

BLACK HISTORY: RECOGNIZING CONTRIBUTIONS TO QUÉBEC AND CANADA

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INTENDED GRADE LEVEL/SUBJECT AREA

This approach is intended for all grades and should be part of all subject areas.

CONCEPTS

- Ancient African civilizations, traditional story telling, colonialism, slavery, the underground railroad, significant sacrifices and contributions of Black Canadians, Black leaders, racial attitudes.

INSTRUCTIONAL OUTCOMES

Students will:

- learn about the history of Africa and Africans and their contributions to human-kind;
- develop an awareness of “the Black experience” in the development of Québec and Canada;
- demonstrate an understanding of and an ability to identify the systemic racism that exists.

RECOMMENDED TIME FRAME

This is a crucial way of thinking and teaching which should permeate all lessons and subject areas on an ongoing basis.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

History teachers must make every effort to teach more about the history of Africa and Africans and their contributions to human-kind. They must expose their students more to "The Black Experience" in the development of Québec and Canada.

It is very important that White students know the historical facts. If adequate and accurate material about the Black experience is not provided in the classroom, racial attitudes will be formed on the basis of misinformation gained from “other sources.” Social change necessitates a commitment to lift the appalling ignorance about Blacks among so many Canadian youths—especially White youths.

Presently, I sit on a committee that has written and is still doing work on the historical text, *Some Missing Pages: The Presence of the Black People and Black Community in Québec and Canadian History*. The Québec Government has taken the initiative in correcting some of the falsities of Canadian history and I do hope that the rest of Canada will follow Québec's lead.

ACTIVITIES

Part One –

The History of Africa and Africans and Their Contributions to Human-Kind

Videos: *Our Legacy, Let Us Tell You About Our People*

These two videos recount the glories of Ancient Africa. Following the Traditional African way of story-telling, griots (the story-tellers) narrate the achievements and contributions of Ancient African Civilizations of the Nile and the Niger. Students are introduced to the Kingdoms of Nubia, Egypt, Kush, Axum, Ghana, Mali and Songhai. They listen to outstanding Black personalities including Imhotep (the greatest of the ancient physicians), Taharqua, Mansa Musa and Askia Mohammed.

The videos tell of the slavery and the dreadful effect on Africa caused by the abduction of a tenth of its population. The storytellers discuss the African diaspora and the role that Blacks have played in the United States and Canada. Students become somewhat emotional as they watch slaves on the plantation. They experienced the slaves' torture, enjoyed the "Negro Spirituals," swayed to their dances, and listened to Harriet Tubman, Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King and others.

History teachers must stress this aspect of African history if they wish to debunk many of the myths, biases, and rigidities that plague Blacks every moments of their lives.

White historians have largely ignored Africa's greatness. History teachers must not.

Part Two –

The Black Experience in the Development of Québec and Canada

The Black experience and contribution in the building and development of Québec and Canada have largely been ignored in traditional Canadian history texts which focus on the British and the French as the "two founding nations." This vision is outdated because it fails to recognize the significant sacrifices and contributions of minorities to the Canadian society.

The videos, *Our Legacy* and *Let Us Tell You About Our People*, and the resource, *Some Missing Pages: The Presence of the Black People and Black Community in Québec and Canadian History*, document the sacrifices and contributions of Blacks from 1605 to the 1980s. They show very clearly that, from as far back as the arrival of Champlain to North America, Black participation in the exploration of Canada was significant. Mathew Da Costa, Champlain's interpreter for communication with the Mi'kmaq, was a Black man. His was the task of developing some sort of communication and understanding between the French Canadians and the indigenous peoples. Thus, a Black-French Canadian partnership was formed.

Blacks have continued to participate in the building and developing of Québec and Canada to the present day. Surely, White historians know of Olivier Le Jeune, the thousands of slaves that entered Canada during the Loyalist exodus from America, the Elgin Settlement, the Underground Railway, the Dawn Settlement, John Ware, Doctor Charles Drew, and others.

In Unit 5 of the Some Missing Pages website we deal with Black soldiers who participated in World War I.

Part Three – *Black History Magazine 93*

As a way to further reinforce concepts related to African history and the contributions of Blacks to Québec and Canada, *Black History Magazine 93* gives examples of several activities that teachers may undertake. They include the following categories:

- Art
- Poems
- Cross-word Puzzles
- Word Search
- Discussions
- Play-writing (Much of the play-writing of the videos was done by Stories students)
- Biographies

MATERIALS/RESOURCES

- *Some Missing Pages: The Presence of Black People and the Black Community in Québec and Canadian History*
(lesson plans, including the Unit 5 on Black soldiers can be downloaded at http://www.learnquebec.ca/en/content/curriculum/social_sciences/features/missingpages/)
- *Our Legacy* (video)
- *Let Us Tell You About Our People* (video)
- *Black History Magazine 93*
- Traditional Canadian History Texts (useful when looking for omissions)
- Historical Texts on Africa

About the Educator

Gordon Blackman believes that, “Black youth, by being exposed to, and knowing their history, will be in a better position to understand and appreciate their heritage and culture.” In 1993, Gordon began work on curriculum to meet the needs of Black students. By 1994, his students were involved in an integrated approach to the study of Black history. They wrote and published a Black History Magazine. They produced two videos entitled *Our Legacy* and *Let Us Tell You About Our People*. Since 1996, Mr. Blackman has sat on the committee that has produced and revised

Some Missing Pages: The Black Community in the History of Québec and Canada. Gordon Blackman continues to push the limits of how “history” is traditionally defined. In so doing, he has enriched his students’ knowledge and understanding of Canadian history and the tremendous contribution made by Black Canadians.