Foremothers of Black Women's Community Organizing in Toronto

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the nature of Black women's activism from 1950 to 1990 in Toronto, Ontario, as revealed in the oral testimony of Rella Braithwaite, Penelope Hodge, and Aileen Williams about the histories of the Canadian Negro Women's Association and the National Congress of Black Women of Canada. Black women's activism was crucial to the economic and political advancement of Black people in Toronto, and organizations developed by Black women activists contributed to nation-building in Canada.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine la nature de l'activisme des femmes noires de 1950 à 1990 à Toronto, en Ontario tel que révélé par les témoignages de Rella Braithwaithe, de Penelope Hodge et d'Aileen Williams au sujet des histoires de la *Canadian Negro Women's Association* et du *National Congress of Black Wommen of Canada.* L'activisme des femmes noires a été crucial à l'essor économique et politique de Noirs à Toronto, et les organismes développés par des activistes noires ont contribué à la construction d'une nation au Canada.

INTRODUCTION

Black women have been engaged in community activism in the province of Ontario since the birth of Canada as a national entity. In this essay, I explore the modern day beginnings of Black women's organizing in Toronto - organizations which grew from the work of mainly Canadian-born Black women who wanted to improve the conditions of Black people in Toronto, but which also made a valuable contribution to nation-building in Canada.

Up to now, Black women have been left out of historical discussions of nation-building. Their work as fugitive slaves, immigrants and as citizens has been ignored even though it has benefited the entire country. This paper explores the histories of two organizations, the Canadian Negro Women's Association (CANEWA) and the National Congress of Black Women of Canada (NCBWC), through the oral testimonies of Penelope Hodge, Aileen Williams and Rella Braithwaite, who were instrumental in developing the organizations and whose work offers a model for the development of other Black women's organizations in Toronto. I begin with brief biographical information on these three women in order to lend some understanding to who they are, and I look specifically at their work in CANEWA and their role in the birth of the National Congress of Black Women of Canada.

A LOOK AT THE WOMEN IN BRIEF

Penelope Hodge

Penelope Hodge was born in 1920 in Digby, Nova Scotia. Her ancestors have lived in Nova Scotia since the United Empire Loyalists settled in the province in 1783.[1] Hodge's mother, Alfaretta Berry, was a teacher and her father, Martin Anderson, was a Baptist preacher. She attended a segregated public school in Yarmouth.

Hodge first came to Toronto in 1945 after working as a teacher in Weymouth Falls, Nova Scotia, and then as a clerk in Ottawa. When Hodge migrated to Toronto she could not continue teaching because of Ontario provincial guidelines. Instead, she took a job as a clerk at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), worked her way up to the position of staffing officer and remained there for over thirty years, until her retirement in 1986. She served as CANEWA's treasurer, vice-president and, from 1956 to 1957, president. Hodge has also been an active member of the Ontario

Black History Society for several years. In addition, she has been the historian, for over 30 years, of the First Baptist Church, the oldest Black church in Toronto.[2]

Aileen Williams

Aileen Williams was born in 1924 in Toronto, where she attended the Duke of York Public School and graduated from Northern Secondary School. She recalls attending social gatherings at the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) at 355 College Street as a teenager.[3] At the First Baptist Church, another important place for Black youth during the 1930s to socialize, Williams was a frequent participant.

In 1949, Williams worked at Simpson's department store in Toronto. Thereafter she held jobs at Metro-Goldwyn Mayer Pictures of Canada, the CBC, and the Ontario Ministry of Revenue. Williams has served as the president of CANEWA on two occasions, 1953 to 1954 and 1973 to 1974. She has also been involved in the Ontario Black History Society, serving as its vice-president in the 1980s.

Rella Braithwaite

Rella Braithwaite was born in rural Ontario in 1923. She went to high school in Listowel, a small farming town just outside of Stratford, Ontario and came to Toronto in the late 1930s. Braithwaite, like Williams, remembers the gatherings at the UNIA building on College Street. After World War Two, she moved with her husband, Henry, to Scarborough where they raised six children. Braithwaite was an active member of the Scarborough School Board and also participated as the only Black member and one-time president of the Soroptimist Business Women's Club. Her championing of Black history led her not only to write books but also become involved in both educational projects and government committees.[4]

EDUCATION, FAMILY AND CHURCH EXPERIENCES

Braithwaite, Hodge and Williams were raised in the Canadian society of the 1930s and 1940s and they shared ideas of race and racism informed by stories of their ancestors' escape from American slavery. Therefore, their notions of resistance to oppression were forged through the examples of their ancestors who actively sought to find an unfettered space in which to live their lives. Through an examination of the educational, family, and church experiences of these women, one can uncover how their personal values have influenced their activism.

Penelope Hodge grew up in Nova Scotia in a segregated Black community. In the 1920s and 1930s there were very few employment opportunities for Black people. This meant that many Black Nova Scotians, including many of Hodge's family members, migrated to other parts of Canada or to the United States. The lack of job prospects among Blacks in Nova Scotia informed their views on higher education, and, according to Hodge, led to differing conclusions about the relevance of education for Blacks. One viewpoint saw higher education as a useless exercise because there were so few occupations open to Blacks. The competing viewpoint considered higher education as an important step towards the time when job prospects would improve.

Penelope Hodge's parents strongly supported the view that higher education might increase the possibility of better employment opportunities for their daughter and her mother made sure that she would remain on the "right" track in terms of staying in school. Hodge recalls:

> My mother taught school in the community. She taught me until I was ready to go to junior high school. My mother said, "you must have an education." And I think I can always remember when I was in high school - I once said to my mom, "I don't think I want to go back to school." Very straight face she says, "I know a lady who's

> wealthy who needs someone to clean." I thought, I don't want to do that. [laughs] I didn't say anything more about not going back to school. You know, she knew just how to divert me, so I stayed in school. I stayed in school.

By saying, "I know a lady who's wealthy who needs someone to clean," Hodge's mother encoded the historical knowledge that Black women who were uneducated could only get domestic work.

A person knowledgeable about the racist practices of segregation in Nova Scotia at the time can understand Hodge to mean that her mother taught at one of the segregated schools in the Black community. When Hodge was later schooled in a desegregated setting, her father emphasized the importance of "good" behaviour as a tool of survival. She elaborates in the following:

> I guess my father [pause] his theory was, you know, you've got to be the best you can be. And he always came down hard on behaviour. I always remember that he would say, "They remember us. It's unfortunate but that's the way it is - because of our colour." He was so right. I can go back to my home town - you know - years and years later and people [would] say, "Oh, you're Penny Anderson, I went to school with you." And I'd think, who are they? I don't remember you. They remember me. I was the only Black kid in school. So that was one of his lessons. Behaviour is very, very important. My father would say, "don't try to do what you see the white kids doing."

The underlying meaning in the text is that "good" behaviour was more important for Black boys and girls. In contrast, Hodge's white classmates' racial identity was not tied to a code of behaviour. Black girls, in particular, were taught that their racialized and gendered identity had specific meanings within the dominant discourse on race.

The dominant discourse on Black women's sexuality in North America has drawn on the myth of the promiscuous Jezebel.[5] To counter that negative stereotype, Hodge's strategy was to be the "respectable" Black girl with proper manners. The emphasis on good behaviour was an acceptance of the ideology of respectability. Furthermore, "proper behaviour" was a strategy of resistance to the dominant discourse's negative portrayal of Black women's/girls' sexuality.

As with Hodge and Williams, educational attainment was also stressed in Rella Braithwaite's family. She attended school with her white neighbours in a small Ontario farming community. But her prime difficulty was the cost of attending high school. She recalls:

> Although I was living in a rural area, they [her parents] did think education was important. I did have the opportunity to go to the town. It was quite an effort to go the town of Listowel and stay there all winter. I had to find room and board to be able to attend Listowel high school. But at the same time it was sort of like a culture shock for me because I lived in the country. To go to this town and high school - the high school seemed so big. And of course I was the only Black one in the high school.

The responsibility of Braithwaite's education was considered to be that of not just her parents but all the members of her family; for example, her elder brother paid for her room and board while she attended high school in Listowel. This belief that educating the youth within a family concerned all members of the family was a value shared by many. At times, the responsibility of educating young people would even extend to Black community members outside the immediate family.

Braithwaite's educational experiences were more subtly affected by race than Hodge's. For instance, in a discussion with Dionne Brand, Braithwaite comments on the reality of being the only Black student: "Being the only Black child in the school - O Mary! - I didn't function that well. Somehow I was not impressed with strangers: I just

didn't feel that comfortable."[6] In this passage it is not explicitly stated that Braithwaite was made to feel uncomfortable by her white classmates or by her teacher but the silence suggests that she endured some racism within this environment. At times, the women I spoke with found it difficult to verbalize painful experiences of racism. Perhaps a conscious effort to put aside memories of racist incidents is a strategy of "emotional" survival.

Aileen Williams, like Braithwaite, attended school along with her white neighbours in a small community in Ontario. She attended a four-year vocational program at Northern Vocational School in Collingwood and her dream was to become an interior decorator. However, a University of Toronto representative discouraged her progress. She remembers:

> I was in four-year vocational. I spoke to my head room teacher about the possibility of going on further. I was interested in taking on interior decorating. I had applied down at the University of Toronto and went down [to Toronto] for an interview. The young lady who was interviewing me - instead of trying to encourage me - which I didn't realize at the time that she was trying to discourage me - she went into great lengths about how expensive the course would be.

There are silences in this text around the racism that Aileen Williams confronted when she expressed her desire to continue her education at the University of Toronto. The anger and pain that she felt in response to this incident are buried within the narrative. It took her some time to understand that this was a racist incident. As a result of it, Williams' parents decided that their daughter should not pursue a career in interior decorating because they felt that she might encounter too much opposition within that occupation. Even though education was seen as very important to the families of the three women interviewed, they felt the impact of racism within an educational system which tended to limit their future employment choices.

EARLY FAMILY LIFE

Family life was crucial in forging the women as radical individuals because it provided them with critical thinking and other skills needed to survive in the face of racial and gender oppression. For example, Aileen Williams remembers when her family shifted from a working class situation to that of a middle-class environment:

> My dad had a regular job. My mom worked as a housekeeper and a cook until my father went into business for himself. He went into the washroom sanitation business. And then my mother looked after his books and she sent out his invoices and stuff like that. In the late 1930s I don't know if you would call that middle class. Everybody has their own interpretation. But I guess middle class or lower middle class.

Both of Williams' parents were responsible for the economic stability of the family. Historians have found that Black women are often very crucial to the economic viability of their family unit.

The perceived status of the Williams family and friends was very important to her self-definition. She recalls what it meant that most of the members in her personal circle had jobs: "I think most of my family's friends, if they had a job, they were doing well. They were happy - no not happy - they felt they weren't on welfare. I think there was a strong resentment for being on welfare."

Williams expresses relief that her family and friends "weren't on welfare." The employment records of Williams' family and friends work against the dominant discourse that "most" Black people are on welfare and unwilling workers. In Penelope Hodge's case, the place of her family and ancestors in Canadian history is important to her identity. She has been exasperated over the denial by some people of her full identity as a Canadian:

> That's why I'm always annoyed when

> people [whites] would say to me, "where did you come from?" "What island are you from?" When I first came here [Toronto] I got a lot of that. They would say, "where's your people from?" "Nova Scotia." "Where's your grandparents from?" "Nova Scotia." I didn't know anything beyond Nova Scotia. And of course my mother was a great historian. She knew the dates and everything. So we are really Canadians who have been here years and years, we really have! I'm a thorough Canadian my dear! I got so annoyed by the question, you know, "where'd you come from?" My mother said, "tell them you're an eighth generation Canadian."

The fury aroused by the repeated questioning of her place of origin is communicated effectively by Hodge.

The increasing number of Blacks who came each year to Canada during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, mainly from the Caribbean, has been utilized by those in the dominant group to maintain the fiction that even Blacks who are multi-generational Canadian are recent migrants. Hodge understands that underlying the question concerning her nationality is a challenge of her Canadian identity and her right to "Canadian-ness."

Hodge's parents were significant in developing and sustaining her self-defined Black womanhood. She states:

> I was that kind of person, I wanted to please my parents. Another thing my parents did, when I wanted to leave home, they never stood in my way. My father said the more places you can go - the more places you can visit. Take the opportunity. I run into parents here who don't like it when their daughters want to leave and go some place. That's so wrong. It really is! Because that's when you have to grow up, when you leave home, you sure do. That's when you have to take responsibility for yourself. Know how you behave and how you pay your rent and that kind of thing. You start to grow up. So I guess [for] my parents, [pause] education was number one. My parents were my role models. They really were.

Hodge believes that as a Black woman she should be financially and personally independent. Many Black feminist theorists have argued that Black women must be able to define themselves. For example, Patricia Hill Collins maintains that Black women activists must sustain "an independent consciousness as a sphere of freedom" in order to engage in various forms of resistance.[7]

Although Rella Braithwaite had a large extended family, her self-definition was attained in the white farming community of Listowel. However, she emphasizes that the members of her family were "respected" in the community and therefore experienced very little racism. She recalls:

> The rural community that I lived in was made up of immigrants from Ireland [and] Scotland and that's going back to the thirties because I was born in 1923. My father was a hard working man and my mother she just helped wherever she was needed. And she was mainly busy in the home. But they...When we look back now and think about our parents they sort of accepted things more so in regards to discrimination. They accepted things more than we would ourselves as we grew up. But we were in a nice community and we became involved in the United Church there. Actually we were highly respected but we were just one family [meaning one Black family]. We were one family in that community but we did have relatives. We were fortunate that we did have relatives that could come on weekends not that far away.

A suggestion here is that the singularity of Braithwaite's family minimized the racism that they might have experienced. On the other hand, the increasing number of Irish or Scottish immigrants

to small Ontario towns during the 1930s was not perceived to be a racial problem by native born whites. The issue of race is a *visible* factor in the lives of Canadian Blacks whereas it is not so for their white counterparts. Throughout her childhood, Hodge was reminded by her parents of the "meaning" of her social positioning and how to navigate, survive and surpass barriers of race and gender.

Adopting the ideology of respectability was a strategy of resistance to ensure the good reputation of Black women. The families of the three informants believed that respectable Black families and their daughters might be seen as being worthy of more opportunities within the whole society. And yet, the ideology of respectability was also a strategy of white women reformers who used it to exclude people of colour and "ethnic" groups from Canadian citizenship. In addition, some Black women activists have used the ideology of respectability as a tool to conform to a notion of Canadian citizenship as defined by the mainstream. Nonetheless, these women are from a long line of Black Canadians who were committed to the racial uplift of other Black Canadians.

THE CHURCH

The Black church was an important part of the early lives of Braithwaite, Hodge, and Williams. Many of the values upheld in their families, such as community responsibility, self-reliance and educational attainment, were echoed in church teachings. The Black church must also be seen as a vehicle through which many Blacks, women in particular, participated in the task of nation-building. The institution of the Black church provided many of the social supports that were wanting in Canadian society. Hodge remembers:

> The church has always been very strong among Black people because there were leadership roles in the church to be taken. You couldn't find it in politics and business and other places but it was in the church. So that's one reason - but I guess to Black people who have been suppressed for so long and had so many horrible things happen to you, the church teachings were important. There's going to be a better land - better - you believed in God because things had to get better somewhere along the line. Don't you think? Yeah I think that's what it was all about. I really really do...Caring for one another - I think it was a very big role in the Baptist church and still is. I think the Black community has always had a lot of self-help organizations, it always has. Whether it was the church [or]...

The model for community organizing and Black leadership, as Hodge points out, originated in the Black church since leadership opportunities in mainstream institutions were closed to Blacks.

Rella Braithwaite's parents believed that the church occupied an important place in their lives. As a young woman leaving home, Braithwaite was advised by her parents to find the church and then the community. She recalls:

> I went to the three different churches. The three main Black ones. I was involved in the African Methodist Episcopal. And then my sister...became a minister and she was busy with the British Methodist Episcopal. I would go to events at either one and also the Baptist because that was one place that the young people would meet. It's not that way these days but many people would meet and they would congregate sometimes outside the church before it started and after it was over.

During the interview, I further questioned Braithwaite on what other roles the church took on beyond concerns for its youth. She explains:

> Besides a meeting place, they did have organizations for the youth. And organized activities for the women. But I think as the Blacks moved out of the central area of the city it became more difficult to remain a member in the Black

> church. I know there were many families that made an effort even when they did move out to Scarborough. They made an effort to go back and be involved in the Black churches.

Individual members involved in organizing church projects became role models to young church goers who were able to see, first hand, Blacks as leaders. Braithwaite and Williams contend that in their youth, church member Mme. Brewton was their role model. Braithwaite recalls:

> She [Madame Brewton] and her husband operated a [salon] - he was a foot specialist, she was a hairdresser. They operated a place on Yonge Street in the early years [1930s] and that was remarkable. She was a wonderful person. She was involved in the church, more than one church. She started up a youth group, it was called the Young Men's Bible class. It soon had women and men. She was just so professional and then her having the business. She was American born. She seemed to be a very smart person. I did admire her and she would always give the youth advice too. She was one of the role models. There were others too. I can't recall them right now but I admired her.

THE CANADIAN NEGRO WOMEN'S CLUB/ASSOCIATION (CANEWC/A)

Rella Braithwaite, Penelope Hodge and Aileen Williams contend that the CANEWC/A emerged in 1951 from an existing group called the Dilettantes. The Dilettantes was a social club in which Black middle-class women congregated to organize bake sales, dances and garden parties. However, members of the Dilettantes also wanted to address social problems in the Black community.

Braithwaite, Hodge and Williams all agreed that Kay Livingstone was a significant figure in the creation of CANEWC/A. Williams explains:

> There was a dozen of us who were friends. We started to have a sort of a social group. It was purely a social club. We called ourselves the Dilettantes. Kay Livingstone came to town [from Ottawa] - to Toronto. She joined the group. She said this is a waste of time, we're just doing things socially, we're not doing anything that would make a difference. We have to get involved. She was very concerned. We had a meeting and she outlined some of the things we could possibly get involved in, and what we should be doing to help our youth and give them some stability. Give them some strength and encourage them. So we changed and we changed the name. Those who wanted a social group dropped out.

Kay Livingstone was concerned about the education of Black youth as well as other social issues facing Black people in Toronto in the 1950s. Her concerns led to the transformation of the Dilettantes into the Canadian Negro Women's Club (later Association). The stated purpose of the new organization was "to become aware of, to appreciate, and further the merits of the Canadian Negro."[8] The subsequent projects that were spearheaded by CANEWC/A reflected the new philosophy.

Kay Livingstone was born in London, Ontario, in 1918. Her parents were the founders of *Dawn of Tomorrow*, the first Black newspaper in Ontario,[9] which was geared to serve the Black community politically and socially. Livingstone was a professional television and radio actor. She had a radio show called the "Kay Livingstone Show" for CBC radio during the early 1950s. The show explored the traditions and cultural activities of Blacks in the diaspora around the world. Livingstone died suddenly in 1974 leaving behind a significant influence on a number of organizations, such as CANEWC/A, the National Congress of Black Women of Canada, and the Women's Section of the United Nations Association. She was the originator of the term "visible minority." In 1975, Hodge said, "Kay was

determined that minority groups should not be overlooked and it was she who coined the phrase 'Visible Minority Groups' which has been picked up and used so liberally in this past year by the media."

The term "visible minority" became an organizing tool which CANEWC/A members could use to challenge unfair institutional practices in education, policing and immigration. Although the term has become a contentious issue today, at the time of its inception it was seen as a "radical" descriptor of their location in Canadian society.

Livingstone also brought together talented Black women within CANEWC/A to strengthen the effectiveness of the organization, a group which included Penelope Hodge. Hodge describes the transformation of the Dilettantes' into CANEWC/A.:

> The first purpose we decreed was to become aware of and promote the merits of the Canadian Negro. Well, at that stage too, we realized that one of the keys was education. We really got involved in trying to encourage kids to stay in school. That was the thing that we were all about. To do that we had to raise money to give scholarships and bursaries. We realized ... that the War was over then, in the early fifties, and jobs were opening up, and we felt that we were never going to take our place in the community or the city if we don't have an education. Some of the men of course were coming back from the army or navy and were able to go back to school.

Hodge's first role in CANEWC/A was finding funds for the scholarships reserved for deserving Black students. She describes the efforts of members of CANEWC/A:

> It was the first big thing that we rallied around and tried to promote, and of course that involved us having to make money. And where was this money going to come from? There was no multiculturalism and there were no government grants. They just didn't exist. So if we were going to make money to help Joe Blow, we had to plan activities and raise the funds so we would have money to give them.

She contends that the annual June Ball which CANEWC/A members used to raise funds for scholarships was a "hangover" from the Dilettantes days. Nonetheless, CANEWC/A did originate Calypso Carnival (a precursor of the present day Caribana festival) which raised thousands of dollars in funds for Black youths' education in Toronto. This fundraising event celebrated and perpetuated a Black Caribbean cultural tradition. Many of the women who organized Calypso Carnival would later become committee members for the first Caribana in 1967.

Aileen Williams was also the president of CANEWC/A for two terms, from 1953 to 1954 and again from 1973 to 1974. She had formerly been a member of the Dilettantes and therefore took part in the transformation of the organization to a more socially conscious entity. Williams remembers her various roles in CANEWC/A:

> I was the President, the Secretary, the Treasurer. I was every position in the group but mostly the Secretary. Some of the girls were real activists. But we played that down because our main program, as we had specified in the beginning, was to encourage young people. We set up scholarships. We had different activities that involved young people. We had the Calypso Carnival that went for ten years and the money was used to go into our scholarship fund so that we could maintain it. We were involved in quite a few activities. We built a chalet in Ghana. Our members went to and joined in the Martin Luther King march.

Williams seems to have been instrumental in maintaining CANEWC/A's image and role as, firstly, a self-help organization and only secondarily an organization agitating for social change. However, Williams, through CANEWC/A,

was well aware of the Black political movements around the world and CANEWC/A members gave their support through raising funds or writing letters of protest.

The other focus of CANEWC/A was to educate all Canadians on the history of Blacks in Canada. Rella Braithwaite wrote speeches and books under the auspices of CANEWC/A particularly during its later years. In a presentation to George Brown College in 1976, she wrote: "As Blacks, as we grope towards new definitions of womanhood and manhood, this can no longer mean denying personal growth and identity. We must know our identity. For any race or nation to achieve recognition it has to have an identity. This identity will become a source of pride, because a country without a history is a country without a future." [10]

The combining of nation and race has been a focus of some radical Black thinkers. Braithwaite ties her self-definition to race and nation within the context of a Canadian past. She considers the history of Blacks in Canada as part of the untold story of the role Black Canadians played in nation-building. Braithwaite recognizes that Blacks have been doubly situated, simultaneously apart from the Canadian state and at the same time, intrinsically a part of Canada's past. Braithwaite, through the uncovering and writing of Black history in Canada, has attempted to reconcile Blackness within the Canadian state and to demonstrate the nation-building role that Black Canadians have played. One example is *Women of Our Times,* a history of Black women of Canada co-authoured by Rella Braithwaite and Enid F. Doyle in 1973 at the request of CANEWC/A members.

Braithwaite, along with other CANEWC/A members, believed that the development and dissemination of Black history in educational settings and throughout society would benefit Black youth as well as other Canadians. So, on March 14, 1958 CANEWA launched the first "Negro History week" in Canada.[11]

As the 1970s began, the members of CANEWA felt that Black women needed a national voice and in 1973 they organized the first National Congress of Black Women. Aileen Williams asserts that this increased politicization was necessary for three reasons: first, male dominated organizations, like the National Black Coalition, were not addressing Black women's concerns; second, the white feminists were ignoring issues of race and racism within the women's movement; and third, CANEWA members wanted to organize Black women nationally because they wanted Black women to have a broader political voice.

NEW BEGINNINGS: THE FIRST NATIONAL CONGRESS OF BLACK WOMEN AND THE CONGRESS OF BLACK WOMEN OF CANADA

The first National Congress of Black Women organized by CANEWA formed the basis for the creation of the National Congress of Black Women of Canada (NCBWC), held at the Westbury Hotel in Toronto on the weekend of April 6, 1973.[12] As president of CANEWA, Aileen Williams was crucial in orchestrating the first National Congress of Black Women. At its opening meeting, members attending the conference workshops passed a number of resolutions that would provide a framework for the formation of the National Congress of Black Women of Canada.

For example, in the first NCBWC report, conference members denounced Canada's immigration policies which discriminated against Black and Third World people. In particular, they denounced the Domestic Scheme which, since the early 1970s, gave only temporary resident status to Black women who wanted to immigrate to Canada.

They highlighted gender discrimination entrenched within the *Immigration Act* and called for an international effort to challenge Canada's immigration policy regarding Black women. A significant issue discussed at the First National Congress of Black Women was the problem of sexual abuse among single Black women. Conference members also defined what they perceived to be a pressing issue in education, that is, the need to create a curriculum of the contributions of the Black community in Canada. To assist school boards with this curriculum change, members of the First Congress were willing to lend their expertise by designing curriculum

materials on Black history. They further recommended the implementation of anti-racist training of teachers.

Members of the First Congress concluded that racism in schools was due to institutional structures, practices and training that were ultimately failing Black students. Even though they believed that the educational system held the responsibility for providing anti-racist training to teachers, Congress members were willing to participate in the training process.

Following the close of the First National Congress of Black Women, Rella Braithwaite was commissioned to write a book about Black women's history. And Williams, Braithwaite, and Hodge remained involved with the NCBWC throughout its crucial years of development.

CONCLUSIONS

The contributions that Rella Braithwaite, Penelope Hodge and Aileen Williams have made to Black women's organizing in Canada are still being felt. The National Congress of Black Women of Canada has remained a viable national voice that continues to address the issues of concern for Black women. In addition, other legacies from CANEWA are the Black History Month and Caribana celebrations. Both events have been crucial in the celebration of the diversity of "Blackness" in Toronto, and, in addition, have resulted in attention and monetary gains to the city for many years.

As nation-builders, Braithwaite, Hodge and Williams created organizations within their communities that would benefit members of the Black community as well as society as a whole. Black women activists' ability to look within their organizations and communities to address settlement issues has also meant that they have not relied solely on the Canadian provincial and federal governments to provide jobs and educational opportunities. The work of these women must be viewed as part of the continuing process of nation-building.

ENDNOTES

1. Sylvia Hamilton. "Naming Names, Naming Ourselves: A Survey of Early Black Women in Nova Scotia", in Peggy Bristow, comp., *'We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up': Essays in African Canadian Women's History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994, pp. 13-40.

2. Penelope Hodge. "The Underground Railroad: The Story of How the First Baptist Church Began", November 1994, papers of the Ontario Black History Society (OBHS); and Sheldon Taylor, "First Baptist Church One Hundred Fifty-Fifth Anniversary, 1826-1981", Souvenir Booklet, papers of the Ontario Historical Society.

3. The building at 355 College Street was owned by the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) during the 1930s: Peter Edwards, "Black History Looms Large at Busy Corner", *The Toronto Star*, January 26, 1998, B3.

4. Premier of Ontario, William G. Davis to Rella Braithwaite, 17 December 1975, Toronto, personal papers; and Alan Hamilton, "Rella Braithwaite Appointed for Multicultural Committee", *Contrast* 8.5 (6 February 1976): 1.

5. Patricia Morton. *Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American Women.* New York: Praegar, 1991.

6. Dionne Brand. *No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Working Women in Ontario 1920s to 1950s.* Toronto: Women's Press, 1991, p. 225.

7. Patricia Hill Collins. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics Of Empowerment.* New York: Routledge, 1990.

8. Lawrence Hill. *Women of Vision: The Story of the Canadian Negro Women's Association, 1951-1976.* Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1996, p. 14.

9. Penelope Hodge. "A Tribute to Kathleen Livingstone", 27 July 1975 for the Canadian Negro Women's Association, papers of the Ontario Black History Society, (OBHS).

10. Rella Braithwaite, presentation to George Brown College, Toronto, 1976, personal papers; Rella Braithwaite, presentation to George Brown College, Toronto, 1976; Rella Braithwaite, "African Canadian Women in Eastern Canada: A Brief Historical Overview", conference speech for the Ontario Multiculturalism History Society of Toronto, 1990, personal papers; and Rella Braithwaite, "Black History in Ontario", speech for Centennial Rouge United Church Highland Creek, Ontario, 17 November, 1991.

11. Aileen Williams wrote a number of letters about "Canadian Negro History Week" to the media in Toronto: Mrs. Aileen Williams, to Mr. John Dalrymple, Managing Editor of *Liberty Magazine*, January 14, 1959, papers of CANEWA; Mrs. Aileen Williams, to Mrs. Doris McCubbin Anderson, Editor of *Chatelaine*, January 14, 1959, papers of CANEWA; Doris McCubbin Anderson, Editor of *Chateline* to Aileen Williams, January 14, 1959, papers of CANEWA; Mrs. Aileen Williams, to Mr. Ralph Allen, Editor of *MacLean's*, January 14, 1959, papers of CANEWA; and Photo: [Negro History Week] "Examining Program", *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, March 17, 1958.

12. Canada's First Congress of Black Women, 28 February 1973, The Canadian Negro Women's Association, Toronto, personal papers of Penelope Hodge; and Report of the First National Congress of Black Women, The Canadian Negro Women's Association, April 6th-8th 1973, Toronto, papers of the OBHS.