



## **Black Loyalist Exodus: 15 Ships to Sierra Leone #1792Project**

Covid confinement guarantees that many of us have seen the latest hit on Netflix “Don’t Look Up.” Perhaps it is safe to say that the satirical truth of climate denial has had a broader impact south of the border than the media-led 1619 project - a project that presents another kind of comet, one that requires us to look back at the history of slavery and racism.

#1792Project is the northern sister to the 1619 project, a date which marked the first arrival of an enslaved person on the shores of Virginia. Canada, in fact can claim earlier arrivals of people of African descent, some say even before the translator Mathieu da Costa’s documented presence in 1608. The 1792 date for Canada contains our unique history of repeated self-liberations, promises of land and justice, petitions, denial, slavery and racism on our threshold.

What exactly is the #1792project? This grassroots Nova Scotian effort includes invitations to municipal councils to proclaim the historic date of the Black Loyalist departure from Halifax harbour; a Pier 21 Nocturne Installation; artwork by Nelson Whynder students and Astral Drive J.H.S.; the “Book of Letters” organized by Auburn Drive High School students inviting letters to the seafarers on 15 Ships to Sierra Leone, as well as building grassroots connections for a memorial on the Halifax harbour front. On the actual date this year, students are organizing a social media event. Share your thoughts #1792Project @auburn\_eagles!

#1792 Project is rooted in the concept of education, education and more education and our foundational text was written by children -- [“R is for Reparations”](#). Thirty children, aged 7 to 12 from Halifax came together and wrote this book, boarding the imaginary Reparations Freedom Train. Their views on the topic of reparations guide #1792Project. In this “alphabet” under “H is for Human”, children remind us that “I am honourable. My history is honourable. I will not hesitate to talk about what I need to be happy. I hope you hear me. You must hear me? Ashay!”

The New York Times 1619 initiative also has many parts to it, including educational materials, a podcast and most recently a book by Nikole Hannah-Jones all of which grew out of the initial Times publication that commemorated the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in the British colony of Virginia. As can be imagined, many trump the long view and insist on a myopic history of erasure that begins with the magical thinking of justice, a denial of critical race theory and a US constitution written by slave owners that cannot spell freedom. It may surprise many Nova Scotians to realize that we are tied to the history of slavery and George Washington directly. One of the self liberated Black Loyalists, Harry Washington, managed to escape George Washington’s plantation in Virginia, served as corporal in the Black Pioneers with Thomas Peters. Like Peters, the unsung Nova Scotian hero and founder of Freetown, Sierra Leone, Harry was resettled by the British in Nova

Scotia. With 1,196 others, both Peters and Washington boarded one of the 15 ships that left this harbour on January 15, 1792 accompanied by their wives Sally and Jenny. The courage to fight for promises of justice from the colonizers for both families continued and ended tragically. The [Black Loyalist site](#) can provide more information on this journey to justice, a journey that all of us should study and learn about.

This year marks the 230th anniversary of this pivot point, the exodus by Nova Scotians who could survive the harsh winter climate because of Mi'kmaq support but could not thrive in the crushing climate of racism here. Over 1000 people came together, walking not only from Preston to the harbour, but also from St. John where humiliating barriers and threats kept information from the Black Loyalists. From October to January 15, they waited as 15 ships were prepared - schooners, ships and barques...the Eleanor, the Felicity, the Mary, the Catherine, the Sierra Leone, the Venus, the Prince Fleury, the Somerset, the Beaver, the Brothers, the Parr, the Lucretia, the Betsey, the Morning Star and the Prince William. Where is the monument at our harbour to these brave souls?

Mayor Mike Savage and HRM council have issued a proclamation acknowledging this historic 230th anniversary. Included are these words:

Whereas, People of African descent have been a part of Canadian society since the early 1600s and that their enslavement occurred on this land for centuries and that the Black Loyalists departure is linked to the failure of institutional, political and societal will to fulfill the promises that were made to the communities that left for Sierra Leone.

Whereas, We are committed to promote histories such as the 15 Ships to Sierra Leone that often have been left in a vacuum of erasure. The resources provided for well known monumentation have historically been funded at the expense of those erasures

To date, Kings Count, Region of Queens, East Hants, Lunenburg and Bridgewater have written and shared proclamations and acknowledgements of the 230th anniversary year. More are expected...

On January 15th, as we remember the honourable Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. 's birthday, it is fitting that these words ring throughout this province. Looking back together so that we can see what is right in front of our eyes will guide us on the only path we must walk - the road of reparations.

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January 11.2022

Acknowledgements: #1792Project would like to acknowledge the consultation, knowledge input, collaboration, art work and inspiration of the following community members and groups: Dr. Lynn Jones, Mr. Sizwe Adekayode, Dr. Afua Cooper, Pier 21, Melissa Marr, Wonder'neath Studio, Rebecca McKenzie-Hopkins, Pier 21, Mr. Roger Marsters, Maritime Museum, Amber Laurie, Joan Smith, Angie, Culligan Bridgeport, Brenda Holoboff, Ms. Megan Neaves, Greg Albers, Principal Ann Johnson McDonald, Students at Nelson Whynder School, Astral Drive J.H.S. and Auburn Drive H.S. and Citadel H.S.