

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING

**N.S. BLACKS:
Past and Present Education**

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In its September 26th issue, the Dalhousie Gazette carried an article entitled "Prejudice in Professional Schools". The point of the article, in a nutshell, was that at this university black students are not receiving a fair shake as far as entrance to professional schools go and that upon entering, there is a great likelihood that the black student will fail, or "be failed" as the writer(s) of the article implies.

The article cites some glaring statistics? four of the six blacks who entered Law School in 1973 failed; between 1967 and 1973 only five blacks were accepted by the School of Dentistry and between 1971 and 1974, two of the three blacks enrolled at Medical School did not pass the 2nd year.

It seems that these statistics were full of loopholes for, in last week's edition of the Gazette, a letter from several medical students explained that one of the two blacks who were in Med. School failed beyond a doubt and the other transferred to another school. The Law School statistics were also said to be wrong by the author of the original articles.

The article has obvious weakness, however, as black Nova Scotians, we are sympathetic to the problem raised. If the problems of the accessibility of blacks to educational institutions and the treatment they face upon entering are to be understood and dealt with, it is necessary to explore this question more rigorously and see it from the perspective of blacks in general and not a few individuals who for one reason or another have gained access to institutions of "higher learning".

One small item which opens up broader issues is that the N.S. Black Student's Association for Higher Learning (the writers of the article, whoever they may be) chose to leave out the fact that none of the medical or dental students were black Nova Scotians and that only two of the law students were.

Black people came to Nova Scotia hungry and ragged. Some came as slaves of the early Portuguese fishing masters; others as slaves of the United Empire Loyalists at the time of the American Revolution. Still others came as former slaves who escaped from their American masters, believing the British offer of a life free from suffering and unrewarding toil. These black people were to learn a bitter lesson.

In Nova Scotia, black people found that the British were two-faced liars. The free land they were promised was not forthcoming without a struggle. This eventually sent Thomas Peters, an illiterate former slave, to Britain to petition for this land. Blacks were not given the proper tools for survival and seldom received supplies. This forced many blacks into sharecropping relationships with local white farmers in rural areas.

By 1792, a scheme was devised by the paternalist British-owned Sierra Leone Company and the local colonial office to recruit and sent over 1,000 blacks to Africa. on a visit to N.S., company agent John Clarkson noted "that in order to satisfy their landlord and maintain themselves they (Negroes) have been obliged to sell all their property, their clothing and



Sydney: Whitney Pier

even their beds." is there any wonder why these people happily left for Africa?

The second major group of blacks to Nova Scotia came during the period of the War of 1812. These blacks, over 2,000 in number, were scattered throughout the province and their settlements formed the precursors of most of the present black communities.

These blacks struggled for many years over the issue of land which was promised and not officially given for over 40 years. Slavery existed in Nova Scotia, usually on an individual or family level where a few farm hands and domestics were held in bondage. This practise continued until the 1890's and probably even longer. Life in these small ghetto-type communities was wretched. Employment was usually found in woodlotting, market gardening, and for women, domestic labour. Life was miserable in summer and even worse in winter as people faced starvation as a daily part of their lives.

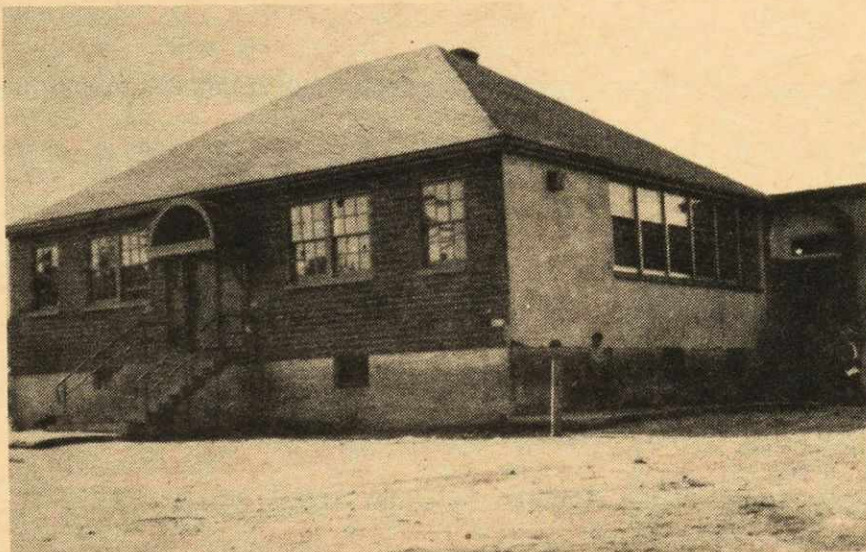
Around 1850, the Earl of Dalhousie visited several local black settlements and made some very interesting observations, "... almost every man had one or two acres of land cleared and ready for seed and working with an industry that astonished me - against the difficulties of nature almost insurmountable and opposed, abused and cheated by the old settlers near whom they had been placed." Two years later this same gentleman revisited these settlements and found that little progress had been made. He noted that "the

habits of their life and constitutional laziness will continue and these miserable creatures will for years be a burden upon the government." But the reason blacks continued such a miserable existence was because there was no economic base upon which they could prosper.

They were systematically excluded from employment in the trades. Because of the lack of industrial development generally in the province, they were tied to an economy based on rural subsistence living. The fact that an economic surplus was not available to them made it impossible for people to pool their few resources. The structural impediments to development were therefore not insignificant. In light of these real obstacles, we must ask, were they to develop their backward settlements just because they wanted to?

In all black communities in this province this chronic condition of poverty continued and was perpetuated by the subsistence-type existence that was forced upon blacks. Today, a similar process continues and it is often unconsciously reinforced by action of government and other agencies. But what of education during this period?

In this school, blacks were merely tolerated. Black students often questioned the administration about these issues and when a plan of action was devised, which was to form an activist black student organization, the school board and the school administration began a liberalization program.



Partridge River School (a black segregated school)