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## The Influence of Little Burgundy on the Development of English Speaking Black Montreal

*By Dr. Clarence Bayne*

Presently, the area of Little Burgundy is located in the Sud-Ouest Borough of Montreal. The Atwater Market marks the boundary where St-Henri ends and Little Burgundy begins. From there, it stretches to Mountain Street in the east and is delineated by the Lachine Canal to the south and Saint-Antoine in the north. Although Notre Dame West functions as the neighbourhood's main artery, for the Black community St Antoine Street was a centre of Black life and culture. However, it would be a mistake, indeed impossible, to draw lines around some territory, like Little Burgundy, or define its social and economic growth and development as embodying all the relevant history of English Speaking Blacks in Montreal. The significance and

history of English speaking Blacks in Montreal extend well beyond the geographic and civic boundaries of Little Burgundy. This can be seen through the Union United Church, the NCC, the Sir George Williams Crisis, and the Negro Theatre Guild.

In the late sixties-early seventies, the radical Black student leaders came to the Union United Church basement to promote their "revolutionary" strategies and seek support from the resident and rapidly emerging immigrant Black community leadership. One such leader was the spiritual head of the Black Community of "Little Burgundy": Reverend Charles Este.

The UUC also went on to sponsor other events of historical signifi-

cance. One such event was the Caribbean style street Carnival. It first took place in Little Burgundy in 1972, which was the 65th Anniversary of the Union United Church. Although it was sponsored by the Union United Church, the English Caribbean speaking immigrant communities also collaborated. It was a plan by Reverend Gabourel, himself an immigrant from Jamaica, to attract new Black immigrants from the Caribbean and the diverse cultures of the Black Diaspora to the fold of the Union United Church (Maranda Moses, Proud Past: Bright Futures).

Later, in the mid-seventies, the Negro Community Center (NCC), located in the heart of Little

## A Word From The President



### 10 Million For Christmas: Giving and Reasons for Giving

By Dr. Clarence Bayne

I am prompted to write this as a response to some reaction to "givings" by two Black sport personalities from the English speaking Black Community of Montreal. The first has to do with an abusive attack on the Erene Anthony Family for an alleged gift that was given to Selwyn House; although, in reality, this gift was initiated by Andre Demarais and patrons of the Selwyn House on behalf of the Anthony Family. The second has to do with an under-current of negative criticism from both the Black and larger Montreal community relating to PK Suban's gift of ten million dollars to the Montreal Children's Hospital. Considering the use that my family, and so many of my friends and their families, have made of the children's hospital, I say to Suban, "Thank you PK. Thank you for underlining the fact that the Black Community is an equal participating partner in the creation of a more healthy society." We have been contributing for an incredibly long time in many different ways; but, as Kevin, from his seat in the Dragon Den, would have said, "the money talks." However, as we see from these previous examples, even money does not quite set one free.

There have been responses to this propensity for negative criticism coming from some unexpected sources, but it is, nevertheless, appreciated and welcomed. However, what I want to do here is to appeal to the rational conscious. We are agents in an environment, interacting between ourselves and our environments. The incredible thing about these multiple interactions is that they cause the environment to change and in turn the agents adapt or change in some unpredictable way. Then we interact in response to the changes in the environment in perpetuity. The world around including us is in constant multi-directional change. In this constantly evolving non-linear system, human agents have the advantage and capability of thought and innovative action. We are capable of learning by action and reflection. In addition, we are social and cultural agents capable of

collaboration. Human beings in a landscape act to preserve life, to perpetuate it and to evolve as a species over time. The fundamental human objective is to increase longevity, the number of their species, the quality of life, and spiritual existence over time into the indefinite future.

Groups when faced with a common enemy tend to collaborate when collaboration offers the opportunity for the survival of the group and the members of the group. In a nation state, as belief systems approach states which guarantee security and greater fitness to a larger number of cultural and kinship groups, loyalties to the institutions responsible for improving increased fitness grow stronger among the different cultural and kinship groups. It should not be surprising therefore that Blacks would donate to hospitals that preserve and perpetuate lives.

Giving is a form of sharing, a social entrepreneurial act, and, at the same time, selfish and social. By definition it has to be so for it is motivated by the intelligent strategy which shows that the life of the individual can be extended and protected by preserving and protective the collective. It is selfish in the sense that we have come to realize that our individual chances for survival, the perpetuation and improvement in the quality of life increases when we share information and the surpluses of our creative abilities. So we have a vested and personal interest in sharing. It is social in the sense that we are capable of empathy and love. Being capable of love, we can care about the preservation and wellbeing of other lives and the preservation of the earth.

But, it is also clear that giving is spiritual. It has to do with the sense of being associated with acts that are seen as elevating the human spirit above its material existence, as well as the creation of a legacy that extends our lives through the collective spirit of the society long after the death of our physical and material self. I refer to this as purchasing one's ticket to heaven in a blazing chariot of glory. However, just as the importance of the widow's mite as a valuable social act should not be discounted, similarly, the importance of altruism of the wealthy as a motive for giving should not be downgraded. There are rich people who are altruistic in their

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# Semaji

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**How do I submit articles to be submitted to our quarterly Semaji newsletter?** *Articles for submission are accepted 30 days prior to publication. Issues are published September, December, March and June. Email [ashlie.bienvenu90@gmail.com](mailto:ashlie.bienvenu90@gmail.com). If you are submitting photos please send a jpeg with credit.*

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## The Road So Far

The Standing on Their Shoulders project winds down

It has been one year since the Standing on Their Shoulders Project began and it has been a wonderful journey of discovery and preservation.

Over the course of the project we have done 39 educational and artistic workshops with youth, collected photographs from archives and generous individuals, and recorded dozens of hours of interviews about the Black English-speaking history of Little

Burgundy.

The core of the Standing on Their Shoulders project has been the 20 young griots who are preparing to share their visions of history with the Little Burgundy community and everyone in Greater Montreal this winter. In addition to being featured at the Black History Month Round Table's annual Black History Month launch celebrations, there will be a community forum in Little



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giving.

There are also economic principles underlying giving that explain how one might go about deciding to give to one cause and not another. The overall objective would be to maximize the benefits over the collectivity in a socially cohesive manner. I think it is not difficult to imagine that a general rule could be that one should distribute one's surpluses such that the greatest good is done for the greatest number of persons. I do not think that we could be justifiably critical of a social allocation of surpluses in which the intent was just that; and if, in fact, the benefits of that allocation could be evaluated to have been socially equitable, inclusive and cohesive. I think that the Children's hospital of Montreal would qualify as such a cause for "giving".

Finally the argument that such gifts are simply an attempt to dodge taxes is simplistic. The policy of tax exemptions for giving allows the donor the freedom to pick an appropriate cause, as opposed to having bureaucrats in the public sector and elected politicians decide on or select our causes for us. For what is not given is either taxed away or disappears unseen by the "Revenue Agency" or the general social collective. Governments also recognize that the private individual has legitimate priorities and preferences that differ from those of government distributive agencies. Accordingly, they respect those rights by exemption clauses in their tax laws. It follows that it is the right of every free being to distribute some of his or her surplus earnings as he or she believes to be most optimal socially, not according to loyalties imposed socially or otherwise.

Burgundy to display and celebrate their hard work and to honour all those that made their creative visions a reality. This community forum will be held on Sunday, **February 21st** from **3pm to 5pm** at the **Georges Vanier Cultural Centre**, located at 2450 rue Workman.

Stay tuned for more information on this event and don't miss the chance to see their reflections of history! We are looking forward to seeing you on this very special occasion.



## Meet The Participants!!

### The Standing on Their Shoulders Project!!



"The Standing On Their Shoulders project has been a rewarding and eye opening experience. As a minority overseas for much of my upbringing has left me with a desire to connect with black legacies and histories. By participating in this project I have learned a wealth about the rich history of Black folks in Montreal, stories that will leave me inspired for years to come. I greatly enjoyed the opportunity I had to speak with and interview such prominent individuals."

-Joseph Ariwi

"The "Standing on Their Shoulders" project seeks to uncover black anglophones' hidden history through storytelling and visuals. It is our way of celebrating our achievements as a people and giving a voice to a community that has been marginalized out of history. We understand that knowledge of self is key to the growth and unity of black youth in Montreal and beyond."

-Yanissa Grand-Pierre

"We felt that this was an important project to take part in because there isn't as much recognition for the people who have worked so hard to get Little Burgundy to where it is as there should be. My sister and I chose Jesse Maxwell-Smith because we found that her story was inspiring and that accomplishments like hers are something to strive for. We are extremely thankful that the Standing on Their Shoulders project gave us an opportunity to learn more about our community and someone who helped shape it."

-Rachel Shelton

"Standing on Their Shoulders is a bridge, in my eyes, to the past in Montreal. They taught me so much about the undiscussed history of Montreal's Black Community. Without them, I wouldn't have gained that knowledge and they are a great contribution to the Black Community because of this project that allowed youths to dig into their roots and create something marvellous."

-Maxwell Step



...Continued from Cover

Burgundy, became the place chosen by the young, immigrant scholars of the sixties and seventies from which to launch the Black Community Council of Quebec and its outreach programs. These programs were based on new social approaches to Black Community development and a determination to reposition the Black Community on the evolving fitness Landscape of Montreal. It was from within NCC that the Pan-Black movement of the English speaking Black Community was born, and expanded into NDG, LaSalle, West Island, Cote des Neiges, LaVal, the South Shore and, through its full participation in the National Black Coalition of Canada, on to the larger Canadian canvass. The Sir George Williams Crisis also gave urgency to that development. But essentially this movement was well on the way before the Sir George William Crisis erupted from the University Campus and became a lightning rod for change in the University and the City.

NCC was also responsible for bringing the English speaking Black immigrant communities and the Canadian born Blacks together, not as Islanders, feminists, ideologists, or members of any specific spiritual denomination, but as Blacks to engage in a struggle to end the exclusion of Blacks from the social, political and economic decision making processes of Montreal and Canada. To accomplish this, the new leadership, who lived mostly outside the physical boundaries of Little Burgundy, set up a network of organizations that together with specialist community based organizations (BSC, QBBE, BTW, the Victor Phillips Organization for the Welfare and Development of the Black Children, etc) linked Blacks throughout the Island of Montreal. These Black Community Associations formed the core agencies of the Black Community Council of Quebec.

There is also a link between the history of Black Montreal and Sir George Williams University that needs to be explored. It is a connection which was dramatized by the Sir George William crisis in 1969. But it was operating through the presence and the activism of Clarence Bayne (<https://vimeo.com/74153552>), Richard Leslie, Dorothy Wills, and a group of students (Carl Whittaker, Winston Nicholls, Don McFee, Kenny Knights) that worked with the Montreal Citizen Association to publish the Magazine: Expression. "Expression" became an important Black academic voice in the Community and in the discourse around the Sir George William Crisis (Special Conference Issue, Winter 1968), and the Black dialogue on Black liberation and development in Montreal and Canada.

The Negro Theatre Guild also has a role in the Sir George Williams Crisis. Under Victor Phillips Directorship and the Trinidad and Tobago Drama Committee, later BTW, and with

the support of Sir George Williams Fine Arts (specifically Norma Springford) and Professor Bayne (Commerce and Administration, Concordia University) the Negro Theatre Guild facilitated the use of space over extended periods of time at Sir George University for the rehearsal and production of plays and cultural events, and meetings of Black community organizations. Professor Roland Wills played a major role in helping to resolve the conflict between the students and the Administration during and after the Sir George Williams Crisis. He also carried out significant fundraising among his colleagues at Sir George Williams University to support programs in the English speaking Black community and to finance building repairs at the NCC. As part of the transition (late sixties to early seventies) of NCC from an organization with a significant White governance body and presence to a Black governance and management, Professor Roland Wills acted as the Black Father Christmas for the NCC Christmas holiday community celebration. This was part of a social strategy of empowerment to raise the self-esteem and pride of Black children in Little Burgundy and the surrounding territories. It was during those transition years of the late sixties and early seventies that Professor Clarence Bayne, along with a team of Black McGill and Sir George William graduates, became a member of the Board of Directors of NCC. It was also during that transition period that Carl Whittaker, a Sir George William sociology graduate, proposed and got the Board's acceptance to launch what he described as the "Comunaology" approach to community development. It was essentially a Pan-Black approach to organizing and managing the diversities in the Black community towards a broadly defined self-autonomy within a Federal multicultural Canadian citizenship. This ushered in a period of Black unity among its leadership voices and social influence in Montreal and Canada that lasted from 1974 to 2000, and which has not been experienced since.

It is in this larger context that the history of the English Speaking Blacks of Little Burgundy must be understood. And to get a sense of its importance and social and historical vitality we must follow the tentacle of its influences through its exemplars out into the far reaches of the surrounding areas on the Island of Montreal and beyond the boundaries of Quebec. I speak of the contributions of Oscar Peterson and Oliver Jones to the distinctiveness of Canada's contribution to World Jazz; the way that Rockhead Paradise connected Montrealers and the English speaking Blacks, immigrant and Canadian born, to the Black legends of the new music cultures that have reshaped many Western and American cultures; and the influence of the Coloured Women's Club that extended throughout the Island and into the rest of Canada (the Black Women's Congress). I am talking of the role that the Union United Church and the NCC played in the creation of new dynamic Black institutions in Montreal as a whole. These two institutions tied the diversities of the English speaking Black communities of Montreal together. They embodied the soul and memories of the early Black Montreal Community.



## Following the Roots



Hello, my name is Adanne and this is my story of following my roots. It all began when we decided to clean out the attic one rainy day. While cleaning we came across an old trunk that belonged to my great-grandmother.

My great-grandmother was descendant from African slaves that were brought to Brazil during the slave trade. She decided to move to Montreal in the 1950's and brought her trunk along with her. It was in this trunk that we found letters from my great-grandmother to her sister, who stayed in Brazil. My great-grandmother was Catholic, and extremely religious, so we were quite shocked to discover that her sister had been a Candomble Priestess.

Candomble, also called "dance in honour of the gods," originated from African religions of the Yoruba, Fon and Bantu regions. However, Candomble also has a strong connection with Catholicism and is considered a syncretic religion because it incorporates various beliefs from different religions, including Islam (<http://www.religionfacts.com/candomble>). The Candomble worshipers believe that there is one almighty god, named Oludumaré, and various other lesser gods, called Orixas, who act as middlemen between the head god and the people, since people cannot communicate with

Oludumaré directly. Each worshiper believes that they have a personal Orixas, who acts as their protector and controls their destiny. This is important since, according to the Candomble beliefs, there is no duality of good and bad; each person must simply fulfil their destiny. However, this is not a *carte blanche*, any evil you do to another will come back to you eventually.

Believers of Candomble practice their beliefs through dance. These carefully structured dances allow the believer to be possessed by the Orixas. Some of these Orixas' are ancestor spirits, called Baba Egum, who regulate the community's moral code through public demonstration during possession. The priests and priestess's also masquerade as these spirits during important ceremonies.

During the slave trade slave owners and Church leaders felt it imperative to convert the African slaves to Christianity. It was because of this that they outlawed traditional African beliefs, and later Candomble, up until the 1970's. As a way to keep their traditional beliefs the slaves outwardly practiced Christianity. However, they still met in secret to practice their beliefs and on special religious days. They hid their practices and symbols within the Christian faith, especially in connection with the Christian saints,

which resembled their own Orixas. Many people now practice Candomble in the open as a way to reclaim their culture and history (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/candomble/>).

This was not so for my great-grandmother's sister, who had to practice her religion in secret all of her life. It was through her letters that we learned of her struggle and dedication. This was why I was so interested in learning about this part of my family history and following my roots back to Brazil.

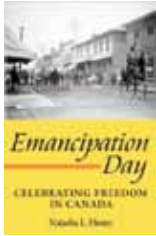
Please write us about your personal experiences with following your roots! Looking back at personal history allows a community to better understand their own history as a whole. It is through looking at these individual pieces that we begin to see the entire puzzle.

One such experience will be featured in Semaji every issue. Send any articles to [ashlie.bienvenu90@gmail.com](mailto:ashlie.bienvenu90@gmail.com). We hope you decide to share your piece of the puzzle with the community. Thank you!





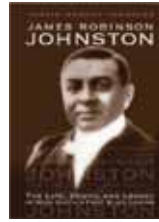
## Cozy up with these Winter Reads!!!



**Emancipation Day: Celebrating Freedom in Canada**, By *Natasha L. Henry*.

This new, well-researched book provides insight into the creation, development, and evolution of a distinct African-Canadian tradition through descriptive historical accounts and appealing images. The social, cultural, political, and educational practices of Emancipation Day festivities across Canada are explored, with emphasis on Ontario, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, and British Columbia.

--Excerpt from Dundurn press



**James Robinson Johnston: The Life, Death, and Legacy of Nova Scotia's First Black Lawyer**, By *Justin Marcus Johnston*.

James Robinson Johnston, known as "Lawyer Johnston" to many, is an important figure in Nova Scotian history: not only was he the first Black graduate of Dalhousie University, he was the first Black graduate of Dalhousie Law School as well. This biography deals with Johnston's personal and professional life, his role as a brilliant lawyer, community man and husband. It also deals with the sensitive issue of his death at the hands of his brother-in-law, Harry Allen, which caused a scandal when it occurred in March 1915. Author and descendant Justin Johnston looks at the associated impact the death and the killer's trial had on Nova Scotia's Black community, both past and present.

--Excerpt from amazon.ca

These books can be found at the Atwater Library's Black Collection.

## Stay Tuned For These Movies!!!



**Creed (2015)**. Cast: *Michael B. Jordan, Sylvester Stallone, and Tessa Thompson*.

The former World Heavyweight Champion Rocky Balboa serves as a trainer and mentor to Adonis Johnson, the son of his late friend and former rival Apollo Creed.

--Excerpt from IMDB



**And Then There Was You (2013)**. Cast: *Brian White, Kate Nauta, and Garcelle Beauvais*.

Natalie resorts to picking up the pieces of her life after her husband leaves her for the family he has outside. She falls in love with Darrell, but he has secrets of his own. Can Natalie handle any more secrets?

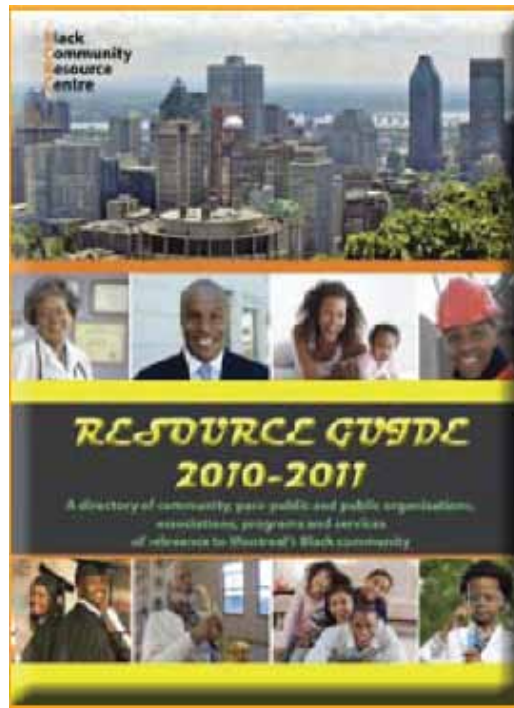
--Excerpt from IMDB



**A Thin Line Between Love and Hate (1996)**. Cast: *Martin Lawrence, Lynn Whitfield, Regina King*.

An observable, fast-talking party man Darnell Wright, gets his punishment when one of his conquests takes it personally and comes back for revenge in this 'Fatal Attraction'-esque comic thriller.

--Excerpt from IMDB



Our Resource Guide highlights a variety of non-profit, public and para-public organizations serving the English-speaking Black community

The Black Community Resource Centre (BCRC) is an organization that strengthens community capacity by providing professional support to organizations and individuals in need. Our team is committed to assisting visible-minority youth rekindle their dreams and achieve their full potential.

Our Funders:

- ◆ Patrimoine canadien /Canadian Heritage, Official Languages
- ◆ Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal

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