



For immediate release — Thursday, October 18, 2018

Award-winning documentary about Alberta's African-American settlers comes to Lethbridge

Media Availability — Deborah Dobbins and Drs. Jenna Bailey and David Este are available to speak to media on Saturday, Oct. 20 at 2 p.m. at the Lethbridge Public Library, Lower Study non-fiction stacks area

Audiences in Lethbridge and southern Alberta have the opportunity to learn about the discrimination experienced by black settlers in Alberta and Saskatchewan in the early 1900s when the documentary, *We are the Roots: Black Settlers and Their Experiences of Discrimination on the Canadian Prairies*, has its Lethbridge premiere on Sunday, Oct. 21.

The film was first shown in Edmonton in February during Black History Month and has gone on to win several high-profile awards, including the Elizabeth B. Mason Project Award and the Oral History in Nonprint Format awards from the Oral History Association, the Heritage Awareness Award from the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation and the 2018 Governor General's History Award for Excellence in Community Programming.

The history project was the brainchild of Deborah Dobbins, president of Edmonton's Shiloh Centre for Multicultural Roots (SCMR). She teamed up with Drs. Jenna Bailey and David Este. Bailey is an adjunct history professor and senior research fellow at the University of Lethbridge's Centre for Oral History and Tradition (COHT). Este is a professor in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary.

"It is with deep appreciation and gratitude that we receive these awards," says Dobbins. "SCMR is humbled by these honours that acknowledge our human-rights struggle is an important part of history that needs to be brought to light."

"We are pleased to bring this film, which highlights a little-known but important part of Alberta's history, to Lethbridge," says Bailey.

In making the film, Bailey and Este interviewed 19 second- and third-generation individuals from the families of the original settlers who left the United States to come to Western Canada between 1905 and 1912. Between 1,000 and 1,500 African Americans came to Canada, largely

settling in the small rural Alberta communities of Amber Valley, Campsie, Wildwood and Breton and Maidstone in Saskatchewan.

“It’s a fascinating history,” says Bailey. “I learned a lot about discrimination in Alberta. What comes through in their stories is resilience. One woman said ‘It’s just a part of who we are; it’s part of our daily lives.’”

“I am a third-generation African-American Canadian,” says Dobbins. “My parents were born in Alberta and they were both African-American Canadians. Our grandparents didn’t want to talk too much about how they got here because it was terrible. The reason they came to Canada wasn’t a positive one. They left because of mistreatment. Whenever *Roots* or anything like that came on TV, my dad said he couldn’t watch because it just made him so angry.”

While life in Canada may have been an improvement for the pioneers, the African Americans not only faced the same hardships other settlers faced, they were also discriminated against, especially in the cities. Work was scarce; men often started their own businesses or worked as railway porters and women worked as housekeepers.

“For me, what stood out is that most Albertans have no idea about this history and these communities that helped build Alberta,” says Bailey. “In general, I think Canadians like to think that we’re not very racist or a discriminatory nation. And the number of discrimination stories that come through in the interviews through all the age groups is pretty significant.”

We are the Roots will be shown in partnership with the Lethbridge Public Library, Main Branch, in the Theatre Gallery on Sunday, Oct. 21, beginning at 2 p.m. A question-and-answer session with Dobbins, Bailey and Este follows.

A trailer is available on the [COHT Facebook page](#).

This news release can be found online at [We are the Roots Lethbridge premiere](#).

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