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“History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived,
but if faced with courage, need not be lived again.” - Maya Angelou
May we face history with courage, and walk together toward renewal.

Introduction

Hello and welcome to this resource for learning about Black Canadian History created by Camellia Jahanshahi in 2026.

This resource is meant to be used in conjunction with the Black History Month toolkit also made by Camellia Jahanshahi in February 2025 for the Canadian Unitarian Council. Together they include lots of resources, reflection prompts, tools to support your nervous system as you unlearn and relearn, and important information around being better supports for our Black peers and work towards confronting anti-Blackness. This specifically is a resource developed by exploring erased Black history in Canada and bringing it into our awareness so we can be better accomplices in addressing and dismantling systemic anti-Blackness.

Anti-Blackness runs deeply throughout our world and systems, in ways that are both straight forward and unexpected. This resource is meant for anyone who is looking to unpack the ways that anti-Blackness has impacted their lives and do a deeper exploration of why and how anti-Blackness has impacted us all. In the work of decentering whiteness, understanding the impact that white supremacy culture has had on non-white communities is imperative.

The videos, exercises and reflection prompts can be done on your own, but I do suggest moving through them with a group as a relational approach can help us uncover more than we might on our own. It also allows for us to have an accountability partner and an emotional support for this work that can often feel heavy and full of grief.

If you're picking this up with the intention of facilitating this group, please go to the end of this tool kit where I've included some opening and closing words and other helpful tips for facilitators.

Otherwise the pacing of this resource looks at Black Canadian History coast to coast and then brings us to contemporary realities and considerations. Lastly, keep in mind

that none of this happened in a vacuum. While my focus on this resource is Black history, please pay attention to the dates and events and reflect on what was happening for other marginalized groups at the time in Canada as well as around the world.

And of course, this is a very cursory look at all these histories. It is by no means complete and if anything serves as a basic introduction into these histories for you to get an overview. There are many more resources to engage with in the references of this work and in the Black History Month toolkit that I encourage you to return to.

In this resource you'll find:

Section 1: Africville (Halifax)

Section 2: Hogan's Alley (BC)

Section 3: Dawn Settlement/ Niagara (Ontario)

Section 4: St. Henri/Little Burgundy (MTL)

Section 5: Little Jamaica (TO)

Section 6: Collective Reflection and Activities

Section 7: Facilitators Support

Section 1: Africville

Brief Intro:

Africville was a historic Black community on the edge of Halifax, Nova Scotia. It was established in the early 19th century by Black settlers who were already in Nova Scotia from a variety of routes, including refugees from the War of 1812 and Black Loyalists, as well as formerly enslaved people moving North, and other migrants from the Caribbeans. It was a close community with its own church, school, businesses, homes, and deep networks of family and mutual aid. It was systematically neglected by the city of Halifax where residents were denied many basic services and in the 50s-70s people were displaced under the guise of urban renewal. Homes were demolished and the community was ultimately destroyed and displaced. Legal action for this began in 1996 and in 2010 the Halifax Municipality offered a public apology, the establishment of the

Africville Heritage Trust that runs a museum, and a small parcel of land and money to reconstruct the church. Not all former residents and their families agreed to this settlement though, and litigation has continued, asking the question; what can an apology repair and what can it not repair?

Content to Explore:

Africville is an eyesore

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1402726037>

Africville is destroyed: Bulldozers move in as residents are shipped out.

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1563591686>

Racism in Halifax

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZ2OM03mtmg>

Africville Black Union Ft. Maestro

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ip91m82m82s>

BLK: An Origin Story

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RhEsy435tM>

Razing Africville: A Geography of Racism by Jennifer Nelson

The History of Africville As Told by the People of Africville By Irvine Carvery

Reflection Questions:

- What does the story of Africville teach us about the history of Black communities in Canada?
- How does the destruction of Africville inform your understanding of the need for reparations in Canada?
- How does Africville challenge the narrative that Canada is free of systemic racism compared to other countries?
- In what ways does the story of Africville inspire movements for collective liberation and solidarity across racial and class lines?
- What does sovereignty look like for Africville descendants in Canada today?
- What else was happening around the world during the destruction of Africville that shows parallel struggles?

- What responsibilities do non-Black and non-Indigenous Canadians have in addressing these parallel struggles?
- How does the story of Africville challenge us to uphold the inherent worth and dignity of Black Canadians, especially in the face of historical and ongoing systemic racism?
- What does Africville teach us about the importance of equity and justice?

Section 2: Hogan's Alley

Brief Intro:

Hogan's Alley was an alley that ran through the southwestern corner of Strathcona in Vancouver, British Columbia starting in the late 1800s/early 1900s. It was a racially diverse area with many Chinese and Japanese immigrants also there, but was predominantly Black with lots of Black owned businesses, the only Black church in the area, and of course, a lively scene for art, music and community. It was systematically destroyed in the 1970s, around the same time that Africville and Little Burgundy were destroyed in the pursuit of urban renewal and the creation of a supposed freeway that was never finished.

The videos and information below explore the history as well as the current repair processes being advocated for and the relationship between Hogan's Alley and Africville.

Content to Explore:

This is a short interview from 2020 when the BLM protests were gathering speed
<https://youtu.be/Pbe6a7S6ZNg?si=fyaFGpyDpBJFAtqH>

Video exploring connection between Africville and Hogan's Alley, plus some of what's happening around repair for Hogan's Alley now
<https://youtu.be/z6stGExTerE>

Podcast on Hogan's Alley:
<https://www.historicacanada.ca/productions/podcasts/a-place-to-belong/a-place-to-belong-hogans-alley-episode-4>

4 part documentary:
<https://www.blkoriginstory.com/en/blk-103-vancouver>

Reflection Questions:

- What does the story of Hogan's Alley teach us about the history of Black communities in Canada?
- Building off of the information from Africville and the topic of displacement and belonging, what's coming up for you with these intertwined histories?
- How do you think the physical destruction of Hogan's Alley (and Africville) affects the collective memory of Black communities in Canada?
- What acts of repair could we as non-Black and non-Indigenous UU's engage in around these histories of dispossession?
- How can your congregation embody the interdependent web of all existence as a call to solidarity across Black and Indigenous struggles for land and life?
- What can we learn from the repair process being pursued in Hogan's Alley? Where can we grow? How can we advocate and support?

Section 3: Dawn Settlement/ Niagara

Brief Intro:

In this section we're looking at two interrelated landmarks that are important to Black Canadian history, the Dawn Settlement and the Freedom trail. They require a bit more of an introduction before you explore the selection of videos.

The Dawn Settlement was founded by Rev Josiah Henson, an integral figure in North American Black History. Born under slavery in Maryland and under the course of his life experienced many different hardships that you can learn about in the videos below. I am hoping to focus on his part of the story where he crossed over into lower Canada, in what's now known as Dresden, to purchase land and set up a Black settlement. This was an initial 200 acres where people grew and sold their own goods as a self sustaining community. Rev Henson bought and extended it another 200 acres for his family and at its peak there were over 500 people living in that settlement.

In his time there, he became a methodist preacher who was an active abolitionist and served in the Canadian army during the 1837 Canadian rebellion where he led an all Black troop. He would later go on to write an autobiography in 1849 talking about his life and work setting up the Dawn settlement, which was an extremely influential book that inspired the story of Uncle Tom's Cabin that came out in 1852...Henson, just to name, went to write an expanded version of his story that was published as "truth stranger than fiction" as a response to Harriett Stowe's book.

I mention this part because when you look into the Dawn Settlement, it's often referred to as Uncle Tom's Cabin and when you try to engage in research on Rev. Henson, you mostly find stuff about Harriet Beecher Stowe and her book. You need to dig a little deeper to find out about Henson's own life, despite his releasing his own book.

Finally, there were a few different Black settlements around Southern Ontario above

Niagara Falls and the Dawn Settlement is just one.

As you engage with the material below, please remember, even though Henson, and others, bought land to escape slavery and create these self-sustaining Black communities in Canada, Canada still had its own experience of enslavement. Canada had just outlawed it before the United States did. It was outlawed in upper Canada in 1793 and then across Lower Canada by 1803, so a good 60 years before the emancipation proclamation in the United States in 1863.

To talk about the Dawn Settlement and the Freedom trail without also understanding that slavery happened here would be a disservice to the process of learning Black Canadian History.

Content to Explore:

▶ Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site Virtual Tour

▶ The Underground Railroad | Secret Path to Freedom over Niagara Falls | Global L...

Rev. Josiah Henson's Story: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DG7QxJpplw>

Slavery in Ontario: ▶ Ontario museum explores life of one of the last Canadians bor...

History of Slavery in Canada and Petition for Government acknowledgement and apology: ▶ Canada had slavery. Now, Black Canadians want an apology

<https://aaregistry.org/story/the-dawn-settlement-is-formed/>

<https://vitacollections.ca/ckmuseums/620/exhibit/2>

Reflection Questions:

- What did you learn that was new to you?
- How did it feel to hear a descendant speak about this history today?
- What does it mean that freedom seekers didn't just "arrive" but built something intentional and economic?
- How does land function as protection and power in the story of Dawn?
- Why do you think it's easier to find information about Uncle Tom's Cabin than about Henson himself?
- How does the reality that Canada had slavery affect your understanding of Canada?
- Does Niagara as a border city and its impact spark any parallels for you today?
- What does sanctuary mean for us in this context?
- What would repair that went beyond remembrance look like?
- What would it look like if we budgeted for justice the way freedom seekers budget for survival?
- What can we learn from the Dawn settlement about building parallel systems (communities) when dominant systems exclude or harm?
- What does it mean to inherit this history?

Section 4: St Henri/ Little Burgundy

Brief Intro:

Established in the 1880s originally as neighborhood St. Antoine, Little Burgundy was a central point for Black workers from the United States, the Maritimes, and the Caribbean to live as the railway industry got larger and many Black Canadians and immigrants worked as railway porters. A job they were limited to due to racial segregation that also led to housing discrimination and the creation of this neighborhood.

This area was rich with culture, full of Black families and Black owned businesses, community endeavors, arts and more similar to Africville and Hogan's Alley. As you'll see in the resources and content below, this area was systematically taken over in the name of urban renewal, similar in methods and timelines to the destruction of Africville and Hogan's Alley.

Content to Explore:

History Museum of Canada page:

<https://www.historymuseum.ca/teachers-zone/early-black-communities/st-antoine-little-burgundy-montreal-quebec/>

History Channel Documentary:

https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQsJnhFIAanCRkGDYbj_inggQIs7Lvk_Q&si=2_aKluXEs386IxOO

Podcast:

<https://www.rcinet.ca/en/2016/02/22/black-history-month-reinterpreting-little-burgundys-black-history/>

Articles:

<https://www.concordia.ca/news/stories/2018/01/30/mark-black-history-month-by-exploring-the-stories-of-little-burgundy-residents.html>

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/uhr/2017-v46-n1-uhr04514/1059112ar/>

Archives of videos, essays, and oral story telling:

<https://storytelling.concordia.ca/archives/collections>

Reflection Questions:

- What made Little Burgundy a community? What kinds of relationships, institutions, mutual aid, culture markers or faith spaces mark as a community? What did it have in common with the other communities we have explored and what can we learn about community from this exploration?
- What surprised, moved, or stayed with you from these videos and essays?
- Little Burgundy is remembered for its jazz and musical contributions, what happens when a community's cultural contributions are more widely celebrated/known than the people and conditions that made that culture possible?
- What can we learn from the racial history of railway porters? What lines do we learn about survival when we look at the racist employment practices and the simultaneous networks for connection that were created by this practice?
- What would it mean to think of Little Burgundy as a history of what Black Montrealers created instead of as a place that was lost?

Section 5: Little Jamaica

Brief Intro:

Little Jamaica is situated alongside Eglinton Avenue West in Toronto, established in the 1950s by Caribbean and African migrants. By the 1970s this became a major commercial and cultural centre for Black and Caribbean communities.

This is a Black diasporic community made up of people from all around Jamaica, other Caribbean countries, as well as African immigrants. The name of Little Jamaica itself has its own history and different pronunciations and is sometimes also called "Likkle Caribbean" which adds to our understanding of this multicultural community.

What is of particular interest to us here is that this neighborhood is still present though is currently experiencing significant loss from commercial interests and again the guise of urban renewal. Construction associated with the Eglinton Crosstown LRT began in 2011 and business owners and community members have been combatting the decline of customers and since then. What's interesting and inspiring here is that community members are not only asking the city of Toronto to preserve Little Jamaica and push back against the construction, but they are also experimenting with collective ownership as a way of preserving the neighborhood themselves.

After looking at the history of such displacement across Canada, we look now to this contemporary issue and what we can do to better understand and support the families, businesses and communities that have been in this neighborhood since the 1950s.

Content to Explore:

Websites and articles:

<https://www.heritagetoronto.org/explore/little-jamaica-toronto-history/>

<https://www.heritagetoronto.org/explore/little-jamaica-toronto-history/jamaica-black-history-hair/>

<https://toronto.citynews.ca/2025/07/11/little-jamaica-community-land-trust-formed-to-protect-neighbourhood-from-gentrification/>

<https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/planning-studies-initiative/s/little-jamaica-oakwood-vaughan-planning-framework/>

Videos:

Nana McClean video (2024)

<https://www.nfb.ca/series/sounds-pressure/season1/nana-mclean/>

Memoires to Little Jamaica (2022) <https://vimeo.com/755966096>

Generations of Home (2023)

<https://chelsea-nyomi.com/film-and-video/generations-of-home/>

Tallawah Abroad: Remembering Little Jamaica (2020)

<https://www.cbc.ca/arts/remembering-little-jamaica-this-new-film-pays-tribute-to-a-disappearing-toronto-neighbourhood-1.5300174>

Reflection Questions:

- How does our understanding of “community infrastructure” change if we included Black owned businesses, salons, restaurants, stores, and more alongside churches, schools, parks and community centres? What does that difference in understanding do for our approach to urban renewal?
- What does Little Jamaica teach us about the ways that immigrants and diasporic communities create belonging rather than simply integrating into existing culture?
- What would Canadian culture look like if we understood it as something continually created by newcomers and their communities?
- Who should have meaningful power to determine what happens to a neighborhood when the people who created its cultural identity don't own most of its land?
- What is the difference between having a community's culture recognized by an institution and having the community possess actual power over the land, resources, and businesses that sustain the culture?
- What changes when we view land as a relationship rather than an asset?
- What does it look like to follow existing community leadership?

Section 6: Collective Reflection and Activities

Weaving the Stories Together: How do we connect the dots?

- What patterns do you notice across Africville, Hogan's Alley, Little Burgundy, and Little Jamaica? Where do their stories diverge?
- What forms of power appear repeatedly across these histories?
- How can something appear "neutral" like a highway or zoning or transit development, produce profoundly unequal outcomes?
- What is the relationship between physical displacement and cultural erasure?
- What did Black communities create despite the conditions imposed on them? What forms of joy, culture, mutual aid, etc. appear?
- What do we miss if we only tell these stories as what was done to Black communities instead of also asking what the community members were building, imagining, and organizing?
- What kinds of knowledge and relationships are carried by communities even when institutions and physical spaces disappear?
- How have land grabs and systemic neglect shaped the economic and social realities of Black Canadians today?
- What is the difference between recognizing a community's cultural importance and giving that community meaningful control over land and resources?
- What can we learn from community land trusts and other collective ownership models about preventing displacement?
- Where do these histories intersect within Canadian colonial systems and where do they require different forms of accountability, repair, and action?
- How does the displacement of Africville, Hogan's Alley and Little Burgundy compare to land dispossession faced by Indigenous peoples in Canada?
- In what ways have systemic neglect and exploitation (e.g., lack of basic services, forced assimilation) been used as tools of oppression for both communities?
- How can discussions around reparations for Black settlements inform or connect with Indigenous land-back movements?
- What can we learn from Indigenous Land Back movements without treating Indigenous frameworks as models to reproduce?
- How can we center compassion while engaging in conversations about reparations and accountability for systemic harm?

Unitarian Universalist Values ask us:

- How can we, as UUs, ensure marginalized voices are heard and empowered in our congregations and broader society?
- As UUs committed to the 8th Principle, what concrete actions can we take to address anti-Blackness and support reparations in our communities?

- How do our principles call us to respond to historical injustices, like those experienced by Africville and Indigenous communities?
- What role do reparations play in creating a world that aligns with our UU values of justice, equity, and collective liberation?
- What happens when governments, institutions, and dominate cultures decide that a community's labour or culture is expendable?
- What responsibilities do those of us who inherit these histories now have?
- What does it mean for a congregation to learn the history of the place where it worships without making the learning itself the endpoint?
- Who has meaningful decision making power in your congregation? Who is consulted but not empowered?
- What are we responsible for noticing that we might previously have been able to overlook?
- What have we learned about race, land, power, memory, community, resistance and responsibility?

Activities to Explore:

Community Ecosystem Mapping:

Gather: writing utensils and paper

Activity:

- Take a piece of paper and write COMMUNITY in the centre.
- Then around it, label all parts you can think of that make a community; housing, work, art, food, faith, childcare, eldercare, businesses, gathering spaces, mutual aid, transportation, cultural memory, political organizing, education, etc.
- Ask yourself, or your group, what happens when one piece of this eco system is removed?

For example:

No housing= no people

No businesses = economic relationships change/end

No community centres/churches = social networks are weakened

- Go through your list and see what comes up! Talk about it!
- At the end of your list, ask yourself, what did governments and developers actually destroy when beyond the buildings?

Recognition Repair Redistribution:

Gather: writing utensils and paper, or a board everyone can see also works

Activity:

- Write 3 categories

Recognition: We acknowledge

Repair: We address the harm

Redistribution: We change who has access to power

- Ask people to place different responses that cities, institutions or businesses have made into the three categories. Here is a list you can explore for ideas:
 - Historical plaque, museum exhibit, apology, renaming a street, financial compensation, affordable commercial space, community land trust, returning land, land acknowledgement, supporting Black owned businesses, community-controlled funds, political representation
- Ask:
 - What can recognition accomplish and not accomplish?
 - What becomes possible when we move from remembering injustice to changing distribution of power and resources?

Notice, Wonder, Practice

Gather: writing utensils and paper

Activity:

Write down the following prompts and fill them in

I notice...

A pattern I see across these histories is....

I wonder...

A question these histories leave me with is....

I am responsible for...

Something I now feel responsible for noticing/changing is...

I want to practice...

One way I want to embody the 8th principle is....

Section 7: Facilitators Support

Small Group Facilitation Support

If you decide to move through this work in small groups, here is a short non exhaustive list to support your work.

Recommended size:

Max 10 for deeper conversations and exploration

Recommended meeting length:

2 hours with a break, no more than once a week but once every other week or once a month is also good to allow you to process and digest

Recommended format:

Gather together- Opening Words

Brief check in (2 minutes each)

Watch or engage with the material here or in the Black History Month toolkit, I recommend nothing more than 30-45 minutes of content

Body Break- 5-10 minutes

15-20 minutes of reflecting on the questions

Group sharing, questions, brainstorming

Accountability check in (what are you taking away from this, what do you want to try committing to this week?)

Closing Words

Other recommendations:

- I do suggest making a covenant together as a group for this work.
- I suggest within the group you also make pairs or small groups of 2 or 3 to be more personal accountability buddies in this work.
- Use the Black History Month tool kit to pull more exercises and regulating practices from
- Make your individual learning goals and group learning goals, encourage sharing!

- If there are non-White people in your group, consider caucusing and ensure you aren't looking to them for answers and labour that doesn't fit the scope of this work.

Finally remember;

- Lead with curiosity
- Give space for responding, silence is ok
- Use "I" statements.
- Make space for everyone, though passing is always ok
- Connect the history with the present, ask; what does this history help us notice about our communities, institutions, and responsibilities today?
- Share power, invite others to find readings for opening and closing words
- Food is always nice!
- The goal isn't perfection, it's engagement and intention. You got this!