

Semaji

Black Community Resource Centre

Supporting Youth, Building Communities, A Holistic Approach

Volume 6, issue 4



March 2009



We're spreading our wings at BCRC!

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BLACK HISTORY



By Dr. Dorothy Williams

Black history in Montreal is largely unknown. Sure, many people recognize that Blacks live in the Montreal region. And yes, during February many people go to exhibits, dances, concerts, occasional lectures and special events to celebrate Black History Month. It's a typical Montreal thing to do: we are quite adroit at exposing ourselves to new experiences in Black Montreal. Still, this does not change anything, as most Montrealers have little knowledge about Black history, and even less knowledge about Black history in Montreal.

I will even concede that many know about African-Americans, the great behemoth to the south. They can, if prodded, come up with a list of five perhaps ten significant African-Americans, be they male or female, with careers as writers, athletes, politicians, actors or even hip-hop stars.

Yet I challenge you to produce a list of similar personages in Canada. You can? Great, now narrow that list to Montreal-go ahead, ask your friends or family members to help. Aah, forget the list and just answer these quick questions: "What is the significance of August 1, 1834?" or "Why did the slave-owners in Montreal send Joseph Papineau to Quebec City in 1801? Here is an easy one: What was the most likely employment in Montreal for Black doctors, lawyers, or labourers up until the 1930s? Maybe a few will know two of the three, but I suspect that most readers are stumped on all of them. Sadly, I rest my case--nigh twenty years beyond Black History Month was first instituted in Canada and no further ahead.

As a writer and historian of Montreal history, my singular lens is on the impact of the Black presence on the island's development. So when asked "why Black History is important to Montreal" I could only think, "Because, Montreal's Black history is Montreal history."

Certainly we can acknowledge that the Italians, Irish, or Greeks, the Chinese or Portuguese and others brought unique

elements to the greatness that is Montreal. Well take note, since the early beginnings of Ville-Marie, Blacks too, alongside the French have spiced up the tiny colony. Then with the influx of the British, the Hessians and Jews the mix morphed again, all the while, helping to create the "joie" or "flavor" that permeates our Montreal megapolis.

Historically, for Blacks Montreal has been a unique spot on the continent—at once a terminus, a stop-over, and even a haven. For others, they called the city home; they shone brightly here when few other cities would let them rise. Sometimes it was just enough to be left alone, at peace to work and raise their family. While other Blacks had to "make do" as they pushed up against the low glass ceiling that limited their possibilities. Fear sometimes dogged Blacks, and other times, despair. Yet the beacon on Montreal seemed always to attract more Blacks. Over time as their presence spanned the urban landscape some Blacks eventually pushed the ceiling higher.

"Montreal's Black history is Montreal's history"

So why is Black history important to Montreal? It's a tale of a community survival, success, and failure in a city whose social, cultural and economic development helped to shape a province and a country. Blacks have always influenced and contributed in all these areas. Montreal's Golden Mile built by railway wealth took full advantage of the city's Black labour. Montreal's world-renown jazz has its roots in the early Black speakeasies and clubs where the genius of Black musicians generated enormous wealth in the twenties during Montreal's golden age of jazz. Black history is important because it is an example courage and determination in this city. It is a narrative of resilience, of a multi-lingual and multi-cultural mix that makes Montreal home to so many others.

For interesting Montreal Black History facts, see page 13

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

It definitely is shaping up to be a big year at BCRC.

Black History Month saw our resident historian, Dr. Dorothy Williams, busy with numerous speaking engagements, from CTV to the Atwater Library. But Black History is not just for February. Any time of the year, whether you're White, Black or any shade in between, we can assist you in learning about Black History in Montreal, our collective heritage.

February also saw our Luigi Marshall as a special panelist at Batshaw Youth and Family Services' Black History Month Panel Discussion. He joined distinguished guests Judge Juanita Westmoreland-Traore, publicist Pat Dillon-Moore and columnist Yvonne Sam in speaking on the theme "Yes we can." BCRC continues to maintain strong ties to Batshaw as a member of their Multi-cultural/Multi-racial Committee (MR/MC) where we give input and a community's perspective on issues affecting Black families and Black children under the aegis of youth-protection.

Moving forward, we are currently working on forming two reading groups for advanced students/readers. A group of elementary students and a group of high school students will both be assigned lists of books by authors of the Black diaspora. There will be discussions designed to support reading in our community and to encourage our youth. Please forward us names of children that you think would be interested in joining our group. Jason Selman will be heading up the project and he is more than happy to give you further information.

We are also working hard to develop volunteerism to support community initiatives. We actively recruit volunteers for both our organizational needs and for the Black community at large. We post ads, attend volunteer fairs, and interview prospective volunteers to determine their interests and match them with organizations within the community. We are currently exploring partnerships with the city's four major post-secondary English educational institutions in order to identify prospective interns and volunteers. Are you interested in supporting our community's institutions? Our application period is open year-round because there is always a need for volunteers willing to utilize their gifts or hone their skills to the community's benefit.

You can also help by increasing

Black representation on Boards of Directors, many of which are looking to add representation from members of cultural communities. We are planning to offer two workshops designed to make a difference and articulate change. These workshops will be organized to help you understand the process, how non-profit and para-public boards work, how to be nominated or and how to run as a candidate. This is a perfect opportunity for youth to gain experience, to network with like-minded individuals and to share and/or develop leadership, communication, and people skills. Serving on a Board is an excellent way to give back to the community by offering new ways of thinking and by bringing cultural interests to the fore. For those interested, please contact Dorothy.

On the education front we're playing a small role in a component of the upcoming updated Black demographic project. We will be assisting McGill Researcher Anne-Marie Livingstone as she oversees Black youth conducting participatory research involving community asset mapping.

"Black education needs family support." This perspective is addressed in the Family Prevention program at our partner, the Quebec Board of Black Educators (QBBE). Over this past year, Dorothy and Dr. Clarence Bayne, a Board Director at both BCRC and QBBE, have both been involved in the evaluation of QBBE's outreach program which works with youth in the Walkley Street area. With support of the Ville de Montreal, the team's evaluation has been geared toward the efficacy of incorporating social and emotional learning into QBBE's programming in their after-school and weekend offerings.

We continue to be involved in Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) activities. As youth is one of our major areas of focus, we are actively involved in presenting the QCGN Youth Standing Committee's 5-Year Strategic Plan for English-speaking Youth in Quebec. Please contact us or the QCGN if you wish to know about the type of action English-speaking youth want to take and about how you can support their endeavors. Other QCGN activities that we were involved in included membership on the QCGN Arts, Culture and Heritage Council, and the QCGN Research Advisory Committee. Specifically, this Committee is keenly interested in developing the IT infrastructure, the content, and community support for the design and launch of a massive database that will support English-speaking organizations in Quebec. Ultimately its goal is

to offer Best Practices, options for advocacy, information on policies, and even historical information, all with the goal of strengthening organizational programming.

Over the past year our membership on the Community Table has strengthened. We sit on several committees including the annual Permanent Review Committee, the Strategic Marketing Committee for the re-branding of the Table and its CEDECs, and finally, the Awards Committee. The Community Table is uniquely engaged in community capacity building which includes increasing the economic viability of English-speaking residents in Quebec. This is a resource for BCRC and a valued partner in working to assist oft-neglected communities. Plans at BCRC are underway to redefine our employability model and support job market integration, specifically amongst Black graduates, with the goal of encouraging the long-term residency of our best and finest minds. We feel it is important to nurture these recent graduates by educating them about the city's offerings, about the Black community and by helping them to find meaningful employment in the region.

A significant aspect of our Strategic Matrix is the area of health impacts and outcomes in our community. We have teamed up with the East Island Health Network situated in Ville d'Anjou. This network comprises a host of other community and health groups and aims to develop programs to educate the wider community on access to health services in the English-speaking communities.

Most Quebecers are aware of the chronic nursing shortage and we have responded to requests to increase the odds for groups of student nurses. Thus, for several months, we have supported the training and mentoring of student nurses eager to succeed in their final exams. The young women from several ethno-cultural communities meet in BCRC's venue to practice and study their exam requirements. This extra boost will, we hope, inspire many graduates to consider permanent work in Quebec medical facilities, keeping our skilled labour working for the benefit of their communities. Further, we are set to encourage these graduates to "give back" by opening opportunities for them to volunteer in projects with youth and families.

After years of research, on February 17 we launched the "Black Communities Speak Out On Violence" report. This study was conducted in partnership with groups in the Hai-

tian, and African communities as well as participation from government departments. The report talked to the community members, its youth and adults and records their responses to questions about the violence they face in their everyday lives or in the lives of others. They talked frankly about gangs in Montreal, racist perceptions about violence and Blacks, about bullying in schools, about violence perpetuated through the unreasonable expectations of parents and the uncontrollable outcomes of state violence through unwarranted police actions against individuals.

We are also maintaining our ties to the African and Caribbean Students' Network (ACSioN). We were able to question Black

students as to what they see as the factors that contribute to their success.

Finally, our Mini-Poste program grows stronger and stronger. In this issue of Semaji, you can read about it in French (we're trying something new). We will soon be launching the Mini-poste website where all partners will be able to get up-to-date information about the program. Our apologies for the recent issues with the BCRC website. We will be launching a redesigned version very shortly.

As always, we invite you to let us know how we can be assistance to you individually or to your organization. We are open to working with all who seek to further the

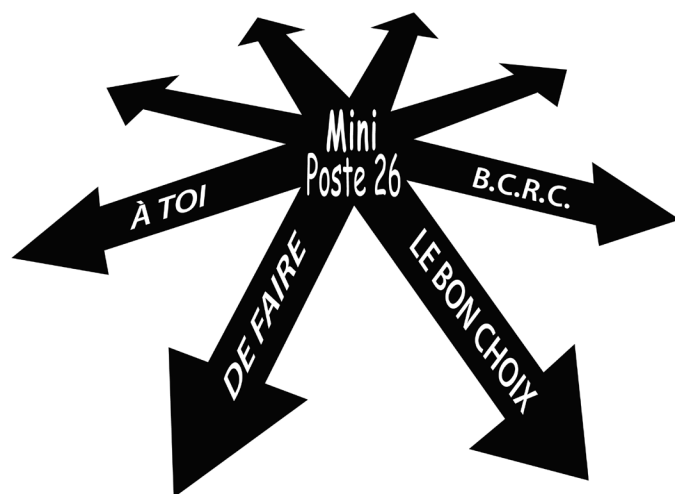
interests of our community. Semaji is a community tool for expression. We hope you see that in this special issue. Should you wish to be part of this newsletter, please don't hesitate to let us know.

Read on, and enjoy,

Akute Azu
Executive Director

YOUTH

Le Mini-Poste: une vague d'activités éducatives



Au cours des derniers mois, le programme Mini-Poste a présenté aux participants une suite d'ateliers intéressants mais aussi provocants. Les ateliers ont plusieurs objectifs, mais ils sont généralement conçus pour stimuler le développement personnel, promouvoir un esprit d'équipe et créer des relations positives avec la police.

Un des premiers ateliers était un exercice pour développer l'estime de soi. Les enfants ont été invités à noter des attributs positifs au sujet d'eux-mêmes et de leurs équipiers. Ensuite, ils ont présenté ce qu'ils ont écrit au groupe. Les résultats ont réellement stimulés leurs réflexions.

Un prochain atelier était au sujet de l'anti-discrimination. Les élèves étaient divisés par taille en deux équipes pour un

petit jeu. Sans qu'ils le sachent, nous avons prédéterminé de favoriser un groupe. Une fois que le jeu était commencé, l'équipe qui n'était pas favorisée est devenue très bouleversée. Même l'équipe favorisée ne se sentait pas à l'aise avec nos actions. Finalement, nous avons éclairci notre motivation réelle. Les élèves en sont venus à comprendre plusieurs types de

discrimination, la peine qu'on peut sentir quand on est victime de discrimination et pourquoi il ne faut pas tolérer que les autres commettent des actes discriminatifs.

Un autre atelier intéressant avait pour buts d'augmenter les habilités de communication et de développer le respect pour autrui. Les élèves ont participé à des débats. Qu'ils furent pour ou contre un sujet quelconque, leurs arguments étaient bien réfléchis et bien exprimés. De plus, ils ont appris à écouter les opinions des autres.

Récemment, ils ont joué au «champ de mines». Dans le champ de mines, les joueurs sont mis en équipes de deux et chaque partenaire doit guider l'autre sur un terrain rempli de mines (cônes). L'autre partenaire a

les yeux bandés et doit franchir le champ de mines, guidé par les directions vocales de son équipier. Le jeu a exigé beaucoup de patience et de discipline.

Aussi, il y'a bien d'autres activités du programme qui ont pris la forme à la fois d'activités intramurales, entre les élèves d'une même école, et extramurales, où les écoles compétitionnent les unes contre les autres. Des exemples incluent le rugby (sans contact physique) et le ballon chasseur.

Il est aussi important de mentionner les diverses activités menées par l'agent de police Lina Borremans. Ces activités populaires ont inclus un parcours d'obstacles, un test de santé physique (où les élèves ont dû porter l'équipement policier) et une démonstration avec le chien policier K-9.

Finalement, l'année 2008 s'est terminée avec une fête de Noël. Malgré le fait que les enfants n'étaient pas intéressés à regarder le film sélectionné, il y avait de la nourriture, des prix et le tout s'est terminé par le jeu de la chaise musicale. Ils se sont tout de même bien amusés, et c'est cela qui compte! Nous attendons que 2009, soit rempli de même plus d'activités intéressants et éducationnels.

Félicitations à Keiana et Yassine pour leur comportement exemplaire.

N'oubliez pas, pour toutes communications avec les animateurs après les heures de bureau, vous pouvez appeler 514-377-1685.

COMMUNITY

Tyndale St-Georges



By Lorraine Ouimet

More than eight decades ago, the Tyndale St-Georges Community Centre emerged thanks to the philanthropic spirit of an industrialist named Charles Johnson. A man with a strong social conscience, he was concerned about the welfare of his employees and their families, many of whom lived in Little Burgundy. With funding from the Montreal Presbyterian Community, he built a safe place –a Settlement House –to keep children off the streets. Today, this Little Burgundy institution still stands proud, and while it rests upon the ideals of its creator, it is no longer the reflection of one man's vision; it is the vision of an entire community, and of the heart with which they care and provide for one another.

Our community has dramatically changed since 1927. Many of the residents who now settle in Little Burgundy do so intending to take advantage of affordable, subsidized housing. Many are single mothers getting back on their feet, wishing to open up a world of possibilities for their children. Others are new Canadians

building a new life on fresh soil, learning new languages, and acclimating to a rich but unfamiliar culture.

It is in the strength, resilience, compassion, and commitment of our members that Tyndale's staff finds the inspiration to create programming that empowers and changes lives. Youth Programs are designed for young people from infancy to adolescence. Our employment programs help young adults and new Canadians acquire valuable skills and find their way into the workplace. We have a very successful English-language training program, which draws participants from all over the city. Our building in Richmond Square is a hub of activity for a number of evening, weekend, and summer programs that keep children off the streets and under the wings of caring adult role models.

An Afternoon at Tyndale

If you were to visit Tyndale on a weekday, shortly after the city's school bells release their flocks of students, you would find yourself caught in a swirl of

youthful energy, dodging kids as they leap off the yellow school bus that drops them off at our doorstep and rush up the stairs to where committed staff and volunteers feed them a snack, help them with homework, or engage them in other educational activities.

As you strolled down hallways, and past activity rooms, loud with the resonating sounds of shrills and laughter, you would find the walls adorned with inspirational quotes from Black leaders, inciting our youth – the vast majority of whom are Caribbean Canadians and African Canadians– to take stock of their heritage and reflect on the accomplishments of those who came before.

Of course, at the moment there exists no bigger inspirational figure for our kids than American President, Barack Obama. Many of them pause as they walk by the posters and drawings that hang throughout the Centre, their heads tilted upwards and their eyes wide-open with wonderment, contemplating what his victory means for them personally. Indeed, Obama's election as leader of the most powerful country in the world has inspired in our youth not only a feeling of belief in their own potential for accomplishment, but also a budding political awakening. They recognize that Obama was elected in part because of the support of his own people. They take pride in the fact that millions of Black folks made their way to the polls to cast their vote, a vote which they dared to hope would change America. How exciting to think that in a few years, when they become legal adults, they too will walk to the polls and proudly make their voice heard. Barack Obama's achievement is an extension of the monumental sacrifices of the Black leaders who came before him, of those who gave their lives fighting for the civil rights of African Americans. Little Burgundy's youth understand that "Rosa sat, so Martin could walk, so Obama

COMMUNITY

could run, so our children can fly!" This is why, this year, our youth will celebrate Black History Month by making a video about the Civil Rights Movement.

Black History Month

"Everyday is Black History Month at Tyndale," asserts Faith Shamonda, our Parent Resources and Support Coordinator; despite this daily recognition, February nonetheless always conjures up the desire to highlight Black History in a more formal manner. This year, our youth will celebrate Black History by taking the creative lead in the

creation of a video documenting the Civil Rights Movement in their own words and images. Concordia University Television (CUTV) will provide the video equipment and help us edit the final product on this cinematographic journey. Once this artful labor of love is complete, we will gather the community for a public viewing.

Looking Ahead

We dream big here at Tyndale St-Georges. Our wish list for the coming year testifies to the size of our vision: we wish that every child entering high school in our community leaves it proudly,

diploma in hand; that each newly arrived immigrant finds behind our doors the tools necessary to become productive members of our society; that all new parents in our community get the support needed to nurture the first few crucial years of their newborn's life; that each citizen eager to work is able to build a fulfilling career through our employment programs and services.

Adult Development Program – Tyndale

By Cynthia Homan

It is with recognition to our many partners such as Emploi-Québec that many individuals from our community are able to choose from more than one qualified employment program, training and other support services at the Little Burgundy Employment Center, under the larger umbrella of the Adult Development Program.

The vast majority of our clientele are visible minorities and immigrants arriving from the many corners of the world. Many immigrants continue to face obstacles, such as learning deficiencies, non-recognition of credentials, insufficient language skills and ethnic and racial discrimination. In spite of these obstacles we see miracles every day at our employment center. Each day, people learn new skills to help themselves in their pursuit of a better life for themselves and their families. We continue to empower people by offering them possibilities.

Pre-employability program

Since 1999 our Pre-employability program has continued to provide a vital service to our community. After the successful completion this past year of two full time programs, totaling 32 participants, we have again surpassed Emploi-Québec's required target of 50% finding employment.

This year

- 72% found full-time employment
- 16% returned to school or started their own business

Tyndale Treasures Retail Sales Training program

This program was initially a pilot project (second hand clothing store) undertaken in Dec. 2002 by residents of the community. With funding from Emploi-Québec the Tyndale Treasures Sales training program was developed. The program addresses all areas of the retail industry from warehousing to sales by providing on the job training, French language training, sales training, & job skill workshops. Having recently started our 5th program in January, this training reaches 17 people per year. Again we have surpassed our set target of 60% finding employment.

This year

- 73% found full time employment
- 20% returned to school for further training

Tyndale Treasures Store

Our store continues to offer affordable clothing and small household items to our community of 10,000 people. It is host for the on the job training of the retail sales program. Having been open for 4 years now, we are very excited about the upcoming year and about our project called "Dress to Impress." Our goal is to have a section of the store devoted to business attire at affordable prices for both men and women who are looking for employment. This service will help clients to be better prepared for their interview process.

If you are inspired by what we do and would like to donate time or money to our efforts and serve our community, please contact us:

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tsgadmin@videotron.ca
www.tyndalestgeorges.ca

French Classes

With our highly qualified professor, Dr. Gilbert Makita, we are able to offer a high level of French language instruction in our employment programs and evening classes to the community. The demand has doubled and we now offer two levels of classes in the evening for more than 40 people. We are working at full capacity. Dr. Makita is a success story himself, coming to us as a recently arrived new immigrant, starting as a volunteer. Within a short time he has become a full time employee of Tyndale St-Georges. His ability to understand our clients' challenges of integration into Quebec society is invaluable in making this service such a success.

Individual Computer Instruction

We offer one-on-one computer training for all levels. As many as 60 people a day use our computer lab with an average of 100 sessions per month being taught. We have recently seen an increase of training for the ages 40 (39% ages 40 – 60 and 16% for ages 60 plus) plus proving that we can always learn something new. Finally, it is important to draw attention to the cultural diversity of our overall staff and the positive returns that they bring to the services we offer in our community.

FINANCES

Plug up your financial leak

As a society we are constantly bombarded with financial information, but many of us are disconnected from managing our financial stress. The truth is most people spend on average about 2-4hrs a month looking at their financial situation, which usually consists of just paying bills and wondering why they cannot achieve their financial bliss.

Now that the gift-giving and the holiday season is out of the way, let's talk about saving taxes and creating some strategies. 2008 was very emotional for everyone with our world's financial and economic challenges. With that in mind, it's time to refocus and make logical financial decisions for 2009.

Getting started

The #1 priority of your plan or goal should be to allow the government to help you lower your existing debt, for example high interest rate credit cards, with dollars you thought were gone because of taxes. A plausible way to kick start a strategy like this could be using a Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) loan. This can be an extremely powerful way to capitalize on the benefits of receiving a tax refund to finance your priorities and propel you towards your financial goals.

What to do

In order to lead yourself in the right direction, start paying attention to your daily spending. Keep track of your financial habits in a small book, PDA or cell phone and then do a simple 1-2hr weekly family spending analysis on what goes in and out of your household. This is a fantastic way to plug the financial leak and start finding dollars to repay your outstanding debt and save on interest.

To ease your mind start an automatic debt repayment schedule. If you are paying high interest on debts, choose a low interest consolidation loan which would be another way to increase monthly cash to create investment vehicles such as a RRSP, a Tax Free Saving Account (TFSA) or even a Register Education Savings Plan (RESP).

The Facts

When looking to protect yourself from tax triggers, an

option like the TFSA allows you to earn investment income tax free and any interest, capital gains or dividend income you earn on your investments is not subject to tax. You can contribute up to \$5000 in 2009. The limit will be increased each year indexed to inflation and rounded off to the nearest \$500. Any unused room can be carried forward indefinitely. Withdrawn amounts of your contributions can be reinvested into your account in a subsequent year without reducing your contribution room for that year. For example if you accumulated \$5000 this year and then withdraw \$2000, you would be able to contribute up to $(\$2,000 + \$5000 \text{ limit}) = \$7000$ the following year.

An absolutely fantastic feature of the TFSA is that withdrawals do not affect eligibility to receive benefits such as the Guaranteed Income Supplement, Canada Child Tax Benefit or Old Age Security benefit. Just like an RRSP, assets can be transferred or rolled-over tax-free to a spouse upon your death.

All Investment allocations are exactly the same as an RRSP where the amount would be invested in the following options: segregated and mutual funds, stocks, bonds and GICs. Lower tax bracket salary earners can forego the modest tax deductions of RRSP and capitalize on tax-efficient growth of TFSA. For those of you, in higher tax brackets who maximize your RRSP contribution room annually, you can use it as an alternative to have extra tax-free growth.

When starting young the TFSA is a huge advantage as it creates more savings than a regular high interest saving account since it does not create an annual tax liability. This option

is great for saving for post-secondary school, a downpayment on a house, home renovations or a future wedding.



"A good plan is like a road map: it shows the final destination and usually the best way to get there."

- H. Stanley Judd

Call the plumber

For 2009 consider the quote above and contact us to start your financial plan.

Garen Lewis
Financial Security Advisor
Tel: 514-866-1336

Email: info@4sightfinancial.com
www.4sightfinancial.com

COMMUNITY

McGill Black Students' Network

By Safiya Simon

Entering McGill University can be a daunting experience, especially when one comes from a smaller institution. In my case, I went from a CEGEP of 5000 students to a university with a population seven times larger. Other experiences can be even worse, as some students enter from high schools of 1000 students maximum. It is very easy to feel like a number in the system or the proverbial drop in the bucket. However, one thing my parents always instilled in me is that, involvement in different activities definitely makes the university experience more fun and memorable. This was one of the many pieces of advice I made sure I followed, but I still found it difficult to integrate into the McGill Community during my first semester.

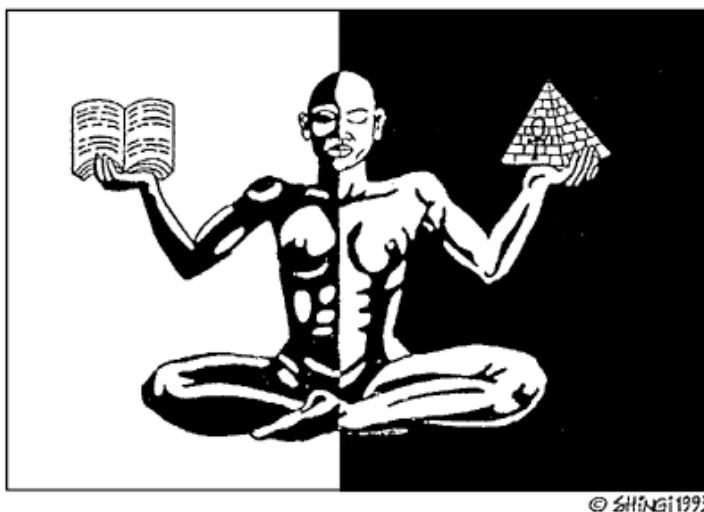
In my second semester, I found out about the Black Students' Network (BSN) and went to many of their events. I had found my niche! I immediately felt like part of a large family. Although I have many friends from many different countries, races and cultures, being a part of the Black Students' Network reminded me so much of my childhood in St. Lucia. I began to take a renewed pride in my culture and it was easy to feel comfortable with all the members of the group.

Black History Month soon rolled around, and with it came preparations for Children's Day. Right away I jumped at the opportunity to volunteer. On the day there were over 100 elementary school children and it was a bit overwhelming. The volunteers had to dress up as past and present prominent Black people. I was Makeba, Queen of Sheba. We had to run to multiple groups of children, and in 10 minutes tell them who we were and ask them questions to prepare them for the game show at the end. Adrenaline rushed as I faced each group of students. I had had little experience with youth, but after each group I became more confident.

After that day, I was truly hooked on the Black Students' Network. Soon after, there were elections for the 2008-2009 Executive and I ran for Internal Communications Coordinator and Social Coordinator. I was elected for Internal Communications Coordinator. This I would soon realize was the start of an exciting year at McGill. Along with the other strong and motivated

Executives, I had huge plans for BSN. We started right off the bat by coming up with our goals for the year in addition to planning educational and fun events.

I was now a second year student at McGill and felt like a big sister to the newly admitted students. Many of them reminded me of myself when I just started: intimidated, shy, but still eager to get involved and make the most of the university experience. The rest of the BSN Executives shared my sentiments about trying to make the new students as comfortable as possible, which resulted in the preparation of a barbecue on Mont Royal, as well as many other social events.



Another one of our major plans was to emphasize the educational aspect of BSN. For this reason we worked very hard in planning our two forums for the semester, 'The African-Caribbean Divide' and 'Interracial Relationships: What's Love Got to Do with It?' These were well attended and sparked interest with the majority of our members.

As I write this, I look forward to the many activities that we have planned for this semester which marks our last semester as BSN executives, and for this reason I am positive that we will be trying our utmost to ensure that we accomplish our goals. The important Black History Month falls within this semester, as does Children's Day (the very day that certified my interest in the BSN) and I anticipate another exciting time ahead. Unfortunately, the downside to this semester is that it marks the end of my term as Internal Communications Coordinator and I hope that I can give up my post without too much trauma. Nonetheless, I am eager to see which of the members will step up to continue the BSN tradition which began in 1985.

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COMMUNITY

Project Genesis



By Members of the Project Genesis Housing Rights Committee: Rehana Akhter, Myrtle Anderson, Ghyslaine Bonhomme, Pilar Espinoza, Daren Lane, Donald Ratnaraja, Nola Shaw

We are members of Project Genesis, a grassroots member-driven community organization. Our organization has been providing tenants with information on how to protect their rights for over thirty years.

Project Genesis also works closely with people receiving social assistance through our Storefront drop-in centre where people can find, free of charge, all kinds of information relating to social assistance, tenant's rights, pensions, etc. Everyone is invited to become members of our committees, the Anti-Poverty Committee and/or the Housing Rights Committees. These committees each meet once a month to learn about the issues of poverty and sub-standard housing that confront people in the neighbourhood, to strategize ways of solving the root causes of these issues, and to implement actions that will create positive and lasting change in the neighbourhood. Project Genesis is run by its members and volunteers. We are very proud of the fact that some people, who get to know our work through coming to the Storefront for information, become active members of our Committees, and eventually are elected to our Board of Directors.

The rents in our neighbourhood of Côte-des-Neiges have increased dramatically in the past few years and some of us find that all of our money is going to pay for rent, with nothing left over for other expenses. We want to live in peace but this is impossible as long

as rents continue to increase. Poor people also need a place to live, yet it seems as though we are being pushed out of our neighbourhoods. Where are we supposed to go? We see that the provincial government, in its last budget, promised 630 million dollars of tax cuts, yet we cannot even afford to pay our rent or find safe secure housing in which to raise our children. This seems backwards to us. Instead of prioritizing people who already live comfortably through tax cuts and incentives for first-time home buyers, why not prioritize people who are living on the streets and people who cannot find decent housing on the private market?

We also cannot understand how a society as rich as Quebec can have so much poverty and so many run-down buildings like the kind we see in our neighbourhood. It does not seem to us that the government has a vision for how housing should be developed in the province. The provincial government needs to show that it takes housing seriously. One way to achieve this would be to name a Provincial Minister of Housing, instead of giving the housing dossier to the Minister of Regional and Municipal Affairs. More concretely, the Provincial Government must commit to a long-term program to develop social housing. We want to see the Provincial Government build 50,000 units of social housing over the next five years. As the current number of families waiting for low-cost housing in Côte-des-Neiges is more than twice the total number of low-cost housing units, at least 20,000 of these units should be low-cost housing units.

As well, the government should protect boarding houses as they are an important

buffer against homelessness for many people and an important resource for people who are homeless. The Province should encourage the transformation of boarding houses into non-profit community-supported housing, removing them from the private market, and subsidizing the rent in these apartments, so homeless people can more easily get off the street. The government should collaborate with homeless people and the people who work with them, in order to provide more services to homeless people, particularly health care services and mental health services. We also find that there are not enough government programs that support people who are living alone or in couples without children. For example, the Shelter Allowance program should be expanded to include everyone under the age of 55, even if they don't have children.

Given the huge rent increases of the past several years and the lack of social housing, it is no surprise to us that the Rental Board handled over 45,697 eviction cases last year. In order to protect these people from homelessness, the Quebec Government must resist any legislative or administrative change that would allow tenants to be evicted more easily or more quickly. And in order to enable people to pay their rent, the Quebec Government must increase and fully index the welfare rate and increase the minimum wage. Food banks are not the answer. We have first-hand experience of people who must look for food in the garbage in order to save enough money to pay their rent on time. This is not a dignified way to live. The government has a responsibility to ensure that everyone in Quebec can live without the perpetual fear and anxiety of ending up on the street.

If you're interested in becoming involved with the Housing Rights Committee ask for Cathy, If you're interested in becoming involved with the Anti-poverty committee ask for Denis. Volunteers are always needed to work in the Storefront.

**Project
Genesis**

4735 chemin de la Côte-Ste-Catherine
Montréal, QC H3W 1M1
Tel: 514-738-2036

HEALTH

Living with Sickle cell



By Simone Powell

The results of my grandma May's china plates and cups splintering on the floor tell me when I am not well. I start to feel pain or numbness and I don't have the strength to hold anything in my hands. Sometimes I'm not able to stand because I am paralyzed from my hands to my feet.

When I was a child, my family didn't know about sickle cell anemia, until I started to get sick regularly. On different occasions, my guardians had to carry me on their back like a rag doll to the emergency room. One day my grandma brought me to the hospital to find out why I was getting sick so frequently. The doctor ran some tests and it was then that we

found out about my disease.

Growing up, I went through some tremendous pain and suffering. At times, I would hum to myself to subdue the pain when it was too hard to bear. A sad expression was often on my face. I shunned people and curled up into a little shell, finding solace in silence, which made it hard to make friends.

Going to school could be unbearable because sometimes during class or an exam my hands became numb or stiff with pain. I was unable to write with my pen or pencil, and once I couldn't move in my chair because I was so paralyzed with pain that all I could do was cry. One day, I was having trouble breathing and I couldn't stop crying. My teacher and a friend both became concerned and called an ambulance. After that embarrassing episode, everyone wanted an explanation of what went down. I told them what little I knew about the disease, wishing I could learn more about my sickness. Some of my friends didn't understand and made fun of me, calling me an invalid because I was always tired or sick.

At times the pain made me suicidal. I couldn't bear the thought of facing life and I would call on God to come early to end my excruciating suffering. Looking for work was challenging. When I did find

a job, either I was too slow or I couldn't stand on my feet for too long because of the fatigue and pain in my joints.

Relationship-wise, I have to be careful who I date especially for long-term relationships. I have to look for a partner that doesn't have the disease or isn't a carrier of the trait. I don't want my children to go through the same predicaments I went through growing up.

I once went to a sickle cell conference in Toronto to learn more about the disease and what I found out in those two days made life more pleasant and efficient for me. Some people attending the conference couldn't believe that I could have sickle cell and look so healthy. But don't let my appearance fool you; I still do feel pain even when I'm looking my best. I just make it a priority to take good care of myself, eat right, exercise regularly when I have the strength, and take my rest when necessary.

I wrote this article to face my deepest fears. It wasn't easy, because every tear I've shed over the years makes writing these words an emotional exercise. But I encouraged myself to finish it, because no matter what, it's best to get out as much information as possible to help make life worth living.

Facts on Sickle cell anemia:

Sickle cell anemia is a hereditary disease that affects mainly Blacks.

An individual who inherits the Sickle cell trait from one of his/her parents becomes a carrier of the trait.

The Sickle cell trait does not develop into the disease.

When both parents carry the trait, the risk of their child having the disease is 25%.

An individual who inherits the trait from both parents inherits the disease.

Approximately 1 in 10 Blacks is a carrier of the trait.

Approximately 1 in 400 Blacks suffer from the disease.

A special blood test can detect the sickle cell trait and sickle cell anemia.

**For more info:
The Canadian Sickle Cell Society
6999 Côte-des-Neiges
Montréal, QC H3S 2B8
(514) 735-5100**

COMMUNITY

N.C.C. Charles H. Estes Cultural Centre



By Lawrence Fraser

The N.C.C. Charles H. Este Cultural Center is in the final stages of having the building on Coursol renovated. All of the elements have been put in place. At present we have funding from the City of Montreal. We are presently awaiting the commitment of the Provincial and Federal Governments. The process of getting the commitment is long. We have the support of numerous influential individuals and feel it should happen in the near future. Once the final funds have been confirmed, work will be able to begin immediately. The funding from the governments will be used strictly for the renovation and restoration of the N.C.C. building.

Within the last two years, we have been working hard to seek public and corporate funding which will be needed for the day-to-day operations of the N.C.C. A television commercial was filmed and it ran on the CTV network, a block party was held, a radio documentary was made, and an art auction was presented. Past dinners which had become a part of our fundraising effort had to be postponed but we will try to present them at a later date. Running a center is a large

financial undertaking, and it is our goal to be as cost efficient as possible, making sure there is no waste involved. We are in the midst of planning fundraising events, and hope all in the community will attend.

The N.C.C. when it opens, will house an archive and resource center. It will house a museum to the achievements and accomplishments of the Montreal Black community. It will also have seniors housing, to assist in the need of affordable housing to the senior community. The plan will also be to have a banquet area that can be rented to the community, along with plans for organizations who are in need of space to rent out portions of the Center when not in use. We need to make the Center financially sustainable for the future so we do not ever let this building close once it is reopened.

The Board of the N.C.C. has been working on the implementation of programs and we are currently contacting the membership of the N.C.C. to get an idea of what types of programs are needed. The programs would be geared towards the different age levels within the community. The focus at this time is to

get feedback from the community so that resources will not be wasted on programs where there is insufficient interest. The responses will be studied by the committee and work will begin to set up the different programs. The programs will be there to benefit the community as a whole, and the need is there for everyone to be part of the establishment of these programs. We are asking for as much input as possible. The email address for suggestions is info@nccmontreal.org. The focus is to keep the costs for the programs at a minimum, so that all in the community would be able to participate.

The N.C.C. in its mission statement is an organization with the purpose of working with other community organizations to better serve the overall community. Our goal is to do our best to not duplicate any programs already offered in the community, unless due to the sheer numbers of people interested dictates otherwise. The N.C.C. will work with existing organizations to ensure that the needs of residents of the Little Burgundy area needs will be met: enriching the area while fulfilling its needs; restoring its place in the day-to-day lives of the community; a place to go when help is needed.

The organization recognizes the need to listen to the youth in the community, as they will be the ones to carry on the efforts of today, and shape the future of the community. We are asking that any youths, with a desire to get involved with the community, contact us. We are seeking young individuals to help in the continuity of ideas as the times progress; bridging the gap between all generations, and mapping the path to the future. Volunteer positions need to be filled on the various committees, such as the programs and education committee, and the fundraising committee. Help us help the Little Burgundy area, and the Montreal Black community as a whole.

Telephone: 450-672-7081
Email: info@nccmontreal.org

HISTORY

Mathieu Da Costa (The first known person of African descent in Canada) explores what is now known as Nova Scotia as a member of the Pouturincourt-Champlain Expedition. Da Costa speaks several languages including French and Micmac and acts as Champlain's interpreter. He is a well educated man. **1606**

Marie-Joseph Angélique, a slave, allegedly performs one of the most dramatic acts of resistance. She sets fire to her master's house to cover her escape. The fire destroys 46 buildings. She is captured, tortured, paraded through the streets, then hanged and her body burned. **1734**

The Underground Railroad: African-Americans enter Canada in increasing numbers fleeing from slavery. Their numbers increase with the passing of the Fugitive Slave Law in the United States. **1850**

Men are often away 20 days of the month, so their wives and girlfriends build community. First Black community organization was the Colored Women's Club. **1902**

As West Indian numbers increase Garveyism becomes popular- the Universal Negro Improvement Association, UNIA, opens in Montreal. **1919**

Fifty percent of Blacks in Montreal work as railway porters. Only 14% of the Black female population is employed. **1941**

Canadian immigration policy explicitly discriminates against Black immigration. **1950**

Two waves of Haitian immigrants settle in Canada. The first wave is considered white collar and consists of many teachers and affluent professionals. The second wave is composed of the educated working class and of blue collar workers. Both Francophone and Anglophone Blacks begin to settle in areas other than Little Burgundy (previously called St. Antoine). **1960's**

Africans begin to immigrate in large numbers. They are highly educated. Over 80% have studied at the university level. They nevertheless, along with the rest of the Black population, suffer high unemployment and have below average incomes. **1975-78**

A group of Blacks begin talking about creating a resource centre. **1993**

1628 Olivier Le Jeune is the first known slave and first Black student in Quebec. He was a native of Madagascar and was brought to Quebec during the English occupation.

1685 The Code Noir is established under Louis XIV. It establishes conditions supporting slavery in the French colonial empire. Slavery was part of life in Montreal.

1834 The Emancipation Act in England, abolishes slavery everywhere the British flag flew.

1838 Over 100,000 Blacks live in Canada.

Canadian railway companies institute the practice of using Black males to work on the sleeping cars. Black community emerges almost exclusively in the St. Antoine district, close to the railway. **1880**

1907 Black American women establish Union United Church for all Blacks.

Prohibition shuts down Harlem nightlife in the U.S. **1920** Jazz artists move to Montreal.

1939 World War II begins-Blacks initially not wanted as combatants-the war's enormous needs change that.

West Indian Domestic Scheme for the first time enables Black immigration of a noticeable degree. Many domestics were educated, middle-class, but could not get into the country except through the Scheme. Women created community by sponsoring family. Canada's current Black population of predominantly Caribbean origin comes from that group of women. **1955**

1960's Despite Blacks living throughout the island, Black services are largely confined to Little Burgundy. Black institutions respond by creating umbrella organizations to a) develop a united response to systemic racism b) facilitate the integration of immigrants.

1979 Haitians are the fastest growing cultural group, numbering approximately 35,000. English-speaking West Indians are the largest group of Anglophones in Quebec.

2008 783,795 Blacks live in Canada, 24 percent of which (second only to Ontario's 60 percent) live in Quebec (primarily in Montreal).

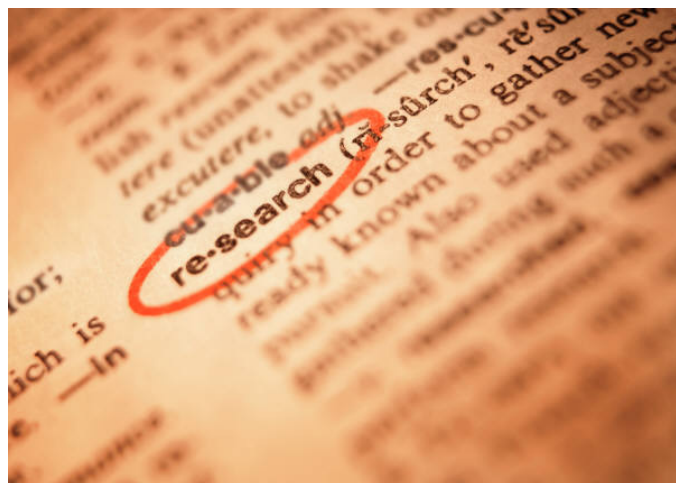
RESEARCH

The 2006 Black Communities Demographic Project

By Anne-Marie Livingstone

The McGill Consortium for Ethnicity and Strategic Social Planning (MCESSP) is once again sponsoring a study on the African-Canadian community in Montreal called The 2006 Black Communities Demographic Project (BCDP). The 2006 BCDP is a repeat of a study that was completed in 2001 and used 1996 census data to produce a comprehensive statistical portrait on the Black community in Montreal.

In the current study, the purpose is to assess the situation of the Black community ten years later, by employing 2006 census data, and to examine the degree to which patterns of inequality identified in 2001 have either persisted or changed. Like the previous study, the analysis will compare the situation of Blacks in Montreal with the rest of the population both in Montreal and across Canada. One new aspect of the study is the addition of qualitative research in which the purpose is to assess how government and community-based organizations have responded to the issues and challenges identified in 2001. Several key areas of policy and programs are being examined, including: employment, education, support for families, youth and the elderly, and the integration of immigrants.



The report of the 2001 study, entitled "The Evolution of the Black Community of Montreal: Change and Challenge," highlighted the degree to which members of Montreal's Black community face inequalities in every sphere of life, including employment, education, and incomes. The study showed that members of the Black community were significantly more likely to live in poverty, to face unemployment, to have lower levels of education, and to earn lower incomes when compared to the rest of the population. Even Blacks with above average levels of education earned incomes that were lower than what would be expected.

One of the primary reasons for doing a second demographic study was the critical nature of the problems identified in 2001 and the need for continually monitoring improvements in the status of the Black community, given the apparent obstacles to its full and equal participation in Quebec society. The analysis of the 2006 census has

only just begun, but it is possible to share some preliminary findings, particularly those relating to labour force participation and incomes. A comprehensive report of the study will be available in the fall of 2009. For the time being, it is possible to report the following:

The population of African-Canadians in Montreal has risen by a percentage of 37% since 1996, to reach a total of 783,795 persons. As a result, African-Canadians now account for 2.7% of the population of Quebec compared with 1.9% in 1996.

In 1996, Blacks were reported to have an unemployment rate that was 2.5 times higher. In 2006, it had declined but was still twice as high as the rest of the population (13.4% for Blacks versus 6.6% for the rest of the population).

The proportion of Blacks who live below the Low-Income Cut-Off (the benchmark generally used to indicate poverty) was 36.4% in 2006, compared to 19.9% for the rest of the population. In 2001, the study indicated that the level of poverty in the Black community in 1996 was as high as 57% in 1996. Hence, the 2006 data indicate a decline, but continuing wide disparities when we compare Blacks to the rest of the Montreal population.

In 2006, Blacks in Montreal still earned much less than average: almost 7 in 10 Blacks (68%) earned less than \$25,000 a year, compared with 50.3% in the rest of the population. Those in higher-status occupations also earned incomes that were below the average; for example, 44% of all Blacks in management positions earned less than \$25,000, compared to 21% in the rest of the population.

Blacks remain overrepresented in clerical, sales and service occupations (43.4% of Blacks compared with 36.7% for the rest of the population) and under-represented in high-paying professions such as physicians, dentists, lawyers and notaries.

This summary of the data provides only a very partial and general picture of the findings that will be discussed in the fall 2009 report. Among other things, the report of the study will go further to examine the interrelationships between education, employment and income and variables like "knowledge of official languages," "period of immigration," age and gender. This will provide a more in-depth picture of the situation and illustrate how different groups within the Black community might be faring in comparison to the general population, including women, children and recent immigrants who are among the most vulnerable groups. Nevertheless, this brief review of the available data indicates that there is much cause for continuing concern. The emerging findings also reinforce the need for public policies and community-based programs that can help to remove systemic inequalities and ensure equal opportunities for African-Canadians.

Despite some signs of progress and many successes by the Black community, which are not reflected in the data summarized above, the BCDP provides yet another important opportunity to use research and census data to enhance our understanding of present-day issues and challenges and to promote positive social change.

JUSTICE

Accessing the law: labour issues



Work is a central part of our life. For many of us, the present economic system that prevails forces us to sell our labour so that we will be able to provide the basic needs for ourselves and our family. Work is strongly linked to our dignity and our (as well as others') opinion of ourselves. Some of us are fortunate to be able to freely choose the kind of jobs we wish to do while others are faced with more limited choices. But, whether you enjoy your job or despise it, we all need to be respected in the work that we do.

Legislation entitled *An Act Respecting Labour Standards* sets guidelines related to wages, overtime, the number of work hours per week, termination of employment, etc, that all employers must respect. The **Labour Standards Commission** (*Commission des normes du travail*) monitors the application of the *Act*.

Nevertheless, the fact is that at times our rights are not respected in accordance with the law. Some employers take advantage of workers who do not know their rights or of workers who are too afraid to speak out when violations occur; however, recourses are available when the law is not respected. The Labour Standards Commission takes complaints and conducts investigations of alleged violations. The website for the Commission is a good place to start when learning to develop general instincts for labour standards. If you have a particular issue and cannot find it yourself, the Commission has agents who you can call. For more detail:

www.cnt.gouv.qc.ca/en/home/index.html
(514-873-7061)

Labour unions are another important way of enforcing your rights at work. In Quebec, organizing and joining a union is a right which is protected under the Quebec Labour Code. The majority of workers in any workplace (50% +1) can decide to join a union by signing union cards. The Labour Code prohibits employers from intimidating and discriminating against workers for deciding to organize a union. The Labour Code also provides for reinstatement of workers if they are fired for exercising their rights.

The biggest advantage of a union is the voice that workers have when joined together. Workers will actually have a say in determining their working conditions by negotiating a collective agreement which will set out their rights in a contract that has the effect of law. This agreement must be followed and so it prevents arbitrary decisions from being made. Another key advantage of unions is that they actually do raise wages. However, workers of colour are generally less likely to be represented by a union (see the Canadian Labour Congress report below). For more information:

www.csn.qc.ca/Pageshtml/OrgDepAng.html (514) 598-2121
www.ftq.qc.ca/ (514) 383-8000

Montreal is home to many community organizations working on labour issues and the defense of our rights at work. Here are two organizations worth checking out and exploring.

The **Immigrant Workers' Centre** activities cover individual-rights counselling, popular education and political campaigns that reflect issues facing immigrant workers. Au Bas de L'Echelle's main focus is to defend the rights of those who are not represented by a labour union. They provide information

services, hold workshops, and publish information related to rights at work. To find out more:

www.iwc-cti.ca/en (514) 342-2111
www.aubasdelechelle.ca/accueil.html
(514) 270-7878

In 2005, the **Canadian Labour Congress** released a report called "Racial Status and Employment Outcomes." The report noted that "Racial discrimination is a large contributing factor to the poor labour market outcomes of Canada's racialized workers. Lower incomes, higher unemployment, and precarious work status are prevalent for workers of colour as a whole, and not just recent immigrants. In fact, it is the non-immigrant, racialized population, who are more highly educated than average, which has the most difficulty finding steady employment at decent wages." The report also noted that the job market experience for workers of colour is also a gendered one. "Women's outcomes are consistently lower than their male counterparts, and even when wages are increased by union coverage, women's average hourly wages are still smaller. Women of colour have the lowest wages and the highest unemployment, despite being more likely to have full-time and permanent jobs than men." The full report can be found on the CLC website:

<http://canadianlabour.ca/sites/clc/files/racialstatusEn.pdf>

We, especially people of colour, still face hurdles in the workplace. However, thanks to the many determined people who fought relentlessly before us, we have better ways of addressing these hurdles. It is important to work in an environment where we know that our rights are respected. The first step to empowering ourselves is to know our rights and how we can enforce them.

Amarkai Laryea is a lawyer and a Trustee of the Alfie Roberts Institute.

COMMUNITY

Council for Black Aging

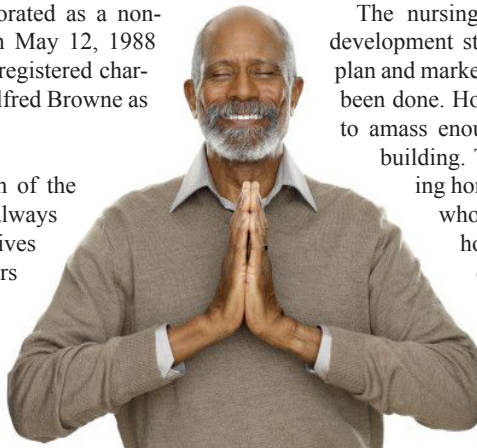
The Council for Black Aging Community of Montreal (CBAC) was founded in 1987 by a group of concerned citizens in order to address mainstream institutions, specifically Health Care Services, which were inadequately responding to the emotional and cultural needs of Black seniors living in Montreal. Much of the historical experiences of Black seniors such as slavery, religious beliefs, musical influences and the diverse cultural values have contributed to Black seniors' mistrust of the Health and Social services delivery system. With this in mind, the Council for Black Aging Community of Montreal was officially incorporated as a non-profit organization on May 12, 1988 and later received its registered charity status with Mr. Wilfred Browne as the first President.

The mission of the organization has always been to improve the lives of all Black seniors living in the greater Montreal area with the aim of working towards meeting their needs, such as creating a nursing home for Black elders while recognizing and validating their many contributions in the community. For over 20 years, ten diligent, devoted and courageous, men and women have served the CBAC as president. Much has been accomplished but not without challenges.

To live up to its mission, the CBAC acts like an advocacy group to the three levels of government, advising them on the changing needs of the Black elders of Montreal. The Council also creates and implements many group activities to satisfy the needs and interests of the elders. We work to stimulate their mental and physical well-being, as well as breaking the barriers of isolation while encouraging them to actively participate in community life. The CBAC also organizes conferences to keep its members abreast of issues pertaining to Health Care Services, so as to create an open forum for discussion in order for them to make informed decisions. The organization is constantly recruiting volunteers in order to provide services for shut-ins and those with reduced mobility.

As previously mentioned, one of the CBAC goals is to have a nursing home

for Black seniors. Five years ago the CBAC embarked on this project, knocking on the doors of most Black organizations to join hands in the advancement and interest of the Black community. Many concurred that the needs were there but were not committed to working towards its fruition. Today, as a result of many dealings with the City of Montreal and the Developer R.O.M.E.L., the CBAC can proudly declare that an affordable senior residence is being built in Cartierville to be completed in 2009 under the name, The Island Golden Door.



The nursing home is still in the development stage, with the business plan and marketing assessment having been done. However what remains is to amass enough money to buy the building. The purpose of a nursing home is to cater to seniors who can no longer live at home due to illness, loss of mobility or family. It will be a place where they will feel a sense of belonging, surrounded by their cultural touch and values without missing home.

The CBAC's success is measured by its many accomplishments throughout its 20 years of existence, the Computer class, the affordable housing, the volunteer services, employability programs, partnering with McGill University, and its many other activities. As with many other organizations, the CBAC has to overcome everyday challenges. The elderly population is growing older and so are the young elderly who are volunteers and now need help themselves. Unfortunately it is proving difficult to recruit youth volunteers as there is an underlying sense of ageism in society. However, for every problem, there is a solution, and the CBAC is actively attempting to bridge that gap.

Membership is open to men and women 50 years and over. The CBAC recruits volunteers to render services to shut-ins and others with reduced mobility. Friendly phone calls and visits are made. Accompaniment to and from medical appointments is also available.

**3021 Delisle corner Atwater
Tel: 514 935-4951.**

Our Programs

Computer class: The computer class motivates the elders' mental and physical wellbeing demystifies and enhances their knowledge of cutting-edge technology. It boosts their dignity and independence. The CBAC's pride is measured by witnessing the elders' commitment, when they walk through the door of the CBAC Day Centre to participate in the class; their contentment of just being able to communicate to relatives and friends from afar and local or just the joy of feeling empowered.

Knitting and Crochet class/Arts and Crafts class: Both classes offer Black elders the opportunity to be creative and develop their own projects, while in a social setting. Participants have the opportunity to share and discuss their respective cultural values, tell stories, share a joke and have a good laugh.

Community Lunch and Birthday Brunch: Most of our members live on their own in isolation and preparing a meal for one and eating alone is a hard task. Members look forward to coming out and eating lunch together, which is prepared by devoted volunteers, usually with cultural flair and flavor. During this activity the CBAC organizes information sessions with guest speakers or creates a forum for members to express issues of concern to them and to encourage them to be decision makers for themselves and their organization. The forum also provides them with the opportunity to interact.

Health Clinic: This is a preventive service where the blood sugar, cholesterol and the blood pressure are measured -since Blacks in general are predisposed to illnesses related to these health indicators.

ARTS & CULTURE

Black Theatre Workshop

By Ashley Belmer

'Impression' is defined as the first and immediate effect of an experience or perception upon the mind. It dictates and directs our ideas and that of society, controlled by influence, pressure and the desire to conform. For several years, Black Theatre Workshop (BTW) has created their season around one important theme. In 2009 it is the theme of 'impression', and how this singular yet powerful element affects daily lives, ambitions and dreams through first impressions, lasting impressions, and impressions as obstacles to be overcome. With almost 40 years of history creating original theatre with a mandate to discover and develop untold stories of the African Diaspora, BTW has certainly made an "impression" upon Canadians. And their upcoming 2009 Season aims even closer to the mark, offering a program certain to leave audiences reflecting on the notion of "impression" and how it affects individuals and society, both negatively and positively, in the past, present and future.

Black Theatre Workshop was incorporated in 1972 as a non-profit organization in a Black Caribbean response to the marginalization of Black people's contributions to world culture. BTW upholds the continuing goal of creating and developing theatre for Canadians of African descent and the African Diaspora, with the intention to encourage and assist Black people in Canada to become contributors to the construction of Québécois and Canadian cultures through the creation of Black literature, Black theatre and professional theatre practice. The story of BTW is virtually the story of Black theatre in Quebec and, as such, the company plays a vital role in the formation of a more meaningfully multicultural theatre-arts ecology at a local, regional, national and international level.

It was the first of its kind, and now only two African Canadian theatre companies, including BTW, remain in Canada. Over the years, 'impression' has become a barrier for Canadians of African descent because they are often categorized before they have the opportunity to prove themselves. BTW's mandate of developing and staging untold stories of the African Diaspora is a way of fighting such 'impression', that is, 'impression' in its most negative form. The theatre educates the public on the personal history surrounding those people who have emerged out of the African



Black Theatre
W O R K S H O P
CREATING
GREAT
THEATRE
DU THÉÂTRE
MARQUANT
since 1972 depuis 1972

Diaspora, while also giving people with otherwise minimal opportunities a chance to succeed in the arts.

BTW's 2009 Mainstage production of *Le Code Noir* by George Boyd is itself based around the theme of 'impression', and how it influences the life of the lead character Joseph Boulogne (*Le Chevalier St. Georges*). Boulogne was a leading composer and swordsman in France during the 17th century – a legendary figure renowned for his classical music compositions and talent as a violinist. However, his 'impression' upon his contemporaries because of the colour of his skin created many boundaries throughout his life, experiences that can be paralleled with the lives of many Canadians today.

Le Code Noir centres on Boulogne's relationship with his father, which is one of the main conflicts of his life. Boulogne's father was a white aristocrat and his mother a slave from Guadeloupe. When, as a child, Boulogne's talent became apparent, his father took him and his mother to France and encouraged Boulogne to develop his career as a composer, musician and swordsman. This arrangement,

however, was not without a price. Boulogne endured continual torment from his father and he was never able to make his own decisions. His father not only represented the control a father may have over the life of his son, he is indicative of society in general. A society that would never let Boulogne reach his full potential or be fully recognized for his talents because of the colour of his skin. Despite his greatness, and the inspirational 'impression' that he leaves on society, the fact that Boulogne is Black denies him total freedom – an 'impression' that results in metaphorical imprisonment and creative oppression for the remainder of his life.

While BTW's Mainstage production is our draw card, the Theatre has an inspiring 2009 Season that continues to ask those questions surrounding 'impression'. The season's school tour, *Skin* by Dennis Foon, discussed the effects of 'impression' on the lives of four teenagers from various ethnic backgrounds. The play follows each character as they navigate their way through the maze of opinions, preconceptions and societal pressures, trying to find their place in the world and themselves. Foon has dedicated his talents to writing plays that encourage young people to challenge themselves and to ask questions about the world and the mixed messages they encounter. Tamara Brown, marked her directing debut, bringing this diverse cast and their powerful issues to life, showcasing a play that caused students and adults alike to question, challenge and understand just how the notion of 'impression' can change lives. *Skin* toured Montreal area schools throughout the month of February, with three open performances on show at BTW's own space in Montreal.

On the celebratory side of life, January 24, 2009, marked BTW's 23rd Annual Vision Gala Celebration. The Gala was a festive retrospect recognizing the contributions of past and ongoing Black Communities to Montreal. This year, BTW honoured Mrs. Ethel Bruneau with the annual Dr. Martin Luther King Junior Award. Mrs. Bruneau is a legendary dancer and teacher in Montreal for more than 40 years. She has inspired many a young person to use dance as a means through which to express their passion and to acquire the discipline and dedication to succeed.

In keeping with their support for youth in the arts, BTW works hard to provide young Montrealers with performance work-

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shops as part of their Youthworks Training Program - helping talented individuals pursue a career in the arts, gain confidence and develop the discipline to succeed. Youthworks' 2009 season is filled with exciting classes, including acting, voice, movement and spoken word, each taught by talented industry professionals. It is a chance for youth in the Black community to find their groove and spirit, and to encourage them to become influential people in our society.

There is a reason BTW has existed for almost 40 years as the only company in Montreal that gives a voice to untold stories of the Caribbean and African Diaspora – a

crucial role in a society that is becoming increasingly unsupportive of theatre and the arts. And BTW is not restricted to those involved in its plays and programs. As an open theatre company, BTW actively encourages the community and all its audiences to take part in its activities, workshops and events. After all, without Montreal community support, stories from the African Diaspora will sadly go untold, and our youth will no longer have the opportunity to become involved in a theatre company that welcomes them with open arms. Give BTW the chance to impress you in 2009, and grab the chance to give back and make an 'impression' on them.



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MosaikArt – A multiethnic art gallery – Unique through diversity



By Adrienne Johnson

MosaikArt, is a cultural gem to be discovered in the heart of Montreal's Plateau. Over its five years of service, this two floor art gallery located at 4897 St. Laurent Blvd. (corner St Joseph St.), has been celebrating creativity and cultural diversity while serving as a vital platform for Black artists and multiethnic works.

MosaikArt was founded in Montreal in 2003 by the passion and determination of Myrtelle Chéry, an artist and businesswoman of Haitian origin, as well as co-founder of SublimArt, a company created for the promotion of artists working mainly in Canada and the United States in 1997. Today MosaikArt has 24 member artists to its repertoire originating from Africa, Haiti, the Caribbean and Europe – based in Montreal or as faraway as Tokyo.

The gallery presents a regular calendar of themed exhibits, making ethnic art & culture accessible to the community. In addition, MosaikArt offers art classes to the public, further enriching our appreciation and understanding of multicultural art. The gallery also serves the community by making itself available for rental for various events – from community conferences, to book launches, fashion shows, and private occasions.

Each season MosaikArt presents new and rich collections of work, including a variety of sculptures, original paintings, and artisan objects, all of which offer exciting, intimate insights into far-away cultures.

MosaikArt fills an important role in Quebec's artistic landscape. Its community commitment and outreach stems from the belief in the value of cultural identity as creative expression, and its contribution to the fabric of Canadian identity. The gallery is a platform for artists of diverse origins not only to present their explorations, but also to open a dialogue that may enrich our understanding of each other through the arts.

MosaikArt began 2009 with "Warriors: Colours on Black Women" an educational and creative fundraising exhibit in celebration of Black History Month, that runs from February 3 through March 31.

Featuring original paintings and photographs by eight of the gallery's artists, "Warriors: Colours on Black Women" has been created to highlight, educate and inspire through the outstanding contributions made by Black women to Canadian society.

The exhibit also featured an art contest open to Secondary V and 1st year college students who were invited to participate along this theme. Students won, amongst other prizes, a year membership to The Canadian Centre for Architecture, The Montreal Museum of Fine Art and The Montreal Museum of Contemporary Art.

Fifteen percent of sales from paintings sold during this exhibition will be donated in support of the Fondation CRUDEM's YU-G-TU development program for women and children in Mali. Based in Montreal for 35 years, Fondation CRUDEM is a non-profit development agency that provides essential social development tools to impoverished women and children in Haiti, Mali and Cameroon.

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OPINION

Language Barrier

By Jason Selman

For as long as I can remember I have defined myself as Black first and Anglophone second. From the time I first entered public education I have both consciously and subconsciously rejected French.

Growing up Anglophone, learning French was never seen as a privilege or a luxury but rather an imposition. Not something I looked forward to but rather something I naively anticipated not having to be bothered with once I graduated from high school. Perhaps as an aspiring musician and artist I assumed that the language of music was universal enough and would afford me the ability to communicate with the rest of the world. Ironically these same gifts which have afforded me the opportunity of travel also gave me the chance open myself up to language and by extension see French in a whole new light.

The luxury of travel has taught me that there is not one monolithic blackness but perhaps infinite concepts relative to culture, class and geography. Going to places like Cuba, and recently Brazil, and meeting with brothers and sisters of the Diaspora opened my eyes to the linguistic dimensions of Blackness that I had never really considered.

Openness in terms of language, a longing to learn and understand, allows someone to not only find out what life is like for Blacks in Brazil, Senegal or Cuba, but to pose the question themselves and get the answers. This openness allows one to get a sense of someone else's reality as it has or has not been shaped by race. These things can be achieved if we are open enough to make an effort to learn a new language and by extension enter someone else's world.

For me there are few greater feelings than traveling halfway around the world and being welcomed – completely; having an instantaneous sense of familiarity while being somewhere that I have never been; coming to an understanding that our story as Black people is so much more complicated and yet beautiful than it seems. But during my travels, my linguistic shortcomings in many ways did not allow me to get to the depth of my discoveries. Coming home, I felt exhilarated by the experiences but also disappointed, feeling that in some way I had failed.

As I told a Brazilian friend upon my return, there is nothing more beautiful than sitting in a room full of afro-Brazilians as they passionately discuss their problems, their issues, and their solutions as I feverishly try to come to an understanding of how similar we are. But there is also nothing more frustrating than knowing that if my Portuguese was a little sharper I could get to the bottom of things.

But sometimes failure is precious. Because through failure I began to see myself. I learned that my failure was not a matter of being incapable but rather a matter of not being prepared. When I went to Cuba in the summer of 2006, the thought of attempting to learn conversational Spanish didn't even cross my mind. But when preparing for my trip to Brazil last November, I felt I had to do something to get myself ready. So several days before my departure I made the miniscule gesture of buying a book on Portuguese in the hope that while there I could reference it and be able to converse.

It doesn't work that way. What I learned is that these types of things take months of preparation. Had I simply started learning Portuguese several months earlier, my trip would have been even more fulfilling. While away, I did however receive an education from my peers and my environment. Being surrounded by friends who had prepared themselves and were making meaningful connections everywhere they

went, I realized that it was possible. Though they all had the advantage of previous travels to supplement their learning I finally felt that I could do it too, as long as I put in the time.

Now that I am home, I think about Brazil almost daily. I plan to continue my travels knowing that it is not just a luxury but an obligation, to return to where I have been and also to see new places and meet new people. Everyday I try to take a little time out to work on my Portuguese with the hopes of one day mastering the language as well as one day making my way back to Spanish.

My life in Quebec is different now, because my attitude towards French has also changed. Having the knowledge and the confidence that I can one day become fluent in languages that are completely foreign to me lets me know that maybe French isn't so difficult after all and perhaps not so much of a challenge as I thought. What makes all this possible are not just opportunities but also an openness within the moment once the opportunities present themselves. Every time someone speaks French to me is either an opportunity for me to reinforce my negative experiences or rather improve my language skills therefore further enriching travels throughout the Diaspora.

When you are at home you have the option of closing yourself to the rest of the world. But once you step out into other worlds your survival can sometimes depend on how willing you are to, and how well you can, communicate. I've decided to keep this sensibility with me and make the most the world. The world outside is mine to explore and the Diaspora is mine to reclaim. There is no better tool to do this with than language.



LAST WORDS



The Progress Program

The Progress Program is a reading group created by BCRC to encourage advanced young readers in the Black community. We will have two separate streams for elementary and high school students. Both groups will meet regularly to read and discuss the selected materials. It is our hope that through these efforts young people who are doing well will be further inspired to do so while serving as an inspiration to their peers. We will focus on books from the Black diaspora with priority being given to Afro-Canadian authors.



BCRC has put together two guides to assist Montreal's Black community.

Our Scholarship and Employment Services Guide gives you detailed information on educational funding and organizations offering job search support.

Our Resource Guide highlights a variety of organizations of service to the Black community.

You can come by our offices 9-5 weekdays and pick up a copy.

Come check out the latest info on vocational and trade training as well. Take advantage of the information on the shelves of our Resource Library. Come and browse or give us a call. Simone will be happy to assist you (514) 342-2247

The Black Community Resource Centre (BCRC) is an organization that strengthens community capacity by providing professional support to organizations and individuals in need.

Our team is committed to assisting visible minority youth rekindle their dreams and achieve their full potential.

Our Funders:

- Human Resource and Skills Development Canada; Multiculturalism, Official Languages Branch; Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, National Crime Prevention Centre
- Emploi-Québec; Fonds Jeunesse du Québec; Ministère des Relations avec les citoyens et de l'immigration; Ministère de l'Emploi de la Solidarité Sociale et de la Famille