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**A False Sense of Equality:
The Black Canadian Experience of the Second World War**

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A FALSE SENSE OF EQUALITY:
THE BLACK CANADIAN EXPERIENCE OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

by

Simon James Theobald

A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate
and Postdoctoral Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
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Abstract

A FALSE SENSE OF EQUALITY: THE BLACK CANADIAN EXPERIENCE OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Simon James Theobald,
University of Ottawa, 2008

Supervisor:
Professor Jeffrey Keshen

A false sense of growing equality pervaded the black experience of the Second World War. Although blacks were not segregated from serving alongside whites, restrictive enlistment policies were utilized by the military out of racial assumptions and the fear that their inclusion could cause racial animosity within units. Yet, these patterns coincided with the reality that, because of the considerable need for manpower, several thousand blacks did serve throughout the war. Prejudice was also plainly evident on the homefront. While the war created new and more jobs opportunities, racial limitations remained and blacks were hired to perform menial tasks and work in secondary roles. This thesis seeks to fill the gap in the limited scholarship on the status of black Canadians in the Second World War, and prove that, while there were some positive trends, overall blacks did not achieve a greater level of equality with the white majority.

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Of course, any errors or omissions are mine alone.

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Abbreviations

BSCP – Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters
CLACP – Canadian League for the Advancement of Coloured People
CB – Construction Battalion
CBRE – Canadian Brotherhood of Railroad Employees
CEF – Canadian Expeditionary Force
CFC – Canadian Forestry Corps
CNR – Canadian National Railways
CO – Commanding Officer
CPR – Canadian Pacific Railway
CWAC – Canadian Women's Army Corps
CWM – Canadian War Museum
DHist – Directorate of History and Heritage
HCCIL – Halifax Colored Citizens Improvement League
LAC – Library and Archives Canada
MP – Member of Parliament
MPP – Member of Provincial Parliament
NAACP – National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NCC – Negro Community Commission
NCO – Non-Commissioned Officer
NRMA – National Resources Mobilization Act
NSAACP – Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People
NSARM – Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management
NSS – National Selective Service
OIC – Officer in Charge
PAO – Public Archives of Ontario
PMBA – Porters' Mutual Benefit Association
POW – Prisoner of War
RAF – Royal Air Force
RCL – Royal Canadian Legion
RCN – Royal Canadian Navy
RFC – Royal Flying Corps

Introduction

The study of the black¹ Canadian experience during the Second World War reveals important complexities regarding the country's then contemporary military policy and social climate. For example, an analysis of recruitment policy exposes the extent to which racial discrimination was accepted to prevent the threat of racial animosity within the military. A survey of the labour force and community organizations on the homefront shows that while blacks supported the war effort alongside whites, their greater inclusion and opportunities were temporary and brought about by the exceptional situation and not as a result of a positive change in racial perceptions. Furthermore, a review of personal accounts from black veterans and community leaders presents how their participation was viewed as an opportunity to be integrated into wider Canadian society. The inclusion of the black experience into the broader historiography of the Second World War is necessary not only to expose the legacy of racial discrimination within the country's institutions but also to reveal the determination of and degree of support from an important minority community.

While political, military, and social aspects of the country's experience in the war have been examined in-depth, and while there have been critical studies of the Ukrainian, Mennonite, Chinese, and Aboriginal experiences, among others, during the Second

¹ The term *black*, as opposed to *African Canadian*, is employed here because of its link to skin colour rather than slavery. Discrimination was far more evident against *visible racial* minorities than *ethnic* minorities. Contemporaries made little or no distinction between blacks from Africa, the Caribbean, the United States, or Canada.

World War, the black Canadian experience remains largely uncharted territory.² One assumption has been that, because of their small population throughout the country's history, the black experience was too specific, did not represent the Canadian experience and was simply not worth studying. In his official history of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF), historian Brereton Greenhous argued that, "though their contributions as individuals were as great as those of men doing identical or similar work, their numbers were relatively small and their overall impact on the service not great."³ This generalization suggests that, because of their small numbers, the significant efforts and struggles of blacks do not add anything important to the discourse. Moreover, it downplays or ignores the reality that blacks wanted to serve their country and viewed the war as an opportunity to earn greater equality in Canadian society.

Yet, even within the realm of black Canadian historiography, there is a lack of discussion. If the wartime experience is acknowledged, it is done so only briefly. These accounts conclude that the war helped blacks integrate but provide little evidence to support it. Robin Winks' seminal work, *The Blacks in Canada*, simply notes that "on both the war and the home fronts, the Negro's position improved."⁴ Furthermore, even when incidents of discrimination and the use of restrictive policies against blacks are acknowledged, significant "progress" is still considered to have been made because

² Thomas M. Prymak, *Maple Leaf and Trident: the Ukrainian Canadians during the Second World War* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1988); Peter Lorenz Neufeld, *Mennonites at War, a Double-Edged Sword: Canadian Mennonites in World War Two* (Deloraine, Man.: DTS Pub, 1997); Marjorie Wong, *The Dragon and the Maple Leaf: Chinese Canadians in World War II* (London, Ont.: Pirie Pub, 1994); R. Scott Sheffield, *The Red Man's on the Warpath: The Image of the "Indian" and the Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004).

³ Brereton, Greenhous et. al. *The Crucible of War, 1939-1945: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force. Vol. III* (Toronto, 1994), p. xxiv.

⁴ Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada* (Montreal & Kingston, 1997), p. 421.

formal military segregation was discontinued. Moreover, it is often presumed that Canadian society accepted the wartime philosophy embodied in the *Atlantic Charter*.⁵ Signed in August 1941 by Roosevelt and Churchill on board warships anchored off Newfoundland, the *Atlantic Charter* set out a vision for a post war world where “all peoples” had a right to self-determination, and that there be “freedom from fear and want.” While blacks were not officially segregated in the Canadian military after the First World War, it was still the case that discriminatory recruitment policies impacted profoundly on black volunteers. This study will show the extent to which racial animosity occurred in the military through the experiences and perspectives of blacks themselves. Other key questions that remain unanswered will also be tackled, including: What was behind the discriminatory policies of the RCAF and the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN)? Had the Army actually changed that much from the time of segregation during the First World War? Did progress made during the war transfer over into the post-war period?

This thesis is divided into four major sections. The first section examines the black experience leading up to the Second World War, namely the history of the No.2 Construction Battalion (CB), a segregated black logistical unit. This reveals how some of the sentiments expressed by the military in 1914-1918 carried over to recruiting policies in 1939-1945. From a military standpoint, the insightful studies on the formation of Canada’s only segregated black battalion, the No.2 CB, show how the unit came to

⁵ See “Atlantic Charter” <<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/wwii/atlantic.htm>> (August 11, 2008); Dennis and Leslie McLaughlin, *For My Country: Black Canadians on the Field of Honour* (Ottawa, 2004), pp. 35-38; Bridglal Pachai, *Beneath the Clouds of the Promised Land: The Survival of Nova Scotia Blacks, vol. 2, 1800-1989* (Halifax, 1990), p. 197; Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, pp. 420-423; Calvin Ruck, *The Black Battalion, 1916-1920: Canada's Best Kept Military Secret* (Halifax, 1987), pp. 70-73.

symbolize the black community's struggle to support the war effort and gain equality. While the formation was a source of pride for the black community, it also further revealed racial prejudice within the military, among government officials, and in contemporary society-at-large. "Coloureds," a term then widely used, were viewed from a set of racist assumptions, namely that they were less intelligent and civilized.⁶ Many military officials portrayed them as "poor fighters" and there was fear that their presence would cause racial animosity in the ranks. Thus, black participation was limited to serving in a segregated labour battalion far removed from the fighting. While no other segregated units were formed after the establishment of the No.2 CB, the racial assumptions expressed during the Great War were repeated during the Second World War.

The second section explores the mobilization of the civilian labour force during the Second World War and the employment opportunities available to blacks. While some positive aspects emerged for black men and women during the war, the homefront experience was still characterized by racial discrimination and the struggle to achieve greater equality. An analysis of the largest contemporary black communities in the country, located in Halifax, Toronto, and Montreal are explored to provide an overview of the social prejudices that impacted black participation in the war effort. Blacks were socially and physically segregated in housing, education, and recreation and refused service in businesses across the country. Convention and Canadian courts ruled that visible minorities could be discriminated against in favour of supporting business under the "freedom of commerce" policy, which permitted merchants to accept or refuse any

⁶ The use of the term "non-white" is to showcase that "white" is viewed as the dominant "other."

customer they wished. Furthermore, blacks were largely restricted to a specific set of menial jobs. Bigoted hiring policies largely prevented blacks from gaining new positions in forestry, mining and the automotive sector until 1942. The growth in rail traffic created by the war largely relegated black men to the same pre-war job: railway porters.

Although portering promised a consistent wage, it reinforced the position that blacks were lower members of society incapable of other forms of work. While the war helped blacks form their own union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the union's labour victories did not affect the wider black community. Meanwhile, in the early stages of the war, black women gained more jobs working as domestics and replacing the white "nannies." By 1943, black women were accepted to work in war industries, finding jobs in munitions factories where they often did dangerous, though vital work. Although these new-found opportunities benefited black women, racial stereotypes remained entrenched. Black women were still excluded from areas such as nursing and the automotive industry. Thus, while general job prospects were improved during the war, their acceptance was grounded in the necessity to support the war effort and not because they were seen more as equals.

In the third section, an analysis is undertaken on the military recruitment of black Canadians to determine what motivated them to enlist, the degree to which they were accepted by specific branches of the military, and what their service represented to them and the black community. With the country at war again in 1939, it was difficult for blacks to directly participate in the effort. Black men and women went to recruitment stations seeking to serve with the army, navy, air force, and merchant navy, but were often turned away. Many black Canadians battled to overcome the racist realities of their

society. The degree to which blacks were victims of racial discrimination by the military depended on when they attempted to enlist and what branch of the forces they sought to join. The RCAF and RCN both maintained a colour bar during the war and, even when this was officially abolished in 1942-43, they remained extremely selective in their recruitment of blacks. The army did not have a restrictive recruitment policy and accepted many black recruits because of the high demand for troops, especially in the infantry. Service with the infantry was considered better suited for blacks especially when compared with the technical work of the navy and air force. Yet, incidents of discrimination were not uncommon in the army. Another reason granted for excluding blacks was based on the same assumptions as that put forth during the First World War, namely that "coloured" servicemen could not effectively co-exist with whites and would foster division within the ranks. Although some black volunteers were fortunate enough to go through the war without experiencing discrimination, their cases were rare. Ultimately, Canada's recruitment policies regarding black volunteers shared many similarities with those employed by both the American and British military.

The fourth section will bring front and homefront back together by analyzing the demobilization of blacks, their postwar prospects, and the formation of black community groups. This part reveals that the status of blacks in the military and Canadian society remained largely unchanged by the war. Blacks tried to link their military service or civilian work with the drive for greater equality. However, their military service was largely based on the growing need for troops, not a broader societal acceptance. Despite optimism of better living conditions and employment opportunities, once the fighting ceased, black servicemen returned home to much the same treatment as they had

experienced before the war. On the homefront, even with the introduction of human rights legislation in Ontario and other provinces, blacks were still not integrated into wider society. Veterans and civilians continued to face racism throughout the country.

In order to promote equality and to confront racial discrimination, community organizations such as the Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NSAACP) emerged to fight for equal rights in Canadian society. The men and women who served directly in the military and “backed the attack” on the homefront helped shape these organizations and made up a significant portion of their membership. On a limited basis and by directing their efforts toward specific areas or incidents, these modest organizations helped to promote black issues, and facilitated growing challenges to the status quo in the years following the conflict.⁷

⁷ This thesis cannot encompass all aspects of the black experience during the war. Issues such as the black community’s involvement in fundraising initiatives and the formation of separate legion halls would have been explored in greater detail given greater time and resources.

Chapter 1

The Great War and the “Civilized Negro”

The early decades of the twentieth century established the social and economic patterns that influenced the experiences of black Canadians during the Second World War. According to the Canadian Census, in the period from 1901 to 1931, the country's black population increased from 17,437 to just 19,456. While there are many problems with Census data, these figures nevertheless show that during the first three decades of the 1900s, the black population consistently comprised only 0.2 percent of the total Canadian population.⁸ The country's hostility to black immigration during this time meant that Canadian-born descendents of Loyalists, Americans, and West Indians made up the nucleus of the population. The black population was concentrated in southern Ontario, southern New Brunswick, and eastern Nova Scotia. The 1911 Census enumerated approximately 6,500 blacks in Nova Scotia and Ontario, while a little more than 1,000 blacks lived in New Brunswick. Unlike in Ontario and the Maritimes, there were no distinct black communities in Quebec or the growing Western provinces. Throughout the nineteenth and the majority of the twentieth century, the black populations in urban centres such as Montreal were smaller than those in Ontario and

⁸ The rubric of “racial origin” used in Census calculations up until the 1960s was ambiguous and imprecise. Census calculations were largely based on the language spoken by the parental ancestor. Thus, English is believed to have been over-counted while “Negroes” was undercounted. Furthermore, the term “Negro” was not accepted by a significant portion of the black community, while others saw themselves as being “English.” For more on how the black population in Canada was measured, see Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, pp. 484-496.

Nova Scotia. In fact, Montreal's black population only became significant with the liberalization of Canadian immigration policy in the 1960s.⁹

Wherever they lived in Canada, blacks were largely restricted to a specific set of menial and labour-intensive jobs, socially and physically segregated in housing, education, and recreation, and generally treated with contempt by the white majority. As historian James W. St. G. Walker argues: "Stereotypes dictated a place for blacks, creating social and economic stratifications which could then serve to demonstrate and validate the original stereotypes. Colour separation was assumed to be natural."¹⁰ These stereotypes were accepted into social behaviour, government policies, and Canadian law.

While white Canadians by and large – though often grudgingly – accepted black Canadians as citizens and voters, they also accepted "scientific" evidence that racial superiority existed. The theory of Social Darwinism claimed that humans could be categorized into a series of "races" and that, based on misreading Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, those who were of white or European stock were the most developed; blacks were placed at the bottom of this Social Darwinist hierarchy. Each racial category also supposedly included a series of genetic characteristics that were prevalent amongst all members of that group. Therefore, since they were considered to be strong, slow-witted, and in need of white supervision, blacks were restricted to carrying out physical labour.¹¹ While the direct influence of Social Darwinism steadily declined over time, it nevertheless left a lasting effect on acceptable social norms. Thus, while

⁹ Dorothy W. Williams, *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal*. (Montreal, 1997), pp. 13-14.

¹⁰ James W. St. G. Walker, *Racial Discrimination in Canada: The Black Experience* (Ottawa, 1985), p. 16.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

most white Canadians were likely unaware of the arbitrary notions surrounding the theory, they unconsciously supported it.

The economic and social constraints imposed upon blacks meant that there were few employment opportunities available for them outside of subsistence agriculture and physical labour. In Nova Scotia, the necessity of living off the land was reflected in the distribution of the population. Although there was a shift towards the Halifax-Dartmouth area during the economic boom of the First World War years, more than eighty percent of blacks in the province lived in rural areas at the start of the twentieth century.¹² This figure also reflected the substantial number of blacks in the province that moved to Cape Breton to work in the coal mines or steel plants.

With the outbreak of war in 1914, blacks enlisted in the military not only out of patriotism, but also to try and create the chance for a better life. Many blacks believed that by demonstrating their loyalty to the British Empire and making a contribution on the battlefield, they would earn greater equality. Like their fellow countrymen, black Canadians responded to the initial call-to-arms with enthusiasm. When they tried to enlist to serve overseas, however, they were rejected by recruiters. These rejections were based on racial stereotypes that assumed that blacks lacked the necessary fortitude required to fight in a “white man’s war.” By 1916, the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), the name given to all of the Canadian troops overseas, was desperately in need of men; yet, military officials continued to turn away hundreds of young, willing black volunteers.¹³

There was no explicit policy preventing blacks from enlisting in the CEF.

¹² Bridglal Pachai, *Beneath the Clouds of the Promised Land*, p. 135.

¹³ James W. St. G. Walker, “Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force.” *Canadian Historical Review* 70.1 (1989), pp. 5-6.

Regardless, the vast majority of the country's recruiting officers rejected blacks on the basis of racist doctrine. As historians Robin Winks and Barbara Wilson state, this was not a random occurrence, but characteristic of longstanding racial prejudice within Canadian society.¹⁴ Local recruiting officers normally determined who was suitable and unsuitable to serve. As Calvin Ruck notes in his work on black military service during the First World War, there were some supporters of black enlistment. Still, the predominant response received by black Canadians from the recruiting officers was that they, "lacked the valour, discipline, and intelligence to fight a modern war."¹⁵

It was only through prolonged political pressure from black Canadian leaders and sympathetic members of the general public that a segregated army battalion was formed for black Canadians in July of 1916. The majority of blacks who enlisted in the Great War served in this unit, the No.2 Construction Battalion. Although at least a couple hundred men managed to join other units and even participate in combat, the more than 600 men who served in the labour battalion symbolized black Canadian involvement in the war.¹⁶

The history of the No.2 CB is crucial to the understanding of black Canadian involvement in the war. Although the unit faced recruitment difficulties and was ultimately demoted to the status of a company during its time overseas, it served with

¹⁴ Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, pp. 314-315; Barbara M. Wilson, *Ontario and the First World War, 1914-1918: A Collection of Documents* (Toronto, 1977), p. cviii.

¹⁵ Walker, "Race and Recruitment in World War I", p. 1.

¹⁶ Although some historians argue that between 1,000 and 1,500 black Canadians served in various other Canadian Army battalions, ultimately the No.2 CB was the centrepiece of the black military experience. Ruck, *Black Battalion*, pp. 22-26. See also Walker, "Race and Recruitment in World War I", p. 25; John G. Armstrong, "The Unknown Sacrifice: A Black Unit in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1917-19" in *Ethnic Armies: Polyethnic Armed Forces from the Time of the Habsburgs to the Age of the Superpowers*. ed. N.F. Dreisziger. (Waterloo, 1990), p. 178.

honour. For black Canadians, the Battalion, despite its being segregated and non-combative, nevertheless represented a vital advance in their struggle to serve their country and achieve equality. At the same time, the history of the Battalion also exposes the depths of the racism that existed within Canada's military and society in the early twentieth century.

The No.2 Construction Battalion was established on July 15, 1916. With the exception of its white officers, the No.2 was a segregated battalion for black Canadians. The Battalion accepted recruits from across the country, but the majority came from Nova Scotia and Ontario. These two provinces accounted for 86.5 percent of enlistments, with Nova Scotia at 60.1 percent and Ontario at 26.4 percent. Unlike the CEF, which was over 50 percent British-born even at the end of the war, 56.8 percent of those who enlisted in the No.2 CB were Canadian and 28 percent were American-born.¹⁷

Initially, the Battalion's headquarters was located in Pictou, Nova Scotia. In order to better stimulate recruiting, the unit was moved to Truro, Nova Scotia, a larger community with a more sizeable black population.¹⁸ The Battalion also had recruiting offices in Toronto and Montreal and held recruiting drives throughout the Maritimes and Southern Ontario. Despite many volunteers, the No.2 CB did not reach its quota of 1,049 men to form a battalion. After years of frustration, many blacks were disillusioned by the entire recruiting process and dissatisfied with a non-combat segregated battalion.¹⁹

¹⁷ Sean Flynn Foyn, "The Underside of Glory: AfriCanadian Enlistment in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1917." MA, University of Ottawa, 2000, pp. 110-111.

¹⁸ Although Truro was the site of the headquarters, members of the Battalion did not necessarily spend a great deal of time there. About 400 men were stationed in Windsor, Ontario, for a number of weeks because military officials feared there could be trouble with so many blacks congregated in Truro. Armstrong, "The Unknown Sacrifice," p. 184.

¹⁹ Foyn, "The Underside of Glory", p. 110.

In the end, when the Battalion sailed for England on March 28, 1917, it went with only 626 men and officers.²⁰

At the outset of the conflict, when enlistment and enthusiasm to serve overseas were high, a small number of black Canadians managed to enlist in their local infantry battalions; some even made it to the front lines during the war.²¹ Like their compatriots, black Canadians volunteered to serve for a number of reasons. Some saw it as their responsibility as loyal citizens to fight for the British Empire. Others saw it as an adventure of a lifetime to participate in the “war to end all wars” and defeat a demonized German nation. A consistent wage was also crucial for many soldiers and their families, especially as the period from 1913 to 1915 saw the country deal with a severe economic downturn. One recruit to the Construction Battalion, in planning his future based on steady military pay (\$1.10/day), told his mother in a letter home: “Please let me know if you get my check every month. Save some for me when I get back, though it may be some time yet.”²² For blacks, there was also the belief that through participation in the war, they would gain group recognition and further their rights.²³ However, since there were thousands of men eager to volunteer at the beginning of the war, the recruiting authorities could afford to be selective. Therefore, they turned away hundreds of Canadians whose skin colour was not white.

²⁰ This situation was typical of the CEF at the time. After March 1916, no unit reached full strength through voluntary enlistment alone.

²¹ Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, p. 314. According to John Boyko, however, “not a single Black person was accepted into the Canadian military in the fall of 1914.” See, John Boyko, *The Last Steps to Freedom: The Evolution of Canadian Racism* (Winnipeg, 1995), p. 159.

²² Byard served in the First Depot Battalion, First Quebec Regiment. See Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 1356 – 52; Pachai, *Beneath the Clouds of the Promised Land*, p. 135.

²³ Walker, “Race and Recruitment in World War I”, pp. 3, 5, 26.

Such practices were also common in the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) and the British Royal Flying Corps (RFC). Throughout the war, both the navy and the air force did not support the enlistment of blacks. Captain Seymour, who served at the Headquarters of the Royal Air Force (RAF), the successor to the RFC that was established in April 1918 – and that enlisted Canadians – admitted that applications from “colored volunteers” would not be accepted unless blacks were “numerous enough to make up a company of their own.”²⁴ The RCN adopted a similar stance on black recruits. Unless there was a group of men large enough to serve as a segregated crew on their own vessel, they would not be accepted. Still, while the RFC, RAF and RCN rejected black volunteers, there were a few who managed to serve as merchant seamen. One was John R. Panhill from Halifax. After being turned down by an army recruiting officer, Panhill was accepted as a seaman. Despite the dangers posed by German U-Boats and once being mistakenly arrested by immigration officials on suspicion that he was a Spanish stowaway, Panhill remembered his years of service as “pretty good,” especially when compared to his work as a coal driver.²⁵

This situation did not go unchallenged by black activists and their supporters. Community leaders from Buxton and Hamilton, Ontario, Saint John, New Brunswick and

²⁴ Seymour’s comments stemmed from a well-known incident involving Harold Leopold Bell. Bell, a Jamaican living in the United States, joined the RAF in Boston and was sent to Camp Sussex in New Brunswick for training. However, shortly after his arrival in Sussex, Bell received his discharge papers and was ordered to leave the unit and come to Toronto to serve as a RAF engineer. Upon arriving in Toronto, despite his experience as a machinist and knowledge of gasoline driven engines, he was rejected. With no position in the RAF, Bell ended up working in a munitions plant. See *The Toronto Telegram*, August 28, 1918.

²⁵ After his service in the Merchant Marine, Panhill worked as a sleeping car porter for Canadian National Railways until his retirement in 1962. Pachai, *Beneath the Clouds of the Promised Land*, p. 138; Ruck, *Black Battalion*, p. 51.

Sydney, Nova Scotia, complained to Ottawa that loyal Canadians were not receiving fair and equal treatment in trying to serve their country. The Minister of Militia and Defence, Sam Hughes, had publicly promised that there would be no barriers to any Canadians who wished to volunteer. One of the earliest incidents reported to Hughes was the November 1915 case of 20 black men from Saint John who were not allowed to join the 104th Battalion, then training at Camp Sussex, New Brunswick, even though they had been initially sworn in. Two of the men, John T. Richards and K.C. Hamilton, wrote to Hughes and the Governor General to report their experience and noted that a public protest was being suggested. When Hughes was informed of the incident, he reaffirmed in the press that no military colour line existed and pledged that the incident would be investigated. However, no report ever emerged and, ironically, the Commanding Officer of the 104th Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel G. W. Fowler, soon released 17 other black recruits on the grounds that their presence “went against the interest of the Battalion.” Responding to criticism, Fowler stated that “I have been fortunate to have secured a very fine class of recruits, and I did not think it fair to these men that they should have to mingle with negroes.” Richards and Hamilton continued their campaign to expose the racial prejudice faced at the New Brunswick camp and to have blacks accepted into the CEF.²⁶

The effort that did the most to precipitate the creation of the black battalion was the intervention of J.R.B. Whitney, editor of the black periodical, the *Canadian*

²⁶ Sean Foyne revealed that at least if eight of these men were eventually accepted into the No.2 CB. See, Foyne, “The Underside of Glory”, pp. 44-50, 121-124; Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, p. 315; James W. St. G. Walker, *A History of Blacks in Canada: A Study for Teachers and Students*. (Ottawa, 1980), p. 95.

Observer.²⁷ Whitney wrote to Hughes about whether a platoon of blacks could be raised and integrated into a battalion. Hughes casually responded that “there was nothing in the world to stop them” from joining anywhere in the country. This comment set off correspondence between the minister, other military officials, and Whitney, from November 1915 through March 1916. These letters revealed that there were hundreds of ready black volunteers – all they needed were units willing to accept them.²⁸ Hughes further emphasized that he opposed segregation, telling a number of recruiting officers that he would not lend himself “to the fad of giving [blacks] a regiment to themselves any more that I intend to have a regiment of one-eyed men with yellow moustaches or red hair.”²⁹ Concerns over black recruits were not restricted to Central Canada and the Maritimes. In British Columbia, two militia officers asked the Militia Council for the authority to raise segregated black units because the colour line “was very sharply” drawn in the province.³⁰ The situation finally reached a point where Ottawa needed to make a firm decision on black enlistment.

The solution appeared in February 1916 when the Colonial Office in London

²⁷ The weekly paper was devoted “to the welfare of the race throughout the Dominion and the universe.” The *Canadian Observer* and the *Atlantic Advocate* (published monthly in Halifax), the two black periodicals in the country at the time, strongly advocated black enlistment. In fact, three members of the *Advocate*’s staff - Wilfred A. DeCosta, E.L. Cross and Dr. Clement C. Ligoure - enlisted in the No.2 CB.

²⁸ Walker, “Race and Recruitment in World War I”, p. 9. There were units, such as the 25th and 106th from Nova Scotia, that did enlist blacks to serve in combat duty. Also, General William A. Logie, director of Military District No.2, accepted 40 black recruits into Toronto area battalions in January 1915. However, in most cases, blacks were reassigned once they reached overseas. See Ruck, *Black Battalion*, p. 22; Boyko, *Last Steps to Freedom* p. 159; *The Toronto Star*, November 11, 1995, pp. SA2, K11.

²⁹ Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, p. 314.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 315. According to the Census of Canada from 1921, 676 “Negroes” lived in the province. See Canada, *Sixth Census of Canada, Volume 1* (Ottawa: F. A. Acland, 1924).

informed Ottawa that it required the use of a battalion of unskilled labourers to build roads, railroads, and canals in France. Since this type of battalion would not need continual reinforcements like infantry, it was seen as the ideal way to both employ a limited number of black volunteers and to maintain the image that when it came to actual fighting that this was a “white man’s war.”³¹ This request from London led to the formation of the No.2 Construction Battalion, by order of the Chief of the General Staff, Major-General Willoughby Gwatkin. On April 13, 1916, Gwatkin wrote a “Memorandum on the enlistment of negroes in the Canadian Expeditionary Force” that characterized the “civilized negro” as vain, imitative, a poor fighter, a source of disharmony, and unable to comprehend the civilized ways of war.³² Gwatkin reached the conclusion that there were three potential options on the military use of black Canadians: they could continue to enlist in white battalions, though at the discretion of white commanding officers; they could form one or two labour battalions; or they could be used by the British in Egypt.³³ Gwatkin favoured the second option; ultimately, the second was chosen, as the consensus was that no white-dominated battalion would accept blacks. Prime Minister Robert Borden and the British Command agreed with Gwatkin’s recommendation and the No.2 Construction Battalion was established in July 1916.

The formation of the Battalion was a bittersweet victory for many black

³¹ John G. Armstrong, “The Unknown Sacrifice,” p. 181.

³² As Robin Winks reveals, two months earlier, the Department of Militia and Defence issued its own memorandum which stated: “The fiat has gone forth: There is to be no coloured line; coloured battalions are not to be raised; coloured men are to be allowed to enlist in any battalion of the C.E.F.” See, Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, p. 315. It is evident that from the summer of 1915 up until February 1916, there were never any clear instructions on what to do with black recruits.

³³ LAC, RG 24, vol. 1206, file HQ 297-1-21, “Memorandum on the enlistment of negroes in Canadian Expeditionary Force,” April 13, 1916.

Canadians. Many were pleased that they could now finally enlist and serve overseas; yet, numerous others had grown disillusioned with the process and naturally took offence to the fact that the No.2 was a non-combat battalion. After lobbying for years for the right to serve in combat, it was difficult for many to find the enthusiasm to support this patronizing response by Canadian officials. The *Atlantic Advocate*, “the mouthpiece and the only colored publication in the Maritime Provinces,” characterized the formation of the No.2 CB as a “failure” by the time it sailed for Europe.³⁴ Other units in the CEF did not accept the new segregated battalion either. Ontario’s No.1 Construction Battalion took exception to the new black battalion, fearing that their association with blacks would diminish their reputation and ability to attract recruits. In order to distance themselves from the No.2 CB, they asked that either their own name or that of the No.2’s be changed. In the end, the white battalion became known as the No.1 Railway Troop.³⁵ Many senior officers spoke out against the enlistment of blacks. Lieutenant-Colonel W. H. Allan, commanding officer of the 106th Battalion, Nova Scotia Rifles, the same combat unit that recruited 18 blacks throughout the war, claimed that: “Neither my men

³⁴ The paper initially characterized the No.2 CB as the “expression of the Dominion’s colored manhood and their pride.” However, after learning that the Battalion did not receive a proper send-off in Halifax and that military officials had gone back on their promise to enlist a black Medical Officer for the unit, the *Advocate* became critical of the whole project. See *Atlantic Advocate*, 1.1 April 1915, p. 1 and 1.10 April 1917, p. 1.

³⁵ Walker, “Race and Recruitment in World War I,” p. 12; The Battalion did not solicit contempt from all sources. On November 14, 1916, the No.2 met with the Acting Minister of Militia F.B. McCurdy (from Nova Scotia). McCurdy warmly received the Battalion and complimented its members for their appearance and excellent behaviour. He also stated that “in this great struggle for Humanity and Freedom the coloured citizen has shown the world that he was ready to stand side by side with his white comrade and brother to do his ‘bit’ and help win a glorious victory for the Allies.” See Armstrong, “The Unknown Sacrifice,” pp. 182-183, 186.

nor myself, would care to sleep alongside negroes, or to eat with them, especially in warm weather.”³⁶

Despite the fact that the No.2 CB's recruitment levels were mediocre, Gwatkin feared that the Battalion would become a nuisance for the military and it was therefore sent overseas. It arrived in Liverpool on April 8, 1917 and remained in England for two months, where it performed various labour duties and served alongside blacks in the segregated South African Labour Corps. Upon its arrival in England, the Battalion was downgraded to a Company and after further training was dispatched to France to join the Canadian Forestry Corps (CFC). When conscription was introduced in late 1917, officers hoped it meant that the No.2 could increase its numbers to become a Battalion. Blacks were liable for conscription, an ironic situation not lost on the men who were prevented from enlisting voluntarily. A formation depot was established in London, Ontario, where it was hoped reinforcements for the No.2 could be organized. Despite the fact that at least 100 blacks were conscripted from across the country, Ottawa felt that the limited numbers made it impossible to adequately reinforce the No.2 and so the formation depot was abandoned. Instead, the conscripts, at least half of whom were trained as infantryman, were sent to England and assigned into other predominantly black labour

³⁶ Allan's position was directly in line with official Canadian thinking. Ultimately, many of the men who were able to enlist for combat duty, including Private Jeremiah "Jerry" Jones from the 106th, were reassigned to other battalions and units, such as the Royal Canadian Regiment, once they were overseas. See *The Toronto Star*, November 11, 1995, pp. SA2, K11; Walker, *History of Blacks in Canada*, pp. 95, 315. For more on Jones, see *Truro Daily News*, August 17, 1917; *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*, September 5, 2000, p. A1.

units. This was viewed as the best option by senior military officials who believed that racial integration would cause severe discontent in white ranks.³⁷

Once in France, the Company was stationed along the French-Swiss border where it joined the CFC's No.5 District Jura Group. From their base of operations at La Joux, the Company was responsible for providing lumber to build trenches and boardwalks. In fact, they helped achieve the one-day record of producing 160,000 feet of lumber. As the commanding officer of the Canadian Forestry Corps noted in the unit's official history, that amount of lumber "cannot be obtained by any of the older firms in the Ottawa Valley, under the best civilian organization."³⁸ While lumbering was the predominant employment for members of the No.2 CB, some soldiers also had the dangerous task of locating and diffusing land mines.³⁹ The majority of the Company's men stayed in La Joux for the remainder of the war and played an effective role in logging, milling, and shipping.

Although commended for its service, the men of the No.2 CB were also subjected to prejudice while overseas. Most notably, they were not permitted to attend recreational activities with the other CFC units and instead had to visit a separate "coloured" YMCA. Also, at the local hospital in La Joux, black Canadians were restricted to a specific wing. Furthermore, a white Protestant Chaplain was brought into the district because the Reverend Captain William A. White, the only black commissioned officer in the British

³⁷ Walker, "Race and Recruitment in World War I," pp. 20-21; Armstrong, "The Unknown Sacrifice," p. 193; Ruck, *Black Battalion*, pp. 27-29.

³⁸ *The Toronto Star*, August 3, 1993, p. A13.

³⁹ *The Toronto Star*, November 14, 1982, p. A18.

Forces during the First World War, was considered unacceptable to tend to the spiritual needs of any whites.⁴⁰

However, the most severe incident of racial antagonism occurred after the war, when the Battalion returned to Britain to await repatriation to Canada. Like many parts in the CEF, the No.2 CB was sent to Kinmel Park Camp in Wales for demobilization. On January 7, 1919, some 275 members of company were involved in a *mêlée* with fellow Canadian soldiers. The incident occurred after Sergeant Edward Sealy of the No.2 CB ordered a white Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) to be locked-up because he allegedly refused to take orders from Sealy and made racist comments. Members of the white NCO's unit took exception to the fact that a black man had arrested a white soldier and decided to confront the Construction Battalion while its members were on parade. A small riot ensued and a number of men from both sides were slashed with razors and beaten with rocks and many of the No.2 CB's huts had their windows broken.⁴¹

At the time of the incident, Sir Edward Kemp, the Minister of Overseas Military Forces for Canada, was actually ignorant of the fact that this unique formation even existed. When Jacques Bureau, the Member of Parliament (MP) for Trois-Rivières, asked his colleagues whether there were any black Canadian soldiers involved with demobilization riots, Kemp replied that if any "negroes" were in the Canadian Army at all, they were "scattered throughout the forces."⁴²

⁴⁰ Ruck, *Black Battalion*, pp. 43-44.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47, 55-56; Armstrong, "The Unknown Sacrifice," p. 193; Foyn, "The Underside of Glory", pp. 120, 127, 131; Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, p. 319; Desmond Morton, "Kicking and Complaining: Demobilization Riots in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1918-1919" *Canadian Historical Review* 61.3 (1980): p. 343.

⁴² Canada. Parliament. House of Commons. *Debates*, 13th Parliament, 3rd Session, June 20, 1919, p. 3741; Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, p. 319.

For the most part, black Canadians belonging to the No.2 and other units returned home without fostering much attention, though there was one incident in early 1920 when some veterans of the No.2 in Truro had their houses stoned.⁴³ After the Battalion was officially disbanded on September 15, 1920, its members returned to their lives amidst the same prejudice and inequality that they had lived with before the war. Still, black Canadians expressed pride in the men who served in the Battalion.⁴⁴ Their efforts were seen as part of the struggle by Canada's 20,000 blacks to earn a more equitable share of the basic human rights that their fellow citizens enjoyed. Black Canadians performed admirably in France and proved that, prejudices notwithstanding, that they were patriotic citizens and ready to serve their country. Unfortunately for them, while exceptions were made during the war, the 1920s did not mark a new era for equal rights and opportunity for blacks. Canadian society still viewed blacks as inherently inferior. Indeed, following the war, Canada's Superintendent of Immigration, W. D. Scott, claimed that "Colored labour is not generally speaking in demand in Canada and it is not only regarded as the lowest grade, but it is the last to be taken on and the first to be discharged in most cases."⁴⁵ Furthermore, as historian Bridglal Pachai states in his examination of employment opportunities for blacks in Nova Scotia after the devastating 1917 Halifax Explosion: "It did not matter whether one was educated, skilled, semi-skilled, or

⁴³ Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, p. 319; Walker, *History of Blacks in Canada*, p. 96. There had also been violent clashes between white and black residents in September 1919 at the Canadian National Railway station in Truro. See Sheridan Hay, "Black Protest Tradition in Nova Scotia, 1783-1964", MA Thesis, Saint Mary's University, 1997, pp. 97-99.

⁴⁴ In July 1993, the No.2 CB was honoured in Pictou with a parade along the town's harbourfront and the erection of a monument. *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*, July 8, 1993.

⁴⁵ Boyko, *Last Steps to Freedom*, p. 160

unskilled, the result was the same: Blacks were employed if and when other candidates were unavailable or unwilling.”⁴⁶

However, some change was occurring in black demographics during the inter-war period. Of the 22,174 blacks in Canada in 1921 close to 85 percent still lived in Nova Scotia and Ontario.⁴⁷ Although blacks in Nova Scotia were spread throughout the Digby, Guysborough and Cape Breton regions, the majority lived in the Halifax area. In Ontario, Toronto overtook southwestern Essex and Kent Counties as the centre of black settlement, as the city’s black population rose from a meagre 472 in 1911 to just over 1,800 by 1941.⁴⁸ A small influx of West Indian migrants, originally brought to Canada to work in the steel mills and coal mines of Ontario and the Maritimes, partly explained these shifts.⁴⁹

In the years leading up to the Second World War, the majority of Toronto’s blacks lived in the poor downtown districts around Spadina, Dundas, and Queen Streets. This population was itself divided between the better-established, native blacks who had first settled in southern Ontario as refugees from the Underground Railroad and the recent West Indian immigrants who sought to maintain their own cultures. Furthermore, the native Canadian blacks were viewed by the immigrants as being more focused on the possibility of tapping into “elite white patronage” rather than challenging racial discrimination. By the beginning of the war in 1939, this division, along with the large

⁴⁶ Pachai, *Beneath the Clouds of the Promised Land*, p. 136.

⁴⁷ Canada, *Sixth Census of Canada, Volume 1* (Ottawa: F. A. Acland, 1924).

⁴⁸ William N.T. Wylie, *Prospective Sites Relating to Black History in Canada*. (Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, 1994), pp. 79-80.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 132. However, Keith S. Henry, in his study of black in Toronto after 1914, cites much higher figures. Based on community group estimates, Henry estimated that the city’s black population ranged from 2,500 in 1925 to 4,000 in 1939. See Keith S. Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto Since World War I* (Toronto, 1981) p. 13.

numbers of blacks of American and Nova Scotian background, made up the “four discernible social blocs” of Canada’s black population. As a result, the inter-war period was characterized as lacking “perceptive leadership, authoritative voices, and trusted and venerable institutions ... [with] the result being community drift and dissipated effort.”⁵⁰

Montreal’s black community, though small, still also expanded during the inter-war period, thanks to immigration and new employment opportunities. The black population of Quebec, about 2,100 people, was concentrated in Montreal’s St. Antoine district.⁵¹ With the expansion of the railways during the First World War, black Canadians, Americans, and West Indians were actively recruited to work as sleeping car porters as both the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National Railways were headquartered in the city. In fact, in 1928, 90 percent of Montreal’s employed black males worked on the railways.⁵²

In cities, blacks were still habitually refused service in restaurants, bars, and theatres or placed in segregated seating areas. Although there were no racial or “Jim Crow” laws that permitted this, the accepted custom of “freedom of commerce” meant that merchants could accept or refuse any customer they wished. For example, in 1919,

⁵⁰ Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto Since World War I*, p. 33. Henry argued that while a “certain fusion of styles and perspectives” merged between these groups after 1945, internal dissent remained very much evident, especially between West Indian blacks and Canadian-born blacks. Ultimately, “black Toronto was still celebrated for its ‘factions and its cliques.’” *Ibid.*, pp. 4-6, 13, 16-17, 30.

⁵¹ Williams argued that it is likely that more than 3,000 blacks lived in the city during the war. She also revealed that the Census indicated that 29 percent of the black population in the city was Caribbean-born and 63 percent Canadian-born. The Census claimed that only 6 percent of the population were American-born. This likely reflects a number of black American residents that retained their American citizenship. See Williams, *Road to Now*, pp. 13-14, 91.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 39; Stanley Grizzle, *My Name’s Not George: The Story of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters: Personal Reminiscences of Stanley G. Grizzle*. (Toronto, 1998), p. 29.

the Quebec Court of King's Bench ruled that the management of Loew's Theatre in Montreal had "the right to assign particular seats to different races and classes of men and women as it sees fit."⁵³ This policy was also supported in the first racial discrimination case to reach the Supreme Court of Canada. At the Montreal Forum in July 1936, Fred Christie, a black chauffeur and Canadiens' season ticket holder, was refused service at one of the arena's taverns. When Christie complained to the authorities, he was told that the Forum did not serve blacks. In response, Christie sued the tavern's owners. In ruling against Christie, the Quebec Court of King's Bench decided that the tavern's policy of not serving "colored persons ... was not against public order and good morals" and that each business owner had the right to serve whomever they wished.⁵⁴ As contemporary author Ida C. Greaves sardonically concluded: "the Negro has exactly the same rights as anybody else until he tries to exercise them, then he can be quite legally restrained."⁵⁵

With the judicial system upholding "freedom of commerce," blacks had to take charge of their situation. Among the prominent in this regard was Beresford Augustus Husbands, founder of the Halifax Colored Citizens Improvement League (HCCIL), the first secular black community organization in Nova Scotia. A native of Barbados, Husbands immigrated to Halifax in 1900. While his early years were spent working with a white Halifax merchant, he soon controlled his own real estate company and a

⁵³ *Loew's Montreal Theatres Ltd. v. Reynolds (1919)*, 30 Que. K.B. 459 quoted in Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950*. (Toronto, 1999), p. 254; Clifton Ruggles, *Outsider Blues: A Voice from the Shadows* (Halifax, 1996), pp. 84-85.

⁵⁴ Backhouse, *Colour-Coded*, pp. 254-257; James W. St. G. Walker, "Race," *Rights and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada: Historical Case Studies* (Waterloo and Toronto, 1997) pp. 122-181; Ruggles, *Outsider Blues*, p. 85.

⁵⁵ Ida C. Greaves, *The Negro In Canada* (Montreal., 1930) p. 63.

wholesale and retail store. In 1932, he formed the HCCIL to unite the black community in support of common political and social goals.

Another noteworthy character was James F. Jenkins, an American living in London, Ontario. The editor of the black newspaper *The Dawn of Tomorrow*, Jenkins, in 1924, along with J.W. Montgomery of Toronto, formed the Canadian League for the Advancement of Coloured People (CLACP). Based on the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the United States, the Canadian League soon expanded to form branches in Dresden, Brantford and Niagara Falls. However, the small size of the black population could not sustain the organization on the same level as its American counterpart.

Another step black Canadians took in improving their quality of life after the First World War was in opening and operating their own small businesses. As in Husbands's case, these businesses were modest and family-run grocery stores, restaurants and barber shops. Often this was done as a direct result of being denied service in "white" establishments. Sydney Jones, a veteran of the 106th Battalion, and John (Jack) Desmond operated successful barbershops in Nova Scotia.⁵⁶ Still, as only a minority of blacks possessed the acumen, education, and money necessary to run businesses. The job opportunities available to blacks outside of farming overwhelmingly remained work as domestics for women, and railway sleeping car porters for men.

The black experience during the First World War and the inter-war period did not markedly improve their place within Canadian society. Although facing tremendous

⁵⁶ Until the Second World War, Jack Desmond was the only registered black barber in Nova Scotia. For decades, his business in downtown Halifax served a racially-mixed clientele. Pachai, *Beneath the Clouds of the Promised Land*, p. 153; Backhouse, *Colour-Coded*, p. 235.

prejudice, blacks demonstrated that they were eager to fight for their country. Throughout Ontario and the Maritimes, they sought to enlist in the CEF because of patriotism, a sense of adventure, and the belief that their participation would finally lead to greater integration within and equality in the wider society. However, government and military officials, who expressed long-standing stereotypes and racial prejudice, willfully minimized black participation in the war effort. Except for a handful of exceptions, “Negroes” were barred from serving in combat. Yet, to satisfy the growing need for men overseas, a segregated labour battalion was formed to accept “coloured” recruits. For military officials, the crucial factors in not freely accepting blacks were the bigoted assumption that blacks did not possess the same abilities as whites and the fear of racial animosity. These sentiments remained factors in Canadian military recruitment policy during the Second World War.

Blacks did not return home from the war to the equal society for which they had fought. Black community groups, such as the HCCIL and the CLACP were formed to unite blacks to strive for more opportunities and justice. Throughout the inter-war years, public opinion, backed by the legally-defended custom of “freedom of commerce,” continued to result in prejudice. Some blacks responded by establishing their own businesses and seeking out new employment opportunities, especially in the growing cities of Toronto, Montreal, and Halifax. During the Second World War, on both the home front and in combat service overseas, numerous Canadian blacks would refuse to accept the same discriminatory treatment a second time around.

Chapter 2

Supporting the War Effort: Employment and Discrimination on the Homefront

A generation after the Great War ended, the world was at war again. On September 10, 1939, nine days after the German invasion of Poland, Canada joined the fight against the Nazis. The war called for a mass mobilization of people and resources, and the black community was willing to contribute. Yet, once more their patriotism was constrained by the presence of racial discrimination in government and society at large. Although blacks were expected to fill the demand for labour on the homefront, the type of employment opportunities available to them was mostly limited to menial jobs. Even black soldiers stationed on the homefront encountered abuse from their fellow Canadians. The few positive outcomes that the war produced for blacks were a direct result of their required participation in the immense war effort and not a result of change in the country's social mores.

In the months following Canada's entry into the war, the government and the military mobilized the necessary human and material resources to fight a war of "limited liability." Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, obsessed with the fierce division caused by conscription during the First World War, was determined to maintain national unity by keeping casualties to a minimum and thus avoid a second conscription crisis. However, the fall of France to the Nazis in the spring of 1940 suddenly made Canada Britain's ranking ally in the war against Germany, thus putting an end to King's "limited liability" policy. In June 1940, the federal government passed the National Resources Mobilization Act (NRMA), creating a conscripted home defence force. The

NRMA called for the immediate registration of Canadians 16 years and older and ordered thirty days of military home defense training for all single men aged 18 to 35.⁵⁷

The registration process was not always simple, however. Two registrars in each federal electoral district carried this out across the country. Each resident over the age of sixteen was required to complete a questionnaire. The completed questionnaires determined the manpower pool for both the military and essential civilian labour.⁵⁸ For the black community, the biggest problem with the questionnaire stemmed from question number eight, which dealt with “racial origin.” T.H. Ross, the MP for Hamilton East, told the *Hamilton Spectator* in August 1940 that many of his constituents had contacted his office complaining that the scrutineers did not recognize “Canadian” or “American” as an origin. Many blacks who were fourth or fifth generation Canadian could not register as a “Canadian” because this was considered a nationality and not a race. Instead, “Canadian” respondents were required to use the birthplace of the first male member of their family to settle in the country.⁵⁹ However, this compromise did not apply to any person of “colour.” For blacks, regardless of how long they and their families had lived in Canada, “Negro” was the only option. This government classification (much like the Census) created inaccurate statistics, and set blacks apart from all other Canadians.

In September 1942, with the threat of a military personnel shortage looming and

⁵⁷ Michael D. Stevenson, *Canada's Greatest Wartime Muddle: National Selective Service and the Mobilization of Human Resources during World War II* (Montreal & Kingston, 2001), pp. 18-19; R. Scott Sheffield, “...In the same manner as other people”: Government policy and the military service of Canada's First Nations people, 1939-1945.” (MA Thesis, University of Victoria, 1995), p. 74.

⁵⁸ Stevenson, *Canada's Greatest Wartime Muddle*, p. 19.

⁵⁹ The following newspaper article was accessed on the Canadian War Museum (CWM) on-line database *Democracy at War* and did not include the relevant page number(s). CWM, *Hamilton Spectator*, August 16, 1940.

the demand for war materiel growing, the federal government created National Selective Service (NSS). A branch of the Department of Labour, NSS was established to act as the main government agency for the organization of the civilian labour force, namely to strike a balance between meeting the needs of war industries, the military, and civilian requirements. It had the authority to dictate the sectors of work that held priority for employment; it could even freeze people in their jobs and did so in several essential sectors, such as mining, munitions and agriculture.

Racial discrimination existed within the NSS. Throughout the war, the principal occupations for blacks remained railway-portering for men and domestic work for women.⁶⁰ However, there was optimism among blacks that wartime labour shortages would open up new opportunities. Yet, even when blacks were accepted in war jobs, they were usually assigned the most menial physical labour. Montreal's director of the NSS claimed that black workers were, "unreliable, worthless" and possessed a "low IQ."⁶¹ In Toronto, members of the black community took to the streets to publicly protest their exclusion from many high-paying war industry jobs.⁶² "Some of us, even those of us who have university educations, are finding doors closed on us, even in wartime," said one black Ontarian in reflecting the frustration of many. "We have supported the war effort; we want to help more. Our people have been downtrodden, wasting their abilities at inferior work."⁶³

⁶⁰ Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto Since World War I*, p. 28.

⁶¹ Williams, *Road to Now*, p. 85.

⁶² Linda Carty, "African Canadian Women and the State" in *We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History*. Peggy Bristow, et al. (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. 180; Alexander and Glaze, *Towards Freedom*, p. 148; Ross Lambertson, *Repression and Resistance: Canadian Human Rights Activists, 1930-1960* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 204-205.

⁶³ CWM, *The Globe and Mail*, October 28, 1943.

Still, by the early 1940s, the Allies' perilous situation against Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan required the assistance of all Canadians. The war thus allowed blacks to enter new jobs, such as in the forestry and steel sectors. Although these were typically the lowest-paying jobs, blacks had never held them before, and the transition was not an easy one, as, for instance, their presence in logging camps prompted some white loggers to seek other employment.⁶⁴ By the mid-point of the war, the country's major steel plants needed 2,000 more employees to keep up with record demand, and Cape Breton's blacks benefited the most from this change.⁶⁵ Automotive plants in southern Ontario also began to employ blacks full-time as the war progressed, though the numbers never surpassed more than a few hundred, and at the major Chrysler plant in Windsor, blacks were refused employment until the 1951 *Ontario Fair Employment Practices Act* forced some change in the company.⁶⁶ Work in the auto industry was demanding, but it represented a rare opportunity for black men to find steady, well-paid employment. Furthermore, because of their membership in the United Auto Workers union, black workers obtained seniority rights, and "received the same wages and piece rates, and in theory, could occupy the same job classifications as all other male auto workers."⁶⁷

While some openings were created for blacks in war industries, the most common job for men remained that of a railway porter. The position was steady, and well-respected within the black community, and, with an average monthly salary of \$80,

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, October 11, 1944.

⁶⁵ Stevenson, *Canada's Greatest Wartime Muddle*, p. 8.

⁶⁶ Pamela Sugiman, "Privilege and oppression: the configuration of race, gender and class in southern Ontario auto plants, 1939 to 1949." *Labour/Le Travail* (Spring 2001): pp. 85-100.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 95. While the auto industry did employ a small number of women during the war, neither the Ford nor Chrysler plants offered work to black women.

allowed men to provide for their families during the war. From the beginning of the twentieth century onward, blacks were employed in the dining-car-service as chefs and waiters on Ontario's Grand Trunk Railway. However, after the Grand Trunk and the Canadian Northern systems were absorbed by Canadian National Railway (CNR) in June 1919, a colour line was established within the Canadian railway service. On both the government-owned CNR and the privately-controlled Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), black Canadians could only find work as sleeping car porters.⁶⁸

While working as railway porters remained the standard lot of black Canadian men during the Second World War years, railway management and the predominant railway union, the Canadian Brotherhood of Railroad Employees (CBRE), prevented blacks from having representation. This segregation persisted within the CBRE until 1964.⁶⁹ However, the war, by creating labour shortages (and thus increasing the power of labour) better enabled black porters to form their own union. In order to improve black working conditions, Canadian divisions of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) were formed in 1942. In early 1939, Charles Russell, a black porter working out of Montreal, invited Asa Philip Randolph, the guiding force behind the establishment of the union in the United States, to come to the city to help organize CPR porters. During the first years of the war, CPR porters steadily joined the BSCP and by July 1942, union

⁶⁸ As Bridglal Pachai reveals, while the CNR preferred black Canadian porters, the CPR recruited black Americans for work well into the 1950s. See Pachai, *Beneath the Clouds of the Promised Land*, p. 170; Walker, *History of Blacks in Canada*, p. 91.

⁶⁹ Agnes Calliste, "Sleeping Car Porters in Canada: An Ethnically Submerged Split Labour Market" *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 19.1 (1987), p. 3; Grizzle, *My Name's Not George*, p. 18; Boyko, *Last Steps to Freedom*, p. 161.

locals were established in Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg.⁷⁰

By the end of 1942, Randolph opened the first negotiations between the BSCP and CPR management. The tense negotiations stalled until the National War Labour Board was brought in to arbitrate. This success helped the union grow from 153 to 620 members in 1943.⁷¹ In May 1945, the BSCP and the CPR signed their first collective agreement: that marked the first time in the Canada's history that a black union and a white employer entered into a collective agreement. With the union formally recognized, the porters won an increase in wages, received remuneration for overtime work, and won the right to present their cases in disciplinary matters.⁷²

The tremendous increase in rail traffic during the war meant increased demand for railway porters. In fact, the CPR sought black veterans to work on the hospital cars which carried wounded soldiers returning from Europe. According to W.A. Gough, the sleeping and dining car agent for Montreal, the use of black veterans was important because they possessed "a bond with their passengers." One of these veterans was Jean-Napoleon Maurice, a black Montrealer who had served with Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal at Dieppe

⁷⁰ Grizzle, *My Name's Not George*, pp. 15-17, 20-21; Headley Tulloch, *Black Canadians: A Long Line of Fighters*. (Toronto, 1975), p. 127. For the dates of when each Canadian Division of the union was founded, along with a list of members, see Appendices 3 and 4 in Grizzle, *My Name's Not George*, pp. 116-119.

⁷¹ Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, p. 424.

⁷² Prior to this agreement, blacks received an average monthly pay of \$80. Following the collective agreement, average monthly salaries increased to \$112. See Grizzle, *My Name's Not George*, pp. 23, 40, 52. Even with the union's success, it was not until 1955 that the first black sleeping car conductors were hired in Canada, and not until 1964 that racial barriers were finally removed from service employment practices. See *Montreal Star*, May 1, 1955; Grizzle, *My Name's Not George*, p. 71; Tulloch, *Black Canadians*, pp. 127, 132; Pachai and Bishop, *Images of Our Past*. p. 115.

and with the Royal 22e Régiment in the Italian campaign.⁷³ Maurice was himself invalided back to Canada in June 1944 and for the remainder of the war he travelled across the country as a porter on one the CPR's four hospital cars.⁷⁴

Meanwhile, in August 1943, the federal District Superintendent of Immigration was outspoken in discouraging the importation of American blacks to work as railway porters. "For obvious reasons," he said, "I do not think we would want to add to our coloured population and I do not believe that the arrangement with the Canadian Pacific Railway for the admission of these coloured porters contemplated the entry of their families."⁷⁵ Yet, while porters eventually won union recognition, this did not have a perceptible impact on the wider perception of blacks. In the words of historian Dionne Brand: "[P]orters obtained a bit of glory and independence when they formed a union. Unfortunately, that didn't carry over into anything else."⁷⁶

At the outset of the Second World War, working outside the home was not uncommon for black women due to financial insecurity. However, racial discrimination meant that black women earned less than white women performing the same jobs. Black women also were constrained as to the type of work thought appropriate for them. Prior to 1945, black women were virtually barred from training as nurses in Canada; the few

⁷³ Private Jean-Napoleon Maurice was commended in the press for his efforts to help save four members of the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry and Essex Scottish Regiment during the disastrous August 19, 1942 raid on Dieppe. See CWM, *Hamilton Spectator*, August 22, 1942.

⁷⁴ *Montreal Gazette*, August 29, 1944, p. 6.

⁷⁵ Boyko, *Last Steps to Freedom*, p. 162.

⁷⁶ Dionne Brand, *No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Working Women in Ontario, 1920s-1950s* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1991), p. 209.

who did qualify obtained their training in America.⁷⁷ In 1944, after completing her training in Virginia, Bernice Redmon became the first Canadian-born black to be employed as a registered public health nurse in Ontario. In 1945, the Halifax Colored Citizens Improvement League and the Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NSAACP) successfully pressured the local Victoria General Hospital to employ two black nurse-trainees, Gwendolen Barton and Ruth Bailey, for the first time in Nova Scotia's history.⁷⁸ Most black Canadian women were relegated to working as domestics in urban centres or as farm servants in rural areas.⁷⁹ For example, in Montreal in 1941, 80 percent of adult black women worked as domestic servants. Yet, it was difficult for black women to work as "nannies" because whites from the United Kingdom were preferred. This changed during the war when white women left domestic work to replace men in higher status and better paid jobs. As such, during the first three years of the war, many black women took over as the "nannies."⁸⁰

By the summer of 1943, the departure of white women for more lucrative jobs in war industries also created a severe shortage of service workers. Black women filled openings, such as in tobacco and candy factories. Some also obtained war work: "Really

⁷⁷ As Dorothy Williams revealed, during the 1930s, hospital staff at the Montreal General Hospital did not permit black nurses to work there "since there were not enough Black patients to care for in the hospitals (and White patients would not allow Black nurses to touch them)." In May 1943, a class of 17 black women in Saint John, NB was considered to be "the first coloured group in Canada" to complete the St. John Ambulance Association first aid and home nurse studies course. See Williams, *Road to Now*, pp. 79-80; *Evening Times Globe*, May 25, 1993, p. 13.

⁷⁸ Peggy Bristow, "The Hour-A-Day Study Club" in *And Still We Rise: Feminist Political Mobilizing in Contemporary Canada* ed. Linda Carty (Toronto, 1993), pp. 146-149; Pachai, *Beneath the Clouds of the Promised Land*, p. 154, 159-164; Walker, *A History of Blacks in Canada*, p. 124.

⁷⁹ Carty, "African Canadian Women and the State", p. 210.

⁸⁰ Walker, *History of Blacks in Canada*, p. 132; Brand, *No Burden to Carry*, pp. 22-25.

and truly, we weren't allowed to go into factory work until Hitler started the war, and then they'd beg you, 'Would you like a job in my factory?'" recalled Marjorie Lewsey. "They were so desperate in the war they didn't bother you – there was no such thing as your race."⁸¹ Black women needed no encouragement to enter the workforce. As Dionne Brand argues in her history of working women in Ontario: "They did not wish to return to the white people's kitchens where there was isolation, no fair wage, no chance of mobility, nor any recourse against the 'personalised' racism of the employer."⁸² However, in several factories, blacks commented that they were assigned the dirtiest and most hazardous jobs.⁸³ Of course, such a suggestion was concealed from the public. In one press photo, taken in 1943, Cecilia Butler is shown doing her work as a reamer at the Inglis Company munitions plant in Toronto. The caption to the photo read: "Negro girl workers are highly regarded in majority of munitions plants, display exceptional attitude for work of precision nature."⁸⁴

Other black women found employment in clothing factories, working as farm labour, and in secretarial positions. Rella Braithwaite worked for a branch of the NSS as a filing clerk in "a job that I really liked."⁸⁵ In rural areas, black women were often placed on assembly line-type operations peeling vegetables, which were then dehydrated

⁸¹ Brand, *No Burden to Carry*, p. 243.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁸³ The evidence here tends to be anecdotal. In her account of her wartime experience, Fern Shadd Shreve stated that she and many blacks employed by the Chatco Steel factory in Chatham, Ontario, were "doing the dirtier work, but I can't prove that." See *Ibid.*, p. 277.

⁸⁴ According to the inscription, the photo was considered part of the "War Workers With Interesting pre-War Jobs" collection, as Butler had been a singer and dancer in night clubs before the war. See LAC, R1196-11-1-E, Box# 200903458, Item# WRM 4036, Accession 1971-271 NPC.

⁸⁵ Brand, *No Burden to Carry*, pp. 226-227.

and sent overseas for the troops. In many instances, while working on the vegetable packing lines, pitching hay or harvesting, blacks and whites worked side by side. This was not always easy because, as June Robbins recalled: “we could work for ‘em, but they didn’t want you up home on level with ‘em. A lot of ‘em felt they were so much smarter than coloured women.”⁸⁶

The discrimination that black men and women faced in certain jobs was experienced in other aspects on the homefront as well. In Canada’s fight against tyranny, the government asked the entire population to help fund the war effort by buying Victory Bonds. Hundreds of advertisements were published to encourage the public to contribute. One of the few advertisements to feature a “coloured” person did little to portray blacks in a positive light, however. The poster, entitled “*That’s Why I Buy Victory Bonds!*” depicted a black railway porter jerking his thumb toward a handsome white soldier, just off a troop train, kissing his girl. Intended to show that Canada’s races were united behind the war effort, the poster presented a stereotyped caricature of a grinning black porter with huge red lips. Daniel Braithwaite remembered the poster being displayed at his military base in Longueuil, Quebec: “I was so disgusted, I just went up, took it off and folded it up. I kept this to show what the prevailing attitudes were toward ... [people of] African descent or African heritage.”⁸⁷

The public was also asked to volunteer and to donate blood. On June 1, 1942 an editorial in the *Toronto Daily Star* discussed the federal government’s plan to expand its aid to the Canadian Red Cross in order to promote and increase the number of blood donations. However, black donors were not accepted at any of the Toronto clinics.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁸⁷ *The Toronto Star*, June 6, 1997, p. A21.

Although the newspaper article did not explain why this decision was made, it did point out that in February 1941, the American Red Cross began to accept donations from black donors. Despite contemporary scientific research that showed there was “no physiological difference between Negro and white blood plasma,” blood from blacks was stored separately and used only on black casualties.⁸⁸

There were also some cases of racially motivated violence. In 1940, the Canadian Press reported an incident in Calgary involving 300 soldiers who raided the home of Lou Darby, a local orchestra conductor. Darby, a 29-year-old black man, had his fence knocked down, windows smashed and home vandalized. The soldiers allegedly sought revenge for an event a few nights earlier when a white soldier was attacked by a black man. Before raiding Darby’s house, the soldiers, with the intention of wrecking some “nigger joints,” had attempted to vandalize a black-owned restaurant in the east end of the city. The police intervened before any damage was done, so the crowd of soldiers then moved on to “Chinatown” where Darby’s home was located. Darby was likely attacked because of a ‘scandalous’ marriage in his family, as Private Thomas Liesk, a white soldier, had married Darby’s sister a month earlier, and was visiting with Darby at the time.⁸⁹ After breaking into the house, the soldiers roughed up Liesk and Darby, though neither was seriously hurt. Both the military and municipal police intervened. In the end, Darby was taken to the police station, Private Liesk was sent to the hospital for

⁸⁸ CWM, *Toronto Daily Star*, June 1, 1942. The American Red Cross, which continued to segregate its blood donations until the end of the war, encouraged black citizens to donate money instead of blood.

⁸⁹ CWM, *Hamilton Spectator*, April 11, 1940.

precautionary reasons, and a hundred soldiers were returned to the Currie barracks, where one member of the Edmonton regiment was placed in detention.⁹⁰

In Toronto, a black soldier on leave for his wedding was refused accommodation by a number of local hotels. Despite the fact that the unnamed soldier and his bride were told over the phone that there were rooms available, upon their arrival they were informed that, as per hotel policy, they did not need to accept “persons of the negro race.” In response, the soldier wrote to the Department of National Defence and declared: “My morale has been broken. This has caused me to ask myself and you, what has a Negro, under such a system to fight for? Surely not a system which discriminates against, and belittles the Negro Race.” As Judge Advocate General, Brigadier Reginald John Orde noted, “[T]he soldier...considers [the incident] an insult to the uniform which he is wearing and to his race.”⁹¹

The press also reported on German prisoners of war trying to force black members of the Veterans Guard to be dismissed from their duties at Canadian prisoner of war (POW) camps. The first reported incident occurred in a camp near Kingston in 1942, where complaints actually resulted in black guards being removed. The district officer in charge of prisoners of war, Major V. W. Fairweather, argued that the incident was allowed to occur because “camp commandants in Canada were ordered to avoid any possible friction here to protect the interests of Canadian men in Germany.” However, the black soldiers received support from their fellow citizens. Members of the Hamilton Trades and Labour Council, for instance, passed a resolution protesting the decision and

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, April 8, 1940.

⁹¹ Public Archives of Ontario (PAO), RG 4-32, File 1942/1121, Brig. R.J. Orde to W.B. Common, October, 26, 1942.

sent letters to Defence Minister J. L. Ralston and Justice Minister Louis St. Laurent. One member of the trades council reminded the government that “after all we’re fighting Nazism.”⁹²

Despite living in the country at war, it proved difficult for blacks to fully participate in the war effort. The NSS, the national agency for the organization of civilian labour, deliberately limited black employment. Despite some positions being opened to black males in the forestry and automotive industries, the majority of men were still restricted to working as railway porters. However, one positive outcome was that increased rail traffic during the war meant there was a greater demand for porters, which ultimately culminated in the formation of a union to try and improve black working conditions. The war enabled more blacks to become nannies – as more white women moved into war industries – and did open some opportunities in factories, though disproportionately in less favoured positions. It was also the case that blood from black donors was segregated and black soldiers stationed on the homefront faced abuse from their fellow citizens. Even Nazis imprisoned in Canadian POW camps sometimes dictated how black veterans serving as guards were treated. The limited progress experienced had more to do with the exceptional wartime situation – namely the massive demand for labour – than any real change in white social mores. As one black resident from Essex County summed up in a letter to his local MP in 1943: “Our people are

⁹² CWM, *The Globe and Mail*, May 2, 1942. Also, in 1943, a number of German POWs at two camps in the Montreal area “objected to being guarded by a man whose race was not white.” See CWM, *Hamilton Spectator*, October 18, 1944.

discriminated against in the hotels and eating places throughout the country ... the country whose all out war effort we are mostly heartily supporting.”⁹³

⁹³ PAO, F 2076, Box 48, File 9-0-5, Alvin McCurdy to Stuart Murray Clark, April 24, 1943.

Chapter 3

“The difficulties of racial differences”: Black Recruits and Restrictive Military Policies

At the outbreak of war in 1939, the country only had 4,000 men serving in the Permanent Active Militia, and 46,000 in the Non-Permanent Active Militia. By the end of the war, however, more than 600,000 men and 25,000 women had volunteered to serve in the Canadian Army. Another 100,000 were conscripted after 1944 under the National Resources Mobilization Act. A further 250,000 men and women served in the Royal Canadian Air Force and 106,000 men served with the Royal Canadian Navy.⁹⁴ All told, more than 1,000,000 Canadians, almost 10 percent of the total population, served in Canada's armed forces. Out of those one million servicemen and women, more than 42,000 died in all theatres of war.

Based on the Census of 1941, 22,174 blacks or roughly 0.2 percent of the total Canadian population lived in the country and 11,517 were male. Furthermore, based on the breakdown of the “Negro” population by age, it can be calculated that there were 4,691 black males between the ages of 15-44.⁹⁵ Unlike during the NRMA registration process, race was not a required criterion on enlistment forms and as there were no segregated battalions, there were no official statistics on how many blacks served in the Canadian Forces in the Second World War.⁹⁶ As the official Census records overestimate

⁹⁴ Charles Perry Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments; the War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945* (Ottawa, 1970), pp. 61-62.

⁹⁵ Canada, *Eighth Census of Canada, Ethnic Origin and Nativity of the Canadian People* (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1944).

⁹⁶ It appears that some recruiting stations, such as the one for the RCAF in Montreal, did have racial origin listed on their application form. See, LAC, RG 24, vol. 3302, No. H.Q. 280-1-2 v.2; Ruck, *Black Battalion*, p. 73.

the number of English and underestimate the number of blacks, the figure of 4,691 provides a minimum for the level of available black volunteers.

As in the First World War, the willingness of black Canadians to enlist and serve reflected a combination of patriotism, the search for adventure, as well as economic motivations. When Canada entered the war, it was still in the grip of a decade-long depression. For some, the military offered a more attractive job prospect. "If you didn't go into the army, you'd work on the railroad," commented one man.⁹⁷ Many were following in the footsteps of parents or other relatives who had served in the First World War. Some men, like Private John Smith from Newport Station, Nova Scotia, enlisted for a second time, having initially joined as a sixteen-year-old with the No.2 CB. Back then, he joined to be with his buddies from the gypsum quarry in Windsor. During the Second World War, he spent three years as a member of the Veteran's Guard, being stationed in Medicine Hat, Alberta, at a POW camp. Looking back on his years in the military, Smith had no regrets, saying that "My service in both wars was a real learning experience."⁹⁸ There was also the desire to fight against an openly racist regime that claimed non-Aryans were inferior. Moreover, as in the First World War, many blacks saw service in the military and overall support for the war effort as a means of obtaining greater equality in Canadian society.

Official regulations approved by Parliament did not prohibit the recruitment of any volunteer based on race or colour. However, across the country, blacks were refused entry into military service, most particularly in the navy and the air force. The navy, which considered itself an 'elite' service, believed that 'coloured' people did not possess

⁹⁷ Brand, *No Burden to Carry*, p. 206.

⁹⁸ Ruck, *Black Battalion*, p. 58.

the same capabilities as whites. The air force considered itself too technical for blacks and feared racial antagonism within the service. In her history of blacks in Montreal, Dorothy W. Williams claimed that “the Canadian Armed Forces, particularly in Montreal, still suffered from negrophobia.”⁹⁹ Military officials and the government largely ignored the discrimination. The irony, of course, was that the federal government claimed the war was being fought against totalitarianism and oppression and for the principles embodied in the *Atlantic Charter*. Moreover, in a speech made by Social Credit MP Victor Quelch in the House of Commons in July 1944, it was proclaimed: “we are not fighting to-day merely to defeat Germany and Japan; we are fighting in defence of definite principles. We are fighting for a peace based on justice, and justice must be granted to minorities as well as majorities.”¹⁰⁰ The same themes appeared in advertisements for Victory Bonds: “These boys – YOUR BOYS – on the world’s far flung fighting lines – have risen above the spectre of religious or racial discrimination. TAKE HEED, lest you weaken their faith in the principles for which they are fighting.”¹⁰¹ Unfortunately such messages diverged considerably with realities in Canada, especially for visible minorities like blacks.

Gordon B. Isnor, a Liberal Member of Parliament for Halifax, brought the issue of black recruitment to the attention of Parliament in July 1940. He questioned whether the Minister of National Defence and his staff assumed that all blacks were “illiterate,

⁹⁹ Williams, *Road to Now*, p. 84.

¹⁰⁰ Canada. Parliament. House of Commons. *Debates*, 19th Parliament, 5th Session, July 17, 1944, p. 4935; James W. St. G. Walker, *Rights and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada: Historical Case Studies* (Waterloo and Toronto, 1997), p. 20.

¹⁰¹ *Vancouver Sun*, May 3, 1944, emphasis is based on original. Quoted in R. Scott Sheffield, *The Red Man’s on the Warpath: The Image of the “Indian” and the Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), p. 99.

flat-footed and barbarian people who cannot be disciplined, who will run at the first sound of a rifle or the first sight of the enemy's bayonet." Furthermore, he wondered whether it was "because gentlemen in positions of high authority in the Department of National Defence have not come in contact with them, and do not appreciate that they are just as anxious to serve as their white brethren?" He implored Parliament to reject such false impressions of blacks and to give "serious thought" to recruiting them into service battalions and recognize that hundreds of capable men were being turned away.

Ironically, there was some lingering racism in Isnor's comments. While his comments in Parliament potentially echoed the presumption that blacks should not serve in combat roles and were better employed in service battalions, Isnor was realistic in hoping to achieve a initial level of participation rather than aiming for full equality immediately. In response to Isnor, and to set the record straight on whether blacks could enlist, Minister of National Defence (Air), Charles Power denied that a discriminatory policy was being employed and that there was "no legal bar" preventing blacks from serving in the military. Furthermore, he argued that, despite the fact that the air force regulations stated that only people of "Pure and European descent" were acceptable, this regulation was not actually enforced because he remembered that one particular black applicant was permitted to enlist. Finally, he claimed that "there are coloured people in all branches of the service."¹⁰²

On the surface the only obstacle to enlistment was the successful completion of trade tests and satisfactory results on a medical examination.¹⁰³ In reality, both the Royal

¹⁰² Canada. Parliament. House of Commons. *Debates*, 19th Parliament, 1st Session, July 31, 1940, pp. 2208-2209.

¹⁰³ LAC, RG 24-E-1-C, Box 298, File 304-117, Letter 6496, A.T. Cowley to CO at Vancouver Recruiting Centre, May 1, 1940.

Canadian Navy and Royal Canadian Air Force had established colour lines in their enlistment policy. Only those who were of white European descent were allowed to enlist. The air force employed this regulation until 1942 and the navy until 1943.¹⁰⁴ Yet, it was not announced to the public as an official policy. However, within the military, it was used on a number of cases. Still, there were instances where black Canadians were accepted into the forces because recruiting officers saw no difference in their abilities compared to whites. Enough blacks were accepted so that both Members of Parliament and military authorities could 'prove' that there was not a colour bar. But in fact, hundreds of black men were turned away at recruiting stations.

According to official air force recruitment policy in the early years of the war, volunteers had to be "British subjects and of Pure European Descent." Furthermore, both of the candidate's parents had to be British subjects or naturalized British subjects.¹⁰⁵ Black Canadians, regardless of how long they had lived in Canada or of how recently they had emigrated from the British West Indies, were not viewed as being "of Pure European Descent." One example of how the policy was utilized occurred in November 1939. The Officer in Charge (OIC) at the RCAF's recruiting centre in Hamilton, O.S. Dunn, sent a letter to the Chief of the Air Staff regarding the recruitment of a "coloured" volunteer to work as a steward. The unnamed 6' 1" and 185lbs black volunteer who had worked as a steward on ships, as well as a porter on the railway, was "an exceptionally clean cut and honest appearing young man, 29 years old, with excellent references."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ LAC, RG 24, vol. 3302, file # 280-1-2 v.2. Scully to Edwards, September 27 1942; Bridglal Pachai and Henry Bishop, *Images of Our Past: Historic Black Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 2006), p. 92.

¹⁰⁵ Directorate of History and Heritage (DHist), 75/347, 25-04-1939.

¹⁰⁶ LAC, RG 24, vol. 3307, No. H.Q. 282-1-2 v.2. O.S. Dunn to Secretary of DND, November 11, 1939.

Dunn felt that based on his qualifications, an opening should be made for him. However, Dunn's superiors felt that it was best that "the 'colour-line' be drawn in the applicant's own interest."¹⁰⁷ In other words, to avoid any possible racial animosity, the RCAF felt that blacks should not be accepted. The official reply to Dunn's correspondence, written by Flying Officer J.H. Hollies on behalf of the Chief of the Air Staff, reiterated the stipulation that applicants must be of pure European descent.¹⁰⁸ Despite the unambiguous, exclusive wording in the policy, an exception was made for "North American Indians."¹⁰⁹

While applying a discriminatory recruiting policy in the early stages of the war, the air force portrayed a false sense of equality. In order to have the public appearance of being open, it did not refuse to examine any application. On August 6, 1940, an Air Force Manning Order was released which stressed to all the Commanding Officers (COs) and staff at Recruiting Centres not to let Canadian-born applicants "feel" discriminated against "because of their racial descent." Furthermore, it emphasized that any Canadian-born applicant had the privilege of submitting an application.¹¹⁰ If an applicant had ever inquired about why they were refused, recruiters were ordered not to say it was because of race but to claim that they lacked "the qualifications required for this category."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ LAC, RG 24, vol. 3307, No. H.Q. 282-1-2 v.2. Hollies to OIC at Montreal Recruiting Centre, November 18, 1939.

¹⁰⁹ As R. Scott Sheffield argued in his analysis of the Canadian Aboriginal experience in the military that no precise explanation was offered for this exception, though it likely related in part to the 'warrior' image of the "North American Indian." Sheffield, *Red Man's on the Warpath*, pp. 45-46.

¹¹⁰ The Manning Order was in response to Canadian-born applicants of Slavic and Ukrainian origin who wanted to enlist in the air force. LAC, RG 24, vol. 3302, file # 280-1-2 v.1. A.F.M.O. M.10/22.

¹¹¹ LAC, RG 24-E-1-C, Box 298, File 304-117, H.P. Crabb to all recruiting centres, October 7, 1941.

With the Manning Order, there was some confusion about whether non-white volunteers were wanted. In November 1940, A.A. Harcourt-Vernon, the Commanding Officer of RCAF Recruiting Centre in Halifax wrote to the Chief of the Air Staff, Wing Commander J. L. E. A. de Niverville, to clarify the details of the enlistment policy. de Niverville replied that being of pure European descent was still a criterion.¹¹²

The air force did its best to keep the colour bar policy outside of the public's notice. When the story of R. T. de la Rosa reached the desk of the Air Officer Commanding No.1 depot in Toronto, military officials did their best to quell any controversy. In the summer of 1941, R. T. de la Rosa was accepted into the Galt Aircraft School. However, once it was discovered that he was black, his superiors tried to dissuade him from joining and ordered him to report back to the Department of Labour. De la Rosa's father interjected and asked if a colour line existed. Fearing that the "father [was] determined to make an issue of this matter" and thus to avoid harmful publicity, it was ruled that de la Rosa be accepted as an Aero Engine Mechanic.¹¹³

Blacks were all but formally barred from becoming pilots and officers. Since October 1941, the RCAF had orders in place to ensure that the majority of blacks were accepted only as groundcrew. Wing Commander H. P. Crabb stipulated to all the recruiting centres that while blacks and Asians of "sufficiently high standard" should not be barred from groundcrew duties, they were not to be accepted for aircrew "because of

¹¹² LAC, RG 24, vol. 3309, file 282-1-2, vol.5. A.A. Harcourt-Vernon to J.L.E.A. de Niverville, November 15, 1940. Harcourt-Vernon wondered if the policy was still in place because, based on his personal observations, it was evident that there were airmen serving who were not "pure." Eight months later, Harcourt-Vernon inquired again if the policy on coloured troops had changed and was told that it had not. LAC, RG 24-E-1-C, Box 298, File 304-117. A.A. Harcourt-Vernon to de Niverville, June 6, 1941.

¹¹³ LAC, RG 24-E-1-C, Box 298, File 304-117. O.S. Dunn (CO at Toronto Rec. Centre) to AOC No.1 Toronto), August 4, 1941.

the difficulties of racial differences.” Furthermore, recruiting officers were not given the same authority to accept black applicants as flying officers as they had for whites. Instead, all the black applications had to be forwarded to Head Quarters.¹¹⁴ When members of the public questioned exclusionary recruitment practices, it was denied by the Department of National Defence. Reverend Dr. Charles H. Este, pastor of the Montreal-based Union Church, the only all-black United Church in Canada, was determined to find out whether there was a barrier to the enlistment of black recruits in certain categories of the air force. In an unsigned letter on behalf of Minister of Defence J. L. Ralston in 1941, it was maintained that, while no restrictions existed, every case had to be considered carefully to be sure that blacks could handle the inequality they would face. Furthermore, the RCAF was pondering “a certain latitude with regard to the enlistment of the coloured race which should prove mutually beneficial.” Although no details were provided, the letter acknowledged the patriotism and enthusiasm of Rev. Este’s “people” and maintained that “many opportunities will be given to them to serve in our united cause.”¹¹⁵

The restriction on black aircrew lasted until March 1942 as change was facilitated by a gathering recruitment crisis. In a letter to all recruiting officers, H. P. Crabb, Group Captain for the Chief of Air Staff, called for the removal of the restriction that prevented “Oriental and Negro” applicants from joining the aircrew or Special Reserve. Furthermore, applications from blacks were not to be sent to HQ any longer. Instead,

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*; LAC, RG 24, Acc.83.24/049, Vol 1624, File 304-113, Letter 45-12-1 (D. of M. 3) S.L. DeCarteret, Deputy Minister (Air Service) to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, December 12, 1941.

¹¹⁵ LAC, RG 24-E-1-C, Box 298, File 304-117, Unsigned letter to Rev. Charles H. Este, May 8, 1941

the application was to go before a selection board and the final authority lay with the CO at the particular recruiting office. While the restriction was removed, Crabb stipulated that recruiting officials should only pick black recruits with university degrees – a very small pool indeed – because they had more experience dealing with racism. To minimize public controversy, it was also stipulated that if the selection board or CO wanted to accept a volunteer, the official response should not cite race. The new policy also stated that female coloured applicants were not desired by the RCAF.¹¹⁶

Two weeks after Crabb sent a letter to all recruiting stations, he wrote an un-used press release claiming that no restrictions existed for blacks in any force in the Canadian military. Although RCAF officials did not believe it was necessary to publish the press release at the time because they did not want to create bad publicity or receive “a flood of undesirable applications,” they nevertheless revealed some of the major attitudes toward black volunteers.¹¹⁷ In it, it was argued that all applicants were treated the same and that only factors like health and educational qualifications determined acceptability. Until 1941, any applicant for pilot training required at least junior matriculation.¹¹⁸ While the rule applied to every candidate, regardless of colour, it must be noted that blacks would not have had the same opportunity to achieve such a level of education. Social issues, such as poverty and segregated schools in many regions throughout the country meant that the majority of blacks did not attend high school. It was only after 1941 that the rule was changed, so that an applicant who performed well on the aptitude and learning-

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, H. P. Crabb to Vancouver Recruiting Centre, March 31, 1942.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Copy of un-used press release, April 13, 1942.

¹¹⁸ Junior matriculation, which is grade 11 in modern terms, was required for all aircrew while high school entrance was required for groundcrew. Also, beginning in June 1941, 4 references were needed for every application. LAC, RG 24, vol. 3302, No. H.Q. 280-1-2 v.2.

capacity tests could be accepted into pilot training. Once in the program they could earn their high school equivalency.¹¹⁹ While a number of black applicants were rejected because they did not meet the educational requirements, there were also some who were turned away despite having the requisite skills and education. In June 1941, an applicant from Halifax who had just completed Grade 12 contacted defence officials in Ottawa to ask why he was rejected from serving in the air force. The reply stated that if he wanted to serve in the air force then he should enlist as a mess waiter or cook, or simply opt for the army.¹²⁰

Many in the military expressed their concern as to whether black servicemen could effectively co-exist with white servicemen. As in the First World War, it was often said that their presence would lead to racial division within the ranks, thus compromising “close comradeship [that] is essential to efficiency.”¹²¹ Indeed, as noted by William S. Carter in his study of Anglo-Canadian air force relations, many Canadians despised being referred to by the British as “colonials” because this placed them in the same grouping as the ‘coloured troops’ from other parts of the Commonwealth.¹²²

Still, at the end of September 1942, with manpower shortages mounting, the racial bar was officially removed from the RCAF’s recruiting policy.¹²³ Plans were discussed by the RCAF on how to address this change, namely how to keep track of the

¹¹⁹ R. Scott Sheffield. “‘Of Pure European Descent and of the White Race’: Recruitment Policy and Aboriginal Canadians, 1939-1945.” *Canadian Military History* 5.1 (Spring 1996), pp. 11-12.

¹²⁰ LAC, RG 24-E-1-C, Box 298, File 304-117, Harcourt Vernon to de Niverville, June 6, 1941.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, Copy of un-used press release, April 13, 1942.

¹²² William S. Carter, *Anglo-Canadian Wartime Relations, 1939-1945: RAF Bomber Command and no. 6 (Canadian) Group*. (New York, 1991), pp. 91, 103.

¹²³ LAC, RG 24, vol. 3302, file # 280-1-2 v.2, Scully to Edwards, September 27, 1942.

number of non-white applications and to determine the number of incidents of racism against black airmen. In order to earmark recruits who were not of pure European descent, Crabb suggested to his fellow officials that a coding system be developed to use on attestation papers. In his view, the coding system would allow records to be kept and eliminate the embarrassment of writing “Negro” on the application. However, the coding system was never put in place because, as Wing Commander T. K. McDougall argued, “the use of abbreviations and code letters has now become so involved ... that it is next to impossible to maintain a staff trained to record the procedure...” The alternative suggested was to adopt the American system of stating “white, black, yellow, etc.”¹²⁴ The Directorate of Public Relations for the RCAF wanted to be informed of any incidents of racism against “dark-skinned airmen.” The reason given was that plans were underway to start a press campaign to “prepare the public of Canada for the advent of larger numbers of dark-skinned trainees,” and to offset any negative stories about racism.¹²⁵ There were also cases of positive stories being ‘planted’ by the military via the Canadian Press news wire service. One centred on Lloyd Perry of Chatham, Ontario, who was scheduled to enter the air force on November 5, 1942. A law student and a track star, Perry was reported to be the “first Canadian negro scheduled for training as a pilot in the RCAF.”¹²⁶ Although Gerry Bell of Hamilton, Ontario, who joined the RCAF in 1933, could be considered the first black airmen in the country, the story nevertheless focused on the

¹²⁴ The proposed coding system was broken down into 6 categories (1. Negroes – U, 2. Chinese – L, 3. North American Indians – B, 4. Esquimax – N, 5. Hindu – E, 6. West Indians (coloured) – H). See LAC, RG 24-E-1-C, Box 298, File 304-117, memo from H.P. Crabb, August 11, 1942, T. K. McDougall and C.C.P. Graham to H. P. Crabb, August 24, 1942.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, S.L. Tilley, August 11, 1942.

¹²⁶ CWM, *Hamilton Spectator*, October 30, 1942.

opportunities available to black Canadians interested in joining the air force.¹²⁷ Another planted story concerned the Carty family. Albert Carty of Saint John, New Brunswick was a veteran of the First World War, having served in the No.2 CB. Although he was too old to serve again in 1939, his family was more than willing to represent him. By the end of the Second World War, all seven of Albert Carty's sons had joined the military. Five saw active service, all with the air force, one was in the Army Reserve, and another was an air cadet.¹²⁸

While there were indeed a number of positive and unique experiences for black volunteers in the air force during the war, it was evident that there were just as many, if not more, experiences that involved prejudice, especially with those who sought to become part of the air crew. Alan Bundy of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia first tried to enlist with the air force in Halifax in 1939. While his friend, who happened to be white, was accepted, Bundy was not and did not receive any explanation for it. His rejection on

¹²⁷ Gerry Bell was the first black Canadian to earn a pilot's licence when he completed his lessons at the Mount Hope Airport in Hamilton in 1929. Four years later, he enlisted with the RCAF and served in the military until 1961. During the Second World War, he trained bomber pilots in England. He passed away in 1989. See, *The Toronto Star*, January 8, 1986, p. A7, January 20, 1989, p. A16.

¹²⁸ *Evening Times Globe*, May 19, 1945, p. 9; *The Clarion*, April 15, 1947, volume 2, issue 7; *The Telegraph Journal*, March 13, 2008, p. D10. The first Carty to enlist was Adolphous who was accepted by the RCAF in September 10, 1939 to work as a mechanic. He was officially discharged in 1945 with the rank of Flight Sergeant, Master Aero Engine Mechanic. His brother William served as an Aeronautical inspector with the RCAF until his discharge in 1945. Clyde, who originally enlisted with the Coastal Artillery, was a fire fighter with the RCAF. Donald, who was an equipment assistant in the RCAF, enlisted in May 1942 and served until August 1946. Finally, Gerald enlisted in the RCAF in September of 1942. Unlike many members of his "race," he was able to eventually become a flying officer. At the age of 19, he was promoted to the rank of Flight Lieutenant and, correspondingly, was one of the youngest commissioned officers in the RCAF. He served almost one year overseas and flew in over 35 missions in Wellington and Lancaster bombers before being wounded in action. He was awarded the Defense Medal, the War Medal (Victory Medal) and the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp.

racial grounds was a bitter pill to swallow but he remained determined to join the air force. In fact, over the next two years he ignored the NRMA notices to join the army, a decision that prompted a visit from an RCMP officer to his home. Bundy's explanation for refusing to enlist in the army was that "I had gone to join the air force in 1939 and if the bullet that kills me is not good enough for the air force then it's not good enough for the army, either." Shortly after this incident Bundy went back to the Halifax recruiting station to try his luck with a new commanding officer. He was right to do so as he was accepted into the Commonwealth Air Training Program in 1942 and became the first black to be accepted for aircrew training.¹²⁹ While he quickly proved his worth and abilities during his operational training in Lachine, Quebec and Bournemouth, England, white navigators refused to fly with him. With the prospect that Bundy would fly only solo fighter missions, Edward "Lefty" Wright, a white sergeant from Midland, Ontario, agreed to fly with him. On their first mission together on October 15, 1944, they sank a German destroyer and two minesweepers off the coast of Norway. In the end, Bundy and Wright participated in forty-three missions as members of RCAF 404 Squadron based in the Scottish villages of Banff and Dallachy. At the time of his discharge in 1946, Bundy achieved the rank of flying officer.¹³⁰ Bundy's wartime experience was extraordinary, but also initially quite typical. Like hundreds of his fellow black countrymen, he was first turned away at the recruiting station because of his skin colour. Even after the RCAF recruiting policy changed in 1942, he still had to wait until a new commanding officer was hired to gain acceptance.

¹²⁹ *The Toronto Star*, January 20, 1989, p. A16.

¹³⁰ Pachai and Bishop. *Images of Our Past*, p. 92; Ruck, *Black Battalion*, pp. 72-73.

While groundcrew was viewed as the appropriate choice for blacks, the acceptance of blacks in such roles was by no means guaranteed. On two separate occasions, Alvin Duncan from Oakville, Ontario, was turned down. With a competent knowledge of radar and radio technology, as well as experience in the militia as a member of the Lorne Scot Army Rifle Regiment in Oakville, Duncan went to the RCAF recruiting station in Toronto in 1940 with confidence that he would be able to serve his country. After taking the aptitude test, the recruiting officers told him that he had failed. However, when he took the same aptitude test at a recruiting office in Hamilton the next day, Duncan gave the same answers. This time he was told that he had passed and was welcomed into the RCAF. Shortly after his acceptance, the medical officer in Hamilton informed Duncan that he could not serve because he had a health condition; his heart was on the wrong side. Suspicious of the diagnosis, Duncan, along with his commanding officer Grant Ryrie, went back to see the medical officer. After this meeting, he was reinstated into the RCAF because, as Duncan wryly recalled, “my heart was in the right spot, I guess.” Finally accepted as a member of the air force, he went on to serve throughout the war as a radar mechanic in Scotland and Northern Ireland.¹³¹

While 5,000 Canadians served in the same capacity as Duncan, only two were black. The other was Sam Estwick from Sydney, Nova Scotia. Estwick, who was born in Barbados, tried to enlist with the RCAF in Halifax in 1940. However, the recruiting officer blatantly informed him that he could not “trust a man of colour.” Despite his experience working as a radio technician and electrical engineer, Estwick was told that he could not become a pilot.¹³² In February 1941, he received an official response from the

¹³¹ *The Toronto Star*, June 6, 1997, p. A21.

¹³² *The Globe and Mail*, May 2, 2008, p. S9.

RCAF that claimed that “there does not appear to be any trade or category for which you would be suited.” In response to the air force’s initial refusal, he wrote his local MP, Clarence Gillis, who represented Cape Breton for the CCF, and who was widely known as a champion for the underdog.¹³³ Gillis informed Minister of National Defence (Air) Charles Power of Estwick’s experience. As he had said in the House of Commons a year earlier, Power replied that there were “no regulations existing at the present time which will debar any coloured person from service in the RCAF.”¹³⁴ Months after the first refusal, the RCAF said it would accept him, but only as a waiter or general dutyman. Estwick was determined not to be pushed aside. The air force finally recognized something of his potential in December 1941 when he was offered a place in the RCAF’s radar school. He excelled in the course and applied his trade in India, Libya, Egypt, and Britain. Indeed, he was offered the opportunity to apply for an air crew position but turned it down because he became enthralled with radar work.¹³⁵

Alvin Duncan and Sam Estwick endured intolerance and frustration in order to prove their worth to the air force and their country. Some black airmen found success in public life after the war, such as Lincoln Alexander, who, in 1968, for the Progressive Conservatives, became the first black MP elected to Canada’s House of Commons. He had a distinguished political career serving as the Minister of Labour in Prime Minister Joe Clark’s government in 1979 and then as Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario from 1985

¹³³ Clarence Gillis, who represented Cape Breton South from 1940-1957, was a trade unionist and veteran of the First World War. He was the first member of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation east of Manitoba to be elected to the House of Commons.

¹³⁴ The letter from Power to Gillis was written in May 1941. *The Globe and Mail*, May 2, 2008, p. S9.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* After the war, he continued to serve in the RCAF’s telecommunications branch and was commissioned as an officer in 1955, and retired as flight lieutenant in 1963.

to 1991.¹³⁶ Others, like Winston Spenser Ruck from Sydney, Nova Scotia, who worked in the Sydney Steel Plant and served in the RCAF during the war, went on to hold high profile positions in industry and also became a leader in community service.¹³⁷

The changes in policy and the recruitment of non-whites into the air force both prior to and after September 1942 created a great deal of ambiguity within the RCAF. Initially, the colour-line employed by the RCAF and the racist beliefs of some recruiting officers prevented willing and capable black Canadians from enlisting. Even after the colour-line was removed, there were still restrictions for the remainder of the war, because the stereotype persisted that blacks were not capable of flying aircraft and should be limited to groundcrew duty. Although a number of blacks had distinguished careers in the RCAF, they were rare and determined individuals.

The air force was not the only branch of the Canadian Forces that had a policy of rejecting non-white applicants. In fact, the colour bar stood a year longer with the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN). Like the RCAF, the RCN recruitment guidelines stipulated that candidates had to be of "Pure European Descent and of the White Race."¹³⁸ The navy argued that it maintained this policy because whites would not want to live and work in close quarters with another race. Furthermore, for security issues, blacks and other minorities could not be trusted to keep mission details secret from the enemy. It was believed that non-whites did not possess the mental capacity to withhold information

¹³⁶ Donna Hill, ed, *A Black Man's Toronto 1914-1980: The Reminiscences of Harry Gairey* (Toronto, 1981), pp. 35.

¹³⁷ Winston Ruck was elected union president at Sydney Steel Plant in 1970 and was involved in numerous organizations such as the Black Cultural Centre. In 1986, he was awarded a lifetime membership in his local branch of the Royal Canadian Legion. Pachai and Bishop. *Images of Our Past*, p. 121.

¹³⁸ DHist, 112.3H1.009/D293, Maclachlan to Camsell, 18 March 1941.

pertaining to missions and locations, and could not be trusted with some basic amenities such as rum rations – a naval tradition. In the RCN's view, the only position appropriate for visible minorities was as stewards, and then only on larger ships so there would be room to segregate them.¹³⁹ The navy officially upheld these prejudicial policies for more than half the war. The RCN saw itself as an elite service and therefore should only be open to white males.¹⁴⁰

Many blacks were affected by the RCN's exclusionary policies. On one occasion, the navy turned away a group of fifteen experienced black seamen, saying that they would only be accepted if they were a large enough group to form an entirely separate crew. Lee Carvey, who was with this group, recalled that after they had all passed the medical examination, they received letters in the mail a few days later stating that "if enough Blacks come forward to man a ship, we would be accepted into the Navy."¹⁴¹ In other words, the only vessel that a black could serve on was a vessel with an all black crew.

Arguably, the RCN was able to maintain its discriminatory recruiting policy because it was the smallest of the three major services. With a lower casualty rate compared to the air force and the army, the navy could afford to be more selective. At its peak strength in January 1945, the RCN had 92,441 people in service. This number was much lower than the RCAF, which had a peak of about 250,000 and the army, which reached 600,000. Furthermore, by war's end, the navy had suffered 2,024 fatal casualties

¹³⁹ Sheffield. "Of Pure European Descent and of the White Race," p. 10.

¹⁴⁰ The navy was also the last branch of the forces to accept women. The Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service was established on July 31, 1942, a year after the formation of female divisions in the army and air force.

¹⁴¹ Ruck, *Black Battalion*, p. 72.

compared to 17,101 for the air force and 22,917 for the army.¹⁴² In the end, only half-a-dozen black recruits were accepted into the navy during the war.

Also illustrative of the navy's restrictive recruitment policy was the case of Piercey Haynes, the first black sailor accepted into the RCN. Haynes, who was originally from British Guiana, was raised in Winnipeg and volunteered for the navy in 1942. He was turned down by the local recruiting officer and told to join the army instead. According to Calvin Ruck, as he left the recruiting office, Haynes replied that "if he was not good enough for the navy, he was not good enough for the army."¹⁴³ Haynes protested about the treatment he received and sent a letter to Hon. Angus L. Macdonald, Minister of National Defence for Naval Services. Macdonald replied that the RCN's restrictive recruitment policy was in the best interests of visible minorities, as, in such close quarters, their acceptance could bring dangerous racial strife. Haynes continued pleading his case to the Minister to such a degree that Macdonald had the Naval Council address the matter. On February 26, 1943, the Minister presented a report to the Privy Council which called for the Canadian Naval Services to accept recruits of non-white origin. Two weeks later, Macdonald's recommendation that the colour line be removed was approved by Order in Council 1986. The resolution stipulated that "any male British subject of any racial origin may be entered for the period of hostilities in the Canadian

¹⁴² J. L. Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* (Toronto, 2002), pp. 178, 311-312; Stacey, *Arms, Men and Government*, p. 66; Sheffield, "Of Pure European Descent and of the White Race," p. 10.

¹⁴³ Canada. Parliament. Senate. *Debates*, 36th Parliament, 1st Session, vol. 137, issue 118, March 10, 1999.

Naval Forces.”¹⁴⁴ Shortly after the resolution, Macdonald wrote Haynes and instructed him to return to the Winnipeg recruitment office and enlist. At the office, Haynes encountered the same captain he had met with months earlier. Despite the fact that he had a letter from Macdonald, the captain refused to deal with Haynes. The recruiting officer was charged with insubordination and removed from his post. With this change Haynes was finally accepted into the RCN.¹⁴⁵ He served for the remainder of the war but never went to sea. Instead, he was stationed in Halifax where he eventually went on to become a popular jazz musician.

Compared to the air force and the navy, the Canadian Army was more accepting of visible minorities. Simply put, the army needed more men in the field because of its high casualty rate. Thus, there was no official colour line in the army’s recruitment policy.¹⁴⁶ For many black men, their only choice seemed to be joining the army or working as a railway porter. Instead of confronting an official colour-line, the black Canadian experience in the army tended to depend on the personality of the recruiting

¹⁴⁴ LAC, RG 2, A1a, PC 1986, Vol 1795, Order and Council 1986 re: Canadian Naval Service accept personnel of any racial origin, March 12, 1943. In the press, Macdonald said that the pressure to abolish “the racial-discriminatory rule came from negro groups.” See *Victoria Daily Times*, March 20, 1943.

¹⁴⁵ *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*, December 11, 1997; Canada. Parliament. Senate. *Debates*, 36th Parliament, 1st Session, vol. 137, issue 118, March 10, 1999.

¹⁴⁶ The only colour line policy that was employed by the Canadian Army during the war was in 1945. After the defeat of Hitler in Europe, 80,000 Canadian were expected to be part of an eventual invasion of Japan. Volunteers were accepted for the 6th Division of the US commanded Pacific Force. With six recruitment centres across the country, Canada was expected to contribute, along with an infantry division, roughly sixty ships, eight bombers and three transport squadrons. However, since everything was to be under US command, blacks were not allowed to join the 6th Division. As retired Colonel and author John Boileau stated: “in order to conform to the segregated nature of the U.S. forces, it was found necessary to impose a colour bar against Negroes so as not to embarrass the United States authorities and/or the soldiers concerned.” For more see *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*, August 14, 2005, special insert.

officer. Thus, while blacks typically met with less discrimination when they went to join the army, there were, nevertheless, local confrontations throughout the country as many blacks were barred from volunteering to fight.

One case involved Austin C. Clarke, who went on to become a well-known author and civil rights leader. Originally from Barbados, he applied for the army through the officer's training plan that was available through universities. While he passed his initial tests and medical examination his application was turned down. He was told that only British subjects were eligible to enlist in the training program. As he recalled, "without putting it in so many words, they left no doubt in my mind that to them 'British subject' meant 'white British subject.'"¹⁴⁷ However, since race was not technically a legitimate reason for refusing an application, the official explanation Clarke received was that he was "rude and hard to get along with."¹⁴⁸

Not unlike the First World War, blacks were also often told not to volunteer because this was a "white man's war." Irving Malcolm Berry was prepared to experience this when he went to enlist at a Halifax recruiting station in 1939. He confronted the issue directly and said that if it was not a "black man's war" than he wanted the papers signed to prove that he was not eligible. Although it was his "first induction into a society that said, 'Hey you're black, we don't need you,'" Berry was accepted into the army and joined the 86th Bridging Company, Royal Canadian Army Service Corps. While he faced racial prejudice at the recruiting station, he was welcomed and accepted by his fellow

¹⁴⁷ Austin C. Clarke, "A black man talks about race prejudice in white Canada." in Richard Laskin, ed. *Social Problems: A Canadian Profile*, (Toronto, 1965), p. 150.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

soldiers during his time overseas in France and the Netherlands. As he recalled, “they didn’t care whether I was green, black, blue, they just become comrades and friends.”¹⁴⁹

Some blacks did not face racial prejudice when they enlisted, but during their service. Stanley Grizzle, later a well-known citizenship judge and activist, characterized his wartime experiences as being full of menial duties. Grizzle joined the army in 1942 and served until 1946. After training with the Medical Corps in Newmarket, Ontario, along with Sergeant Major Sheppard, a black officer, he was sent overseas in early 1943. While in England, he was convinced that his officers loaded all the tedious jobs on him because of his skin colour. He claimed that “they apparently associated African Canadians solely with servants so I was approached to be their batman. I found out that it wasn’t part of my regimental duty to do that and so I refused.”¹⁵⁰ Grizzle complained to his superiors and was placed on permanent latrine duty. After five weeks, he responded by staging a three-day non-violent strike. As well, he protested to his commanding officer that he be discharged from the army since “the principles for which the Canadian Army claimed to be fighting did not apply to me or my people.”¹⁵¹ Colonel Charlie Gossage did not grant his request. Instead, he assigned Grizzle to a permanent post working in the quartermaster’s stores. According to Grizzle, after a month as a Private, he was soon “given two stripes” and promoted to the rank of Corporal. The rest of his military career, which included service in France, the Netherlands and Germany, went off without any

¹⁴⁹ “Irving Malcolm Berry” *Heroes Remember* <http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/remembers/sub.cfm?source=collections/hrp/hrp_detail&media_id=3764> (March 30, 2008)

¹⁵⁰ Grizzle, *My Name’s Not George*, pp. 55-56.

¹⁵¹ In later years, Grizzle claimed that he was reluctant to do military service because he felt that it was inconsistent that Canada was fighting a war for democracy, yet racial discrimination existed in the country. He was also a self-proclaimed pacifist. *Ibid.*, p. 54; Headley Tulloch, *Black Canadians: A Long Line of Fighters*. (Toronto, 1975), p. 131.

trouble. After his discharge in February 1946, he returned to Toronto and attended the University of Toronto. Demonstrating his evident determination and leadership, he eventually became the organizer for the Toronto division of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and eventually the first black person to run for the Ontario Legislature.¹⁵²

In many cases, blacks were thrust into a position they did not want. Daniel Braithwaite, of Sydney, Nova Scotia, was eager to serve as a mechanic in the air force. In 1942, he attempted to enlist at an air force recruiting centre in Toronto but was told, simply, "We're not accepting Negroes in the air force." After the rejection, Braithwaite vowed that when they came to conscript him into the army that he was not going to join. In 1943, when the army did come calling, he kept to his word. In response, two military police officers arrested him at his Toronto home and placed him in an army detention centre in Newmarket, Ontario. After he was in detention for a few weeks, the military officials informed Braithwaite that he would be able to join the air force but only if signed up with the army first and then asked to be transferred. In the end, despite their assurances that he could enlist in the RCAF, when he returned to his home in Toronto, he was told that he would not be permitted to transfer. Thus, he reluctantly served with the army in Debert, Nova Scotia and Longueuil, Quebec before he was discharged in 1944.¹⁵³

While some members of the black community were thrust into the army, for others the army was seen as the ideal way to serve their country and protect their homeland. Arthur Seymour Tyler, a native of Saint John, New Brunswick, served with the army in both World Wars. He enlisted as a member of the No.2 CB and later served with the 8th Winnipeg Rifles. With the Winnipegs (Little Black Devils), he saw action at

¹⁵² Grizzle, *My Name's Not George*, pp. 54-57; Tulloch, *Black Canadian*, pp. 131-132.

¹⁵³ *The Toronto Star*, June 6, 1997, p. A21.

both Vimy and Passchendale and was wounded at Camel Hill in 1917. Tyler was later awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.¹⁵⁴ After the war, he continued in the military as part of the militia. During the Second World War, he joined the Carleton and York Regiment of the 1st Canadian Division where he served as Band Sergeant. He had the honour of leading his regiment ashore when they landed in Greenock, Scotland in December 1939.¹⁵⁵ Tyler was also singled-out by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth during a review of the Carleton and Yorks at Aldershot in early 1940. Tyler continued to serve in England until he was wounded in an air raid in 1941. He was invalided back to Canada and did not see any further service.¹⁵⁶

Besides men, approximately 45,000 women enlisted through the Women's Division of the RCAF, the Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWAC) and the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service, and among them were a number of black women. One of the first was Corporal Marlene Clyke who served in the CWAC, the largest of the three formations with just over 21,000 recruits.¹⁵⁷ Unfortunately, little information is available about Corporal Clyke and the other black women who donned a uniform.¹⁵⁸ One of the only other sources on black female participation is from a Molly Lamb Bobak painting

¹⁵⁴ To view Tyler's First World War files see, RG 150, Acc. 1992-93/166, Box 9860-16, No. 931239.

¹⁵⁵ *Toronto Daily Star*, December 12, 1939.

¹⁵⁶ Tyler then worked as a porter to help "give returning personnel the fastest and most comfortable ride back home." See *Telegraph Journal*, July 7, 1945, p. 7; Ruck, *Black Battalion*, p. 59.

¹⁵⁷ The RCAF(WD) had 17,018 recruits while the Wrens had 6,781. Jeffrey Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers: Canada's Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), pp. 176-177.

¹⁵⁸ McLaughlin, *For My Country*, p. 39.

which strikingly captured a “Private Roy” working at a canteen.¹⁵⁹ Naturally, while some women were accepted for military service, there were also women who were turned away. Grace Fowler was rejected several times at an army recruiting station in Winnipeg. She persisted for over three months, thanks in part to the motivation from the leader of her Black Girl Guide troop. Eventually she was asked to complete a physical. However, by this point, Grace was disillusioned with the whole process, and told recruiters that “I’m not asking you for something, I’m offering it to you. And you’re giving me a hard time trying to give it to you.”¹⁶⁰ Instead of serving in the army, she moved to Toronto and worked in a munitions plant assembling high explosive shells.¹⁶¹

Besides Canadian-born blacks, close to 300 men and women from the West Indies served with the Canadian Armed Forces.¹⁶² One of the most prominent was Owen Rowe who left Barbados in 1942 at the age of 18 in the hope of serving with the Allies. He arrived in Montreal and proceeded to enlist with the army and completed his basic training at Huntington, Quebec. Rowe was then stationed in Kingston where he served as a wireless operator with the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals. After his training, Rowe and 500 others were scheduled to be shipped to England. However, according to

¹⁵⁹ In Bobak’s 1946 work, entitled “Private Roy,” the subject stands between a cluttered bar and some well-stocked shelves with her arms crossed and a stern look on her face. Bobak’s positive portrayal was not only significant in capturing the work of a servicewoman in the army but was also a rare portrait of a black female serving in the Canadian forces. See, Raina-Clair Gillis, “Artistic Impressions of War.” *Canadian Military Journal* 6.3 (Autumn 2005), p. 79.

¹⁶⁰ Brand, *No Burden to Carry*, p. 183.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 182-185.

¹⁶² There were also offers from countries to send troops over to join the Canadian military. In May 1940, I. Harris, the principal from the Government Technical School in Jamaica, offered to send a number of 15-18 year olds that were anxious to join the RCAF and help as British subjects. This request appeared to be referred by the RCAF to the British Air Liaison. See LAC, RG 24-E-1-C, Box 298, File 304-117.

Rowe, his name was mistakenly taken off the list. Months later in Nanaimo, British Columbia, he had one final chance to serve overseas, this time in the Pacific theatre, but as he recalled, his commanding officer told him that it would not be possible because “the Canadian troops in the Pacific are under the indirect command of the American forces and they don’t want blacks.”¹⁶³ Weeks after he found out that he would not be sent overseas with the army, Rowe transferred to the RCAF. Although he did not get the chance to serve overseas with the air force either, his work as a wireless operator did enable him to achieve the rank of Flying Officer. He remembered his time in the service fondly despite facing racial prejudice, and actually seemed to change some views. In one case, Rowe was confronted by a white serviceman and was told, “You don’t smell. You wear clean clothes. You don’t talk about women all the time. I can’t figure it out. You’re not at all what I expected.”¹⁶⁴

Still, evidence abounded that army officials still clung racial prejudices. Perhaps one of the most revealing incidents of the army’s response to black recruits was seen through the debate over the use of “coloured” chaplains. From the end of 1942 to December 1943 there was a far-reaching discussion between the Minister of Defence, military officials, local MPs and the principal Catholic and Protestant Chaplains regarding the use of black chaplains for black and white troops. The first expression of support came from a letter written by Arthur W. Roebuck, a Liberal MP for the Toronto

¹⁶³ Ruggles, *Outsider Blues*, p. 50; “Owen Rowe” *Dominion Institute Digital Archive* <<http://www.thememoryproject.com/digital-archive/profile.cfm?collectionid=61&cnf=wwII>> (March 12, 2008); Judith Pereira, “Owen Rowe” *The Memory Project* November 6, 2003. <<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/special/memoryproject/vetstor/rowe.html>> (March 12, 2008).

¹⁶⁴ Ruggles, *Outsider Blues*, pp. 50-51.

riding of Trinity, to the Minister of Defence J.L. Ralston in December 1942, recommending that the pastor of the African Community Church in Toronto, Rev. C. A. Stewart, be appointed as a chaplain for the “Negro soldiers.” Roebuck, who had served as the Minister of Labour and Attorney-General of Ontario under the Hepburn provincial government of the 1930s, was a strong union supporter and promoter of Jewish and minority rights. In Roebuck’s opinion, there were roughly 1,000 black troops in the army and that they deserved a spiritual leader from their own race because “there is sympathy and understanding among these people which can scarcely exist between themselves and members of another race.” Attached to Roebuck’s correspondence was a letter written by Rev. Stewart expressing his interest to serve as a “visiting chaplain” for black troops in which he wrote that “it will be of inestimable value to the Negro Soldiers morally and in the performance of their duties.”¹⁶⁵

The two principal chaplains for the Canadian Forces argued that the appointment of black chaplains was unnecessary. Protestant chaplain G. A. Wells claimed that based on his personal observation of the troops at home and abroad, the number of black servicemen was “very small indeed and would certainly not justify the appointment of a negro chaplain.” Furthermore, Wells’ counterpart, Bishop Charles Leo Nelligan, argued that Protestant “negroes” were already taken care of and if a black Roman Catholic chaplain were required it could not be done because there were no black priests in Canada. While Wells suggested that research be done to determine the number of blacks in the service and their respective denominations, it was evident that the principal

¹⁶⁵ Rev. Stewart also said he was acquainted with Ralston’s father when he was a Postmaster in Amherst, NS because Stewart was Pastor of the African Methodist Episcopal Church there. LAC, RG 24-C-1-a, Vol 2199, File part 1, File# HQS-54-27-68-56. Appointment of Negro Chaplains for Negroes in Canadian Army.

chaplains did not see the need to recruit a black chaplain.¹⁶⁶ The Department of National Defence agreed and replied, on behalf of Ralston that though “serious consideration was given ... the relatively small number of Negro troops in the Army” meant that the appointment could not be justified.¹⁶⁷

The attitude of Wells and government officials did not change months later when Gordon B. Isnor, the Liberal MP from Halifax who had addressed black recruitment in the House of Commons in 1940, wrote to advocate that Reverend William Pearly Oliver be named as a “Coloured Padre for Nova Scotia.” Rev. Oliver, a well-educated and hard-working community leader, was the pastor of Halifax’s Cornwallis Street Baptist Church.¹⁶⁸ In his private letter to G. A. Wells, Isnor acknowledged the removal of the discriminatory recruitment policies in the air force and navy. Still, he confided in Wells that, at a recent ceremony to celebrate the commission of a RCAF airman, many blacks felt that “a certain amount of discrimination” remained. In Isnor’s view, the enrollment of Rev. Oliver would help to address such complaints. However, Wells maintained that despite “how friendly we may be to the coloured folk...it would be very unwise to create a situation on order to please a very small group which would create dissatisfaction in a very large number.” Based on regulations, an army chaplain was appointed per 1000 troops. Since it was believed that there were not the many black soldiers in the Canadian Army, a chaplain could not be appointed to serve black troops. Furthermore, he reiterated

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, January 7, 1943.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, January 14, 1943.

¹⁶⁸ Rev. W.P. Oliver was very influential in Halifax from the 1930s and in the formation of the NSAACP in 1945. He received his Bachelor of Arts from Acadia University and his Divinity Degree in the mid-1930s.

the view that “it would be a great mistake” to have a coloured chaplain serving as a spiritual leader for white troops.¹⁶⁹

However, by the end of 1943, new developments occurred that set the path for a possible change. First, Brigadier M. H. Hepburn replaced G. A. Wells as the principal chaplain (Protestant). Secondly, Isnor adjusted his argument by suggesting that Oliver be appointed on a part-time basis in the Halifax region. Since Halifax was “the centre of the coloured population in Nova Scotia,” Oliver could meet with members of all 3 services and “be of a real help to the Merchant Navy.” Furthermore, the MP from Halifax stressed that the black chaplain would work solely with black troops.¹⁷⁰

The response to Isnor’s letter was swift. The Honourary Lieutenant-Colonel H. F. C. Cocks at Military District No. 6 in Halifax was contacted and told that the appointment of a part-time chaplain was ideal. Since there were very few coloured troops in any one unit, it avoided the difficulty of where to employ a black chaplain. The Canadian Chaplain Service also argued that the position gave the black population the “satisfaction of knowing that they were represented in the Service, and would also provide a ministry for coloured personnel which is no doubt needed.”¹⁷¹ As a result, Rev. W. P. Oliver was officially appointed as the Honorary Chaplain of the Combined Services and held the rank of Captain. According to a memorandum from March 1944, Olivier’s job description as a part-time padre for black troops in the Halifax area stipulated that he was to work 3 days a week serving the 70 black soldiers currently

¹⁶⁹ LAC, RG 24-C-1-a, Vol 2199, File part 1, File# HQS-54-27-68-56. Appointment of Negro Chaplains for Negroes in Canadian Army, September 21 to 24, 1943.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Isnor to Brig. Hepburn, December 1, 1943.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, E.H.S. Ivison on behalf of Brig. Hepburn to H/Lt.-Col. H. F. C. Cocks, December 7, 1943.

stationed in the city (plus 3 from the other services). However, he worked much more than that, as 5 percent of all the merchant navy personnel in Halifax were black and he lobbied to have proper recreational facilities established for the troops.¹⁷²

While Oliver's services in the Halifax area were beneficial to the servicemen posted there and for all blacks stationed in the region, it is important to note the circumstances under which he was permitted to work. The notion of employing a non-white chaplain was only accepted after it was determined that he be made responsible for all black troops in the area and that he would not serve white troops. As the only official chaplain for black servicemen in the Canadian Military, there was only so much he could do to serve his fellow countrymen posted throughout Canada or overseas. The extent to which blacks were victims of racial discrimination depended on their time of enlistment and what branch of the forces they joined. The colour lines employed by the RCAF and RCN represented the most obvious indicator of discrimination. Ultimately, it was apparent that black Canadian servicemen continued to experience much of the same racial prejudice as they had during the First World War. While some strides forward were made as the war went on, they occurred slowly and were not extensive. Nevertheless, the war experience gave blacks greater expectations and hope for the future. They had played a role in the country's defense against totalitarian rule. A number were also active in the liberation efforts and attaining victory in Europe. Sergeant Lloyd Phillip Turner of Toronto, who served with the Queen's Own Rifles, and Gerald Parris of Springhill, Nova

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, Memorandum, March 14, 1944.

Scotia, landed on D-Day and served throughout the Normandy campaign.¹⁷³ Lloyd Husband, who served as a Signaller, Radio and Teletype operator with the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, was credited with having received the first message of Germany's surrender in May 1945.¹⁷⁴ Author and artist Clifton Ruggles remembered his father being proud of his service and the fact that he was greeted by thousands of whites as a hero during the liberation of the Netherlands in 1945. For many blacks, their service represented not only the first time that they had experienced a sense of equality but also a new found expectation for better things to come. As Ruggles wrote: "they came back with a sense of honour and dignity and the hope that their contribution would be acknowledged."¹⁷⁵ Looking back on his service during both wars, Arthur Seymour Tyler stressed that while blacks did not receive due recognition for their bravery and courage, they were ready for and equal to any task given to whites. As Calvin Ruck aptly concludes: "After all, the Black man, went over there, he trained like a soldier, he fought like a soldier and died like a soldier, and that is all any white man can do."¹⁷⁶

Although the Canadian military did not employ official segregationist policies against blacks during the war like the United States, the attitudes and discriminatory practices that did exist were not wholly different. Fear of racial animosity within the units was one of the significant forces behind each country's policy. While blacks recruits were

¹⁷³ For more on Sergeant Turner see the memorial plaque, complete with his medals, displayed at the Royal Canadian Legion, Swansea Branch, #46 in Toronto. Gerald Parris, who joined the army when he was 16 and served in the military for over 40 years, was one of the last black D-Day veterans when he passed away in 2001. See, *Maclean's*, September 10, 2001, p.13; Nova Scotia. Legislature. House of Assembly. *Debates and Proceedings*, 58th General Assembly, 2nd Session, November 8, 2001, pp. 6760-6761.

¹⁷⁴ Susan S. Christopher, "National Defence comes full circle" *The Maple Leaf* 10.8 (March 28, 2007), p. 15.

¹⁷⁵ Ruggles, *Outsider Blues*, pp. 6 and 51.

¹⁷⁶ Ruck, *Black Battalion*, pp. 59-60.

needed to strengthen the war effort, integration was seen as a dangerous experiment to undertake during war time. As American President Franklin Roosevelt stated in October 1940, changes to the segregationist policies “would produce situations destructive to morale and detrimental to the preparation for national defense.”¹⁷⁷ It was also generally perceived that blacks did not possess the intelligence nor skills to serve outside of the infantry. In the United States, the army air corps, navy, and marine corps were the most restrictive branches of the forces because of their specialized nature. The army air corps prevented black Americans from enlisting until 1941 when they instituted a segregated airfield in Tuskegee, Alabama. Furthermore, blacks were not accepted for general service into the marine corps and navy until 1942. Initially, even the army sanctioned rigid literacy and classification tests to “keep down the number of colored troops” while paradoxically actively recruiting illiterate whites. When blacks were accepted, they were placed in distinct combat units, training schools, and camp facilities and isolated from higher positions so that they never held powers to command or discipline whites.¹⁷⁸

On the surface, the War Department in the United States prohibited discrimination. The Selective Service and Training Act of 1940 decreed that all men between the ages of 18 and 36 were eligible to volunteer for the army and navy and that there was to be no discrimination based on race and colour during the selection. However, the War Department saw integration as a dangerous experiment to conduct during the war and held the authority to decide whether or which volunteers could be

¹⁷⁷ Neil A. Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War* (London, 1976), p. 23.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-24; Phillip McGuire, *Taps for a Jim Crow Army: Letters from Blacks Soldiers in World War II*. (Santa Barbara, 1983), p. xxx.

accepted.¹⁷⁹ Thus, like the Canadian policy, discrimination was discouraged by government and military officials, but many black Americans were rejected because of the assumed racial animosity that would occur with integration. Ultimately, some blacks were accepted because of the need to have troops on the ground.

Britain, meanwhile, also utilized a discriminatory recruitment policy. While government and military officials condemned all forms of discrimination against British subjects, including those from the colonies, it was feared that the widespread integration of blacks servicemen would create disruption within the units. Thus, at the outbreak of the war, the RAF only accepted recruits of “pure European descent” to maintain harmony within the forces. It was not until 1941 and the growing need for recruits, that the RAF began to accept black recruits from their colonies in the West Indies and Africa.¹⁸⁰ Yet, similar to the RCAF, blacks were barred from becoming officers or, for the most part, enlisting as airmen because of a presumed inherent possession of inferior mental and technical abilities. Nevertheless, thousands of blacks did serve as groundcrew throughout the war and a few hundred West Indians managed to serve as pilots. As author Roger Lambo argued, after the change in 1941, the RAF claimed that “race did not prove to be any handicap in training, in the performance of duties, and to service and social relationship within the ranks.”¹⁸¹ However, the RCAF started to slow down recruitment of non-Europeans by the spring of 1944. Pressure from the Colonial Office, which

¹⁷⁹ Although the War Department had initiated policies as early as 1937 to increase the number of black personnel in the army so that it was proportional to the overall black population (roughly 10%), the department refused to introduce policy that would antagonize the American people. See McGuire, *Taps for a Jim Crow Army*, pp. xxiv-xxxii.

¹⁸⁰ Roger Lambo, “Achtung! The Black Prince: West Africans in the Royal Air Force, 1939-46” in *Africans in Britain*. ed. David Killingray. (London, 1994), pp. 145-146.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

condemned the “pure European descent” policy as being “contrary to the avowed policy of His Majesty’s Government”, helped prevent the discriminatory clause from being re-introduced to the Air Force (Constitution) Act at the end of the war. Instead, it was decided that Selection Boards would be employed to preside over “coloured” applications. It was assumed though that most blacks would be eliminated by this process of selection.¹⁸² Ultimately, Canada’s recruitment policy mirrored many factors of American and British policy.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 161.

Chapter 4

“We fought for democracy, now we want a piece of it” Demobilization and Post-War Realities

Blacks emerged from the war with heightened expectations. They had battled through discrimination to serve their country, heard politicians extol the principles of the *Atlantic Charter*, and found new jobs and even won union representation on the railways. Black veterans were entitled to the benefits of the *Veterans Charter*. Black community groups and the local press expressed great pride in the efforts of the men and women who supported the war. There was hope for a better future. After all, how was it that Canadians could fight a war against tyranny and racial oppression and continue to practice and tolerate discrimination against their fellow citizens? Yet, racial inequality strongly persisted. In areas across the country, blacks were still barred from businesses and public spaces. Even the RCAF even returned to employing restrictive recruitment policies against black applicants. Ultimately, these post-war issues demonstrate that the Second World War did not markedly improve the black condition in Canada.

For Canadians at home and on the battlefield, the post-war period symbolized hope for a new beginning. The Canadian government established countless committees for post-war reconstruction. The most immediate concern was the rehabilitation and reintegration of veterans from their war-time service back into civilian society. A social-security net would be created to support soldiers' families and those unable to find work.¹⁸³

In order to avoid the problems experienced after the First World War, the

¹⁸³ Sheffield, *Red Man's on the Warpath*, pp. 87-88.

Canadian government began thinking of post-war reconstruction almost immediately after war was declared. By October 1941, Ottawa announced the *Post-Discharge Re-establishment Order*. It gave a number of guarantees to returning servicemen, including: unemployment insurance, vocational training, free university education, and subsidized loans to start a business. As the war progressed, the government introduced new programs, including: a life insurance program, a re-establishment credit scheme, and subsidized land grants through the *Veterans' Land Act*.¹⁸⁴ Hundreds of thousands of Canadian veterans took advantage of these opportunities.

But what did the homefront offer black soldiers when they returned from war? A popular slogan for returning black servicemen was: "We fought for Democracy, now we want a piece of it."¹⁸⁵ Unlike Aboriginal veterans, technically blacks were entitled to receive the same benefits and privileges as white veterans.¹⁸⁶ The wages accrued by veterans throughout the war – plus a gratuity based on location and years of service – often meant that they could afford to finance home purchases. This had a great effect on where black veterans would settle. As Rella Braithwaite recalled, her husband used the gratuity and assistance received from the *Veterans' Land Act* to purchase a half-acre of land for their new home in Scarborough.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, many veterans took advantage of the federal government's program providing free education, replete with a living

¹⁸⁴ Jeffrey Keshen, "Getting it Right the Second Time Around: The Reintegration of Canadian Veterans of World War II," in Peter Neary and J.L. Granatstein, *The Veterans Charter and Post-World War II Canada*. (Montreal & Kingston, 1998), pp. 66, 68.

¹⁸⁵ Grizzle, *My Name's Not George*, p. 79.

¹⁸⁶ For instance, the *Indian Act* restricted Aboriginal veterans from buying land or obtaining other benefits available to non-Aboriginals. For more on post-war reconstruction and Aboriginal peoples, see Sheffield, *Red Man's On the Warpath*, Chapters 5-7.

¹⁸⁷ Brand, *No Burden to Carry*, p. 230; Williams, *Road to Now*, pp. 89, 93.

allowance. Men like Gerald Carty, who had learned or honed vocational skills in the service, entered trade schools and others accessed universities. Black veterans also found company and comforts through the Royal Canadian Legion (RCL). Two distinct branches were established for black veterans. Branch No. 57 of the RCL in Halifax was named after Nova Scotia's own William Edward Hall, the first black person in the Empire to win the Victoria Cross, while the Dr. Gaspard (No.50) Branch of the RCL served Montreal veterans.¹⁸⁸ Also, in 1946, Wilson Brooks, a flying officer with the RCAF during the war, formed the first veterans group for black soldiers in Toronto: the Toronto Negro Veterans Association (TNVA).¹⁸⁹ During its initial years, the TNVA was unable to find a proper

¹⁸⁸ Hall, who was a veteran of the Mexican War (1848) and the Crimean War (1855-56), was awarded the Empire's highest military honour for his actions in the Relief of Lucknow during the Indian Rebellion of 1857. In 1945, his remains were interred at the Hantsport Baptist Church and a memorial cairn was erected in his honour. In 1938, thirty-four years after his death, a Legion branch was formed in Halifax under the title The William Hall V.C. Branch. The branch was established for black veterans from the First and then Second World War and still continues to operate. The records of the William Hall V.C. Branch are maintained by its current president, Vernon Braithwaite. Regrettably, they could not be accessed for this thesis. In Montreal, on March 26, 1935, Branch No. 50 or the Colored War Veterans Branch was formed. Roughly forty members from the First World War made up the initial membership. One of the charter members of this legion branch was Dr. Gaspard. In 1953, the name of the branch was officially changed to the Dr. Gaspard Branch in honour of the charter member's contributions. Unfortunately, information on this unique branch is limited. The Quebec Command of the Royal Canadian Legion does not have the branch's records and the date in which the Gaspard branch surrendered its charter is unknown. Ruck, *Black Battalion*, pp. 3-4, 38-39; Pachai, *Beneath the Clouds of the Promised Land*, pp. 92-10; *Halifax Chronicle*, November 8, 1947, pp. 6, 12; Virginia Beaton, "William Hall honoured at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic" *Trident: The Newspaper of Maritime Forces Atlantic* 39.4 (February 21, 2005): p. 9; Williams, *Road to Now*, pp. 57, 93, 194.

¹⁸⁹ Wilson Brooks and Dan Hill were prominent in establishing the Ontario Black History Society in 1978, and in pioneering the formal celebrations of Black History Month throughout the country.

office and meeting place. Eventually, the members agreed to temporarily disband the TNVA until a proper location could be located. In 1950, under the leadership of Aubrey F. Sharp, a proper meeting room was acquired for the association in the city's downtown. With a permanent location, the TNVA was reorganized with Sharp as the president. According to Sharp's sister-in-law, Dorothy Gollinger, the TNVA was formed because the black veterans "came home to find they were not recognized or welcomed by white veterans who they had stood shoulder-to-shoulder with in combat."¹⁹⁰ At the outset, the group had a modest membership of roughly thirty black veterans from all branches of the armed forces.¹⁹¹ Another organization was the West Indian Veteran's Association, which was run in Canada by Owen Rowe. Rowe was heavily involved in maintaining ties with fellow West Indian war veterans and ensuring that their sacrifices were remembered. In 1962, their first reunion was held in Montreal, an event that became an annual tradition.¹⁹² Yet, despite their military service, a number of West Indian blacks were denied residency status after the war or their families were not permitted to immigrate to Canada. It was only after public pressure from veterans and community leaders that these men and their families were allowed to settle in the country. The Reverend Dr. Charles H. Este, who had protested the discriminatory enlistment policies of the military, helped

¹⁹⁰ Ted Barris, *Days of Victory: Canadians Remember, 1939-1945* (Toronto, 2005), p. 352.

¹⁹¹ By the early 1970s, the club, then known as "The Toronto Negro Colour Guard War Veterans of Canada," expanded to over eighty members and also included just over a dozen white members. See PAO, RG 36-2, b335763, note from July 20, 1972 and the club's constitution; *The Canadian Negro*, June 1953, volume 1, number 1.

¹⁹² Three of these Canadian veterans from the West Indies went on to become Prime Ministers in their native countries: Milton Cato of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Errol Barrow of Barbados and Michael Manley of Jamaica.

West Indian veterans win the right to have their children settle in Canada.¹⁹³ Furthermore, in an editorial written in 1951 for the union paper at the Massey-Ferguson plant in Toronto, Dennis McDermott, future international vice-president of the United Auto Workers and Canadian Labour Congress President, wrote that some of the ex-servicemen were “shipped back to Jamaica without a hearing.”¹⁹⁴

While numerous black veterans were fortunate enough to benefit from government policies designed to help servicemen re-enter the civilian working world, many employers rejected “coloured” labour. When Donald Carty returned to Saint John and “back to the old status quo,” he felt he was “just another black face on the street.” Work was difficult for Donald to find because some employers “didn’t want to be identified as the person giving ‘those people’ an opportunity.”¹⁹⁵ While Donald did eventually work in a post office, many blacks were still expected to return to work in the railway industry. After 31 years of service in the military, Arthur Seymour Tyler worked for 35 years as a sleeping car porter with the CPR. In fact, many black veterans were

¹⁹³ Rev. Dr. Charles Este was also responsible for establishing the Negro Community Centre (NCC) in February 1927. For years, the NCC was a crucial institution in Montreal and one of the few places to provide educational and community resources to the black community. Williams, *Road to Now*, pp. 54, 84; Ruggles, *Outsider Blues*, p. 73.

¹⁹⁴ Dennis McDermott, “Fair Practices” *Local 439 News* (October 12, 1951), p. 7. Quote taken from Henry, *Black Politics in Toronto Since World War I*, pp. 14, 53 n126. Although Canada admitted over 165,000 immigrants from displaced persons camps in Europe from 1947 to 1952, Ottawa maintained an immigration policy that largely excluded those that were not white. In a 1947 speech to Parliament on immigration, Prime Minister King talked in terms of the country’s “absorptive capacity,” which meant the ability to take people in without causing increased unemployment or extra burdens on limited social programs, as well as not to change the country’s white racial make-up. See Marilyn Barber, *Immigrant Domestic Servants in Canada* (Ottawa, 1991), p. 19; Walker, *History of Blacks in Canada*, pp. 93-94; Winks, *Blacks in Canada*, pp. 300-312; Carty, “African Canadian Women and the State,” p. 214.

¹⁹⁵ Barris, *Days of Victory*, pp. 351-352.

picked out of employment lines and told to go directly to the railway station and apply for a position as a sleeping car porter.¹⁹⁶ Veterans that were able to take advantage of retraining courses often found themselves unable to find work in their trade. In 1947, more than 90 percent of blacks in Windsor, Ontario were working in jobs classified as manual labour.¹⁹⁷ Employment prospects for black Canadian women also contracted from the war years, as most re-entered domestic service.

The military, meanwhile, reinstated aspects of the discriminatory recruitment policies that had prevented blacks from serving. In February 1946, the RCAF ruled that all applications from blacks, "Orientals" and "former enemy aliens" had to be forwarded to Air Force Headquarters for approval, thus removing discretion from local recruiters. According to the Chief of the Air Staff, the justification for having the applications sent to HQ was so that they could "carefully scrutinize" the candidate and determine whether the applicant could "mix" with whites, a practice also portrayed as being "for the protection and future welfare of the applicant."¹⁹⁸ Ultimately, this process was employed by the RCAF until 1956.¹⁹⁹

The black press was determined to discuss social issues and to publish positive stories of returning veterans. The articles provided a source of pride for the community,

¹⁹⁶ *Telegraph Journal*, July 7, 1945, p. 7; Brand, *No Burden to Carry*, p. 229.

¹⁹⁷ Walker, *History of Blacks in Canada*, p. 91.

¹⁹⁸ LAC, RG 24-E-1-C, Box 298, File 304-117, L. M. Wright to AOC in Vancouver, February 14, 1946; H. C. Ledoux to J.G. Stephenson, October 8, 1946.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, R. S. Turnbull to AOC in Edmonton, September 22, 1950, M.G. Bryan to CO in Toronto, July 18, 1956. Comparatively, the American military undertook progressive post-war reconstruction policy that led to the desegregation of its armed forces in 1948 and navy and air force in 1949. See Stanley Sandler, *Segregated Skies: All-black combat squadrons of WW II*. (Washington, 1992), pp. 141-159.

providing proof that it, too, did its bit to defeat fascism.²⁰⁰ Among the most prominent of these sources was the monthly-published London, Ontario, based *Dawn of Tomorrow*, which, since 1923, pursued “the interests of the darker races.” In the final months of the war, the paper advanced its call for social justice by proclaiming that black Canadians must support a government that recognizes “all men as equals...rather than by such artificial and arbitrary standards as races, creeds, color or political affliction.”²⁰¹

Beginning in March 1945, as the war was winding down in Europe, it published a number of editorials calling on black Canadians “not to be content” with their position in society.²⁰² Stories of black Canadian veterans that appeared in 1946 were meant to celebrate accomplishments and to inspire change. The first looked at Russell Rudd of Toronto, who served as a navigator from 1942 to 1945, and then went on to become a lab assistant with the Ontario Department of Health. Another article focused on Lloyd Kelly of London who served four years in the RCAF and was then enrolled in electronics at the University of Western Ontario.²⁰³ A story of Curly Christian, a veteran of the First World War, was published under the title “No Color Line At Vimy.” Christian, who served with the 78th Grenadier Guards Battalion, had both arms and both legs amputated from

²⁰⁰ The Maritime magazines that existed during the First World War had folded but one paper that was published during the Second World War was *The Afro-Beacon*. It was only published for a few months in Toronto and is not available for consultation. Another paper was published out of Montreal during the 1930s called *The Free Lance*. It was edited by Edward M. Packwood and had a circulation of as many as 5,000 copies. However, the paper, which financed a recruitment campaign to send volunteers to Ethiopia during the Italian invasion, folded in 1938 because of lack of funds. For more on *The Free Lance*, see *Montreal Star*, July 19, 1974.

²⁰¹ *The Dawn of Tomorrow*, May 1945, volume 3, no. 50. The same editorial was published again in June 1948.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, March 1945, volume 3, no. 48. Similar editorials appeared in March 1947 and March 1948.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, September 1945, volume 4, no. 6, December 18, 1946, volume 4, no. 9.

wounds suffered at the celebrated First World War battle. Amazingly, he survived and his only son enlisted to fight in the Second World War. While these pieces focused on the achievements of black veterans, another story printed in 1950 revealed some of ongoing discrimination faced by “coloured” veterans. E. Jackman from Montreal, who served for four years, told the *Dawn* that he would not enlist in the Korean War because the “promises” made during the Second World War had not been met.²⁰⁴

Another paper that began its life as a modest church bulletin and that became a significant voice for black Canadians in Nova Scotia in the post-war period was *The Clarion*. It was first published in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia in July 1945. Founded by Carrie M. Best, it published the names of black veterans from the New Glasgow community, as well as stories detailing the soldiers’ experiences overseas and at home.²⁰⁵ In the paper’s second issue, one story urged all veterans to support the church in its fundraising activities. Deacons Howard Lawrence and Murray Williams, the latter a veteran of the war, called on soldiers to serve in peacetime as they had during the war, noting: “it’s a big job, and we need help. However, it’s not as big as Ortona and you did that. Now fight for peace for your children and yourself.” Though a lack of funds eventually led to the publication’s collapse in 1956, *The Clarion* strongly supported black Canadian veterans, proclaiming its commitment to “salute” those who “so proudly wear

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, September 1950, volume 4, no. 47.

²⁰⁵ Best, who died in July 2001, was an influential leader in the black Canadian community. Her humanitarian and journalistic efforts led to her appointment as an Officer of the Order of Canada. Although the paper was small in size and had a relatively short life-span it represented a significant outlet for black Canadian issues.

the Service Button on their coat lapel.”²⁰⁶ Veterans were looked upon as role models for youth and key contributors to the black community in post-war society.

In the January 1947 edition, *The Clarion's* front page listed forty-six veterans under the title “Our Roll of Honor.” Included in that list were Robert Leonard Lawrence and Lyle William Izzard, two black soldiers who “made the Supreme Sacrifice.”²⁰⁷ In the same edition, the paper published two biographies of black Canadian veterans who were characterized as the first to enlist in the Pictou Highlanders and the last from that Nova Scotia regiment to return to Canada. Private Aubrey Redfern enlisted with the Highland regiment in July 1940. He spent three years in Canada serving in Nova Scotia and then in Newfoundland. He then went overseas and served in the Italian campaign. Sergeant R. W. States, who enlisted in August 1940, went overseas in 1941 as a member of the 81st Canadian Artillery Company in the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps. While in England and Western Europe, he served with twenty-six units as a “Military Helper” and worked consistently alongside white compatriots doing important, though often underappreciated, logistical work. Included with States’s biography was a recommendation letter from Captain W. A. Eadie of the Salvation Army Canadian War Services describing him as a reliable, meticulous and honest worker.²⁰⁸ *The Clarion* published the stories of these local soldiers in order to demonstrate the region’s contribution to the war effort and to build pride within the black community.

Another story chronicled the bizarre situation surrounding Private Charles Leslie Johnson as a means of revealing the racial discrimination that still pervaded in the

²⁰⁶ *The Clarion*, volume 2, issue 1. Over the next few months no less than twenty-two veterans were named in the paper.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, February 28, 1947, volume 2, issue 4.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, January, 1947. volume 2, issue 1

community and to advocate for greater interracial understanding. Private Johnson was involved in a case with a member of the Provost Corps over the legitimacy of his war service. While at a bank in New Glasgow, another patron noticed that Johnson wore three wound stripes (symbols that he had been wounded in action) on his army fatigues. The patron, without confronting Johnson, contacted a local reporter as he assumed that the man in uniform was lying about having been wounded three times. A Provost Officer was called in to New Glasgow to “check on the authenticity of the report,” but he also failed to confront Johnson on the issue. *The Clarion* interviewed Johnson and published letters proving that he had been wounded three times, that National Defence knew of his record, and that he was about to receive treatment at the hospital for his chest wound. Johnson, even after his third wound, elected not to accept the usual leave back home to Canada and stayed to fight.²⁰⁹ *The Clarion* took offense to the fact that Johnson had not been consulted about his experience. Although the paper admitted it was rare for one soldier to have been wounded three times, it protested the fact that since Johnson was black, the patron at the bank, and the provost officer, assumed that he had not earned the decorations but was wearing them as an embellishment – an accusation that, it said, would likely not have been contemplated if Johnson was white.

However, while the paper fought for proper recognition of the achievements of black veterans, it appeared that on one occasion it got the story completely wrong. In July 1947, *The Clarion* published a story about “one of the unsung heroes of World War II,” a black soldier from Guysborough, Nova Scotia named Private Howard Pelley. According

²⁰⁹ As the letter from the Director of Records for the Adjutant-General published alongside the story indicated, “There were 277 Canadian Army personnel granted leave to Canada [after] having been wounded three times or more.” *Ibid.*, February 15, 1947, volume 2, issue 3.

to the paper, Pelley enlisted with the Halifax Rifles in 1939 and went overseas with the First Division on December 21, 1939. Then the article claimed that he fought at Dieppe in “spring of 1941.” Then in 1942, it said, he served in Sicily where he was wounded in action and sent to a hospital to recuperate for two months. He was supposedly wounded twice more while serving in Italy, causing him to spend a further nine months in hospital. The article went on to claim that Pelley was awarded the Military Medal after taking command of his unit in the heat of battle because his unit’s commander was blinded. Although Private Pelley’s story was certainly a thrilling one, it had major flaws. First, had he enlisted with the Halifax Rifles, he did not remain with them for long, as they did not see action in Dieppe or Italy. Furthermore, the dates of the Dieppe and Sicily engagements were incorrect. As well, there were no details about when and where the courageous actions occurred that led to the Military Medal. No source for the story was provided. It appeared that in its sincere attempts to publish positive and courageous stories of black veterans, *The Clarion* may have relied too much on anecdotal evidence from unreliable sources.²¹⁰

Along with the black press, some in the black community came together through municipal and provincial organizations to fight for equal treatment in Canadian society. A main goal of these organizations was to promote black rights and to confront racial discrimination. In 1942, the Toronto black community and Ontario Liberal Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) John Glass initiated a campaign for human rights

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, July 2, 1947, volume 3, issue 1. The Military Medal was awarded to servicemen who, on the recommendation of their Commander-in-Chief in the field, provided “individual or associated acts of bravery in the field.” See LAC, RG 24-C-2, vol. 12737, File 21/MM/1. Pelley was not listed as a recipient of the award.

legislation.²¹¹ The impulse for this came in response to the Supreme Court's unwillingness, as seen in Doug Christie's case against the Montreal Forum, to protect citizens against racial and religious bigotry. In 1943, black community groups in Toronto called on the province to "enact anti-discrimination legislation for the benefit of all racial groups," and passed a resolution declaring their "determined and united support of all efforts to eliminate practices which discriminate against the Negro people."²¹² In March 1944, the new Conservative minority government, under the leadership of George Drew, enacted the *Ontario Racial Discrimination Act*.²¹³ The *Act*, the first of its kind passed by a Canadian legislature, prohibited the "publication or displaying of any notice, sign, symbol or other representation expressing racial or religious discrimination."²¹⁴ Yet, under the *Act*, the burden of proof rested with the aggrieved to prove intent of discrimination. Thus, while many incidents of racial discrimination occurred, very few legal complaints were filed because of the challenges that faced complainants, and, as a result, the expense and time needed to go through the legal and bureaucratic proceedings.²¹⁵

After the war, Harry Gairey fought with the Toronto City Council to establish an ordinance which stipulated that no persons should be discriminated against based on their race, colour, creed or religion. Gairey, who was one of the leading advocates for

²¹¹ Glass first introduced the bill in the legislature, entitled "An Act to Prevent Discrimination Because of Colour, Race, Creed or Religion," on January 30, 1943. For more, see Lambertson, *Repression and Resistance*, p. 206; PAO, RG 3-17, b396775, box 442.

²¹² *The Toronto Star*, October 22, 1943, p. 14.

²¹³ Lambertson, *Repression and Resistance*, p. 206.

²¹⁴ PAO, F 2130-7, b444352.

²¹⁵ Lambertson, *Repression and Resistance*, pp. 207, 305; Alexander and Glaze, *Towards Freedom*, p. 151; Grizzle, *My Name's Not George*, pp. 91-93.

anti-discrimination laws in the city, used a recent incident of bigotry against his son combined with the patriotism of the recent war effort to fight for equal rights. His son, and namesake, was refused admission into the private ice skating rink, Icelandia, because he was “coloured.” Gairey went before the City Council to argue his son’s case with the help of Joseph B. Salsberg, a well-respected MPP for the Labour-Progressive Party and member of the Toronto Jewish labour community who lobbied to outlaw acts of anti-Semitism and other forms of racism. Before the mayor and the council, Salsberg argued that if black Canadians were considered citizens who were conscripted into the military during war time, then they should be entitled to the same treatment and benefits that all other Canadian citizen received. The incident was covered in the press the next day and, in support of Gairey, both white and black University of Toronto students picketed city hall. On January 14, 1947, the City Council passed an ordinance that called for all recreation and amusement establishments to have a non-discrimination policy.²¹⁶ The case involving the Gairey family was not unique in the city or the province as from 1948 to 1965, twenty-three percent of all reported discriminatory cases in Ontario involved the use of public services.²¹⁷

In the decade after the Second World War, the Central Citizens’ Association of Windsor – which was formed in the early 1930s in response to welfare and unemployment issues – committed itself to compiling acts of racial discrimination against blacks in the community. In 1949, a community audit was done by the Association and a booklet was subsequently published entitled “How Does Our Town Add Up?” As Carol

²¹⁶ Hill, *Black Man's Toronto*, pp. 26-27; *The Toronto Star*, November 22, 1945, p. 4; Alexander and Glaze, *Towards Freedom*, p. 149.

²¹⁷ Walker, *History of Blacks in Canada*, p. 90.

Talbot claims, “this project provided the initial wedge that cracked the door to human-rights legislation in Canada.” Racist incidents at hotels, restaurants and theatres were documented and made public. Also, to raise awareness of the need for anti-discrimination laws, the Association organized sit-ins, and initiated a number of public service projects.²¹⁸

Soon after the war, the Canadian Negro Women’s Association (CANEWA), a high-profile women’s community group, was also established in Toronto. Its mandate was to be involved more directly and on a larger scale with the black community, instead of just with small fundraising and charity activities. It focused on racial and human rights issues, not just on gender inequality.²¹⁹ The first president and figurehead for the CANEWA was Kay Livingstone, a well-known black Canadian radio host and actress. Livingstone, whose parents founded *The Dawn of Tomorrow*, worked in Ottawa at the Dominion Bureau of Statistics during the war. She later moved to Toronto to work for the CBC and to start her acting career. In the fall of 1950, Livingstone designs for a black women’s club took shape.²²⁰ Although portrayed by some in the press as the “fur coat club” because of their elitist fundraising activities such as teas, fashion shows, garden parties and balls, the fundamental motivation of the CANEWA was actually improving

²¹⁸ Carol Talbot, *Growing Up Black in Canada*. (Toronto, 1984), p. 69.

²¹⁹ Lawrence Hill, *Women of Vision: The Story of the Canadian Negro Women's Association, 1951-1976* (Toronto, 1996), p. 7.

²²⁰ The membership of the CANEWA included women from the United States and Bermuda, but most were Canadian-born. Also, as Lawrence Hill states in his history of the CANEWA: “Although active membership never exceeded forty women, CANEWA was one of the most dynamic and best organized Black organizations in Canada in the period from 1951 to 1976.” *Ibid.*, p. 7; Alexander and Glaze, *Towards Freedom*, p. 167.

education opportunities; such as by establishing a scholarship program for black high school students.²²¹

The post-war period was critical in the development of community organizations in Nova Scotia as well. The most influential was the Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NSAACP). Formed in March 1945, the NSAACP was the most prominent provincial association focused on the concerns of the black community from the end of the war until the 1960s. It grew out of the Colored Education Centre which was formed in 1938 and that focused on the education of black youth. By 1944, the Centre was also concerned with returning servicemen from the war receiving good jobs. Its official mandate was: "To do everything possible for the benefit of the growing generation, also to help our boys who return from the war into getting good positions."²²²

At a meeting in January 1945, the members of the Colored Education Centre voted to change and to expand its constitution as well as its name. Under its new constitution, the major objective of the NSAACP was to promote and improve the conditions of blacks in Nova Scotia by working with the provincial and municipal governments. The principle issues for the NSAACP were improving educational opportunities, expanding and diversifying employment, standardizing housing, and

²²¹ Over the years the CANEWA established other public service projects, such as the country's first "Negro History Week" in 1958, and the first National Congress of Black Women in 1973. Perhaps the most lasting legacy of the association was its involvement in the formation of the first public celebration of Caribbean culture in the city, as in 1956 it managed and financed the Calypso Carnival, the forerunner to Toronto's famous Caribana festival. Lawrence Hill. *Women of Vision: The Story of the Canadian Negro Women's Association, 1951-1976*. pp. 17, 57.

²²² Pachai, *Beneath the Clouds of the Promised Land*, p. 165

pursuing human rights.²²³ While not formed to mirror the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in the United States, the NSAACP was focused on battling discrimination in employment and education, and played a major role in bringing cases to court. Ultimately, its work in the post-war years was critical in convincing the provincial government to enact the *Fair Employment Practices Act* in 1955 and the *Fair Accommodation Act* in 1959.²²⁴

The NSAACP was effective largely because of encouragement it received from other black organizations in the province. Also key was that it attracted a wide membership because of support from black veterans, as well as from the church. The William Hall VC Legion branch and the Cornwallis Street Baptist Church were both key supporters. The energy from the church was critical. Despite the fact that the NSAACP was a direct example of the shift towards using secular, rather than religious, organizations as a mechanism of pursuing change, the church still held a strong fellowship and important leadership role. In fact, the guidance from the pastor of the Cornwallis Street Baptist Church was responsible for merging the interests of the spiritual and secular community under one umbrella. At the forefront of this 'partnership' was Reverend William Pearly Oliver. Oliver not only served as the Honorary Chaplain of the Combined Services during the Second World War, but was also the pastor of the Cornwallis Street Baptist Church. Oliver, and his wife, Pearleen, were active in the meetings and campaigns of the NSAACP, which they promoted in their parish. He spent his entire life in the public sphere working for and representing the local black

²²³ Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management (NSARM), Dr. William M. Cooper, *A Proposed Program for the Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People*. May, 1954; *The Clarion*, December, 1946 vol.1 no.1.

²²⁴ Pachai and Bishop. *Images of Our Past*. pp. 4-5, 73.

community.²²⁵ Another influential member of the NSAACP and the Cornwallis Street Baptist Church was Sydney Morgan Jones. Jones was one of the charter members of the NAAACP, served for forty-two years as a deacon in the Cornwallis parish, and was a veteran of the First World War. When he died in October 1993, he was the last surviving black veteran of the Great War from Nova Scotia.²²⁶ Another veteran of the Great War who was influential in the development of the NSAACP was Richard Stanley Symonds. A veteran of the No.2 CB, Symonds was one of the founding members of the association and served for more than thirty years on the Board of Deacons of the Cornwallis Street Baptist Church.²²⁷

The association conducted housing surveys in the Halifax area and organized adult education centres. It was also influential in establishing adult educational programs in the outlying areas in the province. Working with the Nova Scotia Department of Education, the NSAACP established literacy and self-help classes in areas such as Preston and Hammonds Plains. Many adults did not possess basic literacy or practical skills to find work outside of the traditional domestic and labour positions. Furthermore, to encourage youth to pursue an education, scholarship and bursaries were established for

²²⁵ William P. Oliver was also a significant member of later organizations such as the Black United Front (1969) and the Black Cultural Society of Nova Scotia (1977) and played a leading role in establishing the Black Cultural Centre of Nova Scotia (1983). He was awarded the Order of Canada in 1984 and received two honorary doctoral degrees. Pachai and Bishop, *Images of Our Past*, p. 36; *Clarion*, March 15 1947, volume 2, issue 5.

²²⁶ Private Sydney Jones was one of the eighteen known blacks who were able to enlist in combat duty with the 106th Battalion, Nova Scotia Rifles. He was wounded at Passchendale in 1917. Jones's uncle, Private Jeremiah Jones, was recommended for a Distinguished Conduct Medal for his bravery at Vimy Ridge. See Ruck, *Black Battalion*, pp. 25-26; Pachai and Bishop, *Images of Our Past*, p. 91.

²²⁷ Ruck, *Black Battalion*, p. 58. Other charter members of the NSAACP included Arnold P. Smith, William Carter, Bernice A. Williams, Carl W. Oliver, Walter Johnson, and Ernest Grosse.

high school and university students. This focus on education was an important factor in the community, considering that the province of Nova Scotia maintained segregated schools until 1964.²²⁸

The NSAACP was heavily involved in lobbying for human rights and the most recognized service it performed in this capacity was in its support of Viola Desmond's famous court case against the Province of Nova Scotia. In 1946, Desmond, a 32-year-old black beautician and entrepreneur from Halifax, was charged with defrauding the government at a movie theatre in New Glasgow. After purchasing her balcony ticket, the only type that was made available to blacks, she sat in the lower or "white" section of the Roseland Theatre. She was removed from the premises (despite offering to pay the one cent difference in the ticket cost), arrested, and put in jail overnight. The next morning, Desmond was brought before the New Glasgow court without representation and charged with violating the provincial *Theatres, Cinematographs and Amusements Act* by defrauding the government of one cent. She was ordered to pay a fine of \$20 as well as the \$6 to cover court costs.

The NSAACP led in protesting the decision. It publicized her story in the provincial press, as well as in the major papers across the country. It also established a Viola Desmond Court Fund in order to help pay her legal fees. Desmond's lawyer, Frederick William Bissett, charged Henry MacNeil, the manager of Roseland Theatre, with false arrest and imprisonment, plus assault and malicious persecution. Ultimately, Bissett did not discuss discrimination and segregation. As historian Constance Backhouse observed: "the surviving trial records would have left no clue to the real significance of

²²⁸ Hay, "Black Protest Tradition in Nova Scotia," pp. 159-164; Pachai, *Beneath the Clouds of the Promised Land*, pp. 211-212.

the case.” In the end, the case centered on criminal procedure, and on December 27, 1946, the court ruled against overturning the original charges against Viola Desmond, who chose not to appeal the decision. Instead, she closed her beauty parlour and eventually moved to New York where she passed away in 1965. While on the surface the lawsuit was a failure, as the *Theatre Act* remained on the books, Desmond’s legal challenge did raise awareness of racial issues outside the court room. Her story was published across the country and the symbolism of her efforts rallied human rights activists and the black community throughout the country.²²⁹

Collectively, these issues prove that, despite their experiences during the war, the status of blacks in Canadians remained largely unchanged. The military’s limited acceptance of “coloured” recruits during the war clearly reflected the need for troops, not a broader transformation in the perception and treatment of blacks. The few periodicals that made up the black press in the country were a voice for greater social justice, and expectations among blacks were certainly raised by their wartime experiences and accomplishments and the ideals for which it was said the war was being fought. There were some notable signs of progress such as the *Ontario Racial Discrimination Act*, though the legislation was weak and blacks were still far from fully accepted or integrated into society. While black community organizations did bring blatant cases of racial prejudice more to the forefront and thereby challenge the status quo, they did not have the numbers, resources or influence to significantly redress prejudices that permeated throughout the country. Looking back on the immediate post-war period,

²²⁹ *Saturday Night*, December 7, 1946.

Donald Carty stated that, as a veteran, he was told, “well that was nice you fought in the war, but you’re black.”²³⁰

²³⁰ *Journey to Justice*. Dir. Roger McTair. National Film Board of Canada, 2000.

Conclusion

While blacks were significantly involved in the Canadian war effort, it did not inevitably bring about significant social progress for them. Their military experience was marked by partial acceptance and persistent discrimination. While several thousand blacks were accepted for service, they were largely barred from becoming officers or pilots and encouraged to join the infantry instead. Any wider acceptance they attained was made possible only through their own determined efforts.

Just as they had during the First World War, recruiting officers bluntly told willing black recruits that they were not wanted. Yet, discrimination was not always so obvious. After all, a number of black Canadians were accepted, even by the navy, and recruiting policies were not made public nor were they something most members of the public cared about. When the issue of discriminatory recruitment policies against blacks was brought up in the House of Commons, their existence was denied by Minister of National Defence (Air) Charles Power. Although the army allowed blacks to serve in the infantry, they would not justify the appointment of a full-time "coloured" chaplain. Although Canada had no segregated units in the Second World War like the No.2 Construction Battalion, the Canadian military often discouraged encourage black enlistment due to the belief most whites did not want to associate with them. Hundreds of men, such as Alan Bundy and Alvin Duncan, were initially told that people of their "race" were not wanted or that they did not possess the abilities to be effective combat soldiers. Others who wanted to enlist with the air force or the navy were pressed to join the army instead.

This pattern was also reflected on the homefront. Despite increased employment opportunities, discrimination remained prevalent. Black men were still overwhelmingly employed as railway porters, and black women as domestics. A successful union drive brought better pay and job protection for porters but did not alter the perception of what work blacks were best suited to perform. After the war, black servicemen were eligible to take advantage of the educational and financial benefits of the *Veterans Charter*, but still, in disproportionate numbers, returned to civilian life by working as porters.

Organizations such as the NSAACP were formed to serve the interests of blacks and challenge the racial status quo. They did so by seeking to improve educational and employment opportunities, and pursuing human rights legislation. Many such organizations were greatly influenced by veterans and used them as role models. The black press also used the experiences of black veterans as a source of pride and to inspire and unite the black population to pursue greater justice. Despite apparent successes such as the *Ontario Racial Discrimination Act* of 1944, unofficial but real segregationist policies persisted into the post-war period. Blacks were denied service in restaurants, bars, and theatres, a practice supported by legal decisions rendered in favour of “freedom of commerce.”

For blacks, the Second World War was a conflicting mixture of positive and negative events. They contributed to the war effort through their service and sacrifice with the Canadian military and work in war industries, on the rails, and in the home. Their efforts were rewarded with equal benefits in the government’s demobilization plans and new employment opportunities. Yet, their experiences were also filled with the same racial prejudice and discrimination that existed before the conflict. Many were refused

the opportunity to serve their country overseas and faced segregation at home. Overall, for most, hopes for a new paradigm in race relations resulting from the fight to vanquish fascism were soon dashed. For Canada's blacks, many more battles lay ahead in the fight for equality.

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