AFRICAN CANADIANS – Historical facts and significant dates

1603 The first known black man to arrive in Canada was Mathieu DaCosta. He acted as a translator between the Micmac and the French with Champlain. Clearly, DaCosta had been in Canada some time previous to Champlain’s voyage of discovery, since Micmac is not European nor an African language.

1628 The first known slave, Olivier LeJeune, is recorded. As a child of 6, he had been captured in Africa and was later given the surname of one of his owners – a priest.

1775 The British forces during the American Revolution are led by Lord Dunsmore. In an effort to weaken the "rebel" side, Dunsmore invites all rebel-owned African male slaves to join the British side.

1779 With the hopes of winning the American Revolution, the British under Sir Henry Clinton invite all black men, women and children to join the British side and were promised their freedom for doing so. Ten per cent of the Loyalists coming into the Maritimes are black.

1793 The Upper Canada Abolition Act, supported by Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe, freed any slave who came into the (now) province of Ontario, and stipulated that any child born of a slave mother should be free at the age of 25.

1800 to 1865 Approximately 20,000 blacks found their way into Canada via the Underground Railroad. Harriet Tubman, one of the most famous "conductors" on the Underground Railroad, spirited several hundred fugitive slaves into Canada, despite a $40,000 reward for her capture, dead or alive.

1812 The Cochrane Proclamation invites refugees of the War of 1812 to become British citizens through residence in British territory, including Canada. The settlement of Oro is established by the government for black veterans of the War of 1812. A Coloured Corps is formed after petitioning by black veteran Richard Pierpoint.

1833 The British Imperial Act abolishes slavery in the British Empire (which included Canada) effective August 1, 1834.
1850 The second Fugitive Slave Act is passed in the United States, placing all people of African
descent at risk. The "Underground Railroad" steps up its operations – freeing enslaved blacks
by transporting them into Canada. The Common Schools Act is passed in Ontario, permitting
the development of segregated schools. The last segregated school in Ontario closed in the
1950s.

1853 Mary Ann Shadd left teaching in the U.S. to join with Isaac Ward and her brother Isaac in
publishing and editing the Provincial Freeman, one of the two black newspapers published in
Ontario from 1853-1857. Mary Ann Shadd is acknowledged as the first black
newspaperwoman and the first woman publisher of a newspaper in Canada.

1857 William Hall of Nova Scotia became the first Canadian Sailor and the first person of African
descent to receive the Victoria Cross for bravery and distinguished service.

1861 Dr. Anderson Ruffin Abbott became Canada’s first doctor of African descent.

1885 Delos Roget Davis of Amherstburg, Ontario became one of Ontario’s first black lawyers. He
was appointed King’s Council in 1910.

1894 William Peyton Hubbard became the first black council member elected to Toronto City
Council, and was re-elected council member for 13 successive elections. He served on the
Board of Control, and as acting Mayor on a number of occasions.

1905 The beginning of the "Black Trek," the migration of dissatisfied African-Americans from
Oklahoma to the Canadian prairies. That year, a group led by W.E.B. DuBois and Monroe
Trotter met secretly in Niagara, Ontario, to organize resistance to U.S. racism.

1914 During the First World War, black Canadians joined combat units, despite opposition, and in
1916, a segregated unit, the Nova Scotia Number 2 Construction Battalion, was formed.

1939 In the Second World War, authorities again try to keep blacks out of the armed forces, but
blacks insist on serving their country. Eventually, they join all services.

1948 Ruth Bailey and Gwennyth Barton became the first blacks to graduate from a Canadian School
of Nursing.

1950's New laws make it illegal to refuse to let people work, to receive service in stores or restaurants
or to move into a home because of race.

1951 The Reverend Addie Aylestock became the first black woman to be ordained a minister in
Canada. The following year, Wilson Brooks, an RCAF Veteran, became Toronto's first black
public school teacher, and in 1959, Stanley Grizzle was the first black person to run for a seat
in the Ontario Legislature. In 1963, Leonard Braithwaite, elected to the Ontario legislature, was
the first black to serve in a provincial legislature in Canada.
1962  Daniel G. Hill, an American-born black activist and writer who moved to Canada in 1950, was made the first director of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, the first government agency in Canada set up to protect citizens from discrimination. Hill later became chair of the Commission.

1968  Canada saw the election of its first black Member of Parliament – The Honourable Lincoln Alexander, of Hamilton. In 1979, he became Canada’s first black cabinet minister, as Minister of Labour in the federal government. In 1985, he became Ontario’s first black Lieutenant Governor, and the first black to be appointed to a vice-regal position in Canada.

1969  The first Black History Week was celebrated. Maurice Alexander Charles became the first black provincial judge of Ontario.

1978  The Ontario Black History Society is founded by Dr. Daniel Hill, Wilson Brooks and Lorraine Hubbard. The Society is dedicated to the acknowledgement and preservation of the contributions to Canada’s development by Canadian blacks.

1991  Julius Alexander Isaac, a native of Grenada, was named Chief Justice of the Federal Court of Canada. He becomes the first black Chief Justice in Canada and the first to serve on the Federal Court.

1993  Jean Augustine was sworn in as Canada’s first black female Member of Parliament.

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