

Burn, Baby, Burn

The Inflammatory Historiography of the Sir George Williams Affair and its Current Rekindling

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On January 29th, 1969, over 400 students occupied the computer room at Sir George Williams University (SGWU), now called Concordia University, in a continued protest regarding the academic treatment of six West Indian students. Two weeks later, the city of Montreal's newly-formed riot squad arrested ninety-seven of these students as the Computer Center went up in flames. A biology professor, Perry Anderson, was accused of discriminating against six black students after giving them lower grades than their white peers without just cause.¹ Those six students filed complaints in April 1968, and over the following eight months the student body witnessed a barrage of cancelled hearing committees, stalled decisions, and failed negotiations. Eventually, the University's administration suspended professor Perry Anderson and formed a hearing committee consisting of five professors: two white, two black and one of "East Indian descent."² However, after a confrontation with students, administrators later removed the two black professors from the committee on suspicions of bias inhibiting fair judgement.³ From April 1968 until the events that took place on the morning of February 11th, local news sources referred to the conflict by as the "Anderson Affair."⁴ On January 29th, 1969, a final hearing between the complainants and University faculty lagged and failed to produce solutions. After months of faculty inaction and apparent intransigence, this final failure to heed the complainants' demands catalysed protest: students rallied to the original complainant Kennedy Fredericks's cry to occupy the nearby computer centre, located on the ninth floor of the newly opened Hall building.⁵ Twelve days later, on February 11th, a ne-

gotiated settlement between the University administration and faculty fell through and the newly-formed riot squad was dispatched to clear the protestors. Over the next few hours the situation would escalate as students barricaded themselves within the computer centre, threw thousands of computer punched cards out the windows, and finally evacuated as fire mysteriously broke out behind the barricades. While the exact cause of the fire was never determined, the fire destroyed Computer Center and its machinery and total damages were later estimated at two million dollars. As students escaped the blaze, they were met by anxious observers, verbally violent counter-protestors, police and paddy wagons.⁶ The months-long "Anderson Affair" became the infamous "Sir George Williams Affair" that morning, and the nation exploded with reports of the events, the damages, and the arrests of ninety-seven of the "student radicals."⁷ Perry Anderson, the accused and suspended professor, was reinstated the following day and court hearings continued for months as many students were refused bail and "foreign" students' immigration papers were back-checked for error and fraud.⁸

The names invoked in definition of the 1969 events at SGWU range from "affair" and "incident" to "protest" and even "riot," reflecting the copious conflicts in memory, presentation, and representation of events emergent in its historiography over the past 45 years. This paper will encompass the majority of the Sir George Williams Affair's historiography, focusing on publications with entire sections or chapters devoted to the subject (of which there are relatively few) as well as an examination of its place, or lack thereof, in the popular "Canadian" histori-

1 "SGWU hit by police," *McGill Daily*, February 11, 1969.

2 *Ninth Floor*, directed by Mina Shum (Canada: National Film Board of Canada, 2015).

3 *Ninth Floor*.

4 Dorothy Eber, *The Computer Centre Party* (Montreal: Tundra Books of Montreal, 1969). Dorothy Eber's book refers to the events at SGWU in 1969 as part of the "Anderson Affair." The name "Sir George Williams Affair" had not yet been used.

5 "SGWU hit by police."

6 Eber, *The Computer Centre Party*, 6.

7 Wikipedia, s.v. "Sir George Williams Affair," Wikipedia.org, accessed August 10, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir_George_Williams_affair; Clair Balfour, "Students Destroy Computer," *The Globe and Mail*, February 12, 1969. Both Clair Balfour's 1969 article and the current Wikipedia page refer to the student participants as "radicals."

8 Balfour.

cal canon.⁹ The historiography of the Sir George Williams Affair depicts the nexus of activism, both academic and grassroots, which influenced and produced the events of 1969; the historiography becomes presciently reflective of this nexus at a very early stage, applying methodological frameworks beyond “radicalism” and “student protest.” While the historiography of the SGWU Affair is not large, it provides a specific historical axis around which the ideologies and actors of 1960s Montreal swirl, depicting their current ripples into our contemporary context.

A *McGill Daily* article titled “SGWU hit by Police” was one of the earliest reports to have been published on the events of February 11th, 1969. Released the same day as the breakup of the computer centre occupation, the article details the Sir George Williams Affair *in medias res*, before it had garnered any historical title or the monikers “affair,” “riot” and “incident.” This article, printed and released before the breakup of the computer room occupation by the police, documents briefly the catalyst for action: “teachers... failed to ratify a proposed agreement between the administration and the occupiers which would have de-escalated the crisis.”¹⁰ Both the placement of blame upon the failed ratification and the categorization of the event as a “crisis” focalize the intensity and damage of the “riot” rather than the preceding events or “the Anderson Affair.”¹¹ This article also documents the five specific demands made by protesters and the expected opposition from administration, faculty and their respective lawyers. *The Daily* cites discontent “over the capitulation from students and the Anderson suspension” as the reason for the faculty’s surprising rejection of the proposed agreement.

The article’s byline reads: “Principal Clarke calls police in after students barricade 5 floors of Hall building.”¹² Included above the text is a picture of students, one with their right fist held aloft, and a caption contextualizing the length and location of occupation: “computer centre being held for two weeks and the faculty club for one.” Significantly, the article states “[a]t 6 am today, Station 10 reported no arrests in the Sir George occupation.”¹³ Its im-

mediate release appears to have predated any knowledge of over 90 arrests that would eventually take place. However, by February 12th, 1969, the news had shifted drastically to encompass the new developments including the escalation of student and police confrontation with both verbal and physical violence.

A *Globe and Mail* article published the next day by reporter Clair Balfour states that “[r]acial feelings were not all below the surface. Many of the students outside were indignant at the occupation. Most were white.”¹⁴ Titled “Students Destroy Computer,” the article focuses on the destruction of property and descriptions of the actions taken by police, documenting the arrests on the scene:

“... militant students at Sir George Williams University in downtown Montreal yesterday destroyed the university’s \$1.4 million main computer and set fire to the data centre before running, choking, through smoke into the arms of waiting police.”

The language used to describe the students and the damages wrought depicts the escalation from the previous *Daily* report. Words like “militant” and “radical” are now attached to the students rather than the *Daily*’s “occupier” and “protest.”¹⁵ The demands outlined in the *Daily* are no longer present in Balfour’s account; instead, she lists the criminal charges and their maximum penalties. These two articles, both published within forty-eight hours of the “Sir George Williams Affair” preface the historiography by delineating key elements ascribed to the events and the speed of their escalation from “student protest” and “occupation” to “militancy” and “property destruction.” Placed side by side, the articles depict the explosion of tensions that radiated from February 1969 into the national and international consciousness, through SGWU’s historiography, and into Montreal’s contemporary context.

The previous paragraph shows how quickly reports escalated as the Anderson Affair flamed up into the Sir George Williams Affair. As the change in name sug-

9 For the most part, I will refer to the events of February 1969 – the computer centre occupation and its aftermath – as the “Sir George Williams Affair” (SGWU Affair), except when specifically reflecting the language of a historical source. This title is the one most commonly used throughout the historiography and remains distinct from the Anderson Affair while denoting the particular historical event. “Incident,” “riot” and “protest” are the other common names used.

10 “SGWU hit by police.”

11 Eber, *The Computer Centre Party*. For Eber, the Sir George Williams University Affair has not yet coalesced as a historical event.

12 “SGWU hit by police.”

13 “SGWU hit by police.”

14 Balfour, “Students Destroy Computer.”

15 “SGWU hit by police.”

gests, the burning of the computer centre and subsequent arrests caught the eye of the nation and the news travelled through international tracts by way of West Indian participants, other activists, and official news networks. One such publication (now defunct) was *Chronicle*, a New York based journal on “Politics in the World of Science and Learning.”¹⁶ Written in 1969, several months after the incendiary incident at Sir George Williams, a *Chronicle* article situates SGWU’s Computer Center occupation in a global schema of student protest documenting riots, insurrections, and demonstrations in Prague, Paris, and Ghana. Alongside SGWU’s computer centre occupation, the “Canada” section includes descriptions of student protests at McGill University and the University of Ottawa that took place that same year. After “Canada” comes a section titled “Czechoslovakia” and then the last and longest section “Ghana: the Siren Affair” which details the progression of a 1968 student protest held at the University of Ghana.¹⁷ In doing so, this article initiated a historiographical shift towards international solidarity at an early stage, bringing the events at SGWU into context with student-led actions across the world.¹⁸ The article even called to attention the participation of Cheddi Jagan Jr., the son of Dr. Cheddi Jagan (the leader of the opposition in Guyana), in the SGWU computer centre occupation, mapping out the globality of the tensions rather than their specific Montreal context. This publication represents the earliest – and in some ways strongest – globalizing gesture of SGWU’s historiography. By placing it in a report on notable protests all over Canada in the years 1968–69, and by further contextualizing it on a global schema, the *Chronicle* rejected socio-historical specifics in favor of a broader lens. This dilation was seen in later historiographical trends, such as David Austin’s *Fear of a Black Nation*, but rather than widening the scope, Austin and other more recent historians investigated the specific context of Montreal as microcosm (not microbe) of their contemporary global politics.

By contrast, Dorothy Eber’s *The Computer Centre Party* bypassed the microbe and headed instead for the microscopic, describing the minutia of events surround-

ing the Affair in what reads as an elongated journalistic report. Though thorough in its contemporary scope, the book accounts for very little of the context, especially any proceeding factors that may have instigated the Affair or its incendiary climax. The section titled “Acknowledgements” (which operates as the only introduction) states: “this book takes no sides.”¹⁹ Eber’s use of first person narration somewhat undermines her stated neutral position. The book begins with “THE ARRAIGNMENT” and follows the author as she documents “happenings” and reactions to them, including her own and those she perceived in observance. There is often little indication given to shifts in narration; “I” might be given in the context of a transcribed interview, or may in fact be used to reflect the author’s own opinions or observations.²⁰ Lacking a firm interpretive or methodological framework, Eber’s account reads as just that: Eber’s personal, albeit methodical, rendition and transcription of newspaper articles, courtroom proceedings, and personally observed events.

Dennis Forsythe’s incendiary anthology *Let the Niggers Burn! The Sir George Williams Affair and its Caribbean Aftermath* marks the first, and perhaps most decisive shift in the historiography of SGWU’s 1969 computer centre occupation – from the reporting and documentation of events to an explicit and intentional mandate of historical interpretation. Three years after the events at Sir George Williams, the book’s contributors engaged in the production of historical narratives of the Affair itself, its causal structure, and global effects. “This book is not meant to be an apology for what happened,” Dennis Forsythe, editor, states in the book’s preface, “[i]t is rather the Black manifesto which focuses on the Sir George Affair, showing its wider relevance both in Canada and the West Indies...”²¹ Forsythe is forthright with the “underlying framework” of the book, which places the Sir George Williams Affair in the context of a 400-year-history, tracing various economic and cultural contributions to the events of early 1969.²² All six contributors (Delisle Worrell, Rawle R. Frederick, Bertram Boldon, Roosevelt Williams, LeRoi Butcher, Carl Lumumba) were West Indian scholars, as was Dennis Forsythe himself. Like the *Chronicle* article

¹⁶ “The ‘Siren’ Affair,” *Minerva* 7, no. 4 (1969): 762–778.

¹⁷ “The ‘Siren’ Affair,” 769–777.

¹⁸ “The ‘Siren’ Affair,” 763.

¹⁹ Eber, *The Computer Centre Party*, 5.

²⁰ Eber, 208.

²¹ Dennis Forsythe, et al. *Let the Niggers Burn!: The Sir George Williams University Affair and Its Caribbean Aftermath* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1971), 5.

²² Forsythe, 4.

before it, Forsythe and contributors placed the events at SGWU in their global context, but rather than the *Chronicle's* organizing framework of “student protest,” *Let the Niggers Burn!* used Black Power and Pan-Africanism.²³ The events at SGWU in 1969 are referred to as the “incident” or “confrontation at Sir George,” although Forsythe also mentions the “Anderson Affair” in relation to preceding events. The events have become historical in conception; the naming of the event, the explicit analytical and methodological approaches stated in the preface render *Let the Niggers Burn!* as not only a history of the Affair but an early analysis – or intervention – of its historiography. This book is also the first to have made a direct commentary on the documentation (or historiography) of the SGWU Affair, typified in Forsythe’s confrontation of Dorothy Eber’s *The Computer Centre Party* on the very first page of the preface. Forsythe calls attention to Eber’s “narrow” focus of events: “thus this ‘honest’ attempt at reporting becomes distortion by omission.” The critique of the Affair’s documentation introduces this volume as a near-corrective work and an analysis of the Affair “written by Blacks, to record the case as we see it.”²⁴ By rooting the Affair in the “Black struggle,” its broader Atlantic context and the history of Blacks in Montreal, this group of Black writers and intellectuals made their own interpretative analysis visible, laying out an alternate explanation and interpretation of the events at SGWU.²⁵

Rather than an Atlantic-centred exposition of black ideologies, the scope of Dorothy Williams’s book *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal* instead covers the city’s black population, including major communities and events, from 1628 through the 1970s in incisive detail, enormous scope, and chronological order.²⁶ *Blacks in Montreal 1628-1986: An Urban Demography*, Williams’s first book, makes brief mention of the SGWU Affair in relation to West Indian immigration, which increased in 1967, and the social gap between newly immigrated West Indi-

an population and “Black Canadians.”²⁷ Developed from a research commission documenting Black demographics in Montreal, *The Road to Now* builds upon this observation, dedicating the entirety of chapter seven to the Affair itself. “The Sir George Williams Affair” recounts the happenings that took place in winter of 1969 and various reactions from communities and community members in the contentious aftermath.²⁸ This work reflects Williams’s prior research on inter-community relations within the “Black community” of Montreal, which she found to be in the midst of large demographic shifts by the late 1960s.²⁹ In the first paragraph, Williams posits the Affair as evidence of a “new consciousness of race that emerged in Montreal’s black organizations in the late sixties.”³⁰

In her previous chapter “The Domestic Scheme (1955-1965),” Williams traces post-war population shifts and the formation of communities such as the Union United Church and the Negro Community Centre (NCC).³¹ Since the turn of the century, community organizations like these had worked to provide affordable education, extracurriculars, as well as financial and interpersonal support for generations of black children and families. New immigration policies led to an increase in the West Indian population of Montreal, especially among student bodies. Williams chronicled groups such as the National Black Coalition of Canada (NBCC), which had emerged in the 1960s to challenge traditional Garveyism and Caribbean-centered “going-home” rhetoric. In 1964, the NBCC held multiple debates at McGill University to discuss other waves of thought and activism such as the “American Black Power Movement.”³²

For Williams, this influx of West Indian immigration and its new energy of collaborative activism, combined with the fact that Montreal was historically a destination for black “Loyalists, Fugitives, and Refugees,” provided the groundwork for the events at Sir George Williams in 1968 and 1969.³³ The account and analysis

23 Forsythe, 165-191.

24 Forsythe, 3.

25 Forsythe, 107.

26 Dorothy Williams, *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1997).

27 Dorothy Williams, *Blacks in Montreal, 1628-1986: An Urban Demography* (Montreal: Les Editions Yvon Blais, 1989), 67.

28 Williams, *The Road to Now*, 118-138.

29 Williams, *Blacks in Montreal*, 66-68.

30 Williams, *The Road to Now*, 118.

31 Williams, *The Road to Now*, 101.

32 Williams, *The Road to Now*, 118-19.

33 Williams, *The Road to Now*, 13. The word “migrating” is used purposefully here as many of the routes black people came to be in Montreal did not adhere to the restrictive and changeable legal methods.

Williams provided focused less on reactions and interpretations of specific individuals (as seen with Eber and Forsythe, and later with Mina Shum and David Austin) and more on common responses and opinions of major community organizations described in earlier chapters (UNIA, NCC, and Union United Church). In the final paragraphs of chapter seven, Williams laid out concrete “positives” and “negatives” stemming from the “Sir George Williams Affair.”³⁴ The primary negative function (and this term calls to mind Dennis Forsythe’s “negative history,” i.e., a history of racism), Williams stated, was the proliferation of fear within black communities after the Affair and an aggravated sense of being “vulnerable.”³⁵ On the other hand, according to Williams, the event was causal to the creation of new organizations, such as UHURU, and increased “activity rather than apathy in the community.”³⁶ This attention to group interactions typifies Williams’s research and acts as a helpful counter-balance to the vast timeline she addresses, situating the Affair as both product of and catalyst for community building across the city. *The Road to Now*, for Williams, is certainly not a one-way street; her history is a straightforward depiction of communities converging (formally and informally), clashing and dissolving as the idea and meaning of a “Black Montreal” undergoes constant metamorphosis. In closing, Williams writes:

“Blacks in Montreal have struggled to create a dynamic community. It is a continuing journey which began over three hundred years ago, and which was shaped by slavery, emancipation, Quebec’s pioneer economy...the railroad, black student activism, and immigration.”

For Dorothy Williams, the Sir George Williams University Affair was a “watershed” moment of community unity, disunity and activism which “put to test” the values, ideas and ideologies endemic to sixties Montreal.³⁷

The next major development of the Affair’s historiography came recently, in 2013, with the publication of David Austin’s *Fear of a Black Nation*, which situates the Sir George Williams Affair alongside the Congress of Black

Writers of 1968 to examine their political context and antecedents,³⁸ Austin’s work reads as a near combination of Dorothy Williams’s “tracing” and Dennis Forsythe’s “theorizing” methods into a new analytical framework: the “weaving” of both disparate ideologies and their origins with specific personal and communal narratives. Austin charts grass-roots beginnings, leading figures, and intellectual strands at play in the political activity and organization of the Affair and its aftermath. This book truly operates as a index of Black historical, theoretical, and political authorship which either pre-existed 1969’s “social thunderclap” or came to define and interrogate its wake by equal turns.³⁹ His chapter, “Days to Remember: The Sir George Williams Narratives,” begins not with the facts of the event, but with a quote from *Behind the Face of Winter*, a fictional novel by H. Nigel Thomas that tackles the Affair from the perspective of a student, Pedro Moore, a West Indian immigrant.⁴⁰ By doing this, Austin considers the intellectual, academic, historical sources alongside the fictional, troubling the notion of a purely factual, historical account and pushing memory’s role in historical construction to the fore. This approach ruptures the historiography; what then ensues is a litany of naming, of student participants, leaders, and occupiers of the Affair as well as key participants in the production of its history. From Frantz Fanon to Rocky Jones, from Stokely Carmichael’s 1968 visitation to Irene Kon’s bail expenses, Austin re-constructs the matrix of relationships that undergirded Montreal at the time of the Affair and the network that rose up to commemorate its events.⁴¹

While other histories such as Sean Mills’s *The Empire Within* and Athena Palaeologu’s anthology *The Sixties in Canada* similarly weave together the intricacies of activism in 1960s Montreal, Austin’s *Fear of a Black Nation* does so specifically through the lens of “Montreal’s historical importance within the Black diaspora.”⁴² Austin revives the importance of the SGWU Affair as not only crucial to black Montreal history but to Atlantic and even global historical practice, a fact assumed by many of the historians he cites, such as Forsythe. “Montreal had been

34 Williams, *The Road to Now*, 122-138.

35 Williams, *The Road to Now*, 138.

36 Williams, *The Road to Now*, 138.

37 Williams, *The Road to Now*, 138.

38 David Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation: Race, Sex, and Security in Sixties Montreal* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2013).

39 Williams, *The Road to Now*, 177.

40 H. Nigel Thomas, *Behind the Face of Winter* (Toronto: TSAR, 2001).

41 Thomas, 137.

42 Thomas, ix.

home to major developments in the Black diaspora,” Austin writes, “yet oddly very little had been written about it.”⁴³ A further metric of analysis compounds this revival of information and historical importance: Austin’s examination of surveillance prior, during and after the events at Sir George. Using records recently made available by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Austin tracks the movements of undercover police such as Warren Hart, an FBI agent on loan to the RCMP to monitor Affair participants like Rosie Douglas.⁴⁴ *Fear of a Black Nation* works to uncover the history of the Affair on two levels: the revitalization of names and narratives, and the exposure of facts previously without proof (although broadly suspected). David Austin does not so much intervene in the Affair’s historiography as preserve it, indexing historical accounts as well as actors, while giving further access to Forsythe’s “negative” history: the history of state oppression through surveillance and infiltration.

Like David Austin’s *Fear of a Black Nation*, Mina Shum’s 2014 documentary “Ninth Floor” caused, and continues to cause, a revival of attention to the events of the “computer centre party.” This documentary recounts the occupation of the computer centre at Sir George Williams University through interviews with a variety of persons involved or affected by the 1969 protests, interweaving interviews, news footage and voiceover to piece together the events through the descriptions of those either present or otherwise connected.⁴⁵ Much of the visual material found in Dorothy Eber’s *The Computer Centre Party* is included in the film’s still images, including a map of the ninth floor indicating locations of the barricade, exits, and police arrests.⁴⁶

While David Austin’s historiographic intervention was only an index of Affair participants, Mina Shum’s “Ninth Floor” provides faces to names, voices to transcripts, and a visceral awareness of the living and breathing effects of the Affair today. The events are analyzed in the very words of many of the original participants; this information and narrativization are made accessible via film, for free, on the internet. This accessibility is an unprecedented-

ed intervention in the Affair’s historiography; the reach of film as a medium swings the events at SGWU in 1969 back into the mainstream historical consciousness. “Ninth Floor” brings the voices of those present to the fore, and the Affair itself may yet be catapulted from the niches of social history and back into national awareness and into the canon of Canadian history with the narratives of the participants themselves. Interviews with Bukka Rennie, Valerie Belgrave, Anne Cools, and Robert Hubscher speak not only to the context of 1969 Montreal but our contemporary one and the ruptures between. At one point early in the documentary, Bukka Rennie comments: “It would seem Canadians are racist, but they like to apologize for being racist [laughs].”⁴⁷ This interplay between past and present conditions runs throughout the documentary. Alongside Mina Shum’s “Ninth Floor,” online resources and historical accounts of the SGWU Affair proliferate post-2014. In 2014, Concordia University’s student news source, *The Link*, published a short film on the 1969 Affair titled “OK Computer.”⁴⁸

By February 2014, the Affair’s Wikipedia page had garnered four full sections and the page’s citations had more than doubled from four in February of 2011 to eleven (one of which was David Austin’s article “All Roads Lead to Montreal”).⁴⁹ Encyclopedia Canada and Black History Canada both feature articles on the Affair, although Black History Canada refers to the event as a “riot.” In this context, “Ninth Floor” is both the culmination of and catalyst for the revitalization of the SGWU Affair’s historiography, along with Austin’s more academic induction with *Fear of a Black Nation*.

Due to these interventions, the historiography of SGWU’s 1969 Affair is currently in renaissance, and the historiography continues to broaden. “Ninth Floor” reminds us that while the SGWU Affair is a historical catalyst for the study of student protest, Black Power, and race relations in Montreal, the historiography of it exposes its distinctly ahistorical aspect; these events are not so much in the past as they are in the present. Many participants continue to tell their stories of the Affair, and resurgent

⁴³ Thomas, ix.

⁴⁴ Thomas, 155.

⁴⁵ *Ninth Floor*.

⁴⁶ Eber, *The Computer Centre Party*, 130.

⁴⁷ *Ninth Floor*.

⁴⁸ Thelinknewspaper, “Ok Computer Riot,” YouTube video, 4:20, October 31, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfNa9SSrdSg>.

⁴⁹ “Sir George Williams Affair,” Wikipedia.org, revised 17:14, 21 February 2014. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sir_George_Williams_affair&oldid=596514474; David Austin, “All Roads Led to Montreal: Black Power, the Caribbean, and the Black Radical Tradition in Canada,” *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 4 (2007): 516–39.

analysis of the events post-2010 have shown that the Affair is very much alive in the memory of those who participated, in the inherited modes of activism wrought in the aftermath, and in the current context of Montreal. But as Selwyn Jacobs, producer of “Ninth Floor,” comments in his 2015 interview with Vice, “it depends on which side of the racial fence you’re actually sitting on...for people in the black community, they’ve always known that story. So what are the reasons it wasn’t told?”⁵⁰

The events that took place at Sir George Williams University in early 1969 provide a nucleus around which scholarship of a Black Montreal and Black Montreal history converge, emerge, and re-emerge. The Sir George Williams Affair provides an axis for a historical debate over the role, composition, and activism of the black community in Montreal. As many of the above historians illustrate, this event was not a mere product of imported protest; it was rooted firmly in the organizations and experiences of Black Montreal. This prolonged moment of struggle between the administration and student body, between immigrant organization and grass-roots activism, between the court system and the ninety-seven arrested, coalesce the historiographic threads of both local and international forces that structure the course of Montreal history and its documentation today. February 11th, 2019 will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the SGWU Affair. In federal government, Justin Trudeau recapitulates his father’s liberal regime, under which the Affair took place, and in the States, the Trump Presidency shuts down government, and the shouts of the Black Lives Matter movement feel distant. As we commemorate the Affair’s fiftieth anniversary in the midst of these, the SGWU Affair and its historiographic renaissance seems to ripple to the fore of mainstream historical consciousness as “[t]he past reverberates in the present.”⁵¹

50 Mina Shum and Selwyn Jacob, “The Little-Known Story Behind Canada’s Largest Student Occupation,” interview by Brigitte Noël, *Vice News*, January 14th 2016, https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/mvk4by/the-little-known-story-behind-canadas-largest-student-occupation

51 Austin, *Fear of a Black Nation*, 143.