

Our Roots in Activism

Finding Agency & Allyship in Histories of Anti-racist Mobilization in Canada

December 2024

Knowledge Synthesis Grant Final Report

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Our Roots in Activism: Finding Agency and Allyship in Histories of Anti-racist Mobilization in Canada is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council in partnership with Canadian Heritage.



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We acknowledge that Huron University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Attawandaron peoples, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. This land continues to be home to diverse Indigenous peoples whom we recognize as contemporary stewards of the land and vital contributors of our society.

Executive summary

Background: the issue

Our project begins with the premise that a deep and critical historical consciousness is a prerequisite to social justice activism. Given this premise, what is the current state of knowledge about the rich history of anti-racist activism in nineteenth and twentieth-century Canada, and what can we learn from this assessment?

Four years after the murder of George Floyd, social activism triggered by this horrific event continues to garner public interest across both sides of the Canada-U.S. border. In the wake of renewed consciousness about deep-rooted racism and systemic injustices in our colonial-settler states, Canadians are equally invested in learning about their relationships to race and racism and drawing lessons from the past to shape the present. If we heed the call to *Unsettle The Great White North* (Johnson and Aladejebi, 2022), we must seek to uncover known and unknown phenomena. There is a steadfast and urgent public interest in studies that center on histories of anti-racist work in Canada. Yet, synthesizing knowledge about anti-racist history in Canada is complicated. If, as the Chatham-Kent Black Lives Matter protest of 2020 suggests, “racism is a pandemic”, how do we unpack its presence in our disparate geographies? How do we find historical exemplars of its existence and the myriads of responses to its systemic and systematic manifestations in Canadian history and the present?

Scholarship produced by academic historians only sometimes finds its way into public consciousness; when it does, it tends to crystallize into familiar and simplified patterns. Simultaneously, African Canadians from coast to coast are earnestly preserving and sharing the rich histories of their communities. Still, knowledge created by community scholars and elders does not always find its way into academic work, perpetuating unfilled gaps in our historical awareness. Our project set out to measure the gaps and recommend strategies to address them.

Objectives

Using cross-sectoral and community-based networks, *Our Roots in Activism* seeks to:

- highlight the state of knowledge about Canada’s anti-racist activist past.
- identify gaps in existing knowledge.
- address the barriers that have created them.

Our findings inform recommendations designed to:

- protect vulnerable cultural heritage and community memory.
- open the flow of knowledge about antiracist resistance across knowledge sectors.
- mobilize histories of Black activism and allyship—from the abolitionist movement to Black Lives Matter—to inform antiracist education, institutions, and public discourse.

Results

Based on our collaborative and community-informed methodological approach, the results of *Our Roots in Activism* include:

- Reflections from our student researchers and community partners embedded throughout this report and featured on our GIS Map.
- A public panel sharing project findings and reflecting on the project's significance.
- A student, faculty, and community member joint site visit to Windsor/Detroit
- Course-based student research findings
- A GIS StoryMap showcasing historical and contemporary exemplars of activism in Canada and a website housing research results and documenting the research process.
- A public symposium at Museum London in February 2025

Key messages

Our literature review revealed the importance of recent scholarship that expands the field's boundaries beyond the era of the underground railroad. Most importantly, the project review of community-based knowledge of the history of Black activism and allyship in Canada reveals rich repositories of living memory that have yet to find a wider audience or scholarly attention. The invaluable insights of community knowledge keepers, eager and willing to share with the community, particularly the youth, are threatened by sustainability challenges related to precarious funding and the double burden of serving as community historians and community education organizations.

Historical consciousness across a wide range of community organizations is the centre of knowledge creation and keeping, even in organizations whose primary work is not explicitly in history/heritage. Community organizations' work is not only valuable but also vulnerable. Much of it, which involves cultural and emotional labour, is undertaken by volunteers.

Our project results are newly framed by the Government of Canada's [*Changing Systems, Transforming Lives: Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy, 2024-28*](#) which will provide important context for mobilizing the results of *Our Roots in Activism*.

Methodology

Our methodology was centred on an idea of embedded activism within the project, arguing that documenting collective memory of resistance and resilience is itself part of a culture of resistance and resilience. We collected data through a literature review, a scan of local history repositories, digital searches, surveys and workshops with community-based knowledge keepers, and by integrating community-based experiential learning research components into our undergraduate History courses.

We used qualitative analysis centred on community-based research principles and methodologies of digital history and Public History. We also worked with students as partners by giving them appropriate guidance and space to explore the roots of our activism through researching historical changemakers/ activists or organizations that exemplified the under-studied components of anti-racist work in Canada. The results are truly inspiring.

Our Roots in Activism

Background: “Those who stand on the watchtower of freedom”

In September of 1858, members of the Black abolitionist community in Chatham led a dramatic rescue of a child who had been kidnapped and taken on board a train in London bound for Detroit, where, it was feared, his kidnapper would proceed to the state of Missouri to sell the child into enslavement. One hundred and fifty people, many of them members of the Black freedom organization known as the Chatham Vigilance Committee, rushed from the town centre to the East Chatham station where the train pulled to fill its water tanks. The waiting crowd boarded the train, seized the child and took him to safety. Seven of the participants—two white men and five Black men, were arrested and charged with riot; Mary Ann Shadd, newspaper publisher and a member of the Chatham Vigilance Committee, gave shelter to the child and helped to return him to his family. In the pages of her newspaper, *The Provincial Freeman*, Shadd defended the rescuers, calling on those who “stand on the watchtower of freedom” to join her. The (white) editor of the *Chatham Planet* echoed her support of the Vigilance Committee and urged all Chathamites to help pay the legal expenses of those arrested in defense of freedom.



Mary Ann Shadd Cary statue in the BME Freedom Park, Chatham, Ontario, with History students, Huron University College.

While many Canadians are aware of the symbolism of Canada’s involvement in the underground railroad, and many may know of prominent figures like Harriet Tubman or Mary Ann Shadd Cary; very few Canadians would know the story of the 1858 Chatham Vigilance Committee

rescue. This example opens important questions about history and memory in contemporary Canada. We have been willing to commemorate one idea of the underground railroad but quick to forget armed Black protestors and their allies on the Great Western railway enacting the truth that Black Lives Matter as they pulled a child from the train car and took him to safety. This important exemplar of historical allyship reminds us that the tenets of the contemporary Black Lives Matter movement's investment in "fighting for justice & liberation for black communities and individuals from coast to coast to coast" has deep roots that reach back to the 19th century (Black Lives Matter Canada 2023). Our project asks, what sense of ourselves have we lost by making this choice, and what can a recovery and synthesis of such narratives through *Our Roots in Activism* offer as remedy?



"Racism is a Pandemic"

Protesters gather at the Black Lives Matter March in Chatham, Ontario, in June 2020. The Chatham Kent Black Historical Society led the march.

The visibilities and silences of Black resilience and symbolism in Canadian history prompt important reflections. Why and how do we all know of Viola Desmond's activism (denoted on our \$10 bill) but not of Lincoln Alexander or Rosemary Brown and their impact on the Canadian political landscape? What of the coordinated labour activities of the Sleeping Car Porters or the Renaissance of Hogan's Alley? We hear whispers of the razing of Africville but not of the welcome reception of the Black Panther Party to Nova Scotia, Montreal, Toronto, and Saskatchewan in the 1970s. And what of the nationally funded Regional Coordinating Teams that spearheaded community mobilization projects in the 1990s? In the present, Black Diasporic communities periodically take to the streets and steps of parliament, or the gates of embassies to outcry global injustices. Typically ephemeral, these actions remain historically unchronicled.



Ultimately, all these exemplars remind us that the textured and multilayered nature of the history of Black activism in Canada has yet to be fully unveiled, examined, contextualized, analyzed, and perhaps even commemorated.

We began this project at a critical time. Statistics Canada's 2019 report highlights the diversity of Black people in Canada, providing a snapshot of cultures, language, and generational change. More than 200 ethnic and cultural origins are encapsulated in the single grouping/ identifier of Black (statcan.gc.ca). Data gleaned from the 2021 Canadian census indicate that the Black population is increasing, with children under 15 representing 26.1% of the total population (statcan.gc.ca). Census data further reinforces the importance of this project and its impact on underrepresented populations in both curriculum and policy.

At the same time, the growth and diversifying of Canada's Black population has taken place against the backdrop of the United Nations' Decade for Persons of African Descent (UN 2015). In the years since the decade opened in 2015, movements for racial justice in Canada have refocused attention on the persistence of anti-Black violence and systemic injustice. In 2016, the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent warned of systemic anti-Black racism in Canada's legal system (Maynard, 2017). The Black Lives Matter movement, which gained a clear Canadian identity in the summer of 2020, drew further attention to the systemic injustice identified by the Working Group. Our survey of knowledge generated over this period (2015-2025) asked what role our project can play in addressing the objectives of recognition and justice that the U.N. Decade was intended to foster.

Objectives

Using cross-sectoral and community-based networks, *Our Roots in Activism* surveyed knowledge about Canada's anti-racist activist past, identified gaps in existing knowledge and addressed the barriers that have created them.

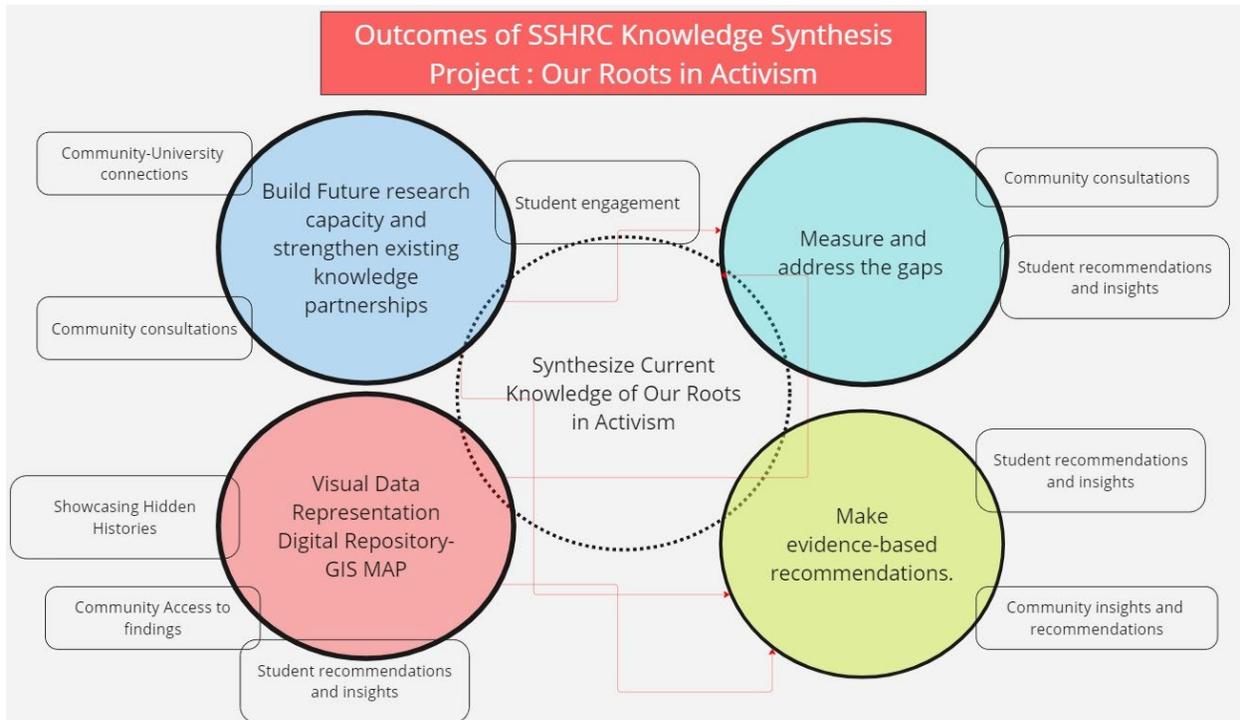
We use our findings to recommend strategies to

- 1) protect vulnerable cultural heritage and community memory
- 2) open the flow of knowledge about antiracist resistance across sectors
- 3) mobilize histories of Black activism and allyship--from the abolitionist movement to Black Lives Matter—to inform antiracist education, civic institutions, and public discourse.

We set out to:

- Gather timely and tangible resources that synthesize current knowledge about Black anti-racist activism and make those resources accessible through an expansive literature review that considers community histories, interdisciplinary scholarship, and commemorative or forgotten spaces as sites of knowledge.
- Critically assess existing research data and problematic methodologies in the field and suggest historiographical remedies

- Create a publicly accessible visual representation (GIS Map) of our knowledge synthesis in an interactive map emphasizing the significance of local cultural and knowledge production.
- Make evidence-based recommendations to local municipalities to build future research capacity and strengthen existing knowledge partnerships.



Methods

Collaboration and consultation provided the project's methodological core, bridging gaps between community history, academic history, and public memory of antiracist activism. We envisioned the project methodology as a form of antiracist activism it seeks to analyze. Guided by our experience with community-based learning in the undergraduate classroom, the project intentionally centred the work and voices of young scholars by integrating the project with course research.

Our activist methodology was embedded in the process of assembling our diverse project team of undergraduate and graduate student research assistants and faculty coinvestigators, all of whom collaborated to shape the project's direction and co-author this report. The teamwork dynamic modelled the aspirations at the project's core, creating a multi-directional flow of knowledge and experience within the team, encouraging reflection on the transformative power of the histories uncovered through the project, and building a new research network that will last beyond the

project funding period. This knowledge synthesis project benefited tremendously by hiring an incoming Masters History student with extensive roots in the local Black community (Neisa Long). The project also benefited from the research expertise of our undergraduate Political Science student Jayden Wright, and the analytical and digital expertise of Jose Ernesto Gonzalez Sardina. Young scholars bring fresh perspectives and an unparalleled passion to a hidden histories project, something that is evidenced in the quality of the deliverables that were created. Engaging students in projects such as this one allows them to develop their professional skills, and significantly enhances the breadth and culturally relevancy of the work produced. In a time of fiscal austerity across sectors, our project sought to do this work feasibly and sustainably within our localities. By building local partnerships and leveraging institutional resources and assets (faculty, staff, and students) everyone gains, ultimately strengthening our capacity to broadly share knowledge about our allyship and activist histories.



Part of the project's activity was a review of existing literature, including recent academic publications, large research projects such as *A Black People's History of Canada*, directed by Afua Cooper, and Cheryl Thompson's *Mapping Ontario's Black Archives*, and interdisciplinary scholarship. In this work, we embedded reflection components in the process of gathering data, asking student RAs to document what they found and consider their relationship to activist history as a usable past. We also opened a series of community consultations with museums, historic sites, community activists, teachers, EDI administrators at local school boards and local municipalities, and students. Pairing students with community knowledge-keepers allowed us to hear narratives of activism that are part of local memory, identify barriers to integrating this research with other forms of scholarship, and envision strategies to support community groups



sharing their knowledge. Closely examining the work of organizations in Chatham, London, and Nova Scotia enabled us to examine case studies of community activism and knowledge sharing, micro examples of Black Historical research and commemoration.

Woven through the project was the methodology of the digital humanities, which was important for visualizing and communicating the results of a complex historiographical project. The digital history component of the project offered student researchers a sense of themselves as scholars engaged in both the recording and production of knowledge (Norcia, 2008.)

By allowing space for engagement between our community partners and our students, we gleaned more profound insight into the gaps between the knowledge repositories and broader historical consciousness in a Canadian context. The impact of the research experience was captured in the reflections of our students and our community partners after the cross-border trip to the Detroit Institute of Art and the Charles H. Wright Museum. As represented by the key terms enclosed in the word cloud below, the community is at the heart of all knowledge creation and dissemination related to allyship and activism in Canada. Thus, our roots in activism project aims to continue to bridge the gap between university-community research and foster more space for knowledge co-production and knowledge sharing.



Results

Literature Review

The project included a scan of secondary sources in Black Canadian history and the integration of innovative Canadian Connections Assignments in a third-year Civil Rights history course. The review of literature focused on new scholarship that is reworking the familiar material of Black abolitionists in the nineteenth century, attending to Black activism and white allyship, and situating this powerful history in a transatlantic context (Ebanda de B'éri et al. 2014, Reid-Maroney 2013, 2027; Prince, 2014; Blackett, 2023.) Studies of communities in the nineteenth century present richly drawn portraits of Black life and resistance (Hepburn, 2007; Moore Davis, 2019; Broyld, 2023; Carter, 2025.) Early studies of resistance against enslavement in Canada are documented in the work of Natasha Henry Dixon (2022) and Harvey Amani Whitfield (2022.)

Reaching beyond abolition to consider other aspects of Black history in Canada, scholars including Melissa Shaw (2016), Deirdre McCorkindale, Carla Marano (2010), Nassisse Solomon (2021), Funke Aladejbe (2021), and Claudine Bonner (2025) focus on a range of twentieth-century Black histories, from the work of Black educators in Canada to Canadian participation in the Garvey movement. Historians of visual culture, of Black creativity, and of sport have opened new ways of reading artistic expression, photographs, dance, music, and other areas of Black life, influence, and cultural production (Nelson, 2018; Jabouin, 2021; Gismondi, 2024; McDoom, 2024; Wilson, 2020; Nzindukiyimana, 2021, Wright, 2023.)

A third area of recent scholarly activity is focused on historiography, pointing to new methodologies (Johnson et al. 2022.) Claudine Bonner's recent article takes stock of the absence of Black history in Canadian historical scholarship, analyzing the reasons for the "glaring silence" of published work focused on Black History in the *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* (Bonner, 2023.) The eminent scholar of Black History in Canada, Afua Cooper, has reflected on her over 30-year career as a scholar and the ongoing struggle to bring Black history in Canada to national attention (Cooper 2021), and historian Barrington Walker has taken up similar challenges, asking what the future of a critical (beyond narrative) Black History in Canada will be (Walker 2022.) All the aforementioned scholars implore us to expand our definitions and consciousness of Black history in Canada.

Community knowledge

While it identified the richness and depth of scholarly activity in History and historiography, the project literature review also revealed the gap between published scholarship and the power and range of knowledge held in the community. Black communities and heritage sites are rich in archival material and cultural production that is not widely known and is vulnerable to loss. For example, a recent research project at the Chatham Kent Black Historical Society revealed a collection of rare books linked to Black abolitionist families, yet conservation resources are scarce for community museums that rely on slim municipal grants to fund their full range of programming. Local history and community organizations that participated in the project have long-established ways of weaving counternarratives of resistance and resilience into their work,

even in context that make historical memory vulnerable and contingent. Our project’s critical assessment of the research data in the field—its “quality, accuracy and rigour”—must confront the complex layers of erasure and memory.

This project highlights the value of fostering institutional-community partnerships to expand our collective understanding of Black life, resistance, and agency in Canada. Community activists and historians have the lived experience and knowledge to enrich our understanding of Black consciousness and Black resistance across time and space. Concurrently, institutions have the capacity to work with community partners and organizations to support their work with resources (funding, research capacity and digital expertise, and institutional repositories) to both preserve and disseminate the knowledge that the community wishes to share. Mutually beneficial relationships premised on trust and reciprocity will enhance our understanding of allyship and resilience in historical and contemporary manifestations of Black resistance and activism.

Archives

The project highlighted challenges involving material available in local archives but not kept and curated in Black communities. Archival and special collections materials exist, but much of the available content in local public repositories disproportionately focuses on community barriers and issues of racism and discrimination rather than celebrating and honouring the groups engaged in early activism. The gap underscores the broader barriers to knowledge and content access local communities face regarding their historical legacy. Moreover, the content within archives is often labelled with derogatory terms, highlighting the critical need for proper digitization and re-categorization of materials related to equity-deserving groups. As a result, this research collection has become a complex puzzle, requiring the meticulous assembly of various articles, documents, names, and community records to accurately reconstruct and tell the stories of these organizations and their significant contributions. Scholars such as Melissa Nelson point to the work of reclaiming the conceptual foundations of Black History archives in Canada and argue for reimagining archives as a “site of possibility” (Nelson 2024; Thompson, 2024.)

Visibility and Resources

Visibility emerged as a key question for the project. For example, our community partner with the London Black History Coordinating Committee recounted the history of local Black activism in the 1990s and the work to connect to Black activism and empowerment across Canada. A national summit created by activists from the Sir George Williams University incident led to the development of Regional Coordinating Teams, focused on activism and the facilitation of skills development, rolled out in various cities, including London, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg and Vancouver. The London Black History Coordinating Committee started in 2000, was formed as part of this larger national advocacy project. However, the institutional history of the group and its links to a larger movement are lost from public view, and the group faces the challenge of archiving its materials on a short-term and shoestring budget. Notable projects in Essex County, including [*We Were Here: Documenting Windsor’s McDougall Street Corridor*](#) the [*Hour-a-Day Study Club*](#) (the oldest continuously operating Black women’s organization in Canada), and the University of Windsor’s [*North Star: Black History*](#)

Portal offer examples of digital projects that have mobilized community and university resources to create a digital presence that preserves community histories while building new research networks.

Undergraduate Community-based Research

Our project's central objectives were addressed in community-based research projects embedded in two History courses at Huron University College in the Fall term of 2024. Tasking students to explore Canadian connections to the Civil Rights Movement in the United States resulted in innovative research projects focused on uncovering hidden histories of activism in Canada. Students were asked to review the *Our Roots in Activism* project description and get familiar with the overall project objectives and rationale. They were then asked to identify a Canadian example of Civil Rights Activism (a person, event, or place) from the late 19th century to the present. The second step of this assignment was completing a literature review (scoping review of materials available) on the topic, person, or place the students identified as being of importance. They were asked to reflect on what aspects of the topic drew them in. Students thoroughly enjoyed the fact that they had free reign to explore any facet that they desired. The self-guided interest sparked deep engagement in the project, prompting innovative methodologies and final deliverables.

For their research process, students were asked to consider the following:

- What has already been published about the topic? / Has there been any scholarly work published on the topic?
- What types of other publications, blogs, or sources of information exist about your topic?
- Are there resource limitations? / Was it easy to find information on the subject?
- What was the perspective from which the information (historical sources) on the movement/person/ event that you are examining was written/ presented?
- Any observations that you would like to note regarding the available resources?
- Is this a well-known topic/ aspect of Canadian history?

Students were free to create a written summary, video, or audio material synthesizing the information they found. However, the final deliverable had to consider the following elements:

- The social impact/ implication of the movement/person/ event they examined.
- The political impact/ implication of the movement/person/ event they examined.
- The specific economic and cultural implications of the movement/person/ event examined.

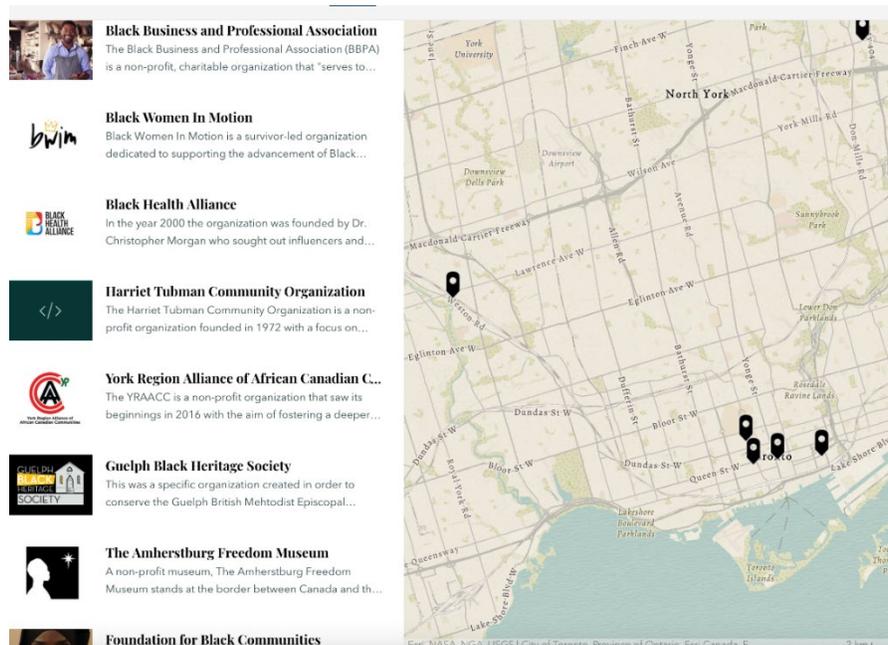
Finally, they were asked to consider why the history they explored was significant and important for the public to be aware of. Asking senior undergraduate students to find entry points of interest into historic exemplars of Black activism yielded results that have implications for this knowledge synthesis project. Students examined a wide array of topics related to Black activism

and allyship in Canadian history, ranging from Canadian responses to the screening of the American film *The Birth of A Nation* (1915) and the rise of the KKK in Vancouver to the warm welcome and support that members of the Black Panther Party received when they visited Nova Scotia, Montreal, Toronto, and Saskatchewan in the mid-twentieth century. Some sought to understand the role of Viola Desmond, Rosemary Brown and Lincoln Alexander in our political and cultural imagination. Examining the role and symbolism of the No.2 Construction Battalion led one student to question the underexamined legacy of race and activism in the Canadian military. Looking to connect the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 and the role of race in labour movements, another examined the Sleeping Car Porters' development and organized labour activism. Searching for exemplars of allyship between African Canadians and Japanese Canadians, another student explored transnational instances of solidarity. Centering the importance of space and culture, another project revisited the legacy of Hogan's Alley to explore why it was significant and how the erasure of the space (community) left a cultural and historical void yet to be filled. Above all, the class's work exemplified the steadfast and urgent public interest in studies centered on histories of anti-racist work in Canada. With rich and reflective assessments developed, the final deliverables will be featured on the project GIS map.

A second embedded project asked students to use the *Dawn of Tomorrow*, a Black newspaper published in London, Ontario beginning in 1923. Its founding editor was an African American, James Jenkins, who came to London from Chicago and envisioned the *Dawn of Tomorrow* in the Black Press tradition of papers such as the *New York Age* and the *Chicago Defender*. In the pages of the *Dawn of Tomorrow*, students encountered the understudied evidence of London's local Black activist history, and examined historical connections and the themes of race, activism, and identity across the Canada-US border. Work with primary sources and local materials brought an immediacy to the themes of the course and helped students develop a critical understanding of how and why our knowledge of the past matters in contemporary discussions of race, justice, and identity. Asked to reflect on their research, students noted that the history revealed by this local source material was otherwise completely unknown to them.

Visualising Black Presence, History, Activism

Many Black communities have been part of the Canadian nation-state for more than five decades, yet we know very little about their historical presence here. Our historical rooting of Black communities in Canada effectively stops in the late 19th century. Yet, small pockets of literature attest to more exemplars of allyship and community mobilization for social justice projects centering Black communities, here and abroad (Solomon, 2019). Our Arc-GIS StoryMap documents the presence of 125 Black history and community organizations in Canada from the 1850s through the present day. The mapping exercise is not exhaustive, but it reveals a depth and richness of knowledge creation and knowledge keeping that is sustained in living communities of memory. Where possible we engaged directly with community organizations to discuss their work, aspirations and challenges. We also linked to digital resources, including documentary and creative films, digital exhibits, and archival material. The map—its entries as well as the gaps it records—has helped us to take the measure of the scope of ideas and traditions from across the diaspora community knowledge and to draw attention to the depth, and extent and importance of Black presence in Canada's past and present.



Black Business and Professional Association
The Black Business and Professional Association (BBPA) is a non-profit, charitable organization that "serves to..."

Black Women In Motion
Black Women In Motion is a survivor-led organization dedicated to supporting the advancement of Black...

Black Health Alliance
In the year 2000 the organization was founded by Dr. Christopher Morgan who sought out influencers and...

Harriet Tubman Community Organization
The Harriet Tubman Community Organization is a non-profit organization founded in 1972 with a focus on...

York Region Alliance of African Canadian C...
The YRAACC is a non-profit organization that saw its beginnings in 2016 with the aim of fostering a deeper...

Guelph Black Heritage Society
This was a specific organization created in order to conserve the Guelph British Methodist Episcopal...

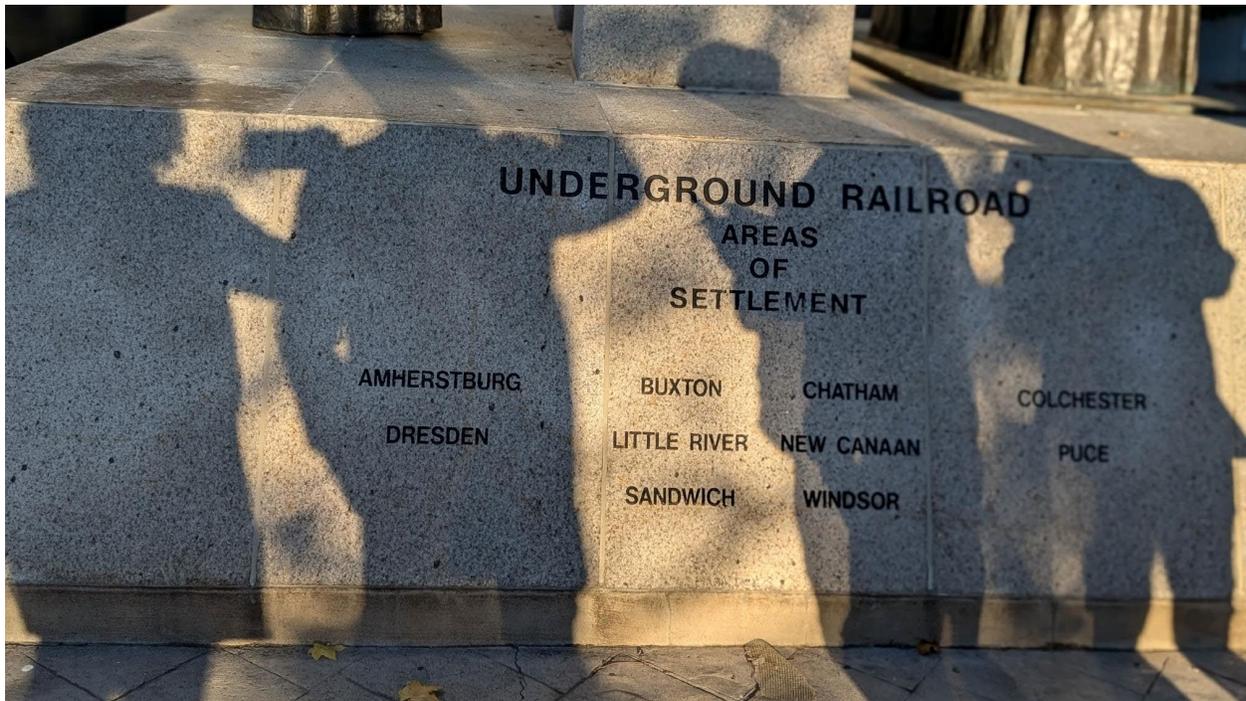
The Amherstburg Freedom Museum
A non-profit museum, The Amherstburg Freedom Museum stands at the border between Canada and th...

Foundation for Black Communities

Our Roots in Activism StoryMap detail showing a selection of entries for southwestern Ontario

Community Knowledge and Place-Based History

There is exciting work to be done at the intersections of classroom, community, public discourse, and academic research. In addition to gathering data through the undergraduate student research completed as coursework, we connected students with community organizations. We travelled with students and community partners to the Windsor/Detroit waterfront to see historical memory sites and compare commemorative practices. Student and community partner reflections were gathered to inform project outcomes. The knowledge synthesis reached across the Canada-US border to make plain the historical connections between Black communities and the transnational geography of Black activism.



Students and community partners visiting the Tower of Freedom, the Windsor half of the International Underground Railroad Memorial on the Detroit River.

Implications

We envision our project results joining the discussion and implementation of the Government of Canada’s renewed and urgent [*Changing Systems, Transforming Lives: Canada’s Anti-Racism Strategy, 2024-28*](#). Given the framework of this comprehensive strategy to support transformative national and cross-sectoral work at all levels of Canadian society, we offer the following recommendations:

Provide frontline support. Among the potential knowledge users we talked to for this study, we found strong interest in connecting to the work of Black communities and histories. We also found a pattern of front-line burnout in EDID offices across sectors, where day-to-day struggles against anti-Black racism take up time and resources before a connection can be made to create stable and sustainable programming to support the work. Building networks and relationships to support the work is as important as funding.

Create sustainable funding models to enhance municipal government support for small museums and community groups in both stable and sustainable ways, freeing staff and volunteers in those organizations to build outreach capacity. The precarious nature of funding impacts the capacity of community organizations and their volunteers to complete their multifaceted work as knowledge keepers, community organizers, and educators. Policies should

address the need for stable funding and recognize the irreplaceable value of volunteer labour in knowledge-keeping, community building, and education by opening connections and pathways to support this work and make it visible.

Incentivize and fund more university-community connections by supporting Black community organizations in meeting their objectives and engaging students as co-creators of knowledge. Universities are crucial in building sustainable partnerships through enhanced administrative support and funding for community-based student research and experiential learning. Experiential learning and community-based research are cost-effective and high-impact practices that meet core degree objectives and bridge the gap between sectors by fulfilling organizations' resource and skill needs while providing skills training opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students through research internships/ placements.

Amplify the anti-racist power of local Black histories by leveraging the interest and resources of secondary school students. Secondary school boards are essential in amplifying and embedding Black histories in and beyond the History classroom. Even small rural boards can find local community knowledge that can be tapped to broaden Black history beyond funding for February activities. A robust Black history curriculum is now widely available thanks to major initiatives such as Afua Cooper's *Black People's History of Canada*. When the resources and scholarship made available for curricula are combined with local knowledge and delivered in partnership with local knowledge keepers, their effect is magnified, and students engaged in even a simple cross-sector project become creators of knowledge in communities of their own.



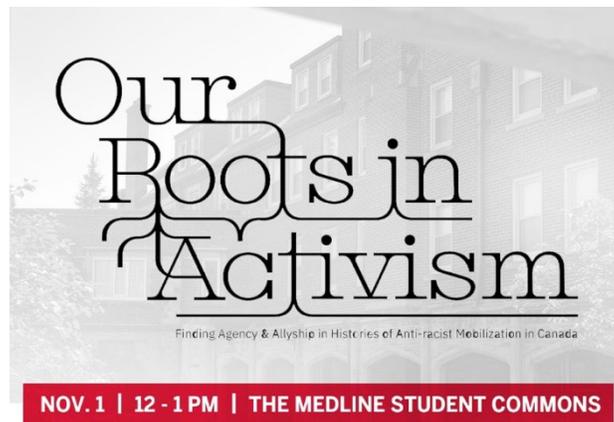
Students and community partners with Our Roots in Activism in Detroit, November 2024.

Conclusion

Whilst noting that public interest in activist histories is strong, we would be remiss not to underscore the changes in our political and social climates since 2020. Institutions are currently grappling with anti-woke and anti-EDID sentiments, which are threatening programs and initiatives that were seeded in the fervour of atonement that took hold in 2020-2022. This reality makes the findings of this report even more pertinent. With fiscal austerity measures at play across several sectors, the work of Black community activists, heritage keepers, and allied community organizations is at more risk than it has been in over two decades. Although the funding period for the knowledge synthesis is complete, we have plans to continue work informed by the project's insights. We recognize that much of the absence of histories of antiracist activism within wider Canadian historical narratives stems from the absence of representatives of these communities in academia. Communities are marginalised because their presence is not recognized as being historical, perpetuating their disembodied presence in Canada as perpetual immigrants (Creese, 2019). Our findings have brought new attention to community-based learning in our courses and their power to make new connections across knowledge sectors. Knowledge mobilization for the project, including a student-moderated panel of community curators and museum directors, will continue to highlight the benefits of university investment in community-based research learning. Mobilizing the resources we already have in place at Huron, we will expand the discussion of our recommendations at a regional curators panel as part of the annual Buxton History and Genealogy Conference in August 2025. The act of documenting collective memory of resistance and resilience through the project has itself become part of a culture of resistance and resilience, opening paths of activism and allyship and reinscribing Black presence and influence on the narratives of Canada's past.

Knowledge mobilization activities

- [*Our Roots in Activism StoryMap*](#)
- Course assignments in History 3313F and History 2302F, Huron University College
- Student RA outreach, consultation, and interviews with community organizations, May-September 2024
- Nov. 1st student RA panel in partnership with Western University's EDID Week



- Project website: huronresearch.ca/ourrootsinactivism
- Detroit/Windsor borderlands trip with students and community partners, November 8, 2024
- *Our Roots in Activism* Panel, February 5, 2025 at Museum London, in partnership with Museum London and the Huron University College History Department
- Student RAs representing *Our Roots in Activism* at the National Black Canadians Summit, Montreal 2025
- Undergraduate student presentations on project coursework at the Spring Conference 2025, Centre for Undergraduate Research Learning at Huron

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Meet the Team

Jose Gonzalez Sardina is a fourth-year student at Huron University College who is completing a B.A. with a Major in History. He was part of Professor Tim Compeau's HISTORY 2801G History Wars class, in which he contributed to research on a team assigned to create a guided story map displaying the journey of the Harris Family of Eldon House across Hong Kong and Macao.

Neisa Long is currently an M.A. candidate pursuing her master's in public history and is the EDI coordinator in the Office of the AVP, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) at Western University. She is a King's Alumni, graduating in 2022 with a B.A. Hons in Criminology and History. As a first-generation graduate, Neisa views her academic achievement as a significant milestone. Neisa's upbringing comes from a complex family dynamic, instilling in her a profound appreciation for diverse perspectives and identities. In her role at the Office of EDI at Western, Neisa supports students, staff, faculty, and community, by amplifying their voices and their sense of belonging. Neisa is also the acting Co-Chair of the campus Black Faculty and Staff Steering Committee and Pride Planning Committee. Neisa's passion for history and uncovering silenced narratives exemplifies her dedication to scholarly inquiry and her relentless pursuit of social justice through storytelling and community engagement.

Nina Reid-Maroney is a Professor of History at Huron University College and co-director (with Thomas Peace) of the Huron Community History Centre. She is the author of *The Reverend Jennie Johnson and African Canadian History, 1868-1967* (University of Rochester Press 2013) and co-editor of *The Promised Land: History and Historiography of the Black Experience in Chatham-Kent's Settlements and Beyond* (University of Toronto Press 2014) and *Women in the "Promised Land": Essays in African Canadian History* (Canadian Scholars/Women's Press 2018). Her research is focused on the intellectual history of antislavery movements in the Great Lakes region, and on religion, Enlightenment, and antislavery in 18th-century Philadelphia. A co-edited collection (with Boulou Ebanda de B'éri and Claudine Bonner) titled *The Black Press: A Shadowed Canadian Tradition* is forthcoming from the University of Toronto Press.

Nassisse Solomon (PhD Western University) is a lecturer in the history department at Huron University College, where she teaches courses in African history and Black Canadian studies. Dr. Solomon's research focuses on the exploration of the history and diversity of the Black population in Canada. She specializes in the rooting of the Ethiopian diaspora in Canada. She is a core member of the *Robbins-Ollivier Research Grant* (which aims at enhancing the black experience at Western) and an *SSHRC Partnership Grant* that looks at the lived experiences of Black youth in Southwestern Ontario. In the past, she collaborated on another SSHRC project that focused on exploring the experiences of second-generation Ethiopian and Eritrean youth in Canada.

Jayden Wright is a third-year Political Science and English Major at Huron University College. She has previously worked as a research assistant studying Black Humanist authors. She is engaged in a range of advocacy roles on campus and is Vice President of Student Affairs for Huron University's Student Council.