BLACK MOTHERS, BLACK DAUGHTERS

Credits

Direction: Claire Prieto	Sylvia Hamilton
Editing:	Claire Henry
Cinematography:	Dominique Gusset
Additional photography: Les Krizsan Michael Mahoney	Kent Nason
Sound:	Jane Porter
Additional sound: Art McKay	Patricia Kipping
Assistant camera:	Kimberlee McTaggart
Production assistant:	Cheryl Crawley
Research, written and narrated by:	Sylvia Hamilton
Script consultant:	Barry Cowling
Music performed by: Delvina Bernard Debby Joanes Andrea Currie Kim Bernard-Morris	Four the Moment
"I Love You Woman" written by:	Delvina Bernard
"Lydia Jackson" written by: Delvina Bernard	George Elliot Clarke
Music recording producer:	Markandrew Cardiff
Technicians Keith Delong Courtesy of CBC Radio, Halifax	Karl Falkenham
Sound editor:	Jane Porter
Re-recording:	Jean-Pierre Joutel
Mothers and Daughters Laura Howe Lavinia Harris and Cleo Whiley	Pearleen Oliver Edith Clayton, Clara Gough and Martha Boucher Martha Boucher Debbie Glasgow Daurene Lewis and Peryl Lowe

Marie Hamilton
Shani Hamilton Greenlaw

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Rev. Donald Skier

Unit administrator: Jane Boyle

Technical co-ordinators: Wayne Cormier
Richard Michaud
Brian Innes

Producer: Shelagh Mackenzie

Executive producers: Shelagh Mackenzie
Germaine Wong

Black Mothers, Black Daughters

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(singing)
We're here
Standing at the shoreline
Made it through some hard times
Black mother, black daughter
Made it through some hard times
Black mother, Black daughter

We're here, standing at the shoreline
Made it through some hard times
Black mother, Black daughter

Sylvia Hamilton: Growing up as a Black girl in Nova Scotia, my strongest memories are of Black women. From them I learned the importance in interdependence of family, church and community. When the century-old Black community of Africville was destroyed and replaced by this Halifax park, part of our heritage was stolen from us. But the true bond and spirit that was Africville, which was carried here by the Black slaves, Loyalists and refugees, survives. My name is Sylvia Hamilton. I want you to meet Black women I've known, mothers and daughters who have patiently fostered and nurtured the survival of our Black culture and community.

Sylvia Hamilton: If anyone had told me, perhaps 25 years ago, when I was in CGIT, and when Mrs. Pearleen Oliver was teaching me all the things that she taught me, that I would be sitting here today on a panel with her, I probably would not have believed it. But I am very, very proud, and very pleased, because she indeed was one of the role models of the women of the past.

Pearleen Oliver: When I was here Tuesday night I made a statement that was given by the Honourable Joseph Howe, and I just want to take one moment, and just go over that statement again where the Honourable Joseph Howe said "the province of Nova Scotia owes you people a debt of justice" Do you remember I said that from the Honourable Joseph Howe? And I really believed it, you know, and I didn't think that we had really received the justice that we should have had. And then, when I picked up my paper yesterday and saw that we have a Black woman judge, I said "that's the first payment on that debt of justice." And it's not only the first payment, but it's payment with interest. So we thank the Nova Scotia government for appointing Coreen Sparks to the Bench in Nova Scotia. My heart just thrilled.
So, let's look at the woman, the Black woman. We only have a few minutes to do this, so you know we can't do the impossible.

P. Oliver It was so horrible to be a woman slave. You were property. You belonged to the master. You were just like a chair or a table. And when they say go, you go, and when they say come, you come, do this, you do this. They were all whipped for any infraction. And there was one Black slave, she stole some ribbons from her mistress, and she received 39 lashes publicly for stealing the ribbons. Many

of towns I guess had a public whipping post.

Female: Why didn't they run away?

P. Oliver: Well, they were easily identified - by marks on their faces, and even the clothing that they were wearing. How far could they get? Where could they go? And then of course the ads were put in the newspapers with all the descriptions with a big reward. Some of them committed suicide.

P. Oliver: The Black Loyalists arrived - the first group - in May, 1783. Many of the Black Loyalist women were seamstresses, many of them were cooks. But the average woman would have to do the work of a man.

Sylvia Hamilton: Black Loyalists settled throughout Nova Scotia, in Digby, Annapolis and Guysborough, but the largest group settled in Shelburne and nearby Birchtown. Pearleen Oliver and I went there to see for ourselves where these Black Loyalists and slaves had lived. In Shelburne, at Ross-Thomson House, we found little evidence that spoke of the lives of these settlers. Even at the Shelburne County Museum, the recovery of our Black history had only just begun.

Female: The white Loyalists who came, for the most part, were very influential white people in the United States - judges and big businessmen, but the Blacks who came had all been slaves. They didn't get the same amount of rations; they didn't get the tools; they didn't get the land. There were just - as much to say - this is good enough. After all, you're free, you're here, and you're just our servants or our slaves. You're not as good as we are. But that was very evident.

Lydia Jackson
Dark as stars
Slaved and served, slaved and starved
In this rough land, cold and hard
Water and Rock were her guard, her guard
And water and rock were her guard

And Lydia Jackson, slave madonna
Had a master, Dr. Bullman
A son of Nova Scotia, gave a son to Lydia
Gave a son to our Lydia, Lydia
Gave a son to our Lydia

And when she, came to him, Or Lord, with the news
He knew just what to do
I said he beat her, beat her
till she was black and blue
And their poor son, died when due
And our Lydia Jackson

Sylvia Hamilton: These acappella singers call themselves For the Moment. They are the story-tellers who sing of the living spirit and survival of Black women in Nova Scotia. Songs like "Lydia Jackson" expand our oral tradition and help us to reclaim our history. The group's leader is Delvina Bernard.

Delvina Bernard: I've been so blessed to be able to have an opportunity to express something in me, and in so many women who feel the same thing, and have an opportunity to stand up and say "look, hey." Because we don't have opportunities to do that - to stand up and say "we're still standing here... and it's because of... of what all of these other women have done throughout the generations, from the time they've landed on the shores of Nova Scotia up till now, that I am able physically to stand here and sing, and tell someone, this is what these women before me have done.

Sylvia Hamilton: These were women like my mother, Marie Hamilton. When I look at my daughter Shani, I hope the world will be a better place than it was for us. But because she is Black, and female, she will certainly face discrimination. So Shani needs the same sense of identity and self-worth that my mother gave me.

Marie Hamilton: A lady was walking along. It was during the Easter season. And she had a little boy who was about six years of age, and she was trying to get him off the bicycle. So she looked up and she saw me approaching, and she said "Oh," she said, "if you don't get off that bicycle, that lady's going to take you." And the little boy, who was white, and he looked up at me and he seen I was different, and I assured the child. I said "no, dear, I'm not going to take you." And I said to her - .... she had, mean thing, she had a prayer book or a Bible clenched to her, you know. So I said to her "are you going to church?" I said "well" I said "if you're going to church, you better go back home and if you went to church, you didn't hear the word of God." There was so much discrimination. Now that little child when he grew up - every time he would see someone, especially a Black woman, he would be afraid, that child. So discrimination starts there - in the home.

Marie Hamilton: As a child living in Nova Scotia, we all played together, we went to church together and we socialized together in the schools. But as I became older and went out into the work force, I found out there was discrimination. I wanted to become a nurse, but I unable to go into training because they would not take any Black students at that time in Nova Scotia to enrol in the nursing profession. So I said well the next I would become a teacher. I wanted to do something for others. In all the schools were Black teachers in the rural communities. My first teaching assignment was in North Preston. The children didn't have very much opportunity for learning. They were so anxious to learn, they wanted to learn, but they didn't have the opportunity. Their parents, some of them were illiterate also. My expectation was to help build the community. I worked with the church

and I worked with the children in the school.

Sylvia Hamilton: As far back as I can remember, within the Black community outdoor baptisms were part of our religious and cultural heritage. Baptisms of both young and old have been public testimony to the strength of the African Baptist faith (singing) In East Preston, the words spoken by Rev. Donald Skier echo more than 200 years of tradition.

Rev. Donald Skier: Do you repent of your sins and accept Christ Jesus as your personal lord and saviour? On profession of your faith I baptise you in the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost (singing)

Sylvia Hamilton: My mother took me to church from the time I was a small child. On this occasion I went with Mum and her friend Laura Howe to the Women's Day service in North Preston.

Marie Hamilton: If you didn't have a church, you didn't have any community.

Laura Howe: No... a community without a church, because I remember a community where I come from, well, my home was New Glasgow, but the community I came from, Africville. Of course y'all know the story of Africville. I've told it so many times. And once the church was taken it was no longer a community. It was just ... because we looked to the church, regardless, you know, and come Sunday morning you could hear that bell toll, toll, toll. It was something and when that left - well, it was a part of us that left.

Marie Hamilton: Yes, part of you, because the foundation to bring up your children in a certain way, and that's all we had.

Laura Howe: That's all we had was our church.... all we had was that church.

Marie Hamilton: Yeah, and you take years ago... that's... well, you go back, you go back to slavery.....

Laura Howe: That's all we had....

Marie Hamilton: After they finished slaving, working for the others, then they all gathered and they stealed away to Jesus.

Laura Howe: Yeah, and that's where that song.

Sylvia Hamilton: Each year members of the Women's Institute of the African United Baptist Church meet on Women's Day to celebrate their faith and renew friendships. (singing)

Female: Lord, I pray today for anyone that needs a lifeline. Lord, I just pray that the lifeline will be thrown out, Jesus. Lord, I personally was sick but, Jesus, you seen fit to bring me back to my feet. I know that there's still healing in the power, Lord, and I know that there's salvation. Jesus, I just want to continue to praise you, Lord, and lift you up. Cause you're God, and you're God all by yourself. Oh Lord, I just leave God in your hands, and I pray today that everyone will be blessed in your name. Amen. (singing)

Sylvia Hamilton: During this service, the oldest women in the congregation are recognized for their hard work and dedication.

Laura Howe: When I look at those women. So much is due to them because they are the ones who brought us where we are today, and I look at Mrs. Saunders - 87 years old. It's just wonderful, does something to us that we should appreciate and respect them and give them an honour what's due to them. It's just beautiful today. I just felt like just going hugging every one of them. It's just beautiful.

Sylvia Hamilton: Within the Black community, caring and nurturing go beyond the immediate family, especially where children are concerned. Mum's friend, Cleo Whiley, lives in Hammonds Plains. Over the years she has welcomed many foster children into her home. Today, she greets Lavinia Harris, whom I've known since I was young. When she was a child, Lavinia drove an ox cart. Now, at 85 years, she drives her own car. I want these women to tell me something of their lives.

Cleo Whiley: I raised about 22 foster children, and I enjoyed them - my husband and I, we both. He loved children and I love children. And there's so many lonely children out there that need a home. And I guess the good Lord just put in my mind to care for them.

Child: You sure were hungry.....

Cleo Whiley: When you play you're bound to get hungry. (pause) Since I'm home, my kids had all grown up, it was so lonely, and the house was so big and empty. And I like children around. I like a family. I always like someone around, someone to talk with, instead of just setting there so quiet when there's no one here. So I just enjoy being with kids.

Lavinia Harris: I lost my mother when I was four years old, so my dad brought myself and my brother up. Dad used to farm and weekends we'd have to get the produce ready to take to the market. We used to have a lot of peas to shell, so we used to sit up Friday nights and shell the peas - 60 quarts of peas. So we'd have to

take the ox and cart and go across the ferry boat. But an ox is easy to drive. All you have to have is a whip to hit him, and he'll go that way, that way... And we'd say "stop" when we got to the boat to get our tickets and go across. It was easy because we learned that from a child up. And it was quite a ways to come, we had to come through Preston. That would be like 15 miles. The city market was a booming place for to make a living. (singing)

Sylvia Hamilton: Beginning with the arrival of the Black refugees in 1812, Black people have sold produce, baskets and wood at city markets to earn a living for their families. Edith Clayton is a descendent of these refugees. She and members of her family are the last of the Black basket-weavers in Nova Scotia. Edith wants her craft to survive, to be passed on. In her East Preston shop, her daughters and her friends gather to weave baskets and to share memories.

Edith Clayton .... basket weaving..... that's weaving with wood.

Debbie Glasgow I had knowledge of Mrs. Clayton through my mother and also I used to come and see Mrs. Clayton's grand-daughter. So I used to see her sitting and making baskets, but I never went to her and said I'd like to learn it, because I always thought she was sort of strict and at that time I was sort of giggly and wasn't all that serious, and I was sort of afraid to even ask Mrs. Clayton to teach me.

Edith Clayton: My mother taught me how to make baskets when I was eight years old. And I enjoyed it very much. My mother used to go to day work and then she was a midwife, and she worked at that for a number of years. She used to travel for miles and miles, all hours at night, all by herself. And I remember the morning that my mother died. She called me downstairs about five o'clock in the morning and she asked me for a drink of water. So I put my arm underneath her head, and lifted it up, and she took three sips of water. And she looked around at me and she said "Edith," she called me by name; she said, "you have done all you could for me, and God is going to bless you." And I'll tell you, to this day, God has wonderfully blessed me. If it hadn't been for the way that my mother had brought me up, I wouldn't have been able to accomplish the things that I did.

Laura Howe: My mother too was like Mrs. Clayton's mother. She - although she wasn't a midwife - but she did day's work. They called it day's work in those days because they went out and they cleaned other people's houses. Of course, when they come home they had to do their own. And my mother was a widow woman and she was left with 8 children, so therefore you now she had it very, very hard, very, very hard. She brought us up with the understanding that right was right and wrong was wrong, and that when we out in life those things always followed us. I had a wonderful mother.

Debbie Glasgow: My mom raised 12 kids on her own, and I'm the youngest in the family. But

even though I was the youngest I still had to pull my load within the family, which was not easy for me, because the type of chores that had to be done was difficult - like cutting wood and all that hard work that I felt that there was no need for it. I didn't like being poor, so I was trying my best to get my education. I had been watching girls that were continuing their education by taking some type of training, going to vocational school, or going to university. By watching them I was encouraged to say "Hey, look, I want the same thing. These girls are trying to make their lives better and easier", so this is what I wanted. And I managed to get to University, to Dalhousie -- but they were the ones to give me the encouragement when it came to education. My mother, she gave me the strength and the initiative to carry on, because this is what she had, okay? My mother didn't have an education at all, okay? She only managed to get to grade 3.

Sylvia Hamilton: My mother always said the older women worked hard to create a path for us, to make it easier for us to do what they could not (singing) The Lewis family have been members of the community of Annapolis Royal since their ancestors arrived here as Black Loyalists in 1783. Daurene Lewis is a weaver and the owner of Studio Wefan. Until recently, Daurene was mayor of Annapolis Royal.

Daurene Lewis: Myself, I never dreamt of being mayor of Annapolis Royal. My brother gets a real trip out of coming home in the summer and saying "but, you're the mayor."

Daurene Lewis: At the time I was growing up in Annapolis Royal the dances were segregated and segregation was very evident in the area, so way-out dreams were just on another plain altogether. They were real fantasies.

Pearl Lowe: While I was weaving, she was also interested.....

Sylvia Hamilton: When I first met Daurene Lewis, I was struck by her relationship with her mother and the strength of their family traditions.

Daurene Lewis: I have responded to some people the fact that I learned weaving by osmosis.

Pearl Lowe She used to help me wind the bobbins and pass me the shuttles.

Daurene Lewis: The loom was always in action as I was a kid growing up. Mother used to get up at four o'clock in the morning so she could do her weaving without having us distracting her, and you just got used to that sound in the house.

Pearl Lowe Shake the crosses through ..... (laughter) It's not so easy to shake the crosses through.

Daurene Lewis: It works well, except it sticks.

Pearl Lowe: It certainly does.

Sylvia Hamilton One of the strongest threads in the fabric of the Lewis family is their Loyalist ancestor Rose Fortune.

Daurene Lewis: The story of Rose Fortune was just part of growing up and being a Lewis in Annapolis Royal. Her picture was always in Fort Anne, and as long as I can remember, the story of Rose Fortune was part of our oral history for the family. Rose Fortune was my great grandmother five times removed. She was noted for being the first female police woman in North America, so it made her quite a colorful character in the town of Annapolis Royal. She started a cartage business with a wheel barrow. She would have met the boats at any of the various slips and carried the baggage down to the hotels. The business became Lewis Transfer, and the trucking company continued on in my family. So it went from one wheel barrow that went from across the street to across the nation, you could say. Knowing that you have somebody as definite a character and a strong character like Rose Fortune, would have or has had a very positive effect in my life because it makes me feel that I'm not the first Black woman to try and do something in my family.

Sylvia Hamilton: In May 1987 Daurene ran for the provincial Liberal nomination in her riding.

Daurene Lewis: We Nova Scotians have a strength. We have a strong sense of identity. We know who we are and we know where we're going. And it's not down the garden path where the Tories are trying to lead us.

Sylvia Hamilton: This nomination further underlines Daurene's place alongside Rose Fortune in the oral history of the Lewis family.

Male: I take great pleasure to introduce to you the Liberal candidate for Annapolis West, Daurene Lewis (cheers).....

Vince MacLean: The next MLA for Annapolis West...

Sylvia Hamilton Although she didn't win a seat in the 1988 provincial election, Daurene did set another landmark in the struggle for the rights of Black people, a struggle my mother in her graceful, yet persistent way, has been a part of all her life.

Marie Hamilton: We as Black people are just as equal as anyone else. And I like to say to the younger people although you may be angry, but being angry will only stop you from going ahead. Because if you take all your energy in being angry, you're going to lose out.

Sylvia Hamilton: Every summer, former residents of Africville gather at the park that was once their home. When I was young, Mom brought me to Africville. Now, I bring Shani here to share in this renewal of family and community. Shani will soon have to join in the struggle we have all carried on, so she needs something to hold onto, to rest against. She needs to know her history and to be strong in the knowledge that she, like her mother and her grandmother, is bound to something larger than herself. I want her to know the women I've known, and to be touched and moved by the example of their lives.
(singing)

I'm a woman Black and a woman first
Cause I know what I have to .....

(reprise - Black Mother, Black Daughter)

END