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The Jackie Robinson Myth:
Social Mobility and Race in Montreal, 1920-1960

Dorothy W. Williams

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
History

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for the Degree of Master of Arts at
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ABSTRACT

The Jackie Robinson Myth: Social Mobility and Race in Montreal, 1920-1960

Dorothy W. Williams

In 1946, the Brooklyn Dodgers sent Jackie Robinson to their farm team, the Montreal Royals. Robinson had been chosen as the first Black who would break the colour barrier in major league baseball. The Royals were chosen because it was felt that Montreal would provide a more tolerant atmosphere than any American city.

From the beginning, Jackie Robinson was well received on and off the field. He became a lasting source of pride for the city, proof that Montreal had a high degree of racial tolerance. But racial tolerance was not so evident to Blacks living in Montreal. They experienced severe discrimination in jobs, in housing and in the city's social life. Yet, some Blacks of the Robinson era made considerable socio-economic gains. The question is whether their success was the result of Montreal's tolerance or of other factors.

This paper examines two Black Montrealers of the Robinson years. Richard Lord achieved prominence as an engineer, a lawyer,

and as a leader of the larger community, a prominence that included service as President of the Quebec Liberal Party. His sister, Gwen Lord, was one the first Black teachers in Montreal, eventually rising to a senior position in the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal.

At first glance, their stories seem to support the Robinson myth that Montreal was a place where Blacks had an equal chance to achieve social acceptance and economic opportunity. However, this study suggests their success had little to do with an absence of racism and that the perceived climate of tolerance in Montreal was a myth.

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In conclusion, I want to thank my family for their encouragement and patience. Their ingenuity and kind actions went a long way. They share this success with me.

To Julie and Pat
From the beginning to the end.

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PREFACE

This thesis is a culmination of many years of research, of collecting data and disseminating Black history to groups and to the media within the greater Montreal area. This research has led to two books which examine the socio-economic mobility of the Black community of Montreal, Blacks in Montreal 1628-1986 An Urban Demography and The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal.¹ This thesis takes a different approach. Rather than examining the Black community as a whole, it inquires into the lives of two individuals. As a result, it does not revise any previous studies; rather it offers a new perspective.

My study examines two members of the Black community whose formative years coincided with the birth of the myth that the Jackie Robinson experience typified life for most Montreal Blacks. After defining the criteria for interviewees, it quickly became evident that only one set of siblings I knew would fit the requirements: Richard Lord, and his younger sister, Gwen.

Over several decades Richard Lord has been involved in community organizations. His name has been well known due to his

¹ Dorothy W. Williams. Blacks in Montreal 1628-1986 An Urban Demography (Cowansville: Les Éditions Yvon Blais, 1989). Dorothy W. Williams. The Road to Now A History of Blacks in Montreal (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1997)

legal and immigration work or alternately, due to his extensive personal and historical knowledge of the development of Blacks in Montreal. Gwen was a role model and a trailblazer in the education field. She was amongst a small group of Blacks who moved into restricted job areas and pushed open many doors. They rose to the top of their professions and made it easier for others to follow. Their trailblazing achievements served as inspirations to a generation of Black Montrealers.

ABBREVIATIONS

CASA	Canadian Association of School Administrators
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CDPQ	Commission des droits de la personne du Québec
CLSC	Centre local de services communautaires
MASA	Montreal Association of School Administrators
NCC	Negro Community Centre
PSBGM	Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal
QASA	Quebec Association of School Administrators
QBBE	Quebec Board of Black Educators
QME	Quebec Ministry of Education
SGWU	Sir George Williams University
STCUM	Société de Transport de la Communauté urbaine de Montréal
UNIA	Universal Negro Improvement Association

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Myth and History

Definition and Use

The Jackie Robinson myth has its roots in an older and broader myth about the experience of Blacks in Canada. The older myth in turn has its origins in American slavery and the perception of Canada as a haven for escaped slaves. Like many myths these contain small truths that become popularly accepted as the whole truth.

History begins in myth.² What is myth? Webster defines myth as “a popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone; especially one embodying the ideals and institutions of a society or a segment of a society.” This definition is closely linked to the purpose of myth, which is a “traditional story, of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain...a belief.”³

At first glance, the dictionary definition clearly explains

² Arthur Lower. History and Myth: Arthur Lower and the Making of Canadian Nationalism ed. Welf H. Heick (University of British Columbia Press, 1975), p. 2. The first chapter, “Historical Essays: Speculative,” is one of the first historiographic discussions of the relationship of history to myth in Canada.

³ Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition (1993).

myth. However, when writing history there are other dynamic processes at play. The historian must be aware of false belief and his own active agency. Arthur Lower believed that “the myth establishes its own version of history, partly by the colouring of fact, partly by deliberate suppression of unwelcome facts.” This is the misuse of half-truths to project a false image. Though historians do create myths, any “perversion of the evidence” simply to create a myth “is an unpardonable sin for the historian” and clearly must be avoided.”⁴

Despite his injunction, Lower rhapsodizes about the exigency and interconnectedness of myth and history. “History is the joint product of myth and fact, soul and body.” In other words, historians do not write outside their innate knowledge of themselves. Their innate knowledge becomes part of the very history they pen. On the other hand, “fact without myth...is dead: [for] myth without fact is not history.”⁵ Historians must draw on myth; myth itself is not to be avoided.

A National Example: The Underground Railroad

Myths are important tools for nation building, for myths are derived from a shared psyche and, simultaneously, they create a shared psyche. The historian plays a key role in a nation’s psyche.

⁴ Lower. History and Myth, pp. 4. 6.

⁵ Ibid., p. 6

“The myth with which the historian deals...is concerned with a people’s conception of itself.”⁶ Like all peoples, Canadians use myth. Even in their short history as a nation, Canadians have mythologized events and people such as the epic building of the national railroad, the traitorous Louis Riel, and the settlement of the frontier.

In the nineteenth century historiography of Canada, there exists an example of this relationship between myth and Black history in Canada. The story of “the underground railroad” is undoubtedly the most important myth.⁷ In the classic version of the legend, Black and White conductors ferried Black runaway American slaves across the American-Canadian border, where the fugitives were protected by the supposedly more humane and beneficent British law.⁸ The government ministries, the press, and the historians have used the existence of the underground railroad to demonstrate the attractiveness of Canada, its land, its people, its

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ For an American analysis of ‘myth and the underground railroad’ see works by Larry Gara. “Propaganda Uses of the Underground Railway,” Mid America, n. s. 23 (1952): 155-171. and. “The Underground Railway: Legend or Reality,” American Philosophical Society Proceedings, 105 (1961): 334-39. and “The Underground Railroad-A Re-evaluation,” Ohio Historical Quarterly, 69 (July, 1960) 217-230.

⁸ The body of literature on the underground railroad is prodigious. In Canada, Robin Winks, “A Continental Abolitionism?,” The Blacks in Canada A History (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press, 1971). Reprint, Montreal, McGill/Queen’s University Press, 1997. pp. 233-271. serves as a general starting point. Rosemary Sadler, Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad: Her Life in the United States and Canada (Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1997) is the latest. W. Siebert, The Underground Railroad From Slavery to Freedom (New York: MacMillan, 1898) is the first scholarly study. Fred Landon, “Canada and the Underground Railroad,” Kingston Historical Society Reports and Proceedings (1923): 17-31. is just one of several he produced.

laws.⁹

Nevertheless, at the same time that the myth of the underground railroad was being perpetuated, harassment of Blacks in Canada was on the rise, and the official government stance toward Black immigration was increasingly negative.¹⁰ Yet Canadians fostered the myth of the underground railroad because it established that they were different, rather morally better, than Americans. Canadians exploited the myth so that they could offer a humane, charitable Canada as a better place for the white traveller to settle. However, they did not want American Blacks to see Canada in the same light and tried to discourage them from emigrating to Canada.¹¹

Another corollary of the myth is that the inherent goodness of White Canada has always been a part of Canada's history. Therefore, the Canadians that treated Blacks in this way surely did not have a slave past. The history of slavery in Canada was swept away to preserve this myth. The history of the underground railroad from 1820 to 1865 is taught in schools, whereas the slave pasts of New

⁹Winks, Blacks, pp. 193-194: [page citations are from the reprint edition of 1997].

¹⁰Winks, Blacks, pp. 233-271, 298-311; See also T. Sessing, "How They Kept Canada Almost Lily White: The Previously Untold Story of the Canadian Immigration Officials who Stopped American Blacks from Coming into Canada", Saturday Night, September, (1970): 30-32.

¹¹ See Winks, Blacks, pp. 298-313 for the government reaction to Black immigration. Quotes are from the various ministry offices to the Prime Minister's office and include the parliamentary debates over the exclusion of American Blacks.

France and British North America, from 1628 to 1834, are ignored.¹²
And so the myth develops.

Historians, the media, and all the other myth-makers have used the story so well that generations of Canadians believe that their history is slave-free. While most Canadians can talk about the glorious role Canada played in the underground railroad, these same Canadians express shock when told that slavery existed on Canadian soil until 1834. The myth is so pervasive and ingrained that the messenger is often called a liar and accused of “promoting slavery where it did not exist.”¹³

At once confused and disbelieving, Canadians ask, “How could this be, for if we had one [the underground railroad] how did we have the other [slavery]?”¹⁴ It appears as a paradox, for in not telling the whole truth, the myth distorts the story. The evolution of the

¹² In Quebec this situation is only recently changing. Each year more educators are using the only text sanctioned for use in schools that introduces slavery into the classroom: Ministère de l'éducation, Blacks in Quebec Society, Past and Present (Ministère des affaires internationales de l'immigration et des communautés culturelles, 1995). In my discussions with parents and educators, the teaching of history is a slow, hit-and-miss process from school to school, even from classroom to classroom.

¹³ While this event took place in 1998, the reaction of the audience was typical. After the launching of Blacks in Montreal in 1989, the initial public reaction was one of surprise and skepticism. Quebecers have only begun to get used to the idea that slavery was a part of their past. This was due to the increased public engagements and discussions as a result of the annual government sponsored, February Black History Month celebrations. See Williams, Blacks in Montreal.

¹⁴ This 'collective amnesia' began around the 1880s, when Canadians were no longer agitating for American abolition, and support for the Black settlements in Canada was forgotten or ignored. These events coincided with the early elucidation of primary race theories and eugenics. Winks, Blacks, pp. 271-336 passim.

events, the ideas that shaped them, and the external and internal influences on them must be explained in a coherent fashion. Only then can we understand how two Canadas can co-exist in the same paradigm: Blacks in Canada were enslaved up to the nineteenth century; and Canadian territory was used by American fugitives to escape slavery in the nineteenth century.

Regional Example: Jackie Robinson

In the twentieth century, another example exists that demonstrates again the abiding relationship between myth and Black history in Canada. This is the Jackie Robinson myth. In Montreal, a myth around the treatment and acceptance of Blacks had already been established well before the Second World War. Despite the fact that Blacks were poverty stricken, constrained to live mainly in one area, and to work in ghettoized service sectors, there was a prevailing belief that the Blacks of Montreal were better treated than Blacks elsewhere. Officially, Blacks did not live under Jim Crow as there were no segregated schools, no back-of-the-bus

system, and no separate services or counters for drink and food.¹⁵ In theory, Montreal Blacks had the right to live anywhere, to shop and to go anywhere. By extension, these freedoms meant that they also had the right to achieve what they wanted to aspire to. Moreover, from the early 1920s, Montreal became a favourite destination even for American Blacks especially after American Prohibition had dried up the eastern seaboard and Harlem had shut down its clubs. Blacks and Whites came into a wide open city where liquor was readily available. Despite the occasional “White-only” signs in downtown clubs, Blacks appeared to move seamlessly across the fabric of the city.

Though the myth of respect for racial acceptance in Montreal is based upon apparent acceptance and total integration, it coalesced around one person, an American Black, Jackie Robinson. The historic event was the racial integration of baseball. In 1946, Montreal was selected for Jackie Robinson’s entry into the major leagues.

Beginning almost immediately with that milestone, the myth

¹⁵ The American Jim Crow system of racial segregation and degradation has spawned a myriad of texts. For an overview of Jim Crow under different themes see: R. C. Schneider comp. African American History in the Press, 1851-1899: From the Coming of the Civil War to the Rise of Jim Crow as Reported and Illustrated in Selected Newspapers of the Time (Detroit, MI: Gale Research, 1996); Glenda E. Gilmore, Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, c1996). Phillip McGuire, Taps for a Jim Crow Army: Letters from Black Soldiers in World War II (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, c1983); Stephanie J. Shaw, What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); David M. Oshinsky, Worse than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice (New York: Free Press, c1996).

crystallized. A shining example to other North American cities, Montreal was purported to be a place where Blacks had already achieved social acceptance and economic opportunity. The Jackie Robinson myth proposed that Montreal's choice as the place to integrate major league sports proved that Montreal was the best place for Blacks to live and succeed in North America.

This thesis challenges the assumptions of the Jackie Robinson myth and will show that the reality of life for the Black person in Montreal was far from the myth. The Black community emerged from World War Two in relatively better shape economically than when the war had started. On the surface, Blacks experienced the positive results of full wartime employment, government control of industrial production and labour conditions, veteran's benefits and higher income due to regulated wages.¹⁶ Nonetheless, there was no real gain in family wealth in the Black family. The bulk of income earnings had simply shifted from the adult wage earner to the young Black adult now working in the industrial sectors. This created an imbalance in the distribution of family wealth rather than an overall

¹⁶ See Williams, "The War Years," The Road to Now; Williams, "Changes" Blacks, pp. 49-60; and Harold Potter, "The Occupational Adjustments of the Montreal Negro, 1941-1948," (M.A. Thesis, Montreal: McGill University, 1949); See D. Brand, "We Weren't Allowed to Go into Factory Work Until Hitler Started the War: The 1920s to the 1940s," African Canadian Women and The State (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994) for a description of how the war changed the urban life of Blacks.

increase in family wealth for the average Black household.¹⁷ The extant socio-economic disparity characteristic of Blacks since the mid nineteenth century in Montreal continued to grip the families in the community.¹⁸

Toward the latter years of the 1940s, as the promise of integrating baseball became fact, Robinson became everything hoped for: the gentleman Negro athlete¹⁹ able to withstand the sting of spit and racial slurs,²⁰ the sports hero, the nation's most valuable player, and a magnet that drew more Blacks into baseball. His stellar rise was so unusual and became so legendary in Black circles, it reprised an old saying, "quicker than Jackie Robinson" and defined an era of, and an aura of, Black success²¹. Though Robinson left Montreal and built upon his achievements here, the myth-makers of Montreal have always drawn on the image of Black success first defined in

¹⁷ Williams, Road to Now, pp. 84-87

¹⁸ For a full analysis of the poverty, job ghettoization, low social status among Montreal's Blacks since the nineteenth century see: Williams, Blacks, p. 27-108 passim; and also Williams, Road to Now, pp. 38-174 passim.

¹⁹ Unless noted, throughout this study I will use 'Black' (popularised in the 60s) when describing the peoples of African descent in Montreal. In this case 'Negro' (used forty years earlier) would actually be the appellation far more suited to the era of Robinson.

²⁰ For examples of abuse Robinson received see: Richard Griffin, 'Jackie Robinson's 'Real' Anniversary,' Toronto Star, June 1, 1996. Reprinted in World Press Review, August 1966, pp. 38-39

²¹ The original saying, "before you can say Jack Robinson" dates back to the eighteenth century and was popularized in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Ivor Evans, ed., Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable, Centenary Edition, Revised (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 602.

Montreal. The corollary of the image is that Jackie Robinson's status and personal success typified the conditions of Blacks who lived in the city.

Methodology

My previous research on the demography and social mobility of the Black community in Montreal, on its economic life, employment patterns, and its cultural and social development, has already assessed the overall conditions of the Black community living in the 1940s.²² However, to evaluate the myth, it would also be of interest to explore the question, "What were the specific conditions that helped some Black individuals of the Jackie Robinson era to achieve a measure of success in Montreal?"

This paper will examine the presumption that conditions in Montreal were so favourable that Blacks could easily prosper. In recognizing that exceptions do occur within populations, a micro-analysis of Black mobility will be warranted. Thus, this thesis is an examination of oral interviews to uncover the early influences, in that era, that did affect the life choices of accomplished Blacks.

Research on Blacks in Montreal has clearly shown the extent to which socio-economic mobility had been severely affected by issues

²² See Williams. Blacks, and also see related text in Williams. Road To Now.

of race and racism.²³ The issues of race and racism weighed heavily in the day-to-day reality of the general Black populace. Throughout this study then, the affect of race as a variable of change or a signifier of social disparity will be noted. This insight is particularly meaningful due to the time period under study. The Jackie Robinson generation grew up before human rights were protected under Canadian or provincial charter. Significantly, the generation of the Jackie Robinson period was the last Canadian born generation to come into adulthood before the winds of the civil rights movement blew across the border and fanned Canada's civil rights movement.²⁴ They were constrained by the racism of their day, forced to endure battles in the streets and within the institutions of society without the support of the law.

This inquiry will be analysed in two parts. Part One, 'Investigating a Dichotomy,' contains two chapters and deals with the inherent dualities as they pertain to the Jackie Robinson myth. To that end, the first chapter will discuss the creation of the Jackie Robinson myth and the uses to which it was put. Newspaper sports articles offer the best examples of exactly how the myth has been articulated by Montreal writers to Montreal readers.

²³ Williams. Blacks. and Williams. Road To Now

²⁴ Peter Stamadianos. "Afro-Canadian Activism in the 1960s" (M.A. Thesis. Montreal: Concordia University. 1994)

Sportswriters create excitement about a specific sport, but on occasion they editorialize sports events, relating the event to an icons of the past.²⁵ The Robinsons themselves have embellished the myth, thereby lending justification to its continued diffusion.

The second chapter will examine the corollary to the myth itself: the contextual background of the “Jackie Robinson generation.” It will examine the structure of Montreal’s Black community: its population, organizational structure, the socio-economic factors of mobility, and the racism that plagued this generation. These influences affected the lives of the children who were between ten and twenty years old at the time of Robinson’s arrival in Montreal. They would have been born between 1926 and 1936. It is most likely that early factors of success would have been ingrained over these two decades through the effects of: schooling, neighbourhood and family life, community affiliations, cultural links, and connections with the wider community.

Part Two, focuses exclusively upon the lives and memories of two successful Black people in Montreal who grew up in the Jackie Robinson era: Richard Michael Lord, and Gwen Lord. Today they are, by every measure, successful in their own careers. Canadian born,

²⁵ For a discussion of the mythologizing role of popular media: Dan Nimmo and James Combs. “That’s Entertainment. Politics Through Popular Culture.” Subliminal Politics Myths & Mythmakers in America (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1980), pp. 126-154.

they are from the same family, and except for the gap in their ages and their genders, they shared many of the same variables: home environment, extended family, schools, recreation, and community contacts. On the surface, they are shining examples of the reality of the myth, that Montreal was an exemplary environment for Black self-actualization. The objective will be to determine whether and why Gwen and Richard were different from their peers, and whether they were truly representative of the prosperity and status that Blacks of the Jackie Robinson era in Montreal could have achieved.

Sources

Secondary: Printed Sources

This study will add to the Black historiography of Montreal in a unique and useful way. The research of the two existing studies of community mobility and history of the English speaking Blacks will be further enhanced.²⁶ This focus upon the individual's mobility will expand the realm of knowledge of Montreal's Black community, while at the same time it will be a challenge to the presuppositions inherent in the first two studies. In 1997 I wrote:

Blacks in Montreal focussed on the role of discrimination in the housing market and its effect on the mobility patterns of the blacks. The Road To Now demonstrates that racism and discrimination have had

²⁶ Both books by Williams deal with only the English speaking community at this time. The Haitian community did not come into the city until at least a decade later. See Williams. Road To Now. p. 156.

major roles in the area of Black employment which has affected the socio-economic mobility of blacks. Housing and employment discrimination affected all sectors of the community to such an extent that it altered or even hindered movement and mobility amongst blacks.²⁷

One can only wonder whether the obvious role of racism and discrimination illustrated in both books will be just as significant a factor to the socio-economic mobility of the individual person.

The research for this thesis draws on a combination of traditional and alternative sources chosen to shed light on the formative years of the Jackie Robinson generation in Montreal from 1928 up to 1949.²⁸ Since 1928 there have been several studies on the Black population in Montreal. Wilfred Israel's, "The Montreal Negro Community" (1928) was the first, a sociological treatise.²⁹ Israel visited with the Blacks he was writing about, and he wrote a very intimate depiction of the Black community in the St. Antoine district. Through his interviews and observations we learn of family case studies, of courting styles, of marital conflicts, of child abandonments and even of the underbelly of Black street life. Israel's rendition is descriptive, yet comprehensive, detailing Black social and economic life through the histories and ethnicity of the

²⁷ Williams. Road To Now. p. 15.

²⁸ For purposes of delineation, the Jackie Robinson era actually ended in 1955 with the start of the Domestic Workers Program in Montreal and the beginning of the West Indian population explosion.

²⁹ Wilfred Israel, "The Montreal Negro Community." (M.A. Thesis: McGill University, 1928).

clubs, affiliations, and associations. Israel opens up the world of Black poverty in the city and shows the myriad of strategies used to alleviate that poverty.

By 1949 sociological investigation had taken a far more analytical approach with Harold Potter's "The Occupational Adjustments of Montreal Negroes, 1941-48" (1949).¹⁰ Like Israel, Potter presented a picture of the Black community. However, it was distinct from Israel's study in three areas. Potter's population was modern, born in the last decade of Israel's research, and now reacting to the enormous changes of the immediate post-war period. Secondly, the essay focused on employment and the many factors that affect it such as: demography, age, gender, family size, and education. The third distinction was the incorporation of scientific methodology and analysis. Building upon the work of Israel, Potter attempted to interpret the changes of the Black community over the long term and revealed that Black poverty had been only slightly ameliorated by the war and post-war industrialization policies. Blacks remained impoverished. Potter's and Israel's research, though sociological in approach, is invaluable to the historian who is delving into the first half of the century. Both have been drawn upon extensively by other researchers and they remain the first

¹⁰Potter, "The Occupational Adjustments."

investigators of Blacks in Montreal in the twentieth century.

Since 1950, there have been other writings that focussed on the period from the 1920s to the 1940s. On a popular level, the Hostesses of Union United Church produced a church history and genealogy book in 1982 based upon the collected memories of the individuals within the congregation. Though a cross between the anecdotal and the factual, Memories contains life stories, family genealogy, the history of protest, and watershed events of the community.³¹ Given the dearth of local histories at the time of its publication, it was an invaluable resource. Since then, Memories has served as a starting point for local Black research in this city.

In academe that same year, June Bertley looked at the connection between culture and education in "The Role of the Black Community in Educating Blacks in Montreal, from 1910 to 1940, with Special Reference to Reverend Dr. Charles Humphrey Este."³² This highly descriptive monograph is based upon novel primary sources. While investigating the essential role of Union United Church and its pastorate, Bertley recreates the unique social, recreational, and educational projects undertaken by Blacks. She paints a different

³¹ Hostesses of Union United Church, The Memory Book (Montreal: Hostesses of Union Church, 1982).

³² June Bertley, "The Role of the Black Community in Educating Blacks in Montreal, from 1910 to 1940, with Special Reference to Reverend Dr. Charles Humphrey Este" (M.A. Education, Montreal: McGill University, 1982).

community than that of Israel or Potter. In it Blacks are innovative, gifted, adroit, actively seeking to impart their dynamic culture and values.

The following year, in 1983, a more extensive study by Leo Bertley, "The Universal Negro Improvement Association of Montreal, 1917-1979" was produced as a doctoral dissertation.¹³ Whereas Israel had discussed the UNIA and its role in the community in six pages, Bertley expanded the subject and completed a 479 page tome. His personal knowledge of Garveyism was buttressed with access to the organization's files and interviews of many key participants. This offered groundbreaking insight into the world of Montreal's Garveyite community. At one time, the UNIA of Montreal included many non-Garveyites, as it had served as the community's major social association. The information, therefore, opened new avenues for community inquiry, and added a fresh page on Black social research in Montreal.

Blacks in Montreal 1628-1986: An Urban Demography turned the page as well. This was the first study since Israel's that offered a longitudinal approach to the subject of Blacks in Montreal. Building upon the social research of the past, Blacks in Montreal also took shape as a scientific study. Drawing upon the diverse sources

¹³ Leo Bertley. "The Universal Negro Improvement Association of Montreal, 1917-1979" (Ph.D. diss., Montreal: Concordia University, 1983).

of previous researchers from many fields, the material was readapted. The goal of the methodology was to synthesize demographical data and to simultaneously demonstrate trace the residential history of Blacks on the island of Montreal. The chronology of Blacks in Montreal has been cited frequently and was often adapted as a modern history text. This was a seminal study and served to clearly position the Black history of Montreal within the burgeoning field of ethnic social historical research in Quebec.

The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal in 1997 was a chronological history and a study of peoples. It cast light on the invisible and to give voice to the voiceless of the community.³⁴ The purpose was to “affirm the presence of blacks on Montreal’s landscape. It also demonstrate[d] that oppression has a Canadian face.”³⁵

The most significant primary sources for The Road to Now were the interviews. These included interviews done by the author and interviews taken from other Black collections. As well, Black newspapers from decades ago yielded a bounty of material as did organizational records from defunct associations and information gleaned from previous studies. Many stories remain to be told but

³⁴ Williams, Road To Now. pp. 13-15. See also footnote of “Introduction” p. 15.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 14.

The Road to Now is a culmination of years of historical investigation and is the first historical drama of Black Montrealers' experiences.

Historical drama has been played out on a national scale. In 1971 Robin Winks forever changed the historiography of Blacks in this country. His book, The Blacks in Canada, was a watershed in its scope, technique, and sources. In the forward to the second edition (1997) Winks states:

At the outset [there were] six distinct goals...to examine the history and nature of African-Canadian life in Canada, to reveal attitudes toward immigration and ethnic identity, using the Black story as a point of entry, to see how these attitudes differed from American attitudes, to show the African-Canadian as an actor in the emerging national history of Canada, and to deal with a neglected aspect of Canadian-American relations.³⁶

Given the sources and the depth of his writing, Winks' study deserves consideration. However, Winks focusses on Ontario and the Maritimes, where primary sources related to Black history are numerous and readily available. For the years after 1900, Winks relies on Israel's "The Montreal Negro Community", and Potter's "Occupational Adjustments" and does not offer new knowledge about the story in Montreal.³⁷

³⁶ Winks. "Preface to the Second Edition." Blacks. p. xiv

³⁷ Out of the last 200 pages of Blacks in Canada, references to Montreal total only 12. They are based upon Israel. a pamphlet from Union United Church. and the work of Ida Greaves. The Negro in Canada: National Problems of Canada, no. 16. McGill University. Department of Economics and Political Science (Orilla: Packet Times Press. 1930). For an in-depth discussion of Black historiography at the national level see Stamadianos, "Afro-Canadian Activism," pp 8-27

Research on how the press reacted to Jackie Robinson spanned the coverage over 50 years, in articles in Montreal's two major English language newspapers: The Montreal Gazette and The Montreal Star.³⁸ Many articles about Robinson refer to his stay in Montreal. However, the purpose was not to be biographical, but rather to present articles in which a viewpoint had been expressed about the relationship between Robinson and Montreal. This was not difficult because Robinson's contract signing, October 23, 1945; his opening day performance; April 18, 1946, the last game of Montreal's Little World Series, October 5, 1946, and the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of his debut in Montreal created considerable media reaction. The press also produced new articles whenever Jackie's wife, Rachel, came to the city. At these times, journalists recall the bygone era as they lived it or have heard of it. The nostalgia is thick and a reference to the myth is made.

Primary Sources: Interviews

To move from myth to reality, interviews will be used extensively in this thesis. The first set of interviews comes from an oral history series deposited at the Concordia Universities Libraries entitled, Black Montrealers: A Piece of the Multicultural

³⁸ Other Canadian newspapers that carried articles about Robinson tended to be republications of articles previously printed out of Montreal.

Mosaic (1910-1960).³⁹ They capture the memories and experiences of eight Blacks and encompass their social conditions, racism and race relations, employment, and community history.

The use of this methodology is warranted because “the oral history tradition is very much a part of the Black community in Montreal.”⁴⁰ The individual experiences of Blacks remain personal and unique. The historian must capture these life stories, and the impressions of community thoughts. Oral history came into fashion in the 1960s, as the reach of history extended beyond the elite, or traditional areas of research, into the domain of the marginalized groups.

Writing on the history of the English speaking Black community in Montreal⁴¹ still takes place at a slow, and arduous pace.⁴² Very few Blacks have taken on the mantle of research. Unfortunately, the situation in Montreal remains almost as it was in 1989 when I penned:

³⁹ Maxine Clarke and Barbara Roberts. tape recording, Black Montrealers: A Piece of the Multicultural Mosaic (1910-1960). Oral History Montreal Studies (Montreal: Concordia University Libraries, 1988).

⁴⁰ Williams. “Preface”. Blacks. n.p.

⁴¹ The history before the mid-1960s was essentially the history of English speaking Blacks. Only after that period did French speakers immigrate in vast numbers. They now dwarf the historic community in size. See Williams. Road To Now, p. 116.

⁴² On the other hand, reams of materials about Haitians are constantly being produced for immigration, familial, linguistic, demographic and gender studies, etc. Since 1970 over two hundred essays, documents, studies, theses have been produced (material being collected for Black bibliography).

There is a desperate need to systematically compile and synthesize what is already known. For those like myself, who decry the invisibility of Blacks in the Canadian historiographical literature, there is much to be done with a tape recorder, with pen and paper.⁴³

Suffice it to say, the oral technique was used throughout the research for Blacks in Montreal and especially for the chronology of The Road to Now, and many of these interviews have been consulted.

In addition to these oral sources used in previous studies, the methodology of this thesis relies strongly upon the oral technique.

The criteria for this study were:

- adults that came of age in the Robinson era;
- preferably Canadian born and raised in Montreal throughout their childhood;
- ideally two or more members from the same family;
- their level of success should be consistent and noteworthy.⁴⁴

The two subjects, Richard Lord and Gwen Lord were both interviewed in July, 1998.⁴⁵

⁴³ Williams, "Preface." Blacks, n.p.

⁴⁴ Success was defined as: one earning above-average income with a high measure of stature in the Black community and with significant influence within and outside the community.

⁴⁵ Richard Lord. interview by Dorothy Williams. tape recording (Cote St. Luc. July 14, 1998). Gwen Lord. Interview by Dorothy Williams. tape recording (Hampstead. July 17, 1998)

PART I
INVESTIGATING A DICHOTOMY

CHAPTER TWO

THE MYTH: THE DREAM AS THEY MADE IT

The Mythmakers

On Thursday April 18, 1946, Jackie Robinson played baseball for the Montreal Royals, the Brooklyn Dodger's top Triple-A farm team that competed in the International League.⁴⁶ In doing so Robinson broke the color bar that plagued the American professional baseball system. During that one season, Robinson batted .393. and almost singlehandedly helped the Montreal Royals win the International League championship--the Little World Series. Based on the public reaction and his performance on and off the field, Jackie Robinson was moved up to the Brooklyn Dodgers the following baseball season.

Throughout this century, Montreal has had many sports heroes such as "The Rocket" Richard, "The Flower" Guy Lafleur, and Jean Beliveau. These great athletes built their reputations over many years of consistent, outstanding performances and a professional commitment to the city. Yet despite the fact that he played only one

⁴⁶ Jackie Robinson was just one of three Blacks chosen to integrate in Quebec that same year. Two athletes went to the Trois-Rivières Royaux. With better stats than even Robinson, they helped Trois-Rivières win the Canadian-American pennant. Neither were able to nor willing to accept the racism in the system. So despite their exceptional abilities neither were ever signed again. Lisa Fitterman. Montreal Gazette, Sunday March 19, 1995. p. A1. A2.

season, Robinson has become a favored son of Montreal.⁴⁷ Jackie Robinson's presence took on a special significance all its own, due to the role that Montreal played in the integration of the major leagues.⁴⁸ Montreal accepted Robinson and "Robinson proved that Montreal was a world-class city."⁴⁹ Therein lies its greatness. Journalists in the city readily made the connection, "Montreal was the right place at the right time...where racism...wasn't central, the way it is in any American city."⁵⁰ In other words, Montreal was an ideal place for Blacks in North America.

This view of Montreal goes back to the first reporting of the event. At the time of Robinson's signing, on October 23, 1945, "Paul Parizeau of Le Canada said that Robinson would be better received in Montreal than in the United States, and...it showed the city was the most democratic place in the world."⁵¹

Since that historic day, this myth has been repeated in many ways. On the eve of the 50th Anniversary of the 1946 season, Jack Todd, The Montreal Gazette's top sports writer said, "By the

⁴⁷ Despite the great ballplayers of Delormier Downs over the years, Robinson's statue stands alone on Delormier's grounds -- a memorial to his one glorious season.

⁴⁸ "Montreal Honors Late, Great Robinson". Winnipeg Free Press, September 4, 1986: 6.

⁴⁹ Jack Todd. "Events Planned to honor Robinson in Montreal". The Montreal Gazette, Thursday April 18, 1996: C5.

⁵⁰ Jack Todd. "Baseball's Noblest Moment: Race Barrier fell in Montreal". The Montreal Gazette, Thursday April 18, 1996: A19.

⁵¹ W. Brown. Baseball's Fabulous Montreal Royals: The Minor League Team that Made Major League History (Montreal: R. Davies, 1996)

standards of 1946, at least, Montreal was an ocean of tolerance in a sea of prejudice.”⁵² Richard Griffin, of the Toronto Star recognized the significance of Montreal itself, “Montreal was carefully chosen to be home base for baseball’s reluctant emancipation...for its perceived lack of racial problems.”⁵³

The supposed lack of racism in Montreal has been used time and time again as an example of what Montreal represented. But some writers have been more cautious:

Montreal in the 1940s was not truly devoid of racism. But it had that reputation. With blacks representing only 2 percent of the population, there was a sense of indifference toward them. Canadians, then as now, pride themselves in being outwardly different from their U.S. neighbours. One of those obvious differences was in the areas of segregation and equal human rights.⁵⁴

The Robinsons

The press has used the Robinsons to convey a rosy view of Montreal to the world. Since Jackie’s death in 1972, Mrs. Rachel Robinson has returned to Montreal several times to preside over memorials, unveilings, or special days at the stadium here. At these events she is frequently asked about her stay in Montreal in 1946. Rachel tells that when apartment

⁵² Jack Todd. “Rachel Robinson Recalls Season of ‘46.” The Montreal Gazette, Friday May 24, 1996

⁵³ Griffin. World Press Review, p 38

⁵⁴ Griffin. World Press Review, p 39

hunting on deGaspe Street, the landlady asked them in and offered them tea. “It was an unusual experience in the ‘40s for a black person to have that type of encounter, especially when you were seeking housing. On the other hand, she didn’t do anything unusual, she was just being courteous--but that’s what was unusual.”⁵⁵

Perhaps because she was visibly pregnant with her first child, this unusual treatment was also extended to Rachel by her neighbours. “That neighbourhood just became a very good place for us. Jack was on the road for two weeks out of every month, and if they didn’t see me out on the balcony, they’d knock on the door to see if I was alright.”⁵⁶

Throughout the summer of 1946 as the pennant loomed closer, Jackie became Montreal’s hero, and the city itself took on its own specialness in the eyes of the Robinsons. Recounting how beneficial Montreal was to Jackie, Rachel remembers that “we were...hurting in a lot of ways...Montreal helped to heal the hurt.” In this city Robinson could play without the stress of vicious racial prejudice--in a “safe and secure” environment where he “could relax as much as [one] can when you have that kind of celebrity- and not be bothered

⁵⁵ Todd, “Rachel Robinson,” p. B3.

⁵⁶ Ibid

by racial considerations.” The Robinson’s view of Montreal-a city free of racism, full of tolerance and mutual respect- has been widely shared.

Rachel has even credited Montreal with having played a positive and essential role in the outstanding career of Jackie. During an interview in New York, Rachel said, “Jack and I attributed a great deal of our eventual success to the love and respect we received in Montreal.”⁵⁷ Over the years, Rachel has indicated that the city was special to them, and yet perhaps the ultimate accolade has come from the writings of one of Jackie’s biographers who stated that “although he went to the Dodgers in 1947, [Jackie] regarded Montreal as a ‘paradise.’”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Clifton Ruggles. “Montreal Fans Went Wild Over Robinson.” The Montreal Gazette. Sunday, March 19, 1995. A2: Todd. “Rachel Robinson.” p B3: Todd. “Baseball’s Noblest Moment.” p A19.

⁵⁸ A. S. Young. Great Negro Baseball Stars and How They Made the Major Leagues (New York, 1963). p 36 cited in Winks. Blacks in Canada. p 462

CHAPTER THREE

THE REALITY: THE COLOR OF PERPETUAL POVERTY

Background

The world the Lords were born into was a world of economic deprivation due to the Depression, a period which exacerbated decades of chronic widespread underemployment, unemployment and employment ghettoization. The Depression severely affected Montreal's Black community because no other Canadian city had suffered the same degree of unemployment and underemployment during the 1930s.⁵⁹ Blacks were coping with near 100% unemployment.⁶⁰ The situation in the Black community was dire.

Many had been born in the waning days of the American porters' era, when the railroads no longer employed most of the working men of the Black community. The railways' work force was drastically altered as a major Black population shift took place. An increase of non-Americans began to compete for coveted railway jobs. By 1940, West Indian and Canadian men were displacing the American rail employees. This trend continued into the forties. Though the

⁵⁹ Terry Copp, The Anatomy of Poverty: The Condition of the Working Class in Montreal, 1897-1927 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1974), p. 148

⁶⁰ By March 1933, close to 80 percent of the Union United Church congregation were unemployed

positions were few, and salaries were depressed, the railway still offered a modicum of financial security that was non-existent in other jobs in Montreal.

The birth of Richard and Gwen Lord occurred at a time when the Black community lived mainly around the St. Antoine district.⁶¹ They were born into a world in which Black social mobility was sharply constrained by racial criteria. The population was in the few thousands and one feature of community life was the strong familiarity and bonds between family groups and local institutions.⁶² Many families were forced to rely on the charity of those few who were able to hold onto their jobs, and on the tireless efforts of community workers.

They were born in the heyday of the St. Antoine district when jazz was king and Black Americans still had numerical dominance. Tightly controlled immigration severely affected the cultural and demographic makeup of the community: Black Canadians were actually a minority group, with little economic power and considered socially inferior by West Indian and American Blacks.

Geographic Description

St. Antoine ward was the largest political division of the city,

⁶¹ For a fuller analysis of Black geographical mobility in Montreal consult Williams. Blacks.

⁶² This is the content of Hostesses. The Memory Book. Also Williams. Road To Now. p 71.

spanning the entire southwestern end of the city of Montreal limits.⁶³ The southwestern and northern parts of the ward were almost exclusively residential while the eastern areas were rife with commercial and manufacturing establishments. The escarpment, just below Dorchester Street, ran along almost the length of the ward and split the ward into “those above” and “those below the hill.”⁶⁴

Blacks shared the area below the hill with others of the industrial working poor. Owned by absentee landlords, much of the district’s housing was dilapidated and dangerous, and even condemned. Rear tenements abounded and outdoor privy pits were breeding grounds for disease and death.⁶⁵

Such abject poverty affected the poor, Black and White alike, except that the climb out of cesspool conditions was much quicker and easier for Whites. As working class and poor Whites moved westward, Blacks moved into their vacated lodgings.

Under these conditions it was not unusual for a family to move

⁶³ It ranged from Cedar Avenue in the north to Notre Dame in the south and east from Durocher and St. Alexander streets to the municipal limits of Ste. Cunegonde and Westmount in the northwest.

⁶⁴ For an engaging look at the lives of those “above the hill” see: Margaret W. Westley, Remembrance of Grandeur: The Anglo-Protestant Elite of Montreal, 1900-1950 (Montreal: Libre Expression, 1990). Today the Ville Marie Expressway is built on this escarpment.

⁶⁵ H. Ames, The City Below the Hill. Sociological Study of a Portion of the City of Montreal (Montreal: Bishop Engraving & Printing Co., 1897), p. 85.

two or three times a year, although those who could afford to move were sometimes hampered by the attitude of Whites around them. Landlords were reluctant to rent to Blacks because they were “afraid that the psychological affect on other tenants would lower rental values.”⁶⁶ Once settled, racist neighbours were the next obstacle to deal with. Fighting these attitudes was time-consuming, and not everyone was willing to do it.⁶⁷

Renting homes outside the district was sometimes just as difficult. For instance, the City of Westmount, immediately to the west of the St. Antoine district, was largely restricted. The few Blacks who could live in Westmount did so on the edge of the escarpment, on the north side of St Antoine Street between Atwater and the Glen. Blacks who lived elsewhere in Westmount were usually light-skinned and could ‘pass,’ or they had White spouses. Living in Westmount was considered a privilege because of its fine schools and superior services. Blacks ringed the southern border of the city of Westmount. By living on the south side of St. Antoine St. in the St. Henri district, many hoped to be able to move into Westmount eventually. In one case, a Black family paid 300 dollars

⁶⁶ Greaves. Negro in Canada, p. 65.

⁶⁷ See D. Quann. Racial Discrimination in Housing (Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development, 1979), pp. 17-19 for a more in-depth discussion of the racist practices Whites use against non-White neighbours.

to obtain the key to an apartment on the north side of St. Antoine Street. The family did not live there but it was allowed to use the address so its children were able to go to school in Westmount.⁶⁸

Employment ghettoization also had an impact upon where Blacks lived. The Black concentration around rail and transportation depots reflected the strong economic relationship that existed between the transportation industries and Black labour. Passenger railways operating out of Montreal used Black labour to service their clients' needs. These train depots were situated along the major east-west axes of St. James and St. Antoine streets: from the Central and Bonaventure Stations to the east, to the Glen terminus of the St. Henri district in the west.

The majority of Blacks followed this natural east-west distribution along St. Antoine from Mountain Street westward.⁶⁹ It was within this area that an identifiable Negro community took shape. Here, non-discriminatory facilities catered to the social and recreational needs of the Black resident, and to the needs of the Black international traveller.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ E. Braxton. R. Jones. interviews by author. Montreal. 1984

⁶⁹ The first Blacks to move west were usually West Indians who could afford the expense. Williams. Road To Now. p. 82.

⁷⁰ Ames. City Below. p. 74

An American Community

From the 1920's to the 1940s, Montreal's Black community was made up of three, distinct cultures: American, West Indian, Canadian. In the 1920s, the most important group by far, in terms of numbers and mainstream perception, was made up of Americans from large cities like New York, Philadelphia, Washington and Chicago. This "dominant group in a sense created the reputation, lifestyle, and economic life of the St. Antoine" district."⁷¹ They had catered to the sporting-betting White population that had come into Montreal to avoid Prohibition. They opened the famous downtown nightclubs, the infamous gambling joints, and the prostitution rings on St. Antoine Street that catered to the monied White spenders.⁷² These spenders wanted to be entertained with dance, the blues, and jazz.

Jazz was king. John Gilmore describes what was a certain mecca-like quality that made Montreal the ideal North American location for a newly developing Black identity focussed on jazz music.⁷³ Jam sessions went into the night and Montreal jazz was

⁷¹ Williams, Road To Now, p. 43.

⁷² Many were porters who parlayed their meager incomes into thousands. Ironically the most famous and enduring club was Rockhead's Paradise which opened in 1929. Mr. Rockhead was West Indian. See: Hostesses, Memory Book, p. 319.

⁷³ John Gilmore, Swinging in Paradise The Story of Jazz in Montreal (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1988). For a study of women during the jazz era in Montreal see "Show Girls: Celebrating Montreal's Legendary Black Jazz Scene". prod., T. Lynch, dir. Mei-Lan Lam. 52 min. NFB video.

innovative, unique and took on a life of its own. In the midst of Prohibition, right into the post-war era, thousands of musicians from across North America either had their start or came to Montreal to work or to live. Montreal was the place to be. Even newspapers in New York noted that Montreal benefited enormously from Prohibition in the States.⁷⁴

Most of this south-north continental movement slowed with the Depression and became just a trickle with the repeal of Prohibition in 1933. Not always registered with Canadian government authorities, Black American residents left Montreal en masse to take advantage of relief services to the south. The numbers officially migrating north also dropped significantly as the Canadian government tightened Black immigration.⁷⁵ The result was that by the mid 1940s Americans were a fraction of the city's resident Black population.⁷⁶

It was not surprising that many Americans left feeling the sting of racism and inequality on this side of the border. Widespread discrimination in the U.S. had created two parallel societies.

⁷⁴ K. Jenkins, Montreal: Island City of the St. Lawrence (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1966)

⁷⁵ Bertley, "Universal Negro" pp. 38, 63.

⁷⁶ For a discussion of the probable size of the American population in the 1940s see Williams, Blacks, p. 53; and Williams, Road To Now, pp. 81, 87, 91.

American Blacks lived in a fully segregated society from top to bottom, one that had its own Black universities, businesses, lawyers, newspapers, hospitals, tradesmen, and labourers. But in Canada where opportunities were purported to be equal, most Blacks, regardless of skills, tended to fit into one level of society-the bottom. Robin Winks, an expert on Canadian-American relations, describes the national differences in this way:

In the United States White Americans would not admit Negroes to be equals in the face of all evidence that, environmental conditioning aside, they were equals. But in the United States white Americans could not ignore Negroes either: they could not be told to leave, for they were needed as a labour force. They could not be forgotten, hidden, or--ultimately--overridden. In Canada they were forgotten, hidden, and overridden: if they left, no one would miss them on the labour market; if they stayed, seldom did they count on that market either. White Canadians could afford to be indifferent to their fellow blacks, and for the most part they were.⁷⁷

West Indians and Economic Life

West Indians were lured to Montreal by exaggerated tales of fortunes on the railroad.⁷⁸ Generally, they were the most educated, vocal, rural, and British of the Black population in the city. Their British ways set them apart from other Blacks, particularly the

⁷⁷ Winks. Blacks. p. 481.

⁷⁸ Israel. "Negro Community," p. 44. By 1928 West Indians made up forty percent of the total Black population in Montreal.

more urban, cosmopolitan American Blacks.

There were a few West Indians on scholarships, who studied at McGill University. These students were in all departments though most were registered in the departments of Medicine and Agriculture. For the duration of their studies they lived in St. Antoine district. However, because most went back to the West Indies after their studies, Montreal's Black community did not, as a rule, benefit from the students' education. During their stay in Montreal they worked for the railroad, generally in the summer. This is one way that the railway companies in Canada benefited greatly from the racism and discrimination in the greater labour market. They were able to hire the most educated and able men to work as porters. This flies in the face of the stereotype of the ignorant, happy, black porter. However, this image was a necessary one in order for the railway companies to justify maintaining the low wages and poor working conditions under which these men laboured.

Not everyone accepted this situation; some Blacks tried other options. There were more West Indian men in industry than any other sector.⁷⁹ Many West Indian run businesses were established throughout the community, but many did not last when the banks

⁷⁹ Israel, "Montreal Negro," p. 98. See also Leo W. Bertley, "Afro-Can Remembers the First International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World." Afro-Can, Montreal, August, 1982, p. 119.

refused them capital and many failed.⁸⁰ In spite of strict government immigration control, over time the West Indian population grew and by the 1940s their numbers dwarfed the American residents.

Canadians

The exodus of Black Americans from Montreal paralleled the arrival of a record number of Black Maritimers. They were looking for work. However, the majority were young, poorly educated adults, possessing few marketable skills. New Brunswickers and Nova Scotians were attracted to Montreal's greater opportunities, and they expected that the fight against prejudice and discrimination would be easier due to Montreal's larger Black population.⁸¹ As the Depression worsened, this influx continued into the decade, while at the same time the continuation of Canada's racist immigration policy effectively dampened Black immigration.⁸²

Among this group of migrants were many West Indians who also decided to leave the Maritimes to find work on the railroad. However, these newly arrived West Indians found themselves at a social disadvantage within the community, for once they arrived in

⁸⁰ This included a bread factory, a community newspaper, a doll repair store, a mineral water company, a truck cartage business, cafes, clubs, several restaurants, barber shops, and rooming houses. Hostesses. "Memory Book," pp. 363, 341. Also, G. Husband, V. Phillips, A. Packwood, R. Jones, interviews by author, Montreal, 1984.

⁸¹ W. A. Spray, The Blacks in New Brunswick (Fredericton: Brunswick Press, 1972).

⁸² S. Ramcharan, Racism: Nonwhites in Canada (Toronto: Butterworth & Co., 1982).

Montreal they were referred to as simply Canadians, or as Scotians. Canadians were actually considered by West Indians and Americans to be uneducated and crude. As a result they occupied the lowest stratum in Montreal's Black community.⁸³ However, with the arrival of the Second World War, the Black Canadian population in Montreal exploded.⁸⁴ The children of the early West Indians and Americans were school age or now bearing a new, Canadian-born generation.

Employment: Men

Surviving the employment situation in the city during these years took up an enormous amount of time and energy. The struggle for suitable jobs commensurate with experience, expectation, and aptitude pushed the limits of endurance and forced some to flee the city.⁸⁵ For others "settling in" in Montreal meant "settling for" its meagre opportunities.⁸⁶

⁸³ Daniel Gay, "Empreintes Noires sur la neige blanche: les noirs au Québec (1750-1900)". *Projet de recherche RS101033* (Laval: Université Laval, 1988), p. 218-220

⁸⁴ Up to 70% of all Blacks were now Canadian. Unfortunately this did not mean a gender balance. Due to Immigration policies, the siphoning of males through the war, the community felt a demographic shift, with young women outnumbering men, forcing women to leave the city to get married. Williams, Road To Now, p. 54.

⁸⁵ Hostesses, Memory Book has accounts of residents having to leave Montreal after attempts at job hunting. Potter suggested, many of them left the city in their search for gainful work. Potter, "Occupational Adjustments," p. 32.

⁸⁶ An unfortunate fact considering that since the turn of the century, West Indians, taken as a whole group upon entry into the country, have been Canada's most educated and skilful immigrants. This is on the basis of cumulative Federal immigration data since the turn of the century. See: W. A. Head, "Correcting our Ignorance of Black Canadians" Perception, November/December 1978, 29; and Ramcharan, Racism.

For many men the job alternatives were menial day labour such as waiting on tables, or bussing, shipbuilding, or shoeshining, portering, or railroad construction. Though many men, in particular West Indians, were craftsmen, or individuals with technical or clerical backgrounds, most were unsuccessful in finding employment suited to their training.⁸⁷ This difficulty caused many to leave the city, and Montreal deepened its reputation among Blacks as a “temporary stop on the way to somewhere else.”⁸⁸

During the Second World War, their visibility continued to prevent many Blacks access to a wide range of job opportunities.⁸⁹ Only a handful of Blacks, those who had highly skilled technical and engineering backgrounds, were able to take full advantage of the existing labour shortages, because such skills were scarce even in the white population.⁹⁰ The lucky few, after the war, were in that youthful, burgeoning population of Canadian born Blacks, who had

⁸⁷ In Bertley's Ph.D. thesis on the Universal Negro Improvement Association his analysis of UNIA members sheds some light on the varied occupations of men in the community. Of the twenty-five members sampled nine worked for the railways, though only one was a porter. The remaining sixteen had the following trades: carpenters, welder, baker, shipper, blacksmith, electrician, brassmoulder, oiler, compositor, and shoemaker, etc. Bertley, "Universal Negro," p. 122. Though his sample is divided on gender lines he purports that the sample is an anomaly--calling both atypical.

⁸⁸ The notoriety of this adage began as early as 1820 when Refugees and later the Fugitive slaves considered Montreal just as a temporary stop on their way to permanent homes in Canada West. It persisted during the railroad building era.

⁸⁹ Potter, "Occupational Adjustments," p. 139.

⁹⁰ Braxton, 1984. The principal employers of skilled blacks were the aeronautical companies on the West Island of Montreal.

been able to acquire post-secondary education. Like their parents and grandparents before them, however, they did not always find that their competencies were particularly desired. Many also found that the ceiling for job advancement was particularly low. Blacks often stayed in the same entry position long after other co-workers had passed them.⁹¹ This continued to perpetuate underemployment, low socio-economic status, and job dissatisfaction.

Older Black men with less training remained in the pre-war service jobs of waiters, doormen and mechanics. Many Blacks in the railway sector would not accept alternative employment for despite poor working conditions, these men did not want to risk losing their hard won seniority and pensions from the railroad.⁹²

Railroads and Status

Visible barriers to employment were not the only factors that induced men to stay on the railways. Over time, the chaos and uncertainty of the rails were mitigated by other factors attached to the industry. This was a time when jobs were not measured solely by their remuneration but by the public respect and the fraternity they elicited. With the haphazard state of labour in other fields, the

⁹¹ The main reason given at the time, for such behaviour was that White employees would not want a Black supervising them. This was a comment that was heard repeatedly during the oral interviews taken during: Karim Rholem, The Black Achievers of Montreal, interviews, Oral History Project. Heritage Canada. Montreal. 1998.

⁹² H. Tulloch. Black Canadians: A Long Line of Fighters (Toronto: NC. Press. Ltd., 1973).

rails' stability and image was a lure for men working in menial jobs. The railroad men wore clean suits and were recipients of the public's friendly attitude.⁹³

This attraction was once so strong that in 1928, ninety percent of all working Black men were employed on the railways.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, for the Black man in Montreal, dealing with the public was sometimes a difficult experience. This was especially so on the railways, due to on-the-job harassment and management abuse.

Blacks:

recall the false accusations which arose out of: minor personality clashes with white conductors who filed reports against them which resulted in several demerit marks or firings; conductors also filed reports claiming that porters became familiar with women passengers and this accusation was often filed against a porter who was close to retirement, as a means of getting out of paying him a pension. These conditions in particular caused porters to live in constant fear, and after a porter's arrival back home from many a trip he wondered how he made it without incident of some sort.⁹⁵

Nonetheless, within the community, the railroad men had status, prestige and later, an image of professionalism. Sylvia

⁹³ Israel, "Montreal Negro," pp. 75-77, analyzes the sociological basis for this attitude of the men on the rails. This sentiment is echoed in Patti Vipond, The Road to Now: Patti Vipond Interviews, cited in, Charles Ashby, A Key to Canada: Part II (Toronto: The National Black Coalition of Canada Inc., 1976), n.p. reprint Spear Magazine, April 1976, n.p.

⁹⁴ Israel, "Montreal Negro," p. 70.

⁹⁵ Hostesses, Memory Book, p. 326

Warner remembered that as a child “there was certain type of glamour associated with it”--an image of prosperity, education and class.⁹⁶ This was an image the men fostered for themselves. There was a pride that the public and members of their community saw, no matter what the men felt about their working conditions. Though employment in a stratified, racist labour force never made up for abuse, lost opportunities, and discrimination, working in a job that garnered a modicum of respect was alluring, especially for the educated or skilled West Indian male. Over time these men comprised what was called the porter’s aristocracy.⁹⁷

Employment: Women

The work of Black women, regardless of origin, was also without power. West Indian women were highly overrepresented as domestics even though many had immigrated with previous training as teachers, secretaries or nurses. They entered this country believing that these skills would be welcomed.⁹⁸ But to their surprise and dismay, once in Montreal they had to deal with the day-to-day constraints of the job market, where domestic skills were

⁹⁶ Mrs. Sylvia Warner. interview by M. Clarke. tape recording, November 4, 1988. Black Montrealers, 1988.

⁹⁷ Roy States. interview by Yvonne Greer. tape recording, 1979-1980, Montreal. See also: Winks. Blacks. p. 424.

⁹⁸ Some of these stories can be found in Hostesses. 1982. See also: Mrs. Thelma Wallen, interview by M. Clarke. tape recording. November 20, 1988. Black Montrealers, 1988.

desired. The work was menial, low paying, with no job security, and no opportunity for advancement.⁹⁹

The seasonal variation of Black male labour made working conditions so uncertain that wives, and daughters, were almost always forced to work outside the home. It was not that unusual for women to maintain their homes and hold two domestic jobs.¹⁰⁰ Women unable to work the long, live-in hours of the domestics found jobs when the garment industry expanded to allow Blacks to work therein.¹⁰¹ The extra income sometimes made the difference between marginal and satisfactory living conditions. In a world circumscribed by the fallacies of racism, these women used creative means to earn income.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ This area has become more open within the past decade as there are now a number of books available discussing first hand historical experiences of domestics in this country. They include accounts of rape, intimidation, etc. D. Brand, No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Working Women in Ontario 1920s-1950s (Toronto: Women's Press, 1991); Peggy Bristow et al. We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up, Essays in African Canadian Women's History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); and, Makeda Silvera, Silenced (Toronto: Williams-Wallace Pub. Inc., 1983); Gloria Montero, The Immigrants (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, Publishers, 1977), pp. 131-136.

¹⁰⁰ Lucille Cuevas, Hymn To Freedom, TV Documentary Mini-Series by Almeta Speaks. (Toronto: Almeta Speaks Productions, Inc., 1993).

¹⁰¹ D. Hill, & H. Potter, Negro Settlement in: Canada: 1628 -1965. A Survey, Report presented to the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. (Montreal, 1966). See also Brand, "We Weren't Allowed."

¹⁰² Some hotels used women as housekeeping staff and during the 1920s the YMCA's head housekeeper and several other members of the housekeeping and kitchen staff were Blacks. There were women in the community who converted their homes, or part of their homes, into rooming houses. Rooms were rented to transient porters, Black visitors to the city, and, in rare instances, to permanent bachelor residents.

Community Organizations

With the great needs of the Depression, fraternal organizations played a vital role in the community's stability. The responsibility for members' family welfare was taken very seriously. The Depression brought these linkages closer together as the community banded together to survive. The contraction of the Black population made it easier to work together. However with fewer new members in the community, the struggle for acceptance and the fight against racism in Montreal were made more difficult.

The Coloured Women's Club and Self-Help

To respond to the distress of the Depression, the nature of social organization in the community changed. Black women organized to ameliorate living conditions. For instance, the Coloured Women's Club of Montreal evolved from a social club to a self-aid society due to the lack of resources available to Blacks.¹⁰³ Collective action was warranted due to the filth and mortality in the city. Montreal, well into the Depression, had the highest child mortality rate of any city in the world and it lagged far behind the rest of North American cities in improving its health, sanitation,

¹⁰³ The Colored Women's Club in 1933 began a soup kitchen and raised money to maintain a bed at Grace Dart Hospital. for Blacks without the resources to pay for hospital admissions. See Williams, Blacks, p. 27; Williams, Road To Now, p. 51-52, 57; Hostess, Memory Book. Israel "Montreal Negro." pp. 199-200. for more in-depth discussion of the role, status, membership of this premier Black institution.

and housing conditions.¹⁰⁴ Open sewers, outside toilets, filthy and crowded tenements were the norm in the poorer sections of Montreal and it was not at all unusual for ten to twelve people or two families to live in a single room. Even outdoor toilets frequently served more than one family.¹⁰⁵

Health and social welfare issues were not high priorities for the city or the province.¹⁰⁶ Such issues were generally the concern of private agencies or benevolent individuals.¹⁰⁷ With the unsanitary living conditions in the St. Antoine area, and the lack of a health services network to respond to Black concerns, it is not surprising then, that activism was so high at this time.¹⁰⁸

The Universal Negro Improvement Association and Education

The socio-economic downturn, coupled with an internal scandal, also had far-reaching affects on The Universal Negro

¹⁰⁴ See accounts in Copp, "Public Health," Anatomy, p. 88-105; and Ames, City Below.

¹⁰⁵ Bertley, Education, p. 26.

¹⁰⁶ High infant mortality among Blacks was not new to this city and environs. Marcel Trudel, Dictionnaire des esclaves et de leurs propriétaires au Canada français (Lasalle: Éditions Hurtubise HMH Ltée, 1990), p. xxvi.

¹⁰⁷ This was the purpose of Ames' City Below the Hill to create and redirect philanthropic interest into St Antoine and Griffintown. For some insight into the philanthropy from residents "above the hill" see: Westley, 1990.

¹⁰⁸ Hostesses. Memory Book, p. 217. This was especially the case after an inordinate number of deaths from pneumonia had occurred among West Indian porters.

Improvement Association of Montreal (UNIA).¹⁰⁹ Solely dependent on community funding, its attendance dropped, supporters were fewer and its membership declined.

In many ways the UNIA was unique. It advocated “self-help and self-reliance...in everything that contributes to human happiness and human well-being.”¹¹⁰ These were not just words but rather essential to building up the cultural and racial pride of its individual members. One man recalled that, “after hearing such inspirational history,” (he) left Liberty Hall with the certain knowledge that no white person was better than a negro. (sic) In those days, that was revolutionary thinking.”¹¹¹

The UNIA of Montreal was part of a worldwide organization committed to “one God, one Aim, one Destiny”--the goals of Marcus Garvey. Being called a Garveyite indicated that one followed Garvey’s political beliefs. Marcus Garvey advocated racial purity and a segregationist stance which the sophisticated American Blacks did not agree with, along with a “Back-to-Africa” call which

¹⁰⁹ The scandal was over Death Benefits and the demise of the Black Star Line. However, ignorance and false expectations about the process of redemption caused resignations, accusations and misunderstandings that lingered and hung over the organization for years. L. Bertley, Canada and Its People of African Descent (Pierrefonds: Bilongo Publishers, 1977), pp. 241-243; Bertley, “Universal Negro,” pp. 199, 204, 208.

¹¹⁰ Israel, “Montreal Negro,” p. 208. More in-depth information of UNIA can be found in Bertley, “Universal Negro,” and in Hill & Potter, Negro Settlement.

¹¹¹ Bertley, “Universal Negro,” p. 138

most Canadian Blacks found offensive.¹¹² However, many West Indians in Montreal fully embraced Garveyism. From the inception of the UNIA, these philosophical tenets were contentious.

Garveyites in Montreal regularly promoted these ideas and educated members about world-wide issues affecting Blacks. As guest speakers from other UNIA divisions spoke, Montreal Blacks developed a pan-African outlook. Support was strong for these meetings because a high value was placed on education. Montreal Blacks believed that education was crucial for the development of Black youth and also for adults.

Blacks also felt that this aspect of the UNIA's role was essential considering the inadequate educational structure in place in Montreal at this time.¹¹³ For instance, the fees for education, books, and uniforms, forced poorer families to pull their children out of school in earlier grades and send them to work.¹¹⁴ And though there were no laws restricting Blacks from attending schools,

¹¹² "Back-to-Africa" was not new to either American or Caribbean born Blacks living in Montreal. It has deep roots in African-American history and fuelled the rise of Sierra Leone and later Liberia in Africa. See: T. W. Shick, Behold the Promised Land A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth-Century Liberia (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1977), and, E. S. Redkey, Black Exodus: Black Nationalist and Back-to-Africa Movements 1890-1910 (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1969). Bertley, in his thesis on the UNIA and Garveyism, analyzes how the debate took shape during the twenties in Montreal. Bertley, "Universal Negro," pp. 144-148, 187-210; & Bertley, Canada, pp. 226-247.

¹¹³ See Bertley, "Education," for detail about the education programmes and the values of Blacks who lived in Montreal between 1910 and 1940.

¹¹⁴ In later years, this perpetuated a cycle of poverty from one generation to the next as the unschooled found it difficult to get a job. Williams, Road To Now, p. 76.

prejudice discouraged them from continuing their education. The teachers, often referring to “the best interests of the students,” made it known that an academic education was irrelevant for students who would inevitably become porters or domestics. Education for the Black child, was in their opinion, a waste of time.¹¹⁵ Blacks who wanted to improve themselves academically and professionally found that this was almost impossible to achieve in Montreal. Unable to break through the barriers in educational and professional institutions in Montreal, those few families who could afford to were forced to send their children to the United States. There they studied and later obtained employment.¹¹⁶

The Negro Community Centre and the Family

The Negro Community Centre (NCC) began to come into its own during the thirties and forties. A host of afterschool, weekend, and summer programs was put into place.¹¹⁷ With a regular source of funding the NCC was able to support programs that brought in an average monthly attendance of 1,000.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ A. Packwood, B. Riley, D. Sweeney, interviews by J. Bertley, 1980, taped recordings cited in Bertley, “Education,” p. 29.

¹¹⁶ Hostesses, Memory Book, p. 229. See Williams, Road To Now, p. 79-81 for various accounts of resistance to Blacks in Montreal’s educational institutions.

¹¹⁷ See: Bertley, “Education,” p. 131-135 for a complete list of programs and activities.

¹¹⁸ With the Red Feather fundraising campaigns, and the varied personal and business connections of the inter-racial Board, unlike the UNIA, the NCC was not exclusively dependent upon the community for income. Williams, Road To Now, p. 78.

This family and youth oriented focus was timely, as the Depression caused drastic familial changes. Its effects sometimes beat down the hardest efforts of NCC members. In families whose parents were unable to cope, children were placed in the homes of relatives, friends, or in the care of private or public child welfare agencies.¹¹⁹

Union United Church and the Arts¹²⁰

Though there was poverty of the pocket there was no poverty of the mind or spirit. Indeed, the people in this community persevered, and continued to aspire to education, the social graces, and earthly refinements. In the depths of the Depression, drama and literary clubs nurtured youth through the teaching of music, the cultivating of dramatic arts, and they maintained a sense of belonging, of challenge and self-discipline by encouraging contacts, volunteerism, and philanthropy. Union United Church was called the people's church--home to all Blacks regardless of their denomination.

Community leaders took their role as cultural purveyors very seriously. Elocution, public speaking, recitation and drama courses were given. Many highly educated Blacks contributed to the

¹¹⁹ Hill & Potter, Negro Settlement.

¹²⁰ For research on Union United Church see: Betty Riley, "The Coloured Church of Montreal" Spear, vol. 3 no. 10. (Toronto):. 24. See also: Leo Bertley, Montreal's Oldest Congregation: Union Church (Pierrefonds: Bilongo Pub. 1976).

community's intellectual life and aided the training of the children. There was focus on training youngsters for future leadership roles.¹²¹ Such goals were indicative of a people who prided themselves on performing well, and on excelling despite the circumstances.

This attitude was evident in most homes. Values were expected to be taught firsthand. Blacks believed that culture, educational values, one's decorum, and even one's manners, were a reflection of the home and household upbringing. Parents and extended family members, even family friends, worked hard to ensure that children were aware of this responsibility and Blacks expected their institutions to promote these values as well.

Racism: Montreal Style

The effects of racism were much more difficult to overcome. Women were faced with the onerous task of nurturing and caring for children knowing that individual and institutional racism in Montreal was also directed at their children. Anne Packwood recalls that, "she was called 'nigger' when she was a little child on Notre Dame Street. The children across the street from where her family lived were always calling her and her sisters and her brother the same racist epithet."¹²² This was not an isolated case. Thelma Wallen,

¹²¹ Bertley, "Education," p. 33.

¹²² Mrs. Anne Packwood, interview by M. Clarke, tape recording, October 30, 1988. Black Montrealers, 1988.

another resident of Montreal in these early days, recalled that during the 1920s, “when she began attending classes one of the nuns called her ‘sunshine,’ which was a derogatory term...This incident on the first day of school, prepared me for life. From year to year the racial attacks differed but never subsided.”¹²³

Bob White recounts similar events from the 1930s and 1940s, “The White people used to call me...’pickaninny’, ‘snowball’, ‘Tomtom’ ...you beat them up and you kicked them and they still called you ‘nigger, nigger.’¹²⁴ To counter this racial virulence, many Blacks banded together and worked hard to empower their children.

Summary

Montreal itself had no legal delimitation of Black districts, nor was there any formal segregation of Blacks in residential areas in the first half of the century. Still, the majority of Blacks lived in groups or clusters. In part, this may be attributed to racial or cultural affinity. Nevertheless, the poor economic life of Black families was the fundamental reason for the congregation of Blacks in certain districts.--especially St. Antoine¹²⁵

There had always been a greater number of Whites than Blacks

¹²³ Wallen. 1988.

¹²⁴ Bob White, interview by M. Clarke, tape recording, October 28, 1988, Black Montrealers, 1988.

¹²⁵ Greaves. Negro in Canada, p. 65.

in St. Antoine. Yet the 'Montreal Negro District' was so named because while successive waves of White immigrants passed through St. Antoine, Blacks remained for generations. St. Antoine was a stepping stone for many Whites who stayed there till they bettered themselves, and then left for newer areas.

In the St. Antoine district the railways' hold on male employment had originally given life to the Black community, but by the 30s and 40s the railroads ceased to be the main area of employment.¹²⁶ The new post-war economy expanded the opportunities for better socio-economic opportunities for most Canadians. Unfortunately, economically deprived due to labour stratification and underemployment, Blacks were not able to reap the benefits of this higher standard of living. So most continued to remain in St. Antoine and in other low rent areas.¹²⁷

The condition of all Blacks in Montreal was also constrained by racist immigration practices, and by the day-to-day fight for a decent existence. For many Blacks who had assumed that Canada was a land of equal opportunity, the reality of racial inequality, and social and labour stratification was to be very disappointing. It is no wonder that the basic purpose of Black community life was to

¹²⁶ By 1941 the percentage of men working as porters hovered around 50 percent. Prior to the Depression that figure had been closer to 90%. Potter, "Occupational Adjustments," p. 29.

¹²⁷ For a discussion of an exception to the residential pattern see: Williams, Road To Now, p. 71. L. Lewis, interview, August, 5, 1984; Phillips, interview, 1984.

ameliorate conditions and to encourage Blacks to stay in Montreal.

The despair of poverty was not unique to Blacks in Montreal. Such conditions were felt by all those within the marginal classes of society. What was different was the degree rather than the type of hardship. In Montreal, living in decent and humane conditions was the exception rather than the rule for the poverty stricken citizen, even before the Depression struck. The financial insecurity and chaos created geographical dislocation and, in severe cases, familial breakdown for many communities. However, within the Black community people reached out to each other to keep together those institutions they had. Out of this determination they developed a rich cultural life to alleviate the poverty in which they lived.

The achievements of outstanding individuals helped to hold people together in the midst of trying times. Men and women, families and institutions, banded together to assist each other. The immediacy of the struggle in the Depression was put aside while Blacks encouraged, boasted, campaigned, and supported the gifted, the brave, and those among them who showed promise.

PART II

THE JACKIE ROBINSON GENERATION RELIVED

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LORD FAMILY

Richard Lord Today

Richard Lord won a sports (hockey) scholarship, which enabled him to study Chemical Engineering at Michigan State University from 1948 to 1953. He broke the national (US) colour bar in varsity hockey, was chosen Hockey All-Star, and made team captain.

Since 1954 his varied career has touched all economic sectors. He has worked in private industry at Dominion Tar and Chemical Ltd. (Domtar), and F. C. Hume & Co. Ltd. As an Electrical Engineer with the City of Montreal, Richard was appointed Project Engineer of Communications for (EXPO) 1967 World Exhibition and was responsible for all the exhibits' communications.

Richard has assisted the federal government through his mandates on the Immigration Appeal Board, and his membership on the Special Committee on Poverty. Richard has been very active in the Quebec Liberal Party, serving terms as Vice-President (1966-68) and later as President of the Party (1968-70). He acquired a law degree in 1976 and currently manages CANAFRIC Development Corp. Ltd., and Richard Lord International Immigration Consultants Inc.

Community directorships include executive positions with: The

Lion's Club, Laval Chapter; the Royal Commonwealth Society, Mtl. Branch; Canadian Unity Organization; Westmount High Old Boys' Association; National Commonwealth Society, Quebec; Decision House; St. Leonard House and the Portage Program. His professional affiliations include the Montreal Black Business and Professional Association, and the Canadian Institute of Immigration Consultants. He has received many honours for his long contribution to social, political, and business life in Montreal.

Gwen Lord Today

Gwen Lord has a Bachelor of Science degree from Sir George Williams College and a teaching diploma from MacDonald College, of McGill University.

Her professional life in education has run the gamut from teacher, School Guidance Counsellor, to the position of Board Black Liaison Officer, to elementary school Vice-Principal, high school Principal, and finally to the position of Regional Director, PSBGM.

She has sat as a member, an Executive, or Director of several professional bodies, including: the Advisory Board on English Education, QME; Dawson College Board of Governors; the Task Force on Multicultural and Multiracial Education, PSBGM; the Anti-Bias Committee, PSBGM; QASA, CASA, and MASA, Protestant Committee.

Community and consultative involvements include: Black

Community Holistic Project; CLSC Cote des Neiges; SGWU Alumni Association; Summerhill Homes; QBBE; the National Congress of Black Women; the Corbo Commission; CBC Cultural Community Consultation; Comité des Plaintes STCUM; Comité Consultatif sur l'Education aux Droits, CDPQ; and the Musée de Science Naturelles.

She has received awards for community service and for her professional work, and a medal from the Governor General of Canada.

The Lord Family Background

The Lord family consisted of eight, with six Canadian born children, (four boys and two girls) and the two parents. Richard was born in 1929 and Gwen in 1936. Richard was the fourth child of four boys. Gwen was the second of two girls and the youngest in the family. Mrs. Lord, their mother, was born on Montserrat. Mr. Lord was Barbadian.

At the time of Richard's birth, they lived on St. Antoine Street between St. Marguerite and St. Phillip in St. Henri. By the time of Gwen's arrival, the family had moved several blocks east on St. Antoine Street between Greene and Atwater, on the north side of the street. This was on the border of the city of Westmount. They lived there over 20 years. Richard and Gwen grew up, then, as citizens of Westmount.

Mr. Lord was a porter on the Canadian Pacific, on the run from

Montreal to Winnipeg, and was out of town for approximately twenty-two days each month. Mrs. Lord worked as a domestic until 1941, and then went to work in an ammunition plant during the war.

Richard first attended Lewis Evans school in Montreal. However, after the family move into Westmount, he transferred to Queen's Elementary School. Gwen and Richard attended Queen's Elementary, Westmount Junior High and finally, Westmount Senior High.

The Lords were Anglican and attended St. Jude's Anglican on Coursol and Vinet, as well as St. George's Anglican on LaGauchetiere.

CHAPTER FIVE

EARLIEST INFLUENCES

Team Spirit

In the world of poverty that the family experienced, team work was essential to keep the unit together. Gwen realized this very early:

It was what was happening in the house that mattered. It was the consistent behaviour of that little group. Not to suggest that we didn't have problems and there weren't a lot things happening to my siblings, but we knew what we had to do. We knew that we had to support this unit called the family and we shouldn't do anything to hold the family back or to cause shame to this family.

When I speak about the family on St. Antoine Street it is that little unit, but it is also the extended family-with walking down that street and having all the mothers watching out for you, all the mothers reporting back on your behaviour. I mean, my behaviour was controlled by what Mrs Edwards would say and, of course it was nurtured by what these women and men would say to me...In other words it was two families. My family the small unit, and then there was the extended family too. This was a big, big strong unit. It really was. We had a sense of purpose.

Family Life

Richard and Gwen have very strong memories of their mother and her striking personality. She had a significant impact on their lives. Richard remembers how the two parents complemented each

other in the household:

Now my mother was very aggressive, and she treated us all like we were the King of England. And my father was very quiet, but...experienced in life and he would say things like, 'Son, you know, look after your responsibilities first before you start complaining, and take care of yourself. Follow your hygiene.' And my father gave us the education of the world. He was in Hungary, in Germany and told us about people [in the district]...'Stay away from that person.' 'Stay away from that person.'

But my mother was the one who laid it out on the line. I mean, if you didn't do something she was the one who gave you the slap on the behind or the head, or whatever it was. And she was the one who took care of us day-to-day, who made the breakfast, lunch and dinner. One thing she did, she fed us well. She taught us to respect the elders. She was a God-fearing woman.

Gwen also carried the effect of her mother's all pervasive influence throughout her childhood:

As with any community, any neighbourhood, there were a lot of distractions, but you knew that...I sort of based it on what would my mother say. What would my mother want me to do? It was nice at that time that we could say, 'My mother won't let me. I can't do that. My mother would be angry.' And I wasn't faking it. My mother would have been very upset. I say my mother even more than my father because my father was away all the time. But my mother was equal to being both mother and father.

Mrs. Lord taught her children that they must be true to themselves regardless of what the world might say to them:

In fact, one time Halloween came we went to a house in upper Westmount. The women asked me where I live and I

said in Westmount and she wouldn't give me anything because she said I lied because no Blacks lived in Westmount. So I didn't get anything from her. And I said to my mother, 'I should have told a lie.' My mother said 'No, you live in Westmount. You told the truth. Forget about that person.'

As the youngest child, Gwen was not expected to care for another sibling. However, she was aware that she still had a responsibility to the family. She knew that her:

father and mother were both working very very hard...I guess when you are part of that team you know that there are two people, who work very very hard for your well being...My mother who must have been hungry because she was working, would always take food off of her plate to give to us, my sister and I, cause we were the youngest. If someone does that for you, you realize that they are really interested in your well being and you feel that you have to support that person or persons in any way you can. So the object was not to mess up, not to make things difficult; to be important or to be part of that team [and not] hold the team back in any way. So there was no question growing up.

They grew up in a disciplined environment. There were household rules, and tasks were assigned for each child. There were always rules:

On Saturday evening I had to help my mother buy things at the market. [We would] go down and buy goods at the market, [and then] come home. Before I could go out of the house on Saturday, I had to wash the floor. We had linoleum on the floor. We had to clean out the shed and so forth. We had different responsibilities. Once we completed our responsibilities we could go out. But we

could not go out until those responsibilities were finished.

Responsibility was a shared task, and Richard felt this burden especially during the war years. With his older brothers occupied with the war, his father often on the rails, and his mother now working on the night shift, a young, teenaged Richard was left to take care of his two younger sisters. However, Richard did not shirk this responsibility and developed a strong bond with them.

In 1940, when Gwen was 4, and Richard was 11, the family settled in the Westmount area, and their lives changed forever. Both had to deal with the white environment of the city they were in. They were given advice about how to get along with the new community that they were living in:

We used to walk in St. Patrick's parade. My father said, [and] my mother said, 'Go ahead and march with them, don't be afraid.' We began marching with the Irish. And people used to laugh. I kept on going because mother said, '[That's] okay. You are going to have to learn to live with them, you share with them.'

Early Education

By Richard's third grade, the transfer to Queen school had taken place. His older brothers had finished with elementary education and Richard was alone. The first year in Queen's school was a shock for Richard for two reasons. He had been first in his class throughout his schooling at Lewis Evans but now he had to

work to keep up. The second reason was that he found himself to be the only Black in his class, and only one of two Blacks in the whole school. But despite the push for his studies and having to make up for the inferior level of education, Richard did not consider himself to be at a disadvantage being the only Black in his school. Pleased to have had an education superior to his neighbourhood peers, Richard considered that his all-white, Westmount public schooling was an opportunity, until he got to the end of his schooling:

I benefited by being the only Black there because they were giving this education that was not intended for me...but I got it because I was among that group, [the] only one. So they had to give it to me because I was in that group. The only thing, the shock came was once I had the education and I got to the end of the line, a lot of those guys went into the banking [sector] at McGill and I had no money to go forward.

Years later the demographic situation had not changed. At the start of grade one, Gwen was the only Black at Queen's School. This situation persisted throughout her pre-university years. She poignantly recalled that, "There weren't any Blacks. I was the only Black in my class in junior high and in senior high. God! Actually in elementary school I was the only Black in my class too. Except that one year my sister...we were in the same class for awhile. And that was it. It was mostly white. God!"

Residential Choice and Black Reaction

The fact that Richard and Gwen were alone in these all-white schools was due to Mrs. Lord's deliberate choice to remain on the north side of St. Antoine Street. Richard believes that his mother was highly motivated to make this serious step. She felt resistance from Whites and even some Blacks who resented the inroads she had made. She was determined to give her children better options and resources. Nothing was going to stop her because Mrs. Lord "was going to make sure her sons did not go to prison. Because there was one thing down in St. Henri, eventually the other Black kids began going to prison--not because they were [bad]... they would go down and steal something from a Coca-Cola truck or something like that."

With the segregated housing market in Westmount, and the gentlemen's agreements between landlords, such a move, for a Black person, was a rare event and not an easy opportunity to acquire. Richard recalls that it was their family size that tipped the scales in their favour because the Catholic landlady "who saw my mother had six kids and said her house was designed for lots of kids."

Despite the inroads that the Lord family had made just by breaking the racist logjam of Westmount's residential market, the community of Blacks in St. Henri living on the south side of St. Antoine had a negative reaction toward the Lords' move:

People didn't want her to move in the district. Black people used to call her pickaninny.¹²⁸ Well it seems that when my mother came from St. Henri there were fair skinned people who were Black who did not want my mother in that area at all. They just felt that Mrs. Lord's coming uptown with her pickaninnies [was a disgrace]. They just didn't want my mother.

In addition to the issue of race and status, the large number of Lord children also produced a similar effect among the close-knit porter community of St. Henri and St. Antoine. Richard remembered his mother's explanation for the name calling he had heard, "She said[we] were pickaninnies, because some people felt that my mother had too many kids for a porter. She had six kids. In fact, after a while people used to call [on] my mother and say, 'Mrs. Lord don't have any more kids.' So she stopped having any [more] kids."

Gwen Lord felt that the Black reaction to their move was class based and had a lot to do with her parents' low education and the displaced anger of the other Blacks towards the family's move:

In the small little black community in Montreal, the Lords on St. Antoine Street were not perceived as being anything special. My father was a porter and my mother did housework. And this was considered almost trash to our other Black neighbours...who were in fact very angry that we were living there, because they were a different class. We were the same colour but they were Jamaican from a

¹²⁸ Pickaninny is an extremely derogatory appellation. It was used as a signifier of the most African characteristics: tight curly hair, dark, almost blue-Black skin, thick Negroid features, etc. Coupled with the physical, was the sense that a pickaninny was crude, uncouth, uneducated. Most often this was pointed toward young undisciplined children.

certain class and they looked down upon us. They didn't think we were anything...because in fact they were all educated. They had degrees and they could have all been doctors or lawyers or whatever. But because of the prejudice in Montreal they were working as porters.

Neighbourhood Life

Rejected by the Black community directly across the street, and now attending a different school than other Blacks around them, the Lord children turned their eyes to the White neighbourhood immediately around them. This included the streets north towards Dorchester. However, they found their reception in Westmount, at times, was not any easier. Richard was not deterred:

When we moved there the whites on Selby Street gave us, some of them gave us a hard time, which was good because when we [had] lived in St. Henri [with] the Whites, we were all just one big family on Ste. Marguerite, St. Phillip. They were Irish, Italian, Polack and so forth. But when we moved on St. Antoine Street at Greene and Atwater they were basically English...Catholics, Anglicans, United, Lutherans. And then I began going up the hill.

This northerly direction had become the regular pattern for the younger children by the time that Gwen was playing on her own:

You know, the direction was not across the street. We played up the street. We played in our back alley behind the house which was safe, there was no traffic, and so on. A lot of our friends were on Selby Street...So most of my friends were in the Westmount side...just in the back alley. So we didn't cross the street. That street [St. Antoine] remember, was two way traffic, with a street car running

down the middle. We didn't cross that street. We went across...to visit...But most of the time the playing was the other way. I think it had more to do with traffic than anything else. Also my school friends were on that side of the street.

Richard developed unique skills to cope with being so visibly different and to gain a sense of belonging in the small area of Westmount he called home. He heartily embraced the customs and habits of an anglicized culture. For instance, at the urgings and support of his parents, Richard was encouraged to fully participate in all the activities of his class and peers, despite how odd it might have seemed.¹²⁹ Despite being the lone Black participant in many things, Richard believed that he had to share and participate fully in the dominant culture around him in order to get along. This total inculcation of Westmount's anglicized culture characterized his youthful approach to life.

Community Connections

Still, the world of Richard and Gwen was not solely restricted to their White playmates. The family's community contacts were typical of those Blacks in Montreal at that time. Encouraged by their mother's strong religious belief and the deeply spiritual culture of the Black community, the Lords went to church, sometimes two or

²⁹ Even today this connection persists. His connection to the Irish, in particular is a profound one. Richard was made a full Irish in 1980, by the St. Patrick's Society. He has been in the parade almost every year since he was a young boy.

even three different churches on Sunday.¹³⁰ The Black churches they attended allowed the children to create links with other Blacks from other parts of St. Henri, St. Antoine and other districts of greater Montreal.

During the week, and more especially the weekends, the children participated in the community centres, the NCC, and the UNIA. Mr. Lord was a strong Garveyite. Though not a member, he participated in many of the activities of the UNIA's Liberty Hall. Gwen and Richard also went there frequently, and they remember that at the UNIA they heard about a proud African history, about the Black history of the diaspora, and about the stories of Black heroes. It was the quintessential organization that defined the African (Black) awareness of a whole generation:

It was for me the place where Blacks [got their] education ...a very important part of Black education was taking place at the UNIA Hall...about our roots, and about what was being done to us. Just the pictures they had up there, the atmosphere that was there, the Black flavor coming out of UNIA Hall was different than any other place in Montreal. There were differences [between people], but at the UNIA Hall there weren't differences. It didn't make any difference who you were and what you wore, you belonged there...you belonged there because you were Black. That was the important thing. That was the issue, blackness at the UNIA Hall.

¹³⁰ Though church going was a household event, it was not a family affair because Mr. Lord categorically refused to attend. Scarred by his experiences of the first war, he could not bear to go to church. He would insist that the family go without him.

During Gwen Lord's teen years she went to the NCC and joined sports teams there. Nonetheless, the NCC had a reputation different from that of the UNIA. It was obvious to her that the age-old internecine battles of class and status were being played out at the NCC. For example, clothing was a status symbol, and people reacted to these indicators of class. This focus on class, she believed, drained the collective efforts for real change at the NCC and was an impediment to true Black unity in the community.

Childhood Influences

The influence of Westmount upon Richard Lord is very clear. He seriously took on the values and mores of the culture around him. This translated even into his behaviour toward his sisters:

One time a girl beat my sister Louise up, and Louise came home and told me. And I went up to Greene Avenue and met this girl and I told her you don't do that and...I slapped her in her face. She began crying. That night I got a call from her brother and he said her father wanted to see me the next day. So I went to see the man the next day. He lived on Clandeboye. I came in and he sat me down and he said 'Richard Lord we have great respect for you, but you don't hit girls.' I said, 'But she hit my sister.' 'But you should not hit girls.' Rather than hitting me he sat down said, 'I see you taking care of your sisters...but this you don't do and this you don't do.' And that man was, I think his name was Marwood, a white man, and he sat down and he gave me an education in regards to how to take care of [one's] sisters, because I took care of my sisters the same way I took care of the guys playing on my teams. I didn't hit them but I would shout at them...but after that I didn't

shout anymore.

Richard's anglophilia is quite noticeable in his speech, dress, and deportment. This was fostered by the Anglo environment of the school, the neighbourhood and the culture in which he participated. Richard recalls that, as a nine year old, the visit of King George in 1938 had a profound effect upon him:

At that time we had just went into Westmount, the lower part Westmount and I was going to Queen's School. The King of England came down Cote St. Antoine Road...and we had a big celebration. We all got little spoons and we sang 'God Save the King', but he went by so fast we didn't see him.

The class affectations of the upper-class Westmount environment that his mother was exposed to daily, coupled with the legacy of their parent's own British West Indian culture, was quite overt within the household:

My mother was a maid...for wealthy people in Westmount. And she saw the young boys in Westmount going forward and my mother coming from Montserrat...[saw] what happened, decided that we would live the same way as the people she was working for in Westmount. The reason I say that was, that my mother, when we sat down on Sunday, we had two forks, two knives, a little spoon and everything else like that sitting at the table. I remember that we couldn't leave the table unless we asked permission and they'd say 'okay leave the table.' And here we were on the third story on St. Antoine Street!

Richard's acceptance in the Westmount neighbourhood was also

due to his popularity. As a youngster, around the age of 12, he already had a reputation as an organizer and leader. He ran softball and hockey teams in the Westmount area. The boys he chose were “kids who were rejected in the neighbourhood. Nobody wanted to play with them cause they weren’t tough enough, or something like that.” Over time these teams became successful and Richard began to develop a loyal following of Westmount boys, and a reputation of fairness and sportsmanship.

Sports became a life-long connection to the upwardly mobile children of the lower Westmount district. Some of his friends in the lower Westmount district were actually English speaking friends who had come from areas around the nearby streets of St. Henri where his family had once lived. The friendships he had with these boys lasted for many years even though many of them went to a different school:

I wanted to play with certain kids we [had been] playing with and I couldn’t go to school with them and I found out why. They were Catholics. They were the O’Connells, the O’Tooles. They went to St. Leo’s...into Loyola. What kept me close to these people, till today, was sports! They were good in hockey. I was in hockey. Some of them were good in boxing. I would follow boxing. I would go to their dances on Friday nights. Of course they wouldn’t go to Westmount High but I would go to theirs because...a lot of these kids, when they got a little money moved on to Selby Street, but they were originally from St. Henri. They would move [north] onto Selby whereas we just moved

along St. Antoine.

Sibling Bond

This dynamic role that sports played in Richard's life also cemented the close relationship between Richard and Gwen. Considered a bother to her older sister, Gwen became Richard's constant companion when she was very young, and the two of them pursued their love of sports together. They competed with each other and against each other. Gwen excelled in track and field, and Richard in hockey. Gwen even played on the all-boys teams that Richard ran. They were each other's strongest supporters. They played baseball, football, basketball, and joined organized teams in the areas around Westmount and Montreal and competed even at the provincial level.

Effects of the War

Both children grew up in the war years, either preparing for the war or living through it. Both children felt a sense of the loss that the war caused. For Richard, the war signalled neighbourhood and community loss. The war was a memory of the names of the young men who eagerly joined up but who never come home again. The loss was felt on the streets and even in their own home, because the whole close-knit community mourned for the loss of one of their

own.

Gwen was aware of the sense of loss around her but she was too young to know personally many of the those in the services. Moreover, the war had a personal cost. It meant the loss of family intimacies from her parents and older siblings, particularly her mother:

I really don't remember the war days. If I do remember anything about the war days was the fact that my mother was working in a war plant. And it was a very lonely time. I remember that she used to leave for work. She was working on the morning, no she was working on the night shift so she would leave home in the dark. So she would return home I guess just as I was leaving for school. So there was a big, big gap. That's what I remember about the war, I remember the absence, you know, of family. My father was away longer. My mother wasn't home.

Impetus for Higher Education

Hockey became Richard's ticket to higher education, but ironically not within Canada. Richard's exceptional ability, particularly in hockey, became well known in many sports areas in Montreal, including McGill University. In 1947, when Richard was in grade 11, his last high school year at Westmount High, Vic Obeck, Director of Inter-Collegiate Athletics at McGill University, approached Richard. He offered Richard a hockey sports scholarship which would have enabled Richard to pursue Civil Engineering. Richard, honoured and pleased, geared up to enter Canada's premiere

university. Unfortunately his plans were dashed only a few weeks later when McGill summarily informed him that the University was withdrawing its offer. His scholarship was being given to a young, white student from Alberta. It was a blow:

I was shocked. It knocked me flat on my back. I was stunned. But I wasn't hurt. I had been conditioned by what they had done to my brother Bobby, you know. Bobby played excellent hockey. He played on the first line with two other players and they won the championship. After the season...all of his teammates got job offers in the NHL even his two linemates. Bobby was never chosen--not one offer. He never went to the majors. That was heart-breaking to see. I was also embarrassed because I thought 'How do I tell my friends?' I was a leader of these boys but I wasn't good enough to be picked. I remember thinking 'Little Boys don't cry.'¹³¹

As the grade 11 high school year was ending, Richard scrambled for options for the coming year. The City of Westmount offered him a permanent position to work at the Unity Boys Club yet despite their good salary offer he declined. Richard was determined to go on to university. "So", he stated, "to salve my hurt I went back to school."

Grade 12 had just been introduced into Montreal area public schools. Essentially first year college, grade 12 cost 10 to 12 dollars monthly. Richard worked that summer of 1947 and returned to Westmount High in the fall. He graduated the only Black out of

¹³¹ Interview with Richard Lord. Montreal. January 20. 1999

that first class of 29 students.

The education, recognition, and support that Richard needed did not come about in Canada.¹³² Richard acquired them in the United States by virtue of a sports scholarship to Michigan State University. Richard's foray into university life came about by a chance conversation of another student and through the timely support of an astute high school counsellor. He considers the timeliness of the circumstances:

In my last year of high school I found out this Jewish guy was going to Denver, Normie Lucovitz. And Normie said he had a scholarship. I said for what? He said, 'Sports! Richard your marks are good. Why don't you try to get in Denver?' So I wrote to Denver. Denver wrote me back and gave me a three hour exam which I took at school. Mr. Bartlett was kind of a Superintendent of the room. I passed that exam and then he told me, 'Why are you going to Denver.' I said, 'Well I want to be an engineer and get an education.' 'Well look, don't go to Denver. Try some other schools.' He said look here. He gave me a list of some other schools.

They all said come a year later, but that was 1949, and Michigan State told me if you come now, this was the third week of September...before October, and if you can maintain a certain average and make the team we'll take care of you.

Penniless but ever resourceful, Richard took advantage of his father's connections on the railroad. Under the guidance of porters, Richard was hidden on two trains bound for the state of Michigan.

¹³² For an example of his hometown's patronizing attitude see APPENDIX C.

Within the week, Richard was registered at Michigan State University in Chemical Engineering, and attending classes on a sports scholarship. In doing so Richard became the first Black hockey player in the NCAA in the United States. At that time he was not aware that he had made history in the U.S.¹³³ Though originally unaware of his role in breaking the color bar in American varsity hockey, he was keenly aware of the color bar that existed in hockey here in Canada, and he regretted the lack of recognition from the country of his birth.

Richard was aware that the colour of his skin had a big impact on the other side of the border:

Every university I applied to accepted me. They didn't know I was Black. They wouldn't have assumed I was Black because what Black would be applying for Engineering? Michigan State didn't even know but it was better that I went there. My high school Principal didn't think that a university down in the south, like Denver, would be a good experience for me. So they suggested places up north. But it was because I could play hockey that I got to stay in Michigan.¹³⁴

Gwen's entry into university came about as a result of the direct intervention of Richard in 1952. Refusing to accept the path she had chosen, (factory work to nursing) Richard straightaway

¹³³ His record has been recorded in: Mike Prisuta, Awe-Inspiring: The History of Spartan Hockey, p. 14, 15. Mike Pearson, "Pioneers" Lansing State Journal, Tuesday, February 16, 1988; Norris Ingells, "People," Lansing State Journal, Sunday, October 28, 1990.

¹³⁴ Interview with Richard Lord, Montreal, January 20, 1999.

registered Gwen for her first college term:

I did graduate from high school and I was 16 cause I [had] started school early. And I was waiting around to become a nurse and you had to be 18. So that summer, my sister and I were working in a dress factory washing our frocks. And Richard came home from college and he said, 'Well, what are you doing here?' And I said, 'Well, I'm working. I am doing very well. I'm a foreman, lady, and I'm going to stay here until I'm 18 and then I'm going to go on into nursing.' He said, 'No way! You're going to go into college.' I said 'No way! Richard I can't go into college...' He didn't talk to me. He just went up to Sir George, registered me in first year science, and came home with the course cards. [He] said [to my] mother, 'Here...Gwen is registered in first year science. I paid the first instalment. You just have to keep it up, and so on.' And he was gone.

Personal Expectations of Higher Education

For Gwen, the idea of attending university was a major move. Though Richard had to deal with the concept of campus life and fraternity living, he had been preparing for this ultimate step for a long time. Gwen, on the other hand, had to become comfortable with the very idea of attending college:

The big step was realizing that you could go to college. It never occurred to me to go to college. You know it wasn't even in my mind. Nursing, yes, I could see that but not college. So that really made a difference. That was a change of my head--that going to college. When I got to college I saw all my friends from high school. They were all there. But it never did occur to me to go there...I didn't talk about my dreams. I didn't talk about anything...I was so busy just having a wonderful time with my schooling and sports and everything...I was living for the moment. I

never really thought way beyond that actual moment...I can't say really honestly [that] I sat down and thought about my future...in Westmount High they would say in the French class, 'What are you going to do when you finish school?' I would just listen to the other students. The girls would usually talk about becoming nurses or getting married. They never talked about becoming scientists or anything like that. I really was echoing what they were saying. I would say I wanted to become a nurse. I don't think anyone in class ever said they wanted to go to university or become a scientist or anything like that.

Parental Expectations Towards Higher Education

Part of Gwen's discomfort was that the Lords did not grow up in an intellectual environment. Mrs. Lord had had high school education on Montserrat and had even taught school there. But she did not consider herself educated. She wanted education for her children, but did not try to instil a particular view about higher learning:

My mother would say to me, 'I'm not schooled but I am learned.' It was really, really good. I understood the difference. My mother was a very, very smart woman, very intelligent. I guess she had a lot of aspirations. She was also realistic and she understood that there was a difference between book learning and learning of life, and that was really quite something.

The use of education as a gateway simply for intellectual pursuit was a foreign concept to Mr. and Mrs. Lord. Mr. Lord was very pragmatic in his thinking. Gwen remembered that he "just wanted

us to be able to take care of ourselves and earn our living and not cause any trouble.”

Gwen stated that both parents wanted her educational pursuits to be practical, realistic, and to fit a woman’s life plan:

I remember when I was going to college [my father] couldn’t see any reason why I should go to college. First of all I was a woman and he thought that I wouldn’t be employed. In other words I’d be just wasting my time. He didn’t think of education for education sake. I don’t think neither my mother or my father thought of education for education sake. They thought of it in the line of advancement, of getting a job and things like that.

Parental Expectations of Career Success

Parental expectations for Gwen’s career were not clearly articulated. Gwen believed that the specific job choice would not have mattered to them. On the other hand, they did not expect their daughters to find an unconventional career or to take a career path that led to the nightlife or the street world:

I think my father would have considered success that, you know, both my sister and I were working. I don’t think it would have mattered what kind of work it was as long as it was respectable. In other words we weren’t going to be prostitutes...we were not going to sing in nightclubs and things like that. We were going to earn our living by the sweat of our brow. That was perfectly acceptable. Working in an office would be okay. Things like that.

The expectations of Mrs. Lord were more integrated and internalized. Having left Montserrat decades earlier in a bid to

improve her present life and that of her future, her expectation was that her daughters would be free from the life of housework--"to go one above that." Gwen stated that she did not, "know what 'one above that' meant." These expectations were very typical of young women in that era. Nursing would have been considered to be 'one above that.' Becoming a secretary also had high status because training took place at the Mother House, which was a convent in downtown Montreal that housed a superior secretarial school for working and middle class girls.

The Personal Face of Racism

Gwen talked about the overt ways in which racism destroyed family members. She sadly recounted a story of how her sister Louise was beaten by racist attitudes in Montreal's job market:

Louise got a job at Bell Canada...as an engineering assistant. In that respect, she was successful. She was earning reasonably good money and if it wasn't for prejudice and discrimination she would have done very well in the Bell. But like my brother and myself, she was exposed to a lot of discrimination and it destroyed her. Really it did destroy her. It was very sad. People beneath her would be promoted and she wasn't and she would ask and they would say, 'Well you are Black and no one would work for you'...So she was a success too, but her success you know, was limited--but not by her choice. She was doing well and in a way she didn't need Richard's help [like I did]. She could have done it on her own. She could have gone anywhere. She would have really been going up the ladder if she [hadn't] been discriminated against.

Gwen expressed the frustration of living with racism throughout her life. From childhood to adulthood, the face of racism changed but the objective was the same--to cut down Black people:

The stuff from the street kids was not bad, you know 'maudit negre' or 'nigger' because the next minute you would say [ami or friend] It was a battering, [but] it was just superficial. The next minute you'd be sort of talking and having fun. No, the systemic racism was the dangerous thing because it was so undercover that you didn't even really know that it exist. So you were just being led into a trap. So you went along doing things and boom! It would strike. And it was insidious. I know that even with my degrees.¹³⁵

Growing up in Montreal, Gwen was aware of the "us and them" boundaries for the Blacks. The discrimination was hidden in Montreal. There were no blatant signs to announce what was off limits. Nevertheless, Blacks did not have to see signs in order to know that there was an unwritten code in many places in the city: if you were Black you would not be served. As Gwen put it:

You know [places that explicitly refused Blacks service were just] about everywhere, whether it was Murray's Restaurant or the Mont Royal Hotel. There were all kinds of places, you know. I stuck pretty close to my community and I wasn't going many places in the 40s and in the early 50s but it was just understood that you wouldn't go to that place or to that restaurant or that store. There were so many. I would say that the ones who did, were the

¹³⁵ See APPENDIX A and APPENDIX B for Gwen's personal account of two encounters she experienced in the early years of her career. Her pain, disbelief and bewilderment she expressed in the accounts are typical reactions in the face of "polite" racism.

exception rather than the rule. A whole lot of places. There weren't signs, but everyone knew. I guess you would have gone in there and sat for a while but they wouldn't serve you. So there would be no point going. You really wouldn't want to be in a place that didn't want you to be there.

In contrast, Richard's world was distinctly different from the world of his sister and even from that of most Blacks of his time. His connections with the English speaking British community opened doors that would have usually been shut in his face. His schooling, his work with children's sports, his willingness to buy into the values of the dominant group and his exceptional leadership and personal popularity, all worked to open opportunities for him.

This was in a period when taverns were so popular they could be seen on almost every corner. Many of these taverns catered to a specific group, class, or ethnic population. The racial barriers that applied to some restaurants often functioned in taverns as well. Yet, Richard crossed that great divide and frequented such unfamiliar haunts with his friends and with the young men he had trained and coached. As a result, Richard was comfortable walking into an Irish tavern or pub.

There were incidents of prejudice throughout his life but Richard refused to be daunted by them. This attitude began with his experiences as a young child. Faced with the prospect of being the

only Black child in a sea of White children, Richard took his mother's advice and learned to find the possibilities in them.

When he was much older, he had a different education about the nature of racism that existed in Montreal. When he came back from the U.S. during school terms, he brought with him many of his fraternity and varsity teammates:

To them Montreal was fabulous. To me [Black Americans] were fabulous--in their big cars. The reason it was fabulous to them [was], when you got off the campus in Detroit, if you were Black, you couldn't go into a store to buy a hat unless it was yours...See we were two Black people looking at one another. I looked at them with their cars and their big homes and I thought, gee those guys were privileged. They looked at me because I was able to go to a white store, a white school. They said I was privileged. They said 'Master Lord, you have so much, you don't know what you have.' So we shared in each other. I had a party for them. We all slept in the same room...They thought it was the greatest in the world. I took them to a tavern, the Kent tavern beside the Forum. They met all my Irish and Scottish friends. And they went up to Westmount Park and played sports and they said, 'Gee you are lucky here. You're rich.' But they had economic freedom. We had social freedom but not freedom to go into the institutions. Even at that time at McGill...If you were Black you had no opportunity to get in but you could get into the tavern. You could get into the movie theatre. You could get into the streetcar. You could get on the bus. And if you had money you could buy a house anywhere, but you had to have money...to rent a house, you could rent a house anywhere [if you were allowed]. So it was a misleading image that we sold.

This experience opened his eyes more clearly to the world he

was raised in. It removed the last remnants of disbelief that he may have had about growing up in this city. The contrast made everything evident.

Nevertheless Richard was not disheartened but actually buoyed by the strengths and new-found Black awareness that these new Black friends gave to him. He recounted how they changed him:

Once I got down in Michigan State I began looking beyond, because I met a lot of brilliant Blacks...working on their Ph.D.s. They were way ahead of me...from places like Tuskegee, Alabama [and] Memphis, Tennessee. These guys were very slow talking but they were Black militants. They [said], 'Don't waste your time here. Get a good education and move on. Blacks need you. I hope you stay in the States but if you do go home don't just get money. Try to lead your people. Don't get into a quarrel with us, there's so few of us. You gotta go forth. You gotta do something. You gotta bring them together. You gotta stay together.' They were all Paul Robeson types.

Richard took their advice very seriously and now holds those friendships great esteem, "If I'm in trouble I'll pick up the phone [to] Detroit. The guys are here in a second. If they're in trouble...I am there in a second. We have a tremendous rapport. We keep it up all the time." Under the mentoring and tutelage of these Black men, the education that Richard received in his late teens, while at Michigan State, was empowering, forward thinking and hearkened back to the education he'd received from his parents at an earlier age.

Mrs. Lord equipped her children to cope with the White world

around them and then gave them advice about how to deal with the racism they would encounter. Gwen remembers that:

She just used the phrase, 'It's a White man's world.' And [she said] that our position was not on the top. It was going to be struggle. It was always struggle. And keep your chin up. Don't let them get you down. She was a fighter and she told us that it was something we were going to have to fight all the time. Just be strong.

The Lords' fight to improve themselves has been a long fight and sometimes a bitter one. For the Black person, individual mobility is intimately intertwined with race. The drive to succeed, to move beyond one's environment outside of the boundaries of race, continues generation after generation. Gwen recounts that her struggle is one that began decades ago, generations before her, on the island of Montserrat when her far sighted grandmother pushed her mother to go and try something different, something that would better herself and her family. Her mother brought this determination to the new, racist environment of Montreal. Despite its limitations, she tried to inculcate her Canadian born children with strong values, and life skills to overcome the restrictions that discrimination creates. The impact of this lesson was not lost on Gwen:

I got a sense that [racism] was something that my ancestors were continuously working on overcoming. You know because she told us about her life in the West Indies.

That her mother was not a slave. Her grandmother was not a slave, but I think perhaps the next generation before them was. And that there were all these White people over them, even...my grandmother worked at picking cotton. In other words she was [an] indentured worker...And their life was really bad because they didn't own anything. And they sort of got the scraps from the table. That's why her mother, my grandmother insisted that they get away. She didn't want them 'picking any white man's sea island cotton,' she said. [emphasis Gwen] So we got a feeling that you know, there was a sacrifice that was made so that she could live better, that we could live better. That we each had to keep on fighting and that it was going to be better. It [would be] a long, slow struggle before it would get better.

Gwen understood how long the struggle would take and how complex it would be. Even though she has financial freedom that could give her the opportunity to experience many things, she muses, "You can't appreciate freedom until every member of your family [your community] is free. And that isn't happening. So it [society] is just a game. It's a struggle. And it's frustrating because there is always in-fighting that goes on [even in the Black community]. So the struggle is from within, [and] without."

Summary

The Lord children grew up in Montreal in the Jackie Robinson era, that immediate post-war period that lasted to 1955. Much of their tales of the war, their family changes, and the cultural and organizational life are familiar--they follow the life pattern of

Blacks living in Montreal at the same time. They lived in the city of Westmount just on the border with the St. Antoine-St Henri district, a residential community crumbling by the sheer weight of its old, dilapidated houses. The search for affordable and quality housing was a constant preoccupation. Born in Canada, or from British West Indian heritage, these Blacks sent their children to schools nearby that were run under the Protestant school system. These families had a vibrant community life and supported their local Black organizations, where they connected with each other almost daily.

The Black community was culturally heterogeneous and the population was small, with many ties between families that spanned generations. It was a conservative community, one that believed in the value of religion, and its small churches were filled. Each member played a vital role in the upbringing of the children. The extended family of elders and relatives functioned to counter destructive influences.

The Jackie Robinson generation had lived through the Second World War. The post-war economy offered potential for economic growth, and some of the youth were able to take advantage of the changes. It was a short lived boom, yet it whetted the appetites of a generation. They had walked into offices, and factories,--something that no Black generation had dare to do previously in Montreal.

Nonetheless, many Blacks found themselves underemployed as their skills and experience were overlooked, others passed over them and they hit the glass ceiling. Similar to the generations of Blacks before in Montreal, the mobility of the Jackie Robinson generation was severely limited. Very few broke the colour line within the sectors of power and influence.

Rather, the reality was the Black individual lived within an economically depressed community that struggled to overcome racist restrictions. Sometimes that struggle was displaced and race supremacy battles flared from within, from one person to another and from one cultural group to the other, but most times the struggle against racism was directed toward the structures on the outside. Whether it was polite racism, covert racism, systemic or institutional racism, for the average person or even the exceptional Black individual, it did not matter. These often ephemeral forms of racism, endemic to Montreal, to its economy, its labour market, and its institutions were difficult to overcome. Clearly, the prosperity of the Lords was not a result of any inherent goodness of Montreal.

Many early factors were crucial to the success of Gwen and Richard Lord. It was not the tolerance of Montreal, rather it was circumstance of birth and family influences. For instance, their mother's teachings and guidance had lasting impact. Moreover her

determination to reside on the north side of St. Antoine Street situated the family in the suburb of Westmount. This decision brought advantages; the most obvious were the superior municipal and educational facilities. The children attended schools that were designed to train future bank managers, business executives, public directors and the like. The expectations for academic and personal success were high, unlike those in the schools attended by most Montreal Blacks. Yet the early factors that made the difference for Richard and Gwen did not even come about as a result of Westmount's exceptional offerings. On the contrary, it was something else.

Natural talent played a significant role in their success as Richard and Gwen were creative, resourceful, and intelligent. A gifted athlete with exceptional leadership skills, Richard had attained an education commensurate with his peers. Yet he never had the opportunity to get a foot in the door in Montreal. This is systemic racism. The door of opportunity is closed even before one takes their first step toward advancement. Usually the struggle against this racism is daunting, and many gifted Blacks languish unfulfilled; their potential is forever lost to the community.

However, this was not the case for Richard, for he was in the right place at the right time. It was serendipity. A chance

conversation with a friend enabled Richard to consider alternative possibilities, and with the subsequent advice from his school room supervisor Richard was able to take advantage of an athletic scholarship outside of Montreal. It was luck. Due to a lifetime of family connections on the rails Richard was able to finagle free transportation to Michigan State. As the doors opened his options broadened and Richard acted.

Then, when the opportunity presented itself, Richard took steps to empower his sister. The enduring sibling bond, cemented by the circumstance of war, had forced them to rely upon each other in their childhood and continued into their young adulthood. Richard's strong conviction that education was the key for socio-economic success, led him to take action. By registering Gwen himself, he opened the door for her. Now buttressed with this support, and then later with the help of colleagues, Gwen pushed the door wide by herself. She moved into hitherto forbidden areas of education in this city and began to make a difference.

Gwen and Richard, two children of the Jackie Robinson era, have had their full measure of prosperity and influence. They are the product of natural talent, a close family upbringing, the dynamic bonds of family and friends, and of a superior education. Yet none of these factors had anything to do with the tolerance or acceptance of

Montreal. It was not the acceptance of Montreal that made a difference. It was circumstance; it was serendipity; it was luck.

CONCLUSION

Though wrapped up with fact and fiction and dreams and hopes and even hyperbole, myths are useful for creating collective identity. Historical myth is the one-sided perpetuation of a credible story and its attendant moral, without revealing its many other facets.¹³⁶ This credibility ensures that myths are difficult to dispel because of the basis of truth from which they are derived. As it is described in Subliminal Politics, “The distinguishing mark of myths is that truth and error, fact and fable, report and fantasy are all on the same plane of credibility...What a myth never contains is the critical power to separate its truth from its error.”¹³⁷ This separation of truth from error is the very raison d’être of historical inquiry.

Black historiography in Canada is fraught with myths. Perhaps the greatest myth is that Blacks came only in the 1960’s and have

¹³⁶ Dan Nimmo and James Combs, Subliminal Politics, p. 16. Credibility is one of several characteristics of myth.

¹³⁷ Walter Lipmann, Public Opinion (New York: MacMillan, 1960), p. 123 citing Nimmo and Combs, Subliminal Politics, p. 17.

not played a role in the Canadian drama.¹³⁸ Even recognition of an earlier presence became mythologized--as in the underground railway. These myths are used for the aggrandizement of the dominant culture. They tell us something about how the dominant culture chooses to be portrayed.

A major myth surrounding Blacks in Montreal is the Jackie Robinson myth. This myth implies that Montreal is a great city because the success of Jackie Robinson is an illustration of the exemplary treatment of Blacks in the city during his time-- long before the civil rights movement in the States. This myth says that Montreal is a good city for Blacks to live in, and Montrealers take great pride in maintaining this myth. The examples of Richard and Gwen Lord appear to support this myth.

The reality was that Blacks in Montreal during the Robinson era suffered from generations of poverty. Underemployment was also a significant barrier to socio-economic mobility. Though the immigrant adults came into the city with education (sometimes professional), their Canadian born children, in many cases, could not

¹³⁸ This myth is also held by Blacks recent to Canada. The dearth of Black Canadians within the Canadian psyche has merely perpetuated this. A great deal of the internecine fighting came about due to this perception and may be one cause of the perennial leadership struggle particularly in the urban centers. This has also led to the Rip Van Winkle myth [Canadian Blacks did nothing till West Indians arrived] is still very much a part of West Indian thinking. Stamadianos does not examine the Rip Van Winkle thinking in the West Indian leadership in Montreal in the 1960s-1970s. He tended instead to focus on the divisive issue of nativism which was prevalent among Canadian born Blacks. See Williams, Road To Now, p. 133. Stamadianos, "Afro-Canadian," pp. 97-100.

hope to achieve the same level of education. Obtaining an education was difficult for the poor Black citizen, and in most cases it was not possible. Without education, socio-economic improvement among Blacks was a slow process. It was a painful, disheartening process as Blacks repeatedly witnessed other, similarly impoverished ethnic groups gain a toe-hold in the job market and pass over them.

The lack of educational opportunity slowed down the pace of social mobility at the individual level. Exceptions do occur. Some Blacks from the Robinson era hold prominent positions today within Montreal. However, using the two examples of Richard and Gwen Lord, it is evident that from this study of their earliest life influences and experiences that their success did not come about as a result of structural factors specific to Montreal.

On the contrary, there were in place factors that blocked the personal success of Blacks in the city. Though most Blacks did not have to worry about injury to their persons from racially motivated attacks, the poor housing, and weak social and health infrastructure all played their part in their recurring poverty. Internecine battles did little to mitigate the sting of societal racism. For those who did make it, systemic racism was hidden, covert, yet insidious and damaging. Racial discrimination in the Jackie Robinson era had been

long a part of Montreal's social environment. Its continuing presence had established two worlds, one of opportunity and entitlement, the other second class, deprived, and worse, ignored, The Jackie Robinson myth is a charming one, but it is just a myth.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

A RACIST INCIDENT: KNOWING ONE'S PLACE

by Gwen Lord

I was working in a lab and...the Comptroller of the company was from South Africa. I guess he was just fascinated that there was this young Black woman working as a control chemist in his company. And he used to come down to the lab to speak to me. And we had a good friendship. We were always talking. He told me how it was in South Africa, and how the Blacks were...and even he said when he first came to this company, the first Blacks that came for interviews were almost kicked down the stairs. You know, they weren't hiring Blacks. He sort of suggested that it was better now, after all look at where I was, and so on, and I sort of agreed with him.

One time when I was meeting a friend at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel...for dinner I saw Mr. [So and so] and I said to him, 'Mr. [So and so].' And he sort of looked at me and he said, 'Aren't you out of bounds.' I sort of recoiled. I wasn't familiar with this term and I couldn't [comprehend]. I repeated, 'I'm meeting a friend here for dinner,' because...it was just so unfamiliar. I never heard of that expression. And after that incident Mr. [So and so] didn't come around anymore. And it took me a while for the coin to drop, to

figure out what had taken place in that exchange. So even though he had thought he had changed, it had come out very very quickly. And in going to jobs I was constantly confronted by this racism which didn't appear to be there, but was there.

APPENDIX B

A RACIST INCIDENT: SORT OF BEHOLDING?

by Gwen Lord

After I was working in the lab I decided I would go into teaching...I went for an interview at the Protestant School Board. And I was very happy after a rather long wait to see my friend's father, [a] friend who I went to college with, whose house I played bridge in, whose father I certainly knew well. He interviewed me and finally said to me, 'Gwen, you know we don't hire coloured.' I said to him, 'Oh Mr. [So and so], I can't understand this. I mean I have come through this system. I have been educated in this system and now you are telling me you are not going to hire me.' And then he saw the distress on my face and then he said, 'Well really it doesn't mean you. You know it means, West Indians and da, da, da,' He said, 'Notwithstanding all of this we won't hire you cause you don't have a teaching certificate. Yes, you have a bachelor of science. But you don't have this paper.' So I said, 'Mr. [So and so], you're saying to me if I go to Macdonald and get this piece of paper that you'll hire me?' He said, 'Yes.'

No problem! I went to Macdonald's [and] took this little mickey mouse course. Got this piece of paper only to find that the PSBGM came to our campus and hired everyone! People with stutters.

People who couldn't teach worth a damn. There were three of us who they didn't hire in that one G class--Ozzie Downs, and Ivy Jennings and myself. It was so glaring! I mean Ozzie had honours math at McGill and so did Ivy.

One of the most bitter things...well it is really ironic. Our class went to bat for us you know. So eventually we were, at least two of us, Ivy and I were hired. Ozzie was never hired.--he was a Black male. It was nice to think that they went to bat for us. On the other hand, in many instances we were so much better than the people who had been hired. So it was a mixed feeling. Even now I meet one of those people who went to bat for me. [He]...is able to say to people, 'Well you know, I was one of the instrumental people in getting her hired, you know.' So I am sort of beholden, not beholden, but I did not have to be put into this position. It wasn't necessary. I mean, I was good. I got the Dean's Award and the Science Prize, and I still had to have this little class go to bat for me. So these are the things that are sort of discouraging.

APPENDIX C
RICHARD LORD TRIBUTE

Chasing Rainbows

By HERB LINDER

I first met Richard in the formation of various activities around Staynor Park, one of the most competitive sporting areas in the city.

To see a young man who so completely dominated his own little groups was a revelation; to see a young man who had a group organized to the point where a name, the name 'Tornadoes', was something to reckon with, was a confirmation of his personality.

Starting out at the Lewis Evans School to get his three "R's" he was only a little fellow who had to battle his way to keep up with

the gang. Working his way up later to Queen's, he still had to prove himself, being quite a lot smaller than the groups he played with. What to do, but gather a lot of youngsters his own age and size and organize their abilities. It was in these formative years that Rich gathered around him, boys who remained loyal and became lasting friends.

While at Queens school and playing all their rugby and hockey games under the name Rinky Dinks, Richard and his pal Willy became conscious of the potent power of unity. His brothers, and

all the other good young athletes, Bob, Fred, Stu, were just a step ahead and a few years older, and the Rinky Dinks were always striving to get on the older group's level. When going swimming also, under the supervision of an interested Boy's Brigade worker at the Y.M.C.A. the little gang was being directed into the proper channels which helped form their citizenship as they grew older.

They were not without their pranks, tears and struggles, but it became the survival of the fittest in the maelstrom of a young boy's active, living, fighting world.

Growing every year into a larger and more active group, Richard and his followers organized the 'Tornadoes.' Willy became the business manager and everyone became a real member with a membership card and a burning desire to play under the Tornadoes colors. With the help of a kind and interested citizen, funds were procured to buy sporting equipment and sweaters.

It was at this time I first watched the little club operate, and marvelled at the grip which Richard had over his small corner outfit. Want some teams for the league? Get a group together for an activity? Train future track and field stars? Stop some unknown errant from doing wrong . . . ? Get Richard!

At the Westmount High Schools, Richard's great passion still was sports and his fanatical drive to win helped many times to keep up the team spirit.

Now, Richard, a freshman studying chemical engineering at Michigan State College, due to recognition of his sports abilities, and the only Montreal boy there — is preparing for a greater battle than when as a small Rinky Dink he fought all the harder because of his size.

Richard Lord, the little colored boy, is now standing with his foot on the starting rung of the ladder.

THE EXAMINER, Westmount
Friday, November 4, 1949, p. 2

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