klan (Winks 301-02).

Winks notes that for many reasons the black Oklahomans were uniquely prepared for migration to the Canadian prairies. Many were already practiced at dry land farming, the kind they imagined would be necessary in Canada, and they were already highly mobile (301). In 1920, 66.6 percent of black Oklahomans had been born elsewhere,<sup>7</sup> and their migrations were organized in terms of group movement rather than individual border crossings (301). They had also already been exposed to emigrationist propaganda. Winks observes that in the 1880s a black man from Tennessee who had lived in Windsor, Ontario, Benjamin “Pap” Singleton, tried to persuade Kansas blacks to colonize Canada, Cyprus, or Liberia. In 1902 C.W. Brown organized a Vancouver chapter of the Colored National Emigration Association, a back-to-Africa movement, which brought added black attention to the Canadian west.

The Canadian government required all settlers to pay \$10.00 for one hundred and sixty acres of land, to live on that land for six months in each year for three years, and in that time to clear a minimum of thirty acres, dig a well, build a house valued at \$300, and erect fencing worth \$200 (Winks 304). Many of the black pioneers' narratives record their enthusiasm at the prospect of owning their own land, even if that land was to be in distant, unknown Canada. Walker Beaver remembers that "In Kansas City there was an agent telling people about Canada—the land of milk and honey—for ten dollars you could buy a hundred and sixty acres of land, a homestead. So people thought they were getting a fortune, you understand, that's why they came" (*Window* 59). After 400 years of slavery, the possibility of owning land, rather than being owned themselves as property, or working as sharecroppers, must have seemed like a dream come true. On the other hand, many pioneers record a more cynical, or perhaps, more realistic, view of the "ten dollar homestead" the government offered the pioneers. Tom and Mary Barrow, who homesteaded near William Beal, the black Manitoban pioneer whose work I examine in the following chapter, explained: "That was the government's bet. They bet you ten dollars against you starving to death on it" (Barrow and Hambly 11). Gwen Hooks similarly recalls, "My mom and dad heard that there were more opportunities for blacks in Canada and less prejudice. This proved partially true. We encountered no legalized segregation or patterns of violence in Alberta, but neither did we find a haven of tolerance, and it wasn't long before it became abundantly clear that Canada did not want black settlers" (23-4).

Although black Oklahomans had been arriving on the prairies since at least 1905 (Utendale 115), the first sizeable group of settlers arrived in Saskatchewan in October of

1909, and settled in the Eldon district, one hundred and fifty railroad miles north of Saskatoon (303).<sup>8</sup> As Winks explains, the black pioneers sought isolation from white communities, proximity to railroads, and distance from the American border (303). Two hundred black pioneers spread out into Manitoba and as far east as the Thunder Bay area (303), but the majority settled in what became all-black communities: the Maidstone and Rosetown districts in west-central Saskatchewan; Junkins (now known as Wildwood) on the Canadian Northern Line east of Edson; Breton, south-west of Edmonton; Clyde, Campsie, near Barrhead, and Amber Valley (originally Pine Creek), located east of the town of Athabasca. Other settlers, labourers, and small business owners went to the prairies' urban centres, Calgary, Saskatoon, Regina, Winnipeg, and notably Edmonton, which by 1911 already had 298 black residents (Hill 120).<sup>9</sup>

Western Canadians' reaction to the black settlers—who at their peak numbered about 1,650<sup>10</sup>—was immediate. The prairie press spearheaded the campaign against them. Its editorials drew heavily on the racialized and gendered images of a “white” and “fair West” to argue against the presence of “coloured” groups or the importation of “dark spots” (Hooks 32) onto the prairies. As the Edmonton *Capital* argued on 16 April 1910, “the task of assimilating all the white people who enter our borders is quite a heavy enough one without the colour proposition being added” (Shepard 66).

Beginning in February of 1910, Winnipeg newspapers predicted that the federal government would move to exclude black immigrants (Winks 306). The Ottawa press reported that Frank Oliver, Sir Wilfrid Laurier's Liberal minister of the Interior, intended to impose a head tax of \$500 “on each Negro arrival” (Winks 307). While the new Canadian immigration law, passed in 1910, was “restricted, exclusive, and selective,”

Laurier's Liberal government could at first see no way of legally excluding black immigrants without offending either the United States or the West Indies, with which they wished to maintain strong trade relations.<sup>11</sup>

In March of 1911 a party of two hundred black Oklahomans arrived at the border station at Emerson, Manitoba, and requested admission to press on to Amber Valley, where they already had family. Canadian officials subjected them to a rigorous examination, but found that they could not legally stop any of them. Each had the required \$200, was in excellent health, and had documentary proof of good moral standing (308). For many fearful Anglo-Canadians, this group presaged the arrival of thousands more black settlers.<sup>12</sup> Boards of trade, the Edmonton Trades and Labour Council,<sup>13</sup> women's organizations (particularly the anglophile Imperial Order of the Daughters of Empire),<sup>14</sup> and newspaper editors importuned the federal government with resolutions, petitions and editorials opposing an influx of blacks and warning that western Canada would be importing the racial problems of the American South (Palmer 36; Winks 309; Shepard 79). Newspapers and petitions revived black stereotypes venting white fears about blacks becoming an economic and sexual threat: black men would lower the living standard of white workers and endanger white women (Palmer 36). On April 8<sup>th</sup> the Lethbridge *Daily News* ran an editorial titled "The Black Peril" which argued that because of the arrival of black Oklahoman men, the "black rapist beast"<sup>15</sup> was now alive and well in western Canada (Shepard 79).

In the context of this editorializing on the "peril" of black sexuality, F.T. Fisher of the Edmonton Board of Trade wrote a seven page letter to Frank Oliver in which he argued that there was already evidence of "bitter race prejudice" in the areas where the

black pioneers were settling (Shepard 77). He warned that if the government did not move quickly to halt the immigration of black settlers, race riots would be inevitable:

White settlers in the homestead districts are becoming alarmed and exasperated and are prepared to go to almost any length. People in the towns and cities ... are beginning to realize the imperative necessity of effective action; and it only needs a slight effort to start up an agitation which would be joined in by practically every white man in the country. There is every indication that unless effective action is taken, such agitation will be put in motion in the near future. (Shepard 77).

This obsession with and fear of black sexuality was not unique to the prairies; it was typical of turn-of-the-century racial beliefs and social mythologies. Tales about black sexual promiscuity and large sexual appetites have long been present as anxieties in the western racial and sexual imagination, as Fanon's work, especially in *Black Skin, White Masks*, points out. According to Bhabha, Fanon locates "the deep fear of the Black figured in the psychic trembling of Western sexuality" ("Remembering Fanon" 112). In the nineteenth century, the new quantifying sciences seemed to provide a rationale for such anxieties. Science set out to class humans according to "race" by measuring sex organs, cranial capacity, pubic hair, and so forth, a mapping of the body Foucault called a "political anatomy" (1978, 149) and which Gilroy terms the science of "raciology" (2000, 12). Western Canadians accepted this mythology as knowledge.

Winks points out that during the height of the black immigration controversy, between 1910 and 1912, Canadians developed a unique racial doctrine of their own. They argued that black people could never acclimatize to the severe weather of the Canadian prairies, and therefore they should be excluded for their own good (296). In response to the arrival of the Sneed party of immigrants at Emerson, Manitoba, in 1911, a woman from the nearby city of Brandon, who signed herself “An Englishwoman Who Has Lived in Oklahoma,” contacted the editor of the *Manitoba Free Press* with her concerns. She wrote, “As negroes flourish in a hot country and do as little work as possible, it is hoped that Jack Frost will accomplish what the authorities apparently cannot” (Shepard 74). The Canadian government later exploited this racial doctrine by sending medical doctors into black communities in Oklahoma to spread the idea that African descendents could never survive Canada’s wintry climate. Dr. G.W. Miller, an African-American medical doctor hired by the Canadian government to counteract the government’s own immigration propaganda, used the climate argument to frighten prospective immigrants into remaining south of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. In the article he wrote for the Guthrie *Oklahoma Guide* Miller said that he could not understand why people would sacrifice what they had spent their lives acquiring to go to a country “that is desolate, frigid, unsettled, unknown and to which they are climatically unfamiliar and financially unfit” (Shepard 97). They had all been born and raised in the south, he argued, and “it will cost your life to live one winter in Canada” (97). Winks points out that, of course, at this time blacks had lived in severe northern climates for two and a half centuries, and there are no racial differences in tolerances to cold. In fact, it was a black

man, Matthew A. Henson, along with Admiral Robert E. Peary, who first succeeded in reaching the North Pole in 1909 (296-7).<sup>16</sup>

The hostile reaction to the 1,650 or so black settlers who arrived on the prairies between 1905 and 1912 was not limited to western Canada or to the western press. The mood in the House of Commons was similarly anti-black. In 1911 a member of parliament for Lanark North,<sup>17</sup> Mr. Thorburn, stood up in the House and, predicting black settlers would “swarm” by the tens of thousands, told government officials that they must “preserve for the sons of Canada the land they propose to give to niggers” (Winks 309). Similarly, a Conservative member for the Manitoba riding of Lisgar rose to state that, like British Columbians who were concerned with Asian immigration, he wanted a “white West” (Shepard 89).

The intensity of the emotion generated against the first-wave migrants, out of all proportion to their relatively small numbers, reveals the profound prejudice western Canadians held against black people. Such virulent racism is thought by Long Lance’s biographer, Donald B. Smith, to be limited to the southern United States (81). But obviously the presence of black people on the prairies did not “cause” or “incite” the “bitter race prejudice” that met the Oklahoma migrants as they stepped off their rail cars and arrived on their homesteads; that prejudice was already present in western Canadian Anglo-dominant culture. And, ironically, it made western Canadian “settlement” possible. The Oklahoman migrants arrived at a time in which the west was being colonized, and it was a manifestly racial and racist ideology that enabled this land to be “opened up” for “settlement” in the first place. It dispossessed First Nations people of their land, and created the brutalities of the reservation system. As Gwen Hooks points

out in her memoir of her pioneer father, Alberta-born Frank Oliver, the Minister of the Interior who opposed black immigration was also the Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Linking Oliver's anti-black position with his work as Superintendent of Indian affairs, Hooks characterizes his role as "a conduit through which the fears and bigotry of the time flowed" (30).

In the summer of 1911, when public outcry against "the black invasion" (Hooks 35) was most intense, the federal government finally acted. On August 12<sup>th</sup> the Liberal government drafted an Order-in-Council prohibiting: "For a period of one year from and after the date hereof the landing in Canada shall be and the same is prohibited of any immigrants belonging to the Negro race, which race is deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada" (Shepard 86). Order-in-Council No. 1324 was approved by Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier and signed into law by the Governor General, Sir Albert Henry George Grey (Waiser 75). This Canadian black exclusion law not only underscored the lengths the federal government was willing to go to keep blacks out of western Canada, but it also confirmed that the prairies were preserved, both culturally and legally, as a "white man's country."

Soon after, concern about maintaining healthy trade relations with the United States and upholding its international image led the Canadian government to repeal the Order two months after it was passed. The government now resorted to an unofficial, covert policy of exclusion. The Department of the Interior pulled all advertising from newspapers in black communities in the United States (Waiser 75). It sent two immigration agents—one of them black—to Oklahoma to talk with parties of prospective immigrants, "pointing out the difficulties of climate and the general prejudice that was

sweeping over Canada against the negro” (Winks 311). The Commissioner of Immigration for western Canada began offering a fee to the medical inspector at Emerson, Manitoba, for every black he rejected (Winks 310). In February of 1912 the Great Northern Railway sent notices to its employees that Negroes would not be admitted into Canada under any circumstances and that ticket sales between Saint Paul and the border should be discouraged (Winks 312).

The informal, but systematic, exclusion policy was effective. By 1912 the first wave of black migration had all but ended, and those who remained on the prairies turned to the business of building up their farms and communities. But in the years that Sylvester Long was on the prairies, the ambient anti-black racism that had been mobilized so effectively against the Oklahomans had by no means dissipated, and fears about the “The Black Peril” were still fresh.

## **II. LONG LANCE IN CALGARY**

Despite his speculation that “Alberta seemed ideal for Long Lance, removed as it was in time and distance from his true origins and all that he was trying to deny and escape” (Smith 80), Long Lance’s biographer himself narrates incidents that suggest that the racial climate Long Lance encountered on the prairies was not as far from that of the American South as he might have hoped. On many occasions during his time in Alberta, Long Lance was confronted by a vociferous anti-black racism which must have confirmed for him the terrible difficulties of being or becoming black during his time there. But in narrating Long Lance’s encounters with prairie racism, Smith’s own writing

participates, on the one hand, in the erasure of the black presence in Calgary and, on the other, in a gross stereotyping of this population. For instance, Smith writes that while he was in Calgary during the 1920s, “Long Lance doubtless winced at the ‘nigger jokes’ that were heard in the city. Calgary had only *a few* black citizens, and they were seldom seen away from the shoeshine stands and railways” (95, my emphasis). But I have already demonstrated that Calgary at this time had hundreds of black citizens, many of whom, of course, were not shoe-shiners or railway workers. Those who were were doubtless often away from shoeshine stands and railways, as they carried on their business throughout the city. Smith continues,

The respected *Beaver* magazine, published by the Hudson’s Bay Company in Winnipeg, included in the March 1926 issue several such barbs. One was titled “Genealogy”:

Two negroes were standing on the corner discussing family trees.

“Yes, suy, man,” said Ambrose, “Ah kin trace mah relations back to a family tree.”

“Chase ’em back to a family tree?” said Mose.

“No, man! Trace ’em! Not chase ’em.”

“Well, dey ain’t but two kinds of things dat lives in trees—birds and monkeys—and yo’ sho’ ain’t got no feathers on yo.’” (Smith 95)

Smith provides more evidence to suggest that Long Lance would have had a difficult time “outing” himself as black during his time in Calgary:

An awkward time of year for Long Lance arrived every fall when Calgary's Rotary Club presented its annual minstrel show which included nearly a hundred blackfaced club members "forming a burnt-cork background five rows deep." The evening of song and dance included dialogue with racial humor and dialect jokes. Among the "Krazy Koons" was Long Lance's direct boss, Charlie Hayden. (96)

It would have been difficult for Long Lance to ignore the "Krazy Koons," since the popular show played at the Grand Theatre in the Lougheed Building, right next to Long Lance's place of work, at the *Calgary Herald* (96).

Finally, Smith records that on many occasions Long Lance was the direct target of Calgarians' racism:

Long Lance hated to be mistaken for an African American and there is evidence that he went along with the humor when it served to take the heat off him. He could only be pushed so far, however, and one night in Calgary he reached his breaking point. Fred Kennedy, a popular Calgary journalist, was covering a regimental dinner at the Palliser Hotel and sat at a table with Long Lance. After dinner Kennedy, Long Lance, and two other companions walked across the street to the McCrohan's Restaurant and sat at the horseshoe counter. Ten minutes later two men entered, and when the waitress motioned them to the stools next to Kennedy's group, they moved forward and abruptly stopped. "I am not sitting alongside any nigger," one of the men told the

waitress. Long Lance ignored the remark, so the same man repeated it, louder. “*I am not sitting alongside any nigger!*”

Long Lance politely excused himself, turned to the man, who was by now glowering at him, and asked, “Were you addressing me, sir?”

“I sure as hell was,” the man said.

The way Kennedy remembers it, “Long Lance’s left didn’t seem to travel any more than eight inches, but when it connected with the man’s jaw, he went out like a light” (96).

### III. LONG LANCE’S *AUTOBIOGRAPHY*

It is not surprising that in such a cultural climate as the one I have just outlined—with its *de facto* segregation and naked anti-black hostility—Long Lance felt that he was safer, and that he could go further, by disavowing any connection, cultural or racial, to blackness. His *Autobiography*, commissioned by the Cosmopolitan publishing company as a boy’s adventure book on Indians,<sup>18</sup> says nothing about his actual childhood in North Carolina, his family, or his journey to the Canadian prairies. Instead, Long Lance skillfully fabricates a romantic Blackfoot history for himself. *Autobiography* describes a boyhood spent in the last days of the buffalo hunt on the northern pre-contact plains. Smith explains that Long Lance relied on a number of different sources for information and anecdotes with which to construct an “authentic” Plains Indian “autobiography.” He incorporated many of the interviews he conducted with First Nations for his *Herald* assignments and he used anecdotes supplied by his good friend Mike Eagle Speaker, a

young Blood Indian whose great-grandmother had been alive when the buffalo still roamed the plains. Smith points out that Long Lance also used a good deal of imagination, and, when it served his purpose, he did not hesitate to invent (201). Long Lance synthesized the information he gleaned from his sources, and made them his own. Apparently, many of the insights Long Lance borrowed, in particular those of Mike Eagle Speaker, were accurate. According to Smith,

through them the book manages a strong and legitimate Indian flavour. Short references to aspects of Plains Indian culture keep appearing, such as the Indians' ancient courtesy of not interrupting anyone while he is talking and their respect for old people "so deeply bred into us that to this day I have not the courage to dispute the word of an old person." Mike Eagle Speaker's finest reminiscences are scattered in this book like raisins in the dough, all carefully selected by a gifted journalist who knew how to use anecdotes. (203-4)

While Long Lance's decision to use Eagle Speaker's memories but claim them as his own might have satisfied his publisher's desire for what Gayatri Spivak calls a "native informant," I read his choice in another way. Long Lance's *Autobiography* is an extended fantasy of being or becoming indigenous, a powerful dream for displaced "new world" black subjects. But it is also, from a postcolonial perspective, a troubling dream, because such reterritorializing desires only further displace First Nations. While the book is now discredited as a fraud autobiography because it breaks what Philippe Lejeune calls the "autobiographical pact"—the promise to the reader that Lejeune argues autobiography as

a genre makes, that the textual and referential ‘I’ are the same (4)<sup>19</sup>—I propose to see it another way. Long Lance’s *Autobiography* is a fiction that tells a kind of true—more metaphorical and allegorical than factual—story about the desire to re-write the history of the violent dispersal of black people throughout the Americas from a territorialized perspective.

No critic has commented on how quickly and how radically the first pages of Long Lance’s “autobiography” disavow any connection to blackness or black community. While Long Lance may have been Native of part-Native, he was raised, culturally at least, as black. He spent the early years of his life surrounded by black people—his teachers, schoolmates, friends, and many of his relations were black. It is for this reason that I find the rejection of blackness in the first pages of *Autobiography* to be so disquieting. This rejection comes a mere ten paragraphs into his opening chapter, “First Remembered Things.” Because Long Lance raises—and then rejects—the spectre of blackness so early in his autobiography, it almost appears as a kind of precondition to the narrative, as though Long Lance was not able to set down his aboriginal “autobiography” without first consciously distancing himself from his own history. The autobiographical move Long Lance makes here is akin to what Mark Freeman, in his *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory Narrative* (1993), calls the “casting out of one’s demons” (36), a kind of narrative projection process in which a writer splits off from and disavows a part of his or herself in order to be able to inscribe a different, more tolerable (to one’s self) autographical subject.

The opening chapter of *Autobiography* describes the sense of mystery that Long Lance declares pervaded everything in his early boyhood with the Blackfoot. “As I close

my eyes now,” he writes, “and allow my memory to drift back to this early nomadic existence, a life which has vanished for ever in North America, the first thing that comes to me is a colour” (14). Which colour infuses Long Lance’s earliest memories? “—a dull, deep bluish grey. That was the colour of my early world. Everything I saw was tinted with this mystic greyness. It represented danger, mystery and distance” (14). As a writer, Long Lance likely chose the colour grey in order to exploit its associations with mystery, memory, and romance. But it seems significant that in contradistinction to the segregated black-and-white world of Winston-Salem in which Long Lance grew up that he colours the prairies in the in-between shades of grey. Consciously or unconsciously, Long Lance constructs the prairies as a borderland place, a place of memory and fantasy to which even a race-interloper like himself might belong.

In addition to the misty greyness that pervaded everything in his childhood, Long Lance writes that rumors began reaching the Blackfoot. They told of distant White men, and even “black white men.” Because this is the key passage in which Long Lance writes about black people, I reproduce the paragraph in its entirety:

Then there was that great mystery of distance which so fascinated us youngsters. Over the flat bosom of the plains we could see as far as the human eye could reach, yet always wondered what was beyond. We heard that there were “big waters”, bigger than the plains themselves; that there were thousands of White People living in another world across the big waters where there were no Indians at all. They traveled in “big houses”, which swam the waters like animals. And they had another “long house”, which spat fire and smoke and raced across the

ground faster than a buffalo could run. These things came to us as legends from other tribes. They even told us of “black white men” who lived under the sun, where it rested when it went under the horizon, and who were “scorched” until they were black. (15)

I have several competing reactions to this passage. First, I am disturbed by how radically defamiliarizing his treatment of black people is. Long Lance writes as though black people were a race of aliens to him, one beyond imagining. They not only live in the unimaginable—and uninhabitable-sounding—land beneath the sun, they are also unimaginably monstrous with their “scorched” skins. Long Lance even emphasizes the outlandish nature of these legends syntactically, by writing that not only was his tribe hearing about White People, “they *even* told us of ‘black white men.’”

But one way we might begin to understand Long Lance’s decision to write about black people in such radically defamiliarized terms is to read the passage as a kind of narrative authentication device. In her analysis of autobiography in the African diaspora, Chinosole notes that, historically, narratives written by African-Americans, both enslaved and free, have included some kind of authentication device. Because they were often published in Europe, or under a pseudonym, these narratives needed “Bills of sale, warrants for arrest, advertisements for capture, along with the character reference by some respected citizen, testif[ying] to the validity of the oppressed condition described in the text and lend[ing] credibility to the narrative” (58). Although Long Lance’s text is not a slave narrative, as a text ostensibly written by a minority from a predominantly oral culture, it shares with slave narratives similar anxieties about authenticity. It includes a

foreword by Irvin S. Cobb, a writer, humorist, and avid collector of Indian art that authenticates Long Lance's text. "I claim that there is authentic history in these pages," Cobb writes, "and verity and most of all a power to describe in English words the thoughts, the instincts and the events which originally were framed in a native language" (vii-viii). The land-beneath-the-sun passage that Long Lance includes so early in the narrative strikes me as an additional authentication device. In it, Long Lance distances himself from blackness and in so doing, highlights just how removed in time and place Blackfoot experience was from that of his readers'. After all, by the time his book was published in 1928 many on the prairies already had some experience of black people. By constructing a childhood for himself in a time prior to contact with either white or black people, Long Lance could ensure that his *Autobiography*—and thus his current identity—would be perceived by readers as authentically "Indian."

Long Lance might also have been drawing on historical records or recollections about the first encounters between Blackfoot and African-Americans for the tone and content of this passage. There are records—albeit highly mediated and unreliable—which document the reactions of Blackfoot to their first meeting with a black man. Hugh A. Dempsey, an archivist with the Glenbow Museum, researched the historical arrival of black explorers and pioneers in traditional Blackfoot territory (which extends from the North Saskatchewan River to the Yellowstone River in what is now Southern Montana, to the Rocky mountains in the west, to the confluence of the North and South Saskatchewan rivers in the east) and determined that "The first record of a Negro on the northern plains occurred in 1805, when the Negro York accompanied the Lewis and Clark expedition on its historic journey" (7). According to Dempsey's source, James K.

Hosmer's *History of the Expedition of Captains Lewis and Clark, 1804-5-6*, York's appearance amazed the Blackfoot. "They had never seen a being of that color and therefore flocked round him to examine the extraordinary monster" (108). It is impossible to determine in this highly mediated recounting of events whether it was the Blackfoot who considered York monstrous, or whether Lewis and Clarke felt so, and then attributed this reaction to the Indians. Given the early date of these explorations (1804-6), it is likely that this was also the first time the Blackfoot encountered white men. But why in the historical chronicle of these encounters do the Blackfoot not flock around Lewis and Clarke to examine those "extraordinary monster[s]"? Nevertheless, Dempsey's article confirms the accuracy of Long Lance's Blackfoot terminology: "This idea that a Negro was an unusual variety of white man rather than a separate race is revealed most clearly in the Blackfoot language. To them, a Negro was a *Six-apekwan* or 'Black White Man'" (7).

It is possible that Long Lance learned of these historical encounters between Blackfoot and black explorers from Mike Eagle Speaker. It is possible as well that the idea of blackness as a foreign, exotic phenomenon was a narrative touch Long Lance picked up from his Native informants and then used to add interest to his *Autobiography*. Nevertheless, for this reader, Long Lance's description of a distant, alien race of black people who live "beneath the sun" with terrible "scorched" skins is unsettling and painful. Having been raised in North Carolina's colored community, Long Lance was intimately familiar with black people, and he was one of them himself (at least, as I understand him). To write about them in this way seems an utter rejection of blackness.

This rejection of blackness becomes more understandable, though perhaps not less painful, when we keep in mind the material circumstances surrounding the fabrication of this *Autobiography*. By the time Long Lance sat down to write the book in Calgary in the summer of 1927, he had been passing as an Indian on the prairies for eight years, following his arrival in July of 1919. He had undoubtedly realized that the prairies were no place for a black person with professional ambitions like his. Long Lance had immersed himself in the life of the city in a way that no black citizen could have done at the time: he officiated at amateur boxing bouts, joined the militia and signed up with the local Elks Lodge. He also coached football for the Calgary Canucks and was elected to the executive (Smith 91). Although throughout his life Long Lance lied about his birthplace depending on what ancestry he wished to claim, it is significant that it was during his time on the prairies that Long Lance began lying compulsively about his origins and achievements. In 1922 on the Blood reserve in Alberta Long was adopted by the Blood and given the name Buffalo Child, but the ritual was only ceremonial. Yet afterwards Long Lance claimed to be a “full blooded Indian Chief,” a chief by “blood inheritance” (Smith 150). Smith explains that some of the Bloods were shocked to see photographs of Long Lance in “tribal dress” splashed across newspapers and magazines, and using his Blood name and tribal connections to commercial advantage.

At the same time, I find it remarkable that in a narrative about a Blackfoot Indian boyhood Long Lance finds a way to write about black people at all. It is as though in repressing any identification with blackness, blackness nevertheless returns, and finds a way into his “autobiography.” In the “mystery” passage, Sylvester Long as writer imagines a boyhood for his current persona. Strikingly, the boyhood he constructs for

Long Lance is one that is haunted, from an early age, by rumors of “black white men.” Although this passage is the *Autobiography*’s only reference to blackness, the “black white men” Long Lance evokes in the opening pages continue to haunt the text. While repressed, they remain present just below the horizon of the text’s consciousness.

Finally, I read this provocative passage another way. It is remarkable that in constructing a boyhood, Long Lance projects his persona, quite anachronistically, back in time to an era prior to European contact, when white people were only a rumor, and when black people still lived in a land “under the sun,” presumably Africa. Long Lance, whose parents were born into slavery on Southern plantations, and who grew up under Jim Crow segregation laws, was well aware of the injustices “the white man” was capable of. He begins his autobiography in a mythic, almost prelapsarian time that exists prior to even the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and then he re-writes the history of contact. In identifying himself with First Nations, Long Lance becomes emblematic of the survival of his people and their culture.<sup>20</sup>

I agree with Nancy Cook’s observation in “The Only Real Indians are Western Ones” that, despite his identification with First Nations, at times in the *Autobiography* Long Lance betrays his difference from the Blackfoot people he writes about (149). Occasionally, he refers to “the Indians” and “they,” not “my elders” and “we”: “The Indians always attacked just at the break of dawn, when everybody was tired and brains were slow to think” (16). He also exoticizes the people whom he writes about, referring to the “weird” and “queer” magic of the medicine men (57). His narrative is also riddled with historical inaccuracies. He writes about participating in the buffalo hunt, but that would have been impossible, since Long was born in 1890 and the buffalo herds on the

Canadian side of the border were extinct by 1879; they were extinct four years later on the American side as well. What seems important for Long Lance is to portray an “authentic” Blackfoot childhood in order to secure his current Native identity; thus his authenticity he measures by the degree to which the Blackfoot can conform to the stereotypical Plains Indian image as invented by authors like Fenimore Cooper. The book was successful in this regard. One book reviewer commented that “Invariably one is reminded of Hiawatha and Fenimore Cooper’s adventure tales...startling accounts of dances, rites, famous medicine men of the past, battles, pony raids, great hunting expeditions in the Rockies—all told with verve and remembered with clarity.”<sup>21</sup>

Significantly but not surprisingly, in the *Autobiography* Long Lance spends very little time exploring his subjective feelings or describing his internal, imaginative world. Although recent theorizing of autobiography has focused on the idea of the “relational self,” the idea that the autobiographical subject is defined through its relations with others,<sup>22</sup> in Long Lance’s text, the autobiographical subject is less relational than it is observational. Long Lance watches and reports, as a journalist does, the action around him. And the action that he focuses on primarily is war. *Autobiography* chronicles the conflicts between the Blackfoot, Assiniboines, and Crees. To Long Lance, the Blackfoot were “the ruling tribe” of the region; in fact, he calls them “Tigers of the Plains.” In the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, when black people could not afford any rebellious expression of anger because of their fear of retaliation, Long Lance seems to take it as a point of pride that Blackfoot remain fighters. During the time-period in which Long Lance focuses, the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Blackfoot were also nomadic. Whereas in the American South as well as on the prairies Long Lance’s

relationship to geography was highly scripted and racially coded, the Blackfoot he imagines cross provincial, territorial, and national boundaries routinely. Long Lance identifies with the Blackfoot nation as a symbol of reterritorialization as well as a symbol of non-white power.

In identifying himself with the Blackfoot, Long Lance constructs for himself a more enabling racialized subjectivity than was available to racialized black subjects during the 1920s on the prairies. This more-or-less enabling subjectivity depends, problematically, on his exploitation of the so-called “noble savage” myth, a myth which fluctuates between an idealization and a repudiation of the “other” in encounter narratives and constructs Indianness through the double concepts of nobility and savagery. But in identifying with the “noble savage” against any identification with blackness does not simply imply that during his time on the prairies in the 1920s First Nations were higher on the social scale than blacks, or fared better. On the contrary, it suggests that their distinct histories and identities could be easily exploited as they were not taken seriously in real life. While Long Lance and other native imposters such as Grey Owl<sup>23</sup> were free to construct their versions of “Indianness,” there were First Nations people who at that time in western Canada had real problems with asserting their rights. Edward Ahenakew’s book *Voices of the Plains Cree*, written in 1923, the time period of Long Lance’s sojourn on the prairies, attests to the abuses of First Nations under the Indian Act. Ahenakew writes in the voice of the storyteller Old Keyam:

I was born just before the Plains Cree began their life on reservations, and  
I was still a child when the Rebellion broke out. Our band took no part in that.

When it was over, I went away to school; I tried to fit myself to the white man's way of life—and I failed. In my failure, however, I still kept to what I believed was the best in Indian life; I have seen the degradation and shame of others who did not hold to that. You call me 'Old Keyam' because you think that I am both old and indifferent; I am neither. It is discouragement and failure that have aged me; it is heart-break, both for myself and for others, that has made me "Old Keyam."

When I talk to you, it is to make you know yourselves and your people; and sometimes I hope that my words may reach out to others in this country. Indians have been too long without a voice in the affairs of Canada, sitting as silent as women in a council of headmen. Some of the fault has been our own lack of education, so that we sit as though we were dumb, permitting others to form opinions and to shape policies that concern us, and that are often wrong, quite wrong. (71)

As problematic as his identification with the Blackfoot is, Long Lance also used his Indian persona in his published articles and in his public lectures to advocate on First Nations issues. As Winfried Siemerling argues, "identification is an act of recognition with both positive and insidious possibilities, ranging from acceptance and fame to stereotype and defamation" (31). Long Lance used his Native persona, and the fame that came with it, to speak widely on the problems of the reservation system and the indignities suffered at the hands of Indian agents, and he openly criticized Canada's Indian Act. It is possible that Long Lance, one generation removed from slavery,

genuinely identified with First Nations people, bitter exiles in their own land. If, as Diana Fuss argues, identification is a “psychical mechanism that produces self-recognition” via “the detour through the other that defines a self” (2-3), perhaps in identifying with First Nations and their histories Long Lance found a circuitous way of recognizing himself and identifying with his own black history.

In 1923 Long Lance wrote a letter to his friend, the reverend S.H. Middleton,<sup>24</sup> who had known Long when he first arrived in Alberta and identified as a Cherokee, justifying his decision to assume a Blackfoot Indian identity. Long Lance cited his desire to advocate more effectively on behalf of the Blackfoot. He explained that he had not lived with his own people since he was sixteen and that he now knew more about the Indians of Western Canada than he did of his “own progenitors” (qtd. Smith 148). Of course Long Lance did not mention to Middleton that in fact his “progenitors” were from North Carolina; instead he allowed Middleton to continue believing that he was born in Oklahoma to Cherokee parents. By presenting himself as Blackfoot, Long Lance continued, he could give his writing “an additional touch of interest.” “Furthermore,” he concluded, “I believe that as a Canadian Indian, which I have become in toto, I can do more for Indians who need something done for them” (qtd. Smith 148).

Long Lance became a famous Native Rights advocate, though how much he actually accomplished on behalf of the Blackfoot is another question. His personal ambitions were boundless and at times he exploited his role as Native rights advocate for the recognition that it brought him. In his speeches and articles on behalf of the Blackfoot Long Lance pushed an integrationist philosophy and he was careful about presenting himself as the model red man—noble but tamed. For instance, the concluding chapter of

his *Autobiography*, “No More Roving,” describes the humiliations of the new reservation system, but Long Lance concludes on a cautious note, arguing that the Blackfoot must settle down to the new reality:

Our day as free rovers of the open plains has ended. A few years later we boys were in mission schools, learning our ABC’s and how to hoe with our hands. How this shamed us: to have to work like women, when we had thought that we were going to be warriors and hunters like our forefathers. This manual labour so humiliated us that whenever we looked up and saw any of our old warriors passing by the school, we would lay down our hoes and stand still until they had passed. [...]

But the new day is here: it is here to stay. And now we must leave it to our old people to sit stolidly and dream of the glories of our past. Our job is to try to fit ourselves into the new scheme of life which the Great Spirit has decreed for North America. And we will do that, keeping always before us the Blackfoot proverb: *Mokokit-ki-ackamimat*—Be wise and persevere. (240-1)

Long Lance was highly rewarded for his integrationist attitude. By 1929 he was a *bona fide* celebrity with speaking engagements across the United States. He attended glittering society parties in New York; the B.F. Goodrich Company asked him to design and endorse a pair of “Long Lance Sport Shoes” (Long Lance modeled them on a pair of moccasins); he even starred in Douglas Burden’s 1930 Hollywood film *The Silent Enemy*. But the more famous Long Lance became, the more difficult it was to hide his

family origins, and toward the end of his life, as his lies and exaggerations became more outrageous, he seems to have come increasingly undone. In the summer of 1926 Long Lance was involved in an unpleasant fight with a black man, Athay MacFarlane, and he lost his job with the luxurious Banff Springs Hotel as public relations coordinator. The *Fort Macleod Gazette* reported that he had taken ““a lady’s part against a nigger”” (Smith 190). According to Smith, during his stay at the Banff Springs Hotel he became involved with a married woman; the woman’s black butler was resentful of Long Lance’s affair with his boss’s wife, and they got into a physical fight. The butler slashed Long Lance’s thigh with a razor, and Long Lance hit him over the head with an iron poker, nearly killing him. Though Smith does not speculate about how race might have played a role in this altercation, I regard it as significant that Long Lance, a race passer, almost killed a black man—a servant—a symbol of everything he was trying to reject and escape. The *Calgary Herald’s* racist reportage of the incident seemed to confirm the necessity of Long Lance metaphorically killing the black man inside himself: “only the thickness of the negro’s skull saved him from instant death as the poker was almost double with the force of the blow” (Smith 190).

It seems almost inevitable that with the fame Long Lance achieved, as well as his intimate involvement with First Nations, that he would at some point let something slip, and be discovered as a race passer. Indeed, the remarkable thing about Long Lance’s story is how long he was able to pull off the masquerade—and how far it took him. However, during the filming of *The Silent Enemy* in 1929, Chauncy Yellow Robe, Long Lance’s co-star, a Sioux who had grown up on the plains in the 1870s and 1880s, observed Long Lance’s behaviour, which he thought odd for a Plains Indian. He noticed

Long Lance's many mistakes in Indian sign language, and that his dancing was strange—not of the plains (Smith 243-44). Because the rumors about Long Lance's origins threatened the authenticity of the picture, the legal counsel for *Silent Enemy* launched an investigation into Long Lance's past. In 1930 they discovered that that he was actually Sylvester Long, that he was from North Carolina, and that, by southern racial standards, he was black. They confronted Long Lance with the evidence, but he denied the charges. Then in 1932 in Los Angeles, amid rumors and speculation that he was part black, Long Lance shot himself.

#### **IV. LONG LANCE AND THE BLACK PRAIRIE ARCHIVE**

The significance of Long Lance's personal history and his *Autobiography* to Canadian history and to black Canadian cultural studies lies in the way they provoke us to go beyond the problematic binaries of conventional “passing” or “imposture” narratives to explore the complexities of racial politics of the Canadian prairies in the early part of the twentieth century. It is important that we not simply regard Long Lance as fraud like other prairie imposters of his time, Grey Owl and Frederick Philip Grove, because the discourses of imposture presuppose the possibilities of a fully self-cognizant subject capable of choosing to perform either a truthful self-representation or “fraudulent” identity. As I hope to have demonstrated, in the context of the prairies in the 1920s, Long Lance did not have much of a choice about being or becoming a self-confidently black or mixed-race subject. He could not have been both black and the writer that he became. Even though, as the black prairie archive demonstrates, the

pioneers wrote as well as recorded orature, Long Lance became a different kind of writer: he did so professionally, on a full-time basis, and his autobiography and articles reached a wide and racially diverse audience (his articles in *Macleans* and *Cosmopolitan* circulated widely, and *Autobiography* became a best-seller). The pioneers who wrote did so in addition to their homesteading labours, and they wrote, for the most part, unconscious of the prospect of a future audience beyond that of their own families and communities.

At the same time as I demonstrate the ways Long Lance's choices were circumscribed by the prairie racism of his time, I do not mean to suggest that he was essentially a tragic figure or that his story is a made-in-Canada "tragic mulatto" narrative. Tragic mulatto narratives, such as Vera Caspary's novel *The White Girl* (1929) and Geoffrey Barnes' *Dark Lustre* (1932) normally centre around female mixed-race subjects, and they essentially present an anti-miscegenation argument. They imply that it is mixed blood that inevitably brings sorrow and tragedy, rather than pointing out the tragedies caused by societies that are socially and legally founded upon binary race-thinking. It is true that Long Lance's story ends tragically, with his suicide, but his story is also oftentimes triumphant. His ability to write the *Autobiography* and live larger-than-life completely under the nose of an anti-black social order is a testament to his courage, and his talent for personal reinvention and survival.

Without minimizing the complexity of Long Lance's racial identifications, I claim him as a key figure in the black prairie archive, and I claim his *Autobiography* as the first *novel* penned on the prairies by a black author, for undoubtedly *The Autobiography of a Blackfoot Indian Chief* must be read as a strong work of imagination, rather than simply as a fraud autobiography. It is perhaps fitting that for a population that

has been so much in flux, so decentered and difficult to describe as the black prairies have been, that one of its most important literary figures should be one whose blackness is as ephemeral and complicated as Long Lance's was. Though in his lifetime Long Lance always denied his black ancestry, he can nevertheless be regarded as a significant literary ancestor, especially for twentieth-century writers such as Esi Edugyan, Suzette Mayr, and Minister Faust, whose novels written in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries explore the complexities and fantasies involved in race and mixed race, and who continue to ask questions about the limits and possibilities of racial metamorphoses and strategic reidentification for black people on the prairies. Though as Mayr's *Moon Honey* (1995) suggests, today mixed-race authors are more likely to identify as black, it is not because in the twentieth century the prairies have become a haven of tolerance in relation to the black population or to black history. As the dehistoricizing treatment of Long Lance by his biographer demonstrates, blackness continues to occupy the space of the repressed in the prairies' official histories and in its cultural self-representations. Mayr's novel literalizes this repression: the central character of *Moon Honey*, Carmen, is a repressed and racist white girl who undergoes a startling transformation into a "brown girl," and then realizes by the book's end that she was really a brown girl all along:

Being a brown girl almost feels like being drunk. She tries to remember the days when she was white and sober, but she can only think of herself as brown—as having always been brown, so that she marvels at how well she pulled off being white. Fooled them all, fooled everyone, even herself, the best magic trick of all. A reverse Oreo cookie, an inside-out coconut, the juice running down

the sides and spilling all over the floor. Now she is brown and drunk out of her mind. She's sipped and gulped so much she's drunk, drunk out of her skull, dead drunk, past drunk, so drunk she's sober, her mind as sharp and bright as the point of a new needle. That's what being a white girl turned brown girl is all about. Or a brown girl who was brown all along but nobody knew, not even herself. Only now learning to enjoy the taste of the drink, not just an intoxicating cocktail, but an empowering elixir. (211-12)

As Mayr suggests, being black on the prairies in our own cultural moment is still a vertiginous undertaking. It is perhaps not such a long way from Long Lance to today after all.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> West Point is the oldest and most prestigious military academy in the United States, located in West Point, New York.

<sup>2</sup> Photograph courtesy of the Glenbow Museum and Archives. Call Number NA-1811-1

<sup>3</sup> The accepted sociological definition of passing, the ability of a person to be regarded as a member of a sociological group other than their own for the purpose of gaining social acceptance, put forward by such critics as Maria C. Sanchez in *Passing: Identity and Interpretation in Sexuality, Race and Religion* (2001) and Daniel G. Renfrow in “A Cartography of Passing in Everyday Life” (2004) is, as we will see, insufficient for theorizing Long Lance’s life story and his autobiography. This notion of passing relies on the idea that people “belong,” intrinsically and essentially, to particular “sociological groups” and races. Instead, I understand passing as a strategic reidentification that highlights at once the constructedness and the fluidity of social identities.

<sup>4</sup> I wonder if it is a coincidence or a strategic move on Long Lance’s part that he chose to identify Oklahoma as his birthplace, since, as this chapter explains, Oklahoma was also the place of origin of most of the prairies’ black settlers. Perhaps Long Lance’s change of name and identification with Oklahoma hints that in some private way that he identified with those migrants.

<sup>5</sup> American scholars, in contrast to Canadian scholarship, have explored what Long Lance’s autobiography and film work reveal about western American regionalism, authenticity, and American racial politics. See Nancy Cook, “The Only Real Indians are Western Ones: Authenticity, Regionalism and Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance or Sylvester Long” (2004); Nancy Cook, “The Scandal of Race: Authenticity, The Silent Enemy and the Problem of Long Lance” (2001); Melinda Micco, “Tribal Re-Creations: Buffalo Child Long Lance and Black Seminole Narratives” (2000), and Laura Browder, “‘One Hundred Percent American’: How a Slave, a Janitor, and a Former Klansman Escaped Racial Categories by Becoming Indians” (1999).

<sup>6</sup> According to Richard Day, *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity* (2000), Robin Winks’s history, along with other minority histories first published in the late 1960s and early 1970s such as George Woodcock’s *The Doukhobors* (1968) and Myrna Kostash’s *All of Baba’s Children* (1977), “contributed to the historical visibility of non-canonical peoples in Canada, and thereby challenged the multiculturalist origin myth. However, George Elliott Clarke contends that “American historian Robin W. Winks’s treatment of African-Canadian history is so negative that it borders on racism” (*Odysseys* 124). Clarke points out one passage in which Winks reports an abolitionist’s description of Samuel Ringgold Ward as “so black [...] that one could not see Ward when he shut his eyes” (265-6). In his doctoral thesis Kent Utendale also points out instances in which Winks’s treatment of African-Albertan history is biased and even incorrect (115; 125; 126). At the moment, however, Winks’s is the most comprehensive

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text available on black prairie history, but I rely on it cautiously, pointing out, wherever possible, his discrepancies, errors, and biases.

<sup>7</sup> Black migration to Oklahoma began after the Civil War and continued into the 1880s. This migration was part of a larger migration of black settlers moving from the older southeastern states to the new lands of the west (Shepard 21).

<sup>8</sup> Utendale points out, contrary to Winks, that black immigration to the prairies from Oklahoma and surrounding states began prior to 1909. Groups of three or four men arrived in 1905, 1906 and 1907 to look at the land and they began filing their homesteads in 1908 (115). However, mass migration did not begin in earnest until 1909.

<sup>9</sup> While the majority of the settlers farmed, those who went to the cities worked as laborers or ran small businesses. In 1912 the Macdonald Hotel was going up in Edmonton (Thomas Mapp, *Window* 19), and the Canadian National Railroad was being constructed in Alberta; black labour helped build both. As Luther Gerard remembers, “The railroad was put in with Swedes, colored people and wheelbarrows” (*Window* 24). There was also employment for black people at Swift’s Meat Packing Plant in Edmonton, at the City Pavement Plant, and, for women, domestic and laundry work (*Window* 32; 34). Other urban blacks started their own businesses. Dwight “Sonny” Tyler remembers that his uncle, Harrison Sneed, “had quite a business—a rooming house, a restaurant, a dance hall, and a pool hall. His business was on 107 Avenue and 101 Street [in Edmonton]. There was a colored barber who had a small barbershop—I used to go there” (*Window* 9).

<sup>10</sup> Different sources put the number of black settlers who arrived on the prairies in the period 1905 to 1912 between one thousand (Waiser, Winks), 1,400 (North of the Gully History Book Committee 358), and 1,837 (Utendale 108). Utendale’s figure includes the 110 blacks other than Americans who also immigrated to the prairies at this time from the West Indies, British Guiana, St. Vincent, Jamaica, and Africa. His estimate of black arrivals from the US, then, is 1,763. I have settled on the round figure of 1,650 because of my analysis of archival Census of Canada data. In 1901 the Census of Canada enumerated 286 “Negroes” in Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan. By the 1911 Census that number had jumped to 1,524, but the migration would continue for one more year. The 1921 census counted a total of 1,935 “Negroes” on the prairies, meaning that, since 1901, 1,649 black migrants had arrived. This is likely a conservative estimate; Cheryl Foggo believes the number is somewhere “between fifteen hundred and two thousand” (“Alberta’s Early Black Pioneers” n.p.).

<sup>11</sup> Canada has long depended on the West Indies as a market for the export of Canadian cod, or saltfish, as the staple is known in the West Indies. ([http://www.heritage.nf.ca/society/fish\\_trade.html](http://www.heritage.nf.ca/society/fish_trade.html)) April 10, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> This fear was inflamed by letters to the editor such as the one published in *The Albertan* on April 21, 1911. It announced the plans of one Col. Tom Harris to “pilot 5000 niggahs into British American soil before the summah goes [...] Ah’ll put a niggah and a

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team of hosses on every quartah section of land I can get my hands on in Alberta, British Columbia or Saskatchewan” (Utendale 83). I have to wonder, given the caricature of southern American speech in this letter, whether it wasn’t written by an Anglo-Canadian under the pen name “Col. Tom Harris” to deliberately incite public fear of black migration.

<sup>13</sup> Palmer records that at a time when Edmonton’s total population was only 24,900, the Edmonton Board of Trade’s petition opposing the entry of blacks attracted 3,400 signatures (36).

<sup>14</sup> The Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, a women’s charitable organization, issued its own petition that warned, “We do not wish that the fair fame of western Canada should be sullied with the shadow of lynch law, but we have no guarantee that our women will be safer in their scattered homesteads than white women in other countries with a Negro population” (Palmer 36).

<sup>15</sup> A tragic news story in Edmonton further aroused white prejudice and seemed to confirm white settlers’ fears of black sexuality. As Shepard records, on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1911, fifteen-year old Hazel Huff was found unconscious on the kitchen floor by a neighbour. She had a handkerchief tied over her eyes and had apparently been drugged with chloroform. When she regained consciousness she told police that she had answered a knock at the door and was grabbed by a black man who tried to drug her. The story circulated quickly. As the *Regina Bulletin* editorialized,

Bad news not only travels fast, but like a snowball on the down grade the further it goes the bigger it grows. This particular item picked up a second negro and flogging between Edmonton and Regina. It can hardly have been less than a murder and lynching when it reached Toronto, and a free-for-all race war by the time it got to New York. (Shepard 80)

The *Edmonton Journal* later reported that Hazel Huff “had not been attacked and overcome by a big, burly nigger who was intent on robbing the house, as was first believed.” She had lost a diamond ring and made up the story to avoid punishment. Shepard notes that the Edmonton police had known the truth for several days but had not disclosed it to the press (80).

<sup>16</sup> Matthew Henson’s story is an interesting one in its own right. According to his co-explorer Robert Peary, due to the length of time Henson spent in the arctic, his ability to speak Inuit, and his hunting and sled-driving skills, Henson was “more of an Eskimo than some of them” (*National Geographic* n.p.) Henson fathered a son with an Inuit woman named Akatingwah, and his descendants still reside in Greenland. Their story is the subject of a book by Allen Counter, *North Pole Legacy: Black, White and Eskimo* (1991), as well as a documentary film of the same name.

<sup>17</sup> Lanark North was a federal electoral district from 1867-1917 located in Ontario.

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<sup>18</sup> Long Lance had written a series of articles about Plains Indians that he published in *Cosmopolitan* and *Maclean's* in 1926; these articles attracted the attention of Ray Long, an editor with the Cosmopolitan Book Corporation, who encouraged Long Lance to write a book-length manuscript (Smith 188, 194).

<sup>19</sup> The stability and unity of the subject that Lejeune posits in this definition has come under considerable attack in more recent poststructuralist and feminist challenges and redefinitions of autobiography as a genre. See Helen Buss, *Mapping Ourselves* (1993) and *Repossessing the World: Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women* (2002); Shirley Neuman "Autobiography: From Different Poetics to a Poetics of Differences" (1992); and Joanne Saul, *Writing the Roaming Subject: The Biotext in Canadian Literature* (2006).

<sup>20</sup> For an analysis of the identification of African-Americans with First Nations as "masquerade," see Joseph Roach's *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (1996).

<sup>21</sup> *The Scotsman*, quoted on the back cover of the latest paperback British edition of *Long Lance* (London: Abacus, 1976).

<sup>22</sup> See John Paul Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (1999) and Susanna Egan's *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* (1999).

<sup>23</sup> There are many similarities between Grey Owl, or Archie Belaney, and Long Lance. They were born only two years apart (Long Lance, 1890 – 1932; Grey Owl 1888-1938) and they lived on the prairies at the exact same time. During the 1930s Grey Owl lived in the newly-created Prince Albert National Park in Saskatchewan, where he was an outspoken conservationist. The difference between these two imposters is that Grey Owl, who was white and English, came from the dominant, colonial centre. His imposture was a fantasy about Indianness and did not have the same amount of fear and shame associated with it as Long Lance's story. See Jane Billingham's *Grey Owl: The Many Faces of Archie Belaney* (1999).

<sup>24</sup> This letter is in Donald B. Smith's papers at the Glenbow Archives in Calgary. Call number: M 6071. (Note, however, that as of the date of this writing, Smith's papers have not been processed and access to them is subject to his permission).

## CHAPTER 2

### INSIDE THE BLACK PRAIRIE ARCHIVE: THE PIONEERS

In 1911, after Wilfrid Laurier's Federal Liberal Government passed Order-in-Council No. 1324 which banned from entry "immigrants belonging to the Negro race, which race is deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada" (Shepard 86), the Oklahoman blacks had to begin seeking opportunities in places other than the Canadian prairies. But the black pioneers who were already in Canada persevered. They weathered the racism mounted against them and turned to the business of farming, and building up their communities, homesteads, and businesses. When in 1929 an acting Deputy Minister for Immigration reported, mistakenly, that none of the original black settlers remained on the prairies (Winks 313), it seemed that nearly everyone had forgotten them. The process of repressing the memory of the first wave of black migration had already begun.

This chapter is concerned with excavating a sedimented prairie blackness. How did the first generation of black prairie people—the "pioneers"—respond to the erasure of blackness in the prairie imaginary? Though in the nation's official histories the story of the black pioneers ends after the furor over them dies down, the archival record tells a different history. As I discovered in my research into provincial and municipal archives and historical societies, and in speaking with descendants of pioneer families, the black pioneers did not disappear into quiet obscurity. In fact, they responded to their new environment by becoming cultural producers: by writing, story telling, and in other ways

preserving their memories. In the absence of official records that could testify to their lives and experiences, the first generation of black prairie people began to create their own personal collections of memory. They kept diaries; began collecting personal materials and ephemera; photographed their communities; composed memoirs; recorded orature; published their speeches in local newspapers; and wrote biographies of their ancestors. These small, personal, “micro-archives” of memory, created by and about ordinary black prairie people, stand in opposition to the official histories of the dominant culture which have failed to remember black prairie lives.

While I have endeavored to include in the black prairie archive all the archival material produced by the pioneers that I could find in public archives across the prairies (see Appendix), a considerable amount of this material remains out of reach in private, family collections. It is difficult to estimate just how much archival material remains outside our public institutions of memory, since there is no database to search, no bibliography or catalogue to consult, and no public, central archive to explore. But in speaking with a descendant of a black pioneer family in Edmonton, Junetta Jamerson, I gathered that there are at least half a dozen significant family collections that have not yet been donated to public archives. Her own family has kept their important family papers, which include her great-grandmother’s diary, and Jamerson knows of three other families in the Edmonton area with comparable collections.<sup>1</sup>

I asked Jamerson why her family has decided to hold on to their papers rather than donate them to the Alberta Provincial Archives or the City of Edmonton Archives, where family materials could be catalogued, kept in a climate-controlled environment, and made accessible to the public. She responded that, to her mind, making the archive

public was equivalent to “giving it over to white people” (Personal telephone communication, February 16, 2006). The mistrust that Jamerson expresses here for the public archive is not necessarily unique to the Canadian context. S.I. Martin observes that many black Britons share a similar wariness of British museums and archives. In his essay “Inheriting Diversity: Archiving the Past,” Martin argues that the “long-standing and genuine cultural resistance and mistrust between most black people in Britain and the heritage sector” needs to be linked to the late-Victorian origins of the museum, which has historically “stood as a testament to British expansion into and documentation of the world at large” (197). “Let us never forget,” Martin writes, “the degrading and enormously popular and large-scale public displays of people of colour (Singalese, Tamils, ‘Bedouin Arabs’, Matabeles, Swazis, Hottentots, Malays) in so-called ‘native villages’ where they could be observed going through the motions of snake-charming or performing a ‘superstitious bush dance’” (197). Given the historical context of museums, it is “inevitable,” according to Martin, that the present-day view remains “that museums, galleries and archives are still places which tend to be *about* us rather than *for* us” (197-8).

Upon entering a public museum or archive, the documents would be handled, catalogued, and scrutinized by professional archivists<sup>2</sup> may not appreciate the memorial, spiritual, sentimental, and cultural value that clings to objects that might at first appear odd and unimpressive: a son or a daughter’s high school essay on Amber Valley; a photograph of a run-down house surrounded by tall prairie grass; a railway porter’s 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary souvenir program. In a context in which black prairie history is apparently not respected enough by the dominant culture to be remembered by its official historians,

the private family collection of memory gains enormous significance. It bears witness to a history that has been denigrated and denied. It becomes a repository of black ancestral memory, and it keeps the memory of these ancestors alive and part of the present.

While some archival material is not available to be included in the black prairie archive I am constructing here because it remains in private collections that, at the time of this writing, I am unaware of, there is other material that is unavailable simply because it has not survived the ravages of time. The cultural production of the first generation was created in climates and conditions that were often not well suited to the preservation of fragile paper documents. For example, although William Beal, a pioneer in Manitoba's remote Swan River Valley, assembled what his neighbours described as a "comprehensive library of learning" (Barrow and Hambly 26) by mail order catalogue, nothing of this library remains, as Beal's homestead burned to the ground in a spring fire in 1911.

Adding to the special difficulties of archiving the black prairies is the reality that the lives of the pioneers did not always produce the kinds of material records that are traditionally recognized as having archival and literary "value." Many members of the first generation were so absorbed in the difficult business of clearing their land, building their homesteads, and eking out a living through the Depression of the 1930s, that they left little behind in the way of a literary record of their lives and experiences. Sometimes the only material documents written by a black pioneer are the ones produced by their correspondence with a Land Titles Office. Yet land title documents, as brief and business-like as they might be, have nevertheless been deemed important enough to the descendants of the black pioneers to be collected in community histories such as *North of*

*the Gully* (1981), a community history of the first pioneers (both white and black) to settle in west-central Saskatchewan, and *Window of Our Memories* (1981), which collects the oral histories of black pioneers in Alberta. These community histories preserve the memory of ordinary black farmers like Samuel M. Boyd whose life story is remembered, interpreted, and told strictly through the few documents he filed with respect to his land:

In August of 1907 Samuel Boyd filed on the N.W. 18-50-22, W3.

He stated at the time of filing that he was thirty-eight years old, and was born in Memphis Tennessee. He had previously been a farmer.

In June 1911, when he received the title to his homestead, he had built a fourteen by twenty-five foot log house, a stable, a granary and dug a well. He had broken thirty acres which was in crop and he owned three head of cattle and three horses.

Over the years, several families lived on the quarter: Fred Pohl, Eugene Klem, Leonard Barber, Edward Rhinehart, Ole Ramstad, Orlando Cox.

In the early 1970s, the remains of the Samuel Boyd buildings were demolished and the land was put under cultivation. (*North of the Gully* 359)

Documents such as these put pressure on common understandings of what “counts” as a valuable archival document by insisting that ordinary black lives on the prairies are important, and worth remembering. The documents that bear witness to these lives, then, are worth preserving.

Because the first generation of black pioneers did not always produce texts of conventional literary value, archiving the black prairies demands a recognition of unconventional forms of documentation, representation and commemoration. The black prairie archive requires that we recognize the cultural and archival value of different genres of expression, such as land title documents, oral testimony, memoirs, letters, recipes, diaries, speeches, and personal ephemera. Given its unusual materials, the black prairies demands an unusual archive. It must be an archive that can find a way to remember the lives of black prairie people, in spite of the fact that frequently their texts are marginal, idiosyncratic, and, sometimes, as immaterial as memory. This chapter, which begins the “pioneer” work of theorizing and interpreting the early black prairie archive, should be understood as working as much to produce an archive as to analyze one. My investigation into black prairie cultural production means ultimately that this project is not only focussed on the writing produced by blacks on the prairies but is also concerned with questions of how to adequately archive, remember, and represent minority culture, history, and memory.

## **I. AN ARCHIVE OF MEMORY**

My subtitle echoes Ann Cvetkovich’s study of lesbian cultures and trauma histories, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures* (2003). There are significant resonances between my project and hers. Just as I investigate the problems of Canadian history and regional identity in relation to race, Cvetkovich approaches the questions of American history and cultural memory “from the unabashedly minoritarian perspective of lesbian cultures” (7). Similarly, her response to

the absence of institutionalized documentation of lesbian lives is to assemble a lesbian cultural history, which she organizes and understands as “an archive of feelings.” This archive is:

an exploration of cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the text themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception. Its focus on trauma serves as a point of entry into a vast archive of feelings, the many forms of love, rage, intimacy, grief, shame and more that are part of the vibrancy of queer cultures. (7)

Because the black prairie archive arises from a culture that has not produced many major novels, books of poetry, plays, or other texts that are immediately recognized by the dominant culture as having literary and archival value, it has to insist on the archival and literary centrality of “ephemera.” Ephemera, Cvetkovich reminds us, is “the term used by archivists and librarians to describe occasional publications and paper documents, material objects and items that fall into the miscellaneous category when being catalogued” (243). Ephemera assumes additional archival importance when the dominant culture fails to chronicle the lives of minorities, such as gays and lesbians, and black people. Because of her insistence on the importance of ephemera, and her emphasis on the psychological and affective dimension of the archive, Cvetovich argues that the lesbian archive of feelings “can be viewed as the material instantiation of Derrida’s deconstructed archive; [it is] composed of material practices that challenge traditional

conceptions of history and understands the quest for history as a psychic need rather than a science” (268).

Though the black prairie archive is not organized as a trauma history, nor is it explicitly designed as an archive of “feelings” (I believe it makes more sense at this early stage to focus on remembering and recovering black history and literature on the prairies than on theorizing the affective dimensions of it) it is forged in response to the erasure of black history from the national and prairie imaginaries, and so it recognizes the injunction of trauma archives and memorials to “never forget.” Thus, while it may not be an archive of feelings, the black prairie archive can be thought of as an archive of memory. More specifically, it is an archive of and for collective black-inflected memory. As a site of collective memory, this archive retrieves the forgotten past and allows it to come into the present, revitalizing and informing the debates and theoretical concerns of the current moment.

Like memory, the archives’ structure is diffuse. Although Derrida reminds us that the word *archive* derives from the Greek *arkheion*, meaning a house, a domicile, an address (*Archive Fever 2*), this archive is not housed in a central building or structure; it exists as a unified archive only here, in the pages of this dissertation. Perhaps one day, if a central African-Canadian Archive is built, the material I have excavated can become part of it, and it could then gain a permanent and central location. However, today, the black prairie archive is decentralized, since all of its original documents remain scattered across the prairies’ archives, museums, and historical societies, as well as in family attics and basements. Still, other material, like William Beal’s remarkable pioneer library, has vanished, and so its materials cannot be included in this archive in the usual way. But

then again, this is no usual archive. Conceived as a site of memory more than a “house, a domicile, an address,” this archive “includes” Beal’s library through the process of remembering it. In memory, Beal’s library attains a kind of metaphysical and archival “presence,” even in its absence. Though memory makes for an admittedly ephemeral archival record, and challenges the very grounds of conventional archival representation, in cases where the material legacy of the black pioneers has been lost, damaged, neglected, or destroyed, it is memory that must become the black prairies’ archive.

To begin to read the black prairie archive, then, is to begin to explore the workings of black-inflected memory on the prairies. Although I organize the bibliography of black prairie cultural production (Appendix) chronologically, so that trends and patterns in the production of black prairie literature and orature are more easily identifiable, it is not my intention here to investigate the early archive in a chronological or otherwise linear fashion. Instead, I move around in the archive more spontaneously, as though proceeding from memory to memory. Each encounter with a text in the archive sparks a memory for me that directs me, in turn, to another text, and to another memory. I begin by remembering William Beal and his vanished library; Beal’s life and history in turn sparks a remembrance of Alfred Shadd, who pioneered in Saskatchewan at the same time as Beal in Manitoba; Shadd’s writing then triggers a memory of Ellis Hooks’ orature, who speaks of pioneering in Alberta. This pattern of investigation puts us in touch with a variety of texts and genres—memoir, documentary photographs, public speech, orature—and so begins the work of remembering and theorizing the generic diversity of the black prairie archive. This investigation also puts us in touch with a broad range of pioneer subjects and pioneering experiences, from Beal, a bachelor and an

intellectual, to Shadd, a doctor and politician, to Hooks, a farmer and sometime black activist. This chapter reminds us of the diversity of people who were part of the black pioneer experience and who, together, forged a complex and heterogeneous culture on the prairies in the early part of the twentieth century.

I harbor no illusions that the complexity of the black prairie's early archival production can be adequately summed up in a single chapter. Even a single thick volume could not claim to offer a comprehensive understanding of the unique and particular production of an entire generation of black pioneers. This chapter's focus, then, is modest, yet, I want to believe, important, as it sets out to identify some of the key themes and issues raised when examining a selection of the cultural production of the first wave. I look at the importance of the reterritorializing impulse exemplified by the pioneers, the role of historical memory, and the ways the pioneers responded to the prairies as an ideational space.

## **II. WILLIAM BEAL: A BLACK PIONEER IN MANITOBA**

Of all the personal collections that have been assembled on the prairies, surely none is more impressive or affecting than the one belonging to the black Manitoba pioneer, William S.A. "Billy" Beal. Although neither Beal nor his archive are well known (to date there have been no articles but a self-published amateur biography), he deserves to be recognized as a key figure in black Canadian cultural studies and in prairie history. Beal's incredible cultural production, which includes seventy three documentary photographs, a brief memoir, and a significant but lost library, has much to say about the

possibilities and impossibilities of archiving the black prairies. Beal's voluminous creative output demonstrates that, although the black pioneers quickly disappeared from public consciousness, many were careful to document their lives. To return to the question that opened this chapter: how did the first generation of black prairie people respond to the erasure of their history in the prairie imaginary? Some pioneers, like William Beal, caught "archive fever" (Derrida).

According to Robert Barrow and Leigh Hambly, community historians who interviewed Beal's friends and neighbours for their biography, *Billy: The Life and Photographs of William S.A. Beal* (1988), Beal arrived in the Big Woody district in the Swan River Valley, an area in west central Manitoba between the Duck and Porcupine Mountains, at least as early as 1906. Beal had been living in Minneapolis, Minnesota, one of the regions where the Manitoba government focussed its immigration advertising. As I recorded in my new historiography of the prairies in the previous chapter, in 1901 the *Saint Paul Broadax*, a black newspaper, printed articles in which the premier of Manitoba extended cordial invitations to all American farmers that would come. Black Americans assumed, mistakenly, that they were welcome. It is possible that Beal read the advertisements in the *Broadax*, but it is also possible that he emigrated for his own private reasons. He arrived in Manitoba alone, not as part of a larger family group, as most black pioneers did, and he did not come to farm. Beal was in fact the first and only black pioneer to arrive in an area settled mainly by Icelandic, Scandinavian, and German immigrants.

It is difficult to speculate the specific reasons for Beal leaving Minnesota since he rarely spoke of them during his lifetime and he did not record them in his memoir. The

eight page memoir,<sup>3</sup> written in Beal's elegant hand sometime during the 1950s, commences only with his arrival in Manitoba. It is as though his life story begins on the prairies, not at birth, as is the convention in the genre of memoir. But as anyone who has immigrated knows, arrival in a new country can often feel like a rebirth; like birth, the moment of immigration announces the possibility of a new life, and a second chance.<sup>4</sup>

Thus Beal's memoir begins:

I came up to this country during Laurer's [sic] land boom and effort was being made to settle the west by giving every man a "homestead" for \$10.00, three years residence and fifteen acres cleared and broke. I did not come to this part of the country to homestead then but to follow my trade of engineer as there [were] many saw mills being operated. (1)

Since Beal was seldom forthcoming about his early history, and not explicit about it in his writing, rumors and speculation about his origins surrounded him in Swan River. The oral interviews that Barrow and Hambly conducted with his neighbours, friends, and acquaintances reveal that many suspected that he came to Manitoba at the turn of the century for racial reasons. Beal, it was rumored, was born to mixed-race, very light-skinned parents but Beal himself was phenotypically black. Tom and Mary Barrow, two (white) pioneers who knew Beal, speculate: "Well, he was a—he had Negro blood in him and it really came out in him, and his family, I guess, persuaded him to come up to this country so they wouldn't be embarrassed having this fella who showed so much Negro in the family" (Barrow and Hambly 4). Though Beal never confirmed nor denied the

rumors, he fueled them by quipping to his neighbours that "he and Abe Hanson were the first White men settled in the Valley" (Barrow and Hambly 15).

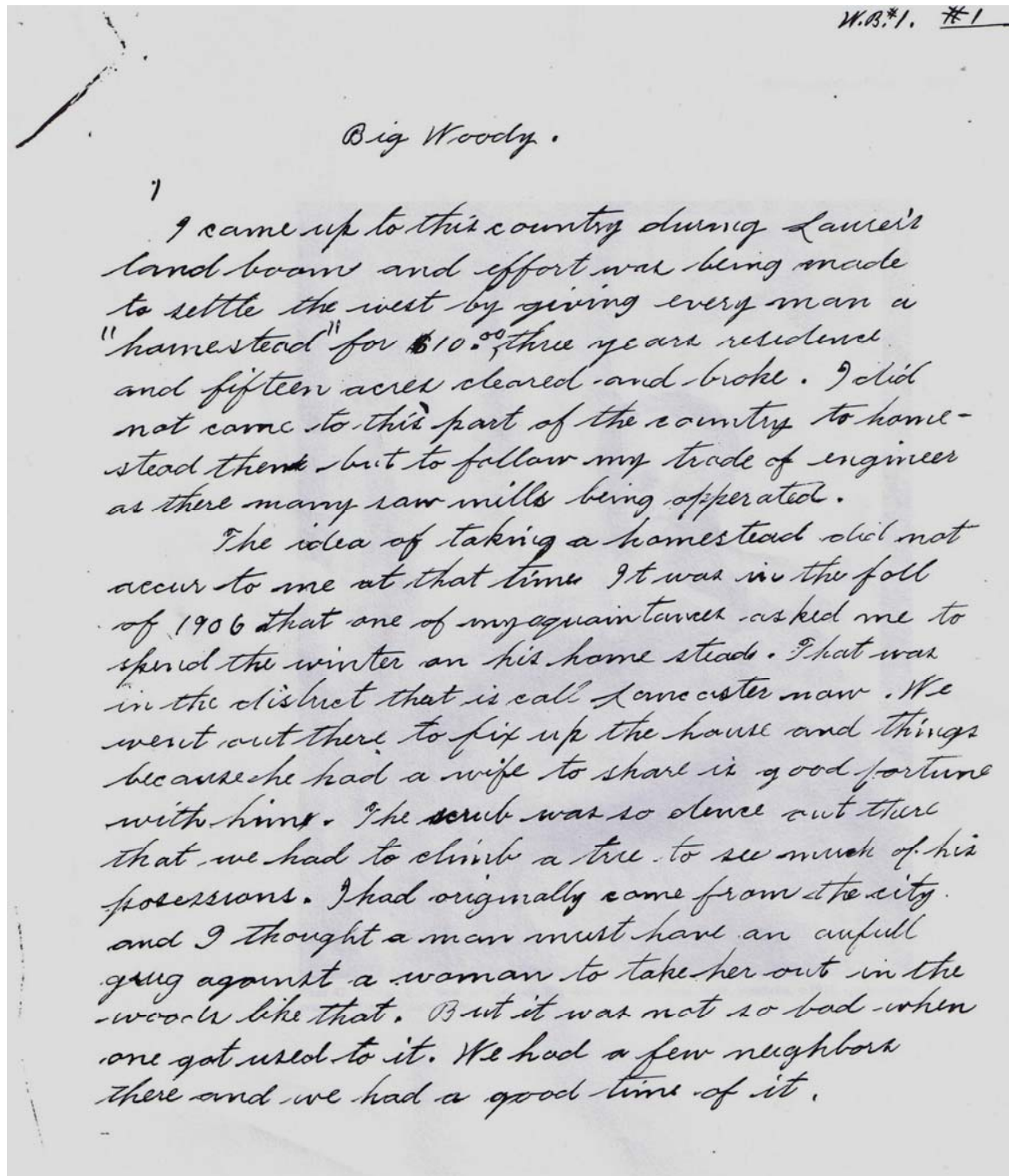


Figure 3. Page 1 of William Beal's Memoir

(courtesy of Robert Barrow.)

Whatever Beal's reasons for leaving his family behind in Minneapolis, by 1906 he found himself working in a sawmill in central Manitoba, but not yet farming. As Beal's memoir continues, he records his first impressions of the pioneer life. This passage is especially interesting because in it we can hear that, after decades of living in Manitoba, Beal retains the unique rhythms and grammatical structures of African-American English. Notice the sound-pattern in the phrase, "That was in the district that *is call* Lancaster now," in which the final *ed* is dropped, a phonological characteristic of African-American English (Green 106-7).<sup>5</sup> Notice, too, the phrase "he had a wife to share *is* good fortune with him," which preserves the oral rhythms of African-American English in written form.

The idea of taking a homestead did not occur to me at that time. It was in the fall of 1906 that one of my acquaintances asked me to spend the winter on his homestead. That was in the district that is call Lancaster now. We went out there to fix up the house and things because he had a wife to share *is* good fortune with him. The scrub was so dence out there that we had to climb a tree to see much of his possessions. I had originally come from the city and I thought a man must have an awfull grug against a woman to take her out in the woods like that.

Unlike many of the black prairie pioneers whose journey to the prairies originated in Oklahoma, Beal had been an urban person, and his immigration to Manitoba must be understood as a reterritorializing move, a return, at the end of the line of flight, to the "earth," and "land" as a "state apparatus" (Deleuze and Guattari 281), meaning that the

earth Beal reterritorialized on was enclosed and managed by the state (specifically, the Department of the Interior), as part of a colonial property regime. His homestead was SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  1-37-29 (Barrow and Hambly 18). It is important to note that it was not the dream of owning “sixty acres and a mule” shared by many post-emancipation African-Americans that lured Beal into the wilderness of west-central Manitoba. As he explains in his memoir, it was his intellectual curiosity, in fact, a book he read, which persuaded him to take up a homestead. (In this passage, notice the African-American phonology of the word “set” for “sit”):

Two years after at the sawmill where I worked most of the men were homesteaders and there was nothing but homestead talk every evening in camp. They would set around the table talked and joked each other about their braking and clearing. [...]

This and a book that I read that summer inspired me to try homesteading my self. So in the fall when the summer season at the mill was over, I applied at the land office in Swan River for a permit to file on a homestead. The only land then available near Swan River was ten miles North West of town some new land just opened for settlement. It was not then even included in the municipality and I was the first one to locate there. This was in 1908. It was very discouraging looking then, all heavy bush or rather dense trees like a forest and I had to clear and brake fifteen acres in three years. There were no roads of course of any kind. Then too, there was the Woody River between it and town and no bridge. I had to cut a road in to haul material in to build my first shack.

It was in this unlikely place, this “shack” in the remote wilderness of Manitoba that Beal assembled his “comprehensive library of learning” (Barrow and Hambly 26).

### **III. WILLIAM BEAL’S “ARCHIVE FEVER”**

What would it have been like to come upon Beal’s library, out in the dense, heavy bush of Manitoba’s Swan River Valley? And what would it have been like to enter the unassuming log shack, the kind typically built by pioneers, with a tar paper roof, mud floor, moss stopping the chinks in the walls, and see the shock of a complete library? It must have been somewhat dim inside, the light coming through one pane of glass at the front of the house. And most likely it smelled of freshly peeled bark and earth.

Though Beal’s pioneer library is long gone, burned to the ground in a spring fire which swept through the Valley in 1911, I would like to give the library a kind of metaphysical presence in the black prairie archive through the act of remembering it. My imaginative reconstruction of the library relies on Barrow and Hambly’s amateur biography of Beal and in particular the oral testimonies they collected from the people of Swan River who have not forgotten Beal or his extraordinary library.

By all accounts, Beal remained reluctant about farming, and despite taking a homestead in 1908 he made only half-hearted attempts to clear his land and grow a garden. Instead, he obtained catalogues from publishing houses and ordered hundreds of books through the mail. Fellow pioneers in the Big Woody district recall that he sent away for “everything from the books of the Bible to the scientific theorists of the day, from Shakespeare and other great classics to contemporary writings” (Barrow and

Hambly 26). As neighbours recall, “Mr. Beal read the books of philosophers. He read the writings of Spinoza. Have you ever read Spinoza? I know I haven’t” (Barrow and Hambly 1).

Beal was especially interested in astronomy, and he collected many books on the subject. The settlers of the Valley were astonished at Beal’s vast knowledge of the stars. One of Barrow and Hambly’s interview subjects remarked, “Christ, I wish I knew half as much as he did, you know” (25). Another subject tells of the time he met Beal on the road one day:

I said, “Mr. Beal, I’m reading a book on astronomy and I find it a surprising fact that I didn’t know, namely that the North Star is not a fixed star, but that it goes around a great orbit of its own every 2,500 years,” whereupon he said, “Oh well, George, that’s right, except that its every 25,000 years. I went home and checked the book, and it was every 25,000 years. I thought this was remarkable in view of the fact that he and I hadn’t discussed the subject before. (26)

It seems significant that Beal read so deeply in the field of astronomy, and knew so much about the North Star, since that star was especially meaningful in African-American folk culture and history. Before the abolition of slavery in the United States in 1865, Negro spirituals such as “Follow the Drinking Gourd” instructed fugitive slaves to follow the North Star to Canaan Land (Canada) and freedom.<sup>6</sup> Though Beal was not a fugitive slave, and he had already found his way north, he kept on eyeing the North Star. In fact, Beal built himself a homemade telescope for this purpose out of lengths of stove pipe and

rolled metal from tin cans (25). Perhaps Beal gazed at the stars and dreamt about finding the kind of freedom that still eluded him and the other black pioneers who had made their way to Canada. If at one time Beal thought that he could evade the racism he was familiar with in the United States by moving to the Canadian prairies, he must have been disappointed. In 1914, for example, when WWI broke out in Europe, Beal wanted to join the army and serve with the Medical Corps, but “they wouldn’t let him go with the White. They were going to put him with the coloured troops, so he wouldn’t go” (Barrow and Hambly 15). Others recall that Swan River, despite being a small, isolated pioneer community in which immigrants had to rely on one another to survive, still had its share of anti-black racism:

One such incident occurred at a box social. At these gatherings, the men bid on box lunches that had been prepared by the women. Each lunch was auctioned off to the highest bidder who then shared it with the person who had made it. At one of these socials, the woman whose lunch Billy had bought was, apparently, so embarrassed at having to share her lunch with him that she sat with her back to him ‘eatin’ with him and they never—she never said a word and her face was red as a beet all the time ... she felt embarrassed because that was something new. Like, we’d never had a dark person take part ... until he started. (21-2)

Perhaps in response to these disappointments, Beal took refuge in his library. His neighbours remember Beal’s shack and library as being crammed to the rafters with books, photography equipment, and various wood-working projects: “His small cabin

was constantly so cluttered with intricately-made desks, tables and chairs—most made for neighbours at their requests—that ‘he just had an alley from his door to his chair’” (28). Like the activity of gazing at the night sky, Beal’s act of collecting books may have served an important psychological purpose. As Walter Benjamin’s 1931 essay “Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Book Collecting” reveals, there are complex psychodynamics at work in the act of book collecting. Benjamin was, like Beal, an avid reader and bibliophile, and his library, assembled at roughly the same time as Beal’s (though an ocean away), included some of the same books, like Spinoza’s *Ethics* (Benjamin 61).<sup>7</sup> According to Benjamin, the pleasures of collecting for a private, personal library center on the “very mysterious relationship to ownership” and “a relationship to objects which does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value—that is their usefulness” (60). This “mysterious relationship” that occurs between the collector and his books is one that, to Benjamin, both highlights and marks the boundary between subject and object. The act of pursuing and purchasing books foregrounds the subjectivity and agency of the collector, as well as the object-ness of the book. Significantly, in his essay Benjamin describes this subject-object relationship in terms of a master-slave dialectic. The acquisition of a new book is an act that “rescues” and confers “freedom” on the book, (64) but which also then “locks” (60) it into a “fixed” position (60) on his library shelf. Benjamin explains, “one of the finest memories of a collector is the moment when he rescued a book to which he might never have given a thought, much less a wishful look, because he found it lonely and abandoned on the market place and bought it to give it its freedom—the way the prince bought a beautiful slave girl in *The Arabian*

*Nights*. To a book collector, you see, the true freedom of all books is somewhere on his shelves” (64).

The subjective encounter with the object and with one’s own subjectivity that the library enables may have been especially important to Beal, as an African-American and a lone black pioneer in Manitoba. Whereas the practices of American slavery denied blacks their subjectivity by transforming them into objects to be bought and sold, and whereas in the Swan River Valley Beal suffered his neighbours’ objectifying gazes, the act of collecting books—of owning objects rather than being owned—is one that perhaps helped to confirm his subjecthood. And perhaps it did so in an important sense not mentioned by Benjamin. The mountains of books Beal crammed into his library—books he carefully chose, bought, and read—stood as signs of his literacy, a testament to his legal freedom.

Beal remained so absorbed in the business of assembling his library, reading, experimenting with photographic techniques, woodworking, even making his own radio (Barrow and Hambly 28) that he often neglected his homestead. One pioneer, George Hunt Sr., remembers dropping in to see Beal one winter morning when the temperature was minus thirty degrees Fahrenheit, and Beal was in bed, comfortably reading:

[George] rapped on the door and Billy was still in bed and he said, “Come in.” And the fire was out and it was cold in there and George said, Never mind, stay in bed and I’ll light the fire. And [Beal] said, “Yea, but there’s no wood in the house.” George said, “Well, I’ll go out and get some,” and Billy said, “Well, there’s none cut.” So George had to go out and cut this wood and bring it in and

light the fire. Later, George says, “Imagine a man going to bed in the middle of winter without even a stick of wood in the house. Just imagine a man being that content.” (Barrow and Hambly 8)

Given this account of Beal, it could have been the black pioneer Benjamin was thinking of when he wrote, in “Unpacking My Library,” “O bliss of the collector, bliss of the man of leisure! Of no one has less been expected, and no one has had a greater sense of well-being than the man who has been able to carry on his disreputable existence in the mask of Spitzweg’s ‘Bookworm’” (67).

Barrow and Hambly record that it was only when Beal lost his library in the spring fire of 1911 that he became finally determined to clear his land and get his land title. “The fire was probably a blessing in disguise for Billy,” they write. “He was an avid reader and the loss of his reading material seemed to give him the time and impetus to ‘prove up’ his homestead” (12). Though his biographers consider it a “blessing in disguise” that he lost his library because it forced him to begin farming, Benjamin, certainly a more kindred spirit, understood what a disaster such a loss could be. “You have all heard of people whom the loss of their books has turned into invalids,” Benjamin writes, “or those who in order to acquire them became criminals. These are the very areas in which any order is a balancing act of extreme precariousness” (60).

Even though Beal’s memoir is written in the unsentimental documentary style characteristic of most black pioneers’ writing, it is possible to detect his heartache over the loss of his library in the way that he structures his narrative. Beal devotes only one unemotional line to recording the fire, but he also documents how after the fire he turned,

reluctantly and heavy-heartedly, to the “herculian [sic] task” of clearing his land. His loss is also palpable in the way that he interrupts the linearity of the narrative to linger again on the fire. In a memoir that is only eight pages long, Beal devotes an entire page to writing about the fire. Although the fire passage, like the memoir as a whole, is written in impersonal language, we can feel his sorrow in the interjection that he was “amazed” by the pioneers who started fires and let them burn freely in the early days of the Swan River Valley. He writes:

I spent two winters on the homestead and worked in the mill in the summer. Then, in 1911, a spring fire burned my shack and all my possessions. I had hoped when I first came here to be able to hire some breaking done but everybody was too busy with his own affairs to spare the time. The next spring, of 1912, I bought a team of oxen, built another shack and planed to stay home in the summer and work out in the winter. I scrubed land and broke. The work seemed to go extremely slow. I had my goal set on fifteen the amount necessary to get my pattent. But fifteen acres cleared in bush land, such as this, seemed a herculian task. We tried to make the acres as small as we could and they were called homestead acres. So when one said he had so many acres broken, they would say, “You mean homestead acres.”

I had my first garden in 1912. I was very proud of my effort with my first experience but we had a frost every month that summer and I got nothing but the potatoes. One of my oxen died and my next neighbour lost one ox too so we made a team of my remaining ox and his and worked on that way. I got my patent in

five years but even then I did not have the necessary fifteen acres broke but the inspector made an allowance for that on account of the density of the scrub. I finally rented my land on the crop share plan.

I was amazed by the eagerness of some settlers to start fires and let them run. They said, "Get the scrub cleared and get the country opened up." These fires however always [hurt] somebody and besides it was burning up wood that would be usefull for fuel and for building too. Many of the first buildings were of logs. I told them, they would want this wood some day. They did not realize the advantage of having a patch of woodland on every [homestead] and would have been satisfied if they could have change the whole country into bare prairie. (4-5)

It is important to remember, as Beal does, that it was the pioneers' breaking and clearing activity that turned the woodland of west-central Manitoba into "bare prairie." What today appears to be natural prairie terrain is actually the result of the pioneers' "herculian" efforts to transform the dense forests, bogs, and marshes of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta into profitable grain-farming land. In his memoir Beal remembers that when the first pioneers settled near him, "there was no grain farming in the early days in Big Woody. Most of the people had meerly [sic] gardens, raised cattle and sheep and the women spun yarn at nite [sic] while the cattle roamed the whole country at will"(3). Beal records the fact that it was only after the 1920s that "considerable land had been cleared and the new settlers could begin real farming and making a living" (6). The prairies, though naturalized in regional discourses as an ostensibly neutral geographical designation, Beal's memoir reminds us, are actually a

construction. Furthermore, Beal's memoir provokes us to recognize the ways in which the term the prairies renders the labour of the pioneers invisible, because it hides the difficult work, environmental destruction, and danger that clearing the land entailed. It was, after all, another homesteader's eagerness to clear his land with fire that resulted in Beal's losing his library and all of his possessions.

Though Beal's library was destroyed, his documentary pictures and brief memoir survive; these provide a record of a particular pioneer experience that does not exist in public memory. According to Barrow and Hambly, Beal's interest in photography peaked between 1915 and 1925, the years after the fire. Beal's photographic subjects were his neighbours, the immigrant Scandinavian, German, and Euro-American pioneers of the Swan River Valley. Though Beal worked in portraiture, and his subjects were all more or less posed for the camera, Beal rarely placed his sitters in a studio setting. Instead, he photographed them during the course of their daily activities: Gus and Louie Jonsson, a newly married couple, skidding logs to build a cabin in 1916:



Figure 4. William Beal glass plate 12, Gus and Louie Jonsson  
(courtesy of Robert Barrow.)

Clarence Abrahamson standing in a field of Marquis wheat (1915):



Figure 5. William Beal glass plate 3, Clarence Abrahamson  
(courtesy of Robert Barrow.)

Bob Dennison reading a book and smoking a pipe on the porch of his homestead, 1918:



Figure 6. William Beal glass plate 11, Bob Dennison  
(courtesy of Robert Barrow.)



Figure 7. William Beal glass plate 42, Self-Portrait  
(courtesy of Robert Barrow.)

Beal's own self-portrait, one of the very few he made, is more formally posed than many of the others. In his city suit, with a studio-like backdrop, and with his gaze focused at some distant point beyond the frame of the photograph, Beal looks a highly dignified subject.

Together, the seventy three glass plate photographs that Beal took of his neighbours document a special pioneer culture that developed in the early part of the twentieth century, and preserve the memory of the immigrant pioneers whose labour turned the scrub, forest, and bogs of west-central Manitoba into the "prairie" land we know today.

It is ironic that the lives of the pioneers of the Swan River Valley were documented so thoroughly and memorialized for posterity by the very person who, by

virtue of his being black, was at times considered an outsider to the community. On the other hand, it makes perfect sense that it was the black pioneer among them—the one who, perhaps, felt the erasures of history most keenly—who understood the importance of preserving the memory of his own unique historical circumstances. It makes sense that it was Beal who caught archive fever.

#### **IV. ALFRED SCHMITZ SHADD: A BLACK PIONEER IN SASKATCHEWAN**

At roughly the same time as William Beal was making his way north from Minneapolis to Manitoba, another remarkable black pioneer was also finding his way to the prairies, but his journey was a westward one, and it began in the celebrated black community of Chatham, Canada West, in present-day southern Ontario. Though scholars of African Canadian history and literature are familiar with Mary Ann Shadd Cary, the Quaker-educated teacher, feminist, activist, and editor of the *Provincial Freeman* about whom Rinaldo Walcott writes in his contribution to *Rude* (2000), “Who is she and what is she to you?” Mary Ann Shadd Cary and the (Im)possibility of Black/Canadian Studies,” few scholars in Black Canadian Cultural Studies remember her brother, Alfred Schmitz Shadd. Yet Alfred Shadd was an accomplished intellectual, politician, writer, and journalist in his own right, and unlike his sister who left Chatham to return to the United States in 1863, in 1896 twenty-six year old Shadd migrated to the Northwest Territory, now Saskatchewan, where he remained until his death in 1915.

Colin Thompson’s study of black Canadian pioneers, *Blacks in Deep Snow* (1979), argues that being the sole black pioneer might have been advantageous to Shadd.

Unlike Long Lance, who immigrated to Alberta at a time when there had previously been a large migration of blacks, and where anti-black racism was already well mobilized, in the small prairie communities of Kinistino and Melfort, Alfred Shadd was more able to realize his personal and professional ambitions. In addition to farming, Shadd served as the community teacher, doctor, pharmacist, and editor. In 1901 Shadd ran in the election for the Northwest Territory Assembly and again in 1905 for the Provincial Legislature and, although both bids were unsuccessful, he continued to record his opinions about and hopes for the west in the speeches, articles, and editorials he published in the local paper, *The Melfort Moon*, of which he became both owner and editor in 1908. Shadd published dozens of articles and editorials in the *Moon* during his lifetime—in fact, too many to be considered in adequate detail in this chapter. Instead, I would like to focus mainly on a key election speech Shadd delivered and then published in the *Moon* in 1905. This speech is of signal importance for black studies in Canada because of the way it articulates Shadd's political vision for the west, and reveals the ways in which Shadd saw his fate as intimately bound up with that of the prairies.

## **V. THE SASKATCHEWAN GENERAL ELECTION OF 1905**

In order to be fully appreciated, Shadd's election speech needs to be read in the context of Saskatchewan's provincial politics at the turn of the century. The 1905 election was the first Provincial election held in the newly-created province of Saskatchewan. According to Bill Waiser's *Saskatchewan: A New History* (2005), until 1905 Saskatchewan had formed part of the North-West Territories, a vast parcel of land stretching from the forty-ninth parallel to the arctic coastline and from present-day

Ontario and Quebec to the Alaska-Yukon boundary (Waiser 3). As the influx of settlers into the southern prairies grew, outstripping the resources and infrastructure of the Territorial government, Frederick Haultain, the North-West Territories first (and only) Premier went to Ottawa to seek autonomy for the region from the Federal Liberal Government (4). Though the idea Haultain proposed to prime minister Wilfrid Laurier was of one large and powerful western province stretching from the international boundary to the fifty-seventh parallel, to be called “Buffalo,” in February of 1905 Laurier passed not one but two Autonomy Bills. The first created the province of Alberta, the second, Saskatchewan. The controversial legislation also gave the federal government continued control over the provinces’ lands, resources, and education.

One could convincingly argue that the phenomenon of “western alienation” that remains a feature of western Canadian political culture today is rooted in the 1905 Autonomy Bills. As Waiser notes, the Laurier government feared that one large western province would upset the balance of power of the Confederation (7). Creating two provinces cut the territory in half, and guaranteed that Ottawa would have no serious rival in western Canada (8).

Saskatchewan’s first election campaign saw candidates focussing on the contentious features of the new Autonomy Bills. Saskatchewan and Alberta had been granted provincial status *with a difference*. According to Waiser, under the terms of the 1867 British North America Act, provinces exercised control over the public lands and resources within their boundaries (8). But this right was denied Manitoba when it became a province in 1870, and it was denied Saskatchewan and Alberta in the Autonomy Bills (8). The other contentious feature was the education clauses. The 1875 North-West

Territories Act allowed religious minorities to establish separate schools, but in 1892 religious control of schools was discontinued in favour of a single, government-run Department of Education (9-10). Waiser argues that these modifications reflected a popular movement in the west toward secular education spearheaded by the largely Protestant population. But in the Autonomy Bills Laurier restored the old territorial school system, which allowed for denominational schools.

The two parties competing for control of Saskatchewan's first parliament were the new Provincial Rights Party, led by Frederick Haultain, the man who had been the Territory's first governor, and the provincial Liberal Party, led by Walter Scott, whom Laurier had appointed as the first Premier of the province, thereby unseating Haultain. According to Waiser, Scott led a campaign based on his sense of optimism for the new province and he concentrated on the practical issues facing the new Saskatchewan. Haultain's Provincial Rights party, on the other hand, was dedicated to securing full provincial rights for Saskatchewan. He promised to challenge the constitutionality of the Saskatchewan Act, especially the federal control of the province's public lands and natural resources (Waiser 83-4).

It is significant that in the election of 1905 Shadd backed Haultain and his Provincial Rights Party, not Scott. His election speech focused on the issues of *western*, not federal rights: he eloquently advocated for stronger provincial government, for provincial control of public lands, forests, and minerals, and local control of schools. The speech revealed that, despite being a racial minority, Shadd also supported the conservative social agenda of the Provincial Rights Party. With regard to education, Shadd argued for a curriculum that would make good Canadian citizens of "incoming

racess and creeds.” While Shadd’s speech suggests he saw his fate as intertwined with that of the prairie west, surprisingly, the west he envisioned was not necessarily a hybridized, heterogeneous, or raced space.

Although they were contemporaries of one another, Shadd and Beal’s texts were written forty years apart, and they differ from one another in several striking ways. Unlike William Beal’s memoir, Shadd’s election speech does not preserve any lexically “black” rhythms or grammatical structures. However, I do not interpret this as an attempt on Shadd’s part to play down his black ancestry, since when the speech was printed in the *Melfort Moon* it ran with this studio photograph of a dark-skinned, mustachioed Shadd prominently positioned in the middle of the text.



Figure 8. Alfred Schmitz Shadd  
(courtesy of the Melfort and District Museum.)

Instead, I understand the speech as rhetorically reflecting Shadd's status as a politician and community leader: he wrote in the elevated standard English of his day. Though in November of 1905 the *Moon* described Shadd as "a fluent and forceful speaker" who could "rouse his audiences to the wildest pitch of enthusiasm when on the political campaign," this speech is formal, and significantly less "oral" than Beal's memoir. As the speech is relatively short, I reprint it here in its entirety:

#### TO THE ELECTORS OF THE DISTRICT OF KINISTINO<sup>8</sup>

Gentlemen, --- We have a very large district, and although I have held meetings in nearly every portion of it, still many of you may possibly not have met me or been made acquainted with my views upon the present issues. I would therefore in the first place say, I am fully convinced that in our purely local affairs it is better that we should consider the province of Saskatchewan first in the present juncture, and the Dominion as a whole second. At the General Elections for Ottawa I would certainly say, consider the Dominion first and our local interests secondary. In short, I think that as a province we will get even [sic] justice when the Premier of Saskatchewan has not to think whether he will injure his party at Ottawa or not, by standing out for our full rights in questions between the local and Dominion government. I think that Mr. Haultain took that stand, knowing at the time that he would be deprived of his position as our Premier by doing so. We have not so very many men in public life who deliberately do this, and when we find them I believe we as electors should uphold their hands.

I believe also the property of railways and corporations and great land companies should be placed upon the same general footing as regards paying taxes as our farm property; and as the Dominion government failed to provide for this in framing the Autonomy Bill, in so far as the C.P.R. tax exemption is concerned, therefore, the Dominion government should increase our subsidy by the exact amount we lose by not being able to tax this property. This is only just, as we know the C.P.R. was built for Canada as a whole and not for us in particular.

We should also undertake in our own behalf the building of a line of railway to Hudson Bay at once. By the word we I mean the Western Provinces. I don't think the Ottawa government will be in any haste to do this work, and I don't think we can wait.

I think again that if we are to become as important a province as, say, any of the eastern group of provinces, we should be handed over the control—and at once—of our public lands, and forests, as well as any minerals we may have. Without these resources we will be forever tied down to the Federal government grant or to direct taxation. Besides, without lands our borrowing power will be very little and our rate of interest correspondingly higher.

Regarding our schools, I believe the matter of their control should have been left in our own hands. Personally, I am convinced that in countries like this where men of every race and creed are coming in and making their homes, a system of national schools for all the little children alike would be the best way of forming good Canadian citizens of them all. And as we all well know, one school

is certainly more apt to be efficiently conducted where settlements are sparse than two.

Apart from this, if I am returned I am prepared to give Mr. Haultain a full measure of support along all lines of general progress. And I am sure we are all agreed, both friends and opponents of his, that Mr. Haultain has in the past done his utmost to give our vast North-West Territories efficient and progressive management. As we have that experience to go by, I am convinced that the Province of Saskatchewan can do no better than return Mr. Haultain as her first elected Premier.

If you, gentlemen, think with me in these matters, I ask your support at the polls.

Believe me, your obedient servant,

A. Schmitz Shadd.

Melfort, Nov. 28

This speech is striking to me on (at least) two counts. First, for the way it reveals the strength of Shadd's regional identification and, second, for the way it records his social conservatism.

In the speech Shadd includes himself in the collective political and cultural community being forged by the young prairie provinces: "By the word we," he writes, "I mean the Western Provinces." Despite the fact that six years after Shadd wrote this speech many people in Saskatchewan would join others in Alberta and Manitoba in arguing that the west should not be allowed to become home to the black Oklahoman

migrants, in this speech Shadd clearly expresses his affinity for the west: it is the social, cultural, and political formation in which Shadd imagines himself, and into which he writes himself. Shadd gives provincial concerns priority over national or international ones in the matters of education and in the management of the province's resources. Whereas the writing of the next wave of black prairie people develops diasporic concerns as well as connections, Shadd's speech, like Beal's memoir, suggests some of the ways that the concerns of the first generation of black pioneers remained strongly reterritorializing ones. Just as Beal's memoir is centred on the history and development of the Swan River Valley, Shadd's speech focuses on the rights of the new province of Saskatchewan. Even Shadd's proposal that a rail line be built connecting Saskatchewan to Hudson's Bay is a reterritorializing, not deterritorializing, proposition. Though the proposal seems radical (it would transform land-locked Saskatchewan into a "coastal" province)<sup>9</sup>, Shadd's motivation is to strengthen the prairies' control over the export of their own commodities, not necessarily to connect the prairies to diasporic routes and communities.

The prominence of this reterritorializing impulse in the first generation of black prairie people is one of the important things black studies in Canada has missed by overlooking the archival writing of the prairies. Today our paradigms for reading black Canada rely heavily on deterritorializing diaspora models for understanding black subjectivity and cultural production. There is a critical tendency to interpret all blackness in Canada—even pre-1950s blackness—as migratory and diasporic in nature. In his Introduction to the second edition of *Black Like Who?* (2003), for instance, Walcott

summarizes and defends his original project in the first edition as an attempt to speak “directly to Caribbean or migrant forms of blackness”:

I made a special attempt to formulate some conceptual ground for thinking about the relationship between pre-Confederation black peoples and more recent arrivals. In particular, I suggested that a politics and sensibility of diaspora could work well to invent traditions that brought these two groups into conversation. (14)

But as Shadd’s speech makes clear, not all forms of blackness in Canada have been migratory and diasporic. Shadd was not interested in addressing cross-border black communities, or even addressing cross-*provincial* communities, such as his home-town of Chatham, in Ontario, either in his writing or with his political activities. In this respect he differs greatly from his sister, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, whose publication, *The Provincial Freeman*, explicitly addressed black communities across the border in order to persuade black Americans to consider Canada not just as a temporary stopping place but also as a permanent home. Both Alfred Shadd’s election speech and the editorials he wrote for the *Melfort Moon* were addressed exclusively to his local electorate: all of his writing was published in this limited-distribution newspaper which only served the small villages of Kinistino and Melfort in the Carrot River Valley of west-central Saskatchewan.

It is important that those of us working in black cultural studies in Canada not forget about the historic importance of the reterritorializing desires of black Canadians like Alfred Shadd. As this chapter demonstrates, the reterritorializing impulse has been a

significant feature of black Canadian history and subjectivity. We need to appreciate the emotional affiliations that black Canadians have formed to the particular places that have become home as part of the diaspora experience, even when this impulse strikes us, in our globalized moment, as somewhat conservative or even regressive, and perhaps less theoretically “current” than diasporic impulses and identifications. But these reterritorializing impulses must be understood in their proper historical contexts. While today Shadd’s regionalism and localism may strike us as conservative, by keeping in mind the culture of anti-black racism on the prairies in the early part of the twentieth century and its rhetoric that black people were essentially, that is, culturally, biologically, and morally “unfit” for the particular climates and conditions of the prairies, we can better appreciate the stands that black pioneers like Shadd took by writing from a sense of being and belonging from the prairies.

However, this is not to say that Shadd was not at the same time a socially conservative politician. In addition to revealing the strength of Shadd’s regionalism and localism, his speech is interesting for the way it promises, should he be elected, that he would pursue a conservative social agenda. Shadd opposed the feature of the new Autonomy Bills that provided for denominational schools. “Regarding our schools,” Shadd writes, “I believe the matter of their control should have been left in our own hands. Personally, I am convinced that in countries like this where men of every race and creed are coming in and making their homes, a system of national schools for all the little children alike would be the best way of forming good Canadian citizens of them all.”

While Shadd was not opposed to immigration, he believed in the assimilation of immigrants and racial minorities into Canadian society. The west might have been fast

becoming racially and ethnically diverse, but, according to Shadd, education ought to help keep it culturally and linguistically “Canadian.”

In light of the assimilationist position on education that Shadd takes in his election speech, it would be fascinating to know what position he took in his reportage of the Oklahoman migration of 1910-12. Did he feel, like many in the west, that the prairies had enough problems assimilating “incoming races and creeds” without “the color proposition being added” (Shepard 66)? Or did he feel sympathy for the migrants, and write articles in solidarity with their plight? Sadly, the issues of *The Melfort Moon* which might have provided some answers to these questions have not survived. The Saskatchewan Archives Board holds many copies of *The Moon* preserved on microfilm, but those from the spring and summer months of 1911, when the controversy over the migrants was at its peak, were not preserved because no originals remain.<sup>10</sup> But in the issues of *The Moon* that survive, from September of 1911 onward, Shadd writes nothing about the aftermath of the Oklahoman migration or about the Order-in-Council that banned black people from entering Canada. In what ways might this apparent editorial silence be meaningful?

Unfortunately, one Canadian historian who noticed Shadd’s apparent silence on the Oklahoman migration, as well as the socially conservative, assimilationist strain in his writing and politics, has argued that among “today’s black militants Shadd might seem to have been another Uncle Tom—black on the outside, white on the inside” (Thomson 58). Thomson tempers his reading of Shadd somewhat later on when he argues that “If Shadd was, indeed, ‘White on the inside’ he was no ‘Uncle Tom’. He was too self-assured, too dynamic, and above all, too proud to be subservient to anyone” (59). But Thompson

concludes his study of black pioneers in Canada by arguing that, in fact, the blacks who pioneered on the prairies *were*, as a whole, subservient. Regrettably, Thomson's reading of black prairie culture is the most succinct one that has been formulated to date. He argues that black prairie culture can be characterized as conservative, quiet, and accommodationist:

While it is true that Blacks on the prairies experienced a peculiar mixture of white hostility, apathy and indifference, they also had other problems. They had a lack of unity within a province or the cumulative pride that the list of individual acts of defiance would lead the observer to expect. Separated by geography and differing histories they remained one generation behind their American brothers in terms of expressing their demands. They followed the Gradualist, Accommodationist philosophy of Booker T. Washington, rather than the more militant W.E.B. DuBois attitude. Many engaged in an "Over there" type of thinking which suggested to them that Blacks elsewhere were in a more difficult position, and therefore that prairie Blacks had that much less to complain about. And they had few heroes for their children. Could they identify with Josiah Henson, the so-called "Uncle Tom"? (Thomson 89)

The charge that black prairie people might have identified with Uncle Tom is enormously problematic. The term "Uncle Tom" comes from the title character of Harriet Beecher Stowe's abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852); Tom, a Christian who prides himself on always being "on the spot" for his master, has become, according to

Linda Williams, the very figure of emasculated docility (225). Since the 1940s,<sup>11</sup> and especially since the emergence of the black power movements of the 1960s,<sup>12</sup> “Uncle Tom” has become a pejorative used to denote blacks whose political views or allegiances are considered detrimental to blacks as a group. This is, according to Sarah Smith Duckworth, because although Stowe’s antislavery sentiments were sincere, they did not “include notions of parity between white and black people, and that her real concern in writing the novel was not to raise lowly Africans up to a position of equality in American society, but to bring an end to slavery for the sake of white salvation” (205). Although Thomson published his book over two decades ago, I still believe it was inappropriate for a white Canadian scholar writing in 1979 to refer to a group of black Canadians as “Uncle Toms,” for certainly by the late 1970s the pejorative meaning of the term was well established. Moreover, his charge that black prairie people might have identified with Uncle Tom is one that could only have been made without reference to the black prairie archive. The archive includes many texts produced by black pioneers that demonstrate the ways the pioneers were far from subservient. In fact, black prairie people were strongly defiant, organized, and eloquent in the face of racism. The black prairie archive remembers the prairies’ black history differently.

## **VI. ELLIS HOOKS: A BLACK PIONEER IN ALBERTA**

The Alberta provincial archives in Edmonton is home to a number of original taped oral interviews with several black pioneers who settled in the all-black community of Keystone (now called Breton), in central Alberta during the height of the first wave of

migration. These interviews, conducted between the 1960s and 1970s by contractors on behalf of the Provincial Archives of Alberta, were part of a larger oral history project to document the memories of Alberta's first pioneers. Three black Keystone pioneers participated in the project: Mrs. Charles King,<sup>13</sup> who arrived in Alberta in 1911 with her husband when she was nineteen years old; Mark Hooks<sup>14</sup> who was born to pioneer parents in Breton in 1926 and who later took a homestead himself; and Ellis Hooks,<sup>15</sup> who arrived in Alberta with his parents in 1911 when he was five years old. Together, these pioneers recorded six and a half hours of oral literature, what the late Ugandan scholar Pio Zirimu first called "orature" in 1971 to "denote poems, plays, stories, etc., in oral form ... reserving the term *literature* for the same things in their written forms" (Chinwizu et al. 2). Their orature preserves their memories of arriving in Alberta, homesteading, negotiating their identities in a new cultural and political geography, surviving through the Depression, organizing the black community and building a prairie culture.<sup>16</sup> This orature has, until today, remained in the archives, neglected and never transcribed. In what follows I focus on my transcriptions<sup>17</sup> of Ellis Hooks's orature about the black community in Keystone/Breton that belies Thomson's claim that black prairie people were "Uncle Toms" and subservient to whites.

Orature, especially of the kind collected by the Provincial Archives of Alberta during the 1960s and 1970s, is a complex genre. Whereas today oral history methodologies are well-established,<sup>18</sup> and include standard practices for interviewing techniques and understanding interpersonal relations in the interview, these methodologies were not yet established in 1978, when Ellis Hooks' orature was collected. Valerie Raleigh Yow, in her *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and*

*Social Sciences* (2005), outlines some of the key procedures interviewers need to observe today. She warns that the interview is not a balanced dialogue, a casual conversation, nor a heated debate, and that the oral narrative researcher should never interrupt the subject, and should ask neutral, not leading questions (155). But it becomes clear in listening to the audio recordings collected by the Provincial Archives of Alberta in the 1970s that, because of how assertively the interviewer projects himself into the conversation and intervenes into his subject's memories, this orature has not just one "author," but two. Reevan Dolgoy interviewed Hooks twice, on August 27<sup>th</sup> of 1978 and then again on October 3<sup>rd</sup> of the same year. Though Dolgoy was not himself a member of the black community, nor a professional historian, genealogist, or archivist, he proves himself a highly motivated and interested interlocutor. He probes his subject insistently, with obvious interest in his life and his memories. But in his eagerness, Dolgoy tends to put words in his subject's mouth. This problem becomes all too apparent in the following exchange about the Baptist church in the early days of Keystone. Dolgoy asks Hooks to remember some of what the African American minister of the church used to preach:

Dolgoy: What did he use to say?

Hooks: What he used to say I can't really relate it.

Dolgoy: Was it blood and thunder sort of—or did he use more of—?

Hooks: No, it was more of a blood and thunder.

Dolgoy: Because that's neat. Cuz that's more spirit in that.

Hooks: Ya, he was the blood and thunder kind, which I've always liked, which  
always stuck with me. Cuz always when I see a minister who's in the

pulpit and he's not thinking about it, he's always just talking—it doesn't get through to me. That blood and thunder really gets me. Yeah.

Over the course of the two interviews it becomes apparent that Dolgoy has many pre-conceived ideas about black culture, and his questions reflect this. Listening to and transcribing the tapes, I often wished Dolgoy would have asked a different set of questions—questions which, admittedly also leading ones, might have gone to the heart of what it meant to Hooks to have been black on the prairies during his time. “Did you feel at home in Keystone?” I might have asked. “Do you think of yourself as a prairie person?” “Do you think the black prairie culture you're a part of is unique?” Instead, as with all texts, ultimately, we are left with a document that reflects the historical situatedness of its authors: Hooks and Dolgoy. Nevertheless, in Hooks' orature we can hear the art of story-telling and history-telling performed by a community elder, and his account of life in the early days of Keystone is compelling.

There is one memory that Hooks recalls in the three-and-a-half hours of orature he records that is of particular relevance to this chapter. Hooks remembers an incident that took place in 1950 that galvanized the black community of Breton to action. The high school had decided to stage a rendition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and to take the play around to all the schools in the vicinity. However, the teachers, well known to Hooks and the black community as racists, had decided not to include any black students as players. Instead, white people were to play the parts of the black characters, and they would play them in blackface—a style of theatrical makeup used by white actors to affect a blackened countenance and exaggerated lips, usually with burnt cork, greasepaint, or shoe polish. Not surprisingly, this decision was taken as an affront to the black

community of Keystone. As Linda Williams notes, blackface minstrelsy, which began in the United States in the 1830s, involved white performers caricaturing the “plantation myth” of happy slavery (68). “Legend has it that in 1831 T.D. Rice imitated, in blackface, a shuffle and song he had seen performed by a black boat worker in Pittsburgh. The dance, which Rice called ‘jumping Jim Crow’—because the dance imitated the movements of a lame crow hopping about—was, along with most blackface performance of the period, full of comic grotesqueries” (68). Williams argues that, ironically, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, considered at the time the quintessential expression of abolitionist sentiment, became an enormously popular minstrel play, the quintessential expression of white racist power (65).<sup>19</sup>

This irony was not lost on the black community of Keystone. When they heard about plans to put on the play, they reacted immediately, and, keeping in mind the time and context we are talking about, they did so with considerable militancy. In 1950, in the United States, the Civil Rights struggles were just beginning to get under way.<sup>20</sup> Yet in a small, historically black town in central Alberta, a black community organized itself swiftly and effectively to shut down a play they deemed “disgraceful” to their people.

Hooks records the memory of this important event in his orature:

Dolgoy: What was your objection? Was it the play or the people in it?

Hooks: No, the play.

Dolgoy: What was the story about?

Hooks: Well, it was from the time of slavery, old Uncle Tom’s Cabin.

Dolgoy: It was *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*!

Hooks: Yes. Mmm-hmm.

Dolgoy: And how were they playing it?

Hooks: Well the main thing we objected to was the kind of language they were using—the kind of English being used.

Dolgoy: I don't want to put words in your mouth, but was it words prejudicial to Negro people?

Hooks: Oh yeah, sure. Of course. Very much so. And in our eyes we heard too much about this kind of stuff. Some of it actually made our blood boil, that it'd been did to the Negro people.

Dolgoy: Awful words like "Niggers" and all that stuff?

Hooks: Pardon?<sup>21</sup>

Dolgoy: Was it that terrible slang words like "Niggers?"

Hooks: Yeah, like that.

Dolgoy: Okay.

Hooks: We decided that we couldn't stand it to have something like that going disgracing us. So we decided to do something about it.

Dolgoy: Because you had been a very proud community, I believe?

Hooks: Oh yes.

Dolgoy: Again, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but—

Hooks: In our way we were!

Dolgoy: Had you ever put up with anything like that before?

Hooks: Never. No. Oh no. Anything like that that reflected on to us that much, well, we fight back, that's all. So we decided to do something about it.

So we talked it over amongst ourselves, I and my wife, and Mark, my brother, and my son in law—future son in law at that time, and my daughter. She is the one that told us all about what was going on. We wouldn't have known. And she told us that they were going to put it on at a certain time in the hall, and that they were going to travel with it around the country—different places.

Dolgoy: I just want to ask you a question now. Who the heck was playing the parts of the Negro people in this play?

Hooks: The main one was this Mrs. Opal.

Dolgoy: But she wasn't Negro.

Hooks: Oh no, she's a white lady.

Dolgoy: But she was going to play the part of a Negro person?

Hooks: Yeah. Yeah. And the other one was the church minister—

Dolgoy: Who was going to play Uncle Tom?

Hooks: Yes. Right. This is right. We decided that we couldn't stand for anything like that. So after talking it over a few days and thinking it over, I think it was my son-in-law, it was, that came up with the right idea about throwing the eggs. So, well, we didn't want to be violent, or anything of that kind, we decided we had to break it up in a big way too. So one day I, my son-in-law, went down to the neighbours and we bought a few dozen eggs. And we had these eggs all in readiness for this night. And of course we went around and alerted what few other Negro people there were. The Fords, I think, and someone else. And had everything in readiness.

Everything in readiness. And my daughter had seen them rehearse so there were some of us went inside the hall and sat and watched while some others like my son-in-law, Mark and Lois, stayed outside. So when it came to this certain part in the play, this United Church minister was lying down on a couch, which I can't remember just what he was saying—he was lying on the couch—and this is when they was using these different words that we didn't like. And this is the time I went outside the hall and around where they were waiting and we went to the side door where they were coming in the stage, and opened the door, and in they came. And we covered him with eggs.

Dolgoy: You egged him?

Hooks: Yeah. There was eggs flying everywhere. You never saw anything like it.

No. So this broke the whole thing up right there. Was never such a big surprise that anyone ever had, I don't think, as that one. Yeah.

As a result of their action, Ellis Hooks and his party were charged with creating a disturbance. They hired a (white) lawyer in Edmonton who encouraged them to plead guilty to the charge. When asked by Dolgoy how he felt about this plea, Hooks responded, “Actually the way I felt, I wanted to plead guilty. I wanted the world to know. I just felt that way. It didn't bother me, being charged, didn't bother me at all because I knew we did it. And we thought we did right, whether we did right or not.”

This uprising, had it taken place at the same time in Alabama rather than Alberta, would surely have seen deadly retribution coming back on the black community. But it is

interesting to observe that, in the United States, black audiences did not, as far as I have been able to determine, reacted as the Keystone community did to a blackface performance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, despite the enormous popularity of the play in the United States between 1880 and the 1920s. In fact, in the U.S., it was white audiences who protested the play. According to Gregory Waller in his study *Main Street Amusements: Movies and Commercial Entertainment in a Southern City, 1896-1930* (1995), the Daughters of the Confederacy (a Southern women's organization) succeeded in pressuring for the passage, in 1903, of a Kentucky state law known as "The Uncle Tom Cabin's law," which specified that any film or show that promoted disharmony among races could be prohibited from public exhibition. For the Daughters of the Confederacy, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was seen as a radicalizing and politically dangerous text. According to Michelle Wallace, after the 1930s, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* declined in popularity (in favor of *Gone With the Wind* [1939], another southern race drama), and was hardly being performed at all. The fact that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was still being staged on the prairies—and in blackface no less—as late as the 1950s, indicates the extent of the differences between the ideational spaces of the prairies and the United States in relation to blackness.

Contrary to Thomson's claim that blacks on the prairies lacked unity and pride, and that they stayed one generation "behind" black Americans, the black community of Breton came together fearlessly and with dignity, using the tools at their disposal to shut down an offensive play. Not only do their actions suggest in no uncertain terms that they did not identify with Uncle Tom, but they also suggest they would not even put up with cultural *representations* of Uncle Tom in their community. Far from being "behind" their

American brothers and sisters, Hooks and his group extended their anti-racist struggles into the realm of cultural representation as well.

Lest the Breton action be thought unique and uncharacteristic of black prairie culture as a whole, Velma Carter and Leah Suzanne Carter's *Window of Our Memories Volume II: The New Generation* (1990) preserves the orature of black pioneers who settled in the Amber Valley and Edmonton areas at the turn of the century and who remember the ways that blacks in these places were politically conscious and well organized. Carter and Carter record that:

During the '30s there were approximately 400 Black people in the City of Edmonton. The Marcus Garvey Movement was growing in the U.S. and the influence was being felt in Alberta. Some Black people called themselves "Ethiopians." [...] Mrs. Stella Procter, one of the leaders of the Black community in Edmonton and vice-president of the Coloured Women's Christian Temperance Union Branch explains: "Although we do not come directly from Ethiopia, we all accept the term 'Ethiopians' in preference to 'Negroes'. Ethiopia has come to be associated as the national home of the Negro people. This is illustrated in the quotation from the Psalm, 'Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands and out of Egypt shall come a prince'." (280)

The first generation of blacks in Alberta were so politically conscious and organized, in fact, that it takes the Carters a dozen pages (280-292) to list and describe the plethora of clubs, organizations, political, and self-help movements they started in Alberta alone. As

the authors explain, “Although the colored community in Edmonton, at that time, was scattered over a large area of north Edmonton, extending east to 101 Street and north of Jasper Avenue to the Exhibition Grounds and 119 Avenue, the far-flung community was well organized” (281).

The Shiloh Baptist Church on 105 Avenue and 95 Street, was one of the key touch stones in the community. Within the church a small but powerful organization formed, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, which, according to Carter, was the only black organization of its kind in Canada. Blacks in Alberta also organized the Negro Colonization and Settlement Society, which was affiliated with the Marcus Garvey movement. They were active in the 1920s to persuade black farmers from the southern U.S. to move to Canada. In Edmonton, the Liberty Protective Society was formed (c.1920-1940) to raise money to help people in the black community who were poor and destitute. The Coloured Canadian Industrial Association formed in 1938 to study and discuss matters pertaining to the general welfare of Black people in Alberta, as well as to plan methods of putting black concerns before governing authorities. Black farmers were active in the United Farmers’ Party from its inception in 1909 through to its transformation into the CCF in 1939. Black citizens of Edmonton in the 1930s even agitated for the establishment of a Wilberforce Home for Children, feeling that black children in need of care should be looked after by black adults. Other organizations looked after the social and cultural needs of the black community in Edmonton: the Lotus Art Club was formed in the 1920s by and for black women interested in needlework, painting and other arts; the High Tension Club was created in the 1930s to organize social events; the Deborah Chapter of the Masonic Order came together in Edmonton in

the 1920s in affiliation with the Minnesota Grand Lodge, Order of the Eastern Star; the Golden Rule Pioneer's Club existed between 1920 and 1930 as a place for "old timers" to meet occasionally for corn roasts and fish fries; the Colored Boys' Athletic club formed in 1930 for school boys interested in sports, and finally, the Fraternal Lodge was established to allow black men an opportunity to get together in Edmonton during the 1920s and 1930s. In other black communities such as Amber Valley, Keystone/Breton, Wildwood, Campsie, Maidstone and Rosetown, black pioneers formed organizations that reflected their own political, cultural and social needs. The collection of orature and history that the Carters have assembled in *The Window of Our Memories* makes it difficult for any scholar to claim that the first wave of black prairie people were passive, apolitical, or that they lacked unity and pride.

This chapter has explored the wealth of work produced by the first wave of black pioneers to the prairies. Their cultural expression stands as a testament to the enormous creativity, self-sufficiency, and courage of the black pioneers whose important lives were already being forgotten by the politicians and historians of their generation, but who found effective ways of archiving their own stories, experiences, memories, and consciousness. The pioneers pressed their words to paper and recorded their voices on tape, but these documents became buried. Four generations later they were discovered by a woman who arrived on the prairies on a second wave of migration. Their unearthed archive—a black Atlantis.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I became aware of these papers too late in the process of writing to include them in this dissertation study. However, it will be a part of my 2008-2010 Grant Notley post-doctoral fellowship project at the University of Alberta to examine these papers for the first time and work with the families to make them public.

<sup>2</sup> Contributing to the alienation of black people from public institutions of memory, both in Canada and elsewhere, is the fact that few professional archivists are black, and few are familiar with archiving and researching black history. As British writer and researcher S.I. Martin asks, “Where are the staff familiar with black history, the black presence in the armed forces, the patterns of black settlement [...] and the particular ways in which these records can be accessed? Where are the black archivists? Moreover, where was the active and continuous expression of interest in black culture beyond the odd regional open-day featuring music, food and oral history showcases?” (198).

<sup>3</sup> Following a tip from Robert Barrow, Beal’s biographer, I found Beal’s memoir at the Ole Johnson Museum, in Swan River, Manitoba. Barrow believes the memoir was originally collected by the local Women’s Institute.

<sup>4</sup> Esi Edugyan explores this theme in her novel, *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* (2004), and I analyze it in some detail in the fourth chapter.

<sup>5</sup> Green notes that there are two explanations for why words such as *test* and *desk* (or, in Beal’s case, *called*, are reduced to single consonants (“tes”) and (“des”) in African-American English (AEE). One explanation is that it is the result of a process called consonant cluster reduction. The second is that African languages from which AAE is descended, does not have final consonant clusters (107).

<sup>6</sup> The lyrics enjoin runaway slaves to follow the North Star in the constellation of the Big Dipper (the “drinking gourd”):

Follow the drinking gourd,  
Follow the drinking gourd,  
For the old man is waiting  
for to carry you to freedom  
If you follow the drinking gourd.

The riverbank will make a very good road,  
The dead trees show you the way.  
Left foot, peg foot traveling on,  
Following the drinking gourd.

The river ends between two hills,  
Follow the drinking gourd,

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There's another river on the other side,  
Follow the drinking gourd.

When the great big river meets the little river,  
Follow the drinking gourd.  
For the old man is waiting  
for to carry you to freedom  
If you follow the drinking gourd. (Southern 144)

<sup>7</sup> Beal may have inherited his love of books from his family. Barrow and Hambly note that, according to the Massachusetts State Census of June, 1880, Beal's father, Charles, was employed as a book agent and a lecturer (17).

<sup>8</sup> I found Shadd's election speech at the Melfort, Kinistino and District Museum, in Saskatchewan.

<sup>9</sup> The rail line to Hudson's Bay was eventually constructed, but not until after Shadd's death. The original Hudson Bay Railway line was built in stages north from The Pas, Manitoba, after a railway bridge was constructed over the Saskatchewan River in 1910-1911 by the Canadian Northern Railway. Today, the Port of Churchill, located on the west coast of Hudson Bay, connects Western Canada to the Atlantic Ocean ([www.portofchurchill.ca](http://www.portofchurchill.ca)).

<sup>10</sup> E-mail communication with Nadine Charabin, Chief Archivist, Saskatchewan Archives Board (April 25, 2006). Unfortunately, Library and Archives Canada does not hold issues of the Melfort Moon either, nor do other libraries or archives (e-mail communication with Raymonde Cyrenne, reference librarian, Library and Archives Canada, January 16, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Michelle Williams notes that Richard Wright named his first book of short stories *Uncle Tom's Children* in 1940. "By 1940, to call someone an Uncle Tom was highly pejorative, equivalent to calling someone 'a white man's nigga'" (142-3).

<sup>12</sup> Malcolm X, Williams notes, was fond of accusing assimilating Negroes, like Martin Luther King Jr., of being "Uncle Toms" (234). The epithet indicates the determination on the part of the black power leader to reject the Christian role model of Tom in favor of a more revolutionary figure.

<sup>13</sup> Provincial Archives of Alberta Accession # 78.65/23

<sup>14</sup> Provincial Archives of Alberta Accession # 78.65/21

<sup>15</sup> There are 3 cassette tapes of Ellis Hooks' orature. Provincial Archives of Alberta Accession # 78.65/32; #78.65/28; and 78.65/28.

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<sup>16</sup> This is by no means a comprehensive list of black prairie orature. The Athabasca Archives in Edmonton houses the original recordings made by Jefferson Davis Edwards, a black Amber Valley pioneer, taped in April 1961. Lloyd and Eileen Chamberlain Fonds 85.285 (cassette #8). There is also a wealth of orature at the Manitoba Museum recorded in 1993 with black sleeping car porters, many of whom were pioneers or descendants of pioneers, in Alberta and Saskatchewan (10 cassettes. Social History Collection. Restricted access.) As well, the new (2007) Heritage Community Foundation website <<http://www.albertasource.ca/blackpioneers/multimedia/oral/index.html>> provides links to MP3 files of orature by four black-Albertan pioneers: John Bell Bowden, Mr. B. Boyd, E.A. Cobbs, and Mr. J. Pharr.

<sup>17</sup> My transcription of Hooks' orature was time-consuming and difficult. It was recorded in 1978 on reel-to-reel technology, then recorded onto cassette tape and, as a result, the sound quality is quite poor. I have done my best to transcribe the tapes as faithfully as possible, and I have not edited it for grammar, repetition, or clarity.

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Donald A. Ritchie's *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* (2003).

<sup>19</sup> Not everyone agrees on this meaning of blackface. In his *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1993), Eric Lott reads white blackface minstrelsy as both love and loathing for blackface. However, I disagree with him that blackface performances, with their painful caricatures of black American people and culture, can be understood as an expression of "love" for that blackness.

<sup>20</sup> The Civil Rights Movement was really a series of movements, beginning in the nineteenth century. But the period of intense, concentrated struggle to bring full civil rights and equality under the law to all Americans is usually thought of as being the period of 1945-1970s, the period that saw the Civil Rights Bill signed into law in 1964.

<sup>21</sup> "Pardon" here could be Hooks's attempt to let Dolgoy know that he himself is crossing the line, using language Hooks finds offensive. Dolgoy, however, seems impervious and presses on with the interview. He even repeats the racial slur.

**CHAPTER 3**  
**THE PIONEERS' DESCENDANTS:  
THEORIZING A "TERRITORIALIZED" PRAIRIE BLACKNESS**

This chapter continues to analyze the legacy of the first wave of pioneer black migration to the prairies by asking how the second, third, fourth, and fifth generations of black prairie writers inscribe a long and continuous black presence on the prairies, and how that long-standing blackness can be theorized responsibly.

Recent debates, in both the fields of black Canadian cultural studies and in regional literary criticism, raise awareness of the complex critical challenges inherent in the project of theorizing a long-standing prairie blackness. A new generation of regional critics is pointing out the problems and limitations of earlier assessments of regional Canadian writing, problems that could potentially trouble this study, too. Frank Davey, Alison Calder, Christian Riegel, Herb Wyile, W.M. Verhoeven, and Karen Overbye, among others, are re-examining the ways that literary regionalists of the 1970s and '80s relied too heavily on the myths of geographic determinism, the belief that the landscape has—or should have—effects on the personalities and perspectives of its inhabitants. Examples include Henry Kreisel's view that the prairie subject was formed by "the impact of the landscape on the mind" (173), Robert Kroetch's argument that the prairies have produced particular kinds of "maleness and femaleness," and Dick Harrison's thesis that prairie writing emerges from "the encounter between the civilized imagination and an unnamed landscape" (xii). In his essay "Toward the Ends of Regionalism," Frank Davey questions why geography "should have greater importance to the individual than

do other possible grounds of identity” (5). He argues that regionalisms are really ideological discourses, which conceal their ideologies beneath highly constructed, “touristic images of landscape” (16). Although, as regional discourses would have it, landscape “makes the west-coast subject easy going or laid-back, and makes a prairie subject transparent and authentic” (5), Davey argues that it is regional discourses themselves which suppress oppositional or minority identities. Regionalisms, he concludes, “have become new dominants, serving particular class, race, and gender interests, and constraining social/ textual dissent and change” (16). Like Davey, Alison Calder questions why, in the most influential assessments of prairie writing, “the land and the climate are everything” (55). In her essay, “Reassessing Prairie Realism,” she notes that “differences in the prairie landscape, and the different responses to it,” are usually effaced in anthologies and book-length studies that regionalize writing of the prairies. Calder also calls for critics to move beyond simple geographic determinisms in order to define the writing of particular regions in more pluralistic terms: “Predicating a critical economy on the idea of environmental determinism,” she argues, “stabilizes the multiple meanings of ‘prairie’ through erasure of the region’s many internal conflicts, as attention to landscape precludes consideration of gender, race, and class conflicts included (or suppressed) in these texts” (57).

How, then, should the work of the descendants of the black pioneers be theorized? Although this project does not set out to argue for the existence of an essential black subject or cultural form that is a manifestation of the interarticulation of blackness and prairie geography, I do wish to explore the possible relationship that exists between race and region, and to highlight the complex connections between place, subjectivity, and

culture. I am aware that in seeking out these connections, I do not leave the specter of geographic determinism very far behind. All the while that literary scholars have been declaring the need for a new regionalism that is willing to explore the complex interrelationship of race, ethnicity, and place, black Canadian cultural studies has been doing just that. One could convincingly argue that contemporary black Canadian cultural studies *is*, in fact, the study of the relationship of race to place—“place” being understood broadly as the geographic, diasporic, metaphoric, historic, and poetic spaces in which Canadian blackness abides. As Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods explain in their introduction to *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (2007), investigations of “where” blackness abides need to be able to look at “place” as bodily, economic, historical, material, geographical, metaphoric, and concrete, every-day, and lived (7); to understand black geography simply as black bodies occupying “black spaces,” they argue, is a kind of “bio-geographic determinism” that makes “black geographies disappear—to the margins or to the realm of the unknowable” (7). Although it would seem appropriate for me to begin to theorize a long-standing prairie blackness in the discourses that black Canadian cultural studies have developed for this very task, as I will demonstrate, there are potential problems inherent in these discourses as well.

### **I. THE LIMITS OF BLACK CANADIAN “INDIGENEITY”**

Until now, critics have relied on metaphors of indigeneity to describe the relationships of second-, third-, fourth-, and fifth-generation black Canadians to place. Since Liz Cromwell first introduced the term “native born Canadians” into black

Canadian literary theorizing in her Foreword to *One Out of Many: A Collection of Writings by 21 Black Women in Ontario* (1975), Canadian descendants of old-line pioneer families have been considered, at least in the discourses of black Canadian cultural studies, as being in some way “natives” of Canada. In 1996 Anthony Joyette extended Cromwell’s indigenizing metaphor by proposing that a distinction be made between “aboriginal (descendents of early settlers)” and “naturalized (immigrant) African-Canadian writers” (*Kola* 8.1, 5), a distinction that George Elliott Clarke admired as “a fine classification” (“Introduction,” *Eyeing* xxii). Rinaldo Walcott posited a similar concept, “‘indigenous black Canadians,’” the same year in *Black Like Who?* (1997), but it was, he wrote, “for lack of a better term” (39). Though Walcott indicated that a better term is needed, and signaled his discomfort with the metaphor through a liberal use of scare quotes, he nevertheless continued to refer to writers such as Maxine Tynes, Carol Talbot and George Elliot Clarke as “‘indigenous’” black Nova Scotians.

The endurance of indigenizing metaphors in Canadian criticism for over two decades indicates that, contrary to what Walcott suggests above, it is not only a matter of a lack of a better term. Analyzing the use of indigenizing metaphors suggests that these terms perform important critical work. Walcott, for instance, uses indigenizing metaphors in the context of discussions about the failures of multicultural and other national discourses to sincerely recognize blackness as an integral aspect of the nation state. Because, as Walcott points out, the nation finds it “impossible to imagine blackness as Canadian” (*Black Like Who?* 42), critics have necessarily reached for tools that enable a different kind of thinking about blackness. Though Walcott hints at the problems involved in theorizing blackness as “aboriginal,” at the same time he shows how

powerfully deconstructive such metaphors can be of both the national myths and the multicultural discourses that continually deracinate black Canadians. In *Black Like Who?* he writes:

George Elliott Clarke, Maxine Tynes, Carol Talbot and a number of others have continually emphasized place and space in their work—in particular the places and spaces which, for lack of a better term, I would designate “indigenous black Canadian space.” This particular group of “indigenous black Canadians” have not garnered as much attention nationally as they should because their presence—the places and spaces they occupy—makes a lie of too many national myths (or raises too many questions) concerning the Canadian nation-state. (39)

As this passage demonstrates, indigenizing metaphors enable critics to powerfully counter the sense of blackness as only a recently-arrived phenomenon by pointing out black presences that are so old and deeply rooted as to seem virtually indigenous.

As crucial as indigenizing metaphors have been to the project of recovering historical black presences in Canada, they are also, at the same time, highly problematic. Both Clarke and Walcott have, in their own ways, acknowledged that indigenizing metaphors are overly divisive of long-standing and immigrant black communities. In his introduction to *Eyeing the North Star: Directions in African-Canadian Literature* (1997), Clarke rightly points out the ways such metaphors “cleave” critical attention between “native” and “immigrant” black literatures:

In the end, many critiques of African-Canadian literature are mere periphrases. They evade a felt cleavage in the canon, namely, that between “aboriginal (descendants of early settlers)” and “naturalized (immigrant)” African-Canadian writers, to employ the fine classifications of Anthony Joyette, the Vincentian-Canadian artist and editor. If the latter are noted for “the ‘immigrant novel’ in which the protagonist and the setting are usually foreign,” the former have emphasized Canada-centred, documentary, spiritual, and historical writing. Intriguingly, old-line African-Canadian communities are mainly rural and African-American in derivation, while the post-1955 new black communities are urban and diverse. Significantly, too, relations between “aboriginal” and “naturalized” writers replicate those between First Nations and mainstream Canadian writers, with tensions developing *vis-à-vis* resource allocations (arts and research grants) and appropriation of discourse. (xxii)

Similarly, Walcott points out that critics have divided their attention between “immigrant” and “indigenous” writers, but that, ultimately, because it is troublesome to think about blackness as belonging to Canada, critics pay more attention to “immigrant” writing. “Thus,” Walcott writes, “in a perverse way, it is around Canadian blacks of Caribbean descent that definitions of blackness in Canada are clustered. The hypervisibility of Caribbean blackness makes ‘indigenous black Canadians’ invisible” (*Black Like Who?* 39).

I agree with Clarke and Walcott’s similar assessments of the problems involved in maintaining rigid critical distinctions between black writers based on their length of

residency in Canada. And, while neither Clarke nor Walcott mentions it, I believe that indigenizing metaphors have been partly responsible for the rifts in our critical canon. Despite the fact that Clarke and Walcott's work is quite varied—both critics have written extensively on so-called “indigenous” and “immigrant” writers<sup>1</sup>—the critics' own performances of “indigenous” black nationalism (Clarke) and diasporic black Atlanticism (Walcott) have made each “representative” of the “native” and “immigrant” perspectives, respectively. This rift in both the creative and critical canons that indigenizing metaphors help to maintain is unhealthy for the discipline, and I agree that critics must work to bridge these divides. At the same time, however, it needs to be pointed out that the problems of indigenizing metaphors run much deeper than either Clarke or Walcott recognize. Neither considers the problems of indigenizing metaphors from a postcolonial or First Nations' perspective. In what follows I scrutinize these terms which have shaped the reception of black Canadian cultural production as well as its criticism in an effort to find a more responsible language with which to theorize long standing Canadian blackness. It is my hope that by theorizing the work of black prairie writers in terms other than those I inherit as a scholar of black Canadian literature, my argument will help move the study of black Canadian culture toward a more ethical, and more truly postcolonial criticism.

## **II. FIRST NATIONS AND THE BLACK CANADIAN LITERARY IMAGINARY**

Already some of the limits of indigenizing metaphors are apparent in the passage I quoted above from Clarke's Introduction to *Eyeing the North Star*. In describing the

“cleft” in the African-Canadian literary canon between “aboriginal” and “naturalized” black writers, Clarke argues that “relations” between these writers “replicate those between First Nations and mainstream Canadian writers, with tensions developing *vis-à-vis* resource allocations (arts and research grants) and appropriation of discourse” (xxii). Clarke is referring here to the appropriation of voice debate that unfolded in the late 1980s and early 1990s between First Nations writers, among them Lee Maracle and Jeannette Armstrong, and several non-native members of the Writers Union of Canada, particularly WP Kinsella, Timothy Findley, and Darlene Barry Quaipe, over the issue of whom native stories “belong to.”<sup>2</sup> While Native writers charged non-native story tellers with committing acts of cultural theft, a move, which, they argued, reproduces dominant colonial relations, non-native writers insisted on their “right” to choose which stories to tell. Non-native writers also accused native writers of “censoring” their voices. While this debate is a well-known and important watershed in the cultural politics of Canadian literary production and publishing, I am unsure of what debate between “native” and “naturalized” black writers Clarke alludes to here. To my knowledge, Canadian-born (so-called “native”) black writers have never accused immigrant writers of “appropriating” either their voices or their stories. What voice, exactly, would black Canadian-born writers accuse immigrant writers of stealing? Presumably Canadian-born writers are speaking and writing in regionally-inflected but standard “Canadian” Englishes—certainly, this is the case in the black prairie archive. How does Clarke imagine non-native writers could “appropriate” this voice? Perhaps Clarke means it to be the other way around: Canadian-born (“aboriginal”) writers have appropriated “naturalized” writers’ languages, such as Caribbean patois, or made use of Caribbean, African, and

African-American narrative traditions. This is a more plausible scenario, but it is not what Clarke implies is happening. He writes that “relations between ‘aboriginal’ and ‘naturalized writers *replicate* those between First Nations and mainstream Canadian writers” (emphasis added), meaning, first, that he sees some equivalency between “mainstream” and “naturalized” writers, and, second, that Canadian-born blacks suffer the same issues of appropriation and cultural theft as First Nations. Yet this is simply not the case. By casting the problem in terms of a debate between “native” and “naturalized” writers, Clarke himself appropriates the important critique First Nations writers made about their particular situations in a different context.

How is it that Clarke, a scholar recognized for his meticulous attention to the historical, textual, and bibliographic details of black Canadian writing and criticism, constructs such a misleading portrait about the issues facing black writers? What motivates this critical desire to understand Canadian-born black writers not in their own terms but in terms of First Nations writers? Part of the answer to these questions, I think, lies in the fact that black Canadian cultural studies is not conscious of the deep psychic work that indigenizing metaphors actually perform. Critics treat indigenizing metaphors as interchangeable *synonyms* for concepts such as “Canadian-born” or “long-standing” blackness. But are they? In order to go more deeply into the psychic workings of the trope of black Canadian indigeneity, let me pause for a moment to theorize how metaphor as a linguistic figure operates.

Metaphor works by structuring our understanding of one thing in terms of something else. According to linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, “*The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another*” (5).

In their influential study *Metaphors We Live By* (1980; 2002), Lakoff and Johnson demonstrate how conceptual metaphor operates. They take the figure “ARGUMENT IS WAR,” and show how the experience of verbal argument in our culture is structured in terms of this metaphor: arguments are “won or lost,” claims are considered “indefensible,” criticisms are “right on target,” critiques are “shot down,” “demolished,” and so forth (4). The authors ask the reader to imagine a cultural situation in which the concept of verbal argument is organized by a different metaphor, such as dance; in this situation “the participants are seen as performers, and the goal is to perform in a balanced and aesthetically pleasing way. In such a culture, people would view arguments differently, experience them differently, carry them out differently, and talk about them differently” (5). By directing attention to particular aspects of verbal argument, and not others, metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson argue, “highlights” as well as “hides” aspects of our experience. They elaborate:

In allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept (e.g., the battling aspects of arguing), a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconstant with that metaphor. For example, in the midst of a heated argument, when we are intent on attacking our opponent’s position and defending our own, we may lose sight of the cooperative aspects of arguing. (10)

Though the authors don’t explicitly analyze the workings of metaphor in psychoanalytic terms, they suggest that metaphors can cause us to “lose sight of” (10) aspects of our experience, or even “mask” (11) parts of the communicative process. Metaphor, it seems,

encourages a kind of forgetting. Understood in psychoanalytic terms, metaphor is a linguistic process that represses awareness of concepts that are inconsistent with or troubling to culturally dominant metaphors. The process by which Lakoff and Johnson say metaphors “hide” aspects of our experiences from ourselves closely resembles the process of repression, which Freud described as a turning away of something, and keeping it at a distance, from conscious awareness (“Repression” 1915).

What does the metaphor of black Canadian indigeneity highlight? And what does it hide? By describing Canadian blackness in terms of the concept of indigeneity, the trope highlights the special, but under-recognized, interrelationships of black Canadians to particular geographies that have evolved over generations despite the metaphorical and actual attempts on the part of the nation to remove them. The destruction of Vancouver’s inner-city black neighbourhood, Hogan’s Alley, in the late 1960s; the similar destruction of Africville in Nova Scotia; and the well-documented whiting-out of black history from the nation’s official historical and cultural self-representations are all examples of the ongoing attempts to pull black Canada out by the roots. The use of the conceptual metaphor of black indigeneity is part of a discourse of cultural and political resistance, a strategy of claiming an inalienable right to place.

But what does the metaphor hide? If indigeneity is to be understood as a trope of belonging that can be applied to black Canada, can it also refer more broadly to any politicized minority that feels they “belong” to a territory? For instance, can the Québécois be regarded as indigenous to Canada for historical and cultural reasons, even if indigenous discourse rarely applies to them? (Maaka, Fleras 30). More broadly still, can it refer to descendents of early European settlers who also claim belonging to the nation?

This particular use of indigeneity as a trope of and for non-native belonging has already been problematized by literary critics some decades ago. Terry Goldie argues in his *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Literature* (1989) that what has been hidden in white settler's cultural assertions of "indigenous" status is the settler's deep attraction to the "impossible" idea of becoming indigenous (13). According to Goldie, European-descended settlers, both fearful and envious of First Nations' aboriginal status, either repudiate native land claims and deny recognition of the original indigenes, or incorporate these claims into white assertions of native status (13). Another literary critic, Margery Fee, has similarly explored what is hidden or repressed in what she calls the Euro-Canadian "literary land claim" (16) in contemporary Canadian fiction. In her essay "Romantic Nationalism and the Image of Native People in Contemporary English-Canadian Literature" (1987) Fee demonstrates how the "identity quest of the bourgeois individual so crucial to Western literature" is problematically resolved in Canadian literature: through the identification of the white subject with First Nations identities and histories (16). Both Fee and Goldie demonstrate how the concept of indigeneity, when it is applied to non-native settlers, represses memory of the historic conquest and dispossession of First Nations and replaces the memory of the indigene with a fantasy of an originary white settler.

Must the concept of indigeneity, then, be understood in ethnic absolutist terms, as applying only to the descendants of the original occupants, that is, those who occupied their lands prior to European conquest, and whose descendants continue to do so? Many First Nations activists and political theorists and their non-native allies think so. Because in Canada and other "new world" contexts the struggle to redress both the historical and

ongoing dispossession of First Nations people from their ancestral lands turns on the key concept of legal indigenous title, it is crucial to acknowledge that the concept of indigeneity *belongs* to First Nations. As Taiaiake Alfred notes in his book *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto* (1999), “Aboriginal” is a *legal* category in Canada. According to Section 35 of the Constitution Act of Canada, 1982, “There are two major groups of ‘Aboriginal people’ involved in forest lands and resource issues in Canada: ‘Indians’ (those who are registered as Status Indians under the Indian Act) and Metis.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, when Anthony Joyette proposes that long-standing black Canadians be considered “aboriginal” he unwittingly inserts black Canada into the discursive legal framework governing First Nations in Canada, that is, the Indian Act and the Canadian Constitution. Alfred uses “aboriginal,” he writes, as a legal term, but “also to emphasize the primacy of the peoples who first occupied the land” (xxvi). This is the understanding of indigeneity that I, too, work with.

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The passage I quoted above from Clarke’s work provides a glimpse into some of the difficulties that can arise when critics theorize the complex interrelationship of black Canadians to place in the simple shorthand of indigenizing metaphors. At this point I would like to go more deeply into the reasons why I believe that a long-standing prairie blackness must be theorized by employing different terms. In order to do so, I turn to one of the most courageous critical voices in black Canadian cultural studies, that of Marlene NourbeSe Philip. Her collection, *Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture* (1992), a study of the affective experiences of dislocation, migration, and being at home

in Canada, has much to say about the politics of place and of indigeneity for black Canadians.

### III. NOURBESE PHILIP AND THE BLACK CANADIAN “UNHOMELY”

Although published sixteen years ago, today Philip’s prescient collection of essays, *Frontiers*, remains striking in its radicality. Like many contributions to black Canadian cultural criticism, Philip’s collection explores a phenomenon we might call “the black Canadian unhomely.” Her introductory essay, “Echoes in a Stranger Land,” argues that the experience of being “at home” for black people in Canada is distinguished by a feeling of “permanent exile” (9). This observation is not particularly new or radical; it has often been made by both black Canadian writers and critics.<sup>4</sup> But unlike other critics, Philip does not locate the origins of the black Canadian unhomely in Canada’s long history of anti-black racism, or in the exclusionary logic of Canada’s multicultural discourses with its “two founding nations” rhetoric, nor in the racial whiteness of Canada’s regional or national imaginaries. This is what remains so striking about this collection: for Philip, the roots of the black Canadian unhomely are buried in the history of the land itself. She writes:

For Africans in the Caribbean and the Americas, who in the words of the spiritual, have been trying to sing their songs in a strange land, be/longing *is* a problematic. Be/longing *anywhere*—the Caribbean, Canada, the United States, even Africa. The land, the place that was the New World was nothing but a source

of anguish—how could they—we—begin to love the land, which is the first step in be/longing, when even the land was unfree? (22)

Without sentimentality or hesitation, Philip outlines the problem of black unbelonging in the clearest possible terms: “The only peoples who be(truly)long here—who be long here (I use “be” in the African American vernacular sense), are the Native peoples” (22). This, for me, is a crucial insight. Rather than dealing with the unhomeliness of black Canada as a phenomenon-in-itself, Philip makes a connection between black Canadians and the wider history of empire that made exiles of so many, including, and especially so, the First Nations.

Although Philip insists on coming face to face with the fact of black Canadians’ non-aboriginality, this does not mean that she also gives up trying to reclaim a sense of our belonging to Canada. On the contrary, Philip suggests that reclaiming a sense of belonging depends upon remembering, against the “massive—and collective social amnesia” (24)—the violent history of colonialism and trans-Atlantic slavery that both dispersed black people throughout the Americas and dispossessed First Nations people of the land that was, and remains, theirs. By remembering our unbelonging we begin to move closer to belonging. This is less paradoxical a formulation than it may at first seem. Whereas claiming black indigeneity to Canada involves forgetting the violent forces that separated blacks from Africa, as well as the forces that, at a different time, displaced First Nations from their ancestral lands, remembering our non-indigeneity restores our history back to ourselves, and restores indigenous title to the people to whom it belongs. Thus Philip keeps this history in the foreground of her analysis: “Unlike all other peoples who

came here, the African did not choose to come, but was forced to come as a consequence of one of the most cruel enterprises in history, the trans-Atlantic trade in Africans” (23). Keeping this history firmly in mind allows Philip to call for a new kind of black belonging to Canada, one that is free from the dangerous illusions of black indigeneity, and inseparable from the belonging of First Nations people: “Canada *needs* to m/other us. Her very salvation depends on m/othering all her peoples—those who be/long(ed) here when the first Europeans arrived—the Native peoples; as well as those, like the African, who unwittingly encountered History and became seminal in its development” (24). I disagree with Philip that “we [black subjects] each, individually and collectively, are equally entitled to a share in this land” and I sympathize instead with Lee Maracle’s position that immigration, from a radical First Nations/ decolonizing perspective, looks more like chronic and continuous invasion (“Oratory on Oratory” 55-70) than “land sharing,” but I remain inspired by the ways Philip consistently imagines black belonging as a collective project between blacks (and, perhaps, other non-aboriginal groups) and First Nations. As she puts it, “we had better find ways of encouraging ourselves and each other to sing our songs—in this land that, with the exception of the Native people, *is* a strange land for us all” (24).

#### **IV. DELEUZE AND GUATTARI: RETERRITORIALIZATION AND THE PRAIRIE PLATEAU**

Because, like Philip, I wish to write about blackness as “be/longing” on the prairies while at the same time preserving the memory of black migration, the rhetoric of indigeneity will not do. I need a different trope, one that is able, on the one hand, to

encompass the sense of the prairies as home for multiple generations of black families, but which, on the other hand, respectfully reminds us of blacks' historical "unbelonging" on this land. This last point is crucial if we want, like Philip, to think of belonging as a collective project that we must strive toward in cooperation with First Nations. I believe Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987) offers the possibility of such a language. Their evocative writing on the subject of migration, particularly their description of migration as a two-part movement constituted, first, by deterritorialization, the "rupture" (9), and "the line of the flight" (510), and second, by "reterritorialization," a return to "earth" (381) and a "state apparatus" (381), is evocative not just of the phenomenon of migration and diaspora, but of the historical black migration to the prairies in particular. If we recall the history of the Oklahoma exodus of 1905-1912, which I wrote about in the first and second chapters, we can appreciate how appropriate Deleuze and Guattari's work is for this project. After the pioneers arrived on the Canadian prairies, they became profoundly reterritorialized: the majority went out to remote homesteads on land that had been newly "freed up" for non-native settlement, and many were among the first non-native inhabitants of Cree, Chippeweyan, Beaver, Assiniboine, Blackfoot, Blood, Peigan, and Sarcee lands. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, a distinguishing feature of migration—in contrast to the phenomenon of nomadism—is the migrant's return to an earth that, like the pioneer's newly created "homesteads," "is mediatized by something else, a property regime, a State apparatus" (379). "If the nomad can be called the Deterritorialized par excellence," they write, "it is precisely because there is no reterritorialization *afterward* as with the migrant" (381). One of the reasons why I find Deleuze and Guattari's concept of

territoriality (the concept of being “captured” in a particular territory and a particular identity as a necessary moment of things) relevant to my project is because, unlike indigenizing metaphors, it helps keep the colonial politics of the territory at the center of the story of migration. Another is that, as a literary critical tool, it helps keeps the politics of the territory at the center of critical analyses. With these tools in hand, let us delve once again into the black prairie archive to read the work of the “territorialized” generations of writers.

#### **V. THE BLACK PIONEER DESCENDANTS SOCIETY’S *BLACK PIONEER CENTENNIAL: A LITTLE TASTE OF SOUL***

The black prairie archive includes many texts written by territorialized writers who inscribe a complex interrelationship between black prairie people and the earth upon which their ancestors reterritorialized. One of the most interesting of these is a slim cookbook published by the Black Pioneers Descendants Society in 2005 in commemoration of the centennial of the Oklahoma migration. *Black Pioneer Centennial: A Little Taste of Soul* is a self-published collection of family recipes, photographs, and memories passed down from one generation to another, from the original black pioneers to their living descendants. It is significant that the cookbook is self-published, for although the centennial of the Oklahoma migration coincided with the 2005 Alberta and Saskatchewan centennial celebrations, the events organized by the Black Pioneer Descendants’ Society were not part of the province’s official celebrations, nor did it receive any government funding.<sup>5</sup> The foreword to the collection, written by Laurie

Carothers Toth, explains that the Black Pioneer Descendants Society independently undertook to publish this collection of recipes not only to intervene into the official centennial celebrations which commemorated only a sanitized provincial history (I write more about this in my conclusion), but also to strengthen the communities' collective recollection of its own ancestral history. As Toth reveals, "All of us are very proud of our heritage, but for many, our origins are obscure, fuzzy at best after one or two generations. Our individual quests for knowledge can be monumental tasks" (4). The cookbook enables that quest for knowledge, she suggests, by both storing and strengthening the memories that proliferate in the community around the preparation, consumption, and writing/ talking about food. As she puts it, the collection of recipes is "a vast information warehouse," a "technology to facilitate sharing our information and knowledge" (4). In its explicit goal of strengthening and sharing community memory, *A Little Taste of Soul* is part of the sub-genre Carol Bardenstein calls the "collective memory cookbook" (355); it is a cookbook that exploits some of the unique operations of memory and collective identification that are deeply embedded in, enacted, and communicated symbolically through the many forms of engagement with food (Bardenstein 355) for the purposes of generating and preserving black-inflected memory on the prairies.

The "commemorative" function of food has been elaborated extensively in a wide range of fields, both in terms of the act of consumption, which, as Roland Barthes, argues in "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food," allows individuals to "partake each day" of the collective past, and the preparation and cooking of food, which has "long roots," constituting "the accumulated wisdom of our ancestors" (170). Recently there has been a resurgence of scholarship on the relationships between food, identity-

construction, and memory, in the context of immigrant and diasporic experience, a context in which, as many have noted, food can play an important role in shaping how people conceive of themselves as individuals and as part of a collectivity, in articulating affiliations and identifications with place as “home,” and in creating a sense of collective memory and cultural identity.<sup>6</sup>

*A Little Taste of Soul* helps us understand how a recipe collection can function as a storehouse of personal and collective memory. Each recipe included in the collection works as autobiography and history, in addition to transmitting and textualizing knowledge about food preparation that has, perhaps until the publication of this book, existed only as embodied knowledge. All twelve contributors to this collection are women, and the majority of their dishes originate in their grandmothers, great-grandmothers, and great-great grandmothers’ kitchens. In this way, the collection functions as a culinary genealogy, connecting the current generation of writers to the tastes and smells of their ancestors’ kitchens and gardens. For example, Linda Peko Campbell’s recipe for “Grandma Mamie Mack’s Mashed Potato Salad” is prefaced by her tribute to several generations of women in her family. She writes:

[I am the] Great granddaughter of Saunders John Andrew Jackson. In memory of my maternal grandmother Mamie (Jackson) Mack, daughter of Sanders and Eliza (McCoy) Jackson of Wildwod (Junkins). She raised eleven children as a single mother. This recipe is still prepared by my mother Jean Mack Clarke who passed the recipe on to her daughters Lorretta Carolyn and Linda Jean Peko. Serve hot or cold!” (A7)

Similarly, Thelma Jackson's recipe for "Uncle Rosie's Two Crust Pork Pie" is contextualized by a brief history of the Jackson family. She writes, "They left Little Rock, Arkansas, arriving in Edmonton in 1905 and homesteaded at Wildwood Area, laying roots for now 6 generations of Jackson descendants" (A8).

In addition to providing an occasion for an author to record and transmit her family's history, writing about and recollecting family dishes evokes the memories that proliferate around food and food production in unique ways, including the ways ancestors grew their own food and kept kitchen gardens. Linda Peko Campbell's recipe for "Aunt Sallie's No Oil Sage Sausage Patties" notes that the dish was "a favorite ground pork recipe at hog butchering time made with fresh garden herbs" (A3). Submitting her recipe for "Miss Elvinda's Cream White Cake," which calls for real fruit jam, reminds Annette Saunders that her grandmother was "an enthusiastic gardener and plant lover, looking after her own garden and flower beds" (A17). These recipes symbolically reconnect descendants of pioneers to the earth upon which their ancestors territorialized.

As a record of the pioneers' lives on the prairies, this collective-memory cookbook is more detailed and more humanizing than any conventional official history ever could be, for it records the history of spaces Foucault argues "remains to be written," including "the little tactics of the habitat" (149). Among the few recipes for African-American-influenced "soul food" dishes like "Miss Marge Jamerson's Frickaseed! Chicken," and "Aunt Sallie's Sweet n' Sour Southern Fried Potatoes," are a number of recipes that remember and document the challenges the pioneers faced while trying to make a living from the land in the early part of the twentieth century. The recipes provide

a material history of what the pioneers ate, what ingredients they kept on hand on their kitchen shelves, pantries, and cellars, what they grew and harvested from their gardens, and, sometimes, how they went without. “Uncle Rosie’s Hard Times Soda Cracker Pie” (A8) is a dessert that must have been created by a resourceful home cook during a particularly lean period, perhaps the Depression of the 1930s. The only ingredients in this pie are soda crackers, sugar, water, cream of tartar, and a little cinnamon. But an index to Uncle Rosie’s hopeful outlook is the line he appends to the end of his recipe, which suggests that the pie be served warm “with some thick farm cream in good times.”

Like “Uncle Rosie’s Hard Times Soda Cracker Pie,” most of the recipes in the pioneer cookbook call either for a few pantry ingredients or fresh ingredients which could be found right on the land, thereby saving a family money as well as an arduous trip to the nearest store, possibly several miles away. For instance, there is a recipe for “Miss Adeline’s Gooseberry Pie” which calls for “2½ cups wild gooseberries” (AA), no doubt gathered from wild gooseberry bushes growing on and around the homestead. There is another for “Miss Edith’s Squirrel Stew” which calls for “1 squirrel dressed and washed thoroughly” (DD), and, least appetizingly of all, “Miss Edith’s Deep Fried Skunk” which calls for “2 skunks, skinned and cleaned and soaked in cold water and salt” and “1½ - 2 cups bear fat or lard” for frying. This recipe admonishes the cook to “Be sure to remove the scent glands from the skunk!”

It is significant that these family recipes were collected and published for posterity not by the pioneers themselves, but by their descendants. Whether consciously or not, the pioneers’ literature and orature never mentions the necessity for cooking with bush meat such as squirrel and skunk. Some of the pioneer orature, like that of Ellis

Hooks and Mrs. Charles King, was recorded by an outsider to the community, Reevan Dolgoy; perhaps the pioneers felt too shy, too embarrassed about sharing the harsh, private realities of pioneer isolation and poverty with an outsider. But the territorialized writers in *A Little Taste of Soul*, some of whom are as many as five generations removed from the pioneer experience, are not ashamed about the ways their ancestors survived on the land. As Edith Arnet, one of the contributors to the collection, explains, “these recipes speak volumes about the black pioneers’ will to survive, conquer and triumph over adversity. They are unusual dishes but [I] share them without apology as a reminder of the deep sacrifices made by our ancestors who cleared and settled the land and built homesteads” (BB).<sup>7</sup> To the territorialized generation, these dishes testify to their ancestors’ talents for survival, for “making a way out of no way,” as the African-American proverb goes.

All the recipes in the cookbook are interesting and historically important in their own right, but one stands out for me more than the others, though not because of its exotic (to me) ingredients. It is notable for the content of its writing. Linda Peko Campbell’s recipe for “Smothered Moose Steak Strips” is prefaced by a fascinating piece of writing that explains the origins of her great-grandmother’s moose dish on “old Samuel Carother’s homestead in Amber Valley about eight miles from Donatville” (A4). Her preface is one of the few texts in the black prairie archive that makes explicit reference to the issue of black settler-First Nations relations. Although the purpose of the text is fairly straightforward, the old family recipe that calls for moose meat and the acknowledgement of the contribution of First Nations people to black prairie culture, make for a complex and powerful piece of writing. As I will demonstrate, Campbell’s

acknowledgement is powerful because it directs our attention to what normally remains hidden in the metaphor of black Canadian indigeneity. I reproduce it here in full:

#### Linda Peko's Smothered Moose Steak Strips

To honor the First Nation peoples, some of whom are family and good friends, we offer this dish as a symbol of the large and small game that they taught our great grandparents to hunt. We thank them for the herbal knowledge, medicines, and survival skills that they shared with us and for being good neighbours! Without their genuine compassion and kindness, many of our families would have been hard pressed to make it through the cold Canadian winters. I personally have shared the bounty of enough moose meat for a winter from a kind First Nations chief! I remember as a small child waking up to find our water pasture on my Uncle Roy Carother's place in Amber Valley, full of tipis and families, who camped and used our well for water and to rest and water their horses and make camp while traveling to a new site. I remember my dismay when I would awake to find they had broken camp. May God bless you, your children, and your children's children to the 100<sup>th</sup> generation! (A2)

Here Campbell remembers what is normally repressed by the metaphor of black Canadian indigeneity. What she remembers is both extraordinary and unsettling. In her memory, a black child watches from the window of a homestead as First Nations families quietly gather outside, then mysteriously disappear. The native's presence is fleetingly

observed by a child of a people with their own long and painful history of bondage, displacement, and exodus, but in this scene the child and her family are firmly and safely resettled. The land which they have helped to enclose and transform into “pasture,” the water well, and the homestead itself are all signs of their permanence, and they stand in sharp contrast to the nomadic movements and temporary camps of the First Nations. Coming from within the stability of the homestead, the gaze of the black child continues to transform the landscape she beholds into an enclosure, for her gaze is the settler’s gaze. As she looks outside, she transforms the land into a bounded space—the water pasture, she writes, was “full” (like a container) “of tipis and families.” And the First Nations, displaced by this family of black settlers, move beyond her field of vision, beyond the visual range of the settlement, and “disappear.” This is a scene that speaks volumes about the complex interrelationship of race and place in the imperial past of the Canadian prairies. Its singularity as a text provokes me to ask the question: can the scene Campbell records be historically accurate?

As we know from the first chapter, most of the pioneers who settled in and around Amber Valley arrived in the years between 1905 and 1912. By that time, the First Nations on the prairies had already signed treaties surrendering their lands to the Crown. After the defeat of the 1885 Métis and First Nations uprising—an uprising, which, I must note, the famous black cowboy John Ware rode *against* (Thomson 34)—First Nations had little choice but to cede their lands in what is today southern and central Alberta, central Saskatchewan, and northern Alberta, and to move onto reserve lands put aside by the Crown “in compensation” for relinquishing their territories.<sup>8</sup> Thus, when Linda Campbell’s family arrived on the Canadian prairies, the First Nations around the

Athabasca area would have been newly displaced onto reserve land. However, the black fur traders, cattle drivers, and interpreters who arrived on the prairies before the turn of the century, before the signing of treaties, had more extensive, and more well-documented, dealings with First Nations than first-wave pioneers. What were the relationships between these early black settlers and First Nations like? Colin Thomson's *Blacks in Deep Snow* records that Dan Williams, a black fur trader who settled on the banks of the Peace river (and whose writing about that settlement I claim as the first instance of black writing on the prairies [Appendix]), married a Beaver Indian woman named Thela, daughter of the Beaver Chief, Komaxala (62). Thomson's inscription of Williams' relationship with the Beaver people indicates that it was, at least in this particular instance, less harmonious and egalitarian than the relations Campbell remembers in the preface to her recipe. Thomson writes:

The Beavers and their chief were mystified by Williams' skin colour. He was considered a "black spirit" who might have "special medicine," both good and evil. Williams was aware that his "medicine" came from a Sharps rifle, a weapon with which he had fantastic skill. On one occasion, his rifle saved Komaxala's life after the chief had been attacked by a huge bear. The Beavers could then at least partially overlook Williams' ineptitude as a fisherman and trapper.

During a hunting expedition Williams' bride-to-be was struck by lightning and left mute. The incident demonstrated to the Beavers that the black man's presence angered the gods, and that they were displeased with Williams' behaviour during the hunt; he insisted on killing wolves which were driving caribou in the direction of the

hunters. Furthermore, the Indians respected animal life and could not appreciate Dan's loud laughter after an animal had fallen to his bullets. (62)

There are accounts, too, of some troubling interactions between John Ware, Alberta's famous black cowboy, and First Nations people. Ware's relationship to First Nations was conditioned by his status as a non-native settler at a time in the 1880s when First Nations people were mobilizing against non-native incursions into their territories. According to Grant MacEwan's biography of Ware, *John Ware's Cow Country* (1960; reprinted 1973), Ware received his Blackfoot name, "Matoxy Sex Apee Quin," or Bad Black White Man, after joining the Stimson Rangers, a patrol group of non-native cattlemen who rode through the southern part of the Northwest Territory on horseback, concerned with the rise of cattle-killing and other actions inspired by the uprising at Duck Lake in 1885. During these rides, according to MacEwan, Ware took a particularly aggressive approach to handling conflict with First Nations, and, troublingly, many of the tactics MacEwan describes in his—admittedly, highly mediated and racializing account—seem inspired by the anti-black violence Ware may have witnessed during his time in the American South. MacEwan writes:

When Fred Ings and John Ware were combining a range ride with patrol duty, they came upon a fresh carcass of beef and a couple of young Stoney nearby. The surly young bucks denied doing the slaughter, but John knew they were guilty and began uncoiling his rope as if preparing for a routine hanging back there in the

hills. “If yo didn’ kill this one, yo p’obably killed some othas,” he said as he looked around, pretending to be searching the landscape for a suitable tree. (73)

MacEwan records numerous such interactions between Ware and First Nations.<sup>9</sup> (In the context of this discussion we might return briefly to the question I posed in my introduction about why Ware is remembered today while the remainder of the prairies black pioneers have been largely forgotten. Ware was not a rebellious black subject but colluded in a public way with the nation-state against First Nations. It is perhaps for this reason that he is rewarded with memory). But whereas Williams and Ware lived on the prairies in the pre-treaty period, Campbell and her family arrived in the region after First Nations had relinquished their lands to the Crown. Given the historical context of Campbell’s writing and the glimpses into black and First Nations interactions that the above vignettes provide, how are we to interpret the “acknowledgement” that accompanies her recipe?

One way we can understand the scene Campbell writes is as part of a new cultural mythology that arose as part of the experience of being territorialized on the prairies. It locates the “origin” of black territoriality in the meetings, cultural exchanges, and intermarriages between black settlers and First Nations in an environment that Mary Louise Pratt has described as the “contact zone.” In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) Pratt defines the “contact zone” as “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations” (5). She notes that whereas “contact zone” is often synonymous with “colonial frontier,” “the latter term is grounded

within a European expansionist perspective (the frontier is a frontier only with respect to Europe).” “By using the term ‘contact,’” she writes,

I aim to foreground the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. A “contact” perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and “travelees,” not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power” (7)

Campbell’s writing emphasizes the importance of the cultural exchanges and cultural traffic of the contact zone for the survival and cultural development of the black prairies. It was not in isolation that black prairie culture developed, her writing contends; it was forged through both imaginative and actual contact and cultural exchange with First Nations and their land. The recipes in *A Little Taste of Soul* testify to this. Campbell’s recipe for moose meat, which, as she notes, her family serves “with hot buttermilk biscuits [to] sop the gravy!” represents a hybridization of African-American and First Nations culinary traditions, and is suggestive of the important knowledge exchange that took place in the generative contact zone of north-central Alberta at the turn of the century.

In her Introduction to *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt is careful to note, however, that the improvisational interactions and cultural exchanges that often occur when “cultures meet,

clash, and grapple with each other” usually take place within radically asymmetrical relations of power (7). In the preface to her recipe, Campbell acknowledges and gives thanks to First Nations for sharing with the black settlers “herbal knowledge, medicines, and survival skills,” but she does not acknowledge any power differential that might have structured this “sharing.” In fact, in the scene of contact that she writes, First Nations somehow remain nomadic even as black settlers enclose the land. Although the black settlers did not choose to come to Canada with an explicitly expansionist or colonialist project in mind—in fact, they, as black people, were not even wanted on the prairies—the pioneers were drawn into the forces of history that helped to displace First Nations people from western Canada/ Turtle Island. Although it is difficult to do so, any critical assessment of territorialized black prairie culture needs to articulate the tensions and contradictions of the pioneers’ complex historical position on the prairies with regard to the territory and to First Nations. By articulating these complexities, we not only transform the inherited picture of the prairie frontier as only a white and native space, we begin to move toward a different sense of belonging for black prairie people, one that can not be divorced from the ongoing struggle of First Nations for indigenous title and justice.

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I wrote above that one of the reasons why Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of territorialization is attractive for this project is because it keeps the politics of the territory at the center of the story of migration. As I have said, this is key if black belonging is to be considered in conjunction with First Nations belonging. But another reason why the

concept is pertinent is because, as Deleuze and Guattari theorize it, and as I theorize it too, reterritorialization does not necessarily signal the conclusion of the migration story. Whereas the concept of black indigeneity only describes the length of time black Canadians have occupied particular locations, the concept of reterritorialization goes much further in describing the dynamic interplay between race and place. According to the authors, after one territorializes, one does not always remain permanently and securely so. One can be deterritorialized once again, “carried off” (292), in the course of a “becoming.” Deleuze and Guattari explain: “One reterritorializes, or allows oneself to be reterritorialized ... in a becoming, one is deterritorialized. Even blacks, as the Black Panthers said, must become-black. Even women must become-women” (291). Thus, as I understand it, when a territorialized subject identifies with the twentieth-century political and cultural discourses of blackness, she becomes-black, and this becoming constitutes a subtle deterritorialization, a “lifting up,” as it were, of the subject out of the territory. As the authors explain, “We can be thrown into a becoming by anything at all, by the most unexpected, most insignificant of things. You don’t deviate from the majority unless there is a little detail that starts to swell and carries you off” (292).

## **VI. CHERYL FOGGO’S *POURIN’ DOWN RAIN***

Keeping in mind, then, that becoming-territorialized is not necessarily a stable or permanent feature of the territorialized subject, that, like other qualities of identity, it is subject to moments of flux, let us delve again into the black prairie archive in order to read another text written by a member of the territorialized generation of writers. Cheryl

Foggo's *Pourin' Down Rain* (1990) is probably the text *par excellence* of territorialized prairie culture. No study of the prairie archive could be complete without it: as an autobiographical coming-of-age narrative by the fourth-generation child of a tightly-knit, black prairie family about becoming-black in Alberta during the 1950s and 60s, *Pourin' Down Rain* tackles the central issues facing this generation of writers. How does one work out a self-confidently black identity on the prairies in the context of the prairies' dominant racial ideologies? How can being-black shape and mis-shape one's sense of belonging to the prairies? How does becoming-black transform one's sense of the prairies itself as an ideational space? And finally, how can a writer write both about blackness and about affective connection to the prairies responsibly? In tracing her own personal struggles with these questions, Foggo inscribes the complexities of the inner, subjective, experiences of black Canadian territoriality.

Structurally and thematically, *Pourin' Down Rain* is a *Bildungsroman*, as it treats the development of a single young individual, from a period of childhood innocence through an experience of initiation and awakening. But because Foggo's narrative treats the maturation of a young black child, this is a coming-of-age story with a difference. The first chapter is entitled "Meeting Jim Crow," and in it we meet five year-old Cheryl who already understands herself as "black," though she is still innocent of the fact that "racism [is] a special problem" in the world (5). Perhaps like the young child in the scene Linda Campbell conjures in her recipe acknowledgement, Foggo's experience of the world at the beginning of the narrative is marked by a profound sense of belonging. It is as though there is an unbroken continuity between her self and the external environment, yet, significantly, this sense of continuity is not expressed in terms of an "oceanic

feeling,” as Freud described the experience of early childhood. Although Foggo’s account of her childhood sense of connectedness with the world evokes the state Freud outlined in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930)—she experiences a “feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole” (Freud 80)—Foggo expresses this “oceanic feeling,” as we will see, in more distinct territorial terms.

The narrative opens in 1958, the year Foggo’s parents buy a house in Bowness, a new neighbourhood on the outskirts of Calgary. Despite the fact that the house is unfinished, having “no plumbing, no basement, no porch, an unfinished yard and only five small rooms,” and that the neighbourhood itself is still under construction, Cheryl finds “nothing amiss, nothing lacking in Bowness” (3). Both the house and the neighbourhood offer Cheryl, her siblings, and their friends the boundless pleasures of a territory charted and claimed as their own:

Our street, 70<sup>th</sup> Street, was gravel and dust. No street lamps. No trees. When the wind blew, which it did frequently, great clouds of sand would whirl up and spin across the road. My brothers and sister and I, and our friends, were delighted by these dust storms. Someone would shriek, “It’s a tornado!” and we would chase the cloud, madly laughing....

Most summer days we spent meandering along the tracks to the river, the usual goal being a picnic in the hills. The picnic, however, was not really the point. The point was the adventure we would sometimes encounter along the way.

On a very warm day, if there was no breeze, the heat from the iron rails and sharp smell of oil and metal bouncing up into our faces would drive us down

from the tracks to walk through the high grasses. This meant slower going, but it was good to sniff the flowers instead of the heat and to dig around what someone would insist was a badger hole. (4-5)

These children's explorations operate as a way of charting and claiming the territory.

When Foggo wasn't exploring the rail tracks or walking in the nearby hills, she spent her summer days playing in the grassy field that lay at the other end of 70<sup>th</sup> Street. In this field grew long prairie grasses, "as tall as I" (3), which could engulf her. Foggo remembers "the field's gently waving rainbow-coloured foxtails" as a particularly "treasured part of the enjoyment in a five-year-old life" (4). The image of the young Foggo in this field surrounded by tall grass—a symbolic "planting"—comes early in the narrative, exemplifying both her own and her family's deep and ancestral "rootedness" in this place.

As the narrative unfolds, we begin to understand why, despite the small, unfinished house and general lack of amenities in the neighbourhood, Cheryl finds "nothing amiss, nothing lacking in Bowness." Foggo continues:

Our street contained the closest thing to a Black community that one would find in Calgary in 1961. Ricky Hayes' parents were biracial, but he, his brother Randy and sister Debbie considered themselves Black. The Hayes', their grandparents across the alley, my family and the Saunders and Lawson families up the road comprised what I believe was the largest concentration of Black people in a single Calgary neighbourhood. (4)

A subtle and interesting thing happens at this point in the narrative as Foggo remembers the existence of this black community. Whereas until now Foggo has conveyed the profoundly territorial nature of her childhood in Calgary, when she writes about the special connection she shared with the other black children in Bowness she describes it as a becoming. It is as though connecting with other black children provokes a subtle withdrawal from the territory.

My parents had an attitude of kinship toward the other Black families on the street. The families knew one another, they knew each other's parents and grandparents, and probably because of that "knowing," they communicated to us our connection to other Black children. We played together. Without isolating ourselves from the other children in the neighbourhood and without any discussion of it, *we sensed a link that transcended our environs.* (4; my emphasis)

Even though at this point in the narrative Cheryl has yet to "meet" Jim Crow, or to form friendships and alliances with other black people based on a sense of shared history and culture of struggle, there is a spark of recognition that passes between herself and the other black children in Bowness, akin to the adults' "knowing," which catalyzes a sudden becoming. The link she has with these children metaphorically carries Cheryl out of her "environs," the geographic and social topographies of Calgary.

I linger on this moment in the text in order to demonstrate the careful, nuanced way in which Foggo inscribes her subjective experiences of being territorialized. While,

on the one hand, Foggo's narrative highlights her affective attachment to particular places in Bowness—70<sup>th</sup> Street, the hills and rail tracks near her house, the cluster of businesses along 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue—on the other hand, she pays close attention to the subtle ways that becoming-black, that is, identifying with particular friends based on a sense of their unique and shared identity, alters her relationship to this location. Rather than inscribing her young self as rooted, in an uncomplicated way, to an equally uncomplicated terrain—for instance, the fetishized topography constructed by popular prairie regionalism—Foggo inscribes a more nuanced interrelationship between race and place. In her account, neither race nor place remains a stable phenomenon, but are ephemeral, changing, and inconstant. As we will see, throughout Foggo's narrative, the deterritorializing potential of blackness holds an important deconstructive promise, which is especially significant when we consider the ways the discourses of prairie regionalism have conventionally relied on the myths of prairie topography as the stable ground for an essential and inevitable regional identity.

In 1966, when Cheryl is eleven years old, her sense of her own blackness begins to shift, and her relationship to place likewise undergoes change. When Foggo's family learns of John Kennedy's assassination, Cheryl's mother Pauline is "deeply shaken," but Foggo's own reaction is somewhat surprising. She immediately reconsiders the relationship she has enjoyed throughout her childhood with the hills and fields around Bowness. Suddenly her explorative romps strike her as manifestly childish, especially in comparison to the revolutionary events girls not much older than herself are involved in south of the border.

I knew that my mother had been deeply shaken by the assassination of John Kennedy, in part because she believed him to be a friend to Black people. I was dimly aware that while I was spending my summers dodging trains on the Twin Bridges and gathering herbs from the hills to make “perfume,” Black people in America were rioting. (43)

Even though, as Foggo admits, “the struggles of Black Americans had very little impact on my day-to-day life,” the year Kennedy was assassinated she “became less comfortable in my White world.” She begins the process of becoming, which will soon carry her away. As she puts it, “Naiveté is rarely permanent and mine began to slip away when cracks started appearing in that world, cracks that eventually became gulfs between me and the things I had formerly cherished” (43-4). The ground beneath her feet is shifting.

The deterritorializing rupture—the rupture that, as Todd May explains, “destabilizes the territorial character of any territory” (138)—comes a year after Kennedy’s assassination, and it is sparked by a not-unusual teenage crisis. Cheryl meets a boy named Brian at a school camp in the foothills west of Calgary with whom she shares a mutual attraction. Early in their relationship he confesses to her that both his father and grandfather are “bigots” (52). Foggo remembers how she “was taken aback by this pronouncement, but as Brian indicated total disagreement with their views and clearly seemed intent upon pursuing our relationship, I shrugged it off” (52). They continue dating after the summer camp ends, but their interracial relationship attracts so much curiosity and attention on the streets of Calgary that, Brian, fairly predictably, proves incapable of handling it. His rejection of Cheryl is sudden and devastating, but, like so

many of the painful events of adolescence, it is also wonderfully transformative. It opens Cheryl's eyes to the codes of race and power that had always been a part of her social topography, and this new awareness in turn initiates a profoundly deterritorializing becoming. The hills of Bowness, the railway tracks, the streets and sidewalks of Calgary, the grassy field, and her school, all of which she previously and easily claimed as her own territory, now suddenly seem to belong to a "White world" that no longer includes her.

I believed that I had only myself to blame for what had happened. I had trusted when I should not have done so. I had been drifting through my life with closed eyes.

I was not Black enough, I concluded. Too many years in a White world had caused me to forget, once too often, that I was Black and that my blackness was the first thing seen and reacted to by every white person that I met and that many, many people would never see beyond my skin. Whether I liked it or not, the world was Black and White and I had been attempting to live in the middle.

I began to retreat from what I perceived to be "White culture." I immersed myself in the literature of Black authors, became fascinated by the history of Black Americans and was attracted to Black music that reflected a "revolutionary" message. I no longer believed that Canada was a refuge from racism and resented being raised in isolation from other Blacks. (53)

A measure of how deterritorializing this experience is for Cheryl is the extent to which she grows resentful of her family's territorialization. She despairs of their western-Canadian ways, their preference for country gospel records over black (American) music. At a family get-together Cheryl lashes out:

“Don't you like Black gospel?” I asked Aunt Ethel. “Don't you like Mahalia?”

My aunt looked at my mother and raised an eyebrow.

“She's in a Black phase,” my mother said in response to her sister's glance. “She doesn't like listening to this White people's music.”

The two of them laughed. “Reminds me of my daughter,” Aunt Ethel said.

“When she's Black she's very, very Black and when she's not, she isn't.” (66)

What are the implications here of Pauline's quip about her daughter being in “a Black phase”? What understanding of blackness and black subjectivity does it imply? Decades before theories about the performativity of gendered (Butler) and racial (Bhabha) identities continued to transform our thinking about identity as biological, essential, and fixed,<sup>10</sup> this family—because of their location on the prairies, where blackness has never been dominant—regards black identity as a *process* and a *performance* marked by a desire for and an identification with blackness. This is a family, after all, who self-consciously performs their blackness by code-switch between African American English and Standard (Canadian) English, depending on the speaking situation. During family get-togethers they heavily pepper their speech with “‘y'all's’ and uhhm uhhm uhhms”;

they say “ain’t,” and “don’t make no difference,” but at home they say “it doesn’t matter” (17). Foggo explains that her family code-switches in this manner “to affirm their ‘Blackness.’ They were people with ambivalent feelings about their isolation from other blacks [...] ‘Talking Black’ to one another, to relatives and trusted friends allowed them to also *feel* black” (18). Cheryl’s “black phase,” then, her penchant for Mahalia Jackson and James Brown records, her new afro, her fascination with black history, and her disdain for white gospel music, are, like her family’s performances of African-American English, recognized by them as a momentary desire for and identification with blackness. But what kind of blackness, specifically, is she identifying with here? As George Elliott Clarke notes in his essay “Must All Blackness Be American? Locating Canada in Borden’s ‘Tightrope Time,’ or Nationalizing Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic*,” African America has long held a particular sway over black Canadians (*Odysseys* 72). Awad El Karim M. Ibrahim explains in his sociological study of continental francophone African youths, “‘Hey, ain’t I black too?’: The Politics of Becoming Black” (2000), that African-American cultural forms—particularly music (jazz, blues, rap, R&B, hip-hop), styles of dress, hair, and language (slang, Black English)—are attractive to black Canadians because “the Western hegemonic representations of Blackness [...] are mostly negative.” Black Canadians “look for black cultural and representational forms as sites for positive identification” (124) and they find these in abundance in African-American popular culture.

It is significant that, in her search for a positive blackness with which to identify, in her historical moment of the 1970s, Foggo looks to African America. Only four decades earlier, in the 1920s, Sylvester Long Lance was unable to find a liberatory form

of blackness—American or otherwise—with which to identify. So whereas he repressed and disavowed any connection to blackness, and found identification with Blackfoot First Nations more enabling, Foggo reacts to her prairie location by going in the other direction—by passionately identifying with African America. The direction of Foggo’s identification shows at once how successful the cultural and political civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s were in redressing the negative hegemonic representations of blackness of which Ibrahim speaks above, and in inventing new and seductive black cultural forms and subject positions. The “black power” message of James Brown’s groundbreaking 1968 single “Say it Loud – I’m Black and I’m Proud,” for instance, a single that spun on Foggo’s record player in the 1970s (44, 52), would have been, quite literally, unthinkable in Long Lance’s day. In the song, Brown deconstructs the historic associations of blackness with subhumanity, brutality, ugliness, excessive sexuality, poverty, and so forth, and calls for a new black empowerment.<sup>11</sup> At the same time as Foggo’s identification with African-American culture suggests how effective the civil rights struggles were in transforming the inherited meanings of blackness, her identification also suggests how challenging it continues to be to recognize and self-confidently identify with forms of a particularly *prairie* blackness. But then again, in a very important way, this is *precisely* what it means at certain historical moments to be black on the prairies. Finding so few cultural resources with which to navigate the social and ideological terrain of the prairies, to inform one’s burgeoning black identity, and to provide courage, one looks for inspiration and examples from elsewhere. In other words, one deterritorializes.

By identifying with African America, Cheryl's "black phase," her becoming-black, carries her, imaginatively speaking, far away from home and the places where she once felt such a strong sense of connection, toward an imagined place where she finds her burgeoning black identity more meaningfully confirmed. Arjun Appadurai, a widely influential theorist of postcolonial spaces and identities, has spoken about such imagined places in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996). Appadurai explains that in the context of the dispersion of people as a result of globalization, "the work of the imagination," particularly electronic media, can "offer new resources and disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and worlds" (3). He argues that electronic media, like the American records and television Foggo consumes, create new mythographies—collective imaginings that are more powerful, influential, and far-reaching than the boundaries of the nation (6). Thus, although she was raised exclusively on the prairies, Foggo develops an oppositional and American-inflected black identity, which suggests that, contrary to the geographic determinism of regional discourses of the 1970s and '80s, physical geography is only ever one ground for identity. The heterogeneous forms of blackness and black identification that have arisen on the prairies—from Long Lance's cross-identification with Blackfoot First Nations to Shadd's social conservatism, to Beal's quiet intellectualism, to Hooks' activism, to Foggo's (momentary) African-Americanism—suggests that cultural geographies, with their historically-shaped contours of race, gender, class, and culture, play significant roles in shaping individual subjects and their relations to the social, political, and geographical territories they inhabit.<sup>12</sup>

The story of Cheryl's awakening does not end, however, with her deterritorializing identification with black America. Having grown resentful of her family for raising her in what she considers the far-flung reaches of the known black world, she becomes curious about how her own family came to be there. As she puts it, "I had begun to see my family as a group of people with a shared history that bore a great deal of influence on the life that I was leading. Choices that had been made well before I was born were affecting me now" (77). Her aunt Daisy and her maternal grandmother relate to her a wealth of oral family history. She learns that her great-grandparents were part of the first large wave of black settlement to the prairies in the early part of the twentieth century, and that homesteaded in Turtleford County, Saskatchewan, in 1912. Like many of the pioneers, they were the first non-native people to settle on that land, and her great-grandfather worked hard to clear the earth of trees in preparation for grain farming. One story her grandmother relates to her illustrates in a graphic, if somewhat gruesome, way how her family is more than metaphorically "planted" deeply in Saskatchewan soil. Family legend has it that Cheryl's great-grandfather's death of gangrene at the age of ninety was due to an injury he incurred many years earlier while chopping crops in a field: "He is said to have accidentally hacked the large toe of one of his feet halfway off. Deciding that the toe was of no use hanging in that manner, he sliced it off completely with his machete and tossed it over his shoulder into the field behind him" (78). This story of (self) amputation hints at the "cost" of territorialization to the pioneers and their descendants. Territorializing on the prairies, it suggests, was not a simple matter of arriving and starting over again in a new environment but involved a certain sacrifice of the self in exchange for identity and territory. It involved perhaps an even deeper,

psychological severance of the self from the cultural, political, spiritual, and linguistic “body” of African America. This story thematizes, in the metaphor of the wound that won’t heal, a continued, and cross-generational ambivalence about that loss. Although the story announces and even celebrates how deeply planted her family is on the prairies, at the same time it reveals the ways the psychic rupture of displacement and migration, sliced so deeply and permanently, as Philip articulates it so beautifully, into the experience of black “be/longing,” lingers still.

Cheryl’s grandmother relates another story about how she came to meet her husband, Cheryl’s grandfather, in another field on the banks of the Saskatchewan River. We can tell by the way Foggo writes her self into the ending of her grandmother’s story that it had a profound effect on her. Like the pioneer descendants’ recipes, this story is a sounding-line back in time which connects Cheryl to the past and to the ground upon which her ancestors territorialized.

The first time my grandfather saw my grandmother she was thirteen years old. They, along with one hundred or more of the Black settlers who lived around Maid stone, Saskatchewan, had gathered to help one of their neighbors in some task on his farm possibly to raise a barn and, of course, socialize. It was probably in the late fall, after the crops were in but before the snow came to force them into isolation from all but their nearest neighbours.

My grandmother laughed when the men rose to attend to the work and my grandfather joined them, taking his hat. “He thinks he’s a grown man,” she whispered to her mother.

She helped to prepare the meal that, upon the return of the men, all the people gathered around the large tables to eat.

It was 1915. Many of the Black pioneers had now been in Canada for five years, some for longer than that, and they had grown accustomed to this way of helping, of leaning heavily upon one another to survive in the strange climate of the country that was less than the promised land they had hoped for.

After joining hands and singing “grace,” they began to laugh and talk and eat the abundance: the ham, chicken, roast beef and gravy, the greens, potatoes, peas, carrots, the corn bread and the fresh, warm bread covered in butter that someone had just pulled from the oven.

My grandparents were just two very young people that day. They did not know that four years later, after the war, they would stand together on the banks of the Saskatchewan River, in Turtleford County, and be married there with the same friends and relatives for witnesses.

They did not know, of course, that they would be married for sixty six years and raise nine children, or that, fifty-four years later, she would sit with her granddaughter in a Winnipeg house and remember that day, the day they met.

(79-80)

Like the authors of the *Black Pioneer Centennial: A Little Taste of Soul*, Foggo inscribes a long black presence on the prairies by remembering the lives her ancestors lived—down to the “little tactics of the habitat”: the food they cooked, the occasions they sat together to share a meal, and the way the families pulled together to make a way out of

no way. In both texts it is the literary legacy of the black pioneers—their writing, recipes, and family orature—not indigenizing metaphors—that territorialized writers use to achieve the sense of a long and continuous black presence on the prairies.

It is significant, but not surprising, that the chapter following the one in which Cheryl learns about her family's history is entitled "Belonging." As Philip argues, it is only by learning about our particular histories of dislocation, migration and arrival—in a word, our unbelonging—that we can begin to make sense of the challenging experience of "be/longing" in Canada. Riding in her parents' car on the way back to Calgary from her grandmother's place in Winnipeg, Cheryl reflects on what her family's stories mean to her.

Calgary ... I was going home, where I would have a few weeks remaining of summer, then yet another year at Bowness High School. Another year of my life.

But it would be different. I would be fifteen, stronger and clearer than I had been before.

I was growing toward a quiet confidence that I could not yet articulate, even in my thoughts. I had learned more about my family's history, about what it meant to be Black in North America, about my own blackness in eight months than what I had cared to know all the previous years of my life. I was beginning to understand that I had the right to exist in my world.

This may not be comprehensible to someone who has not lived as a peculiarity, the idea that a child must one day tell herself, "I am allowed, I was

meant to be, I have the right to exist.” But when you are a Black child who looks out into the world and sees hostility toward Blackness, you begin to ask why, you look for rationality behind the hostility, until the day you realize that racism is not your responsibility, it is the responsibility of its perpetrators. That day you say, I belong in the world. I belong here in Western Canada where my family has lived and worked for four generations.” (83)

By the end of *Pourin’ Down Rain* Cheryl comes to terms with both her blackness and her sense of belonging, which now extends not only to the local territory (“I belong here in Western Canada”), but also, after her deterritorializing identification with African America, to “North America,” and also “the world.” Her sense of belonging now seems all-encompassing, perhaps even oceanic once more. After learning about her family history and the history of the Oklahoma migration, her sense of belonging on the prairies is experienced less as a cut-off, an amputation from African America and the rest of the black diaspora, than as a feeling of deep and meaningful connectedness to a unique and important aspect of “North American” and “world” history.

Foggo concludes her text with an emphatic declaration of belonging, but even this declaration leaves open the possibility for further deterritorializations. She writes, “For all the good, and the bad, I was what I was—Black, Canadian, one of my family—and so I shall always be” (117). How are we to read the list of Foggo’s identifications? Sequentially, or does she feel herself to be primarily black, and only secondarily “Canadian”? Why doesn’t she write “I was what I was—Black *and* Canadian *and* one of my family?” Or do “Black” and “Canadian,” both capitalized, signal different but parallel

territories? In the course of her narrative Foggo has moved between these two poles, these two “geographies”: the black American cultural imaginary, and the western Canadian prairies. The movement between the two alters both geographies simultaneously: removing to the imagined place, the mythography, of blackness in her early teens transforms her relationship to the territory; but as Cheryl learns more about her family’s history on the prairies she returns again to this territory, a movement that, in turn, alters her understanding of her blackness. She no longer identifies exclusively with far-off black America. Instead, she identifies with her own ancestors and their particular history. If the relationship between race, subjectivity, and region in these texts is to be brought to a sum, then it is within this continual flux between the imagined place of race and region that identities are written and the possibility of further differences can be inscribed.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Clarke has written on writing by Dionne Brand, Claire Harris and NourbeSe Philip (see “Harris, Philip, Brand: Three Authors in Search of Literate Criticism” in *Odysseys Home*) and Austin Clarke (see “Clarke vs. Clarke: Tory Elitism in Austin Clarke’s Short Fiction”). For his part, Walcott has written extensively on Mary Ann Shadd Cary (see “Mary Ann Shadd Cary and the (Im)Possibility of Black/Canadian Studies” in *Rude*). Also, the photograph on the cover of both editions of his book, *Black Like Who?*, is of a group of men belonging to the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) who met in Niagara Falls, Ontario, in 1905 (the American side of the Falls is painted into the background of the photo); his selection of this particular image indicates the importance of the long black history in Canada even to his study of “diasporic detours”.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Scott Anderson, “Bread and Races: Writers’ Union, Divided Over Writing Thru Race Conference, Tries to Get Down to Business” (1994); Libby Scheier, “Writing Authentic Voices: The Writers’ Union and Anti-Racism” (1990); Marlene NourbeSe Philip, “Gut Issues in Babylon: Racism and Anti-Racism in the Arts” (1989); Brian Fawcett, “Notes From the Inner Circle” (1989); Marlene NourbeSe Philip, “Disappearing Debate, Or, How the Discussion of Racism Has Been Taken Over By the Censorship Issue” (1989).

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/pub/wf/index\\_e.html](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/pub/wf/index_e.html)

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Austin Clarke’s trilogy of novels set in Toronto which treat the complexities of black West Indian immigrant life in Canada: *The Meeting Point* (1967), *Storm of Fortune* (1967) and *The Bigger Light* (1975). See also Dionne Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here* (1996), a novel about exile set in both Toronto and the Caribbean.

<sup>5</sup> Its sponsors were all private, local, Edmonton-based businesses.  
<<http://members.shaw.ca/blackpioneerwesterncanada/sponsors.html>>

<sup>6</sup> Although this is by no means a comprehensive or even partial list of recent scholarship on the connections between food, identity, and memory—this is a large and ever-growing field—see, for example, Lily Cho’s Ph.D. dissertation *Dim Sum Diasporas: A Culturalist Materialist Analysis of Chinese Canadian Restaurants*; Rafia Zafar’s “The Signifying Dish: Autobiography and History in Two Black Women’s Cookbooks” (1999); Tanya Lewis, “Eating and Identity: Food and the Construction of Region in *The Cure for Death By Lightning* and *Fall on Your Knees*” (2003); S. Leigh Matthews, “(Nearly) Sacred Achievements: Culinary Place in Prairie Memoirs” (2003).

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<sup>7</sup> Deleuze and Guattari might suggest another theory of why it was the pioneers' descendants who recorded their recipes, and not the pioneers themselves. The act of speaking and writing, according to the authors, "always implies a deterritorialization of the mouth, the tongue, and the teeth. The mouth, tongue and teeth find their primitive territoriality in food [...] Thus there is a certain disjunction between eating and speaking, and even more, despite all appearances, between eating and writing" (*Toward a Minor Literature* 19-20). Because the act of eating contradicts speaking and writing, "To speak, and above all to write, is to fast" (20). This theory might cleverly explain why these particular pioneers, who already suffered from hunger during the Depression, left it to future, better off, and more sated generations to write, but it contradicts the fact that so many other pioneers who also went through the Depression did become writers and orators.

<sup>8</sup> Treaty 6 was signed on the 23 of August, 1876. It surrendered Chippeweyan, Cree and Assiniboine lands to the Crown. Treaty 7 was signed first on 22 September 1877 and amended on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December the same year. It surrendered Blackfoot, Blood, Peigan, Sarcee, Chippeweyan, and Assiniboine lands to the Crown. Finally, Treaty 8 was signed in 1899 surrendering Cree, Chippeweyan and Beaver lands (Waiser 28-9).

<sup>9</sup> See pages 72-4 and page 81 in MacEwan.

<sup>10</sup> See Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and Homi Bhabha's "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" in *The Location of Culture* (1994).

<sup>11</sup> Brown sings:

Now we demand a chance to do things for ourself  
 We're tired of beatin' our head against the wall  
 And workin' for someone else  
 We're people, we're just like the birds and the bees  
 We'd rather die on our feet  
 Than be livin' on our knees  
 Say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud

<sup>12</sup> Although a full engagement with the work of new cultural geographers is beyond the scope of this project, for further discussion on the social production of space and geography as a gendered, raced, and class phenomenon, see for instance Edward Soja's *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (1989), Saskia Sassen's *Elements for a Sociology of Globalization* (2006), Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose's *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (1994) and David Harvey's *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (2001).

## CHAPTER 4

### THE SECOND WAVE OF MIGRATION AND THE BLACK PRAIRIE ARCHIVE

Now, there's something black people, or American black people of certain generations, say: we say that no matter where you go, no matter how far, no matter to what unlikely extreme, no matter what country, continent, ice floe, or island you land on, you will find someone else black already there.

C.S. Giscombe, *Into and Out of Dislocation*

Until now this dissertation has been concerned with the literature and orature of the first wave of black migration to the prairies. The writers and orators I have considered so far—Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance, William Beal, Alfred Shadd, Ellis Hooks, Linda Peko Campbell, Cheryl Foggo, and the black pioneers—all landed on the prairies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries via the United States, or descended from the pioneers who did.<sup>1</sup> This final chapter begins the work of exploring another stratum of the black prairie archive. Here I look at the cultural production of the second wave of black settlement to the prairies. These are the writers who arrived, along with thousands of other new black immigrants, after the mid-1950s, when, after four decades of being firmly shut, the Canadian border finally opened for black migrants once again.

Although black migration to the prairies had not been banned outright since 1912, the year Order-in-Council # 1324 was signed into law and then repealed, few black immigrants were able to enter Canada between 1912 and 1953 because of vaguely-defined “climatic criteria” used to evaluate the suitability of prospective immigrants. In

fact, so few black immigrants entered after 1912 that the total black population of Canada actually diminished, from 18,291 in 1921 to 18,020 in 1951.<sup>2</sup> Black immigrants, particularly those from the West Indies, were routinely rejected because, as the language of immigration policy put it, they had a particular “unsuitability having regard to the climatic [...] conditions, or requirements existing [in Canada], temporary or otherwise” (Winks 438). It is no accident that the language of the policy governing immigration in the inter-war years so closely echoed that of the Order-in-Council of 1912. Both used the seemingly commonsense argument of “climate” to effectively exclude black immigrants. As one member of Parliament<sup>3</sup> put it in 1952, “experience” had shown that people from tropical countries were more likely to break down in health than those from temperate zones and, “generally speaking, persons from tropical and subtropical countries find it more difficult to succeed” in Canada (Winks 438). Of course, “experience”—or rather, the black prairie archive—shows no such thing; the immigrants of the first wave and their descendants were extremely tenacious settlers. They remained on the prairies despite the intensity of social opposition mounted against them, and despite the enormous physical, spiritual, and psychic challenges of pioneering.<sup>4</sup>

In 1953, under pressure from black civil rights activists both within and without Canada,<sup>5</sup> the Federal government finally dropped references to climate from its immigration policy, and in the following decades made further revisions, including instituting the points system that gradually allowed more black immigrants to enter.<sup>6</sup> By the end of the 1960s immigration from Africa, the West Indies, Brazil, and Central and South America had increased dramatically, and in 1969 black immigrants made up an unprecedented ten percent of the total immigration to Canada in that year (Winks 444).

As the black population of Canada swelled and diversified, so too did that of the prairies. In 1971 Census Canada counted 2,830 people in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba whose “ethnic group” was “Negro.” By 1986 that population had jumped to 13,105.<sup>7</sup> Not surprisingly, the influx of black immigrants, once again, ignited the anti-black prejudices of a new generation of western Canadians. Though anti-black legislation was never again given a legal foundation as it had been during the first wave, black immigrants moving into prairie cities and towns often found themselves in an unofficially segregated society. For instance, in the 1950s and 1960s, well-publicized incidents occurred in Drumheller and Breton, Alberta, and in Wawota, Saskatchewan, in which black teachers were dismissed from integrated schools for reasons of race (Winks 388). And in 1965 educators at the Briercrest Bible Institute near Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, required all students to sign a pledge promising not to engage in interracial dating. Segregation, they insisted, was God-ordained (Winks 443).

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It was with the second wave that my own family came to the prairies. We were points-system settlers: an educated, “professional” black family with skills the nation-state needed. We arrived in Alberta from Tegucigalpa, Honduras, in 1981, and settled first in Calgary, where my father found a position at the (now-defunct) World Bank, then in a small town about an hour north of Calgary, called Olds, where my mother found work as a high school English teacher. Even in Olds, a tiny, agricultural town established mainly by English, Irish, and white American farmers and CPR railway workers, mine

was not the only black family. There was another black family already living there when we arrived: the O'Haras, who had a daughter the same age as me, who was also in my class. Throughout my time in Olds, from 1983 to 1988, she and I remained very aware of one another's presence at school, but we rarely approached each other to talk. Alone in that small prairie town, we both sensed that it was better—safer—for us not to be seen together. Together we amplified each other's blackness, doubled it, and that, we sensed, could be dangerous.

I never found out where she and her family came from. I am not certain if they were first or second wavers, though, even if I had asked, I am not sure I would have understood her answer. At the time I didn't know anything about the black history of the prairies. I hadn't heard about the first wave of migration, even though Amber Valley, Breton, Campsie, Wildwood, and some of the other pioneer settlements in Alberta were within a few hours' drive of Olds. There was no sign of this history in our social studies textbooks, nothing about it on television, and I never heard it talked about in our town. But a trace of that history remained in the unspoken, sublimated fear we had of being seen talking together. Two quiet black girls, watching each other out of the corners of their eyes. Without knowing it, we were, even then, a part of prairie history in the making.

## **I. DECONSTRUCTING THE LOCAL/GLOBAL BINARY**

Many of the black prairie's best known and most formally innovative writers arrived during this second wave. The black prairie's most prolific poet, Claire Harris, came to Calgary from Trinidad in 1966; Harris's fellow countryman, the poet Nigel

Darbasie, arrived three years later and settled in Edmonton. Science fiction writer Minister Faust's father came from Kenya in 1960,<sup>8</sup> and Suzette Mayr's mother came from Nassau, Bahamas, in the mid-1960s.<sup>9</sup> African folklorist and children's author Tololwa Mollel came to Edmonton from Tanzania in 1966; novelist Esi Edugyan's parents arrived in Calgary in the autumn of 1971 from Ghana by way of Palo Alto, California;<sup>10</sup> and 2006 Governor-General's Award nominee dramatist Lisa Codrington's family came to Manitoba from Barbados in the late 1970s (McLaughlin n.p.). Ian Samuels, perhaps the black prairie's most *avant-garde* writer, also descends from this second wave; his father arrived from South Africa in 1969, settling first in Manitoba and then later, in the early 1980s, Alberta.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the playwright Archie Crail arrived from Paarl, South Africa, in 1980, and settled in Regina.

What effect does the arrival of this second wave of writers have on the black prairie archive? In some respects the work published by this second wave constitutes a significant shift away from the literary traditions of the past. Whereas Long Lance, Beal, Shadd, Foggo, the black pioneers, and their descendants all wrote in a kind of narrative realism, and made the historical modes—autobiography, memoir, orature, and community history—the predominant genres of the black prairies, the writers of the second wave turn to a variety of new, more popular, and less representational genres. The majority of the poetry in the archive—though not all—is written by the prairies' second wave of writers.<sup>12</sup> Second-wave writers also tend to write more drama than the writers of the first wave (and, significantly, their plays are non-autobiographical),<sup>13</sup> and they have also produced the first magic realist novels in the archive, as well as the first works of science fiction.<sup>14</sup>

We might speculate on why writers of the second wave, more so than those of the first, move out into these more popular, and less representational, genres of poetry, drama, magic realism, and science fiction. The historic need of first-wave writers on the prairies to recuperate and record their buried histories, and to represent themselves to themselves rather than being written about (or ignored) by others, has disposed them to work in genres that they have considered more relevant to the task. Walter Mosley, an African-American author and critic, argues that this is the reason why black writers in the United States have been relatively late in taking up popular genres such as science fiction. Writing in the year 2000, Mosley observes that:

One reason for this absence [of black science fiction] is that black writers have only recently entered the popular genres in force. Our writers have historically been regarded as a footnote best suited to address the nature of their own chains. So, if black writes wanted to branch out past the realism of racism and race, they were curtailed by their own desire to document the crimes of America. (406)

Black writers on the prairies, like those in the United States, have been preoccupied with recording their own histories—and they have had to be, since this task has appeared to be their responsibility alone.

In addition to infusing the archive with a range of new literary genres, the work of the second wave articulates a more recent diasporic experience that brings the archive to contemporary theoretical concerns. In the previous chapter we examined how territorialized prairie writers inscribe a long and continuous black history on the prairies.

How do writers of the second wave articulate a more recent migratory and diasporic experience discursively? And how do they respond to the previous historical and cultural black presence on the prairies?

Although in the wide and nebulous field of diaspora and postcolonial studies there is no consensus on what “diasporic” literature is or does, scholars such as Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, Rinaldo Walcott, Carole Boyce Davies, James Clifford, Rey Chow, Smaro Kamboureli, Diana Brydon, Leslie Sanders, Jeff Dersken, and David Chariandy seem to agree that work by writers who share a concern with the histories, legacies, and displacements of transatlantic slavery, histories of indenture, modern colonialism, nation-building, and globalization contributes to the complex and necessary process of “rethinking” the nation as site and origin of racial identity and container of cultural production and struggle. Diasporic literatures, they suggest, shatter the boundaries of geopolitical spaces traditionally defined through citizenship to nation while creating alternative social imaginaries that represent a space where history, culture, subjectivity, and a sense of “home” can abide. Key for many diasporic theorists is the restless and migratory nature of these alternative social imaginaries created by writers that are conceptually figured in tension with the imagined boundedness and territorial stability of the nation-space. In *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (1994), for instance, Boyce Davies replaces the idea of nationhood with respect to black women writers with the idea of a “migratory subjectivity,” in which culture becomes a concept that spans geographic boundaries. The uniformity of a fixed or rigidly bounded culture is replaced by a more open and mutable one in which the imagined spaces “between” nations become sites of new creation rather than marginality. In his wide-

ranging essay on the history of diaspora as a critical concept, “The Postcolonial Diasporas” (2006), Chariandy argues that literary articulations of diaspora powerfully transform oftentimes painful and traumatic experiences of displacement into politically and culturally radical desires for “different spaces” (n.p.) than the ideational spaces of the contemporary nation. Similarly, Walcott understands black diasporic writers in Canada to be engaged in a project of “construct[ing] new sites for locating the self and making meaning in the world” (*Black Like Who?* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 74) beyond the terms of the nation. “Writing from in-between spaces,” he argues, diasporic writers “maneuver across territory that places them on the frontiers of post-colonial and postmodern expressivity” (*Black Like Who?* second edition 74-5).

Whereas for the most part the writers of the first wave remain concerned with the ideational space of the prairies, and, specifically, with the task of re-placing blackness into the prairie imaginary, many of the writers of the second wave continue to trouble the prairie imaginary with respect to race by re-thinking the imagined boundedness of the prairies: they figure the prairies as a formation in dynamic interconnection with a variety of diasporic routes and communities. Ian Samuels’ first collection of poetry, *Cabra* (2000), a meditation on miscegenation, conquest, empire, religion, slavery, mythology, and globalization, works through the discourses of nineteenth-century Brazil, a place where, the back cover blurb reveals, the author has never been. What does it mean for a black poet on the prairies to write not of the ideational space in which he is currently located, but that of a space elsewhere? Part of the project Samuels is working through in *Cabra* is the deconstruction of such binary oppositions, between “here” and “there,” between the current location and elsewhere, and, ultimately, between the local and the

global. Such binary oppositions are seen, from a diasporic perspective, to be untenable and artificial dichotomies.

Samuels' poetic method in *Cabra* involves in a nutshell, taking the discourses of nineteenth-century Brazil and inflating them. His speaker is Senhor Cabra, a supercilious colonist with a detached gaze. "Only at a distance," he muses, "are/ Brazilian towns pretty" (8). As his name suggests—*cabra*, like *mulatto*, one of the historical terms for mixed-race in the Americas (Forbes 53), refers to a mestizo of African, white and Indian ancestry—Samuels' speaker has a mixture of blood in his veins: "A certain suspicious curl in our hair, a sprinkling of the tar brush in our composition" (5). Samuels uses the perspective of this complexly-positioned speaker—mixed-race, but also a member of the colonial elite—to imagine a place as it might have looked to one like Cabra:

The officers express regret. The bridge consists of four chains. The women sell fish. After firing on the crowd the officers will restore order. The men sell goats. The cattle are lowing. The river turns from its southern course as if distracted by fine fields of Indian corn. Even the slaves need slaves. Celebrate masses for the weal of your souls. (5)

By working through the discourses of conquest, miscegenation, and empire from the perspective of his imagined speaker, Samuels' collection effectively produces a space/place that is not contained by nor coterminous with any specific nation—it is neither Brazil nor Canada—but a textual, mythological, imagined, and creative space that, as Boyce Davies contends, exists between and beyond geopolitical boundaries. This textual

and imagined space, what we might think of as a certain kind of creative diaspora space, confounds any easy opposition we might want to make between “here” and “there,” or between the local and the global, for in extending his concern to the discourses of nineteenth-century Brazil, Samuels insists that the legacies of slavery, colonialism, race, religion, and nation-building, are “here” now.

Like Samuels’ *Cabra*, Claire Harris’s many published volumes of poetry work to “diasporize” the prairies, by figuring prairie spaces as inextricably intertwined with diasporic routes and black communities. Oftentimes in her poetry, Harris’s speakers slip, with very little sense of temporal or spatial disjuncture, between their current location in Calgary and remembered places in Trinidad. Significantly, these locations are not treated by the poet as separate, discrete, or oppositional spaces, but as part of the same elastic and movable diaspora formation. For instance, in her 1992 collection *Drawing Down a Daughter*, Harris writes of being encouraged by her Canadian publishers to “send us some thing/ Canadian set here,” as though “here” and Trinidad, part of the same extended diaspora space, could be disentangled and kept separate. Harris’s speaker responds to the publisher’s request with an emphatic declaration: “what she is doing here is/ & important...” (15). The poet does not finish the line; she refuses to re-inscribe the nation in dominant ways—that is, as a self-enclosed, sovereign formation that is incompatible with the space of other nations—and insists that what she writes *is* Canadian, and also important, but not recognizably so if the nation-space is taken to be sealed or cut off from the exchanges and networks of the black diaspora.

I should clarify that in deconstructing the binary opposition between the local and the global, Harris and Samuels are not celebrating the idea of a smooth, seamless global

space in which people and commodities flow effortlessly across international boundaries. This is the commonplace imagined geography of globalization that, as many new geographers and anti-globalization activists are now arguing, problematically enframes economic interdependency as a constitutive of a smooth, decentred and somehow leveled, global space of flows. As Neil Brenner argues in his essay “Beyond State-Centrism? Space, Territoriality, and Geographical Scale in Globalization Studies” (1999), “one of the central intellectual barriers to a more adequate understanding of globalization is that we currently lack appropriately *historical* conceptualizations of social and political space” (40-1). He elaborates:

[T]hose globalization researchers who have moved beyond [...] state-centric geographical assumptions have generally done so by arguing that state territoriality and even geography itself are shrinking, contracting, or dissolving as a consequence of process of “deterritorialization.” A break with state-centrism is thus secured through the state’s conceptual negation, a move that sidesteps the analysis of newly emergent, reterritorialized forms of state power and their associated political geographies. (40)

Harris and Samuels’ work is important and interesting because it addresses the historical conceptions of social and political space which Brenner argues are lacking. Specifically, they address the ideologies of modernity, which historically produced the modern nation-state as a container or fortress, whose boundaries, both internal and external, specify

basic and absolute differences and sameness between people, and which continue to produce, through both regional and national discourses, blackness as a foreign otherness.

I have looked briefly at the work of Harris and Samuels for the way it suggests writers of the second wave continue to trouble inherited ideas of the prairies—by demanding that the prairies be read not in the conventional terms of static center-periphery models of Canadian regionality, but as a complex, elastic, and movable formation that can be read in its relation to an imagined global network of racialized subjects. For the rest of this chapter I want to delve more deeply into the concept of diaspora by turning my attention to the work of another second-wave writer, Esi Edugyan, whose novel *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* (2004), like the work of Harris and Samuels, diasporizes the prairies, and does so in ways that are very meaningful for this dissertation project, for the black prairie archive, and for black Canadian cultural studies itself.

## **II. EDUGYAN'S *THE SECOND LIFE OF SAMUEL TYNE* : BRINGING THE DIASPORIC AND THE ARCHIVAL MODELS TOGETHER**

In my introductory chapter I reconstructed the history of one of the key debates in black Canadian cultural studies, between Clarke and Walcott, regarding which model, the diasporic or the archival, best articulates the historical, geographical, and cultural complexities of black Canada. As I argued there, the debate between these two scholars has long since failed to be generative but remains locked at an impasse. Clarke, a practitioner of the national/archival method, maintains that it is only through recovering

and archiving local black Canadian literature—a literature, he insists, which must be understood in regional and national terms, since black writers in Canada “domesticat[e], conserv[e], and nationaliz[e] [...] foreign influences” (Moynagh 89)—that a specifically “black Canadian” literary culture can be critically delineated. Walcott, on the other hand, advocates for “diaspora sensibilities,” which “are methods for overcoming the problem of locating oneself solely within national boundaries” (“Introduction to the Second Edition” 22), and which can “account for the vitality of artistic expression, national and outernational” of diasporic black Canadians (*Black Like Who?* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 156). From Walcott’s diasporic perspective, Clarke’s various nation-focused recovery projects—his anthologies, archives, and bibliographies—constitute a “regressive localism,” and a “melancholic cataloguing”<sup>15</sup> that evidence his capacity “of only tolerating generations now gone, not to return them to life but to list and index them for his conservative, nativist politics” (22). But from Clarke’s archival perspective, Walcott’s anti-national diasporic focus constitutes a troubling gesture of erasure of locally- and regionally-inflected black histories, literatures, geographies, and identities—a gesture that is all the more problematic given black Canada’s already difficult struggle against erasure. As Walcott and Clarke theorize the national/ archival and the diasporic, the two models remain antagonistic—as incommensurable, we might say, as conventional ideas about the opposition between the local and the global.

But, as we have already noted with respect to Samuels’ and Harris’ work, diaspora is a discourse that, in its most powerful cultural articulations, confounds the false binary opposition between the local and the global, an opposition that is a product of the logic of modernity and of national imaginaries. As Diana Brydon argues in her essay

“Studying the Global From Canadian Space” (2007), “the local and the global are now intermeshed in ways we are only now beginning to understand” (5). The local has been “reconfigured through its various scalar interactions, including the global” (5), to produce a new kind of space, the “glocal” (5). As Brenner explains, social relations are becoming increasingly interconnected on a global scale, and this has “significantly reconfigured, and at least partially undermined, the container-like qualities of states[;] this inherited model of territorially self-enclosed, state-defined societies, economies, or cultures has become highly problematic” (40). According to Brydon, because of the ways the processes of globalization undermine our conceptions of the local and global, “we need to go beyond what Said termed a ‘contrapuntal’ approach, interpreting local and global against and with one another” (6). Diaspora and globalization studies are “teaching us that this is not enough, because the local and global are intertwined in more complex ways that require unpacking through rethinking the very bases of what we once understood these terms to mean” (6). Esi Edugyan’s novel *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* demonstrates how the global and the local are deeply imbricated, and how the archival model and the diasporic model can be brought together.

*The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* narrates the movement of a second-wave family from Gold Coast (now Ghana) to a small town in northern Alberta that was once the site of an earlier first-wave of black migration. Samuel Kwabena Tyne and his wife Maud “moved to Canada on a wave of immigration,” Edugyan tells us. “War brides, Holocaust survivors, refugees of every skin were seeking new lives in a quieter country” (8). But as Edugyan reveals, soon after having been deposited on the prairies in the early 1960s by this wave of migration, her title character appears to be a man emotionally, psychically,

and physically stranded. At forty years of age, Samuel works at a solid, but spiritually deadening job in Calgary as an economic forecaster. Each moment he spends at his desk is excruciating, but the home he returns to at the end of the day is no sanctuary either. Samuel feels himself failing as a husband and father. His relationship with Maud is strained and uncomfortable: she is both overbearing and too quiet. And something has gone wrong with his Canadian-born twin daughters, Chloe and Yvette. Their behaviour is unfathomable and frightening; they communicate non-verbally and even move in synchrony, apparently watching each other out of the corners of their eyes. Samuel's only solace is the workshed he retreats to at night, a place, reminiscent of William Beal's overcrowded library in the wilderness in Manitoba, where Samuel absorbs himself in repairing broken clocks and other electronics. "His shed was a refuge," Edugyan writes, "a hut where life couldn't find him. A place where only Samuel's verdict mattered, and the only place it *did* matter" (7). Having already immigrated and found Calgary less than the fulfillment of his dreams, but feeling no nostalgia for the Gold Coast of his past (2), and no desire to return to his place of birth, this diasporic subject finds himself unable to connect meaningfully to either country. Without the multiple generations of family lineage conventionally presumed necessary for entry into a national community, but also without a strong sense of identification, nostalgia, or memory to help him construct Ghana retrospectively as a the stable locus of his identity and ancestral history, Samuel is, as Edugyan puts it, in a "world [that] held no future but quiet workdays, no past beyond youth and family" (2).

Samuel's affective disidentification from Ghana and his lack of nostalgia for his home country is intriguing, and requires more elaboration. Early diaspora theorist

William Safran's essay in the first issue of *Diaspora*, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return" (1991) sought to define the range of phenomena he felt fitted the "ideal type" of the Jewish diasporic model (84) and nostalgia played a significant role in his evaluation of what diaspora is and means. Safran defined diasporas as "expatriate minority communities" that are dispersed from an original "center"; that "believe they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host country"; that maintain a "memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland"; that see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return, which are committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland, and who feel "importantly defined" by a continuing relationship with this homeland (Safran 83-4). Significantly, the diasporas Safran saw as conforming to this "ideal type" did not include African-American, Caribbean, Canadian, South American or British black diasporas—diasporas which are not necessarily oriented by the teleology of a "return." "In terms of that definition," Safran writes, "we may legitimately speak of the Armenian, Maghrebi, Turkish, Palestinian, Cuban, Greek, and perhaps Chinese diasporas at present and of the Polish diasporas of the past" (84). Safran's critical desire to erect an exclusivist paradigm for diaspora based on a Jewish model, and his exclusion of African diasporas, has already been widely critiqued by a number of scholars, including Robin Cohen, and James Clifford who questions whether even Jewish diasporas themselves historically conformed to Safran's definition ("Diasporas" 305). But the question of whether nostalgia for homeland forms a constitutive and necessary aspect of the diaspora phenomenon is a question still up for debate. Walcott argues that, in terms of representations of black diaspora in Canada, "nostalgia is dead" (*Black Like Who?* 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 38). Recent black Canadian cultural

production, particularly Dionne Brand's novel *In Another Place, Not Here*, he argues, "puts an end to, or at least signals the demise of such cultural representations and (literary) politics" (38) that privilege "nostalgia for 'home'" at the expense of "addressing the politics of the present location" (39). (We might note in passing that here again Walcott constructs the idea of diaspora as a tension between two distinct and separable spaces: "home" and "the present location"). David Chariandy, on the other hand, suggests that the question of nostalgia is still an open one. In his essay "Postcolonial Diasporas" he asks, "Must a diaspora have an extant homeland culture before dislocation or can it develop or invent one retrospectively? [...] Must people in a diaspora long to return home? If so, what type of return is this: physical or symbolic?" (n.p.). Edugyan's novel is interesting in this regard for her title character seems not to participate in nostalgia for a distant homeland—at least not of the kind that has so long been considered a stock theme of ethnic literature in Canada (Kamboureli 41). For in *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne*, Samuel longs not for a return "home," to Ghana, but, as we will soon see, he longs for another kind of return, more metaphoric and historic than physical.

The possibility of rescue from Samuel's state of psychic stranding comes very early in the novel, in fact, on the first page. Samuel receives news of his uncle Jacob's death, and of his inheritance of Jacob's ancient house in Aster, "a town whose most noted relic was the fellowship between its men" (1). Aster, as we learn as the narrative unfolds, is Edugyan's fictional name for Amber Valley, the largest all-black community founded on the prairies by the Oklahoman pioneers in the first decade of the twentieth century, in the Athabasca district of northern Alberta. "For a man like Samuel," Edugyan writes, "whose life lacked intimacy, the town seemed the return to the honest era he longed for"

(1). Samuel sees in Aster, “with its black origins,” a “surrogate homeland, a way of returning without returning” (323). Rather than longing to return to Ghana, then, Edugyan has her character return to this “surrogate” first-wave pioneer community. Instead of a physical return, Samuel enacts a symbolic one, and instead of nostalgia for a homeland, Edugyan transfers this diasporic second-wave character’s sense of nostalgia to the black prairie archive.

The name Edugyan gives her first-wave pioneer community is significant, for in Latin *aster* means *star*. In moving from Ghana to Calgary and then to Aster, Samuel, not an African-American himself but a member of the second-wave, continues the tradition of following the North Star. His journey reproduces the movement of an earlier wave of black migration to Canada, but does so with a signal difference. By moving her family of Ghanaian-Canadian characters to Aster, a community originally established by descendants of African-American pioneers more than a century ago, Edugyan self-confidently intervenes into the historical record. This is the bold achievement of *The Second Life*: Edugyan “diasporizes” first-wave prairie history, and in so doing, confirms the continued importance of places like Amber Valley as locuses of black-inflected memory on the prairies, and suggests that the history of such places are the “inheritance” of second-wave writers as much as they are the inheritance of descendants of the first wave. Just as Samuel inherits a house in Aster, so too Edugyan, a black prairie author, inherits the whole historic and cultural legacy of the black prairies; it is hers’ to work with, her novel announces, and to imaginatively inhabit.

Edugyan revealed in a three-way interview (2005) with myself and the poet Wayne Compton why she, as a second-wave writer, returns to the memory of an earlier

wave of black migration to the prairies for her novel. “I have no historical ties to Amber Valley,” she explains. “The discovery of Amber Valley’s existence (and other Albertan settlements like it, such as Campsie, Wildwood, Breton) was the novel’s main spur. The appeal for me was this: having grown up in 1970s-80s Alberta, in which there seemed to be very few black people, I was fascinated to discover the existence of these black settlements” (“Black Writers In Search of Place” n.p.). Edugyan’s comments reveal not only that black prairie history continues to go missing—she had to “discover” it, even though she grew up in Alberta—but also that her project is deeply rooted in the archival black presence of the prairies. In *The Second Life* the archival and diasporic are intertwined.

Significantly, the way in which Edugyan returns to the archive for her novel addresses one of Walcott’s central concerns with Clarke’s archival method. According to Walcott, Clarke’s archival activity constitutes a “melancholic cataloguing,” evidence of the critic’s capacity “of tolerating generations now gone, not to return them to life but to list and index them for his conservative, nativist politics” (*Black Like Who?* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 22). For Edugyan, the point of returning to first-wave history is not simply to catalogue or memorialize an old black presence on the prairies that is now dead and gone, but to bring this archive into the consciousness of the present moment. She does so by re-visiting an important site of first-wave history and re-imagining it from a contemporary, second-wave perspective. Edugyan’s historical intervention promises the archive, like her title character, a second chance at life.

For the rest of the novel we watch as Edugyan’s historical experiment unfolds. How will first-wave history be handled in the hands of a second-wave writer? What will

happen as a family of Ghanaian Canadians moves to Aster? Will they find what they are longing for there? Will the fact that the town was once all black offer them a unique opportunity for a second chance? And how will the presence of these diasporic characters alter the town, and our sense of the archive itself?

Although Edugyan's Aster retains characteristics that make it identifiable to the reader as Amber Valley, the author confidently works with the historical record to endow this first-wave community with new, oftentimes mythical, properties. She invents a new legend for Aster—it is a legend in the sense of an undocumented, non-historical, oral narrative or myth—that blends the “real” archival history of Amber Valley with her own fiction, and makes it a place uniquely her own. “Myth told of the town’s birth as the first black hamlet in Alberta,” Edugyan’s legend begins, “one not so welcome in those days. As more blacks migrated from Oklahoma to set up lives on the prairie, the locals, folk who had themselves migrated little earlier, took action” (41). Like the historical pioneers, soon after arriving in Alberta the people of Aster are besieged by the anti-black racism of western Canadian Anglo-dominant culture. “Everything from petitions to newspapers to name-calling was used to cure the province of its newcomers” (41). Edugyan remains faithful to the historical record in her recollection of the newspaper campaign mounted against the Oklahoman migrants and the Order-in-Council voted into law to stop further black immigration (41-2). I can hear in the way Edugyan reconstructs this history that she has consulted some of the same critical and archival sources as I, in particular R. Bruce Shepherd’s *Deemed Unsuitable* and Velma Carter and Wanda Leffler Akili’s *The Window of Our Memories*. Like Edugyan’s legend of Aster, Shepherd’s history concentrates on the role of the western press in spearheading the anti-immigrant

movement. And Edugyan gives one of her characters the surname Jefferson (42), the name of an important pioneer in Amber Valley, Jefferson Edwards, whose orature is collected in *Windows*. But although Edugyan remains faithful to the archival record for the first part of her legend, she soon begins calling attention to the special difficulties of remembering and documenting this history adequately. The gaps and lapses that exist in historical memory become apparent as Edugyan narrates what happened to the “strange pilgrims” (42) after the Order-in-Council was passed, and after they settled down to the realities of life on the prairies. Edugyan’s writing now becomes speculative and uncertain, as though she is documenting the surviving historical fragments of an ancient and long-buried civilization—a kind of mythical black Atlantis. “In what seems like purely historical myth,” Edugyan writes, the inhabitants of the town of Aster “were said to have set up a Watch; eighty-nine families met once a week and, after a brief vote, decided to pitch up their fear in the form of a wall” (42).

No one knows the details of what came next, whether a war of sorts was started, or if the backbreaking nature of the work itself was enough to tame the project, but the wall remained ten inches high for several decades. The passing of years saw it kicked down, eroded by constant rain. Now it rises scarcely two inches, a skirt of parched rock at the river’s edge. So the myth goes. Truth is, no one knows how Stone Road came to be. Too mathematically perfect to seem natural, its mystery is the theme of an annual town contest. (42)

Edugyan's legend is richly allusive, even allegorical. Her writing captures the sense of wonder that many second-wave people, including myself, experience on discovering the existence of all-black communities in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, places which, today, seem completely overdetermined in the regional and national imaginaries as white. Because black prairie history has been buried and forgotten, the *real* history of the black prairies already seems mythical. But what are we to make of the strange, partially-built wall of the author's imagining? What does it say about Edugyan's own relationship to the black history of the prairies?

At first, the wall seems reminiscent of other walls that exist around the world, like The Great Wall of China, built to protect the northern borders of the Chinese empire, or Hadrian's Wall, built by the Romans on the border of what is now Scotland and England to keep out the Celts, the so-called "Security Fence" erected between the Occupied Territories and Israel, and the proposed wall on the border of the United States and Mexico; these walls, signs of an extreme or exclusionary nationalism, constructed to keep "invaders" out and to keep the internal spaces of the nation-state "safe," come to mind. In this sense the wall seems to be a statement about just how extreme Albertans' hostility was toward the people of Aster. Their fear and hatred of the new arrivals, out of all proportion to their peaceful intentions and their relatively small numbers, necessitated the construction of a wall. But by having the people of Aster build a wall, Edugyan essentially flips history around. It is not the black settlers who are "invaders" in this scenario; it is the fearful western-Canadians surrounding the black settlement, those whose bigotry has gotten out of control, who are the invaders. Edugyan's imaginative

intervention into black prairie history has the dramatic effect of ironizing that history, of re-reading it from a critical, second-wave perspective.

The allegorical implications of Edugyan's mythic wall don't end there, however. The people of Aster built the wall to keep their neighbours at bay, but Edugyan adds the intriguing detail that they never completed it. And after years of erosion the wall only stands two inches high. It is no more impenetrable now than a row of dominoes. What does the diminutive stature of this wall signify? Perhaps it is allegorical of the pioneers' incomplete attempts at self-isolation. Though historically the pioneers went to great lengths to establish autonomous black communities, oftentimes pioneering miles away from the nearest centers, ultimately, the descendants of the people who established these black communities integrated into the wider society. Fortunately or unfortunately, depending on the strength of one's nostalgia for black community, the viability of autonomous black enclaves relies on the continued existence of racial fear. As soon as the fear of racial hostility subsides, so too does the need for self-segregation. Places like Amber Valley, Keystone, Maidstone, Wildwood, and Campsie are no longer all black, and haven't been so since the early 1950s. As the pioneer Jefferson Edwards explains in his orature in *Window of Our Memories*:

There was a cloud over Amber Valley; I predicted there would be no more Amber Valley in twenty-five years—that just about came out right. Well, you see, the young generation they were growing up and getting educated and they were leaving; and none of us made any provision for the younger generation to stay. You couldn't live off a quarter section of land. Alright, what happed? When the

young ones leave the other races will come in and buy the quarter; because none of the old folk would be able to buy the land, some other race would buy it. Then there would be no more Amber Valley. (13)

One of the things the partially-built wall in Edugyan's legend signifies, then, is that the Aster Samuel longs for in the opening pages of the novel no longer exists. It is no longer a place in which the people are united by a shared history of slavery, racial persecution, migration, and reterritorialization. It no longer has the solace of all the black community organizations and self-help clubs I described at the end of my second chapter. Today, that place exists only in memory and in the archive.

Finally, the wall Edugyan imagines surrounding Aster signifies in a third important way. It can be read as one approach to theorizing an archival black presence, as a bounded, self-contained formation that aims to protect its cultural essence from "outside" influences. This is how Clarke conceives of the Africadian and black Canadian archives. But the wall separating Aster from the world in Edugyan's novel doesn't succeed in keeping the community isolated. As we soon discover, despite the presence of the wall, over time the community receives a steady stream of immigrants. In fact, the property Samuel inherits was a boarding house at one time, built to shelter weary travelers on their passage through the community (43). The house continues to bear witness to this historic traffic. Atop the house is a weathervane, an image Edugyan returns to throughout the book, and one which is reproduced on the jacket cover of the hardcover edition of the novel. The weathervane, the author tells us, "was used as a landmark to guide its residents home" (43). Pointing in all four cardinal directions at

once, the weathervane, an apt symbol of multivalent diasporic movement, confounds the kind of easy binary oppositions between “inside” and “outside” that are suggested by national and regional boundaries, nationalist literatures, and by walls. The weathervane, in contrast, points in all directions simultaneously, replacing the older notion of a territory defined by a geopolitical line: two sides arbitrarily separated and policed. As the anthropologist James Clifford argues in his influential essay “Diasporas” (1994), “Diaspora cultures are not separatist” (308). Clifford elaborates with respect to black Britain:

Black diaspora culture currently being articulated in postcolonial Britain is concerned to struggle for different ways to be “British”—ways to stay and be different, to be British *and something else* complexly related to Africa and the Americas, to shared histories of enslavement, racist subordination, cultural survival, hybridization, resistance and political rebellion. (308)

The weathervane hints at how Edugyan imagines blackness on the prairies as similarly hybridized by successive waves of migration.

In addition to the weathervane, Edugyan’s house bears other markers of the diasporic traffic it has seen. Its multiple rooms and additions testify to how the house has been generously expanded to accommodate new arrivals. “The hallways were lofty,” Edugyan writes, “with domed, pitted ceilings, and smelled of mothballs. They broke onto rooms as unique in character as the home’s various owners: the room strewn with cane prayer mats and altars for the dead; a hall closet smelling of aged tobacco; the antiquated

study; the kitchen, with its pockmarked cupboards, its fridge haunted by the three generations of fragrant food...” (44- 5). This house, “originally” built by African-American pioneers but inhabited—and expanded—by successive waves of immigrants, suggests, in an allegorical way, the author’s own relationship to first-wave history. For her, second-wave history is part of an extended and unbroken black history on the prairies; there are no divisions and distinctions between them in her commodious house, and neither are there any in her treatment of the archive. (The archive, like diaspora, is not separatist.) Edugyan has returned to this ancient house, with its peculiar structure in Amber Valley/ Aster—expanded so often, it resembles a “cauliflower” (44)—not because it is the “authentic” or “original” locus of black-inflected memory on the prairies, but because it remains a creative and generative site of memory that successive waves of prairie writers can draw from, contribute to, expand, and complicate.

By imagining the archive in this way, Edugyan leaves herself free to playfully complicate the archival record of the prairies with new diasporic traditions and concerns. Aster becomes a place in which her characters, for instance, speak Fante (299), chew stalks of raw sugarcane (144), cultivate cocoa yam plants (301) and prepare dishes of hot palm-nut soup and fufu (299) without any sense of geographical or temporal contradiction. And one of the central conflicts Samuel faces after relocating to Aster is the diasporic concern of how to hold the forty days’ ceremony, the traditional Ghanaian funeral rite, for his deceased uncle Jacob (46) “so far from the country in which that act meant something” (170). Yet—and here is where Edugyan’s diasporic historical intervention becomes even more interesting—when the Tynes arrive in Aster, they find another Ghanaian-Canadian *already* living there. She is Akosua Porter, from Winneba,

Ghana (145), and she is married to Aster's only remaining Oklahoman pioneer, a rather nomadic character whose "voice had a strange texture, as though every place he'd ever traveled to, no matter how short the trip or how remotely in his past, had left an imprint on his speech" (148). The marriage between Akosua and Porter is emblematic of Edugyan's project as a whole: it brings the second wave together with the first. Akosua, a diasporic subject who conforms more closely to Safran's model of diaspora than Samuel, for she remains strongly oriented toward her homeland (145), is appalled to learn that the Tynes have not, after several weeks in Aster, yet held the forty days' ceremony for Jacob. "Anyone who thinks himself above grieving has something wrong with him," Akosua chides Samuel's wife Maud. "Moving to a new country does not exempt you from a proper burial and the forty days' libation. Do you think you are not bringing punishment upon yourselves?" (146-7). According to Marleen de Witte, "Funerals are at the heart of Asante culture and social life" in Ghana. "Asante funerals are also the terrain of great creativity, where various forms of expression and art come together" (531). In their essay "Transnational Migration and the Economy of Funerals: Changing Practices in Ghana" (2006), Valentina Mazzucato et. al. note that "funerals continue to act, even in a transnational context, as occasions for reaffirming ties and a sense of belonging; they form a way for home communities, both rural and urban, to keep migrants interested in them" (1047). But for Samuel, who has given up on the idea of returning to Ghana, and who sees in Aster a "surrogate homeland" (323), the ceremony loses its meaning. "Why hold the forty days' ceremony—what was the point of pouring libation so far from the country in which that act meant something, and with a crowd of stragglers unknown to the dead?" he asks (170). The prairies, not his ancestral homeland, do not feel like sacred

ground to him. The act of pouring libation on this earth is empty. Despite Akosua's warning that not holding the ceremony will "bring punishment" (147), Samuel never performs the ceremony. "There was no point," he decides, "Let the dead bury their dead" (170).

But Samuel's decision seems not without consequence. As the narrative unfolds Edugyan heaps misfortune onto her characters. Samuel's twin daughters descend into a violent madness; they appear to be responsible for setting a series of fires in Aster, for pushing their mother off a ladder, for poisoning their father, and even trying to drown a friend (276). They communicate in their own secret language, and then sink into silence altogether. Are they possessed, as Akosua, a Ghanaian traditionalist, believes (275)? Has Samuel made a fatal mistake in treating the prairie ground as unsacred and unconnected to his ancestral home? Or is the twins' madness an allegory about the transculturation of the children of immigrant parents, a process that oftentimes renders the second generation unknowable to the previous one? The twins speak in a "secret language," and, at one point in the text, one of them shocks her mother by declaring, "sorry, I can't understand your accent" (114). In many ways the twins' behaviour speaks to the well-documented problems of the cross-generational tensions and alienations produced by diasporic conditions, and which we see represented in Canadian literature very often.<sup>16</sup> But the twins' behaviour also seems to exceed this reading. By the end of the novel, they are diagnosed with "moderate psychosis" (297) and confined to an institution. The twins remain elusive to the end, and perhaps they are never meant to be neatly summed up. As Edugyan revealed in conversation with Wayde Compton and me, the twins are based on the famous cases of California's "Poto and Cabengo," and of the Welsh "Silent Twins,"

all of whom invented a personal language (an idio gloss) and refused to speak to anyone else: “My preoccupation with these influences and case studies fused into the creation of these wholly alien characters” (n.p.). According to the author, the twins are not meant to function representationally or allegorically, but the critical desire to read them in this way, as a statement, for instance, about the shape and meaning of diasporic blackness on the prairies, nevertheless remains. “What’s interesting to me,” Edugyan says, “is that by dramatizing them at a distinct point in history within a certain geography, one is saying something very different about the racial experience in a given locale than if those characters were placed into a different society. And that to me is an uncomfortable prospect” (n.p.).

At the end of the novel Samuel finds himself alone in the big house in Aster, heartbroken and bewildered about his life. The twins are confined to an institution, and Maud, “only fifty [,] died of grief” (314). Samuel is left to reflect about where he went wrong and how his second chance for a new life was squandered. He considers that perhaps he had “gone wrong [in] coming to Aster. The whole thing had been a fool’s dream, this ridiculous belief in the living perfection of the past. There is no place in the world untouched by time” (301). We realize now that Samuel’s mistake has been in believing that he could return to an unchanged past, to the Aster of memory and archival record. He had fetishized the prairies’ black history in his belief, expressed in the opening pages of the novel, that Aster represented a place of temporal stasis, “the return to the honest era he longed for” (1). At the end of the novel his heart breaks at his realization that, after discovering the existence of this unique black enclave on the prairies, he has lost it for a second time to history.

The conclusion of Edugyan's novel seems to contain a warning about the possibilities and impossibilities of historical and archival return. It suggests, on the one hand, that the idea of the archive can be invoked to underscore the existence of a distinctive and self-conscious black culture on the prairies. This usage of the archive is crucial and important because of the ways racism works in Canada and especially on the prairies to insidiously and consistently deny both the historicity and cultural integrity of black presences. On the other hand, the archive is also often part of a larger rhetorical gesture that asserts the legitimacy of a national black culture locked in a defensive posture against the incursions of dominant or hegemonic cultural forms, both from within the nation-state and without. This gesture sets the archive and diaspora against each other as simple polar alternatives as starkly differentiated and oppositional as the signs for "global" and "local." Edugyan's triumph in *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* lies in rethinking the black prairie archive, diasporizing it, so that it can no longer function as diaspora's polar opposite. The author returns to the archive, but she does so in order to underscore the historical continuities, cross-diaspora conversations, and intertextual and intercultural cross-fertilizations that make the notion of a distinctive and historically self-conscious black prairie culture possible.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Like other first wavers, Alfred Shadd is African-American in derivation, though he came to the prairies via Chatham, Ontario, not directly from the United States.

<sup>2</sup> 1951 Census Canada statistics, “Population: General Characteristics.”

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Noseworthy, CCF Member of Parliament for York South (Winks 438).

<sup>4</sup> Cheryl Foggo observes that many of the descendants of the black pioneers remained on the prairies and rose to prominence, a sign of their tenacity:

Out of these pioneers rose lawyers like Violet King, who became the second woman to be admitted into the bar in Calgary, musicians such as Floyd Sneed, the drummer for seventies super-star rock band “Three Dog Night,” psychologists, professional athletes, civic engineers like Oliver Bowen who oversaw the construction of Calgary’s LRT, writers, artists such as *Edmonton Journal* cartoonist Malcolm Mayes, university administrators, preachers, judges like his honour Lionel Jones, whose father Jesse Jones was a world-class track athlete, theatre practitioners, college instructors, teachers, archaeologists, police officers, entrepreneurs and health professionals. (“Alberta’s Early Black Pioneers” n.p.).

<sup>5</sup> Winks refers to an activist “West Indian leadership” that effectively pressured the government to change its immigration policy. Notable among this leadership were Stanley G. Grizzle (Winks 438), Sir Alexander Bustamante, the Prime Minister of Jamaica from 1962 until 1967, Sir Grantly Herbet Adams, premier of Barbados, Norman Manley, premier of Jamaica, and Eric Williams, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago (442).

<sup>6</sup> In 1955 the Canadian government instituted its now-infamous Female Domestic Scheme (1955-1967), which permitted one hundred female domestic workers from across the Caribbean temporary entry each year into Canada. In 1960 the government increased the number to nearly three hundred. The scheme, which brought young, unmarried women workers for domestic labour in upper-class homes in Canada’s major cities has been widely criticized for the ways it exploited women’s labour while keeping them isolated and vulnerable to deportation. See Patricia Bristow, Dionne Brand, Linda Carty, Afua Cooper, Syliva Hamilton and Adrienne Shadd’s *We’re Rooted Here and They Can’t Pull Us Up’: Essays In African-Canadian Women’s History* (1994).

After 1955 black students from the Caribbean and Africa were also permitted temporary entry; they went to Universities across Canada, including those on the prairies: the Universities of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta in particular attracted many black students (Winks 443).

In 1962, immigration regulations shifted toward an education and skills-based policy. Each immigrant was to be considered “entirely on his own merit, without regard

to race, colour, national origin or the country from which he comes” (Winks 443). Finally, in 1967 the “points system” of immigration was put into effect. Thereafter black immigration increased rapidly.

<sup>7</sup> Data collected by Census Canada on the black population of the prairies is useful as a broad indicator of ways the second wave of migration changed the demographics of the three provinces in terms of race, but these figures are frustratingly imprecise. From year to year Census Canada changed the language of its questionnaires, and this change in terminology undoubtedly influenced the statistics collected. In 1961 the only “ethnic group” in the questionnaire that would have captured the presence of black prairie people was “African.” But judging from the extremely large number of “Africans” counted on the prairies in 1961—nearly twenty-eight thousand!—probably north Africans, South Asians, and maybe even white Africans were counted among them.

In the 1971 census the language of ethnicity shifted from “African” to “Negro”; accordingly, a much smaller number of people were captured by this category, fewer than three thousand. Yet we know that black immigration to the prairies had increased since the previous decade, but this increase is not reflected in Census Canada’s population data.

In 1981 the language returned to “African”, and this time Census Canada found over thirteen thousand people on the prairies of “African ethnic origin.” But how many people who self-identified as “black” or “Caribbean,” as my own father surely must have in 1981, were forced to check the only category available other than “African”: “Other” ethnic origins?

In 1986 the “major Ethnic categories” included “Black origins,” “Caribbean origins” as well as “Latin, Central and South American origin,” and it is likely that the black population of the prairies is split between these categories in this census year. Because of these changes in language, making comparisons between different census years is an extremely tricky business.

<sup>8</sup> Minister Faust’s ancestral lineage is complex and interesting. He revealed to me in a personal e-mail that, “My mother’s side—Euro-Americans—came to Alberta as homesteaders in 1910. My father, a veteran from Kenya’s war of independence in the Kenya Land of Freedom Army (KLFA, what the British derisively dubbed “Mau Mau”), came in 1960”.

<sup>9</sup> Personal e-mail communication, June 25, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Personal e-mail communication, June 29, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Personal Facebook communication Oct 16, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Swelling the archive’s poetry holdings are second-wave poets Claire Harris, Ian Samuels, Nigel Darbasie, Trevor Lawrence, Suzette Mayr and Kaie Kellough. But the pioneers and their descendants wrote poetry too. Gwen Hooks, author of the biography of her father, *The Keystone Legacy: The Recollections of a Black Pioneer* (1977), also self-published a chapbook of her poetry called *As Time Goes By* (1992), and Troy Burle

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Bailey, an author with ancestral history in both Manitoba and Nova Scotia, has written a long poem about a black Manitoban voyageur, *The Love Songs of Pierre Bonza* (forthcoming from my press, Commodore Books, in 2008).

<sup>13</sup> There are three dramatists in the second wave: Crail, George Bwanika Seremba, and Lisa Codrington, to one in the first—Addena Sumter-Freitag.

<sup>14</sup> Suzette Mayr and Esi Edugyan’s novels include magic-realist elements; John Ishmael and Minister Faust’s novels are works of science fiction.

<sup>15</sup> Freud speaks of melancholy, in his essay “Mourning and Melancholy,” as the “unconscious loss of a love-object” (158). To Walcott, Clarke’s lost love-object is the nation. “Clarke’s historical corrective offers no consolation,” Walcott writes, “because it only goes missing again” (22). As much as Clarke’s archives demonstrate blackness to be integral to the nation, the nation continues to produce blackness as a foreign otherness. Although I think Walcott has a point, his *ad hominem* “diagnosis” of Clarke as melancholic, as personal an attack as Clarke’s accusation of treason (in his essay “Treason of the Black Intellectuals”) is a sign of the limits of this debate.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan*, Hiromi Goto’s *Chorus of Mushrooms*, SKY Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Café*, Fred Wah’s *Diamond Grill*, and Dionne Brand’s *What We All Long For*, to name only a few.

## CONCLUSION

### THE POLITICS OF MEMORY IN ALBERTA'S 2005 CENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS

“Alberta”

First Nations built the land  
Fur trade, way back then.  
We've come a long way since that.  
Agriculture, lumberjacks,  
Oil derricks, natural gas;  
There is no turnin' back.  
--Mary Kieftenbeld

This epigraph, taken from the second verse of Alberta's new official song, written as part of the province's 2005 centennial celebrations, demonstrates the troubling politics of memory that marked the historiography around Alberta's commemorative celebrations. The verse begins with an acknowledgement of the presence of aboriginal peoples on the land prior to its settlement by non-indigenous settlers, which is an important part of Alberta's history. But as Amber Dean, Kara Granzow and Sharon Rosenberg point out in their essay “Encounters with Alberta's Centennial Celebrations: Enquiries into an Absent Present” (2007), this acknowledgement becomes paradoxical in relation to a centennial celebration: it challenges the very meaning of the centennial by demonstrating the Eurocentrism and concomitant dismissal of aboriginal and other minority histories evident in the insistence that Alberta has “existed” only for the past 100 years (3). After acknowledging that aboriginal people were “here first,” the song quickly relegates First Nations to a distant, pre-historical past that is not going to be remembered as part of Alberta's

collective and official history. “We’ve come a long way since that,” the song declares. “There is no turnin’ back.” This final line constitutes a rejection of history in the same moment that it is ostensibly being celebrated. Thus any “turning back” to examine the province’s history and constructedness in relation to race, particularly blackness, is never permitted.

And indeed, in none of the province’s official celebrations and events, with their relentless emphasis on pride, unity and progress (Dean et al. 1), was the province’s repressed historical black presence allowed to make a return. For instance, during 2005, the Alberta Centennial Initiative, in partnership with the Provincial Archives of Alberta, released “Centennial Images,” five archival images carefully chosen as “representing various aspects of our past 100 years” (n.p.). The historical memory produced through these photographs involves potent fictions about the prairies’ historical past. For instance, of the five archival photographs appropriated to symbolically represent Alberta’s collective history and to construct its present identity, all include images of people, but none are black or First Nations, or any other ethnic or racial minority subject,<sup>1</sup> and none are taken by black photographers. One of the photographs, captioned “Girl and Wagon Strathmore 1908,” pictures a pretty young Euro-Canadian woman in a long white dress reclined on the front of wagon. Two powerful horses flank her on either side and all around her stretch fields of ripening wheat. This nostalgic image accords well with stereotypical images of the prairie past, and, according to the Alberta Centennial media release, the image “captures much of what Alberta was in the early 1900s, young and full of promise.” But as we know, this archival photograph was taken at the height of the Oklahoma

migration at a time when hundreds of black settlers lived in the province, and so it doesn't begin to capture the complexity of what Alberta was, culturally, racially, and politically, at the turn of the century. Such images reconstruct a romanticized and sanitized version of prairie history based on a tacit collective agreement to forget.

In the context of this incipient and continued loss of historical memory, I have constructed an archive of black prairie literature and orature, in part, as a way of exploring the construction of official "prairie history," its potential for aggressive exclusions and erasures, and as a way of redressing these exclusions. The black prairie archive is a device for "turning back" to look at the historical, cultural, legal and ideological production of the prairies in relation to blackness when official historiography refuses to do so. By recovering the literature, orature, photographs, and other cultural material produced by black people on the prairies, a cultural production that goes all the way back to 1873, the archive acts as a corrective literary counterhistory, at once confirming and historicizing the fact of blackness on the prairies, and exposing the ideological workings of official prairie discourses that would efface that blackness.

In addition to "looking back" with the archive to deconstruct the myths about the prairies perpetuated by its official histories and cultural self-representations, I have theorized the archive in terms of what Pierre Nora calls a *lieux de mémoire*, a "site of memory," and more specifically, a site of collective black-inflected memory, because, as I have demonstrated, for the writers and orators of the prairies I have looked at, the struggle for memory against the willful forgetting of black history at once constitutes and conserves the poetics of the black prairies.

As a site of collective memory, the archive offers a way of “retrieving,” so to speak, the repressed black history of the prairies and bringing it into consciousness of the present moment, reinvigorating a variety of current theoretical debates with the heretofore unseen cultural production of archival and contemporary black prairie writers. Although in many respects it is still too early to make any kind of “conclusion” about the effects of retrieving the history of the black prairies, I can offer a few observations about how archiving and analyzing this literature transforms our received ideas about the prairies, its history and literature, and our current thinking about the shape and meaning of blackness in Canada.

The literature and orature of the nine writers that I have considered in detail in this study suggest that increased attention needs to be paid to the historicity of black subjectivity and culture in Canada. The heterogeneity of writers and writing I have considered—from Sylvester Long Lance’s *Autobiography* to Esi Edugyan’s *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne*—suggests that no trans-historical or essential black prairie subject or cultural expression exists. This is not the same as saying that there is no such thing as a distinctive black prairie subjectivity or culture, but rather that black-inflected prairie subjectivity and culture has been elaborated historically, from the highly territorialized expression of pioneer orators of the first wave, to the more deterritorialized diasporic cultural production of writers of the second-wave; from the strategic “Native”-identified blackness of Long Lance in the 1920s to Cheryl Foggo’s hyper-identification with African-America in the 1970s. Black writers have responded to their historically-shifting ideological terrains by inventing enabling new subjectivities and forms of cultural expression as the need for these has arisen, which

is why I have investigated the archive in historically-specific terms, according “waves” and generations. Future investigations of the archive might want to perform synchronic cross-regional and cross-national studies of black cultural production to see what is revealed by reading writers situated in similar historical circumstances but differing ideational spaces.

Because black subjectivity and culture on the prairies is so heterogeneous, to appreciate its complexities we need to develop a highly flexible critical methodology which includes strategies for reading both the territorialized as well as deterritorialized dimensions of black diasporic history, subjectivity, and literary culture. Both, I have argued, are a part of the diasporic experience on the prairies. I have made a case for making Deleuze and Guattari’s work—particularly their detailed articulation of migrancy as a two-part movement, the line of flight and the return to earth, and a state apparatus—along with the work of NourbeSe Philip, part of the methodological apparatus that is available to black cultural studies. I argued that becoming attuned to the territorial nature of diasporic location that remains in tension with our non-indigenous “unbelonging” puts us more closely in touch with the colonial politics of the territory with respect to black settlement, a critical move that I believe contributes to the necessary decolonization of black Canadian cultural studies.

I have also suggested that a recovered archive, not theorized in cultural-nationalist terms but as a diaspora space, can itself offer new methodologies by remembering histories and contexts that have elsewhere been lost and forgotten. It may be that at times I have read the archive too historically, collapsing literature into history, but

this has been a necessary move as my task has been primarily one of historical recovery, and so I have read the literature in the archive for its historicist dimensions. I have not yet had the chance to consider how the archive, as a new “prairie literature” which contests the very terms by which the prairies and its literature are constituted, contributes to the contemporary critical challenges being made to our inherited notions of what prairie writing is (Calder, Van Herk). In the future I would like to see the archive explored in the context of the “classics” of the prairie canon, works like Sinclair Ross’s *As For Me and My House*, F.P. Grove’s *Settlers on the Marsh*, Martha Ostenso’s *Wild Geese*, and Robert Stead’s *Grain*. How is the literary and critical construction of the prairies as a “forbidding” geographical and cultural terrain in these texts, and criticism of these texts, shifted or deconstructed when read in terms of the black prairie archive? And how is the notion of the “prairie realism” of these works and others like them—an idea which has been central to their canonization as masterpieces of prairie literature—complicated by our new awareness of the absent black presence there?

In order to make this future collaborative critical work possible the black prairie archive will have to be made publicly available to other scholars. This study, with its bibliography of black prairie cultural production, is the first step in making this previously hidden archive open. The next step will be to publish an anthology of black prairie literature and orature. Such future work will, I hope, bring the fascinating and important black history and literary culture of the prairies more firmly into the collective consciousness of the present moment so we, like the black writers of the prairies themselves, can never forget.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.albertacentennial.ca/media/photos.html>

**APPENDIX**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY OF  
BLACK PRAIRIE CULTURAL PRODUCTION:  
1873-2008**

The order of this bibliography is chronological. I have organized it according to the date of textual production so that patterns and developments in the archive are more discernable. The bibliography includes both archival material and published books.

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