



DEANNA BOWEN

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Read through the full petition letter found in the appendix. Then look again at the larger image of the petition with signatures.

Write down some of the words that you would use to describe this artwork.

What emotions come to mind when you first look at this piece?

What about the artwork makes you feel this way?

LOOKING CLOSER

Find and record the following information from the appendix copy of the petition:

Date and location the petition was written and signed:

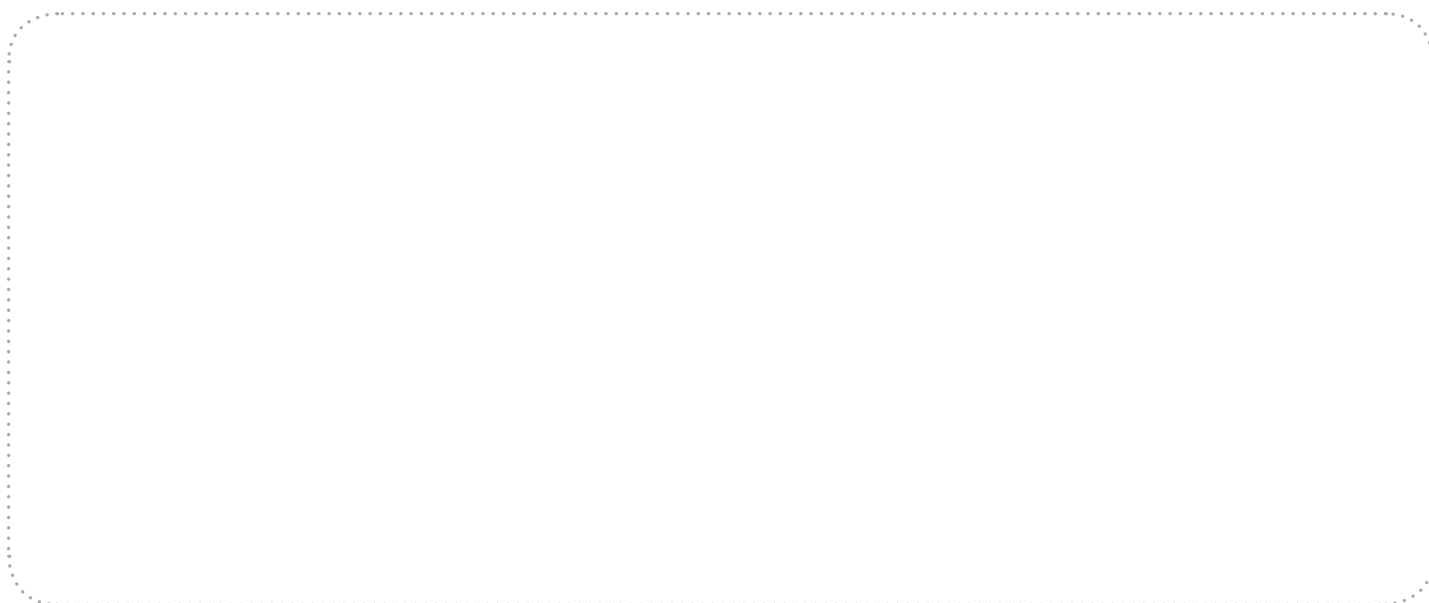
This artwork shows evidence of the discrimination and racism Black settlers coming from the United States experienced from white settlers in Alberta in the early 1900s. What words or phrases from the petition show the discrimination and racism of the white settlers when discussing the arrival of Black settlers? Record some of them here:

LOOKING INWARD

The petition is an example of white settlers attempting to define a Canadian identity that did not include Black people. This idea of a white Canadian identity is still seen today and has real consequences for Black, Indigenous and People of Colour living in Canada.

As an artist, Deanna Bowen explores her own family's history through finding and exhibiting archival material such as this petition. Her ancestors were some of the Black settlers who arrived in Alberta shortly before this document was written. As new Canadians, they would have experienced first hand the discrimination and racism seen in the petition.

Think about your own community. Do you know anyone who is new to Canada? What challenges might they face as new Canadians? What are some ways that you can help them overcome these challenges? Write or draw some of your ideas below.



Think about your own experience living in Canada today. What are some of the freedoms and/or barriers you may experience in Canada? Record some of them here:

RESPOND

Often historic documents record only the voices of the people in power (in this case the white settlers in Alberta). After this petition was sent, the government found ways to discourage and slow Black immigration to Alberta, and Black settlers coming to the province eventually slowed to a trickle.

Think about whose voices are not heard here and write a letter in response to the petition from a different point of view.

LEARN

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Montreal-based artist Deanna Bowen uses a variety of artistic media to define the Black body and trace its presence and movement in place and time. In recent years, her work has involved a rigorous examination of her family lineage and their connections to the Black Prairie pioneers of Alberta and Saskatchewan, the Creek Negroes and All-Black towns of Oklahoma, the extended Kentucky/Kansas Exoduster migrations, and the Ku Klux Klan.

For more than twenty years, Deanna Bowen's practice has evolved from its roots in experimental documentary video into a complex mapping of power as seen in public and private archives. Research and exhibitions are rarely mutually exclusive modes for Bowen, in part because her subjects are capable of revealing new perspectives over time. Whether it is through strategies of re-enactment or dense constellations of archival material, Bowen's work traces her familial history within a broader narrative of Black survival in Canada and the United States.

In 2020, Bowen was named one of eight winners of the Governor General's Awards in Visual and Media Arts, an annual award for outstanding contributions to Canadian creativity.

TERMS

ARCHIVES/ARCHIVAL MATERIAL:

Archives are where a collection of historic documents are cared for and stored, in the same way that art museums like KWAG care for works of art. Archival material is a term used to describe the historic documents kept at an archive. These can be materials such as newspapers, letters, photographs, paper records, etc. These materials can be a type of primary source evidence that is used by historians to understand the past.

DISCRIMINATION:

The unequal treatment of members of various groups based on race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, physical ability, religion and other categories.

EVIDENCE:

Evidence in this context refers to the primary sources used to build an understanding of a specific time in history.

RACISM:

Racism involves one group having the power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society and by shaping the cultural beliefs and values that support those racist policies and practices.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Discrimination and racism such as what we see in this petition is still present and alive in Canada today. Have your students spend some time learning about how racist policies and acts affect people in their own community. Reading local news articles, finding and speaking to community groups may be a good way to start a discussion.

CROSS-CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Canadian Identity, Canadian History, Citizenship, Social Justice Education

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Black Drones in the Hive exhibition information and videos:

<https://kwag.ca/content/deanna-bowen-black-drones-hive>

Artist Website:

<http://www.deannabowen.ca/>

Canadian Encyclopedia entry on Amber Valley:

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/amber-valley>

Black Settlers of Alberta and Saskatchewan Historical Society:

www.blacksettlers.ca

To the Right Honorable Sir Wilfred Laurier, G.C.M.G.,
Premier of Canada,
OTTAWA, Ont.

Sir,-

We, the undersigned residents of the city of Edmonton, respectfully urge upon your attention and upon that of the Government of which you are the head, the serious menace to the future welfare of a large portion of Western Canada, by reason of the alarming influx of negro settlers.

This influx commenced about four years ago in a very small way, only four or five families coming in the first season, followed by thirty or forty families the next year. Last year several hundred negroes arrived at Edmonton and settled in surrounding territory. Already this season nearly three hundred have arrived; and the statement is made, both to these arrivals and by press dispatches, that these are but the advance guard of hosts to follow. We submit that the advent of such negroes as are now here was most unfortunate for the country, and that further arrivals in large numbers would be disastrous. We cannot admit as any factor the argument that these people may be good farmers or good citizens. It is a matter of common knowledge that it has been proved in the United States that negroes and whites cannot live in proximity without the occurrence of revolting lawlessness, and the development of bitter race hatred, and that the most serious question facing the United States to-day is the negro problem. We are anxious that such a problem should not be introduced into this fair land at present enjoying a reputation for freedom from such lawlessness as have developed in all sections in the United States where there is any considerable negro element. There is not reason to believe that we have here a higher order of civilization, or that the introduction of a negro problem here would have different results.

We therefore respectfully urge that such steps immediately be taken by the Government of Canada as will prevent any further immigration of negroes into Western Canada.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

Dated at Edmonton, Alberta,
this 18th day of April, 1911.

NEGRO IMMIGRATION

We view with alarm the continuous and rapid influx of Negro settlers into Northern Alberta and believe that their coming will bring about serious social and political conditions.

This immigration will have the immediate effect of discouraging white settlement in the vicinity of the Negro farms and will depreciate the value of all holdings within such areas.

We fear that the welcome extended to those now coming will induce a very large black population to follow them.

The problems likely to arise with the establishment of these people in our thinly populated province must be plain to all and the experience of the United States should warn us to take action before the situation becomes complicated and before the inevitable racial antipathies shall have sprung up.

We do not wish that the fair fame of Western Canada should be sullied with the shadow of Lynch Law but we have no guarantee that our women will be safer in their scattered homesteads than white women in other countries with a Negro population.

We would therefore urge upon the Government the need for immediate action and the taking of all possible steps to stop Negro immigration into Alberta.

To the Right Honorable Sir Wilfred Laurier, G.C.M.G.,
Premier of Canada,
OTTAWA, Ont.

Sir,-

We, the undersigned residents of the City of Edmonton, & *Strathcona*, respectfully urge upon your attention and upon that of the Government of which you are the head, the serious menace to the future welfare of a large portion of Western Canada, by reason of the alarming influx of negro settlers.

This influx commenced about four years ago in a very small way, only four or five families coming in the first season, followed by thirty or forty families the next year. Last year several hundred negroes arrived at Edmonton and settled in surrounding territory. Already this season nearly three hundred have arrived; and the statement is made, both by these arrivals and by press dispatches, that these are but the advance guard of hosts to follow. We submit that the advent of such negroes as are now here was most unfortunate for the country, and that further arrivals in large numbers would be disastrous. We cannot admit as any factor the argument that these people may be good farmers or good citizens. It is a matter of common knowledge that it has been proved in the United States that negroes and whites cannot live in proximity without the occurrence of revolting lawlessness, and the development of bitter race hatred, and that the most serious question facing the United States to-day is the negro problem. We are anxious that such a problem should not be introduced into this fair land at present enjoying a reputation for freedom from such lawlessness as has developed in all sections in the United States where there is any considerable negro element. There is no reason to believe that we have here a higher order of civilization, or that the introduction of a negro problem here would have different results.

We therefore, respectfully urge that such steps immediately be taken by the Government of Canada as will prevent any further immigration of negroes into Western Canada.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

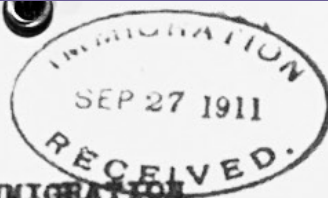
Dated at Edmonton, Alberta,
this 18th day of April, 1911.

James Graham Strathcona, Alta

W. E. Ruston

W. H. Becker

James Gordon



4533336

9 KWAG.CA

NEGRO IMMIGRATION

We view with alarm the continuous and rapid influx of Negro settlers into Northern Alberta and believe that their coming will bring about serious social and political conditions.

This immigration will have the immediate effect of discouraging white settlement in the vicinity of the Negro farms and will depreciate the value of all holdings within such areas.

We fear that the welcome extended to those now coming will induce a very ^{large} black population to follow them.

The problems likely to arise with the establishment of these people in our thinly populated province must be plain to all and the experience of the United States should warn us to take action before the situation becomes complicated and before the inevitable racial antipathies shall have sprung up.

We do not wish that the fair fame of Western Canada should be sullied with the shadow of Lynch Law but we have no ^{us} guarantee that our women will be safer in their scattered homesteads than white women in other countries with a Negro population.

We would therefore urge upon the Government the need for immediate action and the taking of all possible steps to stop Negro immigration into Alberta.

Sertrude Barnes Regent "Westward Ho! Chapter
I. C. O. E."
Ethel Hyndman Regent "Beaver House" Chapter
Lynne Edwards Regent "Kenne Chapter I. C. O. E."
Harriet Hislop Regent "Mistaken Chapter
I. C. O. E."
Matilda B. Deyl Regent
Wanchuck Chapter
I. C. O. E.