

Abstract

In 1922 Matthew Bullock, a young Black North Carolinian was arrested in Hamilton, Ontario having fled the United States following the lynching of his teenage brother. His deportation and subsequent extradition cases received significant attention from the Canadian and American press. Historians Sarah-Jane Mathieu and John C. Weaver have discussed the case in the context of Black community formation and the development of the Canadian courts respectively. However, neither place significant focus on how the Ontario press covered the case. In this thesis, I argue that press and legal responses to Matthew Bullock were informed by a Canadian whiteness shaped by imperial identities and widespread anti-Black racism. Influenced by pop cultural expressions of anti-Black racism such as blackface minstrelsy and films like *Birth of a Nation*, white Ontarians presented Bullock as either a dangerous criminal, or as victim without agency in need of British imperial protection. Canadians have and continue to view Black people as inherently foreign and other, shaping ongoing legacies of white supremacy. Understanding Canadian whiteness, and structural racism requires a discussion of anti-Blackness in the Canadian settler colonial context.

Keywords: race, whiteness, blackface minstrelsy, national identity, Birth of a Nation

Summary For Lay Audience

In 1922 Matthew Bullock, a young Black North Carolinian was arrested in Hamilton, Ontario having fled the United States following the lynching of his teenage brother. His deportation and subsequent extradition cases received significant attention from the Canadian and American press. In this thesis, I argue that press and legal responses to Matthew Bullock were informed by a Canadian whiteness shaped by imperial identities and widespread anti-Black racism. Influenced by pop cultural expressions of anti-Black racism such as blackface minstrelsy and films like *Birth of a Nation*, white Ontarians presented Bullock as either a dangerous criminal, or as victim without agency in need of British imperial protection. Understanding Canadian whiteness, and structural racism requires a discussion of anti-Blackness in the Canadians settler colonial context.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Summary For Lay Audience	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Preface	v
Introduction	1
Whiteness Studies	6
Chapter One: Blackface Minstrelsy and Belonging in Ontario	24
British and Imperial Minstrelsy	30
Blackface Minstrelsy and White Ontarian Identity	35
Canadians on the Late Minstrel Stage	40
Minstrelsy as Community Entertainment in Windsor and Barrie	50
Conclusion	66
Chapter 2: The Birth of a Nation in the Ontario Press	68
The Klan Before The Clansman	72
History Herself: Birth of a Nation on Ontario’s Silver Screens	77
“The Dirt of a Nation”: Black Canadians Protest	86
Conclusion	92
Chapter 3: “Eminently Worth Saving”: The Extradition Case of Matthew Bullock	94
“Very Little Disorder”	98
“He Must Have a Fair Chance Here”: Matthew Bullock and	
British-American Extradition Law	104
Matthew Bullock and the Ontario Press	110
Conclusion	120
Afterward/Epilogue	123
Bibliography	133

Preface

In the spring of 2020, the spring before starting my MA course work, I found myself in lockdown in France watching CBC's *Anne With an E* with 3 children for whom I provided live in childcare. Occasionally, one or both of their parents would join us. Over the course of the 2nd and 3rd season one character, Sebastian 'Bash' LaCroix, a Trinidadian steamship worker settles in Avonlea. Occasionally, he visits The Bog in Charlottetown, a working-class neighbourhood that was home to the majority of the city's Black population, and their white neighbours. There Bash finds connection and community outside of the hostile, white Avonlea.

While watching one of these episodes, one of the parents who I worked for, who had themselves spent a few years in Quebec, expressed surprise and a degree of doubt that Black people had even lived in Canada during that time period. In my own ignorance, I did not know that The Bog had been a real community. Instead, I told the parent, and the children about Africville and the general presence of Black Canadians in the Maritimes and the country more broadly. The parent accepted the information but seemed to be more interested in the show than the history itself.

Their reaction was not particularly surprising, in fact it is quite typical when it comes to discussion of Black people in Canadian history. I would hazard a guess to say that most white Canadians' ideas of the history of Black Canadians begins with the Underground Railroad and Black loyalists and ends with increased immigration from the Caribbean in the middle of the 20th century. There might have been some Black people in Canada before 1960, but not enough to really have mattered. The stories that are typically told about white Canadians' response to their Black neighbours are ones that present the white settler state as welcoming, colour-blind,

and fair, particularly in relation to the United States. There is little discussion among white Canadians of the ways in which the country was and continues to be unwelcoming and structurally racist to Black citizens and residents.

I grew up in a white, working-class, neighbourhood of London, Ontario on what are the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Attawandaron Nations. I am a white settler, as were my parents, my grandparents, and my great grandparents. My maternal great-great grandmother was white woman born in Karachi, in what was then India. She moved to Canada from England with her young family sometime around 1910 and lived in Toronto's Fashion District. My paternal family have been in Canada at since at least the 1890s and are of Welsh and German origin. I was baptised into the Anglican Church as a child and attended Girl Guides, as did my mother, as did her mother. One of my late grandfathers was a member of the Orange Order. One of my close relatives dressed in blackface for Halloween in the late 2000s.

The history of whiteness in Ontario is mine and my family's history with all of its associated imperial connections. My family members likely attended blackface minstrel shows or watched *Birth of Nation* during one of the production's many tours across Southwestern Ontario. It is very possible some of my family members read about Matthew Bullock's extradition in *The Globe*, wanted him to stay in Canada, and felt proud of themselves and of imperial justice for doing so. I say this because I cannot fully separate myself from the society and culture which produced me. This project has forced to me re-examine my own whiteness, and the ways that I and my family have benefited from and contributed to white supremacy. I have frequently questioned whether I should be the one doing this research. However, white supremacy is, fundamentally a white people problem—that is a problem that white people have the

responsibility to deconstruct— and I have come to understand this project as an opportunity to learn and initiate discussions with other white Canadians about the ongoing legacies of white supremacy in this country.

Introduction

Neither the negro nor the Indian are immigrants, and yet they are so entirely different from the ordinary white population that some mention of them is necessary if we would understand the complexity of our problem.¹

--J.S. Woodsworth, *Strangers Within our Gates*, 1909

On January 11th, 1922, Matthew Bullock, a young Black man, was arrested in Hamilton, Ontario. He had been living under an assumed name for a year, on the run from the mob that lynched his brother, Plummer, and another man, Alfred Williams. He was wanted for “inciting a riot” in the small town of Norlina, North Carolina—located near the Virginia border. The charge resulted from his and his community’s efforts to defend themselves from the mob. In the days immediately following his arrest, Bullock’s case received little attention from the Ontario press. Only when members of Hamilton’s Black community contacted the *Globe*, and the NAACP did his case garner attention from white members of the public. Newspapers that covered the case presented Bullock as either a criminal whose right to safety, protection and belonging in Canada were dubious at best, or as a victim without agency and in need of “colour-blind” Canada’s protection. Newspapers presented Canadians as Bullock’s ultimate saviors while simultaneously advertising community productions of blackface minstrel shows. Likewise, the film *Birth of a Nation*, released 6 years prior, remained popular among Ontario audiences during this period.

White Ontarians adopted and approved of genres and stories like blackface minstrelsy, and *Birth of a Nation*, which presented Black people as “Other,” dangerous, and foreign to the Great White North. Anti-blackness was widespread and accepted, and shaped the way reporters and

¹ J.S. Woodsworth. 1909. *Strangers Within Our Gates or Coming Canadians*. Toronto: The Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, Canada, The Young People’s Forward Movement Department. 190.

readers viewed Bullock, his family, and the case. Matthew Bullock belonged in Canada and deserved a fair trial not because he had any inherent right or value, but because he offered white Canadians the opportunity to present themselves, and their white settler state, as moral and benevolent.

Canadians conceptualise our histories of whiteness and racism in relation to the United States. Conventional wisdom holds that white supremacy is not entrenched in Canadian social and political life as it is south of the border. In many respects, this idea has become a point of national pride. However, nativism and white supremacy are and were present in Canada from before its confederation. Canadian whiteness and white supremacy cannot be fully understood without a discussion of the ways that anti-Black racism, settler colonialism, and imperial identities overlap and inform each other in the “Great White North.” Although Canada’s Black population was relatively small during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, that does not mean that the specter of the “Black Other” did not influence Canadian and British ideas of race and whiteness. Ontario newspapers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries demonstrate a conception of whiteness that overlapped significantly with that of the United States. However, Canadian whiteness also hinged on Canada’s relationship to British imperial rule, and its related differences from the United States.

Canadians’ myopia about their own history of anti-black racism is also a result of settler colonialism. Sherene Razack explains the relationship between whiteness and the assertion of innocence in settler colonial nations. She writes, “a quintessential feature of white settler mythologies is, therefore, the disavowal of conquest, genocide, slavery, and the exploitation of the labour of peoples of colour.”² Canadian whiteness is in part shaped by the disavowal of the

² Sherene Razack. 2002. “Introduction: When Place Becomes Race,” in *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society*. Toronto: Between the Lines. 2.

histories and legacies of anti-Black racism and structural violence within the Canadian state. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries the Ontario press condemned overt and violent expressions of American white supremacy while simultaneously celebrating and embracing its more “benign” manifestations in Canada, particularly in the performing arts.

This thesis explores some of the ways that white Ontarians adopted and adapted cultural products that are typically seen as uniquely American expressions of anti-Black racism, while simultaneously pointing to American white supremacist violence as a way to deny their own. Ontario newspapers helped to promote the myth that Canada was a colourblind haven for Black people while simultaneously celebrating and endorsing cultural productions that presented Black racial inferiority and white supremacy as innate and natural. They did so without a trace of irony, nor any mention of this seeming hypocrisy.

The first chapter of this thesis discusses how white residents of Upper Canada/Ontario quickly and enthusiastically adopted blackface minstrelsy as a form of popular entertainment. Though typically seen as a uniquely “American” art form, blackface minstrelsy—characterised by a white performer darkening their skin and performing racist and dehumanising songs and skits—was commonplace in early 20th century Ontario. Minstrel shows put on by charitable organisations were a respectable form of community and civic engagement. I highlight the place of blackface minstrelsy in Essex and Simcoe counties, with a focus on the counties’ major population centres of Windsor and Barrie, Ontario. In order to contain the research to a reasonable scope and scale for a master’s thesis, and so that I could place the Bullock extradition case within its own regional context, I focused on these two communities in Ontario rather than including examples from all over Canada.

I chose to examine the place of blackface minstrelsy in Windsor and Essex County for three reasons. First, as a moderately sized city located on the Canadian-American border, Windsor and Essex County residents had ready access to a major American metropolitan centre Detroit, and the forms of entertainment therein. Second, Essex and nearby by Kent Counties were the home to a large portion of Canada's Black population. Many of the descendants of formerly enslaved people from the United States, Black loyalists, and those enslaved in Upper Canada lived in Kent and Essex counties in Southwestern Ontario. Finally, as a former French settlement, Windsor had a relatively large population of Franco-Ontarian residents when compared to other cities in the area like London. With the city's ties to the United States and a visible population of Black Canadians, Windsor and the surrounding area provide an interesting example of the ways in which regional, national, and imperial identities overlapped in expressions of anti-Black racism. White residents of the Border Cities embraced blackface minstrelsy as a local genre and artform, across ethnic, gender or class lines.

I chose to focus on Barrie as a comparison because it was so different from Windsor. Barrie, Ontario, and Simcoe County were overwhelmingly white, Anglo-Protestant, and rural. Located almost 100km north from Toronto, Barrie residents were also familiar with, and frequently engaged in blackface minstrelsy in a format that was similar to large metropolitan areas like Toronto, or those closer to the American border. Yet Barrie was far from the border, and I include it here to point out that proximity alone cannot explain the enthusiasm with which Canadians embraced racist cultural performances. As in Windsor, blackface minstrelsy was a celebrated form of community engagement and entertainment during the early 20th century. It had a wide appeal across class, ethnic, religious and gender lines. For both regions, blackface minstrelsy functioned as a way to build and express a white community identity. The enthusiasm of participants and

audience members, and the mainstream acceptance of blackface entertainment, is reflective of the deeply embedded nature of anti-Black racism in Canadian whiteness.

Like blackface minstrelsy, D.W. Griffith's (in)famous film *Birth of a Nation*, was readily endorsed and celebrated by white Ontarians in the years following its release in 1915. The subject of the second chapter of this thesis, the film depicts the Ku Klux Klan as the heroes of the South during Reconstruction. The film celebrates the Lost Cause and was in part responsible for the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan in Atlanta in 1915.³ White theatre owners and audiences in Ontario, as in the United States, lauded the actors' performances, the score, the scale, and the modern technical elements of its production. As in the United States, Black Canadians organised in protest of the film's release and its racist messaging. This, however, did not sway the white, movie-going public in Ontario. White audiences, reviews, and theatre owners either outright ignored Black Canadians' protests or denied that there was any merit to their concerns that the film would provoke or further entrench "race prejudice." On the occasions where white theatre owners or the press recognised the controversy surrounding the film in the United States, it was not a cause for concern, but instead something else that could draw in audiences. White Ontarians ignored the racist elements of the film and disregarded their Black neighbours and community members who protested its exhibition.

The ideas presented in blackface minstrelsy and *Birth of a Nation* were not limited to popular culture. The anti-Black racism presented in both stage and screen performances of

³ Another element which contributed to the rebirth of the KKK was the trial and lynching of Leo Frank. Frank, a Jewish factory owner accused of raping and murdering one of his employees, 13-year-old Mary Phagan. The founding of the second KKK is recounted as a coming together of former Klan members, and the Knights of Mary Phagan—a group of Atlanta residents who organised Frank's lynching. See Nancy K. MacLean. *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan*. (New York: Oxford University Press, Incorporated. 1995.) 12.

blackface had far reaching real-world implications by reinforcing white Ontarians' views on race and racial hierarchies. The extradition and deportation case of Matthew Bullock in 1922 offers insights into how white Ontarians' cognitive dissonance about their own anti-Black racism was manifest in the early 20th century. Matthew Bullock, a young Black North Carolinian whose brother had been lynched, fled to Canada fearing that he too would be killed by racist violence at home. Many white Ontario newspapers, and residents, were interested in seeing Bullock remain in Canada. However, their support for his case and his family was frequently expressed in a way that presented Bullock as the stereotype of a Black man found in minstrelsy, and simultaneously presented white Canadians and the Canadian state as his colour-blind saviours. Matthew Bullock, in the eyes of many white Ontario reporters, was the "ideal" victim of Southern American racism and white supremacist violence. He was devout, employed, and from a middle-class farming family, and thought by many to be a veteran of the First World War. He was thus a "good" Black man deserving of protection under British imperial law. The Bullock family tragedy was one which the Ontario press presented as a "feel-good" story of Canadian justice. Following the footsteps, it seemed, of self-emancipating enslaved people who fled to Canada after the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, Bullock offered Canadians a version of themselves as the better, less violently racist, white settler state in North America while disregarding their own history of enslavement and ongoing practices of racial segregation.

Whiteness Studies

Recent academic work on the historic construction of whiteness emerged from the United States in the 1990s. Researchers turned to the dominant group to understand the social construction of race, seeking to understand the "normality" of social and cultural traits associated with whiteness, and the historical instability of the category itself. Whiteness, as a field of study, was

pioneered by Black researchers and theorists in the early and mid 20th century. W.E.B. Du Bois is widely considered to be the grandfather of the field. In his 1920 essay, “The Souls of White Folks,” Du Bois presents whiteness as being rooted in both racial and economic domination. In the face of an increasingly educated and unionised white working class, white supremacy and capitalism were committed to further subjugation of the global south to maintain an adequate pool of labour.⁴ For Du Bois, however, this was not just limited to violence. Charity, too, functioned as an expression of whiteness. White philanthropists and charitable organisations, for example, withdrew into white supremacy when the beneficiaries of their aid questioned or challenged their racial domination.⁵ The idea that race is socially constructed, that it is dependant on historic and social context rather than the result of innate biologically determined traits, is widely accepted across academic disciplines today.

“Whiteness Studies” was interdisciplinary from its outset and feminist theorists, historians, sociologists, and literary theorists all contributed to the field. Much of this work emerged following the development of critical race theory, pioneered by feminist and legal theorists including Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, and Cheryl Harris.⁶ Critical race theory, as a discipline, seeks to understand the ways that racism has become embedded in and is perpetuated by legal and political institutions. White supremacy is not simply overt violence, slurs, or individual prejudice. As Eduardo Bonilla-Silva notes in *Racism without Racists*, white supremacy

⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois. “The Souls of White Folks” in *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe 1920). 35

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See Delgado, Richard., and Jean. Stefanci. *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1997). Cheryl Harris. 1993. “Whiteness as Property.” *Harvard Law Review* 106 (8): 1707–91. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1341787>. Kimberlé Crenshaw. 1991. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6): 1241–99. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>. Kimberlé Crenshaw. ed. *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness Across the Disciplines*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. 2019) <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520972148>.

is a “racialized social system” or “social structure that awarded systemic privileges over non-Europeans” which is continuously maintained and reproduced as those who are racialized as white benefit from them.⁷ Racism and white supremacy do not require an individual to consciously identify as a racist or as a white supremacist in order for the system to be maintained. Rather, as Bonilla-Silva notes, these racialized social systems are upheld and perpetuated by white people who embrace them in a “casual, uncritical fashion that helps sustain the prevailing racial order.”⁸ This thesis will demonstrate that white reporters in early 20th century Ontario, like many white Canadians today, could and did claim that they had no racial prejudice while simultaneously accepting and reinforcing, in an uncritical fashion, white supremacy through their reporting.

Central to the study of whiteness is its nature as an unmarked racial category. In *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison discusses the unmarked nature of whiteness in the creation and understanding of the American literary canon. Black people, and the concept or “specter” of Blackness have always been present, shaping the views and lives of white American novelists and critics.⁹ This “Africanist” perspective has always, and continues, to shape the world views and works of writers that were previously only understood as American.¹⁰ Whiteness is not defined by what it is, but rather by what it is not and what it exists in opposition to; that is, Blackness. In short, whiteness cannot exist without Blackness or a skewed (and always socially constructed) version thereof.

⁷ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. 2022. *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. Sixth edition. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield. 9-10

⁸ Ibid., 11.

⁹ Toni Morrison. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. (Cambridge, Mass.; London, Eng: Harvard University Press 1992).5

¹⁰ Ibid., 9.

Who is or is not considered “white” or who has access to the privileges of whiteness is historically and socially contingent, with different ethnic groups attaining whiteness at different times in different places. As discussed by Nell Irvin Painter in *The History of White People*, the idea of a singular and united “white race” is the product of changing social and historic circumstance.¹¹ Most major works on the historic construction of whiteness have focused on the United States. Historians David Roediger, Noel Ignatiev, and many others have explored the historic construction of whiteness.¹² In applying the idea that race is socially constructed onto the dominant group, these researchers have sought to understand both which and how certain social traits came to be associated with the label “white,” as well as the historic instability of that label. Both Roediger and Ignatiev examine the ways in which working class Irish immigrants were eventually incorporated into the category of “white” American. Irish Catholics, seen as “intemperate” and racially distinct from the earliest Anglo-Saxon settlers, distanced themselves from free Black workers in the north with whom they shared similar material conditions and social position to access the privileges associated with whiteness. Irish immigrants’ political potential as a voting block for the Democratic party, and their power in early labour organising, allowed them to access the privileges of whiteness, and to become properly “white” themselves.¹³ Roediger argues that for working class northerners, the formation of a class consciousness and identity went hand in hand with the formation of a white racial identity. Rather than something imposed upon members of the white working class, whiteness helped white workers distinguish themselves from

¹¹Nell Irvin Painter. 2010. *The History of White People*. New York: W.W. Norton.

¹² David Roediger. 1991. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. London; New York: Verso; Noel Ignatiev. 1995. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge.

¹³ Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*. 144.

their Black counterparts. White workers could, and did, define their class by fashioning their identities as ‘not slaves’ and ‘not blacks’ amid the rise of industrial capitalism.¹⁴

Roediger notes the ways that popular culture shaped ideas about race and whiteness among the working class. Blackface minstrelsy, he argues, was one example of the changing definition of whiteness and the way it was expressed. The early blackface minstrelsy of the 1830s and 1840s, he argues, held a complicated place in the expression of whiteness. Initially it was an expression of northern white men’s repression and longing for a pre-industrial rural life represented by the enslaved Black southern worker. Minstrelsy, he argues, likewise provided a space for the lampooning of economic elites, expressions that would otherwise not be permissible in polite society. The economic success of blackface minstrelsy led to an increase of middle-class involvement. The overtly critical, and, at times, sexual nature of minstrel shows lessened, and by 1870, most blackface minstrelsy offered pro-slavery messages, presenting the antebellum South as a bygone idyll.¹⁵

Popular across the English-speaking world, Blackface minstrelsy exported American ideas about “Blackness” and whiteness created in relation to it. Michael Pickering, W.T Lhamon, Eric Lott, Dale Cockerell, Michael Rogin, Chinua Thelwell, and Ayanna Thompson are just some of the many scholars who have examined the beginnings, spread, and ongoing practices of blackface in the United States, Britain, and the Empire.¹⁶ Although the meanings and practice of blackface

¹⁴ Ibid., 12.

¹⁵ Ibid., 124.

¹⁶ Lhamon, W. T. *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press 1998). Lott, Eric. *Love and Theft* [electronic Resource]: *Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. (20th-anniversary ed. New York: Oxford University Press 2013). Dale Cockerell. *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World*. (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press 1997). Michael Pickering. *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*. (Aldershot, [Hants], UK: Ashgate 2008). Ayanna Thompson. *Blackface*. (First edition. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic. 2020) <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781501374043>.

minstrelsy have shifted according to time and locale, the practice was one that was fundamentally racist. Blackface minstrels performed caricatures of Black people that were dehumanising and cruel. As Pickering has argued, Blackface minstrelsy was quickly adopted by British audiences as what they perceived to be an “authentic” expression of Blackness. It simultaneously allowed for audiences to shed a mask of Victorian decorum and helped to uplift the racial logics of imperialism.¹⁷ Blackface minstrelsy, across national and imperial lines, reinforced the idea that Black people were lesser—uneducated, immoral, and undisciplined—and that their subservience to whites was a natural state, and even beneficial to them.

The ways in which ideas about Black people shaped the development and construction of Canadian whiteness has received relatively little attention. Canadian historians have, in general, placed much of their focus on anti-Indigenous and anti-Asian racism, reflecting the largest and most visible non-white populations living in Canada or areas that became Canada. Settler colonialism, the genocide of Indigenous peoples, and widespread anti-Asian racism are undeniably foundational to Canadian whiteness and white supremacy. This, however, does not mean that anti-Black racism did not shape white Canadians self perception or their perception of the country’s place within the empire, whether they were among the dominant Anglo-Protestant elite, French-Catholics, or recent immigrants. The relationship between settler colonialism, racism and immigration is explored in Barington Walker’s *Race on Trial*. By examining criminal court cases involving Black and Indigenous people Walker demonstrates the ways that Ontario courts used the language of “colour-blind” justice, and British legal-liberalism to obfuscate widespread and systemic racism. Rather than being a haven for Black people as the courts claimed, racialized people routinely received harsher than typical sentences in Ontario, and yet were discussed by

¹⁷ Pickering. *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britian*. xii.

whites as fortunate for even receiving a “fair” trial.¹⁸ In addition to examining the place of the courts in maintaining white supremacy, Walker discusses the ways that immigration policy has shaped and upheld Canadian whiteness. In *The History of Immigration and Racism in Canada* Walker argues that Indigenous histories and immigrant histories are intricately linked; immigrant settlement was only made possible through dispossession and colonisation. Racism, and its associated institutional white supremacy, were foundational to the creation of the Canadian state, not merely the effects of benign or well-meaning immigration policy.¹⁹ The Canadian government’s opposition to Black immigrants, whether from the United States or the Caribbean, was exemplified by the proposed 1911 Order-in-Council banning all Black immigrants from Canada.²⁰ Black residents were temporarily banned on the grounds that they were unsuited to the cold, northern climate of Canada. Audrey Kobayashi, Laura Cameron, and Andrew Baldwin explore the relationship between whiteness and the idea of the expansive and “empty” land in their 2008 collection *Rethinking the Great White North*. As they note, Canadian valorisation of the “north” and “wilderness” were and are inherently shaped by ideas of race and the development of the settler colonial state.²¹

Understanding Canadian whiteness requires a discussion of both anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism within an imperial context. For example, as both Barrington Walker and Robyn Maynard note, Canadian political leaders as well as its legal system viewed Black people through the lens of white supremacist culture. In 1868, Sir John A. Macdonald, sounded the alarm about

¹⁸ Walker, Barrington. *Race on Trial*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2010), 11.

¹⁹ Barrington Walker ed. *The History of Racism and Immigration in Canada* (Canadian Scholars Press, Toronto, 2008). 12

²⁰ Order-in-Council PC 1911-1324, 12 August 1911. Privy Council Office fonds/RG2-A-1-a vol. 1021, PC 1911-1324. Library and Archives Canada.

²¹ Andrew Baldwin, Laura Cameron, and Audrey Kobayashi. *Rethinking the Great White North: Race, Nature, and the Historical Geographies of Whiteness in Canada*. (Vancouver: UBC Press. 2011), 9-10.

the supposed “frequency of rape committed by Negroes, of whom we have too many in Upper Canada,” a comment supporting the death penalty that was based on the rape-lynch narrative then ubiquitous in the US, and not in fact based on any actual cases of sexual assault in Canada.²² In her 1999 book *Colour Coded*, Constance Backhouse explores the legal cases that have defined or re-entrenched racial categories in Canada. Canadian whiteness, she shows, has been defined in relation to Indigenous peoples, as well as Asian and Black Canadians. Her chapter on the *R. v. Phillips* case explores the ways that white Canadians expressed both anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism as well as community and legal responses to Klan organising and activities. In 1930 in Oakville, Ontario Klansmen attempted to prevent Ira Johnson, a Black man, and Isabella Jones, a white woman he had met at church, from marrying. Klansmen “rescued” the bride to be from the home of the groom’s aunt, burnt a cross on her front lawn, and threatened further violence should the two continue the relationship. The Oakville press and police were initially approving of the effort to prevent the marriage, but not the tactics used. Though legal in Canada, “miscegenation,” particularly a white woman marrying a Black man, was understood to be a violation of what it meant to be “truly Canadian.” In the days following the attack, Johnson claimed Cherokee heritage to, as Backhouse argues, give himself some degree of protection and acceptability.²³ Rather than embodying white fears of the hypersexualised Black “Other,” Johnson became a properly assimilated Indigenous man; one who, though not white, had a recognised place within a settler colonial society. Isabella Jones was also transformed. Rather than being symbolic of a threatened white womanhood, she could be understood as an embodiment of the “civilizing” power of white femininity. Like Matthew Bullock before him, press and legal responses to the attack hinged on

²² John A. Macdonald in Robyn Maynard. *Policing Black Lives*. 2017 159. See also Barrington Walker. *Race on Trial*, Chapter 4.

²³ Constance Backhouse. *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950*. (University of Toronto Press 1999). 178.

the idea that Black people had no real place within Canada and were a danger to a white settler colonial state, especially if they married or had children with white women. White Ontarians justified anti-Black racism and white supremacist violence if the racial *status quo* was threatened or questioned.

For example, in the early nineteenth century, colonial Canadian racial anxieties on the west coast were much more focused on Indigenous people than those of African descent. Adele Perry's *Colonial Relations* examines the Douglas-Connelly family, and their place within broader imperial networks. James Douglas, born to a Scottish trader and free mixed-race woman in Guyana, found employment with the Hudson's Bay Company, eventually marrying Amelia Connelly, the daughter of a Northwest Company fur trader and Miyo Nipiy, a Cree woman from a prominent family. Ideas of race and whiteness in Canada did not exist in a vacuum but were instead informed by imperial, settler colonial contexts, and in relation to the United States. When he served as governor of Vancouver, white settlers and the press were less concerned with Douglas' Guyanese ancestry than with his wife's Métis heritage.²⁴ Racial categories, their meanings, and their maintenance changed according to the social, political, and economic contexts. As a settler colonial nation, and member of the British empire, ideas about race developed in relation to European settlement and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. The ideal settler was one who possessed or had the ability to adopt British norms, and whose agricultural labour helped to establish the state's control over the land. Black people, thought to be naturally unsuited to Canada's cold climate, and lackluster independent farmers, were not desirable immigrants.²⁵ Not to mention that their presence was

²⁴ Adele Perry. *Colonial Relations: The Douglas-Connelly Family and the Nineteenth Century Imperial World*. (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press 2015).

²⁵ In 1911, the Laurier government drafted Order-in-Council P.C. 1911-1324 which proposed a ban on Black immigrants as they were thought to be "unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada." See Library and Archives Canada Privy Council Office fonds/RG2-A-1-a vol. 1021, PC 1911-1324.

inconvenient for maintaining a white majority population, and for maintaining the myth that Canada never practiced slavery or anti-Black racism.

The relative reticence to examine the ways in which Black people figure in the construction of Canadian whiteness can be found in scholarship on the second Canadian Klan. James Pitsula's 2013 *Keeping Canada British: The KKK in Saskatchewan* re-examines the history of the Klan in the province. For the Klan and their allies, a British and Canadian identity was synonymous with white Anglo-Saxon ethnicity and Protestantism. Pitsula also argues that the Klan ought to be understood in the context of reactions to the First World War. He notes that Saskatchewan Klansmen viewed the war as a fight to maintain Canada's British identity in the face of perceived threats such as German totalitarianism, Eastern European immigrants, feminists, and the relaxation of prohibition.²⁶ He argues that Jimmy Gardiner lost his battle against the KKK as he conflated the Saskatchewan Klan with their American counterpart and failed to recognise their British and Canadian nature.²⁷ The Klan, he states, did not bring anything new to Saskatchewan, nativism and racism were already there and the Klan represented "a slightly more extreme version of what then passed for normal."²⁸ Pitsula places a greater emphasis on gender and sexuality than earlier examinations of the Klan, which include William Calderwood's 1968 MA thesis and Martin Robin 1990 *Shades of Right*.²⁹ Pitsula highlights how the Klan's anti-Chinese racism was articulated in relation to white women's sexual purity. Although Pitsula does discuss the ways in which white

²⁶ James M. Pitsula. *Keeping Canada British: The Ku Klux Klan in 1920s Saskatchewan*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013.) 12-15.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 40.

²⁹ William Calderwood. 1968. "The Rise and Fall of the Ku Klux Klan in Saskatchewan". *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.*; Robin, Martin. *Shades of Right: Nativist and Fascist Politics in Canada, 1920-1940*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 1990.)

women's safety and sexual purity operated as justifications for racial segregation and anti-Black violence, there is relatively little discussion of the ways in which Black people, or even the idea of Blackness, figured into Klan rhetoric and organising in Saskatchewan. This omission does not mean that there is no evidence of anti-Black racism in Canada.

Like Pitsula, Allan Bartley's recent book *The Ku Klux Klan in Canada*, does not offer a significant discussion of anti-Black racism in Canada and focuses on its anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic sentiments. Bartley tracks the development of the KKK from the early arrival of Klan organisers in 1923, their spread into the prairies and ultimate collapse in the 1930s, to their re-emergence in the 1970s and into the present. Though Bartley's book offers a good overview of their activities, there is little discussion of the Klan's position in a larger Canadian or imperial context. This oversight can most clearly be seen in his discussion of the *R. v. Phillips* case. Though it is mentioned, Bartley does not question Ira Johnson's claim of First Nations ancestry, nor does he question why Isabella Jones' marriage to an "assimilated" Indigenous person would have drawn less ire from the Klan members and other white Canadians than her marriage to a Black Canadian – surely an example of the presence of virulent antiblack racism in Canada.³⁰ He likewise does not engage with recent American historiography of the Klan which is notable given the ties between Canadian KKK branches and the same organization in the USA.³¹

³⁰ Allan Bartley. *The Ku Klux Klan in Canada: A Century of Promoting Racism and Hate in the Peaceable Kingdom*. (Formac Halifax, Nova Scotia. 2020.)

³¹ For more on the second American Ku Klux Klans see Chalmers, David Mark. *Hooded Americanism: the History of the Ku Klux Klan*. (New York: F. Watts 1980); Blee, Kathleen M. *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s*. (Berkeley: University of California Press. 1991); MacLean, Nancy K. *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan*. (New York: Oxford University Press, Incorporated.1995); Pegram, Thomas R. *One Hundred Percent American: The Rebirth and Decline of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s*. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee. 2001); Baker, Kelly. *Gospel According to the Klan: the KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915-1930*. (Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas 2011); Gordon, Linda. *The Second Coming of the KKK: the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition*. (New York, N.Y: Liveright Publishing Corporation. 2017)

In *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present*, Robyn Maynard addresses some of the ways in which Canadian white supremacy and anti-Black racism have been and remain manifest within government institutions. In chapters on policing, child services, education, and immigration Maynard examines the ways in which dehumanising state violence has and continues to disproportionately impact Black communities in Canada. As she notes, although British North America and Canada did not have the plantation style slavery present in the southern United States or the Caribbean, Black Canadians still live in the “afterlife” of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and Canadian slavery.³² Historians Charmaine Nelson, Harvey Amani-Witfield, Afua Cooper, Natasha Henry-Dixon, Marcel Trudel, and Maureen Elgersman Lee have also all discussed the histories of slavery and abolition in Canada.³³ In contrast to the historians of the KKK and Canada, above, most of these authors are Black Canadians. They have clearly established in historical scholarship that the practice of slavery in Canada, as elsewhere, was never benevolent nor humane. Rather, as Maynard notes of slavery, “the domination and subjugation of one group of humans by another is always predicated on violence or the threat of violence.”³⁴ Even though slavery in Canada did not look like the slavery that characterised plantation economies of the Southern United States, or British and French sugar colonies of the Caribbean, it was still fundamentally based in the refusal to see and respect the humanity of Black people (as well as the

³² Robyn Maynard. *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present*. (Halifax; Fernwood Publishing. 2017)

³³ Cooper, Afua. *The Hanging of Angélique: the Untold Story of Canadian Slavery and the Burning of Old Montréal*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press. 2007); Nelson, Charmaine. *Ebony Roots, Northern Soil: Perspectives on Blackness in Canada*. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars. 2010); Nelson, Charmaine. *Slavery, Geography and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica*. (London; Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. 2019); Whitfield, Harvey Amani. *North to Bondage: Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes*. (Vancouver, Toronto, Ontario: UBC Press. 2016); Henry-Dixon, Natasha L. *Emancipation Day: Day: Celebrating Freedom in Canada*. (Toronto: Dundurn Press 2010). Trudel, Marcel. *Canada's Forgotten Slaves: Two Centuries of Bondage*. Translated by George Tombs. (Montréal, Québec, Canada: Véhicule Press. 2013). Elgersman Lee, Maureen. *Unyielding Spirits: Black Women and Slavery in Early Canada and Jamaica*. New York: Garland Pub. 1999)

³⁴ Maynard. *Policing Black Lives*. 18.

Indigenous people who were also enslaved in Canada, as in the US). That shared foundation shaped Canadian whiteness as it shaped American, British, and other versions of whiteness.

Maynard discusses the long history of the pattern of white residents of British North America and Canada pointing south to racism in the United States, and to Canada's history as a terminus for the underground railroad, to disavow Canadian racism. Mary Ann Shadd Cary, the Black American activist and journalist who relocated to Canada in the 1850s, noted when discussing the Canadian abolition movement, that white Canadians were the "anti-slavery Negro hater(s)," with many self-emancipated Black Canadians facing the same violence and mistreatment in Canada from their white neighbours as they had in the United States.³⁵ Many who had fled to Canada following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act returned to the United States following the end of the American Civil War. White Canadian's racism and the pull of legal equality and family in the United States reduced the number of Black residents in Ontario from approximately 40,000 in 1858 to less than 15,00 in 1871.³⁶ This trend of Black Canadians moving to the United States in search of opportunities unavailable in Canada continued into the 20th century. The *Dawn of Tomorrow*, a Black newspaper published in Ontario in the early 20th century, lamented that many highly skilled Black youth were unable to find work in Canada and so moved south in search of opportunity, further training or well-paying employment.³⁷ As noted by Maynard "regardless of legal status, Canada was far from the land of Black liberation, or even basic tolerance."³⁸ Black

³⁵ Ibid., 30.

³⁶ Dana Whitney Sherwood and Boulou Ebanda de B'éri "Unsuited to Become Canadians Change and Continuity in Racial Discourse in Canadian Political Consciousness, A Mari Usque Ad Mare, 1850– 1965" *Women in the Promised Land Essays in African Canadian History*. Reid-Maroney, Nina, and Thomas Bernard, Wanda. Eds. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars.2018). 181-210.

³⁷ "Our Young Men Pass On" *The Dawn of Tomorrow*. 4th, August 1923. 2.
https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.N_00229_192307

³⁸ Maynard. *Policing Black Lives*. 30-31.

voices with experience living in Canada tell a different story than whitewashed myths about the Underground Railroad and colour-blind justice.

Anti-Blackness has been a central feature of Canadian immigration policy as well. In their chapter “Unsuitable to Become Canadians” in *Women in the Promised Land*, Dana Whitney Sherwood and Boulou Ebanda de B’béri examine the history of Black women’s immigration into Canada between 1850 and 1965 showing how Black labour was only valued in so far as Black Canadians did not challenge their supposedly natural subservient role, and so immigrant women of African heritage were generally limited to poorly paid domestic work.³⁹ Until the implementation of the points system in 1967, official Canadian immigration policy explicitly limited the number of non-white immigrants to the country. William D. Scott, immigration superintendent between 1903 and 1924, justified limiting the number of Black Caribbean immigrants as a policy in the best interest of both the Canadian state, and to Black workers themselves.⁴⁰ As Sarah Jane Mathieu notes, between 1870 and 1914, only a few more than 5000 immigrants to Canada were Black people from the Caribbean or the United States.⁴¹ Approximately 4.2 million immigrants landed in Canada during that period, of whom 1.8 million remained in Canada.⁴² By 1931, 22.2% of Canadians were foreign born.⁴³ Similarly, that same

³⁹ Dana Whitney Sherwood and Boulou Ebanda de B’béri “Unsuited to Become Canadians Change and Continuity in Racial Discourse in Canadian Political Consciousness, A Mari Usque Ad Mare, 1850– 1965” *Women in the Promised Land Essays in African Canadian History*. Reid-Maroney, Nina, and Thomas Bernard, Wanda. Eds. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars. 2018),186. As noted, Black women from Guadeloupe who arrived in Quebec as a part of the 1910-1911 immigration scheme received only \$5 a month compared to white domestic workers who were paid between \$12-\$15 monthly.

⁴⁰ Maynard. *Policing Black Lives*. 36.

⁴¹ Mathieu. *North of the Color Line*. 12.

⁴² Government of Canada, “150 Years of Immigration in Canada,” Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, May 17, 2018, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2016006-eng.htm>. and Mathieu. *North of the Color Line*. 2010. 13.

⁴³ Government of Canada, “150 Years of Immigration in Canada,” Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, May 17, 2018, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2016006-eng.htm>.

year, just over 20% of the 20,000 documented Black Canadian residents were born in Canada.⁴⁴ White Canadians presented Black people as inherently foreign and other, even though among Black Canadians slightly more people were born in Canada than in the country overall.

Anti-Black racism shaped views on Canadian immigration policy across the political spectrum. J.S. Woodsworth's *Stranger's Within our Gates* is widely recognised as a work based on anti-Catholicism and the supposed superiority of Anglo-Canadians and other British immigrants. Much of the book centres on the different "types" of European immigrants, with separate sections on the various Austro-Hungarian ethnic groups. By contrast, Black Canadians and Indigenous peoples are discussed together in a short 5 pages. Woodsworth's view of Black Canadians was at best, contradictory. He readily quoted John Commons saying that Africans possessed an "aversion to silence and solitude, love of rhythm, excitability, and lack of reserve. All travellers speak of their impulsiveness, strong sexual passion, and lack of will power." He then went on to say, how white Canadians "may be thankful that we have no 'negro problem' here."⁴⁵ While he recognises that many Black Canadians are "consistent Christians" and "highly respected citizens" it is their "blood, rather than language or religion [that] is the chief barrier that separates them from the rest of the community."⁴⁶ Woodsworth places responsibility for segregation on Black Canadians and their "blood" rather than explicitly naming white Canadians racial prejudice as the source of the "problem." Daniel Coleman addresses the impacts of Woodsworth and *Strangers Within Our Gates* on discourses of whiteness and "civility" in his chapter in *Human Welfare, Rights, and Social Activism*. Coleman argues that through figures like Woodsworth, Canadian whiteness was defined

⁴⁴ Mathieu. *North of the Color Line*. 6. Black Canadians were likely undercounted; whether because they were passing or because they were not counted in the census. Anna Henderson, who I will discuss later, was recognised by herself and her co-workers as "colored" but whose "Racial Origin" was listed as Scotch in census records.

⁴⁵ J.S. Woodsworth. *Strangers Within Our Gates or Coming Canadians*. (Toronto: The Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, Canada, The Young People's Forward Movement Department. 1909.) 191.

⁴⁶ *Ibid* 190, 191.

by its association with Britishness and the “civility” of the settler colonial state.⁴⁷ His view of Black and Indigenous peoples, as well as European and Asian immigrants, represented and entrenched contemporary ideas about race, whiteness, and exactly who was fit for western “civilisation” and citizenship; that is, immigrants who were or could become “white.”

Histories of the Canadian eugenics movement likewise discuss the development of and efforts to create a particular kind of white Canadian citizen. Angus McLaren ties eugenics to nativist and anti-Catholic sentiments in his 1990 book *Our Own Master Race*. For proponents of eugenics, immigrants posed a threat due to their cultural, political, and religious differences as well as in their potential to produce “feeble minded” children.⁴⁸ Erika Dyck’s *Facing Eugenics* discusses eugenics and sexual sterilisation in Alberta from the lead up to the 1928 Sexual Sterilisation Act to its repeal in 1972. Like McLaren, Dyck places Canadian eugenics in a wider international context while also highlighting the distinctly Albertan nature of the program, one shaped by immigration and nativism, and the social gospel movement.⁴⁹ Gender, class, age, and ethnicity shaped the way the program functioned over the course of its 42 years. Eugenics programs, and the long history of forcible sterilisations of Indigenous women, are and were fundamentally about reproducing the right/white type of Canadian. The relationship between health, immigration and race can be seen in the medical exams required of immigrants during the early 1900s, as discussed by Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock in their *Making of the Mosaic*. Minister of the Interior Frank Oliver advised that less desirable immigrants should be subject to

⁴⁷ Daniel Coleman. “J.S. Woodsworth and the Discourse of White Civility.” In *Human Welfare, Rights, and Social Activism*, 221–43. (Canada: University of Toronto Press. 2014.) 224 <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442660342-012>.

⁴⁸ See also Baker, Graham J. "Eugenics and migration: a case study of salvation army literature about Canada and Britain, c.1890-1921." *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 31, no. 1 (2014): 77+. *Gale Academic OneFile* (accessed December 11, 2020).

<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A435359586/AONE?u=lond95336&sid=AONE&xid=179e3187>.

⁴⁹ Dyck, Erika. *Facing Eugenics: Reproduction, Sterilization, and the Politics of Choice*. (University of Toronto [Ontario] Press, 2013), 15.

stricter interpretation of the medical criteria required for entry into Canada. Although race was not explicitly a criterion for entry into Canada, potential Black immigrants and immigration officers were advised that it was unlikely that Black settlers would pass the medical tests.⁵⁰ While Black Canadian women remained a much smaller proportion of the population compared to immigrants from Europe their reproduction was also controlled by the sociocultural prejudice against interracial sex and marriage.

Between 1955 and 1968 the West Indian Domestic Worker Scheme increased the number of Black immigrants to Canada. Only single women without children, and aged of 18-40, were eligible to apply. Women accepted into the scheme were required to go through medical testing, including a screening for sexually transmitted infections. Those who arrived in Canada through the scheme were required to do domestic work for a year before receiving a more permanent landed-immigrant status. Once again, their reproductive capacity proved important for the white settler state to regulate, lest Black people proliferate in the “white man’s country,” and women who became pregnant while in Canada were subject to deportation despite their landed-immigrant status, and regardless of the race of the father.⁵¹ The program, and pamphlets advertising it, suggested that Black Caribbean women who would be permitted into Canada were only worthy or eligible to enter if they were of the most upstanding moral character. Even then, the women who were accepted were uniquely regulated while in Canada, by both the state and their employers given the unequal nature of domestic work.⁵² The women who engaged in this work were valued by the Canadian state for their labour, but only as a “last resort” to replace the domestic labour of

⁵⁰ Kelley, Ninette, and Michael J. Trebilcock. *The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy*. (University of Toronto Press, 1998), 156.

⁵¹ Erica Lawson “The Gendered Working Lives of Seven Jamaican Women in Canada: A Story About ‘Here’ and ‘There’ in a Transnational Economy.” *Feminist Formations* 25 (1): 138–56. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2013.0002.142>

⁵² *Ibid.*, 145.

white women entering the workforce.⁵³ This also reinforced the racist norm that the only correct place for Black people in Canada was in subservience to whites.

In *Policing Black Lives* Robyn Maynard argues that the border, and efforts to police it through detention and deportation, are key factors in the Canadian government's contemporary control and surveillance of black bodies. Rhetoric concerning nation and belonging have and continue to shape the ideas about blackness present in Canada. Black people are consistently presented as foreign, and as perpetual newcomers to the ostensibly white Dominion. The supposedly foreign nature of Black Canadians, opposed to the natural citizenship and belonging of white settlers, was not limited to institutional and governmental contexts. Pop-cultural depictions of Black people, as described in this thesis in blackface minstrelsy, in the popularity of films like *Birth of a Nation*, and in coverage of deportation cases, reflected the denial of Black Canadians' national belonging. Each, in its own way, depicted Black people as better off, or naturally belonging to some place over there, rather than in Canada, regardless of place of birth or citizenship. Instances where free Black people were admitted into the nation, for instance those who arrived in Upper Canada via the Underground Railroad, the Black Loyalists of Nova Scotia, or (as will be discussed) Matthew Bullock who fled racism in North Carolina, were depicted as events in which Black people had done something special to earn entrance to Canada, or as circumstances in which Black immigrants received entrance as an act of British/Canadian charity. Black people had to be different and deserving, or at least a mirror that reflected the supposed goodness of British-Canadian white benevolence, in order to belong in Canada.

⁵³ Ibid.

Matthew Bullock's case, the widespread popularity of *Birth of a Nation* and presence of the Klan in Ontario, as well as the common appearance of blackface minstrelsy in Ontario during the late 19th and early 20th centuries are some of the most visible examples of the ways that anti-Black racism was deeply embedded in Canadian society. Minimizing the presence of Black Canadians and their experiences or focusing only on the "feel good white saviour" history of the Underground Railroad, prevents a deeper understanding of the systemic and institutional nature of white supremacy in Canada.

Chapter One: Blackface Minstrelsy and Belonging in Ontario

Blackface minstrelsy is widely regarded as the first uniquely American performance genre. Originating in northern states in the late 1820s and early 1830s, blackface minstrelsy quickly found wide appeal among domestic American and international audiences. Blackface minstrelsy, is, fundamentally, a racist genre ridiculing and dehumanising the Black people it claimed to represent. The genre features white performers darkening their faces with burnt cork or grease paint, donning wigs, and frequently painting on large red lips. Many historians of blackface minstrelsy have discussed the ways in which the genre interwove national, gender, and class concerns. W.T. Lhamon, Eric Lott, David Roediger and Dale Cockler have all discussed the meaning of blackface minstrelsy and its origins. As academic Phillip S.S. Howard describes in *Performing Postracialism* "antiblackness was both the material from which minstrelsy's class politics was woven and the shared grammar upon which the broad appeal of minstrelsy was built."⁵⁴ Blackface minstrelsy spoke to the racial fears and attitudes of its performers and spectators of the 19th and 20th century,

⁵⁴ Phillip S.S. Howard *Performing Postracialism: Reflections on Antiblackness, Nation, and Education through Contemporary Blackface in Canada*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023.) chap. 2 Kobo

helping to create and reinforce categories of race – especially Blackness and whiteness - and their meanings.

In 1828 Thomas Dartmouth Rice, a working class white New Yorker, premiered his newest song and dance act, “Jump Jim Crow.” The number was a hit among Rice’s working-class male audiences and garnered him significant success. Rice toured the eastern United States throughout the early 1830s performing as “Jim Crow” to large and frequently sold-out theatres. In 1836, Rice took his performance overseas, sparking English interest in the genre.⁵⁵ The format and content of blackface minstrel performances developed and changed over its 130 years of popularity, eventually giving rise to stereotypes of Black men and women that still circulate in popular culture today.⁵⁶ During Rice’s time, blackface performances were limited to one or two small acts within a larger variety show. As discussed by historians of early blackface minstrelsy, the performances featured risqué jokes, drag performances and other material not considered suitable for a mixed gender audience at the time. The basic format of minstrelsy began changing in the early 1840s. In 1843, the Virginia Serenaders, a group of four white men, staged the first long-form blackface minstrelsy performance, renting out a small stage in New York where they performed an entire show in Blackface. The Virginia Serenaders found remarkable success, helping to popularise the long-form performances which would characterise minstrelsy in the years to come.⁵⁷ The troupe

⁵⁵ Pickering. *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*. 7-15.

⁵⁶ Historians of blackface minstrelsy generally limit the time span of blackface minstrelsy to the 130 years between 1830 and 1960. Blackface continued in popular media well into the 2000s but in contexts separate from the comparatively narrow genre of blackface minstrelsy. Blackface performances, and blackface minstrelsy have significant overlap in their context, content and meaning but are not synonymous; for example, *Birth of a Nation* which features blackface is not blackface minstrelsy. Though they are not synonymous these forms of racial impersonation are nevertheless a stereotype of the racial other—one that is alternately uncontrolled, lazy, violent and/or erotic.

⁵⁷ Eric Lott. *Love and Theft Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. 20th-anniversary ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

likewise reduced the “risqué” humour that had previously characterised blackface minstrelsy.⁵⁸ By the late 1840s the New York based Christy Minstrels had succeeded in popularising what would become the “standard” minstrel format. The Virginia Serenaders, the Christy Minstrels, and others achieved success at a time when scientific racism and debates over slavery developed into major cultural and social issues.⁵⁹

The standard minstrel show consisted of three parts, and a rotating cast of stock stereotypes that historians such as Deborah Gray White have found that link enslavement to modern popular culture: the Sambo, Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire characters.⁶⁰ Prior to the performance, a touring troupe might put on a parade in front of the theatre to draw in audiences.⁶¹ The first part contained a musical overture; the interlocutor, who functioned as the master of ceremonies called “Gentleman, be seated” and the troupe took their place in a semi-circular line. Generally, the two endmen Mr./Brother Tambo and Mr./Brother Bones, who played the tambourine and castanets, respectively, would interact with the interlocutor. Frequently, though not always, the interlocutor represented the white middle class. In early minstrelsy, the interlocutor was often the butt of the joke, ridiculed by the blackface characters, though this was not universal in later years, as class dynamics shifted, and racial difference eclipsed class distinctions in the culture of whiteness that animated these performances.

⁵⁸ Dale Cockrell. *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World*. (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁵⁹ The 1840s saw increased debate about the origins of different racial groups. Polygenic creationists, led by Louis Agassiz in the United States held that God created different racial groups in separate creation events—Europeans were descended from Adam and Eve and shared no ancestry with non-whites. See Nell Irving Painter. *The History of White People*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2010).

⁶⁰ Deborah Grey White. *Ar’n’t I A Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*. (New York, NY; W. W. Norton & Company, 1987). 27-61.

⁶¹ See “Advertisement” *The Northern Advance*. Vol. 59 No. 43. 27 Oct 1910. 1 and “Good Minstrels” *The London Advertiser*. No. 20290. May 12, 1911. 15.

The second section, the “olio” served as a variety act featuring singers, musical and comedy acts, and a “stump speech” by a rotating cast of stock characters. Like the format of minstrelsy, the types of characters found in the performances changed over time. These caricatures presented Black people as either unintelligent, subservient, and safe; or, as criminals and upstarts whose attempts at upward mobility were laughable at best. One common caricature, the Sambo, was a happy, and docile enslaved man who accepted his “natural” inferiority and subservient role. Like the “Sambo,” the “coon” character was common in plantation skits. The caricature was portrayed as a lazy and unintelligent enslaved man resistant to any form of work. A variation of the “coon” character, “Zip Coon” represented the “uppity” Black dandy of the north. The humour of “Zip Coon” and other dandy characters was in a Black man’s failed imitation of whiteness and the supposed absurdity that a Black man would ever attain the success and respectability associated with fashionable dress.⁶² The caricatures common in blackface minstrelsy presented black men as violent, lazy, or uneducated and thus unsuited to the economic and political responsibilities available to, and expected of, white men.

Shows that included cross-gender performances likewise featured stock characters and stereotype-laden depictions of Black women. Images of the Mammy and the Jezebel shaped the conditions of enslaved women in the antebellum south. The stereotype of the hypersexual and sensual “Jezebel” could be found in poetry and travelers’ narratives, where she justified white male sexual aggression and assault upon enslaved women. These stereotypes shaped the relationships between slave owner and enslaved person, and the conditions under which enslaved women worked.⁶³ As Deborah Grey White remarked “the choice put before many slave women was

⁶² Michael Pickering. *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*. 164-165.

⁶³ Deborah Grey White. *Ar’n’t I A Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*. New York, NY; W. W. Norton & Company. 1987. 30.

between miscegenation and the worst experiences that slavery had to offer,” that is, give into the unwanted sexual advance of white men or to refuse and risk additional violence.⁶⁴ In blackface minstrelsy of the late 19th and early 20th century, “the wench,” also referred to as the “yeller gal” or the “prima donna” built off and perpetuated the stereotype of the Jezebel. The caricature presented light skinned black women as flirtatious, sexually promiscuous and the object of male characters’ desires. Alternately, the “Mammy” was the loyal enslaved Black women. Frequently depicted as dark skinned, overweight, and matronly, the Mammy caricature is frequently presented as devoted to the white children of the family which enslaved or employed her. “The Mammy” character accepted her own inferiority in relation to the white family in what Kimberly Wallace Saunders has called “a troubled marriage of race and gender essentialism.”⁶⁵ The “wench” and the “Mammy” characters as presented and consumed by white people presented hypersexuality and passivity as essential aspects of “bad” and “good” expressions of Black femininity. Both served white supremacist ends, by rationalizing the mistreatment of enslaved women as sexual objects or as mothers separated from their own children by the slave trade.

The final portion of a minstrel show typically consisted of a one-act-play which might have been original to the troupe, or an adaptation of a popular story. Reinterpretations of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* were especially popular, serving to either promote slavery or its abolition depending on the context of its performance.⁶⁶ In late minstrelsy, troupes would forego the final portion and end the show with the olio, or a similar variety show performance. With the success of minstrelsy as a genre, and the influence of middle-class performers, minstrelsy lost some of its original working-

⁶⁴ Ibid.34.

⁶⁵ Kimberly Wallace-Sanders. *Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender, and Southern Memory*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008.) 2.

⁶⁶ Sarah Meer *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy, and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s* (Athens, Georgia UGAPress, 2005).

class appeal. Although drag remained a feature of the performance, by the 1860s many of the risqué jokes were removed making it a suitable form of entertainment for middle class white women to view or attend. White women's on-stage participation, however, remained uncommon until the 1890s and was considered significantly more risqué than men-only troupes.⁶⁷

Blackface minstrelsy was popular throughout the English-speaking world, spread by touring American performers and later adapted to suit local tastes. American minstrel troupes made stops in Canada as early as the 1840s and were well received. Canadians were quick to adopt minstrelsy as a genre. Notably, Calixa Lavallee, the composer of *O'Canada*, spent his early career as a performer and musical director for various blackface minstrel troupes.⁶⁸ Minstrelsy offered Ontario audiences a form of release in a method that was socially acceptable, and respectable enough for mixed class and mixed gender audiences. Victorian era minstrel troupes frequently made stops in Ontario, and advertisements for them touted the respectable nature of the show and the refined nature of the performance.

Though touring minstrel shows declined in popularity in the 1880s, blackface minstrelsy remained popular well into the 20th century. As Cheryl Thompson notes, Ontario blackface minstrelsy lost much of its upper-class appeal by the 1920s and once again became a popular form of entertainment. Though it returned to a popular form, the blackface minstrelsy of the 1920s had retained its respectability, and it focused on racial difference rather than making fun of the middle and upper classes. Charitable organisations, churches and community theatres in Toronto put on

⁶⁷ Annemarie Bean, "Black Minstrelsy and Double Inversion," in *African American Performance and Theater History: A Critical Reader*, eds. Harry J. Elam Jr. and David Krasner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 174.

⁶⁸ Brian Christopher Thompson *Anthems and Minstrel Shows: The Life and Times of Calixa Lavallée, 1842-1891* (McGill-Queens University Press, 2015). These include Duprez and Green's New Orleans Minstrels, the San Francisco Minstrels, and the Morris Brothers Minstrels.

minstrel shows to raise money for various causes.⁶⁹ The community-level productions popular during the 1920s provided amateur performers the opportunity to take the stage alongside friends and family where they could be celebrated by their community.

The shows depicted and helped to reinforce Canadian whiteness. As Thompson argued of Toronto blackface minstrelsy, the image of blackness presented in minstrel shows tied Black people to the Southern United States, separate and apart from the communities that presented these shows in Ontario. Black people belonged down *there*, not in the modern Canadian state.⁷⁰ The white community formation elements of blackface minstrelsy, I argue, were not limited to metropolitan centres or to minstrelsy's early or most popular years. Community productions of blackface minstrelsy, and other forms of racial impersonation, reflected and helped to create community and national identities across Ontario well into the 20th century. These depictions, and the process of organising a minstrel show, reflected a vision of the local community, and of Canada, which was fundamentally white, in which Black characters were outsiders and thus available to lampoon without risk.

British and Imperial Minstrelsy

Though an American genre, blackface minstrelsy became a popular artform in Britain and other parts of its empire. As in the United States, blackface minstrelsy was a pop cultural phenomenon, presenting an idea of blackness against which whiteness (otherwise fractured by national origin, class, and religious differences) could be constructed and maintained. In his 2008 book *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*, Michael Pickering explores the spread of blackface performances in metropolitan centres in England during the mid 19th century. Pickering notes that

⁶⁹ Cheryl Thompson "Locating "Dixie" in Newspaper Discourse and Theatrical Performance in Toronto, 1880s to 1920s" *Canadian Review of American Studies*. (2019) 49. 207.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 208.

blackface minstrelsy functioned as an ideological support to the racial logic of empire and “provided [an] endorsement of the white man’s burden and the civilising mission.”⁷¹ He argues that blackface had multiple meanings for its audience and performers. It reinforced negative stereotypes about blackness and Black Americans, while also providing participants an avenue for “license, display and release” that was otherwise inaccessible to British audiences in the 19th and 20th century.⁷² Blackface minstrelsy, with its permissiveness and comedic appeal presented Black people as lesser, uneducated, and therefore in need of the “civilised” world’s paternal intervention.

British minstrelsy evolved over the course of the 19th century and developed features not found in the United States. Pickering divides minstrelsy into three periods, its early rise in popularity beginning in the 1840s, its height from 1860 to 1900, and a period of decline beginning in the turn of the century that ended with the cancelation of BBC’s *Black and White Minstrel Show* in 1973.⁷³ From its outset, blackface minstrelsy was not confined to the working class. Though critics viewed minstrelsy as a less refined artform than the opera or hymnals, blackface performance always enjoyed a degree of respectability. From its arrival in Britain, blackface minstrelsy was permissible for mixed gender and mixed class audiences. Second, minstrelsy in Britain adopted elements of melodrama into the performances—including emotional and expressive acting, as well as elements of sentimentalism.⁷⁴ The differences between white audiences and the content of the blackface performance exemplified the way that expressions of

⁷¹ Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*. xii

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁷⁴ Moskowitz, M. and Marlis Schweitzer. “Testimonials in Silk: Juba and the Legitimization of American Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain.” In *Testimonial Advertising in the American Marketplace*. United States: Palgrave Macmillan. 2009). <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230101715>.

anti-blackness could, and did, change according to cultural and political context. Nevertheless, Blackface minstrelsy's appeal in the mid-19th century was transatlantic and trans-imperial.

Robert Nowatzki has examined the place of blackface minstrelsy in American and British abolitionist discourse. He examines anti-slavery literary texts, pamphlets and speeches alongside minstrel songs, stump speeches and travelogues, arguing that both blackface minstrelsy and abolition were shaped by a transatlantic crossing of ideas of race, class, and nation.⁷⁵ Minstrelsy's depictions of blackness, and abolitionist rhetoric, he argues, frequently informed each other, drawing on similar rhetoric, images, and Victorian sentimentality. White abolitionists, like blackface performers, drew from and expressed paternalistic and condescending views of Black people. Though not necessarily used to ridicule, as was the case in blackface performances, white abolitionists' conceptions of blackness were frequently shaped by the objectification of the Black body.⁷⁶ Nowatzki argues that Britons embraced such objectification. He notes however, that the decline of popular abolitionist sentiment in Britain aligned with the spread of blackface minstrelsy into wider British popular culture.⁷⁷ Opposition to slavery, and American forms of racism could both be found in British blackface performances.

Nowatzki is careful to note that the spread of minstrelsy and the decline of abolition did not have a directly causal relationship. Rather, British minstrelsy grew steadily more racist and pro-slavery at a time of imperial expansion, in which Black people were more distant colonial subjects to be ruled, rather than victims of American cruelty in need of rescue.⁷⁸ British blackface

⁷⁵ Nowatzki, Robert. *Representing African Americans in Transatlantic Abolitionism and Blackface Minstrelsy*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. 2010), 2.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 12. That objectification took any forms, from hostility to enslaved black people use of violence to gain freedom, to the sexualization of black bodies in minstrel performances and obsession physical and sexual violence by white abolitionists.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 66-67

minstrelsy, as in the United States, frequently contained skits that drew upon *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In her 2005 book, *Uncle Tom Mania*, Sarah Meer highlights transatlantic cultural exchanges, showing how *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was adopted and adapted on either side of the Atlantic during the 1850s. Proslavery retellings in minstrel performances focused on the “terror” of enslaved people fleeing, playing into contemporary anxieties. The antislavery messaging of the novel was short-lived in American minstrelsy but lasted longer in the United Kingdom. The sentimentalism and melodrama favoured by British blackface audiences made *Uncle Tom* a popular stage adaptation. But where American iterations of the novel were mixed in their support for slavery, British adaptations were distinctly antislavery and often anti-American. On the minstrel stage, adaptations of *Uncle Tom* played into the aspects of the novel that were themselves inspired by blackface minstrelsy—with shows portraying Tom as a “Jim Crow” type character, or offering skits based on the Topsy-Miss Ophelia interactions.⁷⁹ Performances featuring “comical Topsies” were also present in Ontario. One performance in London, Ontario featured comedic skits based on the novel and its characters.⁸⁰ Though both Nowatzki and Meer acknowledge the cultural similarities and exchanges across the Atlantic world, neither author covers the spread of minstrelsy to other parts of the empire.

Fortunately, others have produced scholarship about the spread of blackface entertainment beyond the US and the UK. Historian Chinua Thelwell examines the spread of blackface minstrelsy through the British empire. He focuses on English speaking areas of South Africa, specifically the Cape and Natal colonies of the 19th century. Thelwell examines what he calls the “burnt cork nationalism” of blackface minstrelsy, arguing that the genre depicted and helped to

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ “Uncle Tom's Cabin Tomorrow” *London Advertiser*. 17 March 1899.
https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.N_00255_189903

reinforce the idea that Indigenous Black peoples were perpetual non-citizens, and unfit for democratic political participation.⁸¹ Minstrelsy, with its clear demarcation of un-blackened refined performance in the first half, and blackface stump speeches and plantation skits in the second half, distinguished between “white citizen” and “black alien.”⁸² Thelwell draws from Catherine Cole’s suggestion that blackface minstrels, rather than being quintessentially American, were instead “quintessentially colonial.” He argues that blackface minstrelsy, like settler colonialism, was reliant on extracting monetary value from the oppressed and dispossessed.⁸³ Alienating indigenous Africans from their own homelands, then, served settler colonial ends.

The elements of minstrelsy which drew British and American audiences also appealed to white Canadians. Thelwell’s argument that blackface minstrelsy was inherently colonial helps to explain blackface minstrelsy’s popularity throughout the British empire, including in Canada. Audiences in British North America were quick to embrace blackface minstrelsy. Minstrelsy offered Anglo-Canadian audiences a picture of themselves that was at once morally superior to the United States (just as British blackface was simultaneously antislavery and anti-American), while simultaneously supporting the racial logic of imperial expansion. This contradiction seemed to promise Canadians a version of colonial rule that was magically less violent and less racist than it ever was in reality. Though an American genre, nothing in Blackface minstrelsy challenged white Ontarians self-perception as a safe haven for Black Americans fleeing persecution or an inheritor of colour-blind British justice. As with abolitionists, they could feel superior to Black people while also offering them pity or charity – which only reinforced the superiority of their own imperial

⁸¹ Chinua Thelwell. *Exporting Jim Crow: Blackface Minstrelsy in South Africa and Beyond*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2020), 3.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 5.

culture. Blackface minstrelsy could, and did, offer a place for white people to express a sense of community and local belonging that was tied to both regional identity and Canada's status as a white self-governing dominion within the empire. That it did so at the expense of Black humanity also meant that Black people could never be conceived of as "truly Canadian." Meanwhile, the genre reinforced the consolidation of white identity as truly Canadian without ever even mentioning indigenous or First Nations people – another settler colonial elision.

Blackface Minstrelsy and White Ontarian Identity

Contemporary to minstrelsy's spread to Britain, blackface performers began touring Canada. In her work, Cheryl Thompson notes that Canadian blackface minstrelsy, in content and form, was similar to that of the United States and Britain, with few, if any, uniquely Canadian elements. Minstrelsy served a two-fold purpose in articulating whiteness and Canadian identity. First, the southern pastoralism it evoked depicted Black people as inherently lazy, undisciplined, and thus unsuited to the modern, industrial north, including Canada. Second, it allowed white performers to express and depict an overt racism that was otherwise inappropriate in polite society, since it was done in the context of making fun of Americans – whether they were "racist" whites or stereotypical blacks.⁸⁴ Black Canadians protested the depictions of Black people present on blackface minstrelsy stages. Black Torontonians petitioned the Toronto city council three times to ban touring American minstrel troupes. The council rejected all three petitions between 1840 and 1843.⁸⁵ Opposition to blackface minstrelsy was not limited to Black Torontonians. In 1866, 72 Black Hamilton residents signed a petition to the mayor to ban minstrel shows. Though the petition was ultimately unsuccessful, as the mayor stated that nothing could be done unless the performers

⁸⁴Cheryl Thompson. 2019. "Locating 'Dixie' in Newspaper Discourse and Theatrical Performance in Toronto, 1880s to 1920s." *Canadian Review of American Studies* 49 (2): 208, 220. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cras.2017.032>. 208, 220.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

violated “common decency,” the advertisements which incited the petition were painted over.⁸⁶ So the racist entertainment continued, but it was no longer advertised in the same way. Likewise, Thompson has argued, blackface minstrelsy presented Canadians with an opportunity to deny and disavow their own white supremacy—white Canadians were distant both from the southern Black Americans minstrelsy claimed to represent, and the political question of slavery and, later, violent racism and segregation.⁸⁷

Beginning in the 1850s, Ontarians put on blackface minstrel performances to raise funds for charitable organisations. Minstrelsy’s popularity, and moderately respectable reputation, made it a viable choice for fundraising events. Audiences could simultaneously be entertained and participate in civic life. In the first quarter of 1855, Stanley’s Minstrels put on a monthly show for the benefit of various Toronto area charities with a focus on the “Patriotic Fund.” The performances at St. Lawrence Market drew in an appreciative audience. Stanley’s minstrels advertised popular and original “Ethiopian melodies” alongside an original “comic ballet” titled *The Haunted Pie*.⁸⁸ *The Haunted Pie* was a success with audience members and was requested again in their second performance.⁸⁹ Not only was the event well received and well attended by audience members, but it was also appreciated by members of the municipal council. Following the success of their last performance in March of 1855, Toronto City Council voted to reimburse the stage rental fees for

⁸⁶ Adrienne Shadd *The Journey from Tollgate to Parkway: African Canadians in Hamilton*. (Toronto, Ontario: Natural Heritage Book. 2010.),17-18

⁸⁷ Cheryl Thompson. 2019. “Locating ‘Dixie’ in Newspaper Discourse and Theatrical Performance in Toronto, 1880s to 1920s.” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 49 (2): 208, 220. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cras.2017.032.208.220>.

⁸⁸ “Stanley’s Minstrels” *The Globe (1844-1936)*, January 27, 1855. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/classified-ad-3-no-title/docview/1511618909/se-2>.

⁸⁹ “Stanley Minstrels” *The Globe*; Toronto. February 26, 1855. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/classified-ad-2-no-title/docview/1511617672/se-2>

the troupe.⁹⁰ The shows, which were put on for the benefit of charity, were a public good according to the Toronto city council. The success of the charitable performances reinforced the links between white civic belonging and the “noncitizen” status of racialized groups discussed by Thelwell. White Torontonians engaged with blackface minstrelsy, and enjoyed its “witty sayings, jokes, black blunders [and] dancing” as a form of charitable civic participation.⁹¹ Blackface minstrelsy was acceptable enough as a genre to be used in fundraising drives sanctioned and supported by municipal government. Anti-black racism was so normalized in Ontario that this was possible.

The association between blackface minstrelsy and support for slavery was not lost on all Torontonians in the early years of the genre. In an 1857 article, one contributor to *The Globe* recounted a racist attack by 30 “youths” on the house Mrs. Farrar, a Black woman living in London, Ontario. *The Globe* contributor condemned both the actions of the gang, as well as the less than sympathetic coverage she received. Apparently, it was Mrs. Farrar’s blackness that was itself the cause as “even under the august shadow of the British banner the ‘swart livery’ of Ethiopia occasionally subjects its processor to the persecution of scorn and contempt more intolerable to a sensitive spirit than the branding iron and the lash.”⁹² That description of anti-black racism awkwardly phrased in the passive voice thus avoided pointing out who was actually responsible for the attack. There was racism in Canada, but apparently no white perpetrators. Notably, the author of the article linked the enjoyment of blackface minstrelsy in British North America to

⁹⁰ “City Council Meeting” *The Globe*; Toronto. March 16, 1855. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/city-council-meeting/docview/1511603704/se-2>.

⁹¹ “Stanley Minstrels” *The Globe*; Toronto. March 12, 1855. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/classified-ad-2-no-title/docview/1511603111/se-2>.

⁹² “Misplaced Jocularly” *The Globe*; Toronto. 22 October 1857. 2.

support for slavery. They wrote “the planter and the human flesh huckster argue, and not illogically, that by making the serf an object of laughter and scorn with the million, they diminish public sympathy for his wrongs.” Minstrelsy, and its caricatured depiction of blackness, is recognised for reinforcing the idea that Black people should “occupy an inferior rank in the intelligent creation and fall[s] to be classed under the category of monkey than of man.”⁹³ Though the author could recognise and critique the racism found in Canada West (where London was located), they were nevertheless unwilling or unable to recognise that white supremacy was foundational to the empire.

The author ends, predictably, by upholding British North America as a place where enslaved Black Americans were able to find solace. To their view, the province was “by God’s blessing, the Goshen of the trampled-on victims of republican tyranny and cupidity” and it was to British North America that “tens of thousands of tear-dimmed pining eyes are directed as the only earthly refuge from [the] most grinding and lawless oppression.”⁹⁴ Dripping with Victorian sentimentalism, this writer seemed to believe that blackface minstrelsy, like white supremacy, was solely the domain of the United States. Though a popular artform in Canada, blackface minstrelsy was, in his view, an outside force influencing Canadian and British perceptions of Blackness. As if the US did not originate in the same imperial system as Canada, with Britain at its center.

Other reports also revealed the influence of blackface minstrelsy on popular Canadian conceptions of blackness. At the same time, Ontario newspapers were critical of American racism when it served to demonstrate Canadian moral superiority and a sense of “colour-blind British justice.” For example, in 1888 Adam Morse fled Savannah, Georgia and came to Canada. Morse

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

had been arrested following an altercation with the white train ticketer who had beaten his son. Racial segregation in transportation had originated in the urban North in the 1830s, but by the 1880s had spread across the US, and Blacks often faced difficult confrontations when they attempted to travel in the US.⁹⁵ After reports that he would be lynched, Morse left Georgia for Rochester, New York and then went on to Canada where he lived under the alias Spencer Haines.⁹⁶ He was arrested in Canada and held for the attempted murder of the white train ticketer.

White Canadians were supportive of Morse and his family, viewing his initial arrest as an infringement both of his rights as a parent and of his masculinity, since he had been defending his child. Morse was released after a law enforcement representative from Georgia left Canada before signing the requisite paperwork and never returned. Following Morse's release, members of the community rallied in support and celebration. Early on, most celebrants were white Canadians, with Black Canadians only arriving to the rally at the end of the workday. Much of the support among white Torontonians can be credited to the newspaper coverage that Morse's case received. John Cameron, editor of *The Globe*, offered to be his bondsman should he have been permitted bail, and John Ross Robertson, editor of *The Telegram*, provided funds to bring witnesses from Georgia. *The Globe* celebrated his release, presented Canadian courts as morally superior to those of the United States, and offered much coverage of Black Canadians expressing their grateful loyalty to Queen and country.⁹⁷ The coverage of Morse's case, and the broad support he received

⁹⁵ Elizabeth Stordeur Pryor. *Colored Travelers: Mobility and the Fight for Citizenship before the Civil War* (Philadelphia: U. Penn. Press 2016).

⁹⁶ Colin McFarquhar "Blacks in 1880s Toronto: The Search for Equality". *Ontario History*, 99(1), 64–76. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065797ar>. 74.

⁹⁷ "Coloured Men Rejoice" *The Globe* June 26, 1888, 4. Much of the coverage focuses on how Black Torontonians were not advocating for the release of a criminal, but rather advocating for a fair trial and British justice. While some of it is no doubt genuine, the sheer amount of the pro-imperial rhetoric was likely an appeal to white readership and respectability politics. Dedication and loyalty to the empire and a celebration of birth right citizenship was likewise a way for Black Canadians to assert their right to access all citizenship rights, including equal protection under the law that might otherwise be denied because of overt and systemic racism. Canada, and the empire, is celebrated as a place where Black men are able to express their citizenship and masculinity without fear of lynching, not as a place

by the white press in Toronto, was in large part due to their view of him as a “good” black person. Morse’s case was likewise a “feel-good” story for the white press and their white readers. Journalists and editors could hold up Morse and his choice to flee to the empire as evidence of Canada’s supposed “colour-blind” justice and what Barrington Walker has termed the British legal liberalism of the Canadian courts.⁹⁸ White Canadians could point to Morse, and the failed extradition, as evidence that Canada did not have the same “race problem” present in the United States.

Though many white Canadians were supportive of Morse, that support was shaped by a view of Blackness heavily influenced by the caricatures of blackface minstrelsy. In the coverage of a Black speaker at the celebration, the reporter was surprised to find that the Black man’s speech was not heavily accented like the dialect always written for Black minstrel characters. In fact, the reporter noted, the Black chairman for the rally, George Simpson, spoke “very softly, and without any of the peculiarities of pronunciation usually ascribed to his race.”⁹⁹ It was so impossible to think of a Black man as a Canadian that this Toronto reporter expected him to sound like a white blackface performer, based on a stereotype of an enslaved Black Southerner, rather than like one of his neighbours.

Canadians On the Late Minstrel Stage

While Canadians liked to think that Blackface minstrelsy, as well as anti-Black racism, were imported from the US, many white Canadians darkened their faces and jumped Jim Crow on stage – some even toured in the US and the UK. And by the 1920s, when Matthew Bullock’s case

free from racism or “race prejudice.” One of the speakers, Rev. T. C. Oliver made a joke about Canadian racism that simultaneously did not challenge the racial hierarchy of the country, saying “a white man is just as good as black man if he behaves himself.”

⁹⁸ Walker, *Race on Trial*. 11.

⁹⁹ “Coloured Men Rejoice” *The Globe* Toronto Ont. June 26, 1888, 4.

became national news, church groups and school children participated in blackface performances across Ontario. George Primrose, born in London, Ontario in 1852, was a celebrated Canadian blackface performer.¹⁰⁰ Influenced by Sam Hague's British Minstrels, Primrose and his business partner Billy West took inspiration from British forms of minstrelsy. They presented North American audiences with the "refined" minstrelsy common in the UK, offering ballads and ballet performances. They played the "dandy" characters straight, performing in top hats and coat tails. Though their version of minstrelsy took a step back from its origins as a working-class art form replete with stump speeches, they did not entirely do away with the staples of blackface minstrelsy. Primrose and West were popular performers in the United States, but they also frequently returned to southwestern Ontario over the course of the 1880s and 1890s. Though Primrose and West were based in the United States, their tours often took the troupe to Canada, offering Canadian audiences of the late 19th century the ability to see home grown talent. The troupe played the London, Ontario Grand Opera House located at the corner of King and Richmond on a regular basis. Primrose and West's performance style, with their typically "British" flavour of minstrelsy were popular in Ontario. One Toronto, Ontario reviewer praised the troupes' efforts to "elevate the tone and broaden the sphere of America's favourite amusement."¹⁰¹ Success in blackface minstrelsy was possible for Canadian blackface performers, both at home and abroad, which suggests that their engagement with anti-black racism was not so different from Americans.'

Primrose and West's performances in Canada also featured elements of yellowface and brownface alongside "traditional" blackface minstrelsy. Their 1892 performance consisted of a

¹⁰⁰ Bruce Vermazen. 'Primrose and Dockstader's Minstrels 1912-14', *That Moaning Saxophone: The Six Brown Brothers and the Dawning of a Musical Craze* (New York, 2009; online edn, Oxford Academic, 1 January. 2010), <https://doi-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195372182.003.0007>,

¹⁰¹ "Music and the Drama; Grand Opera House." *The Globe*, May 08, 1888. 8. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/music-drama/docview/1649146216/se-2>.

first part based off the Mikado, profiting off of the popularity of the play. The olio consisted of skits, one written by J. Melville Janson titled “The Bridegroom’s Mistake: or The Coon Who Married for Money” and another “The Monkies and the Farmer.”¹⁰² Their 1894 visit to The Grand Theatre in London, Ontario likewise consisted of a first part with numerous songs, some comedic minstrel songs as well as popular ballads. The olio included a piece called “The Indian Club Specialist,” a football re-enactment, and a blackface skit entitled “The Christening of the Baby” which included a cross-gender performance.¹⁰³ Their 1897 visit to The Grand included a song titled “Nigger Nigger Never Die” and a skit called the “Zouave Patrol” written by Primrose and West respectively.¹⁰⁴ Canadian audiences like those of the United States, were treated to performances which reinforced the racial hierarchy of late 19th and early 20th century North America. Whiteness was all that blackness was not—respectable, refined, and intelligent. The shows positioned Black and Asian Canadians and Americans as the objects of ridicule and scorn. Minstrels shows thus positioned the white audience members and performers as superior to the characters portrayed. In performing blackface alongside other forms of racial impersonation, minstrel troupes like Primrose and West reinforced the idea that Ontario, and Canada were places for white people. “Dixie” was the “natural” place for Black people, and Asian and Indigenous people were similarly unwelcome and unsuited to full citizenship. As a form of popular entertainment, blackface minstrelsy, and its associated acts of racial impersonation helped to

¹⁰² Grand Opera House. *Programme, Primrose & West’s Minstrels*. London, Ont. Friday, Nov. 4th, 1892. Canadiana. <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.56872>

¹⁰³ Grand Opera House. *Programme, Friday Ev’g, April 20th, Primrose, and West’s Minstrels*. London, Ont. 1894. Canadiana. <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.57637/7>

¹⁰⁴ Grand Opera House. *Programme Primrose and West’s Minstrels: Season 1897-98*. London, Ont. 8 December. 8, 1897. Canadiana. <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.56654>. It is unclear if the Zouave performance is referencing French Zouaves stationed in North Africa, or the Zouaves of the American Civil War. The “Zouave” theme was also present in a 1910 Guy Brother’s minstrel show in Barrie. See “Advertisement” *The Northern Advance*. Vol. 59 No. 43. 27 October 1910, p. 1

reinforce a communal identity which excluded people of colour from both local and national circles of belonging.

Primrose and West's performer George Evans would go on to manage his own minstrel troupe. His success in minstrelsy, including touring with the 1894 Primrose and West troupe, earned him enough to purchase the Cohen and Harris minstrels in 1910.¹⁰⁵ He renamed the organisation the Honey Boy Minstrels with whom he toured North America. Described as the "black star with the Honey Boy Minstrels" George Evans and his troupe were a hit with Ontario audiences.¹⁰⁶ Evans' shows feature many of the staples of blackface minstrelsy, while also reflecting his own interests in sports. The 1911 Canadian tour featured former heavyweight boxing champion James J. (Gentleman Jim) Corbett as the interlocutor. The show played at Toronto's Princess Theatre on May 8th, and in London, Ontario at The Grand on May 15th.¹⁰⁷ *The Toronto World* advertised the show as giving new life to the genre, praising the size of the company, and set design, and recognised the genre's cross class appeal.¹⁰⁸ The *London Advertiser* likewise appreciated the performance and called the show "America's one first class minstrel organisation."¹⁰⁹ The Toronto shows featured allusions to local life, Swiss and Irish yodeling, and "a bit of the real old time singing." One well received joke centred on misheard medical terms;

Endman: The uniform suspenders?

¹⁰⁵ "Evans Buys Minstrel Show." *New York Times (1857-1922)*, 14 February 1910. 9. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/evans-buys-minstrel-show/docview/97050711/se-2>.

¹⁰⁶ "At the Princess: Evans Honey Boy Minstrels" *The Toronto World*: Vol. XXXI, No. 11,220. 11 May 1911. 3.

¹⁰⁷ "Evans Minstrels Coming." *The Toronto World*: Vol. XXXI, No. 11,207. 29 April 1911. 10.

¹⁰⁸ "George Evans' Honey Boy Minstrels" *The Toronto World*: Vol. XXXI, No. 11,213. 4 May 1911. 1.

¹⁰⁹ "Good Minstrels" *The London Advertiser*. No. 20290. May 12, 1911. 15 Tickets for the London show ranged from 25c to 1.50 for seats, and \$2 for a box. Later that week The Grand hosted a comedic production of Uncle Toms Cabin featuring separate Black and white brass bands, "Funny Topseys" and an "Eccentric Marks." The production paraded in downtown London prior to its first performances. Ticket prices ranged from 15 and 50 cents for adults, and a flat 15 cent rate for children's matinee tickets. "Grand Theatre Ad." *London Advertiser*. No. 20292 May 15, 1911. 3 and "Honey Boy Minstrels at the Princess" *The Toronto World*: Vol. XXXI, No. 11,213. 4 May 1911. 8.

Interlocutor: No, the vermiform appendix. They took it away from him.

Endman: Took it away from him? He should have had it in his wife's name.¹¹⁰

Like many minstrels, Corbett performed both in blackface and without makeup. The first part of the show featured a one-act play called the "The Crimson Trellis." The company had premiered the act two years earlier at the Apollo Theatre in Atlantic City, N.J. The show featured red costumes with olive green trim.¹¹¹ Though not new, it was still well received in London with the *London Advertiser* calling it a "beautiful creation." The un-darkened portion of Corbett's performance consisted of a lecture on the circumstances leading up to Jack Johnson's defeat of James Jefferies a year prior, which *London Advertiser* described as "graphic."¹¹² The reason a white man lost, according to Corbett, was a "nervous breakdown," an explanation that repaired a potential fault in whiteness with the failure of one white man's masculinity.¹¹³ The troupe returned to London, Ontario multiple times. Their 1912 show featured a new act titled "Seminary Days." The performance also included soft-shoe dancing (a precursor to tap-dancing popularised in blackface minstrelsy by George Primrose), and an appearance by retired minor league baseball player Louis Bierbauer.¹¹⁴ Evans' 1913 show featured, in addition to the usual local references and musical numbers, an award ceremony for the Canadian League (Canadian minor league baseball) player with the highest batting average presented by the mayor.¹¹⁵

Though the show was a success with audiences the praise was not universal. One reporter with the *Toronto World* was critical of the production and its perceived lower-class elements and poor execution. The critic, Trafford, said the show was "lacking many things" with the music of

¹¹⁰ "At the Princess: Evans Honey Boy Minstrels" *The Toronto World*: Vol. XXXI, No. 11,220. 11 May 1911. 3.

¹¹¹ "Cohan and Harris Minstrels" *Variety*. Vol. XV No. 10 August 14, 1909. Page 16

¹¹² "Advertisement" *London Advertiser* No. 20285 6 May 1911. 16

¹¹³ "At the Princess: Evans Honey Boy Minstrels" *The Toronto World*: Vol. XXXI, No. 11,220. 11 May 1911. 3.

¹¹⁴ "Music and Drama: A Clever Dancer" *London Advertiser*. No. 20692. 23 August 1912. 12 and "Music and Drama: Honey Boy Minstrels" *London Advertiser*. No. 20689.20 August 1912 10.

¹¹⁵ "Honey boy Minstrels" *London Advertiser*. No. 20999. 16 August 1913. 10. The winner that year was Jack Fryer.

the show “rounding out the edge of a run of comedy...which needed in its weakness, all the musical help it could get.” It was only the more subdued choral elements of the show that were worthy of praise. For Trafford, the show would have been improved if the comedic songs and skits were removed entirely as the “attempted negro sketches [were] stupid” if not aided by George Evans himself and his “quaint personality.”¹¹⁶ Trafford’s critique was one which reflected blackface minstrelsy’s return to low or pop culture. His concern over the content of the show was not based on its racial and racist elements, but rather the lackluster quality thereof.

Ontarians of the early 20th century also found success writing for minstrel shows through claiming knowledge of “authentic” Blackness. Geoffrey O’Hara, one minstrel show writer, was born in Chatham, Ontario in 1882. O’Hara was born into a white-collar family. His father worked as a lawyer in Chatham, and his elder brother, Francis O’Hara, would go on to work in politics, becoming the Deputy Minister of Trade and Commerce in 1908.¹¹⁷ Following his father’s death, O’Hara took a job as a bank clerk, and then at a Toronto piano store at the age of 21. While there, he began working as a professional singer in churches and other venues around the city. While performing in Toronto, Lew Dockstader, a successful blackface vaudeville performer hired O’Hara, which launched his international career. O’Hara went on to tour with the troupe for a year but ultimately settled in New York where he performed and wrote for vaudeville shows. In a 1921 profile in *MacLean’s Magazine*, O’Hara recounted his first major success in New York, selling his song “Tennessee I Hear You Calling Me” to Al Jolson. Jolson’s version of the song was a hit, selling 128,000 copies in the two months after its first performance. The song’s success was limited by a 6-month long injunction against its publication. Though a ruling was never made, popular

¹¹⁶ Trafford “Honey Boy Minstrels” *The Toronto Sunday World*: Vol. XXXI, No. 11,223. 14 May 1911. 6.

¹¹⁷ Appointt [Appointment] F.C.T. O’Hara as Deputy Minister of Trade and Commerce - M. T. and C. [Minister of Trade and Commerce], P.C. 1908-0202. January 28, 1908. Library and Archives Canada. Item Id: 142521

interest in the song had waned during the publication ban. O'Hara was careful to note that the injunction was not the result of moral opposition to the song, its contents, or its method of performance but was due to "purely commercial reasons."¹¹⁸

Like blackface performers of the early periods of minstrelsy, O'Hara claimed to be able to authentically portray blackness because of his physical proximity to a Black community. He claimed the chorus of the song came to him in a dream, inspired by the songs sung by Black Chathamites, specifically "The Girl I loved in Sunny Tennessee." Despite his claim, it is unlikely he first heard the song through members of Chatham's Black community. "Sunny Tennessee" was first published in 1899 by Jos. W. Stern & Co, written by Harry Braisted and Stanley Carter. The song was a popular ballad and advertised in major newspapers across the United States.¹¹⁹ Jos. W. Stern & Co also advertised in Canada and ran an ad in the Windsor *Evening Press* for the sheet music which listed the song as for sale.¹²⁰ Though not initially a minstrel song it, like other popular ballads, did find its way into minstrel performances. In 1899 minstrel shows in Boston and Washington D.C. included a version of the song in their performance.¹²¹ The song had no major ties to either Black communities or even to minstrelsy and the demeaning caricature it presented.

¹¹⁸Geoffrey O'Hara. "On the Road From Ontario to Tin Pan Alley." *Maclean's (Toronto)*. Vol. 34. No. 7. Toronto, Canada: Maclean Pub. Co. 1 April 1921. 24.

¹¹⁹"Music" ad. *New York Times (1857-1922)*, February 12, 1899. 9. And "Music Bargains" ad. *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922)*, 18 June 1899. 48.

¹²⁰"Popular Songs and Dance Music of 99". *The Evening Record (1893-1918)*; Windsor, Ontario. 22 June 1899: 4. Canadians knew "The Girl I Loved in Sunny Tennessee" well enough that attendees of the Ottawa News Boys celebration organised by the W.C.T.U. offered an impromptu rendition of the song. The celebrations also included an impromptu "cake walk." See "Newsboys Annual" *The Evening Citizen (1898-1915)*, Ottawa, Ontario. 19 January 1900: 6.

¹²¹"Wakefield's Shining Minstrel Lights: Sixth Annual Show of the Lyceum Talent Crowds the Town Hall to Repletion." *Boston Daily Globe (1872-1922)*; Boston, Mass. 28 April 1899: 5. And "Jokes Were Bright and Crisp: Successful Minstrel Show of the Young Men's Mission Church Association." *Boston Daily Globe (1872-1922)*; Boston, Mass. 30 May 1899: 7. "At The Theatres: Old Timey Minstrelsy Inaugurates the Season" *The Washington Post (1877-1922)*; Washington, D.C. 12 September 1899: 7.

Nevertheless, O'Hara claimed that he could authentically portray southern Black Americans as a result of his familiarity with the song.

Sunny Tennessee, 1899	Tennessee, I Hear You Calling Me, 1914
<p>On a morning bright and clear, To my old home I drew near, Just a village down in sunny Tennessee.</p> <p>I was speeding on a train, That would bring me back again, To my sweetheart who was waiting there for me.</p> <p>It was but a few short years, Since I'd kissed away her tears As I left her at my dear old mother's side. And each day we've been apart, She grows dearer in my heart, Than the night I asked of her to be my bride.</p> <p><i>Refrain</i> We could hear the darkies singing, As she said farewell to me. Far across the fields of cotton, My old homestead I could see. When the moon rose in its glory, Then I told life's sweetest story, To the girl I lov'd in sunny Tennessee.</p> <p>As the train drew up at last Old familiar scenes I pass'd And I kissed my mother at the station door.</p> <p>But as old friends gathered round, Tears on ev'ry face I found, And I missed the one I'd been longing for</p> <p>As I whispered mother dear Where is Mary? She's not here!</p>	<p>Down where sweet magnolias bloom I hear my old mammy croon, There she waits to take me by the hand. Welcome me home to old Dixie land;</p> <p>Pine trees sigh and cry for me, Old folks there would die for me, Guess I'll start to tote my little grip, Back to Tennessee.</p> <p><i>Chorus</i> Oh Tennessee I hear you calling me. Yes Tennessee I hear you calling me. Sing on Ring on Gee it sounds so grand,</p> <p>Friends I'm on my way. The B and O Will soon be hauling me, So goodbye troubles fade away, I'm going back to Dixie land.</p> <p>Oh Tennessee I hear you calling me Oh Tennessee</p> <p>There's where all the year is June, There's where those red roses bloom, Mockingbirds sing Honey boy come home,</p> <p>We're mighty sad but you all can make us glad;"</p>

<p>All the world seemed lost, and sadness came to me</p> <p>For she pointed to a spot In the churchyard's little lot, Where my sweetheart sleeps in sunny Tennessee</p> <p><i>Refrain</i>¹²²</p>	<p>Come friend take a glide with me, Hop on take a ride with me, You'll be welcome where my mammy live, Back in Tennessee.</p> <p><i>Chorus</i>¹²³</p>
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Both songs depict the singer as returning home to the South on a train ride following time spent in other states. Both singers receive a warm welcome from their mothers and neighbours. Both songs are deeply sentimental and express a longing for a simple life. “Sunny Tennessee” is a tragic ballad, while “I Hear you Calling Me” invited the listener to imagine themselves joining the performer in an idealised rural life, away from the troubles of the modern industrial north. Being raised in Chatham, close to a Black community with purported connections to the southern States, allowed O’Hara to claim an authoritative understanding of “real” blackness and a right to author minstrel songs. In reality, O’Hara’s understanding of blackness came not from his Black neighbours, but through pop-cultural depictions of blackness which he then mirrored and passed off as his own. This claim to authentic blackness drew on the actual existence of Black Canadians in Chatham – and yet even they are linked to the southern US for claims to authenticity, since they could not be both truly Black and truly Canadian.

Blackface and its associated comedy were also popular in written form. The *Northern Advance* occasionally ran stories featuring jokes from minstrelsy, or a Black character written in

¹²² Music Division, The New York Public Library. "The Girl I loved in Sunny Tennessee" *New York Public Library Digital Collections*. Accessed March 26, 2023. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47df-ec8d-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

¹²³ Al Jolson, Harold A. Robe, Jeff Godfrey (Geoffrey O’Hara). “Tennessee, I Hear You Calling Me” ed. Jack von. Tilzer. New York, NY. Empire Music Company. 1914. O’Hara credited as Jeff Godfrey see The Library of Congress Copyright Office “Catalogue of Copyright Entries: Part Three Musical Compositions Including List of Renewals” Vol. 37. No. 1 1946. 169.

dialect. One such story, “He Buys a Check-Suit” featured a Black character who purchased a new, fashionable suit to attend a city convention and received requests for tickets to minstrel or circus shows.¹²⁴ The comedy of the piece came both from the suggestion that a black man would be involved in municipal politics, as well as his failure to understand why white pedestrians assumed he was a performer for hire since he was a well-dressed black man (and therefore could not be anything other than a joke from the minstrel stage). Minstrelsy in prose was not limited to entertainment. One ad for Dr. Williams “Pink Pills” in the *Essex Free Press* took the form of a testimonial by a blackface minstrel performer whose debilitating back pain which kept him from performing was cured through the patent medicine.¹²⁵ The knowledge about and appeal of minstrelsy was widespread. Even when in prose form, Ontario resident recognised the blackface minstrel format and what went into a minstrel performance. White, Canadian readers would have understood why it was funny that a Black man was wearing a fashionable suit, as well as the physical elements of a minstrel performance and why back pain would negatively impact a performer.

Though high budget stage productions of minstrel shows were in decline by the 1910s and 20s, some elements of the genre remained in other forms, such as vaudeville. The Yonge Street and Winter Garden Theatre in Toronto offered youth minstrel shows during the early- to mid-1920s. The building, designed in 1913, consisted of two distinct theatres, with the Elgin on the ground floor and the Winter Garden above.¹²⁶ The theatre hosted vaudeville performances in its

¹²⁴ “He Buys a Check-Suit” *Northern Advance* vol xxiv no. 49 3 December 1885, p. 6 An earlier story referencing blackface minstrelsy, “The Story of a Handkerchief” appeared in the 6 July 1871 issue of the *Northern Advance*. The paper also advertised sheet music for minstrel songs as early as 1872.

¹²⁵ “A Strange Tale Told by a Well-Known Minstrel” *The Essex Free Press* Vol. XI No. 14. 5 April 1895. 8

¹²⁶ Now called the Elgin and Winter Garden is the only remaining operational vaudeville era stacked theatre. See “Elgin and Winter Garden Theatre Centre,” *Ontario Heritage Trust*, accessed 15 April 2023, <https://www.heritagetrust.on.ca/properties/elgin-and-winter-garden-theatre-centre>.

early years, though the roof top Winter Garden closed in 1928 due to the declining popularity of the genre, and the lower floor Yonge Street Theatre was rewired for sound, allowing the building to remain operational with the rising popularity of “talkies.” The Winter was decorated with real tree branches and colourful silk leaves. Framing the stage were fake trees made of plaster, and electric lights. Though primarily a vaudeville venue, some productions borrowed more heavily from minstrelsy. The 1924 Minstrel Frolic was one such production. Two participants, Elsie Bennie (nee Scraggs) and Betty Ford (nee Montgomery), recalled their participation in the program. The two had experience in highland dance and were eager to be on stage, this time in blackface—telling the producers that they were a year older than they were to meet the minimum age requirement of 16 years for participation. The two had been excited about the pay and the “long sexy lingerie” they wore for the performance.¹²⁷ Although blackface minstrelsy was a family friendly genre by the 1920s, it could, in the form of vaudeville, reclaim some of its more “risqué” allure. Those appealing and risqué elements were the things that these two young women associated with adulthood, independence, and rebellion, but they were also shaped by ideas about whiteness that existed in relation to the hypersexualised Black “Other.”

Minstrelsy as Community Entertainment in Windsor and Barrie Ontario

By the 1920s, vaudeville had superseded blackface minstrelsy as the most popular form of entertainment in the United States and Canada. Though long-form minstrel programs had lost much of their popularity, short-form blackface minstrelsy returned and found a home as one of the many potential variety acts in vaudeville. Michael Rogin discusses the shift of blackface performance from minstrelsy to vaudeville during this period, and later into silent film. Much of

¹²⁷ Stasia Evasuk “Theatre Rebirth Evokes Fond Memories for Vaudeville Duo” Newspaper Clipping. Elsie Bennie 29 028 2008-0-1 OCR. Dance Collection Danse Archive. Toronto, Ontario. And Loew’s Amateur Minstrel Frolic. 1924. Programme. Elsie Bennie 17 028 2008-0-1 OCR. Dance Collection Danse Archive. Toronto, Ontario.

his discussion is on the ways that Jewish-American performers (for example, Eddie Cantor, George Burns, and Al Jolson) engaged with minstrelsy and its successors. Like Irish Catholic immigrants of the 1830s, Jewish blackface performers, he argues, used blackface to assert their own American belonging, through the denigration of Black people.¹²⁸

Though blackface minstrelsy lost much of its formal stage appeal by the 1920s, it did not disappear in Canada, but instead found a home in local theatre productions, community events, and fundraisers. Touring shows and community theatre productions reflected the popular change in format; smaller towns like Barrie, Ontario were not removed from changes in entertainment trends. For example, an act called the “Guy Brother’s Minstrels” made frequent stops in Barrie during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The changing nature of their program, and efforts to stay modern were discussed by the Barrie, Ontario press and were a part of the company’s appeal to Barrie crowds. According to a 1910 article, their musical set largely consisted of polkas and marches, with the comedic blackface elements limited to jokes and impressions by the endmen. Vaudeville was also popular in Barrie at this time with the Barrie Citizen’s Band and Orchestra putting on a large performance in 1911 which featured local jokes and allusions, and chorus lines of yellow- and red face as well as individual brown- and blackface acts.¹²⁹ In this section I will discuss the evidence of ongoing Blackface entertainment in Ontario in the early 1920s – the moment when the extradition case in chapter three was also unfolding in the region. As one of the primary ways that white Canadians learned about Black people, these shows are an important part of the context for that case.

¹²⁸ Michael Rogin. *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot*. (Berkeley: University of California Press 1996).

¹²⁹ “Bones and Tambo” *Northern Advance*, 10 November 1910, p. 5.

Minstrel shows—both performers and audience members—reflected the ethnic and economic background of the organisation which produced them. Shows put on by the Kiwanis Club consisted of largely middle class, Protestant, Anglo-Canadian performers and, one assumes, audience members. By contrast, amateur acts put on by the Knights of Columbus or as a function for a Catholic parish featured Catholic performers, many of them Irish, French-Canadian, and occasionally, of Italian descent. Through local productions, blackface minstrelsy maintained its community elements. The changing format of minstrel shows was not limited to large metropolitan productions. The shows, through their local allusions and jokes, contemporary and classic minstrel music, and homegrown performers reflected the community's idealised self-image; a white community connected to the empire in which people of colour were outsiders available to lampoon.

The purpose of the minstrel show, amateur versions included, was first and foremost entertainment. By the 1890s several minstrel troupes used their respectable nature as a selling point in ads. The shows were suitable for women, these promotions promised, containing nothing “vulgar” that would shock even the most delicate members of the audience.¹³⁰ “Of course, the main object is to amuse,” a reporter for the *Northern Advance* wrote of a 1909 amateur show, “to make people forget their cares and worries of this life, and give them an hour or two of *wholesome, refined humour*.”¹³¹ Newspapers in other parts of Ontario recognised the release and relaxation provided by blackface minstrelsy. The *Border Cities Star* called the 1919 performance put on by the St. John's Anglican church Men's Club a “brilliant” performance and an “ideal tonic to the

¹³⁰“Paragraphers Pencil Points” *Northern Advance*, Vol. XXXIX No. 43 23 October 1890, p. 1 Both advertised that there was nothing “vulgar” about the shows. Guy Brother's Minstrels returned to Barrie on a regular basis until at least 1903. They also stopped in small towns close to the border including Bowmanville in 1901 and Essex in 1910 show. See *The Canadian Statesman* 2 October 1901 Vol XLVII No. 40. 5. And “Town and Vicinity” *Essex Free Press* Vol. XVII No. 48. 2 December 1910 page 5

¹³¹ “Big Minstrel Show” *Northern Advance* Vol. LXI No. 11 14 March 1912, p. 8 Emphasis added.

blues.”¹³² The performance featured a first act that included jokes and local references by the blackface performers, as well as a second part that included skits, acrobatic performances, and a magician.¹³³ For white audiences, blackface minstrelsy could be an escape. Unlike traditionally highbrow forms of performance entertainment like traditional theatre, lectures, or debates, blackface minstrelsy was not something that required critical analysis. There was nothing in a good blackface minstrel act that would remind white Ontario audiences of their day-to-day struggles or offend even the most conservative of white sensibilities. Racism was so normalized that it was a good escape for white families and workers.

Though minstrelsy was a socially acceptable form of entertainment in the late 19th and early 20th century, there remained some detractors. The concerns over minstrelsy had little to do with the offensive racial content, but rather the genre’s appropriateness for particular venues or contexts. Multiple articles in the *Northern Advance* considered women’s participation in minstrelsy entirely inappropriate for church functions, though there was no mention of whether traditional men-only minstrel shows were acceptable.¹³⁴ Another article from 1910 considered minstrelsy unsuited for Masonic Lodges.¹³⁵ The concern was not with minstrelsy in and of itself, but the presence of popular entertainment in what was a formal and sacred space; dancing, card playing, and failure to attend a meeting in proper regalia were similarly troublesome to the author. When minstrelsy was criticized in Barrie newspapers, it was never for the genre’s racial humour. Rather, criticism was based on its situational appropriateness and whether white women’s participation in the performance was acceptable. Those concerned about blackface entertainment, then, were mostly

¹³² “Sandwich Minstrels Present Big Show” *The Border Cities' Star* (1918-1935), Windsor, Ontario. Vol. 1. No. 151. 28 February 1919: 3.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ “Church Fairs” *The Northern Advance*. Barrie, Ont. Vol. 40 No. 5. January 29, 1891. 3. “Church Entertainment” *The Northern Advance*. Barrie, Ont. Vol. 46 No.6. February 11, 1897. 4.

¹³⁵ “Grand Lodge at Belleville” *The Northern Advance*. Barrie, Ont. Vol 59. No. 30. 28 July 1910. 3.

interested in policing the behavior of proper women and did not defend the dignity or humanity of Black people.

Though blackface minstrelsy did not emerge from a Canadian racial context, it nevertheless did emerge from a settler colonial one, with the content reflecting imperial concerns and the community's connection with the empire. One production by the Guy Brothers in 1903 contained a skit about soldiers camping in South Africa, no doubt inspired by British participation in the Boer War and the divisive nature of Canadian participation in the imperial conflict.¹³⁶ In 1904, the Peterborough Rangers infantry regiment of the Canadian Militia encamped in Barrie, Ontario. Their Labour Day weekend celebrations included a minstrel show and parade. Some members of the regiment were noted as being disguised in "girl's dresses." One member of the regiment, Private Richards, was so well disguised that his friends reportedly failed to recognise him in drag.¹³⁷ For Canadian audiences and performers, the inclusion of imperial rhetoric in an "American" genre was not contradictory, it was a way of making it their own. Likewise, regiments and soldiers who actively participated in the imperial project were celebrated for using it. Although there were Black people present in the empire, they remained foreign and other, with no secure long-term place in a self-governing, white Dominion.

Minstrel shows throughout Ontario reflected ideas about Canada's imperial identity in the inter-war years. In 1922 the Knights of Columbus performed multiple blackface shows at the London, Ontario Catholic Club, with one matinee show reserved for an audience of school children and their teachers. The show reflected Canadian imperial connections alongside moral lessons. The cast consisted of fifty amateur "black minstrel" performers enacting the exploits of the crew

¹³⁶ "Around Barrie" *Northern Advance Barrie, Ont.* Vol. 52 No. 43 22 October 1903, p. 1

¹³⁷ "Peterborough Rangers" *Northern Advance Barrie, Ont.* Vol. 53 No. 36 8 Sep 1904, p. 1, 5

and passengers of the Yak-a-Hoola, a South African troopship. The phrase “Yak-a-Hoola” likely came from a 1916 Al Jolson song “Yaaka Hula Dickey Dula (Hawaiian Love Song).”¹³⁸ The *London Free Press* reported on the varied nature of the sets which included cabins, the captain’s bridge, and a large staircase. The show consisted of two acts. In the first, the crew sang multiple “Southern melodies” (presumably Southern American and not South African) which were “well presented” and “well received” by the audience. A second act consisted of a comedic monologue or stump speech and a comedic court room skit in which the judge heard cases for speeding and bigamy.¹³⁹ The performance provided its audience of children with moral lessons in a comedic and accessible form. This performance of blackface minstrelsy to an audience of school children is reflective of how normal racist caricatures were. In performing blackface to an audience of children, the show normalised these depictions of Black people for the audience, and “taught” them that Black people were the same all over the world, whether they came from South Carolina or Cape Town. Although these children may have existed in segregated, or overwhelmingly white spaces— at school, in their neighbourhoods, or in other facets of day-to-day life—they were nevertheless exposed to ideas and stereotypes about race presented as lessons about the empire their families and teachers were proud to call their own. Contemporary media, formal education, and their interactions with members of the community engendered ideas about race, and their own place within the racial hierarchy of early 20th century Canada. The children and families who participated in blackface performances and those who watched them, did so as white spectators. Though one of the “white” self-governing Dominions of the empire, the Union of South Africa was foreign enough, and Black enough, to be the comedic and exotic other.

¹³⁸ Al Jolson, E. Ray Goetz, Joe Young, Pete Wendling “Yaaka Hula Dickey Doola” Waterson, Berlin & Co. Music Publishers. New York, NY. 1916. *Vocal Popular Sheet Music Collection*. Score 1775. <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mmb-vp/1775>

¹³⁹ “Minstrels Score at Parish Hall” *The London Free Press*. 10 February. 1922. 3.

Minstrel and vaudeville performances in 1920s Barrie extended the status of racial and community “others” beyond Black Canadians. Local performances featured both “Chinese” and “Japanese” acts. Minstrelsy was, for Barrie audiences, “always welcomed...for their ready wit and local sallies.”¹⁴⁰ The 1922 performance at St. Mary’s Parish Hall featured multiple numbers that included yellowface alongside blackface. The first act was “Japanese” themed and offered the audience “love songs and fantastical dances.” The second portion of the performance featured minstrels, an inclusion which, in the eyes of the *Barrie Examiner* reviewer was “always welcomed by any audience.” The final act, though more varied than the first two, likewise of “oriental serenades,” a Hawaiian performance and a comedic sketch featuring Irish characters. The endmen were played by 18-year-old Gerald Daley and 17-year-old Richard Flaherty. The youngest identifiable participant, violinist Charles Saso, was 14 at the time of the performance.¹⁴¹ His parents, John and Gaetana Saso would go on to run multiple movie theatres in Barrie and the surrounding area. Monita Daley, the 16-year-old sister of endman Gerald Daley, was particularly well reviewed for her dance, providing “a far eastern air to the performance as an oriental dancer.”¹⁴² The performances were reflective of what had become standard for minstrel performances of the 1920s, while also containing allusions and jokes unique to the community and audience, and performers who were largely of Irish Catholic descent. The pointed local jokes established what it meant to be a part of the community, a particularly meaningful event for immigrant families, while the mask of blackface simultaneously reinforced the whiteness of that community. In blackface and yellowface, a white performer’s critique could reinforce belonging and community for the audience, while also depicting who truly did *not* belong. Irish Catholics

¹⁴⁰ “Music and Comedy at St. Mary’s Review” *Barrie Examiner* 12 April 1923. Vol. 60 No. 15.pg. 9.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

were insiders in this performance, while Asian immigrants were outside the community of belonging, along with Black Canadians.

Beginning in 1923 the Kiwanis Club of Barrie began hiring outside production companies to stage their own minstrel performances. These businesses provided the sets, costumes, director and other production personnel, and the city of Barrie Kiwanis club provided the talent. The practice of hiring outside companies was not unusual in the Barrie region. In 1909 the Orillia Citizen's Band hired Holly Shepard to organise a minstrel show for local audiences.¹⁴³ Three years later, the Barrie Aquatic Club also retained his services. The "old-time" circle featured "coon songs [and] pretty tuneful, catchy ballads" alongside surprisingly modern jokes, local allusions and observation by the endmen, skits, and a ladies' chorus line.¹⁴⁴ The Kiwanis Club hired the Joe Bren Company of Chicago for the 1923 performance.¹⁴⁵ In addition to the director, the musical director was a member of the Bren Company, which also supplied specialty costumes. The cast and orchestra consisted of 50 performers including a "Beauty Chorus" of 16 people, as well as multiple endmen, and an interlocutor. Though much of the organisation and set design was organised by an outside company, the content and performers were local in nature, providing participants and audience members with minstrel entertainment that suited their own tastes, interests, and standards. In this way, a shared anti-Black racism united local, regional, national, and imperial white identity under a banner of community entertainment.

¹⁴³ "Orillia Minstrels" *Northern Advance*. Barrie, Ont. 8 April 1909. 5

¹⁴⁴ "Big Minstrel Show" *Northern Advance*. Barrie, Ont. Vol. LXI No. 11 14 March 1912. 8

¹⁴⁵ Though they did not perform with the Barrie Kiwanis Club, the Joe Bren Company was where Freeman Godsen and Charles Correll, better known as Amos and Andy, got their start in blackface performance. See Ely, Melvin Patrick. *The Adventures of Amos "n" Andy: a Social History of an American Phenomenon*. (1st Free Press pbk. ed. New York: Free Press. 1992)

The Kiwanis Club of Barrie continued their blackface performances following their success in 1923. The 1924 performance was organised by a new company, Harrington Adams, Inc. Much like the Bren Company, Harrington Adams provided their own director, one Doc. Crabtree, as well as sets and costumes. In the lead up to the performance, the *Barrie Examiner* noted the impressiveness of the production for a group of amateurs. Barrie residents too, were looking forward to the return of the Kiwanis minstrel show, noting that local show-goers were particularly discerning and “critical” regarding blackface minstrelsy.¹⁴⁶ The author reassured readers, recounting the dedication of the actors and the “artistry” of the sets and costumes which “[left] little to be desired.”¹⁴⁷ He goes on note the “attractiveness” of the ladies involved whose “lilting grace, terpsichorean expressiveness, technical pedal assurance and undulating rhythmic display of artistic temperament” would be sure to appeal.¹⁴⁸ Much of the music performed by the Barrie minstrels presented a nostalgic view of plantation life and the southern states. In 1924, songs selected for the “knights of blackface” included staples of blackface performance. “I’m Goin’ South” and “How You Going to Keep Your Mind on Dancin” were popularised by Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor, respectively.¹⁴⁹ Others like “Mindin my Own Business” were simply popular songs of the period but performed in blackface for the Kiwanis Club’s audience. Many of the songs embraced by Canadian minstrel performers and audiences contained popular American ideas of blackness and the Southern states. For example, the lyrics of “I’m Goin’ South”:

“I left my mammy's fine caress
To search the world for happiness

¹⁴⁶ “Lets All Go To Minstrel Show” *The Barrie Examiner*. Vol. 61. No. 19. 17 April 1924. 9.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

The things I left behind me
Were the things I sought in vain”¹⁵⁰

Though the song was written for a contemporary performer, it nevertheless contained many of the same features of minstrel classics. The song offers a sentimental view of the South as a natural place for Black Americans, while perhaps also appealing to immigrants and migrants who missed home.

In addition to Black and yellow face, Kiwanis Club minstrel shows occasionally included red and brownface performances. The 1925 show put on by the Barrie Kiwanis Club included a piece described as an “Indian Incident” called Romance of the Forest alongside Minstrel Land, and an Indian themed skit titled East Goes West. The Romance of the Forest, a story set in the Canadian northwest. featured white actors in the rolls of ‘Indian Braves’ and characters called “Princess Waunee,” “Chief Grey Cloud,” and “Deer Foot.”¹⁵¹ As with shows that consisted of only blackface performance, minstrel acts that included brown and red face presented a picture of Canadian and imperial identity which positioned non-white people as perpetually foreign and other. As with blackface performance which presented Black people as naturally belonging in the southern states and in the past, red face performance presented Indigenous peoples as caricatures unsuited to the modern Canadians state who belonged somewhere else, in a wilderness forest.

For some Barrie families of the early 20th century, blackface minstrelsy, and other forms of racial impersonation, were a family affair, and were parish-approved entertainment for some Catholics. Seventeen-year-old Marian Rivard of Barrie took the stage as the “Japanese Maid”

¹⁵⁰ Al Jolson, Aber Silver, Harry Woods. "I'm Goin' South: Fox Trot Song" (1923). *Vocal Popular Sheet Music Collection*. Score 782. <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mmb-vp/78>

¹⁵¹ “Kiwanis Minstrels Draw Big Houses” *Barrie Examiner*, Vol 62. No. 18 30 April 1925. 9. According to the North Advance, the story involved Chief Deerfoot promising Princess Waunee to Chief Grey Cloud despite her affections for a “brave” Wild Horse. “Kiwanis Minstrel Show Big Success” *The Northern Advance*. Barrie, Ont. Vol. 74. No. 10. 30 April 1925. 1.

alongside her father, Nelson, who played a “Mr. Shean” in a comedic skit.¹⁵² Pianist and musical director of the show, Mary Crossland, performed alongside her son Charles on trombone. Edith Smith, a part of the Kiwanis Club’s 1923 “Beauty Chorus,” performed alongside her family’s boarder Thelma Younge.¹⁵³ Siblings Edna and Walter Cooper both performed in the Kiwanis shows in 1923 and 1924.¹⁵⁴ Minstrel shows seemed to have been a particular favourite of the Daley clan. In addition to Monita and Gerald Daley’s participation in the St Mary’s Parish show, their elder sister Mary took the stage in the Kiwanis minstrel show of 1923.¹⁵⁵ In participating in blackface and yellow face performances, Canadian Catholics of various backgrounds had an avenue to express their shared identity—both as Catholics, and as members of a local community through the comedy and the locally relevant jokes. That sense of belonging, however, was achieved through the assertion of their own whiteness and community identity, and the exclusion and ridicule of a racialized other. The southern Black stereotype and stock characters presented in minstrelsy were the perpetual foreigners, belonging to some far-off place and not Canada. This would clearly impact how white Canadians understood the young Black man from North Carolina who had fled to Hamilton.

Located at the Canada-U.S. border, Windsor, Ontario was a hot spot for Canadian blackface minstrelsy in the early 20th century. The city’s reputation for minstrel performances was, for some, a point of pride and a sign of the region’s progress and development. In one 1919 article reflecting on the city’s advancement and technological changes, a *Border City Star* reporter wrote of the

¹⁵² The Rivard family were some of the few in the production who were not of Irish descent. Canada. Library and Archives Canada. *Census of Canada, 1921*. RG31 - Statistics Canada. Item ID: 65260490. <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=census&IdNumber=65260490>.

¹⁵³ Canada. Library and Archives Canada. *Census of Canada, 1921*. RG31 - Statistics Canada. Item ID: 65260829. <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=census&IdNumber=65260829>

¹⁵⁴ “Kiwanis Minstrel Show Next Week” *Barrie Examiner*, Vol. 60. No. 16 19 April 1923. 13. “Let’s All Go to the Minstrel Show” *Barrie Examiner*. Vol. 61 No. 16 April 17, 1924. 9.

¹⁵⁵ “Music and Comedy At St. Mary’s Revue” *Barrie Examiner* Vol. 60 No. 15 April 12, 1922. 9.

association of the region to blackface minstrelsy “Border Cities is a name to conjure with. Minstrelsy, adventure, raids, warfare, romance, smuggling and life and action generally.”¹⁵⁶ For the author, the city’s place on the border, and connections to the nations on either side were both a point of pride, and integral to the identity of the city and its residents. The ties to the United States included a love of blackface minstrelsy. Performers and audience members of Windsor’s early 20th century minstrel shows came from a wide range of religious and economic backgrounds. Minstrelsy, in Windsor, like in other parts of Ontario, was generally a family friendly event. Church groups, fraternal and sororal organisations and children of various ages organised minstrel shows in the late 1910s and early 1920s. Although a majority of performers were adult men, women and children were also involved in organising and performing in minstrel shows. Like in major metropolitan areas like Toronto and smaller towns like Barrie, residents of Windsor used minstrel shows to entertain families and foster a sense of belonging. Blackface minstrelsy was a way to exclude Black residents and to create a vision of the community that was fundamentally white, but inclusive of Catholics, Protestants, and immigrants from all over Europe.

In addition to the community and church charitable fundraisers, residents of Southwestern Ontario occasionally organised minstrel shows for patriotic purposes during the First World War. Charitable organisations put on their own minstrel shows to support their work or received donations from local minstrel show fund raisers. In 1915 some Sandwich, Ontario residents formed the Sandwich Minstrel Club. The troupe of 20 performed two shows locally and at least one in Essex. Proceeds for the Essex performance went to the local Women’s Patriotic League.¹⁵⁷ Women of the Patriotic League it seems took inspiration from the event and put on their own performance

¹⁵⁶ “Progress Phenomenal in Municipal Annals” *The Border Cities Star*. Vol. 3. No. 102. Windsor, Ont. 31 December 1919: 12.

¹⁵⁷ “Patriotic Concert Tonight” *Essex Free Press*. Essex, Ont. Vol. 32. No. 10 April 23, 1915, 1.

in April of 1917. The *Essex Free Press* reported that the Women's Patriotic League sent 25 packages to "our boys in France" that contained 3 pairs of socks, a handkerchief, maple sugar, and a box of Oxo. The paper advised readers to be on the lookout for the next minstrels show.¹⁵⁸ On May 18th, 1917, 25 women of the Essex, Ontario Red Cross also organised a minstrel performance. The show, "Patriotic Minstrels," featured a cast and band entirely made up of women and followed a standard minstrel format. The group performed *O'Canada* as the opening chorus number, followed by a number of classic minstrel or "coon" songs such as "Carry Me Back to Ol' Virginny," "Mammy's Little Coal Black Rose" and "How's Everything in Dixie." According to the *Essex Free Press*, the women were "dressed appropriately" for a minstrel performance and supplied with the requisite tambourines, bones, and other musical instruments. The comedic portion of the performance featured jokes about local "citizens" and the behaviour of the "endladies" as well as a clog dance, presumably done in blackface. The second portion of the show featured three ballads, violin solos and a "dance to the colours." There is no suggestion in the *Essex Free Press* that these more patriotic elements were performed in blackface or with comedic intent. The audience reportedly enjoyed both portions of the performance with the troupe raising \$135 for the Red Cross.¹⁵⁹ The show was such a success that they scheduled a second performance two weeks later for those who had not been able to attend the first one.¹⁶⁰

Children in Essex were not outdone by the adults in the town. Influenced by the success of the show, a group of children between 6 and 10 years old organised their own performance on an empty lot. The children dressed in costume and offered an hour-long performance featuring costumes and local jokes. The children, like the Ladies Patriotic League donated the ticket fee

¹⁵⁸ "Town and Vicinity" *The Essex Free Press*. Essex, Ont. Vol. 34. No. 15. 13 April 1917. 5.

¹⁵⁹ "Patriotic Minstrel Show" *The Essex Free Press*. Essex, Ont. Vol. 34. No. 21. 25 May 1917. 1.

¹⁶⁰ "Town and Vicinity" *The Essex Free Press*. Essex, Ont. Vol. XXXIV No. 22 1 June 1917. 5.

(between 1-2 cents) to the Red Cross. For the reporters at the *Essex Free Press* the performance was an act of young patriotism, writing that “the little ones [were] imbued with the true Canadian spirit.”¹⁶¹ Wartime fundraising, it appears, made women’s and children’s involvement on the minstrel stage appropriate, and there was no suggestion by the local newspaper that it would not have been. The potentially risqué element of a respectable white woman’s presence as a performer in a minstrel show was overshadowed thanks to the unique circumstances. For the children’s show the act of staging a minstrel performance was an endearing act of mimicry and one that deserved praise. Local blackface minstrel productions served as a way to socialise children into whiteness and white supremacy. For those who could not be overseas during the Great War, blackface minstrelsy served as an appropriate, and suitably patriotic, way for all white members of the community to raise money and to forge a sense of belonging for white Essex residents.

Minstrel shows remained a popular form of entertainment in the Windsor region after the war.¹⁶² The Windsor branch of the Masons had its own separate “Minstrel Club.” In March 1919, the group organised a successful local show, which was followed by a dance and refreshments for members.¹⁶³ The Mason’s show was well received, playing in both Windsor and Leamington. The troupe received invitations to perform across the region - as far east as London, Ontario.¹⁶⁴ Although intended to entertain, the minstrel show served a philanthropic purpose as had been the case prior to and during the war. The Minstrel Club donated a portion of the proceeds to the Traveller’s Aid organisation to protect some women travellers, and to prevent others from

¹⁶¹ “Town and Vicinity” *The Essex Free Press* June 22, 1917. Vol 34. No. 25. 2, The proceeds totaled 42 cents.

¹⁶² In 1919 numerous organisations put on amateur minstrel shows. These include St. John’s Anglican church Men’s Club, The Olympian Boys Club, The Letter Carriers Union, and the Odd Fellows. The ethnic and religious background of the performers reflected the organisations which produced the shows.

¹⁶³ “A.F and A.M. At Home” *Essex Free Press*. Essex, Ont. Vol.29. No. 10. 23. February 1912. 1

¹⁶⁴ “Masonic Minstrels go to Leamington Thursday Night” *The Border Cities Star*. Windsor, Ont. Vol. 2 No. 8. March 10, 1919. 3

becoming a “financial handicap” or “moral menace” to the city.¹⁶⁵ (It seems somewhat ironic that they were not aiding Black travelers fleeing American racist violence, or maybe not.) The *Border Cities Star* discussed the beneficial moral impact of the organisation’s minstrel shows. The cooperation necessary to organise the performance and the funds raised for ticket sales were, for the newspaper, a good example of the “pull-together-spirit” of the city.¹⁶⁶ For white residents, participation in blackface minstrelsy was something to be proud of, and a sign of cooperation and community engagement.

William Woollatt, a construction company owner, organised a number of the Masonic minstrel shows in Windsor and the surrounding area. In 1919, in addition to directing the Minstrel Club, Woollatt ran as the Conservative candidate in that year’s federal election. Woollatt’s involvement with the Mason’s Minstrel Club dates to at least 1909 when he played one of the endmen in a performance in the Lodge. Then Mayor of Windsor, Ernest Wigle, took on the role of interlocutor.¹⁶⁷ The *Windsor Evening Record* noted his participation in the 1911 event where he won the watermelon eating competition and chanted, alongside others, “More Melon! More Melon!”¹⁶⁸ For Woollatt and his political supporters, participation in blackface minstrelsy had no impact on whether he was an appropriate candidate but instead (perhaps) made him seem approachable.¹⁶⁹ For his detractors, however, Woollatt’s local fame as a blackface minstrel did some harm—he was a well-liked entertainer but not qualified for office because he was a comic and businessman, and not serious candidate. Ultimately Woollatt’s favourable stance on

¹⁶⁵ “Organisation Planning Wide Extension of Work” *The Border Cities Star*; Windsor, Ont. Vol 2. No. 34. 9 April 1919. 5.

¹⁶⁶ “The Union Masonic Club” *The Border Cities Star*; Windsor, Ont. Vol 2. No. 70 May 22, 1919. 4

¹⁶⁷ “Masonic Minstrels Tickled Audience” *The Evening Record*; Windsor, Ontario. 4 February 1909: 1.

¹⁶⁸ “City Briefs” *The Evening Record*; Windsor, Ontario. 19 August 1911: 7.

¹⁶⁹ “Bill Woollatt’s Supporters Crowd Wyandott Hall” *The Border Cities Star*; Windsor, Ont. Vol. 3 No. 33. 9 October 1919. 14

prohibition and failure to hire union labour were his downfall, and he lost to the Liberal candidate.¹⁷⁰

Women and young children associated with Masonic Lodges also participated in blackface minstrelsy. Women involved with the order of the Eastern Star, which allowed entry to the wives, daughters, sisters, mothers, or widows of men within the order, frequently put on minstrel performances. At least two separate chapters put on minstrel performances in the fall of 1919.¹⁷¹ Unlike the men's Minstrel Club performances, however, were significantly less publicised in the Windsor press, with only a brief discussion of one show's "*real live Dixie flavor*."¹⁷² With the return of men from Europe following the end of the war, women's minstrelsy and its associated charity lost some of its prestige but retained its general sense of respectability.

Fans of amateur minstrelsy in Windsor, Ontario were spoiled for choice during the 1919 season. St. John's Anglican Men's Club performance featured a first part containing jokes and local references by the blackface performers, and a second part that included a one act comedic skit called "Embalming Ebenezer" as well as performances that included a pipe band, an acrobat, and a magician. The Olympian Boys Club performed at the Sandwich town hall April 22-23.¹⁷³ The Letter Carriers performed May 6th and 7th and again at a local high school June 2nd. The show included skits written by some of the performers.¹⁷⁴ Many involved in the Letter Carrier's

¹⁷⁰ "Liquor Issue Fails to Spit Liberalism" *The Border Cities Star*; Windsor, Ont. Vol 3. No 33. 9 October 1919. 10 and "Tolmie and Kennedy Speak at Walkerville" *The Border Cities Star*; Windsor, Ont. Vol. 3. No. 36. 14 October 1919. 5.

¹⁷¹ "Ladies Invade Minstrel Realm with Big Show" *The Border Cities Star*, Windsor, Ont. Vol. 3. No. 74. 27 November 1919. 8.

¹⁷² "O.T.S. Minstrel Show" *The Border Cities Star*; Windsor, Ont. Vol. 3 No.73. 26 November 1919. 8.

¹⁷³ "Happy Hours Club and Minstrels Stage Show" *The Border Cities Star*; Windsor, Ont. 19 April 1919 Vol. 2 No. 42. 9

¹⁷⁴ "Letter Carriers will Give Minstrel Show" *Border Cities Star* May 1, 1919, Vol.2 No. 52. 9 and "Postmen Will Repeat Show at Collegiate" *The Border Cities Star* May 31, 1919ol. 2 No.77 May 31, 1919, 5., "Letter Carriers Second Minstrel Show Big Success" *The Border Cities Star*. Jno. 2 Vol. 79 June 3, 1919. 5 The June 2nd show

performance were Franco-Ontarian, or of Franco-Ontarian descent.¹⁷⁵ Blackface minstrelsy was not a genre limited to Anglo-Canadians. The Odd Fellows performed their own minstrel show in Amherstburg on the 3rd, which the *Border Cities Star* noted had references or jokes about at least 100 local people. The Odd Fellows performance was followed by a social dance for both the audience and actors.¹⁷⁶

As the frequency and ubiquity of Blackface minstrel shows in Southwestern Ontario suggests, by the end of the Great War, Ontario residents had adopted blackface minstrelsy as their own. Minstrelsy, though an American genre, could be made suitably Canadian with the inclusion of local jokes and references. The celebrated civic and cooperative elements of blackface minstrelsy that Windsor, London, and area residents recognised during the First World War continued to make it a popular form of charitable family entertainment. Blackface minstrelsy allowed residents to create a sense of community and to engage with that community in a way that many praised and celebrated. Blackface, with its local jokes and allusions, and charitable associations, was a respectable form of entertainment and civic participation – at least for white Canadians.

Conclusion

As David Roediger and other historians have argued, Blackface minstrel performances presented not only an idea of Blackness, but also of whiteness created in contrast to it. Ontario minstrel shows, with their imperial connections, local references, and songs depicting the American south or “Dixie” as the natural place for Black people, presented an idea of Canadian

featured a new American director and additional minstrel numbers—the newspaper considered it to be an even greater success than the initial performances.

¹⁷⁵ “Posties Give Fine Performance at Sandwich” *The Border Cities Star*; Windsor, Ontario. 07 May 1919: 5.

¹⁷⁶ “West Ont. And County News” *The Border Cities Star*; Windsor, Ont. 24 April 1919. 13. The show had been delayed first due to harsh weather, and then due to a streetcar workers’ strike.

whiteness that was influenced by the United States and the rest of British empire. These ideas were not limited to large stages in metropolitan centres. Minstrel acts toured around Ontario, presenting ideas about nation, empire, and race to communities of different religious and socio-economic backgrounds. By the 1920s, small community or charitable productions likewise helped to reinforce the ideas about blackness, whiteness, and belonging. Not only could members of a fraternal or charitable organisation watch a minstrel show, but they could also be on stage or behind the scenes themselves. As a family friendly and “wholesome” form of entertainment, children too could participate in white community formation, seeing themselves, their families, and their neighbours on stage. These shows helped to create and reinforce hierarchies of race present both on and off the stage. They presented a vision of Canada, and the community in relation to it, which excluded people of colour – Black, Asian, and Indigenous. Blackface minstrelsy, as an American genre performed in Canada, presented both Black people, and anti-Black racism, as naturally belonging in the United States. The “burnt cork nationalism” produced in South African blackface minstrels as discussed by Chinua Thelwell, can also be found in blackface performances in Ontario. Minstrelsy was an avenue for white Ontarians, be they Catholic or Protestant, immigrant or native-born, to reflect a whites-only version of their community and their place within it. The Canada depicted on the minstrel stage by white performers, writers, and directors was one that was white and perpetually loyal to the British empire. How citizens of that Canada would understand Matthew Bullock and his fitness for asylum in Canada in the cultural and social world in which blackface minstrelsy was mainstream will be the subject of chapter 3. In the next chapter, I discuss the other major popular culture context for understanding nationalist whiteness in 1920s Canada: the reception of the major feature film *Birth of a Nation* in Ontario.

Chapter 2: The Birth of a Nation in the Ontario Press

Released in 1915 the film *Birth of a Nation* is infamous as an inspirational force behind the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan. Directed by D. W. Griffith, *Birth* is an adaptation of Thomas Dixon Jr.'s play *The Clansman*, itself an adaptation of his 1905 book by the same name. The novel, play and film all promote the myth of the Lost Cause, depicting the Confederacy and Southern states as the heroic victims of Northern imposition during the American Civil War and Reconstruction. *The Clansman* was the second in Dixon's trilogy lauding the efforts of the Civil-War-era KKK, the others being *The Leopard's Spots* (1903) and *The Traitor* (1907). *Birth of a Nation* holds a complicated place in the history of film. Deeply racist and recognised as such by many at the time of its release (and since), *Birth*, and the false history it spread, remain incredibly influential. The 12-reel epic with a run time of nearly 3 hours was produced at a time when most North American movies were inexpensive single reel shorts with an average length of 15 minutes. It likewise originated many camera and editing techniques central to modern film language including fade outs and the use of an original score.¹⁷⁷ The scale, and (for some) the compelling and (for others) controversial story, made *Birth* incredibly successful with both domestic American audiences and international viewers.

Birth of a Nation tells the story of the southern Cameron and northern Stoneman families from the antebellum period to Reconstruction. The first half of the movie covers the outbreak and progress of the American Civil War up to the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Griffith presents the antebellum South as an idyllic paradise, and the enslaved Black workers on the Cameron plantation as well-treated and happy. Austin Stoneman, a northern politician, is by contrast depicted as radical in his belief in racial equality, and easily manipulated by his mixed-race

¹⁷⁷ Melvyn Stokes. *D.W. Griffith's the Birth of a Nation: A History of The Most Controversial Motion Picture of All Time*. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. 2007.) 3, 95.

housekeeper and mistress Lydia Brown. She, like many of the major “Black” characters, is portrayed by a white actor in blackface. The second half of the film depicts Reconstruction, portraying the period as violent and lawless with Black soldiers, white politicians and a supposedly tyrannical and anti-democratic Freedman’s Bureau terrorising the South. Historian Grace Hale notes how the depictions of Reconstruction, and violence against Black people present in *The Clansman* and *Birth of A Nation* served as a way to reunite white Americans in the North and South.¹⁷⁸ The enslaved Black plantation worker became a caricature -- either violent and “beast-like” or loyal to former slave holders. As Hale argues, these myths were useful to the South as a justification for segregation, and to the North as a way to absolve themselves from walking away from Reconstruction (and for their own segregation practices).¹⁷⁹ *Birth of a Nation*, and the book upon which it was based, painted the “hell” that was Reconstruction as solely the responsibility of former slaves who, as “black beast rapists” had no place as voting citizens or elected leaders in the newly reunited United States.¹⁸⁰ In other words, in depicting formerly enslaved people as unfit for citizenship, whites in both North and South could absolve themselves of the failure of reconstruction and further naturalise ideas of racial difference.

Sexuality and gender are central to Dixon and Griffith’s ideas about race; particularly in who has sexual access to white women and the threat of “miscegenation.” Depicted by a white man in black face, a black male character named Gus chases after the young Flora Cameron whom he wants to “marry.” The girl jumps off a cliff to her death rather than allowing herself to be captured. The newly formed Ku Klux Klan avenge Flora’s death by lynching Gus.¹⁸¹ The character

¹⁷⁸ Grace Hale. *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. (1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books. 1998.) 73.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 75-76.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁸¹ The burning cross as a symbol of the Klan was an invention of Dixon in his 1905 novel. The symbol was carried over into the play, film, and the reborn Ku Klux Klans of the 20th and 21st centuries.

of Flora in the film is not present in the book. Marion Lenoir, Ben Cameron's first love and admirer, serves as the representation of vulnerable and violated white womanhood. Marion and her mother jump from a cliff after Gus and a group of un-named black soldiers break into the family's home and rape them.¹⁸² The original version presented in the novel was evidently too violent for the screen. The threat of interracial marriage is likewise present in the film through the character of Silas Lynch, Stoneman's mixed race protegee portrayed by another actor in blackface. Lynch is depicted as leering and presumptuous for wanting to marry Stoneman's daughter. Likewise, the film's depictions of Black women hinged on racist stereotypes present in blackface minstrelsy. Lydia Brown, Stoneman's mixed-race mistress, and Mammy, an enslaved Black woman on the Cameron plantation, are both portrayed by white actresses in blackface. Inspired by the "wench" and the "mammy" of blackface minstrelsy, *Birth of a Nation* depicted Black women as either loyal, good, maternal, and accepting of their racial inferiority in relation to "their whites," or as uppity, bad, hypersexual and conniving. As Deborah Gray White observed, these stereotypes of Black women originated in slavery and the slave trade, consolidated in the popular culture of the 19th century, and remained salient in depictions of "Mammy," "Jezebel," and "Sapphire" in the 20th century.¹⁸³

Birth of a Nation was popular in Canada just as it was south of the border. The film was a hit in large urban areas and small rural townships and played in Ontario theatres and town halls on a regular basis from the time of its release into the 1920s. The Ontario press was generally uncritical of the film's depiction of Blackness or of the Klan. As was the case with Blackface minstrelsy, white Ontario audiences were not particularly concerned with the racial politics of the

¹⁸² Thomas Dixon. *The Clansman: an Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*. Ridgewood, N.J: Gregg Press 1967), 303-308.

¹⁸³ White. *Are 'n' t I A Woman*.

film. The lack of concern did not come from ignorance. Black Ontarians, in cities across Ontario, organised protests to have the film either barred, or to have its most offensive aspects censored. With the exception of the city of Windsor, these attempts were largely unsuccessful. The press, theatre management, and no doubt some of the white public, had no interest in seeing the film banned or altered. White Canadians were quick to minimize the film's controversy and the harm it caused their Black neighbours. Protesting blackface minstrelsy was not something Black Ontarians of the early 20th century generally did, unlike in the 1840s and 1850s as previously discussed. Perhaps because *Birth of A Nation* was new and distinctly American, it attracted fresh opposition while blackface minstrelsy's local focus and normalised nature made it less controversial. By the early 20th century, vaudeville and other musical theatre offered some Black artists an opportunity to perform and to achieve success among white audiences that they would otherwise not have been afforded, and some black performers enacted characters and skits that were not so different from blackface caricatures.¹⁸⁴ Between 1923 and 1925 writers and editors for *The Dawn of Tomorrow* offered no condemnation of blackface minstrelsy. Rather, the paper occasionally advertised Black minstrels performing in the area and acknowledge that the popular genre had its origins in the work of Black musicians. Occasionally Black minstrel performers were hosted by local Black churches and residents in the cities where they toured. The closest thing to condemnation offered by the paper was a recognition that people tended to associate Black musicians with minstrelsy rather than more serious performances by "real artists."¹⁸⁵ The lack of evidence or coverage of Black protest against blackface minstrelsy in the 1900s, however, does

¹⁸⁴ See Kevin Byrne. *Minstrel Traditions Mediated Blackface in the Jazz Age*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge. 2020; Ely, Melvin Patrick. *The Adventures of Amos "n" Andy: a Social History of an American Phenomenon*. 1st Free Press pbk. ed. New York: Free Press. 1992; Henry T. Sampson *Blacks in Blackface: A Sourcebook on Early Black Musical Shows*. Second edition. Lanham; The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2014.

¹⁸⁵ "Roland Hayes, Negro Tenor, Real Artist" *Dawn of Tomorrow* Vol. 2 No. 18 November 15th 1924.1.

not mean that it did not happen or that some, or even most, black Canadians viewed the genre favourably in the early 20th century. One imagines that when black performers staged minstrel shows for Black audiences those stereotypes themselves were the joke, and it was white racism that was being lampooned.¹⁸⁶

The Klan Before *The Clansman*

Coverage of the Confederacy and the Ku Klux Klan in Ontario newspapers had already shifted from ambiguously critical to compassionately sympathetic prior to the release of the play *The Clansman* in 1905. The first iteration of the Klan formed in Pulaski, Tennessee in 1865 by six former Confederate officers. The organisation spread across the Southern states, attacking freedpeople and their allies, especially in the days and weeks leading up to elections. The Klan targeted Black voters and politicians, white Northerners and their Southern sympathisers with threats, physical assaults, and murder. There was no central Klan organisation at this time, so local chapters acted independently of one another. The U.S. federal government passed several bills, including the 1871 Ku Klux Klan Act, to limit their spread and allow federal troops to enforce the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the Fourteenth Amendment.¹⁸⁷ *The Globe's* coverage of lynchings and Klan activity in the 1860s presented Klan violence and racism as particularly heinous and uncivilised.¹⁸⁸ In one article the author tied coverage of the KKK to contemporary Canadian

¹⁸⁶ See "E. Hogan Started Jazz" *The Dawn of Tomorrow* Vol. 1 No. 39. 5 April 1924. 1 and "Toronto Notes" *The Dawn of Tomorrow* Vol. 1. No. 21. 1 December 1923. 4; "Hamilton Notes" *The Dawn of Tomorrow*. Vol. 1. No. 23. 15 December 1923. 4. And "London" *The Dawn of Tomorrow* Vol 2. No. 27. 31 January 1925. 4.

¹⁸⁷ Elaine Frantz Parsons. *Ku-Klux: the Birth of the Klan During Reconstruction*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. 2015).

¹⁸⁸ "No Title" *The Globe*; Toronto. 14 December 1868. 3. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/article-4-no-title/docview/1518962997/se-2>. "KU KLUX KLAN." 1868. *The Globe* (1844-1936), June 30, 2. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/ku-klux-klan/docview/1518951785/se-2>. "United States" *The Globe*; Toronto. 1 February 1869. 4. A Carpet Bagger. "Ku Klux in North Carolina: Fearful State of Affairs!" *The Globe*; Toronto. 25 August 1870. 2. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/ku-klux-north-carolina/docview/1519669934/se-2>. "NEWS OF THE DAY." *The Globe* (1844-1936), 15 November 1871.

politics and compared the Klan to the Fenian Brotherhood writing “in every respect, assassination included, [The Brotherhood] has showed itself whole brother to [the Ku Klux Klan] which now calls forth the Tribune’s severest denunciations and strains his vocabulary of condemnatory adjectives to the very utmost.”¹⁸⁹ Another article from 1871 compared the Fenian Brotherhood to the Klan yet again, saying both “revolutionary societies” emerged from imagined tyranny.¹⁹⁰

The Ku Klux Klan were occasionally portrayed in pop entertainment as an object of ridicule. The European Circus, based out of New York, performed in Toronto on July 1, 1870, drawing a large audience. The performance included a Klan act featuring puppets “of gigantic and ridiculous proportions” whose tricks on the audience earned “roars of laughter.”¹⁹¹ The Klan, it seems, could be just as funny as Black minstrels – for Canadian audiences both depicted anti-Black racism as an *American* problem. *The Globe* also offered coverage of the passage of the Ku Klux Klan Acts in the early 1870s, and the efforts of the American government to control the violence that white supremacists were enacting upon Black voters or even white Republicans.¹⁹² However, popular cultural forms that depicted the KKK as comedic suggests that Canadians did not view it as a threat to democracy. Rather the first Ku Klux Klan was an organisation to be ridiculed, a fringe

<https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/news-day/docview/1519671081/se-2>. Wheeler, W. W. "KU-KLUX OUTRAGE: STATEMENT." *The Globe (1844-1936)*, 22 April 1871. 4. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/ku-klux-outrage/docview/1519686873/se-2>.

¹⁸⁹ “The Ku-Klux Klan” *The Globe*; Toronto. 18 April 1868: 2. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/ku-klux-klan/docview/1518949915/se-2>.

¹⁹⁰ “Revolutionary Societies” *The Globe*; Toronto 14 August 1871. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/revolutionary-societies/docview/1519692427/se-2>.

¹⁹¹ “The European Circus” *The Globe*; Toronto. 2 July 1870: 4. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/european-circus/docview/1434892010/se-2>.

¹⁹². "The: ARREST OF A Ku-Klux Klan: Arrest of Large Gang the Grand Cyclops." *The Globe (1844-1936)*, October 23, 1871, 4. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/ku-klux-klan/docview/1519698032/se-2>. NEWS OF THE DAY *The Globe (1844-1936)*; Toronto, Ont. [Toronto, Ont]. 15 November 1871: 1

movement of people who were not proper or civil in their whiteness, and whose violence was not serious enough that it could not be entertaining.

The presence of the Klan and lynchings in the Southern States were held up as points of comparison when discussing crime in Canada. Coverage of a murder in Nissouri (present day Thorndale, Ontario) displayed the tendency to discuss American crime in order to represent Canada in a favourable light; writing “We have been in the habit of pointing out that lynch law is unknown among us; that no analogous institution to that of the dreaded Ku-Klux-Klan, which has rendered life in certain states so terribly dangerous, exists in our midsts.” To the author, the tendency to uphold Canadian virtue against a background of American racist violence was a valid comparison writing:

to a great extent our phariseeism is founded on substantial grounds...we have not yet established the science of murder in our midst as high art, nor sunk to the depths of brutality which are found sometimes in large cosmopolitan cities. Occasionally however, we are roused from our sense of security and moral perfectness by the perpetration of crimes most foul and unnatural.¹⁹³

For Canadians of the mid-19th century, the Ku Klux Klan, lynching, and general lawlessness were seen as distinctly American phenomena. Though Canadians frequently looked to the South with scorn, they nevertheless embraced the more entertaining expressions of American racism. While they saw the KKK as a form of American lawlessness or mob rule, that did not mean that they questioned, or disavowed white supremacy, or took an anti-racist position. Canadians’ imperial and national identities marked them as distinct from the United States, but similar in that both the US and Canada were to be understood as nations of and for *white* citizens. Canada did not have a “negro problem” because its black population was, in the minds of whites, nonexistent, not

¹⁹³ “The Nissouri Tragedy” *The Globe*; Toronto. 22 July 1871: 2. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/nissouri-tragedy/docview/1519691195/se-2>.

because it did not share in the anti-Black racism of North American settler societies. This was the context of the post-Civil War period, but things began to change by the early 1910s.

Both iterations of *The Clansman* - the book and the play - were available to Canadians in the lead up to the film in 1915. *The Toronto Star* reviewed *The Clansman* in 1905, offering potential readers the historical background necessary to understand the novel. The review generally appreciated the novel but believed it “would suit the palate of some readers better if it contained more Ku Klux Klan and less insipid love making.”¹⁹⁴ The reviewer noted that much of the interest and appeal of the Klan came from the organisation’s secrecy, rather than its ideology. He alludes to the presence of a secret society at a University of Toronto residence which adopted the name of the Klan and pulled “pranks” on other students. Like earlier coverage of the Klan and the Confederacy, the reviewer was uncritical of the Lost Cause as presented in the novel. Rather the author, like Dixon, discussed the Klan in a favourable light, as the heroes of the South, and adopted the Dunning school of thought on Reconstruction. The Dunning school presented Reconstruction as a mistake—Black people were given the right to vote, abused that right during reconstruction, and thus made themselves ineligible to participate in the democratic process. As Eric Foner has argued, the Dunning school of thought served as a justification for Jim Crow era policies restricting voting rights, as well as for the violence that upholding segregation required.¹⁹⁵ The Dunning school was the prevailing interpretation about the legacies of Reconstruction until the mid-20th century, and Canadian writers and readers were influenced by it. Some, like the reviewer of *The Clansman*, parroted the interpretation, and presented Reconstruction as a period of, in his words, “unsurpassed plunder” and “African superiority” in which southern whites were subjected to both

¹⁹⁴ “Vivid Light on Southern States” *The Toronto Star*. 1 April 1905: 6.

¹⁹⁵ Eric Foner. *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*. (1st ed. --. New York: Harper & Row. 1998). See Also: John David Smith and Lowery, J. Vincent, eds. *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction*. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky. 2013).

insult and injury by former slaves who “refused to work.”¹⁹⁶ For this reviewer, and in his estimation his readers, the picture of the southern states and Reconstruction presented in *The Clansman* was one that was both entertaining and true. Although white Canadians could find *The Clansman* to be an entertaining work of historical fiction, the praise was not universal. The review in *The Globe* recognised the novel’s racist elements, calling it “Uncle Tom’s Cabin reversed” while also taking issue with Dixon’s attempts to justify lynching to his readers.¹⁹⁷ Though critical of the social and political message of the book, the author praised the love stories therein, and the depictions of historic figures like Abraham Lincoln.

Like the book and film which would follow, the play *The Clansman* received favourable reviews from Toronto newspapers. The stage adaptation premiered in Toronto at The Grand Theatre in the fall of 1909. E.R. Pankhurst at *The Globe* offered a favourable view of the production describing how the Ku Klux Klan “rode to the rescue of the gallant Camerons.”¹⁹⁸ Though he considered the theme—that is “the race question” in the United States—to be a “handicap” the Toronto audience was nevertheless satisfied with the production.¹⁹⁹ According to the Pankhurst the story, while fictional it was “true to historic conditions” following the American Civil War and Reconstruction.²⁰⁰ Nevertheless, the scene in which Gus is captured by the Klan and is forced to confess was “weirdly gruesome” to Pankhurst.²⁰¹ Where Pankhurst was ambivalent about the racial politics of the play, the reviewer for the *Toronto Star* took a more favourable view.

¹⁹⁶ “Vivid Light on Southern States” *The Toronto Star*; Toronto, 1 April 1905: 6.

¹⁹⁷ “The Clansman” *The Globe*; Toronto. 15 April 1905: 10. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/clansman/docview/1323683553/se-2>.

¹⁹⁸ E. R. Pankhurst “Music and Drama” *The Globe*; Toronto. 22 November 1909. 14. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/music-drama/docview/1354294925/se-2>.

¹⁹⁹ E. R. Pankhurst “Music and Drama” *The Globe*; Toronto 23 November 1909. 14. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/music-drama/docview/1354834965/se-2>.

²⁰⁰ E. R. Pankhurst “Music and Drama” *The Globe*; Toronto November 22, 1909. 14 <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/music-drama/docview/1354294925/se-2>.

²⁰¹ E. R. Pankhurst “Music and Drama” *The Globe*; Toronto November 23, 1909. 14. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/music-drama/docview/1354834965/se-2>.

He described how the “chivalrous members” of the Ku Klux Klan were able to shake the “terrible yoke” of “negro rule” following the war. The reviewer linked the conditions of Reconstruction to white Canadians contemporary racial fears writing “the Japanese menace in Canada and the west is regarded by many as threatening in its characteristics as the ‘negro peril’ in the South in 1868.”²⁰² For him *The Clansman* “reportedly conclusively proved that the white race should be the only dominating race in the civilised Western hemisphere, and that its prerogatives must not be usurped by any other race, black or yellow.”²⁰³ For the reviewer, it was Asian Canadians who were the most immediate threat to the maintenance of the Canadian racial hierarchy and status quo. Though Canadian readers and reviewers did not have the same patriotic attachment to the Lost Cause as Southern readers, they nevertheless found the white supremacist rhetoric therein compelling. *The Clansman*, like *The Birth of a Nation* later, upheld white Canadians’ sense of racial and moral superiority. Some, such as this reviewer, directly linked threats to white supremacy in the Southern United States during reconstruction to his own contemporary racial anxieties. Even though anti-Indigenous and anti-Asian racism was arguably more salient for white Canadians, who were far more likely to encounter Indigenous and Asian Canadians in daily life, there remained significant interest in American cultural products that featured anti-Black racism. Canadians readily re-interpreted such productions into their own contexts, in ways that both erased Black Canadians and highlighted their racism against people of Asian and Indigenous descent in Canada.

History Herself: *Birth of A Nation* on Ontario’s Silver Screens

Birth of a Nation, the film adaptation of *The Clansman*, premiered in Ottawa in September of 1915 with great fanfare and acclaim. Promoters of *Birth of a Nation* highlighted the technical

²⁰² “The Dominating White Race” *The Toronto Star*. 13 November 1909. 10.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

elements of the film to draw in Canadian audiences. White Canadians, like American movie goers south of the border, flocked to screenings. Billed in Canada and internationally as the “Eighth wonder of the World” newspaper advertisements of *Birth of a Nation* informed potential viewers of the scale and cost of production, as well as the 50 person orchestra which accompanied the show.²⁰⁴ Advertisements in *The Globe* promised movie goers that they would be privy to something truly extraordinary, calling the film the greatest “spectacle the brain of man has yet visioned and revealed.”²⁰⁵ The *Watford Guide Advocate* likewise focused on the technical aspects of the film which was the “talk of the country.”²⁰⁶ They noted that the traveling production of *Birth* at the local Lyceum Theatre required two Simplex projectors and twelve technicians. For the *Watford Guide-Advocate* the only thing people could conceivably find “appalling” about *Birth* was its overshadowing of traditional theatre production techniques.²⁰⁷ The modern technology on display, according to some, overshadowed any significant conversation about the content of the film or its controversy.

Birth of a Nation was both popular and profitable. Any controversy that surrounded it provided additional advertising. Despite the prohibitive cost of tickets, 50 cents to \$1 for matinees and 50 cents to \$1.50 for evening tickets, the show was incredibly popular. The Alexandra in Toronto sold out to capacity night after night during the film’s first run. It was so popular and widely attended that the theatre’s management extended the run by an additional week due to its success.²⁰⁸ The *Toronto World* reported evening crowds lined up from King to Simcoe streets,

²⁰⁴ “Theatres: Birth of a Nation” *The Toronto World*, Vol. 35, No. 12,729. 18September, 1915. 4.

²⁰⁵ “Display Ad 3 -- No Title” *The Globe*; Toronto, Ont. 14 Sep 1915: 2

²⁰⁶ “Birth of a Nation” *Watford-Guide Advocate*. Vol. 63. No. 46. 16 November 1917. 8.

https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.N_00478_19171116

²⁰⁷ Ibid. And “Birth of a Nation” *Watford Guide-Advocate*. Vol. 63. No. 47. 23 November 1917. 5.

https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.N_00478_19171123

²⁰⁸ “Birth of a Nation Stays” *The Toronto World*. 27 September 1915.

https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.N_00367_19150927

drawn in by newspaper coverage and positive word of mouth.²⁰⁹ The coverage congratulated the Ontario Board of Censors for permitting the Alexandra to show the entirety of the film following controversies in the United States. For this presumably white reviewer, the film had nothing to offend Black Canadians. Rather, in his view, the film was evidence of how far Black people had “risen” in the years following the Civil War. As such, he said “no negro who respects himself or his race will find anything in the recital that he need be ashamed of.”²¹⁰ Apparently, “negroes” had fixed racism by “rising” since the 1860s.

The popularity of *Birth* in Toronto is reflected in the number of times the production returned to the city in the following years. After the three-week run in the fall of 1915, *Birth* returned to Massey Hall that Christmas for a second run and again in in the summer of 1916, aligning with the Canadian National Exhibition. Massey Hall, a larger venue with a greater capacity than The Alexandra, could offer tickets at a lower price, making the movie more accessible to members of the Toronto public for whom the 50-cent fee was prohibitively expensive.²¹¹ Following the movie’s success in metropolitan areas, *Birth of a Nation* went on tour, showing in smaller towns and cities across the province. John Forsyth, a clothing manufacturer in Berlin (now Kitchener), Ontario reserved one of the matinee showings at the local Roma Theatre for his employees.²¹² *Birth of a Nation* was a must-see technological marvel, and not a story that was controversial for white audiences.

²⁰⁹ “Birth of a Nation Beyond Promises” *The Toronto World*. 21 September 1915.

https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.N_00367_19150921

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ “Advertisement” *The Toronto World*. 22 September 1915.

https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.N_00367_19150922

²¹² “Will Entertain Employees” *Berlin Daily Record*; Kitchener, Ont. 11 November 1915. 7.

Ontario newspapers also praised *Birth of a Nation* as an historical work. White Canadian reviewers were generally uncritical of the racist depictions in the film or its promotion of the Lost Cause. The *Watford Guide-Advocate* was particularly effusive in its praise and celebrated it as a “realistic” depiction of history. They inform their readers that watching *Birth* “seems as if very history herself rose up as out of some magic caldron and was visualized before your very eyes.”²¹³ *Birth* was a remarkable success in Watford, drawing in an audience from the surrounding townships and selling out the theatre for the evening showing. The success was so great that the management team involved in the small-town production highlighted their role in showing the film when advertising other movies in the years to come.

While film itself might have been questionable entertainment for some Ontarians at this time, this film in particular was a good history lesson, according to some. One article from a London newspaper, by an unnamed Ursuline nun, questioned the moral value of movies but listed *Birth of a Nation* alongside other approved-as-safer movies such as *Snow White*, *The Little Princess* and *Tale of Two Cities* as opposed to the morally questionable *Cleopatra* and *The Common Law*.²¹⁴ The author shamed Catholic mothers for allowing their daughters to go to the movies where they would be tainted by “knowledge received in the wrong ways” and becoming “too sophisticated for their years.”²¹⁵ Based in London, Ontario the *Catholic Record* – the paper this article appeared in - was a weekly English language paper that covered national and international news, often reprinting articles from newspapers around the country. Coverage of *Birth of a Nation* in the *Catholic Record* was mixed, reflecting the Catholic Church’s general suspicion of popular culture both during and the First World War and interwar period. The place

²¹³ “Birth of a Nation” *The Watford Guide Advocate*, Vol.43, No. 47. 23 November 1917. 5.

²¹⁴ “An Ursuline Religious “Moving Pictures and the Young” *The Catholic Record*. Vol. 40. No. 2064 11 May 1918. 3.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*.

of film, and its moral dangers to young women has been discussed by American historian Lauren Rabinovitz. Early cinema was understood alongside older forms of urban amusement, and the cityscape more broadly. Film posed a risk, in the minds of some reformers and reactionaries, to the safety and morality of young women and other “at risk groups” in need of moral guidance.²¹⁶ *Birth of a Nation* was a danger to the moral fibre of its viewers not for its celebration of the Confederacy, anti-Black racism and violence, or the KKK, but for its being a part of a wider popular culture that could harm good Catholic souls.

Reporters discussing *Birth of a Nation*, and its effects on Ontario audience often lauded the film’s educational potential. By the start of the First World War, educators had begun looking to film for its potential as a pedagogical tool.²¹⁷ Others, by contrast, viewed the darkened movie theatres, and entrancing visual media, as a risk to vulnerable groups be they women, children, or immigrants.²¹⁸ Another article, originally published in *The Gleaner*, questioned the educational value of modern entertainment and the quality of Canadian school systems. For the author, *Birth of a Nation*, occasionally advertised as an educational film, was emblematic of the problem. They noted that many schools provided a half day off to permit children to see the film but questioned *Birth*’s value in educating young Catholic Canadians. They write, “[A]s we viewed the mob, battle and love scenes and the evolution of the negro from an untutored slave in the cotton fields to a gentleman, dressed in a smart uniform and playing tennis on a college lawn, we thought to ourselves: Is this instructive? Is this true history?”²¹⁹ They go on to suggest the film, as a medium, would be better suited to depicting Canadian history to strengthen the relationship between

²¹⁶ Lauren Rabinovitz. *For the Love of Pleasure: Women, Movies, and Culture in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago*. (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press. 1998).

²¹⁷ Dominique Brégent-Heald. *Northern Getaway: Film, Tourism, and the Canadian Vacation*. (1st ed. Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen’s University Press. 2022.) <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780228014867>. 57

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 60

²¹⁹ “Is Thinking Becoming a Lost Art!” *The Catholic Record*. Vol. 38. No. 1961 (May 20, 1916) Page 4.

Canada's "two races" and to celebrate the assimilation of Indigenous peoples. The author argues that Canadian would be better served by Canadian content, especially if that content could be put to use normalizing white supremacy and assimilating Native people in Canada.

"What an epic we would have," he wrote "if Cartier and Champlain, Le Caron and Brebeuf, Laval and Frontenac, Huron chiefs and Algonquin braves, Indian children and devoted nuns, Coureurs de bois and Voyageurs, La Salle and Hennepin, Dollard and Madeleine Vercheres, Montcalm and Wolfe were made to pass before us in their right perspective amid the historic scenes of long ago!"²²⁰

The writer raised no concerns about the racial politics of the film, other than to suggest that it was irrelevant to Canadians (a move that marginalized Black Canadians and their experiences) and offered no condemnation of Griffith's Lost Cause mythology or depictions of Black people. Rather, the author of the article recognised the power of film to shape national narratives and wished to do so in a Canadian context. The Canadian settler colonial project, rather than the Lost Cause, was what deserved to be valorised in film for Canadian audiences. As Canada continues to find the unmarked graves of Indigenous children, buried in secret by "devoted nuns," and other members of the church, this assertion is too ironic to quote without comment. Like anti-Black racism, however, the culturally genocidal values of settler colonialism were normal and respectable in Ontario in the 1920s.

In another sense, the film fulfilled wartime desires. For white Ontarians unable to access footage of their loved ones overseas during the Great War, *Birth of a Nation* provided a much-wanted glimpse of warfare. Film historian Sasha Crawford-Halland situated the popularity of *Birth of a Nation* in the context of censorship under the War Measures Act. The Ontario government banned war films in 1914 shortly after the onset of the war fearing that depictions of actual battles

²²⁰ Ibid

would have a negative effect on civilian morale and enlistment. The Militia Department followed suit in early 1915, requesting that provincial governments across the country do the same.²²¹ In the context of that censoring, Canadian appreciation for the battle sequences in *Birth* is clear in some early reviews. One *Globe* reviewer celebrated depictions of battle, comparing the scenes to trench warfare in Flanders. For him, it was the depictions of war that made the film valuable.

Meanwhile, Black Canadians protested showings of Griffith's epic movie. While the Ontario press covered the screenings of *Birth of a Nation* extensively, there was little coverage of Black Canadians' efforts to have the film banned, particularly in larger newspapers. More details about those protests appear in the next section of this chapter, but here I give a few examples of the coverage of Black protest against the film from the white mainstream Canadian newspapers. It was not uncommon. Perhaps there was little interest in undermining the advertisements for which theatre owners and the production company had paid, or perhaps newspapers serving a mostly white readership did not think their audience had any interest in the opinions of Black Canadians (who seem, after all, to hardly exist).

During the initial run, most of the coverage on protests against *Birth* ran in small town newspapers that had yet to show the film. This coverage, however, was not sympathetic to the Black Canadians who wanted to prevent *Birth of a Nation* from being shown in their own communities. Coverage of the protests offered outright critique of the efforts to have the film banned. Belleville's *Daily Ontario* ran a letter from a Black resident alongside their review of the film. The letter writer calls on the town of Belleville to ban the movie as Windsor had done, calling

²²¹ Crawford-Holland, Sasha. 2020. "The Birth of a Nation in Canada: Black Protest and White Denialism Across Canada's Color Lines." *Film History* (New York, N.Y.) 32 (4): 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.2979/FILMHISTORY.32.4.01>.

the movie a matter of public concern.²²² The white reviewer offered little sympathy to the letter writer and other protestors, deriding him as one who would have the film banned. The review does allude to the controversy surrounding the movie in both Canada and the United States but is favourable towards Griffiths' depiction. They call Reconstruction "an orgy of hate and oppression" against the south but celebrate the depiction of Klan activities as a well filmed effort that "surpass[ed] in thrills any Vanderbilt cup race."²²³ *The Ingersoll Chronicle* also noted the efforts of Black Torontonians to have the movie banned by the censor board for its racist depictions. The author reported on the case and the request to have the more egregious portions censored, but did so in a punny tone, writing that the film was "charged with blackening the reputation of the negro race."²²⁴ Like that other "blackening" cultural form, blackface minstrelsy, the film offered an apparently "true" representation of Black characters and Black racial character, and it was comedically ridiculous to suggest otherwise, according to this author. Ontario was not alone in removing some scenes from the film. At the direction of the Manitoba Board of Censors, Manitoba and Saskatchewan theatres removed some of the more troubling parts of the film, namely scenes which depicted white women shocked by the violence of war – a concern that had more to do with recruiting and supporting the First World War than censoring anti-black racism.²²⁵

By February of 1916 productions of *Birth of a Nation* were touring small cities and towns in southwestern Ontario. Exhibited at the Princess Theatre in Woodstock, the film was well received and drew in visitors from the surrounding area. The film was "very appreciated" by

²²² Pte. William Johnston "Would Prevent Presentation of the Birth of a Nation Moving Picture Film" *Daily Ontario*, Belleville Morton and Herity, 27 April 1916. Page 1.

²²³ "The Birth of a Nation Tomorrow" *Daily Ontario* Morton and Herity, 27 April 1916. Page I

²²⁴ "Strong Protest from Toronto Colored Citizens" *The Ingersoll Chronical and Canadian Dairyman* September 18: 1915. Page 1.

²²⁵ Seiler, R. M., and Tamara Palmer Seiler. *Reel Time: Exhibitors and Movie Audiences in Prairie Canada, 1896 to 1986*. (Edmonton, Alberta: Athabasca University Press. 2013), 130.

Ingersoll residents who travelled to see the production. The orchestral production, with 30 players, was praised as a “rare treat.” The educational nature of the film likewise received significant attention. The *Ingersoll Chronicle* noted that “too much cannot be said about the interest and instructive nature of the production.”²²⁶ It was received as true history, if fully American and insufficiently Canadian, and its racism was understood to be a fair accounting of Black villainy and white heroism.

One notable exception to the lack of coverage on Black Canadian protestors in major newspapers appeared in the *Toronto World*. When the Men’s Guild of the Toronto A.M.E. church protested the showing of the film in Toronto, the manager of the Alexandra theatre, W. Cranston, responded in the *Toronto World* saying that the protestors were simply “misinformed about [the] wonderful picture.” *Birth* was simply intended to inform about the history of the United States during the Civil War and the Reconstruction “and in no way casts an unfavourable light upon the present-day negro.”²²⁷ Cranston's defense of the film directly contradicted Black Canadians, and Americans, who rightly condemned the film as racist, and as upholding harmful and violent stereotypes. In the eyes of this theatre manager, Black Canadians were simply overreacting to a harmless, entertaining (and profitable) film. Contrary to Cranston’s views, and easily understood by Black Canadians, the racism presented in *Birth of a Nation* was far from harmless. The ideas about Black masculinity presented in the film, especially the “Black beast rapist,” underwrote and justified the violent mob murder of Black men (and sometimes women) in the US. This same “threadbare lie,” as Ida Wells called it, that Black men raped white women and were lynched for

²²⁶ “Many Ingersoll People Witnessed the Birth of a Nation” *The Ingersoll Chronical and Canadian Dairyman*. 10 February 1916, page 1.

²²⁷ “Nothing Objectionable” *The Toronto World*, Vol 35, No. 12,726, 15 September 1915, 4

it, had long been present in Canada.²²⁸ As discussed by Barrington Walker, white Canadians, including Sir John A. Macdonald, were not ignorant of the stereotypes about black men presented in lynching narratives. As quoted in the introduction of this thesis, in 1868 Sir John A. Macdonald expressed concern about the “frequency of rape committed by Negroes, of whom we have too many in Upper Canada,” a comment he gave in the context of supporting the death penalty in Canada.²²⁹ Black Canadians who protested the film, or advocated for fair treatment for themselves and their communities were treated in the white press as ignorant or “uppity” and told that they simply ought to be grateful for what limited protections they were granted in Canada.

“The Dirt of a Nation”: Black Canadians Protest

While white Canadian theatregoers and advertisers anticipated the Canadian premier of *Birth of a Nation*, members of Ontario’s Black community rallied together to protest the showing of the film. Opposition to the production of *Birth* in Ontario came largely from Black communities in Toronto and Chatham-Kent County. Writers and contributors to the *Canadian Observer* were some of the staunchest opponents to the film’s release in Ontario, and Canada more broadly. They opposed the movie on a variety of grounds, moral and nationalistic. Aware of reactions to the film south of the border, Black Canadian writers linked the film to the outbreak of racist violence and lynchings in the southern states. As argued by Greg Marquis, Black Canadians drew from narratives of patriotism, “Britishness” and citizenship in opposition to the film.²³⁰ A number of those who were vocal in opposing *Birth of a Nation* in Canada drew from personal or familial

²²⁸ “Ida B. Wells. *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*. 1892.

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/14975/14975-h/14975-h.htm>

²²⁹ Barrington Walker. *Race On Trial*. 116.

²³⁰ Greg Marquis. “A War Within a War: Canadian Reactions to D. W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation*.” *Histoire sociale / Social History* 47, no. 94 (2014): 441 doi:10.1353/his.2014.0041.

experience with the first Ku Klux Klan and used those stories to illustrate the dangers that a reinvigorated KKK posed to Black Canadians and the wider Canadian state.

Black Canadian opposition to *Birth of a Nation* was argued on nationalist grounds from its first showing in Canada. One contributor to *The Canadian Observer* wrote a review of *Birth of a Nation* after its Canadian premier in Ottawa. In a telegraphed letter to the Toronto-based editors, they highlighted the negative effect that *Birth* would have on Black Canadians and the danger it would pose in strengthening anti-Black racism. The contributor called on the paper's editors and readership to organise in protest of its showing, noting that the movie was at its "foundation...the creation of race feeling and embitterment." To continue to show *Birth* in Ontario would have negative moral effects and serve only to "engender nothing but race prejudice and hatred." For this contributor, movies like *Birth* and the racism they would inspire did not belong in Canada - "a country where liberty, justice, equality [were] not mere bywords."²³¹ The contributor evoked Canada's mythic status as a haven for Black people in North America and member of the British empire ordered by impartial British justice rather than lynch law. Although the idea that Canada was free from American-style racism was not necessarily true, it served here as a useful rhetorical strategy to get white Canadians to reject the film's racism, and as a rallying cry for collective action against new threats to Black safety. The author went on to question why Canada would allow productions of *Birth* when even some states and municipalities south of the border censored or out-right banned the film. Another contributor, Remler, questioned why Canada, under the flag of the British empire allowed those Americans, "void of backbone" to be her moral arbiter. For him, the film's popularity in the United States was not sufficient justification for its production to spread

²³¹ "The Birth of a Nation" As Played in Ottawa, Ont." *The Canadian Observer*, Vol. 2 No. 15. 18 September 1915. Page 1.

to Canada and was “no reason for the same insult being perpetrated here.”²³² *Birth*, for all its grand spectacle, was both offense and danger to the Black community, Canada, and her place within the British empire as a province of race-blind justice and civilized rule of law.

After *Birth's* premier in Toronto, writers of *The Canadian Observer* continued to question why the film was allowed to be shown north of the border. One author questioned why “our good government stand[s] for this to be played” and said the movie would be more aptly called “Dirt of a Nation” for its glorification of the KKK and lynching.²³³ The presence of the Klan in the southern states and the continued prevalence of lynchings was used by the writers as a criticism of both state and American governments and the quality of the American legal system.²³⁴ Upper-class black Canadians used the failure of the American legal system as a rhetorical spring board to advocate for themselves and their community in Canada. They endorsed the supposed colour-blind nature of the Canadian and imperial legal systems in the hope that confirming this ideal would lead to wider change in Canadian society – such as the support of others against releasing *Birth of a Nation* in their own communities. Articles that advocated for the censorship or outright ban of *Birth* ran alongside articles that advocated for the creation of a Black battalion in the CEF and stories of Black Canadians volunteering for and being turned away from military service. While Black Canadians were striving to prove their national and imperial loyalty, as well as their fitness for equal citizenship by serving (preferably for them in racially integrated units) in the Canadian military, and actively coming up against official discrimination, they were using the myth of

²³² Remler “That Photo Film Have It Cut Out IS Unnecessary” *The Canadian Observer*, Vol. 2 No. 15. 18 September 1915. Page 1.

²³³ “Dirt of a Nation” *The Canadian Observer*; Toronto, Ont. Vol. 2 No. 17. 2 October 1915. 4.

²³⁴ “Ku Klux Klan” *The Canadian Observer*; Toronto, Ont. Vol 2. No. 17. 2 October 1915. 4.

equality under the empire to protest the showing of a racist film – as well as to protest discrimination and segregation in the CEF.

Those who took action to have *Birth* either banned or censored included a Toronto committee organised by the Men’s Guild and Civic Assembly which included a number of upper-class members of Toronto’s Black community. The committee selected William Peyton Hubbard to preside as chair. Hubbard, then retired, was the first non-white person elected to municipal office in Toronto. Born in Toronto to a formerly enslaved couple from Richmond, Virginia, Hubbard attended the Toronto Model school and spent his early career as a baker and inventor. He later worked as a driver for a family member’s livery cab business where he met George Brown. Hubbard entered municipal politics in 1893 at the age of 51 and represented Toronto’s wealthy and overwhelmingly white Ward 4. Over the course of his political year, Hubbard was elected to a municipal office fifteen times including as an Alderman and to the Control Board and occasionally sat as acting mayor.²³⁵ Other members of the committee included J. R. H. Whitney, the owner and publisher of the *Canadian Observer*, and Robert P. Edwards, who would go on to become the editor for *The Dawn of Tomorrow*.

The committee expressed concern with the film’s portrayal of Black women. In a letter signed by the committee and published in *The Observer* they noted that the film created “a stigma upon the women of the Race.” Robert Edwards, when speaking to the committee was adamant that Black men in Toronto oppose the film for its portrayal of Black women. He is reported to have “reminded the men that if they failed to defend the virtues of the women of our Race, God himself

²³⁵ Catherine Slaney. *Family Secrets: Crossing the Colour Line*. (Dundurn, 2003.), 111-17. See also Stephen L. Hubbard. *Against All Odds: the Story of William Peyton Hubbard, Black Leader and Municipal Reformer*. (Toronto: Dundurn Press. 1987).

would turn His face away from them.”²³⁶ Edwards’ rhetoric presented Black women as in need of and as entitled to the protection and respect to which white women were entitled. Black Canadians recognised that the violence of *Birth of a Nation* was not limited to its potential to incite physical harm. Rather, the stereotypes present within the film were an offense in and of themselves. Perhaps focusing on the harmful stereotypes of black women allowed these men to enact a form of protective patriarchal masculinity that would simultaneously show their own civilized manhood – something that would represent them as “civilized men” by Canadian standards, and consistent with the writers’ and editor’s efforts to enlist in the CEF. Unable to defend themselves against racist stereotypes of black manhood without seeming “biased” to white Canadians, they nevertheless defended Black women as “good men” should.

While the *Canadian Observer* offered critiques to those who lauded the film by contrast, a Montreal paper gave space to a conservative Black voice that favoured the film. Montreal A.M.E. Rev R.C. Stewart defended *Birth of a Nation* as a representation of Black achievement in the *Montreal Gazette*. He described the film as a “marvel of production” that did “honor to the negro.” Stewart notes that he regretted the possibility film’s promoters and members of the Montreal Board of Censors for being made to feel upset by Black protesters who opposed the film and disavowed its racism. Worse for him was the potential that white people be upset at an accusation that they were “sowing the seeds of dissention” than the harm that the film caused his own community. He presents “Mammy” as one of the best characters in the play, saying that she, as a “true negro woman” was a better representation of “resourcefulness” and “constancy” than could be found in the “world of feminism.” For Stewart, the depictions of Blackness present in the film were accurate representations of Black southerners when guided or influenced by a “mean white leader” like

²³⁶ “Resolutions Passed Denouncing Play” *The Canadian Observer* Vol.2 No. 15. 18 September 1915. 1.

Austin Stoneman. In his mind, it was only when a “[b]lack man reaches the level of the white individually” that he “need not be told don’t scrape to me.” Stewart’s concern was not with community building or “racial uplift” as was the concern for the writers at the *Canadian Observer*, rather he considered issues of social and educational attainment to be the prerogative of the individual.²³⁷ The letter, which ran in a mainstream, English-language white newspaper represented a sample of some Black Canadian conservative thought. By Stewart’s own recognition and evidenced by the attempts of Black communities across Canada to have the film banned, his view was not the majority among African Canadians. Black communities in Ontario were vocally opposed the film and its depictions of Blackness, recognising it for the racist propaganda that it was.

In a response to Stewart, a writer named George Vernon directly tied films like *Birth* to the spread and normalisation of anti-Black racism in Canada. He offered his readers a thorough critique of Stewart’s claims that *Birth of a Nation* did no real harm to Black Canadians. Vernon had been involved in the protests against *Birth of a Nation* in Ottawa during the film’s first Canadian run. He maintained connections to Black communities across Canada and was a member of the NAACP. Vernon disputed the idea that Black Canadians ought to be okay with the *Birth’s* depictions or contemporary Canadian racism. He wrote in the *Observer* “under present conditions when such pernicious pictures are shown to create sentiment against the negro, we will never reach that level Rev. Mr. Stewart speaks of.”²³⁸ He then went on to suggest Stewart speak with his mother Josephine Kemp, a Montreal resident from Kentucky, about her experiences with the Ku

²³⁷ “The Birth of A Nation, The Lesson a Clergyman Draws from Photo Play” *The Gazette*, Montreal. 5 October 1915. 2.

²³⁸ George Vernon “Vernon Answers Rev. A. C. Stewart: Comes Back at Montreal Pastor for Defence of “Birth of a Nation” *The Canadian Observer*; Toronto. 13 November 1915. 1-2. <https://www-accessible-com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/accessible/docButton?AAWhat=builtPage&AAWhere=THECANADIANOBSERVER.CN1915111301.00001&AABeanName=toc1&AACheck=2.37.1.0.0&AANextPage=/printBuiltPage.jsp#>

Klux Klan. Vernon pushed back against the tokenisation of Stewart in the white press. He asserted in a Black-owned newspaper, with a predominantly Black Canadian readership, that Canada, simply by virtue of not being the United States, was not immune to the vilification of its Black community.

For Vernon *Birth*, and movies like it, directly contributed to the normalisation of racist violence and disregard for the law among white viewers. He called readers' attention to the lynching by the newly formed Klan and the threat that they posed to both Black Americans and the United States as a law-abiding nation. He noted the Klan's resurgence in the south and an increase in lynchings following the release of the film. For Vernon, the showing of *Birth* was not merely an offense but something that actively posed a threat to the lives of Black Canadians and the country as a whole: "In allowing such plays as "The Nger" [sic] (which has been barred), *The Birth of a Nation*, etc., to be shown to create prejudice and influence the passions of the people" these films not only represented anti-Black violence, but also incited it.²³⁹ He suggested that *Birth of a Nation*, as a film offensive to Black Canadians, ought to be banned, just as the *Eternal City*, a film offensive to Catholics, had been banned in Montreal. Like other journalists and writers at the *Canadian Observer*, George Vernon recognised the film's divisive nature. Only in one Canadian city – the border town of Windsor, Ontario – did protests lead to a decision not to show the film.

Conclusion

Like many white reviewers and audience members, D.W. Griffith took offense to suggestions that the film did harm to Black communities. His next film, *Intolerance*, even longer than *Birth of a Nation* at 3.5 hours, was a rebuttal to the NAACP and his other critics. It was they,

²³⁹ Ibid.

not he who were intolerant. White Canadian and American audiences alike appreciated *Birth of a Nation*. The racism of the film, to many, had little if anything to do with the contemporary Black communities. For white Canadians, the film presented anti-Black racism, and the “bad” Black people it depicted as naturally belonging in the American South, and in the past. Protests against the film in the United States were a part of the film’s appeal; the controversy was yet another reason to see it. For white theatre managers, reviewers and reporters *Birth of a Nation* was just a must-see technological marvel, a true representation of American history that had little if anything to do with Canadian or imperial histories of racial violence. When Black Canadians were vocal in their opposition to racial/ist violence and stereotype on screen white Canadians chose not to listen, or even to amplify the one Black voice that agreed with them and supported “mammy” and other stereotypes. It was into this cultural and racial context that Matthew Bullock fled a lynch mob threat in North Carolina in 1922.

Chapter 3: “Eminently Worth Saving”: The Extradition Case of Matthew Bullock

*On February 7th, 1921, a young man sat in the borrowed family car in Buffalo near Bridgeburg, Ontario to cross the border. He was there to begin a new life in Canada, he had \$41 in his wallet, and he was Black. Short the \$250 required for entry, a border guard turned him back.*²⁴⁰

In March of 1922, Arthur Talmage Abernethy, a Methodist theologian, and Klan lecturer, vowed that a million American Klansmen were set to invade Canada in the next 90 days. They planned to kidnap Matthew Bullock, a young Black North Carolinian who had fled the mob that lynched his younger brother. Abernethy threatened to do what the Canadian and American governments could not or would not: kidnap a young man and bring him to “face trial” (by which he meant a lynch mob).²⁴¹ The case had proven to be a challenge for the Canadian immigration board. Bullock had violated Canadian immigration law by his own admission but returning him to American soil would risk his death. Bullock’s deportation and extradition hearings were covered in the local and national press across Canada and the United States. Ultimately Matthew Bullock was allowed to remain in Canada. He disappeared from the historical record following his release.

Matthew Bullock’s plight provided an ideal site for the promotion of Canadian moral (and national) superiority. Although many white Canadians distinguished themselves from the United States by asserting their own colour-blindness in contrast to US racial segregation and violence, typically racist expressions of whiteness and white supremacy were also influential north of the border, as the previous two chapters have established. As the press coverage featured in this

²⁴⁰ “Bullock’s Counsel to Carry Negro’s Case to Ottawa” *The Gazette*; Montreal, 19 January 1922. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/january-19-1922-page-9-20/docview/2150847114/se-2>. Bridgeburg and Fort Erie, Ontario amalgamated in 1932.

²⁴¹ “States Ku Klux Klan Will Get Negro” *The Globe*; Toronto, Ont. 18 March 1922. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/states-ku-klux-will-get-negro/docview/1352064217/se-2>.

chapter will show, caricatures of Black Americans, and the idea of “Dixie” popular in minstrel shows and *Birth of a Nation*, shaped perceptions of Bullock and his case. For some white Canadians, Bullock’s case became emblematic of British justice and fair play. He was young, able-bodied, middle class, Protestant, and thought by some to be a veteran of the Great War. As his pastor would go on to say, Matthew Bullock was a young man “eminently worth saving.”²⁴² Ontario newspaper coverage transformed him into a figurehead for English-Canada’s self-mythology as a refuge for Black Americans fleeing bondage and mob violence.²⁴³ By contrast, others focused on his alleged criminality and his nature as an otherwise undesirable immigrant. Their coverage reflected a vision of Canada based in peace, order, and good government -- for *white* people. Bullock’s defenders and those who would have had him extradited used the myth of colour-blind British justice to promote their own ideas of what Canada should look like. Both presented ideas of a British Canada formed in contrast to the racialized “Other” and to the diverse and divided United States that reinforced Canada’s status as a fundamentally white Protestant nation, and one loyal to the empire.

Matthew Bullock’s deportation and extradition hearings have received some attention from scholars. In his 1996 article “Black Man White Justice,” Canadian legal historian John C. Weaver examines Bullock’s case. He situates the hearings in the development of Canadian extradition law, showing the changing role of the courts in an otherwise political process.²⁴⁴ More recently, Sarah Jane Mathieu has examined the case. In *North of the Colour Line* Mathieu shows how Black

²⁴² “Hold Fugitive Negro Till Canada Decides Justice of His Plea” *The Globe*, Toronto. Ont. 16 January 1922. Page 1

²⁴³ Bullock received significant support from Black communities around Ontario, with significant support coming from Hamilton and Toronto. At this time, there were no newspapers owned or published by Black Canadians. The *Canadian Observer*, published in Toronto between 1914 and 1919 had ceased publication, and the *Dawn of Tomorrow* in London, Ontario only began publication in July of 1923, several months after Matthew Bullock’s release and as such do not contain coverage of his case.

²⁴⁴ John C. Weaver “Black Man, White Justice: The Extradition of Matthew Bullock, an African-American Residing in Ontario, 1922” *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 34.4 (1996): 637.

communities on both sides of the border organised in support of the Bullock family, reflecting Black transnational community formation in the early 20th century. Black Canadians, she demonstrates, skillfully navigated white supremacy in both the legal system and in the court of public opinion.²⁴⁵ Both Weaver and Mathieu note the ways in which white Ontarians' belief in their own colour-blindness shaped attitudes towards the case. As Mathieu argued, it was Black communities on both sides of the border—Matthew Bullock's family, friends and neighbours—who were ultimately responsible for his successful bid to remain in Canada, not the white press.²⁴⁶ In addition to the work of Canadian historians, Vann R. Newkirk discusses both the extradition case and the lynching which preceded it in *Lynching in North Carolina*. He situates the lynching of Matthew's brother Plummer Bullock and Jerome Hunter, a friend who was in the store that day, in the social and political contexts of rural Jim Crow era North Carolina, and in the efforts of the NAACP to pass the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill.²⁴⁷ Newkirk offers little discussion of the Canadian social and political context. He uncritically celebrates the Canada's place as the terminus of the underground railroad and does not engage with recent historiography of Black Canadians or white supremacy in Canada.

There is a wider history of Canadian immigrant deportation into which Matthew Bullock's case falls, particularly the way accounts about him focused on his class, work ethic, and degree of prosperity. In her 1988 book *From Whence They Came* Barbara Roberts examines the ways that

²⁴⁵ Sarah-Jane Mathieu. *North of the Color Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870-1955*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2010. North of the color line chapter 4

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Vann R. Newkirk. *Lynching in North Carolina: A History, 1865-1941*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2009. Newkirk suggests that it was Jerome Hunter, one of the men involved in the later gun fight that preceded the lynching, who was in the store with Plummer Bullock. Hunter was severely injured in the fight and would ultimately be charged for his efforts to defend his community, receiving an 8-year prison sentence. Newkirk also suggest that Plummer Bullock had been out "looking for girls" though this seems unlikely and has been refuted by people working with The Descendants Project. Likewise, those at the Descendants Project argue that it was Alfred Williams in the store, given how selective the mob's ring leaders were in choosing the victims.

the Canadian government used deportations to regulate immigrant labourers. She tracks the development of deportation policy to the discourse focused on class and immigrant poverty, as well as some groups links to radical left-wing politics and labour activism. The Canadian government disproportionately targeted “enemy aliens” and “undesirable agitators” for deportation. Roberts further argues that the Canadian government deliberately misled the public to believe that these deportations were voluntary.²⁴⁸ Likewise, Chinese workers were the primary targets for deportation under the Opium and Narcotic Drug Act, illustrating the continued associations between Asian immigrants, drug use, and immorality to early 20th century Canadian officials.²⁴⁹

In *A Line in Blood and Dirt*, Benjamin Hoy discusses the creation of the US-Canadian border, and its permeable nature in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Communities on either side of the border used it, and the ambiguous laws surrounding it, to their own advantage. Communities in the Great Lakes region frequently crossed the border, looking for land, wages, or access to freedom. As Hoy notes, both enslaved and free Black Americans traveled north and settled in Ontario in the years preceding the American Civil War. At the wars end, however, many Black residents returned to the United States searching for their families or fleeing Canadian racism. During Reconstruction, the southwestern Ontario region that had been home to antebellum Black Americans became a refuge for some Confederates and Klansmen. Such “refugees” included members of the Manigault family, James Avery, a Klansman accused of 11 counts of murder, and Rufus Bratton, another wanted Klansman.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Barbara Roberts. *Whence They Came: Deportation from Canada 1900 - 1935. Whence They Came.* Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1988.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 106-107.

²⁵⁰ Benjamin Hoy. 2021. *A Line of Blood and Dirt: Creating the Canada-United States Border across Indigenous Lands*, Oxford Univ. Press. Ron Shaw. 2018. *London Ontario's Unrepentant Confederates, the Ku Klux Klan and a*

As previously discussed, the Canadian government did not view the Black immigrants, whether from the United States or Caribbean, as desirable new citizens. Though never passed into law, a 1911 Order-in-Council suggested banning all Black immigrants to Canada as they were deemed naturally unsuited to the harsh northern climate of Canada. Matthew Bullock's story reflected competing ideas about who was welcome in and suited to a life in Canada; he was an employable, able bodied, Protestant and from a farming background, but he was also Black and to some, a "criminal." Ontario newspaper coverage reflected these competing ideas; Bullock and his family were either suspected criminals whose place in Canada was questionable, or victims of American racism who through labour and piety became "good citizens" in need of Canadian protection.

"Very Little Disorder"

In 1921 Norlina, North Carolina was a small modernising town in Warren County near the Virginia border. Most of the county's population, 64%, was Black. Warren County was largely rural and had been part of North Carolina's plantation economy where enslaved labourers produced cotton and tobacco for the benefit of the whites who claimed to own them. Warren County had been a part of the "Black Second" Congressional district during Reconstruction, electing several Black politicians to Congress before a 1902 literacy amendment severely limited Black suffrage. As in many segregation-era states, illiterate white voters whose parents or grandparents had voted were exempt from the test. Norlina formed around a railway junction in the late 19th century and was incorporated as a town in 1914.²⁵¹ As was often true of the victims

Rendition on Wellington Street. Carleton Place, Ontario, Canada: Global Heritage Press. Bratton was arrested by American officials and taken to the United States to be tried. The Canadian government protested the arrest with the aid of Britain. Bratton was eventually released back to Canada with the charges dropped. Shaw argues that the Canadian government's strong reaction to the kidnaping was an example of the new country's preoccupation with matters of sovereignty.

²⁵¹ Newkirk. *Lynching in North Carolina: A History, 1865-1941*. 2009.

of lynching, the Bullock family was relatively well off compared to the rest of the town. William Bullock, the father of the family, had worked as a minister in the region as well as in Batavia, New York. The patriarch of the Bullock clan brought his family north with him, as did so many other Black families in the Great Migration of the early 20th century. At some point before 1921 the Bullock family returned to Norlina, having earned enough in the North to purchase a car and a farm. As Vann R. Newkirk has noted, it was the Bullock family's financial success that made them targets for white residents' anger.²⁵² The participation of one of the Bullock sons in the First World War likely intensified that sentiment.²⁵³ By achieving moderate success and embodying respectable patriotism, African Americans like the Bullocks threatened the racist justifications for the colour line, and white supremacists often sought to curtail such success with theft, violence, or threats.

The Bullock family tragedy began in late January of 1921. The teenage Plummer Bullock had gone to the Norlina general store. On offer were two different qualities of apples, Plummer Bullock selected the better apples, for which he paid ten cents. As he left the store, he noticed that the apples the grocer gave him were bruised and nearly rotten. Unsatisfied, he returned to exchange the apples for those for which he had paid. In a later statement to *The Globe*, Matthew Bullock recalled his brother's telling of the events. The white store clerk Brady Traylor (sometimes spelled Traylor) and his brother Rabey took offense at the request and demanded an additional 5 cents. When the argument escalated Rabey Traylor suggested that he and his brother take Plummer out to the back of the store to be shot.²⁵⁴ Fearing for their safety Bullock and Alfred Williams, another

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ The Canadian press and Sarah Jane Mathieu suggested it was Matthew himself who had participated in the First World War. Rather it was another Bullock brother, Thomas who had enlisted. Thomas Bullock eventually settled in Philadelphia. Glenn Hinson, Personal Correspondence, Zoom, Interview. 17 April 2023.

²⁵⁴ Correspondence Shelby Davidson to Walter White 16 January 1922. *Papers of the NAACP*. Pt 8 Series A. Reel 1. Fr. 0304-05. Microfilm. University of Michigan Ann Arbor.

Black Norlina resident there that day, left the store.²⁵⁵ The story of the interaction between Plummer and the Traylor siblings spread throughout the town that day, enraging the white residents. Rumor soon got back to the Black community of Norlina that white residents intended to lynch Plummer Bullock.

Members of the small town's Black community took steps to defend and protect themselves in the face of a lynch mob. Between 50 and 60 people, including Matthew Bullock and Jerome Hunter, armed themselves and gathered that night at the train yard to defend against approximately 150 whites from the town.²⁵⁶ Matthew Bullock recalled that two groups had fired "fully 100" shots before he felt compelled to join. He later told a reporter at *The Globe* that he shot his revolver into the crowd three times though he was "sure I did not hit anyone."²⁵⁷ The fight resulted in eight injured, three of whom—Jerome Hunter, Claude Jones, and Robert Moss—were Black, and five of whom were white—Lloyd Traylor, Rabey Traylor, and three railyard workers H. A. Rainey, W.J. Upchurch, and H.A. Inscoe who were reportedly caught in the crossfire.²⁵⁸ There were no deaths. Rabey Traylor and Jerome Hunter were both seriously injured and required hospitalisation. Traylor was taken to the nearby segregated Henderson hospital whereas Hunter was taken to the closest hospital that would care for African Americans, St. Agnes, located nearly 90kms away in Raleigh.²⁵⁹

Plummer and Matthew returned home in the early morning hours. Matthew Bullock recounted that a brief time later the white chief of Norlina's police force arrived at the Bullock

²⁵⁵ Glenn Hinson, Personal Correspondence, Zoom, Interview. 17 April 2023.

²⁵⁶ "Bullock Goes Free on his Own Record as a Good Immigrant: British Justice Decrees He Is Not to Be Victim of Mob Vengeance." *The Globe*; Toronto, Ont. 28 January 1922: 1

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ "Eight Wounded in Race Outbreak in at Norlina Depot Early Sunday Morning." *Raleigh News and Observer* January 24, 1921.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

household to arrest Plummer, reportedly promising their father a fair trial. Though Matthew Bullock had wanted to stay for the trial, the emotions of the white townsfolk were “running very high” and he left to go north in the family car on his father’s advice.²⁶⁰ Late on the night of January 23rd, 1921, the white mob gathered again and made their way to the Warren County jail, in Warrenton, less than 5 miles away. Shortly after midnight, the mayor of Warrenton warned the governor of North Carolina, Cameron Morrison, of the risk of violence from the masked mob. Rather than immediately mobilising the militia or state troopers, Morrison advised the mayor to deputise members of the town to maintain order.²⁶¹ The masked, armed mob overpowered John Green, the Black jailkeeper, threatening him at gunpoint. They took Plummer Bullock and Alfred Williams from their cells without shoes or jackets. The mob forced the two into a car and drove them out of the town. On the side of the road, halfway between Warrenton and Norlina, the mob took Plummer and Alfred from the car near a forested area. One member of the mob reportedly told them to run into the nearby woods or pray. Plummer ran, Alfred prayed; the mob shot both men in the back.²⁶² Plummer Bullock’s death certificate records that he was shot three times; once in the back, once in the thigh and the once in the chest.²⁶³ The Raleigh news reported that following their murder Plummer and Alfred’s bodies were hanged on the side of the road.²⁶⁴ Details of the lynching vary from report to report. The *Charlotte Observer* noted that the whole affair went off

²⁶⁰ Bullock Goes Free on his Own Record as a Good Immigrant: British Justice Decrees He Is Not to Be Victim of Mob Vengeance. *The Globe*; Toronto, Ont. 28 January 1922: 1

²⁶¹ “Two Lynched at Warrenton by Mob after Race Riot” *Raleigh News and Observer*. 24 January 1922. 1.

²⁶² Glenn Hinson, Personal Correspondence, Zoom Interview. 17 April 2023. Details from the Williams family.

²⁶³ Plummer Bullock, death certificate, January 23, 1921. North Carolina State Board of Health, Bureau of Health Statistics available in A Red Record, Revealing Lynching Sites in North Carolina. https://lynching.web.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/9169/2015/03/S123_117-1844.jpg

²⁶⁴ “Two Lynched at Warrenton by Mob after Race Riot” *Raleigh News and Observer*. 24 January 1921. 1.

with “very little disorder.”²⁶⁵ Presumably, then, making sure Black residents knew that white store clerks had the right to cheat them was part of an orderly society.

At the time of Plummer Bullock and Alfred Williams’ lynching, Cameron Morrison had been governor of North Carolina for 12 days. Morrison was a white southern Democrat, and this was not his first foray into the political arena. He had been elected to the North Carolina senate for one term in 1900 following his involvement in the 1898 Wilmington Insurrection – a violent anti-Black race riot infamous in NC history. Morrison, then in his late 20s was an active member and leader of The Red Shirts, a white supremacist paramilitary group that openly opposed Reconstruction. By the 1890s over half of Wilmington’s population was Black, with a strong Black middle class, several Black aldermen, and a city council controlled by Fusionists.²⁶⁶ Fusionists, a coalition party formed by white Populists and Black Republicans in the 1890s, sought to counter Democrat control of elections in North Carolina. The party was successful in the 1895 elections and gained control of the state’s General Assembly and Supreme Court. During the 1898 municipal elections white Democrats conspired to take back control of the municipal government. White newspapers published articles and political cartoons warning against the supposed “Black Domination” and threatened violence against Black voters.²⁶⁷ On election day, groups of Red Shirts and other armed white civilians patrolled the streets, while others stuffed ballot boxes with votes for Democratic candidates. White Democrats were successful in both preventing Black residents from casting their ballots by violence, and later removed the democratically elected municipal government that had won the election in spite of their efforts. Morrison played an active role in the insurrection. He and the group of Red Shirts he commanded confronted then Governor

²⁶⁵ “Two Negroes Lynched in Warren While Morrison Calls Out Guard” *Charlotte Observer*. 24 January 1921. 1.

²⁶⁶ David Zucchino *Wilmington’s Lie: The Murderous Coup of 1898 and the Rise of White Supremacy*. 2020.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

David Russell—himself a Republican from Wilmington—on a train returning from voting before warning him to hide from another band of Red Shirts at the next station who planned to lynch him.²⁶⁸ Hence, although he had only served as Governor of NC for 12 days at the time of Plummer Bullock and Alfred William's murders, Gov. Morrison was no stranger to the politics or practice of white supremacist violence.

After he fled Norlina, Matthew Bullock eventually stopped in Batavia, NY, where he had lived with his family some years earlier.²⁶⁹ Although New York offered some degree of respite for Bullock, he was still at risk for extradition out of the state. He attempted to cross the border into Canada near St. Catherines, Ontario in February of 1921. Though it was never signed into law, the King government had passed an Order in Council limiting immigration in September of 1920. Single immigrants in the “mechanic” or “artisan” and “labourer” classes, be they skilled or unskilled, who wished to immigrate to Canada to live on a long-term basis required \$250 and their own transportation to their destination in Canada. Men who immigrated with their family required an addition \$125 for relatives 18 and over, and \$50 for those between 5 and 17. The Order-in-Council sought to limit the number of working-class immigrants who entered Canada amid rising unemployment rates.²⁷⁰ The financial requirement also served as a filter for otherwise undesirable immigrants—those with the financial means, or agricultural workers whose presence would contribute to the settler colonial project were freely permitted, whereas those who would compete for jobs with Canadians would not. In one of his accounts Bullock recalled how he was eventually able to cross the border. Mathew Bullock and his Batavia acquaintances connected with a group

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.

²⁶⁹ “Bullock Goes Free on His Own Record as Good Immigrant” *The Globe* (1844-1936); Toronto, Ont. [Toronto, Ont]. 28 January 1922: 1 Correspondence Abi to Violet. 16 January 1922. *Papers of the NAACP*. Pt 8 Series A. Reel 1. Fr. 0304-05. Microfilm. University of Michigan Ann Arbor.

²⁷⁰ “Immigrants of the mechanic artisan or labourer classes” P.C. 1920-2930. 29, November 1920. *Canada Gazette Part II* vol. 54 no. 23. P. 2180. 4, December 1920.

of Black American church-goers.²⁷¹ As discussed by Sarah-Jane Mathieu, Black communities had developed methods of crossing the border undetected that helped to create and maintain connections between Black Americans and Black Canadians – ties that were familial, religious, or occupational (as in the case of Black sleeping car porters).²⁷² Matthew Bullock, on the run, was able to use these connections to ensure his physical safety. With this group, he was able to safely cross into Canada, avoiding the steep financial requirements that had been put in place.



Figure 1. "Mathew Bullock" *Sarnia Observer* January 21, 1922

["He Must Have a Fair Chance Here" Matthew Bullock and British-American Extradition Law](#)

A Hamilton judge issued a second warrant for Mathew Bullock's arrest on February 16th, 1922, at the telegraphed request of the Charles Evans Hughes, a former New York Governor, and the American Secretary of State. Three years prior Hughes had been the keynote speaker at the National Conference on Lynching in support of the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill. At the time of Bullock's rearrest the bill was yet again up for consideration in the Senate, having passed in the House a few weeks earlier on the 26th of January.²⁷³ At the time Snider issued his warrant, no formal evidence had been brought to a Canadian court nor had an American arrest warrant. Matthew Bullock was arrested for a second time in as many months later that day. Hughes' was acting on

²⁷¹ "Bullock's Counsel to Carry Negro's Case to Ottawa" *The Gazette*; Montreal, January 19, 1922.

²⁷² Sarah-Jane Mathieu *North of the Color Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada 1870-1955*. Chapel Hill. University of North Carolina Press. 2010. Page 144, 174.

²⁷³ Newkirk. *Lynching in North Carolina: A History, 1865-1941*. 2009

behalf of North Carolina Governor Cameron Morrison in his capacity as the American Secretary of State.

In 1922 extradition between Canada and the United States was regulated under the Webster-Ashburn Treaty. Signed in 1842, the treaty resolved a number of conflicts between the United States and the British empire. It established a border between New-Brunswick and Maine, established shared use of the Great Lakes, reaffirmed previous border agreements west of Lake Superior, and included an agreement to end the maritime slave trade. Article 10 of the treaty established which crimes were subject to extradition between the United States and Britain. Those charged with murder, assault with intent to commit murder, piracy, arson, robbery, forgery, or uttering of a forged paper were subject to extradition following a hearing in the country where they were detained.²⁷⁴ Bullock and his supporters, including the National Race Council in Washington D.C., hired S. F. Washington, a former Ontario crown prosecutor, to aid Treleven in the defense.²⁷⁵ On February 24th Bullock appeared in the Hamilton court before Judge Colin Snider. Jose de Olivares, the American ambassador to Canada, represented the United States at the behest of Charles Hughes. No representative for the government of North Carolina was present.²⁷⁶

At the hearing Snider refused affidavits written and signed by witnesses in North Carolina. Extradition hearings did not allow the defendant to offer evidence or testimony in their own defences though witnesses could be cross examined. The inability of defendants to offer testimony was a considerable point of concern, both for the public, and for the judge. Relying on an affidavit did not provide Bullock the opportunity of a fair trial, something that Snider himself noted. From

²⁷⁴ Gary Botting. *Extradition Between Canada and the United States*. Ardsley, New York: Transnational Publishers. 2005. 76.

²⁷⁵ *Papers of the NAACP*. Pt 8 Series A. Reel 1. Fr. 0304-05. Microfilm. University of Michigan Ann Arbor.

²⁷⁶ "In the Matter of the Extradition of Matthew Bullock" Court Transcript. 24 February 1922. Canada. Department of Justice. Matthew Bullock File. Library and Archives Canada. RG13-A-5, Vol. 993 No. 303.

the information available to him, Snider characterised the fight in the railyards as a “more or less of a street fight” in which no one was killed.²⁷⁷ Thus, no murder had taken place, and motive in the case of attempted murder was impossible to ascertain without cross examination. Ascertaining intent was not possible without cross examination. “Therefore, I, knowing the weakness of affidavits” Snider stated “and how difficult it is to avoid giving two impressions by a written statement, and the fact that a half truth is worse than nothing at all, and the further fact that this man can’t give evidence in his own behalf, that the only thing he has is cross examination to show the actual circumstance” refused the affidavits.²⁷⁸ Snider likewise considered self defence as a possible cause for the alleged assault. Under treaty law, Snider believed that even malicious intention, one that was meant to frighten but fell short of murder, was an insufficient basis for extradition. Snider went on to reinforce his duty, and that of the courts, to all parties involved in the case, according to British law. He noted to De Oliveras his “desire and a duty to give him [Bullock] up to the State demanding him” provided they have satisfactory evidence. He likewise noted his duty to the defendant and the importance of cross examination given the seriousness of the case: “he is entitled to that much, and I must be just to him. He must have a fair chance here.”²⁷⁹ Snider was obeying the law laid down in the treaty agreement, regardless of the racial dimensions of the case.

While the judge on the case was attempting to ensure that Matthew Bullock received a fair trial, other Canadians expressed concerns about the case’s impact on American-Canadian relations. Officials in the Toronto Police, the RCMP and the Department of Defence were primarily concerned with how the case would impact later extraditions between Canada and the United

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

States, rather than the outcome of remanding Bullock to American custody. In a letter to Albert Cawdron, the RCMP Superintendent of Criminal Investigation, the Toronto Chief of Police Samuel Dickson expressed concern over Judge Snider's request for oral testimony stating:

“If the governor of North Carolina is quoted correctly, I think he is taking the proper stand. Of course, I know nothing about the case other than what appeared in the press but it does seem to me that the effect of all the nonsense concerning this negro will be that the police authorities acting in the interest of the people of Canada will have a very hard time to have criminals returned to Canada in the future if the procedure advocated at Hamilton is followed.”²⁸⁰

In his view, it was Judge Snider who failed to uphold British law by insisting that Bullock's representation be given the opportunity to cross examine his accuser. Snider, not a possible lynching, was the biggest impediment to justice, and it appears the fate of one “negro” mattered little to the Toronto Chief of Police or the RCMP.²⁸¹ At an institutional level, Canadians were more concerned about future hypothetical criminals who might not get returned to Canada by the US in retaliation for this case. Dickson went on to suggest that steps be taken to limit Snider's impact, “some official action should be taken to check the activities of those who are apparently trying to put stumbling blocks in the way of the police.”²⁸² For the Police Chief and RCMP officials who agreed with him, British justice was not absolute when it came weighing the fair trial of a foreigner, and a Black man, against inter-jurisdictional co-operation.

Gov. Cameron Morrison apparently saw the requirement for oral testimony as an affront to the state of North Carolina. Snider's refusal to accept affidavits from North Carolina, and

²⁸⁰ Letter Samuel Dickson to Albert Cawdron. February 24, 1922. Canada. Department of Justice. *Matthew Bullock File*. Library and Archives Canada. RG13-A-5, Vol. 993 No. 303.

²⁸¹ Letter Albert Cawdron to Stuart Edwards. 4 March 1922. Canada. Department of Justice. *Matthew Bullock File*. Library and Archives Canada. RG13-A-5, Vol. 993 No. 303.

²⁸² Letter Samuel Dickson to Albert Cawdron. February 24, 1922. Canada. Department of Justice. *Matthew Bullock File*. Library and Archives Canada. RG13-A-5, Vol. 993 No. 303.

Morrison's offense at the request, transformed the case into one with diplomatic consequences. Morrison made a statement outlining his opposition to the request, and his defense of lynching, which was widely reprinted in the Canadian and American press. Morrison wrote

“People in some sections of the country do not seem to understand that so-called lynchings in the South are nothing more than the killing of a criminal by friends and frequently outraged relatives of the victim of the prisoner's crime ... It is true that Bullock's brother was lynched but it was done quickly, and before the state authorities had any knowledge of approaching danger, an assault being made upon the jail of Warren county...What has come to be called lynchings in the South is *nothing but ordinary killings* in other parts of the country.”²⁸³

The statement only increased public support for Bullock's efforts to remain in Canada.

Charles Hughes, the American Secretary of State, was particularly critical of Judge Snider's decision, and offered complaints to the British Ambassador Auckland Geddes. For him, the decision to require both oral testimony and an authenticated extradition warrant stood in the way of the course of justice. The requirements were “most unusual” and if insisted on with each extradition case would “defeat the purpose of the extradition treaties between the United States and Great Britain.”²⁸⁴ The letter resulted in Snider receiving some professional backlash. The Deputy Minister of Justice, Edmond Newcombe, suggested that the case might jeopardise relations between Canada and the United States writing:

“I may say that extradition relations between the Government and that of the United States have generally been very satisfactory, and it would certainly be a matter for regret if anything in this particular case [were] to affect the good understanding which has prevailed...I do not find any sufficient reason suggested upon the notes for the exceptional rulings...and I should be very glad indeed to be able to explain or justify the procedure to his satisfaction.”²⁸⁵

²⁸³ “Declares Lynchings Nothing but Killing of Negro Criminals” *The Globe*; Windsor, Ont. 20 February 1922. 1, 3. Emphasis added.

²⁸⁴ Correspondence Edmund Newcombe to Judge Colin Snider. 20 April 1922. Matthew Bullock. RG13-A-5, Volume number: 993, File number: 303. Library and Archives Canada. Ottawa, Ontario.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Snider defended his decision and pushed back against the accusation that he was unfair to the United States or ruled in an unjust manner. He explained his request for oral testimony, both as necessary to allow the defense to cross examine the witness, but also to properly identify the man arrested as in fact being Matthew Bullock.²⁸⁶ In this instance the defense's insistence on following the letter of the law, further reinforced the necessity of oral testimony and an in-person witness. Snider consistently defended his requirement for oral testimony and his ultimate decision to release Bullock. For Snider, the requirement was an ordinary one given the seriousness of the crime, and the ambiguity or lack of evidence. What was unusual in this case was the backlash that Snider received in requiring oral testimony. The myth of Canada as a safe have for Black Americans fleeing danger or persecution held significant sway in the court of public opinion. However, on an institutional level, "colour-blind" justice only extended so far as was comfortable or convenient for the maintenance of the racial status quo.

Although Newcombe eventually defended Snider's decisions to the American authorities, he and others within the department questioned the ruling in the months that followed. Newcombe and his aids filled memoranda containing excerpts from legal texts as well as case precedent to argue that Snider was in the wrong for refusing the affidavits as evidence. However, there was little that could be done at the time of the extradition hearings to identify the man arrested as Matthew Bullock. The memoranda noted that the continued interest in the case was largely due to American opposition to the ruling. In a private memorandum dated August of 1922 Newcombe noted that he was not convinced that Snider's decision was correct, and that he was "embarrassed"

²⁸⁶ Correspondence Judge Snider to Edmond Newcombe. 24 April 1922. Matthew Bullock. RG13-A-5, Volume number: 993, File number: 303. Library and Archives Canada. Ottawa, Ontario.

to have defended it.²⁸⁷ Though unsatisfied with the outcome, he largely considered it settled as far as international concerns went.

In Bullock's extradition case, Judge Colin Snider did try to uphold the letter of the law, and the principle of colourblind justice. That however could not negate the institutionalised white supremacy of the Canadian courts. It was only when the defendant was a Black man, and when the governor of the state in question contested the decision, that the Canadian justice system considered typical procedures excessive or superfluous. Although the Canadian courts and the Canadian public lauded themselves for continuing the tradition of colourblind justice in the British fashion, that was not always the paramount concern. At multiple levels of government, from the Toronto Chief of Police to the Deputy Minister of Justice, living up to Canada's self-mythologized status as a safe have for Black Americans proved inconvenient for relations with the United States.

Matthew Bullock and the Ontario Press

In the eyes of white Ontario reporters, the young Bullock brothers were the model victims of Southern American racism. Their stories harkened back to the antebellum period which conveniently alluded to Canada's self-mythologized role as a haven for enslaved people escaping to the "promised land." These similarities were not lost on readers and writers at the time. Bullock's extradition provided the perfect opportunity to remind readers of the history of the underground railroad. Others used it as an opportunity to reiterate southern white Americans' lack of concern for (Black) human life.

The Bullock case took on a political angle. Thomas Church, a former Toronto mayor and sitting M.P. for Toronto North was particularly vocal in his support for Matthew Bullock.

²⁸⁷ Memorandum Edmond Newcombe to Mr. Narraway. 29 August 1922. Canada. Department of Justice. *Matthew Bullock File*. Library and Archives Canada. RG13-A-5, Vol. 993 No. 303.

Following Bullock's arrest Church announced that he would hold Mackenzie King responsible for Bullock's well being should he be deported and lynched. Several papers, including the *Border Cities Star* in Windsor and the *Evening Telegram* in Toronto published a portion of the letter. Church asserts that Bullock had "earned the right" to remain in Canada for his "industry and good behaviour" regardless of having broken Canadian immigration law.²⁸⁸ Church's letter suggested that there would be political ramifications if the inspector, David Reynolds, decided against Bullock, writing "if an immigration inspector representing your government interprets or misinterprets the law so as to force this prisoner Bullock out from the protection of British justice and Canadian law, I will hold you personally responsible in the House of Commons."²⁸⁹ In another letter, sent to George Graham, the Liberal MP for Essex South, Reynolds appealed for his support as a representative of a riding with a large Black population.²⁹⁰

Some commentators, particularly those in Liberal-leaning newspapers, held a critical view of Church's statement. In a letter published in the *Ottawa Citizen* and reprinted in the *Border Cities Star*, one commentator viewed Church's statement as entirely motivated by political considerations. For the writer, Church's expression of support was simply an attempt to gain votes for the Conservative candidate in an upcoming by-election in Kent and Essex counties, two ridings with considerable Black populations. The discussion of political ramifications was seen to be an overstep, with the article assuring readers that the case would "proceed in the usual, time-honoured way" and that Bullock would be deported in the "usual manner" if found in violation of Canadian immigration law.²⁹¹ For both Church, and those who viewed his support for Bullock with suspicion, the Canadian and British legal tradition was at stake. Church used the rhetoric of

²⁸⁸ "Bullock Case Will Be Probed" *Border Cities Star*. Windsor, Ont. Vol.7 No.112. 16 January 1922:1.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁰ *Border Cities Star*; Windsor, Ont. 14 January 1922 page 1 vol 7 no. 111

²⁹¹ "Bullock Case to be Handled in the Usual Way" *London Advertiser*: 16 January 1922. Vol. 57. No. 23234. 1,9.

“Canadian law” and “British justice” to advocate on behalf of Bullock, promoting a Canadian and British moral and legal superiority over the United States. For his detractors, the statement amounted to a “threat” against Mackenzie King -- a political overstep into what was ostensibly a judicial matter.²⁹²

Newspapers frequently noted similarities between Bullock’s case and that of John Anderson in 1862.²⁹³ Anderson, a formerly enslaved Black man, was wanted for murder in Missouri after stabbing Seneca Digges, a white planter, in 1854 in the process of his escape. Anderson lived in Ontario for several years until a former friend reported the incident after a falling out. Anderson was subsequently arrested. Anderson’s lawyer appealed to John A. Macdonald, then Attorney General, arguing that that Digges’ death was manslaughter incidental to the escape and thus not an extraditable offence under the treaty. Macdonald responded in writing stating “I have come to the conclusion with great regret, but without any doubt existing in my mind, that this party has committed the crime of murder; under these circumstances all I can do is to give you every assistance in testing the questions before the Courts or a Judge by *Habeas Corpus*.”²⁹⁴ The Queens Bench decided 2-1 to extradite Anderson to the United States as the Digges’ death met the standards for murder both in the United States and within the British Empire. Following the decision in Canada, the British courts intervened and released Anderson on a technicality though the initial 2-1 ruling itself was not overturned.²⁹⁵ Bullock, like Anderson before him, was a man whose life and liberty rested on remaining north of the border.

²⁹² “Bullock Case will Be Probed” *Border cities Star*; Windsor; Ont. January 16, 1922. Vol 7. No 112. 1.

²⁹³ For illustrative example see “Underground Railroad” *The Globe*; Toronto, Ont. 16 February 1922: 4.

²⁹⁴ Patrick Brode. *The Odyssey of John Anderson*. Toronto, Ontario. University of Toronto Press. 1889. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442681927>. 34. See also Gary Botting, *Extradition Between Canada and the United States*. Ardsley, New York: Transnational Publishers. 2005

²⁹⁵ *Ibid*.

The Globe's treatment of the Anderson case during Matthew Bullock's hearings framed it as one centered on "colour-blind" British justice and Canada's role in upholding it. They noted that the Superior court in Toronto ultimately decided against Anderson but assured readers that the decision was not one shaped by the Judges' prejudices. Rather "the essential and historical facts were few and simple and admitted" with the decision based entirely "on a point of law."²⁹⁶ The article disavowed Canadian racism while claiming inheritance of the British decision that released Anderson. It was "interesting," the author writes, that "all the resources of British law were invoked, and public sentiment was greatly stirred by a demand for the surrender of a negro who sought asylum in Canada." Canada, as a member of the Empire, and carrier of the British legal tradition could claim ownership of the "ashes of the British abolition agitation [that] were still hot in 1862" without reckoning with the fact that the Canadian court's decision against Anderson was itself the cause for British interference in the case.²⁹⁷

Fred Jacob, a reporter for the national edition of the *Chicago Defender*, as well as the literary commentator for the *Mail and Empire*, covered the Anderson case when discussing Bullock's place Canadian history. Bullock was the latest in the long line of beneficiaries of Canadian justice, according to Jacob. Beginning in 1789, Jacob positioned the Canadian and British empire's legal system as the ultimate reason for the successes of the escaped. "The history of the struggle of wits between Canada and the United States over the rights of the escaped slaves," Jacob wrote "is picturesque, and also has its romantic side." It was Canadians who "appear almost

²⁹⁶ "What Happened in 1862." *The Globe*; Toronto, Ont. 17 January 1922. 1. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/what-happened-1862/docview/1356372168/se-2>.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

invariably to have outwitted the slavers” rather than the enslaved themselves.²⁹⁸ Jacob centres white Canadians and the British legal tradition in his account of the abolition movement.

Not only were the Dominion and empire responsible for the safety of the formerly enslaved, but they also apparently benefited. The journey north was so arduous that it acted as a selective force, ensuring only the most industrious Black Americans would enter the empire. “It is said that Canada was fortunate in the class of escaped slaves that reached that country. Only those with more than ordinary character were able to complete the journey... without falling into the hands of some enemy of their freedom.”²⁹⁹ This romantic view of those who emancipated themselves or fled white supremacist violence and made it across the Canadian border suggested that only those with good character could do so or were welcome once they arrived.

The Globe ran articles telling its readers of the security Upper Canada provided the enslaved following the Fugitive Slave Act. They neglected to inform their readers, however, that slavery was legal in much of the British empire at the time. The association of Bullock’s case to the history of the underground railroad was likewise reflected in letters to the editor. One anonymous contributor asserted that Bullock was in even greater danger than he otherwise would have been if he were enslaved as he no longer had monetary value.³⁰⁰

The *Border Cities Star*’s coverage of Matthew Bullock positioned him as one in a long line of Black Americans seeking shelter from mob violence in Canada while simultaneously presenting him as the stereotypically unrefined, uneducated, and unrestrained Black southerner. By the time Bullock’s case came to national attention, community productions of minstrel shows were popular

²⁹⁸ Fred Jacob “Bullock Case Recalls Canada's Stand on Slave Question” *Chicago Defender*. 25 Mar 1922: 15.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁰ “Notes and Comments” *The Globe*; Toronto, Ont. 18 February 1922: 4.

in southwestern Ontario, as Chapter 1 detailed. This was especially true for those in Windsor and the surrounding areas where the annual production by the Knights of Columbus was a celebratory event. In fact, between the *Border Cities Star's* accounts of Bullock's case, they provided their readers with details of the Knight's 10th Annual Minstrel Show. They informed their readers of the high quality of that year's interlocutor and end men, praising their comedic abilities.³⁰¹ The *Aylmer Express* likewise included coverage of a local minstrel show alongside commentary on the case.³⁰²

Canadian accounts of Plummer's lynching and Matthew's escape was more melodrama than it was factual reporting, relying on an idea of a "typical" lynching. In her 2010 book *Lynching and Spectacle*, Amy Louise Wood traces the place of lynching photographs in American popular culture. During the Victorian period, posed photographs of lynch mobs and their victims served to highlight the respectable nature of the white crowd "contained and composed within the frame of the picture" reinforcing a unified sense of whiteness and white supremacy. Stopping to pose and be photographed was itself an aspect of the ritual of lynching. By the early 1900s, anti-lynching activists in the North such as Ida B. Wells reappropriated lynching photographs, using them to promote anti-lynching legislation, and to present Southern whites as intemperate, violent, and animalistic.³⁰³ Wood argues that anti-lynching activists succeeded, requiring Southerners to disavow lynching practices if they were to retain white supremacy. To be pro-lynching was to be barbaric, and as such not truly white.³⁰⁴ Ontario newspapers, in their coverage of the Plummer's lynching, were clearly familiar with contemporary depictions of lynchings. They recounted to

³⁰¹ "Knights Lay Final Plans for Big Show" *Border Cities Star*. Windsor Ontario. 21 January 192: 7.

³⁰² "Notes and Comments" *Aylmer Express*. March 23rd, 1922. Page 4.

³⁰³ Amy Louise Wood. *Lynching and Spectacle Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2009.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

readers that Plummer Bullock was hanged outside the Warrenton jail, offering no mention of a second victim.³⁰⁵ Rather than offering Ontario readers an accurate depiction of the lynching, reporters presented Plummer and Alfred murderers as particularly violent, uncivilised, and governed entirely by emotion as was common in contemporary anti-lynching writings in the northern states.

In addition to reporting a dramatized version of the lynching and Matthew Bullock's flight north, Ontario reporters presented him as a caricature of a Black man by quoting him in a thick southern dialect, and physically imposing and motivated by revenge. Both *The Globe* and *The Border Cities* star reported that Bullock, upon his arrest, advised that he would be lynched if returned to the United States, writing "Boys, ah'm gwine back to be strung up to the first telegraph pole dey comes to. They ain't never gwine to give me no trial, no sah. Dem Southern folks jes string up poor niggahs."³⁰⁶ Bullock's arrest *The Globe* informed readers that the "powerful" and "stalwart giant of a negro" was "determined to avenge his brother's death" and shot a number of men in the white mob and that he was, in turn, shot three times.³⁰⁷ Early reporting on Matthew Bullock's case, including by news outlets that would eventually support his cause, presented him as a mature adult capable of and eager for violence, rather than a young farm worker running from the mob that murdered his teenaged brother and another member of his community over 5 cents worth of apples. While surely Gov. Cameron also had a southern accent, it was Matthew Bullock – who had spent a significant portion of his childhood in upstate New York who sounded like an uneducated southerner on the page. Even when supportive of Bullock's efforts to remain in

³⁰⁵ "Says He's Wanted at Lynching Party" *The Globe*; Toronto, Ont]. 12 January 1922: 1

"The Case of Matthew Bullock" *The Globe*; Toronto, Ont. 16 January 1922: 4.

³⁰⁶ "Mat Bullock's Plight" *Border Cities Star*; Windsor, Ont. Vol 7 no 112. 16 January 1922. 5. And "Says He's Wanted at Lynching Party" *The Globe*; Toronto, Ont. 12 January 1922: 1

³⁰⁷ "Says He's Wanted at Lynching Party" *The Globe*; Toronto, Ont. [Toronto, Ont]. 12 January 1922: 1

Canada, the *Border Cities Star* still relied on stereotypes of Black Americans and popular lynching narratives to convey the events. Ontario newspaper accounts of the Plummer Bullock's and Alfred William's lynching presented racism as a fundamentally Southern American problem. Canadians did not lynch, therefore Canadians, in the narrative presented by the white press, were not racist.

The *Border Cities Star* used the Bullock family, Plummer's murder, and Matthew's efforts to remain in Canada, as details in a story that was ultimately about Canadian goodness and moral superiority. Although the writers were sympathetic to the Bullock family, their case was used to support a narrative of Canada as an inheritor of colour-blind British justice and as a safe haven for Black Americans fleeing oppression and persecution in the South. It was to Canada "which opposes lynching and boasts that it protects the coloured man *within his rights*" that Bullock fled.³⁰⁸ And it was Canadian honour, in addition to Matthew Bullock's well being, that was at stake in the deportation hearings. The authors reminded readers that Essex County served as "the mecca for southern slaves fleeing their cruel masters" and questioned whether Canada now would refuse to shelter the "descendants of these same slaves from the descendants of these slave holders."³⁰⁹ Failing to do so in the Bullock case was a matter of Canadian honour. As an "industrious member of Canada's population" and as a "good citizen" Bullock deserved freedom in Canada "conscious of the fact that in Canada, where he fled for protection, the colour of no man's skin injures his opportunity for progress."³¹⁰ The Bullock case served as a backdrop against which white Ontarians could express their moral and national superiority on matters of racial discrimination.

³⁰⁸ "Mat Bullock's Plight" *The Border Cities Star*; Windsor, Ont. Vol 7 no 112. 16 January 1922. 5.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

The *Border Cities Star's* reliance on blackface minstrelsy caricature was not limited to early coverage of the case. After Bullock's release in March of 1922 and Abernethy's threats that the Klan would cross the border to bring Bullock back south (which opened this chapter), *The Border Cities Star* once again quoted him in blackface dialect. Bullock denied he was afraid of the Klan but noted that he took precautions against their threats: "Ah goes straight from heah to work, and straight back afterwa'ds," he told reporters "and Ah'm mighty careful wheah Ah goes in the evenings."³¹¹ It was a version of a Black man that would have been familiar to Windsor audiences and *The Star's* readers. Matthew Bullock was a victim in a story Canadians told about themselves rather than a young man whose brother and sense of security had been taken by racist mob violence.

Though many Ontario newspapers supported Matthew Bullock's bid to remain in Canada, this was not universal. Some southwestern Ontario newspapers with white readerships, most often in areas with larger Black populations, were less sympathetic. These newspapers were often limited in their coverage of the case, and highlighted Bullock's Americanness and alleged criminality. Where *The Globe* painted Matthew Bullock and his family as the tragic victims of the "uncivilised" South, others portrayed him as an illegal immigrant and a fugitive from American justice. The initial reporting in the *London Free Press* suggest that Plummer and Alfred's deaths were the result of the "race riot" rather than a lynching.³¹² The *Free Press* did not take seriously the threat of lynching should Matthew have been returned to the United States, calling his and his supporters fears only "claims" and making light of the entire situation. For them the whole affair was nothing "but another political incident."³¹³ The also make a joke of the dehumanising way

³¹¹ "Fright From Ku Klux Denied by Bullock" *The Border Cities Star*; Windsor, Ont.

³¹² "Officers on Way to Get Negro" *London Free Press*, 16, January 1922: 5

³¹³ "A Refugee Case in 1860" *London Free Press*, 18 January 1922: 5. and "Untitled" *London Free Press*. 18 January 1922:2

which jail guard spoke to Bullock, calling him only “You,” placing the blame on Bullock himself for having used multiple aliases.³¹⁴ After Bullock’s rearrest in February, *The London Advertiser* likewise congratulated the Hamilton Police Department for their ingenuity and secrecy in making Bullock feel safe enough to return to the city.³¹⁵

Opposition to Bullock’s efforts to remain in Canada were not limited to editorial or writing staff. In a letter-to-the editor, an anonymous reader expressed his opposition to Bullock’s efforts to remain in Canada, and the *Border Cities Star’s* depiction of southern states. He first assured readers that his claims were unbiased as neither he himself, nor his family were from the South but having lived there for some time he had an accurate interpretation of the “race problem.” It was northerners, Canadians included in his view, who had the wrong interpretations of events.³¹⁶ He told readers that Bullock would be safe should he be returned to the United States, and that white Southerners were law-abiding citizens. He then goes on to tell readers that Bullock had been a “a good darkey” prior to his brother’s lynching.³¹⁷ For some, fears that Bullock would be lynched were overreactions from Black Canadians. Bullock was simply a common criminal and not one that was particularly deserving of protection under British law. In focusing on Canada’s supposed legal obligations to return Bullock as well as his supposed criminality, the writers and editors provided themselves plausible deniability that they were not opposing Matthew Bullock’s presence based on race.

For other papers, Bullock’s case was notable only in how little they discussed it. The *London Advertiser* was one such publication. The editors offered readers some initial reporting on

³¹⁴ “No Protection” *London Free Press*. 18 January 1922. 5.

³¹⁵ “Re-Arrest Bullock at Hamilton” *London Advertiser*. 17 February 1922. No. 23262:1.

³¹⁶ “A Protest from North Carolina” *The Border Cities Star*. Windsor, Ont. Vol. 7 No. 128. 03 February 1922: 21.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

the case but did not keep them informed of daily or weekly developments. Editors of the *Advertiser* only offered coverage of his arrests, and did not provide information about his release, his family, or the risks he would face if he were extradited. Apparently, they believed their readers would be interested in the arrest of a Black American man, but not in anything else about this case.

Conclusion

Canadian responses to Matthew Bullock's deportation and extradition hearing are reflective of wider attitudes towards race and national and imperial identities. Black Canadians' responses show the deep connections and sense of solidarity between communities on either side of the border. Bullock's Black supporters used the press to their advantage, shaping public opinion in his favour. For white Canadians, coverage of Bullock's case reflected two different conceptions of imperial Canadian identities and whiteness. For some, Bullock's plight provided the ideal space for performative expressions of Canadian "color-blindness" and praise for Britain's legal liberalism. By condemning American racism, Canadian reporters and politicians were able to disguise or disavow their own. For others, Bullock's case was the perfect opportunity for thinly veiled expressions of anti-Black racism and nativism. Praise for the British, and American, legal systems provided the excuse *not* to show their support for this young black fugitive. To their minds, their coverage was not racist, they were simply obeying and representing the law and the facts. The *Catholic Record*, based in London, Ontario was a notable exception to the self-congratulatory coverage while remaining sympathetic. The writers cautioned readers not to be "too self-righteous or boastful" of imperial justice given Britain's treatment of Ireland (but not ongoing segregationist practices or anti-Black racism in Canada).³¹⁸

³¹⁸ "The Case of Matthew Bullock" *The Catholic Record*; London Ont. https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_06663_2259

Anna Henderson, a Black stenographer in Ottawa who alerted the NAACP to Bullock's case, expressed her ambivalence towards the position of Black Canadians in Canada's settler society in one of her private letters to Walter White. "We have freedom here, of a sort," she wrote "but there is still room for improvement in the treatment of coloured people."³¹⁹ In the matter of Matthew Bullock, black and white Canadians expressed their ideas about just how much freedom Black people should have in Canada.

Matthew Bullock disappeared from the historical record following Abernethy's threats. His allies suggested that he left Canada for Britain, further into the safety of the empire. This however was not the case. According to Bullock family tradition, Matthew returned to the United States every year, turning up in the kitchen in the Bullocks' Washington D.C. home for each Christmas until his father's death. Rather than leaving Canada, Matthew Bullock took a new name, and made a home for himself. Who he became, and what became of him, is not known.

Members of the Bullock family, and the descendants of the 16 men arrested in Norlina have taken steps to commemorate the victims of the 1921 lynching, and the attack on the small town's Black community. The Warren County NAACP, the Warren County African American Historical Collective, UNC's Descendants Projects, and UNC's Humanities for the Public Good Initiative have produced a project "Seeking Justice" to educate the community. Thomas Park, a local playwright, drew from research on the case to present a re-enactment of the trial following the arrest to offer accounts of the experience of those involved, from the men arrested, the women in their families, and John Green, the jailor who was overpowered by the mob in Warrenton.

³¹⁹ Correspondence Anna Henderson to Walter White. 27 January 1922. *Papers of the NAACP*. Pt 8 Series A. Reel 1. Fr. 0304-05. Microfilm. University of Michigan Ann Arbor.

Press coverage of Matthew Bullock's deportation and extradition hearings reflected the ambiguous attitude Anglo-Canadians held for their Black neighbours. While white Canadians often did outwardly sympathise with the Bullock family and their hardships, that sympathy was self-serving. In protecting Bullock from Southern American racism, white Canadians could disavow their own. Canadians did not lynch, Canadians did not kowtow to American demands, Canadians were not racist. Like Adam Morse (1888 case discussed in chapter 1) and John Anderson before him, Matthew Bullock provided white Ontarians the opportunity to present themselves, and the British empire to which they remained loyal, as a place of racial harmony, one that was fundamentally different from the United States. At the same time, Canadians embraced typically American cultural expressions of whiteness and white supremacy while maintaining the institutional racism inherent in a settler colonial society and in the British empire more broadly. The eagerly went to see *Birth of Nation*, and watched or acted in Blackface minstrel shows, throughout the 1920s, demonstrating how normalized white supremacy was in their communities – even as they pretended it was only a US import.

Afterword/Epilogue

The Ku Klux Klan gained a foothold in Ontario in the early 1920s, and in Saskatchewan shortly thereafter. Rallies and other events received attention in the Ontario press; appalled and intrigued reporters offered sensational coverage of Klan members' statements. Klan organisers attempted to have the organisation incorporated in Canada at least twice.³²⁰ Although the organisation has received significant attention by American historians, their organisational efforts north of the border are understudied. With the exception of Constance Backhouse's chapter in *Color Coded*, there has not been a significant discussion on the anti-Blackness of Canadian Klansmen. Neither Allan Bartley's *The Ku Klux Klan in Canada* nor James Pitsula's *Keeping Canada British* offer an in-depth discussion of the way that anti-Blackness shaped Klansmen's self-perception in a Canadian or imperial context. Though much of the Klan's activities targeted Catholic and Asian Canadians, that does not mean that they were not influenced by popular anti-Black racism or "race science." There is no limit on the number of groups a white supremacist organization can target. Likewise, while some may have been critical of the Klan, which does not mean that they could or did recognise those same patterns and sentiments at home and in the empire. In 1924 writers at *The Globe* were quick to recognise the harmful nature of the Ku Klux Klan, and pointed to the United States as a uniquely racist nation, preoccupied with the minutia of racial difference. The contributor acknowledged that attempts by some Americans to further sub-

³²⁰ Correspondence Office of Provincial Secretary to J. Earl Lawson Esq. December 7th, 1925, Rg 3-6-0-574 No. MS 1691. Archives of Ontario, York University. Toronto, Ontario. J.H. Hawkins hired Toronto based law firm Godfrey, Lawson, and Corcoran. J. Earl Lawson, the lawyer who filled for incorporation would go on to represent both York West and York South as a Conservative MP and was briefly appointed as the Minister for National Revenue under R.B. Bennett. Lawson would later get involved in the entertainment business as the president of the Odeon Theatre board of directors. See Robert Morris Seiler, Tamara Palmer Seiler. *Reel Tim: Movie Exhibitors and Movie Audiences in Prairie Canada, 1896 to 1986*. Edmonton, Alberta: Athabasca University Press. Page 250.

divide the “white” races into “Alpine” and “Nordic” categories were unproductive and created resentment among those who were not considered fully white, or fully American:

In the United States, in addition to the racial discrimination against Negroes, the Ku Klux Klan is trying to ostracise Jews and Roman Catholics. To be a good American, if all these ideas are carried out, you must not only be white, but Nordic, and also a Protestant. To ostracise all those who do not possess these qualification is surely not the way to make them good citizens or lovers of American institutions.³²¹

The author, of course, does not mention Canadian and British imperial organisations which sought to further those distinctions within its own territory, or the way which people of colour were marginalised in Canada, or the widespread antisemitism or anti-Catholic sentiments present in the True North.

The bombing of St Mary’s Catholic Church in Barrie in 1926 illustrates the influence of anti-Black rhetoric on Klan violence targeting Catholics.³²² As previously discussed, Barrie residents had ready access to, and were frequent participants in, forms of entertainment that produced and reproduced racist ideas about Blackness which nurtured Klan violence. Although the Canadian Klan largely targeted Catholics, Canadian Klansmen and women did not live in a racial vacuum. The idea of whiteness presented by the Canadian Klan, like whiteness generally, did not exist independently of ideas about Blackness, citizenship, or national and imperial belonging.

On May 23rd, 1926, approximately 150 Klansmen and women from across Ontario attended a rally in Barrie, a disappointing turnout due to poor weather. Even with the rain, thousands of residents lined the streets to watch the speeches and the initiation of new members. C. Lewis Fowler, the Canadian Kligrapp (Secretary) told the gathered crowd of the organisation’s aims: maintaining the purity of Anglo-Saxon and Celtic blood, ensuring Anglo-Saxon control of

³²¹ “Nordics and Others.” *The Globe*; Toronto, Ont, 20 June 1924. 4. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/nordics-others/docview/1351241473/se-2>.

³²² “Three Klansmen Sent for Trial Will Appear at Fall Assizes” *Barrie Examiner*, 1 July 1926, p. 1

Canadian lands, and the protection of Protestant Christianity and the English language. During the speech Fowler railed against interracial marriage, calling it a crime greater than either murder or arson, and called to have businesses started by immigrants appropriated to native-born white Anglo-Saxon Canadians. Fowler's ire was directed towards laundry and restaurant owners, as well as leather, textile, and movie theatre owners.³²³ In Barrie, these businesses were run by or employed Asian-Canadians and Southern and Eastern European immigrants. According to the 1931 census only 37 Barrie residents were of Chinese descent. A small number of families were Southern or Eastern European descent, and none were listed as black.³²⁴ The inclusion of movie theatre owners would have been salient to Barrie residents. John Saso, an Italian immigrant, was one of the leasers and operator of the New Dreamland theatre.³²⁵ The settler colonial project called Canada, according to the KKK, was to be one by and exclusively for white Protestants of British origin. The *Barrie Examiner's* editorial section was more tempered in its messaging than the Klan. The *Examiner* noted that while interracial marriage was "generally undesirable and objectionable" to the "Britisher," or white Anglo-Canadian it was "beyond reason" to call it worse than murder.³²⁶ Fowler, like Klan organisers across North America, drew on local fears and anxieties to garner support and dues-paying members. Much of the rhetoric presented by the Ku Klux Klan that day would not have been incredibly radical to Ontarians of the 1920s—English language schooling and opposition to Catholic schools were common political concerns among Ontario Conservatives as seen with the passage of Regulation 17, and interracial marriage was generally seen as

³²³ "Ku Klux Klan's Visit to Barrie Attracts Crowd." *Barrie Examiner*. 27 May 1926, p. 1

³²⁴ Canadian Census 1931 Chinese residents of Barrie were employed either in laundries or food services. Eastern and Southern European immigrants worked in a variety of fields, but were generally employed as labourers, salespeople or were small business owners.

³²⁵ Aaron E. Armstrong. 2021. "The Eternal Triangle of Barrie Moviedom: Reproducing Metropolitan Cinema Competition in the Hinterland." *Ontario History* 113 (2): 151–66 <https://doi.org/10.7202/1081111ar>. The Saso family, like many Barrie families took part in amateur blackface minstrel performances As previously discussed, the Saso's son Charles played the violin in the St. Mary's parish minstrel show in 1924.

³²⁶ *Barrie Examiner*, Vol. 63. No. 21. 27 May 1926, p. 4.

extraordinary.³²⁷ It was Klan tactics, not Klan views, that were problematic, just as it was Klan violence, but not racism, they had critiqued about *Birth of a Nation*.

The Klan rally in May was just one of the anti-Black spectacles present in Barrie that spring. Two weeks before the Klan gathered in the town, a touring production of *Birth of a Nation* stopped at a local theatre. In addition to a touring production of *Birth of a Nation*, the Kiwanis Club put on one of their annual productions that May.³²⁸ The 1926 Kiwanis Club “Minstrel Mimics” performance “follow[ed] the usual form” of a two parts that included featured classic minstrel songs, popular ballads and at least two skits; one about golfing, and another about a shipwreck on a “cannibal island.”³²⁹ As Chapter 1 established, Barrie residents had ready access to, and were frequent participators in, forms of entertainment that reinforced anti-Black racism, and nurtured Klan violence. Apparently, the confluence of this Klan rally and anti-Black popular culture entertainment had that effect in 1926, just 4 years after Matthew Bullock’s arrest in Hamilton.

The 1926 Klan rally on Barrie likely would have been an unremarkable one had it not been for the action of one of the members initiated into the organisation that night. William Skelly, an immigrant from Belfast, at the direction of local Klansmen Clare Lee (a barber and the local Kligrapp/secretary), and William Butler (the local Kleagle/recruiter) placed a stick of dynamite in the boiler room of St. Mary’s Catholic church. Fortunately, no one was injured, and the damage done was relatively minor.³³⁰ The jury, which included multiple Orange Order members, found

³²⁷ Kevin P. Anderson. *Not Quite Us: Anti-Catholic Thought in English Canada Since 1900*. Montreal; McGill-Queen’s University Press. 2019

³²⁸ “Advertisement” *The Barrie Examiner*. Vol 62. No. 17. 29 April 1926. 4.

³²⁹ “Minstrel Mimics Greatly Enjoyed by Packed House” *The Barrie Examiner*. Vol 62. No. 17. 29 April 1926.

1. This skit featured two Black sailors from a British ship marooned on an island, where they encountered the king of the island, slaves, and “fair island belles”. Other characters, presumably not in blackface included a British army officer and the Prime Minister—whether British or Canadian prime minister is not specified.

³³⁰ “Three Klansmen Sent for Trial Will Appear at Fall Assizes” *Barrie Examiner*, 1 July 1926, p. 1

Skelly, Butler, and Lee guilty. At the trial, the Judge congratulated the jury for their decision despite their Orange membership.³³¹ The Klan's anti-Catholicism, like its anti-Blackness, was not unique to the organisation, and a guilty verdict for all three was not guaranteed.

The Klan declined in popularity following the St. Mary's church bombing. A number of Ontario Klan organisers moved west to Saskatchewan where they were influential in growing the organisation. There, Klan organisers helped to shape the outcome of the 1929 provincial election which ended 25 years of Liberal party governance. The Klan promoted a number of political goals that were ultimately put in place by the new Conservative government including provincial control over natural resources and the 1931 ban on French language schooling.³³² That ban was only repealed 40 years later in 1971.

The tendency of white Canadians to point to the United States to minimise or disavow anti-Black racism and nativism in Canada continues. White Canadians have and continue to participate in far-right, white supremacist terrorist organisations. Today, several domestic and international white supremacist terrorist organisations are active in Canada. Canadians continue to be some of the most active contributors to white supremacist online forums. While not the mainstream of Canadian politics, the presence of these groups matters. The self described "Freedom Convoy" protests in Ottawa in January of 2022 featured multiple Nazi flags, comparison between vaccine mandates and the Holocaust, and some appropriating an Indigenous drumming circle while chanting "yabba-dabba-do."³³³ At least one participant also sought to use the protection of the US

³³¹ "Canada Wants no Dynamiters Says Judge" *Barrie Examiner*, 21 October 1926, p. 2

³³² James M. Pitsula. *Keeping Canada British: The Ku Klux Klan in 1920s Saskatchewan*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013.

³³³ Brett Forrester "Soft Police Approach to anti-vax Protest Reveals 'Pre-Racism'" *APTN*. 31 January 2022/
<https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/soft-police-approach-to-ottawa-anti-vax-protest-reveals-pure-racism-say-critics/>

Constitution's 1st amendment to protect his right to free speech – a losing argument in a Canadian court.³³⁴

White supremacy, and institutional racism are not, of course, limited to the “alt-right” or paramilitary terrorist organisations. From elected heads of government to university campuses, blackface remains a relatively common occurrence in Canada. Frequently written off as either ignorance or “fun,” there were not, until recently, many meaningful discussions about contemporary Canadian whiteness or the enduring nature of blackface. Phillip S.S. Howard examines contemporary Canadian blackface in educational institutions in his recent book *Performing Postracialism*. His work shows how blackface and the contemporary conversations about it reflect modern anti-Blackness, ideas about the nation-state, and the structures of higher education. Contemporary Canadian blackface, he argues, is a part of the “afterlife of slavery” and a continuation of the processes by which Blackness is marked as the antithesis of personhood and the identities and bodies of Black people taken piecemeal for white consumption.³³⁵ Participants in contemporary blackface are frequently rewarded by their peers. In two separate instances, one at the University of Toronto in 2009, and another at Brock University in 2014, white students were awarded cash prizes by their peers for their black face Cool Runnings costume. In her 2020 memoir *Eternity* Martis recounted her experiences of anti-Black racism at Western University and in London, Ontario including one incident in which three white students in blackface harassed Martis and other people of colour at a local bar.³³⁶ Blackface has also been a feature of white Canadians' depictions of ostensibly southern American racism. Two white men, one in blackface

³³⁴ Martha Jackman “Protesters need to understand: Canada’s Charter is not the U.S. Bill of Rights” *The Globe and Mail*. 22 February 2022. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-protesters-need-to-understand-canadas-charter-is-not-the-us-bill-of/>

³³⁵ Howard. *Performing Postracialism*. 2023. 22-23.

³³⁶ Eternity Martis. *They Said This Would Be Fun: Race, Campus Life, and Growing Up*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart. 2020. 23-32

with a noose around his neck and another wearing Klan regalia and a Confederate flag won the prize for “Most original Costume” at the 2010 Halloween party at the Campbellford, Ontario Royal Canadian Legion Hall. The man in KKK costume led the other around the party by the end of the rope. Both men denied that they, or their actions were racist or endorsed the Klan.³³⁷

The relationship between blackface and academic settings is not limited to university students. In 2018 multiple photos and a video surfaced of prime minister Justin Trudeau, dressed in brown and blackface in the midst of federal election campaigns. The photos date from the 1990s to early 2000s, spanning from his time as a high school student to his time as a private high school teacher.³³⁸ CanadaProud, a self-described “grassroots” Conservative Party advocacy group released additional photos via Twitter in during the 2021 election. The photos were released to the press or directly by Trudeau’s political opponents. In both cases, they did little to sway the outcome of the elections. Blackface is not a scandal which cannot be recovered from in present day Canada.

Although the context, and form of blackface has changed in Canada since its decline in popularity in the 1960s, it remains a relevant expression of whiteness and anti-Black racism in Canada. Many of those who have and continue to engage in blackface deny that their intentions are racist or were motivated by racist feeling. However, as noted by Howard, “questions about whether a blackface wearer intended to be racist or was ignorant of the inherent racism of blackface are largely misguided.” The “racial pleasure” to be found at the edges of acceptable humour, and

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ The released photos feature black or brownface in the context of a competition or costume. One features Trudeau dressed in blackface imitating Harry Belafonte as a part of a high school talent show. Another features him dressed in a turban as a part of an “Arabian Nights” themed party. The video, taken at some point in the 1990s features Trudeau in a white tee-shirt, black face paint and a curly black wig.

through the dehumanising consumption and emulation of Black people as parts does not require conscious intent.³³⁹

As was the case in for Matthew Bullock and Black Canadians in the early 20th century, immigration and border control remain a key factor in determining the belonging of Black people in Canada today. As discussed by Robyn Maynard, immigration, detention, deportation, and the difficulty of attaining refugee status remain methods through which the Canadian state maintains control over Black bodies within its boundaries. Black refugees are frequently met with suggestions that Canada is accepting too many applicants or, in the case of Somalian applicants, denial of applications despite persisting conditions which make life in their home countries untenable.³⁴⁰

In addition to ongoing concerns about immigration, there remain significant disparities in policing. Canadians often point to structural concerns with American policing, but until recently there is little self reflection on anti-Black racism within municipal, provincial, and federal policing agencies in Canada. A 2020 Ontario Human Rights Commission report, using data gathered between 2013 to 2017 showed that compared to other groups, “Black people are more likely...to be arrested, charged, over-charged, struck, shot or killed by Toronto police.”³⁴¹ Though only 8.8% of the population of Toronto, Black residents make up 32% of charges and 34% of “out-of-sight” charges such as driving without insurance, which could only be known if a driver was stopped and questioned by police.³⁴² Black people are over represented in instances of police violence including

³³⁹ Howard. *Performing Post Racialism*. 2023. Kobo.

³⁴⁰ Maynard. *Policing Black Lives*. 2017. 162-171.

³⁴¹ Ontario Human Rights Commission. *A Disparate Impact: Second interim report on the inquiry into racial profiling and racial discrimination of Black persons by the Toronto Police Service*. January 2023.

³⁴² *Ibid*. The report also found that Black people were more likely to have their charges withdrawn by and less likely than other groups to be convicted suggesting Toronto police are more likely to stop and charge Black people on limited or non-existent evidence.

28.8% of use of force cases, 36% of shootings, 61% of deadly encounters, and 70% of deaths caused by police shootings.³⁴³ The disparities are reflected in the TPS own analysis. Their report, published in 2022 showed that Black, Indigenous, Middle Eastern and South Asian Torontonians were overrepresented in strip search and use of force statistics collected in 2020. Visible minorities were also more likely to be subject to violent outcomes when interacting with police, regardless of the initial reason for a call or stop. Toronto police were between 1.5 and 2 times as likely to point a gun at Black, Middle Eastern and South Asian Torontonians regardless of whether or not they perceived someone to be armed.³⁴⁴

The historic and ongoing violence of settler colonialism has and continues to shape Canadian whiteness. Since the “discovery” of unmarked graves at Residential schools across Canada in 2021 there has been a growing recognition among white Canadians of Indigenous genocide. Understanding systemic racism and whiteness within a settler colonial society such as Canada will not be complete without an accompanying discussion of the ways that anti-Black racism has and continues to shape the Canadian whiteness. Including histories of Black Canadians in the classroom is important but it is not the only step. Histories of the Black Loyalists, the Underground Railroad, the Wilberforce Colony, and individuals like Mary Ann Shadd Cary and Josiah Henson and their place within Canada are important. Equally so, however, are the histories of the racism they faced from white residents and the state upon arrival. Slavery, discrimination, and violence are also Canadian history. The presence and popularity of genres like blackface minstrelsy and works like *Birth of a Nation* within Canada are simply two of the more visible expressions of anti-Black racism embraced by Canadians in the 19th and early 20th century.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Toronto Police Services. *Race and Identity based Data Collection Strategy: Understanding Use of Force and Strip Searches*. 15 June 2022. https://www.scribd.com/fullscreen/578462243?access_key=14x2zy69z8ecwa0wzhbu. Slide 43-47.

Canadians had access to and readily embraced forms of media which presented Black people as inherently other, lesser, and unsuited to full citizenship in the settler colonial project.

Well meaning white people with good intentions have and continue to uphold and reproduce the structures of power which give us—that is white people—undue advantage. One does not need to consciously identify as a racist to be racist or to cause harm. The process of unlearning white supremacy, and the ways in which one’s own whiteness shapes experiences and perspective is one that is deeply personal and that can be uncomfortable. It is also not a process that ever stops. Recognising the place of anti-Blackness in Canadian history is necessary to understanding contemporary inequalities. Just as structural racism is not solely a personal problem, it cannot be “fixed” with purely personal solutions. From education to public and institutional policies, meaningful Reconciliation and anti-racism require large scale collective action.

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