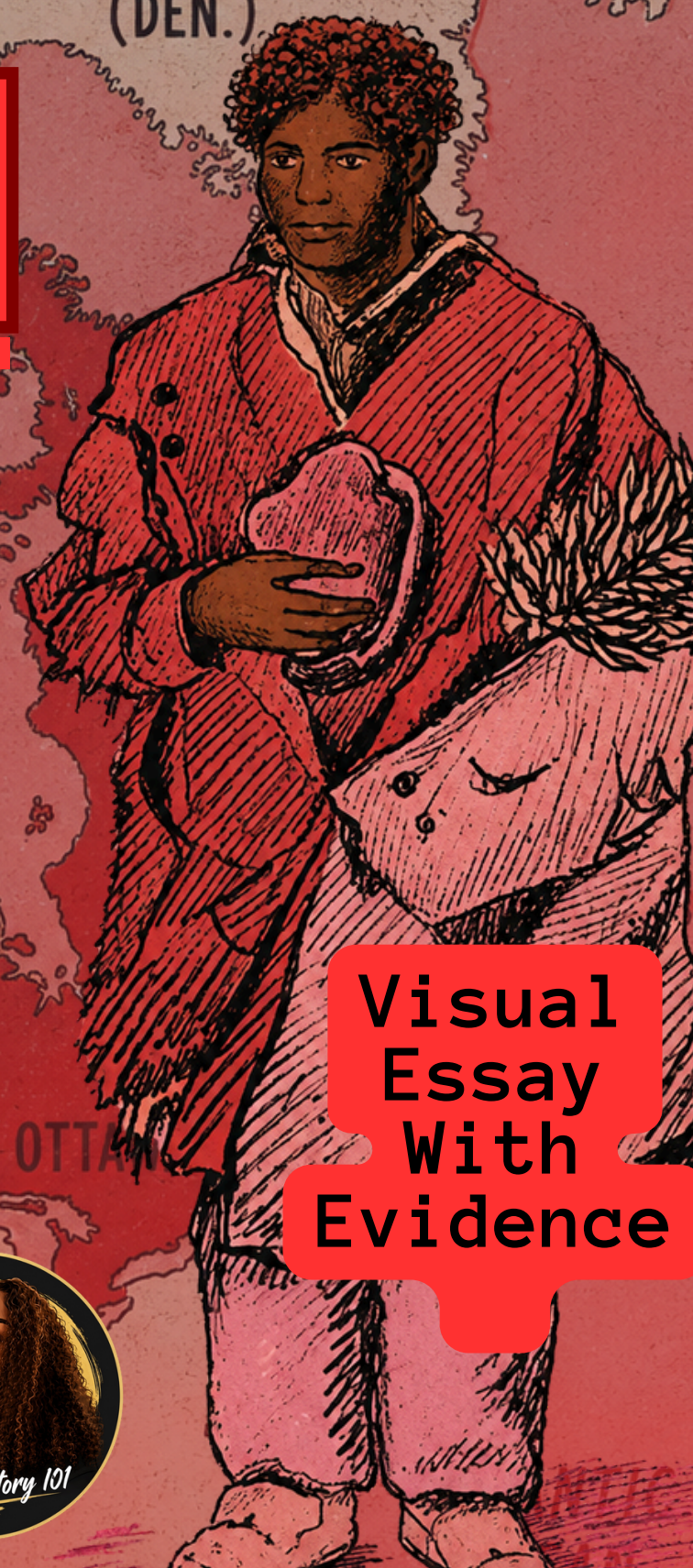
BLACK PEOPLE ESCAPED FROM CANADA BEFORE THEY ESCAPED TO IT.

CANADA IS REMEMBERED AS THE DESTINATION OF THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD.

BUT THAT IS ONLY PART OF THE STORY.



Visual Essay With Evidence

Black History 101

CANADA HAD SLAVERY TOO

For More Than 200 Years

From approximately 1629 to 1834, more than 4,000 people of African descent were enslaved in the French and British colonies that became parts of modern Canada.

THEY WERE BOUGHT, SOLD, EXPLOITED FOR THEIR LABOR, AND SUBJECTED TO VIOLENCE.

Canada did not simply inherit slavery from somewhere else. These colonies developed their own systems of enslavement while participating in the larger Atlantic slave economy.



SLAVERY WAS BUILT INTO COLONIAL CANADA

French Rule. Then British Rule.

In 1689, Louis XIV authorized New France to import enslaved Africans.

In 1709, colonial law explicitly recognized enslaved people as property.

And when Britain took control of New France, slavery did not disappear.

After the American Revolution, Loyalists migrated north and brought hundreds of enslaved Black people with them.



BLACK PEOPLE RESISTED

And Some Escaped South

Enslaved Black people did not simply accept bondage.

In 1793, Upper Canada prohibited the importation of enslaved people after Peter Martin exposed the violent sale of Chloe Cooley across the border.

But the law did not free the people already enslaved.

SOME RESPONDED BY ESCAPING TO NORTHERN U.S. STATES WHERE SLAVERY HAD ALREADY BEEN ABOLISHED.



YES, THEY ESCAPED FROM CANADA

The Records Are Explicit

In 1807, British correspondence described complaints from enslavers in Upper Canada about the:

“Desertions of their slaves into the Territory of the United States.”

At this point in history, for some enslaved Black people, freedom was south of the Canadian border.



THEN THE DIRECTION REVERSED

Canada Became the Destination

The legal landscape gradually changed.

By 1829, Lower Canada’s Executive Council declared that an enslaved person entering the province became free and could not legally be treated as someone else’s property.

Then, on August 1, 1834, slavery was abolished across most of the British Empire.

British North America could now become an important refuge for people escaping slavery in the United States.

Black History 101

SO, WAS CANADA A SAFE HAVEN?

Eventually, It Became a Refuge. But That Isn’t the Whole Story.

After the U.S. Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Black refugees arrived in Canada in large numbers.

Canadian abolitionists organized to provide relief, education, and assistance. The Anti-Slavery Society of Canada formed in Toronto in 1851.

But legal freedom did not eliminate anti-Black racism



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