



# Black Loyalist HERITAGE CENTRE

— PRESENTED *by* EMERA —



A PART *of* THE NOVA SCOTIA MUSEUM

# EDUCATION GUIDE



**"The Black Loyalist Heritage Centre represents the very best of opportunity, community activism and commitment to grow in the wake of oppression and loss."**

**- Lawrence Hill, author of The Book of Negroes**



## About the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre

One of Canada's best kept secrets, the largest free Black settlement in the 1780's where people voted with their feet for freedom. This unique historical site is nestled in beautiful Birchtown on the western shores of Shelburne Harbour, the third largest natural harbour in the world. Come and enjoy a guided tour, search for your ancestral roots and learn about these courageous Nova Scotians.

Our historic site features an interpretive centre filled with interactive exhibits that take you through the history of the Black Loyalists. In addition to our main centre, our site offers the chance to explore the one room Birchtown schoolhouse, a replica of a pit house, and St. Paul's Anglican Church. Enjoy a walk through our scenic trail and end your visit at the Black Burial Ground and monument site which sits at the edge of Birchtown Bay.

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We are available for school and group tours year-round. Please contact the administration office for details regarding special group rates.

### FIND US ONLINE:

**BLACKLOYALIST.COM**



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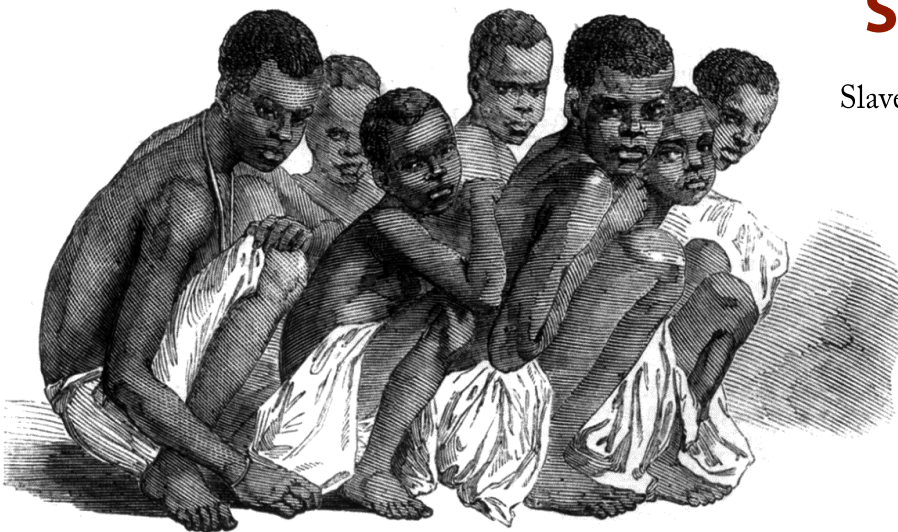
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# Who Were the Black Loyalists?

The Black Loyalists are our ancestors. Formerly free Africans, they were enslaved and taken by force to the Americas. Most worked on plantations cultivating and growing staple crops from which, the wealth of nations grew. When the American Revolutionary War broke out in 1775 many joined the British army and won their freedom. Of those who came to Nova Scotia, some were still enslaved. Others were born free. Without the tragic history of the transatlantic slave trade there would be no Black Loyalists. We descendants would not be here. There would be no story to tell. But we are here. And our story begins in Africa.

Africa is the second largest continent in the world. Its diversity can be seen in the hundreds of different ethnic groups that coexist on the continent. It is estimated that there are over 1000 different dialects spoken by the different people in Africa. Most of the Africans who were enslaved and brought to North America came from West and West Central Africa. For this reason, many African Americans and Black Loyalists can trace their ancestry back to West Africa.

Before Europeans ever set foot on African soil, African Kings engaged in trade with empires in Asia, the Middle East and Rome. Indigenous African cultures flourished as can be seen by the variety of objects they made, songs they sang, and stories passed down over generations.



*Africans Packed into a Slave Ship, 1857.*  
[The Illustrated London News (June 20, 1857), vol. 30, p. 595]

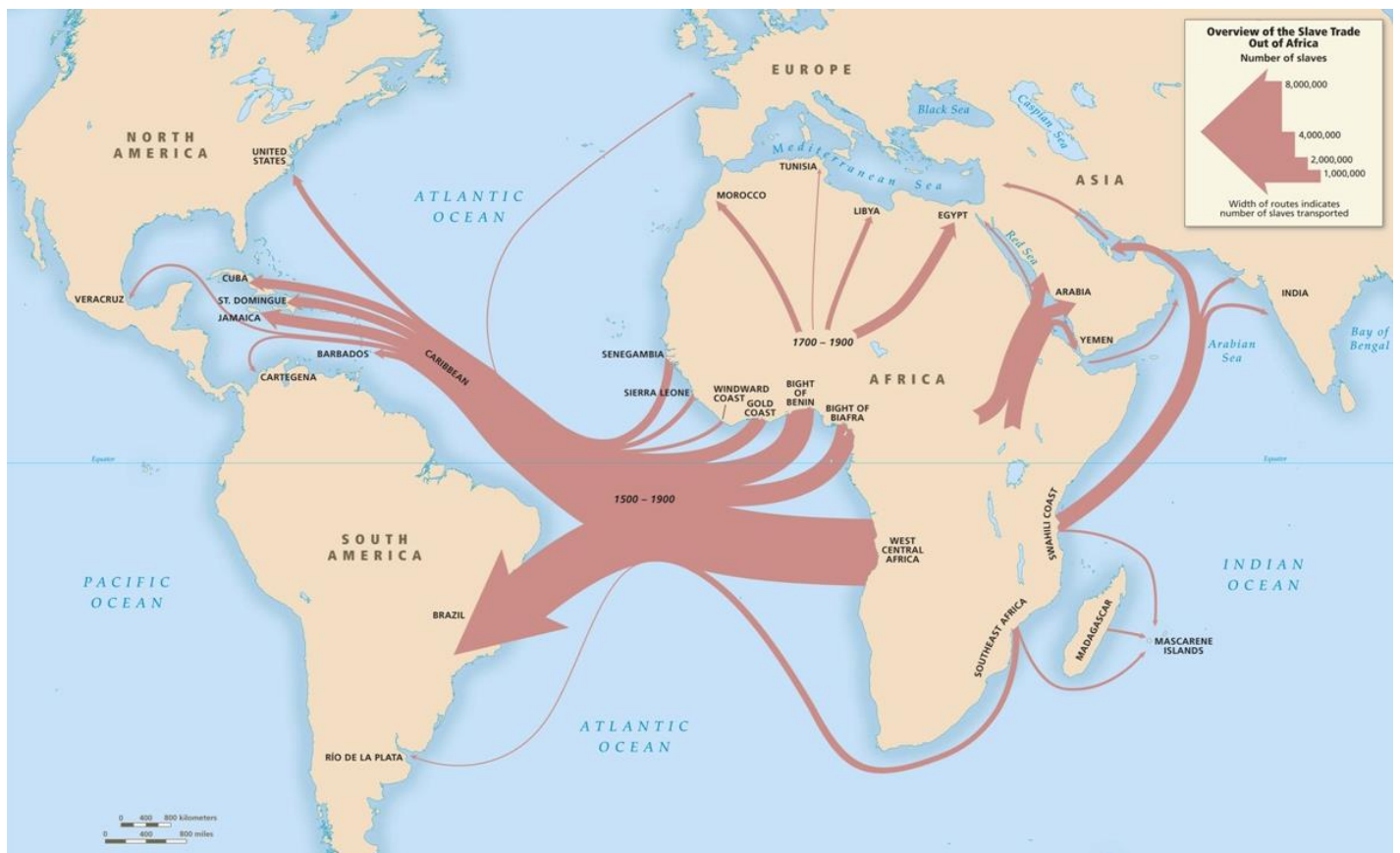
## SLAVE TRADE

Slavery existed in Africa prior to the European transatlantic slave trade. Although a local slave trade existed, it was the arrival of Europeans and European rivalries for dominance that spurred on the enslavement and export of African peoples.

# Africa

European enslavement of African people started in the 1440s with the Portuguese. The Spanish, French, Dutch and English were all engaged in the lucrative slave trade. From the 1700s to the mid-1800s it was the British and Americans who dominated. It is estimated that about 12.5 million Africans were kidnapped during the slave trade. 95% of these were taken to the West Indies and Latin America. The remaining 5% ended up in North America.

The European slave trade differed significantly from the slavery found in African societies. In Africa, those enslaved were taken as prisoners of war, in payment of debt or as punishment for crime. Although enslaved, they were still treated as part of society. Those Africans enslaved by the European transatlantic slave trade were seen as property, and not people. There was a distinctly racial element that characterized the transatlantic slave trade. Because those enslaved were stolen from Africa, blackness of skin became associated with being a piece of property and less than human.



Overview of the slave trade out of Africa, 1500-1900. [Emory Library & Information Technologies]

# Who Were the Black Loyalists?

## ACTIVITY

For many, slavery is perceived as an event of the past. Unfortunately, slavery is still a very real issue today. Because of this misconception, the concept of what slavery is can be difficult to understand, particularly for younger students. The activities included in this section offer ways to introduce and discuss this difficult topic.

Separate the students into groups and give them a piece of chart paper and a marker. Ask them to discuss freedom. Offer them a few starting points:

- *What does it mean to be free?*
- *What are things we associate with being free?*
- *Is freedom the same for everyone?*

Give the groups enough time to discuss and flesh out these ideas. Come together as a class and ask groups to present their ideas. Create a larger flow chart of the ideas from this discussion that can be displayed on the classroom wall. Return to these concepts and ideas when covering the history of the Black Loyalists, and the broader history of Slavery.



*Enchained Captured Africans, Sierra Leone, 1805.  
[Slavery Images: A Visual Record of the African Slave  
Trade and Slave Life in the Early African Diaspora]*



# Africa

## RAIDS AND KIDNAP

*“One day, when all our people were gone out to their works as usual, and only I and my dear sister were left to mind the house, two men and a woman got over our walls and, in a moment, seized us both and, without giving us time to cry out or make resistance, they stopped our mouths and ran off with us into the nearest wood. Here they tied our hands and continued to carry us as far as they could...”*

**- Olaudah Equiano, enslaved African of the Igbo people, Kingdom of Benin, c. 1745-1797**

European traders captured some Africans in raids along the coast. They also bought slaves from local dealers. First you would be captured, then gagged and bound. You would then be forced to walk to the coast where you were loaded onto a slave ship, or kept in a holding area at a slave castle. Depending on a ship's schedule, you might be kept in a pen or cell for weeks or months.

## SLAVE CASTLES

Slave castles were fortifications used during the transatlantic slave trade to house captives as they awaited ships to take them out of Africa. At the height of the slave trade there were forty major slave castles located along the West African coast.

One of these slave castles was Bunce Island, which is situated along the Sierra Leone River. Throughout its history millions of stolen Africans would pass through Bunce Island. Of all the forty major slave castles along the West African coast, Bunce Island had the strongest direct link to North America.



*Bunce (Bance) Island and Fort, Sierra Leone, 1727.  
[Slavery Images: A Visual Record of the African Slave Trade  
and Slave Life in the Early African Diaspora]*

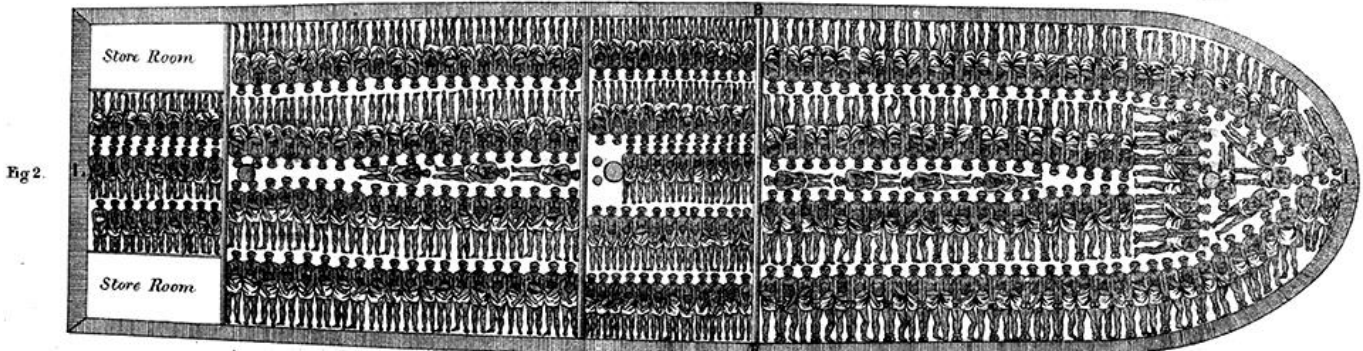
# Who Were the Black Loyalists?

## MIDDLE PASSAGE

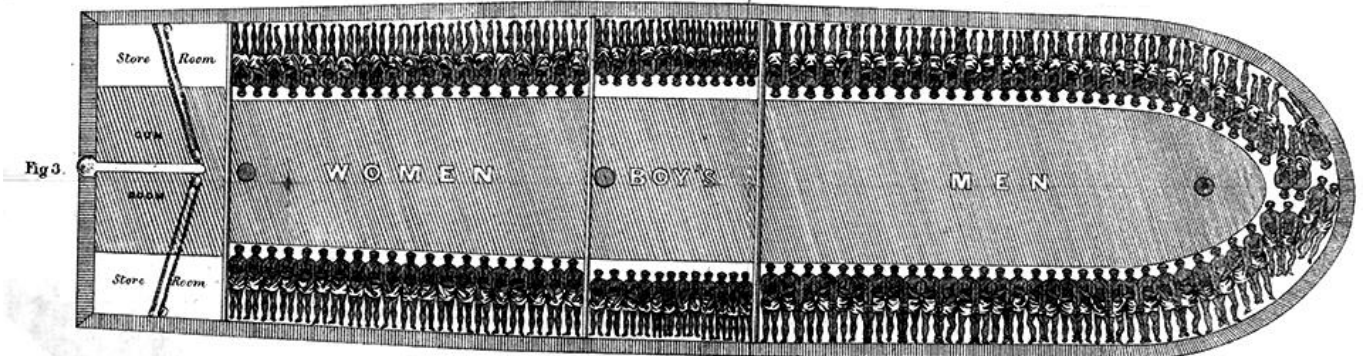
Slave ships would arrive to transport Africans across the sea to live a life of enslavement. Captives would be bound, gagged and crammed into a dark, stinking cargo hold, chained to other Africans, and shipped to the West Indies or the Americas.

The voyage across the ocean was called 'the middle passage' and was perhaps the most traumatic experience. Many were sick from the rocking of the ship, and given the tightly packed spaces, disease was ever present. So too, was the risk of violence at the hands of their captors. The psychological trauma of being kidnapped and a long journey into the unknown must have been terrifying.

PLAN OF LOWER DECK WITH THE STOWAGE OF 292 SLAVES  
130 OF THESE BEING STOWED UNDER THE SHELVES AS SHEWN IN FIGURE B & FIGURE 3.



PLAN SHEWING THE STOWAGE OF 130 ADDITIONAL SLAVES ROUND THE WINGS OR SIDES OF THE LOWER DECK BY MEANS OF PLATFORMS OR SHELVES (IN THE MANNER OF GALLERIES IN A CHURCH) THE SLAVES STOWED ON THE SHELVES AND BELOW THEM HAVE ONLY A HEIGHT OF 2 FEET 7 INCHES BETWEEN THE BEAMS: AND FAR LESS UNDER THE BEAMS. See Fig 1.



*Stowage of a British slave ship, Brookes (1788). [United States Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs division]*

# America

## AUCTION

Those that didn't die on the journey through the middle passage would be brought to auction. There they would be stripped, prodded, poked and examined. If families had managed to stay together up to this point, they were often separated at the auction block.

When sold, your life of labour and servitude began. Your life would likely be filled with violence. If you were a woman with children, they too would become enslaved.

## PLANTATION LIFE

The demand for enslaved people was largely the result of the need for labour on plantations. Sugar plantations were extremely lucrative, especially in the West Indies. In British North America tobacco, rice, indigo, and cotton were the staple crops Africans were forced to cultivate and harvest. European countries and their colonies reaped the financial benefits of slave labour. The foundations of the United States of America were built on the blood, sweat and tears of our ancestors.

Plantation life was difficult and violent. But, community and bonds of kinship were extremely important to African people. Torn from their homes, enslaved people eventually started their own families in the Americas.

From a young age, children would learn to work. Tasks such as watering fields, feeding animals, kitchen and house work, and taking care of younger children were common. Some boys would be taught a trade like blacksmithing or carpentry. By the age of ten, enslaved children were considered ready for full-time work.





# Who Were the Black Loyalists?

## RESISTANCE

Violence was a part of their daily lives, but so too was resistance. There are many ways to resist. On the journey over the middle passage some enslaved Africans refused to eat. Others leap into the sea, choosing death rather than separation from loved ones and a life of unknown violence.

On the plantation, some broke tools which would impede their work. Some ran away, risking recapture and corporal punishment. For others, resistance meant armed insurrection.

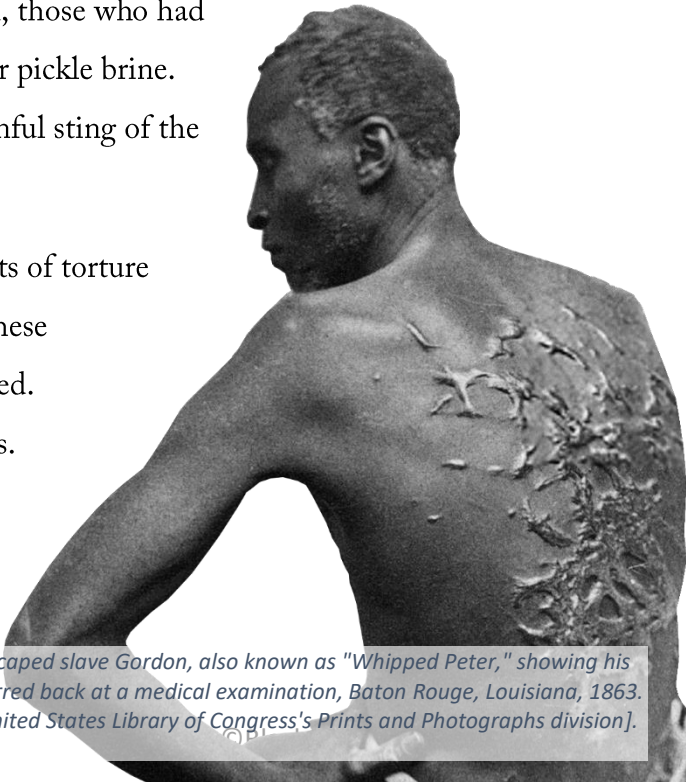
## PUNISHMENT

**“Slaves were used hard...if anything went wrong, they were tied up and lashed, then their backs were bathed in pickle. Grandfather had it done to him in slavery.”**

**– John Farmer, Black Loyalist descendant.**

Lashings were some of the most common methods of punishment used against enslaved people. Some of these sentences were so severe that they could not be carried out in one sitting. To reduce the risk of infection, those who had been lashed would be then bathed in a salted solutions or pickle brine. While this did help to heal the physical wounds, the painful sting of the brine was an additional element of torture.

For runaways, slave owners would use instruments of torture that would impede the person from escaping. Some of these apparatuses included chains and collars with bells attached. The bells would signal where that person was at all times. These collars were designed to stick out from the body, so that if the person wearing it were to try and run through the forest, they would get tangled in the branches and limbs.



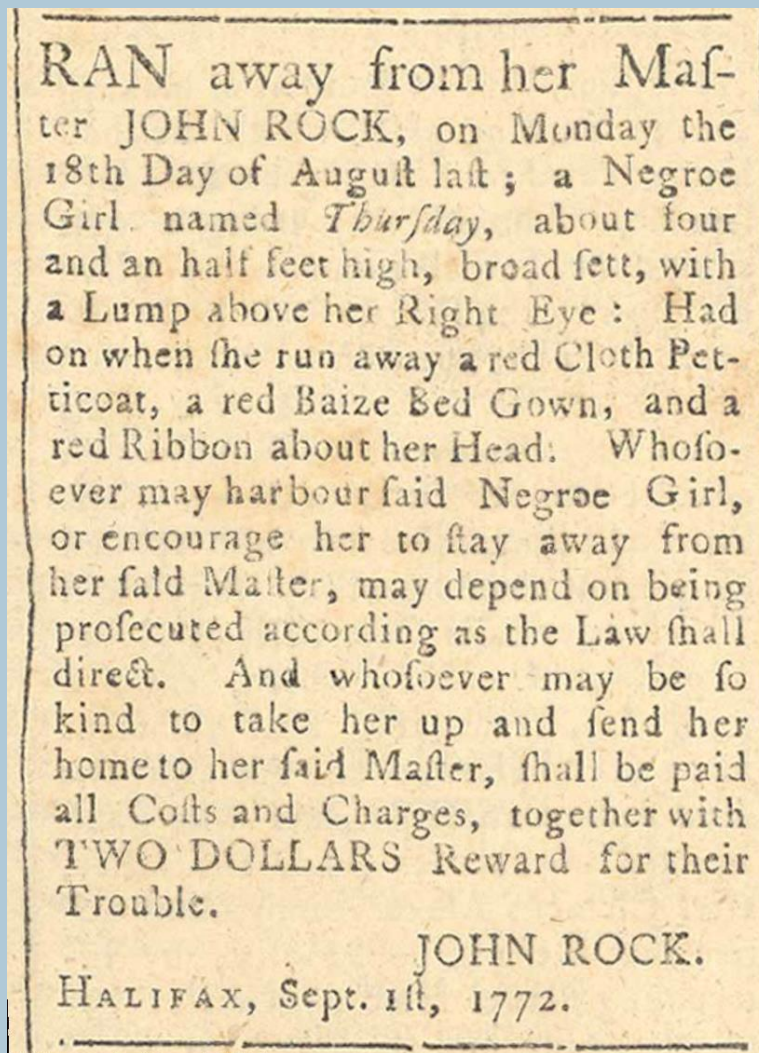
*Escaped slave Gordon, also known as "Whipped Peter," showing his scarred back at a medical examination, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1863. [United States Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs division].*



# America

## ACTIVITY

Have students analyze the runaway slave advertisement from 1772 then answer the questions below. These questions can be completed individually or as a group. Once the students have completed the questions, come back together as a class for a discussion about their responses.



RAN away from her Master JOHN ROCK, on Monday the 18th Day of August last; a Negroe Girl named *Thursday*, about four and an half feet high, broad sett, with a Lump above her Right Eye: Had on when she run away a red Cloth Petticoat, a red Baize Bed Gown, and a red Ribbon about her Head. Whosoever may harbour said Negroe Girl, or encourage her to stay away from her said Master, may depend on being prosecuted according as the Law shall direct. And whosoever may be so kind to take her up and send her home to her said Master, shall be paid all Costs and Charges, together with TWO DOLLARS Reward for their Trouble.

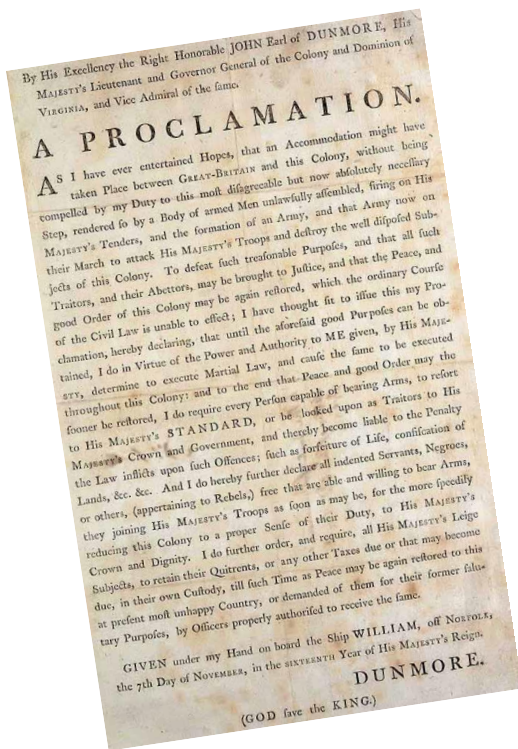
JOHN ROCK.  
HALIFAX, Sept. 11, 1772.

1. *What is this type of document?*
2. *Who made this document and why?*
3. *What does this document show us about the attitudes and beliefs of that time?*
4. *Did anything surprise you about this document? If so, what was it?*

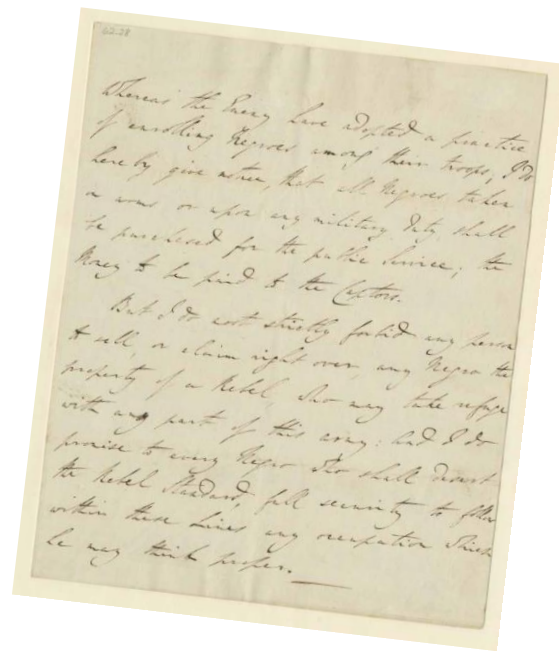
# Who Were the Black Loyalists?

## LIBERTY TO SLAVES

By 1775 talk of liberty and equality filled the homes, town halls and streets of colonial America. This was a message that spoke to the heart of enslaved Africans. It would be the British, desperate to teach the American rebels a lesson, who would offer freedom at a cost. Desert your masters, fight for the British King during the American Revolution and you would have your freedom.



*Dunmore's Proclamation, issued November 7, 1775. [United States Library of Congress Rare Book and Special Collections Division].*



*Philipsburg Proclamation, issued June 30, 1779. [William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan].*

During the American Revolution there would be two main proclamations that would bring enslaved people to the side of the British. The first was issued by Lord Dunmore, the Royal Governor of Virginia, in 1775. It was the first declaration of freedom to those American slaves who were willing to bear arms for the British. The second was Sir Henry Clinton's 1779 Philipsburg proclamation. It deemed all enslaved people in the United States free and entitled to protection and land for serving the Crown.



# A Chance for Liberty

Black Loyalists participated in the war in various ways. They gathered intelligence, acted as guides and messengers, built fortifications, provided service to officers, and engaged in armed combat. Their numbers included skilled artisans, tailors, cooks and musicians. They were well regarded as devoted, hard workers who desperately gave everything for their freedom.

**“...I began to feel the happiness of liberty, of which I knew nothing before...”**

**- Boston King, Black Loyalist**

Those engaged in armed combat included Dunmore’s Ethiopian Regiment, with their badge reading “liberty to slaves”. The Black Brigade, members of the official Provincial units and armed boat companies also fought against the Rebels.

Black Loyalists were part of British units such as the Black Pioneers, New Jersey Volunteers, Engineer Department, British Legion, New York Volunteers, King’s American Dragoons, Royal Artillery Department, Wagonmaster General’s Department and General Hospital Department.

## WAR’S END

New York was the last British stronghold to the north during the war. Here gathered Loyalists both Black and White who could no longer stay in the newly formed United States. For the Black Loyalists, this was a time of fear and uncertainty. American enslavers were entering New York to claim those they had previously enslaved.

*“The Death of Major Peirson, 6 January 1781” oil painting by John Singleton Copley. [Tate Britain]*

# Who Were the Black Loyalists?

General George Washington pressed Sir Guy Carleton to ensure that no Black people who were claimed by Americans left New York. Carleton however, stayed true to the loyal Black people who fought for the British.

## BOOK OF NEGROES

To appease American's demand for compensation, the Book of Negroes was created. It served as an inventory of African Americans who left New York with the British in 1783. Two copies were recorded at the same time – one by the Americans and one by the British. This inventory was used by the Americans to claim financial compensation from the British for their lost 'property' during the war.

The Book of Negroes list the name of the Black Loyalist, gives a description of the person, their status (free or indentured), the name of their former enslaver, the name of the ship they left on, its captain's name and destination, and the port and date of embarkation. For most, this was the first time they were ever recorded by name in any document.

### ACTIVITY

Use the QR Code or link to access the Book of Negroes on the Nova Scotia Archive website. Have students look through this digital document and find the name of a Black Loyalist. Using the information available in the document, have them write a paragraph about that person. Some questions to ask yourself might be:

*Where did this Black Loyalist come from?*

*How old were they?*

*What did they look like?*



<https://archives.novascotia.ca/africans/book-of-negroes/>



# A Chance for Liberty



Map of Black Loyalist Landing Sites & Settlements in Nova Scotia & New Brunswick. [Black Loyalist Heritage Centre]

Over 2,800 Black Loyalists were recorded in the Book of Negroes and departed New York for Nova Scotia and other parts of the world. The ports of arrival for the Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were: Port Roseway (Shelburne), St. John, Port Mouton, Annapolis Royal, Halifax and Fort Cumberland.

# Who Were the Black Loyalists?

## QUESTIONS

Once you have completed this section of the Black Loyalist history take some time and answer the following questions.

1. *Explain the primary differences between the local slave trade in Africa and the European transatlantic slave trade?*

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2. *An estimated 12.5 million Africans were kidnapped and enslaved during the transatlantic slave trade. Where were a majority of them taken?*

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3. *What was Bunce Island, and what was its significance in the history of the slave trade?*

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4. *Name some of the crops cultivated and grown by enslaved Africans on plantations?*

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# Africa and the Americas

5. *Describe the voyage for enslaved Africans across the ocean.*

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6. *Give some examples of acts of resistance by enslaved Africans.*

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7. *What offered the Black Loyalists the chance for freedom during the American Revolution?*

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8. *Describe how Black Loyalists participated in the American Revolution.*

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9. *What was the Book of Negroes document?*

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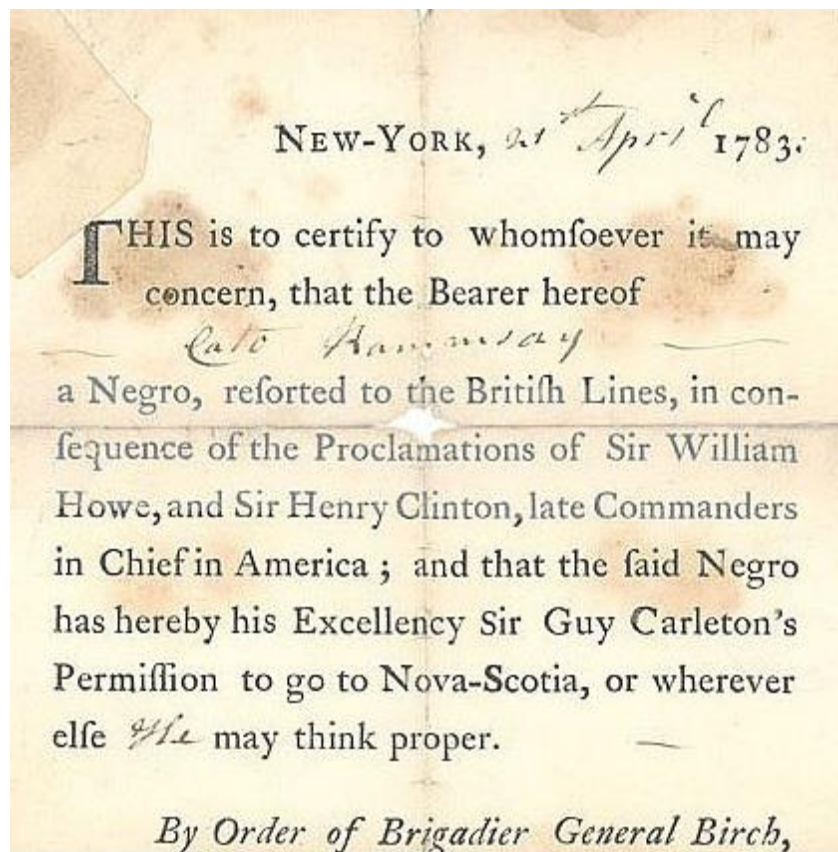
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# A New Life

## ARRIVAL

In 1783 and 1784 thousands of Black men, women and children arrived on the shores of Nova Scotia. Some were the Black Loyalists; others were enslaved to White Loyalists.

The largest landing point for the Black Loyalists was Port Roseway, later renamed Shelburne. It was expected that Shelburne would be a model community for the resettlement of Black people in Nova Scotia. Most of the Black Loyalists lived in a community of their own outside of the town. The community was called Birchtown after General Birch, who had signed most of the Certificates of Freedom.



General Birch Certificate for Black Loyalist Cato Ramsay, 21 April 1783. [Nova Scotia Archives]

Certificates of Freedom, sometimes known as freedom papers, were issued to the Black Loyalists prior to their arrival in Nova Scotia. These were documents signed by British officials, declaring that the carrier had served the British during the American Revolution and were now free citizens.



# Birchtown

Located about 5 km northwest of Shelburne, Birchtown was the largest free settlement of Africans in North America at the time, and a place of refuge for people of African descent escaping enslavement and difficult living conditions. By 1787 there were approximately 200 Black families in Birchtown and another 70 Black families in the northern division of the township. In July 1784, the muster roll shows a total of 5,900 White people and 2,700 Black people. Of these, 1,521 Black people were free.

## MI'KMAQ

Nova Scotia was not an empty wilderness upon the arrival of the Loyalists. It is the traditional land of the Mi'kmaq. The Mi'kmaq would have helped Black Loyalists in many ways including fishing and gathering natural resources needed to survive. Thus, began the ongoing relationship with the Mi'kmaq that continues to the present day.

Many of the newly arrived Black Loyalists were from the southern colonies Virginia, Georgia, and South Carolina. The northern Nova Scotia climate would have been foreign and at times shocking. There was opportunity for the Mi'kmaq to share intimate knowledge of food sources, useful plants – edible, medicinal and functional, trees for building, transportation routes over land and water, as well as hunting and fishing practices. Such insights and advice were no doubt most welcomed especially as the first winter quickly approached.



*A Mi'kmaq family and wigwam. Note the African Nova Scotian woman in the group. Circa 1891. [Nova Scotia Archives]*

# A New Life

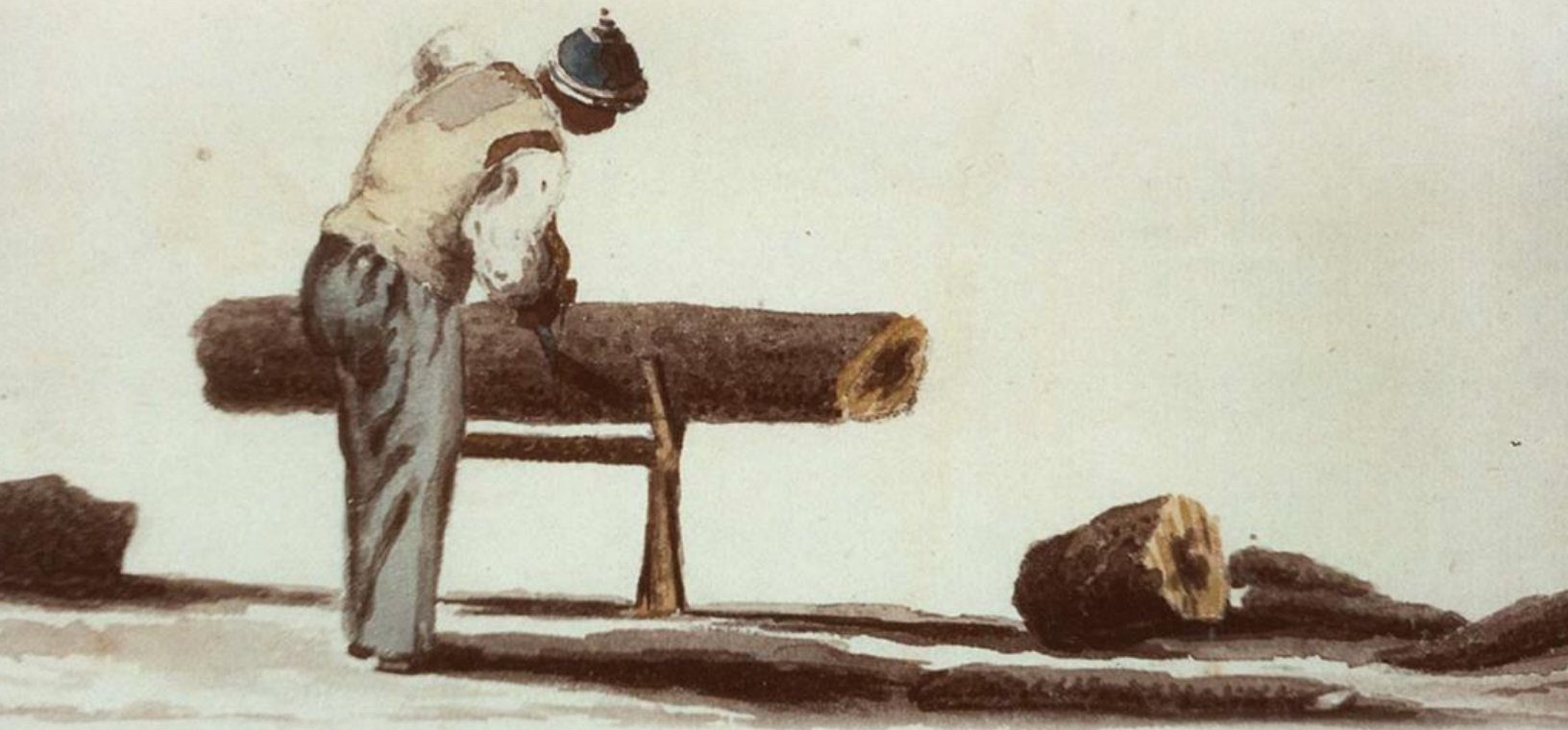
## WORK

The ground in Birchtown was rocky and uneven making it difficult to set up a house or farm. It was also five kilometers from the town of Shelburne, isolating the Black Loyalists and making for a long trek to town for supplies and work.

The Black Loyalists brought a variety of skills with them when they arrived in Nova Scotia. Some Black Loyalists had trades and found work as blacksmiths, carpenters, seamstresses and tailors.

Fishing proved to be the primary occupation of the Black Loyalists. Those who did not work in the fishery or practice a trade found jobs as labourers. They cleared land by the acre, cut wood, and hunted.

However, jobs were scarce, and many of the White Loyalists were not pleased to lose jobs to the Black Loyalists. The Black Loyalists who could find work were paid a fraction of what White labourers were paid or paid in trade. Sometimes they were not paid at all.



*"A black wood cutter at Shelburne, Nova Scotia" watercolour painting by W. Booth, 1788. [Nova Scotia Archives]*



# Work & Home

## HOME LIFE

Despite these hardships, the Black Loyalists set to work. The land had to be cleared in order for homes to be built and to plant crops to grow food. When they arrived, there was not enough time to build traditional houses before winter arrived. Lumber was in short supply. Instead, many built pit houses. These are basically holes in the ground with a roof made of tree trunks.

**“The government gave the negroes land here, but they had no houses, not even log cabins. They just dug a hole in the ground and put a little peaked roof over it. They chose a hill for their purpose because the ground was drier... And that was the black man’s home – a hole in the ground with a roof over the hole.”**

**– John Farmer, Black Loyalist descendant**

### ACTIVITY

Using twigs or sticks students can build their own miniature pit house.

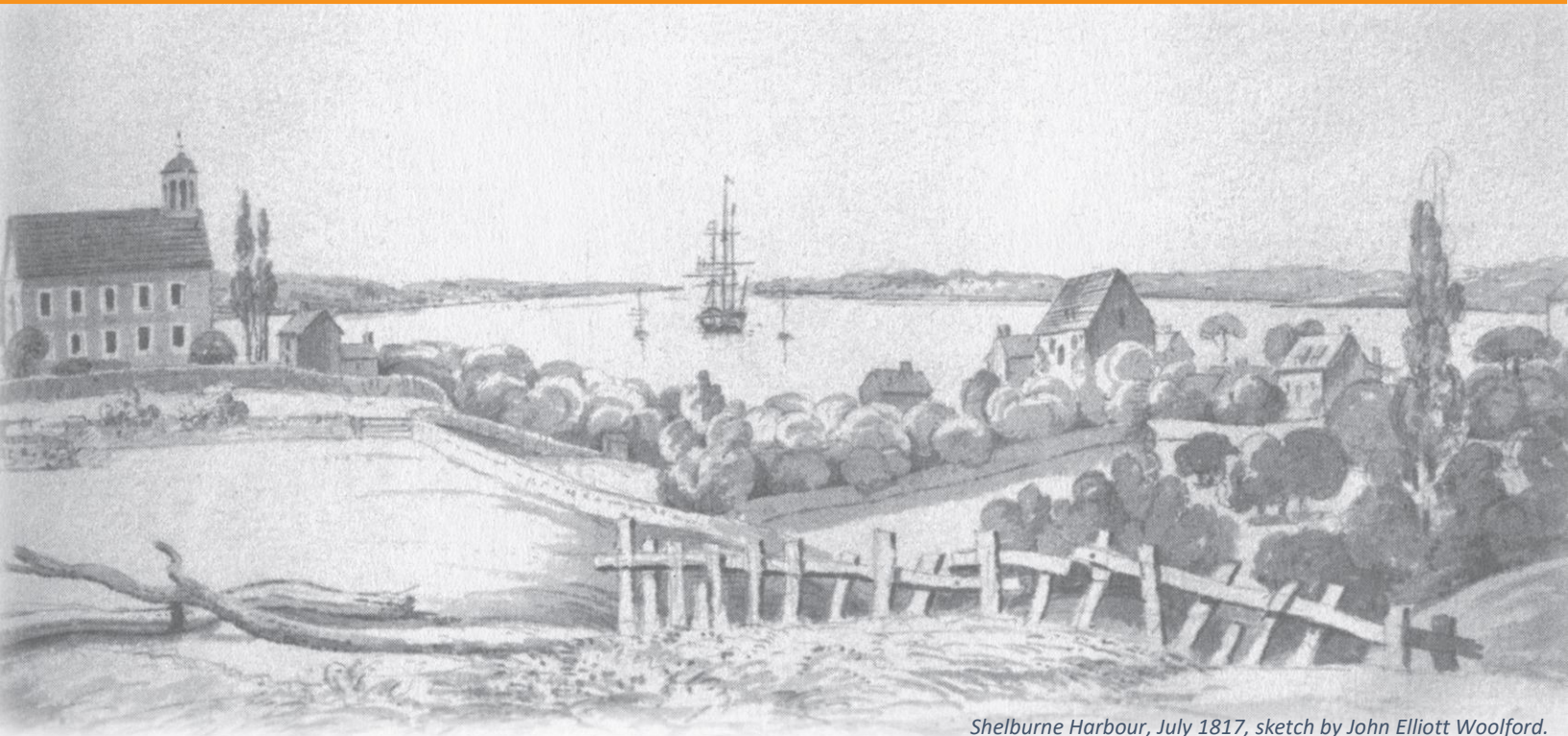
First find two forked twigs and insert them across from another into a Styrofoam base (you can also build outside by inserting the sticks into a soft piece of the ground). Then place a straight stick horizontally across the top. This will be the frame of your pit house.

To form the roof lean sticks along the frame.





# Birchtown



*Shelburne Harbour, July 1817, sketch by John Elliott Woolford.  
[Nova Scotia Museum]*

## NOT THE PROMISED LAND

Birchtown was not the promised land the Black Loyalists had hoped it would be. Upon settling in, they faced numerous hardships including poor land, racism, poverty, unequal treatment and the constant fear of re-enslavement.

Very few of the Black Loyalist received land grants. The land they did receive was of the poorest quality and in the smallest quantity of any distributed to Loyalists in the province. Many Black Loyalists did not receive the land they were promised. Instead of becoming landowning, free British subjects, our ancestors were forced into indentured servitude or “share-cropping” agreements with White landowners.

The soil in Birchtown was poor and difficult to clear, the climate was cold, with a short growing season. In addition, most of the Black Loyalists had come from the south and the crops they were accustomed to wouldn’t grow in this climate. Many Black people were so poor they couldn’t afford seed to start their crops. Lacking tools and farm animals, Black land owners had to clear land with their bare hands.



# Hardships & Struggles

## ACTIVITY



<https://blackloyalist.com/cdc/documents/diaries/king-memoirs.htm>

Use the QR Code or link to access the memoirs of Black Loyalist Boston King. After reading, have students consider the following questions:

*What is the importance of first-person accounts like that of Boston King?*

*What insights does King's account offer about the hardships faced by the Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia?*

*Did anything surprise you when reading King's memoir?*

## BUILDING TENSIONS

Tensions between the Black and White settlers mounted from the moment the Black Loyalists arrived. By the summer of 1784 racial tensions had reached a peak. The Black people of Shelburne had to accept low wages so they would be hired for the few jobs available. This upset many of the disbanded White Loyalists who felt that Black workers were taking their jobs. There was also growing animosity toward David George, a Black Loyalist preacher who was baptizing and preaching to a congregation of both Blacks and Whites.

On July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1784 a group of White Loyalists began rioting against the Black people of Shelburne. The rioters attacked the Black Loyalists and destroyed their homes. The free Blacks were chased out to Birchtown, with the riots continuing for 10 days and attacks for upwards of two months. This became the first recorded race riot in North America.

# Birchtown

## QUESTIONS

Once you have completed this section of the Black Loyalist history take some time and answer the following questions.

1. *Where did the Black Loyalists land when they came to Nova Scotia?*

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2. *How did the Mi'kmaq help the Black Loyalists survive in Nova Scotia?*

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3. *What was the landscape like in Birchtown? Why did this create challenges for the Black Loyalists?*

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4. *What were some of the types of jobs performed by the Black Loyalists?*

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# A New Life

5. *Describe the pit houses lived in by the Black Loyalists.*

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6. *What were some of the hardships faced by Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia?*

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7. *When did the Shelburne Race Riots occur?*

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8. *What was the cause of the Shelburne Race Riots?*

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9. *Why were the Shelburne Race Riots historically significant?*

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# Exodus to Sierra Leone

When the British Government failed to fulfill the promises of land and a better life, the Black Loyalists turned to their community leaders. These leaders petitioned the government on behalf of their communities. Thomas Peters of Annapolis, one such leader, was elected to organize land petitions on behalf of Black Settlers in Nova Scotia and what is now New Brunswick.

## THOMAS PETERS

Thomas Peters was born free in Nigeria and enslaved at the age of 22. At the time of the American Revolution, he escaped his master and enlisted with the Black Pioneers. During the war he married an enslaved woman from South Carolina named Sally and had two children. Following the war's end in 1783 Peters and his family were relocated to Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia.

Peters became disheartened with what he saw as broken promises of land by the British government. He gathered signatures and marks of Blacks around Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to petition the British government to resettle them elsewhere. In 1791, Peters arrived in London where he became acquainted with key figures in the abolitionist movement in England.

Peters became a celebrated figure in the abolitionist circles of England. It was here that he learned of the plan to create a settlement of free Black people in Africa. They were eager to recruit Black Christians, and Peters became a recruiter for the Sierra Leone Company with official company support.



*Statue of Thomas Peters, Freetown, Sierra Leone.*



# A New Hope

## RECRUITMENT FOR SIERRA LEONE

It was decided in London that Lieutenant John Clarkson would lead the exodus to Sierra Leone and in 1791 he arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia to begin recruiting Black people for the new settlement. Thomas Peters arrived home before Clarkson and started spreading the word about the opportunity. The mission was a great success. The company was not prepared for the number of people who signed up for the opportunity.

In order to be eligible to join the resettlement project, Black Loyalists had to meet certain conditions put forth by the Sierra Leone Company. They had to prove that they were honest, sober and industrious. They could not be in debt or in a current indentured servitude contract. This meant that many who had indentured themselves to survive in Nova Scotia, were unable to take the offer to go to Sierra Leone.



Portrait of John Clarkson (1764–1828), artist unknown.

### ACTIVITY



<https://blackloyalist.com/cdc/documents/diaries/mission.htm>

Use the QR Code or link to access the diaries of Lieutenant John Clarkson. After reading, have students consider the following questions:

*How does John Clarkson's account of the Black Loyalist experience differ from that of Boston King?*

*In what ways did John Clarkson help the Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia?*

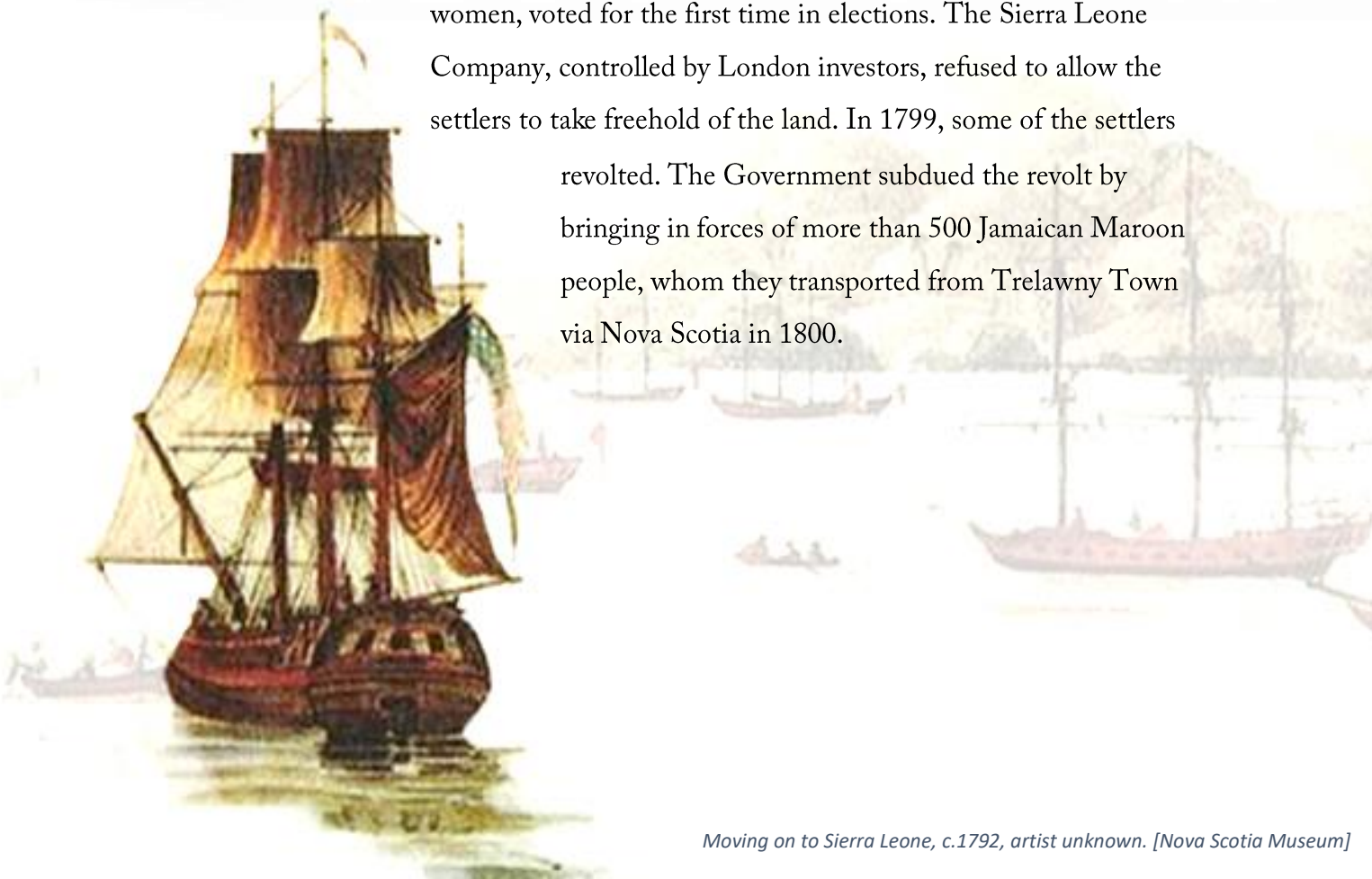
# Exodus to Sierra Leone

## FREETOWN

On January 15, 1792, 1,196 Black Loyalists, including the notable leaders David George, Boston King, and Moses Wilkinson, left Halifax in fifteen ships, for Sierra Leone. Each of the fifteen ships carried around 200 passengers, as well as enough supplies to establish a settlement. Conditions on board the ships were extremely crowded, despite John Clarkson's efforts to ensure fresh air and cleanliness.

Upon reaching Sierra Leone in March, the Nova Scotia Black Loyalists founded Freetown. When they arrived in the new colony, the women remained on the ships while the men cleared the land. The Black Loyalists built Freetown in the styles they knew from their lives in the American South. They also imported American fashion and practiced American manners.

The initial stages of building Freetown were a harsh struggle. The British Government did not supply enough basic supplies and provisions, and the settlers were continually threatened by illegal slave trading and the risk of re-enslavement. In the 1790s, the settlers, including adult women, voted for the first time in elections. The Sierra Leone Company, controlled by London investors, refused to allow the settlers to take freehold of the land. In 1799, some of the settlers revolted. The Government subdued the revolt by bringing in forces of more than 500 Jamaican Maroon people, whom they transported from Trelawny Town via Nova Scotia in 1800.



# A New Hope

On 1 January 1808, the Sierra Leone Company ended its 16 years of running the colony. Beginning in 1808 (following the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in 1807), British crews delivered thousands of formerly enslaved Africans to Freetown, after liberating them from illegal slave ships. Most of these liberated Africans or 'Recaptives' chose to remain in Sierra Leone. Cut off from their various homelands and traditions, the liberated Africans assimilated the western styles of the Nova Scotian Settlers and Maroons. They built a flourishing trade in flowers and beads on the West African coast. These returned Africans were from many areas of Africa, but principally the west coast. During the 19th century, freed Black Americans, some American Liberian 'refugees', and particularly West Indians, also immigrated and settled in Freetown.

Together these peoples created a new creole ethnicity called the Krio people (initially called Creoles) and a trading language, Krio, which became commonly used among many of the ethnicities in the country.

## BIRCHTOWN AFTER THE EXODUS

Approximately 2,500 Black Loyalist stayed in British North America. The population of Birchtown shrank with the migration to Sierra Leone. Even so, those who remained formed the basis of the Black Nova Scotian population of today.

Birchtown remained a small rural community of a few hundred who practiced farming, fishing and forestry. Employment in the nearby town of Shelburne led many families to relocate in later years. The Birchtown community is a proud symbol of struggle by Black people everywhere for justice and dignity.

# Exodus to Sierra Leone

## QUESTIONS

Once you have completed this section of the Black Loyalist history take some time and answer the following questions.

1. *Why was Thomas Peters dissatisfied in Nova Scotia? What did he do about it?*

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2. *When did Thomas Peters travel to London?*

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3. *Upon his arrival in London, who did Thomas Peters meet?*

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4. *What was the proposal of the Sierra Leone Company?*

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# A New Hope

5. *What were the qualifications required by the Sierra Leone Company to take the offer of resettlement?*

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6. *Describe the new settlement founded by the Black Loyalists in Sierra Leone.*

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7. *What were some of the hardships faced by the Black Loyalists in Sierra Leone?*

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8. *How long was the Black Loyalist colony run by the Sierra Leone Company?*

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9. *Why How many Black Loyalist remained in British North America following the exodus to Sierra Leone?*

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# Impact & Legacy

## ROSE FORTUNE

Rose Fortune was born enslaved in the American colonies in 1774. At the time of the Loyalist evacuation, she is 9 years old. While there is no record of her in the Book of Negroes document it is likely that Rose is the child of “Fortune and wife”, listed as free in the Annapolis Royal muster roll of June 1783.

As an adult Rose was well known throughout Annapolis Royal as a strong, independent woman who was not to be tampered with. She began her own business by 1825, transporting luggage between the docks and nearby homes and hotels. She developed a reputation for maintaining the law and order around the town’s waterfront, and today she is considered to be the first female police officer in Canada.

Although Rose Fortune died in 1864 her transport company was passed down to her descendants. It became known as the Lewis Transfer Company and was operated by the family for over 100 years.

Rose Fortune was not the only accomplished member of her family. In 1984 Daurene Lewis, a descendant of Rose Fortune, was elected the mayor of Annapolis Royal. This made her the first black female mayor in Canada.



*Rose Fortune, c.1830, artist unknown. [Nova Scotia Archives]*

### RESOURCE

“The Canadians: Rose Fortune”



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQSTjNX3lqI>

# Black Loyalist & Descendants

## RICHARD PIERPOINT

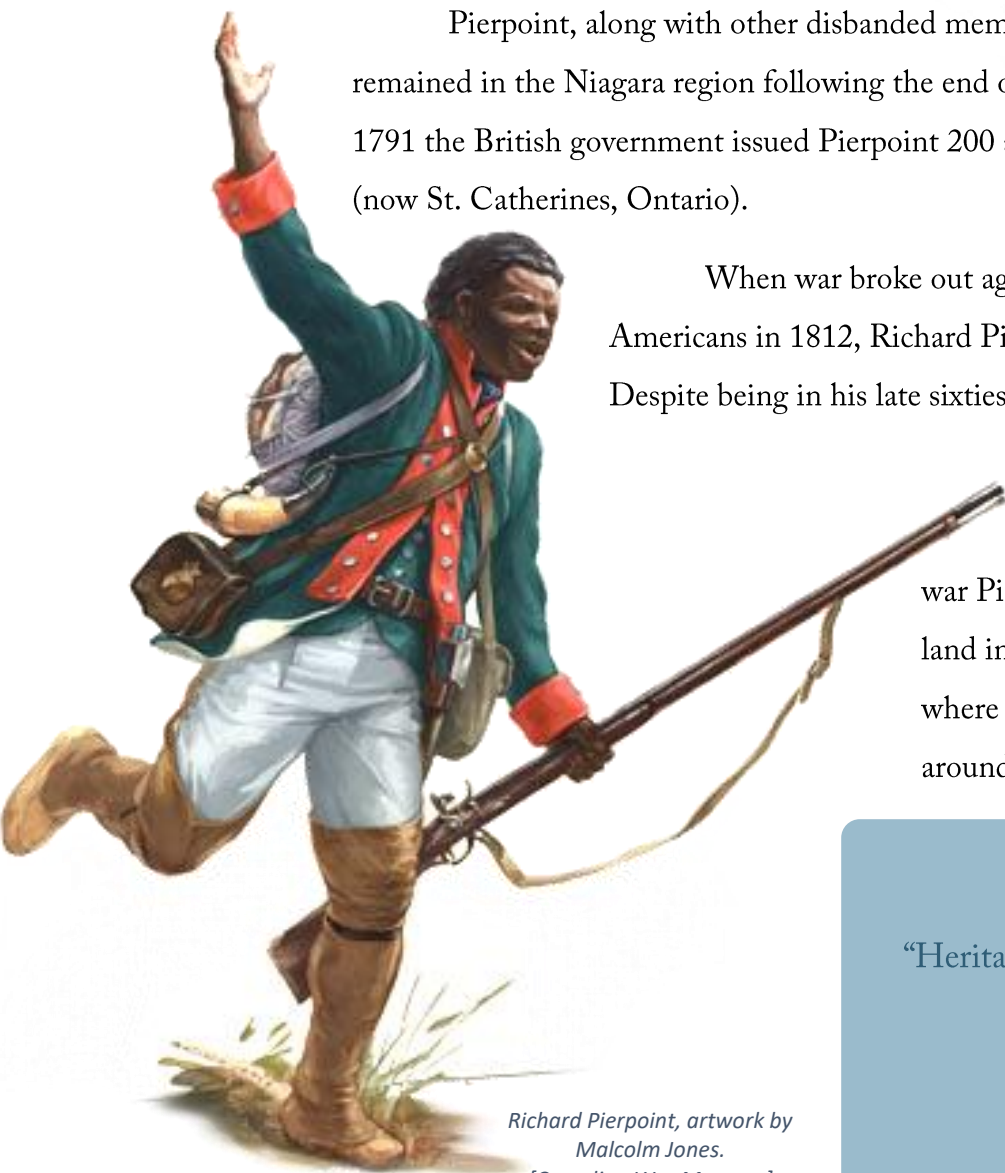
Born in Bondu (now Senegal) around 1744, Richard Pierpoint was stolen from his family as a teenager and sold as a slave to a British officer in the Thirteen Colonies. By 1780 he had escaped to British lines to earn his freedom.

Pierpoint was listed as a pioneer in the Loyalist unit known as Butler's Rangers. During the American Revolution the Rangers were stationed in the Niagara region where they used guerrilla warfare against the Americans. This is a strategy of using small, fast moving groups of non-military units to ambush, raid and sabotage the enemy.

Pierpoint, along with other disbanded members of Butler's Rangers, remained in the Niagara region following the end of the American Revolution. In 1791 the British government issued Pierpoint 200 acres in Grantham Township (now St. Catherines, Ontario).

When war broke out again between the British and Americans in 1812, Richard Pierpoint was quick to enlist. Despite being in his late sixties he joined the Coloured

Corps, a militia of free Black men. For his efforts in the war Pierpoint was grant 100 acres of land in Garafraxa Township where he lived until his passing around 1838.



*Richard Pierpoint, artwork by  
Malcolm Jones.  
[Canadian War Museum]*

### RESOURCE

“Heritage Minute: Richard Pierpoint”



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQyPXOHvwEc>

# Impact & Legacy

## SAM LANGFORD

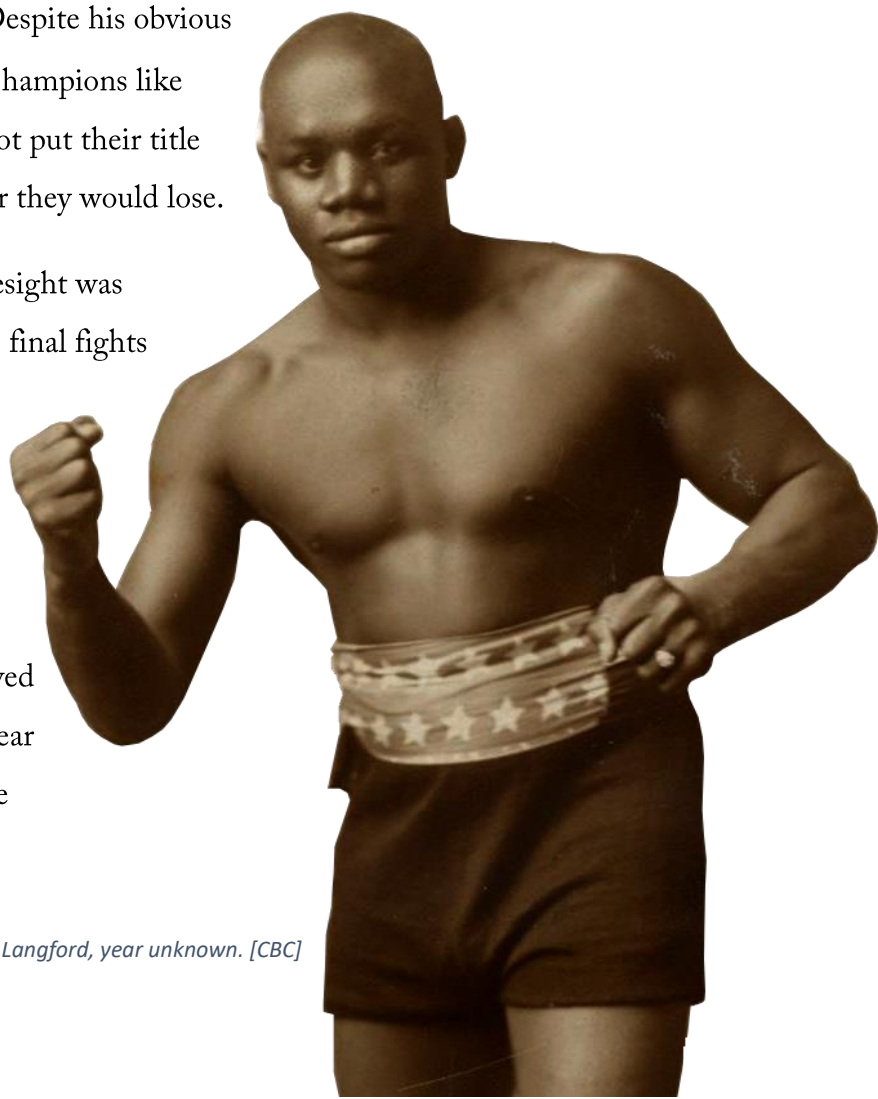
Sam Langford was born on March 4, 1886 in the Black Loyalist community of Weymouth Falls, Nova Scotia. Langford left home as a teenager following the death of his mother and worked various jobs around Nova Scotia and New England, eventually making his way to Boston to work as a janitor in a boxing gym.

While sparring with some of the established boxers who came into the gym, Langford caught the attention of the gym manager who offered to help him launch his boxing career. In 1901 Langford won the amateur featherweight championship of Boston at the age of just 15. The next year he made his professional debut.

Although he measured just five feet seven inches, Langford soon made a reputation for going up – and usually winning – against competitors much larger than himself. Between 1906 and 1914, Langford won 85 of 87 bouts. Despite his obvious skill, he never won a championship title. Champions like Jack Johnson and Stanley Ketchel would not put their title on the line when fighting Langford for fear they would lose.

By the 1920s, Sam Langford's eyesight was beginning to deteriorate. For many of his final fights he had to be led to the ring because he was unable to see. His final fight in 1926 had to be called off because Langford could not see his opponent.

After retirement, Langford removed himself from public life. In 1955, just a year before his death, he was inducted into the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame.



*Sam Langford, year unknown. [CBC]*



# Black Loyalist & Descendants

## PORTIA WHITE

Portia White was born in Truro on June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1911. Her mother was a descendant of the Black Loyalists and her father was the first Black Canadian to be admitted to Acadia and receive a Doctorate of Divinity. During World War I he joined the Number 2 Construction Battalion, the only all-Black Battalion in Canadian military history. Following the war, he moved his family to Halifax where he became minister of the Cornwallis Street Baptist Church.

It was in that church that Portia White got her start. She began singing in the church choir at the age of six. She was both gifted and determined. Each week she walked more than 15km just to attend music lessons.

Though she aspired to be a singer, at the time she could not afford the professional training to pursue her dream. Instead, she went to Dalhousie University to obtain her teacher's training. She went on to teach school in Africville and Lucasville, and used her salary to pay for music lessons at the Halifax Conservatory of Music. She made her national debut in 1941 at the Eaton Hall in Toronto, and shortly thereafter quit teaching to pursue her professional singing career.

*Portia White, year unknown.  
[Nova Scotia Talent Trust]*



White quickly achieved success performing in venues around the world, including a performance at New York's Town Hall where she was the first Canadian to ever grace the stage. Though touring soon took its toll and by 1952 she had announced plans for an early retirement to focus on teaching music.

While she primarily focused on teaching in her later years she did make occasional concert appearances including a performance for Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip. White passed away on February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1968 in Toronto.

# Impact & Legacy

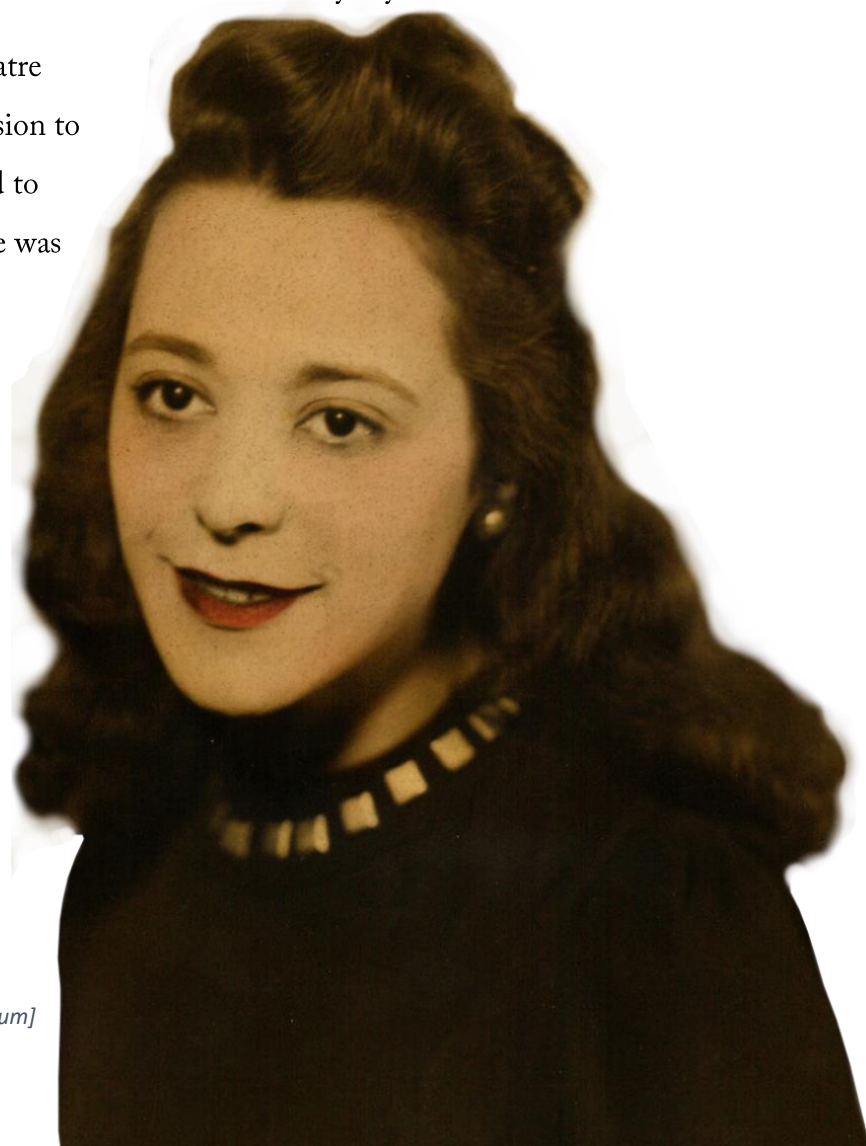
## VIOLA DESMOND

Viola Desmond was born in Halifax on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1914. She attended the Field Beauty Culture School in Montreal, and upon returning to Nova Scotia opened Vi's Studio of Beauty Culture. Following the salons success, she soon opened up her own beauty school and created a line of cosmetics geared towards Black women.

During a business trip in November of 1946, Desmond's car broke down in New Glasgow. While she waited for repairs to be done, she decided to see a movie at the Roseland Theatre. She had requested a floor seat ticket, but instead was given a ticket to the balcony. Thinking a mistake had been made she returned to the box office to exchange the ticket and pay the difference in price. She was promptly told that they were not allowed to sell her a floor seat due to the colour of her skin. Desmond decided to take a floor seat anyway.

She was soon confronted by the theatre manager who argued he could refuse admission to any objectionable person. When she refused to leave her seat, the police were called and she was dragged out of the Roseland Theatre and jailed overnight.

The following day in court Viola Desmond was charged with defrauding the provincial government of one cent in tax, which was the difference in tax between the floor and balcony seat. Although she had offered to pay the difference at the theatre, she was fined \$26.



*Viola Desmond, year unknown. [Nova Scotia Museum]*

# Black Loyalist & Descendants

Viola Desmond died on February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1965 and despite numerous attempts to overturn the ruling against her, she was never cleared in her lifetime. It was through the efforts of her sister, Wanda Robson, that the story of Viola Desmond came to light once more. In 2010 the province of Nova Scotia acknowledged the racial injustice of Desmond's case and officially pardoned her.

Today Viola Desmond is recognized as a civil rights pioneer in Canada. In 2016 she was voted to be the first Canadian woman to appear on a Canadian banknote which was unveiled in 2018.



Viola Desmond Bill, 2018.  
[Bank of Canada]

## RESOURCE

“Long Road to Justice - The Viola Desmond Story”



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yI00i9BtsQ8&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yI00i9BtsQ8&feature=emb_title)

## ACTIVITY

There are many Black Loyalists who have risen to prominence in a variety of fields including arts, sports, and humanitarianism. Have students research a Black Loyalist of significance. Some possible people could include:

- *Rocky Johnson (Wayde Douglas Bowles), professional wrestler*
- *Measha Brueggergosman, opera singer*
- *David George, community leader*
- *Marjorie Turner Bailey, Olympian*



# Impact & Legacy

The history of quilting goes back hundreds of years. Many enslaved women sewed quilts, both for their enslavers and themselves. These quilts were created out of necessity, but within the patterns and designs they also shared messages and history.

## TRADITION

Following long hours of work all day, enslaved African women often spent their evenings making quilts and bedding. These quilts were created from whatever scraps of cloth and material were available at the time. In the South quilts were often filled with cotton batting, while quilters in the North were sometimes made with flax or wool.



*The Journey Quilt. [Black Loyalist Heritage Centre]*

## CODES

Quilting became a cornerstone of the African American experience. When Africans were enslaved, they were forced to adapt to the European ways. Those enslaved used quilts to express artistic, religious and cultural backgrounds from Africa. Through the stitched together pieces of fabric, they were able to keep some remnants of their African homeland and traditions.

Although it is still a matter of debate among historians, many believe that this type of coding within quilts was used by Africans who were making their escape to freedom in the North through the Underground Railroad. Quilts with certain shapes and patterns, such as stars or wagon wheels, were used to direct runaways to the safest path to freedom.



# Quilting

## SYMBOLS

Adinkra (ah-DEEN-krah) are symbols created by the Ashanti people of West Africa for use in textiles. Each unique symbol has a different meaning, often tied to a proverb or idea. Today, these symbols can be found on cloth, and are often included in African style quilts, including the Journey Quilt, which tells the story of the Black Loyalist journey.

## RESOURCE

West African Wisdom: Adinkra Symbols & Meanings



[http://www.adinkra.org/htmls/adinkra\\_index.htm](http://www.adinkra.org/htmls/adinkra_index.htm)



## ACTIVITY

Students can make their own paper quilt using paper, scissors and a glue stick.

Start with a piece of paper as your base. With other scraps of paper cut out shapes for quilt patches. They can be any shape you'd like, and can also include pictures or words if you want.

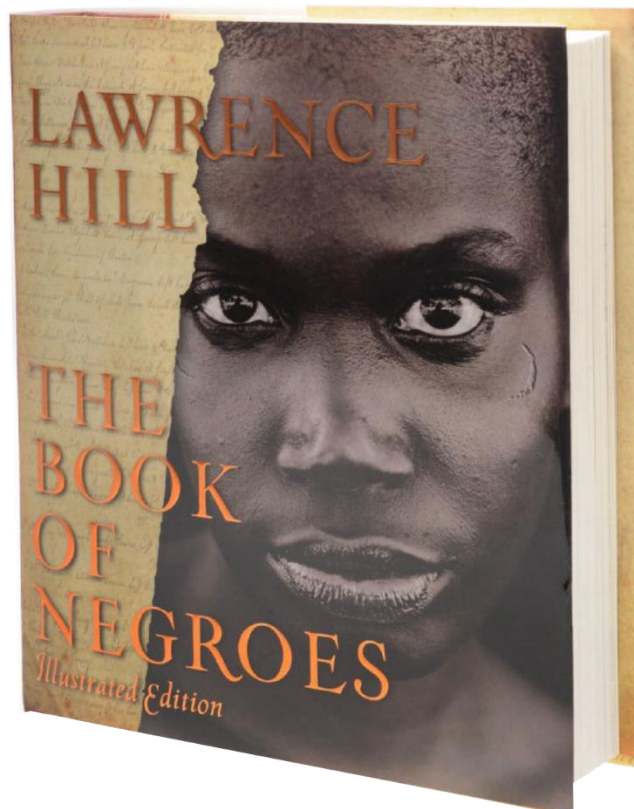
With a glue stick, paste the patches to the base to create your quilt design.

# Impact & Legacy

## THE NOVEL

*The Book of Negroes* is an award-winning historical fiction novel by Canadian author Lawrence Hill. Written in the tradition of first-person slave narratives, *The Book of Negroes*, incorporates major historical events and people within the life of his fictional protagonist, Aminata Diallo.

Abducted from her village in West Africa as a young girl, Aminata Diallo is enslaved and taken across the sea to South Carolina where she is sold to an indigo plantation. Through her strength and skills, she survives the horrors of slavery, and later makes it to British lines. At the end of the American Revolution, she becomes tasked with recording the names of the Black Loyalists in the Book of Negroes document. As a free British citizen, she is sent to Birchtown, Nova Scotia and later Sierra Leone.



*The Book of Negroes* by Lawrence Hill. [Harper Collins]

### RESOURCE

Black History in Canada: Education Guide



<http://education.historicacanada.ca/en/tools/40>

# The Book of Negroes

## THE MINISERIES

Clement Virgo and Damon D'Oliveira purchased the film rights to Lawrence Hill's novel in 2009. The next year CBC and BET decided to jointly fund the project as a miniseries for their respective networks.

Filming for *The Book of Negroes* took place in Cape Town, Africa and in various locations around Nova Scotia. The Fortress of Louisburg was the set for the New York scenes, the Lunenburg waterfront served as the New York docks, and finally the Shelburne scenes were shot on the historic Shelburne waterfront.

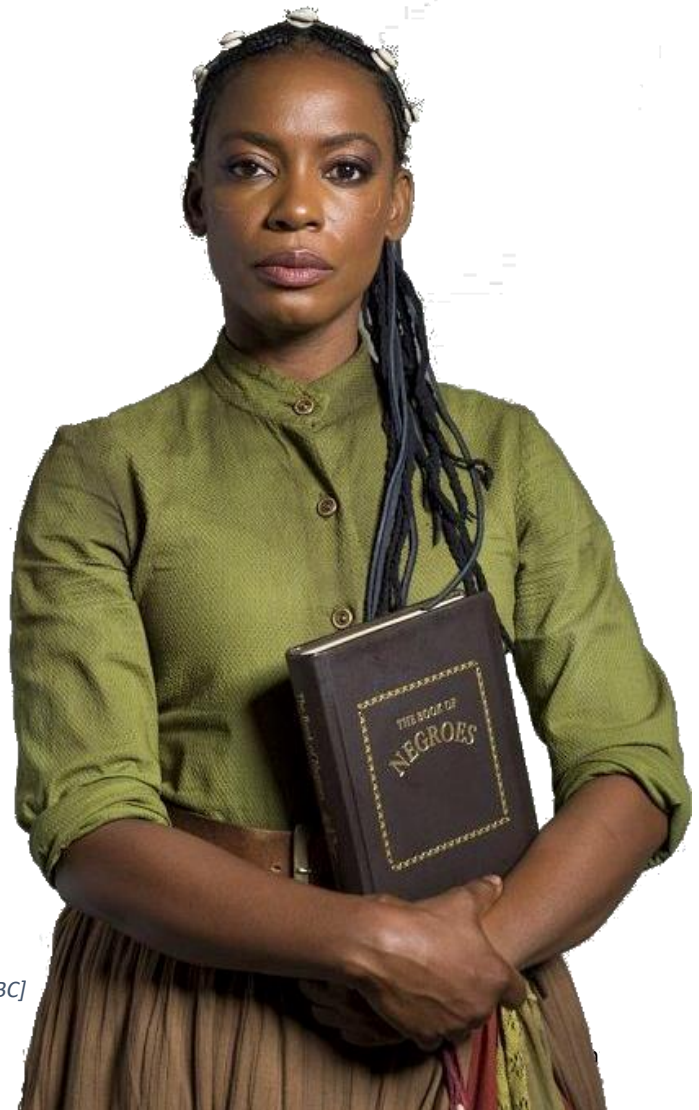
*The Book of Negroes* miniseries premiered on CBC in January of 2015, with the American premiere on BET the following month. The series was extremely popular, and won numerous awards including eleven Canadian Screen Awards and five awards from the Directors Guild of Canada.

### RESOURCE

The Book of Negroes: Teacher Resource Guide



[https://media.curio.ca/filer\\_public/4e/51/4e515f0b-6298-48b9-9a95-2fe34f0e6ca7/bon\\_teachersguide.pdf](https://media.curio.ca/filer_public/4e/51/4e515f0b-6298-48b9-9a95-2fe34f0e6ca7/bon_teachersguide.pdf)



Aunjanue Ellis in *The Book of Negroes*, 2015. [CBC]

# Impact & Legacy

Just as the first Black Loyalists fled the thirteen colonies in search of a place of their own so too have their descendants, been working to build a place to honour their legacy. For years this community worked together to build a network of allies and supporters who share the belief that the Black Loyalist story is also a shared Canadian story.

## ORIGINS

In 1989 the Shelburne County Cultural Awareness Society was founded by a handful of Black Loyalists descendants. This group was created in response to a proposal to put a landfill site in the community of Birchtown. These descendants were aware of the history of the Birchtown community, and worked to protect the area. Soon they were renamed the Black Loyalist Heritage Society and their efforts resulted in Birchtown being designated a National Historic Site.

Throughout the 1990s, the Society began acquiring land in the Birchtown community. These parcels of land are what make up the Black Loyalist Heritage Site today and include St. Paul's Anglican Church, the Birchtown Schoolhouse, and the Black Burial Ground & Monument Site. The society also constructed a new office building on the grounds to house their ongoing projects and research. By 2000, the Black Loyalist Heritage Museum was opened inside the original schoolhouse.





# The Black Loyalist Heritage Society

## ARSON

In 2006 the Black Loyalist Heritage Society office went up in flames as a result of an arson attack. Irreplaceable documents, artifacts and data tracing the history of Black Loyalist families were lost. Heartbreaking too was that the fire was likely started because of racism. Still, with the support of the broader community, the Society continued on and began the plans to rebuild.

## BUILDING A PLACE OF OUR OWN

There needed to be a place to safeguard the Black Loyalist heritage. There needed to be a place where visitors are welcome and where they can learn about the stories of the Black Loyalists. It was a long time coming, but through the hard work and dedication of many supporters the dream became a reality.

The Black Loyalist Heritage Centre was designed by Peter Henry and Christine Macy. The 10,000 square foot centre features an interactive exhibit gallery, an education centre, gift shop, reception area, kitchen and offices for the Black Loyalist Heritage Society. The multimillion-dollar facility was officially opened in June of 2015.

