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**Colour Coded: The reification of “race” through  
Nova Scotia’s Black Business Initiative**

MA Thesis Submission

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	iv
PART I: FRAMEWORKS	
CHAPTER 1:Introduction.....	1
What is the Black Business Initiative?.....	1
Statement of terms.....	5
Background (“That two minutes of history”).....	6
Organization of the text.....	14
CHAPTER 2: Literature Review.....	15
I. Making “Black” visible in Canada .....	15
Locating Canada within “the Black Atlantic” .....	15
“Race”.....	17
II. The question of indigeniety .....	19
The case against Clarke .....	20
Clarke’s (many) response(s) .....	22
Reimagining “indigeniety” and “place” .....	24
III. Multiculturalism and Employment Equity .....	28
Don’t call it Affirmative Action .....	30
The many faces of multiculturalism .....	33
A reply to Kymlicka .....	36
Significance .....	39
CHAPTER 3: Theoretical Framework .....	41
Political economy.....	41
Racial formation .....	44
What is this “place?” .....	46
Summary .....	48
CHAPTER 4: Methodology .....	50
Calls.....	50
Responses.....	51
Design .....	53
“Here” .....	57
Dialogism .....	59
Summary .....	62
PART II: FORMATIONS	
CHAPTER 5: A Complicated History .....	63
‘Scotian roots’ .....	63

The historical formation of a community.....	65
Black Loyalists.....	66
Jamaican Maroons.....	68
Black Refugees.....	69
Exodus.....	71
The institutions of slavery.....	72
The historical record ... skips.....	76
Summary.....	78

### PART III: DIALOGUES

CHAPTER 6: A Family Meeting .....	80
Rooted in place.....	80
Reflections of “Nova Scotia” .....	93
Coping mechanisms.....	98
Crabs in the bucket (Class conflict).....	103
Summary.....	108
CHAPTER 7: Black Business .....	110
Nomenclature.....	111
Intended targets.....	121
Reverse racism.....	133
Summary.....	138
CHAPTER 8: Conclusion .....	141
Summary.....	141
Contributions.....	143
Looking forward.....	146
<i>The Black experience</i> .....	146
The changing face of Black Nova Scotia.....	147
Bibliography.....	149

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## Introduction

Much of the considerable academic literature on Black and African life in Nova Scotia has focused on documenting the historic arrivals, exoduses and experiences of African peoples from the province throughout the past four centuries (Bertley, 1977; Bristow et al., 1994; Forsythe, 1971; Govia & Lewis, 1988; Henry, 1973; Pachai & Bishop, 2006; Thomson, 1979; Whitfield, 2005, 2006; Whitehead, 2013; and Winks 1997) and the experiences of these communities with racism, whether manifest through the destruction and relocation of Africville (Nelson 2008; Clairmont, 1992; Clairmont and Dennis, 1999) or racism's impact on the health and well-being of its targets (James, 2010; James et al, 2010). However, little attention<sup>1</sup> has been paid to the formation over the past half-century of an entire community of state-funded organizations to serve the African Nova Scotian community and the ongoing debate surrounding the naming and (actual vs. perceived) target audiences thereof. While Nelson's (2008) work examines the ways in which municipal officials constructed a historic Black community as a "blight on the city" in need of benevolent White intervention, no similar effort has been made to examine the significant community of organizations advocated for and operated by Blacks themselves in Nova Scotia. This research examines the ways in which one such organization challenges and contests the prevalent and persistent anti-Black racism acknowledged through its creation, as well as the socio-political constructions of a "Black/African" binary of ethnoracial identities asserted by communities competing for access to its services.

### **What is the Black Business Initiative?**

The Black Business Initiative (BBI) was created in 1996 to address disproportionate levels of unemployment and business ownership amongst the province's Black population (BBI Task Force, 1995). Leaning heavily upon the findings of the Black Learners Advisory Committee Report (BLAC, 1994) released the previous year, which identified systemic institutional racism within the province's education

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<sup>1</sup> The exception being Pachai and Bishop, 2006.

sector, the BBI was formed by government edict that an equal effort was needed to “support the development of business and job opportunities for Black Nova Scotians” (BBI Task Force, 1995:3). Located in Halifax’s central business district at the time of this research<sup>2</sup>, the BBI was originally designed to consist of four component parts: strategic planning for communities, a Black business centre, regional business development, and a loan fund. However, the BBI adopted an innovative composite structure shortly before the period of fieldwork for this research in 2013. The structure consists of four main areas: training, mentoring and counseling; communication activities; loan and equity lending; and strategic initiatives, including a robust youth program called Business is Jammin’ aimed at imparting entrepreneurial skills and spirit into the next generation<sup>3</sup> (BBI, 2012). Funded through both federal (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency) and provincial (Nova Scotia Department of Economic Development) sources since its inception, the BBI has a current annual operating budget of approximately \$2,000,000-\$2,500,000 (BBI, 2012), in addition to independent revenue earned through an investment arm of the organization intended to make the organization self-sustainable at some point in the future. It should be noted that this is an increase from the initial funding of \$5 million every five years (BBI, 2012), and thus can be seen as evidence of the perception of BBI operations as a success by its funding bodies. Participants in this ethnographic research were uniform in their opinion of the need for the BBI and that, in particular, it served an important role of providing access to mainstream institutions, networks, and other Black entrepreneurs. However, while the BBI offers a wide array of services<sup>4</sup> to its clientele (the single largest of which is construction industry training and certification courses as part of its Constructing the Future

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<sup>2</sup> The BBI once also operated a community office in the predominantly Black North End of Halifax, but at the time of this research the organization’s sole location was in the waterfront district of the city.

<sup>3</sup> This may be the best-known effort of the BBI, in light of significant media attention paid to Hope Blooms, a business venture started by predominantly Black youth in Halifax’s North End community and which received significant financial backing and endorsement through the CBC television program, “The Dragon’s Den” in 2014. The initial funding and organizational support for this community gardening enterprise, which results in an array of salad dressing sold in retail outlets throughout the province, was provided by the BBI.

<sup>4</sup> The small business loan portion of the BBI’s operations was designed from the organization’s inception to be the least active component of its efforts. Some 237 small business loans were approved between 1996 and 2012 for a total of just over \$2.5 million (BBI Annual Report, 2012) Only four of these loans were approved in 2012, for a total of \$59,000. The organization’s founding document limits small business loans to a maximum of \$25,000 and requires that all loans must be repaid, at a reduced interest rate, within a year (BBI Task Force, 1995).

program), the focus of this research is the organization's very existence and mandate to "foster a dynamic *Black* presence in the business community." Examination of the means by which the BBI defines itself, its clients, and their businesses as "Black" therefore serve to provide insight into social constructions of Blackness in Nova Scotia.

The state must also be seen as playing a role in such definitions, both in light of its funding of the BBI and its own ambiguous position vis-à-vis ethnoracial terminology. By this I mean that as the only province to contain a cabinet-level ministry devoted exclusively to the servicing of Blacks, the state has itself identified Nova Scotia as a significant location for the study of Blackness in Canada. The fact that this ministry is called African Nova Scotian Affairs (ANSA), and defines "African Nova Scotians" as all persons "of African descent" in the province regardless of place of birth or ancestry, therefore problematizes such Black-directed efforts as the BBI. The operational interchangeability of "Black" and "African" in Nova Scotia is perhaps most clearly displayed through ANSA's active assertion of the province as "the birthplace of Canada's *Black* community" through promotion of an *African* Nova Scotian Tourism Guide. In this respect, it should be noted that the BBI also provides funding for the promotion of the cultural and historical presence of the African Nova Scotian community. Through 2011-2012, the BBI provided funding to reconstruction efforts of the province's Black Cultural Centre, a conference on the African Diaspora Heritage Trail, and a new museum to be built in Birchtown devoted to the history of Black Loyalists<sup>5</sup> (BBI, 2012). One could simply dismiss this interchangeability of terminology as mere acknowledgement of shared "African" ancestry, and thus applaud such recognition of the multicultural character of this Canadian province, but for the presence of one additional "Black" identity in Nova Scotia, that of "indigenous Blacks," a subset of the African Nova Scotian community that traces its origins back to three waves of migration in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The active promotion of historical "Black/African" presence by both ANSA and the BBI can therefore also be seen as reinforcing the assertions of indigeniety made by this

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<sup>5</sup> The history of African migration to Nova Scotia is discussed in Chapter 3.

community, largely believed to be the BBI's intended target community in light of the near-uniform use of statistical information pertaining to this demographic to demonstrate the need for such equity efforts.

Neither the BBI Task Force nor BLAC reports make mention of this controversial "indigenous Black" identity. Both documents simply refer to "the Black Nova Scotian community," but the latter does provide a thorough history of Black migration to the province as part of its contextualization of the community's *centuries-long* struggle against institutional racism (BLAC, 1994). Similarly, the BBI Task Force report, while excluding any such historical context<sup>6</sup>, relies on demographic data borrowed from the BLAC Report that excludes all Black residents born outside of Nova Scotia. ANSA traces four hundred years of "African Nova Scotian" history in the province, but also notes that, "10% of African Nova Scotians today are new Canadians, coming primarily from Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States" (2014). The ministry makes no mention of indigenous Blacks. In fact, the sole *official* mention found through this research of "indigenous Blacks" is contained within the current Nova Scotia Public Service Commission's "Count Yourself In!" Self-Identification Survey. Under the heading "African Nova Scotian and Other Racially Visible Persons," African Nova Scotians, "for the purpose of this survey ... are persons who identify themselves as indigenous Black Nova Scotians" (2014:2).

Thus, while aimed at increasing the "Black" profile in the business sector, the BBI is also actively engaged in public promotion of the "African Nova Scotian" community's historic presence in the province. The BBI and Nova Scotia are therefore all the more rich of a site for ethnographic investigation concerning who and what – as well as when and where – is seen as "Black" – whether "indigenous" or not – and "African" Nova Scotian, and why. With these goals in mind, this research asks the following questions: what does it mean to applicants to self-identify as "Black" and/or "African" for the purposes of accessing BBI services; and what meanings and

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<sup>6</sup> It is equally interesting to note that the BBI Task Force Report also excludes any explicit identification of racism in the province. Rather, the report makes repeated reference to the perception amongst the Black Nova Scotian community of discrimination (particularly through the inclusion of personal narratives of incidents seen to be discriminatory by their narrators), as well as caveats that the report does not state these perceptions as fact. This research can only speculate as to the authors' intentions behind this qualification, but it is a distinction between the two reports worthy, at the least, of note.

definitions of “Black” and “African” are being constructed through the operations of the Black Business Initiative? What are the motivations and intentions behind the assertion of an “indigenous Black” identity by historic African Nova Scotians?

### **Statement of terms**

To even begin to discuss this research it has been necessary to define my own usage of these terms of ethnoracial identity. However, I wish to emphasize that these categories have been created for the sole purpose of presentation of the data collected through this research project. Their use should not be taken as academic assertion that such definitions hold true in reality or that ethnoracial identities are in actuality such neatly bounded things. Participants regularly referred to themselves or others using several ethnoracial terms, often in contradictory ways, and frequently dismissed such ascribed “labels” as artificial and constraining categories that they would much prefer did not exist. What’s more, this research considers “race” itself to be a social and political construct used to identify persons by phenotypical features such as skin tone, hair texture and shape of the nose, eyes, and lips, etc. These collective identities are then infused with generalized personality, capability and capacity characteristics formed over lengthy periods of time. Racial identities are therefore historically rooted, formed through socio-cultural processes, and not biologically valid. They are however, very real within societies that possess processes of racialization with real consequences and constraints.

With this caveat thereby offered ... “indigenous Black” will be used to refer to individuals who self-identify as descendents of the historic pre-Confederation communities of African and African-American migrants to Nova Scotia. However, this word “indigenous,” unless starting a sentence, will always be used in the lowercase in recognition of its use as descriptor of Black, which will itself always be used in the uppercase in recognition of its use as collective cultural/ethnic/racial category. “African Nova Scotian” is the term used by the provincial government to refer to all persons of African descent in Nova Scotia. As such, it is used here to identify the same population, but will at times be modified as the *historic* African

Nova Scotian community when the usage of indigenous would be repetitive or inaccurate (i.e. not all members of the historic African Nova Scotian community self-identify as indigenous Black). “African” will be used to refer to first generation immigrants to Nova Scotia who were born on the Continent and who may or may not have Canadian citizenship, permanent residency, or an education/employment visa. Participants will at times also refer to members of this group as “African-Canadian,” but such a designation by the author is used solely in reference to the national population of African immigrants. As with indigenous Black, “Black” will be used to refer to individuals who self-identify using this term, and is therefore used frequently to refer to individuals from all three previous categories, as well as most of those from the Caribbean who participated in this study. However, “Black” will also be used generally as a collective term to refer to national communities often identified as such throughout the Americas and in the United Kingdom. Lastly, “of African descent” will frequently be used to refer to individuals from all four previous categories collectively and most frequently to avoid repetition of terms.

One additional explanation is necessary and concerns my reliance on single quotation marks to denote concepts that I consider problematic to varying degrees. This personal proclivity of punctuation most frequently manifests itself during discussion of ‘the Black community’ (which more accurately would be described as multiple Black and African communities) and should be read as if one were using air-quotes during a face-to-face conversation. With these clarifications provided, this introductory chapter now turns to a brief discussion of Black Canadian history and the lived experiences of African Nova Scotians.

### **Background (“That two minutes of history”<sup>7</sup>)**

Noted historian Afua Cooper shatters any notion of Black presence in Canada as a recent phenomenon by stating clearly that “2004 marked the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of uninterrupted black history and settlement in what is now Canada” (2007:11). Pabst is equally unequivocal that “Black people are not new to the Canadian scene,

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<sup>7</sup> This brief quote is taken from comments made by Marcus, a thirty something indigenous Black participant, with respect to his joy in relating the story of his people (see Chapter 6).

contrary to the popular Canadian belief” (2006:118). Kelly provides a concise summary of Black history in Canada, starting with the arrival of African translator Mattieu da Costa, who later worked alongside Samuel de Champlain, in 1604 (1998:30). Pabst is direct in her assertion that, “Contrary to Canada’s national narrative and contrary to underground railroad mythology, there were two centuries of black slavery in Canada, if on a smaller scale and in a different form from that which emerged in the southern United States” (2006:114). Such explicit acknowledgment of African slaves in “a place called heaven” (Foster, 2005) is an important challenge to the national narrative of Canada as refuge from such American horrors. The largest inflow of Blacks to what is now Canada took place in Nova Scotia and came on the heels of repeated internecine American conflicts of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. According to Mensah,

The Black presence in Nova Scotia is the longest-standing among all Canadian provinces and territories. It goes back to the mid-eighteenth century when the first major group of Black slaves was brought by former New England residents, after the expulsion of the Acadians. The Black population in the region rose with the arrival of Black Loyalists during the 1770s, and later with the arrival of the Maroons from Jamaica. These Black pioneers tilled the land, worked the mines, and built roads and structures that exist even now (2002:89-90).

It is this centuries-old Black presence that makes Nova Scotia such an important location for those interested in the lived experiences of Black Canadians. Kelly refers to Philip in noting that, “If we define culture as the lived experiences of people then it is important to analyze how those lived experiences intersect with the social, political and economic climate of specific periods in history since ‘people are trapped in history, and history is trapped in them’” (1998:56).

To be clear, this project is not interested in pursuing representations of a supposed ‘Black culture’ or more general notions and discourses of “culture” writ large with which anthropology as a discipline is so often associated. Rather, it is interested in lingering ideas about “race” in specific places and the active processes of racialization that continue to shape Canadian society.

My emphasis on “race” within this work is born of the recognition that for those individuals who participated in this research, the narratives offered as explanation for their understandings of themselves as “Black” and/or “African” uniformly concerned racial formations of both states and community, as well as their relationship to racial discrimination experienced in specific places. As noted in Brown’s examination of Liverpool-Born Blacks’ understandings of their asserted identity, “... the trajectory [an informant is] tracing is a racial one. It emphasizes the move from *half-caste* to *Black*<sup>8</sup>. While ‘culture’ is important, it turns out to be a pit stop ... Race is the real issue” (2005:94). Without a doubt, cultural dimensions are present and actively asserted *as means of differentiation within* the African Nova Scotian community, and as such are referenced by participants throughout this work. However, this research argues that the primary tool of social, economic and political marginalization of Blacks examined here is racialization, not cultural differentiation. This can be seen through the identification itself of diverse communities of West Indians, West, East and Central Africans, Americans, historic Canadians, and countless others as ‘African Nova Scotians.’ The sole criterion necessary for their homogenization – *and therefore equal eligibility for state-funded equity efforts* – is their *visibility* as Blacks.

This work argues that Blacks and Africans in Nova Scotia (and Canada, writ large) remain marginalized, despite their centuries of presence on the land, due to their racial difference from the majority. Hence, this work has focused on the racial (and racist) foundations of the country’s initial formation, immigration policies, interpretation and implementation of multiculturalism and employment equity in critical reflection of the *veneers* of cultural tolerance, diversity, and equality. In Nova Scotia, the assertion of historic presence – i.e. equal belonging – made by a diverse African community is therefore examined as a racial, rather than a cultural, identity in recognition of the central role played by social constructions of “Black” and “African” over time in place, and the continued impacts felt by this collectivity to this day as a result of their Blackness.

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<sup>8</sup> In Nova Scotia this trajectory, as noted in Chapter 5, would be from *African to Negro to Coloured to Black to African Nova Scotian*.

However, it must also be noted that amongst a wide swath of social scientists the frequent interchangeability of “race,” “ethnicity” and “culture” is a widely accepted linguistic practice. As noted by Anderson, questions pertaining to ethnicity or cultural background are often interpreted and understood by research participants as polite, academic references to their racial identity, and vice versa (2009:56). Thus, several authors cited throughout this work make reference to “culture” in a manner that is intentionally also a reference to “race,” and have been utilized with an understanding in mind that contemporary notions of political correctness do not allow for official (or public) reference to “race.” In this respect, the explicit identification of a state equity effort as the *Black Business Initiative* – in a province that included a department of African Nova Scotian Affairs – was one of the most compelling features of this project at the development stage.

The primary task of this project is then to trace the specific trajectory of a given “Black” or “African” community. As argued by James (2010:3), “Understanding the Black community as a diverse community requires that we situate it specifically in the Canadian context of place, generation, and time.” However, while this project concerns both the ascribed and asserted ethnoracial identities of its participants, it should be acknowledged that, “race” is “only one of many discourses used to represent self and imagined/experienced others” (Hier and Bolaria, 2006:26). For those studying “race” specifically, Nelson and Nelson argue that “one must come to grips with not only the visible signs of a body but also what those signs have historically signified and the actual process of interpretation through which such signs are read” (2004:14). James (2010) advises researchers interested in racial identities to pay particular attention to the contexts in which such identities are put front and center and the motivations behind these assertions.

It is equally important to include within any examination of Black Canadians an explicit acknowledgement of the level of diversity within so-designated communities in Canada and the homogenizing effects of collective labels (Clarke, 2002; Foster, 2007; James, 2010; James *et al* 2010; Nelson, 2010; Mensah, 2002; Walcott, 2003). For Kelly, it is the common experience of *being Black* in a predominantly White society that unifies these diverse and disparate communities: “Though racialization

is based on more than just skin colour, the saliency of this characteristic is undeniable. The physical differences between African Canadians and the dominant White society result in those physical aspects assuming certain meanings and being associated with particular types of human behaviour and interaction” (Kelly 1998:36). Thus, while other non-racialized immigrant communities have been able to assimilate themselves into mainstream (i.e. White) society, despite cultural and audible difference, the colour(s) of “African” skin serves as persistent barrier to belonging to this society. Mensah notes that “due to their high visibility and the legacy of slavery, Blacks in particular are stigmatized and discriminated against ...”, and can thus be said to experience Canadian society in similar ways irrespective of their diverse origins, cultures, languages and religions (2002:3). In short, common experiences of subjugation within the colonial institution of slavery, while vastly different in both place and application, result in the common identification across the Americas and Western Europe of vastly different peoples under a singular Black “race” *from Africa*. Mensah also criticizes a near exclusive focus on life histories and lived experiences of Blacks from the Caribbean in the Canadian literature, which he argues serves to shove “the experiences of African-born and Canadian-born Blacks to the background” and results in an “overgeneralization of the Black experience in Canada<sup>9</sup>” as that of recent immigrants to Canada in the post-1950s era (2002:4). It therefore behooves the critical academic to note both the commonality of being *visibly* Black within White majority states and the specificity of experiences held by diverse Black peoples in place over time.

However, academics conducting critical multiculturalism and anti-racism studies must also be mindful of the risk of contributing to the legitimization of racial categories through their theorizations and research into racial/ethnic inequality (Li, 1999:13-15). As previously noted, the literature on “race” and (anti-) racism often notes the interchangeability of the terms “race,” “ethnicity,” and “culture” within racialized discourses of power (Das Gupta *et al*, 2007; Henry and Tator, 2006;

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<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 2 for a discussion of vaulted philosopher Will Kymlicka’s (2001) *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism, and Citizenship* as a clear example of such tendencies to privilege demographics over diversity.

Darder and Torres, 2004) and, in the Canadian context, the relation of these concepts to multiculturalism as discourse and practice. According to Henry and Tator, “racist beliefs and practices continue to pervade Canadian society,” on structural and individual levels, *despite and in stark contrast to* the active promotion of multiculturalism (as legislation and social value) and constitutionally protected rights against ethnic or racial discrimination based upon “the egalitarian values of liberalism, justice and fairness” (2006:19). As noted by Nelson and Nelson, in large part “Canada has been constructed as a victim of racism that originates elsewhere” – namely the United States (2004:3). Kelly poignantly dismisses any suggestion of racism as an American import, noting that the “exclusion of Blacks from most recorded Canadian history ... results in an incomplete record that overlooks the real complexities of *historical multiculturalism*” (1998:37, emphasis in original) in Canada.

Anti-Black discrimination has been particularly vicious in Nova Scotia, earning the province the moniker “Mississippi of the North” (Brooks, 2011). “Black” is overwhelmingly the single largest minority group in Nova Scotia today, which cannot be said anywhere else in Canada, and represents 44% of the province’s visible minority population<sup>10</sup> (ANSA, 2014). In Nova Scotia, then, as perhaps nowhere else in Canada, “visible minority” – defined by the Canadian Employment Equity Act as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour” (Statistics Canada, 2012) – is largely synonymous with Black. The vast majority of African Nova Scotians were Canadian-born, either in the province (80.7%) or another Canadian territory (6.7%). What’s more, nearly 80% are at least third generation Canadian<sup>11</sup> (ANSA, 2014). Both Mensah and James note

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<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that ANSA’s figures come from the 2011 National Household Survey from Statistics Canada. James (2010), relying on data from the 1996 census, notes that Blacks represent 57% of the visible minority population in the province, a figure that is over three times the national average. It would be interesting to look further into these numbers to determine if the 13% discrepancy between these findings are evidence of out-migration of Blacks, increased immigration of other racialized groups, or simply the difference in response rates between short- and long-form census surveys. This latter possibility could be particularly informative in light of the Conservative government’s cancelling of long-form census collections in 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Once again there is a significant difference in the data from 2011 and 1996. Mensah notes that “94% of Nova Scotian Blacks are non-immigrants,” compared to “41.9 percent” of the entire Canadian Black population, with that figure ranging from 18-40% if all visible minority groups in Canada are taken into account (2002:89-93). Further research into these figures is required.

that the assertion by some Nova Scotians as “indigenous Blacks” is in reference to this multigenerational presence in the province. However, despite their multigenerational presence, Black Nova Scotians have fared poorly when it comes to education and employment. Using data from the 2011 National Household Survey, ANSA shows that African Nova Scotians have significantly lower outcomes in the areas of educational attainment, average income and level of unemployment when compared to the non-racialized provincial majority.

- 77% of African Nova Scotians aged 25 to 64 years have some sort of certificate, diploma or degree compared to 85.3% of all Nova Scotians;
- 18% of African Nova Scotians have a university degree compared to 22% of all Nova Scotians;
- 14.5% of African Nova Scotians were unemployed versus 9.9% of all Nova Scotians and 12.9% of African Canadians nationally;
- 34% of African Nova Scotians had a prevalence of low-income versus 16.5% for the rest of Nova Scotia.

These low levels of education are especially important when considered in light of the fact that Canadians of African descent, nationally, outperform the Canadian average (Mensah, 2002:3). Creese also notes that, “Canadian-born visible minorities are twice as likely to have a university degree than Whites born in Canada” (2007:206); although it should be noted that here the category is visible minority, not simply Blacks. The important point is that if Canadian-born Blacks, and other visible minorities, are outperforming their non-racialized counterparts across the country, then the lived experiences of African Nova Scotians (when compared against other visible minorities and Whites) is of particular importance and requires further study. As noted by Kelly, through studying the experiences of Black Canadians in their specificity we can gain valuable knowledge of “the formation of racial codes and meanings in the wider society” (1998:9). What’s more, if all African Nova Scotians are being constructed as uniformly in need of governmental intervention solely because of the colour of their skin (i.e. the Black Business Initiative), then such a scenario would provide further evidence of “race as a

pressing contemporary social concern with urgent consequences for Natives and people of colour” (Nelson and Nelson, 2004:18). Citing a study carried out by Reitz et al. in 2009 concerning the level of discrimination experienced by minority groups in the workplace and job market, James (2010:243) reminds us that the main barrier to equal treatment is “race – not religion, not income.” This research is then intended as not only contribution to the growing body of literature examining competing meanings of “race” and competing racial projects through which these varied meanings are produced, reproduced, reinforced and refuted, but also documentation of contemporary inequality experienced by racialized Canadians.

This research takes a political economy approach to anthropological understandings of sociopolitical constructions of Blackness through a critical examination of historical and contemporary forces of domination (and resistance), migration (and immigration), and competition (and solidarity). Political economy’s emphasis on resources, and economic and political processes is seen here as a powerful theoretical tool for tracing the trajectory of racialized African labour from property (i.e. slavery) to exoticized commodity (i.e. competitive advantage in a global multicultural economy). Intended as counterpunch to a national narrative that denies Black presence, struggle, and contribution in Canada, it views the assertion of Black indigeniety as a complex demand by a marginalized community for recognition of their ongoing disenfranchisement and denial of the full rights of citizenship. Leaning heavily on critical multiculturalism and anti-racist works, this research also therefore challenges both neo-liberal notions of free market, meritocratic solutions<sup>12</sup> to institutional racism and lingering liberal notions of the altruistic majority’s multicultural Canadian state and society. Lastly, this thesis rests upon recognition of class, cultural, ethnic, and racial difference within and between

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<sup>12</sup> While much of the literature concerning ‘affirmative action’ and employment equity (see Chapter 2) would contest any representation of such equity efforts as meritocratic in light of their explicitly preferential treatment of designated groups (Kennedy-Dubourdieu, 2006; Simon and Sabbagh, 2005), and rightly so, the BBI should also be acknowledged as resting upon the neo-liberal presumption that once granted equivalent skills and social position (be that professional certification or business ownership) the Black clientele of this organization will then no longer be at a disadvantage in relation to their majority counterparts in the business sector or society at large. Most certainly the same logic can be said to be true of all such equity efforts, but the recognition of systemic racism upon which such initiatives rest should make clear, as do the participants in this ethnographic research, that not all seats at the table, even once acquired, are equal.

diverse communities constructed through competing social movements and political projects as homogenously “Black” and in need of state assistance in achieving collective economic agency.

### **Organization of the text**

This thesis has been organized along three broad themes: frameworks, history, and dialogues. Categorized under Frameworks, chapters 2 , 3, and 4 review the literature concerning “race,” Blackness in Canada, multiculturalism and employment equity, and the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this research. As noted above, a political economy approach has been adopted to this ethnographic examination of a state initiative viewed as racial project pitting “placed” and racialized communities against each other through oppositional binary sociopolitical constructions of “Black” and African.”

Categorized under History, chapter 5 examines the racial formation of the African Nova Scotian community through historic transatlantic transplantations and migration, and resistance against institutional racism and discrimination. This second literature review also challenges historic academic stratifications of Blackness, resistance, and responsibility for contemporary marginalization by demonstrating the valuation of solidarity and common struggle within the diverse founding components of today’s “indigenous Black” community.

Categorized as Dialogues, chapters 6 and 7 consist of data analysis and discuss the meanings and motivations of the assertion of an indigenous Blackness in Nova Scotia as well as the perceptions of who should vs. who is making use of the Black Business Initiative. These chapters discuss the erection and negotiation of symbolic and social boundaries through representations of class, cultural, ethnic, and racial difference, and for the purpose of securing recognition and resources.

Chapter 8 summarizes the entire work that precedes it, makes note of the contributions offered by this original research, and looks forward to additional tensions within the African Nova Scotian community beyond the scope of this project but worthy of further academic consideration.

## Literature Review

This project stands at the crossroads (or perhaps more fittingly the intersection) of four major fields of inquiry: critical “race” studies, multiculturalism studies, Black Canadian studies, and examinations of employment equity – more commonly known as affirmative action – programs. However, as I will argue below, these fields have failed to address: a) examples of the specific mechanisms through which multicultural policies and programs construct racialized identities; b) the role of historic presence and theorizations of how notions of “place” impact the formation of Black Canadian identities; c) and the motivations behind the assertion of an indigenous Black identity in Nova Scotia.

### I. Making “Black” visible in Canada

#### Locating Canada within the “Black Atlantic”

The literature on “Blackness” literally spans the globe, but, generally speaking (at least for those interested in “Blackness” as referring specifically to an international diaspora with ancestral connections to the African continent and shared history of the transatlantic slave trade; i.e. Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic*), the relevant literature comes out of (and generally concerns) either the United States or United Kingdom. The few Canadian authors who address “Blackness” in this conceptualization have viewed the dominance of these two metropolises of knowledge and research as both problematic toward and dismissive of the history of “Black” communities in Canada. Gilroy has been a frequent target of criticism from Canada’s two main proponents of the inclusion of “Blackness” within the field of Canadian Studies – Rinaldo Walcott and George Elliot Clarke. For Walcott, Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* demonstrates a “particularly striking ... reluctance to seriously consider Black Canada” (2000:40). Clarke argues that, for Black Canadians, to read Gilroy’s work is to come face-to-face with the “blunt irrelevance of Canada to most gestures of diasporic inclusiveness” (2002: 8). This research addresses this gap in the literature concerning Canada as an important location for examinations of “Blackness” and the historic and

contemporary “Black Atlantic.” As noted by Walcott, “the complex mixture of Black communities in contemporary Canada offers much for consideration by ‘new’ diasporic discourses. This is especially the case in areas of cultural sharing, borrowing, creolization and governmental ‘support’ of cultural difference – namely, the area of multicultural policies” (Walcott 2000:40).

In the introduction to their collection of essays entitled “*Globalization and Race: Transformations in the cultural production of blackness*”, Clarke and Thomas (2006:27) note that “identities remain bounded by local experiences, experiences that are rooted within very particular historical and contemporary political economies”. The authors make this assertion in opposition to “a view of globalized blackness that assumes a homogenization of transnational black (American) identities” (ibid); identities which often draw upon similar historical events and processes (namely the trans-Atlantic slave trade) to create solidarity, but which vary greatly in their experiences of such processes. In the same edited volume, Naomi Pabst stresses the importance of “identity in relation to ‘place’ ... where we’re from, where we’re at, where we’ve been, and where we’re going, as individuals and as members of multiple categories of belonging” (2006:113). As noted earlier, it is this specificity of experience as influenced by the *lived histories* of diverse “Black” communities – and how differing lived experiences produce different and competing identities – that lies at the heart of this project. As the goal is a clearer understanding of the impacts of politically constructed definitions of identity on those marginalized (and in this case racialized) groups deemed to be most in need of state intervention, we must begin with an understanding of what *identifying as Black in the given place* means. As noted by Omi and Winant, “the determination of racial categories is ... an intensely political process” (1994:3). It is important then to determine the means of and justification for such racially designated categories when and where they are found. To this end, the data collected through the various components of this research project are analyzed *in light of* the contemporary social, political and historical interactions between competing institutional and community based groups, as well as the socio-political and historical contexts within which such

conflict exist, and *with reference to* the experiential and conceptual categories expressed by individual participants themselves.

### **“Race”**

In tracing the history of the concept of “race” since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Baker notes the role of anthropologists in constructing the concepts of “race” and “culture” to “describe difference, differently, among African Americans and American Indians” (2010:4). However, as lamented by Nelson and Nelson, “to expose the social and constructed nature of race is not in any way to diminish its historical and contemporary relevance and potency as a dominant mode of identification that has had, and continues to produce, very real material, social and psychic effects. In other words, race is as real as our collective belief in its existence and ‘truth” (2004:10). Hier notes the debate among academics of the deterministic capacity of “race” and class on the life chances of racialized groups, in which some researchers argue that “race and racism are lived or everyday experiential realities” while others posit “race is often overplayed at the expense of class differences” (Hier and Bolaria, 2007:20). While I wish to avoid wading into this debate too deeply here (for a more detailed discussion on this theoretical tension see chapter 3), a brief overview is warranted in light of my own use of Omi and Winant’s racial formation theory (1994), while also adopting Miles and Torres’s conceptualization of “race” and processes of racialization (2007) below. This may seem to some as contradictory in light of the former’s interpretation of “racial dynamics ... as determinants of class relationships and indeed class identities, not as mere consequences of these relationships” (1994:34), whereas Miles and Brown “emphasize the shifting meanings of racism, on the one hand, and the constant importance of class and the political economy of migration, on the other” (2003:17). It will suffice here to identify my own position within this debate as in agreement with Bannerji’s conciliatory statement that “[r]eal social relations of power – of “race,” class, gender and sexuality – provide the content for our “difference” and oppression ... Our problem is class oppression, and that of objectifying sexist-racism” (2000:119).

Particularly robust debate within the literature concerns the repercussions and validity of using “race” as an analytical concept. The “essential readings” compiled by Das Gupta *et al* (2007) are particularly enlightening for this project. Within this volume is an essay by Miles and Torres entitled, *Does “Race” Matter? Transatlantic perspectives on Racism After “Race Relations”* (2007:65-73), a work written largely in opposition to Omi and Winant’s (1994) defense of the continued use of “race” as an analytic concept. I believe it worthwhile to quote Miles and Torres’s refutation at length:

It is not the *concept* of “race” that continues to play a fundamental role in restructuring and representing the social world” (Omi and Winant 1994:55) but rather the *idea* of “race,” and the task of social scientists is to develop a theoretical framework for the analysis of this process of structuring and representing which breaks completely with the reified language of biological essentialism. Hence, we object fundamentally to Omi and Winant’s project of developing a critical theory of the *concept* of “race” (1993:6-9) because we also recognize the importance of historical context and contingency in the framing of racialized categories and the social construction of racialized experiences (cf. Omi and Winant 1993:6): we believe that historical context requires us to criticize all concepts of “race,” and this can be done by means of a concept of racialization” (as appears in Gupta *et al* 2007:72).

I am in full agreement with Miles and Torres on both the dangers of the use of “race” as an analytic concept and the need to examine the resilience of the *idea* of “race” through research into specific processes of racialization. As such, this project will not examine how “race” shapes the lives of Black” Nova Scotians, but rather the mechanisms by which citizens are *racialized* and the meanings to *racialized groups of being racially defined*. My definition of racialization draws upon Henry and Tator’s two-part depiction as: “(1) the processes by which race is attributed to particular social practices and discourses in such a way that they are given special significance and are embedded within a set of additional meanings ... (2) A process by which ethno-racial groups are categorized, stigmatized, inferiorized, and marginalized as the ‘others’” (2006:351-352). This project therefore also follows both Sefa Dei’s use of “race” as “an idea that governs social relations” (2007:191), and Miles and Brown’s theorization of racialization “to denote those instances where social

relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities” (2003:101). However, as noted earlier this project also relies on Omi and Winant’s theorization of racial formation, in equal agreement with both observations that “[t]o interpret the meaning of race is to frame it socially” and “to recognize the racial dimension in social structure is to interpret the meaning of race” (1994:56-57). My motivation in using these opposing conceptualizations of “race” is therefore to acknowledge and demonstrate both the scientific artificiality of and enduring social belief in “race,” and the socio-political processes (both historic and contemporary) necessary to the creation and maintenance thereof.

## **II. The question of indigeniety**

For at least the past 50 years (Clarke 2011), the historic African Nova Scotian community has made frequent claim to an ‘indigenous Black’ identity in “an overt and positive assertion” (Vaughn 2009:214) of their pre-Confederation presence in the British colony-come-Canadian province (Clarke 2011). While the vast majority of Canadian academia has either ignored this claim entirely<sup>13</sup> or housed the identity within perfunctory quotation marks, the assertion of indigeniety has garnered significant critique from three Canadian academics; critique most pointedly directed at George Elliott Clarke for his active promotion and defense of the contentions nomenclature chosen by the community to which he belongs. The back-and-forth between Clarke, Rinaldo Walcott, and Paula Madden over the question of indigeniety (often expressed through Clarke’s decades-long promotion of an imaginary ‘Africadian’ identity) was an inspiration for this research project and proved to be a recurring theme with participants during discussions on identity, Black/African organizations, and political action in Halifax. Given the influential role of the discussion of indigeniety in the conceptualization of this project and the perception of importance it had with my participants, it is relevant to demarcate the boundaries

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<sup>13</sup> An equally valid statement for blackness in Canada, in general. See Walcott 2003:145.

of the debate. Following this, I introduce the work of anthropologists Mark Anderson and Jacqueline Nassy Brown, whose work with the Garifuna in Honduras and Liverpool-Born Blacks, respectively, provide rich, ethnographic insights into the roles of experiential notions of “place” in racial formations. Their work informs expanded definitions of indigeniety, diasporic linkages, and national and colonial specificities as the “local”.

### **The case against Clarke**

At its core, I argue that the half century of debate over the naming of an historic African Nova Scotian identity concerns differences of opinion/power over how and where to locate Black *community*, a space that bell hooks has termed a “homeplace ... where we return for renewal and self-recovery, where we can heal our wounds and become whole” (1990:49). In the burgeoning literature on Black Canada this is largely a debate over Clarke’s personal – and by its nature very selective and defensive – project of mapping Black Canada’s (literary and literal) geography in an attempt to “contest the erasure and silencing of black culture and history in Canada” (2002:6). It is perhaps only fitting then that Clarke has served as unapologetic defender of his community’s resilient, if perhaps reserved self-identification as “indigenous Blacks.” Madden offers the most direct critique of this identity. In *African Nova Scotian-Mi’kmaw Relations*, Madden (2009) argues the use of indigeniety by Blacks in Nova Scotia “claims equal place with European presence in the nation while also establishing a hierarchy of black belonging” (2009:103). The accusation is two-fold: 1) On the most basic level, the “pre-Confederation” African community’s assertion of “‘indigenous blackness’ accomplishes the same erasure of Indigenous peoples as assertions of indigenous whiteness and on that basis must be challenged” (2009:7); 2), “Clarke’s attention to genealogy, place and his naming of some Black Canadians as indigenous, asserts a claim to the nation that is positioned as more authentic” (2009:34) than that of ‘more recent arrivals’. In short, Madden accuses indigenous Blacks of being “Black settlers” guilty of the same colonial erasure and denial of First Nation title as their White counterparts and, by making

claim to historical presence, of constructing an equally exclusionary (i.e. nativist) narrative of belonging and authenticity.

While in agreement with Madden's critique of fostering division between Black/African communities, Walcott is primarily concerned with "writing blackness" writ large by emphasizing the diasporic interconnectedness of all African peoples rather than claiming national identities grounded in place (Walcott 2003:15). He therefore challenges what he deems to be Clarke's "melancholic" and "impossible desire to belong to the nation. A nation that forms him, but a nation that cannot imagine him within its own formative narratives" (2003:16). According to Walcott, rather than lamenting past erasure and lack of recognition and attempting to catalog Black presence on the land to its earliest point in time, Clarke should challenge national policies – most notably multiculturalism – for emphasizing the 'foreign' and 'recent' origins of 'immigrants.' For Walcott, "Nation-centered discourse can only be a trap that prohibits black folks from sharing common feeling, especially when common actions and practices of domination seem to present themselves time and again in different spaces/places/nations" (2003:147). Thus, for Blacks, whether in Canada or elsewhere, community is to be found in the "in-between," an abstract space that acknowledges the artificiality of nation-based belonging and grounds a "political and ethical stance which refuses the too-easy boundaries of national discourse" (ibid). In short, whereas Clarke's project attempts to demonstrate the heterogeneity of "a world both 'Black' and Canadian" (2002:4), Walcott calls for a "pluralizing of blackness ... through a method of normadology<sup>14</sup>" focused on "movement and exile" across and from national borders in recognition of the fact that "blackness in Canada is borrowed" from elsewhere (2003:146).

To summarize, we can now add to the list a third alleged transgression committed by the historic African Nova Scotian community through their assertion of an indigenous black identity. In addition to erasure of Mi'kmaq title to the land and nativist legitimization of Black belonging levelled by Madden, Walcott dismisses the pursuit of national identity itself as a naïve and "melancholic" desire that fails to

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<sup>14</sup> Walcott defines normadology as "the attempt to think about movement and exile in a fashion which makes those conditions a part of the way in which cultural work is understood and valued" (2003:146).

recognize the necessary exclusion of Blacks by nationalist narratives within a White settler state. Thus, the charge of constructing a hierarchy of Black authenticity within Canada is now joined by accusations of failing to recognize the primacy of diasporic linkages through “border-crossing identi[ties]” (Walcott 2003:147).

### **Clarke’s (many) response(s)**

Clarke has penned multiple responses to his critics over the years, but his most recent publication, *Directions Home*, offers a concise rebuttal to those charges outlined above. In this work, Clarke partially deflects Madden’s critique that assertions of indigenous blackness reinforce the ongoing erasure of Aboriginal title and primacy in Mi’kma’ki by laying claim to a Black *Métissage* through the mixing of African Nova Scotian and Mi’kmaq bloodlines. This shared ancestry, “permits an association with Aboriginal peoples, not a negation, whether there is ever any official recognition of Africadian Métis – or even ‘Black Mi’kmaq’ – people *or not*” (Clarke 2012:7). Clarke must then be seen as only partially addressing the charge or erasure leveled by Madden and as failing to tackle directly her overly simplistic definition of indigenous as Aboriginal. By asserting a biracial, part-Mi’kmaq, part-Black (which in itself erases the presence of at least one White ancestor also claimed by most historic African Nova Scotians) Clarke only provides further fuel for those who wish to accuse him of nativism. What’s more, Clarke’s call for further investigation into the presence of Black Métis – and potential attainment of official Indian status in significant numbers – can itself be seen as a challenge to Mi’kmaq land claims, the penultimate question raised by Madden’s charge (2009). As Clarke readily admits, his acquisition of official status as a member of the Eastern Woodlands Métis Nation is atypical of his African Nova Scotian community and should thus not be taken as a representative definition of this community’s assertion of indigeniety without further investigation (2012:7). Clarke addresses the charge of nativism by dismissing outright any possibility that “scholars can read African-Canadian (or Black Canadian) literature accurately unless they are also able to accept the historical (or ‘indigenous’) African-Canadian population and its cultural production

*as a constitutive element*" (2012:4, emphasis added). Here the question is not one of authenticity (read essentialism), but chronology, referencing the ways in which recent African-Canadian immigrants challenging a white-washed national narrative must themselves acknowledge the ways in which historic African-American and Afro-Caribbean migrants created space for *the very possibility of African-Canadian being* through centuries of struggle for survival, and then equality, in Canada (2012: 207).

Lastly, and in response to Walcott's privilege of diasporic over national affiliation, Clarke insists, "black immigrant authors should be read within a *Canadian* frame of reference as much as within an African Diasporic or Caribbean-centric one" (2012:4). Clearly frustrated by what he perceives to be selective reading by his critics, Clarke polishes his credentials as a Black radical by pledging allegiance to Fanon's "liberation of humanity," Malcolm X's "Pan-Africanism and cultural nationalism to repudiate white racism and Western imperialism," while admitting to having been "oblivious" to the erosion of the nation-state at the hands of "the forces of capitalist-driven 'globalization'" in his earlier works (2012:5). However, Clarke also lays personal political claim to a self-styled, distinctly cosmopolitan-tinged cultural nationalism, arguing, "Yes, an African core – plus history, (slavery, colonialism) – connects African-heritage peoples in the diaspora, but all of us are also shaped consequentially by *national* cultures" (2012:6). Clarke therefore derides Walcott's sacrifice of the nation at the feet of the in-between, arguing that "[t]o pretend geopolitical divisions do not exist, to wish them away out of fealty to the diaspora, is to surrender realism for surrealism, Machiavelli for Mickey Mouse" (2012:6).

The back-and-forth between Walcott and Clarke, in particular and as noted by Clarke himself, as "crucial to the emerging field of Black Canadian studies" (Almonte, as cited in Clarke 2012:5) in, I argue, recognition of its representativeness of conversations among and between Black/African communities across the country. I wish now to step outside Canada's borders and turn to the work of Anderson and Brown for alternative perspectives on the location of community and definitions of indigeniety and diaspora.

### **Reconsidering “indigeniety” and “place”**

*Black and Indigenous*, an ethnography of the Garifuna by Mark Anderson (2005) presents the case of a self-identifying People (*Pueblo*) that assert both blackness and indigeniety as key identity components (examined, in one sense, as “political tools”) in negotiations with the Honduran state for cultural and territorial rights and recognition. In this work, Anderson aims to “unsettl[e] the relationship between blackness and diaspora and advocat[e] an open-ended analysis of the relationship between diasporic processes and place-based, particularistic identity formations and politics” (2005:19). *Black and Indigenous* therefore provides not only an informative comparison to my own ethnographic examination of the indigenous Black community in Halifax, but it also speaks directly to the “seeming paradox between nativist assertions and diasporic affiliations and between affirmations of tradition and modernity, rootedness and cosmopolitanism, blackness and indigeniety” outlined above (2009:7). More specifically, by refusing to further “reify the dichotomy” of Black vs. Indian (read alien vs. indigenous) Anderson proposes an alternate reading of diaspora as “an indigenous condition” shared by African-descended and Aboriginal peoples in the Americas. He therefore challenges the “opposition between indigeniety and diaspora” and the equivalence of blackness with a “diasporic condition of displacement” commonly found in scholarship (2005). To examine the origins of this oppositional relationship, Anderson delineates “a conceptual-political grid” formed during the colonial era in Latin America that “links indigeniety with Indians and Blacks with displacement” (2005:22), largely through a racialization of geography, or ‘place’.

In a nutshell, Anderson’s argument (based largely on Peter Wade’s career-long examination of the fluidity of ‘race’, ethnicity, and blackness in Latin America) concerns “how Negro and Indian are both identified as ‘races,’ defined in terms of geographic origins. The Negro race is attributed phenotypical features and characterized as African. The Indian race is understood as the original (pre-Columbian) inhabitants of the New World. In this sense, the Indian race is

conceptualized as ‘indigenous’ to the New World” and the Negro is identified as an alien entity of African extraction (2009:14). Anderson also notes the impact of territorial policy on the association of slavery with blackness: “the Crown had obligations to protect and convert Indians precisely because they were natives of regions where Spain asserted authority,” while no such jurisdictional imperatives impeded Spanish actions in Africa (2009:15).

Lee Baker provides an equally informative overview of the historic role of anthropology in defining Africans and Indians as dichotomous locations of culture. In *Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture*, Baker (2010) documents the ways in which anthropological studies throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries pitted Native Americans against African Americans through attempts to preserve and promote the cultures of the former, while denying and discounting the existence of *any* cultural remnants of the latter. In this regard, Clarke has described his entire project as an act of self-defense aimed at “correct[ing] the negative assessments of Africadian history and culture” leveled by such academic efforts<sup>15</sup> over the past century. Dismantling the ‘common sense’ distinction between blackness and indigeniety is therefore a crucial step to understanding the contemporary “production of race, ethnicity and indigeniety” (2005:15) that lies at the heart of the debates in Canadian academic circles and in Halifax. Armed with the understanding that “in the Americas, part of the historic fate of the Black subject was to be constructed as diasporic, as dwelling in displacement, out of place, and in loss of home,” Anderson rejects the definition of blackness as diasporic condition. “Black subjects are, of course,” he writes, “not simply members of a diaspora but native citizens of particular nations, regions, places and communities, who belong in place and make claims to place. They have been positioned as out of place subjects by histories of displacement and ongoing processes of racialization and marginalization” (2005:17).

Anderson also provides an alternate understanding of assertions of indigeneity as “marking a particular cultural status or condition, a mode of being more than a

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<sup>15</sup> Clarke levels particular blame against anthropologists and historians in this regard (1991:27).

matter of blood” (2009:8). Through recognition of a seemingly obvious distinction between lowercase-n (read native in place) and capital-N (read Aboriginality) conceptualizations of indigeneity, Anderson makes visible “emerging, contested meanings of blackness and indigeniety as overlapping rather than exclusive categories of identification even as it demonstrates the differences and tensions between them” (ibid). Thus, the assertion of indigeniety can also be seen as political action directed against historically situated state structures and equally ‘place’-specific manifestations of multiculturalism and neo-liberalism.

Jacqueline Nassy Brown’s (2005) ethnographic account of Liverpool-born Blacks (LBBs) provides another insightful and detailed account of an historic Black community, also situated at a seaport of colonial significance<sup>16</sup>. In *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail*, the American anthropologist examines assertions of a Liverpool-born Black identity and discovers, “place is an axis of power relations insofar as LBBs were constructed by it and insofar as they, in turn, used place to specify what kind of Blacks they were” (2005:81). Brown’s first contribution is thus demonstration of ‘difference’ and the desire for differentiation as motivating factors in the creation and adoption of oppositional identities within Black/African tensions. In this effort, Brown views “the local ... as a location from which national processes of race can be seen in all *their* cultural specificity” (2005:6). I am in agreement with Brown and Steven Gregory (who’s own work, *Black Corona*, informs Brown’s argument), and have therefore found it useful to approach my own research on Black/African identities in Halifax not as if this city was “a unique place but rather as a vantage point from which to examine the formation of ‘place’ as an object and symbol of Blacks’ class-based desires and politics, as shaped by national histories of racial inequality” (2005:7). In other words, the goal is to demonstrate “the distinctive role of *places* in informing and molding the meaning of race” (Gregory, as cited in Brown 2005:7). Thus, a key question of this work becomes one of exploring how multiculturalism and immigration policies, let alone national narratives of Canadian identity, interact with local meanings of blackness and African-ness in Halifax and

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<sup>16</sup> More on the role of this geo-political particularity in Chapter X.

through 'Nova Scotia,' as both 'home to Canada's oldest Black community' and 'the Mississippi of the North'. *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail* also offers insight into the reification of 'race' by Liverpool-born Blacks through active promotion of 'place' (i.e. being "born here") as the main qualifier of belonging. In Liverpool, according to Brown, the delineation of belonging is therefore achieved through constructions of post-1960s African and Afro-Caribbean 'immigrants' using a discourse of cultural and linguistic difference – i.e. ethnicity – while "race ... is reserved for Blacks born here" (2005:107). In Halifax then, another question to be asked concerns whether or not self-identifying aspiring entrepreneurs 'of African descent' *become Black* – and thus are once more racialized – through application for and acceptance of Black Business Initiative services and promotion as successful members of the Black business community.

The final contribution of *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail* to this research can be found in the chapter titled "Diaspora and its discontents," which aims to "analyze the contradictory racial positionings that Blacks in Liverpool occupy vis-à-vis each other" (2005:98). To achieve her goal, Brown presents a definition of diaspora "as a *counter/part* relation built on cultural and historical equivalencies. To posit *equivalencies* is to put meaningful differences (such as distinct colonial histories) on the same analytical plane at the start, in order to then expose the ways they come to bear in social practice. The backslash in *counter/part* and the stress that may be put on either side of it index shifting relations of antagonism and affinity; these latter terms depend equally on *difference* while highlighting two possibilities for what people can do with it" (2005:99). I have found this theorization of diaspora invaluable in my own analysis of the opinions expressed by self-identifying indigenous Black, Historic African Nova Scotian, Black Nova Scotian, African Canadian, Afro-Caribbean Canadian and Black Canadian participants in this study. Of particular value is the possibility for affinity and antagonism within this definition. However, in her study of unequal power relations within and between heterogeneous native and immigrant Black and African communities in Liverpool, Brown rejects the "foundational tendency" within cultural and diasporic studies to define diaspora as a condition of displacement from an original homeland (2005).

Frustrated with the ways in which most academics privilege the trans-Atlantic slave trade as “the starting point of analysis, at the expense of examining how historically positioned subjects identify both the relevant events in transnational community formation and the places implicated – or perhaps even produced – in that process,” Brown proposes a redefinition of diaspora from condition to relation (2005:39). In this reformulation, Brown challenges Gilroy for his failure to address “power asymmetries within national Black communities ... [or] relations of power extant across them.” Returning to Anderson’s promotion of diaspora as indigenous condition – “a matter of being more than a matter of blood” (2009:8) – we can see how these two definitions might interact as mutual reinforcement. In other words, a perspective that viewed not only Black inter- and intra-relations as counter/part, but also Black-Aboriginal relations as possessing the same dimension of possibility for antagonism or affinity in light of a shared condition of racialization in place might afford new spaces from which to challenge national narratives of exclusion and essentialism – what Brown terms “the roadblocks and pathways to political community right *here* in this place, as in view of place” (2005:100). With this possibility of relations in mind, I now turn to a historical overview of African migration to and experience in Nova Scotia.

### **III. Multiculturalism & Employment Equity**

Academics interested in the meaning and means of achieving equality in Canada have routinely focused on multiculturalism and employment equity as the government’s main tools in the construction of Canadian identity and the fight against racial discrimination (Abu-Laban and Gabriel, 2002; Ash, 2004; Bannerji, 2000; Banting and Kymlicka, 2006; Bissoondath, 2002; Foster, 2005, 2010; Henry and Tator, 2006; James, 2010; James *et al*, 2010; Li, 2008; Mensah, 2002). When placed alongside the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982), the Employment Equity (1986) and Multiculturalism (1988) Acts have also been identified as cornerstones of Canadian identity (Henry and Tator, 1999; Abu-Laban and Gabriel, 2002) in light of their constitutionally enshrined protections of individual rights,

freedoms and equality. Critical approaches (Abu-Laban and Gabriel, 2002; Agnew, 2007; Chazan *et al*, 2011; Henry and Tator, 2006; James, 2010; Li, 1999; Mensah, 2002) have examined employment equity measures when discussing the merits or shortcomings of multiculturalism policy, and vice versa, in recognition of the relationship of mutual reinforcement marking the two Acts and their respective policies. In this regard, James *et al* recall employment equity measures as being borne of government recognition that multiculturalism on its own was not enough and that “new measures to redress systemic racism were needed” (2010:50). Justice Rosalie Abella, head of the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment, wrote in her final report in 1984: “The problem is essentially one of racism. Strong measures are therefore needed to remedy the impact of discriminatory attitudes and behaviour flowing from this problem” (*as cited in* Sheppard 2005:54). The Supreme Court of Canada has concurred with the Abella Report and extended its considerable support for such “special equity initiatives” based on its own acknowledgement of “systemic discrimination” in Canada (Sheppard 2006:51). This convergence of governmental and judicial acknowledgment is key and considered here as the driving force and measuring stick of governmental equity efforts. Therefore, on a primary level, multiculturalism and employment equity should be seen as Canada’s main efforts at combating systemic and institutional racism.

However, as noted by Mensah (2002) and Winter (2011), scholarly discussion of multiculturalism requires the making of a decision of how to categorize its component parts. Mensah (2002:204) presents a useful four-part definition that includes acknowledgement of 1) the demographic reality of diversity, 2) an ideological position, 3) an arena of socio-political competition for resources, and 4) a federal race-relations management tool within ‘multiculturalism.’ This project therefore views multiculturalism, on a secondary level, as both ideological position – what Winter terms “a societal project or ethos” (2011:16) – and federal policy through which individuals and communities secure state recognition (through either cultural or economic means<sup>17</sup>) of their belonging to the nation. Employment equity,

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<sup>17</sup> Scholarly debate on the merits and/or dangers of multiculturalism and employment equity are often framed within a philosophical framework of recognition vs. redistribution (see Kymlicka 2006; Fraser and Honneth

concerned with correction of systemic institutional discrimination against 'visible minorities,' women, Aboriginal peoples and those with physical disabilities, is seen more pointedly as the federal policy area tasked with redress through direct (and directed) allocation of state resources (i.e. jobs).

### **Don't call it affirmative action**

The Employment Equity Act, introduced in 1986, requires the federal government to strive for the proportional representation within its ranks of four designated groups: women, Aboriginal peoples, visible minorities, and persons with disabilities (Aylward, 2005; Agocs and Osborne, 2009; Jain *et al*, 2012). Justice Abella defined employment equity as "practices designed to eliminate discriminatory barriers and to provide in a meaningful way equitable opportunities in employment" for the four designated groups (1984:7). Amendments to the Act in 1995 broadened its scope to include all federally contracted businesses with 100 or more employees (Mensah, 2002). According to Jain *et al*, the Employment Equity Act covers over one million Canadians (with a 65%-35% split between public and private sectors) and more than 1500 employers (2012:2). While Canadian provinces and territories have not passed employment equity legislation (except for a brief one-year attempt in Ontario in the early 1990s) of their own (Abu-Laban and Gabriel, 2002; Sheppard, 2006; Henry and Tator, 1999), each has implemented policies requiring some form of employment equity within provincial and territorial institutions and organizations (James *et al*, 2010:50). Similarly, all Canadian provinces and territories have adopted multiculturalism policies since the introduction of the official federal policy in 1971 (Mensah, 2002). Interestingly, Canada has made a name for itself as not only the remaining bastion of multiculturalism policy within Western immigrant-receiving countries (Winter 2011), but also as international exporter of its own brand of employment equity to such countries as South Africa, Northern Ireland,

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2003). However, as noted by Fraser, the supposed "distinction between economic injustice and cultural injustice is analytical. In practice, the two are intertwined" (2006:234). This is a fascinating debate, in particular Fraser's promotion of a "socialist economics combined with deconstructive cultural politics" as a potential solution to the "perverse effects" being produced through "the combination of the liberal welfare state and mainstream multiculturalism" (2006:245-246).

Australia and the Netherlands (Agocs and Osborne, 2009; Jain *et al*, 2012). Albie Sachs (in Kennedy-Dubourdieu, 2006, ix), justice of the Constitutional Court of South Africa<sup>18</sup>, describes the “paradox” of employment equity as twofold: “first ... in most societies where it has been tried, the majority need consciously to curtail its advantage so as to favour minority advance ...” The second dimension of the paradox concerns “redress and balance. The objective is not to establish a form of anachronistic or disjunctive compensation for past injustices. It is to rectify the way in which these injustices continue to permeate the world we live in ... structured and institutionalized imbalances in society call for responses that in turn are structured and balanced” (ibid).

Perhaps ironically, in light of Canada’s role as exporter, the Canadian approach to employment equity’s near-uniform failure to attempt such an ambitious undertaking as outlined by Justice Sachs has been the main point of criticism by the policy’s most-likely advocates (Leck and Saunders, 1992; Agocs and Osborne, 2009). For Agocs and Osborne, any critique of employment equity must acknowledge the lack of a robust enforcement capacity within federal initiatives and therefore question the marked divide between “the intent of employment equity policy and practice at the workplace level” (2009). Federal guidelines and requirements for increased participation of the four designated groups have been regarded as toothless and largely symbolic in light of the onus being placed on the individual to file claims of discrimination, the robust enforcement measures recommended by Justice Abella having never even been implemented by legislators, and the all-but-certainly of spotty – at best – monitoring of the policy due to lack of funding for this purpose (ibid, Simon and Sabbagh, 2005). Echoing critique of the national policy, Aylward (2005) takes issue with the administration of the Indigenous Black and Mi’kmaq program at Dalhousie University in Halifax – one of the earliest examples of employment equity in the province – bemoaning “the gulf between the rhetoric of equality and the application of equality”. Aylward rightly highlights the importance of including targeted communities in the creation of equity programs, from the

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<sup>18</sup> A country with an array of historic legislative links to Canada – most notably the Indian Act, which was used as framework for the system of Apartheid. See Calendo and McIlwain, 2012.

earliest stages of conceptualization to the day-to-day administration once programs are implemented. It would almost seem to go without saying, but systemic institutional racism cannot be dismantled and replaced with equal participation by all members of society if the dominant majority unilaterally determines the means and mechanisms adopted to achieve such revolutionary goals. As will be shown below, the enduring “gulf” between the *promise* and *practice* of Canada’s equity efforts is a main feature of critical approaches to multiculturalism and employment equity measures.

However, an original contribution to the literature is made through study of the BBI as a *different* approach to employment equity and, as such, multiculturalism in Nova Scotia. As has been noted elsewhere, employment equity has been most typically viewed as a way to increase the presence of designated groups (in Canada that includes Aboriginal peoples, visible minorities, women and those with physical disabilities) within existing institutions, organizations and the workplace in general. Much of the criticisms of ‘affirmative action’-type programs have therefore centered on the installation of quotas, targets, and weighted considerations of applicant characteristics in this regard. This is not the case with the BBI. In Nova Scotia, state recognition and acknowledgment of systemic institutional racism (particularly anti-Black racism, specifically) has resulted in the erection of an entirely separate community of not only Black-directed organizations – of which the BBI is but a single example, although reasonably unique in its economic mandate – but Black-headed and staffed organizations. To be blunt, every member (less one long-serving temporary administrative member) of the BBI staff is Black. This fact was true of all six of the Black-directed organizations (including Black-directed offices within state institutions) visited during the period of fieldwork. In fact, much of the criticism directed at the BBI from the community has concerned the ratio of indigenous vs. come from away staff (particularly at the executive level).

It should also be noted with respect to the BBI’s focus on entrepreneurial development that a provincial body tasked with the same mandate (“for everyone else,” as noted by several participants) already exists. Further research is therefore required to examine this separation of the entrepreneurial population into Blacks

and all others to determine the impacts on social relations within the economic sphere as a result. However, this research views the BBI as playing an important role in what it means to be Black, what Black business looks like (whether on the street or a bank loan application), how Black business is established, operated and interacts with the society at large, and how existing institutions service and interact with Black business and business owners. As such, it is this racial project that is examined here.

### **The many faces of multiculturalism**

No conversation on multiculturalism can take place without mention of Will Kymlicka. The renowned Canadian philosopher has gained international recognition for his arduous defense of multiculturalism as equal parts child of liberalism and protector of the welfare state (2001, and Kymlicka and Banting, 2006), and has been largely successful in framing theoretical debate on the controversial policy as one concerning the creation of social cohesion (i.e. integration vs. accommodation) rather than equality. Others have taken more critical stances on multiculturalism, either deriding the policy's divisive or dismissive character. On the political right, a frequently cited critic has been Neil Bissoondath. In *Selling Illusions* (2002) takes unbridled issue with the public "cult of multiculturalism" as a divisive promotion of ethno-racial and cultural stereotypes that do nothing to further the individual's goal of becoming (and being seen as) Canadian, full stop. On the political left, Himani Bannerji's *Dark Side of the Nation* rejects multiculturalism as nothing more than maintenance of White supremacist narratives of Canada as a settler state that continues to colonize Aboriginal Peoples, Francophones and 'visible' minorities to further its nationalistic (*née* capitalistic) goal of inclusion as assimilation. In a nutshell, we can therefore understand the debate over multiculturalism policy as concerning its status as protector/destroyer of national cohesion.

However, it is important to remember that Aboriginal Peoples and Quebecois sovereigntists have taken issue with their inclusion within a policy and program designed to integrate "foreign others" into Canadian society (Bannerji 2000; James

2010; Winter 2011). Thus, despite the popular tendency to canonize Pierre Eliot Trudeau famous designation of Canada as a country with two official languages, but no official culture, Bannerji provides a useful reminder of the former prime minister's political motivations for his government's establishment of official multiculturalism<sup>19</sup> as "a diffusing or muting device for francophone national aspirations ... [that] also sidelined the claims of Canada's aboriginal populations" for nationhood (2000:9). What's more, James notes the numerous institutional barriers to racial equality that continue to exist within Canadian institutions with respect to First Nations in particular – from the Indian Act and ongoing contestations over treaties and land claims (ibid) to the federal refusal to address the ongoing murder and disappearance of Aboriginal women – despite over four decades of multiculturalism policies. Bannerji rightly points out that "the reduction of these groups' demands into cultural demands was obviously helpful to the nationhood of Canada with its hegemonic anglo-Canadian national culture" (ibid).

There can thus be no illusions as to whether "multiculturalism as policy and practice in Canada has been contentious from a range of political ideologies and positions" (Walcott 2011:20). As such, the question must be one of logical consistency: if multiculturalism and employment equity represent key pieces of the Canadian identity "invested with legitimacy and moved from a discourse at the margins to a social imaginary at the centre" (Winter 2011:7) over the past forty plus years, why do they remain so controversial? What's more, if "opinion poll after opinion poll" continues to identify the majority's belief in "multiculturalism as a 'cornerstone of Canadian culture'" (Winter 2011:16), what is to be made of the continued racialization of Canadian social and economic relations (Reitz and Banerjee, 2007; Pendakur and Pendakur 2007)?

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<sup>19</sup> Several African-Canadian authors (Mensah, 2002, Foster, 2002, 2005) have noted the promise contained within comments made by Trudeau during his government's introduction of Canada's first official multiculturalism in 1971. I cannot help but see such reverence to political showmanship by Black scholars as shockingly naïve. The continued reference to a speech delivered in the House of Commons, rather than the actual components of the legislation itself, the level of funding allocated to it, or the powers of enforcement and implementation granted to such policies, can be seen as nothing more than a problematic devotion to the *promise* of what multiculturalism *could be, if only* (insert your own justification for the failure of successive government's since 1971 to realize this promise) rather than an honest and scholarly examination of the controversy surrounding multiculturalism legislation, policy and social value as a demonstration of the enduring dominance of the country's "founding nations."

A more realistic approach may be to consider multiculturalism's and employment equity's competing definitions of 'diversity' and 'equality'<sup>20</sup>. As noted earlier, one interpretation of multiculturalism is recognition of "a social fact" of diversity amongst the Canadian population (Winter, 2011:15). However, the policy's left-leaning critics have frequently opined that diversity can also refer to the Otherness of non-European immigrants to a normatively Anglo/Franco Canadian identity. In this interpretation, multiculturalism is projected through a traditional, right-leaning imagination as an important, albeit hollow, symbol of the *inclusiveness* and *tolerance* of a White, Christian, liberal-minded majority towards 'visible minorities' (Bannerji, 2000). Diversity is therefore understood as the difference of hyphenated Others from non-visible "*Canadian-Canadians*" (Mackey, 2002). Right-wing rejection of employment equity employs a similar distinction when defining equality as *opportunity* rather than *outcome* (Mensah, 2002). By placing emphasis on the 'discriminatory' nature of hiring practices that make explicit note of an applicant's 'race', gender and/or ability, employment equity's detractors claim the alleged moral high ground by espousing the virtues of meritocracy and colour-blindness while discounting the enduring legacy and operations of institutional racism – the very systemic ills which justify and to which the policy is directed (Mensah, 2002; James, 2010). On this point Abu-Laban and Gabriel provide important insight concerning the role of neo-liberal notions of individualism and globalization discourse in not only transforming the postwar welfare state into a client-based, diversity-as-economic-advantage form of citizenship, but also the ways in which "struggles for equality and inclusion within the Canadian nation are *portrayed as divisive*" (2008:51, emphasis added). Buttressing this argument is an impressive latticework of scholarship demonstrating the continued presence (and prevalence) of racial discrimination, against Blacks and First Nations in particular, in the Canadian workforce (Li, 1999, 2008; Creese, 2007; Pendakur and Pendakur, 2007). Any academic notion of color-blindness *as practice* in Canada must therefore be seen as

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<sup>20</sup> It is useful to keep the concept of an ideal type in mind throughout this debate, as advocates and right-wing detractors alike of both policies routinely couch their arguments in "idealized conceptualizations" (Foster 2006) of the policy's promise and/or the 'truly just' welfare state's liberal color-blindness (Bissoondath 2002).

willful ignorance in the face of the firmly established relationship between a “social hierarchy of races ... [and] unequal earnings in the labour market” (Li 2008:21). As noted by Mensah, it is difficult to consider the continued charges of ‘reverse discrimination’ as anything less than “old-fashioned White supremacist doctrines and the exclusionary tactics they espouse” (2002:235).

### **A reply to Kymlicka**

It seems only fitting to return to the work of Will Kymlicka to conclude this section on multiculturalism and employment equity. Of particular interest to the preceding discussion concerning the role of both policies in promoting or denying belonging and equality is a chapter entitled “A Crossroads in Race Relations,” constitutive of *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship* (2001). In this chapter Kymlicka compares and contrasts the experiences of African-American and African Canadian communities in light of the presence of specifically anti-Black racism in both countries. This is a rare discussion from the renowned philosopher and is the sole instance found within his extensive scholarship directly addressing Black Canadians in any significant length. In this work, the philosopher poignantly makes a case for “special accommodations” (including financial compensation, affirmative action programs, funding for Black educational institutions and programming, etc.) for both groups to combat continued marginalization in their respective societies. The significance of this chapter is therefore, first and foremost, acknowledgement by such a notable figure of the fact that “Blacks in Canada face obstacles that other non-White groups do not” – anti-Black racism that impacts every aspect of life from “housing and job discrimination ... [to] the widespread assumption that all Blacks must be immigrants” (2001:188). What’s more, Kymlicka acknowledges the historic presence of African slaves in Canada from the earliest moments of colonial settlement, as well as the unique status of Halifax (he limits this nod to the city, rather than a more accurate recognition that this distinction is true of the entire province) as the sole location in Canada where historic Black communities outnumber more recent immigrants from the Caribbean and Continental Africa.

Thus, Kymlicka not only endorses employment equity measures to address “the danger of racial exclusion and separatism,” but argues that “it is crucial to make sure that it is indeed helping the group which is most in need. And amongst Canada’s visible minorities<sup>21</sup>, that is surely Blacks” (2001:198).

And that’s where the wheels fall off. Kymlicka argues that African-Americans remain disenfranchised from mainstream American society due to “the legacy of centuries of slavery and segregation” (2001:184). However, he continues on to claim the history of these two institutions north of the border, “while more similar to the US than most Canadians realize, is not the source of contemporary race relations problems. The numbers of Blacks who experienced these conditions was relatively small, and their descendants are now massively outnumbered by immigrants from the Caribbean or Africa” (2001:186). Rather, in light of the majority of Blacks in the country being of recent arrival from the Caribbean, Canada suffers from “‘subliminal racism’ ... found in people who genuinely and sincerely accept egalitarian values, but who nonetheless, often unconsciously, invoke double standards when evaluating or predicting the actions of different racial groups” (2001:189). Kymlicka thus offers not only a robust defense of contemporary Canadians as well-intending, altruistic multiculturalists, but also an appallingly pedestrian end-run around the historical foundations of nationally acknowledged systemic institutional racism (see the preceding discussion of multiculturalism and employment equity). Kymlicka’s failure to connect the dots between the prevalence of slavery and segregation, on both sides of the border, to the unmentioned racist immigration policies upon which Canada was founded, resistance against such discrimination by African communities for more than 200 years, and the very justification for employment equity efforts in Canada, is perplexing to say the least. Particularly troubling is the vaulted scholar’s recognition that the racial divide in Canada “is less and less white/non-white, and more white/black” (Kymlicka 2001:189) within an argument that begins with the historic presence of key institutions of racism, but which seeks out post-civil rights era causes for anti-Black racism in Canadian society. By relying so heavily on

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<sup>21</sup> It is worth noting that for Kymlicka this category excludes Aboriginal peoples (see Banting and Kymlicka, 2006).

contemporary demographic realities of 'the Black community' as causation of an unconscious and well-intended form of racism, Kymlicka fails to understand the legacy of *ideas* about Black bodies upon which the very state of Canada (first as British colony) was founded.

Kymlicka's representation of anti-Black racism rests solely upon the plight of Caribbean-Canadians in Toronto, amongst whom he notes the development of "an oppositional stance towards the mainstream society" and "conspiracy like fears about the police and courts ... imported from the United States" and "passed on to native-born Blacks" (2001:191). Clearly the noted scholar could benefit from review of the works of Pendakur and Pendakur (2007) or Li (1999) cited in the previous section, both of which note the increasing impacts of racial discrimination on Blacks (and First Nations, in particular) of subsequent generations post-immigration. What's more, in his attempted advocacy for the alleviation of "a disaffected black subculture" in Canada, Kymlicka's "primary justification" for Black-specific employment equity efforts is that such measures have "enormous symbolic value in the Black community ... as one of the few signs that whites have a genuine, good-faith commitment to equality ... As Stephen Lewis put it, affirmative action 'is a kind of cause célèbre of visible minority communities everywhere. They see it as the consummate affirmation of opportunity and access'" (2001:196). Kymlicka further identifies equity programs as "tangible refutation of the conspiracy-type fears that generate an oppositional subculture" (2001: 198), and thus dismisses the possibility that such demonstrable social facts as racial profiling and discriminatory prison sentencing in Canada are pressing concerns in Canada.

Therefore, despite this much-anticipated acknowledgement of anti-Black racism, slavery and segregation during colonial times on both sides of the Canadian border, and historic Black communities, Kymlicka fails to identify the root causes of contemporary systemic institutional racism. The policy's leading international defender thus merely, and once more, reinforces the status quo narrative promoted through multiculturalism of the importation of American racism into a Canadian society marked by an altruistic and well-intentioned, if imperfect application thereof, embrace of difference and diversity.

In contrast, Matt James' contribution to the collection of essays compiled by Banting and Kymlicka entitled *Multiculturalism and the Welfare State* (2006) makes a well-organized case for the redress of historical injustices against racialized groups, including the demolition and ghettoization of the African Nova Scotian community of Africville in the 1960s. Tidily closing the loop on the discussion on Canada's equity efforts thus far, James defends demands for public recognition and financial restitution of historic racial injustices as both "social movement multiculturalism, and hence ... 'the politics of redress'" (2006:224,227). What's more, by emphasizing the *difference* of racial discrimination experienced by African Canadians (compared once more to that of First Nations) than that of other immigrant groups in Canada (2006), James lends robust support to the "distinctive and traditionally ignored distributive needs of this 'community' (2006:245). James therefore demonstrates the valuable ways in which "redress movements are making it untenable for dominant groups to continue to profess ignorance or offer convenient rationalizations for past wrongs" (2006:244). Thus, as noted earlier, the dominant narrative of multiculturalism and Canadian identity as tolerant and inclusive must be seen as "grossly self-serving misinterpretations of the country's past" when viewed in light of continued depictions of demands for equality as divisive threats to social cohesion. For, as noted by Bannerji, "what multiculturalism (as with social welfare) gives us was not 'given' voluntarily but 'taken' by our continual demands and struggles ... Multiculturalism as a form of bounty or state patronage is a managed version of our antiracist politics" (2000:118).

### **Significance**

With the preceding discussion of the literature, we can now take five main points forward throughout the remainder of this text. First, Canada – and Nova Scotia in particular – is an important location of inquiry into historic and contemporary processes of racialization and social constructions of Blackness. Second, and closely related to the first point, histories of experience in specific locations are key tools wielded by Black peoples to delineate the distinctness of their communities through

the assertion of identities rooted in “place.” Thus, negotiations over the *authenticity* of one’s connections to specific locales are necessary for the attainment of belonging, entitlement, and enclosure of community. Third, while recognizing the social facts of competing classes and racial identities, this research understands “race” as reference to shifting *ideas* about socially constructed differences rather than as *analytic concept* with deterministic capacity. However, this distinction is purely theoretical as “race,” despite its constructed-ness, continues to have very real impacts on the daily lives of individuals. Social constructions of “race” are themselves termed processes of racialization, and can be conceived on the individual level as racial projects that perform the social and political role of giving meaning to specific “races.” Fourth, this research understands the term “indigenous” as the product of racial projects during the colonial era in the Americas that served to create oppositional “Indian” and “African” communities. Borne of the need to justify European conquest and enslavement, respectively, these racial identities were legally and politically impregnated with once again competing notions of territorial and cultural belonging and authenticity. Lastly, both multiculturalism and employment equity programs are seen throughout this research as founded upon recognition within Canadian society of systemic institutional racism, a social ill rooted in the very foundations of Canada as a White settler state and maintained through federal and provincial initiatives lacking the enforcement capacity required to uproot the structural marginalization of difference. However, this research makes an original contribution to the literature on such equity efforts in light of the all-Black structure, staffing and mandate of the organization examined herein. The Black Business Initiative, established as a result of Black advocacy for state resources with which to battle systemic discrimination, while clearly shaped by neo-liberal notions of the free market and individualism held by both state officials and Black activists, must also be acknowledged as a uniquely Black-demanded, defined, and directed effort for equality within a majority White society. As such, the BBI proves a complex site of research into competing racial projects of White supremacy, anti-racist ideologies, the construction of racial meaning and definitions of Blackness, and the formation and delineation of competing “Black” and “African” communities.

## Theoretical Framework

### Political economy

This ethnographic research adopts a political economy approach to the examination of identity formation processes within and between communities constructed as “Black” and/or “African” through the operations of the Black Business Initiative in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Stated simply, a political economy approach “places the social and cultural phenomena it investigates within an examination of circumstances associated with getting a living and the structures of power that shape and constrain activity” (Roseberry, 1988:179). As an organization mandated with increasing and promoting the Black entrepreneurial segment of the Nova Scotia economy, the BBI is an ideal research site for this approach. However, this research is less concerned with the organizational operations of the BBI and more with the potential role this organization plays in socio-political understandings of the meanings of Blackness – i.e. who is included in the racial category ‘Black’, and how distinctions between ‘Black’, ‘African’ and *Canadian* identities are constructed by persons “of African descent” in Nova Scotia. Further, as a site of competition over *access to* racially directed state resources, the BBI also provides a useful lens into the motivations behind individuals’ self-identification as either ‘Black’ and/or ‘African’ – and who determines the definitions thereof – within a predominantly White society with a significant colonial history.

While dated, Roseberry’s review of anthropological approaches to political economy in 1988 remains a valid descriptor of the perspective as being heavily influenced by Marx’s historical materialism. Included among those who borrow sparingly from Marx’s broader theory of class conflict, but remain committed to a historical understanding of socio-political (and less so, cultural) processes, Roseberry notes that Eric Wolf has used political economy to argue “the *formation* of communities was intimately connected with a larger history of colonialism, empire-building, international trade, and state formation” (1988:163). Roseberry credits Wolf in particular with crafting a historical approach that views processes of social relations

in a given location as being shaped over time and in interaction with global forces. However, whereas other anthropological approaches to political economy adopted Wallersteinian, Althusserian and traditional Marxist concerns with global systems, dependency, and modes of production, Wolf's historical approach to the local aimed to understand "the formation of anthropological subjects at the intersection of deeply rooted local and global histories" (Roseberry, 1988:164). Roseberry therefore presents Wolf's work as central to the promise of anthropological political economy in light of his tracing of "the imprint of a series of intersections of world and local histories in the very constitution of anthropological subjects" (1988:173). However, it is important to note that Wolf's imagination of this intersection is as the starting point of investigation, rather than analytical finding. It is worth quoting Roseberry's comments on this aspect of Wolf's work at length,

"The statement that anthropological subjects should be situated at the intersections of local and global histories is a statement of a problem rather than a conclusion. The problem imposes upon scholars who attempt to understand particular conjunctions a constant theoretical and methodological tension to which oppositions like global/local, determination/freedom, structure/agency give inadequate expression. They must avoid making capitalism too determinative, and they must avoid romanticizing the cultural freedom of anthropological subjects. The tension defines anthropological political economy, its preoccupations, projects, and promise" (Roseberry, 1988:174).

This conceptualization of theoretical and methodological tension is central to the ethnography undertaken here and is reflected throughout the entire work. However, it must also be noted that these *theoretical* tensions are *experienced* as both fluid and rigid borders, which participants cross and by which they are constrained frequently. One need only consider the ways in which national borders stand simultaneously as impenetrable and impotent barriers to (some) bodies and (some) ideas to comprehend this ever-present duality. Eric Wolf therefore also urges anthropologists to "think about phenomena in flexible and open-ended ways, relationally, in terms of relations engendered, constructed, expanded, abrogated; in terms of intersects and overlaps, rather than solid, bounded, homogenous entities that perdure without question and without change" (2001:333).

This research attempts to answer Wolf's call through historical examinations of African presence in Canada over four centuries, the politico-economic relations of power and production that prefaced, produced and punctuated the formation and maintenance of an African Nova Scotian community, and the social relations within said community vis-à-vis ongoing African and Afro-Caribbean migrations and the majority population. In this effort, particular attention has been paid to historical "processes unfolding, intertwining, spreading out, and dissipating over time ... seeing them not as fixed entities but problematic: shaped, reshaped, and changing over time" (Wolf, 2001:390). Social relations within a historically diverse Nova Scotia are also therefore cast as predominantly concerning the ebb and flow of White demand for – and delineation of appropriate – African (as well as Mi'kmaq and others') labour. However, it is important to note the political – and not simply economic – underpinning of such capitalist relations of production. As noted by Wolf, a global capitalist system "takes clout to set up, clout to maintain, and clout to defend; and wielding that clout becomes a target for competition or alliance building, resistance or accommodation" (2001:385).

Wolf has identified this 'clout' as "structural power ... [seen as power that] shapes the social field of action in such a way as to render some kinds of behaviour possible, while making others less possible or impossible" (ibid). There are therefore clear parallels between Wolf's theorization of 'structural power' and Foucault's writings on 'government' and 'biopower' (Hindess, 1996). However, whereas Foucault was concerned with the power to control individual consciousness and the body through discipline, Wolf is interested in "power that structures the political economy" (2001:384). As this ethnography concerns the socio-political construction and preservation of African Nova Scotian identities, as enacted through the creation, operations and contestations over the Black Business Initiative, Wolf's *structural power* pairs productively with Lee's (1997) notion of the *location of habitus* (discussed below) to examine social relations of material and cultural production *in place*. What's more, this theoretical pairing provides valuable insight into the (external and internal) ideological boundaries and political constraints weighing upon African Nova Scotians in their struggle for equal treatment and opportunity in

“Nova Scotia”. In other words, the *(pre)dispositions* prompted by a location of habitus concerning decisions taken within “Nova Scotia” with respect to the African Nova Scotian community and its demands must be considered as the influence of structural power’s overarching ideologies of neo-liberal capitalism and Western democracy, as well as international discourses of Blackness and civil rights, and national discourses of multiculturalism and identity.

### **Racial Formation**

Omi and Winant’s racial formation theory is a productive complement to a political economy approach in light of its equal emphasis on historical constructions of the shifting meaning of Blackness through state formations, policies, and social movements. The application of this theory to the research undertaken provides three key insights. First, on the national level racial formation identifies multiculturalism (as policy and cultural value) as an amalgam of ongoing, contested, and competing *racial projects* concerned primarily with the meaning of Whiteness (read Canadian) as tolerant and inclusive of racialized Others (i.e. visible minorities), and Canadian as diversity. Omi and Winant explain that racial projects “connect what race *means* in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially *organized*, based upon that meaning” (1994:56). While it should certainly be noted that not all groups that receive funding through multiculturalism programs are racialized, the national narrative upon which all multiculturalism efforts is founded, as argued in the previous chapter, is most certainly a white-washed affair that forces all non-Caucasians to explain their Canadian-ness. However, the critical analyses of such efforts contained in the previous chapter are evidence of an opposing racial project underway through academic investigation of such narratives.

Second, racial formation identifies the Black Business Initiative as but one piece of a broader social movement within Nova Scotia (and Canada at large, as well as internationally) focused on reducing socio-economic inequality borne of anti-Black racism and marginalization of Black communities. In similar fashion to Wolf’s

political economy, Omi and Winant therefore place “socially based movements, rather than traditionally defined, economically based interest groups, at the center of contemporary political processes” (1994:4). This is most certainly the case in Nova Scotia, where a centuries-old mobilized and motivated Black community has made repeated demands of the state and courts for recognition and relief from systemic racism and marginalization. Omi and Winant also note that “in practice economic interests are defined politically and ideologically. The identities which social actors take on are defined ideologically; they are the essence of ideology” (1994:31). Abu Laban and Gabriel (2002) have also noted the ways in which neo-liberal and globalization discourse have resulted in a commodification of Canada’s ethno-racial diversity as economic advantage in international markets by subsequent governments since the early 1990s. Thus, this research remains focused on the intersections of ideologies, political processes, and social relations within (or perhaps through or concerning) the BBI, rather than the organization’s impacts upon the economic sphere more directly.

Third, racial formation theory rightly identifies the fact that “race has been a *fundamental* axis of social organization” of Canadian society from the first ideological justifications of *terra nullis* with respect to the treatment of the First Peoples of this land as uncivilized, to the racially determined immigration policies of its first century, to the national narrative of tolerance and inclusion of an ever-growing “visible minority” population within the hegemonic discourse of multiculturalism. As noted by Clarke and Thomas, racial formation is a useful tool to “demonstrat[e] that ‘race’ is neither fiction nor fixed” (2006:4). The social and political meaning of race has shifted over time and continues to do so. Omi and Winant note,

“How one is categorized is far from a merely academic or even personal matter. Such matters as access to employment, housing, or other publically or privately valued goods; social program design and the disbursement of local, state, and federal funds ... are directly affected by racial classification and recognition of ‘legitimate’ groups. The determination of racial categories is thus an intensely political process” (1994:3).

Racial formation theory “looks at race not only as the subject of struggle and contest at the level of social structure but also as a contested theme at the level of social signification, of the production of meanings” (Winant, 2004:40). Thus, while considering social relations within the Canadian state as being accurately described through a racial formation perspective, this project is primarily concerned with examinations of social relations within and through the BBI as an example (and documentation) of a racial project. In other words, this ethnography will attempt to understand the ways in which underemployment, socio-economic marginalization and otherness are constructed as “Black” problems, as well as the means used by diverse African Nova Scotians to determine and delineate who is and who is not “Black” in competition for state resources directed at “fostering a dynamic Black presence” in the provincial economy. However, it should also be noted that attention has also been paid (see Literature Review) to several other competing racial projects operating in Canada – namely multiculturalism, employment equity and national narratives of tolerance and inclusion. Of equal interest here is the *trajectory* of social movements – i.e. the persistent acts of resistance and assertion of demands by African Nova Scotians over two centuries. The following chapters will perform these two tasks.

### **What is this “place?”**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, my own research largely mirrors that of Jacqueline Nassy Brown’s ethnography of Liverpool-born Blacks. In light of the similarities of the ‘problem’ being examined in both works, Brown’s notion of “place” as “a location from which national processes of race can be seen in all *their* cultural specificity” has proven extremely useful in understanding the significance of “Nova Scotia” in not only constructions of Canadian identity and belonging, but also the racialization of “Blacks” (formerly Coloureds, previously Negroes) in decidedly *Canadian* ways. Brown’s conceptualization of “place” can also shed light on the ways in which “diaspora attends to the production of affinities and the negotiation of antagonisms among differently racialized Black subjects ... not simply in Liverpool

but in view of ‘Liverpool’” (2005:6), and thus also makes visible the aims and means of achieving and protecting the boundaries of an “indigenous Black” identity within a heterogeneous “Black community” through shared experience of “Nova Scotia.” Lastly, Brown’s imagination of “place [as] a vehicle of power” views the specificity of the local “as a basis for the construction of difference, hierarchy, and identity, and as the basis of ideologies that rationalize economic inequalities and structure people’s material well-being and life chances” (2005:8). In fact, one of my own ethnography’s main findings (see chapter 6) is reinforcement of Brown’s observation concerning the prominence of “Blacks’ uses of [their] origin story in the context of racism, nationalism, and localism” to articulate their place within both local social relations and their diasporic linkages and affiliations (2005:5). However, in discussing the relationship between homeland and diaspora, Trew cites Sarup as noting that “[t]he very use of the term ‘roots’ implies stability ... that the deeper one’s roots, the better off one is likely to be” (2009:32). This is a particularly salient point for indigenous Blacks in Nova Scotia in light of the continued negative socio-economic impacts of their racial marginalization, despite their longevity in place. Thus, this project is in staunch agreement with Brown that “place” becomes loaded with the meanings of a Black community’s experiences to such a point that “place” becomes synonymous – if not foundational – to community’s very own “understandings of what Blackness means and who gets to claim it” (2005:5).

However, “place” is also viewed throughout this ethnography as a semi-autonomous actor in the inter- and intra-communal tensions over identity and belonging amongst and between “Blacks” and “Africans” in Nova Scotia. Martyn Lee provides a useful application of Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* to specific locations in this regard; one in which a given city can be viewed as “generating relatively autonomous practices which are consistent with its collective history but not necessarily the inevitable outcomes of that history,” what the cultural geographer terms “the agency of place” (1997:134). While Brown adopts a similar, yet phenomenological, interpretation of place-as-self (2005:11), Lee identifies the city as possessing an expanded version of Bourdieu’s *habitus*, which he terms the “location of habitus” and defines as “a set of relatively consistent, enduring and generative cultural (pre)dispositions to respond

to current circumstances, or the 'outside world', in particular ways" (1997:132). Therefore,

"How a city chooses to spend its budget, the ways in which it uses its land space and the way it tends to envisage its physical landscape, how it sees fit to preserve and depict its history and heritage, the emphasis it places on the collective welfare of its citizens, the choices it makes over styles of civic and public architecture, and so on, all are conditioned by a sort of governing logic which is not merely reducible to the actions of say a particular government but actually constitutes the outcome of the 'guiding hand' of habitus (Lee, 1997:134).

While I have reservations concerning Lee's failure to locate power within the aforementioned "(pre)dispositions," especially in light of Nova Scotia's previous and enduring existence as Mi'kma'ki, the concept can provide interesting insights into not only the official response to Black complaints of continued institutional racism and corresponding demands for redress, but also these very formulations and expressions themselves. In this latter respect, it is important to remember the multiple and ever-present ways in which the 'outside world' intrudes on and interacts with the city. Despite these caveats, Lee's *location of habitus* seems a useful tool for multi-leveled examination of what Gregory terms "the close interplay between struggles over the representation of identity and the meaning of place, and those over the distribution of political power and resources" (2003:286). The application of habitus to "place" becomes all the more powerful when paired with Brown's understanding of the concept as a site from which to view intersecting processes of socio-economic relations of identity, belonging, inequality, affiliation and antagonisms.

### **Summary**

This research therefore takes three conceptualizations forward through the remaining chapters of this work. First, the sociopolitical relations and identity formations examined herein are seen as having historic origins in the colonial period and as being marked by inequalities created, maintained, and justified through capitalist processes and ideologies. Second, differing experiences in different places

over time not only play a central role in racial formations, but also in the ways in which racial projects attempt to maintain or challenge existing meanings of “race” in specific locations (whether local, regional, national, or global). Third, the specificity of place also plays a role in social relations through historically and regionally evolved inclinations of thought and practice with respect to industry, culture, and values.

## Methodology

### Calls

As a consciously critical student of colour within the discipline of Anthropology, the desire to see oneself reflected within one's faculty and student body often goes unfulfilled (Brodkin *et al*, 2011). It can be all the more disheartening when one has equal difficulty locating oneself and one's experiences of racialization within the literature assigned through graduate coursework. First and foremost then, this thesis is intended as contribution to the "growing body" of anthropological work on "race" (Wade 2002:3). Several prominent anthropologists have historicized anthropology's complicated relationship with "race" and noted the recent resurgence of interest within the discipline (Baker, 2010; Wade, 2002, 2009; Wolf, 2001). However, in light of the near-abandonment by the discipline of examinations of "race" for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>22</sup>, Wolf pronounces that "[i]n cultural anthropology we need to take much greater account of heterogeneity and contradictions in cultural systems and to explore the ways in which [ethno-racial] differentiation produces a politics of meaning" (2001:412)."

Without question, my decision to undertake the completion of a master's degree in Anthropology was made, at least in part, due to my understanding of the discipline's beginnings as colonial facilitator and self-destructive crisis of confidence during the second half of the twentieth century. To my mind, anthropology not only has much for which to answer academically *and politically*, it has the perfect tools with which to do so. As noted by Mullings in calling for an anti-racist anthropology, "with its emphasis on underlying social relations and the informal workings of structures, networks, and interactions that produce and reproduce inequality, anthropology has a set of theoretical perspectives and a methodological toolkit that lends itself to the interrogation of new forms of structural racism and to unmasking the hidden

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<sup>22</sup> Wade rightly gives credit to sociologists for advancing studies of "race" and creating a new field of 'race relations' in the post-war period, and until "race made something of a comeback in anthropology" in the 1990s (2002:3). The observant reader will note the disciplinary domination during this period in the bibliography for this work.

transcripts of the process through which difference is transformed into inequality” (2006:3). Clarke and Thomas have issued a similar call for anthropologists to undertake “historically grounded, multileveled ethnographic and critical research” that promotes the “development of an analytic that makes central the relationships between institutional practices and racial ideologies” (2006:9). In her own effort to develop a critical theorization of the capitalist state, Brown notes that, “[i]n the US context, as well as that of other colonial or slave-based political economies, state power is inevitably racialized ... But the white supremacist nature of contemporary state power – the specific mores and mechanisms through which state power is systematically rather than incidentally racist – are only beginning to be theorized by scholars investigating the inscription of race and race supremacy in political power ...” (2006:194). Brown continues on to stress that, “while the racialized, gendered and class elements of state power are mutually constitutive as well as contradictory, the specific ways in which the state is racialized are distinctive (ibid)”, and are therefore of particular importance and accessibility to researchers. The second intention of this research is thus to examine critically the socio-economic and political meanings of “race” and racial identities through research into the operations of state-funded institutions mandated with alleviating the impact of systemic racism within a multicultural nation with an ongoing colonial history.

## **Responses**

Within the literature an important distinction has been drawn between “traditional” ethnography and “new” ethnographic methods (Madison 2005; Berg 2009; Hennink *et al* 2011). While ethnography has traditionally referred to the immersion of anthropologists in remote and foreign communities until the line between *emic* and *etic* becomes indistinguishable – one need only think here of the classic fieldwork of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown – Berg notes the emergence “over the past 40 years” of “a quiet revolution, resulting in a *new ethnography*” that is decidedly more focused and critical in its approach (2009: 192). According to Berg, what some<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See Madison, 2005.

have termed “critical ethnography *is* conventional ethnography, but with a clear political purpose, and which intentionally seeks positive change and empowerment for participants” (2009:199). Further, and in recognition of the continuing evolution of the term and approaches to ethnographic methods being made by a wide range of academic disciplines, Berg notes the emergence of a more directed form of ethnography “focuse[d] on particular *incisions* at particular points in the larger setting, group, or institution” rather than on describing a culture’s “entire way of life” (2009: 193). What’s more, this *microethnographic* method of analysis is seen as being focused “more directly on the face-to-face interactions of members of the group or institution under investigation. By examining these interactions, their implications (or as Mehan [1978] suggests, their *outcomes*) can be considered” (Berg, 2009: 194). I have found Berg’s articulation of this *decisive and incisive* form of ethnography a useful framework for this project.

However, I have also attempted to heed the caution offered by Trew that “each ethnography is a creation, a text which presents a particular sequence and view of events ... at best, an ethnographic account is only a part of the story, a partial truth” (Trew, 2009:40-41). Recognition of my own dominant position as final authority of this text is thus an important reminder that I can make no claim to speak on behalf or in harmony with the participants thereof. As noted in near testimonial fashion by Trew:

“I am, whether or not I wish it, the monologic authority in this text: I have chosen the very selective focus of the research material from the earliest days of the interviewing process; I have analyzed the research material with particular goals in mind; and I have selected and contextualized the informants’ narrative segments which appear throughout the text. There is also a reflexive dimension in the telling which I make no attempt to hide or deny. This research experience was very much about me, about my interactions and relationships with others, and about my own self-perceptions” (2009:43).

## Design

This research undertook three tasks. The first was to conduct a separate literature review of the historical depiction of Black and/or African migration to Nova Scotia with an eye to understanding the historic diversity of not just the provincial population, but that of specifically “the Black community” and the socio-political formation thereof over time and in place. This historical contextualization (see chapter 5) provides a clearer understanding of the different experiences of each migratory ‘wave’ of Blacks and/or Africans to Nova Scotia, their experiences and relations with the majority White population, *and each other*. This critical re-reading of the historical record details the means by which African Nova Scotians were forged as a community through repeated acts of resistance and lends historical and political context to the contemporary assertions of identity made by participants in Nova Scotia. This task addressed one of the primary research goals of this project; namely understanding the initial formation of the historic community in Nova Scotia asserting indigenous Blackness.

The second task was to speak to differently self-identifying members of ‘the African Nova Scotian community’ and representatives of Black-directed organizations about the intended and perceived meanings of their “Black” and/or “African” identities in relation to access to the Black Business Initiative<sup>24</sup>. A combination of non-random sampling techniques was used to locate participants for this study. Approximately two dozen Black entrepreneurs and professionals highlighted as “success stories” were selected from the BBI publication *Black 2 Business* based on the simple characteristic that their business information contained valid electronic contact information. Of the 23 individuals contacted and invited to participate in this research based on this criteria, six agreed to do so. The remaining 30 participants were located through snowball sampling (i.e. recommendations by early participants

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<sup>24</sup> This, at least, was the plan before I arrived in Halifax. Once in the city it soon became clear that the BBI was but one of an entire community of Black-directed organizations borne of the BLAC Report (see chapters 1 and 2) and with a mandate to alleviate the socio-economic marginalization of African Nova Scotians. However, spatial limitations have dictated that this thesis remain focused solely on the BBI and the meaning of self-identification to clients *of such organizations*. Further, a singular focus on the BBI also provides for insight into the strictly economic operations and ideologies at play in Nova Scotia.

and personal contacts in ‘the Black community.’ These non-BBI client participants consisted of BBI staff (10), academics (4), professionals (4), religious and political leaders (4), and members of Black/African directed organizations and services in the Halifax Regional Municipality (8). Participants were almost evenly divided along gender lines (19 men and 17 women), as well as between indigenous Black (14) and first-generation immigrants (14). The remaining participants were at least second-generation African Nova Scotians (8), but made no claim of connection to the historic African Nova Scotian communities identified in chapter 5. All but one participant was considered “Black” or “African” through this research, despite the self-identification of a few participants as variations of “Brown.” Further, while class and generational differences are mentioned as possible sources of division in chapters 6 and 7, personal information concerning income and age were not systematically collected from participants and thus can not be itemized accurately here. As noted earlier, the central concern of this ethnographic research is the relationship between self-identification as either “Black” or “African” and perceptions of legitimacy of access to the BBI. Lastly, only one third of the interviews conducted are cited within this thesis. However, those interviews (and therefore participants) not quoted directly have made invaluable contributions to my understanding of social relations in Nova Scotia, what it means to be a member of ‘the African Nova Scotian community,’ and the importance of “getting it right” with such organizations as the Black Business Initiative.

Informed of the importance of terminology within ‘the community,’<sup>25</sup> a traditional scripted and structured interview style was discarded in favour of a more

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<sup>25</sup> A personal friend in Halifax served as inspiration and one of two key informants for this research project. Perhaps ironically, considering the fact that my father’s family is indigenous Black from the Annapolis Valley in Nova Scotia, I had never heard the term before attending a family wedding in Cape Breton in 2010. Seated during a lovely reception dinner on the banks of the Atlantic Ocean with my then wife at what we laughingly labeled the “Brown” table with another couple of colour, introductions quickly turned to discussions of our respective professions. Upon learning of my interest to continue on to graduate studies in anthropology with an interest in a critical race approach (at the time I was entering the final year of my bachelor’s degree), my new friend uttered a string of words which have changed the course of my life: “Oh yeah, well you’ll love this then. I work for the Black Business Initiative in Halifax. You should come out and see what we do. I think you’d find it interesting.” This project is borne of the conversation that immediately ensued and the flurry of questions that sprung to mind from that brief invitation. What is the Black Business Initiative? How

conversational format consisting of topics of discussion similar to that utilized by Duncan<sup>26</sup> in her ethnographic examination into Spiritual Baptists in Toronto (2008). In practice this meant that the 36 participants interviewed for this study were not all asked the same questions. Rather, I began each interview with an unscripted general overview of the research project and its major interests:

- The meaning of “Black” and “African” as terminologies of identity;
- The difference, if any, between “Black” and “African” experiences in Nova Scotia;
- The meaning of an “indigenous Black” identity, and who *should* be included in this collective;
- The motivation for the creation of the Black Business Initiative, and other Black- or African-directed organizations;
- Personal and ‘community’ perceptions of the BBI and other Black-directed organizations;
- The personal histories of each participant and that of their families in Nova Scotia (i.e. interviewees were asked to ‘tell their story,’ whatever they understood that to mean).

Each interview was prefaced by an unscripted introduction of my own story<sup>27</sup>. This tended to include my biracial heritage, status as a graduate student in Anthropology

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do you determine who is ‘Black’ in Nova Scotia? What do you mean ‘indigenous’ Blacks? The latter question has been a regular theme of our discussions since that auspicious dinner and my friend’s observations of frequent and often tense discussions in Halifax over who was and was not indigenous informed much of my initial designs for this research, particularly my chosen interview method. I am eternally indebted to my friend for her invitation and assistance throughout this project and wish here to formally thank and acknowledge her as one of its primary architects.

<sup>26</sup> Duncan justifies her choice of a conversational interview style as appropriately “sensitive to orality and its intersection with literary modes of expression” within Black cultural traditions (2008:3). While I am in complete agreement with her reasoning and identification of said traditions, it would be misleading to represent my own decision as being based on such considerations. My intention was to participate in an ongoing dialogue amongst African Nova Scotians through as informal means as possible. As stated frequently to participants, my belief was that discussions on being Black – and who was under the mistaken impression that they belonged to this community – were something “most of us have around the dinner table all the time.”

<sup>27</sup> This served largely as my means of establishing rapport with participants and quickly became an automatic way of marking the ‘official beginning’ of each interview. By this I mean that introducing myself and my project (upon the insistence of my initial interviewees and intentionally thereafter), in tandem with the presentation of the mandatory consent form, performed the role of icebreaker and

at the University of Ottawa, marital status, and familiarity with Nova Scotia. Regrettably, and for reasons that I am unable to recall (if they were ever firmly established in the first place), this personal introduction was uniformly performed while participants reviewed the consent form before an interview “began,” and was thus not captured as part of the audio recordings of each interview. Participant were therefore told that my grandparents are members of the historic African Nova Scotian community (my grandfather is from Windsor and my grandmother, Liverpool) and that my father was born and partially raised in Middleton before the family moved out of province due to my grandfather’s lifelong membership in the armed forces. Participants were also told that my mother is White, grew up in the Ottawa Valley, and that her parents were of English and Swedish ancestry. My biraciality was of particular interest and usefulness. In fact, my body had already spoken volumes about me before I ever opened my mouth to mention my name or academic credentials (see Cerwonka and Malkki 2007). Participants frequently assumed and commented on my biraciality, asked after ‘my peoples’ and (not if, but) where in Nova Scotia were they/we from, and if I had been to the province before. Thus, while I cannot comment on what it would have been like to conduct this research project in another body (borne of people from another “place”), the fact of my body, origins, and history were tools in my pursuit of knowledge and understanding of my participants and their lives<sup>28</sup>; my body interacted with the conversations at hand, opened doors to participants themselves, and provided comfort and familiarity to both researcher and participant on the topic being discussed (Duncan, 2008). Participants not only frequently noted my biraciality, but often referred to, pointed to, or touched my skin and used its hue to demark boundaries of ‘Black,’ ‘mixed,’ ‘light,’ ‘dark,’ ‘like you’ when speaking of themselves, relatives, specific places in the province, and questions of identity in general. Thus, as noted by Cerwonka and Malkki, the embodied researcher is inseparable from the

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provided both researcher and participant a few moments to ‘feel each other out’ before launching into a discussion of sensitive and often traumatic experiences of racialization and outright racism.

<sup>28</sup> Venson III & Restall’s *Black Mexico* contains an insightful contribution to this discussion by juxtaposing chapters from Laura A. Lewis and Bobby Vaughn detailing their respective impressions of the ways in which their racial identities (Lewis is White, Vaughn is Black) impacted their reception and acceptance into Black communities as (insider vs. ally) researchers in Mexico.

process of knowledge production and understanding called fieldwork (2007). Having been physically and culturally read in this manner, I am in complete agreement with Cerwonka on the need to think “more about how the body of the researcher is a landscape for analytical insight about various issues as well” (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007:35).

The third task of this research was participant observation. To this end, and when not bicycling up and down the hills of Halifax from one interview to another on my sturdy second-hand means of transportation or visiting BBI’s offices in the Downtown, I attended ‘community’ activities. This included attending a charity golf tournament put on by the BBI’s Business is Jammin’ youth initiative outside North Preston, a guest lecture at Dalhousie University, a panel discussion at the Mi’kmaq Friendship Centre in the North End of Halifax, an annual conference of the Black Educator’s Association in Dartmouth, Sunday service at the Cornwallis Street (African United) Baptist Church, and a public commemoration of the late, renowned, and beloved activist, Burnlee “Rocky” Jones (also on the Dalhousie University campus). There were also countless social gatherings (dinners, drinks, house parties) with community members, participants and family. I knew these efforts had been noticed positively when a participant tapped me on the shoulder outside Jones’ memorial, spun me around and engulfed me in a big hug. “Well look at you, Shawn!” she said. “You’re everywhere! How do you know about all these events?” Laughing over the regularity with which we were beginning to see each other at community events, we hugged warmly. “It’s easy,” I said. “If I see more than three Black people somewhere I follow them and ask what’s going on.”

### **“Here”**

The earliest versions of this project made frequent note of the *uniqueness* of the African Nova Scotian community, its history, experiences, composition and cultural origins in justifying the case for an ethnographic examination of their assertion of an indigenous Black identity. Thus, the *specificity* of this community was initially presumed to be the fact of their historic, multigenerational presence in Canada as

Black Canadians (Mensah 2002). This understanding was routinely reinforced by participants in this study, who often questioned the apparent disconnect between ancestral heritage in Nova Scotia and continued denial of their belonging as Canadians. Quite frankly, this project was borne of my own similar and frequent experiences as a youth growing up in “the nation’s capital,” a space to which I was apparently denied belonging due to the ambiguous-and-yet-decidedly-not-“Canadian” hue of my skin. My earliest hopes for this project were that it could therefore serve as further documentation of Black and Brown as legitimate Canadian shades of identity. And yet, by focusing on the uniqueness and specificity of indigenous Blacks in Nova Scotia I seemed to be only further cataloguing the exceptionality of this community from the Canadian majority. Even amongst Black and/or African Canadians, as Kymlicka (2001, see chapter 2) has so forcefully attested, such historic presence as that of the few scattered Black communities across Canada is routinely derided as statistically insignificant, while simultaneously attesting to the benevolence of Canadian multiculturalism.

And yet, time and again participants were emphatic in their claims of being *born here, from here*, having *never left here* or having *never been anywhere else but here!* So the question became, where is “here”? Certainly, “here” was used, in one sense at least, in reference to Canada, or rather the speaker’s belonging to Canada and entitlement to recognition as Canadian. But people don’t live in “Canada;” they live in cities, towns, villages, and neighbourhoods, and in some cases, provinces. Certainly, for participants of this research project “here” meant Nova Scotia. “Things are just different here, man. Nova Scotia is a crazy place,” Marcus told me over a pint within a private, confessional-style booth at the Irish pub in central Halifax to which I often retreated after conducting an interview with BBI staff. However, despite the fact that nearly every self-identified indigenous Black interviewed for this research mentioned the uniqueness and specificity of Nova Scotia, few if any seemed to be talking about the province itself, as found on a map, or as a destination. Rather, participants described “Nova Scotia” *as experience*, as event, as actor with specific characteristics, attitudes, and proclivities. “Nova Scotia” was an intimate *relationship*. Nova Scotia had to be *understood* (Brown, 2005). “Nova Scotia” was the unique,

specific, location within which “indigenous Blacks” created and contested meaning of their identity and belonging. I had simply not understood the ways in which Nova Scotia was the “place” to be. A full discussion of the theorization of this component of my research is contained in chapter 3.

In short, participant transcripts have been analyzed using “place” as a tool of measurement and meaning-making with the goal of gaining insight into the ways in which “Nova Scotia” as both “place” and “self” (Brown 2005) is used to determine who is “Black” and who is “African,” and to provide meaning to such identities and difference. On the most basic level, participant interviews were read with an understanding that “individual or collective history is inextricably linked with experience of place. Identity then, is contingent upon history and place” (Trew, 2009:31). Analysis, on the other hand, undertook the more ambitious task, as asked by Brown, of attempting to understand “why and to what effect” a particular group of historical actors might be moved to make place serve as basis for, symbol and justification for their Blackness and national belonging. The beginnings of an answer can be found in Trew’s observation that:

“Places are not merely physical but are also cultural, historical and psychical – they can be imagined. The power of place is such that it can gather and hold experiences, languages, histories and thoughts ... And just as people are emplaced, culture is enacted through the actions of the body in place. Since local knowledge (e.g.) culture is situated in a very particular place, perception of that place, which can only occur experientially through the body, is basic to ‘knowing’ local knowledge” (Trew, 2009:31).

### **Dialogism**

A single caveat to the statement of ownership cited above from Trew must be made in recognition of “the dialogic context in which the ideas emerged” throughout the period of fieldwork (Duncan, 2008:18-19). Certainly, ethnographic research is a give-and-take, back-and-forth relationship between research and participant. However, and while Duncan does not cite Mikhael Bakhtin in her brief usage of the term, the Russian literary critic’s theorizations of *dialogism* and *heteroglossia*

advance a complex understanding of such exchanges of information and opinion and the role of language in this process. Yelvington describes Bakhtin's contribution as drawing a "distinction between analogism and dialogism, between meaning as fixed and meaning as the expression of heteroglossia, contestation, negotiation, and multiple, diverse contexts and voices" (2006:5). For example, chapter 2 has demonstrated the various processes of colonization through which "indigenous" and "African" acquired specific and oppositional meanings and geographic affiliations (Anderson, 2009; Lee, 2010; Wade, 1993, 1997, 2002). Anderson's opening line of *Black and Indigenous* makes abundantly clear this history and his own intentions for his work: "The earliest reference to the word 'indigenous' recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* juxtaposes indigeniety with blackness" (Anderson, 2009:1). In a chapter devoted to African-American interpretations of the Russian literary-cum-social critic, Peterson sees Bakhtin's *utterance* (renamed 'articulation') as "a primary act of cultural intervention, but it inserts itself into a prevailing discourse; it orients itself toward an anticipated respondent" (1995:91). Thus, for Ferguson the most salient aspect of Bakhtin's work is the view of utterances as "sites of social contestation" (ibid). Gardiner provides a plain-language example of dialogism within daily interaction by noting the ways in which "Our speech is continually criss-crossed with references to other's speech: 'Everybody says...', 'she or he said...', 'I heard...', 'This book I read said...', and so on" (1992:38). With respect to the assertion of an indigenous Black identity, participants routinely couched their utterances in such acknowledgement of others' words, works and writings. Madden's work (2009) was frequently mentioned as having challenged the community's use of "indigenous," and yet its continued assertion was also frequently expressed as "meaning no disrespect" to the Mi'kmaq. The self-identification as indigenous Black is intentional and intended to perform specified tasks. In the words of Bakhtin himself,

“As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot<sup>29</sup> opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own ... Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one’s own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process” (1981:293-294).

This research has therefore adopted a Bakhtian approach to the analysis of participant transcripts, one which views “discourse and consciousness [as] dialogic, that is, inherently interactive, responding to prior context but constantly generating new meanings” (Yelvington, 2006:5). This Bakhtinian reading of participants’ *utterances* therefore gave birth to the overall structure of this work as a *dialogue* between researcher, participants, historical events and past representations, critiques of the community, and readers. As the reader will note, significant tracts of participant transcripts are used throughout the remaining chapters. This is intended not as justification for the direction and content of said texts, but rather as explanation of how participants interacted with previous expressions or experiences concerning their community. Lastly, and while participants were predominantly interviewed individually (with a few noted exceptions), tracts of their respective transcripts have been juxtaposed under two broad themes (which are then broken up further with subheadings for clarity) in the hopes of conveying the complexity and heterogeneity of participants’ opinions, ideas and experiences. Thus, while Trew feels she can “make no claim to a dialogical or multivocal position” in light of her position as sole determinant of the ethnography presented (2009:43), this research

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<sup>29</sup> Holquist provides a useful explanation of heteroglossia as the set of governing conditions – “social, historical, meteorological, physiological” – that give a word its specific meaning at a particular moment in time and space (Bakhtin, 1981:428).

has a very different understanding of the meaning of the inherent dialogic and the ways in which “all texts talk back” (Mandelker, 1995:2).

### **Summary**

Borne of a critical reflection of self as racialized researcher and excitement with my chosen discipline’s re-commitment to examinations of “race” and the politics of meaning with respect to “race” and racial identifications, this ethnographic research attempted to understand two basic questions. How did the Black Business Initiative come to be and for whom do competing groups within the diverse ‘African Nova Scotian community’ believe this organization is intended? With these questions in mind, the following chapters attempt to contextualize the formation of an historic African Nova Scotian community, understand the relationship between this historic community’s experiences in/with Nova Scotia and the establishment of a BBI, gain insights into the contemporary usage of diverse racial identities by both Black/African communities and organizations, and understand the motivations behind – and tensions over – the controversial assertion of a place-based racial identity (i.e. indigenous Black).

## A Complicated History

*Researcher: I'm from Ottawa. I don't remember the last time I said I was Ontarian. I really don't ... Everyone here, I'm so Scotian. Right? What's that about?*

*Marcus: It's strange, man, when you think about that. Me and my girlfriend talked about this a couple months ago. The exact same way you just worded it. I said we're the only bunch of folks that just claim our province and, I guess, it's like a race. You know? It's weird because even though this is a small little spot down here, we're like, we just went out and expanded everywhere somehow, some for the good, some for the bad. Right? But I mean we went everywhere and there's not a place that don't seem like you can go and say I'm Scotian and they don't understand what the hell that means. It's weird because we're only this big [holds up left hand with thumb and index finger spaced a centimeter apart] down here, right? But I think a lot of that comes from the major Black settlers that came here, because we had so many of them that came here. Right? I don't think there was any other place in Canada that had them like we had them. So it's almost like a transformation. It just went from, I don't know, like it went from being freed slaves to being Black or African Canadian or whichever one to just being I'm a Scotian ... It's funny, but I used to always love giving people the story, because I told you I grew up in Toronto a little bit too, and I always loved giving people the story when they'd say, what's your background? Scotian. Yeah, but where are you from? I'd love to give them that little, just, two minutes of history. They'd be like, really?! Yeah, really. I never knew that, they'd say. Right? So I don't know if, maybe every Scotian told the story, or what the hell happened, but somehow it got out there that hey, there are Scotian Black. They're [shrugs] Scotian. It's funny. It's really funny.*

### **'Scotian roots'**

One of six current or former BBI clients that participated in this study, Marcus highlights the history of African settlement of Nova Scotia. In so doing, he points to the importance of this history, to both those who claim it and for those who have

never heard it. Accordingly, this chapter provides a historical account of African migration to Nova Scotia and the experiences of three diverse groups that became the African Nova Scotian community. It analyses three points emphasized within this community. The first concerns the primacy of the claim made by African Nova Scotians to their historic and expansive presence *on the land* through the adoption of a provincial, rather than national, identity over time. The second point concerns the “*transformation ... from being freed slaves to being Black or African Canadian or whichever one to just being I’m a Scotian.*” The third point concerns the well-documented question posed to many Black Canadians (perhaps, interestingly, outside of Nova Scotia) with respect to belonging – i.e. where are you from, really? (Ash, 2004).

Marcus states his opinion concisely, “*I don’t think there was any other place in Canada that had [Black settlers] like we had them.*” The uniqueness within Canada of African migration to Nova Scotia, in scale, breadth, and diversity, was a frequent assertion by participants. As noted in the previous chapter, Omi and Winant have argued for examinations of the specific *trajectory* of racial formations in place and through time. Marcus’ comments raise an important question – how (and why) did this transformation occur in Nova Scotia, but not elsewhere in Canada? Racial formation can help us examine this question more clearly by uncovering the social and political processes that shifted meanings of Blackness from slave-to-subject-to-citizen. What’s more, tensions over nomenclature within and between multiple Black communities are shown as a historical fact of Black life in Nova Scotia, reflecting class, ideology and origin differences.

However, in addition to raising the specter of the frequent equation Black ≠ Canadian, Marcus suggests that, perhaps, enough African Nova Scotians have told their story that “*there’s not a place that don’t seem like you can go and say I’m Scotian and they don’t understand what the hell that means.*” The important thing to note here not the veracity of the claim, but its speaker’s impression that the Scotian identity is both recognized and known for its uniqueness within the Canadian mosaic/imagination. Sadly, I did not think to ask Marcus if he believed this awareness of the Scotian community included Canadians in general or simply Black

Canadians. However, the claim itself speaks to the self-identification of Scotians as a significant community in Canada, and one with a unique story of settlement (rather than immigration) that challenges the national narrative of Canada as a historically White country.

In short, Marcus' comments make clear that the "Scotian" identity (read here as indigenous Black) has both spatial and temporal boundaries. Thus, the question is not simply whether one is 'from here' or 'from away,' but rather how long have 'your peoples' been a part of the struggle to belong in this place? Once again, as this research largely concerns contestation over the indigenous Black identity, considerable space has been devoted here to an examination of the historical formation of this uniquely Canadian community and its experiences in place over the past four centuries. What follows is a thematic and chronological overview of Black migration to Nova Scotia as a result of colonial conflict, before proceeding on to a discussion of slavery and racial discrimination against Blacks in (mostly) British North America over the centuries, and then concludes with an argument concerning the formation of an African Nova Scotian community through individual and collective resistance against the institutional structures and instances of racism.

### **The historical formation of a community**

Indigenous Blacks today speak of the formation of their community as having taken place through three separate waves<sup>30</sup> of African migration to Nova Scotia in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. These three groups (known as the Black Loyalists, Jamaican Maroons, and Black Refugees), while vastly different in composition, reception, and orientation, were each borne of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the broader colonial enterprise and conflict. Historians have played a key role in drawing further divisions between these three groups, frequently pitting one collectivity against the

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<sup>30</sup> Several participants in this study traced their origins to migrants who came in later waves from the Caribbean that are not discussed here. Sadly, this was a decision made in light of both the spatial/scope limitations of this project and the near-uniform depictions of indigenous participants and historical records kept by this community (see the Black Cultural Centre website). However, the considerable lack of attention paid to the sizeable community of Blacks in Nova Scotia of Caribbean origins not accounted for in the indigenous narrative is an area in dire need of further study.

other and assigning moral valuations of worth to some while castigating others. Winks is most explicit in his stratification of each group's virtues, or lack thereof:

“Unlike the Black Pioneers who were proud in their sense of Loyalism, and the Maroons who were crude but vigorous in their military unity, the Refugee Negroes were a disorganized, pathetic, and intimidated body who seemed unable to recover from their previous condition of servitude, their sudden voyage up the Atlantic to Nova Scotian shores, and their persistent lack of leaders. They unwittingly fanned the sparks of a more conscious, more organized, white racism than Nova Scotia had known, just as the last vestiges of slavery were passing” (1997:114).

Clarke is thus absolutely correct in his view that Winks' work, while remaining a valuable opus of historical data, must be seen as lacking entirely any analytical value in light the historian's “creepiest and subtlest – and supplest – forms of racist thinking” (2002:18n2).

The following pages detail the arrival of these three groups, their experiences in Nova Scotia, and coming together as a community now known as African Nova Scotians. However, once again it is necessary to acknowledge the presence and experiences of First Nations peoples as it relates to the discussion at hand. As Barrington Walker argues:

“early immigration in Canada was absolutely dependent upon the displacement and colonization of Canada's First Nations. Moreover, many of the racial attitudes that plagued Canadian society [during the period of early settlement] were forged in the crucible of early Native/non-Native relations, resulting in the dispossession of Aborigines, colonization, settlement, and a racially and ethnically exclusive project of nationhood and nation building that has strong reverberations in our own time” (2008:12).

### *Black Loyalists*

While acknowledging the presence of slavery (of both Africans and First Nations) north of what is now the United States for nearly two centuries before their arrival, Winks identifies the migration of Black Loyalists in 1783 as the “first really major influx of Negroes to the Maritimes area” (1997:28). There is some uncertainty in the historical record over how many Black Loyalists migrated to Nova Scotia at this time, sparked by the defeat of the British in the American Revolution. According to

Winks<sup>31</sup>, (1997:33) some “3000 free Negro migrants,” a figure which “did not include the Loyalists’ slaves or the few Negroes who left before mid-April” of said year, arrived in Nova Scotia in 1783. By all accounts, the majority of these Black Loyalists were free men, women, and children (J. Walker, 1992; Whitfield, 2005, 2006; Whitehead, 2013; Winks, 1997) from southern plantation-driven colonies such as North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Virginia.

However, many Black Loyalists had already left the United States much earlier than 1783, from East Florida, Boston and Jamaica (J. Walker, 1992; Whitehead, 2013). Indeed, J. Walker notes the first British offer of freedom to all indentured and enslaved Africans willing to side with the British was issued by Lord Dunmore, the Governor of Virginia, in 1775. Seen as more military tactic (20% of the colonial population in the American colonies were Africans) than abolitionist altruism, the slogan ‘Liberty to Slaves’ quickly “became a British slogan and *de facto* a British war policy” (1992:2). Taking into consideration these earlier migrations, Whitehead writes that, “more than four thousand black men, women, and children would come to Nova Scotia as a direct result of the American Revolution” (2013:vii). While providing no source for his figures, Whitfield claims that, by 1784, 3500 free Black Loyalists, alongside an additional 1232 slaves brought by White Loyalists, were present in Nova Scotia (2005:2).

The influx of United Empire Loyalists completely altered the landscape of Nova Scotia. Historians are in agreement that 30,000 Loyalists migrated to the province as a result of this conflict (B. Walker, 2008; J. Walker, 1992; Winks, 1997). While acknowledging contradictory and incomplete historical documentation pertaining to this group, James W. St. G. Walker emphasizes that, “among the 30,000 Loyalists who made their way to Nova Scotia, more than ten percent were free black men, women, and children” (1992:12). However, Barrington Walker puts a “conservative” estimate at 3,550, noting a total population in the province after the influx of 40,000 (2008:59). B. Walker provides detailed accounts of the precise locations of Black

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<sup>31</sup> Clarke, among others, has noted the fact that “though a treasure trove of information, reads, at times, like a compendium of racial slurs ... Time after time, Winks blames Blacks for White racism ... It would be unwise to grant Winks’ interpretations the same credibility that one must grant his facts” (2002:18n2).

settlement throughout the 1780s, including the all-Black towns of Birchtown (1521 individuals in 1784), Brindley Town (211 individuals in 1784), and Little Tracadie (172 individuals in 1787, to which 50 were added in 1788), as well as large concentrations of Blacks within the Loyalist towns of Chedabucto (350 individuals in 1785), Preston (300 individuals throughout the decade), Halifax (400 individuals throughout the decade), St. John (182 individuals in 1784), Shelburne (200 individuals in 1787), McNutt's Island (12 individuals in 1787), Liverpool (50 individuals in 1787), Annapolis (100 individuals throughout the decade), and unknown numbers across the rest of the province (2008:62n59). Thus, by the end of the 1780s, over a decade of Black Loyalist migrations accounted for nearly 10% of the provincial population and, in some areas at least, formed the demographic majority (Pachai and Bishop, 2006; J. Walker, 1992; B. Walker, 2008).

### *Jamaican Maroons*

The second wave of Black migration occurred in June of 1796, when some 556 Jamaican Maroons were forced off the Caribbean island and sent to Nova Scotia (Winks, 1997:80). Having waged more than a century of armed resistance against the British, the Maroons were a cohesive revolutionary force adamantly opposed to colonial (first Spanish and then British) rule. Winks notes that any potential solidarity with the Black Loyalists was quashed by the Maroons, who upon their arrival in Nova Scotia, "quickly let the local Negroes know that they despised all who had ever been slaves of the British" (1997:82). However, the Maroons instantly found favour with the new Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia, Sir John Wentworth, due to their military renown and "the color, the gaiety, and the energy that the Maroons brought to the colony" (ibid). Wishing to keep this fighting and potentially productive labour force together, Wentworth put the Maroons to work immediately on construction of the Citadel and duly settled them *en masse* outside Halifax, near Preston, and in Dartmouth. A small band of 60 Maroons that converted to Christianity shortly after their arrival were settled separately in Boydville (Winks, 1997).

Winks (1997) makes note of the vast difference in treatment received by the Maroons in relation to both the Loyalists and, later, Black Refugees, opining that the respect and dignity extended to the Jamaican exiles was due to their international notoriety as a ruthless fighting force (ironically, against the British). However, the observant reader will note considerable obstacles to Maroon settlement erected by the white population at large, as well as the majority of colonial administrators (of which Governor Wentworth is a noted, albeit complicated<sup>32</sup>, exception) within Winks' tome. Displeased with the Maroons for their religious beliefs, practice of polygamy, and prideful manner (Winks, 1997:83), "the majority of white settlers in Nova Scotia did not want [Sir John Wentworth, Lieutenant-Governor of Halifax] to find a solution to the Maroon problem at all; they wanted the Maroons removed" (Winks, 1997:85). The Maroons were also seen by colonial officials as being too costly to support in the province due to their unfamiliarity with the northern climate, agricultural practices and refusal to convert to Christianity. Additional insight into the public displeasure with the Maroons may be discerned from Wentworth's efforts to "combat prejudice" by offering the Maroons equal pay for equal tasks, whether as labourers on the Citadel or as servants in Government House (Winks, 1997:89).

While much attention is devoted to the various ways in which the Maroons were unsuited to Nova Scotian climate and agricultural practices (i.e. Halifax was too cold to grow yams and the Maroons had a dislike for footwear), Winks acknowledges that "nor was there anything voluntary about their presence" in the province (1997:). The Maroons had been exiled to the northern colony after more than a century of military resistance to colonial rule in Jamaica.

### *Black Refugees*

The third wave of significant African migration to Nova Scotia came once again from the United States due to war against the British. Interestingly, Whitehead postulates that the "rancorous argument over compensation for war-liberated slaves [following

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<sup>32</sup> Hamilton makes note of the sexual liberties colonial officials, including Wentworth, took with Maroon women, as well as the Governor's use of this group as his personal labour and fighting pool (1994).

the American Revolution] ... contributed to the bad feeling which brought about the War of 1812” (2013:142). Whatever role this lingering animosity played in the second conflict between these parties, Black flight behind British lines was sparked yet again when Sir Alexander Cochrane, commander of the fleet on the Atlantic Coast, proclaimed repeatedly in April 1814 that any and all persons would be welcomed into the British military or provided with free transportation to British territories of their choosing, “where they would ‘meet with all due encouragement’ as Free Settlers” (Winks 1997:114). Cochrane’s proclamations resulted in “3,601 slaves ... from Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, Louisiana, and Georgia” who fled captivity to become British subjects. Winks notes that “the majority of these, twenty-four hundred, came from the first two states, and the bulk of those, in turn – nearly two thousand – were taken to Nova Scotia” (ibid).

Landing in Halifax and Annapolis Royal, hundreds of Black Refugees were initially processed, housed and provided with medical treatment on Melville Island (formerly a prison) in 1815. Despite the wishes of the Black Refugees to be settled in Pictou County, where the land was believed to be more fertile and better for farming, “the blacks agreed to move only if nearly half of them were placed on the same location” (Winks, 1997:127). Seen as too great an expense, the Black Refugees for the most part remained in and around Halifax, with some in Preston and Dartmouth, while others formed a small community at the Bedford Basin that would become known (and gain infamy as an example of Canadian racism) as Africville. A settlement in Hammond’s Plain was established in late 1815, and would remain, until 1841, “the largest chiefly Negro town in Nova Scotia” (Winks, 1997:130). Smaller Refugee communities were also established throughout the Annapolis Valley, in Tracadie and Shubenacadie, Liverpool and Truro (ibid). Winks notes that the Refugees, “arrived at the worst of times. Cheap white labor was plentiful; sixteen thousand immigrants had come during the previous dozen years, and sixty thousand more were to pour into the province in the next twenty-five years (1997:125). The historian also lists a bevy of plagues of near-biblical proportions in the years following the Refugees’ arrival, from “the Year of the Mice” in 1815 to “the Year without a Summer” the following year. Both years were also noted for winters “unparalleled in their

severity" (ibid). The Refugees, it seems, had come to the province "to be free, to be frozen, and to starve" (Winks, 1997:127).

With this final wave of African migration into Nova Scotia, Winks emphasizes the significance of the moment, one in which, "for the first time, Negroes lived throughout Nova Scotia, and also for the first time they were broken into clearly identifiable groups" (1997:130). Black Loyalists, Maroons, and Black Refugees faced vastly different social and political landscapes upon their arrival in Nova Scotia. However, on the whole it can be said they also shared equal frustrations with respect to being denied the land promised to all Free British Subjects. As noted by J. Walker, "generally speaking, few blacks received any land at all, and when they did it was in smaller quantities than promised, contained some of the province's worst soil, and was often located so far from major settlements that establishing a viable farm upon it or even visit it was extremely difficult" (2008:49). Despite these overwhelming challenges, these early African Nova Scotians took root in the soil. According to the census of 1851, a total of 4,908 Black men and women were recorded, not including children all across the province (Pachai and Bishop, 2006:4).

### *Exodus*

To the three separate waves of Black migration into Nova Scotia over the 40-year period from 1774 to 1816 must be added three corresponding exoduses from the colony. The earliest and largest exodus was of Black Loyalists who departed Halifax for Sierra Leone on January 16, 1792, ten years after their arrival in Nova Scotia. This group consisted of "a flotilla of fifteen vessels ... with over 1,190 passengers;" just over one third of the Black Loyalists who first came to Nova Scotia (Winks, 1997:73). Nearly ten years later, in 1800, nearly all (approximately 500 of the 556 who arrived four years earlier) of the Jamaican Maroons boarded British ships and also set sail for Sierra Leone, having finally been granted their requests to leave the province. In an interesting twist of fate demonstrative of the colonial forces at play, the Maroons were immediately tasked with suppressing a revolt of Black Loyalists upon their arrival in the West African nation. The final group of Blacks to leave Nova

Scotia and search for a better life elsewhere consisted of a “tiny band” of 95 Refugees who set sail for Trinidad aboard the *William* on January 6, 1821 (Winks, 1997:123). All three exoduses from Nova Scotia were facilitated and encouraged by colonial administrators and the general population. Winks notes that repeated attempts were made to remove the Black Refugees from Nova Scotia, but that they consistently “professed to fear that this was a scheme to return them to slavery” (Winks, 1997:123). Hamilton (1994) notes that it was the Refugee women who made this refusal because they had not heard from any of the 95 Refugees who set out for Trinidad and thus believed them to have been re-enslaved. Of note here is not the Refugees’ suspicion of colonial administrators, for re-enslavement was a very real threat at this time, but their agency to determine whether they stayed in Nova Scotia or consented to transport elsewhere. British officials, as noted by Winks (1997) and Whitfield (2005, 2006), tried repeatedly to *convince* the Refugees to leave, to no avail. I turn now to a brief discussion of a much-denied reality of Black life in British North America, the institution of slavery.

### **The institutions of slavery**

Mensah (2002) provides a useful reminder that for many Canadians, Black, White, and otherwise, the existence of a robust and lengthy Black history in Canada remains a mystery. It is therefore necessary to state that the arrival of thousands of Black Loyalists in 1783 did not mark the introduction of slavery to Nova Scotia. Slavery had existed in New France and British North America since the start of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, albeit on a smaller scale than in the United States and Caribbean (Mensah, 2002). This fact is well documented (Bertley, 1977; Govia and Lewis, 1988; Henry, 1973; Mensah, 2002; Thomson, 1979; B. Walker, 2008; J. Walker, 1992; Pachai and Bishop, 2006; Whitfield, 2005, 2006; Winks, 1997), if still unknown by most Canadians (Bristow et al, 1994; Mensah, 2002). However, in reluctant recognition that I do not have the space to detail the breadth of this dreadful institution as it appeared in Canada, it will suffice for the purposes of this research to provide a brief glimpse into the presence and experiences of slavery in Nova Scotia. This minimal

effort must be made to both challenge the whitewashed national narratives of Canada as Anglo-Franco homeland and to acknowledge the bravery, perseverance and resolve of the thousands of Blacks – free and enslaved – who made the conscious choice to endure and insist upon their freedom here. In addition to the challenges faced by all ‘settlers’ on Mi’kma’ki, these free and enslaved men, women, and children were forced to endure racial oppression that is inconceivable to their descendants today.

Historians and scholars have pointed to Portuguese translator Mathieu da Costa, who arrived in Port Royale (now known as Annapolis Royal) alongside Samuel De Champlain in the early 1600s (Cooper, 2007; Hamilton, 1994; Mensah, 2002; Winks, 1997), although there is some question as to the exact date of da Costa’s arrival and his status. Da Costa was known for his knowledge of the Mi’kmaq language – a fact that has led many to believe he must have been to the British territory before his arrival sometime between 1604 and 1608 (Saney, 1998; Pachai and Bishop, 2006) – and is widely seen as the earliest Black presence in Canada. However, Winks convenes *The Blacks in Canada* with a now-famous quote, uttered by a young African named Olivier Le Jeune: “You say that by baptism I shall be like you: I am black and you are white, I must have my skin taken off then in order to be like you” (Winks, 1997:1). This defiant assertion, and the youth from who’s mouth it came, is mentioned as the first documented instance of an individual taken “directly from Africa [Madagascar], to have been sold as a slave in New France, and apparently to have died a free man” (Winks, 1997:2). However, Le Jeune’s brave words also signal the earliest documented assertion of Black consciousness, defiance, and resistance in Canada and rightly stand alongside the all-too-few instances mentioned here.

Whitfield notes a similar moment nearly two centuries later, but one in which the challenge to universality has taken new form. “In 1818, after fighting with local whites at her farm, Refugee Maria Fuller defiantly informed her adversaries that ‘we are not now in the U. States [sic], and we can do as we like here’” in Nova Scotia (2006:6). One can imagine the emphasis with which Ms. Fuller uttered the word “here;” it is an emphasis that many of the participants in this study used themselves when describing their self-identification as being grounded in the fact of their

historic presence *here*, in Nova Scotia, in Canada, in North America. Whitfield sees this notion of 'here' as delineating the border with the United States, opining that, "Fuller regarded British North America as offering her greater opportunities for social protest than did the United States" (2006:6). But Whitfield's interpretation is too simple, too superficial, too academic. *Here*, as spoken by Fuller and the participants in this study, can also be seen as testament to an individual's embodied connection to a specific location. It is through this powerful, emotional, and embodied sense of the seemingly innocuous 'here' that we can see parallels between the brave Ms. Fuller and African-American icon Harriet Tubman, who in response to (White and Black) attempts in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to repatriate Blacks to Africa, said, "they can't do it; we're rooted here, and they can't pull us up" (Bristow et al, 1994:9). *We're rooted here*. Just like the garden vegetables evoked by Harriet Tubman as metaphor for Black belonging *not on, but in* American soil, Maria Fuller locates her freedom *as British subject* to her being rooted *in Nova Scotian soil*. In both acts of defiance by Black women of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the assertion of presence on and connection to the land is striking in light of the continued practice of slavery and racial discrimination in both societies. This prevalence of *here* and its opposite *away* will be explored further in chapter 6.

Bristow et al. (1994) pay homage to Tubman's words by naming their powerful feminist account of African Canadian women throughout Canadian history *We're Rooted Here*. In an essay contained within this work, Sylvia Hamilton provides a truly enlightening depiction of the early days of Black life in Nova Scotia. Tracing the presence of African slaves in the province to 1686, the prominent Scotian scholar notes the use of slave labour in the construction of Halifax through an advertisement in Boston's *Evening Post* in 1751, concerning the sale of ten slaves formerly put to this task (Hamilton, 1994:15). Sixteen years later, a provincial census recorded "104 people of African descent, spread throughout 12 of the 30 townships surveyed," the majority of whom lived in or around Halifax (ibid). Hamilton assumes these 104 individuals to be slaves, but Whitfield is explicit that the 1767 census "certainly excluded the slave population" (2006:16). Mensah states that by 1776, approximately 500 African slaves were present in the province, having been brought

when New Englanders loyal to the British migrated north following the expulsion of Acadian communities (Mensah, 2002:46). According to Whitfield, “English and American colonists brought a small number of slaves up the coast from the French and British West Indies to Cape Breton and mainland Nova Scotia, slowly increasing Nova Scotia’s black population” in the two centuries leading up to the war of 1812 (2006:9). Unfortunately, Whitfield discounts the scale of the historic presence in 1767 rather than recognizing the ways in which this diverse Black presence nearly a century before Confederation complicates the common Canadian understanding of colonial society at this time.

Hamilton also relates the astounding stories of several Black women who took their ‘masters’ to court to fight for their freedom or that of their children. Included among these women, rightfully described as “bold and decisive despite their official status as powerless slaves,” were: Mary Postell, who took Jesse Gray to court for stealing her children in 1791; Molly (no last name is provided), who also took Gray to court to gain her freedom; and Susannah Connor, who took John Harris to court to regain custody of her son (Hamilton, 1994:23). Sadly, only Connor was successful in her legal battle. However, the mere fact these three women (among countless others, to be sure) had the strength and resolve (not to mention possibility) to enter “an arena that white men normally dominated and controlled” (ibid) boggles the 21<sup>st</sup> century understanding of the institution of slavery and clearly challenges the Canadian narrative of British North America as refuge from said horrors.

Slavery was officially abolished throughout the British Empire in 1834, although this frequently took several additional years to realize in the colonies. However, according to Winks, “the last known private advertisements for slaves appeared in Halifax in 1820” (1997:110). Thus, while the arrival of Loyalists instantly saw the number of African slaves in the province rise to their highest levels, these numbers were not sustainable and quickly marked the final stages of the institution’s end. Having said this, Whitehead rightly notes that, despite the often-told narrative in Canada, “it is only *after* [the British abolition of slavery in 1834] that what we now know as Canada became a haven for escaped slaves from the United States”

(2013:179). Up until this date slavery was considered a perfectly legitimate, morally appropriate, and legally (as well as religiously) sanctioned institution.

### **The historical record ... skips**

The assertion of Black presence and diversity of Black experiences in place are important components of Canadian history and are key to any examination of contemporary Black identities. However, the historical representation of early African migrants to Canada has been far from equal:

“The Maroons and Loyalists were portrayed as brave agents who made their own history. Both groups had fought against institutions of slavery, had attempted to settle in Nova Scotia, and had abandoned the colony in protest against their treatment by the government and the local white population. Of course, the majority of Black Loyalists remained in Nova Scotia, but historians and other scholars have focused more on the exodus” (Whitfield, 2005:5).

The Black Refugees of 1813-1816 are depicted, most notably by Robin Winks, as “a disorganized, pathetic, and intimidated body who seemed unable to recover from their previous condition of servitude” (1997:114). A curious distinction was also drawn between Black Loyalist and Refugee when it comes to the former’s expectation of “the same benefits that a grateful King gave to his white subjects,” what we now refer to as the rights of citizenship (Winks, 1997:35). Rather inexplicably, Winks, as well as J. Walker (1992, 2008), view the perceived ideals of the promise of freedom as exclusively Loyalist traits. Walker is most certainly correct in his assertion that “The passage to Nova Scotia was therefore regarded not merely as an escape from slavery, but as an entry into a new world where the dignity and independence that came of equal citizenship were to be his” (2008:49). However, the same should be said of the Maroons and Black Refugees. Parallels to such instances of cultural defamation are also to be found in Henry’s (1973) examination of the African Nova Scotian population in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as Clarke has noted repeatedly (1991, 2002).

This discrepancy has a lasting legacy and is of particular importance, as the most negative depictions by historians have been leveled at the Black Refugees, from

which most African Nova Scotians today are descended (Hamilton, 1994; Walker, J., 1992, 2008; Whitfield, 2005, 2006; Winks, 1997). Whitfield has made considerable effort to correct this unjust historical record and offers a well-researched work that itemizes the many ways in which Black Refugees “rejected the notion that to be British one had to be White ... Refugees and their descendants engaged in a constant struggle to claim the rights of citizenship in Nova Scotia, while supporting black freedom struggles in the United States and elsewhere” (2006:115). Bristow *et al.* (1994), Pachai and Bishop (2006), and Whitehead (2013) are equally deserving of praise for their nuanced and contextualized accounts in which the experiences, impressions, and words of early African migrants are put front and centre.

Therefore, while it seems only logical that “free Negroes wished to stand apart from the enslaved” (Winks, 1997:35), it is important to remember that free, indentured, and enslaved Black Loyalists, Maroons, and Refugees lived a shared reality of being Black in a territory and society marked by the socio-economic tenets of slavery and social Darwinism. In other words, while Winks provides a class-based understanding of divisions within the African Nova Scotian community under formation at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it behooves the reader to recollect that Blacks of all status were denied promised plots of land, segregated to the most unwelcoming physical terrains in the province, suffered the (often violent) animosity of Whites, and frequently starved to death or died from exposure. Whitfield comes to the conclusion that, it is these very shared experiences – of struggle against segregation and colonial policies, to secure the land promised them and cultivate unfamiliar crops, to earn a living by any means necessary, and to form and maintain family and community ties in the process – that, “along with the quest for citizenship in Nova Scotia, transformed several slave identities into a cohesive and distinct African British North American community” (2006:2). Thus, it was the collective and individual decisions of Black Loyalists, Maroons, and Refugees to stay in Nova Scotia – despite all that meant – that marks the formation of an African Nova Scotian community (Whitehead, 2013; Whitfield, 2005, 2006).

The decisions to stay, to remain, to continue on and fight for their own inclusion and assertion as equal residents, subjects, and citizens are important components of the

modern day identity as indigenous Black. It is this community, forged through the painful experiences lived over multiple centuries by various and diverse groups which arrived in the province over a span of nearly two hundred years – but common in that they entail the experiences of being Black in this place – that is being claimed as indigeniety, not the oft-assumed notion of Aboriginality. As noted by several participants, the self-identification as indigenous Black is an assertion of *historic presence, perseverance and persistence*. Hence the at times near-palpable animosity detectable between this community and those labeled as Come From Away, seen by some indigenous Blacks as modern day poachers, arriving just in time to harvest the crops their families have toiled to cultivate from a barren landscape for generations. However, as seen in the preceding pages, such tensions within and between diverse Black communities are neither new nor a thing of the past – and nor are the global forces which continue to result in ongoing African migrations to the province that bring together very different peoples with very different experiences and senses of self.

### **Summary**

The preceding chapter stands in rebuttal to the overly simplistic critique leveled by Madden (2009) that Black migrants to Nova Scotia were as much “settlers” as their White counterparts in the eyes of the original Mi’kmaq stewards of the land. As noted by Anderson (2009) earlier, the concept of indigeniety is much more complex than Madden’s articulation. Anderson’s argument has been adopted here as reminder that the social and cultural categories “Indian” and “African” are themselves leftover colonial constructs, as are the lingering biologically determinant meanings still attached to these two fundamentally North American racialized communities. Recognition of this social fact therefore allows for a more complex and critical understanding of indigeniety as an experience of oppression justified through ideological notions of White supremacy as part of the multilevel processes of economic and political domination now known as colonialism. Anderson’s citation from the Oxford English Dictionary defining indigenous as “born or produced

*naturally* in a land or region; native or belonging *naturally* to (the soil, region, etc.) (Used primarily of aboriginal inhabitants or *natural products*)” (2009:14, emphasis added) makes the continued reliance on essentialist notions of identity clear as day. It is our job as academics to problematize and contextualize such social processes. The following chapter thus examines the motivations and intentions behind African Nova Scotian assertions of indigeniety in negotiations over access to the BBI.

## A family meeting

As noted in previous chapters, understanding the intentions behind the assertion of an indigenous Black identity is one of the key goals of this ethnography. The public assertion of ethnic or cultural identities has typically been presented in academic discourses as demands for recognition within a vertical relationship between the state and minority groups. While desire for official recognition of a historic Black presence is certainly observable within the indigenous Black identity, state recognition of this historic Canadian community as a distinct people – *à la* Québécois sovereignty movement – is not. Rather, this research is more interested in the ways in which lateral tensions (a component of which concerns mutual demands for recognition and belonging) between the indigenous Black community and more recent immigrants of African descent centre on the unique community of Black/African-directed organizations in the province. However, internal tensions also exist within the indigenous Black community and, while frequently performed as competing class positions and ideologies, also make explicit this community's cultural reference to "Nova Scotia" as experience of racial discrimination, marginalization, and struggle for survival. Thus, for indigenous Blacks, the assertion of their historic presence draws a distinction between themselves and "African" and "West Indian" communities in light of the ambiguous identification of state resources as being intended for the "Black" and "African" Nova Scotian community. It is therefore competition over access to the Black Business Initiative, seen as recognition of both Black belonging and experience in "Nova Scotia," that produces an *articulation* of Black indigeniety based on a historically grounded *positioning* of who is "Black" and who is "African."

### **Rooted in place**

First and foremost, the acknowledgement of First Nations as the original peoples of Turtle Island must be made in any discussion of indigeniety in Canada. Each and every self-identifying indigenous Black made such an acknowledgement as either

preface or explanation of their usage of the term. Thus, the articulation of Black indigeniety – despite Clarke’s personal self-identification as Black Métis (2011, 2012), several participants’ statement of a distant Mi’kmaq relation, and Madden’s (2009) reading of this assertion as erasure of Mi’kma’ki and establishment of a hierarchy of Blackness in Canada – is not a claim of aboriginality.

Christopher and Marcus draw the boundaries of what it means to be indigenous temporally and spatially. To be sure, their identity is a matter of time, but time spent in a specific place. Hence, both men make reference to their belonging to Nova Scotia, not Canada. This claim to a provincial identity should also thus be seen as a statement of presence pre-dating Canada. Directly related to this claim is the experience of enduring inequality between the indigenous Black community and majority society. As noted by Christopher, despite centuries of presence in Nova Scotia his community is not found in the upper socio-economic positions that one would traditionally expect for such long-established communities within a settler society. What’s more, numerous non-racialized immigrant communities have arrived over the past century and been able to achieve levels of success largely unattainable for indigenous Blacks, as well as Black and African immigrants. The simplest explanation for this lingering marginalization, and therefore the most direct refutation of Madden’s (2009) charge, is that African Nova Scotians never received the state support for the cultivation, conquest, and claiming of the land granted to settlers, and thus can hardly be seen as belonging within this category. As noted in chapter 5, such support was not extended to early African migrants to the province in levels that could reasonably be deemed significant and intended to ensure their success. In fact quite the opposite was the case with many African Nova Scotians left entirely to fend for themselves, with all-too-frequently dire consequences. Indigeniety as articulated by this community thus refers to this systemic institutional marginalization within colonial confines.

*Christopher (indigenous Black, small-business owner, in his 50s): Hmmm. My personal understanding is that the term means that we are descendents of Nova Scotia and that, as far as one can look back, these are our roots. It can't be*

*disputed. We've been here a lot longer than most groups of peoples, but they seem to have a firmer leg-hold on, you know, in society than we do.*

*Marcus (indigenous Black, construction industry, in his 30s): It depends on how long before you consider you're indigenous. You know, because I mean where my dad's family's from in Sacville, it's called Maroon Hill, which was settled by the Maroons who came from Jamaica and helped build Citadel Hill. So, I imagine to go back far enough there you'd end up back in Jamaica, where no one knows you. I mean I guess we're indigenous when you consider you know 200 years, or 250 years or something of us being here.*

*R: Can you give me an idea of what that would mean to you then? Indigenous? Like is there a requirement, a time requirement? Is there a cultural requirement?*

*Marcus: If there is I don't know what it is because I just guess myself. My opinion of it would be that after 200 to 250 years you have to be indigenous by now. Right? I mean like if you go back far enough it is only the Natives that are actually indigenous to here, but that's you know, you're going back however many hundreds and hundreds of years. So I'd consider us to be indigenous Blacks ... Black. It's like, I don't know, after we spoke about, you know, I'm a fifth generation, sixth generation, whichever one it is, of being here. It's almost like I never hear anybody here ever use the term, unless they're trying to be somewhat politically correct, I never ever hear anybody use the African-Canadian thing. Never, ever, ever, ever. It's just like we're Black. That's just it, so that's how I'd identify myself and how I think I always have. So it's like I couldn't see me going with any of the others. It just doesn't, I don't know, it just doesn't seem to work because when we spoke about how long before you're just Scotian? You know what I mean? It's like, okay, I've been here for like 300 years. How much more time do I got to put in?*

Marcus speaks to the continued denial of belonging experienced by his community and their refusal to claim a foreign or hyphenated identity in light of their historic presence – and role in the literal construction of – Nova Scotia. His

community is Black, not African-Canadian, but his belonging to this place (i.e. “how much *more* time do I have to put in”) remains a question amongst the Canadian population at large.

However, in addition to recognition of these historic experiences of denial, indigenous Blacks want Black Caribbean and African immigrant communities specifically to acknowledge indigenous efforts – through protest, advocacy and multigenerational demands for the removal of explicit racial barriers – to make the latter’s arrival possible and for establishing the community of Black/African-directed organizations such as the BBI. This acknowledgment, according to Angela, is of the *primacy* of indigenous history, and therefore entitlement to said resources.

*Angela: Well, we expand [who is accepted as African Nova Scotian beyond those born in the province]. We do grandfather people like you [as noted earlier, my father was born in Nova Scotia and would be considered indigenous]. You know, people say, ‘Oh, you’re Scotian! What? You’re father’s from Nova Scotia?’ And I think that’s true of most cultures. That people extend that hand of, hey, one of your parents is from here so you’re one of us too. But in the context of those residing here there is that difference in terms of whether someone was, amongst ourselves, even in amongst our own little circle of different African-descended people, whether you’re born in the United States, if you were born in the Caribbean, if you were born on the continent, or Nova Scotia, is that even though we have that shared experience and that shared culture, that shared history, Nova Scotians seem to make a really, really big deal about our unique experience here ... But we do claim a status as almost analogous to – I don’t ever feel that in my experience as a person of a marginalized culture that in my relationships politically and personally around the table with First Nations people that they move me off the land. They don’t. You know, recognizing the similarities in our situation in the same way that we, as African Nova Scotians recognize a similarity in other African people. But there are times when it comes down to something where First Nations people do claim their right to say that, ‘We are the first people.’ We are the first people. And those of us who ... know the history*

*accept that humbly and step back and bow to that. And those people of African descent who recognize the unique history of Africans in Nova Scotia do the same.*

These three participants' comments frame this chapter's reading of Black indigeniety (expressed as African Nova Scotian by Angela) as consisting of three elements. First, indigenous Black refers to an *ancestral* connection to "*the land*" of Nova Scotia. Thus, I can be "grandfathered" into the community through my father's lineage. Second, and directly related to the first element, indigenous refers to the community's "*unique experience*" on the land. This emphasis on "place" *as experience* has been articulated in chapter 5. Third, "*there are times*" when Black indigeniety is asserted to claim *primary status* amongst "*our own little circle of different African-descended people.*" Thus, the distinction being made by indigenous Blacks from Africans and West Indians is for specific purposes at particular moments in time.

Clearly then, the indigenous Black identity can be interpreted through the traditional Barthian understanding of ethnic boundary making. Important to this research is Barth's observation that, "ethnic groups and their features are produced under particular interactional, historical, economic and political circumstances: they are highly situational, not primordial" (1994:12). However, Lamont and Fournier also note Bourdieu's significant influence in this area of study and the French sociologist's theorization of boundaries as predicated on a "logic of distinction" (2002). Related to this understanding is Bourdieu's emphasis on boundaries as not merely symbolic, but also political in nature as they "freeze a particular state of the social struggle, i.e. a given state of the distribution of advantages and obligations" (1984:477). It is this aspect of the predominantly social boundaries being drawn in Nova Scotia through symbolic means with which this research is concerned (Lamont and Fournier, 2002).

However, I have found the theorizations of *articulation* and *positioning* put forth by cultural theorist Stuart Hall to be most informative of the ethnographic findings of this research. As noted by Li in her own usage of these concepts to examine the calculated assertion of indigeniety by "tribal" groups in Indonesia, Hall's theories address "both the empirical and political dimensions" of such identity claims:

“In relation to the empirical question of how the tribal slot is defined and occupied, the concept of articulation usefully captures the duality of positioning which posits boundaries separating within from without, while simultaneously selecting the constellation of elements that characterize what lies within. Further, it suggests that the articulation (expression, enunciation) of collective identities, common positions, or shared interests must always be seen as provisional ... This feature renders any articulation complex, contestable, and subject to rearticulation ... [Concerning more political dimensions] Hall’s argument that identities are *a/ways* about becoming, as well as being, but are never simply invented, offers a way out of the impasse in which those who historicize the identities or traditions of “others” are accused of undermining subaltern political projects founded upon ordinary, perhaps essential truths ... At the same time, his attention to history and structure suggests a notion of agency quite different from that found in transactionalist accounts (e.g., Barth 1981)” (2000:152-153).

Hall’s work on the boundary making of cultural identity not only provides robust theoretical explanation of the ethnographic data collected through this work, but can also reinforce the conceptualization of indigeneity as condition argued by Anderson (2007), the specificity of “place” argued by Brown (2005), and the emphasis on historical processes of Othering and economic exploitation of African (as) labour that took place throughout the colonial period advocated by Wolf’s (1997) political economy approach. This theory can serve as common thread throughout this research in light of Hall’s decidedly Bakhtinian reading of articulation’s “double meaning” as both “to utter, to speak forth, to be articulate [and as] an ‘articulated’ lorry (truck) ... where the front (cab) and back (trailer) can, but need not necessarily, be connected to one another. The two parts are connected to each other, but through a specific linkage, that can be broken” (1996:141). What’s more, Hall’s foundation of articulation within historically situated process of social relation – i.e positioning – has been developed with Black experiences of colonialism and racialization in mind, and therefore contain community-specific applications relevant to participants’ explanations of themselves.

Erykah’s displeasure with the articulation of indigeneity by Blacks in Nova Scotia, much in line with the critique made by Madden, can therefore serve as a productive launching point for a deeper discussion of Hall’s theory.

*Erykah: I guess I will just put it right up front. I have an issue with the language that is used by the government and just by a lot of organizations and the average person as they walk around to define Black or African. The use of the word indigenous Black, I struggle with. I do. And I know it's a generally accepted term. I feel like language is not just a word that is spoken. Languages carry history and they have weight. When you speak about indigenous people, there are indigenous people to Canada and I feel like we take a bit, we take away from their history by using the word indigenous Black. And I think it confuses people. It really confuses people. You know I have had Black Nova Scotians, I call them Black Nova Scotians, African Nova Scotians, tell me that they can't trace their roots back to Africa. They are indigenous Black of Canada. Well, I would really like them to tell me when the indigenous Black people of Canada popped up from out of the earth and didn't trace their roots, really, either back to Jamaica or back to the States, and then maybe through the Caribbean, from the continent. Like it's something I, I think is very problematic with a group, with a group, they want to call themselves a group. I actually think it's multiple groups because now it's not just those people who came [from] Africa. We're talking about immigrants of this generation, immigrants of the last few generations. Like it's just, people who are coming from multiple places now. But if you are going to choose to identify yourself, you have to be able to do so in a way that allows people to, in a language that allows people to clearly understand who they are. It can be whatever you want it to be. I happen to disagree with what they chose. I'm sure that there was, I'm sure there was much thought into that decision. I just don't understand it and I'm not well read enough on why they chose to use that word<sup>33</sup> so it's something that I find interesting. As part of the immigrant community, I feel like the, also,*

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<sup>33</sup> None of the 35 participants interviewed through this research could identify the locus of the term indigenous Black. Several suggested it was possibly first mentioned sometime during the 1960s, as this was a highly active period of Black political movements on both sides of the Canadian border. Several participants also suggested the term, as stated above, was likely articulated in an effort to distinguish between established historic African Nova Scotian communities and an influx of labour from the Caribbean also during the 1960s. Interestingly, this was also a period in which the initial organizations of the now robust community of Black-directed institutions were being formed. As such, it is equally likely that the same competition over access to resources that fuel contemporary tensions over Black and African identities were the spark for the initial adoption and assertion of indigenous Blackness.

*the language which they use and the way they choose to define those two things [indigenous Black and African Nova Scotian], which they use interchangeably, often excludes us. It excludes people who have immigrated to Canada and haven't been here for generations.*

Erykah's comments of the history and connotations of language, and words in particular, expresses a Bakhtinian understanding of negotiations over Black indigeniety in Nova Scotia between multiple communities of African descent as dialogic. As previously noted concerning the primacy of First Nations in relation to the term indigenous, participants frequently interrupted themselves to speak to alternative understandings of such terms in explaining their self-identifications and routinely acknowledged that their own explanations might have little salience in alternative locations or contexts – what Bakhtin terms the heteroglossia (1981) of language. As Erykah argues, “*language is not just a word that is spoken. Languages carry history.*” But history in the singular implies a definitive claim to authenticity.

Rather, it may be more accurate to say that the histories of the term indigenous are complex, as underlined in chapter 2. Li notes the ways in which activists in particular “draw upon the arguments, idioms, and images supplied by the international indigenous rights movement, especially the claim that indigenous people derive ecologically sound livelihoods from their ancestral lands and possess forms of knowledge and wisdom which are unique and valuable” (2000:155). However, the anthropologist also notes that, “the discourse on indigenous people has not simply been imported. It has, rather, been inflected and reworked as it has traveled” (ibid). Thus, as noted by Anderson, while indigeniety has most typically been understood as reference to a group's *official* status as Indian, Aborigine or nation-specific equivalent, groups such as the Garifuna in Honduras have adopted the term “as marking a particular cultural status or condition, a mode of being more than a matter of blood” (2007:8). Contemporary assertions of indigeniety by various groups around the world have sparked heated and frequent debate amongst anthropologists and legal scholars, in particular (see *Social Anthropology's* two

special issues devoted to this topic in 2006 and 2011). Of particular relevance within this debate is a discussion between Geschiere and Bellier (2011) that hinges on the translation of *autochtone* as indigenous within international law. While I share some of Bellier's concerns that Geschiere seems to be conflating autochthony and indigeniety, rather than aboriginality, I am reluctant to ascribe solely legal definitions to socio-political articulations by indigenous peoples (which is itself a problematic term in international arenas such as the United Nations). As argued by Geschiere, the role of the academic is to "unveil the ideologies that weigh upon the understanding of autochthonous subjectivities, to explain the resurgence of contentious territorial issues, as well as the meaning attached to the concept of a territory, which supersedes the notions of possession and belonging" (2011:210). This research has thus attempted to understand the meaning of indigeniety to indigenous Blacks, as well as the intentionality of its use in drawing the boundary of legitimate access to the BBI and belonging in the Canadian imagination. Erykah's comments provide fruitful insight to achieving this goal and provide ethnographic support for Madden's argument. However, Black assertions of indigeniety in Nova Scotia do not lay claim to the land rights and demands for self-determination typically associated with indigenous/aboriginal *peoples*, whether in Canada or elsewhere. Erykah is correct that indigenous Blacks did not "*pop up out of the earth*," but, as is the case with Madden, she is countering an argument that indigenous Blacks are not actually making. Rather, the indigenous Black community's own imagination of its relationship to the land can be seen in Angela's leveraging of the "*unique history of Africans ... on the land*," not their *origin* in the soil, as basis for its primacy as the first community of Black Canada. This on its own does not remove the confusion as to the meaning of indigenous. The missing element in the equation of Black indigeniety is found in Erykah's frustration with the failure by indigenous Blacks to "*trace their roots, really, either back to Jamaica or back to the States, and then maybe through the Caribbean, from the continent*." This dislocation of acknowledged origin, if viewed as problem for both the in-group and out-group, can thus make visible the repeated and passionate references by indigenous Blacks to '*here*,' such as that expressed by Bristow et al. (1994) in *We're rooted here and they*

*can't pull us up* and Marcus's wondering aloud, "*how much longer do we have to be here?*" Christopher's definition of indigenous now takes on a new dimension: "*we are descendents of Nova Scotia and that, as far as one can look back, these are our roots.*" The difference is therefore between being *rooted* in place, which can be true of any seed taken from one place and transplanted into another, and *originating* from that place.

Simply put, African Nova Scotians are indigenous to Nova Scotia because too much time has passed to make any meaningful connection to their individual or collective origins from elsewhere as a result of the multiple transplantations witnessed through the transatlantic slave trade and conflict-driven migrations over the past four hundred years. The *articulation* of Black indigeniety in Nova Scotia should therefore be seen not as a matter of delineating a purity of belonging, *as would be the case for Aboriginal/indigenous peoples*, but rather the linking of a distinct group's *lived experiences* of subjugation and marginalization in place, despite the repeated promises of freedom (i.e. Blackness) with a political and juridical ideology of belonging *and entitlement to state recognition and resources* (i.e. indigeniety). As explained by Hall,

"An articulation is . . . the form of the connection that *can* make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask under what circumstances *can* a connection be forged or made? So the so-called 'unity' of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be rearticulated in different ways because they have no necessary 'belongingness.' The 'unity' which matters is a linkage between that articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily, be connected. Thus, a theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects . . . [It] enables us to think how an ideology empowers people, enabling them to begin to make some sense or intelligibility of their historical situation, without reducing those forms of intelligibility to their socio-economic or class location or social position" (1996:141–42).

Thus, if seen as an *articulation*, the assertion of an indigenous Black identity is “a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’ ... It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo transformation ... they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power” (1990:225). Hall’s concept of *positioning* therefore refers to the observation that “cultural identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (ibid). This positioning has particular meaning for peoples of African descent in light of the history of colonialism and slavery, and “the ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subject-ed in the dominant regimes of representation” (ibid). Lastly, Hall argues that an unfilled desire for belonging amongst Black peoples across the Americas lies in the fact that “this New World is constituted for us as place, a narrative of displacement” (1990:236). Hall provides an illuminating illustration of this dual process of articulation and positioning through a description of Rastafarians’ linguistic usage and adaptation of the Christian Bible “a text ... that did not belong to them; they had to turn the text upside-down, to get a meaning which fit their experience. But in turning the text upside-down they remade themselves; they positioned themselves differently as new political subjects; they reconstructed themselves as blacks in the new world: they *became* what they are” (1996:143). In similar fashion, Africans in Nova Scotia have adopted and reinterpreted the term indigenous to “fit their experience” and “positioned themselves differently as new political subjects” – indigenous Blacks. Marcus and Melissa can therefore speak to the process of *becoming* indigenous, and in light of Hall’s theorizations, offer a clearer understanding of what Hall terms the “articulating principle,” that is the *connection* that is born as a *result* of an articulation (1996:145).

*Marcus: Well, I mean, if you think about it, to be a third-generation somewhere you’re pretty much from there ... You know what I mean? It’s like, really, how much further can you go back? Right? Going back any further you’re just getting*

*into great and great-great and stuff, just that you really don't know much of your history about anyways. So I'd say three, three generations would kind of do it for me ... Yeah. Because it gives you a whole a sense of a community on a whole if you got the elders. Right? Just having your parents, they're like one generation away from you so it's like, you know, it's like if you go to a village somewhere say in Africa, you got the elders. You know what I mean? Right down to the parents, grandparents, and probably even a couple great-grandkids that are young. You know what I mean? So it's like that's a whole community, pretty much, you know what I'm saying, wrapped up in those couple generations so ... That's what I'd consider. Yeah. I'd say about three. Three would make it.*

Marcus once again makes reference to the passage of a 'significant' period of time in place as qualification for assertion of an indigenous Black identity (which he and a handful of participants used interchangeably with the term 'Scotian'), but this time a much shorter amount of time is required *to become* indigenous than he saw as necessary to describe what it means *to be* indigenous. Whereas his earlier comments make reference to "200 to 250 years ... 300 years" he now considers three to four generations (conservatively 90-120 years) enough to grant an individual "*a sense of community.*" Thus, for African Nova Scotians the "ideology [i.e. indigeniety], which transforms a people's consciousness and awareness of themselves and their historical situation, although it explodes culturally, does not constitute itself *directly* as a social and political force ... But it does become articulated to a social movement, a movement of people. And it functioned so as to harness or draw to it sectors of the population who have never been inside that historical bloc before" (Hall, 1996:144). It is therefore the articulation of Black indigeniety that leads to the formation of an indigenous Black community through adoption and adaptation of a term – indigenous – that resonates with the experiences in place of a newly imagined people.

Melissa's comments on the significance of active participation in the community, and thus a public demonstration of consciousness, reinforce the validity of this finding.

*Melissa: Born and raised here. Born and raised, and not born and moved away.*

*R: And then came back. (Laughs)*

*Melissa: Because even the ones who were born here, raised for a bit, went away and then came back, still have almost like a little bit of a hard time getting back into the stream of things. So I think it's good and bad when you look at it, right, in terms of the point of view of how [the indigenous community] view it ... Like, for example, I was born and raised here, for example. Like everybody else in the 80s, moved to Ontario and came back in 2000. I had a hard time adjusting and fitting in with, say the people that I would have went to high school with or the people that I would have went to university with because I had been away for so long. Even though I came back home to visit, but I wasn't Nova Scotian away. I was Toronto. You know what I mean? Now that, you know, when ... people kinda saw me out and about [working on behalf of] the community – oh, okay. She's from New Glasgow (laughs). It's almost just a little, it's a mind, I don't know what it is, to tell you the truth ... Very unique. Only in Nova Scotia. Nowhere else do you go that you get that.*

Speaking of a frequently mentioned collective of indigenous gatekeepers referred to simply as 'the community,' Melissa considers native birth sufficient to claim indigeniety (thus utilizing a *jus soli*, or right of the soil, criteria for membership similar to that of citizenship in most modern states), but qualifies this requirement with the stipulation of *visible* involvement in the community. Thus, while she expresses the opinion that one must be "*born and raised, and not born and moved away,*" her later reference to being accepted back into the community – despite having lived elsewhere for a considerable period of time, which on its own could result in rejection – was dependent on her being seen as working *on behalf of* the community. Melissa provides further elaboration of the centrality of consciousness below, and thereby brings the discussion full circle to Angela's earlier comments.

*Melissa: Good, but I just wanted to go back to something you were saying about the indigenous almost, I'm going to put it in my words now, the indigenous and the entitlement [to such resources as the BBI]. Going back to historically, I guess*

*some of the struggles that African Nova Scotians have faced in order to kind of get to where they are now, like the BBI for example and [the Council for African Canadian Education] for example, all started from individual people in predominantly Black communities recognizing that – well, I’m sure you probably know the story of how CACE came to be from the BLAC report and all that, but it was parents from North Preston who were just upset with the way the school system was going and the way their kids were being treated. So it just shows the strength when they can rally together, and it was all local people, right? So I think they were thinking, maybe the indigenous part comes from the struggles that they would have endured and overcome as a unit in Nova Scotia. Now then to include others who weren’t part of the struggle yet understand, do you know what I mean? I think just trying to make that difference. That’s just me.*

Melissa’s comments reinforce Angela’s argument on the need for non-indigenous Blacks who nonetheless understand the historical presence and struggle for equality being asserted by indigenous Blacks. What’s more, Melissa identifies the intention of the articulation of Black indigeniety as explanation of experience and entitlement to resources fought for and demanded by this historic community.

The next task of this research is therefore to provide a brief glimpse into this community’s contemporary experiences of “Nova Scotia,” which can now be seen as both cause of and barrier to the desired sense of community and belonging.

### **Reflections of “Nova Scotia”**

As has been noted previously, this research is not an investigation into the presence or persistence of racism in Nova Scotia. Numerous such works have been written (see James 2010, James *et al* 2010, Kelly 1998, Nelson 2005). However, indigenous Black participants routinely described “Nova Scotia” as a place forgotten by time. Most often contrasted with a modern and multicultural Toronto or Ottawa, Halifax was consistently depicted by those born and raised in the province as possessing social relations between Blacks and Whites that could only be found if one travelled “back in time.” And yet, when asked whether such articulations were a reference to

the prevalence of racism in Nova Scotia, indigenous participants routinely refrained from explicitly naming racism, or more accurately, from identifying any event or experience as an example of overt racism. Having been born and raised by a Black Nova Scotian father who moved “away,” this reluctance was naggingly yet inexplicably bothersome until it occurred to me how reminiscent it was of my own family’s reticence to acknowledge incidents that I felt were clearly racist *in such terms*. Indeed, my frequent identification of racism and systemic discrimination has often earned good-natured ribbing from relatives about my “sensitivity.” The observation of a cultural proclivity toward such deflections amongst indigenous Blacks was therefore informative on both a personal and academic level. Having initially given a silent nod<sup>34</sup> to the voiding of verbal space when a participant’s story came to a point where ‘racism’ was obviously the next word to be spoken due to my own familiarity with my family’s discomfort in doing so, this space quickly became a regular focal point of discussions with participants. What’s more, the perception amongst indigenous participants of a more subtle and hidden type of racism was consistently described as unique to Nova Scotia, and one which only Blacks who had been born and raised in the province, and were thus more attuned to this covert form of discrimination, could detect.

*Melissa: It's, I think [race] is a driver. I think it is a driver because there's a lot of things that race is kind of the undercurrent of. How that manifests itself, for example, would be with like say our former minister, [African Nova Scotian Affairs] Minister [Percy] Paris, and the thing that happened down at the halls of the Assembly, right? That's kind of the undercurrent of how that thing kind of happened. I don't know for sure. I'm just only looking at the sidelines saying this*

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<sup>34</sup> Numerous participants made reference to “the nod” as a distinct cultural characteristic of Black life in Nova Scotia. Simply put, Black Nova Scotians nod (i.e. a quick uptick or dip of the head) to each other when crossing paths in public spaces. According to Andrew, “You see two Black guys walking down the street they are going to acknowledge each other with a nod or like, [raises his head slightly and adopts a neutral facial expression] ‘What’s up?’ But why? I, and it’s not just because we’re friendly. It’s not people being friendly because when I ... I don’t walk down the street and see a White guy and he nods at me. It just doesn’t happen. But why do we inherently do that when there’s really no, honestly, there’s a perceived context, but there’s no real context to that interaction. That small split-second interaction, there’s no context to it whatsoever except the perceived ‘I know what you’re going through everyday *because you’re Brown!*’ You know what I mean?” Hence, my usage of the term here is somewhat tongue-in-cheek, but also a recognition of my own connection to ‘Scotian culture discovered through this research.

*is my impression of it. So, and I think the whole thing that may have happened with the – and I know you don't want to go there<sup>35</sup> – the ALI and the DBDALI. Right? You know? Are [government officials] choosing one over the other to say one is better than the other? I don't know all the details of all that. The Nova Scotia Home for Coloured Children. Right? Like what would make them think that we can have this home up there that's in our care, but yet kind of ignore the complaints and everything that kind of go on. So yeah, I think it has a major impact and until, you know, and I don't even know who would be able to start that kind of discussion to get that dialogue going so that eyes can be opened. I think it's different with people kind of coming up, right? The newer and younger folks, say in government, for example, don't necessarily feel that way, but the ones who make the decisions and, you know, can sign off on things, they kind of have those undercurrents as well.*

Melissa raises several events that took place in Halifax in 2013 to demonstrate the ambiguity, in her eyes, of the racism faced by indigenous Blacks. As this section is largely intended as a description of the field (i.e. “Nova Scotia”), it is useful to provide brief explanations of these incidents, as well as a few more that occurred during the period of fieldwork, to illustrate social relations in the province between Blacks and the majority society.

- The provincial government of Nova Scotia is unique in that it is the only Canadian province to contain a Ministry of African (Nova Scotian) Affairs. The two-time minister of this one-of-a-kind portfolio within the New Democrat Cabinet of Premier Darrel Dexter was Percy Paris from 2009-2013<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> As will be discussed below, the Africentric Learning Institute was in the midst of a battle with the government during my period of fieldwork. Being unaware of this controversy entering the field, I made frequent mention of the organization for the simple reason that it used Africentric in its name, and thus provided a ready example of the diversity of identity terms adopted by Black-directed organizations (i.e. the ALI, the Black Educators Association, the Indigenous Black and Mi'kmaq program at Dalhousie, the Council on African Canadian Education, African Nova Scotian Affairs, etc.). However, in light of the fact that participants routinely expressed discomfort with my mention of the ALI, due to this ongoing conflict, in discussions held towards the end of my fieldwork I made clear this organization was not a significant research interest.

<sup>36</sup> Full disclosure: Percy Paris is my second cousin. As a two-time representative (NDP) of the Waverley-Fall River-Beaverbank riding, he is also the only African Nova Scotian to have ever been re-elected as MLA in Nova Scotian history. At the time of the incident discussed here, Paris was also the Minister of Tourism and Economic Development.

However, Paris resigned his post<sup>37</sup> on May 10, 2013 after an alleged physical altercation with Liberal MLA Keith Colwell in the men's lavatory of the provincial legislature. While specific details of the altercation have not been made public, the general opinion within 'the community' (which Paris has all but confirmed) is that Colwell made disparaging comments about the Black community in the House earlier in the day, to which the then-minister did not take kindly. However, while participants frequently made mention of the altercation in descriptions of being Black in "Nova Scotia," as does Melissa above, their concern with the incident concerned the fact that Paris, a sitting minister with three portfolios within the provincial Cabinet, was arrested, handcuffed and escorted from the premises of the legislature into a waiting squad car, and officially charged with assault over the scuffle. While some saw the laying of charges as nothing more than politicking in an election year – Dexter's government was routed by the Liberals in October – many participants (and Paris himself) were of the opinion that a White politician of equal stature would not have been subjected to the same treatment.

- One of the recommendations of the Black Learners Advisory Committee Report was that the province, "establish an Afrocentric Learning Institute to assist in curriculum development and conduct ongoing research on issues impacting on Black learners in Nova Scotia" (BLAC Report, 1994:17). At the time of fieldwork, two organizations (the Africentric Learning Institute and the Delmore "Buddy" Daye Africentric Learning Institute) were operating in Halifax and laying claim to the sole right to do so under the auspices of this BLAC Report recommendation. Participants with knowledge of the dispute alleged that the government (responsible for the funding of both bodies) had established the DBDALI only after trying unsuccessfully to take over the previously established ALI, itself formed and funded by the Council on African Canadian Education within the Department of Education. However, a late

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<sup>37</sup> For more information, see: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/n-s-cabinet-minister-resigns-after-bathroom-fight-1.1344073>.

December 2014 statement<sup>38</sup> from Education Minister Karen Casey announced that CACE (and therefore the original ALI) would no longer receive government funding for having allegedly exceeded its mandate as advisory body by hiring staff. Media reports of the row made mention of CACE claims of being in possession of official authorization by a previous minister to hire staff. Participants described this entire incident as an example of the government attempting to control and/or silence a Black-directed organization mandated with holding the state to account.

- The Nova Scotia Home for Coloured Children was a Halifax-area orphanage that gained notoriety for decades of physical and sexual abuse suffered by the children it housed. The Liberal government of Premier Stephen McNeil issued a formal apology<sup>39</sup> and settlement in October 2014 to all former residents of the orphanage. Many participants described “the Home” as being similar to, and having similar impact as, the Indian Residential Schools for which the federal Conservative government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized in 2008.
- Lastly, at least two cases of alleged racial discrimination against employees of Leon’s Furniture stores were before the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission, and the subject of many a conversation with participants, at the time of this research. The most-often relayed incident concerned the hanging in effigy of a black statuette<sup>40</sup> within a Dartmouth warehouse as alleged means of intimidating an indigenous employee. The second case was prominent in discussions for an incident external, but related to the allegation of workplace discrimination, and which saw the word “nigger” spray painted<sup>41</sup> down the side of the complainant’s car.

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<sup>38</sup> For more information, see: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/africentric-learning-institute-shut-out-of-education-funding-1.2879547>.

<sup>39</sup> For more information, see: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/home-for-colored-children-apology-n-s-says-sorry-to-ex-residents-1.2794728>.

<sup>40</sup> For more information, see: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/black-statuette-allegedly-lynched-in-effigy-at-leon-s-store-1.1323962>.

<sup>41</sup> For more information see: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/n-word-spray-painted-on-dartmouth-woman-s-car-1.1928585>.

It is in acknowledgment of numerous such incidents that the assertion of historic presence takes on meaning as *ongoing survival* in the face of systemic institutional racism – racism that has been endured, named, challenged, and contested by generations of African Nova Scotians. As expressed so eloquently by Angela above, the indigenous Black community has long fought for recognition of the *primacy* of the Black struggle *against* “Nova Scotia,” which can therefore be seen to represent generations of such incidents as those listed here, as well as the substantial level of redress garnered from both the state and society in the form of an unparalleled Black institutional presence in Canada. However, Melissa also makes mention of generational differences in the perception of contemporary relations as being marked by racism. It is important then to examine further this potential generational divide within a community with such an illustrious history of direct challenge to the most deeply entrenched institutions of White supremacy and colonial rule (as shown in chapter 5). The following section discusses the observation made in the field of this mechanism of deflection and explores participants’ understandings of this tendency within their community.

### **Coping mechanisms**

As was the case concerning such high-profile incidents and events as “the Home” and destruction of Africville, participants routinely shared stories and experiences of racism and discrimination when describing the *difference* and *uniqueness* of Black life in “Nova Scotia” compared to the rest of the country. However, seemingly blatant examples of racism, racial profiling (by police and individuals), and stereotypical depictions of Blacks told by participants were also frequently categorized as ambiguous and subtler forms of racism that “you’d have to be born and raised here to understand.” In light of this observation, participants were often asked to comment on this inclination toward deflection and its potential relationship to the Black experience in Nova Scotia.

*Marcus: [The word racism] gets kicked around a lot though. It does get kicked around a lot, but it's not that bad. An example: me and the girlfriend went fishing*

*a month ago and we're over by Eastern Passage, a predominantly White whole area, right. So we're walking back to the car with our, you know, fishing rods and whatever. Older White gentleman standing there looks at me and he says, 'hey boy, did you catch anything'? I started laughing, right? I just stopped and the girlfriend's like, 'What's wrong babe?' I said, 'What did you call me?' He's like, 'I asked you did you caught [sic] anything.' Right? Not even, not rude. He wasn't trying to be rude or nothing, but that goes just back to, you know, he was probably 70-something, 80 years old. Something like that, so to him that's just it. I just made a comment to him like, you know, 'I don't think I been a boy since I was 12 years old,' or something like that. Right? 'Oh no, friend. I didn't mean nothing by that'. But that's just, that's it though. You know what I mean? That's racism, but it's hidden under lots of layers. Right? So it still exists down here. There's all kinds of it. You know, a lot of times I talk to people on the phone in a professional voice, blah, blah, blah, and when I go out and show up they don't even know because in the phone book we're a 'A', so we're one of the first ones they call. You show up and the people are like [facial expression of fear/suspicion], peeking through the curtains and stuff like this. Right? I'm like, 'Hi. How you doing? I'm from [name of his construction company].' 'Oh, oh, okay, okay.' So it still goes on. It even goes on with our side towards the, you know, White people and stuff like that too, right? When you hear White boy thrown around so often and it's like [wincing], geez, goddamn. I don't know, man, but it does go on down here too. Same, but I think people are more hesitant for some reason to speak on it because like for being here for so long the racism that we see here is different than you'd see in a Toronto or an (points to researcher) Ottawa. You know, where it's like we been here so it's almost like the racism we get is so toned down or so hidden that somebody from a Toronto or an Ottawa might not even realize, you know what I mean? ... It's, how can I put this? It's covered up racism, if I can put it that way. There's lots of layers put over it, you know what I mean, but it's still there. Like whenever I get pulled over by the police for whatever stupid reason when at the end of the day, okay, I didn't run no stop sign. I didn't speed. I didn't break no laws. So it's the same DWB [driving while Black], right? It's everywhere, but it's*

*not that often ... It's hidden, like I said. Right? Some people they don't even realize that's what they're showing. They don't realize they're showing racism, you know what I mean? Like I said Black guy shows up at your door. Okay, so I pull up driving a work truck with a bunch of tools visible through the back of the bed. You called a construction company today. What the hell do you think I'm here for? I'm here to rob you, right? Right on. You know?*

Personal narratives of racial slights such as that mentioned by Marcus or police and/or community profiling were common expressions by male indigenous participants of all ages and classes. Female participants (all of which that participated in this study hailed from the middle class) also made frequent mention of incidents of racism, but typically the incidents mentioned by women were stories of racism experienced by others (such as with Minister Paris, and organizations such as the Home for Coloured Children). This is not to suggest that female participants do not experience racism in Nova Scotia. As noted in the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission (2013) report on the racial profiling of consumers, discrimination against Blacks continues to be a serious issue for all persons of colour in the province. However, while minor gender differences in the experiences of racism were observed, particularly in the near-uniform statement by Black women of concern for the safety of Black men, both male and female participants identified deflections from the explicit naming of racism as a coping mechanism.

In this regard, Andrew's comments reflect both self-awareness of his visibility and the various means by which he chooses to manage relations with non-racialized clientele in anticipation of the potentially negative reactions his visibility may inspire.

*Andrew: Playing the Black card at anytime I think doesn't help anything, but I mean I joke about it all the time with all my friends. You know, I'm just, because I'm usually the only Black guy there. So I'm the token Black guy. 'I'm not here to rob ya. I'm just here,' you know. I joke with my clients all the time because my company, I go to people's houses, right? ... So, but you know I joke and, but I joke all the time and it's probably totally playing into a stereotype, but I joke with my*

*clients a fair bit because that's just the type of person I am. I'm like, 'Okay, I'm not here to rob you.' Like especially people who buy gift certificates for other people. I will say, 'Okay, well just tell them when the Black guy shows up he's not there to rob them.' I joke about that, but I do have a lot of clients in the South End of Halifax. That's where a lot of people with a lot of money live ... And they think it's funny, but it's one of those things that I'm sure that some people probably are like, what is he doing here? You know what I mean. ... It's just playing to that stereotype. It's not that I think it's actually going to happen, but that's playing to the stereotype. I think playing with it normalizes it and hopefully it will just go away. You know what I mean?*

*R: The Dave Chappelle philosophy.*

*Andrew: Yes. I'm just, I don't know. I'm Black, I'm Black, I'm Black, I'm Black. We know. We don't really fucking care. Just go work. Right?*

Andrew's conscious decision to make light of the stereotypes of the Black male in his business and personal relations with majority society members in and of itself speaks to his own perception that such stereotypes exist and are prevalent. Simply put, individuals do not form strategies to defuse potentially uncomfortable interactions unless they on some level expect them to occur. Thus, voiding the space occupied by the explicit naming of racism can be seen as a coping mechanism in community and individual dealings with racial discrimination. However, Andrew's comments also reflect the refusal to allow his visibility a deterministic capacity, and are therefore based upon his belief in the very possibility that he can do so. His dislike for "playing the Black card" is equally evident. Thus, rather than "wallow in the past," Andrew actively asserts his identity as equal member of a society less constrained by racial tensions than previous generations.

*Andrew: Why there's all those different [Black-directed institutions] is beyond me, right? ... I think [Nova Scotian society is] probably about as even as it can get, but I think probably it's all about perception. It's all about what you want. I think that a lot of, and I'll get flack for saying this, but I think a lot of Black people in Nova Scotia make it their own issue to be Black and to be different and feel like*

*they're downtrodden on. But guess what? It is what you make it, so it's nobody else's responsibility to take care of your shit. So you need to do it, right? ... It's just because in Nova Scotia, in the circles that I've been in and the people that I know, it's always Black people this and things. But it's like people, like really? Just, it's 2013. Get off your ass and do something instead of just wallowing in the past. Maybe get off your ass and do something ... I don't know about, you know, but the impression is, that I get, is that sure things 20, 30, 50 years ago may have been hard for Black Nova Scotians ... No, maybe longer than that. Fifty, 60 years ago. Sure they would have been maybe difficult, but it was difficult everywhere if you weren't White. But at some point you gotta let that shit go and you just gotta move on. Right? Because in all reality, anybody of my age group, we have really not had a hard time.*

*R: Okay.*

*Andrew: So why are we, you know, we have no real right to talk about what happened 50, 60 years ago because we weren't there. There's nothing we can do about it now so why don't we just move on, right? Here in Halifax there was a Black community, Africville, down by the waterfront. Back in the day that's where the Black community was and so Halifax tore it down, right, and dispersed all the people. I understand that's a horrible thing. It should never have happened, but there's so many people that still to this day feel victimized and feel like they need to be compensated for what happened three generations ago. Didn't happen to me, so I, you know, but at the same time I'm like, I guess you know like, how long are you going to be a victim for? My name, my last name is [...]. Pretty sure not my actual ancestor's name. Just saying. Pretty sure that it was probably a slave owner's name that we adopted. I'm not going to go back and say hey, I want to change my name because it's who I am. It's my dad's name. It's, you know, a generation's name, but I'm not going to dwell on what happened in the past. I'll acknowledge it yes, but I'm not going to be wallowing in self-pity for the rest of my life because I feel like the world owes me something. It's just not going to happen.*

In addition to reflecting a middle-class, liberal ideology of individual responsibility and work ethic, Andrew's comments reflect the point raised by Melissa earlier concerning a generational variation in significant personal experiences with racism. However, this research cannot confirm such an observation. Rather, regardless of age, participants' views concerning the prevalence (or lack thereof) of the impact of racism on their daily lives aligned directly with their ideological perspectives of the world in general. Andrew's comments are clearly reflective of the dominant narrative of multiculturalism in Canada, wherein racism is acknowledged, but as an issue that marred the past and from which we have (for the most part) learned and moved on. In this dominant narrative, expressed to varying degrees by most participants, Canada is an internationally acclaimed country of equal opportunity and cultural diversity. Thus, Blacks and other 'visible minorities' who continue to "*play the race card*" are "*wallowing in the past*" and failing to take responsibility "*for their own shit.*" And yet, the existence of organizations such as the BBI stand in direct challenge to such narratives in light of their foundations upon the persistent presence of systemic institutional racism, as well as the repeated tales of daily instances of "subtle" and "covert" racism expressed by participants of all ages. The final element to be discussed in this chapter thus concerns the impact of such diverse, and contradictory, narratives and ideological perspectives upon relations within – and conceptualizations of – the indigenous Black community. How is community imagined and maintained in the face of such jarringly contradictory points of view?

### **Crabs in the bucket<sup>42</sup> (Class conflict)**

The common thread connecting each of the 36 interviews conducted for this research was the expression of a desire for community, whether determined racially, culturally, nationally, or ideologically. Despite frequent criticisms made against

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<sup>42</sup> Jackson (2001) also makes reference to such "proverbial antics" in a discussion of internal distrust between differently classed Black Harlemites in *Harlemworld: Doing race and class in contemporary Black America*. This work, as well as *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity* (2005), while discovered late in my own research process, has provided important clarity to my own findings and understanding of internal Black relations and communal relations between Blacks and Africans in Nova Scotia.

terms of identity perceived as exclusionary, on the simplest level participants expressed the shared desire for inclusion within a collective that recognized their shared differences from the majority society in Nova Scotia. However, a lack of collective understanding of the differences amongst Black and African Nova Scotians themselves was observable as a major challenge facing these individual desires. Without question, complex tensions over identity exist within the extremely heterogenous African Nova Scotian community, but the desire for community – what Jackson sees as “racial sincerity” based on the “obvious, natural, real and even liberating” feeling of connection amongst Black peoples (2005:15) – amongst participants was constant. What’s more, the continued denial of this desire and speculation as to the reasons for disunity amongst Black and/or African community imagined to exist, if only ideologically and aspirationally, was a powerful theme of each discussion.

In addition to communal differences of origin, class and culture, several immigrant participants also related stories of being actively discouraged from establishing ties with the local Black community by officials affiliated with universities in the province. As noted earlier, all of the immigrant participants (whether from the Caribbean or continent of Africa) in this study first came to Nova Scotia to pursue higher education. At least two of these participants made reference to having been advised by university officials upon their arrival to avoid fraternizing with indigenous Blacks said to be “very different than you.” The imposition of such anticipatory measures to prevent the development of solidarity between immigrant Blacks and the local/indigenous community warrants future study. To be clear, the issue here is not the sowing of internal discord between an imagined universally cohesive ‘Black community,’ but rather that a historic Canadian community may potentially be being marginalized even further through the racial socialization of immigrants. In addition, such actions on the part of majority members of Nova Scotian society in considerable positions of power begs questions as to the motivations behind these ‘warnings.’ Lastly, this finding is relevant to this research as such alleged *external* fostering of *internal* divisions by institutional authority figures has historical corollaries within the oral histories of indigenous Blacks.

*Christopher: I'm a, originally my family is from Africville, which has a long history, you know, and people have heard about. Having said that, I guess like most people from Africville, I've felt, um, what's the word I'm looking for, without a community and in search of a community, whether it be amongst people that just are like ourselves – the Black community – or from the community as a whole, Africville, from what is left. Many remnants are in Mulgrave Park and Uniacke Square, but that is my connection to the community ... I've used the example, and I don't know if it's a good example, of the William Lynch, if you will, story in conversations that I've had with groups of friends and acquaintances here. For the most part I find that, and based on that story, I've used it as an example to kind of point to the issues that we have here. Even with my own business, it's sometimes difficult to even gain work from our own people because there's a suspicion and until we're able to remove that suspicion from one another it's difficult to remove that suspicion from people outside of our own race. We've learned how to, from that story, how to be envious of one another. How to be jealous of one another because of our complexions, or whatever the case may be. Those are the things that have held us back. Crabs in the barrel effect, if you will. I think that it's, having lived away from here for many years, and only having returned here 20 years ago, I think that that's our biggest problem, is that, in part a lot of us have never left here, for economic reasons, whatever the reason may be, and our minds are in that box and don't see beyond the box. Those of us who have ventured out of here have seen the opportunities that one can gain through education, through social means, and it's hard to make people understand where they can be if they've never actually seen anything outside of the area.*

*R: Can you tell me the William Lynch story?*

*Christopher: The Bill Lynch story is a story about a plantation owner whose slaves were known to be very obedient. Whose slaves and, Bill Lynch apparently was brought to a meeting of plantation owners and it was asked of him how he was able to have such good slaves, how they were so obedient, how he never had the issues that ... And he had talked about how in part he had taught his slaves,*

*the light ones to be suspect of the dark, the darker slaves, and how to be envious of one another and to, which made them forget about whatever was being done by the plantation owner. In a sense I think that we are a little suspect (sic) of one another. I know that I've been in amongst people who seem to have more prejudices than Whites I've actually encountered, and have no problems actually voicing those things and being – I have one example, or a couple of examples. I have an example of my grandmother, whom I love, but she's not here anymore. But I was in trade school and she had has a problem in her home, a plumbing problem and I'm a licensed plumber now. I had suggested that I would help her. She thought, you know, that's a nice idea but she had a plumber that was gonna actually come and do that. A few days later I went by my grandmother's house and there was an individual in there working on her plumbing and she says yeah, she had the plumber in there. She was happy he was there fixing it and as I walked in I said I was just going to go in and see who it was. As I walked in it was one of my classmates. It just happened to be a White classmate ... But those are the little slights that we, at least here, no malice I don't believe in, that's there, but it's this preconceived idea that somebody who's not like us can do a better job. It's still the, those are the things that I'm hoping BBI through their processes help eliminate.*

Christopher's powerful account of his desire for community, and his frustration with what he sees as mistrust and a lack of awareness of the possibilities available to his people if they could only escape the mental prison of their uninterrupted experiences with slavery, colonialism and racial discrimination over the past four hundred years is both moving and troubling in light of the alleged 'warnings' being issued to immigrant students. Christopher's comments also convey an important dialectic of the indigenous identity and condition under discussion: namely that the uninterrupted historic presence of African peoples in "Nova Scotia" – and the experiences associated with the struggle to survive (in) this "place" – is seen as both cause for the formation of community and the single largest source of division within the community.

Melissa connects the reluctance amongst indigenous Blacks to explicitly name racism to unequal social relations and power dynamics in “Nova Scotia” that silence such vocalizations and thus any challenge of the status quo.

*Melissa: As you said that, and I'm kind of going back to when I did come back [to Nova Scotia], I was thinking that the people necessarily didn't change. I changed in my thinking. So when I encountered someone that I felt was being racist I would call them on it because well, you know Ontario. Everybody thinks they're it and you know you can say whatever you want.*

*R: [sarcastic tone] I don't know what you're talking about.*

*Melissa: So you know I wouldn't tolerate it, but I guess there's different coping mechanisms that you develop if you're living in Nova Scotia, that you kind of, if you were raised here, you just kinda discard when you go away because when you go away you're empowered to speak up and challenge somebody on it, right? Then when you come back, then if you do that then you could be in a, if you challenge somebody on it then you're in a big, full-on fight with somebody just for asking the question. Like, what's the problem? Do you know what I mean? So it's, it's a different mindset. Yeah.*

Echoing the oral history shared by Christopher, Marcus frames contemporary internal tensions as reinforced by class divisions and vents his own frustration with what he sees as a lack of support for Black economic empowerment as standing in direct contradiction to the “sense of community” and solidarity that first forged the African Nova Scotian community centuries earlier.

*Marcus: Like my grandfather used to say that Black people down home, here, are like crabs in a bucket. One tries to crawl out the rest try and pull you back in. I'm like, I never got that when I was young until maybe like the last seven, eight years I started to understand it. It's just weird. It's very strange being down here. Like we have such a sense of community down here, but yet and still if I went and opened up a grocery store they'd still want to go to Sobey's. It's strange. It's just weird, man ... I could never understand that because me, myself, I try – not that I'm prejudiced in any way, shape or form because like I told you I have White and*

*Native in my family – whenever I hear about a Black-owned business trying to do something, if it's a restaurant I make sure I go eat there. If I don't like the food I probably won't go back again, but I gave you a shot, you know? ... Clothing store, same thing. You know, I'll go and take a look at what you got. If it's not my flavour I'll buy a t-shirt anyway just in support of what you're doing. I try to be like that because I don't want to see the next brother, you know, not having as much as me or beneath me. Hey, go on brother. You bought a house? Good for you, my man. Proud of you. You know what I'm saying? Then it's like, the majority though, it's so weird. You go and you buy a house. A nice house, decent house. Awwww, he thinks he's something now because he got a house. It's like, what the hell? Ain't I supposed to have a house? You know what I mean? The mentality here is weird, very, very weird. It's strange. Very strange.*

## **Summary**

Frustration with internal (that is, class and ethnic) divisions within the indigenous community expressed by Christopher, Melissa and Marcus are emblematic of comments made by many participants, directed both internally and at other Black and/or African communities. However, this is not the place for speculation as to the causes of or solutions to these lingering divisions, which on the most basic level can be seen to have sturdy roots in Nova Scotian soil. They therefore provide the final component of our discussion concerning the intentions of the articulation of Black indigeniety by the African Nova Scotian community, which can now be seen as making three separate demands.

First, the assertion of indigenous Blackness in Nova Scotia demands recognition of this historic community's uninterrupted presence from the earliest years of Canada's colonial past and acknowledgement of the discrimination experienced by this community throughout the centuries. This demand therefore challenges the lingering national narrative of Canada as a White settler state, as well as contemporary narratives that promote the country's modern adoption of

multiculturalism as policy and historic safe haven from the American institution of slavery and racist foundations.

Second, the assertion of indigenous Blackness in Nova Scotia distinguishes this historic community from later migrations of African-descended peoples, whether from the Caribbean or continent, who came to Canada in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century following the country's removal of racially explicit immigration policies. This differentiation thus challenges contemporary racial projects that continue to construct "Black" as foreign and "Canadian" as White by demanding recognition of and distinction between heterogeneous Black and African Canadian communities through acknowledgment of Canada's *historic* multicultural character.

Third, the assertion of indigenous Blackness in Nova Scotia delineates the boundaries of *a distinct ethnic group* in Canada with legitimate claim to redress from the state due to historic and ongoing struggle against systemic institutional racism in place over time. The articulation of Black indigeniety therefore distinguishes between an indigenous community of entitlement and other, immigrant communities with no legitimate claim to compensation for transgressions they did not suffer *here*. However, it is not an assertion of aboriginality or autochthony, as argued by Madden (2009) or theorized by Geschiere (2009). Rather, Blacks in Nova Scotia are making an articulation that emphasizes the ways in which their historical and contemporary *positioning* as a result of being Black has denied them "a place and space with a modern nation's economy and society" (Guenther, 2006). As such, the primary intention behind this articulation by the historic African Nova Scotian community is a statement of ownership of a unique and uninterrupted struggle on the land to be Black *and Canadian*, Black *and a citizen*, to be Black and belong.

## **Black Business**

Before setting out ‘into the field,’ this research was intended as an exploration into the meaning of self-identification for the purposes of accessing the services provided by the Black Business Initiative. However, from the first conversation with BBI officials in Halifax it became clear that no formalized self-identification component was required of applicants. While earlier versions of the self-assessment form provided to applicants contained an explicit reference to one’s ethnoracial identity (i.e. applicants were asked to self-identify as Black), during the time of this research an individual’s eligibility for BBI was typically either assumed or confirmed visually. As such, few of the six BBI clients interviewed for this research recalled ever being asked about their identity for the “obvious” reason that they “look Black.” However, several of the BBI officials interviewed made repeated references to an individual of Egyptian descent attempting to access BBI services in the past – an event which sparked an internal discussion amongst BBI staff on the need to clarify (if at least amongst themselves) the organization’s definition of “of African descent.” This oft-mentioned anecdote is illustrative of the primary role played by skin colour and secondary criteria of ancestry to definitions of Blackness seen as required to access the BBI, as well as the ongoing discussion concerning the definition of “Black” in response to external stimuli.

This chapter examines the ways in which diverse “African Nova Scotian” participants draw symbolic boundaries between “indigenous” Blacks and foreign “Africans” and “Caribbeans” in their attempts to secure social boundaries of access to the Black Business Initiative (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). Itself seen as a racial project that participates in socio-political negotiations over the definition of Blackness (Omi and Winant, 1994), the BBI is also examined as site of internal class and cultural conflict between indigenous Blacks themselves over definitions of racial authenticity and sincerity (Jackson, 2001, 2006). Thus, the assertion of indigeniety is seen as political action by a marginalized community to delineate legitimate targets of an equity initiative aimed at alleviating the ongoing legacy of systemic institutional racism.

However, as argued below, a combination of misdirection and miscommunication between the BBI and the indigenous Black community – as well as the demographic realities of this historic Black Canadian people – surrounding an enduring ambiguity of mandate and intended target has resulted in critiques of this organization of having been co-opted by Come From Aways with little need for such state recognition or redress.

### **Nomenclature**

The first observation of this ethnographic research is that competition over *access* to BBI services is manifest as complex socio-political negotiations over the boundaries of *indigenous* Blackness and *foreign* African-ness through experiences of “Nova Scotia,” constructed as the location of historic struggle against racial discrimination. As noted by Omi and Winant (1994), constructions of racial difference serve the social function through political means of distinguishing the “legitimate” beneficiaries of such racially directed state resources as the BBI. Thus, before any discussion can be had of Black business, we must delineate the meanings of “Black” and “African,” as constructed in Nova Scotia, as one’s self- or ascribed identification as one or the other determines the legitimization of one’s use of the BBI.

*Marcus (indigenous Black, construction industry, in his 30s): I think they got different meanings to me, personally, because to be African-Canadian, I wouldn't classify myself quite as that. I'm Canadian, you know what I mean, because like I said, pretty much to me I'm indigenous to being here. So I'm Canadian. Now I know that some people, some friends of mine, they'd say that they're African-Canadian, but again like I said that goes to their parents came over, their grandparents came over, so they're almost, like they're bringing their actual heritage and putting it with, you know, being a Canadian citizen now, and that's it. So to me yeah, that has a different meaning because I don't consider, I just consider myself to be Canadian and not, you know what I mean, African-Canadian ... The being Black, I think, is just, it's your race, you know. It's like your people ... I'm not 100% sure what or how far back some of [the community of*

*Black-directed] organizations go, but I know the earlier ones it's all Black ... It's only up until, I don't know how far back the Africentric Learning Institute<sup>43</sup> goes ... But even with that term, like I asked this question once or twice of a few people, what is Afrocentric learning? Right? ... To me, it's like to fit the qualification to go and learn some Afrocentric learning I just gotta be Black. But if you're teaching me about something that has to do with African heritage, it doesn't apply to me and telling me this is what our people used to do. You know what I mean? It's kinda like, so whatever they do – They're a complicated bunch ... Say 40 years ago, I guess, or whenever, however long BBI been around. I don't know. Twenty years, however long. I guess it was all good to have something that related to Africa<sup>44</sup> for some strange reason, but at the end of the day it's like when you look around, African is African, Black is Black. I mean I know it's the same thing if you go back far enough, you know what I'm saying, but to be Black in Canada doesn't necessarily, again, give you that African background.*

Marcus draws the symbolic racial boundary between “Black” and “African” through reference to both place and time in a decidedly relational fashion. Such binary distinctions, as noted by Lamont and Molnar, “point to the role of relationality in the definition of identity,” particularly when intended to produce social boundaries of access to resources (2002:174). “Black” thus takes on meaning as a community with ancestral connection to Africa, historical experiences of colonial subjugation, visible distinctness from a dominant majority, and (for some) consciousness of these processes of institutional inequality. “African,” and “African-Canadian,” thus stand in internal opposition to this category and take on meaning through contemporary connections to the continent, material culture, and (for some) skin colour and accent. As noted in the previous chapter, it has been too long since indigenous Blacks in Nova Scotia were severed from Africa for any legitimate connection to African

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<sup>43</sup> The establishment of an Afrocentric Learning Institute was one of the adopted recommendations of the BLAC Report in 1994. However, the establishment of the institute itself is a recent development and one that has had more than its fair share of controversy (see Chapter 6).

<sup>44</sup> This comment refers to the use by the BBI of an ancient Adinkra symbol as its corporate logo, as well as to the prevalence of ‘African colours’ (i.e. red, yellow, and green) in most Black-directed organizations’ promotional material. It came in response to a question asked by the researcher, but which has been removed from this quotation.

heritage to be made. What's more, Blacks have been in Nova Scotia for far too long (via, as Marcus claims for his own lineage, the Caribbean) to claim a hyphenated immigrant-Canadian identity. Thus, Afrocentrists<sup>45</sup> are "*a complicated bunch*" seen as confusing Black Nova Scotian children<sup>46</sup> by teaching them African history rather than acknowledging their more recent (and formational) centuries of colonial and Canadian heritage. The Black identity in Nova Scotia, as understood by Marcus, privileges the colonial processes and experiences of African (of multiple origins) arrivals in Nova Scotia – "*your race, you know. It's like your people*" – not the original starting point of the journey. For Blacks, Africa thus refers to either the historic origins of *all peoples* "of African descent" or recent immigrants from post-colonial nation-states. Marcus emphasizes the experience of *being Black in Canada*, and how this experience is not one that would not "*necessarily, again, give you that African background.*" In light of his earlier references to specific locations and the passage of time, this final definition of being Black as connection to 'the Black experience' (i.e. colonialism and difference in the Americas) in Canada provides an idea as to how one's *race*, or one's *people*, take shape.

Layla speaks to the ways in which the numerous locales (and therefore contextualized experiences) of the African diaspora have produced very different Black peoples.

*Layla (indigenous Black – on her mother's side; father is a first-generation immigrant from the Caribbean, small-business owner, in her 20s): I don't know what everyone else's thoughts on it are, but personally for me a person from the Caribbean, a person from African and a person from here, like we're a different type of Black people. Like yeah, we all have the same skin tones, like the shades may be the same but we're different ... So like for me, like all these terms, like African Canadian or, like, the Afrocentric, like all these names is just like, why is*

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<sup>45</sup> The teachings of Molefi Kete Asante have taken considerable hold amongst a segment of the historic African Nova Scotian community. See Bernard and Bingham, 2012.

<sup>46</sup> Marcus raises the equally important, and increasingly so, question of biraciality amongst African Nova Scotians: "you're teaching [African heritage] to kids that you don't know the kids' background to begin with." While frequent references were made to the perceived increasing numbers of biracial children by numerous participants (and uniformly seen as being born to White mothers unfamiliar with Black culture), the issue is beyond the scope of this research and must therefore be left for future works. See a brief discussion of this issue in Chapter 8.

*there a label like that? Like I don't, I don't like, and then there's like, you said, there's the Africentric Learning Institute, the Black Educators Association, and then there's like BBI<sup>47</sup> ... So to me it would make more sense to say like, the Black this, the Black that because then it's not saying just African. Because like, when you're saying African like, what does that mean? Like people from the Caribbean, are they African? No. Like, they might have people like, they're descended of that, but they're not African. It's hard, you know, but I look at it like, when you just say, you know Black, you just look at it as just the colour. When you're saying African it's like, now you've just branched it off to just African people ... I still have African descent in me, but it's just, it's funny how like, you know they say, they use all these like, terms and everything but, like there's not any people that are really African here. So it's just kind of like, why? Why are we linking that? There's nothing wrong with that. Like I said, we are all of African descent in some way, but how many like, people around here do you see like, wearing African clothes or know how to speak any type of African language? Like, there's hardly any.*

Layla now add specific examples of material cultural to our understanding of the boundaries of “Black” and “African” identity in Nova Scotia as marking *distinct peoples*. Not only do Africans hail directly from African states, they also speak African languages and wear African garb. Layla connects herself to an African diaspora historically and through the colour of her skin, but feels that Blacks (are) from North America (and) walk, talk, and dress like North Americans. This cultural difference is equally true of Blacks from the Caribbean, whom Layla uses to demonstrate the inclusiveness of the “Black” identity, as opposed to an exclusionary “African” identity to which neither indigenous nor Caribbean Blacks can relate. While connected historically to colonial-era Africa, the modern national and regional histories of a diverse diaspora are therefore cast as the determining factors of ethnoracial and cultural identity today.

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<sup>47</sup> One of my interview questions concerned whether organizations such as those listed were intended for different communities based on their use of different identity terms (i.e. Afrocentric, Black, African Canadian, African Nova Scotian, indigenous Black, etc).

Andrew raises the issue of difference of opinion within Black communities over what it means *to be Black* and the impact of social factors external to the community in shaping the meaning (and naming) of Blackness.

*Andrew (first generation, biracial – one European parent, one from the Caribbean – Nova Scotian, small-business owner, in his 30s): That’s such a good question. It’s a hard question to answer. Non-Caucasian, because, I mean, you can have, you can look at it two ways. Some people in the population, your “Blackness” is rated on where you grew up or where you’re from. Sometimes it’s what you look like. There’s lots of other things, but if you self-identify as being Black then that should be good enough. I’m not Black, I’m Brown. Straight up. My t-shirt is Black. Your sweater is Black. I’m Brown. Okay? Even Black people from Africa are not Black. They are Brown, but it’s society. What does Black mean? Black to me means the absence of light. It means the night sky, right? It’s, you know, it’s a colour. It’s not a person; it’s a colour. That’s what Black means to me.*

Refusing to be identified by the misread colour of his skin, Andrew nevertheless identifies a global collective that has been named “Black” by a dominant society; a collective that in turn then redefines this ascribed identity based upon an individual’s consciousness of unequal social relations. Thus, Africans, those from the Caribbean, and Blacks in North America, regardless of the validity of the label, and while visibly brown, are seen and named as “Black” within a racialized society that then ascribes meaning and valuation to this “race” of people. However, while Andrew also notes the breadth of opinion amongst diverse Black communities as to importance of origin, culture, and visibility in determining who is legitimately Black, he assigns ultimate authority to the individual to claim their own identity.

In an illuminating exchange between four immigrant members of the Black/African-directed organizational community, self-identification as either “Black” or “African” can also be seen as acknowledging or rejecting one’s place within the colonial institution of slavery and ongoing racial inequality in settler states.

*Lauryn: (immigrant from the Caribbean, member of the community of Black-directed organizations, in her 20s): I was saying that, yeah, so because, like I say,*

*I'm not from Africa. You know, we don't necessarily, if I see a form and, we self-identify as Black, you know? We don't identify as African-whatever, whatever. We just, Black. And so if I see a form that says Black, most of those minority forms that you have to fill out they ask you your status. They'll have Black, or they'll have African Nova Scotian, or sometimes they have Black Caribbean. Sometimes I'll put Black Caribbean, but if they don't have those differences I'll just put Black because I'm not African Nova Scotian. I'm not African. I'm Black. I mean that's how I self-identify myself, and that's just, like I said, I guess how most people that are from the Caribbean or from places that they don't have that strong connection to Africa or it's not really enforced, so we don't really know a lot about it. We just say that we're Black. Yeah.*

*[...]*

*Martin: (African immigrant, member of the community of Black-directed organizations, in his 60s): So my question for [Lauryn] is, 'Where did your descendants come from?'*

*Aisha (African immigrant, member of the community of Black-directed organizations, in her 30s): I think that's why she said it's not reinforced.*

*Lauryn: Yeah. It's not reinforced.*

*Dalila (African immigrant, member of the community of Black-directed organizations, in her 30s): Actually, you know, just finishing up from what I was saying before in terms of using colours to describe me or anyone, one of the issues that comes out of that is that one, I'm not Black. My skin is not in any way black ... I am brown. You can say I am sandy brown. That is true ... And secondly, describing me as black is very detaching as it kind of uproots me from my location, of my identity and connection to my land. So you're giving me an identity. You're calling me Black. Where is the origin of that word? What is that word? What do you mean by that? That's not who I am, so you're ascribing something that is not me. I am African. So if you call me African, it technically and unconsciously, it gives me a trace. It gives me a strength. It gives me an identity ... When people came [to North America] and they started describing them as black there was a story, there was a context behind that, and I don't want to be part of*

*that. So I don't want to be a part of the oppression or discrimination or whatever that people, you know, through which that identity was carved because it is not my reality ... Black is – that context is the history of slavery and oppression. When people came here the first contact with a Caucasian – I don't want to use white now – the first contact between Caucasians and those who are different, that was the origin of the word black. So they don't know how to, they thought maybe black because black for them is black. So they came up with that name and politicized it and popularized it and it became a norm. So it is out of the reality of every African descendant. That's not true. That is a lie.*

Dalila reinforces Andrew's rejection of Black as an accurate physical descriptor, but also traces the term's origins to the colonial enterprise in the Americas and a lack of African power within said period. As such, she flatly rejects an identity that she reads as making an explicit reference to a history of objectification and slavery. Dalila's insistence that no one accept being labeled as "Black," despite her own qualification that "*it is not my reality*," thus clearly supports the meaning of shared experience attributed to "Black" by Marcus, Layla, and Lauryn. As noted by Angela in the previous chapter, a perceived lack of understanding and empathy towards Black history in Nova Scotia on the part of immigrant communities has long been a barrier to the creation of community and cohesion. However, the questioning of Lauryn's lack of connection to Africa also makes clear the presence of a desire by (at least some) Africans for such an acknowledgement of a connection through shared (albeit ancestral) origin from Blacks. Thus, despite very different trajectories of identification, based upon vastly different (both related and unrelated) experiences with colonial powers in equally diverse places over time, a shared sense of (desire for) community can be seen amidst tensions over ethnoracial identity in Nova Scotia.

Two final perspectives can now be added to our discussion of the meanings of "Black" and "African" in Nova Scotia by William and Erykah, both of whom speak to the specificity of Black as experienced in place.

*William (Second-generation Canadian of Caribbean ancestry, professional, in his 30s.): So my parents always made it a point to have well-rounded other cultures in our lives, right, but the reality is once we went to school it was mostly other White kids. So for me, at the time, like being Black was being visible. It was obvious that you were Black, right? ... And for me my thing was okay, well, you know, I'm gonna be, and my parents always taught me you know you want to be the best at this. You have to be the best at that, you know? So whether it's in the classroom you're, countless times I can remember being told you know you're going to be the first to be seen. You're always the first to be seen. And I didn't get it. I didn't understand, right, until a few issues happened here where I was, I was the only Black in the group and I did get singled out and I was guilty by association ... I feel that when I do things you know, depending on what I do, the perception of what I do is based on my skin colour or who I am. My ethnicity. And it's funny because I'm, to me, I'm like I'm Canadian. I was born and raised here. I've been to [the Caribbean], twice, right? That's it ... I'm more Canadian. And that's where, you know, I will be called, oh you're not Black. You're White. And it's like, well, you know, have you ever been called nigger before? Right? And I've said that, you know. Well then don't call me that because right now that's almost the equivalent to me because that's not me, right? ... So and then the other, just like the last part of it is when I moved here, okay? The Black culture here ... You have an indigenous population here. I think there's just a greater density of a certain culture. There's certain pockets, I should say, certain density in certain pockets in certain areas around Nova Scotia ... Like the Black that I see in New Brunswick, they're people that immigrated to New Brunswick. Like they're Africans, people from the Caribbean islands you know, from all over the world. But here I see like homegrown Black communities and Black people. So you know now I'm starting to learn that there's a completely new or different dialect of the way people speak. The way people handle themselves. Like it's a completely different culture. It's not the same culture that you see on TV. It's not the same culture as - that you see in another province, in Toronto.*

William raises the related issues of the visibility and majority perceptions of Blackness. Both dimensions of this performativity of Blackness can be seen through the warning by William's parents that "you're going to be the first to be seen" as different from the demographic White majority and the related demand that he be "the best" at anything undertaken to counter social definitions of Blackness as poor performance outcomes. This dialectic relationship between visibility and performance results in Black youths being taught that they must be "twice as good as the other kids to get the same grades," in the words of my grandfather, and can be seen as evidence of both majority society's and Blacks' own internalization of negative expectations of Black ability. However, William also notes the fact that his Canadian-ness (whether depicted symbolically as his level of education or pattern of speech) also frequently resulted in claims by other Blacks that he is more White than Black. Jackson (2001, 2005) has provided valuable insight into the ways in which internal class divisions amongst Black communities are frequently referenced as evidence of the "performative limits" of *real* Blackness. Thus, the fluidity of ethno-racial identity can be seen as consisting, at least in part, of class as well as cultural dimensions.

Lastly, William echoes comments by participants cited above who ground distinct Black peoples in the rich and fertile soil of place by noting the difference of the "homegrown Black communities and Black people" to be found in Nova Scotia. As with his own understanding of Blackness, and as discussed in chapters 5 and 6, William once more shows how the indigenous Black identity is an assertion of a lived experience that has shifted and changed with the passage of time and in direct relation to being Black in Nova Scotia. Thus, as this research understands the intention behind this assertion of indigeniety as experience, Erykah provides a final key to understanding Blackness in a similar fashion.

*Erykah (Immigrant from the Caribbean, BBI client, in her 20s): I think that I always, I used to identify being Black as the connection. Anybody who could connect themselves to the African Diaspora in some way ... If you were a result of the African Diaspora or if you are from Africa yourself, I felt like you had a right*

*to claim that heritage regardless of how big or small it was. But I think that experience, the Black experience and how you connect yourself to the Black experience, probably has a large part in that. But in terms of, in my mind what was acceptable, it was never about skin or how you act on a daily basis, where you live. It was never about any of that. It was literally being able to connect, being a person of the diaspora, being a result of the Atlantic slave trade or migration afterwards ... And I feel like everywhere you go being, you know, from, most of my experience is in the Americas, but the Americas are so different, right? ... You can be connected to Africa in the Caribbean, Central and South America without necessarily calling yourself Black ... And I think that, and this is probably not very nice of me, but I find people who walk around and, in my mind, everybody knows they're Black, who don't identify with Black, who don't identify with what they look like and maybe even are negative even to what they look like, I immediately don't like them because I feel like in that dismissal of themselves they're dismissing me ... Because Black here seems to be very different to, yeah, what I'm used to Black being. I generally don't connect well with those people (laughs).*

Erykah brings our conversation full circle with the articulation of a Black identity that rests upon a connection with not only the continent of Africa, but also the global African Diaspora, the multiple experiences of all Black peoples of the past 500 years. What's more, Erykah once again raises the shared desire for connection, for community, expressed by all participants, and frames this longing within a language of acceptance, both of self and the (connected) Other through shared albeit vastly different experiences of disenfranchisement and marginalization by colonial powers now phrased simply as being Black.

For now, we can therefore say that for all participants the meanings of 'Black' and 'African' are firmly rooted in and contextualized by experiences in place over time. Black, whether seen as a positive assertion of survival and political/ideological resistance to the dictates of a dominant white society or shameful marker of servitude and dehumanization, belongs to the colonial

experience in the Americas, while African belongs to the ancient, post-colonial and contemporary continent of nation-states to which it refers. However, pan-African and Black consciousness currents flow through and between these borders, nourishing the minds and souls of residents on—either side of these imaginary lines and erecting a bridge to the conceptual divide. All participants acknowledge their shared ancestry, but (some) self-identified Blacks construct this cultural and political connection as belonging to a moment lost in time. Rather, it is the vastly different experiences in place and through time that have shaped Black assertions as either distinct peoples united by a common “race.” On the most basic level then, we can now begin our discussion of the BBI with the understanding of Black as *native* and African as *foreign* to Nova Scotia. The next question to be considered therefore concerns the perceptions of these two communities regarding the intended targets of a state initiative aimed at fostering *Black* business.

### **Intended targets**

As discussed in chapter 1, the establishment of the Black Business Initiative was borne of the BBI Task Force Report (1995), and is closely related to the Black Learning Advisory Committee’s Report (1994), itself borne of African Nova Scotian (particularly on the part of parents in North Preston) outrage over race riots<sup>48</sup> that took place at Cole Harbour High School in 1991. It is worth noting the unanimous endorsement by the provincial government of all 46 of the BLAC Report’s recommendations in light of the explicit identification of systemic and institutional racism in Nova Scotia by this document. Thus, the examination of the BBI (as noted earlier with employment equity writ large) must first be viewed in light of this state-level acknowledgement of institutional racism and therefore seen as but one of many governmental responses to the educational<sup>49</sup> and economic disparities between the

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<sup>48</sup> This violence occurred between predominantly White students from Cole Harbour and the surrounding areas and predominantly Black children from North Preston, Cherrybrook and thereabouts.

<sup>49</sup> While not borne directly from the BLAC Report, this study has chosen to focus primarily on the BBI due to its own focus on the *economic* wellbeing of Nova Scotians of African descent, rather than their level of education or health. For studies on these areas see James et al (2010) and James (2010). This is an important distinction in

majority society and African Nova Scotians. This foundation, coupled with the uniqueness of the BBI as an all-Black organization with exclusively Black-directed mandate and resources makes the initiative an important site of research if viewed as an anomaly of Canadian multiculturalism and employment equity policies. In fact, the BBI may most accurately be examined as a tangible example of reparations in light of its near autonomy since its foundation in 1996 to define its own clientele.

However, considerable differences in conceptualization of the BBI must be noted before any such identification can be made here. In short, numerous participants expressed frustration with the historic African Nova Scotian community's view of the BBI as nothing more than a fund to which they were "entitled" by virtue of their being indigenous Black, universally accepted as the community whose socio-economic status justifies such organization's in the first place. Such a sense of entitlement would support a reading of the BBI as reparation, if the organization's funds were reserved solely – and explicitly – for these communities. Alternatively, BBI clients, and the BBI itself, described the initiative as a development arm of the provincial government working to enhance the economic productivity *of the province* by increasing the Black entrepreneurial presence to a level more representative of their demographic proportions. This latter perception is more in line with traditional employment equity efforts and clearly reinforces the market-orientated ideologies of the Canadian government since the rise of the Conservative Party under Stephen Harper and would therefore fall under the banner of redress efforts. However, as stated in chapter 1, it is important to remember that the foundations of the BBI – whether read as either reparations or redress – are firmly grounded in liberal notions of individualism and meritocracy. Thus, BBI services (whether small business loan, skills training, or youth initiatives<sup>50</sup>) are offered under the implicit understanding that Nova Scotians "of African descent" will achieve equal standing with their majority counterparts once in possession of equal qualification

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light not only of the primacy of the economic sphere in contemporary Canadian politics since the rise of the Conservatives in the new millennium, but also the ways in which the neo-liberal capitalist paradigm impacts national narratives with respect to individualism, meritocracy, and work ethic in the economic sphere.

<sup>50</sup> The BBI's investment strategies are irrelevant to this research, other than to note their existence and intention as means of self-sufficiency.

and position in the workplace/economy, despite this organization's origins in state acknowledgement of the prevalence and persistence of systemic institutional racism in the province.

Participants also repeatedly raised the issue of complaints from within 'the community' (i.e. historic African Nova Scotian communities) that the BBI allocates too large a share (if not the perceived majority) of its limited resources to 'Come From Aways,' defined as those of African descent not born in the province. These complaints have been a persistent issue for the BBI since its inception, as the initial, and long-serving, head of the organization was a first-generation immigrant from the Caribbean. Starting with this individual (who headed the BBI for its first 16 years), but continuing to this day due to the near equal presence of immigrant and indigenous staff members, the BBI has been a lightning rod and symbol of the perceived 'hijacking' of services/resources meant for indigenous Blacks by more recent arrivals in the province from the continent or Caribbean. A couple of BBI-affiliated participants claimed the BBI conducted internal reviews of their resource allocation in the early years to verify that such claims were in fact baseless. However, these same participants stressed that such internal reviews have never been made public, despite recommendations for such transparency by the BBI's initial external auditors. What's more, several participants made note of the perception within the community that the BBI was attempting to 'correct' this imbalance in recent years through the hiring of indigenous Blacks, including the initiative's current head.

Indigenous Black participants held multiple views on the intended targets of BBI, but were rather uniform on the justification for such an organization.

*Christopher (indigenous Black, small-business owner, in his 50s): We have the largest indigenous Black population in Canada, historically. I've lived in other provinces. B.C. Ontario, you know, Saskatchewan. Even when I see large numbers of Blacks, if they're not from the islands in particular then they have their roots here, most likely. I think that being the largest indigenous population, there aren't as many businesses or people in positions – we're seeing a little more now,*

*but we're not seeing the businesses that should be representative of the numbers. And we're seeing very few professional people who are representative of those numbers. Too often we, as a people, see, if we do see people who are successful and they're Black, then they're perhaps not from here. They're from the islands or somewhere, or an American, you know. I think that they are what the province needs in order to help establish us in those veins ... I think, you know, when I talked about the BBI initially a lot of Black individuals, Black acquaintances didn't think that they were really there to help us. There is a sentiment that they believe that, like [a member of the BBI staff 'from away'], that Africans and [West] Indians – well not necessarily [West] Indians – but Africans and people like, you know from other places are more able to garner their assistance. But I think those are the individuals that come here longing for, you know, to get established and longing for help that seek these individuals out.*

*Marcus (indigenous Black, construction industry, in his 30s): I believe the intended client base (laughs), the name almost speaks for itself. It would be, you know, not necessarily African-Canadians, but just you know Black people in general ... That's my guess on who it is and who it should be as well. You know you look around and you have, I have some friends that went through [the Indigenous Black and Mi'kmaq Initiative at Dalhousie University<sup>51</sup>] ... I just feel like we needed something like that because if you go back far enough, you know, to how we got here and the way that we were brought up here it's like we weren't given the same possibilities. You know what I mean? From that time till you know 100 years after that time there was nothing learned, nothing gained in that time, so then after that there's still nothing learned, nothing gained. Then you come along with [the BBI] to, you know, even though it's been however many hundreds of years since we've been here, coming from slavery or wherever, it's like it's still the same thing. You know? It's still prevalent nowadays because it's like there*

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<sup>51</sup> The IB M program within the university's law department is a quota-based equity effort directed at these two marginalized communities (see <http://www.dal.ca/faculty/law/indigenous-blacks-mi-kmaq-initiative.html>).

*hasn't been a whole lot of, I mean we've made leaps and bounds and progress, yes, sure, but it's almost like systematic or something, you know what I mean? It's kind of like we're here, but we're still stuck back here, you know?*

Both Christopher and Marcus make references to the historic presence of Blacks in the province to justify their need for a structural presence such as the BBI, linking the contemporary negative socio-economic outcomes of their communities to generations of racial discrimination. These negative outcomes are then contrasted with the successes of Blacks/Africans from elsewhere and juxtaposed with the primacy of indigenous Blacks as the oldest and largest source of Blackness in Canada. Christopher also notes how the presence within the BBI of CFAs has led members of his community to see the BBI as being not for them, a perception mirrored in Marcus's belief that the BBI is and should be "*not necessarily for African-Canadians, but just, you know, Black people in general.*"

However, Marcus and Melissa (below) interpret the Black in BBI more broadly, while also reiterating community perceptions of the primacy of indigenous need/entitlement. Melissa and Andrew make reference to both the assumption in 'the community' that the BBI is for indigenous Blacks (whether implied explicitly or not) and the ambiguity of sole reliance organizationally on an individual's self-identification as being "of African descent". Several members of BBI staff made mention of rare, and often comical, instances of (seemingly) White individuals seeking information on BBI services. While the vast majority of these incidents were simple misunderstandings (i.e. some thought the Black in BBI was in reference to an owner's family name), Melissa's example of an Egyptian seeking service was often raised and mentioned in tandem with a hypothetical scenario in which a White South African attempted to make use of BBI. Thus, Andrew's point to the visibility of *looking* Black speaks to the primary qualification of self-identification – people must be *read* as Black. It is therefore only when this visible Blackness is in doubt (or unattainable, i.e. through electronic communications) that an explicit self-identification is actively sought.

*Melissa (indigenous Black, small-business owner, in her 40s): See, that's the, there's a perception that it's for Indigenous Blacks, but if you try and find indigenous Blacks in 2013 there are not really a lot, and there are not a lot wanting to start businesses<sup>52</sup>. Do you know what I mean? So those born and raised here – very few and far between because we're getting a lot of influx of people from all over. Then the question becomes: who is it for then, right? So if I'm from Egypt, which is in Africa, if it's for African Nova Scotians, do I access the money? And that's been a continual debate, right? I always say, as long as you self-identify then, but they are saying, some of the policies are saying no. But I would think that it was for anybody of African descent wanting to start a business.*

*Andrew (first generation, biracial – one European parent, one from the Caribbean – Nova Scotian, small-business owner, in his 30s): Yeah. I mean they don't specify and say we are here for indigenous Black people only, right? ... But because it's the BBI, if that's their mandate, it's called the Black Business Initiative, and they're going to foster anybody who walks through the door that looks Black. They don't have to be, but they look Black.*

However, if there is near-uniform belief that the BBI is *intended* for indigenous Blacks and *justified* by their continued socio-economic need, Melissa raises the equally important question of the indigenous community's ability to exhaust BBI's resources. As noted earlier, exact statistics on the size of the African Nova Scotian population – let alone a detailed breakdown of the various ethnic groups within this collectivity – are unreliable, at best. Regardless, the question of indigenous ability to exhaust funding remains valid, and increasingly illuminating as to the potential reasons why the definition of this identity is so hotly a contested topic. In light of this

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<sup>52</sup> Once again, Melissa references the perception that indigenous Blacks are a dwindling minority in the province, particularly indigenous Blacks with an entrepreneurial bent. As nearly all BBI participants voiced frustration with their inability to make wide-reaching contact within the indigenous community, this perception may be less about actual demographics and more about the middle-class and immigrant networks of BBI staff – all of which are (at least) university educated and/or have a business background of some sort.

ambiguity as to population, the justifications made by non-indigenous Blacks concerning their access to the BBI are an important area of inquiry.

First and second-generation immigrants felt certain that, while the BBI was not initially *intended* for them, and that they might be seen as taking advantage of an acknowledged ambiguity of mandate, the BBI is dependent on their participation to justify its continued existence. Erykah thus concedes that she is not the intended target of BBI's efforts, but also notes one way in which a potential disconnect between actual target audience and services offered encourage better-qualified immigrants to make use of the BBI.

*Erykah: And I'm sure I boost their numbers.*

*R: Meaning?*

*Erykah: Meaning, the way they get funding and the way they write their reports, there seem to be, or they show their success by the amount of people who sign up for things and who actually do it. So they're dealing with a systemic issue of the majority of people who come to them don't understand and, don't understand the benefit of furthering your education because a lot of the people that they're dealing with – apart from small business owners – it's in the construction industry. Right? Like they have *Constructing the Future*<sup>53</sup> ... So it makes sense, in terms of if you were trying to direct people into an industry, where they could enjoy it, not have to spend as many hours in a classroom and still come out with a decent living wage. But the problem with that is a lot of the people that they take in are people that did not like school. To put those people in a classroom setting and not have sessions with them before to, I guess, acclimate them to that environment and, and usually the sessions are run by White professionals and it is in a professional situation. Like the last two sessions that they had was in CANS, which is the Construction Association of Nova Scotia, where it was run by lawyers and engineers ... I boost numbers because any session that I say I'm going to attend, I attend. I always complete it and I always get high marks. So I am, even*

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<sup>53</sup> As noted in Chapter 1, twenty-five percent of the BBI's operations consist of skills training and certification within the construction industry.

*though I am really not the type of person that should be taking those courses. I'm good for them to take the courses because it helps them with their numbers.*

To be clear, Erykah's reference to her not being "*the type of person*" for which BBI courses are offered, according to her, was based on her educational and cultural background, and was therefore not intended as reference to her origins or ancestry. However, several participants made comments similar to that expressed by Erykah concerning the need for the BBI to reconsider whether the services being offered were at an attainable level for those (i.e. indigenous Blacks) most in need of assistance. First generation immigrants in particular, having initially come to Nova Scotia to attend university and deciding to remain in the province afterward, made frequent mention of perceived cultural differences between indigenous Blacks and themselves. In these representations, indigenous Blacks were portrayed as uninterested in education and reluctant to put in the effort required to succeed at courses and trainings, in particular, offered by the BBI, while immigrants (especially those from the West Indian community) were portrayed as placing a high cultural value on education and work ethic, one strictly reinforced by heavily involved and typically well-educated parents.

However, it is also worth noting that the BBI, in setting its expectation of clients at a level that Erykah finds problematic, can also be seen as challenging majority society and internal Black expectations of Black ability to perform at a higher level. It must also be noted once more that BBI's offerings clearly coincide with neo-liberal notions of individualism and meritocracy and reflect the contemporary political climate in Canada of the primacy of free-market solutions to social ills (Abu-Laban and Gabriel, 2002). This statement may seem at odds with right-wing critiques of employment equity as 'reverse racism,' typically based on an argument of disadvantage for White males if resources are specifically assigned to racialized, gendered, or disabled candidates (see Mensah, 2002). However, my point is that the BBI aims to raise its clientele to an equal level of qualification with majority members based on the implicit operational assumption that the playing field (i.e. the free market) is also level. In light of the systemic institutional racism upon which justification for such

equity initiatives rest, the presupposition that equally qualified or positioned Black entrepreneurs will achieve equal success to that of their majority member counterparts in the economic sector seems disingenuous at best.

Andrew provides an additional justification for the use of BBI services, despite his own displeasure for such racially directed resources, and speaks to a related issue with which the BBI must content – namely its own visibility.

*Andrew: I just, like you know in Nova Scotia there's certain programs for Black students and like if you, there's scholarships available if you like reach a certain average in high school and things like that. I was like, listen, if they're going to give me, it's not a race thing, but if they're going to give me money because I got about a 75 average, well I'm taking it. I don't give a shit. So if the BBI has all this money to foster young Black business, and nobody uses it then why the hell not take the money because all you have to do is have a solid business plan, know what you're doing, and the board approves it. Like the board obviously does deny some, but it's not that complicated to, the support's there. You really don't have to work that hard to get it ... I think it's totally unutilized because if it was totally utilized they wouldn't have a nice big fancy office downtown, right?*

Echoing earlier sentiment that the BBI is under-utilized by those most in need, Andrew raises the issue of representation in relation to the BBI as a “Black” organization. The perception of BBI’s penthouse offices and location in the central business district of Halifax, a mere two blocks from the waterfront, was a point of particular interest during my initial planning stage of this research. However, while a few participants felt this location was a source of possible alienation from the less advantaged segments of the indigenous Black community, far more participants spoke of their belief that the BBI needed to represent a prosperous and professional Black presence in the heart of the near-uniformly White business community. While perhaps more representative of the class positions of most participants in this study than of the community as a whole, these comments by participants were a useful reminder of the public role played by the BBI as symbol of a successful Black

business community to not only Blacks, but also the majority society within which this community strives to make a living.

However, a handful of participants did voice concerns that the BBI's location, size of staff, and class orientation were at odds with the lived realities of indigenous community members most in need of such an initiative. What's more, this potential disconnect between the organization and its perceived target audience was often put forth by these participants as (at least partial) explanation for the community's lackluster response to the BBI. Marcus' exasperation is both evident and emblematic of other participants' comments on this issue.

*Marcus: Being from here, I don't know why, but it's always like when you're from somewhere you don't take advantage of certain things. You know what I mean? There's BEA [the Black Educators Association], there's BBI, there's all these, WADE [Watershed Association Development Enterprise]. I forget their whole name now, but the Watershed Development people there. There's all these things. Like I have so many friends that never so much as bothered to drop an application at any of them to go through say upgrading or anything like business loans, nothing. It's like when I sit back and think why are we like that, because it's here for us but we don't use it? Now like you were telling me that BBI is the only, the only place in Canada that's like this is BBI. Right? So I'm like well why the hell don't we take advantage more of the opportunity that's there? It's just, it's weird because it's almost like you get this thing from a lot of people. Like I told ya, I grew up in the 'hood and know everybody in the 'hood, so it's almost like they look down at the people at, say at like the BBI or the Watershed Development Association, they look at them like, like their nose up in the air people. Right? Now to me I don't understand that because it's kind of like what the hell? Right? Like I mean when I first came down [to the BBI] I noticed that there was a lot of people trying to be like very, you know, stand very straight, shoulders back very far and stuff ... So to me I look around and I see the people who try, you know, to do all that stuff and like – [Mimicking a stiff professional and adopting a nasal tone] “Good morning. How are you,” they say [Grasps my hand and performs a*

*traditional Western handshake, standing straight-backed with considerable formality and space between us]. Hey, what's up? [Grasps my hand and performs a 'fraternity style' handshake with interlocking thumbs and mutual grasp of palms, pulling my body in for a chest-to-chest hug]. You know what I mean? This is who we are.*

*R: There's a way we shake hands. Yeah.*

*Marcus: We're here. [The BBI] is ours. We're not out trying to portray nothing to nobody else here. You know? I come down the hallway all the time and I walk by and everybody, they say, "Hi Marcus. How are you? Good morning." [And I say], What's happening? What's up? You know? There's none of this [formal handshake] "Hi, how are you?" stuff. Come on, man! ['Black' greeting]. This is who we are. You know what I mean? Like we all do that. When you're outside of here that's what you do, so just because you put your little suit on and your little pin that says BBI, don't forget who you are because the organization is about who we are, right or wrong. Right? ... It's just funny. Being from here and knowing the people from here, it's like we're given so many opportunities that we don't capitalize on, and then I'll hear a lot of people say, like, BBI don't want to give money to nobody unless they're African. I'm like what the hell is wrong with you? Right? I think about it and I'm like, because us being here won't go and take advantage of what's here, but those who come over here, "Oh, BBI? Okay, I'm going to go down there." Right? So of course that's what you end up seeing. Those success stories are more, not from us who were here, but from those who've come. So I just, I never could understand that, man. I never ever could get that.*

Marcus clearly reads the way one performs a handshake, one's attire, the cultural background of staff members themselves and those immigrants promoted by the BBI as Black success stories as contradicting his definition of *real* Blackness in a manner that Jackson terms the "link[ing] of class stratification to racial authenticity" (2001:189). As noted by Andrew earlier, the BBI (both offices and staff) conveys an air of professionalism and success from the moment one steps off the elevator into its luxurious reception area with an ocean view, but a success that can be read as

foreign and off-putting to disadvantaged Blacks. Thus, Marcus sees BBI staff as forgetting “*who we are*” based on the way in which he is greeted. In addition, the BBI’s active promotion of immigrant entrepreneurs as symbols of Black success through its monthly publication *Black 2 Business* was referenced by both Christopher and Andrew as unintended messages to the indigenous community that the BBI is not for them. Thus, Marcus hears “*a lot of people say, like, BBI don’t want to give money to nobody unless they’re African ... so of course that’s what you end up seeing.*”

We can therefore begin to sketch the outlines of the multiple dynamics at play surrounding the competing conceptualizations of the BBI and its intended target community. As noted by Christopher and Marcus, the BBI is founded and justified in light of the experiences of the historic African Nova Scotian communities now known as indigenous Blacks. However, Melissa and Erykah also note the ways in which the realities of state funding (i.e. deliverables and demonstrable successes) mean that the BBI must be able to locate potential clients and meet pre-determined targets and goals to continue to receive funding. Erykah and Melissa further highlight the ways in which the equally constraining realities of the indigenous community’s sub-par education levels (the realities of which were used to justify the community’s need), economic performance, and demographics prove obstacles to the target community’s ability to access the proffered services in significant enough numbers to exhaust available resources. Thus, the organization must find alternate target communities similar enough to indigenous Blacks to justify their being granted access to directed resources, and in significant enough (and positively so) numbers to meet the organization’s funding goals. Andrew and Marcus provide additional insight into the cultural and class divisions between segments of the indigenous community and the BBI, seen as being magnified by the visibility of the BBI’s *presence and diversity*. Lastly, borne of acknowledgement of institutional racism that continues to target Blacks, once again as demonstrated through poor educational incomes, lower earnings than the provincial average, (not to mention increasing incarceration rates, demonstrable mental health issues) and repeated findings of

racial profiling, the BBI must also counter racial stereotypes through the active promotion of Black success and professionalism.

The subsequent question to be asked is then whether the intended target community – i.e. indigenous Blacks – *can* make significant enough use of the BBI to be its sole recipients. Related to this question, and necessary for our understanding of the level of participation, is the equally evident question of whether BBI services are positioned to be accessible to indigenous Blacks most underserved by mainstream financial and employment institutions. However, it must also be acknowledged that not all members of the community can or should be serviced by an organization with a mandate of entrepreneurial development. In short, both questions require more investigation to provide a clearer understanding of events in Nova Scotia. What can be said here in light of this research is that there is a clear perception that the BBI is intended for indigenous Blacks, that it is not being utilized to its full potential by this community, and that there is a decided need within the indigenous community for such programs and for the positive *local* success stories it aims to foster.

With this analysis in hand, we can now turn to a brief final discussion of participant's perceptions of the need for a Black-specific initiative. As noted in chapter 2 this debate within the academic discourse has largely been one that revolves around competing claims of racism and reverse racism.

### **Reverse racism**

Chapter 2 noted the largely conservative charges that employment equity is nothing more than reverse racism; that by directing state resources toward ethno-racially identified communities the end goal of equality is justified through the same means criticized as discriminatory in the first place (Kennedy-Bourdieu, 2006; Mensah, 2002; Simon and Sabbagh, 2005). Mensah in particular provides a detailed rebuttal to such critiques of equity efforts in Canada. However, it is important to acknowledge the significant presence of this opinion amongst participants, not only to reflect the diversity of perspectives within the targeted communities of the BBI, but also to shed light on the extent to which liberal notions of equality, fairness, and

individual responsibility – not to mention neo-liberal fetishization of the free market – have permeated a historic *Canadian* community with significant ongoing experiences of racialization and marginalization. In short, the debate demonstrates the competing racial projects of employment equity (i.e. anti-racism) and (neo-)liberalism (i.e. Canada as a color-blind, meritocratic market-based society). Marcus and Andrew provide important insights in this regard, espousing egalitarian views on the potential for the BBI to serve all Nova Scotians.

*Marcus: You know it's like, it's unfair, I believe. Even though the organization is BBI, in this day and age to just help Blacks puts us no further ahead and puts us on the other side as to where, you know, we were in the 60s ... (Laughs) For us to turn around, say BBI only helped Blacks. Right? Say if on that [hypothetical form of self-identification] you check Caucasian. Automatic reject pile. If that was what that is, and I'm not sure exactly what goes on ... So, if that was what happens then it's like, all we did was go from where we were in the 60s to the other side, you know, to where the Whites were in the 60s being prejudiced against us. That's the exact same thing. You know this is 2013, almost 2014. It's like what difference does it make what box you check? You know what I'm saying? ... At the end of the day also, the numbers speak for themselves, as far as BBI is obviously a federally funded business. So if you've got, let's just say for hypothetical reasons you've got \$1 million you're given and you have to give up the whole \$1 million in the year on loans and training and whatever. If, you know, three-quarters of the year is gone and you still go a quarter of the money left and there's no Black applicants, but there's Caucasians or Middle Eastern – give them money. Right? It only makes sense to me. I mean I don't know. I don't see any reason in keeping anybody outside the box of the organization. Right? I mean at the centre of it all you got something that's created to help Black, African-Canadian, Nova Scotians, whatever you want to define it as, but at the same time don't confine it to that small box because it's just, it just to me doesn't seem ethically right. You know? That's just my opinion.*

*Andrew: I think business is business, but the fact that it falls under the BBI, which is the Black Business Initiative, then it automatically gets slotted ... Like it's BBI, it's Black business because they cater to trying to help Black people run their own companies. Which I don't know, I think it could probably just be a, maybe a department within the government, but it's its own separate thing and they're building it like it is, you know? But I just, it's, it creates a line where there doesn't really need to be a line. You can support Black business, or White business, or Jewish business, or Muslim business, or whatever, without actually saying we are. You know what I mean? You don't have to have an organization specifically dedicated to it, but they do ... I mean obviously there were people that felt like the Black community was underserved when it came to funding from the government, so therefore this would be, this was a conduit in which to help foster that because it's all about fostering Black business in Nova Scotia. Right? But there's probably, by making it a separate program, personally I just think it's further segregating the population because if, like the BBI services Black Nova Scotians. There's plenty of Caucasian entrepreneurs that could use that support, but they can't go to the BBI because they ain't Black ... Like it's just, to me, I grew up obviously with a White mom and a Black dad and I grew up the whole time, everybody is just people. Right? And I do find it funny that sometimes I think it's a disservice to the Black community to have separate programs for themselves.*

The objections of both men to the exclusivity of racially directed resources are clear, as is their shared belief that fostering Black business need not be a separate and isolated effort from broader attempts to alleviate economic inequality in the province. However, it is important to provide a few clarifications of the statements offered by Marcus and Andrew with respect to their comments on the BBI.

First and foremost, it is essential to state that the BBI is not a business. It is a non-profit organization funded jointly by the federal and provincial governments with an aim of redressing the historic – and ongoing – disenfranchisement of African Nova Scotians from the economic sphere. Second, a larger provincial body directed toward entrepreneurial development – an organization just like the BBI, but “for everyone

else,” as noted by several participants – also operates in Nova Scotia. The Centre for Entrepreneurship, Education, and Development (CEED)<sup>54</sup> has provided small-business loans, skills training, mentorship and youth initiatives to foster the entrepreneurial spirit in the province for more than 20 years (i.e. it was founded only a few years before the BBI and can thus be seen as a template for the latter organization). The existence of CEED and the BBI speaks to the question raised by Erykah in chapter 6 as to whether economic development strategies utilized by the majority society can be effective at alleviating the symptoms of anti-Black racism experienced by indigenous Blacks. It also provides a real world illustration of Lee’s theoretical *location of habitus*, seen as, in this case, a province’s *inclination* towards specific ‘solutions’ to specific ‘problems’ as a result of unique history, population, social relations, and location.

Thus, as noted by several participants affiliated with such organizations in Halifax, the “separate” institutional community of Black-directed organizations in the province has been erected – by the province, but in response to Black demand – as mirror to its “mainstream” counterpart. Therefore, to Andrew’s speculation concerning community complaints of underfunding from the state must be added the related experiences – as noted within the founding documents of the BBI, for example – of a systemic lack of service from state institutions. Simply put, the denial of state services to African Nova Scotians resulted in Black demands for and establishment of their own Black-directed *and Black-run* institutions.

Whereas Marcus and Andrew frame their concern in the language of equality of access for all citizens, Layla notes the individual discomfort with *being seen* to benefit from racially allotted resources.

*Layla: I had friends that were like ‘Oh you’re lucky you’re Black. You get a scholarship just because of your skin colour. I wish I could get \$1500 for going to college because I was Black’. And then I’m saying, yeah, like I didn’t grow up in a bad community and I didn’t have like, you know, bad opportunities. Like I had good parents and I came up from a good background, so you know it was*

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<sup>54</sup> <http://ceed.ca/about-us/>

*fortunate that I did and it was nice that I got that scholarship, but like did I, did it really like, based upon my knowledge, the skills that I had, the work that I did in school to get me to that? No. It was because I'm Black, and what does that mean? So because I'm Black does that mean that you're trying to say ... that we weren't as fortunate? So I'm just given this scholarship? I mean my dad would probably look at this a lot different because he was the one that came to, that paved [the way] to help us, so he'd be like, 'What are talking about, Layla? Why are you downplaying this?' ... So it's just like, it's great for the people that aren't as fortunate as I was, but on a personal level it was like, it was great that I had it. Did I need it? No, not so much because it didn't really scale to how I did academically in school. It scaled because of the colour of my skin.*

Layla's framing of her receiving Black-directed resources, despite her ability and therefore perceived lack of need for such assistance, was a frequent articulation amongst middle class participants in particular. This speaks to both the oft-observed tendency of 'affirmative action' programs to benefit these more advantageously situated members of the target community and the hegemonic liberal narratives of hard work, perseverance, and individual ability/responsibility inherent in such efforts (Kennedy-Bourdieu, 2006; Mensah, 2002; Simon and Sabbagh, 2005). However, it is also prescient that Layla's discomfort with being awarded a Black-directed scholarship comes in response to comments from her non-Black friends. The power inequalities required for such an articulation of economic morality in the face of inequalities born of racial discrimination are therefore an important factor in this debate, and a reality that should not be forgotten.

I wish to discuss one last matter here, an issue that is slightly beyond the scope of this research but which is related to the discussion at hand concerning the intended targets of the BBI. The issue concerns the potential appropriation by majority institutions of the BBI and reconfiguration of the initiative as *broker* or *intermediary* between the Black community and majority society.

*Melissa: Then, you know, I guess the flip side to [Black reluctance to name racism] would be, and I've had these conversations, well, talking about like some*

*of the colleagues about the issues people have in facing the bank and going to the bank, for example, with BBI. They're like, well we, the government put the BBI in place. What more do you people want? Right? Just really kind of educating them on a little bit of the history on how would you feel if you went into a bank and you weren't even serviced? You know what I mean? Or your application was denied just because of the colour of your skin? Or when they say you, 'Oh no, you need to go to the Black Business Initiative.' And that has happened. Right? They wouldn't even accept a small-business loan application because it didn't go through the BBI first. There's no written rule saying that you have to go to the BBI first if you have, whatever. You can go to the bank like anybody else, right?*

In addition to furthering our understanding of the reticence with naming racism as a coping mechanism discussed in chapter 6, Melissa refers to at least one incident in which a national banking institution refused consideration of a small-business loan because the Black applicant had not first been 'vetted' by the BBI. It should go without saying that the BBI is not intended to serve such a function, but such a potential development also seems hardly surprising in light of the sheer volume of experiences of racism shared by participants and ongoing attempts by the state to control the community of Black institutions through the continuation or cancellation of funding (see the discussion in chapter 6 concerning the Council for African Canadian Education and Africentric Learning Institute). It is therefore an important area for further study.

### **Summary**

The BBI was created out of state recognition that Blacks do not receive equal services from the province, financial institutions, or the business community at large. Statistical and anecdotal confirmation of these inequalities are provided by the historic and contemporary lived experiences of the indigenous Black community in "Nova Scotia," yet the BBI mandate is couched in the generic language of "fostering a dynamic Black presence" in the business community. Thus, an initiative unquestionably justified in its creation by the experiences of the indigenous Black

community, which wields said experiences (expressed by references to both “time” and “place”) as evidence of the *primacy* of its entitlement, is then directed at any and all persons who self-identify as belonging to the entire “race” to which the target community belongs, and after which the organization has been named. Participants expressed several theories as to how this development came to pass, from the altruistic desire of the indigenous community (seen as the locus of the organization itself) to embrace all peoples of African descent, broadly defined to the more cynical, and perhaps pragmatic, view that the indigenous community is neither large enough nor able to meet the minimum eligibility requirements of the initiative in the numbers needed to justify its continuing existence as presently constituted. Related to this latter interpretation are frustrations expressed by BBI staff concerning the community’s sense of unfettered entitlement to BBI funds. Illustrative of this dynamic is the often repeated tale of an aspiring BBI client who showed up with a hastily drawn restaurant interior sketched on a bar napkin looking for “my money.” A key cause of tension surrounding the BBI can thus be said to be the result of ongoing ambiguity concerning the organization’s intended target communities and goals.

In other words, while initially created to serve the needs of the indigenous Black community (as recalled by a founding member of the BBI, “We never thought about the name in the beginning. We just thought it was obvious who we were talking about”) the BBI as an organization dependent on state funding soon came to realize that their target community could not sustain the initiative on its own. Rather, Blacks and Africans “from away” were needed to meet the state-determined expectations and thereby justify its continued funding. Thus, a more inclusive definition of (who counts as and what it means to be) “Black” was required. An open definition of “Black” was further justified by the fact that at no point in the initiative’s founding documents (i.e. the Task Force Report) was a more exclusive definition or identification of a specific community provided. Therefore, as explained by the same founding member of the initiative, “We couldn’t then impose a definition on who was Black. The report just said Black, so we decided that anyone who self-identified as Black was who was meant to use BBI.” This lingering ambiguity

therefore can be seen as fostering Black business, but also continued tensions between a self-identified indigenous community and recent immigrants that are cast uniformly by the state as the African Nova Scotian community. Thus, while challenging institutional racism by increasing the visibility of Black success in the business sector, the BBI may also be providing a service to the mainstream financial community (and provincial bureaucracy) as racial liaison and therefore, as an unintended consequence, reinforcing the social divisions it is intended to dismantle.

## Conclusion

### Summary

Intended as an exploratory case study, this research examines the operations of the Black Business Initiative (BBI), a federally and provincially funded organization operating in Halifax with a mandate to create “a dynamic and vibrant black presence within the Nova Scotian business community” (BBI, 2012). Through this examination socio-political constructions of “Black” and “African” identities in Nova Scotia and the meaning thereof to individuals who assert this identities to access services provided by the BBI are made visible. Seen by this research as a rare example of Canada’s much-touted official multiculturalism that explicitly directs resources racially, the BBI is unique in light of the organization’s (at least partial) agency to determine its own membership. This equity effort thus also serves as an opportunity to document one example of a “racial project” (Omi and Winant, 1994) in which both the state and marginalized, yet influential, actors contribute to the reification of “race” as a legitimate social category, both of identification and need. What’s more, the BBI serves as a site of contestation amongst diverse communities “of African descent” concerning the meanings of their own (self- and ascribed) identification as “African” and/or “Black,” as well as the understandings on the part of members of each community of the Black/African Other.

One’s (self or ascribed) identification as “African,” “African Canadian,” “African Nova Scotian,” “Black,” or “indigenous Black,” and the use of these terms<sup>55</sup> by the BBI and other similarly directed organizations, programs and government departments, is a matter of considerable debate and tension within and amongst these various

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<sup>55</sup> Interestingly, “Caribbean” or “Afro-Caribbean” identities, while representative of significant Black populations in Nova Scotia, are not part of the discourse concerning nomenclature of organizations in Halifax. Interesting, because West Indians in particular have made steady migrations to the province in increasing numbers since the 1960s and, according to several participants, were the likely catalyst for the formation of an indigenous Black identity. In other words, while none of these participants could confirm their assumption, the belief that indigenous Black, as an identity, was formed as a means of drawing the boundary of Black communities “from here” and “from away” in competition over jobs and access to state funding for marginalized groups was common. Further research into modern migrations of labourers from the Caribbean (in particular from Barbados to Cape Breton for work in the mining industry) to Nova Scotia over the past 50 years, and relations with African Nova Scotian communities over this period, is required.

communities “of African descent” in Nova Scotia. Wolf’s political economy approach positions such tensions – seen as being born of colonial demand for labour maintained through global/local processes of racialization within capitalist networks themselves marked by difference – as the very “problem” to be examined through anthropological research. Our goal as researchers is therefore to understand “the formation of anthropological subjects at the intersection of deeply rooted local and global histories” (Roseberry, 1988:164). Answering that call, this original anthropological research has found significant insights into the formation of an indigenous Black community in Nova Scotia through the use of Stuart Hall’s theorization of *articulation* and *positioning*. Within this conceptual framework, the *articulation* of Black indigeniety in Nova Scotia is seen as the coupling of a historically distinct group’s lived experiences of subjugation and marginalization in place (i.e. Blackness) with a political and juridical ideology of belonging and entitlement to state recognition and resources (i.e. indigeniety). Thus, a group historically *positioned* as “Black” (i.e. Other) within a lasting “New World ... narrative of displacement” (1990:236) can be seen as adopting and adapting a discourse of indigeniety as an act of political *positioning* and empowerment. This application of the noted cultural studies scholar’s work to the meanings of indigeniety and Blackness is therefore a noteworthy contribution to both literatures, as well as the growing field of Black Canadian studies. Anderson (2007) and Brown (2005), through their respective ethnographic works, inform this discussion on Black identity through theorizations of how indigeniety and “place”-based identity draw upon historically situated experiences with colonialism and the institution of slavery to ground lingering ideas about “race.”

However, while this research has largely focused on the making of a social boundary between “Black” and “African” through reference to experience and “place,” class and ideological tensions are also evident within and between these ethnoracial categories. However, whereas indigenous Blacks frequently derided the lack of awareness and empathy for their plight amongst their immigrant counterparts, the main complaint from African and West Indian participants concerned feelings of being excluded from the local Black community. Both recently arrived and

established immigrants routinely expressed frustration with being labeled *Come From Aways* (CFAs), a term used to describe anyone not born and raised in Nova Scotia<sup>56</sup> and frequently described as illustrative of how historic African Nova Scotian community draws the boundary of belonging to “Nova Scotia” from which they were excluded.

However, it is also worth noting that, historically, it has been individuals from both the indigenous and immigrant communities that have lobbied in partnership for the establishment of the significant community of organizations attempting to correct a persistent institutional imbalance of services and resources accessible by Nova Scotians of African descent<sup>57</sup>. That being said, it is exclusively statistics pertaining to the historic African Nova Scotian community that have been used to demonstrate the need for such organizations as the Black Business Initiative. Thus, the construction of symbolic and social boundaries between “Black” or “African” identity with respect to accessing the BBI – largely performed as the articulation of Black indigeniety – the perceived intended targets thereof, and the understandings of the role of Black-directed organizations in Nova Scotia also speak directly to questions of belonging manifest in multiculturalism and diaspora discourses, as well as competing notions of equality articulated through debate of the *merits* of employment equity.

### **Contributions**

Jacqueline Nassy Brown, in an abbreviated published in a broad collection of works advocating for contemporary applications of Omi and Winant’s racial formation theory, argues for research that is “designed to ground processes of globalization and racial formation in localities other than through displacement and in terms of difference rather than similarity in order to challenge notions of the Black Atlantic as a solidarity community” (2006:16). This project addresses Brown’s call by examining the manner in which diverse “Black” and “African” communities compete not solely for state resources, but also to define their respective identities through

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<sup>56</sup> This term is applicable to the Maritimes in general. As such, I have attempted where appropriate to note regional, rather than racial, characteristics and tendencies.

<sup>57</sup> See Bridgal and Bishop, 2008.

the articulation of difference. In this respect, Appiah and Gutmann (1996:15) note the inherent contradiction, and interdependence, within a system that requires that “government recognize the ways in which race continues to influence the life chances of individuals and that individuals should not view their own or their fellow citizens’ identities as being “too tightly scripted’ by race.” This contradiction is clearly evident in the establishment and operations of the BBI, an equity initiative that performs the admirable task of racial uplift within a social environment marked by persistently pervasive anti-Black racism. In his introduction to the aforementioned work by Appiah and Gutmann, Wilkins asks an important question that lies at the heart of this project: “What message is conveyed to individuals about their own identities when government distributes benefits and burdens on the basis of race?” (ibid). Two preliminary answers to Wilkins’ query are contained within this ethnography. First, African Nova Scotians understand that to access the BBI they must be both *visible* and *recognizable* as “Black.” Thus, competition over access to such racially directed resources bear witness to the *articulation* and *positioning* of an “indigenous Black” community in opposition to foreign “Africans.” Second, African Nova Scotians understand through their self- and ascribed identification as disaffected “Blacks” in need of redress that our society’s ongoing construction of “race” as *difference from* Eva Mackey’s (2002) unhyphenated, indistinguishable “Canadian Canadians” continues to shape national notions of belonging, and thus remains an active site of internal and external contestation. This research therefore contributes to the broader literature on the multi-sited and multi-faceted processes of racialization in Canada, a country renowned for its lasting commitment to multiculturalism, as both legislation and social value.

It is in light of the official multiculturalism espoused in Canada that the state will not relate to its citizenry on the basis of race that the social fact of the BBI (and the broader community of such organizations it represents) is significant in and of itself. Thus, as the first academic work known to specifically examine this organization’s role in social constructions of Blackness this research is also a significant contribution. However, the government decision in December 2014 to cease funding to the Council on African Canadian Education in relation to an alleged disagreement

over control of the Africentric Learning Institute raises an analytic inkling in the field to the level of a pressing concern. Quite simply, how effective can advocacy groups be in their critique of the pillars of institutional racism if they are themselves, albeit at arms length, part of the state infrastructure? This comment is not a criticism of either the BBI or similar equity efforts. Participants were unanimous in their belief that such organizations are desperately needed and having a positive impact in the community, and I see no reason to counter their views. Rather, my interest lies in the repeated decisions made by the authors of the BLAC and Task Force reports and successive provincial governments since 1994 to create ostensibly *separate* organizations, initiatives, offices, and other various bodies directed exclusively to the (widely recognized indigenous Black, but homogenized as) African Nova Scotian community. One can understand the reticence of African Nova Scotian community leaders to believe that majority-led institutions could be trusted to address the racist ideologies upon which they have been built, and their desire to create their own community of organizations. Equally understandable is the diversity of ideologies represented within this community by the varied nomenclatures of its organizations. However, some twenty years after the unanimous adoption of the BLAC Report's recommendations<sup>58</sup> -- a significant moment for Black Nova Scotia -- the reality may be that rather than a truly separate and autonomous Black structural presence, what has taken place is the incorporation of grassroots Black resistance into the belly of the state.

If this is in fact the case, I cannot help but view such incorporation *as state tactic* with clear parallels to “the gulf between the rhetoric of equality and the application of equality” (Aylward, 2005) discussed in chapter 2 in relation to the Indigenous Black and Mi'kmaq program at Dalhousie University. While not discussed in depth in this work, numerous participants also spoke of the now defunct Black United Front<sup>59</sup>, an advocacy organization formed in the 1960s that is widely seen as having

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<sup>58</sup> I make repeated reference to the primacy of this report, rather than that of the BBI Task Force report, in this discussion as it is the document which explicitly names systemic institutional racism as the cause of poor performance outcomes by Black Nova Scotians (BLAC, 1994), and in light of the fact that the latter itself references its own foundation in the former (BBI Task Force, 1995).

<sup>59</sup> Winks (1997) contains the most information found on this organization.

been silenced by the simple cutting of funding once it “got too loud” in its critique of government (in)actions. Further study of this significant community of small-to-medium-sized offices within (or at arms length from) the province may therefore produce fruitful empirical reinforcement of the theorization of the dialectic between structure and agency – and one with a decidedly Canadian flair that may also support Lee’s theory of the location of habitus (1997) as limiting the spectrum of political options through a disposition toward locale-specific responses.

### **Looking forward**

Participants raised three significant issues during this research that, while beyond the scope of this project, are worthy of academic consideration and examination in future works.

### ***The Black experience***

As discussed in chapter 7, more than one participant in this research made allegations that Black international students were being ‘warned’ to steer clear of indigenous areas and bodies. A few indigenous Black participants raised this same issue in discussing what they saw as the preferential treatment of Come From Aways (CFAs) by the retail and service industries. Both communities pointed to elements of material culture, in particular dress and accent, as the means by which majority society (and they themselves) distinguished indigenous and immigrant Blacks/Africans, but skin colour is likely also a factor. Critical examination of this allegation is needed to determine the validity and scale of such differentiation, and if confirmed would speak to the frequent expression of the common experience of being Black in White majority society. Simply put, the active discouragement of intra-Black fraternization by majority members in positions of authority, and the related differential treatment in the public sphere of ‘local’ vs. ‘foreign’ Blacks could provide valuable ethnographic data for the problematization of this long-held belief.

### **The changing face of Black Nova Scotia**

The second potential finding in need of further study is that of changing perceptions of biraciality in Nova Scotia. The existence of biracial individuals, it must be prefaced, is not in and of itself a new development in Nova Scotia. The vast majority of individuals who participated in this study frequently commented on the presence in their own family trees of Aboriginal or European ancestors. However, historically speaking, and due to the prevalence of overt racism and segregation in Nova Scotian society in the past, biracial children were uniformly raised in Black communities by Black families. Most typically these children were raised by the parents of the father – concerns regarding the increasing number of biracial children were exclusively presented through references to the product of relations between “young” Black men and “silly” White girls – or some other relative. Until fairly recently then, biracial children were raised as Black, in Black communities, and were seen as such by Black and White society. The development in recent years is that biracial children are being raised by their mothers outside of Nova Scotia’s historically Black communities, and largely with no knowledge of or connection to their Black relatives. As one participant noted, “these kids are being raised not even knowing their grandparents’ names.” The concern is thus that children visibly identifiable as (at least partially) “Black” – and who are living aspects of the Black experience of racism and racial marginalization – are being raised by White families with no understanding of how their children will be perceived or how to cope with their difference. Several participants predicted this would result in a cohort of angry, disenfranchised and dispossessed young Black men that will inevitably end up lashing out against the society that rejects them due to the lost connection to communities that understand their realities and identity. However, while unexpressed by participants, one can easily see how the construction of a new “biracial” category of identity also poses a legitimate threat to the maintenance of an indigenous “Black” population.

Erykah provides a fitting final thought for this examination of the ever-shifting meanings of Blackness in Nova Scotia, and one that can hopefully serve as inspiration for further discussion.

*Erykah: You see, it's interesting though because Nova Scotia, the face of Nova Scotia, the face of Black Nova Scotia is changing. If you look at the statistics and if you just walk around the city I'm sure you'll notice it, if you go into the Square<sup>60</sup>, neighbourhoods that people think are Black are – huge numbers, visible numbers of White people. A lot of White single moms with Black kids, and one generation down from that you'll get a lot of Black people who look White. So the notion of self-identification is interesting because it's changing. Nova Scotia used to be a place where if your great-grandparents were Black, and everybody knew it, they knew who you were and they knew you were Black. That's not happening. So it's up to the person to choose whether they identify. And now where you have a lot of single, young, White moms, who might not raise their kids and relate them to understand, you know, this thing that you're going through where you don't look like me and other people might look at you or treat you differently is because you are Black. It is because your dad is Black, or whatever the situation is. This is something that is definitely going to have to be dealt with. I don't know ... If you're going to have this Black community, in inverted commas, they're going to have to start asking what is it? What is Black? What does Black mean? Are we choosing to be Black? Like how far along down the line does it go before you're no longer Black, and all these other questions that they're, they're gonna have to look at.*

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<sup>60</sup> Erykah is making reference to a predominantly Black housing project called Uniacke Square in the North End of Halifax. The Square is one of five projects that are now home to the former home-owning Africville community destroyed and relocated in the 1960s.

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