

Confronting Anti-Blackness in Canadian Art History Through the Black “Mixed-Race”  
Female Subject from the Eighteenth-Century to Present Day

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## Table of Contents

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	2
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	3
LIST OF FIGURES.....	4-5
INTRODUCTION.....	6-22
<b>Runaway “Big with Child:” Uncovering Bett from Eighteenth-century Quebec Runaway Slave Advertisement Archive</b>	
CHAPTER 1: .....	23-42
<b>The Colour of Money: An Art Historical Analysis of Viola Desmond’s Representation on Canadian Currency (From 1946 to 2020)</b>	
CHAPTER 2: .....	43-68
<b>Defying Systems of Surveillance: Redefining Nationhood in Camille Turner and Camal Pirbhai’s <i>WANTED</i> Series</b>	
CHAPTER 3: .....	69-83
<b>COVID-19, Self-Determinism, and Multitudes</b>	
CONCLUSION.....	84-88
FIGURES.....	89-117
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	118-136

## Abstract

Written in a time of great turbulence (COVID-19, racial, political and civil unrest, police killings of BIPOC, justified rebellions and climate degradation), this thesis brings together an important body of scholarly work into a critical exploration of the representations of the “mixed-Black” female subject in Canadian art and visual culture. It reflects my engagement with the fields of Race and Representation, Critical “mixed-race” Studies, Transatlantic Slavery Studies, Postcolonial and Decolonial Studies, Black Diaspora Studies and Black Feminist Studies. This thesis is expressed primarily through an Art Historical methodology, particularly valuing the social underpinnings of artistic production as intrinsically linked to the object.

As an art historian, the inherent visuality of race and racism is how I enter the conversation of representations of Black Canadians of multiracial heritage (“mixed”). The goal of this thesis is to make legible anti-Blackness within historical and contemporary Canadian art and visual culture representations of Black “mixed-race” subjects by: 1) uncovering Bett (an enslaved Black woman who absconded heavily pregnant during the winter) from the Quebec Fugitive Slave Advertisement Archive, 2) confronting anti-Blackness in Canada at two distinct times (during her lifetime and the present day) through the analysis of Viola Desmond’s representation on the Canadian ten-dollar bill, 3) countering the Fugitive Slave Advertisement Archive’s inherent racism by way of Camille Turner and Camal Pirbhai’s contemporary Afrofuturist *WANTED* (2017) (photographic) series by re-imagining the portrayal of the enslaved subjects not as criminals but as self-sovereign freedom-seekers.

Réalisée pendant une période de grande turbulence (COVID-19, troubles raciaux et civils, rébellions, brutalité policière et la dégradation du climat), cette thèse rassemble un important corpus de recherches académiques pour explorer de manière critique les représentations du sujet féminin Noire multiraciale («mixte») dans l’art et la culture visuelle au Canada. Elle reflète mon engagement dans les domaines de la race et de la représentation, les études critiques sur le multiraciale, les études sur l’esclavage Transatlantique, les études postcoloniales et décoloniales, les études sur la diaspora noire et les études féministes Noires. Cette thèse se fonde principalement sur une méthodologie d’histoire de l’art, qui valorise en particulier les fondements sociaux de la production artistique comme étant intrinsèquement liés au processus et à la forme finale de l’objet.

En tant qu’historienne de l’art, c’est par la visualisation inhérente de la race et du racisme que j’entre dans la conversation de la représentation des Noir.e.s canadien.ne.s d’héritage multiracial («mixte»). L’objectif de cette thèse est de rendre lisible l’anti-Noir dans les représentations de l’art et de la culture visuelle Canadiens historiques et contemporains de sujets noirs «mixte» en 1) découvrant l’histoire de Bett (femme noire qui s’est enfuie de l’esclavage alors qu’elle était déjà très enceinte et cela pendant l’hiver) présent dans les archives annonces de vente et de fuite d’esclaves dans les journaux du Québec, 2) confrontant l’anti-Noir au Canada par l’analyse de la représentation et signification de Viola Desmond sur nos billets de dix dollars à deux moments distincts (de son vivant et de notre vivant), 3) contrer le racisme inhérent aux archives annonces de vente et de fuite d’esclaves dans les journaux par le biais de la série (photographique) contemporaine Afrofuturiste *WANTED* (2017) de Camille Turner et Camal Pirbhai, qui réimagine les sujets comme des personnes en quête de leur liberté et souverains, afin de «libérer le passé pour que le présent soit vivable.»<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pui-Ian Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 37. Traduit en Français par l’auteure.

### Acknowledgements

It is in the works of scholars such as Gerald Vizenor (2008) and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2011) and in works of artists such as Nadia Myre (2002), Rebecca Belmore (2014), Dayna Danger (2017) among others, that I first learned of an Art History outside of white Western art. They spoke of the difficult and ongoing issues of colonialism, racism, gendered violence, and patriarchal oppression through art and writing. By seeing them, I glimpsed a new path through the thicket of toxic, white Art History. Gratitude for fostering me as I clumsily take/took my first steps towards critical thinking and presentism.

Thank you to my academic advisor and supervisor Dr. Charmaine A. Nelson; being in your orbit has changed the course of my life. You inspire me to be better. Thank you to my mother, Marina Spiratos. I cherish your love and support, always. May we continue to blossom together. Thank you to my chosen family and friends who towed me to the finish line: David Matsushita-Fournier, Josephine Denis, Sophia Sahrane, Joana Joachim, Lindsay Clark. Thank you all for believing in me in the moments when I did not believe in myself. Thank you for going above and beyond. Through your selfless efforts, you made this *our* journey and for that I am forever grateful.

## List of Figures

**Figure 0.1:** Las castas. Casta painting showing 16 racial groupings, 18<sup>th</sup> century, oil on canvas, 148x104 cm, Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán, Mexico.

**Figure 0.2:** Miguel Cabrera, *De español y negra, mulata (From male Spaniard and Black Female, Mulata)*, c. 1763, oil on canvas, 148 x 117.5 x 5.5 cm. Private Collection, source: Museo de Historia Mexicana.

**Figure 0.3 :** Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *De Negro y de India, produce Lobo (From Black male and "Indian" Female, produce Lobo)*, c. 1725, oil on canvas, 80.7 x 105.4 cm. Private collection, Breamore House, England.

**Figure 1.1 :** Table : Enslaved and Indentured Black Female Fugitives after Frank Mackey's research, Charmaine A. Nelson, Source: "Women in the 'Promised Land': Essays in African Canadian History.

**Figure 1.2 :** Johnston & Purss, "RAN-AWAY from the Subscribers," *Quebec Gazette*, 8 March 1787.

**Figure 1.3 :** *Plan of the Champlain district and survey of the premisses belonging to Messrs. Johnston & Purss of the city of Quebec merchants situated and lying in the Lower Town of the said city*, manuscrit en couleur; 41 x 55 cm, Jeremiah McCarthy, arp., 24 août 1799, 03Q, E21, S555, SS10, P43, Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, Centre d'Archives de Montréal (BANQ), Montreal, Canada.

**Figure 1.4 :** Purss, John " WD married and 'now legally got under the lie of the amiable Amy Dow's petticoat! Two girls died of 'scarlet fever & gangrenous sore throat'." *Johnston Family Archive*. <http://www.johnstonfamilyarchive.com/archives.htm>. August 28, 1786.

**Figure 2.1:** Viola Desmond on the ten-dollar bill, Bank of Canada.  
<https://www.bankofcanada.ca/banknotes/vertical10/>

**Figure 2.2:** Back of the \$50 Note (2004-2011) featuring the Alberta's Famous Five, Bank of Canada.  
<https://www.bankofcanadamuseum.ca/complete-bank-note-series/2001-2006-canadian-journey-series/canadian-journey-series-50-note/>

**Figure 2.3 :** Viola Desmond Commemorative Stamp, 32 mm x 24 mm, 2012, Source: Canada Post.

**Figure 2.4 :** Viola Desmond's parents, Gwendolyn Davis and James Davis, in their home. Photograph. March 1948 Source: Backhouse 1999.

**Figure 2.5 :** Sepia Beauty Products by VIOLA DESMOND, unknown date, Wanda Robson's Collection, source: CBC News.

**Figure 2.6 :** Carrie Best with one of the first editions of *The Clarion*. The Clarion, Nova Scotia's first Black-owned newspaper, was published for the first time in 1946. Source: Carrie M. Best: A Digital Archive (by Sheryl Grant).

**Figure 2.7 :** Carrie Best, “Mrs. Viola Desmond,” December 1946, print, *The Clarion*, p.1, newspaper microfilm 4350, Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

**Figure 2.8 :** John A. MacDonald on the \$10 bill, Bank of Canada.

**Figure 2.9:** Viola Desmond Powder Compact, date unknown, Nova Scotia Archives/ Flickr CC. & Compact of Viola Desmond Sepia Face Powder, ca. 1946, Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, 2013-265-2.

**Figure 2.10:** Madam C.J. Walker, Hair Product Tin, 1925, *Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture*, DC, 2011.159.6.

**Figure 3.1 :** Installation view of *Every. Now. Then: Re-Framing Nationhood*. Curators Andrew Hunter (left) and Anique Jordan (right) source: *The Hamilton Spectator*.

**Figure 3.2 :** Michael Belmore, *Rumble* (2017) Sculpture, 172,2 x 24,1 cm.

**Figure 3.3 :** Meryl McMaster, *Edge of a Moment* (2017). Digital Photograph, 154,2 x 239,7 cm.

**Figure 3.4 :** Camal Pirbhai and Camille Turner, *Bell* (Wanted Series), 2015. Digital photograph, dimensions variable. Courtesy of artist Camille Turner.

**Figure 3.5 :** George Hipps, “RUN away from Mr. GEORGE HIPPS” and “IL s’est enfuie de chez Mr. GEORGE HIPPS,” *Quebec Gazette*, 2-3 November 1778.

**Figure 3.6 :** Installation View. Camal Pirbhai and Camille Turner, *Bell* (Wanted Series), 2017. Digital photograph, dimensions variable. Courtesy of artist Camille Turner.

**Figure 3.7 :** Camal Pirbhai and Camille Turner, *Jack* (Wanted Series), 2015. Digital photograph, dimensions variable. Courtesy of artist Camille Turner.

**Figure 3.8 :** Installation view. Camal Pirbhai and Camille Turner, *Jack* (Wanted Series), 2017. Digital photograph, dimensions variable. Courtesy of artist Camille Turner.

**Figure 3.9 :** Camal Pirbhai and Camille Turner, *Unnamed Woman* (Wanted Series), 2015. Digital photograph, dimensions variable. Courtesy of artist Camille Turner.

**Figure 3.10:** Installation View. Camal Pirbhai and Camille Turner, *Unnamed Woman* (Wanted Series), 2017. Digital photograph, dimensions variable. Courtesy of artist Camille Turner.

**Figure 4.1:** Kheanna Walker and James Thomson holding BLM Solidarity Signs, Black Lives Matter - Glasgow June 7, 2020 Solidarity Protest, Courtesy of Kheanna Walker.

**Figure 4.2:** Two protesters hold up signs at Parliament Hill on June 5, 2020. Source: *Sudbury News*.

## **INTRODUCTION**

“As a black female student of Art History in the early 1990s, I quickly noticed the absence of myself within the discipline. This absence was not only in terms of the lack of racial diversity amongst students at my metropolitan Canadian university but the similar lack of diversity amongst my professors.”<sup>2</sup>  
*Charmaine A. Nelson (2010)*

By merely changing the year range to 2014-2020, unfortunately this statement still rings true of my experiences nearly 24 years later. To further illustrate this absence, I am dismayed to say it was only last year, in 2019, that I was finally able to take my first class with a Black professor, Professor Charmaine A. Nelson.

This thesis brings together an important body of scholarly work into a critical exploration of the representations of the “mixed-Black” female subject in Canadian art and visual culture. The subsequent chapters reflect my engagement with the fields of Race and Representation, Critical "mixed-race" Studies, Transatlantic Slavery Studies, Postcolonial and Decolonial Studies, Black Diaspora Studies and Black Feminist Studies. This thesis is expressed primarily through an Art Historical methodology, particularly valuing the social underpinnings of artistic production as intrinsically linked to the object process and final form. As such, this thesis has been profoundly influenced by social, black and white feminisms, queer, postcolonial and decolonial, and Indigenous Art Histories as well as critical race theory. These interests were spurred into development as I navigated my Art History education as a Black female student of multiracial heritage.

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<sup>2</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, *Representing the Black Female Subject in Western Art* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 1.

## **LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND POSITIONALITY**

This thesis was undertaken in Tio'tia:ke/Mooniyaang, unceded Kanien'kehá:ka and Anishinabe territories and waters, at McGill University whose founder, James A. McGill (1744-1813), enslaved a minimum of five people of both Indigenous and African descent,<sup>3</sup> and prospered by trading in slave-produced products.<sup>4</sup> I was born on these lands, however have no claims to them since I am a woman of African-Caribbean and Greek heritages. I am however deeply committed to being in solidarity with my Indigenous siblings, by centering Indigenous sovereignty.<sup>5</sup> I believe, as does F. Graeme Chalmers, “that the examination of ethnocentrism and racism must begin with self-reflection.”<sup>6</sup> To this point, I refer to Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence examination of whether Black people should be considered ‘settlers’ or not in what is currently<sup>7</sup> Canada:

The reality [...] is that Black peoples have not been quintessential “settlers” in the White supremacist usage of the word; nevertheless, they have, as free people, been involved in some form of settlement process. What seems more important than the semantics about whether or not individuals should be called settlers is the question of the relationships that Black “settlers” have, by virtue of their marginality, with those whose lands have been taken, and what relationships they wish to develop, at *present*, with Indigenous peoples.<sup>8</sup>

Given that this work discusses Anti-Blackness, it must also include interrogations of Anti-Indigenous racism. It is essential to situate Anti-Black state-sanctioned violence and oppression

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<sup>3</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, *Slavery, Geography and Empire in the Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016): 87.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>5</sup> I use the term siblings in a creative kinship way to denote affinity, rather than blood-ties. Relating to one another as siblings equalizes us by unsettling and abolishing colonial categorization.

<sup>6</sup> Chalmers, F. Graeme, "Cultural Colonialism and Art Education". In *Cultural Colonialism and Art Education*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill | Sense, 2019), 38.

<sup>7</sup> Following Damien Lee, I am using this phrase ‘...in what is currently Canada’ to open possibilities for imagining futurities beyond the settler state” (Damien Lee, 2018; see also Lee, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence, “*Indigenous Peoples and Black People in Canada: Settlers or Allies?*”. Arlo Kempf (Ed.). New York: Springer Publishing, 2010, 107.

within the colonial origins of Canada which were genocidal to Indigenous peoples.<sup>9</sup> Indigenous oppression and Black oppression exist in parallel.

### **CONTEXTS: TRANSATLANTIC SLAVERY AND “MIXED-RACE” PEOPLE IN CANADA**

The way that statistics are constructed is particularly telling as the Government of Canada touts a 35% increase of (multiple) visible minorities between 2011 and 2016.<sup>10</sup> While this does not specifically speak to “mixed” Black Canadians, it does introduce the fact that “celebrating” “mixedness” and Canada’s official multiculturalism policy go hand in hand to secure the erasure of Canada’s colonial histories including participation in Transatlantic Slavery. By constructing this, the state improves its international reputation and offers “proof” that its official policy, multiculturalism, is producing qualitative results. Sunera Thobani explains how multiculturalism is used in “further[ing] popular perceptions of the nation having made a successful transition from a white settler colony to a multiracial, multi-ethnic, liberal-democratic society.”<sup>11</sup> Just as Michele Elam distinguishes, the question is not “Why are there more mixed race people now?”<sup>12</sup> what must be posed instead is: “Why do we see more people *as* mixed race now?”<sup>13</sup> As a “mixed” person who grew up in Tio’tia:ke/Mooniyaang/Montreal, I (as well as all those in my community of blended heritage) was constantly asked “where are you from?”<sup>14</sup> or the more disparaging version:

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<sup>9</sup> Patel Shaista, “Defining Muslim Feminist Politics Through Indigenous Solidarity Activism” *The Feminist Wire*, Accessed April 23, 2020, <https://thefeministwire.com/2012/08/defining-muslim-feminist-politics-through-indigenous-solidarity-activism/>

<sup>10</sup> See Government of Canada 2001 and 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 144.

It is important to note that this question is particularly misleading when pertaining to colonies, such as Canada, that engaged in Transatlantic Slavery as slavery ensured the explosion of a Black and white “mixed-race” population.

<sup>12</sup> Michele Elam, *The Souls of Mixed Folk: Race, Politics, and Aesthetics in the New Millennium* (Stanford (CA): Stanford University Press, 2011), 6.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> It must be noted that this question is also asked to Black Canadians who are not mixed by white Canadians as Charmaine A. Nelson discusses in *Ebony Roots* (2010), 16.

“what are you?” These questions, that are often justified as an attempt at connecting, hinge on maintaining the misperception of a universal white Canadian citizenship. The goal of this thesis is to make legible Anti-Blackness within historical and contemporary Canadian art and visual culture representations of Black “mixed-race” subjects.

## **VISUALITY OF BLACKNESS AND “MIXEDNESS”**

As an art historian, the inherent visibility of race and racism is how I enter the conversation about the representations of mixed African-European Canadians. Race and racism cannot be separated as they have been used in tandem to justify colonial violence and genocide which began with “turning Indigenous peoples in the Americas into the first racialized subject of the model/colonial world inaugurated in 1492.”<sup>15</sup> Michele Wallace brings to our attention the importance of understanding “[...] how regimes of visibility enforce racism, how they literally hold it in place.”<sup>16</sup> The properties of how blackness are identified are inherently visible and are contingent on defining blackness as opposite to whiteness via phenotype, skin colour and hair texture. After all, the construction of whiteness was “racism by intent” and therefore “racism by consequence.”<sup>17</sup> However, by “seeing it as a strategy of authority rather than an authentic or essential ‘identity,’ ” the artificiality of biological whiteness is broken.<sup>18</sup> In this thesis, I undertake the action of understanding how race has been made to manifest visually by discussing the representations of Black “mixed-race” Canadians.

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<sup>15</sup> Enrique Dussel, *1492: El Encubrimiento del Otro: Hacia el origen del “mito de la modernidad.”* (La Paz, Bolivia: Plural Editores, 1994), 3.

<sup>16</sup> Michele Wallace, “Afterword: ‘Why are there no Great Black Artists?’: The Problem of Visibility in African American Culture,” in Gina Dent ed, *Black Popular Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), 344.

<sup>17</sup> Teresa J Guess, “The Social Construction of Whiteness: Racism by Intent, Racism by Consequence.” *Critical Sociology*, vol. 32, no. 4 (2006): 651.

<sup>18</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, “The White Stuff”, *Artforum International* 36, no. 9 (1998): 21.

## **MIXEDNESS**

In recent times, “mixed-race” studies in Canada and the United States have been enjoying a more prominent position with newspaper articles being written on the subject,<sup>19</sup> the creation of a new journal<sup>20</sup> and conference(s).<sup>21</sup> While the celebration of “mixed-race” people *intends* to foster space for people who identify as “mixed-race” to find community, share their experiences and build from them, if not undertaken with a level of criticality, such spaces run the risk of reinforcing racial essentialism, Anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity due to the problematic, epistemological foundations of “mixed-race” studies. The new vanguard of “mixed-race” studies is taking up this challenge –the likes of Minelle Mahtani, Jared Sexton and Daniel McNeil among others. For one, they have redefined the name of the field to critical “mixed-race” studies. This critical aspect speaks to the new school’s commitment to being reflexive of the field’s history and reckoning with its problematic foundations.

“Mixed-race” studies is a product of the Multiracial Movement which arose post-American Civil Rights movement, during the second-wave of feminism in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Coinciding with “the personal is political” mindset, the movement was supported and influenced by “outcries from indignant white mothers of Black children who were uncomfortable with their

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<sup>19</sup> Joy D'Souza, “Identity Is Complex For Mixed Canadians,” HuffPost Canada (HuffPost Canada, October 16, 2016), [https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2016/09/26/mixed-race-canadians\\_n\\_12157752.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2016/09/26/mixed-race-canadians_n_12157752.html).

Lise Funderburg, 2013. “The Changing Face of America.” *National Geographic* 224 (4).

<sup>20</sup> G. Daniel, R. Kina, L., Dariotis, W., & Fojas, C. (2014). Emerging Paradigms in Critical Mixed Race Studies. *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies*, 1(1). Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2db5652b>. NB: The Journal is no longer in existence.

<sup>21</sup> x PROGRAMS - Critical Mixed Race Studies. (2019, April 19). Retrieved July 27, 2020, from <https://criticalmixedracestudies.com/cmrs2017-program/>

children identifying as Black.”<sup>22</sup> Cynthia Nakashima defines the Multiracial Movement as being composed of:

community organizations, campus groups, magazines and newsletters, academic research and writing, university courses, creative expression, and political activism – all created and done by mixed-race individuals and members of interracial families, with the purpose of voicing their own experiences, opinions, issues, and interests.<sup>23</sup>

My research has been greatly impacted by Ifekwunigwe and Sexton. Firstly, Ifekwunigwe pointed out that the “(dis)continuities in historical and contemporary thinking about ‘mixed race’ [...] is still both sexualized and gendered,”<sup>24</sup> specifically calling on a 1993 *Time’s Magazine* cover with the face of a woman whose likeness was computer-generated to simulate multiraciality.<sup>25</sup> Such an occurrence was not unique as the *National Geographic* also ran a story titled “The Changing Face of America” in 2013 with a photo series of 25 multiracial people (men and women) arranged in a grid to illustrate the “opportunity” that their racial ambiguity affords “the rest of us [non ‘mixed’ people]”: “If we can’t slot people into familiar categories, perhaps we’ll be forced to reconsider existing definitions of race and identity, presumptions about who is us and who is them.”<sup>26</sup> While half of the photo series is male, it is interesting to note that one photo in particular was picked up by other outlets,<sup>27</sup> that of Jordan Spencer, who self identifies as “black/biracial”.

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<sup>22</sup> APA Institute NYU, “What’s Radical About ‘Mixed Race’?” Minelle Mahtani, Ann Morning, & Jared Sexton,” May 18, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSMQpRzcGpA>, 8:35-8:40.

<sup>23</sup> Cynthia Nakashima, “Voices from the Movement: Approaches to Multiraciality,” *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier*, ed. Maria P.P. Root (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1996). 80.

Some scholars who have contributed to American “mixed-race” studies: Minkah Makalani 2001; Heather M. Dalmage 2004; Kim M. Williams 2006; Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe 1999; Paul Gilroy 2000; David Parker and Miri Song 2001; Reginald Daniel 2002; Jayne O Ifekwunigwe 2004; Kimberly McClain DaCosta 2007; Catherine R. Squires 2007; Mary C. Beltrán and Camille Fojas 2008; Jared Sexton 2008; Michelle Elam 2011; Habiba Ibrahim 2012; Greg Carter 2013; and Ralina Joseph 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe, *“Mixed Race” Studies : A Reader..* London: Routledge, 2004, 2.

<sup>25</sup> TIME Magazine -- U.S. Edition. (1993, November 18). Retrieved July 31, 2020, from <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/0,9263,7601931118,00.html>

<sup>26</sup> Lise Funderburg, 2013. “The Changing Face of America.” *National Geographic* 224 (4): 91.

<sup>27</sup> This article features only Jordan Spencer’s photo: Zak Cheney-Rice. “National Geographic determined what Americans will look like in 2050, and it’s beautiful,” April 10, 2014, Retrieved August 01, 2020, <https://www.mic.com/p/national-geographic-determined-what-americans-will-look-like-in-2050-its-beautiful-16166684>

Spencer has light, green eyes, blonde curly hair, a light-skinned complexion; in short, the “mixed-race” phenotype that is deemed attractive and preferred by mainstream media. As Pilar Barreyro McDermott argues: “‘The Changing Face of America’ upholds, rather than disrupts, the problematic status quo of the racialized body through the medium of photography [...]”<sup>28</sup>

Secondly, Sexton also speaks about the significance of sexual politics in interracial relationships:

This trouble stems from the fact that in confronting the domain of interracial sexuality—as a material practice and a discursive formation—one is pressed to reckon with the social formation of white supremacy and antiblackness, the production and reproduction of the historic dividing line between humanity and “infra-humanity” (Gilroy 2000), the inside and outside of a racist polity, economy, and culture.<sup>29</sup>

Sexton aptly argues that when critical “mixed-race” studies fails to engage in the sexual politics underpinning racialised unions, it enables the strategic forgetting of its historical violence. Without reckoning with the violent histories of white supremacy in interracial relationships, we entrench and perpetuate the antiblackness from which such abuses stem. This is very important to the work that I do in this thesis as it explains why studying the “mixed-race” and the Black female subject is continuously centered in this project. I take up this focus in every chapter of this thesis.

Canadian “mixed-race” studies have been formalized for less time than the that in the United States. We still however see early interest in disrupting the state myth that interracial “mixing” as a contemporary phenomenon in the works of James Walker in 1985,<sup>30</sup> George Elliott

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Danielle Cadet, “The Average American's Face Will Change How You Think About Race,” December 7, 2017, [https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/national-geographic-changing-face-of-america-photos\\_n\\_4024415?ri18n=true](https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/national-geographic-changing-face-of-america-photos_n_4024415?ri18n=true).

<sup>28</sup> Pilar Barreyro McDermott. “Fetishising the Future: Deconstructing the United States’ Obsession with the Mixed-Race American Ideal.” Thesis, Unpublished, 2014, <https://www.lse.ac.uk/gender/assets/documents/research/graduate-working-papers/Fetishising-the-Future.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> Jared Sexton. *Amalgamation Schemes : Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 16.

<sup>30</sup> James Walker. *Racial Discrimination in Canada: The Black Experience*. Historical Booklet No. 41, Ottawa: The Canadian Historical Association, 1985. p. 8.

Clarke in 1991/92<sup>31</sup> and Robin Winks in 1997.<sup>32</sup> Another myth that has been frequently dismantled is the fallacy that Canada has historically been welcoming of interracial unions. Debra Thompson reminds us that this is not quite true. Case in point, the Indian Act was “designed to regulate interracial (in this circumstance, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) marital relations and the categorization of mixed-race offspring.”<sup>33</sup> Racist intolerances and disdain for multiracial unions and the contributions of Black Canadians are also laid bare in the NFB film *Speakers for the Dead* (2000) created by Jennifer Holness and David Sutherland. In the film, the viewer is shown just how far white families of rural Ontario (Priceville, Ontario) went to erase and disavow their town’s co-settlers and Black ancestors; from being told by respected, elderly townswomen to burn the “evidence,” ie: the nineteenth-century interracial family albums, to desecrating a Black cemetery to “make way for a potato patch.”<sup>34</sup> In Cheryl Thompson’s book *Beauty in a Box* (2019), she brings a May 1959 issue of Canadian magazine *Chatelaine* to light.<sup>35</sup> This editorial titled “My Daughter Married a Negro,” written by Rita Cummings (of Winnipeg), chronicled first-hand the racist views of the time, this white mother recorded her opinion: “You’ll be asking for nothing but trouble if you go into a life like that [...]” and “I don’t think mixed marriages bring happiness to anybody.”<sup>36</sup> When considering the formal Canadian “mixed-race” studies field, it has been contributed to by the following scholars; Carol Camper 1994; Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar 1997; Lawrence Hill 2001; Daniel McNeil 2010; Debra Thompson 2009 and 2012; Minelle Mahtani 2014.

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<sup>31</sup> George Elliott Clarke. "Introduction: Fire on the Water: A First Portrait of African-Canadian Literature." *Fire On the Water: An Anthology of Black Nova Scotian Writing*. Vol I. ed. by George Elliott Clarke. Lawrencetown Beach, N.S.: Pottersfield Press, 1991. p. 23.

<sup>32</sup> Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*. 2nd ed. Carleton Library Series. Montreal, Que.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997, 496.

<sup>33</sup> Debra Thompson, “Racial Ideas and Gendered Intimacies: The Regulation of Interracial Relationships in North America.” *Social & Legal Studies* 18, no. 3 (September 2009): 354.

<sup>34</sup> National Film Board of Canada. “Speakers for the Dead,” April 22, 2008. [http://www.nfb.ca/film/speakers-for-the-dead/?next=%2Ffilm%2Fau\\_nom\\_des\\_morts%2F](http://www.nfb.ca/film/speakers-for-the-dead/?next=%2Ffilm%2Fau_nom_des_morts%2F).

<sup>35</sup> Cheryl Thompson, *Beauty in a Box: Detangling the Roots of Canada's Black Beauty Culture*. (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2019), 84.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

## **TERMINOLOGY**

Before I go any further, it is important to complicate the colonial exonyms that will be used throughout this thesis. As foils of whiteness, it must be said that such terminology intentionally holds pejorative and demeaning connotations and as such will be in scare quotes throughout around: “Black,” “mixed-race,” “white,” “race,” “slave,” “mulatto,” “Negro”. I will focus in this section on the terms “mixed-race” and “mulatto”. In order to begin this discussion around these loaded terms, we must first acknowledge the fallacy of race<sup>37</sup> and reflect on how that illusion is perpetuated through language.

“Mixed-race” is a term that is used frequently in Canada, however carries problematic connotations of being “mixed” as opposed to being “pure”. “The term ‘mixed race’ is itself contradictory; either it applies to everyone, or must assume at some time past there were pure ‘races’ which when mixed produce a new third ‘race’, a new category that only makes sense by combining existing racialized categories.”<sup>38</sup> This terminology also carries within it that idea that “mixedness” is a less stable identity. It is also important to reiterate who is perceived to be “mixed.” It is not the union of two people of European nations that are denoted to produce a “mixed-race” person, rather the term is typically used for the offspring of a person of color with a white person. I personally have rejected this descriptor for myself and know of others like me who have done the same.

“Mulatto,” has been widely understood for generations as a racial slur in Canada and other parts of the world. However, it is still a daily part of racial terminology in certain regions and contemporary media especially in countries with Latin languages for example Brazil and Cuba. The Edmonton police department was in the news October 2018 for their use of “mulatto” to

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<sup>37</sup> See Ashley Montagu, *The Fallacy of Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

<sup>38</sup> David Parker and Miri Song, *Rethinking ‘Mixed Race,’* (London: Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2001), 10-11.

describe a missing teenager girl in an Amber Alert. While the fourteen-year-old was quickly found an hour after the alert went out and her forty-seven year-old kidnapper jailed, Edmonton police faced public backlash for their use of the racist terminology.<sup>39</sup> This term has explicit denigrative implications because its etymological origins are the Spanish word *mulo* for mule, which refers to the infertile product of a horse and donkey coupling.<sup>40</sup>

### **BLACK SUBJECTS OF MULTIRACIAL HERITAGE IN GLOBAL ART HISTORY**

In the mid-twentieth century, interracial relations in Quebec sparked newspaper articles and M.A. theses alike.<sup>41</sup> Quebec journalists lamented the “tragic” fate of “mixed” children. The primary concern was how any “man or woman of imagination would bring children into the world to condemn them to a life-long affront of the crowd?”<sup>42</sup> Of course, such a statement insidiously hides racist motivations. Montreal pseudoscientists presented findings that “found [that] white women ‘frequently’ becom[e] prostitutes *after* they entered into relationships with ‘dark lovers.’”<sup>43</sup> Of course, such accounts are false narratives constructed with the objective of deterring interracial relations from occurring.

Art history as a discipline and practice, is and always has been predominantly white in its content and its foci. During my art historical academic studies, not only was I hyper-aware of the absence of myself in the classroom, I very early on noticed the lack of positive representations of

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<sup>39</sup> Daniel Otis, “Edmonton Police Apologize for Describing Girl as ‘mulatto’ in Amber Alert,” *CTVNews*, October 07, 2018.

<sup>40</sup> Edward Long, *History of Jamaica* (London: T. Lowndess, 1774), 335.

<sup>41</sup> Dorothy Williams, *The Jackie Robinson Myth: Social Mobility and Race in Montreal 1920-1960*, (Montreal: Concordia University, 1999), 14.

<sup>42</sup> D. R McNeil, *Sex and Race in the Black Atlantic: Mulatto Devils and Multiracial Messiahs* (London: Routledge, 2011), 4-5.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

Black subjects, much less multiracial subjects, when I found images of people like me in generalized, canonical survey art history classes.

In canonical art history, nuanced representations of multiraciality are quite rare. Instead, what we find are art objects that record colonial anxiety. Such objects operate to bind racialised people into categories that define where they “rank” in the colonial socioeconomic and aesthetic ladders and how human they are perceived to be. One such artistic tradition are the *pinturas de casta*, or *casta* paintings, upon which I will focus exclusively for the purpose of this introduction.<sup>44</sup>

*Pinturas de casta* (figure 0.1), referred to in English as *casta* paintings or caste paintings, were an eighteenth-century Spanish colonial painting tradition developed in Mexico by local artists.<sup>45</sup> A fascination with new “racial” literacy brought forward *casta* paintings in which artists around the Spanish Empire imagined the mixing between every “race” that existed within that geographic span. The obsession was such that the illustrations were also preoccupied with the continued mixing of the progeny of “mixed” couples; i.e.: “Mestizo con Española” creates a “Castizo,” the “Castizo con Española” creates a “Español.”

The paintings commonly included text and were often organized in grids with multiple male, female, child groupings. The subject of this genre of paintings was the categorization of the different interracial unions that occurred in the colonies and their eventual offspring. Typically, *casta* paintings combined images and texts and segmented racial hierarchy into sixteen categories

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<sup>44</sup> However, I encourage readers to investigate Agostino Brunias’ paintings of the Dominican mixed race colonial elite and the rare “mixed-race” subject in portraiture (one example, David Martin’s *Dido Elizabeth Belle and Lady Elizabeth Murray, Daughters of Sir John Lindsay and David Second Earl of Mansfield*, 1779). For more information on Agostino Brunias, see:

Mia L Bagneris, *Colouring the Caribbean: Race and the Art of Agostino Brunias*. Rethinking Art's Histories. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018) and Kay Dian Kriz, *Slavery, Sugar, and the Culture of Refinement: Picturing the British West Indies, 1700-1840*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), Charmaine A. Nelson, *Slavery, Geography and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).

<sup>45</sup> Ilona Katzew, *Casta Painting: Images of Race in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 21. We know of one such set was created in Peru. See Katzew, 2005.

featuring a heteronormative couple as mother and father, and a child. Not meant to function as portraits, each fictitious person is racially categorized and labeled at the bottom of the painting. Many of the epithets are zoologically derived such as “lobo,” “coyote,” and “mulatto” (figure 0.2), pointing to the desire to debase and dehumanize people that white colonizers sought to racially marginalize. In these paintings, Blackness is read by stereotyping phenotype and skin colour.

The primary goal of this genre was to naturalize a racial hierarchy that organized white Spanish colonizers at the top, followed by Indigenous people, and finally African-descended people at the lowest rung. It must be noted that while Canada was also founded on colonial ideas of race, there was no such formalized artistic segmentation of the colonial multiracial population to such an extreme degree. Instead, the archives of Canadian fugitive slave advertisements show that “mulatto” and “mulatto Negro” were terms that were in use to pejoratively describe someone with one white parent and one Black parent or people who had some combination of African and European ancestry.

While some iterations divide one canvas into sixteen triads, the most common tradition presents each category as a stand-alone painting. The corpus is substantial, with expert Ilona Katzew estimating that around 2000 paintings were created, demonstrating it to be a very popular genre. While many artists remain unknown to this day, those that have been identified are among the most notable colonial Mexican artists of their time: Juan Rodríguez Juárez, Miguel Cabrera, Andrés de Islas among others.<sup>46</sup>

What is particular about the *casta* painting racial taxonomy is that there is a term to describe the intermixing between Indigenous peoples and African-descended people, “lobo,” which

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<sup>46</sup> Magali Marie Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings* (version 1st ed.). 1st ed. Joe R. and Teresa Lozano Long Series in Latin American and Latino Art and Culture. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003, 104.

translates in English as wolf (figure 0. 3). In Canada, it is interesting that as yet there has been no equivalent term identified despite African-Indigenous co-enslavement (in New France/Quebec), solidarity, and collaboration.<sup>47</sup> Further research is required.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The cornerstone of this research is the fugitive and runaway slave advertisements which will be used as primary sources. Charmaine A. Nelson describes the runaway advertisements as an “uncommonly ‘honest’ archive”<sup>48</sup> that “details all manner of characteristics, attributes, traits, mannerisms and skills of their missing ‘property’”<sup>49</sup> that “consistently pointed out the lie of the supposed homogeneity, inhumanity, inferiority, dependency and lack of civility of the enslaved population.”<sup>50</sup> In other words, the runaway slave advertisements paradoxically “individualized and humanized the enslaved.”<sup>51</sup> Nelson theorizes that due to the visual nature of the textual descriptions, we should view the advertisements as unauthorized portraits of the enslaved. The textual observations prove to be invaluable descriptions of the enslaved at the time of escape and since the description were mainly focussed on the physical body, they are a type of portrait. Following Nelson’s insights, I also understand and read the textual descriptions of the runaway slave advertisements as recuperated, partial portraits of the enslaved.

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<sup>47</sup> This is an insight that Charmaine A. Nelson shared with me.

<sup>48</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, “Ran away from her Master...a Negroe Girl named Thursday’: Examining Evidence of Punishment, Isolation, and Trauma in Nova Scotia and Quebec Fugitive Slave Advertisements,” *Legal Violence and the Limits of the Law*, eds. Joshua Nichols and Amy Swiffen. (NYC: Routledge, 2017), 69.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Nelson continues to state that this is how we might re-focus the lens on the enslaved individuals not as criminals but as freedom-seekers.<sup>52</sup> Here, the runaway slave advertisements are more than just portraits of people subjected to prolific violence.

Frank Mackey describes the runaway slave advertisements as “verbal snapshots”<sup>53</sup> that are “hazy images conjured up from the physical.”<sup>54</sup> Mackey compiles all 94 of the published sale and runaway advertisements for Black enslaved people in Quebec from 1765-1810.<sup>55</sup> His transcriptions make the runaway slave advertisements more accessible and were even a source of inspiration for 9 of the 10 portraits in the photographic series *WANTED* (by Camille Turner and Camal Pirbhai) that reinvents the enslaved described in the ads as full of agency and individuality. Importantly, 5 of the 10 photographs deal with “mixed-race” people that I will be analyzing in chapter 3.

I am also indebted to the works of Saidiya Hartman and Eve Tuck. In this project, I deeply resonated with Hartman when she wrote: “What does the exposure of the violated body yield?”<sup>56</sup> In order to do this thesis with care and avoid reinforcing the very stereotypes I push back against, I think alongside Eve Tuck’s theory of a “desire-based framework” as being “an antidote to damage-centered research” in the attempt to mitigate re-traumatization.<sup>57</sup>

As stated prior, Minhelle Mahtani; 2014, Jared Sexton; 2008, and Michele Elam, 2011 are essential in considering the role of critical “mixed-race” theory in this thesis. These are scholars deeply invested in true critical thinking around critical “mixed-race” theory, in that they

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<sup>52</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, *Slavery, Geography and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica*. (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016): 3.

<sup>53</sup> Frank Mackey, *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 307.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 307.

<sup>56</sup> Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>57</sup> Eve Tuck, “Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities,” *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no 3 (2009).

problematize the field's usual unchecked white privilege. Mahtani, Sexton and Elam move past identity politics to offer a foundation of examining Anti-Blackness as it presents in "mixed-race" issues.

## **THE CHAPTERS**

This thesis is composed of three chapters. Chapter 1, "Ranaway 'Big With Child': Uncovering Bett from the Quebec Fugitive Slave Advertisement Archive" traces the life of an enslaved woman of African heritage named Bett who absconded from the forced service of two Quebec City-based West Indian merchants in late eighteenth-century. As the only documented female winter escape of this region, the harrowing tale of Bett is further heart-wrenching when we consider that she was running away during her third trimester of pregnancy. This chapter supplies historical and theoretical contexts that cement the necessity of exploring the representation of Black women of multiracial heritage in Canadian art. In this chapter, I recuperate fragments of Bett's unauthorized portrait from the fugitive slave and slave sale advertisement archives. To begin this thesis in the period of Transatlantic Slavery with Bett is to recognize that Black enslaved women endured sexual violence at the hands of the white men who enslaved them, resulting in "mulatto" progeny who they then frequently also enslaved. This chapter seeks to supplement the barren state of Black portraiture in colonial Canada by demonstrating the presence of self-affirming Black Canadians, like Bett, during Transatlantic slavery, through the analysis of archival documents and fugitive and for sale slave newspaper advertisements.

Chapter 2, "The Color of Money: An Art Historical Analysis of Viola Desmond on Canadian Currency," delves into what "mixed-race" meant from Desmond's lifetime until today. In this chapter, the notion of "mixed-race" is deeply challenged. By focusing on the representation

of Viola Desmond on Canadian currency – the new ten-dollar bill first printed in 2018 - I attempt to confront anti-Blackness in Canada at two distinct times (1940s and 2018). This chapter also asks if critical “mixed-race” theory is anti-Black and what it means to prominently feature a Black woman of multiracial heritage on the 10\$ bill in a nation where the histories of slavery and historical “mixed-race” populations have been universally suppressed.

In Chapter 3, “Defying Systems of Surveillance: Redefining Nationhood in Camille Turner and Camal Pirbhai’s *WANTED* Series,” I discuss contemporary Canadian artists Camille Turner and Camal Pirbhai’s photographic series entitled *WANTED* (2015). Taken from archives of colonial Canadian newspapers, Pirbhai and Turner re-imagine textual description of enslaved fugitives as photographic portraits. Since half of the series interprets Black subjects of multiracial heritage, it is important to investigate as part of this thesis. Pirbhai and Turner’s series counters the colonial archive’s inherent racism by creating a portrayal of enslaved fugitives not as criminals, but as self-sovereign freedom-seekers.<sup>58</sup> Operating between the traditions of portraiture, history painting and the aesthetics of fashion photography, the artists fold multiple temporalities in true Afro-futurist form within the photographs that re-dress our Western fixation on linear history-telling by incorporating a circular model of time that co-exists with the former. This chapter explores the ways in which *WANTED* “release[s] the past so that the present is livable”<sup>59</sup> as this series is a triumphant feat of Canadian radical Black imagination.

During the research phase of this project, I came across astounding works of scholarship around “mixedness” in Canada. They are works that paved the path that I walk on through their rigorous research: books (Mahtani, McNeil), theses (one that stood out in particular was

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<sup>58</sup> Daniel Hill, *The Freedom Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada* (Agincourt, ON: The Book Society of Canada Limited, 1981), 20.

<sup>59</sup> Pui-Ian Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 37.

Castagno's work on "*Founding Mothers:*" *White Mothers of Biracial Children in the Multiracial Movement 1979-2000*) and curatorial projects (such as McKenzie's titled *Exploring the Inter-subjectivity of Mixed-Race Identity Through the Works of Jordan Clarke, Erika DeFreitas and Olivia McGilchrist*). These works impacted my project in ways I never could have imagined and I am grateful to these scholars. In my work, I attend to the gap that I identified years ago, that of the exploration and analysis of the Black "mixed-race" subject in Canadian Art History. As of yet, there has not been a centralized project that delves into the complex history of "mixedness" in Canada as it is expressed visually through art and material culture. It is my aim to attempt to bring this to light in a thoughtful, critical and most importantly Pro-Black and Pro-Indigenous way. To do this, I intentionally moved away from silo-ing the work.

This looks like confronting the false colonial dichotomy of Black vs white by centering the Black female subject alongside the Black "mixed-race" female subject in acknowledgment that we flow from one another. To pretend otherwise would be disrespectful and harmful to all the Black women of my community who I hold dear. This work is but the beginning. I hope to have more conversations around disrupting white supremacy with people I admire, people that challenge my beliefs, people that call me out when I unintentionally perpetuate the very things I renounce. This, I understand, is part of the process. This work is the beginning of naming potential biases in order to release their power over me and those who I care about. Let us continue to do the inner work in order to uplift each other with care, compassion and love. I feel as if I have just begun the journey and can already admit to not fully understanding its depth and how to course-correct in real-time, but I shall not let my missteps bar me from continuing to correct my actions and leaning into accountability always. We are responsible for becoming more ethical, more caring and more critical than the environment we were raised in. It is not a moment, it is a movement.

## **Chapter 1: Runaway “Big with Child:” Uncovering Bett from the Quebec Runaway Slave Advertisement Archive**

“I have rape-colored skin”<sup>60</sup>  
*Caroline Randall Williams* (2020)

Contrary to popular belief, Canada has a history of slavery –and no, it is not just in regard to the Underground Railroad. Within the context of Transatlantic Chattel Slavery, the first people to be enslaved on the territory now known as Canada were various Indigenous groups all labelled Panis. In New France after French capitulation to the British, slavery remained an institutionalized practice as confirmed by General Jeffery Amherst the eighth of September 1760: "The negroes and panis of both sexes shall remain in their quality of slaves in the possession of the French or Canadians to whom they belong; they shall be at liberty to keep them in their service in the colony or sell them [...]"<sup>61</sup> The importation of Black men, women, and children from the French Caribbean was undertaken as early as 1628.<sup>62</sup> The first known Black enslaved person, Olivier Le Jeune,<sup>63</sup> can be traced back to the Eastern part of modern-day Canada, which at the time was under French rule. In the modern-day province of Quebec, the institution of slavery was practiced by both the French (New France) and British (Quebec) regimes of the territory for approximately two centuries.<sup>64</sup> With the capitulation of New France to the British in 1763, the technology of the printing press

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<sup>60</sup> Caroline Randall Williams, “You Want a Confederate Monument? My Body Is a Confederate Monument.” *The New York Times*. *The New York Times*, June 26, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/26/opinion/confederate-monuments-racism.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, *Transactions of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec: Sessions of 1903 to 1905*. 25th ed. Quebec: Daily Telegraph Job Printing House, 1905, 29.

<sup>62</sup> Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*. 2nd ed. Carleton Library Series. Montreal, Que.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997, 2.

<sup>63</sup> Frank Mackey. *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010, 27.

<sup>64</sup> Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*. 2nd ed. Carleton Library Series. Montreal, Que.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997, x.

was brought to the colony<sup>65</sup> leaving tangible documentation of the enslaved by way of the slave advertisements (auction, sale, and runaway) which became staples of the regional newspapers.<sup>66</sup>

While in the British-held province of Quebec, forty-five enslaved people were the subject of fifty runaway notices.<sup>67</sup> The rarest minority among them, enslaved women, is the subject of this chapter. Out of eleven notices of female runaways (figure 1.1), only one female attempted a winter escape.

In the absence of Quebec meteorological records for the dates of Bett's escape, I turned to the journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (1711-1787), a German pastor living in Pennsylvania, in the hopes that it would offer some insights. While Pennsylvania is 966km south of Quebec City, it remains a pertinent comparative study because just like Quebec City, part of Pennsylvania's northern border is also bordered by water (Lake Erie). It must be noted, however, that Pennsylvania's weather is milder by several degrees, therefore, the comparison is not completely equivalent. Even though, Muhlenberg wrote for March 7, 1787: "It is snowing heavily [...]"<sup>68</sup> He continued on March 9 to say: "Snow and rain are falling [...]"<sup>69</sup> On March 13, Muhlenberg recorded: "During the past night there was a storm with lightning, thunder and heavy rain[...]"<sup>70</sup> Although Quebec City sits at a juncture where the St. Lawrence and Saint-Charles Rivers meet,

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<sup>65</sup> James Murray, "Report on the Government of Quebec and Dependencies thereof 1762," Library and Archives Canada, MG8-E1.

<sup>66</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, "From African to Creole: Examining Creolization through the Art and Fugitive Slave Advertisements of Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Canada and Jamaica," McCready Lecture on Canadian Art, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 20 January 2016 (date of last access 25 February 2020) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gq1-5ERv0oI> ; Charmaine A. Nelson, " 'Ran away from her Master...a Negroe Girl named Thursday': Examining Evidence of Punishment, Isolation, and Trauma in Nova Scotia and Quebec Fugitive Slave Advertisements," *Legal Violence and the Limits of the Law*, eds. Joshua Nichols and Amy Swiffen (NYC: Routledge, 2017)

<sup>67</sup> Frank Mackey. *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010, 307.

<sup>68</sup> Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, 1711-1787. *The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*. Philadelphia: Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania and Adjacent States, 194258, 734.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 735.

the regional similarities in climate point to the high probability that Quebec City was befallen with a substantial amount of snow at the time of Bett's escape. Another source can be found in the article “In Bondage when Cold was King: The Frigid Terrain of Slavery in Antebellum Maryland” (2017). While Maryland is 1158 km south of Quebec City and like Pennsylvania, has higher daily temperature averages, it remains a suitable comparison as Maryland winters are characterised by substantial snowfall, similar to Quebec City. What Tony Perry uncovers is that “although most slaves in Maryland escaped in the June to September period, a substantial number chose to flee bondage from October to March.”<sup>71</sup> Perry offers many advantages a winter flight might have over one in a milder season: Christmas holidays made it difficult to ascertain whether the enslaved person was visiting another plantation or had truly absconded thereby giving the runaway a few days head start and the harsher weather dissuaded frequent patrolling, and provided the possibility of crossing frozen rivers.<sup>72</sup> Perry illustrates that last point by reminding us that “Harriet Tubman appears to have preferred venturing into Maryland to retrieve slaves during the winter as the nights were longer and as the cold inclined people to stay indoors.”<sup>73</sup> In the nineteenth-century, the St. Lawrence River was known to freeze from early January to early April.<sup>74</sup> An ice bridge between Quebec City and Lévis formed naturally and was additionally solidified by the townspeople, “when the ice bridge takes, a road across is soon formed, which generally holds till April.”<sup>75</sup>

An examination of the nature and conditions of Bett’s winter flight, while heavily pregnant (the only documented winter flight of a Black enslaved woman) is the focus of this chapter.

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<sup>71</sup> Tony C. Perry, “In Bondage When Cold Was King: The Frigid Terrain of Slavery in Antebellum Maryland.” *Slavery & Abolition* 38, no. 1 (2017): 30.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>74</sup> J. Ruthven and sons, *The Scots Magazine, and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany: Being A General Repository of Literature, History, and Politics, For 1809*, vol. 71 (Edinburgh, UK: Archibald Constable and Company, 1809), 826.

<sup>75</sup> Henry Beaumont Small and John Taylor, *The Canadian Handbook and Tourist's Guide: Giving a Description of Canadian Lake and River Scenery and Places of Historical Interest, with the Best Spots for Fishing and Shooting*. Montreal: M. Longmoore, 1866, 88.

Utilizing Frank Mackey's transcribed fugitive slave ads for British Quebec (1760-1810),<sup>76</sup> this chapter will analyze the details of Bett's flight as is documented in the runaway advertisement placed by her owners, the West Indian trading partners of James Johnston and John Purss on 8 March 1787 in the *Quebec Gazette*.<sup>77</sup> I will also use additional archival materials to recuperate as much of a portrait of Bett as possible. This type of archival work is significant because

“the women who appear in the archival fragments [...] offer a crucial glimpse into lives lived under the domination of slavery— lives that were just as important as those of more visible and literate people in this period, who most consistently left an abundance of documentary material.”<sup>78</sup>

To center Bett, a Black woman, as the first chapter in my thesis on “mixed-race” people is very intentional because the Black woman *is* the center of my study. The violent and sordid past of cross-racial relations must be reckoned with especially given that such knowledge has been strategically forgotten. The history of Black people in Canada began with the exploitative violence of slavery. It must be said that slavery sanctioned the rape of *all* people across the gender spectrum who were detained and enslaved. The way that sexual assault and violence impacted Black enslaved women was that their rapes were incentivized by the institution to produce more labour “units” for the slaveholder. The legacy of that rape culture permeates our *current* culture. Moreover, the descendants of those non-consensual relations have to contend with the reality that the very symbol of their family's violation was also their source of social privilege: “[...] people experience light skin as a privilege, which it is. It's a profound privilege. But when I think about

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<sup>76</sup> The Quebec Runaway and Sale Advertisements have already been transcribed by Frank Mackey in appendix 1 of his *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840*, Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010.

<sup>77</sup> Johnston and Purss, “RAN-AWAY from the subscribers,” *Quebec Gazette*, 8 March 1787; transcribed in Frank Mackey, “Appendix I: Newspaper Notices,” *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2010), p. 329.

<sup>78</sup> Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016, 2.

how I came by it, it's a privilege that aches me because of how it came to be that I am light skinned."<sup>79</sup>

## **RUNAWAY SLAVE ADVERTISEMENTS AS PORTRAITS**

Across the Americas, running away was a common form of slave resistance and concomitantly, the runaway or fugitive slave advertisement (through which slave owners sought to re-enslave their fleeing human property) became ubiquitous wherever printing presses were present. Such notices paradoxically detailed the fugitive's talents and skills (as well as their physical and racial attributes) insisting on their lack all the while relying on descriptions of individuality, civility, and humanity to aid in the recapture and return of the runaway.<sup>80</sup> Although dubious in nature and intent, such archives hold the largest repository of information on enslaved populations and have been said to be "the most detailed descriptions of the bodies of enslaved African Americans available."<sup>81</sup> According to Nelson, White and White's observation also applies to the regions of the Americas that practiced Transatlantic Slavery, in general, particularly places where abolition predated the development of photography.<sup>82</sup> There is little left that was created by the hands of those enslaved because they were strategically deprived of the leisure time, literacy, and material access to represent themselves.<sup>83</sup> Nelson has argued that the visual nature of the textual descriptions in such ads has produced unauthorized portraits of the enslaved not as

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<sup>79</sup> Trymaine Lee and Caroline Randall Williams, "Transcript: Into 'My Body Is a Monument'," *NBCNews.com* (NBCUniversal News Group, July 2, 2020), <https://www.nbcnews.com/podcast/into-america/transcript-my-body-monument-n1232781>.

<sup>80</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, "'Ran away from her Master...a Negroe Girl named Thursday': Examining Evidence of Punishment, Isolation, and Trauma in Nova Scotia and Quebec Fugitive Slave Advertisements," *Legal Violence and the Limits of the Law*, eds. Joshua Nichols and Amy Swiffen (NYC: Routledge, 2017), p. 69.

<sup>81</sup> Shane White and Graham White, "Slave Hair and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *The Journal of Southern History* 61, no. 1 (February 1995): 49.

<sup>82</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, "Re-Imagining the Enslaved Eighteenth-Century Freedom Seekers as Twenty-First Century Sitters," 2017, <https://ago.ca/wanted-essays>.

<sup>83</sup> Such astute observations are borrowed from Shane White and Graham White's 1995 article and Charmaine A. Nelson's 2017 book chapter. David Waldstreicher also posits similar ideas in his 1999 article.

criminals but as freedom-seekers,<sup>84</sup> thus positioning the runaway slave advertisements as prime materials for an art historian to visualize the previously illusive Black enslaved individuals.

Fled from Quebec-settled West Indies merchants James Johnston and John Purss<sup>85</sup> (both of Scottish birth)<sup>86</sup> on the seventh of March, 1787, the notice for Bett's abscondence (figure 1.2) was published in the *Quebec Gazette* only a day later, signifying the urgency of the slaveholders to recuperate her.<sup>87</sup> The level of surveillance that Bett was living under is obvious within the advertisement because the slaveholders James Johnston and John Purss were able to describe within which hours she had fled: "between the hours of seven and eight o'clock yesterday evening." As Nelson astutely observed, Johnston and Purss "likely [...] had previously witnessed [Bett's] resistive nature," noting as well that "as an enslaved pregnant woman, Bett was rendered even more valuable since her child would soon become the property of the two West Indian merchants."<sup>88</sup> What Johnston and Purss' detailed account of her escape, down to the hour, also disclosed is the fact that Bett had bested them and was able to escape at an hour that would afford her as much cover as possible. The advertisement capitalizes on the shock value of a pregnant runaway and attempts to reinforce such behavior as delinquent.<sup>89</sup> Instead of perpetuating this projection, I posit that the winter context of Bett's escape is a central feature of a deliberate plan. As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, the property that Bett was held at was right on a body

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<sup>84</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, *Slavery, Geography and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016, 3.

<sup>85</sup> Johnston and Purss are known to trade in imported "Molasses, sugar, rum and coffee" as per an advertisement of such merchandise for sale in the *Quebec Gazette*. See No. 452 on 9 September 1773. They also traded in local spruce beer.

<sup>86</sup> Originally, both slaveholders were from Scotland; Purss from Elgin and Johnston from Stromness.

<sup>87</sup> This speedy publication of Bett's escape in the newspaper was facilitated by the fact that Bett's abscondence lined up with the newspaper's printing schedule.

<sup>88</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, Boulou Ebanda De B'éri, and Wanda Thomas Bernard, "Servant, Seraglio, Savage or 'Sarah': Examining the Visual Representation of Black Female Subjects in Canadian Art and Visual Culture." In *Women in the "Promised Land": Essays in African Canadian History*, edited by Nina Reid-Maroney. Women's Press, 2018, 59.

<sup>89</sup> Frank Mackey, *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010: 308.

of water, the St. Lawrence River, and would have been a viable avenue of escape. Escape by sea was a primary strategy for enslaved men because they would disguise themselves as sailors in order to board ships and appeal for labour and protection.<sup>90</sup> This was not a common course of action for runaway women for whom being in the confines of a ship with many men would open them up to sexual assault. Instead, it would not have been improbable for Bett to have attempted to cross the St. Lawrence River in its frozen state. By making space for this possibility, we consider Bett the human, Bett the strategist, Bett the innovator, despite the concerted efforts of Johnston and Purss to destroy her spirit and marked resilience from their version of her flight.

Her daring and dangerous escape is not only a testament to Bett's resilience and strength even during an extremely difficult situation, but it also posits that she was running from the violence that was endangering herself and her baby – perhaps a “mixed-race” child who had been fathered by Johnston or Purss. From the runaway and for sale advertisements, we can recuperate that Bett was a young Black woman who was well within her third trimester of pregnancy and fluent in three languages.

## **TERMINOLOGY**

An exploration of the terms used to describe Bett’s fugitive narrative within the runaway advertisements will be useful: most notable were “negro,” “wench” and “big with child, and within a few days of her time.”<sup>91</sup> The first of the three is a racial denominator that signifies the racial hierarchy that Bett was oppressed by and reveals that racial systems are deeply entrenched in visibility. As Tamara Extian-Babiuk argues, “negro” is not solely used as an indicator of African

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<sup>90</sup> Paul Gilroy, “The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness.” Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993, 13.

<sup>91</sup> Johnston and Purss, “RAN-AWAY from the Subscribers,” Mackey, *Quebec Gazette*, 8 March 1787.

heritage, it also became interchangeable with the term “slave.”<sup>92</sup> It also indexes the racist phenotyping that encompasses the demeaning of particular physical characteristics that have the function of othering Blackness visually. The term “negro”, then, is utilized pejoratively to describe an individual with “prognathic jaws, skin from dark brown to black, woolly hair, thick lips and a broad and flattened nose.”<sup>93</sup> By employing this racialised term, the slaveholders were effectively describing Bett as outside of the category of human and as the antithesis of European beauty, specifically as the foil to white women. The pervasive use of these terms is wrapped up in the fundamental belief of white superiority. This is particularly true when we consider that the child that Bett was carrying was likely Johnston’s or Purss’.

The second term wench, as J. Ogilvie details, is a conflation between a young girl or child and a woman of loose sexual character.<sup>94</sup> This is particularly telling of the hypersexualisation of Black enslaved women who would see their sexual abuse justified by constructing lewd behaviors as inherent to the Black woman's nature.<sup>95</sup> The third term “big with child” indexes the spectacle of pregnancy as viewed from the outside. At that moment in history, confirming a pregnancy involved waiting to see external development<sup>96</sup> and this is especially true of enslaved women as often reporting missed menses and other pregnancy symptoms such as morning sickness were not enough to convince a slaveholder. The reason for this is that those were common symptoms due to arduous nature of back-breaking labour demanded of enslaved people. Furthermore, the

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<sup>92</sup> Tamara Extian-Babiuk, *To Be Sold, a Negro Wench: Slave Ads of the Montreal Gazette, 1785-1805.* Master's Thesis, McGill University, Montreal, 2006, 27.

<sup>93</sup> “Negro Race” in Smith, Benjamin E. ed. *The Century Cyclopedia of Names: a Pronouncing and Etymological Dictionary of Names in Geography, Biography, Mythology, History, Ethnology, Art, Archæology Fiction, Etc., Etc.*, Etc .. New York: The Century Co. 1889, 1089.

<sup>94</sup> J. Ogilvie, *The Imperial Dictionary of the English Language: A Complete Encyclopedic Lexicon, Literary, Scientific, and Technological.* Edited by Charles Annandale, vol. 4, Blackie and Son, 1884, 619.

<sup>95</sup> See White and White 1995; Nelson 2010; Kriz, 2008; Beckles 2000.

<sup>96</sup> Susan E Klepp, “Revolutionary Bodies: Women and the Fertility Transition in the Mid- Atlantic Region, 1760-1820.” *The Journal of American History* 85, no. 3 (December 1998): 922.

animalisation of black people and the belief in Black insentience meant that white slave owners approached maternity completely differently for Black women who were assumed to carry and birth children more easily.<sup>97</sup>

This unwillingness to confirm a pregnancy of an enslaved woman based on the self-reporting of symptoms is in part due to the similarities between common conditions of enslavement and pregnancy as Turner discusses:

"[Stomach ailments] and [a]dditional indicators [of pregnancy] included dizziness, headaches, and engorged breasts. Of course, such symptoms could not confirm pregnancy because they were also associated with the mineral deficiencies, gastrointestinal disorders, and exhaustion that plagued enslaved women."<sup>98</sup>

What would it have been like to be nearing the end of a pregnancy and fleeing? Bett, as an enslaved person, would have most likely been undernourished and suffering mineral deficiency in a normal state; a pregnancy would have aggravated such underlying conditions and added to it many symptoms such as swollen ankles and feet, supreme exhaustion and shortness of breath (that is, if her pregnancy was without complications). An escape under such difficulties would have been terrifying.

### **THE LOCATION OF BETT'S FORCED LABOUR**

According to a survey plan illustrating the complex of properties that Johnston and Purss owned (figure 1.3), "Messr. Johnston and Purss' dwelling house (N.ºI) being 62 feet on Champlain Street by 40 feet in depth, a stone building two stories high on said street, and three stories towards the River St. Lawrence, the roof of which is covered with clapboards."<sup>99</sup> Although the survey

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<sup>97</sup> Sasha Turner, *Contested Bodies: Pregnancy, Childrearing, and Slavery in Jamaica*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017, 88.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> *Plan of the Champlain district and survey of the premises belonging to Messr. Johnston & Purss of the city of Quebec merchants situated and lying in the Lower Town of the said city*, manuscrit en couleur; 41 x 55 cm, Jeremiah

implies that Johnston and Purss both shared a home, it seems unusual to me as James Johnston was married to Margaret Johnston and at that time, actively growing their family with the addition of children. The survey mentions a second dwelling adjacent (N.ºII) to the aforementioned one that perhaps would be more likely to have been Purss' home. If the men lived within two households, Bett would have either been made to split her time between the homes or was predominantly at the service of one of the merchants.

We know that Bett's labour was exploited in the domestic sphere as documented in her sales advertisement of 5 July 1787 which touted her household skills of cooking, washing, ironing, and needlework.<sup>100</sup> Very possibly, Bett would have been seen as a surrogate "wife" or as such women were known in the Caribbean, a housekeeper, to Purss in terms of some of the functions, albeit without any of the social or legal advantages.<sup>101</sup> Purss very likely absorbed the West Indian tradition of keeping coloured (mixed-race) housekeepers rather than arrange a marriage to a white woman of wealth and/or of social status. Such colonial West Indian conventions could have influenced Johnston and Purss at the time of their purchase of Bett, having preferred Bett for her young age as "[a]lthough Jamaican planters wished to purchase a greater number of younger females than they did prior to 1788, they considered captives between ages twelve and sixteen to approximately age twenty-five to be best suited for fulfilling their reproductive goals."<sup>102</sup> Let us

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McCarthy, arp., 24 août 1799, 03Q, E21, S555, SS10, P43, Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, Centre d'Archives de Montréal (BANQ), Montreal, Canada.

<sup>100</sup> For further information enquire of the Printer, "FOR SALE, A STOUT, healthy, active NEGRO WOMAN," Quebec Gazette, 5 July 1787, Frank Mackey, *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 329.

<sup>101</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson. *Slavery, Geography and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica*. London: Routledge, 2016, 67.

<sup>102</sup> Sasha Turner, *Contested Bodies: Pregnancy, Childrearing, and Slavery in Jamaica*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017, 51.

be reminded of George Elliott Clarke's words, such foul strategy was seen as "opportunities for white sexual predation – and concomitant expansion of one's slave 'holdings' [...]"<sup>103</sup>

Furthermore, while Purss' partner Johnston married in his advanced age (James Johnston was 59 years old while spouse Margaret Mackneider was 17 and were married until Johnston's death 7 years later),<sup>104</sup> Purss was a perpetual bachelor until his death. As the wealthy white Briton Simon Taylor detailed in his correspondences to his friends and family, Taylor had never "any thought of marrying and hardly think I shall," preferring the company of so-called 'quadroon'<sup>105</sup> mistresses. Men like Taylor thought that taking a white woman as a wife was more worry than it was worth and conceivably, Purss imagined the same.

Purss described his single status in a letter to Captain W.D. (figure 1.4) on the 28th of August 1786. Written from Quebec, Purss was simultaneously celebratory of this Captain's wedding news yet also self-deprecating about his own single status:

However improperly the odious term of old batchelor may have come from me, I shall be glad to learn you have expunged your name out of our list & entered yourself into the fraternity of your wise brother & my partner and that you have before now legally got under the lie of the amiable Amy Dow's petticoat. If you have, I am convinced from Mrs. Johnston's high opinion of that lovely girl & your own more than lukewarm epithet, you will be infinitely more happy than in the tasteless insipid state of celibacy can possibly afford you [...]<sup>106</sup> (sic)

Purss' intimate and humorously self-deprecating account of his unmarried state is illustrated as an unwanted, condition that he finds himself in. However, it is a very interesting and arguably

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<sup>103</sup> George Elliott Clarke. "Canadian Biraciality and its Zebra Poetics." *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*. George Elliott Clarke. Toronto: Toronto UP, 2002. p. 212. 263 Walker 1992, p. 50.

<sup>104</sup> André Bérubé, "JOHNSTON, JAMES (d. 1800)," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 4, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed July 18, 2020, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/johnston\\_james\\_1800\\_4E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/johnston_james_1800_4E.html).

<sup>105</sup> Quadroon is a racial colonial descriptor denoting people with ¼ Black heritage.

Also see: Christer Petley: Christer Petley, " 'Home' and 'this country': Britishness and Creole Identity in the Letters of a Transatlantic Slaveholder," *Atlantic Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1 (April 2009), pp. 43-61.

<sup>106</sup> John Purss, "WD married and 'now legally got under the lie of the amiable Amy Dow's petticoat'! Two girls died of 'scarlet fever & gangrenous sore throat'." *Johnston Family Archive*. August 28, 1786.

dishonest portrayal of his bachelorhood because his merchant rank and accrued wealth would have been sufficient to attract suitable white female matches. Any number of local women would have been amenable to such a pairing however, despite his reference to his unwed state as a cursed condition over which he had little to no control, Purss' bachelor status indicates a lifestyle choice.

### **MOURNING A CHILD - WHITE PERSPECTIVE EXPLORED**

The private correspondences of Johnston and Purss to family members at Stromness, Scotland, mention the Johnston's loss of their firstborn son, James. Born in 1784, a year after the couple's wedding, the deceased child is mentioned in November 1787 as the letter from Johnston and Purss to Joshua Johnston in Stromness details:

Your Sister in Law much recovered from a sensible affliction she for some time felt from the loss of their young son, James, who was suddenly cut off after he was thought out of danger in the small pox for which he was inoculated, & had a heavy load, being as promising a boy as ever was born, & the first that Mrs. Johnston was able to suckle, & then at the breast, no wonder that it occasioned her much concern.<sup>107</sup>

This recounting of Mrs. Johnston's mourning of her son is incredibly relevant as it is in the same year as Bett's traumatic ordeals. While the archived letters of 1787 do not refer to the pregnant Bett's escape, capture or infanticide trial (or Bett, generally), they do however mention Mrs. Johnston's pregnancy and suffering due to the loss of her son. James was Mrs. Johnston's firstborn. The proximity in which both women would have been mourning their respective children indicates that the two were likely pregnant at the same time within the same or neighbouring households; Bett with her unknown child and Mrs. Johnston with James. Did Mrs. Johnston feel any empathy or sympathy for Bett either during their pregnancies or after their shared losses?

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<sup>107</sup> JOHNSTON & PURSS. "3.11.02 Remitting Money via Mr. Brymer. Sister-in-law, Margaret Recovering from Loss of Son, James, to Smallpox." *Johnston Family Archive*, Scotland. November 9, 1787.

Due to a lack in the archives, I will draw from two early nineteenth-century examples of white women and their relation to Black motherhood, the journals of Lady Maria Nugent and Eliza Chadwick Roberts. Separated by class and wealth, these two women are worlds apart from each other and justified their treatment of Black, enslaved mothers very differently. Maria Nugent, for example, is described by Klepp and McDonald as “[a] devoted mother” as she authored her journal to her children and “breast-fed her babies over the opposition of her husband and her doctor.”<sup>108</sup> However, her devotion to her white children did not open Nugent to feelings of sympathy for Black mothers despite the obvious, patriarchal resistance to breastfeeding her own child. Enslaved women who were frequently forced to be wet nurses for white children did so at the expense of their own infants’ nutrition. Instead, Nugent seemed to have sympathized more with a conch “when the ‘poor little fish’ was routed from its shell” than with the enslaved children forced to labour in the plantation fields.<sup>109</sup> Roberts, on the other hand, described the Black enslaved as: “not separate or inferior people, but thousands of fellow beings groaning under the lash” and was particularly empathetic to the enslaved women with children, evidenced when Roberts wrote of “the wretched mother with her infant lashed to her back” (sic) who “was unable to attend to its cries of distress.”<sup>110</sup> Such comments, however, ring flat when considering that Roberts was not an abolitionist and so did not apply her way of thinking to advocate for enslaved people.<sup>111</sup>

Perhaps Mrs. Johnston was similar to Nugent as Mrs. Johnston was of an affluent class yet insisted on breastfeeding her children. Mrs. Johnston could also have been like Roberts and been sympathetic to the plight of Black mothers through her proximity to and observation of Bett.

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<sup>108</sup> Susan E Klepp, and Roderick A. McDonald, "Inscribing Experience: An American Working Woman and an English Gentlewoman Encounter Jamaica's Slave Society, 1801-1805." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (2001): 654.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 653.

<sup>111</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, *Slavery, Geography and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016, 308.

However, any such sympathy did not stop her from marry a West Indian merchant and becoming a slave owner alongside her husband. Mrs. Johnston might have also been somewhere else on the spectrum completely. More research is required to exhaust all possibilities.

## **INFANTICIDE**

Newborns are fragile creatures and care given or withheld can greatly impact their survival or death.<sup>112</sup> It is also important to note that there is a fine line between a natural death of an infant, an accident and a murder. According to Marie-Aimée Cliche, there were 392 recorded deaths of newborns in Quebec from 1660-1969.<sup>113</sup> The primary cause being still-born deaths at 157, after unknown, the next leading cause was lack of care (*manque de soins*, 35), exposure to the cold (*exposition au froid*, 23), head trauma (*fracture du crane*, 20), and suffocation.<sup>114</sup> This list indexes some of the different ways that Bett could have lost her child, the majority, accidental. After the British Conquest of Quebec, the pre-existing French code condemning infanticide by the death penalty was replaced by the Law of Jacques I which reiterated Henri II's code. Bett is reported by Mackey to have been held in court in May for the charge of infanticide.<sup>115</sup> If we take Johnston and Purss' "big with child, and *within a few days* of her time" (italics mine) description of Bett's to be indicative of the last part of her third trimester, that placed Bett somewhere within weeks 38-40, which demonstrate either a birth that results in complications, unsafe birthing environment, exposure to cold and lack of care -if the child died of natural causes. There is also the possibility

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<sup>112</sup> Marie-Aimée Cliche, "L'infanticide dans la région de Québec (1660-1969)". *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 44, no. 1 (1990): 34.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>114</sup> Unfortunately, Cliche's essay of 30 pages does not mention the intersection between slavery and infanticide. Although her date range brings her well into the slaveholding period in Quebec, and we are aware of at least this one case with Bett that was brought to court involving an enslaved woman after her baby died, Cliche does not make that leap and therefore, her investigation is incomplete.

<sup>115</sup> Frank Mackey, *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010, 309.

that Bett birthed a healthy child and bonded with her baby for a small time before abandoning it, as was the case with Elizabeth Williams, a so-called ‘quadroon’, in Quebec, in March 10, 1840.<sup>116</sup> Williams kept her out of wedlock child a secret, went up north, had the child baptized, kept him for a month and then left the baby under a tree in the woods come April.<sup>117</sup> She was tried and convicted for infanticide yet was saved from the noose by a group of concerned citizens from the County of Two Mountains citing “imbecility of mind, more clearly, than a wilful intention of depriving her infant of life.”<sup>118</sup> Perhaps Bett ran away to have the freedom (if only for a small time) to birth, love and say goodbye to her child the way she wanted.

### **SEXUAL ASSAULT AND MOTHERHOOD WHILE ENSLAVED**

Another comparative analysis might be useful to uncover another possibility of Bett’s life at the time of her flight. Margaret Garner, a pregnant enslaved “mulatto” woman absconded with her husband Simon Garner, their four children and neighboring enslaved people in January of 1856 in Boone County, Kentucky.<sup>119</sup> Their group of eight crossed the frozen Ohio River to Cincinnati, which was one of the largest and most significant free black communities in the self-declared anti-slavery states of the U.S.A. They took shelter with relatives who were making arrangements for passage on the Underground Railroad when the Garners and company were surrounded by armed marshals.<sup>120</sup> On the cusp of apprehension, Garner took a knife to the throat of two-year-old Mary before turning to attempt the same on her other children before being arrested. In an interview, Garner herself said that her choice to do this to her children was a way to "end their sufferings,

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<sup>116</sup> Frank Mackey, *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010, 249.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Mark Reinhardt, *Who Speaks for Margaret Garner?* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010, 4.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

[rather] than have them taken back to slavery and be murdered by piece-meal."<sup>121</sup> To even begin to comprehend the complexities of that decision, we must account for the specific sexual and gendered violence suffered by enslaved women who, routinely and systematically exploited as “breeders,” were subjected to intolerable and ongoing psychic, social and physical abuse which was inseparable from their experiences of maternity.

Present in Garner's heart-wrenching story is the dual oppression that enslaved Black women faced: the obvious physical exploitation of their labour as well as the sexual trauma that they suffered due to as slew of reasons, the primary one being the artificial matrilineal constitution of slavery that imposed the enslaved mother's status upon the child. In the case of Garner, the insidiousness does not stop there. We must consider how it came to be that Garner herself is described as “mulatto.” Who then was Margaret Garner's father? As Weisenburger points out:

In 1833, John Gaines was the only adult white male residing at Maplewood. Moreover, there is nothing in the record about Priscilla [Margaret's mother] being ‘hired out’ elsewhere, and her household duties made it unlikely that she ever would have been. That John Gaines was Margaret's father is, therefore, a reasonable supposition.<sup>122</sup>

The cycle of sexual violence did not end with Priscilla as her daughter, Margaret, was sexually assaulted by Archibald Gaines, her paternal uncle, whom no doubt fathered four of Margaret's five children,<sup>123</sup> including the child, she was carrying during her escape.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> The American Baptist, “A Visit to the Slave Mother who Killed Her Child” in Mark Reinhardt, *Who Speaks for Margaret Garner?* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010, 215.

<sup>122</sup> Steven Weisenburger, *A Historical Margaret Garner*. May 20, 2011, 2.

<sup>123</sup> As Weisenburger deduces, Robert Garner was frequently rented out leaving his wife extremely vulnerable to Gaines' assaults. It seems that Gaines' sexual assaults against Margaret Garner increased when his wife was too pregnant to desire sex, a fact which can be seen in the birth patterns of the two women. Weisenburger is also quick to point out that Margaret's corresponding pregnancies would most probably mean that she would have been the wet-nurse for her white mistress' children as well as the children who were the product of the latest rape by their father. For more, see *Ibid*, page 3-4.

<sup>124</sup> Steven Weisenburger, *A Historical Margaret Garner*. May 20, 2011, 3.

This incest is part and parcel of the Transatlantic Slavery and yet is seldom discussed. It was not even clearly defined during the Garner court case, however, both Christina Sharpe and Kimberly Juanita Brown<sup>125</sup> discuss the implications of the intersections of incest and slavery as the “legal reorganization of kin and property that occurred, and was concealed, under the sign of slavery.”<sup>126</sup> Sharpe connects the disdain for incestual unions and interracial relations as stemming from the same convoluted logic: “Slavery provides both a time and space (real and fantastic) where to commit incest or amalgamation is to break *the same law* and the imminent rupture and onset of forgetting that breakaround which some cultural or national formation has taken hold. (sic)”<sup>127</sup> Slavery as a system incentivised this “perversion” by allowing *blood* to become *property*.<sup>128</sup> This is how the visible testimonies of interracial sexual oppressions become conceived by descendants of this violence as being imbued in their “rape-colored skin.”<sup>129</sup>

Not only does Margaret's unrelenting experiences of sexual assault involve issues of incest, violation of the Garners' marriage and trauma borne by both Margaret and Simon, it also speaks to the enslaved mother's curse of birthing their children into slavery. Was this also on Bett's mind as she prepared to give birth on frozen winter lands, most likely alone? While slave law denied almost every aspect of parental control, Margaret -and perhaps Bett as well- “assert[ed] a mother's right to control the destiny of her children, [...] str[iking] a blow against the material and cultural

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<sup>125</sup> Kimberly Juanita Brown, *The Repeating Body : Slavery's Visual Resonance in the Contemporary*. Book Collections on Project Muse. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015, 25.

<sup>126</sup> Christina Elizabeth Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies : Making Post-Slavery Subjects*. Perverse Modernities. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010, 28.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Caroline Randall Williams, “You Want a Confederate Monument? My Body Is a Confederate Monument.” *The New York Times*. *The New York Times*, June 26, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/26/opinion/confederate-monuments-racism.html>.

foundations of American chattel slavery."<sup>130</sup> Through this, the infanticidal mother becomes an icon of resistance and agency in a system that deprives her of true motherhood.

### **THE LEGALITIES OF INFANTICIDE**

Extracted from Cincinnati as per the Fugitive Slave Act,<sup>131</sup> the Garners were subsequently involved in a trial that prioritised problemising their escape rather than the infanticide - in other words, it was more paramount for the courts to sort out to whom they belonged rather than explain the death of a two-and-a-half-year-old “mixed-race” enslaved child. In Bett's case, it was the opposite, Bett was accused of infanticide. What is known is that Bett's child did not survive her escape and Bett was taken to court for the crime of infanticide.<sup>132</sup> This particular judicial process is contradictory to the nature of slavery in Canada, which like the United States, legally defined slaves as chattel or moveable personal property. By attempting to extract an infanticide judgement rather than a property damage verdict, it is paradoxically redressing the construction that “the slave's status as property was incompatible with his status as a person.”<sup>133</sup> At most, justice would have been served in the form of a sanctioned execution for Bett as “English common law treated child murder just like other forms of murder, as a felony punishable by death.”<sup>134</sup> It begs the question, why even go through the effort of a legal proceeding? If it was not Johnston and Purss, who brought the charges? What were they attempting to achieve? Perhaps this insistence for such a trial betrays one of the merchants/slaveholders as knowledgeable about their status as the father

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<sup>130</sup> Mark Reinhardt, *Who Speaks for Margaret Garner?* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, (2010): 37.

<sup>131</sup> The Fugitive Slave Law Act of 1850 in the United States decreed that even if a successful runaway reached a free-state (that is, a state that made slavery illegal), the fugitive would still be legally enslaved and the so-called property of the slaveholder that is keeping them in bondage. This made extraction legal.

<sup>132</sup> Frank Mackey, *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010, 309.

<sup>133</sup> Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution* (New York, 1956), 193.

<sup>134</sup> Constance B. Backhouse, “Desperate Women and Compassionate Courts: Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century Canada.” *The University of Toronto Law Journal* 34, no. 4 (1984): 448.

of Bett's baby, thereby humanizing the offspring enough to attempt justice for the dead, "mixed-race" child. I continue to wonder if it was not an exercise to obtain a legal execution for Bett as punishment for her flight. Such truths are as of now unknowable as the court transcript, if it ever existed, is absent from the archives. A court verdict, however, remains that reads NOT GUILTY.<sup>135</sup> This is in line with the findings of Backhouse that "[t]he courts regularly returned verdicts of not guilty despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Their response is one of the strongest indications of the attitude towards infanticide in the nineteenth century - that of compassion, tolerance, and sympathy."<sup>136</sup> I wonder if this was the true reason for Bett's verdict? It seems unlikely however it is difficult to ascertain the true motivations without the full transcript.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, by centering the runaway and sale advertisements that concern Bett, we can pull together a composite that reflects (up to a point) a portion of Bett's life in Quebec. Although not a complete portrait of Bett as a woman, these advertisements offer a partial portrait of Bett as an enslaved woman who was rebelling against her oppressors. The marked visibility of such documents supplement the barren state of Black portraiture in colonial Canada and demonstrate the presence of Black Canadians across Canada's formative colonial history which has undergone contemporary sanitization of its active role in Transatlantic Slavery. While the runaway and sale advertisements do not communicate Bett's particular subjectivities and nuances of character, they do illustrate (as the amassed evidence I have presented corroborates) what double oppression, the reality of being both Black and female, looked like and what Bett did to get out of it -for her and

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<sup>135</sup> Frank Mackey, *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760-1840*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010, 308-309.

<sup>136</sup> Constance B. Backhouse, "Desperate Women and Compassionate Courts: Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century Canada." *The University of Toronto Law Journal* 34, no. 4 (1984): 448. DOI:10.2307/825592.

for her child. Against the odds, Bett decided to remove herself in the winter, while pregnant from the exploitative clutches of Johnston and Purss. What superficially might look like hasty, disorganized behavior was more likely to be a calculated maneuver that would see Bett's autonomy restored, albeit temporarily. Through this analysis and exploration of the source materials, Bett's narrative is steeped in sexual violence and the difficulties of enslaved maternity. When considering the differences between white motherhood and Black motherhood, it becomes clear that these seemingly universal conditions are in fact subject to racial, sexual and gendered violence. It is no wonder that infanticide was rampant under such circumstances. Whether Bett intentionally ended her child's life or not is still unclear. What is unambiguous is that regardless of Bett's action or inaction, it is not for us to ascribe a moral judgment upon her. The devastation of motherhood while enslaved is condemning enough.

## **Chapter 2: The Colour of Money: An Art Historical Analysis of Viola Desmond's Representation on Canadian Currency**

“The history of capital is inextricable from the history of Atlantic chattel slavery.”<sup>137</sup>  
*Christina Elizabeth Sharpe* (2016)

On November 19, 2018, the Bank of Canada put into circulation a ten-dollar bill— (figure 2.1) portraying Viola Desmond a Black Canadian social justice advocate of “mixed-race” heritage active from the 1930’s until her death in 1965. Righteous and nationalistic themes are weaved throughout the bill; case in point, the other side features the architecture of the Canadian Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg. The bill was the subject of much sensationalism in 2018, and with it, Canada won the International Banknote of the Year Design award.<sup>138</sup> Media was careful to describe Desmond as the first non-royal woman to be featured on a Canadian banknote on our paper currency.<sup>139</sup> This recognition highlights the fact that female monarchs such as Queen Elizabeth II were previously featured on bills in promotion of the imperial enterprise as well as the Alberta’s Famous Five (figure 2.2).<sup>140</sup> Although there has been female representation on Canadian currency besides the Queen before Desmond (that was erased by media), what is different and significant is that Desmond’s representation is on a regularly circulating banknote.

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<sup>137</sup> Christina Elizabeth Sharpe, *In the Wake : On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press, 5.

<sup>138</sup> “Canada Captures IBNS 2018 Bank Note of Year Award.” The International Bank Note Society. Accessed May 30, 2020. <https://www.theibns.org/bnoy2018/>.

<sup>139</sup> “Viola Desmond to Be Featured on Stamp | CBC News,” CBCnews (CBC/Radio Canada, January 14, 2012), <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/viola-desmond-to-be-featured-on-stamp-1.1149417>. The Canadian Press, “Canada’s New Viola Desmond \$10 Bill Named International Banknote of the Year,” Financial Post (Financial Post, April 30, 2019), <https://financialpost.com/news/economy/canadas-viola-desmond-10-bill-named-international-banknote-of-the-year>.

<sup>140</sup> Between 2004 and 2011, suffragettes Emily Murphy, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Nellie McClung, Louise Crummy McKinney and Irene Parlby, otherwise known as Alberta’s Famous Five, were featured on the 50\$ bill (figure 2). See: “Women on Canadian Banknotes” in *The Canadian Encyclopedia. Historica Canada*. August 11, 2016; Last Edited May 03, 2019.

Capitalist nation-states determine what subjects will be illustrated on their banknotes on the basis of whether they consider them to be epitomical representations of values they claim to uphold. What captured the attention of Canadians and the international community at large is of course how the new bill was presented as a Western first, the public commemoration of a Black woman on paper currency. While there have been coins minted to celebrate emancipation or abolition that featured Black women subjects, they did not cross into the paper currency territory which was exclusively reserved for white subjects of particular note. The criteria that the Bank of Canada observed up until this moment highlighted the racist ideology that dismissed Black Canadian accomplishments. As such, with this 10\$ bill rebrand, the Black subject is shifted from the coin, that featured allegorical or fictional human figures to paper currency where a recognizable portrait of a Black person commemorates an inspirational story and sheds light on Canada's racist roots.

While this shift is promising, we must reserve our celebration of it as we critically assess the ramifications of how this 10\$ bill is potentially being leveraged as visual reparations. Viola Desmond's likeness now is being instrumentalized as a stand-in for the triumph and success of human rights and social justice in Canada which necessitates critical inquiry into the ways in which Black people's experiences are not only tied to but also defined by capital and currency. Let us be reminded of Bett from Chapter 1, an enslaved Black woman who absconded from the forced service of two Quebec merchants in the late eighteenth-century, who is the subject of a runaway slave advertisement placed in the *Quebec Gazette* calling on its readers to return Bett to them for a 20\$ incentive, or in today's context: two Desmond bills.

European banks and currencies funded and provided crucial resources for the functioning of Transatlantic Slavery and settler colonialism beginning in the fifteenth century. For the purpose

and geographical focus of this chapter, it is important to highlight that Nova Scotia participated in Transatlantic Slavery and it is estimated that there were about 500 enslaved people held in bondage there at or around 1715.<sup>141</sup> Capitalism is a fundamental part and practice of colonialism and imperialism; currency being one of its most effective tools for its continued legitimization and domination. The crucial purpose of its circulation, the enrichment of capitalist white men, relied heavily on the displacement and genocide of Indigenous and African-descended peoples. What is the value/worth of a 10\$ dollar bill? What has it been able to afford throughout the centuries? More importantly, *who* has been allowed to accrue wealth through currency or property?

Intersectional projects of emancipation and sovereignty must necessarily be anti-capitalistic. As such, the paradox that Viola Desmond's likeness on a \$10 bill raises is twofold. First, how do we reconcile the gross discrepancies between the value of currency, which is historically based on the abjection of Black people, and the nation-state's appropriation of Viola Desmond's likeness to manifest its purported humanitarian values? Second, how is Viola Desmond's newfound visibility a process of historical erasure and distancing from systemic atrocities carried out by the government and its privileged citizens to this day? Is this a genuine step on the path of atonement, or rather, and in my opinion, a capitalist adjustment to survive the persevering pressures Black and Indigenous communities are putting on the nation-state. In this chapter, I shall be discussing Viola Desmond's representation on the Canadian 10\$ banknote attending in particular to what role Desmond's multiracial heritage and light-skin complexion play in the level of notoriety her legacy is currently enjoying.

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<sup>141</sup> Donald H. Clarimont, and Dennis W. Magill, *Nova Scotian Blacks: An Historical and Structural Overview*. Halifax Nova Scotia: Institute of Public Affairs, Dalhousie University, 1970, 6.

## **VIOLA DESMOND'S HERITAGE, CANADA'S HISTORICALLY RACIST ROOTS AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DESMOND'S IDENTITY THEN AND NOW**

Viola Desmond's representation on Canadian currency is the latest and most significant way her legacy has been celebrated. Before the 10\$ bill, Desmond's representation was featured on a postal stamp in 2012 (figure 2.3),<sup>142</sup> the Royal Canadian Mint's first Black History Month coin in 2019<sup>143</sup> as well as parks<sup>144</sup> and a ferry<sup>145</sup> being renamed in her honour. One of fifteen children, Viola Desmond née Viola Irene Davis was born in North End<sup>146</sup> Halifax, Nova Scotia, to father James Albert Davis and mother Gwendolin Irene (Johnson) Davis (figure 2.4) in 1914. The family's rented apartment was located on 114 Gottingen St.<sup>147</sup> It is on this same street that Desmond would eventually open up her hair salon, which was the source of her entrepreneurial success.

Born to a Black father and white<sup>148</sup> mother in early twentieth-century Halifax, Viola Desmond's parents were one of the very few married interracial couples.<sup>149</sup> Although Canada did

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<sup>142</sup> "Viola Desmond to Be Featured on Stamp | CBC News," CBCnews (CBC/Radio Canada, January 14, 2012), <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/viola-desmond-to-be-featured-on-stamp-1.1149417>.

<sup>143</sup> "Mint's First Black History Month Coin Celebrates Viola Desmond | CBC News," February 6, 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/mint-issues-coin-of-civil-rights-icon-viola-desmond-1.5008417>.

<sup>144</sup> "In 2018, Toronto City Councillor Neethan Shan introduced a motion to initiate the process of renaming Hupfield Park in Scarborough (a suburb east of the downtown core) after a celebrated individual in Canadian history who had demonstrated values of diversity and equity through their work. The motion passed unanimously at Toronto City Council, and the new name, Viola Desmond Park, was formally approved unanimously by Council in June of that year." See more: Cheryl Thompson, 2019.

<sup>145</sup> On July 7, 2016, the Halifax Transit's newest ferry was named in honor of Viola Desmond: Anjuli Patil, "Viola Desmond Ferry Makes First Appearance in Halifax Harbour | CBC News," June 19, 2016, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/viola-desmond-ferry-docks-dartmouth-1.3642542>.

<sup>146</sup> As Graham Reynolds reminds us: "The North End was the larger of the city's two Black communities. The other was Africville, situated on the northeast edge of Halifax, along the shore of the Bedford Basin."

<sup>147</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/halifax-explosion-viola-desmond-wanda-robson-disaster-killed-1.4393272>

<sup>148</sup> Constance Backhouse remarks that while Viola's mother's father was considered "mixed" because he was 7/8ths white, Viola's mother was regarded as 'white'. See: Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded. A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950*. S.I.: University of Toronto Press, 1999, 312-313, 233.

<sup>149</sup> Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded. A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950*. S.I.: University of Toronto Press, 1999, 107.

not have any formal anti-miscegenation laws against white and Black relationships,<sup>150</sup> white supremacy was so engrained into societal norms that informal regulation of intimate “interracial” unions and segregation was the predominant way of control all the while continuously upheld by various governmental apparatuses. It must be noted however that Canada’s Indian Act enacted in 1876 operated very similarly to the anti-miscegenation laws in the United States which decreed that “interracial” relationships between Indigenous women and non-Indigenous men would result in the women being stripped of their “Indian” legal status. These laws were still active until 1985.<sup>151</sup>

Returning to Black and white “interracial” unions, one of the justifications for opposition was the imagined trope that “interracial” offspring would be born with severe congenital disabilities, if born at all. The *Montreal Herald* and *Montreal Gazette* fueled this trope when they ran a fictitious account of the death of an infant that was not only purported to have been born with a physical disability but more significantly, part animal: “The trunk was human; in the thighs and legs, however, there were no bones, the left one terminating in a bear’s paw, and the right in a sheep’s foot. [...] The father was a mulatto.”<sup>152</sup> This of course has direct ties to the etymology of the zoologically-derived “mulatto” epithet which means mule in Spanish, the infertile offspring of a horse and a donkey.

Such blatant racism and hatred were disguised as ‘concern’ for the parents and future child. Such sentiment has transformed with the times but can be found to fuel the “What about the child?” question popularly asked.<sup>153</sup> When someone sees beyond these lies and continues to pursue an

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<sup>150</sup> Debra Thompson, “Racial Ideas and Gendered Intimacies: The Regulation of Interracial Relationships in North America,” *Social & Legal Studies* 18, no. 3 (September 2009): 354.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Herald*, 21 July 1821. *Gazette*, 25 July 1821; Frank Mackey, 290.

<sup>153</sup> Channa Verbian, ‘White Birth Mothers of Black/White Biracial Children: Addressing Racialized Discourses in Feminist and Multicultural Literature,’ *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*, vol. 8, no. 1&2, 213.

“interracial” union, violence is always the tried and true enforcer of the colour line: “With some white Canadians advocating the criminalisation of interracial unions, many African Canadians feared that courting a white woman in some parts of Canada during the 1920s could end in violent retribution.”<sup>154</sup> Such was the reality for many that the KKK targeted. One such case occurred in a town in Ontario, Canada: “The February 28, 1930 Ku Klux Klan cross burning in Oakville threatened Ira Johnson's life and attempted – thankfully, in vain – to prevent the World War One veteran from marrying his white fiancée, Isabella Jones.”<sup>155</sup>

Given this context, it is unavoidable that Desmond’s appearance was highly scrutinized from a young age: “Viola’s younger sister recalls children taunting them in the schoolyard, jeering: ‘They may think you’re white because they saw your mother at Parents’ Day, but they haven’t seen your father.’”<sup>156</sup> This account indicates the town’s anxiety with racial ambiguity and the possibility of Viola (and her siblings) accessing societal advantages restricted racially for those artificially classified as white. Nevertheless, Viola Desmond self-identified “as ‘mixed-race’ and as ‘coloured,’ the latter being a term of preference during the 1930s and 1940s.”<sup>157</sup> Despite the fact that Canadians have a history of describing “racial” mixing by using the term “mulatto,”<sup>158</sup> Desmond’s “racial” identity was suppressed at the time of the trial as well as in today’s press about the 10\$ bill.

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<sup>154</sup> Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Color Line Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870-1955* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 183.

<sup>155</sup> Michael Howie, “Oakville's Forgotten History,” *Burlington Post*, July 30, 2009, 8.

<sup>156</sup> Barrington Walker, *The African Canadian Legal Odyssey : Historical Essays*. (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2012), 107.

<sup>157</sup> Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded. A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (S.I.: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 223.

<sup>158</sup> See Chapter 1 of this thesis.

Instead, Desmond was referred to as a “negress”<sup>159</sup> and as a “negro hair dresser”<sup>160</sup> at the time of the incident in 1946 and “Black” posthumously. I posit that one of the reasons for this during Desmond’s lifetime is to speak to the fact that the incident was racially motivated against Blackness. Desmond’s “mixedness” did not come with all-encompassing privilege at the time of the theatre eviction and so it was not mentioned by the press. Fast forward to today, I would argue that Desmond’s “mixedness” does come with privileges that are unspoken, hidden behind nationalistic virtue-signaling that tokenises Desmond’s experiences rather than speak to infrastructural change. Here, the question we must contend with is why Viola Desmond? This is not in a bid to delegitimize her entrepreneurial success or her brave confrontation with Canadian racism, it is instead a critical examination of which Black representations are state-sanctioned. Black Canadian representation matters. The subtext of this 10\$ bill, however, is reiterating a problematic and persistent stance that light-skin Blackness is the preference. Today’s press on the 10\$ bill,<sup>161</sup> refers to Desmond as being Black, with little to no mention of her blended heritage. While a reparative interpretation might favor an optimistic take in a bid to reconcile mixedness and Blackness as part of each other, a more critical reading would see this as a strategic deletion in order to avoid discussing her obvious proximity to whiteness and how this is likely an institutional move to present a palatable Black figure to the Canadian public at large.

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<sup>159</sup> “Negress Alleges She Was Ejected from Theater,” *Halifax Chronicle*, 30 November 1946, 2.

<sup>160</sup> “Desmond Case Heard, Decision Is Reserved,” *Halifax Chronicle*, 11 January 1947, 11.

<sup>161</sup> See: The Canadian Press, “Canada’s New Viola Desmond \$10 Bill Named International Banknote of the Year,” April 30, 2019, <https://financialpost.com/news/economy/canadas-viola-desmond-10-bill-named-international-banknote-of-the-year>.

See: Globe staff and wire services, “A Viola Desmond Primer: Who’s the Woman on Today’s New Canadian \$10 Bill?,” *The Globe and Mail*, November 19, 2018, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-viola-desmond-10-bill-explainer/>.

See: The Canadian Press, “Canada’s Viola Desmond \$10 Bill Named International Banknote of the Year,” *City News*, April 30, 2019, <https://www.citynews1130.com/2019/04/30/canadas-viola-desmond-10-bill-named-international-banknote-of-the-year/>.

Viola Desmond's heritage is essential in discussing her instrumentalisation in the construction of Canada's official narrative as a nation that values multiculturalism, post-raciality, anti-imperialism, feminism, and social justice. Desmond was part-white, however, her whiteness is understood as proximity to whiteness rather than being part of her. While the privilege that is associated with proximity to whiteness is undeniable, it was never designed to service the "mixed-race" individual, but rather the hegemony and hierarchies of white supremacy. Case in point, in Jamaica, there were restrictions put in place to limit just how much property could be bequeathed to a multiracial offspring by a white male in order to dampen their racial emancipation and social mobility.<sup>162</sup>

In this particular case however, it is privileging Desmond posthumously as her legacy has been cemented into the canon of Canadian civil rights leaving other, dark-skin Black Canadian civil rights icons such as Dr. Carrie Best—who incidentally lived through exactly the same thing as Desmond at the Roseland Theatre four years prior—largely unremembered (more on Best to follow). As such, it is important to reckon with the acceptability of racial proximity that is based on the premise that the closer a Black person is to whiteness—in skin colour, hair texture, behavior, performance, dress, and so on—the more palatable white people find Blackness. This is the basis of respectability politics which has been used to advocate for assimilation.

Part of the Bank of Canada's instrumentalisation of Desmond's likeness lies in this dissimulation of Blackness into whiteness. As Rinaldo Walcott states: "The achievement of Canadian multiculturalism is simultaneously managing race and making it disappear -one of the central organizing principles of the modern nation-state of Canada."<sup>163</sup> I posit that featuring Black

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<sup>162</sup> Winthrop D. Jordan, *American Chiaroscuro: The Status and Definition of Mulattoes in the British Colonies* (Williamsburg, VA: College Division, 1962), 199.

<sup>163</sup> Rinaldo Walcott, "The book of others (Book IV): Canadian multiculturalism, the state, and its political legacies." *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 46, no. 2 (2014): 132.

faces on the canonical medium that is paper money assists in this “achievement.” The promise of Canadian social and racial “progress” as represented by Desmond on the \$10 banknote might not be the most obvious to non-Black people, especially those unaware of her historical racial segregation lawsuit. Her light skin, here tinted by the purple of the 10\$ banknote, along with her straight(ened) hair, fashioned into a pageboy hairstyle (congruent of the times, but potentially anachronistically misread by contemporary eyes) might be too ambiguous for eyes trained to identify Black people according to caricatural or stereotypical features. By “celebrating” her now through the banknote, Canada can be understood as attempting to distance itself from the actions of past governments

### **BIOGRAPHY OF VIOLA DESMOND**

Desmond taught at two racially segregated high schools<sup>164</sup> (for Black students) briefly before pursuing her cosmetology education. Due to racist practices in cosmetology schools in Halifax, they made it impossible for Desmond to study in her hometown, and so Desmond left to study in Montreal,<sup>165</sup> Atlanta City (in 1940)<sup>166</sup> and New York (in 1941).<sup>167</sup> Among her mentors were two of the United States’ first African-descended women millionaires, Madam C. J. Walker (1867-1919) in New York and Madam Sarah Spencer Washington (1889-1953) in Atlantic City. Upon her return to Halifax from Montreal in 1937, Desmond joined her husband Jack Desmond in opening a joint barbershop/hair salon on Gottingen Street, naming her beauty salon Vi’s Studio of Beauty Culture. By 1942, Desmond expanded her business by adding a product line as well as

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<sup>164</sup> After Viola Desmond graduated high school, Desmond taught in Preston and Hammonds Plains. Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded. A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (S.I.: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 234.

<sup>165</sup> Viola Desmond attended Field Beauty Culture School in 1936. See Backhouse, 235.

<sup>166</sup> According to Viola Desmond’s sister Wanda Robson, Desmond attended Madam Sara Spencer Washington’s Apex College of Beauty Culture and Hairdressing in 1940. See Robson, *Sister to Courage*, 38.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, Desmond attended Advanced Hairstyling Studio in 1941.

by establishing a beauty school that catered to African-Canadian beauticians, a sorely underserved niche (figure 2.5).<sup>168</sup>

In 1946, Desmond was traveling for business within Nova Scotia as was routine for the delivery of her beauty products, when her car broke down in New Glasgow. This moment catalysed the series of events that Desmond is known for, the 10\$ banknote refers to, and that subsequently marked Canadian history: Desmond decided to wait for her car to be repaired at the Roseland Theatre.<sup>169</sup>

Desmond purchased a ticket without incident, however when she went to choose her seat, she was told that her ticket was not for the section in which she wished to sit (the downstairs).<sup>170</sup> Under the impression that this was a simple misunderstanding, Desmond reportedly went back to the ticket booth and offered to pay the difference, only to be told that the ticket she wished to purchase was not available to people like her.<sup>171</sup> In an instance of spontaneous rebellion, Desmond re-entered the theater and took up a seat in the “whites-only” section. This incited the manager of the Roseland Theatre to call the police who forcefully removed her. Desmond recounted:

The policeman grasped my shoulders and the manager grabbed my legs, injuring my knee and hip. They carried me bodily from the theatre out into the street. The policeman put me into a waiting taxi and I was driven to the police station. Within a few minutes the manager appeared and the Chief of Police [Elmo C. Langille]. They left together and returned in an hour with a warrant for my arrest.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Constance Backhouse, “‘Bitterly Disappointed’ at the Spread of ‘Colour-Bar Tactics’: Viola Desmond’s Challenge to Racial Segregation, Nova Scotia, 1946” in Barrington Walker. *The African Canadian Legal Odyssey : Historical Essays*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012, 318.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 145.

<sup>171</sup> Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded. A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (S.I.: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 200.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 229.

Desmond was jailed overnight in a cell with detained men.<sup>173</sup> Desmond had collided against Nova Scotia's de facto racial segregation.<sup>174</sup> Case in point, given that Canada did not have these official segregation laws (or visibly demarcated spaces), Desmond was charged with tax evasion, the amount of this supposed tax fraud: one penny.<sup>175</sup> In an interview with the *Halifax Chronicle*, Desmond said:

I can't understand why such measures should have been taken. I have travelled a great deal throughout Canada and parts of the United States and nothing like this ever happened to me before. I was born in Halifax and have lived here most of my life and I've found relations between negroes and whites very pleasant. I didn't realize a thing like this could happen in Nova Scotia -or in any other part of Canada.<sup>176</sup>

While Desmond's statement plays up how unfathomable such racially motivated actions were to her, such things did of course happen in Nova Scotia.

In fact, a very similar incident happened to Dr. Carrie Best (figure 2.6), the journalist who showed her support by writing about Desmond's case in her newspaper *The Clarion*. In December 1941, the Roseland Theatre changed their seating arrangement policy to segregate Black theatre goers in the balcony. When Best heard that Black high school girls were removed from their floor seats, Best went down to the theatre to investigate—in a strategic action against racial segregation—as she herself was a patron of the Theatre for years prior to this incident.<sup>177</sup> In 1942, Best purchased a ticket at the Theatre, took the seat she had been sitting in for years on the main floor and was

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<sup>173</sup> Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded. A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (S.I.: University of Toronto Press, 1999, 103.

<sup>174</sup> De facto segregation is segregation that is not legislated into legal constitution. It is nevertheless enforced by the law in other ways as exhibited by Viola Desmond's tax evasion charge that insidiously operates to both terrorize Black communities and to demonstrate that the justice system is not meant for Black recourse.

<sup>175</sup> Constance Backhouse, "'Bitterly Disappointed' at the Spread of 'Colour-Bar Tactics': Viola Desmond's Challenge to Racial Segregation, Nova Scotia, 1946" in Barrington Walker. *The African Canadian Legal Odyssey : Historical Essays*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012, 105.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>177</sup> *Civil Rights Activist Carrie Best*. Canada: CBC, 1991. <https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/civil-rights-activist-carrie-best>, 1:28-2:20.

arrested for it.<sup>178</sup> Best recounts in her own words: “they literally dragged my son [Calbert] and I out of the theater. We were charged with disturbing the peace. We went to court. We lost of course. Not only that, they took a judgement against my property until I paid a certain amount of money.”<sup>179</sup> As Donald Posterski summarizes, “After a one-day trial, the all-white jury sided with the theater and the judge awarded costs against Best. Not only had she lost, but she also owed the Roseland Theatre \$156.07”<sup>180</sup> which would amount to \$2, 277.96 in 2020.<sup>181</sup> Best continued her fight against racism in Nova Scotia by advocating through her newspaper (*The Clarion*) and a guest column of *Human Rights (The Pictou Advocate)*, and a radio show (*The Quiet Corner*) and was awarded the Order of Canada in 1974 and an honorary Doctorate of Law from St. Francis Xavier University in 1975 among other accolades. Remembered in Nova Scotia, Best’s legacy is not as far-reaching as Desmond’s despite being as deserving and intertwined with Desmond’s fate.

On November 9, 1946, Viola Desmond was brought before Robert Henry Graham of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia<sup>182</sup> accused of “entering a theatre without paying the tax.”<sup>183</sup> In response to the charge against her, Viola Desmond swore: “I am the accused. I offered to pay the difference in the price between the tickets. They would not accept it.”<sup>184</sup> Convicted of fraud and fined 26.00\$, Desmond with the support of Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NSAACP) mounted a legal case to appeal the court’s decision. To assist

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<sup>178</sup> Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded. A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (S.I.: University of Toronto Press, 1999, 101-102.

<sup>179</sup> *Civil Rights Activist Carrie Best*. Canada: CBC, 1991. <https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/civil-rights-activist-carrie-best>, 1:28-2:20.

<sup>180</sup> Donald C. Posterski, *Enemies with Smiling Faces: Defeating the Subtle Threats That Endanger Christians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 59.

<sup>181</sup> Bank of Canada. “Inflation Calculator.” Accessed August 16, 2020. <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/rates/related/inflation-calculator/>.

<sup>182</sup> Robert Henry Graham of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia was also the judge who heard Carrie Best’s case.

<sup>183</sup> Nova Scotia Archives RG 39 C volume 937 Supreme Court 13347 <https://novascotia.ca/archives/desmond/archives.asp?ID=2>

<sup>184</sup> Nova Scotia Archives RG 39 C volume 937 Supreme Court 13347 <https://novascotia.ca/archives/desmond/archives.asp?ID=2&Page=201501005&Language=>

Desmond in her claim, Carrie Best published in December 1946 “MRS. VIOLA DESMOND TAKES ACTION” on the front paper of her newspaper *The Clarion* (figure 2.7). The studio photograph of Desmond that accompanies the news piece is strikingly similar to the portrait on the 10\$ bill: soft gaze and a similar hairstyle, however in the *Clarion* portrait, Desmond’s hair is done with more flair. As part of Desmond’s legal rebuttal, a Writ of Certiorari<sup>185</sup> was deposited against the theatre manager “charging false arrest, false imprisonment, assault and malicious prosecution.”<sup>186</sup> When the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia dismissed her appeal, Desmond became disillusioned. The personal cost was tremendous; Desmond’s husband never supported Desmond’s fight<sup>187</sup>—for fear it would trigger racially targeted retribution—and their union ultimately ended in divorce.<sup>188</sup> Desmond’s professional life was also affected; Desmond lost the will to continue expanding her beauty culture company into the empire she aspired to build and later passed in 1965 at fifty years old of gastro-intestinal hemorrhage.<sup>189</sup> It must be acknowledged that Desmond’s premature death is very likely the ultimate health consequence of her ongoing fight against unjust social and legal systems.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> “A type of writ, meant for rare use, by which an appellate court decides to review a case at its discretion. The word certiorari comes from Law Latin and means ‘to be more fully informed’. A writ of certiorari orders a lower court to deliver its record in a case so that the higher court may review it.” See: Stephanie Jurkowski, “Writ of Certiorari,” *Legal Information Institute* (Cornell Law School, June 2017), [https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/writ\\_of\\_certiorari](https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/writ_of_certiorari).

<sup>186</sup> *The Halifax Chronicle*, page 2. “‘Negress Alleges She Was Ejected From Theatre.’” Nova Scotia Archives, November 30, 1946. <https://novascotia.ca/archives/desmond/archives.asp?ID=21>.

<sup>187</sup> Constance Backhouse, “‘Bitterly Disappointed’ at the Spread of ‘Colour-Bar Tactics’: Viola Desmond’s Challenge to Racial Segregation, Nova Scotia, 1946” in Barrington Walker. *The African Canadian Legal Odyssey : Historical Essays*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012, 130.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, 136.

<sup>190</sup> See D. H. Chae, Wang, Y., Martz, C. D., Slopen, N., Yip, T., Adler, N. E., Fuller-Rowell, T. E., Lin, J., Matthews, K. A., Brody, G. H., Spears, E. C., Puterman, E., & Epel, E. S. (2020). *Racial discrimination and telomere shortening among African Americans: The Coronary Artery Risk Development in Young Adults (CARDIA) Study*. *Health Psychology*, 39(3), 209–219. <https://doi.org/10.1037/hea0000832>

## **CHALLENGING SEGREGATION BEFORE AND BEYOND THE ROSELAND**

Tiffany Gill reminds us that “[...] the black beauty industry since its inception has served as an incubator for black women’s political activism and a platform from which to agitate for social and political change.”<sup>191</sup> Desmond’s fight against Canadian segregation does not begin and end with the stand at the Roseland Theatre. Instead, her larger professional career as a trailblazing businesswoman tells the story of her refusal to bend to racial oppression long before. With resolve and determination, Desmond navigated those barriers by seeking the mentorship required to achieve her goals outside of Nova Scotia. On her way towards economic emancipation, Desmond uplifted her fellow Black Canadian women by offering services and classes, through her school, specifically catered to them. Desmond followed in the footsteps of her mentor Walker who “champion[ed] a diasporic entrepreneurship”<sup>192</sup> in which Walker “expect[ed] to find [her] agents taking the lead in every locality not only in operating a successful business, but in every movement in the interest of our colored citizenship.”<sup>193</sup> Walker’s political and business leadership demonstrates just how the salon, the school and the revindication of civil rights and all of its respective rights collided.

The official narrative of Desmond’s fight against racial segregation in Canada can very easily be reduced to the violence she suffered at the mercy of the Canadian state and for that we must be attentive. Such damage-centric narratives pigeonhole the true breadth of Desmond’s strength as had “[...] racism [...] not stalled Viola Desmond’s beauty business, instead of drawing comparisons to Rosa Parks we might be remembering her as Canada’s Madam C. J. Walker.”<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Tiffany M. Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women’s Activism in the Beauty Industry*. (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2010): 1.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>194</sup> Cheryl Thompson, *Beauty in a Box: Detangling the Roots of Canada's Black Beauty Culture*. (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2019): 95.

The attention that damage-centered narratives generate initially feels as if it brings awareness to the issue and ultimately deters it in the future. Instead, damage-centered narratives aid in reinforcing and perpetuating the same damage.<sup>195</sup>

## **PROCESS OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND COMMITTEES**

In 2013, Merna Forster – author of “100 Canadian Heroines: Famous and Forgotten Faces” (2004) and “100 More Canadian Heroines: Famous and Forgotten Faces” (2011) – started a petition to change the status quo, particularly concerned with getting women represented on Canadian paper money.<sup>196</sup> What ensued was a very successful petition that collected 72,715 signatures.<sup>197</sup> To truly emphasize the importance of the project, Forster sent a letter to the newly elected Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in 2015:

Who and what is celebrated on our banknotes matters, as it reflects what we consider important in our culture and history and who we consider worthy of honouring for achievement? Women are not absent from the list of notable worthies in Canada, just notably absent or under-represented in many of the images that surround us and which contribute to our view of the world and our potential role in it.<sup>198</sup>

The process of putting Viola Desmond’s portrait on the ten-dollar bill was as part of a National public consultation, the first of its kind for Canadian currency (which is said to become the norm for the subsequent bills).

According to the Bank of Canada, Desmond’s representation is on the ten dollar bill because “[t]he \$10 note is more readily used by Canadians and exchanged more frequently than

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<sup>195</sup> Eve Tuck, “Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities.” *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (2009): 413.

<sup>196</sup> Merna Forster, “Sign the Petition - Bank of Canada: Add Women from Canadian History to Canadian Bank Notes.” Change. Accessed July 6, 2020. <https://www.change.org/p/bank-of-canada-add-women-from-canadian-history-to-canadian-bank-notes>.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Keili Bartlett, “B.C. Historian Helped Viola Desmond Make It on the \$10 Bill,” November 21, 2018, <https://www.saanichnews.com/news/b-c-historian-helped-viola-desmond-make-it-on-the-10-bill/>.

higher value notes.”<sup>199</sup> After conducting a National survey to assess the public opinions of Canadians in regards to replacing first Prime Minister John A. MacDonald’s portrait on the 10\$ bill (figure 2.8), their findings pointed to a majority of Canadians wanting the chosen person to be an accomplished and pivotal Canadian woman whose contributions were outside the realm of politics.<sup>200</sup> Out of 26,300 initial submissions, 461 “iconic Canadian women”<sup>201</sup> qualified under the Bank of Canada’s requirements.<sup>202</sup>

An Independent Advisory Council was comprised of Dr. Margaret Conrad (history professor at University of New Brunswick), Perdita Felicien (Olympic hurdler and motivational speaker), Merna Forster (historian and author), Francine Descarries (professor of sociology at UQAM), Dominic Giroux (president and vice-chancellor of Laurentian University), Michael Redhead Champagne (founder of Aboriginal Youth Opportunities), Gurjinder Basran (author of “Everything Was Good-bye”). This Advisory Council was guided by an expert panel that consisted of Dr. Jonathan Rose (professor of Political Studies at Queen’s University) and Dr. Barbara Crow (Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science at Queen’s University). Together, these panels decided on 12 candidates to long-list and from there, 5 were short-listed. The final candidates excluding Viola Desmond were poet E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake) (1861-1913), engineer Elizabeth (Elsie) MacGill (1905-1980), athlete Fanny (Bobbie) Rosenfeld (1904-1969) and artist Pitseolak Ashoona (c. 1904-1983).<sup>203</sup> According to the Bank of Canada’s official statement, the public was

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<sup>199</sup> “A Bank NOTE-Able Canadian Woman.” Bank of Canada. Accessed May 31, 2020.

<https://www.bankofcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/backgrounder-canadian-woman.pdf>.

<sup>200</sup> “2016 Prime Ministers Survey - Executive Summary,” 2016, <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2016-prime-ministers-survey-executive-summary.pdf>.

<sup>201</sup> “Nominations – From 461 to One Iconic Canadian Woman.” Bank of Canada, 2016.

<https://www.bankofcanada.ca/banknotes/vertical10/banknoteable-woman/nominations/>.

<sup>202</sup> These requirements were threefold: 1- the candidate needed to be of Canadian nationality 2- deceased for at least 25 years, 3- non-fictional.

See: “A Banknote-Able Canadian Woman.” Bank of Canada. Accessed December 4, 2019.

<https://www.bankofcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/backgrounder-canadian-woman.pdf>.

<sup>203</sup> “Advisory Council Members and Expert Panel Members.” Bank of Canada.

involved as much as possible throughout this process. They purported to do this by checking in with the public after producing the long list by way of a public opinion survey to “gaug[e] the views of Canadians about the nominees, and focus groups later assessed the views of those short-listed.”<sup>204</sup> It does seem to me however, that given the hierarchical structure of the process, the final decision was heavily steered by the expert panel.

To clarify, Viola Desmond is not ‘replacing’ MacDonald as his representation will be moved onto the higher value fifty dollar banknote in the near future, displacing Canada’s longest serving Prime Minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King.<sup>205</sup> MacDonald endorsed colonial violence and genocide throughout his ten years [1867–1873, 1878–1891] as prime minister by implementing multiple programs, the most infamous among them, residential schools.<sup>206</sup> It is important to understand the significance of residential schools, not as a singular historic event, but as the foundation for the current contemporary foster system that continues to separate Indigenous children from their families, cultural inheritance and land.<sup>207</sup>

### **AMERICAN 20\$ BILL PROJECT**

Similarly, in 2015, the United States considered a petition to commemorate a woman on the 20\$ banknote. When considering this project for similarities to the Canadian project, it is helpful to note that when the petition was reviewed, the US Treasury Department recommended for the change to occur on the 10\$ bill. The reasons offered by the Treasury were operational and

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<sup>204</sup> “A Banknote-Able Canadian Woman.” Bank of Canada. Accessed December 4, 2019.

<https://www.bankofcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/background-Canadian-woman.pdf>.

<sup>205</sup> <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/banknotes/bank-note-series/frontiers/50-polymer-note/>

<sup>206</sup> *Canada's Residential Schools: The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939*, vol. 1 (Montreal: Published for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada by McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 548.

<sup>207</sup> Cindy Blackstock, “First Nations Child and Family Services: Restoring Peace and Harmony in First Nations Communities” in Kathleen Kufeldt & Brad McKenzie, eds, *Child Welfare: Connecting Research, Policy and Practice* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2003) 331.

focused on counterfeiting concerns.<sup>208</sup> Peculiarly, both the Canadian and American projects converge on the 10\$ bill. What does the 10\$ bill convey that the 20\$ bill does not, and vice-versa? Initially presented to the Obama administration and then indefinitely blocked by the Trump administration,<sup>209</sup> the proposed portrait change to replace seventh American president Andrew Jackson was conceived by non-profit organization Women on 20s.<sup>210</sup> Out of ten candidates,<sup>211</sup> Black abolitionist and one of the prominent leaders of the Underground Railroad, Harriet Tubman was the unofficial public choice.<sup>212</sup>

I agree with Calvin R. Coker that this was not the proper way to pay tribute to Tubman's legacy considering her staunch anti-capitalist values, as well as her experience of being bought and sold as a former enslaved person. However, Canada's successful feature of a civil rights icon on its 10\$ banknote puts the country at an advantage in the international arena, and this acts as a distraction from the continued social injustices and ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples and African-descended people in Canada. Canada is not a trailblazer. Viola Desmond –and all those hidden by iconifying her– was.

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<sup>208</sup> It was only when swift backlash on replacing the 10\$ bill portrait of Alexander Hamilton, the founder of the US mint, that the project was approved for the 20\$ bill.

Ana Swanson, Abby Ohlheiser. "Harriet Tubman to Appear on \$20 Bill, While Alexander Hamilton Remains on \$10 Bill." The Washington Post. WP Company, April 20, 2016.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/04/20/u-s-to-keep-hamilton-on-front-of-10-bill-put-portrait-of-harriet-tubman-on-20-bill/>.

<sup>209</sup> Alan Rappeport, "Harriet Tubman \$20 Bill Is Delayed Until Trump Leaves Office, Mnuchin Says." The New York Times. The New York Times, May 22, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/22/us/harriet-tubman-bill.html>.

<sup>210</sup> "\$10 Vs. \$20?" Women on 20s. Accessed June 1, 2020. <https://www.womenon20s.org/points>.

<sup>211</sup> Among the candidates considered: Rosa Parks, Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony, Eleanor Roosevelt, Wilma Mankiller, Alice Paul, Betty Friedan, Clara Barton, Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

<https://www.womenon20s.org/candidates>

<sup>212</sup> Morgan, Iwan, and Mark White, *The Presidential Image: A History from Theodore Roosevelt to Donald Trump*. S.I.: I B TAURIS, 2020, 17.

## **PORTRAITURE**

Across all denominations, the horizontal banknotes feature a portrait of a person deemed important in Canadian history; among the selected: seventh prime minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Queen Elizabeth II, tenth prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie King and eighth prime minister Sir Robert Borden. Each portrait resembles a passport photo; closed mouth, no smiling with a neutral facial expression. Each one looks out from the edge of the bill with a direct gaze. Portraiture is a long-standing art tradition that has been linked over time to the promotion of the sitter through visual cues that speak to their wealth and affluence. Historically, “high art” portraiture - rendered for instance in oil paint or marble - was only feasible by the very rich since materials and the artist’s time were very expensive. For the most part, these financial restrictions precluded racialised and disenfranchised persons from commissioning their own images and they are often in other patron’s portraits as props.<sup>213</sup> The portrait of Viola Desmond that is featured on the 10\$ bill however, was made possible through the invention of the camera and she herself had chosen to sit for the image. This is significant because her image is self-directed. As a racialised woman, Desmond having control over how her likeness is captured was as a way to reclaim her identity through active “partici[pation] in their own image creation, a practice that acted as a valuable social and cultural resistance to colonialism.”<sup>214</sup> The shift is due in part to the photographic technology being more accessible, therefore offering a more democratic access to the self-portrait. Due to this, Desmond’s portrait carries some of her spirit and subjectivity. This is anchored in the new orientation of the 10\$ bill, vertical. It makes the new bill stand out in comparison to the older ones. Another thing that does this is Desmond’s facial expression; in her sister, Wanda Robson’s

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<sup>213</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, *Representing the Black Female Subject in Western Art*. Routledge Studies on African and Black Diaspora. Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2010, 71.

<sup>214</sup> Lynne Warren. *Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Photography*. Vol. 1. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2006, 25.

words: “That’s my Viola. That’s her. It’s her. There’s nothing wrong with it. It is her -in one of her soft smile moods.”<sup>215</sup> Desmond portrait speaks to her desire to solidify her identity as her own. Desmond even used photos like the one on the 10\$ bill on the packaging of her cosmetic products such as a face powder that was sold as being “ESPECIALLY BLENDED TO ENHANCE DARK COMPLEXIONS” (figure 2.9).

Placing her likeness on the tin is extremely significant as Desmond adopted this strategy after her mentor Madame C.J. Walker (figure 2.10). Desmond’s appearance was important, yes because she was perceived as a testament to her beauty school and products, it was also because self-care is self-affirmation, especially in a world that tries its best to reduce the amount of space one takes up. Erin Chapman elucidates Walker’s motivations: “[r]epresentations of black people in realist or plainly human forms rather than in carefully crafted, idealized portraits, easily discernible blackface minstrel comedy, or cartoonish exaggerations – and the dissemination of these plain forms to nationwide and even world-wide audiences –were still new, still risky and daring, still in formation. [...]”<sup>216</sup> Canada shared United States’ visual dearth of positive Black representations and as such “beauty practices in Canada became interconnected with the United States due in large part to rapid expansion and growth in the black beauty culture industry in the postwar years.”<sup>217</sup> By placing their self-possessed portraits on the packaging, both Walker and Desmond contributed an affirming visual of Blackness and appealed to their Black female clients by stating that they shared their consumers’ racial identity. Important to note that while Walker and Desmond both undercut racist stereotypes visually, the difference between them is that Walker

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<sup>215</sup> “Viola Desmond Inspires Sister.” CTVNews, November 19, 2018.

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=1544063>, 1:56-2:09.

<sup>216</sup> Erin D. Chapman, *Prove It on Me: New Negroes, Sex and Popular Culture in the 1920s*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 84.

<sup>217</sup> Cheryl Thompson, *Beauty in a Box: Detangling the Roots of Canada's Black Beauty Culture*. (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2019), 69.

was a dark-skinned Black woman and Desmond was a light-skinned Black woman. While Walker's look confronted racism with the aforementioned positive visual, Walker also had to contend with colourism that sought representations of light-skinned Black women over their darker-complexioned counterparts and overtly African phenotypes.

Desmond's look was a draw for her Black female clients at a moment when many products marketed to Black women were appealing to them to associate beauty with lightening their skin and straightening their hair. Thompson states that such an ideal was created by African American magazines to counteract the white beauty ideal myth, labelled " 'Brownskin' ideal—a heterosexual and feminine woman who was visibly black and whose stylized display of respectable, feminized heterosexuality embodied the crowning glory of an attendant African American middle class."<sup>218</sup> By availing her likeness to her product, Desmond capitalized on Black women's desire to ascribe to the Brownskin ideal, an ideal that persists to this day if Viola Desmond's appointment to the 10\$ bill is any proof. While the recognition of Desmond's legacy challenging racial injustice is important, we must ask ourselves, who is being erased in Desmond's shadow and why?

Acknowledging how colourism operated in Black communities is one thing, it is an entirely different matter to interrogate the impetus of this colourism. While colourism was first formally defined by Alice Walker in the early 1980s, colourism has been a by-product of white supremacy since Transatlantic Slavery. Walker describes colourism as the "prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color."<sup>219</sup> I want to make clear that as a light-complexioned Black woman of multiracial heritage, I recognize that I navigate the world with more ease than my dark-complexioned Black female and femme counterparts. That being said, the

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<sup>218</sup> Cheryl Thompson, *Beauty in a Box: Detangling the Roots of Canada's Black Beauty Culture*. (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2019), 70.

<sup>219</sup> Alice Walker, "If the Present Looks Like the Past, What Does the Future Look Like?" *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens*. (CITY, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 290.

system that entrenched colourism was not creating it for my direct benefit and that nuance must be disavowed and spoken about. Colourism reproduces white supremacy within the very communities that are disenfranchised by that racism. To focus only on how colourism discriminates within Black communities would be to once again relegate the blame onto the victims of the violence rather than denounce the true instigators and benefactors of this phenomenon. It is insidious in its way of pitting community against one another. It incentivises community divide by encouraging light-skin privilege to those that are closer to whiteness. To ascribe to colourism is to ultimately serve white supremacy.

### **THE AESTHETICS OF THE 10\$ BILL**

The ten-dollar bill that Viola Desmond has now become synonymous with is characteristically purple. While the colour overlay is common for all Canadian bills, it has an accidental function of cancelling out the orange undertones of Desmond's skin, leading me to question the legibility of Viola Desmond's Blackness by non-Black Canadians. As previously mentioned, colourism might be at play here in order to present (white) Canadians with Blackness at its most palatable. Unconventionally vertical, this new orientation allows for Viola Desmond's portrait to be far larger than the previous horizontal bills.<sup>220</sup> Taking up the majority of the bill is a reproduction of the famous photograph of Viola Desmond which was featured in newspapers at the time of her trial as well as posthumously in textbooks. It is important to note that until very recently, Viola Desmond's story had been erased or suppressed from Canadian history.

Desmond looks out with a soft gaze, her appearance immaculate with a perfectly coiffed pageboy style and dainty pearl earrings. She is the epitome of class and poise. Hair grooming was

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<sup>220</sup> "A Bank NOTE-Able Canadian Woman." Bank of Canada. Accessed May 31, 2020. <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/background-Canadian-woman.pdf>.

an important part of achieving acceptance via respectability politics. Constance Backhouse, a legal scholar who is generally understood as being the first researcher to have formally examined Viola Desmond's life, describes "[Desmond] as both 'elegantly coiffed and fashionably dressed,' a 'fine-featured woman with an eye for style.' Her contemporaries recall that she was always beautifully attired, her nails, make-up, and hair done with great care... Desmond was a well-mannered, refined, demonstrably feminine woman."<sup>221</sup> However, despite the fact that "[he]r challenge to the racially segregated seating policies was carried out politely and decorously,"<sup>222</sup> this did not shield Desmond from state violence. Hers was a Black experience that posthumously became the face of Canadian Black civil rights, and one must entertain how her "mixedness" factored into this outcome. Later in this chapter, I will go into further detail as to how light-skin privilege and mixedness palpability plays a role in the selection of Viola Desmond on the 10\$ bill.

Of particular note is the inclusion of a grid-style map of the North End of Halifax's downtown where Desmond lived and operated her salon. Underneath her portrait is the vaulted window of the Library of Parliament surrounded by many different maple leaves. On the other side of the bill, underneath the denomination value is an excerpt of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in English and in French:

Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination [...]" The excerpt is quite a bit shorter than the actual quote which continues to name the discriminations as being: "discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability."<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded. A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (S.I.: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 312-313.

<sup>222</sup> Barrington Walker, *The African Canadian Legal Odyssey: Historical Essays*. (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2012): 112

<sup>223</sup> "Section 15 – Equality Rights." Department of Justice. Charterpedia, Accessed June 17, 2019

This quote hovers above the representation of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg<sup>224</sup> which opened in 2004 with great opposition by multiple communities.<sup>225</sup> The general outcry was based around the sentiment that the museum (that exists on stolen land) encouraged a reading of the many genocidal narratives it presents as being pitted against one another: “[James Kafieh, an Ontario lawyer and chair of Canadians for Genocide Education] said it promotes an ‘elite’ view of human rights, and elevates one atrocity over all others in pursuit of an ‘emotionally manipulative indoctrination.’”<sup>226</sup>

Notably, the back of the note features a gold eagle feather placed in a very prominent position near the denomination value at the top. The Bank of Canada explains the inclusion of the eagle feather by stating how important it is to Indigenous peoples within Canada as it “symbolizes ideals such as truth, power and freedom.”<sup>227</sup> In ceremonial use, the eagle feather takes on connotations of “peace and justice” that bind people to “honour and truthfulness.”<sup>228</sup> When bestowed upon someone, the eagle feather is a mark of distinction of the highest honour. A person might receive such a feather within Indigenous society for acts that benefit others. Therefore, to have such a potent Indigenous symbol on this bill of Canadian currency that celebrates African-Canadian Viola Desmond requires more attention. My initial feeling is that this marks a recognition of cross-community solidarity between African-descended people and Indigenous

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<sup>224</sup> The Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg was also the site of the official circulation launch party of the bill.

<sup>225</sup> Gareth Davis, “Canadian Museum for Human Rights Opens to Public in Winnipeg.” *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, September 26, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2014/sep/26/canadian-museum-for-human-rights-opens-in-winnipeg>.

Lara Schroeder and Lauren McNabb, “Canadian Museum for Human Rights Opens amid Controversy,” September 19, 2014, <https://globalnews.ca/news/1570967/human-rights-museums-journey-to-opening-mirrors-struggle-for-rights/>.

<sup>226</sup> Joseph Brean, “Canadian Museum for Human Rights Opens amidst Controversy and Protests.” *National Post*, January 25, 2015.

<sup>227</sup> “A New Direction for Canada's banknotes.” Bank of Canada.

<sup>228</sup> Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010, 172.

peoples that is rarely acknowledged. However, this reading is based on my own desire for that to be true. Instead of an Indigenous nation bestowing an eagle feather onto Viola Desmond's legacy, it is the Bank of Canada that has appropriated this tradition. Another reading might suggest that the eagle feather is not destined to Desmond, but instead is an empty "symbol" for "reconciliation" that has no basis in actual action.<sup>229</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, once past the initial feeling of wonderment that representation of 'hidden histories' and unsung minority heroes engenders, we must reckon with what it means to be able to put previously un-Canadian figures into our Canadian pockets. While the official narrative projected by the Bank of Canada and repeated by the mainstream media sources is one of corrective justice that takes responsibility for racism, segregation, colonial genocide and the suppression of Indigenous rights, Canada has yet to redress its white supremacist core and thereby continues to perpetuate colonial violence upon African-descended people, African-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples as well as many other people of colour within Canada. Rather, this move has more to do with virtue signaling rather than true reparation. It is hard to believe that Viola Desmond's violent confrontation(s) with the state and her decision to fight for justice did not play a major factor in her divorce and early demise. While I applaud the attempt to shift Canada's Euro-centric historical narratives, this particular approach continues colonization undisturbed by subsuming Desmond into a Canadian narrative under the guise of creating a shared history. In other words, Desmond's

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<sup>229</sup> When discussing reconciliation in Canada, we must mention the Truth and Reconciliation Council that brought Canada's cultural genocide of Indigenous people through Residential Schools. The council witnessed and collected the testimonies of residential school survivors and their families that culminated in a final report, presenting 94 calls to action across multiple sectors in order to make actionable reconciliation in Canada. June 2, 2020 was the fifth-year anniversary of these calls and very little progress has been made.

likeness is transformed into capital to ultimately be placed onto capital. Black historical lives should be commemorated, but in the right way. Desmond and so many like her have become historical figures because they resisted state violence. The first step is truly acknowledging Canada's past and current role in that sanctioned violence. In a less pessimistic vein, this commemoration can also be understood as a reminder of everyday Black resistance that fits in one's pocket.

### **Chapter 3: Defying Systems of Surveillance: Redefining Nationhood in Camille Turner and Camal Pirbhai's *WANTED* Series**

In 2017, several commemorative birthdays were marked; Canada's 150th, Montreal's 375th and Expo 67's 50th anniversary. While Montreal's so-called premier institutions were eager to celebrate these "milestones," the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto (hereafter AGO) took this opportunity to look introspectively at what Canada 150th was actually purported to celebrate. The nation is rooted in violent colonialism, its legacy is still felt today by those who do not fit the paradigm of Canadian as white: "It is those 'people', historically defined as white unmarked Canadian-Canadians, who claim the final authority to define inclusions and exclusions in this civic nation."<sup>230</sup>

Assembling close to fifty contemporary Canadian artists, the exhibition was led by senior curator of Canadian Art Andrew Hunter and adjunct curator Anique Jordan. As an important aside, Anique Jordan has been seen by many to be part of this "new vanguard of Black female curators [and artists]."<sup>231</sup> Her presence brought to light the profound racial segregation of the Canadian art world. According to a 2017 *Canadian Art* study, 92% of Canadian curators and directors are white.<sup>232</sup> "Every. Now. Then: Reframing Nationhood" was described by Hunter as their "critical response to Canada 150, designed to be a catalyst for significant change within an institution that remains (like so many others in this country) burdened by, and seemingly committed to, a deeply problematic and divisive history defined by exclusion and erasure."<sup>233</sup> While the success of this

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<sup>230</sup> Eva Mackey, *House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*, Taylor & Francis Group, 1998, 168.

<sup>231</sup> Kelsey Adams, "A New Vanguard of Black Female Curators Is Rising." *NOW Magazine*. February 02, 2018. Accessed April 14, 2019. <https://nowtoronto.com/culture/art-and-design/new-vanguard-black-female-curators-of-ourselves-gladstone/>.

<sup>232</sup> Michael Maranda, "Hard Numbers: A Study on Diversity in Canada's Galleries," *Canadian Art*. April 5, 2017. Accessed April 12, 2019. <https://canadianart.ca/features/art-leadership-diversity/>

<sup>233</sup> Andrew Hunter, "Why I Quit the Art Gallery of Ontario: Former Canadian-art Curator Andrew Hunter Explains," *The Star*. October 03, 2017. Accessed April 5, 2019.

ground-breaking exhibition was undeniable, this exhibition was Hunter's last before he very publicly quit due to what he perceived to be the insurmountable internal systemic racial barriers keeping the institution complicit in perpetuating exclusionary practices.<sup>234</sup> Through immigrant, Indigenous and Black narratives, the exhibition vehiculates a reckoning with the numerous myths of Canada's benevolence and race-blindness. Eva Mackey deconstructs the 'Benevolent Mountie Myth', demonstrating how official 'tolerance' for 'others' functions as an addendum to the invisible, and still dominant, Anglo-Canadian culture, and argues that officially endorsed versions of multiculturalism abduct the cultures of minority groups, pressing them into the service of nation building without promoting genuine respect and autonomy.<sup>235</sup>

"Every. Now. Then: Reframing Nationhood." ran from June 29, 2017 to December 10, 2017. In comparison, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts was running its iteration of "Revolution" (a travelling exhibition that was created by the V&A in London<sup>236</sup> from June 17, 2017 to October 9, 2017 followed by its romanticized "Once upon a time... The Western: A new frontier in Art and Film" that erased prominent Black<sup>237</sup> and Indigenous cowboys from its narrative. In both instances, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts exemplifies the seismic departure of Hunter and Jordan's take on Canada 150.<sup>238</sup> This exhibition was extremely significant in the history of

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<https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/visualarts/2017/10/03/andrew-hunter-why-i-quit-the-art-gallery-of-ontario.html>.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Eva Mackey, *House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1998, 1.

<sup>236</sup> Again, this colonial mentality of the colony here refers back to the imperial motherland as a source of culture and by extension appropriating those civilizing properties.

<sup>237</sup> John Ware born in Georgetown, South Carolina (1845-1905) later settled in Alberta in 1882 where he pioneered new techniques in ranching. See: Richard W. Slatta, "The Canadian Cowboy." *The Journal of American History* 85, no. 1 (1998): 176-79.

<sup>238</sup> This was the federal government's marketing name for the anniversary. See Canadian Heritage, "Government of Canada," May 7, 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/anniversaries-significance/2017/canada-150.html>.

Canadian curating because it was one of the few moments of true criticality within a colonial art institution of the stature of the AGO.

Within the first room of the exhibition (figure 3.1), the viewer was presented with three works: at the centre, Michael Belmore's *Rumble* (2017) (figure 3.2), an installation piece rooted in Anishinaabe motifs (of thunderbird and underwater panther subtext) is made from a copper Trans-Am hood and wooden plane model that deal with the intersection of human/nature and nature's ability to remind humans of our vulnerability and fragility despite our arrogant inventions, Meryl McMaster's *Edge of a Moment* (2017) (figure 3.3), a photograph of a fantastical figure (the artist herself) looking backwards, while walking on the lip of Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump; this work is as invested in futurity as it is in historicity (as McMaster "calls her ancestors to travel with her into the future"<sup>239</sup>) and with this intense engaged gaze confronts the viewer. The third artwork does very similar things to the McMaster piece. Made by Camille Turner in collaboration with Camal Pirbhai, *Bell* (figure 3.4) from their photography series *WANTED* contributes an additional pair of female eyes to confront the visitor.

Hand cocked on hip, cell phone to her ear, *Bell* represents a lone woman in a strong stance as she stares directly out at the viewer, almost as if to imply that we have interrupted her. This engaged gaze operates within a well-known feminist mechanism that disables unimpeded sexual consumption of the female body by the white heterosexual male gaze. Instead, this Black woman locks eyes with the viewer in what bell hooks terms as an "oppositional gaze" which actively refuses to comply with hegemonic pressure.<sup>240</sup> The phone adds another layer of protection as accessing this woman is near-impossible: *she is occupied by something other than you*. This

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<sup>239</sup> Andrew Hunter, "Why I Quit the Art Gallery of Ontario: Former Canadian-art Curator Andrew Hunter Explains." The Star. October 03, 2017.

<sup>240</sup> bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, (New York: Routledge, 2015): 3.

demonstrates Bell having and living a life that is not at the whim of another. This is significant, as the subject in question is based on a Quebec City runaway slave advertisement published by butcher George Hipps on November 3, 1778 pertaining to the second escape of one “Mulatto wench named BELL” (figure 3.5). Turner and Pirbhai’s photographic work therefore allude to her freedom.

The artist duo focused upon the centrality of the clothing described in runaway slave advertisements, particularly present in the notice featuring Bell.<sup>241</sup> In the advertisement, Bell is not particularly well described. Case in point, Hipps identifies her as “Mulatto Negress”<sup>242</sup> in the first notice and a “Mulatto wench”<sup>243</sup> in the second.

Hipps depends heavily upon the description of Bell’s clothing to describe Bell to the public. Besides the description of her clothing or lack thereof, one of the other differentiating characteristic included in the notices is how Bell was named. This demonstrates that enslaved Black people were so greatly reduced to commodities that their descriptions were interchangeable with objects, like their clothing.<sup>244</sup> Through the historical commodification that humans of African descent underwent throughout the period of Transatlantic Slavery, an enslaved person was legally considered akin to a chair as a slave owner's movable personal property. By describing the clothing, Hipps was effectively describing the woman.<sup>245</sup> Within the notice of Bell’s escape, the description of her clothing and her body were flattened and became interchangeable with one

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<sup>241</sup> David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, (April 1999): 244.

<sup>242</sup> George Hipps, “RAN AWAY from my service, on Tuesday night,” *Quebec Gazette*, 19 August 1778.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid and “IL s’est enfuie de chez Mr. GEORGE HIPPS,” *Quebec Gazette*, 2-3 November 1778.

<sup>244</sup> David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, (April 1999): 244.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

another. Through this, Turner and Pirbai build the photographic series around fashion marketing aesthetics in order to narrate the reimagined portrait of Bell.

The *detournement* occurs however, when considering that Bell is very much the focus of the photograph. She is wearing the clothes and not the other way around. This latter situation can be seen on many occasions in fashion photography where the model is simply employed to be a gratified hanger to showcase garments. This is not the case in *Bell*, whose main figure embodies individuality and spirit that speaks to her humanity in a way that enthralls the viewer in wanting to know more about who she is.

Fashion is seen by many to be a validating process in which identity is performed at the level of one's styling. In this instance, the advertisement's insistence on the clothing descriptions speaks to the reality that the enslaved was wearing hand-me-downs rather than something that was carefully chosen or created by their hand for themselves to self-actualize through sartorial expression.<sup>246</sup> In the *WANTED* series however, the subjects are stylishly dressed. Gone are their worn and torn garments, replaced by refined, custom-made outfits. This emphasizes the role that fashion has had and continues to play in the African Diaspora for self-actualisation.

Another striking part of the photograph is the bronzed, light-reflective skin of the subject. Tied into this is the fleshiness that is suggestive of corporality for sale. There is something about the iconography of a woman on the street in this way that seems to be operating within a sex-for-hire framework. This can be connected to the historical fact that Bell was bought and sold to four

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<sup>246</sup> Charmaine A Nelson, "Roundtable: Cash's Bundle: Fugitive Slave Advertisements, Clothing, and Self-Care," *The Junto: A Group Blog on Early American History*, February 16, 2017, <https://earlyamericanists.com/2017/02/14/roundtable-cashes-bundle-fugitive-slave-advertisements-clothing-and-self-care/>.

(and perhaps more) different men between 1778 and 1783 which put her at an increased risk of sexual assault and violence.<sup>247</sup>

Across the Americas, enslaved people would frequently abscond from those who kept them in bondage. As a result, the runaway slave advertisement became a commonplace strategy by white slave owners to re-enslave their human commodities. Charmaine A. Nelson theorizes that due to the visual nature of the textual descriptions, we should view the advertisements as unauthorized portraits of the enslaved. Nelson continues to state that this is how we might re-focus the lens on them not as criminals but as freedom-seekers.<sup>248</sup> Such a premise is enticing and as Nelson also points out the precarious condition of the “sitter” as enslaved would engender many deviations from traditional portraiture. As Nelson puts it, these “portraits” are indeed unauthorized. Their consent was legally unnecessary and contemporary excavation of such information within such an archive is fraught with peril. As tradition would have it, with portraits of a sitter who was also the patron, the sitter was in control of their likeness and would have had much to say in the final product, even to the point in suggesting that the portraitist exaggerate or minimize particular attributes as requested to guarantee a more flattering likeness.<sup>249</sup> The runaway portrait is more akin to a mugshot in that its primary objective was to dehumanize and objectify which would pejoratively distort reality across the board. Although this navigation is particularly difficult, it remains important to compare the runaway slave advertisements to portraiture since enslaved black people did figure quite frequently in historical “high art” portraiture. When present, the Black individual would be a prop used by the white sitter(s) to convey their abundant wealth and power.

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<sup>247</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, “Servant, Seraglio, Savage or ‘Sarah’: Examining the Visual Representation of Black Female Subjects in Canadian Art and Visual Culture,” *Women in the Promised Land?: Essays in African Canadian History*, eds. Wanda Bernard, Boulou Ebanda de B'éri, Nina Reid-Maroney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 56.

<sup>248</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, *Slavery, Geography and Empire in Nineteenth-Century Marine Landscapes of Montreal and Jamaica*. (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016): 3.

<sup>249</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, *Representing the Black Female Subject in Western Art* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 65.

Here, the disenfranchised becomes a locus of capital affluence. By operating within the portraiture genre, the fugitives in the *WANTED* series transcend their origins of representing symbolic violence. Pirbhai and Turner remind the viewer of this inequitable representation that remains in our art historical canon. These “portraits” repossess the freedom-seeker with humanness without romanticizing their traumatic experiences under slavery. In actuality, the “portraits” operate more truly in the aesthetics of history painting, which I will discuss later.

The exhibition sought to ask three questions of Canada’s identity: “where has Canada come from, what is it now, and where is it going?”<sup>250</sup> This is indicated in the choice of title for the exhibition as the somewhat cryptic *Every. Now. Then.* portion locates the leading inquiries of the project deeply within an exploration of *history as time* that point to the interdependency of the past upon the present as well as the future, and all permutations in-between. Hunter recounts his curatorial process as follows:

I am looking at maps, images, and renderings, moving through and over time, not back in time, but into a pool of deep time - where a past that awaits us in the future was here before us, and with us, always. Everything expands and contracts, turns back on itself. *Every Now is Then, and Then is Now, and what Then?*<sup>251</sup> (emphasis mine)

The figures of runaways are tremendously compelling as they embody rebellion in a very particular way. Their resistance restores their identity. Neil Roberts states that “[a]cts of marronage<sup>252</sup> demonstrate the intrinsic agency of slaves. It is the degrees of materialisation of purposive movement that in part distinguishes slaves and non-slaves. It’s for these reasons and

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<sup>250</sup> "Speakers – The Entangled Gaze: Indigenous and European Views Of Each Other." *The Entangled Gaze Indigenous and European Views Of Each Other*. Accessed April 15, 2019. <http://www.entangledgaze.ca/speakers/>.

<sup>251</sup> Andrew Hunter, *Every. Now. Then: Reframing Nationhood*. (Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2017): 113.

<sup>252</sup> Marronage, in this case, petit marronage, refers to individuals or groups running away from slavery. Grand marronage refers to fugitives who permanently evade recapture and live together in sequestered, remote communities.

more why marronage still matters.”<sup>253</sup> The fugitive slave is guilty (in the eyes of the law and enslavers) of what Marcus Wood aptly conceives of as “self-theft.”<sup>254</sup> This paradox is characteristic of the Transatlantic Slavery which was contemporaneously referred to as “the peculiar institution” which denotes its contradictory qualities. One might even say it indexes the cognitive dissonance created in the minds of those who enslaved their fellow humans. The self-thievers protested their condition by running away from it and that waywardness is exemplary. Saidiya Hartman theorizes that:

Waywardness is an ongoing exploration of *what might be*; it is an improvisation with the terms of social existence, when the terms have already been dictated, when there is little room to breathe, when you have been sentenced to a life of servitude, when the house of bondage looms in whatever direction you move. It is the untiring practice of trying to live when you were never meant to survive.<sup>255</sup>

Effectively, to even consider the possibility to run away despite the suffocating levels of surveillance around Black life, one would require an aptitude for futurity and imagination to dream oneself out of enslavement. The future, it would seem, was the location of freedom.

The product of such grueling and emotionally taxing research is steeped in Afrofuturism in that “[a]frofuturism can be read as a philosophy of the remix.”<sup>256</sup> Afrofuturism can be understood as a platform for Black reimagination. Samatar continues to explain that “[r]emix is a religious ritual that removes demons of fear and releases imagination.”<sup>257</sup> This catharsis of the imagination is vital as “[t]his colonization of mind and imagination has been one of the primary

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<sup>253</sup> Neil Roberts, “Theorizing Freedom, Radicalizing the Black Radical Tradition: On Freedom as Marronage Between Past and Future.” *Theory & Event* 20, no. 1 (2017): 220.

<sup>254</sup> Marcus Wood, “Rhetoric and the Runaway: The Iconography of Slave Escape in England and America,” *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780-1865* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000): 79.

<sup>255</sup> Saidiya V. Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*. (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019): 119.

<sup>256</sup> Sofia Samatar, “Toward a Planetary History of Afrofuturism.” *Research in African Literatures* 48, no. 4 (2017): 1, 179.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid*, 180.

reasons many black folks remain wedded to white supremacist thought and practice.”<sup>258</sup> Through diasporic and historical imagination, speculation becomes employed in service of healing. In *Bell*, Pirbhai and Turner are not imagining what those of African-heritage would have been like had colonialism never happened. Instead, *WANTED* is working *through* the genocidal past to perform the all-important representation of self-sovereignty in the present. It also speaks to the fact that while these individuals were enslaved, they were never *slaves*. This de-conflation of race and the condition of the slave is paramount as it de-links those of African-descent from a subhuman status past, present and future by imbuing the portrait with specificity of individuality and character.

The usefulness of historical layering is especially illustrated in *WANTED*. The temporal interdependence within *Bell* is demonstrated not only in the photograph but also in the way the artwork is exhibited. By installing the runaway notice on the side of the artwork’s didactic panel, Bell’s true identity as freedom-seeker is revealed (figure 3.6). This juxtaposition can be understood as an aesthetic strategy of co-existence with one informing the other. However, the ambiguity of this person’s identity and condition is what engages the viewer to come into the piece and enables the thinking process. By not explicitly marking Bell visually as a slave, the viewer is confident in her human-ness and agency. When they read the label, it re-shapes their experience of the work.

Operating through the aesthetic language of fashion photography, the photographs offer up the glossy spread that one would expect to see in a fashion magazine or department store catalogue. However, in the artists’ rendition, they are not selling the public anything. Not only do the photographs operate on billboard scale, they exploit a long-standing art tradition of larger-than-life scale that typically was reserved for history painting,<sup>259</sup> a genre of European painting that was

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<sup>258</sup> bell hooks, *Writing beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice*. (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013): 187.

<sup>259</sup> History painting is a term first used in the seventeenth-century by the French Academy.

regarded as being of the highest class.<sup>260</sup> Habitually, the subjects of such historical paintings were European white men engaged in so-called noble activities. European women were also depicted, however, they were most often times in various states of nudity in the service of an allegorical narrative. Predictably, racialised individuals were not regarded as the primary subjects of such art. Black subjects often appeared in historical art, but as peripheral to the narrative and within the compositions. Consequently, Pirbhai and Turner's work inserts the Black, disenfranchised subject as worthy of such a monumental depiction as a way to offset the historical denigration of Black subjects.

What occurs when the past and the present converge in this series? By intentionally basing the photographs on the personal narratives of the runaway enslaved people, the artists are making visible the haunting of the present by the past. Somatically, this traumatic past is transferred between generations. Anique Jordan recounts such an experience in the exhibition catalogue, "Blackness and Canadian-ness seem to be at odds. If I am Black, I am not Canadian. If I am Canadian, I am not Black. When I deliberately join these identities, I am uneasy."<sup>261</sup> Katherine McKittrick explains that:

[O]ur present landscape is both haunted and developed by old and new hierarchies of humanness. If past human categorization was spatialized, in ships and on plantations, in homes, communities, nations, islands, and regions, it also evidences the ways in which some of the impressions of transatlantic slavery leak into the future, in essence recycling the displacement of difference.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> This idea was based on a hierarchical system that acclaimed aristocratic knowledge of mythology, biblical literature and ancient Greek and Roman history as well as precision when rendering human anatomy, all of which required specialized education systematically denied to women, people of color and those of lower socioeconomic status. See Nelson "The Color of Stone," 2007.

<sup>261</sup> Anique Jordan, "Tangential Tableau: Reworking Canadian Content" in *Every. Now. Then: Reframing Nationhood*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2017, 131.

<sup>262</sup> Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2006): xvii.

This *leak* is what Jordan speaks to which lives in the racialised body as embodied histories. Camille Turner shared a similar observation: “My experience of Diaspora is a sense of restless landlessness, offering no possibility of return. Without place as an anchor point, the idea of belonging becomes a poetic metaphor.”<sup>263</sup> The specter of colonization and Transatlantic Slavery stunts the realisation of Black Canadians. This is in part due to the systematic dismissal of Canada’s colonial past in a bid to distance it from sentiments of non-belonging felt by African-Canadians.

While the excavation of these traumatic narratives not only required emotional resilience on the part of the researcher, here, primarily Camille Turner, it requires that person to confront absence and a narrative crafted without the consent or perspective of its primary subjects. Despite the runaway slave advertisement archive being the most complete descriptions of enslaved people,<sup>264</sup> it remains a problematic one that not only is infused with white supremacy, but that is also comprised of fragmented snippets of many peoples’ lives at their moments of greatest terror. *Bell*’s contemporary “portrait” as well as *Jack*’s (discussed below) and the *Unnamed Woman*’s are partial, because of the many absences within the archives. This was a strategic deprivation that stripped particular individuals from leaving documentation of their lives. Pirbhai and Turner subvert this partiality by having the subjects all demonstrate lives and narratives that seem to extend beyond the frame of the photograph. They are living their lives with dignity which in and of itself is an act of rebellion and refusal.

*WANTED* speaks to the legacy of colonization that built Canada and the ways in which such exploitative practices ushered in the geological era we currently find ourselves in, the

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<sup>263</sup> Camille Turner, "Miss Canadiana Confronts the Mythologies of Nationhood and the Im/possibility of African Diasporic Memory in Toronto." *Issuu*. March 2012. Accessed April 4, 2019. [https://issuu.com/caribbeanintransit/docs/issue\\_2\\_caribbean\\_intransit\\_location\\_and\\_caribbean/52](https://issuu.com/caribbeanintransit/docs/issue_2_caribbean_intransit_location_and_caribbean/52).

<sup>264</sup> Shane White and Graham White, "Slave Hair and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries." *The Journal of Southern History* 61, no. 1 (1995), 49.

Capitalocene.<sup>265</sup> As Andreas Malm describes it: “Ours is the geological epoch not of humanity, but of capital.”<sup>266</sup> By recognizing the rise of colonialism –and the genocide of millions– as the starting date for the ecological crisis, the Capitalocene “calls violence by its name”<sup>267</sup> and highlights the intersection of race and climate change that is too often overlooked.<sup>268</sup> Exploitation, extraction and exceptionalism are the pillars of colonialism, which are all present in the notices for Bell’s escapes. By revealing this “hidden” history of Canadian slavery within the scope of an exhibition in conversation with Canada 150, Turner and Pirbhai reappropriate and change the narrative of these enslaved people’s stories and lives, highlighting their fierceness and disobedience in the face of violence and oppression.

Although, *Bell* is ascribed within this decolonial framework, we see this most prominently with two photographs from the same series that orbit the exhibition. As *Jack* (2017) (figure 3.7) hangs on the exterior of the Jackman Hall entrance on McCaul street (figure 3.8), visitors to the gallery were made very aware of his monumental scale as the figure looms over visitors almost as if he were a giant about to stomp them. This experience of the work is due to the way in which the photograph was shot, from below. Gleeful in his demeanor, it seems as if power rests with Jack as he lifts one foot up over entering visitors. The second photograph navigates power in a different manner. *Unnamed Woman*’s (figure 3.9) prominent position in the center of downtown Toronto was the brainchild of the AGO marketing team. The curatorial team was looking for other venues within the city to show more works in order to make the exhibition more lived-in and the marketing

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<sup>265</sup> T.J. Demos, *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today*, Sternberg Pres, Berlin, 2017, 59.

<sup>266</sup> Andreas Malm, “The Anthropocene Myth,” *Jacobin*, March 30, 2015, Accessed August 10, 2020.

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/03/anthropocene-capitalism-climate-change/>

<sup>267</sup> T.J. Demos, *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today*, Sternberg Pres, Berlin, 2017, 60.

<sup>268</sup> Naomi Klein, “Why #BlackLivesMatter Should Transform the Climate Debate,” *Nation*, December 12, 2014, Accessed August 10, 2020. <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/what-does-blacklivesmatter-have-do-climate-change/>

team proposed this jumbotron at the heart of consumerism-proper in Toronto, Dundas Square (figure 3.10). It entailed putting most of the promotional budget into this one rental location. However, it can be easily argued that this move was particularly successful in attracting attention all the while retaining the artwork's integrity. In *Unnamed Woman*, a Black woman curls a weight/dumbbell and looks out at the viewer.<sup>269</sup> The adjacent screen reads: NOT. FOR. SALE. Here is a woman in all her humanness, not to be bartered or sold, but a force to be reckoned with. Particularly fitting and speaking to the essence of the *WANTED* series, this moving photograph and accompanying text was slotted in between advertisements utilizing their language, but not of their world. Human/non-human and commodity were all interlinked and subsequently redressed. Much of the work's significance is derived from understanding that the subject in the photograph was considered an object in the notice and therein lies the heightened power of the assertive woman standing in all her humanity. Pulled out of her own time, teleported to appear in front of us and reclaiming her agency.

Technology is featured prominently in the Bell photograph; specifically, older, obsolete, forms of communication. The subject stands in front of a Bell pay-phone, hand cocked at hip, the other cradling a mobile flip-phone to her ear. Interestingly, the phone, at the time of its invention, was heralded as "propelling Americans into the future."<sup>270</sup> This is a tongue-in-cheek juxtaposition of the two Bells: first, the disenfranchised fugitive and second, the telecommunications giant.<sup>271</sup> This might allude to the networks that the runaways would have to first identify and then tap into proving once again their adeptness and intelligence. This phone call also has the effect of conjuring

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<sup>269</sup> Note: Tracy Moore, host of Cityline Toronto, posed in *Unnamed Woman*.

<sup>270</sup> *The New York Times Guide to Essential Knowledge: A Desk Reference for the Curious Mind*. (New York: St. Martins Press, 2011), 81.

<sup>271</sup> This is perhaps a comment on Alexander Bell senior opposition to chattel slavery, (his son later to be the inventor of the telephone who is memorialized as Bell Telecommunications' namesake).

Bell's voice, which symbolically represents agency. Bell's confrontational demeanor is complicated as where one phone, the cellphone, is "in use," the other, the payphone behind her, is "hung up." Where the utilized cellphone is eliciting Bell's voice, the aesthetic juxtaposition with the inactive payphone acts as a visual silencer. I interpret this as the limitations of the archival source as the runaway slave advertisement conjures up Bell's image, her body, but not her spirit thereby offering a partial depiction of who she truly was. This is visualized by her body being interpellated yet her voice remains unknowable. What would Bell have us know of her story if she was the one to write it? In the absence of Bell's autobiography, Pirbhai and Turner's hunger for memory transforms the little archival specks into a spectral apparition. They become the "voice consciousness" with which the subaltern "speaks."<sup>272</sup>

In conclusion, Camal Pirbhai and Camille Turner's sampling of their *WANTED* series within AGO's *Every. Now. Then: Re-framing Nationhood* sets the stage for the viewers to access not only the visual art, but also the story and the lives of the people they feature. Although embedded in the artworks themselves, the complexities of displacement, defiance and self-sovereignty are contextualized more overtly which allows for a deeper understanding of the ways in which *Bell*, *Jack* and *Unnamed Woman* operate. Canadians are faced with important questions around who is widely considered a Canadian and who is not. *Every. Now. Then.* presents those who are excluded from being Canadian by centering these counter-narratives within such a critical time in Canadian history, Canada's 150th. This de-colonial/anti-colonial exhibition was held within a colonial institution. While it remains deeply attached to its exclusionary rhetoric and canon-building exhibitions, *Every. Now. Then.* will remain a shining example of curation that did not shy away from exposing white supremacy's complicity within art institutions, and by

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<sup>272</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010): 80.

extension, challenges its viewers to investigate their complicity as well. This entangled mess becomes visible when considering the *WANTED* series' visualisation of the multiple levels of co-existence and inter-dependency with which we all must reckon. Perhaps we might juxtapose history with the present in order to "reclai[m] the history of the future as well"<sup>273</sup> as Pirbhai and Turner so successfully did.

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<sup>273</sup> Lisa Yaszek, "An Afrofuturist Reading of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*," *Rethinking History* 9, no. 2/3 (2005): 297.

## **Conclusion: COVID-19, Self-Determinism, and Multitudes**

“Whenever those of us who are members of exploited and oppressed groups dare to critically interrogate our locations, the identities and allegiances that inform how we live our lives, we begin the process of decolonization.”  
bell hooks, *Love as The Practice of Freedom* (2006)<sup>274</sup>

As I submit this thesis, activists march and organize in solidarity with Black Lives Matter. We mourn and protest the police brutality that robbed Breonna Taylor,<sup>275</sup> Ahmaud Arbery,<sup>276</sup> George Floyd,<sup>277</sup> Regis Korchinski-Paquet,<sup>278</sup> and Chantel Moore<sup>279</sup> of their lives. We reject the tired rhetoric that Canada is not as bad as the United States.<sup>280</sup> The lethal racism which is afflicting Black, Indigenous, and people of colour is not a recent occurrence. Rather, such racism has been perilously prevalent for centuries for BIPOC. The police are actively murdering Black and Indigenous people in the middle of a pandemic when the primary focus of most of the world is to not catch the virus and stay alive. I will echo the protestors messages here: “Racism is a pandemic

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<sup>274</sup> bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture : Resisting Representations*. Routledge Classics. New York: Routledge, 2006, 248.

<sup>275</sup> RIP Breonna Taylor; See: Richard A. Oppel and Derrick Bryson Taylor, “Here's What You Need to Know About Breonna Taylor's Death,” May 30, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/breonna-taylor-police.html>.

<sup>276</sup> RIP Ahmaud Arbery : Sean Collins, “The Killing of Ahmaud Arbery, an Unarmed Black Jogger in Georgia, Explained,” Vox (Vox, May 6, 2020), <https://www.vox.com/identities/2020/5/6/21249202/ahmaud-arbery-jogger-killed-in-georgia-video-shooting-grand-jury>.

<sup>277</sup> RIP George Floyd; See: Alisha Ebrahimji, “This Is How Loved Ones Want Us to Remember George Floyd,” CNN (Cable News Network, June 3, 2020), <https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/27/us/george-floyd-trnd/index.html>.

<sup>278</sup> RIP Regis Korchinski-Paquet; See: Noa Mendelsohn Aviv, “The Hard Truth about Regis Korchinski-Paquet,” thestar.com, June 9, 2020, <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2020/06/09/the-hard-truth-about-regis-korchinski-paquet.html>.

See: Shanese Steele, “Will Black Lives Get as Much Attention as Those Using the George Floyd Protests to Build Their Careers?,” rabble.ca, June 9, 2020, <https://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/views-expressed/2020/06/will-black-lives-get-much-attention-those-using-george-floyd>.

<sup>279</sup> RIP Chantel Moore; See: Dirk Meissner, “Chantel Moore's Mother Says She Wants Justice after Fatal Police Shooting | CBC News,” CBCnews (CBC/Radio Canada, June 19, 2020), <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/chantel-moore-s-mother-says-she-wants-justice-after-fatal-police-shooting-1.5618551>.

<sup>280</sup> See Benjamin Shingler and John MacFarlane, “Montreal Mayor Promises Change after Report Finds City Has 'Neglected' Fight against Racism | CBC News,” June 16, 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/ocpm-systemic-racism-report-1.5610701>. and Daniel Leblanc and Kristy Kirkup, “Trudeau Contradicts Commissioner Lucki over Existence of Systemic Racism in the RCMP,” The Globe and Mail, June 12, 2020, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-trudeau-vows-to-keep-working-with-rcmp-commissioner-to-combat-systemic/>.

too” (figure 4.1) and “Racism is the worst virus” (figure 4.2). It is just as Dionne Brand says: “I know, as many do, that I’ve been living a pandemic all my life; it is structural rather than viral; it is the global state of emergency of antiblackness. What the COVID-19 pandemic has done is expose even further the endoskeleton of the world.”<sup>281</sup> We are living within an apocalyptic moment within an apocalyptic moment as if they were nestled Baboushka dolls. The phrase “new normal” that so casually entered our everyday vocabulary in 2020 now takes on a more intentional meaning. EKOS Research found “that almost 3 in 4 Canadians expect to see a broad transformation of our society at the end of COVID-19 crisis,”<sup>282</sup> echoed by the Canadian Research Insights Council: “72% also said that the pandemic is an opportunity to make some major changes to Canadian society.”<sup>283</sup> We are currently at an incipient moment, a crucial point. Indigenous Lives Matter, Black Lives Matter.

In 2020, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau took a knee at a Black Lives Matter protest at Parliament Hill in Ottawa a symbolic move while still systemically continuing to “ha[ve] his knee on our necks collectively as Black and Indigenous populations in this country.”<sup>284</sup> Given this, Robyn Maynard continues to say that it is “an empty gesture.”<sup>285</sup> At a time when Quebec Premier François Legault<sup>286</sup> and Toronto premier Doug Ford<sup>287</sup> –both issued statements in 2020– that

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<sup>281</sup> Dionne Brand, “Dionne Brand: On Narrative, Reckoning and the Calculus of Living and Dying,” July 4, 2020, <https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/books/2020/07/04/dionne-brand-on-narrative-reckoning-and-the-calculus-of-living-and-dying.html?fbclid=IwAR3sbNPIvcJsiJtPJdf7OddsHuWvqlFR2XWIDwbIGWPkcg0tuTIdXwTRnWA>.

<sup>282</sup> EKOS Research, “Our Latest Poll by @Voiceoffranky Found That Almost 3 in 4 Canadians Expect to See a Broad Transformation of Our Society at the End of COVID-19 Crisis. <https://t.co/u6mcv5euCP>,” Twitter (Twitter, May 14, 2020).

<sup>283</sup> “CRIC COVID-19 Public Opinion Research Hub,” Canadian Research Insights Council, May 27, 2020.

<sup>284</sup> Harrison Samphir, “Policing Black Lives’ Author on Confronting Canada’s Historical Amnesia, Black Expendability, and the Path Forward,” *Canadian Dimension*, June 8, 2020.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Matthew Lapierre, “Legault Supports Protesters, but Says There’s No Systemic Racism in Quebec,” *Montreal Gazette* (Montreal Gazette, June 2, 2020).

<sup>287</sup> Beatrice Britneff, “We Are Not Better than the U.S.’: Expert Slams Premiers’ Comments on Racism in Canada,” *Global News* (Global News, June 5, 2020), <https://globalnews.ca/news/7020609/experts-slam-premiers-comments-racism-canada/>

systemic racism does not exist in Canada, my thesis has sought to expose that it has and does still exist. In the midst of this chaotic and difficult time, I am reminded of what Toni Morrison said about “the importance of writing in the face of hate”: “It is the job of evil to keep us from doing our work. We have to keep doing the work through the dark times.”<sup>288</sup>

Throughout these three chapters, I have explored the anti-Blackness that pervaded representations of Black women of multiracial heritage, “mixed-race” subjects. While this thesis did not touch on the full spectrum of gender, I invite interested scholars to explore how this topic might be differently understood with male subjects or transgender subjects for instance. To discuss “mixedness” without “Blackness” is to artificially isolate it and can (intentionally or not) buttress pre-existing racially-motivated attempts to divide our community. Instead I would argue that true critical “mixed-race” studies are simply another aspect of Black studies. It is also important to reckon with the privileges “mixedness” affords.

In chapters 1, 2 and 3 the representations that I considered – like fugitive slave advertisements, Viola Desmond’s representation on the 10\$ bill, and the *WANTED* Series were primarily of unauthorized and authorized portraiture. Examining portraiture is strategic and significant to this thesis because “mixed-race” people have been and are still regularly apprised on their appearance. Various types of art and visual culture have been discussed: painting, newspaper advertisements, photography, and currency. In chapter 1, I argued that in fugitive slave advertisements, the presence of the “mixed-race” figure indexed the sexual coercion and rape of enslaved Black women. In chapter 2, I analyzed how human rights icon Viola Desmond’s brush with racial injustice and overt white supremacy was co-opted to symbolize the progress of a nation as the multicultural symbol of a new order by way of her representation on the 10\$ bill. The

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<sup>288</sup> Toni Morrison Reads From and Discusses "God Help the Child" (Full Event), Youtube, Apr 28, 2015: 1:01:17-1:04:39.

imagery of “mixed-race” subjects is frequently employed as metaphors of peacemakers, bridges between different cultures or “races”. In chapter 3, through the *WANTED* series, we are asked as viewers to consider how to move beyond harmful epithets and violent histories with the artists Camille Turner and Camal Pirbhai’s representations of Blackness and “mixedness” challenging the confines of imposed colonial definitions of identity.

What this thesis makes clear is that it is not simply enough to ask: what does it mean to be “mixed-race”? Instead we must ask how that meaning has changed over time and across the space of the nation. The questions posed in this thesis have been: what, when and where is “mixed-race” in an effort to help to make that which is most often obscured by the catch-all term “mixed-race” visible. To center Bett, an enslaved Black woman, as the first chapter in my thesis on “mixed-race” people is very intentional because the Black woman is the center of this phenomenon. The violent and sordid past of “mixed-race” relations must be reckoned with especially given that such knowledge has been strategically forgotten. The history of Black people in Canada begins with the exploitative violence of Transatlantic Slavery. It is important to undo the romanticisation of being “mixed-race” by acknowledging that as much as interracial intimacies might be sites of intercultural exchanges, they were historically fundamentally based on power imbalances within the period of slavery.

This thesis also pushed back against the “where are you from?” question that is the primary mechanism of Canadian “innocence.” If Black people are only ever perceived to be recent arrivals, immigrants, then white Canadians can pretend that slavery did not happen here and that “mixed-race” people were not initially almost exclusively the product of rape and sexual coercion. In Katherine McKittrick’s geographic undertaking, she dismantles Eurocentric geographic arrangements by reminding us that colonial conceptions of space are upheld by a “corresponding

language of insides and outsides, borders and belongings, and inclusions and exclusions” that exposes “domination as a visible spatial project that organizes, names, and sees social differences (such as black femininity) and determines *where* social order happens.”<sup>289</sup> Following McKittrick, we must move beyond these problematic geographical metaphors and imagine different ways of knowing.

This thesis reckons with the artificial racial boundaries set by white-determined taxonomy that categorized those of dual African and European heritage as “mixed-race.” Throughout, I sought to dismantle the top-down, white supremacist gaze on what it means to be of multiple racial backgrounds. We must continue to confront the way racism attempts to structure our experiences of the world, of how we relate to each other and how we cultivate community. We must ensure that our gaze is fixed on each other rather than on how the white gaze views us. We contain multitudes.

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<sup>289</sup> Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006): xiv.

Figure 0.1



Las castas. Casta painting showing 16 racial groupings, 18th century, oil on canvas, 148x104 cm, Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán, Mexico.

Figure 0.2



Miguel Cabrera, *De español y negra, mulata* (From male Spaniard and Black Female, Mulata), c. 1763, oil on canvas, 148 X 117.5 X 5.5 cm. Private Collection, source: Museo de Historia Mexicana.

Figure 0.3



Juan Rodríguez Juárez, *De Negro y de India, produce Lobo* (From Black male and "Indian" Female, produce Lobo), c. 1725, oil on canvas, 80.7 x 105.4 cm. Private collection, Breamore House, England.

Figure 1.1

**Table 2.1:** Enslaved and Indentured Black Female Fugitives

<b>City</b>	<b>Name of Fugitive</b>	<b>Name of Owner</b>	<b>Date of Escape</b>	<b>Date of Notice</b>
Quebec City	None given	Isaac Werden	22 August 1766	1 September 1766
Quebec City	Susannah	None given	11 September 1769	19 October 1769
Quebec City	Bell	George Hipps	18 August 1778	20 August 1778
Quebec City	Bell	George Hipps	29 October 1778	5 November 1778
Quebec City	Cash	Hugh Ritchie	24 October 1779	4 November 1779
Quebec City	Bett	James Johnston and John Purss	7 March 1787	8 March 1787
Quebec City	Ruth	John Saul	Spring 1789	14 December 1789
Berthier	Cloe	Judah Joseph	13 July 1791	28 July 1791
St. Marys (near Montreal)	Lydia/Lil & Jane	James Frazer	12 August 1798	20 August 1798
Montreal	Eve	Boruck B. Levy	24 March 1810	23 April 1810
Montreal	Eve	Boruck B. Levy	24 March 1810	9 April 1810
<i>Note: All were enslaved except for Eve.</i>				

Table : Enslaved and Indentured Black Female Fugitives after Frank Mackey’s research, Charmaine A. Nelson, Source: “Women in the ‘Promised Land’: Essays in African Canadian History, 2018.

Figure 1.2

or separately) now occupied by Messrs. *Lorions* and *Sargeant*.

*Quebec, 6th March, 1787.*

**R**AN-AWAY from the subscribers, between the hours of seven and eight o'clock yesterday evening, a NEGRO WENCH named BETT, about eighteen years old, middle stature, speaks the English, French and German languages well; had on when she went away, a blue Kersey Jacket and Pettycoat, a dark cotton Cap with yellow strings, and an Indian Shawl round her neck, was big with child, and within a few days of her time.

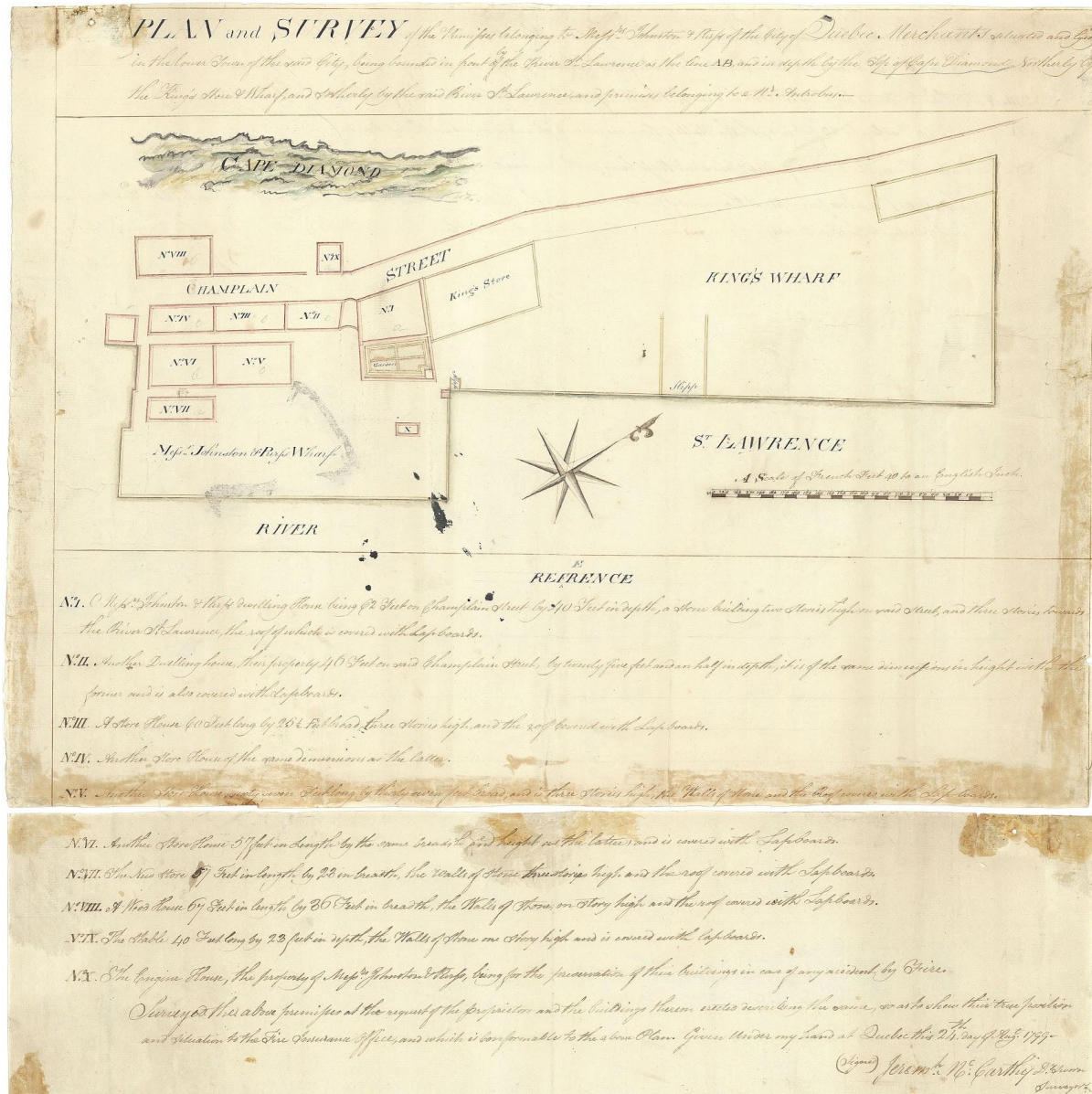
Whoever will apprehend said Negress, and secure her return, shall be paid A REWARD of TWENTY DOLLARS, and all reasonable expenses.

Any person who may harbour or conceal the said Negress, will be prosecuted to the rigour of the law, by

**JOHNSTON & PURSS.**

Johnston and Purss, "RAN-AWAY from the Subscribers," *Quebec Gazette*, 8 March 1787.

Figure 1.3



Plan of the Champlain district and survey of the premisses belonging to Messr. Johnston & Purss of the city of Quebec merchants situated and lying in the Lower Town of the said city, manuscript en couleur; 41 x 55 cm, Jeremiah McCarthy, arp., 24 août 1799, 03Q, E21, S555, SS10, P43, Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, Centre d'Archives de Montréal (BANQ), Montreal, Canada.

Figure 1.4

Capt. W. D.      Leice 28<sup>th</sup> August 1786  
 Dear Sir  
 However in spite of the odious term of Old Bachelor may have come from me, I shall be glad to learn you have expunged your name out of our list & entered yourself into the fraternity of your wise Brother & my Partner and that you have before now Legally got under the lee of the Amiable Amy Dow's petticoat, if you have I am convinced from Mrs Johnston's high opinion of that lovely Girl & your own more than lukewarm Epithet you will be infinitely more happy than in the tasteless insipid state of Celibacy can possibly afford you. However far my inclination might have led me, or that the Connection might have been agreeable to either of the lovely objects you abide to I have the mortification to inform you that a wise and all directing Providence has seen fit to deprive me & the world of their in dearling persons being both cut off in the bloom of Life by a scarlet fever & gangrenous sore throat Miss Betty on the 3<sup>rd</sup> & Miss Mary on the 4<sup>th</sup> March last after an illness of a very few days, both laying Corpses in the House at the same day - a melancholly instance of the

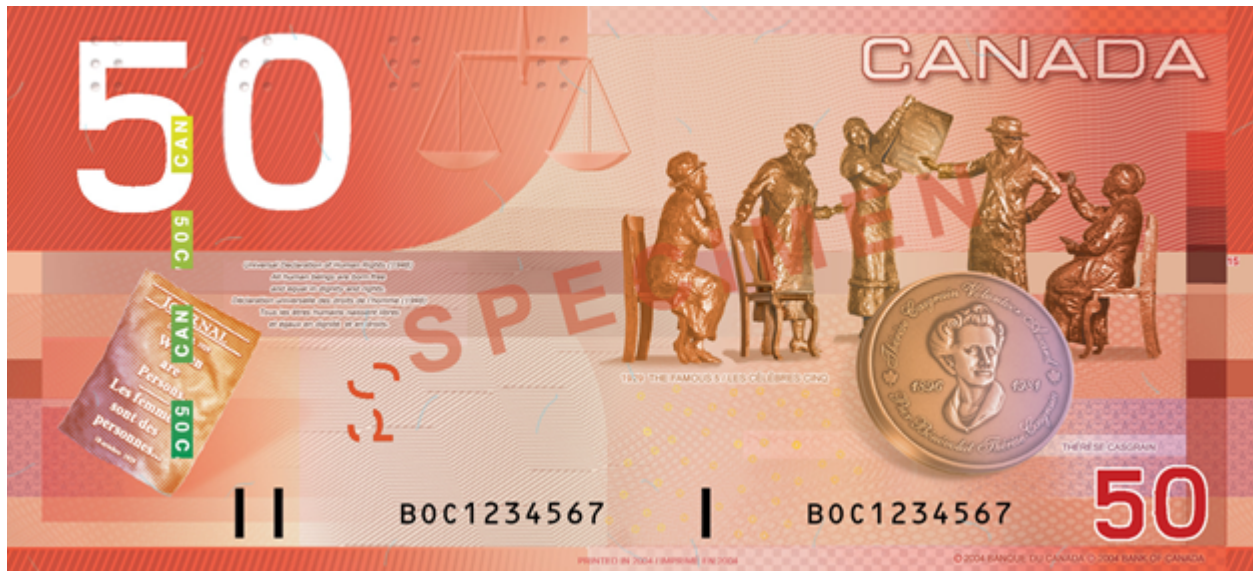
Purss, John " WD married and 'now legally got under the lie of the amiable Amy Dow's petticoat'! Two girls died of 'scarlet fever & gangrenous sore throat'." Johnston Family Archive, UK. August 28, 1786.

Figure 2.1:



Viola Desmond on the ten-dollar bill, Bank of Canada.

Figure 2.2:



Back of the \$50 Note (2004-2011) featuring the Alberta's Famous Five, Bank of Canada.

Figure 2.3:



Viola Desmond Commemorative Stamp, 32 mm x 24 mm, 2012, Source: Canada Post.

Figure 2.4:



Viola Desmond's parents, Gwendolyn Davis and James Davis, in their home. Photograph. March 1948 Source: Backhouse 1999.

Figure 2.5:



Sepia Beauty Products by VIOLA DESMOND, unknown date, Wanda Robson's Collection, source: CBC News<sup>290</sup>

<sup>290</sup> Sherri Borden Colley, "New \$10 Bill Tells Valuable Civil Rights Story, Says Viola Desmond's Sister | CBC News," November 19, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/viola-desmond-banknote-tells-important-story-says-sister-1.4909271>.

Figure 2.6: Dr. Carrie Best



Carrie Best with one of the first editions of *The Clarion*. *The Clarion*, Nova Scotia's first Black-owned newspaper, was published for the first time in 1946. Source: Carrie M. Best: A Digital Archive (by Sheryl Grant). <http://www.parl.ns.ca/carriebest/bestslide.html>

Figure 2.7:



Carrie Best, "Mrs. Viola Desmond," December 1946, print, *The Clarion*, p.1, newspaper microfilm 4350, Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Figure 2.8 :



John A. MacDonalD on the \$10 bill, Bank of Canada.

Figure 2.9:



Viola Desmond Powder Compact, date unknown, Nova Scotia Archives/ Flickr CC.



Compact of Viola Desmond Sepia Face Powder, ca. 1946, Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, Photo from Bank of Canada Museum.

Figure 2.10



Madam C.J. Walker, Hair Product Tin, 1925, *Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture*, DC, 2011.159.6.

Figure 3.1



Installation view of *Every. Now. Then: Re-Framing Nationhood*. Curators Andrew Hunter (left) and Anique Jordan (right) source: [The Hamilton Spectator](#).

Figure 3.2



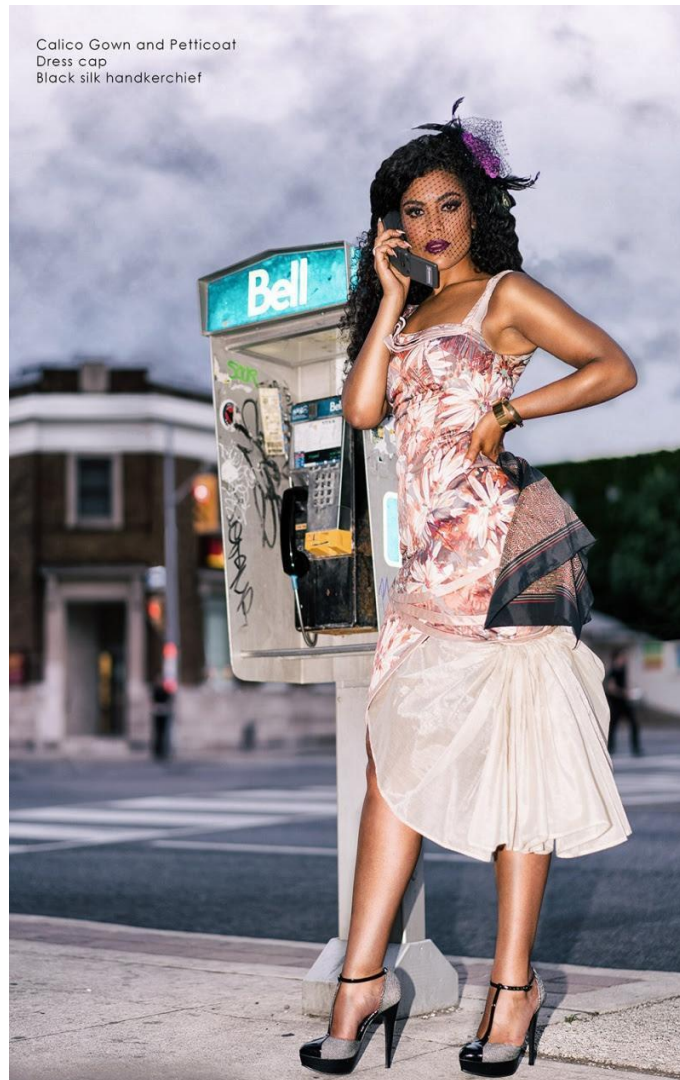
Michael Belmore, Installation of *Rumble* (2017) Sculpture, 172,2 x 24,1 cm.

Figure 3.3



Meryl McMaster, *Edge of a Moment* (2017). Digital Photograph, 154,2 x 239,7 cm.

Figure 3.4



Camal Pirbhai and Camille Turner, *Bell* (Wanted Series), 2015. Digital photograph, dimensions variable. Courtesy of artist Camille Turner.

Figure 3.5


it is further said, that Gen. Burgoyne's troops are removed farther back into the country, to prevent any ill fate that might happen, in consequence of their being so nigh, in case an attack should be made upon Boston. It is said, that the Continental money is held in so low account, that 40s. of hard money will purchase 40 dollars of it.—That rum is 8 dollars per gallon, and all kinds of provisions are sold at very exorbitant prices.

**CUSTOM-HOUSE, QUEBEC, Inwards none.**  
**CLEARED OUTWARDS, None.**  
**ENTERED OUT.**

Delaware,	Thomas Butler,	FOR	New-York.
Mary,	William Morwick,	—	Ditto.
Friendship,	John Richie,	—	Ditto.
Triton,	Thomas Byrne,	—	Ditto.

**ADVERTISEMENTS.**

**R**UN away from Mr. GEORGE HIPPS on Thursday last, a Mulatto wench named *BELL*, this is to give notice, that any person or persons whatsoever who harbours the said Girl may depend that he will go to the utmost rigour of the Law. When she went away she had upon her a Callico Gown and Petticoat, a drefs'd Cap, and a black silk Handkerchief.  
**QUEBEC, November 3, 1778.**



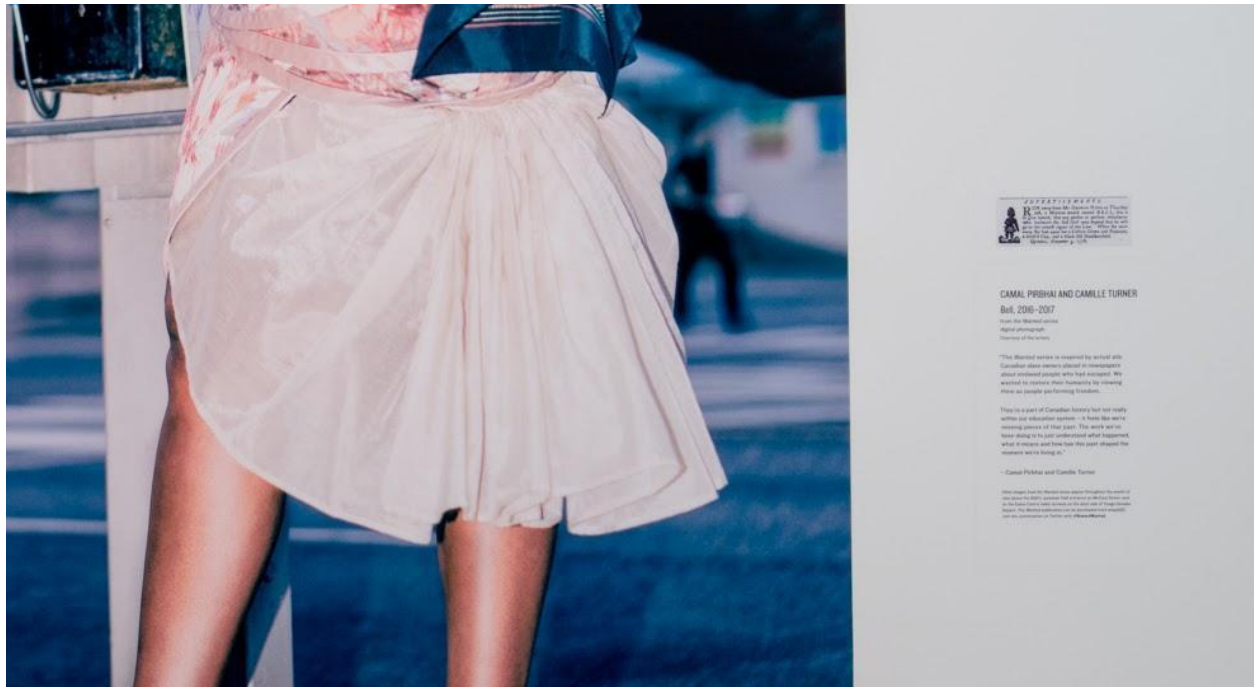
avoit trois frégates Françaises mouillées dans le port près de la ville.—Que les Bostonois étoient dans la plus grande consternation imaginable par l'appréhension qu'ils avoient de recevoir une visite du Lord Howe; qu'en conséquence ils se retiroient dans la campagne avec beaucoup de précipitation.—Que les Bostonnois et les François sont toujours en brouille.—Que trois Lieutenans de vaisseaux François, dont l'un étoit premier Lieutenant du vaisseau de l'Amiral, ont depuis peu été tués par les Bostonnois. Et on dit deplus, que les troupes du Général Burgoyne ont été éloignées dans la campagne pour éviter tout accident qui pourroit arriver par leur proximité, en cas que Boston fut attaqué. On dit que l'on fait si peu de cas de l'argent Continental que pour quarante shellings d'argent blanc on auroient quarante piastres de cette monnaie.—Que le rum vaut huit piastres le gallon, et que toutes sortes de provisions se vendent à des prix exorbitans.

**AVERTISSEMENTS.**

**I**L s'est enfuie de chez Mr. GEORGE HIPPS Jeudi dernier, une Mulatre nommée *BELL*: le présent est pour avertir que quiconque donne refuge à la dite Mulatre, peut être assuré d'être poursuivi selon toute la rigueur de la Loi. Lorsqu'elle s'enfuit elle portoit une Robe et un Jupon d'Indienne, une Coëse à la mode et un Mouchoir de soie noir.  
**Québec, le 2 Novembre, 1778.**

George Hipps, "RUN away from Mr. GEORGE HIPPS" and "IL s'est enfuie de chez Mr. GEORGE HIPPS," *Quebec Gazette*, 2-3 November 1778.

Figure 3.6



Installation View. Camal Pirbhai and Camille Turner, *Bell (Wanted Series)*, 2017. Digital photograph, dimensions variable. Courtesy of artist Camille Turner.

Figure 3.7



"Red coat,  
faced with  
green, buff  
waistcoat and  
breeches."

Camal Pirbhai and Camille Turner, *Jack* (Wanted Series), 2015. Digital photograph, dimensions variable. Courtesy of artist Camille Turner.

Figure 3.8



Installation view. Camal Pirbhai and Camille Turner, *Jack* (Wanted Series), 2017. Digital photograph, dimensions variable. Courtesy of artist Camille Turner.

Figure 3.9



Black gown and  
red callimanco petticoat

Camal Pirbhai and Camille Turner, *Unnamed Woman* (Wanted Series), 2015. Digital photograph, dimensions variable. Courtesy of artist Camille Turner.

Figure 3.10



Installation View. Camal Pirbhai and Camille Turner, *Unnamed Woman* (Wanted Series), 2017. Digital photograph, dimensions variable. Courtesy of artist Camille Turner.

Figure 4.1:



Kheanna Walker and James Thomson holding BLM Solidarity Signs, Black Lives Matter - Glasgow June 7, 2020 Solidarity Protest, Courtesy of Kheanna Walker.

Figure 4.2:



Two protesters hold up signs at Parliament Hill on June 5, 2020. Source: *Sudbury News*<sup>291</sup>

<sup>291</sup> Canadian Press, "Trudeau Takes a Knee at Anti-Racism Protest on Parliament Hill," *Sudbury.com*, June 5, 2020 (<https://www.sudbury.com/national/trudeau-takes-a-knee-at-anti-racism-protest-on-parliament-hill-241130>)

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