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“WE HEARD CANADA WAS A FREE COUNTRY”: AFRICAN AMERICAN MIGRATION
IN THE GREAT PLAINS, 1890-1911

by

Rachel M. Wolters

B.S., Southern Illinois University, 2010
M.A., Southern Illinois University, 2013

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Doctor of Philosophy in Historical Studies

Department of History
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
December 2017

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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By

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in the field of Historical Studies

Approved by:

Dr. Gray Whaley, Chair

Dr. Jo Ann Argersinger

Dr. Jonathan Bean

Dr. Natasha Zaretsky

Dr. Peter Argersinger

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
October 20, 2017

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

RACHEL WOLTERS, for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in HISTORICAL STUDIES
presented on October 20, 2017, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: “WE HEARD CANADA WAS A FREE COUNTRY”: AFRICAN AMERICAN
MIGRATION IN THE GREAT PLAINS, 1890-1911

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Gray Whaley

This study uses a transnational lens to examine the migration of Black Americans from Oklahoma to Canada in the early 20th century. Although scholars have documented this movement, they have not fully explored the vital and durable transnational connections among African American immigrants themselves. The use of family histories, newspaper articles, and immigration files show how black migrants searched for land and equality in Canada and attempted to build all black communities. Encouraged by the promises of Canadian immigration recruiters, black migrants left their homes and Jim Crowism in Oklahoma to settle in a “free country” and to realize the goals of American citizenship in a foreign land. But, Canada wanted white—not black—American settlers and immigration officials closed to African Americans the once porous boundary between the U.S. and Canada. Canadian authorities recognized the power of transnational connections among black migrants in promoting migration and settlement and, ironically, by effectively sabotaging that network, they ensured that African Americans had to abandon their quest for equality and opportunity in Western Canada.

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INTRODUCTION

In March 1913, Sally Carothers and her family made the journey from Weleetka, Oklahoma, to Edmonton, Canada, following the path that hundreds of African Americans from Oklahoma took to Western Canada in the early twentieth century. Sally immediately felt the isolation of the western plains in Canada: there were no churches or schools when her family settled on their homestead. But, she also knew that her parents were not concerned about the absence of these institutions because they had migrated to find freedom.¹

In 1907 Oklahoma became the forty-sixth state with the merging of Oklahoma and Indian territories, and white Oklahomans, influenced by southern traditions of racial exclusion, immediately implemented Jim Crow legislation. As a result, hundreds of black families sought freedom in Canada. “All they had in mind,” Sally recalled of her parents, “was coming to a country where we could have freedom- free to be a human being; free to be able to cope with any white person,” adding, “I never heard my dad say he regretted coming here.”²

Freedom for many African Americans meant not only being “able to cope with any white person,” but also meant having land of your own. And, African Americans traveled north to Canada in search of land for their families. Walker Beaver was thirteen when his family left Oklahoma on March 21, 1910, for Athabasca, Alberta. His family traveled with a large group of people who brought all of their household goods with them on a chartered freight car. Walker remembered that some people even brought their horses and wagons with them. These farmers

¹ The first three pages of this introduction, along with numerous sections throughout this dissertation, were originally published in: Rachel Wolters, “As Migrants and As Immigrants: African Americans Search for Land and Liberty in the Great Plains,” *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 35 No. 4 (Fall 2015): 333-355. University of Nebraska Press.

² Velma Carter and Wanda Leffler Akili, *The Window of Our Memories*, (St. Albert, AB: B. C. R. Society of Alberta, 1981), 63.

were part of a larger migration of people leaving the United States for the Canadian prairies in search of cheap and productive land. As Walker recalled, “In Kansas City there was an agent telling people about Canada- the land of milk and honey- for ten dollars you could buy a hundred and sixty acres of land, a homestead. So people thought they were getting a fortune, you understand, that’s why they came.”³ For African Americans in Oklahoma, Canada represented an opportunity for both freedom and land.

Land and Liberty

The twin themes of land and liberty that drove African Americans from the South to Oklahoma and then onward to Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a transnational migration of people and values. Both political policies and cultural attitudes in the United States and Canada affected the movement of Black Americans. African Americans traveled by the thousands to Oklahoma in the 1890s in order to acquire land during the opening of Indian Territory to settlers. These black settlers held hopes for the establishment of an all-black state and freedom from the hardening of Jim Crow laws and discrimination in the Southern states. Some built all-black towns; others lived in towns and communities with a white population. But the land runs brought many more white settlers than black settlers to the territories, and the dream of an all-black state soon disappeared. Even worse for African Americans were the racist sentiments held by white migrants, who sought to ensure that Oklahoma resembled the Jim Crow South they had left.

³ Ibid., 59.

At the same time that black settlers in Oklahoma faced the tightening of Jim Crow restrictions, the government of Canada advertised for American farmers to settle on the western prairie provinces, mostly Alberta and Saskatchewan. The Canadian government had admitted Alberta and Saskatchewan as provinces in 1905 and hoped to fill the plains with farmers who would work the land and boost Canadian agriculture. But only a few eastern Canadians ventured west, and the Canadian government decided to advertise for immigrants from the United States and European nations, including Great Britain. Canadians saw American farmers as ideal immigrants because they were already familiar with the cultivation of such crops as wheat that flourished on the Canadian prairies. The Canadian Immigration Branch established offices in numerous American cities that relied on newspapers and agents to broadcast abundant cheap land and plentiful opportunities in Western Canada. Appealing to Americans' "frontier spirit," immigration officials advertised the Canadian prairies, which occupied the northern half of the Great Plains, as the "Last Best West" on the North American continent.

White settlers living in the United States responded to the Canadian appeals and traveled northward to claim their cheap land. Black farmers also found the promise of land and liberty particularly attractive, as news of Canada's land offers spread throughout black communities in Oklahoma. But, Canadian officials had envisioned a white migration to their northern prairies and even a small influx of black migrants ultimately forced a reconsideration of national policy on immigration. Indeed, the land of "milk and honey" became for African Americans a familiar place of Jim Crow restrictions and white racism.

By examining this migration of African Americans, this dissertation contributes to the fields of transnational, Western, and Great Plains histories. It traces the migration of black migrants to Oklahoma and their hopes for both economic opportunity and social justice. But

white racism and discrimination undermined those hopes and caused African Americans to become disenchanted with Oklahoma. This work explores the impact of the appeals of Canadian immigration officials and Canadian advertisements that urged settlers to move to the “Last Best West”: the new provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. While chapters two through five especially show the transnational elements of this migration, chapters two and three highlight the transnational movement of propaganda and people that encouraged and sustained this brief black migration to Canada. These chapters place the study of this migration within a transnational framework and offer important insights to the motivations and expectations of African American immigrants in Canada. These chapters also elaborate on the themes of land and liberty as catalysts for the migration to Canada. This dissertation also shows how white settlers in Western Canada feared a mass influx of African Americans and demanded that the immigration department and the Canadian government take actions to prohibit the migration of black migrants. Although the total migration of African Americans to Western Canada in the early twentieth century was only between 1,000 and 1,500 people, understanding the significance of that movement of Black Americans helps better explain the larger history of race, immigration, and restriction. That African Americans considered leaving their homes and their citizenship for a foreign land demonstrates the power of their dreams of opportunity and equality.

Ian Tyrrell, a scholar of United States and transnational history, noted that the “boundaries between American and foreign developments were culturally, economically, and socially porous,” and the U.S.-Canadian border constituted a rather permeable boundary that saw various groups travel back and forth to pursue shifting economic opportunities.⁴ But those

⁴ Ian Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective Since 1789*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2. Seema Sohi analyzed the influence of the western U.S.-Canadian border for Indians fleeing British control in India during the early twentieth century in, “Race, Surveillance, and

borders, often easily negotiated by white migrants, ultimately proved considerably less flexible for black migrants as the Canadian government moved to restrict black migration. The hardening of those porous borders reflected and reinforced the movement north of Jim Crowism and white racism.⁵

Harold Troper's *Only Farmers Need Apply: Official Canadian Government Encouragement of Immigration from the United States, 1896-1911* provides an excellent background on the larger migration of American farmers to the Canadian prairies and the activities of the Canadian Department of Immigration in promoting this migration.⁶ Additionally, Troper devoted one chapter to the experiences of black immigrants from Oklahoma as they sought to migrate to Canada amidst protests from white Canadians and officials in the immigration department. Sarah-Jane Mathieu also explored this African American migration in a chapter of *North of the Color Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870-1955* in order to provide a basis for race relations that black porters experienced in Canada during the twentieth century.⁷ Importantly, Mathieu does recognize this movement as transnational, although she does not focus upon the specific transnational elements or examine the many different experiences of individual migrants. Robin Winks' work *The Blacks in Canada: A*

Indian Anticolonialism in the Transnational Western U.S.-Canadian Borderlands," *The Journal of American History* (September 2011): 420-436.

⁵ For more on transnational migration studies and trends, also see: Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), and Peggy Levitt and B. Nadya Jaworsky, "Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends," *Annual Review of Sociology* 33 (2007). For an excellent article describing the movement of fugitive slaves in North America, including across the Canadian border in search of freedom, please see: Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, "Fugitive Slaves Across America," in *Workers Across the Americas: The Transnational Turn in Labor History*, edited by Leon Fink, Chapter 17 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁶ Harold Martin Troper, *Only Farmers Need Apply: Official Canadian Government Encouragement of Immigration from the United States, 1896-1911* (Toronto: Griffin House, 1972).

⁷ Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Color Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

History places the migration in the larger context of the history of Africans, African Americans, and African Canadians within Canada.⁸ R Bruce Shepard produced many texts on the migration of African Americans from Oklahoma to Western Canada, which culminated in his book, *Deemed Unsuitable: Blacks from Oklahoma Move to the Canadian Prairies in Search of Equality in the Early 20th Century Only to Find Racism in their New Home*.⁹ Shepard's work is the base that this project will expand outward from in order to more fully understand the migration as a transnational movement of people and ideas. Shepard described the discriminatory conditions in Oklahoma that encouraged African Americans to look northwest, some of the migrants' experiences, and the efforts by the Canadian Department of Immigration to halt the migration.

Newspapers in Oklahoma, national US papers, and those in Western Canada are important sources that identified and discussed the migration. These included articles that discussed the actual travel of migrants to Canada, those who made multiple trips to Western Canada, white settlers' reactions in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and the Canadian Department of Immigration's efforts to discourage black migration. Immigration Records, held at the Library and Archives of Canada also provided extremely useful information on the transnational flow of immigrants. These records were compiled by archivists on immigration department reels, a few of which are entitled "The Immigration of Negroes from the United States to Western Canada."

⁸ Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997).

⁹ R. Bruce Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable: Blacks from Oklahoma Move to the Canadian Prairies in Search of Equality in the Early 20th Century Only to Find Racism in their New Home* (Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1997). Also by Shepard: R. Bruce Shepard, "Black Migration as a Response to Repression: The Background Factors and Migration of Oklahoma Blacks to Western Canada 1905-1912, as a Case Study," (MA Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1976), R. Bruce Shepard, "Diplomatic Racism, Canadian Government, and Black Migration From Oklahoma, 1905-1912," *Great Plains Quarterly* (Winter 1983), R. Bruce Shepard, "North to the Promised Land: Black Migration to the Canadian Plains," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 66 (Fall 1988), and R. Bruce Shepard, "Plain Racism: The Reaction Against Oklahoma Black Immigration to the Canadian Plains," *Prairie Forum* 10, no. 2.

These included letters by migrants to immigration agents that detailed their plans to migrate and their concerns about Western Canada, and also included interdepartmental correspondence concerning how the department navigated the issue of the black migration. Although Shepard, Troper, and Mathieu used both newspapers and the immigration files in their scholarship, this dissertation uses some different material from these sources, and in different ways, to depict the migration as transnational. Other primary sources that helped to tell the story of the individual immigrants were memoirs and family history books that were collected and printed by local historical societies in Alberta. Additionally, many black migrants to Canada discussed their experiences in newspaper articles and magazines printed in Alberta and Saskatchewan primarily during the 1970s and 1980s. Local Canadian archives also collected primary sources of the black settlers, and some archival holdings included interviews with migrants and descendants of the migrants. Although scholars in Canada used these sources to discuss the black communities in Alberta and Saskatchewan, historians have not adequately used these collections to discuss the migration. Such sources provide an understanding for why individual African Americans and their families migrated from Oklahoma to Western Canada, and their experiences in the actual migration.

Historiography

This dissertation connects many different strands of historiography, and this project also fits into larger areas of historiography, including race history, transnational history, Great Plains, and US-Canadian borderlands in the West. This is, above all, an African American struggle against the history of race, exclusion, and discrimination in North America. For African

American migrants, land and equality were the primary motivations for moving, first to Oklahoma and then Canada, not unlike Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History."¹⁰ However, African Americans faced racial constructions in both the United States and Canada that influenced relations with Euro-Canadians and Euro-Americans, and, although Canadians believed in their own racial superiority over non-white peoples, they did not directly confront a threat of blackness in their society until thousands of black migrants from Oklahoma considered migrating to Western Canada. Scholars such as George Fredrickson and Mia Bay discussed this construction of race in the United States. In *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* Fredrickson addressed how white Americans viewed African Americans through slavery, emancipation, and within the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and how white Americans placed an identity of racial inferiority upon black Americans.¹¹ In response, Bay's *The White Image in the Black Mind: African American Ideas about White People, 1830-1925* examined how black Americans, including enslaved people, thought about white identity and race.¹² James Russell's *Class and Race Formation in North America* compared the construction of race in Canada, the United States, and Mexico.¹³ This work highlighted the connections between colonial development,

¹⁰ Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 1893. Other foundational works on the American West that this dissertation builds upon, includes: Ray Allen Billington, *America's Frontier Heritage*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966; Patricia Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987); Patricia Limerick, Clyde A. Milner II, and Charles E. Rankin, eds., *Trails: Toward a New Western History* (University Press of Kansas, 1991); and Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

¹¹ George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Wesleyan University Press, 1971).

¹² Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind African-American Ideas about White People, 1830-1925* (Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹³ James W. Russell, *Class and Race Formation in North America*. University of Toronto Press, 2009.

dispossession of Native lands, slavery, immigration, and economics that relied heavily on racial difference and exploitation by white North Americans. Other works discussed the use of race specifically in the Wests, including Richard White and John Findlay's *Power and Place in the North American West*, in which essays highlighted the connection between power, race, and cultural constructions of place.¹⁴ This connection between race and control is especially useful in considering how white Canadians in the West believed that western land belonged to white settlers, as a result of white Canadian control of the region. Canada's approach to race and racial identity is fundamental to this project, and works including Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis' *Canada and the British World: Culture, Migration, and Identity* and Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds's *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the Question of Racial Equality* set the groundwork for understanding how Canada viewed itself as part of a "white world," linked through its connections to Great Britain.¹⁵ These racial constructions and identities in both Canada and the United States were reflected in their immigration policies of the twentieth century. David Chang's *The Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832-1929* is fundamental in understanding the experience of black migrants and landowners in Oklahoma based upon race. His analysis of the relations between black Americans, white Americans, and Native Americans in Oklahoma directly contribute to this study, and also allows for comparison in how Canadians struggled with race and land in the Canadian West. As Chang noted: "Land was thus the physical manifestation of

¹⁴ Richard White and John M. Findlay, eds, *Power and Place in the North American West* (University of Washington Press, 1999). William Robbins also discussed power in the American West in terms of the rise of capitalism in: William G. Robbins, *Colony and Empire: The Capitalist Transformation of the American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994).

¹⁵ Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, eds, *Canada and the British World: Culture, Migration, and Identity* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), and Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the Question of Racial Equality* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

the nation, the earth in which races took root, and the capital over which the landless and the landed struggled. Nation, race, and class converged in land.”¹⁶ Not immune to racism, Euro-Canadians engaged in the removal of First Nations to reservations and objected to the immigration of groups such as Chinese and Japanese into Canada based on a sense of racial inferiority of non-white peoples. However, white Canadians did not face the possibility of a mass influx of black migrants until the Oklahoma migration, and their language of disapproval strongly imitated racial ideology of the American South.

Elements of transnationalism are discussed in numerous chapters throughout this dissertation. By drawing on the works of Donna Gabaccia and David Thelen, chapter three outlines how the movement of the migrants themselves across an international border represented one mode of transnationalism.¹⁷ This chapter focuses on the transnationalism of the black migrants themselves. Chapters two, four, and five all show how the transferring and spreading of ideas across an international border also fits into the model of transnationalism. In these cases, information and ideas discussed in Canadian promotional materials, in Canadian Department of Immigration correspondence, and in newspaper articles printed in both the United States and Canada represented a circular motion of ideas and perceptions that often showcased and positioned Western Canada as a land for a white population. This transnational spread of ideas and information aligns with arguments presented in other scholarly works, such as Daniel Rodgers’ *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* and the previously mentioned

¹⁶ David A. Chang, *The Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832-1929* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 7.

¹⁷ Donna R. Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), and David Thelen, “The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History,” *The Journal of American History* (December 1999): 973.

works of Ian Tyrrell, and Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds.¹⁸ Lake and Reynolds described the contradictions of white transnationalism when they said that this “imagined community of white men was transnational in its reach, but nationalist in its outcomes, bolstering regimes of border protection and national sovereignty.”¹⁹

In addition to expanding upon ideas and examples of transnational migrations and ideas, this project also contributes to the growing literature on African Americans in the American West and Great Plains region. Quintard Taylor’s *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* portrayed African Americans in many areas of the West, especially focusing upon black Americans in western cities.²⁰ Importantly, Taylor noted that many previous historians focused on the black presence in the West and he reflected that perhaps some scholars had overemphasized the importance and significance of African American contributions in some industries, positions of authority, and in their population numbers; they overcorrected in their attempts to show the black presence in the West. With this in mind, this project attempts to accurately depict the black migration from Oklahoma to Western Canada, a migration that ultimately consisted of a limited number of immigrants, between 1,000 and 1,500. However, although the actual number of migrants was rather small, the impact and conversation concerning the migration reflects a much more widespread effect. In 2009, Bruce Glasrud and Charles Braithwaite edited *African Americans on the Great Plains: An Anthology*, which brought together fourteen essays that focused upon African Americans and

¹⁸ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Harvard University: Belknap Press, 2000); Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation*; Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*.

¹⁹ Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 4.

²⁰ Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: Norton, 1998). Another work that featured African Americans in the West: Blake Allmendinger, *Imagining the African-American West* (University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

their communities within the Great Plains region.²¹ The collection included Bruce Shepard's article entitled "Diplomatic Racism", which focused on the efforts by white Canadians and the Department of Immigration to stop the black migration from Oklahoma to Western Canada. This project adds to the collection's goal of understanding "the black experience on the plains," by setting the black migration in the Great Plains within a transnational framework that illuminated African American aspirations and their hardships in both the United States and Canada.²²

Scholars in the past decade have focused more upon the US-Canadian borderlands in the West, and this project seeks to build on these foundations and add additional understandings of the relationship between the US and Canada in the Great Plains region of the American and Canadian Wests. Sterling Evans' edited volume, *The Borderlands of the American and Canadian Wests: Essays on Regional History of the Forty-ninth Parallel* provided numerous examples of people, ideas, and goods that crossed the forty-ninth parallel in the West.²³ Unlike the southern border and borderland with Mexico, the northern border has received much less attention from historians and recent scholarship such as this volume attempted to correct this neglect. American historians have focused on the US-Mexico border more because of the result of societal and cultural concern with the southern border; past military engagements and apprehensions over ethnicity and racial differences demanded more attention toward the southern border. However, this volume showed that although the forty-ninth parallel may not have attracted the attention of the nation in the past or even present, the border and borderlands region have significantly impacted both American and Canadian populations. Many of the essays focus specifically on the

²¹ Bruce A. Glasrud and Charles A. Braithwaite, ed., *African Americans on the Great Plains: An Anthology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 2-3.

²² *Ibid.*, 2.

²³ Sterling D. Evans, *The Borderlands of the American and Canadian Wests: Essays on Regional History of the Forty-ninth Parallel* (University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

crossing of the border within the borderlands region and this project expands the movement of people and ideas across this border to include migrants from the southern Great Plains.²⁴ In her important essay calling for more work on the bi-national pasts of the United States and Canada, Elizabeth Jameson stated that in order to understand both the connected and separated histories of the United States and Canada, historians needed to acknowledge and understand the images and perceptions that each country attributed to their own country and to the other country.²⁵ This dissertation keeps this appeal in mind, especially in terms of understanding how perceptions of the Canadian West influenced why, based on racial stereotypes created by white Americans, Canadians believed that African Americans did not belong in the Canadian West. Other historians, such as Sheila McManus in *The Line Which Separates* and Andrew Graybill in *Policing the Great Plains*, provide a base for discussing the differences between the Canadian and American Wests.²⁶ McManus focused upon the making of two different Wests in the United States and Canada that she believed were socially constructed and influenced by ideas of gender and race. The presence of the Canadian federal government in Alberta, before a large influx of white settlers, allowed Canada to control its Native populations and use treaties to remove First

²⁴ Other important works on the borderlands and frontiers in the Wests include: Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History," *American Historical Review* 104 3(June 1999); Robert Hine and John Mack Faragher, *Frontiers: A Short History of the American West* (Yale University Press, 2008); J. M. S. Careless, *Frontier and Metropolis: Regions, Cities, and Identities in Canada before 1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989); Robert Lecker, ed., *Borderlands: Essays in Canadian-American Relations* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1991); John Findlay and Kenneth Coates, *Parallel Destinies: Canadian-American Relations West of the Rockies* (University of Washington Press, 2011). Works that focus on specific non-white groups in the borderlands regions of the United States and Canada include: Kornel Chang, *Pacific Connections: The Making of the U.S.-Canadian Borderlands*, (Oakland: University of California, 2012); Beth LaDow, *The Medicine Line: Life and Death on a North American Borderland* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Hana Samek, *The Blackfoot Confederacy 1880-1920: A Comparative Study of Canadian and U.S. Indian Policy* (University of New Mexico Press, 2011).

²⁵ Elizabeth Jameson, "Both Sides Now: 'Parallel' Lines Across Bi-National Pasts," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 42 (Dec. 2012).

²⁶ Sheila McManus, *The Line Which Separates: Race, Gender, and the Making of the Alberta Montana Borderlands* (University of Nebraska Press, 2005), and Andrew R. Graybill, *Policing the Great Plains: Rangers, Mounties, and the North American Frontier, 1875-1910* (University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

Nations to reservations with little conflict. In contrast, settlers in the American West often moved onto land before the federal government removed Native Americans, causing clashes and bloodshed.²⁷ The Canadian West became identified as a peaceful, law-abiding land, but the American West was known for its violence and wildness. However, these visions of the West do not necessarily represent the reality, as demonstrated by the violent confrontations between Canada and the Métis in the Red River and North-West Rebellions. Importantly, historians tried to separate these constructed myths and visions from the realities of the Wests. Examples of works that focus on the myth of the West include Gary Hausladen's *Western Places, American Myths: How We Think About the West* and C.L. Higham and Robert Thacker's *One West, Two Myths: A Comparative Reader*.²⁸ However, these ideas of Western Canada as lawful and less violent than the American West encouraged African Americans in Oklahoma to move to Western Canada after they experienced discrimination and Jim Crow laws in Oklahoma. Ironically, similar to white Americans and Europeans who were inspired to move into the American West because of concepts of freedom, individualism, equality, and opportunity, African Americans also moved to Oklahoma and then Western Canada for the same reasons. Unfortunately these two Wests both disappointed African American migrants and failed to represent the opportunity and freedom that they sought.

The Chapters

²⁷ McManus, *The Line Which Separates*, xii.

²⁸ Gary J. Hausladen, ed., *Western Places, American Myths: How We Think About the West* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2003), and C. L. Higham and Robert Thacker, eds., *One West, Two Myths: A Comparative Reader* (Calgary AB: University of Calgary Press, 2004). Other works that also focused on the myths of the West include: Alvin Finkel, Sarah Carter, Peter Fortna, eds., *The West and Beyond: New Perspectives on an Imagined "Region"* (The West Unbound: Social and Cultural Studies Series. UBC Press, 2010), and David M. Wrobel and Michael C. Steiner, eds., *Many Wests: Place, Culture, and Regional Identity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997).

The story of the black migration primarily takes place within only a few years in the early twentieth century; the years of 1910 and 1911 are the main focus of this work. Although events of the previous decades are discussed in numerous chapters to show how and why this migration took place, many of these chapters cover events that overlap each other in the early twentieth century. Therefore, in a general sense, this dissertation is chronological in terms of events within each chapter, but it is not necessarily chronological from chapter to chapter. More so, this dissertation is a thematic depiction of the black migration to Canada.

Chapter one describes the migration and settlement of African Americans in Oklahoma. This chapter itself does not necessarily provide “new” information to the study of the black migration, but is necessary to set the stage for the following chapters. The motivations for black migrants to settle in Oklahoma later mimicked many of the same reasons that influenced migrants to leave Oklahoma for Western Canada. Most of the black migrants who later migrated to Canada did not live in Oklahoma for long. Rather, these families were of a transient population who moved around the United States following emancipation in search of land of their own and freedom from discrimination which they experienced in the southern states. However, as this chapter also outlines, Oklahoma territory increasingly reflected the attitudes of the Jim Crow South, and by the time that it became a state in 1907, the Oklahoma black population experienced segregation, discrimination, and violence.

At the same time that black settlers in Oklahoma experienced increasing discrimination, Canada began to advertise for settlers in its western provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. Saskatchewan and Alberta became provinces in 1905 and the Canadian government hoped to fill up those provinces with experienced farmers who fit into their national vision of

Canada. Chapter two explains the Canadian vision of its West and Canada's aggressive campaign to attract farmers from the United States. These advertisements appealed to black farmers in Oklahoma as well because they indicated that migrants would experience land ownership, success, and opportunities in Western Canada. Letters to the Canadian immigration department indicated that Western Canadian propaganda greatly affected and influenced black settlers in their decisions to migrate to Canada.

Chapter three is the centerpiece of this dissertation as it focuses on the transnational migration of African Americans to Western Canada. Although previous scholars used some voices of the migrants to explain this migration, this chapter primarily uses black migrants' experiences and their own words to describe their motivations, experiences, and journeys as they made their way to black settlements in Alberta and Saskatchewan. It details the transnational connections between the migrants as families and friends encouraged others to migrate. Additionally, it shows the experiences of a few men who served as transnational figures themselves—who traveled back and forth across the forty-ninth parallel in their goals of promoting a massive black migration to Western Canada. In an effort to give a voice to black migrants as historical figures in this narrative, this chapter is important in discussing the migration as an active experience of black individuals and families; rather than simply describing the migration as an historical event that occurred among one group of people.

The other voices that perhaps stand out the loudest in the story of the black migration are those of the men within the Canadian Department of Immigration. Chapter four explains how men within this department dealt with the black migration. Officials in the department promoted immigration to Canada, but when they advertised in the United States, they did not intend to encourage the migration of black migrants. Although Canada did not draw the color line,

officials within the department knew that the Canadian government envisioned a West that was primarily white. In response to black inquiries concerning Western Canada, the department emphasized that the climate of Canada was not suitable for African Americans and that Canada did not believe that black settlers could be successful. Correspondence between officials in the department, including immigration agents in the United States, reflected the department's intentions to deny black migrants' entrance to Canada without officially drawing a color line. This correspondence also reflected a transnational flow of information between Canada and the United States as department employees discussed people, events, methods, and motivations concerning the black migration.

In response to the black migration into Western Canada, white settlers urged for the exclusion of African Americans. Chapter five addresses the prejudices of white settlers in Western Canada and their voices in terms of the black migration as they called for exclusion. Western Canadian newspapers reprinted stories from southern newspapers and from Oklahoma that described violence associated with African Americans. White populations accused black men of the rape of white women, which often resulted in lynching. Stories of black violence and the lynching of black men appeared in Western Canadian newspapers, creating fears among white settlers in the Prairie Provinces that their preconceived stereotypes and beliefs about the black population in the United States were true. Therefore, in their calls for exclusion, white settlers demanded that the Canadian government protect white women and exclude all African Americans. This chapter also presents the flow of information through newspapers as a transnational movement in which the physical migration of African Americans interacted with the stereotypes and stories of violence presented in newspaper articles printed in both the United States and Canada.

While previous chapters focus on the voices and experiences of people directly tied to, or influenced by, the migration, chapter six focuses on the black migration in the context of international relations and the Canadian election of 1911. One of the primary concerns of constituents during the 1911 election was the relationship between the United States and Canada. Although not a major issue for all Canadians during the election, the black migration was an important topic for constituents in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Therefore, this chapter explains the role that the migration had in the election and how international relations between these two countries influenced Canada's responses to the migration. Additionally, while Canada considered an official exclusion of black migrants during the election, the immigration department also implemented new methods to dissuade settlers in Oklahoma from migrating to Western Canada. Thus, it was the combination of the 1911 election and these new methods of dissuasion that ended the possibility of a large black migration to Western Canada in 1911.

Importantly, this migration was not an anomaly in black migration history. Rather, it fits into the framework of both Back-to-Africa movements and western expansion on the part of all Americans. As with Oklahoma, African Americans migrated to Arkansas before the 1890s in search of land and freedom from white discrimination. With the rise of Jim Crow, disfranchisement, and racial violence in the 1890s, a Back-to-Africa movement emerged out of Arkansas as residents searched for a new place that could provide them a haven from racial discrimination.²⁹ Additionally, chapter two explains black migrations to Mexico in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Therefore, African Americans searched for numerous

²⁹ See: Kenneth C. Barnes, *Journey of Hope: The Back-to-Africa Movement in Arkansas in the Late 1800s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004). Another work on nineteenth century Back-to-Africa movements is: Emma J. Lapsanky-Werner and Margaret Hope Bacon, eds., *Back to Africa: Benjamin Coates and the Colonization Movement in America, 1848-1880* (University Park, PE: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

new homes outside of the United States as the promises of emancipation and Reconstruction failed to materialize. Aside from scholarship on Back-to-Africa movements, African American emigration history, and all United States emigration history, is a small and hidden history. Historians produced a few works of U.S. emigration history in the past few decades, although these primarily focus on the second half of the twentieth century.³⁰ During the period of this migration to Canada, most contemporaries, and later historians, focused on the massive period of immigration into the industrial cities of the early twentieth century. As a nation of immigrants, our nation's attention focuses on immigrants to the United States both in the past and in the present. In focusing on why people throughout the world want to come to the United States, Americans emphasize positive aspects about our society and culture. And, although these histories often explain the hardships that immigrants encountered once they settled in the United States, these immigrants naturally held positive reasons for wanting to migrate to the U.S. Emigration history of the United States often reflects the negative aspects of our society and culture; why Americans choose to leave a country that is supposed to be equal to all peoples and is supposed to provide numerous opportunities that are not available in most other areas of the world. Admittedly, emigration numbers are historically much lower than immigration numbers for the United States, but telling the stories of groups of people who did choose to leave the U.S., provides a better, more full, and balanced history of our nation.

³⁰ See: Arnold Dashefsky, et al., *Americans Abroad: A Comparative Study of Emigrants from the United States* (Plenum Press, 1992); Robert Warren and Ellen Percy Kraly, *The Elusive Exodus: Emigration from the United States (Population Trends and Public Policy, Vol. 24, Issue 12, No 8)* (Population Reference Bureau, 1985); and John R. Wennersten, *Leaving America: The New Expatriate Generation* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2008).

CHAPTER 1

OKLAHOMA: MIGRATION, SETTLEMENT, AND DISCRIMINATION

Just as the Exodusters, African Americans who migrated from the South to Kansas, sought land and freedom in the 1870s, African Americans in the 1890s traveled to Oklahoma as a haven from Southern discrimination. Such black leaders as E. P. McCabe and W. L. Eagleson urged fellow African Americans to resettle in Oklahoma and organizations like the Oklahoma Immigration Organization and First Colored Real Estate Homestead and Emigration Association of Kansas also encouraged African Americans to acquire land and escape the Jim Crow South.¹ Letters, newspaper stories, and advertisements, along with the encouraging statements of black leaders, positioned Oklahoma as a place where black settlers could live free and perhaps even become the first all-black state. Jefferson Davis Edwards, who would later migrate to Canada, stated that he had been born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas in 1888, but that his family moved to Oklahoma during a land rush in order to escape racial prejudice.² The opening of Native American lands during the 1890s represented the last opportunity of open land for many homesteaders in the United States, and both whites and blacks hoped to take advantage of it. Black leaders, including McCabe, promoted free farming in Oklahoma and envisioned a resettlement of 20,000 to 30,000 black migrants from the South.³

¹ Daniel F. Littlefield Jr. and Lonnie E. Underhill, "Black Dreams and 'Free' Homes: The Oklahoma Territory, 1891-1894," *Phylon* 34, no. 4 (4th Quarter 1973): 342-343. Statements and portions throughout this chapter appeared previously in: Rachel Wolters, "As Migrants and As Immigrants: African Americans Search for Land and Liberty in the Great Plains," *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 35 No. 4 (Fall 2015): 333-355. University of Nebraska Press.

² "People," *Alberta's Black Pioneer Heritage*, Heritage Community Foundation, Alberta Online Encyclopedia. Available through University of Alberta Libraries.

³ Philip Mellinger, "Discrimination and Statehood in Oklahoma," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 49 (Autumn 1971): 343-344.

Numerous historians discussed the settlement of African Americans in the Oklahoma and Indian territories. Jimmie Lewis Franklin and Arthur Tolson provided scholarship that sought to cover multiple areas of the black experience in the territories.⁴ Both covered the black migration to Oklahoma, settlement of black towns, race relations, and discrimination in connection to statehood. For a discussion on race relations between Native Americans, Creek Negroes, newly arrived African Americans, and white settlers in the territories, David Chang provided a rich analysis of how these groups interacted as they fought over land control in *The Color of the Land*.⁵ The tensions between these groups over land depicted the growing divisions between people based upon color as white settlers increasingly associated Creek Negroes with African Americans from the South rather than with the Creek, and as Creek Negroes and African Americans pushed back against this shared group identity. The discussion of these race relations reflected the tensions and discrimination that African Americans increasingly faced in the territories, and then state of Oklahoma, as these settlers began to look towards Canada. Scholarship such as Hannibal Johnson's *Acres of Aspiration: The All Black Towns in Oklahoma* discussed the development, significance, and operation of all-black towns in Oklahoma.⁶

⁴ Jimmie Lewis Franklin, *Journey Towards Hope: A History of Blacks in Oklahoma*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), and Arthur L. Tolson, *The Black Oklahomans: A History, 1541-1972*, (New Orleans: Edwards Printing Company, 1974). Numerous historians from the 1970s onward outlined black migration and settlement in Oklahoma and Indian territories, including: Hannibal B. Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration: The All Black Towns in Oklahoma*, (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 2002), Martin Dann, "From Sodom to the Promised Land: E.P. McCabe and the Movement for Oklahoma Colonization," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (Autumn 1974), Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990*, (New York: Norton, 1998).

⁵ David A. Chang, *The Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832-1929*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). Other historians who outlined the racial relations between African Americans from the South, freedmen already living in Oklahoma and Indian territories, Native Americans, and whites include: Murray Wickett, *Contested Territory: Whites, Native Americans, and African Americans in Oklahoma, 1865-1907*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), and Donald A. Grinde Jr. and Quintard Taylor, "Red vs Black: Conflict and Accommodation in the Post Civil War Indian Territory, 1865-1907." *American Indian Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (Summer 1984).

⁶ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*.

Johnson's work signified the importance of all-black communities for African Americans that allowed black settlers more involvement in local politics, growth of successful businesses, and the creation of local community organizations; and it was from many of these all-black towns that migrants to Western Canada lived before they migrated.

The existing scholarship on African Americans in Oklahoma showed the hopes that migrants held in migrating to Oklahoma and Indian territories; hopes of freedom, equality, and land. As African Americans in the American South experienced increasing discrimination during the era of Jim Crow, Oklahoma appeared as a haven from southern discrimination.

Unfortunately, many white Americans, including southern whites, also moved to Oklahoma and as white supremacy expanded in the territories and state, African American migrants looked towards Canada for many of the same reasons that they once migrated to Oklahoma.

Native Tribes and African-Descended Peoples in Indian Territory

Enslaved African descendants accompanied Native Americans on the Trail of Tears and remained enslaved among the Five Civilized Tribes in Indian Territory: Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole. Following the Civil War, the African enslaved peoples of the tribes became free. These freed people were different than the freed people of the southern United States, as they were not African Americans since they lived, or were born, in Indian Territory and not the United States. Enslaved people of the tribes intermarried with members of the tribes; they also spoke native languages and adopted native culture. The children of African-Native marriages claimed "blood" relationships to a specific Nation, while also identifying with

that Nation's culture. After emancipation, these freed people identified more with their tribes than southern freed people who migrated into Oklahoma and Indian Territories.⁷

Among Native Tribes in Indian Territory, culture was more important than race; however, when white migrants settled in the Oklahoma Territory during the land runs of the 1890s, they distinguished between members of the Native Tribes who were descended from Africans and those who were not. And, although Indian freed people identified more with the tribes than those they called "state Negroes," white settlers often grouped all peoples of African heritage together.⁸ Native Americans resisted both black and white settlers who sought to take their land, but white racism proved even more effective in restricting the acquisition of land by African Americans, and minimizing land acquired by the freed people of Native Tribes. The story of the Brown family highlighted this separation between Native Americans and those who were members of the tribes, but descended from Africans. Thomas Jefferson Brown, who was of African American and Irish heritage, moved from Arkansas to Indian Territory in 1870. Brown married twice to women of the Creek and Seminole Nations, and had eight children with them. The mothers of the children were listed on the Dawes Rolls, meaning that the children each acquired 160 acres of land. Together, this land acquisition was over 1,000 acres and became a Black and Creek settlement in Indian Territory known as Brownsville. In 1910, Brown and his family were forced or coerced to abandon their land, like many other African-descended and Creek landowners. Therefore, although Brown and his children acquired the land because of

⁷ Celia E. Naylor, *African Cherokees in Indian Territory: From Chattel to Citizens* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 1, 4, and 22. For more on the African-descended peoples of the Creek Nation and their relationship to the tribe, please see: F. G. Speck, "The Negroes and the Creek Nation," *The Southern Workman* 37 (Jan.-Dec. 1908).

⁸ Naylor, *African Cherokees in Indian Territory*, 197.

their tribal connections, they lost their land because white Oklahomans in 1910 identified them as black settlers.⁹

White violence also forced black migrants to purchase land from speculators and boosters who segregated black settlers from both white and Native American communities.¹⁰ Oklahoma became the sight of land competition between three groups of people: blacks, whites, and Native Americans. And, as Linda English examined in “Southern Reflections: Evolving Attitudes on Race and Region in Indian Territory,” Native Americans were often much more accepted and respected by white settlers than were African Americans.¹¹ Although some scholars assumed that black migrants to Canada were descendants of the tribes in Indian and Oklahoma Territories, most evidence suggests that Black Native Americans made up a very small number of black migrants to Canada. Rather, black migrants who settled in Canada were usually people who migrated to Oklahoma in search of land and freedom, and later migrated to Western Canada when Oklahoma disappointed them.

Black Migration

In 1864, the United States government passed the Homestead Act, which opened government-owned land to farmers. The campaign to fill the states of the Great Plains with

⁹ Kendra Taira Field, “Grandpa Brown Didn’t Have No Land”: Race, Gender, and an Intruder of Color in Indian Territory” in *Interconnections: Gender and Race in American History*, edited by Carol Faulkner and Alison M. Parker (University of Rochester Press, 2012), 105-107.

¹⁰ Bonnie Lynn-Sherow, *Red Earth: Race and Agriculture in Oklahoma Territory*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 32-35.

¹¹ Linda English, “Southern Reflections: Evolving Attitudes on Race and Region in Indian Territory,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (Fall 2014): 365-386. For more on the Five Civilized Tribes in Indian Territory and Oklahoma, please see: Angie Debo, *And Still the Waters Run* (New York: Gordian Press, 1966) and Minnie Thomas Bailey, *Reconstruction in Indian Territory: The Story of Avarice, Discrimination, and Opportunism* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1972).

settlers increased after the Civil War and expanded in the 1870s with the continued growth of railroads in the West. As Charlotte Hinger recently determined in her work on Nicodemus, Kansas, this campaign to populate states in the plains occurred at the same time that Reconstruction ended in the South and many freedmen in the South saw their opportunities and freedoms vanishing.¹² Furthermore, Hinger outlined two periods of black migration to Kansas. The first migration was Black Americans from Tennessee and Kentucky, who migrated between 1873 and 1877. The second movement was that of the Exodusters in 1879, who migrated from Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, and Tennessee.¹³ Later migrants to Oklahoma, during the 1890s and early 1900s, were even more varied in terms of their starting locations. Migrants came from, among other states: Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, and Texas.¹⁴ When the federal government opened Native American land for settlement in the 1890s, it represented the last opportunity for many Americans to gain farm land in the Great Plains. Therefore, just as black migrants came to Kansas, and to a lesser degree Nebraska, they also migrated to Oklahoma when land became available. By 1900, the black population of Nebraska numbered over 6,000, the population in Kansas was over 50,000, and the population of black settlers in Oklahoma was around 56,000.¹⁵

Future migrants to Canada either migrated previously to Oklahoma, or were born there. Many of the black settlers in Oklahoma migrated from southern states, and for numerous families, Oklahoma was just one stop among numerous that they made before migrating to Canada. Census records and family histories indicated that migrants often moved from the

¹² Charlotte Hinger, *Nicodemus: Post-Reconstruction Politics and Racial Justice in Western Kansas* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable*, 103.

¹⁵ Frederick Luebke, *Ethnicity on the Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), *xxii*.

southern states in the southeast or upper mid-south to places like Texas, Arkansas, and Kansas before settling in Oklahoma. Some also settled in Oklahoma and then moved to Kansas before Canada. The Rufus and Drucilla Smith family settled in Bristow, Oklahoma and then Tulsa, Oklahoma before migrating to Canada. Rufus was born in Arkansas and Drucilla was born in Alabama.¹⁶ Joseph and Mattie Mayes migrated to Saskatchewan in 1910. Joseph was born in Colouen, Georgia and Mattie was born on a plantation near Atlanta, Georgia. Following the Civil War, Mattie's family left Georgia and moved to Tennessee, where she met and married Joseph. The Mayes moved to Oklahoma a few years after their marriage, where they rented a home near Edna, Oklahoma and raised cotton and sugar cane crops.¹⁷ Cousins Willis and Columbus Bowen moved their families multiple times in both the United States and Canada before settling in Alberta. Willis was born in Evergreen, Alabama, and his wife Jeanna was also born in Alabama; both around 1874.¹⁸ Willis's father was multiracial and his mother was black and Cherokee. Before migrating to Oklahoma, he moved his family to Texas for a few years. Columbus was the son of "Big Daddy" and Janie Bowen. "Big Daddy" was likely a freed slave and his family did not know another name for him. Big Daddy and Janie raised their eight children in Pine Flats, Alabama, and Columbus's wife, Martha Watts, was also raised in Alabama. After marrying, Columbus and Martha moved to Montgomery, Alabama before moving to Lee County, Texas.

¹⁶ Maidstone Mirror, *North of the Gully*, Compiled by North of the Gully History Book Committee, (Maidstone, Saskatchewan: Maidstone Mirror, 1981), 369.

¹⁷ Maidstone Mirror, *North of the Gully*, 365. Some records indicate that the Mayes also lived in Texas after they left Tennessee and before settling in Oklahoma. See also: "Joseph Mayes in the 1900 United States Federal Census," Year: 1900; Census Place: Township 14, Muscogee Nation, Indian Territory; Roll: 1854; Enumeration District: 0062; FHL microfilm: 1241854. Accessed through: Ancestry.com. 1900 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2004.

¹⁸ "Willis Bowen in the 1910 United States Federal Census." Year: 1910; Census Place: Tohee, Lincoln, Oklahoma; Roll: T624_1259; Page:10A; Enumeration District: 0113; FHL microfilm: 1375272. Accessed through: Ancestry.com. 1910 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2006.

After living in Texas for a few years, they moved again to Guthrie, Oklahoma. Still, they moved once more, to Chandler, Oklahoma before they joined Columbus's cousin Willis on the migration to Canada.¹⁹ The story of the Mapp family also showed settlement in Texas before Oklahoma. Thomas Mapp was born in 1884 in White Plains, Georgia. In 1889, his parents moved their family to Tyler, Texas. Missouri Brooks, Thomas's future wife, was born in Tyler, Texas in 1887. Her father was from Virginia, and her mother was from Alabama. Thomas and Missouri married each other in 1906 in Tyler and left for Weleetka, Oklahoma on the night of their wedding.²⁰

These were only a few examples of the migrations of families who settled in Oklahoma before migrating to Canada. Other family histories and census records indicated that most migrants to Canada were not born in Oklahoma, unless they were very young when they migrated to Canada. Rather, these black migrants came to Oklahoma from other places in the South, and for many migrants, Oklahoma was the third or fourth stop in a long migration pattern. Therefore, although the black migrants who made the journey to Canada did largely come from Oklahoma, they were not necessarily "Oklahomans." These were transient peoples who migrated from place to place in the United States as they sought land and better opportunities.

All-Black Towns

For many Black Americans, they were able to prosper in Oklahoma and even some integration and cooperation occurred. Census records indicated that between 1890 and 1900, and

¹⁹ East Athabasca History Book Society, *Land of Dreams: Districts East of Athabasca: Golden Sunset (Tawatinaw), Parkhurst, Toles (Amber Valley), Rodger's Chapter, Forest, Ferguson, Clover View*, (East Athabasca History Book Society, (MB: Friesens Corporation, 2009), 406 and 396-397.

²⁰ East Athabasca History Book Society, *Land of Dreams*, 441.

then 1900 and 1910, the black population of Oklahoma jumped significantly. This indicated that promotional methods for enticing black migration and settlement were successful. In 1890, the black population numbered at 21,609, in 1900 the black population was 55,684, and by 1910, the Oklahoma black population was 137,612.²¹ In comparison, the population for white residents, not foreign-born, was 172, 554 in 1890; 649,814 in 1900; and 1,404,447 in 1910.²² Although, white migration and settlement always outpaced black migration and settlement, black settlement numbers were still significant for the Indian and Oklahoma Territories (and Oklahoma State). Indeed, African Americans created as many as thirty-two all-black towns in Oklahoma and Indian territories –a development that many black leaders regarded as profitable and which promised a brighter future for African Americans.²³ Additionally, most of these black towns were located in Indian Territory, in what would become the eastern part of the state.

Advertisements to encourage black migrants to settle in the all-black towns located in Indian Territory mirrored the advertisements that black settlers later read about for Western Canada, in terms of land opportunities and better living conditions. However, many advertisements for Oklahoma also focused specifically on the all-black towns. A simple advertisement for the opening of the new town of Red Bird in Indian Territory, as promoted by the Red Bird Investment, Co. of Fort Smith, Arkansas, stated: An Opportunity for the Colored

²¹ Eugene S. Richards, “Trends of Negro Life in Oklahoma as Reflected by Census Reports,” *The Journal of Negro History* 33, no. 1 (Jan. 1948): 40.

²² *Ibid.* The Native population for the same years were: 64,456 in 1890; 64,445 in 1900; and 74,825 in 1910.

²³ Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 148. Scholars have also examined the migration and settlement of Blacks in Kansas, including: Nell Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1976), Joseph V. Hickey, “ ‘Pap’ Singleton’s Dunlap Colony: Relief Agencies and the Failure of a Black Settlement in Eastern Kansas,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 23-36, and Claire O’Brien, “ ‘With One Mighty Pull’ Interracial Town Boosting in Nicodemus, Kansas,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 117-130.

Man.²⁴ Another ad described the town as being populated by “intelligent, self-reliant colored people, where all lines of business, professions and your local government will be in your own hands; where your chance for development and growth, financially, politically, socially and intellectually will be limited only by your own ability.”²⁵ Published correspondence also indicated that the town of Red Bird was located next to the railroad, black farmers owned numerous acres of land, the soil around the town was rich and productive, and the climate was healthy.²⁶ The message was that black migrants could hope for little better than settling in such a location. Advertisements for the all-black town of Clearview, Oklahoma were similar: “Clearview has some of the best propositions on small farms...The soil is the best, to say the least...The climate is mild and the winters are short, thereby making it possible to raise all kinds of produce, fruit, and vegetables...Hundreds of avenues are open to the business man and the farmer. Act now. Get busy.”²⁷

In his article about the all-black towns in Oklahoma, Mozell Hill described the development of the towns as part of a social movement. He explained that these towns followed distinct patterns of western towns; towns along the frontier were either utopian communities, “Boom Towns,” or “Promoters’ Enterprises,” and in the case of the all-black towns in Oklahoma, they were a combination of all three of these types of western communities. African Americans saw the towns as utopian escapes from the South, and the towns developed rapidly as boom towns partly due to the promotional scheme efforts by black leaders such as E. P. McCabe

²⁴ Red Bird Creek Nation of Indian Territory Information 1905, Box 4, File folder 18, Oklahoma Historical Society.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ “Room For a Thousand Homeseekers,” *The Clearview Patriarch*, January 26, 1911.

and W. L. Eagleson.²⁸ Black residents in the all-black towns operated their own businesses, provided markets for local farmers, and participated in local politics. For example, McCabe used the *Langston Herald* to promote ideas of political liberty, racial advancement, and middle-class Victorian values in all-black towns.²⁹ African Americans created educational and religious institutions that provided opportunities for advancement without the burden of discrimination.³⁰

The most well-known all-black town in Oklahoma was Boley. The town was founded in 1903 and by 1905; it boasted two banks, two cotton-gins, one newspaper, one hotel, and the Creek-Seminole College and Agricultural Institute.³¹ The town benefited from its location along the railroad, although like many of the all-black towns, it was in Indian Territory. And, as described in a very early article about the town, both newly-migrated African Americans and freed people of Native Americans lived in and around the town.³² Early advertisements for Boley also described the town as prosperous and successful. *The Boley Progress* began printing in 1905 and advertised for more settlers. A lengthy ad in April of 1905 described the importance of the town: “Boley stands apart. Nothing like her ever happened before. Nothing like her will ever happen again. The birth of this town reads like a fairy story, and her marvelous development has

²⁸ Mozell C. Hill, “The All-Negro Communities of Oklahoma: The Natural History of a Social Movement,” *The Journal of Negro History* 31, no. 3 (July 1946): 256-257. In his work detailing centuries of black life in the West, William Katz also included a chapter on the all-black communities in Oklahoma: William L. Katz, *The Black West: A Documentary and Pictorial History of the African American Role in the Westward Expansion of the United States* (New York: Touchstone Edition, 1996).

²⁹ Kenneth Marvin Hamilton, *Black Towns and Profit: Promotion and Development in the Trans-Appalachian West, 1877-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 102-106.

³⁰ Norman L. Crockett, *The Black Towns*, (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1979), 46, 50-51, 113. If, however, blacks moved beyond their towns to engage in economic activity or participate in territorial politics, they faced exclusion and even violence.

³¹ “Boley, A Negro Town in the West, The Booker T. Washington Papers, vol. 9,” *The Outlook* 88 (January 4, 1908): 433.

³² *Ibid.*, 433-435.

the effect of intensifying the likeness to the results that were produced through the agency of Aladdin's lamp."³³ In the following paragraphs, the ad also supported Hill's claims that these towns were often "boom towns," as it described Boley as never experiencing a childhood, but rather jumping straight into adulthood. Furthermore, the ad emphasized the importance of the railroad to Boley and the agricultural promises of the surrounding land, where "corn, wheat, potatoes, cotton, alfalfa, apples, peaches, grapes and all kinds of berries can be successfully cultivated."³⁴ Indeed, Boley sounded like a paradise to potential black migrants in the South. As one of the most successful all-black towns of Oklahoma, the town grew in population from 824 residents in 1907 to 1,334 in 1910, and then held a population of 3,000 by 1912.³⁵

Oklahoma: A Jim Crow State

In 1906, the Democrats in Oklahoma gained control of the territories and the Republican loss of power in the territories meant increased discrimination and segregation for African Americans.³⁶ Although African Americans from the South continued to migrate to Oklahoma, African Americans already settled there focused more upon protecting existing black rights

³³ "Come to Boley," *The Boley Progress*, April 20, 1905.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Monroe N. Work, ed, *Negro Year Book; An Annual Encyclopedia of the Negro, 1912*, (Nashville: Sunday School Union Print, 1912), 32. For more on Boley, see the references in footnote four for this chapter, and in addition: James M. Smallwood, "Crossroads Oklahoma: The Black Experience in Oklahoma," Crossroads Oklahoma Project College of Arts and Science Extension (Stillwater, OK: Oklahoma State University, 1981), "Conversations." Oklahoma Twines Centennial Celebration, 1891-1991: Muskogee, OK, and Larry O'Dell, "Oklahoma's All-Black Towns," Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History Project Collection, Box 42, Series 3, File Name: Museum Exhibit African American, Oklahoma Historical Society.

³⁶ Franklin, *Journey Towards Hope*, 39. Danney Goble, *Progressive Oklahoma: The Making of a New Kind of State*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), Chang's *The Color of the Land* and Mellinger's "Discrimination and Statehood in Oklahoma," also addressed the impact of Oklahoma statehood on the black communities in Oklahoma, and the passing of Jim Crow laws within the state.

rather than encouraging others to join them.³⁷ Additionally, just as black settlers from the South migrated to Oklahoma, white settlers from the southern states also settled in Indian and Oklahoma Territories. Historian Bruce Shepard determined that in the first census following statehood, one-third of Oklahoma's residents came from the states of Texas, Missouri, and Arkansas, and when these settlers gained control of the territorial government, African Americans were in trouble.³⁸ After 1907, segregation moved beyond schools to include other public facilities and whites residents in bi-racial towns forced out many African Americans. As Danney Goble explained, successful and self-sufficient black settlers faced a particularly strident racism. White settlers resented the rise in the number of landowners and professionals among African Americans and especially objected to black migrants who moved to predominantly white cities.³⁹ When Oklahoma became a state in 1907, it entered the union as one of the leading proponents of segregation; it was clearly a "Jim Crow" state. And, as Bruce Shepard determined: "African Americans, refugees from the politics of racism, had moved west seeking land and liberty only to be caught once more in the web of white racism."⁴⁰ The new state of Oklahoma was in the hands of Democrats in terms of its senators, representatives, and its governor. Most African Americans in the state were Republicans, and therefore had little representation in the new state. Additionally, in the midst of struggles between the Democrats and Republicans in the state, a growing group of Oklahoma Socialists began to recruit Black Oklahomans into their party. However, due to factionalism among Socialists, Oklahoma's increasingly discriminatory

³⁷ Mellinger, "Discrimination and Statehood in Oklahoma": 349.

³⁸ Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable*, 27.

³⁹ Goble, *Progressive Oklahoma*, 137-138.

⁴⁰ Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable*, 35.

laws directed towards African Americans, and the relative short life of the agrarian Socialist party in Oklahoma, African Americans still saw little advancement and equality at the state level.⁴¹

Violence in Oklahoma increased after statehood; in a twenty-one year period (1886-1907) Oklahomans lynched fourteen people, but between 1907 and 1915, they lynched fifteen African Americans.⁴² National statistics for lynching between the years of 1885 and 1911 showed that the highest number of lynchings occurred during the 1890s, but the number also remained high for African Americans in the early twentieth century as well. For example, in 1907 records indicated that vigilantes lynched three white people, while sixty Black Americans suffered the same fate. In 1908, seven white people faced lynch mobs, while ninety-three black people were lynched. Additionally, between 80 and 90 percent of all lynchings in this period occurred in the South and most lynchings were the result of murder or murder accusations. About one-third of lynchings occurred because of accusations of assaults or insults to white women.⁴³

This white violence, and the threat of white violence, often forced black settlers to flee towns in Oklahoma. An article in *The Guthrie Progress* in August of 1904 stated that the third

⁴¹ H. L. Meredith, "Agrarian Socialism and the Negro in Oklahoma, 1900-1918," *Labor History* 11, no. 3 (1970), 281-282. For more on agrarian Socialism in Oklahoma, also see: Garin Burbank, "Agrarian Radicals and Their Opponents: Political Conflict in Southern Oklahoma, 1910-1924," *The Journal of American History* 58, no. 1 (June 1971).

⁴² Lowell L Blaisdell, "Anatomy of an Oklahoma Lynching: Bryan County, August 12-13, 1911," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 79 (Fall 2001): 300. By 1907, African Americans made up between eight and ten percent of the population in the state, but one-third of all lynchings.

⁴³ Work, ed, *Negro Year Book*, 149. Brent Campney determined that racism and violence in the West in terms of population proportion during the period of Reconstruction (1865-1877) was equal to the South; as shown in the figures presented, this violence continued during the early twentieth century, too: Brent M.S. Campney, "Light is Bursting upon the World!": White Supremacy and Racist Violence against Blacks in Reconstruction Kansas," in *Lynching Beyond Dixie: American Mob Violence Outside the South*, edited by Michael J. Pfeifer (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 101.

attempt to destroy a black restaurant in Pawnee, Oklahoma was successful. The attackers used dynamite to decimate the building, and numerous people narrowly escaped with their lives; this was a message for black residents to leave town.⁴⁴ Such was also the case in December 1907, in the racially-mixed town of Henryetta when James Garden shot Albert Bates after Bates refused to rent Garden a rig from his livery; a denial Garden regarded as white discrimination. A white mob quickly located Garden and left his body, “strung up to a telegraph pole in the heart of the city...and riddled by bullets.”⁴⁵ After witnessing the lynching of an African American in their town, many black residents of Henryetta, fearing further violence, fled to Muskogee. In 1911, white residents accused John Lee of the rape and murder of a white woman in Durant. After lynching Lee, whites in Durant forced the black population of thirteen to move out of the town.⁴⁶ Another incident of lynching in 1911 involved a black woman and child. The *Clearview Patriarch*, a black paper, reported in June of 1911 that a white mob dragged a black woman and child out of the Okemah, Oklahoma jail on the night of May 24th. They dragged the victims by automobiles for six miles and then hung them along the county bridge, beside the North Canadian River. Someone reported the lynching to the sheriff the next morning, but no effort was made to arrest members of the mob. Additionally, pictures of the crime were sold. The paper knew that justice for the woman and child would not occur: “Oh! Where is that Christian spirit

⁴⁴ “Blew Up Negro’s Restaurant,” *The Guthrie Progress*, August 27, 1904. A few days before, the same paper recounted that criminals blew up a black hotel with dynamite. The hotel was built by white businessmen of Holdenville who did business with black settlers in the nearby countryside and wanted a safe place for black men to stay when they visited town: “To Prosecute the Criminals: Negro Right Clear,” *The Guthrie Progress*, August 11, 1904.

⁴⁵ “Negro Murderer is Speedily Lynched,” *Okemah Ledger*, December 19, 1907.

⁴⁶ Blaisdell, “Anatomy of an Oklahoma Lynching,” 298-299, 306.

we hear so much about—What will the good citizens do to apprehend these mobs—Wait, we will see—Comment is unnecessary. Such a crime is simply Hell on Earth.”⁴⁷

Violence and discrimination against African Americans in Oklahoma also directly affected and encouraged black settlers who later decided to migrate to Oklahoma. For example, in 1905 Rufus Shaw, a black store owner in Oklahoma, sold goods to both black and white customers. When someone accused him of raping a white woman, a mob attempted to capture him. Shaw hid safely in a root cellar with his parents and siblings until the threat of capture had passed, and although Shaw died shortly after the incident, his brothers, John and Walter, decided to move to Canada because of this event.⁴⁸ J.D. Edwards, another black migrant to Canada, later recalled his experiences with segregation in a drugstore in Oklahoma:

I used to go to this drugstore whenever I wanted a drink of soda pop and had always been able to sit at the counter and enjoy myself. Then one day, the clerk told me that I couldn't sit at the counter but had to stand in the aisle. Next time, when I came in they told me that they couldn't serve me in the store, but that I would have to go outside to drink my pop. Pretty soon I couldn't even go in the store.⁴⁹

Conclusions

The fear of lynching, along with the hardening of Jim Crow laws, motivated African Americans to seek refuge outside of Oklahoma. The disfranchisement of African Americans in August of 1901 further encouraged them to migrate, although white Oklahomans defended the political exclusion of black settlers and argued that the law had not “driven any negroes out of

⁴⁷ “Mobbed,” *Clearview Patriarch*, June 1, 1911. The paper did not indicate, at least in this article, what criminal accusations were made against the woman.

⁴⁸ Kent Utendale, “Race Relations in Canada’s Midwest: A Study of the Immigration, Integration, and Assimilation of Black Minority Groups,” Dissertation (Pacific Western University, 1985): 76.

⁴⁹ As quoted in: Stewart Grow, “The Blacks of Amber Valley: Negro Pioneering in Northern Alberta,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 6, no. 1-2 (1974): 19.

the state, for a large majority of them care nothing whatever about voting.”⁵⁰ But the loss of rights and the increase in violence led many African Americans to head north to Canada. As Willa Dallard recalled, “My father, always ambitious and proud, wanted to go where every man was accepted on his merit or demerit, regardless of race, colour, or creed. So in the summer of 1909, we moved to Canada.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ “Oklahoma and the Negroes,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 3, 1911.

⁵¹ Willa Dallard, “Memories of My Father, the Late Willis Bowen of Amber Valley, Alberta,” (Prelate, Saskatchewan, February 1978). http://www.deannabowen.ca/pdfs/Memories_of_my_Father_Pt1.pdf (accessed February 21, 2014).

CHAPTER 2

WESTERN CANADA: THE LAST BEST WEST

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Hudson's Bay Company owned much of the Canadian West, but through the efforts of expansionist Canadians, the land was transferred to Canada in 1870. According to Doug Owrn, this movement to expand Canada into its western territories also transformed the image of the Canadian West from a cold wilderness to fertile agricultural land. When the Canadian government took over the western land, national political and economic discussions commenced in Canada not only about what type of products would be produced, but also about what type of society would develop in the West. Also, many believed that settling Western Canada would save the land from falling to U.S. expansion.¹ Still, eager to fill the Canadian plains with productive wheat farmers, Canadian officials appealed to American farmers, promising 160 acres of farmland. Rising wheat prices made the offer of cheap land especially attractive to American farmers, many of whom were already familiar with the techniques of dry farming. Canadian officials predicted that the settlement of the plains would provide a necessary boost to the economy and thanks to the recruitment efforts of Canadian immigration officials; the prairies witnessed a major population increase between 1896 and 1911. Although an international border separated Canada and the United States across the Great Plains, regionally and geographically, certain areas of the plains were very similar. As Ian Tyrrell noted, the history of this American migration to Western Canada encompassed "continental relations of Americans to Canadians" that drew upon the transnational relationship

¹ Doug Owrn, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 3-5, 217.

of migrants and the influence of national governments.² The common English language, and similar customs and economics, made crossing the border for white Americans in the United States rather easy; the completion of the Canadian Pacific railway in western Canada made the journey both accessible and relatively inexpensive.³ The closing of the land grabs in the Oklahoma and Indian territories in the 1890s further encouraged American farmers to look north. This chapter is twofold in its goals: first, it explains the Canadian campaign to inspire American farmers to move to western Canada, and secondly, it portrays the reactions of African Americans in Oklahoma concerning the promotion of settlement in western Canada. Additionally, this immigration of American farmers into Western Canada touches upon a particularly neglected part of American migration history: American emigration. As Agnes Laut wrote in an article for *Century Magazine* in 1909, about 388,000 American farmers moved into Western Canada in the previous six years, and another 100,000 American businessmen also moved north. However, Laut also lamented that, “If half a million American settlers should suddenly pull up roots and migrate in a body to some foreign land, the event would be heralded as one of the most epic movements of the century. Yet that is virtually what has happened, with little notice and less comment, in the last six years.”⁴ Although a few American politicians, newspaper editors, and citizens took note of this northward movement, Canadians discussed the migration in much more earnest. Therefore, this American migration into Western Canada was treated the same by Americans as other emigrations from the United States—with little fanfare or notice.

² Ian Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective Since 1789* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 5.

³ Michael B. Percy, and Tamara Woroby, “American Homesteaders and the Canadian Prairies, 1899 and 1909,” *Explorations in Economic History*, 24(January 1987): 79, and Randy William Widdis, *With Scarcely a Ripple: Anglo-Canadian Migration into the United States and Western Canada. 1880-1920* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998), 292.

⁴ Agnes Laut, “The Last Trek to the Last Frontier: The American Settler in the Canadian Northwest,” *Century Magazine* 78 (May 1909): 99.

Immigration, and not emigration, was a much more pressing and important topic within the United States.⁵

Numerous sets of historiography inform this chapter, such as Canadian immigration and policy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the specific American immigration into Canada. Scholars such as Valerie Knowles, and Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock, provide the basis for understanding Canadian immigration and policies during the Wilfrid Laurier administration, 1896-1911. Knowles, and Kelly and Trebilcock's works, *Strangers at Our Gates: Canadian Immigration and Immigration Policy, 1540-2006* and *The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy*, respectively, provided broad understandings and backgrounds on centuries of immigration policies in Canada.⁶ In contrast, other scholars focused specifically on American immigration into Canada, including, Karel Bicha, and Harold Troper.⁷ Both Bicha and Troper described the migration of American farmers into the Canadian West:

⁵ Portions of this introduction appeared previously in: Rachel Wolters, "As Migrants and As Immigrants: African Americans Search for Land and Liberty in the Great Plains," *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 35 No. 4 (Fall 2015): 333-355. University of Nebraska Press.

⁶ Valerie Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates: Canadian Immigration and Immigration Policy, 1540-2006* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2007) and Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010). An early work that focused on this topic was: Marcus Lee Hansen, *The Mingling of the Canadian and American Peoples, Volume I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940). For more on the settlement of Western Canada, also see: Howard Palmer, ed., *The Settlement of the West* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1977) and Frances Swyripa, *Storied Landscapes: Ethno-Religious Identity and the Canadian Prairies* (University of Manitoba Press, 2010).

⁷ Karel D. Bicha, *The American Farmer and the Canadian West* (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1968) and Harold Martin Troper, *Only Farmers Need Apply: Official Canadian Government Encouragement of Immigration from the United States, 1896-1911* (Toronto: Griffin House, 1972).⁷ Other scholars who have analyzed the movement of American farmers to the Canadian prairies include: Randy William Widdis, *With Scarcely a Ripple: Anglo-Canadian Migration into the United States and Western Canada, 1880-1920*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), Marcus Lee Hansen, *The Mingling of the Canadian and American Peoples, Volume I*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), Paul F. Sharp, "When Our West Moved North," *The American Historical Review* 55, no. 2 (January 1950), Michael B. Percy, and Tamara Woroby, "American Homesteaders and the Canadian Prairies, 1899 and 1909," *Explorations in Economic History*, 24(January 1987), and Pierre Berton, *The Promised Land: Settling the West, 1896-1914*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, The Canadian Publishers, 1984). For more on the importance of wheat to the American and Canadian prairies and how the crop created ties between Mexico, the United States, and Canada please refer to: Sterling D. Evans, *Bound in Twine: The History and Ecology of the Henequen-Wheat Complex for Mexico and the American and Canadian Plains, 1880-1950*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007).

what attracted American farmers to the Canadian prairies, where these Americans came from, and the methods that the Canadian Department of Immigration used to broadcast the *Last Best West* to American farmers.⁸

American and Canadian Wests

The Great Plains and the Canadian Prairies came to be known as the Wests of their respective countries, and with that connection, their representation as Wests sparked certain meanings for each nation. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the American West was finishing filling up its empty spaces with people, while the Canadian West was only beginning to encourage settlement. Both Wests continued to promote agrarian lifestyles, and hoped that settlers would be white farmers fulfilling national ideals of success and prosperity connected to such individuals, on both sides of the border. However, as the Canadian government began to encourage immigration into the prairies of Alberta and Saskatchewan in the late nineteenth century, they drew upon an image of the Canadian West that connected to positive elements of the American West and distanced the Canadian West from negative aspects of the American West. As historians such as Sheila McManus have shown, in constructing the border of the forty-ninth parallel through a region that did not exhibit a physical boundary upon the landscape, Canadians and Americans created differences that separated their Wests. In *The Line Which Separates: Race, Gender, and the Making of the Alberta Montana Borderlands*, McManus showed that differences in removal of native peoples from the landscape, white population numbers in Alberta and Montana, and federal authority and policing in the regions

⁸ Portions of the introduction and sections, "American and Canadian Wests," "The Opening of Western Canada," and "Western Canada Propaganda," were written previously in an unpublished research paper for the seminar course, HIS 555.

created differences upon a seemingly uniform landscape. The Canadian prairies held only a very small white settler population in the mid to late nineteenth century as the government removed indigenous peoples to reservations through the force of the North West Mounted Police.⁹ Additionally, land control in the prairies was firmly in the hands of the federal government. In comparison, white settlers flocked to Montana before authorities removed Native Americans to reservations, often causing violent conflict between white settlers and Native Americans. Montana did not have a structured, united police force such as the Mounties, and federal authority over the land was not as rigid as in Canada. The differences between the methods of control and social construction of Alberta and Montana in creating the border and establishing their differences, helped to reaffirm an image of the American West and Great Plains as a place of lawlessness in a wild and rugged landscape. In contrast, the Canadian West, and Plains, was depicted as a structured and law-abiding region.¹⁰ In *Policing the Great Plains*, Andrew Graybill also demonstrated the perception of Western Canada as lawful and peaceful: “The Mounties would facilitate these goals by establishing governmental authority in the North-West, at once placing it beyond the reach of grasping Americans while preparing the diplomatic and structural groundwork necessary for the smooth absorption of the territory into the new nation.”¹¹

Although the international border in the Great Plains was rather permeable throughout the nineteenth century, it would become more firm as Canada began to develop its West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Since Canadians viewed their own West as different

⁹ For more on the removal of indigenous peoples from the Canadian prairies, please see: James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (University of Regina Press, 2013).

¹⁰ See: Sheila McManus, *The Line Which Separates: Race, Gender, and the Making of the Alberta Montana Borderlands* (University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

¹¹ Andrew R. Graybill, *Policing the Great Plains: Rangers, Mounties, and the North American Frontier, 1875-1910* (University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 14.

than the American West, then the border would become more important in separating distinct peoples and nations in the twentieth century. Despite the existence of the national border for decades, this region really operated more as a borderland, but the development of Western Canada created changes as described by Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron in their work on borderlands: “as colonial borderlands gave way to national borders, fluid and ‘inclusive’ intercultural frontiers yielded to hardened and more ‘exclusive’ hierarchies.”¹²

The Opening of Western Canada

Although Canadians viewed their West as lawful and orderly, it was also extremely under-populated when the Liberals took over the national government in 1896. Traditionally, Conservatives advocated for high tariffs and close links to Great Britain, while the Liberal Party promoted free trade and less connections to Great Britain and imperialism. The Liberal Party promised to retain the National Policy of high tariffs in the 1896 election, thereby attracting former Conservatives upset with their own party over the Red River Rebellion and Manitoba Schools Question. After winning the election, the Liberals increasingly promoted reciprocity, free trade with the United States, and promoted immigration to the western provinces. As the Canadian government sought to divide the land in the West for settlement, they followed a similar pattern to that of the American West: 160 acre homesteads. These homesteads were

¹² Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History,” *American Historical Review* 104 3(June 1999): 816. For more on this borderland region and the people who traveled back and forth, with ease, over the international border, see: Andrea Geiger, “Caught in the Gap: The Transit Privilege and North America’s Ambiguous Borders,” in *Bridging National Borders in North America: Transnational and Comparative Histories*, edited by Benjamin Johnson and Andrew Graybill (Duke University Press, 2010), Peter S. Morris, “Regional Ideas and the Montana-Alberta Borderlands,” *The Geographical Review* 89 (Oct. 1999) and Evelyne Stitt Pickett, “Hoboes Across the Border: A Comparison of Itinerant Cross-Border Laborers Between Montana and Western Canada,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 49 (Spring 1999).

created on a grid pattern that was easily implemented because the region was divided into farm holdings before a large population of settlers arrived.¹³ This division of land conveniently occurred at the same time that wheat prices soared in the late nineteenth century. In order to take advantage of the wheat prices, Canadian officials hoped to fill the prairies as fast as possible. This was both an incentive for individuals, but also a possible enormous moneymaker for the Canadian economy.¹⁴ This opening of Western Canada was made possible through the support and financial contribution of the 3.5 million Canadians living in the East. An economic boom in the West would be good for all Canadians, while it would also serve to promote Canadian sovereignty over their western lands. Therefore, as Gerald Friesen pointed out in his work on the prairies, aspects such as the policing, railroad, settlement, and impact of the tariff in the Canadian West, all served the interests of Eastern Canada as well.¹⁵

The Canadian government first encouraged Canadians in the East to move west, but with only 95,795 migrants in 1901 and 165,962 in 1906, Canadians could not fill up their prairies on their own.¹⁶ During the entire Liberal era, the Canadian immigration branch did view one immigrant group, Americans, as especially worthy of immigrating to the Canadian plains

¹³ Graeme Wynn, "Realizing the Idea of Canada," in *North America: The Historical Geography of a Changing Continent*, ed. by Thomas F. McIlwraith and Edward K Muller (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), 359.

¹⁴ Bicha, *The American Farmer*, 42.

¹⁵ Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (University of Toronto Press, 1987), 162. Portions of the sections "The Opening of Western Canada" and "Western Canada Propaganda" were written previously in an unpublished research paper for HIS 457.

¹⁶ Assistant Superintendent to Frank Oliver, 23 March 1911, Canadian Immigration Branch Records, "Immigration of Negroes from the United States to Western Canada," RG 76, Vol. 192, File 72552, Part 4 (Ottawa, Ontario: Library and Archives of Canada.). It is also worth noting that immigration officials did not see any westward movement of Black Canadians from the east to the west, and used the climate argument to explain the lack of a migration. From here, immigration records will be listed as "IBR" with appropriate reel number information. RG76-192-72552 includes records listed in the "Immigration of Negroes from the United States to Western Canada" reels. All other reel numbers are other files within the immigration branch records.

because American farmers possessed significant financial investments, in addition to sharing a language, continent, and cultural attributes with Canadians.¹⁷ In 1909, William J. White, the Inspector of Canadian Immigration Agencies in the United States, characterized American farmers who emigrated to Canada as: “men of splendid character, physically strong and of an integrity that comes from close connection with the uplifting surroundings of farm life, these people crossed the line bringing with them at a reasonable estimate, in stock, cash and effects, upwards of \$60,000,000.”¹⁸ This focus on the capital of immigrants was especially important for the immigration department because it meant that these migrants were likely to be productive citizens who would not become the responsibility of the state after migrating. When White was asked in 1910 why such a successful class of people would want to migrate into Canada when it seemed that they were doing well in the United States, White responded that wheat-growing land was becoming scarce, especially for the sons of farmers. Therefore, these migrants were taking the opportunity to move to Canada and secure enough productive land where they could continue their accustomed lifestyles.¹⁹ Of course, immigration agents also discovered thousands of former Canadians living in the United States, and they actively sought to encourage their re-migration back into Canada.²⁰ W. D. Scott, the Superintendent of Immigration from 1903 to 1919 attributed the adaptability of Americans to the similar climatic and agricultural conditions of the Northern and Western states to those of Western Canada. And, although many Canadians feared the

¹⁷ Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Color Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 28.

¹⁸ Canada Parliament. *Sessional Papers, Volume 15, Second Session of the Eleventh Parliament of the Dominion of Canada, Session 1910*, Volume 44, no. 15 (Canada Parliament, 1910.), 80.

¹⁹ Correspondence to Superintendent of Immigration, 26 March 1910, IBR, C-4742 RG76-75-5146-3.

²⁰ Canada Parliament. *Sessional Papers, Volume 15, Second Session of the Eleventh Parliament of the Dominion of Canada, Session 1910*, Volume 44, no. 15 (Canada Parliament, 1910.), 83.

Americanization of their West, Scott believed that Americans would assimilate into Canadian culture.²¹ However, only a small number of African Americans would migrate into Western Canada. Between 1870 and 1914, 1.8 million people immigrated to Canada and fifty percent of the population in the West was American, yet only 5,000 of these migrants were African Americans and West Indians.²² Of the three prairie provinces, statistics show that for 1906 and 1911, Americans were most likely to settle in Alberta, with Saskatchewan close behind. Although other migrants settled in large numbers in Manitoba, in comparison, Americans did not.²³ In terms of the American migration into Western Canada, Randy Widdis's *With Scarcely a Ripple: Anglo-Canadian Migration into the United States and Western Canada, 1880-1920* provided an excellent synthesis as to the development of Western Canada and the motivations of American farmers migrating into Western Canada.²⁴

During the Liberal tenure between 1896 and 1911, two Ministers of the Interior were tasked with filling up the Canadian Plains with hardworking agriculturalists. Clifford Sifton was the Minister between 1896 and 1905, and Frank Oliver served in the post between 1905 and 1911. Both men were Liberals, but differed significantly in their approaches to immigration. When Clifford Sifton took over the immigration branch of the Department of the Interior in

²¹ Adam Shortt and Arthur G. Doughty, *Canada and Its Provinces: A History of the Canadian People and Their Institutions By One Hundred Associates*, (Toronto: Glasgow, Brook, and Co., 1914), 555-556.

²² Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates*, 88-89 and Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*, 12.

²³ David D. Harvey, *Americans in Canada: Migration and Settlement since 1840* (Lewiston NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), 205. Harvey's work provides numerous statistics on immigration for the Canadian West, especially on pages 202 and 205. However, he did note in the preface that total numbers of migration cannot be known because border records were not kept before 1908, and that even in the following years, people could still avoid immigration agents when they crossed the border.

²⁴ Widdis, *With Scarcely a Ripple*. Americans were also migrating across the United States at this same point. Overviews of the internal migrations of both black and white Americans can be found in: James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2005), and Homer C. Hawkins, "Trends in Black Migration from 1863 to 1960," *Phylon* 34, no. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1973).

1896, he sought to fill up the prairies with farmers. He was not necessarily concerned with ethnicity as much as occupation. Sifton made buying land easier for migrants and brought the railroads, steamship companies, and land companies into his promotional campaigns for Western Canada. In the United States alone, Sifton opened up twenty-four immigration offices to give out information on Canada and to assist in the movement, in addition to sponsoring guided tours of the West.²⁵ Agents in these offices canvassed the country in search of prospective settlers and they used pamphlets and newspaper advertisements to broadcast the opportunities available in western Canada. Savvy agents even courted farmers who were hoping to receive land in the US. In the summer of 1901, an agent in Kansas City moved to Chichisha, Oklahoma Territory, in order to persuade farmers who would not likely receive land for homesteading to settle instead in Canada, and as a result of his efforts, over 300 families moved to Alberta.²⁶ In addition to the massive efforts conducted by the immigration department under Sifton, world conditions around the turn of the century also contributed to Canadian immigration. As Barbara Messamore wrote in her edited volume on migration patterns, “a European population boom, rural overcrowding, the persecution of ethnic minorities, and the draw of employment opportunities and higher wages” encouraged many groups of people to leave their homelands at the same time that Canada was welcoming migrants.²⁷

²⁵ K. Tony Hollihan, “‘A Brake upon the wheel’: Frank Oliver and the Creation of the Immigration Act of 1906,” *Past Imperfect* Vol. 1 (1992): 95 and Kelley and Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic*, 118.

²⁶ Bicha, *The American Farmer*, 69. Some of this information appeared in: Rachel Wolters, “As Migrants and As Immigrants: African Americans Search for Land and Liberty in the Great Plains,” *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 35 No. 4 (Fall 2015): 333-355. University of Nebraska Press.

²⁷ Barbara J. Messamore, ed., *Canadian Migration Patterns From Britain and North America* (University of Ottawa Press, 2004), 3.

When Sifton resigned his post in 1905 following the Manitoba Schools Question, Prime Minister Laurier selected Frank Oliver as the new Minister of the Interior.²⁸ Oliver continued the massive propaganda campaign that Sifton had implemented, but he believed that excellent farmers did not directly translate into the type of settlers that Canada wanted in the West. Desirable settlers should easily assimilate into Canadian society.²⁹ Oliver believed in the vision of the West that the Canadian government promoted for decades, and he sought to keep Western Canada white. Sifton attracted thousands of immigrants to build the Canadian economy, but it was Oliver who would make sure that Canada remained Canadian through its transformation and period of growth.³⁰

Western Canada Propaganda

As previously mentioned, in order to attract desirable farmers from the United States, the Canadian Department of Immigration published propaganda in numerous sources, including journals, country weeklies, and town papers. Promotional literature produced by the Canadian government illustrated three main goals related to the environment and land of the Canadian prairies. Some advertisements built upon the attractive similarities and ideals of the West. Others emphasized how the Canadian West was different and better than the American West. Finally, others highlighted the abundant growth of wheat, and thus, prosperity of settlers in the

²⁸ The Manitoba Schools Question was a decades-long struggle in Canadian history over publicly funded schools. One side was represented by Anglo, English-speaking, Protestants; the other side consisted of Francophone Catholics.

²⁹ Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates*, 104.

³⁰ For more on the impact of Clifford Sifton, Frank Oliver, and their policies, see: Maureen D. Shields, "Clifford Sifton, Frank Oliver, and the Decline of Nativism in Alberta, 1896-1911," Master's research essay (Carleton University, 1990).

Canadian West. The advertising campaign was directed at rural and agricultural presses to gain the attention of farmers, and usually appeared more in certain months according to the farming season. Migrants would only move north before or after farming season.³¹ Entitled *The Last Best West*, Canada's most popular pamphlet described the Canadian prairies as the last available land in North America. Agents circulated the brochure widely and took advantage of the popular discussions about the closing of the American frontier to woo American farmers northward. The pamphlet included numerous photographs of the lush agricultural land in the prairies of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. In addition, it included detailed maps of the towns and settlements, along with vivid descriptions of abundant natural resources in the regions and the types of industries that flourished in each. The *Last Best West* also celebrated the railways through each province and described a climate that was advantageous to farming. It was indeed a perfect handbook for any American considering moving to the Canadian West.³²

Advertisements and promotional literature that connected the American and Canadian Wests looked to connect the ideas of rich soil and a promised land associated with the American West to that of the Canadian West. Additionally, just as the Great American Desert became an Eden when transformed into the Great Plains, Canadian officials hoped to make the same transformation for the Canadian prairies, as the prairies were often viewed as an extension of the

³¹ Troper, *Only Farmers Need Apply*, 79-82.

³² Canada, Dept. of the Interior, *The Last Best West*, (Ottawa, Canada: Dept. of the Interior), 1907. Laura Detre wrote an excellent article describing the campaign for immigrants while analyzing images within *Canada West Magazine* (The Last Best). Her focus on the sources themselves were primarily from the 1920s onward: Laura Detre, "Canada's Campaign for Immigrants and the Images in 'Canada West' Magazine," *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 24, Issue 2 (2004). Portions of this paragraph appeared in: Rachel Wolters, "As Migrants and As Immigrants: African Americans Search for Land and Liberty in the Great Plains," *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 35 No. 4 (Fall 2015): 333-355. University of Nebraska Press.

plains.³³ As Kenneth Norrie discussed in his work on Western Canada settlement, Canada should not be viewed, “in isolation but as the northern frontier of the phase of continental agricultural expansion after 1870. The more humid areas of both Canada and the U.S. were naturally settled first.”³⁴ This opening of the land in Western Canada to settlers also influenced a reemergence in ideals of Manifest Destiny for American settlers looking to expand westward. By the early twentieth century, most of the open land in the United States was gone, but Canada offered a new opportunity for an old dream.³⁵

An advertisement for Western Canada in the *Okemah Ledger* in 1907 ran the headline: “160 Acre Farms in Western Canada Free.” This headline would have immediately drawn the attention of American farmers, in that it sounded similar to 160 acre farms provided by the Homestead Act of 1862 in the United States. The ad went on to state other draws to the Canadian West for American settlers: good laws and low taxation, splendid railroad facilities and low rates, schools and churches, good climate and perfect health, and chances for profitable investment.³⁶ All of these incentives described the American West too. Another ad in the *Boley Progress* in 1910 used the words of a senator from Illinois to describe the benefits of Canada: “There is a land hunger in the hearts of English speaking people; this will account for the removal of so many Iowa farmers to Canada. Our people are pleased with its Government and the excellent administration of law, and they are coming to you in tens of thousands and they are

³³ David J. Wishart, “Settling the Great Plains, 1850-1930: Prospects and Problems,” in *North America: The Historical Geography of a Changing Continent*, ed. by Thomas F. McIlwraith and Edward K Muller (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), 237 and 253.

³⁴ Kenneth H. Norrie, “The Rate of Settlement of the Canadian West, 1870-1911,” *Journal of Economic History* 35 (June 1975): 423.

³⁵ Sharp, “When Our West Moved North,” 297.

³⁶ “Western Canada” ad, *Okemah Ledger*, December 12, 1907.

still coming.”³⁷ This senator proved that the Canadian West was just as satisfactory for Americans as their own West, and as that West was filling up, the Canadian Prairies offered an excellent alternative. The land, and values, were similar.

Other ads sought to appeal to farmer’s sons, and the lack of land in the United States. This ad was labeled, “The Farmer’s Son’s Great Opportunity.” Just as the American West had appealed to sons in the East to go west and acquire land of their own, the Canadian immigration office appealed once again to sons, only this time to go north.³⁸ This appeal to sons was used in articles about the Canadian West too, although with a different incentive in mind. An article titled, “Silhouettes of Western Canada,” included the testimony of an immigrant to Western Canada who stated, “We have no chance of keeping our sons around us back home... To keep them on the farm and in touch with us, we come up here and make little colonies with the children around us, on homesteads or bought land.”³⁹ Other articles stressed the growth of towns in Western Canada. Towns provided a sense of organization, stability, law, and business prosperity in both the American and Canadian Wests. And, these articles credited agriculture in the prairies in allowing for the growth of towns, and prosperity.⁴⁰ Additionally, in Stewart Grow’s work on the black settlement of Amber Valley in Alberta, he recognized that the Canadian immigration department were even able to use U.S. President Taft’s own words to promote migration to Canada:

We have been going ahead so rapidly in our own country that our heads have been somewhat swelled with the idea that we are carrying on our shoulders all the progress there is in the world. We have not been conscious that there is on the north a young

³⁷ “Western Canada” ad, *Boley Progress*, March 24, 1910.

³⁸ “The Farmer’s Son’s Great Opportunity” ad, *Boley Progress*, December 22, 1910.

³⁹ “Silhouettes of Western Canada” ad, *Okemah Ledger*, January 6, 1910.

⁴⁰ “The Growth of Towns in Western Canada” ad, *Okemah Ledger*, January 19, 1911.

country and a young nation that is looking forward, as it well may, to a great national future...The country is hardly scratched.⁴¹

Although articles and advertisements that stressed links between the American Great Plains and Canadian Prairies were not always overt correlations, farmers who read these ads would have recognized the goals of American farmers and the resemblance between the American and Canadian Wests. The confidence of immigration promoters was displayed in statements such as: “The best blood of the mid-west are pouring into the Canadian west in an ever-increasing stream, and are learning that “God Save the King” and “My Country ‘Tis of Thee,” are sung to the same tune.”⁴²

Advertisements and promotional literature that emphasized the differences between the Canadian and American Wests hoped to show the Canadian West as lawful, orderly, better wheat-producing, and more profitable than the American West. One of the arguments that propelled settlers toward the Canadian prairies the most was the closing of the American frontier. Land was no longer cheap, or available, in the Great Plains, but there was plenty of cheap land in Canada.⁴³ This change in direction of the agricultural frontier can be seen in the advertising words of one pamphleteer who urged, “Go Northwest, young man, go Northwest!”⁴⁴ Horace Greely’s famous words, altered, represented the move of opportunity towards the Canadian prairies. Of course, it is important to remember as Michael Percy and Tamara Woroby argued, promotional activities do not create the underlying level of incentives that induces a larger flow

⁴¹ Article in *Wellston News*, March 1, 1909. As quoted in: Stewart Grow, “The Blacks of Amber Valley: Negro Pioneering in Northern Alberta,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 6, no. 1-2 (1974): 21.

⁴² “For Consideration by the Thoughtful,” *Boley Progress*, March 16, 1905.

⁴³ Wynn, “Realizing the Idea of Canada,” 368.

⁴⁴ Bicha, *The American Farmer*, 83.”

of migrants; it simply reduces the time of response.⁴⁵ These advertisements and pamphlets showed American farmers the opportunities in Canada, but individuals had to experience some form of dissatisfaction within the United States in order to move to Canada.

One of the most compelling arguments for farmers in the Great Plains, and other areas of the United States, to move north was the proliferation of tenancy. Many farmers no longer owned their own land, but rented land from larger landowners. Numerous Canadian ads emphasized the free and cheap land available in Western Canada. These asked, “Why rent a farm and be compelled to pay to your landlord most of your hard-earned profits? Own your own farm. Secure a free homestead in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, or Alberta.”⁴⁶ Owning land, ever an American dream and goal, could be obtained in Canada—a land similar, but with better opportunities than in the United States. Other ads emphasized the success of Americans in Canada to show the superiority of the Canadian Prairies over that of the American Great Plains. One ad stated: “The 300,000 contented American settlers making their homes in Western Canada is the best evidence of the superiority of that country. They are becoming rich.”⁴⁷

Other ads attempted to attack climate concerns of Americans. Canadians needed to dispel the idea that the northern plains were a frozen, barren land, and in order to do so, they made statements such as, “Magnificent climate—farmers plowing in their shirt sleeves in the middle of November.”⁴⁸ Although it was doubtful that the weather in the northern plains region was as hospitable as that in the southern plains, Canadian officials needed to emphasize that the climate was not as harsh as many believed. And, most importantly, although perhaps a little colder, the

⁴⁵ Percy, “American Homesteaders”: 85.

⁴⁶ “Why Rent a Farm” ad, *Boley Progress*, December 8, 1910.

⁴⁷ “The Last Best West” ad, *Boley Progress*, April 8, 1909.

⁴⁸ “Mixed Farming” ad, *Boley Progress*, October 12, 1905.

climate was perfect for wheat! Many articles expanded on the notion of the image of the Canadian West as a lawful, safe place in comparison to that of the American West. These articles stressed the cheap and fertile land of Canada, but also the idea that life and property were safer in Western Canada than in the lawless American West.⁴⁹ Articles and advertisements that stressed the better agriculture and living conditions of Western Canada over that of the American West sought to distinguish the Canadian prairies from that of the Great Plains. Although there were differences between the land in Alberta and Texas, the land in places such as Alberta and Montana were fairly similar. Therefore, the Canadian government had to rely not only on the promotion of the fertile soil, but on how much land was available for settlers and the better social institutions in the Canadian prairies.

Advertisements and promotional literature that explained the abundant growth of wheat in the Canadian Prairies was essential in influencing interest in the region. Canadian officials wanted American farmers with experience in growing wheat, and therefore luring those farmers with promises of success and large profits was a key element to advertising. Almost all advertisements for Western Canada discussed wheat in some way. These advertisements made it clear who belonged in the Canadian West, and who would succeed. Additionally, the Canadian immigration office targeted newspapers in the upper Midwest and in the Great Plains, where farmers often grew wheat. One of the primary focuses of the *Canada West* magazines was also the production of wheat; these magazines included stories about men who vastly succeeded in wheat production as an example for others.⁵⁰ It was the hope of the Canadian government to

⁴⁹ “New Railways in Central Canada” ad, *Boley Progress*, December 9, 1909.

⁵⁰ W.D. Eaton, “The Man Who Grew That Wheat,” *Canada West* Vol. VII No. 1 (November 1909): 56-58. Other articles in the magazine discussed the improvements made in Western Canadian provinces in previous years that sustained growth and development; see: Clayton M. Jones, “Harnessing the Sun,” *Canada West* Vol. VII No. 3 (January 1910): 147-153.

compete with the Great Plains in terms of wheat production, and to do so by luring those farmers north.

Numerous articles and advertisements stressed the production and profits of wheat on the Canadian prairies. Although land in the American West could be similarly fertile, farmers in Canada had the opportunity to own more land and therefore gain more profits. Many articles listed the number of bushels of wheat per acre and the annual income of all farmers in Alberta or Saskatchewan for a given year. Headlines read, “Splendid Crops in Saskatchewan (Western Canada), 800 Bushels from 20 acres,” “Twenty Bushels of Wheat to the Acre,” and “\$16 An Acre in Western Canada is the Amount Many Farmers Will Realize From Their Wheat Crop This Year.”⁵¹ Numerous ads and articles also promoted the idea that within a few years, the United States would in fact be importing wheat from Canada because of the abundance of wheat production. Who would want to miss out on such a market? One article quoted J.J. Hill, a railroad owner as saying, “The greatest need of this country (United States) in another generation or two will be the providing of homes for its people and producing sufficient food for them. The days of our preeminence as a wheat exporting country are gone. Canada is to be the great wheat country.”⁵² Although Hill made a lot of money transporting American farmers by rail to the Canadian prairies, his point would stand correct: America did begin to rely on imports of Canadian wheat to feed its ever-increasing population. These advertisements that focused upon the profits of wheat were especially important in attracting farmers to the Canadian prairies and depicting what the Canadian government believed the land in the West should be used for.

⁵¹ “Splendid Crops” ad, *Okemah Ledger*, January 5, 1911, “Twenty Bushels of Wheat to the Acre” ad, *Boley Progress*, May 11, 1905, and “\$16 An Acre” ad, *Boley Progress*, November 18, 1905.

⁵² “Western Canada,” ad *Okemah Ledger*, January 6, 1910.

While the Canadian government aimed their advertisements towards American farmers, they did not publicly distinguish between the race of farmers that they encouraged to migrate. Advertisements in newspapers, *The Last Best West*, and inquiries to local immigration agent offices in the United States represented the Canadian West as a mecca for farmers, where law and order presided and men became rich. Advertisements also appeared in Oklahoma black newspapers such as the *Boley Progress* and *Clearview Patriarch*, and in papers in bi-racial towns as well. Moreover, newspapers across the country reprinted articles and advertisements from other papers, making them available to Midwestern Black Americans.⁵³ The hopes and dreams represented by Western Canada not only appealed to white farmers in the United States, but also to African Americans looking for good farmland and freedom from the reach of Jim Crow.

Canada – “The Land of Milk and Honey”

Frustrated by their disfranchisement and fearful of escalating white violence, black Oklahomans proved receptive to the appeals of Canadian officials and looked to Canada as their new hope for a promised land of equality and opportunity. Between 1905 and 1912, over 1,000 African Americans made the trek to Canada and most of them came from Oklahoma.⁵⁴ Many of these Canadian immigrants had been migrants to Oklahoma, who had hoped for an all-black state but instead encountered white violence and Jim Crowism. They believed they had been

⁵³ Despite the objections of town leaders in all-black towns who feared the out migration of their residents which would dilute the presence of black settlers in Oklahoma and adversely affect the towns' economies, newspaper editors continued to print these ads. Some statements in this paragraph appeared in: Rachel Wolters, “As Migrants and As Immigrants: African Americans Search for Land and Liberty in the Great Plains,” *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 35 No. 4 (Fall 2015): 333-355.

⁵⁴ Some historians place the number of immigrants closer to 1,500 because early records during this period were not as comprehensive and it is difficult to know how many listed as “American” may have been black, and how many people crossed the border in areas without immigration stations.

abandoned by America and hoped to lead freer lives in Canada, where they were told prosperity awaited. Although part of the larger white migration, African Americans regarded their move to Canada in very different ways from white Americans.⁵⁵

The black settlers in Oklahoma who considered migrating to Canada, and those who did, were not the first African Americans to make their way into Western Canada. The most well-documented example of an early black migrant to Western Canada was the black cowboy, John Ware. Ware was born on a cotton plantation in South Carolina and moved to Texas after emancipation. In Texas, Ware began work on a ranch near Fort Worth, and by 1879, he took part in a cattle drive into the northern ranges. After the trail ended in Montana, Ware tried his luck in the western gold fields and when he was ready to go back to Texas, he met up with one of his trail partners in Idaho. But, instead of going back to Texas, Ware and his friend Bill Moodie, a white man, traveled into Canada in 1881 to find work instead.⁵⁶ The men were hired at the Bar U Ranch. Over the next twenty-five years, Ware made a name for himself in Western Canada as both an adept cowhand at numerous ranches and as a friendly, good man; he died in 1905 when his horse stumbled into a hole, pinned Ware underneath him, and crushed Ware.⁵⁷

John Ware married Mildred Lewis in Calgary in 1892 and moved to a ranch at Millarville, Alberta. Daniel and Charlotte Lewis, the parents of Mildred, came to Alberta with their children in 1889. The family was from Ontario, although Daniel was born in Virginia and

⁵⁵ Portions of this section, “Canada—The Land of Milk and Honey,” appeared previously in: Rachel Wolters, “As Migrants and As Immigrants: African Americans Search for Land and Liberty in the Great Plains,” *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 35 No. 4 (Fall 2015): 333-355. University of Nebraska Press.

⁵⁶ John Ware: Interview with Nettie Ware- Vulcan August 1956. John Ware Collection, M4215 D920.W269A, Glenbow Museum, Calgary, AB. The Glenbow Museum has numerous records on the Ware and Lewis families within their archives; it is the primary facility for studying the life of John Ware. For more on John Ware, also see: Grant MacEwan, *John Ware's Cow Country* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1976).

⁵⁷ Biographical article on John Ware, John Ware Collection, M-9677, File 7, Glenbow Museum, Calgary, AB.

came to Toronto when he was very young.⁵⁸ John, Mildred, and their children lived in numerous places in and around Calgary until 1905, when Mildred also died from pneumonia. John Ware and the Lewis family represented a few early black migrants, both from the United States and from Eastern Canada, who decided to move into the west. Although they likely experienced instances of racism in their daily lives, they were accepted into their communities. However, when Ware and the Lewis family moved into Western Canada, the population was still very small and they were more easily accepted within their communities because of their own very small number. Western Canadian communities acted very different when they were presented with the possibility of thousands of black migrants into their society.

Aside from a few examples, such as the Lewis family, very few Black Canadians in the East chose to move west, and as previously mentioned, few white Canadians in the East moved west, too. The population of Black Canadians was also relatively small. In 1901, the total number of Black Canadians numbered at 17,400, with the majority of that number residing in Ontario, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick.⁵⁹ Much of the black populations in Canada were descendants of free black loyalists during the Revolutionary War or fugitive enslaved people from the United States who formed free communities in eastern Canada. The image of Canada as a haven for black people remained in the public imagination long after emancipation in the United States. Although Canadians did welcome fugitive enslaved people, they were not welcoming to a potential large influx of black settlers, and they were not free from racist and discriminatory prejudices. As one refugee to Canada later stated: "I must say that, leaving the

⁵⁸ Nettie Ware and the Lewis Family, John Ware Collection, M-9677, File 1, Glenbow Museum, Calgary, AB.

⁵⁹ Chongo Mundende, "The Undesirable Oklahomans: Black Immigration to Western Canada," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 76 (Fall 1998): 284.

law out of the question, I find that prejudice here is equally strong as on the other side. The law is the only thing that sustains us in this country.”⁶⁰ Therefore, the law treated people equally in Canada, but social discrimination still existed. The treatment and discrimination towards black citizens and migrants in Canada is discussed further in Chapter 5, but it is important to understand here that despite the real conditions of prejudice within Canada, it still represented a land of freedom and opportunity for many African Americans.

Black interest in Western Canada expanded greatly after 1905, when Alberta and Saskatchewan became provinces and immigration propaganda for those regions intensified. However, African Americans began to migrate to British Columbia in the 1860s. Black migration grew stale in the latter part of the nineteenth century and despite some renewed efforts by the black community in British Columbia to gain more settlers, the black population in British Columbia did not significantly increase in the early 1900s.⁶¹ Part of this failure to increase the black population in British Columbia may have been due to the response that black inquirers received from the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, who sold land to settlers in the West. Mr. H.T.F. Williams, Esq., of Houston Texas, wrote to the CPR in October of 1903 on behalf of a group of interested black Texans who were considering migrating to British Columbia. Originally, the B.C. Land Commissioner for the CPR sent Williams a map, pamphlet, and information about railroad fares, but when Williams sent another letter to the Commissioner that further illustrated the plans for a large group of African Americans to migrate, the Commissioner

⁶⁰ G.F. Simpson, as quoted in: George Hendrick and Willene Hendrick, *Black Refugees in Canada: Accounts of Escape During the Era of Slavery* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010), 158. Other examples of scholarship which discuss the black settlements in Eastern Canada include: Linda Brown-Kubisch, *The Queen's Bush Settlement: Black Pioneers, 1839-1865* (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2004), and Benjamin Drew, *Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada* (Dundurn Press Limited, 2008).

⁶¹ Crawford Killian, *Do Some Great Thing: The Black Pioneers of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1978), 12 and 158. Interestingly, some of the African Americans who migrated to Alberta in the early 20th century later settled in British Columbia, along with some Black Canadians from the East.

asked the President of the CPR how he should respond. In doing so, the Commissioner expressed that the situation was “delicate” because “there may be strong opposition on the part of the people of British Columbia to the settlement of any large number of negroes in that Province.”⁶² In response, the assistant to the President of the CPR responded that the Commissioner was correct and that the President’s office did not believe that African Americans could succeed in British Columbia because they were “lacking in energy and other essentials necessary to their success in this Country.”⁶³ This group of African Americans in Texas was discouraged from migrating to Canada; but, a few years later, interest from African Americans in Oklahoma would be significantly more pronounced and cause a large, significant discussion in Canada over African American migration.

African Americans not only looked north to escape discrimination and find good farming land; they also looked south towards Mexico. Records, although scarce, seem to indicate that the movement of black migration to Mexico was even less successful and less reported upon than the migration to Western Canada. Fugitive slaves escaped to Mexico, just as they had to Canada; and following emancipation, many African Americans continued to view Mexico as less prejudicial than the United States. There were references to African American migrants to Mexico within United States’ newspapers, but the number of African Americans in Mexico was unknown. In the 1890s, a colonization effort between a Mr. H. Ellis and the “Agricultural, Industrial, and Colonization Company of Tlahualilo, Ltd” resulted in a spectacular failure. Over 800 black colonists migrated to northern Mexico, but after experiencing an outbreak of liver disease and then smallpox, many sought to return to the United States. Almost 150 colonists died during the

⁶² Canadian Pacific Railway, Land Settlement, and Development, M-2269, File 2112, Glenbow Museum, Calgary, AB.

⁶³ Ibid.

endeavor, and another 250 were not accounted for after the rest returned to their homes in the southern states.⁶⁴ On a much smaller scale, ads for African American migration also appeared in Oklahoma newspapers at the same as Canadian ads. An ad in the *Boley Progress* in 1906 promoted cheap and rich lands in Mexico, and stated that hundreds of Americans were migrating to the region to experience excellent crops of corn.⁶⁵ Another article discussed the success of Billy Vann, who led a group of black migrants from Oklahoma to Mexico in 1910 or 1911; the article said that everyone was doing well in their new country.⁶⁶ And, another article titled, “Mexico Offers Negroes of United States Great Opportunities: No Race Prejudice,” related the prosperous conditions of numerous African Americans who were living in Mexico. G.W. Slaughter, the writer of the article, wrote on his visit to Mexico City: “I had no sooner landed from the train than I discovered that I was in what seemed to be essentially a black man’s country. Every place I went I saw prosperous, industrious Negroes carrying on business of their own.”⁶⁷ Despite these records that indicated some success for African American migrants in Mexico, there was much less information documenting black migration to Mexico than to Canada. This is either because the overall number was insignificant and made little impact on Mexican society, or, perhaps the immigration of African Americans into Mexico did not cause

⁶⁴ J. Fred Rippy, “A Negro Colonization Project in Mexico, 1895,” *The Journal of Negro History* 6, no. 1 (Jan., 1921): 67-73. Newspapers related to this colonization effort in Mexico include: “Negroes Seeking Homes in Mexico,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 30, 1889, “Negroes in Mexico,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 17, 1893, and “Georgia Negroes Arrive in Mexico,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 7, 1895.

⁶⁵ “Buy Land in Tropical Mexico,” *Boley Progress*, January 4, 1906.

⁶⁶ “Former Creek Citizen Now With Madero,” *Okemah Ledger*, May 25, 1911.

⁶⁷ “Mexico Offers Negroes of United States Great Opportunities: No Race Prejudice,” *The Chicago Defender*, March 26, 1910.

the type of backlash that it did in Canada, and therefore, it was not a significant topic of conversation in the Mexican press and among the Mexican populace and government.⁶⁸

In Oklahoma, and among other black populations in the Midwest and Great Plains regions, Canada was a much more popular place for consideration to migrate than Mexico. Although the Canadian Department of Immigration did not intend to advertise to black settlers in the United States, their promotional advertisements and articles led to the unintended consequence of black migration.⁶⁹ Relocating to Canada, however appealing, was not always an easy decision. It required uprooting families, making a long journey, and establishing new communities on the prairies. Indeed, it even, on occasion, broke up families as was the case with the Saunders family from Clearview, Oklahoma. William Saunders and his son, David, moved to Amber Valley, Alberta in 1907, but William's wife chose to stay in the United States, later moving to Chicago.⁷⁰

But, many black Americans found the lure of cheap land irresistible, and felt little encouragement to remain in Oklahoma. And, the advertisements that boasted of cheap and productive land in Canada, where African Americans could live their lives free of discrimination sounded very similar to the promotional material that had also lured many to settle in Oklahoma. George Ramsey had moved to Oklahoma in 1905 and lived among the Creek Indians, but by

⁶⁸ Admittedly, much more research needs to be done on the migration of African Americans to Mexico during this period. However, such work falls further out of the scope of this research. Two other research publications that focus on the connection between African Americans and Mexico include: Kenneth W. Porter, "The Hawkins' Negroes Go to Mexico," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 24, no. 1 (1946), and Arnold Shankman, "The Image of Mexico and the Mexican-American in the Black Press, 1890-1935," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 3 no. 2 (Summer 1975).

⁶⁹ Michael Payne, "The Settlement of Oklahoma Blacks in Western Canada," draft report February 20, 2004: (no page #s). Report viewed at Breton and District Historical Museum, Breton, AB.

⁷⁰ "People," *Alberta's Black Pioneer Heritage*, Heritage Community Foundation, Alberta Online Encyclopedia. Available through University of Alberta Libraries.

1910 he had moved his family to Keystone, Alberta, because of cheap land.⁷¹ Ellis Hooks later recalled that the promise of land was extremely strong for black immigrants. Hook's father had first worked as a construction worker in Edmonton, Alberta, but soon moved his family to Breton "because land was cheap."⁷² A reverend from Wewoka, Oklahoma wrote to J. S. Crawford, the Canadian immigration agent stationed in Kansas City, that "...I am bound for Canada and can't stay away. I am goin looking for a free Home where I can Bee at rest, Farm and make a liven at Home."⁷³ The recollections of the Mayes family, which settled near Maidstone, Saskatchewan, reported that the location of the Mayes homestead in Oklahoma contributed to their migration to Canada. In Oklahoma, their land often flooded from a nearby creek, causing them to lose their crops. After raising more hogs and vegetables to sell, the family was able to sell many of their personal belongings and move to Canada in 1909.⁷⁴ Boadie Bowen, another black migrant, believed that the first settlers in western Canada possessed a vision of homesteading and creating prosperous farms. These settlers focused on the benefits that western Canada offered not only for themselves but also for their children.⁷⁵ William Smith admired the determination of his grandparents who settled in Campsie, Alberta, saying, "I'm amazed at the spirit those people had, to pick up and go, but they weren't settled and happy in the States."⁷⁶

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Velma Carter and Wanda Leffler Akili, *The Window of Our Memories*, (St. Albert, Alberta, Canada: B. C. R. Society of Alberta, 1981), 67.

⁷³ Reverend in Wewoka, OK to J.S. Crawford, 6 October 1910," in Immigration Branch Records, "Immigration of Negroes from the United States to Western Canada", RG 76, Vol. 192, File 72552, Part 2 (Ottawa, Ontario: Library and Archives of Canada.) Microfilm.

⁷⁴ Maidstone Mirror, *North of the Gully*, Compiled by North of the Gully History Book Committee, (Maidstone, Saskatchewan: Maidstone Mirror, 1981), 365.

⁷⁵ Carter, *The Window of Our Memories*, 22.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 57.

Still, some migrants did admit that although they were attracted to Canada for the land, the reality once they settled in Canada was sometimes different. It was a hard living and settlers had to work hard to clear their farms and make their land profitable. Thomas Mapp told an interviewer that people were not satisfied with what they had in in the United States and once they heard that they could receive 160 acres of land for ten dollars, they were interested in migrating; this amount looked good to African Americans: “that looked pretty good when you’re down south that looked pretty good. But when you got on the homestead, that was a horse of another colour.”⁷⁷

Letters sent to J.S. Crawford, the immigration agent in Kansas City, also reflected an interest in the land offered in the Canadian West. While some letter writers clearly stated that they were African Americans interested in Canadian land, others simply requested information about Canada without reference to their race. These letters usually requested the agent to send literature and information concerning the best place to settle in Canada. Additionally, most writers asked for the lowest settlers’ rate for train tickets.⁷⁸ Other letters reflected that interest in Canada was a family matter and that interested inquirers were planning to move with their families, or meet family and friends already in Canada. Such letters asked how much it would cost on the trains for husbands, wives, and children. Other letters asked for information on where particular migrants had settled in Canada so that the inquirers could hopefully settle near their acquaintances.⁷⁹ Letters to the department also showed that inquirers shared their literature

⁷⁷ Thomas Mapp, Interview by Charles Irby. Charles Irby Collection, 1790-1988, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives of the University of California, Santa Barbara, CEMA 10, Box 14, Folder 13-15.

⁷⁸ Examples included: S.B.W. May (?) to J.S. Crawford, 7 September 1910 and J.C. Rowland to J.S. Crawford, 10 September 1910, IBR, RG76-192-72552-2.

⁷⁹ Examples included: George W C(?) to J.S. Crawford, 7 September 1910 and C.S. Allrich to L.M. Fortier, 23 December 1910. IBR, RG76-192-72552-2.

concerning Western Canada with each other. In Abe Jordan's lengthy letter to J.S. Crawford, he stated that he had shared his literature and promotional books with a friend whom he would like Crawford to send some more material.⁸⁰ This type of letter clearly showed that interested black settlers in Oklahoma discussed the possibility of migrating to Canada with one another and shared information. Other letters to the department clearly indicated that African Americans were receiving the messages from the department concerning the climate of Canada and that it may not be "inducive" to black settlement. In asking where it would be best for him to settle, H.M. Simpson wanted information concerning the best climate, while John H. Kormies stated that he previously traveled to Winnipeg and "know about the climate."⁸¹

The prospect of acquiring cheap land resonated with both black and white Americans, but African Americans also saw Canada as a refuge from the discrimination and white violence commonplace in the United States. As one settler explained, "We heard about free lands here and also that everyone had the right to vote and was a free man."⁸² Indeed, other African Americans noted that Canada now served them as it had fugitive slaves in the nineteenth century. Moreover, they found land free from lynching especially desirable. William Allen moved to Keystone, Alberta, in 1909 from Oklahoma, when the Ku Klux Klan threatened his life.⁸³ A member of the Mayes family, who migrated to Saskatchewan, recalled that his grandfather decided to move to Canada because he feared for his sons' lives. After a white man shot his grandfather's dogs for

⁸⁰ Abe Jordan to J.S. Crawford, 6 September 1910, IBR, RG76-192-72552-2.

⁸¹ H.M. Simpson to J.S. Crawford, 29 September 1910 and John H. Kormies, 20 January 1911, IBR, RG76-192-72552-2.

⁸² As quoted in: Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable*, 65.

⁸³ "People," *Alberta's Black Pioneer Heritage*.

wandering onto his land, his grandfather said that he wanted to move before “one of his boys got killed.”⁸⁴ Katie Williams Melton also remembered the reasons for her father deciding to migrate:

...my daddy said he wasn't gonna be driven around no more. Back in the States, if a colored man had a good crop or was just doing' good—here come the white man! They'd make a fire and get to making them 'Ts' and things. (burning crosses). That meant you had to get outta there. My mamma liked this country in a way (Canada). She said at least the white man won't be laying on my doorstep all the time.”⁸⁵

Mryna Wisdom, whose grandfather was the black migrant Willis Reese Bowen, also related the story that ended with the Bowen family migrating to Alberta. Her grandfather had two phone lines to his home in Oklahoma, one to communicate to his white neighbors and another to communicate to his black neighbors. After someone cut the line to his white neighbors, her grandfather became very angry and threatened to attack the governor of Oklahoma, whom he blamed for the worsening race relations in the state. Willis' wife Jeanie, fearful of raising a family of nine children alone if her husband committed the crime, convinced her husband to migrate to Canada instead.⁸⁶

Black Americans also believed that they did not—and could not—receive legal protection as citizens of the United States. In May 1911, for example, a black Oklahoman wrote to the *Chicago Defender*, complaining that authorities had failed to prosecute white rapists, adding that African American women could only receive protection in Canada: “Our girls and women must be protected, and since there are no marriage laws to protect her then away to the land of the free and the home of the brave- Canada.” He concluded that the United States

⁸⁴ Father of Ruben Mayes, Interview by PAA, 1997, audio recording PR1997.0262.0113, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, AB.

⁸⁵ As quoted in: Gail Davis, “Freedom Worth the Hardships,” *The Athabasca Advocate*, July 30, 1985. Located in “Newspaper Clippings” Athabasca Archives, Athabasca, AB.

⁸⁶ East Athabasca History Book Society, *Land of Dreams: Districts East of Athabasca: Golden Sunset (Tawatinaw), Parkhurst, Toles (Amber Valley), Rodger's Chapter, Forest, Ferguson, Clover View*, (East Athabasca History Book Society, (MB: Friesens Corporation, 2009), 390.

government had failed African Americans and, “the next best thing to do is to run back to Canada where the fugitive slave once found shelter.”⁸⁷ When asked decades later if he regretted leaving the United States, migrant Thomas Mapp replied that he had enough of the United States and maybe “a little too much of it.”⁸⁸ His sentiments reflected those of many black migrants to Canada—no regrets concerning leaving the place of their birth, where they had faced numerous cases of oppression and discrimination.

For many African Americans, Canada offered not only a refuge that promised more security from white racism but also a country where equality could be had. A spokesperson for a group of black migrants from Oklahoma who entered Canada through British Columbia stated, “The people of Oklahoma treat us like dogs. We are not allowed to vote and are not admitted to any of the theatres or public places. They won’t even let us ride the streetcars in some of the towns.”⁸⁹ Gwen Hooks expressed the frustration in the search of freedom by black migrants when she said, “We left our homes because of the injustices we were forced to suffer after Oklahoma became the 46th state in 1907.”⁹⁰ One black man wrote the immigration department to explain his interest in Canada: “My intention of goin too Canada well I will tell you the truth the first, I am deprive of life liberty...I like your law better they are good...I can’t owen no land here,” declaring that he wanted, “too Become a Setlar or a British subject.”⁹¹ He placed his treatment as a black man above his identity as an American and he believed that Canada would

⁸⁷ “Welcoming Negroes into Canada, the Land of the Free,” *Chicago Defender*, May 13, 1911.

⁸⁸ Thomas Mapp, Interview by Charles Irby. Charles Irby Collection, 1790-1988, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives of the University of California, Santa Barbara, CEMA 10, Box 14, Folder 13-15.

⁸⁹ As quoted in: Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable*, 65.

⁹⁰ Gwen Hooks, *The Keystone Legacy: Reflections of a Black Pioneer*, (Edmonton, AB, Canada: Brightest Pebble Publishing Co. Ltd., 1997), 9.

⁹¹ As quoted in: Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*, 30.

offer not only hope but rights as a “citizen.” Similarly, a prospective migrant from Muskogee, Oklahoma wrote the Canadian superintendent of immigration requesting “all information Concerning the Colored man opportunity in Canada as a Citizen...I was born in Oklahoma and a citizen of this State, but I would be willing to sell my property and go to some Country where a man Color don’t hold him back.”⁹² To escape segregation and lynching in the South, Molly and Crawford Hayes moved to Oklahoma in 1905. However, after Jim Crow laws followed them to Oklahoma, the Hayes headed for Alberta in 1911. Others did the same.⁹³ In the *Amber Valley Journal* of 1975, a writer explained why the founders of the black community in Alberta decided to migrate:

Like most people who uproot themselves, these blacks were looking for land and opportunities to work and better themselves; they were attempting to find an environment which, socially at least, was not repressive or hostile to them—an environment in which their bodies, their minds, their spirits, their children could thrive; an environment which would allow them freedom of expression, afford them dignity as individuals and as a people.⁹⁴

As one migrant recalled, “We heard Canada was a free country.”⁹⁵

Black Leaders’ Responses to Emigration

Black leaders knew that African Americans were interested in Canada, and they were also aware that the Canadian Department of Immigration was not welcoming to black immigrants. W.E.B. Du Bois, in particular, took note of Canada’s possible exclusion of black Americans in numerous articles on the topic in *The Crisis*. His articles related to exclusion are

⁹² “Letter to Superintendent from Muskogee, OK, 13 December 1910,” IBR, RG76-192-72552-2.

⁹³ “People,” *Alberta’s Black Pioneer Heritage*.

⁹⁴ *Amber Valley Journal* 1975. Athabasca Archives, Athabasca, AB.

⁹⁵ Carter, *The Window of Our Memories*, 63.

addressed further in Chapter 6. Groups of black leaders and citizens in the United States joined Back-to-Africa movements through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which serve as comparisons for the movement to Canada. The Canadian migration, the possible migrations to Mexico, and the Back-to-Africa movements all indicated a desire by African Americans to emigrate from the United States due to racism, discrimination, and treatment as secondary citizens. Furthermore, the migrations to Canada and Mexico lessen the perception that African Americans joined Back-to-Africa movements because of a desire to migrate to the lands of their ancestors; in terms of culture, language, politics, and social values, those in the movements possessed little in common with the land and peoples living in Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁹⁶ Rather, the interest in places like Canada and Mexico indicated that all of these movements concerned emigration and a desire to leave the United States rather than simply a desire to migrate to a perceived “homeland” of Africa. Although pull factors existed for all of these places, the push factors within the United States had to be strong enough to encourage them to look for a home elsewhere.

Important black leaders of the early twentieth century, including W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and Kelly Miller, discussed and wrote about the conditions that African Americans faced. As Miller stated:

The black man’s political rights, civil privileges, educational opportunities, and the advantage of sympathetic and helpful contact with the white race will be conditioned upon the evil reputation foisted upon him by mob violence, inflicted on account of alleged execrable crimes. No people will tolerate a race of potential rapists in their

⁹⁶ For more on the Back-to-Africa Movements, see: Edwin S Redkey, *Black Exodus: Black Nationalist and Back-to-Africa Movements, 1890-1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), Kenneth C Barnes, *Journey of Hope: The Back-to-Africa Movement in Arkansas in the Late 1800s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), and Emma J. Lapsanky-Werner and Margaret Hope Bacon, eds, *Back to Africa: Benjamin Coates and the Colonization Movement in America, 1848-1880* (University Park, PE: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

midst...No individual of this blood, however upright his personal life, could escape the taint of racial reputation.⁹⁷

Because of the reputation, stereotype, and conditions explained by Kelly, African Americans faced a very difficult life in the United States, especially in the southern states. However, black leaders also disagreed with one another in terms of black migration to escape this discrimination. Although Du Bois understood the reasons for migration to Canada and defended the rights of black migrants to move into Western Canada, Washington did not agree with such a migration.⁹⁸ Records do not indicate Washington talking specifically about Canada, but he did not support the Back-to-Africa movements, and therefore, he likely did not support the migration to Canada. He believed that there were no places in Africa that provided areas for improvement for African Americans, and also argued that attempts to leave the United States and live prosperously elsewhere had all failed.⁹⁹ Washington often focused on black improvements in the South in terms of education, property, jobs, and character. And, he also visited the all-black town of Boley, Oklahoma in 1905, but was torn about its importance. On the one hand, Washington thought that African Americans should stay in the South rather than move westward into the plains; however, he also recognized that all-black towns allowed African Americans to experience self-government, develop leadership, and craft skills.¹⁰⁰ These concerns about the all-black towns in Oklahoma likely reflected similar concerns about the black migration to Canada.

⁹⁷ Kelly Miller, *Race Adjustment; Essays on the Negro in America*, (1908), 70-71.

⁹⁸ For more on Du Bois' writings, see: W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co, 1903). For more on Du Bois, Washington, and Marcus Garvey, see: Howard Brotz, ed, *African-American Social & Political Thought 1850-1920*, (Basic Books, 1966).

⁹⁹ Booker T. Washington, *The Future of the American Negro*, (1899), 159 and 200.

¹⁰⁰ Norman L. Crockett, "Witness to History: Booker T. Washington Visits Boley," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 67 (Winter 1989): 389.

Leaders in the black communities within Oklahoma also questioned the wisdom of the black migration to Canada. The threat of out migration alienated leaders in Oklahoma's black communities. According to the black paper, *Clearview Patriarch*, the movement of two hundred black migrants from Oklahoma City, Weleetka, and Okmulgee, to Canada adversely affected the communities. Estimating that it cost the migrants over \$5000 to move to Canada, the paper criticized the migrants for moving so soon after migrating to Oklahoma and for spending money that could have been used within the local black communities. Arguing that looking for a country free from discrimination was foolish, the paper advised African Americans to, "...cease to ramble here and yonder, and be content and 'let down the buckets where we are.'"¹⁰¹ A month later, the same paper carried another editorial concerning the migration. This article recognized that the cultivation of wild lands in Western Canada could provide the migrants with the type of self-respect and hard work that Booker T. Washington promoted; however, the prejudice that local white settlers felt against black migrants should serve as a warning against migration. Rather, the article advocated for black settlers in Oklahoma to remain, or, if they must move, then move to black towns or black colonies in order to concentrate their forces.¹⁰²

Conclusions

Whether or not Canada wanted black immigrants from Oklahoma, African Americans began to leave Oklahoma in large numbers. Black Americans in Oklahoma learned of the opportunities in Western Canada from their local newspapers and through information given out by the Canadian immigration agency in Kansas City. Canadian advertisements in the black

¹⁰¹ "To the Better Land," *Clearview Patriarch*, March 23, 1911.

¹⁰² "The Immigration of Negroes," *Clearview Patriarch*, April 13, 1911.

newspapers, such as the *Boley Progress* told African Americans that Western Canada grew excellent crops of wheat and that they could be successful farmers in a rapidly expanding Canadian economy.¹⁰³ Communication between the Canadian Department of Immigration and settlers in Oklahoma also represented a form of transnational communication, as readers received propaganda from the department and, in turn, wrote to the department about the opportunities in Canada. Although a large mass exodus never occurred among black settlers in Oklahoma, thousands did consider migrating to Canada and engaged with the Canadian Department of Immigration concerning support for black migration. These discussions about the motivations for African Americans to migrate to Western Canada signified an important part of neglected American history: emigration. Before the Canadian government crushed the hopes of resettlement for black settlers in Oklahoma, Canada represented the *Last Best West* and an opportunity for freedom, equality, and public rights for African Americans. The hopes that black writers expressed for Canada were represented in their letters of inquiry to the Canadian Department of Immigration: “I am aware that Canada’s offer is to all industrious law abiding people without regard to race...the American government, unlike that of the British Empire, is to[o] political to establish justice for all its people, hence the necessity of our separation.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ See, as examples: “Will Look to Canada for Wheat,” *Boley Progress*, May 5, 1911 and “Independence on the Farm,” *Boley Progress*, September 15, 1910.

¹⁰⁴ Reverend William Hurt to J.S. Crawford, 6 October 1910, IBR, RG76-192-72552-2 and Stephen W. Hill to Superintendent of Immigration, 6 October 1903, IBR, RG76-192-72552-1.

CHAPTER 3

TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION OF AFRICAN AMERICANS FROM OKLAHOMA TO
WESTERN CANADA

Jefferson Edwards left Oklahoma for Edmonton in 1910, and left behind his girlfriend, Martha, noting, “I wrote back to her and told her I was not coming back; if she wanted to marry, she must come to me.” Martha also had other connections to the Canadian prairies: her father and brothers already held homesteads in Amber Valley, and by November 1911, Martha had migrated to Alberta.¹⁰⁵ The black migration to Western Canada occurred as a transnational chain migration, in which families and friends encouraged one another to migrate to Canada. They wrote letters of encouragement to one another and some individuals traveled back and forth across the border, bringing numerous groups of migrants into Alberta and Saskatchewan.¹⁰⁶

Scholars have analyzed the movement of Black Americans to both Oklahoma and Canada, noting the role of Jim Crowism both north and south of the US-Canadian border. In particular, Bruce Shepard, Harold Troper, and Sarah-Jane Mathieu have ably documented this migration, but the connections among the migrants themselves have often been overlooked. And although Mathieu acknowledges the transnationalism of the migration in her work on black railroad porters in Canada, she does not fully examine the consequences of transnational networks.¹⁰⁷ Using more fully a transnational framework, this chapter enriches the understanding of migrations and borders, of national and international exchanges, and of the flow of peoples

¹⁰⁵ Velma Carter and Wanda Leffler Akili, *The Window of Our Memories*, (St. Albert, Alberta, Canada: B. C. R. Society of Alberta, 1981), 11-13.

¹⁰⁶ Numerous paragraphs within this chapter appeared previously in: Rachel Wolters, “As Migrants and As Immigrants: African Americans Search for Land and Liberty in the Great Plains,” *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 35 No. 4 (Fall 2015): 333-355. University of Nebraska Press.

¹⁰⁷ Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Color Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870-1955*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

and values. African Americans who moved north were not only influenced, for example, by the appeals of Canadian immigration officials, but they also relied heavily on the information provided by friends and families. Their interactions formed an informal network of community relations –a network that crossed state and national boundaries and proved essential to the movement north of African Americans. As migrants to Oklahoma and as immigrants in Canada, Black Americans counted on each other in their search for land and liberty, and they never lost sight of the unequal confines in which they operated. By tracing more fully the movement of African Americans to Canada, this chapter further illustrates the power of the transnational flow of ideas, policies, and aspirations and corresponds to what David Thelen, describes as the study of “interactions, exchanges, constructions and translations that people made as they engaged each other across national borders.”¹⁰⁸ As foreigners in Canada, black Americans remained connected to families and friends in Oklahoma, pointing up the important –and neglected – dimension of the black migration to Canada. Donna Gabbacia has written about the transnational links of Europeans who came to the United States, and the system of “immigrant foreign relations” that informed immigration and settlement in the United States can also be applied to the northward migration of black migrants who established a similar network of foreign relations that facilitated the processes of immigration and settlement in Canada.¹⁰⁹

Family and Friend Chain Migrations

¹⁰⁸ David Thelen, “The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History,” *The Journal of American History* (December 1999): 973.

¹⁰⁹ Donna R. Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1.

African Americans who settled in Canada eagerly anticipated the arrival of thousands more black immigrants. And the success, encouragement, and family connections of immigrants increasingly motivated more African Americans to migrate from Oklahoma to Canada. Individuals connected with each other across national borders in order to create communities in Canada where black settlers, they believed, could live free from racial discrimination. They responded to the stories and letters of families who had already moved to Canada. These “transnational linkages” created by the immigrants themselves further fostered chain migrations of African American families to Canada.¹¹⁰ They constituted an important form of communication that aided both the decisions to leave and the journeys they made. They formed a type of crossborder network that assisted migrants in settling in Canada; black families could get useful tips about traveling and advice on where to settle. And, although these black migrants were fleeing racial discrimination in Oklahoma, they were not refugees as other scholars labeled them in the past.¹¹¹ Rather, these migrants made calculated inquiries and decisions in their determinations to migrate; and, the planning for some migrants took years before they actually migrated. These migrants searched for better living conditions, but were not forced out of the United States; rather they were encouraged to migrate. The Days, from Wewoka, Oklahoma, settled in Keystone in 1911, and did so because of the encouragement of another immigrant. After William Allen settled in Keystone, Alberta in 1909, he recruited thirty-five families to join him by promising them good farmland and no discrimination. These families began arriving in 1910, and Keystone soon boasted fifty-two families. Allen also encouraged black migrants who

¹¹⁰ Gabaccia analyzed similar chain migrations and “the intersection of transnational linkages created “from below” by immigrants” in *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective*.

¹¹¹ Charles C. Irby, *All That Blood: The Amber Valley Saga*, Manuscript, located in Jacob Selwyn “We Remember Amber Valley” Film Collection (Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, AB), 2. Additionally, using the label of refugee for the migrants focuses on the push factors and neglects the pull factors within the migration.

lived in Canadian cities to move to Keystone. Samuel Hooks, who had lived in Edmonton, credited Allen with explaining the homesteading opportunities in Keystone which led him to leave the city for an all-black agricultural community.¹¹²

Both Canadian and American newspapers recognized the value of this network of “foreign relations” in sustaining the migration of black migrants to Canada. The *Edmonton Capital* noted in April 1911 that, “During the past two years approximately four hundred have left for the north and the encouraging reports which they have sent back has been instrumental in inducing their friends in this state to migrate northward.”¹¹³ Under the headline, “Land of No Lynchers, No Snakes, and No Jim Crow Cars,” a letter to the *Chicago Defender* encouraged Black Americans to head north, adding that, “This is a fine country where people get equal rights in every business or pursuit. Those that have come are doing well; they stand the cold as well as anyone else.” After listing the names of a few immigrants, the author noted, “I could give you a hundred more. They are doing well and everyone likes this country.”¹¹⁴

The critical family and friendship ties produced a robust chain migration of African Americans to Canada. In 1909, Henry and Candace Payne along with their son Tony, left Oklahoma for Junkins, Alberta. The following year, the Payne’s other children and their spouses joined them in Junkins.¹¹⁵ Andrew Henderson explained that after he came to Canada, he wrote his sister and her husband about the advantages in Canada, and by 1918, after three separate

¹¹² “People,” *Alberta’s Black Pioneer Heritage*, Heritage Community Foundation, Alberta Online Encyclopedia. Available through University of Alberta Libraries. Keystone was later renamed Breton. Willa Dallard remembered that in 1908 a group of families left her community in Oklahoma for Amber Valley. Afterwards, her father organized a group of five families to move to Vancouver B.C. Dallard’s father traveled before the rest to make arrangements for the large group. Willa Dallard, “Memories of My Father, the Late Willis Bowen of Amber Valley, Alberta,” (Prelate, Saskatchewan, February 1978), 2.

¹¹³ “Another Colored Colony Headed for Alberta,” *Edmonton Capital*, April 11, 1911.

¹¹⁴ “Negroes Making Good in Canada,” *Chicago Defender*, June 17, 1911.

¹¹⁵ “People,” *Alberta’s Black Pioneer Heritage*. Junkins was later renamed Wildwood.

migrations, every member of the family had moved to Canada.¹¹⁶ Daisy (Smith) Mayes Williams recalled that her father, Rufus Saddler Smith, read in a newspaper that settlers could file on a 160 acre homestead for ten dollars in Canada. Rufus and two of his sons left for the Eldon district of Saskatchewan in 1910, followed by two of Rufus's daughters and their families shortly afterward. Finally, Rufus's wife Drucilla, and the younger children, migrated to Saskatchewan in 1912.¹¹⁷ Many families migrated together, but it was also common for men to migrate first and prepare the homestead for the rest of the family to come afterward. Although this migration involved families, it also separated some members of a family. Ellis Hooks was young when he migrated with his family to Canada in April of 1911. He migrated with his parents, Samuel and Neoma Hooks, along with one brother, two sisters, and his grandmother on his mother's side of the family. Members of his father's family also planned to immigrate into Canada, but when his paternal grandmother was excluded based on her medical examination, Ellis's grandfather, uncles, and aunts all turned back so that they could remain in the United States with his grandmother.¹¹⁸ Although the family was split by the migration, they did stay in contact with one another. Ellis recalled that he maintained contact with multiple uncles, and a cousin came to visit him in Alberta in 1977.¹¹⁹ Still, other family members and friends of migrants chose to stay in the United States for other reasons. Kent Utendale interviewed black migrants to Canada, and their descendants, for his dissertation: "Race Relations in Canada's Midwest: A Study of the

¹¹⁶ Carter, *The Window of Our Memories*, 32.

¹¹⁷ Maidstone Mirror, *North of the Gully*, Compiled by North of the Gully History Book Committee, (Maidstone, Saskatchewan: Maidstone Mirror, 1981), 369.

¹¹⁸ Ellis Hooks, interview by PAA, 1978, audio recording PR1978.0065.0028a/ V9.1.2.1, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, AB.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Immigration, Integration, and Assimilation of Black Minority Groups.¹²⁰” In his work, Utendale wrote that one of his informants, Clarence Shaw, believed that many African Americans remained behind in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Tennessee because they were invested in their land ownership or businesses in those states. Others, he believed, did not migrate to Canada because they were tired of being drifters.¹²¹ As mentioned in Chapter One, black settlers in Oklahoma often moved several times before settling in that state, and therefore, many African Americans did not want to pick up their belongings and families to migrate yet another time.

For those families who did decide to migrate, families already in Canada opened up their homes for friends and family as they worked to establish their own homesteads. Such support strengthened the bonds among community members and served to provide support in times of need.¹²² Many years later, Jefferson Edwards explained how the settlements in Canada represented chain migration, and his interviewer, Stewart Grow, also determined that while there was no doubt that chain migration existed, it might have been accidental. Edwards explained that segregation from white communities may not have been intentional, but that the black migrants to Canada were just like other immigrant groups; he explained the settlement of Amber Valley: “It was good land, good for wheat and mixed farming. So I wanted to investigate it. Also some colored folks had already taken up a homestead there. I guess we are just like other people. Take a Frenchman, if a Frenchman settles in a place, other Frenchmen will settle near him. If a

¹²⁰ Kent Utendale, “Race Relations in Canada’s Midwest: A Study of the Immigration, Integration, and Assimilation of Black Minority Groups,” Dissertation (Pacific Western University, 1985).

¹²¹ Ibid., 110.

¹²² Chip Lake Historical Society, *Where the River Lobstick Flows*. Example of the Boone family. (Wildwood, Alberta: Chip Lake Historical Society, 1987), 284.

Ukrainian locates in a place then the Ukrainians move in. I guess that is the way it was with us.”¹²³

Community histories of the black families in Canada, along with census records and border crossing records, indicated the role that families and friends played in this migration. Individual families occasionally made the journey to Western Canada, but more often, groups of families migrated together from Oklahoma and into Western Canada. Individuals recalled in family histories the other families who made the journey at the same time as their own, and border records showed that black migrants often traveled in large groups. For the border entry point of Emerson, Manitoba, where most black migrants from Oklahoma entered Canada, some months of records reflected very little, if any, black migration. However, other months showed numerous families on the same trains, or on trains that crossed within days of each other. For the month of March, 1910, border agents recorded thirty-six heads of families. Many of these thirty-six also included wives and children listed. Most single individuals listed seemed to be single men, or men whose families would join them later.¹²⁴ However, some of these records also listed only wives and children with notations indicating that husbands were “coming with car.”¹²⁵ Rather than riding on the train with their families, some men chose to ride in train cars with their belongings and any livestock that they were transporting into Canada. Race of the migrants was indicated on the records by border agents writing “colored” under their country of birth, but this was not the only way to recognize the groups of migrants as being linked together. The

¹²³ As quoted in: Stewart Grow, “The Blacks of Amber Valley: Negro Pioneering in Northern Alberta,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 6, no. 1-2 (1974): 27.

¹²⁴ Canadian Department of Immigration and Colonization: Border Entry Records, 1908-1918 and 1925-1935 (RG 76 C5a). Digitized Microfilm. Reel T-5475. Border records were notorious for being inadequate and poorly kept. Some records indicated the day, month, and year on the files, while others only listed the month and year.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

destination listed for the migrants also indicated that they were traveling together. For March of 1910, the first seventeen records of black migrant families all showed that the migrants were heading towards Edmonton, Alberta. The next eleven entries showed that migrants were landing in Maidstone, Saskatchewan, and the remaining entries of black migrants for the month were mixed between destinations of Edmonton and Maidstone. This, therefore, revealed that there were two separate groups of black migrants traveling into Western Canada at the same time.¹²⁶

The family history book for the settlement of Shiloh, or the Eldon district of Saskatchewan, also mentioned this group of people. It stated that the group numbered close to four hundred, with around two hundred people stopping at the Immigration Hall in Battleford, Saskatchewan, and the rest continuing on towards Edmonton, Alberta.¹²⁷ Likely, the division of the group was based on familial connections, friendships, and places of origin within Oklahoma that determined the final destination of migrants before they boarded their trains to Canada. Reflections of descendants of the migrants also indicated that different groups of migrants were aware of each other and kept in contact with one another. Geneva (Toles) Willis, whose father helped establish the black community in Amber Valley, recalled that her family knew of the Willis family before they settled in Amber Valley. Although the Willis family, from Oklahoma, migrated into Canada through Vancouver and lived there first, it seemed that the community at Amber Valley were in contact with the Willises and knew that they were planning to move to Amber Valley to homestead.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Ibid. One entry also listed a laborer headed to Winnipeg. All of the migrants headed to Edmonton or Maidstone were listed as farmers.

¹²⁷ Maidstone Mirror, *North of the Gully*, 358. Given that border entry records were sometimes incomplete, these exact figures cannot be corroborated with the border records.

¹²⁸ Interview with Geneva (Toles) Willis. 12 August 1973. Charles Irby Collection, 1790-1988, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives of the University of California, Santa Barbara, CEMA 10, Box 14, Folder 13-15.

These families and individuals who crossed at Emerson were also financially well-prepared for their migration. Monetary records showed for these same groups in March of 1910 that individuals brought as much as one thousand dollars with them across the border, while families often brought three hundred, four hundred, or six hundred dollars with them. And, as discussed in Chapter Two, migrants relocated during certain times of the year based upon the farming season. Therefore, records for black migrants were more common in the months of March and April for 1910 and 1911 than other months. Interestingly, many of the records for black migrants in other months of the year often reflected more individuals crossing rather than families. Possibly, this indicated black individuals who traveled to Western Canada to check out the land before actually moving their families across the border.¹²⁹

Transnational Individuals

A number of African Americans took advantage of the ease of travel between the U.S. and Canadian borders to promote immigration to Canada. These individuals represented how single migrants engaged in a transnational migration through multiple trips back and forth between Canada and the United States, and attest to Donna Gabaccia's assertion that "almost all immigrants remain connected to the people and places they supposedly left behind when emigrating."¹³⁰ These migrants visited black towns in Oklahoma and instructed residents on how to migrate, including details on the journey itself, the homesteads awaiting them, and the advantages of living in Canada. One such figure, Robert Heslep, recalled that every time he

¹²⁹ Canadian Department of Immigration and Colonization: Border Entry Records, 1908-1918 and 1925-1935 (RG 76 C5a). Digitized Microfilm. Reel T-5475.

¹³⁰ Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations*, 2.

visited his home town of Boley, Oklahoma, he attracted a crowd: “Naturally, when I got back to Boley they would gather around me. If they heard somebody say something about Canada the crowd would get larger...They wanted to hear more about [Canada]; they had read about it.”¹³¹ These recruiters were not paid but saw their role as simply to encourage more African Americans to migrate to Canada. They facilitated the movement of hundreds of families and broadened the base of transnational communication that was essential to the black migration to Canada. The *Edmonton Bulletin* reported on the efforts of W. Johnson who, the article said, “was so enamored with the country that he went back to his family and friends with such enthusiasm that a regular regiment of them have come here to settle.”¹³² A black newspaper editor from Clearview, Oklahoma brought a group of twenty-nine African Americans with him to Edmonton from Oklahoma, and returned to Oklahoma for more families.¹³³

The most well-known of the border crossers was Henry Sneed, a black preacher from Clearview, Oklahoma. Sneed first traveled to Amber Valley in 1905 to determine if the land was suitable for black settlers and then returned to Clearview, where he recruited 200 black settlers to move to Alberta in 1910.¹³⁴ Sneed made this first trip with two other interested African Americans, Nimrod Toles and Jordon Murphy. In family histories, descendants referred to these three men as “spectators” or “delegates.”¹³⁵ These titles meant that black communities in

¹³¹ Carter, *The Window of Our Memories*, 60-61.

¹³² “Party of Negro Settlers,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, April 15, 1908.

¹³³ “Immigration of Negroes,” *Edmonton Capital*, January 19, 1910.

¹³⁴ “People,” *Alberta’s Black Pioneer Heritage*. This community was named Amber Valley in 1932 and this is how many historians and descendants of migrants refer to the community. However, it was also originally called Pine Creek, and was sometimes called Toles. Toles referred to Nimrod Toles, one of the first settlers of Amber Valley and the name of the first school in the settlement.

¹³⁵ Margaret Mapp referred to her grandfather, Henry Sneed, as a spectator in: Boyle and District Historical Society, *Forests, Furrows, and Faith: A History of Boyle and Districts* (Boyle and District Historical Society, 1982), 538. The daughter of Nimrod Toles, Geneva (Toles) Willis, referred to these men as “delegates” in an interview with

Oklahoma sent individuals to Canada with the express intention to evaluate the land and communities in Western Canada in order to determine whether or not residents in Oklahoma should migrate. Upon his return to Oklahoma, Sneed attracted another 160 migrants for the migration north based upon his reports and recommendations; this group migrated in 1909.¹³⁶ Sneed brought his own family to Canada in the 1909 trip, and as his granddaughter later recalled, her grandmother's sister, Georgia Coleman, and her family also migrated at the same time.¹³⁷ Therefore, Sneed was not only encouraging other families and individuals to migrate, but he also encouraged his own family, and extended family, to make the trip as well. The years between the original trip and subsequent migration was possibly explained by Geneva (Toles) Willis. Geneva was the daughter of Nimrod Toles and remarked in an interview that her father had visited Canada once before permanently migrating in 1909 or 1910. She remarked that he "made crop" in Oklahoma when he returned from the original trip in 1905. Therefore, it was likely that transnational individuals such as Toles and Sneed needed to raise money to move their entire families to Western Canada once they had decided to do so.

Additionally, descendants of Henry Sneed commented on the work that he engaged in to persuade Oklahoma residents to emigrate. According to them, Sneed talked to both black settlers and black freed people in Oklahoma about leaving the state and migrating to Canada. Much preparation went into organizing so many families to sell their land and many of their possessions, while also preparing them for leaving family, friends, and their communities in

Charles Irby: Interview with Geneva (Toles) Willis. 12 August 1973. Charles Irby Collection, 1790-1988, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives of the University of California, Santa Barbara, CEMA 10, Box 14, Folder 13-15. In the same collection, Thomas Mapp also referred to the men as "delegates:" Interview with Thomas and Susie Mapp. 30 July 1970.

¹³⁶ The exact number of migrants varies; accounts differ between 120, 150, 160, 175, and 200.

¹³⁷ Boyle and District Historical Society, *Forests, Furrows, and Faith*, 538.

Oklahoma. The grandchildren of Sneed commented that he had little difficulty convincing people to leave Oklahoma, given the implementation of Jim Crow laws in the state, but the trip itself took careful planning. In planning the trips, Sneed considered if the possible migrants were healthy enough to make it across the border and establish a new community in a difficult environment, and if they had the financial resources necessary to establish themselves in a new place.¹³⁸ Sneed made a third trip in 1911; however, he encountered more resistance from Canadian officials at the border. They informed the party of African Americans that the Canadian climate was not suitable for African Americans, checked the amount of money that individuals carried with them, and subjected each person to a medical exam.¹³⁹ Sneed's group of migrants numbered 194, and despite Canadian officials' efforts to bar their entry, they all passed the medical exams and carried the necessary cash with them.¹⁴⁰ Immigration officials did hold three migrants with the last name of Bell, Bowden, and Whittaker, but officials released them after being unable to find legal reasons for holding them.¹⁴¹ Some scholars and descendants noted that each of these families brought between 1,000 and 3,000 dollars with them, in addition to spending money on railway cars that held migrants' goods.¹⁴² However, border records

¹³⁸ East Athabasca History Book Society, *Land of Dreams: Districts East of Athabasca: Golden Sunset (Tawatinaw), Parkhurst, Toles (Amber Valley), Rodger's Chapter, Forest, Ferguson, Clover View*, (East Athabasca History Book Society, (MB: Friesens Corporation, 2009), 446.

¹³⁹ Numerous scholars described the experiences of the Sneed party, including: Pierre Berton, *The Promised Land: Settling the West, 1896-1914* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, The Canadian Publishers, 1984), 184; R. Bruce Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable: Blacks from Oklahoma Move to the Canadian Prairies in Search of Equality in the Early 20th Century Only to Find Racism in their New Home* (Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1997), 88; Colin A. Thomson, *Blacks in Deep Snow: Black Pioneers in Canada*, (Canada: J. M. Dent and Sons Limited, 1979), 79; Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 308.

¹⁴⁰ Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable*, 74.

¹⁴¹ Utendale, "Race Relations in Canada's Midwest," 90.

¹⁴² Utendale, "Race Relations in Canada's Midwest," 90 and East Athabasca History Book Society, *Land of Dreams*, 447.

indicated that only one migrant in this group reported an amount of 3,000 dollars. Most amounts numbered 200 dollars or less. This means that although migrants did possess enough cash to cross the border, they either did not have as much cash as they later said they did, or, they only reported and showed the necessary amount to the border officials that their families needed in order to cross the border.¹⁴³ Reporting a few dozen less than the 194 migrants, the *Saskatoon Daily Phoenix* declared that 93 adults and 56 babies all passed the inspections and planned to settle outside of the Athabasca Landing region in Alberta. The article went on to say that “The men are all farmers and expect to find good farms where they are going. They have good equipments of horses, mules, plows, and other machinery for their work,” and “the whole party bore the delay necessary at the boundary with remarkable good will, inspired with confidence.”¹⁴⁴ Sneed clearly ensured that all of the migrants were healthy and wealthy enough to pass the inspections at the border and continue on their journey to Alberta.

The Journey

The migrants’ full journey to Western Canada differed based on their beginning location and where they settled in Western Canada. All migrant journeys included a train ride from Oklahoma, or other starting locations, across the border and then into major cities such as Maidstone or Edmonton. This trip also involved multiple train rides to reach the final destination. The family history of the Mayes family described a journey that began outside of Tulsa, Oklahoma. The family traveled by wagons and carts to Tulsa, where they boarded a train to St.

¹⁴³ Canadian Department of Immigration and Colonization: Border Entry Records, 1908-1918 and 1925-1935 (RG 76 C5a). Digitized Microfilm. Reel T-5475.

¹⁴⁴ “Negro Immigrants Have Passed Winnipeg,” *Saskatoon Daily Phoenix*, March 24, 1911.

Paul, Minnesota. From St. Paul, they caught different trains in Regina and Saskatoon, before finally landing in Battleford, Saskatchewan.¹⁴⁵ After exiting their final train ride, migrants would use horses and wagons to make their way to their settlements and homesteads. These walking and wagon journeys could also take multiple days; Jefferson Edwards explained that it took three days to reach Pine Creek (Amber Valley) after leaving Edmonton.¹⁴⁶ Additionally, on the trail to Amber Valley, the migrants had to cross three creeks. They used nearby timber to build the bridges across these creeks as they moved eastward from Athabasca and into Amber Valley.¹⁴⁷ Migrants often had multiple wagons with all their goods that they brought with them from the United States, along with the necessary equipment to begin building homesteads. Some settlers also brought items on their journey that they did not need in Western Canada. For example, one migrant brought a cotton gin all the way to Alberta because he thought that he could grow cotton. After realizing that this was not possible in Alberta's climate, the cotton gin sat on his dining room table as a centerpiece.¹⁴⁸

Memories of the Bowen's family journey to Canada described conditions that slowed migrants down on their journeys. The Bowens were part of the migrant group that entered Canada through British Columbia. Parts of their migration are described in other chapters in terms of how the Canadian Department of Immigration reacted to black migrants crossing at White Rock, British Columbia. Immigration correspondence, however, does not mention that

¹⁴⁵ East Athabasca History Book Society, *Land of Dreams*, 365.

¹⁴⁶ Jefferson Davis Edwards, Interview. Athabasca Archives, Athabasca, AB. <http://digicon.athabascau.ca/cdm/singleitem/collection/AthaArch/id/1618/rec/1> (accessed August 10, 2016). The railroad did not run through Athabasca until shortly after the bulk of the black migration.

¹⁴⁷ East Athabasca History Book Society, *Land of Dreams*, 416.

¹⁴⁸ "The Pioneer Legacy of Black Alberta," *Compass*, (date unknown). Viewed at Breton and District Historical Museum, Breton, AB.

when members of this group originally tried to cross the border, immigration officials refused their entry. Recollections of the Bowen family described that a son of Willis Bowen had a cast on his leg and this was the reason that the family was denied entry. While the family waited for the leg to heal, Willis worked on road construction along the Wenatchee fruit valley. And, after the cast was removed, the family crossed the border at White Rock and encountered zero problems in entering Canada. Additionally, rather than going straight to Alberta where the Bowens knew several families, they settled in Vancouver for three years before continuing on to Amber Valley.¹⁴⁹

The experience of the journey itself also differed among men, women, and children. Women migrants often reminisced that they felt a long way from home and were not necessarily happy, initially, with the migration to Canada. These kinds of sentiments also indicated that men likely made the decision for the families to migrate. Emma King said, about Alberta: “It seemed like I went out of the world when I come here.”¹⁵⁰ King described herself as a 19-year-old bride when she made the journey with her husband’s family and more than thirty other families. She took a train to Edmonton, but said that men had to cut roads to Breton (Keystone) in order to make it out to their farms. Still, Emma King also recollected that it took several years before many of the families actually moved to Breton. Rather, they stayed in Edmonton until the men had the farms ready for the families to live on and had built a house.¹⁵¹ During an interview in 1978, the interviewer asked King what she thought when she first arrived in Western Canada;

¹⁴⁹ East Athabasca History Book Society, *Land of Dreams*, 391.

¹⁵⁰ “Alberta Seems Another World to Pioneer,” *The Representative: Town and Country*, April 12, 1978. Viewed at Breton and District Historical Museum, Breton, AB.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

she replied, “I cried for days,” and “I wanted to go back.”¹⁵² Furthermore, King believed that her husband also wanted to go back to Oklahoma, but because they had already made the trip and spent the money, they were staying.¹⁵³ For migrants in a completely new place, with years of work ahead of them on farms that were distant and isolated from other communities, these kinds of initial sentiments were likely widespread. But, as Emma King determined, when she looked back on the migration, she said that she never regretted leaving Oklahoma for Alberta.¹⁵⁴ In his dissertation, Kent Utendale described a similar experience of a Mrs. Cook. Mrs. Cook arrived in Canada in 1909 with her husband and children; she remembered that the weather was so cold when she got off of the train that she sat down and cried. She described the experience of sleeping in tents while there was snow on the ground, and that she, and others, were originally from the southern United States and did not feel that they were adapted to the type of dry snowy cold that existed in Western Canada. However, just as Emma King later said that she never regretted coming to Canada, Mrs. Cook declared: “By the next day I was feeling some better and we made the trip up and weren’t going back.”¹⁵⁵

Establishing Black Communities in Western Canada

African Americans who immigrated to Canada occasionally lived in established white communities and cities, but more often formed their own black communities. Optimal locations

¹⁵² Mrs. Charles King, interview by PAA, 1978, audio recording PR1978.0065.0023, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, AB.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ “Alberta Seems Another World to Pioneer,” *The Representative: Town and Country*, April 12, 1978. Viewed at Breton and District Historical Museum, Breton, AB.

¹⁵⁵ As quoted in: Utendale, “Race Relations in Canada’s Midwest,” 127-128.

for black communities included those isolated from white communities, close to a railroad, and distant from the U.S. border.¹⁵⁶ Black migrants wanted their own land, where they could build their own communities, away from the discrimination and racism that they associated with whites and the United States. Many immigrants moved together as families, creating communities with kinship ties.¹⁵⁷ Dwight Tyler-Sonny's family, for example, moved to Stocks, ten miles outside of Amber Valley where he explained, "my people wanted to settle close together, and there was a lot of land close together."¹⁵⁸ According to another Canadian immigrant, "The blacks stuck together- that was the only way of getting along. It was impossible to live independent because it was very hard making a living."¹⁵⁹ This settlement of all-black communities with kinship ties was strengthened through the transnational communications between friends and families in Western Canada and the United States, as successful settlers urged others to follow their path northward.

The most successful black settlements in Alberta included Pine Creek (Amber Valley), Junkins (Wildwood), Campsie, and Keystone (Breton). Black migrants also settled in significant numbers in Maidstone, Saskatoon, and Regina in Saskatchewan, and Edmonton, Athabasca, Calgary, and Lethbridge in Alberta.¹⁶⁰ The land was cheap for immigrants, but building a homestead could be beyond the reach of individual families and they had to share resources in order to make a go of it. Colonization groups also supported chain migrations of black

¹⁵⁶ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 303.

¹⁵⁷ Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable*, 104.

¹⁵⁸ "People," *Alberta's Black Pioneer Heritage*.

¹⁵⁹ Carter, *The Window of Our Memories*, 67.

¹⁶⁰ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 304. Their homesteads usually cost \$10 for 160 acres and owners were required to live on their property for six months in each year of three years. Homesteaders also had to clear a minimum of thirty acres, dig a well, build a house valued at three hundred dollars, and erect fencing valued at two hundred dollars.

immigrants from Oklahoma, even providing money for a year's worth of homesteading in Canada.¹⁶¹ Still, other companies saw resettlement of black migrants in Canada as a profitable venture. The Haslam Land and Investment Company of Regina, Saskatchewan, for example, hoped to settle hundreds of black migrants from Oklahoma outside of Edmonton, Alberta.¹⁶²

Migrants described numerous hardships in settling and establishing their communities in Alberta and Saskatchewan. And, as historian Stewart Grow wrote, the growing season in northern Alberta was short and the land was covered in heavy bush. Grow also found that provincial land records showed that over 70,000 vacant homesteads were available south of Edmonton; land that was in the Alberta grassland region and much easier to farm. The availability of this land raises questions, then, as to why the migrants chose to move to isolated areas with difficult land for farming. As Grow determined, and numerous migrants alluded to, migrants often wanted to isolate themselves from white communities after their experiences in the United States. Additionally, more northern land had available homesteads right next to each other, allowing the black migrants to form their own communities and settle next to each other without the disruption of other migrant groups.¹⁶³

After migrants made it to one of the black communities, they chose a quarter of land designated as a homestead site. Each homestead was marked by a peg and a number which migrants took to the land office, along with ten dollars. The Canadian government then gave settlers titles to the land if they cleared thirty acres within three years.¹⁶⁴ Clearing this land was

¹⁶¹ "Negro Immigrants Are Being Financed," *Edmonton Bulletin*, April 11, 1911.

¹⁶² "Many More Negro Settlers For West," *Winnipeg Free Press*, May 24, 1911.

¹⁶³ Grow, "The Blacks of Amber Valley," 24-25.

¹⁶⁴ Gail Davis, "Freedom Worth the Hardships," *The Athabasca Advocate* July 30, 1985. Located in newspaper clipping collection: Athabasca Archives, Athabasca, AB. For more on the type of land that migrants settled upon, please see: C. P. Hotchkiss, Report on Athabasca District, Alberta (1922), Department of the Interior

especially hard work for settlers. Jetteree Murphy Brown described the process of making the land farmable:

A grub-hoe (a long-handled tool the head of which consisted of an axe edge backed with a pick end) was used to clear the land of big trees. You dug around the roots. It took time. For awhile it was just push and cut—push and cut—then, finally, down it'd come. Once you got the big trees outa' the way, you axed down the heavy brush. It was piled and burned. You hand-picked the roots and rocks and then broke the land with a 'walkin' plough.¹⁶⁵

Additionally, settlers often worked for others to build up enough money supply to buy materials and livestock that they needed to clear their own homesteads. Jefferson Edwards spent his first spring in Alberta working for another farmer, and then spent the winter of 1911 working in a lumber camp at Lac La Biche. These jobs provided him with enough money to start work on his own homestead in 1912, after buying a team of oxen.¹⁶⁶ Aside from clearing the land, the settlers built their homes on the homesteads. These were usually log houses built directly on the ground, with one small window and a sod roof. Learning quickly that the low floors were very cold in the winter, later settlers built their houses with a foundation that was one to two feet off of the ground.¹⁶⁷ Many of the black migrants were also unprepared for the extremely cold winters in northern Alberta. Edwards said that many settlers in Amber Valley crowded together in communal shelters during their first winter, and that the settlers lost a large number of their

Topographical Survey of Canada, 89.04/47 PA 68.321 Box 1 Item 2, Athabasca Archives, Athabasca, AB; and, Donald Norman George Stone, "The Process of Rural Settlement in the Athabasca Area, Alberta," (master's thesis, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, 1970).

¹⁶⁵ As quoted in: Gail Davis, "Freedom Worth the Hardships," *The Athabasca Advocate* July 30, 1985. Located in newspaper clipping collection: Athabasca Archives, Athabasca, AB.

¹⁶⁶ "A Hard Price for Freedom," *Herald Magazine*, August 16, 1974. Located in newspaper clipping collection: Athabasca Archives, Athabasca, AB.

¹⁶⁷ East Athabasca History Book Society, *Land of Dreams*, 409.

livestock.¹⁶⁸ Emma King remembered that she had never seen snow before migrating to Canada and did not know what it looked like; meaning that her family was very unprepared in terms of clothing during their first winter.¹⁶⁹ In fact, numerous migrants later recalled that harsh winters caused more than a few families to move back to the United States.¹⁷⁰ However, exact numbers on the reverse migration are unknown, and numerous people left the black rural communities in Western Canada for the cities of Edmonton, Calgary, Maidstone, and Saskatchewan during World War I and the 1920s; this rural to urban migration took place in the United States during this same period.

Once settled in their black communities, the migrants continually made journeys back and forth between their communities and larger towns for supplies. Settlers in Amber Valley used an entire day to make the trek to Athabasca, and then another day to get back to Amber Valley. Footpaths and marshlands made this journey difficult; “wagons got stuck, wheels fell off or broke and had to be mended or changed; horses got tired and worn and had to be rested and pacified.”¹⁷¹ Living days away from larger towns meant daily work for women was often consumed with food production and home maintenance. Women canned fish, rabbits, berries, and vegetables; they baked their own bread; they would acquire wild meat such as moose, deer, and whitefish from the Northern Cree in exchange for their own potatoes, carrots, and other

¹⁶⁸ “A Hard Price for Freedom,” *Herald Magazine*, August 16, 1974. Located in newspaper clipping collection: Athabasca Archives, Athabasca, AB.

¹⁶⁹ Audrey Dorsch, “Alberta Seems Another World to Pioneer,” *The Representative: Town and County*, April 12, 1978. Located in newspaper clipping collection: Breton and District Historical Museum, Breton, AB.

¹⁷⁰ Example: Nellie Whelan in: Shawn Ohler, “Black Pioneers’ Alberta Roots,” *Edmonton Newspaper* (unknown title and date). Located in newspaper clipping collection: Breton and District Historical Museum, Breton, AB.

¹⁷¹ Amber Valley Journal 1975, Athabasca Archives, Athabasca, AB, 3.

vegetables that they grew.¹⁷² With limited, or no, access to doctors, childbirth for women could also cause anxiety in the isolated black communities. However, some of the communities did have a midwife who served the local settlers. In Amber Valley, Mary Ellen Robinson served as the community midwife, delivering many of the first babies born to black migrant families in Canada.¹⁷³

Despite hardships during the early days, some migrants remembered the early settlement period with fondness. Boadie Bowen said that a garden, rivers, and wild life sustained his family during the first years, and that, “A man could get a moose right in front of his cabin. There were rabbits and ‘the biggest strawberries you ever saw’ ”.¹⁷⁴ Emma King also stated in an interview that, in Breton: “We had fun; dances, picnics, ball games; all were happy.”¹⁷⁵ Cultural activities of the black communities were influenced by those in the United States, and migrants brought this culture with them in the migration. Mark Hooks recalled that his mother always sang songs that he never heard elsewhere in Canada, and therefore, suspected that they were lyrics she brought with her from the United States.¹⁷⁶ Baseball, especially, became a popular activity in the Amber Valley area. The team was first known as the “The Pine Creek Baseball Team” and they played other local teams near Athabasca.

¹⁷² Gail Davis, “Freedom Worth the Hardships,” *The Athabasca Advocate* July 30, 1985. Located in newspaper clipping collection: Athabasca Archives, Athabasca, AB.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ken Liddell’s Column in Centennial Scrapbook, John Ware Collection, M-9677, Glenbow Museum, Calgary, AB.

¹⁷⁵ Mrs. Charles King, interview by PAA, 1978, audio recording PR1978.0065.0023, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, AB.

¹⁷⁶ Mark Hooks, interview by PAA, 1978, audio recording PR1978.0065.0021, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, AB.

One of the primary concerns for black families settling in Western Canada was continuance of education and religion. Emma King recalled that the Canadian government was willing to help provide a school within these black communities because they wanted the land settled and knew how important education was to the black settlers. In Breton, the community built the Funnell School shortly after settlement, along with a log church.¹⁷⁷ In Amber Valley, the community established the Toles School on February 25, 1913. The school was named after Nimrod Toles, the oldest pioneer of the settlement, and also the family who donated the land upon which the school sat.¹⁷⁸ The black settlement outside of Maidstone, Saskatchewan first attempted to have an integrated school in Eldon. However, the municipal government refused to allow white children to go to school with black children, and black settlers in Eldon had a segregated school until 1919.¹⁷⁹ In Amber Valley, the first church services were held in the home of Columbus Bowen, and after numbers increased, the community built a church. The first church was called “African Methodist Episcopal Church,” however; it served the needs of both Methodists and Baptists within the community.¹⁸⁰ Following the establishment of schools and churches, the communities built post offices, stores, and gas stations.

Conclusions

¹⁷⁷ Audrey Dorsch, “Alberta Seems Another World to Pioneer,” *The Representative: Town and County*, April 12, 1978. Located in newspaper clipping collection: Breton and District Historical Museum, Breton, AB.

¹⁷⁸ East Athabasca History Book Society, *Land of Dreams*, 369-370.

¹⁷⁹ Lionel Hughes, “The Farmer, the Doctor, and the Filmmaker,” *Saskatchewan Naturally Magazine* Vol. 3, no. 4 (Spring 2002): 28. Located in newspaper clipping collection: Athabasca Archives, Athabasca, AB. For more on black settlements in Saskatchewan, see: Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2005). And, for the experiences of a skilled black worker living in Manitoba during the early twentieth century, see: Robert Barrow and Leigh Hambly, *Billy: The Life and Photographs of William S.A. Beal*, (Winnipeg: Vig Corps Press, 1988).

¹⁸⁰ East Athabasca History Book Society, *Land of Dreams*, 397.

Despite the difficulties that settlers faced in establishing the all-black communities in Alberta and Saskatchewan, their successes and motivations encouraged their families and friends to make the migration to Western Canada. The correspondence between families and friends proved to black settlers that those advertisements and promises of the Canadian Department of Immigration that described Western Canada as a promised land were indeed true. The larger portion of this migration occurred in 1910 and 1911, and it was the success of those who came in prior years that motivated these black settlers to cross the forty-ninth parallel. As was shown in the migrants' own words, both the lure of the land and promise of less discrimination encouraged this migration. The correspondence to African Americans in the United States and the physical migration of black migrants into Western Canada created this circular transnational system made up of correspondence, literature, and migrants themselves.¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ For more on North American Migration History, see: Marc S. Rodriguez, ed., *Repositioning North American Migration History: New Directions in Modern Continental Migration, Citizenship, and Community* (University of Rochester Press, 2005).

CHAPTER 4

THE CANADIAN DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION AND THE COLOR LINE AT THE
FORTY-NINTH PARALLEL

On December 13, 1910, Noah Butler wrote to the Superintendent of Canadian Immigration that he wanted more information on settlement in Western Canada as he hoped to migrate from Oklahoma to Western Canada. Butler cited state corruption, disenfranchisement of African Americans, and restricted access to the court system in Oklahoma as motivation to move. He requested information, “concerning the colored [man’s] opportunity in Canada as a citizen” as he hoped to move to a country in which, “a [man’s] color don’t hold him back.”¹ In describing his hopes for Canada, Butler stated: “If I can get a homestead free and be in a country where I can be protected I would like to come up there and live.”² Unfortunately for Noah Butler, the Canadian Department of Immigration was not interested in black migration to Western Canada and actively discouraged black interest in its western provinces. In reply to Butler’s request, W. D. Scott, the Superintendent of Immigration, advised Butler: “I do not think it would be in your interests to settle here. Our winter climate would not be found congenial to you. It is considered in this country that coloured people are not of a class likely to do well on

¹ Noah Butler to W. D. Scott, 13 December 1910, in Immigration Branch Records, “Immigration of Negroes from the United States to Western Canada,” RG 76, Vol. 192, File 72552, Part 2 (Ottawa, Ontario: Library and Archives of Canada.) Microfilm. From here, immigration records will be listed as “IBR” with appropriate reel number information. RG76-192-72552 includes records listed in the “Immigration of Negroes from the United States to Western Canada” reels. All other reel numbers are other files within the immigration branch records. Much of this chapter was written previously in an unpublished research paper for the seminar course, HIS 555.

² Ibid.

our free grant lands in the Western Provinces, and we are therefore not encouraging the removal of any of your people to this country.”³

Exclusionary Visions and Practices

Black Americans, such as Noah Butler, wrote to the Canadian Department of Immigration in hopes of receiving more information on Western Canada and, increasingly, to inquire whether Canada restricted black immigration. Although racism within the Canadian Department of Immigration played a part in discriminatory practices, Canada did not directly bar any groups of migrants coming into Canada and was hesitant to exclude Black Americans based upon race. Therefore the immigration department adopted discriminatory practices towards African Americans at the U.S.-Canadian border and actively discouraged Black Americans in their responses to inquiries about homesteading in Western Canada in an effort to satisfy those white Canadians who wanted to keep the West white, while not officially adopting racist immigration policies.

The Canadian Department of Immigration was instrumental in both creating the massive propaganda campaign that attracted thousands of settlers to Western Canada, and in working to restrict the type of migrants that Canada actually wanted in the West. The policies and correspondence of the immigration department during the Wilfrid Laurier administration, 1896-1911, shows how the Canadian government turned from color-blind policies in immigration laws towards policies that specifically barred certain racial groups. These policies reflected the attitudes of the men in the immigration department who implemented immigration policy, often according to their own interpretations and in direct opposition to the national immigration law.

³ W. D. Scott to Noah Butler, 22 December 1910, IBR, RG76-192-72552-2.

The Department of Immigration believed that the Canadian West was intended for white settlers, and they denied “undesirable” immigrants based upon race while hiding behind the official color-blind national immigration policies of the Canadian Parliament. Their reaction to African American migration to Western Canada shows how the internal policies within the Canadian bureaucracy became public policy as Canadians increasingly feared a mass influx of black Americans.

Chapter 2 outlined the goals of the Canadian Department of Immigration during the Liberal government’s term between 1896 and 1911, and this chapter analyzes the actions of the department more in-depth concerning the issue of black migration. Many scholarly works in both Canada and the United States have analyzed African American interest in Western Canada and the resulting efforts to exclude black migrants. Aside from Bruce Shepard, other scholars who analyzed the role of the immigration department in the early twentieth century include Harold Troper, Sarah-Jane Mathieu, Christopher Anderson, Robin Winks, and Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock.⁴ Many of these scholars emphasized the Canadian Department of Immigration during this period within larger works on Canadian-U.S. history. All of these works differ significantly in their primary focus and the degree to which they address the black migration to Western Canada. However, by bringing together such varying strands of scholarship, this chapter shows how the issue of black migration reflected the goals and beliefs of individuals in the immigration department in a period in which the national policy towards black exclusion was inconclusive. The reactions to black migration by the Canadian Department

⁴ Harold Martin Troper, *Only Farmers Need Apply: Official Canadian Government Encouragement of Immigration from the United States, 1896-1911* (Toronto: Griffin House, 1972), Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Color Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), Christopher G. Anderson, *Canadian Liberalism and the Politics of Border Control, 1867-1967* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), and Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

of Immigration shows how departments within a bureaucracy can indeed implement their own policies that differ from the laws of a national government when national policy is not clear and direct on issues. Additionally, this chapter shows how the Canadian Department of Immigration fit into the process of drawing a global color line, as described by Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynold in *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the Question of Racial Equality*.⁵ These were white men in a position of authority who chose to implement methods to restrict the movement and settlement of people of color. Historians also examined the black migration, and Canadian immigration policy during the early twentieth century, but none have clearly shown how the immigration department interpreted and manipulated national immigration laws to suit their own beliefs about who was “desirable” in the Canadian West, and who was not. Just as Jeffrey Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky described in *Implementation*, policy often breaks from its unidirectional concept in the implementation phase.⁶ Bureaucracies do not always follow and carry out the law as intended by those who create the laws; in this case, the Department of Immigration did not implement immigration policies as intended by the Canadian Parliament.

Transnationalism runs as a strong current throughout this chapter. In chapter 3, it was the migrants themselves and their correspondence with one another that acted as modes of transnationalism. This chapter shows that the correspondence of the immigration department was also transnational, however, the intent of the correspondence and traveling of information and directives across the national border sought to work in the opposite direction of the transnational

⁵ Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the Question of Racial Equality* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁶ Jeffrey L. Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky, *Implementation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973). For more on government bureaucracy, also see: James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).

currents taking place among the migrants. This correspondence usually reflected a goal of deterring the black migration rather than encouraging it. And, there were also men within the department who traveled back and forth across the border within their job capacities.

As covered in Chapter 2, while the Canadian government aimed their advertisements towards American farmers, they did not publicly distinguish between the race of farmers that they encouraged to migrate. Advertisements in newspapers, *The Last Best West*, and inquiries to local immigration agent offices in the United States represented the Canadian West as a mecca for farmers, where law and order presided and men became rich. These hopes and dreams not only appealed to white farmers in the United States, but also to African Americans looking for good farmland and freedom from the reach of Jim Crow.

In order to combat the migration of undesirable immigrants such as African Americans, Oliver drafted, and Parliament enacted, two restrictive immigration policies in the Immigration Acts of 1906 and 1910. These acts showed that Oliver clearly placed immigrants' cultural values and ethnicity above the potential of agricultural contributions. The Acts of 1906 and 1910 implemented drastic new regulations that differed much from previous legislation. The 1906 Act described undesirable sick and destitute immigrants, such as those considered: "feeble-minded, an idiot, or an epileptic, or who is insane...deaf and dumb, or dumb, blind, or infirm...with a loathsome disease...who is a pauper, or destitute, a professional beggar, or vagrant, or who is likely to become a public charge...who has been convicted of a crime involving moral turpitude, or who is a prostitute."⁷ The 1910 Act expanded the group of excludable immigrants to possibly

⁷ United States Immigration Commission, *The Immigration Situation in Canada*, presented by William Paul Dillingham, Doc. No. 469 in Senate Documents, Vol. 63, 61st Congress, 2d Session: 1909-1910 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910), 41-42.

include entire races and migrants who traveled to Canada by non-continuous journey.⁸ The Canadian laws also allowed officials to deport any migrants within one year of landing if they were found to be sick, commit a crime involving moral turpitude, or become wards of the state.⁹ These conditions applied to migrants of different ethnic groups, but could be applied more frequently to certain groups as a method to deny entry of an ethnic or racial group.

As previously discussed, Canadians were no strangers of racist and discriminatory thoughts and practices towards numerous groups of people living within Canada and immigrating into the dominion. Historian Howard Palmer described the new social and ethnic conflicts that confronted Canadians in the early twentieth century when he said: “Despite the relative prosperity and optimism of these boom years, ethnic conflict was at times intense and stereotypes abounded as people from diverse backgrounds attempted to make sense of one another and establish relationships in a new society.”¹⁰ These stereotypes and beliefs about ethnic and racial groups also impacted the men working within the immigration department, as they often considered certain ethnic and racial groups more likely to be “undesirable.” Correspondence from the department showed that the department’s disparaging ideas concerning groups of people were not only linked to Asian immigrants and African Americans, but also to other groups. A letter from a health officer in 1905 lamented that six Jewish men were “hanging about the Halls” of the immigration hall in Winnipeg. The officer wrote that he considered the men as “physically able to work, but apparently, too lazy to do so,” and that they “have on all

⁸ Kelley and Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic*, 136-137.

⁹ “The Immigration Act,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, June 18, 1906.

¹⁰ Howard Palmer, “Strangers and Stereotypes: The Rise of Nativism, 1880-1920” in R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer, eds., *The Prairie West: Historical Readings* (Edmonton: Pica Pica Press, 1992), 309.

occasions refused to work when same was offered them.”¹¹ Still, although the term undesirable was often linked to ethnic and racial groups, it was also applied to ethnically desirable immigrants who did not fulfill the expected job role of the immigrant: the farmer. In a letter written by the Bureau of Colonization and Forestry in Ontario to W.D. Scott, complaints were made about men who they considered unsuitable for farming. In addition to complaining about unemployed mechanics, bricklayers, and carpenters, the letter also protests about immigrants who failed at farming and then “came into the city where they have stayed for a few weeks, spend all the money they had, failed to find employment, became thoroughbred bums and then as a last resort apply to us to be sent out to a farm.”¹² The letter goes on to state that the issue of undesirable immigrants was even linked to Great Britain, where the bureau suspected that English authorities were using immigration to Canada as a way to dispose of their own undesirable people, such as criminals.¹³ Although farmers were the ideal immigrants, by 1910, the immigration department also felt a stronger need for railroad workers and therefore they relaxed some of the restrictions for immigrants who were railway laborers. The department removed the requirements of money qualifications and direct journey as long as the individual was mentally, morally, and physically fit, with “the exception of Asiatics.”¹⁴ They were still not wanted.¹⁵

¹¹ Letter from Dominion Health Officer to Commissioner of Immigration, 19 July 1905, IBR, C-4765 RG 76-102-15197-3.

¹² Letter from Bureau of Colonization and Forestry in Ontario to W.D. Scott, 8 December 1904, IBR, C-4765 RG 76-102-15197-2.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Letter from E.B. Robertson, 20 July 1910, IBR, C-10246 RG 76-335-350171-5.

¹⁵ Although not addressed in this work, Seema Sohi identified the experiences of Indian immigrants to both the United States and Canada as a transnational migration in which Indians faced opposition from Canadians: Seema Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny: Race, Surveillance, and Indian Anticolonialism in North America*, (Oxford University Press, 2014).

Canada often denied entry of immigrants based upon health or monetary restrictions. Canadian monetary requirements were particularly interesting in that they could vary “according to race, occupation, or destination of the immigrant, and otherwise according to circumstances.”¹⁶ For example, Canada implemented a head tax of five hundred dollars on Chinese immigrants, effectively halting most Chinese immigration without explicitly doing so. However, even the 1910 Act did not explicitly bar a racial group from entering Canada, but instead gave Parliament and the Interior the ability to do so, if needed. Oliver operated the *Edmonton Bulletin*, in which he continually stressed the importance of immigrants fulfilling the expectations of citizenship.¹⁷ Canada still had time to select its own immigrants and hopefully save itself from the problems of the United States: ethnic conflicts, labor strikes, poverty. In March of 1910, Oliver made clear his understanding of Canadian immigration policies when he said:

It is true that there is no ban put upon a man by the Immigration Department because of his nationality, but it is not the less true that in the administration of the work of immigration, there is a preference shown, and properly shown, to the people of our own race...it is the policy of this government to secure the settlement of our vacant lands, and the improvement of our cultivated lands, by adding to our population those who will add to our citizenship, as well as to our labour.¹⁸

The language in the Immigration Acts of 1906 and 1910, and the authority that the acts gave the Department of Immigration, allowed Oliver and immigration officials to manipulate the laws in order to bar black migrants. Officials could find medical and monetary reasons to deny entrance to African Americans, or they could state that a black migrant was likely to become a ward of the state or was guilty of moral turpitude. Cloaking reasons for barring immigrants under the label of

¹⁶ United States Immigration Commission, *The Immigration Situation in Canada*, 111.

¹⁷ K. Tony Hollihan, “‘A Brake upon the wheel’: Frank Oliver and the Creation of the Immigration Act of 1906,” *Past Imperfect* Vol. 1 (1992): 96 -98.

¹⁸ Canadian Parliament, *House of Commons Debates*, 11th Parliament, 2nd Session: Vol. 3 (1910): 5850.

“undesirables,” also allowed the immigration department to expand the meaning of the term to include entire races. This term brought to mind vagrants, beggars, criminals, and sickly immigrants, which allowed the department to defend their actions when they used the same label of “undesirable” in denying entrance to black migrants.

American Black Interest in Western Canada

The image of Canada as the home of the fugitive slave cemented the image of Canada as welcoming to the African American population. After the failure of Reconstruction in the United States, African Americans once again looked north for better treatment and equality. As historian Sarah-Jane Mathieu explained, many Black Americans “eyed the dominion as a Canaan, a second chance at making Reconstruction work.”¹⁹ And, as Samuel Barreto, a Black Canadian born in Halifax, Nova Scotia, explained to the Canadian government: “Our government has always been a friend to the colored man especially is this true during the war of 1812 and later the underground railroad system...as our country is not largely populated and as we have large undeveloped tracts of land in our country, we might offer as we did in times gone by free lot of land and a years provisions to all thrifty negroes.”²⁰ And, as mentioned in Chapter 2, many of the former fugitives and their descendants lived in Western Ontario, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, numbering around twenty thousand.²¹ Although many of these black citizens of Canada

¹⁹ Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*, 13.

²⁰ Samuel Barreto to Department of Agriculture, 21 February 1901, IBR, RG76-192-72552-1 At the time that he wrote the letter, Barreto lived in the United States, where he moved to receive what he described “a better education.” His parents still lived in Halifax.

²¹ Adam Shortt and Arthur G. Doughty, *Canada and Its Provinces: A History of the Canadian People and Their Institutions By One Hundred Associates*, (Toronto: Glasgow, Brook, and Co., 1914), 554.

were respected within their communities, the Canadian government did not actively encourage further migration of African Americans.

The Canadian Department of Immigration received inquiries from African Americans about Western Canada at least as early as 1899. However, when J.S. Crawford, the immigration agent stationed in Kansas City, Missouri, asked his department if Canada allowed the immigration of Black Americans into Western Canada, he received this reply, “It is not desired that any negro immigrants should arrive in Western Canada, under the auspices of our Department, or that such immigration should be promoted by our agents.”²² In 1902 and 1903, the immigration department received inquiries from African Americans across the United States, including from places such as Georgia, Alabama, and Pennsylvania. These inquiries asked about the possibilities of establishing black colonies in Western Canada and for information on the conditions in those provinces.²³ Land companies, such as the German-American Colonization Co., Ltd also expressed interest in establishing a black colony in Western Canada. Z.W. Mitchell, an African American from Minneapolis, Minnesota, tried to work with the company in establishing a colony, and promised only the “very best” would be asked to join the colony. However, the response to the colonization company’s inquiry to the immigration department was very brief: “The Department is unable to entertain your proposal with reference to reserving land for a colony of colored people.”²⁴ Also in 1908, C.J. Broughton, the immigration agent stationed

²² Letter to Crawford, 23 January 1899, IBR, RG76-192-72552-1.

²³ See: J. A. Strachan to Clifford Sifton, 21 July 1902, Simmons to Secretary of the Interior, 19 October 1902, and Stephen Hill to Superintendent of Immigration Department of the Interior, 6 October 1903, IBR, RG76-192-72552-1.

²⁴ Fortier to John Steinbrecker, 22 May 1908, and Steinbrecker to W.D. Scott, 13 May 1908, IBR, RG76-192-72552-1. The immigration department was familiar with colonies, or settlements, such as religious groups of Mormons and Dunkers, and ethnic groups of Germans and Ukrainians, but they did not want entire settlements of blacks.

in Chicago, Illinois, expressed the wishes of Black Americans in Springfield, Illinois to establish a colony in Western Canada.²⁵ And, in 1910, W.V. Bennett, the agent in Omaha, Nebraska, wrote to W.D. Scott for advice on how to respond to a black man's inquiries in Omaha about Western Canada as Bennett believed, "the Canadian Officials were not desirous of having Colored people enter Canada."²⁶ Thus, black interest in Western Canada manifested across the United States, but the greatest interest came from African Americans in Oklahoma.

In order to determine why African Americans wanted to leave Oklahoma, the Canadian Department of Immigration sent their Inspector of U.S. Agencies to Oklahoma to examine the black population in September of 1910. W. J. White determined that race relations were not good between white and black people, and that political elements in the state encouraged black residents to move north. White anger towards black landowners, local railroad promotion of a migration, and black clergymen who encouraged Canadian migration as a means to keep their rural congregations together instead of losing them to urban migration, all contributed to discussions of a mass black migration out of Oklahoma.²⁷ White saw both Black Americans and Black-Indians in Oklahoma as undesirable when he described black farmers: "The farming that they did was indifferent and careless and they were not desirable for Canada."²⁸ Therefore not only did white settlers who lived among African Americans in Oklahoma see them as undesirable, but the Canadian Department of Immigration did not view the immigrants as the type of American farmers that they desired for Western Canada.

²⁵ C.J. Broughton to W.D. Scott, 20 October 1908, IBR, RG76-192-72552-1.

²⁶ W.V. Bennett to W.D. Scott, 13 January 1910, IBR, RG76-192-72552-2.

²⁷ Troper, Only Farmers Need Apply, 134-135.

²⁸ W.J. White to Frank Oliver, 14 September 1910, IBR, RG76-192-72552-2.

The Canadian Department of Immigration Confronts African American Migration

The men in the Canadian Department of Immigration who implemented the immigration policy in the early twentieth century agreed on the type of immigrants that they wanted in Western Canada: easily assimilated, white, British, European, or American farmers. Officials did not want black migrants, and as historian Sarah-Jane Mathieu made clear, many politicians and immigrant officials in Canada ignored the existence of the Eastern Black Canadian population as they attempted to explain the color line as protection against an American invasion, even as they insisted they did not have a color line.²⁹ Historian Mathieu aptly explained how Canadian bureaucrats showed their acceptance of Jim Crow ideology and practices: “By sending agents to the South, hindering the sale of railway fares, subjecting African American settlers to grueling medical examinations, harassing black immigrants after their entry, co-opting celebrated southern African American leaders, and polluting African American newspapers with falsified accounts, the Laurier administration...gave contour to Canada’s color line.”³⁰ In addition, the language in correspondence between immigration officials and agents reveals the extent of their own racism and perception of African Americans. Of course, some of the language was also veiled in an attempt to protect the department and Canadian government from violating their laws that did not allow for exclusion based upon race. In an article titled: “How They Kept Canada Almost Lily White,” Trever Sessing wrote that this was a “backroom effort” and that a “long series of letters exchanged among immigration authorities worried about how to be

²⁹ Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*, 6.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 47.

functionally anti-black without *seeming* anti-black.”³¹ In attempting to find out if letters of inquiry about Western Canada were written by black men, inter-departmental correspondence often used disguised language, such as, “find out from Okmulgee people if all right,” and “find out from the Station Agent or the Postmaster of those towns if these parties are of the kind that we wish; if so, kindly give them the information desired. If they are not of the class that we want pay no attention to their letters.”³² In a letter that W.J. White wrote to J.S. Crawford, the agent in Kansas City, he said the following about his letter: “This is not an official letter, but is for your personal information, and only a suggestion on my part.” His advice towards handling black settler inquiries was that, “While the Department does not care to give instructions in this matter, it would be well for you to advise yourself that they are not a class of people that Canada wishes to have.”³³ Officials in the department could not directly advise their agents to tell African American inquirers that they were not welcomed in Canada, but they “suggested” the directive to their agents, who in turn “suggested” to African Americans that they would not do well in Canada. Therefore, African Americans in Oklahoma received contradictory descriptions about Canada. Family and friends already living in Western Canada sent back reports that the climate was good and that their farms were successful, but Canadian immigration agents told black inquirers that the climate was too cold for them and that they would not find success in Canada because of their race. The Canadian Department of Immigration found that they had to work very hard to counteract the incentives in migrating that Oklahoma black settlers heard about from

³¹ Trevor Sessing, “How They Kept Canada Almost Lily White,” *Saturday Night* 85, No. 9 (1970).

³² W. D. Scott to J.S. Crawford, 5 November 1910 and L.M. Fortier to J.S. Crawford, 6 November 1910 IBR, RG76-192-72552-2.

³³ W.J. White to J.S. Crawford, 12 April 1909, IBR, RG76-192-72552-1.

their family and friends, and that they read in newspapers meant to encourage the migration of white settlers.

Restriction of African Americans was mostly acquired through administrative directives within the immigration department, and with such a massive campaign and string of offices located in the United States, the department left a significant trail of correspondence that reflects the goals, and misunderstandings, within the department related to black migration. In W.D. Scott's report on "Immigration and Population" in 1914, he wrote that the department operated sixteen regular offices in the United States, and that each office was in charge of circulating immigration propaganda throughout the year. Offices printed articles in about five thousand newspapers, circulated pamphlets, and set-up exhibitions.³⁴ Located in U.S. cities including Detroit, Spokane, Kansas City, Milwaukee, St. Paul, Omaha, Toledo, Chicago, Great Falls, Indianapolis, Boston, and Pittsburgh, agents kept in constant contact with their superiors.³⁵ Although correspondence of the immigration department reflects some black interest in Canada from places like Chicago and Omaha, much of the correspondence related to African American migration came from the Kansas City office, which was in charge of migration from Oklahoma to Western Canada.

For example, in March of 1910, J. Bruce Walker, the Commissioner of Immigration in Winnipeg wrote to W. D. Scott that J.S. Crawford, the agent in Kansas City, had issued numerous African Americans settler certificates. The department issued settler certificates to immigrants intending to settle on homesteads in Western Canada that included a reduced railway fare to help migrants in their move. Walker urged Scott to tell Crawford to stop issuing

³⁴ Shortt and Doughty, *Canada and Its Provinces*, 586.

³⁵ United States Immigration Commission, *The Immigration Situation in Canada*, 29.

certificates to African Americans because reports from the districts around Edmonton, Alberta, where black migrants from Oklahoma were settling, gave Walker the impression that black settlers:“ are extremely poor, some of them destitute, have no means to go farming, are huddling together in large numbers, they have generally very large families, have little or nothing to clothe or maintain themselves with, and are altogether, in my judgment, not such a class of persons as we ought to encourage to enter the country.”³⁶ Scott forwarded Walker’s letter to Crawford, telling him to “take immediate measures to check this class of immigration.”³⁷ However, in Crawford’s response to Scott, he denied any responsibility for undesirable black migrants entering Canada, stating: “I am not able to discriminate as to letters. When I have known of colored parties applying I have declined to forward literature...I know of no way except to draw the colored line to stop them going as any other people.” Crawford then added, “Whether they receive the certificates or not they are going just the same.”³⁸ This line of correspondence highlighted the difficulty of agents in U.S. cities in attempting to balance the Canadian law that no group of people could be denied entry based upon race, with the preference of the department to essentially bar people based upon race. In attempting to satisfy his superiors by not sending literature to black residents in Oklahoma, or issuing certificates, Crawford took Scott’s suggestion to ask postmasters whether inquirers were white or black, if the letter-writer did not directly state his color. Although some postmasters responded with “Nigger” and “Black as hell,” at least one postmaster responded, “Postmasters are not allowed to furnish information

³⁶ J. Bruce Walker to W.D. Scott, 14 March 1910, IBR, RG76-192-72552-2.

³⁷ W.D. Scott to J.S. Crawford, 22 March 1910, IBR, RG76-192-72552-2.

³⁸ J.S. Crawford to W.D. Scott, 26 March 1910, IBR, RG76-192-72552-2.

concerning patrons of this office.”³⁹ Crawford forwarded the letters onto Scott in order to prove that he was fulfilling his job in not encouraging black migration.

Despite his declarations that he tried to curb black migration, J.S. Crawford was in trouble with his immigration department. According to W.J. White, he had originally verbally instructed Crawford to stop issuing certificates to black Americans in 1909. When White visited Oklahoma in September of 1910, he complained to Frank Oliver that Crawford was still issuing settler certificates to African Americans.⁴⁰ This was the same complaint that Walker and Scott had discussed previously, in March of 1910. Although the correspondence of the department does not directly state that Crawford was transferred to another office because of his role in the black migration, it is clear that he was removed from the Kansas City office because of these complaints. On November 8, 1910, White wrote to Crawford to inform him that “it has been decided that you shall take charge of the work in New York State for the Immigration Branch, with headquarters at Syracuse, N.Y.”⁴¹ There were very few African Americans applying for settler certificates in the Syracuse branch office. In his defense, Crawford wrote to Oliver saying that if it was not for him, thousands of African Americans would already have migrated to Western Canada and that he would be happy to explain the situation in Oklahoma because White had wrongfully blamed him in his report.⁴² White wrote back to Crawford at the end of December with Oliver’s final decision: “The Minister has again been seen in your behalf and he advises that he cannot change his instructions, and therefore it will be necessary for you to make

³⁹ J.S. Crawford letters dated 11 November 1910, 20 December 1910, and 9 January 1911, IBR, RG76-192-72552-2.

⁴⁰ W.J. White to Frank Oliver, 14 September 1910, IBR, C-7298 RG76-142-33919-6.

⁴¹ W.J. White to J.S. Crawford, 8 November, 1910, IBR, C-7298 RG76-142-33919-6.

⁴² J.S. Crawford to Frank Oliver, 2 December, 1910, IBR, RG76-192-72552-2.

immediate arrangements for your transfer to Syracuse, N.Y.”⁴³ W.H. Rogers, who had formerly worked in the Indianapolis office, took over the Kansas City office. Although it did Crawford little good, Rogers wrote a letter to W.D. Scott in April of 1911 that essentially verified the difficult position that the agent in Kansas City was placed in concerning black migration. Rogers identified the work of the Kansas City office as some of the most important in the United States, but “because of its ‘Negro Problem’ the most difficult to manage.”⁴⁴ Rogers went on to state that black settlers in Oklahoma had the experience and finances to go to Western Canada, which made it problematic for him to navigate the politics of this situation. Additionally, the office was very busy in terms of total number of interested people wanting to go to Canada, and therefore because of these joint conditions, Rogers demanded: “I now realize the character of the work in this field, and especially the unpleasant feature of playing the part of buffer between the Department and the Negro movement, I have decided to give myself to this task, on condition that my expenses at Headquarters are met, or that my salary be raised \$30.00 per month.”⁴⁵

The Department of Immigration also sent replies back to African Americans in Oklahoma who expressed interest in Western Canada. Agents sent letters of inquiry by African Americans to their superiors, and the Superintendent or his office sent replies back, discouraging them from migrating to Western Canada. The Department sent these letters as early as 1899, but the number proliferated in 1910 and 1911, when many black settlers in Oklahoma expressed a more urgent interest in migrating after the passing of Jim Crow laws. The standard reply in every letter included the paragraph, or something similar to: “I am not sure whether it will interest you or not

⁴³ W.J. White to J.S. Crawford, 30 December 1910, IBR, C-7298 RG76-142-33919-6.

⁴⁴ W.H. Rogers to W.D. Scott, 6 April 1911, IBR, C-7314 RG76-157-40043-3.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

but I may state that a number of coloured people have been going from your district lately to Western Canada, and it is not considered that they are a class of colonists who will be likely to do well in our country.”⁴⁶ L.M. Fortier, the Deputy Superintendent in the Department of Immigration, often added onto the statement, “I merely mention this in passing in case the matter may have some bearing upon your decision.”⁴⁷ Clearly, Fortier attempted to distance himself from possible allegations of discrimination by cloaking his recommendation as a suggestion, not to be mistaken with a direct order not to migrate. Officials also wanted Black Oklahomans to understand that the admittance of certain individuals did not mean all would be welcomed. When Mrs. Robert Shumake asked the department if she would have any problem joining her husband in Western Canada who had lived there for two years, Fortier replied that although she would not encounter any issues in joining her husband, Canada wanted to make it clear that “the Canadian Government is not seeking the admission to Canada of coloured people, and your case is given more favourable consideration from the fact that your husband is settled upon land in Canada.”⁴⁸ The immigration department hoped that Mrs. Shumake would pass on such information to possible migrants who might be under the impression that Canada welcomed African Americans since she would not face any trouble in crossing the border.

Numerous letters of reply from the Department of Immigration referred to the climate of Western Canada in deterring black migrants from settling in places like Saskatchewan and Alberta. Statements read, “the Canadian Government is not seeking immigration to this country of coloured people as it does not believe that the climate and other conditions here are

⁴⁶ W.D. Scott to F. Glenn, 22 September 1910, IBR, RG76-192-72552-2.

⁴⁷ L.M. Fortier to W.A. Grump, 3 November 1910, IBR, RG76-192-72552-2.

⁴⁸ L.M. Fortier to Mrs. Robert Shumake, 16 March 1911 in response to Mrs. Robert Shumake to Secretary of the Interior, 3 March 1911, IBR, RG76-192-72552-4.

favorable,” and “the climate and other conditions here will not likely be found congenial and we do not want to encourage coloured people in the United States to sell out only to meet with disappointment in their endeavor to settle in Canada.”⁴⁹ In explaining Canada’s reluctance in admitting black migrants, Fortier explained to a St. Paul land company that African Americans would not enjoy the climate of the Prairies: “Canada has already quite a negro population and these are found almost entirely in the milder sections of the country. They do not take up farming in Western Canada and we infer from this...that the West is not congenial because of its climate and other conditions.”⁵⁰ At least one reply to a possible migrant by F.C. Blair, the Secretary of the Department of Immigration, actually attempted to say that black migrants did not seem to possess agricultural tendencies since those in the east did not migrate west to settle and farm the western lands.⁵¹ Ironic, since many African Americans in the United States were chiefly employed in agriculture.

These tactics also received backlash from black residents in both Canada and the United States, as well as from white residents in eastern Canada. Immigration records included a few examples of letters that the department received from various individuals. A black writer from Alberta wrote to the immigration department concerning their claims about the weather: “You or any other white man who claims to be looking out for the negroes health is a Point Blank liar, for the negro stands this weather just as well as any one else...it is simply that the scum of the earth whites are wanted to take up this land, you and all of your class.”⁵² The secretary of the Civic

⁴⁹ F.C. Blair to M.M. Rodgers, 3 March 1911, IBR, RG76-192-72552-2 and L.M. Fortier to J.C. Brown, 14 March 1911, IBR, RG76-192-72552-4.

⁵⁰ L.M. Fortier to Business Manager of Luse Land Company & Development Co., 14 March 1911, IBR, RG76-192-72552-4.

⁵¹ F.C. Blair to Makins, 4 April 1911, IBR, RG76-192-72552-4.

⁵² Letter to W.J. White, 21 June 1911, IBR, RG76-192-72552-4.

Civility League in St. Paul, Minnesota also wrote the department in order to defend his race against black stereotypes, stating that, “Yes, we have the worthless negroes among us; we have the shiftless negroes, but can we not look around us and see other nationalities with the same classes of people among them?”⁵³ Furthermore, he went on to claim that the groups of African Americans wanting to migrate to Canada were indeed the types of settlers that the immigration department was looking for: Christians and law-abiding citizens.⁵⁴ Finally, an especially angry letter from an eastern resident living in New Brunswick, who had political ties to the black community, condemned the department’s tactics as non-Canadian: “such actions...are not only highly insulting to colored people, but they certainly look like downright Southern-cracker tactics or hidebound colorphobia.”⁵⁵

In restricting the migration of African Americans to Canada, the Department of Immigration convinced the Canadian Pacific Railway to work with them in not promoting the black migration. As previously mentioned, both the immigration department and the CPR actively worked to promote American migration to Western Canada, and sold tracts of land in the provinces. Since 1886, the completion of the CPR railroad defined Canada as a modern, industrial nation on the rise. The railroad not only connected the nation from one ocean to another, but also represented white goals of Canada as the railroad formed a very important part of the national vision of Canada.⁵⁶ The CPR, as part of the national vision and promoter of

⁵³ John T. Richards to Frank Oliver, 27 September 1911, IBR, RG76-192-72552-4.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ James Glass to Frank Oliver, 8 April 1911, IBR, RG76-192-72552-4.

⁵⁶ Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*, 3-4.

settlement in Western Canada, held a responsibility with the immigration department to ensure that only desirable immigrants entered the western provinces.

In an agreement with the immigration department, the CPR agreed to exclude African Americans from any organized tours of Western Canada, to report any government agents encouraging black migration, and to stop issuing reduced railroad rates to African Americans, even if they were eligible settlers according to Canadian immigration laws.⁵⁷ The CPR could not refuse African Americans the settler's rate if they produced a certificate from a Canadian agent, but as Fortier noted, it was unlikely that they could produce such certificates since agents were not supposed to be issuing certificates to Black Americans, if possible.⁵⁸

Historian Harold Troper also pointed to the influence of the Southern Pacific Railway in Oklahoma in encouraging "black land owners to sell their property and migrate, potentially to Canada, in order to soothe racial anxieties of white settlers moving into eastern Oklahoma."⁵⁹ W.J. White informed numerous US railroads that the Canadian Department of Immigration did not want thousands of black migrants transported to Western Canada; and to guarantee that US railroads did not encourage such migration for their own profit, the immigration department advised the railroads that they would be responsible for carrying any excluded people back to their former homes, at the railroad's cost.⁶⁰ Canada defined the responsibility of transportation companies in the Immigration Acts, stating that, "Every immigrant...brought to Canada by a transportation company and rejected by the Board of Inquiry or officer in charge shall, if practicable, be sent back to the place whence he came...The cost of his maintenance, while being

⁵⁷ Troper, *Only Farmers Need Apply*, 144.

⁵⁸ L.M. Fortier to W.W. Cory, 14 March 1911, IBR, RG76-192-72552-4.

⁵⁹ Troper, *Only Farmers Need Apply*, 53.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 144.

detained at any immigrant station after having been rejected, as well as the cost of his return, shall be paid by such transportation company.”⁶¹ The possible cost of transporting thousands of passengers for free deterred many U.S. railroads from promoting black migration to Western Canada, or providing reduced rates for African American passengers. As White told W.D. Scott, “The railroads in the South...will not take any chances in having a large number of them [African Americans] rejected and then have to haul them back free.”⁶²

Immigrants who did make it to the U.S.-Canadian border faced inspections at border entry points, and the Canadian Department of Immigration subjected African Americans to rigorous inspections in an attempt to deny the entry of as many people as possible. The department instituted formal inspections at border entry points beginning April 1, 1908. The goal of the border inspection points along the U.S.-Canadian border was primarily to keep undesirable immigrants from entering Canada. Once allowed into Canada, the deportation of immigrants was much more tedious work for immigration officials. In a circular to boundary inspectors in October of 1910, the Superintendent of Immigration stated that “there must be no attempt to deport from Canada supposed citizens of the United States until instructions so to do are received from him,” and that the United States Immigration Commissioner in Montreal would then be notified and “an investigation made as to the status of the proposed deport in regard to United States citizenship, which being verified, permission is given for the deportation to take place.”⁶³ Thus, it was much more efficient to bar American immigrants who were suspected of being undesirable at the border. Additionally, the department was aware that immigrants who were

⁶¹ United States Immigration Commission, *The Immigration Situation in Canada*, 116.

⁶² W.J. White to W.D. Scott, 28 January 1912, IBR, RG76-192-72552-5.

⁶³ Circular from W.D. Scott to Immigration Department, 4 October 1910, IBR, C-10429 RG76-497-774004-2.

excluded at one border entry point might attempt to enter at another point. Therefore, the department also issued supplies of postal cards to border offices; the department instructed border officials to fill out the cards when they rejected an undesirable immigrant and then send these to each border inspection point that the rejected immigrant might try to enter through.⁶⁴

Although all immigrants who crossed the border had to complete medical exams and questions about their character and future settlement plans, inspectors had the ability to apply regulations especially harshly to African Americans. As Frank Oliver intended with the vague language in the Immigration Acts of 1906 and 1910, officials could interpret the law and regulations either strictly or laxly, dependent upon the desirability of the immigrant in question.⁶⁵ The 1910 Act included a provision passed by the Privy Council in 1908 that required that all migrants to possess at least \$25 on landing in Canada, but the Act also allowed border agents to set fiscal requirements for migrants based upon race, occupation, or destination, and as Mathieu suggested: “Border agents could...arbitrarily require that black migrants possess \$500 at the time of entry but wave in a white American migrant with only \$25.”⁶⁶ After the passing of the 1908 provision, a department circular stated the reasons for the \$25 requirement. The circular stated that the fee was not universal but rather was to ensure that a migrant, who was not going to friends or family, had the financial means to support themselves. Furthermore, the circular suggested that the regulation was a tool of immigration officers that provided them a means to exclude people whom they deemed as undesirable.⁶⁷ However, the requirement of \$25 was

⁶⁴ Circular from W.D. Scott to Border Inspectors , 23 June 1910, IBR, C-10429 RG76-497-774004-2.

⁶⁵ Troper, *Only Farmers Need Apply*, 140-141.

⁶⁶ Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*, 33.

⁶⁷ Circular from W.D. Scott to Department of Immigration, 8 May 1908, IBR, C-10246 RG76-335-350171-

further clarified in April of 1910, when the Canadian government passed an Order-in-Council concerning this amount. At that point, single immigrants were required to carry \$25, but the same requirement was made for the head of families and additional family members over the age of 18. And, heads of families were also required to carry \$12.50 for those between the ages of 5 and 18. Additionally, migrants traveling between November 1st and the end of February were required to double the previous amounts for a family, or in the case of a single migrant, carry at least \$50. These kinds of changes caused confusion and problems for migrants. One example of an African American migrant who encountered issues because of these changes was Martha Murphy, who migrated in order to marry Jefferson Edwards. Martha arrived in Edmonton in November of 1910 and was unaware that she arrived in the timeframe during which she needed to possess \$50. She was forced to wait one week in Edmonton until Jefferson could get the full amount of money to her.⁶⁸

Medical examiners at the border entries possessed the greatest potential in denying entry to black migrants as immigration regulations gave doctors the power to deny migrants based only on their inspections and recommendations. In Amy Fairchild's work on American immigrant medical inspection, she also discussed the Canadian philosophy. Fairchild believed that while the Canadian philosophy of immigration control was similar to the United States', it emphasized selection over discipline. Canadians were very concerned about "degeneration" in their society, but they did not directly link degeneration to the genetic makeup of immigrants. Rather, Canadians were more likely to link this degeneration to "behaviors, habits, and the social and

⁶⁸ Stewart Grow, "The Blacks of Amber Valley: Negro Pioneering in Northern Alberta," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 6, no. 1-2 (1974): 23.

economic condition of arriving immigrants.”⁶⁹ This meant that immigration officials relied on asking themselves if, or how, an immigrant would be beneficial to Canada. Between 1902 and 1911, the number of total rejected migrants arriving in Canada was .46 percent, but of that percentage, 40 percent were rejected for medical reasons.⁷⁰ Still, because of stereotypes, certain immigrant racial and ethnic groups were considered to represent more of a degenerate threat to Canadian society than others, and therefore, more likely to be rejected.

W. D. Scott told medical examiners that Canada required some nationalities to pass stricter regulations than others. Additionally, the immigration department employed one of the leading Canadian eugenicists, Dr. Peter H. Bryce, as the chief medical officer and supervisor of all doctors employed within the immigration department. In calling for the medical inspections at the border in 1908, Bryce proclaimed that: “At all points along the boundary the unemployed, not infrequently of an undesirable class physically, mentally and morally, have entered Canada, and some have found their way into charitable institutions and others into our common jails.”⁷¹ It was also possible that medical officers actually received a bonus of five dollars for every black immigrant whom they rejected at the border.⁷² In 1936, the assistant deputy minister in the immigration department stated that one of the methods to deter the black migration was to “pay doctors at certain ports of entry, notably Emerson and North Portal, a fee for examining these prospective migrants,” and he went on to state that “the fee, I think was paid on rejections

⁶⁹ Amy L. Fairchild, *Science at the Borders: Immigrant Medical Inspection and the Shaping of the Modern Industrial Labor Force* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 146.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Alan Sears, “Immigration Controls as Social Policy: The Case of Canadian Medical Inspection 1900-1920,” *Studies in Political Economy* Vol. 33 (Autumn 1990): 101.

⁷² Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*, 42.

only.”⁷³ Still, although the power of the medical officers in the immigration department was well-documented, the records of the medical officers and these inspections for the border entry points have either disappeared or remain buried. In his report, “The Immigration Situation in Canada,” U.S. congressman William P. Dillingham, a Republican from Vermont, contrasted the authority of medical officers who served the departments of immigration in both the United States and Canada. His report showed that Canadian medical officers served in both administrative and professional roles because they had the authority to deny immigrants based strictly on the inspections that they conducted.⁷⁴ However, even with rigid medical examinations, Canadian inspectors found it difficult to bar the hundreds of healthy black immigrants who attempted to cross the border.⁷⁵

Beginning in 1910, the immigration department required border officials to list within their border records why an immigrant was rejected at the border. During the period in which most black migrants entered Canada, in 1910 and 1911, many of the listed rejections were cited with “P.C. 924” or “P.C. 920.” These referred to the Privy Council provisions of the requirement of \$25 and continuous journey, respectively.⁷⁶ As mentioned previously, the border records do not seem to be complete and some are hard to read. For black immigrants who entered Canada, the agents listed “colored” under their country of birth, in addition to sometimes including “A” or “U.S.” Some examples of the numbers of rejected immigrants indicated that black Americans were likely more harshly scrutinized than many other immigrants crossing the border. For the list

⁷³ Chongo Mundende, “The Undesirable Oklahomans: Black Immigration to Western Canada,” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 76 (Fall 1998): 292.

⁷⁴ United States Immigration Commission, *The Immigration Situation in Canada*, 42.

⁷⁵ R. Bruce Shepard, “Diplomatic Racism, Canadian Government, and Black Migration From Oklahoma, 1905-1912,” *Great Plains Quarterly* (Winter 1983): 7.

⁷⁶ W.D. Scott to W.J. Corbett, 26 May 1910, IBR, C-10429 RG76-497-774004-2.

of rejected immigrants in June of 1910 at the border point of Emerson, Manitoba, six out of eight rejections were people of color. The listed reason for rejection was “P.C. 924;” so, they did not possess the required \$25. On the rejection list for Emerson in November of 1910, five groups of people were listed as rejected. The rejected included a cook from Jamaica who was rejected on the grounds of the continuous journey provision, and a black family of six who were rejected because they failed to pass the medical inspection. Interestingly, both of these rejections had an additional remark made in their file: “colored.” The other rejections did not state race or ethnicity.⁷⁷ Although these migrants might have been excluded on legitimate grounds, the high representation of black individuals and families in these rejection lists in relation to the overall volume of black migrants attempting to enter Canada, pointed to a very possible harsher implementation of the border crossing requirements for black migrants than non-black migrants.

When thirty-four black immigrants arrived in Edmonton, Alberta from Oklahoma in December of 1910, through the entry point of White Rock, near Vancouver, immigration officials sent numerous messages throughout their department to determine why the migrants chose to go through Vancouver and how they passed strict medical exams. When the Department of Immigration agent in Edmonton, W.J. Webster, told W.J. White that each migrant family claimed to have between 300 and 800 dollars, immigration officials were still not satisfied that the immigrants should be allowed to stay in Canada.⁷⁸ W.D. Scott told Webster: “If you can discover any reason why any of the thirty-four from Oklahoma should be deported take action. If you are suspicious that there are any who would not come up to the physical qualification call in

⁷⁷ Canadian Department of Immigration and Colonization: Border Entry Records, 1908-1918 and 1925-1935 (RG 76 C5a). Digitized Microfilm. Reel T-5475.

⁷⁸ W.J. Webster to W.J. White, 4 January 1911, IBR, RG76-192-72552-2.

City Health officer to examine.”⁷⁹ Although border inspectors passed the group of African Americans into Canada, officials still contemplated deportation; possible expulsion clearly based upon racial discrimination cloaked in medical reasoning. However, J.H. MacGill, the agent in Vancouver, assured the immigration department that all of the migrants were “remarkably healthy and prosperous looking,” and that “apart from their colour there was absolutely no doubt in my own mind that they were a very promising lot of immigrants.” MacGill went on to state that although he had considered drawing the color line, he had no clear instructions on how to do so, and therefore was left with little action other than to admit the migrants.⁸⁰ This example clearly demonstrated the problem that medical and immigration officials faced in denying entrance to healthy black migrants, and that the vagueness in the language of immigration policy that allowed the department to be flexible in their interpretations of desirable and undesirable immigrants, also caused confusion within the department itself in how to legally exclude certain categories of undesirable immigrants.

In March of 1911, the immigration department once again faced a crisis along the border when 125 African Americans were stopped in Emerson, Manitoba. As the *Edmonton Capital* reported, “if any plausible excuse other than the color line can be found for detaining the party it will be done.”⁸¹ And, in hopes of forcing the group to turn back towards Oklahoma, the department implemented extremely rigorous medical exams. Although Walker, the Commissioner of Immigration in Winnipeg, told W.D. Scott that 22 migrants were rejected by

⁷⁹ W.D. Scott to W.J. Webster, 5 January 1911, IBR, RG76-192-72552-2.

⁸⁰ J.H. MacGill to W.D. Scott, 17 January 1911, IBR, RG76-192-72552-2.

⁸¹ “Negroes Stopped at Boundary Line,” *Edmonton Capital*, March 21, 1911.

medical officers, the rest were found to be “of good physique and have the necessary funds.”⁸²

Most black migrants who traveled to Canada passed the medical exams and officials were forced to allow the immigrants to stay in Canada. However, the implementation of such harsh exams for African Americans represented the views of many Canadians that Western Canada was not intended for black settlement and served to deter many from leaving their homes in Oklahoma.

The Canadian Department of Immigration communicated extensively within its ranks over their concern of black immigration into Western Canada. Racial beliefs of individuals within the department contributed to their readiness to label African Americans in Oklahoma as “undesirable,” and to discuss the best ways in which to unofficially bar black migrants from entering Canada. Officials in the department knew that they could not directly bar black migrants because the national immigration policies did not draw a color line, but they also knew that by labeling African Americans as “undesirable,” they could depict them as the type of migrants that Canadians did not want: beggars, vagrants, and sickly people. However, interdepartmental communication reflected that the vague language of the Immigration Acts in describing undesirables that allowed the department to discriminate against certain groups also caused confusion within the department in how to legally exclude black migrants if they met cash and medical requirements. Department officials and agents knew that they were supposed to exclude black migrants, but they were not entirely sure how to fulfill those goals. Therefore, even as the immigration department continued to discriminate, they could never directly state that Black Americans were denied entrance based upon race; they could dissuade Black Americans from migrating because of race, but if they were denied entrance, they had to cloak the reasons in medical or monetary terms of an “undesirable.” The actions of the Canadian Department of

⁸² J.B.Walker to W.D. Scott, 23 March 1911, IBR, RG76-192-72552-4 and “Negro Immigrants Subjected to Rigorous Medical Examination,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, March 22, 1911.

Immigration shows how a department within one national government can directly impact the citizens of another government when a department actively circumvents national policies.

Frank Oliver Defends the Department of Immigration in the House of Commons

Frank Oliver designed the Immigration Act of 1906, and with its passing, immigrants faced greater restrictions in Canada, and Parliament gave the Minister of the Interior, Frank Oliver, more discretionary power over immigration policy implementation.⁸³ With these increased powers, Oliver and the immigration department could essentially bar African Americans without official directives from Parliament. Although some Liberals in Parliament reminded their party that Canada believed in the British institution of haven for unfortunate men within their borders, the Department of Immigration could discriminate on the basis of race behind official policy.⁸⁴ In a House session, Oliver said:

We want to be in such a position that, should occasion arise, when public policy seems to demand it, we may have the power, on our responsibility as a Government, to exclude people whom we consider undesirable. If this power is given to the Government, then the Government can be held responsible should there be a sudden influx of an undesirable class of people. We cannot tell at what time, or under what circumstances, there may be a sudden movement of people from one part of the world or another, and we want to be in a position to check it, should public policy demand such an action.⁸⁵

Unfortunately, this exclusionary power allowed the Department of Immigration to feel confident in telling African Americans that they were not wanted in Canada, although they could not say that Canada directly barred black migrants from crossing the border. Vague language in describing “undesirables” gave the immigration department more power in denying entry to

⁸³ Hollihan, “ ‘A Brake upon the wheel,’ ”: 101.

⁸⁴ Anderson, *Canadian Liberalism*, 72-73.

⁸⁵ As quoted by W. D. Scott in: Shortt and Doughty, *Canada and Its Provinces*, 573-574.

people of different races based upon the more politically-acceptable term of undesirable. But, such language also caused confusion in Parliament over the implementation of Canadian immigration policies. Despite passing the Acts, many in Parliament did not seem to understand how the laws actually worked, and they received many questions from Canadians and African Americans over black exclusion.

Records of the “House of Commons Debates” show the discussion over black migration within the Canadian Parliament. A.H. Clarke of South Essex, Ontario called attention to a newspaper article in the *Canadian Press Despatch* that explained the movement of immigration officers to Emerson, Manitoba in March of 1911, intending to stop the entrance of the 165 black migrants from Oklahoma. Clarke did not agree with black exclusion as he stated in a session on March 22, 1911: “If it is correct that the officers of this government have taken the steps to prevent the entrance into this country of these people on account of their colour, then I think it will require a very great deal of explanation from the department to justify it.”⁸⁶ Oliver replied that statements such as those in the *Canadian Press Despatch* were false and that the immigration department did not draw the color line, however, he went on to clarify:

The immigration policy of Canada to-day is restricted, exclusive, and selective as compared with the former policy of indiscriminate immigration. We have exclusion officers stationed along the boundary between Canada and the United States and at our ocean ports, and under the laws and the regulations authorized by them, the exclusion officers take measures to prevent the entry of all persons who may be considered undesirable under our law, without any distinction of race, colour, or previous condition of servitude.⁸⁷

However, when asked about the term undesirable, Oliver admitted that admission or exclusion of an immigrant often depended upon either a strict or lax interpretation of the law, and whether a

⁸⁶ Canadian Parliament, *House of Commons Debates*, 11th Parliament, 3rd Session: Vol. 3 (1911): 5911.

⁸⁷ Canadian Parliament, *House of Commons Debates*, 11th Parliament, 3rd Session: Vol. 3 (1911): 5911.

particular immigrant was viewed as a member of a more desirable or less desirable class of immigrants.⁸⁸ This confession meant that immigration officials would apply restrictions more firmly to classes of immigrants that they deemed undesirable, such as African Americans. Members of Parliament were clearly perplexed over the situation, as one member declared: “I cannot tell for the life of me whether these coloured people are to be allowed to come in or not.”⁸⁹

Conservative and Liberal members from areas of Canada who represented Black Canadians particularly opposed drawing the color line. These members also opposed the possibility of an expensive head tax placed on African Americans, like the Chinese head tax. Members who opposed discriminating against African Americans displayed their support for black migrants, such as Liberal McCoig of West Kent: “I would regret deeply if this government of which I am so proud and which I am so glad to support should in any way discriminate against coloured people, especially when we have amongst us men of that race who are doing their share to build up this Dominion.”⁹⁰ When conversations concerning black migration commenced again on March 23, members once again questioned Oliver about desirable immigrants and the migrants who immigration officials stopped in Emerson, at the border. Members stated that all of the migrants said that they were migrating to Western Canada to farm; just the type of migrants that Canada sought. However, Oliver distanced himself from the event, saying that he heard immigration officials allowed all of the migrants in, and that he, personally, did not know more

⁸⁸ Ibid, 5912.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 5913.

⁹⁰ Canadian Parliament, *House of Commons Debates*, 11th Parliament, 3rd Session: Vol. 4 (1911): 5944.

about the incident. He defended any black exclusion examples by the immigration department as based on restrictions besides color, namely, medical and monetary restrictions.⁹¹

When Parliament turned to the discussion of black migration again, on April 3rd, Conservative William Thoburn asked the government, “If they think it in the interests of Canada that we should have negro colonization in our Canadian Northwest? Would it not be preferable to preserve for the sons of Canada the lands they propose to give to niggers?”⁹² Thoburn’s question was directed toward Oliver, in which he answered that the government did not explicitly bar African Americans from Canada because Parliament had not authorized the Interior to exclude any specific races. And, Oliver went on to remind Parliament of the differences between legislation and administration. It was up to Parliament to pass laws and decide how to handle the issue of black migration, although Oliver himself had created both the Immigration Acts of 1906 and 1910.⁹³ With the passing of these Acts, especially the Act of 1910, Oliver ensured that his immigration branch could discriminate against African Americans and hide their methods behind the language of “undesirables.” Parliament was confused about the immigration laws that they had passed, and in the absence of explicit language of exclusion of a racial group, the immigration department continued unofficially excluding black migrants through their methods of discouragement and inspections. And, the immigration department received encouragement from members of Parliament who represented settlers in the West, as one member declared: “I rose principally to protest against the immigration of negroes into western Canada. We, with British Columbia, wish to see a white west. We do not wish that kind

⁹¹ Canadian Parliament, *House of Commons Debates*, 11th Parliament, 3rd Session: Vol. 4 (1911): 5946-5947.

⁹² Canadian Parliament, *House of Commons Debates*, 11th Parliament, 3rd Session: Vol. 4 (1911): 6524. The question of black migration divided Parliament, with Conservatives and Liberals on both sides of the argument.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 6524 and 6526.

of immigrants coming into western Canada.”⁹⁴ Therefore, even Parliament disagreed on how the immigration department should implement immigration policies, and both members of Parliament and officials in the immigration department questioned how to interpret their immigration law in response to African American migration.

Conclusions

Unfortunately for African Americans, the Canadian Department of Immigration did not believe that black migrants were desirable immigrants, and implemented numerous resources to dissuade them from migrating from Oklahoma. From telling African Americans about the cold climate of Western Canada and calling black migrants “undesirables,” to sending agents to Oklahoma to discourage migration, the immigration department worked hard to keep Western Canada white. Although no law officially barred African Americans from Canada, the Immigration Acts of 1906 and 1910 allowed the department to discourage black migration while officially stating that Canada did not bar African Americans from crossing the border. The crisis of black migration to Western Canada shows how individual officials within a bureaucratic system implemented their own immigration policies that differed from national policy; they interpreted a color line in an immigration policy that denied exclusion based upon race. And, it was the immigration department who had the power of communication with black settlers in Oklahoma that allowed them to circulate their own interpretation and implementation of national Canadian immigration policies. This circulation and implementation of immigration department goals and directives represented a transnational flow of information that worked against the black migration. Superiors within the department kept in close contact with their agents working

⁹⁴ Canadian Parliament, *House of Commons Debates*, 11th Parliament, 3rd Session: Vol. 5 (1911): 8126.

in the United States, as represented by the circular motion of correspondence within the immigration files.

CHAPTER 5

SOUTHERN PREJUDICE IN WESTERN CANADA: WHITE SETTLERS RESPOND TO BLACK MIGRATION

A short article that appeared in the *Edmonton Bulletin* in 1907 reflected the attitude in Western Canada towards black migrants before the larger migration of African Americans began their journeys into Canada. The article titled, “Talked Lynching: Brutal Assault Made by Calgary Negro on Young German Girl,” referred to Thomas Rife as a “big husky negro,” and a “colored cowpuncher” who was employed by a local livery. Apparently one man tried to form a lynch mob but stated that he was unsuccessful because he “could not find enough Americans to join.” Although short, this article displayed the stereotype of the large black male who was a sexual predator of young white girls; and it also showed the sentiment that whites who lynched African Americans were usually Americans.¹

Euro-Canadians, Euro-Americans, and Europeans who lived in Western Canada objected to black immigration based upon racial prejudice and the belief in discriminatory stereotypes of African Americans. This chapter examines the responses to black migration by white Canadians and white settlers from Europe and the United States who also migrated to Western Canada. These white settlers included a number of Europeans and Canadians from the East, but many protestors were white Americans who resettled in the Canadian West, bringing with them the racial attitudes and stereotypes of African Americans from places like the American South. Historian Bruce Shepard accurately described the mood in Western Canada when he stated:

The Canadian reaction to the black immigrants was plain racism. The dominant groups who settled on the Canadian Plains had well-developed views of blacks. This prejudice

¹ “Talked Lynching: Brutal Assault Made by Calgary Negro on Young German Girl,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, May 6, 1907. Another article referring to the same incident said that Rife was given a life sentence for rape and the jury was only out for seven minutes: “Life Sentence for Rape,” *Strathcona Evening Chronicle*, June 5, 1907.

was confirmed, and transmitted throughout the developing society, by the racist portrayal of blacks in prairie newspapers. Blacks were the butt of jokes and cartoons which regularly appeared in western journals. Blacks were also negatively pictured in numerous advertisements. Minstrel shows were very popular at the time, and were frequently advertised.²

These white migrants overwhelmingly called for the exclusion of black Americans and based their beliefs for exclusion in racial ideology that portrayed African Americans as inferior, lazy, likely to become wards of the state, and in particular, described black males as threats to white women. Although in recent decades, Canadians have begun to address the racism of their past, there is still very little scholarship on the effects of American racial ideology on the Canadian consciousness in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Therefore, this particular chapter addresses a neglected dimension of racial and sexual ideological transfer between the United States and Canada. It examines the flow of information from the American South and Oklahoma into Western Canada that informed the prejudice of settlers. This network of racist beliefs, discrimination, and violence mirrored the transnational flow of African Americans into Western Canada. In particular, white settlers sought to protect white womanhood from the perceived threats of black migration. These fears were based upon stereotypes of the rape of white women by black men in the American South, which caused white settlers in Western Canada to fear that such actions could take place in Alberta and Saskatchewan.³

Works such as Bruce Shepard's *Deemed Unsuitable* and Barrington Walker's edited volume, *The History of Immigration and Racism in Canada: Essential Readings* established the

² R. Bruce Shepard, "Plain Racism: The Reaction Against Oklahoma Black Immigration to the Canadian Plains," *Prairie Forum* 10, no. 2: 368.

³ The basis, and portions, of this chapter were first written in a conference paper: Rachel Wolters, "Southern Prejudice in Western Canada: Fear of Black Male Sexuality and Protection of White Womanhood," (paper presented at the 2016 SIUC WGSS Conference).

basis of nativism, racism, and anti-immigration sentiments in Canada.⁴ Although African Americans viewed Canada as a haven for fugitive slaves before emancipation, white Canadians did not want a large influx of black Americans. Racism existed for centuries in Canada, as reflected in the treatment of First Nations and Métis peoples, and the backlash to immigrants from China, Japan, and South Asia. However, the possible influx of a large black migration from the United States created a particular anxiety connected to the fear of blackness. And, the migration of white southerners into Western Canada meant that they brought their racial stereotypes and beliefs of black inferiority with them. Sylvia Van Kirk's *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur Trade Society, 1670-1870* and McManus' *The Line Which Separates* showed the importance of white women in settler communities, and how the presence of these women represented eastern society and civilization.⁵ Van Kirk's work, especially, showed the transformation in the Canadian West of marriage partners for Euro-Canadian men: white men first married Native women, then Métis, and finally, turned towards Euro-Canadian women as trade and economic developments stabilized under white control. White settlers in Western Canada then sought to protect this white womanhood in the early twentieth century from the perceived threats of black migration. In particular, stereotypes of the rape of white women by black men in the American South caused white residents in Western Canada to fear that such actions would take place in Alberta and Saskatchewan if thousands of African Americans immigrated to the regions. Scholarship, including Martha Hodes' *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South*, showed the reality of relationships between black

⁴ R. Bruce Shepard, *Deemed Unsuited: Blacks from Oklahoma Move to the Canadian Prairies in Search of Equality in the Early 20th Century Only to Find Racism in their New Home* (Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1997), and Barrington Walker, ed, *The History of Immigration and Racism in Canada: Essential Readings* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., 2008).

⁵ Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983) and McManus, *The Line Which Separates*.

men and white women and how the American South responded to these relations.⁶ W.J. Cash described the fear of black male sexuality in his classic work, *The Mind of the South*, through his analysis of the “rape complex.” Although the probability of rape of white women by black men was rather small, the fear was great, and it was this fear that influenced Southern Jim Crow measures that separated black men from white women.⁷ As this fear proliferated, it was carried West by white migrants, and then north, into Canada. White settlers in Canada feared that a larger population of black settlers would cause an increase in crime, and therefore, lynching in Western Canada.⁸ Scholars have also addressed that lynching occurred in places outside the American South, such as Michael Pfeifer’s edited volume, *Lynching Beyond Dixie: American Mob Violence Outside the South*.⁹ Official statistics of law enforcement recorded no lynchings in Canada, at the same time that hundreds of lynchings occurred in the Jim Crow-era United States. Although crimes and violence occurred in Western Canada, often on the part of Euro-Canadians and Euro-Americans, white settlers believed that a significant migration of black Americans would destroy the image, and myth, of the Canadian West as a lawful and peaceful society.

The importance of newspapers throughout this entire work cannot be understated, but they were especially important in the dissemination of news about Canada in Chapter Two and they were equally important in creating the transnational flow of information and ideas within this chapter. American journalism itself was transformed in the late nineteenth century, when

⁶ Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

⁷ W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941), 114-117.

⁸ Some of this paragraph was previously published in: Rachel Wolters, “As Migrants and As Immigrants: African Americans Search for Land and Liberty in the Great Plains,” *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 35 No. 4 (Fall 2015): 333-355. University of Nebraska Press.

⁹ Michael James Pfeifer, ed, *Lynching Beyond Dixie: American Mob Violence Outside the South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

newspapers became large production with an increased circulation range. These papers addressed politics, but also included a mix of local, regional, and national news that included a focus on many topics such as: “business, crime, accidents, fines, divorce, suicide, labor, education, religion, sports, inventions, disease, weather, books, theater, music, fashion, and recipes.”¹⁰ Gerald Baldasty described this new type of news as a manufactured product; reflecting aspects of the organization producing the paper, along with the vision of its editors.¹¹ Before depicting stories about the acts of violence and threats that black men posed to white settlers, newspaper editors in both the Great Plains region of the United States, and in Canada, depicted Native Americans in disparaging terms. Hugh Reilly determined in his study on frontier newspapers during the Plains Indian Wars that newspapers often sensationalized their reporting and with few exceptions, newspapers treated Native Americans as subhuman.¹² Similarly, Mark Cronlund and Carmen Robertson found that the Canadian press primarily viewed Aboriginals as filled with moral depravity, racially inferior, and as living in a stagnant past.¹³ Therefore, the presses in the Great Plains region and those within Western Canada practiced printing their racial views and sensationalized stories of groups of people whom they viewed as inferior; they were well-prepared to aim this racialized lens of inferiority towards African Americans when they settled in both Oklahoma and Western Canada.

¹⁰ Gerald J. Baldasty, *Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 3.

¹¹ Ibid. Also see: Christopher B. Daly, *Covering America: A Narrative History of a Nation's Journalism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), and David Paul Nord, *Communities of Journalism: A History of American Newspapers and Their Readers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

¹² Hugh J. Reilly, *Bound to Have Blood: Frontier Newspapers and the Plains Indian Wars* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), xv and 134. Also see: David Dary, *Red Blood and Black Ink: Journalism in the Old West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf: 1998).

¹³ Mark Cronlund Anderson and Carmen L. Robertson, *Seeing Red: A History of Natives in Canadian Newspapers* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2011), 7.

It was through newspapers that ideas and fears about black male sexuality spread throughout the American South in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Newspapers also depicted the violence, lynching, and the threat of lynching that black settlers in Oklahoma faced; and, it was through newspapers that Western Canadians read about Black Americans in both the American South and in Oklahoma. Western Canadians' own newspaper stories in the early twentieth century then reflected the impact that such American newspaper stories had on their own communities when Canadian newspapers discussed African Americans in the same language and tone as newspapers in the American South and Oklahoma. These newspaper stories thus contributed to the anxiety and fear that encouraged white settlers in Western Canada to call for the exclusion of African American migrants. The black leader, Kelly Miller, fully understood the impact of newspapers in spreading fear about black men, he said, "Assault by a Negro, actual or alleged, is displayed by the press in the boldest headlines, whereas like offenses by white men are compressed within a half inch space, as part of the ordinary happenings of the day," and "Whenever a Negro is accused of this crime the Associated Press sends the announcement all over the land."¹⁴ Clearly, the black population was fully aware how stereotypes and fears spread across the United States and into Western Canada: through newspapers.

Fears of Black Male Sexuality in the American South

Rape and murder were the leading accusations that led to lynching; however, the allegation of rape of white women by black men gave white men a justification for lynching. Although white males could also face lynching for the crime of rape, lynching was racialized as white Americans believed that African Americans were more violent, more likely to commit

¹⁴ Kelly Miller, *Race Adjustment; Essays on the Negro in America*, (1908), 67-68.

crimes, and less likely to be controlled by judicial courts.¹⁵ And, as historian Cynthia Skove Nevels determined in *Lynching to Belong: Claiming Whiteness Through Racial Violence*, lynching was not only about gender and sexuality in response to black male sexuality, but it was also determined by economics, politics, social repercussions, culture, and religious significance.¹⁶ Black men who either had sex with white women, or were accused of doing so, threatened white women and girls and their respectability. White women were thought to be pure and the image of black males as depraved destroyed the innocence of white women if the two engaged in sexual relations—whether consensual or not.¹⁷ Therefore, it was the duty of white males to protect white women from the sexual aggressiveness of black men, and lynching was used in order to deter black men from having sex with white women. White Americans cloaked this protection in rhetoric of white womanhood and the defense of households and families.¹⁸ However, as historian Martha Hodes pointed out, this protection of white women from black male sexuality arose out of a system of subordination after slavery and as a restriction of sex between black men and white women in order to maintain racial purity. In order to preserve the racial hierarchy in society, all white women could only have white children.¹⁹ And, although white southerners did recognize the terrible consequences of lynching, many also believed that it could not be prevented; in many white minds, lynching was a necessary evil needed to control

¹⁵ William D. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 133.

¹⁶ Cynthia Skove Nevels, *Lynching to Belong: Claiming Whiteness Through Racial Violence* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 3. For more on lynching, also see: Ken Gonzales-Day, *Lynching in the West, 1850-1935* (Duke University Press, 2006), Stewart Emory Tolnay and E.M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), and Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

¹⁷ Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 183 and 198.

¹⁸ Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture*, 161.

¹⁹ Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 199 and 202.

the black population and limit natural black criminal tendencies. The ideas of the black male sexual predator was not new at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, but, it took on new meanings and the black male elicited more fear from white southerners through their own attempts to limit interracial relationships.²⁰

Southern newspapers were filled with stories about lynching of black men and the crimes, or perceived crimes, which they committed. Such stories represented the racial and sexual ideologies of the southern populace; however, these stories were often carried further than the local communities in which the papers were printed. There are hundreds of examples of southern newspaper stories that discussed lynchings and described black men as threats to white women. The *Chicago Tribune* reprinted an article on March 26, 1910 that was originally printed in Pine Bluff, Arkansas the day before. The article recounted: “Resenting alleged improper conduct on the part of Judge Jones, a Negro, and a young white woman, a mob of forty men gathered at the county jail have tonight, overpowered the jailer and his deputies and hanged the Negro.”²¹ This type of article pointed out not only the lynching of a black man because of the accusation of sexual assault against a white woman, but also showed that such incidences sometimes divided local law enforcement from the local populace at the time of the lynching. Of course, law enforcement rarely held the local white population accountable for their actions after the crime was committed. Southern newspapers often recounted attempted assaults in resulting lynchings in succinct details. For example, an article in *The Lancaster News* in South Carolina, reported on the lynching of a black man in Calhoun, Louisiana in 1906. The article stated that Alfred Schaufneit, a black man, was lynched by a mob for intending to assault a Miss Olive Chambers;

²⁰ George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Wesleyan University Press, 1971), 274-276. For more on class and race in North America, see: James W. Russell, *Class and Race Formation in North America* (University of Toronto Press, 2009).

²¹ As quoted in: Ralph Ginzburg, *100 Years of Lynchings* (Black Classics Press, 1962), 69.

he confessed shortly before he was hanged to a telegraph pole. The report was only two short paragraphs, but told readers everything that they needed to know: a black man attempted to assault a “prominent” white woman of the community and he was subsequently lynched by a local mob.²² The *Okolona Messenger*, printed in Mississippi, took great care to provide readers with all details surrounding the lynching of Else Patton. Patton was taken from the Oxford jail at night and lynched the day after he had assaulted and murdered a Mrs. McMullin. The newspaper related the history of Mrs. McMullin, a woman who moved to the area to be near her husband who was imprisoned for resisting an officer. The following was recorded of the attack:

About 1 o'clock Tuesday afternoon Patton went to the McMullin home to drive a cow to town for Mrs. McMullin. Mrs. McMullin and her 19-year-old daughter were alone in the house and the negro made an insulting remark to Mrs. McMullin as she went out to direct him where to take the cow. Mrs. McMullin ran into the house when she saw the negro moving toward her and secured her revolver. It was unloaded, however, and Patton rushed forward and seized her. Pushing back her head with one hand, the negro drew a razor and cut her throat from ear to ear. Mrs. McMullin broke loose from her assailant and ran. Her only thought was to reach her husband before she died. She ran 100 yards toward the jail, where he was confined, and fell to the ground. Miss McMullin was standing in the doorway when her mother was murdered.²³

Western Canadian newspapers reprinted these articles from the American South, rooted in language concerning black men's sexuality and the protection of white womanhood. These articles emphasized lynching of black men, racial violence, and crimes committed by African Americans, and they represented the means by which thousands of white settlers in Western Canada formed their views on black Americans. Additionally, many of the white settlers were also migrants from the American South who carried their views on race with them into Western Canada. Other examples of newspaper articles from the South that newspapers in Western Canada reprinted included those such as the *Raymond Rustler's*: “Burning of Uncle Abe: Vivid

²² “Negro Lynched in Louisiana—Confessed to Attempting Criminal Assault,” *The Lancaster News*, August 29, 1906.

²³ “Lynching at Oxford Mississippi,” *Okolona Messenger*, September 9, 1908.

Description of a Horrible Spectacle; An Actual Scene of Lynching an Old Negro Witnessed in the State of Virginia”; and the *Edmonton Bulletin*’s: “Another Lynching Episode: Negro Charged with Attempting Assault Hung to a Tree and Riddled With Bullets”; and “Have Surrounded Swamp: Posse Hard After Negro Who Escaped Lynching.”²⁴ Additionally, it was not only events within the American South and Oklahoma that caused concern for white settlers in Western Canada. Western Canadian newspapers also covered the Springfield, Illinois race riot of 1908. Headlines such as “Fierce Race Riot in Springfield” and “The Negro Riots at Springfield” recounted the events of a riot that started with the attack of a white woman by a black man.²⁵ Numerous homes and businesses were set on fire and the violence ended with the deaths of six black men shot, two black men lynched, five white men killed, and perhaps more people injured but not reported. With limited contact with African Americans and stories such as these appearing in their newspapers, white settlers in Western Canada developed a discriminatory stance towards black Americans. Besides stories about the violence that black Americans committed and then the violence that was committed upon black bodies, the only other topic concerning African Americans that received significant attention in Western Canadian newspapers was the boxing career of the African American boxer, Jack Johnson.²⁶

²⁴ “Burning of Uncle Abe: Vivid Description of a Horrible Spectacle; An Actual Scene of Lynching an Old Negro Witnessed in the State of Virginia,” *Raymond Rustler*, October 22, 1909; “Another Lynching Episode: Negro Charged with Attempting Assault Hung to a Tree and Riddled With Bullets,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, April 17, 1907; and “Have Surrounded Swamp: Posse Hard After Negro Who Escaped Lynching,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, May 23, 1907.

²⁵ “Fierce Race Riot in Springfield,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, August 15, 1908 and “The Negro Riots at Springfield,” *Strathcona Evening Chronicle*, August 17, 1908.

²⁶ Black American newspapers also gave significant focus to Jack Johnson. He became the heavyweight boxing champion of the world in 1908, and was challenged by Jim Jeffries (who was white) in 1910. Johnson won the fight against Jeffries. For coverage of these events by the *Chicago Defender*, see: Ethan Michaeli, *The Defender: How the Legendary Black Newspaper Changed America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016).

Violence Against Black Men in Oklahoma

Although African Americans in Oklahoma did not quite experience the same level of discrimination and violence as black Americans in the Deep South, the violence directed towards black Oklahomans received significant coverage in Oklahoma newspapers and served to remind African Americans that even when they migrated into the great American West, they still faced violence and discrimination. Racial violence in Oklahoma served to both propel African Americans out of Oklahoma and towards Western Canada, and to create fear among white settlers in Western Canada that racial violence would follow black Americans into Canada. Numerous examples of violence in Oklahoma between 1907, when OK became a state, and 1911, the year by which Canada had successfully deterred black migration, illustrated the similarities between treatment of black Americans in OK and the deeper South. As previously mentioned in Chapter One, in December 1907, in the racially-mixed town of Henryetta, OK, James Garden, an African American, shot Albert Bates after Bates refused to rent Garden a rig from his livery; a denial Garden regarded as white discrimination. A white mob quickly located Garden and left his dead body in the middle of town.²⁷ In 1909, a black man named James Emerson was accused of assaulting a young white girl near Blackburn, Oklahoma. Although newspapers did not have exact evidence, they wrote that the local community generally believed that a lynch mob murdered Emerson after he disappeared from the city marshal's custody. The marshal said that Emerson escaped; this likely pointed to cooperation between the lynch mob and the city marshal.²⁸ In 1911, white residents accused John Lee of the rape and murder of a white

²⁷ "Negro Murderer is Speedily Lynched," *Okemah Ledger*, December 19, 1907.

²⁸ "Officers Believe Negro Lynched," *The Daily Ardmoreite*, September 9, 1909.

woman in Durant. After lynching Lee, white residents forced the black population of thirteen to move out of the town.²⁹ Following the initial attack and lynching in Durant, there was an unfounded report of an assault southwest of Durant, in Warwick. This report said that a white woman and her husband were shot by another black man. Numerous groups of armed men searched through nearby towns for a suspect, and white residents of Durant feared a large group of black residents from the town of Atoka were going to descend on Durant for revenge of the previous lynching. Within a day or two, Oklahomans agreed that this second attack was only a rumor and no large group of Black Oklahomans were coming to Durant. Rather, African Americans fled from the surrounding countryside in fear of the white backlash taking place.³⁰

Sometimes black men who were accused of attacking white women were saved from lynching, but these stories, nonetheless, served to provide readers with an image of the black man as a primary sexual threat to white women. Such an example appeared in the *Guthrie Daily Leader* in 1909 under the heading: “McAlester Lynching Averted; Negro Assailant of Woman Removed from Danger Zone; Victim Will Recover from Injuries Inflicted; Saved from Horrible Fate by Fierce Attack of Her Faithful Dog.”³¹ Previously, in 1908, the same paper reported on a nineteen-year-old black man named Will Johnson who was accused of brutally attacking a seventy-five-year-old woman named Mary Cuppy. The woman survived the attack and Johnson was identified as the perpetrator by his bloodstained trousers and “a wisp of grey hair” found in his boot.³² Although a lynch mob arrived at the local jail in the evening, the Sheriff of the town had already removed Johnson to Oklahoma City for his own safety.³³

²⁹ Blaisdell, “Anatomy of an Oklahoma Lynching,” 298-299, 306.

³⁰ “Durant Quiet Again Today,” *The Daily Ardmore*, August 15, 1911.

³¹ “McAlester Lynching Averted,” *The Guthrie Daily Leader*, November 27, 1909.

³² “Johnson’s Neck Still Unstretched,” *Guthrie Daily Leader*, November 13, 1908.

Black residents of Oklahoma were well aware of the perceived threat that black men posed to white women in the white mind, as evidenced by editorials in black newspapers. For example, in a plea for African Americans to unite in western states, the *Boley Beacon* ran an article stating that: “While they have women to protect and social conditions to uphold, we, as Negroes, have grievances and complaints. We must unify.”³⁴ The first line here was rather sarcastic and pointed to the contradictions of society and politics within the United States; White Americans talked about equality after the emancipation of enslaved Black Americans, but what they really wanted was to maintain a status quo of the existing social and racial structures within the United States.

Racism in Western Canada

Although African Americans viewed Canada as a haven for fugitive slaves before emancipation, white Canadians did not want a large influx of black Americans. Racism existed for centuries in Canada, as reflected in the treatment of First Nations and Métis peoples, and the backlash to immigrants from China, Japan, and South Asia. Western Canada experienced fewer conflicts between First Nations and white settlers than occurred between Native Americans and white settlers in the American West. As discussed in Chapter Two, this occurred because the Canadian government restricted most First Nations to reservations before a large number of white settlers arrived in the Canadian West. Still, white settlers brought their stereotypes of First Nations peoples into the West as they claimed western land as their own. Through spatial and

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ “Editorial,” *The Boley Beacon*, March 19, 1908.

legal practices, Canadians maintained their hold on Western Canada as they made it a white society.³⁵ The Canadian prairies filled with settlers from Europe and the United States, and the 1911 census reflected that forty percent of the population at that point was of non-British origin.³⁶ Numerous racial and ethnic groups entered Western Canada, and as Howard Palmer discussed in his class work on nativism in Alberta: “Ethnic conflict was at times intense and stereotypes abounded as people from diverse backgrounds attempted to make sense of one another and establish relationships in a new society.”³⁷ Thus, into this already fragmented society, the possibility of a large black migration caused fear for many people of diverse white ethnic backgrounds as they relied on stereotypes and fears in considering relationships with potential black neighbors. Kelly Miller recognized the problems that black migrants faced, no matter how law-abiding the individual migrant: “No people will tolerate a race of potential rapists in their midst...No individual of this blood, however upright his personal life, could escape the taint of racial reputation.”³⁸

Official statistics of law enforcement recorded no lynchings in Canada, at the same time that hundreds of lynchings occurred in the Jim Crow-era United States. Although crimes and

³⁵ Sherene Razach, ed., *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society* (Between the Lines, 2002), 1. For more on how the United States and Australia implemented settler colonialism, see: Margaret D. Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

³⁶ Howard Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), 18. Palmer wrote numerous books about the settlement of the Canadian West, including: Howard Palmer, ed., *The Settlement of the West* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1977), Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, *Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity* (British Columbia: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd, 1985), and Howard Palmer, *Ethnicity and Politics in Canada Since Confederation* (Canadian Historical Association, 1991).

³⁷ *Ibid.* For more on racism in Canada, see: Ormond Knight McKague, *Racism in Canada* (Fifth House Publishers, 1991). Asian immigrants faced a harsh backlash to their immigration, too. In British Columbia, and especially Vancouver, incidents of racial violence and threats against Chinese and Japanese immigrants reflected, again, the efforts to keep Canada “white” and restrict the movements and prosperity of non-white immigrants. See: John Price, “ ‘Orienting’ the Empire: Mackenzie King and the Aftermath of the 1907 Race Riots,” *BC Studies* No. 156 (Winter 2007/08), and Kay J. Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991).

³⁸ Miller, *Race Adjustment*, 70-71.

violence occurred in Western Canada, often on the part of Euro-Canadians and Euro-Americans, white settlers believed that a significant migration of black Americans would destroy the image, and myth, of the Canadian West as a lawful and peaceful society. A migration of black Americans threatened both white women and threatened to turn good, white Canadians into lawless criminals as they would be forced to exact vengeance on black men who attacked white women. Canadians could claim that they were not racist and did not experience the racial issues of the United States, as long as the population of Black Canadians remained low. They adopted the fears and concerns of White Americans in the United States, arguing that Black Americans would become wards of the state, that white women were threatened by black sexuality, and that racial violence and lynching would proliferate.³⁹

Despite their use of racist language, white Canadians often blamed racism in Canada on white American settlers, calling racism an “American problem.” Others warned that Canada should look at the United States and its race problems to see the future of Canada if black immigration was not regulated.⁴⁰ Canadian civil servant C. W. Spears wrote: “I would consider it unwise to permit them [blacks] to come in large numbers to our country, as they would soon assume such proportions that we might be confronted with the same difficulties, political and

³⁹ Portions of this paragraph and the following paragraph appeared in: Rachel Wolters, “As Migrants and As Immigrants: African Americans Search for Land and Liberty in the Great Plains,” *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 35 No. 4 (Fall 2015): 333-355. University of Nebraska Press.

⁴⁰ Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable*, 84 and Shepard, “Plain Racism”: 371. In other cases of immigration, Canada and the United States looked very similar in their exclusions and bans on certain races. Both nations placed restrictions on Chinese immigration, and were hostile to Japanese and Indian immigrants. In *Deemed Unsuitable*, 81, Shepard quoted a white Canadian named Simmons in Edmonton who did not want Alberta to become: “Black Alberta,” just like those in British Columbia fighting Oriental immigration did not want to become “Yellow British Columbia.”

social, as the American Republic is dealing with to-day.”⁴¹ The *Chicago Tribune* also identified the source of anxiety for Canadians:

...the authorities at Ottawa and the legislature there may find themselves forced by public sentiment to enact laws excluding the American negro, with the object of averting any wholesale negro emigration from the southern states to the phenomenally rich western provinces of Canada, and of avoiding the endowment of the dominion with a troublesome problem from which it is now exempt—namely: the negro question.⁴²

The *Edmonton Capital* concurred, calling for the exclusion of African Americans: “We welcome the most of what is coming to us from the south of the line but we prefer to have the southern race problem left behind. The task of assimilating all the white people who enter our borders is quite a heavy enough one without the color proposition being added.”⁴³ Fearing the influx of black settlers, the Board of Trade Office in Athabasca Landing explained,

...it will not require many parties of negroes, the size of the present party, to outnumber the whites. When it was learned around town that these negroes were coming out there was great indignation, and many threatened violence, threatened violence to meet them on the trail out of town, and drive them back. It would be a very serious matter if such a thing should happen, but that is the feeling of the people.⁴⁴

Canadians also feared that the presence of Black Americans could make them more like white citizens in the United States—lawless and racist. Rather than acknowledge their own racist sentiments, they concluded that the race problem was an American import that must be stopped.

⁴¹ C.M. Spears to J. Bruce Walker, 26 October 1910, Immigration Branch Records, “Immigration of Negroes from the United States to Western Canada,” RG 76, Vol. 192, File 72552, Part 2 (Ottawa, Ontario: Library and Archives of Canada.) From here, immigration records will be listed as “IBR” with appropriate reel number information. RG76-192-72552 includes records listed in the “Immigration of Negroes from the United States to Western Canada” reels. All other reel numbers are other files within the immigration branch records.

⁴² “Canada May Bar the U.S. Negroes,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 5, 1911.

⁴³ “Knocking Your Own Town,” *Edmonton Capital*, April 16, 1910.

⁴⁴ Letter to Frank Oliver from Athabasca Landing Board of Trade, included in: Leo W. Bertley, *Canada and Its People of African Descent* (Pierrefonds, Quebec: Bilongo Publishers, 1977), 124-125. A number of black immigrants recalled having experienced white racism in western Canada. Ruth Jones explained: “We used to live in Campsie when we were children...There’s one thing that I remember, that I’ll never forget, that was the Jim Crow Law they had out there...In Campsie there were a lot of colored people, but the White predominated.” Velma Carter and Wanda Leffler Akili, *The Window of Our Memories*, (St. Albert, Alberta, Canada: B. C. R. Society of Alberta, 1981), 55.

Additionally, numerous historians wrote works that focused upon Black Canadians and the legal system within Canada. These scholars found that although Canadians practiced Jim Crow as a social structure, the law in Canada also supported this discrimination. As Barrington Walker found, the law often supported anti-Black racism and segregation in the court system, meaning that Black Canadians were considered outsiders.⁴⁵ For many White Canadians, the presence of a small Black Canadian population that they largely considered as outsiders or on the margins meant that their black population represented little threat as long as they kept them “contained.” Introducing thousands more black settlers threatened to elevate the social and legal positions of all black citizens in Canada—they could rise in society, politics, and the law.

Despite discrimination within the law system, many white and black Canadians believed their law system was superior to that of the United States because it was supposed to be fair and Canadian courts pledged to uphold the law equally. The court case of Frank Roughmond in Ontario during 1909 demonstrated these ideas of equality. Roughmond was accused of the rape and murder of Mary Peake, an elderly white wife of a local farmer. Right after Peake’s body was found; a lynch mob formed and threatened to lynch Roughmond. In his pleas for his life, Roughmond begged the lynch mob to recognize his humanity and to follow the laws of British justice. These pleas perhaps saved Roughmond from the mob as he was arrested and brought to the local jail rather than being lynched. Still, during the trial, Roughmond was referred to as a “husky brute,” “big Negro,” “burly Negro,” and “inhumane monster;” Roughmond was found

⁴⁵ Barrington Walker, ed., *The African Canadian Legal Odyssey: Historical Essays* (University of Toronto, 2012), 28. See also: Barrington Walker, ed., *The History of Immigration and Racism in Canada: Essential Readings* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press Inc., 2008), Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (University of Toronto Press, 1999), and Esmeralda M. A. Thornhill, “So Seldom for Us, So Often Against Us: Blacks and Law in Canada,” *Journal of Black Studies* Vol. 38, No. 3 (January 2008).

guilty and the judge said that Roughmond received a fair trial.⁴⁶ Although this court case took place in Ontario rather than Western Canada, it showed the mindset of Canadians at the time of the black migration. White Canadians, for the most part, insisted that Black Canadians be treated fairly and equally under the law; however, limiting that black population, in their minds, would limit instances of black violence that brought black defendants into the court system in the first place.

Of course, not all white Canadians felt that African Americans were a threat to their society. Newspapers printed some letters by supporters of black migration to Canada. One such example, written by Joseph A. Clarke to *The Edmonton Journal*, also appeared in black newspapers in Oklahoma, such as *The Clearview Patriarch*. In this letter, Clark recognized that race relations in the United States were terrible, but he placed the blame on white southerners in terms of their Jim Crow laws and prejudicial attitudes towards black southerners. Advocating for treating African Americans fairly as human beings, he said, “Use negroes as human beings, say I, and you will find them the last people on earth to butt in or make themselves obnoxious. But attempt to import into Canada the methods and policy of the southern states and we will very likely get the same results.”⁴⁷ Stating that Canada already handled a black migration successfully during earlier years, he believed that Canada could manage another, larger, migration of African Americans, too. While these voices of reason did exist in Canada, they were often far outweighed by the cries and demands of white Canadians who feared a significant black migration from the United States.

⁴⁶ Barrington Walker, *Race on Trial: Black Defendants in Ontario’s Criminal Courts, 1858-1958* (University of Toronto Press, 2010), 123-129.

⁴⁷ J.A. Clark, “J.A. Clark in Negro Defense,” *The Clearview Patriarch*, June 1, 1911.

The Southern Problem in Western Canada

Many incidents of racial violence in Oklahoma appeared in Western Canadian newspapers. These articles served to present African Americans in Oklahoma as similar to those that white settlers had read about in southern newspapers that discussed lynchings and attacks on white women by black men. Therefore, white settlers paid particular interest to the accounts of racial violence in Oklahoma as they feared a mass influx of black Americans from Oklahoma into their own communities. As Bruce Shepard determined, white settlers in Western Canada already had well-developed views of African Americans before reading these stories, but these publications served to confirm white prejudices.⁴⁸ In 1908 Canadian newspapers paid particular attention to the Okmulgee race riot, in which five African Americans (one who was a woman), the chief of police of Okmulgee, and the county sheriff were all killed. Additionally, half a dozen other people were wounded. The riot started after a fight erupted between a Native American and African American at the railroad depot.⁴⁹ Newspapers also discussed the lynching of a black man named Carter who was accused of assaulting a white woman in Purcell, OK, in 1911. Headlines included: “Negro Burned to Death by an Oklahoma Mob: Man Charged with Assaulting White Woman Taken from Jail by Infuriated Whites—Sheriff and Deputies Locked in Jail While Crime is Committed.”⁵⁰ This article described the following scene: “While men and women looked on, some men soaked a brush pile with coal oil, then poured oil upon the negro, who was thrown upon the brush pile. A torch was then applied...and a blaze shot up, hiding the screaming negro

⁴⁸ Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable*, 85.

⁴⁹ “Seven Killed in Okmulgee Race Riot,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, November 16, 1908.

⁵⁰ “Negro Burned to Death by an Oklahoma Mob: Man Charged with Assaulting White Woman Taken from Jail by Infuriated Whites—Sheriff and Deputies Locked in Jail While Crime is Committed,” *The Edmonton Capital*, August 26, 1911.

from view. The body was burned to a crisp.”⁵¹ Such articles warned white Canadians not only that black men would attack white women, but also that white women would be subjected to watching violence play out as white Canadians took retribution upon black bodies. The importance of the editors of Canadian newspapers also showed the impact that personal political views had upon what was printed within the newspapers. Frank Oliver, the Minister of the Interior who oversaw the Department of Immigration, was also the publisher and editor of the *Edmonton Bulletin*.⁵² This meant that a man who adamantly opposed black migration in his political position was able to support that view by printing derogatory and prejudicial stories about African Americans and black migrants to Canada within his own newspaper.

As in the American West, women made up very few of the earlier migrants and settlers in the Canadian West. They often experienced loneliness and isolation; Agnes Laut wrote in 1909 that she met a woman in the West who did not have a woman neighbor for over one hundred miles near her, and that in another region, three white families lived over three hundred miles from the nearest town.⁵³ Although few at first, the Canadian government pushed for white women to settle in the Canadian West and they soon made up a significant portion of the western population. White women’s presence in the West meant that the region was “civilized” and controlled by the national government; they were needed to promote social institutions of western towns and to increase the white population through the birth of children.⁵⁴ After

⁵¹ “Negro Burned to Death by an Oklahoma Mob,” *The Edmonton Capital*, August 26, 1911.

⁵² Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable*, 71.

⁵³ Agnes Laut, “The Last Trek to the Last Frontier: The American Settler in the Canadian Northwest,” *Century Magazine* 78 (May 1909), 108.

⁵⁴ As discussed in Chapter 6: Sheila McManus, *The Line Which Separates: Race, Gender, and the Making of the Alberta Montana Borderlands* (University of Nebraska Press, 2005). For more on women in the Canadian West, see: Elizabeth Jameson and Sheila McManus, eds., *One Step Over the Line: Toward a History of Women in the North American Wests* (University of Alberta Press, 2008), Myra Rutherford and Katie Pickles, eds., *Contact*

encouraging the migration of white women into the West, the Canadian government then felt a duty to protect those women. Legal authorities said that the West was a “haven for white women.”⁵⁵ This image as a haven for white women went hand-in-hand with the image of the Canadian West as a lawful and peaceful place. Included within this perception of the West, newspaper coverage indicated that sexual violence against western women was rare, and as historian Leslie Erikson determined: “When it did occur, the courts responded swiftly and harshly to punish the typically foreign or working-class offender.”⁵⁶ Therefore, the perception of black men as sexual threats to white women joined with goals of protecting white women from sexual violence; the result of this connection between black men as sexual threats and white women in need of protecting, led to a backlash against the African American migration from the United States.

The most sensational story of a black man and white woman that took place in Western Canada in 1910 and did not include an actual lynching, but a confession of murder by James Chapman, an African American. Chapman came to Edmonton from Stillwater, Oklahoma, along with Mrs. Lawrence Mathews and her two children. Mathews was a white woman and Chapman confessed to local authorities that he and Mathews had murdered her husband in Oklahoma before migrating to Alberta. Chapman took back his initial confession, and then later said that his original confession was again correct. At times he said that he helped Mathews murder her husband because he was in love with her and she had used his feelings for her own gain.

Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada's Colonial Past (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983), and Vijay Agnew, ed., *Racialized Migrant Women in Canada: Essays on Health, Violence, and Equity* (University of Toronto Press, Inc., 2007).

⁵⁵ Lesley Erikson, *Western Bound: Sex, Violence, the Law, and the Making of a Settler Society* (UBC Press for the Osgood Society for Canadian Legal History, 2011), 119.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

Mathews maintained that she did not murder her husband and that her husband died of natural causes. From the court proceedings, it appeared that Chapman's greatest fear was not punishment in Canada for his crime, but rather being extradited to Oklahoma, where he feared he would face a lynch mob. Although Canadians took this into consideration, they did end up releasing him into the custody of the Stillwater sheriff. Despite escaping once from the sheriff near the US-Canadian border, Chapman did stand trial in Oklahoma and was found guilty of murder. Believing that Mathews was partially responsible for her husband's murder, Oklahoma also tried to have Mathews extradited back to the state to stand trial. Numerous newspapers covered every aspect of this event, likely because of the possibility of extradition for Chapman, but also because of the rare relationship between Chapman and Mathews.⁵⁷ This was a highly publicized relationship between a black man and white woman that emphasized the greatest fears of white men: an interracial relationship that resulted in the death of a white husband. Additionally, this example caused particular anxiety for white settlers in Western Canada because of the location that Chapman and Mathews migrated from—how many black men from Oklahoma were willing to murder white men and have affairs with white women?

In order to protect white women from the perceived threat of black men and black male sexuality, white settlers in Western Canada appealed to the rest of the western population and to Canadian politicians to protect white womanhood. Using the example of South Africa, Dr. Ella Synge appealed to Canadians to protect their women:

⁵⁷ Numerous newspapers covered every aspect of this event, please see: "Negro Gives All Details," *Edmonton Capital*, April 14, 1910; "Oklahoma Murder Case," *Edmonton Bulletin*, April 27, 1910; "'I'm in Love,' Says Negro," *Edmonton Capital*, May 13, 1910; "He Fears Stake May Await Him," *Edmonton Bulletin*, May 13, 1910; "Negro Chapman Loses His Nerve," *Edmonton Bulletin*, May 19, 1910; "'It is True,' Said Negro," *Edmonton Capital*, May 20, 1910; "Negro Tells Whole Story," *Edmonton Capital*, May 21, 1910; "Mrs. Mathews in Witness Box," *Edmonton Bulletin*, May 23, 1910; "Negro Should Be Lynched He Says," *Edmonton Bulletin*, May 25, 1910; "Negro Chapman on Way to Stillwater," *Edmonton Bulletin*, June 13, 1910; "James Chapman Escapes Custody," *Edmonton Capital*, June 14, 1910; "Chapman Found Guilty of Murder," *Edmonton Bulletin*, December 14, 1910; and "State Will Again Try to Extradite," *Edmonton Capital*, January 4, 1911.

Surely the result of Lord Gladstone's foolishness in South Africa is apparent enough already, in the enormous increase of outrages on white women that has occurred since his reprieve of a negro for an abominable crime. And I see the finger of "Lynch Law" written large in the north country, which will be the ultimate result, as sure as we allow such people to settle among us. Does not the recent frightful case in Hamilton, in which a black man was largely concerned, show well enough what undesirable citizens these are – And now is the time to prevent –later, is too late to cure.⁵⁸

Stories about the lynching of black Americans who had assaulted women in Oklahoma towns exacerbated local anxieties, as Dr. Synge pointed out in her statement. Additionally, Dr. Synge believed that the rape and assault of white women by black men was not only a problem within the United States, but anyplace with a black and white population, as shown in her example of South Africa. When a thirteen year old girl in Edmonton claimed a black intruder had assaulted her and stolen a diamond ring, the public panicked and the police rounded up African Americans as suspects. But, a week later the girl confessed that she had fabricated the story and had lost the ring herself.⁵⁹ This example illustrated how quickly the Canadian press and populace believed the probability of a black man attacking the young girl, and it demonstrated the widespread belief that black men attacked vulnerable white women as this young girl knew that adults would quickly believe such a story. The Daughters of the Empire in Edmonton wrote to Oliver that their chapters signed petitions that called for the exclusion of African Americans; they appealed to Canada to protect its women: "We do not wish that the fair fame of Western Canada should be sullied with the shadow of Lynch Law but we have no guarantee that our women will be safer in their scattered homesteads than white women in other countries with a Negro population."⁶⁰

⁵⁸ "Woman Utters Protest Against Negro Invasion," *Edmonton Capital*, March 27, 1911.

⁵⁹ Newspapers articles and scholars covered this story extensively; for further descriptions of the event, please see: "Negro Attacks a Little Girl," *Edmonton Bulletin*, April 5, 1911; "Suspected Negroes Have Been Released," *Edmonton Bulletin*, April 7, 1911; "Police Hoodwinked By a Young Girl," *Edmonton Capital*, April 13, 1911; "Story Was a Fake," *Edmonton Bulletin*, April 14, 1911; "Crime," *The Crisis* 2 (June 1911): 53; Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable*, 78.

⁶⁰ Daughters of the Empire to Frank Oliver, 27 September 1911, IBR, RG76-192-72552-3. Portions of previous paragraphs appeared in: Rachel Wolters, "As Migrants and As Immigrants: African Americans Search for

Calls for Exclusion Based Upon Race

After keeping a close eye on race relations in the United States, and particularly in Oklahoma, white western Canadians made their beliefs about black immigration known to local newspapers and to the Canadian Department of Immigration. Numerous white settlers and officials in Western Canada wrote to Frank Oliver asking for exclusion, and others wrote affidavits showing that they did not take homesteads because of the presence of black settlers. Fritz Freidrichs, a white settler in Mewassin, Alberta wrote to Frank Oliver, Canadian Minister of the Interior that, “You know Hon Minister that the negroes has made a big trouble in the States. These negroes have misused young girls and women and killed them. They will do the same in our country too.”⁶¹ Additionally, Freidrichs made his political intentions clear; if Oliver would stop the immigration of African Americans into Western Canada, then Freidrichs would vote for Liberals in the next election, and if not, then he would not support the party.⁶² The signers of the affidavits traveled from Montana to inspect homestead areas in Alberta, but all declared that although the land looked wonderful for farming, they would not settle in an area that was so heavily populated by African Americans. These men also suggested that they would not tell their friends to settle in Western Canada because of the black population.⁶³ These affidavits provided evidence to the Department of Immigration, and the Liberal Party, that black

Land and Liberty in the Great Plains,” *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 35 No. 4 (Fall 2015): 333-355. University of Nebraska Press.

⁶¹ Fritz Freidrichs to Frank Oliver, 12 April 1911, IBR, RG76-192-72552-3.

⁶² Fritz Freidrichs to Frank Oliver, 12 April 1911, IBR, RG76-192-72552-3.

⁶³ See affidavits dated April 15, 1911: Frank Gareau, Patrick Bonner, George Haney, Frank Stedman, and Edward Stevens, IBR, RG76-192-72552-3.

migration did check the migration of at least some white American farmers, the exact type of migrants that the national government wanted for Western Canada. The sentiments of an English woman, who had also lived in Oklahoma, captured the popular feeling:

It is with regret that I have read the account of the invasion of thousands of negroes from Oklahoma to the fair land of Canada. As there is in my heart a desire for the welfare of the Dominion, and no great interest in that of Oklahoma. I feel sorry that this country should be saddled with those that the Southern States are only too glad to be rid of...As negroes flourish in a hot country, and do as little work as possible, it is to be hoped that Jack Frost will accomplish what the authorities apparently cannot.⁶⁴

Canadians not only feared a massive immigration of African Americans, but a migration of any black population. Protests from white Canadians about blacks outside of the United States confirmed that their reactions against African Americans were part of a racial response to all black migrant groups. Letters to the Canadian government showed a fear that Canada would lose its whiteness. In a very lengthy letter to Wilfrid Laurier in March of 1911, “a friend” noted, “If you have ever visited Brazil or any other country in South America, Mexico, Central America or even the parts of the U.S. where the black man is common, you will wonder whether or not there is a person without tainted blood,” and he lamented a decline of whites citizens in the United States and possibly Canada: “What a pity the great white-race of the U.S. cannot remain pure and untainted. Why should not Canada, proud of her pure white-English blood, preserve it and by every means in her power seek to build up a race of improved English stock.”⁶⁵ This fear of racial mixing in Canada caused many people to advocate for the exclusion of all black migrants. The resentment against African Americans in Western Canada was also evident in complaints to the immigration department about West Indians, specifically those from Barbados, who migrated

⁶⁴ “Thinks Negroes Not Desirable,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 27, 1911. These examples also appeared in: Rachel Wolters, “As Migrants and As Immigrants: African Americans Search for Land and Liberty in the Great Plains,” *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 35 No. 4 (Fall 2015): 333-355. University of Nebraska Press.

⁶⁵ Letter in “Sir Wilfred Laurier Fonds: C-902,” *Canadiana*, Public Archives of Canada, 1-2, 4-5.

to Western Canada. The mayor of Virden, Manitoba, where a group of fifteen black migrants from Barbados intended to reside, wrote Bruce Walker that the men, “certainly were not asked for nor wanted, but simply dumped on us...these men cannot secure work as farmers wives are afraid of them, and they are destitute.”⁶⁶ Other Canadians suggested that immigrants from Barbados should be barred because the Canadian climate was not suitable for them.⁶⁷ This was the same popular argument used against black migrants from Oklahoma who intended to migrate to Western Canada.

One of the strongest oppositions to black migration in Western Canada came from the Edmonton Board of Trade, led by F.D. Fisher. The board presented Laurier with a resolution to bar the further migration of black migrants into Western Canada, and asked that black residents already in Canada be segregated. Fisher warned Oliver that people in the West were so agitated about black immigration that soon a major backlash to their presence would occur, and that if no action was taken, the Canadian West would start to resemble the United States in reference to its racial violence.⁶⁸ Additionally, Fisher declared that the black settlements in Alberta deterred white individuals from settling in the Canadian West, the kind of settler portrayed in the national vision. He acknowledged, too, that the best settlers were American farmers familiar with the race problems of the United States and that if the Canadian government allowed a large number of Black Americans to settle in the prairies, the best immigrant farmers would not come.⁶⁹ Members of the Board of Trade circulated a petition calling for the exclusion of black migrants, which

⁶⁶ George Clingan to J. Bruce Walker, 21 August 1908, IBR, RG76-192-72552-1.

⁶⁷ J. Bruce Walker to W.D. Scott, 24 August 1908, IBR, RG76-192-72552-1.

⁶⁸ Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*, 48-49.

⁶⁹ F.D. Fisher to Frank Oliver, 16 April 1910, IBR, RG76-192-72552-2.

garnered thirty-five hundred signatures within a few weeks.⁷⁰ Edmonton newspapers printed articles on the actions of the Board of Trade, and the articles circulated in papers across Canada.⁷¹ Once communities in other areas of Western Canada learned of the Edmonton petitions and calls for exclusion, other boards of trade took similar actions, including those in Winnipeg, Morinville and Strathcona. And, other organizations in Edmonton called for the exclusion of Black Americans. The United Farmers of Alberta in Edmonton wrote to Oliver that they agreed with the Board of Trade's resolution, and that the issue was important for both the province of Alberta and the Dominion at large.⁷² Interestingly, many of the protests in places like Calgary, Edmonton, and even Winnipeg in Manitoba, came from the urban areas of the provinces and were led by businessmen; few protests against black migration came from the rural farming communities in which the majority of black migrants actually lived.⁷³

Conclusions

The language and fears expressed about African Americans, and specifically black males, in newspapers in the American South, Oklahoma, and Western Canada, all represented similar fears concerning black male sexuality and white women. Not only did white settlers in Western Canada think that black men posed a threat to white women, but more generally, they thought that black men were more likely to engage in violence and be disorderly. This kind of conduct

⁷⁰ Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*, 48-49.

⁷¹ See: "Board of Trade Goes on Record," *Edmonton Capital*, April 19, 1911; "Petitions Remonstrating Against Negro Immigration Are Circulated," *Edmonton Capital*, April 25, 1911; and "Is Not Opposed to Negroes Here," *Edmonton Bulletin*, April 27, 1911.

⁷² United Farmers of Alberta to Frank Oliver, 29 April 1911, IBR, RG76-192-72552-3.

⁷³ "A Hard Price for Freedom," *Herald Magazine*, August 16, 1974.

did not reflect the type of Western Canada that Canadians envisioned—that peaceful, orderly West in which little violence occurred and lynching was never witnessed. The publication of southern newspaper stories and those from Oklahoma in Canadian newspapers in which black men were depicted as sexual aggressors clearly influenced white settlers in Canada to advocate for the exclusion of African Americans. Still, many white settlers maintained that they were not racist, but rather that they did not want the conditions of the Jim Crow American South to exist within Western Canada. According to those who advocated for exclusion, the black population that already existed in Canada experienced little racial prejudice, but a large influx of black migrants would cause Canada to face issues similar to the American South. These white settlers refused, or ignored, the contradictions of their argument. Yet, as numerous examples within the chapter depicted, other white settlers in Western Canada held no reservations in their protests concerning black migrants; they did not want to live among a black population that they thought threatened white women and a peaceful, orderly society of white settlers.

CHAPTER 6

THE CANADIAN ELECTION OF 1911 AND THE HALT OF BLACK MIGRATION

By 1911, numerous forces collided to cause the end of the black migration to Canada. Although a few family members and friends continued to migrate in the following years, events of 1911 ended the possibility of a mass migration of black settlers into Western Canada. The primary issue of the Canadian election of 1911 was reciprocity with the United States, however, black migration played a role in that issue, along with proving to be an issue in itself. Therefore, both reciprocity and a comparison of immigration policies of Canada and the United States help to identify how black migration played a role in the 1911 election. In addressing the calls for black exclusion by constituents in the Prairie Provinces, the Canadian Department of Immigration also conducted unofficial methods to discourage and exclude black migrants. They sent numerous officials and African Americans, who were paid by the department, to go to Oklahoma in order to discourage the migration; speaking about the harsh climate and the greater possibilities for black settlers if they remained in their Oklahoma communities.

The scholarly works of John Higham, Roger Daniels, Daniel Roediger, and Erika Lee discussed American nativism and immigration policies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Americans and Canadians welcomed immigrants during this period, but often sought to monitor where these immigrants came from. Higham's *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* identified Americans' fear of immigrants and promotion of nativist parties and societies.¹ Daniels' *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882*, Roediger's *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's*

¹ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (Rutgers University Press, 2002).

Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs, and Lee's *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America* and *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* all described desirable and undesirable immigrants in the United States.² Similarly in Canada, immigration policies discussed by Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock in *The Making of the Mosaic* and Valerie Knowles in *Strangers at Our Gates*, reflected the influence of race and identity as these nations sought to only attract and allow in immigrants who fit within their white, European roots.³ Additionally, the United States' restriction and exclusion of certain groups of migrants meant that U.S. politicians had little authority to protest the possible exclusion of African American migrants to Western Canada, even if they wanted to do so.

During the early twentieth century, Taft's administration in the United States and Laurier's administration in Canada sought to create a closer relationship between the United States and Canada. This discussion of a closer relationship largely centered on reciprocity agreements about trade and tariffs, but other connections between the countries were also discussed. Gordon T. Stewart discussed this relationship in *The American Response to Canada Since 1776*.⁴ The national political connections and conversations, especially in 1910 and 1911, did not necessarily address the black migration into Western Canada, but the hopes of a closer

² Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (Basic Books, 2005), Erika Lee, *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America* (Oxford University Press, 2010), and Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

³ Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), and Valerie Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates: Canadian Immigration and Immigration Policy, 1540-2006* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2007).

⁴ Gordon T. Stewart, *The American Response to Canada Since 1776* (Michigan State University, 1992).

relationship did mean that politicians who promoted more connections were reluctant to upset reciprocity talks over the issue of Canadian exclusion of black migrants.

The Canadian election of 1911 was discussed by scholars, including Patrice Dutil and David MacKenzie in *Canada 1911: The Decisive Election That Shaped the Country*.⁵ This election was important in reference to the black migration because it ended the Liberal Party's control in Canada and reciprocity talks between the United States and Canada. Additionally, the political change in Canada coincided with the seemingly successful methods of the immigration department in halting black migration, including monetary requirements, medical exams, discouragement to individuals, and tours by African Americans on behalf of the department in Oklahoma to promote not migrating to Western Canada.

United States and Canadian Relations

The relationship between the United States and Canada in the early twentieth century influenced the way in which Canadian politicians and immigration officials handled African American migration to Western Canada. At the same time that the Canadian government encouraged the migration of Americans to Western Canada, some Canadians feared annexation by the United States. With fifty percent of the population in the West American, some Canadians felt that the US government would follow its citizens into Western Canada, if not all of Canada. Immigration officials dismissed arguments about possible annexation or Americanization as groundless, arguing that American settlers in Western Canada embraced being Canadian and that

⁵ Patrice Dutil and David MacKenzie, *Canada 1911: The Decisive Election That Shaped the Country* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2011).

their children readily embraced Canadian values.⁶ Fear of annexation or Americanization was furthered enflamed by the possible loss of British identity among Canadians. Canada became federated in 1867, but full independence from Great Britain was a process and not completed until 1982, although Canada retained allegiance to the British Head of State and Monarchy. In the early twentieth century, Great Britain controlled most of Canada's foreign affairs, but generally left domestic affairs to Canadians.⁷ However, Canada managed most affairs with the United States since they were such close neighbors and economic business partners. Many Canadians still felt allegiance to Great Britain, and as expressed by Wilhem Cohnstaedt in his travel letters: "I gained the conviction that the Canadians belong to the British Empire not merely out of habit, not only for practical considerations, but from a warm feeling of kinship."⁸ Essays recently compiled by Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis support Cohnstaedt's understanding of the Canadian-British relationship. Buckner and Francis believed that there was a gradual renewed interest in Canada's place in the "British World" in the early twentieth century, and that this world was primarily linked through a sense of belonging in a shared British culture rather than through commerce and trade ties.⁹ Yet, growing cooperation between the United States and Great Britain in international affairs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also encouraged friendly relations between the United States and Canada. Economic

⁶ Adam Shortt and Arthur G. Doughty, *Canada and Its Provinces: A History of the Canadian People and Their Institutions By One Hundred Associates*, (Toronto: Glasgow, Brook, and Co., 1914), 556.

⁷ Canada increasingly took over its foreign affairs, and in 1909 Laurier established a Department of External Affairs.

⁸ Wilhelm Cohnstaedt, *Western Canada 1909: Travel Letters by Wilhelm Cohnstaedt*, translated by Herta Holle-Scherer and edited by Klaus H. Burmeister, *Canadian Plains Studies* 7, (Canadian Plains Research Center: University of Regina, 1976), 32.

⁹ Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, eds., *Canada and the British World: Culture, Migration, and Identity* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 5-6.

ties between the two nations especially strengthened the relationship and friendship as the two nations settled most of their previous quarrels.¹⁰

Reciprocity between the United States and Canada would cause changes in tariff rates and allow for free trade between the two countries. In 1910, 37.54% of Canada's exports went to the United States, and 59.47% of Canada's imports came from the United States.¹¹ Politicians in Canada and the United States discussed the possibility of reciprocity numerous times in the nineteenth century, but the most serious discussion occurred in 1910 and 1911. U.S. President William Taft described reciprocity: "This trade agreement, if entered into, will cement the friendly relations with the Dominion which have resulted from the satisfactory settlement of the controversies that have lasted for a century, and further promote good feeling between kindred peoples."¹² Concerned about limited natural resources, many people in the United States, including Taft, saw reciprocity as the best way to secure Canadian resources for the growing population of the United States. Canadian wheat was central in consideration of reciprocity to help feed the massively increasing U.S. population. But, supporters of reciprocity in the United States also believed that closer economic ties between the United States and Canada would help to limit the growth of Canadian imperial trading encouraged by Great Britain, and prevent further consolidation of Britain's imperial trading system. Taft tried to present reciprocity to Americans as beneficial in providing the United States with Canadian resources, but the plan

¹⁰ Oscar D. Skelton, *The Day of Sir Wilfred Laurier: A Chronicle of Our Own Times* (Toronto: Glasbow, Brook, and Company, 1916), 257.

¹¹ Chantal Allan, *Bomb Canada: And Other Unkind Remarks in the American Media* (Edmonton: Athabasca University, 2009), 14.

¹² United States Senate Finance Committee, *Reciprocity With Canada: Compilation of 1911, Part 3C*, in Senate Documents, Vol. 15 Part 3, 62d Congress, 1st Session: April 4-August 22, 1911 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1911), 4675-4676.

appeared to Canadians as steps towards annexation.¹³ Canada's conservatives began to rally behind Robert Borden in their skepticism as some members in the U.S. House called for annexation if reciprocity did not pass. Then, after five months of debate in the Senate, the reciprocity bill was passed on July 22, 1911.¹⁴ Despite US congressional claims that reciprocity was based upon, "just principles and designed fairly to secure the mutual advantage of the two Nations," Canadians remained skeptical.¹⁵

Reciprocity was one of the only clear distinctions between the Canadian Liberal and Conservative parties, with most Liberals supporting the measure, and Conservatives opposing it.¹⁶ Liberals, including Wilfrid Laurier believed that reciprocity would benefit Canadians in their relationship with the United States and boost their economy. However, opponents in Canada argued that reciprocity threatened the political stability of Canada, and that closer economic ties with the United States would threaten national unity as well as the bond between Canada and Great Britain.¹⁷ Some Canadians also viewed African American migration to Western Canada as the first part of reciprocity with the United States. The editor of the *Calgary Herald* saw a connection between discussions of reciprocity with the arrival of black farmers and wrote: "Reciprocity means that Canada is anxious to take all that America does not want."¹⁸

¹³ Stewart, *The American Response*, 104-115.

¹⁴ Allan, *Bomb Canada*, 18 and 23.

¹⁵ United States Senate Finance Committee, *Reciprocity With Canada: Compilation of 1911, Part 2*, in Senate Documents, Vol. 14, 62d Congress, 1st Session: April 4-August 22, 1911 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1911), 1649.

¹⁶ Patrice Dutil and David MacKenzie, *Canada 1911: The Decisive Election That Shaped the Country* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2011), 284.

¹⁷ Skelton, *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfred Laurier*, 374.

¹⁸ As quoted in: Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable*, 76. For more on the 1911 reciprocity issue, please see: Eugene Beaulieu and J.C. Herbert Emery, "Pork Packers, Reciprocity, and Laurier's Defeat in the 1911 Canadian General Election," *The Journal of Economic History* Vol. 61 No. 4 (December, 2001); Richard Johnston and

The United States and Canada shared many similarities in their immigration policies of the early twentieth century. Both countries wished to restrict similar ethnic groups of immigrants including Chinese, Japanese, Eastern and Southern Europeans, and West Indians. As Howard Palmer concluded in an essay on stereotypes and nativism in Canada's West: "Immigration restrictions kept numbers of Chinese, Japanese, and Black immigrants to a minimum and also played a role in keeping the amount of legal discrimination and public agitation demanding such discrimination at a minimum."¹⁹ Additionally, both countries did not want immigrants who were sick, disabled, or likely to become wards of the state. Both governments also faced opponents in businesses as to the type of immigrants that were wanted; industries often employed Eastern and Southern Europeans and Asians in large numbers. In creating and implementing immigration policy in the early twentieth century, the United States and Canada sought to limit some immigration during a period of immigration expansion. This meant that both countries used a "rights-restrictive" approach in which the government had the right to regulate the borders of the state and manage who crossed those borders.²⁰ The Canadian Immigration Acts of 1906 and 1910 implemented drastic new regulations that differed much from previous legislation. The 1906 Act described undesirable sick and destitute immigrants, and the 1910 Act expanded the group of excludable immigrants to possibly include entire races and migrants who traveled to

Michael B. Percy, "Reciprocity, Imperial Sentiment, and Party Politics in the 1911 Election," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* Vol. 13, No. 4 (December, 1980); Simon J. Potter, "The Imperial Significance of the Canadian-American Reciprocity Proposals of 1911," *The Historical Journal* 47 (2004); C. P. Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict, Volume 1: 1867-1921* (University of Toronto Press, 1984); John Herd Thompson and Stephen J. Randall, *Canada and the United States: Ambivalent Allies* (2nd ed. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Howard Palmer, "Strangers and Stereotypes: The Rise of Nativism, 1880-1920," in R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer, eds., *The Prairie West: Historical Readings* (Edmonton: Pica Pica Press, 1992), 319.

²⁰ Christopher G. Anderson, *Canadian Liberalism and the Politics of Border Control, 1867-1967* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 58.

Canada by non-continuous journey.²¹ However, in contrast to U.S. immigration laws, even the 1910 Act did not explicitly bar a racial group from entering Canada, but instead gave Parliament and the Interior the ability to do so, if needed.

In his work on the United States' immigration policies, Roger Daniels described that after the US passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, it increasingly began to narrow and initiate, "a 39 year period of successive exclusions of certain kinds of immigrants, 1882-1921, followed by 22 years, 1921-43, when statutes and administrative actions set narrowing numerical limits for those immigrants who had not otherwise been excluded."²² Therefore, during the period of black migration to Canada, the United States was very familiar with, and actively engaging with, multiple exclusionary avenues directed towards immigrants who the US viewed as undesirable. On April 1, 1910, Congressman Dillingham presented his report to the U.S. Congress, in which he contrasted the immigration laws of Canada with the United States. He determined that the Canadian laws were just as rigid as the United States', although sometimes the methods for exclusion differed. The United States barred: "all idiots, imbeciles, feeble-minded persons, epileptics, insane persons...paupers; persons likely to become a public charge; professional beggars; persons afflicted with tuberculosis...polygamists...anarchists...prostitutes," and the list continued. Similarly, Canada barred immigrants considered: "feeble-minded, an idiot, or an epileptic, or who is insane...deaf and dumb, or dumb, blind, or infirm...with a loathsome

²¹ Kelley and Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic*, 136-137.

²² Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door*, 3. For more on U.S. immigration policies and exclusionary practices, please see: Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2004); Higham, *Strangers in the Land*; Natalia Molina, *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (Basic Books, 2005); and Daniel J. Tichenor, *Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Control in America* (Princeton University Press, 2002). For more on Canadian immigration into the United States, please see: Bruno Ramirez, *Crossing the 49th Parallel: Migration From Canada to the United States, 1900-1930* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001).

disease...who is a pauper, or destitute, a professional beggar, or vagrant, or who is likely to become a public charge...who has been convicted of a crime involving moral turpitude, or who is a prostitute.”²³ The Canadian laws also allowed officials to deport any migrants within one year of landing if they were found to be sick, commit a crime involving moral turpitude, or become wards of the state.²⁴ As discussed thoroughly in Chapter 4, these conditions applied to migrants of different ethnic groups, but could be applied more frequently to certain groups as a method to deny entry of an ethnic or racial group.

United States congressmen and government officials understood the type of migrants that Canada wished to settle in Western Canada. As stated in the *Immigration Situation in Canada*: “Organized effort is made to secure immigrants from countries which furnish the classes or races most desired as settlers for the agricultural regions of the Dominion now under development.”²⁵ And, in trying to promote good relations between the two countries and show their similarities, the U.S. Senate Finance Committee said:

Generous and equitable trade relations between the United States and Canada are the natural, logical, and inevitable result of forces that began their operation when the North American Continent was first settled by western Europeans. The period in the onward march of western civilization has now been reached when the development of the vast resources of Canada is necessary for the welfare of the race. The same impelling forces which under similar conditions drove the settlers of the Atlantic States across the Appalachian Range, thence later into the Mississippi Valley and across the Rocky Mountains, now cause the adoption of the same measures for the general welfare in the progress of a group of two great people whose homogeneity rests upon origin, propinquity, and interdependence and not upon political affiliations.²⁶

²³ United States Immigration Commission, *The Immigration Situation in Canada*, 41-42.

²⁴ “The Immigration Act,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, June 18, 1906.

²⁵ United States Immigration Commission, *The Immigration Situation in Canada*, 11.

²⁶ United States Senate Finance Committee, *Reciprocity With Canada: Compilation of 1911, Part 3C*, 5176.

Clearly, the U.S. government understood that Canada most wanted American farmers to settle its western provinces, and some American officials supported this migration as part of the destiny of white settlers moving West. The Finance Committee was also promoting reciprocity, and therefore wished to focus upon the similarities of the two nations and the benefits of closely aligning with one another.

Although Taft energetically supported reciprocity with Canada, he was not overly supportive in losing thousands of American farmers to the Canadian prairies. In an effort to retain farmers in the United States, Taft increased the public domain available for homesteads in June of 1910. Americans now had over one million acres of available land to choose from in the United States.²⁷ A representative from Louisiana, Ransdell, even urged immigrants and young men to move South to halt the exodus of citizens to Canada. In addition to providing land for all migrants, Ransdell insisted that, “the Caucasian and the negro can and do dwell together, each working out its own destiny in friendly co-operation and competition. The negro question is settling itself.”²⁸ Violence and lynching in the South contradicted Ransdell’s claims of racial harmony, but his assertions showed the eagerness of some Americans to stop the flow of immigrants north.

African American immigrants represented a special class within Canadian immigration laws because they were undesirables from the United States. As historian Bruce Shepard declared: “Since the United States had itself banned Asian immigration it had little room to

²⁷ “Taft Opens Land to Entry,” *New York Times*, June 12, 1910.

²⁸ “‘Go South,’ Says Ransdell,” *New York Times*, June 15, 1910. For more on opposition to migration to Canada, see: “Statesmen Think We Face a Canadian Peril: Dangerous Emigration from This Country Across the Dominion Border Where They Are Lured by Government Bait for Home-Seekers,” *New York Times*, August 7, 1910.

maneuver.”²⁹ In the midst of reciprocity talks, the United States government wished to avoid any conflict with the Canadian government, and therefore said little on the issue of the barring of African Americans in Canada. Additionally, the U.S. government and the American people, discriminated against Black Americans and passed Jim Crow laws; therefore the U.S. government could say little in its defense of the migration of African Americans to Canada as citizens of the United States. The U.S. State Department also tried to reroute African Americans who considered migrating to Canada, to the Northwest, or to Central America.³⁰ One black migrant to Western Canada stated: “The United States Government would like to see us go to Washington, Montana, or even to Mexico, and at the last minute tried to get us to change our minds.”³¹ Diverting black migrants elsewhere would cease any possible tension between the two nations due to African American migration.

Many Canadians feared the repercussions in U.S.-Canadian relations if they denied entry to African Americans, showing that both sides did not want the issue of black migration to become a major wedge within their relationship. An article printed in Alberta’s *Western Globe* spoke of the special case of black migration to Western Canada. The article said that Canadians did not wish to import the race problem, and feared that the United States would see exclusion as an unfriendly act against the freedom of U.S. citizens. The article showed the problem of drawing the color line when it claimed: “Uncle Sam would be delighted to have us take a few millions of negroes off his hands.”³² For many Canadians, drawing a color line might anger

²⁹ Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable*, 90.

³⁰ Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*, 38.

³¹ “The U.S. Did Not Want the Negroes to Leave,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, March 25, 1911.

³² “Negro Immigration—A Problem,” *Western Globe*, May 3, 1911.

Americans in two ways: firstly, U.S. citizens would be denied entrance into Canada, and secondly, an avenue for reducing the black population in the United States would be closed.

However, even if some White Americans in the United States supported the migration of Black Americans to Western Canada, the United States government did not want to risk the political and economic relationship with Canada over the issue of black migration. Dr. John Jones, the U.S. Consul General stationed in Winnipeg, spoke to Canadian and U.S. officials concerning the black migration. After Jones learned that immigration officials were offering bonuses for every black person that medical inspectors rejected, he warned that the United States would view measures to bar African Americans as an “unfriendly act.”³³ However, as Jones worked to ensure that healthy black migrants who possessed the required amount of money to enter Canada were not discriminated against at the border, he ultimately answered to the wishes and demands of his superiors in the United States. Bruce Walker, the Commissioner of Immigration in Winnipeg, expressed Dr. Jones’ opinions and the conversations between Jones and Philander Knox, the U.S. Secretary of State, in a letter to Frank Oliver. Jones told Walker that he explained to Knox “it might be found necessary for the Canadian Authorities to pass an Order in Council,” barring African Americans from Canada. To which Knox replied that “one could not very well blame the Canadian Authorities if they did.”³⁴ This letter suggests that U.S. politicians would not be offended if the Canadian government denied entry to African Americans; shared racism on both sides of the line united white government officials against

³³ Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), 310-311. Kent Utendale also discussed this correspondence in: Utendale, “Race Relations in Canada’s Midwest.”

³⁴ J. Bruce Walker to Frank Oliver, 23 May 1911, Immigration Branch Records, “Immigration of Negroes from the United States to Western Canada,” RG 76, Vol. 192, File 72552, Part 4 (Ottawa, Ontario: Library and Archives of Canada.) From here, immigration records will be listed as “IBR” with appropriate reel number information. RG76-192-72552 includes records listed in the “Immigration of Negroes from the United States to Western Canada” reels. All other reel numbers are other files within the immigration branch records.

black migrants seeking freedom and equality, and the U.S. government would willingly sacrifice the rights of U.S. citizens to migrate to Canada in order to promote reciprocity.

The Canadian Election of 1911

Aside from the international political and economic relationship between the United States and Canada in the early twentieth, the Liberal Party in Canada faced an election in 1911 that greatly influenced the discussion of the black migration to Western Canada. Since 1896, the Laurier administration had propelled Canada into the twentieth century with a dramatic economic expansion in agriculture, industries, manufacturing, and services. Improved wheat prices, and new forms of wheat, increased the economic capital of the Western prairies. Additionally, population growth exponentially increased with the arrival of three million immigrants between 1896 and 1914, thirty percent of whom settled on homesteads in the West. By 1911, the population of Canada had grown to seven million.³⁵ Despite the growth of the economy and population, the Liberal Party faced growing criticism from the Canadian public as to the type of immigrants admitted to the country and the possible agreement of reciprocity with the United States. As Dutil and MacKenzie wrote in *Canada 1911: The Decisive Election That Shaped the Country*, the 1911 election was about Canada's place in the world, national independence, and relations with the United States. Viewed as friendly towards the United States, Laurier faced criticism from a population that remained critical of U.S. intentions.³⁶ Attitudes towards black migration in Canada reflected the feelings and anxieties of a changing

³⁵ Kelley and Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic*, 111-112.

³⁶ Dutil and MacZenzie, *Canada 1911*, 9-10.

political climate in Canada which called for exclusion of black migrants in protecting Canadian nationalism.

White citizens in Canada asked immigration officials and the Canadian national government to exclude black migrants completely from migrating to Canada, and with the election of 1911 rapidly approaching, western politicians paid close attention to their voters' cries for exclusion. As shown in the parliamentary debates, Liberals and Conservatives fell on both sides of the issue of black migration, but leaders in the Conservative Party, including the leader of the opposition, Robert Borden, saw black migration agitation as an opportunity to depict the Liberals as inept in handling the crisis.³⁷

The Liberal government worried about the implications of discriminating against African Americans migrating to Western Canada when there was a large black population in some areas of Eastern Canada. In a letter to Frank Oliver, W.J. White addressed the bind that calls for exclusion placed the Liberal Party in: "There is a fairly large colored vote in Eastern Canada, most of which is liberal, and if it came to their notice that their people were discriminated against, it might lead to their opposition. On the other hand, I know that the people in the West do not care to have them in their neighborhood."³⁸ This was the crux of the problem for Liberals; black exclusion would secure Liberal votes in the West, but cost the party votes in the East, in addition to possibly harming the relation between the United States and Canada that Laurier worked hard to maintain and strengthen.

³⁷ Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable*, 89. Borden was against the exclusion of Blacks, and he criticized the Liberal government in making a mess of the issue in their attempts to create closer ties with the United States. He was strongly opposed to reciprocity, too.

³⁸ W.J. White to Frank Oliver, 14 September 1909, IBR, RG76-192-72552-1.

Exclusion

To appease calls for the exclusion of African Americans, Frank Oliver, the Canadian Minister of the Interior, used the expanded powers of immigration personnel incorporated in the Immigration Acts of 1906 and 1910 to exclude African Americans from Canada unofficially.³⁹ These acts empowered officials to deny entrance to individuals deemed “undesirable,” to those who could not pass medical exams administered by the immigration department, or to those who did not possess the certain amount of currency.⁴⁰ Oliver urged immigration officials to use these powers to exclude African Americans. Through these acts, Canada could officially defend itself as not excluding black migrants, as all races were subjected to medical exams and required to bring in the same amount of currency. Still, for black immigrants who met all of the requirements, Canada continued to have problems denying entrance. Moreover, whether black migrants were denied or allowed entrance depended on the individual immigration official. As addressed in Chapter 3, Henry Sneed, the African American who had already brought a group of black migrants to Canada and attempted to bring a second group of 160 people in 1911, met with some resistance. Despite the immigration official’s warnings about an inhospitable climate, the group proved undeterred. Even the medical examinations of all the members of the migrating party resulted in only three members being denied entrance. Other black migrants, however, faced stiffer opposition.⁴¹ Willa Dallard recalled that her father had organized a group of five

³⁹ Harold Martin Troper, *Only Farmers Need Apply: Official Canadian Government Encouragement of Immigration from the United States, 1896-1911* (Toronto: Griffin House, 1972), 23.

⁴⁰ For further explanation of these acts, please see: *The Immigration Situation in Canada*, William Paul Dillingham and Walter V. Husband, 61st Congress, Senate Doc. No. 469, (Washington: Government Printing, 1910).

⁴¹ Pierre Berton, *The Promised Land: Settling the West, 1896-1914* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, The Canadian Publishers, 1984), 184-185. This incident was highly publicized in both Oklahoma and Canadian papers. Examples include: “Oklahoma Blacks are Turned Back,” *Okemah Ledger*, March 23, 1911;

families to move to Canada and had chartered a special railway coach, adding, “Here were forty black people to be screened by people who knew nothing about Southern Negroes, but what they had read in books and the press!”⁴² This was the inspector who strategically rejected one member in each family at the inspection point near Vancouver in an attempt to prevent each family from crossing the border.⁴³

Even more rigorous inspections at the border did not halt the movement of Black Americans into Canada, and despite the relatively small number of African Americans crossing the border, fears of a mass black migration from Oklahoma remained high. In response, the resolution by the Edmonton Board of Trade resolved that the Dominion government had to stop black emigration from the United States.⁴⁴ Despite the protests of black residents in Canada, other cities adopted similar resolutions and African Americans who had moved to Canada feared their own marginalization and the loss of critical connections to new migrants. The transnational exchanges which had strengthened African American communities in Canada were now threatened and African Americans feared that, as had happened in Oklahoma, they would be fresh targets of Jim Crowism in Canada. In particular, and with a large dose of irony, Canadian

“Negroes are Turned Back,” *Boley Progress*, March 30, 1911; “To Keep Out the Negro Settlers,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, March 21, 1911; “Negro Immigrants Subjected to Rigorous Medical Examination,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, March 22, 1911; “Negroes are Hopeful of Becoming Canadian Citizens,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 23, 1911; “Negro Immigrants Held Up at Emerson,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, March 23, 1911; “Continue the Careful Inspection of Negroes,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, March 23, 1911; “Party of Negroes Passes Boundary,” *Calgary Daily Herald*, March 24, 1911; “Cold Reception to Negro Party,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 28, 1911; “Negro Colony Arrives and Will Farm Near Landing,” *Edmonton Capital*, March 25, 1911.

⁴² Willa Dallard, “Memories of My Father, the Late Willis Bowen of Amber Valley, Alberta,” (Prelate, Saskatchewan, February 1978), 2.

⁴³ Much of this paragraph and the following paragraph appeared previously in: Rachel Wolters, “As Migrants and As Immigrants: African Americans Search for Land and Liberty in the Great Plains,” *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 35 No. 4 (Fall 2015): 333-355. University of Nebraska Press.

⁴⁴ “Board of Trade Goes on Record,” *Edmonton Capital*, April 19, 1911; “Petitions Protesting Against Negro Immigration are Numerously Signed,” *Edmonton Capital*, April 27, 1911; “Negro Immigration Opposed by Trades and Labor Council,” *Edmonton Capital*, May 3, 1911; “Board of Trade is Against Negroes,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, April 19, 1911.

immigration officials took advantage of the transnational networks of information that had encouraged black migration to stop the process of immigration. They hired African Americans to lobby against migrating and tapped black newspapers and churches in mounting a campaign against emigration. Moreover, as examples of Canada's own racism and restrictions on immigration emerged, such newspapers as the *The Crisis*, carried stories of Canada's Jim Crowism to its readership. Examples of letters from the immigration department to *The Crisis* appeared in the April 1911 edition. The first letter, from John C. Walker, stated that the color line did not exist concerning the black migration. The second letter, from L.M. Fortier, stated that while no regulation existed, the department did not believe that the climate was suitable for black migrants and they were not a class considered to do well in Canada.⁴⁵ The following issue, in May, blamed the Southern press for spreading the idea that Canada was barring black migrants, but also described the debates in the House of Commons concerning the black migration.⁴⁶ In the same issue, an article titled "Emigration to Canada," asserted that "It is positive that the people of Canada do not want the Negroes as settlers and future citizens."⁴⁷ The article continued with numerous examples of the explanation as to why Canada did not want black migration as presented in newspapers in both Canada and the United States.

The Canadian immigration office hired aggressive black leaders to tour Oklahoma and dissuade black settlers from leaving for Canada. Armed with stories of frigid winters, harsh conditions, and homestead failures, these African Americans challenged the once popular view of Canada as the "land of milk and honey" as they sought to undermine the transnational links

⁴⁵ "Canada and Colored Folk," *The Crisis* 1 (April 1911), 11.

⁴⁶ "Along the Color Line," *The Crisis* 2 (May 1911), 6.

⁴⁷ "Emigration to Canada," *The Crisis* 2 (May 1911), 13-14.

between families and friends in the northward migration. The most effective agent used by the Canadian immigration office was Dr. G. W. Miller, a black doctor from Chicago, who toured black settlements in western Canada and visited black towns in Oklahoma, where he spoke to black residents and provided articles for local newspapers. In the *Oklahoma Guide*, Miller asked, “Why should people sacrifice their homes that they have spent a life time to acquire? Why should they isolate themselves from friends and relations to go to a country that is desolate, frigid, unsettled, unknown to which they are climatically unfamiliar and financially unfit?” His answers were direct: “The hardships you inter and must endure are too numerous to enumerate... You yourself cannot stand the cold. You were bread born here in the south and it will cost your life to live one winter in Canada.”⁴⁸

In addition to dissuading possible migrants through letters and promoting the work of Miller, the department sent C.W. Speers, General Colonization Agent, from Winnipeg to Oklahoma to convince African Americans not to migrate. Speers discussed Canada with many possible migrants and he effectively engaged the black clergy in Oklahoma in his maneuvers of dissuasion. Bruce Walker, Commissioner in Winnipeg, revealed to John Jones, the U.S. consul in Winnipeg, that the goal for Speers in Oklahoma was to emphasize the cold Canadian climate and increasing prejudice directed towards black settlers in Western Canada. In addition, Speers was to suggest that black settlers in Oklahoma were the victims of a scheme by a railroad in Oklahoma to buy their land for less than it was worth when black settlers decided to migrate to Canada. At the same time that Speers told African Americans about their enemy, the railroads, he spoke to railroads in Kansas City and convinced them to stop soliciting railroad tickets to

⁴⁸ “Dr. G.W. Miller of Chicago,” *Oklahoma Guide*, July 6, 1911. This paragraph appeared previously in: Rachel Wolters, “As Migrants and As Immigrants: African Americans Search for Land and Liberty in the Great Plains,” *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 35 No. 4 (Fall 2015): 333-355. University of Nebraska Press.

Black Americans with intentions of migrating to Canada.⁴⁹ Speers found supporters among African Americans doctors, preachers, and news editors in counties in Oklahoma where leaders in the communities did not want to lose their black population to Western Canada.⁵⁰ He encouraged these leaders to tell people about the climate and discrimination that they would encounter in Western Canada, and believed in his success: "I feel assured that the movement of this special class unsuited to our country and climate, is being set back and interscepted in a very effectual manner."⁵¹ Speers recognized that the primary reason for African American interest in Canada was the passing of the grandfather clause in Oklahoma. When the Supreme Court declared that the Oklahoma statute conflicted with the U.S. Constitution, Speers stressed to his black associates that it would be only a matter of time until the grandfather clause was ineffective and then there would be little reason for African Americans to want to immigrate to Western Canada.⁵²

Western Canadian whites who protested the immigration of African Americans, called for exclusion, and threatened the power of the Liberal government, ultimately forced Laurier's cabinet to pass an Order-in-Council. The order was proposed by the Superintendent of Immigration, W.D. Scott, signed, and submitted to the Governor General on June 2, 1911, and passed by the council on August 12, 1911. Frank Oliver supported an order-in-council for excluding black migrants in the belief that the House of Commons would never agree to pass such a measure. The order would have the authority of law without the actual consent of the

⁴⁹ R. Bruce Shepard, "Diplomatic Racism, Canadian Government, and Black Migration From Oklahoma, 1905-1912," *Great Plains Quarterly* (Winter 1983): 8-9.

⁵⁰ Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*, 44-45.

⁵¹ C.W. Speers to W.J. White, 17 May 1911, IBR, RG76-192-72552-4.

⁵² C.W. Speers to S.S. Jones, 24 May 1911 and C.W. Speers to Hernigan, 24 May 1911, IBR, RG76-192-72552-4.

House.⁵³ The order prohibited “any immigrant belonging to the Negro race, which race is deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada” from landing in Canada for one year.⁵⁴ The limit of one year, it was hoped, would crush the black migration without barring African Americans for an indefinite period and angering the black population already in Canada. Thus, satisfying the white constituency in the West immediately outweighed, for Liberals, the possibility of insulting the United States or black votes in Eastern Canada.⁵⁵ Without the support of western whites calling for black exclusion, the Liberal Party would not win the election of 1911.

Liberals passed the order-in-council that would bar African Americans from entering Canada in a last effort to secure votes in the Western provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. Usually these provinces were firmly in the control of the Liberal Party, but the controversy over immigration policies signified a possible shift toward the Conservative Party in the West. Considered more nationalistic, many Conservatives supported exclusionary immigration policies that would allow Canadians to control the types of immigrants who entered into Canada. Therefore, passing the order showed white westerners that the Liberal Party was finally willing to specifically exclude black migrants in the West. But, the order only satisfied citizens in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and the Liberal Party lost the election on September 21, 1911, proving that Canadians wished to maintain their close ties with Great Britain through the Conservative Party and distance themselves from the United States, with whom the Liberal Party supported closer ties. Many regions in Canada voted along previous party lines, but small shifts

⁵³ Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*, 57.

⁵⁴ As quoted in: Troper, *Only Farmers Need Apply*, 140.

⁵⁵ Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*, 57.

in the voting turned over the government to Conservative control. Although Liberals satisfied voters in the western provinces with the order barring black migrants, many Canadians still worried about the changing population of Canada and the growing relations between the United States and Canada. The result of the 1911 election told the government that Canadians were not interested in reciprocity with the United States and that they wished to retain their ties with Great Britain rather than shift allegiances towards their southern neighbor.⁵⁶ Reciprocity was a goal of Wilfrid Laurier and the Liberal government, and with the shift to a Conservative government and new Prime Minister, Robert Borden, Canada told the United States that reciprocity was dead and that it was no longer interested in attempting closer ties with, or not offending, the United States.

The Liberals never acted upon the order-in-council that excluded African Americans and a day before the Conservatives took over the government on October 6, 1911, the order was repealed “on the pretext that the Minister of the Interior had not been present at the August meeting.”⁵⁷ Historian Bruce Shepard believed that the hesitance of the Liberal government to implement the order meant that it was really passed as a “pocket order,” and that the government and immigration department would only actively deny black migrants entry based upon race if the campaign of discouragement in Oklahoma was unsuccessful. However, the campaign proved a success from the reports of C.W. Speers and the new agent in Kansas City, W.H. Rogers, along with reduced migration numbers over the summer, and the Liberal government never acted upon the measure.⁵⁸ Borden, although a nationalist Conservative, did not publicly support the exclusion of black migrants.⁵⁹ However, the results of the Department of Immigration’s

⁵⁶ Dutil and MacZenzie, *Canada 1911*, 279.

⁵⁷ Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable*, 100.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Canadian Parliament, *House of Commons Debates*, 11th Parliament, 3rd Session: Vol. 4 (1911): 5947.

campaign to stop the black migration from Oklahoma during the Liberal government meant that Borden's government would not face the same crisis. Black residents in Oklahoma knew of the order-in-council and although it was never officially implemented, it still discouraged African Americans from migrating to Western Canada. And, with less friendly relations between the United States and Canada after the failed reciprocity agreement, the immigration department felt assured that they could continue dissuading black migration with little concern from the government over insulting the United States. Canada's commitment to unofficial black exclusion remained intact after the turnover of the government, and although Frank Oliver was replaced by Robert Rogers as the Minister of the Interior, W.D. Scott remained as the Superintendent of Immigration. That Borden did not replace Scott affirms that he supported the methods and goals of the Department of Immigration, and that although he did not publicly support official black exclusion during the Liberal government, he was not overly concerned about the unofficial exclusion of African Americans during his tenure.

As the networks of people and information reinforced the view of Canada as an undesirable location, especially with the passing of the Order-in-Council, black settlers in Oklahoma rejected migration and the promise of a mass exodus largely disappeared. Although black migrants in Canada continued to support their new home, the *Edmonton Bulletin* could happily report that the "Campaign of Discouragement Checks Immigration of Negroes."⁶⁰ The specter of a "Negro Menace" had been eliminated and white Canadians were reassured that the South had not moved north.⁶¹ For black settlers in Oklahoma, the "Last Best West" represented

⁶⁰ "Campaign of Discouragement Checks Immigration of Negroes," *Edmonton Bulletin*, June 5, 1911.

⁶¹ "Negro Menace Dispelled by Returns," *Edmonton Capital*, June 3, 1911.

not a new frontier of opportunity, but another country where racism and restriction mirrored the American South.

Post-1911

Discussions of a large mass exodus to Western Canada ceased by 1912, although some African Americans continued to migrate to the western prairies. Many of these migrants already had friends and family living in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and followed in their footsteps. Records of the Canadian Department of Immigration show that officials were still concerned about black migration in 1912, as the national policy remained unclear. Officials wrote that they believed African Americans were still interested in Western Canada because, “The Government and other publications...do not even hint at a color line,” and that Black Americans were becoming more aggressive in asserting their rights as American citizens: “They are getting advice as to what they can claim as American citizens and to that extent are becoming more insistent, more incredulous and less apprehensive. Several have recently declared they would have the matter brought to the attention of the U.S. Congress through their representatives.”⁶² But, African Americans no longer migrated in large groups and white Canadian settlers no longer feared an influx of thousands of African Americans. Borden did allow significant numbers of black migrants to enter Canada in positions such as porters for the railroads, which Mathieu focused upon in *North of the Color Line*. Viewed as subservient positions, occupations open to black immigrants were specific to the service industry, and the availability of new

⁶² W.H. Rogers to W.D. Scott, 15 February 1912, IBR, RG76-192-72552-5.

homesteads for black settlers in Western Canada ceased to exist.⁶³ Furthermore, as Speers and White discussed in May of 1911, the decision by the Supreme Court that the grandfather clause in Oklahoma was unconstitutional encouraged Black Americans to stay in Oklahoma.⁶⁴ African Americans in Oklahoma also sought new opportunities in the United States by 1914, choosing to migrate to northern cities. As part of the Great Migration north, Oklahoma Black Americans lost much of their interest as farmers in Western Canada.⁶⁵

However, despite opportunities elsewhere, at least some interest continued in terms of black migration to Canada during the 1920s and 1930s. A few records in the Canadian Department of Immigration files showed a continuing concern about black migration, and an article in the *Edmonton Bulletin* in 1923 titled “500 Rich Negro Farmers Followed by Thousands More to Settle Alberta,” discussed the aims of the Alberta Negro Colonization and Settlement Society of Alberta. This society sought to encourage black migrants throughout the world to settle in Western Canada, but only those who were prosperous. Efforts of the society would first target black residents in Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, and Oklahoma; those familiar with farming. As with the promotional campaign in the first decade of the twentieth century, Canadian literature and promotional materials would be used to encourage migration. Additionally, the society planned to illustrate the “traditional justice of the British race to people of all colors,” which would show, “the American negro that in Canada he is quite as free as are the various

⁶³ Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*, 58.

⁶⁴ See: W.J. White to Frank Oliver telegram, 24 May 1911, “Immigration of Negroes;” “Negro Immigration Expected to Fall Off Very Materially,” *Edmonton Capital*, May 30, 1911; and “To Terminate Negro Movement,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, May 30, 1911.

⁶⁵ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 313.

branches of the white race.”⁶⁶ The article went on to state that there was no racial antagonism in Canada and that the climate was healthy and suitable for migrants from the south.⁶⁷ In many ways, the Alberta Negro Colonization and Settlement Society of Alberta addressed the same issues in the 1920s that black migrants faced over ten years earlier. Still, these efforts for migration began in Canada rather than within the United States.

With some irony, white Canadians also began to point to the presence of their black settlers as an indicator to the good climate and prosperity of the region. Western Canada suffered from a drought during the 1920s, and they also experienced the depression of the 1930s. One example of this flip in the climate argument concerning black migrants was a topographical survey of Canada in 1922 on the Athabasca district, completed by the Land Classification Division. This report was supposed to serve as a guide for possible settlers in the region, and in order to show that Athabasca had a congenial climate in which new settlers could prosper; the report showcased a photograph of a black family as evidence. This photo included eight children outside of a log cabin, with the caption, “Indicative of an Invigorating Climate: Family of a coloured settler in the Pine Creek District near Donatville post office.”⁶⁸ Given the perception that black people could not survive in harsh, cold climates, this report used a black family to show that the climate of Western Canada could not be too harsh since black families survived in the region.

⁶⁶ “500 Rich Negro Farmers Followed by Thousands More to Settle Alberta,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, January 10, 1923. Located in: Canadian Pacific Railway, Land Settlement, and Development, M-2269, File 243, Glenbow Museum, Calgary, AB.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ C. P. Hotchkiss, Report on Athabasca District, Alberta (1922), Department of the Interior Topographical Survey of Canada, 89.04/47 PA 68.321 Box 1 Item 2, Athabasca Archives, Athabasca, AB, 286.

After the successful Canadian campaigns to discourage black migration to Canada in 1911, black settlers in Oklahoma looked elsewhere to escape the racial discrimination they experienced in the state. Drawing on previous Back-to-Africa movements, a new movement arose among the black communities in Oklahoma, led by “Chief” Alfred C. Sam. Sam was a member of an Akim tribe along Africa’s Gold Coast, and in 1913, he appeared in the Great Plains and invited African Americans to “return” to Africa. He purchased the ship, *Liberia*, and sailed to Galveston, Texas in 1914 to pick up migrants from camps that stretched from Texas, to Oklahoma and Kansas. After landing in Liberia in 1915, many of the migrants found that promises of success and prosperity made by Sam were not true, and many of the migrants returned to the United States within the following years.⁶⁹ Although viewed by both contemporaries and historians as a horrible failure, “Chief” Sam’s movement indicated yet another transnational migration among black settlers in Oklahoma. After facing restriction and an invisible color line in terms of Canadian migration, black settlers in Oklahoma turned to other options to escape racial discrimination.

Conclusions

The case of African Americans presented a unique situation for the Canadian Department of Immigration in the early twentieth century. Canadians placed a heavy head tax on Chinese immigrants and signed a Gentleman’s Agreement with Japan, but national relations between

⁶⁹ Kenneth A. Lewallen, “‘Chief’ Alfred C. Sam: Black Nationalism on the Great Plains, 1913-1914,” *Journal of the West* 16, no. 1 (Jan. 1977): 49. See also: William E. Bittle and Gilbert L. Geis, “Alfred Charles Sam and an African Return: A Case Study in Negro Despair,” *Phylon* 23, no. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1962); William E. Bittle, *The Longest Way Home: Chief Alfred C. Sam’s Back-to-Africa Movement* (Indiana: Wayne State University Press, 1964); J. Ayo Langley, “Chief Sam’s African Movement and Race Consciousness in West Africa,” *Phylon* 32, no. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1971); Edwin S. Redkey, *Black Exodus: Black Nationalist and Back-to-Africa Movements, 1890-1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969); and “‘Chief’ Sam and the Negro ‘Exodus’” *Literary Digest* Vol. 48 (January-June 1914).

Canada and the United States did not allow for such measures against African Americans, who, although discriminated against in the United States, were still U.S. citizens. The conversations and methods of the Canadian Department of Immigration reflected their knowledge of the relationship between the two countries, and the unclear language of “undesirables” in the Immigration Acts, as immigration officials sought to restrict black migration through unofficial policies in order to fulfill the national vision of a white Canadian West. The Liberal government of Canada sought to remain friendly with the United States in the face of reciprocity trade negotiations, and therefore did not wish to offend the United States with a declaration that a group of Americans were undesirable in Canada’s West. But, by the time of the 1911 election, the Liberal Party took drastic measures to satisfy white settlers in Western Canada who protested the black settlement and threatened to vote for the Conservative Party. The order-in-council was never implemented, but the fact that Canadians passed such a far-reaching law of discrimination and hatred convinced many African Americans that they were not wanted in Canada, and the possibility of a large migration to Canada ceased.

CONCLUSION

African Americans searching for land and equality migrated to Oklahoma and then to Canada in hopes of finding opportunity and equality. By immigrating to Canada, these African Americans willingly gave up their American identities to become Canadians and win the respect and recognition that eluded them in the United States. Indeed, they believed that Canada offered a solution to white racism and violence in America. Unlike their white counterparts who migrated to Canada, black immigrants linked their movement directly to their color and to possibilities for not only cheap land but also for a future free from oppression. Many of them came from all-black towns in Oklahoma and sought similar security in numbers in Canada. Black immigrants may have traded their national identity for what they saw as Canadian “rights,” but they never lost sight of the importance of a unified black identity and strong familial relationships through chain migrations and valuable exchanges.

This movement of African Americans across the border between Canada and the United States demonstrated the power of a transnational migration of information and values and reflects issues related to the larger history of race, immigration, and restriction. The Canadian government had promoted a thorough propaganda campaign within the United States to attract white settlers and newspapers in the United States assisted this effort. But, the fact that these appeals also attracted African Americans confounded Canada’s immigration officials and alarmed white Canadian residents. In response, both newspaper editors and their readers in Canada borrowed from America’s white South to fan the flames of Canadian racism and heighten popular fears about black immigration.

Canadian officials recognized that the most remarkable and decisive transnational connections were those among the immigrants themselves. Direct contact and fresh connections

among African Americans across national borders were critical to African Americans in migrating to—and settling in—Canada. This durable network of friends and families figured prominently in their decisions, in their attitudes, and even in their success as homesteaders in the Great Plains. So enamored of the promise of a better life in Canada, many blacks crossed back and forth across the border to lead migrants to the “promised land.” And, their search for land and liberty was only derailed after Canadian authorities recognized that power of immigrant relations among African Americans in Canada and the United States. By subverting the network established among African Americans in Canada and the United States, Canadian officials were ultimately successful in dissuading African Americans from immigrating. It was for many Black Americans a cruel irony, and their hope that Canada would be different dimmed, effectively ending their journey northward in search of opportunity and justice.¹

In the United States, few scholars devoted works to this migration; although it is often mentioned in scholarship concerning the all-black towns in Oklahoma. Canadian scholars covered the migration in much more detail and emphasis, especially in works that highlight the growth and settlement of Western Canada and the all-black settlements in Alberta and Saskatchewan. In recent decades, the descendants of the black migrants in Western Canada preserved the history of the black settlements. Members of families who migrated from places like Oklahoma to Western Canada conducted interviews with those who migrated and their children; they set up museums at places like Amber Valley, Alberta; they produced community memoirs with family histories; and they have helped produce films, plays, and literary books on the black communities in Western Canada. The importance of their role in the preservation of this history cannot be understated. For members of the families who migrated, this history is

¹ These conclusions appeared previously in: Rachel Wolters, “As Migrants and As Immigrants: African Americans Search for Land and Liberty in the Great Plains,” *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 35 No. 4 (Fall 2015): 333-355. University of Nebraska Press.

family history and local history, but it is also migration, national, and transnational histories as well. While the all-black communities in places like Alberta and Saskatchewan have largely disappeared today as descendants moved into cities and other provinces; these descendants of the black migrants from Oklahoma represent a significant amount of the Black Canadian population today. For the United States, this history of the migration depicts the struggles of African Americans to find a home in which they could acquire land and experience freedom; for Canada, this history of the migration presents a complicated history of race in Canada while also setting the stage for the growth of the vibrant and active Black Canadian culture that exists today.

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APPENDICES

September 19, 2017

Rachel Wolters
2701 N Mill Ave, Apt. 33
Bowling Green
IL 42104

Dear Rachel Wolters:

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Manjit Kaur
Manager, Journals: Management and Publishing Solutions
University of Nebraska Press
1111 Lincoln Mall
Lincoln, NE 68588
e-mail: mkaur2@unl.edu

VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University

Rachel Wolters

rachelmwolters@gmail.com

John A. Logan Community College
Associate in Arts, May 2008

Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Bachelor of Science, History Education, December 2010

Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Master of Arts, History, May 2013

Special Honors and Awards:

Great Plains Quarterly 2016 Frederick C. Luebke Award; Graduate Paper Presentation Award: WGSS Conference, SIUC 2016; Graduate Teaching Assistantships 2011-2016; 2015 Stanley Zucker Paper Prize; 2013 Outstanding History Teaching Assistant Award; John Leason Award; Marjory Leason Award; Randolph County SIU Alumni Scholarship; SIUC Dean's List; Magna Cum Laude

Dissertation Title:

“WE HEARD CANADA WAS A FREE COUNTRY”: AFRICAN AMERICAN
MIGRATION IN THE GREAT PLAINS, 1890-1911

Major Professor: GRAY WHALEY

Publications:

“As Migrants and As Immigrants: African Americans Search for Land and Liberty in the Great Plains, 1890-1912,” *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 35, no. 4 (Fall 2015).

Forthcoming: “Charles Francis Adams,” “Maria Chapman,” “Abigail Kelley Foster,” and “Charles Sumner” in *Opposition to War: An Encyclopedia of United States Peace and Antiwar Movements*. Edited by Mitchell K. Hall. ABC-CLIO, (January 2018).

Review of *Staging Migrations Toward an American West: From Ida B. Wells to Rhodessa Jones*. By Marta Effinger-Crichlow. *Journal of African American History*, Vol. 102, No. 2 (Spring 2017)

Review of *Joe, The Slave Who Became an Alamo Legend*. By Ron L. Jackson Jr. and Lee Spencer White. *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 36, No. 3 (Summer 2016).

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