THE PROCESS AND IMPLICATIONS OF RACIALIZATION:
A CASE STUDY

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Sociology and Equity Studies
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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Abstract

This social history of the process and implications of racialization explores some of the sociopolitical and economic factors that affected the ways in which members of an African Canadian/American family resisted and/or accommodated the process of racialization over the course of several generations. The impact of selected events in the social history of Canada and the US is illustrated through an interpretation of the experiences of three generations of the Abbott family as they employed various strategies in their quest for human rights and racial uplift. In addition to focusing on how these events impacted the Abbotts when they lived in Toronto and Chicago, the study follows the subsequent migration of family members as they moved and radiated across the continent, gradually developing separate lives and racial identities.

During a period of racial segregation in the US many light-skinned African Canadians/Americans avoided the repercussions of racial discrimination by passing as white. They tended to seek light-skinned or white spouses and essentially raised white families. For some families this remained a secret and their descendents were not aware of their black ancestry. Yet it cannot be denied that despite the legal and social advancement of many Blacks light-skinned individuals moved up the scale
more readily than those of a darker hue.

The study progresses to the present day descendants to explore the diverse ways in which they were implicated by their ancestor's practice of passing as white. Through a series of narratives, they share their reactions and explain how they have accommodated the forces of racialization in their own lives in order to maintain their location with respect to the colour line.

The present study demonstrates how the influence of the social, political and economic forces shifted over time from one generation to the next in the process of developing racial designations for stratification purposes. This cross-cultural, cross-border (Canadian-American), cross-generational study offers rich insight to the process of racial assimilation and acculturation within a multicultural society, from both a historical and sociological perspective.
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Ruth, your thought-provoking one-on-one sessions provided me with a good deal of new insight that allowed me to expand and develop my thesis in a way that truly enhanced its meaning and value. I very much appreciated the kind and generous offer of your time to walk me through that journey of discovery.

Rinaldo, your feedback challenged me to explore new ways of generating ideas and creative formats that contributed significantly to the final product. I believe that process drove me to dig a little deeper and seek a little more in an effort to strive to the best of my ability.

Kenneth, it was truly serendipity that prevailed when you stepped into the picture for it was at a time when I was quite clearly stuck in a rut and your calm and capable manner and invaluable advice effectively calmed my fears and encouraged me to go forward with my project. Thank you so much for seeing this through to the end.

Carl, I was sincerely delighted to hear that you had agreed to be the external for this examination and I am honoured that you found it worthy enough to participate in the process.
Foreword

I became intrigued by this mystery fifteen years ago when I first encountered the Abbott papers in the Toronto Reference Library. At the time I had no relevant academic experience and no research skills to speak of. But I was keen and curious and so I pursued the evidence that slowly but steadily surfaced from the primary sources that became available. Yet it remained a family story and although it proved to be of interest to many others with similar and not so similar ancestries, it was not truly an academic study.

It was my belief that the Abbott papers offered an invaluable and untapped primary source for historians who were intent on investigating Canadian black history. With this in mind I had hoped that my transcriptions of the papers would make them more available to researchers as well as the general public. However, I was not convinced that they were subsequently used beyond a superficial reading and minimal interpretations that regularly appeared in the writings of historians and journalists. I felt that the papers offered much more than had yet been appreciated and thus I was compelled to undertake my own study.

The study proved to be of a very complex nature that necessarily involved convolutions in and around the subject matter that compelled me to employ a particular format. In Chapter 1, I established a working definition of the process of racialization and the operational definitions were presented in the initial stages of the thesis in order to provide a venue for the subsequent discussion. My personal background led directly into the limitations of the study based on my own racial and familial location.

In Chapter 2, I chose to present an historical perspective based on a literature review of history to demonstrate the various social, economic and political events that predated the actions of three generations of Abbotts (Wilson, his sons Anderson and William and Anderson’s sons, Gordon and Wilson II).

In Chapter 3, I held to tradition and presented the methodology that was applied to the study of the living participants, the present-day Abbott descendents.
Chapter 4 generally provides for the presentation and analysis of the findings but in this case I decided to separate it for a number of reasons: the length of the chapter was somewhat unwieldy at sixty five pages, the literature review, quite different from that presented in Chapter 2 needed to precede the presentation of the findings that arose from the responses of the participants and the data that was collected did not fit into the format in Chapter 3 which had served to simply define the methodology.

And finally, Chapter 6 aligns the historical analysis with the perceptions of the participants in an effort to make meaning of the past pertinent to the present situation faced by the Abbott descendants.

Overall, the study was an attempt to bring history to life and provide meaning to those who shared an interest in the lives and experiences of those who came before. Archival research provided the foundation to the study and the narratives of the participants rendered substance to that documentation. An historical overview of the life experiences of the family members presented a unique opportunity to examine the perspectives of individuals who were affected by the acts of their predecessors.

The international sample provided an opportunity to examine issues from both an American and Canadian perspective. I wanted to bring the question forward into the present-day and examine the implications of what had transpired in previous generations. The intergenerational aspect provided a longitudinal format to the study that related to the historical context of the information and documentation that had been collated.

Seventeen adult members of the Abbott family responded to an invitation to participate in the study and share their perceptions of their family ancestors. The interviews focused on questions that pertained to kinship affiliation, racial/cultural identity, future prospects for future generations and the concept of race as a myth. Individuals were interviewed privately and some of them participated in an informal focus group to discuss some of the key issues that arose out of the questionnaires and private interviews. Although I initiated some of the discussion, personal narratives and storying were encouraged throughout the session on the part of the participants.
Family members explored the factors contributing to the process of denial or acceptance of racial/cultural identity across sequential generations. This experience demonstrated the interconnectedness of the participants and acknowledged a diversity of responses to a similar heritage.

The phenomenological approach granted me special access to the intimate thoughts and perceptions of individuals who would not normally be given voice. I expected that this study would be personally meaningful to the participants and me and therefore it seemed perfectly reasonable that an analysis of the findings would be of great interest to the participants and their families.

The study essentially presents two different sets of findings that pertain to the thesis questions. The process of racialization was not a discrete event but one that grew up out of the desire of one group of people to dominate another. As interracial unions inevitably occurred, the criteria of differentiation became obscured and less rational means were employed to ensure the separation of groups of people. Hence a concept of race was developed and promoted to justify various forms of discrimination.

The Abbotts represented one of many families affected by this social/political/economic by the phenomenon of racism which had become entrenched in Canadian and American society. Although the three generations of Abbott ancestors faced different challenges depending on their specific temporal and spatial locations, the actions of all of them ultimately affected the descendents. The direct descendents of Gordon and Wilson were most profoundly affected by their fathers' decision to pass as white. However, more importantly it was the fact that their heritage had been kept a secret that stung the most, for they felt hurt, shamed, bewildered and angry, particularly because their parents had died without ever sharing the knowledge with their children. However, the subsequent generations of Abbotts did not appear to demonstrate as much of the emotional and personal need for vindication. Instead present-day descendents for the most part, indicated a strong sense of familial pride and sought to maintain a feeling of kinship with their Abbott ancestors. The association allowed them to seek a deeper awareness of the issues that
led to the present circumstances and they were all very keen to pass along this new knowledge to their own children.

There appears to be a will among the family members to move forward with their new sense of awareness and to work towards breaking down barriers that they feel were initially erected due to ignorance and fear that stemmed from the racial climate of earlier times. Today many of the Abbotts indicate that if given their chose, they would select the option of assuming a rather blurred racial identity, if indeed they would assume one at all. Although some feel comfortable claiming a specific racial affinity, they all tend to point out the mixed values of their ancestry; that is black with white ancestors or white with black ancestors. Although most would be quite comfortable claiming a cultural identity based on white or black social criteria, there seems to be a certain reluctance to claim any single racial designation in genetic terms.

The participants in this study indicated that interracial marriage did not pose the negative prospects it once did to their predecessors. The fears of racial stigmatization that parents of the early 20th century held were rejected by those children when it came to their own offsprings' prospects. However it might be interesting to observe whether or not the pendulum will swing back as the subsequent generation faces new challenges based on cultural differences that currently challenge the efforts to harmonize and effectively oppose the insidious forces of racism that continue to prevail in both Canadian and American society today.
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This work is dedicated to all who strive to seek social justice, harmony and enlightenment in their quest to eliminate racism forever.
CHAPTER ONE: THE PHENOMENON OF RACIALIZATION

Helped are those who are enemies of their own racism: they shall live in harmony with the citizens of this world, and not with those of the world of their ancestors, which has passed away, and which they shall never see again.¹

1.1 Introduction

When Wilson Abbott came to Canada in 1835 as the son of a Scottish white man and a free black woman, he became prominent in business and early Toronto politics, even to the point of sitting on the City Council. Although illiterate, until his wife taught him to read and write, he had a gift for numbers and eventually he acquired significant wealth in real estate. As members of an evolving group of black elites who were anxious to move up the social ladder, the Abbotts sought to provide a classical education for their children within a predominantly private school system. In later life, these children slipped readily into an elite middle-class lifestyle which transpired along side, rather than within the white, mainstream society. One of their sons became a British Methodist Episcopalian (BME) minister, their daughter became a patron of the arts and their other son became the first Canadian, black doctor. As the most outspoken in the family, he lectured and wrote about the experience of being black in Canada, expounding on the rights of Blacks as British subjects and how they could expect to earn and maintain the privileges enjoyed by the white citizens of the country. He specifically promoted the need for his race to prove themselves worthy by upgrading themselves in all aspects of social, political, intellectual

and cultural life, to a point where they would attain equal, if perhaps not the same, status as Whites.²

The family had emigrated from the United States immediately after the British abolition of slavery in the colonies. Although they had been subjected to persecution, with the burning of their mercantile store in Mobile, Alabama, they had managed to acquire some financial resources. Even at this time Wilson Ruffin Abbott was purchasing the freedom of other enslaved Blacks, including that of his wife and her sisters. While living in the United States, he had been forced to abide by the Black Codes, wearing a black armband to indicate his race and posting a monetary bond to a white man of good reputation. His sense of pride and ambition would not allow him to continue this form of indignity, and consequently, he brought his family to settle in the town of York (Toronto). He became deeply involved in political and social projects that promoted the welfare and rights of early black immigrants and seemingly passed onto his children, a strong sense of racial pride and self-worth. His children later dispersed and lived in both urban and rural centers in Canada and the United States, traversing the border regularly, and in the process, developing their own racial affiliations.

As the decades passed, the social and political climate changed, not only in Canada, but around the world, and Wilson found himself challenged by racially discriminating aspects of Canadian institutions that could not be so easily overcome.

² For a more in-depth version of this intriguing story, the reader can refer to Family Secrets: Crossing the Colour-line, to be released in October, 2002 by Natural Heritage.
Furthermore, his own children faced a very different social climate than their parents, and were forced to seek new horizons using innovative strategies appropriate to the shifting social structures that had evolved in the 20th century. A generation later, when Anderson’s3 youngest son, Gordon came of age, he rejected his parent’s elite lifestyle, and rather than pursue an academic education and intellectual life, he chose to follow the rapture of motor car racing and found employment as a mechanic in Buffalo. Eventually he settled down in Toronto into a respectable job with the hydro company and became involved in the politics of labour relations. When he married a white woman in 1920, he decided to live as white and thus nothing further was ever mentioned about the blackness of his ancestors - publicly or to his children- although the family still remained close, even across the US border. This study presents a fascinating journey through history and brings forward issues related to knowledge and power, especially through the institutions of religion and education, which are so closely linked to social class and race. In summary, the following questions will be explored: How did social, political and economic factors in 19th century North America influence the ways in which members of the early black elite, such as Wilson and Anderson Abbott resist or accommodate the forces of racism? How did social, political and economic factors in 20th century North America influence the construction of black and/or white racial/cultural identities and affiliations in their descendants?

3 Anderson was the oldest surviving son of Wilson and Ellen Abbott (1935-1913). He became known as the first Canadian black doctor.
1.2 Defining the Process of Racialization

Today the term *race* is generally interpreted as a socially constructed concept that refers to a specific heritage derived from an ancestral lineage that classified people according to genetically transmitted physical similarities such as skin color, shape of eyes and hair texture. Based on this constructed concept of race, the notion of *hypodescent* or the *one-drop rule*⁴ was conceived in the US to provide grounds for social and economic exclusion. Specifically it served to define who was black, not only during the time of slavery, but during the *Jim Crow* era when racial segregation was legalized in the US. Although highly contentious, the practice was condoned by many, even after the dismantlement of segregation and served as a general rule of racial categorization in the public domain. Although such racial purity laws are now stricken from the books, many discriminating social norms and attitudes have not dissolved and the one-drop rule of racial purity still proves to be a powerful indicator today.

Legally the practice of segregation based on race was not condoned in Canada but the inherent belief that biological differences existed between the so-called races was clearly embedded in the ideology of the fathers of Confederation. In 1901, Canada implemented a census and designated four racial classifications that were based on skin

⁴ In 1924, Virginia instituted racial purity laws which defined a white person as “the person who has no trace whatsoever of any blood other than Caucasian, but persons who have one-sixteenth or less of the blood of the American Indian, and no other non-Caucasian blood shall be deemed white persons” Scales-Trent, 1995:3). But such laws were not consistently implemented, for while Mississippi defined a Negro as anyone having 1/16th “Negro blood,” other states used different fractions such as 1/12th and 1/8th (K. Johnson, 2003).
colour: “whites” were Caucasian, “reds” were Aboriginal, “blacks” were African or Negro and “yellows” were Mongolian. For purposes of that census, only those determined to be pure white were supposed to be recorded as such. Nevertheless, it can be readily noted these early attempts to categorize people according to the colour of their skin were conducted in a highly subjective manner, as they were dependent on the physical observations of the census taker or alternatively, the freely asserted self-identification of the individual. For example, many of the Abbott’s racial designations were recorded with little consistency as white, mulatto, coloured, black, Negro and even Irish. Furthermore, their racial designation tended to change with each census depending on the year and where they resided at the time and in effect was “built upon shifting sands” (Backhouse, 1999:7). The implications are extensive and complicated, and this study explores how the creation and enforcement of such categorizations exerted powerful forces on those who embody black/white ancestral affiliations.

In 1865, following the Civil War and the abolition of slavery in the US, reconstruction efforts were instituted to promote a means by which African Americans could establish themselves in a position of citizenship. However, the agenda was

5 See Ignatiev’s How the Irish Became White, 1995 for further details. Early Irish immigrants to the US were initially relegated to the lowest social class, par with that of free Blacks. The process by which the Irish created a niche within the white infrastructure demonstrates how the construction of whiteness within the class structure perpetuated a system of racial oppression. Irish immigrants assumed the work in the service and industrial sectors that had been previously performed by free blacks. The Democratic Party fuelled their pro-slavery bid by promoting the fear that free Blacks would compete for the same employment. Irish laborers not only refused to work with African Americans, thereby forcing them out of the labour pool but also initiated numerous violent attacks on middle-class black communities which embodied their most likely competitors.
circumvented by other demands and with the free status of Blacks it became more
difficult to distinguish many of them from Whites (Wright, 1997a:166). This sharpened
the nation’s need to define race and the one-drop rule was applied to justify a system of
racial segregation. Thus “separate but equal” policies became prevalent and Jim Crow
laws gradually overtook the nation.

It was in this racial climate that many light-skinned Blacks chose to pass as white
in an attempt to evade racial discrimination and access the many privileges accorded to
whites, sometimes even foregoing membership within their own kinship group. This
selective action highlights the point that successful passing could only be accomplished
by those individuals who could be identified as white by others primarily based on the
colour of their skin.

The basis for this conflict reaches back to a time in the 19th and early 20th
centuries, when an elite sector maintained a position of privilege based on a stratified
social system within the black community. These old-line black families represented a
diverse cross section of the community, drawing their members from a variety of social
levels and income brackets, “where standards for inclusion were based upon traceable,
distinguished ancestry, movement within exclusive social circles, refinement, and

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Refer to Lawrence O. Graham’s *Our Kind of People: Inside America’s Black Upper Class.* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999) for a comprehensive study of the elite black upper class. The book caused much controversy in both white and black camps for it challenged the stereotypes of Blacks commonly depicted as working-class or impoverished and posed the reality of a tiered structure within black society dating back to the times of slavery (5).
explains that membership in these status groups was granted in a subjective manner, while classes were defined by economic factors. By 1915, some of the educated sons of the black elite had forsaken the white patronage their fathers practiced and established a professional black middle class composed of doctors, teachers, dentists, newspaper editors and small businessmen who provided services to the black community that the whites refused to serve. In the following decades, a prominent black middle-class emerged in the US and the prevalent political climate offered distinctive economic prospects for those who chose to affiliate with the black power elements of the community. In an ironic twist of fate, this situation presented an intriguing alternative for those who chose to identify or even pass as black.  

When I began to research my own racial location within the black/white Abbott family, I was forced to admit that race had never been a signifying factor in terms of my personal identity. In fact, it was a revelation to me that the question of race had permeated the lives of so many members of my own family throughout the last two centuries. To those who are not directly affected, the implications of racism may seem minimal, but at this juncture, I had to consider the perspective of those who did display signifying physical characteristics. It would appear that when someone like me has not been sensitized to racial identification or “racialized,” one might not appreciate the acute reality of the racism that is apparent in our multiracial/cultural society today.

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7 This provokes an interesting premise that could provide a venue for a practical interpretation of the practice of “passing” as a broadening of the definition of racial constructs that would promote a climate of inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness.
Additionally this reflection raised the enigma of *white privilege*. McIntosh (1997) emphasizes that this can be perceived as an invisible package that can be traded in by people like me for unearned assets on an everyday basis (76). Piper (2004) explains that the recognition forces us to confront our obliterated collective past and the responsibility that links “the criminal acts of extermination and enslavement committed by our forefathers with our own personal crimes of avoidance, neglect, disengagement, passive complicity, and active exploitation of the inherited justices from which we have profited” (28). How then would I be able to reconcile the intrinsic values with which I had been raised and the sense of moral responsibility I now felt? In the back of my mind, I continued to struggle with the fact that my grandfather had ensured that I would be granted this package of “whiteness” upon my birth. McIntosh was absolutely correct in that it was an invisible package, but was it really a gift after all? I was beginning to see it as a ponderous responsibility and I felt compelled to do something about it.

As I groped for some kind of elementary explanation I found myself dependent on the thoughts of others. Blauner (1990) articulated my feelings when he observed that “people who saw themselves as fair-minded and committed to equality and individual responsibility did not want to face the possibility that their social position, even in part, might be the product of racial privilege” (16-17). I certainly did not want to be one of those who perpetuated racism and discrimination, but how could I take my own experience into the larger forum of my world? It was apparent that I was finally confronting the reality of being designated as white as I focused on “how whiteness is

Indeed, Frankenberg (1999) warns that people like me tend to see racism as someone else’s problem, but when whiteness is named and assigned, it places everyone in the relationship.

This was what set my course as I mapped out the format of this dissertation. It would become a personal awakening for me and I prepared myself to face many astonishing discoveries that would be punctuated by moments of overwhelming angst and turmoil as I gradually converted my racialized ignorance into responsible awareness.

The investigation employs the integration of a historiography with a case study that focuses on the lives of nine of my Abbott predecessors: my great-grandfather, Wilson Ruffin Abbott (1801-1876), his sons Dr. Anderson Ruffin Abbott (1837-1913) and William Henson Abbott (1848-?), and five of Anderson’s children, Helene (1872-1951), Grace (1876-1941), Ida (1878-1958), Wilson (1873-1938), and my grandfather, Gordon (1885-1950).

It begins with Wilson Ruffin Abbott, born into a world fraught with the aftereffects of the French Revolution and the beginnings of industrialization, in the antebellum South where slavery was the predominant economic resource. His tumultuous adventures are explored in light of his personal endeavours, opportunities and achievements as he negotiated for civil rights and social justice around the political and social upheavals that he faced in both the US and Canada. His influence, combined with a critical overview of the events of the period are examined through the lives of three of his
children, Anderson, Amelia and William and the subsequent life choices they made that illustrated the obstacles they encountered, as well as the advancement of racial uplift attained through their efforts to establish an equal footing in their respective societies.

As the social, political and economic pendulum swung into the 20th century, the import of new events is viewed through the lives of Anderson’s daughters, Helene, Ida and Grace and his sons, Gordon and Wilson. These individuals, like their forebears, continued to strive for an equitable form of racial accommodation by deconstructing the racialized complexion of their worlds. New ideology, although riddled with remnants of ignorance from the past, offered tantalizing, if yet tentative new prospects for breaking down social barriers based on race, class and gender.

In a final analysis, the study moves to the present-day descendants who describe their perceptions of themselves in light of their forebears. They explain that the emergence of black pride during the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s brought about a strong collective sense of racial polarization. The light skin and a white appearance that had been assets for upward mobility in the times of their grandparents had apparently lost appeal and cultural value for many of them. Although it could not be denied that despite the legal and social advancement of many African Americans/Canadians, light-skinned and mixed-race individuals had moved up the scale more readily than those with darker skin, new options were now available. Thus the study ultimately examines how the privileges and elite status secured by light-skinned Blacks such as Wilson Ruffin Abbott set the tone for later generations to become better educated, trained in skilled
occupations, and to have more access to the dominant white culture (Rockquemore and Brunsma, 2002: 9). The perspectives of present-day family members provides crucial data in establishing insight into the ways in which families such as the Abbotts will integrate the deeds and the events of the past with their own present-day lives. As a result of this investigation, it is hoped that an enhanced appreciation of historical events will lead to a deeper understanding of the decisions and practices of our predecessors and facilitate more frank and meaningful relationships between peoples of all ancestral affiliations. In summary, the following questions will be explored from two comparative historical perspectives: The Past and the Present.

Past - How did social, political and economic factors in 19th century North America influence the ways in which members of the early black elite, such as Wilson and Anderson Abbott resist or accommodate the forces of racism? To what extent did they use their elite status and light skin colour to resist or accommodate the process of racialization?

Present - How did social, political and economic factors in 20th century North America influence the construction of black and/or white racial/cultural identities and affiliations in their descendants? To what extent did their middle class, racial identity and skin colour allow them to access new opportunities today?
1.3 Operational Definitions

One of the most difficult obstacles in this kind of investigation is the use of language that adequately and effectively represents the intentions of the author. In the case of racially based terminology, traditional interpretations are often fraught with misperceptions and misconceptions and thus meanings, translations, assumptions and relevance are subject to temporal and spatial connotations.

Researchers often face particular challenges as the language of equity becomes subverted and for purposes of interpretation it may become necessary to reconstruct a word or phrase in order to develop "overarching terms that incorporate the language of inclusiveness" (Rees & Shelton, 2000:14). Race is one of those terms. Pierson (1998) has noted that the "'scientists' of race labored to divide the vast diversity of the human species into a small number of separate and distinct races" (4). Nevertheless this study launches from the position that race does not exist, but it does acknowledge the very real concept of race and its profound implications on individuals, societies and nations. The present study addresses the concept of race: the instigating conditions that precluded it, the culminating events that sustained it and the deterioration of obsolete concepts that revised it within North American perceptions. For purposes of this study the word "race" will define a socially constructed concept that refers to a specific heritage that classifies people according to genetically transmitted physical similarities and in particular skin color and hair texture that are derived from their genetic ancestry. Haney Lopez (2000)
argues that “race must be understood as a *sui generis* social phenomenon in which contested systems of meaning serve as connections between physical features, faces, and personal characteristics” (165). The concept of race is discussed within the context of a “set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced … intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination” (Frankenberg, 1999:6). This study demonstrates how the meaning of this concept tends to change over time and how it exerts a real and tangible social and political impact on an individual’s sense of self, experiences, and life chances (Frankenberg, 1993:11). Although Castagna and Dei (2000) acknowledge the difficulty in using conceptual and analytical concepts that are themselves social contracts they assert that the concept of race does provide a useful analytical tool to distinguish between the “production of racism” and the “reproduction of social oppression [in the] continued manifestation of racism in society” (19).

In the 1920s, some researchers chose to replace the term race with *ethnicity*, which served to differentiate, organize and entitle individuals to a group membership based on shared cultural or religious characteristics rather than on physical ones (Backhouse, 2000; CCMIE Report, 1999; Frankenberg, 1993; Johnson (1973); Omi & Winant, 1994; Phinney & Rotheram, 1986). W.D. Wright (2002) rationally argues that a black race is not a pure reality because it is composed of many ethnic groups that may have different cultures, social structures and languages and that their racial features may vary. He contends that there is only one Black ethnic group but many black ethnic groups would be more efficiently named according to their national affiliation. He claims that
historians should have clarified this distinction but that most people do not recognize
the fact that “there are different kinds of black people in America” (2). 8

In many instances race is determined by individuals self-identifying and labelling
themselves “black” or “white” within a particular cultural social group and not by
physical characteristics. It would appear that often individuals fall into the trap of
racialization because of the societal demands to identify who is white, who is black, who
is red and who is yellow, and yet ironically this is exactly what contributes to the
preservation of racism. Omi and Winant’s (1994) theory of “racial formation” describes
race as a “fluid, unstable and decentered complex of social meanings constantly being
transformed by political context” (59).

Generally racism refers to an act or behaviour that denies a person or group
humane treatment or a fair opportunity because of a belief in the natural superiority of
one racial group over another (Backhouse, 2000; Laszloffy & Hardy, 2000; Reddy,
1997). Although McTair (1995) argues that racism is an attitude “anchored in material
structures and embedded in historical relations of power” (32), the term racism was not
actually coined until the 1930s by social researchers. Frankenberg (1993) explains that
the basis of racism and essentially, the racial divide arose out of a discourse on biological
diversity that was ultimately used to rationalize the infliction of economic, social and
political inequities (13).

8 For more on this refer to W.D. Wright’s book Black Intellectuals, Black Cognition, and a Black Aesthetic, 1997.
Systemic racism refers to negative and oppressive practices and attitudes that are inherent in the policies and practices of organizations within our society that contribute to the creation of unsubstantiated assumptions, in a way that either deliberately or inadvertently obstruct another's potential. Henry, et al (1995) maintain that there exists a form of systemic racism in Canada that is particularly insidious because it manifests unconsciously in the minds of individuals and often plays a role in the development of organizational policies. Henry et al (1995) explains how cultural racism acts as a powerful deterrent by representing the value system still embedded in North American society that continues to perpetuate a form of racism based on perceptions of racial and cultural differences.

For purposes of this study, the word mainstream is an all-encompassing term and refers to those who identify with the Eurocentric, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) population, but are not necessarily "purely" derived from such stock. Although the term in this study applies to the dominant majority race/cultures that colonialized North America it could technically refer to other races or cultures in different locations and at different times (Backhouse, 2000; Graham, 2000; Lazarre, 1996; Reddy, 1997; Root, 1992).

Racial assimilation refers to the adaptation of an individual in physical, social, and psychological terms, into the mainstream or dominant social group. As the individual or group becomes acculturated into the dominant group, they may release or deny parts of their ancestral culture. Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) claim that such groups do not
tend to “experience structural barriers associated with their ethnic group status, nor are they culturally distinct from whites” (13).

The terms *acculturation, amalgamation* and *accommodation* incorporate similar but variable interpretations of assimilation in that the individual assumes the behaviours, attitudes, traditions, language and religion of the dominant social group (Pires & Stanton, 2000). These terms are used in this study in the context of the individual subject or participant.

The concept of miscegenation or the mixing of races will be addressed in this study, but is considered to be another misnomer in that it too is based on the social construction of the concept of racial differences.

The process of *racialization* transpires out of the socially constructed concept of race and its application to the differentiation of people or “social collectivities” (Miles, 1989:75) with the intent of racial discrimination.

The practice of *race passing* became a common means of transgressing the colour line, particularly during the early twentieth century. This study examines how the act was used as “both a social enterprise and a subject of cultural expression” (Wald, 2000:11). Historically it has been viewed as an attempt to assimilate into the white mainstream by “passing oneself off as a human person with all the rights and privileges thereof” (Stetson, 1976:156).

For the purposes of this study the term *biracial* is not employed as it is commonly understood to refer to the offspring of one black parent and one white parent.
Furthermore, it tends to give credence to the one-drop rule and impedes the ability of individuals to blur their racial identities. Once again, the result of this definition is that people of mixed lineage are usually categorized as “black” for demographic and social stratification purposes (Golden, 2000; Kilbride, 2000; Rockquemore and Brunsma, 2002).

The concept of a self-system (Cross & Madson, 1997) provides an encompassing definition of the sense of self and includes the terms self-concept, self-image, self worth, self-esteem, self-evaluations, self-perceptions, self-schemas, self-affects, self-efficacy, and self-monitoring as just some of the ways one sees oneself (Harter, 1999). The present study will accede to Harter’s (1999) notions that self-concept relates to evaluative judgments of attributes within discrete frames such as intelligence, social acceptance and physical appearance; self-worth or self-esteem refers to a more overall evaluation of one’s worth or value as a person; self-image or body image refers to physical or external states, particularly with respect to how one perceives how others see them (5).

The term ideology reflects the various sets of beliefs about the nature of society in which they live and the role of the legitimized authorities to establish and maintain that society (Johnston, 1997:13). In the present study a Weberian conceptual framework is used to explain the ways in which members of the Abbott family were impacted by the social forces of their day.

Finally the inevitable challenge of using “correct” terminology persistently invokes some spatial and temporal considerations throughout the text when referring to
the process of racialization. The historical documents that inform this study invoke the terms Colored, Negro, Afro-American, Afro-Canadian, Afri-Canadian and Black freely and do not seemingly restrict the references to denote any particular type of individual. The present study attempts to employ these terms within the historical context that they were used by the supporting historical materials. It should be noted that this usage does not imply any specific correlation between these terms and anyone’s degree of black ancestry.

The term “Negro” was commonly used until the middle of the 20th century, as can be seen in the numerous historical references. The phrase, “people of color” has been used interchangeably for decades to refer to any combination thereof, in various references. More recently, the names African-American and African-Canadian are preferred by many people of African descent in North America, and have been in use over the course of the last century. The term Black became popular during the civil rights movements of the 1960s in reference to ‘Black Power’ and ‘Black is Beautiful’ sentiments. In this study, with respect to the word “Black,” the upper case “B” denotes a distinct ethnic group of people who are socially and culturally defined and self-identify as different from the white mainstream. The lower case “b” is used as an adjective to describe elements of that culture. The same procedure is used to denote the ethnicity of “Whites” versus white culture.9

Other terminology that surrounds the discussion of race and culture was equally problematic as terms such as tolerance, acceptance, elite, up-lift, assimilation, amalgamation, interracial and even black and white all took on personal connotations and various forms of authenticity and acceptability.\(^{10}\) As the researcher I was aware that I had stepped into the research experience with my own personal bias or "conceptual baggage (Kirby & McKenna, 1989), and in this case my conception of the white mainstream was my "norm." I acknowledged that this "norm" was a socially constructed concept and I attempted to use this awareness constructively, allowing it to inform me as I interacted with my participants. Razack (1999) noted that this concept of a social norm arises when the researcher "interprets the words and acts of others, and that we do so subconsciously but always in conformity with the way in which our culture has taught us is the 'proper' way" (8). It is with this in mind that I must accept the probability that others who adhere to a different social norm may interpret the premise of this thesis differently than I had intended.

\(^{10}\) For example the word "tolerance" is commonly used in the public domain when referring to levels of social equanimity. Folson (2004) points out that the word implies that a "form of standardization, whereby, a mode of doing things or perceiving the world is assumed to be the 'standard,' and any other ways are 'deviant' from the acclaimed standard, and therefore need to be 'tolerated'" (pc).
1.4 Personal Background

To trace what you can recognize in yourself back to them; to find the connection of spirit and heart you share with them, who are, after all, your United Front.\footnote{Walker, A. (1990). *The temple of my familiar*. New York: Simon and Schuster: 354.}

In 1975 Dr. Daniel G. Hill approached my family as part of an investigation he was conducting on the history of the early black communities in Ontario. He had been privy to some Abbott family papers that were made available to him through another branch of the family and he had hoped to supplement that information with some family anecdotes and verification. Indeed, he and his wife Donna, co-founders of the Ontario Black History Society had been collecting oral histories for some time in an effort to document and preserve the social history of Ontario’s black settlers before it was lost forever. The tradition of passing along family and community histories from generation to generation is practiced around the world as a means of preserving a version of history that has not been re-written by outsiders. The North American black community has also engaged in this practice and thankfully we are now able to access much information that might well have passed out of reach to those today who are involved in historical investigations.
On that fateful day in 1975, the Hills revealed to us that my great-grandfather just happened to be the first African Canadian to graduate from the University of Toronto as a doctor and therefore had been Canada’s first black doctor. Although Dr. Hill encouraged us to read the papers in the library and explore this fascinating family history more thoroughly, we did not consider ourselves archivists or genealogists and for all intents and purposes, thought we were the “end of the line,” so to speak.

However some 15 years later, I developed a twinge of curiosity and made my way down to the Baldwin Room to take a look at the Abbott Collection. To my surprise, I was presented with a trolley full of materials, including photograph albums, diaries, letters, property deeds, wills, testimonials, newspaper clippings, scrapbooks and scribblers of hand-written notes, all carefully preserved on silk backing by the library archivists. At this point I had no idea that this was only the beginning and that an enormous project would take me back into the past where instead of family stories I would discover family secrets. It would appear that my grandfather, along with many other light-skinned Blacks, chose to pass as white when he married a white woman. In this way, his direct descendants all grew up, knowing about their ancestors, but with no knowledge that they could be designated or even racialized as black.

As the years ticked by some of the “white” Canadian Abbott descendants gradually drifted away from their “black” American cousins. Of course this was likely due to a variety of factors that would include distance between branches of the family, age differences between the cousins and the inevitable generation gap. So as the “white”
side gradually lost touch with the "black" side, the once-strong family ties began to dissolve and all that remained to tell the story was a pile of dusty old papers stacked in the Toronto Reference Library.

When I first became aware of my black antecedents, I was very bewildered. I had heard much about my mother's father and how wonderful and gracious a man he had been and yet suddenly, I was faced with this ruse. Why had he hidden his racial ancestry from my mother? Had he acted alone in this endeavour or had the rest of the family gone along with him? For the time being, I was left with the assumption that he must have chosen to deny his black heritage in order to protect his children from the effects of racial discrimination. What kind of life had led my grandfather to think the way he did? Was it just the times—those years between 1920 and 1950 when the Depression and World War II were a part of his daily life? What terrible consequences did he fear if his children were privy to this knowledge? If he had lived past 1950, would he have changed his mind and how might he have responded to the current public revelation?

Since both he and my grandmother died early in the 1950s, I had no opportunity to seek an explanation from him personally, and so the only way I could hope to understand the phenomenon was to enquire among the few remaining Abbott relatives that my mother had known. However, to my surprise, not all of the relatives were willing to discuss the subject and it became clear that I would have to expand my research tentacles to more distant sources.

My mother's brother had already made it perfectly clear that he did not want to
explore the story any further. He had chosen not to tell his own children and was quite appalled when they learned about their black ancestry from a television documentary based on Dr. Hill’s work. Before the show was even over, the television was clicked off and their enthusiastic inquiries were brusquely whisked aside, choking off any further discussion indefinitely. Although my uncle had been aware of his black family ancestry, he had followed the example set by his own parents and had kept silent, even with his own children. For many years afterwards, he would stiffly explain that his own parents had not discussed their racial history with their children when he was growing up and, although he had harboured his own suspicions, he had respected their wishes.

I was not prepared to confront him over those personal issues at that time. Instead I decided to try my luck with my mother’s one remaining (or so I thought) American first cousin. Alas, it was not to be, for to my surprise I encountered a powerful reluctance on his part to delve into the “family closet.” His mother had died when he was a young child and he had been raised by her parents who were white. They and his father, had chosen to shelter him from any knowledge of his father’s racial ancestry, and it was not until after his father’s death that he learned about his black heritage. Consequently, he considered such family business to be private and he refused to contribute to the project at that time.

With my curiosity immensely piqued and my immediate sources of information depleted, I sought out more distant relatives, writing innumerable letters, contacting dozens of genealogical societies, sifting through archives and accumulating reams of background material. In the process of uncovering a little history, I had come to see and
appreciate the life of my family ancestors from a new perspective.

When I first began to delve into my family history, I began to meet a whole new side of the family never previously known to me. I had no idea that they would be "black" since I of course was obviously "white." Nevertheless, as I began to correspond with my newly discovered cousins, increasing evidence suggested that I was going to be in for some enlightenment. When they mailed me their family photographs, I was intrigued to observe great variations in their appearances and that indeed, some of the cousins were very "black," some rather "dark," and others quite "light." In one case I received a photo from a "black" cousin who so strongly resembled my "white" uncle they could pass as brothers. Each considered himself a fair representative of their chosen race.

Although tales of family and individual accomplishments have been handed down through the generations, the fact that some of my antecedents were black was imperceptibly deleted from the stories told to my own mother. Since so many of my "dark" cousins lived in the United States and most of the "light" ones lived in Canada, it was a simple task to discreetly omit the fact. My mother was the last child born to Gordon and Ann Abbott and, since her father was the youngest in his family, she found herself to be an entire generation younger than the rest of her first cousins. Thus, as the baby of the clan, it was easy for her parents to skim over the colour question and allow her to assume a "white" identity.

As I pursued my investigation, nagging questions lingered in my mind. I was perplexed. I had always been taught that colour didn't matter and that everyone should be
considered equal. Certainly growing up in Toronto in the 1950s, as middle-class white children within mainstream society, my siblings and I had never been aware of any personal instances of racial discrimination. In fact, the question of race simply had never been an issue. From what cruel indiscretions and ignorance had our privileged lifestyle shielded us? After all those years, even though I am now aware of the circumstances my grandparents faced, I still found myself harbouring certain feelings of guilt, embarrassment, unworthiness and even shame. Sociologist, Avery Gordon (1997) proposes the concept of a haunting as “recognition that a profound social phenomenon is persistently addressing itself to you, distracting and disturbing your daily life, often mess ing it up and leaving in its wake an uneasy feeling” (63). It was as if an irreversible transformation had taken root within my being, as I engaged in this effort to wrestle with both my inherited “blackness” and “whiteness” and the questionable legitimacy of the privileges and assumptions I had previously taken for granted.

References found in early 20th century fictional literature12 validate such attitudes during that period, and appear to indicate that those who participated in the act of passing did so surreptitiously with deliberate secrecy, often denying contact with their extended family members in the process. Reading these stories I am inclined to believe that my

grandparents were forced to live out similar experiences. Today, the word “passing” continues to evoke some of those ambivalent feelings that I felt when I first heard about it, as I am beginning to realize that, in a sense, I am a product of this practice. Imber-Black (1999) notes that “skin color may underpin painful family secrets, including scapegoating family members whose skin color is most different from the rest, [and] ‘passing for white,’ while living a double life, or cutting oneself off totally from one’s family” (6).

In conversations with other family members, we were able to review some of the experiences of our ancestors and subsequently reflect on the repercussions that today affect our own lives and those of our children in an effort to untangle the relationship between the past and the present. The repercussions were elating as older family members found ways to reconcile some long-standing feelings of rejection and exclusion that had haunted them for so many years. Banking on Jago’s (1996) assurance that “revised stories…reflect new found beliefs in personal agency and control,” (507) I found myself eager to continue to share my experiences and exchange my thoughts with others.

The entire revelation awakened in me a strong yearning to know more about my family down through the ages. I had not originally intended to search for my roots, but it became a necessary step in opening the shutters of ignorance and fear. I realized that the process of self-exploration in a racial and cultural context, through an historical lens, was an important step in my personal evolution. Eventually I was able to contact many other cousins in the United States and Canada and as they began to come forward with family
stories of their own, it became a fascinating group project to piece together the tapestry of our common ancestry. Since that time we have enjoyed several family reunions which have proven to be very special for all of us. My mother recalled that first occasion with deep pleasure. She said,

I guess my most vivid memory is the wonderful feeling of coming home that I had that night. I can remember going around from table to table visiting with all the branches of the family and thinking how enormously alike we all were. Certainly not in looks, in fact we were just about every shade imaginable, but there was some indefinable spark that seemed to bind us. It was like looking at the same person in a dozen different guises! Especially the women...it was almost like seeing yourself over and over again, in a variety of colour. I couldn’t get over how much alike we all were in personality; all the women talking with their hands and all obviously excited and delighted with the evening and in meeting each other. I remember thinking how pleased my grandfather, Anderson Abbott, would have been to see us all together again. It’s hard to describe that evening; one of those things you really have to experience...I can just recall a true sense of family! (MY, 2003).
Thus it would seem that despite the efforts over the years to wash away the past, the Abbott descendents have now re-discovered each other and perhaps the family stories will once again be handed down to generations to come.

When I began the project, there was no doubt in my mind that the family “secret” arose out of the desire of parents to protect their children from the insidious effects of racial discrimination during the time of the Depression and War—a time when many were more concerned about immediate survival than about fairness and equality. But such presumptions may have been premature. As I dug deeper, I began to realize that the effects of racism could be far more extensive than I had initially thought. Why had these individuals chosen to deny their illustrious ancestors and hide behind the sanctity of their light skin? What were the social, political and economic forces that propelled them to relinquish their roles as leaders and advocates for social justice within the black community? Despite my trepidation, I had to proceed with my investigation.
1.5 Limitations of the Study

The framework of this study is based on the researcher's personal interpretation of historical events and attempts to conceptualize a very broad subject with the aid of a case study of the Abbott family living in both Canada and the USA over the last two centuries. Selected aspects of history and events have been incorporated into the study to portray particular experiences common to many individuals in those times and places. The study attempts to re-present a part of history that if re-interpreted and re-examined, might contribute to further understanding of the racial and cultural location of the Abbott descendents in both the past and the present.

The intergenerational aspect of the study preceded the fact that I, as researcher was speaking for those who had already died. In this case, the act of passing had been a secret, and the individuals never explained their acts in person, nor did they leave any writings that revealed their position or feelings about the practice, whether it extended to their workplace, their school or educational institution, the general public or their personal home and family life. As a researcher I sought "only to give word[s] to those who cannot speak..." (Sengupta, cited in Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan, 1997:xii) and yet I am profoundly inhibited by the enormous responsibility of speaking for those who are now dead.

An interesting project based on narrative research was presented by Jennifer Holness and David Sutherland in their film Speakers for the Dead. The message of the
film reiterates the fact that our world is composed of unequal relations of power and in this case, the filmmakers attempted to bring an injustice to light when they revealed how an entire black community that was once located just south of Collingwood, Ontario simply disappeared from our history. The town of Priceville, named after a black officer, no longer exits but at one time it was home to a number of Black Loyalists who were veterans of the War of 1812. The filmmakers interviewed the descendents of both the early white and black settlers. They had inadvertently set themselves a formidable challenge, as they were of Jamaican descent and it was important that they presented themselves as non-racialized, objective individuals who were capable of telling someone else’s story. In order to address this issue they chose to simply allow the interviewees to speak and did not insert a narrative of their own to reinterpret the stories or analyze them. The entire film was pieced together with excerpts from the narratives of the interviewees. Ultimately the music, background photography, special effects and film editing did produce a powerful statement about the history and perpetuation of racism in the

13 During the 20th century, all evidence of these black residents vanished and was not publicly acknowledged by the present-day community until film makers revealed that these settlers had been forced off the land granted their families by the British government and squeezed out of town through the racist behaviours of its white residents. It seems ironic, and ultimately tragic that the early black settlers who fled American "democracy" in favour of British "colonization" and proclaimed their loyalty on numerous occasions, ended up experiencing so much racial persecution in their quest for the "land of freedom." The only remnant of their existence today is a cemetery that was desecrated by some of the local farmers of the area. The film traces the efforts of a small group of concerned descendents who hope to confirm and acknowledge the presence and contributions of their ancestors. As the cemetery project evolved, disturbing revelations came to the surface and previous racist sentiments were once again expressed by some of the local white residents.
community. It is with these considerations in mind that I will prepare the presentation and interpretation of the social history of my deceased participants.

The sample size was limited to 17 participants that represented 4 out of the 7 generations of one family that were addressed in the study. Prior to conducting the study, a general announcement was made to the entire family of known Abbotts in the US and Canada and those willing to participate were invited to come forward. The sample size was limited to twenty individuals who responded to the general invitation and seventeen actually completed the study. These participants do not necessarily reflect all of the perspectives of the family but they do provide valuable data that pertain to their personal locations.

As a single researcher I interviewed the participants, interpreted the data, and drew upon previous studies and seminal theories for support. (Brayboy, 2000; Dien, 2000; Golden, 2000; Kilbride, 2000; Tizard & Phoenix, 1993; Taylor, Gilligan & Sullivan, 1997). Although I was phenomenologically involved in this study I did not see myself as an evaluator. Rather I strove to be an observer and fellow participant and tried to remain alert to the difficult task of bracketing or holding back my own racial biases and preconceptions so as to minimize the extent they affected the investigation. In this way I sought to discover a universality and consistency between me and my research participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). Discrepancies between professed (what people say they do) and operant values (what they actually do or what people say others do and why they do it), inevitably arise in this kind of a study (Bruner, 1990:16). The
interviews and personal stories of participants may be subject to some bias as they are based on selective memories, one-sided interpretations and perhaps in some cases, misinformation.

The issue of language and terminology that conveyed accurate meanings and interpretations of subjects and concepts, previously addressed in the operational definitions also presented a challenge. To some extent the integration of the personal concepts of race and culture will have influenced the data collection, as participants likely harbour different interpretations of the terminology, based on their own racial/cultural locations than those of the researcher. However, it is equally likely that their own efforts to convey particular perspectives may not be readily perceived by this researcher. Ultimately it is hoped that these multiple layers served to enhance the authenticity of the findings rather than impede them and that they will offer a place to begin further dialogue.

Certainly there existed an element of power imbalance between myself as the researcher and my participants, as I was the one who set the agenda, composed the questions, edited and interpreted the data, and finally presented the findings based on the literature and my personal conclusion. I was fully aware, as Frankenberg (1993) warns, “there is no disinterested position to be adopted in scholarship,” (29) and am hopeful that this will be taken into account on the part of the reader who will also harbour what Kirby and McKenna (1989) call their own “conceptual baggage.” Nevertheless one of the advantages of this kind of qualitative research is that it allowed for multiple variations
and allowed for a range of responses and interpretations of the narratives through the use of open-ended questions. Variables such as class, gender, age, education, religion, and nationality added significant interest and richness to the study but inevitably also complicated the process of interpretation.

On a personal note, I am deeply disappointed that I have not been able to adequately address the place of women in this project despite a concentrated effort to collect historical references, documentation, photographs and narratives, even within the confines of my own family records. It would seem that the personal stories, professional achievements and power agendas of the men in the Abbott family were readily and publicly celebrated and preserved into a format that commemorated them, but those of the Abbott women were either negated or dispelled with little or no explanation. This appears to be indicative of the patriarchal manner in which historical documentation, interpretation and presentation has traditionally been ignored by both male and female historians as they shaped our society. However, a feminist interpretation and analysis is most clearly required to address this indiscretion and the women in this story would certainly provide intriguing subjects worth studying in more detail.

There are a few exceptions and some women have come forward to begin to fill the gap. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (1988) offers some insight through a gendered lens into the life and times of plantation mistresses and their slaves in her book *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*. In this volume she gives voice to previously neglected testimonies of these women through the use of
narratives, letters and diaries to produce a definitive analysis of events that they encountered on an everyday basis and their personal responses.

Although there is a distinct lack of academic literature that deals with issues of mixed race and racial assimilation, a number of novels published in the early part of the twentieth century acknowledged the situation through characters who passed as white. For example, Nella Larson wrote two such volumes, *Quicksand* in 1928 and *Passing* in 1929. Both epitomized the tragic fate of the beautiful mulatto heroine who is forced to decide whether to pass as white and live a life plagued by guilt and fear of discovery, or to return home to the loving fold of her black heritage. This has been a stereotype that women of mixed race have had to live down for decades (Brown, 2000; Mahtani, 2000). If they were not portrayed as the tragic heroine, they were depicted as exotic and mysterious. Other novels depict male characters of mixed race that turned out to be rather crafty at turning the circumstances in their favour, passing as white when it seems most advantageous, but never relinquishing their true black identity (Schuyler, 1998; Wilson, 1983). Although both images present somewhat embellished and dramatized characters they may well actually represent a true-to-life impression of people of mixed race at the time of the writings.

Most of the academic literature that addresses black history written by and about women tends to be more recent although some efforts continue to lack a feminist perspective. Pierson (1998) notes this dilemma in her scholarly efforts to avoid committing ‘epistemic violence’” while recovering the voices of women from the

There is a final limitation to this study that I cannot overlook or deny. I had undertaken a study that traversed the colour line in more ways than I had originally imagined. I thought I was just looking into the story of my own family and that would eventually explain some of the social forces that led to the discovery of the family secret. It was the "secret" that proved to be the key to the academic question that hinged on the deepest implications of the racialization process and ultimately became evident in the most obvious and salient factor of the study – skin colour. The cruel taunts delivered on the school grounds – 'If you're light, you're all right, If you're brown, stick around, But if you're black, get back' - were news to me. Growing up as white in Toronto, I had no previous awareness of this situation but slowly I was ‘educated’ by black racialized members of my family. It was a long and painful struggle to incorporate these kinds of concepts into my white racialized mentality. In an effort to learn more about what it was like to be ‘black,’ I sought to associate myself with black individuals, organizations,
speakers, writers and community groups. On one occasion I decided to join a black writer’s workshop on the basis that I was writing about the history of my black ancestors. When I got there, the facilitator discreetly took me aside and informed me that this workshop was for Black people only to which I cringed inwardly and replied, “I know.” It was a very embarrassing situation as she apologized profusely and made some polite comment about light-skinned Blacks today. Needless to say, it turned out to be one of many enlightening and humbling experiences as I futilely attempted to ‘pass’ as black. I did not have the skill or the courage to carry it off successfully.

Gradually I began to develop an awareness and appreciation of the tremendous guilt and shame that arose from the practice of passing (Graham, 1999: 393). Certainly the imposing factors of racism lay at the root of the passing phenomenon. My intent was to examine it from the inside and work my way out. It was with this humiliating event in mind that I decided to pursue a more scholarly process of enlightenment and hence I enrolled in a Masters and then the current PhD program at OISE/UT. Again I encountered numerous challenging and intimidating circumstances with respect to the course work, the students and even the faculty as I tenuously made my way through the reading materials and my culminating project in the form of this dissertation. It has truly been a painful and awesome awakening as I begin the process of de-racializing myself and the world around me.
1.6 Revising History

The Abbotts represent one of the early black families that emigrated from the US to Canada during the 1830s and gradually assimilated into the Canadian mainstream. Their experience offers an interesting example of how the temporal and spatial conditions of their lives affected the various ways in which they accommodated the forces of racialization during those times. An overview of some of their experiences will be integrated into a revised social history that will offer new relevance to the agency displayed by Abbott individuals. The study examines how social structures and barriers have shifted over time within a racialized society and reveals how the actions that at one time worked so well for some family members have become obsolete and ineffective for the present generation of Abbotts.

The primary purpose of a social history is to address those aspects of the past that affected the everyday experiences of either individuals or groups of individuals within a particular temporal and spatial context. During the 1960s and 1970s a significant transformation began to take place with respect to the way in which social histories were presented and interpreted by modern historians and sociologists. Cultural historians asserted that a more subjective and narrative “revisionist” approach to the acquisition of social histories could address an inquiry more effectively than previous traditional methods of presentation and interpretation. E. H Carr (1961) suggested that the historian’s representation of selected aspects of events of the past could be viewed as
subjective in character and based on the experiences of an individual who was essentially a product of a collection of social forces. James. W. St. G. Walker (1986) notes that history is not just a period of time but it is a “record of trends, developments and forces which continue to operate in the present” (51).

This study offers a unique opportunity to re-present and re-interpret aspects of Canadian black history that have too often been superficially glazed over by modern historians and Walker (1986) claims that “to overlook black history is not only to ignore an important cultural heritage; it is to misunderstand the direction of Canadian history in its entirety” (51). For the most part the stories of black Canadians were merely linked chronologically to the history of the Underground Railroad and presented through a racialized lens that reflected the values, beliefs and assumptions of historians who represented the colonial social system prevalent at that time. In many instances, “the very existence of slavery in Canada was denied or obscured in Canadian historical writing,” (Walker, 1991:xvii) despite evidence to the contrary that both British and French officials had kept slaves and indentured individuals as household servants (Winks, 1971:26).14

From a Canadian perspective, R. Winks (1971) in his book Blacks in Canada contended the lack of academic diligence paid to Canadian black history investigations on both an individual and national level was largely contingent on the fact that until 1960,

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14 Not until 1793 did Colonel John Graves Simcoe, the first Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada initiate legislation that prohibited the importation of slaves. Although the law did not emancipate them, it did prohibit the importation of others until the Proclamation Act of 1834 that abolished slavery in the British Empire. Simcoe’s legislation stipulated that the children of black slaves would only be free when they reached twenty-five years of age and that their offspring would be born free.
Blacks made up only two percent of the total population of Canada (ix). Yet, despite amassing an impressive volume of research on the history of black Canadians, Winks did not attempt to critically analyze his findings. In a more recent publication of his book, he explained that he viewed himself as an anthropologist, not a sociologist and therefore did not feel qualified to interpret the information that he had collected (Winks, 1997: xvii).

James W. St. G. Walker (1999) in his book *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone 1783-1870* acknowledged Wink’s diligent attention to detail and use of primary sources but noted what he considered a lack of critical interpretation which in his opinion, minimized the impact of the work. In response Winks (1971) asserted that his work responded to the social and political impetus of the era and that it continues to stand as a product of it’s time.\(^{15}\) Furthermore Winks dispelled numerous forms of misinformation that had been circulated by governmental departments and officials over many decades (472).

The benefit of black history is that it has the potential to correct the understanding of the black experience in the minds of the public. It is particularly important that in the quest to provide a black perspective, the history is presented in an accurate format or as Talbot (1986) states “tells it like it was, without trying to make super heroes out of ordinary human beings” (5). For example, the participation of Black Loyalists in the Rebellions of 1837 must be appreciated in the context of an oppressed group of people

supporting their oppressors. It is particularly illuminating to note that in his memoirs written at the end of the 19th century, Anderson Abbott was well aware of the racialized manner in which history was being recorded when he highlighted the role of the Black Loyalists in the Rebellion of 1837.

History gives but a meagre account of their primitive condition, especially that part relating to their condition of servitude. This is a theme upon which, for the sake of posterity, the pen of the historian has been significantly reticent. He has chosen rather to spread over the pages of English history examples of patriotism and heroism, worthy of the imitation of coming generations. This is why the Anglo-Saxon of today is imbued with the idea that there is nothing that the genius and intellect of his race cannot accomplish.

To be sure you will not find the part they took in the rebellion recorded in the history of our country. The literature of the 19th century with all its intellectual developments has not yet reached the dignity of doing justice to the heroic deeds of the colored man. Who had heard of that gallant band of colored men who

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16 The Abbott Collection is located in the Baldwin Room at the Toronto Reference Library under the identification code S-90. It is comprised of personal papers, memoirs, speeches and documents compiled and composed by Anderson Abbott. There are 17 notebooks and 2 scrapbooks. Most of the articles are undated and although many were published at one time, the collection is considered a primary source and the papers remain in most cases, undated, unsigned and untitled. Henceforth, these sources will be cited as Abbott Papers, if not signed and nd. (no date) if a date is not available.

17 A. Abbott, October 1st, 1873: Letter to Editor, Chatham.
seized after the schooner or American gunboat in the Detroit River and brought her safely to the Canadian shore – a valuable prize to the British Government. You will look in vain for a record of it. The eye of the historian today is too jaundiced by prejudice to notice such things. How many of us can declare that we were taught this history even in our modern schools with their enlightened curriculum? How many of our own children have heard of these events?18

In response to this situation, Anderson Abbott put pen to paper and produced a formidable collection of writings, memoirs, editorials, speeches and lectures. Many of his articles were published in the newspapers of his day, both in Canada and the US, including the Chatham Planet, the Dundas Banner, the Toronto Globe, the Toronto Leader, the New York Weekly News, the New York Age, the Conservatore Chicago and the Missionary Messenger. During his retirement he undertook the task of soliciting and documenting statistics, memoirs and anecdotes of the deeds and accomplishments of black Canadians and Americans that served to counter the stereotypical whitewashed presentation and interpretation of history that was currently available to the public. The following appeared in a Toronto newspaper:

I am interested in a work, in course of preparation, on Afro-Canadians. Information is so solicited from those who are holding or have held civil,

18 A. Abbott, nd.
military, professional, educational, commercial, fraternal, or industrial positions in the United States or elsewhere. If not regarded too inquisitional, facts concerning family history, business, resources, assets, married or single, where born or place of residence in Canada, educational or other qualifications; description of workmanship, mechanical, artistic, invention, agricultural and mechanical data especially desired. 19

The Abbott papers today reside in the Baldwin Room of the Toronto Reference Library, modestly assigned to a shelf designated simply as S-90. The very significant valuable and extensive collection includes photo albums, diaries, legal documents, locks of hair, ledgers and seventeen volumes of handwritten notes that have been carefully preserved on silk backing and acid-free paper. Two scrapbooks contain hundreds of newspaper clippings that Dr. Abbott scrupulously cut and pasted into a cryptic collage that now poignantly in minute detail, illustrates the daily events and experiences that so intimately affected the people of that time and place. Not only do these records provide us with invaluable information, but having been specifically selected by Abbott, they represent a very personal interpretation of a social history that has not been adequately acknowledged. For example how well known are the efforts of the black loyalists who joined Captain Fuller's Company of Volunteers during the Rebellion of 1837? Abbott

19 A. Abbott, nd.
reported, "Nearly a thousand volunteers for service... Blacks were an important part of the British forces. In all, five companies of Black soldiers (still under white officers!) took part."\textsuperscript{20}

Abbott made every effort to point out the accomplishments of those who resisted the forces of racialization and when his good friend William Peyton Hubbard was returned to the Toronto Council for the fifth time, Abbott penned a lengthy tribute that was published in the \textit{New York Age}.

An Afro-Briton has forced his way to the front of this community in such a rapid manner that he is likely to make history before his career is ended. A community whose institutions are founded upon a monarchical system and whose sentiments are molded, to some extent, by the mildew relics of an obsolete feudal system involving considerations of caste and accidents of birth, would in the reasonableness of things, be least expected to raise a colored man from the humble walks of life and place him in one of the highest positions of trust and responsibility in its civic affairs.\textsuperscript{21}

Abbott assumed a leadership role within the black community although he did not always choose to identify himself under a racial signifier. The agency of his writings and

\textsuperscript{20} A. Abbott, nd.
\textsuperscript{21} A. Abbott, January 27\textsuperscript{th}, 1898.
accomplishments all point to a commitment to the cause of “racial uplift” yet he appears to have been just as interested in legitimizing his citizenship and civil rights.

Tell me not, that the colored men are an undesirable class of emigrants. They have given irrefutable evidence that they are capable of attaining to all that pertains to moral, intellectual and industrial progress. Any man with instincts above the level of a brute would see in this, evidence of providence and industry. And as for their loyalty, they are far more loyal than a great many in this country who left the land that gave them birth and curse it because it could not, or would not give them a living. Within less than half a decade we have seen men of our race step from the condition of serfs, to take a position in the highest executive chamber of the neighbouring Republic and if our progress in future shall be in a corresponding ration as in the past, there is no telling to what possibilities we may attain. The time has gone by when one race was regarded as the sole possessor of intellect and genius. It has been shown that the same qualities may lie beneath a Black skin and under favorable conditions will break forth like a sunburst upon our senses and radiate with its effulgence, the whole intellectual atmosphere.²²

²² A. Abbott, nd.
In comparison in the US more attention was granted to the study of black history from a broader perspective. Evidence of this is can be found in E. Genovese’s (1974) volume of *Roll Jordan, Roll* which presented a comprehensive overview and analysis of the slave/master relationship in the antebellum southern US and definitively illustrated how powerfully each shaped the other’s destiny (xv). In keeping with the revisionist approach, Genovese demonstrated through the use of primary sources such as letters, diaries and personal papers from both masters and slaves a more subjective, comparative and personal interpretation of the experience of slavery than earlier researchers.

In a similar manner, Tuttle (1970) claimed that a more honest, complete and accurate interpretation of black history could be forthcoming if more than the “white” versions were formally acknowledged by scholars (vii). He points out that much of the literature about black Americans was written by white Americans whose perspective, whether sympathetic or not tended to emphasize the negative rather than the positive aspects of life within black communities.

Race, of course, is the badge separating blacks from whites – but what of the variations within the black community in social and economic level, education, regional background, sex, shade of skin color, physical health, and temperament? What of the ‘exceptions’? What of a black family, for example, with a history of generations of patrifocal family stability? For scholars, white and black alike,
such a family obviously has not commanded the same degree of consideration as has been devoted to disintegrating family structure with its ‘pathology’ of illegitimacy, unemployment, illiteracy, and disease. In surveying black America the focus has been on failure, not success; on group statistics, not on individual human beings; on passive recipients of injustice, not on people capable of adjusting to and ordering their own lives within a caste society” (Tuttle, 1970: vi-vii).

Drake and Cayton’s (1962) seminal study entitled, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* focused specifically on the conditions that affected many members of the Abbott family. It presented a comprehensive description of the Black population in Chicago and gave a thorough analysis of the conditions, problems and issues that this population faced, unlike any other study of the period. Johnson (2004) asserts that although their findings were accurate and valid for that period, they did fail to predict or project the significant increase in the Black under class and the deterioration of the lower and under class Black nuclear family. They also failed to anticipate the civil rights revolution, the subsequent rapid removal of discriminatory barriers and the flight of the Black professional and middle class from “Bronzeville” (the black community) and the simultaneous flight of Black businesses and institutions. The civil rights revolution is relevant to this study because some of the conditions influenced the identity choices available to those Blacks who could pass for it became less important and desirable.
All historians face an enormous challenge as they shoulder the responsibility of presenting and interpreting history in an accurate and unbiased manner. Today oral narratives often supplement historical data with insight into the implications of historical events that are useful in developing a meaningful interpretation. Indeed the researcher should seek a new level of insight by listening and recording the narratives candidly and accurately so that the subject draws their own conclusions. Lather (1995) too emphasizes that the listening should adhere to the performance rather than the historical truth and that this experience of narrating might actually “elicit testimony that exceeds the testifier's own awareness, to bring forth a complexity of truth which, paradoxically, is not available as such to the very speaker who pronounces it” (14).

Ruth Frankenberg’s (1993) study that examined the ways in which the forces of racism shaped women’s lives demonstrates how the whole of an experience must be examined in order to accurately interpret the extent of influence of social forces on the subject. Through the process of interviews she constructed historical overviews of the lives of white American women participants and their experiences with race and concluded that there existed a strong contingency between the social geography of race in childhood and the ways in which her participants engaged racial relationships.

Until the 1960s, few historical sociologists attempted to rectify the lack of black history that was available to the public. In 1978 Dr. Daniel G. Hill and his wife Donna co-founded the Ontario Black History Society in an effort to highlight and celebrate black history. They were aware that numerous sources of information lay in the hands of black
families and local repositories and were concerned that much of it could be lost to subsequent generations because it had not been adequately documented. In an effort to relieve this situation, Dr. Hill wrote the *The Freedom Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada* in 1981 and documented the details of many early Canadian black settlers that had hitherto had not been included in the history books. Although the information, photographs, letters, and family records were lodged in various archives and family holdings, they had not previously been accessible for the purpose of educating the general public. The challenge in documenting and analyzing black history in Canada was revealed to Dr. Hill in the 1950s when he researched his University of Toronto Ph.D. thesis on *Negroes in Toronto*. Since that time the growth of a body of academic and literary works devoted to the black experience has evolved due to the motivating efforts of people like Daniel Hill.

In 1975 Wilson Head undertook a project to document the black experience of Metropolitan Toronto Blacks through the compilation of a number of previous studies that had essentially slipped unobtrusively into the archives. He brought his report forward to the Ontario Human Rights Commission where it was made available to the public under the title, *The Black Presence in the Canadian Mosaic: A Study of Perception and the Practice of Discrimination against Blacks in Metropolitan Toronto*. Although it was subject to criticism that the findings were not entirely representative of the Toronto black ethnic group and that the efficacy of the proposed solutions were inadequate, it did confirm the “existence of a considerable amount of discrimination in Metropolitan Toronto” (Head, 1975:229).
The Black Abolitionist Papers project was undertaken in 1976 to document the experience of black American abolitionists between 1830 and the end of the American Civil War in 1865. This was a collaborative effort to select and document the achievements of and events pertaining to Blacks who have made a significant contribution despite the obstacles beset by an oppressive society. Once again, the motivation lay in the fact that scholarly attention had overlooked an important aspect of Afro Canadian/American history partly because of the lack of accessible materials and documentation. Most of the revealing sources of information came from manuscripts, letters and diaries that had previously rested in the hands of families or local archives. Even the antebellum newspapers had not been adequately reviewed with respect to an historical analysis from a black perspective. It was through the efforts of individual historians who came forward with independent projects that initiated a renewed scholarly interest to source out this virtual gold mine of information.

Over the last several decades great strides have been taken to document and commemorate Canadian black history and present it to the Canadian public. The recent publications of Lawrence Hill (1993) Trials and Triumphs: The Story of African-Canadians, Adrienne Shadd, Afua Cooper, Karolyn Smardz Frost (2003) The Underground Railroad: Next Stop, Toronto, Dr. D.B.E. Walls (1980) The Road that Led to Somewhere, Bryan Prince (2004) I Came as a Stranger all demonstrate a revitalized interest in black history by black historians. In Ontario new learning materials and criteria
have been added to the revised elementary and secondary curriculums that inform students about the contributions and roles that non-European settlers made to the nation.

In 1979 the Ontario Black History Society successfully initiated the formal celebration of February as Black History Month with the City of Toronto, but it was not until December 1995 that it was passed and subsequently became effective in February 1996. Rosemary Sadlier, President of the Ontario Black History Society in her article “Why a Black History Month?” explains, “[w]hen the contributions of people of African descent are acknowledged, when the achievements of Black people are known, when Black people are routinely included or affirmed through our curriculum, our books and the media and treated with equality, then the need for a Black History Month will no longer exist” (Ontario Black History News, June 2, 2004: 1).

In 1998 the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada engaged Shannon Ricketts to prepare a “paper that examine[d] selected Underground Railroad sites in Canada which may merit designation on grounds of national significance” (Minutes, Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, Nov. 1996) with the purpose of using it “as a means to evaluating possible national historic significance of sites within the context of important aspects of the UGRR experience in Canada” (Ricketts, 1998:1).

In 1999 I was invited by Parks Canada to participate on a consultative committee to develop a multi-media exhibit on the experience of UGRR refugees in Canadian urban centres (1820s – 1860s) that would be installed in a museum with a mobile component to travel across Canada. In 2003 the Underground Railroad: Next Stop – Toronto was
exhibited at the Royal Ontario Museum where it was so well-received that it was taken over by the Black Creek Pioneer Village on a permanent basis.

A look at the epistemology of historical sociology with respect to rational choice theory reveals that people are purposeful and goal oriented in the reality of their assumptions. Kuhn (1962) presents a multifaceted theory that incorporates a way of interpreting history which can be “viewed as a repository for more than anecdote or chronology, [it] could produce a decisive transformation in the image of science” (cited in Somers, 1998: 722-723). Somers (1998) concludes that “what makes a theory true cannot exist outside of the spectrum of historically conceivable questions of its time” and that “for any theory to provide an explanation requires a structure of causal linkages” (775). Thus it would seem that a non-racialized documentation of this social history must connect these causal links and acknowledge the value and authenticity of the contributions made by all members of society, including those who have been racialized. It is truly ironic that before we can reconstruct our social history we must deconstruct the misconceptions that have reinforced the process of racialization for so long.
CHAPTER TWO: Resistance, Accommodation and Opportunity: A Case Study

The notion of ‘indigenousness’ highlights the power relations and dynamics embedded in the production, interrogation, validation and dissemination of global knowledge. It also recognizes the multiple, collective and collaborative dimensions of knowledge and affirms that the interpretation or analysis of social reality is subject to different and sometimes oppositional perspectives.\textsuperscript{22}

2.1 Overview

The following social history of the life and times of three generations of Abbotts will illustrate some of the ways in which the social, political and economic forces in 19\textsuperscript{th} century North America influenced how this family resisted and accommodated the forces of racism. Despite the formidable obstacles encountered throughout their lives, they each made a concerted effort to negotiate a place for themselves and their descendents. Their efforts to confront, ignore and resist the belief that “to the white face belongs control, and to the black obedience” (Blockson, 1984:5) are exemplified in the way which they emancipated themselves to achieve “racial uplift” through the means of wealth, social status, education and self-respect. The study synthesizes a mode of “indigenity” to the current bank of historical knowledge that has not been adequately acknowledged by

academia and offers "a celebration of oral, visual, textual, political and material resistance of colonized groups, a shift away from a sole preoccupation with victimage" in an effort to "destabilize imperial notions (Dei, 2001:5).

The chapter is based on the simple concept of construction of a modality or building structure. Wilson's life illustrates the laying down of a foundation of resistance strategies to access new opportunities. The following generation, namely that of Anderson demonstrates how the concept of accommodation opened the doors and windows to new modes of racial uplift and opportunity. The third generation is depicted as the final step where the ceiling, invisible as it may be, was raised to allow new levels of access and upward mobility for future generations.
2.2 Laying the Foundations of Resistance

What people believe about politics, about the state and society, about government and power and authority, and rights and equality and opportunity – all these beliefs make a difference to what happens in the real world...what people think about the political world shapes their behaviour, their consent, or their level of tolerance.²⁴

Wilson Ruffin Abbott grew up in the antebellum south where slavery was tenaciously established as a system of exploitation that justified European domination of the world markets that were dependent on agricultural resources and production. By the 1660s, a system of racial servitude arose out of a desire of American landowners to retain non-rebellious bond laborers as a large work force to plant, harvest and cure the tobacco crop that propelled the economy of the British colony. A concept of racial distinction between slave and master was eventually emphasized in an effort to rationalize and justify how some people lived off the labour of others. Genovese (1974) suggests the institution of slavery was in essence based on the ideology of class rule and that the development of a paternalistic system proved to be particularly powerful because it

undermined the ability of the oppressed slaves to unite as a common force by effectively linking them as individuals to their oppressors (5).

Variable sets of terms for servitude were established for bond laborers from Christian nations versus non-Christian (African) ones and required non-Christian laborers to serve longer, indeed for a lifetime. Further laws were then established to prevent any African American bond laborers from escaping a lifetime of servitude by converting to Christianity. The signifier ‘white’ gradually replaced that of ‘Christian’ or ‘free’ in laws regulating both free and enslaved individuals. Mixed marriages were highly discouraged and traditional English laws were reversed to provide for a lifetime of servitude from the offspring of African women by declaring that their children would inherit the bond status of the mother, where previously children had inherited the bond status of their father. “Ties of family or the existence of children with indeterminate status as to whether they were white or black would have impeded the workings of the system of racial oppression” (Helfand, 2001: 8). While Wilson was growing up laws continued to be developed in Virginia to impede the freedom of African Americans, denying them voting privileges, the right to hold public office or witness against a white person and interracial marriages were declared illegal.

Nevertheless, during the vibrant trade era in the early 1800s the legal status of slaves was considered by many to be similar to that of indentured servants and led to a number of interracial relationships (Genovese, 1974:30). Hence, it was fairly common for many black or mixed-race individuals to be free in some of the southern states at the
same time that others were entrenched in slavery. Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) note that the practice of miscegenation was considered a “vice of the white underclass” (4) despite the fact that this group of people essentially served as a buffer between white and black communities. However, by the early 1880s Wright (1997a) notes that, “the free status of blacks and the growing difficulty in distinguishing them from whites sharpened the nation's need to define race” (166) and accordingly mixed race individuals were designated the same legal status as Blacks, in accordance with the one-drop rule.

Wilson Abbott pointedly asserted throughout his life that he was the son of a Scottish white father and free black mother. He was obviously well aware of the class issues that lay behind his lineage and made every effort to ensure a public awareness of his “legal” right to freedom as well as his white kinship. The fact that he was able to become a carpenter’s apprentice demonstrates the level of privilege awarded him thus providing the mobility and access to opportunities normally reserved for free Blacks.

When he decided that the racial/political climate did not offer him the prospects he desired, he appears to have been free enough to leave the city to create a new life for himself. It is even conceivable that he had some monetary support from his father, who may or may not have been a man of financial means. At the age of fifteen, Wilson left Richmond to seek his fortune, and made his way to Alabama, eventually settling into work as a steward on a Mississippi River steamship. It was there that he met and married his wife Ellen Toyer, a “coloured” woman from Baltimore who had accompanied two young girls travelling from Boston. Although she may have been free at the time, family
papers subtly indicate that Wilson bought her freedom shortly after their meeting. In later years, he performed the same generous act for both of Ellen's sisters, Jane and Mary,\textsuperscript{25} as well as for other indentured individuals who were able to repay such charity in a dignified manner by working off their "purchase price" through wages earned in honest employment. It is interesting to note that a convenient lack of documentation regarding Wilson and Ellen's genealogy allows them to author their own history in a way that manipulates the future prospects for both themselves and their descendents. It is only through a "reading between the lines" that the odd discrepancy is detected. For example, the freedom of Ellen's sisters, Mary and Jane is referenced in benign newspaper notices such as birth and death announcements. If Mary and Jane had been enslaved, it therefore is feasible that their sister Ellen had at least at one time also been in the same predicament.

The couple settled in Mobile, Alabama and established a thriving mercantile business which catered to a mixed clientele composed of free blacks, white slave owners and black slaves. His fortunes increased and Wilson purchased a number of valuable properties, lodging his family in a lovely residence located on one of the rivers that flows into Mobile Bay. As fate would have it, just a year later, the Nat Turner Insurrection\textsuperscript{26} in Virginia crushed any dreams of Southern comforts for Blacks as the white population

\textsuperscript{25} Both Jane and Mary lived with and worked for Wilson and Ellen as a housekeeper upon their arrival in Canada. A diary owned by Ellen Toyer Abbott and cemetery records in Buxton indicate that several Toyer men appear to have been related to Ellen as brothers and immigrated to Canada in 1849 to join Reverend King at the Elgin Settlement.

\textsuperscript{26} Nat Turner, a bold and enraged fugitive slave, had incited a group of other slaves to participate in a gory uprising, murdering their masters, including more than fifty-five men, women and children
recoiled in horror and fear with the realization that this outbreak could occur in their community. Many states reacted by instituting or reinforcing the infamous Black Codes and on April 14th, 1830 Wilson was forced to comply to the ordinance of the Mobile Commercial Registry to post a bond and carry identification. But this band-aid solution did not resolve the underlying social insecurities and some of Mobile’s white residents devised their own plan of action.

The fact that Wilson had proven himself to be a successful businessman capable of purchasing properties provided substantial grounds for resentment among the white population. Indeed, the whole idea of property ownership (and people ownership) is closely linked to relations of legitimization, authority and power. For all intents and purposes, he had ventured dangerously close to the social status of white folk and Munford (1996) suggests that it was in this way that Wilson was racialized into a group “by the operation of social laws emanating from the racist predisposition as mediated by historical development” (Munford, 1996:7).

Feelings of trepidation had probably been present throughout the community and it was in this atmosphere, that a friend anonymously slipped a desperate warning to the family that their store had been targeted. Wilson expediently redeemed his ready cash and dispensed Ellen and their infant son safely on a New Orleans steamer. He then remained behind to surreptitiously witness this anonymous informer partaking in the ransacking

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27 These codes were legal edits that required free Negroes to post a monetary bond with two white men of good standing and to wear an armband at all times verifying that the bond had been posted.
and burning of his store. Many years later Wilson would attempt, with the aid of lawyers, to reclaim some compensation for the loss of his property but to no avail. It is clear that as an opportunist, Wilson had used his resources wisely and turned a good profit both with his properties and his store in Mobile Alabama where he had served both white and black customers. Yet his fundamental respect for freedom can be seen in his effort to extend it to others of colour, whose freedom he purchased.

The family did attempt to settle in New York City, but there they encountered tremendous racial turbulence, as thousands of Irish fleeing the potato famine in Ireland, competed for the limited jobs and opportunities with other new immigrants. It is hard to imagine how the family survived those times, as it could not have been easy to convey the legitimacy of their free status. They must have relied heavily on their savings, as business ventures and employment opportunities would have been extremely scarce, especially if the family had no papers to substantiate their freedom during this period of so much unrest.

In 1835 Wilson and Ellen arrived in the town of York at a time when the remains of a cultural and psychic connection to Britain continued to mingle with notions of political independence for many Canadians. Severely stung by the repercussions of the American Revolution of 1775-1783, Britain’s political response had been to settle

\[29\] Abbott Collection. Anderson Abbott indicated in his memoirs that his father engaged the legal services of Cleveland and Hazzard, a Toronto law firm.
“Loyalists,” or British American refugees and their allies in Upper Canada\textsuperscript{30} thereby maintaining a strong political presence in the colony. The War of 1812 highlighted the animosity between Americans and Canadians and the ensuing decades of American threats of invasion further aggravated these sentiments. Accordingly, most Black Loyalists\textsuperscript{31} hoped that their commitment to the British would reaffirm their affiliation and ensure protection from the prospect of falling back into American hands and inevitable slavery once again. Propitiously, the British grasped this opportunity to weaken the American position and offered freedom to any escaped slaves entering British territory, thereby implying that “morality, economy, and a desire to discard American standards played their part” (Head, 1975:9). Although Canada was beginning to pull away from British authority Canadians in general had no desire to become objects of an American conquest.

When the Abbott family first settled in Toronto they met little social or economic opposition in the community for in family, religious and social matters they kept to their own kind. In the commercial and political sectors Wilson boldly integrated into the mainstream and became an astute businessman, initially opening a tobacco shop on King Street East.\textsuperscript{32} When the shop failed to be profitable, he quickly turned his hand to real

\textsuperscript{30} Canada West after 1851.
\textsuperscript{31} The Charlton Papers, doc. 2094, Clinton, 30 June 1779 reveal that in 1779 Sir Henry Clinton, the British Commander-in-Chief issued the Philipsburg Proclamation that promised “to every NEGRO who shall desert the Rebel Standard, full security to follow within these Lines, any Occupation which he shall think proper.” For a complete history of this the British Loyalists, refer to James Walker’s book, \textit{The Black Loyalists}, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1992.
\textsuperscript{32} This was where the present-day Canada Life building now stands.
estate and bought and sold prime properties all over Toronto, Hamilton, Dundas, Owen Sound and Buxton. In Toronto Wilson would have encountered a handful of black pioneers like himself who proved to be self-sufficient and self-motivated and were not about to let a thing like "colour" hold them back. It almost appeared as if they had inexplicably found a means to divert the usual course of discrimination and segregation and managed to attain a solid position within what was to become an elite circle of 'old-line' black families. Unlike those who settled in some of the smaller black communities across Upper Canada, most of the members of this group were not destitute or poor and in fact many of them operated their own businesses. 33

Having achieved financial security and personal freedom, Wilson had good reason to defend his new home and lifestyle. In 1837, he rallied to the assistance of the Crown and eagerly joined Captain Fuller's Company of Volunteers when William Lyon Mackenzie made his quest for independence. Years later, as the political climate changed Wilson would switch gears and rally support for the future Reform Party. Weber contended that in this way, such individuals were able to achieve security and success in the face of adversity, despite the powerful oppression exerted by British colonialists. Perhaps they even resorted to a form of legitimized power in their quest for prestige via the institutions of politics, education and religion.

In 1835 the population in the town of York had hitherto enjoyed good race relations and boasted a population of 9,300 that included about 500 Blacks (Jones, 1924:

33 A. Abbott, nd.
Although many of the newcomers were poverty-stricken, some came with enough skills to attain work as waiters, cooks, house servants, bakers, mechanics, blacksmiths, painters, carpenters, shoe-makers, barbers, and railroad workers (Head, 1975:9). They required and asked for less charity than other groups, they were hardworking, prosperous and industrious and actively involved in their community affairs. Head (1975) notes that most of them made an effort to assimilate into the general population. They had arrived in small numbers over a period of several years and the prosperous city offered plenty of employment opportunities. In later years, Anderson Abbott asserted that, in his opinion, this state of affairs remained fairly consistent, even during his own lifetime:

... I do not claim that there is no race prejudice in Canada. In Toronto, at least it is innocuous. There are no indications of it in our churches, schools, societies, hotels and places of public resort. I can therefore confidently commend our city to Afro-American tourists as an eligible objective point where they can enjoy life without being subjected to all sorts of humiliating experiences.

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34 In 1851, the first Canadian Census indicated a category for Coloured Persons and Indians and at that time recorded 2,095 coloured persons, although Winks (1971) suggests that about 8,000 coloured persons were residing in Canada West at that time.

35 It is interesting to consider how and why Anderson made such blatant statements when he clearly opposed numerous instances of racial discrimination. It might be assumed that when viewed in the context of the times, the covert forms of racism he encountered in Toronto might have been far less debilitating that the vicious and overt practices such as lynching common in the American south at that time.
... Afro-Americans in Toronto are justly entitled to the respectful treatment they receive for several reasons. They are and always have been loyal, peaceful and law-abiding. 36

Early black settlers in Canada had to carefully negotiate their way into positions of power through the use of specific strategies that perpetuated the social and political values defined by the "mother" country and her monarchy. Despite concern about the growing exodus of African Americans from the United States, the Canadian provinces did not submit to a formal Black Code, 37 however during the initial period of settlement in Canada certain behaviours were employed to attain and sustain a position of social and financial security within the British colonial structures. In the early 1800s, most of the power and wealth still resided in the hands of those who had been appointed by the British Crown despite the insurgence of a number of Reform efforts. In 1828 the Legislative Council with its over-ruling power vetoed 58 constitutional bills introduced by the Legislative Assembly. 38

Of course, not all of the white, British subjects living in Canada at the time were abolitionists, nor were they particularly interested in bettering the state of affairs for Blacks, but in line with Exchange theory, they tended to accept limited participation of a

36 A. Abbott, nd.
37 Black Codes were instituted by American federal and some state legislatures to regulate and segregate free black men who were forced to wear an armband and post a monetary bond with a white man of good standing to demonstrate their accountability for their behaviour.
few, token Blacks whose behaviour was constructed to acquiesce to the legitimized power that lay within those systems of authority, just so as long as it did not impact the white community in a negative way. However, this was a tenuous state of affairs, as the political structure gradually shifted and a demand for responsible government instigated a desire for self-determination and a severance of the reins of power exerted by Britain.

Self-government was not initially on the agenda and the colonial administration served to reinforce an international policy of consensus building and loyalty to a distant sovereign that acknowledged a unique acceptance of difference from the mother country. Nevertheless, Britain adopted extreme measures to combat civil unrest and revived and instituted a number of politically outdated practices by means of a strong colonial gentry and titled nobility to uphold the values and policies of the protestant Churches of England and Scotland. In this privileged atmosphere members of the upper class moved with ease to secure their own political interests and even Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe could only justify the education of the upper-class children as worthwhile. 39 In 1843 Bishop John Strachan, representing the United Church of England and Ireland established King’s College, which was essentially intended as a school for the “gentlemen” who were to be groomed to take over the administration of the colony.

By the 1830s a unique racial and political climate appeared to overtake the Canadian psyche which was relatively different from that prevailing in the United States.

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39 Simcoe referred to these children as “The Children of the Principal People of This Country” (Sweet, 1997: 20).
Black communities thrived in the urban centres of Niagara Falls, St. Catharines, London, Bronte, Dundas, Hamilton and Toronto. Sailing ships and freighters had even landed a stoic group of Black fugitives on the shores of Lake Huron, where successful permanent colonies in Owen Sound, Collingwood and Priceville\(^4\) were eventually established. Some of the settlements in southwestern Ontario such as the Dawn Settlement at Dresden, the Refugee Home Society outside of Windsor and the Wilberforce Settlement in Middlesex County near London promoted a communal and self-help policy. Gradually many of the refugees dispersed across the province and settled in other cities or rural communities. St. Catharines proved to be one of the major gateways to the “promised land,” and a haven to which many Underground Railway conductors furtively guided their charges over the Niagara River into Ontario.

The people of the Niagara belt were strongly influenced by the political climate in the northern United States, and black refugees could not escape the repercussions of the racially discriminating and segregating practices of the Jim Crow phenomenon that had spread northward. As the black population increased in certain pockets of what was to become Ontario, racism began to fester. Schools, churches and even military units were commonly segregated.

In 1843 two Chatham black militia companies mustered in response to the threat of an American invasion only to be forced to disband by fearful white residents. In 1852

\(^4\) For an interesting account of the original Black settlers of Priceville, Ontario refer to the National Film Board (NFB) documentary, Speakers for the Dead by Jennifer Holness and David Sutherland (2001). The film traces the development of this Black settlement and the subsequent depletion of Black residents who were apparently dispersed from the area by racist sentiments and practices.
a coloured militia suffered taunts and assaults from white spectators when they joined a white militia in a parade exercise. The white fire brigade responded to the alarm with the understanding that the black militia had instigated the conflict and a brutal attack was inflicted on the black community. In 1854, the Provincial Freeman reported that hotel owners only barely averted a strike of coloured waiters protesting the "... cruel prejudice which denied colored persons, however respectable, the use of public conveniences to and from the railroad station and steamboat."\textsuperscript{41}

Concurrent to these events, global upheaval was prevalent with the advent of the French Revolution, massive recessions, widespread unemployment and radical political movements. Thus it was deemed that certain value lessons were necessary as there were fears that budding political agitators in the Canadian colony and the public schools presented an excellent opportunity to deliver not only literacy and education, but also provided a means of social control.\textsuperscript{42} Hence, Canada instituted an education system and curriculum responsive to the perceptions of fear and uncertainty embodied by the colonial governing entities. It was clear that the wealthy and powerful bourgeoisie were seriously threatened by the influx of new immigrants who aspired to hone in on the assumed privilege that the colonialists had attained for themselves. Perhaps they even recognized

\textsuperscript{41} A. Abbott, nd.
\textsuperscript{42} Michael Katz (1968) and Alison Prentice (1977) both put forward a model of social control and reform based on the statements of reformers. Curtis (1999) challenges this and argues that the process of social change in which the public education system was instrumental worked through hegemony rather than social control (Sandwell, 2004, pc).
the difficulty they might have in “legitimizing the inequalities of wealth created by the new industrial order” (Baldus and Meenan, 1996: 332).

While living in Toronto the Abbott children attended both public and private racially integrated schools. When the Buxton Mission School was established in the Elgin Settlement, Wilson and Ellen enrolled their children in the hope that it would offer them a sound, classical education under the tutelage of a Methodist divinity student from Knox College. Traditionally teachers had been hired solely on the strength of their religious affiliation and oral examinations were administered by school trustees, some of whom could barely read and write their own names. The Buxton School had originally been established for the education of the black children from the settlement but within a short time it had earned such a superior reputation for its quality of instruction that, despite the segregated policy of the public school in Chatham at the time, white parents eagerly sought a placement for their own children. Within one year Buxton boasted the first racially integrated public school in North America. “No where else in Canada, the United States or in England had the anti-slavery societies, the interested churches or the

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43 Anderson Abbott describes the racial climate in Toronto using the term “tolerant.” In keeping with his intent and the context of the times, the word appears to imply that despite numerous overt and covert instances of racism in Toronto that he describes in his memoirs, he participated in activities and social institutions that would have been denied to him in many other North American locations. Abbott continually asserts that racism exists but advocates various strategies to gain access to privilege and social status.

44 For a full history of Rev. King’s Elgin Settlement, refer to Victor Ullman’s Look to the North Star.

45 Graham (1999) asserts that a college education was “clearly the earliest and surest method for earning respect among progressive whites” (9).
Quakers, established Negro schools to prepare pupils for the standard classical education” (Ullman, 1994: 121).

The strategy employed by the common schools involved teaching children from both upper and lower classes to accept their places in society and hopefully not question the class structure that sustained any social inequities. Even today, James and Mannette (2000) have noted that although “education is an important mechanism for promoting social justice, enhancing equality of opportunity” in the creation of good Canadian citizens, social stratification, classism and racism serve as barriers to racialized individuals (73). Nevertheless, it would appear that in the 19th century the Abbotts negotiated a way around this doctrine by placing themselves within the middle echelons of society, thereby creating their own reality by making themselves “worthy” of the privileges of the rich and/or powerful elite. Schools were funded through taxes that were, for the most part paid by the wealthy who were committed to maintaining the status quo. Furthermore, the system encouraged a strong sense of duty in the children who were taught to work hard and do what they had to do because that was their lot in life.

As black immigration increased, pressure was exerted on the Ontario legislature to develop a segregation policy but in 1850, a Separate School Act made it optional to integrate schools upon the wishes of the residents, thereby eliminating the mandatory requirement to segregate children based on their race and religion (Sweet, 1997). However, in 1855, the St. Catharines School Board refused to admit coloured children to the white school until 1857 when black high school students were allowed to attend if
they sat is a separate area. In 1859 the tables were reversed and the Separate Schools Act was revised to allow five or more black families to petition for a separate school for themselves.

In 1840 Wilson chaired a meeting of Toronto Blacks, to address the objectives of the Colonial Church and School Society, an English-based missionary association that wanted to establish an all-black school in Toronto. The Toronto black community was against the idea, for it believed that such an institution would only serve to reinforce an image of Blacks that portrayed them as poor, helpless, begging indigents who were dependent on charity. A general consensus of the group suggested that Toronto schools should not make any distinction based on race and thus segregated schools in Toronto were unnecessary. Wilson’s opposition appears to arise out of what Dei (2001) describes as an anti-racist approach which acknowledges that institutional structures can be effectively challenged by the “power of local social practice and action” (4). Hill (1960) suggests one of the reasons for rejecting segregated schools in the city was that the black population was small and had integrated into the mainstream population more slowly than in the communities located closer to the Canadian/US border (30).

Wilson’s interest in the welfare of other Blacks was obvious in the fact that he submerged himself in the business of the Elgin Settlement where he was able to ensure it
a solid financial foundation as Treasurer of the Elgin Association. In 1849 he joined
with Adolphus Judah, J.G. Joseph, and David Hollin to confront Edwin Larwill, a
tinsmith and real estate broker, who objected to the settlement and vehemently declared
that Raleigh Township did not want a black settlement intruding on their soil. Although
Larwill rallied the following year, he was subsequently overthrown on the strength of the
black voters by Archibald McKellar, a Chatham lawyer and a Clear Grit (Liberal).

The plans of the Elgin Association were condemned and a resolution was passed
setting forth objections to selling any of the public domain “to foreigners, the
more so when such persons belong to a different branch of the human family and
are black” … Larwill had a record for hostility to the colored people though at
election times he was accustomed to parade as their friend. In 1856 he introduced
in the House of Assembly a most insulting resolution calling for a report from the
government on “all negro or colored, male or female quadroon, mulatto, samboes,
half breeds or mules, mongrels or conglomerates” in public institutions. Larwill
was at once called to account for his action and a resolution was introduced
calling upon him to retract.  

King did encourage his settlers to use their votes to block adversaries like Larwill, who

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46 The association successfully resisted the opposition to the settlement by local white residents. At the
time, a third of the population of Ken County was Black and racial violence was cited in Chatham as early
as 1826, when the white community opposed the integration of Black settlers.
47 A. Abbott, nd.
was eventually replaced in 1856 by the formidable George Brown.

Since Wilson had established himself securely within the financial circles of Toronto businesses, he was able to wield a certain degree of legitimized power and authority within respected society. In 1840, the Abbotts resided at the corner of Teraulay and Albert streets when Wilson took his causes and ambitious spirit to the municipal podium and won a seat on the Toronto Council by a margin of 40 votes to represent St. Patrick’s Ward. The *Toronto Directory* of 1846-1847 indicated that at least 81 coloured men lived in that area, working as labourers, skilled tradesmen, business proprietors and ministers. Elite theory explains this venture as the inevitability of a few who will rise to the top to fulfill the leadership roles within society. It suggests that there will always be an elite and not everyone can be equal.

By 1859, Wilson was serving as a member of the Reform Central Committee, and stood prepared to challenge any issue that struck him as illegal, unjust or tasteless. One of the most aggravating situations for the people of colour in the City of Toronto involved the performances of some American travelling theatrical groups that sometimes cast Blacks as buffoons and scapegoats in “nigger minstrel” acts. Usually white performers in “black face” took these roles, but the effect was still exceedingly demeaning. Roediger (2002) suggests that minstrel shows served to create a new sense of whiteness by portraying a negative stereotype of blackness and ultimately they emphasized how much

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48 The site of the present-day Toronto City Hall.
whiteness really mattered. The lyrics of the minstrel songs tended to purvey negative misconceptions of the progress of Blacks and served to promote slurs and scorn of the so-called elite, either white or black. Wilson Abbott would have none of it and submitted a petition with eighty-five signatures to the Toronto City Council, in 1840:

The subscriber of this humble petition represented to his worship, the Mayor and the corporation that they have remarked with sorrow that the American Actors, who have from time to time visited this city, invariably select for performance plays and characters which, by ridicule and holding up to contempt the colored population, cause them much heart-burning and lead occasionally to violence. They therefore respectfully entreat his worship and all those to whom the right pertains, to forbid in future the performance of plays likely to produce a breach of the public peace."\(^{50}\)

Unfortunately, Council did not have the authority to censor such performances, but it did institute a requirement that the troupes had to procure a license. In 1843, Wilson noted that Kingston, the newly-appointed capital city of Canada, had passed a bylaw that banned any racially offensive performances. So, with another petition in his pocket, he appealed to Mayor Henry Sherwood to enact a similar bylaw that would empower

\(^{50}\) Cited in the Abbott papers from the Minutes of the Toronto City Council located in the Ontario Archives.
Council’s “right to licence or refuse requests for the exhibition of shows [and] to make such laws as will tend to the peace, welfare and safety, of the inhabitants of this City.” 51 Mayor Sherwood agreed to grant the offending travelling circus a license only “on the condition of their not singing Negro songs—this to save the feelings of the gentlemen of color.” 52

During the 1850s, black voters began to lend their support to Reform candidates. As the social and political climate shifted, Reform candidates were quick to realize the potential of the black vote and strove to address their concerns. In 1850, a second Fugitive Slave Law had been passed in the US which reiterated the original terms, preventing any fugitives from testifying on their own behalf and penalizing any official that did not uphold the law. As a result, black fugitives began entering Canada at an even faster rate than before and white communities in northern states expressed concern about the increasing black populations within their midst. It was during this period that the largest wave of black refugees immigrated to Toronto, swelling the black population to about one thousand.

On February 26, 1851, the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada was established in Toronto. Wilson joined the mayor and his strong ally, George Brown to support an effort on the part of other Toronto Blacks to establish an official policy that would provide refuge for black fugitives. Although the organization was mainly composed of white

51 Ibid

52 Ibid
sympathizers, out of fourteen vice-presidents, three were Black including Wilson Abbott and Samuel Ringgold Ward. Dr. Michael Willis, Principal of Knox College was nominated as the president. During its first year of existence, they chose to concentrate on relief activities such as raising funds for the feeding and clothing of indigent Blacks and sponsoring motivating public speakers such as Frederick Douglass. Landon (1942) suggests that it was no small task for these Canadian abolitionists to care for the fugitives, provide them with opportunities for educational and social advancement and enable them to become useful citizens. As he summarized,

The object shall be to aid in the extinction of slavery all over the world by means exclusively lawful and peaceable, moral and religious, such as by the diffusing of useful information and argument, by tracts, newspapers, lectures and correspondence, and by manifesting sympathy with the houseless and homeless victims of slavery flying to our soil (Landon, 1942:33).

Relief work was looked after by a Ladies’ Auxiliary composed of the wives of the officers of the society and within a short period of time they founded a night school for the young black men and women. Employment opportunities were also made available by the society and many were later encouraged to purchase land in order to become independent and self-sustaining. Even more importantly, the Anti-slavery Society served to provide a means of monitoring legislation and court actions pertaining to human and civil rights issues. Ultimately, the society was seen as merely a local factor and fugitive
relief organization and no Canadian political party ever made the Negro question a part of its platform.

The North American Convention of Colored Freemen met at St. Lawrence Hall in 1851 to debate the abolitionist effort and thwart segregationist efforts. Hundreds of coloured freedmen from England, Canada and the US gathered in Toronto, which was considered distant enough and therefore safe enough from the US border and the threat of American slave hunters.

The Convention resolved to encourage American slaves to enter Canada instead of going to Africa. It was felt that Canada was the best place to direct anti-slavery activity. On the problem of segregated schools in the southern part of the Province, the Convention agreed that the ‘establishment of exclusive schools and churches for coloured people contributes greatly towards the promotion of prejudice heretofore known in the Canadas and we do hereby recommend that all such organizations be abandoned as speedily as may be practicable’ (Hill, 1960:34).

Urban life was not always blissful and given racist fears Vigilance Committees were formed in cities like Toronto, Chatham, Windsor and London where there was a perception that “Negro vagabonds” would prey on fugitives for the purpose of financial gain. On August 9th, 1854, Wilson joined forces with Thomas F. Cary and led a group of
thirty five others, to create the Provincial Union Association in Toronto which sought to encourage regular school attendance and to discourage any further fragmentation within the black churches. Its members tried to persuade new black refugees to disperse throughout the province in order to hasten racial integration, deplete the potential for racial conflict, and allay prejudice by decreasing the concentration of black populations in any one area.

Wilson was one of those hard workers, determined to overcome constraining structures in order to enjoy the fruits of his labour. Despite his light skin he knew that he would never truly be accepted as one of the white elite. So how did Wilson become so influential and successful? Was it personal, his pioneering spirit, his light-skin or financial wizardry? Was it more to do with the perception of a tolerant racial climate, a small and self-sufficient black community, a strong abolitionist presence or lack of racism? Was it just a period of time before the larger influx of African Americans and fugitive slaves that tipped the tolerance levels of the white citizens? Clearly he felt no compunction to try to pass as white, despite being at least "half" white. His children were all raised as black and they displayed a strong allegiance to that racial identity during his lifetime. From the distance of time, it would seem that Wilson was able to enjoy the life he sought without having to compromise his principles or his racial heritage. Did he use his "whiteness" to resist racism? It would seem that he used every advantage he could to resist racism without any attempt to hide behind a light skin or family name.

A Weberian epistemology might explain the social "progress" experienced by
Wilson and his family in relation to the particular niche they inhabited in the structural composition of society which allowed this motivated, literate and light-skinned black family to slip into a middle ground between the white, British "bourgeoisie" and the black or aboriginal indigent or fugitive "proletariat" that inhabited the country during that 19th century. Here we can see that agency played a significant role in the way the Wilson attained a position of prestige, authority and legitimacy. "Such consciousness emerges from an awareness of the intellectual agency of local subjects and the capacity to use knowledge to challenge, rupture and resist colonial and imperial relations of domination and to resuscitate oneself from mental bondage" (Dei, 2001:5). This agency was manifested in the structures or systems that enabled or constrained his actions and thus provided the impetus for his assent up the social ladder. It is clear that Wilson, through his claim to agency was able to select modes of action that allowed him to sustain a level of power and effectively negotiate within the constraints of the established social structure to construct his own social reality. New levels of power were available for the taking in the developing town of York and Wilson Abbott had jumped at the opportunities that laid a foundation and prepared a way for the next generation.
2.3 Setting Doors and Windows for Accommodation

Wilson and Ellen had three children who survived to enjoy the fruits of their labour. Amelia Etta, born in 1842 became a well-educated patron of the arts who married a light-skinned Toronto clerk, John Watkins. Their one son died at the age of 22 years but their daughter Helene Amelia brought them much parental pride as an accomplished pianist and soprano soloist who frequently performed in churches and at public concerts before she married a black American and removed to the US.

William Henson Abbott, born in 1847 attended the Methodist theological college at Victoria College and became an ordained British Methodist Episcopal minister in 1875. He lived in both Canada and the US and engaged in the management of the family properties along with his siblings after the death of his father. However, William married Louisa Jane Moore from Lewistown, New York who was a light-skinned woman of mixed black, white and native ancestry and they appear to have lived as white after moving to the US in 1875.

Anderson Ruffin Abbott, born in 1837 attended several private schools, including the Buxton Mission School and Oberlin College in Ohio which served a number of American middle-class students and held the distinct honour of being the first co-educational college. In 1857, Anderson enrolled in University College in Toronto to

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53 Oberlin College was considered to be one of the best colleges for wealthy blacks until the 1960s when other black colleges and better-endowed East Coast colleges became popular because of their world-wide
study Chemistry and in the following year entered King’s College Medical School, which was part of the University of Toronto. He graduated in 1861 to become the first African Canadian licentiate of the Medical Board of Upper Canada. Graham (1999) reports that “[a]lthough some prominent families established their roots in positions with important church congregations or universities, the more common paths to success in the black elite have been through careers in medicine, dentistry, and law ...[or] individual entrepreneurship that served either the black or the white communities” (11).

As a new doctor, Abbott regularly attended the charity patients sequestered at the poorhouse and offered new immigrant black women free medical services in return for the use of their cases for medical instructional purposes. In this way he was able to take advantage of valuable learning opportunities to develop his knowledge and skills with respect to disease control and hospital sanitation, interests that he later pursued in his medical career.  

Although the upper educational institutions in Toronto were not racially segregated like those in the US, financial hardship tended to curb the opportunities available to black students. Dr. Abbott and his friend and mentor, Dr. Alexander Augusta

reputations (Graham, 1999: 10). In the 18050s, students explored philosophies pertaining to Christian Perfectionism, family relationships, the communal sharing of property, the abolition of slavery, and even women’s rights. Although manual labour was originally an important component of the curriculum it was later modified into one of the first physical education programs.

54 A part of Trinity College before the amalgamation of the colleges into the University of Toronto.

55 It might be presumed that Black women probably could not readily attain medical care from white doctors at that time.

56 A. R. Abbott was a keen admirer of the famous Florence Nightingale and the development of her methods of disease control and sanitation during the Crimean War. The Abbott Papers provide numerous articles written by A. R. Abbott pertain to this interest.
became closely involved with the Educational Institute where they frequently offered Lyceum lectures to the public. Both men were very interested in the practice of free expression, especially pertaining to civil rights, and Anderson often spoke on racial issues to the members of the Provincial Association for the Education and Elevation of the Colored People of Canada which served as a kind of literary society.  

By 1861 the US was split between the Union and the Confederate causes and Canadians were caught in a powerful tide of fluctuating loyalties. Primarily they were faithful British subjects but many still retained a strong affection for their birth countries, either in Europe or the United States, some even lending sympathy to the Confederate cause. Strong familial and economic ties frequently bound many southern families to the British aristocracy, and even some Canadian newspapers like the Toronto Leader and the Montreal Gazette publicly pronounced their sympathies for the South. Although Britain officially remained neutral throughout the Civil War, she was dependent on the trade from the southern states and supported the Confederate states in subversive ways, particularly after the Union blockaded the Atlantic ports (Hoy, 2004; Mayers, 2004).

On April 16th, 1862, slavery was abolished in the District of Columbia and on January 1, 1863, President Lincoln publicly endorsed the Emancipation Act. Tens of

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57 A. R. Abbott, nd.
59 The Emancipation Proclamation: That on the 1st day of January, A.D. 1863, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State the people whereof shall be then in rebellion against the United States shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free. The Emancipation Proclamation did not end
thousands of Canadians felt compelled to join the conflict south of their border for a variety of reasons. Questions concerning the economic value of the practice of slavery elicited worldwide interest, but Canada was in particular affected by the anti-slavery agitation going on in the United States. With the passage of the Fugitive Slave Laws, the possibility of international complications developed and both black and white Canadians were convinced that there could be no permanent peace, no assurance of safety on this continent until slavery was wiped out. Many considered the war to be an opportunity for human rights and in the eyes of Anderson Ruffin Abbott,\textsuperscript{60}

\textsc{It was not a war for the extension of territory. It was not a war for racial supremacy. It was not a war for spoilation of the weak and defenceless. It was not a war for white men or black men, yellow men or red men. It was a war for humanity. It was a war of the most momentous importance, far reaching and vital in its effects as can be that stirred the heart of a nation or stiffened the fibre of its manhood. It was in the beginning to be sure a war for the preservation of the Union, but in its ultimate results it transcended all geographical and political considerations. It became a struggle between beautiful right and ugly wrong, between barbarism and civilization, between freedom and slavery. It decided slavery in America for this was achieved by the passage of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution on Dec. 18, 1865, but it did designate it as a basic purpose for the war.}

\textsuperscript{60} Anderson Ruffin Abbott was a contract surgeon for the Union forces and held the honourary rank of Captain, while acting as Surgeon-in-Charge of Freedmen's Hospital during the Civil War. He later joined the GAR (Grand Army of the Republic), a Civil War veteran's group that strove to bring public awareness to the sacrifices of those who lost their lives in the war and the purpose of their fight for human rights.
whether that fair land dedicated to freedom should be in fact as well in name - the land of the free and home of the brave, or whether it should be the land of the tyrant and the home of the slave.\textsuperscript{61}

In 1861 General Ben Butler, Commander at Fort Monroe refused to release fugitive slaves to the Confederates for he surmised that they would only be put to use against his own troops. Despite the fact that the Fugitive Slave Law remained in effect, Butler was determined to employ these men in support of the Union effort and with some reluctance, the President granted permission for them to become military labourers. Two coloured companies were raised in Massachusetts despite the fact that Lincoln himself demonstrated little confidence in the effort and voiced the opinion that he feared their arms would end up in the hands of the secessionists.\textsuperscript{62}

Nevertheless, this event marked a significant shift in the designation of fugitive and freed slaves for as contraband of war they felt some reassurance that they would not be returned to an enslaved condition. However their prospects and very survival were extremely tentative for they had no homes, no source of income, no food and no means by which to gain employment. Subsequently they began to congregate along the North/South borders and in the cities in alarming numbers -- up to ten thousand in Washington and another three thousand in Alexandria. The authorities established a

\textsuperscript{61} This quote is taken from one of his Memorial Day speeches for the GAR (Grand Army of the Republic) veterans of the Civil War delivered in Buffalo or Detroit. A. Abbott, GAR speech, March 20th, 1913
\textsuperscript{62} Numerous references cite this attitude in Lincoln. A. Abbott also writes about it in his articles, nd.
contraband camp at Arlington, called Freedman’s Village where they were eventually
organized into teams of blacksmiths, wheelwrights, carpenters, tailors and shoemakers to
be assigned to the Union forces. Prior to this coloured recruits and even coloured contract
surgeons were not considered potential candidates for service, but the Proclamation Act
of 1863 essentially made them all legitimate citizens of the United States of America.

Although Anderson was Canadian-born he was keen to participate in the Union
effort, but it was a complicated process to legally enlist in a foreign army. After much
coercion and correspondence Anderson Abbott was eventually gratified to be hired as a
contract surgeon on a salary of $100 a month. He was never formally commissioned as an
officer, but was awarded the honorary rank of Captain and he became one of eight black
doctors in the Union Army. He replaced Dr. Augusta at Freedmen’s Hospital as the Chief
Executive Officer and Surgeon-in-Chief until the end of the war. Throughout his life Dr.
Abbott was acutely dissatisfied with his “unofficial” rank and continued to seek some
form of official recognition. He must have been highly vexed, knowing that other
Canadians, both white and black had joined and fought with no regard to the international
agreement.

Dr. Abbott had always been particularly impressed with the flourishing
accomplishments of the famous Florence Nightingale, who, with her innovative policies

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63 In contrast, Dr. Augusta was American-born and became the first African American Major of Cavalry. He left as a Brevet Lieutenant Colonel, the highest rank achieved by a coloured commissioned officer during the Civil War.
64 A. Abbott offers a detailed description in his memoirs of the adventures that he and Dr. Augusta undertook during their stay in Washington, D. C. during the Civil War.
of personal hygiene, hospital sanitation and disease prevention techniques, had recently revolutionized the role of hospitals in the Crimean War. Abbott’s memoirs indicate that he excelled in the business administration of the hospital and he took great pride in his ability to achieve similar high levels of efficiency. He had a staff of six surgeons, two clerks, two stewards, two matrons, a large corps of servants and a full staff of nurses. Although the hospital served only the “contraband” or coloured soldiers it was fully equipped with a capacity of two thousand beds. His responsibilities would have included surgery, administering medical procedures, ordering rations, controlling disease and sanitation procedures and administration of the staff (Cobb, 1962: 271-287).

Following the Civil War the Freedmen’s Bureau administrated for the needs of the freed slaves in the form of financial loans, lands grants, medical attention, schooling and skilled training. Nevertheless, the country quickly slipped into an economic depression which marked the beginning of labour conflicts and “older notions of equal rights and the dignity of labor gave way before a sense of the irreducible barriers, separating the classes and a preoccupation with the defense of property, ‘political economy,’ and the economic status quo” (Foner, 1988: 517). As time went on, opposition from the old South regained momentum and the dreams of true social justice and harmony flew by the wayside. In a few short years, many of the original intentions of Reconstruction had been undone or overturned. Gradually southern state legislatures regained enough power to re-enact black codes and once again severely limited the freedom and rights of Blacks. For the most part, African Americans in the South
remained downtrodden and destitute, with little opportunity for education, employment or civil liberties for almost another century. By 1870 a system of racial segregation and “separate but equal” policies took root and Jim Crow laws gradually overtook the nation. The “one drop rule” prevailed as “the free status of blacks and the growing difficulty in distinguishing them from whites sharpened the nation's need to define race” (Wright, 1997a:166).

In the North, things seemed somewhat different at first, since the abolitionists were fairly abundant, influential and compassionate. However, as immigration from Great Britain and Europe increased, many of the opportunities shifted from the plate of the African American to that of the white European refugees. Political agitation and controversy increased and most African Americans retaliated by thronging together in ghettos. Graham (1999) notes that since Chicago was segregated into black (South side) and white neighbourhoods, black-owned businesses “attracted undiluted black support [and] were able to fuel the community and flourish” (188). Although integration was the ultimate goal black organizations such as the Equal Rights League appeared to provide the most effective means of attaining social justice. Some critics have suggested that in essence they developed a segregated movement that fostered the very thing they were attacking (Meier, 1968:7).

Dr. Abbott was honourably discharged from duty in August of 1865 and, upon his resignation, he received several commendations. After devoting the following year to work with the Freedmen’s Bureau in Washington, he returned to Toronto in 1866.
Several weeks after his return to Canada, he received a black and white houndstooth shawl from Mrs. Lincoln that had belonged to the President as a token of her gratitude and respect. 65

When Dr. Abbott returned to Toronto in 1865, he re-entered Trinity College and, in 1867, graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Medicine. He became a member of the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the Ontario Dominion Medical Association. The original building of the Toronto General Hospital was located on a lot the size of the entire block, bounded by King, Adelaide, John and Peter streets and a Deed of Sale found in the Abbott Collection indicates that Wilson Abbott had, at one time, owned the property where the original hospital once stood. 66

The social standing of the Abbotts and their Toronto cohorts proved to be somewhat different than that of some of the other black immigrants for many of them lacked the necessary education and financial resources that might have eased their assimilation into mainstream society. Dr. Abbott repeatedly advocated that all people should be valued as human beings and their contributions to society should be based on their accomplishments rather than their socio-economic status. Interestingly, there is no

65 A. Abbott, A Night of Horrors: Some Recollections of Lincoln's Assassination. The Anglo-American Magazine, May, 1901. After Dr. Abbott's death, the shawl was passed on to his descendants. When it came into my mother's hands, she sent it along to her American cousin. Of course, at the time, she had no knowledge of the history behind the shawl, nor of how fittingly the black and white threads of its houndstooth weave portrayed the contrasting images of her own family. Today the shawl rests in the capable hands of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, where it is suitably treasured as a worthy Civil War memorial.

66 Indenture made May 31st, 1876 between Trustees of the Toronto General Hospital and Wilson R. Abbott.
evidence to suggest that Dr. Abbott actually set up a formal medical practice in
Toronto, although it is reasonable to assume that he attended to some of the medical
needs of his community. However, it is well documented that the racial atmosphere in
Toronto in 1868 was unique and a newspaper clipping reveals that Dr. Abbott assumed
the position of Surgeon-in-Chief at the Toronto General Hospital for a period of two
years (Cosbie, 1975:84).

Anderson Abbott must have chosen a career in medicine for some very specific
reasons. He was highly motivated and intelligent enough to learn meticulous information
and he was extraordinarily inquisitive and fascinated by the intricacies of all the arts and
sciences. In keeping with his father’s strategy for social mobility such a career would
have opened many avenues normally closed to African Canadians and he may have
viewed the profession as a concrete way of highlighting the limitless possibilities for
other members of his race.

However, the social climate shifted after the Civil War and by 1870 many black
fugitives had returned to the United States, thus depleting the markets and clients for the
remaining black professionals and businesses. Most of those based in rural localities were
forced to move to the cities to further their prospects and some encountered a strong
insurgence of racial opposition. When Thomas Pinkney, a black Anglican minister,
made Elizabeth King, a white teacher in the Negro school, a great outcry ensued as the
local Whites demanded new legislation to prevent such “...desecration of the white man’s

\[67\] Many Blacks returned to their homes in the United States after the Civil War.
lineage, his breed, and his distinctive features and characteristics. Howe (1864) reported the opinions voiced by some of the white residents that he interviewed: “The feeling against the colored people has been growing ever since I came here, and more particularly since your President’s Proclamation” (26).

It was in this atmosphere of contrasting social and political climates that Dr. Abbott courted and married Mary Ann Casey from St. Catharines, Ontario in 1871 at St. George’s Anglican Church in Toronto. Her father, Thomas Powers Casey was a light-skinned black man of Irish descent and her mother, Mary Ann Adams was white and of Scottish descent. Although well-respected in St. Catharines in 1867 the Casey family had moved to Toronto where Thomas set up shop as a barber in the old Queen’s Hotel, the present-day Royal York Hotel, located on Front Street.

Shortly after the marriage the prospect of becoming Coroner of Kent County arose and it was Dr. Abbott who boldly stepped forward to claim the position. On March 4th, 1874 he received the appointment, making him the first black coroner in Canada. Politically speaking, a dream had been fulfilled, for a decade before Dr. Augusta had been denied the honour on the basis of his race. Although Anderson Abbott never appears

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68 Newspaper clipping from Abbott Papers, nd.
69 Graham (1999) notes that he Episcopal (Anglican in Canada) and Congregational Churches attracted the black elite with their formal services, well-educated clergy, and ties to British traditions. Although Anderson and Mary Ann remained with the BME Church while living in Chatham, they transferred to the Anglican Church upon their later moves to Dundas, Oakville, Toronto and Chicago. Present-day Abbott descendents tend to follow the tradition and those who live in Chicago attend St. Edmund’s or Good Shepherd, those who live in Detroit attend St. Matthew’s and those remaining in Toronto attend St. George’s.
70 Her father, Elias Adams was a white abolitionist and served as Mayor of St. Catharines before the family moved to Toronto.
71 Toronto City Directory, 1867, Toronto Archives.
to have sought election into political office, this appointment would have carried a significant prestige making him a Civil Servant as well as providing him with a regular income. Even in the 1870s the Coroner’s position would have demanded a high degree of investigative and analytical work. Dr. Abbott’s extensive experience with Civil War deaths would have combined well with his deep interest in the interpretation of the law, and would have contributed to the makings of a formidable medical examiner.  

His adherence to high professional standards gained him the respect of the community and when he was elected Chairman of the Kent County Medical Association in 1878, a local paper announced the following:

At a recent meeting of the Chatham Medical Association our esteemed townsman, Dr. Abbott, presided, having been appointed Chairman by a unanimous vote. This may be a small matter for comment, but it is said, straws show how the wind blows and this little circumstance is another proof that condition, not color, is what operates to the disadvantage of the colored race. 

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72 In the Abbott collection a newspaper clipping advertises his services. There is no date but it could not have been earlier than 1874 which is the date of the first public record of him as Coroner.  
73 Abbott papers, 1878.
In another article Anderson was described as one “who has proven himself to be very skilful. Many we have reason to believe would have been called to stand in their lot, had they been left in other hands.”

In 1850, the Ontario Common Schools Act was passed, to allow any racial or religious minorities to establish separate schools for their children, an act that pleased both Protestants and Catholics. Protestants could continue to proselytize to their heart’s content and, with the help of teachers and lay ministers, ultimately “rule the conscience, regulate the pulsations of the heart and restrain the passions” (Sweet, 1997:25). Catholics, likewise, were free to continue to regulate their religious instruction through the clergy. However, some school boards took advantage of the Act to ensure that black children remained segregated, based on the wishes of the majority of the local inhabitants.

The coloured people were acutely aware that their children were not receiving an education equal to that of the white children, despite the fact that they contributed a full sixth of the total taxes for this lack of privilege. Back in 1824, the Princess Street Public School in Chatham was specifically opened to coloured students after the children of Israel Williams, a Chatham butcher were refused admission to Central Public School in town. In 1861, the Chatham school board established boundaries for separate schools that obviously were intended to exclude black children from the white school district. The action was declared illegal and in 1864:

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74 Abbott papers, nd.
... Chief Justice William Henry Draper ruled that if a separate school had been established for Negroes and then allowed to fall into disuse, Negroes must be admitted to the still-functioning common school (Winks, 1971:375).

The black residents persisted in their demand for integration. They wanted to enroll their children in the best school, regardless of the "... unlawful, unjust and unreasonable proscription."75 In the heat of the ensuing raucous, the Board of Trustees hastily called a meeting and unanimously passed the following resolution:

That the inspector of the Public Schools be and is hereby instructed to notify the Head Teacher of each Public School in this town, that no child of school age, whether white or colored, is to be excluded from any of the Public Schools in this town, provided the average attendance of any such school, as shown by the Registry Book, will, according to law, warrant their admission.76

With smug satisfaction, Abbott (1875) assured the community: “You see by a determined and united effort on the part of our people this vexed question has been settled now and forever.” And he did his part to maintain the status quo. The local paper

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75 A. Abbott, 1875.
76 cited in Abbott Collection, a clipping from the Missionary Messenger, 1875.
recorded the results of his first attempt to become a school board trustee. The sentiments of the coloured community are clearly biased in his favour:

In Eberts Ward, the candidates were—Dr. A.R. Abbott (colored) and Mr. John A. Hoon (white). The latter was elected by a majority of ONLY ONE VOTE. Considering that Dr. Abbott was unavoidably absent from town on the day of polling and that he is a colored man and a comparative stranger in Chatham, he may well feel proud over the result of the contest. Had Dr. Abbot been present at the poll and had not his opponent VOTED FOR HIMSELF, he (the Doctor) would have beaten the other candidate all hollow.

We are informed that steps are being taken to protest the election, as it is alleged the poll was closed SEVEN MINUTES before time, thus preventing four persons from recording their votes in favor of Dr. Abbott. It is also said that two minors were allowed to vote. There is no doubt but that another poll will be obtained and Dr. Abbott’s friends—both white and colored—say he SHALL BE ELECTED, providing he is present on the day of “combat.” It is very necessary that he be present and we sincerely hope that he may, in order that the colored citizens of Chatham, conjointly with the unprejudiced whites, may be able to establish a
An early attempt to offer educational opportunities to black residents to develop trades and craftsmanship in Chatham appeared in the form of the Nazrey Institute College outside Chatham. In 1873 it amalgamated with the British American Institute in Dresden to become the non-denominational Wilberforce Educational Institute that prepared black high school students for university. Dr. Abbott served as President from 1873 to 1880.

He continued to engage in other forms of community education and was active in the Chatham Literary and Debating Society which eventually became the Kent County Civil Rights League. Abbott strongly believed that words could be employed as powerful tools in the able hands of the intelligent debater and that it was not good enough just to know right from wrong, nor was it good enough to observe it, be aware of it or read about it. Real change came from action, strong, good and noble action and he made every effort to instil that realization in all who would listen: for the purpose of mental, moral and social improvement.

Knowledge then being power, the cultivation of the intellect is the means of becoming possessed of that power. This may be accomplished in three ways: First by reading and study, second by observation and travel and

77 Election of public school trustees, newspaper clipping, 1875.
78 This was the precursor for the Chatham Literary Association, formed in 1891 as a Negro club that promoted Civil Rights.
third by taking part in debates... This is an age of progress, of unprecedented intellectual activity; and any people who are content to slumber in mental inertia may expect to awake far behind in the race of life. Ignorance, whether in white or Black, cannot expect to take precedence with education and refinement ... you will not be able to command regard for the one or respect for the other until you are in a position to enforce your demand by the power of intellect.\textsuperscript{79}

All his life, Dr. Abbott was to fight for desegregation in schools, as he could never accept the “separate but equal” concept. Yet until 1891, such was the law in Chatham when the last separate Negro school finally closed. In 1951, a Royal Commission on Education in Ontario repealed the offending clauses of the Common School Act. Even then, several Kent County delegations expressed the opinion that black children were receiving a better education in the segregated system. Incredibly, it was not until 1964, when Leonard A. Braithwaite, the first black man elected to the Ontario Provincial Legislature, demanded that all references to black separate schools in the Common School Act be removed.

Although vestiges of inequality continue to plague our schools and educational institutions today, it has not gone unnoticed and perhaps this consciousness will eventually become a strong enough force to impel our society to balance the scales in a

\textsuperscript{79} A. Abbott, nd.
productive and innovative manner. Until that time comes, we must press on, prodding and provoking, antagonizing and challenging, just as Dr. Abbott did 150 years ago.

When the Abbotts moved to Dundas, Anderson once again assumed an interest in education and became involved in the Dundas Mechanics Institute. Along with this pastime, he also honed his writing skills and became Assistant Editor of the local newspaper, the *Dundas Banner*. Not one to pass up an opportunity to spread his views, Dr. Abbott set a rapid pace and wrote and spoke to his heart's delight. Many of his papers reflect the type of topics commonly debated amongst the townsfolk. He assumed several *nom de plumes* when writing about issues concerning the welfare and civil rights of the coloured people. Two of his favourite aliases were “Ethiope,” obviously referring to himself as an Afro-Canadian, and “Plutarch,” both of which stem from the names of two ancient Greek philosophers. Under these pseudonyms, Anderson attacked any unfair and misleading published and oratorical views that depicted his race as inadequate, dishonest, unworthy, or objectionable in any way. He made every effort to expound on the achievements of his race and their ability to succeed under fair and just conditions.

In 1889 the Abbotts lived briefly in Oakville, where a small but active black community was solidly established. A year later they returned to Toronto to live in a residence at the corner of Dowling Avenue and King Street, while their children Helene

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80 This was originally an English organization, was considered to be the precursor of the modern library and in 1841 was an early attempt to provide educational resources and opportunities for the purposes of the general public. Mechanics Institutes offered the use of books to all classes of people at a time when most would have found it impossible to afford the luxury of a personal library. Intensive debates provided a stimulating alternative to otherwise long dreary evenings, with little entertainment available.
and Wilson attended the University of Toronto.

In 1891, the Abbotts moved to Chicago at a time when the city was host to a budding black community of 15,000. Most of the black residents were employed in domestic service or as porters on the popular Pullman coaches. Drake and Cayton (1962) note that several distinct groups evolved and thrived within the black community; an elite group of businessmen, professional men, politicians, and a group of ambitious individuals who worked as personal and domestic servants.

In the years between the Fair and the First World War, these were the civic leaders, and their wives the social arbiters. A diversified institutional life taking form between 1890 and 1914 included a hospital and training school for nurses, a YMCA, branches of national organizations such as the National Negro Business League, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Federated Women’s Clubs (Drake and Cayton, 1962: 54).

Four newspapers were established, including the *Chicago Defender*, a weekly black paper edited by Robert S. Abbott, which played a significant role in encouraging many African Americans to leave the south and come to the North. In 1878, the *Conservator*, a weekly black newspaper carried a regular editorial that reiterated a

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81 R.S. Abbott was not related to Anderson Abbott. Indeed he received severe criticism for supporting the Republican establishment at the expense of the needs of the black community in the 1920s (Graham, 1999:193).
strategy of education and correct living for those aspiring to what Drake and Cayton (1962) referred to as “racial uplift”\(^\text{82}\) (48). The Sumner Club offered elite black professional men, like Dr. Abbott who served as treasurer and secretary, an opportunity to socialize and network their way through the echelons of the Chicago social strata. In 1892 Anderson and Mary Ann joined the Manasseh Society of Chicago,\(^\text{83}\) a group of interracial couples who although well-accepted by the local black community tended to socialize amongst themselves. “This club had a dual significance, however, for on one hand, the Chicago society was not so rigid that intermarriages were taboo, yet on the other hand, such couples were sufficiently alien to both the Negro and white communities as to make it desirable to organize among themselves for mutual aid and recreation.”\(^\text{84}\)

The club dissolved in the late 1920s as tolerance for interracial unions increased within the intellectual and professional communities, but some members continued to enjoy enduring friendships and retained a form of solidarity.

During the time that the Abbotts lived in Chicago hospitals were segregated and although Cook County Hospital catered to the white community, there was a need for medical services for black patients and a professional institution for black medical staff.

\(^{82}\) This term was commonly used prior to the 1960s to denote a concept of social mobility and access with respect to racial barriers.

\(^{83}\) The Manasseh Club – “Equal Rights for All” was their motto – the original club was founded in Milwaukee in the early 1900s and shortly afterwards established a branch in Chicago. Its members were stable, working-class couples, who scrutinized all new candidates for membership carefully, in order to bar common-law unions and shady characters. The group was organized as a fraternal benefit society, owned a cemetery plot and had elaborate initiation and burial rituals. The organization engaged in many social activities, including an annual picnic and dance. By 1910 it had become an established part of the associational complex in the Negro community. Its annual ball, presented at the Eighth Regiment Armory, was one of the high spots of the social season (Drake and Cayton, 1962:145-146).

\(^{84}\) A. Abbott, nd.
In 1894 Provident Hospital opened its doors to the black community of South Side Chicago and served as the first private, non-profit hospital. Shortly afterwards, the Medical Superintendent, Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, a prominent Afro-American heart specialist and one of the co-founders assumed the position of chief surgeon at Freedmen’s Hospital in Washington, D.C. and Dr. Abbott was invited to take over both the hospital and the Training School for Nurses. Despite the publicity surrounding this institution, it is surprising that very little history of Dr. Abbott’s work at Provident is available. Possibly this was simply an uneventful period of its history or perhaps he was considered a foreigner and therefore not of interest to the American public. Even in 1910, Drake reports that out of the 109 Negro male physicians and 25 female physicians present in Chicago, only 50 of them were listed in the American Medical Directory.

In the late 1890s new Jim Crow laws were instituted and many jobs, public accommodations and schools once again eluded black Americans. “Even though these people had money, education, and social status, the white community began to shut them out and limit their ability to move as freely as they had before” (Graham, 1999:224). Perhaps this turn of the tide influenced Anderson and Mary Ann’s decision to return to Toronto with their children Grace and Gordon.

Ultimately it appears that Anderson did not depend on his medical career to make a living. Instead, he used his pen to create a resource of articles and commentaries that

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85 Dr. Daniel Hale Williams performed the first open-heart surgery in 1893 at Provident Hospital (Hayden (1992:195-196)).
were widely published in both Canadian and American newspapers of his day. Always eager to learn something new and exchange ideas, Anderson continued to be active in a variety of community organizations. He was a member of the Canadian Institute, a group that sponsored lectures on all manner of things and quite likely, he performed his share of public speaking for the group a well. His likeness has also been spotted in a photograph of the Natural History Society in 1909.

Throughout his retirement Dr. Abbott remained abreast of the latest developments in a variety of fields, including politics, writing, teaching, public speaking and medicine. He recorded his thoughts in great detail in his journals, but a few of the following excerpts may suffice to verify his philosophy on the prospects of a racialized society in Canada.

... The law, which governs the evolution of races, teaches us that where two races of different degrees of civilization occupy the same soil the weaker becomes subject to the stronger and more progressive race. Under such conditions peace and civil order can be maintained only when the relation of master and servants mutually acquiesce in, or the dominant race is so entrenched in power as to render resistance on the part of the servile race futile. This was the relation that existed between the white and black races in the South during slavery. When it was disturbed by the emancipation of the slaves it resulted in direful consequences to both
races, the effects of which are still manifested in violence and bloodshed.

... The Negro having survived all efforts to reduce him again to a condition of vassalage and all schemes to get rid of him by legislation, emigration and repatriation having failed, there are but two alternatives left; the races must either be exterminated or become absorbed. The former alternative is not within the bounds of possibility, therefore, the absorption into a composite race is, in my opinion the manifest destiny of the Southern Negro. It is just as natural for two races, equally conditioned and living together on the same soil to blend as it is for the waters of two river tributaries to mingle with each other.

...Several generations will pass from the stage of action before this change is realized to any appreciable degree. In the meantime the white people of the South will realize the necessity of treating the Negro more fairly than they do now both in the matter of wages and protection of person and property. And the Negro on his part will rise to a more intelligent appreciation of his duties and responsibility as the laboring class upon which the South must depend for its progress and prosperity.

... The Negroes will remain for many generations the industrial element upon which the South must depend for its progress and prosperity. Therefore all schemes looking to their wholesale deportation from the
South I regard as chimerical and will as theretofore, come to nought.\textsuperscript{86}

It would appear that Anderson Abbott enjoyed a rather different life than his father before him. He was born into a favoured class and received a classical academic education to become a medical doctor, whereas his father had to raise himself up from illiteracy, through the ranks of apprenticeship and labourer to become an astute businessman. Nevertheless, Anderson, like his father, did like to challenge the status quo and constantly devoted himself to acts of resistance to the social forces that persistently oppressed and marginalized people. Although he was cognizant of his own social privilege and class, he did not turn his back on those of lesser means. Rather, he endeavoured to use his good fortune to further the interests of others through the promotion of education, Christian principles and civic responsibility.

Anderson Abbott had lived his life as a protagonist. He challenged all black Canadians to consider themselves equal to white Canadians. He used the tools of culture, through music and literary appreciation, fine manners, good taste and gentility to prove his point. He impelled his people to seek a good education, no matter how demanding their daily menial tasks, for only through a better education did he believe they could ever hope to gain the respect and acknowledgement they sought as equals. Thus, he may have offered a form of advice, opening the doors and windows and prescribing the means and ways to a better way of life for his people. But as the years passed he began to foresee

\textsuperscript{86}A. Abbott, nd.
what he thought was inevitable and he believed that peace would eventually come in
the form of racial amalgamation. He must have prayed that some day Black and White
would mix and his family would truly embody a single race. Only time would tell how
his children would cope with such issues and accommodate or resist the forces of
racialization.
2.4 Raising the Ceiling for Opportunity

Understanding the process by which individuals develop racial and ethnic identities is therefore an important part of understanding the total person.\(^{87}\)

Anderson and Mary Ann Abbott apparently led model middle-class lives in Canada and the US where they found the opportunity and freedom to live openly as black within a white world. Although they invested their time and resources into the black community, they did not allow the white community to limit their activities, principles or accomplishments. Indeed, even in the US evidence shows that they would not abide racial restrictions and it must be presumed that they passed that attitude onto their children. But with the tide of change, racial affiliations began to shift according to political and social events below the border and it became difficult for Canadian light-skinned, middle-class Blacks to identify with new black immigrants who came to work on the railroads and in the factories.

The following generation encountered a very different world in the 20\(^{th}\) century as they struggled to maintain the status quo previously established by their parents and grandparents. The early prominence that the family had enjoyed dissipated in the wake of massive economic depressions, world wars and massive immigration from Europe. As

the family money and other financial resources dissipated some members of the
Abbott family sought a new life back in the land of their forefathers.

By 1900, the city of Chicago had earned a reputation that entailed rapid growth,
colourful wickedness and frequent labour violence. As urbanization increased in the
north, the need for labour rose at the same time as the agricultural industry became
mechanized in the south. Southerners headed for the northern industrialized cities like
Chicago where they could access more opportunity for economic and professional
advancement into white collar jobs. Despite the fact that it was difficult for African
American professionals to work with clients outside their own community, an urban,
middle-class way of life began to transform the prospects for many who had previously
lived below the poverty line. Indeed a great turning point in the economy was reached
when they became consumers of their own labour instead of just workers.

It is not clear why the Abbott family picked up their roots at such a late stage of
life to live in a foreign country in 1891, especially since neither Mary Ann nor Anderson
had ever been American citizens. However, it had been a regular practice of several of
the family members to traverse over the border and work in both Canada and the United
States at various times over the years. The two eldest children, Helene and Wilson had
completed highly acclaimed programs at the University of Toronto, yet they did not
pursue further education opportunities in Canada, nor were they ever employed here. It
would seem that the US, with a large, mobile black community offered more in this
respect than Canada for those middle-class young people of African descent, regardless
of their appearance otherwise. The Abbotts would have been part of the group of ‘old
settlers,’ who had resided in Chicago and enjoyed a high level of acceptance and
inclusion both socially and professionally. However upon the massive migration of
Blacks from the southern states in the early part of the century, the balanced relationship
between the black and white communities disintegrated and the ‘old settlers’ were
relegated into the general population of the reformed black communities.

It was during this period that Drake and Cayton (1962) note that the forces of
racialization again overwhelmed the community and racial segregation in public places
became the dominant policy. Although most Chicago Blacks demonstrated strong
opposition to a job ceiling, they did not generally seek residential integration, preferring
to live in separate communities with respect to their voluntary organizations, churches
and family activities. Furthermore, they faced strong objections to residential integration
by white property owners who feared that the colour line would be transcended. Varying
degrees of opposition to social equality ranged across the communities. In the North
agitation could be evoked upon the appointment of an African American to a position of
authority, the observation of black men socializing with white women, or when a group

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88 Drake and Cayton (1962) refer to the ‘old settlers’ as a group of elite middle-class Blacks who
established themselves in as educated professional intellectuals. Graham (1999) refers to the same group as
the ‘black upper class.’ Hill’s (1961) ‘old-line’ black families occupied a similar niche in Toronto and
indeed many of them were related.

89 The church represented a very strong stabilizing factor in the early black communities. Walker (1986)
claims that “no other institution, historically, has done more to sustain black life and culture...as a haven
from a racist society, as an opportunity for cultural development, and as a common response to the
indignities imposed by majority institutions” (55). Graham (1999) also notes that the black upper class
prefer the Episcopalian or Congregational denominations over the AME or Baptist which serve the others
(13).
of Blacks chose to invade a restaurant or nightclub previously only frequented by whites. However, it was generally accepted that a rigid colour line in work situations would be economically unprofitable and politically inexpedient and during the 1920s the prevalence of desk jobs and ‘clean’ work made it possible for almost half the black population to gain professional, managerial or clerical work.

A network of separate black institutions such as cliques, churches, voluntary organizations, sororities, fraternities and colleges evolved as a result of segregation and rejection by white society but they were not necessarily perceived as inferior. “In fact they express considerable pride in it, viewing it as evidence that they as well as whites, can create a collective life. Thus they do not ‘agitate’ for social equality, because they do not ordinarily experience their social separateness as oppressive or undesirable. Black Metropolis is the world of their relatives and friends. They know no other” Drake and Cayton, 1962:121-122). Yet the authors concede that although the Chicago Blacks found it easier to simply “stay on [their] own side of the color line” (123) and not agitate for social equality, they certainly resented being reminded that they could not have it! (124). Gunnar Myrdal also maintains (1944) that it was the color-line which restricted them to a segregated world and shut them out of many professional occupations (Drake and Cayton, 1962:125).

It was in this tumultuous racial climate that the Anderson Abbott’s children negotiated a place for themselves on both a personal and professional plane. In keeping with their father’s keen interest in education, his eldest daughter, Helene entered the
University of Toronto to enroll in the new and provocative Froebel Kindergarten Program.\textsuperscript{90} Upon her graduation she was appointed to a school in St. Louis where, in 1873 the first kindergarten program had been established. "The St. Louis kindergarten program was considered a model program and only the best teachers were employed by it" (K.R. Johnson, 2003). By 1883, every public school in St. Louis had a kindergarten, thereby setting a national precedent for the public school system.

Certainly Helene would have been highly encouraged by her father, who wrote an interesting account of a visit to the Detroit schools which was published in the \textit{Canadian Monthly}. "Not only are colored children to be seen in all the schools, but at least one colored teacher is employed by the Board... The peculiarity of the Kindergarten system is that it develops the whole nature of the child by natural methods" (nd). At that time, although educational opportunities were available in Canada, employment was not. In the article entitled \textit{The Colored Woman of Today}, Fanny Barrier Williams makes a number of interesting observations:

\begin{quote}
A little over a century ago colored women had no social status and indeed only thirty years ago the term "womanhood" was not large enough in this
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{90}The philosophy was first promoted in the 1830s by German educator Friedrich Froebel. He designed a kindergarten program to teach young children about art, design, mathematics, and natural history. In 1883, Dr. James L. Hughes and his wife, Ada Marean Hughes introduced the program to the Toronto public schools. As innovators, they were second in the world to employ this method of teaching, the St. Louis, Missouri school board being the first, in 1876. Shortly afterwards, the concept of kindergartens spread rapidly throughout the Province, and in 1887 they were recognized by the Government of Ontario and received a share of the provincial grant.
Christian republic to include any woman of African descent. No one knew her. No one was interested in her. Her birthright was supposed to be all the social evils that had been the dismal heritage of her race for two centuries…

But in spite of these prejudicial hindrances and a lack of confidence, the young colored women of this generation are emerging from obscurity in many interesting ways that will happily surprise those who have never known them by their womanly qualities and graceful accomplishments…

That they appreciate the value of the culture and intelligence is shown in the ever-increasing number of young women who are graduates of those universities and professional institutions whose doors are open wide enough to include all women, regardless of color....In nothing is the color-line so relentlessly drawn as it is against the employment of accomplished young colored women in the higher grades of occupations.

School teaching has afforded the best field for young colored women. That profession has laid requisition upon the very best women of the race and they in return have elevated the profession by a great variety of accomplishments. It is easy to find these young women capable of teaching everything that comes within the curriculum of the best American institutions. Miss Helene Abbott, of the St. Louis schools, is an interesting...
type of the young women who bring to the colored schools of the country everything that is best in modern pedagogy (Williams, 1897: 29-30).

Between the years 1892 and 1902, Helene was influential in the introduction of early childhood education for the black children of working mothers in St. Louis and later in Chicago. Her ability reached the ear of Booker T. Washington, who offered her a position at Tuskegee but having had enough of the prejudices of the south, she declined. A lovely tribute to Helene by the Principal of the Dumas and Simmons School was kept by her daughter. The following includes some of the highlights:

Rules largely through love and gets them to love her ... has excellent control of her children...draws out the best in them by the efforts she exerts in behalf of their development...so well instructed herself that she makes it an important point to see that her children are active, thoughtful and wide awake...well-informed and thoroughly interested in the work ...secures commendable results from her pupils ... a most valuable acquisition to the corps...an influence for good among parents and children...co-operative in spirit and willing to do anything to further the best interests of the school. 91

91 Helene taught at the Dumas School and Simmons School in St. Louis from 1892-1902.
After eleven years of teaching, Helene retired and married Benjamin Sayre and proceeded to set an impressive pace in the field of community service and education. Like many women of her day, Helene participated in the founding and support of projects that nurtured the needs of black women and children, including kindergartens, day nurseries, reading rooms, employment agencies, homes for the elderly, the infirm and working girls, youth clubs, and camps as well as participating in holiday activities for children. Along with many other committed African American women, Helene worked with local churches, businesses, and urban chapters of national organizations, participating in numerous fund-raising, educational and social uplift activities.

As a young mother and community leader, Helene’s experience in education and music was put to work. During World War I, she organized the “Patriotic Service Leagues” at Farren, Coleman, and Raymond Public Schools where her young daughters joined others to learn First Aid and knit socks, mufflers and sleeveless sweaters for the soldiers. During World War I, she served as an unpaid volunteer worker with Lula

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92 Women were expected to retire from employment as teachers once they married.

93 A speech about of Helene Abbott was delivered in 1961 to the Chicago Board of Education which highlighted her following accomplishments. She sponsored many youth groups, including young men in both the Satellites and the Maroon Clubs. Mrs. Lovelyn Evans, Mrs. George Cleveland Hall, and Helene Abbott Sayre founded the Ella Smith Taggers Association to raise funds for the old and the new Provident Hospital and served as its first president. She became the founder and first president of the Parent Teacher Associations of both the Farren Elementary Schools and the DuSable High School and President of the Wendell Phillips Parent Teacher Association. Moreover, she held regional and state offices in the Parent Teachers Association.
Lawson\textsuperscript{94} in Red Cross activities, such as meeting early morning trains of soldiers and cheerfully passing out hot coffee and doughnuts and was among the first women to devote many months and years to helping the returning men to adjust to urban life. With Ada McKinley,\textsuperscript{95} she organized "Soldiers and Sailors Clubs" at the McKinley House Center, forerunner of the present U.S.C. Centers, where men met in a home-like atmosphere to play games, write letters home and dance with girls selected by the sponsors.

In the 1920s, race riots were common in the south end of Chicago and Helene worked with the Red Cross and the Chicago Urban League\textsuperscript{96} as the Woman Placement Director where she negotiated on behalf of women factory workers for better working conditions. She worked closely with such pioneer social workers as Jane Addams\textsuperscript{97} of Hull House, Mary McDowell, Ada McKinley, Mary McLeod Bethune, Lovelyn Evans, Ida B. Wells,\textsuperscript{98} Lula Lawson,\textsuperscript{99} Mary Church Terrel of Washington D.C., Beatrice

\textsuperscript{94} Mrs. Victor Lawson, wife of the publisher of the Chicago Daily News, supported the Negro Fellowship League.
\textsuperscript{95} Ada McKinley was a board member of the Illinois League of Women chapter; president of the Citizens Community Center (Knupfer, 1996:152
\textsuperscript{96} Chicago Urban League was established in 1916 with a mission to eliminate racial discrimination and segregation and to work for the achievement of equal opportunity and parity for African Americans, other minorities and the poor in every phase of American life. Today the League's work is focused in three primary areas: education, economic development and community empowerment. Graham (1999) notes that although the black elite supported and promoted organizations such as the Urban League and the NAACP, they did not tend to see it as a necessary advocate for themselves (Graham, 1999:12).
\textsuperscript{97} Jane Addams was a white social reformer worked with African American women "on issues of discrimination in housing, juvenile facilities for African American children, and female suffrage" (Knupfer, 1996:47). She supported The People's Movement and it's founder, Oscar de Priest in his efforts "to 'purify' the Republican Party by representing the majority" (Knupfer, 1996:54).
\textsuperscript{98} Ida B. Wells. "Born in Holly Springs, Mississippi. Founder of the Negro Fellowship League; cofounder of the Frederick Douglass Centre; founder and president of the Ida B. Wells Club, the Ideal Woman's Club,
Caffrey, and social workers in the Northwestern University Settlement House. She was active on a political level and traveled throughout the mid-western states making speeches on behalf of Ruth Hanna McCormick, a Congresswoman and U.S. Senate candidate.

Her civic work as President of the Illinois Children's Home and Aid Auxiliary the Home for Working Mothers promoted philanthropic work among African American women. She worked for better conditions in the schools and community playgrounds and as president of Wendell Phillips P.T.A. she appeared alone before the Board of Education hearing to secure a consensus to build a new high school.

After suffering a stroke in 1937, Helene Sayre lost her sight. Adjusting to her new role, rather than affliction, she organized, in her home, an interracial group of the gifted blind into the “Fellowship Circle of the Blind.” She then undertook a project to prepare publications for the Chicago Public Library on how blind and handicapped people could be more useful to society which ultimately led to the development of new education methods.

and the Alpha Suffrage Club. Speaker for the Anti-Lynching Bureau of the National African American Council; vice president of the Frederick Douglass Woman's Club; first African American woman appointed as an officer in the Adult Probation Department. Her husband, Ferdinand Barnett, was a lawyer and an assistant state attorney” (Knupfer, 1996:156).

99 Lulu Lawson was born in North Carolina; a graduate of Howard University. Worked with the Rosenwald Fund as a social worker; chair of the YWCA, 1921-1923; field worker for the Chicago Red Cross during the war; member of the Chicago Women's Amateur Minstrel Club” (Knupfer, 1996:151).

100 Wendell Phillips High School was frequently targeted by community efforts to confront racial segregation. In 1915 segregated dances were organized by the Principal and Dean to appease those parents who objected to interracial dating and dancing. Despite a visit from Ida B. Wells, the school continued to segregate students in both the high school and the night school. The Progressive Negro League officially condemned the practice and recommended “co-operated action, allied activities, earnest efforts, and social service agencies as a cure for the alleged evil” (cited in Knupfer, 1996:60).
In 1939 Helene was awarded the title "Mother of the Year" on Mother's Day by the Chicago Defender Weekly newspaper. She was then a grandmother of two girls and a boy. Ten years after her death in 1951, on Founder’s Day, February 21st, 1961, the Parent teacher Association of the Du Sable High School proposed that her name be considered for a new school in Chicago Board of Education. It was never done.

It was an impressive life and the foregoing only notes the statistical data achievements. Clearly Helene was an accomplished and determined woman who confronted numerous social barriers. She was raised as black, attended integrated schools and then immersed herself in the black public school system in the US. She married black and raised a family of four children. Although she herself was very fair-skinned, she chose to identify as black, both racially and culturally. It is interesting that although Helene visited her Canadian relatives regularly she never took her husband or children on these trips. Did she have a choice? It would appear that she did not, for even in Canada, either it was not an option or she did not demonstrate enough confidence in the public school system to forge a professional position for herself upon graduation. Since the University of Toronto Kindergarten program served as a model for other institutions, there must have been a demand for such qualified individuals. Yet, she chose to go south and work in the black schools of St. Louis. Did she enjoy certain advantages there that she did not have in Canada? Perhaps the strength of the black community in St. Louis and

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101 The highschool was named after Jean Baptiste DuSable from Santo Domingo, Haiti. He was a black explorer who founded the city of Chicago in 1773. Initially he worked as a fur-trapper and ran a trading post but with 25 years, he acquired more than 400 acres of land and eventually moved to Missouri with his Native American wife in 1800.
Chicago did bolster her status and provided opportunities that would have been inaccessible in Canada. Did she use her “whiteness” strategically? It is highly likely that she was well aware of the advantages her light skin granted for the Abbott family clearly engaged in the social activities of other upper class Blacks who were also light-skinned for the most part. However her immense success as a kindergarten teacher and human rights activist would indicate that she used all of her resources to promote “racial uplift” in accordance with her father’s example.

Wilson II, Anderson Abbott’s oldest son was born in Chatham in 1873 and grew up in Chatham and Dundas. He eventually followed in his father’s footsteps, pursuing a degree in Pharmacy at the University of Toronto. When the family moved to Chicago, Wilson went on to Cornell University and then the Medical College at the University of Illinois where he received a degree in Medicine. He then became a professor of biology and chemistry at the latter institution and published a number of medical papers. Later he worked as Clinical Director of the Chicago Tuberculosis Institute until he was appointed Chief of Staff at Henrotin Hospital\textsuperscript{102} in Chicago, and was appointed Chairman of the Medical Executive Committee of the Hospital. During World War I, he served as a Major and Chief of Staff at Fort Bayard, New Mexico, at the United States Veterans Service.\textsuperscript{6} As a renown heart and lung specialist in Chicago, he was prominently recognized for his

\textsuperscript{102} Henrotin was a segregated white hospital in Chicago and was closed down in 1985 (http://www.ihatoday.org/public/facts/closuresalpha.htm). Most of the black Abbotts were unaware that Wilson Abbott had practiced at this hospital as it was considered to be an elite institution. Their response not only indicated astonishment but also a certain smugness that he had been able to thwart the barriers of segregation to attain such a prestigious appointment (E. Johnson and J. Small, September 18, 2003).
innovative treatment of tuberculosis, an approach which involved the collapsing of the lung.

Wilson turned out to be a rather debonair sort of fellow. In Chicago he became acquainted with the Nightingales, a well-established white family stemming from the Mayflower Quakers. Florence Nightingale (not the famous nurse) was one of nine children. Her grandfather had been a Railroad doctor, stationed in Iowa, and had accumulated enough money to retire in comfort, even purchasing a lovely summer cottage on Lake Geneva in Wisconsin. His niece recounts, "They were real gents and the ladies wore French dresses. They left Chicago and moved up to a suburb and they had this lovely home on the river with a wharf" (E. Osborne, 1991). Florence's father had been a school teacher and later held such positions as President of the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois, Principal of Lake View High School in Chicago and Superintendent of Cook County Illinois schools.\(^{103}\) He was very much involved in the politics of the day and acquainted with such men as Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. An affiliation to such a family would have blended well with the interests and concerns of the Abbotts.

It would appear that the Nightingales were aware but undaunted by Wilson's race, but as the couple resided in the northerly white part of Chicago, they obviously assumed a white identity, despite Wilson's familial ties to the southerly black section of town.

\(^{103}\) Apparently he was instrumental in establishing the secondary schools in Chicago.
without the knowledge of his white community or employers. As a loyal brother, he visited his sisters faithfully each week however they all handled the situation with discretion. His son, Augustus (1906-1995) was raised by his white maternal grandparents upon the death of his mother. He grew up with his cousins who were like brothers and sisters to him and so it was that he was raised in a “white” family as the “white” son of a prominent doctor. Wilson married twice again, always to white women.

In Wilson’s case, his colour became a major issue for him in all areas of his life. Although he had been raised as black, he had enjoyed a racially integrated upbringing. The small black community of old-line families in Toronto had shaped his tendency and expectations to blend and meld into a middle-class existence. When the Abbotts moved to Chicago, his appearance, wealth and education allowed him to transgress readily over the colour line and he found himself living in a virtual white world. Although his father maintained a highly prominent position at the black and segregated Provident Hospital, Wilson was able to leave home and disengage from that affiliation while pursuing his medical training. It would have been impossible for him to attain the professional recognition that he did if he had been open about his “blackness.” He moulded his own profile through the accreditation that he earned for himself. He married into a prominent white family and melded smoothly into their folds. The main difficulty that he faced would have been to maintain a relationship with his parents and siblings. Yet he managed to do this. Although it must have been awkward, hurtful in some respects and most certainly, very sad, his fond letters to his brother and sisters demonstrate a strong bonding
love that lasted until his death. Did Anderson and Mary Ann return to Canada to assist him in his deception? It’s definitely a possibility.

Ida, born in 1878, was Anderson and Mary Ann’s youngest daughter. She too grew up in Chatham and Dundas and attended integrated public schools. She completed her secondary school education in Chicago and then got married. Between 1935 and 1945, Ida lived with her sister Helene and it is highly likely that she was involved in many of Helene’s civic ventures during the years preceding and during World War II.

Ida was raised as a black Canadian but as an adult, switched her allegiance to the US. She married Black and raised black children. Yet, Ida was the fairest of the Abbott children. As a result of her fair complexion she was chosen to attend the funeral of her brother Wilson in 1938. The other sisters chose not to attend to preclude any questions of their relationship being raised even though they too were relatively light-skinned. Certainly this situation does press home one of the disastrous effects “passing” plays on a mixed-race family (A. Sayre, 2003).

In 1929, Anderson’s widow, Mary Ann bought a lakeside home in the town of Baldwin, Michigan on the shores of Lake Idlewild, and every August all of the Abbotts would congregate for a family vacation. Idlewild, founded in 1912, had been one of the few places where professional upper and middle-class blacks could vacation in those days of segregation, meeting and socializing with other Blacks. Situated close to Chicago, it was a prime location for jazz nightclubs, where famous musicians like Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong and Count Basie would be invited to perform in the various dance halls
and resorts where doors were never marked "colored entrance" or "whites only" in those Jim Crow days. Ida inherited the Abbott summer cottage on Lake Idlewild and it continues to rest in the hands of her descendants today.

In 1905, Anderson Ruffin Abbott predicted that the Afro-Canadian would gradually disappear through the process of amalgamation. He recognized that Canada offered an appealing alternative to the racial oppression that many African Americans experienced in the US at the time although their freedom was really more of a legal one than a social one, for discrimination and apprehension continued to prevail in many of the communities. Winks (1997) argues that the African Canadian did not demonstrate as actively against racial oppression as their American counterparts but rather adhered to the pacifist and separatist philosophy advocated by Booker T. Washington rather than the militancy of W.E.B. DuBois. Furthermore no strong black leader arose in Canada to summon a sense of unity and organization to a common cause (473). Winks explains this by virtue of the low population of Blacks in Canada and the consequent scarcity of middle class, professional men who dispersed into the wider Canadian community, “achieving the assimilation they sought without carrying any or many of their brethren with them” (475). Ultimately Winks concludes the Canadian pluralism developed out of the nineteenth century assumption that the early Canadian immigrants were transplanted Europeans. The diversified communities of Blacks in Canada were considered to be

104 Winks (1997) asserts that this lack of leadership is consistent with the “general Canadian condition, however, for in a plural society there have been few, if any, figures upon whom whites might place the mantle of national hero (474).
African or alien and yet as a group “had no national heritage to fall back on for self-
identification,” while US Blacks, despite a history of slavery and discrimination, were
generally viewed as “a natural part of the new American landscape” who shared a
common experience (476-7).

Despite the fact that racialization and segregation were embedded in the social
structures a sense of unity was derived from the of black community in the US. Lipsitz
(1998) argues that racialized hierarchies have developed out of a “possessive investment
in whiteness” (vii). He notes that whiteness can be used as a commodity, a bonus that
affords those fair-skinned individuals clear opportunities for financial and social
advancement. He points out the relationship of this “possessive investment in whiteness”
to immigrants like the Irish who created a niche within the white infrastructure. Ignatiev
(1995) argues that the success of these Irish male workers was partly due to the system of
racial privilege for Whites. Political forces also contributed to this end and the
Democratic Party even made an attempt to oppose the abolition of slavery by promoting
the fear that freed Blacks would present serious competition for the employment
opportunities the Irish were presently enjoying. In turn, Irish labourers refused to work
with Blacks thereby forcing them directly out of the labour pool. Ignatiev (1995) argues
that this undercurrent of racism lent momentum to the perception that white men did
white men's work and that the value of such jobs became the terrain of the white worker.
During the 1900s the composition of the Toronto black community shifted in response to a variety of social and political events similar to those occurring south of the Canadian/US border. In 1911 the census enumerated only 468 Blacks, however significant numbers of immigrants from the Caribbean and the US subsequently changed the face of the black community. In the early part of the 20th century, the city saw a huge influx of British West Indian\textsuperscript{105} and American Blacks\textsuperscript{106} who responded to the employment opportunities provided by the railroad industry. The West Indians established a number of organizations and social clubs, based primarily on Marcus Garvey's black nationalistic ideology.\textsuperscript{107} However, the Americans represented a moderate position and did not tend to strike a strong allegiance to these organizations, nor did they align themselves with the old-liners and native Canadians. Despite the fact that de jure segregation was not condoned, interracial marriages were discouraged within both black and white communities.

By 1941, a social welfare agency reported a Toronto Black population of between 4,000 and 5,000, while the 1951 Census recorded only 1,000. However, enumeration methods during the 1940s and 1950s were unreliable and consequently produced

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{105} During World War I, the population expanded due to an influx of British West Indians who came to fill a number of employment vacancies in the mines and shipyards and to serve as porters and waiters on the railroads (Hill, 1961; Winks, 1997).  
\textsuperscript{106} Winks (1997) notes that a group of Harlem Negroes immigrated to Montreal during the US period of prohibition (487).  
\textsuperscript{107} Garvey advocated a race conscious approach and promoted a back to Africa agenda. The Universal Negro Improvement Association was established in 1927 but it was not a well-accepted organization among Canadian and American-born Blacks who rejected the black nationalism ideology.}
conflicting statistical data including the discrepancy in racial identification by racialized individuals themselves. Black ghettos did not develop in Toronto, despite a high concentration of African Canadians living in the lower end of Ward IV, commonly referred to as the “District.” Italians, Jews, Portuguese, Chinese, Ukrainians and Anglo-Saxons also populated the area as well, making it an area in transition, a reception centre for post World War II immigrants, who were poor and lived in conditions of overcrowding and inadequate open space for parks and playgrounds (Head & Lee, 1975; Hill, 1960).

Although many prosperous African Canadians were able to buy homes in other parts of the city without discrimination, renters repeatedly encountered rejection. In Toronto it proved difficult to establish a cohesive black community as the black residents had dispersed throughout the city and suburbs and did not continue to participate in black organizations or their activities. At the same time, many second generation West Indians also shirked their former cultural values and ways of life and began to assimilate into the larger Canadian society (Head & Lee, 1975:17).

The oldest, most privileged segment of the community referred to as ‘old-line’ black families tended to fulfill white-collar positions and pointed to the accomplishments of previous individuals with pride and satisfaction. The old-liners demonstrated a preponderance of “inter-racial marriage patterns, non-involvement in Negro

\[108\] Examples of these accomplishments are seen in the histories of Wm. Peyton Hubbard and Anderson Abbott.
organizations, high integration in the city’s institutions and a general abhorrence of race consciousness” (Hill, 1960: v).

for the most part, the old-liners’ are regarded with scorn by the professionally trained, business-oriented West Indians, who assert the East Enders are not ‘race people’ and have done nothing to advance the cause of the Toronto Negroes (Hill, 1960:255).

A few black organizations developed during this period, but most of the black residents integrated relatively smoothly into mainstream life and found ways in which to participate in the diverse activities available in the mainstream settings. Unlike some other areas in southern Ontario, segregated institutions did not develop in Toronto and black organizations such as the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Colored People were not strongly supported on a national scale (Winks, 1997: 474). In the 1940s organizations such as the United Negro Improvement Association were established to promote black interests and resist discriminatory practices based on race. The Brotherhood of Railway Workers complied with the withdrawal of racial restrictions and granted access to the Sleeping Car Porters who were mainly West Indians and in his

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109 Winks (1997) notes that the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Colored People had more influence in Nova Scotia where it was closely affiliated with the black churches (474).
report, Head (1975) points out they were “often the originators of a strong activist spirit” (16).

Hill (1960) denotes three distinct periods in the development and socialization of a black community in Toronto. The original settlers made up the ‘old-liners’ group and collectively promoted an agenda of assimilation and absorption but as the social climate evolved in the United States, many emigrated back to their birth place. “The children of the old-line families shared in the upswing of inter-racial marriages and withdrew from the one formal institution – Home Service Association – that their parents had supported” (Hill, 1960:vi).

By the 1930s the uncommitted attitude of the Canadian government left many African Canadians in a dilemma for they could see that, in comparison to Canada the US offered greater economic prosperity for them, but they would have to live under conditions of racial segregation. In Canada they ostensibly were given *de jure* “equal” status but in actual fact they could not count on any support against racial discrimination without the assistance of national black organizations, grievance agencies, educational or legislative back-ups.

During the 1940s, many of the more prosperous families left the District and the early West Indian based organizations were abandoned as their descendants rejected the race-consciousness of their parents. “Professional and business Negroes realize that social status is not elevated by association with floundering Negro organizations, and simultaneously discover that participation in the social organizations of the white
community is for the most part encouraged” (Hill, 1960:vi). It would seem that the “myth” of a black community did not transpire into reality because of the traditionally divisive sub-groups, the disruption of the organizations, alienation from parental race-consciousness by descendants and the very strong pattern of social integration uniquely featured in the city of Toronto. However, Hill (1960) warns that although integration was practiced, there remained a negative feeling among those who identified openly (or were identified by others) as Black, particularly among the lower class District families. He suggests that this was aggravated by the lack of local black heroes or models in a city such as Toronto, where most Blacks participated in an overwhelmingly white society (Hill, 1960, vi).

After World War II, the social and economic prospects for African Canadians expanded as it did for everyone. New industrial development and a wider selection of employment raised the job ceiling and opened up new residential possibilities for many black residents as they began to move out of the District. Once again, a unique aura settled upon the Toronto110 suburbanites, for as the black population spread to surrounding Toronto areas, they faced no significant opposition to the move. These events coincided with the further disintegration of many black organizations, and in particular the Universal Negro Improvement Association (Hill, 1960:347). Generally the community experienced a conflict of interests as the older generation attempted to

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110 Hill (1960) notes a significant difference in Halifax and Windsor, both of which experienced severe racial conflict and Blacks were
preserve some sense of racial solidarity while the next generation sought to disassociate from traditional affiliations. This transition may also have been a result of the "great variance in roles that they must assume as they attempt to define their relationship to the outer society" (Hill, 1960: 349).

After the war, new employment opportunities became available but racist incidents continued to occur and black workers suffered discrimination on the job. In 1944 the Racial Discrimination Act prohibited the display of discriminatory symbols. In the 1950s the Fair Employment Practices Act and the Fair Accommodation Practices Act were aimed at ensuring equality and social justice. In 1958 the Anti-Discrimination Commission was established to publicize human rights issues in Ontario and in 1961 transformed into the Ontario Human Rights Commission headed by Dr. Daniel G. Hill.

When the Abbotts returned to Toronto in 1889, Grace was twelve years old, Ida was eleven and Gordon was only four. They attended the integrated schools of the big city, while their older siblings, Wilson completed a pharmacy program and Helene completed a kindergarten teacher’s program at the University of Toronto. Two years later, in 1891, the entire Abbott clan removed to Chicago. However, the family had retained strong ties with the Toronto community and eventually they returned and Anderson renewed his friendship with William Peyton Hubbard and together they forged their ideals onto the municipal front. Their friendship was augmented when Grace, married William’s son, Fred, a successful young man who later became prominent as the

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111 The Abbott home was situated in the Parkdale district of Toronto, on the corner of King and Dowling.
Commissioner of the Toronto Transit Commission. Fred and Grace’s son, Frederick, later became the Secretary to the Commissioner of Assessment and Property for Toronto and also served with distinction with the Tuskegee Black Flyers\footnote{The documentary, \textit{The Tuskegee Airmen}, provides an excellent accounting of the situation for black airmen in the United States at that time.} during World War II as a Warrant Officer.

Like her sisters, Grace was light-skinned and yet had married into a black family. Whenever family functions occurred, or American relatives visited, they all convened at the Hubbard house, which served as the family hub. Little personal information about Grace has been documented, but it would seem that she enjoyed a pleasant, middle-class lifestyle, married to a prestigious business man who was well respected in the Toronto political and social scheme. Various anecdotes refer to the occasional situation that called for a verification that the family should remain aware of their tenuous social position which rested on the family achievements. Thus although race remained a prominent issue in their lives, the Abbotts found ways to accommodate their situation and resist racism.

Anderson and Mary Ann’s youngest child, Gordon was born in Dundas, Ontario, in 1885. When the family removed to Chicago he was still a child. As his older brother and sisters wielded their way between racial barriers, Gordon was likely benevolently protected and indulged, but as an adolescent, Gordon had his own agenda in mind. Quite unlike his siblings, who had attended university and settled into dignified lifestyles, Gordon would later regret his rejection of a post secondary education. In those early
years of the 20th century, Gordon displayed traits of that forthright spirit so prevalent in other family members and he impulsively chose to follow the lure of car racing, which had become so popular during his youth. At the time, automobiles were still very new and exciting and around 1910 to 1912, they beckoned him to Buffalo where he joined the famous Thomas Flyer Company (founded by Wilson Abbott’s cohort, Henry Thomas from the Elgin Settlement), as a plant inspector. On weekends, he teamed up with a driver, serving as a racing car mechanic. One day he even drove the Thomas Flyer entry in the famous cross-country race, from New York to Buffalo.

Perhaps he had had his fill of noble and ardent gestures on the part of the black race, like his father, but as BA put it, “Frankly, I think he was a bit of a rebel. It was as if everyone else was seeking to be part of the ‘upper’ class and that just wasn’t his thing” (R.Abbott, 1996). While in Buffalo, Gordon was employed by the New York Railway Signal Company. There his job consisted of installing and monitoring railway signals on the New York Central Line that ran from Buffalo to New York City.

Eventually his father’s oratory and negotiating skills caught up with him and he entered the field of management and union relations where he became a “working man’s advocate.” At this time, he appears to advocate the Marxist view that “political development is an expression of economic development” (Roger, 1991: 15). In his work relations, Gordon deftly employed Gramsci urgings that “the hegemony of a dominant class is exercised in civil society by persuading the subordinate classes to accept the values and ideas which the dominant class has itself adopted, and by building a network
of alliances” (Roger, 1991:18). It would seem that the ways of Gordon’s predecessors had become obsolete and ineffective as the new hegemonic spheres presented a counter culture to block old forces within society and influence new modes of production. As this newly acquired consciousness filtered across the continent, the hegemonic influences were reconfigured and relations of power through persuasion and coercion changed the consensus of what was considered to be the norm. Gordon moved with the times and seized a limited opportunity to remain stable in a turbulent world.

In Gordon Abbott’s day racism influenced social structures in a very differently way than it did in his father’s time. Physical characteristics had become the critical factor in designating race and in North America two categories were generally used as the deciding criteria for privilege: white and non-white. Whiteness had historically proven an intangible entity and for the most part had been defined according to what it was not. This had serious economic implications as well and Haney Lopez (2000) claims that it significantly shaped both economic prospects as well as politics as a “race-conscious market screens and selects us for manual jobs and professional careers, red-lines financing for real estate, green-lines our access to insurance, and even raises the price of that car we need to buy… race mediates every aspect of our lives…[r]ace suffuses all bodies of law, not only obvious ones like civil rights” (164).

In 1917 Gordon married a white woman and as the economic depression deepened, he assumed a white identity, thereby shirking the burdens that had both enabled and constrained his father and grandfather. It was not easy to maintain a strong
family connection but with a wife and three children, he did what he had to do to survive. Passing as white allowed him to take on new challenges that reflected the issues of the day. With his light skin, good education, soft-spoken manner and relatively secure social position, he could not be easily classified as black any longer, for the definition had shifted to include Caribbean and African immigrants who often embodied a very different culture, language and way of life.

By 1930, Gordon was employed by the privately-owned Toronto Power Company, which generated power from a plant just above Niagara Falls, transmitting it through to Toronto. He worked as a stationary engineer at a steam plant on Terauley Street (Bay Street), between Queen and Dundas streets. It was not long before Ontario Hydro, or then the Ontario Electric Power Commission, monopolized the industry across Ontario. Gordon moved on to work as an electrical sub-foreman for Hydro at the Davenport station. The Hydro managers were impressed by his eloquence and the warm rapport he was able to establish with everyone he met. They invited him to develop a Hydro Employee Association, which later became the forerunner of CUPE and then the Power Workers Union of Ontario. Gordon Abbott was its first President.

Hydro continued to appreciate Gordon’s abilities and later asked him to leave the union and join the management team. Initially he began as a training officer and taught courses on Electricity and General Administration, for what was later to become the Lineman Training School. Shortly after that, he was promoted to the position of Grievance Officer and hence forth, handled all the grievances for management for the
entire commission. As the years flew by, the details of Gordon’s black ancestry faded from the family stories and finally slipped out of reach upon his death in 1950, just a few months after my mother and father married.

He never did tell her about her illustrious ancestors. Perhaps he never planned to, but we would like to think that as the racial tension eased within the prosperous climate of the times, he might have relented. However, he died so suddenly that no one really had a chance to think about the future and how the family secret would ever be resurrected or even resolved.

Gordon had been the son of a prominent black physician who had made name for himself across the continent. It was no secret and there was never any attempt to hide the fact that the family was black. Indeed, they celebrated their ability to overcome racial barriers to attain a form of social justice and equality as a form of racial uplift. Did they actually achieve “equality”? It appears to be a matter of perception of the moment, based on individual agendas and experiences. Gordon was seen as a light-skinned black man from a black perspective, but merely “quite dark” from a white perspective. Nevertheless, he lived as black for the first thirty years of his life. Not until he was married to a white woman, did he leave a part of his racial identity behind him. He chose to do what many people did in those circumstances. He went about his business within a mainstream society that was “colour blind” and that did not ask or provoke the question; he refused to acknowledge a racial classification by ignoring any reference to his racial identity in public, and in this case, it would seem with his daughter; he did not forsake his family,
nor his relationships but he kept them private in order to protect his immediate and
his extended family from the repercussions of racial discrimination. Ultimately, it would
appear that Gordon did his best to eliminate the colour line and reject the process of
racialization on himself and his immediate family.
2.5 Summary

Thus an interesting phenomenon occurred as the Abbott children began to forge their new careers and start families of their own. When Anderson and Mary Ann lived in Chicago, their daughters would have been in their twenties, and likely looking for prospective husbands. We note that two of them did marry American Blacks, Helen a dentist, and Ida a postman. Wilson, the eldest son, followed in his father's footsteps, pursued a medical career and eventually married into the white race. Gordon and Grace returned to Toronto with their parents. Grace resumed her romance with her father's best friend's son, Fred Hubbard, and eventually they married and lived as black. Conversely, after Gordon finished his secondary education, he went off on his own adventure to live in Buffalo in a black community. By the time he returned to Toronto there were few old-line Blacks left and when he married a white woman it must have seemed strategically astute to simply assume a white identity. It would have been very difficult for Gordon to assume a black identity when he had relatively fair skin, straight hair and light-coloured eyes. It would have taken an enormous effort to maintain a black identity in the midst of the West Indian community and perhaps it was only natural to slip into the mode of least resistance, thereby raising the ceiling for the next generation of descendents.

Contrary to what Anderson Abbott predicted, the races did not amalgamate but rather differentiated on the basis of skin colour and dominant culture. As Winks (1997) points out, Canadian and American Blacks sought accommodation, particularly through
the churches and schools\textsuperscript{113} within mainstream society and in many cases either endured or "accepted the dominance of that community and worked neither to undermine it nor to become equal to it but to find a guaranteed role to play within it" (480). Winks (1997) further points out that those who did assert themselves passed over one of three borders; the color border, the residential and employment border or the political border in the US – all strategies employed by Abbotts.

In fairness Winks (1997) contends that there was little choice involved. In order to have a greater influence on black interests, Canadian Blacks would have had to amalgamate with the US black organizations and their specific agendas. This would have proven counterproductive with their long-established British affiliation for the "Canadian and British governments could not have tolerated activist black Canadian residents who similarly devoted their chief energies to continued identification with another country" (481). Furthermore, in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century it would place them in a position of seeking political sanctuary from a country they had recently fled due to oppressive conditions.

Winks (1997) argues that the resulting dilemma lay in the structure of the Canadian mosaic that did not initially lend itself to the process of cultural assimilation but rather encouraged "retention of their identifiable old world cultures" (482). Where was the light-skinned black Canadian to go? Wilson Ruffin Abbott shirked his US affiliation

\textsuperscript{113} Winks (1997) asserts that the schools advocated accommodation by teaching "values that divested the Negro of his own legitimate cultural heritage, and the churches...stressed that final grand accommodation to come in the hereafter, diverting eyes from the immediate problems of the day" (480).
(although he likely had never been a voting US citizen) when he immigrated to Canada and became a naturalized citizen in 1847.\textsuperscript{114} The subsequent descendents in the early half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century were left with the choices posed by Winks – to assimilate into the Canadian or American mainstream by passing as “white,” or by crossing over the Canada/US border to live as “black” within a black, ethnic community.

The implications of these events will be taken up in Chapters 4 and 5 where the present-day descendents will be polled to ascertain the long-term affect of the choices made by their forebears. The narratives and experiences of the descendents whose antecedents chose to pass as “white” versus those who chose to live as “black” and immigrate to the US will be compared within an intergenerational context.

\textsuperscript{114} Nominal Index to Upper Canada, Naturalization Records 1828-1850 (P.A.C., RG5, B47, Volume 7).
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

"The purpose of research is to discover answers to questions through the application of systematic procedures."\textsuperscript{114}

3.1 Introduction

The present study is an attempt to bring history to life and provide meaning to those who share an interest in the lives and experiences of those who came before them. Archival research has provided a unique backdrop to the events that motivated certain individuals in the Abbott family to conduct their lives in a way that provided fulfilment, economic stability and success and ultimately allowed them to achieve a certain degree of accommodation into mainstream society.

3.1.1 Research Rationale

The first part of the study explains the shift in the forms of historical research and interpretation provides a chronology of historical events, a description of the racial climate at the times of those events and a description of how the Abbott individuals responded to the events with respect to the process of racialization.

\textsuperscript{114} Berg, B. L. (2001). \textit{Qualitative research methods for the social sciences}. Toronto: Allyn and Bacon, 6.
The second part of the study integrates the literature on the development of self and relates the ways in which Abbott descendents have constructed their own racial identity in response to the actions of their predecessors and other present day social forces through a narrative investigation.

3.1.2 The Questions

The study incorporated an historical overview of the life experiences of family members, some of whom had the opportunity to pass as white. The research consisted of interviews of members of my own Black/white family. Although Frankenberg suggests that white people tend to view themselves as racially and culturally “neutral” rather than privileged or dominant, this study focused on why it is important to look at the racial (less)ness of the white experience (51). Frankenberg (1993) reminds us that the landscapes of childhood are crucially important in creating the backdrop against which later transformations must take place. Looking at the social geography of race in the childhoods of people of mixed race may then provide information and tools useful to us in the project of comprehending and changing our places in the relations of racism (55).

This study begins with the notion that the racial/cultural identities stem from our personal experiences and social geographies to our daily environments; the purpose of the
study is to identify some of the historical, social and political processes that brought these environments into being. It was hoped that in reconceptualizing past experience the participants would recognize how the process of racialization had impacted their lives and contributed to the construction of their racial identity. It was hoped that the self-reflective exercise might heighten a stronger appreciation and awareness of black/white identities. The following questions were explored from the perspectives of the various participants.

Past - How did social, political and economic factors in 19th century North America influence the ways in which members of the early black elite, such as Wilson and Anderson Abbott resist or accommodate the forces of racism? In what ways did they use their elite status and skin colour to resist or accommodate the process of racialization?

Present - How do social, political and economic factors in 20th century North America influence the construction of black and/or white racial/cultural identities and affiliations in the Abbott descendants? In what ways do they use their middle class, racial identity and skin colour to resist or accommodate racialization forces today?
3.1.3 Research Design

Through a comparative historical approach this researcher has essentially stepped back in time to bring light to some of the experiences of her own predecessors, as they reacted to the early forces of racialization in Canada and the US. Through the examination of a collection of archival research, genealogical studies, and the works of other researchers, the researcher demonstrates how “the meaning of reality is, in essence, in the ‘eyes and mind of the beholders’” (Wiersman, 2000: 238).

3.1.4 The Procedure

Twenty adult members of my own interracial family, the Abbotts were invited to participate in the study for the purpose of taking a comparative look at how and why some of them maintained a “black” identity while others melted or passed into the dominant “white” majority. The participants were asked to share some of their perceptions with respect to their family history in terms of kinship affiliation, racial/cultural identity and what they saw as the future prospects for future generations. They were encouraged to reflect on their own racial identity and discuss how it affected their lives and those of their children socially, politically and economically. The approach was based on Frankenberg’s (1993) notion that we all live racially structured lives built on a system of differentiation which shapes those upon whom it bestows privilege as well as those it opposes (51). The participants were asked to determine if they felt that racism
played a part in the decision of certain ancestors to pass or not pass as white and how that decision ultimately affected their lives and those of their children today.

3.2 Method

3.2.1 Questionnaire

Before being interviewed, all participants were asked to respond to a demographic survey on age, gender, marital status, education, employment, income, residential location, physical characteristics, and racial classification as identified by self and by others.

3.2.2 Interviews

Participants were interviewed privately and taped, in person or over the telephone for about 1 hour, within a 2-month period. The questions that were posed were open-ended, but pursued a line of questioning that directed the participant into specific issues of discussion. Although there was a risk of interviewer bias, the researcher attempted to develop a format that encouraged the participants to offer full and honest answers that reflected their personal opinions and experiences. Their own concerns and biases were also discussed at this time.
3.2.3 Focus groups

An informal focus group provided an opportunity to discuss some of the key issues that arose from the questionnaires and private interviews. Although the researcher initiated some discussions, personal narratives and storying were encouraged throughout the sessions on the part of the participants. Family members explored the factors contributing to the process of denial or acceptance of racial/cultural identity across sequential generations of extended family through dialogue, by sharing their experiences, concepts and perspectives about their shared ancestry. This experience was intended to demonstrate the interconnectedness of all members within the study group and yet acknowledge the variety of responses to a similar heritage.

3.2.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed to demonstrate similarities and differences of experiences within a family of related individuals based on aspects of racial identification and shared experiences of racialization. The responses were related to the thesis questions and the research literature.

3.2.5 Implications

It was intended that the short and long-term effects of racialization and the subsequent maneuvers of various individuals to avoid racialization and discrimination
might become more apparent through an increased awareness of the varied experiences of individuals within a single family of mixed racial identification.

3.2.6 Participants

Twenty Abbott related adults, including grandparents, parents, children and grandchildren, siblings, nieces, nephews, cousins, aunts and uncles, presently residing in either the United States or Canada, were invited to participate in the study. The international cross-section provided an opportunity to examine the issues from both an American and a Canadian perspective. The intergenerational sample provided a longitudinal format to the study that related to the historical context of the information to be collected.

3.2.7 Recruitment

Individuals were invited to participate in the study through a letter that explained the intent and format of the inquiry. Invitations were sent to adult members of my family who had already indicated an interest in participating in the study. Although all of the invited individuals responded positively to the request, only 17 of them returned the surveys and took part in the study.
3.2.8. **Risks and benefits**

It was anticipated that participants would suffer minimal risk as they were already aware of the family history and had indicated an eagerness to expand their own awareness and understand the experiences of other members of the family. Participants were told that they could withdraw at any time and cease to participate at any stage of the study. Only those willing to participate were involved in this part of the study.
CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

I've often thought that who a person is in this world is a two-fold concept; one, being how one views oneself and the other, how the world views a person.\textsuperscript{115}

4.1 Introduction

The first section of this chapter presents an overview of the literature that pertains to the social, economic and political forces that tend to influence ways in which a racial/cultural identity is formed. Family stories and experiences are integrated with the literature to demonstrate examples of how some of the Abbott descendents constructed or deconstructed their racial/cultural identities. The second section of this chapter presents the demographics and statistical findings of the data collected from the participant surveys. The following chapter presents the interview and survey responses from present-day Abbott family members who participated in the study which addressed the thesis question: \textit{How did social, political and economic factors in 20\textsuperscript{th} century North America influence the construction of black and/or white racial/cultural identities and affiliations in the Abbott descendents? To what extent do their middle class, racial identity and skin colour allow them to resist or accommodate racialization forces today?}

\textsuperscript{115} AR Personal communication, 2003.
4.2 Literature Review

To trace what you can recognize in yourself back to them; to find the connection of spirit and heart you share with them, who are, after all, your United Front.117

There is no doubt that kinship affiliations can be considered both a blessing and a curse. When an ancestor embodies a legacy of honour and accomplishments, awareness of it may well instill a personal sense of pride and belonging in the descendent. If an ancestor is found to have lived and performed contrary to our sense of moral values, even when it was acceptable during their own times, the descendents may contend with unwarranted but nevertheless, real feelings of embarrassment, shame or unworthiness. Despite the fact that these ancestors may be several generations removed, it would appear that this disconcerting tendency to affiliate can have a powerful and in some cases, eternal impact on families.

Frankenberg's (1993) compelling hypothesis suggests that three significant shifts have occurred chronologically around the paradigm of race and cultural discourse and the consequent process of racialization: the first defines race in essentialist terms based on a concept of biological inequality, the second addresses the mindset that promotes essential

sameness, colour-blindness or what some people of colour have noted as evasioneness and the third focuses again on difference as defined by people of colour.

Polkinghorne (1988) explains that our personal identities and self-concept are achieved through a narrative method of developing and expressing a story that is constantly being revised as new events unfold into experiences. Bruner (1990) concludes that “self, then, is not a static thing or a substance, but a configuring of personal events into an historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will be” (116). Poston (1990) expands on this premise and proposes that personal identity is meshed with reference group orientations based on racial identity, racial esteem, and racial ideology, in the process of defining the development of a racial identity. Schwartz (1998a) claimed that although this model worked well for children who embraced more than one race, it did not always suit those of multiracial heritage who preferred to consider themselves as monoracial or those who chose to acknowledge only one race. Stephan (1992) ties these concepts together by proposing that the self acquires identities as meanings through social interaction. Therefore ethnic identity, “is particularly important to the self because it is a master status, an identity that overrides all others in others’ judgements of the self [and as such, is] basic to the establishment of self-meaning” (Stephan, 1992:51).

From a historical perspective, physical characteristics have been the critical factor in identifying members of a race. Legal definitions have ranged from the One Drop Rule to the Blood Quantum category which was created by the US federal government to
“elevate” Native Americans who qualified for benefits (Reddy, 1997; Wilson, 1992). Although Canada did not enforce stringent definitions of race in the same way, most people were well aware of the American code and its influence permeated our social constructs and practices (Backhouse, 1999; Valverde, 1992). Until recently the census both in the United States and Canada directed persons of mixed racial and ethnic origins to choose a single category that most closely reflected the way they were recognized by their community. In other words, they were classified according to the way they looked (Daniel, 1992; Wilson, 1992).

Physical characteristics are important criteria with respect to the identity of multiracial individuals especially with respect to the extent that they compare the measure of their self-worth to a white model (Bradshaw, 1992; Golden, 2000; Kilbride, 2000; Mahtani, 2000; Reddy, 1997). hooks (1996) maintains that “[t]hese are the variables that white researchers often do not consider when they measure the self-esteem of black females with a yardstick that was designed based on values emerging from white experience” (xiii). Although many people today attempt to resist the forces that promote stereotyping it is not easy. Gardner (1998) highlights a sensitive point. “Look at TV and magazines and the standard of beauty they portray...basically white...This whole issue of light versus dark skin still confronts blacks – that light skin is better, or that dark skin is more authentic than light skin” (2).

Carol Talbot (1984) offered a frank rendition of her personal experiences as a young black woman growing up in Toronto, and explained how the social events of the
time changed her attitudes and behaviour. As a young girl she did not like feeling different but in the 1960s during a climate of black consciousness she saw herself in a new light. “My Afro was a public statement of my identity and the knowledge and courage it took to make that statement were the first small steps towards evolving a really ‘black’ me” (Talbot, 1984: 51). For those of a darker hue like Talbot, the era that celebrated Black Power offered a tantalizing means of retaliation “in terms of the assimilation bargain” and ironically, it became hard to be white during those militant years (Blauner, 1990:16). Omi and Winant (1986) suggest that a new concept of ethnicity based on behavioural factors rather than biological ones accounts for the gradual assimilation of people of colour into mainstream North American society. They point out that when new social paradigms based on class and nation evolved during the 20th century, the practice of racial passing served as a valid and inevitable manifestation of the assimilation process (Backhouse, 1999; Frankenberg; 13; Hare, 1991; Schuler, 1932; 1998; Wilson, 1983).

Today, multiracial individuals enjoy several options when choosing a racial/cultural affiliation and many parents make a special effort to engender a sense of pride in all aspects of their children’s heritage. However, some people of colour challenge racialization forces by rejecting any designation that depicts them as “not white,” preferring instead to be classified as “human”(Pinderhughes, cited in Schwartz, 1998a). They contend that a sense of individualism is of prime importance, not racial identification (Pfeiffer, 2003:89).
Developing an ancestral or kinship affiliation within the Abbott family involved a number of factors, one of which is a racial or ethnic affiliation or as Max Weber put it, a real or fictive kinship which embodies a “sense of common provenance and history” (Spickard, 1989:12). This sense of kinship is based on a number of variables such as common ancestors, religious affiliation, physical characteristics, nationality and family traditions and values. However a feeling of belonging to a kinship group also involves the processes of cultural and structural assimilation and the role they play in the development of social networks and power politics. Spickard (1989) suggests that a sense of kinship identity is established through identification with an ethnic group even if the various branches do not participate in the same cultural activities. Weber’s notion of “imputed common descent” (Spickard, 1989: 15) shows how kinship affiliation transgresses the practice of intermarriage, for the choice of a spouse is often made on the basis whether they are “one of them.” Although intermarriage does entail an aspect of loss with the kinship group to some extent, the black and white Abbott descendents of today appear to have constructed meaningful connections to their ancestors in a variety of ways.

Racial identity is intimately linked to a feeling of similarity to one’s parents on a physical, emotional and psychological level (Phinney & Rotheram, 1987). In the case of interracial families however, the race and culture of the parent may be somewhat different than that of the child and therefore prove difficult to establish the threads of connection to the ancestral kinship group in order for ancestral pride and family stories to
become relevant. Reddy (1991) suggests that these parents might find it helpful to re-
story their his/stories in a way that is applicable to their child’s experiences and rela-
tionships. In some cases, the stories that are passed on may be true but sometimes they may be contrived. In my case, without the knowledge of my black heritage, growing up in a white community in the 1950s and 60s, my mother’s reference to a Spanish great-grandmother provided an explanation for my feelings of difference with respect to my dark complexion. Without this story to fall back on I am quite certain I would have found it very difficult to align myself with only a Scottish ancestry. Even though the Spanish ancestry story was eventually revealed to be false, it served a constructive purpose at the time. As I got older I was able to consolidate other more accurate aspects of my ancestry with my physical appearance. In her personal memoir, Shirlee Taylor Haizlip (1994) traces the lives of ancestors who passed as white two generations earlier and concludes, “that an integrated racial identity offers a far more accurate, far more satisfying, and far more comfortable sense of self than one that accepts the premise of segregation” (149). In my case, my mother had been told that her dark complexion was inherited from her Spanish grandmother and I in turn, enjoyed feeling that like my mother, I had inherited similar traits. We were the only dark ones in the immediate family and it served to bond us together in a unique way that no one else could share. Instead of feeling a sense of negativity or shame about my difference, I was proud to display this signifying aspect of my heritage.

When I visited the Ontario communities of Chatham and North Buxton, I was
startled to find a very different racial atmosphere than I had experienced in Toronto. I found the black people of southwestern Ontario to be very race conscious for they celebrated a proud black history of experiences that contributed to a strong sense of kinship. In my insensitive state I merely understood that they were very fair-skinned and at first I was tempted to presume that they were white. I was quickly enlightened! Yet such an attitude confused me for at the time I did not fully appreciate the connection they had constructed with their predecessors. Later I discovered that this community had suffered a long history of racial conflict and even today, those who left the community for the big city told me that they would sometimes return to find that the experience had somehow transformed them into “outsiders.” It proved to be an insightful experience for me as I began to unearth my own kinship connections and the truth about the hue of my skin.

On one occasion a black cousin who shares the same great-grandparents as me described how her light-skin has always set apart from the rest of her immediate family who were much darker. Despite being proud of her African ancestry, she described a long-standing desire to justify her right to belong within her own black family. Shortly after meeting other black and white cousins at a reunion in Toronto, she told me that she had been able to return to Texas “... with such a sense of pride and wholeness.” It would seem that armed with new awareness of her family history, she was able to reconcile her appearance with her multiracial heritage.

Another black cousin indicated that although he had cast his identity with the
Afro-American community he felt ambivalent about his racial identity as a young adult. “My birth certificate identifies my parents as black. My physical appearance is otherwise. I now realize my ties to family would not allow me to break away to a totally white identity. Additionally, I could not live comfortably, trying to keep one foot in a white camp and another in a black camp” (AS, 1991). In fact, he said that the events of the 60s, Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement actually made it more exciting to be black than white. Nevertheless, the choice becomes more difficult for his children as their mother is white. Now as adults they are caught in their own search for identity. In this case he believes that “having antecedents such as Wilson Ruffin, Anderson Ruffin and Helene Abbott along with other illustrious personage to find pride in could make their choice easier” (AS, 1991).

Graham (1999) notes the contrasting dilemma members of the black elite may encounter of both pride and guilt – “a pride in black accomplishment that is inexorably tied to a lingering resentment about our past, as poor, enslaved blacks and our past and current treatment by whites. On one level, there are those of us who understand our obligation to work toward equality for all and to use our success in order to assist those blacks who are less advantaged. But on another level, there are those of us who buy into the theories of superiority, and who feel embarrassed by our less accomplished black brethren. These self-conscious individuals are resentful of any quality or characteristic that associates them with that which seem ordinary” (18).
In general, it would appear that children initially learn about their ethnicity from others as they gradually become aware of the differences between racial/ethnic groups (Phinney and Rotheram, 1987). The emergence of the ego, dependent on new experiences, new information and developing cognitive abilities, contributes to the awareness of ethnicity and allows the child to self-identify with a racial/ethnic group and this ability to self-identify is contingent upon the acquisition of language and self-understanding (Bruner, 1990).

In the case of the Abbotts, it would appear that a familial or kinship connection has been an important factor in the ability of family members to reconstruct affiliations that had been erased by the family secret. Imber-Black (1999) suggests that the family works as a dynamic organism with critical life-cycle changes and this determines if and when secrets will be created or shattered and whether they will alter the course of the lives of future generations. He explains both sides of the Abbott dynamics. Based on Imber-Black’s (1999) theory, living outside the central family secret of passing like the white Abbotts made it possible for them to shape their identities and behavior in ways that upon revelation of the secret generated feelings of self-doubt, distance, and suspicion. Living on the inside of the secret like the black Abbotts put them in a rather unprecedented position of responsibility, power, anxiety, protectiveness, shame, burden, and fear as they perpetrated the secret (7). As the meaning and historical context of the secret changed over time the collective manner in which the family confronted the revelation critically impacted the way in which the his/story was to be retold.
Originally my earlier efforts to seek out some family history were met with a mixture of positive and negative responses. In one case, my mother’s white cousin declined to participate in the revelation. “I trust you will realize the attitude on the subject is much different in the United States than it is in Canada ... revealing the story will be tragic for my daughter and her four children” (AA, 1991). This secret had powerful relationship implications that exemplified AA’s sense of autonomy in keeping the secret. The challenge to set himself free was exacerbated by his own feelings of betrayal by his father and his desire to protect his children. Imber-Black (1999) explains that this kind of a secret may “lead us to nail the closet door shut” and yet in an effort to protect our loved ones we may “find ourselves mired in a confusing morass of protection and deception that erodes the very relationships we were hoping to preserve” (10). Thus in keeping with this prediction, when he finally told his children they were severely chagrined to think they had been kept ignorant all these years. However within a short period of time, they grasped their new identity with zeal and enthusiastically sought further confirmation.

This new knowledge has definitely changed my feelings of identity. I really don’t know how to explain it other than to say I never really thought I fit. I was kind of a round peg trying to fit into a square hole. I have always felt there was something missing. I know this sounds strange, as it must seem hard to imagine how one can miss something they never knew they had. I feel that with each new family contact I make, or each letter I
receive from relatives, regardless of their racial identity I am a more complete
person (BG, 1991).

Even though the rules had changed over the last century and the need for the
secret no longer existed, the rest of the family, including myself wrestled with the
responsibility of holding onto the secret as Imber-Black (1999) asserts, “We still
struggle with whom to tell, who has a right to know, and at what price such
secrets are kept or opened” (79).

Early in my quest I came upon ML, another maternally related black cousin who
divulged the discovery of an interesting family secret on his paternal side. His father’s
birth certificate indicated a different last name and curiosity led him to his grandmother
who he discovered had changed the last name of herself and her children upon her
divorce. The importance of this historical episode became evident later, when ML and his
family travelled to Richmond, Virginia to attend the family reunion of his cousin,
Governor Lawrence Douglas Wilder, of Virginia. ML described the governor’s bearing,
diction and mannerisms as being very reminiscent of his own father and he described the
experience to be like that of a homecoming—truly remarkable.

Shortly after we exchanged a few letters, ML arranged to travel to Toronto with
his family to meet my family. This would prove to be our first in-person contact and as
the appointed evening approached we gathered to await their imminent arrival. Since we
had no photos of ML’s family, we did not know what to expect. Would they be fair, dark
or black? Sure enough, when the doorbell sounded we eagerly opened the door to reveal some very black faces. Later we had quite a chuckle about it, as ML divulged that they too, had wondered what we would look like and sure enough, as the door swung open, their eyes had settled upon some very white faces.

Although I had found our visit extraordinary, I had not been plagued by any prior anxiety about being accepted by them. I was therefore very touched when he expressed such heart-felt relief and appreciation. “I don’t know what I anticipated, but your warm, thoughtful reception for us was much more than I expected. Everyone among your family and relatives made us feel right at home and part of the family and I cannot thank you enough” (ML, 1991). Since my family considered the reunion a great mutual pleasure, we were quite surprised. I can only speculate about what other types of reception they might have anticipated since surely we were the lucky ones. For those of all of us who had been held in the trap of secrecy for most of our lives, this experience awakened in us a sense of appreciation and admiration for our now extensive kinship group and it propelled me to renew my commitment to continue to do what I could to break down the forces of racialization that had victimized my family.

The construction of a racial identity normally begins when a child identifies with one or both of their parents, often on the basis on physical similarities (Golden, 2000; Rotheram & Phinney, 1987). When a child is of mixed race, this process may create confusion as the child struggles to choose one parent over the other, creating internal anxiety and stress related responses (Gotoweic, 2000; Rotheram & Phinney, 1987).
Parents may identify themselves and/or their children from a variety of classifications but it is always possible that their children may not concur once they become adults and at that point they may construct a very different sense of self. For example, Okun (1996) has noted that adolescents often reconstruct their racial identity even though they may endure subsequent conflicts between their family and friends. “Frequently, they choose a single minority racial identification publicly, believing it is politically correct to do so, while privately still cherishing their multicultural heritage” (Schwartz, 1998a:5). When I asked a biracial friend why he chose to identify as black, he told me that there was no way he could be part black – it was all or nothing for him. He said that growing up in Toronto in the 1960s was like living in a void for he had no other friends who were of mixed race despite the reality that his personal loyalties fluctuated from one race and parent to the other.

It has been suggested that one’s racial/cultural identity is also affected by various life experiences and conflicts (Frankenberg, 1997; Helms, 1990; Rotheram and Phinney, 1987). In some cases, acceptance, denial or acknowledgement of a racial and cultural heritage may well become an issue of significant concern in the quest to establish a sense of personal identity. bell hooks (1996) describes her own painful experience of seeking self-identity as a “…struggle to create self and identity distinct from and yet inclusive of the world around me” (xi). Social and personal aspects of our daily lives tend to be implicated by the racial and cultural identity that we inherit or adopt. Bruner (1996) notes
that "culture shapes the mind, [and] provides us with the toolkit by which we construct not only our worlds, but our very conceptions of our selves and our powers" (x). 118

Many of the early investigations on racial/cultural identity were conducted from a variety of perspectives as developmental and cognitive psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists and sociolinguists addressed it in different ways. Most of them focused on the traditional black/white racial categories pertaining to adult populations within entire cultures rather than on individuals or children. Phinney and Rotheram (1987) coined the term "ethnic socialization," referring to "the developmental processes by which children acquire the behaviors, perceptions, values, and attitudes of an ethnic group, and come to see themselves and others as members of such groups" (11). Their findings showed that children raised in a pluralistic or multicultural society easily integrate the norms, attitudes, and behaviour patterns of other racial groups both in the home environment and at school. Despite the lack of supporting literature, Phinney and Rotheram’s (1987) seminal studies strongly held that children who were raised in two cultures tended to be more flexible, adaptable and to some extent, more creative, depending on factors such as the attitudes of the majority culture, strengths of the minority groups and family interactions.

118 The term culture has also been used to describe different ethnic communities with respect to a specific heritage that depicts such aspects as religion, dress, food, surnames, language, customs, rituals, traditions, forms of expression, and place of origin (Brayboy, 2000).
When children enter the public arena, they are exposed to “an alien system of values” (Aschenbrenner, 1976:344) which may make them feel out of place. These feelings of rejection may then be redirected against the family at home, thus further alienating them from their kinship group. It is in this situation that multiracial children may choose to simply submit to acculturation forces and pass into the dominant society.

Symbolic interaction involves a micro level analysis based on the assumption that racial identity can be created and changed through social interactions and validated by self-understanding and the confirmation of others (Rockquemore and Brunsma, 2002:23). Very early in the search for an understanding of ethnicity in children, Mead (1934) found that children begin to understand the meaning of specific acts in their culture and in turn develop a meaningful and appropriate response. However, more recently it has been observed that as children grow older, they are exposed to media and life experiences that influence their ability to recognize that some of their acquired behaviours are in fact “ethnic” which may make them different from other ethnic groups (Rotheram & Phinney, 1987; Stephen, 1992).

Moran (2001) notes that multiracial children are presented with several options of racial identification according to their genotype, their phenotype and their social connection but not an all-encompassing identity of their full heritage. In the past many interracial couples tended to accept that their children would be classified as black and therefore assisted them in the construction of an identity with that social culture. If they were light-skinned they were aware of the option to pass over into the white group,
although the necessity is not so urgent in the present multicultural climate. Today multiracial children bear a unique social location that encompasses all aspects of their ancestral heritage and it is the duty of parents and educators to ensure that they feel their unique identities are acknowledged and accepted by society.

As the new discourse on the multiracial categories of census recording takes place these children may confront resistance from both sides of their heritage, as they negotiate the forces of racialization that have so often challenged black/white families like the Abbotts.
4.3 Data Collection

An open invitation to participate in the study was extended to all members of the Abbott family in the form of a survey and/or a private interview and/or a focus group session. Some simply returned the surveys. A number indicated that they felt their thoughts and feelings were well represented by siblings and other cousins and they did not feel compelled to respond formally to the survey. Many of the questions in the survey were directed to the white descendants of predecessors who had passed as white and therefore perhaps only those who perceived themselves as affected chose to respond.

Some indicated that they had little to say and that the topic was not of interest to them or did not pertain to them personally. Some preferred to write letters rather than answer specific questions on the survey. Some members chose to converse rather than writing or emailing, while others preferred to informally join a group chat session. Overall, these sessions were family oriented and informal, despite the fact that they were either tape recorded or documented.
4.3.1 Surveys

- Twenty surveys were sent out to individuals who had previously indicated an interest in participating in the study. Seventeen surveys were returned.
- Ten were from white cousins, seven were from black ones.
- Four of the white ones were male, and six were female, all ranging in age from 21 to 73 years.
- Five of the black ones were American males and ranged in age from 40 - 74 years, two were black females, about 50 years of age. A number of women indicated an interest in the study but did formally respond to the surveys preferred to chat informally in an interview and focus group.
- Five of the participants were descendants of Gordon and they assumed white identities, four were descended from Wilson and they assumed white identities, four were descended from Helene and they assumed black identities, two were descended from William and they assumed black identities, one was also from William and she assumed a white identity and one other was descended from a more distant line and he assumed a black identity.
- In total, five were Canadian and twelve were American.
- None of the Canadians had assumed black identities. (Although there is a branch of the family that identifies as black, they did not respond to the survey).
4.3.2 Interviews

The interview process was very fruitful with respect to feedback and data but was not conducted consistently across the participant pool. Not all participants were available for personal interviews. Some were conducted at a family gathering over a single weekend. Some were conducted over the telephone and others were completed at specific appointment times. Some of the participants were more familiar with the researcher than others and had known her for a longer period of time, having participated in previous efforts to extract data and feedback from their racial experiences.

Generally it would appear that the descendants of Anderson’s children, Wilson, Gordon and Helene were the most interested in participating as they were directly related to those particular individuals, had known them well, and in many cases, had patterned their lives after them as role models.

For the most part, the American cousins seemed to be well versed in the questions that the study addressed. They were experienced, well informed and had obviously given the questions thoughtful consideration even before being asked to participate in the study.

On the other hand, the Canadians were not familiar with the questions and tended to struggle with explanations and self analysis with respect to the whole concept of racialization.

All of the participants expressed keen interest in the study and felt that it represented an important and often ignored part of history. They wanted their stories to be heard.
CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The findings of this study were divided into three topics for the purpose of analysis and discussion:

- Constructing Kinship Affiliations
- Constructing a Racial/Cultural Identity
- Constructing Future Generations

5.2 Constructing a Kinship Affiliation

The most profound response from every participant demonstrated an overwhelming sense of pride in the accomplishments of their black and white ancestors. Even the cousins who were only recently aware of their black/white ancestry expressed strong appreciation for the knowledge and were keen to pursue further family research and genealogical study. It was interesting to note that racial affiliation of the participants did not colour their feelings of pride and an eagerness to affiliate with their illustrious black ancestors.
- I am extremely proud. From my perspective the legacy that our ancestors left us has the common thread of people who are sensitive to others and truly embrace diversity (BG, 2003).

- I am very proud of this ancestry. The pride from their deeds encourages the continuation of educating myself on black history and current black issues (SS, 2003).

- I have grown to be extremely proud of my ancestry, and have incorporated our black ancestry into my own racial identity (JR, 2003).

- They affect the pride and strength I derive from just being descended from this stock (AS, 2003).

- It gave me a sense of importance in the world (LR, 2003).

- I feel that whatever made me who I am, I’m GRATEFUL! (EB, 2003)

- It matters very much to me what my predecessors experienced and accomplished. Their deeds affect me very much as I find out who I am and where I came from and what my ancestors went through to survive, reproduce and live in a world such as they lived in. It is an example to me (AR, 2003).

- I am so impressed with the accomplishments of my many distant cousins of color. If anyone compared the educational and professional achievements of them with our “white” family members, this would squelch any sense of racial superiority that some might harbour! (DD, 2003)
I smile and actually feel a shiver of pride and humility in knowing a little about them...belated and posthumously might be the time for honor and respect for those we learn about (DD, 2003).

It would appear that some individuals are prepared to openly acknowledge the rather recent phenomenon of “white” people researching, accepting and celebrating their black heritage. Many would admit that it was common for “black” people to seek a connection to their white ancestry, but Stephen Gregory from Baltimore MD voiced in an interview that rarely was it the reverse (Radio Interview, WOL and XM, March 7, 2004 with Stephen Gregory and Catherine Slaney). He was apparently referring to the fact that today’s generation of Abbotts, both black and white, were actively seeking a connection to their black kinship group because it was a source of pride for them.

Discovering and accepting African ancestry into the mixed heritage which most Americans have been proud to claim seems to have become a new, popular phenomenon. I’m not quite sure just what that means sociologically. Maybe it is a manifestation of the degree to which people of African origin have now been accepted as citizens. It may also signal profound change on the part of those born in the “white” social construct: the concepts of “racial purity” and “white supremacy” may be eroding. Those concepts have power
to arouse some of the populace but the revelations we have accepted in our family are implicit attacks on such false ideas (JD, 2003).

Overall, it would appear that the issues addressed in the study did not affect all of the cousins to the same extent. The white ones who felt most impacted by the “passing” of their ancestors were eager to describe their experiences, but many more indicated that it was an issue too far removed from their daily life today and merely found the history somewhat interesting.

All of the cousins who responded indicated that they understood how and why Anderson’s sons, Wilson and Gordon, had passed as white and did not seem to harbour any strong feelings of shame or resentment over their actions.

- They passed because they could (LR).
- Passing probably made life much easier (EB).
- They passed for personal professional advancement and to protect their children from discrimination. I suspect that there was more pressure to pass in the US than in Canada. Professional opportunities for Blacks were probably greater in Canada and the potential for violence was also lower there (WA).
- I believe that they passed because it was easier for them to allow others to assume they were white. I do not believe that they truly denied their black ancestry, but instead, due to the type of affluent persons they associated with and in
consideration for their children to blend in with the majority of society, the
black ancestry became an issue left from discussion (SS).

- They passed to gain a greater economic and social freedom for themselves and
  their children. Also they just might have decided they didn’t want to marry a
  woman of African descent but preferred a woman of European descent (AS).
- They passed because they were men and had access and opportunity to move up
  (MG).
- They passed because they married white and it made it easier for everyone (MY).
- They passed because they were light and for education and professional reasons
  (WS).
- I think that my grandfather really wanted his descendants to be “white” because
  of the social benefits this would bring (WA).
- People did what had to be done to survive and better their position in life. It is
  though, a shame, that many could not reach back and bring some of those with the
  deeper hue along (DD).
- As they set out on this voyage across the colorline, none of them realized in what
  way or how quickly society would change. None were very experienced in society
  outside of DC. They were simply caught up in a very unfair and prejudiced world.
  They did what they did and reacted to a world they lived in without recognizing
  the long-term results (AR).
Some felt a twinge of resentment and disappointment, perhaps even betrayal that their predecessors had not trusted them enough to tell them about their mixed ancestry.

- I am quite ambivalent about Wilson and Gordon Abbott passing as white. On one level, I can understand that they lived in a time of extreme racial prejudice and as dedicated family men; they only wanted what was best for their family. On the other hand, I feel that they ‘sold out.’ I view our family history as something to be proud of, and I feel that by passing, they minimized and devalued the accomplishments of the family (JR).

- It is my contention that the whole ruse was for the egos of those who perpetuated it and not for the good of their children. In families where passing in entered into as a way to provide a better life for one’s children it is often done with the understanding and acknowledgement of the children. They are introduced to their black relatives and exposed to the other ways of life. There are visits, which were at times clandestine in nature, in an effort not to give away the secret identities of those passing. These situations provide an understanding by the youth involved rather than a fear of who they might be. There are many such stories within my family branch. Often stories are told of members passing for white that took chances and didn’t care about giving themselves away as they helped and assisted those who were unable to pass for white. Surprisingly almost no animosity has
been shown by darker relatives in my family for individuals that were light enough to pass and took that opportunity (AR).

- I am very proud of this ancestry and am only ashamed that it was kept hidden for so long although I understand that it was done to ‘protect’ us (WA).
- I do wish my father had had enough trust in me to tell me about it (MY).
- My lack of racial identity was imposed by others. I have personally identified my own racial identity. I suffered because it robbed me of my identity. Their passing would not have had to have that affect had it been done in a less extreme way (AR).
- They could never have been white if they were known to be black (AR).

MY remembers how deeply in love her parents were. However, she rationalizes that social pressures must have influenced their decision to pass, not only for their children’s sake, but also for themselves and the sake of her mother’s family.

- My parents obviously didn’t have a problem personally with the difference although they did make every effort to “pass” as both white. I don’t agree with their decision, yet I understand how difficult it must have been for them in those days. My mother must have been quite brave, although I think her family was very understanding. I remember my mother often saying as I grew up that Dad
came from a very good family. I guess she thought that someone might find out and tell me differently (MY).

BA did not realize that passing strategies were being practiced when he was a child.

- Of course I knew that Aunt Nell and Aunt Ida must have had a family over there. But, in my day that was a long way away and not until later, did I realize that a decision must have been made that there should be no visits. When we were young, we were often taken along to visit the American side of the family. As we got older, only my younger sister was taken along. I guess they thought that she wouldn’t notice, but we boys were left behind when we got older (BA)

EB related a story of passing that affected him personally.

- When I was in college, the college president's son, BB, who was white, came to visit me in Mobile. We were getting ready to catch a taxi when we were stopped by the Police just for being together. BB passed as “colored” & showed some pictures taken at the college to prove it He visited me a few years ago & we laughed about it (EB).

One cousin sums up the gender issue.
In that time frame it was common for black men to “marry up” or marry lighter skinned women and obviously white would be best if they were in a place where that would be an option. The women had less choice and less of a desire to “marry up.” Men as the more dominant figures at that time, were in more of a position to be doing the selecting than were women and were more driven to select lighter skinned partners than were women (AR).

One described how he tends to allow the circumstances and the location to guide him in his decision to indicate a racial affinity. At other times he finds that his physical appearance dictates how other see him.

Because I am mixed race, how people respond to me is mostly a reflection of their perspective rather than how I look. In the US at some times I’ve been thought of as black, or part-black, as East Indian, or Latino, or as white with a great tan. Perceptions varied with the income, race, exposure, education of the perceiver. Outside of the US, I’ve been thought of as Puerto Rican, near US military facilities, East Indian or Malay in South East Asia, and even half-Chinese or Japanese, when I spoke their language. It is so incredibly relative (JS).

The strongest factors that influence my racial identity are the physical reality of my heredity and ancestry. Sometimes I allow others to assume I am something
else but it often makes me uncomfortable. It may in part be a form of
deception, self-preservation and good strategy. It’s none of anybody’s business
what or who I am racially (AR).

Some branches of the family have discovered a connection to Native American/Canadian
lineages and historically their predecessors have incorporated this heritage along with
their black/white heritage. Others have excluded their black heritage completely and
instead inserted a Native one to explain their “non-white” physical characteristics.

- Some of my distant cousins of color and members of their family could have
  passed as “white,” but chose not to live their lives that way. I am proud of them
  for that but understand that others chose to live as “white,” with some Native
  American lineage confessed (DD).

- Even though he [distant cousin] he denies his black heritage, he will not
  relinquish his alignment with his Indian heritage (DD).

DD shares some personal correspondence from another cousin on the topic of passing as
it pertained to her own family [not an Abbott relation].

- Passing in my day, was only hoping that someone of color would not stir the
  waters to question who you were. We as those people labelled black by the US
Census be it right, wrong or indifferent, accept this. I personally though fair-skinned, never felt prouder of my Blackness. When my mother told be as a preteen of 11 or 12, when we were taking our nightly stroll on Broad St. in Philadelphia, PA, that she wanted me to stop and look up. I did so, and she asked me what I saw. I responded ‘endless sky’ and she told me that that was my limit. So, it was something, knowing that this lovely, loving woman who had more finesse, class, breeding and education in her little finger than most would have in their entire body, was limited on this planet by a single thing called “color” (B).

I’ve always thought that passing was a cop out. Many of those that did abandoned those that could not. Then, I had to rethink my position when it came to my own father. People saw this white man had no idea that he was tri-racial. Very proud of his blackness but, in the world as seen in those days and even to the present, the ability to further his career would have been hampered had it been known that what he appeared to be was not what it was. He walked a fine line and my mother bore the sting of racism and would abdicate her role of wife and allow me, when old enough, to attend functions with him in the radio and political arena. I couldn’t understand at that time. I suspect that is why I turned to the “Black Panthers.” This was to prove my Blackness. Hindsight is always 20/20 (B).

Had it been known that the “one drop rule” could have set the white race on its heels it would have never been instituted. This elimination from the majority race with genes would have diminished this race. In 1805 a Supreme Court ruling in
Maine stated that, “Any person with the race factor listing them as “Mulatto” on a birth record in this state can and should petition the courts to have that designation changed to “White” (B).

- Plecky in Virginia, changed many Indian and Mulatto persons to Black on his own on their birth certificates. This was done to eradicate the problems with Indians and Mulattos. To this, he thought would make only two races dominate the white race and subjugated to servitude class would be the blacks. All wrong. With instituting this action and those that could “pass” it negated what he thought was a brilliant idea of genocide (B).

KJ sums it up nicely.

- I found that “passing” can be put into three categories: 1) passing temporarily for convenience (being taken for white in a particular situation for immediate benefits...taking a drink of water from a white only drinking fountain or, as I did, pass for white while I was in the military that was segregated at the time I was in it...[my cousin] did the same while he was in the military, I think; 2) passing for economic gain (passing on the job only); and, 3) crossing the racial boundary permanently (totally abandoning one's Black origins and living as white). Perhaps, a fourth category is being taken for white by others while not trying to pass as you yourself [the researcher] may have experienced (KJ).
An interesting prospect to consider is whether or not white Abbotts who are now aware of their black ancestors might consider “passing as black.” Although not a part of the official study, the question was posed informally. The idea was not met with enthusiasm on the part of any of the white participants who felt that it countered the legitimacy of their claim to a black kinship group. Although the white Abbotts were not raised with any knowledge of their black ancestry, they all claim that if they had known, they would have intentionally constructed a closer connection to the black community on a cultural level and that they would have a right to consider themselves legitimate members. This in fact, is one of their regrets and a source of bitterness for some who feel a sense of loss and deception. It is something they now actively counter for the sake of their children. Perhaps this will be one of the options now available to the next generation.

The black Abbotts were also strongly opposed to the notion of passing for black for as they see it, passing as white was a strategy to avoid detrimental circumstances. They view the idea of passing as black as naïve for it belittles what they have endured and is difficult for them to accept the practice as legitimate, despite the cultural appeal that has been disseminated by the media.

- Passing is an act of subterfuge—a deceptive act intended to hide one's identity for the purpose of gaining an advantage in social and/or economic areas. The
individual who passes, of course, does not initially have to hide his/her
identity from the primary Black group in this way (the individual must avoid the
primary Black group to keep the passing secret from the white dominant group).
The individual whose primary group is white and who learn of his/her Black ancestry does not “pass” into blackness because his/her Black identity is announced when the individual participates in a Black social context. In fact, the individual must make such an announcement to keep from being identified as white by the Black group into which he/she wants to participate (KJ).
5.3 Constructing a Racial/cultural Identity

All of the cousins tended to identify like their parents in terms of race and culture, although some enjoyed a wider range of options if their other parent was also of mixed race or culture. Only one indicated that they felt their racial identity was imposed on them by others, although they said they did not identify with their parents racial identity. All appear to be content with their own racial identity at this point in time and would not attempt to change or adjust it publicly. If anything, many of them have become more ambivalent about their racial identity and would prefer not to identify racially at all. Several of the black cousins preferred to ignore any attempt to label them specifically as black or white. These individuals were the most sensitive to the racial “mixture” and did not want a racial identity imposed on them. Some qualified their answer.

- I often think of mixed race families as blending white or blending black as successive generation find their place in the world… I’ve often thought that who a person is in this world is a two-fold concept. One being how one views oneself and the other, how the world views a person (AA).
- I identify myself as “mixed race” in the US but it depends on who is asking and the context it is being asked in (JS).
- My main concern in ‘identifying’ myself racially is NOT to. Unless I am to have an on-going tie with the individual I generally side-step the question. I try to
include enough to make it clear that I don’t identify myself as generic and/or white and still leave them guessing (DS).

- I never refer to myself in racial terms unless confronted and then I let that person decide how to describe me racially. Sometimes I allow others to assume I am something else if it serves my purposes (LR).

- It is so incredibly relative. What really seems to matter is that I am a NON-white in America, which opens up a whole range of perceptions and associations made by those I meet in most parts of the country, but does little to help them understand who I am (JS).

- Sometimes I volunteer only the relevant part of my ethnicity – part black or part Arab being the most common (JS).

- My experiences living abroad as a child and adult shaped my understanding of the relativity of race. It is a matter of perception (JS).

- In reality I couldn’t change it. I could however adopt a believable but false claim of a different ancestry. I wouldn’t bother (AR).

None of the cousins are technically “bi-racial” (one parent white/one parent black) but rather are the offspring of one or more parent of mixed race. Therefore, most of them do not face the challenge of choosing the identity of one parent over another. However, it would appear that if the physical appearance of each of the parents is different, they tend to identify with the one most like themselves, if at all.
The white ones admitted that they could never be accepted as anything but white, but had straddled the colour line on occasion, particularly when they were younger. These ones tended to be open to identify with other cultural combinations through the other parent’s lineage. Physical appearance seemed to be the deciding factor in the ability of a white cousin to identify as anything other than white.

- My parents never called themselves mixed, black, coloured or mulatto so my racial identity was based upon my appearance as white and reinforced by the lack of contradiction to this assumption (SS).
- I describe myself as white, with black ancestry. I now go out of my way to explain to people about my black ancestry (JR).
- I believe that normally persons at work or in the community would not immediately identify me as being of African descent (AS).

However, this did not exclude the fact that all of them described themselves as white with black ancestors and for the most part, were pleased to call themselves “mixed.”

- Family history is the strongest factor. I am generally viewed as white but think of myself as a ‘politically black’ mutt (mixed race). In other words: I don’t identify as white but it would be silly to claim to be black since I don’t look black and did not grow up within black culture but I do view political issues in terms of
Some continue to harbour concerns that revealing their racial heritage might influence the social comfort zone that they presently enjoy.

- I will always have trouble admitting I am black to some of the narrow-minded and conservative people my job and life expose me to. I will continue at times to use my “Indian smoke screen” my parents developed for me when answering the rude questions many people ask. It may always illicit embarrassment and an uncomfortable feeling but on the other hand I have begun to answer honestly on some occasions and I am proud and interested in my ancestry (AR).

MY’s parents assumed an illusive role in not teaching her to acknowledge racial difference within her own family. Although she recalls some lively discussions about racial injustices while growing up in Toronto, they did not equate the stories to themselves.

- I always believed I was a WASP - white, upper middle-class, Anglo-Saxon – as was my family, or so I thought. I didn't know there was a black component until I was 45 years old. In school, I never knew I was part black and so as a child, as an
adolescent and as an adult, I was treated the same as everyone else I knew and I felt I fit in well with my peer group. But I never sought out any special peer group based on race. My experiences or lack thereof were partly due to where I lived. I knew very few people of different colour or nationality and spent next to no time thinking about it as I was growing up. I was raised to believe all people were basically the same - they just come in different shades (MY).

- Today I feel like a WASP even though I now know I’m not completely. My parents obviously knew our mixed racial identity and in order to make my life easier chose not to tell me. They died when I was still a young woman, but I’d like to think they would eventually have felt confident enough in my strength of character and that of my husband’s, and also of the ability of my personal friends and community to accept the truth and tell me (MY).

MY is gradually incorporating her lately acquired knowledge of her black ancestry and says that although she has reconciled with her racial heritage, she still feels some sadness about her parents’ reluctance to tell her the truth. MY does express regret that she did not have an opportunity to talk to her parents about this. She wishes that they had been more open and that she could have reassured them that she did not mind. It was unfortunate that her parents died by the time she was 24 years old, in the early 1950s. She now says she is gradually recognizing her own colour-blindness, as she becomes more
aware of the "other" within herself. She believes that she was "blind to colour" because it simply did not matter to her.

- I think strangers see me as white. I feel as if my black cousins in the States see me as one of them – black, for the most part, although I still don’t know them very well. I’ve changed in my own mind a little, but I don’t really think about my race much. If my daughter didn’t bring it up so often I probably wouldn’t think much about it at all. It’s really no more of a factor in my daily life than it ever was – except as an interesting fact. I always believed Blacks were equal, just a different colour, so this revelation hasn’t really changed my opinion of myself. However, I must admit that I do tend to take notice them more than when I was young and uninformed (MY).

She does not find her racial mixture a problem in her everyday life. It does not really matter to her what others think of it, as she herself does not claim her identity through race. On occasion she will refer to her racial background in a joke, just to make a point and raise a bit of public awareness.

- I think diversity is good if we can all learn to accept it, but with the understanding that, though different, we are all equal. So in some ways the answer might be to all become melded and the same. I doubt we will ever do that though. I think
sometimes being a little different is an advantage because it gives you the opportunity to be more objective about people and judge them all by the same standards despite their differences. I guess racial identity is more important to those people who have been more affected by being different in both good and bad ways. I feel good about my own racial identity but it's easy for me because it didn't really change anything in my day-to-day life - it just made my ancestors more interesting. I still feel white or whatever I am. Since I found out nothing has really changed for me. Even though it doesn't affect me I do identify with being black to some extent now when I didn't before because I didn't have any reason to before (MY).

BA felt a deep sense of rejection when the parents of his wife objected to their marriage because of their own mixed racial ancestry. His wife's parents were from Barbados and identified themselves as white West Indians; her father was white but her mother, including her entire family passed as white. When the prospect of marriage and the possibility of black children became a reality, her parents were extremely reluctant to condone the union. BA was devastated but his wife said that although she was extremely sad about the circumstances, she accepted her parent's effort to redirect what they believed to be a poor decision. When they returned from the honeymoon her parents picked up their relationship with their daughter as if nothing had happened. For BA, the fear that this could happen once again to his own children seemed to lock him into a
mindset that remained until just before his death when he appeared to have reconciled his feelings about his parent's marriage.

- I wonder if Mother, being very English and light-skinned, and Dad with his background that went into his decision to not do as the rest of his family and stay in colour. Whether that was the reason, whether he felt it would be an embarrassment to we three children. We were always told we had Spanish background to explain our dark skin. I always thought it was strange that he married out of colour, but it was certainly a wonderful marriage (BA).

Although he eventually accepted the fact that his father was black, he never felt comfortable with others knowing about it and worried about public exposure and consequent humiliation. Before his death, he made a tape describing his feelings, his regrets, and his deep love for his father. It would appear that the loving deeds of his parents elicited mixed blessings, for they left him with much to resolve in later life.

- I know in later years I have always been so very sorry I had not made a point of sitting down and talking to him. But as I say there seemed to be a veil that it was not expected and not appreciated, though Dad was certainly not the type that would ever turn you off. It was just a sense that you had (BA).
The findings in this study indicate that the 1950s generation did not experience a multicultural curriculum in their schools. During this period, teachers, texts, and learning materials were considered poor promoters of the present-day aspirations of tolerance, acceptance and respect (Reed, 1992). Their parents had been more concerned that their children learn to read and write properly so that they would be accepted into university or could attain a good job. Before the advent of the Civil Rights movement, integrated schools presented many obstacles for some.

- When I was going to high school and playing basketball I wasn’t really very dark. I never felt inferior or anything like that. But you can see, in this picture, the coach has placed me on the end of the row of players and I was too ignorant to know why. In my first year at Maine State, I was one of the best players. But I couldn’t understand why the coach always played this other guy that had played 13th on my team at Eastern High, instead of me. One day, our Alumni rep came down to visit and noticed that I was not playing on the first line. He went to see the coach, and then all of a sudden I found myself out on the court! (RO).

- Another time I hurt my knee in a game and had to go on crutches. The captain of our team said to me, “Well, why don’t you go see our doctor?” I said, “I didn’t know we had a doctor!” He went in to talk to the coach and when he came out he said, “I just handed in my suit. If I were you, I’d hand yours in too!” Do you
know that coach called my office seven times when he was retiring to make sure that I would be coming to his retirement party? Of course I wasn’t going (RO).

Most of the participants who are presently parents indicated that they had not experienced a multicultural curriculum and most of them did not attend diverse racial/cultural schools. They felt that the teachers who attempted to address issues of race did so inadequately and had not been prepared by the system to engage students in the process. Those who were younger did experience more of a multicultural curriculum but for the most part, were more influenced by the general multicultural population in their community. However, from the viewpoint of both black and white participants it seems apparent that some progress has been made within the education system, despite the continued prevalence of racial barriers. It bears repeating that these changes are reflective of an overall shift in social and political attitudes.\textsuperscript{119}

- Race and culture were not really taught during my school years and most of it pertained to slavery and KKK incidents. I was taught about Frederick Douglass and George Washington Carver as being great, not because of their race but in spite of it (WS).

\textsuperscript{119} This shift in attitudes does not dispel the fact that racism and racist attitudes continue to prevail in the Toronto population (Henry, 1986: 403).
I feel today’s schools approach diversity much more openly and enthusiastically than they did when I was in school (RS).

I did not attend a very diverse school. We had some Asian and East Indian kids, but the overwhelming majority were white. I associated mainly with white kids (JR).

I think my generation was the first in Canadian history to have received education in multicultural diversity (JR).

I did not attend a racially diverse school. It was black. I did not suffer racial discrimination in school (EB).

I did not attend a diverse school. The teachers did not handle multiculturalism well as they had no real experiences as our world was so white – no diversity in the classrooms to enrich discussions (CG).

Did not attend a racially diverse school and I associated with whites. There was no multicultural policy in the school and teachers did not address it (MY).

However, most participants indicated that enlightenment, increased awareness and education held the key to the extinction of racialization.

The days of trying to “protect” others from the truth of mixed race lineage must end. Those few who might not be able to handle it, might eventually come to terms with it, and perhaps discover through the process a great spirituality and
respect for themselves as well as those who are “different” from what they expect within the confines of a narrowly constructed sense of self. When we deny the history of our own families based upon race, we are denying ourselves. When we hide the truth, we are denying others the opportunity to grow and to explore a far more interesting and vital life than they might know otherwise (DD).

- The more who are connected and share mixed race information, the greater the dissemination of facts and the more enlightened others might become...I am so very happy to contribute in my own small way (DD).

- No problems or racial experiences (JJ).

- I did not feel exploited or racially discriminated against (WS).

- I have mixed feelings about Affirmative Action because I feel those individuals are not well-treated by other students and I would like to see better opportunity in schools before college selection (WS).

- No personal problems. I am not aware of others. The company I have worked for during the past 25 years has been very progressive in making sure there is balance in the workforce (RS).

- Yes I felt exploited and discriminated. I felt passed over due to my race. I saw it happen to others as well and it made me feel lousy (LR).

- I feel empowered
Most black participants grew up in middle-class urban centres. They indicated that they did not see their community as race based and did not tend to seek support from it in that way. This is not to deny that they maintained strong ties to the black community but they felt empowered enough to access all opportunities and lived according to the principles of integration. Some white respondents indicated that they did not define their mainstream white community in racial terms and therefore answered accordingly.

- Racial community is not important as a support system (EB).
- My community is not important as a support system (LR).
- I don’t identify racial community as a support system (AS).
- There is no racial community therefore I have no support (AR).

However, some did feel that they related strongly with their “white” community although it is possible that they were speaking for “others” and not for themselves with respect to their affirmation of support.

- Racial community is very important as a support system (MG).
- Pretty safe from racial discrimination (CG).

MY’s present lifestyle emanates within a white, rural community. She does not feel that she encounters many racial or even multicultural situations. Most of her friends
are around her age and have migrated from the city to the country to enjoy their retirement years. Their lives involve hobby farming, horses, tennis, informal social gatherings, and croquet matches.

- My white community assumes that I am the same as they are even though some of them know of my black heritage. I expect it is because I look much the same as they do. I feel sometimes now when I tell people that I’m part black that either they don’t believe me or they don’t care. Many of my friends think it’s very interesting though, just as I do. Sometimes I think they don’t quite know how to react when I tell them, especially if I do so after some joke or comment has been made about race (MY).

- My own identification as a white person growing up in a white community and being treated by others as belonging to that community are the strongest factors that influence my racial identity.

Others defy the practice of racial classification.

- I would say that all members of my family identify themselves as white people, and one of the by products of being white is that you do not consciously interact with other white people in terms of racial identification (JR).
However, their church and religious denomination varied and some found comfort in the traditional practices. All were Protestant except for one who married a Catholic woman and converted to her faith.

- Religion is Christian – not important at all. What is important to me is that I always have morals and stand by them but not moral from a religious text (MG).
- My religion is Episcopalian and it is very important and the basis for my ethics and values (LR).
- United (JJ).
- Methodist but not important (EB).
- I was baptized in the Anglican church but do not have any religious affiliation at the present time (JR).
- I’ve followed the Episcopal Church along with my father and mother. It is not terribly important, just comfortable. It’s what I’ve known since childhood…It does lend stability to one’s life. It’s a constancy in an every changing environment (AS).
- United – identifies me even more as a WASP – I guess I consider this a plus? I live in a white community and am Presbyterian (WS).
- A reasonably good attempt by my mother to raise me as Presbyterian, but I married a Catholic girl and have been associated with that denomination ever
since. I feel that being associated with only one religious denomination is very restrictive to spiritual growth (RS).

Most participants did not experience racial profiling personally although they were all well aware of it happening to others. It would appear that the ones most experienced with integration were more often exposed to racial profiling.

- I did suffer from racial profiling (LR).
- No racial profiling (EB).
- Racial profiling mostly as good white citizens and there was no sufferance from it (SS).

But some qualified their answers.

- It’s difficult to pinpoint if bad service is due to poor worker behaviour or due to racial profiling. I’ve received equally poor service behaviour from both Afro-American and Euro-American employees (JS).

The present-day descendants have clearly identified as either white or black. None of the cousins who identify as white feel that they have a choice. Some of the ones who identify as black admit that they could “pass” as white, but do not. Others avoid the question altogether and refuse to identify as one or the other; neither will they allow a
racial identity to be imposed. All of them declared that they would identify the same
at home, school and in their community. All of them identified the same as their parents
if pressed although they tend to feel that even their own parents resisted racial labels and
instead promoted themselves as individuals.

- I never asked about it because I knew I was not supposed to ask .... In later
  years I have always been sorry that I had not made a point of sitting down
  and talking to my dad about it. At the time there seemed to be a veil and
  one knew that the questions would not be appreciated, although Dad was
certainly not the type that would have ever turned you off. It was just a
  sense that I had ... I guess my biggest regret is that I never took the
  opportunity to share more time with him and to learn from him—just to
  get to know him a little better (BA, 1998).

Another cousin recently described his personal feelings with respect to the
discovery of his black ancestry.

- I am angry at my parents. They lied to me. I don’t believe it was just to make
  things easier for the children. I think they passed as white to make it easier for
  themselves. But in the process I lost a lot of my own identity, experiences that my
cousins and I could have had, people we might have related to and known. It is all
lost. I think they were ashamed of their ancestry and to this day they don’t want anyone to know about it (AR).

These negative feelings appear to be prevalent in the sons and daughters who are directly descended from members of their family who passed as white. For the most part they say that they understand how and why their parents responded to the racialization process prevalent at that time. They understand why the secret had to be kept from others, but they do not accept the fact that their parents did not feel obligated to pass on this knowledge to their children. They were never given a choice. The anger and bitterness apparent in some of the narratives stems from the frustration that the choice of a legitimate racial affiliation was taken from them. Those who were raised in the 50s and 60s express some chagrin that they would have liked to have felt they had a more personal vested interest in the civil rights movement that prevailed during their adolescence and young adulthood. They believe that they would have developed a deeper awareness and sensitivity of the issues and might have taken a more active role in the movement. For better or worse, most of these descendents will never have the opportunity to ask their parents for an explanation for they have already died.
5.4 Constructing Future Generations

This section of the study brings the question of racialization to the present generation of offspring who are implicated by the ways in which their ancestors and parents have negotiated the colour line in Canada and the US before them. As our nations shift their ideology to one that encompasses diversity and multiculturalism, their children may be presented with new options. They may choose to remain black or white, but they may seek innovative identities that move beyond the limited but powerful social forces that racialized their parents and grandparents.

Ten of the respondents had children; five were black, five were white. Spencer, Noll, Stoltzful, and Harpalani (2001) suggest that schooling and identity formation processes are closely linked with cultural influences, and that parents play an important role, especially during the early stages of their children's development. It was interesting to note that few of the black ones spent much time discussing race, racial issues, discrimination or racial identity with their children. It was the white mothers who appear to have spent the most time teaching their children about their mixed racial identities and take an active part in school activities that promote racial awareness and the celebration of diversity. However it should be noted that certainly societal barriers exist that allow and/or prevent this kind of social engagement.

Overall, their children indicate they feel distant and removed from the antecedents described in this study and that although they take an interest and pride in their past they
do not personally assume those particular identities. Their experiences are often very different than that of their parents and they do not feel compelled to relate in the same way as their parents did in the past. They all attend schools that are diversified where multicultural policies are promoted by both the school boards and the parents. This is very different from the experience of their parents.

- I teach them about their Black/White heritage though most of our learning was done by listening to stories of the family and visiting with relatives rather than any concerted effort to teach us (JS).
- Yes the issue of race have affected my children. They talk about race and I teach them about their Black/Euro-American heritage. I believe they acknowledge all parts of their biological inheritance (AS).
- My children identify like me and my husband and consider themselves white (JJ).
- Yes my children are affected by race but they don’t talk about it. I did not teach them about their Black/white heritage (EB).
- I teach my children about race but no to any great degree (JS).

Some black parents did indicate that they had been profoundly affected by the participation of their parents in the Civil Rights movement in the US while they were youngsters and they had tales to tell of Jim Crow experiences and segregation conflicts.
I remember my father, Fleetwood C. Littlejohn, Jr. (Anderson R. Abbott's grandson) telling me that once he traveled by train down south and sat in the “Colored” section. Thinking my father was white the conductor approached my father and said that he was in the wrong section. My father said, “No, I'm not!” (LL)

My Mother is fair complexioned & while travelling on a train when I was in my teens in Mobile, Alabama. I had gotten on the train first. (The "colored" coach was right behind the engine) & when my mother got on the conductor tried to steer her left toward the "white" coach! (EB).

Yet some children harbour strong feelings of resentment that their parents and forebears did not share the truth about their racial heritage. Their problem is not that they passed as white but that they did not reveal the “secret” to their children so that they could make their own choices. This is considered to be selfish and egotist on the part of the parents who assumed control over the racial destinies of their children. In this case, their choices were not appreciated by some present-day descendants.

They may have succeeded in their pretence as they went out and related to their individual worlds but their thinly veiled untruths and pretences have done far more damage than the admission to themselves and their children the truth. I think
that what may have started as an innocent desire for equality was taken to an extreme and turned into a misguided disaster for their children. Their plan worked out for the most part but as it was carried out it beat back and battered down the truth and the psyches of some of its members. It disallowed, prevented and robbed us of the celebration of a wonderful heritage. In so doing, the affect was reversed in that it created insecurity and a feeling of lack of self worth in contrast to what recognition and acceptance of our blackness would have done (AR).

- Their children were not allowed to be who they really were (AR).
- They had stories made up to replace those that could give away their heritage.
  They refrained from visiting or being visited by those that were clearly black...Basically we were taught that it was a taboo subject. My parent’s reactions to my questions and the questions of others, as well as other things we inferred, taught us that to be black was bad and under no circumstances were we to be black. This is simply a rule passed down to us from our parents or from their life as black children and reinforced by attitudes in the 1950s and 60s (AR).
5.5 The Final Question: Is race a myth?

Six feel that the concept of race is a myth and they refuse to be delineated into a strict classification. However, they all admit that it is difficult to remain unidentified and that in essence, their social parameters dictate what and who they are despite what their genes may tell them.

Four feel that race is not a myth. The contingencies that determine how they negotiate a space for themselves in relation to their daily experiences of race relations, prove to them that “race” has become an entity in their lives.

- Yes, issues of race affect me. The reason race matters, is because people think it matters. My experiences living abroad as a child and adult have shaped my understanding of the relativity of race. It is a matter of perception (JS).

- I believe that racial identity is both constructed by myself and society. Both factors were at work in the construction of my racial identity. As an individual with very light skin, no one will relate to me as anything other than a white person unless I reveal my black ancestry to them. Therefore, I believe that if I want to explore and develop my black identity, it is my responsibility (JR).

- The world or that people that are doing this viewing, varies between individual and individual, between neighbourhood and neighbourhood, society and society and between one country and another. As years pass and these societies evolve,
the concept or view of various people changes. The concept of a person’s race can vary in this way from era to era (AR).

- The act of passing and the concept of race really only exist in a person’s mind and in human terms. Racial distinction and passing only exist within a given situation or in a specific time frame and are only necessary as a result of racial prejudice and slavery… I hope that my more modern way of thinking and accepting and much of society’s more advanced way of accepting the blending of races is a sign of a stronger and more advanced society in the future (AR).

Overall the difference in the two perspectives appears to rest on variations in their interpretation of the definition of race. Although they all appear to understand that race is not an entity unto itself and that it is a concept or social construct with no empirical or biological substantiation, its implications have become real. It would seem that they are really referring to the reality and implications of racism rather than race.
5.6 Discussion of the Findings

The eagerness of the black/white Abbotts to embrace both their black and white kinship affiliation is prominent in many of the responses. All of the participants do know each other and have developed a pleasant rapport that intrigues them to further develop their interrelationships. Yet there are many other Abbott descendents who did not participate in the study and it would be naïve to think that they all feel so positive about the reconnection of family members. Although some of them were invited to participate in the study, they did not respond or acknowledge the request. There were others who had already indicated that they did not consider themselves a part of the black kinship group and chose to dissociate themselves from such an identity, privately and publicly. There are likely many other Abbotts who have not yet been given the choice for they still remain uninformed victims of a racialized society.

The problem is compounded when society assigns a different status to each racial/cultural group. Johnson (1973) notes the problem of skin colour with respect to those who identify as “black.”

In the past, there has been a great deal of conflict between those Black Americans who are black or brown and those Black Americans who are yellow. This conflict is attributable to two factors: 1) the beauty standard of the dominant group in American Culture which stated that ‘white is right’ and therefore yellow Black
Americans were ‘better’ than other darker Black Americans; and 2) the kind of ‘head start in the American Society which yellow Black Americans got during the slave period (44).

In summary it would appear that in the US “an etiquette of race relations, an attitude system” (Hill, 1960:6) profoundly affects those who identify as black, essentially stemming out of a history of the practice of slavery and racial discrimination. Traditionally African Americans have responded by developing a strong affiliation to the black community where they tend to live, work and play. Although the black Abbotts indicate that they freely integrate with the white community, they retain a sense of race consciousness. Hill (1960) suggests this was “heightened by [their] racial visibility and the outer community’s compulsion to make [them] different and to restrict [their] physical and social mobility” (6). In Canada, the smaller black community and its institutions tended to function within the larger mainstream community allowing black individuals to choose various locations along the colour line that were not imposed by a strong race consciousness. Nevertheless, Frankenberg (1993) suggests that earlier historical moments continue to shape present-day experience and subjectivity of people like the Abbotts who demonstrate how illusive a racially based “black” kinship connection can be when one has light skin.

120 Graham’s (1999) study notes that the older black Chicago residents perceive many of the young black professionals as somewhat removed from the traditional life and history of the earlier generations. “They may be upper-class… but they need to know that we have a history here” (212).
Overall, employment access and mobility did not prove a concern to these participants. They were all well-educated and gainfully employed. Most held professional status such as lawyers, business administrators, teachers and professors, doctors, computer analysts, or diplomats. Some admit that their racial designation or dark skin colour may have impeded their progress along the way, but that they overcame it as a matter of course. Those with light skin did not indicate any such impediments. None of them demonstrated any strong resentment towards the racialized system but noted that it was indeed racialized and lived with the challenges as they were presented. Although they did not personally feel racially discriminated against or passed over, they did indicate that they had all seen it happen to others and that they were strongly opposed to the practice. None had accessed any affirmative action or employment equity programs and were ambivalent about the advantages they were intended to offer. This response is reflected in the findings of James and Mannette (2000) which suggest that such applicants must be willing to publicly “categorize themselves as racial minorities or people of colour who will favour and use ‘affirmative action’ programs as a means of gaining access to educational opportunities” (74). The liberal ideology of multiculturalism draws on the concept of “voluntary marginal differentiation” which means that the applicants must consent to the process through which they are granted access. On the surface, this sounds like social justice is being pursued, but in reality little effort has been made to change the actual system itself, for this of course would mean
changing the present power relations which serve to maintain those unfair systems.¹²¹

The participants in the present study who might qualify for these programs did not care to label themselves in this way and instead chose to take their chances on the basis of their own merit and achievements. In contrast to James and Mannette’s (2000) findings, these participants did not indicate any concern about being perceived as access candidates although that may well have been why they did not take advantage of the programs.

Winks (1997) also notes that when Myrdal’s (1944) scale of values was applied to the Canadian black community the rank order of discrimination practices proved to be very similar. Myrdal argued that intimate interracial relationships ranked as the most objectionable to Whites, followed by social etiquette, social activities (dancing, swimming, eating, drinking together), then use of public facilities such as schools, churches and transport, then voting rights and legal discrimination and finally access to land, credit, jobs and social welfare. Winks suggests that black Canadians encountered far more resistance in employment access than their American counterparts due to a higher level of competition with larger numbers of immigrants and consequently “Canadians moved more slowly than Americans toward recognizing the need for legislation to assure equality of access to employment” (471).

The era and location in which the participant was raised tended to affect their interest and level of dialogue about race and skin colour with their children. The findings

¹²¹ Examples of these discussions can be reviewed in the report edited by Vincent D’Oyley entitled Black Presence in Multi-ethnic Canada, Toronto and Vancouver: Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction, Faculty of Education, UBC and OISE/UT.
demonstrated that the parents who raised their children in the 1950s and 1960s reported that they did not tend to address identity issues with their children. Slaney’s (2001) study showed similar results and further suggested that the children of mixed racial heritage may well have experienced an element of ambivalence about their own multiracial/cultural identities on the basis of their physical appearance. In that study, those parents explained that they had felt there was no reason to be so concerned at that time; the war was over and their perception was that a new wonderful world was unfolding where everyone would be free, employed, healthy, and would enjoy infinite prospects for a successful future. They believed that all of their children would grow up to be happy, educated, and successful and it was not until their children headed into the tumultuous 60s that they took heed of their past naivety.

Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001) suggest that such individuals might well have practiced their parenting in a slightly different way with respect to race, culture, and self if they had had the benefit of more foresight but at the time these parents were raising their children, they were responding to a global climate of optimism.

In the present study, black parents presented a variety of experiences. Those raised in the 1950s and 1960s are not currently as concerned about skin color as much as their parents, who had been systematically sensitized to it and taught that skin colour would likely play “an important role in determining one’s popularity, prestige, and mobility within the black elite” (Graham, 1999: 377). Johnson (2004) explains how his own parents counseled him in his choice of spouse.
My parents and my wife's parents were very conscious of skin color, and my generation was told--commanded--to marry individuals who were light skin ("people like us" was the phrase used in the command). Our children, who grew up during the civil rights revolution, were not as conscious of skin color. In fact, they often derided my generation for 'racist' views. The advantage light skin Blacks enjoyed has slowly eroded. I don't think it is as much an advantage today as it was years ago. Still, it is an advantage, particularly when interacting with white Americans. I have had white Americans tell me that they are more 'comfortable' with light skin Blacks and that they don't feel 'threatened.' A light skin color still matters with white Americans, but it does not matter so much with Black Americans (pc).

In a similar vein, an interview in 1991 with EO revealed that her own mother, Helene Abbott Sayre was counselled by her parents and siblings not to go "back" when they had already come this far, referring to the skin colour of her selected spouse (pc).\(^{122}\)

It would seem that a similar distancing from traditional values is also transpiring in Toronto as Slaney's (2001) findings suggested that the parents in her study were raising their children in a different racial climate than the previous generation. Unlike their parents whose optimistic view of the future did little to prepare them for the events

\(^{122}\) Helene married Benjamin Sayre, a relatively light-skinned black man.
that culminated in a volatile racial and cultural climate across the continent, they assumed a more proactive approach. They indicated that they felt a strong sense of responsibility for their children’s physical, mental and spiritual welfare and education and they became actively involved in perpetuating a broad racial and cultural heritage for their children in a bid for cultural enhancement. Overall these parents endorsed the Canadian multicultural policy in theory as a means of promoting inclusiveness and indicated hope that it would transpire into reality one day. It would seem today’s generation is proceeding into an era of increased racial and cultural diversity that offers different ways in which racial and cultural identities will be defined and experienced. Not long ago a racial distinction was made on the basis of the one-drop rule but today it would appear that once again “the problem of the [Twenty-first Century] is the problem of the color line” (DuBois, 1970:xxvii).

The following is a true story that clearly depicts how the concept of race based on the colour line pervaded the lives of light-skinned Blacks during the Jim Crow era in the deep south.
A tall, handsome man was about to enter the Jim Crow car, when the brakeman stopped him with: "That is for the colored people sir. Next car for white gentlemen." He stopped, smiled either at his own blunder or for somebody else's mistake, thanked the brakeman, and entered the car for white gentlemen. He had a fine face, which was improved by a Van Dyke beard of reddish tinge. His hair was light and looked the true type of the Southern aristocrat, one belonging to the best blood of the cavalier, born to rule. He might be a college professor, a lawyer or a literary man. He was the handsomest man in the car, and many of the ladies took a second to look to be sure that they had made no mistake in pronouncing him such when he entered.

I wanted to meet a true born Southern gentleman, one born to ease and luxury, surrounded by refining influences all his life, and I made the excuse by asking a share of his seat. There was an instant flash of surprise at my request, followed immediately by a smile as he removed his traveling bag and made room for me by his side.

The weather opened the way for a conversation and an editorial in a Southern paper that I had in my hand, offered the rest. It was an editorial in favor of a separate car law controlling streetcar engagement. In this article was the assertion that the Black Negro, who stolidly held his seat when ladies entered, could be tolerated, though he might be ragged and dirty, but the saddle-colored Negro, who imitated whites and politely offered his place to a lady, was intolerable, because for that moment he compelled her to make some acknowledgement of his courtesy and recognize him as she would a gentleman.

"That seems extreme grounds to a Northern man," I remarked, calling his attention to the article.

"It is," he replied. "But that is the tender spot with Southern people. The South justified slavery on the ground that the Negro was unfitted for anything but slavery. The Negro was not a man or a woman. Not even the offspring of a slave could be better, except to be taken for house servants instead of being sent to the field. There were some parts of the old South, this little city we have just left for instance, where no Southern family could move in the best society unless they had a saddle-colored coachman and saddle-colored slaves about the house. Those servants learned the ways of polite society to a certain extent and their masters were proud of them for their accomplishments. But they were slaves and no question was raised about their inferiority to the race they served."
"Some of the best strains of blood in the South coursed the veins of these saddle-colored slaves as they took pride in owning handsome horses with good blood. They liked blooded stock, whether they belonged to the human or the brute kind.

"But people never forgive their own folly or wrongs against others. We find these saddle-colored Negroes and some much lighter than the saddle color were more objectionable to the whites than the Black men because the line distinction is not so pronounced. It was something like the objection to putting servants in swallow-tailed coats just like the guests. They were liable to be mistaken for gentlemen instead of niggers. That is the tender point with the Southern people. They dislike to have you Northern people make mistakes."

"But do you draw no line where the white Negro ceases to be a Negro?"

"No. The descendants of slaves are all Negroes. They may be full-blooded Black men, or have only one-thirty-second of Negro blood, but they are Negroes. They come from a race of slaves and our Southern people can recognize no man as a gentleman whose ancestry dates back to slavery. They are Negroes, their children will be Negroes, and so will their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren. There is no escape for them should they become as fair as you or I."

"But there are so many of these saddle-colored Negroes in the South, is there not the possibility that barring out such blood as is almost as pure as that of the best whites will make the predominant race in time?"

"There is that possibility, but the coming generations must settle that question. Many of these lighter colored Negroes have purer blood, as measured by the old aristocracy than ninetenths of the whites in the South. They are like the blooded race horses condemned to the plow because one place is lost in the pedigree.

"He might accumulate property and divide the wealth and the business with the old aristocracy so as to leave the latter in the minority with only its claim of blood to make it superior, and not even able to back up that claim with proof from the ancestral tree. Then might come an embarrassment equal to that of the New York society people, who found no descendants but butchers and manufacturers, and small tradesmen in Chicago. There are now millions in Chicago, and they are recognized because commercial interests move the world and even guard the gates of society."

A number of others in the car had become interested in the conversation, and were delighted with the broad-minded young Southerner, who was able to bury his prejudices and look
at this question in a philosophical way. He was an illustration of the growth of the new South and was a product of Henry W. Grady's coaching. His quiet manner, fair views, and consideration for the Negro showed that the whites of the South can be left to take care of this question without the intermeddling of the radicals of the North.

The train pulled into the cradle of the Confederacy and just as we were beginning to draw out the young Southerner as to the place Jefferson Davis would eventually take in history, half a dozen passengers came in and took their seats. They looked about and put their heads together for a moment, and then one of them went out to speak to the conductor. The official came in, leaned over, and spoke quietly to the gentleman at my side.

"You have made a mistake sir. The first car in front is for colored passengers."

Then, turning to those who had been conversing with him, he said, without a trace of bitterness in his voice, "You see how easy it is to be mistaken in the South, and why such papers as the New Orleans Times-Democrat complain more of the 'saddle-colored nigger', for you have mistaken me for a gentleman. It will be necessary for people to carry the family record with them when they travel after a while. The separate car law is as embarrassing to the railroad conductors.

The gentleman over there recognized me as the son of a woman who was born in slavery, and he also knows my father was once the Governor of this State and that no name stood higher in the old South. This little interruption has possibly been embarrassing for you. If so, I regret it. Good day." And he walked out of the car, still a handsome, proud gentleman.123

123 Abbott Papers, nd.
To be a person of color in white territory is to be monitored, marked, and excluded. To be white in white territory is to be able to pass the gaze of its bourgeois sentries and traverse its social space as an included, or at least properly subjugated member.¹²³

6.1 How the Abbotts Crossed the Colour Line

Anderson Ruffin Abbott, even in his day must have been keenly aware of the “passing” process, although it may have taken on a rather different connotation. On several occasions he noted that their numbers were dwindling and that eventually he could foresee an overall assimilation of the black population into the mainstream. By the time of his death in 1913 no more than a few hundred Blacks still resided in Toronto. How could he have predicted that the immigration of thousands of West Indians and Africans would some day inflate their social profile?

During those years it could not have been easy to find a place in Canadian society, no matter what the shade of one's skin.\textsuperscript{125} The former racial climate that Anderson had experienced in Toronto had receded and racial oppression became much more open and prevalent in both urban and rural communities. Judy Scales-Trent (1995) suggests that as “the white community began to withdraw privileges from the light-skinned black community in the mid-nineteenth century, the light-skinned group started to seek out alliances with darker blacks (1). The pressure to simply slip into the mainstream must have been tantalizingly strong, despite the presence of those who felt that the black community should foster a positive black identity. To many “old-line” Blacks it was a question of equality, not difference that held their concern and passing may have simply become just another reality.

Race was lived in many different ways among the Abbotts but distinct patterns emerged as the pathways of the men, Wilson and Gordon began to vary from those of the women, Helene, Grace and Ida. The men passed as white because they were light-skinned and their “blackness” was not imposed on them by others when they chose to deny it. Furthermore they lived in a white world and competed with white men for white-collar jobs. They needed to be white to be considered for their positions within their chosen professions. Although it is feasible that their employers, co-workers, neighbours and friends were aware of their black roots, they were granted a form of immunity, perhaps

\textsuperscript{125} For more on the difficulties that Blacks had in competing with other large groups of new immigrants to Canada in the mid 1800s refer to Winks, 1997:470-483.
even a surreptitious form of employment equity or affirmative action. The fact that they fulfilled the conditions of whiteness - married white women, lived in white neighbourhoods and associated socially with other white folk essentially made them eligible for white status.

In the case of the Abbotts it would appear that although socioeconomic status and class did factor into the equation, this was something that had been inherited, not necessarily earned, as Gordon was a mechanic and Wilson was a doctor. However, it would seem that generally those of mixed racial heritage enjoyed greater security in their professional fields when they were independently wealthy, owned their own businesses, functioned as labour leaders or fulfilled professions such as lawyers and physicians. In terms of integrating into the mainstream community on a social level, most found it difficult to find a place to live in a white community unless the black partner was light enough to pass as white.

However gender also appears to have been a factor. In the case of the Abbotts, only the boys married white and then actively “passed,” while all the girls married black and apparently made no attempt to pass. Perhaps it was just coincidence, but for a number of possible reasons, the girls either could not, or would not cross the colour-line, while the boys, after the death of their father, passed readily into the white mainstream. It is conceivable that the boys felt more at ease with passing as they had married into a white life and reportedly maintained very close relationships with their white in-laws.
The gendered inequities suffered by all women during the early 20th century severely impacted black women who could not readily cross the colour line and freely choose or reject relationships based on skin colour. Drake and Cayton (1969) confirmed that "it is the male partner who plays the more aggressive role in contracting marriage, and since white women are 'forbidden fruit' to Negro men, it is not surprising that more Negro men than white marry across the color-line (137). In other words, as one of my aunts explained, "Women, especially black women had to wait to be asked for marriage!" (JA, 2003). Although the Abbott women were light-skinned they had established themselves within a niche of the black community that ultimately served their aspirations and purposes well. It was a place for them to excel and their efforts to promote racial and women's uplift were appreciated and rewarded. In a sense, they were a "somebody."

With respect to the prospects of his children, Gordon must have been concerned about employment opportunities. He would have been well aware of the difficulty that black women encountered in their efforts to obtain white-collar jobs such as stenographers, telephone operators, receptionists and clerks if they were identified as black. When his daughter applied to Eaton's as a white woman she was granted a position as a salesclerk. If she had applied as a black woman she would only have been considered for more menial tasks such as housekeeping or elevator service. One of Gordon's sons, BA moved quickly up the ladder of management into the role of labour negotiator with Ontario Hydro while his other son Don became a Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer.
This situation contrasts starkly with the experience of darker family members such as Grace’s husband Fred, who earned a much more substantial income than Gordon, was well-established in the municipal bureaucracy as Toronto Transit Commissioner, lived in an up-scale neighbourhood and enjoyed the services of a maid and a chauffeur. Yet his daughter explained to me that despite all that “uplift” he very carefully selected the businesses that he frequented and the manner in which he presented himself, both in etiquette and attire. Gordon in contrast is described by his family as one who often looked like a rumpled bed. Although he lived in a nice neighbourhood and always had a respectable job, he drove a used car and was considered a man for the common people. Both men performed their civic duty with impunity and dedication, but one was a black man and the other a white man. One raised a black family; the other raised a white family. Grace and Fred’s son eventually married a white woman and still raised a black family. Gordon’s children all raised white families.

In 1929, during the period of racial segregation in the US, Anderson’s widow, Mary Ann bought a lakeside cottage in the town of Baldwin, Michigan on the shores of Lake Idlewild, and every August all of the Abbotts would congregate for a family vacation. To this day, the property remains in the hands of Ida’s family. It is ironic how perspectives alter as we grow older. When I asked BA about his summer visits to the lake he said, “I never realized at the time of course, but the whole community was black!” EO related a noteworthy incident concerning her cousins BA and his brother, DA during one summer holiday.
The boys had gone down to the wharf and came running back crying that some kids had made fun of them, calling them "nigger." Their mother was quite taken aback and asked Aunt Ida and my mother Helene, what she should do. They replied, "That's your problem!" and they up and left her to come up with an explanation that obviously never did clarify the situation, for the boys remained ignorant of the fact that they or anyone else in the family were black! (E.O, 1991).

BA had a hard time coming to terms with his black heritage in later life. He appears to have suffered immensely from what Britzman (1996) has labelled the ambiguity of "difficult knowledge," (42) whereby he internalized conflicted feelings of love and hate (44). BA found it difficult to put aside his early perceptions of the "family secret," and he could not reconcile himself to the possibility of disclosure. As a result he chose to perpetuate the silence that encircled the family business.

It seemed as if there was an unwritten law and the family remained united in its endeavour. Although some of the Americans went back into the black race, the ones in Canada that had managed to gain a white status were careful to keep it. All of the predecessors knew about the family's ancestors but the next generation was not allowed to get to know the black descendants. Of course I knew that Aunt Nell and Aunt Ida must have had a family over there. But, in my day that was a
long way away and not until later, did I realize that a decision must have been made that there should be no visits. When we were young, we were often taken along to visit the American side of the family. As we got older, only my younger sister was taken along. I guess they thought that she wouldn’t notice, but we boys were left behind when we got older (BA, 1999).

When Fred Hubbard died, Wilson’s son AA came to Toronto to attend the funeral and subsequently became more closely involved with Gordon’s family. As both Gordon and Wilson had deliberately passed as white, their sons did not encounter any difficulty relating to each other and continued to keep in touch.

BA explained how his Uncle Wilson handled the secret with AA.

Uncle Wilson had a much more difficult time keeping the families separate. AA didn’t even know that his father had a black medical practice, or that he volunteered his medical services in the black section of the city on the weekends. He was never allowed to go along and the odd time he offered to drive his father to work, he was turned down (BA, 1999).

In this case, we can see that Wilson obviously felt an obligation to give back to his black community despite the fact that he did not reveal his black identity to his white professional co-horts. Adele Logan Alexander cited in Graham (1999) points out that
“most educated or privileged blacks feel a sense of obligation to acknowledge their own black community and to give back to others who may not have the same advantages” (389).

EO described how they handled Wilson’s funeral.

Well, when Uncle Wilson passed away, Mama and Aunt Grace went with Grandma to the Funeral Home before the service. The funeral was scheduled for 4 o’clock and they went a couple of hours early and signed the register. When AA saw their names on the guest register he realized there was something amiss. Before this, everyone had thought, ‘Why bother telling him? If anything had shown up in the child... but it didn’t. After he was married and moved to Wisconsin he still always wondered about it. Eventually he wrote a letter to the Hubbards in Toronto and AA was subsequently invited for a visit, where the entire story was finally disclosed (EO, 1991).

Perhaps a brief description of some incidents will serve to illustrate the era that justified these kinds of deceptions. My mother recalls an indignant family discussion at the dinner table, when the renown, black, opera singer, Marian Anderson came to Toronto to perform, and was banned from the very conservative Granite Club. In those days, some of the Abbott cousins, like Clarence Lightfoot and his white wife Nellie
opened their doors to visiting Blacks, such as the writer, Langston Hughes and put them up for the night when the major hotels and restaurants refused them service.

When the soldiers returned from World War I to a depressed economy, jobs were very hard to find. The Canadian-born black veterans who had been permitted to enlist could not simply pick up where they left off, and subtle and not-so-subtle forms of discrimination restricted even the well educated when they applied for employment. My two uncles served honourably in the Canadian Armed Forces during World War II, but of course they had been accepted as white recruits. During World War I self-declared Blacks were only taken into the labour or construction battalions, but during World War II the recruitment policy was revised in theory but not necessarily in practice. When my mother asked her father, Gordon why he never joined the Armed Forces during World War I, he answered ruefully, “Oh, well, I had a bad thumb!”

Surely then, a strong case could be made for the practice of passing as white. Marriage, employment and acceptance into the armed forces were only a few of the obstacles that would need to be negotiated along the way. Many of the Abbotts had entrenched themselves in the hallowed ranks of the Ontario Hydro Company. This was, in all likelihood, because of the close friendship between William Peyton Hubbard and Adam Beck. When Beck, as chairman, hired a Negro as a clerk in London, at the Ontario Hydro-Electric Power Commission, North Hamilton’s Member of Parliament

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126 Adam Beck was born in Baden, Ontario. As an avid abolitionist, he became the Mayor of London, Ontario in the mid 1800s. Known as the “Father of Hydro” in Ontario, he became the first Chairman of the Hydro Commission (Abbott papers, nd).
voiced his objections. Thus, it would be understandable that when Gordon worked at Hydro, he would either not be inclined to divulge his black affiliation or perhaps simply chose to sidestep any potential challenges.

Drake and Cayton’s seminal study (1962) noted that the infusion of a few light-skinned blacks to the white domain through interracial marriages did not trigger concern within the white community as long as the person who was passing did not associate with other Blacks. This was a common and acceptable practice for convenience purposes from both a black and white perspective in the North where people congregated in large impersonal social settings. Generally speaking, Gordon did not associate with the black community on a public level, although it would appear that he and his wife both engaged in some form of community service for new black immigrants to Toronto.

Thus the motivation to pass as white was significantly heightened, for as Pfeiffer (2003) asserts, blackness brought objectification while whiteness offered agency (12). Based on the circumstances, Sollars (1997) claims that the practice of passing was a rather unique “Americanism” (247) for it provided one of the few options for many Blacks to evade the confines of their “racial group membership” (Rockquemore and Brunsma, 2002:12). Hence the act of camouflaging one’s racial identity appears to have arisen out of the desire to evade discrimination and enjoy an access to the privileges normally accorded only to the privileged Whites. Yet it was a selective process as successful passing could only be accomplished by those who looked white for it was widely believed that “certain descent characteristics, even invisible ones, were viewed as
essential and more deeply defining than physical appearance, individual volition, and
self-description, or social acceptance and economic success” (Sollors, 1997:248). Drake
and Cayton (1962) conclude that the “racial identification of such marginal persons is
sociological rather than biological; and what really determines their ‘race’ is how much
the public knows about their ancestry” (165) and whether or not it is revealed.

Although some have condemned passing as a form of opportunism Daniel
(1992a) has suggested that it also served effectively as an underground tactic that
subverted the line between the oppressor and the oppressed, specifically between those
who were designated as “black” and those who had assumed a “white” identity (92).
Stonequist (1961) justifies the practice of passing on the basis that it “signifies that the
group conflict is so severe that the individual is compelled to resort to subterfuge” (194).

Notably not all passers fared well with respect to their racial affiliation for on
occasion they “encountered a backlash of condemnation from some members of the black
community” (Rockquemore and Brunsma, 2002:12). Some have charged that the act of
passing as white demonstrates a form of racial self-hatred, yet others dismiss the charge
as an “argument used by many Blacks to put down and persecute the individual who is
able to pass” (K. Johnson, 2003). Pfeiffer (2003) too criticizes these charges by asking:
“Must the passers’ embrace of the potential for success to which their white skin avails
them to be seen simply as their co-optation by a culture founded on ‘white’ values? Must
passing necessarily indicate a denial of ‘blackness or racial self-hatred and nothing
more?’”(2). Instead she asserts that the expression of individualism might provide a more
complex explanation to the nature of the practice of passing.

So although time had wrought changes to the common perception of race it would seem that the dye was cast, for the Abbott family finally separated and each branch followed their own path, deriving individual pride and sustenance from a common kinship. Whether or not they believed in the legitimacy of the practice, the experiences of these Abbotts clearly demonstrates the conviction that light-skinned Blacks were able to attain certain privileges by passing as white.
6.2 Implications of Racialization: The Moral Dilemma

If revealed, an act of passing can force those in the passer’s wake to rethink what made the passing necessary in the first place...It’s not too much of a stretch to see passing as an instrument of social change.\(^{127}\)

The present study clearly demonstrates that over the last two centuries the practice of passing as white in the US and Canada developed in response to the social, political and economic forces that condoned and encouraged a *de jure* and *de facto* policy of racialization. Ultimately the defining element underlying this story is found in the social construction of a concept of race that justifies the existence of white privilege and the power of skin colour.

In 1896, the case of *Plessy vs Ferguson* demonstrated how the process of racialization was legalized when Homer Plessey, who appeared to be “white” but was designated as one-eighth black, refused to sit in the Jim Crow section of an intrastate railcar. He was subsequently charged with breaking the Louisiana state law of “separate but equal” accommodations for Blacks and Whites. Plessey alleged that his constitutional rights under the Fourteenth Amendment had been violated and that the Jim Crow laws

did not provide equal treatment under the law. The presiding judge, John H. Ferguson disagreed and upheld the law thereby enforcing the one-drop rule and subsequently a policy of racial segregation prevailed for another seventy years.

Interracial unions in the Abbott family exemplify how the process of racialization affected the ways in which various generations selected suitable marriage partners. Kennedy (2003) notes that interracial intimacy “played a prominent role in the development of the free black community during the age of slavery” (66). Wilson Ruffin Abbott was the son of a white man of Scottish ancestry and a free black mother in Virginia in 1801. Although Wilson’s father was able to offer some, albeit tentative social and economic prospects to his son by virtue of his fair-skin and white affiliation, he could not legally recognize him. In turn, Wilson’s two sons, Anderson and William both married women who were themselves daughters of black/white parents. It is interesting to note that Wilson’s daughter Amelia married a black American and subsequently moved to the US to live as black. As previously noted the scenario is repeated when Anderson and William’s sons all married white and passed directly into the white community in both the US and Canada.

It must be noted that Wilson did not attempt to pass as white and although he apparently married a light-skinned black woman it was not considered an interracial union. Yet in the following generation we see how easy it was for Anderson and William to cross over racial designations and marry women who could (and likely did to some
extent) pass as white in their later years.\textsuperscript{128} Drake and Cayton (1962) distinguish between the two: “the difference between intermarriage and passing lies in the fact that in the former case it is immediately obvious to the general public that the color-line is being crossed, whereas ‘passing’ is, in its very nature, a surreptitious act” (129). Their findings indicated that passing as white did not pose the same threat as intermarriage because it left the fundamental principle of segregation intact and yet provided an option for those who looked white. On the other hand, intermarriage represented a flagrant and obvious breach of established barriers.

Throughout the generations, Abbotts have confronted issues of miscegenation from both a legal and social standpoint. Between 1920 and 1950 when Gordon and Wilson married and raised their “white” families, public opinion still overwhelmingly opposed interracial marriages. Spickard (1989) confirms that the “bulk of White Americans were just as horrified at the thought of interracial marriage in 1950 as they had been in 1900 or 1850” (288). The only way in which light-skinned Blacks could make it work was to assume a low profile and engage in passing. Kennedy (2003) notes many instances where interracial couples suffered under these social constraints by being dismissed from their employment, avoiding public events such as weddings and funerals, strictly separating home and work life and essentially avoiding public scrutiny. These attitudes were promoted and dramatized on stage and in motion pictures. Anderson’s

\textsuperscript{128} Various documents such as cemetery records, death certificates, census records, property records indicate that the Abbott women such as Mary Ann Abbott (wife of Anderson Ruffin Abbott) and Louisa Jane Moore (wife of William Henson Abbott) were designated as white after the deaths of their husbands.
favourite Shakespearian play of Othello and other classical productions were usurped by 20th century producers who cast white actors in the place of black characters. Such films as *Symbol of the Unconquered Race* (1920), *House Behind the Cedars* (1920), *Island in the Sun* (1957), *Kings Go Forth* (1958), *Night of the Quarter Moon* (1959) and *Imitation of Life* (1959) all curtailed any display of interracial intimacy. In 1934 the Motion Picture Production Code declared that miscegenation “shall not appear in pictures produced by [members of the Motion Picture Association of America – that is the major film studios], irrespective of the manner in which they are treated” (Kennedy, 2003: 95).

In the 1930s, Gordon Abbott was incensed that the black opera singer, Marian Anderson was barred from the prestigious Granite Club in Toronto. In the 1950s, Nat King Cole, a favourite jazz singer of Gordon’s, was physically assaulted at a concert in Birmingham, Alabama.

If professional and economic forces had not already exerted enough pressure to pass as white, the volatile opposition to interracial marriages at the time would have compelled these couples to keep a low profile. It may be elementary at this point to belabour the point, but further research might reveal to what extent these social forces precluded the Abbott men’s decision to marry white or whether it was their interracial marriages that subjected them to these forces. In any case, anti-miscegenation laws remained in place in some states until 1967 when they were finally struck down by the US Supreme Court, long after the deaths of Anderson and Wilson and their white spouses.
Present day Abbott descendants now face the implications of those interracial marriages as they confront their own racial identities with respect to their social locations and status that are conceivably a direct result of the decisions and actions of their forebears. Castagna and Dei (2000) contend that the “idea of race and the practice of racism denote a conflation of class, religious and broadbased cultural and political concerns and definitions” (27). Today the Abbott descendants display a wide range of skin colour yet many of them do not necessarily consider it to be indicative of their racial affiliation. Cultural and social aspects have overtaken the white-based criteria once sanctioned by legislation and court precedents as pride and dignity in black affiliations emerges amongst those who James and Mannette (2000) have described as “historically disadvantaged” (James and Mannette, 2000:73). It would seem that “despite the backlash and the remnants of white hostility to ‘race mixing,’ the most salient fact about interracial intimacies today is that those involved in them have never been in a stronger position, or one in which optimism regarding the future was more realistic” (Kennedy, 2003: 124).

Many of the participants in this study indicated that although they were not prepared to shun either their black or their white kinship affiliations, they did not feel bound to adhere to obsolete restrictions and “classificatory regimes that impose singular racial identifications” (Kennedy, 2003:142). Today it may well come down to an all or nothing classification as most of my cousins now entertain options that range from a multiracial identity or alternatively, no racial designation at all. But can they truly, as Reddy (1994) claims serve as a “racial bridge” for future generations? (117)
Kennedy (2003) notes that “amalgamationists do not restrict their claims for interracial intimacy’s benefits merely to the individuals involved; they also declare, more broadly, that black-white interracial intimacy can be an engine of positive social transformation” (157). It is interesting to note that today we are no more nearer creating one race than we were in Wilson Ruffin Abbott’s day, but the process of racialization appears to have moved somewhat beyond the boundaries that were based on ignorance and naivety. As Spickard (1989) concludes the order of the hierarchy has not changed much but “[w]hat did change was the point where the line between Us and Them was drawn” (372). Although attempts to promote the process of racial amalgamation have had limited influence on the manifestation of racial hierarchies the increased public awareness and acceptance of interracial unions provides an avenue where progress might be made.

Perhaps some of the discrepancy lies in unrealistic theoretical concepts of social order and the distribution of power that are doomed to failure. Baker (1986) suggests that “there is an implicit contradiction between the existing theoretical formulations of a plural or multicultural society and the ideal structure that is politically envisioned” (208). Rather than promoting a policy of assimilation a concept of cultural pluralism might prove to be a useful “tool for shaping experiences and for patterning and ordering behaviour” (Hutson, 1986:226). Yet, back in 1905 Anderson Abbott predicted that interracial unions would eventually result in a “composite race” based on the melding of families and cultures.
... History records many instances of the fusion of races under similar conditions. It is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that as the Negro approaches nearer the stand of the white man in education, culture and refinement, objections to intermarriages will disappear and fusion of the two races will go more rapidly until both races will become blended into a composite race (Abbott, nd).

Perhaps he would be pleased to know that his own black/white descendents have now melded into a family that enthusiastically embraces their common black/white ancestry and kinship with pride and dignity.
6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Before we as a society can liberate ourselves from the grip of racism, we have to acknowledge that it exists, and that it is not something which has been blown out of proportion; neither is it a figment of some people's imagination (Adrienne Shadd, in McKague, 1991).

Upon completion of the current study I find myself once again back at the source of my quest. I began this investigation in an effort to promote a deeper understanding of people like my predecessors whose actions and decisions in a specific time and place ultimately affected so many others today. My curiosity led to the simple act of visiting the archives and as a result the floodgates of history opened and shed light upon so many lives and lifetimes hitherto unknown. When I first discovered the Abbott Collection in the Baldwin Room of the Toronto Reference Library I was appalled at the lack of public awareness of the collection. At that time the papers were still in their original form and could not be read or studied to any great extent by researchers or curious individuals. It was therefore imperative that the papers were photocopied and transcribed into a format that was more accessible to the general public. Once I had accomplished this I assumed my duty was done and that academics and historians would subsequently grasp the opportunity to read and analyse the contents of this potentially valuable collection. However this did not transpire to any great extent and consequently I felt compelled to do
more to bring awareness to the attention of the public and the academics by writing a book about the Abbott family broadly based on the papers in the collection.

The present study is the result of my efforts to seek meaning out of the subsequent stories and discoveries that followed but is by no means a comprehensive analysis of Anderson Abbott’s writings. It behoves Canadian historians to take their inquiries beyond a superficial overview of Abbott’s personal papers composed of speeches, lectures, memoirs, letters and documents and cast them against the backdrop of the vast compilation of clippings from numerous newspapers across the continent. Although referencing of the original sources of some of these clippings might now be impossible to some extent, the specific composition of them surely speaks to the social issues and forces of the times that affected the early diverse population of Canadians and their American counterparts. An in-depth comprehensive analysis of these writings, clippings and other pertinent sources would be an extremely valuable and welcome addition to the current black historical resources.

Such an investigation might further the implications of the present study and challenge and repudiate the continuing practices of racialization in society today. A number of recent social histories have addressed the advent of racism based on skin colour with an emphasis on an examination of the legislation that provided a means of legitimacy to the movement. A focus on the ways in which these legalities were enforced or contravened would shed some light on the strategies used by racialized individuals to manoeuvre around and within the confines of the law. For example it is clear that
although interracial marriages were not legally recognized in many US states until 1967, they continued to occur regardless of whether or not they were legitimized demonstrating that “legal formalities do not always mirror social conduct” (Kennedy, 2003: 68).

With a look to the present generation, further investigation into current marriage options might reveal previously unforeseen changes in the purpose, function and dynamics of intimate interracial relationships. The participants in this study indicated that interracial marriage does not pose the negative prospects it once did to their predecessors. Further data collection across a wider range of the Canadian/US population might reveal other factors affecting the choice of partners in intimate relationships that were not addressed in the present study.

Throughout the study the element of class often became a significant issue and further investigation in to this factor might provide insight into the stratification process within the light-skinned black community. Perhaps a comparison between the classes that comprise the black communities in Toronto and Chicago would reveal how these communities have developed into such diversified populations.

Although the reasons for passing have dissipated in response to a shift in the definition of difference, some individuals may still find reasons to engage in the practice. Further investigation into such actions may reveal new knowledge about the present-day power dynamics which drive such decisions and behaviours in a racialized society.

As long as the process of racialization is perpetuated and unchallenged the need
for special programs based on racial categories will continue. Although affirmative
action and employment equity programs\textsuperscript{129} have been received with mixed reviews,
further investigation into the other ways of distributing resources and opportunity might
contribute to the development of more effective programs.

As we cast an eye to the future, we must consider the importance of dispelling the
myths that granted power and credence to the process of racialization. Race is indeed one
of those myths but renewed efforts in the field of education, race relations and
multicultural programs may provide a means to dispel the forces that continue to
perpetuate the process of racialization. Yet it must be acknowledged that the process of
racialization would not have been possible without the impetus provided by the powerful
forces of racism. Although this study suggests that racism is less virulent in Canada
versus the US, the results still indicate that it was racism that propelled some of the light-
skinned Abbotts to pass as white despite a strong sense of familial pride and kinship. A
deeper analysis of the factors that contributed to the institutionalization of racism in
Canada might well provide further validation and confirmation of its perpetuation,
despite the general denial within the mainstream population.

\textsuperscript{129} For an in-depth look at issues of access, refer to C. E. James and J. Mannette’s (2000), “Rethinking
Access: The Challenge of Living with Difficult Knowledge” in G.Dei and A. Calliste’s \textit{Power, Knowledge
and Anti-racism Education}, Halifax: Fernwood.
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- The Democratic Character Of The Modern State (I.E. Canada) And The Responsibility It Entails Upon The Citizen
Appendix 1 – Participant Package
Dear Cousin,

Over the last several years you have been aware that I have been researching the practice of racial passing, particularly from a familial perspective. Like me, some of you have had the unique experience of living the first half of your lives as white and the second half as a white person with Black ancestors. Some of you may have experienced the reverse – identifying as Black, in some cases, perhaps even unaware of your White antecedents. Since our initial encounter we have become better acquainted and have been able to share many of our varied experiences and common interests with respect to this phenomenon.

I am eager to further this inquiry through deeper conversations with extended family members. In partial fulfilment of my Doctorate thesis in Sociology and Equity Studies in Education, I am seeking relatives to partake in this inquiry. The purpose of this part of the study is to explore the factors that influenced the practice of passing and racial and/or cultural assimilation that occurred during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in both Canada and the United States. Although the practice of passing is still prominent in society today, I have chosen to examine the lives of two of our antecedents, Wilson and Gordon Abbott, within a historically and culturally specific set of circumstances. It would be helpful to hear from any of the descendants from the extended family about their thoughts or experiences pertaining to their own inherited or acquired racial identities, particularly in light of the multicultural emphasis on policies and practices that is promoted in both of our countries today.

I was hoping that you would be willing to assist me in gathering data that may be of benefit to others who have had similar experiences. If you agree to partake in the study you will be asked to describe some of your experiences, including your self-perceptions in terms of racial identification.

The process of data collection will involve the following:

1- Completion of a questionnaire.
2- Participation in a taped focus group discussion with other family members. (Optional)

The study will commence in June 2003 and all participant involvement should be completed by August 2003. I realize that many of you have already endured my probing for personal information for years now, and I know this kind of participation takes a
significant amount of time and effort that may not be convenient for everyone. However, if some of you are inclined to submit to one more intrusion, I do believe it will contribute to valuable insight into the workings of our own social history and make for a very interesting study. Due to the distance and time factors, I will not attempt to interview anyone in person unless they prefer that format. Instead, I am asking that you submit your responses to the questions via email or telephone, so that the data can be readily documented. If you can respond before our reunion in July, some of us might be able to find a time to chat about it in a group setting when we meet at Interlaken.

Your participation is not expected to involve any expense on your part. Once the study is completed, you will receive a summary of the findings. All of the data collected from the questionnaire or the interview and the focus group discussion will be strictly confidential and only my faculty supervisor and I will have access to this information. Although your identification will not be kept anonymous from other relatives who participate in the focus group, it will be anonymous in the data that is presented to the public. This information will be kept confidential and secured in my research office until the study is completed and the data have been analysed.

I am aware that you may feel some form of pressure from me or other relatives to participate in the study, but please rest assured I have conceived your role in the study to be a bonus, not a necessity for the continuation of this inquiry. You may withdraw from the study at any time without any further commitment. Furthermore, you will be under no obligation to answer all or any of the questions if you choose not to do so. It is possible that you may become upset during the interview or focus group discussion, given that difficult questions are being asked. If that happens it is important that we address and resolve the issues together.

If you would like to become a part of this intriguing study, please contact me so that we can arrange to begin the process. Thank you in advance, for taking time to consider this request. You assistance is very much appreciated and will contribute valuable data that may ultimately challenge racial barriers that continue to prevail across our borders.
Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: The Process and Implications of Racialization: A Case Study

Supervisor: Rose Folson  Committee: Rinaldo Walcott, Ruth Sandwell and Kenneth Johnson

Name of Participant: (Please print) __________________________________________

I understand that this study in which I have agreed to participate will involve revelation of personal information regarding the behaviour, thoughts and feelings of myself and other family members with respect to our race and culture. The researcher will engage me in a private interview in order to review and discuss the extent to which I, and other family members have chosen to or been able to assimilate into the dominant culture. A questionnaire will be presented before the interview is conducted and a focus group will be organized after the interview.

I understand that I am free to withhold any information that I do not care to reveal at that time. I understand that I may be asked intimate questions regarding the race of my family, our cultural practices and our personal beliefs. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason without penalty. I understand that there will be payment/no payment for my participation. I understand that there is no obligation to answer any question/participate in any aspect of this project that I consider invasive, offensive or inappropriate. I understand that all personal data will be kept strictly confidential and that all information will be coded so that my name is not associated with my answers. I understand that only the researchers named above will have access to the data. I understand that I have the right to decline to answer any question at any time during the study. I understand that I may terminate my participation in the study at any time without obligation to the other participants, nor the researcher.

I understand that I am not to pressure any other participants before, during or after the completion of the study.

Participant Signature ___________________________ Date _____________________________

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in the study, you may contact Catherine Slaney at (905) 873-1797, cslaney@cogeco.ca or Professor Rose Folson at 416-426-7232. Feedback about the use of the data collected will be available in September after the study is completed. An explanation will be provided for you upon request. Thank you for your help! Please take one copy of this form with you for further reference.

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Survey Questions: The purpose of this survey is to provide information that will determine how the practice of passing as white, or not by our antecedents has affected you and your family.

*Wilson and Gordon Abbott, sons of Anderson Ruffin and Mary Ann Abbott were raised as black but as adults, they chose to pass as white. They married white women and raised white families and had white descendants. Their sisters, Helene, Ida and Grace alternatively did not pass. They married black men and raised black families. Why did the men pass and not the women? What social/political factors influenced their choices and ultimate decisions? What were the implications on their descendants?*

The following questions have been developed to provide an open-forum for discussion pertaining to your personal opinions, feelings, thoughts or perceptions. You are invited, indeed encouraged to be introspective in your responses and feel free to talk about whatever ideas these questions provoke. It is not necessary to answer any or all of the questions but rather to reflect on what they mean to you in light of your own life experiences and those of your family members. There are no wrong answers. If you feel there are issues that are not being addressed or that other questions should be posed, I would be grateful for your suggestions.

Feel free to insert your answers directly into the document – perhaps you could use italics or bold fonts. Then you can save them as a word document and then mail them back.

Thanks so much for your gracious assistance.
1. Ancestry
   a) Tell me about your branch of the Abbott family. Who were they and what happened to them?
   b) Did they pass any stories down to you regarding their Black/White ancestry?
   c) Was there a time when you were not aware that you were part of a mixed-race family?
   d) Are you proud/ashamed of this ancestry? Why?
   e) How much does it matter to you what your predecessors experienced or accomplished? Do any of their deeds affect you today? How?
   f) Why do you think Wilson and/or Gordon Abbott passed as white?
   g) Was it different in the United States than in Canada? How?
   h) Do you think that Canadians were affected by similar social/political movements? To what extent?
   i) How different was the racial climate in the early 20th century from today?

2. Perception of Self
   a) How would you describe yourself in racial terms?
   b) Have you always identified in this way?
   c) Did you base your self-identification on the basis of your perception of your parents’ race?
   d) Was your racial identification imposed by others?
   e) What factors determine your racial identification, i.e. Physical characteristics, skin colour, cultural lifestyle, political/social climate, racial population of your environment?
   f) Do you identify differently at home than you do at work or in the community? Why?
   g) Does the location (community, state, province, country) affect the way in which people like you are identified?
   h) Do you tend to associate with people who racially identify like you?

3. Perception of Racism
   a) What does racism mean to you?
   b) Have you ever experienced instances of racism on a personal level?
   c) Have you ever unwittingly engaged in racist acts, now that you think about it later?
   d) To your knowledge, have any members of your immediate family ever experienced racism on a personal level?

4. Perception of Predecessors’ Racial Experiences
   a) What kind of racism do you think your ancestors faced? When was this?
   b) How did they deal with segregation?
c) How did their socioeconomic class factor into this equation?

d) Do you think that these experiences influenced the decisions (racial identity, religious affiliation, residential location, professional occupation, schools, etc) they made with respect to their personal (or their family’s) well-being, safety, security or comfort?

e) Do you think they were concerned about the racial location of their future descendants?

f) Do you identify differently than they did? Why?

g) How do you think their passing has affected you? Did you benefit/suffer from it? How?

5. Perception of Children’s Racial Experiences

a) Do you think that your children are affected by issues of race in their personal life?

b) Does your child(ren) talk about race?

c) Do you teach your children about their Black/White heritage?

d) How do they identify themselves on the basis of race?

e) Do they identify differently than you and/or your spouse? Why?

6. Educational Access

a) Did you attend a racially diverse school?

b) Who did you associate with?

c) Do you think that you enjoyed racial/cultural privilege at school?

d) Did you ever feel deprived from educational opportunities, based on your race?

e) Did you suffer any positive or negative racial differentiation at school from peers or teachers?

f) Do you remember learning about multiculturalism or diversity or equity issues in school?

g) Did you feel different from the other students at any time in your school years?

h) Did you ever feel that your aspirations or ambitions were unrealistic due to racial barriers?

i) How well do you think teachers and schools handled issues of race and culture in your day compared to today?

7. Employment Equity/Affirmative Action

a) Did you ever feel that you were exploited or racially discriminated against in your workplace?

b) Did you see it happen to others? How did you feel about it?

c) Did you ever feel passed over at work due to race?

d) Were you ever the butt of racial slurs or distasteful jokes?
e) Did you ever take advantage of employment equity/affirmative action incentives?

f) Do you feel limited or empowered in terms of social mobility due to your racial identification?

8. Community Experiences

a) Have you or members of your family ever suffered from racial profiling in the community: police, service providers, border control, housing accommodation, stores, restaurants, hotels, theatres, courts of law, hospitals or medical centres, church, recreation facilities, etc?

b) How important is your racial community as a support system for you and/or your family?

c) What is your religious denomination? How important is it to you that you identify with that particular affiliation? Why?

9. Other Factors

a. What do you consider to be the strongest factors that influence your racial identity?

b. Are you happy with this identity?

c. Would you ever consider changing or hiding your racial identity?

d. Do you sometimes allow others to assume you are something else if it serves your purposes at that specific moment? If so, how does this make you feel? Do you think that is a form of deception? Self-preservation? Good strategy?

e. Do you believe your racial identity is something that you constructed for yourself or was it something dictated by society?

f. Could you change it if you wanted to? Would you?

g. Do you believe that the concept of race is a myth?

10. Debriefing

a. How did you feel about being asked to talk about these things?

b. Is there anything else I should have asked you? Is there anything else you would like to say?

c. Do you think this exercise will motivate you to do anything differently?

d. Were you uncomfortable at any time while answering these questions? If so, how can I address your concerns? Can I do anything to alleviate your discomfort?
Resource Support for Participants

The following resources may be able to offer you further support information regarding current race issues faced by many individuals today. Please feel free to contact them as they have an extensive network of further resources that strive to inform the public about racism and anti-racist endeavours.

Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 4900 Yonge St., Suite 1305, Willowdale, On M2N 6A4
Telephone: (888) 240-4936, Fax: (888) 399-0333, Website: www.crr.ca

Canadian Council for Multicultural and Intercultural Education
124 O’Connor Street., Suite 200, Ottawa, On K1P 5M9
Telephone: (613) 233-4916, Fax: (613) 233-4735, Website: www.ccmie.com

Multiculturalism Program, Department of Canadian Heritage
15 Eddy St., Hull, PQ K1A 0N5
Fax: (819) 953-9228

Canadian Civil Liberties Association
299 Yonge St., Suite 403, Toronto, ON M5B 1N9
Telephone: (416) 363-0321, Website: www.ccla.org

Canadian Human Rights Commission
320 Queen St., Place de Ville, Tower A, Ottawa, ON K1A 1E1
Telephone: (613) 995-1151, Website: www.chrc.ca

Ontario Human Rights Commission
180 Dundas St. W., 7th floor, Toronto, ON M7A 2R3
Telephone: (800) 387-9080, Fax: (416) 314-4533, Website: www.ohrc.on.ca

Urban Alliance on Race Relations
675 King St. W., Suite 202, Toronto, ON M5V 1M9
Telephone: (416) 703-6607, Website: www.uarr.org

Worldwise International Awareness Centre
16 Pelham Rd., St. Catharines, ON L2F 1P9

Canadian Ethnocultural Council
176 Gloucester St., Suite 400, Ottawa, ON K2P 0A6
Telephone: (613) 230-3867, Website: www.ethnocultural.ca
Appendix 2: Presentation of Data
### DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF PARTICIPANTS

| American |            |           | Gender | | Canadian |            |           | Gender |
|----------|------------|------------|--------| |----------|------------|------------|--------|
| Race     | Age        | Post       |        | | Race     | Age        | Post       |        |
| B        | W          | Pre50s     | 60s    | M        | F          | 60s        | 60s        |        |
| 7        | 4          | 3          | 9      | 5        | 8          | 3          | 0         |
|          |            |            |        |          | 6          | 2          | 1         |
|          |            |            |        |          | 3          | 2          | 4         |
| Summary of Demographic Breakdown of Participants |
- 11 Americans – 7 Black – 4 White – 8 male – 3 female
- 6 Canadians – 0 Black – 6 White – 2 male – 4 female
Figure 2 – Chart of Black/white Ancestry of Participants

- Total number of surveys distributed 30
- Total number of surveys returned 17
- 10 male – 8 Am, 2 Can
  - 4 male - 2 Am, 2 Can
    - Age Range 28 - 73 years old
    - Nationality 2 Am, 2 Can
  - 6 female – 2 Am, 4 Can
    - Age Range 21 – 73 years
    - Nationality 3 Am, 3 Can
- 7 BLACK
  - 6 male - 6 Am
    - DOB 1964, 1963, 1931, 1929
    - Age Range 40 – 74 years
    - Nationality 6 Am
  - 1 female – 1 Am
    - DOB 1950
    - Age 53
    - Nationality 1 Am

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<td>Black</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>WWBB</td>
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<tr>
<td>JRA James</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>WWBB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARA Anderson</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>BBBW</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAA Mary Ann</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>BBWW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHA William</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>BBBW</td>
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<td>LJA Louisa</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>BWWB</td>
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<tr>
<td>GA Gordon</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>AA Ann</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>WWWW, WWWW</td>
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<tr>
<td>WA Wilson</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>BBWW, BBWW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FN Florence</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>WWWW, WWWW</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS Helene</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>BS Benjamin</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>GH Grace</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>BBBW, BBWW</td>
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<tr>
<td>FH Fred</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>BBBW, BBBW</td>
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<tr>
<td>IS Ida</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>BBWW, BBWW</td>
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<tr>
<td>CS Charles</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>BBBB, BBBB</td>
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### Figure 2 - Chart of Black/white Ancestry of Participants

ARA — Anderson Ruffin Abbott  m  MAA — Mary Anna (Casey) Abbott  
WHA — William Henson Abbott  m  JA — Louisa Jane (Moore) Abbott  
GA — Gordon Abbott  m  AA — Ann Abbott  
WA — Wilson Abbott II  m  FN — Florence Nightingale  
HS — Helene Abbott  m  BS — Benjamin Sayre  
IS — Ida Abbott  m  CS — Charles Stevenson  
GH — Grace Abbott  m  FH — Fred Hubbard

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<th>DNA</th>
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| MY             | White     | 3   | BBBBWWW
WWWWW(8) |
| WS             | White     | 4   | BBBBWWWWW
WWWWW(16) |
| BG             | White     | 4   | BBBBWWWWW
WWWWW(16) |
| JJ (WHA)       | White     | 4   | BBBWWW
WWWWW(16) |
| CG             | White     | 4   | BBBBWWW
WWWWW(16) |
| MG             | White     | 5   | BBBBWWW
WWWWW(24) |
| RS             | White     | 6   | BBBBWWW
WWWWW(24) |
| WA             | White     | 5   | BBBBWWW
WWWWW(24) |
| SS             | White     | 5   | BBBBWWW
WWWWW(24) |
| JR             | White     | 5   | BBBBWWW
WWWWW(24) |
| EB (JRA)       | Black     | 4   | BBBBWW
WWWW(16) |
| AS             | Black     | 4   | BBBBWW
WWWW(16) |
| JS             | Black     | 5   | BBBBWWW
WWWWW(24) |
| DS             | Black     | 5   | BBBBWWW
WWWWW(24) |
| LR             | Black     | 5   | BBBBWWW
WWWWW(24) |
| FL (WHA)       | Black     | 4   | BBBBWW
WWWW(16) |
| LM (WHA)       | Black     | 5   | BBBBWWW
WWWWW(24) |
Appendix 3: The Abbott Family Tree
Descendants of Wilson Ruffin Abbott-1017

I. Wilson Ruffin Abbott-1017 (b.1801-Richmond d.1876-Toronto,Ontario)
   sp: Ellen Toyer-69 (b.1802-Baltimore, Maryland m.1830)

   2. Anderson Ruffin Abbott-1017 (b.1835-Toronto,Ontario d.1913-Toronto,Ontario)
      sp: Mary Ann Casey-54 (b.1856-St. Catharines m.9 Aug 1871 d.21 Apr 1931-Toronto,Ontario)
         3. Gordon Anderson Abbott-16 (b.5 May 1885-Dundas,Ontario d.14 Dec 1950-Toronto,Ontario)
            sp: Ann Louise Leworthy-17 (b.8 Feb 1899-Toronto,Ontario d.8 Apr 1954-Toronto,Ontario)
            5. Grace Isobel Abbott-55 (b.1886-Clutha,Ontario d.1941-Toronto,Ontario)
               sp: Frederick L. Hubbard-119
      3. Ida Anna Abbott-56 (b.1878 d.1958)
         sp: Charles J. Stevens-239 (b.1873-St. Louis m.27 Aug 1902)
      3. Wilson Ruffin II Abbott-37 (b.17 Jul 1873-Chatham,Ontario d.5 Dec 1938-Chicago,Illinois,USA)
         sp: Theresia Nightingale-70 (b.22 May 1858-Chicago,Illinois,USA m.1903 d.12 Oct 1912-Chicago,Illinois,USA)
            sp: Ruth-263
            sp: Lee-265
         sp: Benjamin Seyer-779 (m.5 Apr 1902 d.22 Feb 1935-Chicago,IL)
      3. Mabel Jane Abbott-1029 (d.1873)
      3. Stephen Abbott-1050

   2. Amzie Bita Abbott-773 (b.1842-Toronto,Ontario)
      sp: John Watkins-244
         3. Helene Amelia Watkins-245
            sp: Bruce Vancey-248 (m.1865)
      3. John Lloyd Watkins-246 (b.1856 d.1888)

   2. William Henson Abbott-87 (b.1848-Toronto,Ontario)
      sp: Louisa Jane Moore-240 (b.26 Jul 1856-Levis,NY,USA m.8 Nov 1871 d.28 May 1926)
            sp: UNKNOWN
         3. Anderson Richard Abbott-242 (b.Sep 1877)
            sp: Vivian Welsh-351

   2. Wilson Ruffin Abbott-1031 (b.1832 d.1895)
   2. Walter Abbott-1032 (b.1833)
   2. Martha Elizabeth Abbott-1033 (b.1835 d.1896)
   2. Mary Ellen Abbott-1034 (b.1839)
   2. Eliza Jane Abbott-1035 (b.1844)
Appendix 4  Chronology: Anderson Ruffin Abbott, M.D - (1837 - 1913)
Anderson Ruffin Abbott

1835  Parents, Wilson R. & Ellen Toyer emigrated originally from Richmond, Virginia & Baltimore, Maryland, then from Mobile, Alabama, then from New York City, New York to Toronto

April 7, 1837  birth of Anderson in Toronto, Canada

1850  attended Rev. King’s first graduating class at the Buxton Mission School considered one of King’s “intellectual children.” The first graduate was Jerome Riley, then Anderson Abbott, James Rapier (from Alabama) and four others.

Before 1856  Toronto Academy, honour student

1856 - 1858  Oberlin College, Ohio, Preparatory Department

1861  graduated Toronto School of Medicine, University of Toronto

1862  licentiate of the Medical Board of Upper Canada licensed by the Dominion Medical Board

February 6, 1863  requested a commission in Union army

April 30, 1863  re applied as a medical cadet in the US federal (Union) army

June 26, 1863  initial contract with Union army, $80/mo

Friday, July 10, 1863  travelled to Washington D.C. via New York City with Mrs. Augusta

Monday, July 13, 1863  New York draft riots

September 2, 1863  Acting Assistant Surgeon, Captain

Winter 1863-64  Abbott and Augusta are guests at President Lincoln's levee at the White House

February 26, 1864  paid $100/mo, 113.83 + transportation when performing in the field

1863 - 1866  Washington tour of duty - outstanding
Dec. 30, 1864  Abbott suggested changing name of Freedmen’s Hospital to “John Brown” or “Butler”

April 1865  Assassination of President Lincoln

April 1865  Mrs. Lincoln presented Dr. Abbott with a plaid shawl which Lincoln wore on his way to his first inauguration

Jan 2, 1866  from records of Bureau of Freedmen, Refugees and Abandoned lands in the US National Archives, Augusta was made a Brevet Major

May 12, 1866  commendation from Dr. Robert Reyburn, Surgeon-in-Chief, Washington, D.C.

May 14, 1866  Abbott’s resignation accepted by Caleb W. Horner, Surgeon US Volunteers, Chief Medical Officer with regret

May 15, 1866  Dr. R.O. Abbott, surgeon US army and medical director, Department of Washington wrote a commendation for Dr. A. Abbott

June 26, 1863 - June 25, 1865  Abbott served at Contraband Camp, Washington – Camp Baker or Barker

June 26, 1864 - August 21, 1865  Freedmen’s Hospital

1864  Acting Executive Officer for Freedmen’s Hospital

Jan 22, 1865  Director of Abbott Hospital in Freedmen’s village, Virginia

1867  passed the primary examination for the degree of medicine at University of Toronto

1869  became a member of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, Ontario

1869 - 1871  acting resident physician of Toronto General Hospital

Aug. 1871  married Mary Ann Casey in Toronto

1874  coroner of Kent county and first African Canadian to hold that position
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<td>president of Kent County Medical Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>1873 - 1880</td>
<td>president of Wilberforce Educational Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>1870s</td>
<td>board of Chatham Collegiate Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>1870s</td>
<td>associate editor of the messenger, an organ of the BME Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>settled in Dundas</td>
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<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>director of Dundas Mechanics Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>Vice Treasurer and President of Dundas mechanics institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>Dundas high school trustee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885 - 1889</td>
<td>chairman of internal management committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880s</td>
<td>warden of St. James Anglican Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800s</td>
<td>registrar of St. James guild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>moved to Oakville</td>
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<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>moved to Toronto - 119 Dowling Ave</td>
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<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>moved to Toronto affiliated with St. George's Anglican Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>April, 1890</td>
<td>elected a member of James S. Knowlton post no. 532, Grand Army of the Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November, 1890</td>
<td>appointed as Aide-de-camp to the commanding officer of The Department of New York - achieved the highest rank and prestige ever awarded a non-white of African descent in Canada or the US</td>
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<tr>
<td>1891 - 1897+</td>
<td>lived in Chicago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>surgeon of James S. Knowlton Post No. 532</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<tr>
<td>1894 - 1897</td>
<td>appointed surgeon-in-chief of Provident hospital in Chicago in the absence of the famed heart specialist, Dr. Daniel Hale Williams who had accepted a position at Freedmen's Hospital in Washington</td>
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<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>licensed to practice in Illinois</td>
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<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>licensed to practice in Michigan</td>
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<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>back in Toronto</td>
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<tr>
<td>December, 29, 1913</td>
<td>died in Toronto, buried in Necropolis cemetery</td>
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Appendix 5 – Selections from the Abbott Papers
THE WHITE HOUSE LEVEE

When Dr. Abbott was appointed as Dr. Augusta’s Assistant Surgeon-in-chief in Washington, they enjoyed many adventures together and even managed to crash a levee at the White House, much to the surprise of the guests, Robert Lincoln, son of the President and possibly even the President himself. However, one has to wonder at the audacity of the two doctors engaging in such a bold endeavour. Perhaps Mrs. Lincoln’s Lady-in-waiting, Mrs. Keckley, a coloured woman and good friend of Mrs. Augusta and Dr. Abbott was able to procure the invitation.

Elizabeth Keckley, a talented dressmaker acted as Mrs. Lincoln’s Lady-in-waiting. She had been a slave for thirty years in Virginia and had endured her share of good and bad times. As a skilful dressmaker, she was eventually able to save enough money to purchase the freedom of herself and her son, George in 1855. Shortly afterwards he enlisted in the Union Army but was killed in action. Elizabeth was deeply concerned about the welfare of the thousands of Negro refugees that flocked to Washington, under the impression that they were heading for a haven. In response to the critical need for the necessities of life, including food, clothing, shelter and medical services, she founded the Contraband Relief Society. This endeavour would likely have brought her into close contact with Dr. Abbott’s hospital and contraband camp.
I suspect she may well have provided the doctors with a unique opportunity to attend one of the Presidential soirees. Since Mrs. Augusta was also a dressmaker and designer she may have had a professional as well as a social acquaintance with Mrs Keckley. At any rate, the two coloured doctors made a name for themselves and a point for their race one night. Here is Anderson’s account of their dramatic ascent into the upper echelons of Washington society.

Dr. Augusta and I determined to visit the President at the next Levee that he held in the White House. One evening we appeared at the White House in full uniform. As we entered the porch, we were conducted to a room and relieved of our wraps, for it was in the winter. The White House was a blaze of light. Soldiers were guarding the entrance. Carriages containing handsomely dressed ladies, citizens and soldiers were continually depositing the elite of Washington at the entrance to the porch. Music was wafted to our ears from the Marine band, which was stationed in the Conservatory. Ushers, lackeys, waiters and messengers were scurrying here and there attending the guests.

After leaving the vestibule we were led along a wide hall to a door. There we were met by Mr. B.B. French, a Commissioner of the Treasury Department, who conducted us with all the urbanity imaginable, to the President, who was standing just inside the door. Mr. French introduced Dr. Augusta first. We had previously given him our cards. Mr. Lincoln, on seeing Augusta, advanced eagerly a few paces forward, grasped his hand and as he held the Doctor’s hand, Robert Lincoln, who had been standing beside his mother about six paces off, came up to the President and asked a question very hastily, the purport of which I took to be, "Are you going to allow this invasion?", referring, doubtless, to our presence there! The President replied, "Why not?" Nothing more was said and Robert Lincoln returned to his mother’s side. Then the President turned again to Augusta and gave his hand a hearty shake and then I was introduced and the President shook hands with me also. Then we passed on to a position in front of Mrs. Lincoln and were introduced to that lady.

We then passed out into a room on the opposite side from where we had entered, called the East Room. Next, we were destined to undergo an ordeal with which, in comparison to what
we had experienced thus far, was only a dream. The moment we entered the room, which was
crowded and brilliantly lit up, we became the cynosure of all eyes. I had never experienced such
a sensation as I did when I entered the room. We could not have been more surprised ourselves
nor could we have created more surprise if we had been dropped down upon them through the
skylight.

I suppose it was because it was the first time in the history of the United States that a
colored man had appeared at one of these Levees. What made us more conspicuous, of course,
were our uniforms. Colored men in the uniforms of the United States, military officers of high
rank had never been seen here before. I felt as though I should have liked to crawl into a hole.
But as we had decided to break the record we held our ground. I bit my lips, took Augusta's arm
and sauntered around the room endeavoring to or pretending to, view the very fine pictures
which adorned the wall. I tried also to become interested in the beautiful music discoursed by the
Marine band, but it was the first time that music had failed to absorb my attention. Wherever we
went, a space was cleared for us and we became the centre of a new circle of interest. Some
stared at us merely from curiosity, others with an expression of friendly interest, while others
again scowled at us in such a significant way that left no doubt as to what views they held the
Negro question. We remained in the room and faced monocles and lorgnettes. Stares and
fascinating eyes levelled at us for half of an hour or so and then we passed out of the room and
secured our wraps. Just as we were leaving, we were besieged by an ubiquitous reporter who
wanted to interview us, but I handed him our cards, and so ended our first visit to the White
House.

I do not know whether we were really the first colored guests to visit the President of the
United States at one of his levees but I am inclined to think we were. I asked an attaché of the
Haitian Embassy whom I met in Washington if he had visited any of those levees and he replied
that he had done so frequently, without any embarrassment. But I can understand that in his case,
as he was so light complexioned, that he would pass unnoticed in a throng like that. However, we
had broken the ice.

The following morning there appeared in the Washington Star the following item among
the news from the White House, “During the evening Dr. Augusta, the Colored Surgeon of the
District of Columbia Colored Regiment, dressed in his Major's uniform and also Dr. Abbott,
Assistant Surgeon of the Colored Regiment called upon the President and was kindly received by
him." The Honorable Fred Douglas\textsuperscript{130} shortly afterwards visited one of the President's Levees and was received very cordially.

\textsuperscript{130} Frederick Douglass was formerly a slave. His eloquent speeches and descriptions of slavery made him a powerful member of the Anti-Slavery Society, fighting for civil rights and racial equality while recruiting troops for coloured regiments.
The Afro-American population of Toronto is about 1,500, the descendants of successive colonies, principally from Virginia, Maryland and South Carolina who settled here during the troublous period following the Nat Turner insurrection. A considerable accession to the population took place in 1857, during the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law. Every Southern State has an exiled son or daughter in this city, but the bulk of the colonists were free and intelligent men who left Virginia rather than submit to intolerable persecution and came to Canada bringing sufficient means with them to purchase homes, and secure for themselves an honorable and substantial citizenship. A very few of the original settlers are living but their family names frequently crop out in their descendants. Whenever you come across a particularly bright youngster with patronymics as Harris, Johnson, Tinsley, Abbott, Edmunds, Williams, Lewis, Hickman, Davis, Hubbard, Mink, Judah, Harney, Burke, Drake, Berry, Coates, Crouch, Smith, Gant, Wanzey, Warren, Watkins, Bryant, Carey, dovetailed in their names, you may know that they belong to the old stock. “Pap” Tinsley, who is over 108 years old, and Elisha Edmunds, who came to Toronto when it bore the pseudonym of “Muddy Little York,” are the nesters.

Afro-Americans have shared with others in the rapid growth in value of real estate. I have no means of judging of the amount of property they possess; half a million is an underestimate of the value of property owned by them. The constant drain to which our population has been subjected since the close of the Civil War precludes the possibility of any very great increase in wealth or numbers. Our youth evince a strong disposition to cross the border-line as soon as they acquire sufficient knowledge and experience to make a living. In this way we are impoverished and you are correspondingly benefited. By the process of absorption and expatriation the color line will eventually fade out in Canada. There are two churches, Methodist and Baptists, and several fraternal and benevolent societies. Outside of these civil and military organizations have Afro-American representatives enjoying the fullest freedom of intercourse and occupying in some instances positions of trust and responsibility.
A most gratifying feature of the visit of the National Educational Association of the United States to Toronto last summer was the satisfaction expressed at the arrangements that had been made for the comfort and convenience of the teachers. The hearty enthusiasm with which all classes co-operated in making the visit pleasant and profitable was adequately appreciated and reciprocated. So many highly cultured men and women never before were assembled in Toronto. Their admiration of our city was unbounded and they spoke so enthusiastically of their reception that I felt very proud of "This Canada of Ours." What they particularly recalled as a pleasant memory was the freedom from restraint with which they could move about without attracting special notice. Many of them declared that they had never before experienced such entire immunity from the repressing influences of race proscription. A few weeks ago I had the pleasure of dining at the Rossin house, the rival of the Queen's with a friend from the "City of Homes and Churches." The white waiters in attendance were respectful, attentive and obliging. Chaplain Allensworth, U.S.A.; Prince Momola Massabuoy, West Africa; G.E. Jones of Little Rock, Ark., and many other distinguished visitors were so enraptured with Canadian life that they lingered here some time after the convention had adjourned.

All this seems very strange to us who are "native and to the manner born." I presume that had we spent the better part of our lives nursing our wounded sensibilities we should be able to realize what these estimable people enjoyed. As it was we could only wonder at a civilization that refuses to recognize manhood, intelligence and respectability when they irradiate a dusky face. I do not claim that there is no race prejudice in Canada. In Toronto, at least it is innocuous. There are no indications of it in our churches, schools, societies, hotels and places of public resort. I can therefore confidently commend our city to Afro-American tourists as an eligible objective point where they can enjoy life without being subjected to all sorts of humiliating experiences.

Afro-Americans in Toronto are justly entitled to the respectful treatment they receive for several reasons. They are and always have been loyal, peaceful, law-abiding. By providence and industry they have secured homes and educated their children, who are employed as tradesmen, mechanics, laborers; some are in the service of the government, and a few following professional pursuits, besides the usual quota of waiters, barbers, restaurant and boarding house keepers. There is not a saloon in the city kept by an Afro-American. Our young men are not in the habit of frequenting bar-rooms or gambling dens; our young women are not
indolent and empty-headed. In fact our young people are too much concerned with the serious affairs of life; too many opportunities within their reach, too many incentives to make use of them, to permit them to indulge in frivolities.

The Canadian people, quick to fan the kindling flow of enthusiasm in our youth for higher education, encourage in every possible way the feeblest effort in that direction. Our schools, colleges and universities are becoming training schools for Afro-American youth. A Canadian and a West Indian have recently graduated from the University of Trinity College, Toronto. Bishop's College, Queen's College, Kingston and the University of McGill, Montreal have turned out Afro-American graduates. All of our high and public schools, collegiate institutes, have representatives in the race in attendance; a few are employed as teachers. Music, painting and elocution are cultivated to some extent; a few are qualifying themselves in the conservatory and schools of art to teach those branches and for professional life. I am free to confess that some are not benefiting by their environments to the extent they should. I am surprised that more of our young men do not take advantage of the technical schools to acquire trades and a knowledge of other industrial avocations. When we consider, however, the circumstances under which many of their parents settled in the country and the limited means at their disposal, we are forced to admit that it is a far cry from that to their present position and prospects. The flower of our youth are leaving us yearly, yet we do not factor in the uplifting of the Afro-American on this continent by supplementing those moral, intellectual and industrial forces which are slowly but surely elevating him to a higher civilization.  

A.R. Abbott, M.D.  
The AGE, Toronto, March 5th, 1892
Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:-

Honor and responsibility are twins. What greater honor than to be a recognized member of an autonomous state! A state like Canada, having all the qualifications of self-government! This is an honor, but one implying great responsibility.

This is clearly seen, when we consider what the government of a country means. Does it not mean the management of its affairs from various stand-points? The post office, currency, militia; the appointment of courts of justice, of judges, police, and magistrates; the management of asylums, jails, railroads, telegraphs, and other public systems; the raising of the revenue by the different modes of taxation, the regulation and sale of certain articles, the safe guarding of the lives and property of the citizens; the giving permission to certain people to immigrate and others to emigrate; the allowing or disallowing of foreigners to do our own labor; and the importation of all that is necessary to supply the wants and desires of a great people. Therefore it is clearly seen, that those who hold the helm of state though seemingly the "Favorites of Fortune" have no light task to perform.

The question then before us is, what qualifications should the citizen possess in order to be competent in discharging these duties?

In the first place it would be absurd to expect that any man fully understand the complete work of government and yet it is his duty to oversee and judge the work of all officials, to whom these duties are assigned.

Insight into events transpiring in the state, and foresight with regard to the future, are two necessary qualifications of the highest statesmanship. And I certainly think, that any man without such qualifications, should not be invested with the highest office in the gift of the people. A statesman ought also, to possess practised ability in public speaking, not only that he may defend himself against the attacks of his enemies, but also that he may recommend his policy to the country. Again he should weigh carefully the smallest claim of duty and discharge the functions of his office, in accordance with strictest morality. It is also the duty, sir, of every true friend of his country to point out rocks ahead, and indicate how they may be avoided.
The qualifications in reliance upon which a candidate may sue for the highest office in the gift of the people are: good birth, integrity, and energy. When he has these qualifications he may consider a firm foundation laid for his canvass. It is well for him, if he has all three. If not he must not assume that the doors of office are closed to him, or that he will be left in obscurity. For many a man,

"Breaks his birth's invidious bar,
And grasps the skirts of happy chance,
And breasts the blows of circumstance,
And grapples with his evil star."

Yes sir, if only he is loyal and honest, if no extravagance can be laid at his door, no love of pleasure, no riotous living, he will be counted worthy by the people, of obtaining the highest favors, - for a man who is always willing to serve others, keeps his merits before the public eye. In this country there has always been a fair field open to men of true merit, in which they could come to the front and receive recognition. Therefore, in the first place, a candidate who is to head a pole in a democratic state must have people's good work and good will, and these he must secure by good nature, justice, and honesty. Let him therefore be at the service of his friends, let him conciliate kindness and avoid shocking the feelings of anyone. In the second place he must have influence, for one who affects to despise such, the enthusiasm of friends is very apt to be impaired.

Hence such an education is necessary as will train the judgment, broaden the common sense and sympathy of each citizen, - judgment as it relates to character, to work, and results of work.

Every elector should be able to discriminate the impostor, demagogue from the just and honest parliamentarian. As facts of government are often hard to get at, the voter must be quick to estimate probabilities and draw conclusions from open and well known circumstances.

I, therefore lay it down that every citizen in a democratic state, have a fair amount of scholarship. If a man cannot read or write, his sources of knowledge are second-hand and very small. If a man can simply read and write, his judgment is very narrow and his prejudices too strong for a mixed community. Hence to form a fair judgment, a man should have a good English education, and by a great variety of exercises as possible, be trained to think for himself.
We live in a country, where every inducement is given to the individual to improve himself and his estate. Knowledge has power here, as elsewhere; but more emphatically here, because it opens an avenue to every position in the eyes of the state and must monetize position, to commerce, engineering and science. Hence men will strive to get an education.
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