

# The Council for Black Aging



## **Life Stories From Montreal's Black Community: Documenting the History of our Elders**



2009



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## **Foreword from the Council for Black Aging**

Ever since I came to work for the Council, I have met and befriended countless men and women with a rich understanding of their history, values, traditions and cultures. Whether they were born in Canada, the Caribbean, or elsewhere, each had a life story characterized by remarkable experiences. Stories of success, resilience, struggle, community, and perseverance were common threads in the lives of our Black members. Unfortunately, these stories gradually disappear as we age; as time passes, stories become forgotten and silenced. I feel a compelling need to document and preserve these life stories before they are forgotten by the newer generations. For our community, it is important to treasure our past—for it is a starting point for the black community in Montreal, one forged by our older Black members.

My hope is to preserve these life stories and to ensure that younger generations are able to understand and appreciate the experiences that their grandparents and great-grandparents endured. How did they live? What were the challenges they faced? What types of resilience were displayed during the 20th century? In many ways these are life experiences that can be seen as life lessons, with our elders playing the role of mentors. As such

they deserve our attention and respect. In reading their life stories, I was impressed by the resolve of elders such as Mr. Ferguson, Mr. Medford, Mrs. Shouclair, Mrs. Riley, Mr. Bonaparte, Ms. Humphrey and Ms. Davis who left their homeland to start a new life in Canada. Their diligence and dedication were fuelled by a desire to have better opportunities for themselves and their families. However, I was equally impressed by stories of members like Mr. Lord, Mr. Leacock, and Mrs. Westmoreland, who were born in Montreal. All these elders were able to preserve the values and histories from their parents, and their understanding of family history was one of the factors that make them so strong. They also talk about the overt racism that they faced in Montreal and describe how they overcame problems by engaging themselves in the community and local organizations.

Not only is this book dedicated to the older members of the community, but to the younger ones as well. Many of the challenges that our sons and daughters face relate to overt racism and discrimination. I want the younger generations to know that like their older members, they too can lead successful lives. As we read from the life stories and life lessons of our elders, members of the younger Black community can strive for great things by simply being true to themselves, through education and through self-learning. These were the keys to success that our older members

adhered to. In a sense their message is this: be involved and committed in the community; have a good education, and strive together so that you can be stronger. Ultimately, these words will push you toward great achievements. To put it simply: If you are committed you will excel.

**Elisée Faure**  
**Director of the Council for Black Aging**





## **Preface from the Council for Black Aging**

It was my pleasure to take part in this important project. I listened with awe and wonder to the stories contained within these pages. With each word uttered, the privilege I felt was palpable and mounting. History was revealed to me through these men and women's recollections of adversity and turmoil, as well as unwavering faith and steadfastness in the midst of storms. Through these stories, I have come to realize that it is in the valleys that we grow, and on the mountaintops that we see how far we have journeyed. Everyone has a story, and it is my fervent hope that these powerful oral accounts will inspire all those who read them.

Catherine Orr  
President of the Council for Black Aging



## **The History of the Council for Black Aging**

The Council for Black Aging Community of Montreal is a charitable, non-profit organization located at 3021, Deslisle in Montreal. It was founded in 1987 by a group of concerned citizens who felt that the mainstream health care institution was not meeting the basic growing needs of the Black elders. The reality was that the system did not understand the cultural needs of this population. The organization committed itself to bring changes to the system by meeting the needs and validating contributions made by Black elders living in the Greater Montreal Area.

On May 12, 1988, the organization was registered as a corporation and elected its first president. Its mission is to improve the quality of life for the Black elders living in the Greater Montreal Area. Its objectives are to:

- Establish quality research based on the needs of Black elders
- Organize activities to improve their quality of life
- Encourage elders to maintain their autonomy and independence for as long as possible at home
- Interpret legislation from all levels of government that affect Black elders

- Recruit volunteers to render services to the Black elders

With the support of its members, board of directors and staff, the Council for Black Aging was, and will continue to be a fixture within Montreal's Black community.

The Council has been served by the following presidents:

<b>1988—1990</b>	<b>Wilfred Browne</b>
<b>1991—1994</b>	<b>Adolphus N. Robertson</b>
<b>1994—1998</b>	<b>Melville Medford</b>
<b>1998—2000</b>	<b>Lindors Mayers</b>
<b>2000</b>	<b>Micheal Thomas</b>
<b>2000—2003</b>	<b>Erla Sandiford</b>
<b>2003—2004</b>	<b>Richard Lord</b>
<b>2004—2005</b>	<b>Erla Sandiford</b>
<b>2006</b>	<b>Emile Leacock</b>
<b>2006—2007</b>	<b>Emelda Phipps</b>
<b>2008— Present</b>	<b>Catherine Orr</b>





**Life Stories  
from  
Montreal's Black  
Community:  
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History of our Elders**





## Dennis Bonaparte

The world...is changing so fast that the younger people today think...they're entitled to it—not realizing the struggles that went on before to bring these about...taking some things for granted.

Guidance and structure from the parents. That's what the kids need...We have to...start focusing on the kids. Start focusing on the parents. You need to focus on the parents, then the...kids.

## Key Events in Dennis Bonaparte's Life

<b>1928</b>	Born in Jamaica
<b>1957</b>	Travelled to England to attend tailor academy and design school
<b>1964</b>	Left England for Canada
<b>1960s</b>	Worked at various factories in Montreal
<b>1968</b>	Opened men's clothing store at Guy and Sherbrooke
<b>1974</b>	Opened a land development company in Montreal following a brief stint as a real estate agent in New York State
<b>1976</b>	Land development company terminated. Opens a dry cleaning shop in the Town of Mount Royal
<b>1981</b>	Denied lease renewal contract by landlord; dry cleaning shop forced to relocate
<b>Present</b>	Retired and board member of the Council for Black Aging in Montreal



## **Dennis Bonaparte's Life Story**

Dennis Bonaparte was born in Jamaica in 1928. His father was a dentist and soft drink factory owner, while his mother worked for the government. Mr. Bonaparte left school early on to pursue a trade. Certain that he would succeed, he stated at a younger age that: 'Someday it doesn't matter, I do the best of what I do'.

After working some time as an employee, Mr. Bonaparte decided to open his own business. He took on a partner, who eventually looted the business. This event played a pivotal role in Mr. Bonaparte's future career choices, as it stressed the importance of independence. Afterwards, Mr. Bonaparte moved on and opened another business at the same location, specializing in police uniforms. When Mr. Bonaparte eventually sought to expand his clothing business, he realised that it would be necessary to go to England to do so:

So realizing that, the only materials you can get were from England—the heavy wool stuff. I said, 'They're no good for me', so I decided right to go to England and do designing...Expand the curriculum...And the British Government said, 'Well you know if they want work, let them come to England'. So at that time, there was a rush of people going to England.

Thus, in 1957, he travelled to England, successfully graduated from a tailoring academy, and attended design school. He remained in England for seven years until he had a chance encounter at the Canadian consulate:

One day I was kind of walking around...and I saw a Canadian flag in front of an office. You know? ...So I told my friends, 'See let's go around', and so we went in and saw them in the office, and said 'Hi, could you get me a good job in Canada?' She just looked at me, and then I smiled and she gave me a form. 'Could you sign your name in, and that, that, that'. So I put my name down and she takes a big book...'Sir, look through this book and see if you find a job that you like'. About, ten [days] later, I got a letter from the Canadian embassy.

In 1964, Dennis Bonaparte proceeded with an interview and medical examinations. Within two weeks, he was invited to come to Canada, and was offered a position by his English employer at a Canadian factory. Soon after migrating to Canada, Mr. Bonaparte left the job that was provided to him by the English firm because he was dissatisfied with the salary. He found a new job as the manager of a cutting room at a garment factory.

During his time at the garment factory, Mr. Bonaparte created several new patterns, most notably a men's trench coat, which greatly increased the factory's production. His

contribution to this success was never acknowledged, a factor which drove Mr. Bonaparte to leave the factory to open up his own men's store in 1968 at Guy and Sherbrooke. He remained there until a case of sabotage by a contractor who 'didn't want the competition from a black business'.

Mr. Bonaparte closed his store and found employment with a real estate office in New York State. Mr. Bonaparte ventured on his own in 1974, opening up a land development company in Quebec. However, once again, Mr. Bonaparte's business was disrupted by external forces: the 1976 election of the Parti Quebecois disrupted the market and led to the rezoning of Mr. Bonaparte's properties as agricultural land. He ended his real estate business, and opened up a dry cleaning shop in the Town of Mount Royal (TMR). After a successful five years, the property owner refused to renew Mr. Bonaparte's lease on the shop—a decision that Dennis Bonaparte deems racist. Disappointed but undeterred, he then re-opened at a new location, where he remains today.

When speaking of youth and aging, Mr. Bonaparte discusses his concern of 'systematic racism' within the school systems. He suggested that the solution to the problems with today's youth lies in focusing on the parents, and encouraging them to 'guide the kids prop-

erly'. On the other hand, when asked for some advice for older people, Mr. Bonaparte indicated that 'there is very little advice for them ...because their way is set...When a person reaches a certain age...you can't do anything about it'.

# **Dennis Bonaparte's Memorable Quotes**

## ***On Community Leadership and Integrity***

In order for us to function properly, we should set an example, be a leader, a leading group in the community. And to be a leading group in the community, we've got to have, we gotta be boss ourselves. Ok...[there is currently] a lack of collectiveness. And the people on the top wanted to collect what they were putting in.

## ***On Discrimination***

In those days (1968)...there wasn't many Black people in Montreal. And the few Blacks who were here, and all that, they were going to school, or, you know, they have some auntie or cousin who sent for them and they do the minimal...the minimum wage jobs. Right? So, you know, '68 was a hell of a time...One weekend I had a big wedding to go to [as a tailor]...the groom and all his best men...I took the clothes in on Monday morning, they put the dress up in the distance, then they pick it up and have it fitted...I had it fitted and everything, it was perfect. Bring it back in...took it back in. So Friday evening, and Sunday I go back to pick up the clothes for my people. And all the suits were ruined. All of them were ruined in 30 minutes...it was sabotage, it was sabotage...They didn't want the competition from a Black business. So it was sabotage.





## Rubina Davis

I went to school...and I was so happy...I said, 'Who couldn't like school?...I have to be good in this world, [why] do you think I [came] here?...I'm going to do something when I'm going out'...I'm not letting down my mother.

## Key Events in Rubina Davis' Life

<b>1922</b>	Born in Jamaica
<b>Childhood</b>	Joined choir in Jamaica
<b>1943</b>	Immigrated to Canada
<b>1950s</b>	Traveled to England to study
<b>1940s – 1960s</b>	Worker as a nurse's aid (accompanier)
<b>1940s</b>	Gave birth to daughter
<b>1940s— Present</b>	Active Church Member; Participates in Bible reading
<b>Present</b>	Active member of the Council for Black Aging



## **Rubina Davis' Life Story**

Rubina Davis was born in Jamaica in 1922, and immigrated into Canada at the age of 20. Initially spending her youth in Jamaica, Ms. Davis would later travel to England, where she worked as a nurse's aid. After a short period of time in the United Kingdom, she moved to Canada and continued her life as a nurse's aid, accompanying patients in the hospital. Rubina Davis notes how life outside of Jamaica was initially difficult. During her time in the UK, she encountered challenges in her new environment relating specifically to culture and isolation. Despite these experiences, she was able to draw on the support of friends and the church to carry her through.

Describing herself as a quick and fast learner, Ms. Davis is someone who takes pride in doing her best. In particular, she discusses the importance of doing well in school. For Ms. Davis, having a good education and the opportunity to learn are very important:

Oh, sure. I work, sure, sure, and I go to school ... You can't be a giant all the time. You must make some mistakes. But I cover them fast.

Initially working in a factory in Canada, Ms. Davis eventually was employed as a nurses aid. She describes these experiences as generally positive—an opportunity to succeed

and establish new social ties. Part of this optimism can be attributed to Ms. Davis' ability and disposition to overcome any challenge or barrier.

So I don't keep too much company...But I go to my school, I go to church, I got to Sunday school. And I never fight, and I never find quarrel with anybody. I was a getter. [You] only see me grin, I laugh all the time, but I never hurt anyone, and I never had to go to courthouse or anything. Nope. I stayed with my brother, and I had my own room. And he had a wonderful wife. She cherished me



One of the major themes in Ms. Davis' story is her strong work ethic. In the following excerpt, she talks about her opportunity to come to Canada, and the ensuing interview process. Undeterred by challenge, she shows her determination and self-confidence. Ms. Davis saw her move to Canada as an opportunity—and continued to place a high level of importance on doing well:

I have to write, I have to read, I have to be good in this world, what do you think I come here for? To learn something which the others doesn't have. They have it but they don't use it.

You, you make a better life. I don't know who don't but you make a better life...When you go look for your room or your apartment, try and look for the best...I can't remember an employer who do not call me Miss Davis and put my money in an envelope and seal it...and [says] 'You know something, you're the best'. I get a lot of time too, and I get a lot of lifting up. I was, [and] I'm well accepted here. That's why I did not go back to London, you see...Everybody was nice to me for I know my job. And I keep them clean, yep.

Ms. Davis' family was an important part of her story. Claiming that she did not want to be tied to any man, she focused on raising her family. Ms. Davis gave birth to a daughter while in Jamaica, and raised her in England. She describes motherhood and family as an integral part of her life.

Now entering her late life, Ms. Davis talks about the importance of family. She identifies how the support of those around her are able to sustain her as she grows old. The death of her parents was a key event, one that leaves her lamenting over her past times with her family. However, Ms. Davis is able to draw from the support of her friends, and the church.

I can think of many things that makes me happy. Working with good people. My daughter. My grandchildren. My mother, my father. All the family. All when they died, it kills me. I miss them so. I will never forget my daughter. Never.



# **Rubina Davis'** **Memorable Quotes**

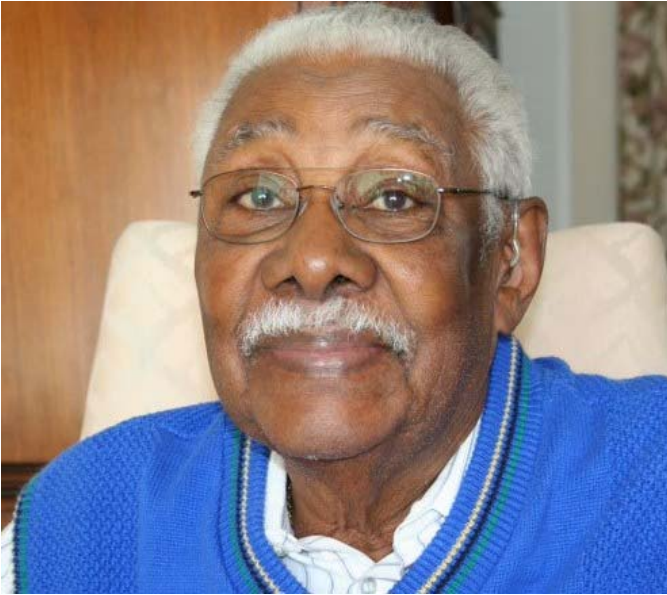
## ***On Spirituality***

You gotta reach out, try! God will help you, I always call him to help me...I whisper, 'oh Father, you know I'm trying to make it, will you please help me?...Please Lord, I want to be somebody, and I want to have, I want to have a name which is well-spoken'

## ***On Living the Good Life***

The greatest achievement is the people I work for and with...I have a good life...I never fight, I never have anybody to go up and say 'Oh, you see that girl? Be careful of her she's vicious'. No, I'm well liked





# Raymond Ferguson

**Advice for younger people:**

My words to them are: Brother I made it. And I made it in my shoes. If you want to get where I am, there are a lot of steps that you have to walk. You can't just hop in from the street onto the sidewalk...So I went through all that and I made it, so no use giving up...You might as well try and you will get there.

## **Key Events in Raymond Ferguson's Life**

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| <b>1920</b> | Born in Jamaica   |
| <b>1935</b> | Starts work at Harrall Company in Jamaica   |
| <b>1954</b> | Immigrates to Montreal, Canada under the sponsorship of Lorna, his fiancé   |
| <b>1954</b> | Marries wife Lorna in Canada  |
| <b>1959</b> | Begins work as an auto mechanic at a GM dealership in Montreal  |
| <b>1979</b> | Promoted to the position of Supervisor at the dealership. He is one of the first black men to be placed in this position. |
| <b>1988</b> | Retires from dealership   |
| <b>1988</b> | Start of liaison and community work with Black youth  |
| <b>1989</b> | City of Brossard honors Mr. Ferguson for outstanding community service.   |



**1990-1995** President of the South Shore Black Community. Mr. Ferguson facilitated dialogue between the Black community and the South Shore Police Department

**Present** Happily retired with wife Lorna

## **Raymond Ferguson's Life Story**

Raymond Ferguson was born in Jamaica in 1920. Throughout his life, Raymond has always been physically active, partaking in many outdoor activities. A significant part of his youth and midlife involved sports such as high-jump, cricket, cycle-racing, basketball, and soccer. However, Mr. Ferguson's life story, begins in the farms of Jamaica, where his dedication to 'community' took root. The following excerpt depicts the importance and impact of his communal upbringing:

We grew up on a farm. My father was the manager of...the largest transport company...of the island of Jamaica...We had parents that lived in the farm too, some of them in huts. ...So we were not [only] responsible to mama or daddy but for others parents around...and I think this built up a lot of...confidence or courage in you to not to exhibit the things in front of other people what they wouldn't do in front of your parents.

Mr. Ferguson's upbringing was largely influenced by his mother who was a local nurse. At the age of 15, Mr. Ferguson joined his father in the automobile industry to work for Harrall Company. Initially washing and fixing cars in the garage, Mr. Ferguson demonstrated a talent for management. He soon came to work his way up to the service department, ultimately taking on the supervisor po-

sition in his mid-thirties. During this time, he also became engaged to his future wife, Lorna.

Raymond Ferguson speaks fondly of his life in Jamaica and his experiences on the farm. The sense of community and upbringing would later play a significant role in his middle and late life. In the following excerpt, Raymond recollects how his life on a farm in Jamaica influenced his role as a father during his thirties and forties.



You know, these are the kind of things that, sometimes late at bed at night...your mind goes back to these things there and then you got a smile like...why get old? (*Mr. Ferguson laughs*)... They have helped me through my days because when my own child came along...I was able to help Lorna along with guiding the best I could.

In 1954, Mr. Ferguson immigrated to Canada after being sponsored by his wife. As a nurse working in Montreal, Lorna Ferguson encouraged her husband to relocate to Canada by writing letters of how much she enjoyed her experiences in Montreal. Within a week of his arrival, they officially got married. While Lorna was able to sustain her profession as a nurse, Mr. Ferguson endured several challenges to his new life; one of which was having his professional experience validated. Although he was employed by General Motors, he was told that his training and experience in Jamaica would not be recognized in Canada. This proved to be a challenging transition in Mr. Ferguson's life because he was making ten cents an hour as a service man in Montreal— a wage which was significantly lower than his work in Jamaica, where he was making the equivalent of \$100 per week as an automobile manager. The following narrative illustrates the barriers that Mr. Ferguson faced when integrating into Canadian society—moving from an established career in Jamaica, only to start at the bottom upon arriving in Montreal:

Oh, how did I feel?...Well (*long pause*) it was like clipping your toenails, and clipping them too short. (*Mr. Ferguson chuckles*) It hurts...I think because I read...in books and in the scriptures and rest of it, 'one day you will fall' (*Mr. Ferguson takes a long pause*) and this was the attitude that I had from [the beginning] when I was young; my father used to tell me, 'You got none unless if you work for it'...This is what you had to do, and from there on...and to get there you have to work your self up to the top.

In spite of these hardships, Mr. Ferguson was able to overcome these experiences through his faith and self-determination. Although dissatisfied with working below his experience, he felt that he had made a commitment to lead a new life in Montreal. Encounters with fellow Black members of the Montreal community provided Mr. Ferguson with the inspiration to continue on. In the following quote he talks about how he was able to put his 'situation into perspective':

Well, there were two things...If I went back...I would not get back to...the top of the ladder... And, having come here I said, 'I made up my mind to come up here, I gave up a lot to come here, and...the Lord will provide. One day it has to get better'... So I resigned myself to it. And... then I looked around at other people. And I spoke with fellas, different fellas, some locals, some West Indian. So let me tell you think you have it hard?...These are the days that you look back and [realize] the conditions that I went through—although there were difficult...in the beginning, or at certain stages, there are people here...who had worst conditions.

Raymond Ferguson continued to work and raise his family, and he slowly worked his way up and stayed atop the management ladder. At the age of 68, he began a new path as an active member of the Black community (particularly in the South Shore of Montreal). In this role, he served for many years as a liaison between school boards, police and members of the Black youth community. Mr. Ferguson had always felt a need for advocacy and guidance for his community, particularly for the Black youth. This sense of kinship was born from his experiences as a youth in Jamaica:

It goes back, because I was one of seven children. I was the second. And when I was able to do [things] for myself, and...mama would say, 'Ray this diaper needs changing'. (*Mr. Ferguson laughs*)...So from there on I am going up, there was always something about the younger ones that needed help and...in my growing up we had – my father had a farm, and in this farm we had a lot of work...You see how the [newborns] follow the ducks, and the children followed the parents and...the mother's responsibility is to look up for the oldest, and then that one looked after the other, and then they go down and down and down and down until...it gets to the mother's parents.

Among the many organizations that Mr. Ferguson became involved in was the South Shore Black Community Association. In these types of groups, he was responsible for a program that mentored younger members of the Black community: transferring skills such as

leadership and community organization skills (for both parents and children alike). Although this role required an endless supply of time and dedication, he felt that his work was generally appreciated:

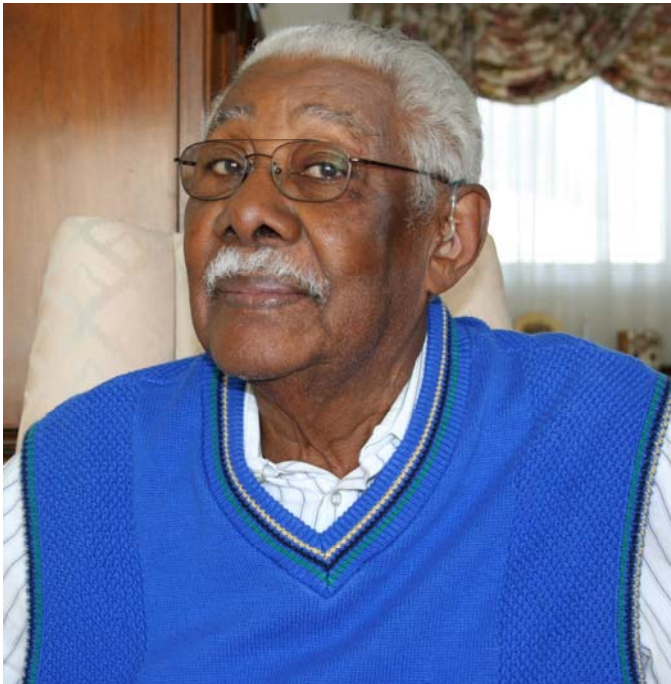
You know some people...came around to tell me the appreciation that they had...I've had two other boys as a matter of fact, [come] and thank me for helping them...Like the interviews we had at the school one day because, one of them was just about to be thrown out...I took him with me to the gates...And when we were finished [talking]...his mother and father went with me. He sat down and cried and, he was admitted back to school, and do you know he became one of the...[best] kids at the school eventually?

As an older man, Raymond Ferguson now reflects on his life as a senior member of society. In this role, he notes significant differences between the younger and older generations—particularly noting the contrasts in upbringing. In this regard, he comments on how today's current generation of youth have to both reach out to their elders, and turn back to previous generations where connections were made between children, parents and grandparents—and the importance of family relationships.

Now in his late life, Mr. Ferguson also looks to the church for spiritual guidance and reflection. He and his wife attend weekly mass, where they reflect on the words of the

**Lord. This provides a sense of satisfaction and meaning:**

The Lord provided, and we made it...Keep your hope alive, and one day, and one day you will be able to say 'I am happy because I did what I did'





Mr. Ferguson also has words of wisdom to the younger generation—particularly to young members of the Black community, suggesting that young Black men and women should strive for a fulfilled life that can be achieved through hard work and persistence. In spite of the challenges and barriers he encountered throughout his life (notably when integrating into Canadian society), he was able to make a difference for his family and community.

## **Raymond Ferguson's Memorable Quotes**

### ***On Overcoming Discrimination***

I must say at times, I was saying, 'What kind of move did you ever make?' ...How could you leave a land of sunshine; a job that you had to come here to start at the bottom of the stairs like that...And when I came here I came from the office, and when I came here to get work I was a company manager. Oh man! I was just about told, 'You managed a company out there, you don't manage nothing here down here. What experience have you got?' So I had to start at the bottom of the ladder again in the first garage I went to. You know, I had me washing up two general parts! And I had to start with that...You know, when I left home...I was making, say, let's use the Canadian currency. I was making about 100 dollars a week...At that time, and when I came here, while I was one of the highest paid men in the automobile industry there, and when I came here I worked for ten cents an hour.

### ***On Spirituality***

To me going to church is listening the word of God ...the plants, the corn, the animal, the atmosphere, the light, the trees...I will tell you, you get this stack, and you plant it, and it grows, and then it becomes these little buds, and then it makes up flowers, and this is what comes out you know, and you know, like, some readings here in the morning, do you see that?...So going to church, it gives

me a good feeling, a feeling of blessedness, a feeling of fulfillment

### ***On the Importance of Education***

[I would like to see] those who have the opportunities to go to school use your books, get an education. Respect, not only to your parents, but respect people, because this is something that you see out here, you see the kids, they are out there in the class...I would love to see the Black children today...get an education, and learn to read and write, respect your elders. And, once they can appreciate that, they will get somewhere. One day they can appreciate that. Respect your father and mother.





# Constance Humphrey

Don't worry yourself ...You can't be bothered with everything. You just have to let some things go by, you know...Be yourself. And don't let anybody try ...and make you feel [bad]—like out there they always know more than you. They always know everything...so don't ask...Just try and live and be happy. Ask God for an angel...Let Him send an angel, you know? And everything will be okay

## Key Events in Constance Humphrey's Life

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>1925</b>       | Born in British Guyana   |
| <b>1966</b>       | Immigrated into Canada; initially working as a domestic worker<br><br>Worked for the Montreal Children's Hospital  |
| <b>Late 1960s</b> | Began working for Merck Frost as an administrative assistant. She was employed at this company for over twenty years<br><br>Member of the Guyanese Association's 'Pioneer Women', a social group for Guyanese women living in Montreal |
| <b>1967</b>       | Sponsored her sister, nephew and niece to Canada   |
| <b>1970s</b>      | Ms. Humphrey helped raise her nieces and nephews in Canada   |
| <b>Present</b>    | Ms. Humphrey remains very socially active with the Council for Black Aging and the Guyana Association  |

## **Constance Humphrey's Life Story**

Constance Humphrey was born in British Guyana in 1925 into a small family of one sister, and one brother. In her early years, Ms. Humphrey attended a co-ed public school, in which she achieved several memorable academic successes that she has cherished throughout her life. Ms. Humphrey also remembers the large role that the church played in her childhood. She recalls attending Sunday school with her Grandmother—a weekly ritual that lasted from dawn until nightfall. Overall, Ms. Humphrey reports having had a ‘good time growing up’:

Growing up in Guyana...to me it was good...I went to school...And that school was one of the best schools there. The head of state, he was Mr. Dawson...It was built with everything...When we come to school we had to wear Panama hats...and then after we go in the line, and play the music, and we walk down in the stairs...And then the teacher say pray, say our prayers...It was the best school in Georgetown, you know...No others schools there in Guyana was like that.

In 1966, Ms. Humphrey immigrated to Canada; an event that proved to be life-altering. The story begins with a close friend that encouraged her move to Canada. Ms. Humphrey recalls that ‘Her name was Gio-

vanna Price...and, the lady sent for me and I came up! I had no trouble...to come up’.

Ms. Humphrey worked for about a month as a domestic worker—a job set up Mrs. Price. Although Ms. Humphrey was satisfied with her work conditions, she soon moved onto another field. At the urging of a neighbor, Ms. Humphrey applied for a job at Merck-Frost, a pharmaceutical company in Montreal. She was hired as an administrative assistant, a position she held for approximately 26 years.

Ms. Humphrey emphasizes the integral role that her social activity played during her younger and mid-life. Notably, despite having multiple suitors over the years, Ms. Humphrey chose never to marry. The only regret that Ms. Humphrey mentions is not having gone further with her education—a life lesson that she hopes younger men and women will learn from. When asked to share advice with the younger generation, Ms. Humphrey stresses the importance of school and community.

Ms. Humphrey has remained very socially active in her later years, although she does note the new challenges of aging. However, she is able to address these issues with the support of her friends and community. She has plans to travel to Guyana in the near





future with members of the Guyana Association.

When describing her life story, Ms. Humphrey highlights the important role that God has played throughout her life, from childhood to the present day. In particular, Ms. Humphrey has looked to her faith in times of insecurity or distress. She does not describe her religious practice as one explicitly related to the worship of God, but instead describes her spirituality as the practice of trusting a 'voice' to tell her what choices to make.

Ms. Humphrey views the lifestyle of some of today's youth as very different from her own growing up: 'Well, children behave differently that when we were, you know, when we were young...So, life was entirely different to what it is now'.



# Constance Humphrey's Memorable Quotes

## *On Faith*

I have a feeling that...like a certain something will come and tell you, 'Don't worry,' you know, things like that...Anytime, anything, the voice come and ...I don't know if it happen to other people but if this thing come to you and say, 'Don't do it,' don't do it. Because it don't work out. It [won't] work out...[Faith] will come and tell you what to do.

## *On the Secret to Happiness*

Don't worry yourself, you know. You can't be bothered with everything. You just have to let some things go by, you know...I don't worry myself, I don't worry. I just live along in my own way, in my own peculiar way and live a lot of things like that. I try to live, you know, and be nice and you know, and all the things like that.

## *On Education*

That is one of the things that stayed with me. [I want to tell young people] to go to school. To go to school...and listen, to the others and to the teachers. And the big persons. Listen to what they have to tell them.





## Emile Leacock

That incentive in you, this freedom that you express, you have to turn it into something...Life. You move. You think. You do things. What you do is adapt. You be flexible. You do the best you can to make sure that you get what you need at the time that you need it...Once you're born, you're born. Take care of business on your own. You grow, you keep on doing what you're doing

## Key Events in Emile Leacock's Life

- |                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| <b>1929</b>      | Born in Montreal   |
| <b>1941</b>      | Leaves elementary school after altercation with teacher. Start of working life at the age of 12; employed by Montreal City Mission |
| <b>1950s</b>     | Boxer in the middleweight division   |
| <b>1954-1963</b> | Worked for the Pullman Railway Company as both a porter and a semi conductor.  |
| <b>1963-1988</b> | Worked as a union representative, and eventually a union president at Steinberg, a grocery chain in Montreal                       |
| <b>1988</b>      | Retired from work at the age of 56. Member of Black Council on Aging soon after its inception                                      |
| <b>2006</b>      | President for the Council for Black Aging  |
| <b>Present</b>   | Member of the Council for Black Aging  |

## **Emile Leacock's Life Story**

Emile Leacock was born in 1929 to a family of six children. Mr. Leacock's lifecourse is rich with stories of work and self-reliance. After leaving school at a young age due to a violent confrontation with an elementary school teacher, Mr. Leacock began his working life at the age of 12 with the Montreal City Mission.

Mr. Leacock's narrative starts with his family—a theme that is deeply embedded in his story. He attributes his tremendous strength to his mother and father, who taught him core values that he describes throughout his lifecourse. His parents are central influences in his story. Mr. Leacock highlights how he was, and continues to be, an extension of his parents. This starting point is unwavering throughout his life, a trait that greatly impacted his identity:

I happen to be one of those very fortunate human beings 'cause I think it was due to the fact that if my father, papa, the man wasn't the influence he was on me, I don't think I would be here right now. I be not be sitting right here in this calm place. I would be somewhere else...Do you know what I'm saying?...I'm talking about a bow-legged, bald-headed, thought-he-was-cute little man, my father, who got off some ship in this... place. And got lucky by running into my mother who came from Guadalupe in 1908...I will like to know what people were thinking, since he was

born in 1879, among slavery in Barbados. How the hell did he manage to keep sane?

Throughout his life, Mr. Leacock was active in sports. He played hockey until the age of 42, and other indoor and outdoor activities. However it was his time as a boxer that defines him: 'For six and a half years I fought as a middle weight. I got over 40 fights. Knocked out 19 men. Lost 4 fights. And I figured I was robbed'.

His skills as a boxer are also apparent in other aspects of his life. Throughout his narrative, Mr. Leacock makes it clear that he is always prepared for a fight. When faced with any challenge, he never fails to assert himself—a trait that has allowed him to fight against experiences of racism and discrimination. This fighting spirit still remains as he enters his late life:

Certain hour of certain day, it's time for me to eat some food; I better have some food there. Now, how did I get that? With the cement jungles around me, there's no way to grow things like it used to be. So what you do is adapt. You be flexible. You do the best you can to make sure that you get what you need at the time that you need it. But you're very very independent, as far as that goes.





After engaging in the amateur boxing scene, Emile Leacock then began working the railroads in 1956. He worked up his way to porter, and, eventually, to the position of semi-conductor for the Pullman Company. He identified both of these jobs as two of the most challenging positions he has encountered. Never satisfied to be in one spot, Mr. Leacock left a secure job in the railway industry and began working at Steinberg as a Union Worker's representative in 1963, a profession that sustained him for 26 years. During this tenure, Mr. Leacock held the position of Union President, a position that commanded respect from his peers. Mr. Leacock describes himself as a boss who 'took care of business'. The following excerpts demonstrate how Mr. Leacock carried himself as a union president.

Listen...I [worked] 26 and a half years at Steinberg's...I'm also boss man of union business. 402 employees. Used to call me Castro. ...When Sam Steinberg's in front of me, he looked at me, 'Is there anything we can do to help you?' I said, 'Do I look like the type of man who needs help?'...In other words, don't start no noise with Leacock. ...When there's an argument, discussion, union business, I stop the whole building...That was it. Strictly taking care of business.

I've had a lot of antagonism in my life. Being a so-called minority, I don't even like that word, minority. Majority. Fight them, is what I think. I don't want nothing, anything from them... There's a lot of people today who sometimes sit back, they'd like to give you the idea that they're special...They're always yes-ing people. They're always accommodating people. They don't really fight. All they do is basically song-show that we can get along. I don't believe that. Never believed that.

While working for Steinberg, he earned several rights and pay raises for his employees. At the age of 56, in 1988, Mr. Leacock took on early retirement; a decision he calls the biggest decision of his life. Although he retired, Mr. Leacock continued to be active within the community, especially the Black community, where he served as President for the Council for Black Aging in Montreal. Mr. Leacock has also had a great deal of involvement with youth, through coaching various sports and mentoring at a public school.

Having lived through his life at the height of discrimination and racism, Mr. Leacock encourages the younger generation to fight for their rights, much like he has throughout his entire lifecourse. Now entering his late life, he continues to lead a life influenced by his family, and his fighting spirit.

My thing is to live as long as I can, in as good shape as I can. Because I know the other part. Once, all of a sudden, you're unable to do whatever it is you been used to doing, there are people around who would...take advantage of that.

Part of life, is dying. In other words, if I reach 10 years old, I'll be happy. If I reach 16, I'll be happier...If I get to be 25, oh, Lord! If I get to be 31, ohhhhh! If I got to be 40, that's where it's at. When I got to be 50, half a century. But look at me now, 78, gonna be 79, I'm thinking, how did I make it? So what we have to use here is optimism. I enjoy my life no matter how much this that or whatever. It's got nothing to do with other people, it's got something to do with me.



# Emile Leacock's Memorable Quotes

## *On Racism and Discrimination*

When my buddy joined the army, he was sixteen and a half. He joined the army...[and] made sure that the rent was paid, the food was coming in and everybody had clothes. So I figured to join the army, too. October 13. I go up [there]...I said, I want to join the army...White man looked at me and he said, 'You better go home, this is a white man's war!' He's lucky I didn't get upset...We're talking about living the experience. We are not talking about what has been [inscribed] in some book...We're talking about when my sisters went for jobs and were told, because they were black, they can't have the job...Do you understand what I'm talking about? I come from that!

## *On Challenging the Black Community to Succeed*

Where is the appreciation of who and what we are? Where is this shown? When...is it shown? I would like to know that. Someone, well, 'you know, he got this and he got that and he made this'...That same black so and so, when he gets in the white company, he's not invited to anything... So the bottom line is, no, [they] don't want 'em. ...Because that's what they are. Where in the hell is the bottom line?! We, as a people, origination? Where is it?...You live one life...Brother, it's why you're here, [why] you're alive and what you do is like me looking at you...Two things that most hu-

man beings have to do, no matter what race, colour or religion...Born, and the next thing is you're going to die. So, it's between being either being born and then dying, what you going to do?

### ***On Building Power***

Know what the system is all about and then do it. And build it. One thing my father left all of us with, in our family: you gonna learn how to work. The name of the game was work ethics. And each and every one of us was independent of what goes on. We each took care of business. And made sure that before you left this earth, you did the finest life in this life...I come from a time when we had trouble, even to rent a goddamn house. I mean that.



## Richard Lord

**Get yourself educated. Know yourself, know your people. Study the background of your mother and father. Get a philosophy to live by. Or a faith to live by. You gotta live for something beyond yourself**

## **Key Events in Richard Lord's Life**

<b>1929</b>	Born in Montreal
<b>1941</b>	Coach for various sports teams in Montreal
<b>1950s</b>	Attended Michigan State University where he was the first Black student to play in the American College Hockey League
<b>1950s-1960s</b>	Engineer (for Dominion Tar and Chemical, FC Hume, and the city of Montreal)
<b>1968-1969</b>	Appointed to the Special Senate Committee on Poverty
<b>1969-1972</b>	Worked with Vanier Institute of the Family
<b>1970s</b>	Enrolled in Law School, and appointed to the Immigration Appeal Board of Canada
	Vice President of Liberal Party of Quebec
	Royal Canadian Legion Hospital's Award for dedicated Community Service
<b>1976</b>	Member of the Immigration Appeal Board



- 1994-1996** Served as adjudicator at the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada.
- 2003** President of the Council for Black Aging
- Present** President of Twenty Club (debating society of the University Club in Montreal)
- Served as director of the following organizations:** Decision House, St-Leonard House, Portage Drug Dependency Center of Montreal, Montreal Press Club, President of Westmount High Old Boys Association, Royal Commonwealth Society, CANAF-RIC Development Corporation Limited, Richard Lord International Immigration Consultants Inc. and Deputy Warden of St. Georges Anglican Church.

## **Richard Lord's Life Story**

Richard Lord was born in Montreal, Quebec, in 1929. Over the 78 years of life-course, Mr. Lord has accomplished great feats in his personal and professional lives through perseverance, ambition and hard work. He has degrees in both chemical engineering and civil law, and has directed many local service organizations.

His personal journey is today is rooted in his upbringing. Good values, morals and beliefs were instilled in Mr. Lord at a young age. The Lords were a tightly knit family of six, where Mr. Lord's parents working hard to support their children. His father worked in the railroad sector, while his mother worked as a domestic worker. Mr. Lord's mother played a key role in teaching him how to overcome racism and discrimination. This influence helped guide Mr. Lord as he progressed through his life course.

At the early age of 12, Mr. Lord was actively involved in the community, where he organized and coached local sports teams at the peewee, bantam and juvenile levels. This represented the start of major accomplishments in Mr. Lord's life and demonstrated the discipline he had at a young age.

I would start this little group called Rinky Dinks, and...we began winning championships. And in...grade 6, the principle of the school. Mr. Seaman...he's going to give me \$50 a month to coach the basketball team and the football team. So here I was making \$50 a month, going to grade 7, and every Friday I'd come back and coach the team. And I'm only one year out of elementary school and I'm the only black kid, and all the kids are white. So I'm teaching these kids and I taught them discipline, and if they win or lose they [shook] hands because that's how I'm trained...But after a while we won the championships the second year in the basketball and hockey! And then my hockey teams...we won the juvenile, the midget, and the bantam league in Westmount.

This was also the start of a successful sports career, where Mr. Lord eventually earning a sports scholarship at Michigan State University. These years were also historically significant. At the time, Mr. Lord was the only black student in Westmount High, and he broke barriers at Michigan State by becoming the first black captain of a varsity team and later the first black president of the varsity club. He was the first black student to receive the John A. Hannah Award, an honor reserved for students who excelled in both academics and sports. It was during his years at Michigan State that Mr. Lord earned his degree as an engineer and began a successful career in this domain (first working at Dominion Tire Chemical, and later FC Hume).

Mr. Lord played a significant role during Montreal's rapid growth during the 1950s and 1960s. He was a city engineer and was in charge of lighting the Metropolitan Boulevard, and the Decarie Expressway. He also played a significant role in engineering Expo 67, and became involved in knowledge exchange programs in Detroit, Michigan. After working 10 years for the City of Montreal, he left that position when an opportunity arose to work as a consultant on a study of poverty in Canada. This enabled Richard to travel to all over Canada to examine poverty levels.

I got a call from Ottawa...[A colleague] said, 'Look, Richard, I gave your name. They want you to do something...We want you to be on a study committee on poverty...We need somebody black who could communicate with people. We want you to travel east. You'll start today'. I said, okay. I went there...they flew me to Fogo Island...off the coast of Newfoundland...Then I studied and I came back with a report that said poverty is not how much money you have, it's how life fulfills. Those guys had less money than some miners in Cape Breton, but they were healthier, their families were richer, they felt free, there was no pressure on them. They knew their heritage and so forth.



In his later years, Mr. Lord served as vice president of the Liberal Party of Quebec, where he became connected with well known members of the Liberal Party (including Pierre Trudeau). He later went back to school, at the University of Montreal, and obtained his degree in law. This started a new career in advocating for the Black community. One of his many triumphs as a lawyer was helping members of the Black community get their pensions after arriving in Canada.



Being an active member of the black community, is an important theme in Mr. Lord's life. He spoke on numerous occasions on how the black community needs to come together in order to mobilize as a group. In an effort to encourage young Black members of the community to succeed, Mr. Lord offers a scholarship to high achieving students at Westmount High School.

By staying active in various community organizations, Mr. Lord demonstrates a strong desire for the Black community to succeed. His hard work and dedication to both education and community work has earned him various awards—making a role model within the community of Montreal.

# **Richard Lord's Memorable Quotes**

## ***On Knowing History***

You gotta live for something beyond yourself... send money out to different people to get to school and so forth and so forth. And my sister [and] I give a cup every year to the outstanding girl [and boy] at Westmount High...Not only, not the guy with highest marks, but the one who contributes to the school as well as gets a passing of above 60%. So, and I created this thing because most Blacks were not getting marks. They were flunking out so I gave it in the category where they could excel.

## ***On his Experiences of Racism***

...there was Michigan, who had more blacks than I'd ever seen in my bloody life, and yet they weren't ready for a black to be white. I was the first black to have a white roommate, first black to be in the varsity club, first black to become president of the varsity club, first black to be captain of the hockey team, first black to play hockey in anywhere in the United States in a league and so forth, first black to ever graduate as a chemical engineer. You know?...And then when I came back, I found out, it took me about 350 applications to get a job in the field, and when I got a job in the field even out here, they asked me: 'Are you



a chemical engineer?' And I said, 'why?' Because I was black...Oh, jeez, I must have gone through many, many [experiences]. And I went to hell and back





## Melville Medford

Our grandparents came through the slave trade. They were slaves. And anything that they got away from, they tried to teach us nowadays [we've] got to teach our children to look at everyone as a human being – if you don't know anything, ask questions. Because that's the only way to learn...If you don't ask questions, you can't learn. And don't segregate yourself. Don't segregate yourself.

## Key Events in Melville Medford's Life

<b>1925</b>	Born in the Barbados
<b>1930s</b>	Mother dies
<b>1930s</b>	Awarded high school scholarship
<b>1930s-1940s</b>	Entered the tailor trade
<b>1956</b>	Wife immigrates to Canada
<b>1958</b>	Sponsored by his wife to come into Canada
<b>1960s</b>	Begins work in cleaners; switched over to the railway
<b>1960s-1970s</b>	Moves from Canadian Pacific Railway to Canadian National Railway where policies were more egalitarian
<b>1965</b>	Bought house in Montreal
<b>1970</b>	Retired
<b>1994</b>	Served as President for the Council for Black Aging
<b>Present</b>	Active member of the Council for Black Aging and Union United Church where he is a choir member

## **Melville Medford's Life Story**

Melville Medford was born in Barbados in 1925. At the age of 7, he lost his mother and was brought up by his father and step-mother. As the oldest sibling of the Medford clan, Mr. Medford had a major role in caring for his younger siblings. While he found this role to be somewhat difficult, he highlights the importance of tradition, religion and community. He discusses how his upbringing in Barbados instilled respect for the community.

In elementary [school]—we were taught discipline...We had to show [teachers] respect and the teachers embedded into you, that you must be respectful to your seniors and...the school. As a matter of fact, we had to learn certain parts of scriptures by heart, recite like a dictation. Nowadays...there's none of the scriptures in the schools...So, we were brought up in our olden days to be humble, honest, and trust in God... I don't know if I would ever go back to our days... but...in our time, we were brought up to serve God. To be mindful to our family, strangers, and everybody and everything to be respectful.

Growing up, Mr. Medford stood out as a very bright child. After graduating from elementary school, he was awarded a scholarship that allowed him to attend high school for free. It was during this time that teachers recognized his potential and offered free, private

lessons to cultivate his intellectual development. However, while he excelled in school, Mr. Medford felt that he needed to find a job to financially support his family. He decided to enter the tailor trade, where he learned how to cut and sew garments. By taking on this job, Mr. Medford was given the financial flexibility to help his family.

While he was working as a tailor, Mr. Medford began a relationship with his eventual wife, Ruby. Soon after, Mr. Medford received advice to come into Canada:

A teacher...said to me...'It's a good thing to come to Canada. Let your girlfriend come down, join and go to Canada. And she can support you after a year in Canada'. So, like I said to you before...I get to see all my cousins come in to Barbados, that were seamen and they looked so smart I says, 'Oh my God, working in the Canadian Navy. And Canada may be the best place for me to go!' Not knowing that Canada is not the best place to go! But I said that, because that was in my mind...I told Ruby. She went... and she came up, on the second batch.

Mr. Medford's wife first came into Canada as a domestic worker, with the intent to sponsor her husband a year later. However, these plans were delayed when Mr. Medford's father died, causing him to care for burial arrangements. After laying his father to rest, Mr. Medford finally joined his wife to start their new life in Canada. However, upon arrival Mr. Medford experienced difficulties adjusting to

his new life in Canada. His story contained several experiences of racism and difficulties in finding a job. Mr. Medford was expecting a better life with his wife. However, soon after arriving, he found that the predominately White community was discriminating against members of the Black community. For example, Mr. Medford and his wife were relegated to the 'Black Church', after the Anglican Church in Montreal refused to marry them.



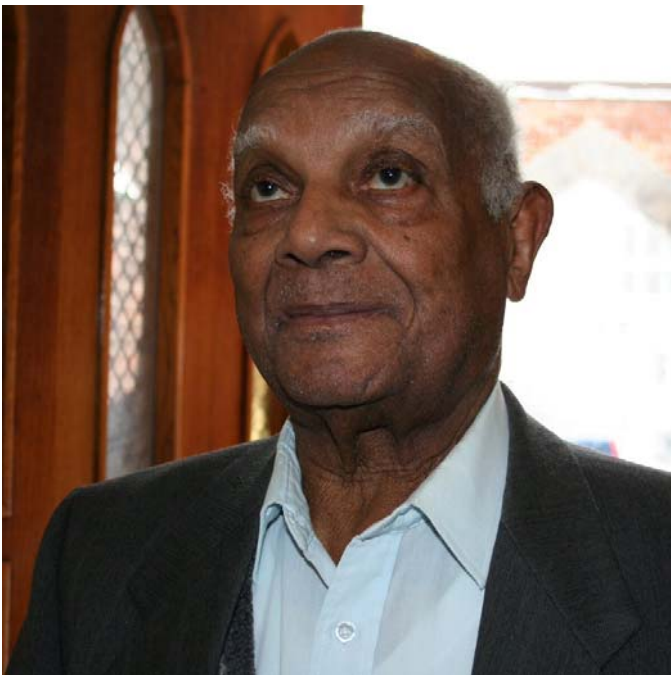
So, I came in '58. I left Barbados in March '58. and I came and I got married the month after. Right in this church there. An old church at the time. And, the reason I got married in this church—in Barbados, I was an Anglican, but when I came to Canada...I was told, I had to go down to the Black church. I tried the Anglican Church and they sent me to the Black people church right down there.

Undeterred by the overt acts of racism, Melville drew from his belief in God. He married his wife at the Union United Church, and took on jobs that were below his qualifications at various laundry mats in order to support his growing family. Eventually, he joined the railway sector for better wages:

I had lots of friends working on the railroad. And they were doing a lot better than I...was doing. So I said to myself, I said, 'look for the best job you could to help your family'. Because I had no choice...So I...joined the railroad...in 1960... And, working in 1960 at the railroad, I started as a porter. Because as a black man, they don't care about your education...I said, 'Okay, I'll work'. I started to work as a porter but then after they found out of the ability that I had, I moved from a porter—I was porter for maybe...6 months. And then, I [became] a waiter, serving the bar and nicotine and that. And from this, it become the conductor and the steward.



Mr. Medford later transferred to a competitor company (Canadian National Railway) that had better policies and benefits for Black workers. During this time, Mr. Medford's wife decided to sponsor the rest of her family from the Caribbean. In order to accommodate more people, Mr. Medford and his wife decided to move into a bigger apartment. However, they encountered more racism, with landlords refusing to lease to Black families. Frustrated but undeterred, Mr. Medford bought a house in NDG in 1965; a home he and his wife live in to this day.



So, I live like I said, because God wants me to live. I'm 84 years old now. OK? And, uh...I didn't meet for glory, I fight for every day of my life. And I decide to be a generous and... my house, is for the people everyday. And especially, as a young man, we [had an open house where we] liked to play dominoes, we played this and everything and in the weekends and had a lot of fun.

Through the years, Mr. Medford raised seven children, and is the grandfather to several grandchildren; he remains very close with many of them. Mr. Medford is very proud of his family, and willing to provide them with any support they need. At the age of 70, Melville Medford begun a new career as the President of the Council for Black Aging. His involvement with friends and the community has carried him to this day, where he continues to draw on the support of his religious beliefs, his extended family and the black community.

# Melville Medford's Memorable Quotes

## *On Religion*

As a youngster in the Barbados...religion was part of the subject...Scriptures you had to know by heart!...The church [is] there for the communion, community because that's really where they're getting the benefits from...And I believe in God. Strongly believe in God. I say my prayers all the time...I grew up loved. That's my witness.

## *On Respecting Seniors*

We had to be very respectful to [seniors]. I got a flogging one time, just running past a lady and I had to go to school. ...So, I had to go to school on time. So, I run past this lady, so I didn't stop and didn't speak to her and when I got back home... my great aunt Mrs. Thorpe she pulled down my pants and...give me three lashes because I past Mrs. Larson and didn't speak to her. And I said, I said, 'Auntie, I didn't even see her'. I didn't want to hurt her. But, that's the way that, um, we were brought up. To be very submissive to seniors, to be respectful and things like that.

## *On Life in Barbados*

So I was the older one in the family at the time. And I train myself...The things that the girls should be doing, I had to help to do. And things like that. So, it's only after I become around four-

teen years old I realized...oh, you're the slave of the family (*laughter*)...Although, at that time, I had two older sisters, two years older than me and they were bigger than me but you know how women treat girls, their children. They were the prize; they can go to some school; they can go to this thing, they were well-dressed, and things like that. And the boys were always with the boys. We were always...like, like a second class. I realized that was happening, and...so I enrolled into a school, and I always had education my mind. To get the very best education I could.



## Catherine Riley

You have to put your words into actions...Love people, love your neighbour...Help them. Be kind. Be gentle...be loving. Do little deeds of kindness. Speak gentle words of love...You have to learn to forgive and forget...Try and be helpful...You know, whatever you can, and speak kind words...of love.

## Key Events in Catherine Riley's Life

<b>1921</b>	Born in Montserrat
<b>Childhood</b>	Begins community work at a young age
<b>1947</b>	Immigrates to Canada, and marries her husband during the spring
<b>1948</b>	Entered the work force; worked in a textile factory
<b>1957</b>	Worked for Canadian Pacific Railway
<b>1972</b>	Gave birth to son
<b>2004</b>	Active Member of the Council for Black Aging in Montreal
<b>Present</b>	Active member of the Union United Church and Council for Black Aging

## **Catherine Riley's Life Story**

Catherine Riley was born in West Indies in 1921. She is a mother of one child and grandmother to two children. Mrs. Riley starts her narrative with her experiences of immigrating into Canada on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 1947. Mrs. Riley settled into Montreal after her initial plans to move to New York City were delayed. Soon after her arrival, she married her husband who served in the Canadian Army. Mrs. Riley describes having a very good experience coming into Canada, despite being initially shy in a new social environment— which she describes as a ‘strange place’ with ‘strange people’. However, she was able to adjust by making connections through the church. These connections helped her to establish a strong social network. The following excerpt demonstrates her first experiences when coming into Canada:

During my first year in Montreal...it was strange, like everybody when they come first. I was a little strange...and a little shy. But people were really nice and really friendly to me as far as I go ‘round and where I go, many people always try to help and all this... But it was very good.

When I went to the Church, I was always well greeted and well...received and very well welcomed...So...I think I had a very good story and a very good time and as far as I have to say that I

think I came to the right place at the right time and I'm very satisfied with my life in Montreal now. Sometime there is a little hardship, mind you, or little ups and downs as everything becomes. Nothing is perfect but...general...most things, is satisfactory to me.

Mrs. Riley married her husband immediately after her arrival into Canada, and entered the workforce fairly quickly. Her story in the workforce started when she was immediately hired to work in a textile factory. After nine years in this environment, Catherine applied for a job at Canadian Pacific Railway where she received better wages. She worked in this domain for 35 years.

When I first arrived and onwards and afterwards ...I get a job and I was working and...little by little, we paid our way and became used to Montreal and so on there.

Mrs. Riley is also actively involved in the Council for Black Aging in Montreal, where she regularly attends meetings and outings and supports several community initiatives. Here, she participates in the knitting, crochet and computer classes. Mrs. Riley describes her participation as being involved and helpful whenever she can.

Well, I come to the meeting and whatever they have, right...I don't come to everything but certain things they have I try and attend and support what they have...I used to take the computer class but that stopped for a while. When they



have the trips, I used to go—nowadays I don't go that much because I can't do too much walking... But the Black community, in anything if I could help, I'll help.

As someone who immigrated into Canada in the 1940s, Catherine Riley has seen changes in the Montreal community that range from changes to the public transport system to changes in the language laws. Mrs. Riley discusses how Montreal was integrated in both languages, but how services were separated into English and French. She also sees these divisions among the older and younger generation. Mrs. Riley recognizes the strengths and knowledge of younger generations.

When asked, her advice for both younger and older generations is to enjoy life, and to continually seek the support of others—advice inspired by her initial experiences when coming into Canada.





Now entering her 87th year, Catherine Riley is facing the challenges of aging. In her story, she discusses the hardships of aging, and the physical and cognitive changes she has experienced as an older woman. Despite her concerns about physical decline and mobility issues, Mrs. Riley relies on her faith to help her through these times. She attends Church once a week and describes herself as being 'very religious'.

With all the technology and all that, find a formula...to keep you young...Well of course, when you're young, you have your—you dye your hair, you have false teeth, false eyes, facelift and all kinds—but still, you're still old because the years go by and your still, the body prefers a raise.  
*(Mrs. Riley chuckles)*

My dear, when you get old, there's nothing you can do, you can't turn back the hands of time... Youth comes but once in a lifetime and they are the best years of your life. The best years are when you're young. Well, I think so. 'Cause I could look back on when I was young, I would list the things I used to do and where I used to go and what not and everything.

# Catherine Riley's Memorable Quotes

## *On Religion and Spirituality*

I'm really religious....Like most people I was brought up in the Anglican faith and I mean, I try to follow that up till now...I like to go to church because...its like when you when you first get very thirsty and get a drink of cold of water or when you're very hungry and you get a meal...I...like the church, I like reading...Its one God, one faith, one Lord, one baptism. And wherever you go, there are many churches, just like a tree. You count many branches but it is the one root, the one tree... You have to put your words into actions. Up and down. Love people, love your neighbour.

## *On Life in the West Indies and in Canada*

First of all, my country is warm and Canada is cold...I was a young woman, then, there...in both countries, I had a very good [life]...I was young, and...we were poor, we didn't have no luxury, when I was there...We didn't have a fridge there... We didn't have television, all these luxuries we call then at that time. Now they have them but then in my days, they did not...I mean, Canada is a rich country and that is a poor country...When I was there, they...cooked in the fire with the wood stove, wood, you know, they threw fire rocks and cook on that.

### ***On Advising the Older Generation***

Loving. Laugh. Smile...That's one of the things that keeps you [young]—to laugh, smile...Smile, don't get angry...Meet others rather than be by yourself. Don't stay by yourself in your home because some people they have no one...and they think of what they didn't have or what they should become and so on. Don't do that. Come out in a group. [These senior places]...get together with them...you talk, you laugh, you doing your little things, so meet. And anything like that. Just to get together. Get together, be together, come out and meet people...just be loving and sincere with each other.

There are many things out there—wars, ups and downs, and so on; that you can't do nothing about. They always going to be because, you see...there is no love in this world unless there's...peace. We need peace in the world and [to] be loving with each other. That is one of the things the world needs...We need [to be] more helpful to people. Look at them...listen to them and see what way to help and because we can help.





## Kay Shouclair

You live and learn...The children of today...you have to respect your parents...be polite [and] respect the elderly...You should know to speak to the elderly as bigger people than yourself...Respect for your elderly and respect for your children. (*Mrs. Shouclair points to a photo*) There's my grandmother, oh, I used to love my grandmother.

## Key Events in Kay Shouclair's Life

<b>1925</b>	Born in Jamaica
<b>1944</b>	First marriage Birth of first son
<b>1948</b>	Birth of first daughter
<b>1956</b>	Immigrated to Canada
<b>1950s</b>	Worked as a domestic worker in Canada
<b>1960s</b>	Returned to school in Canada for nursing
<b>1960s</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> marriage to professor from Concordia
<b>1974 - 1990s</b>	Studied and worked in the United States Worked in various hospitals in Montreal and the United States
<b>1991</b>	Retired
<b>1994</b>	Named Citizen of the Year of Cut River, Syria
<b>Present</b>	Participates in community groups catered to seniors



## **Kay Shouclair's Life Story**

Born in 1926 in Jamaica, Kay Shouclair was raised by her aunt and Syrian-Jamaican father. Her childhood was spent in Jamaica where she went to elementary school. Mrs. Shouclair eventually went on to become a school teacher in Jamaica, teaching fourth grade students. It was during this time that she married her first husband. Mrs. Shouclair eventually immigrated into Canada at the age of 30. Her story of coming into Canada was unique, one that came by chance after an encounter with one of her students.

It's funny, I always wanted to travel...So I was walking down next to this young man. I used to teach him in school as a school kid...I saw him and...he said, 'well, my girlfriend gone to Canada'. I said 'what do you mean gone to Canada?' He said, 'well, they're looking for people who is going to Canada, who wants to travel. And if they check you out, and if you qualify, they take care of your examination and tests, and see your education, and see who you are and your family'... The next day they called me to come for an interview...So I wasn't going to shy away...Next thing I know, I'm ready because we were leaving like next week. The boat, the plane was leaving so you had to have everything all fixed up to go.

After learning about Canada's search for new workers, Mrs. Shouclair went home and started the process of immigrating into Can-

ada. Her family and co-workers were very supportive of this decision, and helped her in completing her application. After completing the necessary interviews, Mrs. Shouclair arrived in Canada, where she initially worked as a domestic worker for various families in Montreal. In this context, she was able to apply the skills she learned in Jamaica to her new job in Canada.

While in Canada, Mrs. Shouclair encountered an entirely different life. Among the challenges she had to overcome were the changes in climate, social isolation and changing professions. Mrs. Shouclair had no social networks, and had to essentially start a new life from scratch. She describes this phase of her life as an 'uncertain time'.

So that was it. So, here I am. And when I came, I didn't know where I was going to live, 'cause you had no home here. And next thing I know, they put me at the lady's house...And I was there in housekeeping.

After immigrating into Canada, Mrs. Shouclair went to school to study nursing. She eventually earned a degree, and sought work as a nurse at various Montreal hospitals. Eventually, an opportunity arose where she could practice in this profession.

My friend...called me one morning...She said, 'Meet me at Atwater...Don't ask any questions, just meet me!' Anyways, so I got dressed and everything, meet her at the bus, get out at Atwater, there she was. And she, she took me to the Douglas...I always said I want to be a nurse, and she knew that. And they were looking for people in Douglas just hoping to come in and do the nursing. So this is how I started. So she took me there, and they like me right away, they hired me. And so, in the morning, before I come to work...I used to go to school...So I've been to all these schools and I was well qualified for my job.



It was around this time that Mrs. Shouclair would marry a second time at the age of 46, to a physics professor at Concordia University. This was a happy time for Mrs. Shouclair, and was one of the major events in her life in Canada. Together she and her husband owned and operated a nursing home for about 20 older adults in the South Shore. As she approached her late life, Mrs. Shouclair's husband fell ill and she assumed a caregiver role. In order to fulfill this obligation, she retired earlier than expected in order to provide for her husband.

The reason I retired, I could work as much as I want. But my husband became ill, and I wanted to take care of him myself...I went to the hospital, I used to check him at the hospital...They put him in a place, you know...And they have him sitting there. And I said for what? He don't deserve this. So I just phoned in sick from there. I put him in my car, bring him home. And then I didn't go to work that day, I took care of him... Earlier than I wanted too, I [retired] because he was always calling for me. So I took care of him myself...But he was a good man.

As an 82 year old woman, Kay Shouclair expects to lead her life as she has been for the past few years. She is currently affiliated with the Catholic Church and ascribes to the belief of helping your fellow man. Overall, Mrs. Shouclair's life is one marked by travel, work, success and above all, independence. In 1994, she was named citizen of the year in Cut River, Syria.



Well I don't know, I don't know. I think I'm a good person. And I don't...I am happy for anybody who's doing well.

# **Kay Shouclair's Memorable Quotes**

## ***On Being Independent***

I take everything step by step...when I graduated I was quite impressed because...I did everything. What I like about myself is that I don't wait on people. I do things I want to do, and I'm not a jealous person to say 'oh you're going to do this...I do everything my self. I do everything my self, I clean my house, I do everything. because if you don't use it, you lose it.

## ***On Intergenerational Respect***

Well [children] should be polite to respect the elderly. That's the main thing. You don't go cursing your grandmother, and then embarrassing them in public. You should know to speak to the elderly as bigger people than yourself. You should learn that! You try telling your mother all kinds of nonsense...I mean, you know. You can't do that to me. I'll sit my son there. I sit down and tell him right from wrong, and if somebody tell him how, you say 'No, my mother wouldn't like that'. You wouldn't let him do it. It's how you bring up your child! And he was a good kid all his life until he grow into a big man.



## Florence Westmoreland

My mother used to say, 'It's out there for you. Whatever is out there for you, you can go and get it. So don't let nobody stand in your way'...She pushed us...she was a pioneer before her time... You see when you push your kids and give them lots of love—it's just like my mother, she gave us lots of love...and she made us do things. So, first thing is, you take care of yourself...The next thing is your family.

## Key Events in Florence Westmoreland's Life

<b>1923</b>	Born in Montreal in the Plateau
<b>Childhood</b>	Grew up in the working class part of the Plateau
<b>1920s</b>	Enjoyed baseball and other activities with her mother
<b>1930s</b>	Helped kids after school with their homework
<b>1937</b>	Attended night school (for high school diploma)
<b>1930s</b>	Worked part-time in Montreal factories
<b>1940s</b>	Divorced and remarried
<b>1950s</b>	Traveled to Europe
<b>Present</b>	Member of the Council for Black Aging; makes annual trips to Barbados



## **Florence Westmoreland's Life Story**

Born in Montreal in 1923, Florence Westmoreland describes her life as one of opportunity. Growing up in the working class district of the Plateau, Mrs. Westmoreland was able to integrate into the community of mostly working class Europeans. In order to be part of her surroundings, she learned to speak Yiddish, English and French. She highlights how learning these languages was a necessity because:

When you went to the stores, the children were working. And the older people stayed in the store. So they didn't speak English. They came from Europe. ...So you had to point to what you want. So then they would say, oh, onions, zibele. You want onions. If you want flour, 'mem'. See, so I learned like that...So, we all learned French... Yiddish...Yeah, I still speak it still today.

Mrs. Westmoreland was part of a large family, where she socialized and was encouraged to be as active as possible. Her mother played a central role, always pushing her children to strive for their best:

I have to go all the way back to my mother...We played tennis...we did horseback riding, we did skiing, we were the only ones that did all those things! We didn't have the habits, the riding habits and all that but we, we did all those things. That's right. And my mother, when we were

younger, she used to take us up in the mountains...So, you know, she pushed us, she was a pioneer before her time. Riding a car, driving a car, at 55. She was separated from my father then. And she did catering, landscaping, all those things at 55 at the Y...So, all those things you learned, you know when you go back and you think and you say, 'Geeze, I was always...like almost a hustler, just, trying to... get ahead'

As part of a large family, not everyone had the opportunity to go to school. Instead, children of the Westmoreland clan were relegated different roles—older siblings attended school, while the younger siblings, including Mrs. Westmoreland, had the role of caring for the family. However, Mrs. Westmoreland would eventually go to night school at the age of 14.

Mrs. Westmoreland presents herself as a woman who is head-strong, independent and willing to take on certain roles even though she had little experience. Her strong sense of autonomy was again seen in her mid-life, when she traveled alone to Europe, and was able to experience new adventures. Overall, these travels illustrate Mrs. Westmoreland's independence; she is a woman who commands respect for not only herself, but for those around her.

I went all over Europe. I went from here, my brother got me a ticket, it was, 200 dollars for a Euro Rail pass. And I went from here to New York, from New York to Belgium, Belgium to Paris. And stayed with my brother a couple days. ... I left, went to pull my cousin in Switzerland and went to Switzerland. And then from Switzerland, I stayed there three days, I hit the road. I went to Madrid.



In addition to a strong family upbringing, a common theme that throughout Mrs. Westmoreland's lifecourse is a strong work ethic. However, she would always place her family as her priority:

I had to get a little bit of money, that's why I always worked. I sewed, I always had two days to sew. I worked in the factory sometimes. I did alterations for...cleaners. When my kid was only 5 I used to say, 'Stay away from the machine. And don't come near my machine'...Everyday. And then I said, you know, with the children, that's no good. So I stopped that. Then I used to go to work at the factory on St-Lawrence. Part-time...And then I said, 'Ok, you know what, I'll stay home and do two days of sewing'.

The notion of independence and being one's own woman was very important for Mrs. Westmoreland—a core characteristic that she encourages other Black women to follow. In particular, she highlights how this independence will help her in her late life:

You have to put yourself first. You put your—you're working, you pay yourself first, cause you're doing all the work. Then, even if its 20 dollars, 30 dollars, you put that aside for you. Eventually you're going to need it. Women don't realize that when you get older, about 55 or 60, like that and you have nothing and somebody is giving you a terrible time, its very depressing for you. Life is hard enough as it is.

Mrs. Westmoreland revisits the theme of family when talking about the differences between today's and yesterday's generations. She highlights how family structure and intergenerational interactions are imperative to ensure strong relationships and family dy-

namics. Mrs. Westmoreland advocates for a relationship where parents challenged their children, and at the same time provide guidance so that they may be independent and self-sufficient:

[My children] listened because they got love. Anytime they needed anything, I used to tell them, 'If you need anything or if anybody is bothering you or anyone is doing anything to you, you're to come and see me. You know why? Cause I love you. People are going to give you advice. They don't love you, what is, however they feel at the time, that's what they tell you. But I'm a mother...If I don't know somebody smarter than me, well work it out'. And my children all came, they used to bring their friends. ...So now, my children will say, above and beyond duty...I gave them my time, I worked and all that but I sat them down and explained why I had to work.

Mrs. Westmoreland also has words of advice for women as they experience aging. Still adopting an active lifestyle, she advocates for older Black women to get their pensions:

If you're in Barbados and you don't have a pension, I tell them, 'You have to have a pension from somewhere if you're 65 and over'. A lot of them don't realize that you can apply for a pension from your country...They, they'll say, oh, this woman is around and she has nothing, she drinks, she smokes, she has no pension and we have to give her and we have to give her. You don't have to give her nothing. She's entitled to a pension from someplace. You get the papers. I

would get the papers for them...Mail them down. You fill them out. Send them in. And you will get something.

As older woman, Mrs. Westmoreland also takes the time to reflect on her life. As active individual, she fears decline of aging. In order to combat this, she stays as active as possible and asserts her physical independence. One way that Mrs. Westmoreland stays socially active is through the church, where she is able to stay in touch with others.

In her late life, she still makes trips to Barbados, and is an active member of the Council for Black Aging in Montreal. She also speaks very fondly of the accomplishments of her step-daughter, who is a judge in Toronto, Ontario.

## **Florence Westmoreland's Memorable Quotes**

### ***On Tradition and Community***

We had an organ. We had a piano. And my mother learned how to play the organ by herself. And the piano. And we had a Professor [who] ...used to come, and give her singing lessons and give my brother singing lessons. And my sister had violin lessons...I took piano lessons with Oscar Petersen. 10 cents every Saturday at the centre. I remember the train coming and I was so scared cause we used to come from, all the way from Laval (in the Plateau). Took an hour and a half to get to the centre. At that time it was, uh, on the side of the church...Ten cents a lesson...You think we stayed home? We had to play in those cantatas they had on Sunday afternoon after church. You just didn't go around and do nothing...We played duets. My mother sang. My sister would sing with her

### ***On Advice for Older Women***

I see my friends and I pray, dear Lord, please help me to give me strength. I pray every morning, every night. Dear Lord, give me strength. Give me peace of mind, mostly...So you can accept what you get. You know? Yeah, but I tell women, do not sit down. Do something to keep yourself busy...even go to the hospital, read to somebody. Keep in contact with people 'cause soon as you're by yourself and you don't do anything, you feel sad for

yourself, you know...You have to get out there and do something. I go for breakfast twice a week...I make sure I get out. I don't eat a whole lot out but you have to do things that keep you busy. Mentally...I read. Try to get books that are educational or light or stimulate your mind...I feel, right now, at peace with myself. I'm very much at peace... When you're at peace, it's very good.

### ***On Spirituality***

I believe in God. I don't run to church every Sunday but when I feel it I go and when I feel it, I listen...And I enjoy going downstairs after. And meeting everybody. Everybody. 'Cause I love people. I'm a people person, you know?









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## **Interviewees**

Dennis Bonaparte

Rubina Davis

Raymond Ferguson

Constance Humphrey

Emile Leacock

Richard Lord

Melville Medford

Catherine Riley

Kay Shouclair

Florence Westmoreland

## Project Committee Members



### **Eliséé Faure**

Mrs. Faure was born in Seychelles, where she was an educator and a government official in labor laws. She came to Canada in 1986, where she worked as a community activist. Mrs. Faure joined the CBAC in 1999, and in 2003 was promoted to executive director. As stated earlier, Mrs. Faure felt compelled to document the life histories of the older generation. She served in the project committee, and conducted interviews, analysis and editing.



### **Amanda Grenier**

Dr. Grenier is a faculty member of the School of Social Work at McGill University. She became involved with the project, serving as a member of the project committee, and research consultant where she trained members on how to conduct narrative interviews. She also analyzed and edited the stories in this booklet.



### **Catherine Orr**

Mrs. Orr was born in Antigua, and came to Canada to further her studies in nursing. In 2006, she became a devoted member of the Council— getting involved in nearly all activities provided by the organization. In 2007, she retired, and became a full fledged volunteer. In 2008 she was elected president for the Council. In this project, she participated as an interviewer, and was part of the project committee.



### **Eileen Collins**

Mrs. Collins was born in Barbados, and came to Canada in 1963, where she worked for 14 years as a psychiatric nurse at Douglas Hospital. She would later advance her studies (nursing) at Dawson College. Mrs. Collins became a member of the Council in 2000, soon after her retirement and would serve as Secretary for the Board of Directors. She was part of the project committee and interviewed several participants.



### **Emelda Phipps**

Mrs. Phipps was born in Trinidad, where she was employed as a graduate nurse. She came to Canada in 1970 to advance her studies (Dawson College and Concordia) and would later work at Douglas Hospital. Always encouraging the advancement of the Black community in Montreal, she joined the Council in 1994, and served as President in 2006. She was a member of this project committee, interviewed participants, and conducted analysis.



### **Ilyan Ferrer**

Ilyan graduated with a MSW at McGill University. He became involved with the project after expressing a desire to conduct community based research. He served as the project coordinator, and conducted interviews and analysis. He also oversaw the creation of the booklet.



### **Dwight Raffington**

Dwight was born in Jamaica, and has a BA in Political Science. Initially working as a community work intern at the Council, he extended his services by volunteering, and visiting older members of the Council. In recognition of this commitment, he was invited to participate in the project, where he served as interviewer, and was part of the project committee.



### **Selvena Walters**

Selvena was born in Canada (of Barbados ancestry), and studied social work at McGill University. She was employed by the Council in 2008, where she serves as the assistant administrator – writing and the coordinating the quarterly newsletter. She helped coordinate the project.

## **Members of the Project**

### **Tatiana Gomez**

Tatiana is a professional photographer, who provided most of the photos for the project.

### **Sarina Isenberg**

Sarina is an English Literature student at McGill. She helped edit and format the final version of this booklet.

### **Victoria Pierre**

Victoria is a student in Biochemistry at Concordia University. She conducted interviews for the project.

### **Secola Phillip**

Secola is a Social Work student at McGill University. She worked on the layout and design of this booklet.

### **Christine Porterfield**

Christine is an Anthropology student at McGill University. In this project, she transcribed interviews, and helped to write the booklet.

### **Lizzette Soria**

Lizzette has a BA in Sociology at McGill University. For this project, she transcribed interviews.

### **Trudy Wong**

Trudy has a masters of Social Work at McGill University. She transcribed interviews for the project.



**Council for Black Aging  
Staff and Directors**

Elisée Faure

Catherine Orr

Pauline Nichols

Dennis Nurse

Oliver Cole

Eileen Collins

Dennis Bonaparte

Claire Kirven

(The late) Keith Charles

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