

Secular, Scarred and Sacred: Education and Religion Among the Black Community in Nineteenth-Century Canada by Jerome Teelucksingh

Claudine Bonner

Volume 113, Number 1, Spring 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1076080ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1076080ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Bonner, C. (2021). Review of [*Secular, Scarred and Sacred: Education and Religion Among the Black Community in Nineteenth-Century Canada* by Jerome Teelucksingh]. *Ontario History*, 113(1), 106–108.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1076080ar>

Book Reviews Spring 2021

Secular, Scarred and Sacred

Education and Religion Among the Black Community in Nineteenth-Century Canada

By Jerome Teelucksingh

New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2019. 137 pages. \$48.48 hardcover.
ISBN 978-1-4331-6226-8 (peterlang.com)

In *Secular, Scarred and Sacred*, Jerome Teelucksingh draws attention to the historic relationship between Christianity (Protestantism in particular) and education in the Black community. Focusing mainly on the experiences of fugitives from enslavement south of the border, he highlights how the Church played a significant role in the settlement and acculturation of this population. He goes as far as asserting that “the relationship between Blacks and religion was essential for their relatively successful assimilation and socialization in Canada.” (9)

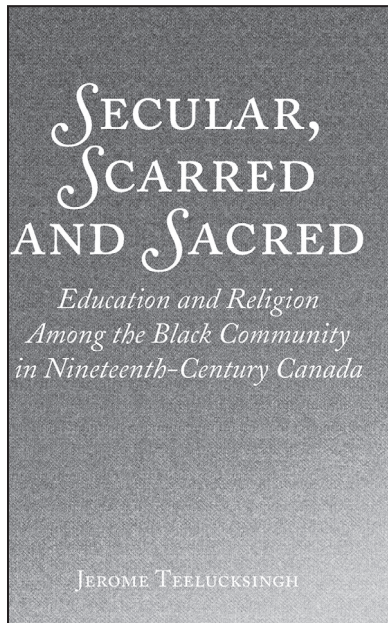
The book begins with an introduction in which the author provides an extensive historiography of the Black presence in

Canada as well as highlighting the dearth of literature exploring the Black religious experience in Canada. The chapters explore slavery and migration to Canada, churches in the United States, the role of the Church in education as well as in the development of Black leaders, and finally, the creation of Black churches in Canada. Chapter One provides an overview of the history of slavery and Black migration into Canada, laying the groundwork for an examination of the creation of Black communities, with churches at their centre.

Chapter Two provides a chronological overview of Protestantism in the United States, including ideological struggles over the question of slavery, where most church-

es chose not to speak out against the institution. Teelucksingh draws connections between the American and Canadian Protestant churches. He incorrectly asserts that “the refusal and delay of the major Protestant denominations in the United States to publicly declare their opposition to slavery led to a steady exodus of slaves and free Blacks to Canada.” (34) While this could have played a small role in the decision-making of some, the steady exodus to Canada came as a result of a need to escape a cruel and inhumane system. His focus on the American churches also fails to acknowledge the distinctiveness of the Canadian religious context, which was influenced not only by immigration from the United States, but a large influx of immigrants from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The impact of Britain on Canada cannot be ignored in this discussion.

Chapter Three explores the role of the Church in education, specifically highlighting the importance of education in Black life, affording individuals empowerment, leadership training and access to spiritual dignity with a promise of full (equal) participation in the Church. In this chapter Teelucksingh focuses on the work of Protestant missions, providing a look at specific cases, such as the mission school at Buxton, partially supported by the Presbyterian Church. The mission schools provide excellent examples of the ways religious groups worked to serve the Black communities, providing an education in



contexts where racism and discrimination limited access to the common schools. For the author this education was also instrumental in the processes of socialization and assimilation into Canadian society, taking a very limited and specific read of the notion of socialization as specific to religious inculcation. However, the relationship with the churches created a paradox the author raised throughout the book, the ambivalence of the White population in terms of

integration. Did the Protestant churches really want equal Black membership?

Chapter Four takes a look at the emergence of a Black leadership class “during the process of integration and assimilation into Canadian society.” (55) In some contexts, this was driven by experiences of racism and discrimination which led the Black populations to form their own churches. While he does an excellent job of detailing the rise of independent Black denominations and congregations, the focus is on the organizational models provided by White Protestants and their churches in the development of the Black church tradition in Canada. For Teelucksingh, the inculcation of the Black population through the taking on of the mores of White leaders “ensured the baton of religious leadership would leave an indelible impression.” (69) He seems to suggest that Black leadership and religiosity only come about as a result of an affiliation with White Christian morals.

Chapter Five builds on this discus-

sion of the importance of the socialization of the Black population, highlighting the challenges faced by the communities in the face of discrimination. Their experiences with their White neighbours led to the creation of Black churches and communities, slowing, and in some cases preventing any chance of assimilation. Teelucksingh points to this, as well as the need to reconnect with family and community as underlying causes for Black departures from Canada in colonization schemes and *en masse* to the United States by the 1860s. While noting patterns of settlement of immigrant groups in any society, and that the settlement of the Black communities mirrored this process, he erroneously lays the blame of “alienating themselves” (93) on this immigrant population after having acknowledged the racism and discrimination as well as forced separation in education and religion. He also acknowledges that in some spaces, there was some degree of assimilation despite the difficulties experienced. Chapter Six seems misplaced within the manuscript. This chapter takes a close

look at the development of the Black Protestant churches in Canada, their leadership and management, as well as providing an examination of Black theology. It does seem somewhat of an afterthought when this could have provided a backdrop to the historical progression of Black churches in Canada.

Teelucksingh has provided an impressive breadth of research in *Secular, Scarred and Sacred*, accessing material across multiple archives and collections. This in some ways works against the author however, as there is a clear need to better synthesize and narrate the information he has collected. For scholars of Black Canadian history, they will be interested in his use of resources examining Blackness and religiosity. They may however find it jarring to get past the constant use of distancing and homogenizing language in reference to the Black community.

Claudine Bonner

Associate Professor, Sociology & Women's and Gender Studies, Acadia University

Civilian Internment in Canada

Histories and Legacies

Edited by Rhonda Hinthér and Jim Mochoruk

Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 2020. \$31.95 paperback.

ISBN: 978-0-88755-845-0 (uofmpress.ca)

The new collection of essays in *Civilian Internment in Canada: Histories and Legacies* adeptly bridges together multiple histories of civilian internment that have previously been considered according to the experiences of individual ethnic communities. The collection challenges predominant narratives on Ukrainian Cana-

dian and Japanese Canadian internment and their relationship to redress activism, and it expands research to communities previously “ignored or lumped into an erroneous category.” (10) Many authors in the collection argue that civilian liberties were trampled by the necessity of national security during and in between the World