THROUGH THEIR EYES

Was Canada’s Response to Black Soldiers Racist?

In 1914, Canadian society had a fairly rigid racial, linguistic, religious, and ethnic structure. White Anglo-Saxon males were at the top of the scale, followed by White immigrants from European countries, then White immigrants from non-European countries such as Russia and the Ukraine. Non-White Canadians were, at the lower end. This structure, to a large extent, carried over to the military during the First World War. For example, it was official military policy that any man who was of age and medically fit could join the army. However, it was up to commanding officers of local regiments or battalions to accept or reject applicants. In 1914, most Black Canadian applicants were rejected, although a few Black Canadians managed to enlist in White battalions, including the 25th Battalion from Nova Scotia and the 160th Battalion, Nova Scotia Rifles.

For each of the following letters and memo, prepare an organizer like the one below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retell (key points of each)</th>
<th>Relate (make connections to what you already know)</th>
<th>Reflect (questions, thoughts)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Start with “This is about” or “It is” (time)</td>
<td>Start with “This reminds me of” or “This makes me feel”</td>
<td>Start with “I wonder if” or “How I want to learn”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What questions would you like to ask, if you could, that would help you understand why each letter and memo was written? What do the letters and memo tell you about attitudes in early 20th-century Canada?

Arthur Alexander served as principal of North Buxton School for 37 years. North Buxton is located in southwestern Ontario. Alexander had just turned 29 when he wrote this letter on November 6, 1914.

Minister of Defense
Ottawa

Nov. 6, 1914

Dear Sir,

The coloured people of Canada want to know why they are not allowed to enlist in the Canadian militia. I am informed that several who have applied for enlistment in the Canadian Expeditionary Forces have been refused for no other apparent reason than their colour, as they were physically and mentally fit. Thanking you in advance for any information that you can give me in regards to this matter.

I remain
Yours Respectfully, for King & Country

Arthur Alexander
North Buxton, Ont.

Evidence 1.14

November 20, 1914
To Arthur Alexander, Esq.,
North Buxton, Ont.

Sir,—

The Honourable Minister of Militia and Defence has duly received your letter of 6th instant, enquiring about coloured persons not being allowed to enlist in the Canadian Militias for Overseas Expeditionary Force.

Under instructions already issued, the selection of Officers and men for the second contingent is entirely in the hands of Commanding Officers, and their selections or rejections are not interfered with from Headquarters.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

Lt.-Col. MURPHY
Munitions Secretary

Evidence 1.15

Sir William Grey Gwatkin, KCMG, CB
Chief of the General Staff
13 April 1916
Memorandum on the enlistment of Negros in the Canadian Expeditionary Force

1. Nothing is to be gained by blinking facts. The coloured negro is vain and impulsive. If in Canada he is not being impelled to enlist by a high sense of duty, in the trenches he is not likely to make a good fight; and the average White man will not associate with him on terms of equality. Not No. 2. It is willing to accept a coloured platoon as part of its five battalions in Canada, and would be humiliated to have this coloured men themselves to serve in a battalion where they were not wanted...

2. In France, in the firing line, there is no place for a black battalion, G.B.P. (Canadian Expeditionary Force). It would be eyed with disfavour...

Evidence 1.16

What reasons do you think the government had for preparing this poster? The views expressed in Evidence 1.13, 1.14, and 1.15

Evidence 1.17

COLORED MEN!
Your King and Country Need YOU!
NOW is the time to show your Patriotism and Loyalty.
WILL YOU NEED THE CALL AND DO YOUR SHARE?

Your Brothers of the Colonies have rallied to the Flag and are distinguishing themselves at the Front.

Will you also be your opportunity to be identified in the greatest War of History, where the fate of Nations who stand for Liberty is at stake. Your formes are equally at stake as those of your White Brothers.

NO. 2 CONSTRUCTION BATTALION
Now being Organized All Over the Dominion
Summons You. WILL YOU SERVE?

The British and their Allies are now engaged in a great forward movement. Roads, Bridges and Railways must be made to carry the Victory forward.

The need of the day is Pioneers. Construction Companies and Railway Construction Companies. No. 1 Construction Company has been recruited. No. 2 Construction Company is now called for.

Lt.-Col. D.H. Sutherland is in charge of the Company’s Headquarters at Prince, and applications may be made at the Prince Recruiting Station: elsewhere to any Recruiting Officer, or by letter to —

MAJOR W.R.A. RITCHIE, Chief Recruiting Officer, Haliburton, N.S.
Grave marker of Private Jeremiah A. (Jerry) Jones. During the Battle of Vimy Ridge, Canadian troops were pinned down by German machine-gun fire. Jones worked his way across the battlefield to the machine-gun nest and tossed a hand grenade into the Germans' position. Several soldiers were killed and the rest surrendered to Jones. Jones was not granted the Distinguished Conduct Medal for which he had been recommended, because he was Black. Over the years, efforts continued to have his achievements recognized. In September 2000, this grave marker was unveiled in Truro, Nova Scotia, with full Royal Canadian Legion honours. The sculpture was taken down in October 2007 because of excessive wood decay in the base. The Jones family and the artist, Bruce Wood, are looking into creating a fiberglass copy of the original for reinstallation.

Truro Daily News
August 17, 1917

A "D.C.M." for a Truro Soldier
Pte. Jerry Jones, Ford St., Runs in Bunch of Hess is The Machine Gun
Paceously Hands M.G. Over to His C.C.O.
Has been recommended for Distinguished Conduct Medal
what a Truro Officer in England writes.

We believe the well-known, industrious and highly respected Truro colored man, Pte. Jerry Jones, a resident of Ford Street, who went overseas with the 106th Battalion, has scored a big hit in his scrap with the Hess at the front.

When Jerry Jones joined the 106th under Col. Innes, he was a strapping big fellow—a fine looking soldier—he took a humble position, played his part well; went overseas, volunteered for the battlefield and has been a terror to the treacherous German on more than one occasion.

He was lately wounded in action and is just recovering, and nobly getting ready for his "bit" again.

He has shown himself a patriot, brave, powerful and resourceful, and we understand he has been recommended for the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

In 1991, to honour the No. 2 Construction Battalion, the Pictou council in Nova Scotia declared Market Wharf, which had been the headquarter of the battalion, to be municipal historic property. In 1993, the Canadian Historic Sites and Monuments Board announced its decision to commemorate the Market Wharf. On July 10, 1993, a monument to the battalion (Evidence 1.18) was officially unveiled.

Evidence 1.17

When you compare the photographs in Evidence 1.19 and 1.20, what conclusions can you draw about changes in attitudes toward Black Canadians in Canadian society and the Canadian forces?

Evidence 1.19
Officers and men of the Black Canadian unit at Windsor, Nova Scotia. These men were part of the No. 2 Construction Battalion.

Evidence 1.20
Soldiers from the First Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry read and chat during some rest time at their Forward Operating Base in Northern Kandahar, Afghanistan, May 5, 2006.

Evidence 1.18

Monument to the No. 2 Construction Battalion in Pictou, Nova Scotia.

Why is this monument important in Canadian history? Have attitudes changed in Canada? How do you know?

No. 2 Construction C.E.F. First Headquarters Site 1916-1918

Evidence 1.18

1. Prepare a speech to advocate for or against the presentation of the Distinguished Conduct Medal to Private Jeremiah Jones. Be sure to include evidence to support your views.

2. Starting with the evidence in Section Two, provide a journal entry for one of the individuals in this section.

3. Create a mind map to show the relationships between the ideas of military leaders and the contributions of Black soldiers during the First World War. Use the question from the section title, "Was Canada's response to Black soldiers' service?" as your central concept.