

A Black Community in Vancouver?: A History of Invisibility

by

**Adam Julian Rudder
B.A., Simon Fraser University, 2001**

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of History

**We accept this dissertation as conforming
to the required standard.**

**© Adam Rudder, 2004
University of Victoria**

All rights reserved. This dissertation may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopying or other means, without the permission of the author

ABSTRACT

Supervisor: Dr. John Lutz

This paper explores the difficult but common historical problem of why some peoples are included in History and others are left out. The challenge of writing History which includes these people “without a History” has been the focus of social historians world wide since the 1970s and some advancements have been made in the effort to give voice to people who have been silenced in the past. The focus here is slightly different and more subtle: how do you write a history of the absence of absenting of a people?

The example I focus on is the absence/presence of blacks in the Strathcona district of Vancouver, British Columbia and more especially the historically contested space of “Hogan’s Alley” which is considered by many today to have been the historic heart of the black community. Although the thesis does use standard forms of historical research including interviews, archival, newspaper, census and secondary sources to establish the presence of people of African descent in Strathcona, this is not a history of these people. Rather it is an extended analysis of why there is so little History about them. I also address the challenges of making visible minorities visible historically and offer a brief explanation of why the cloak of invisibility slipped somewhat in 1970s.

Examiners:

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	An Introduction.	1
2	A Question of Authority?	18
3	A Hogan's Alley Black Community?	34
4	Constructing a Black Community.	69
5	Black Organizational Development in Vancouver.	82
6	The Politics of Recognizing 'Others.'	111
7	The Conclusion.	125
	Bibliography	130

Chapter 1 – An Introduction

There is a paradox in thinking about the history of black people in Vancouver. In a population dominated by white immigrants of British descent, the small black population was hard to miss on the streets or in the places of work or recreation where they might be encountered. And yet, this community so visibly marked by their skin colour is almost entirely invisible in the histories and historical records of the city. This thesis argues that there are several overlapping reasons for the visibility/invisibility paradox that characterized black presence in Vancouver and the changing conditions in the 1970s that began to invert this paradox. It explores the notion that invisibility was not an accident, or a result of the small numbers of black residents, but that invisibility was a predictable outcome of settler colonial histories and a *tactic* used by black residents in order to avoid aggressive white hostility. Until the 1970s historians have largely overlooked the presence of blacks in British Columbia and in Canada along with other immigrant and indigenous groups because the central role of history in this long era was to establish the legitimacy of white British Columbia and Canada. The exception to this was the attention paid to the immigration of black people into Victoria BC in the 1850s because they could be nicely used in the national narrative to contrast British/Canadian tolerance to American racism. Overall invisibility of blacks served the larger national historical narrative.

When I tell people that I am writing a thesis on black experience in Vancouver they often react by asking: “there were black people in Vancouver?” Such skepticism makes sense, considering that people of African descent are only given brief mention in most Canadian history surveys, even less attention in British Columbia, and are almost completely absent from Vancouver’s historical landscape. It is the misconception that Vancouver is without a history of black presence and experience that provides impetus for the writing of this thesis. Regardless of small numbers, we know that there were black people living in Vancouver because there are census, newspapers and oral histories to tell us they were here. This discussion of invisibility will suggest that black presence in Vancouver’s history *says* something about how Canada constructed its notions of national belonging prior to the 1970s.

The absencing of blacks and other minorities by historians is not surprising. What is surprising is that blacks in Vancouver made invisibility work for themselves as well. Black Vancouverites found opportunities for work and mobility. They were off the radar screen of white purists hyper-concerned with the threat from Asian immigration. Drawing attention to themselves worked against their strategies to blend into white neighborhoods and avoid ghettoization. Even the black community core, as some would call Hogan’s Alley, was an alley, out of sight of white Vancouver. Both white historians and black residents had incentives to make black presence “vanish.”

There is a third factor that helps explain the absence of a black history. This thesis argues that, while there were plenty of black Vancouverites, there was a tenuous sense of community among them. The ‘black community’ is invisible

because the main thing that they shared was a common identity ascribed by white society. Different shades, religion, languages, and national backgrounds divided the so called “black community” into smaller communities that did not see themselves as necessarily having anything in common and thus they were unable to form stable organizations that define community and create historical records.

Finally, this paper argues that a number of factors came together beginning in the 1970s which inverted the visibility/invisibility paradox. From being invisible, blacks suddenly began to appear in histories of Vancouver, British Columbia and several books were written just about black history. In the late 1970s Toronto declared February “Black History Month” and in 1995 the Canadian Parliament made it into a national event.¹ The new state-driven celebration of multiculturalism as a distinctive Canadian contribution to the stresses of *immigration* comes with its own particular problems as significant as the earlier invisibility.

This paper is not a history of black Vancouver, a difficult enough task given their absence from the record, but rather a historicization of its absence in historical literature—an explanation of why there is not a history. It might be suggested that people of African descent were not visible simply because this group of people was too small to have an impact on Vancouver city’s social, cultural and political scene. Small numbers, however, do not completely address the question of why the Vancouver black community was not more remembered. As we have witnessed in countries such as South Africa where white settlers are a minority, they are still extremely visible in terms of South Africa’s national histories and have had an

¹ Black History Month, February 2000, <http://www.ontla.on.ca/library/repository/mon/1000/10285065.htm>, (July 15th, 2004).

overwhelmingly disproportionate effect on the social and political culture of the nation. Nor did numbers alone dictate who received public attention in Vancouver. In the case of South Asians, though small in numbers, they received a considerable amount of attention from white British Columbia as a result of the threat they posed to “racial homogeneity.”² Moreover, the small number of black people in Vancouver is more the effect of racist Canadian immigration policy than it is a cause of their invisibility.

This thesis will point to the limitations of primary sources and empirical research in terms of exploring the presence of communities that have been historicized into absence and/or have chosen to remain invisible in hostile environments in which high visibility could easily turn them into targets of white aggression. This discussion is an introduction to the possibility of writing histories of people, such as the black people in Vancouver, that have not been remembered.

In some oral historical accounts, Vancouver’s Strathcona neighborhood surrounding a little entertainment district called Hogan’s Alley was a black “community” which existed from about 1910 to the end of the 1940s.³ In this thesis I will refer to the area around Hogan’s Alley, in Vancouver’s East End, as the Strathcona area even though it did not become officially known as “Strathcona” until the 1950s. Hogan’s Alley was not only the site of a number of gambling and bootlegging joints, prostitution houses, and clubs and restaurants which were owned and frequented by black people, but it was also the location of the African Methodist

² Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1978), 82. The “Komagata Maru Incident” will be discussed briefly in chapter 4 when I examine the dangers of high visibility in British Columbia before the 1970s.

³ British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), *Opening Doors: Vancouver’s East End, Sound Heritage*, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977.

Episcopal Church (AME). The AME church in Strathcona would later come to be seen by some Vancouverites of African descent as the spiritual center of the Hogan's Alley community.⁴ There were also a number of social and political organizations which started to fight discrimination largely in the areas of housing and employment and to combat the largely Eurocentric focus of the education system in Vancouver. Many of these organizations based on African American models had great success in their efforts to unite black people spiritually and politically in cities all over the United States. In Vancouver, however, these organizations had limited impact on Vancouver's social and political scene and struggled with membership until the 1970s when most of them became obsolete with the coming of the multicultural era in Canada.

The unusual goal of this thesis—to understand the absence of a history of Blacks in Vancouver rather than trying to write one—requires an unusual methodology. In part, the approach is standard: the review of secondary literature, the examination of newspapers, census and archival documents, could be as much a part of a study of presence as well as absence. Even the dependence of several chapters on oral history is not out of place in standard approaches. What makes the approach different is the focus on absence as well as presence and on the integration of theoretical stances on race, history, and multiculturalism throughout as I attempt to see what was present but not visible and explain why.

In Vancouver, people of African descent are given very brief mention in a number of sources that have emerged since the 1970s but there is no history of their

⁴ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2717 (Transcripts), Nora Hendrix, 14 April 1977; BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977.

lives and experiences which places them within the culture and political context of the city. Perhaps the first thorough investigation of black presence in British Columbia came from James Pilton. He focused on the black settlers that immigrated from San Francisco to Victoria in the 1850s.⁵ In the 1970s, Crawford Kilian also wrote a book about black British Columbia entitled *Go Do Some Great Things* in which he acknowledges and gives credit to Pilton's work.⁶ Kilian's book is problematic as a secondary source because it does not footnote its primary research. Evidence collected by Robert A.J. Macdonald suggests that black people were present in Vancouver's historical record as early as 1875 when surveyor George Dawson reported the presence of "Negroes and Mulattoes" in the Burrard Inlet.⁷ In a collection of essays compiled by John Norris entitled *Strangers Entertained*, Rosemary Brown has written a short but informative essay on "The Negroes" of British Columbia which discusses "the second installment of Negro immigration into British Columbia" that began in the 20th century and settled in Vancouver.⁸ I will suggest in chapter 3, that many of these newly arrived black settlers ended up in the Strathcona neighborhood. Perhaps the most thorough account of the Strathcona Hogan's Alley black people comes from oral historical accounts collected and compiled by Daphne Marlett and Carole Itter in *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East*

⁵ James Pilton, "Negro Settlement in British Columbia 1858-1871," (University of British Columbia, MA Thesis 1951).

⁶ Crawford Kilian, *Go Do Some Great Thing: the Black Pioneers of British Columbia* (Vancouver, B.C.: Douglas & McIntyre, 1978), 11.

⁷ Robert A.J. Macdonald, *The Making of Vancouver: 1863-1913* (Vancouver: UBC Press), 19.

⁸ Rosemary Brown, "The Negroes," in John Norris *Strangers Entertained: A History of the Ethnic Groups of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Evergreen Press Limited, 1971), 241.

*End.*⁹ This valuable collection of oral histories draws attention to some of Vancouver's often marginalized voices and highlights their experiences. With these few notable exceptions, black history in Vancouver has not made it into print, though there is a Black Historical Society now focusing on that goal.

Although generally a historicized study of absence, this thesis will examine the few remaining written sources that can be found in census, newspaper clippings, archives and in dusty boxes in basements of the informal activists and historians for the people of African descent in Vancouver. For newspaper representations of black experience, I will be examining primarily the *Vancouver Sun*, the *Vancouver Province* and the *Vancouver News Herald* found in indexes in the Vancouver City Archives and the British Columbia Provincial Archives. There are certain limited documents from the British Columbia provincial and Vancouver city archives that deal with black social, political and religious organization that have also provided valuable information. The primary material I have used in this paper does not exhaust the possible list of potential sources for information with regard to black presence in Vancouver. Although it was beyond the scope of this paper, the Vancouver Archives City Planning Documents and also Vancouver city police records might provide useful sources for any further studies that might be undertaken.

Oral history has been fundamental to my examination of the experiences of people of African descent in Vancouver. I personally conducted nine interviews with people who lived in or around the Hogan's Alley area and with those who were involved in various cultural and political organizations in the black community before

⁹ Daphne Marlatt and Carole Itter, eds., *Opening door : Vancouver's East End* (Victoria, B.C.: Aural History Program, Ministry of Provincial Secretary and Government Services, Provincial Archives, 1979).

1975. I have also used six of the seven interviews conducted with black people who lived in Hogan's Alley at various points from 1918 until 1977 and participated in the *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End* oral historical project. These sources have been crucial in establishing the presence of black political, cultural, and social organization in the Hogan's Alley area. In recent years oral histories have become recognized as crucial aspects of historical research. Miles and Crush suggest that "life-history" research "opens a window on the struggles of ordinary people, who have otherwise left little documentary trace."¹⁰ Pioneers in the field hoped that oral histories could be collected in an objective and neutral fashion, in this way revealing past historical facts. As Miles and Crush point out however, this "myth of detachment" was always an impossible objective given the complex social, political, cultural and interpersonal dynamics that surround the interview process.¹¹

Eric Wolf describes anthropologists as the "offspring of imperialism."¹² In regard to research in the colonial and post-colonial context, Edward Said has pointed out in *Orientalism* that formal and informal research and the collecting of knowledge about the colonized has always been an extremely politicized process – a process in which knowledge over a people has been used with the intent of creating and maintaining the borders that define and rank legitimate claims to power based on racial, gender and national identity.¹³ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who writes about Maori experience in New Zealand, urges scholars to recognize that it is important to be

¹⁰ Miranda Miles and Jonathan Crush, "Personal Narratives as Interactive Texts: Collecting and Interpreting Migrant Life-Histories," *Professional Geographer*, 45:1 (Feb 1993): 92.

¹¹ Miles and Crush, "Personal Narratives as Interactive Texts," 84.

¹² Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, c1982), 18.

¹³ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 94-110.

respectful of the fact that in some indigenous communities “research” has become a “dirty word.”¹⁴ Andres I. Perez y Mena expanded upon the dangers inherent in Tuhiwai-Smith’s warning in his interviews with informants who had participated in research conducted by previous academics. He found that some of the informants had a considerable amount of contempt for researchers, or just did not feel that they had any obligations to tell them the truth.¹⁵ People of African descent, as well as other indigenous people all over the world, are at times reluctant to share their stories and secrets with those whom they associate with colonial power or racist institutions.¹⁶ In the case of Vancouver informants of African descent, it is important to keep in mind that, in some cases, valuable information may have been lost because certain individuals are reluctant to involve themselves in the research process.

Some scholars and researchers suggest that the presence of insiders, or those who grew up in the communities that are being considered for academic research, will help to alleviate some of the biases and rapport problems that have compromised earlier oral historical research.¹⁷ They suggest that insiders have experiential knowledge of the languages and cultural knowledge of the community being investigated, and that their positions within those communities would help them interpret the research material with fewer biases. The subject position of the ‘insider’ has also been complicated by considerations of gender, class, and the often intimate relationship that the ‘insider’ has with institutions of power such as academia or

¹⁴ Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People* (London; New York: Zed Books, 1999), 1.

¹⁵ Andres I. Perez y Mena “Cuban Santeria, Haitian Vodun, Puerto Rican spiritualism...” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37:1 (March 1998): 4.

¹⁶ Tuhiwai-Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 1-18.

¹⁷ Miles and Crush, “Personal Narratives as Interactive Texts,” 86-7.

development agencies. Although some would label me an insider to the group of people of African descent that I spoke with, I will suggest that my own academic training and the worldviews that I have acquired during this process, have made me an outsider in most senses of the word. Furthermore, the notion of 'insider' is strongly based on notions of community as a cohesive whole rather than a group united by some common qualities and divided by race, class, and gender. My gender, class, education, and objectives have slanted the questions I ask and the spaces I create in which these questions can be answered. Although I have shared some of the same experiences, and admittedly had access to stories and disclosures that a white researcher may not have had, the histories that I collected are nonetheless small and biased pieces of a larger whole that is beyond full retrieval. Indeed, it is the "history beyond retrieval" that is the primary interest of this study.

A historical project which uses the oral accounts of black people in Vancouver is complicated by the fact that members of "marginalized communities" are not always eager to pass on the details of embarrassment and humiliation inflicted upon them by social systems which denigrate and misrepresent peoples based on their race. There exists a tendency to romanticize the past, and people have vested interests in how their community is represented, so at times they focus on their more positive experiences.¹⁸ Some of the early history of 'blacks' in Vancouver in general was marred by stories of struggle and rejection, and is therefore perhaps seen by some as a time to be forgotten.

Due to the fact that race and racism can be sensitive topics of discussion among black people I was cautious with regard to the kind of questions that I asked. I tried not to

¹⁸ Miles and Crush, "Personal Narratives as Interactive Texts," 90.

probe and dig only for details about racism toward black people in Vancouver that would be useful to my thesis, but listened to what my interviewees had to say about general topics. At times I asked them to elaborate on certain aspects of the stories that they shared with me, but I did not ask them to define the kind of racism that they encountered or how they organized to resist it. Given that the aim of the thesis was not to gain an accurate picture of “how the black community *was* in Vancouver,” but rather to discuss the possibility of writing a history of a people who had been generally ignored by mainstream historical documentation, my interview style did not introduce any crucial barriers to the execution of this project.

Given the limited amount of written black cultural production in British Columbia, African American and British scholarship will be used partly to provide important comparative insights regarding the ways in which black populations have been dealt with in Vancouver. However, I will use these macro-historical writings with caution, and attempt to point out some of the ways in which people of African descent in Vancouver had distinct experiences with the predominance of ‘whiteness.’¹⁹ Given Canada’s proximity to the more well established black historical traditions in the United States, I find it crucial to argue strongly against over-generalizing African American theories of community development and resistance to white privilege and against mechanically imposing such theories onto British Columbian contexts.

¹⁹ Rinaldo Walcott, *Black Like Who* (Toronto: Insomniac Press, 1997), 26. I will be working primarily off of Walcott’s assumption that “those who make diasporic claims of understanding and intimacy need to pay attention to the specific concerns of various groups within a given nation while making their transnational argument.”

During the course of this essay I will unfortunately be obliged to use terms that are still heavily laden in the essentializing “logics of race.”²⁰ Although race does not have value as a biological term, it would be naïve and irresponsible to suggest that the concept has no influence in the daily lived experiences of those who live with raced identities.²¹ Furthermore, race has, in the 20th century, played a central role not only in how Europe constructed its ‘others’ of African descent, but also in the ways in which people of African descent have come to view themselves. It is also true that the terms black and community in the context of Black Studies have relied heavily on the logics of race.²² In the first drafts of this paper I scare quoted the terms black, white, and community in order to signify my disbelief in their generalizing tendencies. In the revised text scare quotes became cumbersome and distracting, and I therefore have chosen to leave them out with the hope that the reader will keep in the mind that these terms often obscure the particularities of the people they are employed to describe. The terms “Canadian of African descent” or “peoples of African descent” have their own problems with prescribed identity and imprecision, but in my opinion are useful because they do not ascribe group membership based on skin colour and do not have many of the connotations that the term ‘black’ has developed from years of use.

The term ‘community’ will also be used with caution in this thesis. Broadly speaking, this thesis is concerned primarily with two different conceptions of

²⁰ Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 11-53.

²¹ Gilroy, *Against Race*, 29-30.

²² Renuka Sooknanan, “The Politics of Essentialism: Rethinking Black Community,” in *Rude: Contemporary Black Canadian Cultural Criticism*, ed. Rinaldo Walcott (Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2000), 137-158.

community. I will discuss the kind of ‘community’ that is built top-down by scholars, nation states, and political activists using language, ethnicity, race and skin colour signifiers. Alternatively, I will also stay aware of the community that emerges as a manifestation of the common interests, desires and/or will of a particular group of people. In this thesis I will not ascribe the term community to the group of black people that lived in the Strathcona neighborhood in order to signify cohesion. I have chosen against characterizing Strathcona’s black people as a *cohesive* community for reasons that will be discussed more thoroughly in the following chapters. For now, and for the purpose of avoiding confusion, I will only add that the term “black community” will simply refer to the group of people who had black skin and who lived in and around the Strathcona area. My main concern is that the reader approach any of the terms that ascribe membership based on racial markers with a critical eye to the ways in which they simplify the intentions and dynamics of certain groups of people.

This essay is divided into seven chapters, that employ the visibility/invisibility paradox to discuss the presence/absence of black people in Vancouver. Much post-colonial scholarship has been concerned with analyzing the biases, and at times Eurocentric viewpoints, through which non-European people have been constructed by Western scholars. Chapter 2 will begin this essay with a brief introduction to how non-European subjects were brought into the realm of the knowable through Western scholarship before the 1970s. I will suggest that most academic research prior to the 1970s was concerned with legitimating European colonialism and in this process worked to make black subjects invisible. Fundamental to colonial histories was the

establishment of European authority. This authority was used to decide who could write and tell legitimate history and what kind of methodologies and techniques had to be used in order to make the world knowable.²³ The authority of the historian was negotiated in politicized spaces and therefore often created biased and at times insidious representations of the objects of analysis—it also resulted in certain historicized absences which will be the focus of this thesis.²⁴

Chapter 3 will attempt to bring black Hogan's Alley into historical view using the memories and stories of black people who have lived in Vancouver since as early as 1911.²⁵ The neighborhood which has come to be called Strathcona was, from about 1910 to the 1950s, host to a number of black people and black-owned business. Although these people of African descent have been almost entirely invisible to the majority of Vancouver's residents, their presence has recently begun to be remembered. Many people of African descent in the interviews that I conducted and in conversations at various social events have suggested that between 1910 and 1960 the Hogan's Alley area of the Strathcona neighborhood was a 'black community.' In 2003 the Hogan's Alley Memorial Project organized an event entitled "Hogan's Alley Revisited: Exhibit Commemorating Hogan's Alley," which sought to represent Vancouver's original black neighborhood, as well as the larger Vancouver 'black experience.' Mainly through an examination of oral historical data I will discuss the *idea* of Hogan's Alley as a black community and the reasons internal to the black community why invisibility may have also been desirable.

²³ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Cultural* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 89.

²⁴ Stephen Morton, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 49-62.

²⁵ BCA, *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage*, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Nora Hendrix, 14 April 1977.

Chapter 4 will explore some potential reasons why the black Vancouver did not come together and form effective community organizations to promote black culture and fight racialized discrimination in the city. Whereas chapter 2 is concerned with how black people had been historicized into invisibility, this chapter will discuss invisibility as a *tactic* used to avoid aggressive white racism. I will use the term “tactic” to discuss some of the *ways of maneuvering* that seem to characterize some of the means by which black people in Vancouver resisted white racism.²⁶ The term “tactic,” used in this sense, is important because it does not imply unified action based on a well organized plan or *strategy* that was conscious in the minds of all black people living in Vancouver. Rather, “tactic” suggests that black people were continually engaged in a process of resistance against a system which intrinsically privileged whiteness and sought to exclude them from full participation in all areas of Vancouver life. The use of the word ‘tactics’ avoids attributing a conscious plan or concerted group action but at the same time, suggests awareness, at either a conscious or unconscious level, of the discriminatory strategies that were deployed against them. It is hard to imagine a tactic without some kind of overarching objective which gives it meaning in certain historical and cultural moments.

In Vancouver white racism did not take on the often violent and aggressive forms that it did in other areas in North America, and predominantly in the United States. Since the times of slavery, black cohesion on a symbolic level has been constructed in opposition to white privilege, and this has often obscured the tensions and divisions that were present within the black community itself. Chapter 5 is offered as a case study in invisibility as a maneuvering tactic. It will look at the

²⁶ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c1976), 145-152.

successes and failures of black cultural and political organizational development based primarily on archival and oral historical research. Many of the organizations that arose to create unity in Vancouver were founded in the United States. These political organizations were most active during times when white racism became particularly aggressive in Vancouver but were unable to produce a lasting legacy. Given the small numbers and the subtle nature of racism in Vancouver, African American-inspired community-based mobilization may have been less effective than integration and just simply remaining invisible.

The discussion in chapter 6 leads to an examination of how non-European peoples have emerged from obscurity in the eyes of the Canadian nation state since the 1970s. Despite the prevalence of discrimination toward, and the exclusion of, people of African descent, Canada has for a long time been seen as the end of the underground railway and a place where black North Americans could live free from the tyranny of the United States. As Walcott suggests, it is the “discourses of Canadian benevolence” that have marginalized the actual experiences of people of African descent in Vancouver, and in the rest of Canada as well.²⁷ The rhetoric of multiculturalism has left very little room for black Canadians to maneuver as a distinct group with unique histories and experiences in Canada. Moreover, the attempt to recognize people of African descent in Canada may be only part of the process of dealing with their historicized invisibility before the 1970s.

Biologists remind us of the rate of species extinction on the earth and linguists about the loss of languages which occur every year. In many places in the world histories or minority and marginalized communities are disappearing from historical

²⁷ Walcott, *Black Like Who*, 36.

record. Valuable experiences and knowledges are being lost because this history is often considered unrecoverable even by members of those communities. Emmitt Holmes suggested that if I had come even ten years earlier I would have had access to many more stories and perhaps people who would have kept some of the written documents of community organizations.

I am sure, if you had a come about ten years ago, they would have had lots of stories, but the thing of it is, we started trying to trace the history of when our folks came in, back in Saskatchewan, and not having that great of success, because got interested too late, because the folks that knew that had the knowledge, they're all gone, so where do you turn, can't go dig it up because there is nothing down there... the young ones today they're not interested...²⁸

In the following chapters I will focus on and discuss the difficulties and possibilities of writing histories of people who have remained invisible to historical record and chart the reasons for that invisibility. I hope that the theoretical aspects of this research will help the reader to understand why we need to interrogate the historicized invisibility of non-European peoples.

²⁸ Emmitt Holmes, personal interview, 21 January 2003.

Chapter 2 – A Question of Authority?

The experiences of black people in Vancouver are just some of the many histories that are lost because they were denied textual representation prior to the 1970s. This chapter attempts to create a theoretical framework which marks and challenges the invisibility of certain peoples in Western historical narrative, without marginalizing the agency of those erased people who were often in dialogue with the structures in which they maneuvered. The following section will draw links between how historicized “vanishing” was used during the establishment of British cultural and political hegemony and our attempts to represent them now. Representing colonized people continues to be a subject of debate not only because non-European people were historicized out of presence but also because academia has not fully come to terms with questions of authority—who gets to write about what and why? Questions of representation and authority are important in this project because they draw attention to the influence that the historian can have on the *creation* of marginalized “communities.”

Part of the historical absence of black people in Vancouver can be explained by the political and cultural context of pre-1970s Canadian settler colony society. During the process of establishing the Canadian state, historians played an important function in providing justification for European colonization. They wrote histories imbued with notions of progress and civilization which legitimated British presence and political authority in British Columbia. These narratives of ‘progress’ suggest

that every culture or society must go through a number of steps on a path that leads upward toward civilization. The discourse of 'progress' sought to create a meta-narrative or universal history that could create a social, political and cultural standard by which peoples and societies could be judged and organized based upon their particular relationship to certain historical processes. Given that Europeans had reached a higher level on this scale of human achievement and civilization it seems that they may have thought it fitting to take positions of leadership in the newly forming state. Early histories of Vancouver were written from this dominant culture perspective, and tended to highlight the achievements of great white men who were considered the most active in the process of making history.

During the colonial era, many historians assumed that Western political structures and academic institutions were superior because they had foundations in empirical evidence and scientific ways of knowing the world. Certain forms of colonial histories suggested that 'Western' historians, who were imbued with scientific ways of knowing and were able to use rationalized methodology to uncover 'truth,' could create a channel through which past events could speak to the present free of the biases and desires of their own current political and cultural climate. Non-European people, who were considered to lack reason and rational thought, could not know themselves or their surroundings in an objective manner, and therefore their opinion or experiences did not need to be sought out and included in colonial narratives. It was this cultural and political context in which the experiences of black people could not only go unnoticed but also be considered unworthy of historical investigation.

The theoretical move from empirical histories to analysis of discourse in the 1970s enabled Western and non-Western researchers to look more closely at the social, political and cultural context which historians wrote out of and into. Moreover, it has allowed a closer examination of the rhetorical spaces that are constructed in which certain questions for interrogation even become possible.²⁹ An important shift in the process of writing about the colonized or non-European subject came with Edward Said's critique of European discourses on the 'Orient' in *Orientalism*.³⁰ The link between research and the researcher and the institutions of power that support their claims to knowledge were drawn out and analyzed for the first time in systematic fashion. Said concentrated not on the colonized subject as the object of history, but on the discourse that the West used to create objects of research. His approach was revolutionary for its ability to highlight the ways in which the social, historical and political backgrounds of Western researchers affected the discourse that the West used to describe the 'Orient' and its peoples. Importantly he suggested that the 'Oriental' was less a factual reality and more a fiction of Europe's imperial imagination. Fundamentally biased and naïve representations of the Islamic World became so prevalent in 19th century European popular and political culture that "every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist and almost totally ethnocentric."³¹

In the case of Vancouver Said's work might suggest that the way in which black people were conceived and dealt was linked to racist European constructions of the African. Discrimination and racism towards black people in Vancouver did not

²⁹ Lisa Blackman, "What is history doing?" *Theory and Psychology* 4:4 (1994): 491-497.

³⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

³¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 204.

arise out of interpersonal interaction between white and black people, it arose out of a way of thinking and writing (or not writing) about people of African descent that was designed initially to justify slavery and later to rationalize their exclusion from certain social and political spaces that were reserved for white people. Although this sort of analysis has had lasting impact on the ways in which the humanities and social sciences have viewed Western attempts to talk about non-European peoples, it has also been heavily criticized for the ways in which it marginalized non-European agency within structures of colonial domination.

Critiques of discourse theory and the desire to give voice to marginalized people have compelled some historians to write histories of the marginalized. There are a couple of problems with histories that seek to make invisible histories visible. Siad's discourse analysis also suggested that there is another story out there, beyond Western discourse, that could potentially tell the historian more about how non-European people *actually* lived. However, as early as 1978 Louis Mink had already begun to see fundamental problems with histories that sought to critique traditional universal histories with social histories, or histories that tried to tell the stories of those who had been silenced or made invisible in traditional narratives. He suggested that histories of marginalized peoples did not completely break with modernist traditions that sought meta-narrative narrative histories.³² The process of writing the histories of the marginalized in some ways still assumed that there was a meta-narrative that could be found if better techniques and methodologies were employed. In fact, from this view point, oppositional narratives can be seen as adding legitimacy

³² Louis Mink, "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument," in *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*, eds. Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 129-49.

to the notion that there is a Universal History or a meta-narrative.³³ This process of finding marginalized historical narratives presupposes that the ‘authentic’ experiences of black subjects are waiting to be exposed and will give us a better understanding of that material reality which lies out there in partial pieces waiting to be articulated in a more comprehensive (less biased) historical narratives. In this thesis I will not assume that there is a meta-narrative of black Vancouver out there still waiting to be discovered. As should be clear by now, stories are interpreted and not discovered. I continue to be interested in histories of invisibility because the small pieces of the larger story that we are able to find and interpret still say something about black experience in Vancouver in the 20th century.

The second problem with some forms of social history is that they fail to come to terms with the position of the historian in the process of history making. Fundamentally this is a question of authority. Mink suggested that the notion of the historian as a privileged knower is problematic because it still assumed that history-making is a neutral process which can allow the objects of investigation to be viewed in an objective manner.³⁴ Although there have been many attempts to address the problems of authority in historical research, in 1989 Said commented that there it was still far too common that the researcher “speaks, and analyzes, amasses evidence, theorizes, speculates about everything—except *itself*. Who speaks? For what and to whom?”³⁵

³³ Mink, “Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument,” 195-96.

³⁴ Mink, “Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument,” 129-49.

³⁵ Edward W. Said, “Representing the Colonized: Anthropologies Interlocutors,” *Critical Inquiry*, 15 (Winter 1989): 212.

The issue of *who* represents the histories of the marginalized has particular significance in the case of black people in Vancouver. In the interviews I conducted with black people from Vancouver there exists a number of contradictory claims with regard to whether or not Hogan's Alley was a black community and whether or not there was a *cohesive* black community. The ways in which I as a history student have come to define blackness, community and whiteness all have potential impacts upon how I might construct the group of 'black' people that lived in Vancouver. As I have stated before, I am reluctant to label the group of black people living in the Strathcona area as a black community because I have found contradictory claims with regard to whether or not they shared common desires, intentions and/or political will and would have called themselves a community. However, this does not mean that a black community did not exist, just that given my particular reservations with regard to labeling certain people a "community," I was unable to justify calling the group of black people that lived in Strathcona a "black community." Given that there have been so many negative and inaccurate representations of black people in the past, the issue of highlighting their invisibility should be approached with sensitivity—as with any group that has been underrepresented.

Another issue of contention arises out of the question about how people in Vancouver sought to exert their agency as black citizens in a highly discriminatory environment. Given that there are so few representations of this black community, the researcher should be particularly sensitive with regard to how black agency is constructed and put forward. Were black people in Vancouver condemned to invisibility or did they play a role in creating it and thus become active agents in the

process of constructing covertness and integration as a strategy? The desire to integrate has in the past been characterized as the strategy of “house negroes” or passive black people who do not want to create a disturbance. The desire to integrate has also been seen by white cultural critics as acquiesce to the superiority of white culture. It is helpful to understand how the position of the researcher could potentially influence their interpretation of black Vancouver. The political, cultural and social standpoint of the investigator can influence the questions they ask and the ways in which they interpret the information that they find.³⁶ Writing history is a political *act* which shapes how certain groups of people are seen. Given that there have been so many negative and inaccurate representations of black people in the past, the issue of highlighting their invisibility should be approached with sensitivity—as with any group that has been underrepresented.

In the 1990s debate continued over who can speak for the invisible subject. The concept of hybridity is another tool that uses discourse analysis to talk about the ways in which the non-European subject did indeed have agency within hegemonic European representations of the ‘other.’ They have also provided us with a discourse with which to challenge the authority of the historian. According to Homi Bhabha the discursive strategies of colonialism were far from absolute, and their failure to articulate the complex nature of the ‘native’ can be used as an entry point into the investigation of how non-European subjects exerted agency. Within colonial texts there is a contradictory motivation which sought to ‘civilize’ the ‘native’ and at the same time fix them in otherness. It is due to this contradiction in the ‘civilizing

³⁶ John Lutz, *Makuk: Work and Welfare in Aboriginal-Non Aboriginal Relations* (forthcoming UBC Press), 387.

mission' that "the body and the book lose their representational authority."³⁷ Hybridity proposes that there are 'slippages' or gaps, where the voices of the 'native,' or the black, can be heard in Western historical representations. This approach not only challenges the authority of the Western research but also begins to look at 'native' agency in a different way. It succeeds in its desire to complicate notions of an authenticity that are based on fixed and stable subject locations. It posits instead that they are unstable and can only be fixed within specific cultural and historical moments.³⁸ Given that, in many cases, all we have left of the subaltern image is that which can be found in Western texts and other forms of cultural production, some postcolonial theorists have retreated from questions of structure and focused their attention instead on cultural difference and textual representations. Hybridity theory assumes that "something always survives which creates difference..."³⁹ and that this difference can be the basis for the construction of 'marginalized' historical identities and can provide insights into the ways in which they exercised agency.

Hybridity analysis, therefore, often speaks of resistance to dominant representation in terms of 'cultural difference.' Instead of placing the non-European subject within structures of colonial domination, resistance is formulated in the flawed emulation achieved by colonized peoples.

...resistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or exclusion of the 'content' of another culture, as difference once perceived... [but] the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference.⁴⁰

³⁷ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 92.

³⁸ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 49-50.

³⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 86.

⁴⁰ Homi K Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders," in Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (New York and London, 1998), 177.

This form of agency takes place in recognizable forms of cultural difference rather than in overt reactions to socioeconomic marginalization. According to Bhabha, the site of resistance for the colonized person is in their flawed “mimicry” of their colonial oppressor. Their flawed “mimicry” becomes proof of the resilience of ‘native’ culture and leaves room for the notion that the colonized made conscious decisions to adopt the culture of the colonizer for their own personal gain.

There are some insidious implications to theories which focus on cultural difference as a site of resistance to colonial representation. In response to culturally based notions of resistance to colonial representation, Arif Dirlik suggests that allegiance to cultural specificity as a site of resistance is also complicit with the political agenda of neo-liberal capitalist structures that seek to reduce broader structural tensions to the level of the individual.⁴¹ The concept of flawed mimicry is meaningless without a subsequent acknowledgement of unequal power dynamics between the colonizer (an unstable representative of the global capitalist structure) and the colonized (a fluid geographically and culturally specific yet still marginalized subject) within the hegemonic political will of global capitalism.⁴² Within this context of global hegemony, to reduce the negotiating power of the non-European or ‘colonized’ to a discursive and cultural level, is to leave the historian with few tools to discuss political, economic and gender-based resistance to systems of domination.

Dirlik also criticizes certain insiders and non-European scholars, particularly South Asian academics, for taking part in this shift toward cultural difference in post-

⁴¹ Arif Dirlik, *The postcolonial aura : Third World criticism in the age of global capitalism* (Boulder: Westview Press, c1997), 331.

⁴² Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura*, 341.

colonial writing. Some post-colonial theorists have suggested that insiders to particular marginalized communities must begin writing new histories. It has been suggested by many scholars that insiders, due to their cultural and experiential knowledge of the communities which they study, will be free of the biases that corrupted the works of their European predecessors. Regardless of who is writing, however, theories which rely on cultural difference and textual representation can leave colonized people and their struggles lingering in the realm of academic discussion. Dirlik, however, criticizes certain non-European scholars for using their institutionally established positions as ‘insiders’ to act as peddlers of romantic and individualistic notions of non-European subject agency in a context which is still very much dominated by the workings of global capital.⁴³ Understanding the ways in which non-European researchers have created positions of authority within structures of power is crucial to understanding the ways in which postmodern discourses have appropriated and soothed the violent and destructive tendencies or reactionary critiques.

In an essay called “Can the Subaltern Speak” Spivak suggests that the subaltern, or politically, economically and sometimes gender marginalized individual, is trapped in a state of silence.⁴⁴ The notion that the subaltern subject is silent points to the difficulties inherent in research projects which attempt to give voice to the voiceless, or those that lack social and political power to be heard in public spaces. Spivak acknowledges that while it is important to “highlight oppression and to

⁴³ Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura*, 331-48.

⁴⁴ Morton, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, 64.

provide the perspective of oppressed people,” one must understand the limitations of such an endeavour:

[s]he therefore suggests that intellectuals adopt the Gramscian maxim – ‘pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will’ – by combining a philosophical skepticism about recovering any subaltern agency with a political commitment to making visible the position of the marginalized.⁴⁵

For the purpose of this exploration into the possibility of writing about black experience in Vancouver, I would suggest that on an ontological level, the subaltern as an identity construction is trapped in a state of silence. However, though the *subaltern* may be silent, Spivak seems to remain committed the political goal of making visible the position of the *marginalized* through her translations of works by authors such as Mahasweta Devi. Devi is a Bengali author who is well-known for her novels that deal with the plight of “subaltern” communities in India. In this thesis I will take a similar approach to writing about the experiences of black people in Vancouver. I will attempt to write about some of the challenges that black people faced in terms of racism and marginalization while at the same time remaining skeptical about how they expressed there agency and who they actually *were*.

In order to deal with the contradiction that is created by the attempt to write about a people who are ontologically silent yet still speak, I will employ a particular version of Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, perhaps similar to the one that was mentioned by Spivak in the previous quote. Certain interpretations of Gramsci’s notion of hegemony seem to create way to talk about oppressed peoples without creating more fixed, stable and/or voiceless representations of a subaltern people. Stuart Hall’s notion of hegemony provides a theoretical perspective through which to

⁴⁵ Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 234.

examine the successes and limitations of postmodern identity constructs. Hall employs a slightly modified version of Gramsci's notion of hegemony which allows for a fluid and destabilized notion of the historical subject, defined less by superficial and reductionist material or discursive ways of knowing while still categorically positioning identity constructions based on race, sexuality, gender, and class within structures of domination.⁴⁶ Through this perspective the native is not viewed as a passive historical agent completely subjugated to the norms of colonial discourse, nor is he/she an overly self determined subject. This concept of hegemony suggests that power does not shape and construct absolutely fixed identities, but engages them in a process of negotiation in which the terrain upon which they activate is only partly defined by colonial/global capital/majority economic and political norms and structures.⁴⁷ It allows for a subject that not only lives both within structures that define them as black/native/minority while at the same time influencing and living beyond them. In Vancouver, it allows for the possibility of a black population that was historicized into invisibility but also took advantage of the privileges that obscurity provided and took part in the creation of their own absence.

Although I will be keeping in mind these uses of Gramsci's notion of hegemony while writing this history of invisibility I would also like to be clear about what I see as the limitations of any conventional academic representation work. I will suggest that there are still those who dwell beyond our norms of cultural intelligibility and are often missed or misunderstood because there exists no language with which to understand their experience or the impact that their experiences have on the

⁴⁶ Stuart Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 10:2 (Summer 1996): 123-27.

⁴⁷ Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," 123-27.

historian's construction of the subject.⁴⁸ It is in fact partly their refusal to be easily categorized that makes them so problematic to a system intent on examining, knowing, and managing so called 'deviant' subject positions. However, it is precisely in the spaces which these 'deviant' subject positions create that best speak to the ambiguous ways in which power is accumulated and deployed against alternative positions in respect to sexuality, race, gender and class. In these zones that exist beyond our conventional rhetoric to define them, 'deviant' subject positions are present in complete forms that occupy a number of categories and roles simultaneously. They are oppressed and use power in ways that complicate and thwart explanation.

Robert Reid-Pharr discusses the ways in which these spaces necessarily must shift our conceptions of agency, power and identity in his examination of Gary Fisher's book, *Gary Fisher in your Pocket*. He suggests that the "shock" of Fisher's confessions is that they construct power and agency in a subject position that could be seen as victimized and powerless. Reid-Pharr asserts that Fisher exists outside of the Hegelian binary discourses of "master" and "slave."⁴⁹ Reid-Pharr quotes this compelling poem to begin his chapter:

Nigger youre dead with your zipper open and your dick hanging out of
your pants
Youre dead with a booger hanging out your nose and your zipper open
and your dick hanging out
Youre a dead nigger hanging with your dick out and a big booger and
snot hangin out your nose

⁴⁸ Rosemary Hennessey "Queer Theory: A Review of the *differences* Special Issue and Wittig's *The Straight Mind*," *Signs: Journal of Women in Cultural and Society*, 18:4 (1993): 964-73. Hennessey speaks of how structures of intelligibility inhibit the researchers ability to construct the subject beyond the influence of heterosexual norms.

⁴⁹ Gary Fisher, *Gary Fisher in Your Pocket*, in Robert F. Reid-Pharr, *Black Gay Man: Essays* (New York University Press: New York), 135.

Nigger, yous dead with your guts and your dick hanging out your nose
 So, yous dead, nigger, with your guts and your dick cut off and
 hanging out your mouth
 So, yous dead with someone elses dick in your mouth
 So, *yous alive* with someone elses dick in your mouth, nigger.
 (emphasis added by me) ⁵⁰

This poem realizes the degraded status of the black man as object of a white man's racial and sexualized gaze, while at the same time acknowledging that Fisher's character, as a black gay man, is not a powerless victim. The victimized object of the white man's egocentric gaze becomes a fiction which Fisher is able to slip by re-imagining himself as "alive." I have chosen to emphasize "yous alive" because it marks the point at which Fisher seems to proclaim agency. Even at the most 'perverse' and 'defiled' level of the black man's subject construction, Fisher still has the power to imagine himself as a manifestation of his own will, beyond the master/slave narrative. Though the white man's gaze at this particular point in history has power to influence heavily the spaces in which the 'subaltern' maneuvers, and can determine their socio-economic status, the 'subaltern' has always spoken and will continue to speak. Perhaps the question should be: how do we listen respectfully?

There is no end point to the investigation into that diversity of subject constructions such as the 'subaltern' or the 'black.' The subaltern is as diverse as the minds of academics who have will to conceive them. Rey Chow suggests that the European researcher was in many ways involved in a process of constructing the non-European as a reflection of his own insecurities:

What I am suggesting is a mode of understanding the native in which the native's existence – that is, an existence before becoming "native" – precedes the arrival of the colonizer. Contrary to the model of Western hegemony in which the colonizer is seen as a primary, active

⁵⁰ Fisher, *Gary Fisher in Your Pocket*, 135.

“gaze” subjugating the native as passive “object,” I want to argue that it is actually the colonizer who feels looked at by the native’s gaze. This gaze, which is neither a threat nor a retaliation, makes the colonizer “conscious” of himself, leading to his need to turn this gaze around and look at himself, henceforth “reflected” in the native-object. It is the self-reflection of the colonizer that produces the colonized as subject (potent gaze, source of meaning and action) and the native as his image, with all the pejorative meaning of “lack” attached to the word “image...” Western man henceforth became “self-conscious,” that is, uneasy and uncomfortable, in his “own” environment.⁵¹

Although desire certainly always has more than one motive force, Chow effectively argues at least one potential motive behind the colonizing man’s need to represent the ‘other’. According to Chow, the desire for knowledge over the colonized arose at least partly from the need for authority in the administration of colonies. The white man most surely did not develop his ability to reflect on his own subject position solely through encounters with the ‘other.’ His interaction with the ‘native,’ however, certainly had much to do with the construction of ‘European’ and white identity during the colonial and postcolonial periods.

Although this thesis is a history of invisibility I am still unavoidably representing the black people of Vancouver. In this chapter I have pointed toward some of the problems inherent in the process of taking a position of authority over the representation of marginalized communities. Said’s critique applies not only to white scholars writing about the “Orient” but also to any scholar seeking to represent a group of people. Given this responsibility, I have chosen to be influenced by Stuart Hall’s approach because it allows for the construction of black identities that are fluid and in constant dialogue with their surroundings. Moreover, I have suggested that

⁵¹ Rey Chow, “Where have all the Native Gone?” in Angelika Bammer *“Natives,” Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, c1994), 144-45.

there are black identities that are beyond my realm of cultural intelligibility, people that will remain silent until examined by a researcher with different sensitivities, perhaps writing from a different political context and with different goals and concerns. An approach that allows for the fluidity of identity construction is important to the examination of invisibility because it allows for black Vancouver to engage in a dialogue with the structures that to a certain extent restricted their attempts to define themselves within the city. This chapter is meant to create room for imaging a group of black people who may have been involved in the construction of their own invisibility as well as a strategy to integrate and make use of what privilege became available to them. The next chapter will use the experiences of black people in Vancouver to show that it is possible to be present within a city and yet not represented in historical writing.

Chapter 3 – A Hogan’s Alley Black Community?

To write a history of absence it is necessary first to establish a presence. Blacks cannot have been vanished from the history of Vancouver unless they were indeed a part of the social fabric. This chapter establishes the presence of blacks in Vancouver from 1910 to the 1950s in the Strathcona neighborhood concentrated in and around a small entertainment district called Hogan’s Alley. Though there has been some dispute over whether or not Hogan’s Alley was the actual center of a black community, there is compelling evidence to place black people in this area. Hogan’s Alley made an appropriate symbolic representation of black presence in Vancouver due to the fact that it existed behind Main Street, very present, but just out of sight of mainstream white Vancouver. Hogan’s Alley was located behind the Main Street, and in between Prior Street and Union Street. Hogan’s Alley was also known more formally as Park Lane. Many of the people that refer to the Hogan’s Alley community suggest that it spanned from Union Avenue to Keefer Avenue and from about Main Street to Campbell Street.

This chapter will deal with why black people chose to live in Strathcona and why this area become known as a ‘black area’ of town. Hogan’s Alley is remembered in different ways by different people. The point that I would like to stress in this chapter is that it is remembered by former residents, if not the larger historical community, and the extent to which its existence was determined by the visibility/invisibility paradox in which black Vancouverites became embedded.

Nora Hendrix was one of the few African Americans who was able to relocate to Vancouver. Coming with her husband from Seattle in 1911, she lived in Hogan's Alley for a number of years. She recalled many black people living in the Strathcona area around Hogan's Alley and that many of them were from other provinces and cities within Canada, and not from the United States.

Well, they scattered all around. Around down in Prior and Union and around down in that way. There was a quite few... well, right on Georgia Street, where I lived, and there was some up on Campbell Avenue, before they tore down them houses, was... I don't know how many families... A lot of them came from Alberta. Yeah, there's a lot of those folks.⁵²

Black settlers to Vancouver seemed to come from various places in the Prairies and from Vancouver Island.⁵³ One might expect to find more black people in Hogan's Alley from America; the small numbers of African Americans in British Columbia make sense, however, given that even in the peak of immigration from the United States in the years from 1901 to 1911 fewer than 1500 black people immigrated from the United States to Canada.⁵⁴ In fact, many of the people who migrated to Vancouver in the beginning of the 1900s were probably born in Canada. According to the 1901 and 1911 *Census of Canada* statistics, in these years there was also very little immigration of black people to Vancouver. The overall population of black people enumerated in the province actually dropped from 532 in 1901 to 473 in 1911

⁵² BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2717 (Transcripts), Nora Hendrix, 14 April 1977.

⁵³ Kilian, *Go Do Some Great Thing*, 158

⁵⁴ Francis R. Douglas, Richard Jones, Donald B. Smith, *Destinies: Canadian history since Confederation*, (Toronto : Harcourt Brace Canada, c1996), 133.

while in Vancouver their numbers increased slightly from 91 in 1901 to 166 in 1911.⁵⁵

Black immigration into Canada was severely limited by immigration policies. "In this racially conscious age, American blacks were not welcome in Canada."⁵⁶ Black and Asian people were considered the least suitable immigrants.⁵⁷ Census statistics, however, seem to show that black people were the least desirable of all. Black people were the only group in Canada to decline in numbers from 21,946 in 1871 to 19,456 by 1931. By comparison, the Chinese and Japanese populations were enumerated at 4383 and 0 in 1881 and their numbers had increased by 1931 to 46 519 and 23 342 respectively.⁵⁸

As a result, by 1931 census data suggest that 79.6% of the 19 456 black people living in Canada in 1931 were born in the country, with only 11.4% born in the United States and less than 9% born elsewhere.⁵⁹ Despite the falling number of black people in Canada in general, the population of "Negro" people enumerated rose in Vancouver from 166 in 1911 to 320 in 1931 suggesting a migration from other parts in Canada.⁶⁰ It seems likely that the population grew significantly during the Second World War due to national labour shortages which made mobility easier.

Emmitt Holmes arrived in Vancouver in the 1940s and recalled that many of these black newcomers settled in the Hogan's Alley area.

⁵⁵ The *Census of Canada*, 1901, vol. I, Table XI; The *Census of Canada*, 1911, vol. II Table VII. Given the marginal and transient nature of some of the blacks it is likely that they were under-enumerated in some degree.

⁵⁶ Douglas and Jones and Smith, *Destinies*, 133.

⁵⁷ Douglas and Jones and Smith, *Destinies*, 140.

⁵⁸ The *Census of Canada* 1931, vol. I Table II, Racial Groups Arranged to Eliminate Incomparability, Canada, 1871, 1881, 1901 – 1931, 236.

⁵⁹ The *Census of Canada*, 1931, vol. I Table II, Racial Groups Arranged to Eliminate Incomparability, Canada, 1871, 1881, 1901 – 1931, 236. The *Census of Canada*, 1931, vol. I, Table III.

⁶⁰ The *Census of Canada*, 1901, vol. I, Table XI; The *Census of Canada*, 1931, vol. II, Table 32.

No, I guess at that time that most of the people in the black community lived between Main St. and Clark Drive and between I guess about from where the Station is back to the Waterfront, I guess that was the area if you wanted to see black folks, otherwise you could be in Vancouver for a long time and not find them because you didn't know where to look, and at that time there wasn't that many anyway.⁶¹

Dorothy Nealy traveled to Vancouver from Winnipeg in 1938 and stayed for one month. During that visit she spent time in Hogan's Alley. She liked Vancouver so much that she moved there in 1944 and lived there until the time that she was interviewed in 1977. She remembered black people living in the Hogan's Alley area in 1938 and 1944.

Mrs. Nealy: It was all black people here, then. And they had all... most of them had come from the Prairies, too, you know... Whole apartment blocks that were all full of blacks. In '44 it was a black ghetto... [The East Indian] district was 7th, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th. That was their section... This [Hogan's Alley area] was the black section, Pender Street was the Chinese section, Powell Street was the Japanese section. And the only races that really intermingle, like, in one section, that I know of, was us and the Italians... [Black people lived] in the 600 block, Prior 638, I think it was four stories high, now that was all black people in there. And then there was another apartment block, Prior 500, 546, that was all black there. There was an apartment block, too, London Drugs was underneath it, Union and Main. And that was four stories high. That was full of blacks. And across the street, Three Star Rooms, on Union and Main,⁶² that was all full of blacks. And all up and down this street, here. Well there must have been at least 400 people lived down here.

Q: Huh, that's amazing, cause you have no sense of that nowadays.

Mrs. Nealy: No, that's what I am saying... There's only one, two, three, four... live black people left in the neighborhood.⁶³

Commemorative activities, such as "Hogan's Alley Revisited: Exhibit

Commemorating Hogan's Alley," organized by the Hogan's Alley Memorial

⁶¹ Emmitt Holmes, personal interview, 21 January 2003.

⁶² BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977.

⁶³ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977. The apartment block also known as Eagle Block on Keefer Street, and the Afton next door to the Empress Hotel on Hastings. Three Star Rooms on 207 Union Street, corner of Main, before the mid-40s used to be known as the Luck Man Rooms.

Committee in 2003, suggest not only that people of African descent lived in Hogan's Alley, but that this entertainment district in Strathcona was the focal point of a "black community."

Despite these present day attempts to claim this geographical space as a place of black cohesion and sense of community, there are those within the group of people of African descent that lived and still currently live in Vancouver who would not agree with naming Hogan's Alley the center of a black community.⁶⁴ Doris Lawson moved to Vancouver in 1941 and did not recall Hogan's Alley as the center of a black community.

Mrs. Lawson: Oh well, it was nice, you know. A lot of people lived around there. Not very many Chinese. It was mostly on Prior Street Italians and, you know, all mixed nationalities. Quite a few black people, you know. But it was kind of all mixed nationalities. Pender Street, you know, it was Chinese. But Prior Street was mostly all Italians, and...

Ms. Were there quite a few black families there?

Mrs. Lawson: Where?

Ms. Out along Prior Street or...?

Mrs. Lawson: No, none.

Q. Where were they?

Mrs. Lawson: I don't know. All over. Because... well, there was quite a few of us lived in the Prior Apartments, you know. About 8 or 9 families. But at that time, black people lived all over. I know, when I first came to Vancouver, I didn't know very many people. Because you see, I was from Saskatchewan, you know, so I didn't know very many people. Just got to know them working for Mrs. Pryor, you see.⁶⁵

Although in this quote Mrs. Lawson seems unclear about whether or not black people had lived in the Hogan's Alley area, in the preceding quote, in a different interview with Rosa Pryor she is clear about the fact that there were a number of black people living in the area.

⁶⁴ "Kilian is Mistaken." *Vancouver Sun*, April 21, 1978.

⁶⁵ BCA, *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage*, Tape 2676 (Transcripts), Doris Lawson, 7 May 1977.

Mrs. Pryor: Well they mostly lived around in that area.

Mrs. Lawson: Well, really was quite a few too, you know, Quite a few families.

Mrs. Pryor: Um-hmm.

Mrs. Lawson: But they all lived right around Union, Georgia, and Prior, Gore. Right around there.⁶⁶

There is at least one person within the interviews that were conducted for this oral research project that adamantly refused the notion of Hogan's Alley as a center of black experience or community. Unfortunately, I am unable to quote him directly because he is opposed to the tone of our research proposal and refuses to sign an informed consent form. The inclusion of his refusal to take part in this research project is important because it highlights some of the difficulties inherent in oral history projects and also accentuates the at times contentious nature of naming projects.

His decision to decline having his interview included in this thesis may be partly due to the ways in which Hogan's Alley was seen by the larger Vancouver community. Hogan's Alley had a reputation for being a rough area of town or a slum, where Vancouverites of all nationalities could indulge in their less respectable proclivities—mainly gambling, bootlegging and prostitution. Both Adeline Lane and Richard Collins were raised near to Hogan's Alley but neither one of them spent any time there. Mrs. Lane remembered that Hogan's Alley had a bad reputation and she was not permitted by her father to go there.

I only just heard about it. I was never, my dad, he helped a man in it, you know, like it was a gambling place and my dad looked after books. And he'd come home with stories about Hogan's Alley, but I

⁶⁶ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2675 (Transcripts), Rosa Pryor, 15 April 1977.

never knew, as I was growing up he would never allow us kids down there. It was always just hearsay, such and such a thing happened in Hogan's Alley.⁶⁷

Richard Collins also spent part of his childhood in the Hogan's Alley area and recalled that Hogan's Alley had a bad reputation in Vancouver.

Mr. Collins: As we understood it, it was a bad area. Stay away from it, that's what I understood, they named the alley after somebody named Hogan, and apparently there was always pimps, prostitutes, ne'er-do-wells in this alley they called Hogan's Alley, that used to hang around all the time. That's all I ever knew about, you know, I was never down there until I grew up and drove by there or something. But it was suppose to be a bad area, and that's all we ever heard was bad things about it.

Q: Was it perceived as black area?

Mr. Collins: Yes, straight black, I don't know if this person Hogan was black, I can only assume that he was. But there was knifing and shooting and everything else going on down there. Boozing, drunks, and all the underworld stuff that you could think of doing, that is where it was done.⁶⁸

Undoubtedly, not all are pleased with this association between a slum and a black community. In Vancouver's public mind in the 1940s Hogan's Alley came to stand "for three things – squalor, immorality and crime."⁶⁹ Hogan's Alley had been considered a bad area of town by both black and white people who did not live there, and it had also, perhaps inaccurately, come to be associated with blackness. Mr. Collins assumed that Hogan's Alley was named after a black man named Hogan, and hence the association developed. In an excerpt from a letter written in 1958 by His Worship Gordon W. Scott (Deputy Police Magistrate) to Major J.S. Matthews (City Archivist), Scott suggests that Hogan may have been an Irishman who was reported

⁶⁷ Leonard and Adeline Lane, personal interviews, 15 January 2003.

⁶⁸ Richard "Dick" Collins, personal interview, 28 November 2002.

⁶⁹ Vancouver City Archives, Major Matthews File, Periodicals, "Mayor Makes Defense, Hogan's Alley Fate at Stake: Civic Body Inspects Scene of Long Criminal History," c 1940.

to be “the shining light of the social side of the Alley.”⁷⁰ Given that there were so many Italian people also present in the area, it is interesting that this neighborhood has come to be seen by some as a black area.

To some outsiders of the black people who lived in Hogan’s Alley, and perhaps some that did not live there and only frequented some of the local establishments, it was a place where only the “ne’er do wells” of the black community spent time. Austin Phillips suggested that it was only a certain kind of black person that frequented Hogan’s Alley.

Well, yes there was quite a few lived [in Vancouver] but they was all scattered all over town, same as it is now, but they all congregated there, that is, all the rowdier crowd [of black Vancouverites.] The real decent people, however, they didn’t go down there...⁷¹

At this point it is difficult to ascertain with certainty what Mr. Phillips had meant by “real decent people,” but the association between Hogan’s Alley and criminal activity is clear. In fact, even in interviews with black people who had fond memories of living in Hogan’s Alley I detected a somewhat defensive tone about their experiences there—a defensive tone to the city’s characterization of Hogan’s Alley as a dangerous place plagued by poverty and criminal activities, and by implication an unfit place to raise children.

Some of the interviews with black people who lived in Hogan’s Alley told a very different story about this stigmatized area. Doris Lawson worked at Rosa Pryor’s Chicken Inn, a black owned restaurant in the heart of Hogan’s Alley, and never experienced any of its so called dangerous elements.

⁷⁰ Vancouver City Archives, Major Matthews File, Topical and Categorical, AM 0054.013.02158.

⁷¹ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver’s East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2681 (Transcripts), Austin Phillips, 23 June 1977.

I was living in Hogan's Alley. And I'd walk with my purse at night, coming home, or early in the morning, 5 o'clock, coming home from work, and I had my money in my purse there, and there was nobody who'd run by you and snatch your purse, or nothing, like you'd be scared. And in my time, before the war, you didn't read about no rapes or nothing like it is now, and things like that, and you'd be scared to let the kids go out and play. No, it was quieter, and much better than now. And I would never, I never knew nothing about no dope until I hear it just lately.⁷²

In the same interview, that was conducted with both Mrs. Lawson and Mrs.

Pryor, Mrs. Pryor spoke about her experiences running the Chicken Inn. The

Chicken Inn hosted a varied clientele, from professional people who had come from the Stratford Hotel to people who had been drinking heavily and could at times get rowdy.

And I never did have a cash register, and I had my money sitting on a little table... And when I'd jump up and run in there and start a fight and leave my coffee can and everything sitting there, sometimes it had fifty, sixty, seventy dollars. You know, what I'd made for the night... No, I never had nobody rob me.⁷³

Hogan's Alley was not an easy place to run a business. Much of the clientele had been drinking and at times they would get out of hand. Mrs. Pryor was a woman of her time and place, equipped to handle her particular clientele.

Mrs. Pryor: Yes well there was lots of people who was going to fight me (laugh) but I... I'd fight 'em back. I never went for no police for the whole time I was there. I never went – you know, do you remember me going to any police?

Mrs. Lawson: Well you know how a night club is... And, them days, you'd come in and bring your own whiskey, and some time in the garbage would be maybe 50 or 75 empty whiskey bottles would be thrown out... Jee-suz, didn't Mr. Pryor have a stick? Didn't he have a stick.

⁷² BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2675 (Transcripts), Rosa Pryor, 15 April 1977.

⁷³ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2675 (Transcripts), Rosa Pryor, 15 April 1977.

Mrs. Pryor: Yes, I'd had a stick!

Q: You always had a stick too, eh?

Mrs. Pryor: yeah, always. Right here under my apron there. By God, I'd draw that out, they'd leave, (laughing) You had to have something... I don't like calling the police... I never lost a fight!⁷⁴

It is safe to assume that much of the late night clientele was inebriated, but this did not necessarily make the area an unsafe place to spend time. Leona

Risby commented that there was:

...the odd drunk, a few winos, but it wasn't rough, I didn't think. Nobody got robbed, or, not near like they are now. And... you could go to work safe – well I walked to work and back, I lived on Prior Street, in the 300 block Prior.⁷⁵

Although outsiders to the Hogan's Alley community may have considered it a dangerous place to live, not all of its residents had similar opinions.

Dorothy Nealy, who had traveled to Vancouver in 1938 and then came back to live in 1944, had positive memories of her experiences in Hogan's Alley.

When I came here in '38, there was no violence till these kids came down to start this riot, in '38. But outside of that, I mean, I staggered there drunk dozens of time, you know. Go in a bootlegging joint, and they had a piano going, and somebody singing or somebody playing the guitar. You just sat down and ordered a drink. It was 25 cents a drink. You want some fried chicken, or a hot tamale, bowl of chili, you ate. You danced. And you walked from one place to the other, from bootlegging joint to the other all up and down Hogan's Alley... There was houses, the alley was just like a street. There was houses on both sides of the alley. And there was Italians down there, and there was Ukrainians and there was East Indians and there was Negroes down there. So whoever you wanted to patronize, you want to go in a Negro place you went to the Negro place and bought liquor. You want

⁷⁴ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2675 (Transcripts), Rosa Pryor, 15 April 1977.

⁷⁵ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2682 (Transcripts), Leona Risby, May, 1977.

to go and sit with the Italians, you went to the Italians and drank wine... we all mixed together, everybody got a long... So it was mostly Italian and black people down here. So when I came here, in 1938, oh, I thought I was in, something like Hollywood, here, because every door was sitting wide open and you could walk right in, you know. There was a no such thing as, it was just like walking in the beer parlour today. And, but these were bootlegging places. And they all had a piano player. Some of them had three or four-piece band. And they all sold something to eat. And you could go from Main and Union down to Campbell Avenue, or you could go down Prior Street, Keefer Street, Pender Street, Gore Avenue. Once in awhile we went across town. But very rarely cause everything was here... And I was just fascinated. The first place I went to, I heard all the music and I just stood there, and the coloured people came down, and they said "Hi, how are you?" I said, "I'm fine." "What's your name? Where'd you come from?" So I told 'em my name, and I said, "From Winnipeg." "Well, come on in and have a drink." I said "Okay" and walked in.⁷⁶

Nealy offers an interesting and informative look into Hogan's Alley from the perspective of someone who lived there and also frequented some of the drinking establishments that it was known for. A thorough reading of this oral historical research seems to suggest that opinions of Hogan's Alley were also heavily influenced by particular moral and value systems. Those who were opposed to drinking, gambling and prostitution would have obvious problems with Hogan's Alley at a moral level.

There were also many houses of prostitution in and around Hogan's Alley. Not all of the residents of the Strathcona area had moral or political objections to the presence of prostitution. In fact, Mrs. Hendrix suggested that the city's attempts to "clean up" Hogan's Alley only made the area less safe.

I remember Mayor Taylor, and everybody liked Mayor Taylor, cause he was one of those... treat... kind of plain man, he looked like he was for everybody. And he had the town fixed so that the sporting

⁷⁶ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977.

people live in one part of the town and the other class of people live in another. He had them all separated. And they had a red light district, you see? That was what a lot of people liked about Taylor, having this red light district, because it did help to keep the people, you know, the what-you-me-call women, was all in this category. And when the boats and things come in, when the fellows, sailors and things want to go somewhere for a good time, well they knew where to go. See, they'd go to this street in this neighborhood, cause it was all set for them. And these women had these houses and they had these girls in there and they had doctors their looked after them and all that, you see. All that was when Taylor was in... As I say, the people, they didn't bother you on the streets like they do now. Oh no. You could walk all around and didn't nobody bother you. Men wasn't grabbing women and all that stuff. Cause they, a man, well knew where to go, down... the street where... he knew where to go, you see. He didn't have to bother you or any other lady walking up and down the street and grabbing you coming out of the woods or something and grabbing all that stuff. No. It was a good thing to have that. And everybody knew where the street was. Sure.⁷⁷

Some of the residents in the Hogan's Alley may have even thought that the houses of prostitution were a good idea. Prostitution was considered something that was inevitable, and the prostitution houses took women off the streets and provided a semi-regulated space where these activities could take place.

Q: How did other people in the community regard prostitutes?

Mrs. Nealy: Well they never thought nothing about it. I was none of their business. It didn't interfere with them. They just went on. School kids went to school, and... so on. They never thought nothing about it. It was not big thing. Cause I mean jobs were scarce, you know. And everybody was having a hard time... They used to say "McGeer has put the lid on Vancouver, and he's sitting on the lid." So, because before that, you know, these people ran these places like they had a license, but they didn't, you know. But, like all the sporting houses, the, they had to pay the police, because if any strange woman was walking hustling or in their block, in front of their houses, they phoned the police and had them arrested. Because they had like, so many houses on Union Street, all up and down Gore Avenue were houses of prostitution. And then they had houses down Pender Street. And they had so many houses of bootleggers and houses of prostituting, on all

⁷⁷ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2717 (Transcripts), Nora Hendrix, 14 April 1977. Gerry McGeer: mayor terms 1953-36 and 1947 and Louis D Taylor mayor: 1910-11, 15, 1925-26, 1927-28, 1931-34

these streets...It ran from Main Street to about Heatly. But the most of the houses were up or, between Gore and Main.

Q: Did the houses specialize at all? Like, did one house have certain kind of women?

Mrs. Nealy: No, no, they had all kinds of women. Some of them had Chinese, Japanese, white, coloured, all nationalities. None of them specialized. Because the girls were moving from place to place.

Q: They could travel all over North America to different houses of prostitution.

Mrs. Nealy: All the girls, all the landladies knew each other. You know.

Clear

across Canada, and down through the States. And the girls, they had to go to the doctor, and they'd get their blood test and smear, to see if they had syphilis or gonorrhea. So it was a good thing, really, you know. Especially a seaport town... I think its just terrible now, you know. Because I mean, well, I never heard of so much child molesting and rape, then. Things like I hear now, you know. They'll rape you if you're 90 years old now, you know? They just don't care. But I think if they had a district, had a district for that – because you're not going to stamp out sexual intercourse. That's stupid. And here are these people, wants to stamp out prostitution. It, "prostitution" is just a word for, up until the last few years, for against women. You know? But the sex act is going to go on and on and on, as long as man is on earth.⁷⁸

Prostitution most likely contributed to the construction of Hogan's Alley as a slum area. It would seem that the Hogan's Alley community came to terms with the presence of prostitution in their neighborhood in their own ways. However, it is quite possible that some black residents did not want to be associated with the activities that were taking place in Hogan's Alley and therefore sought to move out when the means became available. There is little doubt that certain members of the community did not want to be associated with Hogan's Alley.

Part of the characterization of Hogan's Alley as a black neighborhood may have come from the small numbers of black owned and frequented businesses in the

⁷⁸ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977.

area. Although these establishments were often frequented by black people, people of all nationalities and from places all over the city came to them. Mrs. Lawson recalled some of the businesses that were owned and operated by black women in the area.

Oh, Mrs. Mitchell, she had her place there. She ran a porter's headquarters for CNR. They slept there, you know. And then, Miss Alexander, later on, she had a Chicken Inn like Mrs. Pryor's and then it was Sarah come along, then Vie.⁷⁹

It was reported that at least one of the bootlegging houses was owned by a black man. The close proximity of the Porter's Quarter likely gave these local establishments a lot of out-of-town business.

I never, I have been in 'em, but I never laid down a penny, they didn't like you to hang around messing with the playin'... played poker and black jack, yeah but mostly poker... it would be people from the neighborhood and porters that came in because we had porters running in from Seattle to Vancouver and other place across Canada so when they came in they got a few tips on their trip so they come in here and man they were big shots, so sit down in here and play poker...⁸⁰

Single black men with pocket money continually flowed through the alley.

And the influx of porters, most of whom did not stay and live in Vancouver, probably artificially inflated the numbers of black people on the street.

One of the better known and longest run restaurants was Rosa Pryor's Chicken Inn, which opened in the 1919. The Chicken Inn was the first restaurant in Vancouver to serve southern fried chicken.

I know, I come like, I come here in 1917, in that district until 1919, is when I – 19... about the 18th of July that year I opened up the Chicken Inn. And I was there 42 years. In business

⁷⁹ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2675 (Transcripts), Rosa Pryor, 15 April 1977.

⁸⁰ Emmitt Holmes, personal interview, 21 January 2003.

there. I stayed in there for 38 years when Harrison died, my first husband, then I stayed there four years after he died.⁸¹

The Chicken Inn was run out of a house that was converted into a restaurant. For a long time, there were stairs leading right from the seating area where customers ate, directly into Mrs. Pryor's suite. As she was able to save more money and expand her business she created a separate entrance to her own apartment upstairs. There were 5 or 6 tables in the Chicken Inn with a jukebox and piano to provide entertainment for the patrons.⁸² Mrs. Lawson and Mrs. Pryor estimated that they had had up to 100 people in the Chicken Inn at once. Although they did not serve alcohol on the premises, people would bring their own, and would also gather to eat and dance after spending time in the bootlegging establishments.

Though it seems clear that black people lived in the Hogan's Alley area from about 1910 to sometime in the late 1940s or the beginning of the 1950s, there is some dispute over when they started to move into the greater Vancouver area. By the time Richard Collins was growing up in Strathcona in the late 1940s and 1950s he maintained that black residents were not visible on the streets.⁸³ Mr. Collins himself commented that:

I didn't know of no black community until I got older and went to the [African Methodist Episcopal] church... I don't know of any other blacks, there might have been a few that were scattered but no center or anything where you could obviously see black people.⁸⁴

⁸¹ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2675 (Transcripts), Rosa Pryor, 15 April 1977.

⁸² Mrs. Lawson and Mrs. Pryor could not come to an agreement on how many tables they had had in the Chicken Inn. They also argued a little over when they had gotten a jukebox and then later which musicians had come to play the piano that they eventually purchased.

⁸³ Richard "Dick" Collins, personal interview, 28 November 2002.

⁸⁴ Richard "Dick" Collins, personal interview, 28 November 2002.

This seems to contradict Mrs. Nealy's assertion that Hogan's Alley was a black ghetto in the 1940s. Although there may not have been a noticeable presence of black people in Strathcona this does not indicate their absence necessarily. Leonard Lane suggests that when he arrived in Vancouver in the 1930s black people were not very visible, but they were still there. In the 1930s, many black people that were present in Strathcona were older, and friends of his parents and these people still attended the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church. Perhaps there were black people present in larger numbers than we might suspect, if one knew where to look for them.⁸⁵

There is no consensus on exactly how many black people were living in Strathcona area in the 1950s. In 1944 an article appeared in *The Vancouver Province*, the Reverend Theo R Jones claimed that there were 500-700 black people living in Vancouver.⁸⁶ A "Community Roster" compiled by members of the AME church from the 1956 suggests that there were at least 400 black people living in the Strathcona area that were still members of the AME Church.⁸⁷ Ross Lamberston has suggested that there were as many as 700 black people living in Strathcona at the beginning of the 1950s. He seemed to based his figures on an article written by Bruce Ramsey for the *Vancouver Sun*.⁸⁸ The 1941 *Census of Canada* enumerated the "Negro" population of Vancouver to be: 187 males and 171 females for a total of 358 people.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Emmitt Holmes, personal interview, 21 January 2003.

⁸⁶ "Opposition Needed for Unity -- Life Too Easy Here, Says Negro Pastor" *Vancouver Daily Province*, 17 Jan 1944.

⁸⁷ African Methodist Church records, "Community Roster," 1956.

⁸⁸ "Negroes Live Next Door," *Vancouver Sun*, July 19 1952.

⁸⁹ The *Census of Canada*, 1941, vol.2, Table 33

Although there maybe have been some under-enumeration, it was likely to be under 10% and therefore there were probably at least 400 people of African descent living in the Vancouver area, with many of them living in the Strathcona area.

It is difficult to estimate whether or not the numbers of black people living in Vancouver and Strathcona increased throughout the 1940s. Certainly, there were not many black people immigrating into Canada from the United States or other parts of the world due to tight immigration regulations which were unfavorable to people of African descent. Obtaining an accurate count of how many black people were living in Vancouver in the 1950s is also exacerbated by the fact that the “Negro” category does not appear the 1951 and 1961 Census. The declining official interest in the category “Negro”, or the increasing habit of lumping black people into the “other” category, has helped to contribute to the lack of visibility of Canadians of African descent in official sources.

Based on the interviews that I conducted and the *Opening Doors* oral historical accounts, it seems certain that by the end of the 1950s black people had moved from Strathcona and scattered into the greater Vancouver area. When families chose to move outside of the lower socio-economic area of Strathcona and into more middle class neighborhoods, only a few of them still visited Hogan’s Alley. However, people still kept in touch. Mrs. Nealy heard regularly from her friends and also attended picnics that were organized once a year, until the 1970s at least. When

the interviewers asked her if black people still came back to the Hogan's Alley area she replied:

Oh very rarely. The only time I see a bunch of black people is at a funeral or a picnic, or a dance. Once in awhile, I'll run into them in the Stratford beer parlour. But they don't even bother coming down here like they used to. Before, they used to come every weekend, no matter what part of the city they lived in. But then the clientele has changed so much in the Stratford, they don't bother about coming down here at all. They just drink in their neighborhood, now. Cause they live in Burnaby, and out there on Boundary Road, and different places, you know, and they don't bother about coming down. We usually contact everybody by phone now. My phone rings all day, or I'm phoning somebody. I just got four or five phone calls this morning. And talked, and kept up with the news and what's going on in Victoria, and who's sick and who's in town and who's leaving town and you know. People are going on trips and different things, to the Holy Land and wherever.⁹⁰

Perhaps, as Mrs. Nealy suggested, black people did not live in Hogan's Alley as a matter of choice and wanted something different for their children.⁹¹ It is likely that Hogan's Alley had a higher concentration than any other area in the city, but this was due to discriminatory practices than an exertion of will on the part of black people in the Hogan's Alley area. In the next section I will explore how the informal and formal racism of the city limited the types of employment and accommodation that was available to black people.

According to my interviews, most black people living in the Strathcona area aspired to move to more "middle class" neighborhoods as soon as the means became available. Although some, such as Mrs. Nealy, may have chosen to live in Strathcona for the sense of community, it is

⁹⁰ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977.

⁹¹ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977.

difficult at this point to ascertain how many people shared her sense of a black community in Hogan's Alley. Oral historical accounts seem to suggest that the need to rent housing was a barrier to finding accommodation outside of the Strathcona area. Once black people in Vancouver were able to find better employment, they were able to buy houses which gave them more freedom to live in the suburban areas of greater Vancouver. Mrs. Nealy suggested that,

[Black folk] they had never realized that they could move out of this area, because... if they went some place to rent a house, they wouldn't refuse them and say that "we don't want you here, because your black." They'd just mention some exorbitant price for the rent, you see. And then... they knew they couldn't handle it, first cause the first thing they'd ask them "Where do you work?" Well, they worked on the railroad, you know, and they just... earned a certain amount of money. And then they had 4 or 5 kids to support, so they couldn't pay rent like they can now.

Now... they... got in good jobs, you know. And... soon as they got good jobs and were able to save some money, then they'd start buying homes. When they realized they could get other jobs, then they quit the railroad, some of them went longshoring, and some of the started driving trucks. There must have been at least 400 people lived down here. And now there's only a handful of black people left in the neighborhood. Well, they, then they moved to North Vancouver, Burnaby, and Richmond – New Westminster. So then... they're all gone. There's only about... well there's a couple in Mclean Park. And then there's... one lady – senior citizen – then there's myself... live here, and then there's a coloured fellow that lives upstairs. And that's about all that's left here, of the black people. Everybody's gone. That was after hundreds and hundreds of families.⁹²

This quote is important because it draws connections between informal discrimination in Vancouver and how it contributed to the concentration of black people in Strathcona neighborhood.

Another factor that contributed to the concentration of black people in the Strathcona area was the need to rent housing. Finding a home to rent in

⁹² BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977.

Vancouver could be difficult because so many landlords were unwilling to rent to black people. These difficulties with accommodation prompted local human rights activists Kanute Buttedahl and Emmitt Holmes to conduct some informal research of their own to inquire into the renting practices of the city in the late 1950s. Mr. Holmes was the only black member of local 217 of Iron Workers Association, and he worked with them from 1944-64. He also became one of the key founding members of the British Columbia Association for the Advancement of Colored People (BCAACP.) Mr. Buttedahl served as executive secretary of the Vancouver Civic Unity Council and was also another founding members of the BCAACP. Mr. Holmes describes how they organized their research:

When we were making a case for the fair housing, we used to take the newspaper and take all the clippings out of it for suites for rent. And he and I would, Kanute and I would divide them. And we would sometimes, him and his wife would go, and Ruth and I would go, and then they would follow us to the same house and see if the people would rent to them, and then Kanute and I would document all this. And then other times, times we would switch wives to see... [We thought] well, let's try something a little different, "ok so Ruth you go with Kanute and Irene you come with me, we got some good chuckles out of that, watching people go huh. Irene would probably say, well, I called you on the phone, and I could just see 'em sayin' to each other, you know, "but she didn't say that she had a black husband!"... but we always phoned you know, ahead of time, to see if the place was available, then we got there and they saw who we were, all of sudden the place wasn't for rent anymore, it had already been taken, and yet if you phoned back again you would find that the place wasn't taken at all...⁹³

Although Mr. Holmes could not remember the exact figures, he remembered that very few landlords were willing to rent to black and mixed race couples. Unfortunately

⁹³ Emmitt Holmes, personal interview, 21 January 2003.

the files that recorded these experiments, like many documents that would be so useful in our excavation of events, are still lost in a basement somewhere, or thrown out by those who underestimated the importance of that history.

Discrimination in Vancouver did not usually take the form of burning crosses or any of the classic motifs that one would find in African American history. Vancouverites had their own ways of expressing their disapproval of newly arriving black residents to neighborhoods that were predominantly white. They also had a particular way of accepting them after time had passed. Adeline Lane told the story of a time when her family had just moved into a neighborhood in the East End of Vancouver:

These white kids stormed into the house, and started pulling things and looking through this that and the other. And I was a feisty little thing, I didn't bite my tongue at anything no matter how big they were, and I just asked this one girl what she were doing. She said well, they weren't too happy about having us in the neighborhood...⁹⁴

People who were bold enough to enter a black family's home uninvited were rare.

However, Mrs. Lane's parents always reminded her and her brothers that racism was part of life in Vancouver and that they should never forget that they were black. They were encouraged to remember that being black would carry unique challenges with regard to racialized exclusion. She recalled that any time her family moved into a new neighborhood, they were usually confronted with prejudice:

We all got called names, which was something that always happened. We managed to get past it. We would just tell the kids to shut up or something like that, but quite often other kids would stick up for us: it always seemed to be that after a while we all got to be friends. I don't know, it never seemed to last for very long. It could have been because we were the only ones in the neighborhood; every neighborhood we were in, we were the only black family. And in

⁹⁴ Leonard and Adeline Lane, personal interviews, 15 January 2003.

school up until I was in grade six, I was the only black girl, and my two brothers were the only black boys, and everyone knew us...⁹⁵

It is interesting to note that as white people came to know Mrs. Lane's family they often stopped calling them names and "accepted" them to a certain extent. This probably had much to do with the fact that Mrs. Lane's family was hard working, spoke English and in many ways conducted themselves as a 'respectable' middle class family. Regardless, tolerance did not always translate into cross cultural understanding and acceptance. Mrs. Lane commented that subtle forms of racism still did exist under the veil of tolerance: "[a]s I was growing up, got to be a teenager, you get to notice a lot of little things. I would feel it but I guess I would shrug it off..."⁹⁶

Black people's experiences with initially intolerant neighbors continued until least the end of the 1960s. Eleanor and Richard Collins recalled similar experiences with "intolerant" neighbors when they moved to a neighborhood in Burnaby.

Mr. Collins: Even when me moved to Burnaby, we bought the house in Burnaby and moved there. It was just a year old then, they just build the houses and the guy moved out, and I bought it. They were, when you think of it now a days, it was 6000 dollars then, you know, for the house, and new house you know – I got some pictures of it in there, you know. I ah... I lost my train of thought now... Oh, we moved to Burnaby and bought this house and moved in this house, they had started a petition in the area to bar us. Then they said we were bootleggers, that the only reason we got the money, you know.

Interviewer: How did you react to this.

Mr. Collins: Oh I don't know, after a while, course we ignored it, it never came directly to our face. The neighbor would tell us, you know, I refused to sign this petition. And ah, the kids were all small and going to school there, and so Eleanor joined the church, not joined the church but went to the church with the neighbor and she was in the choir. Just by being their and minding your own business and this and that there, it developed until everyone was curious, all the children would come to our yard to play and it just got around that you know, now everyone knew us and was completely different. Even our next door neighbor at

⁹⁵ Leonard and Adeline Lane, personal interviews, 15 January 2003.

⁹⁶ Leonard and Adeline Lane, personal interviews, 15 January 2003.

the time was cautious when we first moved there, I had to go out on the railroad the next day, and Eleanor just had Tom my youngest, so she didn't know anything about the water shut off, and it burst. Eleanor didn't know where the water shut off was or something else. So she sent Judy next door to ask him if he would come over and shut the water off for her. And we didn't know for years later, but Judy and the little girl were playing next door and the little girl told Judy, hey Judy you remember when you come over when you first came over and so and so and so, mother told me be quiet and they will think we are not home!"⁹⁷

Again, however, the Collins reported that once people became accustomed to their family they warmed up considerably. The logic of race was predominant in the ways that people interacted in Vancouver in the 20th century, and many of Vancouver's black people just came to accept it.

Occasionally white responses to black newcomers were a little bit more aggressive. One documented example comes from a *Vancouver Sun* article entitled "Young Negro Couple Threatened with Death Unless They Move." In April of 1948, Mr. and Mrs. Dermont G. Cromwell moved into a house at 586 East 53rd and received a letter threatening their lives unless they moved to a different neighborhood.⁹⁸ The way in which the larger community dealt with this issue is also telling. Some communities supported the Dermont family and offered them housing in their apartment buildings.⁹⁹ Unfortunately these nice gestures did not come to terms with the segregationist tendencies of some Vancouver neighborhoods or individuals. At a meeting of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in 1951, local members spoke out against "[r]estrictions in Shaughnessy, British Properties, the

⁹⁷ Richard "Dick" Collins, personal interview, 28 November 2002.

⁹⁸ "Young Negro Couple Threatened With Death Unless They Move," *Vancouver Province*, 15 April 1948.

⁹⁹ "Neighbors Rally Behind Threatened Negro Couple," *Vancouver Province*, 16 April 1948.

University area and other city districts [that] forbid sale of property to colored races.”¹⁰⁰

Although Vancouver’s racism has often been characterized as being subtle, it did take some overt forms. In 1951 A. Phillip Randolph, the president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, commented that the colour ban in Vancouver “keeps young people of colored races from earning their livelihood.”¹⁰¹ When Emmitt Holmes arrived from Saskatchewan to Vancouver in the 1940s, it was not uncommon for local business to hang help wanted signs on the doors that read “all white help.”¹⁰² At the beginning of the 1950s a local newspaper reported that one black woman was told, “we don’t hire niggers, please leave, I am busy.”¹⁰³ Most of the time, however, it seems that black Vancouverites were subjected to a much more subtle forms discrimination. Nealy remarked, “finding jobs... Oh well, they’d tell you, well “Oh that job was just filled fifteen minutes ago, and if you had a come a little earlier, you could have had the job.” They would no more have hired you than shot themselves!”¹⁰⁴

For those black men and women newly arrived to Vancouver throughout the 20th century, employment was difficult to find. In the 1940s the majority of black men still worked mostly as porters and in other certain menial positions. Mrs. Hendrix noted that,

¹⁰⁰ “Subtle City Racism Lashed by Porters,” Vancouver City Archives, Major Matthews File, Periodicals, Newspapers Clippings, Negroes in Vancouver, 2 August 1951.

¹⁰¹ “Subtle City Racism Lashed by Porters,” Vancouver City Archives, Major Matthews File, Periodicals, Newspapers Clippings, Negroes in Vancouver, 2 August 1951.

¹⁰² Emmitt Holmes, personal interview, 21 January 2003.

¹⁰³ “We Don’t Hire Niggers’ Said He,” Vancouver City Archives, Major Matthews File, Periodicals, Newspapers Clippings, Negroes in Vancouver, 28 July 1951.

¹⁰⁴ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver’s East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977.

... Well it was for just ordinary jobs, because there wasn't none around here particular. Unless you got into oh, janitor work. Well they, lots of them got janitor work. That was a good deal of what they had. But there was a lot of railroad men coming and going that didn't live here. They just... they stopped at the railroad place, where they had a place for them, and there's some people used to let them room at their house. Those that want to room at the same... their friend's house, well they do, and then but they had a regular railroad porters quarters for the railroad porters to stay. There was lots of railroad men, coming and going. But the few families here, they had certain kind of jobs. There's different kinds of jobs here. Like, the, a lot of them as I say, had these jobs, cleaning up the buildings. There's one man was a kind of overseer, like, and he could hire different men, you know, for these buildings, to keep the buildings cleaned up. And if there was any... want a whole lot of shoe shining stands. There was a few, but not no whole lot. Because the Italians had a lot of those.

Coal yards in Vancouver also offered potential employment to black men. And during the WW II positions at some of the local mills became available as well due to man power shortages. Leonard Lane describes his experiences looking for working after getting out of the army:

The majority of them was porters. Either you're a porter, or quite a few of them worked in a coal yard, which I did when I first got out of the army, and some of them delivered coal. And I heard when I first got out of the army, they would even hire you in the saw mills if you were black. But when I got out of the army, the men were a little short, and they started taking us in the saw mills. I worked in Vancouver saw mills, 2 or 3 saw mills, False Creek... all kinds of different nationalities.¹⁰⁵

Though the racism that existed in hiring practices in Vancouver may have been subtle, it was very effective in determining where a black person could work and therefore where they could afford to live.

Black manual labourers and service personal were usually able to find jobs eventually, if they were diligent and persisted and did not expect to find work that

¹⁰⁵ Leonard and Adeline Lane, personal interviews, 15 January 2003.

would dignify their level of education or training. The situation was more challenging for those men and women with training and degrees from colleges or universities. As Mrs. Nealy points out, it was not just a question of qualifications,

Oh, they started moving out in... around the 50s. They started leaving, one by one. And then they go... as I said, they got good jobs because... it got to the point then, that if you were qualified, you got a job, you know. It wasn't like that in the old days. Nor matter if you had a... no matter how many degrees you had behind your name, you just didn't get a job, because there was more doctors and lawyers running on that railroad as porters and shoe shiners, because they just couldn't get a job... Cause I myself, I went through high school, and I took up typing and shorthand, and when I went... finished school and went and asked for a job, that woman, she just threw back her head and she laughed and laughed and laughed. So I had to end up scrubbing floors, for 25 cents an hour.¹⁰⁶

Nealy suggests that black people began moving out of Hogan's Alley in the 1950s.

There is a contradiction here that may be explained by the time period in which black people started to obtain higher paying employment. Mrs. Nealy claims that black people were forced to live in Hogan's Alley because there was limited employment.

In the 1950s black people started to obtain jobs that would allow them a certain amount of mobility. Many black Vancouverites were likely compelled to take positions that were below their level of education and qualification because of the stigma that had been attached to their skin.

Even when jobs were found, possibilities for advancement were limited.

Employers were reluctant to give a black man or woman management positions. In the late 1960s when Mr. Holmes was looking for work with an education and

¹⁰⁶ Dorothy BCA, *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End*, Sound Heritage, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977. The difficulties that black people had finding employment in Vancouver are supported by many other sources: "Shoeshine or Porter Only Situations Open" *Vancouver Province*, Saturday, March 4 1950; "Few Occupations Open to Negroes, Group Told" *Vancouver Province*, Jul 29 1949; "Negro Raps Color Bar in Industry," *Vancouver Province*, 23 August 1948; "New Group Organized to Fight Discrimination," Vancouver City Archives, Major Matthews File, Periodicals, Newspapers Clippings, Negroes in Vancouver, Dec 20 1951.

qualifications, he faced slightly more subtle, but essentially the same kinds of prejudice. He mentioned that it was almost impossible to find work through advertisements in the newspapers. Potential employers would call him and say that Mr. Holmes had just the qualifications that they were looking for. But, when he arrived at the place of employment, the secretary would be shocked to see a black face. As he recalls:

...now, right then you might as well turn around and leave because excuses. You just saw the secretary, and you just saw the expression on the secretary's face, and she has to go in the other room and tell the boss, and the boss has to come out and see. [The boss would say:] "Oh well Mr. Holmes, nice of you to come, and yes you have nice qualifications, but we have three or four other people who are probably equally as qualified, and we would like to have the opportunity to interview them also. If we decide it's you, we will get back to you." Well, I know that no one is going to get back in touch with me. I know that because I know she has gone and said "Hey, there is a black man out there; Mr. Holmes is a black man." With a name like Holmes I could have been a cousin of Sherlock Holmes. Those were the kind of situations I ran in to. I never got a job from the newspaper.¹⁰⁷

In the 1970s, Canada was attempting to change its stance on non-European peoples in the areas of employment, housing, and immigration policy. It was during this initial push to have more people of colour working in the government that Mr. Holmes was finally able to secure a position with the government at a branch of the Manpower and Innovation Ministry.

I was counseling for 7 years, and then I was a supervisor, I made the rank of supervisor after that. I was supervisor for 14 years, or whatever it was, 15. I enjoyed being a supervisor because people would, you know they couldn't believe that a black man could be the supervisor, and they would come in and want to see the supervisor. I'd say, "Well, what do you want to say to him." "You're not the supervisor." I said, "Oh, I'm not eh?" And I'd say, "Well, who do you think is the supervisor?" "That fellow over there." (Mr. Holmes pointed). And I say "Good, good." I said "Now, you go, and I'll tell

¹⁰⁷ Emmitt Holmes, personal interview, 21 January 2003.

him that you want to see him.” And then, they’d go see them and that guy would say “that guy’s my boss,” he says, “you got to go see him.” And then they would come with their tails between their legs.(laughter)¹⁰⁸

Given that there were so few black men in the city, and that many of them were middle class in aspirations, educated and hard working, it is likely that these negative images of black men were in part the legacies of slavery and colonialism and were in part perpetuated through North American media. American race relations between black and white people had influence throughout North American. They not only shaped and influenced the way that white Canadians saw black people, but also how black people saw themselves and their struggles with racism in Canada. Mr. Holmes suggested that it was the “old stigma across the line from the States, even though there has never been slavery here, that blacks just couldn’t be on the same level as whites... you could have a job if you are down here, and I am up here, but not on my level, that was the way that whites thought.”¹⁰⁹

Black women faced similar challenges in their attempts to find employment in the city. Finding work that was befitting of their qualifications was an extremely difficult task. The Lanes suggested that it was not uncommon for a black women to go to college and “take courses in various things,” only to end up working in a factory.¹¹⁰ Black women often did housework for wealthier white people in Shaughnessy, the West End and in South Vancouver.¹¹¹ When asked about where black women used to work, Mr. Lane replied:

¹⁰⁸ Emmitt Holmes, personal interview, 21 January 2003.

¹⁰⁹ Emmitt Holmes, personal interview, 21 January 2003.

¹¹⁰ Leonard and Adeline Lane, personal interviews, 15 January 2003.

¹¹¹ Leonard and Adeline Lane, personal interviews, 15 January 2003.

The white people, go to the white people's houses... in the West End, and South Vancouver, like in Shaughnessy. Cause my sister, when they left home, that was all that they could get. Some of them, couple of them, took courses in sewing and they finally they got into a factory.¹¹²

At times black women also found work in prostitution houses, not as prostitutes, but as cleaners and cooks. Although there is a lot of stigma attached to prostitution houses in Canada in current times, some people looked at them differently. Mrs. Hendrix explained that working in prostitution was just a job that paid quite well in comparison to others.

Oh just like any other houses. They're just a house where the... and they have cooks in them houses. Them girls [sex trade workers] don't have to do nothing. They have people, maids, to come and clean up the house and all that. There was a lot of coloured girls and things that used to love to go there to work, cause it was good money. Sure. Go there and cook. Some... I know a lady who went down there and cooked down there and she made I don't know how much... a 1000 dollars in a little while. And she sent back to the States and brought her family here. Yeah. She went down there cooking, for one of the places. Oh yes. A person, a woman that's looking for a job, to cook or clean up, that's where you could make your money. Yeah. And nobody'd bother you. You wouldn't get molested, or nothing. Um-umm. Cause the men that come in there, they coming in there to see the girls. They wouldn't bother you. You were just a working woman around there. There were a lot of women just liked those place cause they, that's money, they was sure of that money. When you go in and work down there. Of course, I never worked down in there, but I know other people you know, and I know this lady that used to do the washing. She'd go get the clothes and bring them home, and her and her daughter would wash and iron them. They wasn't dirty, they just kind of mused up, you know. And charge whatever they want to charge, you see. It's up to them. Whatever they charge it, why, the girls pay it. And that-a-way, well they made (laughs)... that old lady and her daughter, made plenty money. I'm telling you.¹¹³

¹¹² Leonard and Adeline Lane, personal interviews, 15 January 2003.

¹¹³ BCA, *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End*, Sound Heritage, Tape 2717 (Transcripts), Nora Hendrix, 14 April 1977.

Black women in Vancouver were able to find work partly because they were willing to do whatever it took to provide for themselves and their families.

Of the four black women interviewed in the *Opening doors: Vancouver's East End* oral history project, all had worked in businesses owned by black women and around Hogan's Alley, primarily fried chicken and steak houses.

And practically every black woman in Vancouver has worked for Mrs. Pryor sometime or other. Some of them has worked, worked there for years and years, from the time she started. But when she first started, she couldn't afford to pay wages. So everybody worked for their tips. And then when things got a little better, I think the first wages we got was four dollars a week. Then when I came out here they were... it was raised to 15 dollars a week, which was a big thing... Oh it was crowded practically every night. Yeah, because as I said, she had a wonderful business. By the time I got here, you know. She'd been open since 1917. That's a long time.¹¹⁴

There was also work for black women to be found at poultry packing houses and fish canneries. Nealy claimed that there were 22 "Negro" women working at Visco's at one point during the times that she worked there.¹¹⁵ These places had very racially diverse crews and many immigrant workers were able to find jobs there.

When black people were able to get better jobs, they began to buy houses in other areas of the city. Risby states that,

...as soon as they got good jobs and were able to save money, then they'd start buying homes. Well...they...then they moved to North Vancouver, Burnaby and Richmond... New Westminster. So then...they've all gone...And that's about all that's left here, of the black people.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ BCA, *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End*, Sound Heritage, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977.

¹¹⁵ BCA, *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End*, Sound Heritage, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977. BCA, *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End*, Sound Heritage, Tape 2682 (Transcripts), Leona Risby, May, 1977.

¹¹⁶ BCA, *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End*, Sound Heritage, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977; Leonard and Adeline Lane, personal interviews, 15 January 2003.

The ability to purchase homes was an important aspect to mobility within Vancouver, and so it was poverty not choice that created a concentration of black people in the Strathcona area. When black people moved to nicer areas of the city, Chinese people took their place in Hogan's Alley, perhaps for similar economic reasons. In most neighborhoods there were no codified mandates against selling housing to black purchasers; however, this did not mean white people were delighted to see these new comers in their neighborhoods.

Some of the challenges that Vancouverites of African descent faced within this community were quite similar to those faced by black people in the United States. Though they may have been subtle, they were equally as demeaning and racist. During an interview with Adeline Lane, she remembered being refused service at a business on Robson St.

I can remember when my daughter and I went down to Robson street. Just to look around because you hear lots of things, because it's an interesting street, you know, to go on. And we popped into this restaurant and we sat there and sat there and sat there, and the waitress just back and forth. So I said Lenora, "I don't think we are going to be served in here." "Oh just wait a minute," she said. We waited, and we never did get served so we just go up and walked toward the door. And then somebody caught us, said "Oh would you like something." I said "No thank-you." And we walked out. She must have been 15 or 16, that was a long time back.¹¹⁷

Many of the people that I interviewed maintained that there were very few examples of overt and aggressive racism in Vancouver. Being refused service in Vancouver, however, was by no means an isolated incident.

The Stratford Inn in Hogan's Alley was popular not only because it was an easy place to meet other black people and find out where the parties were but also

¹¹⁷ Richard "Dick" Collins, personal interview, 28 November 2002.

because it was one of the few places in town that would serve black people without hassle.

There used to be the AME church, it was on Jackson, and I went to that church for a long time, and there was some black girls going to that church, and their parents, but you never get invited to their home. They'd say hi and how are you, and that's it. So I ended up most the time, lots of time just being by myself and going down to the Stratford, and you'd get invited to a party in 15 or 20 minutes if you wanted to. You could go to church forever and you never get invited. (laugh) Well that just the way it was, that's they way I looked at it anyways... I'd just sit there, myself and Howard Fair, we used to get there early, and there used to be one seat in the corner where nobody could get behind you. So we'd go there and get this seat. We didn't really drink that much, but we'd just get a beer and watch the action, and there would be fighting and arguing. That was our television show in those days... No I never found the Stratford so rough. There'd be lots of loud talking, but the Main Hotel, I never used to go there very much because it was really rough, that was another place that black people could go and drink. Cause at that time there was a lot of clubs around town you couldn't get in if you were black. I remember one time we went to... Patricia's on Hastings? I can't think of the name. But Howard and I were out one Saturday night, cause we were just trying out these different places, and we went there, and they used to have little booths you could sit in and drink. And we must of sat in there an hour and a waiter never did see us. He was just passing back and forth and back and forth. Well we knew that was the reason, and after that we heard, and well we knew that was the reason, that they didn't serve black people... that would be in the late 40s...¹¹⁸

One of the most well-documented processes in Vancouver newspaper indexes was black people's struggle to end formal and informal segregation in the 1940s, 50s and 60s, which will be discussed in more depth in chapter 5. In fact, in the 1940s and 50s musicians often had to make arrangements with black people in Vancouver before

¹¹⁸ Leonard and Adeline Lane, personal interviews, 15 January 2003.

they could book shows to play here because the difficulties finding a hotel room were well known.¹¹⁹

Hogan's Alley as an entertainment district was also one of the few social interaction points between white and black peoples. White college kids and other well-to-do people liked to visit Hogan's Alley in search of gambling, drink and prostitutes. Richard Collins suggested that many people came to Hogan's Alley with the thought, "I can do whatever I want, my friends won't see me here."¹²⁰ Austin Phillips describes these "uptown" visitors as important to the financial well-being of club and restaurant owners in Hogan's Alley. He commented that:

...you'd see some women that was rich women from uptown and all over. They'd come down there slumming, you see, just come in to see what it was like... Well that's where the big boys make their money. The rest of the other guys didn't have no money, the regular crowd that hang around there didn't have no money.¹²¹

According to Nealy, these interactions between white and black peoples were not always peaceful: from time to time there were clashes.

In 1938 tensions between black and white people reached what Mrs. Nealy would later refer to as the riot of 1938. The tensions began when one of the young white women who had been frequenting Hogan's Alley began dating a black man. Although there were generally few tensions between black people and white people, interracial dating was always a point of contention. Mrs. Nealy describes the events of the "Riot of 1938":

¹¹⁹ "To Take Negroes," Vancouver City Archives, Major Matthews File, Periodicals, Newspapers Clippings, Negroes in Vancouver, Aug 13 1949; Richard "Dick" Collins, personal interview, 28 November 2002.

¹²⁰ Richard "Dick" Collins, personal interview, 28 November 2002.

¹²¹ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2681 (Transcripts), Austin Phillips, 23 June 1977.

[The young white men] said that [the white] woman was down there someplace and that they were going to put a stop to it. Black people sent out the call and kicked the shit out of 3 carloads that had come down. They didn't come back on that one. Once in a while some white boys would come down and call someone a nigger. Can't wait for police protection cause if the police come and drive them off, they are only going to come back.¹²²

Mrs. Nealy, like many of the other black people living in the area, rarely relied on the police to settle their disputes. She suggested that “the only way to let [white men] know that one man is just as good as another is just to beat the shit out of them. And then they'll let you alone.”¹²³

From 1910 until the end of the 1950s, Vancouver's Strathcona neighborhood was one of transitions for its black residents. The individuals interviewed in my oral historical data recalled several things: that black people were likely attracted to Hogan's Alley because there were a number of restaurants, gambling houses, and drinking spots that black people owned and frequented; that many of the first black people to settle in Vancouver were railway Porters and Hogan's Alley was also very close to the railroad station; and finally they remembered that the informal and formal racism in Vancouver limited the types of occupations that were available to black people and hence hindered their ability to purchase homes in neighborhoods of their own choosing. Forced to rent, black people were often confronted by landlords who refused to rent to black people. However, at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s black people were able to find better employment which helped to enable them to bypass prejudiced landlords and purchase houses. As we will see in

¹²² BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977.

¹²³ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977.

the coming chapters, black Vancouverites usually chose less visible ways of challenging the systemic racism that was prevalent in the city. For the most part, they chose to work hard, integrate and exercise patience. Unfortunately, this strategy left very few historical records. In the next chapter I will discuss some of the reasons why black people may have chosen a strategy that rendered them virtually invisible in Vancouver.

Chapter 4 – Constructing a black community

I refuse, absolutely, to speak from the point of view of the victim. The victim can have no point of view for precisely so long as he thinks of himself as a victim. The testimony of the victim as victim corroborates, simply, the reality of the chains that bind him—confirms, and, as it were consoles the jailer.

-- James Baldwin

Routine experiences of oppression, repression and abuse—however widespread—could not be transferred into the political arena from which blacks were barred. Instead they become a basis for dissident cultures and an alternative public world. Togetherness produced under these conditions was inherently unreliable.

-- Paul Gilroy

It should be clear at this point that there were people of African descent living in the Strathcona area from the years of about 1910 to the 1950s. What remains unclear is whether or not it would be accurate to refer to these people as the “Hogan’s Alley Black Community.” If there was a community in Hogan’s Alley one would expect to find community organizations that could help united black people and record their experiences. In Vancouver, most of the black organizations left only traces that can be tracked sporadically before they slip out of historical record entirely. Why did these organizations that were often founded on successful African American counterparts have so many difficulties with membership and effectiveness? Before we can discuss the effectiveness of black community organizations in Vancouver it will be useful to develop some sense of how the terms ‘black’ and ‘community’ have been used in unity building projects in North America. Much of black community building discourse which has sought to unify blackness has also relied upon certain constructions of whiteness. The ways in which white people in

Vancouver and in the United States maneuvered for privilege differed significantly and may have affected black attempts to mobilize against discrimination. In Vancouver black people themselves may have benefited more from relative invisibility than from attempts to create black organizations that would have created increased visibility. I would like to suggest that it is possible that people of African descent were also involved in the creation of their own invisibility as a *maneuvering tactic* or a way of avoiding the potential dangers of becoming too visible in majority white contexts. In this chapter I want to open up the *idea* of a ‘Vancouver black community’ to further investigation and develop the notion of invisibility as a maneuvering tactic as a way of discussing the limited success of black community organizations in Vancouver.

Black community organizations in Vancouver formed sporadically and had difficulties with membership and effectiveness throughout the 20th century. Some of the difficulties that Vancouver’s black people seemed to face with regard to cohesion can partially be explained through an investigation of the terms that are used to talk about community. Terms such as ‘black’ and ‘community’ are not merely descriptive but carry a constitutive aspect that can shape the ways in which unity is constructed between specific groups of people.¹²⁴ Underlying current notions of community formation is the prevalent idea that race can be used as a tool to investigate and know groups of people of African descent. The logic that informs the construction of categories such as ‘black’ and ‘community’ is heavily steeped in ways of understanding identity that seem more concerned with masking differences so that

¹²⁴ Sooknanan, “The Politics of Essentialism: Rethinking Black Community,” 137-158; Gilroy, *Against Race*, 11-53.

groups can be unified and *managed* rather than *understood*.¹²⁵ Uncritical uses of racialized constructions of community are ineffective in understanding the fluidity and diversity in non-white communities.

Although I have pointed toward some of the difficulties inherent in community building projects that rely upon the “logic of race” in order to define their membership and objectives, portions of the oral historical research support the idea that there was a ‘black community’ in Hogan’s Alley. As I have mentioned, it has been common practice for peoples and communities themselves to identify themselves based on skin colour and race. This correlation between race and unity, the kind of unity that can create and sustain community organizations, is problematic for a number of reasons.

In North America colour has not only become associated with race and ethnic identity, but also “supports a special rhetoric that has grown to be associated with a language of nationality and national belonging...”¹²⁶ The notion that skin colour, race and ethnicity can heavily influence the desires and character of individuals and communities has roots in how identities are constructed within the context of modern nation states.¹²⁷ One of the key assumptions that hinders the investigation of the black community in Vancouver is that skin colour, race and ethnicity necessarily play roles in the creation of nationalist or community building mentality. Much work has been done in regard to interrogating the legitimacy of race as a sufficient component

¹²⁵ Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown*, 24. Kay Anderson gives an in depth discussion on how the Chinese community was created and managed. Chinatown was a fiction created to unify the ‘other’ and define the limits or boundaries of civilized white Vancouver.

¹²⁶ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 2.

¹²⁷ Gilroy, *Against Race*, 63-8, 98-9.

of national or community belonging.¹²⁸ Renan began to notice this trend as early as 1882 and warned rather prophetically against the danger of collapsing ethnicity and nationality given the lack of historical evidence to suggest that pure ethnicity exists.¹²⁹ Eric J. Hobsbawm asserts that skin colour and ethnicity can be at best only partial indicators of a shared historical past with which to base a nationalist or community discourse upon.¹³⁰ Colour, ethnicity and race do not have importance as identity attributes on their own; they must be connected to larger narratives of shared experience through clever manipulations of specific historical events.

Despite the rather glaring limitations of nationalistic discourse based on race, color, and ethnicity, it has nonetheless been used by those who write about African descent experience in the diaspora. Blackness has been overused in black oppositional political movements that attempt to create unified and stable identities that can be deployed with the language of 'we.' This predominantly modernist discourse with regard to the essence of black folk has often exacerbated the fissures and tensions that exist among people of African descent by refusing to come to terms with what these divisions mean. The reality is that most people of African descent have differing views with regard to what blackness is about. These differing perspectives have much to do with the type of colonial experience they had, the language they speak, their country of birth and of course their individual desires and preferences.

¹²⁸ Sooknanan, "The Politics of Essentialism: Rethinking Black Community," 141-43; Gilroy, *Against Race*; Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*; 65-6; Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" in Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 12-16.

¹²⁹ Renan, "What is a Nation?," 12-16.

¹³⁰ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, 65-6.

In the *Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy draws attention to the limitations of black nationalist discourse in his discussion of Martin Delany, hailed by some as the propagator of black nationalist identity. The foundations of Delany's black nationalist discourse were based on an oppositional stance to a shared experience of European colonization. He posited that peoples of African descent in the black Atlantic were from a variety of religious, language and colour backgrounds, and that these divisions would need to be overcome if they were to be successfully united against the gross injustices of slavery and white supremacy in the Americas.¹³¹ People of African descent could become aware of themselves as black people if they were willing to see themselves through the eyes of their oppressor. The fundamental difficulty with Delany's strategy is that it relies upon a clearly defined white enemy. The difficulties with this analysis still have resonance within black political struggles in the postmodern era. After slavery, the conditions under which peoples of African descent found themselves differed dramatically according to where they lived in the Diaspora. As Gilroy suggests,

As far as black political cultures are concerned, in the period after emancipation, essentialist approaches to building solidarity and synchronized communal mobilization have often relied upon the effects of racial hierarchy to supply the binding agent that could in turn precipitate national consciousness.¹³²

Without a slave owning 'white enemy,' or even the aggressively racist one, the basis for black unity based on opposition no longer existed in the same generalizable form.

In current times, and in much community building research and literature, notions of black communities have come to be heavily dependent upon white

¹³¹ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 28-9.

¹³² Gilroy, *Against Race*, 38.

opposition. In some ways, the idea of blackness has become dependent upon a cultural and political context in which it was necessary, for means of support, protection, and sometimes survival, to identify and unite in opposition to white oppression. Gilroy's interrogation of the diversity present within the black Diaspora and the unifying effect of white opposition is pertinent to this discussion of the black community in Vancouver. The development of black political organization in Vancouver has been heavily correlated to the development of white opposition. As we will see in the following chapter, increases in black cohesion and political activation can be witnessed in times when opposition to white injustices was most needed.

The ways in which these oppositional black community building projects over-generalize whiteness has been particularly harmful in Vancouver. These oppositional based conceptions of the white community often obscure the ways in which white communities maneuver for privilege in particular historical contexts.¹³³ Different European communities in different contexts had and have differing strategies and goals depending upon particular experiences with black people. For example, the ways in which Europeans maneuvered in the south of the United States and in Vancouver differed dramatically. The basis of difference between particular white communities does not work within the binary framework of racist and non-racist. The ways in which they responded to black people depended upon a number of normative and contextual factors. In Vancouver, responses to black people were

¹³³ Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, 23-26.

influenced by the perceived threat they posed to the establishment of white predominance.¹³⁴

Despite the relatively small numbers of South Asian people in Vancouver at the beginning of the 1900s, the threat of increased immigration and the desire for white homogeneity within the province of British Columbia made them hyper-visible.¹³⁵ Similar to black Canadians, their immigration in to Canada was harshly restricted. Ward claims that out of the 2,500,000 people to immigrate into Canada between 1905 and 1914, only 5,300 of them were South Asian. Resistance to South Asian immigration took on its most overt and possibly most threatening form during the *Komagata Maru* Incident of 1914 when 376 prospective South Asian immigrants arrived in Vancouver Harbour aboard the *Komagata Maru*. Journalists and anti-Oriental organized quickly mobilized an arsenal of Orientalist rhetoric to support the Canadian government's resolve to prohibit the immigration of the South Asian people aboard the *Komagata Maru*.¹³⁶ Racial tensions remained high in Vancouver and other parts of British Columbia long after the incident and certainly made matters bad for the South Asians who were already living there.

Given that the city was preoccupied with the threat of the "Asian hordes" the relative invisibility of black people in the public mind of the city may have presented

¹³⁴ Kilian, *Go Do Some Great Thing*, 156. One British Columbian history comes from Victoria. Black settlers who immigrated to Victoria in the 1850s found an environment relatively accepting of their desires to work and become successful. As they rose in prominence in the 1860s—owning business and becoming involved in politics—so did the racist reactions from the Victorian white community. Tensions between them only died when most black residents emigrated back to the United States after the Emancipation Proclamation and the black community fell into relative obscurity. Anger and intolerance quickly turned to the Chinese population who were competing with whites for jobs. This example can be found in Irene Genevieve Mari Zaffaroni, "The Great Chain of Being: Racism and Imperialism in Colonial Victoria, 1858-1871," (University of Victoria, MA Thesis 1987), 125.

¹³⁵ Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 82.

¹³⁶ Ward, *White Canada Forever*, 90.

itself as a godsend. Though Asians struggled to find work in informally prescribed jobs, in Vancouver their high visibility had not been an effective strategy to combat these forms of racism. Generally, our knowledge of black communities in North America arises from those cases in which people of African descent have become visible to the public eye and therefore gathered much negative textual representation. Conceptions of blackness and whiteness vary depending on the political context in which these terms are given their meaning. In order to deal with the diversity of African descent peoples and their varying contexts throughout North America, we must examine and critique blackness and whiteness in terms of their explanatory power. There was and remains an arsenal of negative images that could be employed against black people given the right political context. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the limitations of the ways in which we have come to think about blackness and whiteness – with particular regard to how these categories function within the process of “black community” construction.

In Vancouver, the strategies which were used to build social, cultural and political organizations were greatly influenced by the African American movement for civil rights and relied heavily on African American referents. Though they provided important frameworks through which to begin interrogations of discriminatory practices, the American movements for civil rights also encouraged strategies that may not have been applicable to Vancouver’s race relations context. One of the predominant reasons for the prevalence of African American ways of looking at race relations in Canada, must, as Walcott has suggested, be attributed to

the black American cultural hegemony.¹³⁷ The prevalence of African American experience has in some ways influenced the ways in which BC people of African descent have come to see their challenges, and to evaluate their severity.

I can't remember the first time, but I can remember hearing – not so much because of Canada, but because of the States. I remember hearing that they had lynched somebody or whatever the case may be. And I used to think and say, well, “Why don't the black people get together and lynch a white person too.” Whenever they did this, and did that sort of revenge thing, you know. I could never understand why they didn't do that. I can now. Then I didn't understand it at all. I figured it was sort of retaliation, but we never noticed any colour barrier up here other than the kids calling, you know. If you go for a job, I went for a job at the American can company at one time, and the fellow gave me application and you'd try to fill it out or something. You walk out the door, I look back, he tore it up and threw it in the basket, didn't he? They just wouldn't consider you. But I never really honestly came across something blatant until I moved up to Burnaby. And I went up the barbershop to get a haircut, and he wouldn't cut my hair. He said he didn't know what his client would think about it, in 1960 something. The barbershop is gone now, but I remember him saying that at the time. And that kind of stunned me but then I finally got finished telling him, I suppose you are sitting in the front row of the church and you call yourself a Christian and so on and so forth. And that's really the only time I directly run into it you know. And I think then, I suppose we became a little bit conscious of it. Because I got one friend now, and him and his wife live in Abbotsford and ah, we went out one night and he wanted me to have a drink, and this and that. And I don't drink. Said to him, “You know, it's a funny thing but if I was to drink and go with you, we were going to a night club or something... You come in drunk, and you know they say, you're celebrating New Years. But if I did it, they would be saying look look, they're all like that, you know.”¹³⁸

This statement reiterates the commonly held Canadian notion held by both blacks and whites that Canada has never been “as bad as in the United States.” Crawford Kilian claims that while black people in British Columbia “suffered less overt racism than their American cousins, they have not escaped it completely; and the war of

¹³⁷ Walcott, *Black Like Who*, Introduction.

¹³⁸ Richard “Dick” Collins, personal interview, 28 November 2002.

complexional distinction is not yet over for them.”¹³⁹ What does it mean to be “not as bad as the United States?” This language does a poor job of explaining just what exactly was happening to Mr. Collins. And it does not give people of African descent in Vancouver tools to analyze their own particular struggles critically and develop effective strategies for confronting them.¹⁴⁰ These kinds of comparative analysis fail to come to terms with the rather particular ways in which Euro-Americans maneuvered for white privilege in British Columbia.

The problematic predominance of African American race relations has fallen under criticism from Canadian and British scholars of African descent. These scholars have made important contributions to the fraught tendency of African American-inspired black nationalist movements to define racism and black diasporic experience.¹⁴¹ Their works have been important in the creation of a language with which to talk about the importance of African American contributions to African Diaspora cultural studies while at the same time being critical of the ways in which black American affiliation to an imperial power have at times obscured the particularities of black communities outside of America.

These black nationalist discourses did not speak to the particular ways in which people in Vancouver were coming to terms with being black in a majority white culture. Blackness was, and in many senses has remained, a nebulous term without much power to describe the daily lived experiences of people of African

¹³⁹ Kilian, *Go Do Some Great Thing*, 158; Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 18. Canada in the American imagination as a place that treated you better than in the United States. The end of the underground railroad.

¹⁴⁰ Walcott, *Black Like Who*, 26-30.

¹⁴¹ Gilroy, *Against Race*, 32-9; Walcott, *Black Like Who*, 17-33.

descent.¹⁴² Blackness uses skin color to describe the existence of an “imagined community” that allegedly exists primordially, free from the processes of history. It neglects the fact that blackness must be actively maintained to be used effectively as a tool for building unity among people of African descent. There is no reason to assume, particularly in the case of Vancouver, that a common ‘race,’ or colour of skin, would necessarily aid in the development of a strong and socially and politically active community or collective consciousness. Very few moral and political goals are easily united under the slippery and fluid category of black. Although there has been a lot of discussion with regard to the use of skin colour as a referent within the language of white racism, there has been much less work done on the ways in which the term is used by people within the black community itself.

Today there is little historical evidence to support the claim that Strathcona’s Hogan’s Alley was a ‘black ghetto.’ But if not, why did Mrs. Nealy want to refer to Hogan’s Alley as the center of a black community and why is there an effort to commemorate it as such? Perhaps it is because terms such as ‘black’ have been and continue to be important terms within the black diaspora for talking about a local process in which peoples of African descent have been constructed and dealt with by European and North American European people. However, not all black people wanted to create community institutions that bring unwanted attention and complicate their desire to integrate in to mainstream or white Vancouver. This may have been a wise decision given that visibility did not always benefit non-white communities in Vancouver’s history. Notions of a Chinese community or a Japanese community have been used as terms within dominant European rhetoric to talk about an area of

¹⁴² Sooknanan, “The Politics of Essentialism: Rethinking Black Community,” 139-142.

town that is not ‘normal.’ The rhetoric used to talk about these communities served more to construct a body of knowledge accessible to European popular audiences than to describe the lived reality of Asian descent people – their experiences, challenges or worldviews.¹⁴³ As Anderson points out, Chinatown might exist in the popular mind of the city, but there does not exist a corresponding “white-town.”¹⁴⁴ ‘White community’ organizations are not seen as promoting white culture, but just culture. The historical construction of Chinatown has been used to talk about who is non-European or Canadian rather than to engage the lived experiences of Chinese descent people in Vancouver.

The neighborhoods of marginalized people have also often been the target of neglect, exclusion and abuse. In the past, black people have made decisions not to form black community organizations, and instead chose to spread out and integrate into white communities. For one, this would assure them that their children were likely to receive the same kind of education and standard of living as their European neighbors.¹⁴⁵ On the other hand, marginalized peoples have at times chosen to live in close proximity to one another for social and psychological support and to limit the impacts of discrimination. In Canada, however, despite the low social acceptability, black people have rarely been spatially concentrated in Canada. Due to the fact that Canadians of African descent have unique experiences in Canada, Joseph Mensah, a Canadian of African descent scholar, suggests that there is a need to avoid the

¹⁴³ Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown*, 28-33. Refer to Kay Anderson for an in-depth discussion of how the Chinese community was constructed through a European perspective in Vancouver.

¹⁴⁴ Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown*, 29.

¹⁴⁵ Joseph Mensah, *Black Canadians: History, Experience, Social Conditions* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing Company, c2002), 82-85. This idea can also be seen in the community of people who moved to Victoria in 1858. They arrived in Victoria with conscious intent to integrate into white Victorian society.

application of American urban geography-based models on Canadian cities.¹⁴⁶ His theory would certainly seem to hold true in Vancouver where people of African descent spread to suburban neighborhoods throughout the lower mainland as they were able to find better employment opportunities. Canadians of African descent continue to be one of the least segregated groups in Canada, not because of the lack of racism toward them but due to their small numbers and their relative invisibility.¹⁴⁷

Without formal segregation in most places in the lower mainland, white neighborhoods could complain, or sign petitions, but could not stop people of African descent from buying houses in the suburbs. They moved to suburbs, their children by and large had access to good educations and a good standard of living. Perhaps, remaining invisible was the best tactic they could have chosen.

¹⁴⁶ Mensah, *Black Canadians*, 83.

¹⁴⁷ Mensah, *Black Canadians*, 84-85.

Chapter 5 – Black organizational development in Vancouver.

In a city like Vancouver that had a history of subtle and not so subtle racism toward black people one might expect to find a number of community organizations which could be used to provide evidence of their passing. In other communities throughout North America black people formed churches, and social and political organization to shield them from white intolerance and provide spiritual and personal support. In Vancouver, various political, cultural and spiritual organizations formed but achieved limited success in terms of membership and impact on Vancouver's public sphere. Until the 1950s two main organizations served the religious and political needs of the Vancouver's black population: the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters. These institutions are important not only because they play a key role in making history but also because they usually record their history. Although these organizations had rich histories of success in terms of uniting black communities all over North America, in Vancouver they had less impact .

In Vancouver prejudice and discrimination did not often compel black Vancouverites to form oppositional organizations. In cases where white violence or oppression was the most blatant, or most like the forms of racism found in the United States, black people did form organizations to react against them. However, these organizations had trouble developing long-term membership. Black peoples' ability to find decent employment and buy homes hindered black organizer's attempts to

develop centralized institutions. Without the existence of an aggressive white opposition, the term 'black' did not have a unifying effect at a symbolic level as it did in other places in the African diaspora. At first glance, it would appear as though Vancouver's black community was more or less content to exercise patience. Perhaps when their patience ran out, they relocated to other North American cities where there were large enough black populations to support its more successful members.¹⁴⁸ Or perhaps they made individual decisions to fight racism in their own way at a cultural level, that is difficult to excavate with historical research.

African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME)

The African Methodist Fountain Chapel Church was founded in 1922 under Rev. Ulyses Robinson.¹⁴⁹ Located at 823 Jackson Avenue, the Fountain Chapel was just two blocks up from Hogan's Alley and surrounded by what most in those days referred to as "the slums." Conveniently, the AME was located just across the street from the largest concentration of black folks in Strathcona, found in the low-rent Prior apartment building – "it was right where the people needed it most."¹⁵⁰ This little church, so close to a center of the vice represented by Hogan's Alley, was at times an important center of the organizing activities for Vancouver black people. Although the Fountain Chapel was relatively successful in its efforts to gain the support of Vancouver black people in the beginning of its existence, it went through

¹⁴⁸ "Negroes Live Next Door," *Vancouver Sun*, Saturday July 19 1952.

¹⁴⁹ BCA, City Directory, 1921-22. Until 1921, the building on the corner of Jackson Avenue and Prior Street is listed as a Norwegian Lutheran Church.

¹⁵⁰ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2682 (Transcripts), Leona Risby, May, 1977.

periods of ups and downs and was eventually abandoned by the AME in about 1971. There are a number of reasons why this organization may have eventually failed to become a long-term center of a Vancouver black community.

When Nora Hendrix arrived in the Strathcona area in 1911 Vancouver did not yet have a black church. Black people had been gathering in a small cultural club on Homer Street where they would:

...have affairs, like, meeting and singing and whatever they did. Occasionally missionaries would come through and set up store front churches for a time, but no one in the black community had ventured to get a church of their own. They commence to getting together, say "Well, we should get a church for their own. Yeah. Ain't got any other business of our own, so got to get a church anyway, if nothing else."¹⁵¹

So the men of the community contacted the head office of the African Methodist Episcopal church in the United States. This early contact was followed by a meeting in which AME representatives came from the United States to discuss their involvement in the founding of a new AME church in Vancouver. It was agreed that the AME head office would contribute half of the 1000 dollars that would be needed to buy the church; they also agreed to send elders and preachers.¹⁵²

This first meeting the Strathcona community was a long way from the realization of the Fountain Chapel Church. Hendrix remembered that:

all of the sisters and brothers and everyone, we commence getting busy then, to start to having entertainments and bazaars and suppers and everything we could have to raise the money to buy this church. So when we worked around and got our share of the money together, well, they let the residing elder know that we was ready, and so they came over and then set up our church, so then we had our own church

¹⁵¹ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2717 (Transcripts), Nora Hendrix, 14 April 1977.

¹⁵² BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2717 (Transcripts), Nora Hendrix, 14 April 1977.

then. So it was 1000 we had to pay down. Getting dollars together them days was hard. When you went out to work, all you got was a dollar and a half for your day's work. And your carfare. That's what you got in them days. So, you see it took us a little while to raise up 500.¹⁵³

Though small in size, black people in Strathcona did not lack organizing ability when they felt committed to a cause. The founding members of the church rallied the Hogan's Alley black people and were able to raise the money they needed.

Though the Fountain Chapel began strong, built on the will of black people living in Strathcona, it soon began to encounter some difficulties. Given that preachers were supported by the black people in the Hogan's Alley area, they had to rely on the goodwill and hard work of the congregation. The Fountain Chapel congregation was responsible for providing for the living expenses and accommodation for their preachers:

Well, they didn't exactly have a [house]... but he used to room at different people's houses, cause they didn't have no special house built for him. We were supposed to, but we couldn't afford that, so we had to pay for him living in with some of the families or wherever he wanted to live. The church had to pay for that. Cause the church is suppose to pay for the preacher, keep up his expenses and everything. So that kept us busy, you're going to take care of a preacher (laugh). Yeah, you're suppose to look after the preacher. Take up all that collection and all this monthly payments and things, in to the church, that go, and what, so much have to go to the conference every year or so, that they'd take in the Head conference in the States...¹⁵⁴

Mrs. Hendrix commented that in the beginning "they were lucky to have "good" preachers, who did godly duty and also did odd jobs and things that

¹⁵³ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2717 (Transcripts), Nora Hendrix, 14 April 1977.

¹⁵⁴ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2717 (Transcripts), Nora Hendrix, 14 April 1977.

needed to be done around the church.”¹⁵⁵ Given that the members had to be committed in order to support their ministers, it was really important that ministers were liked by the community.

At its height in the 1920s until sometime in the mid-1930s, the church managed to support a steady flow of African American preachers. There were enough black people living in the Hogan’s Alley area at the time to fill the church and some of the preachers were able to gain the support of the community.

I’ve forgotten how many people the church could hold. I guess, I wonder if it could hold 100? I guess it could get... might get 200 in there, and lots and lots of time it would be full right up, and have to go get some chairs, maybe to sit way in the back there and all the seats would be full up. Oh, a lot of it, oh, when the church first started, five or six years there, we were doing fine. Then it finally kind of went down. Some of the older people, you know, kind of got ill and couldn’t attend, and I don’t know, we get different preachers. After Reverend Robinson left, well, got some other preachers that didn’t seem to hold the people together. It’s kind of hard, you know, to kind of keep the people together, you know. If they like one, oh, my, they’d do everything in the world for that one. Oh, some of those sisters just worked like 60, all ready to give this... oh, yes we’re going to have this, have that. And they’d work. And if they didn’t, if some preacher come, they didn’t particularly bother, well, they didn’t work... They’d do their share, give their share, but otherwise, naturally, it would kind of run down...¹⁵⁶

Later on, when newly arriving ministers were unable to gain the support of black people living in the area, specifically the women, the church began to run into membership and financial problems.

The Fountain Chapel was involved in a number of fundraising activities in the Hogan’s Alley community. The dinners and socials they organized became important

¹⁵⁵ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver’s East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2717 (Transcripts), Nora Hendrix, 14 April 1977.

¹⁵⁶ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver’s East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2717 (Transcripts), Nora Hendrix, 14 April 1977.

meeting places for black people and brought in individuals from the community who may not have otherwise attended church. In this way, the AME played an important social function as well as spiritual. Mrs. Hendrix elaborates on the dinners that church women organized for the church:

But we used to give them chitlin' suppers, too, and we'd... sell out so fast. Why, they wouldn't last no time. You see, most all those sportin' people, they like that kind of food and before you know it, it was all gone, just like that...you'd have chitlins and corn bread, that had to go along with it and with the other cabbage slaw and whatever other things we'd put with it. But we'd sell it so fast, oh my, make your head spin... just put the word out. Somebody'd just go around down in the district where all the sportin' fellows and what not, and tell them the sisters going to have chitlin' dinner over at such and such a place. It it's at somebody's house or at the place... a hall or something... why they'd be there sittin' in the hall. If they didn't come eat it, they'd send plates and buckets and things to take it out, and then you'd turn around in a little while and they're all gone... Well, they scattered all around. Around down in prior and Union and around down in that way. There was quite a... well, right on Georgia Street... and further down there on Prior and Union, well there's quite a few more lived down in that district. Yeah, that ... down that way is where most of the sportin' fellows had their clubs and whatnot. They're the ones that used to get... eat up all the chitlins (laughs) No. Never have no trouble selling them. No. You never get enough of those.. Yeah, it was... said it was hard time, but we didn't realize it were hard times. No. I didn't realized no hard time. So people say about hard time. I said, oh... good time for me.¹⁵⁷

Strathcona must have been a difficult community to survive in as a preacher. Women were an integral part of the operations of the church – organizing church social functions and helping to ensure that the priests were taken care of. If "the women like the pastor they would work hard for them, if they didn't would not get too much out

¹⁵⁷ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2717 (Transcripts), Nora Hendrix, 14 April 1977.

of them...”¹⁵⁸ With a comparatively small congregation, supporting ministers financially became one of the number one challenges for the Fountain Chapel.

Financial difficulties were also exacerbated by the fact that the Fountain Chapel was also expected to send money to the district superintendent in Seattle. Reverend Elrod suggests the district superintendent for the Fountain Chapel who was located in Seattle may not have always been in touch with the needs of the Strathcona community,

One difficulty the church had its entire history, and I am very conscious of this because I have just gone through this with Unitarianism, was that it, that it was an American denomination, and the property was owned by the Americans and they were demanding of financial support for the district, but yet the church being up here all by its lonesome, got very little support from the district. I mean they were supposed to help pay the salary of the district superintendent but what were they getting in return – almost nothing. So, this was always a matter of attention. And in fact it’s what ended my efforts, was the American district superintendent. Had there been enough other congregations in Canada to form a Canadian AME, it could have happened... I think the Mennonites, when they divided, the Canadian branch grew. Colonizing or whatever, doesn’t work... it was isolated, this was the problem.¹⁵⁹

This quote also draws attention to close ties that many Canadian community institutions had with African American precursors. At times, these tensions may also have influenced certain members decision to remain a member of the Fountain Chapel. Reverend Elrod speculated,

I think they felt they had been taken advantage. They had been milked. They felt used. Each church was suppose to pay a certain percentage to the district, plus paying their own minister’s salary... They had a small group...¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ BCA, *Opening Doors: Vancouver’s East End, Sound Heritage*, Tape 2682 (Transcripts), Leona Risby, May, 1977.

¹⁵⁹ Reverend Elrod, personal interview, 23 December 2002.

¹⁶⁰ Reverend Elrod, personal interview, 23 December 2002.

The tensions between the Fountain Chapel, a somewhat isolated Canadian church, and the district superintendent were not limited to financial matters.

Tensions within the Fountain Chapel also arose between certain ministers and the congregation. Leona Risby, a devoted member of the Fountain Chapel, taught at the Sunday school and was very involved in many of the fundraising and social activities. Although most of the ministers that came to the Fountain Chapel were at least respectable men, some evidence from the oral historical data would suggest that some of them were not completely honest. Members of the church that were interviewed were reluctant to talk about the ministers that were unable to gain the support of the church because they engaged in dishonest behaviour, but Mrs. Risby hinted that “people lose interest when there is questions of honesty in the Church.”¹⁶¹ These tensions may also have been responsible for alienating certain younger members of the church, who did not have a historical or sentimental attachment to its success.¹⁶² Though it is difficult to speculate given the reluctance of black people to talk about the tensions that arose between the congregation and the ministers at the Fountain Chapel, dishonesty may have also contributed to a decline in service attendance.

Certainly one of the main contributing factors to the decline of the AME Church in Strathcona was the exodus of black people out of the Hogan’s Alley area and into the surrounding suburbs at the end of the 1940s. It is difficult to ascertain when black people stopped going to the Fountain Chapel, and all of the reasons for their decision to attend church service in other neighborhoods, but we know that it

¹⁶¹ BCA, *Opening Doors: Vancouver’s East End*, Sound Heritage, Tape 2682 (Transcripts), Leona Risby, May, 1977.

¹⁶² Richard “Dick” Collins, personal interview, 28 November 2002.

was still active in the 1940s. When Mrs. Lawson arrived to the Strathcona area in 1941, she remembers attending service at the Fountain Chapel.

Yes. Yeah, I went there the first year I came here. It was lovely, and the minister was Reverend Wilson, and I was living on 638 East Prior – 638 Prior Street. Prior Apartment. And I went there. Reverend Wilson was there. Oh yeah. And my daughter'd go there to Sunday school, because that was the only church around, you know... Fountain Chapel.¹⁶³

At this point, the church still had a Sunday school service, so one can assume that they still had a large enough congregation to support it. Mrs. Nealy moved to the Strathcona area in 1944 and remembers that the AME church was still quite active, and served an important role in what she would consider to be the Hogan's Alley black community.

And then they had the church on Jackson Avenue... and if you wanted to meet anyone, the thing to do was to go to that church. And that little church would be just packed to the doors. They had a beautiful choir, and... it was really the whole hub of this ghetto, was the church. And then as people moved away, and moved to another place, well, they went to the church in their neighborhood. Like after that, everybody moved out, well I just started going to the First United Church. Of course, I was raised in the First United Church in Winnipeg. So when everybody left here, then I just started going back there. Moore moved because he got a good job, with a salary and a car, and university education for his children, "Here, he was poor like the rest of us."¹⁶⁴

In Vancouver, the lack of segregation in housing and churches meant that black people could choose to attend church service in their new neighborhoods. In fact, in 1944 Reverend Theo R. Jones criticized the black community in Vancouver for

¹⁶³ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2676 (Transcripts), Doris Lawson, 7 May 1977.

¹⁶⁴ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977.

committing spiritual adultery.¹⁶⁵ He suggested that the lack discrimination in Vancouver made life too easy for black people, and as such they felt no urge to support black institutions such as the AME Church.

Whether it was convenience, dissatisfaction with the AME church or spiritual adultery that influenced black people to attend church in their new neighborhoods remains a question for debate. Unfortunately for the church, the migration of wealthier black people out of the Strathcona area also meant the loss of some of their key members. Reverend Elrod had ministered in many areas in the United States and had noticed similar trends with black mobility and the decline of black churches.

The congregation wasn't large enough to attract a minister from the states, and there were no Canada AME ministers. I mean it was the same as my experience in Tennessee and Ohio. As people in Tennessee and Ohio, as people left the small towns the congregations became too small to support a minister. As in Vancouver, as people left Strathcona, there wasn't a large enough group to pay a salary.¹⁶⁶

The financial situation for the preachers at the Fountain Chapel became even more difficult, and it is likely that Reverend Moore was not the only minister that chose a position in larger communities that could afford to pay him a decent salary.

Reverend Elrod came to Vancouver in 1969 to minister, and began to minister at the AME church. He was the first white reverend ever to minister in the AME church in the United States. He was assigned to Vancouver to get the church up and running again, but by 1969 the AME church was fading quickly.

When the bishop in Ohio heard that I was coming to Vancouver he said, "Oh we have a building there." Buildings in Methodism are owned by the domination instead of the congregation. He said, "I will appoint you as minister, see if you can get the congregation started

¹⁶⁵ "Opposition Needed for Unity -- Life Too Easy Here, Says Negro Pastor" *Vancouver Daily Province*, 17 Jan 1944.

¹⁶⁶ Reverend Elrod, personal interview, 23 December 2002.

again.” So I went to the church, there was an AME Zion women, not holding service but using it as a hostel for the homeless. I offered to share the building with her, but she was unwilling to do this. I checked with the city and yes the building was owned by the AME not the AME Zion, and I had my, both my book, my ordination paper, and my appointment to the church paper. So the bailiff evicted her and I took the building over, got in touch with some of the old members. They were willing to come for an afternoon service, but not a morning because they had scattered, their children were involved in their own communities and things. So I began an afternoon service, white minister, black congregation. Local black Pentecostal woman minister contacted me and said “Since you aren’t using the sanctuary Sunday morning may I use it.” So there we were, in the afternoon a white minister with black parishioners, and in the morning a Pentecostal service, black minister white parishioners. A district superintendent came up from Seattle, I... he was I think, senile, a bit past it. He went to a morning, and said “Well a morning service with a black parishioner looks better to me.” And so, none of the black parishioners attended to Pentecostal because they were too educated, too sophisticated, too middle class, too upper middle class, to be comfortable in a hell fire and damnation dancing around Pentecostal service. Now as far as I know, my services there were the last AME services held in the Fountain Chapel, I could be wrong but I am not aware. Because certainly the former members would have nothing to do with the Pentecostal minister and were completely disgusted with the district superintendent...¹⁶⁷

The decision of the Seattle superintendent did not really end the AME church.

Reverend Elrod claimed that he had only had about 20 “old timers” left in his congregation and that:

It was not, I mean, I don’t think it could have ever become a viable congregation again. They lived too far from each other. There were no families for a church school. Unless you have a church school, you don’t have a growing church for the future.¹⁶⁸

In 1971 Reverend Elrod left the AME church and so did what remained of the original congregation.

¹⁶⁷ Reverend Elrod, personal interview, 23 December 2002. Pentecostal minister was Anne Girard, who took over the church and unofficially ended the AME church.

¹⁶⁸ Reverend Elrod, personal interview, 23 December 2002.

Regardless of the Fountain Chapel's shortcomings, however, it still played an important role in the community. Throughout the history of the AME it served as a centre of not only religious but social and political gatherings. The women of the Fountain Chapel had many dinners and other sorts of social events that enabled opportunities for black people to network and meet others who were faced with similar political hardships in Vancouver. Some of the Fountain Chapel's reverends became active members in the political community. During the Clemons case in 1952 Reverend Moore was an outspoken advocate for black civil rights and helped to organize the community against police brutality and unequal treatment.¹⁶⁹ During Elrod's term at the AME he had used the Church as a halfway house for black and white Vietnam War deserters trying to reintegrate themselves into North American society. Many of the black people who stayed in Reverend Elrod's halfway house became long-term residents of Vancouver. These social and political functions of the Fountain Chapel were very much in keeping with the traditions of the AME Church.

170

Railroad Porters Union

For Canadians of African descent, finding employment was in some respects even more difficult than in the United States.¹⁷¹ Even without formal segregation, becoming a railway porter was one of the only jobs available to black men in Canada.

¹⁶⁹ Ross Lambertson, "The Black Brown and Red Blues: The Beating of Clarence Clemons," (unpublished work), 15.

¹⁷⁰ Reverend Elrod, personal interview, 23 December 2002.

¹⁷¹ Stanley G. Grizzle, *My Name is Not George: the Story of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in Canada* (Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1998), 26.

Many of the porters' duties which included making beds and cleaning were considered feminine jobs that white males would not do. However, the public nature of this work also made the porters' duties unsuitable for white women. Black Canadians competed with white people on most other jobs and therefore found building solidarity with white unions extremely difficult.¹⁷² Even when black men were hired, they were barred from joining white labor unions because of their perceived threat to white priority, and so were able to find very little support despite the fact that they were subject to constant racism on the job site.¹⁷³

In 1915 Canadian porters organized to create the Porters Mutual Benefit Association (PMBA) that provided much-needed social benefits for porters and their families. Five divisions across Canada were created in all of the major cities: Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary and Vancouver. Although this organization was important due to its ability to mitigate some of the persistent and lingering effects of low wages and ridiculously long hours, their mandate was not to agitate for systemic change.¹⁷⁴

In 1919 the CNR Porters applied to become members of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railroad Employees (CBRE). Their application was rejected because they were 'black.' Later that same year, under the leadership of J.A. Robinson, the CNR porters formed the Order of the Sleeping Car Porters and began to persist with their former application to become members of the CBRE. After much lobbying and mounting pressure, the black porters were permitted a very conditional Jim Crow-

¹⁷² Joseph F. Wilson, *Tearing Down the Color Bar: A Documentary History and Analysis of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1989), 3.

¹⁷³ Grizzle, *My Name is Not George*, 11.

¹⁷⁴ Grizzle, *My Name is Not George*, 14-15.

inspired entry into the CBRE. The CBRE and CNR executives agreed to create two separate collective agreements, one for ‘whites’ and another one for the black members.¹⁷⁵ In the end, the white members of CBRE union and the CNR executive were successful in their attempts to exclude black porters from true membership.

The Order of the Sleeping Car Porters was driven by the CNR porters’ small but significant gains to organize the CPR black porters. The CPR was privately owned however, and immediately fired many of the key organizers and supporters of the union. Seven of the fired porters grieved, but were unsuccessful in winning the support of the CPR’s conciliation board.¹⁷⁶ This little setback did not dampen the porters’ desire for fair treatment however, and just a few years later, when A. Phillip Randolph was called to Canada to help organized the porters, they were ready to hear his message.

A. Phillip Randolph is a massive figure in the black labour movement in the United States. As president of the Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP or the Brotherhood), he helped to ensure that this organization would not only be a vehicle for change within the black labour movement, but an “engineer and catalyst” for social change in the larger North American society.¹⁷⁷ The Brotherhood made significant contributions to the ideological and organizational component of the civil rights movements of the 1960s. They carried their message by railway throughout North America, becoming a “mobile propaganda army.”¹⁷⁸ Their newspaper, which began as *The Messenger* and later became *The Black Worker*, became a venue in

¹⁷⁵ Grizzle, *My Name is Not George*, 18.

¹⁷⁶ Grizzle, *My Name is Not George*, 19.

¹⁷⁷ Wilson, *Tearing Down the Color Bar*, 3.

¹⁷⁸ Wilson, *Tearing Down the Color Bar*, 22.

which issues most pressing to African Americans of the day were discussed, including criticism of its leadership.¹⁷⁹

In 1939 A. Phillip Randolph was called to Canada by Charles Russell to organize the CPR. He made a great impression on Canadian blacks who found truth in what he had to say. Over the next five years Randolph and his Vice President Bennie Smith would make trips to Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver to consult with Canadian organizers. Canadian porters began organizing in secret, passing messages discreetly and keeping alert for “stool pigeons” who had been planted by the CPR.¹⁸⁰ When the vote was taken, 470 out of the 477 porters voted in favor of joining the Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters. It was the first time in Canadian history that a trade union organized for and by black men had signed a collective agreement with a white employer.¹⁸¹

I was a member of the Sleeping Car Porters. That made a difference, the union made a difference you know. The railroad system was that, the porter really wasn't anything but just to work, that's all, so if it came time to sleep you slept in the smoking lounge. Everything you put down, your clothes always got dirty and dusty. Well the union changed all that, they made it so that you had a bed, a berth to sleep in like everybody else. And the hours, even now, I guess the hours are the same you have to work, but you get a longer layover in town. Like you are allowed 3 hours sleep out of 24. But now because of doing it, because of labour laws and different things like that, once you make the trip then maybe you stay in down for about 7 days or something... The union made a considerable difference in the railroad. But then that was an American union and we were just a branch of it, because it was the Pullmans union really. I remember being fascinated by going to hear... A Phillip Randolph came here who was head of the union and came here to speak, and I was fascinated by this black man speaking, because he was a wonderful orator, and I sat there and I was

¹⁷⁹ Wilson, *Tearing Down the Color Bar*, 27. Criticizes “Negro Leadership.”

¹⁸⁰ Grizzle, *My Name is Not George*, 21.

¹⁸¹ Grizzle, *My Name is Not George*, 23.

just amazed. For years I said I haven't heard anybody who impressed me as much as that.¹⁸²

The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car porters under the leadership of men like A. Phillip Randolph inspired black men all over North America to become more involved in the civil rights movement. It also created opportunities for black men like Richard Collins in remote places like Vancouver to be connected to a larger North American civil rights struggle.

The Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters was an important factor in the development of civil rights activism in Vancouver. The Brotherhood created opportunities for people like Frank Collins to gain leadership skills. Collins would not only lead the Brotherhood from 1939-56 but would also become a key organizer in Vancouver. Richard Collins describes his brother's activities:

Frank used to go around, he used to speak at the university when Dr. Norman McKenzie was president of the University and he used to give talks all the way around. He used to go to the different stores and complain that they didn't hire any blacks. I know he went to Eatons' one time, and they just wouldn't do it, but I noticed that they did afterwards and they got a supervisor there and everything else at one time. But he used to go all over making speeches to different places and things like that about blacks. He was one of the instigators to get the union for railroad porters. Phillip Randolph and some other Americans were the main ones but Frank was writing them all the time telling them the conditions and different things.¹⁸³

Frank Collins would also become the first president of the Canadian League for the Advancement of Colored People (CLACP). He was involved in the formation of the Negro Citizens League (NCL) and served as the first president of the British Columbia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (BCAACP). The

¹⁸² Richard "Dick" Collins, personal interview, 28 November 2002.

¹⁸³ Grizzle, *My Name is Not George*, Appendix 4. Richard "Dick" Collins, personal interview, 28 November 2002.

ideas that traveled to Vancouver via the trains inspired all kinds of political work and resistance.

In the 1950s the sleeping car porters ceased to be an all black profession and the Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters gradually began to dissolve.¹⁸⁴ In Vancouver some of the sleeping car porters found other jobs and began to move out of the Strathcona area. Some of the key members from the Brotherhood would become involved in many civil rights organizations in Vancouver, and would even help to found some of them. Although the Brotherhood was never able to inspire a mass movement of black people against discrimination and racism in Vancouver, they played an important role in raising consciousness and creating leaders who would play important roles in organizations such as the Negro Citizens League, Canadian League for the Advancement of Coloured People, and the British Columbia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People.

Black Organizational Development from 1945-1970

In August of 1945 A. Phillip Randolph again visited Vancouver in an effort to help establish a Vancouver branch of the Canadian League for the Advancement of Coloured People (CLACP or The League). In a speech given during his visit, Randolph warned that post-war employment gluts were coming and that Canadians of African descent would be hit the hardest. The CLACP was meant to begin rallying for a Fair Employment Practices Act similar to the one that had been fought for in the United States. The League was established with Frank Collins as its president and

¹⁸⁴ Richard "Dick" Collins, personal interview, 28 November 2002.

Lillian Washington as secretary.¹⁸⁵ In 1949 the League continued under the leadership of Duke Cromwell, the same man who was the target of “poison pen” letters in 1948.¹⁸⁶ The CLACP continued to lobby the province of B.C. to adopt fair employment and housing practices legislation. Despite the potential for a strong black civil rights lobbying organization in Vancouver the CLACP was not able to achieve a long lasting impact and has fallen out of historical documentation.

The case of Clarence Clemons did, for a brief period of time in 1952, draw a significant amount of public concern toward issues of human rights and racism in Vancouver.¹⁸⁷ Clarence Clemons was a black longshoreman who many suspected died as a result of injuries sustained while in the custody of the Vancouver police. The alleged assault took place on July 19th when the police took Clarence Clemons into their custody for “loitering” in the New Station Café. It is interesting to note as well, that the New Station Café was well known for its drinking and loitering clientele.

And it stayed open for 24hrs a day. And it was world-renowned, anything you wanted to find, go to the New Station. And people would come from all parts of the city, and you ordered something to eat and you had your bottles with you, and you drank, and you met people and laughed and talked and danced up and down the aisles. I... and Chinese people owned and operated the restaurant. I don't know how they stood it. You know, they... they made money, and I think the whole attitude was, well it was no Chinese making a fool of themselves, you know. You know, that was their whole attitude. They'd serve you and take your money and walk all the way from...

¹⁸⁵ “Negroes Seek Full Civil Rights,” *The Vancouver News Herald*, August 6 1945.

¹⁸⁶ “‘Few Occupations Open to Negroes,’ Group Told,” *Vancouver Province*, July 26 1949. Duke Cromwell was mentioned as the president of the CLACP. Cromwell’s family, which was issued with a death threat in one of the suburbs in Vancouver, was the subject of this newspaper article: “Young Negro Couple Threatened With Death Unless They Move,” *Vancouver Province*, 16 April 1948. I would suspect that this experience with racial intolerance may have had something to do with his decision to become more politically active in Vancouver.

¹⁸⁷ Ross Lambertson, “The Black Brown and Red Blues.”; Peg Kelly, “Creating a Harmonious Society: Human Rights Organizations in Vancouver – 1845-1956,” (unpublished work), 21.

they never said anything or complained or throw'd you out, or anything. You, if you started a fight, well you'd just call the police, and the police came in with the wagon and threw whoever was going in there, and threw 'em in the wagon, and party went on. And people used to come off the ships, the merchant seamen, and they'd stop you, and "Where's the New Station?" (laughs)¹⁸⁸

Certainly, Clarence Clemons would not have been out of place in this environment.

Following the arrest and time spent in police custody, Clemons lingered in a semi-conscious state for a number of months until he died on December 14th, 1952. During the time that Clemons was in his semi-conscious state in the hospital, momentum was gathering around his case in the black and human rights communities in Vancouver. Historian Ross Lambertson claims that a group of black Vancouverites organized and approached Rev. Moore at the AME church, who immediately took up the Clemons case.¹⁸⁹ Rev. Moore became the first black man appointed to the Civic Unity Counsel, no doubt as a result of the Clemons case. Though few considered Clemons to be a pillar of the community, he seemed to provide a rallying point which black people in the Strathcona area could talk about their experiences with racism and prejudice in Vancouver.

Due to the special circumstances surrounding the Clemons Case, namely the allegations of racism and human rights abuse leveled at the Vancouver Police Department, the coroner's inquest following Clemens' death attracted a lot of attention from black people and the human rights communities. A Jewish lawyer by the name of Nathan Nemetz was appointed special counsel to "ensure that all possible

¹⁸⁸ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977.

¹⁸⁹ Lambertson, *The Black Brown and Red Blues*, 21.

evidence was brought before the Coroner's Jury."¹⁹⁰ Due to Nemetz's experience and history in the British Columbian human rights community, he was "a first rate choice."¹⁹¹ However, many from the black community were upset that the "Coroner deviated from common practice and had not chosen the members from the local community, but rather plucked them from as far afield as Burnaby, West Vancouver, and the university area."¹⁹² The fact that the Coroner chose a jury composed entirely of white middle class men probably did nothing to ease black anxiety that this coroner's inquest would not deal properly with Clemons' beating because he was black.

The police admitted to engaging in a scuffle with Clemons, claiming that he was resisting arrest. In some ways, their story was not difficult to believe due to the fact that Clemons had just recently been released from prison for a stabbing incident when this altercation took place. Clemons was no stranger to the law, having been charged with attempted murder, indecent assault, assault causing bodily harm, and living off the avails of prostitution. It is easy to assume from this track record that Clemons was far from an upstanding citizen. Lambertson suggests that this may account for the jury's reluctance to find the police responsible for the scuffle that ensued between Clemons and the Vancouver police officers.¹⁹³ The Coroners' Jury concluded that there was not enough evidence to conclude that Clemons had died as a result of injuries sustained during police custody in July 19th of 1952.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ Lambertson, *The Black Brown and Red Blues*, 15.

¹⁹¹ Lambertson, *The Black Brown and Red Blues*, 15.

¹⁹² Lambertson, *The Black Brown and Red Blues*, 18.

¹⁹³ Lambertson, *The Black Brown and Red Blues*, 20.

¹⁹⁴ BCA, Coroner's Inquest Report, 325. The Coroner's Jury ruled: "An unnatural death, the result of an injury to his spinal cord caused by an old injury which may have been aggravated by his strenuous struggle while resisting arrest by the Vancouver City Police Officers."

The treatment that Clemons received in police custody and his subsequent death became an important event in that it brought awareness to police harassment of black residents in Vancouver. The coroner's inquest hearing was a symbolic occasion in the history of black presence in Vancouver. 84 people (up to 90% of the spectators) at the inquest hearing were black people who had arrived searching for justice not only in the Clemons case but in their own everyday lived experiences as well.

...I think that was one of the things that triggered us to set something up. I attended the inquest you know, and it was a farce. Lies. Clemons was about my size, and they said oh, he was this big and strong longshoreman type. I said, I knew the guy, and he wasn't any bigger than I was. And I knew this policeman too, cause I played ball with him. And I knew he was lying through his teeth. That policeman, oh what's his name, I've forgotten his name now, right after that case he resigned from the force and he went back to Saskatoon, that's where he come from, and I think his dad was a police officer out there. What... Winters, oh that's what his name was, what he used to do, at the end of the month, when these people got their cheques, you know, and they would come along, say, with their little bottle that they had purchased from the liquor store. They were going to go home and have a little drink. Well he would take it away from them and say well, "You're drunk." Well, that's the type of policeman that he was, he didn't care. Even one day I heard him boasting about it. And I said, what kind of guy is that on the police force, I think his first name was Barry, Barry Winters. He left right after that, cause he knew that he had lied to get off the hook, and he was afraid that one day someone might catch him in an alley, and work him over. But he was a bigger guy than Clemons.¹⁹⁵

According to Lambertson, the discussion that took place in the local newspapers revealed a side to the Clemons Case that did not come out during the course of the coroner's inquest.¹⁹⁶ Based on his reading of local newspapers he suggested that

¹⁹⁵ Emmitt Holmes, personal interview, 21 January 2003.

¹⁹⁶ Lambertson, "The Black Brown and Red Blues," 7.

there had been tensions between the black community and the police even before the Clemons case.

It is certainly evident from my reading of the oral history, that police were not the first place that black people turned if they had trouble in Vancouver. This may have been because they preferred to settle their disputes themselves. However, I think there was also an element of distrust harbored by some members of the black population toward the police. Some of this distrust came out in an interview with Mr. Holmes.

They tried to interest me in getting on the police force. well they didn't have any blacks on the force... none of us did because all – at that time there was a lot of American service that came up for the weekend and some of them was dealing drugs and this and that – but all they wanted, you see, because I questioned them good before saying no. They wanted somebody they could put up here to patrol the area where the blacks lived, and to be a stooge. Now, that's not my job, why can't I be down on Granville Street! you know, why can't I be down there, why must I be up here. “Well you know the people, and you know the culture.” Well that's hogwash, that wasn't what they were interested in, they were just interested in someone who could be there as a stooge. So then I said no, that wasn't for me.¹⁹⁷

There may have been historical reasons for black people in Vancouver to distrust police. It seems that the benevolence of certain members on the police force was in question.

Two organizations were created in the wake of the Clemons case to deal with police brutality and black civil rights: the Negro Citizens League and British Columbia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People. Mr. Lane remembers the first meeting of the BCAACP:

I was at the first meeting [of the BCAACP]...Emmitt Holmes started it and got us together. And as I remember right, one of the prime

¹⁹⁷ Emmitt Holmes, personal interview, 21 January 2003.

reasons that it started was when ummm... what was the fellow that got beat to death by the police men. Clemons, yeah, it was right after that. It was quite public. And at that time there was another. I can't remember the name of the one that Jim Ramsey started. He started it because of the Clemons beating, and then they got branded as being communists, and at that time you weren't supposed to be communist... that was the Negro Citizen's League. So they sort of left that alone and started the BC Association for the Advancement of Coloured People and him and Holmes actually got us together.¹⁹⁸

Due to the presence of many communists, and the tendency of the larger society to name any black organization with civil and labour rights mandates 'communist,' the Negro Citizens League had limited success.¹⁹⁹

In 1956 the BCAACP was formed by Emmitt Holmes who gathered up some of the people who had been involved in the Negro Citizens League and other concerned members of the community. Other founding members of this organization included Howard Fair, Len Lane, Charles McFadden, Roy Williams, Ernie Lawrence and Kanute Buttedahl.²⁰⁰ Frank Collins' experience with civil rights organizing in Vancouver in his positions with the Iron Workers Association and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters made him an obvious choice. Mr. Holmes describes why he saw the need for the BCAACP:

I didn't have any group behind me, and yet I was fighting for the black people of the community without an organization... I was talking to some of my friends and they said well, "Why don't you form your own organization." They had the NAACP in the States, and so somebody gave me the name of a lawyer over their, so I got him to come up here and give a talk to some people who were interested up here.²⁰¹

The BCAACP was meant to be a broad-reaching organization that could link the political, social and cultural interests of the black peoples in British Columbia. They

¹⁹⁸ Leonard and Adeline Lane, personal interviews, 15 January 2003.

¹⁹⁹ Ernie King, "personal interview," in Kelly, "Creating a Harmonious Society," 22.

²⁰⁰ Leonard and Adeline Lane, personal interviews, 15 January 2003.

²⁰¹ Emmitt Holmes, personal interview, 21 January 2003.

decided that the most pressing issues in the community for black people were accommodation, employment, police brutality and proper education for black children.

The organization was at first meant to be a branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The NAACP had an extensive history of fighting for black civil rights in the United States which made them seem like an ideal organization to become affiliated with.

Well it was a good meeting as far as I remember. We got together and we talked about what our platform would be, and tried to decide on a name, which we didn't decide on that very night because we went to another meeting... I remember the organization writing to them, and asking them, the NAACP, and asking them about [affiliation]. They said well, "our rules were so different than yours are in Canada, so you would be better to go out on your own. But any support that we can give you, we'll give you support rather than be affiliated with you." So we applied and got a charter, and it was running for quite a while.²⁰²

From the beginning of the organization, its members were aware that the tactics of the NAACP had limited applicability in a Canadian cultural and political context. Given that Vancouver black people were young as a group and that they all had other jobs and families to support, developing their own particular political strategies must have been a challenge.

The kind of racism and discrimination that existed in Canada during the time of the inception of the BCAACP was very difficult to fight. Mrs. Nealy describes some of the reasons the NAACP's approach may not have worked very well in Vancouver.

In the states the racism is blatant and they segregate you, you can fight it. Because they call you a "nigger" and they segregate you, out loud

²⁰² Leonard and Adeline Lane, personal interviews, 15 January 2003.

and clear. You know what I mean? But the racism in Canada is so subtle, and so elusive, you can't really pin it down, to fight it. Like I was telling you about landlords, putting up the rent so, because they knew darn well that you couldn't pay the rent. So how were you going to fight that, in those days? 20 years ago you know... but that's the way they put you down. In a nice way. So how were you going to fight that kind of prejudice? You know. And the Americans wouldn't know about our kind of prejudice, to help us fight. We'd have to do this ourselves.²⁰³

Given the small number of people involved in the BCAACP and the arduous process of developing ways to fight Vancouver's particular kind of racism, this organization had perhaps set an impossible task for itself.

Throughout the duration of its existence the BCAACP met with local Vancouver police and city officials with regard to a number of civil rights issues. These civic bodies were more than willing to meet with the BCAACP representatives, but Holmes reported that very little action resulted from these meetings. The ineffectiveness of the BCAACP was perhaps one of the reasons why some people chose to work through other organizations in Vancouver. Mr. Holmes also worked with the Civic Unity Association in the late 1960s. It was more effective in many ways because it united a number of groups of people in Vancouver who had similar struggles and added strength in numbers.

Many groups speaking as one voice, that was the idea. The Jewish people were having the same problem as us. When they found out they were Jewish, they used to have a sign... oh, restrictive covenants they had in West Vancouver. And it said, "No niggers, dogs and Jews." We got them to strike the restrictive covenant in Victoria... because then if you wanted to keep an area white, that was all you had to do was get permission for this restrictive covenant. And you would never, it would never change, it would always be that way...²⁰⁴

²⁰³ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977.

²⁰⁴ Emmitt Holmes, personal interview, 21 January 2003.

When Mr. Holmes was asked if the BCAACP ever had any success with its efforts to effect legislation in Vancouver he replied:

No. Let's see, I was chairman of the Labour Committee for Human Rights for the Vancouver Labour Council, I was on that committee for 14 years, and for 7 years I was the chairman of it, and as Chairman of that committee I had the backing of the Labour Council behind me, so there was some weight and we got fair housing for the city. I don't even remember what year it was... Frank Collins and I and two other members of the Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters and I went to Victoria with BC Federation of Labour for fair employment practices. And we sat down with Bill Black, who was the provincial secretary and Bob Barner who was the Attorney General, and this Wicks, don't remember his first name. He was the Minister of Labour at the time, so anyway, they did pass legislation, but it was very weak, had no teeth, it was just something on the books to appease Labour and these liberal groups that are there lobbying for their causes.²⁰⁵

Though many of the members of the BCAACP were dedicated to the fight for civil rights in Vancouver, the BCAACP itself was ineffective and few black people participated.

Despite its limited impact the BCAACP continued to exist and attract new members from time to time. Though it may not have been able to provide tangible results in Vancouver political scene, it continued to offer some kind of support for people who were struggling against racial intolerance or discrimination. In 1977 Mrs. Nealy was asked if the BCAACP sent letters to local newspapers and city officials in cases where people had come to BCAACP with a problem they found unmanageable on their own.

Yes, they have done it, you know. We have a crisis committee, and but, the, these things that happen, like, in isolated cases, it gets so bad, that they have to come to us, but as a rule, the average individual, if something terrible happens to them in the neighborhood, they'll just move out of the neighborhood... instead of going to City Hall, a lot

²⁰⁵ Emmitt Holmes, personal interview, 21 January 2003.

of people don't know how to fight, anyhow.... You know, they don't know who to turn to... they don't know where to go...

In the 1970s the BCAACP also organized a community newsletter and conducted a province-wide survey that aimed at investigating the experiences and quality of life for black British Columbians.²⁰⁶

Although the BCAACP had limited success in terms of political gains, they were able to have some impact in terms of educating black children. Given the largely Eurocentric focus of Canadian education, black people in Vancouver did not know much about the history of black people in Canada or the world. Mrs. Nealy discusses some of the potential effects of this kind of education system on black people:

I don't think we knew anything about Africa in the first place. Do you know what I mean? It was just some country way out there. But now we know Africa. And now that, like, there's several Canadians here have made trips... And people in some parts of Africa, the blacks, are really wealthy. And they got nice cities and nice homes. And, like, the average person thinks everybody's living in the jungle. You know. But they're not. They're living just like they are in Vancouver... Yes 10 or 20 years ago we weren't interested in Africa. We didn't know anything about it. And another thing – we were all Canadians. And therefore, all we knew was British history. You know. Like, I never knew Hannibal was a black man till after I was grown and married. You know? All we read, we just had a little paragraph about him in our history book. But, what I was taught about, Sir Walter Raleigh, and all the great explorers and the seafaring men and how the British Empire was won. But we didn't really know at what cost that the empire was built on. You know. Until, well it really is just in the last few years we've really become aware of what's been happening. See what, and, these magazine, see, and then we started reading. And anyway, there was a time, we couldn't even get these Ebony's in Canada. We had to get the American railroad porters to bring 'em into Canada. But now these are sol on... So we get to reading, then you

²⁰⁶ Black British Columbia Community Survey, BCAACP.

sort of get a... a race pride. You know what I mean?... about who you are.²⁰⁷

The BCAACP held dinners and socials where slides from the trips that Canadians made to Africa could be seen. In that way, the BCAACP played a role in transforming how black people came to see themselves as descendents of Africans.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s some people didn't see the need for an organization. The civil rights movements in Canada and the United States were slowly changing Vancouver's view of their black citizens. Mr. Holmes suggests that this may have been enough for some people of the community.

Our main interests, as I said, were fair employment and fair housing, and once we got that, the people say well, you know, "We don't need an organization now we got this and we got that." And so it wasn't as easy to draw people in. Oh sure, you could have a picnic, everybody comes out to the picnic, and you see them once a year. And they would say "oh yeah you folks is doing a good job, keep up the good work." But you see, the way we were thinking at that time, is that we didn't need the organization for ourselves, we needed it for the kids that was coming along... We were settled into what we were doing, we had our houses, and so, we weren't, but we wanted to make sure that those people that were trying to rent, that they were getting a fair shake, and also thinking of the generation that was gunna follow us that they would have equal opportunity to get a decent job. Yes see, but after the kids felt "Well, we haven't experienced none of this stuff that you folks are talking about." So if they are not experiencing it they don't see the need, and that's the way it was, that is why the organization went down.²⁰⁸

Although the BCAACP did not have huge impacts, it was active until sometime in the 1980s. Toward the end of its existence, the BCAACP became more interested in cultural awareness and social events.

²⁰⁷ BCA, *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End*, Sound Heritage, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977.

²⁰⁸ Emmitt Holmes, personal interview, 21 January 2003.

Community organizations in Vancouver were likely not very visible in the public mind of the city for a number of reasons. Many black people in Vancouver, despite the subtle racism that they faced in the areas of employment and housing, seemed to feel that with hard work and determination they could make a good life for themselves and their families and therefore did not find the need for organizations that might attract unwanted attention. This lack of overt discrimination also created situations for black mobility and increased the employment that was available to them and this had impacts on where they could choose to live through greater Vancouver. The lack of aggressive racialized discrimination against black people created a situation in which they did not need to come together as a community—as in other places in Canada and the United States. Particularly after the 1950s many black people moved out of the Hogan's Alley area and scattered into the surrounding suburbs with no one neighborhood functioning as a “center of the black community.” If there was a community of people of African descent in Vancouver it was a private matter, that was built through interpersonal networks and for the most part escaped the historical record.

Chapter 6 – The Politics of Recognizing ‘Others.’

One of the most striking contradictions about colonialism is that it both needs to ‘civilize’ its ‘others’, and to fix them into perpetual ‘otherness.’²⁰⁹

-- Ania Loomba

Thus far, we have discussed black invisibility in Vancouver as a historicized absence and a maneuvering tactic undertaken by blacks themselves. This chapter will focus on the changes to the state’s approach to black people which inverted the invisibility-visibility paradox. Suddenly, beginning in the 1967, it was not only alright to see blacks in Canada, it became important to spot them and focus on blacks as a visible sign of multiculturalism at work, and as a badge of difference from the racial conflicts of the United States. Canadian policy toward people of colour in Canada after the 1970s has meant limited increases in the visibility of black history and experience in Vancouver. People of African descent have yet to be made visible as the fluid and diverse community that they are. Celebrations of Black History Month in Vancouver have yet to actually celebrate the history of people of African descent in Vancouver. Black History Month celebrations in Vancouver often highlight African American slavery and Civil Rights Movements or make vague and generalizing attempts to discuss Africa or the Caribbean but they do not necessarily speak directly to the experiences of people of African descent living in Vancouver. This discussion is meant to suggest that perhaps writing histories that make black people more visible in Canadian history is only one part of the process of correcting their historicized absence and may have its own consequences as severe as invisibility. This

²⁰⁹ Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 173.

examination will point toward some concerns that are still present with the effort to bring groups such as the black Vancouverites into visibility only to become “visible minorities.”

In Vancouver it is still common place for Canadians of African descent to be asked where they are from. This question, harmless though it might be in intention, is an interpersonal manifestation of a Canadian national rhetoric which still has not come to terms with a historical tradition that has vanished black Vancouver from its history books. As part of a larger North American response to the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, to African decolonization, and to the increasingly negative connotations attached to racism, laws and attitudes in Canada also changed. In 1967 immigration polices changed to allow more immigration from the Caribbean and African nations.²¹⁰ The legislative aspects of multicultural policy have meant that people can no longer be discriminated against on the basis of race. These policies have created a shift within the group of black people in Vancouver as well.

The long history of silence around black history has begun to be broken since the 1970s. Histories of black presence in Canada began to be written.²¹¹ A number of organizations have been formed, such as the Vancouver Black Historical Association of British Columbia, the Hogan’s Alley Memorial Committee and the Black Historical Association of Victoria that are attempting to create more inclusive versions of Vancouver with regard to black presence. Particularly since the 1980s

²¹⁰ Francis and Jones and Smith, *Destinies*, 452. In 1958 director of the Immigration Branch explained why “coloured British subjects” from the Caribbean were excluded from Canada: “They do not assimilate rapidly and pretty much vegetate to a low standard of living.”

²¹¹ Three notable survey texts include: Robin Winks, *The Black in Canada: A History*. (London: Yale University Press, 1971); Crawford Kilian. *Go Do Some Great Thing: The Black Pioneers of British Columbia* (Vancouver BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 1978); James Walker, *A History of Blacks in Canada: Study Guide for Teachers and Students*, (Ottawa: Minister of State, Multiculturalism, c1980).

they have become more interested in the development of a history of Vancouver that highlights their struggles and achievements. Despite this increased desire for visibility by both the Canadian state and black people within Vancouver themselves, some Canadian scholars have suggested that there are certain historical continuities between the way that black people were made invisible before and how they are made visible now.

Though there are particularities in the experiences of people of African descent in Canada, their story connects them to larger narratives of European colonialist expansion and knowledge building. In the quest to create a universal Canadian identity based on British norms, values and practices, Canadian policy makers characterized those of non-British, non-European and non-US descent as a threat to the establishment of a “civilized” and “progress oriented” modern nation state. Canada as a national project has a history of defining the conditions for membership based on British European values and norms.²¹² In the West of Canada even those who were not committed to strictly Anglo-Celtic hegemony, “wanted an ethnic mix among the white immigrants, they believed that the finer qualities of all new westerners would surface to create this superior race.”²¹³ At best, black Canadians were problematic to the achievement of these goals.

The strategies employed in the construction of British-European hegemony have changed throughout the construction of the Canadian nation state. There remain, however, some discernable continuities in the manner in which British-

²¹² Richard J. F. Day, *Multiculturalism and the history of Canadian diversity* (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 2000), 122-27; Patricia Roy, *A White Man's Province* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1989), 266-268.

²¹³ Francis and Jones and Smith, *Destinies*, 141

Canadians have maneuvered to maintain their privileged status. In the 1860s policy makers began to realize that settling the vast frontiers of Western Canada would require that they recruit more than just “healthy, wealthy, Anglo-Saxon bodies.”²¹⁴ The task of settling Western Canada, however, had to be undertaken with particular attention to the ‘quality’ and ‘suitability’ of immigrants chosen. The rhetoric of ‘civilization’ and ‘progress’ based on notions of race and modernization, was employed to decide who would make suitable settlers.²¹⁵ When policy makers failed to achieve their “fantasy of British purity,”²¹⁶ British Canadians were quick to show their commitment to the ideal. In the early part of the 1900s, they lashed out at Asian settlers in Vancouver and Victoria, and Doukhobor and Eastern European settlers in the prairies.²¹⁷ For this discussion, it is important to keep in mind that the type of language that was employed to justify these attacks on those who were considered unsuitable to be Canadian has continued resonances in the multicultural policy of recognition. What has remained consistent in Canada’s discussion of the ‘problem of diversity’ is the rhetoric of ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ that continues to be present in more subtle forms in present day multicultural policy.

Much of the rhetoric of multiculturalism as a state policy suggests that diversity has always been present in Canada. Multicultural policy refers to this ‘primordial diversity’ as the fact of *multiculturalism* in Canadian history.²¹⁸ Much of current multicultural rhetoric evolves out of a desire to acknowledge this ‘fact of

²¹⁴ Day, *Multiculturalism*, 122.

²¹⁵ Himani Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Gender* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2000), 96-97.

²¹⁶ Day, *Multiculturalism*, 123.

²¹⁷ Day, *Multiculturalism*, 123. For a detailed analysis of Anglo-Canadian responses to Chinese immigration consult Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown* and Roy, *White Man's Province*.

²¹⁸ Day, *Multiculturalism*, 18-23.

multiculturalism' through the recognition of the many cultures, peoples and languages that make up Canada's diversity. This policy of multiculturalism has evolved primarily out of three documents: the *Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism*; the *Multiculturalism: Building the Canadian Mosaic*; and *Multiculturalism: Being Canadian*.²¹⁹ These documents are based on a desire to recognize diverse groups in Canada without completely coming to terms with the ways in which colonialism influenced the construction of non-European in the Canada state.

The rhetoric of multicultural policy seems to suggest that the *recognition* of 'marginalized communities' is key to their development as historical groups within Canada. The process of recognizing 'multicultural' identities is important in this discussion of Vancouver because recognition has also become fundamental to black people's desire for a Canadian history that reflects their experiences. During the colonial process, European science and ways of writing history were used to undermine African claims to having "worthy" culture. The denigration of African people and culture through the slavery and colonial periods has had significant impacts on the ways in which people of African descent have come to be recognized and how they recognize themselves.²²⁰ However, their desire for recognition, I would argue, does not begin with the need for "equal respect" merely on a cultural level. In fact, this desire arises out of a context in which people of African descent have suffered from political, social and economic marginalization based upon the ways in

²¹⁹ Day, *Multiculturalism*, 18-19.

²²⁰ Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the politics of Multiculturalism*, ed. Charles Taylor (United Kingdom: Princeton University Press: 1994), 36. Taylor suggests that the refusal to acknowledge marginalized peoples can have effects on their personal development.

which they have been recognized as racialized (and often inferior) minorities throughout Canada's history.²²¹ The desire for recognition is partly a search for protection within a society that does not in real ways give "equal respect" to those who come from "traditional" cultures.

The difficulties confronted by people of African descent with regard to gaining recognition as historical agents in Canada are unique, but they involve some similarities to the experiences of African Americans. In an influential argument for the necessity of an African American literary canon, Henry Louis Gates Jr. argues that the development of literary and historical traditions must play an instrumental role in African Americans' attempts for recognition within the American national picture. The development of these traditions are not only crucial in the development of a national consciousness that will help African Americans to respect themselves as agents in the formation of the American state, but also help them to gain respect within a society that is dominated by European norms and values.²²² Given the preeminence of nation states and the particular ways in which they organize people, Gates suggests that marginalized societies must create textual histories in order to be recognized in the system of modern states and therefore gain the power and influence that is necessary to affect change on these institutions.²²³ In order to gain respect within institutions based on Western hierarchies of culture and race one must be active in the processes of history and have written traditions to prove it.

Henry Louis Gates Jr. highlights three important American anthologies which had as one of their primary goals to demonstrate the existence of a black literary and

²²¹ Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation*, 132.

²²² Gates, *Loose Canons*, 17-42.

²²³ Gates, *Loose Canons*, 34.

historical tradition as a political defense of the black racial self against racism.²²⁴ In Vancouver, this need for a historical tradition has already been acknowledged and acted upon by Wayde Compton, scholar and poet, who has recently published an anthology of literature that is prefaced with some history of black presence in Vancouver.²²⁵ With his introduction Compton acknowledges the role that literary traditions have played in the development of black historical identities in other parts of the world. His use of a historical introduction uses black Vancouverites' often marginalized literary tradition to insert them into Vancouver's historical landscape.²²⁶ Compton follows a long line of black North American anthologists who have realized the importance of written literary and historical traditions to the formation of recognized and respected national identities.

Anthologies that canonize black literature and historical achievements have played an important role in black people's attempts to be recognized as members of particular national communities, and even simply as human beings capable of 'civilized' cultural achievements. In Vancouver, the desire to be recognized as a contributing part of the Canadian state seems to be a motivating force behind their historical projects.

Given that the aims of black people in Vancouver and those of the state seem to be compatible, the politics of recognition seems to be a viable solution. Some would suggest, however, that there are some fundamental problems with the ways in which multicultural policy recognizes "visible minorities." Within the rubric of

²²⁴ Gates, *Loose Canons*, 26.

²²⁵ Wayde Compton, ed., *Bluesprint: Black British Columbian Literature & Orature*, (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2002), Introduction.

²²⁶ Compton, ed., *Bluesprint*.

multiculturalism is the idea that Canada is faced with a ‘*problem of diversity*.’²²⁷ This rhetoric seems to suggest that ‘we’ as Canadians are in a struggle against immigrant cultures which could lead to the eventual disintegration and fragmentation of Canadian society.²²⁸ The politics of recognition still finds itself wrestling with the idea of how to incorporate the non-European ‘they’ into a liberal society without fundamentally disrupting British cultural and political hegemony. Advocates of the politics of recognition seem to suggest that this ‘struggle’ is made worse by Canada’s reluctance to recognize ‘non-European’ peoples. Humani Bannerji suggests that this paradigm of ‘us’ and ‘them’ leaves very little room for true inclusion of non-European people.²²⁹

The politics of recognition suggests that ‘we’ as Canadians have a personal obligation to recognize non-European and non-British culture and experiences. One of the major contributions to the theoretical foundations of the politics of recognition in Canadian multicultural thought has come from Charles Taylor.²³⁰ In an essay written in 1994 named “The Politics of Recognition,” Taylor suggests that the politics of recognition offer a viable and preferable solution to fragmentation of Canadian unity.²³¹ However, recognition does not necessarily translate into a recognition of equal worth. Further, Taylor complicates the notion that equal worth can be recognized in previous writing. In *The Ethics of Authenticity*, which seems to have contributed many important ideas to his essay named the “The Politics of Recognition,” Taylor discusses the cultural spaces which give meaning and

²²⁷ Day, *Multiculturalism*, 19-21.

²²⁸ Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” 64.

²²⁹ Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation*, 148.

²³⁰ Day, *Multiculturalism*, 35.

²³¹ Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation*, 138.

significance to personal choice and the individual's ability to recognize worth. In a chapter called "Inescapable Horizons," he suggests that "horizons of significance" continually engage the individual in a dialogue with larger cultural frameworks created by the norms of values of particular societies during the process of "authentic identity" formation. He suggests that "things have significance not of themselves but because people deem them to have it" and therefore the notion that individual choice is based on monological feeling "is crazy."²³² Given the dialogical nature of identity formation, positive recognition is key to creating healthy multicultural citizens within Canada. However, the state driven goal to achieve the ideal of equal recognition is thwarted by the fact that "we can only pay lip service to equal recognition, but we won't really share an understanding of equality unless we share something more. Recognizing difference, like self-choosing, requires a horizon of significance, in this case a shared one."²³³ Although he often suggests that "we" have a responsibility to acknowledge the right of "multicultural communities" to be recognized, Taylor takes a cautious position with regard to acknowledging the inherent worth of "traditional culture" due to "our" inability to understand how worth is assessed outside of "our" own "horizons of significance."

The problems inherent in the process of passing judgment on the relative worth as a component to recognition does not stop Taylor from suggesting that,

merely on the human level, one could argue that it is reasonable to suppose that cultures that have provided the horizon of meaning for large numbers of human being, of diverse characters and temperaments, over a long period of time—that have, in other words, articulated their sense of good, the holy, the admirable—are almost

²³² Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1991), 36.

²³³ Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 52.

certain to have something that deserves our admiration and respect, even if it is accompanied by much that we have to abhor and reject.²³⁴

Taylor remains ambiguous with regard to how these noteworthy cultures, which I would assume refer also to some of the more predominant European cultures given his commitment to liberalism, have achieved their prominence. If these intrinsically preeminent 'cultures' have "articulated their sense of good, the holy, the admirable" through a process of colonization which involved death and the destruction of 'inferior' culture in order to create their expanded "horizon of meaning," it is possible to imagine that not all would share in lauding that culture's over-all benevolent character.²³⁵

Inherent in the process of determining cultural worth, I would suggest, is a lingering *question of authority*. Preston King writes: "There is something intolerable about the concept of 'tolerance'. For if one concedes or promotes a power to tolerate, one equally concedes a power not to tolerate... Where we empower an agent to be tolerant, we empower him equally to be intolerant."²³⁶ What is important about this quote is the notion that being tolerant or being given the choice to recognize gives the person who is tolerating or recognizing a certain kind of power and authority. Taylor puts forward the notion that a "fusion of horizons" which would enable 'us' as Canadians to make judgments of cultural worth is a possible and commendable goal.²³⁷ I remain skeptical, in light of arguments that Taylor has made himself, of the

²³⁴ Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 72.

²³⁵ Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 72.

²³⁶ Preston King, *Toleration*, in Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 85; Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation*, 135.

²³⁷ Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 67.

authority that would be able to decide when the Anglo-Canadian person has learned enough to make judgments about 'non-European' culture.

The main question I am concerned with here is: who is the 'us' recognizing 'them'? Moreover, what are the structures of power that have given particular people that power to make decisions with regard to cultural worth? According to Taylor, the individual is created through his or her ability to articulate those qualities about themselves which make them different. Within this rhetoric, individuality is not a choice based on a feeling, but one that is formed through difference given meaning in "horizons of significance."²³⁸ Bannerji has suggested people of colour have played a key role in the articulation of that difference that has been fundamental in the European construction of self since the formation of the Canadian settler colony.

Could the European and North American for the last few hundred years recognize themselves without their colonies, colonized and enslaved others, and their civilizational discourses?... By keeping the right to recognize or not at will, while denying the other the right to assert their identity through rights or other oppositional politics, do "we" use the politics of recognition as a device for entrenching the mastery of the master and the enslavement of the slave? Does the moment of others' plea for recognition, then, amount to the creation of a mirror for self gazing?²³⁹

The desire of multicultural policy to contain and manage 'non-white' settlers can be seen most clearly in the rhetoric of 'visible minority.'²⁴⁰ The divided nature of Canada's civil society links it to a colonial past in which membership was more overtly defined based upon notions of colour, race, and ethnicity.²⁴¹ The construction of the 'visible minority' is an anti-climatic epiphany in the development of state-

²³⁸ Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 36.

²³⁹ Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation*, 148.

²⁴⁰ Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation*, 15.

²⁴¹ Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation*, 97.

driven policy designed to deal with the 'problem of diversity' in Canada. Bannerji asks the question: "visible to who?"²⁴² Non-European and 'non-white' people are at once included into the national narrative of multiculturalism while at the same time being generalized, marked and managed by a term that actually says nothing about the communities it is attempting to "embrace." At the same time, whiteness and European-ness remains as the neutral and unquestioned marker of what it truly means to be 'Canadian' or the assumed "us."²⁴³ 'Visible minorities' are at once included in gestures, and excluded and marked by their skin color, a marker that is deeply embedded in the logic of race. The 'they' that is the 'visible minority' thus becomes a nebulous object which the nation state can manipulate in the interest of 'unity' during times of management crisis. 'Visible minorities' are used to rationalize and justify Canada's self proclaimed status as a 'multicultural nation,' though very little is done to alleviate the misconceptions and lingering logics of race that continue to mar this subject category with negative connotation.

In this historical and political context how do we trace the histories of black people in Canada, and in what ways does the policy of multiculturalism facilitate the myth of all people of colour as 'recent arrivals'? Ignorance with regard to the role that people of African descent have played, and the nature of the kinds of racism that they faced, has allowed Canadian narratives of benevolence toward people of African descent to flourish. Several of the myths that were created in Canada with regard to its 'tolerance' of people of African descent were made possible through comparisons to America, and its history of segregation and slavery. The extreme extent to which

²⁴² Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation*, 15.

²⁴³ Bannerji, "Charles Taylor's Politics of Recognition," 138-143.

African Americas were terrorized by sanctioned and violent oppression has come to shape the ways in which whites and black people themselves have come to evaluate the severity of racism in Canada. Canada has been constructed as a place of sanctuary for run-away slaves and the end of the underground railroad.²⁴⁴ Black History Month and other celebrations of Canada's diversity have lent themselves to the "discourses of Canadian benevolence" and reduced black political, social and economic struggle to the level of cultural difference. Perhaps, as Walcott suggests, acknowledging the history of people of African descent in Canada would also "make a lie out of too many Canadian myths."²⁴⁵ The rhetoric of cultural difference can allow Canada to avoid a deep interrogation into the ways in which white privilege has been constructed and maintained in Canadian society.

This discussion has been important only to suggest that histories of invisibility are perhaps not enough to deal completely with the reasons why people of African descent have been historicized into absence in Vancouver. The seductive language of multiculturalism tells people of African descent that they are now included in the "Canadian family," to celebrate and wait patiently because the problems of racial and cultural discrimination are being fixed as we speak. Histories are being written that are actively working on the construction of marginalized historical identities so that 'we' can recognize 'them'. Perhaps the tactic of patience will continue to work in some ways for people of African descent in Vancouver but they will likely not find the types of inclusion they are looking for until categories like "visible minority" are examined and discarded for the divisive tendencies they ultimately manifest.

²⁴⁴ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 36; Walcott, *Black Like Who*, 22.

²⁴⁵ Walcott, *Black Like Who*, 39.

Chapter 7 – The Conclusion

Through the course of this thesis I have mapped the process of “vanishing” in Western historical writing generally and the writing of the history of Vancouver specifically. I have suggested that the invisibility/visibility paradox suited the tactical aims of both white historians and black residents in Vancouver before the 1970s. In the central chapters of this thesis I have tried to show that black people did not form the same kind of community that one might find in other places in North America. This was partly because discrimination did not take the same forms in Vancouver as it did in other North American cities—it was subtle, difficult to pin down. Furthermore, as well as being difficult to fight, racialized discrimination in Vancouver was also not coded in fixed ways and allowed for a flexibility that black people used to move themselves gradually and silently into higher paying jobs and buy houses. Their small numbers allowed them to remain invisible and to go quietly about the business of raising their families and seeking to increase the quality of their lives. Although their small numbers and invisibility served them well it has made documenting their experiences and struggles extremely difficult.

The central challenge of chapters two and three was to investigate the possibility of reconstructing an invisible people from a small collection of oral historical data and newspapers from various archival indexes from around the city. Rather than providing proof of their existence, the small numbers of documents and newspapers articles in archival indexes presented themselves like traces from a group

of people that had passed through the city sporadically and then disappeared. Given that these traces were initially all that was left of these people it seemed appropriate to ask: how can a story about black people in Vancouver be written and what does their absence say about how history is documented in the city? These chapters provide an entry point for projects that seek to examine groups of people that leave very little historical record.

While examining oral historical research it was tempting to begin talking about the black people that lived in the Hogan's Alley area as a community. For Dorothy Nealy, Hogan's Alley was not only a black ghetto created by discrimination and intolerance in Vancouver but also the center of a black community.²⁴⁶ However, oral accounts are somewhat divided and unclear on the subject of whether or not Hogan's Alley was the center of a black community. This uncertainty about whether or not Hogan's Alley was the center of a black community led me to an examination of what is meant when we talk about community. Chapter 4 attempted to grapple with some of the ways in which black people have come to talk about community in North America. Terms such as 'black community' and 'black organizations' seem to suggest that there is a certain kind of unity created by skin colour. I argued that white oppression of black people has served to unite people of African descent in the past but does not serve as a historical or stable foundation for unity.

In chapter 5 the Vancouver black community was used as an example of the limitations of a notion of black unity that is constructed in relation to the presence of an aggressive white oppressor. Given that many of the organizations that were

²⁴⁶ BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977.

formed in Vancouver were largely dependent upon American precursors for their ideological and structural organization, they were ineffective at dealing with the specific and subtle forms of racism that existed in Vancouver. Even organizations such as the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, which became an important vehicle for political mobilization and a catalyst for social reconsideration of black identity in the United States, enjoyed limited success in Vancouver. In many parts of the African diaspora, the foundations of community and 'national' consciousness can be found correlated to the movements of larger, often white majorities and their desire to contain black identities through the rhetoric of 'crisis management.'²⁴⁷ In Vancouver, black people remained largely invisible and did not attract much attention from white Vancouverites and the state. There was never a well organized and aggressive white majority attempt to block black Vancouver's determination to find employment and accommodation. When there were examples of suggested foul play by the police, such as in the case of Clarence Clemons, there was an upsurge in black involvement not only in black organizations but also in other human rights organizations in the city. Black community social and political organizations which grew from the need for protection from reactionary white majorities found their limitations in Vancouver's race relation context.

Lack of segregation and discrimination also played another role in the limited success of black organizations. In the AME church, for example, when black people were able to move out of the Strathcona area and to the Greater Vancouver area they

²⁴⁷ Eleanor M. Godway and Geraldine Finn, eds. *Who is this 'We'?: Absence of Community* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, c1994), 2; Day, *Multiculturalism*, 19.

were able to attend service in Churches in their new neighborhoods.²⁴⁸ There were no stories of people of African descent being rejected from predominantly white churches; and because of this, there was no need for a particularly black church.²⁴⁹ Likewise, predominantly white human rights and labour organizations were not opposed to having black members.²⁵⁰ Given the strength in numbers of these organizations they may have seemed like preferable alternatives to black organizations that struggled with effectiveness and membership.

The 1970s brought a shift in Canada's approach to black people. No longer was it in the state's interest to keep blacks invisible, in fact quite the contrary. Immigration policy was reformed to allow for the increased immigration of black people into the country and employment and accommodation legislation was put in place. In the era of multiculturalism groups such as the black Vancouverites are encouraged to share their stories and cultures. Unlike the years prior to the 1970s, the dangers to black people of becoming visible were no longer as apparent and because of this people of African descent have begun organizing to write their histories and develop a more visible presence in the Vancouver community. Nineteenth and Twentieth century nation states have relied on literary and historical traditions in the development of community, and this relationship has been well documented.²⁵¹

Chapter 6 attempted to contextualize the politics of recognition found in multicultural policies in Canada's own history of colonization and the creation of the 'other.' It

²⁴⁸ "Opposition Needed for Unity -- Life Too Easy Here, Says Negro Pastor" *Vancouver Daily Province*, 17 Jan 1944. Theo R. Jones accused the black community of committing "spiritual adultery."

²⁴⁹ Richard "Dick" Collins, personal interview, 28 November 2002.

²⁵⁰ Leonard and Adeline Lane, personal interviews, 15 January 2003; Emmitt Holmes, personal interview, 21 January 2003. Both were active members of other organizations.

²⁵¹ Maureen Moynagh, "Africville, An Imagined Community," *Canadian Literature* 157 (Summer 1998): 15-16; Gates, *Loose Canons*, 55.

suggested that there are limitations to projects which highlight cultural difference through projects such as history-writing and Black History Month celebrations borrowed from the United States. Black visibility is perhaps only one piece of a strategy which must also expand to include interrogations of how whiteness has been constructed in Canada. Origin stories which still rely upon the notion of the two founding fathers (English and French) and smooth over the founding violence of this state will have to be identified and come to terms with.²⁵² There has to be an effort undertaken to understand how the social, political, cultural and educational structures that we now possess are still heavily influenced by British founding hegemony.

The process of forgetting and remembering/incorporating is an instrumental aspect of multiculturalism's function within Canada's official nationalism.²⁵³ The ambiguous category of 'visible minority' has been constructed, commemorated by official multicultural policy, and is quickly filed in the "dealt-with" section of Canada's collective amnesia. We must be careful of how people of African descent are made visible and then remembered. Remembering people of African descent in Vancouver is not a process of becoming aware of things that happened in a distant past and are near to being fixed.²⁵⁴ Rather, it is about creating a solid foundation of understanding upon which division between identities such as "black" and "white" can truly be dealt with and overcome.

²⁵² Bannerji, *The Dark Side of the Nation*, 98.

²⁵³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 187-206; Gilroy, *Against Race*, 25-26.

²⁵⁴ Gilroy, *Against Race*, 25-6.

Bibliography

Archival Sources

British Columbia Archives

BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2623 (Transcripts), Dorothy Nealy, 28 April 1977.

BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2676 (Transcripts), Doris Lawson, 7 May 1977.

BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2682 (Transcripts), Leona Risby, May, 1977.

BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2681 (Transcripts), Austin Phillips, 23 June 1977.

BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2675 (Transcripts), Rosa Pryor, 15 April 1977.

BCA, Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End, Sound Heritage, Tape 2717 (Transcripts), Nora Hendrix, 14 April 1977.

BCA, Vancouver City Directory, 1921-22.

Vancouver Archives

Vancouver City Archives, Major Matthews File, Periodicals, "Mayor Makes Defense, Hogan's Alley Fate at Stake: Civic Body Inspects Scene of Long Criminal History." c 1940.

Published Sources

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1991.

Anderson, Kay. *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, c1991.

Bannerji, Himani. *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Gender*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2000.

- Bhabha, Homi K. *Nation and Narration*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Bhabha, Homi K *The Location of Cultural*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Blackman, Lisa. "What is history doing?" *Theory and Psychology* 4:4 (1994): 491-497.
- Brown, Rosemary. "The Negroes." In John Norris *Strangers Entertained: A History of the Ethnic Groups of British Columbia*. Vancouver: Evergreen Press Limited, 1971.
- Census of Canada*. Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1901,1911,1931,1941.
- Chow, Rey. "Where have all the Native Gone?" In Angelika Bammer "Natives," *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, c1994, 125-51.
- Compton, Wayde, ed. *Blueprint: Black British Columbian Literature & Orature*. Vancouver : Arsenal Pulp Press, 2002.
- Daniel Hill. *The Freedom Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada*. Agincourt, Ontario: Book Society of Canada, 1980.
- Day, Richard J. F. *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000.
- Dirlik, Arif. "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism." *Critical Inquiry* 20 (Winter 1994): 328-56.
- Edmunds-Flett, Sherry. "A Home for Our Children in the Right Place: First Generation African Canadian Women and Their Daughters on 19th Century Vancouver Island." Unpublished Work. 2001.
- Francis R. Douglas, Richard Jones, Donald B. Smith. *Destinies: Canadian history since Confederation*. Toronto: Harcourt Brace Canada, c1996.
- Garraway, Garbette A. M. *Accomplishments and Contributions: A Handbook on Blacks in British Columbia*. Vancouver, B.C.: Black Theatre West, 1990.
- Gates, Henry Louis Jr. *Loose Canons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Gilroy, Paul. *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso, 1993.

Gilroy, Paul. *"There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack": The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. London: Hutchinson, 1987.

Godway, Eleanor M. and Geraldine Finn, eds. *Who is this 'We'? : Absence of Community*. Montreal: Black Rose Books, c1994.

Grizzle, Stanley G. *My Name is Not George: the story of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in Canada*. Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1998.

Hall, Stuart. "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10:2 (Summer 1996): 123-27.

Hennessey, Rosemary. "Queer Theory: A Review of the *differences* Special Issue and Wittig's *The Straight Mind*." *Sings: Journal of Women in Cultural and Society* 18:4 (1993): 964-73.

Hobsbawm, Eric J. *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Kilian, Crawford. *Go Do Some Great Thing: The Black Pioneers of British Columbia*. Vancouver BC: Douglas and McIntire, 1978.

King, Preston. *Toleration*, in Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (New York: Routledge, 2000)

Kelly, Peg. "Creating a Harmonious Society: Human Rights Organizations in Vancouver – 1845-1956." (unpublished work).

Lambertson, Ross. "The Black Brown and Red Blues: The Beating of Clarence Thomas." (unpublished work).

Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. New York and London, 1998.

Lutz, John. *Makuk: Work and Welfare in Aboriginal-Non Aboriginal Relations*. Forthcoming UBC Press.

Marlatt, Daphne. and Carole Itter, eds. *Opening doors : Vancouver's East End*. Victoria, B.C.: Aural History Program, Ministry of Provincial Secretary and Government Services, Provincial Archives, 1979.

Mbembe, Achille. "Ways of Seeing: Beyond the New Nativism. Introduction." *African Studies Review* 44:2 (Spring 2001): 1-14.

- Mena, Andres I. Perez Y. "Cuban Santeria, Haitian Vodun, Puerto Rican spiritualism..." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37:1 (March 1998): 15-28.
- Miles, Miranda and Jonathan Crush. "Personal Narratives as Interactive Texts: Collecting and Interpreting Migrant Life-Histories," *Professional Geographer* 45:1 (Feb 1993): 89-100.
- Mink, Louis. "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument." In *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding* ed. by Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978) 129-49
- Morton, Stephen. *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. New York and London: Routledge, 2003.
- Moynagh, Maureen. "Africville, an imagined community." *Canadian Literature* 157 (Summ 1998): 14-34.
- Pilton, James. "Negro Settlement in British Columbia 1858-1871." MA Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1951.
- Reid-Pharr, Robert F. *Black Gay Man: Essays*. New York University Press: New York, 2001.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1978
- Sooknanan, Renuka. "The Politics of Essentialism: Rethinking 'Black Community'." In *Rude: Contemporary Black Canadian Cultural Criticism*. Rinaldo Walcott, ed. Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2000.
- Taylor, Charles. "The Politics of Recognition." In *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Multiculturalism* ed. by Charles Taylor. United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Taylor, Charles. *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Tuhiwai-Smith, Linda. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. New York: Zed Books, 1999.
- Vancouver Sun*, 19 July 1952 – 21 April 21 1978.
- Vancouver Daily Province*, 17 January 1944 – 4 March 1950.
- Vancouver News Herald*, 6 August 1945.

- Von Clausewitz, Carl. *On War*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c1976.
- Walcott, Rinaldo. *Black Like Who*. Toronto: Insomniac Press, 1997.
- Walker, James. *A History of Blacks in Canada: Study Guide for Teachers and Students*. Ottawa: Minister of State, Multiculturalism, c1980.
- Ward, Peter. *White Canada Forever*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978.
- Wilson, Joseph F. *Tearing Down the Color Bar: A Documentary History and Analysis of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1989.
- Winks, Robin. *The Black in Canada: A History*. London: Yale University Press, 1971.
- Wolf, Eric. *Europe and the People Without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, c1982.
- Zaffaroni, Irene Genevieve Mari. "The Great Chain of Being: Racism and Imperialism in Colonial Victoria, 1858-1871." MA Thesis, University of Victoria, 1987.

Personal Interviews

- Reverend Elrod, personal interview, 23 December 2002.
- Leonard and Adeline Lanes, personal interviews, 15 January 2003.
- Richard "Dick" Collins, personal interview, 28 November 2002.
- Emmitt Holmes, personal interview, 21 January 2003.
- Camie Jolie, personal interview, 29 October 2003.
- Tracy Mcdougall, 17 January 2003.
- George Jolly, 22 January 2003.
- Monty Garraway, 07 January 2003.
- Ralph Taylor, 10 December 2003.