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Opinion: The Quebec Human Rights Commission Is Too White

By Yvonne Sam (Chairman of Rights and Freedoms Committee at BCRC)

The Quebec Human Rights and Youth Rights Commission has come under harsh scrutiny, following the hiring of a senior manager in its Investigation Division. The Commission has failed to diversify its senior management

personnel, with almost no managers from racial minority backgrounds and no Anglophones. Now, front and centre of conversations, are the concerns about this displayed inability of the Commission to practice what it preaches, espe-

cially as it refers to employment.

From its inception in 1976, the Human Rights Commission was constituted under the Charter of Human Rights and Freedom to ensure that Quebec's laws, by-laws,

standards and institutional practices, both public and private, comply with the Charter, which prohibits discrimination based on race, colour, ethnic or national origin and religion in the exercise of human rights and freedoms.

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A Word From The President



BLACK HISTORY MONTH CELEBRATIONS: Is it any longer relevant in Montreal?

By Dr. Clarence S. Bayne
President of BCRC

Mr Egbert Gaye, the Editor in Chief and owner of Community Contact (Community Contact, Volume 28, Number 02 Jan, 26 20118) in an interview featuring Michael Farkas, the President of the Black History Month Round Table (BHMRT) posed the question: "Is the celebration of Black History Month any longer relevant in Montreal?" Egbert, in the lead up to this question, described the official opening event for Black History Month traditionally held at City Hall in a way that captures the feeling in the Black English speaking community. He said it is an event in which the Black English speaking community has lost interest and from which they feel that they have been excluded. By and large the key organizational leadership in the English speaking Black Community have absented themselves from the event; and the same is true of the major Black French speaking organizational leaders.

Let me put it up front I believe that the event in and of itself is important but for it to be truly meaningful and not be mere smoke and mirrors, the City Administration and Provincial government must show evidence that they are aggressively eliminating the systemic barriers to Blacks in their administrations and their distribution of resources. In general, most Blacks I speak to do not believe that this is happening or will happen. Moreover, because of my working relationship with the BHMRT I have had to respond in private to many of the questions and observations made by Egbert in his interview with Michael. So in this article I am going to pretend that I am being interviewed and responding to Community Contact and several other Community leaders from the English speaking community questioning me, as in fact they have, about the relevance of the celebration and the significance of the events at City Hall.

The first question. "Clarence as a leader in this Black community and a Professor I do not have to tell you that Black history is about life, survival, and living. We do that every day. So why you and your friends get together with the City to celebrate Black

History for only one month in the year? Do you feel that makes sense?"

The first thing I do when I attempt to answer this question is to get out of this leadership role that is so gratuitously being assigned to me. Because it usually is a trap. So I make the point that I want to breath fresh air, drink clean water, and to be safe from the cold and other inhospitable things like "bad moutherers", reproduce myself and feel good. But I can't do that to the maximum possible without making sure that some others also survive. So I do what I have to do (act responsibly) so that my true friends and my family all have a better chance. So let's drop the preamble, "as a leader, etc," Moreover being a professor is how I make a living salary. That's it. Having said that, I agree with those that say "Black history month is every day". But I think that when we compare Black activities and visibility in the early sixties with today, we are living our history and reproducing our cultures as a people incredibly more than we were then. Unfortunately, we are doing it under great stress and negation by the mainstream White culture and the levelers in our own community. Part of the problem is that we have no one telling our stories and singing the praises of our achievements between the events at City hall. So we are more likely to hear the voice of the personality assassinator than the creative voice of achievement and hope. But the reality is that the activities that our children take for granted today and question did not exist in 1960: there were only 5000 Blacks living mostly in Little Burgundy; there were only three Montreal born Blacks at McGill and Sir George University; and Mr. Clyke, with a Master's degree, could only find work as a porter on CNR. There was no Black Theatre Workshop, no Vues d'Afrique, no Nuits d'Afrique, no Black Film Festival, no Carefiesta, no Ragae Festivals, no Jamaica Day, no Trini Day, no Oliver Jones, no Charlie Biddles, no Oscar Peterson, no Blue Ribbon or DouDou Boicel Jaz Festival, no Calypsonians, no Eddie Tousaint, no Zab nor Westcan, no taste of the Caribbean, no African and Caribbean restaurants; no Caribbean Associations, no Black Doctors

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Semaji

Volume 13, Issue 4 February 2018

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Black Studies Centre



...Continued From Page 2

or Nurses, no University trained managers and professionals, etc. Blacks were trapped in low paying jobs as porters with CNR and CPR, suffered discrimination at most restaurants, night clubs and bars, and were not permitted to rent in most neighbourhoods of the City. We began to push back the barriers to our progress from the mid-sixties during the "quiet revolution". The Sir George William computer Crisis, the Black writer Congress, the creation of the National Black Coalition of Canada represent high points in the struggle to change the inhospitable landscape that we met in the late fifties and early sixties.

In 1991, a group of activists went down to City Hall and told the mayor that we were fed-up with being excluded from the cultural, social and economic proprietorship of this City and Province, and that we wanted our culture and contributions recognized. We wanted greater strategic control in the social, cultural and economic life of the City. The City Administration of the day, under Mayor Jean Doré, agreed. The City not only agreed but became engaged in getting the province to put in place a Table de Concertation to address the broader issues of racial discrimination and the economic isolation of the Black community in Montreal and Quebec. To accommodate this the Black Community Forum was created in July 1992 to mobilize the Black English speaking Black communities.

Concretely, one of the things the City and the Black Community leadership agreed to was to adopt the Black American model for Black History Month and officially declare February Black History Month, to be celebrated by all Montrealers. This declaration did not give ownership to the City Administration. Nobody owns Black History month. It is a time for celebration of our presence and contributions and to get some recognition of the contributions of Bauxite, Sugar, cotton, banana, rum, citrus and slave labour to the development of the British Empire and Canada. God knows in the English speaking Caribbean we ate a lot of salt fish tail and processed salted herrings not suitable for European markets to keep cost cheap and

profits high for the Canadian and its booming Maritime economies of the time. In effect, "Black History Month" in North America and the Caribbean evolves out of the English speaking Black experiences of the triangular mercantile trade, and slavery and capitalism. It is a celebration of the victory of the Western Black victory over the hell hole of plantation slavery and the embracing of hope and the march to the "mountain top".

It would be crazy for us, as Blacks, to say that the City and Province should stop this symbolic and official recognition of Blacks; that only Blacks should celebrate Black History Month. The latter would defeat the purpose of the Event here in Canada. What we need to do is to get the mainstream to learn more about us and incorporate our contributions in a valid and more integrated history of Montreal and Quebec. That has to be a struggle that we must continue above all else. We cannot just allow City officials, policy makers and administrators to think that all they have to do is invite us to City Hall once a year and that we will be satisfied with a superficial type of fraternization. Unfortunately, this is what many activists in the English speaking Black community believe has happened since 1992.

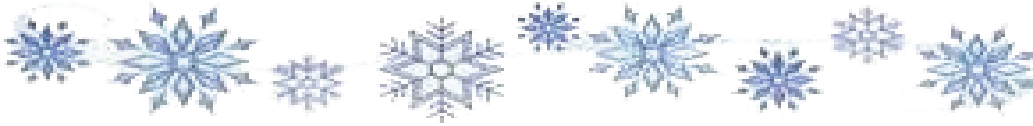
The polite terms in which Community Contact puts it is that it has become an event where, after some chit chat from the Mayor and maybe the Police Chief, "guests will mull around the hall, chit chatting and enjoying the dipsy variety of cheeses, finger foods and wine whisked around by servers dressed in formal attire. And when it is all done it appears as if that is the end of Black History Month." Egbert expresses a view that is widely held in the English speaking Black Community. And if you try to tell those individuals anything different, they will tell you that "you are just trying to defend your buddies."

Egbert says that interest has waned and Michael, the President of Black History Month Round Table, agrees. But the reason is not, as Michael is reported as saying, that there is a "societal shift towards acknowledging diversity in a broader sense." Black History Month in North America is not simply about diversity. It is about reconciliation, inclusion and community education and the correction of history. The concept of a larger diversity is the type of avoidance that one might expect from the French nationalists pre-occupations with distinctions between "multiculturalism" and "interculturalism" or their increasing impatience with the "others" cultures. In my opinion,

what has really happened is that the population, both Black and White, sees the City Hall event as not pertinent to what they are doing. One thing I am constantly being asked is why, out of courtesy, English is not spoken at the event. Second statement of detachment is that the event is no longer an expression of the Western Black struggle for reconciliation, recognition and strategic control. The English speaking Blacks, especially the Caribbean English speaking Blacks, feel that they have been excluded from the decision making processes with respect to the City Hall event. In general, it is believed that the "Calendar" has two serious flaws: one is that it no longer promotes other events in the Black community outside the control of the Black History Month Round Table. Thus, at times, it is a competitor with the events it was created to support. The second problem frequently cited in both the Black and White communities is that awarding twelve Laureates per year raises questions about the value of being a Laureate. One critic actually said to me that awarding a laureate to a sixteen year old Black Youth for having gained a "Black Belt" is an insult to Youth achievers. A prominent Black politician complained to me about the seeming absence of consistent criteria for making choices of laureates. The person ventured the statement, that it should not be aimed at the superficial satisfaction of the individual's need for self-actualization but at the promotion of excellence. Here again they say that the BHMRT seem to be competing with other Black agencies and not marking out a niche need area, like youth achievers in certain fields of endeavour, etc.

My Opinion

I do not believe that Black History Month is being honoured less. I believe that Black arts, cultural and social events have increased in quantity and quality; that these events are taking place throughout the year. I believe that the reason that there appears that interest has waned in the Black and White communities is because there is not effective coverage and encouragement of activities. Some attempts have been made to improve that situation by the Pan-Black Website created by an alliance of Black community organizations and administered by the BHMRT. But the BHMRT is awaiting support from the City and other sponsors to manage the site professionally. Also, I would like to point to the fact that the Black Theatre Workshop School Tour which takes place specifically for Black History Month has been booked for over forty schools in the English speaking school



...Continued from Cover

The organogram organizational chart of the Human Rights Commission shows that starting from the very top and with virtually no stop, diversity is totally disregarded. Both vice presidents, Camil Picard (Acting President) and Philippe-André Tessier, are Francophones and white. The same is true for 12 out of 15 senior managers.

Completing the landscape is an unprecedented absence of Indigenous and racialized Anglophones, which further serves to impair the decision making process.

Meanwhile, political uproar surrounded the appointment of the Commission's first Black president, Tamara Thermitus, currently on sick leave since last fall. Before becoming head of the Quebec Human Rights Commission she found herself at the center of growing controversy as both parties in the National Assembly objected to her appointment, claiming that she was too "multiculturalist" and much too close for comfort to Dominique Anglade, Liberal Economy, Science and Innovation Minister who also shared her roots.

One is left with a troubling sense that the principal agency tasked with ensuring

diversity is the one doing the least effective work. Another aspect of the problem may be that the true meaning of diversity in Quebec has not been fully understood where it matters most.

"It is time for the Quebec Human Rights Commission to look in the mirror, and cease the denial before they find themselves on trial."

To juxtapose the current situation and place it in its correct perspective, the judicial system also displays a glaring lack of diversity. Of the more than 500 judges operating at different levels in the courts of Quebec, only three are black.

Considering the fact that at the level of the Commission decisions are made daily, the majority of which have a profound and long lasting impact on the lives of visible minority individuals, it's important that diversity is reflected in the makeup of those who occupy the role of judge and listener. Plainly put, powerful institutions must or should reflect the society they serve.

In order to cultivate an arena

of legitimacy in the eyes of the citizenry, Premier Philippe Couillard was called upon to give thoughtful and deliberate consideration to racial and linguistic diversity, and Anglophone and minority representation when filling existing vacancies, such as at the Human Rights Commission.

It is time for the Quebec Human Rights Commission to look in the mirror, and cease the denial before they find themselves on trial. All that is being asked is to carry out their mandated task by practicing what they preach.

This plea has sadly fallen on deaf ears as the task of creating and maintaining diversity has fallen to those who are themselves considered "diverse." A leopard cannot change its spots and it is difficult to teach an old dog new tricks.

Originally Published in Huffpost February 2, 2018.

http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/yvonne-sam/the-quebec-human-rights-commission-is-too-white_a_23346680/





As the preliminary event which kicks off Black History Month, the Black Theatre Workshop's 32nd Vision Gala celebrates Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday and the impact that community members have made in the arts. Not only is the Black Theatre Workshop responsible for represent-



Denburk Reid; Photo Taken from <http://www.blacktheatreworkshop.ca/vision-celebration-gala-2018/>



Don Jordan; Photo Taken from <http://www.blacktheatreworkshop.ca/vision-celebration-gala-2018/>

The Black Theatre Workshop's Vision Gala

By Ashlie Bienvenu

ing Black identity in the arts, they are also one of the founding organizations that led to the celebration of February's Black History Month in Montreal. While there were many well-known faces at the event, the recipients of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Achievement Award and the Dr. Clarence Bayne Community

Service Award were, respectively, Mr. Don Jordan and Mr. Denburk Reid.

See

<http://www.blacktheatreworkshop.ca/vision-celebration-gala-2018/> for further details

...Continued From Page 3

Boards in each of the last three years. Moreover, the schools have been inviting speakers to make presentations and participate in programs on diversity put on by the school staff themselves.

However, BHMRT has to become more active in supporting and promoting these events. In particular, it has to promote the initiatives of the Union United Church walking tour of its history all year round, as well as the Church's Martin Luther King Jr Birthday church service; and it has to actively support the Vision celebration event of BTW as the opening event leading into Black History month; and the educational school tours during February. This is particularly important, since BTW was one of the original Black English speaking companies that lobbied the City to declare February Black History Month, and was active in the early years organizing and staging a number of its variety theatrical performances.

I do not think that Black History Month events alone should be responsible for defining us and our place in Quebec. However, it has put the focus on us in a

way that is not the case with other cultural groups. But we must realize that it lends itself to being exploited as a mechanism for token recognition. It receives none of the kind of financial support that would qualify as identity defining support. It is the operations of agencies like Zab, Black Theatre Workshop, Nuits d'Afrique, Vues d'Afrique, Black Film Festival, Carifesta, Blue Ribbons, the Ragae Festival, the poetry jams and readings of Black artists, cultural displays by Concordia and McGill universities; and the University of Montreal, cultural sponsor of Black arts and culture such as the BSC Charitable Fund, Michaëlle Jean Foundation, the TD Bank, the Cole Foundation, private arts and cultural events that are doing that work on a long term basis to define us and the roles we play in this society.

The City Default

On the other hand, the City has defaulted on early promises. It has cut key resources to the English speaking events such as the Carifesta and the Black History Month celebrations. It has failed to give the full value to the contributions of Oscar Peterson and Oliver Jones here in this City where they were born, grew up and became World greats. Other Cities have

done more for Peterson. No organization knows better than the Black History Month Round Table the sting of the slap we received as a community from the City in the 375th Montreal Celebration year of 2017.

Black English Speaking Community Gratitude and recommendation

We must commend the Organization and its President, Mr Michael Farkas, for the role they played in expressing our concerns and anger at our exclusion from the celebrative events. The Black History Month Round Table theme "Ici pour rester, Ici pour durer" represented our feelings as a community. Also the Black Community Forum partnership with the BHMRT was successful in representing the community frustration and anger at the rejection of BHMRT project for full participation in the 375th celebration. It led to the naming of a building in the Sud-Ouest after Oliver Jones. The news coming from the English speaking Caribbean sectors of the Black communities is that BHMRT needs to do more of this type of collaboration and to more actively promote and celebrate the English speaking communities and organizations. This is the message I am getting and asked to deliver.

Community Events and Information



YOUTH & SENIOR PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR NEW INTER-GENERATIONAL PROJECT

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BY DJENNIE LAGUERRE
DIRECTED BY DAYANE NTIBARIKURE

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For more information:
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mai
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Journée internationale des femmes International Women's Day

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Comment les droits des femmes ont-ils changé au fil du temps?
Qu'est-ce qui nous empêche de les faire valoir pleinement?
Comment se mettre en action aujourd'hui?

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- Discrimination et racisme au travail
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6767, Côte-des-Neiges
Grande Salle / in the Main Room

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How have Women's Rights changed over time?
What prevents us from fully asserting our rights?
How can we take action today?

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Activity open to the all public. In French and in English

Activité organisée par Femmes du monde à Côte-des-Neiges, en collaboration avec le Centre des travailleurs et travailleuses immigrés-e-s, Prévention NDG, Projet Génie.



...Continued From Page 6

On February 26th, 2018, at Concordia University, Cinema Politica screened a film, "Unarmed Verses", by Charles Officer. This screening was presented as an event for Black History Month.

In Unarmed Verses, acclaimed filmmaker Charles Officer creates a thoughtful and vivid portrait of a family and community threatened with imposed relocation. The film focuses on the power of art and creativity in navigating adversity, giving agency to those who are rarely heard in society, and mirroring our need to express ourselves, find a voice, and belong.

For more information on the film go to:
<https://www.cinemapolitica.org/screening/concordia/unarmed-verses>

For more Information on Cinema Politica go to:
<https://www.cinemapolitica.org/concordia>

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Word Find Answers from Last Issue



A	O	L	S	U	P	R	O	U	D	M	A	R	Y	N	K	Z	R	V	R	C	X
A	U	E	Q	O	N	N	M	W	Z	W	E	A	F	I	O	G	B	H	R	K	P
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Black History Shouldn't Be Confined To 1 Month A Year:

By Yvonne Sam (Chairman of Rights and Freedoms Committee at BCRC)

February just ended, which means for some I am out of time to weigh in on issues that affect Black people.

It is a known fact that beyond the 28 or 29 day stretch, the significance of Black history is analogous to a barely visible flicker in the dark of night. It is rarely the topic of any on-going conversations, and/or daily teachings to present the truths to the misinformed and under-educated populous at large.

One can never fully understand Canada without reference to Black people, but at the same time, Black people cannot afford to wait to learn about Black history when it is convenient for the rest of Canada, but instead should remain owners of their own enlightenment, keepers of their own achievements and ultimate missionaries of their own salvation.

Canada has, and continues to, pride herself on her exceptionally inclusive ways, even Quebec included. However, for this to ring true, recognition and contributions of all peoples must first take place. History must be told in its entirety.

Currently, Black people have been largely eradicated from the history books, so that there are no reminders of the brutal discrimination of the past — or the subtle racism of the present.

While inventions and new discoveries have changed the face of math and science in schools, history has remained static, under the assumption that our scholarship of it was

factual and complete. How can this be achieved if certain facts fail to form part of history, and have left Black students to cope with the omission and erasure? In addition, invisibility within the curricula and the predominantly white demographic makeup of educators continue to negatively affect Black students.

Recent viewing of the documentary "Speakers for the Dead", revealed some hidden history of Black people in Canada, and also hidden secrets of Canada's past. The majority of the attendees confessed to never having heard of the "sundown laws," being totally unaware that in the 1920s in Canada, Black presence in public spaces was restricted in some places with sundown laws, or curfews imposed that forced them to be indoors by a certain time.

The documentary served as a deflator to the "not in our backyard" myth, the false notion that persists to this day that Canada did not enslave Africans like our American neighbours. A heightened level of shock permeated the audience on being informed that under Sir John A. Macdonald, abusive residential schools were created and the practice of segregation ensured that Black children receive substandard or no education.

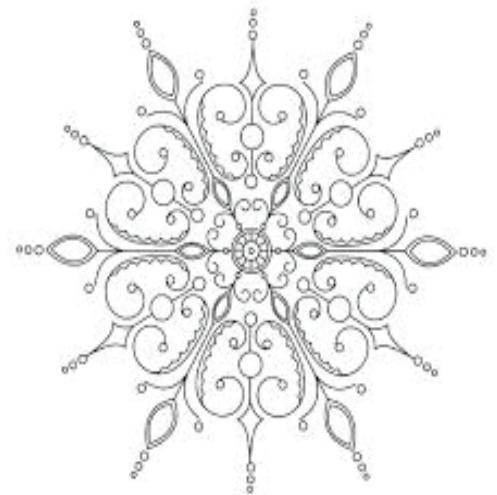
The time has come for the history pages that were lost to be incorporated into the curriculum at any cost. The past must be faced with honesty, and the input of Black

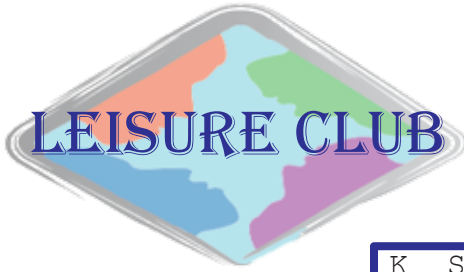


people should be included in the history books for all to see.

Intention alone is inadequate in producing change. School boards are called upon to diversify teaching staff, and provide teachers with reference books that will give students the true picture of Canada, so that the next generation will not have to face the same prejudices. Otherwise, the goal of an inclusive curriculum runs the risk of being relegated to a feel-good rhetorical attempt at compromise.

Originally published in Huffington Post:
http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/yvonne-sam/black-history--shouldnt-be-confined-to-one-month-a-year_a_23372932/





Test Your Knowledge With This Historical WordFind Puzzle!!

WordFind Words

- ❖ Black History Month
- ❖ Black Theatre Workshop
- ❖ Black Film Festival
- ❖ Vues d'Afrique
- ❖ Quiet Revolution
- ❖ Michael Farkas

K	S	V	M	I	V	P	M	N	Z	Q	O	Z	C	G	Z	N	H	L	Y
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Y	H	E	R	J	R	C	K	D	L	F	N	P	R	F	C	Q	V	D	N
K	H	J	G	J	Q	X	Y	Z	M	T	I	P	G	L	Y	U	Q	L	Q
H	Q	Y	U	X	S	C	E	I	L	G	L	Z	D	V	G	F	B	M	G
N	S	M	I	C	H	A	E	L	F	A	R	K	A	S	V	C	D	H	D
J	X	I	Q	H	L	A	A	F	V	I	A	X	E	X	E	P	L	D	H
G	W	A	C	S	I	G	Q	Y	L	S	X	K	O	A	L	C	H	Q	H
C	U	P	C	Y	U	W	P	M	P	Q	Y	F	Q	U	B	E	O	M	U
D	I	B	F	Y	Q	A	I	H	Y	Q	Y	F	H	U	U	J	P	M	E
Q	N	S	P	T	N	F	N	E	D	Q	K	D	N	L	B	Y	B	R	T
C	M	H	N	Q	L	P	H	I	H	E	Q	Y	O	B	I	R	P	F	C
R	J	C	X	I	F	Q	Y	H	I	Z	Y	X	F	B	I	L	X	Z	R
Q	S	F	B	V	N	P	Y	L	Q	X	N	V	X	Q	R	C	J	T	M
Q	B	L	A	C	K	F	I	L	M	F	E	S	T	I	V	A	L	P	L
P	O	H	S	K	R	O	W	E	R	T	A	E	H	T	K	C	A	L	B
P	M	Q	U	I	E	T	R	E	V	O	L	U	T	I	O	N	I	M	X



Cozy Up with This Book!!!



The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal, By Dorothy W. Williams.

Blacks have always been a part of the Québec experience—from the original European explorations to enslavement, from Confederation to the present day. Dorothy Williams returns to the roots of black history by chronicling slavery in Montreal, which lasted officially in New France for seventy-one years. The author describes the impact of the railways on Montreal's black community and charts the evolution of the black community's institutions.

--Excerpt from amazon.ca

This book can be found at the Atwater Library's Black Collection.

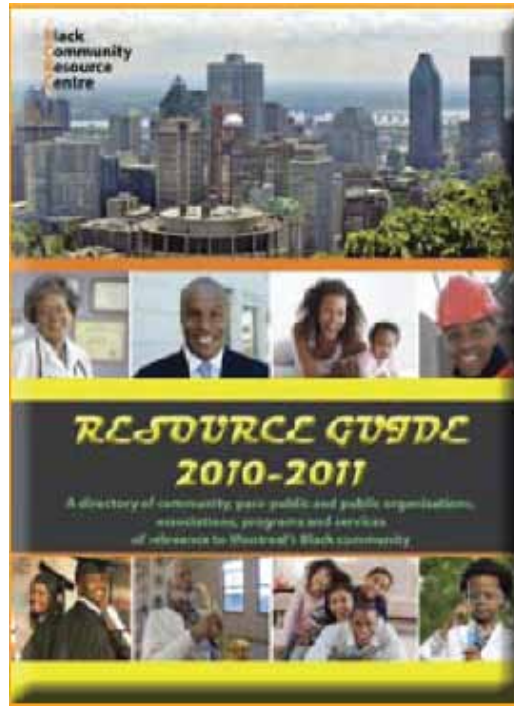
Stay Tuned!!!



Black Panther (2018).
Cast: Chadwick Boseman, Michael B. Jordan, Lupita Nyong'o.

T'Challa, after the death of his father, the King of Wakanda, returns home to the isolated, technologically advanced African nation to succeed to the throne and take his rightful place as king.

--Excerpt from IMDB



Our Resource Guide highlights a variety of non-profit, public and para-public organizations serving the English-speaking Black community

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:

- ◆ Patrimoine canadien /Canadian Heritage, Official Languages
- ◆ Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal
- ◆ Black Studies Centre (BSC)

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