TO WHAT EXTENT IS THE HISTORY OF AFRICVILLE, NOVA SCOTIA AN EXAMPLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM?

BY

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Introduction

Environmental racism and its effects have serious impacts on minority communities, and it is no stranger to Canada. Indigenous, Black, and other minority communities have all been affected by environmental racism throughout Canada's history. One local example of this is the case of Africville: a majority Black community once located just outside Halifax, Nova Scotia along the north-eastern corner of the Halifax peninsula, overlooking Bedford Basin. After enduring over a century's worth of multiple hazardous land uses, Africville was declared a "slum" by the municipality and destroyed by the city of Halifax, displacing its residents, and wiping clean its historic landownership. This thesis argues that the history of Africville is a textbook case of environmental racism.

Environmental racism, as defined by Bullard, refers to any policy, practice, or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups, or communities because of their race or colour (Bullard, 2005, pp. 32). These policies and practices are implemented and reinforced by political, economic, legal, governmental, and military institutions (Bullard, 2005). Environmental racism is, quite simply, an act of violence. These acts can include 'state-sanctioned racial violence perpetuated upon the lands, bodies, and minds of Indigenous and Black communities through decision making processes, and policies that have their roots in a legacy of colonial violence in Canada and other white settler nations' (Waldron, 2018, pp.37). This type of racial violence is a component of settler colonialism; important to note as Canada is a settler-colonial state. This can be defined as the 'contemporary forms of colonialism in British-descended "settler colonies"…focusing specifically on the elimination of Indigenous [and Black] peoples and their relationships from and with the land' (Waldron, 2018, pp.38).

Decades of research have shown that racial minority communities are more likely to be located near sites of pollution. Environmental racism is present all over Nova Scotia, which encompasses the 'denial of human rights, environmental protection, and economic opportunities to the communities where people of colour live and work' (Bullard, 2005, pp.1). For instance, a study carried out in 2002 determined that 30% of all African Nova Scotians live within five kilometres of a dump (ECE Law, n.d.). The community of Lincolnville is another prime example of environmental racism. Within their community, there were high rates of cancer, asthma, and other illnesses, suggesting a direct link between pollution from the landfill to the community (ECE Law, n.d.). As demonstrated by Lincolnville and many other majority Black communities, "waste and race go hand in hand in Nova Scotia," as stated by James Desmond (ECE Law, n.d.).

Similar to other Black communities in Canada and beyond, Africville was the site of many different kinds of pollution, from toxic waste facilities to the official sanctioning of poisons and pollutants (Mascarenhas, 2012, pp.8). More often than not, Africville is remembered as the site of a violent displacement of a Black community. However, this thesis argues that understanding the history of environmental racism in Africville is imperative for understanding how and why Africville was placed in a position to be demolished by the city.

This study examined environmental racism in Africville through a case study approach. This included analyzing academic articles, interviews from previous community members and environmental racism research. This methodological approach fits the overall research design as the case of Africville has many socially intertwined parts. The razing of this community is not just black and white in nature – there are racial, social, economic, and political factors at play, none of which cannot be analyzed on an individual level; they must be understood as a collective.

The case study of Africville was conducted using theoretical frameworks established by Nelson, focusing on the Black narrative of events, and drawing on scholarship on environmental racism. All studies relating to Africville were chosen based on three criteria; the first being that it has a theoretical focus on environmental racism. The second, it was written or involved Africville residents; and third, written with the perspective of the Black community in mind. These characteristics allow for the narrative to be moved away from Black people being seen as "helpless" and not having an opinion on the situation to the community members having a voice on the matter.

A brief history of Africville

Africville came to be a community through the displacement of Black refugees (from the War of 1812) from their previous settlements at Preston and Hammonds Plains due to the economic hardships associated the rocky, non-arable land (Clairmont & Dennis, 1999). A few families who were able to move to the Bedford Basin area bought thirteen acres along its shore, initiating Africville's community growth. In 1848, their deeds were officially registered, and the Seaview United Baptist Church was established a year after (Walker, 1997).

The defining features of Africville were not the beauty of the surrounding area but the railway tracks bisecting the community and the city dump that lay to the west (Bobier, 2008). Over the course of Africville's 150-years of existence, Halifax placed various undesirable industries in the surrounding area. These included: toxic waste disposal pits, an infectious disease hospital, sewage disposal units, along with many other polluting industries (Denise, 2003).

Although Africville was located on the outskirts of the city of Halifax, they still possessed a lively community consisting of a school, church, and entrepreneurial businesses. Africville was technically a part of Halifax although there was a drastic lack of public services, there were no 'police protection, paved roads, [or] snow plough services' (Clairmont & Dennis, 1999). Overall, the community did not possess a good-standing relationship with the city, much of which stemmed from its "ghetto" status and racism towards its Black residents. Furthermore, this Black community was viewed as a place of impermanence and immorality to outsiders. As stated in the Halifax newspaper, *Star Weekly*, the ongoing demolition encompassed "the slow and welcome death of Africville" (Walker, 1997, pp. 160).

Over the course of Africville's existence, there was steady and continuous encroachment from industry. The city of Halifax saw this land as a prime area for industrial development – including ports, train lines, oil plants and storage, as well as a slaughterhouse (Clairmont & Magill, 1999). Halifax was also set on increasing urban renewal projects due to the integrationist civil rights and emerging liberal welfare relocation policy seen throughout Canada and the USA after WW2 (Clairmont, 2007). These factors confined the community of Africville, which essentially halted their growth, as they were 'confronted by an industrial complex' (Clairmont & Magill, 1999, pp. 93). The increased pollution, noise, and smell coming from the dump and disposal pits all influenced the negative image Africville had obtained (Clairmont & Magill, 1999). The increase in industry not only signalled the oncoming urban renewal, it also 'set in motion the cycle of deterioration that led to Africville being labelled a slum' (Clairmont & Magill, 1999, pp. 93). Jumping forward to 1957, some Africville properties were expropriated, without the owners' knowledge, for the development of the "Industrial Mile", which never actually became a reality (Loo, 2010). Furthermore, Africville came to be viewed as a slum due

to the racism that continued from the legacy of slavery between the Black and white populations. As Nelson clearly describes, the effects of systemic poverty, reinforced by local government's policies and practices, made places like Africville 'appear, and often become, unsafe, unclean, and associated with disease, moral deficiency, and crime' (Nelson, 2009, pp. 41).

Africville was razed in the 1960s when the community was forcibly dismantled by the city, all in the name of urban renewal (Nelson, 2011). The 400 Africville residents were relocated to different parts of the downtown area, receiving minimal, if any, financial compensation for their land. However, when initial talk of relocation began, determining land ownership was almost impossible as records became vague after 1795. Furthermore, Africville homes were not regularly assessed until after 1956, making any type of economic compensation during the razing in the 1960s near impossible to determine – it was as though 'Africville was almost completely illegible to the state' (Loo, 2010, pp.13).

Although the physical community of Africville was destroyed, its legacy lives on. In 1995, the Genealogical Society in Halifax filed a lawsuit against the city to seek title to their ancestors' land. They stated that they wanted to 'develop the site as a historical memorial and as a source of employment and revenue, to enable a reversal of the 1960s dislocation' (Walker, 1997). The land that Africville once encompassed is now home to an off-the leash dog park. A replica of Seaview United Baptist Church was built following pressure from former community members and their families, who still gather for yearly picnics on the site. However, there is little other physical evidence remaining of this important community.

Understanding Africville in the context of environmental racism

To understand environmental racism in Africville, we must examine factors such as policy, social structure, and the creation of space. Policy and legislation played a large role in the razing and demolition of the community, such as changing land use and limiting the city's resources in the area. The emphasis of race-based stereotypes perpetuated many social issues within the Africville community, which increased discourse on its eventual destruction. Finally, the creation and perception of space within Africville contributed greatly to its eventual demolition – from its perception as a slum to the degrading language used by the city targeted at the community.

In the following sections, I offer a review of relevant literature with a focus on environmental racism and its societal impacts. These topics encompass the theory of Black Geographies; how space and communities are racialized; implications of the white gaze, as well as resistance efforts by residents. I then discuss how the community of Africville specifically is a case of environmental racism along with distinct examples of incidences impacting members of the community. The generational effects of poverty and race are explored to give further context to how demolition was an acceptable act by the city, as well as the role of white dominance over racialized communities. Lastly, Black identity and the final act of razing the community are analyzed before presenting a concluding analysis on the environmental racism events and their impacts of the community of Africville.

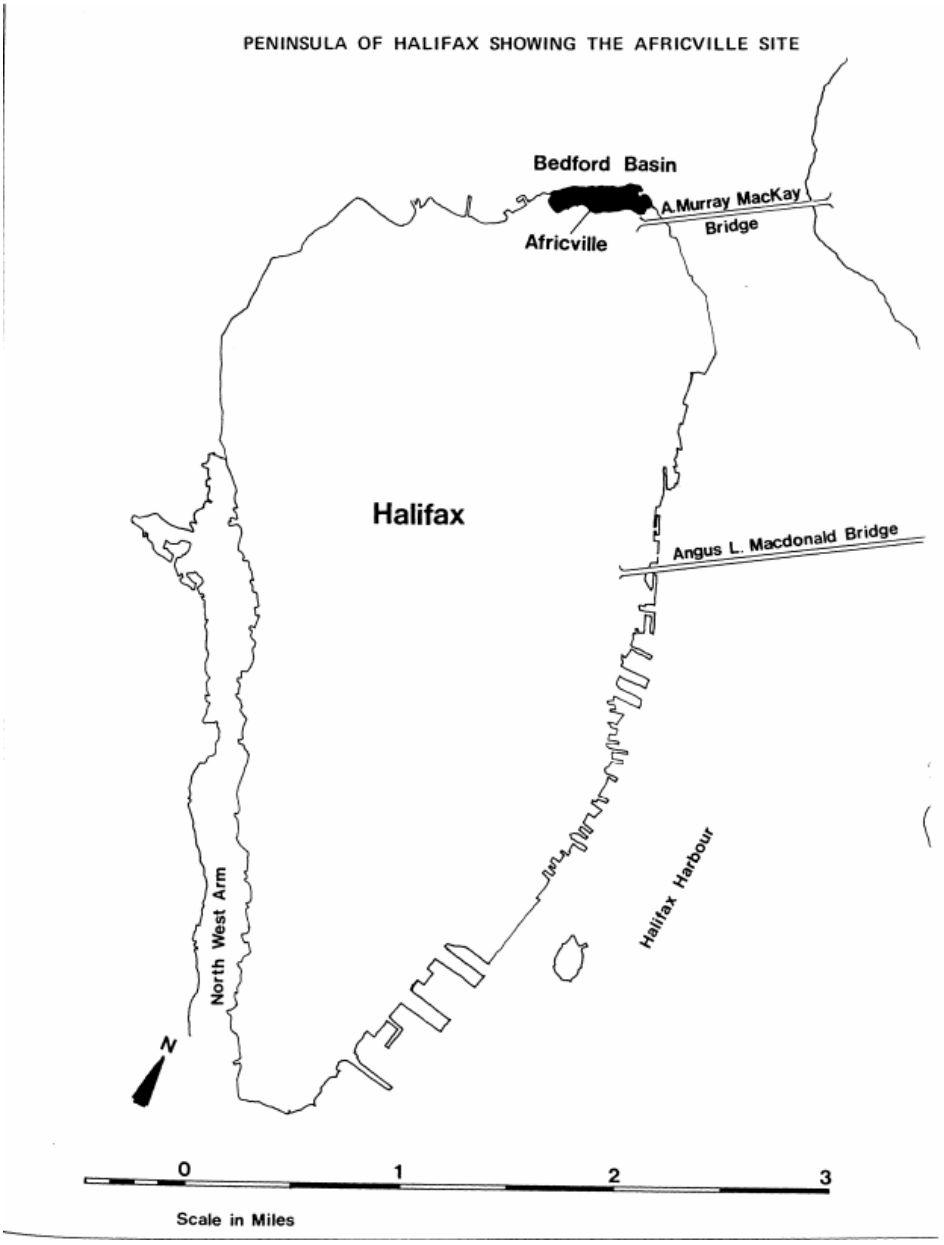

Figure 1. Africville in comparison to the city of Halifax (Clairmont & Magill, 1971)

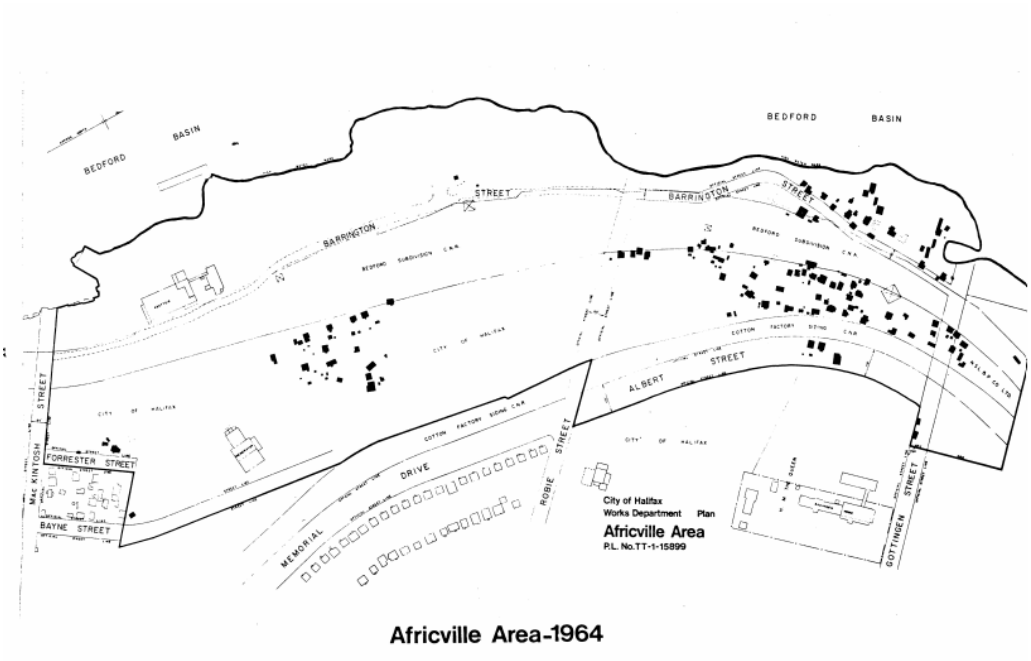

Figure 2. Map of the Africville community from 1964 (Clairmont & Magill, 1971)

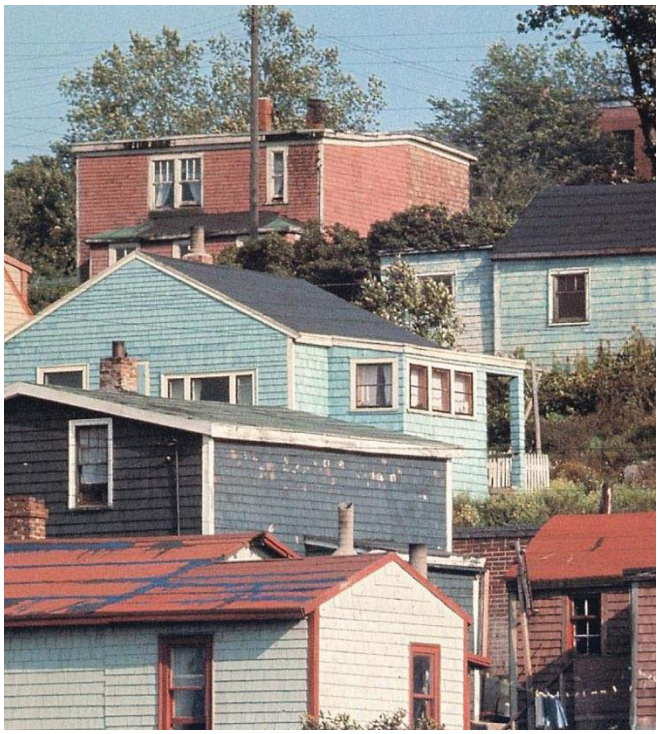

Figure 3. Hillside of the houses in Africville (Africville Heritage Trust, 2021)

Literature Review

Overview of environmental justice and environmental racism

Environmental justice and environmental racism are two of the most important terms to understand when analyzing the case of Africville. Environmental justice can be defined as the 'fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies' (Delpla & Rodriguez, 2019, pp. 315-333). Environmental justice is to be understood in tandem with environmental racism as they both have a focus on understanding and combatting environmental inequalities (Bullard, 2005). The United States Black civil rights leader, Benjamin Chavis, coined "environmental racism" in 1982 (MacDonald, 2020). He defined it as

> racial discrimination in environmental policy-making, the enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of colour for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in our communities, and the history of excluding people of colour from leadership of the ecological movements. (MacDonald, 2020)

Chavis' definition is directly relevant to the issues Africville faced for 150 years, from polluting industries to a lack of representation during the demolition discussions.

Black geographies

Scholarship on Black geographies is also relevant to understanding the history of Africville in the context of environmental racism. This is an important lens to use because of the lack of Black narrative and representation within the discipline of geography and social science

more generally. Within Black geographies, there is a specific school of political thought focusing on the Black Radical Tradition, encompassing the 'connections between [the] Black liberation movement [and] understands racism and white supremacy to be central organizing principles of capitalism' (Hawthorne, 2019, pp. 4). Black Geographies and Black Radical Tradition aim to understand systematic issues enforced on minority populations by 'engaging with questions of gentrification, displacement, uneven development, and spatial segregation' through understanding the production of race and space (Hawthorne, 2019, pp. 6). Engaging in this type of research scholars have been able to challenge the 'naturalization of Black life to undeserved urban space', as seen in the community of Africville (Hawthorne, 2019, pp. 6).

Focusing on Black Geographies is important in this instance because it affirms that racism is also a spatial process, in addition to being social and political (Hawthorne, 2019). Previous research on Africville concluded that both place and space play a role in reproducing racism. As stated by Lipsitz, this is a major way in which anti-Blackness is promoted: inferring that Blackness is "out of place" within white society (Hawthorne, 2019). Overall, the production and creation of space is tied to the production of difference. The Black population being confined economically, socially and spatially to the outskirts of Halifax was perpetuated by white society which 'bound individuals and groups in place, [classified] them according to their geographical locations, and [arranged] them in a spatio-temporal hierarchy' (Hawthorne, 2019, pp. 3).

Scholarship on Africville

Research on Africville has proposed several interrelated reasons and contexts for its history and eventual demolition. The destruction of this community is a complex social issue

stemming from multiple facets of society, some of which include racialization; the concept and creation of Black identity; the perception of space and its uses; the workings of the Africville community; and municipal and federal legislation impacting the area. Despite this issue having many moving parts, multiple social scientists have tried to uncover and make sense of the issue at hand. Many of the research works focus on the regulation of Africville, concepts of power over a marginalized community, and how white dominance has impacted its residents. In the following sections, I will explore how scholars have theorized Africville through four themes, including the racializing of space, the white gaze, the Africville community, and the role of state power.

Racializing Space

Throughout all the studied works, themes of racializing both people and places are prevalent. The act of racializing people is defined as discriminating '[against] a group, or an individual member of a group as inferior' (Nelson, 2009, pp. 21). This theme is imperative to understanding why an area like Africville underwent such environmental torment for so many years. In Nelson's 2011 work titled *Panthers or thieves: racialized knowledge and the regulation of Africville*, she describes how poor, Black communities, such as Africville, are constantly racialized and criminalized due to the colour of their skin. The way this community is discussed and portrayed through stereotypes influenced the destruction of the community as the city of Halifax viewed it as inferior and a social "other". This conception of Africville as a racial slum in need of "saving" put pressure on the city to get rid of its degenerate poor through urban renewal. The "need" for it to be destroyed was perpetuated by systemic poverty and race issues.

Nelson's 2009 book *Razing Africville, a geography of racism*, discusses the differences between what it means to be a Black community, how others perceive it, and its contrasts within white society. Africville was labelled a slum area, which perpetuated associations of the Black community with degeneracy and crime and led to fears that its "immorality" would contaminate the city of Halifax. Nelson details the downsides of urban renewal and relocation, stating that just because a poor, lower-class demographic is moved out of a slum area, they do not automatically become wealthier and more educated. They are still poor, lower-class citizens but in a different location. Hence, the social problems Halifax was trying to irradicate by razing Africville are now just in closer proximity to the white, upper-class.

In 1999, Clairmont and Magill published the third edition of their research titled *Africville: the life and death of a Canadian Black community*. They focused on multiple different aspects of the community, both internal and external, that led to its destruction, as well as how it has stayed relevant in environmental racism discussions presently. In Chapter 4, Clairmont and Magill discuss Africville as being labeled a social problem and the ramifications it caused. Due to the stereotypes placed on Black people, residents of Africville had a full understanding of the 'othering' and marginalization they endured from the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). This made the majority of the community unwilling to follow certain laws and regulations enforced by the city. Their unwillingness was especially prevalent considering the lack of social support from Halifax, which in turn, further perpetuated negative discourse and stereotypes about the area.

In Loo's 2010 research, *Africville and the dynamics of state power in postwar Canada*, Africville is described as a textbook case of environmental racism. The razing of Africville and the community's displacement enforced the notion of racialization and racial difference, as

discussions moved from a social to a spatial aspect (Loo, 2010). This also links with Nelson's discussion on the creation of space and its perception. Loo explores how Africville's defining spatial features – the dump, railway, polluting industries – helped to maintain white identity as superior, as Black identity became closely associated with pollution and crime. Loo further describes how the city of Halifax did not meet their promises of relocation, from placing former residents in inadequate housing to causing the collapse of much-needed informal economies (Loo, 2010).

All these research works highlight how the land surrounding the community had been chosen for industrial development in advance by the Halifax City Council, with longstanding implicit intent of eventually razing the area (Clairmont & Magill, 1999). They also describe many other polluting industries that limited Africville's economic independence, such as contamination of the Bedford Basin, making fishing unattainable.

The white gaze on Africville

To delve into this section, we must first discuss sense of place and what it means. The Encyclopedia of Human Geography defines sense of place as 'the emotive bonds and attachments people develop or experience in particular locations and environments, at scales ranging from the home to the nation' (Foote & Azaryahu, 2009, pp. 96-100). Sense of place is created both individually and collectively; each person can have their own opinion about an area – what it means to them if they have a personal connection – yet it can also be influenced by greater societal understandings and assumptions. This point is greatly summed up by Nelson: 'we attach meanings and judgements to spaces and those who inhabit them' (Nelson, 2009, pp. 29).

In the case of Africville, residents had deep connections and attachments to their land. However, the dominant culture, represented by non-Black Haligonians, had a negative sense of place regarding the area despite most of them having never even entered the community. Perception of space played a large role in the eventual downfall of the Africville community. Haligonians looking into the community from the outside created their own ideas about the meaning of this Black society. The outsiders' perception of Africville being in need of fixing generated a white-saviour attitude that justified razing the community for residents' "own-good".

In *Razing Africville,* Nelson discusses the relationship between space, identity and power, and how these factors influenced the destruction of the community. The focus on the creation of space is an important factor to consider especially concerning that the nature of Africville's space has only ever been discussed and portrayed through a lens of whiteness. Nelson goes on to delve into the notion of whiteness being pure, while the discourse around the Black community conveniently produces feelings of fear, unworthiness, and criminality. The premise of urban renewal – based solely on whiteness and the "need" for social reform – was the ultimate contributor to Africville's demise. Nelson also points out the important relationship between space and its subjects, as individuals are understood depending on their surroundings. This is prevalent in Africville's case study as discourse influenced both the residents' identity as well as increased 'othering' from Haligonian society.

The community of Africville and resistance

In Clairmont's 2007 article on Africville, he discusses how although the community was demolished, it is an important symbol for many other Black communities. Its destruction and the inequalities it represented encouraged Black communities and organizations to take action to

ensure this type of racial injustice did not happen to others. He also discusses the history of Africville, describing how it came to be, as well as the struggles with municipal and federal laws it faced, such as relying on itself for the policing of the community (Clairmont, 2007).

The research paper titled *Allegories and orientation in African-Canadian Histography: the spirit of Africville* (Walker, 1997) reinforces the notion that Black society, within Canada, is subject to marginalization, impoverished living conditions, and remaining dependent on the state. Walker's discussion of Africville's dependence on Halifax links to Bobier's piece, *Africville: the test of urban renewal in Halifax, Nova Scotia*, which delves into the social issues for Africville residents stemming from its demolition. First, it took over fifteen years for the full completion of the removal; second, the way the city experts addressed urban renewal and racism changed over this period causing discrepancies in policy and social issues within the Africville community and Halifax society (Bobier, 2008). Although 400 residents were displaced and forcibly removed from their 150-year-old community, Bobier points out that the majority of the residents were given a higher standard of living, access to better education, and services – despite the loss of their community identity and social structure.

While some residents did gain some positive social aspects, as previously stated, the loss of collective community identity hit the hardest. To combat this loss, former residents created the Africville Genealogy Society in 1983. This group organized events on the past site of Africville such as picnics, weekend gatherings, and church services (Tattrie, 2014). This area is also home to one of the longest civil rights protests in Canadian history (Tattrie, 2014). Carried out by Eddie Carvery, a former Africville resident, who lived in a tent on his former land in protest beginning in 1970. His main goal was to demand a 'public inquiry and individual

compensation for community residents', accomplishing this by actively occupying the site on and off for five decades. The protest ended in November of 2019 (Tattrie, 2014).

Through the work of organizations like the Africville Genealogy Society, the Halifax Human Rights Advisory Committee (HHRAC), and continuous public pressure, Africville was declared a National Historic Site of Canada in 1996. The past and present struggles faced by Africville residents and their descendants display the community resistance to unfair political and social treatment. Presently, Africville stands as an important symbol regarding the fight against both segregation and racism in Nova Scotia and beyond (Tattrie, 2014).

The role of state power

The dynamics of state power held by Nova Scotia play an important role concerning the treatment of Black residents in the province. Due to this, Africville reveals not only instances of racism but the impacts of state power as well. Contrary to popular belief, Nova Scotia was not as progressive concerning race throughout the Civil Rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s. Loo's research states that although Nova Scotia was considered a model of race relations regarding legislations in place, societal structures did not duplicate this. For instance, as found in Loo's literature, 'Black women who graduated from secretarial school discovered that promises of employment made over the telephone evaporated when they turned up in person' (Loo, 2010, pp. 29). This statement clearly exemplifies the discrimination issues prevalent at the local level. In Halifax, there were large discrepancies between race and legislation and its implementation. On paper, Nova Scotia was more racially equal than other provinces, but individual local mentalities were not. Racism playing a large part in Haligonians' everyday lives, whether overt

or not, reaffirmed the supposed need of eliminating the "troubled' Africville community, as explained in Loo's research (*Africville and the dynamics of state power in postwar Canada*).

Much like Clairmont's discussion on racial legislation, Bobier delves into how Nova Scotia's and Halifax's racial injustices were hidden beneath detailed legal protection (Bobier, 2008). Thus, further reinforcing the act of 'othering' of this Black community. Bobier also discusses the implications of urban renewal based on Stephenson's Africville report, which further moved the focus from race relations to solely liberalist social change and white-saviour attitudes. One of the main discussions included how the demolition and relocation would provide an increase in economic activity, yet this increase would only benefit white, middle- and upper-class society whilst removing much-needed informal economies which many Africville residents relied on.

The Halifax Human Rights Advisory Committee (HHRAC) was created to help combat such issues. The HHRAC was also involved in the relocation of Africville by overseeing compensation agreements enacted between the city and residents. Although the committee had 31 members, it was not an accurate representation of Africville's or the city's demographic. Of the main core members, 'three were Africville residents…and the others – three [Black people] and four whites – were not' (Loo, 2010, pp. 29). This statement clearly exemplifies the discrimination issues aimed at the poor and racialized community of Africville, being extremely prevalent on a local scale as well as portraying how these marginalized residents were removed from important decision-making processes on their future.

Figure 4. Photo looking at the Seaview United Baptist Church in the background with laundry in the breeze. (Credit: Bob Brooks, 1965)

Discussion

The theme of environmental racism and specific examples from the community are explored to determine its impacts on Africville. The roles of poverty, race, and white dominance are all factors contributing to the overall systemic racialization of the Black community. All these factors influenced the decision to completely rid the area of Africville, Black culture and identity.

Africville as a case of environmental racism

Black people in Africville were disproportionately affected by forms of oppression and racism. As Africville was considered outside of society, it enabled Haligonians to view and treat these residents as less than human. Removing the humanity from the community made it possible for all sorts of forms of environmental racism to take place. These included three systems of railway tracks, an open city dump, toxic waste disposal pits, an infectious disease hospital, sewage disposal units, along with many other polluting industries in close proximity to the community (Denise, 2003).

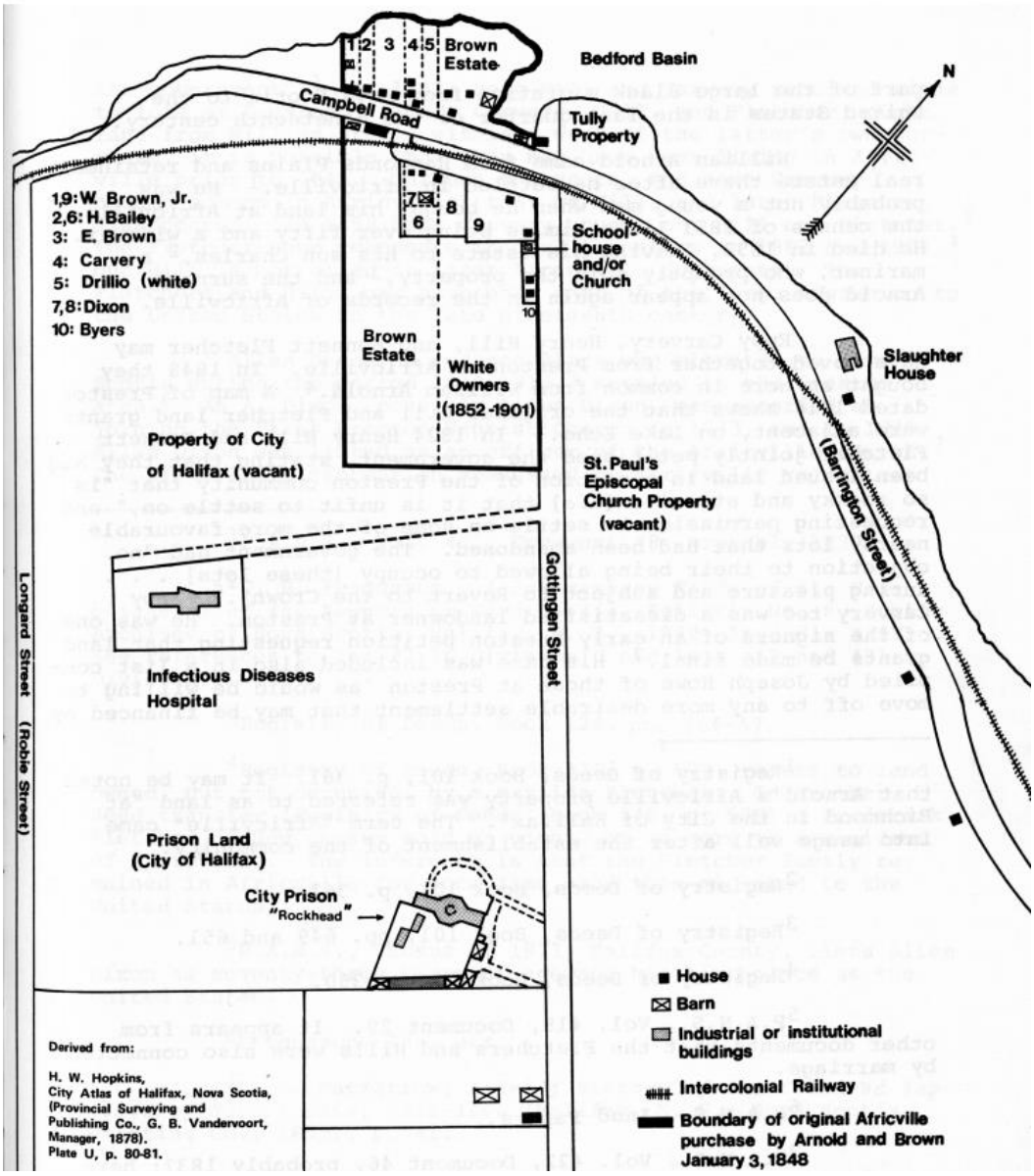

Figure 5. Map of Africville showcasing the different types of polluting industries and their proximity to housing (Clairmont & Magill, 1971)

Examples of environmental racism

As a racial minority community, Africville is an example of a "residual city." This term, as explained by Peter Marcuse, denotes the commonality of minority communities becoming the waste-place of society (Nelson, 2009). Residual cities can house undesirable pollutants from garbage disposal, sewer systems, "shanty" housing, to infectious disease hospitals (Nelson, 2009). For instance, encroachment from Halifax's industrial development specifically included a bone-mill plant, a nail factory, a slaughterhouse, stone crushing industry, a foundry, and a shoe plant that tanned leather (Clairmont & Magill, 1999, pp. 93). Although these polluting businesses provided jobs and economic activity for some of the area's residents, the social impacts of living amongst pollutants as well as the many negative health impacts took a toll on residents and their community structure.

Before diesel engines were introduced in the 1950s, trains that ran through the community contributed both air pollution, from the layers of soot they produced, and noise pollution (Clairmont & Magill, 1999). Furthermore, this industry was physically dangerous as the railway tracks passed through centre of the community. There are stories of children being hit by passing trains as there were no safety rails in place for public protection; this displays Halifax's blatant disregard for Black lives. Additionally, the main dump for Halifax was placed on the outskirts of Africville. This is a clear example of environmental racism because of the lack of discussion and consultation with Africville residents leaving its placement to be made by the Halifax City Council. The city had considered multiple locations for the placement of the open-pit dump such as the area of Fairview, but deemed it an unacceptable site (Tattrie, 2014). This is because it was widely understood by the Council that the dump would be degrading to human health; one alderman stating that it would be a "menace" to the surrounding population

(Tattrie, 2014). However, shortly after, the western-most edge of Africville was voted as the best location, accompanied by silence concerning any type of health risks it would pose. As Africville was viewed as a slum and place of degeneracy there was no push back from Haligonian society concerning its placement, especially as many already perceived the area in a negative light.

Although the city of Halifax collected taxes from Africville residents, it refused to provide services such as sewers, running, water, and paved roads (Tattrie, 2014). Furthermore, many of the houses lacked heat, leaving families somewhat helpless come winter. To combat this, one family scavenged for car batteries at the nearby dump to burn throughout the winter season. However, this caused them to contract lead poisoning (Mackenzie, 1991). This story is a clear example of environmental racism taking place as they had no other option; they could either risk lead poisoning but stay warm or, quite literally, freeze to death.

Africville also lacked access to resources such as water mains and lines. The community thus built its own structures that paralleled those found in the city (Clairmont & Magill, 1971). For instance, residents had makeshift wells that 'ran dry in the summer months and were a constant threat to health' (Clairmont & Magill, 1971, pp. 75). The severity of Africville's situation is exemplified by a report produced by a City Manager which states:

> The water supply [in Africville] is from shallow wells which show more contamination than is desirable. The proximity of privies to these wells is particularly bad with the rocky soil conditions. The City of Halifax has been fortunate that no serious health conditions have resulted from this situation. (Clairmont & Magill, 1971, pp. 75)

The lack of support and facilities in the area made personal safety an everyday issue. This is further elucidated by the problem of fires within the community. As there was no real access to

water resources, there were no fire hydrants in close proximity that the fire department could use in case of emergency. As stated in a local newspaper, during a house fire in Africville the "firemen drew water from a hydrant more than one-half mile from the community" (Clairmont & Magill, 1971, pp. 75). This, unfortunately, was a common occurrence, one former resident explained that they had tried to get access to a water supply, especially since two houses had burned down in a span of just five years, yet Halifax "just [didn't] do anything" (Clairmont & Magill, 1971, pp. 75).

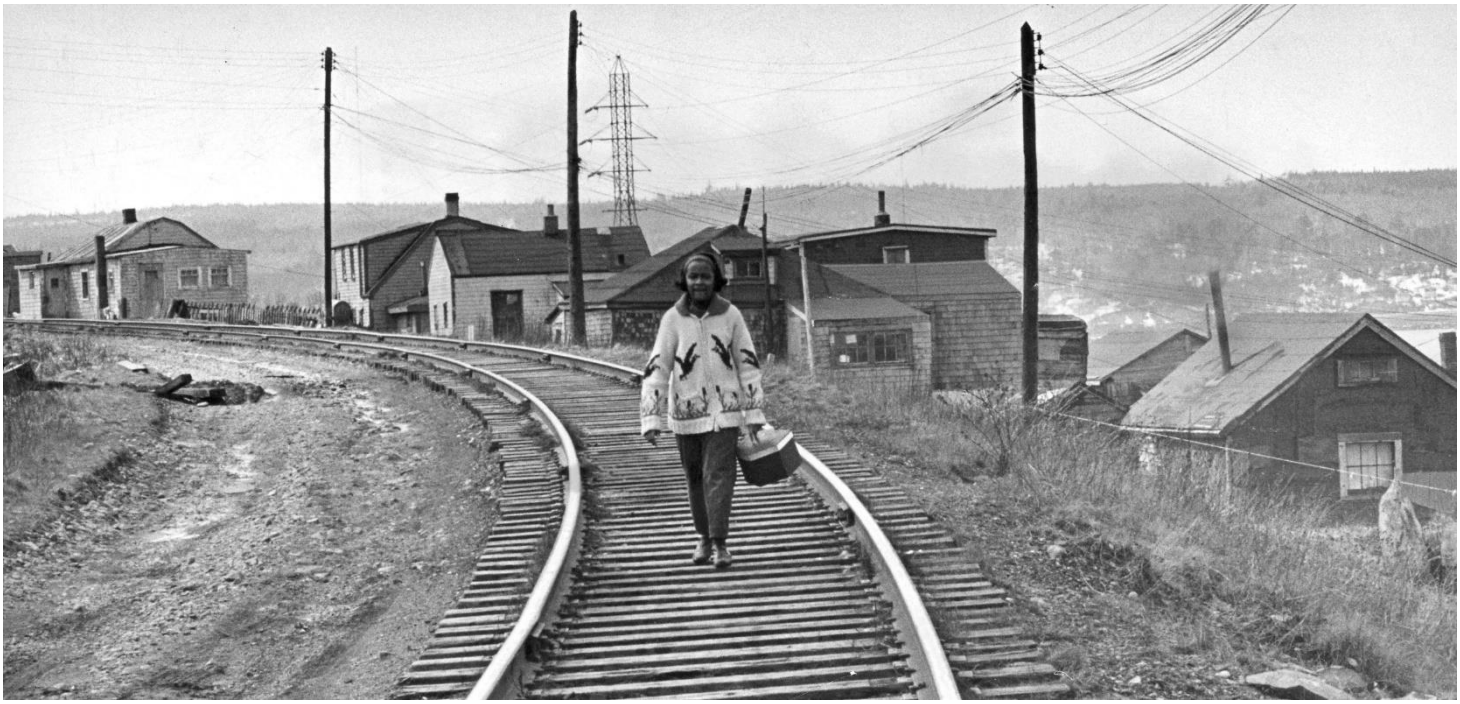

Figure 6. Africville resident walking along the train tracks that bisected the community (Historica Canada, n.d.)

Figure 7. Photo displaying well water in the Africville community, showing a sign stating "Please boil this water before drinking and cooking" (Clairmont & Magill, 1971)

On top of there being a lack of access to fire hydrants causing much more damage to infrastructure than necessary, the state of housing in the community further perpetuated this issue. Africville was described by city officials as having “deplorable” conditions, as well as holding “blighted housing and dilapidated structures” (Walker, 1997; Tattrie, 2014). This is because building construction in the area was not held to the same standards as the rest of the city. Urban planners, during Africville’s existence, noted ‘extremely poor housing conditions

among [Black people]' with half lacking bathing facilities (Nelson, 2011, pp. 124). In addition to racialization, systemic poverty further influenced their housing structure. For example, in the 1970s the majority of Nova Scotia's 15,000 Black residents were living below the poverty line (Nelson, 2011). Without a disposable income, people's housing was made up of items scavenged from the dump to save costs as well as using family members and neighbours as contractors and builders instead of certified construction companies.

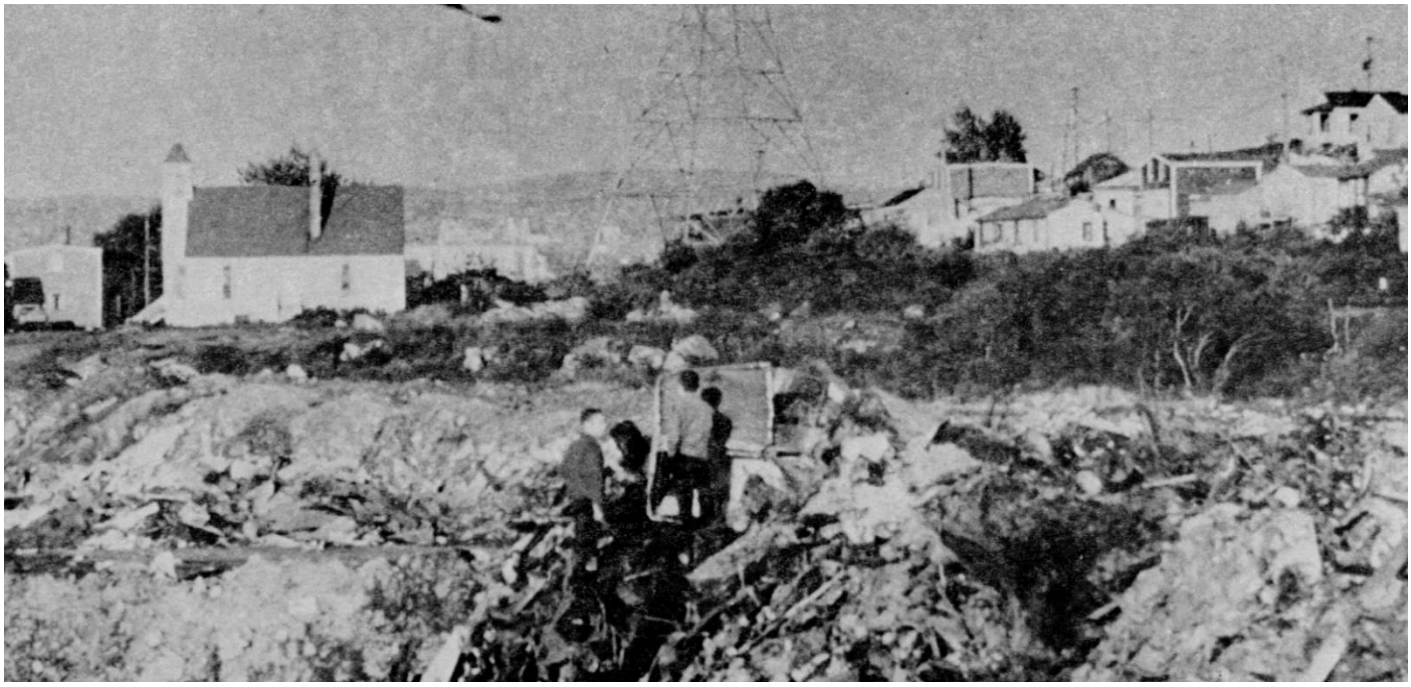

Figure 8. The city dump (Clairmont & Magill, 1971)

The role of poverty and race

Minority groups' lived experiences of race have a spatial dimension, concerning where they live, as well as the inverse – their lived experiences within a space have racial components (Lipsitz, 2007). Historically, racism has disproportionately impacted Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) communities; concerning Africville's Black population, slavery and segregation are the main contributing factors. Throughout Black peoples' settlement within Nova Scotia, they have had to endure incessant prejudice from white populations, discrimination, and oppression all while dealing with the racialization of their communities (Lipsitz, 2007; Clairmont & Magill, 1999). The racialization of Black spaces in Halifax can be further exemplified through the locations of their settlements – being 'clustered in isolated rural areas or on the fringes of white towns and cities' (Clairmont & Magill, 1999, pp. 25). As seen with Africville, they were located on the fringes of white society, close enough to commute for work but far enough away as to not be associated socially with the white upper-class population (Walker, 1997). Thus, further reinforcing how opportunities for economic growth, education, and upward social movement are limited in society both spatially and racially (Lipsitz, 2007).

Africville illustrates how poverty and race work in unison. Centuries of racism towards Black people have led to systemic and generational poverty. In 1970, Clairmont and Magill concluded that 90% of Halifax's Black population was living below the poverty line, with individual annual incomes being around $3,000, the equivalent of $16,000 in 2006 (Nelson, 2011, pp. 124). Comparatively, only 24% of Halifax's white population fell into this category (Nelson, 2011, pp. 124). These poverty statistics are just one of the factors that drove the demolition of Africville – instead of blatantly discussing racism and environmental racism towards the community, it was hidden under the premise of removing poverty-stricken areas.

The “culture-of-poverty” concept ‘gave those who were uncomfortable with frankly fundamentally racialized theory of the defective poor while avoiding the stigma of racism’ (Nelson, 2011, pp. 130). Hence, this aspect of culture became a stand-in for race-related issues (Nelson, 2011).

White dominance and its impacts

Within Africville and the surrounding HRM, white dominance was enforced by Euro-American ideals of society. Defining Africville as an area of wasteland and creating its sense of place to be unworthy was based solely on the enforced polluting industries. This was an essential aspect in its demolition, especially concerning the preservation of white identity in the area (Loo, 2010). To continue the upkeep of white dominance in the Halifax region, Africville was deemed a ghetto. The label of “ghetto” reinforced the drastic lack of socio-economic support from the city, including its substandard housing and contaminated water (Loo, 2010).

The symbolism of whiteness and its inherent qualities is something that is actively protected. David Sibley describes whiteness as a “symbol of purity, virtue and goodness and a colour which is easily polluted” (Nelson, 2009, pg46). The theme of purity is a central aspect of colonialism, as well as managing present-day slums. There is a fear that minority groups, the other, will contaminate the pure, white society that colonialism has created. Marginal communities are viewed as lawless places filled with illegal activity, yet these same factors are what makes these communities so appealing to the white upper-class. Black and white outsiders commonly noted the familiar ‘practice of going to Africville for “women and alcohol”, and many mentioned bootlegging, partying, and drinking, for which the area was renowned’ (Nelson, 2011, 133). Being able to go back and forth between lawless and civilized society means that the

actions taken in the “slum” are left behind; the contamination of Africville is ‘contained in the bodies and spaces of the Other, while the elite subject can escape contamination through return, and secure [their] dominance in doing so’ (Nelson, 2009, pg47).

Whiteness can be described as an analytical category, which refers to ‘the structured advantages that accrue to whites because of past and present discrimination [against minorities]’ (Lipsitz, 2007, pp. 13). The racial demography of white spaces concludes that all white people reap the benefits of white privilege as well as producing the ‘exclusion of non-normative others’ (Lipsitz, 2007, pp. 15). The continued segregation and removal of the Africville community from “regular” Haligonian society is closely linked with systemic exclusion of BIPOC communities. This encompasses both race and class relations. For example, Lipsitz states that white society ‘produces a racially-marked form of consumer citizenship that seeks to secure services for itself at the cheapest possible price, while passing on the costs of remedying complex social problems onto the less powerful and less wealthy populations’ (Lipsitz, 2007, pp. 15). Examples include environmental hazards, location relative to employment, and access to education; all of which can be seen through Africville (Lipsitz, 2007). For instance, there were multiple reports of declining social conditions, perpetuated by “othering” from the white-norm and overt and covert racism towards, and within, the Black community. The worsening social conditions in Africville throughout the 1970s included ‘increasing criminal activity, rising transience among residents, and a general departure from traditional values centred around the community church’ (Nelson, 2011, pp. 125).

Overall, the destruction of Africville was meant to protect white spaces within the city. As seen through acts of colonialism from European settlers to post-colonial land uses, the elimination of Africville is about white territory. Even presently, white people decidedly have a

'self-proclaimed right to land that [is] not theirs' (Nelson, 2009, pp. 28). The perceptions of white space in Halifax are greatly protected through covert racism: systemic poverty, lack of resources at the far edges of the city – more specifically at the site of Africville – and the implementation of polluting industries. This reinforces the concept of how space, its implementation and regulation, can also be considered a political process.

The destruction of Africville is centred around multiple ideologies, the main being the implications of whiteness and its dominance over society (Nelson, 2009). The symbolic quality of whiteness as "pure" was a major contributor to Africville's erasure. White Haligonians viewed the community as inherently dangerous and 'the perversities of the slum betrayed significant anxieties about the confinement of racialized populations' (Nelson, 2009, pp. 44). These anxieties were developed around discourses and stereotypes of Black culture. For example, Black people, to this day, are viewed as other to white Canadians with assumptions being that they are immigrants from Africa, regardless of whether they were born in Canada or not. This is caused by years of racist narratives towards Black populations, promoting their existence as arriving from a "dark continent of savages" (Nelson, 2009, pp. 43).

Racialization of Black identity

Preconceived notions and stereotypes of Black people reinforced their mistreatment. For example, communities that are racialized buy into the self-fulfilling prophecy that is placed on them. This leads to a narrative of the 'Black ghetto as the home of uncontrolled, degenerate, and therefore undeserving people' (Nelson, 2011). This is a vicious cycle; unrealistic stereotypes are placed on a person, they go their whole life being told that they are dangerous, poor, dirty and have no economic means to escape their situation. They then start buying into these negative

stereotypes because they do not know any different, thus reinforcing whiteness in society being superior and the stereotypes are, yet again, reinforced. Due to the image of the Black population being helpless and alienated from broader society, social reform became the main goal of white society for Africville. Focusing on social reform allowed the white population to "rehabilitate" people in poor communities rather than examine or challenge the systemic causes of poverty and segregation in question (Nelson, 2011). Yet again, they distanced themselves from the oppression taking place in Africville and placed the blame on the abused. Wanting to reform the community of Africville meant that white people could 'support initiatives in favour of displacing poor and racialized groups while espousing concern for their conditions' (Nelson, 2011).

To determine the reasoning behind the helpless, dependent stereotypes placed on residents of Africville, one must look at the social pathology of its surrounding environment. Social pathology refers to aspects of social structures, as well as values and behaviours as part of a specific social category. This can be seen through the ways people in Halifax described, interacted with, and discussed the community of Africville. For example, a newspaper article in the Halifax Mail Star, written by Frank Doyle, described Africville as having "shacks into which people are crowded"; "growing acres of wasteland"; and observing "scavengers" on the "rotting mess" of the City dump (Nelson, 2011). The words used in this report exemplify notions of belittling Black residents and are extremely 'reminiscent of the colonial gaze, [portraying] both repulsion and fascination' for Black community and culture (Nelson, 2011). Africville consistently being described in this way made it come to signify 'a slum; a repository for the wastes of society; a site of danger, degeneracy, and lawlessness; a social problem; an object of

pity; a site of attempted social reform and rescue; and a place of daring escape and transgression' (Nelson, 2011).

Colonizers and colonizing states have always 'defined, confined, regulated, and eradicated groups marked as racially inferior through the control of space' (Nelson, 2009). By controlling and razing Africville, Haligonians took back control of land they do not possess to reinforce and reinstate whiteness in the area. This ties into the topic of the creation of space and how it is perceived. Places and spaces are not naturally occurring, they are built-up over time with social influences. Henri Lefebvre stated that "space is not a scientific object removed from ideology and politics; it has always been political and strategic" (Nelson, 2009). This can especially be seen with how Black people obtained the land of Africville in the first place. After the War of 1812, Loyalists were allotted parcels of land, however, Black persons were given the undesirable, unwanted and non-arable land. This was most certainly a strategic way to minimize their possibility of producing an income through farming, as well as placing them on the outskirts of society – further dehumanizing them.

Razing Africville

Although Africville was considered a rural community, it was more clearly defined as a segregated Black settlement. There was a clear 'parallel between governmental policy towards Africville' which was reinforced by its social and geographical isolation (Clairmont & Magill, 1999, pp. 48). Black Geography scholars insist 'that racism and capitalism are fundamentally intertwined, and that this relationship is both structured by and structuring of space' (Hawthorne, 2019, pp. 6). This statement clearly reinforces the capitalistic drive from the city of Halifax to raze the area for industrial growth.

Relocation policies are created for and adopted by politicians for political gain, while being implemented by the wealthy and bureaucratic society (Clairmont & Magill, 1971). The intended relocatees cannot fully grasp the extent to which it will affect them as they are not included in the relocation process. The imposed destruction and relocation of Africville did not only cost residents their homes, but it 'destroyed the fabric of the community' (Loo, 2010, pp. 27). The main purpose of this razing was to erase one of Halifax's worst areas; to put it quite plainly, it was to remove Black people from an area of highly desirable land.

During the late 1950s and into the 1960s, Halifax saw urban renewal and development as its new future. In other cities, dissolving poor and racialized areas had increased the cities' overall status while promoting economic activity. Halifax's specific urban renewal strategy was based on the Stephenson Report from 1957 (Bobier, 2008). Dr. Gordon Stephenson's study suggested:

> Redevelopment should set two goals: first, the industrial development of the general metropolitan region particularly emphasizing on the waterfront areas; second, the improvement and provision of low-cost housing to replace decayed and overcrowded residential areas. (Bobier, 2008, pp. 165)

Unfortunately, Africville fell into both these categories. Continually, the Stephenson report emphasized the area's vast industrial potential, additionally stating that both Halifax and the Africville community would benefit from its demolition (Walker, 1997). Despite Africville residents being opposed to this relocation, 'decision makers made little attempt to understand residents' positions' and went ahead with demolition without consultation' (Nelson, 2009, pp. 100). Instead of demolition, Africville residents desired the resources and assistance that were previously lacking to be implemented in their community. These resources included 'running

water and paved roads and decent housing and police protection' (Walker, 1997, pp. 159), resources that could be found in every other part of the city. However, the racial tensions in the 1960s made it politically impossible for the city to restore this "deplorable" Black community as it would have appeared as approving and promoting a ghetto and degenerate behaviour. Instead, its razing allowed for the image of Black integration into white society to take the forefront as this move was both politically necessary and socially desirable at the time (Walker, 1997).

The demolition of Africville was achieved through relocation initiatives, to move people out of the area and finally rid Halifax of its most undesirable neighbourhood. Although, in theory, new age urban planning initiatives were set to focus on the social aspect of communities rather than the economic and physical traits, this could not be accomplished in Africville as only one man – Peter MacDonald, a provincial social worker – was tasked with relocating 400 people in just 20 months (Loo, 2010). This is indicative of the power, or lack thereof, of the welfare state at the municipal level.

After 150 years of neglect from the city, it was impossible to determine where property lines started, ended, and which families owned which areas. It was not uncommon for land in Africville to be passed down through generations without any form of official paperwork. This made determining compensation for the land an almost impossible task as social factors were taken into account: 'whether the individuals involved were elderly or had dependent children, what their source of income was, and what debts they had' (Loo, 2010). Therefore, MacDonald's decisions on land compensation packages for individuals or families were 'entangled with community dynamics giving state power a hybrid quality and casting its oppression in a more multifarious light' (Loo, 2010).

Urban renewal

Africville's determining factor of being labelled a slum was caused by governmental policies and practices that undoubtedly forced the community into a space of economic and infrastructural despair. Systemic poverty within the Black community caused the area to become unsafe, dirty, and filled with crime. These factors further reinforced whiteness and colonial power as Africville had to be "regulated" for the safety of broader society. Africville being labelled a racial slum gave it a metaphorical stigma of moral degeneracy, repulsiveness, and inferiority (Nelson, 2011). Due to this, its regulation became imperative and was able to be carried out through the premise of urban renewal.

The shack-like infrastructure, lack of clean fresh water, along with many other factors, contributed to the view of Africville being an impermanent society, despite its previous 150-year existence. The image of impermanence, along with the previously stated dehumanizing imagery of its residents, reinforced the notion of the Black community being unworthy of the space they occupied. The land Africville occupied was desired by the city of Halifax to further develop the area economically and socially. The disregard for the livelihoods and families occupying this area implies that space, without the racialized Black community, 'could be rendered adequate for the City's standards, while the bodies that inhabited it could not', linking it to the idea that Black people are uncivilized and unworthy of taking up space (Nelson, 2011).

Urban renewal was seen as a socially-focused fix to a deep colonial and systemic problem. To many Haligonians, the thought of blaming racism for the need to develop the area did not sit right. By branding the razing of this community as "assisting impoverished persons", it was easier to back the government decision to cleanse the area of Black identity. As stated by Bobier (2008), the concept of urban renewal allowed Halifax residents to 'dovetail their interests

in economic progress with liberal policies towards race and poverty.' Furthermore, it ties into the white saviour attitudes. It was believed that by displacing Africville residents and moving them to different parts of the city, the cycle of slum and impoverished life would be broken. However, the only reason why the Africville community was deemed a ghetto was because of the years of mistreatment from the white ruling class.

Figure 9. Community meeting held at the Seaview United Baptist Church, August 1962 (Credit: Bob Brooks, 1962)

Conclusion

Over the course of 150 years, the community of Africville endured incessant environmental racism, implemented by the city of Halifax. As a racialized and minority community they endured everything from polluting industries and increased health risks to the eventual demolition of their homes, culture, and society. As exemplified through the analyzed works, Africville was much more than just a housing problem. It encompassed issues such as systemic poverty and racism to state power and the influence of white-dominant society on the area.

As showcased through this community's history, residents were 'victims of city neglect and encroachment, which produced the unsatisfactory "problem" conditions which in turn justified relocation' (Walker, 1997, pp. 163). Sense of place and perceptions of space play into this and negatively impacted these Black Nova Scotians. Stereotypes of Black people being dirty and dangerous assisted largely in this discourse, being especially relevant considering 'spaces themselves influence how occupants know themselves, and how they are known by outsiders' (Nelson, 2009, pp. 29). As discussed throughout my analysis, this notion is directly linked to whiteness and the dominant society's everlasting need to protect it from impurities. This is showcased through the study of Africville as there is a belief that in order to protect whiteness, racialized populations must be confined (Nelson, 2009). This is because marginalized neighbourhoods and slum communities, as understood by white society, encompass 'inherent dangers and perversities' (Nelson, 2009, pp. 44).

The relocation itself not only cost residents their homes and livelihoods, but it also brought about the death of their community and culture. Africville residents lost their communal identity as well as their safe haven from the racial torment experienced in the rest of the HRM.

As beautifully explained by Walker, ‘the injustice in the relocation was not in the way it was handled but in the very fact that it happened at all’ (Walker, 1997, pp. 165). The lack of empathy and understanding from the city emphasizes the drastic capitalistic nature of the events that transpired. As understood by the razing of the community throughout the 1960s, they were ‘displaced [by] notions of progress and development in modern Halifax society’ (Nelson, 2009, pp. 60). This statement is reinforced by the shipping port, industrial mills and train station built to help economically grow the HRM.

Overall, the issues analyzed in this work support my thesis statement in that environmental racism was one of the primary reasons for its demolition. The examples focused on throughout my dissertation also support the conclusion that longstanding racism towards minority communities played a large role in the unfortunate, but not uncommon, death of this Black community.

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