



RETHINKING THE ‘OTHER’ BORDER: CARIBBEAN MIGRATION TO CANADA

INTRODUCTION

Historica Canada’s minute-length film in its series Heritage Minutes called “Underground Railroad” illustrates the heart-wrenching narrative of two adult children waiting anxiously for their father to arrive safely from the Southern United States to Canada. The father eventually arrives hidden in the bottom of what appears to be a church pew. Amidst exuberant voices, the narrator reminds the audience that during the years 1840–60, about 30,000–40,000 enslaved African Americans made their way to Canada via the Underground Railroad. The family can be heard saying, “We made it to Canada; we are free.” Without question, Canada provided refuge to enslaved, free people and loyalists who sought to escape the brutality of slavery and oppression in the United States. The reality is that while “Canada represented new liberty [...] this was a new liberty mixed with familiar prejudice and a racism that knows no boundaries” (Reid-Maroney 10). To “recreate events of importance, accomplishment, and bravery in our country’s history,”¹ Historica Canada reinscribes and reinforces a hegemonic narrative that reaffirms Canada as the “Promised Land”² and conveniently ignores slavery on its own soil. In this script, enslaved people often appear as extras in episodic instances to maintain a myth of Canada as a country willing to open its borders to dispossessed populations.

An iteration of Canada as the “Promised Land” was reproduced in a slate of stories circulated in the Canadian, US, and British media

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1 For a discussion regarding the significance of the Underground Railroad in Canada, see Davis.

2 For an explanation of the “Promised Land,” See Reid-Maroney et al.

in 2017. “Migrants Walk Through Snow to Canada After ‘Hatred’ in US,” “A Surge of Migrants Crossing into Quebec Tests Canada’s Welcome,” “A Back Road to Hope: Immigrants Flood into Canada on Foot at Unofficial Crossings,” and “Prime Minister Trudeau Says Canada Welcomes Refugees” are examples of some headlines (Razek, Levin, Ring, CBS/AP). In a few of these scenarios, Canada is juxtaposed with the United States, which is a hardly uncommon comparison. Historically, Canada has constructed its identity vis-à-vis its neighbor South of the border. Eva Mackey argues how “the constant attempt to construct an authentic differentiated and bounded identity has been central to the project of Canadian nation-building, and is often shaped through comparison with, and demonization of the United States” (147). Whether concerning its history of race relations vis-à-vis its treatment of Indigenous peoples, health care, or political parties, Canada emerges as a better and more caring nation.

Indeed, several of the displaced persons interviewed in the stories above pointed to the Muslim ban in the US and the country’s anti-immigrant sentiments as the reason for wanting to live in Canada. Like the descendants of African Americans who came to Canada in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for these newcomers, Canada represents hope. However, as this paper illustrates, Canada’s response to Black bodies entering its borders has hardly been convivial, as reflected by the measures undertaken by Immigration Canada to restrict Caribbean migration.

Relying on archival and secondary sources, such as immigration records, the paper focuses primarily on Caribbean domestic workers to reimagine who is involved and what counts as nation-building activities. While there is some recognition that Chinese and Sikh immigrant men furnished the physical labor necessary for nation-building by constructing railways and working in the lumber industry (Razack 2), the bodies and the work performed are gendered. Thus, I argue that Caribbean domestic workers should be included to expand the repertoire of actors and the parameters of what counts as nation-building activities. Specifically, I examine how these working-class women both inadvertently and directly contributed to Canada’s nation-building in two ways: 1) by assuming reproductive tasks on behalf of middle-class white women and their families and 2) through their activism against deportation. To understand the experience of the domestic workers, some attention to Immigration Canada’s response to prospective Caribbean migrants, mostly men, is warranted.

Whiteness is inextricably connected to nation-building; thus, immigration policies are designed to ensure that only certain migrants are eligible to enter the country. There was no question, especially in Canada's infancy, that British and northern European migrants were preferred and viewed as integral to the nation-building project regardless of their labor. To ensure that Canada remains a white nation, officials circulated racist and sexist discourses of Caribbean people, including domestic workers, as lazy, sexually promiscuous, mentally and morally deficient, and therefore unfit to belong to the Canadian nation. Indeed, Immigration officials at various levels appointed themselves "guardians of Canada's racial purity" (Schultz 53). Despite concerted attempts to exclude them, a few Caribbean people entered Canada. During the First World War, for example, Paula Hastings pointed out that "hundreds of West Indians migrated to Canada to join the Canadian armed forces, to meet the labor demands created by wartime economic expansion, and the absence of enlisted workers, and to study at Canadian universities" (Hastings 444).³ These wartime activities should be considered as a component of the nation-building enterprise. Such an acknowledgment disrupts the narrative, which positions white people as primarily responsible for the creation of and maintenance of the nation while simultaneously disavowing and ignoring the Indigenous presence. Despite their contributions to Canada's wartime economy, immigration officials were relentless in their efforts to prohibit Caribbean migration.

The inability of the colonial Caribbean to provide employment for its inhabitants and Canada's need to fill particular niches led to migration initiatives. To encourage out-migration, the Barbadian government subsidized the transportation of skilled tradesmen in carpentry and mechanics. The men migrated to Halifax, Nova Scotia, and other Maritime ports. Upon their arrival, however, these skilled workers found themselves restricted to tedious work in the coal mines and the steel plant's coke ovens of Sydney, Nova Scotia (Calliste, "Race"; Flynn, "Caribbean Migration"). Similarly, to alleviate Antigua's unemployment, in 1923 and 1924, the governor of the Leeward Islands petitioned Canada to allow 1,000 harvesters to migrate. Despite objections from Immigration Canada, the Dominion Iron and Steel Company (DISCO), located in Sydney, Nova Scotia, recruited 61 laborers from

3 A perusal of McGill University yearbooks, for example, featured Caribbean students primarily in medicine and other disciplines. See Flynn, "In Search of What Better Life?"

the Caribbean to work in the mines during 1920–21 (Calliste, “Race” 135). While most migrants came from Barbados, recruits also came from Grenada, St. Vincent, and Guyana (Reid 323–337).

To preclude Caribbean people from migrating to the Maritimes, Superintendent of Immigration W.D. Scott and individual agents devised a range of schemes such as tightening “local inspections by means of strict enforcement regulations” (Calliste, “Race” 136). Claudine Bonner, in her detailed study, highlighted how immigration officials relied on legislation as well as “their discretion” to position Black migrants as inadmissible. When their tactics proved unsuccessful, immigration agents were summoned privatively to “exclude Caribbean [B]lacks even when they complied with the Immigration Act.” Writing to Scott, the Inspector of Immigration Agencies in the Maritimes suggested that “every obstacle is to be put in their way, and if everything fails [...] reject them under subsection (g) of Sec. 3. of the Act as ‘likely to become a public charge’” (136). Several individuals, such as the Chief of Police in Sydney, disputed the public charge insinuation. He and others pointed to the fact that Caribbean migrants found work. Those who did not work in the mines or the steel plants found employment as “waiters in restaurants, carpenters, or shoe-shine shops,” noting that “most appear to get work” (Williams). The Chief also included a meeting with Mr. Hickey, an immigration agent who “had no knowledge of any negroes becoming a public charge.” Hickey told the Chief that he spoke to a captain who had brought “over 50 [N]egroes from Barbados to Sydney” and warned him of the implications if the migrants’ were unable to find employment. Hickey told the captain, “If they became a public charge he would have to take them back at his own expense” (Williams). The lack of evidence substantiated by other agents of the state regarding Caribbean migrants as potential public charge did not deter immigration officials. They continued to concoct ways to curtail Black migration even at the expense of companies who needed labor, albeit inexpensive and expendable.

To satisfy their racist imagination that Caribbean people were clamoring to enter the country, immigration officials resorted to detaining and deporting potential migrants. Verbal instructions were given to “deport any coloured person whether they complied with the law or not.” A letter signed by Pickford & Black Ltd., representing the Canadian Pacific Railway Company (CPR), elucidates the tensions between immigration officials and companies sponsoring or recruiting laborers. The agents wrote that two Jamaicans were “being excluded from your department” based on the assumption of them becoming a public charge (Pickford and Black Ltd). In defending the two migrants,

Pickford and Black pointed out that both fulfilled all immigration requirements, including being medically fit. Clearly displeased, Pickford and Black wrote:

We protest [a]gainst the deportation as we brought them forward in good faith complied with every immigration regulation and if any new regulations are to be put in force, then steamship companies should have sufficient notice in order to enable them [to] advise their agents [...]. (Pickford and Black Ltd)

The CPR was not the only company impacted by the Department of Immigration's arbitrary detention policies. Local agents of The Royal Mail Steam Packet Company wrote W.D. Scott about nine passengers detained on the ship *Chal*. The agents explained, "We have wired you enquiring if passengers can obtain guarantee from reliable persons that they will be given employment if you permit them to land." The agents continued, "They all seem to be able bodied and willing men and they left their own country in good faith and on positive assurances that their medical and physical examination was in accordance with the requirements, it is unfair that they are not allowed admittance" (William Thompson and Co.). Given immigration officials' claims about the Caribbean migrants' admissibility, even as they were advocating for their companies, some agents criticized the unfair and capricious practices leveled against Caribbean workers.

Besides detaining and deporting Caribbean migrants, one senior immigration official attempted to create panic around local labor conditions in Sydney. Following an interview with L.M. Fortier, Inspector of Immigration Agencies of the Maritime, the headline in the *Sydney Daily Post* read: "Immigration to Sydney to Be Censored," followed by "Many West Indians Gain Entry To This City." "Will protect local labor" and "Rigorous Supervision of All Aliens To Be Inaugurated [...]" ("Immigration to Sydney"). To buttress white Canadians' fears, Fortier pointed out that Caribbean migrants were taking jobs that rightfully belonged to them. Like Scott, he also gave the impression that there was an influx of Caribbean people in Sydney. In fact, during the years 1900–16, Black migration accounted for 0.04 percent of the Canadian population, a figure that would also include African Americans (Mathieu 59). By 1921, there were a total of 1,200 Caribbean migrants in Toronto and 400 in Montreal. By 1923, The Black population in Sydney was 600 (Reid 325).

The most egregious policy designed to restrict Black migration was the order-in-council signed on August 12, 1911, by Sir Wilfred Laurier. Sarah Jane Mathieu argues that:

The new edict, the first ever of its kind adopted in Canada singling out a racial group for unqualified racial exclusion, codified white paranoia into federal law and earned the Department of Immigration the dubious distinction of being the first federal government branch to institute a nationally implemented Jim Crow Law in Canada. (57)

Mathieu points out that while the “order in council fell through the cracks of the federal government turnover in the fall of 1911, the white supremacist rationale fueling it haunted Black would be settlers for another century” (57). It is in this climate of anti-blackness that Caribbean migrants attempted to thrive.

Caribbean migrants in Sydney worked to ensure their survival and challenged dominant narratives that they were lazy. Aware of the economic situation in their home countries, these men found employment in a wide range of industries, often working in conditions not of their choosing. Besides working in the coal mines and coke ovens, some found employment in carpentry and the can-meat factory. Others worked in hotels as waiters. One man migrated to work as a barber at his brother’s barbershop. Even as immigration officials worked assiduously to curtail Caribbean migration, they supported the request of elite men and facilitated the migration of Caribbean domestic workers.

THE FIRST DOMESTIC SCHEME

While domestics from the Francophone Caribbean are often associated with the first domestic scheme, archival evidence suggests that domestics from the English-speaking Caribbean were also in Canada around the same time. J. B Williams, the department’s “travelling border inspector,” wrote to Immigrant Branch Superintendent, W. D. Scott, informing him that there were Negro girls in Nova Scotia “who came from time and are in great demand as domestics, and those that have them in their employ speak highly of them.” Williams added, “Two of these girls are working at the hotel, and are giving every satisfaction, and appear to stand the winter weather alright.” Likewise, L.M. Fortier, Chief Clerk Immigration Branch, wrote how a friend “of a well known barrister [...] is bringing Creole girls from Jamaica as domestics.” Regardless of the period, Caribbean domestic workers

were never sought after or welcomed to migrate to Canada; they were the last resort to meet the demand for inexpensive labor.

J.M Authier, a former consul in Guadeloupe, traveled to the island “to bring from there a party of coloured domestic servants for situations awaiting them at Three Rivers, Quebec” (Robertson). The arrival of what appeared to be the first group of Francophone domestic workers to Quebec caused quite the spectacle, evidenced by the coverage in the local media. The headline in the *Montreal Herald*, written in capital letters, read, “58 Dark-Skinned Domestics Here Advance Guard.” Underneath the aforementioned caption was the following: “Importation of Colored Servants From Guadeloupe Inaugurated by Montrealers,” followed by: “All Have Places in Local Families” written in capital letters (“58 Dark-Skinned Domestics”). If Montrealers expected the women to arrive in Quebec appearing dowdy, they were pleasantly surprised. The women wore long, colorful dresses complemented by hats and handbags. Unfortunately, no one informed them about the weather prior to their arrival. The women arrived in April, which meant that compared to the weather in Guadeloupe, Montreal was cold. The final caption in the story was the tagline: “French-Speaking Housewives Meet Girls and Loan Them Clothing.”

The domestic workers could not escape the stereotypes of Black women as lascivious. Even though the *Montreal Herald* mentioned that “French-Speaking Housewives Meet the Girls and Loan Them Clothing,” the *Colliers* magazine ran a story that “red light district women” met the girls and, in exchange for warm coats, took them away to work as prostitutes (Calliste 141). Immigration officials chose to investigate the story, ignoring the fact that the women were accounted for; all were placed in the homes of their employers. That the story was fabricated made no difference to Immigration officials who contacted employers inquiring about the domestic workers’ performance. As the Caribbean men discussed earlier, reports attesting to Guadeloupian domestic workers’ suitability were ignored by immigration officials. In fact, before the women began working, they were assessed favorably.

Before and after their arrival in Montreal, the Guadeloupian women were interviewed by various immigration personnel. A. Regimbal, Asst. Dominion Immigration Agent, writing to the Superintendent of Immigration, explained, “the majority of them have been in domestic service for years in their native country. They are all strong and apparently healthy; they seem to be a good class of immigrants and in all probability will prosper in this country.” Similarly, the Acting Canadian Government Official posted on Ellis Island described the domestic workers as follows: “I found them to be of a very intelligent class,

almost 70% of the party being able to read and write” and except for one of the women, they all spoke French (Klein). Another immigration officer determined the women “to be physically and mentally quite able to pass the medical examination.” He also noted, “these domestics seem intelligent and capable” (Klein).

Guadeloupian domestic workers lived and worked in a conservative society where Quebec women’s rights were severely curtailed. The inability to vote meant, according to John Dickinson and Brian Young, “women virtually had no power [...]” in male-dominated institutions such as the government and the education system (239). Even when Quebec women trained for skilled jobs, such as teaching, nursing, and telephone operators, “their job training [...] had larger ideological implications [...] preparing them for their roles as wives and mothers” (239). As soon as they were married, “women were expected to quit the paid labour force and to exemplify wifely, motherly, and homemaking virtues” (239). As will be illustrated shortly, domestic workers were expected to embody specific degree characteristics akin to motherly and homemaking virtues, reflected in their employers’ assessment, which will be discussed shortly. The low status of domestic work, coupled with characteristics ascribed to the women who perform such work, makes it challenging to underscore parallels to middle-class white women. Domestic workers lived and worked in homes where traditional gender ideals prevailed. Husbands serve a dual role as breadwinners and employers. Their productive work for remuneration sustains families and pays their household help. Freed up from some of their reproductive responsibilities, wives can focus on meeting their husbands’ physical and emotional needs. In addition to household work, domestic workers were also responsible for caring for children. Indeed, when some of the responsibilities of mothering are relegated to domestic workers, they are helping white women raise future citizens, indirectly assisting with fulfilling the ideals associated with nation-building. Moreover, domestic workers maintain healthy families and, by extension, a stronger nation. While influenced by racist and sexist views of Black women, the employers’ description of their domestic workers suggests they did their jobs well. Employers’ feedback to immigration officials simultaneously challenged public perceptions of women’s morality and aptitude.

Writing on behalf of his brother, Dr. Arthur Lemieux, Auguste Lemieux expressed his gratitude to L.M. Fortier for his role in facilitating the migration of the Guadeloupian women. In his letter, Lemieux not only mentioned the women’s dress being inappropriate for the weather, but he also noted that “they are not too ugly after

all.” (Lemieux). While clearly irrelevant as relates to the drudgery of domestic labor, Lemieux’s comments about Caribbean women’s attractiveness are most likely mediated by his views about Quebecois women as representative of normative femininity.

While none of the other employers commented on domestic women’s attractiveness, they drew on gendered and racial stereotypes in their descriptions of them. The employers’ perceptions must consider the power dynamics inherent in an already asymmetrical domestic worker/ employer dyad. It means recognizing certain spoken and unspoken norms that govern the relationship. Surely, working in the private sphere of the household, domestic workers no doubt recognized their subservient position and enacted their femininity in ways that aligned with the employers’ expectations. Two months following their arrival, the immigration branch conducted what Agnes Calliste refers to as “a half-hearted survey of the 96 employers of the Guadeloupian domestic workers” to determine whether they were satisfied with their employees’ performance and conduct (“Race” 141). Fifty-five employers responded satisfactorily. With two Guadeloupian domestic workers, one employer, a medical doctor writing under the initials A.A., wrote to Fortier approvingly: “[They] give me entire satisfaction in every respect; they are clean, docile, attentive to their work, and their moral conduct leaves nothing to be desired.” He then complained how “there was great difference between the services they give us and that we had from the greater number of whites who have been in my employ during the last 30 years” (A.A.). In addition to being dissatisfied with the service provided by white domestic workers, the employer also noted the exorbitant wages they demanded. He mentioned that the Francophone domestics, in contrast, offered much better service.

In closing, the employer urged the government to consider the importation of “more creoles” as they are a benefit. Particular virtues such as morality, devotion, and cleanliness, used to describe domestic workers, are also expected of wives. They also were expected to perform acceptable feminine behavior that coincided with their wifely and motherly duties. Even then, this particular employer clearly believed that Black women were suited for domestic work and exploited this belief in terms of how Francophone domestic workers were remunerated.

Unlike his mother, who had difficulties with her domestic worker, prompting Dr. E.D. to suggest a trial period, E.D. expressed satisfaction with his own domestic worker. He noted, “she is a good girl, obedient, a worker, sufficiently devoted [...]” adding that “If you have a family and are obliged to keep servants, I should not wish better for you than

you would have one like mine.” (E.D.) Dr. E.D.’s mother, Madame E.D., also completed the survey. While her domestic worker could not read or write, which she found unsatisfactory, Madame E.D. maintained, “They are excellent servants, of irreproachable character, persons belonging to a class desirable for this country.” (E.D. “Madame”) The supposition here is that as long as domestic possessed the requisite qualities and values that employers desired and remained as domestic workers, they were welcome to join the Canadian nation.

Households with children are emotionally demanding and labor-intensive. In these scenarios, domestic workers operate as surrogates who assume the more physical and taxing part of child work with employers, especially mothers upgraded their own status to mother-managers (Rollins). White middle-class mothers are expected to be guardians of the nation’s values and are expected to instill them in their children to create upstanding future citizens. Surely, Caribbean domestic workers assisted mothers in this endeavor. While the number of children in G.A.’s household is unclear, it was important to him and surely his wife that their domestic worker had an amicable relationship with their children. G.A. noted his domestic workers were slow but “clean, and careful in cockery [sic] and very fond of children.” (G.A.)

There is no question that the employers’ views of their domestic workers were paternalistic and motivated by their own self-interest in acquiring cheap labor. Even as the job demanded performing a particular kind of femininity and knowing one’s place within a hierarchical relationship, the employers’ description of their domestic worker’s characteristics stands in stark contrast to immigration officials. Employers saw the domestic workers as a class of acceptable migrants suitable to work in their homes and live in Canada. Described by their employers as “good,” “capable,” “clean,” “devout,” and often “religious,” domestic workers, albeit commodified and inexpensive, were viewed as “Other” by immigration officials. The scheme was short-lived despite the employers’ favorable assessment of the domestic workers and additional demands for Guadeloupian domestic workers. Canadian Immigration halted the migration of additional domestic workers.

During the years 1913–1914, the Quebec government initiated deportation proceedings against some of the women “on the grounds that they come become public charges” (Arat-Koc 74). Unlike the employers, immigration officials’ fervent beliefs of Black women as ‘undesirable’ migrants persisted. Decades later, a similar demand for domestic workers led to a second scheme.

THE SECOND DOMESTIC SCHEME

Unlike the first domestic scheme, which was motivated by individual needs, the second domestic scheme was an agreement between the Caribbean and Canadian governments to send English-speaking Caribbean women to Canada. Similarities existed between both schemes.

The decision to allow Caribbean domestic workers to migrate to Canada was far from altruistic; the state's response suggested an investment in the myth that Canada belonged to them (as opposed to Indigenous peoples), giving them the authority to control and decide who entered its borders. Like the first domestic scheme, the state also operated in the interest of middle- and upper-class white Canadians. Long after the first domestic scheme was canceled, the question of Black women's alleged immorality "was still being used to explain the restrictions on Caribbean migration" (Arat-Koc 74).

Several factors led to the recruitment of Caribbean domestic workers. According to Sedef Arat-Koc, "After attempts in Europe to secure domestic workers, and with mounting pressure from the Caribbean governments and Britain, Canada finally entered into a domestic scheme with Jamaica and Barbados" (75). As the Guadeloupan Caribbean domestics discussed earlier, this group was also seen as the last undesirable alternative. However, they also took on the reproductive responsibilities traditionally borne by middle-class white women. As they entered the growing labor force in greater numbers, middle-class white women shifted the burden of their reproductive tasks onto racialized women. As they sought their liberation in the world of paid work, white women could work for remuneration secure in the knowledge that their homes and children were cared for.

The women had to agree to specific stipulations to be eligible for the scheme. They had to be without minor-aged children or the encumbrance of common-law relationships and be between 18 and 40 years old.⁴ The women were required to have at least a grade 8 education and pass a medical examination. Prospective applicants were then interviewed by Canadian Immigration officials, who then decided on suitability. Despite passing their medical exam, upon arrival in Canada, the women were "further subjected to gynecological examinations" (Arat-Koc 75). Granted landed status (permanent resident), the women were placed in a home for a year and were free to leave their employer if they did not meet the conditions stipulated in the employment agreement. While the scheme was officially elimi-

4 The reference to the ages of the women were either 21–35 or 18–40.

nated in 1967, the demand for domestic labor remained. The criteria for entry remained in place well into the 1970s, and many Caribbean women continued to enter the country as domestic workers.

The criteria for admission were clearly deliberate and intended to ensure that the women had no dependence or intimate relationships, eliminating the possibility of sponsorship. Erica Lawson argued that “the specificity of the requirements, and in particular, erasure of children and intimate partners, produced [B]lack domestic workers as women not expected to have children or to deny them emotional involvement and physical presence in the lives of their own children” (Lawson 143). The supposition was that Caribbean women, even if they did have children, could, out of sheer desperation, leave their families behind at a whim to assume the responsibility of reproductive tasks in the homes of middle-class families.



Fig. 1. The names of the first 25 Barbadian women who migrated to Canada as Domestic workers in November and December 1955. Courtesy of Carolyn Neblett, 2007.

During the first year, Canada allowed 100 women from Jamaica and Barbados to enter the country on a trial basis. Apparently, many of these women were educated and had extensive experience in their home countries but could only enter Canada as domestic workers (Caliste 1989). Perhaps the most notable of these women is the Honorable Jean Augustine, who migrated to Canada from Grenada in 1960. Augustine worked as a domestic worker and eventually earned her permanent resident status. She enrolled in a teacher's college and became a teacher, vice-principal, and principal before pursuing a political career. She became the first Black woman elected to the House of Commons in 1983 (Keung).

Augustine's observations about Toronto warrant commentary. She explains, "The Toronto I came to in 1960 was very different from today—I could walk for hours on end and not see another Black person." She continued, "And there were people who did not feel that Black people had a place in Canadian society" (Keung).⁵ Augustine's remarks not only support Mathieu's point earlier regarding the long-term implications of the order-in-council regarding Black migration but also provide a glimpse of the environment that domestics lived and worked in. The introduction of the point system in 1967, which replaced race as the criteria for migration, would subsequently change the face of cities such as Toronto and Montreal. Caribbean migrants remained vulnerable despite a supposedly liberal immigration policy. The well-publicized case of the Jamaican Seven, who entered Canada under the criteria of the second scheme, conveys the sad reality of who belongs to the nation. The ideal family is the one that Caribbean domestics migrated to care for; their children, however, did not belong in Canada.

Having lived in Canada for several years, some domestic workers proceeded to sponsor their children who were still residing in the Caribbean. In 1976, the Canadian government began deportation proceedings against several of these individuals, alleging that they had failed to disclose the fact that they had minor children on their immigration applications (Fudge 119). The rationale seemed to stem from a recession in Canada, which reduced the demand for their labor. While the workers acknowledged withholding information about their children, they did so based on advice from Jamaican Ministry of Labour officials, who told them that the children's status was irrelevant since they were not traveling with them. The women also disclosed that

5 It is important to point out that as a Caribbean migrant, Augustine's advancement in Canadian government and society is exceptional.

the Canadian Manpower and Immigration Representatives were aware of the information regarding their minor children but chose to disregard it due to the demand for their labor. In a booklet published in 1900 titled “Advice to West Indian Women Recruited to Work in Canada as Household Helps,” prospective domestics were told, “You should not try to sponsor the immigration of any of your relatives or friends to Canada unless you have been there for at least 18 months.” (“Advice to West Indian Women”). Whichever government body was responsible for creating these guidelines, presumably the Jamaican Ministry of Labour, anticipated that women would want to sponsor their relatives at some point. Given these instructions, it makes sense that even though sponsoring their children was not a part of the initial agreement and was prohibited by the Canadian government, some women would attempt to do so. Unsurprisingly, it did not appear that reporters or Immigration Canada investigated the women’s claims that representatives of the state in the Caribbean and Canada knew their children. Instead, Immigration Canada sought to deport the women for failing to disclose that they had dependents under the age of 18 (Federal Court of Appeal). Some women then brought their plight to the Canadian public using the slogan “Save the Seven.”

THE “OTHER” BORDER:
On Canada/US Culture,
Power, and Politics

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Fig. 2. Some of the women from the second domestic scheme: left to right: Laurene Blunt and Esther Reid; the names of the other women are unknown. The second row is Donald Moore, founder of the Negro Citizenship Organization. A Civil Rights Activist, Moore was instrumental in challenging Canada’s exclusionary policies against Caribbean migration. Courtesy of Carolyn Neblett, 1956. Neblett is Blunt’s niece.

The seven women—Elain Peart, Lola Anderson, Carmen Hyde, Rubena Whyte, Elizabeth Lodge, Eliza Cox, and Gloria Lawrence—were the appellants in the case against the Minister of Employment and Immigration. The “Seven” is a larger movement that includes Julia Farquharson, a landed immigrant who became its public face. By bringing their plight to the public, the Jamaican Seven and Farquharson jolted Canadians out of their perpetual denial regarding gendered racism in Canada and, by extension, the immigration system. Often denied agency and presence, the women’s activism engendered incredible support and created several organizations and alliances devoted to domestics. Indeed, these women called into question the meaning of citizenship and belonging by underscoring their status as mothers and workers who contributed to Canadian society.

Given how some media outlets called them liars, the tenacity and courage exhibited by the Seven and Farquharson are far from the image and discourses generated about domestic workers, which is significant given that other women were scheduled to be deported but chose not to come forward. Cognizant of how they were situated within the larger political economy of care workers as cheap, expendable labor, coupled with their fragile immigration status, the Seven and Farquharson were willing to “fight back” against the gendered racism enacted by the state. Elaine Peart pointed out, “we were brought here to clean rich folks’ homes, and now we are not cleaning rich folk’s homes so you want to throw us out because we’re black, we can’t be held down forever” (Leah and Morgan 23). Gloria Lawrence, one of the seven, asserts, “The immigration holds that fear of deportation over immigrants’ heads’ to prevent us from demanding better jobs, working conditions, better wages and social conditions” (quoted in Leah and Morgan 23). Lawrence not only recognizes but can name the state’s complicity in their oppression by its willingness to deny them these social rights, which essentially are markers of citizenship.

To suspend the deportation, individually, the women took their case to the Canadian Immigration Appeal Board and the Federal Court of Appeal but were unsuccessful. Once the women exhausted their appeals, they contacted the Committee Against Racism (C.A.R.). It was through C.A.R. that the women learned about each other. In expressing the significance of their meeting, Lawrence explained, “I found I wasn’t alone. Six other women [...]—all of us took a step forward against racist and chauvinist harassment we suffered at the hands of the Immigration Department” (Leah and Morgan 23). In addition to articulating the intersection of race, class, and gender to explain their treatment by the state, Lawrence also elucidated the larger significance of their

struggle. Their fight against Canadian Immigration was a Civil Rights issue. “Believe me, If I had thought that I would be in the lead of one of the most important Civil Rights fights in Canada, I wouldn’t have come! But here I am, here we all are, and we plan to stay to win this fight” (Leah and Morgan 23), she states.

Given the failure of the appeals at the federal level, on March 1, 1978, the women, represented by Civil Rights lawyer and activist Charles Roach, filed a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC). The CHRC adjudicates discrimination claims with a mandate to ensure an inclusive society where people are free from discrimination based on their different social locations. In presenting their complaints to the CHRC, Roach pointed out that the women believed “that the real reason for their deportation is racial discrimination in that they were Black, and their country of origin is Jamaica” (Lawson 142). The women’s fight was both political and personal; they had children and family members in Jamaica who were dependent on them for remittances they sent home. In an interview, Elizabeth Lodge, who worked at a hotel, explained that “My take-home pay is about \$180 a week and I’ve sent about \$100 a month for their food, and I keep them in clothes” (Lawson 147). Moreover, given the economic crisis in Jamaica because of structural adjustment policies, Roach emphasized the economic hardship women would face if they returned to Jamaica. Like the domestic workers who came at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Seven responded to a demand for their labor with the goal of making a better life for themselves and their children. Having taken care of White peoples’ children, the Seven needed to take care of their own. The activism that ensued directly appealed to the Canadian nation-state to live up to its mythic ideal. Equally important was how the case served as a vehicle for a broader social justice agenda.

While their case was being heard, the women engaged in a few public forms of activism via a series of marches, some held, though not exclusively, under the slogan, “Save the seven,” the name of the defense fund established to assist them in their fight to remain in Canada. Following the complaint to the CHRC on May 1, 200 people marched downtown Toronto on May 8. Moreover, approximately one year later, “the seven” led the May Day March on May 5, which also included Farquharson, who, though not one of the Seven, was also supported by the C.A.R. Like the other women, Farquharson was a landed immigrant, but not a domestic worker. She was the sole support mother of three Canadian-born children. The reason for Farquharson’s deportation remains unclear. *The Globe & Mail* article stated that she was “convicted of fraud for cashing a welfare check for a girl-

friend in New York” (Ring 4). However, Farquharson claimed she did not realize that cashing the check was illegal. In the article “Immigrant Women Fight Back: The Case of Seven Jamaican Women” by Leah and Morgan, the authors suggest that Farquharson’s deportation stemmed from her inability to achieve financial independence, which led her to rely on welfare. They argue that a combination of factors—such as the deportation of her common-law husband, low-paying jobs, and a lack of affordable daycare—forced Farquharson to seek public assistance (23).

Regardless of how the state constructs the Jamaican Seven and Farquharson as Other, the women viewed Canada as home. Secure in this knowledge, they challenged the state to treat them and their children accordingly. Farquharson was determined that her children would grow up in the country where they were born. “I’m not leaving, and my children aren’t leaving, they have the rights as any Canadian” (Leah and Morgan 24), she explained. Farquharson took issue with the fact that the government penalized her for what was called at the time “mothers’ allowance,” noting that it was support for her Canadian-born children and that denying her rights as an immigrant meant denying her children’s rights (Leah and Morgan 24).

Immigration Canada’s willingness to deport Farquharson’s Canadian-born children vexed the Canadian public. The support these women received strengthened their resolve to continue fighting. “I know that I can fight back, and that other people are backing me” (Leah and Morgan 24), Farquharson explained. In many ways, public support legitimizes their humanity. Other groups recognized the significance of the women’s plight, as exemplified by their inclusion on May Day in March. In addition to lawyer Charles Roach, the March also included speakers from the Iranian Student Association, the Arab Palestinian Association, the Sikh Community, and the Canadian Party of Labour. As they made their way to the Canadian Immigration Department, Farquharson addressed the group, reminding them it was important “to continue the struggle” (Boyadjian). In speaking truth literally and figuratively to power, the women amassed national support, forging various alliances not specific to the Caribbean community.

As a result of the women’s ordeal, several organizations were created, such as the Committee Against the Deportation of Immigrant Women (Silvera 198–201). The organization was founded by Sherona Hall to “advocate for landed status for Jamaican-born domestic workers who were facing deportation.” How appropriate were the bywords, “Good enough to work, good enough to stay” (200), which became a rallying cry for the Seven but also for other domes-

tic workers and other immigrants? As Erica Lawson pointed out, “The women’s case also symbolized the plight of immigrants struggling to establish themselves in Canada under difficult circumstances, highlighting, in particular, the restrictions imposed on other workers with temporary status” (Lawson 150). International Coalition to End Domestic Exploitation (INTERCEDE) formed in 1979 “coordinated a national campaign” on behalf of the Seven who were also supported by other organizations in Vancouver, Montreal, and Ottawa (Fudge 125). INTERCEDE and allies met some success when after intensive lobbying, “the immigration system was changed in 1980 so that domestic workers were given two-year temporary permits requiring them to live-in before they could apply for landed status.” The activism of the Seven and Farquharson benefited not only them in that their deportation was halted but also the larger Canadian society, and it must be viewed as an element of nation-building. As a result of their activism, The Jamaican Seven and Farquharson called on the Canadian nation to live up to its image and ideals.

CONCLUSION

Canada is rarely associated with racist and exclusionary immigration policies due to an emphasis on narratives of African Americans fleeing enslavement and other forms of oppression via the Underground Railroad. Indeed, the slate of stories of media welcoming migrants following the 2016 US election serves to further reinforce the image of Canada as a benevolent and welcoming nation. As a white settler colony, Canada historically encouraged migration from Northern Europe, particularly from Britain, because immigrants from these regions were considered ideal for the nation-building project, which was not the case for Caribbean migrants. However, those who entered Canada in the early and mid-twentieth century, such as the men who worked for DISCO and the women who comprised both domestic schemes, occupied the lowest rung on the occupational ladder. While Caribbean men’s gender, due to their labor performed, could qualify them as nation builders, the same cannot be said of the domestic workers. Elite white individuals who see themselves as nation-builders determined the parameters of what activities count as contributing to the nation-building project, who is allowed to participate, and on what grounds. Ultimately, this process determines who belongs to the nation. Thus, there is a need to reimagine those considered nation-building actors as domestic workers. Indeed, these women assumed some of the responsibilities of middle-class white women, the quintessential

nation builders responsible for reproducing the nation by inculcating the values and norms of national culture into their children. If there was an acknowledgment of Caribbean domestic role and contribution to white Canadian families, then there would be no need for deportation proceedings against them.

Because nations can and do regress, nation-building activities are critical to maintaining and guaranteeing social and political rights, for example. Thus, the Jamaican seven and Farquharson's activism must also be considered an aspect of nation-building. The women, along with their allies, troubled white Canadians' complacency about institutionalized forms of oppression. Together, they challenged the state's hegemony, intervening in and calling attention to its violent epistemic practices, ultimately leading to remaining in Canada.

At the time of writing, Justin Trudeau's Liberal government has announced plans to reduce the number of migrants allowed into the country for two years, noting that the decision "is temporary—to pause our population growth and let our economy catch up" (Reuters). This announcement contrasts with Trudeau's position during the 2016 US election, which he mentioned at the beginning of this article, where he championed Canadian values of being "welcoming" to outsiders. As the Liberal government works out the plan's logistics, especially in light of the current economic situation, the question of which migrants will be admitted to Canada is difficult to overlook.

Abstract: This paper challenges the myth of Canada as the "Promised Land" for displaced peoples, such as enslaved African Americans who sought refuge via the Underground Railroad. "Drawing on archival and secondary sources, the paper examines the measures taken by Immigration Canada to exclude Caribbean people, arguing that these policies are inextricably connected to the question of who is considered worthy of belonging to and contributing to the nation-building project. While some recognize that Chinese and Sikh immigrant men furnished the physical labor necessary for nation-building by constructing railways and working in the lumber industry, the bodies and the work performed are gendered. This paper seeks to expand the repertoire of actors and the parameters of what counts as nation-building activities by including Caribbean domestic workers. Specifically, the paper examines how these working-class women both inadvertently and directly contributed to Canada's nation-building in two ways: 1) by assuming reproductive tasks on behalf of middle-class white women and their families and 2) through their activism against deportation.

Keywords: Migration, Canada, Caribbean domestic workers, nation-building, activism, reproductive labor

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