From Site to Sound and Film: Critical Black Canadian Memory Culture and Sylvia D. Hamilton's *The Little Black School House*

Winfried Siemerling

Art as Intervention

What does the work of art do in the world? Is art action, interaction, part of the "real"? Art has often been considered outside such dimensions that valorize its pragmatic and mimetic functions. These aspects seem time and again to be crucial, however, in the case of works that relate to the experiences of aggrieved communities. Such texts, films, sonic creations, and performances routinely exemplify a kind of art that wants to intervene in the world and exert "civic agency."[1] In this article, I focus on one of Sylvia D. Hamilton's films, *The Little Black School House* (2007), to understand how it fuses individual forms of memory and witnessing with archival materials to forge a critical memory culture that can strengthen a participatory and democratic public sphere, showcase the resilience and creativity of hitherto marginalized communities, and address significant lapses of understanding and memory in Canada's self-perception.

An interventionist dimension is strikingly evident in much contemporary black Canadian art. It is especially conspicuous in the ways that much of this art uses past-oriented impulses to look to the future, often charting avenues of becoming and hope by delving into historical events and referencing black textual antecedents. Translating commemorative aspects of diasporic culture into visions of social justice and future aspirations, this work embodies what Hortense Spillers calls "critical" culture (00:07:05-00:07:12). For her, the critical dimension of black culture is rooted in a long tradition of resistance to the status quo but also means that black culture in many ways is "an event to come" (00:07:20-00:07:27); given the persistence of inequality and the unsustainable values of a dominant culture focused on material gain, many of its cor-

rective tasks remain to be completed, and much of its potential is still unfulfilled (00:19:20-00.20:05). A similar emphasis on futurity is also present in many influential reflections on diasporic identities. Stuart Hall, for instance, suggests that diasporic identity is crucially "a matter of 'becoming.'" For him, diasporic identity "belongs to the future as much as to the past" and is not "something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture" (225).

Much of black Canadian writing, film, and music — often created with the full awareness of a long tradition of black testimony and memoir — not only deals with the hauntings of historical trauma but also seeks to engage audiences now, exert forms of civic agency, and offer visions of change and a better future. Given the persistent emphasis in much of this work on the legacies of the past, it can be seen to transform creatively the cultural work of earlier examples in which the pragmatic function of black culture and expression was paramount. Black writing and testimony routinely had to function in pragmatic ways, whether black individuals had to "prove" their humanity through "the ability to write" (Gates 21) or whether testimony was requested of slaves accused of crimes — think of the 1734 trial of Angélique.[2] Narratives by former slaves were recorded in the service of abolitionism, black writing was asked to underwrite black Americans' claims to national belonging (e.g., Du Bois 8; Gates xxiii), and black art was employed to serve the more militant aims of the 1960s Black Aesthetic.[3]

Most contemporary artists would resist a one-dimensional functionalization of their art, and black Canadian writers, musicians, and filmmakers are no exception. Lawrence Hill, for instance, has emphasized that his task is not to provide black role models in his fiction (14). George Elliott Clarke has equally rejected this burden (866). Yet one can say that much recent black Canadian work has important interventionist dimensions. Whatever else its intentions, much of this work, including that of Hill and Clarke, also wants to witness, critique, problematize, or convince, and in some form it seeks to influence the audience with the aim of transforming the "real." Yet how does this work stage the transformation of the past into the future? How does it address audiences in order to make transformation happen? What can be said of its communicative function?[4]

Sylvia Hamilton: Testifying to Black Experiences through Images, Voices, and Music

Some answers to these questions can be gleaned from the films of Sylvia Hamilton. An important Nova Scotian public intellectual, she has also embraced poetry, installation art, scholarly writing, and teaching in the course of her career.[5] The documentary films that she has now directed for over twenty-five years represent an outstanding contribution to interventionist critical black memory culture in Canada. She has also had a significant impact on other filmmakers through her organizational work within the Atlantic Studio of the National Film Board (NFB) and her creation, with co-creator Executive Producer Rina Fratacelli, of the New Initiatives in Film program at Studio D, the Women's Studio at the NFB in Montreal, which supported films made by Indigenous and women of colour directors (McGuire and Varga 185).

The importance of the transmission of black experiences and testimonies for the nurturing of black identities is a recurring theme in Hamilton's films. Her debut as a director, *Black Mother Black Daughter* (1989, co-directed with Claire Pietro), concentrates on the conveyance of knowledge among several generations of black women against the background of black Nova Scotian history and the sustained fight against inequality. The film validates the experiences of older black women — whose achievements find little or no mention in public records — and shows the value of their witnessing for a younger generation.[6] More specifically, Hamilton underscores "the intergenerational transmission of values, goals, and experiences through life examples and story telling" and therefore the "importance of oral tradition" ("Daughter's Journey" 7). The emphasis on the oral and personal transmission of knowledge responds to the systematic and quotidian failure of mainstream channels to provide images and stories that reflect black lives, concerns, and achievements. Having witnessed the disconnection between her own experiences "and the images and visual representations I and others were given back via the educational system [and] the multiple forms of mass communications," Hamilton was motivated to make films because of the realization that creating "images would become a way to forestall forgetfulness and to counter the erasure of stories from our individual and collective memories" (9). This concern can be seen to have guided all of her film projects to date.

Figure 1: Hamilton on location for *The Little Black School House.* Courtesy Sylvia D. Hamilton, Maroon Films Inc.

Given the centrality of education in the process of providing usable models and patterns of identification, not surprisingly Hamilton's second film, the award-winning S*peak It! From the Heart of Black Nova Scotia* (1992), concentrates on the elision of black history from Nova Scotia's educational curricula. The film features black high school students in Halifax who actively seek to respond to this deficit and raise awareness of the racism that they encounter. The film also documents the theatre work of writer and director David Woods with these students, work focused on making black history a presence in their lives and making it matter for their audiences. The film illustrates several goals that Hamilton has prioritized in her work. First, it provides images of black students and their lives, countering their elision from public representations of Halifax and Nova Scotia. Hamilton describes her own earlier experience of "a yearning, a longing" ("When" 8) for such images of black people since they were absent from educational and media materi-

als. Her early interest in viewing images and films is prominent in an account of her intellectual and artistic trajectory, and she mentions the various devices — beginning with a Brownie camera, a Kodak instamatic, and photo booths — that allowed her to realize the desire of producing such pictures herself. Citing Toni Morrison's and Alice Walker's similar rationales for their own writing, Hamilton states that she makes films that she would have liked to see but that were not made.[7]

Second, *Speak It!* further demonstrates her interest in moving black subjects to the foreground in films and other forms of representation, showing them in the process of shaping their own lives and of doing so especially through language. One of Hamilton's main concerns is to portray black individuals "as active subjects with agency, not as problems and historical footnotes" ("When" 10). We see, for example, the student narrator of the film, Shingai Njakeka, addressing his class on the subject of black Nova Scotian history and participating with his fellow students in other activities to counter racism and the elision of black knowledge from the school curriculum. The film also shows how, in the process, these students create a reflected account of their situation, increasing the possibility of improving it. Hamilton has emphasized that her "work re-inserts and re-positions African-descended people in our landscapes by presenting stories and images of people being *witnesses* of their own lives" (4). The idea of witnessing gives a specific contour to Hamilton's larger project of providing images of black people and their lives, one that makes black speech — and black singing voices and music — central to her films and their strategies of intervention.

Evoked imperatively in the very title of S*peak It!*, black voices and acts of witnessing are prominent features in the films that followed. They are central not only to *Black Mother Black Daughter* and *Speak It!* but also to *Against the Tides: The Jones Family* (Almeta Speaks Productions 1994),[8] which focuses on the family of black activist "Rocky" Jones as an entry point into black Nova Scotian politics and history;[9] they are also essential to Hamilton's two-part documentary on violence against women in black communities, *No More Secrets* (1999), the first part of which emphasizes speech again in its title, *The Talking Circle*. Speaking, witnessing voices are again a crucial element in another film that returns to the issues of education, the documentary *The Little Black School House*. Together with *Speak It!*, the film rose out of the ashes of a fire at the Halifax NFB office in which Hamilton lost much

of the material that she had been shooting. This "Phoenix number two" ("When" 14), however, would not appear until 2007. *The Little Black School House* deals in particular with experiences related to segregated schools in Nova Scotia and Ontario, experiences that Hamilton herself shared when she attended a segregated school in rural Beechville, near Halifax. I want to examine this film here more closely with regard to its interventionist strategies. As in so many of her other films, Hamilton seeks in this work to translate individual and private forms of memory into a public arena, creating a process that gives voice to silent sites, markers, and archives that need to be communally accessed so that they can release their potentially transformative force in the present.

For such reasons, it is no coincidence that — in addition to visual elements — voice and sound play such important roles in Hamilton's documentaries. Sound in her films carries the oral testimony of those black witnesses who can provide the knowledge routinely ignored and passed over in silence by official, white-dominated histories, which so often seem to normalize biased forms of knowledge. The power of the black voice is also celebrated, however, through the mesmerizing sonic presence of Delvina Bernard's a cappella quartet Four the Moment in *Black Mother Black Daughter* and again through the singing voice in Hamilton's documentary about the famous eponymous Nova Scotian contralto singer, *Portia White: Think on Me* (2000). In other films, such as *Keep on Keepin' On* (2004) and the more recent *We Are One* (2011), the sounds of instruments, such as an African drum, come to constitute an important part of the overall communicative strategy of the film. In *The Little Black School House*, the music composed and performed by renowned jazz pianist Joe Sealy — a former Halifax resident who also created the Juno Award-winning *Africville Suite* (1996) — joins the speaking and singing voices to build up the sonic presence and interventionist force of this film about black experiences of education in Canada.

Critical Black Memory Culture in *The Little Black School House*

In *The Little Black School House*, Hamilton seeks to break the silence that surrounds segregated schools in Canada, working extensively with archival footage, photographs, witnessing, and expert knowledge in an attempt to make these materials "speak" and tell their stories. Hamilton's project is all the more important since the forces of forget-

ting and erasure seem to be ubiquitous; as Hamilton observes, in "this ahistorical, highly disposable age, it is fundamental that we maintain our efforts to underline the importance of history and its relevance to our lives today; we need to stop, reflect, reconsider who we are, and how we arrived at this place at this time" ("Stories" 96). For a filmmaker such as Hamilton, this means that knowledge of past experiences and events has to be transmitted, visually translated, and given voice in such a way that it can carry out a critical and practical function in the present.

As historian Peggy Bristow reminds us in the film, black people came to Canada especially in the nineteenth century for freedom and education. We also learn, however, that segregated schools started in Guysborough, Nova Scotia, as early as the 1780s and that they were formally endorsed by law in Nova Scotia from 1836 on[10] (and in Canada West — the later Ontario — in 1850).[11] The last one, again in Guysborough, closed as late as 1983 (see also Beckford 118).[12] Hamilton's film alerts audiences to the fact that North American school segregation was not, as much public opinion in Canada would have it, a United States phenomenon only. In fact, Hamilton explains that she avoided United States and South African footage to ensure that the subject clearly appears as "a Canadian story, a made-in-Canada experience" ("Stories" 105). This insistence challenges the cherished Canadian habit of exteriorizing race-related issues, too often conveniently projected onto an apparently more prominently problematic culture south of the border.

To achieve the goal of facilitating critical memory in Nova Scotia and more generally in Canada, Hamilton relies on community and the power of personal witnessing, together with socio-historical remembering, intergenerational exchange, and what French historian Pierre Nora calls "sites of memory" (Nora, "Between" 284). Hamilton references Geneviève Fabre and Robert O'Meally, who refer in *History and Memory in African American Culture* to sites of memory as a "new set of potential historical sources such as paintings, buildings, dances, journals, novels, poems, orality — which, taken together, linked individual memories to create collective, communal memories of African American culture and life," thus providing a "theoretical framework for an examination of the co-joined themes of history and memory" ("Stories" 98). Useful for Canadian contexts as well, for Hamilton this concept more specifically "brings together the private, through oral storytelling and family histo-

ries, and the public, as found in archival documents" ("Stories" 98). In a subsequent discussion of Nora's concept, Hamilton also speaks of a "multilayered, broad public space" ("When" 10) created when personal stories are made available to larger audiences through the medium of film.

Former segregated schools constitute sites of memory in her eyes. As Hamilton explains, "there are generations of invisible stories embedded in these geographic sites and in the memories of the students, teachers, parents, and trustees who were the schools' communities" ("Stories" 99). The film opens with the photograph of a school's interior while a voice-over presents the conceit of the old schoolhouse itself conveying the stories that it has witnessed. But stories are also hidden in photos and other archival materials related to segregated schools, which Hamilton extensively researched. Looking at "early photographs of people of African descent in Nova Scotia" brings up for her what she calls "the embedded or hidden stories behind each image"; the film uses such images "to give a voice to those hidden stories" ("*Little*" 70). As part of this strategy, Hamilton uses a number of photos of school classes but also of individual children, often juxtaposing such pictures with testimonies by the same individuals later in their lives. *The Little Black School House* gives prominence to lives otherwise often marginalized and documents how some dreams were crushed by racism (70). While the film captures several emotionally charged moments that speak to disappointments, it also underscores the resilience of resourceful individuals who, in many cases, made "a way out of no way." In the case of Corrine Sparks, for instance, her childhood picture is followed in the film by her present-day witnessing, which shows her in her robe as a judge of the Nova Scotia Family Court, which she was appointed to as the first black Nova Scotian in 1987. This successful community leader, however, also speaks to the difficulties of growing up black in Nova Scotia. She recalls that, "When you grow up as an African Nova Scotian child, you have to come to grips with your heritage. You can't run and hide from it, it comes across to you." The historical context provides the canvas for the film, but Hamilton emphasizes that the "contemporary witnesses — the teachers, the students, the community leaders — gave it life, dimension, and meaning based upon their lived experiences" ("Stories" 107). Their role as witnesses makes the presence of the past come alive, thereby including the audience in its ambit.[13]

The Little Black School House fittingly uses a brightly coloured school

bus as a kind of visual leitmotif that signals a communal journey serving to connect the past with the present. Its appearance is usually accompanied by an energetic musical sequence composed by Sealy, at times orchestrated with rhythmic hand clapping. Writing about the film, Hamilton recalls her mother's skill in securing such a bus (free of charge) when the members of a 1990 reunion of the Association of Retired Teachers of Segregated Schools of Nova Scotia wanted to take a tour of their former schools ("When" 13). Having lost her footage from that trip in the NFB fire mentioned earlier, Hamilton organized a second bus tour in 2006 to visit former segregated schools in Guysborough County in the southeast of Nova Scotia. On board this time were not only retired teachers but also parents and students of former segregated schools. Their accounts, together with comments by historians and educators who provide appropriate contextual information, constitute a "public act of remembering, one where the individual stories taken together shape a collective memory" ("Stories" 102). Significantly, however, those who witnessed segregated schools themselves are joined, on this trip, by a group of current black and white students whom Hamilton encountered while presenting her film project at Guysborough Academy, which then became the site of the film.

Figure 2: Guysborough Elders and Students in *The Little Black School House*. Courtesy Sylvia D. Hamilton, Maroon Films Inc.

Active listeners, these students participate in this "public act of remembering" by asking their own questions. As Hamilton explains, she wanted to include these high school students in the film so that they could learn directly from those who personally had experienced segregated schools. The school bus on the road thus shows two generations of travellers engaging with each other in the context of the sites of memory that they visit and bring to life. In addition, the film itself becomes a vehicle for a journey toward knowledge through engagement; it invites audiences to engage similarly with this communal act of remembering that offers itself as a site of memory.

The Little Black School House as a Site of Memory

As a documentary, *The Little Black School House* therefore translates a specific communal act of remembering into an occasion for a wider public participation and response. I mentioned earlier Hamilton's dissatisfaction as a school student with the absence of images of black lives in education and the media. In an account of her own black female Nova Scotian resistant spectatorship[14] from the 1950s onward, Hamilton expresses her delight at discovering young Stevie Wonder, Sidney Poitier, and Cicely Tyson on the screen, followed by an ever-increasing number of black musicians, including The Supremes, Chuck Berry, The Temptations, and Marvin Gaye ("When" 6-7). Importantly, Hamilton also mentions local black Nova Scotian magazines such as "*The Negro Citizen*, *The Clarion*, *The Jet Journal*, and *Ebony Express*" as communal resources (7), stressing that she was interested above all "in seeing the pictures"; this interest would lead to her subsequent concentration on taking pictures "as a way to forestall forgetting" (8). But how does her own film's particular contribution to black memory culture not only respond to her idea that she wanted to make the films that she could not see otherwise but also affect particular audiences? And how does it intervene in spheres otherwise marked by the devaluation or elision of black lives?

Reflecting on the communicative and pragmatic dimensions and outcomes of *The Little Black School House*, Hamilton distinguishes among several groups of audiences. For those who experienced segregated schools, the film provides hitherto missing representations of their experiences in a public medium. The effect is different for those who either deny or are ignorant of the existence of these segregated schools.

Hamilton explains that she wanted to "capture as many of these experiences [in segregated schools] on film as possible. So those who lived it would have some validation of what they had experienced, and so those who denied that this existed or those who had no idea, would be able to see" ("*Little*" 64-65). Hamilton does not focus here on racial difference as a factor; rather, she offers the proposition that any interested viewer might benefit from the personal witnessing offered in the film. She thus extends the cultural memory work of personal witnesses of segregated schools to suggest its beneficial effect in a wider societal sense: "What the people who appeared in this film . . . remember, they remember for all Canadians" ("Stories" 107). For Hamilton, their witnessing contributes to a critical black memory culture that transcends racial difference since it generally offers a more realistic and useful alternative to the deficient accounts of history provided by blinkered dominant national narratives.

The critical memory work mediated by the film also produces changing effects over time and into the future, as suggested by the theme of generational difference and Hamilton's experiences with collective viewings that extend the film's cultural work through public discussion. I have already mentioned the important intergenerational scenes that involve "high school students in conversation with community elders" (Hamilton, "Stories" 102) both on the bus and inside school settings. For the older participant-witnesses of segregated schools and racism in non-segregated schools, such exchanges allow for a validation of their pasts, letting them share memories of the supportive atmosphere in black schools but also remember particularly vicious acts of racism in mainly white schools and educational opportunities missed by students of either schools because of racism. The film is also about the younger generation, however. In this regard, *The Little Black School House* continues the project of the earlier film *Speak It!*, which deals with contexts of empowerment for current students. In *The Little Black School House*, the young students are seen to react with curiosity but often also astonishment to the narratives of their elders. These accounts let them contextualize their own experiences as they learn, for instance, about more overt and direct forms of racism in the past. The stories of the elders also underscore their own concerns about the elision of black topics in school curricula and the potential impact of racial barriers on their future careers. The film repeatedly stresses the necessity of full

black participation in education and economic opportunities; the older participants, however, also voice their concerns that the high expectations of the younger generation might still be dashed by systemic racism. Their memories serve to raise important questions about the past and future of equality with regard to black participation in central civic and economic aspects of Nova Scotian society.

The film's music and the leitmotif of the school bus are particularly effective in commenting on the ongoing "Struggle for Dignity and Equality through Education" (as a section title written on a blackboard underscores). The school bus, as I have suggested, signals the intergenerational learning process that builds a critical black memory culture by drawing on the past to request and create another future. The film's music works its own effects in this regard. At times stately and beautifully reflective — especially when it parallels the voicing of memories — it also sounds a contrasting, energetic theme as a sonic leitmotif often accompanying the visual one of the bus on the road. Composed and played by jazz great Joe Sealy (on piano, with Paul Novotny on bass, Reg Schwager on guitar, and Steve Heathcote on drums), the music adds its own voice to the film's soundscape and what Hamilton calls its "multivocal narrative" ("When" 15).[15]

Hamilton wanted the music "to evoke the moods of the people featured . . . and the rootedness of Black Canadian experiences" ("*Little*" 69). For some viewers, however, "the music was too upbeat" (69) given the film's subject and the ongoing concerns about black access to education and the economy. Hamilton responds by pointing to some of the persistently positive and forward-looking themes of the film. Discussing the collaborative process with Sealy, she mentions that "I told him that children were at the core of the work" and this idea "unlocked the project for him." Commenting further on the upbeat sonic registers of his musical vision, Hamilton stresses that "there is also great resilience" in that culture (69), carried forward through cultural memory work to the next generation. Sealy's music indeed effectively expresses commemorative and reflective as well as future-oriented, active, and interventionist dimensions of the film.

In this regard, it is important to note another aspect of how a work such as *The Little Black School House* can address audiences to intervene in the public sphere and exert agency. Hamilton understands film "as a collective experience," not only because it can involve the collective

creation of memories and communication between groups, but also because "it generates discussion" ("*Little*" 68). She recalls seeing films as a child in groups, having fun watching them but also discussing the experience afterward. For similar reasons, she enjoys public screenings since they create discussions. This is "when the audience will engage in conversations, share and debate ideas, and disagree with each other, which is why I make documentaries in the first place" (69). These discussions that her films provoke are also the work of a critical memory culture in action, which ultimately facilitates the creation of community and a critically informed future.

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Hamilton's film, then, intervenes in memory culture and public space in many different ways, both during the shooting of the film and through various forms of its reception. During the process of filmmaking itself, a project such as *The Little Black School House* uses sites of memory to facilitate the act of witnessing, bringing individuals and generations together. Through its dissemination, the film can further help to extend the reach of these acts of bearing witness and, as Ian Baucom has written with regard to other contexts of witnessing, "to serialize the event and its affect and also to elongate its temporality to stretch its time along the line of an unfolding series of moments of bearing witness" (177). In *The Little Black School House* and other films by Hamilton, this process of setting memory and witnessing in motion also means translating and transforming silent sites, images, and documents not only into moving pictures but also into the testimony of living voices and the moving power of music.

Recording these important acts of generating and conjoining personal memories, the film creates a durable medium of collective memory that allows for reiteration in different contexts. *The Little Black School House* thus creates the condition for multiple reinscriptions of this testimony in the public realm. Allowing the concerned subjects to see themselves reflected in a positive public medium, the film validates their experiences and personal geographies[16] together with the very processes of memory making and witnessing. Constituting an example of black memory culture in action that invites larger audiences into the process, *The Little Black School House* itself becomes a site of memory or "lieu de mémoire." It offers a site for later viewers and communities that makes

it possible for them to relate to the past while looking also at the present and the future and to engage in discussion. The creation and availability of *The Little Black School House* reflect one of its most important themes since the film itself is a mobile vehicle for education that can create new communities and constitute sites of critical self-reflection for even larger ones. The film thus contributes to what Spillers sees as aspects of the larger but unfinished task of black culture as critical culture: to reaffirm its human, non-materialistic values and "complete the work of equality" (00:19:45-00:19:50).[17] Reasserting black lives, communities, and their pasts and presents within Canadian culture, the film is relevant not only for the immediate communities involved but also as a site for critical memory work with regard to larger national narratives and self-perceptions.

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Notes

[1] My formulation here is inspired by the title of Doris Sommer's study *The Work of Art in the World: Civic Agency and Public Humanities*.

[2] Marie-Joseph Angélique, an enslaved black woman in Montreal, was accused of setting fire to the town and hanged in 1734 (see Siemerling, *Black Atlantic Reconsidered* 33-36, 186-94).

[3] Henry Louis Gates Jr. has summarized some of the concerns of the Black Aesthetic movement: "One repeated concern of the Black Aesthetic movement was the nature and function of black literature vis-à-vis the larger political struggle for Black Power. How useful was our literature to be in this centuries-old struggle, and exactly how was our literature to be useful?" (xxv-xxvi).

[4] How, for example, do works such as George Elliott Clarke's *George and Rue* or Marie-Célie Agnant's *The Book of Emma* position or implicate their readers? What is the effect of Wayde Compton's poetic and fictive evocations and transformations of Hogan's Alley and black British Columbia? Or how does *The Book of Negroes* appeal to its audiences? I have tried to explore some of these questions in *The Black Atlantic Reconsidered*, "Ethics as Re/Cognition," and "New Ecologies of the Real."

[5] Hamilton's poetry has appeared in journals such as *West Coast Line*, *Dalhousie Review*, and *Fireweed*, and it has been anthologized, for instance, in Ayanna Black's *Fiery Spirits* (1995) and Valerie Mason-John and Kevan Anthony Cameron's *The Great Black North* (2013). Her installation *Excavation: A Site of Memory* has been shown in Halifax at the Dalhousie Art Gallery in 2013 and in the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic in 2014. In 2014, Hamilton also published her first collection of poetry, *And I Alone Escaped to Tell You*. Besides her many scholarly studies on film, she has contributed studies such as "Naming Names, Naming Ourselves: A Survey of Early Black Women in Nova Scotia" in the important collection *"We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up": Essays in Canadian Women's History*, edited by Peggy Bristow, and an MA thesis on "African Baptist Women as Activists and Advocates in Adult Education in Nova Scotia." Hamilton is a professor at the University of King's College in Halifax.

[6] This conversational setting also creates a space for viewers of the film; as D.B. Jones observes, *Black Mother Black Daughter* "lets us get to know women of a small black community in Nova Scotia as people rather than spokespersons for political aims" (28).

[7] As Hamilton writes, "I began making films about our experiences as African Canadians because these films were not being made at all, or rarely in a manner that satisfied me. Above all, I needed these images" ("When" 9).

[8] *Against the Tides: The Jones Family* constitutes part 2 of the 1993 television miniseries (made available as a DVD in 1994) *Hymn to Freedom: The History of Blacks in Canada*.

[9] On Burnley "Rocky" Jones, see also his recent autobiography (Jones and Walker).

[10] As Dalhousie University Law School professor Michelle Williams explains in the film, in 1836 education commissioners were legally allowed to establish separate schools in Nova Scotia, which were also on the books when free and compulsory education was introduced in the province in 1865. Williams adds that in 1876 black children were excluded by law from Halifax common schools.

[11] In 1850, the Separate School Act allowed for segregated schools, ostensibly to help communities that desired them; this possibility was soon used to exclude black children from non-black schools. Mary Ann Shadd nonetheless famously claimed in *A Plea for Emigration* in 1852 that in Toronto churches "the presence of coloured people, promiscuously seated, elicited no comment whatever" (61). She went on to state that "There are no separate schools. At Toronto and in many other places, as in the churches, the coloured people avail themselves of existing schools; but in the western country, in some sections, there is a tendency to 'exclusiveness'" (63-64).

[12] The last segregated school in Ontario, in Colchester South Township, closed in 1965.

[13] Hamilton emphasizes that "I really wanted to have the individuals that I interviewed during the reunion who had either taught or gone to the segregated schools to speak to their personal experiences" ("*Little*" 70). She adds elsewhere that "Their faces, their bodies, and their memories became the landscape of *The Little Black School House*" ("Stories" 107).

[14] For the concept of the black "resisting spectator," see Diawara, who charges that many approaches to spectatorship have "remained colorblind" (211); bell hooks extends this critique to include gender but also charges that "Feminist film theory rooted in an ahistorical psychoanalytic framework . . . actively suppresses recognition of race" (295).

[15] Sealy has provided many contributions to a sonic black Canadian memory culture. The son of a porter, he is featured in Selwyn Jacob's NFB documentary *The Road Taken* (1996), which also uses his music. The full palette of his musical expression can be heard in the commemorative evocation of a black community — and his father's birthplace — the Juno Award-winning CD *Africville Suite* (1996).

[16] Shana McGuire and Darrell Varga thus note that Hamilton's "films are a reclaiming of space through the exercise of oral culture and dispossessed history" (186; see also 190-93). Varga also discusses the role of space in *The Little Black School House* (170-71).

[17] Spillers also returns to the work of W.E.B. Du Bois and his critique of American culture as a "dusty desert of dollars and smartness" (Du Bois 8, qtd. 00:11:20-00:11:28) to understand black culture as the antithesis of what she calls the "toxic" aspects of the "unbridled pursuit of wealth," which ultimately produces the threat that we might "lose the planet" (00:20:15).

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