"escape" back to her beloved Gran and Tobago. Margaret makes the promise to get her friend back to Tobago when she is filled with sympathy for her in a seemingly impulsive moment. It is, however, the memory of Harriet Tubman's work that will give shape and solidity to her attempts to help her friend return to where she belongs.

By the end of the book, Margaret is reflecting on the possibility of changing her name to an African name which harks back to a yet older history — the history of Africa — which she will no doubt exploit as she becomes a woman.

In successfully helping her friend to return to Tobago and her Gran (albeit with the help of another older woman, Mrs. Billings — a foremother); in challenging her loving but misguided parents who refuse to understand her; in making a claim for her own uniqueness and identity as a young woman of African-Canadian heritage, Margaret was and is indeed a direct descendant of Harriet Tubman. I had it — the name of the book! *Harriet's Daughter.*

Marlene Nourbese Philip *is an award-winning poet, fiction writer, and essayist. She has degrees in economics (BA) and political science (MA). She is also a lawyer, and a teacher in the Women's Studies Program at New College, University of Toronto, a Guggenheim Fellow in poetry (1990-91), the winner of the Casa de las Americas prize (1988) and the Toronto Arts Award (1995). She is best known for her novels,* Harriet's Daughter *(Heinemann 1988) and* Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence *(Mercury 1991), her critically-acclaimed collections of poetry — including* She Tries Her Tongue: Her Silence Softly Breaks *(Ragweed 1989) — and her recent collection of critical essays,* Frontiers: Essays and Writings in Racism and Culture *(Mercury 1992).* Her most recent work is Showing Grit, 1994 (Poui Publications).

REFLECTION OF BLACK CANADIAN HERITAGE

Rosemary Sadlier

Résumé: L'auteur explique les raisons qui ont motivé son choix du métier d'écrivain; elle insiste sur l'importance d'éveiller ses jeunes lecteurs à la richesse de l'héritage africain du Canada.

Rosemary Sadlier

Where I grew up, I never saw a person of African ancestry in a routine way. I was the only Black student at my school and I never had a Black teacher until I was in high school. I never saw Black people reflected in the books that I read, I never saw Black people in significant positions of authority and respect. I rarely saw

African Canadians in a positive role on television, and I rarely heard the music of African Canadians/African Americans on the radio stations that were easy to pick up. I did not see people of African descent. I did not observe them going about their lives in my community. And I grew up in Toronto.

From Monday to Saturday, I learned and lived the "mainstream" culture, but on Sunday, my mother took me to our church, a Black church. Here I had the opportunity to see Black people in positions of authority and respect. I heard eloquence, experienced the expression of my cultural essence through the music, the sermons, the history and the interaction with others. My church family helped to nurture my cultural identity. This is were I learned and was affirmed about being Black in Canadian society.

Only as an adult, can I look back on those early years as being positive. My mother did not drive in those days, so the long walk out to the bus was not something that I always looked forward to, particularly in the winter. And since my father had other things to do on Sundays, we could not expect to ride in the car with him!

Without the experience of the church, the Black community was practically invisible and without a voice.

While everything around me told me that I (we) were not there, or had not made any positive contributions to Canadian society or that I (we) were all newcomers who had not paid our dues, I still knew that this was not true. My mother had told me how her ancestors came into Canada on the Underground Railroad. During annual church conferences, I had the opportunity to visit another city or town in Ontario to see people of African descent who may also have come into Canada on the Underground Railroad or as Black Loyalists. We had built our church buildings or tilled the soil or developed some communities. I saw a broader range of Black people — some who may or may not have been related to me, who were farmers or office workers, who lived a slower paced rural life or an exciting border city existence, who were somewhat isolated and self-contained or who had the advantages of an urban setting. I saw people taking responsibility for themselves, their families and their commentates. I saw people co-operating with each other. I knew people who would become my role models.

When I had children of my own, I was forced to re-experience the problems of being a minority member with the analytical skills of an adult. I had to deal directly with the events in their lives and help them to develop the knowledge base, the armour, that would help to make them strong in the face of their experiences. Even a two-year-old can notice if Black people are not included in a book, film or television show. And if people of African descent are included in these items, they can identify if the portrayal is acceptable. If a Black child can notice this, so can any other child.

Racism and stereotyping are a part of this society. And it hurts, and instances will occur. Racism hurts the people who practice it because they work on an inflated image of themselves. Racism hurts the person on the receiving end because they feel diminished by the occurrence, and, with so little available to

counteract these experiences, the debilitating sting lasts longer.

To prepare my children, I also took them to the same Black church I had attended in addition to the discussions we would have at home. However, this was not enough. Certainly my children were being educated about our culture, but what of their friends at school, or the children of new arrivals to Canada who did not go to our church. They would not "just know" about the history of Blacks in Canada. They would not have been exposed to Black Canadian family histories, family members or one of the three main historic Black church organizations in Canada. (e.g. the British Methodist Episcopal Church of Canada is the oldest continuously Black Canadian owned and operated church in Canada, established in 1856) Certainly, it was still not readily available in schools.

I began to volunteer for the Ontario Black History Society with the knowledge that my own family had come into this country on my mother's side on the Underground Railroad by about 1840. Shortly after my father's death, I learned that my father's ancestors were Black Loyalists who arrived in Canada in 1783. It really brought home to me the fact that Black history has been lost, stolen or strayed. I learned more about the achievements and contributions of African Canadians each time I gave a presentation to school groups and I could not help but notice the hunger of both teachers and students for more Black history information. It helps to complete what they had covered in mainstream history. It speaks to the pressing need to understand who we are as Canadians and what it is we have done to deal with the multicultural reality as we chart a way to deal even more effectively with issues of inequality, and racial intolerance. It is a lively and stimulating field that engages their interest. Black history includes adventure, intrigue, chases, suffering, activism and co-operation — all of the elements of a good book.

The entry into writing was perhaps inevitable. Even if I had wanted to, it would have been impossible to make a Black history presentation to every classroom. Writing provided a medium to identify and express the knowledge that I had about the events, the personalities and the experiences of people of African descent from the perspective of someone who is a part of that community. Writing gave me the voice to share and teach about my community, the African Canadian community.

I was shocked to learn that the books approved for classroom use, the Ontario Ministry of Education Circular 14 list, did not include much, if anything, about Blacks in Canada. Yet the first known African arrived here by at least 1603, and he, Mathieu Da Costa, was free and acted as a interpreter for Samuel de Champlain. How is it that people of African descent could be here for so long, contributing to the development of this country yet their stories are not known? Why is it that being born, raised and educated here that I never really learned these things in school? Why is it that I am frequently asked where I am from when my roots usually predate those of the person asking the question? Why is it when students think of a Canadian, they only think of someone who is blond, blue-eyed and white?

In my first book, *Leading the Way: Black Women in Canada* (Umbrella Press 1994), I tell the history of Black people in Canada through the stories of African

Canadian women over time. Five women are discussed at length, including Harrie Tubman — one of the most famous conductors on the Underground Railroad; Mary Ann Shadd — the first woman and the first Black woman to found and edit a newspaper in North America; Carrie Best — an outstanding community activis who fought against segregation and unfair housing practices; Rosemary Brown — the first Black woman to be elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly, and Sylvia Sweeney — accomplished athlete/musician/journalist/ television and film producer. Brief biographies are provided for 35 other remarkable contemporary o historical African Canadian women from across the country.

I was moved to write my second book, *Mary Ann Shadd: Publisher, Editor, Teacher, Lawyer, Suffragette* (Umbrella Press 1995), and my just released third book, *Tubman: Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad; Her Life in the United States and Canada*, because I discovered even more about these fascinating women that I felt would be valuable to share. These are two women both several generations American, one free, one enslaved, who rocked the foundations of slavery through their work and helped to set the stage for the Civi War. Both were incredibly committed, dedicated and they followed through with their plans even in the face of great risk to themselves. Both contributed in great measure to Canada years before Confederation.

Even though I had known many of Shadd's descendants, I never fully understood the nature and significance of Mary Ann Shadd's struggle and achievement. Shadd's story should be known by young people because as a young person of sixteen she had already committed herself to educating others particularly the disadvantaged Black children of her time. As a young woman she left her successful teaching assignments in the United States and headed for Canada. Shadd followed the thousands who were teeming into Canada to ensure that they would have the benefit of an education. In 1850, segregated schools came into effect through the Common Schools Act in Canada and the passing of the American Fugitive Slave Law forced free and enslaved Blacks to leave the United States to preserve/seek their freedom. She held very high standards and she therefore could not allow Henry Bibb to continue to defraud affluent people for his own benefit, in the name of the fugitive slaves. This battle of wills became a battle of words as Bibb inserted countless attacks upon the very character o Shadd in the newspaper he controlled. To defend herself, her school and to elevate the perspective about the success of fugitive slaves in Canada, Shadd founded and edited the Provincial Freeman, an abolitionist newspaper. Thus Shadd became the first woman editor of an anti-slavery newspaper, and the firs Black woman editor of a newspaper in North America.

Tubman's story is somewhat more known but most books have overlooked the eight years that Tubman spent in Canada and the strong role Canada had to play in the anti-slavery movement. Born a slave on a Maryland plantation Tubman saw her own sisters sold further south. Forced to work while still a young child, Tubman grew up like a "neglected weed" as she herself put it

However, her encounters with demanding slave owners, and, her talks with other slaves who had travelled north and learned the process of becoming free on the Underground Railroad, convinced her to make herself free. She did succeed as a freedom seeker, and instead of being satisfied with her own security, she made several more trips into Maryland to free her relatives and others. She worked with prominent individuals in St. Catharines to obtain assistance for the refugees and to ensure their long term security. Eleven of her nineteen rescue missions started and ended in St. Catharines, Ontario. I was curious about the people, perhaps as many as 300, that Tubman escorted into Canada. Did she have any descendants here? There are many obstacles in preparing a genealogy for people of African ancestry. Still, I was able to find and meet many of Tubman's kin on both sides of the border, and they were very generous in sharing their stories or unpublished pictures with me.

Just two women with absolutely fantastic lives revolving around helping others: other Black people, other women, other disadvantaged people. And there are so many stories yet to be told! In the face of the negative images of Africans in North America, these positive stories help to correct a rather skewed sample. And the relevance of the experiences of these role models while historical can be readily brought into the contemporary realm. When we have been able to examine and understand the pain and the triumphs of the past we can more readily approach the future.

Rosemary Sadlier *is a sixth-generation Canadian who has a strong commitment to promoting the significant history and contributions of Black people in Canada. She graduated from York University and the University of Toronto, where she received her Master of Social Work and Bachelor of Education degrees. She is the author of* Leading the Way: Black Women in Canada, Harriet Tubman: Her Life in Canada and the United States *and* Mary Ann Shadd: Publisher, Editor, Teacher, Lawyer, Suffragette.