

Power In Presence: Understanding Black-led coalitions and policy change in Halifax, Nova  
Scotia

by

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## Dedication

To my child —

I did not know you when this was written, but this work is for you. I hope this work reminds you of the brilliant and majestic heritage that you can claim and teaches you that your humanity can never be reduced or taken by another. You are a shining light, and I will always love you.

Table of Contents

*List of Figures*..... *vi*

*Abstract* ..... *vii*

*List of Abbreviations*..... *viii*

*Acknowledgements* ..... *ix*

**Chapter One – Introduction** ..... **1**

**Objectives** ..... **8**

**Argument** ..... **9**

**Literature Review**..... **13**

        Black Canadian Activism ..... 15

        What are social movements? ..... 20

        Resource mobilization theory ..... 21

        Interpretive approaches to social movements ..... 23

        Political Opportunity Structures ..... 27

        Discursive Opportunity Structures and Social Movement Frames ..... 30

**Halifax** ..... **34**

        Halifax as a medium-sized city ..... 34

        Rurality and underinvestment in Black communities in Halifax ..... 35

        Gentrification and exclusion in urban Halifax ..... 37

**Chapter Outline**..... **39**

**Chapter Two – Black Radicalism, Self-Determination and Institutional Orders: A Theoretical Framework**..... **43**

**Racial institutional orders** ..... **48**

**Engaging the Black radical tradition**..... **52**

**Self-determination** ..... **60**

**Conclusion**..... **66**

**Chapter Three – Research Design and Methodology** ..... **68**

**Policy areas of focus — policing and public health**..... **69**

**Methodology**..... **77**

        Autoethnography..... 79

        Semi-structured interviews ..... 84

        Frame analysis ..... 88

        Archival research ..... 90

**Conclusion**..... **93**

**Chapter Four – Understanding Black communities in early Halifax (1605-1883)**..... **94**

**Slavery, the Loyalists & the Maroons** ..... **99**

**The Black Refugees** ..... **102**

19th century Halifax – the school petitioners and self-help.....	108
Conclusion.....	112
<i>Chapter Five – 20th century Halifax - Africville, Black Power, and the challenges of unity.</i>	<i>113</i>
Africville.....	116
Black Power in Halifax .....	122
The Panthers and the creation of the Black United Front .....	128
Black United Front and government funding.....	131
Conclusion.....	139
<i>Chapter Six – The 1991 'Uptown Riots', and new pathways for change .....</i>	<i>141</i>
July 18, 1991.....	146
The aftermath of the ‘riots’ and multiracial coalitions.....	149
Government responses to the ‘riots’ .....	155
The Incident Review Committee and state repression.....	159
Lasting trauma .....	163
Conclusion.....	167
<i>Chapter Seven – Direct action and policy advocacy.....</i>	<i>171</i>
Repertoires of contention.....	174
<b>Direct action .....</b>	<b>177</b>
Direct action, emotion, and resonance.....	177
Direct action, frame alignment, and the politics of care.....	180
Criticisms of direct action.....	186
“Closed-door meetings” and resisting co-optation .....	190
<b>Public advocacy .....</b>	<b>193</b>
Getting started.....	194
Resonant frames and racialized organizations.....	198
Infrastructure building, tactical choice and positionally.....	201
Pragmatism and local context.....	207
Looking forward .....	208
Conclusion.....	210
<i>Chapter Eight - Community organizations and representative bureaucracies.....</i>	<i>212</i>
<b>Community organizations and Black self-determination.....</b>	<b>214</b>
Community organizations: roots & flourishing .....	216
Community organizations and social planning.....	223
<b>Locality development and policy co-design.....</b>	<b>228</b>
<b>Black policymakers &amp; community organizations.....</b>	<b>234</b>
<b>Diaspora, representative bureaucracy, and community organizations.....</b>	<b>243</b>
Conclusion.....	254
<i>Chapter Nine – Funding and movement capture.....</i>	<i>256</i>

<b>Provincial governments and core funding .....</b>	<b>263</b>
<b>Community organizations constrained .....</b>	<b>271</b>
<b>Activists, community organizations, and coalitional thinking .....</b>	<b>275</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>280</b>
<b><i>Chapter Ten – Conclusion.....</i></b>	<b><i>281</i></b>
<b>Contributions to the literature .....</b>	<b>284</b>
Developing an empirical account of Black self-determination in Canadian political science .....	284
Addressing Black social movements in Halifax as an institutional order .....	285
Contributing to burgeoning literature on representative bureaucracies .....	286
Articulating nuanced discussions about the diversity of Black Canadian communities .....	287
Limitations and future research .....	288
<b><i>Bibliography.....</i></b>	<b><i>291</i></b>
<b><i>Appendix A: Interview Guide.....</i></b>	<b><i>0</i></b>

List of Figures

Figure 1: Map of historical Black communities in Nova Scotia (Nova Scotia Museum, 2001)...36

Figure 2: Social Change through Black Self-Determination cover ..... 132

Figure 3: Structure chart for Black United Front health promotion project (Black United Front of Nova Scotia 1972, 31). ..... 138

Figure 4: Daily News article depicting the August 1, 1991 Unity March (Hays 1991b)..... 144

Figure 5: Daily News article signalling Black community organizational discontent with Unity March (McLaughlin 1991) ..... 152

Figure 6: A model demonstrating the tactical repertoire that Black activists use in Halifax, Nova Scotia ..... 176

## Abstract

This dissertation explores the tactical and discursive means that Black activists and community organizations in Halifax, Nova Scotia use to prompt policy change in public health and policing. This dissertation argues that Black organizers in Halifax engage in “worldmaking” via a centuries-long lineage of resistance, institution-building, and advocacy connected to trans-local and diasporic understandings of Black liberation. These understandings have been translated to account for the development of distinct African Nova Scotian institutions and organizations. The concept of worldmaking facilitates a focus on self-determination: being able to decide for oneself the trajectory of one’s community. Orientation towards self-determination is a vital bulwark against erasure and state-based discourses of Black inferiority and victimhood – the mechanisms of structural and institutional violence that maintain and deepen harm within Black communities in Nova Scotia (whether historic or immigrant). The fight for self-determination can be articulated as a distinct political identity from which coalitions can be formed across heterogeneous communities of African descent as well as other racial, class, and national identities.

I develop this argument using a combination of archival research, twenty-five semi-structured interviews, and autoethnographic methods. Data gathered during my fieldwork is analyzed through a theoretical framework that combines insights from Canadian Political Development literature. The theoretical framework for this dissertation centres on the development of racial institutional orders in Canada, combining a diverse set of literatures (including Black Studies, political development, and social movements literatures) with community knowledge and insights to disrupt a status-quo that erases these perspectives. The dissertation first uses a historical narrative to account for the development of Black community organizations and institutions over time, which are rooted in the concept of Black self-determination. Building from the history, I conduct an analysis of the contemporary tactics used by activists and community organizations oriented around Black self-determination. Ultimately, this dissertation seeks to address the erasure of communities of African descent within the study of Canadian politics, opting instead to engage with the extensive lineage of organizing within and between communities in Nova Scotia.

## List of Abbreviations

ACLM – Afro-Canadian Liberation Movement  
ABSW – Association of Black Social Workers  
ANSA – Office of African Nova Scotian Affairs  
ANSDPAD – African Nova Scotian Decade for People of African Descent Coalition  
AUBA – African United Baptist Association  
BOPC – Halifax Board of Police Commissioners  
BIPOC – Black, Indigenous and Persons of Colour  
BUF – Black United Front  
CAYG – Cultural Awareness Youth Group  
CPS – Canadian political science  
HAAC – Health Association of African Canadians  
HRP – Halifax Regional Police  
NDP – New Democratic Party  
NSPPWG – Nova Scotia Policing Policy Working Group  
NSAACP – Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People  
NSM – New Social Movement  
NSHA – Nova Scotia Health Association  
RCMP – Royal Canadian Mounted Police  
WUNC – Worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment



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## Chapter One – Introduction

*Aug 18, 2021 — Protest at the Old Central Library on Spring Garden Road*

*I arrived at the Old Central Library shaky and out of breath. The air was humid and thick despite the forecast calling for a 22c high — a temperate peak for a Halifax August day. It felt, perhaps, that the fury of the crowd before me was fuelling the cauldron-like atmosphere in the little patch of grass in front of the Old Central Library on Spring Garden Road — adjacent to the main shopping district of Halifax, Nova Scotia. No doubt, the plumes of smoke coming from the hot-dog cart set up right next to the crowd also amplified the fiery undertones of the scenes unfolding. Here, under the shadow of boutique clothing stores and office buildings, a statue of Winston Churchill, and swinging construction cranes signalling Halifax's burgeoning economic boom, a group of police officers grappled with protestors intent on stopping them from dismantling the encampment of unhoused residents that stood at the site.*

*The unhoused residents, whose ranks swelled across the municipality as the COVID-19 pandemic reached its first anniversary and migration to Nova Scotia dramatically increased, were being evicted under an edict from the municipal government. The shelters were full; the cost of rent in the province was skyrocketing, and there was nowhere for these residents to go. A provincial election that concluded the preceding day returned, for the first time in over a decade, a Progressive Conservative government to Province House. The scene felt like a harbinger of the challenges to come — and a backlash to the liberatory, anti-racist transformations sought by protestors a year prior at protests held just a few hundred metres away.*

*The crowd of protestors forming a wall to confront the police officers was, in a manner that became the norm during the 2020 protests, mixed in terms of age, gender, race, class &*

*ability. I saw plenty of familiar faces on the front lines, but interspersed with seasoned protestors were people who left work to observe the commotion and joined in the chanting. I saw several people going about their daily business stop to inquire what was happening, express horror at the situation, and stay to protest after learning about the evictions. Some of the evicted unhoused residents were also watching events unfold. I spoke with one person who was sleeping in a tent in the neighbourhood. He told me his story, which included a brief prison stay, the confiscation of most of his possessions, and a complete lack of supports in HRM for folks who were living in temporary housing. Word spread the night before that the evictions would be happening, and he was able to get to his medications in time to make sure they were not thrown away.*

*The protestors in the crowd were furious. The main focus of the crowd's attention was the second shelter that the Halifax Regional Police officers wished to dismantle (the first was dismantled before I arrived). A protestor sat on the roof of the shelter for hours - guiding chants, warning people about approaching officers, and refusing to climb down into the throng of approximately officers that surrounded him seeking his removal. For most of my tenure at the site, there was an uneasy tension without much movement. The crowd would cheer and chant when onlookers noticed the scene, including a notable uproar when a Harbour Hopper tourist transportation vehicle passed by the site amid screams of "fuck the police" and "This is what Halifax looks like." The tourists' horrified faces demonstrated that this anti-tourism 'ad' had been quite effective.*

*Many of the chants from the crowd were focused on the police, asking "who do you serve? Who do you protect?" Crucially, many of the protestors used the action as a direct example of why the municipality ought to defund the police. The stark parallels between the*

*extensive resources used to evict the city's most vulnerable residents, all while the services ostensibly designed to support them were unable to do so because of a lack of capacity and resources, were the apex of months of tension in the city surrounding issues of policing, public health, racism, and the city's approach to poverty. This powder keg exploded in one day.*

*The officers at once seemed disorganized and also, in words and in actions, behaved as if they relished the battle against the citizens they ostensibly served. I saw them push and shove and mock and demean protestors that confronted them until they went silent to plan their exit strategy. It appeared that they did not anticipate for the protestors to be as organized, as persistent, and as angry as they were. When I arrived at the Old Central Library, two individuals were being pulled down and restrained by police officers. They put their arms and bodyweight on the neck of one protestor until they were subdued and shoved another to the ground. They dragged and kicked two other protestors. They arrested anywhere from 12 to 20 people at my count. They pushed women by the breasts and commented on their bodies. Disproportionately, from my view, Black and queer protestors were the ones getting hit the most (although well-meaning white folks stepped into the breach too). The scene devolved when the protestor on top of the second shelter was eventually removed and was arrested. Protestors aimed to build a human chain around the police van; the officers with bikes formed a wall to push them back so the van could advance.*

*The worst of the skirmishes started then. The officers swung their bikes, toppling anyone in proximity. They started pepper spraying the protestors. When the spraying started, they became indiscriminate, attacking anyone in close range including, we later found out, a ten-year-old child (Cooke 2021). Amidst the chaos, I noticed that the Black officers seemed to be the ones who luxuriated the most in the conflict and were some of the most belligerent and*

*aggressive towards Black protestors like me. I wondered why, but then I reflected on the dynamics of racialized organizations including the pathways and initiations that they must have navigated to get to that point. I realized that survival in such an environment meant inculcation into the most extreme aspects of this organizational behaviour, including “thin blue line” and “Blue lives matter” rhetoric.*

*Municipal councillors were absent though their offices were less than a kilometre away, and there was a great degree of anger amongst protestors and residents alike at the municipality’s perceived callousness and trickery. This day, it felt, would erase any trust some residents had in the municipality for good. There was a sense of solidarity in our anger and in our fear. We were all disgusted; alienated by a place that no longer felt like it could be a home for any of us. Someone pointed out the irony of the dismantling of the shelters on land that once was a poorhouse, and before that was a graveyard. Endless cycles of brutality.*

The events of August 18<sup>th</sup> 2021 described above are indicative of the profound tensions at work in this dissertation project. In Halifax, Nova Scotia — the setting of this dissertation — these tense confrontations between police forces and citizens over the mistreatment of vulnerable community members are periodic, demonstrating a disjuncture between state power and a community-centric understanding of mutual aid and care. Though this work does not explicitly focus on homelessness as a policy area of analysis, these confrontations between what can be conceived as conflicting institutional orders are catalysts of policy change in Halifax, particularly as they relate to communities of African descent. This chaotic day, at once seemingly inevitable and painfully avoidable, showed the heavy-handed and aggressive approach that governing institutions (i.e., organizations, rules and networks that are a product of municipal, provincial, or federal government action) continue to take towards vulnerable

populations that they deem, in actions if not words, as inferior to the populations they perceive as their constituency.

Frequently, this perceived inferiority is racialized as Black — even if many of the actors involved in the conflict are not people of African descent — and in important ways this discourse predates the formation of Canada as a nation-state. Slavery, entwined with processes of settler colonialism which facilitated the genocide of Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island, is at the root of racism in Canada.<sup>1</sup> As a result of this centuries-long subjugation, Black people in Canada have a paradoxical status in the Canadian imaginary. We are at once present as a pathology (being framed as malignant social actors who would bring conflict to an otherwise peaceful nation<sup>2</sup>) or absented from national discourses entirely by being subsumed into a “visible minority” policy framework that aggregates and lessens the historical and contemporary claims Black communities can make against the Canadian state.<sup>3</sup> Black Canadians’ paradoxical standing in the Canadian imaginary does not stop at historical commemoration. Instead, it informs the landscape within which Black people in Canada can exercise our political citizenship. This racialization is expansive and informed the treatment of both the unhoused residents at the encampment and the protestors who confronted police officers at the site by removing their voices and perspectives from decision-making processes about the encampment. Unhoused

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<sup>1</sup> Robyn Maynard highlights the foundational role that slavery plays in underwriting racism in *Policing Black Lives*: “It is the practice of slavery that set the stage for the subsequent centuries of dehumanization of Black life across Canada. Social amnesia about slavery, as is common in Canada, makes it impossible to understand anti-Black policing in the current epoch. It is only in recovering this original brutality by engaging with the making of the perceived relationship between Black bodies, inferiority, and pathology that we may more thoroughly understand the contemporary disenfranchisement of Black life through policing and other state institutions” (2017, 19).

<sup>2</sup> Order-in-Council P.C. 1911-1324 is an important example of the linkage between Black migration to Canada and discourses of inferiority – the order, signed by Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier, states that “the Negro race...is deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada” (Yarhi 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Jennifer J. Nelson, in *Race, Space and the Law*, highlights this paradox when discussing the commemoration of Africville. She highlights that at once, white Haligonians resented Africville residents for making demands of the city and provincial government for restitution while insisting that there was no racism or injustice to begin with (2002, 229).

Haligonians, disproportionately Black or Indigenous community members whose ranks are rapidly growing, were excluded from making basic decisions about their own future by municipal representatives who had limited or incorrect information about their day-to-day experience (Draus 2022; Woodford 2021; Bousquet 2021).

More important to this incident and to this project, however, is the story of those who contest that state power — the networks of activists, community organizations and affiliated community members who align in complex and sometimes contradictory ways to prompt policy change. Though in the August 18<sup>th</sup> case, these actors were not explicitly protesting racism within governing institutions, the underpinning of many of the frames they used to imagine what the future could be — as well as the networks and connections made by actors on the ground — emerged in part as a result of Black-led coalitions across the city and across the province whose advocacy has contributed to and inspired radical action amongst groups of Haligonians of all races. This advocacy takes innumerate forms: from direct actions that include protests and blockades, to creative resistances like music and dance, to policy-oriented lobbying.<sup>4</sup> Black activism and resistance in Halifax, and indeed in Canada, is as plural, multifaceted, and limitless as Black imaginations are. Black activists are often pathologized in policymaking spaces and in the media, however, for radical or direct forms of action, while at the same time rendered inert (or worse) within pluralist forms of political expression like lobbying. The implications of this institutional indifference to Black political expression are that, in many ways, formal political

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<sup>4</sup> Janaya Khan summarizes the expansive possibilities of contemporary organizing in *Until We Are Free: Reflections on Black Lives Matter in Canada*: “We are the first generation to have the tools that we do, and in many ways we are building the plane as we are flying it. Still, there is something pretty remarkable in being tasked with bringing our twentieth-century models of organizing, activism and direct action into the twenty-first century, of creating the blueprint for winning in the digital age” (2020, 118).



institutions at all three levels of government render Black advocacy work (if not Black advocates themselves) invisible.

This dissertation, therefore, contests that epistemological and ontological erasure by addressing the research question: *What methods do Black-led coalitions in Halifax, Nova Scotia use to contest durable racial inequities in policing and public health?* In addressing this research question, this dissertation places Black activism in Halifax in its historical and contemporary context, rejecting the once-ubiquitous notion that African Nova Scotians and other people of African descent in the province are policy-takers with no capacity to advocate for themselves nor to be the authors of their own futures (Clairmont and Magill 1999, 273). In asking this question, I emphasize the agency of actors in this space, and account for the heterogenous perspectives and motivations for collective action in the city. A narrow focus on methods does not, however, fully account for the multifaceted and translocal lineages of Black resistance that continue to animate action in Halifax, and indeed in cities and towns across the world. I engage these lineages by documenting the connections between the ways that activists and community organizations in Halifax conduct their work and the liberation movements that exist as part of the Black radical tradition of political thought and activism. Throughout this project, I engage the ethical stakes of resistance work and the profound acts of care, esteem-building, and support through adversity that go beyond tactics and towards utopian visions of just communities of non-domination (Shor 2004, 173-174). I make these connections by addressing the supplementary research question for this dissertation: *What is the anatomy of the racial institutional order that connects Black resistance to white supremacy in Halifax?*

## Objectives

This dissertation has four key objectives that I outline below:

- *Combating the erasure of Black organizing in the Canadian political science literature:*  
This project engages with interdisciplinary work in Black Studies, as well as work on political development and on social movements to assert the importance of Black organizing to democratic governance in Canada by using Halifax as a rich and detailed case study of urban organizing.<sup>5</sup>
- *Connecting distinct and temporally bound Black social movements in Halifax to a translocal and diasporic racial institutional order:* This project situates social movements in Halifax within a larger institutional order that seeks Black liberation through self-determination. In so doing, it expands this project's lens of analysis beyond discrete moments and methods of contest to the forms of care and connection that sustain these communities through oppressive circumstances.
- *Expressing the contradictions and heterogeneity between and within Black communities in Nova Scotia, including in these communities' approach to activism:* This project honours the unique and rich experiences of historical African Nova Scotian communities and experiences while accounting for the important ways that generations of people of African heritage have also experienced and advocated for their own visions of self-determination – often, but not always, in coalition with each other.
- *Supporting local activists, organizers, and even those in the bureaucracy in understanding their shared context and trajectory towards self-determination:* This project describes the multiple approaches that Black community members in Halifax use

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<sup>5</sup> Important interlocutors in the study of Canadian politics that shape this work include (but are not limited to) Kiera Ladner, Nisha Nath, Debra Thompson, and Ethel Tungohan.

to seek policy changes in public health and policing. It illuminates the ways that community members, in coalition, can play discrete but important roles in working towards self-determination. These discrete roles do not always align, and actors frequently disagree about tactics, and these disputes often obscure the shared goals that community members may hold. This project thus investigates these shared goals and makes the case for a diversity of approaches and perspectives as being vital to the success of movements over time.

### **Argument**

In this dissertation, I argue that Black organizers in Halifax engage in “worldmaking” towards self-determination via a centuries-long lineage of resistance, institution-building, and advocacy. Worldmaking, used by Adom Getachew to describe the anti-colonial movement to create a “domination-free and egalitarian international order”, is the tangible steps taken by actors to build institutions and spaces that reject empire and racial hierarchy (2019, 2). In *Worldmaking After Empire*, Getachew (2019, 2-8) articulates a vision of worldmaking shared by global anticolonial thinkers like Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, and Eric Williams. These leaders sought to transform the globe by destabilizing and dismantling an international order underpinned by a racialized hierarchy of empire. Instead, they sought to build a world with new international institutions and traditional nation-states that actualized theories of Black internationalism and socialism as expressed in Pan-African liberation movements (Getachew 2019, 15). For these leaders, therefore, self-determination refers to an articulation of new forms of state sovereignty in the international arena to spur the era of decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s (2019, 3).

In this project, I translate these global concepts to a significantly different, local context. I use worldmaking to describe the dynamic means that activists and community members in Halifax use to bridge the gap between utopian visions of a solidaristic and egalitarian city where people of African descent have full agency and autonomy over the circumstances of their own lives, and the pragmatic reality of navigating state oppression and discrimination that shape everyday life. These community members bridge this gap by building institutions with normative heft governed by logics and norms of holistic care, esteem and accountability that underpin marches in the streets, Sunday school conversations and even provincial strategies for health care provision.

This worldmaking is a crucial component of self-determination, which in this account means being able to decide for oneself the trajectory of one's community in relationships of non-domination and relational autonomy (Young 2007, 44). Here, actors do not seek to establish state-like sovereignty over distinct territorial spaces that others cannot interfere with, but instead advocate for autonomy, respect, and justice in their dealings with the state and with each other (Young 2007, 48). Crucially, self-determination does not mean uniformity of approach, nor does it mean a lack of responsibility to and for others within the broader polity (Young 2007, 48-49, 51). Instead, it means building institutions and governance processes that offer the radical democratic possibility of accounting for the specific interests, perspectives, and desires of a political community (Young 2007, 48, 52).

The process of worldmaking, and the self-determination that it drives, are the engine of efforts by Black activists at a local level to resist the domination of a governing racial institutional order that shapes their day-to-day lives: a constellation of actors at a federal, provincial, and municipal level that perceive Black Haligonians through the binding racial

concept of Black inferiority and victimhood and thus creates policy that is either unresponsive or directly contrary to community interests, and consequently harms the health, well-being and autonomy of Black residents of the municipality.

This stance or orientation towards self-determination is a bulwark against erasure and discourses of inferiority and victimhood and can be articulated as a distinct political identity from which organizing can be developed and coalitions can be formed. This political identity is distinct from the ascribed or observed racial identity that offers little room to organize across difference and fosters recrimination, conflict, and a strategic fuzziness that dilutes the efficacy of advocacy. Underpinning this political identity is a holistic, egalitarian vision that asserts the humanity of Black Haligonians through the politics and praxis of care. This care is demonstrated in the dedicated spaces and programming that rebuffs domination and honours a lineage of resistance in communal care. The continual evolution of Black organizing towards transformation in Halifax is part of a competing racial institutional order with a transnational and translocal lineage of resistance to white supremacy and colonialism.

This political identity, and the organizing it produces, interacts with the political and discursive opportunity structure of municipal and provincial policymaking in dynamic and contradictory ways, particularly at critical junctures. The municipality has little financial or policy capacity, which offers opportunities for greater responsiveness to organizing efforts on the governing institutions themselves but also means that this change may be short-lived due to a lack of resources to compliment mobilization.

Efforts at transformation at a provincial level are typically well-structured, sustainable community organizations that often develop service-provision arms to serve Black communities in Halifax and across Nova Scotia as part of their advocacy. This work is unique and fosters

spaces that can embolden community members to seek redress for inequities within the broader system. It also, however, leaves these organizations uniquely exposed to what can be called “movement capture” – or co-optation of organizational priorities by funders (in this case provincial and federal governments), shifting them away from radical action and towards an inert relationship that buttresses rather than contests policy discourses of inferiority and victimhood (Francis 2019).

This “worldmaking” matters because it connects the historical and present-day organizing within Halifax to a national and global set of frames, organizations and ideas that seek redress against a global system of white supremacy. It connects activists and community organizations in Halifax to a larger institutional order that does not receive its legitimacy from the exercise of state power, but rather from egalitarian visions of justice and connectivity (Kelley 2002, 196; Jones 2022, 183).<sup>6</sup> This sense of linked fate,<sup>7</sup> and the anti-colonial actions that this sense inspires, animate coalitional thinking and organizing across difference — both in Halifax and beyond. These coalitions contribute to impactful, if incomplete, changes in the ways that governments craft policy that affect communities of African descent and address the extensive democratic deficit that centuries of neglect, disinvestment and discrimination have facilitated in the ways that these communities are governed.

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<sup>6</sup> Kelley’s encouragement in the conclusion of *Freedom Dreams* to “think like poets” in conceiving of a better world sparks a connection to El Jones’ poem “We Still Rise” in *Abolitionist Intimacies* (2002, 186). Jones writes: “We are generations of resistance that cannot be put down/We extend beyond elections and whoever’s in the White House/We have been to the top of the mountain/We have survived, from genocides to witch trials/And they could not burn us out or wipe us out/Or push us aside” (2022, 185-186).

<sup>7</sup> The term “linked fate”, penned by Michael C. Dawson, refers to the belief that one’s self-interests are connected to the interests of a racial group as a whole (1994, 77).

## Literature Review

Despite the important contributions these Black-led coalitions have made and will continue to make on Canadian politics at a municipal, provincial, and federal level, however, little attention has been paid, however, in the mainstream Canadian political science literature (CPS) to the tensions and complexities of this work. Instead, where engagements between Black activism and CPS exist, they are often framed through the prism of liberal multiculturalism, which refers to the hypothesis that “states can adopt multiculturalism policies to fairly recognize the legitimate interests of minorities in their identity and culture without eroding core liberal-democratic values” (Kymlicka 2010, 258). This framing is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, as Nath notes, the liberal multiculturalist hypothesis still positions what Vickers calls the prototypical political subject – the White, heterosexual, able-bodied male – at the centre of its project by emphasizing “tolerance and containment” when discussing race (2011, 164). This positioning comes despite attempts to reconcile what Kymlicka calls the “legitimate interests” of ‘minorities’ with Rawlsian conceptions of freedom, equality, and solidarity (2010, 258). Framing the fight against the oppression of Black people as “legitimate interests” that must be reconciled tacitly centres those doing the legitimizing of those interests as those who ultimately have power and control.

Secondly, the inclusion-oriented tendency of liberal multiculturalism does not map neatly onto Black Canadian histories or trajectories. A leading theorist of multicultural citizenship notes in *Finding Our Way* that Black Canadian experiences do not appear to be following the same integrative trajectory as other minority groups (1998, 82). The divergent histories and contexts of Black Canadian communities mean that no uniform categorization is available for the kinds of state-community relations that exist or might exist in the future. Moreover, this emphasis on inclusion absents the degree to which slavery and its afterlives continue to shape state institutions

and racial concepts in Canada, making the prospect of inclusion into the state fraught with constraint.<sup>8</sup>

Thirdly, the limits of the liberal multiculturalist hypothesis (in practice if not in theory) are defined by the boundaries of formal politics. As Bonnie McElhinny points out when citing Matthew James in her discussion of multiculturalism and official apologies, there is a clear distinction between a state-managed multiculturalism that distinguishes between what it perceives as legitimate and illegitimate forms of diversity, and a “social movement multiculturalism” that calls attention to injustice and links activist movements (2016, 59). State-managed multiculturalism thus cannot account for the plural modes of Black activism, nor can it effectively respond to them.

This lack of attention to Black activism (outside of the multicultural frame) is indicative of a disciplinary tendency to avoid discussions of racism and racialization especially as they implicate the discipline itself in upholding these epistemic inequities, and also to view Black citizens as undeserving of focused political analysis. Instead, in the study of Canadian politics and beyond, Black researchers are required to constantly prove and validate the idea that a) race is political (Thompson 2008), and b) that we can tell more interesting and more nuanced stories about Black Canadian communities and their relations to and against the state, and to each other (Jones 2022, 76). My intervention in this dynamic is to take as a *departure point* that issues of race and racism in Canada are political, and instead focus instead on the work that communities of African heritage do as political actors in shaping policy processes in Canada within a broader lineage of organizing towards self-determination.

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<sup>8</sup> Kymlicka states in *Finding Our Way*, for example, that “the history of slavery and segregation in Canada, while more similar to the US experience than most Canadians realize, is not the source of contemporary race-relations problems” (1998, 79). This commonly held view is refuted throughout this project.



One way that researchers in political science have attempted to account for the ways that citizens excluded from receiving the benefits of state inclusion organize themselves to decide their own fate is to analyze social movements, which can take rational & interpretive approaches to understanding collective action. These bodies of literature offer important concepts that I use throughout this project, but crucially very little in the social movements literature addresses the specific experiences of Black Canadians — and even less engages with the history and organizing of African Nova Scotians — meaning that this dissertation seeks to interject these insurgent voices into this broader conversation. I have chosen in this work to use the concept of racial institutional orders (King and Smith 2005) to describe what I perceive as a more complex and long-standing interplay between community actors and their political context than the often exogenous and temporally bound approach that can characterise social movement study. Understanding the literature on social movements, however, is still an important part of this journey. In moments of contention, these movements give voice to ideas and emotions that cannot be suppressed any longer (Thompson 2017; Orsini and Wiebe 2014).

### Black Canadian Activism

Research that does focus on the experiences and organizing of Black Canadians rarely fits within the discipline of political science, and instead exists within cognate disciplines or as interdisciplinary work. While this dissertation project does not in any way seek disciplinary fidelity, it does offer a unique intervention into the literature on Black organizing and Black protest in Canada.

Impactful collections like *The Fire That Time* and *Until We Are Free: Reflections on Black Lives Matter in Canada* identify the diasporic and transcontinental connections that facilitate Black radical organizing in Canada. (Mohabir and Cummings 2022; Diverlus, Hudson

and Ware 2020). *The Fire That Time*, for instance, collects essays that reflect on the Sir George Williams University student uprising of 1968 in Montreal, tracing its decolonial roots and its transnational implications – both in terms of the actors involved in the occupation and in terms of the further actions this occupation inspired (Mohabir and Cummings 2022). *Until We Are Free* offers a rich volume of essays reflecting on the mobilizing and direct action spurred by the Black Lives Matter movement. The volume engages the impact of these actions on the arts, on diasporic understandings of Blackness in Canada and even on experiences of mothering in the movement (Diverlus, Hudson and Ware 2020). These volumes are instrumental in identifying the translocal dimensions of Black activism in Canada, but often do not explicitly address the ways that this organizing affects the policy process in the cases that they address, nor do they extensively engage Black communities in Canada outside of the large metropolises of Toronto or Montreal. This dissertation thus focuses on a case-study in Halifax, a medium-sized city in Atlantic Canada.

Recent work that engages issues of policing, prisons and anti-Black racism in Canada include texts like *Policing Black Lives*, *Abolitionist Intimacies* and *The Skin We're In: A year of Black resistance and power*. *Policing Black Lives* (2017) traces the way that policing as a system of dominance and control interweaves with cognate policy areas including Canada's immigration and child welfare regimes to assert hegemonic dominance over Black communities across the country (Maynard 2017). Maynard's analysis engages both the historic and contemporary terrain of anti-Blackness as expressed by governing institutions in Canada, giving the reader an extensive insight into the way that policing as an institution reflects and entrenches these harmful discourses. Desmond Cole's *The Skin We're In: A year of Black resistance and power* (2020) approaches organizing against police brutality and surveillance from a first-person and

journalistic perspective, and his approach dovetails neatly with the autoethnographic approach taken in this project. The text, recounting a year in Cole's life, sets about engaging with Black resistance across the country through the lens of a series of crucial moments of mobilization – from the killing of Andrew Loku by the Toronto Police Service to the near-deportation of Abdoul Abdi by the federal government to Black Lives Matter-Toronto's stoppage of the Toronto Pride Parade to protest police presence at the event (Cole 2020, 87, 99, 198). Cole includes in his journey an excursion to North Preston, a historical Black community in Halifax Regional Municipality, to discuss the crucial leadership that Black women demonstrate in resisting state violence (Cole 2020, 169-170). Cole's work demonstrates the interconnections between movements and communities across the country, situating resistance not only in the demonstrations that activists in organizations like Black Lives Matter-Toronto make but also in the everyday lives of people living under and through state violence. *Abolitionist Intimacies* by El Jones (2022) primarily engages the horrors of imprisonment in Canada as well as the nuanced and vivid emotions and experiences of those locked away from their communities (2022, 5). Jones combines argumentative and autoethnographic essays, non-fiction prose and poetry to showcase the humanity of those who have been dehumanized in the process of being constructed as criminals (2022, 5, 11, 19). In the process, Jones identifies the ways that all Canadians are implicated in a system that is dependent on the suffering of those locked away and calls on us to bear witness to the brutality of the system without removing the humanity of the people subjugated by it (2022, 38, 55). These works inspire this project's analysis of policing as a manifestation of the racialized policy discourses of Black inferiority and victimhood, as well as its commitment to centring the humanity of Black community members. Where this project

differentiates itself is in its focus on health organizing and activism that engages with, but is distinct from, organizing in issues of criminal justice.

Texts that engage other relevant policy areas like environmental racism and racism in urban planning also offer this project a rich foundation of knowledge and evidence surrounding the social and structural determinants of health as they relate to people of African descent in Nova Scotia, as well as a robust understanding of the ways that municipal and provincial governments in Nova Scotia have historically undermined efforts at transformation to better serve those communities (Rutland 2018; Waldron 2018). Ted Rutland's text in *Displacing Blackness* identifies the ways that urban planning decisions in Halifax are dependent upon processes of racial subjugation and entrench a violent, anti-Black modernity in the city (Rutland 2018, 2-4). Rutland's work engages the history of Black activism in Halifax in contesting these planning decisions (including, but not limited to, the destruction of Africville that is one of the most well-known instances of racialized displacement in Canada) – and pays particular attention to the history of the Black United Front and their struggle for self-determination in urban planning decisions in the 1960s and 1970s (Rutland 2018, 217). Where this project differs from Rutland's account is in its emphasis on framing tactics, as well as its incorporation of policing as a policy area that entrenches the oppressive circumstances that Rutland identifies in his work. Rutland thus is a vital interlocutor for this project, offering an enmeshed but distinct account of the way that Black Haligonians have resisted oppressive policy discourses that have shaped the city.

Ingrid Waldron's book *There's Something In The Water* identifies the ways that these processes of racial oppression shape environmental policy affecting Indigenous and Black communities in Nova Scotia. Waldron identifies, using a critical environmental justice

framework, the ways that white supremacy facilitates exposure to state-sanctioned violence and environmental harms by rendering Black and Indigenous communities as disposable in the interests of extractive profiteering (2018, 24). Waldron's text also tells the story of Black and Indigenous resistance in Nova Scotia to environmental racism and settler colonialism. It uses community-based participatory action research to intervene in these injustices via the ENRICH Project and its advocacy for distinct policy solutions to address environmental racism in the province and nationwide (Waldron 2018, 62, 258). Waldron's work inspires this project's emphasis on placing community expertise and advocacy at the centre of analysis and interrogation. Her work allows for a situated engagement with the tactics that community advocates in Black and Indigenous communities use to prompt change at a local level to harmful policies that have impacted communities like Shelburne, Sipekne'katik First Nation, and Lincolnville (Waldron 2018, 136, 160, 234). In so doing, she identifies the ways that structural determinants of health transform life chances and life choices for people subjugated by racial capitalism (Waldron 2018, 102, 186). While I do not adopt an environmental justice framework in this project, Waldron's work operates as a key inspiration for the approach I take to analyze the organizing efforts of Black Haligonians.

Despite the rich and interdisciplinary literature that identifies centuries of organizing in Black communities across Canada, the extensive body of political science work on social movement formation and mobilization rarely engages Black Canadian activism at all. A notable exception to this rule is Agnes Calliste's work on the Civil Rights and Black Power eras, as well as her work on the organizing of Caribbean nurses and train porters (Calliste 1995; Calliste 1996).

This project, therefore, takes inspiration from and engages with these works and others to articulate the experiences of Black Canadians — their histories, their differences, their solidarities, and their hopes — as foundational to understanding politics in Halifax, and by extension politics in Canada. I engage the broader theoretical lineage of the Black radical tradition, as well as the political development literature that informs this project’s focus on racial institutional orders, in Chapter Two. Below, I discuss the concepts from the social movements literature that I use in this project to better situate the analytical approach I take in this project.

### What are social movements?

There are divergent perspectives in this literature on the best way to describe and analyze what Castells frames as “purposive collective actions whose outcome, in victory as in defeat, transforms the values and institutions of society”<sup>9</sup> (Castells 2011, 3). Some authors perceive that these movements are only powerful to the extent that they can effectively mobilize resources to underpin their grievances, while others focus on a movement’s ability to define an identity that extends beyond strict class analysis. The meeting point between these two perspectives appears to be the study of political opportunity structures, which takes political and social context into account to frame how movements choose to address tactical realities. This research, while diffuse, offers a useful foundation to address Black Canadian activism insofar as it does not treat movement identity and movement tactics as static, discrete factors, but instead engages them as fluid parts of a process.

When movements mobilize, they organize into forms of collective action that exist outside of formal or governing institutional contexts and whose concerns may extend beyond the

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9. Another useful explanation for how social movements operate comes from Charles Tilly in *Stories, Identities and Political Change*: “Whereas an electoral campaign pays off chiefly in the votes that finally result from it, a social movement pays off in the effective transmission of the message that its program’s supporters are WUNC – (1) worthy, (2) unified, (3) numerous and (4) committed” (2002, p. 88).

confines of government action. As Snow et al. describe, there are considerable overlaps between social movements and interest groups, and some of the organizations I study in this project straddle the line between the two. Where they do differentiate, however, is in their orientation to the state, their embeddedness within institutional settings, and in their willingness to pursue non-institutional means to achieve change (Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2008, 7). The movements I cover, while often being funded by state grants to deliver services, offer direct rebuttals that might include direct action to contest what they perceive to be unjust and unreasonable policy decisions. Beyond these examples of processual impacts, these movements also have an important role to play in contesting the institutional logics and taken-for-granted concepts that guide decision-making, meaning that their mobilization and organizing offers conceptual and discursive pathways towards transformative change for actors willing to address and implement their demands (Schneiburg and Lounsbury 2008, 649). In the process of organizing towards transformation, these movements contribute to the development of a racial institutional order that contests white supremacy by linking, regrouping, and reforming racial concepts towards an egalitarian vision.

### Resource mobilization theory

The study of social movements began in earnest in the 1960s as a response to social unrest and upheaval in liberal democracies with pluralist tendencies<sup>10</sup> (Meyer 2004, 127). The Civil Rights Movement can be framed as a quintessential challenge to the pluralist frame insofar as it

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10. Meyer also notes that before this time, political scientists wrote of protest movements “with fascism in general – and Nazism in particular – in mind. They thus defined movements as dysfunctional, irrational, and inherently undesirable, and described those who joined them as disconnected from intermediate associations that would link them with more productive, and less disruptive, social pursuits” (p. 126).

demonstrated that *polyarchy* as framed by Robert Dahl<sup>11</sup> is insufficient as a model to facilitate the political voices and perspectives of those who, both formally and informally, have been excluded from formal political arenas. These movements erased, according to Miriam Smith, the distinction between the personal and the political – illuminating how the “private sphere is imbued with power relationships or politics” (2017, 24). These movements were also not solely focused on formal political organizations, but instead extended to target cultural norms, religious organizations, and private businesses (Meyer and Reyes 2010, 218). The failure of the pluralist account to reflect political realities in the 1960s led to a reflection among political scientists on the methods of and barriers to mobilization.

One such approach to studying social movements beyond the pluralist account is the study of resource mobilization, or the “how” of social movement formation. Resource mobilization addresses the tactical and asset-driven dynamics that determine movement success or failure (Dennis 2016, p. 32). These dynamics are driven by pre-existing grievances that motivate mobilization, but the salient factor to whether movements arise is their capacity to garner both material and non-material resources. In the book *A Civil Society?: Collective Actors in Canadian Political Life*, Miriam Smith outlines a non-exhaustive list of resources that includes money, organization, expertise, and public support, noting that movements leverage those resources to achieve their objectives (2017, p. 28). Resource mobilization theory thus indicates that social movement actors are not self-interested short-term thinkers but are, in fact, motivated

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11. Richard W. Krouse frames Dahl’s concept of polyarchy succinctly: “In his discussion of the “American hybrid” system of government, Dahl argues that elections combined with continuous political competition between individuals or parties or both are the two critical methods of social control distinguishing polyarchal democracy from dictatorship...Polyarchy is neither pure majority rule nor unified minority rule. It is an open, competitive, and pluralistic system of “minorities rule”” (Krouse, 1982, p. 443). Dahl, in *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*, delivered a foundational work in urban politics that laid the foundation for pluralist theory in urban settings.



by pre-existing social grievances. These pre-existing grievances serve as context that prompts organizing. In this way, context is important in resource mobilization studies, but only insofar as this context determines and conditions strategic mobilization opportunities (Canel, 1997, 3). These grievances, from this perspective, are only preconditions and are not enough to explain why social movements emerge. As Agnes Calliste demonstrates in her study of how the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements impacted Black organizing in Canada, this analytical perspective is useful but insufficient in accounting for the scope and contours of Black social movements in Canada.

#### Interpretive approaches to social movements

The crises that disrupted the pluralist response to social movements also spurred researchers to investigate movements from the lens of identity construction and maintenance. This school of thought became framed as New Social Movements (NSMs) theory and was used to describe movements that do not centre class conflict as the sole platform from which to mobilize. Instead, according to Pichardo, “NSMs are characterised by their focus on issues such as quality of life and the construction and maintenance of identity” (1997, 412).

New Social Movements offer granularity regarding the construction and mobilisation of identity. This nuance comes in the form of challenging governing discourses<sup>12</sup> and meta-narratives of neglect and erasure, and in the case of intersectional movements, reframing relations of power across different aspects of identity to demonstrate how privilege and marginality can compound or conflict within the context of a person or group’s social location. By framing the social and political world as a series of socially constructed discourses that

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12. Dorothy Smith’s work on ruling relations emphasizes how these governing discourses, and the oppression that they produce via institutions, become embodied through everyday practices of work.

include some and erase others, NSMs can recast history and contemporary relations as contested spaces.

Part of the analytical utility of NSM theory is in understanding how these movements, whose focus is on discourses, histories, and symbols, define and articulate movement identities. These movements often “make links between identities and movement causes in order to recruit participants” (Meyer & Reyes 2010, 224). In doing so, NSMs participate in constructing collective identities for individuals that form their membership. These collective identities can be defined as “an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader category, practice or institution” (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 285). The connections above can often be traced to an ascribed identity (race, gender), but typically morph into a chosen affiliation, like calling oneself a feminist or a Black activist (Meyer & Reyes 2010, 225). This affiliation does not necessarily emerge from class location, but instead from a desire to “change dominant normative and cultural codes” (Polletta & Jasper 2001, 286). These collective identities allow NSMs to create and maintain symbolic boundaries that allow movement actors to “define themselves as a challenger group, isolate their targets as dominant incumbents, and distinguish themselves from “the web of others in the contested social world”” (Taylor and Whittier 1992 cited in Wang et al. 2018, 168). These identity-setting processes will help me to interrogate how and why actors within the institutions I engage with in Halifax describe themselves, and the work that they do, in ways that invoke connections to the broader diaspora as well as to a lineage of resistance.

While this focus on movement identity is vital, losing the “how” of social movements may lead to a form of self-reflexivity that would not effectively answer my research question. As Pichardo notes, there is no “distinctive tactical style of NSMs” (1997, 416). This lack of a

defined paradigm limits the theoretical utility of this analytical lens for my research question, as does the Western-oriented, white, middle-class sensibility of many NSMs (Pichardo 1997, 417; Bracey II 2016, 15). With these critiques in mind, a sole focus on NSMs would be insufficient to fully explore the institutional order that is at the heart of this project.

The questions of mobilization that emerge in resource mobilization theory are useful when combined with an attendant focus on the impacts of internal movement identity and boundary spanning across coalitions. An example of such a combination can be found in Agnes Calliste's 1995 article "The Influence of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement in Canada". Calliste combined NSM theory with resource mobilization theory to study how both the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement impacted the social and political consciousness of African Canadian social movements. She details the evolution and intensification of anti-racist organizing from the 1940s to the 1970s in cities like Halifax, Montreal, and Toronto, as well as the subsequent response by the Canadian state of organizational incorporation and surveillance of perceived radical actors (1995, 124). Despite the best efforts of conventional advocacy organizations like the Nova Scotia Society for the Advancement of Coloured People (NSSACP) to win modest gains like the expansion of educational opportunities beyond elementary school for African Nova Scotians, a lack of significant change within the Canadian state maintained a status quo of social exclusion and marginalization for African Canadians across the country (Calliste 1995, 128—129).

The emerging Black Power movement in the United States in the 1960s created a context and a network that facilitated a radical, pan-African approach to organizing and direct action in Canada – one that transcended traditional class boundaries within Black communities and led to famous events like the occupation of Sir George Williams University (now Concordia

University) in Montreal in 1969 (Calliste 1995, 132). This direct action was not popular among older, middle-class advocates who were a part of early efforts for reform, but it did reorient youth activism around Black self-determination and Black self-identity (Calliste 1995, 129).

In light of a radical strain of Black activism pushing more moderate organizations like the NSSACP and the Black United Front (BUF) to be more confrontational of formal political institutions, provinces and the federal government pumped money into organizations that they perceived would be a buffer between Black radical sentiments and white Canadians' fear of social unrest (Calliste 1995, 133—134). This money, in Calliste's analysis, was a salient factor in the undoing of Black radical organizations, operating as a co-opting influence that also included government organizations hiring movement leaders and reorienting funds to "cultural programs" (1995, 135).

Calliste's analysis is an example of the benefits of an approach that combines NSM and resource mobilization theory to engage African Canadian activism and is one of the few pieces in Canadian political science that assesses the strategies of Black Canadian activism. By looking at how mobilization unfolded and was influenced by movements in the United States, Calliste reveals some helpful lessons about the history of Black activism in Canada, including an exploration of the contradictions within communities around funding and orientation to the state. Calliste's discussion is missing, however, a detailed analysis of the role of state actors in facilitating and constraining movements. The piece attributes the downfall of radical Black movements to state interventions but does not go into detail about how those interventions emerged and were received, nor does it account for the agency and choices of those involved in the movements themselves. Engaging these questions, therefore, will develop upon the foundation that Calliste provides.

### Political Opportunity Structures

Building upon the foundation that Calliste's work provides to this project, the study of political opportunity structures offers a balanced perspective on the factors that prompt movement success or failure, if combined with some of the focus on identity and discourse present in the study of new social movements. What movement success or failure looks like for movements is contextual. For the purposes of this project, however, this evaluation is rooted in the theoretical terrain of the Black radical tradition addressed in Chapter Two and takes into account discursive approaches to better understand how racial concepts are adapted in policymaking. Political opportunity structures are, according to Tarrow (1996), "consistent but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements" (54, cited in Guigni 2009, 361).

Meyer and Minkoff note that Eisinger's 1973 work on the conditions that led to urban 'riots' in the late-1960s was the first formal use of the concept of political opportunities, as he focused on the openness of urban governments to formal means of redressing political grievances (2004, 1459).<sup>13</sup> Eisinger's analysis largely focused on how static institutional variables like centralization in local government interacted with this open or closed political structure, and highlighted that activists, in this case, chose to protest when they sensed there was opportunity and when they assessed that there was a need to do so (Eisinger 1973, 12; Meyer & Staggenborg 1996, 633).

As Meyer (2004) notes, Eisinger's criteria for defining opportunities was restricted to those that might produce riots in specific, but his work offered a useful conceptual frame to build upon.

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13. Eisinger's work also operates as a useful connection between urban politics and the study of social movements.

Charles Tilly later used Eisinger’s work to analyze how states facilitated or constrained movement tactics from a “repertoire of contention” (1978, cited in Meyer 2004, 128). For Tilly, these repertoires are often inherited types of public performances that are well-known within organizing circles and are designed to advance claims against the state (Tilly and Tarrow 2015, 14, 15). These repertoires, according to Tilly and Tarrow, evolve to adapt to the opportunities of the day: sometimes rapidly in periods of dramatic political change, and sometimes incrementally to adjust to structural changes like a clearer connection between claim-making and everyday social organization (Tilly and Tarrow 2015, 20). Repertoires of contention can be rigid (meaning that actors repeat the same actions over and over regardless of context) or flexible (meaning that actors approach to context is iterative and responsive). Scholars like Takeshi Wada also note that explanations for why these repertoires vary in strength (or rigidity) range from the political opportunity structure of a particular polity to factors like urbanization and ideology (Wada 2016).<sup>14</sup> Repertoires of contention like strikes, marches and demonstrations are applicable across diverse contexts and stakeholders, making them modular in nature and thus worthy of focused analysis as shifts in these modular repertoires are indicators of shifts in the relationship between governing authorities and the general population (Wada 2012, 545). The concept of repertoires of contention facilitates a richer and more nuanced understanding of how activists respond to shifts in opportunity structures by articulating the strategic and experiential nature of claim-making over time. In this project, I explore tactical repertoires in depth in Chapter Seven.

As the concept of political opportunity structures expanded in usage, it also developed in scope. Works like Doug McAdam’s 1982 text *Political Process and the Development of Black*

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<sup>14</sup> Wada notes that urbanization has a particular impact on the flexibility of repertoires of contention because of the ways that information rapidly diffuses in urban environments in comparison to rural ones (2016, 453, 462).

*Insurgency, 1930-1970* developed on Eisinger's initial conceptualization of political opportunities to create the political process model, which argues that "the emergence of widespread protest activity is the result of a combination of expanding political opportunities and indigenous organization, as mediated through a crucial process of collective attribution" (McAdam 1999, 2). McAdam outlined an analysis of "indigenous organizations" in his work that serve as the connective tissue of social movements by providing four key resources for effective contest: by recruiting members either through membership in the organizations or by organizational fusion; by providing an established structure of solidary incentives for movement participation which directly addresses Olson's "free-rider" problem; by developing communications infrastructure that serves as the connection between potential movement actors; and by developing leaders that can offer new movements coordination and direction (1982, 44-47). McAdam's analysis is useful in articulating the ways that movements exist and develop over extended periods of time to foster cohesion via indigenous organizations. The political process model that this analysis of "indigenous organizations" contributes to was an attempt by McAdam to transition social movement research from the realm of the psychological to the political by emphasizing that the structural potential of political opportunities can only be catalyzed by a "cognitive liberation" among movement actors (1982, 51). McAdam also extends elite theory's critique of concentrated power and wealth in the American system to also include elements of Marxism (1982, 37). Importantly, however, McAdam's work seems to segment movements into discrete historical junctures that do not capture the extended histories and discourses that underpin both the existence of indigenous organizations and the purposive conceptions of self-determination that drive movement actors to join them.

Typically, researchers analyze political opportunity structures to assess the interaction between activism outside of mainstream political institutions and conventional political activity within them, leading to outcomes of policy changes or electoral shifts (Meyer and Minkoff 2004, 1458). This research tends to analyze the conditions in which activist claims are discarded or accepted by governments as well as the efficacy of protest tactics in capitalizing on those social conditions (Meyer and Minkoff 2004, 1458). These conditions can include dynamic and changing factors such as the newfound availability of allies, or electoral instability, as well as structural dynamics that include a nation's democratic history or political culture (Della Porta 2013, 2).

#### Discursive Opportunity Structures and Social Movement Frames

Just as research on political opportunity structures focuses on the impact that context has on activists' prospects for mobilization and policy change (Meyer 2004), research on discursive opportunity structures identifies taken-for-granted ideas and concepts that constrain or enable the reception of social movement frames that seek mobilization and policy change. These frames are the result of "collective actors [articulating] their interpretations of the social or political problem at hand, its solution, and the reasons why others should support efforts to ameliorate the condition" (McCammon et al. 2007, 726). In other words, social movement frames are the arguments that movements make, and discursive opportunities are the ideas that inform a political or institutional context predisposed to accept certain arguments and to ignore others. These frames bridge the gap between what Markowitz articulates as "abstract constructions of identity and concrete behaviour" (2007, 133). Actors align themselves with arguments that adhere to their conception of their identity, prompting mobilization around those arguments (for change, or for continuity).



Benford and Snow note that there are two core features of social movement frames: action-oriented “core framing tasks” and “interactive processes” that facilitate the creation and mobilization of these frames (2000, 615). Core framing tasks are the basic mechanisms that structure collective action frames – the diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames that propose causes of a problem, offer solutions, and motivate action based on a shared understanding of the issue (Benford and Snow 2000, 615; Markowitz 2007, 134). The interactive processes of how frames develop are the “emergent, contested, and socially constructed quality of cognitive frames as they are molded in interaction” (Johnston and Oliver 2010, 5). These processes can be codified into three categories: discursive, strategic, and contested. Discursive processes are developed in conversation with other movement members and via public speech within the context of movement activities. Strategic processes are goal-directed and deliberative, with the purpose being recruitment, mobilization, resource acquisition and more. Contested processes are the interaction between frames and counterframes, as well as disputes within movements and event-generated misalignments (Benford and Snow 2000, 624—626). Social movement framing can have a significant impact on the ways that individuals may develop their own identity, as well as on specific movement outcomes. The impact of social movement frames is also, however, mediated by discursive factors in the broader political and institutional context that movements work within (McCammon et al. 2007, 745).

McCammon et al. demonstrate this process in their study of the expansion of jury laws to include women in the United States in the early 20th century. What they describe as a “highly stable and hegemonic legal discourse, centered on the legal rights and duties of citizenship” in the United States created a discursive opportunity for activists by creating a clear rationale for activists to include women within this broader conception of citizenship, and thus reforming jury

laws to include them (McCammon et al. 2007, 745). The linkage between framing and discursive opportunities for movement success is, therefore, dynamic – it requires the existence of discourses that may provide an opportunity for activists, and it requires activists to identify and take advantage of those opportunities (McCammon et al. 2007, 746).<sup>15</sup>

This discursive approach mitigates many of the challenges of political opportunity structures by exposing the contested nature of meaning-making and interest articulation to prompt mobilization and change. This approach can serve to situate activist contest in a dialectic with institutional acceptance, with movement frames that resonate with state actors potentially serving to marginalize actors who are mobilized by radical frames (Graham 2012, 10). Understanding this dialectical relationship will be key to engaging with the kinds of arguments that actors in Halifax make regarding the racial institutional order I describe, as well as the openings they perceive in advancing policies towards Black self-determination.

### Bringing the study of racism into Social Movements

Another key flaw in political process theory and with the study of political opportunities (which can be considered part of the same school of thought) is in its theorizing of race and racism. Works like text *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* analyzed Black movements, but as Bracey notes, avoided rigorous engagement with race theory (2016, 12).<sup>16</sup> Political process theory (and the study of political opportunities in general) thus erroneously centres and emphasizes state integration as a core goal of Black movements, often

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<sup>15</sup> The concept of discursive opportunities has been used to investigate the capacity for ideas like transitional justice to mobilize diaspora populations to seek justice for past atrocities (Orjuela 2018), as well as for ‘minority’ political representatives in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (Aydemir and Vliegenthart 2018) and can be used to discuss broader social contexts as well as narrower institutional dynamics (McCammon 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Critical Race Theory was not a defined field at this time but theorizing about race and the role it plays in society far precedes the emergence of CRT.

excluding radical frames or tactics like rioting (Bracey 2016, 12). Moreover, the structure of political opportunities changes if one focuses on the resources and organizing of those who are oppressed, rather than the possibilities afforded by institutional political structures. Bracey describes this ontological shift when critiquing Tarrow's study of the antislavery movement in England in the 1800s:

An analysis derived from a black standpoint, rather than the white racial frame, produces completely counter findings concerning the political opportunities available to resisters of transatlantic slavery. Where Tarrow represents the British political system as open and opportune, an African perspective reveals the English system to be completely closed. Subsequent British anti-slavery mobilization can be understood, therefore, as a reaction to African mobilization. Whether this reaction represents an emergent political opportunity or an early example of whites' collective effort to limit costs while extending their racial dominance is debatable and depends on one's racial frame (Bell 2004; Moore 2013). What is clear is that Africans' ability to quickly organize, collectively diagnose (frame) their situation, and avail themselves of temporal opportunities and scant physical resources are the key causes of the emergence of resistance to transatlantic slavery. The role of political opportunities relative to the state appears extremely slight, if it exists at all (Bracey 2016, 21).

What Bracey highlights in this section is the key methodological implications of this emphasis on white institutions as the primary site of movement activity: the presumption of institutional benevolence as changes occur. African mobilization is thus erased from Tarrow's analysis, which in turn erases a crucial story of Black agency and resistance.<sup>17</sup>

The implications of Bracey's critiques, as well as this gap in the Canadian political opportunities literature are clear for my research: a study of Black Canadian social movements grounded in the Black radical tradition, with a historically grounded view of how racism is

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<sup>17</sup> This erasure is in-keeping with a larger trend in social movement studies that Watkins Liu calls "social mention without social analysis" (Watkins Liu 2018, 315). This approach, for Watkins Liu, is typified by a process of knowledge production that benefits "wealthy, white, heterosexual men" by giving credence and support to ideologies and perspectives that benefit them, as outlined in her study of Charles Tilly Award winners for the study of social movements at the American Sociological Association (Watkins Liu 2018, 307). Here, the interests of the dominant group serve to minimize the benefits of social movements research for vulnerable groups while enhancing the cache and esteem of those who already maintain power both in the study of social movements and in society at large (Watkins Liu 2018, 317).

interwoven into governing institutions would go some way towards redressing unnecessary imbalances in the study of social movements in Canada.

## **Halifax**

The research site for this dissertation is Halifax, Nova Scotia. Halifax is an ideal location for this research beyond my five-year residency in the city — in many ways, the city encapsulates important and under explored demographics, perspectives, and movements that will contribute to a more detailed understanding of urban politics, Black activism, and Black community organizations in Canada. I address these movements and these perspectives in detail via a historical narrative of Black organizing in Halifax in Chapters Four and Five. Below, I identify some factors that situate research on Halifax as an important addition to research on Black organizing in Canada.

### Halifax as a medium-sized city

As noted above, research on Black Canadian activism and organizing is under-explored in Canadian political science. Where this work does exist, it focuses on the largest cities in the country — Toronto and Montreal in particular — where the majority of Black Canadians live. Missing from this work, however, is insight into the experiences of Black Canadians that are not a part of the metropolitan core, and thus have a different relationship to the services delivered by municipal and provincial governments, as well as a different history of exclusion and marginalization to contend with. Many of these Black Canadians live in and around medium-sized cities, a term used to describe municipalities with between approximately 50,000 and 500,000 people in the Canadian context. As Hartt and Hollander highlight, this definition is distinct to Canada's urban geography given the uneven distribution of our population into nine large cities — of which Halifax is not one (Hartt and Hollander 2018, 2). The significant

proportion of Canadians that live in medium-sized cities means that their experiences are crucial to a robust understanding of urban politics across the country. Indeed, the importance of medium-sized cities to urban politics is significant as just around half of all urban-dwellers worldwide live in cities of less than 500,000 people as opposed to megacities like Mexico City or Lagos (Zlotnik 2018). Medium-sized cities are also, according to J. Eric Oliver, more likely to have residents who are civically inclined and engaged in local affairs due to their stronger connections with their neighbours and because they are oriented towards a public conception of the civic good (Oliver 2000, 371). Oliver's findings indicate that organizing in medium-sized cities, therefore, is a distinct experience to organizing in a larger city that requires a contextually responsive approach. In Halifax, as I explain in Chapter Eight, this approach includes building the kinds of networks and relationships with actors inside of governing institutions that can sustain conflicts that directly implicate those institutions as oppressive and harmful actors in a racist system.

#### Rurality and underinvestment in Black communities in Halifax

Another important factor that distinguishes research on Black organizing in Halifax to research on Black activism elsewhere in Canada is the fact that many Black Haligonians live in rural settings within the Halifax Regional Municipality with extensive histories as opposed to dense, urban, and diasporic communities. Halifax Regional Municipality is the largest city in Nova Scotia and the largest city in Atlantic Canada and has a relatively dense urban core on the peninsula, sprawling suburbs in Dartmouth, Bedford and Sackville, and a rural outer ring that extends 165km from Hubbards in the west to Ecum Secum in the southeast. According to Statistics Canada, Halifax has 20,565 people that identified as Black in the 2021 Census, and a significant proportion of those people live in historically Black communities located outside of

the urban core like Cherry Brook, Hammonds Plains, Beechville and Lucasville (2022; Halifax Regional Municipality 2018).

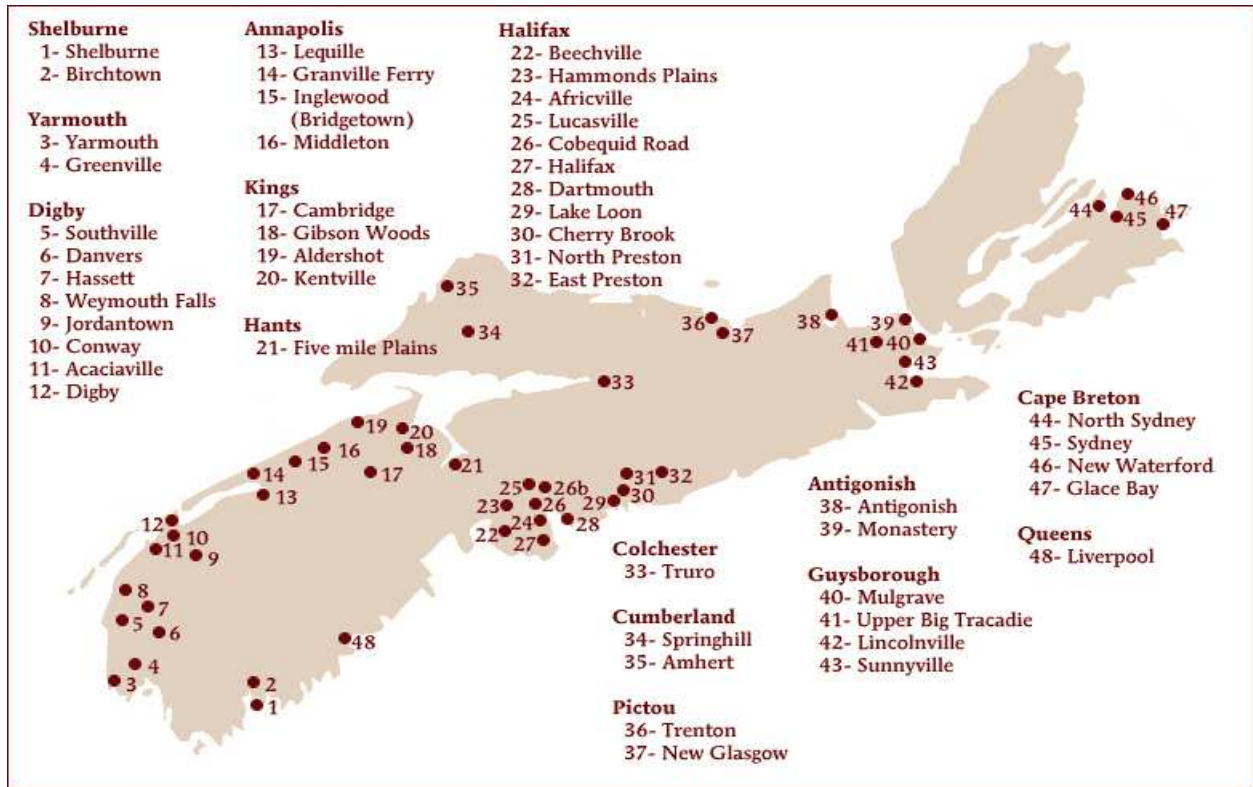


Figure 1: Map of historical Black communities in Nova Scotia (Nova Scotia Museum, 2001)

Increasingly, communities of Black immigrants from the African continent and from the Caribbean (notably Nigerians and Jamaicans among other nationalities) are growing in the urban neighbourhoods of Clayton Park, the North End and Dartmouth. A contributor to this increased immigration is the post-secondary sector in Halifax, which has played an important role in shifting the demography of the city (Charbonneau, Johnson, and Andrey 2006, 294; Bunting et al. 2007, 41).

Halifax’s significant land mass does, as noted above, create real challenges for service delivery and for governance — particularly for Black communities. The Preston Township

(comprised of East Preston, North Preston, Cherry Brook and Lake Loon) to the east of Dartmouth, for example, has sparse sidewalk coverage on the side of Trunk 7, and the area's first library office only opened in 2021 (Berman 2019; Mullin 2022). As I identify in Chapter Four, the location of the Preston Township, and the area's ongoing deprivation from adequate levels of municipal and provincial services, are a consequence of broken promises from the colonial administration and the historical segregation that followed these choices. Such segregation is not merely a historical artefact. In 2010, the municipality gave white residents of Lake Major, a small community right next to North Preston, access to a private road to avoid extensive and cumbersome roadwork while refusing the same access to Black residents of North Preston. This discriminatory act led to a two-day blockade of the road by residents until the municipality reversed course and closed the road to all residents (Moore 2010; CBC News 2010). The Preston Townships, then, bear the brunt of interlocking inequities that contribute to the construction of the peninsula as an exclusionary, and mostly white, space.

#### Gentrification and exclusion in urban Halifax

Black Haligonians that do live in the urban core, whether in Clayton Park, the North End of Halifax, or Dartmouth, face different but impactful challenges of overpricing and discrimination that, when paired with strained municipal and provincial resources and an increasingly gentrifying city, contribute to marginalization (Price 2020; Chisholm 2021; Mercer 2020). It is in these neighbourhoods both rural and urban that the intersections of racism, classism and austerity are experienced via interactions with the police, or interactions with the health system.

These unfolding and interlocking oppressions create policy challenges that have been, at this stage, under-researched. Research that focuses on large cities like Toronto, for instance,

demonstrate that COVID-19 rates are significantly higher among Black communities (McKenzie 2021). Few cities of Halifax’s size have the resources or capacity to collect race-based data about COVID-19,<sup>18</sup> creating what Choi et al. call a “data vacuum” about the health of Black communities during the pandemic (Choi et al. 2021). Though Halifax has no responsibility for public health surveillance, the paucity of data about health outcomes of Black communities in the city means that decision-makers have relied on community organizations like the Health Association of African Canadians and the Association of Black Social Workers to guide their pandemic response in Black communities (Nova Scotia Health 2022). Middlesex-London Health Unit, one of the few medium-sized cities in Canada to collect race-based data about the COVID-19 pandemic via its local health unit, declared anti-Black racism a public health crisis indicating how severe and distinct the effect of the pandemic has been on Black communities in these spaces (LeBel 2020). This crisis was amplified by the reactive and pre-emptive policy choices that provinces and municipalities used in the early days of the pandemic: the use of policing to enforce lockdowns. In cities like Halifax, police officers were ordered to enforce compliance with stay-at-home orders, and these orders were often enforced at the expense of Black residents (CBC News 2021). When combined with the extant challenges that typify Black Haligonians’ daily experiences in the municipality, this conspicuous lack of information about community concerns and priorities thus becomes a contributor to the exclusion that community members face.

This dissertation thus exists to address this perceived lack of evidence about community needs and desires in Halifax by engaging community members as experts in their own lives, with

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18. Also, as explained below, municipalities in Nova Scotia are excluded from public health surveillance entirely as opposed to provinces like Ontario where they have a limited role as part of health units with devolved responsibilities.



contextually situated and nuanced understandings of the geographic and political spaces they inhabit (Hussey 2012, 4). Crucially, this project does not seek to supplant these community voices but rather to amplify them to combat ignorance and exclusion. As I go on to explain in Chapter Three, I address this community expertise with a particular focus on policing and public health. I illustrate the extensive connections between these areas in the ways that governing institutions within them have reinforced discourses of Black inferiority and victimhood, and I also connect them in terms of the ways that organizers have resisted these discourses by asserting self-determination.

### **Chapter Outline**

Chapter Two of this dissertation outlines the theoretical framework of this project, combining an analysis of the Black radical tradition with literature on political development and social movements to situate the world-making inclination of Black organizers and activists in Halifax in its historical and theoretical context. It explores the connection between the idea of racial institutional orders and the development of community-centric institutions, protest tactics and identities that serve as a bulwark against dominant policy discourses of Black inferiority and victimhood. This framework articulates the radical and pragmatic traditions from which Black organizing in Halifax spring.

Chapter Three adds detail to my methodological approach, grounding this project in an interdisciplinary milieu that prioritizes community voices and perspectives. In this chapter, I explain how I combine autoethnography, archival methods, semi-structured interview, and frame analysis to produce the empirical findings of this dissertation.

Chapter Four is the beginning of the historical narrative of this project, and outlines the experiences of enslaved people, the Black Loyalists, the Black Refugees, and the school-petitioners of the 1880s to establish the stakes and context of Black resistance to explicit discourses of Black inferiority and victimhood in Halifax. This chapter establishes the context for extensive mobilization in Black communities in the 20th and 21st centuries, as the historic experiences of exclusion that typified Black life in Halifax during these eras prompted the creation of a robust political identity.

Chapter Five reviews the important critical junctures that Black communities in Halifax faced during the pivotal Black Power Era. It first explores the integration work conducted by figures like Pearleen Oliver to facilitate the inclusion of Black Haligonians into public life in the city, before explaining why this approach did not work for residents of Africville. The chapter then discusses the response to the horrors of the destruction of Africville: the emergence of the Black Power movement in Halifax. It concludes with an exploration of the funding arrangements and programming used by the Black United Front to deliver on its promises to the community and to its funders.

Chapter Six chronicles the “Uptown Riots” of 1991 to demonstrate the shifts in authority within both governing institutions as well as amongst community actors who sought a less conciliatory approach to addressing police brutality. I argue in this chapter that this era is where the idea of Black representation as a policy goal takes root in a significant way in Halifax, and I establish the mechanisms of collaboration and dissent amongst a multiracial coalition of actors by concluding my historical narrative.

Chapter Seven uses autoethnography to explore direct action and policy advocacy efforts around policing that I engaged with during the summer of 2020. It argues that by engaging in

what Chloe Thurston calls the politics of visibility, direct action remains a vital tool in the repertoire of contention in Halifax (2018). Here, I establish using interviews with other organizers as well as reflections on my own experiences, that policy advocacy must reflect the goals of direct action for it to be effective. Actors negotiate the purpose and pattern of direct action, framing arguments that help to recruit members and to mobilize for change. Ultimately, however, these options — and the advocacy that also accompanies them — can fall short without a robust infrastructure supporting sustainable change.

Chapter Eight establishes the important of Black-led community organizations in self-determination efforts and addresses their role in policy co-design processes in interaction with newly diverse bureaucracies. This chapter argues that a crucial part of the value that Black-led community organizations bring to self-determination efforts is by creating spaces of communal care and belonging that enable democratic voice, and that voice can be powerfully heard in policy co-design efforts. It also establishes, however, a potential limitation to those efforts: a bureaucracy that — while shifting — still adheres to some of the dominant discourses of the past. Those charged to shepherd this bureaucracy through the process of engagement with Black communities are Black bureaucrats who, using principles of representative bureaucracy, are charged with behaving as intermediaries to facilitate these policy processes. These roles are important but challenging to manage.

Chapter Nine explores the fundamental contradiction at the heart of organizational activity in Halifax: the province acts as the principal funder of many of the organizations who — tacitly or explicitly — may contribute to efforts that contest unjust policy from governing institutions. This chapter argues that organizations can and should use the resources they garner from the state to keep providing the important services they deliver but should take advantage of these

resources to also support those engaged in direct action who, through their work, enable additional funding for these organizations.

Chapter Ten concludes this project and offers suggestions for future research, tying together the previous discussions of self-determination and worldbuilding in the context of this project's objectives while articulating this project's contribution to the discipline of Canadian politics.

## Chapter Two – Black Radicalism, Self-Determination and Institutional Orders: A Theoretical Framework

This chapter addresses my main research questions (*What methods do Black-led coalitions in Halifax, Nova Scotia use to contest durable racial inequities in policing and public health? What is the anatomy of the racial institutional order that connects Black resistance to white supremacy in Halifax?*) by drawing from the literature on Black radicalism, Black self-determination, and political development to construct the theoretical framework that guides the rest of this dissertation project. I write to reject the erasure of Black scholarship in understandings of political change, taking up a decolonial tradition of focusing on those who exist in the Fanonian “zone of non-being” (Gallien and 30 ,2020 جاليان).

Typically, the goal of theoretical and empirical interventions in political science is to address perceived absences in the literature, using literature reviews as a foundation to critically assess what exists, and in the words of Jeffery Knopf, “present [one’s] considered judgments about what’s right, what’s wrong, what’s inconclusive, and what’s missing in the existing literature” (Knopf 2006, 127). Knopf’s framing of this common task within a dissertation or project is helpful in guiding writers towards a meaningful contribution to the field. Importantly, however, this common task – to pursue gaps, absences, or vacuums among other similar metaphors – conflicts with my ethical and methodological stance in this work if not placed in its proper context. As I note in Chapter One, the distinct process of racialization for people of African descent in Canada constructs us as both present within and absent from the Canadian imaginary. Declaring an “absence” or “gap” in work about Black communities without identifying the distinct inequities in knowledge production that have constrained what is perceived as legitimate scholarship in the field, therefore, contributes to these ongoing harms.

This chapter positions this dissertation amongst other crucial works in Black Studies, paying homage to a rich tradition that offers important tensions and convergences that shape my approach to interpreting the political world I am describing. The sets of knowledge that I engage in this chapter are, from this perspective, theoretical “tools” that help me to describe what I perceive to be important concepts and dynamics that affect urban politics in Canada and elsewhere. I explore, for example, the theoretical tensions between calls for a territorial form of self-determination rooted in lineage and connections to land, and a diasporic articulation of this idea rooted in visions of solidarity that extend beyond the nation-state, and I address some of those tensions empirically in Chapter Eight during discussions about solidarity across difference in community organizations in Nova Scotia. These tensions also shape my everyday practice of advocacy, operating as competing prisms that motivate or curtail stances I take. Where I do divert in my attention from that tradition, I do so to establish important theoretical and methodological choices that I am making in the rest of this project. In other words, the concepts that I interrogate in this chapter help me make sense of the stories and experiences I encounter in this journey.

In this chapter, I explore what has been written about how Black people create and maintain visions of a just world through building institutions to rebuke discourses of Black inferiority and victimhood. These visions can be defined as a part of a “radical” tradition, which as Herb Boyd articulates when citing Marcus Garvey, is a label applied to those endeavouring towards freedom (Boyd 1998, 44). Though, as I will explore in Chapter Eight, many of the actors I engage with in this project would not call themselves radical, I argue that the process of institution-building in a context where governing institutions at all levels have historically and contemporaneously sought your erasure is in-keeping with a lineage of liberation work.

Using the understandings I have gained in interacting with this literature and in community, I contend that constellations of Black community organizations, advocates, activists, and policy entrepreneurs that animate policy transformation efforts in mid-sized cities like Halifax comprise a distinct racial institutional order that works across difference to build communities where Black residents can thrive. This institutional order is rooted in concepts of Black self-determination, which I define in this project as the efforts to build communities of African descent of interdependence and care, where hierarchies of white supremacy and colonialism are rejected in favour of non-domination and respect, and where material well-being is rooted in a connection with land and a connection with other Black people across the diaspora that does not explicitly depend on territorial sovereignty.

Here, I refer to the concept of a racial institutional order articulated by King and Smith, who apply this research to formal political institutions in the United States that have developed historically to achieve shared racial concepts, commitments and aims to develop coalitions and shape policy outcomes (King and Smith 2005).

I adapt this framing to focus on community institutions, policy entrepreneurs and actors who develop contesting policy approaches to support & advocate for Black communities within and outside of governing institutions. Adapting the concept of racial institutional orders allows for a rigorous analysis of the processes that impact how political actors build, navigate, and engage these complex and sometimes contradictory political coalitions. As highlighted in Chapter One, a detailed understanding of the identities, tactics, and discourses that underpin this institutional order is particularly salient in medium-sized cities like Halifax, given the higher likelihood of interpersonal connections and an important tendency towards what Eric Oliver calls “civic volunteerism” in these spaces (Oliver 2000).

The shared concepts and similar aims that anchor this institutional order are not reactionary. These concepts coalesce around the idea of non-domination and egalitarianism both within and outside of moments of contest. Actors are, however, responsive to opportunities, and mobilize into distinct coalitions and movements to take advantage of political and discursive opportunities that offer the prospect of shifting municipal and provincial governments towards addressing anti-Black racism. In this way, actors within this institutional order also use what Woodly calls a pragmatic imagination (2022, 50), informed at once by a history connected to liberation movements and an orientation towards self-reliance, to also create supportive institutions that offer services and support to individuals and communities that governing institutions ignore or mistreat.

This process of support is highly political. It rejects the dominant discourses of Black victimhood and inferiority that inform policies made and enacted by governing institutions that attempt to strip Black residents of their personhood. In this way, this institutional development reasserts through resistance a commitment to democratic engagement that has, as I establish in the historical sections of this project, been deprived to Black residents by municipal and provincial governments in Nova Scotia. Importantly, this community-driven institutional development also contributes to a different discourse: one that advocates for material redress as well as political representation for historic and contemporary injustices. In this process of institution-building, organizers develop relationships, resources, and shared goals that influence the potential successes of advocacy in moments of contention.

I situate this work at the intersection between Black social movements and institutional orders to highlight the world-building nature of political contest that sustains these networks over generations. For Woodly, the catalytic nature of social movement formation and mobilization is



akin to the “swailing”, or controlled burn, of a forest by community members to guard against more destructive fires that could destroy the forest (Woodly 2022, 12). To extend that metaphor, the institutional order I describe is akin to a centuries-old practice of care for the forest, of which swailing is just one technique. It is the lineal process of learning the flora and fauna of the woods; the kinship built in protecting this space from threats. It is the agony of watching the forest set aflame, and the determination to tend to it so that it can sprout anew.

I begin this discussion by discussing racial institutional orders, including definitions of what institutions are, as well as discussions of why state-based approaches to institutional continuity and change do not capture the coalitions and organizations that I focus on in this project.

After providing that foundation, I explore the literature on the Black radical tradition, including theoretical insights about the historically situated ontological and epistemological differences between Black organizers across the Black Atlantic and white anti-capitalist organizers. These differences develop into a discussion of Black self-determination, which includes a discussion of Black nationalism, economic self-sufficiency, and cultural pride, as well as a discussion of how Black self-determination interacts with Indigenous articulations of the concept at international and local levels.

By informing my analysis with an understanding of how racial institutional orders operate in Canada, and by combining insights about the nature of political opportunity structures as identified in Chapter One with a focus on how discourses contribute to organizing efforts, I develop the foundation for an ongoing discussion of Black self-determination as well as the development of Black social movements throughout the rest of this dissertation.

## **Racial institutional orders**

As noted above, the foundational concept I will introduce in this theoretical framework is that of racial institutional orders. This concept emerges from the American Political Development (APD) literature and has rarely if ever been applied to the Canadian Political Development (CPD) literature. As Lucas and Vipond note, APD (and CPD) are historically rooted approaches to the “big questions” in political science, particularly those that contribute to our understanding of institutional stability and change (2017, 229–230). In the study of political development, institutions are regularities in political life – things like rules, norms, organizations and organizational structures, and cultural scripts among others (Lieberman 2002, 699). Typically speaking, institutional research is focused on formal law and state-based organizations (what I call governing institutions) and can be criticized according to Clemens and Cook for being predisposed towards focusing on stability while framing institutional change as an exogenous shock (1999, 442; Schneiburg and Lounsbury 2008, 648).

To address these critiques, political development scholars often utilize the concept of political orders, which combine political culture and institutions into a synthesis that describes governing state institutions and nonstate institutions that have a similar ideology, approach, and goals (Lucas and Vipond 2017, 230). These orders do not exist in isolation – from a political development perspective, political institutions are forged within the context of other, established institutions. These institutions may be parts of the same state, but may have different purposes, logics, and perspectives (Lucas 2017, 341). This process of institutions (and more broadly, orders) overlapping and potentially competing is called *intercurrence*, and occurs over what Lucas frames as political space and political time (Lucas 2017, 341). This overlapping means that multiple political orders may exist at once, and changes within and between these orders

may not be discrete – instead, key events may filter through political orders with divergent impacts.

King and Smith’s framing of racial institutional orders, or orders in which “political actors have adopted (and often adapted) racial concepts, commitments, and aims in order to help bind together their coalitions and structure governing institutions that express and serve the interests of their architects” (2005, 75), expands the analysis of political orders from the transnational all the way to the local. Racial institutional orders, according to King and Smith, are “complex and breakable”, riven with potential contradictions and divergent goals (2005, 76).<sup>19</sup> King and Smith note that these orders “exercise governing power in ways that predictably shape people's statuses, resources, and opportunities by their placement in “racial” categories”, which in turn shapes how actors perceive their own racial identity and the benefits and burdens they can expect to receive from the state (2005, 78-79). In the United States case, white supremacist orders bound together state and non-state actors who materially benefitted from chattel slavery as well as from western expansion and the genocide of First Peoples (King and Smith 2005, 79). In so doing, it conditioned citizens racialized as white to adopt this order as natural and as a central part of their identity, thus facilitating policies that entrenched that order even though these policies benefitted wealthy landowning white people far more than poorer white communities (King and Smith 2005, 80). Yet a “transformational egalitarian” order existed

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<sup>19</sup> King and Smith’s articulation of racial institutional orders is written in conversation with Omi and Winant’s work on racial formation and racial projects, which identify racial projects as historically specific political, social, and cultural developments that shape processes of racial formation as a contingent sociohistorical process (Omi and Winant 2011; HoSang, LaBennett, and Pulido 2012, 91). For Winant, racial projects facilitate understandings of the ways that racialization as a process is continually linked to structures of domination and power while simultaneously being remade by the complex interactions between legislation, institutions, and people living their everyday lives (Winant 2016, 2288). The racial projects approach is helpful in identifying the ways that racial identity is constructed and leveraged in an interactive process with others. In this work, however, I am principally concerned with the ways that institutions have been built and maintained around distinct racial projects (or concepts), and therefore I situate my analysis within the political development literature.

in parallel with the white supremacist order that was animated by a commitment to equal rights, and that order shaped the Reconstruction era when formerly enslaved Black people briefly exercised formal civil and political rights (King and Smith 2005, 81). In King and Smith's account, this order subsequently retracted when white voters and some formerly egalitarian Republicans defected to white supremacist framings of political and social problems to advance their own economic and social interests (2005, 81). King and Smith's framing of racial institutional orders is thus crucial in understanding the ways that strategic and tactical coalitions in governing institutions have coalesced around white supremacy to maintain political and economic dominance, even as the benefits of these coalitions have been inequitably distributed and have contributed to poverty in white communities.

A focus on formal politics and *governing* institutions in an analysis of political orders, however, offers little in terms of understanding the non-state manifestations of political culture as expressed through community institutions and logics. It is vital, therefore, to understand communities as a distinct and powerful form of institutional order that, according to Marquis et al., "provides a key source for institutional logics that provide meaning and shape behavior of actors in an institutional field" (Marquis, Lounsbury, and Greenwood 2011, xvi). When citing Schneiberg (2002), Marquis et al. outline the "cognitive and relational" mechanisms that ground institutional action in community settings that included the development of cooperative and community-bound associations in the Americas in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries against the prevalence of expanding corporations (2011, xvii). These logics can be place-bound but can also be shared across jurisdictions by offering "diffuse resources" than can be drawn upon across geographic boundaries (Marquis, Lounsbury, and Greenwood 2011, xvii). Here, we can perceive that a shared concept towards Black self-determination might operate to provide "diffuse

resources” to institutions in Halifax – from support at the United Nations through their Decade of African Descent all the way down to calls for increased active transportation access in the Preston Townships as historic Black communities in the Halifax region.<sup>20</sup>

It is this ideational adaptation of Black self-determination across territorial and jurisdictional boundaries that provides this institutional order the resources it needs to mobilize community members in moments of contest. As Debra Thompson highlights in her analysis of the development of racial ideas via the Canadian Census, the interaction between transnational racial conceptions and national institutional norms via cultural translation is vital to understanding decision-making, and can be seen as the mechanism through which intercurrence shifts into the codification of a political order:

*Cultural translation* [author’s emphasis] is the process through which actors attempt to create congruence between transnational and domestic norms. The characteristics of a norm may help or hinder this process. If a transnational racial idea resonates with domestic norms already in place, then this strong “cultural match” can make the diffusion of the racial idea more rapid. But the process of creating cultural congruence is an interpretive exercise – actors can make norms appear to be more congruent by discursively aligning transnational racial ideas and “national cultural repertoires (2020b, 2).

Thompson’s explanation of cultural translation aligns neatly with where I aim to develop this project theoretically. In Thompson’s example, this process meant early statisticians taking 19<sup>th</sup> century views of “biological racialism” (the idea that race is a genetically-based and immutable characteristic that determines intellect, culture, moral worth and more) and aligning them with national norms (the idea of the Québécois and the English as the founding races of the nation thus establishing a bicultural national identity; the inferiority of Black migrants and Indigenous peoples across the country) (Thompson 2020, 13–14). This process allowed for, in

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<sup>20</sup> The United Nations Decade for People of African Descent, proclaimed via a resolution passed in the United Nations General Assembly in 2013, is centred around the theme: Recognition, Justice, and Development.

official pieces legislation like the *Immigration Act* of 1869, the designation of desirable groups of immigrants (and subsequently the designation of non-white immigrants as undesirable) (Thompson 2020, 15). This process of cultural translation helped to define and entrench a racial order within which Canada is imagined as a “white-settler society” maintained with discriminatory pieces of legislation like the *Indian Act* (Thompson 2020, 16). Thompson goes on to note that institutional translation is the concomitant process of incorporating these transnational norms into local institutional practices, potentially but not always leading to policy change as a result (2020, 2).

If, as Thompson indicates, racial ideas are constructed transnationally but are translated via extant institutional norms within governing institutions to create durable institutional orders, I hypothesize that a similar — though liberatory — process is at work within Black communities in Halifax to adapt transnational discourses into local struggles in a manner that can facilitate coalition-building across difference. As I show in Chapter Seven – the durability of these coalitions, despite the efforts of governing institutions to disrupt them, indicates that the ideas that underpin these racial ideas (principally, but not limited to, ideas of self-determination) are viable as a mechanism to contest discourses of Black victimhood and inferiority.

### **Engaging the Black radical tradition**

I turn to a rich literature that highlights a Black radical tradition of organizing for liberation that extends to the advent of slavery and settler colonialism in the Americas to better understand the transnational racial ideas of liberation and self-determination that I explore as a foundational racial concept in Halifax. This literature is both reflective of and contributes to the concepts that help to connect this contesting institutional order, inspiring generations to resist domination by contextualizing their actions in a broader lineage.

Cedric Robinson sketches this historical and materialist terrain in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, noting that this tradition has been obscured with great effort in the West to dehumanize African peoples to justify enslavement and colonialism.<sup>21</sup> Despite this effort, however, the Black radical tradition Robinson describes endured – brought to the Americas by the people captured and enslaved on the African continent alongside “African cultures, critical mixes and admixtures of language and thought, of cosmology and metaphysics, of habits, beliefs and morality” (2021, 121–122). Some of those who were enslaved in the Americas resisted the subjugation and torture that white settlers enacted upon them in a multitude of ways, first of which was by escaping to Indigenous territories where they joined uprisings and raided settler territories. Here, Robinson demonstrates the connection not just between settler colonialism and slavery, but the resistance to those oppressions (Robinson 2021, 130). He goes on to outline the widespread and consistent forms of responses to the attempts by enslavers to dominate that include work slowdowns, stealing, and even self-mutilation and suicide, noting that “[slavery] altered the conditions of their being, but it could not negate their being” (Robinson 2021, 124, 125).

Robinson’s intervention is foundational in establishing the stakes and resonance of resistance in these circumstances. By eschewing the Western mythology of enslaved people as docile or accepting of their lot, he invites readers to begin to understand the repertoires of contention that have evolved and developed to resist white supremacy in the Americas. Instead, Robinson introduces *marronage*, a historical and ontological state where maroon communities (or those communities established by runaway slaves) cultivated and actualized their own freedom (Robinson 2021, 169; Bledsoe 2017, 31). According to Bledsoe, these early

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21. Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism, Revised and Updated Third Edition: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Revised and Updated Third edition (The University of North Carolina Press, 2021).

communities were inclusively constituted to rebuff the racial hierarchies that structured life and labour under the enslavers, opting instead to provide protection against the violence that those hierarchies were created to justify (2017, 32). In so doing, these communities were the first spaces and movements in the Americas “to assert that Black lives do, indeed, matter” (Bledsoe 2017, 32).

The battle to eradicate slavery through revolts and through abolitionist movements is central to what one might conceive as a diaspora-wide tradition of resistance. This resistance takes a distinct shape: a form of militant refusal that is grounded in a constructive lineage of democratic thought that animates these liberation movements. C.L.R. James, in *A History of Pan-African Revolt* says that the successful revolt in French San Domingo (later Haiti) developed amid conflicts between Mulattoes (Haitians of mixed heritage), rich whites and poor whites over status and rights after the French Revolution, where slaveowners began to arm enslaved people to fight in the burgeoning civil war, which was important for logistical and philosophical purposes (James 2012, 74). James notes two important reasons for the revolt’s success. The first is a refusal by commanders like Toussaint L’Ouverture to compromise to the demands of any imperial power despite this being an easier path towards a temporary victory (James 2012, 85). The second is a belief amongst the formerly enslaved Black Haitians in the “revolutionary doctrine” which, despite being deprived of formal education, facilitated what he calls “a liberality in social aspiration and an elevation of political thought equivalent to anything similar that took place in France” (James 2012, 86). James highlights this particular and definitive ethical inclination towards liberation by using L’Ouverture’s words to demonstrate a fervent belief in the revolutionary principles that France itself was abandoning by attempting to re-enslave Haiti (James 2012, 90). I find James’ insights foundational in understanding this



tradition because they speak to the profound principles that animate refusal in service of liberation. The Haitian revolution, while distorted by the unconscionable demands placed on the free nation post-independence, is nevertheless a vital and distinct example of a form of world-building that refused to be subject to the logics of white supremacy that animated the attempted entrenchment and expansion of empire by colonial powers during the era.

This belief in a vision of liberation through resistance was, according to Boyd, shared by militant abolitionists like David Walker and Henry Highland Garnet who refused more moderate attempts to use moral suasion to convince enslavers to free those they had captured (Boyd 1998, 44). Even when militant abolitionists narrowly lost a vote at the Negro Convention Movement in 1843, these ideas and sensibilities of militant refusal were, for Boyd, taken up by figures like Harriet Tubman and John Brown in their efforts to liberate enslaved people from bondage (Boyd 1998, 44, 45). The roots of this uncompromising disposition are a commitment, according to Heynen and Ybarra, to a Du Bois-ian form of abolition democracy that seeks a transformation of social structures beyond the contingent inclusion offered to Black people by states across the Americas and Europe (Heynen and Ybarra 2021, 23).

Black women were at the forefront of organizing to construct such an abolitionist democracy at the end of slavery in the Americas, and the leadership of Black women is a central feature of the Black radical tradition. Angela Davis traces the complexities of this work in *Women, Race, and Class*, noting that the solidarities afforded to Black women by white women during the abolitionist era and throughout the suffragette and women's rights movements were always contingent (Davis 1983, 164). For Davis, these solidarities rested mostly upon the expediency with which white women could achieve their movement goals and were subsequently cast aside to align their movements with white supremacy (Davis 1983, 165, 193). Despite these

dispiriting dynamics, Black women continued to organize in spaces that were hostile to them. She outlines the story of Lucy Parsons, for instance, who was an important part of the labour movement in the United States as one of the first women to join the International Workers of the World (Davis 1983, 202).

Davis' work sits in conversation with that of Claudia Jones in its identification of a unique and specific necessity to centre the fight for Black women's liberation in radical and anti-capitalist movements. Jones, a Trinidadian Marxist journalist in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, was a leading figure of the Communist Party of the United States and fused an internationalist and anti-imperialist stance with vociferous advocacy for Black women's rights that eventually got her deported from the United States before her death in 1961 (Davies 2008). As Carole Boyce Davies notes, Jones not only was clear about the "superexploitation" that Black women face because of the compounding oppressions of racism, patriarchy, capitalism, but she also viewed Black women as an "untapped" resource for the Communist Party of the United States (Davies 2008, 34). Jones' politics, in their advocacy for and articulation of a prototypical radical Black feminism is another indication of the dreams that animate the Black radical tradition, as well as the sacrifices that were required to sustain it.

Another key feature of the Black radical tradition is the fight for liberation through flight. A desire to leave oppressive and dehumanizing states, according to Kelley, is a manifestation of "freedom dreams" – a nod to the Abrahamic story of flight from Babylon that evokes visions of Black self-determination without interference (Kelley 2003, 16, 17). The most obvious example of the enactment of these freedom dreams, as Davis notes, is the escape from enslavement led by abolitionists like Harriet Tubman, who led over three hundred people to freedom as a conductor on the Underground Railroad (Davis 1983, 33). African Nova Scotians

know these freedom dreams well. The flight of 1100 African Nova Scotians to Freetown, Sierra Leone in 1792 after enduring famine, exclusion, and North America's first race riot in Shelburne 8 years earlier, as well as the effort to resist the colonial enterprise backed by the Crown in that nation is an important example of the radical act of refusal to submit to the horrors of white supremacy (Saney 1998, 80—81; Abasiattai 1992).

The promise of freedom dreams was also taken up by the United Negro Improvement Association, led by Marcus Garvey and later Amy Jacques Garvey, who created what Shilliam calls an “extra-territorial Pan-African sovereign authority” that operated with a distinct sense of political autonomy that evolved through translation between revolutions both within colonial spaces and outside of them (Shilliam 2006). Institutions like the Black Star Line, which sought to establish trade relations across the African diaspora as a building block to creating a Black nation-state while fostering Black economic independence in diaspora, demonstrate the unfinished work of Exodus that animated these movements (Bandeled 2010). The UNIA had important linkages to Nova Scotia, and was not a “radical” organization in many ways – they presumed that a form of Black capitalism held the key for pan-African liberation, and they articulated a somewhat condescending sensibility towards communities that did not necessarily seek their support or perspective (Christian 2008, 323) – but the animating principle of their organization was to seek an upheaval in a world system that afforded Black people no power or autonomy (Satter 1996). These freedom dreams recast the African diaspora into a space of resistance and liberation, reclaiming the symbolic and material connections across the Atlantic that, for Richard Iton, represent an opportunity to “denaturalize the hegemonic representations of modernity as unencumbered and self-generating and bring into clearer view its repressed, colonial subscript” (2008, 201). Iton sees in diaspora the capacity for local contexts like

“Charleston, Halifax, Accra, Marseilles, and Liverpool” to “[...] function as a site of diasporic rediffusion” (2008, 200). In this process, these sites can act, in the words of Paul Gilroy, as a springboard to move past the “narrow nationalist perspectives” that foreclose other ways of relating to and interpreting politics and culture (1993, 29). Yet these “narrow nationalist perspectives” are, for some, deeply felt and intimate ties to land and to a form of civic inclusion that has been denied (Kelley 2003, 17).

Christopher Harris discusses these dynamics in his work on the development of organic intellectuals and Canadian Black Power discourses in Toronto in the late 1960s and early 1970s, noting that there was a tension in organizing spaces between revolutionary-nationalists (akin to the Panthers) who were distinctly internationalist and anti-capitalist in their perspective, and cultural nationalists who sought change that was locally-oriented and capitalist in its approach (Harris 2014, 142, 143). This cultural nationalist approach evolved into an Afrocentric philosophy that centers the experiences, philosophy, cosmology, and history of African-descended peoples (Mazama 2001). Afrocentric philosophy has been particularly influential in Nova Scotia and underpins provincial policy documents including the *Count Us In: Nova Scotia’s Action Plan in Response to the International Decade for People of African Descent, 2015–2024* (Government of Nova Scotia 2019). This perspective has been frequently criticized, particularly by members of the Black Panther Party and other Black anti-capitalist activists, for essentializing and minimizing diversity within diasporic communities while neutralizing dissent by removing radical politics from their aesthetic (Ngozi-Brown 1997; Brown and Shaw 2002). Importantly, Harris notes that while these perspectives could not be entirely reconciled, organizers on the ground were able to find commonality by forming a “united front” to support Black working-class youth through service-delivery in the form of a community centre as well as

the formation of a new bridging program to increase Black student enrollment (Harris 2014, 142). Harris highlights the role of spaces like Third World Books, a Black-owned radical bookstore in Toronto, in fostering intergenerational spaces of learning that assisted in bridging the gaps between these interactions by exposing community members to “informal educational resources” that include the lived experiences of seasoned organizers (2014, 144, 145, 146).

Harris’ work helpfully outlines the mechanisms of Black Power organizing during this period, noting not only the intense debates that animated ideological evolution in the community but crucially the vitality and unity found in an organic and communal solidarity. What Harris describes is a dynamic I observe in Halifax: a combination of rigorous debate and meaningful cooperation that, when situated in nurturing spaces and allowed to flourish, has greatly contributed to building shared momentum towards achieving policy goals amongst actors that might otherwise be unable to coexist. This bridging work is, as I explain in Chapters Five and Eight, not without its challenges. The Black United Front in Halifax aimed to bridge between radical and moderate perspectives in its inception in the 1970s, but the organization quickly acquiesced to the desires of its principal funders: the federal government (Calliste 1995, 135).

Harris’ work on the Canadian Black Power movement is indicative of a vital piece of the Black radical tradition that often gets buried to satisfy political exigencies: a pragmatic and anti-essentialist stance that uses articulation as a mechanism for coalition-building across difference. In other words, difference becomes the anchor for coalition, not the barrier to it. For Patterson and Kelley, this stance recognizes that diaspora is both “a process and a condition”, one that is continually being made and remade within the context of political struggle and cultural production, but also one that is shaped by broader racial and gendered hierarchies (2000, 19, 20). Their work echoes that of Stuart Hall, who notes that despite a common history of slavery,

colonization and transportation, there are important differences across diaspora that must be translated and embraced in their specificity (Hall 1996, 228). For Hall, therefore, the binary constructions of “past/present” or “them/us” are unhelpful because these boundaries cannot ever be fixed (1996, 228). Instead, Hall notes that the experience of being in diaspora “is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity” (1996, 235). Hall’s approach offers much to the “pragmatic imagination” that shapes the way I understand my research question. His articulation of cultural identity offers an approach to solidarity that is rooted in shared meaning-making, one that allows for hybridity while still holding space for organizing that is rooted in liberation from shared historical and contemporary oppressions.

### **Self-determination**

This communal solidarity is indicative of the self-determination that I perceive is at work in Halifax, facilitating vibrant networks of care that protect against the neglect and abuse of the state. Jakeet Singh helpfully outlines this practice as “self-determination from below” and notes that this practice is not about seizing “a particular form of institutional power”, but instead about “[actualizing] an alternative, non-hegemonic way of life, form of subjectivity, and/or ethical-political goods” (Singh 2014, 63). This approach is related to, but not the same as historical movements for self-determination that have sought (and won) explicit territorial autonomy that include anti-colonial organizing and advocacy at the United Nations post-World War II, as well as self-government arrangements for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples across Canada (Imai 2009; Getachew 2019a; Karuka 2017).

Adom Getachew, in *Worldmaking After Empire*, highlights that Black anti-colonial nationalists between the 1930s and 1960s framed the term self-determination as a liberatory rejoinder to empire as a form of enslavement (Getachew 2019a, 77). This framing, according to Getachew, was contingent on the political and historical processes that facilitated its resonance on an international stage – the end of World War II, the beginning of the Cold War, and the incongruity of empire with an emerging global discourse of human rights (Getachew 2019a, 78). A rights-based framing of self-determination thus became an attempt to build an “anti-imperial world order in which the rights to independence and equality constituted the legal basis of nondomination within international society” (Getachew 2019a, 79).

This rights-based approach has been applied at an urban level by Black organizers in the United States in the 1970s, who saw a network of “landlords, merchants, realtors, racketeers and politicians, union leaders, licensing and inspector bureaucrats, university and school administrators, doctors, lawyers, and policemen” operating as an imperial power within their communities (Turner 1970, 9). In “Black in the Cities: Land and Self-Determination”, James Turner refers to Black communities in urban areas in the United States as being in a “colonial captive position”, noting that these communities have no control or capital ownership in these spaces, even when Black officials are elected to political office (Turner 1970, 10). Of particular concern to Turner were the intertwined discourses of urban renewal and “white flight” that reshaped urban spaces in the era that removed the tax base from inner cities, leaving Black communities defenceless against a process of dislocation and erasure (Turner 1970, 12). For Turner, self-determination in this context would mean a movement to organize Black people in urban areas to develop independent political organizations to wrest control of all institutions within the areas they occupy, subsequently claiming those areas as autonomous city states that

operate under principles of African Socialism to sustain self-reliance (Turner 1970, 13). Turner notes that such a movement must “begin with the people where they are” by raising a nationalist consciousness among the community and creating cooperative developments to sustain the movement’s evolution (Turner 1970, 13). While Turner’s end vision of autonomous city-states did not come into fruition, his analysis of the network of oppressions that overlap in an urban context with global discourses of imperialism and colonialism offer a great deal to my understanding how self-determination can be articulated within urban politics.

No conversation around self-determination, particularly in terms of territory, can be held in North America without a meaningful engagement with the self-determination of Indigenous peoples across the continent. Harkening back to histories of *marronage*, there are clear and vital pathways where Black self-determination can develop and flourish in relationship to and in solidarity with Indigenous articulations of this concept. The most relevant of these articulations to this project is found within Mi’kma’ki, the unceded and unsundered territory of Mi’kmaq nations that includes Kjiptuk (Halifax), which is covered by the Treaties of Peace and Friendship signed between 1725 and 1779 with the British Crown. These treaties state that Mi’kmaq nations had the liberty to hunt, fish and profit from those natural resources that abounded in their territories while also maintaining a peaceful and harmonious relationship with the settlers who arrived in their lands (Nova Scotia Archives and Daugherty 2020). This relationship, rooted in connection to the land, has been repeatedly violated by settlers who have neglected their Treaty responsibilities over generations (Martin 2020; Ladner 2005, 925). Understanding the Treaties of Peace and Friendship, and the relationship that peoples of African descent who were not signatories on these treaties but were living within Mi’kma’ki have within this Treaty, is thus an important and ongoing process.



Another important articulation of Indigenous self-determination appears in Yann Allard-Tremblay's piece "The Two Row Wampum: Decolonizing and Indigenizing Democratic Autonomy". Allard-Tremblay articulates a philosophy of self-determination that is rooted in the Two-Row Wampum of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and that is relational in its approach to non-domination, interdependence, and responsibility (Allard-Tremblay 2022, 226, 228). As Allard-Tremblay points out, the Two-Row Wampum has in many ways become an exemplar for Indigenous peoples across North America in terms of the ways it articulates non-domination and these nations' distinct political status relative to settlers in these lands (2022, 231).

The Two-Row Wampum Belt is a record of a 1613 treaty between the Kanien'kehá:ka and a Dutch trader near Albany that was meant to establish peace between these polities (Allard-Tremblay 2022, 230). According to Allard-Tremblay, a wampum belt is a "living agreement... [one that is] informed by, and concretely manifests, Indigenous political philosophies" (Allard-Tremblay 2022, 230). The Two-Row Wampum uses the symbols of two vessels travelling down the same river together – one vessel for the Haudenosaunee (and more generally for Indigenous peoples) and one for white settlers – where both vessels are connected by the river they are sailing down, but neither entity tries to steer the other's vessel (Williams 1986, 291). Allard-Tremblay notes that this treaty asserts self-determination and autonomy but also harmony, or, in the words of Aaron Mills, "the ceaselessly changing but grounded state of interdependent selves engaged with each other in personal practices of mutual aid, which we may call living in right relation" (Allard-Tremblay 2022, 233). Crucially, for Allard-Tremblay, the Two Row Wampum treaty refutes the presence of a sovereign to express a group's autonomous will, instead focusing on our interdependence as the relational foundation of political autonomy (Allard-Tremblay 2022, 236). The Two-Row Wampum offers much to understandings of democratic self-

determination that prioritize interdependence over solitude, while at the same time emphasizing the autonomy and respect associated with Indigenous political philosophies at all levels of engagement – from individuals to supranational organizations (Allard-Tremblay 2022, 247). In so doing, it disrupts a view of democratic theory and practice that is “decisionist” and “solipsistic” in nature.

This other “solipsistic” view of self-determination can be seen in the Wilsonian principle articulated at the League of Nations which, according to Getachew, seeks a counterrevolutionary and racialized uniformity of a people to meet the threshold of being a self-determining political community (Getachew 2019b, 40). This framing has been used to undermine and dislocate projects of non-domination and liberation at a supranational, nation-to-nation, and even local level (Karuka 2017, 90; Getachew 2019b; Allard-Tremblay 2022).

Manu Karuka notes in “Black and Native Visions of Self-Determination”, however, that Black and Indigenous organizers and thinkers have imagined and produced movements for self-determination in ways that can “productively interact with each other, working independently and in concert toward shared ends, building the capacities for futures beyond state power” (Karuka 2017, 77). These movements, as Karuka describes, have taken numerous forms over history: some that were explicitly land-based and territorial in nature like the UNIA “back to Africa” movement or the Oglala and AIM takeover of Wounded Knee in the early 1970s<sup>22</sup>; and some like the survival and welfare-rights programs led by Black women in the Black Power movement that were founded on the “respatialization and repoliticization of urban space” (Karuka 2017, 89). The intertwined processes of settler colonialism and slavery in the Americas add complexity to what we might conceive as territorial self-determination claims made by

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<sup>22</sup> The 1973 occupation of Wounded Knee in South Dakota was organized by the American Indian Movement who resisted the United States government for 71 days over their refusal to honour treaty rights.

people of African descent if they are not paired with a recognition and engagement with First Peoples in these lands, as seen with the Republic of New Afrika movement who “sometimes recapitulated the language and logic of settler territoriality” in their attempt to establish an autonomous community in Mississippi (Karuka 2017, 88). Nevertheless, Black and Indigenous movements for self-determination have found ways to articulate and reconstitute space in ways that are unrecognizable to the “sovereign authority” expressed in settler colonial and racialized projects (Karuka 2017, 91).

What Karuka describes works in concert with the historical and contemporary approaches to self-determination that I observe in Halifax. Karuka’s approach also works in concert with Iris Marion Young’s assessment of self-determination as relational autonomy in the context of nondomination as explained in her essay “Two Concepts of Self-Determination” to best articulate what I mean by self-determination in this project (Young 2007, 44). For Young, relational autonomy means understanding that people can choose for themselves what they desire and ought to have the opportunity to pursue those ends in a context of interdependence and relationships with others (Young 2007, 47). This relational autonomy is best expressed via collective, decision-making institutions that can account for different opinions and perspectives within the affected peoples while simultaneously developing and deciding upon shared goals (Young 2007, 50). In this project, these institutions are the network of community organizations, social movements and policy co-creation efforts that account for the desires and demands of Black Haligonians – or the institutional order that I describe above. These institutions, in coalition, do not always align and are complex in the ways that they express policy goals, but they do orient around a vision of Halifax where people of African heritage are able to express and define for themselves an egalitarian vision of their lives within interrelated communities.

Nondomination, on the other hand, means addressing the state's capacity to exercise arbitrary power over peoples without consideration of their interests or opinions regardless of their choice to exercise that capacity in a particular instance (Young 2007. 48). For people of African descent in Halifax, this domination is the primary outcome of the extant racial institutional order that perceives Black inferiority and victimhood and is expressed via discriminatory treatment by the police and within the health system.

Organizing towards self-determination, then, links global processes of resistance and solidarity to local efforts to assert spaces that facilitate Black flourishing and autonomy in opposition to governing political institutions that perpetuate disrespect, disrepair, and dislocation. Self-determination in this account is a form of inter-communal solidarity that is expressed by the creation of institutions with a world-making vision. These institutions are connected to place in complex ways but can also be flexible enough to seek visions of self-determination from a diasporic standpoint and in relation to Indigenous movements for liberation. Moreover, as I explain in Chapters Six and Seven, the articulation of a vision of Black self-determination does not preclude multiracial coalitions and solidarity to develop as a part of these processes. Rather, these coalitions are an important part of deconstructing the hegemonic forms of racialization that underpin discourses of Black inferiority and victimhood, actualizing the interdependence that Iris Marion Young articulates in "Two Concepts of Self-Determination". In this way, self-determination acts as the binding concept that grounds the racial institutional order I describe in the rest of this project.

## **Conclusion**

The networks of Black community organizations, activists, organizers, and affiliated institutional actors in Halifax are a part of a racial institutional order that uses a shared concept

of Black self-determination to animate efforts to create a city where Black residents can thrive. This institutional order offers a durable foundation for communal solidarity and mobilization over generations and extends from a lineage of radical contest across the African diaspora. It is most commonly expressed, in Halifax, via the creation of distinct community organizations that provide services that meet the holistic needs of the community in a manner that resists the erasure and neglect of the state. The transnational nature of concepts of Black self-determination means that, when actors choose to embrace hybridity, this institutional order can amass resources to change material conditions for community members marginalized by governing institutions who operate from discourses of Black inferiority and victimhood. The viability of this institutional order, therefore, is contingent upon the capacity of actors within it to embrace both the shared history and profound differences within communities of African descent to achieve meaningful policy change.

### Chapter Three – Research Design and Methodology

*My research questions – What methods do Black-led coalitions in Halifax, Nova Scotia use to contest durable racial inequities in policing and public health? What is the anatomy of the racial institutional order that connects Black resistance to white supremacy in Halifax?– came together iteratively. The earliest tendrils of this idea emerged in the fall of 2019, shortly before the then-Minister of Justice Mark Furey announced a permanent ban on the use of street checks in Nova Scotia. Representatives from the African Nova Scotian Decade for People of African Descent Coalition (ANSDPAD)’s Justice Working Group were in talks with the province to advocate for a halt to the practice. As a part of the Health Working Group for ANSDPAD, I was not a part of those discussions, but I felt as if they were intimately connected to those that we were holding with the province as part of efforts to prompt them to collect race-based data. I remember chatting with Vanessa Fells, the Director of ANSDPAD, about their negotiations in the parking lot of a gas station in Bayer’s Lake on our way to hold a meeting with the Nova Scotia Health Authority about slow-moving initiatives for transformation. It looked at that time like the marches in the street worked to halt street checks for good, and I wanted to know whether such an approach was even tenable for issues related to our health. I could not, at the time, understand why we were not more incensed about the state-supported indignities and inequities that facilitated disease and ill health for Black people across the city. I wondered aloud whether a march for Black health would work to prompt government to act promptly as opposed to occupying our time with endless, and seemingly fruitless, meetings. The answer for why this approach would not work appeared to be self-evident: there was no tangible moment or event to capture this injustice. Instead, the harms to our health seemed to hang in the air – invisible yet virulent – foreshadowing the clarifying events to come. What I sought then was a*

*succinct answer to this research question to be applied in practice. What I realized, once I delved deeper, was that there was no easy answer.*

The theoretical foundation I offer in Chapter Two requires a range of approaches to better understand how Black self-determination develops and is mobilized in the everyday practice of community organizations and advocates, as well as the ways this concept affects municipal and provincial policymaking in public health and policing. In this chapter, I outline my methodological process in this dissertation. I begin by outlining the policy areas I choose to analyze in this project, before defining autoethnography and situating its use in social movement research as well as in political science. I then explore my own positionality as an insider-outsider in the community, which offers ethical and epistemological considerations that are important to understanding my approach to this work. I conclude by explaining the other data-collection methods that I use in this project: archival research, semi-structured interview, and frame analysis.

### **Policy areas of focus — policing and public health**

In this project, I focus on organizing around and policymaking around two interconnected but distinct policy areas: policing and public health. These policy areas are the responsibility of two distinct levels of government with two very different mechanisms of public engagement and accountability. What connects these areas is their unique legislative *and* normative power to allow the state (broadly conceived) to suspend or impede upon the civil liberties of individuals and communities. This legislative power has notably been demonstrated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic across Canada, where the outbreak of the virus prompted public health emergency orders that restricted the freedom of movement and freedom of assembly enshrined in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and the enforcement of these orders was undertaken by police

forces across the country (Canadian Civil Liberties Association 2020). Predictably, the brunt of these orders was borne heavily by communities of African descent across Canada, for whom the types of surveillance that accompanies such extensive powers is a common feature of everyday life whether within the pandemic or not (Ajadi and Thompson 2021; Canadian Civil Liberties Association 2020; CBC News 2021).

The compounding effects of discrimination within policing and public health institutions on the health and wellbeing of people of African descent has not just been felt in the pandemic, although this moment provides a uniquely tangible and devastating confluence of these two policy areas. Even when there is no direct overlap between these policy areas, there is a tangible connection between the impacts of policing on the health and wellbeing of Black people. An extensive body of research in public health and health promotion identifies the stress caused by experiences of discrimination related to racial profiling and policing as a key component of the structural determinants of health that often influence the distribution of ill health (Alang et al. 2017; Bailey 2016; Obasogie, Headen, and Mujahid 2017; Laurencin and Walker 2020; Alyasah Ali Sewell et al. 2021; Abigail A. Sewell and Jefferson 2016; Hutto and Green 2016).

These connections also extend to the War on Drugs, which is a key driver of the mass poisoning and overdose crisis that, in jurisdictions like British Columbia, has killed more residents than COVID-19 did (McNeil et al. 2022). Police officers enforce outdated and harmful criminal legislation that continues to expose people who use drugs to the mass poisoning and overdose crisis via criminalization and surveillance which, in practice, has worsened the scale and scope of the violence and harm that have unfolded (Carter and Macpherson 2013). The War on Drugs has disproportionately affected communities of African descent and Indigenous communities by driving rates of incarceration to be many times higher than representation in the



wider population due to overpolicing of these communities as well as punitive sentencing guidelines and practices, while also worsening the structural vulnerabilities that Black and Indigenous peoples already face in Canada (Collins et al. 2019; Khenti 2014).

This punitive surveillance and enforcement is not, however, backed by evidence of increased substance use in these communities. A national study conducted by Blair and Siddiqi on substance use and ethno-racial identity indicates that amongst those that are born in Canada, there is no difference between substance use across ethnoracial identities, and the rates of substance use among those that are immigrants or first generation in Canada are significantly lower than in white Canadians (Blair and Siddiqi 2022). The disproportionate harms caused by the War on Drugs, therefore, are a quintessential example of Gilmore's explanation of racism as the "state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (Gilmore 2007, 28). The institution of policing, as the primary enforcement mechanism of state power amongst people who use drugs, directly and indirectly produces vulnerability to premature death for Black and Indigenous communities in Canada (van der Meulen, Chu, and Butler-McPhee 2021; Collins et al. 2019).

In both policy areas, data collection and surveillance have been mechanisms that governing institutions have used to entrench and deepen racial inequities, prompting vocal opposition and contest between activists and governing institutions. The primary example of this surveillance in policing in Halifax has been street checks, defined by Justice Michael Macdonald and Jennifer Taylor in their independent legal opinion for the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission as "an interaction or observation (without interaction) whereby personal and/or identifying information is collected by an officer and entered into the Versadex database for future use" (MacDonald and Taylor 2019, 2). This information, according to the policy manual

that Halifax Regional Police uses to guide its actions, is supposed to be of “intelligence value” and is intended to contribute to future investigations (Wortley 2019, 101, 102).

Predictably, Black residents were overrepresented in the 11 years of street check data that Wortley analysed – the data shows that Black residents are checked 5.7 times more than white residents and five times more than our proportion of the population at 18 per cent of the total number of street checks conducted during this time (Wortley 2019, 104). Black men were particularly affected by street checks at a rate 9.2 times higher than the general population, or at a rate of 3.3 street checks *per Black male resident* over the time span. Street checks, therefore, are indicative of the harassment and discrimination that is foundational to policing in Halifax.

Public health policy is constrained in Canada by a patchwork system of data collection and governance that conversely erases the unique experiences of racism faced by Black people in terms of their health by either aggregating them into a broader visible minority framework or refusing to collect health data disaggregated by race altogether (Ajadi 2019). Inequity in these settings is therefore about a *lack* of surveillance and attention to compounding structural vulnerabilities throughout the life-course that, according to epidemiologist Nancy Krieger, are quite literally embodied through the expression of diseases among distinct populations (Krieger 2012, 937). Data that has been traditionally collected about the health and wellbeing of Black Canadians has often contributed to processes of extraction from these communities without enthusiastic and ongoing consent and has provided justification to discourses that underpin anti-Black racism (Black Health Equity Working Group 2021, 4; Benjamin 2019). This process leads, in turn, to a unique situation where harmful stereotypes about Black people inform clinical decision-making practices that expose Black patients to inappropriate forms of care, but Black *communities* are unable to access reliable information about their health and wellbeing on a

population level (Moscou and Baker 2018; Black Health Equity Working Group 2021). That lack of information also feeds into a policy context where decisions about service provision are not made with adequate consideration of the needs of communities, feeding into a lack of usage of these spaces as well as a lack of culturally responsive care (Kirmayer and Jarvis 2019).

I contend, therefore, that the connections between police brutality towards Black residents and public health are a matter of democratic legitimacy. Governing institutions in both policy areas offer Black residents a form of distorted responsiveness, which Prowse, Weaver and Meares term when referring to police as a contradictory presence where these authorities are “everywhere and nowhere” (Prowse, Weaver, and Meares 2020, 1428). To elaborate, distorted responsiveness occurs when governing authorities are ever-present in punitive or harmful ways but absent in offering the support and services that communities seek, leading to perceptions that these institutions have abandoned or aim to extract from the community overall (Prowse, Weaver, and Meares 2020, 1428, 1429). As I demonstrate in Chapter Six, in Halifax, this process has historically been observed in policing in the Uniacke Square neighbourhood in the North End, where the Halifax Regional Police established a “community policing” unit that simultaneously failed to offer the safety that community members were seeking and contributed to the harassment and criminalization of many young Black men in 1991, adding to the contextual conditions that caused that year’s ‘riots’. In public health, distorted responsiveness is more diffuse – and is rooted in the ways that data collected about Black communities is used in ways that do not meaningfully impact the health and wellbeing of those same communities despite the ubiquity of stereotypes used to harm them.

Crucially, as Chapter Eight elaborates, the mechanisms for community engagement in both policy areas are often lacking, necessitating the role for community organizations to step in

and advocate on these communities' behalf while simultaneously attempting to deliver services in these areas. In public health, the formalized method of civilian input in Nova Scotia are community health boards, but these bodies are often ineffectual, and the representation of Black communities is uneven in scope (Ajadi and Rodgers 2021). The Board of Police Commissioners, Halifax's civilian oversight body for the Halifax Regional Police have traditionally been, by their own admission, functionally useless in engaging with community or providing any robust policy for police forces to follow (Honsberger and Moreash 2016).

Furthermore, local control over institutions in both policy areas is diminished in Halifax, meaning that organizations in policing and in healthcare feel less pressure from their ostensible overseers to be responsive to community concerns. Policing, for example, is a shared jurisdiction in Halifax between its municipal police force (the Halifax Regional Police), and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police – the federal policing agency that operates a contract with the municipality and with the province for its services. Halifax's two-force arrangement is unique nationwide — though other metropolitan areas with distinct municipalities also contract the RCMP. Having both forces subject to the same municipality is a consequence of the amalgamation of Halifax, Bedford, Dartmouth, Sackville, and the assorted rural villages and towns that currently make up Halifax Regional Municipality in the 1990s (Hollingsworth 2021). The two police forces are bound together by an integrated Criminal Investigation Division that addresses high-level investigations like homicides and sexual assaults (Francoeur 2018). In practice, however, this model offers confusion and conflict over jurisdictional responsibility, and means that the Halifax Board of Police Commissioners has no ability to compel or set policy for

the Halifax District RCMP.<sup>23</sup> The Halifax District RCMP's lack of accountability to residents or to the municipality shows up in its refusal to apologize to Black Haligonians for conducting street checks, in opposition to the HRP's 2019 apology and despite municipal councillors' exhortations for the organization to do so (Byard 2021).<sup>24</sup> The shared jurisdiction between the HRP and the RCMP in Halifax is a reminder of the rural areas encapsulated as a part of the municipality that are a hallmark of medium-sized cities, and the municipality's lack of oversight of the RCMP indicate the limitations of its system of civilian police governance.

Halifax's constrained power extends to issues of public health. There is no local control or input over public health surveillance or health promotion in Nova Scotia. Local governments are typically removed from decision-making in health in every province in Canada (Marchildon 2016). Nova Scotia's centralization, however, is distinct in its extremity, with other provinces like Ontario having distinct local public health units, and regional health authorities like Vancouver Coastal Health having significant municipal representation on their board (Raphael and Sayani 2017; "Board Members - Vancouver Coastal Health" n.d.). Instead, Nova Scotia has a single health authority that provides health services to all areas of the province via four zones that have four corresponding medical officers of health, and a Department of Health and Wellness that houses the Chief Medical Officer of Health's office and that sets a policy direction for the health authority to follow (Government of Nova Scotia 2021; Nova Scotia Health Authority 2020).

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23. Of course, the Halifax Board of Police Commissioners has almost never used its powers under the *Police Act* to set policy for Halifax Regional Police, meaning that this lack of capacity is bolstered as a problem by the Board's vexatious inaction.

24. One quote from Councillor Sam Austin in this article neatly encapsulates part of the problem with the RCMP's presence in the city: "I said it at Council that if the RCMP is so centrally controlled from Ottawa that they can't even manage three words, "I am sorry" then it really makes me question whether they're at all capable of reforming policing with us. We may reach a point where we have to choose between changing policing and keeping the RCMP. If they can't change with us, it's hard for me to see the RCMP having a long-term future in HRM."

This centralization is a relatively recent phenomenon. The Liberal-led provincial government controversially amalgamated nine distinct health authorities into one in 2014 – before that time, the Halifax area was represented by the Capital District Health Authority (Laroche 2014). The regional system of health governance itself is a product of a similar thrust of regionalization that created the Halifax Regional Municipality and was conducted under the same provincial government led by Dr. John Savage (present-day Halifax mayor Mike Savage’s father) in 1994 (Maddalena 2005, 91).

Gregory Marchildon describes this shift by the province as a move from fiscal and administrative delegation by provincial governments to regional health authorities to administrative decentralization with centralized policy and fiscal control, where health authority offices are scattered around the province, but the actual decision-making capability of those offices is minimal (Marchildon 2016, 13).<sup>25</sup>

Nova Scotia’s rapid about-face to repudiate regionalization in its healthcare system has had a dampening effect on its public health capacity according to an editorial written by prominent public health leaders and researchers in the *Canadian Journal of Public Health* in 2017, who also question the capacity for medical officers of health to maintain their “scientific independence” in these policy arrangements, and call for “removing PH units from health authorities and relocating them in or in close association with municipal governments” (Hancock et al. 2017, 1, 2). This lack of input and engagement between the province’s public health architecture and the municipality was acutely felt at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, where a municipal staff member explained how little notice or input they received from public health officials at a tumultuous time:

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25. The province’s centralizing impulse was also notably demonstrated by the elimination of school boards province-wide in 2018.

There is little linkage between the work that I do, and the work of substance of public health people other than we have good relationships, good working relationships, and we meet monthly. We chat about things and learn from each other. But in terms of a decision-making table... the city was informed at the 11th hour about changes to [rules in] COVID. Nobody knew any of the provincial...the director of the Rec Center, we get a call that morning saying everything's closing down in three hours, like *that* level of communication, like no communication (anonymous municipal policymaker, interview with author, May 4, 2022).

Assessing these policy areas in tandem is important, therefore, to reveal not only the historically situated manifestations of racism that permeate these governing institutions, but also the democratic and world-building impetus that the institutional order led by Black organizers creates. By engaging with the ecosystem of direct action, policy entrepreneurship, service-delivery and other organizing efforts that span across and between these areas, we can begin to understand the ways that Black self-determination as a concept can intervene and countervail white supremacy in policymaking over time. Understanding how and for whom this concept has developed and implemented in community historically and contemporaneously requires a methodological approach that can account for the nuances of conducting liberation work in practice.

## **Methodology**

I work, in this project, to combine autoethnography with archival research and semi-structured interviews. I use frame analysis to analyze the data I collect, interrogating the frames, methods, and identities that underpin organizing and contest against durable inequities in policing and public health in Halifax. The methods that I am using to address my research question are, in the context of this study, housed under the umbrella of interpretive research. An interpretive study, or an exercise in “sustained empathic inquiry”, focuses on the socially and politically constructed meanings shared among actors to better understand how they guide action

(Yanow 2003, 11; Yanow 2014, 133). Interpretive research is, to paraphrase Carolyn Hendriks, intense (2007, 278). The process of ascertaining meaning, and of understanding meaning-making processes among actors historically and contemporaneously, demands that researchers are flexible, reflexive, adaptive and — importantly for this project — act as advocates for emancipatory ends in the spaces they focus on (Hendriks 2007, 280—281). In other words, this research is historically, socially, and politically situated within a context and within a worldview that explicitly prioritises and advocates for Black liberation and the destruction of white supremacy and patriarchy. It does not aim to meet for arbitrary standards of objectivity or generalizability, or to strictly adhere to disciplinary norms in political science or urban politics. In the words of Katherine McKittrick, “discipline is empire” (2021, 36). It constrains us from seeing the interwoven pathways and trajectories of resistance created by Black and Indigenous communities against white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy that avoid categorization (McKittrick 2021, 38). While I believe that what one might conceive of as ‘conventional’ approaches to politics and policymaking offer important contributions and insights that inform this work, a methodology grounded *solely* in those approaches would negate the purpose of a project that explicitly seeks to counter processes of erasure that render communities of African descent as unimportant, uninformed, and passive political and social actors. I turn, therefore, to a methodological approach that I believe contributes to the values that this project works toward in addition to those specified by Hendriks above: an approach that prioritizes credibility, reciprocity, and reflexivity (Tungohan 2020; Ademolu 2023; Gillan & Pickerill 2012).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Tungohan’s article on socially engaged research illuminates the importance of reciprocity by identifying the ways that academics must be committed to social justice to truly adhere to methodologies that engage community concerns beyond input (2020, 178). While the research design of this project is not participatory action research, the values I aspire to in this work and in future projects emphasize similar normative and political commitments to social justice.



Credibility here speaks to the ways that this work corresponds with the experiences of those that are part of these movements and these organizations. Reciprocity assesses the ways that this project contributes to the movements I have and continue to engage with in terms of knowledge-sharing and storytelling, and in terms of the actual skills I have been able to contribute during my fieldwork (Gillan & Pickerill 2012, 135). Reflexivity refers to the ways that I account for my values and interests coalesce with the methodological design of this project, and with the knowledge claims I make given the study I have undertaken (Ademolu 2023, 3). Below, I outline the components of this methodology to better articulate how these approaches interweave to inform my argument.

### Autoethnography

The foundational methodological approach I am taking in this project is that of analytic autoethnography. Analytic autoethnography, according to Anderson, is an ethnographic piece of work where “the researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in the researcher’s published texts, and (3) committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena” (2006, 375). I chose this approach to account for my significant involvement in community advocacy around policing and in public health since 2018 as a member of the Board of Directors of the Health Association of African Canadians, member of the Board of Directors of the East Coast Prison Justice Society, a co-founder of the Nova Scotia Policing Policy Working Group and as a main author on the *Defunding the Police: Defining the Way Forward for HRM* document. Autoethnography allows me to articulate and probe these experiences and roles as data alongside placing my “self-story” in a broader social, political, and economic context that is a vital piece of the story that I present (Burnier 2006, 415).

In practice, what analytic autoethnography means is that I add the emotional and embodied experiences of researching and producing this project in a way that is theoretically inclined and informed, helping to illuminate the power relations inherent both in organizing and in research-based processes of knowledge production. As you will see throughout this project, I comment, using field notes compiled from March 2020 to May 2022 alongside evocative reminiscences that are rooted in the emotional experiences and insights I have garnered from engaging in organizing work in community since 2018.

I occupy what I perceive to be as an ‘insider-outsider’ position in the constellation of community organizers, activists, advocates, and organizations that I engage with in this project. My identity as an insider comes from the work that I have done, as a Black resident of Halifax, to combat racial oppression in collaboration with many others in the community. I am on the board of two organizations (the Health Association of African Canadians, and the East Coast Prison Justice Society), I co-founded one (the Nova Scotia Policing Policy Working Group), and I have also been extensively involved in initiatives including the African Nova Scotian Health Strategy and, in the Subcommittee to Define Defunding the Police. I did not start out, however, knowing that I would be involved in the community in this way. I moved to Halifax in 2017 to pursue graduate studies at Dalhousie University. I chose to study in Halifax for many reasons, but one of the most important was that I learned that there was a vibrant and historic Black community in the city. I wanted to feel the kinship and warmth that I perceived to be shared across communities of African descent across the diaspora – at least in the places in North America, the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa that I have visited and lived in. I was moving from St. John’s, Newfoundland – a city with far fewer Black residents – and expected an easy, uncomplicated embrace from Black Halifax. I had no idea about the history or present-day

experiences of African Nova Scotians; no idea of the complexities of Black solidarity in a city riven with overlapping and intersecting mechanisms of oppression. As Ademolu articulates, the presumption that I carried into these spaces was that my racial identity was enough to bridge a lack of contextual understanding and shared context — ultimately leading to a homogenizing and static view of the communities I engaged with in this project (2023, 7).

My hubris was quickly, but gently, punctured by some of the mentors and guides I found at Dalhousie University. Upon seeing my boundless and uninformed enthusiasm, these mentors pointed me in the direction of several community groups which included HAAC, and the just-launched African Nova Scotian Decade for People of African Descent Coalition (ANSDPAD). I clumsily navigated the logical skepticism that came alongside my sudden arrival. People needed to get to know me and to trust me.

I learned how to be humble in the face of extensive, community-based knowledge. I often listened quietly in meetings, learning acronyms of community groups past and present I had never heard about while doing my best to show up to events – not just when it was convenient, or when I was involved. In so doing, I began to build the trust and connections to gain “access” to what Polletta and Jasper term as “free spaces” that exposed me to counterhegemonic ideas and perspectives (2001, 288). These spaces foster commitment and participation by fostering an affective loyalty based on an emotional connection not only to the subject matter at hand, but to the people and communities that I have gotten to connect with (Jasper and Owens 2014, 531). Those emotions, and their role in shaping my actions and the actions of those around me, are thus a vital part of this story as they provide important context to the ties that prompt mobilization and connection in community.

My “insider-outsider” status thus provided me with the empathy to understand the frustrations and challenges that come with extensive advocacy over years and generations, and the clarity to try to weave together disparate threads and bodies of knowledge to describe and analyze those challenges in this project. In this process, I was offered extensive support and care by community members who mentored me, encouraged me, and framed my success in this project as being a valuable contributor to community advocacy efforts. After interviews, several participants thanked me for the opportunity to take a step back and reflect on *why* it is they do the work they do, with the understanding that I sought not to produce a hagiography but to portray these actors as experts in their own lives and their own work. In other words, engaging in this work made me more of an “insider” than I had considered myself to be, as I grew in understanding in the process of investigation. There were, however, important challenges that emerged from this “insider-outsider” positionality. Engaging in this work academically meant that I had to segment the meetings, conversations, and actions I was a part of during this period into “research mode” and “advocacy mode” with the understanding that not every interaction or conversation I was a part of was for the consumption of a wider audience. The ethical challenge of autoethnographic work is in this intimacy, and in the potential consequences of what disclosures and adverse framings could mean for those involved in the project (Ellis 2007). My navigation of this challenge was made easier by the fact that my “access” to the field emerged from my identity as a graduate student and researcher, which meant that many of the initial contacts I made were familiar with my status and thus at ease with my transition into “research” mode. To navigate these challenges, I also made sure to identify myself and my project whenever I was in “research” mode in observation and offered to leave spaces or simply not incorporate information that community members felt uncomfortable with me writing about.

This navigation between multiple sites of identity has forced me to acknowledge that I can never be either wholly “inside” or “outside” of this community but rather remain suspended between multiple histories and lineages. I thus am required to clearly state my intentions and to prioritize above all a generative and community-centric honesty that animates this project.

Work that speaks to emotional, embodied experiences – particularly focused on the self – is rare in political science because of a disciplinary inclination towards positivism and ‘objectivity’ (Behl 2017, 583, 584). This sensibility stands in opposition to that of critical scholars, particularly those who are rooted in Black feminist praxis, who take as a foundational principle that the process of knowledge production itself is racialized, gendered, and abled in ways that support ongoing injustices and forms of domination (Behl 2017; Gooden and Hackett 2012). To be critically reflexive, then, about the embedded processes of domination and marginality that shape knowledge production is a way of challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about our social and political worlds. This reflexivity is partially about my own positionality but is also rooted in a broader political analysis about how said positionality and the attendant privileges and marginalizations that come along with it affect the work that I do in communion with others. I offer a reflexive analysis of my identity where this lens serves the broader analytical goal of understanding processes of organizing and advocacy. Commentary on how my status as an immigrant to Nova Scotia, socioeconomic status, and lifelong access to political and social resources play a role in this story is only useful in this work if it contributes to a broader understanding of the key themes that have emerged from this work – and as long as this information contributes to a praxis of liberation work.

The ethical stakes of autoethnographic work are high. Autoethnography, at its best, is a praxis of care and social justice that can help to identify what people who are often left out of

dominant narratives and debates in society care about, for, and why (Visse and Niemeijer 2016, 305). Autoethnography also allows me to speak in my own voice, which means that I avoid speaking for or over anyone else in this research journey – a vital component of ethical research in this context (Lapadat 2017, 593). Yet, without reflexivity, “my own voice” can conceal important power relations that shape my experience — namely the privilege I wield as an upper-middle-class cisgendered man with a British passport, a graduate degree, and access to elite spaces as a result. Autoethnography must therefore also include interventions from those beyond the self — to help contextualize and make meaning from experiences that go far beyond what I am exposed to.

#### Semi-structured interviews

I am only myself in relationship to others. The relationships that allow me to write with the understanding that I have about the communities that I am fortunate enough to be a part of are thus vital to reflect upon from an ethical perspective. These relationships are reflected in the 25 semi-structured interviews I conducted with activists and policymakers throughout this project. The semi-structured nature of these interviews was informed in part by the archival research I conducted (see Appendix A for the question guide), which helped me to engage the history that many of my interviewees were either a part of or were aware of in Halifax. In crafting these questions, I noted that I felt self-conscious about the theoretical and abstract nature of the ideas implicated in the questions I raised. Here, in a manner like that Edward Ademolu describes in his article on critical reflexivity and insider-outsider relationships in British-Nigerian communities, I felt an “acute self-consciousness” (2023, 14). I aimed not to predispose actors towards a grandiose history that I imagined, but rather to reflect the understandings they brought to their

own lives and lineages. As such, my “self-consciousness” was tempered by the relationships I maintained within the communities that are a part of this study.

For the purposes of this project, I am separating between activists and policymakers. The definition of an activist is a diffuse concept in the literature, and one of the outcomes of this project is to better articulate the kinds of activities and relationships that can be called activism to add more nuance to how social movements are defined and studied. As we will see in Chapter Eight, teasing out role-definition in these spaces of enmeshed and longstanding relationships can be difficult. As an initial definition, however, Nolas and others (2017) build upon previous definitions of political activism as participation in electoral campaigns, community organizing, strikes, and protests to include “critique, invention and creative practice which challenges social norms” (2017, 4). This definition allows for the inclusion of actors who would not necessarily perceive themselves as activists in a traditional sense due to factors like their age or their socioeconomic status, and whose identities and practices do not conform to traditional views of activism.

The classic definition of policymaking is, according to Thomas Dye, is “whatever governments choose to do, or choose not to do” (1972, 3). With this note in mind, policymakers are those who do the choosing – in other words, those tasked with developing a rationale within governing institutions for the decisions that are ultimately taken by legislators, as well as the legislators themselves (who have budgetary control over these institutions). In this context, that means members of the Board of Police Commissioners, members of municipal councils, members of public health units, medical officers of health, and administrators in provincial health authorities.

I used two methods to recruit participants for this dissertation. I began with a purposive recruitment of actors and organizations in the field given my prior understanding and work within this context. I then used the snowball method, to ask participants that I recruited to suggest people to speak to, and then asked those people for an interview, and if they accepted asked them to suggest someone else to talk to (Kirchherr and Charles 2018, 1). I began my ‘snowball’ by talking to prominent heads of community organizations like the African Nova Scotian Decade for People of African Descent Coalition and the Health Association of African Canadians as well as unaffiliated but prominent community activists as an initial starting place. I also used my archival research as a foundation for contacting people engaged in the historical incidents I cover in Chapters Five and Six. The benefits of the snowball method are that they map in important ways the networks that are so crucial to the community institutions and organizing that I engage in this work, addressing what Noy calls “interactional and political” knowledge about Black communities in Halifax (2008, 327). This approach also, however, potentially limits the scope of the project by constraining the extent of my recruitment. This challenge was compounded in this dissertation by the COVID-19 pandemic, which reduced my capacity to reach people, and left the membership of community organizations inundated with requests for support with little additional capacity to engage in interviews. While I do believe I reached “saturation” in terms of the themes and perspectives included in this project, I recognize that those who did not participate have meaningful and important stories to tell that may align or conflict with this one.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Hennink and Kaiser note in their systematic review of four databases that between 9-17 interviews is sufficient for saturation in qualitative studies (2022, 8).



The foundational structure for these interviews emerged from themes generated in my archival work, but these conversations ventured in many different directions once we began talking. The context of these interviews helped to shape some of this divergence. As much of this research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, many of these interviews were conducted over Zoom, but 13 were conducted in person, while 12 were conducted on Zoom. I was able to share space with participants in their everyday lives, meeting them virtually or in person where they were most comfortable. I visited office spaces, cafes, sparse virtual backgrounds, and kitchen tables. And, as you might expect, everyday life shaped our discussions in all kinds of unforeseen ways. One participant, for example, had a defective fire alarm that had disturbed their sleep and that they could not reach. Being 6'3, I offered to help fix the issue. When I climbed the ladder and got to the fire alarm, however, I realized that my height was functionally useless because I did not have any idea what to do to fix the problem. The participant then invited a neighbour in to help address the problem, which they subsequently did. The fire alarm affected our conversation in two ways. It explained the participant's initial exasperated affect, which I could have interpreted as frustration at hosting this conversation at all, meaning that I could have constrained or curtailed what ultimately proved to be an expansive and meaningful conversation for the both of us. Her neighbour's (considerably) helpful intervention also led to a discussion about a neighbourhood that is rapidly transforming, and the community ties that are at risk of being lost in said change. These kinds of experiences help to shape interpretation and help me to understand the complex and multilayered roles that participants play in their communities and in their families. As Beals and others note, this kind of immersion required me, as an insider-outsider, to be an "edge worker" — to recognize that my role is not to reflect dominant approaches to research that relegate these experiences as

peripheral, but rather to incorporate these perspectives and experiences into the ways I am making meaning of the dissertation project (2020, 597).

To ensure that this project does not contribute to ongoing extractive and harmful research practices, I sought the informed consent of every participant, made sure that those who sought anonymity in the project were able to receive it, and engaged in a process of member checking, or a process of triangulating and clarifying meaning with participants to validate my interpretations of these interviews (Caretta 2016, 312). Member checking allows me to co-construct meaning with my interview participants, therefore injecting community participation into this autoethnographic project while ensuring that each participant feels represented accurately in this work.

Ultimately, the foundational principles of this project are reciprocity and trust. This work is designed to contribute to and support efforts for justice in the community as much if not more than it is designed to contribute to the paucity of extensive work on Black organizing in Canadian politics. The extent to which this project resonates with those on the ground working every day towards liberation – the extent to which this work is perceived as credible, reciprocal, and reflexive – is my barometer for its success.

#### Frame analysis

The rigour required to create a project that is credible requires that I add to my interviews and autoethnographic insights with other forms of data to in the words of Carolyn Hendriks, “make sense of the many stories” that may arise during research to create a narrative that reflects this experience (Hendriks 2007, 282). To achieve this goal, I also use a combination of data collection methods that include extensive archival research and an analysis of the policy frames

that are used in policy documents produced by both community activists and governing institutions.

Frame analysis, according to Lindekilde, is a focused sub-variant of discourse analysis that focuses directly on causal questions of movement participation and mobilization (2014, 198, 200). The ‘frames’ in question are, according to McCammon et al., the media through which “collective actors [articulate] their interpretations of the social or political problem at hand, its solution, and the reasons why others should support efforts to ameliorate the condition” (2007, 726). My analysis of these frames as they appear in media sources, policy documents, interviews, and in secondary historical sources are grounded in the three core framing tasks that actors in this space use to frame policy problems and propose policy solutions (Benford and Snow 2000). These tasks are diagnosis (the framing of the problem), prognosis (the solution to the problem) and motivation (why one should act on the problem) (Lindekilde 2014). By analyzing these core framing tasks as used by both governing institutions and by activists, I can better understand the ways that contested racial discourses are used as a tool by actors to motivate or to constrain coalition-building, particularly in contexts that are often hostile or resistant to change. The policy analysis contained in my project thus interrogates what Howarth and Griggs identify as “the centrality of politics and power in the forging, sustenance, and grip of various policy frames or discourses in particular social and historical contexts” (Howarth and Griggs 2015, 111). I aim to complicate enduring conceptions of policymaking as a technocratic process removed from the influence of communities by identifying how policy discourses may shift over time to correspond with activist demands.

### Archival research

The final approach I take in researching this project – and the one that follows this chapter – is archival work that takes the shape of an extensive historical review of Black organizing in Halifax from the days of slavery until the early 1990s. This historical approach to understanding how Black self-determination emerges in Halifax consists of using a historical narrative form, using evidence garnered by 95 primary and secondary source documents in archives including the Black United Front collection at Nova Scotia Archives, the Jackie Barkley collection at Halifax Municipal Archives, and the Lynn Jones African Diaspora and Heritage Collection in the Saint Mary’s Archives to identify the main actors, identities, and political orders at work in this historical narrative.

As Stuart Hall notes in “Constituting an Archive”, engaging archival work (whether as a curator or as a researcher) is not about finding uniformity, but rather about making sense of “its very dispersion” (2001, 90). This act of making meaning from heterogenous sources is thus an important act of interpretation that can in and of itself constitute important ethnographic work (Gracy 2004, 337). This archival work accesses contemporaneous media sources, meeting notes, project proposals, draft reports and personal correspondence found in these archives to try to understand the ways that actors at the time understood and resisted white supremacy as it manifested in policy at all levels of government, while simultaneously probing the decisions they made in context that have shaped the organizing terrain in Halifax in the present day. This work is explicitly political as it seeks to combat the erasure and stereotyping in knowledge production that, in and of itself, underpins discourses of Black victimhood and inferiority historically in Halifax. While I address these discourses of victimhood and inferiority directly in this historical narrative, this work also rejects a simple quantification of the violence done to Black residents of Halifax. As Katherine McKittrick notes in “Mathematics Black Life”, the challenge of archival

work that accounts for the violence Black communities have historically faced is that an overemphasis on this violence takes away from the humanity of those that have faced it:

The tolls of death and violence, housed in the archive, affirm black death. The tolls cast black as impossibly human and provide the conditions through which black history is currently told and studied. The death toll becomes the source (2014, 17).

To avoid an exercise of reinscribing and reinforcing Black death and trauma in this project, I pull primarily from documents compiled by two community activists that I have interviewed in this project: Jackie Barkley and Lynn Jones. Jones in particular spoke with me extensively about her process in compiling the collection, and her work has been invaluable in crafting my own approach to this rich history.

Jones, a vital figure in Black organizing in Halifax and across Nova Scotia for over 40 years, talked me through the spark that started her on the road to compiling the African Diaspora and Heritage Collection as a child when I went to visit her at her current home in Truro. She noted how rarely Black people were to be found in the newspapers that were delivered to her home on the Marsh, one of Truro's historical Black communities, and mentioned that her parents sought to instill a pride in their identity as people of African heritage that flourished in her collecting:

It's easy to pinpoint when this collection started. I was in the music festival in Grade Two. And I placed in the music festival. My picture was in the paper in grade two. That's how it's easy to tell when I started the collection. Up to that point in time, I was reading my mother's articles, all of them. Now my picture was in the paper, which meant my picture got to go on the dining room table because she had cut out the picture. And like I said to people, it used to work its way to the bottom of the pile, but I'd bring it back up to the front - to the top of the pile. I made sure everyone knew. It was a big deal to be in the paper! And then a light bulb almost went off, like my mom's collecting all what she wants, and whatever. And well, now that I had my picture, why couldn't I collect what I wanted? And you know, do the same thing about what would interest me? She was very encouraging. There was no "no you can't have that." So I got her leftover papers or sometimes she'd give me some of her articles to put with my articles. And that's when the collecting began. So like I said, it's easy to pinpoint. It's not even a guess. Here's the

strange thing. I don't have that picture. So I'm putting it out to all you young people to find it! (L. Jones, May 9 2022, interview with author)

For Jones, then, the archive is about preserving an exuberance and enthusiasm for Black *life* in all its manifestations, especially in a context where Black people were not covered with respect or care in the media that she had access to – if they were covered at all:

I didn't put an archive together. I put stories of my people together, I collected stories of African people wherever they may be. So it wasn't a... you can call it an archive. People may give these names. But for me, it was that as a very young person I loved learning about [and] I was always inquisitive about Black people, and African people and where we came from and who we were (L. Jones, May 9 2022, interview with author).

Jones' framing is crucial because it demonstrates the stakes of conducting archival work in service of Black liberation. It means holding onto and seeing the value in a history and in a group of people that the rest of society is insinuating – explicitly or implicitly – is worth little, as she explains when she describes how she kept her collection going:

But for whatever reason, I had enough... whatever they meant enough to me, I guess that I always felt like if that history would be lost. If I didn't collect, if I didn't keep it, how would anybody know? And remember, you weren't into computers and stuff. So you had no idea that things would go on computers and be saved, or anything, it was only the physical. So if the physical was gone, there's nothing left. So I had this burning, burning, burning desire not to have this lost, and that somebody needed to. And it's not that I was going to do this remarkable thing with it. But it had to be saved so people could access it (L. Jones, May 9 2022, interview with author).

It's this battle against erasure, and a battle for a rich and multifaceted articulation of Black communities in Halifax, that acts as the guiding principle for this work. Learning from Jones about the history behind her collection, and being able to access the collection firsthand, has allowed me to develop a rich account of self-determination as it has developed over time, and as such adds to the credibility I seek in this project.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter assesses the methodology for this project to answer the research questions: *What methods do Black-led coalitions in Halifax, Nova Scotia use to contest durable racial inequities in policing and public health? What is the anatomy of the racial institutional order that connects Black resistance to white supremacy in Halifax?* I outline the methods I used to conduct this research, which includes autoethnography, semi-structured interviews, and archival research, as well as the approach I use to analyze this data (frame analysis). I frame this methodology around three key principles: credibility, reciprocity, and reflexivity, and identify how my positionality as an ‘insider-outsider’ shapes this project. I articulate an understanding of archival work as a political act, opting to refuse racial violence via erasure and dispossession and instead articulating a vision of self-determination constituted over time in the archives I accessed. These methods, in combination, ground this project in a tradition of empathic and radical care, opting towards showing the vibrancy of Black life in its heterogeneity.

#### Chapter Four – Understanding Black communities in early Halifax (1605-1883)

*It's a cold, clear November day in north-end Halifax. I'm riding my creaky, mustard-coloured bicycle slowly, worried about the veering traffic side-swiping me while trying to get downtown. I leave my home and ride down Windsor Street, taking a left on Almon to pass the Halifax Forum, before veering through potholed side-streets until I hit Gottingen. I imagine riding alongside a throng of people, on a late August day 53 years prior, marching towards the police station incensed at the arrest of three young Black boys by police officers who probably harassed them the week before. As I coast down to the intersection of Gottingen and Gerrish streets, I see the intersection where that same crowd threw bricks and bottles at those officers they might have viewed as occupiers.<sup>28</sup> I imagine the heady mix of adrenaline and fear that comes with the first salvo thrown in a street confrontation; the conflict between the exaltation of finally pushing back against those that push you around and the horror of the backlash of violence that was surely about to come.*

*After a quick pause for a sip of water, I push on, riding towards the police station where the crowd protested until the early hours of the morning. In my mind's eye, the crowd spilled out from the steps of the building now named for one of the officers who may have been policing them onto the sidewalk and up the small incline on Gottingen Street towards the downtown core. I stop again to take in my surroundings, and to catch my breath. I look over to the intersection of Gottingen and Cogswell. I spot a #7 bus pulling in on the opposite side of the road to drop off some passengers. The LED panels on the front and the side flip over to read "Black Lives*

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28. Burnley "Rocky" Jones recounts this incident in his autobiography *Revolutionary*: "[When] I get to Gerrish Street there are all of these police and the police are scared because I'd say there might have been 200 kids there, Lord knows how many, and you could see the police are literally shaking. That whole area is filled with kids and they're yelling and screaming and going on and they're picking up stones and that [...] And they're yelling "Black Power!" They've got all this rhetoric on the go" (2016, 85).



*Matter” before flicking to “Every Child Matters” – a harbinger of my destination on this ride that strikes me awkwardly. I continue riding up Gottingen before taking the right turn to circle the bottom of Citadel Hill. I decelerate and descend from my bike, dodging a couple of pedestrians before pushing the vehicle up the cold, damp grass until I reach halfway, and I spin around.*

*“Black Lives Matter”, the same three-word phrase that flashed on the side of the bus, is emblazoned in bright yellow paint that runs right in the centre of Brunswick Street. Beyond the symbol, I can see the historic core of the city where legislators have, over hundreds of years, directly contradicted the words on the street in the policies and practices that have shaped life in this municipality. The hill that I stand on – the Citadel – was rebuilt in 1796 by the Maroons from Jamaica whose own acts of resistance meant that they were forced here, under near starvation conditions, to work as labourers for an uncaring colonial elite intent on restoring Halifax’s important military capacity while suppressing rebellions from Mi’kmaq communities whose lands and resources they stole after signing the Treaties of Peace and Friendship fifty years prior.<sup>29</sup>*

*In this journey, and throughout this city, I see a profound paradox. If the words on the street and on the buses are true, why do the hallmarks of entrenched and deepening racial inequality dotted around Halifax catch the eye as much as the yellow paint on the street? When did Black lives – our lives – start mattering to those that have the power to mark this space? What does the contradictory and vexing nature of this symbol tell us about those institutions or*

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29. For more on the history of the Trelawney Town Maroons, including their brief tenure in Nova Scotia, read Ruma Chopra, *Almost Home: Maroons Between Slavery and Freedom in Jamaica, Nova Scotia, and Sierra Leone* (Yale University Press, 2018).

*organizations that have shaped this space, and what does it tell us about those who have fought for such a statement to exist on this street in the first place?*

I ask these questions in the knowledge that many Black Haligonians may have asked similar questions in the past without the incentives of academic research or the protections of academic freedom and have endured profound risks as a result. As I note in Chapter One, I intend in this dissertation to disrupt processes of erasure by historically situating contemporary Black activism about public health and about policing in Halifax in a lineage of resistance that extends for hundreds of years. I investigate how racial institutional orders developed and are sustained in Halifax, and in Nova Scotia, to garner a better understanding of the power relationships that shape organizing and mobilization today.

My focus in this chapter is on the responses to racial oppression that Black activists have historically used to address the municipality, the province, and the federal government. I engage with the arguments that these activists develop to contest oppressive policies that entrench racial inequity in the municipality and in the province. In the process, I learn that resistance through protest is a starting place; a visible manifestation of a complex and interconnected set of understandings and perspectives about history, identity and place that stake out a unique space within the Black Atlantic.

I argue that contemporary institutional arrangements and policies at a municipal and provincial level related to the health and wellbeing of Black Nova Scotians are products of the tension between a racial institutional order that places perceived Black victimhood, criminality, and disease as central concepts through which policy is developed and evaluated, and a competing institutional order that seeks Black equality through a form of self-determination attenuated by a resource- and identity-driven imperative to seek representation and status in

hostile political and social institutions. As I discuss later in the chapter, self-determination here refers to the capacity for African Nova Scotians to lead and to develop economic, cultural, and political self-sufficiency via community organizations, businesses and initiatives in a way that would lead to equitable opportunities for a holistic sense of community wellbeing. As I explore in Chapter Two, academic discussions about Black self-determination in North America abound, but they largely engage a specific strain of Black nationalist thought that emerges from the United States. As Bayyinah S. Jeffries explains in “Prioritizing Black Self-Determination: The Last Strident Voice of Twentieth-Century Black Nationalism,” this lineage reaches from the UNIA with Marcus Garvey, Amy Ashwood, and Amy Jacques, engages with the socialist inclinations of the African Blood Brotherhood, through the interventions of figures like Malcolm X, Kwame Ture, and onto the cultural engagements of Maulana Karenga as well as the militant inclinations of the Nation of Islam (2020). I attempt in this chapter to outline the development of a distinct but connected strain of Black consciousness-raising – one that is conscious of and even attends to cultural stylings of Black self-determination as articulated by Karenga among others – but one that also holds tightly to its own history and diasporic trajectory.

Contemporary policies aimed at ameliorating inequities in the health system as well as in the criminal justice system among others are indicative of the extensive, but incomplete successes of generations of organizing. The durability of those inequities, however, demonstrates that ideas around perceived Black inferiority are powerful, and have been reconstituted in explicit and coded ways that show up in policing and public health policy today despite such rigorous contest.<sup>30</sup>

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30. Katherine McKittrick identifies the challenges and possibilities of this tension: “The contradictions of black life are painfully laborious: race is the fiction we must physiologically live with and through *as* racial violence just as it

The durability of what we might call white supremacist “racial concepts, commitments, and aims” is, in part, attributable to a political order that in its 20th century form used an openness rooted in colourblind ideology, conditional relationship-building, and funding to mitigate gaps in service-provision to dilute radical demands for transformation (King and Smith 2005, 75). When these tactics were unsuccessful in addressing the anger created by the ongoing material and societal harms Black Haligonians faced at the hands of a dismissive and hostile institutional order, the conflicts that resulted created friction and disjuncture across political space, (across the jurisdictional designations that would traditionally maintain the status quo), and across political time (the overlapping and sometimes contradictory concepts that bind together distinct orders). Here, in these moments of intercurrency,<sup>31</sup> we see important changes in the ways that institutions address the community at large, as well as in the tactics that organizers use for contest moving forward.

This chapter uses a historical narrative form, using evidence garnered by primary and secondary source documents in archives including the Nova Scotia Archives, the Halifax Municipal Archives, and the Lynn Jones African Diaspora and Heritage Collection in the Saint Mary’s Archives to identify the main actors, identities, and political orders at work in this historical narrative. By identifying key actors, institutions, and mechanisms of power that have

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provides the conditions of being black that refuse our present system of knowledge. Black consciousness is the laborious and heretical aesthetics of freedom-making” (2021, 60).

31. As identified in Chapter Two, the explanation of intercurrency that has been most useful to me in this journey can be found on pages 341 and 342 of Jack Lucas’ 2017 article, “Urban Governance and the American Political Development Approach,”: “Across political space, we expect to find multiple political orders coexisting at once, each with different purposes, internal organization, and ideological commitments. Across political time, we also expect that changes to political orders will not be as clean as any simple periodization might suggest; not only will the internal dynamics of political orders evolve at different paces but also the diverse institutions and ideas that are present in those orders will mean that large-scale trends and events—economic shifts, political crises, ideological movements—will filter through those orders in very different ways.”

shaped the contest I describe above, I develop a foundation to understand the institutional arrangements, both within and outside of the state, that shape present-day organizing in Halifax.

This chapter begins with an overview of the experiences of the Black Loyalists and the Black Refugees of the late 1700s and early 1800s, before transitioning to a discussion of organizing tactics developed by the school-petitioners of the late Victorian era. It concludes by establishing the complicated organizing terrain through which consequential moments in the 20th century, including the destruction of Africville, would be navigated.

### **Slavery, the Loyalists & the Maroons**

This narrative begins, not at the Citadel, but in the Atlantic Ocean beyond it. The experiences of people of African descent in what is now Nova Scotia, and throughout British North America during the 18th and early 19th century were inextricably tied to slavery (Saney 1998, 80). Mathieu Da Costa was the first known Black person to set foot in the province in 1605 and was not enslaved, and there were small free Black populations living across the province in these early days (Saney 1998, 80). Yet 100 enslaved Africans were counted in the population shortly after the establishment of Halifax in 1749 by Edward Cornwallis on Mi'kmaq lands (Hamilton 1994, 15). Moreover, documents from the era demonstrate that enslaved Africans were taken from the Caribbean to be sold in Halifax, and from Halifax to be sold in Boston (Whitfield 2017, 214).

As historian James W. St. G. Walker notes in his retrospective booklet *Racial Discrimination in Canada: The Black Experience*, slavery was the fundamental basis of the treatment of Black people across what is now Canada:

From the very beginning of their history in Canada, blacks were associated with slavery, and therefore with a subordinate role in society. The first African slave landed at Quebec

in 1628, and from then until 1783 almost all Canadian blacks were slaves whose economic function, by definition, was to serve others (1985, 8).

It is in this context that the Black Loyalists, who escaped from slaveholders and fought on the side of the British during the American War of Independence; the enslaved people who accompanied the white Loyalists; and the Jamaican Maroons, who were deported by the British from Jamaica to crush resistance in the Caribbean colony to slavery; arrived in Nova Scotia (Whitfield 2005, 10, 11). The Loyalists, according to historian Isaac Saney, were promised 500-600 acres of land per family as well as full rights as a subject of the British Crown, but when they arrived in the province, were given scrub and non-arable land of a much smaller acreage due to corruption within the land-granting process (Saney 1998, 80; Walker 2017, 21).

With little prospect of subsistence via farming, and despite their status as skilled tradespeople, many Black Loyalists were forced to venture into Halifax and other towns to find work and were underpaid and abused while performing this labour in a manner analogous to other slave-trading societies (Walker 2017, 41, 42). Some of these Black Loyalists were even ensnared into a form of indentured servitude, and subsequently re-enslaved (Walker 2017, 50; Troxler 2008, 77). Worse still, the Black Loyalists faced Canada's first race riot in Shelburne because of white racist anger at the Loyalists' quest for labour and sustenance in the town (Hamilton 1994, 22). The Black Loyalists, promised the full rights and privileges of citizenship, found themselves in a similar destitution from the horrors they escaped in the American colonies, as Walker notes:

Either as veterans or as Loyalists, the free blacks had a right to expect treatment as full citizens. They had been promised as much, and these promises were reinforced by statements of officials in London and Halifax. On the one hand, they were required to perform the duties of citizenship, on the other, their rights fell short of equality. Clarkson recorded that the blacks were required to pay taxes, and for Sydney County at least the poll tax returns indicate that some of them did so [...] While fulfilling these

responsibilities, the blacks were 'entirely deprived of the privileges of British subjects, particularly trial by jury' (Walker 2017, 55, 56).

This deprivation of rights for Black Loyalists across Nova Scotia was particularly acute in matters of criminal justice, where they were not given equal treatment before the courts. Black women were subject to corporal punishment for trivial crimes like stealing butter or vagrancy while their white peers were given fines (Walker 2017, 56). Halifax County was the outlier in this regard, offering more leniency to Black residents relative to communities like Digby or Birchtown (Walker 2017, 57). The sum of these experiences prompted 1200 Black Loyalists to organize to leave the province for Sierra Leone and, despite strong opposition by the colonial government, they set sail in January 1792 (Saney 1998, 81).

The injustices and indignities that the Black Loyalists endured are an important foundational element to the development of what we might call a white-supremacist racial institutional order in Nova Scotia. The Black Loyalists were at once subject to the burdens of citizenship without receiving many of the benefits and were disproportionately punished in the nascent criminal justice system in the province (with this, of course, occurring before the development of a professional police force). A similar fate befell the Jamaican Maroons, who largely left the province after a miserable four-year tenure mostly spent constructing the Citadel in near-starvation conditions (Saney 1998, 81; Whitfield 2005, 11). The lesson taken by those in power in Nova Scotia was that, short of cheap labour, there was little benefit to the presence of Black communities. In 1815, the Nova Scotia Assembly voted to ban further Black immigration as there were enough "labourers and servants" in the province, though this ban was struck down by the British Parliament (Walker 1985, 8).

The jarring similarity between the resolution passed by the Nova Scotia Assembly and contemporary anti-immigrant sentiments points to the enduring nature of these patterns of oppression and discrimination (Newbold 2020). Here, we see the reinforcement of a racial concept of Black Nova Scotians as *other* – as impediments to the establishment of a settler society based on the “reward of labour” who were only fit for slavery (Whitfield 2005, 11). The prognostic frame used by white settlers to address this ‘impediment’ was (and is) for Black Nova Scotians to leave. We also see, however, the development of forms of resistance amongst Black communities, and the establishment of a distinct identity with ties to the African continent, and to the broader Black Atlantic. The next wave of Black migration to the province, known as the Black Refugees, would face similar barriers to full citizenship as the Loyalists, and would develop new strategies to combat them.

### **The Black Refugees**

The War of 1812 offered a new opportunity for enslaved Africans in the United States (particularly in the Georgia Sea Islands and Chesapeake areas) to seek freedom in British-held territory, including the areas now known as Nova Scotia and New Brunswick (Whitfield 2003, 92). The province was in dire need of labour to support its increased manufacturing efforts considering the ongoing war, and the colonial authorities saw an opening to return to a familiar wellspring of Black labourers that they could underpay (Saney 1998, 83). Of course, the resolution passed by the Nova Scotia Assembly in 1815 was just one indication of the resistance from white Nova Scotians to the influx of new Black immigrants, and combined with an economic slowdown in Halifax, conditions were not promising for even a partial acceptance of the Refugees (Saney 1998, 83).



The colonial government did its best to target and undermine the Refugees' rights claims in the early days of settlement to get them to leave. They decided to settle the Refugees on ten-acre farms in areas around Halifax like the Preston Townships and Beechville – areas that had long been known as the worst land in the province and practically inhospitable on plots of that size – in part because their inability to subsist on the land would force them to become a cheap labour supply for white farmers, just as they had done 25 years previous with the Black Loyalists (Whitfield 2003, 93). Increased immigration of white European day-labourers to the province combined with crop failures and bad weather created conditions that were so bad for the Refugees that the colonial government was forced to provide aid to stave off starvation (Whitfield 2005, 15). Despite the Refugees' diverse cultural, political, and spiritual backgrounds given the different areas they previously came from, they were treated like a homogenous – and unwanted – mass with little to offer the province (Whitfield 2005, 14). When the Refugees sought urban wage labour in Halifax to find a more sustainable source of sustenance, the legislature passed a law to prevent them from acquiring these jobs before abandoning it after Refugees intentionally ignored the legislation (Whitfield 2005, 16, 17). Here, we see the criminalization of the Refugees in a manner that would continue generations after they arrived through the intentional linkage of Blackness and criminality. The message from the colonial authorities, and from white settlers, was clear: the Black Refugees were not welcome in Nova Scotia.

This framing, institutionally reinforced in formal and informal ways, was met with resistance by the Black Refugees who began to organize and develop a sense of shared identity in response to the exclusionary tactics of the white colonial authorities. When Lord Dalhousie, who called the Refugees “slaves by habit and education”, tried to enter a treaty with the United

States to send the Refugees back, they resisted, and the treaty was cancelled (Whitfield 2005, 17; Cooper et al. 2019, 10). When he later offered to send the Refugees to Trinidad, only 95 people out of a population of 1600 decided to go – an act of profound significance considering the conditions of famine and destitution that these communities were placed in (Whitfield 2002, 47). Black Refugee resistance did not simply extend to refusal to leave their established home no matter the circumstances, but instead extended to the development of a salient and cohesive political identity that, according to Refugee historian Harvey Amani Whitfield, revolved around raising consciousness about their African heritage as well as the specificity of their experiences in Nova Scotia and advocating against the horrors of chattel slavery:

The identity developed by the Black Refugees had several components that included recognition of their double dispersal from Africa and the United States, attachment to their ancestral homeland of Africa, struggle with slavery and freedom, memories of slavery, promotion of abolitionism, resistance to hostile whites, and claims for citizenship within their new political home (Whitfield 2005, 19).

The political identity that the Refugees developed drew from their experiences of the Black Atlantic – including the horrors of slavery and the promise of renewal and return to the African continent – but they also drew from an attachment to the British colonial government in a way to distinguish themselves from an American state that thrived on the forced labour of Black people. This affiliation presented itself in what Whitfield describes as “public displays of loyalty” to the Crown, a staunch abolitionist stance fostered through faith-based organizations, and a pursuit of political inclusion (Whitfield 2005, 19). The Refugees’ development of a distinct identity claim, combined with their search for political inclusion and their advocacy for abolition adhere closely to Tilly’s discussion of the claims that collective actors make to governing institutions to frame their arguments of unity, as well as arguments for resources and for action (2006, 32). Here, the Refugees’ identity claims incorporated, rather than rejected, membership in the institutions that

they were advocating to, meaning that their presence was useful for the white British colonial subjects as a key distinguishing characteristic of British North America over their American enemies (Whitfield 2005, 22).

The external tensions of the political and social identity that the Refugees developed were obvious to observers at the time. The British state that they demonstrated loyalty to, whether as a matter of strategy or as an article of faith in the good intentions of the Crown, did not ever offer meaningful support in return. White British travellers to Nova Scotia observed the colony as an experiment in free Black labour, and one that largely led to poverty and destitution that was not spread evenly throughout the other communities in the area (McNairn 2008, 37). Crucially, however, these British observers attributed this failure to Black inferiority just as Lord Dalhousie did. Many believed that the Refugees could not be integrated into North American society, and instead ought to be removed (McNairn 2008, 39, 40).

A removal was not forthcoming – the Refugees stayed, despite the odds, due to the formation of thriving and salient social and political movements within and outside of the context of the church. The African United Baptist Association, founded by Reverend Richard Preston, emerged during this era beginning with the Cornwallis Street (now New Horizons) Baptist Church and spreading to 19 member churches across the province (Oliver 1953). The church created a space of endogenous spiritual, social, and political empowerment. As Harvey Amani Whitfield emphasizes when citing Frank Boyd’s historical genealogy of the Baptist church in the Preston Townships, a move to separate Black churches “signified an important transition from dependency on whites to self-determination,” though one that “had its limitations” (Whitfield 2003, 98). The Baptist Church gave life to organizations like the African

Abolition Society (Whitfield 2005, 23),<sup>32</sup> as well as the African Friendly Society which gave voice to community values and political perspectives (Whitfield 2003, 96).<sup>33</sup> Importantly, however, the identity claims of the Black Refugees also assert a distinction and agency that eventually evolve into standing claims – or claims that assert rights or protections because of this identity (Tilly 2006, 32). As Whitfield (2002) notes in his article ““We Can Do As We Like Here”: An Analysis of Self Assertion and Agency Among Black Refugees in Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1813-1821”, after decrying the feeble and barren land they were granted by the colonial authorities as a plot to ensure they would all die, the Black Refugees’ refusal to leave morphed into an identity premised on solidarity against a state that would put them back into the hands of enslavers, and an assertion via petitions to the government for more land based on their capacity to survive in these adverse circumstances (Whitfield 2002, 41, 45, 49). These articulations of identity as a premise for solidarity are important because they allow for the organizations that eventually emerged to operate under a shared sense of understanding and rapidly cohering policy goals.

Sometimes, these organizations affiliated with either the Liberal or the Progressive Conservative parties in subsequent elections, with community affiliation often depending on whether the politicians at the helm of the parties were actively seeking Black engagement and participation (Whitfield 2005, 20). Joseph Howe’s Liberals, for example, altered the tickets of location Preston residents were living under to freehold grants in 1840 (Whitfield 2005, 21). The

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32. This vignette from Whitfield about the African Abolition Society is revelatory: “It combined elements of the Refugees’ American background, British connection, and African origins. The Refugees maintained an anti-American attitude because they recalled their experience as American slaves and it dictated many of their concerns about communal security and the fate of black people in the Republic. American slavery had robbed many Black Refugees of family members and their anger over this and other injustices made them accept the difficult conditions of Nova Scotia” (2005, 23).

33. Whitfield elaborates: “Religious gatherings underpinned the social, political, and moral interests of the Black Refugee communities. They provided a sanctuary where the Refugees could voice common concerns and issues.”

Progressive Conservatives went one step further and involved Richard Preston in their political campaign in 1847. It was the Progressive Conservatives, however, who moved away from supporting Black Nova Scotians after they lost the 1847 provincial election, and after a fight broke out between Black Conservatives and Irish Catholic Liberals at a nomination event in Hammonds Plains (Whitfield 2005, 21).<sup>34</sup> The Refugees' propensity to seek out the political parties that offered, however temporarily, a route towards Black participation in the political process as well as self-determination via land grants is indicative of the binding concept that connected community advocacy: the freedom to decide and to build a community of care and solidarity.

The story of the Black Refugees is vital to one's understanding of racial institutional orders in Nova Scotia. The manifestation of explicit white supremacist discourses and the attendant framings of Black inferiority during the era – including a focus on criminality – were durable ideas that informed the development of governing institutions pre- and post-Confederation. From the still-unsettled injustices of land distribution and land claims in the Prestons to Lord Dalhousie's attempts to remove the Refugees due to their “climactic unsuitability” in Nova Scotia, the focus of the colonial government at the time on the exploitation and subjugation of the Black Refugees is a vital aspect of understanding how racialization has and continues to unfold in the province. Just as important, however, is the resistance to and contest of this institutional order by the Black Refugees through organization, community-building, faith, and the development of an explicitly Afro-diasporic identity that is uniquely and distinctly Nova

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<sup>34</sup> Whitfield notes that media criticism of the Progressive Conservative party for bringing Black voters to the event despite the fact that they, as property owners, were able to vote in the nomination ultimately prompted the Conservative retreat from supporting Black communities (2005, 22).

Scotian. This identity, and the movements it inspired, has been as durable as those that would seek its demise.

### **19th century Halifax – the school petitioners and self-help**

The struggles of the Black Loyalists, the Maroons, and later the Black Refugees in Halifax established the racial institutional order through which governing institutions would engage Black Haligonians. This engagement was not a relationship in any meaningful sense. Instead, Black Haligonians lived and advocated from a spectrum of conditions from near integration to what amounted to full segregation. This spectrum of conditions map onto class, rurality, and gender, and appears to have influenced the tactics used and the resources available to advocates in the area.

A push towards broader integration into civic life was the primary objective of advocacy for upwardly mobile middle-class Black Haligonians living in the North End of Halifax. The late Victorian era in the city brought extensive changes to the economic prospects of the region, as rapid industrialization as well as population growth. The benefits and burdens of this growth were unevenly distributed within the Black community living in the areas around Creighton and Maynard Streets, with a small minority of residents gaining access to increased education, opportunity, and membership within civic and organizational spaces (Fingard 1992, 172). To maintain that trajectory towards integration with the rest of the city and the region, Black North End residents sought respectability and acceptance from their white neighbours, as Fingard (1992) explains:

United by colour, they were nonetheless clearly divided by attitude and behaviour. Upwardly mobile blacks had about as much sympathy for the social misfits and 'undeserving' poor among their own people as their white counterparts had for theirs. What set them apart from their lesser brethren was not greater wealth or more prestigious occupations but their devotion to respectability. The worthy black citizens of Halifax

considered respectability to be the key, not only to their superiority over their rough brethren, but to equality with whites, dignity in status, and justice in the public sphere (Fingard 1992, 172).

For the upwardly mobile Black Haligonians of the Victorian era, then, increased proximity to white Haligonians in culture as well as attitude were perceived as the best ways to access social, economic, and political equality. It is from this perspective that some Black Haligonians contested both formal and informal segregation that maintained inequalities within the city. Educational institutions in the city and across the province, for example, were divided by *de jure* legislation like the *Education Acts* of 1836 and 1865 that allowed school boards to explicitly separate Black students into separate and unequal schools (Reynolds 2016, 50). The members of the Black elite petitioned the school boards in 1883 to integrate the schools in the area, and did so according to Lingard by speaking in a collective voice that had four distinguishing characteristics:

1. All of the official petitioners were men despite women doing the bulk of the organizing within individual schools as well as participating in the citizens' meetings about the issue;
2. Most of the signatories were prominent in civic life through faith-based and temperance organizations which distinguished them from the so-called 'undeserving' poor who drank alcohol;
3. Many of the petitioners actively sought out the respect of white Haligonians in public fora, and some grudgingly received it;
4. The petitioners believed that their status as longstanding middle-class taxpayers who participated in wider Halifax society, including in formal political arenas, would be sufficient to demonstrate that school integration was a right that they had earned (Fingard 1992, 173–78).

These organizing characteristics, and their attendant methods of organizing (petitions, citizens' meetings, partial boycotts, and informal agreements) are a blueprint that middle-class Black Haligonians advocating to governing institutions would repeatedly follow throughout the 20th century, even if the aspirations to whiteness and the patriarchal influences changed. These

methods relied on the idea that community organization, grounded in faith and in resilience, would be enough to overcome the oppression of racial injustice (Reynolds 2016, 167, 168). Moreover, these petitioners used core framing tasks to diagnose the social problem: that schools were segregated in the city. Through their advocacy, these petitioners also offered a prognosis (that schools should be integrated) and crucially, a motivation (they deserved this right because of their adherence to white Nova Scotian societal values of temperance and faith). The advocacy of the petitioners worked, but in an informal, ad-hoc format where ambitious and highly motivated parents were able to place their children in white schools while other Black children were kept in segregated classroom environments (Fingard 1992, 184).

Bridglal Pachai, (once the Director of the Black Cultural Centre and subsequently the executive director of the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission) framed these appeals and the tactics that drive them as a consequence of the profound racism that the petitioners, and Black Nova Scotians in general, face:

It has often been argued that Blacks got what they deserved and desired: separate institutions. What is not generally appreciated is that separate institutions and separate settlements evolved not because they were preferred but because they were forced upon the black communities by that segment of society which wielded influence and power [...] Given these circumstances, Blacks did more than make virtues out of necessities. Lacking acceptance accorded to white immigrants, they responded in the limited ways open to them. They petitioned relentlessly for government assistance to complement their own efforts at self-help (Pachai 1987, 8).

Pachai's words are clarifying and help to shape this ongoing interrogation of self-determination. The brutality of white supremacy cannot be erased in this story of community empowerment – without it, what would be the impetus for resistance? – but a focus solely on the deprivation caused by racism also does not begin to account for the multiplicity of approaches that Black Nova Scotians have taken towards self-determination in these lands. To attribute these efforts to



a reactionary sense of injustice is to strip agency away from people, families, and communities over generations. To ignore the presence of this injustice is to paper over the horrors of a political order that promoted Black victimhood through paternalism and inequity. Here, the school-petitioners had agency and embraced a distinct identity of their own to make distinct standing claims: that by virtue of their class and their temperance, they deserved formal equality in an educational context. Unlike the Black Refugees, their arguments and petitions did not develop upon ideals of solidarity, but rather sought access by virtue of their class and their behaviour to a system that viewed them as inferior. Access to this system was limited, because their class membership and their adherence to standards of temperance and respectability did not allow them to transcend the binding concepts of Black inferiority and victimhood that were at the root of the legislation they were contesting.

It is simplistic, however, to launch critiques against those that used the resources they had available to them to make the change that was relevant in their own communities – regardless of one’s alignment with their political and ideological commitments. Instead, if we grapple with the discomfort of communities that are aware that they need to seek support from those who would deprive them of the full expression of their rights, we can begin to understand how self-determination and government support and acceptance can sit in uneasy proximity as frames for policy change. The upwardly mobile Black Haligonians of the 19th century knew that the political order they interacted with as citizens would not facilitate the full expression of their citizenship, or their humanity. Therefore, they took what they could get without compromising on what it is that they sought: opportunity, equality, and dignity as a distinct set of communities within the municipality (and, to some extent, within the province). The cost of this identifiable strategy was a reliance on the individual goodwill of white citizens in positions of power in the

municipality – a challenging strategy that, throughout the 20th century, would only deepen in its complexity.

## **Conclusion**

The experiences of the first migrants of African descent to Nova Scotia were foundational to understanding the formative experiences of their descendants. These communities endured enslavement, broken promises, and exclusion, and sought the “freedom dreams” (as identified by Robin R.G. Kelley and cited in Chapter Two) through flight to Sierra Leone. These early communities expressed those very same dreams, however, by staying in Nova Scotia despite the ongoing forms of exclusion and discrimination that they faced. The Black Refugees formed a distinct political identity that allowed them to leverage political affiliation with the major parties in the province to ensure that their communities would hold onto the land they were promised. In so doing, they provided a blueprint that was adopted by the school-petitioners of the 1880s, shaping their advocacy as well as their search for political and social inclusion. As we will learn in the next chapter, this blueprint had some successes – it allowed, for example, those that followed to defend their North End communities from the threat of urban renewal by adhering to similar tactics and principles. The downfall of that approach, however, was that those that could not engage in respectability politics were treated as disposable, creating a new form of advocacy that refused to engage with dominant discourses of inferiority and victimhood.

Chapter Five – 20th century Halifax - Africville, Black Power, and the challenges of unity

*I hop back on my bike and take a right at the base of the Citadel onto Sackville Street. I pass the Halifax Public Gardens – a site filled with commemoration to Boer War veterans and soldiers who gleefully leapt into wars of conquest against people in my homeland: Nigeria.<sup>35</sup> I smirk as I pass these beautiful, if hostile, grounds, and push on towards Summer Street. I'm close to my next destination: the Nova Scotia Archives. Here, I hope to learn about how organizers in the 20th century – those whose exploits loom large over the ways that we advocate in Halifax today – worked to create social change.*

The advocacy template used by the school-petitioners decades earlier was a path followed by 20th century advocates within the health system like Pearleen Oliver, who fought for the integration of nursing schools in Halifax. Oliver, a stalwart of the African United Baptist Association (AUBA) as well as a co-founder of the Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NSAACP) in 1945, was a pivotal figure in the integration of the Victoria General Hospital's nursing program in 1946 (Calliste 1996, 283). A 1991 interview

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35. I participated in an alt-historical walking tour of the Halifax Public Gardens in June 2020. Some excerpts from my comments will help to clarify the statement above: "Clonard Keating was a Nova Scotian who was killed when trying to colonize what we now call Nigeria. He's commemorated here in the Public Gardens. It's important that I give you a bit of historical context for why Keating was there, why, and where he was killed, and what happened next [...] Keating sailed up the Niger River and ended up in a place called Yelwa. Yelwa is in Central Nigeria, pretty far away from where my family is from [Ibadan, which is in the South-West]. He tried to steal some canoes from some villagers, who refused to give them to him and his unit. His response was to kill their king, steal their canoes, and also attempt to abduct villagers to work for him. Keating was a real winner. As Keating tried to escape, he and his unit ran out of ammo. The villagers came at them with their own weapons - bows and arrows among other items. They tend to work a lot better in close combat. The men he tried to abduct overturned the stolen canoes in the river, and the villagers, who obviously knew how to navigate the water far better than Keating and his ilk did, managed to wound and eventually kill Keating. In other words, run up and get done up. That's what Keating is commemorated for: being terrible at murder, enslavement, and theft. The Brits, in their classic form, sent 100 troops to Yelwa shortly afterwards and burned the whole village down. This is the brutality and horror of the colonial regime. This is what Halifax remembers."

between Oliver and researcher Catherine Arseneau reveals the catalyzing incident behind Oliver's advocacy:

The girl from Guysborough matriculated from High School and passed to go into nursing. If you were white and had grade 11, you could train. She was going to the V.G. [Victoria General Hospital] in Halifax and when she arrived she was required to complete a registration form that asked for her racial identity. She put "coloured" on it because her mother had coloured blood in her...and when they saw that in the office...they said you made a mistake. She said, "No, I'm coloured." The Hospital staff member replied: "Oh well then, we can't take you here. You cannot train" (Reynolds 2016, 168).

After comforting the woman who had been turned away from the V.G., Oliver embarked on a public advocacy campaign that took her from speeches at the Coloured Citizens' Improvement League in the North End to the Lord Nelson Hotel in the wealthy, predominately white South End to speak to prominent businessmen – in effect breaking the colour line that shaped life in the city: "Here I am in the dining hall with the beautiful tables where I had never been before. And I'm at the head table...So I told them...what conditions were like when I grew up and what conditions are like today. And if we are fighting for democracy overseas, we'd better do something right here. They liked my speech...so I got invited again" (Reynolds 2016, 170). Oliver's advocacy within these moneyed settings eventually paid off – the chairperson at the helm of the Halifax Children's Hospital asked her to identify two students who might be suitable for placement in the hospital's nursing program, and these students were the first Black nursing graduates in Canada in 1948 (Reynolds 2016, 171).

Oliver's advocacy follows the model of the late Victorian school integrationists in many important ways. Her status as a stalwart of the African United Baptist Association and as an upstanding member of the community facilitated her awareness of the issue, as community members sought her out when students were being turned away from the V.G. Her social status also meant that she was a safe and respectable figure to cross the colour line and speak to the

wealthy businessmen during their luncheons. The content of Oliver's speeches to the businessmen aimed to expose the contradictory nature of fighting in the Second World War while fellow Haligonians suffered without rights, continuing the discursive tendency of the school-integrationists to advocate for human rights based on deep and abiding civic ties, rather than from a normative principle of natural rights abstracted from civic obligations. Finally, the eventual outcome of her advocacy – the integration of nursing schools in the province – emerged in an ad-hoc, contingent form where she was asked to hand-select a small number of viable candidates to begin this process, and the right to train as a nurse was eventually expanded to reach a larger number of potential graduands once the white executives began to push for the change (Reynolds 2016, 171).

This chapter assesses the tensions of ideology and tactics that underpinned critical junctures in Black organizing in Halifax during the 20th century. I discuss the destruction of Africville and the emergence of Black Power, before going in depth into the formation of Black United Front and the organization's complex relationship to ideas of self-determination and community accountability. I explore the challenges of coalition-building and co-optation in a global and local context of Black liberation struggles, and I identify the role of the municipal, provincial, and federal governments in entrenching discourses of Black inferiority and victimhood in their policies.

The model of advocacy that Oliver used to integrate nursing schools would later be used by the NSAACP to make advancements in fair employment, to fight against the segregation of public spaces through the Viola Desmond case, and to push for the creation of the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission (Calliste 1996, 288, 289). The NSAACP added data collection about racism in housing and employment to their tactical arsenal to convince policymakers of the

necessity for change (Walker 2012, 177). The fundamental premise of the group, as James W. St G. Walker articulates, was that if they proved themselves worthy and respectable enough in the eyes of white Haligonians and white Nova Scotians, they would eventually achieve full equality in formal and informal arenas (Walker 2012, 177,178). The benefits of this form of advocacy, in a similar way to the mechanisms of school integration in the 1880s, were unevenly distributed among Black Haligonians. For residents of Africville, perceived to be extremely poor and on the margins of city life, such appeals for justice were never available.

### **Africville**

The advocacy efforts used by the school-integrationists and the NSAACP were not typically available to the residents of Africville. A village of around 400 residents on the shores of the Bedford Basin at the extreme northern tip of the Halifax peninsula, Africville was founded in the 1840s by William Brown and William Arnold who purchased the land from white merchants and set up a church, a school, and a few small stores (Nelson 2000, 165, 166). The village, while just as barren as the land in the Preston Townships, at least offered residents access to fish in the Bedford Basin and proximity to wage labour in the Halifax core. That proximity, however, meant that the burdens of Halifax's development as an industrial hub during the Victorian era and into the 20th century were downloaded onto the village. The city chose to place its dump close to the village shortly after it was founded, and then added the Rockhead Prison and the infectious diseases hospital close to the site to add to the slaughterhouses, tanning plants and oil storage facilities encircling the space (Nelson 2000, 166). At the same time, the city neglected to provide other essential infrastructure like sewers or potable water in the village despite significant investment in these services under the auspices of public health promotion (Loo 2010, 26; Rutland 2018, 84). These choices are a quintessential example of what we now

call environmental racism and worked to frame the site in the minds of white Haligonians as a cesspool of disease (Loo 2010, 26). Ted Rutland, author of the text *Displacing Blackness: Planning, Power and Race in Twentieth-Century Halifax* explains the municipality's approach to Africville in the early 20th century:

The board of health's mandate to order sewer construction when it was "in the interest of the public health" was consistently ignored when it came to this community [...] Surface pavement and street lighting were consistently withheld in Africville as well. Indeed, the community eventually came to be known precisely by its absence of pavement and associated conveniences: "Where the road ends," it was often said, "there's Africville" (Rutland 2018, 88).

Africville's status in the eyes of white Haligonians as a community of deprivation and disease was only worsened by its perceived status as a hotbed of crime. Historian Michael Boudreau notes in his book *City of Order: Crime and Society in Halifax, 1918-35* that Africville stood as a paragon of perceived Black deviance in the city:

Africville, while physically a part of Halifax, remained a social appendage of, and a so-called "national blot" on, the city. During the 1920s and 1930s, this "segregated black settlement," located on the northern extremity of the Halifax peninsula, was known as a place where blacks and some whites could go for "boot-leg booze and fun," notably prostitution. It became, in essence, a potent symbol of black "deviance" (Boudreau 2012, 162).

Africville, in essence, became the city's dumping ground both in terms of physical waste and social problems – a place where municipal and provincial governing institutions of all types abandoned their responsibility to their constituents (Nelson 2000, 168). Police officers presumed that trouble in Africville was internal to its residents, and never bothered to patrol the area to prevent crime – a fact disputed by residents who identified the troublemakers as visitors to the village in a 1919 petition to city council (Boudreau 2012, 162).

Unlike the aspirational Black residents of the North End, however, Africville's petition for equal service provision under the law fell on deaf ears. The Police Commission instead

suggested that Africville residents form their own police department as they had “no spare men to send such a distance” (Boudreau 2012, 162, 163). The contrast between the partial acceptance by white Halifaxians of the petitions of the school-petitioners and the pleas of Africville residents demonstrate the degree to which the village’s residents were deprived even a basic capacity to organize for change. The petitioners’ strategy outlined above was completely unavailable to Africville residents. The area was already framed in the minds of white Halifax residents as a space of alcoholism, crime, and prostitution, and so an appeal founded on the respectability and humanity of the residents was simply ignored and disregarded.

Fifty years later, with the prospect of “urban renewal” and “slum clearance” looming for the residents of Africville as well as the residents of the North End, a similar pattern played itself out.<sup>36</sup> The prospects for “slum clearance” were sold to constituents as a matter of public health, as the services like potable water and sewers that the municipality denied Africville (and to a lesser extent to the North End) were said to degrade the mental, physical, and moral health of the residents (Rutland 2018, 124). Black residents of the North End represented by Rev. William Pearly Oliver (husband of Pearleen Oliver and co-founder of the Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People) challenged the municipality’s proposal on the basis that residents of the area were homeowners and not tenants, meaning that they had enough motivation (and enough capital) to warrant a stay on displacement (Rutland 2018, 125).<sup>37</sup> Here, we see Rev. Oliver reconstituting the well-worn pattern of respectability politics to appeal to council and to resist plans to displace Black North End residents.

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36. While a robust discussion of the genesis of liberal urban renewal discourses is beyond the scope of this chapter, this terrain is well-covered in *Displacing Blackness* as well as the 1974 study *Africville: The Life and Death of a Canadian Black Community* written by Donald Clairmont and Dennis Magill.

37. On this point, Rutland notes that the municipality’s plan to displace North End residents was abandoned mostly because of financing rather than because of a sense of moral obligation.



Oliver, alongside other prominent community advocates including Gus Wedderburn as well as three members of the Africville Ratepayers Association, helped to form the Halifax Human Rights Advisory Committee (HHRAC) to intervene in the relocation in 1962 (Loo 2010, 29). Formed after some Africville residents wrote to prominent human rights advocate Sid Blum about the impending relocation, the HHRAC was a key player in relocation and oversaw the compensation agreements that some Africville residents agreed with the city. In keeping with some of the key players' political inclinations, the HHRAC's priorities were towards integrating Africville residents into mainstream Haligonian society (Loo 2010, 31). With the majority of HHRAC members being progressive, middle-class residents (some Black, some white) with considerable social and political connections, the group was able to prompt the city to access the services of Albert Rose, the architect behind Regent Park.<sup>38</sup> Yet, as Loo explains, his presence did not go the way HHRAC advocates had planned:

While forming a coalition with civil liberties advocates strengthened the position of Africville's residents as Borovoy argued it would, doing so did not guarantee their wishes would be heeded. Both they and the members of the Halifax Human Rights Advisory Committee – some of whose members lived in Africville – agreed that there was a housing problem in Africville and that it would be useful for the city to have expert advice. But in recommending Albert Rose, a proponent of integration, the committee narrowed down the possible futures for Africville to one: relocation. Despite the fact that many residents had made it clear they did not want to leave Africville, Rose told them it was in society's (and their) best interests to do so and to integrate themselves with the rest of the city (Loo 2010, 32).

The limitations of HHRAC's advocacy became clear over time. Despite including some Africville residents onto the committee, the group was largely structured to favour the perspectives and interests of the middle-class progressives. These perspectives were shared by Black and white members, and largely saw Africville as a social and political problem that could

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38. In an ironic twist of fate, Regent Park itself became a relocated and gentrified community in a manner that draws comparisons to Africville, though 50 years later.

be resolved by integration rather than by the provision of more effective and equitable services to the community. Years later, Gus Wedderburn saw the error in his approach to the community: “Listening to residents talk about the rich and fulfilling lives they had led and what they had lost in the relocation made him realize he had not understood the place fully. Holding up a photograph of the community, he says, “I did not see the flowers . . . I did not see the flowers””(Loo 2010, 24). By orienting their advocacy towards garnering respect and integration from white Haligonians, the HHARC inadvertently offered the city a pretext for the decision they had already planned to make without consulting the majority of Africville residents.

Furthermore, the HHRAC relied upon external consultants like Blum, Borovoy, and Rose as experts to facilitate the transformation (and eventual destruction) of a community few of them had ever visited, aligning national and international frames of urban renewal with locally rooted frames of Black inferiority. The group’s inclination towards a technocratic form of advocacy was in-keeping with what Daniel McNeil calls the “shy elitism” that accompanied the human-rights intellectual ecosystem of this era (2021, 334). These experts endorsed the “liberal-welfare” model of relocation, which positioned Africville residents as victims in need of “caretakers” that would usher them to a modern city via urban renewal (Claremont and Magill 1999, 7). This discourse extended far beyond the HHRAC – it was, in fact, a product of an extensive and nationwide effort by the federal government in tandem with municipalities to transform Canada’s cities towards modernity via an expert-driven process that used white, middle-class values as the ‘neutral’ standard to which all communities ought to aspire (Rutland 2018, 118; Loo 2019, 7). Importantly, as Tina Loo argues, this standard applied to Black and white residents in the North End as well as Africville residents (2019, 14). It was the HHRAC’s engagement of external expertise, therefore, that facilitated the shifting of renewal discourses from the North End

residents who had access and connections to those in Africville who did not. As Daniel McNeil notes in “Even Canadians Find It a Bit Boring: A Report on the Banality of Multiculturalism”, these experts were welcome provided they confirmed liberal orthodoxy, as opposed to outsiders who contradicted it like the Black Panthers, who we will encounter later in this narrative (2021, 413-414). In positioning expertise ahead of community engagement and broad-based support, the HHRAC created an exclusionary dynamic that ultimately served to foster distrust as opposed to solidarity.

Africville residents had an explicit knowledge of the racism that was the cause behind their substandard municipal services and resisted this oppression by surviving – through mutual aid, subsistence from the land, and through community-based labour (Rutland 2018, 146). They did not require caretakers and were experts in their own context. A 1962 survey by the Dalhousie Institute of Public Affairs showed that the majority of residents enjoyed living in Africville and did not wish to leave, but this did not matter to Council, who expropriated land and removed all Africville residents by November 1969 (Rutland 2018, 146). As Nelson explains, Council decided to proceed with its plans for “urban renewal” without worrying about whether this choice would further entrench poverty or racism:

Not surprisingly, it seems that there was little space to argue Africville residents’ claims as contextualized within a history of poverty, racism and colonialism inflicted by the same dominant group enacting current violences. I have struggled with the problematic of identifying the precise legal (illegal?) moves made by the city, as it seems in all accounts I have read that the destruction of the community was simply ‘carried out’ [...] a commonsense logic prevails, composed of interwoven themes of understandings to which ‘we’, as rational, race-neutral beings, are assumed to adhere (2000, 174).

Nelson’s point about the lack of conscience or consideration that Council gave the residents of Africville demonstrates the stigma and oppression that white Halifaxians placed upon members of this community over a century. This stigma, entrenched by pathologizing discourses of

disease and criminality founded upon race and class-based hierarchies within the municipality, neutered the organizing capacity of Africville residents despite their best attempts at resistance.

The destruction of Africville demonstrates the white-supremacist racial institutional order evolving to its 20th century form. Entreaties to colourblindness and rational improvement-based discourses replaced explicit statements of Black inferiority by leaders within governing institutions (Loo 2010, 28). As Loo highlights, conditions in Africville were perceived as a “welfare problem” that required solving, largely without consultation (Loo 2010, 27). Policymakers preoccupied with transnational concepts of slum clearance and urban renewal translated these ideas through racialized and historically constructed perceptions of Black residents as being disease-ridden and predisposed to crime (Rutland 2010; Loo 2010). The combination of these taken-for-granted ideas about Black inferiority and a national policy paradigm that facilitated relocation programs meant that the destruction of Africville was a fait accompli.

### **Black Power in Halifax**

It is here, in the aftermath of the destruction of Africville, that the lineage of a credible contest to the white-supremacist racial institutional order in Nova Scotia garnered new momentum. Like much of the Black Atlantic, Nova Scotia experienced the ruptures and upheavals of the 1960s through a prism of racial conflict and protest. For white media observers, if not white Haligonians writ large, there existed a Manichaeian binary within the Black community: on the one hand, the old order of institutional advocates like the NSAACP who worked tirelessly within the formal boundaries of civic engagement to appeal to the conscience of white residents; and on the other, the raucous, radical Black Power activists who sanctioned violence and sought a form of separatism. This 1967 report from Murray Barnard of *Maclean's*

about a conflict between Black youth in the North End and Halifax Regional Police officers is indicative of the contrast observers drew between important organizers in the city:

As in the U.S., Negro leaders in Halifax differ in their militancy toward the white community. But they agree that Halifax could easily get what it fears most from its Negro quarters: a race riot [...] In any case, the new competition brings up a vital question: Who's likely to do more to avert the danger of race riots in Halifax — Rocky Jones, a Black Power advocate urging young Negroes to examine their relationship to white society, or Buddy Daye, a congenial moderate trying to distract them with volleyball and ping pong and a lot of dandy games? (Barnard 1967)

The well-worn tropes found in Barnard's writing about Black organizing in Halifax, reductive as they were, help to outline some key figures and stances in this pivotal moment for Black activism in the municipality. He mentions Delmore "Buddy" Daye, the former champion boxer turned community organizer who worked in the North End to provide opportunities for Black youth before running as an NDP candidate in the 1967 provincial election.

Barnard also mentions a figure that is central to this moment, and to 20th century Halifax in general: Burnley "Rocky" Jones. Rocky Jones was an esteemed lawyer and activist who exposed a generation of Black youth who had seen the harm caused by racist institutions to the virtues of Black liberation and self-determination as political frames. Born in Truro in 1941, he worked over the course of his life to highlight the workings of institutional and structural racism in the province and the country. In doing so, he became a driving force behind many of the institutional shifts that Halifax and Nova Scotia would undergo in the latter parts of the 20th century – from the founding of the Transition Year Program at Dalhousie University to arguing the pivotal *RDS v Her Majesty The Queen* case in the Supreme Court of Canada that established the rules for applying social context (especially race) in judging across the country. Rocky's reflections on this vibrant and rich life experience were captured in the oral history *Burnley "Rocky" Jones: Revolutionary* before his death in 2013.

The story Jones presents of that fateful day in 1967, and of the dynamics underpinning Black organizing in the city and in the province, offers far more complexity in terms of approach and roles than the account offered by Barnard. The co-founder of Club Kwacha, the Nova Scotia Project as well as a co-founder of the Afro-Canadian Liberation Movement, Rocky was well-known to what he deemed as the “traditional” Black leadership in town, but saw little hope for changing the oppressive conditions that Black Haligonians lived within without direct confrontation and action:

We’re already into the sixties and the Black community is still excluded from mainstream economic and educational activities. It’s hard for people to understand how people in the Black community were treated [...] The role of the police is to protect the community but they’re not protecting the community, they’re occupying the community and they’re using the tactics of an occupying force and we want them out. So in order to have them out we figured we needed a force to protect the community, because drugs were just starting to come in. So we set up our own police force (Jones 2016, 87).

The obvious parallel for Jones’ rhetoric here is to African American Black Power luminaries like Huey Newton, Kwame Ture and George Jackson, whose aggressive and militant approach to occupying police forces in their own context prompted massive mobilizing efforts across the nation. He speaks of the contrasts between moderate and radical stances as a matter of tactical disagreement rather than a burning personal or philosophical animus:

We were coming with a philosophy of participatory democracy, of self-determination. We had to connect with the internal leadership, and we had to confront the establishment. This included some of the major Black institutions, and it certainly included the government. The prevailing attitude among that “official” leadership was that you have to cooperate with government; government will be your friend and solve your problems [...] If you want government to cooperate, you can’t go confronting it. You send petitions and you have meetings and you persuade the government. This was not going to be our modus vivendi. As a result our relationship became frayed with this committee [the Halifax Advisory Committee on Human Rights], with the NSAACP (Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Colored People), with all or almost all of the traditional spokespeople of the Black community. Despite all this I had good personal relationships with all these people (Jones 2016, 94).

Jones' ecumenical approach speaks to confrontation with Black traditional leadership and to government speaks to an ever-growing tactical awareness that goes largely uncaptured in accounts like that of Barnard's. He freely admitted that his start in activism in Toronto was largely accidental – a combination of a happenstance attendance at a protest outside of the American consulate in 1965 and a reflection on his lived experience growing up in segregated Nova Scotia – but he quickly deepened his involvement in the mostly-white leftist axis of anti-war, civil rights and labour activists in Toronto (Jones 2016, 58, 59).

When he moved back to Halifax, however, he realized that the mobilizing efforts in Toronto or Montreal had little hope of working in Halifax, where Black community members had a distinct approach to assigning organizational authority that depended on factors like family kinship, religious standing and an authenticity that emerged from speaking to perceived local issues as opposed to abstract stances related to rights claims in other places (Jones 2016, 95, 100, 101). To combat this, Jones and his co-organizers addressed the practical and direct concerns of Black North End residents and tried to educate them around what they perceived to be the limited political lens they held (Jones 2016, 100). Moreover, Jones realized that anti-capitalist organizers neglected the role of racism in perpetuating capitalist exploitation and oppression. He gives an anecdote of workers on the Halifax docks who “had a vested interest in keeping Black people out of the unions and off of the docks” (Jones 2016, 103). Jackie Barkley, a white antiracist organizer who Jones worked in alliance with for years, affirmed Jones' sentiments about white anti-capitalist organizers when I interviewed her:

I think the white left deserves a profound self-critique for not being able or finding a way to sustain the relationships with the then development of the Black Power movement away from a Marxist analysis. But the whole world was complicated, right? I mean, you know, the Black Panther Party was working with the Algerian revolutionaries and revolutionaries all over the continent, going for trips to Ho Chi Minh City and going to

trips to China. It's a period that did not require the white left to examine its white supremacist attitudes, because the Black leadership was right there making alliances with us that were denuded of any kind of self-criticism. So it's like, "Hey, no, the Panthers, the radical Black activists, they want me to be involved. So there's nothing matter with me." I think is a deep thread that continues to run through white progressive movements (J. Barkley, interview with author, October 7 2021).

The white workers' perspective, a vestige of the white-supremacist institutional order that mobilized to deprive the Black Refugees of work in Halifax during a famine, prompted a pivot from Jones towards an explicit Black Power stance. Here, Jones and Barkley articulate a dynamic described by Michael C. Dawson when speaking about Black exclusion from the Leninist and social democratic left in the United States (Dawson 2013). Through an erasure of both the role of racism in depriving Black organizers from prominent roles within radical and social-democratic forms of anti-capitalist organizing, as well as an erasure of the contributions of Black organizers to radical histories, Black anti-capitalists have effectively been shunned from the institutional organs of the left (Dawson 2013, 16, 17). Rocky's response echoed that of the Panthers and of Black radicals across the Black Atlantic: "In order to fight this I cannot rely on someone who is oppressing me to fight my battle for me. I can have an alliance at a given time if we both have some power and there is a reason for a particular coalition or alliance, but generally speaking I can only rely on myself and others like me" (Jones 2016, 103).

This pivot from an integrationist ethos to that of explicit and vocal form of Black self-determination uninterested in any form of external support is crucial to understanding the purported divide between traditional Black leadership and the new Black radicals. Instead of a disagreement, Jones is describing an evolution based on a failed attempt at the older way. This nuance, small as it may be, is vital in accounting for the contrast in approaches but never makes an appearance in the reporting of figures like Barnard.



The erasure of the role of Black women in the larger narrative of this era of Black activism is another way that Barnard's reporting misses the subtleties that shaped the terrain on the ground in Halifax. While it is true that Rocky's initial tilt towards direct and confrontational action reflected, as Agnes Calliste notes, a patriarchal orientation to Black radical movements that held across the nation and erased Black women's needs and organizing efforts to subordinate roles within activist spaces, this tendency does not and should not mean that the advocacy of Black women in this era was somehow less important (Calliste 1995, 132).

As Reakash Walters reminds us, three generations of women in Jones' own family were integral in Black organizing in the province and in Halifax (2020). Jones' mother, Willena Jones, was a stalwart of the Women's Institute of the African United Baptist Association for many years – fighting as Pearleen Oliver fought to desegregate schools and other institutions in her home in Truro (Walters 2020, 389). Oliver herself was a vital ally for Rocky Jones in the early days of Club Kwacha. Jones describes Oliver as “running interference” between him and her husband William Pearly, while offering support for the burgeoning organization he was tasked with leading (Jones 2016, 78). Joan Jones, Rocky's spouse at the time, was also a co-founder of Club Kwacha, and was vital in formulating the strategy behind and political orientation of the movement – crafting many of the public statements that Rocky would deliver (Walters 2020, 399, 400). Later in life, she was also the driver behind the founding of Black History Month in the province, and sat on the Advisory Group on Race Relations that would process the events of the 1991 uprising discussed in Chapter Six (Tutton 2019). Finally, Rocky's sister Lynn was and is an iconic and unique figure in Canadian labour organizing among other interests – forging a path that included the 1995 occupation of the Canada Employment Centre on Gottingen Street

for 122 days which was the longest occupation of a federal government building in Canadian history (Walters 2020, 407).

Their stories and their experiences are vital to understanding the dynamics that shaped the organizing landscape in Halifax throughout the 20th century. By excluding them from the conventional analysis of Black leadership in the era, observers miss a wealth of experience, as well as a crucial facet of the tactical inclinations of the figures they claim led the movement. The stark contrasts observers like Barnard draw between important Black figures indicates the lack of nuance with which these observers see them – static, one-dimensional characters with little capacity to grow. Such categorizations have never been true and would be quickly discarded by those who they were applied to.

### **The Panthers and the creation of the Black United Front**

Despite the lack of nuance present in accounts of the divergent perspectives amongst Black community members in Halifax, one incident did garner enough attention – both good and bad – to completely shift the dynamics of Black organizing in the city. After a visit to the Congress of Black Writers in October 1968, Rocky and Joan Jones invited prominent members of the Black Panthers including Stokely Carmichael (later Kwame Ture) and Miriam Makeba back to Halifax for what Rocky had hoped would be a relaxing, and anonymous break (Jones 2016, 118). Rocky underestimated the degree of interest that Carmichael, Makeba and company would draw from the media and from the police, especially after Carmichael and Jones highlighted the inevitability of violence as part of Black liberation efforts in their comments in Montreal (Walker 2012, 175). As more Panthers came to Halifax to organize around Black self-determination and pride, the assumption that violence and chaos would follow was amplified by moderates of all races, including Gus Wedderburn of the NSAACP who warned: “Time is running out, let’s start

finding solutions to the problems of the Negro” (Walker 2012, 175). This feeling of impending chaos intensified when George Sams, an American Panther, was arrested for carrying an illegal gun in Rocky’s car, and Rocky himself was arrested as the owner of the vehicle despite not being present at the time of the initial arrest (Jones 2016, 122). Yet, as Jones notes, the Panthers had little interest in organizing explicit self-defence strategies:

It wasn’t all confrontation, and apart from George Sams, the Panthers did not talk about or advocate violence [...] They did a lot of education around the issues of love and self-love and how we had to love and respect each other as African people. They didn’t talk at all about insurrection, they were really smart enough to understand that Nova Scotia was a different environment than the large northern cities in the States. They talked more about building the community so the community could have more control over institutions (Jones 2016, 123).

The Panthers were, in fact, the impetus behind the organization of a Black Family Meeting for Black people across the city and across the province on November 30, 1968. The meeting, which drew as many as 400 participants, incorporated moderates like Oliver and Wedderburn, radicals like Jones, and beyond (Pachai 1987, 249). According to Jones, the constellation of actors expressed predictably oppositional perspectives, but the meeting still produced a profound outcome – the creation of the Black United Front of Nova Scotia:

No matter what was put on the agenda, no matter what we tried to talk about that night, there was some extreme position that was taken by someone, so you couldn’t get through anything. What did happen, and what was really good, was that for the first time, even in that meeting with all the dissention, people realized that we as Black people could control what we did. We told the press they couldn’t come in, and we were in control. Cops couldn’t come in, we were in control [...] It was very clear and definite that this organization was to be a coalition of all of the organizations and not something in its own right. And they would be able to have representatives, and we would make decisions from there (Jones 2016, 126, 127).

The pressure on both moderate Black organizations and governing institutions in Halifax caused by the Panthers’ presence opened important opportunities for mobilization and coalition-building in Halifax’s Black community. For moderate Black institutions, the prospect of Black

“problems” being adjudicated by the wider public and of losing the capacity to be included into the civic culture of Halifax through institutional acceptance prompted at least a surface-level engagement with radical Black organizers, if only to make sure that they did not radicalize more community members (Pachai 1987, 249). In so doing, both sides realized that there may be some tactical advantage to a strategic coalition designed to mobilize towards Black self-determination in the city and the province. As W.P. Oliver noted in an interview cited by Pachai, the time had come for an organization “of anti-violence, in favour of a new firmness, dignity, aggressiveness, even militance...wanting action in the immediate future” (Pachai 1987, 249). Such rhetoric would never be espoused by the school-integrationists of the late 19th century, or even Oliver half a decade earlier, and appears to be at least a partial recognition that an outwardly conciliatory approach with governing institutions was unlikely to produce markedly different outcomes to those that were ongoing.

For municipal and provincial governing institutions, the presence of the Panthers as well as the creation of the Black United Front prompted a pivot towards amelioration to little effect. The presence of a credible, and potentially radical Black movement disrupted incremental reforms long in the making. The creation of the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission, for instance, was a transformation that the NSAACP had advanced over the course of a decade. But when the Commission was announced at a conference a week after the Black Family Meeting with a white journalist named Martin Schiff from Toronto as its lead, Black community members felt tokenized and aggrieved (Calliste 1996, 295; Jones 2016, 129). That frustration was only amplified when another speaker at the Human Rights Conference where the appointment was announced raised the Black Power fist and cried out “freedom now!” (Walker 2012, 183). The transformation in the sentiments of Black community members opened up a discursive

opportunity for radical activists to point out the lack of respect and lack of care demonstrated by the province's choice among many others, but it also opened up a space for moderate advocates to back-channel with state actors to negotiate a way of pacifying dissent.

### **Black United Front and government funding**

The front cover of the document *Social Change Through Black Self-determination*, published by the Black United Front in 1974, tells a conflicted story. The stark orange colour scheme and glossy, professional print wrestles the reader's attention to the document. I imagine the document sitting beneath paperwork on a nameless policymaker's desk in 1975 – a hint of orange peeping out underneath stacks of manila envelopes and legal-size folders, and I imagine said nameless policymaker reaching beneath the stack to pull out this magazine. One might expect, given the title of the document and its colour scheme, the figure on the front of this attention-grabbing document to strike a confrontational pose: a Black Power fist, or a stare directly at the reader. Instead, the young Black woman front and centre on the cover stares away from the reader, looking softly into the distance. The reader sees her pearl earring, her turtleneck, and little else – not even her hair.



*Figure 2: Social Change through Black Self-Determination cover*

The contradictions that the cover demonstrates continue throughout the document, and are representative in many ways of the tensions endemic to BUF itself. I see references to renewed Black pride and consciousness across the diaspora (“In the past 20 years of political struggle Black communities throughout the world have experienced a rebirth of a consciousness and pride lost long ago”), and references to organization as a means of overcoming the echoes of slavery

and present-day oppression (“Though the institution of slavery has left itself indelibly imprinted on the past social-consciousness of Nova Scotians there is now an increased optimism on the part of Black Nova Scotians that these problems can be overcome with organization. Thus the importance of BUF”) (Black United Front of Nova Scotia 1975, 2, 3).

These seemingly radical stances that recognize the complicity of the Canadian state in a global system of oppression that Black people struggled against for 20 years, however, sits uneasily next to the budgetary statement: “BUF was funded in 1970 by the Welfare Grants section of the Department of National Health and Welfare for a five-year period. Since that time BUF has diversified its funding sources to the point where the organization now receives funding from several federal and provincial departments” (Black United Front of Nova Scotia 1975, 7). Elsewhere, the document refers to service delivery (“One of the objectives of BUF was the gathering of a Black professional staff who were committed and dedicated. We are pleased to report we have been extremely successful in acquiring this professional staff and in putting together an effective service delivery system”), as well as the descendants of Black Refugees raising themselves “by their own boot straps where in many instances no boot straps existed” (Black United Front of Nova Scotia 1975, 8, 30).

These statements tell part of the story. Shortly after the Black Family Meeting where the interim committee for BUF was named, and included Rocky Jones, W.P. Oliver, Gus Wedderburn, and others. Oliver used his prerogative as chair to add other members, including his brother (and later Conservative Senator) Donald Oliver as well as his son Jules. Oliver and Wedderburn later drew up a proposal document to take to federal luminaries including Allan J. MacEachen without the knowledge of the radical members of the group (Walker 2012, 183; Jones 2016, 132; Calliste 1995, 133). According to former chair of the Nova Scotia Human

Rights Commission, a 1969 memorandum to Cabinet that was discovered eight years later showed that the federal government was fearful that Black activists might foment violence and disrupt the Canadian Games, and thus offered a grant to BUF to facilitate moderate advocates keeping control over the Black United Front (Pachai 1987, 252). Control of the Black United Front, therefore, was a murky prospect for the radical activists who had hoped for a direct confrontation of government. These activists, including Jones, formed the Afro-Canadian Liberation Movement in 1969 – a short-lived organization that hewed far closer to the radical inclinations of the Black Panther Party – but one that continued to affiliate with BUF under the premise that unity was an indispensable principle (Walker 2012, 184; Jones 2016, 135).

The duelling voices of moderate, conciliatory influence of the NSAACP and the radical perspective of the ACLM are threaded throughout the report in subtle ways: in passive voice allusions to the “denial of our rights” as well as to the “erosion of our communities” while simultaneously calling for the “support and attention of the society at large” to surmount the problem facing Black Nova Scotians (Black United Front of Nova Scotia 1975, 32). Despite the allusions to a form of self-determination that, on its face, directly contradicts the idea of integration into an unwelcoming *polis*, the organization appears willing and enthusiastic at the idea of white acceptance and engagement.

To this end, the Black United Front developed a liaison committee with the province to collaboratively reach decisions on program scope and delivery – and later, the RCMP congratulated the organization for “maintaining social and civil stability” and in serving “as a buffer between the White establishment and Black militants” (Calliste 1995, 133).

The genesis of the Black United Front, especially as it relates to the federal funding given to the group at its outset, is an example of the overlap of competing political orders across



political space and political time. Across political space, the intervention of the federal government into provincial and municipal conflicts is an example of the active, nation-building role that the federal government sought during this era. This intervention – one that superseded the provincial government’s Human Rights Commission announcement – was shaped in no small part by a perceived national security imperative given the transnational movement for Black liberation unfolding throughout the Civil Rights Movement and the later push for Black power and Black nationalism (Waters 2013). Across political time, the federal government’s tactic of funding amenable, and moderate, community champions to develop initiatives within their own communities stood in contrast to the provincial government’s paternalism in appointing an outsider to the Director position in the Human Rights Commission. By underwriting the early years of the Black United Front, the federal government gave itself nominal control over the initiatives the organization would seek funding for without creating backlash for undermining community autonomy.<sup>39</sup> The community saw immediate benefits in the interventions that some of the funded service-provision organizations made in the community, but these benefits did not change the structural or institutional dynamics that perpetuated injustice. As I go on to discuss in Chapter Nine, this process of state granting offers distinct complexities for movements and organizations that take the prospect of self-determination seriously as they offer an obvious

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39. Here, I am inspired by Megan Ming Francis’ discussion of movement capture and propose an adaptation of the concept to the Canadian context, where private funders are few and far between, and where state grants for social movement organizations are commonplace: “the process by which private funders leverage their financial resources to apply pressure and influence the decision-making process of civil rights organizations. The movement capture framework hinges on the power imbalance between those that have resources and those that need them. In this way, movement capture relates to work that highlights the power asymmetries embedded in the relationship between community organizations (international and domestic) and funding from NGO’s and businesses who take a “corporate social responsibility” approach to governance.” “The Price of Civil Rights: Black Lives, White Funding, and Movement Capture,” *Law & Society Review* 53, no. 1 (2019): 278, <https://doi.org/10.1111/lasr.12384>.

mechanism for the state to exercise domination over the desires and interests of these organizations – and by extension the communities that they serve.

The tension between radical rhetoric and moderate actions inherent in BUF activity was also generative of many important interventions in the service delivery space. Many of the programs and services that the group proposed and delivered filled vital gaps experienced by Black Haligonians and Black Nova Scotians. An early example of BUF's intervention in the wellbeing of Black Nova Scotians is contained in the 1972 document *A Proposal for a Preventative Community Health Education Project using Indigenous Staff*. This initiative was a holistic look at the ways that Black Nova Scotians had been excluded from the health system, and aimed to at once improve communication pathways for Black residents to access health services while also training Black volunteers to work in community health promotion roles (Black United Front of Nova Scotia 1972, 3). By seeking culturally responsive and community-centric health promotion, this proposal is ahead of its time in many ways.<sup>40</sup> It cites Black representation and the development of Black health leaders as a vital part of the success of the proposed program:

The use of indigenous animators and the development and training of indigenous leaders is seen as vital to the success of the process. The indigenous animator because of his knowledge of his culture and because he shares similar values and problems is in a good position to gain trust and confidence of people and to communicate with them on a level which they can understand and appreciate. Community action will not result unless this trust and confidence is present and unless communication takes place (Black United Front of Nova Scotia 1972, 9).

The document identifies what we now call the social determinants of health – factors like housing, education, employment, diet, and a sense of belonging among others – as well as a lack

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40. A 2001 report by Dr. Josephine Etowa titled *Black Women's Health: A Synthesis of Research Relevant to Black Nova Scotians* calls for similar programs to be developed to address health inequities for Black women in the province.

of trust in the health system as key barriers for Black Nova Scotians in improving their health outcomes (Black United Front of Nova Scotia 1972, 6).

Where the document politically departs from the extensive health advocacy work of the Black Panther Party in the United States among others is in the absence of critique of the conditions that prompted these inequities in the first place.<sup>41</sup> An example of this absence of accountability can be found within the project description: “Due to a long history of isolation, the blacks of Nova Scotia have developed attitudes of indifference and apathy towards themselves and to their surroundings since they have seen few opportunities through which they could positively effect their life circumstances” (Black United Front of Nova Scotia 1972, 8). By using a shorthand of isolation to describe centuries of institutional and structural discrimination, the proposal writers obscure the mechanisms that produced the adverse health conditions Black Nova Scotians face. In doing so, the writers tip their hand – they knew that their audience in the provincial government would not accept criticism in such a form, and thus did not levy it.

Another key departure from the radical health activism of the era was in the rigid organizational structure afforded by the proposal. The BUF proposal sought “indigenous animators” – in effect, situated community organizers working specifically on this proposal, who would act as “change agents” whose efforts would inspire community members to address personal and communal challenges (Black United Front of Nova Scotia 1972, 9). Those animators would be led by a project coordinator, who would be accountable to a project committee, and subsequently to the BUF Board Council, who would liaise with municipal,

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41. Alondra Nelson’s book *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination* does an excellent job of tracing the evolution of the Black Panther Party as it relates to health activism in the United States.

regional provincial officials on behalf of the community. The structure of the project is outlined in Figure 3:

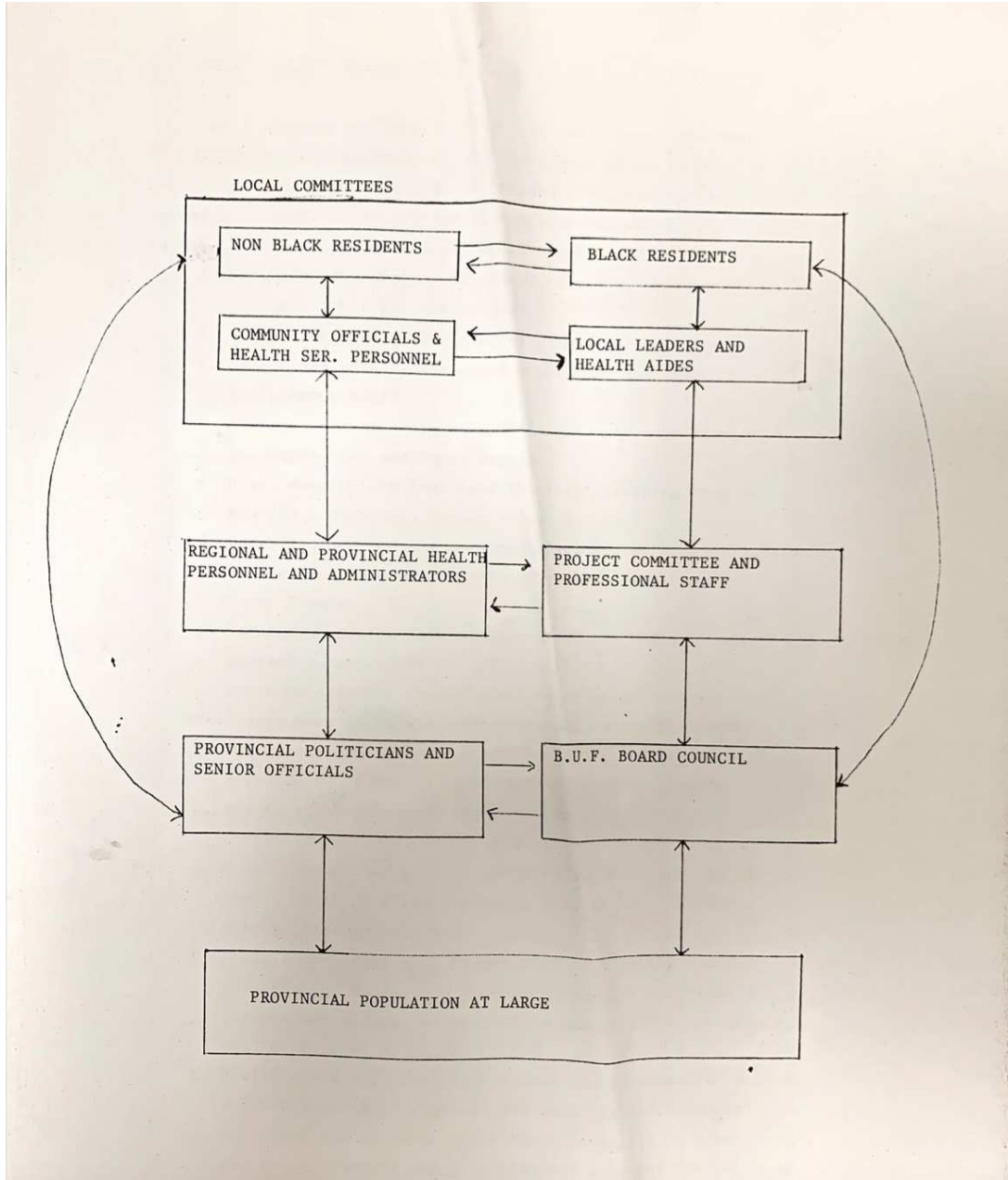


Figure 3: Structure chart for Black United Front health promotion project (Black United Front of Nova Scotia 1972, 31).

The structure for the project explicitly separates Black residents from being able to advocate for their own affairs with regional health officials, politicians or even community health

officials – uploading that capacity instead to staff members and other BUF representatives. This approach maintains the discourse of Black self-determination in form, but not in spirit – Black residents that were engaged in this effort would still be governed in their health choices by bodies that they did not necessarily relate to and that were not necessarily accountable to them.

Evidence of this disconnect can be found in a BUF internal document from 1979 titled *An Impressionistic Profile on Halifax's Black Community* written by Ms. Frances Mills. In between descriptions of Mulgrave Park and Uniacke Square as near uninhabitable, with people who have no pride in their neighbourhood upkeep, the document also notes: “People do not see BUF’s input in the Halifax area as much as in the outside communities. Most people do not understand the role of BUF, its Board and Council members and how they are chosen” (Mills 1979). The disconnect that Black Haligonians felt from BUF indicates the challenges the organization had in actualizing its potential. Where radical promise flourished early on, the organization’s vision of self-determination was revealed over time to be lacking in significant ways, despite achieving its goal of winning funding for the health promotion initiative.

## **Conclusion**

Focusing on the activities of the Black United Front reveals much about the intricate and complex dynamics of Black organizing in the 1960s and 1970s in Nova Scotia. As a coalition organization, BUF was riven with contradiction. The organization fused radical discourses of self-determination and Black Power with institutionalist approaches to ameliorating challenges of service provisions in Black communities across the province. In so doing, BUF absorbed the momentum of Rocky Jones and the ACLM while simultaneously bringing funding and attention to Black issues in a manner that was palatable to the governing institutions of the day. The benefits of the emergence of BUF included a growing consciousness among Black Nova

Scotians about their history and their culture as well as meaningful interventions into the service-delivery and employment spaces (Walker 2012, 189). The downside of BUF's interventions were, in many ways, a suppressing of a strengthening culture of Black protest in the city and the province – a pattern followed by other coalitional organizations of the era including the National Black Coalition of Canada (Calliste 1995, 134, 135). This suppression is particularly salient when viewed through a class lens – the discursive separation of the leaders and professionals BUF envisioned as colleagues and staff versus those they describe as being unable to care for their homes and communities is stark.

The creation of the BUF is at once indicative of the strengthening contest to the white-supremacist racial institutional order and evidence of the power of that institutional order to blunt and neuter Black radical movements. As Walker notes, BUF's moderation was less a mechanism of co-optation and more of a continuation of the moderation and institutional affiliation practiced by figures like W.P. Oliver and that augurs back to the school-petitioners of the Victorian era (Walker 2012, 190). That these moderates felt the need to consistently compromise with and seek the approval of discriminatory governing institutions is evidence of the profound weight of subtle white supremacist discourses in Nova Scotia which attenuated and limited their efforts at prompting change. Despite the overarching salience of that white-supremacist discourse, BUF still argued for self-determination, and still shifted the terrain for Black Nova Scotians in terms of what to expect from governing institutions in the future. The paternalism of the days of Africville had not been erased, but it was credibly exposed.

Chapter Six – The 1991 'Uptown Riots', and new pathways for change

*I reach my destination on this circuitous journey through Halifax: the Lynn Jones African Canadian & Diaspora Heritage Collection located in the Saint Mary's University Archives in the Patrick Power Library. On the way into the building, I pass Huskies Stadium, which acted as a stage for a crucial part of the final vignette in this story: the Unity March organized by the Cultural Awareness Youth Group (CAYG) on August 1, 1991. The March, as well as many of the activities of the CAYG, was vividly chronicled in the 1992 film *Speak It! From the Heart of Black Nova Scotia*, directed by Sylvia Hamilton for the National Film Board of Canada.*

Three minutes and ten seconds into the film, the camera pans across a *Chronicle-Herald* headline from July 19, 1991 that reads: “Race riot rocks downtown”, before rapidly cutting to other clippings that highlight the March (Hamilton 1992). Seconds afterwards, we see Black teenagers handing out black buttons that say “Together we can stop racism” to white March attendees. We then see a multiracial throng of marchers holding a Cultural Awareness Youth Group banner marching through the same North End streets I’ve travelled through on this journey. The crowd passes Citadel/Maroon Hill, chanting and smiling with trumpets and drums on a warm summer’s day, before we see a young Black woman named Tanya Hudson addressing a crowd of hundreds huddled in the bleachers at Huskies Stadium at sunset (Hays 1991a). Hudson, the president of the youth council of the Cultural Awareness Youth Group, speaks adroitly and passionately about the participation of youth in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, before stating: “Youth in this province are frustrated that the opportunities to succeed in the metro community and this province appear to be denied to us because we are Black. We are frustrated that our views, hopes, and concerns are not taken seriously” (Hamilton 1992).

The Cultural Awareness Youth Group that Hudson hailed from was an enigma: a youth-guided and focused organization that engaged Black high-school and university students across the city. The CAYG was designed by founder David Woods to instill a sense of cultural pride and self-esteem in Black students across the city (Woods 2016). Initially emerging from a BUF-funded grant, the CAYG was, according to Woods, “dropped” from the province-wide organization but maintained support through the Halifax North Branch Library and other community organizations (Woods 2016). Some of the group’s activities are covered in *Speak It!*: Woods facilitates a group of students who are interested in putting on a play relevant to their lives as one such example of a CAYG initiative (Hamilton 1992). Developing a sense of Black pride, as the film demonstrates, can also be a radical (and radicalising) act, and some members of the CAYG organized a sizeable march to protest racial discrimination in downtown bars in March of 1991 (Clairmont 1992, 80). One of the chief organizers of the protest-oriented activities of the CAYG was Reverend Darryl Gray, an African-American preacher at St. Thomas Baptist church in North Preston who became a trusted confidant and organizer, and who ran as a candidate for the Progressive Conservative party in 1993 (Chiu 2020; *The Chronicle-Herald* 1993).

I spoke with Helen<sup>42</sup>, a community activist who was present during the events in 1991 and who was a part of the Cultural Awareness Youth Group at that time, about the effect of the CAYG on African Nova Scotian youth during that period:

One of the founders, David Woods, who comes to us from Trinidad, lived in Nova Scotia for a very long time, and saw the lack of historical motivations. That was, how do I describe it, he saw that the young black people in Nova Scotia, were not being taught about their history in themselves, and saw how some of us weren't as proud of who we were as people of African descent, because what the school system was doing to us [...] I

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42. Helen requested anonymity, and so is using a pseudonym throughout this project.



credit CAYG a lot with my activism and my advocacy, because it really taught you how to stand up with words, action, and knowledge to advocate for yourself. And that's what we did. That's why it was such a peaceful, well organized, march in 1991 (Helen, interview with author, December 13 2021).

These marches and the conflict that prompted the larger Unity March in August took place in the febrile context of 1991, with the Cole Harbour High conflict occurring two years prior alongside the conclusion of the Royal Commission on the Donald Marshall Jr. Prosecution being released the year before.<sup>43</sup> This period of outcry echoed the cascading series of local, regional and national emergences of Black-led protest in the 1960s, and quickly dispelled the idea levied by Wilson Head and Donald Clairmont (authors of the Marshall Commission) that Black Nova Scotians were “non-political and powerless” (Head and Clairmont 1989, 20). Where the March also stood out historically is in its multiracial composition, with as many white attendees as those that were Black. The image below, taken from a *Daily News* article covering the March, shows the buoyant and multiracial optimism of the day’s proceedings:

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43. For more on the segregated schooling context that birthed the Cole Harbour High conflict, read Slaunwhite, Stefanie R. “Reflections on Racism: Oral Accounts of Integration at Graham Creighton High School, Cherry Brook, Nova Scotia” 23 (2020): 23. The 1990 BLAC Report on Education gives a system-wide look at the challenges Black learners at the time faced. The Royal Commission on the Donald Marshall Jr. Prosecution is a Royal Commission called by the Government of Nova Scotia to investigate the wrongful conviction of Donald Marshall Jr., a Mi’kmaw man for the 1971 murder of Sandy Seale, a Black teenager.

# 'Racism has got to go'



Blacks and whites joined forces in last night's march against racism through Halifax.

**March draws more than 1,000 on route past riot flashpoint**

By PETER HAYS  
The Daily News

A vibrant, energetic crowd of more than 1,000 people flowed through downtown Halifax last night in a boisterous display of unity against racism.

Earlier fears the march from the city's north to south end might provoke trouble proved unfounded as onlookers along the way waved from doorsteps and tooted car horns in support.

Led by a line of kids bearing a Cultural Awareness Youth Group banner, the throng stretching more than three blocks down Gottingen Street waved placards, chanted "Racism has got to go" and sang songs as they walked toward downtown.

At Cogswell Street, the marchers strayed from their intended path and flowed up to Rainnie Drive, before bearing left onto Argyle Street, site of the violence two weeks ago that sparked the march.

#### Raised voices

Among the marchers was Harold John Williams, a slight 21-year-old who was beaten up that night. "I was just walking home, and I got hit. I was beat up pretty badly," he said.

Wearing a white ball cap and black leather jacket, Williams said it was important for him to be there yesterday. "I just want everything to be a lot better than it was. I don't want see that stuff happening anymore."

As the crowd passed Argyle Street bars, they raised their voices and their hands in peace signs, shouting "No more racism."

People came out of the bars, and some encouraged the marchers.

"It's great. I think the people have shown they are committed to do things non-violently," march proponent Rev. Darryl Gray said of the walkers.

#### 'Just fantastic'

"This is a coalition of conscience, and they have shown that Nova Scotians and Halifaxians do have a conscience," Gray said as the crowd turned right up Blowers Street towards Sackville Street.

Many had similar words of enthusiasm for the march.

"Fantastic. This is just fantastic. And all those who had doubts and fears, too bad for them," said a woman who identified herself as Pat from Dartmouth. "There's solidarity in this province. We've just got to work it out."

Motorcycle police escorted the throng to Saint Mary's University stadium, where a series of speeches were heard.

Bringing up the rear of the march was a line of motorcyclists, including Donald Brown, who described the event as "a rainbow about ready to shine."

Among the participants were Attorney General Joel Matheson, former premier Gerald Regan and Halifax Windjammer Willie Bland.

Figure 4: Daily News article depicting the August 1, 1991 Unity March (Hays 1991b)

Analyzing the Unity March, and the so-called riots that preceded it, helps us to see how the dynamics of Black-led organizing, and the tensions both within and outside of organizing circles that surrounded the conflict, created an unfulfilled promise of a transformed Nova Scotia. This conflict illuminated the friction created when overlapping institutional orders collided: when the old institutional order that perceived Black inferiority through neglect and colourblindness collided with an emerging multicultural consciousness: one that required federal intervention and sought transformation through increased Black representation in many walks of life. The idea of Black representation in the leadership of hostile organizations spurring

transformation, even within those like police forces that operate under institutional norms that do not change easily, was a powerful one that underpins advocacy claims today. Whether those claims are worthwhile, however, is inconclusive when assessing this incident.

The overlap and friction that characterized this era extended to Black community organizations and advocates, who were embroiled in important debates about tactics, responsiveness, and representation. The so-called ‘old guard’ of community organizations, like the Black United Front, had been severely weakened by a decade of controversy over financial malfeasance, and a public schism among the community that emerged as a result (Bateman 1989). In orienting towards service-provision in the 1970s, the organization was collaborative and conciliatory with government. It chose to save its advocacy efforts for intervening to advocate for increased representation in government and in institutions like the courts and hospitals in the Pepin-Robarts Task Force on Canadian Unity (Criss 1977). The radical rhetoric of the previous era had dissipated, replaced with declarations of fiscal accountability. The racial inequities that African Nova Scotians endured in public life in Halifax, however, were ongoing. A younger generation began to question whether the approaches for change sought by their elders were working given the significant changes they observed both within their city and further afield and developed alternative means of contest as a result. This generational upheaval is important because it demonstrates the degree to which the ecosystem of community institutions and actors was also affected by processes of policy drift in terms of their tepid response to unfolding conflicts<sup>44</sup>, flawed engagement processes and, of course, intercurrency<sup>45</sup>.

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44. Galvin and Hacker describe policy drift as what happens when “a policy or institution is not updated to reflect changing external circumstances, and this lack of updating causes the outcomes of the policy or institution to shift—sometimes dramatically” (2020, 217).

45. As mentioned in Chapter Two, intercurrency is the overlap of institutional orders across political space and/or political time.

These processes are important because they spurred transformative change in the ways that this ecosystem functioned going forward. The Black United Front, for example, fell further into inefficacy before disbanding altogether in the mid 1990s. Coalitional politics within the community fell out of vogue for a generation, while radical approaches and multiracial anti-racist organizations came to the fore. These moments of transformation are thus vital in setting the context for how organizing is practiced in community today.

### **July 18, 1991**

This conflict was, as before, a confrontation that started because of discrimination in a local bar (Clairmont 1992, 79). According to an extensive report written by Donald Clairmont chronicling the key factors driving the tensions of July 1991, the catalyst for the entire conflict was a fight that broke out in downtown Halifax (1992, 81). This fight between Black and white patrons had no explicit racial tenor, but the bar ended up banning the Black patrons while allowing the white patrons to come back the next night. This choice, in a context of consistent discrimination against young Black men in the bar scene, angered the Black patrons and their friends while also prompting police intervention. Helen recounted to me how frustrating the experiences of discrimination within the downtown bars, particularly from bouncers were for Black youth at the time:

No one [wanted] to listen to us, because sometimes the bouncers who were predominately all white thought that they were all this, right, they thought they were big, they were muscular. And so they were aggressive. And they expected us, and even our men to take their aggression and not do anything with it [...] And this person is just a person like you and me, and they just have a security jacket on they happen [to be] a bouncer. It don't mean they can't get pushed and hit just the same way they can push and hit other people. And I think that's what created some of the energy that happened. And I have to say energy, because that's what it was (Helen, interview with author, December 13 2021).

The men promised to return the next night, and that promise mobilized a significant police presence to quell any conflicts that might arise. Clairmont notes that the police, having made extensive strides towards a community-based policing model that we will discuss below, tried to use those relationships to dampen the conflict before it started:

A communication link had been established several months earlier under the aegis of Halifax's coordinator on race relations to deal with issues of discrimination on the bar 'scene' and to improve relations between Blacks and bars' management. This link was now utilized as the bar management contacted a major Black leader associated with the youth group which had protested against Downtown discrimination (referred to above) and discussed the situation and what preventative action might be taken (1992, 82).

The preventative action that the police officers sought was unsuccessful. Instead, Black protestors marched downtown, where they were met by extra-duty police officers. After some scuffles in the Argyle Street area, the crowd moved to Gottingen Street – just as it did in 1967. Police officers dressed in riot gear closed the bridges over to Dartmouth, and sealed the perimeter. The police officers also, in a controversial move, arrested the person they saw as the “mob leader” which greatly inflamed the conflict and led to further violence outside of the police station (Clairmont 1992, 86). Helen pointed out that, from her perspective, a lot of those causing the property damage and violence were not African Nova Scotian:

[It] wasn't necessarily people of African descent that were doing that [breaking windows and trashing bars]. Because what happens in any type of protest is that you always have these...what are they called...looters. These rioters who take advantage of the situation and join in and create more problems than good. Our Black community in Nova Scotia is not that big and our downtown Black community in 1991 was not that big. But we were the ones that were being brutally handled by the police. It's as if it's our fault that some of the things are happening and [the police] didn't look at the way the bouncers or other bar attendees were also creating problems. They often would say that the only bar that wasn't affected I think was the Derby [a predominately Black bar on Gottingen Street]. It just blows my mind how even then... how we were seen as people to fear (Helen – interview with author, December 13 2021).

By the end of the night, police arrested four individuals, and laid numerous charges for assault (The Chronicle-Herald and The Canadian Press 1991). Violence in Halifax continued for two

days after the Friday brawl, and included a stabbing in Spryfield and retaliatory threats aimed towards Black community groups from white residents (The Chronicle-Herald and The Canadian Press 1991).

This conflagration – called a “race riot” by members of the media – gives us an important snapshot into the fissures in Haligonian life that could not be attenuated by service-provision initiatives like those championed by the Black United Front in the 1970s and 1980s. Newspaper clippings from the days after the Friday night brawl echo with recrimination, particularly from Black residents. Reverend Ogueri Ohanaka, of the now-beleaguered Black United Front, noted that “[the] question is always ‘what can the black community do,’ [...] what about the rest of the community?” (Lee and LeBlanc 1991). The immediate interpretation of the violence was a venting of the incredible frustration of African Nova Scotians living in the city, summarized neatly by Rocky Jones, who noted that unemployment in the metropolitan area for Black residents was the highest for Black residents anywhere in the province, which was “[an] expression of the kind of racism that gives rise to the kind of frustration that leads to this kind of outbreak” (The Chronicle-Herald and The Canadian Press 1991). Former Africville residents, who were now decades removed from the razing of the community, said that the purported “rioters” did the “right thing” and called for Black people to mirror the Kanesatake Resistance (also known as the Oka Crisis) if the city ever decided to put a road through the park that was created when Africville was dismantled (Sadler 1991). One former resident noted, referring to the ongoing fight to dismantle apartheid, that “they talk about South Africa. We have South Africa right here in Halifax” (Sadler 1991). This connection to national and international struggles like the anti-apartheid movement and the Kanesatake Resistance is indicative of the ways that the actions of Halifax Police Department were received as domination by Black

Haligonians. The police used its monopoly on state violence to unleash chaos, suppressing a spontaneous but authentic expression of the legitimate frustrations that accompany life in a city where racialized oppression was the norm.

### **The aftermath of the ‘riots’ and multiracial coalitions**

The events of July 19<sup>th</sup>, and the subsequent melees that occurred in the following days, prompted Black organizers across the city to rapidly respond to a cascading crisis. The tenor and tone of the response, however, was the source of considerable public and private grappling amongst community organizations with different stances on how strident and forceful they could be in pushing for change. After organizing the protest against discrimination in downtown bars earlier that year, Rev. Gray was warned by the managers of some of the downtown bars that a conflict might arise before the incident on July 19<sup>th</sup>, and the bars also engaged the Halifax Police Department (Clairmont 1992, 82). In the aftermath of the incident, Gray saw an opportunity to amplify the CAYG’s previous message, especially amongst a group of self-described “[concerned] citizens, and members of church, labour, community health and social services, women’s and other organizations” who were predominantly white and who met in the days after the incident (Faye and Oosterveld 1991). The group, which called itself the Metro Coalition for a Non-Racist Society, rapidly organized and released a strident public statement where they attributed the conflict solely to the existence of institutional racism in Nova Scotia: “Any suggestion by political and business leaders that the current street violence is a one-time, isolated incident in otherwise harmonious race-relations in N.S. insults and trivializes the long history of attempts by the Black community to win legitimate demands for anti-racist education, jobs, and political and cultural quality in this province” (Faye and Oosterveld 1991).

Jackie Barkley, one of the co-founders of the Metro Coalition and a white community activist and social worker with decades of experience working in solidarity with Black organizers, noted that the statement came together hastily over the phone after Black community leaders were being inundated with requests to explain the violence:

And here in Halifax, the press of course, runs to Black leaders and says, “Can you explain to us what happened?” Rocky [Jones] says, “Why, I can't explain to you what happened - you should ask white people what happened, this is the cause of the event.” And so Jeanne [Fay], who's working with Rocky, and really trying to grapple with all these issues as well, was a very close friend. We have a lot of cigarettes in the basement trying to figure all this shit out (J. Barkley, interview with author, October 1, 2021).

Barkley and her collaborators quickly recognize the stakes of their burgeoning intervention: to establish clearly that it was in fact white Halifaxians who bore the responsibility for creating the conditions within which racialized violence could occur:

Jeanne calls me in Vancouver and says, “I think I have to lead the press conference. As a white person. Could you guys kind of write something for me to use?” And so Delvina [Bernard] and Kim [Bernard] and I drafted a statement and faxed it back to her which she read at the press conference the next day. Which was the statement that white people, it is our responsibility to begin looking at these issues. And that was that was when a whole bunch of people signed - I'm interested in forming a coalition of white people. And then of course, like all of them do just like last summer to now. We go from 1000 to 12. Right. And that's how that started (J. Barkley, interview with author, October 1, 2021).

Barkley's recollection, and connection of the events of 1991 to the events of the summer of 2020 insofar as the attrition of coalition members indicates the contingent nature of mobilizing white community members to organize in a sustained way. The ideas of the Metro Coalition and the drive to demonstrate to Black community members that there could, one day, be a “non-racist society” in Halifax were ambitious, and required extensive engagements with Black organizers to ensure that the group was not overstepping any agreed-upon boundaries in their work. Rev. Gray presented at a July 26 meeting of the Metro Coalition, where he updated the group on meetings in the Black community, with government officials, and discussed the need for the



Unity March stating that “people have seen the violence, now they need to see the unity” (Guild 1991, 2). The meeting notes for the July 26 meeting also suggest that members of the Metro Coalition had contacted Black community leaders by phone, and their response was “positive [and they were] clearly relieved that there was broader community support for the work they had been doing” (Guild 1991, 1).

It is a considerable surprise, therefore, to see – on the same page as the *Daily News* article about the Unity March, no less – the headline: “Demonstration too hasty, black umbrella group says” (McLaughlin 1991).

# Demonstration too hasty, black umbrella group says

By PETER McLAUGHLIN  
*The Daily News*

Hours before Rev. Darryl Gray led his anti-racism march through Halifax last night, the organization representing Nova Scotia's 11 black associations offered only grudging support for the demonstration.

Rev. Ogueri Ohanaka, spokesman for the Nova Scotia Alliance of Provincial Black Organizations, told reporters yesterday morning the time was not right for a march.

Echoing sentiments of Black United Front vice-president Cyril Wright Wednesday, Ohanaka said racial tension was still too high to have a rights march through Halifax — a city still stinging from three nights of racial violence and tension two weeks ago.

Ohanaka, executive director of BUF, said the alliance is also upset Gray's Cultural



OGUERI OHANAKA

Awareness Youth Group didn't hold off on the march until black organizations across the province had time to organize a more meaningful demonstration under "a more conducive atmosphere."

Alliance members were also angered Gray did not consult them about his plans for a march, Ohanaka said.

"While the alliance is supportive of the march in principle, it regrets the board of CYAG, with its decision to proceed with this march, has not given the members of our wider community a chance to participate," he said.

Ohanaka said the alliance would not try to stop alliance members from joining the march but he emphasized the alliance would not officially endorse the march.

He denied there is a power struggle between black leaders and said the difference of opinions on the march would not jeopardize solidarity between alliance members.

Gray said his youth group felt the time was right to hold a peace and unity march to show that people united could solve racial problems in a non-violent way.

Figure 5: Daily News article signalling Black community organizational discontent with Unity March (McLaughlin 1991)

The statements of Reverend Ohanaka, which echoed those of Black United Front representative Cyril Wright, clash with the characterization of the Metro Coalition of their meeting five days prior. While I can find no evidence to suggest where this disconnect occurred, the *Daily News* article provides some hints of why the pushback on the March became so public. The article states first that the organizations perceived racial tensions to be "too high" before noting that the CAYG did not wait for the established Black organizations to organize their own march "under a more conducive atmosphere," before concluding that the board of the CAYG did

not “[give] members of our wider community a chance to participate” (McLaughlin 1991).

Ohanaka’s statement is particularly curious because it did not appear to reflect the actual events on the day – one look at the clips of the March contained in *Speak It!* shows that plenty of Black Nova Scotians not only attended the March but played prominent roles in the organization and in speaking during the day’s events. Moreover, the current attorney general Joel Matheson and former premier Gerald Regan attended the March, demonstrating that the environment was safe enough for prominent politicians to feel comfortable participating (Hays 1991b).

The rationale that I infer from Ohanaka’s statement to the *Daily News* is that the CAYG, in its courting of white participation and with Gray’s upending of the established norms of organizing protocol within the community, exposed the established Black community groups to risks they were unwilling to take. These risks may have been untenable not just in terms of potential ongoing conflict as Ohanaka states, but also in terms of the reputational risks posed by the stridency of statements like the Metro Coalition’s or those from the younger members of the CAYG. If Ohanaka, and the other groups that comprised the Nova Scotia Alliance of Provincial Black Organizations were concerned that these statements and the March might threaten their funding from municipal or provincial sources without their input, then such a distinct public departure may have been understandable. The model of self-determination established by the Black United Front in the 1970s – that of filling service gaps through government funded projects while simultaneously masking that assistance with radical rhetorical flourishes – would be threatened if governments stopped funding these organizations and either started funding new ones or withdrew funding entirely due to a heightened political risk. Where the CAYG saw promise in the idea of a multi-racial coalition, the Alliance of Provincial Black Organizations appeared to resist it. The presence of the state as a principal funder of Black community

organizations at this time thus facilitated a form of domination, as the potential of funding cuts prompted this Alliance to circumscribe its critiques despite the mood of the community being one of strident resistance.

If what I intuit here is correct, then this friction between organizers is indicative of an overlap in political time – a clash of ideas about the ways that Black organizers ought to contest racism. The CAYG’s approach to the Unity March was founded upon the idea that white people could and ought to be convinced that they should play an active role in promoting equality through unity – that, in Gray’s words, “people united could solve racial problems in a non-violent way” (McLaughlin 1991).

I asked Archy Beals, a member of several of the community organizations covered by the Alliance of Provincial Black Organizations and a co-author of the Advisory Group for Race Relations’ 94 recommendations that emerged after the 1991 ‘riots’ why the Alliance gave the March such a mixed reaction:

I think people in the community said it wasn't the right time to do it. Because number one, it was organized and led by a group of young people in the Cultural Awareness Youth Group. And I don't think the leaders at the time, or organizations at the time felt that it was a time or an issue for young people to stand up to and speak about. Number two, I think there were, you know, leaders in the community who didn't feel that Reverend Gray was... they felt he was too radical. You know, coming from the United States, having family in East Preston, but coming here from the United States, and speaking that radical voice and giving credence to marches and protests. And, you know, I think people were a little ambivalent about that. But from what I recollect, it was a great act of solidarity amongst young people coming together, for a cause. Whether the community felt it was the right cause for them to come together for... I think it, you know, proved that young people can make a difference. And, you know, young people have a voice. And I think that voice needs to be listened to (A. Beals, interview with author, February 1, 2022).

Beals’ articulation that Gray’s approach was perceived to be too radical demonstrates the gulf between generations at this time, and bolsters my thesis that there was an overlap in political time that occurred during this era. The optimism for and belief in a multiracial solidarity

movement led by and for young people was not shared by those that had experienced the tumult of the late 1960s and 70s and had emerged from the 1980s battered and bruised by internal strife.

In many ways, the Unity March demonstrated a particular form of trust between Black and white Haligonians of a certain generation. The approach to self-determination taken by the Black United Front and other organizations did not approach relationships with white Haligonians with the same trust. Instead, self-determination from this prism depended on developing specific and relevant programs to the community to develop an internal political and economic capacity that would, in and of itself, lead to social, economic, and political transformation. In developing this capacity, these organizations also pushed to facilitate increased representation in political and economic institutions that have otherwise been hostile to Black participation.

The overlap in these concepts caused friction that led to an important shift in authority: between organizations, as the Black United Front eventually disintegrated a few years after the Unity March, and between concepts, as the idea of getting white allies on side as an organizing tactic became more widespread in movements that followed. We might say, therefore, that this moment demonstrated intercurrency on a micro-scale.<sup>46</sup>

### **Government responses to the ‘riots’**

A similar level of overlap in political time prompted the municipality to change course from its initial response: one of denial and obfuscation. The mayor initially refused to acknowledge that racism was the foundational cause of the incident, calling the conflict a “blip” that would not be repeated (Lightstone 1991). The federal Minister of Multiculturalism and

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46. Here, I draw inspiration from Orren and Skowronek (1996). While their analysis is rooted in a broader conception of the American political system, I think that it adapts well to an assessment of meso and micro-level discussions of organizing practices and discourses.

Citizenship intervened when the Mayor would not, and called a meeting with the provincial Minister in charge of the *Human Rights Act*, the Mayor, and Black community members. The agreement that emerged from the meeting was the creation of the Nova Scotia Advisory Group on Race Relations, a group comprised of representation from all three levels of government as well as the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission, and eight Black community representatives (Advisory Group on Race Relations 1991). The group had one month to consult with community members and work on a report designed to “accelerate the movement toward the elimination of racism and racial discrimination in Nova Scotia”(Advisory Group on Race Relations 1991, 1). Once the report was written, the Advisory Group requested responses from the groups “affected” by the report within 30 days. After this intervention, the Mayor promised to hire more Black police officers to the force (Nicoll 1991). Both the municipality and Halifax Regional Police, meanwhile, sought to walk the line between distancing itself from wrongdoing in the events and satisfying public calls for a broader investigation.

The group developed 94 recommendations in seven categories: Education, Employment/Economic Development; Black Community Participation and Access to Services; Policing, Justice and Human Rights; Black Community Development; Communications/Media; and Tourism and Culture.<sup>47</sup> Matters of Black health are conspicuously absent from the report, as are recommendations about core issues like housing and gentrification that were already reshaping life in the North End (Clairmont 1992, 8). Some recommendations do, however, speak to the durable and ongoing policy processes that have contributed to the exclusion and marginalization of Black Nova Scotians. Recommendation 9 (“That all municipal planning departments throughout the Province show greater sensitivity to the concerns of Black Nova

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47. The comprehensive nature of this report means that there is little space in this chapter to analyze the recommendations in every sector.

Scotians and seek input from the Black community when making planning and development decisions”) speaks directly to the legacy of municipal neglect exemplified by the razing of Africville, while Recommendation 10 (“THAT land near Black communities throughout Nova Scotia not be considered for landfill sites, incinerators or composting facilities given the long history in Nova Scotia of insensitive planning and development decisions (i.e. Africville dump in Halifax, Crichton Avenue dump in Dartmouth). The Advisory Group further recommends that no landfill sites be located near any dwellings or residential communities bearing in mind environmental considerations”) was a direct attempt at addressing an unfolding injustice – the East Lake waste site located right next to the Preston Townships.<sup>48</sup>

The recommendations on Policing, Justice and Human Rights are particularly salient to the conflict and, by proxy, identify where the Advisory Group placed much of the blame for the toxicity of the previous July’s events. The preamble to the recommendations cuts to the heart of the matter:

Over the past decade, a number of national initiatives has been undertaken to deal with the dissonance between the police and the visible minority community. These initiatives have generally focused on the three main areas of intercultural training; recruitment/selection; and police/visible minority relations.

While reaction across the country has been more or less favourable to these efforts, in Nova Scotia these attempts at reform have been perceived as inadequate and have failed to inspire the desired confidence in the Black community.

Black people in Nova Scotia are convinced that they are not policed in the same manner as their white counterparts. They point to the inability of members of their community to become members of the force; the hasty and often unnecessary use of force in altercations involving members of the community; the frequent expression of derogatory attitudes; and the lack of awareness of and sensitivity to Black Nova Scotia culture (Advisory Group on Race Relations 1991, 13).

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48. (Advisory Group on Race Relations 1991, 12; Saunders 1999, 36, 37) For more on the East Lake landfill, read Ingrid Waldron, “Re-Thinking Waste: Mapping Racial Geographies of Violence on the Colonial Landscape,” *Environmental Sociology* 4, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 36–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2018.1429178>.

This preamble is remarkable in its stridency and speaks to the depth of frustration that Black Nova Scotians felt about their treatment at the hands of police forces across the province – particularly in the Metro area. In highlighting the lacking nature of the techniques that other jurisdictions have used for managing ‘race relations’ between police officers and Black residents, the report writers implicitly demonstrate the severity and durability of racism in police forces in the province as a part of a larger culture of systemic racism in the city. Beals noted that convincing government representatives around the table of this durability, and the need to transform policies as a result, was the hardest part of working on the Advisory Group:

I knew that we had to look at changing the system. You know? And [to look] at changing policies and procedures because that's where the issue stemmed from, you know, practices that these establishments had which was systemic and institutional. That's where the change needed to happen. And, you know, I think one of the things that I was very if I, my memory serves me, right...[one of the things] we had a hard time dealing with and had a hard time convincing government that that was the issue. And that was what needed to change. You know, people could change their mindsets. But if you have policies and practices in place institutionally, then that's where the change needs to happen (A. Beals, interview with author, February 1, 2022).

The recommendations the Advisory Group suggested generally sat in line with extant interventions aimed at increasing “visible minority” representation through the creation of a Race Relations Secretariat under the *Multiculturalism Act*, changes to recruitment practices to attract Black officers, and the creation of incident review committees that reflect the “populations that they [police forces] serve”(Advisory Group on Race Relations 1991, 14, 15, 16). One significant recommendation by the Advisory Group that sought a holistic remedy to this conflict was a Task Force designed to investigate the relationship between Black community members and the police via a review of the *Police Act* on issues such as use of force, as well as community relations and the role of the Police Commission (Advisory Group on Race Relations 1991, 16). Here, the Group takes a step towards addressing the discrimination and inequity articulated in the



preamble quoted above. This recommendation, however, was one of several that the provincial government endorsed “in principle” without engaging fully. The province instead offered to create an advisory committee reviewing these issues, but not one that would have the authority to address the *Police Act* in general (Government of Nova Scotia 1991, 29). The reception to the report overall was mostly positive – at least from the perspective of the governments involved. The federal government, the province and the municipality accepted most of the recommendations of the report overall, and the municipality accepted all recommendations related to policing that were within its purview (Connell 1991).

### **The Incident Review Committee and state repression**

The Advisory Group on Race Relations was not the only response to the events of July 19, 1991. A second report pitted institutional interpretations of the conflict in direct contrast with those from community representatives. The Halifax Police Department, submitting to widespread pressure, created an Incident Review Committee comprised of three prominent Black community members as well as three members of the Police Department: Rev. Donald Skeir, the long-tenured pastor of three Baptist churches in the Preston Townships and Cherry Brook; Rev. Calvin Symonds, a pastor at Cornwallis Street Baptist Church among other congregations; and the Hon. Mayann Francis, who would later go on to become CEO of the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission and Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia (and who was added to the committee after a subsequent community meeting) (Murphy 1991, 1).

In its divergent framing of the conflict, the report is instructive of the frames that underwrite police responses to accusations of racism as well as the tactics that police departments use to nullify dissent. Written in two parts, with the police account coming first, the document immediately establishes a hierarchy of importance that holds the official police

account of proceedings as paramount. Inspector David Murphy was the Chairman of the Committee as well as its media spokesperson, and no other Committee member was allowed to speak to the media (though media communications would be agreed to by the entire Committee) (Murphy 1991, 2). The Chief of Police also set the mandate and investigative authority for the Committee, and though the dualistic structure of reportage was designed to prevent undue police influence, the very structure of the Committee calls into question the findings of the civilian members (Murphy 1991, 3).

Inspector Murphy's account, in its scant two pages, avoids any accountability from the Department about their role in the conflict. Instead, his account states among other things that the Department's response to the conflict was "controlled and well managed", that "all communications [...] were at all times professional and in accordance with operational policy", and that the Department's efforts in developing a Community Based Policing Service "became evident; by the community response brought forward by leaders and members" (Murphy 1991, 5). Murphy also discards the idea that racism may have been a factor in the tenor or the ferocity of the incident, instead arguing that the incident "was intended to be "a settling of a score" by a black community member employed within the liquor industry with a white community member also employed within the same industry for an assault the previous evening" (Murphy 1991, 4). Finally, Murphy's recommendations to address the incident sought to increase the recruitment of "visible minorities" in police positions and on Police Advisory Boards to complement increased "cross-cultural/sensitivity training" (Murphy 1991, 5).

Murphy's account of the incident on July 19 serves two purposes: to maintain police legitimacy in the face of criticism, and to reinforce frames of Black criminality unmotivated by

racial discrimination.<sup>49</sup> The argument he levies is simple: the incident was an example of community-based policing working as designed, as community members worked alongside the police in a professional manner to avoid further conflict caused by individuals with a personally driven animus. Here, a clear inclination towards the status quo is bolstered by Murphy's recommendations of increased "visible minority" representation, which is designed to strengthen the perceived legitimacy of the force by community members by "creating a work force truly representative of the community we serve" (Murphy 1991, 4, 5). The call for more representation rings hollow when preceded by a short, but impactful, demonstration of power to silence community outrage, as the Police Department demonstrated in its submission.

This attempt to neutralize dissent and challenge is particularly stark when placed next to the report from the civilian committee, which directly and stridently contradicted every one of Murphy's arguments save the idea that the conflict started due to an interpersonal conflict. Despite engaging with the same witnesses, tapes and other forms of evidence as articulated in the methodology section of the report, Francis, Skeir, and Symonds highlighted extensive inconsistencies between official reports and witness recollections as well as numerous alleged incidences of explicit and racialized police brutality and improperly handled internal investigations into the night's events (Francis, Skeir, and Symonds 1991, 4). Police misconduct alleged in the report by witnesses includes, but is not limited to:

- Attacking a young Black man who was "not aggressive" with billy clubs causing him to smash through the window of an H&R Block on Gottingen Street;

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<sup>49</sup> Murphy argues that racial discrimination did not precipitate the event, but rather that a Black employee of the liquor industry had a "score to settle" (1991, 5). In the process, he de-links the incident from a broader contextual analysis and towards stereotypes of a vengeful, wayward Black man at the root of the crime.

- The use of racial slurs by officers (as highlighted by a Black constable who appeared before the committee and who saved the youth from being harmed when being pushed through the window);
- Selective arrests in the Gottingen St. area as opposed to downtown;
- The suspicious disappearance of tapes between police vehicles where racial slurs were alleged to have been uttered;
- Officers, while arresting a young Black man, saying “let’s throw this nigger off the bridge”, and a subsequent internal investigation refusing to interview the assaulted party or the officers alleged to be involved (Francis, Skeir, and Symonds 1991, 5, 7, 8, 9).

The civilian committee connected these encounters to a longstanding pattern of abuse and misconduct, noting that the prominence of the July 19 incident meant that increased scrutiny ought to have improved the quality of the investigation. They questioned: “If we as civilian members of the Committee could uncover such inconsistencies in the internal investigations conducted by the police for a matter of such high visibility – what then happens to cases that are of low visibility?”(Francis, Skeir, and Symonds 1991, 12). Despite highlighting the systemic and historical nature of anti-Black racism in Halifax, however, the committee framed the Police Department’s role in engaging Black Haligonians as a moral and legal obligation that they had been guilty of being “complacent” in fulfilling (Francis, Skeir, and Symonds 1991, 13).

The civilian committee’s recommendations fall in line with this attempt to balance systemic critique with a desire for ongoing engagement by bringing the influence and legitimacy provided by studies in other jurisdictions to bear on the Halifax case. They supported the Advisory Committee on Race Relations’ recommendations and sought a “Minority Liaison Committee” in line with that suggested by Inspector Murphy & the Halifax Police Department,

but hoped for additional community control over composition, evaluation, and extended powers to review incidents, policies, and practices relevant to the functioning of the Police Department (Francis, Skeir, and Symonds 1991, 15). Crucially, while they were unable to deliver extensively written recommendations because of their lack of resources, the civilian committee appended a copy of the recommendations of the *Report of the Race Relations and Policing Task Force* written in Ontario in 1989 as an example of a “thorough contemporary study” of related issues, despite not agreeing with the entire contents of the report (Francis, Skeir, and Symonds 1991, 16). The Ontario report speaks to a relationship between the police and “visible minorities” fractured by a dialectic of neglect and harassment and recommends, among other items, increased monitoring standards, a rewrite of the *Police Act* to develop tighter policies on the use of force, better representation of “visible minorities” on Ontario police forces, and local advisory committees for race and ethnic relations (Lewis et al. 1989, 153, 154, 198, 201, 214). The dynamic this report describes mirrors complaints in the North End of Halifax during the same era and echoes back to the challenges faced by Africville residents 40 years prior, again suggesting a deeply-rooted pattern inherent to the practice of policing itself. Both reports, however, stress the vitality of the function of policing, and both reports take pains to stress how “visible minorities” or Black communities aim to work with the police (Francis, Skeir, and Symonds 1991, 17; Lewis et al. 1989, 23).

### **Lasting trauma**

The public response to the Incident Review Committee’s report was as polarized as the report itself. Francis, upon seeing the police version of events, noted that the police refused to accept accountability, stating “if you read the report [...] there is nothing that would say there is a problem” (LeBlanc and Erskine 1991). Police officers, meanwhile, complained about a drop in

morale related to a failure by the Committee to “consider a police officer’s mandate, to keep the peace and to enforce the Criminal Code,” with a union representative warning that hesitancy caused by allegations of racism could leave an officer dead (LeBlanc and Erskine 1991). Some white Haligonians took issue with the ideas contained in both the Advisory Group on Race Relations report and the Incident Review Committee’s offering, with one commentor in the *Daily News* offering a stark rejection of the idea that there should be a transformation in the ways that Nova Scotians should engage with Black residents:

I don’t want my children being told in school that their parents were racist bigots; I don’t want my children to be told they must, because of the callousness of previous generations, take a back seat to the aspirations of minorities. My children have no particular animosity toward minorities now, but I fear this obvious and incessant brainwashing being suggested will, without doubt, breed a type of hatred and discontent never before experienced in this province (Leslie, n.d.).

This letter is indicative of a prevailing sentiment among some white Nova Scotians that the Advisory Group had overstepped their bounds in advocating for equity for Black Nova Scotians, a sentiment that columnist Charles Saunders also addressed after the release of the Advisory Group’s report:

The emphasis of the advisory group’s report was not on handouts and privileges, as some of last week’s *Daily News* Hotline callers were so quick to assume. Some government financial assistance was suggested. But blacks aren’t the only Nova Scotians to request such assistance. Why is government largess considered a “grant” for Sysco Steel, but a “handout” for the Black United Front? (Saunders 1991)

These responses demonstrate that the optimism and solidarity exemplified by the Unity March a few months earlier had, by December 1991, diminished. In many ways, the same dynamics, and conversations as before the incident reconstituted themselves, leaving some Black community members in particular feeling despondent about the future. A report by the *Toronto Star* from the next summer hinted at the lack of meaningful change emerging from the incident: “Skeptics point out that little has really changed for blacks in their day-to-day life. Unemployment among

blacks remains high [...] And this spring, leaders from Halifax-area municipalities voted to put the region's new garbage dump near the black communities of North Preston and East Preston" (Spears 1992). A 1992 report written by Donald Clairmont, the author of a canonical report on the harms caused by Halifax's decision to destroy Africville, showed that the impact of the incident on Black North End residents was to entrench suspicions of community policing models being piloted in the region, with one resident noting: "I know I hate the police more than ever. They're up here with their Charlie zone office pretending like they're concerned about our welfare and about improving the feeling between us and them. But it's always been us and them and it will always be us and them. If they were fooling anybody up to that point, they aren't anymore" (Clairmont 1992, 94). For Helen, the trauma of 1991 negatively shaped the way that she viewed police officers, creating an anger that still simmers today:

I think that after we had that experience, a lot of us stopped going downtown and also stopped trusting the police. Because you're now at the age. 19 is the age. You're now at the age where you can be charged as an adult. You don't see the police as protecting you. And so most of us would have been driving as well, like 16 to 19. We've been driving. So our images of what police stood for and how they were supposed to protect us were probably very disjointed after that event. And just watching them come in with their, their billy clubs or whatever they're called, and, and just how there'd be like, so many police cars that swarmed downtown, you could have sworn that it's like a huge, huge riot. Whereas it was just people standing up for the rights and being mad at... you're making me get all passionate and upset again (Helen, interview with author, December 13 2021).

Helen's pulse-quickening affect when divulging the psychic harms July 19<sup>th</sup> 1991 had on her encapsulates the wide-ranging impact of these emergences of police violence. The police acted akin to a sharpened chisel, driving home the bludgeoning weight of an exclusionary city with billy clubs, slurs, and assault charges. The ramifications of this violence on the health of those who experienced it directly, as well as onlookers like Helen, are significant. Police violence, particularly when it is viewed as procedurally unfair by Black community members, leads to worse self-reported health outcomes amongst that community, and the effects of this violence are

compounded upon Black women in particular throughout the life-course (McFarland, Geller, and McFarland 2019; Abigail A. Sewell 2017; Alyasah Ali Sewell et al. 2021; Lutgendorf and Costanzo 2003). Helen highlighted that this trauma even extends to decisions she makes as a parent:

Even as I raise a 19 year old, no, he's 18 but he'll be 19 soon... but a 22 year old. And whenever I hear that they're going downtown. It just brings back memories. Like I really wish they didn't go downtown. And that is it. That's interesting as I sit here with you, and you're asking me these questions, but I know now and recall is a powerful thing, why he would go downtown, and I would literally leave my house and set my alarm and pick him up [...] As I reflect on that, I'm not just doing that as this helicopter parent. I'm doing that because I remember what the downtown bars were like for me when I was 19. And they weren't kind. And I need to make sure that my children are getting home safely. And I need to make sure that the police see me as an educated mother picking up their child. I think sometimes I go downtown to taunt them so that they can see that Black parents are responsible, and that Black children aren't the only ones causing problems. And I want them to see me as a mother picking up my child from the downtown bars and taking him home safely. I think that's why I do it (Helen – interview with author, December 13 2021).

The trauma of July 1991 caused by the state, then, had cascading and compounding impacts on individuals and on the wider community that were never addressed by the government institutions that were responsible for them. The attempts by community advocates in interaction with government at all three levels to shift the dynamics of the police were rapidly revealed to be ineffective. Calls for the *Police Act* to be rewritten to allow for external assessments of racial ‘disturbances’, or even the implementation of the 94 recommendations of the Advisory Group were rebuffed by the Chief of Police, leading Rev. Ohanaka to declare that working with the police has “failed” (Hussey and Sadler 1992). Calls for increased representation in decision-making processes were heeded in this example – via the Advisory Group, and via the civilian committee. Halifax Police Department did follow through with an Advisory Group recommendation to create a community liaison committee with Black representatives, which some observers perceived as a step towards accountability (Lightstone 1992). The presence of



Black community advocates in these processes, however, did nothing to ensure that these governing institutions would actually *follow-through* in terms of implementation. The idea of Black representation within governing institutions as a transformative mechanism for change nevertheless remained as a policy doctrine that has great resonance, despite the context around those demands shifting away from relying on representation solely as a useful mechanism for change.

There was, however, some cause for optimism. The incident helped to forcefully demonstrate the depth of anger at the deprivation and marginalization that anti-Black racism in the city and the province maintained. In the words of community advocate and Black United Front representative Cecil Wright, “[The] one positive thing that did come out of that is some people in the bourgeois community are starting to believe that some people are serious about making good on some threats.”(Lightstone 1992) Lastly, the emergence of the Metro Coalition for a Non-Racist Society seemed to be a lasting impact from that fateful July night: a committed and engaged set of white community groups and individuals who saw the unearned material and psychic benefits that a racial institutional order founded upon the idea of Black inferiority gave to white Nova Scotians and tried, in solidarity, to refuse them (Lightstone 1992).

## **Conclusion**

The July 19, 1991 incident is instructive in the murky, but important, shifts in authority that occur in moments of crisis in Halifax. The municipal government and the municipal police force operated in a paternalistic and discriminatory manner towards Black Haligonians before, during and after the incident – from the distorted responsiveness that characterized the policing of the North End for much of the 1980s (Prowse, Weaver, and Meares 2020), to the Mayor’s initial denial after the incident occurred that racism was a factor. The federal government stepped

in – publicly as opposed to privately in the case of the Black United Front – to convene an Advisory Group attended by all three levels of government. This intervention, in many ways, was a public acknowledgement that the municipality had failed to meaningfully shift into the political order of the day – a political order that touted multiculturalism but upheld a white and Eurocentric hegemony that was perceived to be beneficial not only to community relations, but also to business (McNeil 2021, 416).

The positive reception of the Advisory Group’s findings from policymakers indicates that the authority of federal intervention, buttressed by provincial support, increased the salience of some claims by Black Haligonians that the city had fundamentally mistreated them. Importantly, these claims did not run afoul of the multicultural concepts and discourses that animated federal and provincial policy at the time because they were attenuated by solutions that did not challenge this prevailing political order. In other words, the idea that racial inequalities existed within the multicultural political order did not present a challenge to that order. Instead, the policy response to those inequalities – via descriptive representation in governing institutions and advisory groups – is a re-assertion of the necessity of multiculturalism to eliminate them over time. In this way, the political order in Halifax shifted, but only to reinscribe a form of structural exclusion masked by a discourse that promised the opposite.

This response stands in contrast to that of municipal governing institutions who, by denying the role of racial discrimination in the way that the conflict unfolded and was addressed by police forces, invited contest from the broader community and lost credibility. Their evasion and misdirection – particularly within the Incident Review Committee report – caused outrage, and only deepened the resistance to other initiatives like the Charlie Zone office that were developed to ease and not heighten tensions between police officers and Black residents.

The consequence of this shift in authority was not limited to the governing institutions themselves, but also affected Black organizers in their approach to building coalitions that could shift policy. The old order, exemplified by the Black United Front, was supplanted in terms of its ability to translate community anger to governing institutions in a manner that would facilitate resources coming to the organization and, to a smaller extent, the community. Though these resources typically came at the cost of suppressing radical forms of dissent, they did sustain the organization – and the service-provision activities it conducted – for over 20 years. Instead, Rev. Gray and the Cultural Awareness Youth Group, with their youthful exuberance, adoption of an Afrocentric aesthetic, and willingness to partner with white allies (and politicians) in highly visible actions, were able to navigate the political and discursive opportunities that emerged during the conflict. Their message of unity aligned with the approach of the federal and provincial governments to the conflict, making the Unity March an attractive opportunity for government representatives to demonstrate their support for the initiative.

The methods that organizers used to prompt change and the outcomes they were able to win in 1991 became institutionalized. As I will go on to explore in Chapter Eight, advisory groups, task forces and policy reviews became a default response by governments to charges of racial discrimination. The inaction and administrative burdens that these models of deliberation produce can be an effective deterrent to grassroots organizing. They do not, however, eliminate it. In the next chapter of this project, I explore contemporary manifestations of direct action and policy advocacy around policing. The tactics of delay and denial that accompanied organizing in 1991 are still effective in frustrating and constraining the scope of policy change. In both eras, however, the presence of multiracial coalitions taking to the streets in search of justice enlivened and extended the long horizon of self-determination efforts.

*I leave the Patrick Power Library and head back to my bicycle just as the first tendrils of dusk appear on the horizon. The contradictions I could not resolve earlier on are no clearer now. Instead, I am left with more questions: about the patterns of contest that appear to repeat, and about my role in that repetition. As I make the long, slow climb up South Park Street, I see a peek of Maroon Hill (the Citadel) in the distance. I press forward in search of emergent answers.*

### Chapter Seven – Direct action and policy advocacy

*This idea that somehow theory is not a practice is stunning to me, because what we do on the streets is theoretical. It is a method. It is an analytic. It is an assessment.* (O. Dryden, interview with author, September 8 2022).

If the idea of Black self-determination in Halifax is a concept that binds together a unique institutional order, its adaptation and evolution must extend to the tactics used by the actors that are connected to it. In other words, as Rocky Jones learned in the early days of his organizing efforts, the tactical dispensation of organizers in Oakland or Toronto did not fit Halifax. He adapted the approach that he learned from anti-capitalist and anti-war organizers in Toronto when he returned to Nova Scotia. He learned very quickly that there was a pattern of organizational structure and leadership that existed within the African Nova Scotian community in Halifax that ran counter to his perceptions of what was needed at the time – a revolutionary confrontation with governing institutions to fight racism and capitalism as expressed through discriminatory policy (Jones 2016). Yet Jones’ interventions were still premised upon the idea of relational autonomy towards nondomination – the idea that Black Haligonians deserve to have their perspectives and desires to be embraced and engaged as a part of decision-making, and that they ought to resist the arbitrary usage of state power to oppress and demean their community.

As Chapters Five and Six demonstrate, Rocky’s work alongside other radical activists in Halifax shaped the repertoire of contention that has and can be used by community members to address “a public decision they consider unjust or threatening” as much as the conciliatory and collaborative approach used by organizations like the NSAACP or, later, the Black United Front (Della Porta 2013). Despite these overlapping histories, however, observers have described

African Nova Scotians as “non-political” or “defeated” in their stance toward the historical and contemporaneous injustices caused by the state (Head and Clairmont 1989). I take up the argument here that this view is founded upon an ahistorical reading of African Nova Scotian history that is tied to discourses of Black inferiority and victimhood. Instead, Black activists and advocates in Halifax navigate a political and discursive context that constructs direct action as a “third rail” action that can rarely be used legitimately in the eyes of the state and established organizations within Black communities.

I argue that direct and radical action is, in fact, a vital part of the tactical repertoire that Black Haligonians can and often do use to shift policy. Direct action allows Black activists, in coalition with other actors, to engage in what Chloe Thurston calls the “politics of visibility” by highlighting often unseen mechanisms of oppression by governing institutions (2018). Direct action also allows actors to bridge identity divides within communities using processes of boundary-spanning that clarify issues that must be addressed along with the actors who must address it (Wang, Piazza, and Soule 2018, 170). This bridging process allows those who engage to collaborate, creating meaning from the experience of contest, which can lead to stronger coalitions over time.

Some actors use direct action as a principled stance to refuse co-optation and to highlight the fundamental injustices that shape Black life in Halifax. They speak of “refusing the meeting” – resisting the tendency to be brought into the fold and allowing the status-quo, shaped by perceptions of Black inferiority and victimhood, to be maintained. This direct action is complemented by vociferous advocacy within conventional and public channels of engagement designed to prompt governing institutions to pay attention to, and accede to, movement demands.

This advocacy is uncompromising and articulates success as changing the parameters of resonant policy frames in addition to formal shifts in government behaviour.

Other actors use the threat of direct action as an indicator of communal duress to force governing institutions to the negotiating table and into processes of policy co-creation. These actors do not simply “take the meeting” but are active participants in networked forms of governance via policy entrepreneurship & long-standing service-provision relationships that guarantee access to decision-makers within governing institutions. These negotiations can focus on discriminatory policies (like issues with street checks covered briefly in Chapter One) but can also pertain to issues of substandard service-delivery, availability, and engagement. The goal of these relationships, therefore, is to advocate for the state to provide the material resources to community organizations so that they can meet community needs via culturally specific programming and service-delivery. These forms of governance, while ostensibly being collaborative, are often indicative of a fundamental lack of trust in the state within communities of African descent which I discuss in further detail in Chapter Eight.

This chapter discusses the tactical choices that actors who engage with Black self-determination as a racial concept use to advance efforts to transform municipal and provincial policy. I focus on issues of policing, with my analysis converging specifically on the organizing around defunding the police that unfolded in the summer of 2020. I also focus on direct action and public advocacy as tactical choices, discussing the nuances of organizational development in Chapter Eight. I outline the spaces where activists and policymakers converge from the activist’s perspective – from the standpoint of agreement that there is structural injustice to dismantle, but a multitude of approaches and perspectives about how one ought to go about dismantling it. Negotiating this ecosystem requires an understanding of the historical and contemporary factors

that influence the repertoire of contention that actors use to prompt change, as well as the political opportunity structure that facilitates responses by governing institutions.

To ground this discussion, I begin this chapter by returning to the concept of a repertoire of contention and identifying how this repertoire interacts with the collective action frames that organizers use to articulate their calls for change. I then map out the repertoire of contention used by activists in Halifax as identified by interview participants and via participant observation. I group these methods under two broad umbrellas - direct action and public advocacy - before describing how actors in Halifax used these tactical approaches during the summer of 2020 as both a participant in actions and an organizer of advocacy efforts. The chapter concludes with a normative reflection on the ways that understanding this repertoire of contention might benefit actors interested in fostering transformative policy change in Halifax.

### **Repertoires of contention**

As noted in Chapter One, repertoires of contention refer to the ways that collectives assert normative claims towards powerful individuals or groups – typically in opposition to a public decision (1978, 147–151). The repertoire of contention in a particular population is often limited by history and culture because it emerges from a contextual and everyday understanding of the mechanisms of change that are available to actors via the claims they make, thus only changing marginally or in periods of great duress (Tilly 1978, 156; Wada 2016, 451). As della Porta notes, the tactical decisions that collectives make are not simply about an ideological disposition or about perceived ‘rationality’ but about an internal ‘logic of action’ that can, in modern movements, opt towards the logic of bearing witness to convince onlookers rather than a demonstration of strength to overwhelm opponents (Della Porta 2013, 2).



These repertoires are contingent on participants making arguments against or to the governing institutions that are the focus of their contest. Tilly notes that these claims take three different shapes: “identity,” “standing,” and “program” claims (Tilly 2006, 32). Identity claims are an assertion of the presence and unity of a collective; standing claims advocate for resources and status based on said identity, and program claims call for institutions to act on behalf of claimants and do something (Tilly 2006, 32). These claims are intertwined with the framing processes I outline in Chapter One of diagnosis (or problem definition), prognosis (what ought to be done to alleviate the problem) and motivation (why this action ought to be undertaken) by acting as a means to legitimate one’s own actions while delegitimizing an opponent (Haunss 2007, 166). This connection is particularly salient when focusing on diagnostic frames, as problem identification in activist contexts is typically part of a broader “master frame” of injustice and allows actors to assign responsibility and blame to governing institutions for said injustice (Haunss 2007, 166, 167). In so doing, injustice frames strengthen both identity claims and standing claims by identifying a population that has been wronged and offering a possibility of rectifying said wrong through increased standing, leading to action (Tilly 2006, 32).

Understanding the connections between repertoires of contention and collective action frames is useful in this project because these processes reveal how the tactical methods that actors are intending to prompt change, therefore also revealing the ways that state mechanisms operate in response to these inputs. Chapters Four, Five and Six of this dissertation identify via historical narrative how Black community members have developed distinct collective action frames to respond to injustice and have used a rigid repertoire of contention that combines occasional outbreaks of direct conflict with governing institutions alongside organizational development and public advocacy to contest racism in a hostile city and province.

As Tilly explains, these connections between tactics, frames and audience constitute a performance (2006, 35). Performances must be recognizable to the object of claims, which means that while variations might happen at a micro-level, ultimately there must be consistency in the macro for these performances to resonate.

Below, I combine insights from the historical narrative outlined in Chapters Four, Five and Six with insights from contemporary organizers to identify what that repertoire looks like for Black activists and Black-led coalitions in Halifax. The figure below identifies the specific methods that actors have identified in their conversations with me, as well as some of the tactics that I have used in collaboration with others:

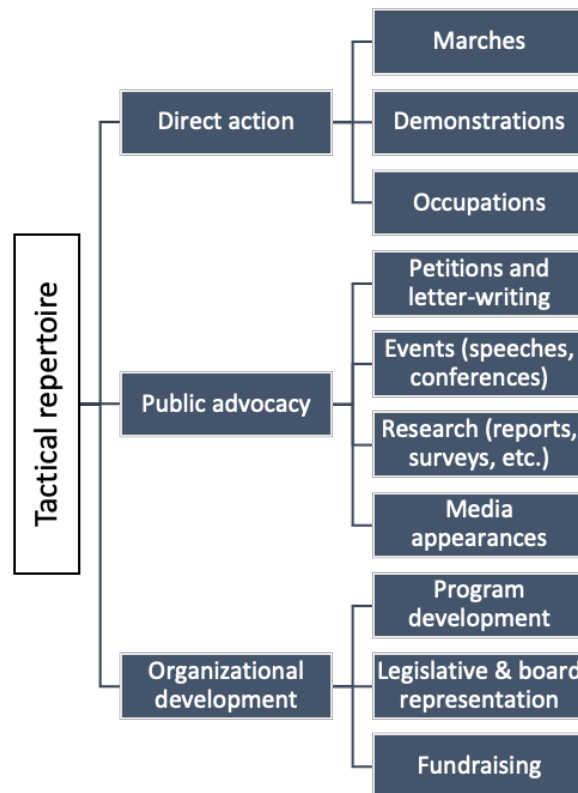


Figure 6: A model demonstrating the tactical repertoire that Black activists use in Halifax, Nova Scotia

The methods above are not always used by all actors to contest municipal or provincial policy, but a combination of these tactics often accompanies moments of contest. Below, I will outline, alongside discussions with the activists that I have interviewed during this dissertation, how these tactics are strategically deployed to transform policy.

### **Direct action**

Direct action, via marches, occupations, and demonstrations, are the tactical approaches that are the most visible and traditional representations of activism among the people I interviewed. In this section, I discuss the experience of protest during the summer of 2020. Engaging in direct action during the pandemic, especially as part of a community stigmatized as being a threat to public safety during this time, demonstrated the necessity for organizers to ground their actions in a holistic and worldbuilding model of care. This form of care shaped the nature of the tactics chosen by organizers as well as the ways these organizers were able to collaborate to construct meaningful solidarities across difference during this time. Direct action directly led to tangible policy victories, including the reversal of an armoured vehicle purchase by Halifax Regional Council, as well as discursive victories that including the resonance of defunding the police as a policy frame. As I demonstrate below, these successes also come with significant costs that include risks to organizers' safety and a risk of co-optation. Most of all, while direct action functions as a catalyst to prompt change, it must be supported by an infrastructure that can translate demands into tangible policy wins.

### Direct action, emotion, and resonance

Marches, occupations, and demonstrations are tactics that Black organizers in Halifax have used frequently to demonstrate dissent.<sup>50</sup> These tangible and spatial forms of challenging state

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50. Salient historical examples can be found in earlier chapters of this project.

power are commonly associated with images that stem from the 1960s and 70s and includes the push for civil rights and the Black Power movement, both of which loom large as an inspiration for Helen's advocacy:

Interviewer: What does being an activist or an advocate mean to you? And what role do you see yourself playing within the broader community?

Helen: It's funny you asked that question because I always say to people: I was born in the 60s, but I should have been an adult in the 60s. And I say that because I like to think that I'm not afraid. Especially when whatever actions I can make can create positive change. And so when I look at the shoulders of the ancestors I stand on in the work that that was happening physically in the 40s, to the 60s, and even still to today. So I'm glad that I can be part of some of the movements. They made sacrifices. They made sacrifices to go to prison, some lost their lives, some lost their jobs. And I think because I have such a strong belief in equity and advocating for Black people, that I wish I could have made that similar sacrifice (Helen, interview with author, December 13 2021).

Helen's identification of physical and material sacrifice in pursuit of justice and equity for Black people as a manifestation of the "strong belief" of her ancestors demonstrates the degree to which these tactics can, according to Jasper, develop affective ties that stir emotions long after movement participation is over (1998, 403). Providing a venue to express these emotions, often typified by anger and frustration at oppressive circumstances or events, are a vital part of the tactical utility of marches as community advocate and co-founder of GameChangers902 DeRico Symonds told me:

"So the marching is, you know, whether it actually changes anything or not, it's also symbolic and therapeutic at the same time, because it's symbolic of, you know, [a] representation or sample, if you will, of the people that have had enough. And then it's therapeutic because it's literally a way to kind of yell out your frustrations, walk off some of that anger, and or emotion that may come with what has just happened. And I think that mentally people need that, like people need that release" (D. Symonds, interview with author, March 14 2022).

The ritual nature of a march against injustice, and the heady emotions of direct confrontation in unwelcoming spaces, can offer a form of healing and release that allows for

participants to feel heard and an internal movement enthusiasm that promotes the belief that change is possible (Jasper and Owens 2014, 532, 533; Thompson 2017, 459). This Durkheimian collective effervescence (1915), or the energy created from a group of people in the same place for the same purpose doing the same thing, offers a clarity of purpose that makes marches an appealing first choice to express dissent, and an important mechanism to recruit participants into a broader movement.

Tapping into that effervescence also allows organizers to demonstrate the resonance of the frame of racial injustice, especially when that frame has both local and global implications. The murder of George Floyd on May 25th 2020, for example, prompted global marches for justice against police brutality (Buchanan, Bui, and Patel 2020). Two days later, Regis Korchinski-Paquet – an Afro-Indigenous woman with roots and family members living in Halifax, was killed during a confrontation with Toronto police officers that occurred during a wellness check (CBC News 2022). These events were themselves preceded by two notable incidences of police brutality against Black Haligonians earlier that year: the assaults of Santina Rao and Demario Chambers (E. Jones 2020; Chambers 2020). The protests that followed Korchinski-Paquet’s death, therefore, took on the heft of a global call to action to oppose police brutality while simultaneously feeling like a direct attempt at challenging a local status-quo.

The focus of local activists was to align the global diagnostic and prognostic framing of injustice stemming from police brutality (accompanied by the empathic, solidaristic response it prompted from observers in Halifax) with a motivational framing that identified these endemic problems as being the responsibility of Haligonians (and especially white Haligonians) to address (MacArthur 2020; Daly 2020; Grant 2020). This process of alignment is, according to Kubal, a form of “cultural resonance” which can facilitate the connection between broader

themes in the cultural environment and claims that movement actors are making (1998, 542). This cultural resonance was a surprise and was unique given the scale and scope of the global protests against police brutality. Such rigorous critique of not only the practice but the *institution* of policing were previously radical frames, which Ferree states are those claims that are “attractive to movement actors who seek a restructuring of hegemonic ideas and the interests they express and support” (2003, 305). As I will explain later, the transition of calls to defund the police from a radical to a resonant frame shaped the form of advocacy that actors engaged in as the summer of 2020 unfolded.

#### Direct action, frame alignment, and the politics of care

The focus of mobilization and attention at protests and on social media rapidly became a \$368,000 armoured vehicle purchased in 2019 by the Halifax Regional Council for the Halifax Regional Police to address a “critical gap” in the force’s ability to address crises (Rutgers 2019). Though the vehicle had already been ordered by the police, organizers used the global attention on police brutality to identify a clear prognosis in the local context (the order should be cancelled) as well as a clear motivation for action for onlookers to join protests (to convince city councillors to act). These protests, combined with petitions and statements to the media that diagnosed the issue as a militarization of the police force that would ultimately harm Black Haligonians, proved to be effective (McDonald 2020; Welsh 2020).

As de Vydt and Ketelaars highlight, frame alignment affects the propensity for onlookers not only to resonate with activist claims and intend to participate, but to actually engage in movement activities of some kind (2020). The strategic choice of direct action to bring these frames into alignment was ultimately successful in cancelling the order of the vehicle, with councillors noting that the “world had changed” since the order of the vehicle, and that the

cancellation of the vehicle would represent “to the vulnerable populations and the historically disenfranchised African Nova Scotian community that we [Halifax Regional Council] are listening to them and that we don’t want to have that physical statement of our values on policing” (Berman 2020; Woodford 2020). The ability, therefore, for direct action to bring about a tangible transformation in the municipality’s policy was enhanced by the strategic work that organizers did to align these frames and convince empathetic residents to move towards action.

Councillor Lindell Smith, currently chair of the Board of Police Commissioners and representative for the North End of Halifax, told me that actions like phone zaps and demonstrations outside of City Hall were particularly effective at the municipal level because of the lack of political parties meant that individuals on Council could change their minds given the nature and extent of public outcry:

With our electoral system here with municipal government, I think we are thankfully in a place where we can act individually and we don't have to deal with a political system where it's parties so we can make those changes. If you advocate for and you can convince your other members, so I think yes, sure. There is a part of the system that doesn't want to see some changes, but we can make a change. A perfect example is with the armoured vehicle when that would have been something that... If it was, say, the provincial government, and one of the major parties said “we want this armoured vehicle” and that they were empowered, they would have got it. But with council, even though others supported initially, they changed their minds. After hearing the outcries from the community and being convinced that Council... that we can do something better, their minds were changed. So I feel Council is a good place to challenge the system (L. Smith, interview with author, February 17 2022).

Smith’s admission that the pressure mounted by direct action and protests ultimately swayed the business of the Regional Council is an important one both for what it confirms and what it forecloses. Smith confirmed the efficacy of direct action in shaping Council’s decision-making, which speaks to the degree to which the municipality relies on the passive consent of its

residents in the majority of its decision-making around policing.<sup>51</sup> His admission also shows the barriers that might limit the possibility of the same kind of mobilization happening at a provincial level because of the insulation that political parties offer to legislators who make decisions like the purchase of the armoured vehicle.

The alignment of the local with the global made those initial protests feel electric with possibility and energy. A protest held on June 1, 2020, for example, took over several blocks of Spring Garden Road, spilling into the Public Gardens and into side-streets like tributaries feeding into a mighty river. After a series of speeches amplified using a “human mic” by prominent organizers in town like Lynn Jones, the protest erupted into a dance party in the middle of Spring Garden and South Park – one of the busiest intersections in the entire city. Dozens joined in, masks adorning their faces, in this cathartic moment. This act of occupying space and embracing humanity after months of being locked inside while bearing witness to unspeakable horror through a screen, was a thrilling example of collective effervescence at work. This ‘blocko’, (a large and rebellious dance party used by Black queer organizers at Toronto Pride for years) was also, as Dr. OmiSoore Dryden explained to me, a continuation of a radical tradition that affirms Black life:

We wanted to do a blocko, because blockos are always one of the things we were seeing out of the US, and that we’ve seen in South Africa and that we’ve seen in Nigeria, and that we’ve seen and we’ve seen, right? You remember anti-apartheid movements dancing? They were holding the line. They had a ball. Why? Because we were affirming Black life (O. Dryden, interview with author, September 8 2022).

Importantly, the choice to march or to occupy is also an opportunity for seasoned activists to demonstrate a form of radical care that also deepens relationships and symbolically demonstrates

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51. This passivity is important because it facilitates the inefficacy of the body ostensibly charged with reflecting community values around policing — the Board of Police Commissioners.



a morality that is a part of a collective identity. As Hobart and Kneese note, principles of radical community care have long been a part of antiracist and feminist movements, and these principles orient actors towards liberatory ends while simultaneously exposing unequal and unjust power structures (Hobart and Kneese 2020, 5, 7).

In the case of the 2020 protests, these models of care were vital as the context of the onset of the lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic meant that organizers were under more scrutiny than usual when planning marches to ensure the safety of participants. The Premier of Nova Scotia, Stephen McNeil, identified East and North Preston as COVID “hotspots”, placing additional stigma on Black community members and prompting organizers to want to be seen as responsible in the face of the unfolding crisis (Ryan 2020). The protests, therefore, were an opportunity to demonstrate community care above and beyond that which was offered by the state, while exposing the callous stereotypes that underpinned the comments made by the Premier and by others on social media as El Jones reminded me:

El: Actually the Regis protests were the first protests like, “back”, and we were so anxious about the whole COVID thing and drawing lines [to indicate the 2m distance required for social distancing], remember?

Interviewer: People walking around with hand sanitizer!

El: You know? Because we were really worried about like, the bad publicity of coming out during COVID. And [the streets] were so packed. I remember that like giving out masks and everything, you know, and this was before everyone was like, it was cool to be outside. We kind of broke isolation for the Regis stuff.

Interviewer: And it was maybe a week after McNeil said it was people gathering in the Prestons who were spreading COVID [after fact-checking, it was actually almost 2 months].

El: You know, we were very, very paranoid, but we were like “don’t come if you’re sick” you know, we had all of that. (E. Jones, interview with author, May 8 2022).

The success of these initial marches, and the sense of moral clarity and certitude that the COVID-conscious affect of the marches provided, ultimately facilitated a summer of actions in Halifax where the global movement against police brutality amplified rather than displaced local concerns. These concerns were not only confined to issues of police brutality experienced by Black Haligonians, but also those experienced by Mi'kmaq community members across Mi'kma'ki. Within a matter of two weeks, Chantel Moore and Rodney Levi were killed by police officers in New Brunswick, and Mi'kmaq organizers held healing walks across the province, including a large event in Halifax where attendees respected proper protocols that were outlined in advance of the event (CBC News 2020). The Healing Walk was a powerful moment of solidarity, articulated by organizers to honour the lives of those lost – and in particular Indigenous and Black community members – at the hands of the police (CBC News 2020). The wide-ranging and voluminous support for events like the Healing Walk and for the protests held at that time surprised even seasoned organizers like Lynn Jones, who articulated her optimism to Robert Devet in the Nova Scotia Advocate:

Never in my born days would I have imagined the size and persistence of the anti-racism protests taking place here in Halifax ever since George Floyd was murdered in late May [...] some of the people who are stepping up have never done so before. They're scared, but they're bringing forward concerns that they never raised before. Yes, there are feelings of hopelessness, but I also see it as a great opportunity (Devet 2020).

Jones' surprise is indicative of the impact of the early days of protest and direct action, and point to another major benefit of direct action as a tactic in a repertoire of contention: the ability to recruit a breadth of people who may not otherwise maintain the networks or have the access to get involved in Black-led efforts to challenge governing institutions. By demonstrating what Tilly calls WUNC (worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment), the early days of the 2020

protests helped to mobilize an unprecedented number of new participants to join movement activities (2006, 184).

These protests and earlier protests around issues like street checks also provided a space to broaden coalitions to include Black residents who are not African Nova Scotian.<sup>52</sup> DeRico Symonds identified the complicated but important linkages made between African Nova Scotians and other people of African descent in Halifax during periods of contest when identifying potential strategies for bridging the two groups:

It's really the converging of these two populations in the midst of the struggle that I think brings the communities together the best, because again, it's that kind of common understanding that we are going... although we have our individual challenges we are we are commonly going through this together. What I would observe is that in these challenging moments – street checks, George Floyd, human rights complaints, all of the above – in those moments are when I think the two populations [African Nova Scotians and other people of African descent who are either first or second generation in the province] see the humanity in each other. And also see, like, you know, that nod that Black people do when they see each other when it's just like, like, we're going through this together. It's really like thinking about how do we continually kind of capture that emotion or that feeling of 'we're in this together' so that it's not just bred out of trauma? Trauma bonding really is probably what I would call it. Because I feel like through the trauma people bond together for good or bad (D. Symonds, interview with author, March 14 2022).

What Symonds describes here is a phenomenon called identity boundary-spanning that social movements use to forge meaningful ties, especially when economic and other resources are scarce and when local threats abound (Wang, Piazza, and Soule 2018, 171). The moments of struggle Symonds identifies are made visible by organizers taking to the streets, and in the process of direct action, the organizational and ideological boundaries maintained between African Nova Scotians and other communities of African descent can be spanned by actors interested in sharing resources and demonstrating unity. This boundary-spanning is also

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52. The complexities of these coalitions will be covered in depth in Chapter Eight.

facilitated by the extensive political opportunities that exist in moments of crisis that incentivize a coalitional approach as a mechanism to advocate for policy change, as well as by an intersectional understanding of movement actors' identities (Wang, Piazza, and Soule 2018, 172, 173). Crucially, this boundary-spanning can lead to new organizations and coalitions emerging from spontaneous and direct responses to state violence, meaning that direct action becomes a crucial component to the development of worldbuilding infrastructure (Reich 2017, 1). As I go on to discuss below, the transition from effervescent and spontaneous organizing in the streets to formal advocacy organizations is a challenging process with important considerations of positionality and responsiveness that must emerge at the forefront of movement work.

#### Criticisms of direct action

The benefits of direct action, as highlighted by some research participants, are numerous in moments of crisis. Importantly, however, many participants also expressed reservations about the use of direct-action tactics in terms of their sustainability as well as in terms of their ability to transform the governance and policy processes that lead to inequity in the first place. Louise Adongo, a self-described "actionist" with experience in the provincial government as well as at the helm of a community organization that works across the province, identifies her distinction from being called an activist or participating in direct action by using Occupy Wall Street as an example of inefficacy:

I agree with what advocates say and do I understand where activists are coming from, but I want to know where the rubber meets the road. And where it actually does something for people, which is difficult, because I'm also a visionary and a big picture person [...] if I like, think about the point where I say, I'd say that Occupy Wall Street, there was a lot of things that people are asking for, and throwing into the pile that were just not practical or pragmatic, or ever gonna mean something when there was actual needs [...] So I wouldn't describe myself as the activist who feels it, and it's like, "something must be done about this and so here's what we're gonna do, we're gonna march, we're going to strategize, we're gonna make the big slogans, we're gonna do the big thing." I'm like, I see that I feel all that energy. I'm not gonna march with you. Because I want to start

building like, you guys go burn it down. And I want to build a blueprint of what we're building after you've burnt it down, is how I see my role as an actionist. (L. Adongo, interview with author, April 4 2022).

Adongo here speaks to the challenges inherent to the boundary-spanning and coalition-building approaches that direct action tactics facilitate. While the diagnostic and motivational framing of Black-led protests against police brutality, for example, are well-defined, the prognostic frames used to identify what ought to be changed can be rapidly contested, leading to external actors perceiving the conceptual fuzziness that Adongo describes. During the summer of 2020, for example, the prognostic frame that Black activists globally and locally used was to defund the police.<sup>53</sup> During a march, however, the extensive and robust understanding about what defunding might look like practically and about its abolitionist roots are not easily communicated, lending opponents a clear target to develop “counter-frames”, or alternative arguments that compete with collective action frames to mobilize support amongst the public (Aklin and Urpelainen 2013, 1225).

In the summer of 2020, these counter-frames appeared in editorials issued in newspapers and other media sources across the political spectrum, and argued that defunding as a policy proposal was specious and unclear (Zorn 2020; Yglesias 2020; Ferguson 2020). These initial counter-frames later gave way to counter-frames that suggested that the call to defund the police was dangerous, and inconsistent with the sentiments of those most affected by police violence (Gagliano 2020; Jackman 2020). A clear and concrete program of action rapidly became muddled in such a way that even when organizers (including myself) tried to establish how these calls would work in practice in Halifax, counter-framing efforts were able to morph this

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53. As I will discuss later in this chapter, work around defunding itself became one of the lasting contributions of the summer of 2020 to the policy discourse.

pragmatism into a perceived “reformist” sensibility that could not possibly be as radical as we claimed as it did not adhere to the “laughable caricature” of activists in the streets (VandenBeukel 2022). A risk, therefore, of direct action is that it provides opponents a legible pathway to counter-frame calls to action by organizers by ceding them the ground of ‘rationality’ and ‘specificity’ in favour of moral and political heft. The “fuzziness” of collective action frames that are part of direct action are thus an important challenge to the efficacy of this tactic.

Another core challenge of direct action is sustaining contest beyond moments of effervescence towards a sustainable theory of change. El Jones noted in our conversation that few participants are interested in the often-boring and behind-the-scenes work that goes into planning actions and other methods of organizing:

Everyone always tells you, “oh, there’s lots of ways to do activism, like you can actually run a shelter for people or you can take a selfie of yourself.” So there’s always this corporate watering down hashtag, and it has its role. I’m not saying that I’ve never taken a selfie. I’m not saying that there can’t be ways that [such initiatives] organize people. But the danger is that stuff is so much easier to do than the stuff that needs to be done. And often gets media attention and stuff. And then like... No, this is always my kind of bugbear. It’s easy to do a protest, it’s relatively easy. You just rent a thing that goes on the corner, like invite people, you know? It’s a lot harder to run a prison line that we have to every day, *do* it. Because there’s people gonna be yelling at you, and you have to give over your life [...] So we start getting this attrition where everybody wants to be in the media and do the protests, or do the art project to do this. And nobody wants to do the jail line or write the report or do things that are really grinding and generally reward less, you know? (E. Jones, direct correspondence, May 8 2022).

Jones here notes that the relative ease of planning a protest obscures the real costs of organizing that supports and goes beyond direct action. Participating in direct action and in developing a broader radical infrastructure offers tangible risks, which she notes many are unwilling to bear:

“Activism is cool now, but trust me in 2007, 2008, 2009, it wasn’t. It was like Rocky, you know, there were [other] people but it was like you had to be *about it*. Because you were making these sacrifices. You weren’t getting like on the cover of this mag and getting these awards, like, and I’m still not” (E. Jones, direct correspondence, May 8 2022).

What Jones points to are the grim realities of direct action as a method in a broader context that views protest as excessively antagonistic or violent. This negative perception was a key factor in some organizers' desire to identify to the media and to fellow protestors the importance of a non-violent approach to protest, noting that it would be the "only way we can be heard" (Daly 2020). This articulation mirrored the tactical choices taken by Rev. Darryl Gray and the Cultural Awareness Youth Group 29 years prior, and facilitated a similarly positive response by the media and by representatives of governing institutions including Mayor Mike Savage, who attended the June 1, 2020 protest on Spring Garden Road, and Dr. Robert Strang who gave the protests his blessing as the Chief Medical Officer of Health (Groff 2020). These choices also, however, had the effect of neutering some of the radical potential of that moment as an organizer who I am naming Kemi explained to me: "People were more interested in getting a picture of kneeling with [Mayor Mike] Savage and the Chief of Police than they were with Black life" (Kemi, interview with author, 2022). The move towards a conciliatory stance by some involved with the protests created a fissure in the unity of those planning further actions, as the cost of the strategic choice to appeal to the perceptions of external actors beyond the values of those organizing was a loss of human capital and expertise about how to navigate contentious politics.

This loss of expertise fed into challenges in keeping protest participants safe later on in the summer of 2020, and into the summer of 2021. The growth in participants in direct action in Halifax meant that the human and material resources needed to develop and train people in ways to keep each other safe in moments of contention were stretched. DeRico Symonds highlighted in our conversation many of the steps that he and other organizers took to ensure the safety of other protestors when planning a protest:

We think about who the marshals are going to be at the events kind of guiding the crowd, who are going to be some of the lookouts, and they have to be... we make sure they're white people who are looking out for police. Do we have any lawyers that are on standby, because we expect something to happen to Black folks. And then we also get people who are willing to almost create a wall. It's usually white people who kind of protect, like stand in front of the police. For Black folks, we think about exit strategy (D. Symonds, interview with author, March 14 2022).

The planning Symonds describes maps onto my own experiences at protests and marches as a marshal in Halifax.<sup>54</sup> The deep and abiding concern for injury for Black and Indigenous participants was front of mind for me, particularly when counter-protestors tried to aggressively interrupt (using chants, threats, and shoving) a solemn and peaceful event. As Symonds identified, white participants intervened – forming a wall to stop these counter-protestors from getting closer to many of the participants. Other participants sought to antagonize the participants in a direct confrontation. In these moments, I could not help but fear for my own safety – from the counter-protestors and from the police – and I was keenly aware of the discrepancy of consequences between myself and the white people who also attended the Healing Walk should violent conflict occur.

#### “Closed-door meetings” and resisting co-optation

The harms that Black organizers face are not limited to actions themselves, but frequently extend beyond into other aspects of their lives. Organizers are sometimes ostracized in their places of work, particularly if they happen to have a job within government. One anonymous organizer gave me an anecdote from his days leading the street checks marches:

The other one that personally happened to me was in the height of street checks in that whole movement. [...] My supervisor actually pulled me into a meeting. The Sunday before that, I said to [a colleague], “watch, I’m going to get fired or something at work.” And so I go to work Monday, and sure enough the supervisor calls me in. And she says, “we need to sit down and just chat about the protests.” And I said “well, hold on, it wasn’t a protest it was actually a peaceful march that I organized on a Saturday, from my

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54. One such example of my participation as a marshal was the Healing Walk mentioned above.



personal email, not during work time.” She said, “well, the CAO, the mayor, the lawyers were talking about if you even should have been there. So you know, the direction that I’m getting is you’re being asked to step down from talking about street checks and racism in HRM.” And I said, “well, I’m absolutely not going to do that” (anonymous organizer, interview with author, 2022).

This organizer’s experience is not unique – other interviewees discussed their concerns about identification for similar reasons. These obvious risks demonstrate to Jones why committed and sustained direct action is so rare in Halifax:

The only people who really have that freedom are like academics or like, young people [who] don’t give a shit, right? And I was both. So I think that’s part of it. If I write an editorial, no one’s making a call to my boss the next day being like, “now I’m defunding like the African Nova Scotian Affairs department because you said this” which is what happens to people. So people aren’t being unreasonable when they’re scared to speak out (E. Jones, interview with author, May 8 2022).

Instead, as Jones explains, the radical energy and anger characteristic of direct action is often snuffed out in what she calls the “closed-door meeting”, offered by politicians and policymakers in moments of acute pressure:

So when people realize that we weren’t winding down, then they began offering a closed-door meeting. But we know that people go into those meetings. Have you ever seen notes from a closed door meeting in your life? Nobody ever says what happened in that meeting to the community [...] And it’s like, nobody tells you not to. Everybody just understands somehow. Desmond [Cole] said [...] “I’m going to tell you exactly what you’re gonna say when the meeting is brought up. So you’re gonna say it was great. He was very nice.” It’s like that script will fall out of you — that you felt that it was productive, he’s like, “that’s what happens.” [...] It’s like forces beyond you. And then you still want to feel important, and significant, and welcomed especially if you’re Black and you’ve been excluded. You want to be seen. All these dynamics come into play (E. Jones, interview with author, May 8 2022).

In describing these closed-door meetings, Jones makes a similar case to that of Steven Lukes in *Power: A Radical View*. Lukes argues that people engage in patterns of what he terms as “willing compliance”, or the propensity for people to adhere to extant patterns of domination and normative control despite believing that they are pursuing their own interests and making their

own choices (Lukes 2004, 106). In this account, Black Haligonians are subject to the discourses of inferiority that have led to their exclusion from political and social power, and thus reconcile with the very forces that continue to propagate that exclusion without recognizing this process is underway. Jones' solution for avoiding this "willing compliance" is simple: avoid taking the meeting in the first place (E. Jones, interview with author, May 8 2022).

For other prominent community organizers and advocates, however, the closed-door meeting can be an important tool to amplify the concerns of protestors in the streets whose claims may otherwise be ignored by policymakers. Robert Wright, a social worker, sociologist, and community advocate whose work straddles issues of health and criminal justice, notes that the nuance and tactical understanding required to navigate complex policy issues with overlapping areas of jurisdictional responsibility are difficult to communicate in a protest setting, inevitably leading to attrition:

I've been thinking a lot about the need for us to have a governance and policy school for community advocates...you know, you say, well, "the 500 people who come for a march aren't interested in governance and policy. No, they march saying "street checks got to be banned, got to be banned, got to be banned." They know this is clear. But that 600 people are not going to sit through a day long seminar on, you know, what is the responsibility of the police commission? What is the responsibility of the Police Complaints Bureau? What is policing? What is the Charter of Rights? How do we manage that? 600 people will condense to about a dozen people who are able to sustain a policy advocacy agenda (R. Wright, interview with author, December 7 2021).

Instead, for Wright, there is a principled role that advocates that do understand the policy context they are operating within to at once take the closed-door meeting that representatives from governing institutions often offer while simultaneously respecting and amplifying the claims being made by those in the streets. He offers this nuance with a tongue-in-cheek analogy about "angry negroes" and "reasonable negros":

There's this dichotomy there: the angry negroes and the reasonable negroes. When the angry negroes are burning shit, government will approach the reasonable negroes to ask "how do we solve this problem?" And it's okay for the reasonable negroes to entertain those meetings, as long as they declare, as the first item on the agenda, that "I'm with the angry negro", right? I have the capacity to be in this meeting and to do this policy work. But let us be clear, I am Black, and I'm with my brothers and sisters who are in the street. It's when Black reasonable negroes play respectability politics, and advocate for their own personal advancements, [that is] when all this breaks down (R. Wright, interview with author, December 7 2021).

Wright's understanding of the role of advocacy informed by and accountable to "the streets" speaks to the interdependence of these tactics in articulating and ultimately securing pathways to actualizing movement claims. The prognostic, motivational and diagnostic frames used in direct action to contest racial injustice should not, in this view, be changed. Instead, these frames should be restated and translated to facilitate action by governing institutions, as well as respect for those marching in the streets.

Direct action, therefore, is a vital tool in the repertoire of organizers within Halifax and further afield, but it is fraught with contradiction and consequence. Whether one perceives themselves to be an "actionist", as Adongo articulates, or a seasoned protestor, contesting the state requires more than the act of expression. Without said expression, however, the other tools that are a part of the repertoire of contention are less effective as I will explain below.

### **Public advocacy**

The recruitment gains made by direct action can quickly dissipate without the commitment and tactical interventions of seasoned organizers who can build a sustainable infrastructure to support and extend early gains. The approach that many take to extend the gains made in the streets towards policy change is with public advocacy (via letters, speeches, research, and media appearances). These methods of contest are most familiar to those that I interviewed, but require both material resources and a careful attention to the relationship between advocacy tactics and

identity formation to avoid reinforcing a form of respectability politics that reinforces discourses of Black inferiority.

I reflect in this section primarily on the creation of the Nova Scotia Policing Policy Working Group (NSPPWG), an advocacy organization that I co-founded alongside Harry Critchley, Dr. El Jones & Dr. Martha Paynter in June 2020 (Nova Scotia Policing Policy Working Group 2020). Among other activities, members of the NSPPWG advocated for and wrote the *Defunding the Police: Defining the Way Forward* report for the Halifax Board of Police Commissioners, and ran a survey of all candidates running for Regional Council in the 2020 municipal elections.

#### Getting started

Much of this work was conducted and sustained by a group of volunteers who were mobilized in the early days of the 2020 protests and wanted to sustain the momentum of the movement. We decided that, as a group of individuals who had experiences from grassroots organizing to service provision to research to legal advocacy, our best option was to try to develop the resources and capacity to lead to sustainable change in policing policy in the city and the province.

Our initial venue of choice was the municipal Board of Police Commissioners, where El Jones, Harry Critchley and Martha Paynter had presented in earlier in 2020, and where — as I explain below — conversations around defunding the police were first raised by Jones in the Halifax context. These proposals were quickly and swiftly rebuffed. This strategic choice to engage an arms-length civilian board while knowing that the outcome of these presentations was likely to be poorly received was an example of what Jämte et al. term as pragmatic radicalism, or the marriage of radical movement principles with conventional and institutionally-oriented forms

of contest (2020, 27). In these initial actions, we complemented protests in the streets with our statements at the Board rather than, for example, demonstrating at the Board or occupying Council chambers as a strategy to prompt change. This pragmatic radicalism underpinned our public advocacy as well as our organizational structure.

Jones noted in our discussion that the choice to engage the Board was, in part, a recognition that the marches and demonstrations that accompanied the fight against street checks were not likely to be effective in addressing the municipality's culpability in police violence and surveillance. She noted that a similar process had already unfolded in Toronto a couple of years earlier, also highlighted that the Halifax Regional Police were keen to move on from addressing their deficiencies after offering an apology for street checks in 2019:

I know what's going to happen. They will apologize and be done, and then we're going to be told "Oh, they're working on it" as they do. They're consulting with people. And then everybody breathes a big breath because we've pushed to get to this point, and people are tired, or it's no longer in the headlines, all these things... so we back off. So I was like people really need to engage with our democratic organs. We need to start going to the Police Board. Because every time I talk to people, they're all staging stuff at the Police Board. You know, if you watch *The Skin We're In* documentary [directed by Charles Officer and starring Desmond Cole], they are at the Police Board, BLM is at the Police Board. We're always doing protests. I'm like, why did we never go to the Police Board?" (E. Jones, interview with author, May 8 2022)

Jones' question was particularly pertinent given the then-recent and protracted advocacy around the practice of street checks in the city, which the provincial government eventually banned in October 2019. A central point of contention during that debate was whether the Board of Police Commissioners had any jurisdiction over the practice, or whether they were required to defer to the province for action under the *Police Act*. The ANSDPAD Coalition, according to Director Vanessa Fells, spent little time engaging with the municipal board on the issue for two reasons. Firstly, while the practice was concentrated in Halifax, it was used across the province and any

ban would have province-wide ramifications (V. Fells, interview with author, November 3 2021). Secondly, and more importantly, Fells did not believe that the Board understood its own powers:

The issue that we found is that the Board of Police Commissioners really weren't informed as to their ability and their authority to be able to make those policy changes. So when we spoke to the Commission Board, because of course, we were sending letters to the Commission Board, to the Department of Justice, to the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General, to the Serious Incident Response Team and to the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission. We were covering every gamut. And what we realized and what we found out is that the [Board of Police Commissioners] is at least in our thought ill-informed as to what their powers actually are. They didn't believe they had the power to stop street checks from happening. And that [a ban] had to come from higher up, even though the [Board of Police Commissioners] is tasked with overseeing the policy changes in how police conduct themselves (V. Fells, interview with author, November 3 2021).

Fells' view on the Board's lack of understanding about its own capacity was confirmed by Councillor Lindell Smith, who is currently the Chair of the Board of Police Commissioners:

It was interesting to see that [the Board] approached it almost like this has never been done before [despite work on carding in Ontario]. So [the Board] got to start from scratch, which meant that the Board didn't really know exactly where its powers laid and where they didn't lay. And that's why [the Board] had to use the Human Rights Commission, [and] had to ask them to get an outside legal opinion, to help support and understand what [the Board's] role was, and, etc, in the legality around it (L. Smith, interview with author, February 17 2022).

These concerns about the Board's capacity amplified the concerns outlined by Honsberger and Moreash that led them to state that the Board was "not providing police governance oversight consistent with the provisions of the Nova Scotia Police Act of 2006" (2016, 2). The Board's regulatory dormancy thus shaped the landscape for advocacy. The Board had regulatory powers that it had yet to use or recognize and had a lack of capacity that required it to reach out to the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission to get a legal opinion on its own functioning. Advocates like El Jones, Harry Critchley and Leah Genge among others identified this lack of capacity as an opportunity for transformative interventions.

Jones' first presentation to the Board on January 20, 2020 was the catalyst for defunding conversations in the city. Jones presented to the Board to express concern about a significant increase to the police budget at the time that was later scrapped because of the COVID-19 pandemic. She made several points during her presentation that ultimately shaped the NS PPWG's advocacy over the next two years, including the idea that the approval of the police budget ought to be tied to the implementation of *Wortley Report* recommendations as she explains to me:

I was just trying to come up with something to present on and I'm like, I'm gonna just say "don't give them more money", so it wasn't even defunding. It was like the barest [version of] defunding, like don't give them more budget. And then I also said, for every dollar [that is in] the police budget, \$3 should go into community. I bet you'll justify the budget then if you have to put the money somewhere else. And I said that, you know, until they lived up to the recommendations of the Wortley report, why should we reward these people. So this is performance based metrics (E. Jones, interview with author, May 8 2022).

Jones' presentation was met with immediate resistance from members of the Board of Police Commissioners, with Councillor Tony Mancini asking her if she could "name any good that you have seen that the police has done the last few years" as a way to undercut her presentation (Devet 2020). Jones also directed criticism towards African Nova Scotian Board members, asking them to adequately represent the community or step aside while advocating for "community self-determination of policing" (Devet 2020). Jones' comments, while attracting media attention and also occurring within a context where two Black Haligonians had been assaulted by Halifax Regional Police officers shortly before the presentation, were not immediately met with extensive mobilization or advocacy. Her articulation of self-determination in policing was a radical framing within an institution that was, to that point, unprepared and unresponsive to those kinds of claims. Here, Jones' recital of the idea of self-determination was a direct rejoinder to the arbitrary power of the Halifax Regional Police, but also the ineffective and

unresponsive institution that shielded Halifax Regional Police from accountability. She sought, as a Black woman in this space, to insert radical frames into an institution wholly unprepared to hear these insurgent perspectives at that time.

#### Resonant frames and racialized organizations

When the Board *was* presented with arguments that at once were resonant frames and that also supported the idea of defunding the police in the same meeting, they opted to exercise their rarely used policymaking power. Jones was joined in the meeting by Harry Critchley and Leah Genge of the Mobile Outreach Street Health Centre, who presented on two community-based alternatives to policing: sobering centres and managed alcohol programs (Dubé et al. 2020). Both initiatives identified a key process (alcohol and public intoxication) through which police officers often interact with residents with sometimes deadly consequences, and both initiatives sought to remove police presence from those processes by adopting a health-focused model of care. This presentation was Critchley's first time engaged in policing work, but as a law student who had also already presented in front of the Law Amendments Committee of the Nova Scotia Legislature about police violence, he was looking for ways to deepen and further that health-connected work with Genge:

Leah had all these things that she wanted to do, where she was like, “oh, man, now we should try and get them to ban spit hoods. And also there's a massive problem with Taser use. My patients are being tasered in the waiting room at the North End Community Health Center. And that's really fucked up. We should do something about that.” And I was like, “yeah, I don't know how the fuck we even do that” (H. Critchley, interview with author, February 12 2022).

Critchley and Genge's presentation convinced the Board to order a staff report on both issues, and eventually led to the municipality's Public Safety Office developing a proposal to create sobering centres despite some councillors cautioning that this work was focused on the “health and wellbeing of Nova Scotians” and therefore out of their jurisdiction (Woodford 2021).



The presentation used comparisons to other medium-sized cities in Canada that did currently have sobering centres, and also couched the efficacy of the centres in both economic and equity-oriented terms (Critchley 2020). Critchley, in conversation, acknowledged that the success of his presentation was in part due to the ways that his racial identity and his gender identity were embraced as credible by Commissioners in the room:

The most obvious example is at that police board meeting, where Leah and I presented and El also presented. People forget that I was there too. She did a presentation about how police boards weren't useful, right? She basically called on the entire board to resign unless it was going to take its responsibilities more seriously. And [Commissioner Tony Mancini] was really racist in response to her. He and I got in a fight about that. In terms of the questions that they asked El, they were basically not engaging at all – very dismissive. And then there's me, where I came in, and I almost played up like, "I'm just like a reasonable incrementalist kind of guy" right? And this is a small, incremental change that is based in a massive body of evidence, and I can play that up a lot. And I could be the most reasonable man in the room. And then it was easy enough for them to be like, "oh, yeah, this sounds great." I played up the academic dimension of it. I feel like... I think that works because I'm white. I'm a white guy. And I think people know that I have a research background (H. Critchley, interview with author, February 12 2022).

Critchley's awareness of the racialized dimensions of advocacy are crucial to understanding the coalition we formed as the NSPPWG. His comments also help to highlight what Victor Ray articulates as the nature of a racialized organization where whiteness is used as a credential to confer organizational resources and status unto some and restrict the same power from others (2019, 41). Here, whiteness is not simply a racial identity but a relationship to a form of hegemonic domination that is reinscribed by legislation, institutions, and the lived experiences of those who suffer its harms (Harris 1993). By articulating the racial discrimination that he perceived to be at work in the January 2020 meeting and contesting this discrimination as it was ongoing, Critchley was able to use the access and the benefit of the doubt given to him by virtue of his racial identity to disrupt the unspoken racialization that unfolded to undermine Jones

during the meeting. Jones, when reflecting on Critchley's intervention, noted that she felt it was a radical move:

The interesting thing with that [meeting] is we actually didn't know we were both going to be presenting on the same day. So there was this weird confluence of those two defunding-related things happening, because I had gone first and particularly Tony Mancini had asked me "is there anything good about cops" and was snickering as if I was doing something ridiculous. Then Harry came up, and he opened his presentation by saying to Mancini, "I think your line of questioning to Professor Jones" — and he kept using this title, Professor Jones — "was deeply inappropriate and disrespectful." Then throughout his presentation he kept emphasizing Professor Jones: throwing back credit to me about things. That was, I think, such a radical move in that space where there had been this idea that I was this radical, crazy person who has to be tolerated in case I go off, but we all know how she is. And then for this white man to come into the space and so actively intervene in that [discourse] and actively support [me]. I think it was an extremely radical move. [Critchley] wasn't like, "let me be the respectable one." I actually think it was a giving up of respectability to stand in solidarity with a Black woman. And I think that was actually a really important move to take place (E. Jones, interview with author, 7 November 2022).

At the same time, Critchley used those same unspoken and racialized dynamics to effectively advocate for a policy intervention that would, by his own framing, primarily support Black and Indigenous communities who were disproportionately affected by the criminal justice system (Critchley 2020). He, in practice, also used the racialized credentials that he was critiquing to advance arguments aimed towards racial justice. Critchley's advocacy combined frames that would resonate with the Board like aligning municipal practice with similar jurisdictions and maintaining economic efficiency with potentially radical outcomes, and this combination worked because of his racial identity. The tension of Critchley's position in this and other spaces meant that he, and other white members of Black-led coalitions, required trusting and mutually reinforcing relationships of support and care with Black organizers to continue this work.

### Infrastructure building, tactical choice and positionally

Critchley subsequently approached me about ideas to collaborate after our numerous friendly conversations about what we perceived to be a carceral system operating to oppress Black and Indigenous people in Halifax and in Nova Scotia. We had collaborated on projects before that established a shared perspective on issues of the carceral state and its linkage to racial health inequities, and after the murder of George Floyd and Regis Korchinski-Paquet, we both agreed that we could use our experience and our skills as policy and legislative researchers to make an intervention:

Then there was also much interest in policing, right? With George Floyd. And I was like, man, you know, I really don't want this to be a situation where there's so much attention on something for a couple of weeks and then it dissipates. My hope was like, alright, let's start something, and make a process [...] there was so much attention on the issue. And I was like, we should try and like...not use it in a negative sense. Like, we have to try. Unless you build a structure, it's all going to dissipate (H. Critchley, interview with author, February 12 2022).

Critchley's determination for structure mirrored my own at the time, and our conversations that also included Jones and Paynter ended up coalescing into the Nova Scotia Policing Policy Working Group in early June 2020. We rapidly decided to focus on making legislative and policy changes to advance the claims that we were making in the streets, effectively bifurcating our roles in the broader push for structural change. Our alternate approach to contest shows in the framing of our initial letter as shown in the below excerpt:

Despite these clear duties under the Act, there have been longstanding concerns that the Board has in large part abdicated its responsibilities. For example, a 2016 self-study of the Board conducted by former Commissioners Fred Honsberger and Mike Moreash concluded that "the Halifax Board of Police Commissioners has failed to meet its legislated governance requirements under the 2006 Police Act for the past 10 years," a failure which the reviewers attributed to "longstanding systemic flaws in the framework and support network of the Board." [...] It is our contention that these changes will allow for greater democratic participation in Board meetings and, ultimately, improve the capacity of the Board to act in its civilian oversight capacity on behalf of the citizens of Halifax (Nova Scotia Policing Policy Working Group 2020).

The letter, unlike the calls in the streets, addresses and engages the Board within its systemic confines, articulating its problem as being a lack of adequate functioning versus a fundamental illegitimacy of its vision. The letter also seeks to address procedural concerns that include opening access to Board meetings to members of the public and ensuring that police policies are accessible to the public (Nova Scotia Policing Policy Working Group 2020). Moreover, the letter itself is written in inaccessible language that cites relevant legislation and research to back up our arguments, relying not on WUNCness<sup>55</sup> as a demonstration of our efficacy but rather the clarity and incisiveness of our arguments. Our letter and our subsequent work as the Policing Policy Working Group, which includes administering a survey to all municipal election candidates about their stances on the *Wortley Report* and on defunding the police in Halifax, as well as advocating for and eventually co-writing the *Defunding the Police: Defining the Way Forward for HRM* report, ultimately hew closer to the letter than to direct action.

When I reflect on our choice to adopt these methods, I suggest that we were influenced by a combination of strategic foresight and class alignment. The strategic foresight we garnered was simple: the Board of Police Commissioners is a civilian organization that has, historically and contemporaneously, been staffed by volunteers who typically had little experience with policing. We were, as Critchley notes above, in a potentially transformative moment for policing globally and locally. Leveraging our research skills and our knowledge of the relevant legislation was thus a way to make our arguments appear to be authoritative and robust in a manner legible to the Board and, crucially, to the media to foster policy change at the Board level. Here, we acted

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55. WUNCness stands for worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment.

as policy entrepreneurs as much as activists by demonstrating what Mintrom and Norman call “social acuity” to recognize and seize upon a policy problem that had salience both within and beyond our context, developing networks of support and advocacy that increased pressure on the Board to accept our interventions as legitimate (2009, 652). These strategic choices became increasingly important throughout 2020 and 2021 as the pace and intensity of direct action slowed, and a pivot towards institutionally legible forms of contest became necessary to sustain any momentum.

Beyond strategic concerns, however, was the fact that for me, this method of engagement and activism offered fewer potential risks to perform than hitting the streets in protest. Here, my positionality as an international student with the financial resources to attain a graduate education on a different continent (along with the class status that accompanies such education and travel) played a significant role in allowing me to feel comfortable relying on my expertise in a highly public setting, and also shaped the extent to which I could expose myself to risk by engaging in actions that could expose me to police intervention which would jeopardize my tenure in the country. The tension I navigated from these tactical choices is akin to that which Critchley navigated during the January 2020 meeting of the Board of Police Commissioners, though instead of using whiteness as a credential, I used my education, class, and immigration status as credentials instead. In this process, I had to be careful not to drift into respectability politics, or the performance of a comportment and behaviours palatable enough to white onlookers that I could be perceived as virtuous (Lopez Bunyasi and Smith 2019, 185). These salient social identities were factors in the relative success of our advocacy campaign but, if reinforced and uninterrogated, could ultimately undermine our goals and our values. To address this tension, we had to adhere to the strategy that Robert Wright identified: to echo the calls of

the streets as loudly and as vociferously as possible inside of the previously inaccessible spaces we suddenly had access to.

Our actions as the Nova Scotia Policing Policy Working Group took an actor-centred approach which, according to Doherty and Hayes, attend to the ideological and psychological significance of the details of tactical choice (2018, 277). For Doherty and Hayes, tactical choice is important not only to the efficacy of a group, but specifically to the individual activist who is “disposed to adopt behaviors they feel comfortable with” (Doherty and Hayes 2018, 277). While members of our group were (and are) comfortable engaging in direct action, as a collective, we have sought an approach grounded in tangible political wins, as Critchley described to me in our interview:

I don’t know, this is maybe just part of my personality, but I was like let’s try and find things that are sort of doable, right? [...] I mean, if we had started with disarm all the police in Halifax, it probably wouldn’t have gone anywhere, right? You know, it would have made for a great social media post, but it wouldn’t have been like... I don’t know if...it just wouldn’t have like, sustained itself. I was like, alright let’s focus on overdose calls. Let’s do that. And I said, “what are they doing elsewhere that we could build on?” (H. Critchley, interview with author, February 12 2022).

Both Jones and Critchley identify benefits and drawbacks to this pragmatic sensibility that underpins the NSPPWG’s public advocacy. For Jones, the cascading effect of her initial presentation to the Board of Police Commissioners was that her expertise was finally recognized in the city she lived in by those that would typically ignore or insult her:

[through laughter] And then it’s kind of worked out for me because then defunding happens in June and suddenly the only person who’s ever gone on record [in Halifax] talking about defunding is me. So by coincidence, I now get the big “I told you so” that I’ve always been waiting for in my life. I’m like “I told you so! I said this in January!” (E. Jones, interview with author, May 8 2022).

Ultimately, Jones’ presentation in January facilitated our leverage with the Board of Police Commissioners, which we used to apply pressure on the Board via television and radio

interviews as well as via open letters to create a public consultation process around the police budget. Our narrow and concentrated focus on these points of emphasis issued in established communication channels ultimately paid off, as the Board asked Jones to create a definition of defunding the police in Halifax after an unclear definition from an anonymous member of staff<sup>56</sup> threatened to undermine the Board's credibility on the issue:

We were like, trying to strategize [around] it right? Like, what would it mean to work for the Board? And we were immediately all like, a definition isn't helpful. [...] We were like "what should we do? What should we ask for?" And that's when we were like, "I'll do this if..." and it was the things [we listed as] more than a definition: a public process, a review of other municipalities and practices, and like a review of like social services and availability, whatever. (E. Jones, interview with author, May 8 2022).

The pressure that we levied on the Board allowed for us to be included in their governance processes via the formation of the Subcommittee to Define Defunding the Police, the extensive public consultations that we held (a survey with over 2300 responses, focus groups, and 8 hours of public hearings), and the *Defunding the Police: Defining the Way Forward for HRM* report. While this work was unpaid, it allowed us a distinct platform and access to policymakers that we would not have had otherwise under the Subcommittee's broad mandate. The report also conferred onto Jones in particular a way to subvert the expectations of her vocal ideological opponents:

"Normally when these reports come out, the responses say that "you're a cop hater, and this is a disgrace. And the cops have low morale." They couldn't do that on ours I think because it was full of evidence" (E. Jones, interview with author, May 8 2022).

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56. The definition (and accompanying motion) of defunding the police that an unnamed municipal staff member created is below:

"That the Halifax Board of Police Commissioners adopt a definition of defunding the police that supports a role for policing in HRM that includes: Police performing policing functions; Appropriate resources to perform non-police functions; Investment in resources that have been proven to support community risks and promote crime prevention" (Woodford 2020).

Jones' identification of the evidence as being crucial to the positive reaction from the report is buttressed by the ways that the Subcommittee behind the report was perceived publicly. The Subcommittee was comprised of a combination of subject-matter experts, representatives from relevant community groups and community members with lived experience. The benefit of this approach was that it allowed us to access the networks of each representative as we set about developing and distributing a survey as well as organizing a public consultation session. By recruiting prominent experts and respected community members into the process, we were able to build a substantive coalition of actors that advocated for and worked towards our broader objectives, which therefore refuted the capacity for others to frame our work as fringe or radical (Mintrom & Norman 2009, 653). We were also able to demonstrate via the Subcommittee that as a collective, we had a claim to a hearing, or a unique and specific expertise garnered from lived experience as well as practice that allowed us to intervene in the Board's policy debates (Callaghan and Sylvester 2021, 126).

Crucially, the Subcommittee was a demonstration of self-determination – as a practice of relational autonomy towards nondomination – in practice. The composition of the Subcommittee was of representatives from the communities most affected by the punitive and arbitrary power of policing in the community. While all Subcommittee members were not Black, the practice of developing and agreeing upon specific recommendations and interventions was a practice of recognizing our interdependence in creating a domination-free city. In creating a venue for Subcommittee members' concerns to be articulated, as well a pragmatic and tangible mechanism for those concerns to be specifically addressed, we went some way towards actualizing that vision.



## Pragmatism and local context

Critchley identified the pragmatic approach that underpinned our advocacy as an advantage for a local context where experimentation is part of the opportunity structure as long as there are comparable initiatives happening in other places:

“We kind of seized on one thing that we knew we could use as a vehicle to engage on a lot of things. And also importantly seized on something that was already being done elsewhere. And I think that’s probably part of the Halifax context. It’s like... one thing I love about Halifax and what I used to love about when I did service type work [is that] we’re the sort of place where, because we’re quite a small place it’s easy enough if you want to just start an initiative and do it without getting paid. You can do it pretty easily (H. Critchley, interview with author, February 12 2022).

Our ability to start the NSPPWG, to advocate for the Subcommittee to start, and to produce a significant report on the other side of it became, as Critchley points out, contingent on our tenacity and our willingness to volunteer our time to ensure that our work was realized. As Callahan and Sylvester note, the depth of our commitment to seeing the report through and our access to municipal policymakers was relatively rare for private citizens, who are typically excluded from meaningful participation within the system as policy entrepreneurs (2021, 126). Instead, private citizens engage externally as activists who attempt to place pressure on policymakers to act, while policy entrepreneurs are often employed in fields directly related to policymaking (Callahan and Sylvester 2021, 127).

Our ability to transition from being external sources of pressure to actors mobilizing support within the context of the Board of Police Commissioners was thus facilitated, according to Critchley, by a lack of capacity and experience at the Board level around how to deal with well-researched, policy-oriented groups:

“I don’t find people here really think in those terms, in terms of how do we change the general structure, right? Or how do we change a set of rules? They’re more comfortable

thinking [as in] “what’s an initiative that we could create on a pilot basis?” And try that out. [...] I find, for instance, the Police Board, they’re uncomfortable thinking in terms of policies. They’re more comfortable thinking in terms of programs and things like that [...], and I think there’s less literacy...it’s because there’s not these big established organizations here that are constantly pushing policy agendas, right? I don’t think there are coherent policy agendas that the members of the Police Board have, the police have, the city... I don’t even think the city really has a very clear policy agenda in terms of how they want to approach certain things. They don’t – particularly not in any kind of systematic way, right? There are certain things that they think to do and then they’re like, “homelessness is bad, better give 500 grand to that”. It’s so ad-hoc (H. Critchley, interview with author, February 12 2022).

Our presence, therefore, acted as a substitute for the Board’s lack of policy capacity around an issue that affected its legitimacy as a potentially representative body for civilians in HRM, and therefore facilitated our perspective and our suggestions to be taken seriously by members of the Board, and subsequently members of the Regional Council. Our ability to display a coherent set of policy demands, backed by evidence from other jurisdictions, thus made us credible actors that garnered support within the Board and the municipality.

### Looking forward

Critchley does not, however, perceive the labyrinthine path we took to shift the Board towards accepting defunding as a policy frame as easily navigable for other advocates. Instead, he notes that policy change in Halifax, and in Nova Scotia, is primarily dictated by the choices of other, larger governments:

I think it’s extremely difficult to get policies changed and [to] get the government to do things, basically. My feeling is that Nova Scotia and Halifax – they don’t want to do anything. Less so Halifax, more the province, but Halifax never wants to be the first one to do something. I find the province have to be basically the last one to do [something] before they willing to do it. And then the city, I think thinks of itself as more progressive in some ways, but like they still want to see that it’s been done in other midsize cities (H. Critchley, interview with author, February 12 2022).

The drawback to the success of the report and the Subcommittee for Jones is the legacy that she perceives our approach might leave for the next generation of radical activists who choose different and less palatable methods of contest against governing institutions:

I feel like what it's going to become is "why can't you be more like El? She did a nice evidence-based report and you're out here saying ACAB, right?" Like, that's how it's going to be used. So then now the next person says fuck the police it'll be like "even El Jones, who's crazy, didn't go that far" (E. Jones, interview with author, May 8 2022).

Jones' palpable concern was likely informed by a context where protestors in Halifax were arrested and charged with obstruction of justice, assaulting police, resisting arrest, and mischief for resisting the city's attempt to evict unhoused community members from encampments around the city (Ryan, 2021). Her concern may also be informed, however, by the pressure towards conciliation that protestors in the summer of 2020 felt from Black community members for whom direct action is a contravention of established norms of engagement — norms which uphold discourses of Black inferiority and victimhood.

Ultimately, for both Jones and Critchley, the imperfect and incomplete nature of our advocacy offered promise as a pathway for those who might continue to contest the nature of policing in Halifax. For Critchley, the additional scrutiny placed on the Board is an important and necessary shift:

I think there's been a very major change honestly, in the way the other board members talk about their role and their responsibilities. And [how they talk] about the seriousness of it. I think that's changed a lot. I think it was really easy for them to dismiss the Board and the duties of the Board for a long time. And I don't think that they really feel...and you saw in the in the Board meeting [that preceded our call], they had to sort of say explicitly there will be changes, like, "Don't worry, we are going to make a change". They felt the need to justify themselves in a way that they haven't before. I think that's really valuable in and of itself, despite not getting the outcome that you want. The fact that they feel like they're almost on the defensive a little bit. They know that people are watching the board meetings more than they have in the past (H. Critchley, interview with author, February 12 2022).

Jones ultimately sees activism as an ongoing struggle that allows for future organizers to disagree with the choices we made that could age poorly, and to develop their own approaches to the repertoire that we have had the opportunity to perform:

You'll always make choices now that somebody else will be living out five years, 10 years, 20 years in the future. And that's always what activism is. That's why it moves generation to generation. And, you know, I like that. I actually like the notion that, you know, we just pick up and then it's never done, you know? Like, this work extends long beyond us. And there's something kind of beautiful in that. You can die and let it go. Somebody else will be carrying it, but it's also like, yeah, the mistakes you make today, some young activist is going to be picking up 20 years from now and being like, "why did you guys do that?" I mean because we live that out, like things that people thought were like, real solutions. 10 years, 15 years ago, that at the time did seem like progressive solutions. Like body cameras (E. Jones, interview with authors, May 8 2022).

This expansive, wide-ranging view of activism generates new questions as much as it resolves internal tensions. The tensions between being "in the streets" and being an advocate engaging with governing institutions, for instance, are heightened within the context of established community organizations that navigate issues of fundraising and accountability to their broader membership. How do organizations support and develop visions of Black self-determination while resisting co-optation from their funders? What are we to make of those who work within governing institutions but who seek to transform policy towards Black self-determination? Finally, who gets to advocate on behalf of the community or communities? These questions animate the rest of this dissertation.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter explored the tactical repertoire that Black activists in Halifax use to contest governing institutions by focusing on direct action and public advocacy in the summer of 2020. I analyzed the ways that direct action catalyzes and shapes public discourse around policing in Halifax despite significant costs shouldered by organizers in these processes. I demonstrated that

direct action is a vital component of the tactical repertoire in Halifax, and that advocacy without a connection to those protesting on the ground risks tilting into respectability politics. Successful advocacy that emerges from direct action brings into alignment frames that are globally relevant by situating them in a local context, providing tangible prognostic and motivational arguments that can increase the reach of recruitment efforts and solidify coalitions. The viability of direct action as a long-term approach to prompting policy change is, however, attenuated by counter-framing efforts from opponents, as well as the ways that participation in direct action can affect participants' employment and social connections.

In this chapter, I also explored the nuances of engaging with governing institutions as an advocate, and subsequently as a policy entrepreneur advancing an agenda within the Board of Police Commissioners in Halifax. I learned that frame alignment as a policy advocate depended on the work of organizers in the streets that could be echoed and extended in conventional venues of contest like Board meetings. I interrogated my own tendency to opt for advocacy-based tactics over direct action as a manifestation of my own positionality and, in the process, the need to avoid respectability politics because of that positionality. In the next chapter, I return to the question posed at the end of the direct action section — should you take “the meeting”? — by speaking to members of community organizations and to bureaucrats about what happens during, and after, the meeting takes place.

## Chapter Eight - Community organizations and representative bureaucracies

*No matter what you do [as a community advocate], there is the process of policymaking. Whether you use that tactic [of exposing government inaction in the media] or not, if it's government that has to act, government's going to act how government acts, you see what I mean? You can't make legislation in the neighbourhood. You make legislation in the legislature. You can't make policy without engaging public servants in policymaking.*

*(S. Davis-Murdoch, interview with author, 4 March 2022).*

The vignette above, offered by Sharon Davis-Murdoch, is a powerful reminder of the role that Black-led community organizations play in creating spaces where community voices challenge policy discourses of inferiority and victimhood. In the previous chapter, I explored the ways that Black activists in Halifax use a combination of policy advocacy and direct action to prompt policy change in policing during the summer of 2020 and beyond. I noted that these tactical choices were part of an established repertoire of contention that has shaped Black organizing in Halifax historically and contemporaneously. In this chapter, I analyze Black-led community organizations and the complex policy environments they navigate to develop spaces and programs that contribute to world-building and self-determination efforts in Halifax. I use data from interviews conducted with members of these organizations, as well as with municipal and provincial policymakers, to understand the ways that their work is constrained and enabled by Nova Scotia's changing political opportunity structure.

I focus specifically on organizations that intervene in issues of public health and health promotion. Importantly, these organizations are attuned to the complexities of policy advocacy

that spans orders of government as well as non-governmental organizations. They sustain their advocacy despite changes in government and in policy direction at a federal and a provincial level, and have had many recent successes at a provincial level including a successful effort to codify into legislation a provision to provide a health equity framework that accounts for inequities in Black communities by July 2023 as well as a decades-long fight to push the provincial government to collect health data disaggregated by racial identity, ethnicity and language (Communications Nova Scotia 2022; 2021). Actors in these organizations build relationships over time, become known by policymakers as trusted advisors as well as fierce adversaries, which allows them to capitalize upon policy windows that emerge in response, primarily, to those in the streets protesting injustice.

I make three distinct arguments in this chapter:

- 1) *Black-led community organizations are vital to Black self-determination efforts.* These organizations share many of the same goals as radical activists in terms of advocating for the autonomy of community members using holistic forms of care, as well as seeking a responsiveness from the state that contravenes established policy discourses of neglect and victimhood. These organizations share these goals despite generally avoiding radical politics in favour of conciliatory policy co-design initiatives.
- 2) *These spaces are both enabled and threatened by the recent involvement of the provincial government in engaging in policy co-design.* The province's engagement with these organizations is vital as they have historically had no other source of financial support, thus limiting their impact and scope.

3) *A representative bureaucracy means more than simply descriptive representation.* The increased presence of Black bureaucrats in the public service has, in the eyes of many interviewees, transformed the resonance of the arguments organizations make about the necessity of their services. Yet for these bureaucrats and for these organizations, representation goes beyond Blackness and must account for perspective – a challenge heightened by perceived government bias towards immigrants of African descent that fractures understandings of solidarity across difference.

I begin this chapter by analyzing how community members understand and experience the organizations that are a part of what interviewee Sharon Davis-Murdoch calls the “Black health infrastructure” of Nova Scotia. I then discuss the benefits and drawbacks to the policy co-design and funding arrangements that exemplify the relationships between these organizations and the province, focusing on the presence of Black bureaucrats. I conclude with a discussion of coalition and solidarity across difference within and between communities of African descent in Nova Scotia.

### **Community organizations and Black self-determination**

The third portion of the repertoire of contention that I outlined in Chapter Seven is organizational development: the creation and sustenance of community-run institutions whose work is oriented towards Black flourishing and well-being in community. If, as Jakeet Singh argues, self-determination is about “[actualizing] an alternative, non-hegemonic way of life, form of subjectivity, and/or ethical-political goods”, and this non-hegemonic way of life contributes to a form of relational autonomy towards nondomination (Young 2007, 48), then the role of community organizing in supporting that way of life with programming and policy advocacy is pivotal to this political order (Singh 2014, 63). Community organizing, according to Douglas et



al., is “a collaborative process that engages, educates, mobilizes, and unites oppressed and marginalized residents, local organizations, and key stakeholders in strategic, collective efforts to gain voice, power, and influence within their communities, and effect social and environmental change such as culturally relevant, community-based health promotion” (J. A. Douglas et al. 2016, 489). Organizations like the Health Association of African Canadians (HAAC), the Association of Black Social Workers (ABSW), and the ANSDPAD Coalition’s Health Working Group among others advocate for and often develop programming and services uniquely tailored to Black communities in Halifax and across Nova Scotia. In doing so, they develop partnerships and marshal resources to transform the ways that governing institutions account for the health of Black people in the province. Their interventions open a space for community voices to directly shape health policy, extending the promise of initiatives like BUF’s community health project into a disposition that embraces democratic engagement as a form of healing, and asserting self-determination through establishing communal care. At their best, these organizations foster a sense of trust and esteem in the community that disrupts the historically dominant discourses of Black inferiority and victimhood that have shaped policy in Nova Scotia over centuries.

These programs and the spaces they create emphasize, through what Deva Woodly identifies as the “politics of care”, the hollow façade of policy-making that ignores the specific health needs of Black Nova Scotians in favour of colour-blind efforts at improving the health and wellbeing of Nova Scotians in general (2022). These organizations often overlap both in terms of membership and in terms of populations being served meaning that they can create an ecosystem of support that demonstrates, through service-delivery as well as advocacy, the limitations of the state as it relates to Black communities. The development of a Black health infrastructure in the province is thus an important contribution to the world-building trajectory of Black self-

determination efforts as it actualizes the promise of having responsive institutions that account for and take seriously the desires of Black communities in a city where this has previously never been the case.

An important lens through which these organizations articulate the necessity of their programming to both their funders and to the communities they serve is the social and structural determinants of health. The social determinants of health – which according to the World Health Organization are the circumstances in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age – are familiar terrain for governments at all levels, often being cursorily included alongside references to health equity and health in all policies in policy documents (WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health 2008; McGibbon, Fierlbeck, and Ajadi 2021). These community organizations’ framing of the structural determinants of health extends beyond these minimal attempts at social care and towards an account of health inequity that includes an understanding of how power is leveraged and mobilized along racialized, gendered, and classed hierarchies (Crear-Perry et al. 2021; McGibbon, Fierlbeck, and Ajadi 2021, 71). These organizations thus take an expansive and inter-institutional view of what health policy can and should look like, and in their programming and advocacy often become conversant in different policy areas to achieve their aims in ways that governing institutions find challenging to mirror.

#### Community organizations: roots & flourishing

As covered extensively in Chapters Four and Five, community organizations have formed an important part of the backbone of Black resistance and survival in Nova Scotia since the founding of the African United Baptist Association by Rev. Richard Preston in 1854 and the affiliated community organizations that fought for schools to de-segregate decades afterwards.

While policy advocacy was once an important function of these organizations, of equal importance to their legitimacy and their success was the support that they provided to the communities they served. This support often took the shape of dedicated programming. The Cultural Awareness Youth Group, for instance, ran educational workshops primarily aimed at fostering a sense of empowerment and esteem in Black youth in the Halifax metropolitan area. The ethos the group espoused propelled the success of the Unity March they organized in July 1991, indicating a mutually reinforcing process of contest and community engagement. As Robert Wright explained to me, these community organizations are vital within a context like the health system that does not typically reward or establish holistic care or support:

What people don't understand is the public health system is public health dollars that fund private practitioners. That is not a public health system. The North End Community Health Center [is a] multidisciplinary clinic dedicated to serve a particular geography of people who are known to be underserved. That is public health – public health service delivery. You walk into that clinic any given day, and there are racialized people and people with disabilities and immigrant peoples that are there in the clinic. Why? *Because they've developed over time a model of health service delivery that meets that need of that diverse community. You will not see that if you go into any private physician's office at any day of the week. Because it is not within their corporate fiscal model to serve difficult people* [emphasis added]. (R. Wright, interview with author, 7 December 2020).

Wright establishes one of the core functions of these community organizations – to establish a modality of responsive care that addresses those the state would otherwise neglect or erase. Importantly, many of these organizations have historically been a space for Black women's leadership, even when that leadership has not been externally recognized. Bernadette Hamilton-Reid, the executive assistant for the ANSDPAD Coalition, noted that her mother worked as a secretary for the Black United Front and that the few strong Black women in her life like Pearleen Oliver were found in the church:

She [Oliver] brought us up in the church, through choir and singing, and she would always talk about us young girls [saying] “you little Black girls, be proud of who you

are.” She would always instill in us our Blackness and would say “don't let anybody talk you down and you have beautiful voices. And you can do this, and you can be anything you want.” She wrote a few books that she would bring to read to us so even though it's quite quiet in Sunday school, she also schooled us in who we were as Black people (B. Hamilton-Reid, interview with author, 3 November 2021).

Hamilton-Reid's experience as a child instilled values of community pride and participation within her, and she developed upon and extended those values to participate in community organizations as she completed a degree and ventured from her home in Beechville into Halifax to play basketball:

I played basketball at the community Y[MCA]. So I got involved with those communities that were always advocating for themselves. Because besides being Black, they were inner city. And they were also seen as socioeconomically poor. So there was always people talking about something because they're always fighting for something in school, you're fighting for your race here. You're fighting to be in the class, you're fighting for the lunch line. And then I just started working with [and] belonging to groups that were forming [at the time] (B. Hamilton-Reid, interview with author, 3 November 2021).

Hamilton-Reid's experience of empowerment as a child shaping her identity and her drive to become involved in community advocacy signals the importance of these organizations and the spaces that they create for their capacity to represent – in substance as well as demography – Black women. The welcoming and nurturing spaces that these organizations create carry through to adulthood, acting as a reprieve from the hostility of working in white organizations and bureaucracies that can leave people of African descent feeling, in the words of Veronica Marsman who is the past president of the Association of Black Social Workers (ABSW) as well as past president of HAAC, drained and exhausted:

What it [being isolated as a Black person in an organization or workplace] means is really digging deep every day. You come home and you're drained because you've had to step out of your comfort zone. The minute you step outside your house, you can be prepared, that you're gonna be in...or you're putting on this mask – the masks that we wear as Black people [...] when you're in community, that mask kind of comes off, because you don't have to put up the fakeness, if you want to call it that [...] It's that inner strength buildup that you need. I don't know the proper words for it. But it's like, inner reality. It's

gathering enough strength to deal with winter, with what's going to be before you that day. And if it's community, you don't need to gather that much. If it's other stuff out there, then you've got to psych yourself up (V. Marsman, interview with author, 15 November 2021).

Marsman's identification of the "inner strength buildup" needed to navigate the working world as a Black woman, as well as the costs to one's well-being to display such fortitude was a key impetus for the creation of the Health Association of African Canadians, which was started in 2000 by four Black women: Sharon Davis-Murdoch, Susan (Sue) Edmonds, Josephine Etowa and Yvonne Atwell (Health Association of African Canadians 2022). These women noticed that Black health issues - and in specific Black women's health issues - were completely ignored by policymakers and researchers in the province. These women had also, individually, sought to bring these issues to the fore as exceptional interlopers navigating the typically exclusionary rules that guided governing institutions at this time as the 'only ones in the room'. Atwell was the province's first Black woman to be elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly and was the representative for the Preston area shortly before founding HAAC. Davis-Murdoch, meanwhile, worked as a policy advisor to two Ministers of Health before moving to the public service as a policy analyst. She then became the Special Advisor for Diversity and Social Inclusion to the Associate Deputy Minister. She retired to work at the community level in 2015 and now serves as HAAC Co-President. These women also had extensive experience working and organizing in the community, and used the connections they forged both inside and outside of governing institutions to build an infrastructure to change what was happening inside of them. Sharon Davis-Murdoch, now co-president of HAAC, told me that the development of this infrastructure was the defining narrative of her work both in community and in government:

I don't have a deep understanding of what is meant by self-determination by people who use it from [ANSDPAD]. I would assume that it means that we can basically, you know, we can have control over our own future. That's how I would read that. But you know, I

might be wrong, because I don't think I've ever had anyone spell it out for me. But if that is what you understand – that we have control over our future – then I would say that we do, and we don't. *We must build capacity to have that, which is one of the things I want to do* [emphasis added]. And going back to your very first question you asked, what is the narrative [of this work]? If I didn't say it, please add it is to *build Black health infrastructure* [emphasis added]. So we are building, block by block. The house is not built yet. So the infrastructure is going to make the difference between where we are now, and what the future looks like in terms of self-determination (S. Davis-Murdoch, interview with author, 4 March 2022).

In this way, organizations like HAAC and the ANSDPAD Coalition have taken up the mantle of their historical antecedents and have combined an extensive understanding of this legacy of carving out space for Black flourishing and care with an expertise, through memberships that include current and former policymakers in the provincial government and in the provincial health authority, in navigating the policy process. Hakeem,<sup>57</sup> a provincial policymaker who is also affiliated with many of these organizations, explained that this historical precedent also shapes the actions and attitudes of Black community organizations towards their work:

So if you go back to that, you know, precedents have been set through organizations such as [the] AUBA and then if you fast forward into the [1960s] with the version of the NAACP which was here in Nova Scotia [the NSAACP]...you think about the Black United Front, you think about so many different organizations that were actually put in place. So what these organizations in the contemporary times ended up doing is not surprising, because they're essentially building on generations of what African Nova Scotian organizations have been doing to just say, you know what, the empowerment of our people is essentially in our hands (Hakeem, interview with author, 15 March 2022).

This orientation towards a historically rooted and expansive vision of community empowerment is a shared lineage highlighted by many of the community members I interviewed and accompanies much of the work that these organizations do and advocate for. Sometimes, this vision guides organizations towards working with governments to create new programming to address the gaps in efficacy as well as in holistic vision that extant programs offer. HAAC, for

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57. Hakeem asked to remain anonymous in this project.

example, was a core part of the conceptualization and development of the Nova Scotia Brotherhood Initiative housed in the Nova Scotia Health Authority in 2012 after a visit by Davis-Murdoch to Chicago in the United States to visit the Project Brotherhood project that operates in that city. The Brotherhood is, broadly speaking, a health promotion initiative designed to support Black men's health needs, but it also hosts culturally-specific primary care clinics, counselors, system navigators and peer support-based initiatives like walking groups and a Men's Health League to create wrap-around services<sup>58</sup> and support that is uncommonly found within the health system for Black community members throughout the life-course (Fante-Coleman and Jackson-Best 2020; Lin 2022; Konkor et al. 2020). In so doing, the program helps to construct a sense of ownership from participants that, according to former Brotherhood manager Mario Rolle, inspires them to advocate for more culturally specific health services and Black health professionals throughout the system (Ericsson 2021).

The combination of HAAC's policy advocacy and service-provision that the genesis of the Brotherhood demonstrates is at once informed by an understanding of the province's current capacity as it relates to health promotion, and also oriented towards reshaping health system offerings towards a holistic and solidaristic form of care. Such programming resists what Douglas et al. call the "prevailing approach" to health promotion that asks Black individuals to adapt to the disinvestment and neglect produced by the state that shape the determinants of health in their communities (2016, 489). The development of programming that avoids such a narrow and individualistic form of service-provision is an important component in resisting policy discourses of inferiority and victimhood both within and beyond health promotion, as

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<sup>58</sup> Wrap-around services refer to holistic and specific services delivered in a needs-based and collaborative manner. The term is often focused in cases of child welfare but can apply broadly in care settings (Cook 2022).

Hakeem identified when discussing his experience with the African-Canadian Employment Clinic<sup>59</sup>:

[The Clinic showed that] the type of service that Black people receive when it comes to employment, employment opportunities, career, aspiration, is not the same. And by and large, where [Black people] were able to receive those services, those services were not delivered to them in a culturally proficient manner. [...] But now flip it to the Clinic. The clinic came from a place of centring its client by basically saying that first and foremost, it is about you, it's not even about the employment. The employment is what comes up later, as an addition. *First of all, we're starting with you as a person. We're understanding you, we're understanding your history, your realities, the barriers that you face when you want to get to that job interview* [emphasis added]. [The Clinic asked] what are your challenges? What are the things that are in your way for not getting there? If it's a babysitting issue, we'll make arrangements – we'll make sure that we connect you to a babysitter that can come and watch that child while you go to your job interview (Hakeem, direct correspondence, 15 March 2022).

Hakeem's experience with the Clinic shows that the act of community organizations providing holistic care stems from a profound commitment to the people they are serving that extends beyond the narrow outcomes that such programming must meet to maintain their funding and functionality. In these acts of care, these organizations demonstrate that there must be alignment between the outcomes that an institution might seek from a program and the ethos they develop in their approach. Deva Woodly notes when discussing the Movement for Black Lives that this form of care is not philosophically or politically contrived: “[There] is no appeal to abstract categories to bestow significance on the bodies, minds, and spirits in need of care. People simply matter, and that is reason enough to care” (2022, 92). These demonstrations of care, grounded in the everyday realities of the people that these organizations serve, offer an important and powerful context from which worldmaking and self-determination efforts can emerge.

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59. The African-Canadian Employment Clinic was a community-run clinic housed in the Canada Employment Office on Gottingen Street. When the federal government threatened to close this centre to save money, community activists including Lynn Jones occupied the space for 133 days — the longest occupation of a federal government office in Canadian history (Chisholm 2021).



### Community organizations and social planning

A key role that community organizations can play to develop the kinds of spaces from which self-determination can emerge is in convening actors with significant expertise who may be working in siloed professional environments but who can collaborate when freed from the strictures of governing institutions. Vanessa Fells, director of the ANSDPAD Coalition, recounted much of the same history as Hakeem when identifying why she believes the coalition model that incorporates advocacy in a multitude of policy areas is so effective and important for the wellbeing of African Nova Scotian communities:

I think sometimes, as a community, you know, you lose your way a little bit. And part of that is just you, you get caught up in every day. And so, I find that, even if you look back in our history, when our community comes together and works together, that is when we have the most progress. When we sort of work in our own silos, in our own thing, we make progress, but that progress is slower. And so for me, the benefits of a coalition are having that unified vision and the unified voice. And even though, you know, for me in the [ANSDPAD] Coalition, I may be working on something different every day, I may work on justice, one day, I may work on child welfare, the same day and health in the afternoon. But by working as a coalition, it gives us the collective ability to bring all different voices and different perspectives to the table. *Yes, we all have a common thread. And we are all people of African descent, but we still have different lived realities and different experiences. And so by, you know, providing the space and the ability for people to come together and talk collectively, it gives us a better way to strategize on how to collectively solve an issue* [emphasis added] (V. Fells, interview with author, 3 November 2021).

Fells' comments point to the ways that organizations like the ANSDPAD Coalition conceive not only of decision-making and governance, but of the ultimate outcomes that they seek in their work: to use extensive capacity garnered in a multitude of sectors to advocate forcefully and holistically for the health and wellbeing of people of African descent in the province. A coalition formed in 2016 after a visit to Halifax of the United Nations Working Group for People of African Descent, the ANSDPAD Coalition encompasses 30 community organizations as well as

individual members who joined to support the Coalition’s work.<sup>60</sup> The ANSDPAD Coalition’s mandate is extensive, engaging in policy advocacy in issues of health, child welfare, criminal justice, and community services among other issues (ANSDPAD Coalition 2022). Crucial to its mission, however, are themes of communal health and wellbeing, as well as respect and non-domination:

Recognizing that African Nova Scotians are a distinct founding people in Nova Scotia who have been a key part of the province’s culture and history since 1605, the DPAD Coalition’s mission is twofold: *to build strength and health* [emphasis added] across African Nova Scotian communities, and to forge a renewed working relationship with government(s) that creates conditions for all African-descended people in Nova Scotia to thrive.

While acknowledging that much work remains to address the legacy of enslavement, segregation, and generational effects of systemic anti-Black racism in Nova Scotia, *we strive to call governments out of past attitudes and behaviours—doing to or for African Nova Scotian communities, instead of with—and into a meaningful engagement that respects people as agents in their own solutions* [emphasis added]. We seek a relationship where African Nova Scotians are engaged, included, and listened to at all levels of policy- shaping and decision-making. We also seek to strengthen relationships amongst ourselves to equip communities and organizations to work collectively and holistically across sectors, in an accountable and mutually supportive way (ANSDPAD Coalition 2022).

The organization’s mission statement demonstrates what is a profound tension that Black-led community organizations often find themselves negotiating in Nova Scotia: the need to advocate forcefully against governments for the neglect that has produced entrenched inequity in the province while simultaneously seeking to partner with those governments to ameliorate that neglect – all while seeking to represent and be accountable to the communities they serve. As Robert Wright explains, this tension requires a careful and clear navigation of the roles that these organizations must play to align their practices with their values:

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60. I am a member of the ANSDPAD Coalition, as well as a member of its Health Working Group.

Government does not fund its own opposition. So government funds organizations that deliver programs and services that the government sees as part of its mandate. Alright. So you have to have a clear enough understanding of the different roles. So I am accountable to government for my service delivery that meets the expectations that they set out in whatever contract that they funded me through. I'm going to deliver these programs and services for male identified victims of sexual abuse, because I got a grant to do that. I'm also a person who's advocating for more attention to be paid to male-identified victims of sexual abuse. That's advocacy work. There's service delivery work, and then there's advocacy work. And you have to be very careful that government doesn't think that you're spending their money on advocacy. Because they'll say, "well, didn't we pay you to deliver a service? Where's the service? All we see is these marches that are making us look bad, because we don't provide enough funding for the thing that we thought we provided you funding for." And I think that it's easy, I think it's just about ensuring that you are delivering the thing that you are funded to deliver. And then what you do on your other time and with your other resources is your own business (R. Wright, interview with author, 7 December 2021).

In the example Wright gives above, the provision of services designed to ameliorate an injustice can and should be paired with advocacy for such injustice to no longer exist – provided that there is a clear delineation of the roles that these organizations or these actors are playing at the time. This form of alignment extends to the ways that community-based programs and organizations are conceived and developed. The Nova Scotia Brotherhood, for example, was to some extent a form of “social planning” – what Bezboruah calls a “top-down approach [to community organizing] characterized by the involvement of experts in setting goals and designing action plans” (2013, 13). HAAC identified and developed a model that might address a suite of needs in the community, and advocated for the province to provide the resources and space to make this model a reality – a clear delineation of two vital roles in prompting the Brotherhood to exist.

HAAC’s choice to engage in this “social planning” as opposed to facilitating a broader community engagement was borne out of a perceived crisis. Sharon Davis-Murdoch, co-president of HAAC, tells me that the program’s genesis was, in part, about reorienting government intervention around gun violence away from incarcerating Black men towards providing care and connection that would address the upstream determinants of conflict:

With the establishment of the Nova Scotia Brotherhood Initiative, I can tell you that when I proposed that to the Minister at the Department of Health and Wellness, it was against the background of gun violence, particularly with Black men in HRM, and there was a death and there was another death and there was a death and there were...and it was frightening. And frankly, nobody was sure what to do. And so recognizing where we were, I didn't know it would be me who would see a model that could be very useful and that it would come from a health perspective. It could have easily come from a criminal justice perspective or another. But when I saw that, I was able to recognize the need and come forward with an option [for] a model that would certainly not get rid of the problem but would address it in an effective way, and in a way where it was going to be a win-win (S. Davis-Murdoch, interview with author, March 4 2022).

Here, Davis-Murdoch's understanding of the extent of the problems that community members were facing combined with her extensive knowledge of both the policy process within government, and best practices internationally for culturally-specific and communally responsive care that did not involve the carceral state but instead sought to humanize, protect and care for Black men in the city and in the province. In this way, the existence of the Brotherhood among other initiatives hews closely to the demands espoused by radical organizers in the summer of 2020, and is an example of the ways that community organizations can support radical efforts at transformation while still fulfilling their role as service-providers in important ways.

The success of the Brotherhood<sup>61</sup> and other community-based initiatives aimed specifically at people of African descent in the province are contingent, in part, on the capacity of the leaders of community organizations to manage relationships with the governments that either fund or interact with the services they are developing. Davis-Murdoch, for instance, is a policy entrepreneur whose work is enhanced both by her connections with the community and, crucially, by her connections within governing institutions. She explained to me that these

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61. The Nova Scotia Brotherhood is now being expanded to include a Sisterhood initiative aimed specifically at Black women's health needs.

connections are important, as they help to shape the trajectory of advocacy efforts that necessarily have a long-range horizon for success:

So depending on who individuals are, you may get more done on any given file at any given time [...] So strategically knowing who the players are, [and] responding to what is their history and lived experience is also beneficial to moving things forward. You know, under one Premier, it took seven years of treading water. Under another, it took six months to move us ahead. You know, that's just the way it is. *And so the influence of individuals in policymaking – the importance of timing – could not be overstated* [emphasis added]. Certainly the understanding of what the government of the day wants to do, what their policy objectives are, what they have said in their platforms, how their positions [are shaped], or the circumstances under which they find themselves... who would have known 10 years ago that we would have a pandemic called COVID-19? With that has come extraordinary opportunities for moving policy forward. So the right place, the right message, the right time, is essential for moving policy forward. And sometimes when those things don't align, you may continue to make policy recommendations, and try to make your case, but it will not be as successful as in recognizing when the time is right (S. Davis-Murdoch, interview with author, March 4 2022).

Here, Davis-Murdoch uses her extensive policy experience to navigate the challenges inherent to seeking transformative change without seeking to behave as an exogenous shock to government, and therefore risking the capacity for her organization to provide the vital services that it does. Her identification of the policy priorities of important actors and institutions could also be articulated as an understanding of what Thomas Oliver calls “concentrated interests” that often shape the boundaries of what is possible within public health policy, leading to the incrementalism that she describes (2006, 207—208).<sup>62</sup> Moreover, her identification of “extraordinary opportunities” as necessary to advance objectives that have been developed and articulated over decades is an important component of Kingdon’s (1984) Multiple Streams Approach that identifies three critically important streams (the policy stream, the problem stream

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<sup>62</sup> Oliver’s reference to “concentrated interests” in the health system in the United States speaks to the constellation of interest groups including but not limited to “trade associations, individual corporations, and other membership organizations representing physicians, hospitals, nurses, health insurers, drug companies, nursing homes, large and small businesses, labor unions, senior citizens, and other groups whose material well-being is closely linked to the trillion-dollar health system” (2006, 208).

and the politics stream) that operate independently and that must be connected via policy entrepreneurs to develop distinct policy windows that lead to policy change. Davis-Murdoch leveraged this understanding to great success in the Brotherhood project, demonstrating that “social planning” can, at times, be a helpful approach to building vital programming in the community.

This section demonstrates the importance of Black-led community organizations in creating spaces of care that aid in efforts towards self-determination. By working in coalition and navigating challenging policy spaces to develop holistic forms of care, these organizations rebuff discourses of neglect and victimhood, seeking instead to establish the necessity of community input and engagement in policy development. As we will see in the next section, when these organizations engage in policy co-design, these organizations are exposed to both enabling and constraining factors in achieving transformative change.

### **Locality development and policy co-design**

Community organizations can be agents of transformative change, but must engage extensively with the state in order to develop the kinds of programming and opportunities that are so meaningful to the communities they serve, especially as the state operates as most of these organizations’ principal funder. In doing so, they seek and are beginning to receive engagement from a bureaucracy that is transforming into being representative (both descriptively and substantively), most notably through policy co-design efforts. There are important benefits to this approach, not least the necessary suffusion of community voice and perspective into policy proposals being paired with internal champions whose role is to help those proposals come to life. There are also significant drawbacks to these interactions, which include the prospect of movement capture, as well as the stymying of policy proposals that emerge from the community

as being supplementary appendages to the true work of government. These tensions are not easily resolved by those I interviewed, but they are held in balance by a commitment to the values they espouse.

Davis-Murdoch, and other leaders of community organizations, have earned a detailed understanding of the policy process through decades of experience and education. Many of those leaders are also conscious of the need to pass this knowledge on to other community members by engaging in “locality development”, or the process of working from the bottom-up in community to identify problems, set policy goals and monitor outcomes (Bezboruah 2013, 14). Without this experience, as Louise Adongo explains, the policy goals of programming can become exclusive, leading to a lack of efficacy in community work despite the best efforts of organizational leaders:

Sometimes a community organization person will come and speak as and for [other community members], and it's a very different experience [compared to] an actual community member [...] I will say that that is something even HAAC has faced. Because I remember when I was on the board, we would keep having AGMs. And we would keep trying to have community meetings so that it wasn't always Sharon, or Phyllis or Donna speaking for community members (L. Adongo, interview with author, 30 March 2022).

Importantly, however, when locality development works, it can lead to community members shaping and articulating their own desires in a way that epitomises the drive towards self-determination, even if those efforts ultimately become delayed or stymied by the state. Such was the case with the beginning of the African Nova Scotian Health Strategy. The Strategy was a policy co-design effort initiated by HAAC members in 2016 after representatives from the IWK and the Nova Scotia Health Authority visited the Black Cultural Centre as Louise Adongo describes:

[The meeting was] how I knew we were finally coming to the end of that [of community organizations speaking for community members] and had success. I will still remember the moment – I had tears in my eyes. Her name was [a representative] from the IWK. And she came to talk to the community about this amazing idea she had and they were

how they were finally coming to listen. And so they were going to do a whole series of workshops on how they were going to understand. And residents in Cherry Brook, East Preston, North Preston... literally the HAAC board sat at the back and shut down. The residents schooled her for 25 minutes, made her comms team feel foolish that they didn't prepare her because they told her: "we do not need three workshops. These are our priorities. These are our issues. We've been telling you for 10 years. Thank you for finally coming and listening to us. When are we ready to start?" That is an example of when that's working well, because though none of those people had affiliations with us, other than they were soon to be paying members of HAAC. It was their first voice and it was powerful. And the IWK and NS Health were rightly embarrassed and had to figure themselves out (L. Adongo, interview with author, 30 March 2022).

The meeting Adongo describes encapsulates the power of locality development in community organizing: it allows communities to endogenously define and articulate their own visions for what they need to thrive. In so doing, this articulation forced the Health Authority and the IWK to re-evaluate and pivot away from its typical policy process — one where community members are consulted broadly but not involved with the explicit design of an organizational work plan — towards a policy co-design model that became the African Nova Scotian Health Strategy. In this instance, co-design was a formal and extensive process that included the development of a steering committee composed of community members, HAAC representatives, academics, and representatives from the Health Authority and the IWK whose task was to develop a comprehensive approach by the Health Authority to service-delivery for people of African descent in the province.<sup>63</sup> As Osborne et al. note, policy co-design and co-production is increasingly becoming identified by policymakers globally as a “normative policy good” that at once empowers community members to become involved in government service delivery and supports innovation within the state (2016, 644).

The genesis of the Health Strategy, then, adhered to the extensive tradition of worldbuilding that Black community organizations in Nova Scotia have developed over

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63. I was a member of the steering committee for the Strategy.



centuries. Here, community knowledge pointed to a potentially transformational intervention to Nova Scotia's health system that offered the possibility of moving that system closer to egalitarian visions of care in tangible ways. Yet capitalizing on that possibility was something that the province (via the Nova Scotia Health Authority) was required to actualize, echoing back to Davis-Murdoch's quote at the beginning of this chapter. The development of the Health Strategy itself was thus an attempt to harness the potential energy of the community meeting into a form that was legible to the state. The Health Authority entered a partnership with HAAC and the IWK to facilitate 18 community consultations with hundreds of participants across the province over the course of a year for Black communities, diverse in their heritage, immigration status and language, to articulate the barriers that currently exist within the health system and their vision for what transformative change might look like.

Dr. Ingrid Waldron<sup>64</sup> took the results of these consultations and wrote a report in 2019 that located these consultations in a broader framing of the structural determinants of health, identifying the colonial structure at the heart of the racialized discourses of inferiority and victimhood as being at the root of the policy decisions that have produced ill health for people of African descent in the province. Waldron identified seven key recommendations that included improving data collection efforts, emphasizing employment equity - particularly for African Nova Scotians in the health system - and improving service delivery for rural African Nova Scotians (Waldron 2019). Yet, at the time of writing, the Strategy has still not been formally accepted by the Health Authority (J. Douglas 2021b).

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64. Dr. Waldron is a member of the supervisory committee for this dissertation project.

The challenges to implementation of the Strategy have been extensive. The first recommendation in the Strategy was hiring, and the Health Authority has partially implemented it by naming Rhonda Atwell as the African Nova Scotian Health Consultant. As Atwell and Carr noted in their interview with Jeff Douglas on the CBC's *Mainstreet* show, however, the COVID-19 pandemic hit right as Atwell was hired, stymying broader progress on the file because Atwell was a core organizer of the Health Authority's response to the early days of the pandemic (J. Douglas 2021a). Moreover, the Health Authority's senior leadership, CEO and organizational structure have all undergone significant changes in the years between the initiation of the Strategy and the present day (The Canadian Press 2021; Rankin 2019). This turnover has meant that sustained engagement has been difficult to come by, and that the relationships that Davis-Murdoch mentioned as being crucial to developing meaningful policy change are more difficult to develop and to maintain.

Beyond those challenges, however, are the foundational challenges of power differentials in policy co-design to which the Strategy has been no exception. As Michelle Farr notes, the foundational theories behind and benefits of policy co-design are primarily state-based, and are distinct from the emancipatory theories that animate the Black radical tradition amongst other liberatory perspectives (2018, 625). Moreover, while policy co-design aims to reorient power relations between service users and policymakers, in practice the process of priority-setting and implementation within governing institutions is shaped by the hierarchical structures of the institutions that are the sites of change. As Farr notes, collaboration may happen at the level at which community members have the power to instigate change (i.e. the committee level), but these forms of collaboration do not translate to extensive institutional power (Farr 2018, 640). As Adesola, a provincial policymaker who requested to remain anonymous told me, the Strategy

had a limited impact on the decision-making of the Health Authority, but Black senior administrators who have recently been hired in the Department of Health and Wellness may yet prompt action on the file:

So I really don't think it [the Strategy] had much impact, to be honest with you [...] in terms of the real change that needs to happen, that's just happening now. Or no, sorry, I should say, we're *just talking* [emphasis added] about making that happen now. That is because the leaders [...] are the people who are interested in doing something about it. We had to go upstream. So because they have somebody at the Department of Health and Wellness who looks like me – who cares – they are now looking at the African Nova Scotian Health Strategy and saying we are going to make this...they're not saying “we want to,” they're saying we *will* make this come to life [emphasis added] (Adesola, interview with author, 7 April 2022).

To paraphrase, decision-makers in the Health Authority were ultimately subject to the hierarchies inherent to a bureaucracy. Authority comes from above, ultimately resting with the Premier of the province via the Minister responsible for the file. Any discussion of collaborative governance or policy co-design must address this context. This reality does, however, sit in uneasy tension with the clarity and unanimity of purpose that Adongo described during the initial meeting that prompted the development of the Strategy in the first place. If this meeting was an important demonstration of community empowerment, then the conclusion that this policymaker draws appears to be a direct subversion of that moment - a reorientation of power back *into* the hands of governing institutions. The policymaker's conclusion also identifies other policymakers who “look like them” as a vital component of shifting policy towards community empowerment and self-determination, echoing Davis-Murdoch's articulation of relationships as a vital component of the kind of advocacy that community organizations must undertake. Here, we must turn to the ways that a crop of workers within governing institutions – many of whom have been recently hired – understand and experience their own role relative to the institutions they are a part of as well as within the broader community in a push towards self-determination.

## **Black policymakers & community organizations**

Unlike the era of the Black United Front, or the era of school petitioners before them, there are now an increasing number of policymakers and legislators within the provincial government in Nova Scotia who are of African descent. Members of community organizations and bureaucrats alike perceive this kind of descriptive representation as vital to the overall success of their initiatives and to their broader push towards self-determination. As Adesola explained, without this representation, policy initiatives like the Strategy would largely flounder:

Nova Scotia Health has hired a diversity and inclusion director who is an African man. The beauty is because he is representative of the community, he cares enough to do something. So now that that's happened, for the first time from what I understand, he is really taking policy [like the Strategy]: what's been written in it, and all of the recommendations, and he's now breathing life into those things. Now, we're looking at things being resourced and possibly capacity being built within the organization because there's a Black person who cares enough because he himself is that! Do you see what I'm saying? *So it really does work when you have...and I'm not saying all Black folk are kinfolk – but when you have somebody who's conscious, and who's connected, that's where the change happens* [emphasis added]. Hence the reason why we need more people of colour in leadership because that's where the “Karen”<sup>65</sup> concern comes from, otherwise, it is just a checkbox. And that's what I've seen time after time – that the policies essentially are just paper until somebody like the Director of Diversity & Inclusion within a higher organization, a person of colour comes in and says, you know, what, no, we're going to now do things differently and actually make some changes here. Before that...no, I personally haven't seen anything change (Adesola, interview with author, 7 April 2022).

To further understand the role these bureaucrats play in terms of supporting community efforts towards self-determination, I spoke with some of these Black bureaucrats.<sup>66</sup> I sought to understand whether their work facilitated what the public administration literature terms as the transformation from “passive” to “active” representation in the bureaucracy or whether it

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65. The “Karen” concern refers to the meme of a “Karen”, which Williams refers to as a “shorthand for White entitlement in popular culture [...] any White woman who exercises her power to police, surveil, and regulate Black individuals in public spaces” (2020, 2). The interviewee identifies the “Karen” concern in their context as negative and dismissive responses by white women in senior positions in her organization to criticism of their commitment to racial equity.

66. All of these bureaucrats requested anonymity, and so for ease of reading, I have given each different names from the Yoruba tradition to preserve their privacy. I choose the Yoruba tradition because it is my cultural lineage.

operated as a symbolic benefit only (Cepiku and Mastrodascio 2021; Fernandez, Koma, and Lee 2018; Riccucci and Van Ryzin 2017).<sup>67</sup> I was curious about the ways that these policymakers, concentrated in part in the province's Office of African Nova Scotian Affairs (ANSA) but also with increasing Black representation in the province's Department of Health and Wellness amongst other organizations, felt that their work overlapped with or diverged from that of community organizations – especially those that seek decision-making capacity for their membership. This perception is important because the presence of these Black bureaucrats may influence both the political and discursive opportunity structure that these organizations address to render their concerns visible and to seek policy change.

What I found, in ways that contradict the linear forms of policy success that may seem intuitive to this kind of engagement, was that Black bureaucrats are faced with a tension that is a challenge to reconcile without the presence of external agents – radical activists, to be specific – that can make the case for a shift in the institutional logics and processes that characterize the status-quo. This tension occurs in part because of the contradictory roles within and outside of the bureaucracy that these policymakers are often asked to play as one policy-maker who I am naming Adewunmi told me when explaining the formation of ANSA:

ANSA was set up so that it could survive the shocks of government coming and going. And it was set up to try to be a conduit for community voice. The problem that ANSA had, though, is that [the Office] had to do it in real time: respond to the community's needs, which were everything, and then respond to government needs to be a mouthpiece, which was not what it was set up for. So ANSA over the course of time nurtured this notion that [the Office has] two feet: one foot in the community, one foot in government. So inside of government, [ANSA was] able to develop quiet power to give government a pause before they just rush in, in terms of being on the political side of the equation, versus what is the intentions that will show itself in either policy or program or platform. So ANSA was trying to slow government down. But at the same time, that's not what the

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67. Passive representation here refers to a mirroring between the demographics of the bureaucracy and the demographics of the broader community, while active representation goes a step beyond demography to push for policies that are sought by members of that broader community (Riccucci and Van Ryzin 2017, 21).

community wanted. Because community, some of the elites [were saying], “come on, come on, let's get going.” I think they were very narrow in their thinking (Adewunmi, interview with author, 11 April 2022).

The multiplicity of roles that ANSA plays demonstrates the contradictory stances that Black policymakers take to advance policy goals that might support community priorities. As this policymaker highlights, the Office was meant to at once provide the substantive and active representation ostensibly offered by legislators (by acting as a “conduit for community voice”) to residents of African descent, and also to communicate government priorities to community members – even if those priorities work against community desires.

The challenge outlined above is significant, not least because of the “quiet” role this policymaker identified ANSA must play to advance policy within government, and it also creates a context of mistrust between those policymakers and the community (as exemplified by the comment that “elites” in the community being “narrow in their thinking”). Here, the potential openness created by the existence of the Office, for example, may end up constraining rather than enabling transformative change. Black bureaucrats in this position are forced to run interference for a government whose policy priorities have not traditionally supported or aligned with the priorities of communities of African descent, while simultaneously trying to shift those priorities in ways that align with institutional norms.

This approach has, however, led to some achievements that policymakers inside government tout as successes, including the department’s centrepiece policy document named *Count Us In* as one provincial policymaker who I am naming Gbenga told me:

It went from being an advocacy group for the community for a very long time. [If the] community has a problem with something, and ANSA went to the responsible department and said, for example, “Hey, Lands & Forestry, you're cutting trees on African Nova Scotian property, what's up?” And, you know, [ANSA would] go back and forth and do collaboration and partnership with the community. [ANSA would] tell the

department “hey, you need to meet with the community and explain certain things and what's going on. You know, you've got to do some consultations”, all that stuff. So for a very long time, that's what ANSA in my mind was with a small amount of the government coming to ANSA asking for advice: policy advice, decision making advice. But it's slowly started changing, especially with the launch of *Count Us In* which I think was where the needle really changed. It has become now, rather than just advocating for the community, it's more of a 50/50, where [ANSA is] still advocating for the community. But departments want to come and do things right for the African Nova Scotian community (Gbenga, interview with author, 6 May 2022).

The *Count Us In* document is a whole-of-government “action plan” in response to the United Nations Decade of African Descent that places the provincial government as a partner of Black communities in the province, stating proudly that “[Participation], co-operation, willingness, and patience are the keys to the positive change we need to make” (Government of Nova Scotia 2019, 8). The document’s design draws some inspiration from the Afrocentric imagery of the cultural nationalists referenced in Chapter Two, and the preamble hearkens to “the lives lost and the blood spilled during the enslavement period and the struggle for independence” across the African Diaspora (Government of Nova Scotia 2019, 4). It identifies three key pillars that underpin the plan’s push to “reduce barriers, attitudinal and discriminatory practices African Nova Scotians face” and that mirrors the United Nations’ framing of the Decade: recognition, justice, and development (Government of Nova Scotia 2019, 5,9). Importantly, under the development pillar, *Count Us In* cites the development of the African Nova Scotian Health Strategy as a priority (though the plan itself was ironically released a year after the Strategy’s design was completed) (Government of Nova Scotia 2019, 17). In these ways, the document appears to take up the challenge of crafting policy that is responsive and specific to communities of African descent in the province.

As several policymakers and community members mentioned to me though, the existence of *Count Us In*, and other government responses to systemic inequities is dependent on a vocal and forceful advocacy that pushes the government to act:

It's essential. It's what moves the needle. The community moves the needle, the advocacy of the community is what moves the needle. It's almost like this: I was just saying this to my partner earlier, the squeaky wheel gets the oil. What I realized is when we are... when we don't say anything, and we just take it, nobody does anything, nobody cares. We have to be the agent of change in our life, and that's individually and also broadly. Right? Because nobody cares like that. They just don't, sadly. You might find the off person who does but come on [...] That's why I'm even here in this position. It's because of the community's voice (Adesola, interview with author, 7 April 2022).

This sentiment was echoed by Veronica Marsman, who attributes the increased responsiveness of governing institutions in their engagements with community organizations to radical uprisings and youth protest:

If you had asked me this [how responsive governments are to the organizations she is a part of] at the beginning, say, three, four years ago, I'd say, not really responsive to us because we're not anywhere. But asking me that now, I'd say, hey, [with] both the young and the new people in the positions [as policymakers], I can see change, I can see great change. [I see change in] what they want to do. I attribute a lot of it to the Black Lives Matter movement. That made a significant difference – in this province, in this world, I think. At least in North America or Canada [...] they [policymakers] recognize the injustices, they want to do something about it. They don't know how. They are reaching out to us, there's not enough of us to go around for being taxed. So I do feel that it has made a big difference and I attribute, I do, a lot to young'uns being there and asking that question, like I said earlier about, “well, why is this being done?” (V. Marsman, interview with author, 15 November 2021).

Marsman's statement reveals much about the vital role that direct action plays in creating the context for a plan like *Count Us In* to exist, let alone for such a plan to resonate with policymakers across government. As Chloe Thurston identifies, movements like Black Lives Matter make the “submerged state” – the constellation of decisions, relationships, policy discourses and legislation that uphold inequalities – visible (2018, 166). Once the state *is* visible, however – once scrutiny is applied by members of the public, the state is left with a choice: face



a crisis of perceived legitimacy by actively supporting previously tacit inequalities, or attempt to respond by adjusting to address the crises of the day. As Marsman demonstrates, the provincial government in Nova Scotia has chosen the second path by recruiting from a diverse pool of bureaucrats that may challenge the entrenched discourses of inferiority and victimhood that produce the systematic neglect that underpinned its engagements with Black communities in the province. Importantly, the province has also reinforced and extended its engagements with community organizations, seeking their input and perspective in ways that were unlikely and uncommon in previous years.

With *Count Us In*, then, the provincial government staked its claim towards the kind of collaborative responsiveness and community-led policy co-design that many community organizations had been seeking with initiatives like the Strategy. Yet the plan also came with a murky plan for implementation – there are no timelines for when the government is supposed to achieve many of the actions it identifies, and responsibility for implementation is diffused between an interdepartmental committee of Deputy Ministers supported by ANSA that would, ostensibly, coordinate with community organizations:

Government will play a key role in the implementation of Count Us In: Nova Scotia's Action Plan in Response to the International Decade for People of African Descent. The Committee of Deputy Ministers for African Nova Scotian Issues will regularly monitor the progress of the plan. Coordinated community involvement is vital to the success of this action plan [...] Community groups and organizations working on advancing any of the suggested actions in this plan are encouraged to share their progress with African Nova Scotian Affairs as we work collaboratively to address issues for the success of the African Nova Scotian Community (Government of Nova Scotia 2019, 18).

Upon its release, *Count Us In* was criticized by the ANSDPAD Coalition for a lack of collaboration and consultation, as well as a lack of faith in the government's intentions to follow-through on the plan:

As the African Nova Scotian Decade for People of African Descent Coalition, we are pleased that Nova Scotia is one of the only jurisdictions to fully recognize and respond to the Decade. Yet we wish African Nova Scotian groups had been more involved in developing the action plan, and we want to see government held accountable for delivering on the plan in concrete ways that make a difference for African Nova Scotians (ANSDPAD Coalition 2019).

This rebuke of the plan by the ANSDPAD Coalition echoes decades of advocacy that has identified a lack of involvement and agency as a crucial undermining of self-determination efforts. By shifting the onus of the success of the plan onto community groups while simultaneously absolving itself of the responsibility for the success of *Count Us In*, the plan takes on a veneer of transformation while largely maintaining the same power relations that the very community groups they reference as partners have criticized for years. The awkwardness of the plan's launch and implementation is indicative of the challenge for bureaucrats – even Black bureaucrats – to translate the specific demands of community groups into tangible government agendas. As Gilad et al. note, bureaucracies tend to translate movement demands as compatible with their current direction, or as an endorsement to expand the trajectory of their current work (2019, 370). This dispensation emerges, in part, because of an embrace by senior bureaucrats of “institutionalized problem frames, rooted in their organizations' distinct missions”, as well as a “strong commitment to existing policy programs and instruments” (Gilad, Alon-Barkat, and Weiss 2019, 372). In the case of Black bureaucrats who have had to battle not only to get their positions in the first place, but also who must navigate experiences of interpersonal racism in their workplaces, this translation thus becomes an even bigger challenge as one policymaker explains to me:

The barriers that I find internally are more around getting stuff done. Most of the people that I work with have a lens... most of them don't look like me, unfortunately, inside [of government]. Outside of that, though, in community they do. So getting people to work with me around equity, diversity, inclusion hasn't necessarily been difficult. It's more about getting the actions that are needed, the changes that are needed, getting those things

resourced, and building from there, and getting people to see a bigger, broader vision, not just checking a box. I think that's been a challenge too. *Because essentially, even though people that I've worked with want to see change, they don't really want to change the way they do things* [emphasis added]. And so in order to make the changes, you have got to change the way that you're doing things. Sometimes [that] even means relinquishing your own power and privilege. And that is...I mean, I've faced barriers there, personally. [There are] people within the organization who think I'm taking their work away from them, things like that. So the barrier for me within the organization is doing this work myself, and essentially trying to address systemic racism and experiencing it at the same time (Adesola, interview with author, 7 April 2022).

By identifying these barriers, this policymaker shows that as hard won as the discursive shifts identifiable in a plan like *Count Us In* might be, they do not reshape the policy discourses or decision-making processes that underpin the inequities that these bureaucrats are attempting to undo. Moreover, in response to these barriers, the response from some of the policymakers I interviewed was a tendency towards the “quiet power” that one policymaker identified earlier – a position that, while understandable, cuts awkwardly against the radical and emancipatory potential that these bureaucrats are often confronted with by members of the communities they serve.

These bureaucrats themselves are quick to identify and articulate why these contradictions, and the need for government to maintain a form of formal control over engagement processes, might produce a lack of trust in the institutions they are a part of:

“And there's also what I'm noticing is that...people are scared. People were actually scared - even though they will know the answer [to requests from community organizations] – government folks are scared to say and be fully transparent with community. That's why you always get the sort of communications-crafted speeches. I'm sitting at all of these tables, and I'm seeing exactly how these things work. And I'm doing engagement with community. *So I know exactly what people are saying. And, you know, I speak up, but I may not be in the final decision-making position* [emphasis added]. It's really the whole formality around how government perceives community work because there's not really a navigator or outreach position where you can just be in community and do things that way. It's all formalized. And, you know, someone's [assistant] will reach out to you and community to schedule a meeting, not the actual person you're meeting with. I think that it's just a huge barrier in terms of being authentic with folks. It

also just breeds the whole mistrust thing and keeps perpetuating the same thing, because we just keep doing it the same way” (Oladayo, interview with author, 14 March 2022).

This policymaker’s identification of a lack of authenticity in the ways that the provincial government communicates its priorities exemplifies the ways that the presence of Black bureaucrats does not, in and of itself, transform the processes and power relations inherent to the institutions they represent. Instead, in the dismissiveness and the lack of authenticity that Oladayo identifies government actors using to communicate unpopular or unwelcome decisions, we see tendrils of the domination that Iris Marion Young defines: the usage of arbitrary power to coerce community members to acquiesce to policy decisions they would otherwise not seek in ways that are neither responsive to their desires nor reflect their perspectives (Young 2007, 48). This domination is present even when the province is attempting, by initiating consultations, to do the ‘right thing’ because the architecture of the institutional order that these actors are operating within does not easily integrate or account for divergent perspectives or experiences as part of its decision-making paradigms. Ultimately, these Black bureaucrats are members of the communities they serve, and as one policymaker told me, feel a responsibility (however unpopular) to take a long view in the ways they garner and distributed resources to community groups:

There's a lot of people that had a lot of...they really weren't appreciative of what I was trying to do. They were very much angry, annoyed, frustrated, and without understanding that inside of government, it's not an empty well for money. And it's one where I have to be very mindful, because I can't be seen to be propping up one particular political party, not the other, because these guys are on cycles. And I wanted to move away from the notion of being on a cycle, I wanted us to be more transformative in what we're doing (Adewunmi, interview with author, 11 April 2022).

Here, the tension between the roles that this policymaker plays – as community member and policymaker with a responsibility to avoid partisanship and responsibly manage a budget – intermingle with their understanding of an important challenge that Black community groups

face and that members of these groups identify: a shifting and unreliable political climate that could easily shift from abundance to scarcity. This concern, coupled with the fact that the province is a principal funder for many of the community organizations covered here, shapes the ways that these community groups navigate the opportunities available to them.

The presence of Black bureaucrats within governing institutions continues to be a central plank of the advocacy and policy co-design that many of these community organizations are a part of, as the push for a representative bureaucracy is identified as an important pathway towards self-determination. Importantly, however, this representation is not *a fait accompli* – bureaucrats of African descent have a difficult path to navigate between institutional imperatives and community desires, and the difficulty of this path is only magnified by a need to balance the specificity of different communities’ experiences within Nova Scotia alongside a drive to foster solidarity across difference, as I will explain below.

### **Diaspora, representative bureaucracy, and community organizations**

As noted above, the recent push by governing institutions, especially at the provincial level, to hire Black policymakers has been welcomed by many Black-led community organizations. The logic behind these hires from the perspective of these groups is clear: policymakers that understand the struggles, barriers, and oppression faced by African Nova Scotians will exhibit an increased responsiveness and push for policy change. For governments, these hires create legitimacy and goodwill with communities that have shown, historically and contemporaneously, an extensive capacity to advocate and organize against neglect and violence despite having a minimal electoral impact as a small population.

Baked into this logic, however, is a fundamental assumption: one’s racial identity might necessarily account for shared experiences, understandings, and perspectives about what ought to

be done to address racism within governing institutions. This assumption obscures the multifaceted experiences and relationships that individuals and communities of African descent may have with the state, and with each other, flattening a hard-won practice of solidarity across difference into an essentialized identity marker that does not necessarily lead to better decision-making. This assumption generates tension, as these increased opportunities for “people of African descent” are perceived to go to first- or second-generation immigrants to the province born on the African continent or in the Caribbean who moved to the province either to acquire post-secondary education or via federal immigration pathways that privilege those with extensive qualifications and experience. In contrast, many historical African Nova Scotians feel as if they are being denied even these positions due to historical barriers towards achieving educational credentials as well as a bias within governing institutions against them. These tensions are present both within the bureaucracy and indeed within community organizations, causing gaps in collaboration that weaken the important strategic alliances these organizations can use to push for policy change.

These tensions also point to a larger question: to what extent does representation within governing institutions responsible for the domination of Black communities help to facilitate relational autonomy? Here, the focus is as much on interdependence as it is on resisting domination, as these heterogeneous communities of African descent are placed into a form of competition rooted in the scarcity of opportunities for employment and representation in government that in and of themselves are indicative of the historic marginalization of Black people in the city and in the province. The drive for representation and responsiveness within these institutions runs the risk of worsening, and not alleviating, the divisions between these

communities by incentivising a hegemonic uniformity of identity and approach that benefits some while greatly harming others.

This section will thus probe this tension by exploring with policymakers and community members alike the roots of the conflicts that frequently emerge, and by identifying potential bridging strategies that can and have been used to reorient focus by actors towards shared visions of self-determination. Those I interviewed, whether historically African Nova Scotian or not, identified a common desire to navigate beyond these moments of friction via collaboration and seek a solidarity that recalls the words of Stuart Hall I referenced in Chapter Two: “[defined] not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity* [emphasis original]” (1996, 235).

The tension I describe above is palpably felt by many of the people I interviewed during this project, and many of those people identify white representatives of governing institutions as being the engine behind conflict despite often avoiding the direct ire of those who are implicated in inter-communal issues. As Sharon Davis-Murdoch, who is originally from Bermuda, explains to me, the barriers to representation in the bureaucracy as well as in clinical settings emerges from long-maligned barriers to achievement for African Nova Scotians in the education system that place Black immigrants as being better positioned for the few jobs available:

It is clear systemically that anti-Black racism exists. We've had too few Black people altogether in clinical positions, certainly way too few in administrative positions. But then when you look at who is there, it tends to be immigrants who have been who have come from someplace else, [who have] been educated someplace else or educated here, educated in Nova Scotia as international students, and then moved into [government] when those very few positions are available. [Those people] have sometimes been able to get in – most of the time not – but African Nova Scotians...there has been barrier after barrier in place. We know that in terms of how the education system has not prepared them, has been antagonistic and hostile to them; we know about those IPPs [Individual

Performance Plans] that seem to be the bane of our people's existence. Then we also know about the refusal of the white establishment to engage populations in any kind of decision-making. So you can't see that and not understand that there are reasons for the... not only reasons, but the history speaks to such inequity. For [African Nova Scotian] populations to have done as well as they have to have been able to perform and exceed expectations is extraordinary (S. Davis-Murdoch, interview with author, 4 March 2022).

Davis-Murdoch's articulation speaks to the upstream roots of this inequity in the school system in Nova Scotia, which in turn are ironically rooted in the very policy discourses of inferiority and neglect that are the reasons for these positions to exist in the first place. This dynamic, in turn, leads some historical African Nova Scotians to feel as if spaces, organizations and positions explicitly created to serve them end up serving people from the diaspora who are already well-supported, as Helen tells me:

Historically, what you've seen, and that's why it's important for our brothers and sisters in the diaspora to understand about the history of Blacks in Nova Scotia, because having an adequate education system really challenges your employability and your ability to go on to higher education. So even to this day, we'll see a number of custodians who are African Nova Scotian, since you mentioned in our healthcare system; as custodial staff, you'll see them in the shopping malls. You don't see them as managers, you don't see them as doctors, you don't see them as nurses. What you will see, and that's beginning to change slowly, is people who were not born in Nova Scotia in some of those positions that are Black [...] *Every time we have organizations that are specifically about African Nova Scotians, or with a focus on African Nova Scotians to fill gaps, it changes to people of African descent* [emphasis added]. And I'm okay with that, but I'm not okay with that at the sacrifice of not making sure African Nova Scotians are still part of that need, because our school system still is failing us. And we are still in Nova Scotia. So I need to be very clear when I say that, because I'm not saying that people of African descent shouldn't have advantages and be included in these programs. But they need to understand the historical context of why these programs are created. And we're still not reaching that level where we need to be en masse for those employment opportunities (Helen, interview with author, 13 December 2021).

These shifts in program and hiring emphasis are a choice often made by the institutions responsible for maintaining these inequities in the first place – indicating a lack of attentiveness to the nuances and differences between these communities of African descent, and hinting at the arbitrary usage of power that is at the root of domination in the province. The culpability of



governing institutions in this tension do not stop, however, at the structural factors that animate organizing but extend to the ways that governments themselves seek to understand the people they ostensibly intend to serve. As a white municipal policymaker explained to me, governments at all levels are frequently in search of simplistic ways to engage with communities, meaning that they often miss the specificity required to understand how different communities might respond to actions they take and do not take:

Even with consultants recently, we were talking about how to talk about showing that representation is given to the appropriate people. And we're talking about the effects of policing, for example. And one of the things that was mentioned was "well, we could just use the umbrella term of BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour]." I'm like, "that actually gets so far away from what we're talking about." It's when you try to create a category that is so dilute that it ends up creating further silences, instead of actually creating that plurality of voices that is needed to express trauma in the way that it's experienced in individual communities (municipal policymaker, interview with author, 4 May 2022).

Asked why governing institutions tend towards "creating further silences" as opposed to addressing communities in their own contexts to hear distinct experiences, this policymaker goes on to explain that this tendency is a manifestation of "equity-washing", or the surface-level desire to appear progressive on issues of race and racism:

One of the problems with trying to get bureaucrats and deeply white bureaucracies to reflect on their own colonialism, or imperialism, or racism is that they are so terrified by that notion that they could be carrying these ideas with them: genetically, epigenetically, epistemologically, where they frame everything they do, that they're deeply resistant to being able to de-bias themselves to decolonize their own theory of mind and their own mental space. So I don't know how much effort we need to face, including making white people comfortable with recognizing their own invisible senses of privilege and stuff like that, but it's definitely a huge problem. You see it all the time in bureaucracy. I think that is one of the big impetuses for what we're calling "equity-washing." It's that very natural sense of trying to virtue signal against what I call a deep, inherited cultural guilt. And when that cultural guilt is turned into shame, and repressed, then it just propagates itself as subconscious colonialism that obviously just perpetuates the problems that we're experiencing (municipal policymaker, interview with author, 4 May 2022).

This explanation of “cultural guilt” resonates with the lack of authenticity described by another policymaker above in the ways that the province engages Black communities whether diasporic or historically African Nova Scotian, and, paired with the structural factors outlined by Davis-Murdoch and others, lead to a tendency to be simplistic in their hiring practices, as Donna Smith-Darrell, an African Nova Scotian retired nurse and board member of HAAC, tells me:

The more they [the white establishment] perceive that you are like them, then the better it is [in terms of hiring], which is, as you know, quite ridiculous, but there you go. Yeah, I would see that. I guess for some of our people, that puts a little bit of a... not a little bit, a lot of a chip on the shoulder. And so when they present, they're presenting in a way, with a defensive stance because they're going in ready to do combat because of what we've experienced (D. Smith-Darrell, interview with author, 2 March 2022).

Here, Smith-Darrell alludes to immigrants from the African diaspora as being “like them” in terms of having the credentials sought by those in power. Crucially, however, the agent in Smith-Darrell’s anecdote is the governing institutions that perceive that those that are not “like them” (i.e. African Nova Scotians) as unable to work in these roles. This perceived deficit is particularly acute if community members do not adhere to the limiting perspectives of institutions that have historically been explicit in the ways they perceive African Nova Scotians as inferior. It is little wonder, therefore, that the turn by these institutions towards Black representation would be treated with suspicion and derision by African Nova Scotians in this context.

Others I interviewed, however, identify core stereotypes that they perceive are held by historical African Nova Scotians and people from the diaspora alike about each other. These stereotypes, which Helen describes below, are the engine that maintain this tension and prevent communication:

So some of the historical stereotypes that exist about some of our Blacks from the diaspora is what carries into that lack of solidarity, right? So the idea that African Nova

Scotians, historic African Nova Scotians aren't educated, are poor, are lazy, are unemployed, live in the rural communities, aren't strong academically, all those negative things about African Nova Scotians is what some other folks believe. Then you have the belief that the Caribbean are class-based, they're coming with money, they're close to the British, they think they're better than us, all of that. And then you have those who are coming from the continent, and they are solid in their Africanness. No one else should be African. They're African. They're the only ones who are African. There's no such thing as African Nova Scotian, there's no such thing as African Canadian. "We're African – stop claiming Africa." A lot of [African Nova Scotians] don't think about those who come as refugees, those who come escaping war, most of us think that the Africans who come are coming from money [...] We think they're coming from money because of the international fees that people pay [to go to university in Nova Scotia]. So why else in the hell would you come to [a Nova Scotian university] unless you're coming from families with money? *And so it creates this disconnect, which is so not real. It makes it difficult for people to talk and communicate with each other* [emphasis added] (Helen, interview with author, 13 December 2021).

These stereotypes run up against the collective identity of Blackness that many of those involved in both community groups and who now work as bureaucrats within the provincial government subscribe to, as one policymaker and community member who is African Nova Scotian highlights:

"I have seen [the tension], I've experienced it. It is my life. [...] I've always been exposed and connected to my people from the...directly from the continent is what I'd say, *because we're all the same people* [emphasis added]. Bridging that gap between the two communities has always been a challenge [...] It's the same community but different, you know what I'm saying?" (Adesola, interview with author, 7 April 2022)

The challenge that navigating this hybridity – being the same community but different – presents in a context framed by scarcity is extensive, as there is a fracturing in the solidarities that are so powerful in moments of contest and in advocacy. In the presence of institutional hierarchy, the strategy that accompanies univocal solidarity can dissipate, indicating the domination that has historically underwritten institutional responses to Black organizing. As Young (2007, 48) points out, this arbitrary power does not have to be explicitly orchestrated by those within governing institutions, but rather is a part of the structural architecture that shapes these power relationships. As Polletta and Jasper (2001, 292) note, this fracturing in a collective identity can

precipitate movement decline and a ceasing of membership within organizations as members begin to seek representation and connection elsewhere. These stereotypes, then, present a meaningful risk to the efficacy of organizations in pushing for policy change.

For newcomers to Nova Scotia, these stereotypes are embedded by interactions with non-Black Nova Scotians who may hold views of historical African Nova Scotians that adhere closely to those Helen identified, as Hakeem explained to me:

Because of the fact that this is systemic, this has sort of been fed into the society at large. Your average person [hears these narratives] in whatever way that they might have been exposed to them – be it through the media [...] I would say, from my interaction with people, I think this is just coming from all different directions with respect to how people have come to perceive the African Nova Scotian community. Individuals have formed their own narratives or their own conclusion to the point where they now feel that they have the audacity to educate people, *especially those that are new* [emphasis added], about things that they may not know about this community to say “okay, well, warning, you just don't go there. Just stay away, you know, just pull back.” And I think that audacity is what actually really angered me too. *How dare you have, you know, so much confidence to the point where you can look at me – a Black person – and tell me, who I should relate to with respect to other Black people?* [emphasis added] (Hakeem, interview with author, 15 March 2022).

These stereotypes are important because they contribute to a lack of trust between communities that extends to the work that Black bureaucrats do within governing institutions and with communities. The lack of engagement across differences, prompted in part by these stereotypes, can lead to a lack of understanding about the ways that different communities identify and articulate distinct policy priorities. One provincial policymaker told me that stereotypes are isolating workers from the diaspora, stating that “now all of a sudden, you have people, more brothers and sisters that are coming with those kinds of talents. And they're being shunned, and they shouldn't be” (provincial policymaker, interview with author, 11 April 2022). For African Nova Scotians, these stereotypes act as another perceived barrier to the kinds of individual and communal successes that many seek. Relational autonomy, from this perspective, is diminished

by these stereotypes and the lack of trust they produce. The specificity required for communities to have their priorities accounted for and articulated in policy processes can also allow for interdependence, but only if there is a degree of trust that one community's interests do not impose upon or undermine another's and that the decision-making processes that account for communal desires are designed to reflect nondomination (Young 2007, 49-51). The lack of trust that these stereotypes demonstrate indicates the degree to which scarcity rooted in structural inequity threatens these kinds of relationships.

This lack of trust is also rooted in a different understanding of the ways that racism unfolds in Nova Scotia, where immigrants who hail from African and Caribbean nations are subject to racism that sometimes unfolds in different ways than it does for African Nova Scotians, as one provincial policymaker explains to me:

I always say that coming from a predominantly Black country, where I was never a minority, but a majority, where I never experienced racism, per se. You know, it was really challenging to understand that when somebody asks me, "Where are you from? And I mean, *where are you from* [emphasis original]" – it is interpreted and translated as racism. So I needed to understand, from those who have experienced it, what exactly that meant. How do I act or address it in a way that will be more – again, to that concept that we talked about understanding the historical background of African Nova Scotians here – how do I stand in solidarity with them by addressing this issue? [...] It's an eye opener, to understand what all these experiences [are like] from a slavery standpoint and oppression meant for somebody who has gone through that from generation to generation (Simisola, interview with author, 6 May 2022).

The process of learning about the ways that racism – as a function of individual microaggressions, as institutional policy, and as an intermingling of policy discourses and material deprivation – functions and can be contested in Nova Scotia as a newcomer can be facilitated by membership within community organizations that explicitly seek to bridge the gaps between communities of African descent. Hakeem, for instance, began to deepen his understanding of and connection to historical African Nova Scotian communities by a

combination of visiting communities like North Preston and Uniacke Square and by working in support of the Black History Month Association in the early 2000s:

Right away, that just propelled me into the eye of the storm, if I can put it that way. Because at that point, I had no choice but to learn more, to dig deeper [and] understand the history of the Black Loyalists, and understand the history of the Maroons, the history of the Black Refugees, what happened to the migrant workers in Cape Breton – just the nuances of different experiences of Black people here in the province. And that for me was just like, “wow, this, these are things that I never knew, these are things that I'd never read about.” So I will say that was kind of how that journey started. And then from there on, I stayed connected with so many Black organizations (Hakeem, interview with author, 15 March 2022).

This process of learning and exchange is vital within bureaucratic spaces, where many newcomers face discrimination that, according to one policymaker, they find it hard to name without engagement with and connection to African Nova Scotians that have faced similar treatment for generations:

I think that there's just a difference in our perception and our approach. There's a lot of fear I find, amongst our brothers and sisters from the continent, because it's almost like [...] I don't know what it is, maybe you can clarify that for me at some point. But this idea of, you know, I hate to say it, but the land of milk and honey and being here and you don't want to ruffle any feathers. So you just keep your head down and work and keep going, and not address [racism] whereas those of us who have been here all this time – we've had enough. We grew up with it, we went to school with our fists up, literally. [...] It takes a minute, I find, for people to really get what is even happening to them until their heart health starts to wane. Their diet changes... all these things. We know what the immigrant effect is. [...] I say, if you're from the continent and you're connected to a lot of African Nova Scotians who are doing advocacy work already, then you're more open to jumping on board with [advocating for yourself]. You feel more secure, you feel, you know, There's a relationship so you're not by yourself. I think when you're isolated, and you're alone, is when you're limited in your advocacy (Adesola, interview with author, 7 April 2022).

The empathy that Adesola shows here is indicative of the kind of relationship that can allow for hybridity. Here, Adesola recognizes the difference of approach between historical African Nova Scotians and Black immigrants in the province and identifies where this divergence might come from: a precarity that accompanies immigrant experiences that cannot be fully accounted for by

those who have a generations-long tenure in the province and in the country. This empathy comes from experience, engagement and understanding that can go a long way towards restoring trust.

Elsewhere, organizations like HAAC make this kind of education and bridging across community spaces an important part of their mandate, as Smith-Darrell tells me:

What we've really done is made a conscious decision that in the leadership that there would be an African Nova Scotian and an immigrant person. So I would see that as a conscious decision, and it's written in our bylaws and constitution that that has to happen [...] I would say that it is really a concerted effort. And we certainly will, and do, if, if we are requested [to do] anything through [African Diaspora Association of the Maritimes], or even some of the [other newcomer community] societies, we would do education or getting them involved (D. Smith-Darrell, interview with author, 2 March 2022).

HAAC's organizational format, as specified in its by-laws, allows for the kinds of stereotyping outlined above to be easily debunked, informing instead a form of collaboration and engagement that is practiced on a daily basis. As a result, the organization is able to behave as a trusted broker and advocate, as its membership and its leadership are reflective of multiple communities, and the spaces the organization creates are, in and of themselves, sites of exchange and negotiation.

These exchanges are not always pleasant. One HAAC board meeting that I observed was entirely devoted to the topic of disunity between communities, with historical African Nova Scotians expressing concern that community organizations that once served them now exclusively serve people from the diaspora as Helen articulated above, while people from the diaspora in the meeting identified a feeling of exclusion and marginalization by African Nova Scotians. Importantly, however, these sentiments and resentments were expressed alongside interventions that sought a different approach – one board member suggested creating “communities of practice” so that members of the organization can continue to articulate shared

values and priorities, while another expressed a desire not to pass these conflicts and resentment down to future generations. The meeting concluded with solemnity, but also a commitment to intervention in this burgeoning topic within and across communities. For many, including one community member and policymaker who was present at this meeting, the path beyond these conflicts is difficult to see, but has its roots in fostering meaningful relationships over time like a recent jollof rice competition held in the Preston Townships:

For me, it's about building relationships. There's a hesitancy... I think [this hesitancy] comes out of just not knowing people. [...] I think the gap is getting closer in terms of that relationship. And it's gonna have to happen through things like that, through jollof rice competitions, through events, conferences, meetings. We need to be together in the same room and learn more about each other. I do see a shift, but I do see that there is a big divide because one thinks one's getting more than the other (Adesola, interview with author, 7 April 2022).

These difficult exchanges are a demonstration of the value of community organizations in building the kinds of spaces necessary for communities of African descent to push towards self-determination. These community organizations have the credibility and capacity to understand the specificity required to build long-lasting relationships, helping to foster solidarity not as an abstract principle but as a practice of grappling with the divergent perspectives and experiences of oppression that people from these divergent communities face in Nova Scotia. They also act as sites of knowledge exchange that are vital for Black policymakers to understand and participate in, thus helping to foster the forms of substantive representation that these organizations and community members alike seek within governing institutions.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter explored the extensive role that Black-led community organizations in Nova Scotia play in creating spaces and services that contribute to conceptions of Black self-determination. It engaged with the long history of Black-led community organizations in Nova



Scotia and the kinds of supports these organizations provide, before analyzing the ways that these organizations engage in policy co-design efforts in the province, arguing that these efforts are ultimately determined by the composition and policy priorities of the governing institutions that host them. This chapter then probed the role of Black policymakers in facilitating these co-design efforts through the policy process, and the tensions that this intermediary role can produce, before engaging with the ways that community organizations play a vital bridging role across communities of African descent when the solidarities that are vital to these co-design efforts are tested. The penultimate chapter of this project will identify the constrained funding environment that further shapes the ways that community organizations organize to prompt policy change and will identify the role of direct action and radical activists in holding both governing institutions and these organizations to account in the process.

### Chapter Nine – Funding and movement capture

*Although they're [the provincial government] resourcing things more for our community, it's still kind of backwards because there is lack of representation in leadership. And it almost seems like a bit of a band-aid. But we're willing to take it because we've gotten nothing thus far. So I think it's... there's some handing out going on. We're taking it, but what are we going to do with it? I think in terms of sustainability, that's what I think about. And that's what I worry about sometimes: how do we sustain this? What happens when this government is no longer in power? Is it going to change again? How do we sustain ourselves? I think we need to start having that conversation and really thinking about that, and [remove] ourselves a little bit more from government, because that's a temporary band-aid. And we need to think about something that's foundational for tomorrow – for our children, our children's children, something that they can run. I think that's really the only thing that's going to change it (Adesola, interview with author, 7 April 2022).*

The tensions that Black-led community organizations navigate in their engagements with governments at all levels are rooted in a fundamental contradiction: these organizations are often principally funded by the very governments that they may be tacitly or explicitly contesting with their programming and with their advocacy. This contradiction is underpinned by the constraints placed on Black community organizations in Canada by a lack of material resources and an inability to raise those funds outside of the support potentially provided by governing institutions. As the *Unfunded* report written by the Network for the Advancement of Black Communities and Carleton University's Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership program

demonstrates, the philanthropic sector has almost uniformly avoided funding Black organizations in Canada unlike in the United States – only 0.03% of total grant funds given in 2017 and 2018 by public and private foundations reviewed by the report authors were given to Black-led or Black serving organizations (Pereira et al. 2020, 2).

The ramifications of this absence have historically constrained the ability for Black community organizations to advocate for and deliver the Black health and criminal justice infrastructure that they seek. Agnes Calliste identified this tension amongst the organizations that sprouted during the Black Power generation of the 1970s, emphasizing that support from the state was incompatible with liberation-oriented movements because “[most] of the state’s criteria were incompatible with the organizations’ goals since the former involved supporting the status quo” (1995, 134, 135). In Chapter Five, I explore the effects of these funding arrangements on the advocacy efforts of the Black United Front, who were initially funded by the federal government before eventually transitioning to provincial funding before their eventual demise in the 1990s. 50 years later, the fundamental dynamics that Calliste identified remain, despite the important differences between that era and contemporary times in the relative economic capacity and policy experience that exist in Black communities in Nova Scotia.

To describe this complex set of relationships, I invoke an amended form of what Megan Ming Francis refers to as “movement capture”:

I propose the concept of movement capture—the process by which private funders leverage their financial resources to apply pressure and influence the decision-making process of civil rights organizations. The movement capture framework hinges on the power imbalance between those that have resources and those that need them. In this way, movement capture relates to work that highlights the power asymmetries embedded in the relationship between community organizations (international and domestic) and funding from NGO’s and businesses who take a “corporate social responsibility” approach to governance (2019, 278).

Ming Francis' framework is particularly salient in the United States, where philanthropic foundations and private sector organizations are the primary funders of community organizations oriented towards racial justice, and as she proves throughout the article, have an outsized if contested influence on the decision-making of community organizations as a result (Francis 2019, 277). The impact of these philanthropic organizations has been framed by Tiffany Lethabo King and Ewuare Osayande as "misdirection", with the authors noting that the results of purportedly progressive philanthropic actions "have been little more than a few cosmetic adjustments to make capitalist foundations appear progressive and the Left complicit in supporting systems of oppression, exploitation, and domination" (2007, 80). The mechanism of movement capture in this account is in the concentration of capital in these philanthropic organizations, which are controlled by a small group of wealthy and predominately white individuals, and which support causes and groups that have intimate connections to this inner circle (King and Osayande 2017, 81). Even when Black causes are funded, and when grassroots Black organizations and groups are recruited into these spaces for capacity-building and fundraising training, King and Osayande contend that this training is only useful to build relationships with the very wealthy circles that have excluded Black organizations thus reifying their power over organizational priorities (King and Osayande 2007, 85). This pattern has also been named by other scholars as the "white saviour industrial complex", with donations being used as a way to channel "white guilt" while still maintaining a system of dominance and deprivation (Kherbaoui and Aronson 2021, 273). In essence then, these scholars are wary of the influence and impact that capital will have on liberatory movements given the power relations that accompany funding.

In Canada, the “white saviour industrial complex” has yet to truly take root given the lack of money available from the philanthropic sector. While the Foundation of Black Communities has recently released a Black Opportunities Fund designed to allow Black community organizations to access money from foundations and private-sector organizations, its recent launch means that the Fund has yet to make a meaningful impact in the ways that the community organizations I engaged seek funding. Only one of the two Nova Scotian awardees for its education and health grants is a Black-led organization that supports employment efforts in Cumberland County, and thus is outside of the scope of this project (Foundation for Black Canadians 2022). The philanthropic sector in Canada, therefore, is not a primary impetus for the kinds of pressure and power imbalances on Black community organizations as it is in the United States.

Instead, the state acts as the principal funder for community organizations, meaning that the mechanisms described above work differently. Leslie Pal traces the contours of this discussion in the Canadian context in *Interests of State: The Politics of Language, Multiculturalism and Feminism in Canada*. Pal, in discussing the grants given by the federal government to advocacy organizations over a 20-year period (from 1969-1988), argues that this funding was prompted by national unity concerns, and was an attempt by the federal government to reconcile the contradictory impulses of encouraging increased participation amongst citizens marginalized from the “national character” and defining that national character in a way that would reduce polarization (Pal 1993, 251-254). Pal contends that these groups have the contradictory effect of developing and emphasizing “particularistic identities”, with in-group solidarity taking the place of fostering a broader ethic of national unity to create what he calls a “politics over-determined by division and difference” (Pal 1993, 256-257). These identities lead

to what Pal calls a shift in Canadian political discourse towards one that prioritises “equality-seeking” groups, is reliant on historical grievances, and that orients towards symbols as important signals of political change (Pal 1993, 259-261). Pal is sanguine about the degree to which co-optation happens because of state grants, in part because the administration he observes was loosely monitored and shifted over time, and in part because the groups he covered represent core identities like race and gender that require membership to have meaningful sway over decision-making. For Pal, these groups were thus autonomous from the state and could not be meaningfully influenced (Pal 1993, 262-264).

While Pal points to similar mechanisms of state capture that I do in this chapter and in this project, he does so from an entirely different vantage point. Firstly, Pal’s work focuses on federal interventions into advocacy organizations, where this project looks at the ways that different levels of government including the provinces and municipalities have different impacts on movement organizing and outcomes, including in the ways they offer resources to advocacy organizations. Secondly, Pal’s primary concern in his work is the eponymous “interests of state” – in other words, the ways that these policy choices impact state-bound imperatives and policy goals. I am uninterested in the benefits of these policy choices to the state, and instead turn my analysis towards those that have faced domination from the very state whose interests Pal is articulating. Pal’s contention that these groups contribute to a politics of “division and difference” glibly ignores, in the case of Black Haligonians, centuries of oppression chronicled throughout this project that animate resistance. This project is uninterested in preserving a unity premised upon erasure and violence, and instead seeks to find means through which self-determination can be actualized to create a different world. Finally, and most importantly to this chapter, his argument that co-optation does not happen due to state funding is rebuffed in this

project by important factors that include a lack of core funding for organizations compared to the time Pal was writing in 1993, as well as a disagreement in our analysis of power. If we take seriously Young's contention that arbitrary power is structural, and we incorporate Lukes' argument that communities can be subject to "willing compliance" even if they might believe they are behaving autonomously, then group membership because of identity does not in and of itself preclude co-optation. Instead, group membership can conceal the power relationships that reorient and dampen fervour for transformative change.

Actors who operate at the interface of community organizations and government policymaking note that the primary mechanism that governing institutions use to co-opt community organizations are these funding arrangements and the implicit power relations that those arrangements demonstrate. Rayside and Lindquist noted a similar dynamic amongst HIV/AIDS activists in the 1990s, noting that project-based funding shifts community groups "[into] the role of state sub-contractor [...] Fears of biting the hand that feeds, and increasing governmental talk of "partnership," make confrontational activist campaigns more difficult to mount" (1992, 48). This sub-contractor status, they argue, could impact the decision-making of community organizations even as the work they produce supports the community (1992, 48). People I interviewed agreed, noting that the most effective organizations in terms of raising funds to support programming are those that are able to leverage their relationships within and outside government to navigate this complex environment, though success from this perspective does not necessarily translate to advances in the expansive democratic vision that many actors seek. Any future funds that might arrive from philanthropic agencies via initiatives like the newly created Black Opportunities Fund would likely be given to organizations that have developed prior logistical and institutional infrastructure via state funds. These organizations,

and the actors that drive them, must therefore hold in tension the democratic expansion that their efforts promise, and the potential for “movement capture” in the funding arrangements they are prompted to seek.

This chapter probes this tension by asking key members of some of these organizations about the ways that they navigate this funding environment, and asking policymakers about their perceptions of the role governing institutions play in shaping the agendas of community organizations. I focus my attention on the ways that Black-led community organizations navigate the extensive power asymmetries that develop within the funding relationships they have with governing institutions, especially those at the provincial level. By distributing funding to organizations and projects that they deem to be amenable to their policy agendas while withholding funding at other times to organizations or projects that either do not align with or otherwise contravene those agendas, these governments exercise their power and influence to shape the offerings, the orientations, and the outcomes of community-based programming. Actors on the ground who are part of these organizations are keenly aware of the impact that these funding decisions have on the trajectory of broader efforts towards self-determination. Many attribute government decision-making to an active and politicized strategy of “divide and conquer” that privileges some organizations over others on the basis of their compliance.

Importantly, this perceived imbalance is not uniform, nor is it absolute. Community organizations are able to navigate these constraints to consequently intervene in the policy process, while maintaining agency in the ways they respond to the opportunities that are presented to or concealed from them. Moreover, the overlap between radical actors and organizations allows for consequential advocacy to emerge even when said advocacy might be risky, as the drive towards self-determination is worth jeopardizing potential funding for many of



those I interviewed. Finally, the policymakers I interviewed recognize this imbalance and seek to address it in the spaces they have influence. Nevertheless, this form of “movement capture” is a clear and pressing risk to self-determination efforts that organizations and activists alike must take seriously.

I argue that Black community organizations can and should use the resources available to them – including financial and logistical support from governing institutions – to support Black flourishing. In the process of accessing these policy windows, however, these organizations must prioritize staying connected to the policy priorities identified by affiliated movements in the streets by using an expansive vision of developing support and resources to make their world-building projects happen. Radical activists are catalysts for policy changes that these organizations also seek like improved service-delivery for communities that attenuates inequities, and thus seek accountability and honesty from all actors as a precondition for coalition. Radical activists and community organizations are not necessarily working in opposition even when those organizations are working in partnership with the province, but can play complementary and enabling roles for each other in pushing for transformative change.

### **Provincial governments and core funding**

Access to core, sustainable funding is a frequent and pressing call issued by community organizations as a way to ensure that the forms of care they provide can continue and expand, and is a central feature of how people like Sharon Davis-Murdoch perceive they can develop and establish a sustainable infrastructure of care:

You know, when we begin to have centres of excellence for Black health established, when we begin to have research that is funded at the highest level, and CIHR gives us more than \$40,000 to do a project and starts to give us you know \$4 million to do a project, then we would be in a better position to have better practices improved. And with those practices, we will be able to measure and monitor improved outcomes in our health.

So the Black health infrastructure, the building of it is beginning. The substantial establishment of Black health infrastructure brings us closer to self-determination (S. Davis-Murdoch, interview with author, 3 March 2022).

The logic of these calls is clear: these organizations are best placed to play a role in creating responsive and specific forms of care to the community alongside co-developed policy proposals helmed by the state, and the achievement of these interweaving imperatives would go some way towards dismantling historical domination in the province. In this account, self-determination and state involvement are not juxtaposed, but rather can be managed by trusted brokers that access resources to provide community support. Community organizations in search of funding to support programming and service-delivery are ecumenical in which level of government they will approach to support their work, but understand that the resources they can accrue are contingent on a knowledge of how each level of government is likely to respond. Veronica Marsman told me that the federal government is the level of government most likely to provide financial support, but that accessing that support is complicated and requires building alliances and relationships with policymakers at all levels of government:

Often as we know, the federal government have the dollars and they'll say to the province, you administer it [a funding program], and then it comes to the city... the province will come to the city. But then the city sometimes identifies issues. I think the biggest [catalyst for change] probably would be the federal government. Because the city could identify issues. But then the city says we have no money. The city we know has a more limited budget. So sometimes the city can push the province. But we know the province doesn't have a lot. So I'd say the biggest catalyst probably would be the federal government. [...] it starts with the dollar, who's the holder of the key, and most of the time, it's the feds (V. Marsman, interview with author, 15 November 2021).

Municipal policymakers who seek to shift the city's approach to creating healthy spaces as well as to support Black-led organizations with their efforts are quick to concur with Marsman's interpretation of the city as a cash-strapped player, thus limiting their impact in policy co-design efforts:

We have the resources of a medium-sized city, but have the issues and the aspirations of a big city. A good example would be competing for funding for National Housing Strategy funding. And so a lot of cities like Toronto or Vancouver who have a much better [chance], I mean, Toronto especially does housing themselves. They're much more set up to be able to access that funding versus HRM or even our nonprofit housing organizations [...] So partnership with the province is really, really, really integral to most of the work we do. And then, yeah, trying to figure out different ways. Where can we find different parts of funding throughout the municipality? How can we shift the way we do things so that we maybe don't have to take full responsibility for something but can at least support it (municipal policymaker, interview with author, 4 May 2022)

The impact of the municipality's absence as a player in funding discussions is that community organizations working in health primarily orient their lobbying for funding towards the province even as the programs they offer might have important implications for municipalities. The roots of this absence are in part because of the ways that municipal politicians themselves view the policy domains they may or may not have responsibility over. A survey of 1084 elected municipal politicians conducted by Lucas and Smith notes that indeed the perception amongst these politicians is that issues of public health are entirely a provincial responsibility – from development, to resource provision, to implementation (2019, 280). To extend the constraints on these organizations, the federal government may have the most resources available, but often distributes those resources via intermediary bodies that sometimes make it difficult for these community organizations to access the necessary funding programs according to several people that I interviewed. The turn to the province for support, therefore, becomes an imperative for organizations eager to capitalize on the momentum generated by protests in the streets. Depending on the priorities of the government of the day, though, this search for funding can be constrained by a narrow understanding of health provision and promotion as Louise Adongo explains to me:

I think depending on which level of government you're engaging, people just really care about acute care, and clinical care, and not the broader health considerations. Ironically, when this was a Liberal government, which is who funded us, there was definitely much

more of a broader definition of health and community well being. With this government [the Progressive Conservative government led by Premier Tim Houston] being elected on a platform that's about understanding the long term care and care needs in rural communities...it'll be interesting to see.[...] We're in the "invite people to come and dream and imagine a future that doesn't exist" space. And there's not that much funding towards imagining futures that don't exist, because the nature of government funding is very reactive (L. Adongo, interview with author, 30 March 2022).

While there is nothing notable about governments seeking to establish their own policy priorities with targeted funding aimed at addressing those issues, this tendency shapes the opportunities that these community organizations can pursue by simply making some projects or approaches to promoting community health and wellbeing implausible to offer. This hesitancy is salient in a provincial budgetary context typically conditioned by limited financial resources, as one policymaker explains to me:

Here in Nova Scotia, we do not have a lot of things to draw down on for resources, right. We used to be able to rely on our extraction of resources, but they would be extracted, sent to the centre of our country, and then given back to us as finished goods. But the extractives are all gone. No more fish, no more timber, no more coal. So the base of what government relies on is that tax base and when it relies on a tax base, it's a very gentle dance. What can we offer communities in its entirety? Any budget, at least in Nova Scotia – 60% goes to M U. S. H: municipalities, the universities, social services, and health. So that's a big chunk of the budget that's just gone. Absolutely. Out the window. So that's the roads, that's the health care, that's the education systems, all those things are there [...] *What's left over is how do you improve the lives of citizens in ANSA or Aboriginal Affairs or Acadian Affairs. [These offices] get caught up because the assumption is that these are little satellite offices. My argument is no, these offices are part and parcel of the citizenship of Nova Scotians. So it's how you deliver those services equitably, to everybody [emphasis added]* (provincial policymaker, interview with author, 11 April 2022).

This policymaker's identification of the scarcity of resources available to offices like ANSA, and thus available to community organizations, is important for two reasons: firstly, it positions these offices of the provincial government itself as "policy-takers", or the recipients of public policy decisions taken by others, rather than agents with the capacity to influence how budgets are distributed (Howlett, Ramesh, and Capano 2020, 491). Secondly, their understanding of this

context also identifies the policy areas that these offices are responsible for as surplus to the core function of government, which implies that the organizations who care about these issues are also additive rather than vital.

The lack of importance granted by the province to matters of Black health as well as racialized injustices within policing is also, according to one community advocate who wished to remain anonymous, a product of previous governments including that led by former NDP Premier Darrell Dexter seeking alliances with other marginalized groups in the province while ignoring Black issues:

It's only I think in the last two years that language around systemic racism is used more comfortably than ever in the history of our province. And thank God for it. But in those days, which wasn't that long ago there was always a question of the "whataboutism" that they talked about in the United States. So it was, "what about LGBTQ2S folks." It's like, yes, absolutely. They are marginalized. And there's intersectionality. "Yes, but if you're only talking about race, then you're not talking about them?" And it would be like, no, many, many people who are gay are also Black, or Indigenous, or brown or whatever. But, you know, we look at populations. White people who are gay or who are trans have a different experience because of whiteness [...] you know it isn't that one group has to suffer because another group finally gets some justice and some equity. You know, all groups can get their own justice and equity. But it was high time that race was understood as a factor. Having said that, the government of the time, which started out as being a Conservative government, was followed for the first time in history by an NDP government. And the NDP government made all kinds of policy strides for LGBTQ2S+ people, and certainly did not focus on people of African descent. And I was absolutely shocked and disappointed by that. Because I would have thought if there would have been any party who would have stood up and started to make policy recommendations that were really progressive, it would be them (anonymous community advocate, interview with author).

This example demonstrates that the scarcity faced by these organizations is, in important ways, a political decision oriented towards identifying and supporting target populations who are perceived to be a part of a governing party's broader coalition. In this instance, this community member is claiming the NDP government in Nova Scotia may have perceived people of African

descent as being less vital to their governing coalition, thus leading to the ‘whataboutism’ they described.

Another policymaker explained that this scarcity of resources is prompting a pivot by the province towards project funding and away from core funding, meaning that the scarcity that these community organizations will face will only intensify: “I think it's gotten to a point where I, you know, government is trying to get out of the business of core funding. [...] But I think core funding, when it comes to African Nova Scotian groups, it's going to become more difficult if new ones come to the table” (provincial policymaker, interview with author, 7 May 2022). This move away from core funding – a form of funding that can allow organizations to build responsive and community-centric programming over time – and towards program funding offers significant challenges for these organizations in terms of their capacity to apply for these grants as well as the scrutiny the government will apply to these organizations as a result:

I think projects or program funding – there's two sides to that. Again, it's systemic barriers, systemic discrimination, that many of the programs are not set up to recognize how African Nova Scotians do programs and business. Then the other side is that the capacity is not there in the community. Our community gets a lot of denials [as a result]. [...] Let's say [an organization applied for] a grant for food insecurity and they didn't get it, and they ask why. Well, you know, some of the stuff didn't have any detail – we didn't know the true outcomes of your program, and so forth. So it's that capacity and knowledge that [some] African Nova Scotian communities are missing or rather organizations and stakeholders. [It's about] knowing what to say, because to them, it's like, “we know this will have an impact, creating a community garden.” The community garden is not about providing enough food and healthy food for all the community. It's about building awareness about eating healthy. But if you don't mention that, you're not gonna get the funding, because all they're looking at is that, okay, so you're making a community garden that's only going to help out five families. But there's 50 families in the community. So I don't think our 30,000 or 40,000 [dollars] is gonna go a long way (provincial policymaker, interview with author, 7 May 2022).

This kind of expertise in crafting an ask, or capacity to write a successful grant or project proposal, is largely concentrated in the organizations that are already well-equipped to be

successful given their membership and connections. Beyond expertise, however, the move away from core funding also represents a move away from institutional flexibility to be responsive in real time. With project specific funding, these organizations are forced to narrow the scope of their ask to account for what the state would prefer, and not to engage the needs of communities on the ground.

The challenge that bureaucrats seeking to support Black community organizations face to understand and translate these asks into successful and tangible proposals *on their own terms* is accentuated by the scarcity discussed above, making it easier and more efficient to carefully shepherd certain projects through the policy process:

How I navigated [this scarcity of resources] was if people were serious, sit down and talk to me. And behind closed doors, I'll tell you what strategy you ought to apply in order to get or advance [a project]. Some people would take advantage of that [opportunity]. But other people just hold their arms and say, "Oh, he doesn't support us, he's no good. He's only supporting that particular group," without coming and asking me, because I always had an open door policy, I made myself and my staff available all the time. But in any given budget year, you do not have a blank cheque. You have a certain amount of resources that you are expected to stretch. And in some years, it was thin. In some years, instead of laying off staff, I had to reduce what we would call our grants to community. That's painful because that's what the community tends to rely on. And that's what they see. But I was trying to get the community to try to rally around a bigger set of opportunities. And I think the community has missed out on a couple of opportunities, because they were a little bit more narrowly focused on a small initiative rather than a bigger initiative (provincial policymaker, interview with author).

These questions of emphasis and approach by community organizations are challenging to overcome for both these policymakers and for the community organizations they are engaging with for both historical and contemporaneous reasons. The present-day conditions of frequent scarcity are also informed by a history of Black-led community organizations being accused of financial impropriety by governments that funded them, as mentioned briefly in Chapter Six. This history adds scrutiny to the financial workings of present-day organizations in a way that

makes even organizations with core, sustainable funding feel strained by their reporting responsibilities as one policymaker tells me:

I'll give you an example. A group got some money – a good amount of money from the government. And the idea was okay, we can continue doing this [funding the organization] as a core funding type of thing. However, there are certain things that you need to provide us with: a business plan, you need to provide us audited statements, you need to provide us regulatory financial policies with the money, and it's like you're only giving in the \$100,000 range, you know? And, to them, that might seem a lot. And people will agree. You know, a good few, a few \$100,000 is great. But you're not giving them a million to \$2 million. You know, I would expect those things from you know, if you're giving millions of dollars to an organization, yes, we want audited financial statements, right? Because it's easier to hide that you stole \$50-60,000 out of a million or two [than] out of \$200,000 [...] those are the expectations in government.

It's like, for Black organizations, why is that [expectation] there for, in my mind, a grassroots organization that has done well, has never had an impropriety, or anybody say they misallocated funds? [...] And in the big scheme of things that, you know, in government, who has billions of dollars worth of a budget, and I recognize that government has to account for how they spend their money. But you're putting in my mind policies and structures on an organization who is going to benefit greatly with this influx of cash, and has been running a shoestring budget for a very long time. Compare [that] to an organization that continues to get millions of dollars, from private donors, from other people, other governments, you know, civil society, and you're giving them millions, and you're expecting the same conditions that you've given the million-dollar groups, that you're giving this African Nova Scotian group. So that's what I mean about the structure and then the evaluation. Again, it's who's sitting around the table (provincial policymaker, interview with author, 7 May 2022).

The reporting requirements are another way that the funding environment benefits organizations that already have the structure and the resources to process these requests, further curtailing the kinds of approaches that are available avenues for success. In so doing, this funding environment creates a positive feedback mechanism where organizations that have goals and structures that are legible to the state are those that are supported and upheld as evidence of the state's responsiveness – even as austerity within provincial finances narrows the scope of these organizations' efforts. This opportunity structure subtly shapes the trajectory and goals of community projects in ways that align with the movement capture framework. The imperatives



of scarcity in this provincial context, as well as a shift away from core funding and towards project-based funding create a threshold for proposals that is limited in its scope and that requires ideas and approaches that are legible to the priorities of the government of the day.

### **Community organizations constrained**

Community organizations and their members are acutely aware of the scarcity of resources outlined above, and adapt the ways that they articulate or express their concerns to the province to account for these realities. An example that several interviewees raised to describe this propensity to soften criticism was after the appointment of Pat Dunn, a white MLA representing Pictou Centre, as the Minister for African Nova Scotian Affairs by Premier Tim Houston after his election in 2021 (Gorman 2021). This appointment coincided with the Premier's choice to dismiss Késa Munroe-Anderson, a Black Deputy Minister who had the responsibility for the Office of African Nova Scotian Affairs under her mandate, as well as to dissolve the board of the Nova Scotia Health Authority where Dr. OmiSoore Dryden had recently been appointed as the organization's first ever Black board member (Doucette 2021; The Canadian Press 2021). The outcry amongst Black community members was vociferous, but as one policymaker and community member identified to me, some organizations hesitated to criticize the government extensively:

You're at the mercy of the government where you could complain about the government. But you can't get to a point where you're becoming a nuisance, per se, for the government, because that might affect your core funding to a degree. I think a perfect example of that was when the new government came, and they appointed a white man to become the [African Nova] Scotian Minister. There were some groups who were up in arms and were upset. [They] were advocating hard because they could because they weren't getting any funding from government or core funding. However, there was some who were quiet or [who came] right out saying, "Well, I don't think I could talk about this decision because our funding comes from government and I don't want to hurt that" (provincial policymaker, interview with author).

This concern about “biting the hand that feeds” is pressing as these organizations are aware of the history of other organizations like the Black United Front who they perceive were demobilized because they challenged the province, as Archy Beals explained to me:

You don't want to bite the hand that feeds you too hard. Because, you know, you might bite it off, and then, you know, the hand is gone. I think there are times when we as a community don't advocate as hard as we should, because of that very reason [...] we had these examples of organizations in the Black community, funded by government, advocating on behalf of the community. When they advocated too hard, [they] lost their funding. It goes to show again that we need to be self-sufficient (A. Beals, interview with author, February 1 2022).

These tangible examples, historic as they are, condition the perceptions of members of these organizations towards moderation thus acting as a demonstration of the lingering effects of historical domination by the province. Louise Adongo, in explaining this reticence to challenge the government, articulates that these organizations are ultimately not to blame for fearing what might happen should they speak out:

I think it [the extent of government direction over community organizations via funding] actually is more dependent on how autonomous the people in the organization feel, or how, frankly, how much they feel like “we're just going to do what we're going to do” and who's savvier at making something seem like it needs to. And for different reasons, different organizations might not feel that way or that protection. So I don't fault organizations for not being bolder, or feeling freer and doing what they can do. Because we're starting, especially starting with Black communities, you're already underfunded, you're already trying to do the best you can to help your people. It's kind of like when Kanye West was saying that if he was one of the slaves, he would have fought back and it's like, yeah, but if you fought back, you would have been killed. Don't be upset with people for doing what they needed to do so they could survive; so you could run your mouth. I guess what I would say is the burden and the opportunity really has to be upstream in terms of power, and in this case, financial and social capital, and all the ways not at the level of the community organization or community member who's got enough to deal with (L. Adongo, interview with author, 30 March 2022).

This framing of relative scarcity also influences these organizations in terms of the ways that they behave to and with each other, creating a competitive context that some members of these organizations refer to as a “divide and conquer” process:

There has been a long legacy of what I will say is mistrust within our community. And that has been, I don't want to say ingrained in us, but the historical context has always been to divide and conquer. And so, sadly, those ideals still persist today. And what it creates is this legacy of not trusting people and saying, “well, if you're going to get that I'm going to go without” (V. Fells, direct correspondence, 3 November 2021).

This mistrust is, in part, founded upon the historical scarcity of resources devoted to matters of wellbeing in Black communities and is characteristic of the ways that the province “captures” organizations. In this environment, policy success is oriented towards the goals and evaluation metrics of the funders, thus narrowing the scope of possibilities for organizations and thus for communities. Importantly, as Robert Wright explains to me, this process is often passive as opposed to active – the bureaucrats themselves are not seeking *a priori* to create division and dissent within the community when they do offer funding to initiatives or groups:

Well, I think that this idea that government funding can be used to divide and conquer is [...] there is a truth [to it] and a lie. The lie is that in most cases, I do not think that there are bureaucrats in back rooms trying to cook up a funding opportunity that is going to disrupt the community, right? I think that their systemic processes are disruptive to the community. So for example, they might say, "It's clear now that there's a need for a Black community navigation service delivery system. And to be fair, we're going to put an RFP [request for proposals] out and we're going to say, here's \$400,000 to develop community networking and navigation services for Black folk." That RFP will effectively cause chaos in the Black community because it is effectively throwing chum in the water. *So there's a structural problem. But the other problem is that we in the community are behaving like sharks* [emphasis added] (R. Wright, interview with author, 7 December 2021).

What Wright is identifying when he notes that “we in the community are behaving like sharks” is a tendency by organizations and actors to use accusations of unfairness against one another to succeed in the resource-scarce environment as opposed to collaborating to deliver transformative services to the communities that these organizations serve. This orientation away from coalitions is particularly obvious when considering the challenges of navigating broad funding mandates for communities of African descent in Halifax and across Nova Scotia when those communities have important differences in background, perspective, approach, and

relationships to the provincial government as discussed in the previous chapter. In a political context where the nuance that many interviewees identified about the important differences between experiences and communities may not be understood or respected by those making funding decisions, general calls for attention to “people of African descent” leave organizations and actors feeling invisibilized, thus fracturing rather than supporting coalitional thinking.

This perception of scarcity within and between these communities, conditioned by the budgetary priorities of the province, facilitates the mistrust that Fells and many other interviewees discussed with me, thus leading to fractures in the kinds of practical coalitions that can and should be built between organizations to lead to transformative change. Crucially, this mistrust leads to a lack of communication and information-sharing, which weakens the stances of organizations and activists who are seeking to hold the government to account. As a result, these organizations are more likely to acquiesce to the demands of governing institutions when they *actively* seek to orient or shape the decision-making of organizations, as Robert Wright explains when giving an example of provincial meddling under the guise of developing a “design team” to “transform” public safety in the province in the fall of 2020:

The most telling example of this, the most dramatic and telling example of this, was the design team. So [ANSDPAD], you know, there's the street checks, the Wortley committee, all this kind of work is going on, and we're saying “we think we need an African Nova Scotian Policing Strategy.” And we've been talking with them and talking with them and talking with them and talking with them. And then my phone is ringing. Because there's a press conference that they're implementing a design team. Excuse me? You're implementing a design team? Weren't we just talking to you yesterday about the need for a strategy? Yes. Nobody mentioned that for months, “we've been implementing this design team, it's going to be a great thing” [...] And they handpick Black people to be on the design team, swore them to secrecy. And then after they announced it, the Black folks that they had on the design team didn't even understand the implications of what they had agreed to! So that's not just a funding thing. That's a strategy thing. In that case, government very strategically tried to disrupt DPAD (R. Wright, interview with author, 7 December 2021).

This explicit attempt by the province to neuter momentum towards transformation, especially following the summer of 2020, was aided by the lack of communication between members of community organizations about being appointed to the “design team” as they were all sworn to secrecy, thus allowing the province to garner their consent to be named as representatives for an initiative they did not wholly support (Kimber 2020). While the “design team” ultimately did not end up functioning as an active body after outcry from community members who either were not consulted as part of its establishment or who resisted the idea of the team in principle, the existence of the team is evidence of movement capture in the ways that some organizations and actors acquiesced to government demands (CBC News 2020). The province, in attempting to set the agenda for policy discussions around racism in the justice system via the Design Team, relied upon the extensive relationships they have built *as well as* the resources they are able to leverage to facilitate organizational engagement. These organizations, given the conditions of scarcity discussed above, have a constrained ability to say no to some of these demands. Resisting is not, however, impossible. Instead, some organizations and radical activists alike are able to intervene in ways that other organizations are unable, and use this capacity to seek accountability and honesty in their relationships with each other and with the state.

### **Activists, community organizations, and coalitional thinking**

The example of the Design Team is instructive in the ways that the state plays an active role in “movement capture”. Yet this effort, and others like it, have had uneven success in preventing the momentum catalyzed by direct action and radical activists in the community. When the Team was launched, members of the North Preston community like Evangeline Downey immediately rejected the premise as “unacceptable”, while others like El Jones identified the effort as a way to stall progress on urgent issues that had been the focus of

community advocacy (Rankin 2020). Simultaneously, those voices of refusal also refused to condemn their fellow community members for signing on to the Team in the first place (Rankin 2020; CBC News 2020). This demonstration of both accountability (by highlighting the harmful actions of the provincial government and halting the rollout of the Design Team) and care (by refusing to levy recrimination and blame on community members who signed onto the Team without knowing the full context) is a crucial piece of the pathway towards self-determination within and across communities of African descent. To extend the metaphor articulated by Robert Wright above, no ecosystem can survive if everyone behaves like a shark. Instead, what is required is for actors connected to these organizations and movements on the ground to play a different role in this dynamic: to seek accountability and honesty for and with community members by appealing to values of self-determination that animate action.

Lynn Jones, who was one of the prominent community voices speaking out against the Design Team, has worked to strike the balance between the imperatives of accountability and care within community organizations for over four decades. During the days of the Black United Front, Jones and others protested what she perceived as a bias towards moderate perspectives and an inclination towards silencing dissenting voices:

They had all these rules and regulations about who could attend meetings and who couldn't. I know I was often on the protest side [...] You weren't allowed to speak at the annual meetings because it was all rigged. We'd arrive and not be allowed to speak at our own Black [United Front]. [The people] who were selected – the tendency would be to say that they were very moderate. The people that were selected to be on their boards in the communities. And so there was a lot of turmoil [...] The youth were fed up with the Black United Front and they weren't meeting their needs. So we occupied the offices, and I played a very central role in the occupation. Although I'd never occupied anything before. And remember, I don't know all these Halifax people, I'm from the country kind of, but I felt really pleased because I had a skill that was needed. And guess what it was: typing! (L. Jones, interview with author, 9 May 2022).

Jones' example of the occupation demonstrates the rancour that the Black United Front's funding arrangement and compartment caused amongst those who sought a different approach in their work. Yet Jones was also quick to note that her subsequent interactions with the former director of BUF Jules Oliver were pleasant and caring:

I was working on a program with the public service. They hired him to be the Director of whatever we were doing, and I thought, "Oh, this is not going to be good, because here I was part of his leaving Nova Scotia. And now here, he's going to be in charge of me." It was a management program I was going through, you know what, he was absolutely wonderful. Absolutely wonderful. I know that when he came back, he didn't do community work. He had moved beyond wanting to be but he would have been really good. He was just that he was roped into something (L. Jones, interview with author, 9 May 2022).

Jones, in engaging with Oliver in a different context, was able to not only co-exist with him but also to seek his return to community work, therefore recognizing the value of his contributions and approach. This ability to hold both of these perspectives on the work of BUF simultaneously emerges, in part, from Jones' clarity about the morality of community organizations receiving money in the first place:

I think we have a right to government funding, let's get that clear. We pay our taxes. We put our [fair share into] the society. In fact, we don't get even one quarter of the government funding we should be getting. But it's not the funding in itself. I suppose it's no different than what happens, for example, with United Nations or any of the international organizations. It's that there's always strings attached to who gets the funding, who doesn't, for what reason...you get it? That's the problem, not the funding in and of itself (L. Jones, interview with author, 9 May 2022).

Here, Jones makes a point echoed by several other interviewees: the work that these organizations do for the community is vital and thus must be funded extensively by the province, but that funding must not be used as a pretext for control or coercion. Robert Wright identifies this as having a "mature relationship" with government that allows for individuals and groups to play distinct roles as both service-providers and advocates:

I think that your relationship with government has to be a mature relationship. When I say relationship with government, a principal in a community-based agency must have good enough relationships with the principal contacts within government such that there is trust and confidence. So that if some politician gets their nose out of joint, because I wrote an op-ed that said that they're not doing this or that, or they might feel like their nose is bloodied because I've been on the news, and says, "Why are we giving that guy money anyway?" Well, I need to have enough confidence in the bureaucracy that someone's going to say, "look, Robert Wright is providing the best services that are available in the community. And that's what we're funding. Part of the challenge of working with Robert is that he's a zealous advocate for the community. And that's the cost of doing business. *We could defund Robert Wright tomorrow. But guess what, that's not going to shut him up. Because we're not funding him to do the advocacy work. He's been doing that for 30 years, with or without us* [emphasis added]. And defunding him is actually going to look politically messy for us, given that he's doing the best work in the community" (R. Wright, interview with author, 7 December 2022).

Wright's articulation of the distinction between advocacy based on values and advocacy based on organizational priorities is an important one. His determination to engage in advocacy *regardless of the organizational impact* punctures the possibility of movement capture by affording him the latitude to make choices that might be controversial organizationally but that adhere to values of self-determination. Moreover, Wright's separation of roles involves these honest and "mature" relationships with bureaucrats, which could otherwise be considered intentionally-limited coalitions within which actors might share broad ideologies without sharing distinct priorities (Pullum 2018, 229). These intentionally-limited coalitions, in this instance, are formed around a need for particular services to be provided to community members – a need that does not necessitate a broader political alignment, thus vacating the impulse to succumb to movement capture.

These intentionally-limited coalitions are not limited to work with bureaucrats, but can also extend to alignments between radical activists and community organizations. For some actors, these coalitions might mean that in moments of conflict, collaborations might happen, but accepting funding from the state is unacceptable, as El Jones tells me:



I've never taken government funding to do this, because like, why would the government fund you to dismantle itself? This is something my partner always says because at the same time funding is practical and it's prestige, right? So then you see all the articles – “this person has these millions, and they're so fantastic and you don't have anything.” I don't want it from the government. But it's nice to get recognition sometimes, which I don't get, so I'll complain about it and he'll be like, “they only give money to sellouts. You're not getting money because you're doing good work, because your work attacks them. They fund Black people to stop work from happening!” I'm sorry anybody reading this who's in an organization is going to take offence to this – maybe you do good work. But the whole purpose of a Black organization, and this goes back to BUF, is exactly this. And this has been the trajectory of this province.

Many people have observed this [phenomenon]: that we turn from political organizing to becoming social workers. So instead of organizing political power, we mentor you. And those aren't bad things. But we don't have anything, we still don't have a political organ. As we saw in the election, everyone's freaking out about the white Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs. The time to organize is before elections, but we weren't organized because we don't have a political organ. And then if you have government funded institutions, they can't organize because they have to sit down with that government, whether it's Conservative, whether it's Liberal, whether it's full of white people, so you can never rely on organizations because their interest is in consistency of funding (E. Jones, interview with author, 8 May 2022).

Jones' incisive critique of movement capture in Black-led community organizations offers the kind of direct disruption to consensus opinion that cannot be offered by any other actor in this ecosystem. Whether actors agree with these stances or not, radical activists have the credibility and the relationships to levy these critiques and still collaborate around a broader set of values in moments of conflict to prompt change. To paraphrase the words of one anonymous activist I interviewed, organizations cannot give priority to simply being “at the table” rather than working extensively to accomplish what they are tasked by their supporters and by the broader communities they serve to do when they get there. Ultimately, this kind of insurgent critique is an important part of how movement capture can be identified and navigated. While these activists cannot change the imperatives of funding for vital services and programs, nor the restrictive presence of government policy priorities attached to communities, they can act as a continual reminder to organizations of their responsibilities to the communities they serve.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter analyzed the challenges that unfold for community organizations that emerge due to the imperative to seek funding for the vital programming they offer to community members. It explored the contradictory impulses for community organizations in navigating an opportunity structure shaped by the fact that governing institutions act as the principal funders for services and programs that contribute to concepts of Black self-determination. In a provincial budgetary environment framed by scarcity, organizations are conditioned to compete with each other while also facing pressure to dampen their critiques of their principal funders: the very governments responsible for the inequalities their programs address. These dual pressures work in tandem to shape the opportunities and the constraints that organizations navigate in the process of working towards self-determination. Organizations ultimately find pragmatic ways to deliver services and assert their autonomy despite these conditions but run the risk of being constrained by these funding relationships in perception, if not in practice. To address these power imbalances, community organization leaders and activists alike must be clear about their values and seek accountability and honesty from each other and from the communities they serve to avoid movement capture. As Robert Wright identifies, the development of such a “mature relationship” with governing institutions helps to assert the important boundaries that are in-keeping with self-determination efforts.

## Chapter Ten – Conclusion

*I do think that there is value in the valley. Right? There's a reason why we've gone through this as a people, there's a reason why we've struggled. It's not to excuse the fact that that, you know, systems and people have done us wrong. They have. But we are who we are because of it. Now it's time to push the needle again* (Adesola, interview with author, April 7 2022).

This dissertation situates the work of contemporary Black activists and community organizations in Halifax within a tradition of worldmaking towards self-determination that resists a governing institutional order centred around discourses of perceived Black inferiority and victimhood. I argue that self-determination, or the ability for communities of African descent to exercise relational autonomy towards nondomination (Young 2007, 44), can act as a concept upon which Black communities in Halifax can build a distinct political identity which shapes organizing and coalition-building to prompt change in policing and in public health policy. This identity takes up the lineage of the Black radical tradition in its capacity to combine the utopian and the pragmatic to make a better world by building institutions that orient themselves around norms of communal care, esteem, and accountability. This radical tradition is most obviously expressed in moments where community members mobilize using direct action to address profound injustice in their community as chronicled in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, but also has significant implications for the community organizations that are the focus of Chapters Eight and Nine.

This identity is capacious in moments of contest, offering community members an expansive and normative vision of what democratic and caring communities can and ought to be.

At times, however, this identity (and the worldmaking that it emerges from) can be fractured by the state's use of arbitrary power in explicit and implicit ways. Explicitly, this arbitrary power shows up historically and contemporaneously in the intentional choices state actors at the municipal, provincial, and federal level have made to uproot, undermine, and oppress Black Haligonians – from the *de jure* segregation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the razing of Africville to the implementation of street checks in the municipality. The implicit use of arbitrary power by the state is shown in the complex relationships between policymakers and community organizations. These relationships create a disjuncture between stated intentions of responsiveness and specificity and outcomes of division between heterogenous Black communities, as actors navigate resource-scarce environments to offer vital services to their communities while looking for support from the very institutions that have historically offered domination..

This political identity, and the organizing it produces, interacts with the political and discursive opportunity structure of municipal and provincial policymaking in dynamic and contradictory ways, particularly at critical junctures like the summer of 2020. Where community organizing efforts have had success, that success can be attributed to the work of organizers to align contextually relevant policy frames such that they resonate with members of the public and with policymakers alike. Community organizations have developed service-provision arms to serve Black communities in Halifax and across Nova Scotia as part of their advocacy. This work is unique, and fosters spaces that can embolden community members to seek redress for inequities within the broader system. While organizations may be vulnerable to movement capture given the nature of funding arrangements where governing institutions are their principal funders of community organizations and use that power to attempt to dampen criticism and co-

opt community organizations, the presence of activists that espouse values of accountability and care help organizations resist capture.

Part of this process of worldmaking towards self-determination is reckoning with hybridity: the ability to navigate heterogeneity within Black communities in a way that embraces the strategic necessity of essentialism in opportune moments to push for change while simultaneously accounting for the specific needs and desires of each community over time. Another part of this worldbuilding is engaging the different roles that actors play in pushing for self-determination: from radical activists in the streets expressing dissent to advocacy organizations echoing those calls in policy processes, and even to policymakers who translate those calls as best as they can to bureaucratic and hierarchical organizations that craft policy in the city and the province. Most importantly, this worldmaking situates these actors within a translocal and diasporic lineage of resistance to global discourses of white supremacy, creating a sense of linked fate and a capacity to meaningfully transform the city and the province towards an egalitarian vision.

This dissertation is written as an autoethnography, and prioritises credibility, reciprocity and reflexivity in its approach and presentation. I offer, in this project, a perspective on BlackLife in Halifax that I hope resonates with those that continue to live and thrive in the city. In the process of creating this project, I sought reciprocal relationships with those that supported and shaped my thinking in this work. To the extent that reciprocity is possible in a project filtered through academic hierarchies, I aimed to contribute to the movements that I am writing about both by participating in actions in real time and by taking a step back to try and analyze how these moments were connected to a wider institutional order characterized by resistance. I also aimed to be reflexive in this work – identifying my own perspective as being situated within

a positionality and worldview that shapes my interpretation and my interactions with others. This reflexivity supported my analysis by prompting me to articulate the complex set of relationships and perspectives that I perceive to be the field I am working within.

## **Contributions to the literature**

### Developing an empirical account of Black self-determination in Canadian political science

This dissertation articulates an empirical account of Black self-determination in Canada that is connected to, but not dependent on, territorial and property-bound conceptions of place. I identify the ways that people of African descent in Halifax have sought to articulate and define their own futures despite the deprivation and harm caused by federal, provincial, and municipal governments over centuries. Chapter Two connects these locally situated efforts to national and global world-building efforts by engaging scholarship on the Black radical tradition, Black and Indigenous solidarities, and social movements to understand how these ideas have translated into the Halifax context. It argues that the constellation of community organizations, radical organizers, and allies that work within governing institutions constitute a distinct racial institutional order. This order is centred around the fundamental tenet that people of African descent can and should decide for themselves the trajectories that their communities — linked as they are through a diasporic history grounded in the processes of slavery, settler colonialism and imperialism — must take to thrive. Developing this account intervenes in the erasure of Black activism and Black organizing in Canadian political science by combining a diverse set of literatures (including Black Studies, political development, and social movements literatures) with community knowledge and insights to disrupt a status-quo that forecloses these perspectives in the discipline.

### Addressing Black social movements in Halifax as an institutional order

Throughout this dissertation, I also advance an empirical understanding of Black activism as connected to a translocal and diasporic racial institutional order that uses self-determination as a concept to animate action. I advocate for a pluralistic and expansive view of understanding members of Black-led social movements as strategic actors with extensive internal debate over tactics and framing. These movements are also subject to rigorous identity-defining and spanning work which helps actors develop coalitions and strategies for action to prompt policy change. Beyond strategy, however, are the meaningful expressions of care and solidarity that prompt action and that shape programming, rebuffing instrumentalist accounts of why and how actors mobilize to work collectively in their communities.

In Chapters Four, Five, and Six, I use a combination of primary sources garnered from archival research and secondary literature to construct a historical narrative that incorporates thick descriptive analysis to explain the ways that people of African descent in Nova Scotia have historically contested policy discourses of inferiority and victimhood leading to important policy changes in both the health system and in policing. I establish, using this narrative, the tension between two distinct racial institutional orders at work in Halifax. The governing institutional order in Nova Scotia historically constructed policy around discourses of Black inferiority and victimhood. These discourses underpinned both policies and practices at a municipal and provincial level that created a web of oppressive circumstances through which Black citizens had to navigate so that they could survive. The contesting institutional order, led primarily by African Nova Scotian community organizations and multiracial radical coalitions, advocated with some success for a transformation in these power relations.

These conflicts, extended over centuries, led to incomplete reforms and the promise of meaningful transformation — a promise that precipitated the direct action and public advocacy

that emerged in the summer of 2020. In Chapter Seven, I use autoethnographic methods to describe how I, in collaboration with others, sought to contest these policy discourses in the summer of 2020 using both direct action and policy advocacy informed by these historical examples. In Chapter Eight, I draw heavily from interviews conducted with bureaucrats and with members of community organizations to understand the ways that these organizations engage in policy co-design processes as a strategy to prompt transformative change in governing institutions.

I identify in Chapters Five, Seven and Eight the crucial roles that Black women have played in creating spaces of care and humanity deprived to communities of African heritage in Nova Scotia, as well as the extensive advocacy and direct action that these women have undertaken to protect those spaces and to advocate for self-determination. Their work is a demonstration of the care and esteem that is at the root of worldmaking – a marriage between a utopian vision of egalitarian communities of non-domination and the pragmatic capacity to build those communities one step at a time.

#### Contributing to burgeoning literature on representative bureaucracies

In Chapter Eight, I contribute to the burgeoning literature on representative bureaucracies by investigating the tensions and challenges that Black bureaucrats must navigate as intermediaries between governing and community-led institutions with different priorities and decision-making processes using data gathered from semi-structured interviews with policymakers and with community members. In doing so, I challenge understandings of a representative bureaucracy as an unadulterated “good,” and instead argue that the presence of radical activists engaging in direct action efforts is the vital catalyst that creates windows of opportunity for governing institutions to shift their practices and their policies. Without



acknowledging the vital presence of these activists, these representative bureaucracies risk further entrenching the discriminatory tendencies they seek to ameliorate.

This work on representative bureaucracies supports understandings of policing and health policy as important areas of research in Canadian politics for their ability to incentivise collective action despite (or perhaps because of) an undemocratic structure within governing institutions often accompanied by a veneer of engagement that these representative bureaucracies seek to address.

#### Articulating nuanced discussions about the diversity of Black Canadian communities

In Chapter Eight, I engage discussions of Black identity and solidarity that are rarely addressed in the Canadian politics literature: namely the challenges of solidarity across difference between Black communities and community organizations. Far from a homogenous entity, historical African Nova Scotian communities have different relationships to governing institutions and understandings of structural oppression and discrimination than people of African descent who have migrated to the province — and this difference has grown as the provincial government and important institutions like universities have sought to attract highly-qualified migrants to live and work in the province. These different experiences, combined with a provincial context of resource scarcity for community organizations conditioned by the policy discourses of inferiority and victimhood identified earlier in the dissertation, produce conflicts between members of these communities that can be attenuated by community organizations that seek to build coalitional relationships across communities.

In Chapter Nine, I add to the literature on the “movement capture” experienced by Black-led community organizations by addressing the ways that these organizations are uniquely vulnerable to state overreach. Here, I take up Agnes Calliste’s contention that state funding led to

the decline of self-supporting Black organizations by stifling dissent by asking members of those organizations as well as bureaucrats about the processes of diversion they observe and the tactics they use to overcome this tendency (Calliste 1995, 134). I find that this vulnerability is due, in part, to a lack of opportunity for these organizations to garner resources from private or not-for-profit funding outfits, meaning that the only way these organizations can continue their vital work is through government support. In so doing, these organizations are vulnerable to exogenous and endogenous pressure to acquiesce to the explicit and tacit demands of their funders, shaping their programming as well as their advocacy. This vulnerability is not a reason to stop accepting funding to conduct this work but must inform the distinctions that actors make between the roles they play as advocates and as service-providers being guided, in part, by values of self-determination.

#### Limitations and future research

There are some limitations to this project that I aim to address in future work, as well as some ways that I seek to deepen themes that emerged in this work in future projects.

The most important limitation of this work is that it is an interpretive snapshot of a rich and vibrant history and set of communities. I, like all interpretive ethnographers, am reflecting upon a set of understandings, interactions, and texts from my perspective, which limits the “generalizability” of this work and the extent to which the claims I make about the processes I observe within the text may have greater resonance outside of it (Wedeen 2020, 264). The meanings and perspectives I draw from in this dissertation are not universally shared by all actors involved in the “field,” nor are they immutable beyond the context within which they were collected and analyzed. Instead, as Wedeen notes, these meanings and understandings are replicable insofar as they are well-understood by many actors in the space and were generated

with their input and insights (2010, 266). The implications of this lack of generalizability for future research are that there is far more work to be done to understand the ways that discourses of Black self-determination can impact policymaking processes in Canada. This topic would be rich, for example, to explore using survey research to better understand how people of African descent in Nova Scotia define and articulate this concept, and to see whether they perceive it to be relevant to their daily lives. This kind of survey research would be a useful accompaniment to the thick, descriptive analysis generated here.

A second limitation to this work is that all of the fieldwork and interviews have occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted access to important sites, archives, and access to important individuals. As Gailloux et al. articulate, the pandemic has inserted considerable uncertainty into qualitative research by exposing researchers to risk during fieldwork while simultaneously depriving these researchers of the capacity to build the forms of trust and collaboration that animates this kind of work (2022, 1, 2). Moreover, several of the individuals and many of the communities I interviewed and engaged with had experienced significant challenges and loss during the pandemic, meaning that I had to prioritize flexibility and empathy over extracting additional information (Santellano 2022, 409). Many of the interviews I conducted during this dissertation were done online, which led to barriers including cancelled interviews, technological glitches, and challenges in reading non-verbal body language (Pocock et al., 2021). This limitation will, I hope, be addressed by the ending of the pandemic, but could also be addressed by a longer time in the field and by more archival work in Halifax.

This work may act as the underpinning to future research related to interactions between activists and institutions related to police governance like police service boards and police review boards in municipalities across Canada. As Laming and Valentine note, qualitative

research on police service boards like the Board of Police Commissioners is needed to understand the lived experiences of those who oversee police services (2022, 25). Combining this work with a deeper analysis of the ways that organizers in different communities perceive these boards and their function would go some way towards addressing this call for additional work while addressing this under-explored aspect of the urban politics literature.

Another fruitful avenue to extend work from this dissertation may be developing a comparative approach to understanding Black-led coalitions across Canada and internationally. This work would feature a multi-scalar approach to questions of self-determination and linked fate, and could build upon meaningful work by scholars such as Adam Elliott-Cooper, Marcus Johnson and Danielle Clealand among others. Ultimately, my future work aims to contribute to the transformative movements and visions I have chronicled here.

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## Appendix A: Interview Guide

### General Interview Questions

1. What prompted you to begin this work? What inspires you to continue?
2. What role do you see yourself playing within your organization/within your community?

### Coalition-building questions

3. How do you motivate others to work with you? What, if any, are the barriers that you see to building coalitions in your community?
4. In what ways, if any, do you think that your racial identity affects your work as a policymaker? Are there other aspects of your identity that influence your work? If so, in what ways?
5. How would you characterize the relationships across communities of African descent (historical African Nova Scotians/Black immigrants to Nova Scotia) What strategies if any have you used to work across difference/what hope do you see for future collaboration?
6. How does your organization communicate about the policy issues that you work on? Do you think there is an overarching narrative to your work? If so, what is it?

### Institutional engagement questions

7. How responsive do you think your municipality (if applicable) is to your concerns? How responsive is the province to your concerns? What level of government/what institution do you think offers you the greatest opportunity to push for change?
8. To what extent, if any, do you rely on policy documents and/or legislation in your organizing work? If you do use these documents, which are most important to your advocacy? Why?
9. To what extent do you/your organization rely on government funding? Which level of government (if not multiple) supports your work? In what ways, if any, does that affect your advocacy?

### RIO questions

10. To what extent do you see the municipality/the province engaging in [insert case] in a way that you would consider to be conscious of the role of race or racism in shaping policy outcomes?
11. Do you see your work as part of a lineage or a tradition? Why or why not?

### Public health questions:

1. When, in your experience, did you first begin to see issues of Black health as a topic that could mobilize community members in advocacy?
2. How responsive has the province been to community advocacy from your perspective? Has this responsiveness changed over time?
3. Do you see any role for the municipality in supporting your advocacy goals in issues of Black health? Why or why not?
4. What role does data play in your work? Why is it or is it not important?
5. Have you/your organization achieved your desired outcomes? What effect do you think you/your organization has had on broader efforts for racial justice in the city and the province?

If applicable (for policymakers):

12. What role, if any, do you think that advocacy groups/advocates play within your organization's policymaking process?
13. Do you think that advocacy from the community has affected the way your organization is perceived? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?
14. How do you think your organization has historically engaged with communities of African descent? Do you think that type of engagement has changed over time? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?
15. What, if any, do you see as the main opportunities in engaging with community advocates? What, if any, do you see as the main drawbacks?