

Derailed: The History of Black Railway Porters in Canada Video Transcription

- Thank you everyone for joining us today for the quarantine edition of our Myseum Intersections program, "Derailed: The History of Black Railway Porters in Canada." My name is Joshua Dyer, I'm the director of marketing here at Myseum of Toronto. To be honest, usually I have a script that I follow for these introductions. However, I don't think we can have this discussion we're about to have today without reflecting on some of the recent events and protests over the past week that stem from racism and systemic violence against the black community. Our team here at Myseum is incredibly proud of the work we do in remembering, commemorating, honoring the histories of Toronto's diverse communities, and not shying away from the difficult conversations or difficult realities and injustices that are a part of our history. I personally feel that museums are not neutral spaces, in that we have a responsibility to educate ourselves and our audience and our community about past and present injustices. I believe we have a responsibility to amplify the voices of those that are victims to injustice, and we must listen to their stories, learn from their struggles, so that we can work together to uproot deep-seated iniquities that continue to exist in our society. It is only through confronting our past that we can chart a path forward. With that said, today's event is a Myseum of Toronto initiative presented with the support of the City of Toronto and the Ontario Black Historical Society. It was originally slated to be a part of our Myseum Intersections Festival in April. That program was being presented with support by Union Station, the Toronto Railway Museum, and Mayworks. And we do intend to present the live version of this program in the near future or next year. In light of the postponement of our festival due to COVID-19, we've been working with the artists and organizers of each project to reimagine how we might collaborate, work together to post and share their events online, as a part of the quarantine edition of our Intersections Festival. We're incredibly grateful for the cooperation we've received from partners and panelists and the support from our community. When we first pivoted to online programming we really weren't sure what to expect, and we've been incredibly surprised by how engaged our audiences have been and how impactful some of the conversations we've been able to post through digital programming have been. With that said, I would like to thank everyone again for joining us today. That includes our moderator, our panelists, for sharing their time and insight, and for the Ontario Black Historical Society and City of Toronto for supporting this initiative. Lastly, if you find today's discussion relevant or impactful and would like to participate in future Myseum programs, I encourage you to check out our website, subscribe to our newsletter, or follow us on social media to stay in the loop and stay tuned with what's coming up next. So thanks again everyone for joining. I'd like to now introduce our moderator today, Cheryl Blackman. Cheryl is the Director of Museums and Heritage Services with the City of Toronto. She is responsible for all ten city-owned and operated historical museums in the City of Toronto. So I'll hand things over to Cheryl. Again, thanks everyone for joining.

- So bear with me for one second, folks, while I get my audio to come back online. It's for some reason not wanting to come back up. So good afternoon, everybody. I'd like to thank Josh for that kind welcome, and certainly I couldn't agree more that museums are not neutral. This is a really important time in the lives of everybody in Canada and the world, and museums have to play a role in storytelling and making sure that the voices of many are amplified versus the voices of few. So I'd like to begin by just acknowledging the land that Myseum and the Toronto History Museums is situated on as the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, the Wendat peoples, and it is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples. I also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit. I acknowledge all treaty peoples, including those who came here as settlers, as migrant, either in this generation or in generations past, and those of us who came here involuntarily, particularly as a result of the transatlantic slave trade. I would like to also ask for us to hold George Floyd and Regis Korchinski-Paquet in our thoughts. And before we actually dive into our conversation I would ask that we take a moment of silence to remember these two souls and the tragic ways that they passed. So I'm gonna pause for a moment while we reflect. Thank you. So in my role as Director of Museums and Heritage Services for the City of Toronto History Museums, we are actively reimagining Toronto's many histories, its past, its present, and its future. Our new program narrative states that the histories you'll experience here are not tales penned by a select few, they are tales and stories written by the many who shape them. They are as diverse as the perspectives and the experiences of our people, and we are many. We hope that you will see amazing and appalling objects, taste sweet and bitter flavors, hear laughter and lament, touch the silky and the prickly edges of our history, and that we'll meet at the intersections of countless viewpoints that will leave you inspired about this place that we call Toronto. I'm honored today to be joined by four amazing members of the black community. I had the privilege of meeting with them and chatting with them about this web experience, and I really am in awe of all the depth of knowledge and passion that they share for storytelling, and in particular storytelling that is focused on the black community and black Canadians. So I'd like to start by introducing our panel. We're joined this afternoon by Cecil Foster. Cecil is a leading author, academic, journalist, and public intellectual. Meghan Swaby is an actor and playwright born and raised in Toronto. Natasha Henry is a Ph.D. candidate in history at York University, and Natasha is the President of the Ontario Black History Society. And Peter Bailey, who is an actor who resides in Toronto. You will find their detailed bios in the chat, and certainly I'm really honored to be moderator today, and I welcome you to this conversation. So in order to kind of dive in and get started, we really must reflect on what's happening in the world today, and in particular in the last 10 days with the loss of George Floyd and Regis Korchinski-Paquet. So let me start with a simple question. I just wanted to know how each of you are doing, and I'll start by asking that question to Cecil.

- Well, thank you Cheryl, for asking the question. And welcome to everyone who's joining us for this discussion, and I want to start by saying that it's a privilege to be participating in this initiative by the Myseum and everyone else that's involved. I think I'm doing pretty well. I am missing everyone as I can't get out and meet them, and particularly, in particular I'm missing

my grandkids. So I can't get across the border as much as I would like to. But otherwise I think I'm doing well.

- Meghan, how are you doing?

- I feel like it fluctuates minute to minute a little. But it's been, I've been speaking a lot to my sister, she lives in the States in Grand Rapids. And on her drive in to downtown she had all these, you know, military trucks following her, and she's like, "This is my drive." And just sort of, yeah, I feel like, I don't know, I don't have a word for it yet. But right now in this moment, I'm really excited about this panel, and seeing all these faces and seeing that there's so many people that are eager to join in and witness this panel. So in this moment right now, excited and really looking forward to the conversation.

- Great. Natasha, how are you today? How are you feeling?

- Hi, good afternoon everyone, hi Cheryl. I'm doing well today. In, similar to what Meghan was just saying, you know, the feelings and the emotions do fluctuate, you know, from a range of feelings of sadness and anger, but having these opportunities here to build community and be part of community in a virtual capacity today is really something that gives me strength and motivation.

- So Peter, hearing, you know, the feelings of the fellow panelists, how are you feeling today?

- You know, I was numb. By Friday I was numb. And not having words to describe, you know, my rage and all that kind of stuff. Lost all words, and I feel like I've been obviously blessed to have the opportunity to work with Myseum and some other folks, and that's been restorative for me. So yeah, I don't really have words for anybody. I just, I'm working through right now. Like Meghan, these are the restorative things that's kind of been a balm in this period. But yeah, that's where I'm at.

- And thank you all for that. You know, I think it's really important right now that everybody understand the heartbreak that is being shared collectively across the black community, and across the world with allies who are supporting as we go through these really dark days, not only looking at what's happening with COVID-19 and the way that it's impacting black communities, the elderly, and people living on the margins, but also seeing the level of injustice that we've been witnessing over the last 10 days. So I'd like to start our discussion with a reflection on issues in the present time. Comments were made this past Tuesday by our premier, who, when asked about protests in the city, cities across America sparked by the death of George Floyd, said, "Thank god that we're different than the United States "and we don't have the systemic deep roots "that they have for years." Do you agree with the way that Doug Ford characterized racism in Canada, Cecil?

- No, I don't, and I wonder when I read that if his brother, his late brother would have even agreed with him when he said that. Because the history of racism is the same right across the hemisphere. There's no difference, and I am currently, I'm doing some research on the book that I'm writing on multiculturalism, which traces the roots that racism was there from the very beginning. And certainly the suggestion that Canada is different from the United States is one of the narratives that have been perpetuated on us for a long time, and which we rarely have to engage and debunked. Indeed, in 1867 the Canada that was being set up, the institutions and the agencies, were no different from what was envisioned for what would have happened if the South would have won the Civil War, in which they would have set up an all-white state. And we know that that continued well into the 1960s, before we got into the kind of discussion we're gonna have today, where people like those porters that we are gonna talk about, decided enough is enough. And if that seemed to resonate with what the young folks are saying on the street today, that enough is enough, they were saying back then in the 1950s and 1960s, enough is enough. Let's start with a new morality, let's steer Canada in a different direction, and indeed, let's turn what I hope that the Premier was thinking about, that Canada set off on a distinctly different track. But the history is the same, and the convergent points are about the same.

- So Natasha, the Ontario Black History Society, what does your kind of leadership and your experience show you about the characterization of racism in Canada?

- Well, it's, part of the Canadian narrative, this idea of Canadian exceptionalism as it relates to either the enslavement of African people and indigenous people, you know, a history of deep-seated anti-black racism that was upheld by the highest courts in different provinces and in the country. And so, you know, part of the work that we've been doing for just over 42 years, is really working to correct that narrative, in a way that really reflects the agencies of African Canadians in terms of pushing for change and making a difference. And so when we talk about, you know, some of the things that are celebrated as part of Canada's history and part of Canada's narrative today, things such as the Human Rights Code and open immigration, as Cecil was just mentioning, these things came about because of the activism of people of African descent here in Canada. And so some of the work that we do is around education for the general public, and particularly developing resources and offering programs for young people to, you know, learn a more accurate representation of Canadian history.

- So Meghan, as a thespian and a writer, have you felt the unique difference that, you know, was articulated in the former sentiment about the characterization of racism in Canada?

- Oh, absolutely. When I saw that headline I, just laughing and speaking to my mother about, like the racial gaslighting, and that followed up by a lot of the sort of theater companies and arts organizations that are predominantly white spaces in terms of their admin and in terms of their programming, you know, showing these signs of solidarity when everyone has, you know, myself with a lot of other black folks have stories of feeling, stories of violence, really, you know, of microaggressions, of all of these things. And so it was just really sort of keeping in line with

this, again, this narrative of, well, Canada's not as bad, that doesn't happen here. And, so it's sort of consistent with how some people hold up this myth of what Canada is, but you know, for people who know the truth, it has been, and hasn't, this didn't just start this week, and it's something that it's now like, okay, so what are the actions behind it? So even Doug Ford, I believe he's had another comment along the lines of, "Okay, maybe I was wrong" or something. He should maybe read Cecil's book. You know, it's like all, it's also I think a slap in the face to all of the incredible work that, I mean people of this panel have done, and activists and people who've come before in terms of educating and putting in place the policies that are in place today. So I just see that as such a direct, like such a sort of disgraceful comment. 'Cause it sort of tries to negate all of the work that's been done.

- So Peter, you know, as a black man, as an actor, as somebody who has a very vast body of work, when you hear people characterize racism as being uniquely different, or not even existing, whether they walk it back or not, how does that kind of resonate with you?

- It points to the lack of education and the miseducation. It reminds me of being in history class in high school and not being interested in Canadian history in grade nine, and I'm realizing it's because they didn't tell me the truth. And there were literally chapters in the books that we had that we skipped over, that did deal with that. I clearly remember that, and asking teachers, "Why are we skipping over this section?" It's not in the curriculum. McGraw Hill, it's all tied to money. And until we actually start rooting there, so for me it just pointed to the lack of education, and deliberately so, systematically so. And we have to really acknowledge that. That's by design, not by accident.

- And if I can just chime in there with what Peter's saying in terms of the design, you know, something that I say all the time, and that people who are listening here will know what I'm gonna say, there continues to be nothing in the Ontario curriculum that all students in Ontario have to learn about our 400 year presence of African peoples here in Canada. And again, that is intentional. And so that is one example of systemic anti-black racism that continues to be ongoing. And so, you know, when we have people who, such as the Premier or the Prime Minister or other people who have a public platform, you know, gaslighting or talking about, or just, you know, willful ignorance, we have, or the educational system, has to, is responsible for producing some of these, and reproducing some of this, right, this level of ignorance and misinformation around, whether it's black experiences, racism, or colonization. And so, you know, it really is overdue in terms of, you know, attention being paid through the curriculum.

- So I think this is a nice opportunity for us to segue, Cecil, to you maybe sharing a reading from your book, "They Call Me George: The Untold Story of Black Train Porters." Could you bless us with your words, please? You're muted still.

- Yeah, and indeed this is timely, because the story that I want to talk about and the excerpt I want is to bless us in the moment of now and to think back on what it was like back in the 1950s, where history bring us to a point, but we know that life continues, and we have to

gesture to the future. So I'll give a very short reading about what those porters were thinking about: In the spring of 1954, a sleeping car was chartered for porters, former porters and their allies, to visit Ottawa for a protest. The group's mission: to change the country. With the exception of a few allies, most prominently members of Canadian Jewish communities, these protesters were very much on their own. They were demanding new thoughts and new actions about who could become a Canadian citizen, a status to which in practice only white British subjects were entitled. The porters wanted to shift the country, move it toward a future that would be very different from the one Canada had established for itself through its plans and policies. Historically, Canada had been created as a white country, exclusively for the habitation and benefits of people of European ethnicities. The porters' alternate Canadian model was one that no other European settlement in the hemisphere had attempted: a new nation-state created out of all the peoples of the world, a country of equality where specific ethnic groups would not have all the privileges and others none, and where every member of society had an unhindered opportunity to rise to the best of their own ability and imagining. The Canada the train porters protesters were proposing and envisioning would be a country based on inclusiveness and diversity, one where race would not matter. It would be a modern country in which ethnic mongrelization of diversity would be natural, where the various peoples of the world mixed freely with the indigenous people on whose land these hemispheric colonies, dominions, and even independent republics were constructed. It was a model for a universal brotherhood, as it was called in the day, with all of humanity sharing the same collective dignity and sense of fraternity. And I will stop there.

- [Cheryl] Cecil, thank you so much for that. And I think, you know, Peter, I'm wondering how that reading resonates with you in light of what you shared in your earlier remarks.

- You know, it's, you know, the conception of multiculturalism, you know, and Canada, you know, multiculturalism versus the melting pot, you know. But it's still, I'm reminded of the sense that it's still aspirational, we haven't accomplished that yet, just like the States hasn't accomplished, you know, equality across the board. And it reminds, it's something aspirational, to aspire to. But something as, like I was saying, it's a destination, we haven't arrived there yet. So a comment like Rob, like what Rob did, we're patting ourselves on our back for something we actually haven't done. And that's something we have to face, maybe not people that look like us, 'cause we know that truth, but that's something that white Canadians have to face. I mean, a couple years ago there was, on the Toronto Star, describing and admitting that we lied about a particular treaty, that Canada lied, and it was on the front of Toronto Star. And it was like, it just disappeared into the consciousness. But if Canadians are gonna, actually gonna make change and accomplish multiculturalism, we have to face those truths. And that's the thing that resonated with me, what Cecil just read.

- Absolutely, and Natasha, I think, you know, Peter very powerfully and clearly is really pointing out the impact of erasure. You know, so in terms of Cecil's reading, how does your work really begin to address that challenge of erasure?

- Is that to me?

- [Cheryl] To Natasha.

- Oh, sorry.

- The erasure of black experiences, of black presence, takes place at many different stages. And so we could go back to, if we're talking about the process of producing historical narratives, could go back to the archives and the practices of archives, whose stories are taken in into archival spaces and collected, right? And then from there, those, the materials that are there are then the ones that are used to produce particular narratives. So the archives that we, the official archives that we rely on for historical narratives as relates to Canadian history, are colonial narratives. And these are stories that, and records that belong to the elite, the upper class, politicians and military, and so there's a history of, you know, these spaces not taking in collections as it relates to black history. And so you have people who, as a result, or you know, even just to preserve history, we have individuals who have gathered these stories. So we have older people who have clipped newspaper articles, and who have, you know, recordings on VHS, for example. So you have individuals who have also archived black stories. And so, you know, come in, you know, here comes the Ontario Black History Society, where we have a group of community members from the, you know, black Canadians, who were very concerned about what their children were not learning about, and concerned about, you know, the record-keeping, the collective record-keeping as it relates to black history. And so the Ontario Black Historical Society was born out of that. And so that's a real, strong mandate of ours is to preserve and to gather, to collect these stories, whether it's interviews, whether it's, you know, through exhibits, through different artifacts, and you know, paper records. This is important work, and this, you know, serves as a counter-narrative to the dominant narrative that silences and erases black experiences.

- So Meghan, as a, you know, in the work that you're doing, writing plays, and you hear Natasha talking about the gaps in the facts, how does that impact your ability to be a storyteller, when you hear Cecil talk about, you know, and read about that chapter, that excerpt from the book?

- Absolutely. It's interesting, there's, just want to shout-out Amanda Parris, 'cause she's done so much wonderful work and is an artist herself, but a lot of those spotlight articles she's been issuing called "Black Light," and you know, did a spotlight on black filmmakers and the history of that as well as, you know, female black playwrights. And just thinking of the lack of documentation, and when we're looking at in theater, oftentimes in general with Canadian playwrights it can be rare to get a second production of something, and so you think of the sort of lifespan, or whether things are published, and how that trickles down into, you know, within these training institutions, when students are looking for monologues, and where, when they're depending sometimes on what they're being given by professors, and there is, you know, it's void of monologues that they connect with, or taking that extra step and having to,

like scour and find those things. And so there's that, in terms of the lack of documentation, in terms of performance, and that it's there, but like Natasha was saying, sometimes it's those individuals, those individuals that are cutting out the newspapers, and also that, the oral history of that, and how storytelling isn't always documented. So I find that that is also, presents another challenge. And some may see it as, if it's not documented then it's somehow less legitimate. And so I think that is a constant challenge. And of course now it's, we all have cameras and things on our phones, that that is gonna rise to where everything's sort of, maybe even over-documented. But then you have algorithms that push certain things through and whatnot. So it's always coming up as an issue that I think is important to be aware about as creators, storytellers, performers. Yeah.

- So I think, you know, that's a really important point that you make there, and Cecil, I'm wondering, you know, about all the things that you're hearing, and just what, you know, when you were thinking about writing a book called, you know, "They Call Me George," and telling the story, "The Untold Story of Black Train Porters, what would be the thing that actually motivated you to look in that direction?

- Well, I have always been fascinated by the story of the black men who built Canada. I spent quite a bit of my time as a reporter, and some people might recall my reporting niche from the Global Mail, the Star, the Financial Post, and elsewhere, and I was always fascinated by the stories about Canada and the building of Canada. And especially when I was a transportation writer, and I would write about VIA Rail and transcontinental travel, and the story that Canada was built around this ribbon of steel. And I was fascinated by that, but the more I researched, I found that very often nothing was said about the people who actually worked the trains, and that's when I really became enamored, and of course I got to meet some of the older porters, and got to find out about their story, about how difficult it was, but in a sense, and I want to borrow one of the words that Peter said, that was aspirational. But it was also inspirational, because out of it they set themselves goals, but they also look among themselves and inspired themselves. The notion that they belonged in Canada, the notion that they are Canadian, the notion that the Canada of the future would find those two things incontrovertible, and would be accepting of those things, it was at the same time aspirational, as something that they wanted, but it was inspirational in the way that they went about doing it.

- So you know, Meghan, I think I'm curious because we talked a little bit earlier about, you know, the Premier's comments. And certainly yesterday, to the speaker, the Premier did go on to say that, you know, that not only just in the black community, a lot of minority communities throughout the history of Ontario and Canada have faced racism. And he also acknowledged that he has never walked a mile in someone's shoes that has faced racism, and I'm grateful for that acknowledgement. When you, when we're talking about just the choices of telling a story, understanding that the environment doesn't always acknowledge the story that you're telling, how does that kind of motivate you to move forward?

- It's funny, there's that part of my brain that's like, "I'm gonna make you remember." I think that motor is definitely what I would say like sparked sort of the drive to even want to decide to, you know, to be an artist. Instantly seeing that there were less people who look like me on stages. Like, for some reason that was a motivation in and of itself to, okay, well. And same with writing, if it's, and a lot of, like the work that I write, and even the work that I love and consume in terms of other playwrights' stories center black bodies, and I think there's just like an insatiable hunger for that. Because I just don't see it as much as you would like to. And it has increased, and there's more of it, but you know, that to me is, in terms of the environment, there's also the fatigue of that. Right, the exhaustion of the constant wanting to, like almost having to justify your existence. You know, and writing oneself into existence. I think that is the thing that is perpetually, like the motor that is absolutely the motivation for saying yes to certain projects and no to others, or writing, and as a performer.

- So I think it's really interesting. I think part of our experiences about acknowledging that we see each other, and one of our members of the audience today in chat shared that their great-uncle, who is now 100 years old, and their deceased uncle Malcolm Street, were both porters in Canada, and that's just really exciting and exceptional to have somebody who's in the audience right now listening to this who actually feels that deep connection to actual personal history. So thank you for sharing that point that you were making.

- And can I comment on that, because I saw that note as well.

- Yes, please.

- And I knew Malcolm, indeed I consider him to be a friend. And when I worked at the Globe and Mail I remember hanging out with him around Toronto. And at that time, he was with VIA Rail. So I tip my hat to Malcolm, and Malcolm to me as well symbolizes the Diasporic aspect of what we're talking about. Because even though he was from Cape Breton, and in that small Barbadian community in Cape Breton, he counts himself a very much Caribbean person as well as a member of the Pan-Africanist movement. So I learn a lot from Malcolm, and I do remember him often, and I remember him fondly.

- Yeah. It is so important that we see each other and that we acknowledge each others' presence, so I really appreciate that comment. So you know, Natasha, if we go back 103 years to 1917 when black Canadian sleeping car porters John A. Robinson, J.W. Barber, B.F. Jones and P. White formed the first black railway union in North America and secured rights for black men in the workplace, what would life have been like in Ontario for these men at that time?

- In 1917, we were just coming off of, you know, World War I, and Canada was a segregated place. Cecil had talked about earlier, you know, the development of this idea of the nation, right, of the nation-state of Canada, was about this great white country, the Great White North. And so people of African descent were not part of that. And the definition of what Canada was, or what they were, the definition that they were developing, was predicated on the exclusion

of, and the restrictions placed on African Canadians. So and at that time, you would see how that played out in the lives of railway porters. Black men who served in World War I had served in primarily in a racially segregated, right, battalion, the No. 2 Construction Battalion. And they were not welcome to fight on the front lines, because their white colleagues did not want to fight beside them. And so hence the work that they had to do to gain a laboring, a labor force for the nation, once again, in the war. And then these men would come back and face racial segregation. Hugh Burnett talked about, or this was in World War II, but some of these men talked about, you know, being denied service, they talked about, you know, residential segregation. At that time there were still some racially segregated schools in Ontario and in Nova Scotia. And so we have this entrenched, you know, anti-blackness that the black communities were facing across Canada. And in 1917, just a few years prior the federal government, you know, intended to restrict the immigration of African-Americans from Oklahoma. These people were trying to take advantage of the free land, I put in quotes, to settle out West. And the federal government instituted, wanted to institute a one-year ban on black immigration into Canada at that time. And so, you know, it really speaks to some of the structural barriers that the black communities faced. But then when we take a look at, you know, the stories of these men and their families, we really get an appreciation for who these people were as individuals, who these people were as part of black communities, and better understand, you know, their lives and their experiences, their contributions, and really present a fulsome story. And so it really is important to put a name to some of these experiences, which Cecil does through, you know, through his book.

- Thank you for that, Natasha. And in fact, another one of our audience members just shared that their uncle from Nova Scotia, who is also 100 years old, is Denzel Braffitt. So that's, you know, really, it's amazing that we have this presence today, Cecil, and I feel like, you know, you've really called the ancestors to come to this call through the people who are not only panelists, but who are listening. So talk to me a little bit about who these men were. Where did they come from? How did they end up in these jobs? Were these jobs kind of fitting of their station?

- I like to stay with the name Brathwaite, indeed with a Barbadian pronunciation it would have been said as Brathwaite. Because much of this story begins with a guy named John Brathwaite out of Nova Scotia, who in fact had been born in Barbados, spent some time working on the Panama Canal, ended up in Nova Scotia, and of course at that time the only job that was available to black men was working on the railway. And he spent his life working on the railroad. And when he retired, he wanted his granddaughter in Barbados to come and spend some time with him. And when he applied for a visa for her, he got back the standard statement that said, look, this young woman is coming from a tropical country, she is black, and black people cannot survive in Canada. So no, for her good, we are not going to allow her into Canada. And of course they had heard that story so often for almost 100 years before. And this was at the point when he and many of the porters really got angry. They used that as the test case. They got a member of the CCF at that time to take the issue to Parliament, and as a result they started to put pressure on the government. Then we have a followup for this is Stan

Grizzle and others, where Stan is doing all of the major research and feeding it to the CCF to prove that there is nothing, no credibility in any of the arguments that the government is making that black people could not survive in Canada, because most of all there were the porters who were black, and who were in Canada. And that was the beginning of the story. That was the beginning of the narrative. And out of that, they got the strength. So I take my hat off to the Brathwaites, who in fact are responsible for a lot of what happened and what become ultimately multiculturalism in Canada.

- Thank you for that. So Natasha, I understand, 'cause Cecil just mentioned Stanley Grizzle, I understand that the OBHS has some artifacts. Can you share a little bit about what you may have brought with us, brought to share with us today?

- Yes, absolutely. So at the Ontario Black History Society, we do have a collection of materials donated to us over time. And more recently, through Stanley Grizzle's estate, he donated to us a few artifacts. And so we are really delighted and honored to be recipients of these items, and in effect, stewards of some of this history. So I just wanted to share some of these items. Here is a book, a signed copy of Stanley Grizzle's book, "My Name's Not George." And you know, I chose to show this today because it's one aspect of, you know, the importance of writing our own stories and documenting our own stories. Here, Stanley Grizzle's, you know, story is documented in his own words. A really important contribution to Canadian and black Canadian history. The next item, and oh yeah, that's the cover of his book. The next couple of items, here is a cap. It was his porter, one of his porter caps. And again, this is something that speaks to his experience as a sleeping car porter and, you know, part of their job was to be dressed meticulously in their uniform. And this is one of his caps. The item here, there's his gavel as well. If you could just go back one quick second. That is also his gavel. Stanley Grizzle was the first black Canadian citizenship court judge, and this is the gavel that he used in the court for some time. The next image is an image of Stanley Grizzle with the Honorable Lincoln Alexander. And, you know, just looking at, you know, his involvement in the political arena there, and he was also very active in the labor movement as well, you know, not just with the formation of the sleeping car porters union. But he was also very active in the labor movement as well. And here he is with the Honorable Lincoln Alexander as well. And if you could just go to the picture in the next, the following image, this is a postcard that was part of the collection, that his daughter, one of his daughters, Stanley Grizzle's daughters, sent to him from the United States. And in the note she records that she saw this image, this postcard, and immediately thought of her father, that it would be something of interest to him. The image is of black women who were working as, on the railways, and they were working, let's see here, I just wanted to make sure I get this right. So these women were working and they would shovel some of the coal and all of that as it related to the railway. And if you can go back to the back of the postcard. Why I chose to share this image as well is because in the story of the sleeping car porters, the men, of course the porters were men, you know. But there's also a huge story behind, or beside these men, and that of their wives and the women in their lives and the roles that black women played in the movement that the porters were part of. So, you know, there were women who were part of the Ladies Auxiliary, for example, who did a lot of community

work and held a lot of social events. And here is, with the image of the postcard, it also pays attention to the employment situation that black women faced during that particular time. So, you know, coming out of the history of enslavement, black women primarily and continued to work as domestics. Right, that was, they were very limited in their employment opportunities. And so here at the back of the postcard it just gives a brief description of, you know, that 90% of women, of black, were working either as domestics or on the farm, and that, you know, when the war happened, that few opportunities came for black women to work either in factories or in other industries such as we see in this image here. So it's, you know, it's also important to represent, you know, that relational history between black men and women during that time, through the stories of the porters.

- So I think that's really an important point. And I see, you know, we have another comment in our chat, just from a female who's a third generation of railway workers, and up to just recently, in the last year, 31 years was involved with the railways. And so this opportunity to hear the names being spoken again, really does actually create impact for this audience member as well. So thank you. And I think, you know, I guess for Cecil, I'm wondering, you know, when we talk about "They Call Me George," and we're trying to create some context for folks who really don't understand, you know, what porters were called, and just that way that they lived under the kind of, the auspices of a deeper, darker kind of history, and in particular George Pullman. Maybe you could tell a little story about George Pullman and how, you know, porters, the black porter experience kind of came to be.

- Wonderful, and I'm glad that we had that picture of Stanley's book, "My Name is Not George." Because that typified how people like Stan and others felt, they absolutely hated that name. The idea of porters will go back to about the 1860s, after the end of the American Civil War, and the emancipation of the slaves. This guy, George Pullman, came up with this idea that what he would do is to allow people to stay on the railroads and make it possible that they can travel right across North America without ever getting off. Until then, what would happen is that people would travel for about eight hours, get off and go and stay at a hotel overnight, and then come back in the morning and resume their travel. And as a result, it would take them about a week or longer to get from the Atlantic to the Pacific or the Pacific to the Atlantic. So he came up with this idea that he would let people stay on the trains and let them sleep. And to do that, he would create what was the equivalent of an antebellum society in the South. He would get black people to live and take care and to do good housekeeping. And that's what the porters were. Indeed, when the union was started to set up the sleeping car porters union, it was called the International Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids, because those were the jobs that were available to black people. So the black men were in fact maids on the trains. And they worked, and as good housekeepers, made sure that when you got on that you were well received, that your beds were turned down at night and turned up in the morning, that they were at your beck and call, that they provided a box for your hat, that they polish your shoes at night, and made sure that you really lived in luxury. Now while all of that was happening, most of them had to indicate that the car in which they were working on were under their administration. So you would see their name. But nobody ever called them by their

names. They were simply called Boy, which was the normal thing to address black people, men at that time, or they were simply called George's boy. Because they were employed by George. And this goes back to the whole notion that you always carry the name of your slave owner, or you carry the name of the person who employed you. So these men were considered to be George's boys. And then ultimately with time, the name, the word boy fell off, and they were simply all called George. So no matter who you were, and you went onto the train, and someone wanted your attention, they said, "Hey, George," and you were supposed to respond. And they absolutely hated it, for obvious reasons, because it meant there was no individuality for them. They all had names and they had pride in who they were. But also, it was a perpetuation of an old system where their labor was commodified and their labor could not be differentiated. It was all one standardized type of labor. And that it was the ownership of the labor by which they were identified, rather by their individualism.

- So thank you for that. And I just want to acknowledge that we are seeing questions coming in, and we will get to questions in a few minutes. I want to also acknowledge that the chat is just blowing up, so thank you for kind of having that conversation going, not only with ourselves but also with the other members of the audience. So Meghan, you know, while white porters got promotions, black porters were denied. Where white porters could join unions, black porters could not. How were you able to channel the emotions of these historic figures when you developed and created your play, and how did you manage all that trauma?

- Well, it was difficult, 'cause there's so much in Cecil's book, I, there's a moment where I knew I couldn't include everything. And also in terms of, like the trauma of these men who, I mean, some of the stories that I guess just would viscerally hit me, that sort of became a compass as to what characters, or where I would create characters around, or based on. And that's why John K. Crutcher comes to mind, 'cause I just imagine, you know, there's, you could be the perfect employee, and it still wouldn't matter. There would still, you know, if there could still be a reason why they could, you could be found for an infraction or a demerit point if you messed up once, but if you had a history of outstanding work. And so this idea of I think respectability politics and, you know, not ruffling any feathers, that sort of thing, that those could, you could still be punished if you, you know, you weren't allowed to make mistakes. And that's something that really resonated, and I think still resonates, where you know, I think as, like as black folks it's like, the one mistake that can be made sometimes, it's like that, the punishment for that is like a tsunami. And of course, like within different contexts, but specifically with the porters, with John K. Crutcher and him missing his train because he had no money for food. So he was sort stuck behind, between a rock and a hard place. So that was one story that I knew, and because there's so much great information as well about, and even talking to Cecil, like so many great stories. Those were things that I was like, okay, how do I find the heartbeat behind some of these stories? And unfortunately, that did mean exposing that trauma, and especially when you can draw the parallels to today, that's what makes it really fresh and raw. But it was really actually exciting to get behind some of these voices and reimagine, 'cause in a way, I can't say this is exactly what they said word for word. I'm using Cecil's words and combining

and taking some liberties. But it was neat to sort of animate these voices and create, try to reenvision this world, using this book.

- So thank you for that. And so while, Peter, I'm gonna ask you if you can share a reading. And while you just kind of get yourself organized there, I just want to share one other message in the chat, which is from one of the audience members that says, "My grandfather was Leo Chevalier, "and he was a black sleeping car porter "in Toronto from 1924 to the 1960s, "and he was recruited from Louisiana."

- Oh, we're recording now? Okay, name for the record is John K. Crutcher. 52 years old, I've been a porter for the CPR, sorry, Canadian Pacific Railway, yes, 20 years. Not sure why you want to talk to me. I guess the whole thing was like a ticking time bomb. That we were all working hard and trying to provide for our families, and still that wasn't good enough. But treating us like mules, mindless mules who should be grateful for whatever scraps we got. It was Christmas Eve, 1954, that I was assigned to tourist car number three six. And that train was to depart at 10:25 p.m. sharp. And when they say sharp, they mean that, with no wiggle room. And we was leaving Union Station, just up there, and heading to Winnipeg. Long and cold journey. Now, with the train departing for 10:25 p.m., I report for duty at 7:30 p.m. because there's lots of work to do in the carts before a passenger even steps foot on there. I did my mandatory inspection to make sure the car was impeccable, beds made and turned down, floors swept, ashtrays turned, empty, towels full. If one thing was skipped or carried out incorrectly, I could get hit with demerit points. Now me, now my record was clean. For all my years working, not one demerit against me. I had seniority after having worked for the railway for many years. Sometimes I got stuck working the holiday shifts. No one liked working those. Christmas Eve should be spent with your loved ones, not on a cold, empty train. I didn't have a family of my own, but my fiance Mildred and I were making plans. My pay from the railway wasn't much, but it was steady, most of the time that is. So when I completed my checklist and went over it once more, I stood at the door, waiting for the passengers to board. It was Christmas Eve. No one boarded that train. Not a single soul. I called up the reservation office and was told there'd be two passengers in my car and three over on the neighboring car where my buddy James Ewan was working. See, you don't get paid to work on empty trains. That's what we call dead ends, or deadheads. We hated those rides because our pockets stayed empty just like those seats. No passengers means no tips. Management wouldn't even consider us working, even though we had to stay in uniform. See, I know what you're thinking. Oh, we could fill our bellies full, kick up our feet, and catch up on some sleep. Oh, no sir. You were still expected to work and maintain the cleanliness of your car. In fact, they wouldn't even include a free meal. Now, I didn't have a cent to my name, but my stomach was growling. But I asked Edwin if he could spot me a small loan. Edwin would sometimes spot me from time to time, but not this day. He only had enough for himself. Time check, 10 p.m I would have enough time to make a quick trip home and be back before the train departs at 10:25 p.m. It would be close, but I could do it. You never think of all the things that could go wrong in a situation like that. I was optimistic. I know it wasn't the right thing to do, but how was I supposed to last all them hours without any food? You tell me. Someone would have had to drag my lifeless body off that car. I asked

Edwin to keep watch over my car. I even kept my uniform on, threw on my coat and hat, and headed out the street to flag a taxi home. I was, it started to snow, bad. And when that happens, there's less taxis on the road. Too difficult to see means more accidents. It took me longer than expected to even get a taxi. When I finally got one, boy were we going real slow. My heart began to race through my wool coat. Eventually I got home, I burst through the door and explained myself to my girl Mildred. Got my cash, I looked at the time and got that sinking feeling in my stomach. I wasn't gonna make it back to Union Station in time for the train's 10:25 p.m. departure.

- [Cheryl] Thank you, Peter. That's so powerful, and I guess, you know, I would ask you, having just shared that with everybody, the reading, what does that, how does that make you feel? Understanding that these are real people who had these experiences on this land?

- You know, what strikes me between now, between reading this and the similarities between now and then, it's, what touches me is the denial of our humanity, that we're not equal. And to strike that at every turn, you know. And that's something that strikes me, and leaves me speechless, because it still happens today. So that's the thing, but also the struggle through, the struggle through that, you know, to fight, and to know that it was harder then, and that it serves as inspiration for now.

- That's, you know, that inspiration, Meghan, I'm curious about the way that you take inspiration, and in particular the work you did with "Venus' Daughter," where you looked at the objectification of black bodies, and what parallels were you able to draw between "Venus' Daughter" and "They Call Me George?"

- Oh, that's really interesting. Exactly what Peter just said so beautifully, like the denial of humanity. That is, when I think of going through Cecil's book and even just work that resonates with me and work that I want to create for myself and really for, like black audiences like at large that I hope to keep doing, is, you know, building on the writing into existence. But if we're looking at the story, like "Venus' Daughter" was inspired by the story of Sara Baartman, also known as the Hottentot Venus, who was a South African Khoekhoen woman who was taken from South Africa and brought to London, England. And you know, this was the time of human zoos. So the commodification specifically of black women's bodies, which is something we see today, it is, you know, consistent in terms of the currency that, you know, everything from, you know, sort of cultural appropriation and the things that we affix to black women's bodies, but when they are removed and put on non-black bodies, they have more currency. Things like that, a constant devaluation of the black woman's body, at the same time being hypersexualized and exoticized. So when, if we're talking about commodifying the labor of these men, these sleeping porters, when we're talking about denying them the humanity of, how is someone actually expected to work their job at the level of professional, and you know, sort of exceptional customer service that these men were required without even considering that they would need to be fed, that their bellies need to be full. Like, such a basic human, like our needs, right, the basic human needs that aren't even met. And that being because they did not

see them as human. So yeah, like there's so much, there's so many parallels, and there were so many things that I could draw lines to that's like, oh, okay, yep, I think I know a little bit about that feeling, and, you know? Yeah.

- So Cecil, I think, you know, this is a really good time to kind of get our, make sure that we're clear about, you know, the real history of trade unions in Canada, and the really important role that these black porters played in establishing the social justice that we probably take for granted today. Can you talk to us a little bit about that?

- Yes, and before I start, let me say that I am truly looking forward to when Meghan's play is mounted. I read the script, and I had chills reading it. I think it's a wonderful piece of work, and I think that the world is gonna be in for a treat when she and Peter and others get together to put that on. So I, in fact, am looking forward to it. And in fact, it helped me to rethink many of the things that I was talking about in the book. But to the question that you asked, in terms of the history, you know, one of the things that I want to underline is that many of these porters were very highly educated men. Indeed, if you had to look at a pecking order, to become a sleeping car porter in the black community was the height of achievement. Yes, there were some people who went on to become doctors and elsewhere, but you worked through the sleeping car porter on your way to becoming such a person. Indeed, part of the ideal was that, especially for people in the southern United States or in the Caribbean, that they would come up to Canada and they would work on the sleeping car, as sleeping car porters, while they study medicine or law, classics, or whatever. And then many of them would go back home. Indeed, the history of the Caribbean is that of many leaders, prominent leaders, who in fact worked as sleeping car porters, and then went back to become Prime Ministers and Chief Justices and other things like that. And many of them who became prominent medical people in Canada, the United States, and elsewhere. So it was a situation where it was expected that they would work, but the conditions under which they work were the worst. And going back to the example you gave of in the 1917s, when the very first black rail union was established in North America, when that was established because primarily the conditions were so hard. And the one example I like to give is that we often refer to them even to this day as sleeping car porters. And the porters themselves had a joke among themselves where they would argue that they were not sleeping car porters, but they were in fact sleepy car porters, because they were so deprived of sleep. Very often they would be going for 17, 18 hours out of 24 without sleeping, and as we saw with the example with Crutcher, if they were to be caught sleeping or relaxing, they could be fired. So those were the conditions under which they worked, and the conditions under which they knew that if they began life as a 16-year-old, a 17-year-old as a porter, and they were to retire at 60, 65, they would still retire as a porter, because there was no promotion. There was no other job that was available for them, because they were considered to be not very essential to the railway, they were simply providing housekeeping.

- So thank you for that. And I think, you know, Natasha, I, you know, I listen to Cecil talk about this and it makes me feel very emotional. And I'm wondering to myself, you know, when you think about Stanley Grizzle, what do you think he would have felt or said, and I know you're of

course crystal ball gazing at this point. If he could see the unrest of the past week, and the death of George Floyd and Regis Korchinski-Paquet, considering the sacrifices that were made to create a Canada where social justice is, you know, embedded, and to create a world where social justice is embedded, with that American lens in mind as well?

- Well, I think, and again, like you said, in terms of, you know, crystal balling here. I think what Mr. Grizzle would have done is he would have been able to succinctly contextualize what is happening, as someone who was well-read, and you know, well-versed in what was happening in the world as it relates to African peoples. And so he would have definitely been able to provide some important context to what is happening. And I also think, you know, based on what I know of him through his history, that he would also be, you know, there on the front lines, and someone who has always agitated for change and been involved in activism in very many different ways. And so I think that he would have been part of that, and I think he would have also called on people to be involved in making change, using the examples of the change that they were able to influence to then say, you know, we've done this, that you know, now it's the time for others to continue on in that fight, in that struggle, in order to effect another level of change.

- So Cecil, you know, I wonder to myself, these people really gave so that modern Canada could evolve. And I'm, you know, looking at the past 10 days, looking at the last 80 plus days where Covid is ravaging the black community and communities of elderly persons and marginalized people. You know, is there a light at the end of the tunnel?

- Well I hope so, and this is one of the things that I think that the porters inculcated in us, that we should look to the light, even in the darkest moment. Because remember, in the 1950s when they went to Ottawa, nobody was taking them seriously. They were considered to be kooks. Their idea that they can lead a protest and go to Ottawa to see the Prime Minister, and then the Prime Minister decided at the moment that he wasn't gonna meet with them, but they were going to go and they were going to come up with this lofty idea that black people, and not only those of African background. But they talk about the fact that how at that time that people, immigration from India was limited to 150 people a year, and that if they were coming from Sri Lanka it was 50 people, and if they were coming from Pakistan, 150. And they said, how can it be that so many people from around the world, and you can limit these numbers, where you get about 200 from the West Indies, and 150 from India and 150 from Pakistan. Open up Canada! Canada needs people. So they went and they fought. And they kept at it. So I think, and knowing that Stanley Grizzle, the way that I saw how he walked the streets, how he led the protest against South Africa, how he led the various kinds of progress for better wages for domestic workers, the way that he worked with indigenous people, and the coalitions that he wrought. And going back to that picture of Stan` with the gavel, that's why he took great pride in being a citizenship judge, because he would always argue and give that talk to new members of the Canadian society, that citizenship means something, and that citizenship can translate into a better future. So he took great pride in talking about the power of citizenship. So I think that while he would be certainly out marching and protesting, and even writing a

letter to Premier Ford to correct him, because he never shied away from doing those things, that he as well would be very hopeful. And I remember as well the hope that he had even in the days when Martin Luther King died, and how he organized to bring Coretta Scott King to Toronto and to honor her and to honor Martin and to project to the future that Canada, and certainly North America and the world, can be a better place.

- So thank you so much to our panelists. You have really, again, you've blessed us with your knowledge and your insight and your aspirations and your inspiration for Canada. So thank you for that. And the audience has been very patiently waiting to have their questions answered. So I'm gonna jump into some questions, if that's okay, and I'll maybe point to certain people on the panel to respond. So the first question is, and I'm gonna ask that question to Cecil, in what ways can we work to make Provincial Canadian Archives more accessible to black communities in the present, or is it an impossible mission considering Canadian archives primarily function as colonial institutions?

- Well, I think that they still do, but that is the challenge that we have, to change them. And that's why people like yourself and other have an important role to play. Look, I could not have written this book without going into the archives. And the fact that someone like a Stan Grizzle was a pack rat, where he threw away nothing. And when I went into the archives and I stumbled upon his funds and I'm going through them, and my eyes are opening, and I'm saying, I thought I knew Stan Grizzle. And I write about this at the start of the book, how I would meet him on the street and talk to him, but when I went into the archives and discovered the things that he kept, and thank god that he never threw away anything. Because he gave a pile of stuff to the public archives, he gave a pile of stuff to the Ontario Archives, and as Natasha said, he also gave some stuff to the Ontario History Society. So he threw away nothing, and I think that's a very good example for all of us, that those things are meaningful. But it also meant that he had a sense of history. He had a sense of what he was doing, and an importance of the things that people like himself was doing. And yes, he was there, so it was not only the archives, but he would have been out to see the kind of play that Natasha is putting on, he was out at the launch of just about every black book around Toronto. He was totally involved. And I think that what he was saying is that citizenship and our humanity matters, and we can display it at many levels, and that we should live a full life.

- Thank you for that. In fact, we're joined on the call today by the archivist for the Canadian Railroad Historical Association, who's writing and saying that it's much appreciated to be able to participate in the discussion, and that there's a sense that these kinds of issues are the kinds of issues that archivists take into consideration when they're doing their jobs. And really, I think there's a sense that a deeper desire exists for this particular archivist to share black history and indigenous history. So opportunity for a linkup afterwards for sure. There's another question here, I'm gonna ask this one to Natasha. What difference do Canadian allies like John Graves Simcoe and J.S. Woodsworth and the legacy of the 1793 Anti-slavery Act make in the grand scheme of Canada as a colonial state?

- Well, in terms of the legacy of the 1793 act, what it did essentially was confirm the slave status for the African people who were held in bondage here. That's the first thing that it did. And so it really, you know, for some of the unsurety as it relates to slave-holding in different colonies in what we now call Canada, such as Quebec and Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia, what that piece of legislation did was acknowledge that loyalists and their descendants had the legal right to continue to hold those that they held in bondage at that particular time. And it was a graduated abolition that that piece of legislation put forth, because the majority of the politicians at that time, the members of the Assembly and the Council, they were themselves enslavers of African people at that time, or from families who enslaved African people. And so I think that sets a particular context as it relates to the presence and the social status of people of African descent here in Canada. But what it also did simultaneously was that it also created a space for freedom for African, for people of African descent coming from other jurisdictions. So if they were able to come into Canada after that, after 1783, that they would be considered free. And so we have this situation where you have, you know, people of African descent with differing social statuses existing in the same place at that same time. So John Graves Simcoe was someone who wanted to introduce the bill, along with the Attorney General John White. And of course, as I mentioned, it wasn't successful. But he himself was also a complicated character as well, in terms of his motivations or his relationship as it relates to the enslavement of African people. Because after he leaves here, he gets a post in Haiti, where he wants to reinstitute the enslavement of the recently freed Haitian, right, Haitian slaves at that time. And so we also need to look at these stories and what is happening in a global context, to really contextualize the experiences of African people here in Canada. But, so I hope that answers that question in a bit.

- Absolutely, thank you Natasha. And so Cecil, you know, one of the questions that's being asked is, you know, are there any black leaders within the Canadian rail transportation system left? And you know, I guess the other part of this question is, you know, how did the Pullman system of racialized division of labor develop, and clarify for the audience, if it was imported from the US?

- In a sense it was imported from the US, and it happened because the Canadian porters, after they were disbanded in the, from 1917 on, and they got tired of having to fight a sort of guerrilla warfare against the railways. Bear in mind, for example, on the Canadian National Railway, they were unionized, but their union promoted segregation. They were in a section of the union which said that as sleeping car porters they had no rights. So very often their fight was, their fight for recognition was against their own union, the union to which they paid dues. And that continued well into the 1960s. On the other hand, you had those who were working for CP. And they could not organize on their own because as soon as they set up an institution, a union, CP would crush it and try to create its own in-house union. And then, I tell the story of this guy Ernest, who came back into Montreal after a trip out west, and he is now tired, and they accuse him of having fallen asleep while working. And he gets in about 9 o'clock in the morning and they told him that he had to go to the office. And he goes to the office and they kept him sitting there until about 12 o'clock, one o'clock, and this guy just want to get home

and sleep. So when he got home, he wrote a letter to the guy who was setting up the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in the United States. And Philips, Randolph Philip, who as you would know would be the guy who organized the March on Washington and who introduced Martin Luther King to give the "I Have a Dream" speech. So he was organizing the sleeping car porters across North America. This guy in Montreal writes him and said, hey, come and help us. And they came across, met in people's homes, in private places, and set up the union. And then after a while, the sleeping car porters union in Canada and in the United States was the same union.

- So Cecil, we actually have a member of our audience who's sharing with us that their grandfather and four of his brothers were sleeping car porters. And when they unionized, they had meetings at this person's grandparents' place. So it really is, you know, these are not stories that are that far removed from current day. And so I'm very happy that, you know, folks are really able to kind of remember and share those stories orally, and having your book now exist so it's also written, is super, super important. And that brings me to my next question for Natasha. Are there groups working with the Ministry of Education to bring black history to the masses in a more impactful way?

- Well, I will say that the black community, black parents, have been agitating for a responsive curriculum for quite a long time. And when you look back at some of the studies that have been conducted, going back to the first, the first study in what is now TDSB. I think it was about 1978, 1979, the issue of curriculum and representation on the curriculum, or exclusion from the curriculum, has come up, and so we have government after government who have been slow to respond. The curriculum as it stands now, there are optional topics in the curriculum, so teachers can choose from these optional topics, and some of these optional topics do speak to black Canadian experiences. But there, as I mentioned, there isn't one specific thing that needs to be changed. And so that's a lot of the work that I've done to advocate for, to develop resources, to have that representation in the classroom, for quite some time, that's the work that the Ontario Black History Society, that we do in terms of agitating for change. And I think, not I think, but particularly now is a great time, I think, to continue to push for that. If we have governments signing on to the International Decade for People of African Descent, and education is a large component of that, then we need to see that in, right, we need to see some change as it relates to the curriculum. If they're talking about addressing anti-black racism, bigotry and prejudice, and educating people in order to effect change, social change, then we need to see that substantive, substantial change in the curriculum. And so I would encourage people who are listening now to continue or to join myself and the Ontario Black History Society, black community members and organizations who raise this issue all the time. Because in the end, it really, you know, we ask for these things, and are demanding these things, but how is the Ministry of Education responding? And so when they're talking about acknowledging anti-black racism in the public education system, the Ministry of Education also has to recognize how they're perpetuating and reinforcing those same systemic erasures and exclusions through the curriculum.

- Thank you for that. And we have a couple more questions, and I want to try and get through as many of those as possible, 'cause folks have been so patiently waiting for us to get to questions. Cecil, there's, some of the folks in the Q&A section are making connections between emancipation of slaves and liberation of Canadians, and the plantation slavery system. Can you maybe just clarify the relationships between the antebellum South and, you know, emancipation and all these different points in history that kind of lead us to where we are now?

- Well, in a sense they're all connected, too. Because if we start the narrative of thinking of the abolition of the slave trade in the real South, in the Caribbean, in 1806, 1807, and then we jump to emancipation in the 1830s, but remember somewhat similar to what Natasha was talking about, it wasn't complete or freedom. There was a period of apprenticeship where, that people supposedly had to learn how to become free. And that is part of the idea that, I guess, that Simcoe and others were dealing with when they kept that joint, or two statuses, that some people was free and some people were not. There was always the question is that, were black people equipped to be free? And then we have, then the Civil War in the United States where slavery had continued, and ultimately Lincoln issuing his Proclamation. Bearing in mind that he issued it at a point when it looked as if the North might very well have been losing the war, and he needed extra soldiers, and he needed people to disrupt the South. And so we then have the Proclamation. But the Reconstruction that happened after that was very temporary, which meant that black people did not really have full citizenship, and they were left out, and the only jobs that were available to them, again, were working as housekeepers on the trains. They could not become supervisors, they could not become engineers, they could not become anyone that was considered to be important to the operation of the train. And this became important, because let's deal again with the notion of sleeping. It became very clear that the longer that you were deprived sleep on a railway, that the higher the probability that there'll be accidents. So the unions, the various unions, would advocate with the governments across North America, to limit the number of hours that a railroad, or a rail worker, can operate. So maybe 12 as a maximum. And then the unions agreed that they would agree on a number like 12, but it would not apply to sleeping car porters. Why? Because sleeping car porters were considered to be not operational, and as a result, they did not run the train, and they were not likely to cause accidents. So the history is one of freedom, no matter where it starts, and to a sense it bring it all together. Because after a while, across the hemisphere if you went to North America you might get a job and you might get a job as a railway porter.

- So I think this is kind of one of the interesting questions that's being asked about the way that sleeping car porters are treated south of the border versus north of the border. Were there any real discernible differences? And I guess it kind of segues into this other question about what we can do to advance conversations of diversity. In particular this person is asking about true multiculturalism. Cecil, what are your thoughts? And maybe Natasha I'll get you to follow in after that.

- And you see, and that's one of the key things, and this brings us back to where we started when we talked about the Premier saying that Canada was different. There was no difference. A sleeping car porter worked the same hours under the same conditions, relied for income on tips, whether he was in Canada or he was in the United States. And remember that often the railroads ran through the United States. In fact, for a while if you wanted to go from the eastern Canada to western Canada, a good portion of the travel was through the United States, even though it was on a Canadian railway. There was no difference in working conditions. So let's put that aside. And as a result, the reality and the struggle became one, so that you can then see Stanley Grizzle mimicking and learning and patterning himself based on what he is seeing happening in the civil rights movement in the United States. And for all intents and purposes, there were the same. And one of the reasons why they were the same was because at that time there were not really referred to as Canadians or Americans, they were referred to as Negroes. And we know what a Negro is, a Negro is someone of African ancestry who does not have a country. So whether you are born in Johannesburg or you are born in Lagos or you are born in Atlanta or Toronto, you are a Negro. And that's why part of the struggle that people like Stanley Grizzle and others undertook was for the removal of that term as an identification, and we come up with notions like African American and Jamaican, Barbadian, Canadian, and that black people could be identified based on the country to which they belong, rather than this notion of a wider race or ethnicity.

- So Natasha, as you think about the question about multiculturalism, there's also this kind of question about, you know, what are some of the resources people can lean into if they're trying to find a comprehensive history of black Canadian experience?

- And I think the question around multiculturalism calls for an understanding of critical multiculturalism, and it's not, you know, looking at, saying oh, we have all of these different groups here, and everyone is all the same. I think true and critical multiculturalism pays attention to the very different, unique experiences and historical legacies that people have faced. And so I think that's important. And again, we get to a foundational level of understanding through education, and that can take place in a lot of different forms. So when you're asking about resources, you know, there are some curriculum resources, for example, some that I've helped to, developed over the years that are available for use either in the classroom or at home or for individual, independent learning. The Ontario Black History Society, as I said, we have developed a number of resources. Our website was shared in the chat there. We have various events, and due to the Covid restrictions we will be having, hosting, some of our events virtually as well. We have our annual Emancipation Day event coming up. We have, we were slated to have an exhibit of Stanley Grizzle's items, some of his items, at Queen's Park and at Sheridan College. But that has been postponed to the future. And we continue to develop, as I said, some online exhibits. So there's quite a number of resources. There's a lot of books that are available. A Different Booklist is a great resource, community resource, they have, they carry a lot of the Canadian titles around black experiences, whether it's through history books or through other kinds of literature. And so I would encourage people to look there as well. And again, I think it's important for us to really

come to the realization that if we are to avoid coming back to this same point in time yet again, that there needs to be an intervention in the curriculum, and that is an important place where all young people come through the educational system, people who then go on to be employers and government officials, and so it's an important place for an intervention in terms of correcting some of the misinformation and the non-information as it relates to rich, rich, substantive black Canadian history.

- And Cheryl, if I could jump in quickly and add to that.

- Yes, please.

- Even the notion of multiculturalism, as Natasha says, we really have to engage and interrogate. Because in the early stages, multiculturalism wasn't about what we now call visible minorities. Multiculturalism was really about how to make Europeans who were non-English and non-French, Canadian. And ultimately now when we read the story about multiculturalism, we often hear it as, multiculturalism as a sop to the vis mins, and that the betrayal of the real Canada, so that visible minorities can take over. That was not the case. Originally multiculturalism was intended to cement and to broaden the notion of who is white. And therefore, by being white, you could be recognized as a Canadian. And that is why the struggle is still so much with us over a kind of reconciliation. How can we in fact achieve the dreams of Grizzle and people like them who said a Canadian can be anyone from anywhere in the world? And that is what multiculturalism is about, and we're still struggling for that, because we are still looking for the day when we can have a Prime Minister that isn't white. And we're still looking for the day where we can have people who are running the institutions, the CBCs, the courts, and others, who are not white. And that is still the challenge for multiculturalism, to make multiculturalism really real in terms of recognizing the many cultures and peoples that produce different cultures in the world, and how they can be at home in Canada.

- So this is our final question, and it's for anybody in the panel. Do any of the panelists know of any examples of solidarity between the black and the indigenous railway workers?

- Oh yes, there have been. I mean, and even if we go back to the sleeping car porters, they themselves had outreach to the indigenous people. When you look at the work that Stanley Grizzle did, and remember that someone like a Stanley Grizzle who was involved in the, as a politician, and who ran for office, but again, when we talk again about the Ontario History Society, we talk about people like Dan Hill and his wife and others, they were very much involved in the fact that any issue, trade union, labor issue, that it had to be multiracial. And that's why, when they went to Ottawa, they talked not only about the denial of rights of black people, the rights of Indians from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, they talked about the treatment of the indigenous people as well. So that is one of the earliest places where you can find, when you go and you look at the documents that they presented in Ottawa, where they talk about the mistreatment of indigenous people. So, you know, I think this audience and this panel, I have been absolutely blessed to be your moderator this afternoon, and I thank you all, Cecil

Foster, Meghan Swaby, Natasha Henry, Peter Bailey, for your kind and generous sharing today, and for your truth, more than anything your truth.` And you know, these are very, very tough times. And for you to be able to give so much of yourself, despite your own pain, is something that I honor. And for our ancestors who made this possible today, I am ever grateful, so thank you so much for having me as your host today and your moderator. Back to you, Josh.

- This is usually where I'd ask for everyone to give a round of applause. But one of the changes of digital programming is that is no longer a possibility. Anyhow, I would like to thank, again, thank you Cheryl for moderating this discussion, making sure many comments and questions from our audience have been addressed, and just, we've covered so much ground. And so thank you for sort of steering the conversation in that way. Thanks again to our panelists, Natasha, Cecil, Meghan, and Peter, for blessing us with your knowledge and expertise. For everyone who's joined us, if you would like to revisit this conversation, maybe there's something that was brought up, and you know, you really want to sort of follow up on it but didn't remember what it was, we'll have this up on our website, on myseumoftoronto.com, within the next couple days. Or you can find it on our Facebook page immediately after this stream ends. Also, I've seen many of you have shared personal and family histories throughout this conversation today, which has just been really incredible. We're always looking for new stories or histories to explore and to share with our community at Myseum of Toronto, so you can reach out to us any time at our email, stories@myseumoftoronto.com and share anything that you think we should be exploring or following up on. Pardon me? Sorry.

- Sorry.

- If you'd like to do a deeper dive on this particular history, or other black Canadian histories, Cecil Foster's book, "They Call Me George," is a great resource. Ontario Black History Society, another great resource. And I believe somebody brought up, or Natasha brought up A Different Booklist, here in Toronto, another great place to find, and do a deeper dive on black history in Canada. Lastly, we have more programming in the works at Myseum of Toronto. June 24th we'll be bringing back another installment of our "In the Time of Covid" series, where we explore how COVID-19 is affecting some of the different communities across Toronto. And on July 1st we'll have our second annual Canada Day program that explores Canada Day through an indigenous lens. We might have something in between that, in between now and June 24th. But the best way to find out about that is to follow us on social media, check out our website, or subscribe to our e-newsletter where we do a weekly update. Again, thank you everyone for joining us today, thank you, all the panelists, for sharing your knowledge. I personally know, this is a bit of a difficult time to do that sort of, there's a bit of soul-searching required to sort of, if you're part of the black community, to even sort of discuss these issues. So I thank you all for sort of taking the time and lending yourself to do that work. So thanks again, everyone, for joining us. Hope to see you all soon. Thanks.

- Be well, everybody, take care.