

The True North Strong and Free

by Kiké Roach



MONTREAL (CUP)--

*"Oh righteous Father, will
thou not pity me,
And aid me on to Canada,
where all the slaves are free"*
--popular freedom song

Canada: a welcoming haven for fugitives escaping the brutal system of slavery in the Southern United States. Or *so we thought*. The reality however is that the "peculiar institution" made itself quite at home here too.

Though the history of slavery in this country has been sublimated or completely ignored, slavery as an institution existed, was legally sanctioned and upheld for 170 years. It was practised mainly in Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

In 1628 in New France (Quebec), a young boy from Madagascar, named Olivier LeJube, became the first African slave of record to be purchased in Canada.

However, Blacks were not the first slaves here. By the early 1500s Portuguese and French explorers are known to have captured and enslaved some of the Amerindians they came in contact with. French colonists who settled in Acadia and New France continued this practice

a hundred years later. Amerindian slaves, called "panis", often significantly outnumbered the Black slave population.

Canadian style slavery varied from its Southern cousin in that the goals and economic interests of the French and British here differed from those of the owners of the vast cotton and sugar plantations.

In the beginning, Imperial interests in Canada lay primarily in expanding the fur trade and the fishing industry. The French and British relied heavily on Native people's skilled labour in the trapping and hunting of fur bearing animals. In 1780, between 300-400 Black slaves were imported from the colony of Bermuda to work on the fishing fleets of the Grand Banks of Newfoundland.

As European interests shifted, strategies for exploiting Canada's natural resources and establishing more permanent domination over the region developed. Slaves were imported gradually in keeping with the pace of these newly emerging colonies.

In 1689, the first major importation of Africans occurred when King Louis XIV of France gave permission to his subjects to bring slaves into New France as agricultural workers. Many

see May 1, 1689, the day of the decree, as the official birthday of slavery in Canada.

The number of Black slaves in Canada remained small but increased considerably between 1783 and 1784. White slave-owning Loyalists, emigrating to Canada after the American War of Independence, brought a total of 2000

*"Just over 1200
of these slaves
were
distributed in
Nova Scotia,
New Brunswick
and Prince
Edward Island."*

Black slaves with them. Just over 1200 of these slaves were distributed in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

At the time of the Loyalist immigration the slave population in Upper Canada (Ontario) was estimated to be 500 persons and just over