

The Exploitation of Black Labour as Experienced by the Black Loyalist

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Examining the history of the Black Loyalists is essential to Black Canadian history. More significantly is examining the social inequality the Black Loyalists faced in the past. Much of the early history of the Black Loyalists is shaped by the institution of slavery. The institution of slavery is maintained by ideologies and traditions that justify another race's enslavement. At the heart of these justifications is anti-black racism. Racism weaved throughout the fabric of white society and resulted from hundreds of years of imperialism, subjugation, and racist dogma. Black individuals had no legal safeguard for themselves nor any political power. This essay intends to argue that the Black Loyalists' experience illustrates the racist attitudes held by white society. This paper will focus on the preconception that Black people's value came from their usefulness in service to white people. The maintenance of anti-black racism will be examined through three generalizations. The different motivations and experiences between white and Black Loyalists, the overlap between freed and enslaved Black people living in Nova Scotia, and the continual exploitation of Black labour for white people's sole benefit.

The story of the Black Loyalists has been covered considerably by many different historians. James W. St. G. Walker was the first to explore the historical archives about the Black Loyalists. His book, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870*, covers the history of the free and enslaved Black Americans who came to Nova Scotia with the British after the Revolutionary War and the eventual exodus of some to Sierra Leone. Throughout his book, his descriptions of the Black Loyalists' experience illustrate why so many Black Loyalists decided to leave. The reality of colonial discrimination dashed their hope of gaining social and political equality. Robin W. Winks' book, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, supplies an overview of the history of Black Canadians. His book explores the early history of slavery in New France and the eventual transformation of slavery in the British colonies. Important to the study of Black Loyalists, Winks ties together the distinct experiences of white Loyalists, Black Loyalists, and enslaved Black people. Black and white Loyalists had a strained relationship as they were living close together in areas such as Halifax and Annapolis or segregated in Birchtown and Digby. The existence of slavery added more animosity as free and enslaved Black people living side by side challenged the notions of Black servitude. Harvey Amani

Whitfield's book, *North to Bondage: Loyalists Slavery in the Maritimes*, illustrates the dying system of slavery in the maritime colonies. There is a clear distinction between the white Loyalists, the Black Loyalists, and the enslaved black people. Whitfield's book surveys how the white Loyalists brought their slaves into the new settlement of Nova Scotia which transformed the already established tradition of slavery in the province. The maintenance of slavery by white Loyalists had profound impacts on the free Black Loyalists while simultaneously creating a rift between free and enslaved Black people. These authors supply a foundation for the transition of exploiting Black slaves' labour to the exploitation of free Black labour. By examining the period from 1783 to 1792 and the Loyalists' settlements in Nova Scotia, one can gather insight into the racist experiences of the Black Loyalists. Set to the background of the American War of Independence, the newly freed slaves set out to carve a new settlement and identity in the British Empire.

With the British defeat in 1783, those who claimed loyalty to the British Crown emigrated from America to England or other British colonies including Canada. Of the estimated 60,000 total Loyalists, about 14,000 were Black.¹ Although the number is unclear, the largest settlement in the Canadian Maritimes was in Nova Scotia. Of the total number of Loyalist settling in Nova Scotia, ten percent were free Black Loyalists and enslaved Blacks following their masters.² Land was promised to both Black and white Loyalists for services and loyalty to the British military during the Revolutionary War.

Black and white Loyalists had differing interpretations of loyalty which divided their experiences as Loyalist. In 1775, Lord Dunmore the Colonial Governor of Virginia proclaimed that "I do hereby further declare all indented Servants, Negroes, or others, (appertaining to Rebels,) free that are able to and willing to bear Arms, they joining His Majesty's Troops as soon as may be."³ Shortly after its publication, around 300 black men joined the Ethiopian Regiment led by

¹ Clarkson, John. "Journal Account of Lydia Jackson". Nova Scotia. 30 November 1791. Archives MG 1 vol. 219 pp. 197-201; published in Clarkson's Mission to America, 1791-1792 p. 89-90 (Public Archives of Nova Scotia Publication no. 11, 1971) (F90 /N85/ Ar2P no. 11). <https://archives.novascotia.ca/africanns/archives/?ID=45&Page=200402064>

² James W. St. G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870*, 12.

³ R. Johnson, *Lord Dunmore's Proclamation of 1775*. Document. (Virginia: United States). <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/lord-dunmore-s-proclamation-1775/>

Dunmore himself.⁴ As the war raged on, the Commander in Chief of the British Army in The Thirteen Colonies Sir Guy Carleton promised that all Black slaves would be free once they crossed British lines and declared their loyalty.⁵ Therefore, some Black people freely swore their allegiance to the British Crown and supplied their services in anticipation that all Blacks would be emancipated once the British won the war.⁶

The consequences Black runaways would face if caught by the revolutionary army was severe. In response to the Dunmore proclamation, the Virginia Assembly declared:

“[It] is enacted that all negro or other slaves, conspiring to rebel or make insurrection, shall suffer death, and be excluded all benefit of clergy: We think it proper to declare, that all slaves who have been, or shall be seduced, by his lordship's proclamation, or other arts, to desert their masters' service, and take up arms against the inhabitants of this colony, shall be liable to such punishment as shall hereafter be directed by the General Convention. And to that end all such, who have taken this unlawful and wicked step, may return in safety to their duty, and escape the punishment due to their crimes, we hereby promise pardon to them, they surrendering themselves to Col. William Woodford, or any other commander of our troops, and not appearing in arms after the publication hereof.”⁷

This response illustrates two key points. First, that those who run away and deliberately take up arms against their masters will face severe punishment likely death by the American militias if captured. Second, if a slave does come back freely and declare themselves unarmed, they would be pardoned. There is no mention of freedom. Thus in the context of the state of Virginia, the runaway slaves had two options: death or continual enslavement. As the numbers recorded by the British military showcase, many enslaved Blacks chose to risk this punishment and cross into British lines.

Likewise, although they never faced the punishment of enslavement, many white Loyalists faced severe repercussions for their expressed loyalty. The story of Brigadier General Timothy Ruggles illustrates this. As a delegate from Massachusetts and President of the First Colonial Congress, Ruggles was a prominent political figure in the thirteen colonies. Despite the political

⁴ James W. St. G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870*, 1.

⁵ Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, 31.

⁶ James W. St. G. Walker. *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870*, 5.

⁷ “A Declaration” *Virginia Assembly's Response 1775*. Retrieved from Digital History, http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/active_learning/explorations/revolution/virginia_assembly.cfm

power and prestige afforded to him as a citizen of the colonies, he openly refused to sign the document addressed to the King to exempt the Americans from the new Stamp Tax. This open refusal resulted first in Ruggles's dismissal and then to his property's confiscation and looting as he was forced out of his estate by angry citizens. Ruggles managed to get to Boston in 1774 and became involved with the Loyalist troops. He provides a detailed explanation as to why a white citizen might adhere their loyalty to the crown.

As Historian Katie Cottreau-Robins argues, this defiance "positioned Ruggles early on among Loyalists who envisioned an Anglo-American empire in which the mother country and her colonies would work together to improve economically, politically and culturally."⁸ Ruggles and many other white Loyalists saw the advantage of British rule and were willing to fight for that continued existence. Once declaring their loyalty to the British and following the collapse of British power, the white Loyalists lost their homes, political status, and citizenship. After the war, however, the British planned to compensate them for their losses and promised land and security in their other colonies. On the contrary, the status of Black Loyalists was uncertain as the terms of an agreement between the British and Americans came together. As they waited, many ex-slaves lived in fear of being sent back to their masters and the subsequent punishment they would face.⁹ For white Loyalists, loyalty to the crown was a personal and political choice while for Black Loyalists, the choice was either continued enslavement or service to the British. This distinction is significant because it showcases the emphasis on Black labour. White Loyalists chose to exist as citizens of the newly formed America or as citizens of the British Empire. Black Loyalists were fighting for an existence separate from slavery.

Dunmore and Carleton clarified that an expression of loyalty and service to the British army could grant Black people's their freedom. It is arguable that for white military and political personnel, the Black American's emancipation was never truly about granting freedom and justice for the countless years of misery, bondage, and suffering Black people faced. Instead, emancipation was a military tool used as a desperate measure. No new laws legally recognized Black Americans as citizens nor were there federal laws that abolished slavery. Therefore, it can be deduced that some Black Americans' emancipation was an opportunity taken by some military

8 Katie Cottreau-Robins, "The Loyalists Plantation: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Informing Early African-Nova Scotian Settlement," 37.

⁹ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 31.

leaders rather than an attempt to make the lives of Black Americans better. The acceptance of Black soldiers and service men into the British army signifies the transition to free Black labour rather than a transition to more tolerable attitudes. In the late 18th century British colonial society, Black lives were conditional and came at the expense of white people's own goals and ambitions.

Eventually, both America and Britain agreed that the Black people who fled to the British lines became free as soon as they did and were thus allowed to leave American soil with the other white Loyalists.¹⁰ Despite both groups proving their loyalty to the Crown, the Black Loyalists faced disadvantages in Nova Scotia. This mistreatment of the Black Loyalists who settled in Nova Scotia speaks to the more significant phenomenon of social inequality that continued in Nova Scotia. The reality for the British personnel in charge of surveying and resettling the thousands of Loyalists was that they were extremely overwhelmed and underestimated the sheer number of new people. This administrative issue resulted in the neglect of Black Loyalists who often received little to no land. If they did receive the land grants, the land "contained some of the provinces' worst soil and was often located so far from major settlements that establishing a viable farm upon it or even visiting it was extremely difficult."¹¹ Some Black Loyalists did receive land and Birchtown, Brindley Town and Little Tracadie became the only all-Black Loyalists communities.¹² The largest settlement of Black Loyalists was Birchtown on the outskirts of Shelburne.¹³

This visible segregation would further amplify the animosity between the white and Black Loyalists. Similarly, many Black Loyalists stayed in Halifax¹⁴ which caused further proximity to white Loyalists through employment in the urban city. This proximity to one another only seemed to highlight their different treatment. According to Robin W. Winks, there were 486 land grants eventually given to the Black Loyalists. The Black Pioneers living in Annapolis Valley received most of these grants. They also received more respect from the white Loyalist than any other Black settlers.¹⁵ The treatment of the Black Pioneers in comparison to other Black Loyalists is another example of the perception of Black labour in white society. The members of the Black Pioneers were a visible example of military service performed under the British. Those who served in the

¹⁰ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 32.

¹¹ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, pp 18.

¹² Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 28.

¹³ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 22.

¹⁴ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 30.

¹⁵ Winks. *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, 41.

military were recognized as more deserving of their land titles compared to the many other Black Loyalists who performed different tasks for the military.

Like the allocation of land, the provisions promised by the Government prioritized white Loyalists.¹⁶ Although the white Loyalists also had to deal with poverty and scarcity in these communities, Black Loyalists fared worse.¹⁷ William Dyott, an eyewitness in 1788 at Birchtown, describes this reality:

[Dyott and fellow officers] walked through the woods about two miles from the barracks to a negro town called Birch Town. At the evacuation of New York there were a great number of these poor devils given lands and settled here- The place is beyond description wretched, situated on the coast in the middle of barren rocks, and partly surrounded by a thick impenetrable wood - Their huts miserable to guard against the inclemency of a Nova Scotia winter, and their existence almost depending on what they could lay up in summer. I think I never saw wretchedness and poverty so strongly perceptible in the garb and the countenance of the human species as in these miserable outcasts. I cannot say I was sorry to quit so melancholy a dwelling.”¹⁸

This passage informs us that there was some land given in Birchtown. The conditions, however, of the people living there are desperate. In the immediate years of resettlement, Black Loyalists made very little progress. Even when given land, they had little ability to cultivate it or build shelters that would suffice. Further emphasizing Black Loyalists desperation is the white town of Shelburne. A letter by Benjamin Marston, describes that:

The new settlers here have suffered no other hardships and difficulties than are commonly incident to the settling of a new country -- a proof of which is the universal state of good health enjoyed in this place, no other disorders having prevailed than such as are usual in the country in general, and if some tender worn out constitutions have fallen a sacrifice, more have been bettered by the change of climate from N. York to N. Scotia. The greatest difficulty they have had to encounter has, in my opinion, been the living in less roomy and commodious habitations than some had been heretofore used to, but that is every day growing better. We have been well served with the King's provisions, which have been very good of their kind, particularly the bread. There has been likewise a distribution of clothing, working tools, some boards, &c., but in what proportion I do not know, those matters being out of my line.¹⁹

¹⁶ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 43

¹⁷ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 45.

¹⁸ “Excerpts from William Dyott’s Diary”, Sunday, October 1788.

https://blackLoyalists.com/cdc/documents/diaries/dyott_excerpt.htm

¹⁹ “Marston Describes Shelburne”, 1785.

https://blackLoyalists.com/cdc/documents/diaries/marston_journal.htm

According to this letter, unlike the Black Loyalists the white Loyalists faced little hardship besides adapting to a new country. Although this letter may exaggerate superiors, the difference between the two towns is evident. Even more noticeable, the town received provisions from the government. This advantage is a sharp contrast to the poverty the Black Loyalists in Birchtown faced. The desperation that many Black Loyalists faced was not for lack of trying. Although this description of Shelburne is not representative of all white Loyalists' experience as there are records of white poverty, it still highlights the difference between white and Black Loyalists.

The fear of starvation pushed many free Blacks into conditions that they did not envision when promised their freedom. In the more rural communities desperate for work, some Blacks joined the system of 'share-cropping.' A very exploitative system, the tenants of the land were tied to it while the landowner took a percentage from the tenant's harvest. This system ultimately would keep the tenant bound with no hopes of gathering enough savings to purchase land of their own.²⁰ Indentured servitude was another exploitative system. Slightly above actual enslavement, free blacks would lease their labour for an extended period in hopes of avoiding starvation and homelessness.²¹ Some Black parents were desperate enough to lease out their children.

Sometimes, however, white masters would claim the child as a slave or extort the parent for their children's return.²² The privilege that some white Loyalists had compared to the Black Loyalists created the circumstances where Blacks had to revert to a similar form of slavery they desperately fought to escape. Despite their egregious experiences, they were still a bit above the Blacks who were slaves.

The practice of slavery occurred before the Loyalists arrived in Nova Scotia. Although it was not as institutionalized as the Southern States, the maintenance of slavery and the usage of slaves in the North informs significant understandings of the maritime society. A newspaper advertisement for a runaway slave in 1772 provides context for Nova Scotia's attitudes before the arrival of the Loyalists in 1783. Describing the runaway girl's appearance and naming her Thursday, the newspaper advertisement states:

²⁰ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 46.

²¹ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 49.

²² Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 50.

Whoever may harbour said Negro Girl or encourage her to stay away from her said Master, may depend on being prosecuted according as the Law shall direct. And whosever may be so kind to take her up and send her home to her said Master, shall be paid all Cots and Charges, together with TWO DOLLARS Reward for their Trouble²³.

Similarly, another advertisement in 1781 from the same magazine *Nova Scotia Gazette* has a similar advertisement for a runaway slave boy named James:

Whoever will apprehend and secure the said Negro in any of His Majesty's Goals so that his Master may have him again, shall be entitled to Five Pounds Reward and all necessary charges paid. Masters of Vessels and others are cation'd not to Harbur, conceal or carry said Negro. If the said James, will return to his Master he shall be forgiven.²⁴

These advertisements both give insight into the practice of slavery in Nova Scotia. Written almost ten years apart, they both share a very similar formulation. There is the name of the runaway, the description of their appearance and clothing, the cautioning of anyone who might be harbouring them, and a reward for their return. These descriptions signifies that there may have been an issue with runaway slaves. Also, it is essential to note the reward which would have encouraged assistance from the public. Slavery was public knowledge and the owners of the slaves were not embarrassed to discuss their issues about their slaves. Whitfield further supports this concept by arguing that slavery was a wildy accepted practice in Nova Scotia.²⁵ Entering Nova Scotia in 1783, freed Black Loyalists were quickly disillusioned to the idea of all Black emancipation.

With the arrival of white Loyalists, there was also an influx of new slaves into the colony. According to Walker, about 1,232 slaves or 'servants' entered Nova Scotia with their white masters. Shelburne, which had the largest settlement of Loyalists also introduced many new slaves along with the new number of free Black Loyalists.²⁶ It is important to note that the distinction between 'servant' and 'slave' was very grey. Many records referred to many of the Blacks

²³ "Fugitive Slave Advertisement", Nova Scotia Archives. *Nova Scotia Gazette and Weekly Chronicle* 01 September 1772 p. 3 (microfilm no. 8155).
<https://archives.novascotia.ca/africanns/archives/?ID=10>

²⁴ "Runaway slave advertisement for 'James', property of Abel Michener of Falmouth", Nova Scotia Archives. *Nova Scotia Gazette*, 22 May 1781 p. 3 (microfilm no. 8159).
<https://archives.novascotia.ca/africanns/archives/?ID=16>

²⁵ Harvey Amani Whitfield, *North to Bondage: Loyalists Slavery in the Maritimes*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016), 36.

²⁶ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 40.

accompanying the white Loyalists as their servants. What is significant is that the two terms' variability highlights a growing sensitivity to the term 'slavery'.²⁷ Regardless of the movement away from the term 'slavery,' the practice continued. As many of the Loyalists came from the northern colonies such as New England, they brought the already entrenched practice of slavery. This form of slavery differed from the middle colonies as it shifted from chattel slavery with large plantations to an emphasis on skilled labour²⁸. The proximity between owners and their slaves was an attractive trait of the northern colonies and continued in Nova Scotia. The slaves also tended to be smaller in number and were used in various occupations "including baking, butchering, carting, carpentry, shipbuilding, and seafaring."²⁹ Regardless of the differences between Northern and Southern systems of slavery, the system itself still relied on the exploitation of Black labour.

After the Revolutionary War, white Loyalists could bring whatever property with them including their slaves.³⁰ The continuation of slavery leads to two conclusions. First, enslaved Blacks who had Loyalist masters were not given the same opportunity for freedom as runaways slaves from rebel masters. Second, assuming that the slaves of Loyalists continued to work as slaves for their masters during the war, they technically fulfilled the first conditions of the Dunmore proclamation. Like other Black people who were declared free, their service for the British ranged from "cooks, orderlies and waiters in the British regiments, or were assigned as personal servants to the officers."³¹ Their service to their masters did not indicate the same conditions that gave emancipation to slaves of Rebel masters. This discrepancy can be explained by understanding that Black labour was conditional to the priority of white goals. For the British, emancipating the slaves during the war was a tactic that was perceived to benefit the British. By not extending this grace to the slaves of Loyalists, the British showcased more concern for white people and their 'property' than the enslavement of Black people. For white Loyalists, their ability to bring their slaves with them to Nova Scotia assumes that the attitudes towards Black people did not change. Instead, it merely shifted to benefit white society.

Furthermore, the practice of slavery is significant to both the enslaved and free Black Loyalists. As mentioned above, those Black people who crossed British lines anticipated not only

²⁷ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 45.

²⁸ Whitfield, *North to Bondage*, 21

²⁹ Whitfield, *North to Bondage*, 21.

³⁰ Whitfield, *North to Bondage*, 42.

³¹ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 5.

their release but the emancipation of all Black people. They assumed that once the British won, then all Black people would finally be free. Instead, the Black people who fought for their freedom lived alongside enslaved Black people. White Loyalists who owned slaves had to contend with the visibility of free Black people. The presence of free Black people contradicted the notion that Blacks deserved their enslavement. For communities with a large free Black population such as Birchtown, white masters could not avoid the interaction between free and enslaved Black people. Birchtown even became a place of protection for runaway Black slaves whose masters would be unsuccessful at retrieving them.³² As the advertisements for runaway slaves expressed a monetary reward, it is reasonable to assume that this had no impact on free Black people's willingness to shelter runaways. They themselves were only free because they risked the uncertainty of running away. Thus, the few dollars they would receive in return for putting a fellow Black person back into bondage would have been an unforgivable act. The free Black people also had to live with the fear that if society practiced slavery, there was a chance that white people would force them back into slavery.

While it was not common, there are documented cases of freed Black people resold into slavery. The 1791 court case of *R v. Gray* highlights the instability of freedom for Blacks in Nova Scotia. Jesse Gray a white Loyalist had no qualms about selling his mistress Mary Postell (confirmed by herself in the court documents) in exchange for 100 bushels of potatoes. He also tried to sell her children. As the court document shows, Gray was tried but the court acquitted him of any criminal activity and thus Postell was forced to remain in slavery.³³ This case indicated two things. One, even though there was no clear legislation as Nova Scotia never had a Statute Law relating to slavery³⁴ the local white officials had the authority to allow Black people to continue in servitude. Also, the court case informs us that buying and selling slaves by white Loyalists continued. The British colony allowed white Loyalists to bring slaves into Nova Scotia as part of their compensation and allowed them to participate in the trade within the community. Similarly, the court proceedings of Elizabeth Watson further attest to the likelihood of white officials sympathizing with white Loyalists and not with the plight of Black slaves. Born free in

³² Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 41.

³³ *R. v. Gray*. Shelburne County Court of General Sessions of the Peace. April-November 1791. Nova Scotia Archives RG 60 Shelburne County vol. 1 file 49-4. <https://archives.novascotia.ca/africanns/archives/?ID=46>

³⁴ Whitfield, *North to Bondage*, 85.

America, Watson was forced into slavery and brought to Nova Scotia. She sued her master in 1779 for having no legal grounds to keep her enslaved and wanted reparations for the severe abuse she suffered under his captivity. The judgement, however, was passed down in her master's favour: "Therefore it is considered that the said William Proud do secure and hold the said Negro Woman Phillis, previously calling herself Elizabeth Watson, as the property and slaves of him the said William Proud."³⁵ This judgment further showcases the prioritizing of white Loyalists. Even though Watson claimed that he was abusing her, the courts still allowed Proud to continue to keep her enslaved. Even though Watson had a witness testify that they knew Watson in America as a free person, the courts still allowed her continual enslavement.

Furthermore, Lydia Jackson's story illustrates how easy white 'employers' could and did exploit the circumstances of desperate Black Loyalists for their gain. As a free Black Loyalist, Jackson indentured herself to a white Loyalist. Taking advantage, he tricked her into signing an agreement that kept her bound for longer than the year to which she agreed. Eventually, he sold her to another white loyalist who abused her for another three years. Jackson, however, was able to find freedom by escaping to Halifax.³⁶ Her testimony indicates that many Black Loyalists had very little legal recourse for contesting their enslavement. It also indicates that white Loyalists were just as willing and able to be violent towards their slaves. This notion of the northern slaves being well treated and less likely to face brutality³⁷ is unconvincing. As Whitfield argues: "despite their pseudo-pious expressions of concern for their "slave family," owners reinforced the racial hierarchy of slavery and extracted as much labour as possible by regularly resorting to brutal punishments and to separating families by selling the children."³⁸ Slavery had nuances but if people legally own other people the owner always had discretion. Therefore, the very existence of slavery in Nova Scotia reminded both the enslaved and free Black people that their labour was their only value. For enslaved, indentured, and free Black people their labour had a particular

³⁵ *Watson alias Phillis v. Proud* (judgement). Supreme Court of Nova Scotia — Halifax County judgement books. Nova Scotia Archives. RG 39 J Halifax County vol. 6 p. 103. 1779.

<https://archives.novascotia.ca/africanns/archives/?ID=14>

³⁶ John Clarkson. "Journal Account of Lydia Jackson". Nova Scotia. 30 November 1791.

Archives MG 1 vol. 219 pp. 197-201; published in *Clarkson's Mission to America, 1791-1792* p. 89-90 (Public Archives of Nova Scotia Publication no. 11, 1971) (F90 /N85/ Ar2P no. 11).

<https://archives.novascotia.ca/africanns/archives/?ID=45&Page=200402064>

³⁷ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 50.

³⁸ Whitfield, *North to Bondage*, 62.

expectation. They rarely got to see the fruits of their labour and were constantly at the mercy of white society.

Moreover, like slavery, the transportation of racist attitudes was further developed in Nova Scotia. Even though slavery was slowly dying down by the end of the 18th century as white people looked more and more to free Black labour, the racism that instituted Black people being inferior to whites continued. The Black Loyalists faced continuous examples of discrimination. This paper has already stated many examples: the lack of provisions, lack of land, and the inability to maintain large communities. These examples are by-products of the racist system. A prioritization of white communities left Black communities to receive much less of the available resources. This prioritization can be attributed to the systemic racism that provided fewer opportunities to Black Loyalists making them more likely to experience poverty and desperation. There are, however, multiple examples of overt racism directed towards the Black Loyalists from other white Loyalists.

The most notable example of explicit racism performed by some white Loyalists against free Black Loyalists is the Shelburne riot of 1784. Although many free Black people continued to stay in Birchtown, some moved to Shelburne as there were more job opportunities. This increased presence in Shelburne of free Black people was a tangible target for the discontented white Loyalists who found themselves unemployed.³⁹ Two passages from Benjamin Marston, who was sent to Shelburne to help develop the land for the new settlers, gives an ominous insight into the riots:

Monday, 26. Great Riot today. The disbanded soldiers have risen against the Free negroes to drive them out of Town because they labour cheaper than they -- the soldiers. Tuesday, 27. Riot continues. The soldiers force the free negroes to quit the Town -- pulled down about 20 of their houses.⁴⁰

This account is brief but provides context for the white violence that targeted free Black people. First, these were previous soldiers who fought in the Revolutionary War so they believed they were entitled to a comfortable life in exchange for their services. Second, the white Loyalists were somewhat successful in riding the free Black people out of the town. Present here is the irony of white entitlement. The white Loyalists' animosity towards Black Loyalists was rooted in their

³⁹ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 39.

⁴⁰ "Benjamin Marston's Journal", 1783 to 1784.

https://blackLoyalists.com/cdc/documents/diaries/marston_journal.htm

perceived superiority to Black people. They lived under the assumption that they always came before Black people. Thus witnessing that they were not getting the jobs to which they believed they were entitled, they attacked the Black community hoping to cause enough fear for the Blacks living in Shelburne to leave. Instead of recognizing that white employers hired Black employees because of economic circumstances, the white Loyalists used violence against the Black Loyalists to assert their racial superiority. Even when Black people had no control over the economic situation and were only conceding to the exploitative wages because it was the choice between that and starving, the whites still blamed Black people. The racist ideology that white people always came first culminated into a violent riot.

Similarly, David George a Black preacher who accompanied the Black and white Loyalists to Nova Scotia after the Revolutionary War also describes his own experience with the Shelburne riots:

Soon after this the persecution Increased, and became so great, that it did not seem possible to preach, and I thought I must leave Shelburne. Several of the black people had houses upon my lot, but forty (40) or fifty (50) disbanded soldiers were employed, who came with the tackle of ships, and turned my dwelling house, and every one of their houses, quite over, and the meeting house they would have burned down, had not the ringleader of the mob himself prevented it. But I continued to preaching it till they came one night, and stood before the pulpit, and swore how they would treat me If I preached again. But I stayed and preached, and the next day they came and beat me with sticks and drove me into the swamp. I returned in the evening, and took my wife and children over to the river to Birchtown, where some black people were settled, and there seemed a greater prospect of doing good then at Shelburne. I preached at Birchtown from the fall until the mid of December.⁴¹

This account is significant because it confirms that white Loyalists did tear down Black houses and tried to instil a fear that would force many Blacks to leave Shelburne. It is also important because it shows that the white Loyalists were not selective of whom they targeted. The white Loyalists' motivation for attacking the Black homes was their anger against their employment yet they still attacked the house of a preacher. George's presence would not have interfered with white Loyalists' job prospects. This account speaks to the generalized racism that the white Loyalists felt. They perceived all free Black people as a threat to their security and prospect. In the context

⁴¹ "An Account of Life of Mr. David George from S. L. A. given by himself." 1792.
https://blackLoyalists.com/cdc/documents/diaries/george_a_life.htm#riot

of the Black Loyalists, their presence and cheap labour had an enormous impact on the communities in which they dwelled. White people had to contend with a large presence of free Black people which sometimes manifested in racism and discrimination.

The Shelburne riot is just one example that illustrates the racism in Nova Scotia. As free Black people were continuously excluded from participating fully in society, many other forms of racism manifested themselves. For example, access to education was next to none. The only forms of schools that Black people could attend were schools for children which taught the children of both free and enslaved Black people. These schools, however, tended to be small and few and far between⁴². Similarly, Government policies continued to exclude Black people from gaining any sense of citizenship and the benefits that come with it. For example, free Black people did not have the right to vote in legislation nor did they have the right to participate in a jury.⁴³ This last part is significant because of the court cases as mentioned above that always favoured the white Loyalists. Even in a court of law, free Black Loyalists had no representation nor government support. Racism was present in every aspect of the Black Loyalists' life. Although not enslaved, free Black people still missed out on the benefits that freedom was supposed to guarantee. The society in which Black Loyalists lived in the late 18th century facilitated a system which perceived Black people as inferior to white people. The actions of many whites and the poor conditions of Black Loyalists demonstrate this. The Black Loyalists did not have the same privilege in society as the white Loyalists yet contributed their labour for the benefit of white society.

The ongoing shift between the practices of slavery to exploiting Black labour is rooted in the same ideology of racism. The same racism that justified the enslavement, trading, and mistreatment of Black people for centuries morphed so that Black labour exploitation flourished. The first indication of this is where the Black Loyalists' story began with the Dunmore Proclamation. To reiterate, it would seem that the Colonial Governor of Virginia was an abolitionist. This is untrue as he later became the Governor of the Bahamas for a short period and purchased slaves.⁴⁴ Thus, we can assume that the Proclamation was not rooted in the Abolition's goal but rather an opportunity for the British. The public call for enslaved Black people to take up

⁴² Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 58.

⁴³ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 45.

⁴⁴ Tony Pace, "Lord Dunmore," accessed November 12, 2020, <https://blackLoyalists.com/cdc/people/influential/dunmore.htm>.

arms worked two-fold. It gave the British an influx of potential soldiers and more likely an influx of new labourers. Similarly, a large number of slaves leaving their rebel masters was hoped to cripple the southern economy and scare the Americans into conceding.⁴⁵ The latter plan was not successful but the British still got an influx of new labourers. During the war, Black Loyalists worked as “boatmen, woodsmen, general laborers, buglers and musicians.”⁴⁶ Free Black people and the enslaved Black people of white Loyalists were both employed to service the British army. The free Black people had no choice but to give their labour freely to the British or else they would lose their protection against enslavement.

Even after the War, the British still had the expectation to extract labour and service from Black Loyalists. For example, in the early months of the resettlement of Nova Scotia, the government employed members of the disbanded Black Pioneer regiment to construct the town of Shelburne.⁴⁷ The top priority for resettlement was the white Loyalists. Using the services of the Black soldiers allowed those in charge of resettling the incoming Loyalists easy access to labour. Similarly, as the settlement of Nova Scotia continued, Black labour was prioritized over white labour. This prioritization is not because of some desire to support Black communities. Instead, it was a seizure of an opportunity. Because of the systemic racism, white employers could pay Black labourers less and without solid political or social capital many Black labourers had to take what they could get.

Indeed, their labour was further exploited in conditions that they could not avoid. For example, a requirement of the Black Loyalists living in Digby was to work for free in exchange for government provision.⁴⁸ This condition was not an expectation put on white Loyalists who received provision much longer and without the stipulation that the Black Loyalists faced. Similarly during a particularly rough winter, the Black Loyalists were refused supplies to build their homes unless they worked on the roads in white communities.⁴⁹ This example is one of many in which white people coerced Black people into performing free labour. Sharecropping is another example of this exploitation. As previously mentioned, Black Loyalists were less likely to receive land and so sharecropping or tenant farming was their only possibility at having access to some

⁴⁵ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 29.

⁴⁶ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 31.

⁴⁷ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 30.

⁴⁸ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, 42.

⁴⁹ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 43.

land.⁵⁰ The unlikelihood that Black tenants could one day purchase land forever tied them to White-owned land. Thus, Black tenants had to work on their harvest and provide service and crop yields to the white landowner. These examples illustrate that white officials recognized that they could exploit Black people's labour without any argument. The racism that permeated everyday society informed this understanding. These examples are evidence of the continuous pattern of the exploitation of Black labour. Even when Black people were no longer held in bondage by white owners, Black people's labour was still tightly held. Even though the Black Loyalists were crucial to the development of Nova Scotia's colony, they still received less of the benefits than their fellow white Loyalists. Like the history of slavery, the fruits of Black labour rarely were distributed accordingly.

In conclusion, the emancipation of Black slaves during the revolutionary war would seem to speak to the trend that would eventually lead to the abolishing of the slave trade in the British Empire. A closer look, however, at the Black Loyalists' experience during the war and their re-settlement into the colonies illustrate the continuation of racist attitudes. The contrast between white and Black Loyalists, the continual existence of slavery in the new colony, and the exploitation of Black labour illuminate the racism that allowed Black people to be physically free but bound to the white mandate. The story of the Black Loyalists speaks to the truth of Canadian history and their support of the system of slavery. Acknowledging that the early Canadian colonies were just as complicit in Black people's oppression is the first step in rectifying the current state of white hegemony. This complacency is not to say that every single white person in the British colony of Nova Scotia harboured the intent to keep slaves nor believed in the morality of slavery. Like any oppressive system, some individuals do not conform fully to cultural attitudes. This essay and the historical research done before on the topic of Black Loyalists supplies the stepping stones toward recognizing that Canadian society today still echoes the racist attitudes that place Black Canadians in unfavourable conditions. Racism and prejudice still exist and by untangling the complex web that racism creates Black Canadians can hope to heal.

⁵⁰ Whitfield, *North to Bondage*, 58.

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