

SEMAJI

The Official Newsletter of the BCRC



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Word from the Team

Written by Tenisha Valliant

It is a new year and the BCRC has expanded. We are more than happy to be able to provide even more services to the English-speaking Black Community than before. We now have an office housing a Managing Director, Finance Director, Communications and Outreach Coordinator, Administrative Assistant and a Researcher and Youth Animator tasked to work for the Living History Oral History project.

We all work on our mandated duties but above all, we are here to respond to the mission of the organization: **BCRC is a growing, resource-based organization that strengthens community capacity by providing professional support to organizations and individuals in need. The Centre is committed to helping visible minority youth rekindle their dreams, and achieve their full potential.**

There is much to look forward to at the Centre, including a new Weekly Community Update sent via email and accessible through the BCRC website, a new look to the Semaji Monthly Newsletter, a revamped Senior Project, the annual Summer Blood Drive, the summer launch of the audio memoryscapes produced by the Living History Black History Research Interns, and much, much more! Stay up-to-date with all of our upcoming events via Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and through the BCRC website.

Enjoy this edition of Semaji.



Please join us for an opportunity to learn about this history project and how you can contribute. We want your support, comments and ideas!

COMMUNITY FORUM

October 24, 2018 - 5:00 P.M. - 7 P.M.

UNIA 2471 Notre-Dame, Montreal

H3J1N9

Light snack will be served.

Living History: 100 Years of Black History, Culture and Heritage Project Update

Written by The Living History Team

The BCRC's "Living History: 100 Years of Black History, Culture and Heritage" Team is happy to announce a successful start to the project. For the past few months our team has been hard at work researching Montreal's Black history, connecting with partner organisations, recruiting research interns and hosting a community forum for feedback about the project.

On October 24, the Living History Team hosted members of Montreal's English-speaking Black community in the UNIA's Liberty Hall for a public forum on the project. Here, the team summarised our current research and presented a shortlist of 20 potential topics for the memoriescapes. These topics include the Coloured Women's Club, Doudou Boicel's Rising Sun Celebrity Jazz Club, the Black Writer's Congress of 1968, the Black Community Council of Quebec and many others.

The community was supportive of our work so far, but reminded us of the importance of moving history outside the confines of books and into popular discussion. "How is Cote-des-Neiges going to be featured in this project?" and "What about the Black Youth Television Workshop?" were a few of the questions and suggestions our audience posed.

It seems like our research had only scratched the surface of Montreal's Black history.

The Community Forum was also attended by numerous educational institutions interested in Living History: 100 Years of Black History, Culture and Heritage.

Representatives of Dawson College's Dawson Oral History Project confirmed their support and our team is now in talks with them regarding future collaboration. Their online archive of oral histories is impressive and they also bring valuable experience and expertise regarding interview ethics. We look forward to a close collaboration and thank them for their support. You can check out the Dawson Oral History Project on the web:

<http://dohp.dawsoncollege.qc.ca/>

A special thanks to Mervyn Weekes of Montreal's UNIA for hosting our Community Forum in Liberty Hall. Your support has helped make this project a success!

Are there any sites, peoples or organizations that you would like to make sure are included on our (ever-growing) list? Please let us know by emailing livinghistory@bcrmontreal.com

Brief Histories: Montreal's UNIA

Written by The Living History Team

In 1914, Marcus Garvey formed the Universal Negro Improvement Association, a black nationalist fraternal organization focused on black pride and racial unity. Garvey believed that uniting Africa and its diaspora would help Black communities to thrive and overcome the disadvantages resulting from centuries of slavery and colonialism. In 1917, Garvey visited Montreal and two years later members of Montreal's Black community founded the first division of the UNIA in Canada. The organization has provided social, educational and recreational opportunities for Blacks, while also celebrating a proud African heritage.

June 9, 2019 marks the UNIA's Liberty Hall's centennial celebration; we hope to see everyone at 2741 Notre Dame Street West to help celebrate Marcus Garvey and his lasting legacy.



The Right Honourable Marcus Mosiah Garvey, founder of the UNIA and a Jamaican national hero. (b. 1887- d. 1940)

Living History Introduction to Oral History Workshop

Written by The Living History Team

Oral history is necessarily political. The discipline itself arises from the impetus to expand the historical archive and to create spaces for voices that have traditionally been marginalized. Concordia University's Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS) has emerged as a leading institute in this discipline. COHDS maintains the political impulse of oral history by opening their workshops and equipment to the larger Montreal community. Individuals outside of the university interested in or working on oral history projects are invited to become affiliates of COHDS and have access to all their resources free of cost. Living History: 100 Years of Black History, Culture and Heritage is a proud affiliate of COHDS and would like to offer a special thanks to Dr. Stéphane Martelly for giving a personalized Introduction to Oral History Workshop to our research interns.

During the workshop, we learned that the process of an oral history interview is meant to challenge traditional understandings of authority and expertise. Scholars such as Michael H. Frisch have stressed the importance of deconstructing the traditional researcher-researched dichotomy. The interview is a dialogue most often led by the interviewee. We all hold different forms of knowledge and oral history works to allow these different forms to coexist and build on one another.

Along with the notion of shared authority comes an understanding by the researcher that they do not own the stories they have been told. The researcher may think of themselves as a curator, but the story remains that of the individual or community that was willing to share. Therefore, a standard of interview ethics and informed consent are necessary aspects of oral history. In the coming months, the research interns of Living History: 100 Years of Black History, Culture and Heritage will have an additional workshop concerning interview ethics alone, to make sure that our project continues to share authority with its participants.

Dr. Martelly also taught us that there are three steps in oral history work: collection, processing, and dissemination. Often, the phase of dissemination proves most difficult to ensure shared authority. Oral history must have a variety of outcomes and be made accessible, first, to the communities involved in the project, and second, to the wider public. Simply archiving interviews or publishing an article in an academic journal is not good enough.

In the case of Living History: 100 Years of Black History, Culture and Heritage, there will be numerous outcomes: memoryscapes, a website, an exhibition, workshops with schools and community groups, and articles in newspapers such as Community Contact and journals like the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network's Quebec Heritage News. It is our hope to highlight the history of English-speaking Black Montrealers, celebrating it and making it visible for all to see and, in this case, for all to hear.

References

Frisch, Michael H. *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1990.

**Are you interested
in finding out
more about
COHDS? Visit their
website:
[http://storytelling
.concordia.ca/](http://storytelling.concordia.ca/)**



Dr. Martelly and BCRC research interns after a successful oral history workshop



Remembering October 1968

Written by The Living History Team

Edited by Dr. Clarence Bayne

Blacks in Montreal have been organising to better their communities since first arriving here. One only needs to look at the legacy of institutions such as the Coloured Women's Club, Union United Church, the Negro Community Centre, the Universal Negro Improvement Association and many others to see such dedication. However, it was not until October 4-6, 1968 that the first national conference involving Blacks throughout Canada was held-- the Conference of Black and Canadian Organisations. Just one week later, from October 11-14, Montreal also hosted the Congress of Black Writers. Both conferences grew out of the evolving dynamics of the Caribbean Conference Committee and, after 50 years, still hold relevance to Black life and social

entrepreneurship in the Black communities of Montreal.

The Caribbean Conference Committee, originally known as the Conference Committee on West Indian Affairs, was a student-led initiative that began organising conferences in the 1960s. While some immigrant students planned to make Montreal their permanent home, others saw their education abroad as a temporary phase before returning home to their birthplaces. As waves of decolonisation swept the world many students hoped to return to their newly (or soon to be) emancipated nations to help build a better future.



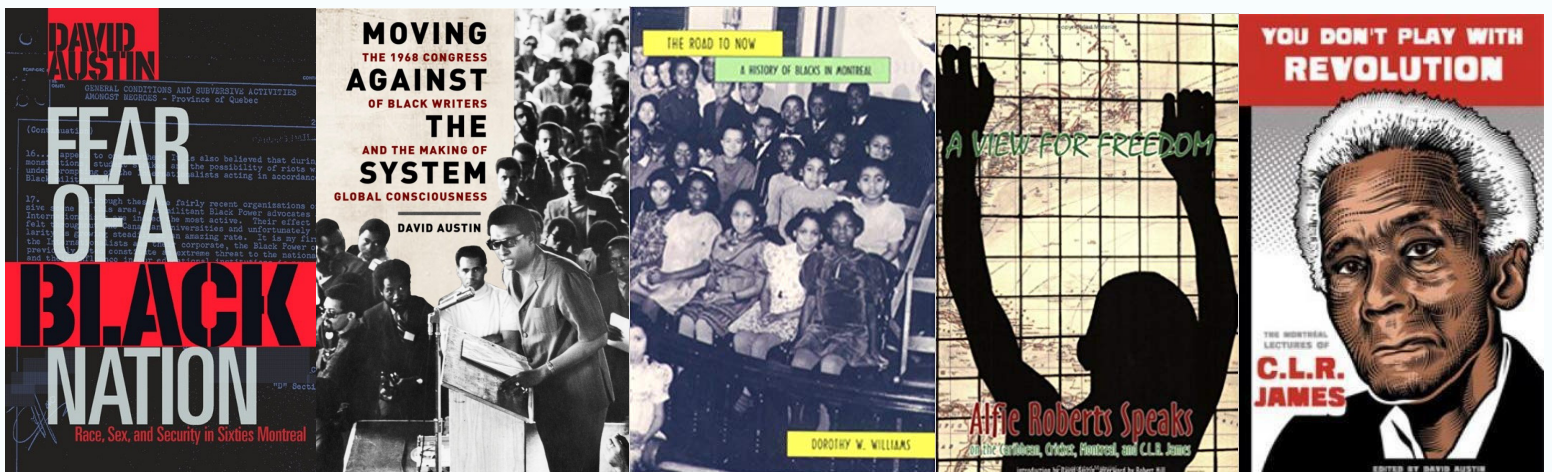
Initially, it was the "going home" students that provided the dominant leadership in the Caribbean Conference Committee. Early conferences invited speakers from the West Indies and focused on issues pertinent to the Caribbean. However, the larger Black community of Montreal--including students who wished to make Montreal their permanent home--were critical of this focus and advocated for further attention to the creation of mechanisms and new approaches to address local and regional problems. By 1967, the divisions between these two groups hit a breaking point when the leadership of the Caribbean Conference Committee decided that the next conference should be held in the West Indies. Members of the "staying here" group deposed of the "going home" leadership and changed the direction of the Committee, as shown through their decision to change their name to the

Canadian Conference Committee the following year. In October of 1968 this new leadership under Clarence Bayne enlisted the help of Ashton Lewis, Dorothy Wills and Patsy Townsend to organise a conference held at Sir George Williams University to address the "Problems of Involvement in the Canadian Society with Reference to Black People." This conference addressed concrete issues facing Blacks in Montreal, Quebec, and Canada as a whole, such as racism, exclusion, poverty, employability and housing. Speakers and scholars of local celebrity were invited to the conference including Dr. Howard McCurdy, Richard Lord, Gus Wedderburn, Frank Collins and Dan Hills. The Conference of Black and Canadian Organizations helped facilitate the creation of a network of Black leaders and organisations throughout Canada, ultimately leading to the creation of the National Black Coalition of Canada (NBCC).

A central objective of the NBCC was to give a distinct voice to the importance of local Black and Canadian thought relating to national issues and problems of development as well as participants in the international Black struggle and liberation movements.

The following week, members of the "going home" faction held a second conference at McGill University-- the Congress of Black Writers. In contrast to the previous conference's focus on domestic issues, the Black Writers' Congress took an internationalist perspective. Speakers at this conference were of international celebrity, including C.L.R. James, Stokely Carmichael, Walter Rodney and Lloyd Best. Over 2000 people packed into McGill's Student Union Ballroom to participate in this event.

Looking back, some scholars have stressed the importance of Black radicalism for social and political change. They have credited the Black Writers' Congress with helping to quicken the political awakening of Montreal's Black community. Direct connections have been drawn between the consciousness-raising efforts of the Black Writers' Congress and the Sir George Williams Protests that would occur a few months later. In contrast, others point to the tangible results of the Conference of Black and Canadian Organisations, such as the creation of the NBCC which represented the Black community on a national scale for over a decade. Furthermore, they argue that Montreal's Black community was consciously working for change well before the Caribbean radical left and American Black Power movements emerged in Montreal. In either case, October of 1968 should be remembered in Montreal as a time when Black communities gathered to envision alternative futures liberated from the injustices of racism and colonial capitalism



Further Reading

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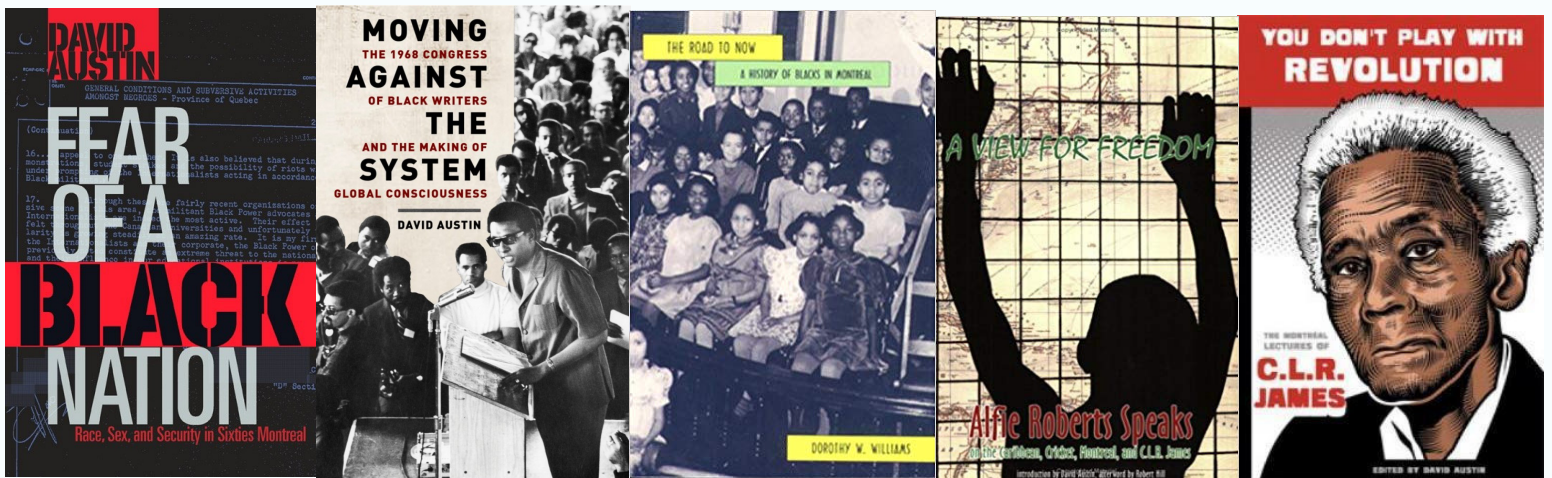
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ARTICLES FOR
SUBMISSION ARE ACCEPTED 30 DAYS PRIOR TO
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PHOTOS PLEASE SEND A JPEG WITH CREDIT.

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