

# Blacks in Canada: A long history

by Anne Milan and Kelly Tran

Canada is home to many visible minority groups,<sup>1</sup> some of whom have a long history here, while others have immigrated in recent years. In 2001, the three largest visible minority groups were Chinese, South Asians, and Blacks. There is, however, much diversity between and within minority groups. Blacks, in particular, vary extensively in their roots, with some born in the Caribbean, others in Africa, while yet others have been in Canada for many generations.

The experience of Canadian-born Blacks in this country differs from

that of foreign-born Blacks. This analysis will examine the historical and current residential settlement patterns of Blacks, and the places of birth of Black immigrants, especially those who arrived during the 1990s. In addition, the labour market experience of Blacks, and some family characteristics will also be explored.

## First Blacks came to Canada 400 years ago

The first Black person in Canada, who served as an interpreter under Governor de Monts in Nova Scotia, was

reported in 1605.<sup>2</sup> From 1628 until the early 1800s, Black slavery existed, particularly in Eastern Canada, where Loyalists immigrating from the United States would often bring slaves with them. In the late 1700s, Canada also became home to some Black Loyalists who had been promised land grants for supporting the British during the American Revolution.<sup>3</sup> Many early Blacks chose to remain in Canada and founded settlements in Nova Scotia and Ontario, and, later, in Western Canada with the opening of the frontier in the mid-1800s.

The 1901 Census of Population reported 17,400 Blacks (or what the early censuses refer to as "Negro") living in Canada, or 0.3% of the population. In the early 1900s, the growth in the Black population did not keep pace with that of other visible minority groups, particularly the Chinese. For example, while the number of Blacks actually decreased from 21,400 in 1881 to 19,500 in 1931, the number of Chinese grew tenfold from



1. Visible minorities are defined by the *Employment Equity Act* as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-White in colour". "Black" is one of the groups which make up the visible minority population, as identified by Employment Equity regulations.
2. Saney, I. 1998 "Canada: The Black Nova Scotian odyssey: a chronology." *Race & Class* 40, 1: 78-91.
3. Henry, F., C. Tator, W. Mattis, and T. Rees. 1998. *The Colour of Democracy: Racism in Canadian Society*. Scarborough, ON: Nelson Thomson.

## CST What you should know about this study

This analysis uses data from the 2001 Census of Population, which asked respondents to identify themselves as belonging to one or more population groups. Blacks self-reported by checking a mark-in category on the questionnaire. Respondents could identify with several groups and could therefore check several boxes on the questionnaire, but most chose only one. With the exception of a small number of respondents who identified themselves as belonging to both Black and White groups, multiple responses are excluded from this analysis.

This type of question, used to identify visible minorities, was first introduced in the 1996 Census. Prior to 1996, data on visible minorities were derived from responses to the ethnic origin question, in conjunction with other ethnocultural information, such as language, place of birth and religion. Because different Census questions are used to identify the Black population over time, there may be some comparability problems in the time series.

4,400 to 46,500 during the same period.<sup>4</sup> Most Blacks living in Canada during this time resided in Ontario or the Maritime provinces. Over the next several decades, the number of Blacks in Canada grew slowly, to 32,100 in 1961, accounting for 0.2% of the population.

During the 1960s, immigration policy reforms eliminated preferences for immigrants of European origin and implemented a points-based system for economic immigrants to ensure maximum employability in an economy where skilled labour was becoming a priority.<sup>5</sup> Immigrants gained points based on criteria such as occupational skills, educational level, knowledge of English or French and age. Consequently, the source countries of immigrants became more diversified, including increasing numbers of Blacks from the Caribbean and Africa. By 1991, there were 504,300 Blacks living in Canada, roughly 1.9% of the total population.

### Blacks are the third largest visible minority group

In 2001, Blacks were the third largest visible minority group in Canada, behind Chinese and South Asians. The 2001 Census enumerated 662,200 Blacks, representing just over 2% of Canada's total population and 17% of the visible minority population.

## CST Number of Blacks increase substantially in recent decades

	Black population	Blacks in population (%)
1871*	21,500	0.6
1881	21,400	0.5
1901	17,500	0.3
1911	16,900	0.2
1921	18,300	0.2
1931	19,500	0.2
1941	22,200	0.2
1951	18,000	0.1
1961	32,100	0.2
1971	34,400	0.2
1981	239,500	1.0
1991	504,300	1.9
2001	662,200	2.2

\*Includes Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

Note: 1996 was the first time a question on the population group was asked and used to derive counts for visible minorities. Prior to 1996, data on visible minorities were derived from responses to the ethnic origin question, in conjunction with other ethnocultural information, such as language, place of birth and religion.

Source: Statistics Canada, censuses of population.

4. Statistics Canada. 1936. 1931 *Census of Canada* (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-1931, vol. 1).
5. Reitz, J.G. 2002. *Immigration and Canadian Nation-building in the Transition to a Knowledge Economy*. [www.utoronto.ca/ethnicstudies/Reitz\\_june2002.pdf](http://www.utoronto.ca/ethnicstudies/Reitz_june2002.pdf) (accessed March 11, 2003). p. 3-4; Reitz, J.G. 2001. "Immigrant success in the knowledge economy: Institutional change and the immigrant experience in Canada, 1970-1995." *Journal of Social Issues* 57, 3: 579-613.

In 2001, in Atlantic Canada, Blacks represented just over 1% of the population. Yet many Blacks in the Atlantic provinces have a history dating back several centuries. Most Black residents in Atlantic Canada are third-generation Canadian or beyond. Like their counterparts across Canada, Blacks who settled in Halifax more than 200 years ago were promised land grants and adequate food, clothing and shelter, but instead, many experienced destitute conditions. Despite these difficulties, Blacks established communities throughout Nova Scotia, one of the most famous located in the part of Halifax known as Africville.<sup>1</sup> A tightly-knit social network, Africville was formed by Black families as a way to maintain their culture and to resist poor treatment by the broader society.

Over time, several facilities were developed near the area, including a slaughterhouse, an infectious diseases hospital and a garbage dump. By the early 1960s, these residents were still without water or sewer services, and many residents were living in substandard housing. Consequently, Africville was perceived by outsiders

to be a slum area. The residents of Africville were relocated into public housing. This meant many Blacks became renters instead of landowners, and many felt that they lost the sense of belonging and neighbourhood which they had previously shared. A monument to Africville now stands in a park where the vibrant community once stood.

Today, in Nova Scotia, and especially in Halifax, there is a large population of Blacks who have called Canada home for many generations. In 2001, over 90% of Blacks living in Halifax were Canadian-born, the highest proportion among census metropolitan areas. Eight in 10 Haligonian Blacks aged 15 and older were third-generation or beyond, compared with one in 10 Blacks in Canada overall. There were nearly 13,100 Blacks in Halifax in 2001, representing close to 4% of the population, the third largest proportion behind Toronto and Montréal.

1. Clairmont, D.H. and D.W. Magill. 1999. *Africville: The Life and Death of a Canadian Black Community*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

In comparison, Blacks accounted for 13% of the population of the United States.<sup>6</sup> Between 1991 and 2001, the population of Canada increased by 10% while the Black population grew by 31% and the total visible minority population grew by 58%. The rapid growth of the Black population and other visible minorities has contributed to Canada's changing cultural mosaic.

### Nearly half of Blacks are born in Canada

The recent rapid growth of many visible minority groups has been driven by immigration. However, many Blacks have a long history of residing in

Canada. In 2001, nearly one half (45%) of Blacks were born in Canada, second only to Japanese (65%), and much higher than South Asians (29%) or Chinese (25%). In fact, that year only one in five Blacks was an immigrant who came to Canada in the previous 10 years compared with more than one in three Chinese and South Asians.

Among the Black population aged 15 and older, second-generation Blacks, or those who were Canadian-born with at least one parent born outside of Canada, accounted for 19% of the Black population. This proportion is behind only that of the Japanese population (31%) and was slightly higher than the national average (16%).

The third generation and beyond are those who have a longer ancestral history in Canada. These are people whose parents were also born in Canada. In 2001, 10% of Blacks were third-generation Canadian. In areas

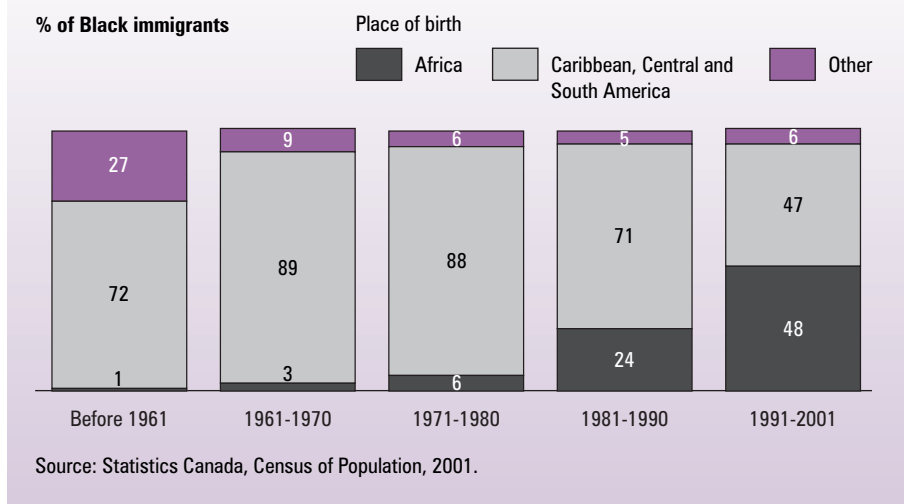
which have a longer history of Black settlement, such as Nova Scotia, more than four in five (84%) Black residents were at least third-generation Canadian.

### Black immigrants come from many countries

In 2001, about 48% of Black immigrants who came to Canada in the 1990s were born in Africa, virtually the same proportion as those born in the Caribbean, Central and South America (47%). Compared with Black immigrants from earlier decades, the source regions have shifted dramatically. Among foreign-born Blacks who came to Canada before 1961, only 1% was born in Africa, and 72% came from the Caribbean, Central and South America.

The Black foreign-born community consists of people from many different parts of the world, but predominantly from countries in the Caribbean and Africa. According to the 2001 Census,

6. McKinnon, J. April 2003. "The Black population in the United States: March 2002." *Current Population Reports*. U.S. Census Bureau. [www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/p20-541.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/p20-541.pdf) (accessed October 30, 2003).



one third of the 4,400 Blacks who arrived in Canada prior to 1961 were born in Jamaica. Those from Barbados accounted for 15%, the United Kingdom (6%), Trinidad and Tobago (6%), and the United States (5%).

During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, the number of Black newcomers to Canada grew. Jamaica remained the leading source of Black immigrants with 30% to 40% of all immigrants while Haiti became the second largest source. Haiti accounted for nearly 20% of Black immigrants during the 1970s and 1980s. During this period, declining proportions of Black immigrants arrived from Barbados, the United Kingdom and the United States.

According to the Census, about 139,800 Black immigrants residing in Canada in 2001 had arrived between 1991 and 2001. One fifth (20%) were from Jamaica, followed by Haiti (12%), Somalia (10%), Ghana (8%), and Ethiopia (5%).

### Black population younger than the overall population

In 2001, Blacks had a much younger age structure than the total Canadian population. Children under age 15 accounted for nearly 30% of the Black population, compared with 19% of

the total population. In addition, 17% of Blacks were aged 15 to 24 compared with 13% in the overall population. However, only 5% of Blacks were aged 65 or over, less than half the proportion of the Canadian population (12%). Possible explanations for this pattern include higher fertility and mortality rates for Blacks than the overall population.

### Black children more likely to live in lone-parent families

According to the 2001 Census, a much higher proportion of Black children aged 0 to 14 lived with only one parent than other children (46% versus 18%).<sup>7</sup> Canadian-born Black children were more likely to live with a lone parent (47%) than were foreign-born Black children (40%). Some researchers have argued that the economic obstacles faced by Blacks have affected their family circumstances.<sup>8</sup> Census data also found that Black children were more likely than other children to be living in low-income households (44% compared to 19%).<sup>9</sup>

Of the nearly 118,000 couples involving Blacks in 2001, 57% involved two Black partners, while 43% were comprised of a Black person and a non-Black person, most often a Black male

and a white female. The duration of residence in Canada for many Blacks may partially explain why they have one of the highest proportions of mixed marriages or common-law relationships among visible minority couples.

### Almost half of Canada's Blacks live in Toronto

In 2001, almost all Blacks (97%) lived in urban areas and nearly one half (47%) of the Black population, about 310,500, lived in the Toronto census metropolitan area (CMA), one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse urban areas in the world.<sup>10</sup> Blacks represent 7% of Toronto's total population, the highest proportion among CMAs. In some municipalities within Toronto, Blacks represented even larger shares of the population: Brampton (10%), Ajax (10%), and Pickering (9%).

In Toronto, 57% of Blacks were foreign-born. Close to three-quarters (73%) of the 178,200 foreign-born Blacks in Toronto were born in the Caribbean, and South and Central America, mainly from Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana. Indeed, every year since 1967 Toronto has celebrated its Caribbean presence with a carnival known as Caribana, which displays Caribbean culture in costume, music and dance.

7. Data for children aged 0 to 14 excludes a small proportion of children living in the territories or on Indian reserves.

8. Calliste, A. 1996. "Black families in Canada: Exploring the interconnections of race, class, and gender." In M. Lynn (ed.), *Voices: Essays on Canadian Families*. Toronto: Nelson Canada.

9. These are households below the low income cut-offs. The cut-offs convey the income level at which a family may be in difficult circumstances because it has to spend a greater proportion of its income on the basics (food, shelter and clothing) than the average family of similar size.

10. Statistics Canada. 2003. *Canada's Ethno-cultural Portrait: The Changing Mosaic* (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 96F0030XIE2001008).

**Toronto has the largest Black population and highest proportion of Blacks in 2001**

Selected census metropolitan areas	Black population (number)	% of total population who are Blacks	% of Blacks who are Canadian-born	% change in Black population 1991-2001
Canada	662,200	2.2	45	31
Toronto	310,500	6.7	40	29
Montréal	139,300	4.1	41	37
Halifax	13,100	3.7	91	24
Ottawa-Gatineau	38,200	3.6	38	75
Windsor	8,100	2.7	60	87
Oshawa	7,200	2.4	52	34
Hamilton	12,800	2.0	48	30
Kitchener	7,300	1.8	46	29
London	7,600	1.8	52	43
Winnipeg	11,400	1.7	45	17
Edmonton	14,100	1.5	49	20
Calgary	13,700	1.4	45	34
Vancouver	18,400	0.9	48	20
Non CMAs	41,000	0.4	72	14

Source: Statistics Canada, censuses of population.

Montréal has the second largest Black population in the nation (139,300), representing over 4% of its population. In some Montréal communities, Blacks represent even larger proportions of the population: Montréal-Nord (15%), LaSalle (9%) and Pierrefonds (9%). Like Toronto, most Blacks in Montréal (55%) are foreign-born and predominantly from the Caribbean, South and Central America. In 2001, 78% of Montréal's 76,200 foreign-born Blacks were born in this region, primarily Haiti where French is the official language. Fewer than one fifth (18%) of foreign-born Blacks living in Montréal in 2001 were born in Africa.

**Canadian-born Blacks are just as likely to be university educated as others born in Canada**

Blacks of prime working age (age 25 to 54) are less likely to be university educated and more likely to have a college education than the total population. In 2001, foreign-born and Canadian-born Blacks of prime working

**Canadian-born Blacks fare better than foreign-born Blacks**

	Total population					Blacks			
	Canadian-born		Foreign-born			Canadian-born		Foreign-born	
	1991	2001	1991	2001		1991	2001	1991	2001
<b>Highest level of education</b>	%								
Less than high school graduation	27	20	26	19		30	17	24	18
High school graduation	27	25	24	22		27	27	26	25
Trades	14	14	13	10		13	12	15	14
College	15	20	14	16		15	23	19	24
University	17	21	23	32		15	21	15	20
<b>Labour force outcomes</b>									
Age-standardized employment rate	78	81	77	76		72	76	77	77
Age-standardized unemployment rate	9.0	6.0	9.6	7.0		12.5	7.9	12.5	9.6
	1990	2000	1990	2000		1990	2000	1990	2000
<b>Employment income</b>	\$								
Average	34,100	37,200	34,900	34,800		29,200	29,700	30,100	28,700
Average age-standardized	34,100	37,200	34,900	34,800		30,000	32,000	30,700	29,200

Note: Includes prime working age population aged 25 to 54.

Source: Statistics Canada, censuses of population.

age are just as likely as all Canadian-born persons aged 25 to 54 to have a university education — about one in five. However, foreign-born Blacks are much less likely than other immigrants to have a university education. In 2001, 20% of foreign-born Blacks of prime-working age have a university education compared with 32% of all prime-working age immigrants. Recent Black immigrants tend to be better educated and more highly skilled than Canadian-born Blacks because admission of immigrants has increasingly emphasized skills which promote economic independence once in Canada.

Over the last decade, employment rates for Canadian-born Blacks improved while those of foreign-born Blacks remained the same. In 2001, the age-standardized employment rate of prime working age Canadian-born Blacks (76%) remained lower than the rate for all Canadian-born persons of prime working age (81%).<sup>11</sup> Although foreign-born Blacks aged 25 to 54 were substantially less likely to be university educated than other immigrants, employment rates were the same for both groups in both 1991 and 2001 at about 77%.

Unemployment rates in 2001 were substantially lower than they were in 1991, but rates for Blacks were higher than those for all prime working age adults. In 1991, Canadian-born and foreign-born Blacks of prime working age both had a 12.5% age-standardized unemployment rate. Like other visible minority groups, the unemployment rate of Canadian-born Blacks dropped more than that of foreign-born Blacks. In 2001, Canadian-born Blacks had a 7.9% unemployment rate compared with 9.6% for foreign-born Blacks.

Although Canadian-born Blacks aged 25 to 54 were just as likely to be university educated as all Canadian-born persons in the same age group, in 2000, Canadian-born Blacks' average employment income was substantially lower than all Canadian-born persons

(\$29,700 versus \$37,200). The younger age distribution of the Black population may contribute to the earnings gap, as younger people usually have lower earnings. Age-standardizing average employment earnings of Canadian-born Blacks aged 25 to 54 increases their average employment income to \$32,000 and reduces the earnings gap.<sup>12</sup> Between 1990 and 2000, the age-standardized average employment income of Canadian-born Blacks aged 25 to 54 increased by 7% compared with a 9% increase for all Canadian-born persons in the same age group.

Although foreign-born Blacks were less likely to be university educated than all foreign-born persons aged 25 to 54, the earnings gap was narrower than for Canadian-born Blacks, and earnings dropped between 1990 and 2000. Foreign-born Blacks aged 25 to 54 earned less than all foreign-born persons in the same age group (\$28,700 versus \$34,800). Age-standardizing foreign-born Blacks average employment income increases it to \$29,200. Between 1990 and 2000 the age-standardized average employment income for foreign-born Blacks decreased by 5% while it decreased by less than 1% for all foreign-born Canadians aged 25 to 54.

Lower employment rates and employment income and higher unemployment rates for Blacks may be related to discrimination or unfair treatment. According to the Ethnic Diversity Survey, Blacks are more likely to feel that they had been discriminated against or treated unfairly by others because of their ethnicity, culture, race, skin colour, language, accent or religion. Nearly one third (32%) of Blacks aged 15 and over said they had had these experiences sometimes or often in the past five years, compared with 20% of all visible minorities and 5% of those who were not a visible minority. Another 17% of Blacks rarely reported these experiences, compared with 15% for all

visible minorities and 5% of those who were not a visible minority.

### Summary

Blacks in Canada have diverse backgrounds and experiences in Canada. Some Blacks can trace their roots in Canada back several centuries, while others have immigrated in recent decades, and are just putting down roots. In many ways, Blacks have helped shape the cultural mosaic of the local and national landscape.

The Black population is growing faster than the Canadian population and is concentrated in Canada's largest cities, especially Toronto. Blacks are younger and their children are more likely to be living in lone-parent families and in low income households. Canadian-born Blacks are just as likely to be university educated as all persons aged 25 to 54 born in Canada, but foreign-born Blacks are much less likely to have a university education than other foreign-born persons. Blacks, in particular those who were Canadian-born, are slightly less likely to be employed and had lower employment incomes and have higher unemployment rates than all 25- to 54-year-olds.

---

11. All employment and unemployment rates are age-standardized. Rates for Canadian-born Blacks age 25 to 54 are age-standardized to the same age distribution as all Canadian-born persons in this age group while rates of foreign-born Blacks are standardized to the age distribution of all foreign-born people.

12. Average employment earnings of Canadian-born Blacks age 25 to 54 is age-standardized to the same age distribution as all Canadian-born people in this age group.



**Anne Milan** is an analyst with *Canadian Social Trends* and **Kelly Tran** is an analyst with Housing, Family and Social Statistics Division, Statistics Canada.