

Federalism and the Black Canadians

(à la manière de Pierre Elliott Trudeau;

in honour of The Founding of the Federation of Black Canadians)

Let's imagine that Pierre Elliott Trudeau's writing
Federalism and the Black Canadians,
and guess at what he'd say....

He's gotta start with historical *Calumny* in the colonies, eh,
cos that catalyzes *Oppression* in the provinces.

Say that scholarly Trudeau looks far east to Newfoundland, "The Rock,"
identifying rightly that Bermudian slavers make stops in St. John's,
that rebellious slaves in New York City get packed off to Newfoundland,
that slave fishermen—
chained to their nets—
are so good at harvesting cod
that they get banned from the salt-spray colony;
even so, the salted cod catch off the Grand Banks
gets slooped and slopped, sailed to the Caribbean,
to get served as saltfish, a slave-food-staple,
eaten up funkily in a briny, brothy callaloo,
while sugar, molasses, and rum
get sent back in fair trade....

P.E.T.'s gotta continue his voyage montage
by studying Prince Edward Island—
that pallid-beach and jade-grass mirage of Ireland—
where more than one black ex-slave's head
has to fit through the halo of a noose,
to be hanged for t'iefin' bread,
and the body goes absolute zero,
chilled to the "oh-no" that's a corpse;
and Trudeau mentions the black folks plunked down
in Charlottetown's malarial Bog,
close to the legislature,
where one way to get free
is to become a pugilist,
using boxing-ring fisticuffs—
to square-off versus segregationist circles....

When P.E. Trudeau examines Nova Scotia,
 he counts hundreds of slaves at Fortress Louisbourg
 on what's now Cape Breton Island;
 he notices that, as Acadians get pushed outta Nouvelle-Ecosse
 at bayonet-point,
 hundreds of Yankee slaves land
 at Halifax to gild the aristocracy
 or get carted down to the Annapolis Valley
 to knock down apples and pick up potatoes;
 Trudeau observes that *Slavery*
 only dwindles and dies in Nova Scotia
 once thousands of free Negroes dock
 as Black Loyalists,
 or scam north as Black Refugees,
 or anchor as hundreds of Jamaican Maroons,
 but still end up (those who stay),
 having to harvest cabbage among stones,
 pluck blueberries off the edge of swamps;
 clearly, they're all free now to starve
 and/or be slave-wage serfs,
 to survive as second-class Scotians,
 in dozens of Africvilles,
 most denied any schoolin';
 and their remains segregated even in the cemetery,
 as if black people got black bones!
 "Mon dieu," Trudeau exclaims,
 "at least there's Richard Preston,
 "Apostle to the African Race,"
 ridin' horseback round the Bluenose province
 to erect white-painted Black Baptist Churches,
 in every mainland nook and niche."

When Monsieur Trudeau surveys Nouveau-Brunswick,
 he finds the same "downpression," the same disgraces,
 only slightly less only because N.B. got fewer black people.
 But Trudeau also reports that white Loyalists
 are rumoured to hold black slaves
 in chains in dank, dark basements,
 in mansions catty-corner to the legislature;

and it's definite that black settlers in N.B.
 get situated on tiny plots,
 slivers of land not much bigger than a grave—
 all miserable earth—
 to make sure they'll either sweat for pennies in Saint John,
 or Fredericton,
 if they stay at Elm Hill;
 or steal away onto a train or a boat,
 exit the colony,
 escape to Boston or Montreal:
 No other way out!

Now when Trudeau notates his native province,
 what was "Nouvelle-France,"
 and then what was "Lower Canada,"
 he confesses that here were the most slaves—
 5,000 roughly—
 in colonial British North America and New France—
 but that 2/3 of this number were Indigenous.
 M. Trudeau sees that New French slaves produced one heroine,
 Marie-Josèphe Angélique—
 who, in *les printemps*, 1734,
 allegedly conceived an arson that decimated the *vieille ville*,
 the old city of Montréal,
 turning churches into char,
 cos she craved to live free, love as she chose,
 and was willing to see a swath of wood-and-granite edifices
 and domiciles
 turn to torched, haunted hulks,
 to render land-thief enslavers homeless
 as much as they'd rendered Africans and Indigenous homeless, eh?
 Yes, scholar Trudeau sees that Angélique herself—
 that black pantheress Nanny-of-the-Maroons—
 got captured, tortured, knacked down to ashen manure—
 in a perverse scenario—
 this unanswerable picture of *Martyrdom*—
 but still she's our sincere favorite for *Liberation Struggle*—
 our untutored *ur-guerilla*—
 our uncommon *Glory*....

Reviewing next Ontario,
 while inking *Federalism and the Black Canadians*,
 our Trudeau spies that, in Upper Canada,
 John Graves Simcoe passes a law barring admission
 to the colony of any fresh slaves,
 thus enacting the Crimson Empire's first anti-slavery legislation;
 and Trudeau establishes that Upper Canada
 got preserved, in the War of 1812,
 from Yankees yanking it away from Britain,
 thanks to companies of Negro defenders,
 setting bayonets at slaveholders,
 discharging cannons at slaveholders.
 But the politic author also realizes that in muddy York
 (one day to be termed *Toronto*),
 throngs of shackled Africans bemoan, mourn bluesy,
 the theft of *Liberty*, the theft of *Labour*,
 and will be restless 'til they wrest back their *Freedom*,
 aided and abetted by ex-slaves, runaway slaves,
 born-free blacks fearing enslavement,
 who come to populate Canada West—
 Chatham, Amherstburg, Sandwich,
 Windsor, Buxton, Peterborough, Kingston,
 and as far north as Owen Sound—
via the Underground Railroad—
 thanks in part to George Brown's propagandist—
 abolitionist—newspaper *The Globe*
 (heroic precursor to the grumpy "Glob-and-Pail"),
 and to the oratorical insurgency of Frederick Douglass
 and the anti-slavery freedom-fighter Harriet Tubman
 and the firearmed firebrand, John Brown—
 that "Righteous Gentile" of *Armed Liberation Struggle...*

Looking left cross the Dominion map to Manitoba,
 our authorial Trudeau writes up that province
 as the domain of Afro'd voyageurs
 (pronouncing the s)—
 the Bonga clan by name—
 black fur-traders—
 who, thanks to their Indigenous wives—
 add Black Métis, Afro-Métis,

i.e., a black-red—“burgundy”—tile
 to “the Canuck Mosaic”
 (and also to Section 35
 of the twenty-year-later Charter of Rights and Freedoms),
 so that prairie Black Métis
 join with Afro-Métis (like me, *moi-même*)
 outta Scotia, Brunswick, Ontario, P.E.I., Québec—
 disputing formulae of race purity, blood purity,
 quantum of this and quotas of that....
 (But *truth* be *Truth*—like scripture—
très difficile to contradict).

Like a Leftist, looking further left, further west,
 Pierre Trudeau registers *circa* 1962,
 Black Prairie pioneers, fleeing Ku Klux Klan terrorism
 in Oklahoma and Dixie,
 traverse to Saskatchewan and Alberta,
 by the hundreds,
 to be farmers in the Battlefords of Saskatchewan,
 living in sod huts,
 and to be cowpokes, ranchers, up Amber Valley, in Alberta,
 herding up cattle as horsemen;
 and Trudeau tells us how one of these dudes, John Ware,
 founds the Calgary Stampede.
 Moreover, P.E.T. scourges the skittish presence
 of the K.K.K.—
 that grotty *Malignity*—
 amateurishly odious—
 in Saskatchewan;
 how that swarm of white-jacketed gangsters
 got no choice, ironically,
 but to invite “All Races and All Religions”
 to their Dominion Day Picnics,
 because there be too many Orthodox and Catholic Christians,
 too many Africans and Chinese and Indigenous peoples,
 too many Métis and Francophones,
 to allow a WASP-only gathering on the prairies.
 There’s assuredly “Black Comedy” in the fact!
 Even so, P.E.T. is disgruntled to admit
 that it’s the Grit governors

of the brand-new province of Alberta
 who petition Laurier's federal Government
 to nix African entry into Canada,
 and this ban lasts for 50 years.

While thinking his way through *Federalism and the Back Canadians*,
 Pierre Trudeau eyes the Left Coast, B.C.,
 and learns that the western-most province
 joined up with Confederation,
 thanks to the machinations of Sir James Douglas,
 a so-called octoroon, ex-Guyana,
 who, as the colonial governor,
 offered settlerhood to hundreds of Black Californians
 (fleeing a state named—ironically—
 for a 16th-century Spanish novelist's
 Black Amazon Queen heroine)
 to flotilla north to back Queen Victoria's colony
 and face down Annexationists drooling
 to flip B.C. real-estate to Uncle Sam;
 and these prosperous, Af-Am refugees set up shop
 and housekeeping,
 dwelling in Vancouver, Victoria,
 and on Saltspring Island.

Finally scanning the Dominion's northern reaches,
 our conjured Trudeau chronicles the gossip that the first
 Non-Inuit person to reach the North Pole
 was not the Euro-Yankee Admiral Peary,
 but his African-American aide, one Matthew Henson,
 who had to carry the sickly Peary to the North Pole
 after he, Henson, had already romped about the site.
 Though that story is tough to verify,
 our Trudeau also iterates that Henson
 increased Canada's Afro-Métis population
 by fathering a son with his Inuit companion.
 The author notes how ironic it could be that,
 "if Henson is considered an honorary Canuck,
 he got to play Santa Claus at the right site,
 long before any Caucasian Canuck could imagine doing so."

Now, let's imagine that, after critiquing black colonial history
 in Canada, Trudeau opines
 that Europeans be always chattin bout human rights
 and civil liberties,
 and never more loudly than when they're t'iefin'
 other peoples' lands
 and t'iefin' other peoples' labour.
 Thus, Pierre Trudeau draws powerful parallels between
 Africville and Soweto,
 Canuck reserves and *Apartheid* townships;
 he excoriates both white racism and black "escapism"—
 i.e. fantasies of Back-to-Africa Garveyism—
 or illusions of nationalist, Black Power in Canada—
 as if all Black Canadians should vacate Toronto
 and relocate to Prince Edward Island
 to create a "black-majority province,"
 where fabled Anne would be "Anna Nzinga of Green Gables!"
 Instead, Trudeau summons African-Canadians to harmonize
 and strive non-stop
 for "unadulterated *Equality, Liberty, Democracy*";
 Trudeau urges black citizens to admit,
 "our weakness is in our passivity,
 our laxity,
 our treatment of each legislature as a cavity,
 a 'black hole' (pun intended) of *Loss*,
 not to mention our lack of electoral *gravitas*;
 how we grieve results instead of becoming governors!"
 He complains that we've been "addled
 by the black-robed hyenas of *Hypocrisy*
 and riddled by the black-biz-suited cockroaches of *Corruption*";
 worse, some "misleaders" have—
 to "save" us from modernizing—and marauding—*Capitalism*—
 "exalted illiteracy, minstrelsy, anti-intellectualism, and mysticism
 as the organic essence of *Négritude*,
 instead of *Economics, Politics, Law, and Science*,
 all of which are also resolutely 'Negro'—
 and have been ever since the first Pharaohs
 needed geometers to architect the first Pyramids...."
 Gee, it sounds like he's quoting Fanon!

Our pretend Pierre Elliott Trudeau concludes
Federalism and the Black Canadians
 by advising us to move bodily into professions,
 boldly into leadership, brazenly into government,
 to take command wherever our talents give us lead....

As my fantasy exercise concludes, I know—
 and we all know—
 that the champion of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms,
 the architect of *Multiculturalism*,
 the champion of liberal *Immigration*,
 never wrote the book I've just outlined.
 No, he failed to do that.
 He was unversed in such poetry.
 He wasn't Austin Chesterfield Clarke.
 He wasn't Michaëlle Jean.

But we are not failing.
 We are writing *Federalism and the Black Canadians*
 with every colossal scuffle against suspect police abuses;
 with every studious, fastidious insurgency in classrooms;
 with every beauteous, electoral candidacy and/or *Election*;
 with every vehemently wonderful attainment of *Expertise*;
 with every terribly, unbearably noisy action against *Injustice*;
 with every undiminished demand for *Reparations* and *Apologies*;
 with every obsidian annunciation of "becoming the first";
 with every continuously sinuous insinuation of *Soul* versus *Suppression*;
 with every congregation vociferously anti-imperialist and anti-antichrist;
 with every shout that "We, too, be the True North—
 Nordic souls naturally at home on black ice—
 given that Africville hockey players invented the slap-shot,
 and note how we dominate the other Canuck game,
 namely basketball"

With every gathering, like now, of the Federation of Black Canadians,
 we author our progress and our success—
 with public politesse and private pressure.
 Our *Federalism and the Black Canadians* is
 this Federation of Black Canadians—
 so long a time in coming about;

yet, ya know, a good idea is never too late.
So we're coming together,
coming on strong,
coming from every part of the country and the world,
and we're coming into our consciousness
that we're going to be strong,
going to be united,
going to be the best, the top,
and going always, always, always, to be free.