

The history of the land that Toronto was built on is dark, unsettling, and difficult to face. While *From Here* sheds light on the beautiful aspects of how the city has become the multicultural place it is today, it does not discredit or ignore the sacrifices and mistreatment of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples to whom this land belongs to. This project acknowledges that Toronto is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, and that the city is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit. Although history can not be undone, with accountability and compassion, it can be reconciled *From Here*.

# ROOTS

## CONTENTS

04

### COHORTS OF THE CARIBBEAN

Visualizing the history of Caribbean immigration to Canada

06

### LITTLE JAMAICA

Toronto's neighbourhood hub for Caribbean culture

14

### COMMUNITY ORGANIZING BY AFRICAN CARIBBEAN PEOPLE IN TORONTO, ONTARIO

An instinctive initiative caused by racism and social exclusions

16

### HOME IS WHERE MY HAIR IS

The beauty supply store as a crucial Caribbean third space

26

### TREAJAH ISLE

Maintaining authenticity within small business development



Canada accepted about 21,500 immigrants from Caribbean countries. A slight increase in immigration occurred in 1945 to 1960 due to postwar economic expansion and the West Indian Domestic Scheme (1955-1967).

An immigration program for Caribbean women, mainly from Jamaica and Barbados, between 1955 and 1967. Through the scheme, approximately 3,000 Caribbean women emigrated to Canada to work as domestic workers. Although the women that participated in the scheme were given an otherwise unavailable opportunity to migrate to Canada, they often faced difficult work conditions and racial discrimination.

1900-  
1960

# COHORTS

Visualizing the history of  
Caribbean immigration  
to Canada

People from the Caribbean region began to settle in Canada in the late 18th century. In 1796, between 550 to 600 Maroon men and women arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia, after an unsuccessful British attempt to enslave them in Jamaica. Between 1800 and 1920, a small number of Jamaicans and Barbadians immigrated as labourers to work in the Cape Breton and Sydney mines. There have been three major immigration cohorts from the Caribbean to Canada.

# OF THE CARRIBBEAN

1960-  
1971

Canada accepted about 64,000 people from the Caribbean. In 1962, Canada introduced new immigration regulations (1962 Immigration Act), which reduced the emphasis of people migrating to Canada based on the colour of their skin or their nationality and increased the emphasis on their education, and skills. In 1967, Canada implemented the points system. This allowed people to immigrate to Canada from all over the world.

1971-  
1996

1973 saw the highest number of Caribbean migrations to Canada with approximately 20,000 persons from Caribbean countries admitted into the country. However, by the mid to late 1970s, an economic recession slowed down Caribbean migration to Canada. Caribbean immigration fell from 10 per cent of total immigration in 1975 to six percent in 1979. It remained at six percent until 1996.

In the 2016 census, 749,155 Canadians reported that they originated from the Caribbean. According to the 2021 Census, over 774,500 Canadians reported having Caribbean origins. As the Canadian census is due to be updated this year of 2026, a continued growth is expected to be reported.

"Raggae Lane" in Little Jamaica.



# LITTLE

# JAMAICA

Toronto's neighbourhood hub

for Caribbean culture



"Little Jamaica" located on Eglinton Avenue W.



Caribbean Farm Fresh storefront, located at 1596 Eglinton Ave W

Located along the strip of Eglinton Avenue West between Keele Street and Allen Road, Toronto's "Little Jamaica" has houses many Caribbean owned businesses, including hair salons, restaurants, grocery stores, and more, since the late 1970s. Over the years, Caribbean immigrants, especially of Jamaican descent, have built a home away from home in this neighbourhood, creating a safe space for members of the Caribbean community and those of other cultures alike to be immersed into island life right here in Toronto. Through the lively food, music, and art scenes, and the integral sense of community, Little Jamaica works to not only preserve Caribbean culture in Toronto, but also strengthens it for generations to come.

"Reggae Lane" in Little Jamaica.



Stores lining the street that forms "Little Jamaica."



Community advocacy posters hung up in store windows.



Barbershop forced to shut down.

In recent years, the Little Jamaica community has been heavily impacted by the construction of Toronto's new Line 5 LRT. Approximately 48 Black-owned businesses in Little Jamaica have shut down, which is over 50 percent of the original 85 that existed prior to the start of the LRT construction in 2011. With Line 5 finally opening this past January, many business owners not only hope, but desperately need to see an increase in foot traffic and a return to the lively neighborhood that Little Jamaica once was. Members of the community request compensation from the city in order to build the neighborhood back up to its original strength and continue to preserve Caribbean culture within Toronto.

Approximately

# 48

Black-owned businesses in Little Jamaica have shut down

Hair salons and barbershops located at 1565 and 1567 Eglinton Ave W.



An instinctive initiative caused by racism and social exclusions

# COMMUNITY ORGANIZING BY AFRICAN CARIBBEAN PEOPLE IN TORONTO, ONTARIO

The history of African Caribbean people in Toronto is deeply tied to community organizing as a means of survival, resistance, and self-definition. Despite the common national narrative of Canada as a welcoming and racially tolerant society, Black people in Canada have long faced systemic racism, social exclusion, and economic marginalization. As a result, community organizing became not only necessary but instinctive for African Caribbean migrants who worked to create spaces of belonging, advocacy, and cultural preservation within a society that denied them full access to citizenship and opportunity.

Although Canada's ethnic diversity has been widely studied, the histories and lived experiences of African Canadians and African Caribbean immigrants have often been overlooked. Toronto, home to the largest Black population in the country, serves as a critical site for examining how African Caribbean migrants organized themselves between 1912 and 1996. The influx of Caribbean migrants beginning in the 1960s significantly altered the city's racial and cultural landscape, forcing both White Canadians and Canadian-born Blacks to confront entrenched ideas about race, belonging, and community.

Prior to large-scale Caribbean migration, Black community organizing in Toronto had already been established by Canadian-born Blacks, many of whom were descendants of African Americans. Due to exclusion from White institutions, early Black Canadians built their own churches, businesses, and social organizations, such as the First Baptist Church (founded in 1826) and various benevolent and fraternal societies. These institutions provided dignity, mutual aid, and limited economic opportunity, but systemic discrimination ensured that such successes remained the exception rather than the norm.

When African Caribbean migrants began arriving in greater numbers in the early 20th century, they formed organizations that reflected their distinct cultural identities rather than immediately uniting under a single Black Canadian framework. Early groups such as the West Indian Federation and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) served social and economic functions, including credit unions and import businesses. While these organizations fostered connection and cultural continuity, their strong transnational focus often limited local political organizing and broader coalition-building within Canada.

By the 1950s, Black organizing in Toronto had become fragmented. Dozens of organizations existed, but few functioned as effective advocacy or grievance agencies. Two key exceptions emerged during this period: the Canadian Negro Women's Association (CNWA) and the Negro Citizenship Committee (NCC). The CNWA played a critical role in bridging divides between Caribbean-born and Canadian-born Blacks, while also foregrounding the contributions of Black women. The NCC, meanwhile, became the first major grievance agency in Toronto, lobbying aggressively against Canada's racist immigration policies and advocating for Caribbean migrants facing deportation or employment barriers.

The NCC's efforts were instrumental in pressuring the federal government to reform immigration policies in the 1960s, which led to a dramatic increase in Caribbean migration to Canada. As Caribbean populations grew, nation-specific organizations such as the Jamaican Canadian Association and the Trinidad and Tobago Cultural Association emerged. These groups offered vital settlement support, cultural programming, and social connection. However, their emphasis on island-based identity sometimes hindered broader pan-Caribbean or pan-Black unity, limiting collective responses to systemic racism.

Caribana stands as one of the most visible examples of both the potential and the challenges of African Caribbean organizing in Toronto. Originally envisioned as a pan-Caribbean festival that would build community and generate resources for Black social justice initiatives, Caribana quickly became a major economic driver for the city. Despite generating millions in revenue, little of this wealth was reinvested into the Black community. Government funding practices further exacerbated internal divisions by selectively supporting rival groups, undermining long-term organizational sustainability.

During the late 1960s and 1970s, Black student organizing introduced a renewed diasporic sensibility to community activism. Students at Toronto universities created tutoring programs, cultural initiatives, and advocacy groups that addressed educational inequities and connected local struggles to global Pan-African movements. Unlike earlier island-specific organizations, this generation increasingly viewed Black people in Canada as a unified community, regardless of national origin.

The 1980s and 1990s marked a shift in Black organizing toward demands for political recognition and accountability. Organizations such as the Black Action and Defense Committee emerged in response to police violence against Black communities in Toronto. While these groups successfully brought public attention to systemic injustice, they were often met with state surveillance, harassment, and funding withdrawal—tactics that historically weakened Black collective action in Canada.

By the mid-1990s, many African Caribbean migrants had become disillusioned with the Canadian nation-state. Despite high levels of education, Black communities faced disproportionately high poverty rates, limited entrepreneurship, and minimal political influence. Although a diasporic sensibility had strengthened solidarity across national and cultural lines, Black organizations remained numerically and economically constrained, limiting their ability to function as powerful lobbying forces.

Ultimately, the history of African Caribbean community organizing in Toronto reveals a continuous struggle to balance cultural preservation, settlement needs, and political advocacy within a racially stratified society. While these efforts have evolved over time, they remain shaped by systemic barriers, state interference, and internal divisions. Nevertheless, they also demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and an enduring commitment to building community in the face of exclusion.

# HOME IS WHERE MY HAIR IS

The beauty supply store as a crucial Caribbean third space

Ciara Rahming  
**FEATURED MODEL**

Ragga Hair Studio & Beauty Store  
**SHOOT LOCATION**





*Conversations flow between the aisles with product suggestions and the exchanging of hair tips creating a sense of comfort.*







*Beyond products, the shelves hold familiarity.*

*And of course,*



*you'll always leave with more than you came for.*

# TRE

**TYSA:** To start off, if you want to just say your name and what your role is here at the store.  
**CHOSEN:** I'm known by Chosen and I'm the manager slash owner here at TreaJah Isle.

**T:** From what I understand, TreaJah Isle has been a family run business, yes?  
**C:** Definitely.

**T:** And who in your family was it who originally founded the store?  
**C:** Before me, my uncle ran the store. Prior to him, he purchased the business from someone else in the 90s. I've been the owner and operator of the business since I purchased it in 2009.



TreaJah Isle storefront, located at 1514 Eglinton Ave W.

# EA JAH

**T:** Do you have any early memories from being here as a kid when your uncle was running the store?  
**C:** My memories aren't the store, but actually the whole strip. Just being up and down on Eglinton. Kiddies Caribana used to be down here, so that was something that we looked forward to coming to as kids. The block was lively, music everywhere, lots of people, so it was always an experience. Just coming to a community where everybody looks like you definitely was an influence on me growing up.

**T:** Did you grow up like in the area too, or was it more so that you would come down here for events and stuff?  
**C:** So we would come down. I didn't grow up in the area, but my parents did. But yeah, we frequently visited.

**T:** Compared to your childhood, with the neighborhood being so lively, how would you say it is in comparison now that you're older? Especially with the LRT construction and things like that, there's been issues with a lot of businesses having to close down so how would you say the area has changed?  
**C:** Right now, it's not as vibrant as it once was, but hopefully some changes will be made so that we can keep the area alive. We've lost some communities that would patron this whole area, like half of Lawrence Heights community has changed. We lost Region Park as well, so

**communities that look like us have been displaced and its affected businesses as well, not just the communities.**

# ISLE

Maintaining authenticity within small business development

In order to be successful in the Toronto market, Caribbean owned businesses must work to expand their reach and remain relevant with the times. Located in Toronto's Little Jamaica, TreaJah Isle has been a staple of the community since its initial opening in the 90s. Formerly a record store, the business has continued to evolve, as owner and manager Chosen has brought in new business models over the past nearly two decades. Take a look into how his deep rooted connection to the community shines through in the work he does at TreaJah Isle.



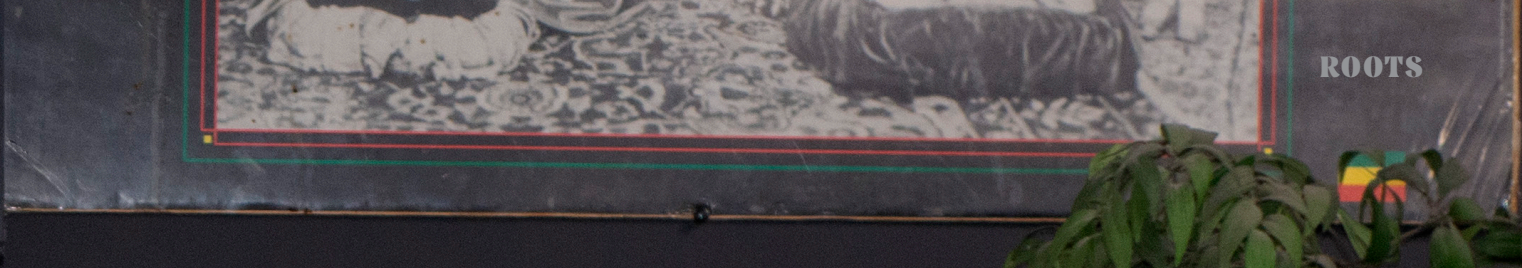
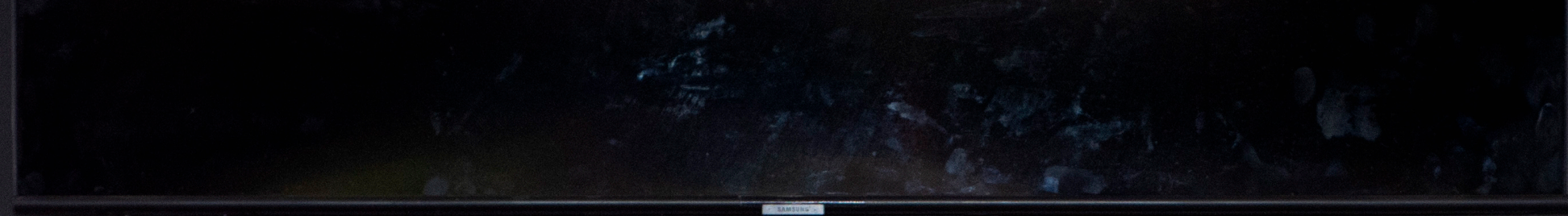
TreaJah Isle storefront, located at 1514 Eglinton Ave W.



CD stand inside of TreaJah Isle.



Product display inside of TreaJah Isle.



**T: In your role here managing the store now, what are some of the things that you've done in attempts to contribute to the community and help keep it alive as best as you can?**

C: We've definitely always engaged with the community. So over the years, one thing we've always tried to do and strive to do was give back and tap into the community. We've done food security for people who needed it, we did giveaways for Christmas, for youth, and we partnered with local 13 division, kitchen 21, other local businesses, and grocery stores to make sure our community is well.

**T: That's awesome. I guess working with other businesses who might also be affected by the same things helps make you guys stronger. Going off that, a similar question I had was what challenges you face in attempting to keep the store alive, specifically in terms of shifting to an age where records are not as popular anymore.**

C: In any business, you have to be able to pivot and keep things fresh, or else you kind of fall behind the times. That's where businesses close. So we've always evolved. When I came in, records and CDs were still pretty hot, but I ushered in a lot of the digital. I started pushing the digital, and then started pushing other products as well as times changed to be able to service the community.

**T: Aside from music, do you want to speak a little bit about what other products you offer as well?**

C: Yeah, so because we were coming from the Rastafarian culture, we have a different type of diet. We live kind of differently and we try our best to live clean. We don't eat certain foods. So it's more of a vegan, vegetarian or pescatarian diet. We're very big on natural health as well, and because of that, we would help bring in products and promote products that were healthy for people. That grew over time and we did health seminars and sessions, introducing products and different teachers to the community. We were vital in bringing Dr. Sebi to Canada, it was the only time he's ever been to Canada, and that was in 2011. And again, not realizing what we were pioneering at the time and how much influence and impact we were having on our community. But that kind of led us to do our own foods and juices and it turned into a juice bar and then the foods came in more recently. So, yeah, definitely stuff that reflected our lifestyle became an influence on the store as well.

**T: Over the years, would you say you have noticed a change in your audience or the people that come into the store?**

C: We've always had majority Caribbean people visiting the store. We would have people from other cultures that loved our culture as well. So we had people from Japan, we had people from Germany, and collectors that love reggae music all come in. Over time, it definitely has changed, especially with bringing in the natural health and then the food as well, and even the ice cream. We're definitely seeing a completely different clientele of people, and that's business. Money doesn't have a colour, business doesn't have a colour either.

*We're definitely seeing a completely different clientele of people, and that's business. Money doesn't have a colour, business doesn't have a colour either.*



TreaJah Isle's interior decor.



TreaJah Isle's interior decor.



TreaJah Isle's ice cream shop.

*It may be through just giving  
back, it may  
be through  
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but just  
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**T: Do you do anything specific to cater to bringing in different demographics at all?**

**C:** We just stay true to our roots. Again, we believe that, you know, God's rainbow is speckled, so it doesn't matter what background you're coming from. We respect all people. It's always been a friendly neighbourhood with people always inquiring and we've been inquisitive to the people in the community around us. We'll always welcome everybody in.

**T: Looking ahead into the future, in what ways are you looking to continue to evolve well at the same time staying true to your roots and what you have to offer?**

**C:** Going forward, definitely just being able to tap in with the community any way we can, and to connect with the community so we can serve the community the best way we can. It may be through just giving back, it may be through business, but just keeping that culture that we always had and being true to ourselves as well. That's the big loop, and longevity has played a big factor in that. The store has been here for many years. A lot of people know about it and they still come through. We still have international artists that come in and say hello when they're in the city. So yeah, it's always a vibe and that comes from authenticity, 100%.

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"Little Jamaica" located on Eglinton Ave W.