

Nataly Kelly

**MATHIEU DA COSTA,
INTERPRETER EXTRAORDINAIRE**

**An Azorean interpreter for French, Dutch,
Portuguese, Basque and... Mi'kmaq?**



Who was the first recorded Black man to arrive in Canada? An Interpreter, of course, by the name of **Mathieu Da Costa**. Da Costa was a Black Ladino Moorish Jew. He was born in the Azores of African ancestry, and is believed to have traveled to Canada in the early 1600s on an expedition with Samuel de Champlain. His role was to interpret between the native Mi'kmaq people and French explorers.

At the time, it was commonplace for Africans to work as interpreters for European explorers. Even before Da Costa's time, Africans had worked as interpreters for at least a full century as Europeans explored along the African coast. Da Costa already knew Dutch, French, and Portuguese before coming to Canada. He likely also spoke a form of Basque, which was commonly used as a trade language at the time, since the Basques of northern Spain often visited the Atlantic coast. Da Costa came to speak Mi'kmaq when visiting the Americas from 1604 to 1607.

Da Costa is significant for many reasons, not only because of his ability to connect so many speakers of different languages, but because he personally spanned so many different cultures, a reflection of the multiculturalism that is common in Canada today.