

Robin W. Winks, The Blacks in Canada: A History

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twentieth century as a whole. It is, to borrow the jargon of the social scientist, "macro-history," and deals with a large expanse of specific actions and events agglomerated together. However, without the existence of a "micro-history," studies which focus in on particular periods and individuals, it is difficult to check and balance the Noel interpretations. For example, Sir Richard Squires is portrayed as an opportunist who was willing to engage in corruption to favour his own ends, although it has been suggested by an apologist for the Squires Government, the Honourable Leslie Curtis, that there were a substantial number of irregularities involved in the trial of Sir Richard Squires.¹⁰

On the whole, *kudos* are to be extended to Professor Noel on the undertaking of a more than successful narration and analysis of Newfoundland in the twentieth century. Whatever shortcomings it possesses are largely beyond the control of the author, and lie inherently in the subject matter and the paucity of research sources. It is to be hoped that future research will be undertaken to round out some of the tentative interpretations taken by Professor Noel. One may expect that this will occur as the number of professional historians from Memorial University increases, if the current interest in Newfoundland continues, and if non-Newfoundland scholars can be co-opted into research on the island's affairs.

DAVID J. BELLAMY

The Blacks in Canada: A History. Robin W. Winks. Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1971.

Most Canadians, Professor Underhill used to say, live in a curiously isolated world at the top of the North American continent. To their snug haven, gently touched by the great tides that have swept over and disrupted mankind in the past two centuries, they have welcomed people from many places and heard their stories at the national fireside. From time to time they have reached outward to become involved in worldwide affairs at the highest level, though nearly always at one step removed from the centre of events. They have participated smugly, vicariously, in other men's dramas and have formed opinions that reflect the life of other countries rather than being derived from their own domestic experience. This is true in particular of their attitudes towards race. On one side Canadians have been fascinated by the great American dilemma arising out of the oppression of Blacks in a society dedicated to Freedom; the Loyalists leaving New York in 1783 saw the irony in the presence on the docks of George Washington's aide-de-camp, who was there to ensure that an accurate record was being kept of each departing Negro for whom the Americans might claim compensation. On another side they have shared in the paradox

¹⁰ See Hon. Leslie Curtis, "I Have Worked With Two Premiers," in J. R. Smallwood, ed., *The Book of Newfoundland* (St. John's, 1967), III, p. 145.

created by the British who, after developing a doctrine of humanitarian paternalism, handed over control of native policy and immigration to colonies that became self-governing; out of this came the dilemma of South Africa and race came to be recognized, in George Bennett's phrase, as "the last and deepest hindrance to the true development of the Commonwealth."¹ It was the Commonwealth tie that drew Canada into the international arena of modern racial politics when John Diefenbaker gave a lead in securing South Africa's exclusion from the Commonwealth. In view of the extent to which Canadians have sat in judgment on the racial policies of other countries, it seems appropriate that an American historian should undertake a critical examination of race relations within Canada. In *The Blacks in Canada: A History*,² Professor Robin Winks of Yale University tells the story of the people of African descent who have lived in Canada, and in doing so makes significant observations and judgments on the conduct of Canadians and the values accepted in Canadian society from the *ancien régime* down to 1970.

Some innocents will undoubtedly be shocked to discover that racial intolerance has been widespread and continuous in Canada and some readers may feel that the author, in an effort to ingratiate himself with Blacks and with Canadians, is somewhat patronizing towards both, but most will respect the sincere effort that is made to understand Canadians and "to reveal something of the nature of prejudice in Canada" (p. ix). For specialists in the history of the Maritime Provinces the author provides a study of race relations over a period of two centuries. By pointing out such features as the shortcomings of the policy of leaving responsibility for the education of Blacks to voluntaryism and local initiative, Winks draws attention to structural weaknesses in Maritime society which should be of scholarly concern to social historians and of immediate concern to Maritime politicians.

The book is solidly built on the twin pillars that support much outstanding American scholarship, 'commitment' and 'method'. "Today no historian has the right to indulge himself in the luxury of research that has no point other than merely to unscramble a segment of the past . . ." (p. 479), Professor Winks writes, as if it were no longer permissible merely to wish to know. Carried to its logical conclusions, such a point of view could lead to the death of scholarship. As used here it brings it to life. His curiosity in looking for information is boundless. The newspapers, the novels, and the poems have been read carefully, and journeys have been made to the Nova Scotian villages and Alberta farms, even to the hillside overlooking the beach in Sierra Leone where Black settlers from Nova Scotia waded ashore in 1792 to lay the foundations of a West African nation. Like Parkman, Professor Winks is a great believer in knowing the ground. Many individuals have been interviewed and their stories

1 G. Bennett, *The Concept of Empire: Burke to Attlee, 1774-1947* (London, 1953), p. 20.

2 All references unless otherwise cited are to this book.

recorded. This is assisted research intelligently and effectively used. Canadian social historians will be impressed by the imagination and the diligence shown in the search for documentation, as well as by the information that has been collected. Professor Winks' accomplishment becomes even more remarkable when it is recognized that his is largely a pioneer work. There are bound to be slips, but the scholars who point out errors, suggest alternative interpretations, and attempt to provide a deeper analysis of important questions, will be thankful that Professor Winks has attempted and accomplished so much.

The opening chapter, on slavery in New France and Acadia, draws heavily on the work of Marcel Trudel.³ Since there were not many Blacks in New France, more than two-thirds of the slaves being Indians, attention is focussed on the institution with incidental treatment being given to such general questions as the status of slaves in the French and British Empires, French-Canadian writing on slavery in New France, and the employment of Africans in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world. Professor Winks ascribes the greater humanity of French slavery to the strong influence of the Church in French society and to the greater protection offered to slaves under French law. His discussion of the geographical limitations on Black slavery, which arrives at the conclusion that "the limiting conditions were man-made, fortuitous, accidental, and open to change..." (p. 18), is not convincing, although one can sympathize with the author's desire to refute the arguments of white racists who have attempted to prove that Blacks could not adjust to cold climates.

It was the dividing up of the British Empire in North America in 1783 that first brought Afro-Americans northward in significant numbers. The Loyalists brought many slaves to Nova Scotia and Quebec, but a greater impact was made by the arrival of more than three thousand free Blacks in Nova Scotia, some of them members of the Black Pioneers who had fought with the Loyalist forces. Their arrival created the conditions for one of those political and social experiments into which the British frequently stumbled.

"Formal, and still more legal, distinctions between classes or races — distinctions recognized by both parties — seemed to permit some social relaxation which disappeared when the special status of the dominant people was threatened," wrote Philip Mason a few years ago. "It was easier to share a meal with a man you could sell than with one who might vote against you."⁴ The free Black Nova Scotians did not receive the right to vote, nor did they share many meals with their white compatriots. In their search for freedom and dignity they found some notable champions among the officials — Professor Winks thinks highly of the efforts of Governor Parr and Sir John Wentworth on their behalf — but not many found a secure place in the community. When given the opportunity to go to Africa in 1792, nearly twelve hundred — 222 of

3 His most important published work is *L'esclavage au Canada* (Québec, 1960).

4 P. Mason, *Prospero's Magic: Some Thoughts on Class and Race* (London, 1962), p. 98.

them from New Brunswick — sailed for Sierra Leone where they were joined eight years later by more than five hundred Jamaican Maroons who had spent four years in Nova Scotia.

The historian who attempts to write the history of uneducated, 'ordinary' men will always be hampered by lack of documentation. Much of the historical evidence on the Blacks comes from the pens of officials and other Whites. The information on the 1780's and 1790's in Nova Scotia is richer than that for many later periods. Both the free Blacks and the Maroons were able to gain the attention of the British government. Negro religious leaders established ties with British Baptists, Methodists and Huntingdonians. "The Associates of the Late Dr. Bray," a Church of England agency, gave valiant assistance to Black education, and members of the Clapham Sect interceded with the British government to make the move to Sierra Leone possible. In telling the story of the recruiting of the Sierra Leone settlers and of their landing in Sierra Leone, Professor Winks makes effective use of the journal of the neurotic Evangelical, John Clarkson, who was sent to Nova Scotia by the Sierra Leone Company to look after their interests and took it upon himself to be the protector of the disaffected Blacks. By placing Clarkson prominently at the centre of affairs, he has achieved a dramatic tension which is lacking in Christopher Fyfe's version of the same story in his *History of Sierra Leone* (London, 1962), but Fyfe's emphasis on the discipline of the settlers on board ship, organized in companies along religious lines, represents an aspect which should be given a more central place in the story. The story of the Maroons is also told with vigour, but it, like a good deal of the 1792 migration, is probably of more direct interest and concern to historians of the British Empire than to those who wish to understand the development of the Black community in Canada.

The author has a good understanding of these matters but occasionally shows a tendency to reach farther than he can grasp. Some of his observations on Henry Dundas, for example, are inaccurate, though this does not invalidate his point that it was Nepean, the under-secretary in the Home Department, who handled Nova Scotian affairs in the summer of 1791. Similarly, a reference to the Colonial Laws Validity Act in an explanation of the constitutionality of an Upper Canada Act of 1793 is completely inconsequential, having no meaning in this context. Such errors are minor but they are disquieting.

In writing of the antecedents of the present day Black communities in the Maritimes, Professor Winks makes the rather startling observation that "the majority of present-day Nova Scotian Negroes" are descendents of the Refugee Negroes who were brought from the American South after the British campaign there in the War of 1812. Since he also asserts that they "remained an identifiable group late into the nineteenth century" (p. 127), the implication seems to be that their descendents outnumber the descendents of the Black Loyalists. This is puzzling since, at the time of the arrival of the Refugees, the Loyalist group and their descendents should have considerably outnumbered

the Refugees. Unless there was an unusually high mortality or an undetected migration, there should have been more than three thousand Black Loyalists, slave and free, in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick after the departure of the Sierra Leone settlers. About two thousand Refugee Negroes came to Nova Scotia, according to Professor Winks' estimate. Among these the mortality rate was high while they were adapting to the country and their numbers were further reduced by the emigration of 95 who accepted an opportunity offered by the government to go to Trinidad in 1820. The question of the ancestry of Black Nova Scotians will no doubt be cleared up by time-consuming research into census, land and taxation records from which it should be possible to reconstruct, at least in some places, community patterns for the nineteenth century. It would also be interesting to know how long Major Stephen Blucke of the Black Pioneers, the most socially prominent of the first generation of Black leaders, continued to have influence in the Church of England and whether he had any successors.

Why did the Refugee Negroes fail in their efforts to become independent farmers? There were failures in all the immigrant communities but the "miserable story" of the Refugees appears, on Professor Winks' reading of the evidence, to have been one of almost complete disaster. Unlike the Black Loyalists, they were not prepared for northern conditions. They, like the Micmacs and Malecites who experienced, with a few exceptions, a similar lack of success at individualistic farming, apparently suffered from some form of culture shock. But the barriers to their success were very high. They were in competition with cheap labour from the British Isles which came flooding in on the returning timber ships in the depression years after the Napoleonic Wars; these immigrants, unaccustomed to associating with Blacks, may well have been more hostile than the earlier North American Loyalists and pre-Loyalists. Settled near Halifax and Saint John, in order that they might be available for occasional employment, many received land rejected by earlier immigrants as unsuitable for farming. Moreover the plots were small, and often too far from town to be convenient either for labourers or for market gardeners. Some established themselves in rural areas, including a few in Cape Breton who were the putative ancestors of Kipling's Gaelic-speaking cook in *Captains Courageous*.

The greatest wave of Afro-American migration into Canada was into Upper Canada between 1815 and 1861. Fugitive slaves from the United States, of whom perhaps twenty thousand arrived by way of the Underground Railroad in the decade prior to the Civil War, increased the population of Blacks in the Canadas from less than ten thousand in 1833 to perhaps sixty thousand in 1861. Many of them were literate and they had the support of the dedicated originators of many of the techniques of modern propaganda, the anti-slavery societies of Britain and America. Their history is richly documented, and they were also the occasion for the creation of the myth of Canadian racial toleration

which emerges from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and other sentimental literature of the pre-Civil War era. Professor Winks has devoted a large part of his book to the fugitive slaves and to the Black communities in Ontario that they established. Under leaders who were comparatively well-educated and who were industrious and creative, these communities have been much more productive, in both material and cultural terms, than those in the Maritimes. Racial intolerance was present before Uncle Tom arrived, and the author shows that injustices continued into the 1960's, but it does not seem to have been so oppressive as in the Maritimes.

Running through all of Professor Winks' book is clear and emphatic approval of all measures, state and social, that led to the removal of restrictions in matters of personal status. He likes 'progress', and dislikes separate schools, separate churches, separate units in the military forces and other social devices that restrict the freedom of the individual to integrate himself into the society of his choice. Given this attitude, it follows almost automatically that his handling of the judicial, political and popular aspects of the ending of slavery in the British North American colonies has been lucid and thorough. In Nova Scotia two successive chief justices, Thomas Andrew Strange (1791-1796) and Sampson Salter Blowers (1797-1833), "dedicated themselves to 'wearing out' slavery by waging a judicial war of attrition upon slave-owners" (p. 102). The attempt to abolish slavery through the law courts failed in New Brunswick where slavery persisted longer than in Nova Scotia. It took no firm hold in Prince Edward Island and Cape Breton, while in the Canadas it declined steadily from the 1790's onwards as a result of judicial decisions, legislation, and the opportunities for escape across the border into American jurisdictions that had abolished slavery. Slavery came legally to an end in all the colonies in 1834 by virtue of an act of the British Parliament.

Opposition to the social integration of Blacks appears to have become stronger in Canada, as in other parts of the North Atlantic world, with the emergence of doctrinaire racism in the mid-nineteenth century.⁵ In 1884, W. S. Fielding used "virtually every argument known to man against mixing of the races" (p. 377) in opposing a motion to repeal the law on which separate schools in Nova Scotia were based. In 1915 many commanding officers refused to enlist Negro volunteers, despite pressure from Sir Sam Hughes and orders from the Militia Council. In 1940 both the army and air force were hesitant in accepting Black volunteers, and some outstanding Black candidates were refused commissions. On the basis of information presented by Professor Winks it would seem that the situation had changed significantly by 1945. It would be helpful to have an investigation, using oral history techniques, of attitudes in the armed services and among civilians to try to find out in what ways at-

5 See P. Curtin, *The Image of Africa* (Madison, 1964), chapter 15, and C. Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (London, 1971).

titudes and patterns of behaviour changed during the course of World War II, and to discover the reasons for the changes.

Until well into the twentieth-century most Black Canadians lived in small widely-separated communities with little sense of identity as a national minority. In some towns racial separation was almost complete in churches, schools, lodges, and even in YMCA's and the Canadian Legion; in others there were few acknowledged restrictions, and in a few, including Toronto, Blacks were elected to municipal office. The K.K.K. was active in several provinces in the 1920's and 1930's, although for once the researchers failed in not detecting its activities in New Brunswick. Strong black urban communities began to develop in Montreal and Toronto in those two decades with nationwide ties provided by migrants from the Maritimes and rural Ontario and by the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters whose members took "hold upon Black economic leadership in Montreal and other rail centers" (p. 424). West Indians, many of whom came to Canada during World War I, moved widely through the country, and made a distinctive contribution to the self-awareness of Canadian Blacks.

Although they were poor and isolated, the Blacks in Nova Scotia were, Professor Winks argues, members of a continental Black community. Most were Baptists, and their churches were the agencies through which they expressed their sense of community locally and through which they maintained links with the wider North American community. "The separatist rationale" (p. 345), expressed through the African United Baptist Association of Nova Scotia established in 1854, persisted into the twentieth century. Emigration in the late years of the nineteenth century drained the vitality from the Black churches, just as it did from other segments of the Maritime population. When are the social historians, the sociologists, the economists and the social psychologists going to give us an analysis of the burden imposed on Atlantic Canada by sustained emigration? A generation of effective Black leaders emerged in the 1930's, when a renewed vigour in the churches was accompanied by a new spirit in social matters. Professor Winks' account of their efforts to improve the Black schools after World War II is one of the most depressing sections of his book. "By 1970 the Negro in Nova Scotia — one-tenth of the population of the Province⁶— was one of the most overstudied underprivileged minorities in Canada" (p. 384). Up to World War II the history of the Blacks in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island emerges as an echo of that in Nova Scotia, though occasionally a distinctive harmonic is heard; most notable was the appearance in the 1890's of "the most interesting and certainly the most intellectually ambitious effort towards a Negro publication in Canada," the short-lived monthly *Neith*, edited in Saint John by a barrister and orator, A. B. Walker, "a negro separatist and early advocate of black power" (p. 398).

It is difficult to give a sense of the breadth of it all, of the intricate and often fragile web which links Americans and Canadians, and of the ambiguous

6 This figure is far too high; see pp. 486, 487 and 493.

position in which the Black still finds himself after three hundred and fifty years. Using the wonderful image of "The Black Tile in the Mosaic" as his title, Professor Winks ends his *History* with a survey of the 1960's, for which he neatly disclaims responsibility, at least in his capacity of professional historian: ". . . no historian can claim to bring the tale he tells down to the present, for events near to us lack perspective, and so do we" (p. 468). Making use of a professional newspaper clipping service, he has amassed his usual impressive array of factual evidence. But much of his interpretation is speculative, a pleasant flow of ideas suggesting possibilities, sometimes reflecting current Black Studies in the United States. The idea of the Canadian mosaic is accepted, and the possibility is suggested that it is because Canadians think in Burkean terms of group identity — Professor Burt's "collective liberty"⁷ — that it was necessary for the Blacks in Canada to become self-consciously a group. History has two lands, the sown land that has been brought under historical cultivation and the wilderness of what has not been disproved. Professor Winks is a master cultivator who is not afraid to go scouting into the wilderness.

D. MURRAY YOUNG

⁷ A. L. Burt, *The Evolution of the British Empire and Commonwealth from the American Revolution* (Boston, 1956), p. 39.

The drawing of a clipper-bowed schooner on the cover is from a photograph of the E. P. Theriault, 310 tons, built by the Theriault Brothers in 1919 at Belliveau Cove, Nova Scotia.

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