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DIPLOMATIC RACISM

CANADIAN GOVERNMENT AND BLACK MIGRATION FROM OKLAHOMA, 1905-1912

R. BRUCE SHEPARD

From the turn of the century until World War I, hundreds of thousands of American farmers migrated to western Canada.¹ Not all of them were welcomed. Between 1905 and 1912, more than one thousand black men, women, and children joined the trek.² They came mainly from Oklahoma, and they settled in Saskatchewan and Alberta. While their numbers were small in comparison to the total American migration, the appearance of these black settlers aroused bitter race prejudice among western Canadians, many of whom demanded that the Canadian government stop more blacks from coming. How the government went about this task is the subject of this article.

Who were these black immigrants? They were ex-slaves and the descendants of former slaves who had moved westward from the older Southern states following Reconstruction.³ These people settled in what were then

the Oklahoma and Indian Territories, and began leaving for western Canada at the time these "Twin Territories" began preparing for statehood in 1907.

The immediate cause of the migration was racist legislation that Oklahoma aimed at blacks living in the state. Immediately after statehood was achieved in 1907, segregation legislation was passed that confined blacks to separate schools, railroad cars, and seating on street cars. The very first bill introduced in the new state House of Representatives was a "Jim Crow" measure, while in the state Senate it was only the fourth. In 1910, the blacks' rights were again cut back when their right to vote was taken away. Black Oklahomans reacted immediately to these laws by challenging them in the courts and organizing protests. Some even turned to violence.⁴ Nothing worked, however, and many began looking for a way out of Oklahoma.

Segregation and disfranchisement were the key factors that sent the blacks toward Canada. Jeff Edwards of Amber Valley, Alberta, claimed that he first became interested in western Canada when Oklahoma began its segregation policies. The blacks who went north to eastern Canada were fleeing slavery, he said; "We in

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Amber Valley are here because we fled something almost as hard to bear—'Jim Crowism'." One black emigrant group reached St. Paul, Minnesota, in March 1911 and said they had been driven from Oklahoma by the theft of their property and the denial of their right to vote. They also said that there were five thousand more blacks ready to follow them. These sentiments were echoed by one member of a group of black Oklahomans who tried to enter Canada in British Columbia. Only two were admitted, and one was reported in Vancouver as stating, "The people of Oklahoma treat us like dogs. We are not allowed to vote and we are not admitted to any of the theatres or public places. They won't even let us ride the street cars in some of the towns." When asked why they chose Canada, he answered, "We heard about the free lands here and also that everyone had the right to vote and was a free man."⁵

The black migrants learned about Canada by reading their local newspapers. Before World War I the government of Canada advertised extensively in American newspapers, attempting to lure farmers to the Canadian plains. Even though the Canadian government did not issue special promotional material for blacks, as it did for other American ethnocultural groups, advertisements for Canadian land filled black Oklahoma newspapers. The Canadian government appears to have contracted through a press service and may not have checked the end products too closely in its haste to attract settlers.⁶

These advertisements cast doubt on the argument that black farmers had no way of becoming informed about Canada because they were poorly educated and often illiterate and that, therefore, Canada was never especially attractive to them.⁷ In fact, the opposite was true—Canada was very attractive to the blacks, and they could easily learn about it.

Extensive advertising about Canadian settlement appeared in the black Oklahoma press. While it is true that Afro-Americans had a high illiteracy rate, that rate had fallen from 1865, when only one in twenty could read and write,

to one out of every two by 1900.⁸ In any case, it takes only one literate person to read a paper to a group of illiterates, and once word of a movement starts, it spreads easily. Furthermore, to take one example, the black *Boley Progress*, in which Canadian advertisements appeared, was distributed throughout the South in an effort to attract blacks to that town. Therefore, blacks in other states could have known of Canada's desire for settlers.⁹ The question then is not why only several hundred blacks trekked to western Canada, but what stopped several thousand from following them? The answer lies in the actions of the government of Canada.

In 1910 the Democratic party of Oklahoma began a campaign to disfranchise the state's black citizens. This sent many more blacks toward the Canadian border. Frank Oliver, the Canadian minister of the interior, and thus the man responsible for immigration, became so concerned with the developing black exodus that he sent his inspector of United States agencies on a five-day trip to Oklahoma. The minister received a letter on the issue in September 1910.¹⁰

Following this visit, the Canadian government took steps to try to halt the migration. It contacted its agent in Kansas City, who was closest to the scene, and suggested that he contact the postmasters of the towns stamped on inquiries, asking whether the person writing was black or white. The idea was that if the agent could find out which writers were black, he would not send immigration literature to them. Some of the postmasters' replies show the state of race relations in Oklahoma at the time; one from Keystone used the term "Nigger," while another from Hominy read, "black as hell." The border points of Emerson, Manitoba, and Portal, Saskatchewan, were also alerted, and the agents told to examine any blacks carefully, since the American agents were no longer issuing settlers' certificates to them.

When several black families appeared in Edmonton late in December 1910, Frank Oliver wanted to know who had let them in and

whether they had been medically examined. On 5 January 1911, the minister got his answer. This group had gone from Oklahoma to Vancouver, on Canada's West Coast, and then up to Edmonton. The government immigration officers in Vancouver were then given the same instructions as those at the other border crossings. The Edmonton agent also got a telegram on 5 January, telling him to take action if he could discover any reason for deporting any of the immigrants and suggesting that he call in the city health officer if he suspected any would not meet the physical qualifications.¹¹

Clearly, the Canadian immigration authorities believed they could stop the influx by depriving the blacks of information. This proved to be haphazard at best, so they tried to use vigorous medical examinations at the border as a deterrent. They even went so far as to try to bribe the medical authorities. In the spring of 1911, the American consul-general in Winnipeg, John E. Jones, had to help a group of his black countrymen enter Canada. Jones later determined that the commissioner of immigration for western Canada had offered the medical inspector a fee for every potential black immigrant he turned away.¹² To his credit, the doctor does not appear to have taken the money. In any case, tough medical inspections were rendered ineffective when obviously healthy black men, women, and children presented themselves. In March 1911, a large group led by one Henry Sneed, bound for northern Alberta, shattered the medical examination idea because of their good physical condition. This fact, plus their numbers, attracted considerable publicity.¹³ The publicity, in turn, provoked comment and revealed western Canadians' deep feelings on the subject of black immigration.

White western Canadians reacted overwhelmingly against the black settlers. Sneed's group aroused negative comments from newspapers across the prairies. The Edmonton chapter of the Independent Order Daughters of the Empire, a women's patriotic group, petitioned the minister of the interior in Ottawa to keep the blacks out. The Edmonton Board of Trade

launched a vigorous and successful petition campaign in that city. They also contacted other similar agencies, and by the end of May 1911, boards of trade across western Canada had all joined the Edmontonians in denouncing the black immigration. Several chapters of the United Farmers of Alberta also went on record as favoring an end to the migration.¹⁴ This widespread public response was echoed in the House of Commons in Ottawa. On 3 April 1911, William Thoburn, the Conservative member for the Ontario riding of Lanark North, asked the minister of the interior whether the government was prepared to stop the developing black influx and whether it would not be preferable "to preserve for the sons of Canada, the lands they propose to give to niggers?"¹⁵

While Ottawa tried to find a solution to its dilemma, events in Oklahoma were forcing more blacks to try to escape. In 1911, their condition was only too clear, especially after an ugly lynching in May of that year. A black mother and son, arrested for murdering a deputy sheriff, were taken from the Okemah jail, dragged to a railway bridge south of the town, and hanged. Blacks were predictably horror-struck by the event. According to one black journal, pictures of the crime were being openly sold. It did not attempt to conceal its anguish when it cried:

Oh! where is that christian spirit we hear so much about
 —What will the good citizens do to apprehend these mobs
 —Wait, we shall see—Comment is unnecessary. Such a crime is simply Hell on Earth. No excuse can be set forth to justify the act.¹⁶

Western Canada was still an escape from these horrors, for despite their concern with black immigration, the Canadian government had not removed its advertisements from black Oklahoma newspapers. Throughout 1911, the qualities of the northern prairies continued to be described in glowing terms. The Canadian authorities were well aware of the continued interest of black Oklahomans. On 14 March 1911, the secretary of the Department of the Interior, L. M. Fortier, wrote to W. W. Cory,

deputy minister of the department, arguing that, "if we are to prevent a large influx of these people during the next six months, some steps will have to be taken at once."¹⁷

Another measure of the continued black interest in moving to Canada was the commentary this issue stirred in the black Oklahoma press. Little of it was favorable, however, since black editors felt that their people should stay where they were and face their problems. The *Clearview Patriarch*, for example, understood that it had cost more than five thousand dollars to transport one large party north, and argued that such a sum, if added to another, could operate a huge business that would be a "credit to the race." It also did not believe that the best results could be obtained by moving so often. Another black journal was even more emphatic. After noting that many blacks had come to Oklahoma in its early days, overcome crises, built themselves homes and farms, and now had a place where they could raise their heads, it argued that these same people were now selling everything they had without due consideration. Conditions in Oklahoma were improving, it urged.¹⁸

Reports on the agitation against the black immigration into western Canada obviously buttressed the black editors' arguments, and they were noted and commented upon. In a front-page editorial in its 13 April 1911 issue, the *Clearview Patriarch* reprinted an entire editorial from the *Edmonton Journal* of 27 March that recognized the existence of anti-black prejudice in western Canada. The black newspaper then argued that the Canadian item proved that, wherever he went, the black man had to face a problem. Not quite a month later, the black *Oklahoma Guide* of Guthrie carried a front-page item from an unidentified New York newspaper headlined, "Protest against Immigration—Race Prejudice Caused by Colored People in Canada." This piece noted the increase in antiblack feeling in Alberta and Saskatchewan due to the rise in black immigration from Oklahoma, and observed that, for the first time since they began moving north, a class of American citizens was being deemed

undesirable by Canada. The resolutions of the boards of trade in Edmonton and other western Canadian communities were noted, as was the argument that blacks could not adapt to the climate. This, the article suggested, was only a polite way of saying that the blacks were not welcome. The Canadian government was obviously feeling the pressure of public opinion, and it could be forced to pass restrictive immigration regulations. The journal's argument concluded by noting that the American federal authorities were also in a delicate position, "in view of the fact that although the federal government does not protect the Negro from disfranchisement at the hands of the Southerners, it does hold him entitled to the same rights as the white man under foreign treaties and conventions."¹⁹

Black Oklahomans continued to be informed of Canada's reception of their brethren. The Muskogee *Baptist Informer* carried an item on 8 June 1911 about a resolution of the Calgary Board of Trade against black immigration.²⁰ But there was a more personal source of information, albeit somewhat biased, for blacks interested in going to Canada or for those who were headed north. Sometime in April or May 1911, the Canadian government sent the first of its agents to Oklahoma to report on the black situation and take action against their migrating to Canada. The government had finally found a way to stop, and not merely frustrate, the black trek.²¹

Sending an agent to Oklahoma was part of a Canadian government plan to stop the black immigration. The strategy was revealed to John Jones, the United States consul in Winnipeg, by Bruce Walker, the Canadian commissioner of immigration in that city, in a confidential meeting held on 22 May 1911. During the meeting Walker stated that an order-in-council would be passed shortly that would bar blacks from entering Canada.²² In the meantime, the Canadian government was doing all that it could to persuade blacks not to go to western Canada. The agent in Oklahoma, Walker stated, was pointing out to blacks the trouble they would have with the Canadian climate and the

prejudice that was emerging in western Canada against their entry. Walker also told Jones that his agent was suggesting to black Oklahomans that they were the innocent victims of a scheme, engineered by a major railroad company operating in Oklahoma, to get their land for less than it was worth by telling them to go to Canada.

Walker also revealed to Jones that he had hired a black physician from the United States and had sent him to investigate the existing black settlements in western Canada. Once the black doctor had completed his report, it would be sent to Ottawa. In the meantime, the usual medical inspection of immigrants would be dropped for blacks, Walker indicated, since it was his intention to bar them completely.²³

The agent sent to Oklahoma was C. W. Speers. He contacted W. J. White, the inspector of United States agencies in Ottawa, on 8 May and again on 17 May to describe his visits to Muskogee, Tulsa, Oklahoma City, and Wellston, Oklahoma. He described the blacks' poor housing and generally inferior conditions, and argued that "Jim Crow" segregation and disfranchisement were the "great source" of their problems. He had been able to discuss the emigration issue with several black preachers and believed that this was the area with the best potential for stopping the flow. Dr. S. S. Jones, president of the Oklahoma Conference of Black Baptists and editor of the *Baptist Informer*, had readily agreed with Speers's assessment of the situation and had promised to use his influence to stop the blacks from leaving. Several of his colleagues had joined him in this vow. Jones was as good as his word, for he publicized his meeting with Speers and the other black ministers in his newspaper. Speers was correct, the preacher argued; black people should stay in Oklahoma and fight for their rights. Jones also wrote to W. D. Scott to inform him that he felt the blacks should not enter Canada because of the harsh climate, and he gave the Canadian official permission to use his letter in any way he saw fit.²⁴

The Immigration Branch became aware of Speers's success on 15 May when it received a

letter from the Reverend H. H. Edmond of Oklahoma City. Edmond contacted the superintendent of immigration to get information about Canada before advising his congregation on whether to leave. He was having second thoughts since Speers contacted him and told him not to leave, but he wanted to know for certain what the weather and the country were like. The superintendent replied to Edmond's queries with a letter arguing that for climatic reasons he and his black followers should not come.²⁵

Speers was in Chicago during the last week in May, but his interest still lay further south. On 24 May he addressed virtually identical letters to Jones in Muskogee and to a Reverend Hernagin in Oklahoma City, obviously following up his earlier contacts. In his letters, Speers referred to Booker T. Washington's teachings and stated,

Surely with a degree of confidence they (black Oklahomans) can let their buckets down and draw from their own resources in the midst of their own congenial surroundings.

Why should your people be driven hither and thither, through oppressive and despotic measures to climates and conditions wholly unsuitable? Why cannot they dwell in peace enjoying every privilege of full citizenship in the country and under conditions best suited to themselves?

I feel assured that your advice to the colored people will not only benefit them, but reflect credit upon yourself.²⁶

On 31 May, Speers, now in Ottawa, wrote to W. D. Scott regarding other matters relating to black immigration. Speers said he had observed the agents of American railroads operating in Oklahoma, trying to increase traffic by encouraging blacks to go to Canada. He had spoken to railroad officials when he was in Kansas City, and they had promised to stop the soliciting. He had also spoken to D. B. Hanna, third vice-president of the Canadian Northern Railway, when he was in Toronto, and Hanna had promised to use his influence on the southern companies. Speers then suggested

that William Whyte, second vice-president of the Canadian Pacific Railway, should also be asked to use his influences, "as there is a strong international courtesy between the railway companies. I feel assured that this would have a very good effect," he said.

Speers's apparent success with the black clergymen and his continual reference to Booker T. Washington's ideas may have been the basis for a suggestion by W. H. Rogers, now the Canadian agent in Kansas City. In a letter to an unnamed superior in Ottawa, Rogers argued that the only way to stop the blacks was by striking the fear of death into them. He proposed that evidence on blacks dying in cold climates be collected and sent to Booker T. Washington, who believed that blacks should stay in the South. "I feel sure his influence would be material advantage to us in this matter," Rogers said. While there is no evidence that this proposal was ever acted upon, it did reflect a fertile mind for schemes to stop the black movement, and this was not Rogers's only proposal. In an earlier letter to W. D. Scott, the Kansas City agent had said that he was very pleased with Speers's work and recommended that he continue it. Rogers said he felt that Speers's approach was the most effective way of dealing with the problem, but if that agent were unable to return to Oklahoma, a Reverend J. B. Puckett could be used. "This man," Rogers said, "would not cost the Department nearly as much as that colored man from Chicago."²⁷

"That colored man from Chicago" was Dr. G. W. Miller, the American black medical doctor who had been hired to tour the black settlements in western Canada. Apparently satisfied with his report, the Canadian government employed Miller as its second agent to be sent to Oklahoma to try to stop the black migration. Miller was clearly the more effective agent because he was black and was thus more readily accepted. In addition, he had professional medical qualifications and could therefore buttress the idea that blacks would be affected by Canada's climate.

Exactly when the doctor arrived in Okla-

homa is as obscure as how much he was being paid, but beginning on 24 June 1911, he sent daily reports to Chicago. In his first report, sent from Muskogee, Miller said he had interviewed a Reverend Perkins of the Second Baptist Church and had convinced him to keep his congregation in Oklahoma. In the next day's report, he said he had spoken to large audiences at the First and Second Baptist churches and thought that he had managed to change a number of minds. He also said he had arranged to have his address printed in Reverend Jones's Muskogee *Baptist Informer*, but that the clergyman-publisher wanted to be paid for the service.

Miller's first two reports were a blueprint for his activities over the next month. He would enter a town or city, contact the black clergymen and anyone he heard was interested in going to Canada, arrange to speak in the churches or at some large gathering, and have his speech reprinted in the local black newspaper, if there was one. He did not waste any time, either, for he crisscrossed eastern Oklahoma rather quickly. On 26 June he reported from Okmulgee that he had spoken to several black clergymen who promised to help stop the flow. On 27 June he was reporting from Weleetka, having stopped at Bryant and Henryetta "en route." He had not found any blacks in either of the latter places, but many in Weleetka seemed interested in going north, and he called a meeting for the next night. "It is quite an easy matter to get the people here," he said, "as they are all anxious to hear about Canada."

On 28 June Miller described the meeting at Weleetka and once again claimed to have convinced many not to head north. He began his talk by "describing minutely" what happened to him when he entered Canada, a snow storm he had witnessed, and the early and late frosts he had encountered. He found that these descriptions were new to the people. His aim, he said, was not only to discourage the northward migration, but to get the blacks to see how thankful they should be to live in Oklahoma, with its bountiful soil and good climate.²⁸

Miller was modest in describing his talks. An

article he wrote for the Guthrie *Oklahoma Guide* has survived, and it is possible to gain an insight into his discussions. Miller began with a running commentary on what blacks could expect when reaching Canada and then singled out specific areas that they would be interested in. He said he felt it was his solemn duty to his race to make them aware of the conditions he found when he traveled in western Canada and of the plight of those who had already headed north without question or investigation. He could not understand why people would sacrifice what they had spent their lives acquiring, to go to a country "that is desolate, frigid, unsettled, unknown and to which they are climatically unfamiliar and financially unfit."

The blacks' problems began at the international boundary. A government inspector would meet them, Miller said, and examine their luggage. Then the entire family would be subject to a thorough medical examination, "where your wife and daughter are stripped of their clothes before your very eyes and examined by a board of men. What man of you would desire his family undressed and humiliated in such a manner," he asked. Their livestock was also examined, but since this commonly took thirty days, the extra expense was a real burden. And all of this took place, he said, even before they were allowed to enter the "so-called promised land."

Nor should the blacks think they had escaped racial prejudice by entering Canada, for wherever there were two distinct races, hostility appeared. Yet there were those who would disregard his warnings, who would rush off and waste their life's savings in one season, reduce their families to poverty, and do it all in a land where the winters were long and cold, and the summer, "but a dim memory of morning." They should stay where they were, Miller argued, where they had friends, happiness, and bountiful harvests. Besides, their children had to go to school, and there were none in the Canadian woods. If they wanted to go to a city or to church, they would have to travel great distances.

They would also have to go at least seventy-

five miles to find a doctor, whereas they had medical help at their door where they were. Above all, there was the intense Canadian cold—snow fell waist deep, and the ground froze to a depth of from six to ten feet. They had all been born and raised in the South; "it will cost your life to live one winter in Canada," Miller argued.

Miller then turned his attention to specific areas such as food, clothing, the soil, crops, the seasons, water, and shelter, but his overwhelmingly negative tone did not change. They would find that food would cost twice as much in Canada as it did in Oklahoma, he said, and because of the climate, they would find they ate more. Their farms would not keep up with their demands, and they would end up buying food imported from the United States. They could not get many of the foods they would want, and if it was true that man lived to eat, then many of them would surely die. If they did not starve, then they would freeze to death or die of consumption or pneumonia because they lacked the proper clothing. After spending all of their money to be transported to their new homes, they would find that they did not have funds for the necessary warm clothing and furs.

The soil in western Canada was not what they had been led to believe, Miller continued. It was a sand-based light sod, and anyone with farming experience would know that nothing profitable would grow in it. Their homesteads would be covered with timber and bush, which was hard to clear, and in every open area grew a vegetable called muskeg. They would need to know scientific farming to raise crops in Canada, for they would have to deal with a killing frost in June and another one in August. Furthermore, there were only two seasons in Canada: winter and summer, and the winters were so long that they would start to think summer would never come. The only houses to guard against the climate were log cabins, which they would have to build themselves. They would have to fill the cracks with mud, but when it rained the mud would fall out and the cold wind would blow in. As if all this were not bad

enough, the only water they could get was a mixture of alkali that would injure their stomachs and make them ill.²⁹

Miller carried his message from Weleetka to Clearview, Oklahoma, and on 29 June he reported from the latter town that many blacks there were planning to leave for Canada. He spoke to a large gathering and arranged to have his address published in a local black newspaper. On 30 June he was in Boley speaking to a number of prominent blacks and was informed that a local movement was under way to try to stop the movement northward. Guthrie was his next stop, and in that town he spoke to several black ministers. They arranged for him to speak to a large audience by announcing the meeting in all of the town's black churches.

At the gathering Miller's statements were challenged by relatives of settlers already in Canada who had written that they were doing well. Miller left, however, "satisfied that they were convinced that such is not the case." From 4 July until 8 July he was in Oklahoma City, speaking with families who had expressed an interest in moving to Canada. He again displayed confidence in having dissuaded them, but he was not having quite the same success with black newspapers. Apparently some editors were reluctant to print his article, perhaps because Miller did not wish to pay for the publicity.

From 9 July until 11 July he was in Watonga, speaking at churches and interviewing families who were thinking of leaving. He reported his usual success but found that some families were so poor that they did not have the means to leave in any case. Back in Oklahoma City on 12 July, he spoke to a few more potential migrants. There he found that some had already heard unfavorable reports, as a former black settler had returned from Canada spreading "cold winter" stories. From Oklahoma City he proceeded to Bristow, spending two days there convincing nine families not to leave. From 15 to 17 July he was in Sapulpa and again found that a returning settler with an unfavorable report had preceded him. In his last report, dated Sapulpa, Oklahoma, 17 July, Miller said,

"The Canadian Boom is rapidly dying out, as the unfavourable reports relative to Canada seem to have spread over the entire state. Everywhere I go, people say they have heard of me and the unfavourable report of Canada."³⁰ Miller was substantially correct, and for all intents and purposes the black migration from Oklahoma to western Canada faded as 1911 progressed. Miller had done his work well.

Miller's success at dissuading the black Oklahomans from migrating was not immediately apparent. Even as he traveled through the state, his employers looked for other ways of stopping the trek. One solution was simply to bar the blacks from entering the country. The *Calgary Herald* had earlier suggested this method. Its Ottawa correspondent had noted that a section of the Immigration Act of 1910 gave the Canadian government the power, with an order-in-council, to exclude for a period, or permanently, any race thought unsuitable to Canada's climate. The problem with this approach, however, was that it could discourage white Americans from heading north. Indeed, an official of the Canadian Pacific Railway Colonization Department in Chicago had written to Frank Oliver on 28 April to complain that newspaper reports citing this argument had already prevented some whites from migrating. This did not stop the minister of the interior, and on 31 May 1911 he sent a recommendation to the cabinet for an order-in-council barring blacks from entering Canada for a period of one year.³¹

The federal cabinet did not pass the order-in-council immediately. There were several arguments against such a drastic move. It could cause stormy diplomatic relations with the United States when the reciprocity question was still in the air; and every vote was needed for the upcoming Canadian election, so why alienate the black voters of Nova Scotia and southern Ontario? In addition, the fear of scaring off white American immigrants was undoubtedly a powerful argument against the move.

On 12 August 1911, the cabinet in fact passed an order-in-council barring blacks from entering Canada. It stated,

For a period of one year from and after the date hereof the landing in Canada shall be and the same is prohibited of any immigrants belonging to the Negro race, which race is deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada.³²

This order-in-council was never acted upon, however. It was repealed on 5 October of the same year on the pretext that the minister of the interior had not been present at the August meeting.³³ The fact that it was passed indicates how serious Canada was about keeping the northern plains white.

The chronology of events involving the order-in-council also suggests that it was a "pocket" order, to be used if Dr. Miller failed in his mission to Oklahoma. The idea was originally suggested in May, when the physician was touring black settlements in western Canada. It was passed in August when he was in Oklahoma, and it was repealed in October when his success in stopping the migration was becoming clear.

Several months later, in February 1912, Canadian immigration officials again became concerned with the black immigration issue. Word spread that the blacks were still restless and again looking to Canada as a possible home. Government officials recommended that an agent be stationed in Oklahoma City or Muskogee to handle the problem, and once more it was argued that legislation barring the blacks be passed. W. J. White, the inspector of United States agencies, was in Ottawa on 22 February 1912, writing letters to American railroads (the Soo, the Rock Island, the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas, the Frisco, and the Union Pacific lines), asking them not to encourage blacks to emigrate from the southern United States to Canada. He told these railroads that he was also contacting the Great Northern, Northern Pacific, and Santa Fe lines on the matter, although no record of this correspondence is in the files of the Immigration Branch. The fears of a renewed black migration never materialized, however, and the only concern that Canada had regarding blacks in 1912 was a number of friends and relatives who were trying to visit

settlers already in the country. The Canadian officials' apprehension about these people was expressed in a reply to a query from John Foster, United States consul in Ottawa, regarding one visiting black who had been turned back at the border. Foster was told that Canada was concerned that these people were, in fact, trying to settle in Canada, but were entering "under the guise of tourists or visitors."³⁴

The unfavorable press reports, the critical commentary of black editors and preachers, and the activities of C. W. Speers and especially Dr. G. W. Miller stopped black Oklahomans from moving to western Canada. It was clear that they were not wanted and would encounter trouble if they tried to enter, and given the expense and other difficulties of the journey, they put the thought out of their minds.

In the decades following the American Civil War, many black Americans headed westward hoping to find peace and land of their own. One destination was the future state of Oklahoma, and before it reached statehood, thousands of blacks had migrated to it. White Americans had also been attracted, and they brought their racism with them. White Oklahomans succeeded in segregating their black neighbors shortly after statehood was achieved. In 1910, they also took away the blacks' right to vote. Canada was advertising homestead lands in its western provinces in black and white Oklahoma newspapers at this time, and a number of black Oklahomans took advantage of the opportunity. While hundreds headed north, thousands watched with anticipation.

The Canadians' reaction to the black migration indicated that they believed many of the same stereotypes and myths about blacks as did the white Americans. While western Canadians did not resort to violence to halt the black migration, they did urge their government to develop policies to stop the blacks. Although covert and deceptive, this effort was in itself a form of violence, for it condemned other black Oklahomans to continue to face racist violence in that state. The Canadian government reacted to a sea of petitions, resolutions, and editorials,

all aimed at keeping western Canada white. The government began a campaign of diplomatic racism. Discriminating against blacks through medical examinations and depriving potential black settlers of immigration material were haphazard methods, however, and Canada eventually sent two agents to Oklahoma to dissuade blacks from migrating. Their work was highly successful, and by the fall of 1911, the black migration from Oklahoma to western Canada was coming to an end.

NOTES

1. Estimates vary greatly, some citing figures of more than one million American settlers. See Marcus Hansen and John B. Brebner, *The Mingling of the Canadian and American Peoples* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, and New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1940), p. 220; Paul Sharp, "The American Farmer and the 'Last Best West,'" *Agricultural History* 21 (April 1947): 65-75; Paul Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada: A Survey Showing American Parallels* (St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 1948; reprint, New York: Octagon Books, 1971), p. 1; Paul Sharp, "When Our West Moved North," *American Historical Review* 55 (January 1950): 286-300; Karel Denis Bicha, "The American Farmer and the Canadian West, 1896-1914: A Revised View," *Agricultural History* 38 (January 1964): 43-46; idem, *The American Farmer and the Canadian West, 1896-1914* (Lawrence, Kans.: Coronado Press, 1968), pp. 114 and 140.

2. The exact number of black immigrants is not known. The 1921 Census of Canada, however, showed 1,444 blacks in Alberta and Saskatchewan in that year. Canada, *Census of Canada, 1921*, vol. 1, *Population*, p. 355.

3. There is a debate among certain Canadian historians regarding the possible Indian ancestry of some of the black migrants to Canada. This debate is too involved for recapitulation here, and the bibliography too extensive for citation. My own view is that substantial, convincing documentary evidence does not exist to support the view that the migrants were partly of Indian ancestry. In fact, the surviving homestead applications that the black immigrants filed with the government of Canada point to

their being ex-slaves and the descendants of former slaves who had moved westward after Reconstruction.

4. R. B. 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" (M.A. thesis, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, 1976), pp. 48, 50, and 77.

5. Stewart Grow, "The Blacks of Amber Valley: Negro Pioneering in Northern Alberta," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 6 (1974): 17-38; Ina Bruns, "Kind Hearts and Gentle People," *Montreal Family Herald*, 25 June 1959; *Oke-mah* (Oklahoma) *Ledger*, 23 March 1911; *Calgary Herald*, 22 April 1911.

6. Harold Troper, *Only Farmers Need Apply: Official Canadian Government Encouragement of Immigration from the United States, 1896-1911* (Toronto: Griffin House, 1972), p. 124. Troper has argued that the Canadian government did not advertise for black settlers. Technically, this is true; however, such advertisements did appear in the black Oklahoma press, including the *Boley Beacon*, 20 February 1908 and 19 March 1908; *Clearview Patriarch*, 2 March 1911 and 18 May 1911; *Muskogee Cimeter*, 8 January 1909, 4 February 1910, and 2 December 1911; *Boley Progress*, 16 March 1905, 12 October 1905, 18 January 1906, 11 March 1909, and 13 January 1910.

7. Troper, *Only Farmers Need Apply*, p. 123.

8. Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower: A History of the Negro in America, 1619-1964*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 240; United States, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920*, vol. 3, *Population*, p. 814.

9. *Boley* (Oklahoma) *Progress*, 24 August 1905.

10. W. J. White to Frank Oliver, 13 September 1910, *Immigration Files*, RG 76, vols. 192-93, file 72552, part 1 (microfilm), Public Archives of Canada.

11. L. M. Fortier to J. S. Crawford, 8 November 1910; Keystone, Oklahoma, to Ottawa, Ontario, 11 November 1910, and Hominy, Oklahoma, to Ottawa, Ontario, 20 December 1910; J. L. Doupe to J. S. Crawford, 30 December 1910; telegram from W. J. White to J. Bruce Walker, 30 December 1910; telegram

from W. J. Webster to W. J. White, 5 January 1911; telegram from W. J. White to J. L. Doupe, 5 January 1911; telegram from W. D. Scott to W. J. Webster, 5 January 1911, *Immigration Files*, RG 76, vols. 192-93, file 72552, part 2 (microfilm), Public Archives of Canada.

12. Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1971), pp. 310-11.

13. Shepard, "Black Migration As A Response to Repression," pp. 97-102.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 102-3, and 110.

15. Canada, House of Commons, *Parliamentary Debates*, 3 April 1911, 6523-28; Ernest J. Chambers, ed., *The Canadian Parliamentary Guide, 1910* (Ottawa: Mortimer, 1910), p. 168. Also see Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, pp. 306-7.

16. William E. Bittle and Gilbert Geis, *The Longest Way Home: Chief Alfred C. Sam's Back-To-Africa Movement* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1964), pp. 55-56; *Okemah* (Oklahoma) *Ledger*, 25 May 1911, 1 June 1911, and 8 June 1911; *Clearview* (Oklahoma) *Patriarch*, 1 June 1911.

17. For examples of the Canadian advertisements, see the *Boley* (Oklahoma) *Progress*, 2 March 1911, and the *Clearview* (Oklahoma) *Patriarch*, 13 April 1911. Both of these journals carried such material until well into 1912. L. M. Fortier to W. W. Cory, 14 March 1911, *Immigration Files*, RG 76, vols. 192-93, file 72552, part 4 (microfilm), Public Archives of Canada.

18. *Clearview* (Oklahoma) *Patriarch*, 23 March 1911; *Oklahoma Guide* (Guthrie), 11 May 1911.

19. *Clearview* (Oklahoma) *Patriarch*, 13 April 1911; *Oklahoma Guide* (Guthrie), 11 May 1911.

20. *Baptist Informer* (Muskogee, Oklahoma), 8 June 1911, *Immigration Files*, RG 76, vols. 192-93, file 72552, part 4 (microfilm), Public Archives of Canada.

21. Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, p. 306. Winks argues that the Canadian government successfully frustrated attempts by black immigrant groups to reinforce their numbers. By sending agents to Oklahoma to try to stop the flow, the government was actively trying to check, not just frustrate, the black migration.

22. An order-in-council is a regulation passed

by a federal or a provincial cabinet under the authority of the governor-general or a provincial lieutenant governor.

23. John E. Jones, consul-general, Winnipeg, Manitoba, to the secretary of state, 22 May 1911, *Department of State Decimal Files, 1910-1929*, RG 59, Box 8868, no. 842.511/7, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

24. C. W. Speers to W. J. White, 8 May 1911 and 17 May 1911; newspaper clipping, *Baptist Informer* (Muskogee, Oklahoma), no date; Reverend S. S. Jones to W. D. Scott, 20 May 1911, *Immigration Files*, RG 76, vols. 192-93, file 72552, part 4 (microfilm), Public Archives of Canada.

25. Reverend H. H. Edmond to W. D. Scott, 15 May 1911; W. D. Scott to Reverend H. H. Edmond, 19 May 1911, *Immigration Files*, RG 76, vols. 192-93, file 72552, part 4 (microfilm), Public Archives of Canada.

26. C. W. Speers to Reverend S. S. Jones, 24 May 1911; C. W. Speers to Reverend Hernagin, 24 May 1911, *Immigration Files*, RG 76, vols. 192-93, file 72552, part 4 (microfilm), Public Archives of Canada.

27. C. W. Speers to W. D. Scott, 21 May 1911; W. H. Rogers to an unidentified party, 4 June 1911; W. H. Rogers to W. D. Scott, 25 May 1911, *Immigration Files*, RG 76, vols. 192-93, file 72552, part 4 (microfilm), Public Archives of Canada. There is a certain irony in Rogers's proposal, since blacks have lived in Canada since 1628; Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, p. ix.

28. Dr. G. W. Miller to an unidentified party in Chicago, 24, 25, 26, 27, and 28 June 1911, *Immigration Files*, RG 76, vols. 192-93, file 72552, part 4 (microfilm), Public Archives of Canada. An exhaustive search of the budgets of the Department of the Interior and the auditor-general's reports in the Canadian Sessional Papers for 1911 and 1912 failed to reveal Miller's salary.

29. *Oklahoma Guide* (Guthrie), 6 July 1911.

30. Daily letters, Dr. G. W. Miller to an unidentified party, 29 June-17 July 1911, *Immigration Files*, RG 76, vols. 192-93, file 72552, part 4 (microfilm), Public Archives of Canada.

31. *Calgary Herald*, 17 April 1911; Canada, *Statutes of Canada*, 9-10, Edward VII, chap. 27, An Act Respecting Immigration, 4 May

1910, sec. 38, sub. sec. "c"; Poynter Standly to Frank Oliver, 28 April 1911, and an order-in-council recommendation from Frank Oliver to the governor-general, 31 May 1911, *Immigration Files*, RG 76, vols. 192-93, file 72552, part 3 (microfilm), Public Archives of Canada.

32. Order-in-Council no. 1324, 12 August 1911, *Orders-in-Council*, RG 2/1, vol. 269, Public Archives of Canada.

33. Order-in-Council no. 2378, 5 October 1911, *Orders-in-Council*, RG 2/1, vol. 772, Public Archives of Canada.

34. W. H. Rogers to W. D. Scott, 15 Febru-

ary 1912; W. J. White to W. W. Cory, 16 February 1911; W. J. White to the Soo, the Rock Island, the Missouri, Kansas and Texas, the Frisco and Union Pacific lines, 22 February 1912; James Veal, Junkins, Alberta, to W. D. Scott, 13 April 1912; J. C. Johnson, Wewoka, Oklahoma, to the secretary of state, Washington, D.C., 25 June 1912, received by Canadian officials 9 July 1912; John Foster to W. D. Scott, 8 July 1912; W. D. Scott to John Foster, 11 July 1912, *Immigration Files*, RG 76, vols. 192-93, file 72552, part 4 (microfilm), Public Archives of Canada.