The Heritagization of Africville: Tourism, Racism, and the Politics of Commemoration

Precious Chukwuemeka Ndukauba

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University of Ottawa

Abstract

This dissertation critically examines the heritagization of Africville, a historic Black community in Halifax, Nova Scotia, through the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT). Utilizing qualitative methodologies—including critical race methodology (CRM) and netnography, and methods such as semi-structured interviews with former residents, descendants, and stakeholders, participant observation at the Africville Annual Reunion, and document analysis of articles and online visitor reviews—the study investigates Africville's transformation into a heritage tourism site and museum. The findings reveal how the Africville Museum functions as a site of racial resilience, collective memory, and anti-racism discourse, while simultaneously serving as a platform for reconciliation and healing. However, the research also interrogates how institutionalized reconciliation efforts may inadvertently reinforce marginalization within the "apology paradigm." By foregrounding lived experiences and visitor interpretations, the study highlights the dual function of Africville as both a commemorative space and a catalyst for social justice advocacy. It argues that museums must evolve beyond static repositories of history to become participatory spaces that foster agency, dialogue, and community ownership. This work contributes to scholarship on roots tourism, Black heritage preservation, and racial justice, offering practical insights into how heritage institutions can more equitably engage with histories of systemic racism and support transformative policy and public understanding in postcolonial Canadian contexts.

Keywords*: Africville, Critical Race Theory, Netnography, Heritage Tourism, Black History, Racial Resilience.*

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Dedication

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Chapter One – A Journey to the Africville Museum

Introduction

This dissertation is born out of my interest in tourism in general but also, in the value of heritage sites and their historical significance. As a Nigerian international student in Canada, my fascination for cultural places and attractions, including museums, has afforded me a distinctive perspective to examine the merging of leisure, culture, history, and identity at heritage sites, particularly those celebrating and commemorating the history of Black people in Canada. My engagement with these sites and locations extends beyond conventional tourism, as they serve as entry points into the lived experiences and historical trajectories of Black North American descendants of the transatlantic slave trade. As an African student and researcher, I became especially interested in Black heritage locations around Canada, as testaments to the perseverance, challenges, and victories of Black communities, both historically and contemporarily. My enthusiasm for researching these locations arises from a commitment to comprehend, conserve, and disseminate this significant past, alongside a conviction that the narratives they convey can aid in cultivating a more inclusive and fair society in Canada.

Canada is often associated with the narrative of emancipation of Black people in North America via the Underground Railroad (Earhart, 2006). However, in Canada, Black people and communities still experience a range of racial discrimination, segregation, and forced relocation, with the severity and character of these issues varying by region (Clairmont & Magill, 1971; McRae & McCullough, 2023). The history of the community called Africville is a highly symbolic case that tarnishes the reputation of Canada as a model of inclusion and diversity.

Africville, a thriving Black community founded between 1835 and the early 1840s, flourished for over 150 years despite systemic discrimination and deprivation (Clairmont & Magill, 1971; Nelson, 2000). The Seaview United Baptist Church, also known as *"*the heartbeat

of Africville*,"* served as the community's spiritual and social hub, hosting key events such as marriages, funerals, and baptisms (McRae, 2023; Tattrie, 2021). During that time, residents of the community faced persistent neglect from Halifax officials, who denied basic services such as sewage, clean water, police services and paved roads, while imposing harmful infrastructure, including a railway tracks, a garbage dump, a fertilizer plant, an infectious disease hospital, and a prison in and around the community (Clairmont & Magill, 1971; McRae, 2023). These actions, rooted in anti-Black racism, underscored the systemic marginalization Africville residents endured (Tattrie, 2021).

In the 1960s, Halifax authorities classified Africville as a slum and targeted the area for urban renewal projects (Clairmont & Magill, 1971; Nelson, 2008). Using the term "urban slum," Halifax officials portrayed the relocation as a necessary public improvement project, ignoring the systemic racial prejudice that had contributed to Africville's marginalization (Nelson, 2008). By the early 1970s, the Africville community had been dismantled under the Africville Forced Relocation Program, initiated by the City of Halifax between 1964 and 1970 as part of a broader urban renewal strategy. This initiative resulted in the displacement of residents through mechanisms of coercion, financial inducement, and property expropriation (Nelson, 2008; Tattrie, 2021). The loss of this community sparked decades of advocacy from former residents seeking justice. That led to Africville being designated a National Historic Site in 1996, recognizing it as a symbol of resistance against racism (Khan, 2021). Furthermore, in 2010, the Nova Scotia government issued a formal apology and funded the reconstruction of a replica of the community Church as a museum named Africville Museum (Halifax Regional Municipality, 2018; Khan, 2021).

More recently, on October 9, 2024, the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, in collaboration with the Africville Heritage Trust, announced Africville's designation as Canada's first UNESCO Place of History and Memory linked to Enslavement and the Slave Trade (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2024). The UNESCO designation carries profound symbolic and material implications. While Africville was not a direct site of enslavement, its historical and cultural significance emerges from the legacy of slavery and systemic anti-Black racism in Canada. As such, its inclusion within UNESCO's global framework for sites connected to the history of slavery do not only elevate Africville's historical status but also embed it within a transnational narrative of remembrance, resistance, and justice.

This specific UNESCO's designation is typically reserved for locations that were either directly connected to the transatlantic slave trade—such as slave ports, plantations, auction markets, fortresses, and burial grounds—or are symbolically significant as places where the memory of slavery is preserved and honored. These sites function as living archives, bearing witness to past atrocities while also promoting education, public engagement, and reconciliation. Africville, through its painful history of racialized displacement, environmental racism, and community marginalization, embodies this latter category. Though formed in the aftermath of slavery, it represents the persistent structural violence endured by Black communities and their ongoing struggles for dignity, recognition, and restitution.

This designation of Africville as a UNESCO Place of History and Memory linked to Enslavement, and the Slave Trade will likely serve several interrelated purposes. Firstly, it will ensure the preservation and protection of the site against further erasure or neglect. Africville's material remnants and symbolic heritage are at risk without sustained institutional investment. International recognition would demand accountability from local, provincial, and federal

governments to maintain and conserve the site responsibly. Secondly, such recognition will elevate Africville's role as an educational space, facilitating deeper public understanding of Canada's complicity in global systems of racial injustice. The story of Africville reveals how the afterlives of slavery have manifested through discriminatory urban planning, environmental exploitation, and the denial of basic infrastructure and services to Black communities.

Moreover, the designation supports anti-racist and human rights education, offering a platform to interrogate the broader legacy of anti-Black racism in Canadian history. More than ever, Africville is becoming a vital site for memory work, enabling collective reflection, intergenerational dialogue, and political mobilization. The recognition aligns with broader anti-colonial and anti-capitalist strategies that seek to center marginalized voices and histories within national consciousness.

From a practical perspective, a UNESCO designation can also stimulate cultural tourism, research collaborations, and international visibility, which in turn could lead to economic opportunities for descendants and the surrounding community. Africville will be repositioned not only as a local heritage site but as a node within global memory networks that honor the histories of slavery and its afterlives. This shift would also entail certain responsibilities for government institutions, including the ethical stewardship of the site, inclusive policy-making processes, and the prioritization of descendant community voices in heritage governance.

In conclusion, the international recognition of Africville through a UNESCO designation represents a significant step toward redressing historical harms and amplifying the stories of Black resilience in Canada. It contributes to the global movement for reparative justice, while positioning Africville as a critical site for education, resistance, and remembrance. Such a

designation is not merely symbolic; it carries tangible possibilities for historical reckoning, public accountability, and long-term community empowerment.

Consequently, these recognitions of Africville significantly deepened my engagement with the historical legacies embodied in heritage sites. My introduction to Critical Race Theory (CRT) and its methodological extension, Critical Race Methodology (CRM), provided the analytical tools to critically examine structural racism as a pervasive force—not solely confined to formal institutions and policy structures, but also intricately woven into the fabric of everyday life, cultural memory, and spatial dynamics (Asch, 2017; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2022). While many factors such as colonialism, imperialism, and the slave trade played a significant role in establishing a global system of racial hierarchy, contemporary racism, though less overt, remains pervasive and continues to impact minority groups. Moreover, the lasting effects of the slave trade persist, influencing health disparities, socioeconomic conditions, and overall well-being. Thus, employing a CRT framework to study Africville was crucial; it allowed me to examine the story of Africville (Adams, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021), and understand its destruction within contemporary shape shifting colonial forms of power that continue to structure discrimination, and sociopolitical control (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005). Furthermore, CRT allowed me to highlight the community's resilience in the face of the demolition of their homes and Church while assessing how the Africville Museum has been utilized to mitigate the former residents' struggle for individual justice and to shape historical narratives (Adams, 2017; Clairmont et al., 2010; HRM, n.d; Kohl & Halter, 2021). This research approach reinforced my commitment to emphasize Africville's past in broader conversations about race and heritage.

Today, Africville functions as a vital site of memory and pilgrimage, preserving its legacy as a cornerstone for understanding anti-Black racism and resistance in Canada (Khan, 2021). Each summer, former residents and their descendants return to this historic space to honour their shared ancestry and commemorate the community's resilience in the face of systemic displacement and marginalization (Tattrie, 2021). At the heart of this remembrance is the Africville Museum, housed in a reconstructed version of the original Seaview United Baptist Church—a symbolic and spiritual epicentre of the former community. The museum curates a compelling assemblage of photographs, artifacts, and oral histories that bear witness to Africville's lived realities and collective memory (McRae, 2023).

Crucially, the museum features storytelling from former residents, whose first-hand accounts bring authenticity, emotional depth, and intergenerational continuity to the visitor experience. In line with CRT, which emphasizes participatory, community-driven engagement over static curation, these narratives are not mere supplements to archival material—they are central to the museum's epistemological framework (Adams, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021). Given the impermanence of oral witnesses, the presence of these storytellers constitutes an urgent and invaluable opportunity to capture knowledge that may soon be lost. Their testimonies transform the museum from a space of passive display into one of active, dialogic remembrance. More than a memorial, the Africville Museum thus operates as a living, breathing institution committed to social justice. It safeguards the cultural and historical legacy of Africville while fostering critical reflection and public dialogue about the ongoing legacies of anti-Black racism, land dispossession, and systemic inequality. In doing so, it exemplifies the transformative potential of community-rooted heritage institutions in redressing historical wrongs and shaping more equitable futures (Chen et al., 2014a, 2014b).

In this context, exploring the lived experiences of Black communities in Canada—those who resisted slavery, championed civil rights, and contributed meaningfully to the formation of the nation—offers a vital sense of historical continuity and cultural connection (Cotter, 2022). Heritage sites such as the Africville Museum serve as tangible markers of these legacies, embodying narratives of resistance, resilience, and community survival (Africville Museum, n.d.). As an international student navigating the cultural and academic terrain of a new country, my engagement with such sites has provoked deep personal reflection. The histories of Africville and the Black Loyalists, both shaped by displacement and fortitude in the face of adversity, strongly resonate with my own identity as a descendant of the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria—a people with a parallel history of marginalization—and as a newcomer adjusting to life in Canada. While the sociopolitical contexts differ, I find a meaningful alignment in the themes of perseverance, self-determination, and collective memory. These resonances underscore the broader importance of Black heritage sites—not only as archival spaces but also as pedagogical and inspirational arenas that help shape critical dialogues about race, belonging, and social justice. It is within this intellectual and affective framework that my doctoral research on the Africville is situated, shaped by both academic inquiry and a personal identification with themes of displacement, identity, and remembrance.

The significance of Black heritage attractions thus extends beyond their immediate communities. These sites hold transformative potential for Canadian society and the global public by fostering more inclusive understandings of national history and cultural identity (Adams, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021; Simpson, 2007). In Canada, Black history has often been marginalized or rendered invisible within dominant historical narratives (National Trust Canada, 2020). By visiting, learning from, and advocating for the preservation of Black heritage spaces,

individuals and institutions can actively challenge historical erasures and elevate Black contributions in public consciousness (Clover, 2015). I approach museums and heritage sites not only as repositories of the past but also as platforms for education and advocacy (Meethan, 2004). These institutions can function as catalysts for societal transformation by offering richer, more equitable representations of history (Adams, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021; Simpson, 2007). Specifically, engagement with sites such as the Africville Museum invites critical reflection on Canada's racial past and present and creates space for ongoing conversations about anti-Black racism and structural inequality (Brooms, 2011; Potter et al., 2024).

A substantial body of academic literature has documented the historical experiences of Black and African-descended communities in North America, tracing their migrations, contributions, and struggles over the past four centuries (Bertley, 1977; Bristow et al., 1994; Forsythe, 1971; Govia & Lewis, 1988; Whitfield, 2005; Whitehead, 2013; Winks, 1997). These scholarships have also engaged deeply with the persistent influence of racism and systemic exclusion. Seminal works have examined the destruction and forced displacement of Africville (Nelson, 2008; Clairmont & Dennis, 1999), as well as broader analyses of race and mobility (Dillette, 2021), and the memory politics embedded in sites of enslavement (Benjamin et al., 2016). More recent studies have explored how Black travel narratives are represented through digital media, offering contemporary insights into global Black mobility and identity (Dillette et al., 2019; Peters, 2021). Despite this growing scholarship, there remains a noticeable gap in critical academic engagement with Black tourism and heritage sites specifically within the Canadian context—an absence this dissertation seeks to address.

Thus, the purpose of this dissertation is to explore the heritagization process of Africville, with particular emphasis on how the site is experienced, remembered, and lived by its former

residents and their descendants. While also considering the perspectives of visitors of the site, this study centers the voices of those for whom Africville remains a deeply personal and ancestral home. Through the lens of CRT, I examined the processes that led to the Africville residents' eviction, to the official apology, and until the construction of a museum on the site. I am interested in the implications of the creation of the space as a heritage site, within the notion of root and pilgrimage tourism, for former residents, their descendants and visitors, as "theatre of pain," but also as a site for fighting anti-Black racism and stimulating hope. Based on qualitative research, this dissertation used CRT and its methodology, netnography, and collected data using participant observation, semi-structured interviews, document analysis and online reviews as methods. The objectives were to;

1. Document the story of Africville through its heritagization process that led to the building of the Church replica and then museum of Africville;
2. Explore the experiences and narratives of former residents and descendants from Africville regarding the site as heritage;
3. Examine and document the former residents and descendants' annual Reunion through root tourism;
4. Examine how visitors experience and perceive the site and museum by analyzing their online reviews.

Some of the questions that this thesis would like to answer and highlight are how and why did Africville become a heritage sites, why was the church destroyed and what led to the building of the replica of the church turned museum, how do former residents make sense of the museum, how the former residents and descendants remember Africville through the annual Reunion, how the Reunion serves as a cultural act of reclaiming of space, how it serves as a

counter-storytelling narrative and how visitors make sense of the story of Africville after their visit to the museum. My task entails critically analyzing the ways in which the Africville site conveys the past and contribute to current conversations about racism, identity, leisure, and belonging. The story of Africville and its "museification" provide a chance to address difficult historical facts about Canada pertaining to institutional discrimination and racism. We can better understand the causes of today's social problems and fight to build a more equal society by studying these histories.

Dissertation Format

This dissertation is structured as an article-based thesis made up of three publishable papers. In chapter two, the aim of the article is to explore the Africville museification process and how it became a contested site. Using a CRM lens, I analyze the social construction of Africville as an urban slum to justify the demolition of their community and land eviction (Nelson, 2000), which ultimately led to an apology from the city and the creation of this memorialized museum space. I also examine how the site embodies an reconciliation paradigm (Green, 2012), which framed Africville's destruction as a singular and isolated historical "error" that is acknowledged and re-integrated into mainstream Canadian history through the museum exhibition. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data from Africville former residents, their descendants and key stakeholders.

In chapter three, I examined the Africville Reunion, a deeply symbolic annual event held at the Africville site in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The event has transformed the Africville landmark into a site of roots and personal memory tourism. This paper aimed to specifically explore the development of roots and personal memory tourism on the Africville site. I adopted a CRM

framework to examine the intersection of race, identity, and historical justice, emphasizing the importance of counter-narratives and the need for structural reforms (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The analysis considers how the Africville Reunion fosters community resilience, preserves historical memory, and serves as a platform for anti-racism advocacy. By interrogating the complexities of Africville's history and heritagization, this research contributes to broader discussions on the transformative potential of roots tourism within racialized contexts.

Lastly, in chapter four, I explored the online reviews provided by visitors on the prominent online review platforms in the tourism industry, namely Google Review and TripAdvisor, regarding the Africville Museum. The goal was to critically analyze their impressions and encounters at the museum to understand their viewpoint of the Africville Museum. Incorporating elements of CRT, the analysis aimed to understand how visitors experience the museum and how they make sense of the underlying issues of racial discrimination and discourses about the story told in the Africville Museum (Adams, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021). The results of the study revealed the museum's crucial role in enlightening the public about a key but frequently disregarded period in Canadian history (Perla, 2020; Simpson, 2007). The emotional resonance of the story and the displays, together with the difficulties with accessibility and museum infrastructure, constitutes a pivotal aspect of the visitor experience and perspective of the Africville Museum.

Literature Review

The literature review for this dissertation includes studies conducted on heritage sites and attractions such as museums, roots and pilgrimage tourism, online review and tourist perception and experiences at heritage attractions. I also examined a variety of themes, including the reasons

for visiting ancestral homelands (Coles & Timothy, 2004b; Duval, 2002), roots travel as a sort of pilgrimage (Esman, 1984), and homesick and personal memory tourism (Marschall, 2014, 2014b, 2015, 2016).

Heritage Sites, Roots and Pilgrimage Tourism

Heritage experts and scholars define heritage as the modern-day use of the past for a variety of reasons, including conservation, education, entertainment, and tourism (Timothy & Boyd, 2003, 2006). Heritage resources and attractions for tourism typically include museums, literary places, historic buildings, villages, cultural landscapes, monuments, Reunions, battlefields, castles, Churches, traditional cuisines, folkways, folklore, sacred places, and archaeological sites (Timothy & Boyd, 2003, 2006). Heritage, self-discovery, and the quest for kin reconnection are also combined in what has been referred to as roots tourism, based on discovering and learning about the culture of ancestral society (Mensah, 2015). According to Basu (2004), roots tourism is a type of tourism motivated by the search of roots and the desire to return home, which results in travelling to the ancestral homeland and this sort of trip is sometimes considered as a pilgrimage and experienced as “a journey of discovery” and “life-changing experience” (p. 151). Similarly, McCain and Ray (2003) call “roots tourists” people travelling in search of genealogical information or just to feel connected to their ancestors and to their ancestral roots (p. 713). Moreover, Timothy's (1997) contributions to the tourism literature helped the idea of roots travel gain academic and further research interest. Timothy emphasized that millions of people worldwide travel domestically and internationally to experience and participate in roots tourism (Timothy, 1997).

Furthermore, many travellers make these “journey of discovery” to connect, heal, and make peace with the dark past of the transatlantic slave trade (Dillette, 2021). This is consistent

Basu's studies (2001, 2004a, 2005, 2007), which noted that many of the frequently occurring themes set involved religious concepts like pilgrimage and expressions of piety or sacredness, as well as a widespread reluctance to present oneself or be presented as a tourist (Higginbotham, 2012). In that sense, pilgrimage tourism is about different ways of understanding and connecting to a place; it is "a particular travel genre in which people construct meaning through the consumption of place" (Kelner, 2012, p. 9). Critically, this form of pilgrimage has led to a massive increase in the number of protected sites, attractions, Reunions, memorials, and festivals devoted to promoting the histories and identities of Black people and other historically marginalized communities in North America within the broader tourism sector (Benjamin et al., 2016). Certainly, Black people in North America are interested in researching their ancestors through family history/genealogy studies (Coles & Timothy, 2004), and connecting with their departed ancestors in the form of pilgrimage tourism (Bradish & Bradish, 2000; Matthiessen, 1989; Timothy, 2001). Thus, this dissertation falls under the realm of roots and pilgrimage tourism studies for people whose primary purpose for tourism and travel activities is to visit their ancestral homes or a place of origin (Teye et al., 2011); most times, the ancestral homes symbolize a sacred site for the tourist (Shinde, 2007).

Overall, heritage, roots and pilgrimage tourism is now a crucial part of the overall tourism industry, making essential contributions to economic growth, security, stability, and the shaping of historical and cultural identity around the world (Park, 2010, 2014). Heritage has evolved into an intricate and diverse field that centres around the commercial utilization of history in the present. It constantly changes due to political, economic, and sociocultural factors (Park, 2010, 2014). This modern perspective regards heritage tourism as a personal experience and emphasizes that certain tourists may view sites and attractions "as a part of their own cultural

heritage" (Poria et al., 2004, p. 20). However, the majority of these research studies have primarily concentrated on cultural encounters rather than the tourists' impression and encounter of the heritage site associated with a historical violent event (Gursoy et al., 2022).

Black Museification and Decolonial Museum Practices

Black museums play a critical role in safeguarding and narrating the histories of African-descended communities, acting as vital spaces for cultural memory, political engagement, and historical redress (Faden, 2007; Sandell, 2007, 2016). In Canada, institutions such as the Africville Museum and the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia offer not only archival preservation but also sites of cultural assembly, storytelling, and education rooted in local Black experiences (Adams, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021). These museums challenge the historical exclusion of Black narratives and reframe heritage by presenting counter-histories that decenter dominant White perspectives (Brooms, 2011; Potter et al., 2024).

However, many museums through the museification process have also been critiqued for commodifying culture and detaching heritage from its living context (Choay, 2019; Ruy & Almeida, 2020). Museums have historically operated as colonial institutions, legitimizing Eurocentric narratives and reinforcing Whiteness as a cultural norm (Domínguez et al., 2020; Harris, 1993; Simpson, 2007). CRT scholars argue that unless museums engage in anti-racist and decolonial praxis—beyond mere inclusion—they risk reproducing the very inequalities they seek to redress (Heller, 2021; Moore, 2024). This includes critically re-evaluating interpretive frameworks, confronting structural Whiteness, and shifting toward participatory models of co-curation (Kohl & Halter, 2021).

Therefore, the emergence of community-led museum models represents a meaningful departure from top-down institutional authority. Such approaches prioritize the voices of

marginalized communities, enable collaborative authorship of history, and foster allyship within cultural institutions (Adams, 2017; Faden, 2007; Moore, 2024). The Africville Museum exemplifies this shift by centering descendant narratives, resisting cultural erasure, and enabling intergenerational dialogue around place, memory, and identity. Drawing on concepts such as Tolia-Kelly's (2016) “theatres of pain” and Samuel’s (1994) “theatres of memory,” Black museums are more than static spaces—they are dynamic, pedagogical institutions where historical trauma and resilience are performed and reinterpreted. Institutions like the Africville Museum serve not only as memorials but as restorative, community-led spaces where descendants reclaim historical agency through storytelling, cultural artifacts, and oral histories—many of which are fragile and at risk of being lost. These curatorial practices and efforts offer opportunities for reflection, social justice, and the reconstitution of erased communities (Griem & Allen, 2022; Moore, 2024).

Overall, in a purported post-racial era, museums are increasingly called upon to be agents of social change. CRT’s principle of counter-storytelling provides a framework to challenge dominant historical narratives and foster more inclusive, justice-oriented forms of knowledge production (Adams, 2017). As museums grapple with how to meaningfully engage with systemic racism, their role must evolve: from neutral preservers of culture to active sites of resistance, truth-telling, and transformation (Brooms, 2011; Potter et al., 2024).

The Role of Online Reviews in Museum Studies

Museum research has progressively transitioned from an emphasis on objects to a focus on people and communities (Gao & Yu, 2024). This transition is not only apparent in the practical functioning of museums but also manifested in the way museums engage with social and online media (Gao & Yu, 2024). Vasquez (2012) defined online reviews as concise

narratives detailing visitors' experiences at heritage sites and attractions. Wang et al. (2022) and Kim and Kim (2021) found that travellers commonly use online review platforms to browse, acquire, and share relevant reviews about a tourist attraction or destination. Online reviews allow users to articulate their perspectives and assessments using written content, images, and videos, as well as to engage in communication and collaboration with fellow users (Wang et al., 2022). This behaviour tends to stimulate the exchange of knowledge, the desire to travel, and value production among visitors (Gu & Zhu, 2023). A study by Shin and colleagues indicated that online reviews, whether in digital or handwritten form, can impact users' opinions on important aspects, such as the quality, value, and characteristics of heritage attractions, such as museums, in the community (Shin et al., 2020). In addition, the experiences and emotions of museum visitors are extensively shared on social media platforms as online reviews, which subsequently impact the visiting intents and expectations of other future visitors (Gao & Yu, 2024).

Online reviews also serve as an essential tool for museum marketing and audience engagement. Kirilenko et al. (2021) analyzed online reviews to identify the factors influencing visitor recommendations. Their findings revealed that reviews containing detailed narratives and personal experiences were more likely to attract engagement and influence potential visitors. Thus, the growing body of research on online museum reviews underscores their value as a tool for understanding visitor experiences. Although the significance of museum visitors in heritage and museum studies has been acknowledged, existing research has yet to effectively utilize online visitor reviews to critically assess their perceptions and experiences at museums with histories of violence, racial injustice, and minority oppression. Additionally, there is a notable lack of research that examines online reviews of museums and historical sites associated with segregation and racial injustice through the lens of CRT and its corresponding methodological

approaches—an area that remains both underexplored and urgently needed (Hong, 2020; Riva & Agostino, 2022).

Visitor's Experiences and Perception of Museums

Online reviews have become essential in the modern age of digital technology. They provide vital insights into the long-term impact and transmission of legacies within heritage contexts (Christou & Pericleous, 2024; Wu, 2024). When people express their views online, we can observe recurring patterns highlighting similar experiences and perceptions of these heritage sites and attractions (Christou & Pericleous, 2024). A study conducted by Soren (2009) showed the importance of several elements like personal and social elements of the museum and visitors' perceptions in shaping their experiences. Similarly, Kim Lian Chan (2009) expressed similar ideas regarding the significance of personal, social, and physical circumstances in shaping visitors' experiences in a museum. According to these authors, for a visitor to have an exceptional experience and be motivated, the museum's social and physical surroundings should match the visitor's expectations. In other words, contemporary evaluations of museums extend beyond their collections and physical infrastructure to include the broader social, cultural, and experiential benefits they offer to visitors and the communities they are intended to serve (Watson, 2007; Weil, 1997).

Other aspects of the visitors museum experience from the literature include learning, enjoyment, and escape (Kang & Gretzel, 2012; McIntosh, 1999). Regarding the first aspect, visitors tend to view their visit as positive when it provides them with a meaningful educational experience facilitated by the displays and tour guides (Falk & Dierking, 2002, 2011). The second one involves enjoyment, which means that museums not only serve as educational spaces but also enhance visitors’ experiences by offering opportunities for enjoyment (Aljahdali, 2016).

Packer (2008) supported this perspective, noting that modern visitors seek exploration and learning driven by enjoyment, rather than purely for educational purposes. As a result, the motivation to visit museums extends beyond acquiring knowledge, encompassing desires for enjoyment, social interaction, and the in-depth exploration of personal interests. The final aspect, referred to as "escape," pertains to tourists temporarily immersing themselves in the attraction's context and experiencing a sense of liberation from the constraints of everyday life (Rojek, 1993). Within the context of a museum visit, the term "escape" also refers to a journey back in time – in other words, participation in a pilgrimage tourism and the evocation of nostalgic emotions. Therefore, considering the focus on audience-centred and socially significant museum practices, it is crucial to understand visitors' motivation, perception, and experience when engaging with exhibitions, memorial museums, and memory sites through the CRT lens.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) Advocacy and Its Implications

In recent years, CRT has gained significant attention for its role in addressing race and racism in North America and beyond (Closson, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT is defined as an activist-oriented theoretical framework that seeks to understand, challenge, and transform social systems in which racial stratification results in subordination (Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). A foundational principle of CRT is the recognition that race and racism are enduring and systemic, embedded deeply in social structures, making racism appear normal and natural within the dominant culture (Asch, 2017; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). There are various CRT principles that theorists and practitioners embrace or work with. But for the purpose of this dissertation, I focused on the interest convergence (Bell, 2003; Ladson-Billings,

1998), the permanence of racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995), counter storytelling (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) and strong commitment to social justice (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

Interest Convergence

The concept of interest convergence, developed by Derrick Bell, posits that racial justice initiatives are only implemented when they align with the interests of the dominant White group (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). For this current study, this principle is explored and elaborated through the apology paradigm, which encompasses political actions by states and institutions to address historical injustices. These mechanisms often aim to maintain political stability, establish legal frameworks, foster reconciliation, and create revised historical narratives (Teitel, 2003). Furthermore, apology initiatives, often implemented through truth-telling, psychosocial therapies, memorialization, prosecution, restitution, or repatriation etc., have been adopted globally, particularly in former colonial states grappling with the harms inflicted on Indigenous and minority populations (Balint, Evans, & McMillan, 2014; Kim, 2018).

In Canada, the apology paradigm operates within the CRT tenet of interest convergence, employing tools like truth commissions, monetary compensation, memorialization funding, and public apologies (Olsen et al., 2010). However, scholars such as Kim (2018) critiqued this paradigm as a colonial bureaucratic mechanism that prioritizes state interests over the needs of Indigenous and marginalized communities. These dynamic's underscores the failure of apology initiatives to address ongoing settler colonial challenges effectively. Therefore, it is expected for governments to confront contemporary colonial structures to ensure meaningful reconciliation (Short, 2012).

The Permanence of Racism

The permanence of racism, a fundamental CRT principle, highlights racism as a systemic and enduring feature of social structures (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). This study examines environmental racism, a term coined by Benjamin Chavis (1982), which describes racial discrimination in environmental policy development, regulation enforcement, and the placement of hazardous facilities in Indigenous and marginalized communities (Bullard, 1990, 2002). Environmental racism perpetuates racial inequalities by disproportionately exposing Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities to environmental hazards, compounding their socio-economic challenges (Robinson, 2000; Waldron, 2021).

In Canada, environmental racism reveals systemic oppression against Indigenous and Black communities, characterized by land dispossession, inadequate housing, and proximity to polluting industries (Waldron, 2021). The sociopolitical factors contributing to this phenomenon include poverty, political marginalization, weak environmental protections, and neoliberal policies that exacerbate the vulnerabilities of marginalized groups (Fryzuk, 1996). These systemic injustices undermine the capacity of affected communities to resist environmental harm and demand equitable treatment. Addressing environmental racism requires anti-colonial and anti-capitalist mobilization centered on collective empowerment and resistance against White supremacy (Waldron, 2021).

Additionally, the legacy of colonialism remains evident in Canadian governments' failure to fulfill their obligations under the Indian Act to protect Indigenous lands and address environmental degradation. Tackling environmental racism necessitates acknowledging and dismantling the systemic power dynamics entrenched in White settler societies (Waldron, 2021). Thus, CRT challenges the "colourblind" approach, which denies the persistence of racism and

legitimizes racial oppression (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Instead, CRT promotes the dismantling of race-neutral policies, extending its insights to other domains like heritage and museum studies (Nebeker, 1998).

Counter-Storytelling and Commitment to Social Justice

Counter-storytelling, another central CRT tenet, empowers individuals to share their lived experiences as a counter-narrative to dominant discourses (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). This principle uses first-person narratives and interdisciplinary approaches to amplify marginalized voices and challenge oppressive systems (Bell, 1995). While no single narrative can fully encapsulate the diverse experiences of oppressed groups, however, collective storytelling strengthens the capacity for transformative change (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). Furthermore, counter-storytelling allows racialized communities to reclaim their histories and assert their perspectives within systems that have historically marginalized them (Daftary, 2020).

Finally, CRT's strong commitment to social justice seeks to enact systemic change, addressing racial, gender, and class inequalities through transformative actions (Matsuda, 1991). This commitment emphasizes the importance of liberating historically oppressed communities and fostering equitable participation in societal structures (Asch, 2017). In the context of this study, CRT offers a framework for addressing the marginalization of the Africville community and its former residents, demonstrating the potential for CRT to achieve meaningful social reform (Adams, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021).

In conclusion, CRT provides a powerful theoretical framework for understanding and addressing systemic racism and its multifaceted impacts (Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Through the tenets of interest convergence, the permanence of racism, counter-storytelling, and social justice advocacy, CRT exposes the enduring structures of racial

oppression and offers pathways for transformation (Adams, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021). The apology paradigm, while significant, must move beyond state-centered approaches to address the needs of marginalized communities genuinely (Short, 2012). Similarly, addressing environmental racism requires acknowledging its roots in colonialism and neoliberalism and empowering affected communities to resist systemic injustices (Waldron, 2021). Counter-storytelling and a strong commitment to social justice further highlight CRT's potential to amplify marginalized voices and drive systemic change (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). By challenging dominant narratives and advocating for equity, CRT fosters a deeper understanding of race and racism, offering transformative solutions to persistent injustices (Bell, 1995). In applying these principles, this study underscores the critical role of CRT in achieving social reform and advancing the fight for racial justice (Asch, 2017).

Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the study of the nature of knowledge, its foundations, and its validity (Chilisa, 2012, p. 21). This dissertation is grounded in a social constructionist epistemology, which holds that knowledge is not objective, universal, or fixed but rather socially and contextually produced through dialogue, shared meanings, and cultural interpretations (Crotty, 1998; Neuman, 2000). Social constructionism emphasizes that reality is co-constructed through human interactions and shaped by historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts. Within this framework, meaning is not discovered but rather created, negotiated, and constantly reshaped through social processes (Butowski et al., 2021).

As a researcher and a Black doctoral student, I am deeply aware that my own background, social location, values, and lived experiences inevitably shape both the research process and its

outcomes. This awareness is central to the social constructionist approach, which recognizes that the researcher is not a neutral observer but a co-producer of knowledge. My interactions with participants in this study were shaped by a dynamic process of mutual interpretation—both I and my interviewees brought with us particular histories, languages, social positions, and cultural understandings that influenced what was said, how it was said, and what it came to mean (Chilisa, 2012). In this sense, interviews were not sites for uncovering a singular or objective "truth," but rather moments of collaborative meaning-making shaped by the immediate social setting, the relational dynamic between myself and the participant, and the broader cultural and historical context in which Africville exists (Butowski et al., 2021). Reflexivity, the critical examination of my role and influence in the research, was therefore essential. It allowed me to interrogate my assumptions, remain attentive to power dynamics in the interview process, and ensure that the narratives of former Africville residents and descendants were interpreted with care, respect, and contextual understanding (England, 1994).

The social constructionist lens also informs my engagement with Black heritage tourism. My identity and scholarly interests align with a broader imperative to diversify and decolonize tourism narratives, which have historically centered Eurocentric and settler-colonial perspectives (Adams, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021). As such, this dissertation seeks to contribute to a more inclusive retelling of Canadian heritage by elevating Black voices and histories through sites like Africville. In doing so, I also acknowledge that knowledge about Africville, its museum, and its significance is not static but continually reinterpreted through personal stories, community memory, and sociopolitical discourse.

Ultimately, by adopting a social constructionist epistemology, this research does not claim to present an absolute account of Africville's history or heritage. Instead, it offers a situated

understanding of how meanings are produced and contested—by both myself and my participants—within an evolving landscape of race, memory, and place.

Methodology

Research Design

I employed CRM and Netnographic for this dissertation. CRM is a research framework that integrates CRT with qualitative methods to analyze and challenge racial inequities (Solórzano & Yosso, 2022). CRT arose from people of colour's necessity to move debates of race and racism from the personal sphere to the political arena (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Tate, 1997). CRT prioritizes examination of race and racism (Fernández, 2002), where race is defined as a social construct, the continuing and contradictory process of social categorization based on phenotype, ancestry, and other historically contingent and socio-political battles (Lopez, 1994).

Recently, there has been much discussion on CRT advocacy and its implications for understanding race and racism in North America and beyond (Closson, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Building on this discourse, critical race theorists have argued that mainstream scholarship has historically failed to confront racial injustice directly, often minimizing or overlooking the foundational role of race and racism in shaping the legal and institutional structures of society (Crenshaw, 2025; Harris, 2024).

Critical Race Methodology

Critical race methodology (CRM) is a research methodology that draws from CRT to examine how race, racism, and power operate in society, while elevating the voices and counter-narratives of marginalized communities (Solórzano & Yosso, 2022). Present-day researchers advocated for the application of CRT to address the inadequacy and constraints of traditional

research methodologies for dealing with communities of colour, which tend to exacerbate structural racism (Adamian & Jayakumar, 2018; Goessling, 2018). When CRT is applied as a methodology, it informs the research process by guiding the selection of research questions, data collection, and analysis through a lens that centers race and power dynamics (Solórzano & Yosso, 2022). Subsequently, CRM extends CRT tenets from legal and political arena to the social sciences and other field of studies, emphasizing the lived experiences of members of marginalized communities, counter-storytelling, and a commitment to social justice (Adams, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2022). In museum studies, CRM provides a crucial lens for interpreting historical narratives, curating exhibitions, and engaging with communities (Brooms, 2011; Faden, 2007; Griem & Allen, 2022; Simpson, 2007). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) articulated five core tenets that underpin the foundational concepts and perspectives of CRM. For the purposes of this dissertation, I employed four tenets that were most directly applied within the scope of this study.

The four tenets as described in the CRT theoretical section of this dissertation are neither original nor novel to academic research as a whole, but collectively or individually, they question the established practices of critical race studies (Romero & Margolis, 2005). I chose CRT as a methodology to critically analyze the systemic injustices faced by the Africville community, ensuring that the research not only studied these issues but also aimed to challenge and transform the underlying structures of oppression. In addition, I chose CRT as a methodology because it aligned with the goals of amplifying Africville descendants' voices and exposing ongoing racialized injustices, including environmental injustice and apology paradigm. Thus, CRT/M provided a framework for this study to examine the Africville space by integrating the voices and experiences of the former residents of Africville and their descendants into exhibitions, tours,

educational programs, and institutional policies (Asch, 2017; Faden, 2007; Griem & Allen, 2022; Heller, 2021; Moore, 2024). By incorporating oral histories, I ensured that the voices of Africville residents are not erased. These narratives offer a counternarrative to official government reports, which historically justified the destruction of Africville as an urban renewal project (Clairmont & Magill, 1999).

As the author of this study, I identify as a Black scholar whose personal, academic, and cultural identity is profoundly shaped by the broader African diasporic experience and its enduring legacies of displacement, resistance, and resilience. Though I am not a descendant of Africville, I engage this research with a deep sense of ethical responsibility, historical solidarity, and critical attentiveness to the interwoven struggles of Black communities across global contexts. My positionality as a descendant of the Igbo people—a historically marginalized ethnic group in southeastern Nigeria—further informs the interpretive lens through which I approach this study. The Igbo, like many African communities, have endured centuries of colonial exploitation, cultural erasure, political marginalization, and the transgenerational impacts of systemic violence. This background shapes not only my academic perspective but also my emotional and ethical orientation toward the research. It enables me to enter into the narratives of Africville's former residents, descendants, and advocates with a heightened sensitivity to the complexities of memory, trauma, and the struggle for dignity and recognition.

This positionality is not merely symbolic but operationalized through a methodological approach grounded in CRM, which calls for the centering of marginalized voices, the rejection of neutrality, and the pursuit of social justice. I did not engage with participants as subjects of study, but rather as bearers of knowledge whose lived experiences and oral testimonies are central to the integrity of the research. My relationship with the Africville community and the

Africville Museum is rooted in mutual respect, ongoing reflection, and a commitment to ethical engagement that foregrounds relational accountability. In this spirit, I have sought to listen deeply, represent thoughtfully, and contribute meaningfully to a broader conversation on racial justice, heritage, and collective memory.

This research was conducted with care and intentionality, acknowledging the emotional weight of memory and trauma, and with a recognition of the generational pain that such stories often carry. I view the act of conducting and presenting this research as a form of social justice work—a platform through which community voices can be amplified, honored, and preserved (Asch, 2017; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In alignment with CRM, I position myself not as an objective outsider, but as a scholar-activist whose interpretive lens is informed by both critical scholarship and lived experience (Solórzano & Yosso, 2022). CRM calls on researchers to explicitly reject the false neutrality of traditional academic detachment (Solórzano & Yosso, 2022). In this spirit, I openly situate myself within the narrative—both as a witness and as an advocate. In addition, my commitment to participants was both academic and ethical: to accurately and respectfully represent their stories, to challenge dominant historical narratives that have excluded or distorted their truths, and to contribute meaningfully to ongoing conversations about restitution, recognition, and Black cultural heritage. This project is not just a scholarly exercise—it is a dialogic process of remembrance, resistance, and accountability.

Overall, CRM offered a transformative approach to this study, challenging dominant narratives and amplifying marginalized voices (Adams, 2017; Moore, 2024). This methodology was used for chapter two and three of this study. Through this study, I discussed how CRM can be applied to preserve and interpret Black history in ways that counter historical erasure and promote social justice (Heller, 2021; Moore, 2024). As museums worldwide grapple with issues

of representation and equity (Griem & Allen, 2022; Moore, 2024), CRT provides a crucial methodological tool for decolonizing these institutions and ensuring that historically marginalized communities have support in how their histories are told (Adams, 2017; Moore, 2024; Solórzano & Yosso, 2022). CRM guided this research project's interpretative and deductive contribution by focusing on the participants' experiences as a means of highlighting their experience, knowledge, and history (Yosso, 2005). It allowed different cultural and racial frames of reference to direct research topics, impact data gathering and analytic procedures, and arrive at novel conclusions (Solórzano & Yosso, 2022).

Netnography

The second methodology used for chapter four of this dissertation is the netnographic methodology. This approach was employed to explore the narratives, perspectives, and ethical viewpoints of tourists visiting the Africville Museum (Marques, 2024). Kozinets (2010) introduced the term "netnography" to describe a method for understanding individuals' social behaviours and interactions on the Internet. According to Kozinets (2010), netnography is a research methodology that focuses on studying the cultural practices of online groups. It examines a wide range of concepts, such as ideas, meanings, social activities, relationships, languages, and social systems. In tourism studies, netnography is a modernized version of classic ethnography that uses the Internet as a virtual fieldwork site (Mkono, 2012). Thus, I utilized the netnographic technique for the fourth chapter of this dissertation since it is well-suited for understanding the human experience derived from online social interaction and information (Kozinets, 2015). The rationale behind selecting this methodology for the chapter is to conduct a thorough and analytical study of the discourses found in online reviews of the Africville Museum. Specifically, the focus was on the comprehensive exploration of the self-expression of

tourists (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, 2008). Overall, a more detailed summary of how this netnography methodology was used is stated and described in chapter four.

I used the two methodologies described above by observing, recording, documenting and articulating the coherent stories and contents shared by former residents of Africville, their descendants, stakeholders and heritage tourist that visited the Africville Museum. These stories or narratives shed light on the social, cultural, and institutional contexts in which the historical experiences of the Africville community were built, evolved, articulated, and enacted (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). These methodologies enabled a thorough examination of the collected data, revealing contextual information that "highlights the distinctive characteristics of former Africville residents, their heritage, and their roots tourism experiences, while elucidating the unique complexities of their situation" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15). In addition, the utilization of critical race and netnographic methodologies has provided valuable insights into the intricate social, cultural, and political dynamics that shape and influence the tourism sector (Jennings, 2009; Mkono, 2012c; Phillimore & Goodson, 2004; Riley & Love, 2000).

Methods

According to Crotty (1998), methods are the strategies or processes used to collect information pertaining to a certain research question. Methods utilized for this dissertation includes semi-structured interviews for chapter two, participant observation and document analysis for chapter three, and online reviews analysis through netnography for chapter four. These data collection approaches were utilized to obtain information from the study participants. I conducted semi-structured interviews with seven former Africville residents, descendants, and key community stakeholders — a sample size well within the recommended range for qualitative

research aiming for depth and richness of understanding (Mason, 2010). Participants were recruited through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques, resulting in a diverse range of perspectives that captured the complexity and nuance of Africville's heritagization process. Complementing these primary data source, I employed participant observation at the Africville Annual Reunion offered direct engagement with the community's commemorative practices, and document analysis of various documents of Africville further enhancing the richness of the dataset. I also analyzed 300 online reviews from Google and TripAdvisor that reflected visitors' perspectives on the Africville Museum. This robust dataset supports the dissertation's goals of critically examining the Africville Museum's role in heritage tourism, racial resilience, and the politics of commemoration through the lens of CRT.

Interviews

In qualitative research, semi-structured interviews are frequently used to learn about participants' experience, perceptions, the motivations behind their decisions and behaviour, their attitudes and beliefs, and the effects of particular policies or events on their lives (Harvey-Jordan & Long, 2001; Raworth et al., 2012). This method is regarded as the primary approach used in qualitative studies (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Oltmann, 2016) and "the most direct, research-focused interaction between researcher and participant" (Kazmer & Xie, 2008, p. 258). This is because it has been demonstrated to produce deeply contextualized accounts of participants' experiences and their interpretation of them (Schultze & Avital, 2011). The appeal of semi-structured interviews lies in their flexibility, accessibility, and clarity, making them particularly well-suited for researchers seeking to understand how participants interpret and make sense of their social environments (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

Semi-structured interviews require previous knowledge of the research topic area (Kelly et al., 2010; Wengraf, 2001). The questions are planned and written down using an interview guide (Mason, 2004; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Taylor (2005) described the interview guide as covering the study's primary topics. The guide should be intended to strike a balance between the need to collect generally identical types of information from all participants while also capturing each participant's unique perspective on that subject matter (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The guide used for the chapter two study can be found in Appendix A.

For the chapter two study, recruitment presented some challenges due to the sensitive history of Africville, and the emotional weight associated with the topic. Former residents and descendants remain cautious about how their stories are portrayed, making trust-building essential. Their skepticism stemmed from a longstanding distrust rooted in historical and ongoing tensions between Africville descendants and various governmental bodies—particularly in light of the forced relocation and systemic neglect experienced by the community.

I assured participants that the research was in line with the ethical guidelines approved by the university's Research Ethics Board. Second, I engaged in trust-building practices before initiating formal interviews. This included attending community events, listening respectfully to community narratives, and inviting informal conversations that demonstrated my commitment to ethical and inclusive research. By being physically present and receptive, I aimed to counteract historical patterns of extractive research that many Africville descendants have come to associate with outsiders, especially those connected to the state. Lastly, I recognized that some individuals' refusal to participate was an act of resistance and a valid form of agency. Rather than viewing these refusals as limitations, I interpreted them as meaningful data in themselves—reflecting ongoing tensions, trauma, and the politics of memory surrounding Africville's legacy. This

reinforced my commitment to presenting the research findings with care, nuance, and fidelity to community voices.

Snowball and purposeful sampling were effective in reaching participants with strong ties to the community and museum (Naderifar et al., 2017; Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton, 1999). I successfully recruited the type of participants essential for this study's depth and credibility: former Africville residents, descendants, and key community stakeholders. These individuals offered first-hand knowledge and unique perspectives on the site's heritagization and the museum's role in preserving their history. Many were actively involved in the Africville Annual Reunion and had connections to the museum's development, making their insights particularly valuable.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the semi-structured interview participants

List of participants	Description of the Participants	Interview Mode	Duration of interview
1. Africville Former Resident 1	Resident who lived in Africville from its establishment until its demolition	In-person	60 minutes
2. Africville Former Resident 2	Resident who lived in Africville from its establishment until its demolition	In-person	120 minutes
3. Africville Former Resident 3	Resident who lived in Africville from its establishment until its demolition	Online	45 minutes
4. Africville Former Resident Descendant 1	Offspring of former residents of Africville	Online	60 minutes
5. Africville Former Resident Descendant 2	Offspring of former residents of Africville	In-person	45 minutes

6. Africville Stakeholder 1	Community member working with the Africville Museum	In-person	45 minutes
7. Africville Stakeholder 2	Community member working with the Africville Museum	In-person	60 minutes

The semi-structured interviews questions were carefully designed to align closely with the research aims for chapter two, ensuring that the data collected directly addressed the study's core objectives. Interviews were conducted within three-months with seven Africville former residents, descendant and stakeholders, six located within Halifax, Nova Scotia and one in Ottawa, Canada. Interviews were conducted both in person and online, accommodating participants' availability and comfort. Most in-person interviews took place during my visits to Africville, Halifax, Nova Scotia, while online interviews were at the availability of the participants. Both methods ensured flexible and meaningful engagement without compromising data quality. The interviews were audiotaped to aid in their verbatim transcription to ensure the reliability of the qualitative data obtained (Lofland et al., 2006; Moyle, 2002). Their responses regarding the history, heritage, roots and pilgrimage tourism experiences helped examine and address the study objectives (Gosine, 2007).

Although I conducted seven interviews, the depth of information gathered was substantial. Participants provided detailed, reflective narratives on Africville's history, displacement, and cultural memory. The breadth and depth of perspectives captured offered a robust foundation for analysis. Moreover, the study's contribution lies not only in the volume of data but in the uniqueness and importance of the voices represented. These participants were not just informants but key figures in Africville's ongoing legacy — former residents, descendants, community advocates, and individuals connected to the museum's creation and operation. Their accounts

provided rare and invaluable perspectives that advance knowledge in heritage tourism, CRT, and Black Canadian history.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is an ethnographic fieldwork method (Spradley, 1980) in which the researcher is the primary instrument for observing and collecting data (Creswell, 2003). Jorgensen (1989) noted that "participant observation is exceptional for studying processes, relationships among people and events, the organization of people and events, continuities over time, and patterns, as well as the immediate sociocultural contexts in which human existence unfolds" (p. 12). The process of participant observation begins with the researcher selecting a project in a social setting, after which the researcher asks ethnographic questions, collects data, makes a record, analyses data, and writes a manuscript (Spradley, 1980). In other words, as Thomas (2016) stated, participant observation entails "talking to people, watching, reading documents; keeping notes and anything else that enables you to understand a situation" (p. 198). The process continues as the findings frequently spark new study questions in the same or a different social setting (Mackellar, 2013).

Moreover, participant observation has been recognized as a valid research method in travel, tourism, and festival studies (Agapito, 2020; Holloway et al., 2010). Thus, I utilized this method to document and understand the heritage, root and pilgrimage tourism narrative expressed during the 41st Africville Annual Reunion in chapter three. This immersive method provided valuable insights into how former residents, descendants and supporters interact with the site, engage with their history, and navigate issues of identity and memory (Clairmont, Kimber, Pachai, & Saunders, 2010). Notes were taken during and after each activity to capture the richness of the experience and ensure a nuanced understanding of the Reunion's cultural and

emotional significance. This method also enabled me to the identify recurring themes, such as the role of communal practices in memory preservation and the use of the Africville site as a space for healing and resistance (Jorgensen, 1989; Spradley, 1980).

Document Analysis

Document analysis is a rigorous qualitative research technique employed to assess textual, visual, or audio content, enabling researchers to discern patterns, themes, and meanings within data (Krippendorff, 2019). This method is especially useful for interpreting social phenomena, as it facilitates the analysis of different kinds of communication and representation (Berelson, 1952; Holsti, 1968). In museum and heritage tourism research, document analysis is an effective method for analyzing materials like museum exhibitions, archive records, visitor feedback, promotional materials, and social media content (Winter, 2018). It allows scholars to investigate how museums and heritage sites convey their narratives, safeguard cultural identities, and interact with visitors. For example, scrutinizing museum exhibits can provide both implicit and explicit signals on cultural heritage, while evaluating visitor reviews and social media content can offer insights into tourists' perspectives and emotional reactions to heritage sites (Tavakoli & Mura, 2018).

Moreover, document analysis facilitates the recognition of persistent themes and deficiencies in the representation of historical injustices and marginalized voices, in accordance with critical frameworks like CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). For the Africville study, document analysis can clarify how the location and its related narratives confront institutional racism, community resilience, and communal memory. Its flexibility and robustness render it an essential tool for understanding the convergence of tourism, heritage, and identity. Therefore, this method was used to analyze letter, texts, images, and other media materials that document

the Africville Reunion and its historical and cultural context. Sources included the "apology for Africville" letter, municipal reports, media articles, Africville Heritage Trust publications, photographs, museum exhibits, event programs, digital media platforms that capture the voices and perspectives of Africville's community members and personal accounts shared during the Reunion (McRae, 2023). By analyzing narratives from the Africville community, the study highlights counter-narratives that challenge dominant historical discourses and underscore Africville's significance as a site of racial resilience and activism (Adams, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021).

Online Reviews

The last form of data is online reviews. The online reviews regarding the Africville Museum were collected through the netnography research method by assessing popular travel review platforms, namely Google Reviews and TripAdvisor. **Google Reviews** offers a publicly available platform that allows for easy extraction of its data for research purposes (Xue, 2024). The primary reason for this is the public nature of the evaluations. As a result, reviewers are aware that their feedback will be publicly accessible (Xue, 2024). In addition, Google Reviews is a top-rated site for evaluating different attractions, services, activities, and places. It attracts a broad spectrum of people from varying cultural backgrounds, which is vital for this research (Xue, 2024). The significance of Africville extends well beyond its former residents, as its history and subsequent designation as a heritage site embody a profound symbol of Black resilience and systemic racism. This legacy resonates within the wider Canadian milieu and holds critical relevance in a global context (Adams, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021). Examining how individuals from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds perceive and interact with the Africville Museum provided valuable insights into its role in discussions on race, identity, and collective

memory (Simpson, 2007). Additionally, this diversity enhanced the analysis by offering multiple perspectives on the museum's significance in addressing historical injustices and influencing public awareness (Simpson, 2007).

As for **TripAdvisor**, it is widely recognized as an established resource for conducting tourism studies using a netnographic technique (Mkono & Tribe, 2017; Tavakoli & Wijesinghe, 2019; Vo Thanh & Kirova, 2018). TripAdvisor was established in the year 2000, with the specific objective of helping visitors collect travel information, express their opinions on travel-related matters, participate in interactive travel forums, and not about attracting sponsors or financial profit in the industry (Crotts et al., 2012). The online travel platform is well recognized that the information given on the platform significantly influences the tourism industry (Jeacle & Carter, 2011). Based on statements about TripAdvisor, I incorporated it as an additional platform for data source for the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

During the online data collection process conducted in mid-August 2024, a total of 284 visitor reviews of the Africville Museum were retrieved from Google Reviews. To ensure relevance and coherence with the research focus, the dataset was refined by excluding one-sentence comments primarily referencing the surrounding park rather than the museum itself, as well as reviews not written in English. These exclusions were justified by the researcher's language proficiency in English and the predominance of English-language reviews in the dataset. Following this filtering process, the final sample comprised 260 reviews. On TripAdvisor, the platform initially provided 43 reviews that were later reduced to 40 following the same refining guide used for the Google Reviews. Before commencing the online reviews collection, an examination was conducted to review the terms of use for Google Review and TripAdvisor. This was done to ensure that the research conducted in this study adheres to the

regulations set out by both platforms. Thus, utilizing the data for research purposes is an acceptable and authorized use of the reviews (Xue, 2024). The chronological scope of these online comments spanned from 2012 after the museum was launched until 2024 at the time of online review collections. The process yielded 300 selected online reviews from Google and TripAdvisor relevant to the study's aim, objective, and literature review. The online reviews provided significant data from a tourist perspective for chapter four study of this dissertation, facilitating a more comprehensive study (Xue, 2024).

Overall, the combination of critical race and netnography methodology with semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and online review ensured a well-rounded approach. The study's ability to foreground community voices, address systemic racism, and explore the politics of commemoration positions it as a meaningful and original contribution to the field. The methodological frameworks were well-suited to the study's aims, and despite the small sample size, the quality and depth of the data gathered support a compelling and academically rigorous analysis (Francis et al., 2009).

Thematic Analysis

To answer the research questions of this dissertation, reflexive thematic data analysis was employed as the primary analytical procedure through some CRT tenets to evaluate the data obtained for this study. In doing thematic data analysis and applying CRT in tourism research, it is essential to consider the particular setting of the study and the intersections of race, racism, and ethnicity with the lived experiences of the respondents, in this case, the former residents of Africville. This method requires a thorough analysis of topics such as representation, power dynamics, and the historical prejudice experienced by Black communities (Griem & Allen, 2022; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Thematic data analysis can be applied to qualitative research that

focuses on detecting patterns of meaning across a dataset and is based on developing narratives through interviews and online reviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I conducted thematic analysis of interviews, participant observations, contents and online reviews of visitors at the site. This involved identifying patterns and narratives that highlighted systemic racism, historical injustices, and the community's resilience. The analysis was iterative and reflexive, ensuring that the voices of Africville residents were central, and that the findings challenged dominant narratives that have historically marginalized their experiences — a hallmark of CRT informed critique.

To conduct the analysis, I followed the Braun and Clarke (2006) six processes for thematic data analysis. First, I became familiar with the information gathered from the interviews, participant observation, documents/exhibits, and online reviews actively and repeatedly (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is intended to identify potential codes and meanings. The second phase of developing preliminary codes commences upon completing the preceding steps. Coding enabled me to “sort data into understandable categories” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). The objective is to code important features of the data set and then collect data pertinent to each code (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After completing the coding process, I produced the themes crucial to the study aim and objectives. That is, I “began to evaluate codes and consider how different codes may mix to generate an overarching theme” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89).

Once I compiled a list of themes, sub-themes and prospective themes, it was time to conduct a themes analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There are two levels to analyzing themes: the first checks the codes to determine whether or not the themes adhere to a logical pattern that may be used to generate a thematic map. Afterwards, I advanced to step two, where themes were evaluated throughout the entire data set to validate the thematic map's representation of the data

(Braun & Clarke, 2006). The final two rounds of thematic analysis aimed to identify themes while analyzing data and selecting quotations to illustrate the research aim and objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In general, I utilized thematic data analysis approach through the CRT lens to analyze the data obtained from the former residents of Africville and stakeholders and also tourist's heritage, roots and pilgrimage tourism experience in the Africville Museum and site in Halifax, Canada. Additionally, the research process, which includes the design, method selection, data analysis, interpretation, presentation of findings, and recommendations, helped evaluate all race and racism issues in all aspects of the current study (Graham et al., 2011).

Ethics

This ethics for my dissertation was approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Ottawa on 25 November, 2023 with Reference No. H-10-23-9658 (see Appendix C). This study adhered to the University ethical policy statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, specifically chapter two: "A Journey into the Depths of Africville Museum: Black museification and the apology paradigm." With that, the ethical consideration was duly observed, and careful considerations were taken into place to achieve that. An extension of the ethics was requested and was approved on 28 October, 2024.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this dissertation offers significant insights into the heritagization of Africville and its broader implications for Canadian Black root tourism, heritage tourism, and Canadian Black history. Through the application of CRT and its methodology, this study emphasizes the enduring effects of systemic racism and the importance of counter-storytelling in preserving marginalized histories (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The research contributes to the

literature on Canadian Black root tourism by positioning the Africville Museum and the Annual Reunion as powerful sites of memory and identity, illustrating how displaced Black communities reclaim their narratives through cultural and personal memory tourism (Dillette, 2021). Furthermore, it enriches heritage tourism discourse by highlighting the role of community-led initiatives in shaping public understanding and confronting historical erasure (Adams, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021). In the context of Canadian Black history, this study amplifies the voices of Africville's former residents and their descendants (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2022), offering an essential counter-narrative to mainstream historical accounts and underscoring the long-term impacts of forced displacement and institutional neglect (Clairmont & Magill, 1999).

Despite its contributions, the research also has several methodological strengths and limitations. The application of CRT and its methodology provided a robust analytical framework, enabling a critical examination of the museum's role in fostering social justice and racial resilience (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2022). The recruitment process was, however, constrained by the need to build trust within a community deeply affected by historical marginalization, which influenced participant availability and willingness. Additionally, while the analysis of 300 online reviews provided valuable visitor insights, the perspectives of international visitors and non-English speakers were underrepresented, pointing to areas for future research. Nonetheless, the depth of the collected data and the consistency of emerging themes affirm the study's robustness and its meaningful contribution to advancing scholarship on race, heritage, and identity in Canada.

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Chapter Two – A Journey into the Depths of Africville Museum: Black Heritagization and Pathways to Healing

Abstract

This paper explored the heritagization process of the Africville Museum and how it has turned into a sacred site. Through a Critical Race Methodology (CRM) framework and lens, we review the history of Africville that led to the creation of this memorial space and examine how this site is becoming a meaningful place for anti-Black oppression and social justice, celebrating Africville as a site of hope. Based on qualitative research, this study incorporated semi-structured interviews with Africville former residents, descendants and key museum stakeholders. While representing a reconciliation effort by the Nova Scotia authorities, this study shows that, beyond a site helping former residents and descendants to heal, to reconnect with their history and celebrate themselves as a people, the "museification" of recent events – rooted in a long history of marginalization – remains unresolved, ongoing, and charged with conflicting contradiction.

Keywords: *Africville, Black Museum, Museification, Heritage Tourism, Critical Race Methodology*

Introduction

> "Canada is a land troubled by questions of race and space, whether we are speaking of First Nations land claims, Quebec nationalism, or the 'absented presence' of others." (Walcott, 2003, p. 37).

In North America, after decades of fight for social change, equal rights and opportunities have greatly improved, but sadly, discrimination and harassment based on race and ethnic origin remain a concern in most aspects of work, leisure, and daily life (Foster, 1999; Hall, 2014; Jackson, 2020). The travel industry has not escaped these imbalances, as Black people are still experiencing difficulties and hurdles when participating in recreational and tourism activities (Dillette et al., 2019; Jackson, 2020). For instance, African Americans, particularly in the southern United States (US), experienced physical separation from mainstream White society during the Jim Crow-enforced segregation period from 1873 to 1964 (Dillette et al., 2019; Foster, 1999). African Americans were, by law, excluded from White-only spaces such as schools and transport systems and had separate bathrooms, drinking fountains, parks, restaurants, hotels and so on (Foster, 1999). In other words, Jim Crow was the very legitimization of anti-Black racism. Although Canada did not implement formalized segregationist legislation comparable to the Jim Crow laws of the United States, Black individuals and communities in Canada nonetheless experienced systemic racial disparities, de facto segregation, and instances of forced relocation. These manifestations of anti-Black racism varied across regions and were shaped by local socio-political dynamics (McRae & McCullough, 2023). Scholars such as Walker (2010) and others have argued that rather than being merely a northern contrast to the American South, Canadian practices of racial exclusion and segregation in fact prefigured or influenced aspects of Jim Crow. Walker contends that Canada's racial history—often framed

within a national mythology of tolerance—masks a long-standing pattern of anti-Black racism that operated through informal yet deeply entrenched systems of exclusion and inequality.

In this work, I explored the historical and contemporary experience of a community named Africville in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. This community was founded between 1835 and the early 1840s, and for over 150 years, hundreds of families created a flourishing, close-knit community (McRae, 2023; Clairmont & Magill, 1971; Tattrie, 2021). Despite their isolation and authorities' neglect, they thrived through fishing and minimum-wage employment in Halifax (Clairmont & Magill, 1971). The Africville community in Halifax faced persistent neglect from municipal authorities, despite its residents fulfilling their civic duties, including the payment of taxes and active contributions to society (Tattrie, 2021). The city consistently withheld fundamental services such as sewage systems, paved roads, police services, and fire protection, which are typically provided to urban neighborhoods (Clairmont & Magill, 1971). Moreover, the area's decline was exacerbated by the city's decision to surround Africville with undesirable infrastructure, including a fertilizer plant, railways, a prison, and a human waste dump. These developments contributed to the community's characterization as an urban slum (Nelson, 2000). This degradation was then used to justify the forced removal of 400 residents through the destruction of their homes between 1967 and 1970. The displacement of Africville, framed by Halifax city officials as both inevitable and benevolent, was deeply embedded in racial prejudice and systemic neglect. This process disregarded the community's longstanding presence and contributions within Canadian history. The destruction reached a symbolic and devastating climax in 1967 with the nighttime demolition of Africville's Church—an act that not only marked the physical dismantling of the neighbourhood but also signified the erasure of a vital cultural and spiritual institution. Since then, former residents have sought justice, resulting in an

apology from the city of Halifax in 2010 and the creation of the Africville Heritage Trust Board. The settlement included the return of 2.5 acres of land and funding for a replica of the destroyed Church. However, while some residents hoped to restore their community's soul through the Church, the replica of the Church became a museum, serving as a memorial for tourists rather than a functioning place of worship.

This paper aims to examine the heritagization of Africville and how it has emerged as a contested cultural and historical site. Central to this exploration is the construction of Africville as an urban slum (Nelson, 2000), a narrative that facilitated its destruction and ultimately paved the way for the establishment of a memorialized museum space. The study critically assesses how the Africville Museum is a product of what Green (2012) describes as the reconciliation paradigm—a process through which state actors frame historical injustices as isolated anomalies, re-inscribing them into dominant national narratives through symbolic acts of recognition. Grounded in qualitative research, this study employs Critical Race Methodology (CRM) and incorporates semi-structured interviews with former Africville residents, their descendants, and key museum stakeholders. While the museum has become a powerful site for confronting anti-Black racism, affirming community resilience, and advancing social justice, this paper also interrogates how the reconstructed Seaview African United Baptist Church—once the spiritual and communal heart of Africville—has been reimagined within the museum as a complex and contested space. It now functions at the intersection of identity, memory, and reclamation, while simultaneously operating as a heritage tourism site within broader discourses of anti-racism and reconciliation.

Literature Review

Black Museification and Safeguarding of Black Narratives

Museums focused on Black history and culture are essential organizations for conserving, interpreting, and showcasing the rich tales of African-descended communities (Faden, 2007; Sandell, 2007, 2016). They serve as reservoirs of material culture, providing concrete links to a Black intellectual past and promoting community participation outside conventional academic environments (Adams, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021). In Canada, entities such as the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia and the Africville Museum illustrate this function by preserving and promoting the heritage of African Nova Scotians, offering venues for cultural assembly and instruction (Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, n.d.). Similarly, the National Museum of African American History and Culture in the United States is committed to the collection, preservation, research, and exhibition of African American history and culture, considerably enhancing the national narrative (Dixon, 2022). Therefore these museums not only chronicle historical experiences but also actively engage in the continuing discourse around race, identity, and heritage within the wider societal framework (Adams, 2017). Black museums refocus on Black experiences and decenter White narratives.; they present an alternate account of real-world experiences and a history that has been ignored in most museums (Brooms, 2011; Potter et al., 2024).

Black Museums as "Theatres of Pain and Memory"

Tolia-Kelly (2016) would describe a museum space like the Africville Museum as a theatre of pain, "a site that materializes the pain of epistemic violence, the rupture of genocide and the deadening of artifacts" (p. 899). Drawing on Samuel's (1994) concept of "theatres of

memory," museums operate as sanctioned sites of collective remembrance that can become loci of agony or "theatres of pain." In particular, Black museums serve as powerful pedagogical institutions with the potential to challenge dominant historical narratives and foster critical consciousness. By centering Black experiences and histories, these museums contribute to societal efforts aimed at confronting social injustice and resisting anti-Black oppression (Clover, 2015; Said, 1978). Intentional education about challenging social issues and political objectives by Black museums and art galleries advances social fairness and transformation (Clover, 2015; Griem & Allen, 2022). In Canadian racial discourse, the work and narratives of black-centered museums such as the Africville Museum are crucial (Brooms, 2011). These places not only confront the injustices experienced by those of African descent, but they also give visitors a chance to reconsider their presumptions regarding racism and race (Brooms, 2011). Examining these important subjects requires facing up to delicate and frequently terrible pasts of discrimination, cultural genocide, and segregation (Dillette et al., 2019).

Additionally, Potter et al. (2024) observed that, although heritage scholars have extensively examined various memory, heritage, and tourism locations, Black museums have received little attention in terms of research and theoretical development in North America. As sites of transformative racial justice, Black museums patrons, "require deep understandings of racial history alongside affirmations of the alternative definitions and practices of humanity and placemaking based in Black, Indigenous, and other communities of colour" (Winston, 2021, p. 2185). By drawing on the memories of local descendants, historical records, and archaeological evidence, lost or overlooked communities can be reconstructed and preserved, even in the face of intentional erasure (Orser, 2022). In this context, Black museums serve as restorative spaces,

fostering a Black sense of place and providing agency in the preservation and interpretation of collective memory (Potter et al., 2024).

The Museification of a Living Story

While Black museums represent the reappropriation and control of Black experiences and placemaking, the very process of museification can be seen, however, as crystallizing, petrifying, and freezing life stories by removing their historical and sociocultural context, losing their historicity, functionality, and becoming object of consumption and knowledge for external public and visitors (Choay, 2019). This is all encapsulated within the tourist industry configuring living stories as a functional exotic object often excluding local roots and direct inheriting communities (Ruy & Almeida, 2020). Melis and Chambers (2021) argued that heritage is not only a "programmatic object of knowledge" but also a mechanism that legitimizes certain truths, making it a site of ongoing political contestation (p. 2). Paraphrasing their perspective, museums, as respected and authoritative institutions, can impose narratives shaped by technocrats, potentially disempowering the very communities they purport to represent.

However, when centered on communities, museums can also serve as powerful testimonies to injustices, conflicts, human rights issues, and the diverse experiences that have shaped populations (Adams, 2017). By presenting multifaceted narratives, they not only foster connections but also challenge preconceptions and provide perspectives on the world that are often complex and difficult to grasp (Adams, 2017). More recently, racial issues in museums have gained attention, analyzed through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Kohl & Halter, 2021). In what is often described as a supposedly post-racial era (Scott, 2016), the museum field of research examines inequities within museums, seeks to address representation gaps, and works to dismantle Whiteness (Heller, 2021; Moore, 2024).

Methodology

For this chapter, I utilized CRM, a research framework that integrates CRT lens, with qualitative methods to analyze and challenge racial inequities (Solórzano & Yosso, 2022). CRT arose from people of colour's necessity to move debates of race and racism from the personal sphere to the political arena (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Tate, 1997). CRT prioritizes race and racism (Fernández, 2002), where race is defined as a social construct, the continuing and contradictory process of social categorization based on phenotype, ancestry, and other historically contingent and socio-political battles (Lopez, 1994; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Critical race theorists noted that scholars failed to address issues of racial injustice openly, and disregarded and underplayed the significance of race and racism in creating the legal frameworks on which our society is built (Crenshaw, 2025; Harris, 2024).

CRM extends these CRT tenets from law to the social sciences, emphasizing the lived experiences of members of marginalized communities, counter-storytelling, and a commitment to social justice (Adams, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2022). In museum studies, CRM provides a crucial lens for interpreting historical narratives, and engaging with communities (Brooms, 2011; Faden, 2007; Griem & Allen, 2022; Simpson, 2007). Subsequently, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) outlined five tenets that serve as the foundation for CRM's basic concepts and viewpoints. However, I briefly discussed four employed in this paper.

The **first tenet** of CRM utilized for this study entails focusing on race and racism and recognizing the connections to other forms of classism, oppression, and subordination (Gordon et al., 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Parker, 1998). The permanence of racism, a fundamental CRM principle, highlights racism as a systemic and enduring feature of social structures (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). This study examines environmental racism, a term coined by

Benjamin Chavis (1982), which describes racial discrimination in environmental policy development, regulation enforcement, and the placement of hazardous facilities in marginalized communities (Bullard, 1990, 2002). Environmental racism perpetuates racial inequalities by disproportionately exposing Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities to environmental hazards, compounding their socio-economic challenges (Robinson, 2000; Waldron, 2021).

In Canada, environmental racism continues to reveal the systemic oppression faced by Indigenous and Black communities, characterized by land dispossession, substandard housing, and their disproportionate exposure to polluting industries (Waldron, 2021). Sociopolitical factors such as economic marginalization, lack of political representation, insufficient environmental regulation, and neoliberal policy frameworks exacerbate these injustices (Fryzuk, 1996). These structural conditions weaken the ability of affected communities to resist environmental harm or advocate for equitable treatment. Addressing environmental racism thus necessitates anti-colonial and anti-capitalist mobilization that foregrounds collective empowerment and actively resists White supremacy (Waldron, 2021).

A recent investigative report by La Presse (2025) underscores the persistence of these dynamics through the example of Lincolnville, a historic Black community in Nova Scotia that has endured the presence of a nearby landfill for over fifty years. The article documents the community's long-standing concerns about the landfill's health impacts—especially a disturbingly high incidence of cancer among residents—and the provincial government's continued inaction. Despite numerous calls for health studies and landfill closure, residents' voices have been consistently marginalized. This pattern mirrors other cases of environmental racism where Black and Indigenous communities such as the Africville community are treated as

disposable. The Lincolnville case adds further evidence of how environmental racism not only endangers health and well-being but also reinforces systemic neglect through bureaucratic delay and racialized disregard.

Moreover, the legacy of colonialism remains visible in the Canadian state's ongoing failure to fulfill its fiduciary obligations under the Indian Act, particularly concerning the protection of Indigenous lands and the mitigation of environmental degradation. Tackling environmental racism, therefore, requires confronting and dismantling the systemic power dynamics embedded in White settler colonial societies (Waldron, 2021). CRM offers a lens for doing so by challenging the dominant "colourblind" legal and political frameworks that obscure the persistence of structural racism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Rather than promoting neutrality, CRM demands the dismantling of race-neutral policies and extends its analytic reach to other institutional realms, including heritage and museum studies (Nebeker, 1998).

The **second tenet** of CRM challenges the established conceptions of objectivity, meritocracy, race neutrality and equal opportunity (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Nebeker, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Bell (2003) referred to it as "interest convergence" since racial equality is only accepted and put into policy when it is in the best interests of the dominant White group (Ladson-Billings, 1998). This principle is explored and elaborated through the apology paradigm, which encompasses political actions by states and institutions to address historical injustices. Although the term apology paradigm lacks a definitive origin or attribution to a single author, it has come to denote a constellation of state-driven initiatives and mechanisms aimed at maintaining political stability, influencing legal and institutional reforms, fostering reconciliation, and reshaping historical narratives (Teitel, 2003).

In Canada, the apology paradigm operates within the CRM framework of interest convergence, manifested through tools like truth commissions, monetary compensation, memorialization funding, and public apologies (Olsen et al., 2010). Kim (2018) critiqued this paradigm as a colonial bureaucratic mechanism that prioritizes state interests over the needs of Indigenous and marginalized communities. These dynamic's underscores the failure of apology initiatives to address ongoing settler colonial challenges effectively. Despite the expectation that governments should confront ongoing colonial structures to facilitate meaningful reconciliation (Short, 2012), many have consistently fallen short of fulfilling this responsibility.

Solórzano and Yosso (2022) **third tenet** of CRM refers to counter storytelling and emphasizes the value of marginalized individuals' direct experience (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Counter-storytelling empowers individuals to share their lived experiences as a counter-narrative to dominant discourses (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). CRM studies are "characterized by frequent use of the first person, storytelling, narrative, interdisciplinary treatment of law, and the unapologetically creative use of creativity' (Bell, 1995, p. 899). While no single narrative can fully encapsulate the diverse experiences of oppressed groups, collective storytelling strengthens the capacity for transformative change (Crenshaw, 1991; Daftary, 2020; Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). In addition, counter-storytelling allows racialized communities to reclaim their histories and assert their perspectives within systems that have historically marginalized them (Daftary, 2020).

The **fourth tenet** of CRM is a strong commitment to social justice and premises of freedom and transformation. CRM's strong commitment to social justice seeks to enact systemic change, addressing racial, and class inequalities through transformative actions (Matsuda, 1991). This commitment emphasizes the importance of liberating historically oppressed communities

and fostering equitable participation in societal structures (Asch, 2017). Within the context of this study, CRM provides an analytical lens for interrogating the historical and ongoing marginalization of the Africville community and its former residents, while also illuminating the community's agency in resisting erasure and advocating for justice (Adams, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021). In this way, CRM underscores the potential of community-driven efforts to inspire and inform broader social reform (Asch, 2017).

In conclusion, these four tenets are neither original nor novel to academic research as a whole, but collectively, they question racism by establishing practices of critical race studies (Romero & Margolis, 2005). Through the tenets of interest convergence, the permanence of racism, counter-storytelling, and social justice advocacy, CRT and its methodology exposes the enduring structures of racial oppression and offers pathways for transformation (Adams, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021). The apology paradigm, while significant, must move beyond state-centered approaches to genuinely address the needs of marginalized communities (Short, 2012). Similarly, addressing environmental racism requires acknowledging its roots in colonialism and neoliberalism and empowering affected communities to resist systemic injustices (Waldron, 2021). Counter-storytelling and a strong commitment to social justice further highlight CRM's potential to amplify marginalized voices and drive systemic change (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

For data collection, semi-structured interviews were used to learn about participants' experience, perceptions, behaviour, their attitudes and beliefs, and the effects of Africville eviction and demolition on their lives (Harvey-Jordan & Long, 2001; Raworth et al., 2012). The semi-structured interview is regarded as the primary approach used in qualitative studies (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Oltmann, 2016) and “the most direct, research-focused interaction between researcher and participant” (Kazmer & Xie, 2008, p. 258). This is because it has been

demonstrated to produce deeply contextualized accounts of participants' experiences and their interpretation of them (Schultze & Avital, 2011). The questions were planned and written down using an interview guide (Mason, 2004; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The guide, which is included in "Appendix A," was used to strike a balance between the need to collect generally identical types of information from all participants while also capturing each participant's unique perspective on that subject matter (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Subsequently, this study employed a combination of snowball and purposive sampling techniques to recruit seven participants. Snowball sampling, a non-probability method commonly used in qualitative research, involves participant referrals and is particularly effective in accessing hard-to-reach or marginalized populations (Naderifar et al., 2017; Palinkas et al., 2015).

The seven participants included three former residents of Africville (who were in the early adulthood and lived in Africville until its destruction in 1967, and they are now in their early 80s), two descendants, and two key museum stakeholders. Specific participants are members of the Africville Genealogy Society and some of them also work at the Africville Museum. Each interview lasted approximately between 45 mins to 2 hours. The seven interviews conducted for this research provided a foundation for the analysis due to the depth, quality, and relevance of the participants' insights (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each interviewee was carefully selected based on their experiential and knowledge of Africville's history, the community's struggle for recognition and restitution, and the development of the Africville Museum. Their central roles — whether as former residents, descendants, community advocates, or key figures in the museum's creation — positioned them as vital informants capable of offering unique and detailed perspectives (Patton, 1999).

Overall, this qualitative study gathered information about participants' experience, perspectives, attitudes, and beliefs regarding the Africville destruction and the impact of events on their lives. The study utilized a deductive method of thematic data analysis as the primary analytical procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2006), following the CRM tenets, to examine the data collected for the purpose of this current study. Thematic data analysis can be applied to qualitative research that focuses on detecting patterns of meaning across a dataset and is based on developing narratives through interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings and Discussion

The story of Africville gathered from participants of this study exemplifies a multifaceted convergence of systematic racism, environmental injustice, and the displacement of Black populations in Canada. This analysis incorporates CRT tenets into the Africville narrative obtained from the participants of this study to critically assess how my participants perceived these institutional forces that sustained Africville's marginalization, degradation, and eventual *museification.* In the following sections, I will discuss four themes that I developed with thematic analysis, guided by the principles of CRM.

Permanence of Racism and the Bulldozing of the Beating Heart of Africville

Africville was a close-knit Black community established in the early to mid-19th century in the Bedford Basin area, located in the north end of Halifax, Nova Scotia. It became a refuge for Black Loyalists, Black refugees from the War of 1812, and Jamaican Maroons—descendants of formerly enslaved Africans who had escaped bondage and formed autonomous, self-sustaining settlements (Nelson, 2000, 2011). Africville evolved into a vibrant community with essential institutions including a Church, a school, local businesses, and a post office, reflecting

the residents' resilience, communal solidarity, and determination to thrive despite systemic exclusion and neglect (Nelson, 2000). This location offered opportunities for waged employment due to its proximity to Halifax city center and food security from fishing. The Seaview African United Baptist Church was the heart of the Africville community. Founded in 1849, this Church functioned as a site for religious worship, communal gatherings, and cultural festivities (Clairmont & Magill, 1971, 1999). The Church carried profound importance for the locals, symbolizing their ability to endure, their sense of self, and their power amid prejudice and exclusion:

> The Church was as old as the community itself and embodied much of Africville's sense of historical continuity. The Seaview African United Baptist Church contained within itself the principal formal organizations in the community and, through religious services, youth and auxiliary organizations, and a missionary society, provided residents with a collective identity and fostered sentiments of solidarity. (Clairmont & Magill, 1971, p. 68)

The edifice represented hope and a sense of belonging for many generations of African Nova Scotians, as attested by participants of this study: "The Church, of course, as in many Black communities, was the center of focus for the community" (Africville Former Resident 1); "The Church was a significant part of the community. We gathered and better-strengthened things from going to Church, and almost everyone believed in God and the Church" (Africville Former Resident 3).

While Africville residents paid taxes and contributed to the Halifax economy, the city consistently denied the community's requests for sewage treatment, paved roads, running water, building permits to improve their homes, police services, garbage collection, and fire protection

(Thompson, 2012). Instead, through the years, the railway lines, a prison, a fertilizer plant, an infectious disease hospital, the city dump, and other factories encircled the land of Africville, which contributed to the making of an urban slum (Nelson, 2000) and justified the expropriation of 400 residents through the bulldozing of their homes between 1967 to 1970. The socially constructed perception of Africville as shanty area gave rise to a representation of the community as a site of filth, degeneracy, and helplessness—attributes that were essentialized and framed as naturally inherent to Blackness. This racialized discourse served to obscure the historical and social realities of the community, positioning its residents as transients or squatters, despite their longstanding presence and centennial legacy as Canadian settlers (Nelson, 2000, 2011). The forced dislocation's culminating point was the bulldozing of the Church, the beating heart of Africville, at night, in 1967 which was the death knell for its people that were evicted and scattered to derelict or rented public housing. Some former residents attested to this below:

> The city came down and tore down our Church because they felt it would get rid of the protesters. People were refusing to sell. So, I guess it was their thought if we get rid of the Church, they'll probably leave. So, they came out in the middle of the night and tore down our Church in 1967. The sale of the Church wasn't completed until 1968. A whole year before they had ownership, they tore it down. Because they thought they could do whatever they wanted. And because they are just dealing with this poor group of Black people over here, they don't know anything; they are uneducated. So, I want you to think about 1967 when they tore down our Church; what are we as a country celebrating? One hundred years of Confederation, right? It was the centennial year; we were celebrating 100 years of the Great Confederation of Canada coming together to form a country, and at the same time, you were coming into the Black community and tearing down their

> Church. Do you know why? Do you know why that's fitting? Because that single act is indicative of the treatment of people of African descent from the time of Confederation, before the time of Confederation, but we'll use Confederation as the date. So, that single lag for me represented the treatment of Canada as a country towards people of Africville descent (Africville Former Resident 1).
>
> "Our Church was pulled out of our community; as poor as it was, it was our community. And it was devastated by the government. And people couldn't believe it" **(**Africville Former Resident 2).
>
> You know, we lived here for years. They said they couldn't bring out the sewer and water for years. Now, I'm sitting in a replica of my Church. I'd go a few steps and use a washroom with running water. But when I lived over here, they had an incinerator on top of the hill, and just below the tracks, they had an abattoir that had running water. So, figure that out. We were in the middle. Why? Could we not have and why could we not still be here today? **–** Former Resident at the Africville Virtual Museum.

These testimonies underscore the significant influence of racial oppression, aligning with the CRM tenet of the permanence of racism. This principle asserts that racism is a deeply embedded and enduring feature of North American society, rather than a peripheral or incidental factor shaping individuals' lived experiences (Asch, 2017; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). According to Orser (2022), attempts to undermine or eradicate the cultural legacy of marginalized racial groups may include the demolition of structures, monuments, or even public areas. Furthermore, the concept of environmental racism as coined by Benjamin Chavis in 1982, describe the deliberate practice of racial discrimination in the creation and execution of environmental policies, the enforcement of regulations and laws, the intentional choice to locate

toxic waste and other contentious facilities, transforming and marginalizing even more, already impoverished and purposefully neglected areas. In the context of Africville, the deliberate creation and neglect of urban slum conditions can be understood as a manifestation of state-sanctioned racialized violence. Such structural practices functioned as mechanisms of control over Indigenous and racialized bodies, geographies, and epistemologies, thereby undermining the economic, political, and social well-being of these marginalized communities (Waldron, 2021).

Moreover, the promotion of racial stereotypes contributed to several social problems inside the Africville community, ultimately leading to discussions over its future demolition by the city of Halifax. Nelson (2000) emphasized that these circumstances were portrayed as proof of Africville's *natural inferiority,* reinforcing preconceptions of Black communities as corrupt and ephemeral. Similarly, Loo's (2010) study characterized Africville as a paradigmatic example of environmental racism within the context of postwar Canada's dynamics of state power. The demolition of the Africville Church and the forced relocation of the community reinforced the concept of racialization and discrimination based on race (Loo, 2010). The conceivability of "an enduring communal black presence" in a valuable harbourfront space was intolerable, so "putting the community out of its misery" through forced dislocation was construed as inevitable, benevolent, race-neutral, and commonsense (Nelson, 2000, p. 164).

Interest Convergence and the Africville Museum in the Age of Apology

In 1983, the Africville Genealogical Society (AGS) was created and started seeking redress in 1985. The society's initial intention was to keep the memory of Africville alive as "an educational project that dispels the myths of a seaside favela and show the heart and happiness of Africville as one of Nova Scotia's oldest minority communities" (Africville, n.d.). In 2010, after

a long struggle for redress for many former residents and their descendants, then Mayor of Halifax, Peter Kelly, tendered an “Apology for Africville” on behalf of the city of Halifax (HRM, 2018). Although the former residents received no personal compensation, the Halifax Regional Municipality and the Province of Nova Scotia agreed to give $3 million and $1.5 million, respectively, to The Africville Heritage Trust, a newly formed entity (HRM, 2023). The Trust’s mission is to preserve Africville’s legacy. It was founded by the city of Halifax to construct and operate a replica of the Seaview African Baptist Church on a portion of the former Africville site (HRM, 2023).

Additionally, the municipality created a maintenance agreement for the 2.5 acres of land that bordered Seaview Park and transferred it to the Trust (HRM, 2018). The city also set up an African Nova Scotian Affairs office under the agreement, which allowed it to better serve the Black population by providing municipal services (HRM, 2018). The mayor's formal apology was touching for some former residents and their descendants (HRM, 2018). Still, some community members believed that the apology fell short of their expectations and that further restitution and tangible steps were required.

> The apology means nothing to me. At that time, when we were at that last meeting before the apology was given, the genealogy society was saying that the city was going to apologize or whatever. They led us to believe that the apology was just the beginning, and we would get restitution for everyone. But that didn’t happen (Africville Former Resident 2).

> I’m not a big fan of forced apologies, and I don’t care what they look like; I don’t care how much coverage you give them. To me, it’s a forced apology. If you had come to me and said, as a government, we want to apologize because we didn’t know this happened

> and acknowledged that what happened was wrong, it would have been a different case. But when you have to force and fight them for an apology, the apology means nothing to me. And it gives the government a certain absolution to the mainstream society. So, it is an absolution. It helps the rest of society to breathe a little easier. Because I think, well, at least they apologized. But the trauma remains for years with people that inward trauma of what was done to people human beings, families, that remains (Africville Former Resident 1).

> I think it's hard for people to accept an apology for an issue like Africville's destruction. If you're not fully reversing what happened, you know, in this particular case, apologize, and then you could transfer the land back to the residents and their descendants who are still alive. But I think that, you know, with what has been created, some of that would have been, I think, politicized. And what happens is that a lot of Black people become political pawns. So, I think we can start with an apology and ask what the former residents want and can agree upon **(**Africville Museum Stakeholder 2).

The Apology for Africville illustrates the principle of interest convergence, wherein racial injustices are acknowledged primarily when such recognition aligns with the interests of the dominant White majority (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The apology benefitted the dominant White group by providing the government with a type of absolution for the wrong, as observed by one of the former residents of Africville. This reconciliation paradigm also seeks to attenuate the desire for restitution, compensation, or vengeance; it appeases and distracts from interrogating the structural sources of violence and the role and purpose of the White settler colonial Canadian state in "producing" the urban slum as a dispossession tactic (Green, 2012). The apology silences the actors of violence in a reconciliation process where one of the main

parties is not assessed but rather dictates the script while gaining absolution. For Green (2012), the apology is used as a strategy to strengthen power and authority; recognizing the loss and trauma caused by the displacement and eviction is at the heart of a "therapeutic" mechanism "displacing justice as the ultimate goal" (p. 130).

For some former residents, the apology to Africville was perceived as a meaningful and successful gesture. However, many descendants remained dissatisfied with the apology itself and the broader implications surrounding it. Although the restoration of the Africville Church is a noteworthy stride in recognizing and safeguarding the history and contributions of African Nova Scotians, it was nevertheless recognized and fragmentally restituted through a carefully crafted settlement that converged with the authorities' best interests. In other words, reconciliation is limited to a truth-seeking narrative crafted through an isolated and individualized account of suffering while erasing the perpetrator's motives and responsibilities (Green, 2016). But one thing that is sure is that Black people from Nova Scotia know this is not an isolated case:

> Oh, "racism doesn't exist here." Well, of course it exists, because Black communities were always marginalized. They always - if they weren't inside of a town or a city - they were outside on the worst land. If they were inside, they were ghettoized. So it's the same thing. You may not have a sign-up saying no colors are allowed. But it's semantics (Africville Museum Stakeholder 2).

> The one thing you need to understand is that the historical treatment of Africville was the same treatment all Black communities received (Africville Former Resident 3).

While several former residents wanted their Church rebuilt to recover a glimpse of their lost community's soul through weddings, funerals, baptisms and regular Church services, the city built a small replica, which became a museum in a memorial park that receives visitors that

learn about the story of Africville. The observation that the Africville Museum is a replica of the community Church and smaller than the original building is an essential point that warrants clarification and deeper reflection in this research. As scholars like Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga (2003) argued, the material dimensions of reconstructed spaces contribute to shaping collective memory and cultural identity, and the physical downsizing of such a historically and culturally significant structure can be interpreted in multiple ways. This smaller scale can symbolize the marginalization of the Africville community within broader Canadian society, reflecting how Black spaces have often been minimized both literally and figuratively in national narratives (Nelson, 2000). Moreover, the size reduction raises important questions about authenticity, representation, and the politics of space in heritage tourism. The replication of the Church in a diminished form may influence visitors' perceptions of the community's historical presence and significance. Scholars like Harrison (2013) emphasized that heritage sites are not just reflections of the past but also active constructs that shape contemporary understandings of history and identity. Therefore, the smaller size of the museum risks underrepresenting the scale and vibrancy of the original Africville community, potentially reinforcing narratives of marginalization.

Counter Storytelling through the Territorial Museification of Canadian Anti-Black Racism

Counter storytelling is a fundamental and valuable principle of CRM that elevates underrepresented and marginalized voices to contest prevailing narratives (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). The accounts of Africville's former residents and their descendants who I interviewed function as compelling counter-narratives that challenge the conventional depiction of Africville as a ghetto community. The accounts

emphasize Africville's dynamic cultural and social life, centred around the Seaview African United Baptist Church (Clairmont & Magill, 1971, 1999).

Following the official apology for the destruction and displacement of the Africville community, the Africville Museum, was constructed in the 2.5 acres Africville Memorial Park. The Park serves as a gathering place for former Africville community members and their families who now have annual Reunions at the site. The museum is small and hosts part of an exhibition created in 1989, when the Mount St-Vincent University Art Gallery joined hands with the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia and the Black Genealogical Society to co-create the Africville: A Spirit that Lives On exhibition. This showcase honoured Africville's enduring legacy and essence, in an exhibition driven by collaboration and community involvement.

The museum display currently reflects the history, culture, and resilience of the community of Africville including artifacts, photographs, documents, and personal narratives emphasizing the community's experiences, challenges, and successes. The exhibition provides a thorough examination of Africville's social, economic, and political aspects, encompassing its Church, school, companies, and community groups. Additionally, it illuminates the pervasive prejudice and disregard experienced by former residents of Africville from government authorities and the community's continuous struggle for justice, restitution, and acknowledgement. According to Sitzia (2023), the Africville Museum significantly contributes to providing the people of Africville with a sense of direction, validating their personal and shared identities, and safeguarding their historical heritage. Some of these testimonies below attest to this:

> I think the museum, like anything else, maintains our history. The story is maintained. Museums for anything help to do that. You want your generations to know it, the rest of

> the world to know it; you want your community to know it. And a museum to me is much like finding the bones of a dinosaur. That museum becomes the dinosaur's bones, and you can go and see it visually. It puts the picture to the words like you think, okay, something like that existed. Something like that actually happened. It's one picture worth 1000 words. So, if you have pictures, videos, and written words, it's right there at your fingertips that it can't be denied. It's the whole idea of being unable to deny it when it's in front of you. Once the museum is built, that's your dinosaur taken out of the rocks. So, it's tremendously significant (Africville Former Resident 1).

> Well, the first thing I want to say is that it's one of the very few museums probably in the world that talks about people who are still living. So, the children of Africville are in their 60s, 70s and early 80s. So, we have a living history within the community, and former residents are often there to tell their stories. It's children growing up in Africville. So, I think that's one of the things that makes it unique and very special. And that's what the museum is all about. It's about not losing sight of the history of this unique historic black community and finding ways to bring that history to other people, not just within the museum, but with other things we create that go beyond Nova Scotia **(**Africville Museum Stakeholder 1).

> The Church is important because it still gives us an anchor there. It shows we do exist. It shows that we did have a community there. And even though we were erased from that community, putting that Church there even though it's just a symbol, that symbol still shows "Hey, we were here at some point" (Africville Descendant 1).

Visitors at the museum can learn about Africville's history, its development into a self-sufficient and close-knit community, and its demolition and displacement consequences. Visitors

can also learn more about Africville's legacy and its long-lasting impact on African Nova Scotian identity and heritage by exploring the museum's interactive displays, attending educational programs, and listening to stories told by former residents who work as guides at the museum. Based on these testimonies, the museum is important because of its capacity to disrupt mainstream, often distorted representations of Africville's history by centering the lived experiences and memories of its former residents and their descendants. In this way, the museum becomes a vehicle for counter-storytelling, providing an alternative narrative that challenges the systemic erasure and mischaracterization of the community (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2022). The stories told through the museum's exhibits and community events offer a powerful form of resistance against historical and ongoing marginalization, transforming Africville's painful legacy into a source of strength and pride. By presenting Africville not as a site of deficiency but as a vibrant and resilient community, the museum fosters a deeper understanding of Black Canadian history and contributes to broader efforts for racial equity and reconciliation (Clairmont & Magill, 1999).

The original Seaview United Baptist Church served as a profound symbol of hope, unity, and spiritual belonging for successive generations of African Nova Scotians (Clairmont & Magill, 1971, 1999). As reflected in the testimonies of former residents, the Church functioned as the social and cultural nucleus of Africville. One resident emphasized its centrality, noting that, much like in many Black communities, the Church was the focal point around which community life revolved. Another recalled that the Church played a significant role in fostering cohesion, faith, and resilience, as nearly all community members found strength and solidarity through shared religious practice. These recollections directly counter the dominant municipal narratives that characterized Africville as a place of decay and disorder, and instead highlight the

community's vitality, moral grounding, and social fabric. Such perspectives disrupt the racialized rationale that was historically used to legitimize the community's forced displacement and demolition (Faden, 2007). Furthermore, the Africville Museum serves as a counter-narrative platform, safeguarding and disseminating the community's history (Adams, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021). In addition, the museum serves as a repository of transformation by focusing on the experiences of a Black community that has been systematically displaced and disenfranchised, so contesting the notion of post-racialism and emphasizing the persistent effects of racism in Canada (Thompson, 2012). By doing this, they promote understanding, empathy, and a feeling of humanity.

While some participants expressed these positive thoughts on the museum and its exhibition, most of them also expressed concerns about the overall decision to transform the church replica into a museum and how it reproduces marginalization.

> Well, the rebuilt Church is just for symbolism. It accomplished nothing. For so many years, White people used the Seaview Park as a dog park to walk their dogs. And when the people from Africville were upset about that, the White people were like, "Well, where are our dogs supposed to go?" So, nobody actually cared about the community, and eventually, they thought, "Okay, let's get these Black people a symbol. We'll make them this little Church and call it a museum of the Church." You can't hold events, and it's really small. So, I think at one moment, you could maybe get 25 people in there, but you can't do anything. So, people from there can't have any type of like family events. You can't hold a wedding or do anything in it. They literally erected and spent all this money on a building that no one can use (Africville Former Resident 3).

> We were led to believe the museum was built as a replica until the bigger Church was built where we could go and worship, whatever, but that didn't happen (Africville Former Resident 2).

> What they wanted was a Church. They wanted a real Church where they could have special services. And so, when they heard that they would be the reconstruction of the Church, that's what they envisioned (Africville Museum Stakeholder 2).

> It's a museum owned by the province, and the province profits from it. As a descendant of that community, I have to pay to look at a museum, although the contents are of my ancestors. It's not logical. It makes no sense (Africville Descendant 1).

> Yeah, there are no sidewalks here. There are no bike paths. There's no safe way to get to the Africville Museum unless you are in a car. There are no safe way/roads to get here. When you think about that, as a National Historic Site, it is shameful (Africville Museum Stakeholder 1).

The testimonies above illustrate the museification of Africville. Museification, as conceptualized by Choay (2019) and Ruy and Almeida (2020), refers to the transformation of cultural spaces into preserved heritage sites, often leading to the symbolic commemoration of communities rather than their continued existence. The interviews with former Africville residents, descendants, and community stakeholders reveal persistent tensions regarding the Africville Museum's function as a site of memory and its apparent disconnect from the lived realities of the displaced community. A central concern raised by participants is the symbolic and economic estrangement between the museum and the very people whose history it preserves. One descendant, for example, questioned the logic of having to pay to access a museum that displays the legacy of their own ancestors, and the institution being provincially owned and

operated for profit. This sentiment highlights the broader issue of heritage commodification and reflects Choay's (2019) critique that heritage institutions often prioritize state control and commercial interests over meaningful community engagement. In this context, the museum becomes not only a space of historical representation but also a site of exclusion, where descendants are positioned as consumers of their own cultural memory. This exclusion is further underscored by the contrast with practices involving Indigenous communities in Canada, who are granted free access to museums. The Africville case thus exemplifies how heritage frameworks can perpetuate marginalization under the guise of commemoration, raising critical questions about ownership, access, and justice in heritage tourism.

Furthermore, the participants expressed dissatisfaction with the symbolic reconstruction of the Africville Museum, a decision they believe fails to meet the practical needs of the community, which was a functional space for worshipping and gathering. One former resident described the museum as "just for symbolism. It accomplished nothing." This critique aligns with Ruy and Almeida's (2020) concept of territorial museification, where heritage sites become static representations rather than dynamic spaces that serve the needs of their communities. The lack of a functional Church for events, worship, or gatherings reinforces the perception that the Africville Museum serves more as an institutionalized memorial than a community hub. While the museum narrative seeks to reflect the lived experiences and suffering of the community, the very act of museification crystallizes their story, removing it from its historical and sociocultural context and fixing it in a static time-space, ultimately transforming a living history into an object of consumption for external audiences (Choay, 2019). Former residents of Africville had envisioned a space that would support and revitalize their cultural and spiritual practices but received a static and symbolic structure that reproduces the dispossession of their own historicity

and living experiences and turns their spirit into a place for education and tourism for the world and everyone else but themselves. As a result, many former residents feel a deep sense of betrayal and disillusionment, as their living history has been repackaged for others, for consumption, leaving them marginalized in the very space meant to honor their existence.

Overall, the Africville Museum, similar to Samuel's (1994) concept of "theatres of memory," functions as an authorized but contested space dedicated to preserving the memories of Africville residents. This space serve as site of suffering and pain, ensuring that the stories and contributions of Africville former residents are frozen in the past but respected for future generations (Brooms, 2011; Potter et al., 2024). Institutional and dominant narratives about Africville are recounted by former residents who directly experienced the community's displacement, offering deeper insights into the significance of the Africville Museum. As part of the municipality's formal apology, residents were promised the reconstruction of the original Church as well as the establishment of a separate interpretive centre (HRM, 2018). However, this commitment was not fully realized. Instead, a replica of the Church was constructed to serve as a combined museum and interpretive centre. While symbolically meaningful, this structure lacks the functional capacity to accommodate religious services or gatherings of a scale suitable for the Africville community.

Commitment to Social Justice

As outlined above, another foundational tenet of CRM is its explicit commitment to social justice, which informs and supports initiatives aimed at addressing the historical and ongoing injustices experienced by the former residents and descendants of Africville. Central to this principle is the role of the researcher as an agent of change, employing action-oriented strategies to dismantle systemic inequities and promote equity within both academic inquiry and

broader social contexts (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2022). One of the Africville stakeholders explained it as follows:

> I would say in this particular case, you know, I like to use the term reparatory justice. That's sort of an all-encompassing term and so certainly monetary reparations would be in there. I'm thinking about things like scholarships for the descendants of former residents to attend quality school. Thinking about even sort of like a direct pathway into skill acquisition programs like, carpentry or home building. Thinking about things like free mental health counseling or support. And then, you know, so, we're looking at sort of repairing like the whole person rather than just giving them money. I think that the financial piece is part of it. But like, when it comes to Africville, and then you know, some type of insertion of funds to help actually jumpstart the kind of economy there. So, if the land has to be given back, well, how can we help the Africville people sort of help themselves? Well, we're going to give them I don't know "X amount" of endowment fund, and then they can start to build a hotel, Marina, etc., and then generate their own income, so they no longer need to rely on the city. So, you know, I would say the land has to be given back. Questions like how can we help the Africville people sort of help themselves should be asked. So, you know, I would say reparatory justice, with those sorts of things somewhere in the mix (Africville Stakeholder 3).

The lobbying initiatives of the Africville Genealogical Society and other stakeholders also illustrate this CRM tenet of social justice. Their prolonged campaign for acknowledgment, reparation, and restitution resulted in the "Apology for Africville" in 2010, the creation of the Africville Heritage Trust, and the reconstruction of a replica of the Seaview African United Baptist Church (Clairmont & Magill, 1999; Murray et al., 1978).

Additionally, museums serve as powerful institutions for social transformation, fostering compassion, understanding, and unity (Heller, 2021; Moore, 2024). More specifically, achieving social justice requires the Africville Museum to facilitate critical engagement, prompting visitors to reflect on their own preconceptions and biases by presenting complex and often challenging dominant narratives (Adams, 2017). In this way, the museum can connect audiences with pressing social justice issues and encourage them to consider their role in promoting a more equitable future by highlighting the enduring impacts of systemic racism on Black and Indigenous communities in North America (Perla, 2020).

Furthermore, the efforts of AGS to get Africville the designation as a UNESCO Place of History and Memory linked to Enslavement, and the Slave Trade will likely serve as another social justice purpose. Firstly, it will ensure the preservation and protection of the site against further erasure or neglect. Africville's material remnants and symbolic heritage are at risk without sustained institutional investment. Secondly, such recognition will elevate Africville's role as an educational space, facilitating deeper public understanding of Canada's complicity in global systems of racial injustice. The story of Africville reveals how the afterlives of slavery have manifested through discriminatory urban planning, environmental exploitation, and the denial of basic infrastructure and services to Black communities. Moreover, the designation supports anti-racist and human rights education, offering a platform to interrogate the broader legacy of anti-Black racism in Canadian history.

More than ever, Africville is becoming a vital site for memory work, enabling collective reflection, intergenerational dialogue, and political mobilization. The recognition aligns with broader anti-colonial and anti-capitalist strategies that seek to center marginalized voices and histories within national consciousness. Africville will be repositioned not only as a local

heritage site but as a node within global memory networks that honor the histories of slavery and its afterlives. This shift would also entail certain responsibilities for government institutions, including the ethical stewardship of the site, inclusive policy-making processes, and the prioritization of descendant community voices in heritage governance. Thus, the international recognition of Africville through a UNESCO designation represents a significant step toward redressing historical harms and amplifying the stories of Black resilience in Canada. It contributes to the global movement for reparative justice, while positioning Africville as a critical site for education, resistance, and remembrance. Such a designation is not merely symbolic; it carries tangible possibilities for historical reckoning, public accountability, and long-term community empowerment.

Overall, critiques from former residents on the apology and restitution initiatives highlight the necessity for more transformative strategies. Strategies could include transforming the Africville Museum into more inclusive, community-oriented entity capable of confronting challenging history and current societal challenges (Faden, 2007; Moore, 2024). This strategy will promote genuine and substantive social justice activities, emphasizing the restoration of land, resources, and opportunities to displaced communities, instead of depending on superficial gestures.

Conclusion

Despite contested realities, the Africville Museum remains essential in safeguarding the recollection and heritage of Africville, as well as fostering comprehension and discussion regarding the history of anti-Black racism in Canada. The Africville Museum's efforts and stories play a crucial role in the debate on race in Canada (Brooms, 2011). Through the lens of

CRM, the Africville story reveals how interest convergence, the permanence of racism, counter storytelling, and a commitment to social justice intersect in the struggle for recognition and restitution. The Africville Museum is transforming into a significant location that addresses issues of anti-Black discrimination and advocates for social justice.

This study offers new and significant contributions to the existing body of knowledge on Africville by providing an empirical investigation grounded in contemporary voices and lived experiences, expanding the conceptual framework through which Africville's history and legacy are analyzed. While Nelson's work (2000, 2011) has been foundational in documenting Africville's history and the systemic injustices faced by its former residents, this study provides the people's narratives and how they make sense of the process of heritagization of their own lives and stories, exploring how counter-storytelling — a central concept in CRM — operates in the context of Black Canadian identity (Closson, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Overall, Africville's history highlights the necessity for ongoing activism and transformative measures to rectify the enduring structural disparities within Canadian society. While Black museums stand as symbols of reclaiming and directing Black narratives and cultural spaces, the museification of Africville can also be criticized for freezing and decontextualizing life stories, stripping away historical and sociocultural significance of a people still alive and hurting (Ruy & Almeida, 2020). The exhibition in the space of the Church commodifies the formers residents' lives and stories for consumption and education for external audiences, perpetuating exoticism and telling an "exceptional" story that ultimately excludes the survivors and their descendants as individual victims (Choay, 2019). Some of the participants of this study work at the museum as guides or are members to the Genealogy Society, which helps them reappropriate their own stories and provides some relief and help a healing process. However,

the apology paradigm incarnated by the museum has attenuated a heritage that can be seen as a manipulated tool from authorities, shaping truths in ways that may disempower the very communities it claims to represent, and provide an absolution that dissipates structural environmental racism and displace social justice (Green, 2012, 2016; Waldron, 2021).

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Chapter Three – The Africville Reunion: The Route to Roots and Personal Memory Tourism

Abstract

This study investigates the Africville Reunion in Halifax, Nova Scotia, as a site of roots and memory tourism deeply rooted in the African diaspora's struggle for recognition, justice, and healing. Using Critical Race Methodology (CRM), the paper examines how the Reunion reclaims Africville as a living heritage landscape, offering a counter-narrative to dominant, state-sanctioned histories. Through participant observation at the 41st Annual Africville Reunion 2024, the research explores the intersections of racialized displacement, systemic environmental racism, and grassroots heritage practices. The study argues that the Reunion functions as both a cultural celebration and a ritual of resistance, challenging the symbolic limits of municipal apologies and heritage institutions. Findings show that while initiatives like the Africville Museum and partial land restitution serve interest convergence, they often fall short of addressing systemic inequalities. Ultimately, this paper calls for more transformative, justice-oriented frameworks for heritage, restitution, and land reclamation rooted in the lived experiences of Africville's descendants.

Keywords: *Africville Reunion, Roots tourism, Critical Race Methodology, Land justice, Restitution*

Introduction

Roots tourism, often referred to as diaspora or heritage tourism, constitutes a profoundly personal and political form of travel that connects individuals to ancestral homelands and fragmented cultural memories (Pelliccia, 2018). Within the African diaspora, this form of tourism represents more than a journey of geographical return; it is an act of historical reclamation, cultural resistance, and healing in response to generations of displacement and systemic racial injustice (Basu, 2004; Dillette, 2021). This research explores the Africville Reunion, an annual gathering of former residents and their descendants at the historic site of Africville in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Once a year, former residents, descendants, and friends return to reconnect with the shared heritage of a lost community (Tomczewska-Popowycz & Huang, 2023). While loitering is prohibited, camping and caravans are tolerated during the Annual Reunion, held every July over a long weekend. During this time, the Africville landmark is transformed into a ritualized space of remembrance and personal memory tourism where the community comes together to commemorate, celebrate their shared identity, and honour the resilience of a place that once nurtured a thriving community despite a tragic fate (Clairmont & Magill, 1971; McRae, 2023; Tattrie, 2021). This study argues that, through collective remembrance, cultural performance, and embodied engagement with place, the Africville Reunion challenges state-sanctioned narratives of heritage and reasserts a grassroots claim to land and dignity.

This study is rooted in Critical Race Methodology (CRM), which fuses Critical Race Theory with qualitative research approaches to examine how race and racism structure social experiences and institutional practices (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2022). CRM offers a powerful lens for interrogating the processes through which Africville's

destruction was justified, how its memory is curated, and how its community members continue to resist erasure. I employed participant observation to explore the cultural and political significance of the annual Africville Reunion and document analysis to analyze various documents such as the Apology to Africville. I documented firsthand the emotional and symbolic power of return for former residents and their descendants. These acts of remembrance and reoccupation of space transform the land from a site of trauma into one of celebration and resistance, underscoring the Reunion's role as a counter-narrative to the dominant heritage discourse curated by municipal authorities.

First, this study reveals the historical processes that led to the organic founding of the Africville Reunion, where former residents sought cultural celebration and revival, engaged in a political project of reclamation, and pursued a broader struggle for reparative justice. It then describes how former residents, descendants and friends return not only to honour the past but to assert continued belonging to a land that was unjustly taken from them. The Reunion creates what Marschall (2015) described as embodied memory, where participants reconnect with place through physical presence, ritual, and storytelling. These acts foster a deep intergenerational transmission of knowledge and identity, reinforcing community cohesion while contesting the city's narrative of reconciliation. This research highlights the broader implications of Africville's legacy for understanding Black heritage, systemic racism, and the politics of memory in Canada. It demonstrates how grassroots commemorative practices like the Africville Reunion disrupt institutionalized histories and assert the legitimacy of lived experience as heritage. By focusing on the intersection of tourism, race, and memory, this study contributes to ongoing conversations about land restitution, cultural survival, and the transformative potential of community-led heritage practices. In doing so, it calls for a reimagining of reconciliation that centers the voices,

memories, and dreams of Africville's people—not only as subjects of history, but as active agents shaping its future.

Literature Review

Roots, Pilgrimage, Nostalgia and Personal Memory Tourism in the African Diaspora

Roots tourism, a term encompassing various forms of travel aimed at exploring one's origins and identity, represents a unique and growing category in tourism studies (Pelliccia, 2018). Defined by Meethan (2004) as travel that seeks to reconnect with one's heritage, roots tourism often carries a transformative quality, seen as both a journey of self-discovery and a pilgrimage. Basu (2004) viewed it as a quest for origins and a desire to return home, where the ancestral homeland becomes a sacred site of cultural and emotional importance. McCain and Ray (2003) added to this, describing roots tourists as those who travel to discover genealogical connections and to experience a sense of ancestral belonging. For many individuals of African descent, such travel experiences transcend the notion of leisure tourism, constituting instead a form of diasporic pilgrimage characterized by emotional reckoning, self-reflection, and healing (Dillette, 2021).

For many individuals of African descent, such travel experiences constitute a form of diasporic pilgrimage characterized by emotional reckoning, self-reflection, and healing. This is particularly evident among Black travellers who engage in what Ebron (1999) and Alleyne-Dettmers (1998) refer to as "roots tourism" or "heritage travel," wherein journeys to historically significant sites facilitate a confrontation with the enduring legacies of the transatlantic slave trade. Key sites within this affective geography include Elmina and Cape Coast Castles in Ghana, Gorée Island in Senegal, and the Slave Haven Underground Railroad Museum in

Memphis, Tennessee. These locations function not only as repositories of historical memory but also as spaces where travellers grapple with ancestral loss, racial trauma, and the possibilities of cultural reconnection (Butler, 2001).

Africa holds a particularly significant place in the landscape of roots tourism, drawing in individuals of African descent who seek to reconnect with their ancestral heritage. These journeys to the African continent—particularly to regions such as West Africa, including modern-day Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sierra Leone—began as early as the 1830s and have since prompted extensive academic discourse concerning their cultural, political, and economic implications (Mensah, 2015; Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011). Early examples include the return of formerly enslaved African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans to Liberia and Sierra Leone, often framed within ideologies of pan-Africanism, spiritual return, or Black nationalism (Walker, 1992).

Roots tourism sites across Africa notably Elmina and Cape Coast Castles in Ghana, Gorée Island in Senegal, have become essential to this reconnection process, serving as locations for memory preservation and as powerful tools in confronting and understanding racial injustices both past and present (Dillette, 2021). By facilitating a physical return to a perceived homeland, these sites allow travellers to embody historical memories, thereby creating a connection to a past that, while painful, is intrinsic to their identity (Potter et al., 2024). This pilgrimage-oriented form of roots tourism has fostered an interest in African heritage among African Americans and other descendants of the African diaspora, encouraging them to learn about their lineage and experience the culture of their forebears (Thanopoulos & Walle, 1988). Such journeys often entail not only personal discovery but also a re-engagement with the collective histories of the African diaspora, histories that are marked by both resilience and loss. Bradish and Bradish

(2000), Matthiessen (1989), and Timothy (2001) describe how these sites and activities reinforce memory and legacy, thereby fostering a stronger sense of heritage.

Marschall (2014b) distinguished roots tourism from "memory tourism," which involves revisiting sites of personal significance rather than collective heritage. Within this context, tourist motivations are often rooted in deeply personal memory work, as individuals seek to revisit sites associated with childhood experiences, family histories, or significant personal milestones. This form of memory-based travel can also serve as a means of engaging with unresolved historical traumas. For instance, in the case of former residents of Africville in Halifax, Canada, return visits to the site of the former community represent opportunities to confront the legacy of forced relocation and the emotional ruptures it produced (Marschall, 2014).

Additionally, personal memory tourism, as Pavlakovič et al. (2016) explained, differs from roots tourism in that it does not require a tangible cultural site but focuses on emotional and psychological connections to place. Tourists may visit these personal memory sites to experience nostalgia, process memories, or reconnect with significant life moments, whether joyful or painful. Bartoletti (2010) emphasizes that memory tourism is rooted in individual experiences and that the act of revisiting places associated with meaningful memories allows tourists to create new connections between their past and present selves. This dimension of tourism underscores how identity and memory are interconnected, as personal memories shape tourists' motivations and experiences, often leading to a deeper sense of self-awareness and identity.

Methodology

For this chapter, I utilized the Critical Race Methodology (CRM), which is a research framework that integrates Critical Race Theory (CRT) with qualitative methods to analyze and

challenge racial inequities (Solórzano & Yosso, 2022). In recent years, CRT has sparked considerable discussion, especially regarding its advocacy and influence on understandings of race and racism in North America and beyond (Closson, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT seeks to analyze, challenge, and transform social dynamics where racial hierarchy perpetuates inequality and subordination (Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Subsequently, CRM extends these principles from law to the social sciences, emphasizing the lived experiences of marginalized communities, counter-storytelling, and a commitment to social justice (Adams, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2022). CRM provides a crucial lens for interpreting historical narratives, curating exhibitions, and engaging with communities (Brooms, 2011; Faden, 2007; Griem & Allen, 2022; Simpson, 2007). This framework underscores that racism is pervasive and systemic, shaping institutions and lived experiences in ways that make discrimination feel normal (Solórzano & Yosso, 2022). For this study, we focused on three key CRM principles: interest convergence (Ladson-Billings, 1998), the permanence of racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995), and a commitment to social justice (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

The concept of *interest convergence* introduced by Derrick Bell, asserts that racial justice measures are typically adopted only when they align with the interests of the dominant White group (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This principle suggests that, in many cases, changes toward racial equality are driven more by the interests of those in power than by genuine recognition of injustice (Marsman, 2024; Matsunaga, 2016). For instance, formal state apologies illustrate this dynamic. Often, in transitional justice, the apology is seen as a complex approach in which governments or non-governmental entities address past injustices or official misconduct through formal apologies, reconciliation efforts, and truth commissions (Balint et al., 2014). While intended to foster peace and address historical wrongs, these apologies can be

problematic. For instance, Teitel (2014) suggests that apology mechanisms are often bureaucratized, with organizations like the United Nations establishing standardized practices for various countries, irrespective of local contexts.

In Canada, the reconciliation paradigm is evident in truth commissions, monetary reparations, or memorialization initiatives designed to address harms against Indigenous peoples and minority groups (Matsunaga, 2016). However, these initiatives may lack genuine engagement with the specific needs and cultural values of the communities they aim to support, focusing more on state-centered approaches that serve national interests rather than survivor-centered reconciliation (Marsman, 2024; Matsunaga, 2016). Consequently, as Kim (2018) argues, such standardized apologies risk becoming tools of colonial bureaucracy, sidelining Indigenous and minority voices and, in some cases, failing to achieve real reconciliation.

The *permanence of racism* is another foundational principle of CRM, asserting that racism is not an isolated aberration but a systemic, enduring feature of social, political, and economic structures (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). This principle highlights how racial inequality is embedded within the very fabric of institutions and everyday practices. One domain in which this structural entrenchment is acutely visible is the environment. Environmental injustices—such as disproportionate exposure to toxic waste, lack of access to clean water, and the siting of hazardous facilities—are not random occurrences but rather manifestations of systemic racism that disproportionately affect Black and Indigenous communities.

The concept of environmental racism powerfully illustrates this tenet of CRM. First articulated by Benjamin Chavis in 1982, environmental racism refers to policies and practices that deliberately or indirectly place racialized populations at greater risk of environmental harm, often through the location of polluting industries in or near their communities (Bullard, 2003).

Scholars such as Robinson (2000) and Lipsitz (2007) have emphasized that these practices are deeply connected to the historical legacies of racial discrimination, contributing to intergenerational poverty, poor health outcomes, and restricted access to basic resources in already marginalized neighborhoods.

In the Canadian context, communities such as Africville provide a stark example of how environmental racism is used against minority groups. Black residents in Africville were subjected to decades of environmental neglect, including proximity to sewage treatment plants, waste disposal sites, and heavy industrial infrastructure, ultimately leading to forced eviction under the guise of urban renewal (Clairmont & Magill, 1999). Similarly, Indigenous communities continue to face heightened exposure to pollutants and systemic displacement from ancestral lands. These environmental injustices are not merely ecological or public health issues; rather, they are part of a broader constellation of systemic violence—including police brutality, food insecurity, and inadequate housing—that reinforce racial hierarchies and exclusion (Waldron, 2021). Through the lens of CRM, environmental racism is understood as a continuation of colonial and racialized power structures, where land, health, and community well-being are subordinated to the interests of White settler dominance and capitalist exploitation (Waldron, 2021).

Finally, CRM is underpinned by a *strong commitment to social justice* advocating for structural reforms that challenge legal, racial, social and economic inequalities (Matsuda, 1991; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Through this tenet and commitment, CRM promotes a vision of justice that actively seeks to dismantle discriminatory systems and uplift historically marginalized communities. Asch (2017) underscores CRM's mission to enable communities of color, including marginalized groups like the people of Africville, to achieve social recognition

and rights within a global society. This dedication to social justice highlights CRM's role not merely as a theoretical or methodological framework but also could be used as an activist movement aimed at realizing tangible social reforms and securing a place for oppressed groups within the broader socio-political landscape. Social justice as a CRM tenet extends beyond traditional legal frameworks, urging a re-examination of policies and practices across institutions, from education to environmental regulation, to address and rectify racial disparities (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002, 2022).

Overall, CRM offered a transformative methodological framework for this study, challenging dominant narratives and amplifying marginalized voices (Adams, 2017; Moore, 2024). To construct an account of the official narrative surrounding the annual Reunion of Africville, which will address our aim and objectives, participant observation technique was employed to construct a short history of the Reunion through the heritagization of Africville. This approach demonstrated the ways how the Africville Reunion is becoming a meaningful event for anti-Black oppression and social justice, celebrating Africville as a site of hope (Said, 1978), and turning the Africville site into a space to heal, learn and pursue liberatory dreams (Moulton, 2021).

Participant Observation

Participant observation serves as the primary data collection method for this study, providing direct engagement with the Africville Reunion. The method employed in this study aligns with ethnographic fieldwork, as conceptualized by Spradley (1980), wherein the researcher serves as the principal instrument for both observation and data collection (Creswell, 2003). Furthermore, Jorgensen (1989) emphasized that participant observation is particularly well-suited for examining dynamic social processes, interpersonal relationships, the organization

of people and events, temporal continuities, and emergent patterns, as well as the immediate sociocultural contexts within which human life is situated.

As a doctoral student researching the historical and cultural significance of Africville Reunion, I had the privilege of attending the Africville 41st Annual Reunion from July 25 to 29, 2024. My observations include the setup and organization of the event, storytelling sessions, cultural performances, and the Africville Walking Audio Tour. Immersing myself in this vibrant gathering of former residents, descendants, and stakeholders was both an academic and personal milestone. I actively participated in setting up tents, ensuring that the event's logistical needs were met, while engaging with community members who shared their lived experiences. Assisting in cooking traditional meals offered a unique opportunity to connect with Africville's culinary heritage and foster deeper bonds with attendees. One of the most impactful moments was joining the Africville Walking Audio Tour. Traversing the historic land, guided by powerful narratives and archival recordings, I gained a profound understanding of the community's resilience and legacy. This experience not only enriched my research but also reaffirmed my commitment to amplifying Africville's story through my academic work.

This immersive method provides valuable insights into how former residents and descendants interact with the site, engage with their history, and navigate issues of identity and memory (Clairmont et al., 2010). Notes were taken during and after each activity to capture the richness of the experience and ensured a nuanced understanding of the Reunion's cultural and emotional significance. This participant observation method also enabled me to identify recurring themes, such as the role of communal practices in memory preservation and the use of the Africville site as a space for healing and resistance (Jorgensen, 1989; Spradley, 1980). This

study data collection method was ideal for documenting and understanding the roots and pilgrimage tourism narrative expressed on the Africville site during the 41st annual Reunion.

Document Analysis

Document analysis is a rigorous qualitative research technique employed to assess textual, visual, or audio content, enabling researchers to discern patterns, themes, and meanings within data (Krippendorff, 2019). This method is useful for interpreting social phenomena and involves analyzing texts, images, and other media that document the Africville Reunion and its historical and cultural context (Berelson, 1952; Holsti, 1968). Sources included municipal reports, media articles, Africville Heritage Trust publications, photographs, museum exhibits, event programs, digital media platforms that capture the voices and perspectives of Africville's community members and personal accounts shared during the Reunion (McRae, 2023).

In museum and heritage tourism research, document analysis is an effective method for analyzing materials like museum exhibitions, archive records, visitor feedback, promotional materials, and social media content (Winter, 2018). It allows scholars to investigate how museums and heritage sites convey their narratives, safeguard cultural identities, and interact with visitors. For example, scrutinizing museum exhibits can provide both implicit and explicit signals on cultural heritage, while evaluating visitor reviews and social media content can offer insights into tourists' perspectives and emotional reactions to heritage sites (Tavakoli & Mura, 2018). By analyzing narratives from the Africville community, the study highlights counter-narratives that challenge dominant historical discourses and underscore Africville's significance as a site of racial resilience and activism (Adams, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021).

Both data collection methods were chosen for this study for their ability to provide nuanced insights into the Africville Reunion's impact on roots tourism and community

empowerment. The combined use of participant observation and document analysis ensures a holistic exploration of Africville as a heritage site, emphasizing its cultural, emotional, and political dimensions. In addition, by critically examining these themes through the lens of CRT, the study contextualizes the Africville Reunion within broader discussions of racial justice, cultural preservation, and memory tourism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

A Short History of the Reunion through the Heritagization of Africville

The displacement of Africville's residents, its Reunion, and the contested question of land ownership lie at the heart of the community's history. Established in the early to mid-19th century along Halifax's Bedford Basin, Africville was a historical Black community founded by Black refugees, freed Africans, and Jamaican Maroons (Nelson, 2000). Some families today trace their roots in the area back to the late 1700s (Africville, n.d.). From its inception, Africville was shaped by exclusionary land policies and racialized neglect. Residents were relegated to marginal, geographically isolated land—often rocky and unsuitable for farming—and most lacked formal land deeds or legal title, leaving them vulnerable to expropriation (Clairmont & Magill, 1999; Nelson, 2000).

Although community members invested in their homes, Churches, social institutions and paid taxes, Africville was persistently denied basic municipal services such as running water, sewage systems, police services and garbage collection. By paying property taxes on their land and homes, Africville residents saw themselves as participants in the economic life of Halifax and expected access to the same municipal services provided to other taxpaying neighborhoods (Clairmont & Magill, 1971, 1999). Furthermore, this discourse reflects the broader struggle for

recognition and justice. This framing remains essential in understanding their historical and ongoing fight for restitution and recognition. It also exemplifies environmental racism, where discriminatory policies and practices exposed marginalized communities to harmful conditions, justifying dispossession (Bullard, 2003; Waldron, 2021).

The case of Africville exemplifies a calculated form of systemic dispossession, wherein the City of Halifax framed the community as a slum to legitimize the forced eviction of over 400 Black residents between 1964 and 1967. By 1970, the municipality had demolished homes and the Seaview United Baptist Church—the spiritual and cultural heart of Africville—effectively erasing a vital site of Black heritage (Clairmont & Magill, 1999; Nelson, 2000). Compounding this act of spatial violence was the strategic siting of hazardous infrastructure—such as an open dump, an infectious disease hospital, and an abattoir—within close proximity to the community, reflecting patterns of environmental racism and a broader systemic disregard for Black lives and land rights (Nelson, 2000; Waldron, 2021).

The city's refusal to grant legal land titles to Africville residents further entrenched this dispossession, reinforcing the slum narrative and providing bureaucratic justification for the community's demolition. This denial of ownership not only undermined Africville's legal legitimacy but also contributed to the erasure of its identity as a self-sustaining and close-knit Black settlement rooted in cultural continuity and resilience. Contrary to dominant portrayals of Africville as impoverished and transient, oral testimonies and historical records reveal a deeply rooted community characterized by kinship networks, civic agency, and perseverance in the face of institutional neglect. The deliberate dismantling of Africville thus demands a critical re-evaluation of urban planning practices that have historically marginalized racialized communities.

The story of Africville is emblematic of broader land dispossession patterns across Nova Scotia, where colonial policies and entrenched racial inequities have long shaped Black experiences of space, ownership, and belonging (Marsman, 2024). These dynamics are mirrored in earlier histories of forced displacement, most notably the expulsion of the Acadians beginning in 1755. During this period, Acadians—French-speaking settlers with strong ties to the land—were forcibly removed from their homes by British authorities and deported to Louisiana, France, and Australia, among other destinations (Griffiths, 2005; Hodson, 2012). In the aftermath, their fertile agricultural lands were redistributed to British military officers and other colonial settlers deemed "desirable." When some Acadians attempted to return years later, they discovered their former lands had been permanently transferred and were now the foundation of established Anglophone communities. As with Africville, this episode illustrates how colonial land regimes strategically erased entire communities through dispossession and spatial reordering. Together, these histories demonstrate a longstanding pattern of using land policy as a mechanism for exclusion and control, targeting communities considered outside the colonial ideal of belonging and citizenship.

From the late 18th century onward, land allocation practices significantly favored White settlers, while Black newcomers were systematically excluded from equitable access to land and secure tenure. This disparity has ongoing implications for Black communities in the province. After the American Revolution, Nova Scotia became a destination for both White Loyalists and Black Loyalists – formerly enslaved Africans who had supported the British and were promised land access. While White Loyalists were granted formal land titles with documented surveys and legal support, Black Loyalists received significantly less land, often on inferior terrain, and without the documentation necessary to establish legal ownership (Walker, 1992; Whitfield,

2016). Many Black settlers were therefore relegated to marginal lands with no formal deeds, creating long-term insecurity, limiting their access to credit, and leaving families vulnerable to displacement. These systems enabled the liquidation of wealth, limited access to political power and social stability, perpetuating a racialized divide in land ownership and opportunity (Marsman, 2024).

In recent years, the Nova Scotia provincial government has made efforts to address longstanding historical injustices related to land ownership. The Nova Scotia Land Titles Clarification Act (LTCA) was designed to assist Black residents in five communities in securing legal title to land that has been held informally for generations (Nova Scotia Land Titles Initiative, 2021). Although the initiative signifies a noteworthy policy shift, it continues to face substantial challenges, including navigating complex legal frameworks, establishing intergenerational ownership, and ensuring sufficient financial and institutional support (Marsman, 2024). Marsman (2024) critiqued the LTCA, arguing that despite its intentions, the Act fails to fully consider the historical and racial contexts specific to Africville's forced displacement. Consequently, former residents of Africville remain largely unable to reclaim their land, perpetuating entrenched patterns of dispossession and marginalization. Moreover, the continued denial of access to their land has fractured cultural continuity and weakened community cohesion. In this context, land embodies far more than territory—it is a repository of memory, identity, and belonging (Marsman, 2024).

According to Marsman's (2024) analysis, the Africville community had long advocated for a formal title clarification process, including a proposal for it to be overseen by a special judicial committee. This initiative was part of broader efforts by African Nova Scotians to secure legal recognition of land ownership, which had been denied for over a century. However, the

government ultimately rejected this proposal, diverting the community's focus from title clarification and formal expropriation toward an expropriation and compensation scheme within the broader urban renewal plans (Clairmont & Magill, 1999; Matsunaga, 2016). "Homeowners, about 14 of them (with clear, legal title to their property), were offered an average of $7,847, while other residents without legal title would receive a gratuitous payment of $500 for a quit claim deed and vacant possession of their property. Residents with proof of legal title could claim compensation through the courts or in negotiation with the city" (Clairmont & Magill, 1999, p. 85). It remains unclear whether there has been any poised quest for compensation through the courts.

Although 2.5 acres of Africville land was given to the Africville Heritage Trust, the issues go beyond ownership. The constraints center around how the land is managed, who gets to make decisions about its use, and whether the community's vision and interests are truly being represented. Questions remain about access to the land for descendants and how it is being used for commemoration, community activities, and heritage preservation. Marsman (2024) underscores the need for legal mechanisms that consider the historical and racial contexts of affected communities. Without such considerations, legislative efforts like the LTCA risk reinforcing existing inequalities rather than addressing them (Simmonds, 2014). The case of Africville highlights the urgent need for an equitable approach to land title clarification that meaningfully addresses the enduring impacts of racial injustice (Marsman, 2024). Given historical precedents of land restitution for other displaced communities in Canada, a strong case exists for similar policies in Africville (Marsman, 2024). Alternative mechanisms, such as community land trusts or direct land transfers, could be explored to restore property rights to the descendants of Africville former residents.

Towards the First Official Reunion by the Africville Action Committee

The destruction of Africville and the forced relocation of its former residents between 1960 – 1970 were overseen by the Halifax Human Rights Advisory Committee (HHRAC). Although the committee was presented as the voice of the Africville community, its composition did not truly reflect the population it claimed to represent (HRM, 2024). With four White and three Black members, none of either were from Africville; thus, the committee failed to authentically advocate for the community's best interests (Clairmont et al., 2010). This point is relevant because the lack of elected representation for Africville residents at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels contributed to their marginalization and exclusion from decision-making processes that directly affected their community. As a result, after the relocation, the residents of Africville faced significant hardships: "on the whole, Africvilleans had become more vulnerable to money problems, more beholden to others' rules (public housing or welfare authorities), and less enmeshed in family and community support systems" (Clairmont et al., 2010, p. 77). In other words, since they were forcefully removed and moved to public housings, their lives were not improved as they lost the sense of community, the social capital and solidarity that allowed them to survive and even to thrive, despite not having services and being disconnected from the city.

In 1969, the Africville Action Committee was formed to push for more equitable compensation and better treatment for the displaced community. The group actively lobbied city officials, held media campaigns, and sought to highlight the injustice of the relocation process (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2014). However, their efforts faced insurmountable challenges. City authorities consistently cited a lack of resources, imposed bureaucratic hurdles, and presented legal barriers to derail the committee's progress (Canadian Museum for Human

Rights, 2017). Experienced officials adept at navigating and manipulating the system gradually undermined the committee's momentum (Clairmont et al., 2010). By the early 1970s, these obstacles had weakened the committee's ability to continue lobbying for compensation effectively (Clairmont et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, the Africville Action Committee pivoted its efforts toward supporting Africville's displaced residents by developing special programs to assist those struggling to adapt to their new circumstances and providing resources and guidance to ease the transition (Canadian Museum for Human Rights, 2017). More significantly, the committee played a pivotal role in preserving the cultural and spiritual essence of Africville. In August 1972, they organized a remembrance ceremony to honour the community's legacy. This gathering, which drew over 1,200 participants of all ages, became a profoundly moving event—a spiritual revival that celebrated Africville's enduring spirit (Clairmont et al., 2010). It was only in 1983 that the Reunion became more formally staged as an annual gathering. That year, Deborah Dixon and Brenda Steed, childhood friends from Africville, co-founded the Africville Genealogical Society (AGS) with the primary goal of reconnecting scattered members of the community after the forced relocation. As Steed expressed about survivors, "the ones who were children at the time of the relocation grew up and began having children of their own and we didn't even recognize them on the street. We felt we were losing our identity" (Clairmont et al., 2010, p. 81).

The AGS created a board of directors, established contacts with survivors and ancestors' families, organized monthly meetings, a variety of events, and began hosting formally the Reunion that would become an annual tradition and ritual. Since then, each year, former residents, descendants, and supporters gather to remember the community, celebrate its culture, and strengthen the bonds of those affected by its destruction. The Reunion has since grown into a

powerful symbol of resilience and connection, ensuring that the story of Africville remains alive for future generations (Timothy, 2016). The Africville Reunion is poised to symbolize the enduring spirit and resilience of Africville's people, functioning both as a ritual, cultural celebration, and a form of resistance against the systemic forces of urban development that reinforce existing social hierarchies (Nelson, 2008; Ruck, 2020; Yankholmes & Timothy, 2017). It also highlights the tension between grassroots cultural expression and its transformation into institutionalized heritage, where lived traditions risk being co-opted and redefined within formal frameworks (Harrison, 2013; Smith, 2006; Waterton & Smith, 2010).

Reorganizing the Fight: Keeping a Politically Engaged Spirit Alive

While the AGS was initially established to preserve the memory and cultural legacy of Africville, its mandate evolved significantly under the leadership of its fourth president, Irving Carvery, who was elected in 1985. Carvery expanded the organization's focus to include a renewed political mission centered on advocating for justice, equitable compensation, and the restitution of Africville's land (Clairmont et al., 2010; Kimber, n.d.). This shift transformed the society from a social organization into a vehicle for activism, working to preserve Africville's legacy and address the systemic injustices faced by its former residents.

One of the first heritagization actions of the city of Halifax in 1985, and in response to a increasingly organized voice of the survivors, was the creation of Seaview Park on the former site of Africville which elicited mixed responses from the former residents and their descendants. While the park served as an acknowledgment of the land's historical significance, many felt it failed to address the deeper emotional and cultural wounds caused by the community's forced displacement. As one former resident expressed during the 41st annual Reunion, "the park had long been used by White residents as a dog park." For some former residents, the park

symbolized the city's effort to erase Africville's physical presence without fully addressing the trauma of its destruction. While renaming the site from "Seaview Park" to "Africville Park" marked a step toward acknowledging the community's history, it also underscored the ongoing struggle for meaningful restitution and reconciliation, seen by many as a symbolic gesture that fails to confront the deeper injustices tied to the erasure of Africville and its people (Green, 2012).

In 1989, a collaborative effort revived the hopes of the AGS to change the narrative of Africville perceived by Nova Scotians as a ghetto. The creation of a major exhibition, *Africville: The Spirit That Lives On* involved the AGS in partnerships with various institutions including Mount St-Vincent University Art Gallery, the National Film Board of Canada, the Black Cultural Centre of Nova Scotia, and Dalhousie University academics. The creation of this exhibition was seen as an opportunity to reappropriate the narrative of Africville, not only as a marginalized community but as a thriving, resilient one, and to renew and support the fight for compensation (Clairmont et al., 2010). An organizing committee was formed and began collecting artifacts for the exhibition. The exhibition was followed by a conference at Mount St-Vincent University Art Gallery, attracting around 150 people to discuss Africville's legacy, its importance in the fight against racism, and the broader context within Nova Scotia's history (Clairmont et al., 2010). This exhibition brought national attention to Africville's legacy and was instrumental in highlighting the need for reparations, recognition, and anti-racism struggle. By 1992, the exhibition had transformed into a traveling display, further expanding its impact and awareness, while a short documentary was produced to amplify the story of Africville to a global audience (National Film Board of Canada, 1991). Through these efforts, Africville's legacy was reframed, gaining both cultural and political significance.

In the 1990s, plans to reconstruct the Seaview African United Baptist Church were proposed but never materialized (Clairmont et al., 2010). The AGS ultimately filed a legal case against the City, renewing compensation claims for the community's losses, but the final response was that the City withdrew its offer of Church reconstruction and declined to address claims for individual restitution (Halifax Regional Municipality, n.d.). A few years later, in 1994, the province of Nova Scotia pledged $200,000 toward the Church reconstruction (Clairmont et al., 2010). During the same year, Victor and Eddie Carvery, former residents of Africville, staged a protest against the compensation given to most of the displaced community members who were said to be renters, which amounted to only about $500 per household. The brothers set up a trailer in Seaview Park, near the site of their former family home on Barrington Street. This demonstration led the city to pass a bylaw prohibiting camping in public parks. While the brothers were no longer allowed to camp in Seaview Park, they relocated their protest to the site of the former Church, just outside the park's boundaries. Despite the city's efforts to regulate and control the land and its usage through the camping prohibition, advocacy by the AGS ensured an exception for camping during the annual Reunion (Clairmont et al., 2010).

The following years, the president of the AGS continued working tirelessly to draw international attention to Africville's history, participating in conferences and events aimed at addressing racism (Clairmont et al., 2010). By 2001, discussions with the Halifax Regional Municipality about compensation began to show progress, offering hope for a resolution (Halifax Regional Municipality, n.d.), while in 2002, the federal government took a symbolic step to recognize Africville's importance when Heritage Minister Sheila Cops visited Halifax to officially designate the site as a National Historic Site (Parks Canada, n.d.). In 2004, the United Nations released a report addressing modern racism, discrimination, and intolerance, which

recommended that Canada explore reparations for former Africville residents. This sparked debate and renewed the AGS's push for individual compensation for those affected. In 2005, the society finalized a strategic plan focused on reviving the Church reconstruction project and creating an interpretive center to honour Africville's heritage (Halifax Regional Municipality, 2010). The shift compared to 1991 can be understood within the broader sociopolitical context of Canada's evolving approach to historical redress and reconciliation. By the mid-2000s, Canada had entered what scholars often describe as an apology era, in which governments increasingly acknowledged historical injustices faced by marginalized communities (Green, 2012). This period also saw growing public awareness and activism around racial justice and historical accountability, which likely influenced the political climate around Africville's demands for recognition and restitution. While it may not have been an election year, political leaders were attuned to calls for justice from various communities, and official apologies became a way to demonstrate commitment to reconciliation and equity (Green, 2012). This context helps explain the shift in attitudes toward Africville and the increased willingness to engage with the community's demands compared to the relative inaction of the early 90s.

In 2006, a feasibility study was conducted for both the Church rebuilding and an interpretation center. This effort received backing from organizations such as the Halifax Regional Municipality, Nova Scotia's Department of Culture and Heritage, the Department of Canadian Heritage, and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. Feedback from former residents, their descendants, and other stakeholders was incorporated into the planning process (Clairmont et al., 2010). Updates on the project were shared with the community during the 23rd Africville Annual Reunion which took place in 2006. Despite these developments, many former residents continued to experience unresolved grief and resentment, maintaining that the loss of

their homes had not been sufficiently acknowledged or redressed. Their perspectives reflect a persistent sense of injustice and displacement that remains unaccounted for in official narratives and restitution efforts. While many still called for land repatriation or financial restitution, the AGS supported the creation of a Church and an interpretive center as meaningful steps toward healing, fostering unity, and ensuring Africville's history would be preserved for future generations. In 2009, after consulting with federal, provincial, and municipal officials, the AGS decided to begin with the construction of the Seaview Church, making it the initial phase of the restoration project (Clairmont et al., 2010).

The establishment of the Africville Heritage Trust and the reconstruction of the Seaview African United Baptist Church signify meaningful steps toward memorialization. These acts of memorialization can be viewed as powerful tools for tangible reparation. These actions of the former residents of Africville represented by the AGS align with CRM's advocacy for material redress and community empowerment (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Nevertheless, the absence of individual compensation highlights a critical gap. For instance, a former Africville resident, Eddie Carvery, expressed his skepticism and demand for additional reparative measures which underscore lingering distrust—a reflection of systemic inequities that CRM scholars argued persist when reparations fail to meet the full scope of harm (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Thus, the municipality's commitment to renaming Seaview Park as Africville and establishing an African-Nova Scotian Affairs office represents an attempt to institutionalize recognition (Clairmont et al., 2010), which signifies an interest convergence (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). This lasting commemoration — through the museum, and public recognition — aligns more closely with the city's interests because it enhances Halifax's visibility as a city engaged in historical redress while promoting cultural tourism and a progressive public image

(Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Unlike individual compensation, which directly addresses the material losses of Africville residents, these symbolic acts serve broader civic interests by showcasing reconciliation efforts without requiring ongoing financial commitments. This reflects the concept of interest convergence — the idea that marginalized groups' demands are "likely to be met" when they align with the interests of the dominant group (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2022). In this case, commemorating Africville through lasting public symbols offers a partial response to the community's call for recognition while simultaneously benefiting the city's reputation and long-term cultural strategy. Nonetheless, CRT emphasizes that symbolic measures must be paired with structural change to dismantle power imbalances (Taylor et al., 2023). Without sustained action to address systemic racial inequalities, these measures risk being seen as an act for show.

Following the extensive campaign for restitution by many former residents and their descendants, a pivotal moment occurred on February 24, 2010, when the then Mayor of Halifax, Peter Kelly, issued an "Apology for Africville" on behalf of the city, acknowledging its culpability for the anguish inflicted by the destruction of Africville (HRM, 2018). The apology for Africville offers a significant moment in the history of systemic acknowledgment of racial injustices in Canada. In addition to the apology, The Halifax Regional Municipality and the Province of Nova Scotia also allocated $3 million and $1.5 million, respectively, to The Africville Heritage Trust, a new organization established by the city in lieu of providing individual compensation for the former residents of Africville (HRM, 2023).

The Trust was established specifically to operate the replica Seaview African United Baptist Church and the Interpretive Centre as well as safeguard the legacy of Africville (Clairmont et al., 2010). The municipality established a maintenance agreement for the 2.5 acres

of land adjacent to Seaview Park and transferred it to the Trust (HRM, 2018). The city also established an African Nova Scotian Affairs office pursuant to the agreement, enabling enhanced provision of municipal services to the Black population (HRM, 2018). The returned land was utilized for the construction of the Africville Museum, inaugurated in 2012.

Overall, for transformative progress, reparative efforts must extend beyond symbolism to include tangible restitution and structural change, ensuring the lived experiences of Africville's descendants inform and shape equitable policy decisions (Solórzano & Yosso, 2022). Providing individual compensation would prioritize the direct material needs and justice claims of Africville's displaced residents — but this approach offers little visible benefit to the city itself. The preference for collective, symbolic forms of redress reflects the city's strategic interest in solutions that are more palatable to the broader public and more sustainable in terms of public relations and long-term legacy (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

The Reunion as a Land Reappropriation Ritual

The Africville Annual Reunion is more than a celebration; it is a form of resistance against historical erasure and a means of sustaining intergenerational ties. Many participants are individuals who lived in Africville prior to its demolition or are descendants of those who were displaced and scattered across Halifax and beyond. The Reunion provides a space for storytelling, cultural expression, and political reflection, reinforcing the community's ongoing demands for justice, restitution, and recognition. By protecting and institutionalizing the Africville Reunion, the community has ensured that the legacy of Africville endures—not only as a memory of loss but as a living testament to resilience and the enduring strength of African Nova Scotian identity. The Reunion also welcomes members of the broader African Nova Scotian community, reflecting the intertwined histories and solidarities among Black

communities throughout the province. Attendees often travel from various parts of Nova Scotia including Beechville, Halifax, Dartmouth, North and East Preston, Cherry Brook and Shelburne. Most of these communities share parallel histories of marginalization, segregation, and cultural survival, creating a strong sense of solidarity with Africville's story and its ongoing significance.

Furthermore, many attendees travel from across Canada and beyond. For instance, former residents and descendants who relocated to Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia, in search of better economic opportunities following Africville's demolition also attend the event. Some participants even journey from the United States, particularly from the northeastern states, where historical migrations and familial ties to Africville have been maintained across generations. Their journeys underscore the diasporic nature of the Africville experience and the enduring emotional and cultural ties to the land, despite physical displacement (Basu, 2004; Dillette, 2021). For many, the Reunion offers not just a reconnection to Africville itself but also a reconnection to extended family networks, shared cultural practices, and a collective history that continues to inform their identities (Tomczewska-Popowycz & Huang, 2023).

The Reunion includes a mix of accommodations, but camping holds special significance. Many descendants and participants choose to camp on the original Africville site as an act of remembrance and connection to the land, reflecting the community's deep attachment to their heritage. However, not all participants camp — some stay in hotels or with family — making camping an important but not exclusive part of the Reunion experience. Prior to the 41st Africville Annual Reunion, I visited the site 3-4 times and met people, visited the region and met families that took me with them to the Reunion. On the evening of July 25, 2024, I arrived at Africville Park in Halifax to participate in the 41st Annual Africville Reunion as a participant-observer. I participated in the setting up of the grounds and tents by the former residents of

Africville and the opening of the Reunion at 6:00 AM. The site—marked by the reconstructed Seaview United Baptist Church—held a dual presence: one of loss and resilience. The event officially commenced on Friday, July 26, with a Meet and Greet at 6:00 PM in a big tent set up as a welcome centre, allowing the former residents and their guests attendees to reconnect and share their experiences of Africville. Shortly after that, an open-air gospel concert commenced near the Africville Museum. The sound of traditional hymns reverberating across the Bedford Basin created an emotionally charged atmosphere.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, elders and descendants gathered in a circle, many of them holding hands or swaying gently to the music. These moments of spiritual continuity are not performative but deeply rooted in communal practices that long predate displacement. For many, the singing was an invocation—not merely of religious faith but of ancestral presence. I found myself drawn into these rhythms and silences, noting how the spatiality of the park, now reconstructed and renamed, was being symbolically reclaimed through ritual and repetition. At 7:00 PM, the launch of the "Walking Africville Audio Tour" provided an immersive historical experience, enabling participants to engage with the landscape of Africville through guided narration on their mobile devices. Such embodied cultural practices underscore CRM's tenet of counter-storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), offering narratives that resist dominant historiographies which render Africville's legacy invisible or illegitimate. Later that evening, at 8:00 PM, the "Movies Under the Stars" event at the Africville Museum grounds brought a communal viewing experience that featured the movie *Remember Africville* relevant to Africville's legacy. The day concluded with an Entertainment Dance featuring a local DJ named RS Smooth at 10:00 PM, reinforcing the celebratory atmosphere, with people dancing and kids running around on the land.

Over the course of the weekend, the Reunion transformed the park into a dynamic cultural archive. Tents lined the edges of the field, showcasing family photographs, homemade food, arts and crafts, and historical artifacts. These temporary installations functioned as mobile memory spaces—curated not by institutional authorities, but by community members intent on preserving and transmitting Africville's oral and visual histories. I spoke informally with a third-generation descendant who emphasized that her family's photo collection had been excluded from municipal archives. "This is our museum too," she said, gesturing toward a quilt adorned with appliqué portraits of past residents. "Not everything worth remembering fits inside a building." Her words reflected a broader sentiment among attendees: the need for community-controlled narrative spaces as a form of resistance to institutional erasure (Adams, 2017).

On Saturday, July 27, the program was deliberately structured to engage participants across all age groups. The day commenced with a "Kids Day and Picnic," held from 10:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in the vicinity of the main tent, which served as the central venue for the majority of activities and formal addresses. This event encouraged intergenerational bonding and education about Africville's past. Afterwards, the Reunion's symbolic procession began. Participants carried handmade banners bearing family names once tied to Africville's land. The atmosphere was reverent—more pilgrimage than parade. Observing this ritual, I was struck by the affective dimensions of return. For some, coming back to Africville was not only a celebration but a form of grief work. Several participants told me that the Reunion was the only time they could "visit home," as most of them now live scattered across Canada and the United States. A former resident spoke candidly about the psychological dissonance he experiences: "They called this place a slum when I was a child. Now it's a park with plaques. But I still see the houses." His reflection underscores the contested meanings of heritage landscapes, especially those forged

from histories of racialized displacement (Nelson, 2000; Waldron, 2021). In these testimonies, Africville emerges not as an isolated tragedy but as part of a broader pattern of systemic violence and environmental racism (Fryzuk, 1996). The spatial arrangement of the event underscored this history. From the vantage point of the park, one could see the location where a landfill operated for decades near Africville—an arrangement emblematic of environmental racism. Former residents described how their community was forced to coexist with a dump, a prison, and infectious disease hospitals—facilities rarely imposed on white communities. Later that evening, a dance competition among the former residents and attendees of the Reunion was held from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM, allowed wider participation beyond the Reunion attendees. The night had another Entertainment Dance at 9:00 PM, featuring DJ RS Smooth.

Unfortunately, the rest of the planned events for Sunday, July 28 and Monday, July 29 were cancelled after a tragic shooting at the camping site, the night of Saturday, July 27, which resulted in five injuries and hospitalizations. From the vantage point of a participant-observer, this incident re-inscribed the very patterns of systemic violence that CRM seeks to illuminate. The panic was immediate. Families scattered, elders were ushered to safety, and children cried as police sirens pierced through the rhythmic music that had only minutes earlier unified the space. Conversations with attendees the following day revealed deep sorrow—but not shock. Others described the shooting as an echo of state abandonment, a reminder that Africville remains vulnerable to the same systemic neglect and marginalization it has historically endured. The shooting case remains unsolved as the government of Nova Scotia province has offered a reward of up to $150,000 for any information that will lead to the arrest and conviction of the people behind the shooting at the Africville annual Reunion (Government of Nova Scotia, 2025).

Throughout the event, I was also attentive to the role of youth in sustaining community memory. I witnessed teens interviewing elders on mobile phones, asking questions about daily life before the eviction. One young girl asked her grandmother, "What did it smell like here?" The elder paused before describing the scent of wood smoke, salt air, and bread baking. In that moment, memory was sensory, intimate, and pedagogical circulating outside of formal educational structures. These intergenerational exchanges functioned as informal knowledge systems, through which Africville's history was being reinscribed on the land and within kinship networks. These exchanges reflect Waterton and Smith's (2010) theory of affective heritage, where meaning is transmitted not through official texts but through lived, felt experience. Furthermore, informal discussions throughout the weekend also reflected ongoing skepticism toward institutional involvement. Several participants refused to be recorded, and at least two asked whether my research was connected to government work. "We've been studied enough," one woman said. "It's time to be heard." These concerns are grounded in historical mistrust of research institutions that have historically extracted data from Black communities without reciprocity (Smith, 2021). As a researcher, I responded by limiting my data collection to field notes when permission was given and engaging primarily as a listener and guest. Perhaps the most profound dimension of the Reunion was its function as a space of intergenerational dialogue.

The Reunion was also a site of political engagement. Panel discussions focused on reparations, land return, and the limits of symbolic recognition. The 2010 municipal apology was repeatedly described as "too little, too late," especially given the inadequate restitution and continued exclusion from development decisions. Descendants voiced frustration over the slow pace of progress and the absence of Africville descendants in municipal planning—further

demonstrating that commemoration without redistribution cannot serve justice. While the reconstruction of the church and the annual Reunions signify progress, many participants remain skeptical of government commitments. Their critiques were not merely historical grievances but pointed analyses of contemporary anti-Black racism, housing insecurity, and environmental inequities in Halifax and beyond.

The Africville Reunion has also become a site of interest for scholars, cultural workers, and allies who recognize the event's significance in conversations about heritage, racial justice, and Black Canadian history. While the primary focus remains on the Africville community, the presence of broader audiences reflects the growing recognition of Africville's importance as a symbol of both historical injustice and cultural resilience within Canada's national narrative. The Reunion intersects with personal memory tourism as it enables former residents and their descendants to relive familial and communal memories tied to Africville's legacy. This deeply personal act of returning to a site of significance aligns with the motivations behind memory tourism—nostalgia, reconnection, and the processing of shared and individual experiences (Marshalls, 2014b). Like other personal memory tourists, Africville's participants forge new connections between their past and present selves, ensuring that the spirit and stories of Africville remain vivid and influential for children and youths (Bartolleti, 2010). In this way, the Africville Reunion transcends mere commemoration, becoming a dynamic interplay of memory, identity, ritual and cultural heritage.

The 41st Africville Reunion functioned as a living archive—a space where memory, resistance, and belonging coalesced. As a participant observer, I left with a deeper appreciation for Africville's ongoing legacy—not as a relic of the past but as a living and breathing testament to community endurance. This experience reaffirmed that any academic engagement with

Africville must be rooted in reciprocity, reflexivity, and commitment to justice. In this space, CRT finds vivid expression: the permanence of racism is contested not only through legal or political channels but through memory, music, food, and collective presence (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Tate, 1997). The Reunion reclaims not just land, but narrative. It demands that we view heritage not as a neutral act of preservation, but as a political tool to confront systemic racism, environmental violence, and the politics of erasure. In this sense, Africville continues to teach—even as it continues to fight.

Conclusion

The Africville Reunion, as explored in this study, is far more than an annual gathering or community festival. It is a powerful act of remembrance, resistance, and reclamation that reconfigures a site of dispossession into one of cultural survival and resilience. By analyzing this study through the lens of CRM, this research demonstrates how Africville's descendants strategically transform historical trauma into a living legacy. The Reunion challenges dominant heritage narratives and intervenes in a broader landscape of symbolic redress that, while publicly visible, often fails to meet the demands of structural justice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2022).

The study's findings through my observation of the participants of the Reunion reinforce that Africville remains a contested land—physically, symbolically, and politically. The establishment of the Africville Museum and the 2010 municipal apology have offered symbolic gestures of reconciliation. However, these efforts are emblematic of CRM's concept of interest convergence (Bell, 1980), where the recognition of Black suffering is advanced only when it aligns with broader State institutional goals. As such, these symbolic acts often serve

institutional interests more than they meet the concrete needs of Africville's displaced residents—such as land repatriation or individual compensation (Kim, 2018; Marsman, 2024). The participant observation data further revealed that the Reunion is a ritualized reappropriation of space. Camping on the site, storytelling, shared meals, and cultural performances all become acts of re-inscription—rituals that claim the land spiritually and emotionally. In this way, the Reunion constitutes a profound form of personal and collective memory tourism, creating what Marschall (2015) terms expressed memory. These embodied practices reaffirm Africville's importance as a place of identity, not just history, and expose the limitations of institutional frameworks that incentivize heritage while continuing to deny unrestricted land access to descendants.

This research makes clear that true reconciliation cannot occur through apologies or museums alone. It must include land justice, economic reparations, and decision-making power for Africville's descendants. Community land trusts, special land titles tribunals, or direct transfers of ownership could all serve as practical steps toward this goal. Without such measures, symbolic redress will continue to obscure, rather than resolve, the legacy of dispossession (Solórzano & Yosso, 2022). Finally, the Africville Reunion is not only a commemoration of what was lost, but a vision for what can be reclaimed. It functions as a site of intergenerational learning, cultural expression, and political awakening. As descendants gather, they affirm that Africville is not a relic of the past, but a community that lives on through memory, movement, and the land itself. The task for scholars, policymakers, and community advocates is to ensure that heritage practices like these are not confined to spectacle but mobilized in service of justice.

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Chapter Four – A Critical Analysis of Visitors' Online Reviews of the Africville Museum: A Netnography Study.

Abstract

Museums have evolved from colonial institutions to spaces for community engagement and social justice, as seen through the Africville Museum in Halifax, Nova Scotia. This study investigates visitor experiences at the Africville Museum through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and use a netnographic methodology to analyze online reviews from Google reviews and TripAdvisor. I examined how tourist actions towards the counter-narratives heard about the history of Africville at the museum can help achieve social justice. The findings underscore the museum's function in safeguarding Africville's narrative of racialized displacement while promoting education, memorial, and social justice. Visitor criticism highlights the museum's emotional influence, and the ongoing marginalization reflected in its accessibility issues. The Africville Museum, via the integration of counter-storytelling and CRT lens, serves as a transformative theatre that contests prevailing racial narratives, stimulates public discourse on structural racism, and promotes community resilience, social justice and equity. This study emphasizes the significant role of museums in confronting historical injustices and fostering equitable and inclusive societies.

Keywords: *Africville Museum, Online Reviews, Netnography Methodology, Critical Race Theory, Social Justice*

Introduction

Museums, once critiqued for their roles as colonial and imperialist institutions (Griem & Allen, 2022; Moore, 2024), have increasingly reoriented themselves in response to decolonial critiques. In this evolving context, they now endeavor to serve as inclusive spaces that engage meaningfully with the histories and heritage of the communities they represent. Beyond their traditional functions of preservation and education, contemporary museums seek to foster dialogic relationships with marginalized groups, offering platforms that foreground underrepresented narratives. As such, museums have the potential to act as powerful witnesses to historical injustices, social conflicts, and human rights violations, while also reflecting the complex and diverse experiences that have shaped minority populations across time (Adams, 2017). By presenting multifaceted narratives, they not only foster connections but also challenge preconceptions and provide perspectives on the world that are often complex and difficult to grasp (Adams, 2017). Recently, racial issues in museums have gained attention, analyzed through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Kohl & Halter, 2021). In what is often described as a so-called post-racial era (Scott, 2016), the field of museum studies examines inequities within museums, seeks to address representation gaps, and works to dismantle Whiteness dominancy within these institutions (Heller, 2021; Moore, 2024).

The Africville Museum was established in 2012, over half a century after the demolition and dispossession of the Africville community in Halifax, Nova Scotia (Thompson, 2012). In the 1960s, the City of Halifax decided to displace Africville's residents under the guise of urban regeneration, labeling the community as dilapidated. Officials claimed that relocation to government-subsidized housing across Halifax would offer significant advantages and improve residents' quality of life (Nelson, 2008). Despite strong protests from Africville residents against

the forced relocation, the bulldozing of the community began in 1964, their Church was demolished in 1967, and the last home was demolished in 1970. In 2010, after decades of advocacy for justice, the City of Halifax issued a formal apology for the destruction of Africville. As part of the apology, financial compensation was offered to the community, enabling the construction of a replica, albeit much smaller size, of the Seaview African United Baptist Church—once the heart of Africville (Clairmont & Magill, 1999; Murray et al., 1978).

This Church replica houses the Africville Museum that quickly became a vital site of remembrance and education. In 2012, it became home to part of the 1989 exhibition "Africville: A Spirit that Lives On," a collaborative effort by Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, and the Africville Genealogy Society (Thompson, 2012). Through community-driven storytelling, the exhibition celebrated Africville's enduring legacy and cultural essence. Today, the Africville Museum continues this mission, preserving and reflecting the community's history, culture, and resilience. Its displays feature artifacts, photographs, documents, and personal narratives that highlight Africville's experiences, challenges, and triumphs (Thompson, 2012). What makes this museum especially powerful is that many of the guides who welcome visitors are Africville survivors themselves, sharing their memories, experiences, and knowledge, offering a deeply personal perspective on the community's story.

Tourists' online feedback about their visits to historical sites and museums further amplifies these narratives of such sites and locations, providing a platform for sharing collective perceptions and experiences. Through these digital reflections, the impact of the museum and the stories it tells reach a broader audience, keeping Africville's legacy alive in public memory (Christou & Pericleous, 2024). Furthermore, online review platforms provide a mutual online

space for tourists to share their emotions, understandings, and experiential knowledge gained from their interactions with physical surroundings, activities, historical facts, and tour guides at specific attractions like museums, places, and sites (Dillette et al., 2019; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017). In addition, online review platforms have been recognized as a vital resource for researchers seeking to describe and investigate tourist experiences and behaviours at different heritage attractions due to the characteristics associated with online reviews (Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015).

The purpose of this paper is therefore to explore the experiences of visitors at the Africville Museum. This study employed a netnography methodological approach looking at online reviews provided by visitors on the prominent online review platforms in the tourism industry, namely Google Reviews and TripAdvisor (Kozinets, 2015; Munar et al., 2021; Tavakoli & Mura, 2018). Using the lens of CRT, the goal of this paper is to analyze visitors' impressions and encounters at the Africville Museum and understand their views of the Museum. The experiences articulated in the online reviews are notably rich and detailed, reflecting voluntarily shared reflections by visitors on public digital platforms. The emotions conveyed, the knowledge expressed, and the descriptive accounts of visitors' encounters with the Africville narrative offer valuable insights into the interpretive impact of the museum. These narratives are critical to understanding the evolving role of museums as sites of memory, education, and social engagement, particularly within the context of a purportedly post-racial era.

Literature Review

Museums as Imperial and Colonial Institutions

The public's perception of race, identity, and cultural heritage has long been shaped by museums in a complicated and frequently problematic way (Simpson, 2007). In addition to promoting White, Western viewpoints and marginalizing or exoticizing non-Western cultures, museums have frequently been criticized for upholding colonial and imperialist ideas (Fifi & Heller, 2019; Griem & Allen, 2022; Kohl & Halter, 2021; Moore, 2024; Teslow, 2007). This strategy is consistent with Harris's (1993) definition of "Whiteness as property," which shows how White privilege is ingrained in various institutions of the society, such as museums. Indigenous and non-European cultures in museum exhibitions are often framed through an exoticizing lens, presented as objects of curiosity, which reinforces cultural hierarchies that uphold Eurocentric superiority, while Euro-American exhibitions is elevated as "high culture" (Domínguez et al., 2020; Griem & Allen, 2022). Furthermore, museums' collections frequently contain plundered items and relics that contain histories of violence and dispossession, demonstrating the colonial legacy of these institutions (Bennett, 2017; Teslow, 2007). The frameworks that museums employ to interpret and exhibit history, which frequently prioritize Eurocentric viewpoints and centre Whiteness, are also affected by this problem, which goes beyond material culture (Heller, 2021).

Consequently, CRT has been essential in revealing these disparities, offering a framework like counter-storytelling to examine how institutional racism and colonial ideology have influenced the narratives within museums (Griem & Allen, 2022; Kohl & Halter, 2021). Museums in post-racial era are anticipated to evolve into more inclusive, community-oriented entities capable of confronting challenging history and current societal challenges (Faden, 2007;

Moore, 2024). Recently, museums have sought to critically analyze race and confront preconceptions. For instance, the American Anthropological Association's exhibit “RACE: Are We So Different?”, inaugurated in 2007, sought to dismantle biological concepts of race and examine its social construction and implications (Teslow, 2007). Likewise, art museums have progressively showcased works by artists of colour that tackle racial concerns, such as Kara Walker’s silhouettes that address enslavement and Kehinde Wiley’s portraits that reinterpret Black characters using classical European painting techniques (Teslow, 2007). This counter-storytelling method corresponds with Faden's (2007) characterization of a transition in which museums function as “facilitators of public conversation about the burdens and legacies” of history (p. 82). This method can effectively address the underrepresentation of Black histories and cultures in museum spaces (Scott, 2016).

Adopting a Community-Led Museums Approach

The necessity for museums to change from being authoritative establishments to community-led venues has gained more attention in recent years (Faden, 2007). According to Kohl and Halter (2021), in order to promote diversity and authenticity, museums need to prioritize the perspectives of historically underrepresented groups. This change is part of a larger movement to decolonize cultural institutions, which entails acknowledging and correcting historical injustices while promoting diversity (Sandell, 2016). Community-driven museums must therefore give underrepresented groups’ views and experiences top priority while providing them with the chance to influence the stories that are told in museum settings (Adams, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021). The Africville Museum serves as an example of how museums are adopting community-led strategies that give voice and importance to underrepresented groups in response to these concerns.

Furthermore, the museum's community-oriented methodology guarantees that the narratives of oppressed people are conveyed truthfully and with respect (Adams, 2017; Faden, 2007; Moore, 2024). These initiatives criticize the conventional top-down curation approach, highlighting co-creation and participatory activities as essential components of a post-colonial museum philosophy (Heller, 2021). Moreover, community-led museums function as venues for social justice. Scott (2016) contended that in a purportedly post-racial period, museums must address persistent racial disparities and foster environments for debate and reconciliation. Museums should actively cultivate a culture of allyship which Kohl and Halter (2021) highlighted as a fundamental purpose for these institutions, especially when they exhibit a persistent dedication to significant community engagement. This entails not just rectifying representation shortfalls but also proactively deconstructing the entrenched structural Whiteness that has historically characterized museum operations (Adams, 2017; Moore, 2024). By adopting a community-centered strategy, museums can transform into venues of empowerment and advocacy, elevating the voices of historically marginalized individuals in a purported post-racial era (Faden, 2007).

Museums in a Post-Racial Era

The notion of a post-racial era, characterized as a society in which race no longer influences opportunities or experiences, has encountered skepticism (Scott, 2016). Kohl and Halter (2021) assert that the concept of post-racialism complicates the ongoing systemic racism and enables institutions to evade confronting structural imbalances. This critique is pertinent in museums, as these institutions mirror wider societal power dynamics (Adams, 2017). Employing CRT lenses, researchers have analyzed how museums sustain racial disparities via their collections, narratives, and organizational frameworks (Adams, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021).

These scholars concluded that museums, far from being neutral spaces of knowledge production, often operate as sites where whiteness is normalized and minoritized perspectives are marginalized or tokenized. Consequently, unless museums actively engage in decolonial and anti-racist practices, they risk reinforcing systemic inequalities under the guise of cultural preservation and education.

Consequently, the core tenets of CRT offer a valuable analytical framework for interrogating how museums and other contemporary institutions might begin to dismantle the colonial legacies embedded within traditional museological practices (Kohl & Halter, 2021). Central to this inquiry is the CRT principle of the permanence of racism, which raises a critical question posed by Adams (2017): "How do we create experiences that dismantle racism instead of putting it on display?" (p. 292). This question underscores the need for museums to move beyond passive representation and toward active engagement with anti-racist praxis. In this context, Moore (2024) highlighted the potential of museums to serve as sites of resistance against racial inequality, while Heller (2021) contended that confronting racism within these institutions requires not only diversifying collections but also critically re-evaluating the interpretive frameworks through which history is curated and communicated. Such efforts demand more than symbolic gestures of inclusion; they necessitate sustained, structural commitments to equity and justice. As Brooms (2011), Perla (2020), and Potter et al. (2024) argued, meaningful transformation involves a deliberate and ongoing process of institutional self-examination and reform aimed at addressing the systemic nature of racism in contemporary society.

Reframing Narratives: Museums as Catalysts for Change

The issue of museums' involvement in colonialism and the subsequent depiction of Indigenous and minority peoples has proven difficult to resolve. However, as people's awareness of museums' potential as social change agents has grown, so too has the need to convey inclusive and transformative accounts of minority groups (Sandell, 2016). For example, Clifford (1991) explains how British Columbia tribal museums have reframed anthropological collections and reclaimed artifacts to highlight "stories of revival, remembrance, and struggle" as opposed to static ethnographic displays. Likewise the U.S. National Museum of the American Indian is a larger-scale attempt to elevate Native voices and viewpoints (Carpio, 2006; Lonetree, 2006), although some academics contend it falls short in addressing colonial brutality. In addition, Adams (2017) discusses initiatives at Historic Fort Snelling in Minnesota to recognize the site's significance to the Dakota people, notably as a site of exile and imprisonment, and to go beyond a mere military history of celebration. To do this, the region must be known by its Dakota name and work with a Dakota advisory council. According to Adams (2017), these methods seek to acknowledge Indigenous sovereignty and decolonize museum narratives.

Given this, decolonial museums could be effective instruments for social transformation that promote compassion, understanding, and unity (Heller, 2021; Moore, 2024). Museums may encourage critical interaction and stimulate visitors to consider their own preconceptions and biases by showcasing intricate and frequently challenging stories (Adams, 2017). These organizations should consistently invite visitors to reflect on how racism's and colonialism's past atrocities still influence society now by relating them to current concerns. That is, museums should aim to engage visitors with pressing social justice issues and encourage critical reflection on their individual and collective responsibilities in fostering a more equitable society. This can

be achieved by foregrounding the ongoing impacts of systemic racism on Black and Indigenous communities in North America within their exhibitions, programming, and interpretive strategies (Brooms, 2011; Perla, 2020; Potter et al., 2024).

Online Reviews of Museums and its Role Towards Social Justice

Online reviews have evolved into discussion forums, allowing museums to reach audiences well beyond geographical bounds (Damala et al., 2008). Vasquez (2012) defined online reviews as succinct accounts of visitors' experiences. Studies indicate that online reviews serve as a medium of public conversation that can either uphold or contest the prevailing narratives propagated by museums. Furthermore, online reviews enable users to express their opinions and evaluations using written information, photographs, and videos, while also facilitating conversation and collaboration with other users (Wang et al., 2022).

The rise of social media has shifted museum research away from artifacts and toward visitor experiences, increasing community interaction and information exchange (Gao & Yu, 2024). As digital platforms become more widely available, visitors will be able to share their experiences and analyze the museum's connection to social justice through online reviews. These evaluations contribute to larger discussions about fairness, diversity, and inclusivity in cultural contexts. As a result of this shift, social justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (SEDIA) are being given greater importance in museum operations. Another contribution of online reviews to museum studies is their role in assessing visitor experience and satisfaction. Su and Teng (2018) conducted a sentiment analysis of museum reviews and found that visitors frequently mention aspects such as exhibition quality, staff interactions, and facility maintenance in their feedback. Their study demonstrated that positive reviews often emphasized engaging storytelling, well-curated exhibits, and interactive elements, while negative reviews

commonly cited issues related to accessibility, overcrowding, and high admission fees. Similarly, Gursoy et al. (2022) emphasized the emotional component of visitor feedback. Their research applied text-mining techniques to online reviews and found that emotional expressions—such as excitement, disappointment, or nostalgia—play a significant role in shaping public perceptions of museums.

Thus, online reviews and social media interactions have become critical means for communicating with audiences and moving social justice projects forward (Ng et al., 2017; Sandell, 2016). Although the significance of museum visitors in heritage studies has been acknowledged, scholars have not adequately used online visitor reviews to assess the perception and experiences of tourists who visited a museum with a history of violent, racial and minority issues in Canada (Deligiannis et al., 2020; Gursoy et al., 2022; Kirilenko et al., 2021; Simeon et al., 2017; Su & Teng, 2018). Additionally, research that examines online reviews in the context of museums and historical sites of segregation and racial issues through the CRT lens is relatively scarce, yet needed, during these contemporary times (Hong, 2020; Riva & Agostino, 2022). By examining these reviews, researchers can better understand how museums influence public awareness and inspire societal change. This approach is particularly relevant for studying community-driven museums like the Africville Museum, as it allows researchers to explore how visitors respond to the museum's focus on social justice and community resilience.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

CRT has sparked considerable debate in recent years, particularly regarding its influence on understanding race and racism in North America and beyond (Closson, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT is a scholarly and political movement aimed at analyzing, challenging,

and reshaping social systems that perpetuate racial hierarchies and minority domination (Griem & Allen, 2022; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). A core tenet of CRT is that race and racism are deeply embedded in legal, political and social institutions of North American societies, shaping and influencing individuals lived experiences (Bell, 1973; 1976; Freeman, 1978). This perspective drives CRT scholars to draw on diverse disciplines, including ethnic studies, history, and religion, to explore how racism, sexism, and classism intersect to impact racialized individuals (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). It further highlights how racism is normalized within dominant cultural frameworks and academic disciplines (Asch, 2017; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Additionally, CRT provides a critical lens to investigate issues of dominant and minority voice (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). Among the CRT five tenets, this study focuses on two tenets: counter-narratives and a commitment to social justice.

Counter-narratives or storytelling, as discussed by Ladson-Billings and Tate IV (1995), serve as a tool to challenge dominant narratives, while the pursuit of social justice aims to foster equity and transformation (Griem & Allen, 2022; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Counter-narratives are a defining feature of CRT, empowering marginalized individuals to assert authority over their experiences (Griem & Allen, 2022). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) defined counter-storytelling as a narrative technique that seeks to challenge the legitimacy of commonly accepted assumptions or beliefs, especially those held by the majority in a society. This method is used to document, critique, and dismantle dominant narratives across theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical contexts (Goessling, 2018; Griem & Allen, 2022; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Contemporary scholars advocate for CRT's ability to address limitations in conventional research methods, which often reinforce systemic racism (Adamian & Jayakumar, 2018; Goessling, 2018). Counter-storytelling employs multiple stories and narratives that utilize

diverse types of "data" to depict the racialized, sexualized, and class-based encounters of individuals belonging to communities of colour (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002a, 2002b). These stories often intertwine biographical and autobiographical elements, situating them within historical, social, and political contexts (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b). In this study, counter-storytelling is employed to examine tourist feedback on online review platforms can help to gain insights into how visitors engage with the Africville Museums and the counternarratives they present (Delgado, 1989, 1990).

The second CRT tenet I utilized for this study is a firm dedication to social justice and the foundations of freedom and transformation, as Solórzano and Yosso (2001) outlined. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) noted that a key advantage of CRT is that its stresses the legitimacy of experiential knowledge from communities of colour in understanding and addressing systemic oppression. In this study, I examined how tourist actions towards the counter-narratives heard about the history of Africville at the museum can help achieve social justice. Most importantly, how do the museum stimulate and engage with the visitors to promote social justice (Dillette et al., 2019; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017). As a result, I utilized CRT in this study to analyze online reviews of/about the Africville Museum, aiming to bridge the gap between visitors, the counter-narratives told, and a quest for social justice. Such analysis can disclose how visitors reflect on their role as agents of transformation (Schult, 2022). By fostering awareness and advocacy, the Africville Museum has the potential to drive transformative social change and justice for Africville's displaced community (Katharaki, 2022). Through this lens, CRT offers a pathway to social reform, justice, and equity.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative methodology to analyze the online narratives, perspectives, and ethical viewpoints of tourists visiting the Africville Museum (Marques, 2024). The netnographic technique is particularly suited for understanding human experiences emerging from online social interactions and information exchange (Kozinets, 2015). Robert Kozinets (2010) introduced the term "netnography" to describe a framework for comprehending individuals' social behaviors and interactions on the Internet. This framework examines a wide range of concepts, such as meanings, social activities, relationships, languages, and social systems. Within tourism studies, netnography adapts classical ethnography for virtual fieldwork conducted online (Mkono, 2012; Mkono & Markwell, 2014).

Accordingly, Kozinets (2002) outlined three key steps for conducting a netnography. First, researchers must identify the most relevant online communities or platforms for their research interests. To achieve this, Kozinets (2010) provided six criteria for selecting sites for netnographic research: they should be "relevant, active, interactive, substantial, heterogeneous, and data-rich" (p. 89). For this study, I identified and focused on Google Reviews and TripAdvisor, chosen for their prominence and data accessibility. These platforms attract millions of visitors monthly and host extensive reviews, enabling researchers to collect rich data on tourists' experiences (Sthapit, 2018). Google Reviews, in particular, offers a substantial quantity of reviews regarding the Africville Museum, predominantly written in English, a language in which the researcher is proficient and widely used locally and in Canadian tourism. The second step entails data gathering.

Kozinets (2015) identified three distinct categories of data that can be collected through netnographic research, each contributing to a comprehensive understanding of online

communities and cultural practices. The first category comprises primary data, which refers to information directly obtained by the researcher through active engagement, such as participation in online discussions or interviews with community members. The second category involves secondary data, which includes content that is passively compiled by observing, recording, and capturing naturally occurring online interactions, such as posts, comments, images, and videos shared by users within digital environments. The third category consists of researcher field notes, which are reflexive accounts and analytical observations made during the data collection process. These notes provide context and interpretation, capturing the researcher's insights, reactions, and evolving understanding of the online setting (Souto, 2018). The third step emphasizes ethical responsibilities. When browsing blogs or review sites as passive observers, there is no obligation to disclose study objectives or seek consent, as these platforms are public forums where contributions are often archived (Mkono, 2012; Mkono & Markwell, 2014). This study employed a passive or secondary netnographic approach, using archived online data without engaging with informants to avoid influencing the study (Costello et al., 2017). This approach ensures a clear separation between researchers and visitors while maintaining ethical standards by focusing exclusively on publicly available data (Arsal et al., 2010; Langer & Beckman, 2005).

I utilized online, user-generated reviews as my primary data source, focusing on online reviews of the Africville Museum from Google Reviews and TripAdvisor. Google Reviews, a widely accessible platform, allows for straightforward data extraction due to the public nature of its evaluations. Users are aware that their comments are publicly visible, enhancing the authenticity and breadth of the feedback (Xue, 2024). Google Reviews is also highly regarded for evaluating a variety of heritage attractions, services, and destinations, attracting a diverse audience across languages and cultural backgrounds. This diversity was particularly valuable for

the study, providing a robust dataset (Xue, 2024). Also, TripAdvisor was chosen as an additional source of data due to its established role in tourism research that has employed netnographic methods (Mkono & Tribe, 2017; Tavakoli & Wijesinghe, 2019; Vo Thanh & Kirova, 2018). Since its founding in 2000, TripAdvisor has been instrumental in helping travelers and tourists share opinions and gather information, making it a vital platform for this research (Crotts et al., 2012). Its influence on the tourism industry is well documented (Jeacle & Carter, 2011).

Online reviews were collected in mid-August 2024 from two major digital platforms: Google Reviews and TripAdvisor. At the time of data collection, the Africville Museum had accumulated a total of 284 reviews on Google. To ensure relevance and coherence with the research focus, the dataset was refined by excluding one-sentence remarks that primarily referred to the surrounding Africville park rather than the museum itself, as well as reviews not written in English. These exclusions were made due to the researcher's linguistic proficiency in English and because the majority of reviews were composed in that language. Following this refinement process, 260 Google reviews were retained for analysis. Similarly, of the 43 available reviews on TripAdvisor, only 40 were deemed relevant and included in the final dataset based on their substantive engagement with the museum experience. During data collection stage, I adhered to the platforms' terms of use to ensure compliance (Xue, 2024). The selected reviews spanned from 2012, when the museum was opened to 2024, culminating in 300 reviews in total that aligned with the study's objectives. To maintain data integrity, reviews were extracted verbatim word for word in the quotes, including original grammar and syntax errors (Mkono, 2012; Mkono & Tribe, 2017). The meticulous curation of visitors' feedback resembles the purposive sample strategy, as noted and described by Kozinets (2002). Since these reviews are published

on a publicly accessible website, my collection of the online comments was not disclosed (Arsal et al., 2010; Langer & Beckman, 2005).

Thematic Analysis

Thematic data analysis is used in qualitative research to identify patterns of meaning within a dataset. As described by Boyatzis (1998) and Braun and Clarke (2006), it involves generating themes based on the data. This study employed both deductive and inductive thematic data analysis approach following CRT tenets to analyze the online review. Deductive thematic analysis refers to the process in which themes are developed through the systematic grouping of codes, informed by multiple factors including the data itself, the researcher's subjectivity, theoretical orientation, conceptual frameworks, and prior training and experience (Braun & Clarke, 2022). While inductive thematic analysis is a data-driven approach where themes are constructed naturally from the data without being influenced by pre-existing theories or concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Both deductive and inductive thematic analysis allowed themes to be developed while also applying CRT frameworks for deeper analysis. Employing the CRT lens discussed above enabled a more comprehensive exploration of the "multifaceted connotations of race" within the online review data (Huber, 2008, p. 91).

In this study, the coding process was guided by pre-established theoretical constructs derived from CRT and museum studies literature. Specifically, codes were developed to capture patterns related to racial representation, historical erasure, emotional engagement, perceptions of justice/injustice, educational impact, visitor expectations, and identity affirmation or disruption. The data was manually coded, with key themes identified through careful categorization of keywords, ensuring a comprehensive and rigorous analysis (Souto, 2018). These codes were then

clustered into broader themes that reflect how visitors interpret and emotionally respond to Africville's historical narrative as presented by the museum.

Findings and Discussion

Experiencing and Learning About Canada's Past and Present Best Kept Secret

The Africville Museum, situated in Halifax, Nova Scotia, is a powerful emblem of endurance and commemoration (Nelson, 2008; Thompson, 2012). This theme about Canada's past and present best kept secret encapsulates the significance that visitors at the museum attribute to commemorating and enlightening others about the history of Africville. Africville, a predominantly Black community that thrived for over 150 years, was systematically demolished and appropriated in the 1960s by the City of Halifax. This act effectively erased a significant dimension of the history, culture, and legacy of the African Nova Scotian community—elements that served as vital affirmations of their presence, resilience, and contributions within the broader Canadian narrative. The Africville Museum functions as both a memorial to the injustices endured by the residents of Africville and as a hub for education, cultural conservation, community restoration, and a location for social justice (Nelson, 2008; Perla, 2020; Thompson, 2012). Many online reviews of the Africville Museum underscore the importance of empowering the institution to preserve and interpret the history of Africville. These reviews highlight the museum's vital—yet often overlooked—role in representing a significant chapter of Canadian history that has been marginalized in mainstream narratives. For instance, Joe S noted that:

> It's a chapter of our history that I believe every Canadian should know. In 1964, after years of neglect, Halifax City Council voted to relocate the people of Africville and went on destroy a community of mostly Black residents on the shore of the Bedford Basin that

> had its roots in the Loyalist migration from the U.S. With no meaningful input from residents, the city razed their homes and their beloved Seaview United Baptist Church which was the focus of their community all in the name of "urban renewal – Joe S.

Laura Miller also commented that

> Every Nova Scotian should ensure they go to this place and learn about this horrible time in our history. The museum is well curated and has welcoming staff who will answer any and all questions with grace – Laura Miller.

Furthermore, these online reviews specifically highlighted the experiences and injustices endured by the Africville community. They also emphasized the importance of future generations learning about this significant chapter in Canadian history and referred to the history being “Canada’s past and present best kept secret.” For example, Donna C. described the museum as a place for those interested in the real history of Canada’s best secrets.

> It's Canada’s best kept secret that illustrates the horrors of racism, marginalization and hypocrisy in the name of urban redevelopment, community improvement and progress. I was so shocked by what I came to learn about the residents of Africville that it’s taken me a few days to process before writing this review. Imagine citizens who paid taxes but never received basic services afforded to them by their government. The same government allowed their area to fall into a state of disrepair and decided instead of fixing the wrong, first tear down their Church in the middle of the night, then their homes. To add insult to injury, they move the now displaced people into government housing. The reasoning? It was declared unsafe, and it would be better for all the residents of Africville (who were Black btw) to live elsewhere so that they could “improve” the area through urban redevelopment. Can you believe this happened only a

> generation ago in the 1960s? This museum came about after decades of demanding an apology and for the government to right the wrong done to the people in Africville. They got an apology all right but only 2.5 acres of the 500 acres back to rebuild the Church that was torn down and no extra funding to maintain or expand upon it. It's even very difficult to get to when it shouldn't. If ever you visit Halifax this is a museum you should see to remind us that we need to see each other as human beings and choose to do what is right in the eyes of God instead of what is expedient or convenient, glossing over the wrong with pretty words and vain intentions – Donna C.

While Rochelle B. pointed out that Africville's story is

> …an important part of Canadian History and Nova Scotia heritage. I am thankful for the family members and curators that put this together. The front desk staff was very informative and generous with their time. I got emotional when I found out that the dump was put right beside Africville when there were still residents living there. When you visit here, you will see that it is still an industrial dump right by the museum. It's shameful... as if things have not changed. As if this piece of history is an afterthought to the city and would prefer it be forgotten rather than highlighted. But as the sign says - The Spirit Lives On. My wish is to visit here again, and I hope to see the entire area converted to a vibrant Africville as it should be and deserves to be – Rochelle B.

This theme demonstrates the museum's function in commemorating and enlightening the public about "Canada's past and present best kept secret" and the historical significance of Africville. And, as a decolonial museum, the Africville Museum has shown to be a strong agent of social transformation, a vital aspect of CRT, encouraging empathy, understanding, and solidarity (Heller, 2021; Moore, 2024). The Africville Museum, via its exhibitions and

storytelling, engages and encourages visitors to contemplate how the legacy and effects of colonialism and racism continue to impact society today (Adams, 2017).

These reviews can serve as immediate records of how a diverse group of visitors perceive and interpret the heritage and legacy of the Africville Museum (Christou & Pericleous, 2024). Online comments in the modern age of digital technology are essential for offering valuable viewpoints on the enduring impact and transmission of legacies within heritage and museum environments (Christou & Pericleous, 2024). With the analysis of the online reviews for this study, it shows that the Africville Museum is doing a great job at not only recounting a narrative of tragedy – a critical aspect of CRT – but also honours the fortitude of the individuals who resided in Africville and their offspring (Kohl & Halter, 2021). The museum, through its exhibits and programming, stimulates critical discussions regarding race, history, and justice, providing a framework for how museums might effectively confront racial disparities (Brooms, 2011; Potter et al., 2024).

By situating the impacts of systemic racism on Black communities in Canada within its exhibitions and interpretive frameworks, the Africville Museum plays an active role in engaging visitors with contemporary social justice issues. This approach not only fosters critical reflection on individual and collective responsibilities in promoting equity and inclusion but also positions the museum as a transformative space for public education and dialogue (Brooms, 2011; Potter et al., 2024). In this capacity, the museum serves a dual function: it preserves the historical legacy of Africville while simultaneously acting as an agent of change in what some have termed a post-racism era. Through the amplification of voices from former Africville residents and their descendants, the museum challenges dominant historical narratives and encourages deeper consideration of the enduring consequences of racial discrimination and urban development

policies in Canada (Nelson, 2008). Furthermore, the museum's emphasis on community-driven storytelling and the preservation of personal narratives contributes to the ongoing discourse on racial equity (Walcott, 2003). In this way, the Africville Museum not only commemorates the past but also advocates for meaningful societal transformation by encouraging collective action and the recognition of Black Canadian history.

Emotional and Personal Connection

Another major theme identified was the Africville Museum's capacity to evoke strong emotional responses from its visitors. This theme reflects the concept of *emotional resonance*, which refers to the affective impact of museum experiences and their ability to connect individuals to broader historical and social narratives. Scholars such as Knudsen and Waade (2010) and Witcomb (2013) have emphasized the centrality of emotional engagement in contemporary museum practice, particularly within online and participatory museum communities, where affective responses play a critical role in meaning-making, memory work, and social connection. Visitors frequently contemplated the profound emotional impact of the museum's material, articulating sentiments of sorrow, indignation, and a heightened comprehension of the challenges endured by the Africville people. For instance, Tara Elizabeth expressed the following:

A recurring theme in the literature on online reviews of museums and other cultural institutions is the emotional dimension of visitor experiences (Marques, 2024). Soren (2009), in her exploration of transformative encounters within museum settings, observed that even a simple conversation can evoke the recollection of past events, thereby eliciting profound emotional responses. This underscores the capacity of museums to serve not only as educational spaces but also as catalysts for personal reflection and emotional engagement. Furthermore,

visitors' emotional reactions are linked to their perception of participation and engagement as they walk, listen, and envision the original site or location (Schult, 2022). For instance, one of the reviewers Jean-Addlaire shared:

> "My visit to the Africville Museum was both deeply moving and incredibly informative. While the story of Africville is one of injustice, the museum presents it with respect and highlights the resilience of the community. The displays are well-organized, and the personal stories bring the history to life. A must-visit for anyone looking to understand a vital part of Halifax and Canadian history" — Jean-Addlaire

Consequently, emotions can serve as a means of learning and a conduit for visitors to acquire a historical understanding of the Africville community and Black Canadians in general (Bareither, 2022). The stories and perspectives of the survivors, who were former residents of the Africville community, elicit emotions in a direct response (Jaeger, 2022). Furthermore, the Africville Museum can been described as a "theatre of pain" like Tolia-Kelly (2016) noted in her work about the on Maori visitors at the British museum, which can also elicit emotions, thereby encouraging visitors to share their feelings with others and engage in commemorative activities (Popescu, 2022). Museum guides can generate positive and life-affirming messages that can contribute to social justice, another critical aspect of CRT (Bareither, 2022). This is further clarified by the fact that the emotions that visitors experience in museum spaces can allow them to extract moral messages, inform their motivation to combat injustice, and activate a sense of social and political consciousness (Bernard-Donals, 2022; Popescu & Umbach, 2022; Schult, 2022). Moreover, emotions are such a natural reaction to a painful past, that academics have argued that museums and historical sites should do more to offer safe spaces for visitors to "decompress where [they] are asked to pause and reflect upon their experiences" (Tsiftsi, 2022),

psychological support, and emotional support for visitors before, during, and after a visit to a theatre of pain related site (Bernard-Donals, 2022; Popescu & Umbach, 2022; Schult, 2022). Indeed, visitors frequently characterize their experience as profoundly moving, with many reviewers expressing that it moved them to tears. For instance, Joseph noted that,

> It was a humbling experience visiting this museum and learning the history of Africville. The workers here were so lovely and took the time to really explain the history. I was so moved by the resilient spirit the former residents of Africville had. I hope one day they get the government can repay the families what they are owed and much more. — s Joseph.

While Bárbara N part of online reviews reads that,

> My personal experience was of feeling a lot of grief. I couldn't help but get emotional watching the voices of the people that got displaced by classist and racist politics. If you are interested in real history - not a Whitewashed version of it - go and see it.

Furthermore, the emotional impact was associated with the personal connections and compelling storytelling that were communicated by the staff and exhibits which exhibits the CRT principle of counter-storytelling. For example, R. Schwarz noted that:

> A must-visit museum for Halifax tourists. The staff are passionate storytellers and are doing great work to preserve the meaningful and tragic story of the Africville residents.

While Courtney G pointed out that:

> I think everyone needs to visit this museum and listen to the story of what happened to Africville from the perspectives of those who were affected — Courtney G.

Consequently, the Africville Museum's emotive impact on the visitors appears to be a direct result of their direct interaction with descendants with the painful aspects of history and

the personal narratives of those impacted. In a study by Buckley-Zistel and Williams (2022), the affective dimension of visitors' engagement—particularly feelings of empathy, sorrow, pride, and connection to Africville's history—was also prominently reflected in the online reviews. This aspect of emotional response played a central role in shaping the visitor experience, with the study concluding that such emotional reactions are integral to how tourists interpret, internalize, and remember their encounters with heritage sites.

Overall, this theme underscores the museum's ability to educate and profoundly connect with its visitors personally and emotionally and with hope that it would transform the visitors to take actions towards social justice for the Africville community – another vital aspect of CRT. This shift from the traditional museum approach toward community-driven curation and interpretation marks a significant movement in museum practice, reflecting a growing recognition of what Crew and Sims (1998) describe as the "poetics and politics of representation" within museum contexts (as cited in Teslow, 2007, p. 41). This perspective foregrounds the importance of whose stories are told and how they are conveyed, thereby challenging traditional authoritative narratives. By engaging the former community members who work at the museum as guides in all facets of museum building and programming, the Africville Museum strive to rectify power inequalities integral in the construction of historical narratives. This interactive method corresponds with CRT's focus on counter-storytelling to contest dominant perspectives (Adams, 2017).

Walking through an Almost Living Museum Exhibition

The exhibits' presentation, the museum staff's deep knowledge, passion, and personal ties to the Africville community, as well as the overall visitor experience, form the primary focus of this theme. A defining and exceptional feature of the Africville Museum is that some of its

staff are themselves former residents or direct descendants of the displaced community—individuals who not only interpret history but lived it. These "living" voices embody the past, sharing first-hand memories of the displacement, of life in Africville, and even of moments immortalized in national symbols such as the commemorative postage stamps. This kind of survivor-led storytelling is rare in museum practice and will not endure indefinitely, making its presence both historically invaluable and temporally urgent. It transforms the museum into a dynamic, living archive where the past is not only represented through objects but also spoken into the present by those who experienced it.

Furthermore, such embodied encounters with history align with a theme of community engagement and social impact, signalling a shift in how museums are assessed—not merely by their collections but by their tangible benefits and contributions to the communities they serve (Watson, 2007). The Africville Museum's visitor experience is further shaped by the intersection of what Falk and Dierking (2002, 2011) describe as the contextual model of learning: the personal context, which encompasses visitors' interests, attitudes, motivations, beliefs, needs, and expectations; the sociocultural context, which includes cultural background, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and country of origin; and the physical context, which includes the site's architecture, ambience, objects and artifacts, sensory elements such as smell, touch, lighting, colour, placement of objects, and text readability. For example, Tara Elizabeth expressed the following:

> "What a touching tribute to another shameful Canadian racist act. We were delighted by our guide and love that both people working there are descendants of people who lived in that area before their forceful expulsion. Her story of camping reunions was really touching"—Tara Elizabeth

> "It was a powerful experience. We had the privilege of meeting some of the individuals who were displaced during Africville's forced relocation—a reminder of the strength and dignity of this community" —Richard Picard
>
> "I loved it, even my kids were very happy, we spoke to an elder that was just a child when this community was thriving. It was amazing to see" —Shauna Roach-Armstromg

Likewise, Geoffrey B also commented that,

> The staff were extremely welcoming and informative on the history and stories that come from Africville. The interactive and detailed displays throughout the reconstructed Church paint an accurate picture of what life was like before and after the forced expulsion of the African Canadian community here. This would be an ideal place to bring your family or school group to learn of this dark period in Nova Scotian history. The adjacent park is also a great place to run around and take in the surroundings. The spirit and determination of Africville comes alive through the staff and stories told via the museum – Geoffrey B. And Jenna M added that,
>
> Would highly recommend exploring this historic sight. it's a self-guided tour that takes you all through the lives of the people & community of Africville, with photos, text, and even videos to learn as you walk through. glad I was able to learn all about what the vibrant life here & the deplorable displacement of an entire people – Jenna M.

Subsequently, educational engagement within museum spaces plays a pivotal role in fostering critical reflection, community dialogue, and historical understanding, as exemplified by the Africville Museum's pedagogical initiatives. In other words, an experience in a museum is indicative of the visitor's engagement with the content, design, and spatial context through their senses, as well as their capacity to make critical judgments and derive both personal and

collective meaning from their visit (Popescu, 2022). In light of this, the educational features of the Africville Museum have been highlighted in several online reviews. CRT emphasized the importance of community involvement in shaping institutional narratives and policy frameworks (Ng et al., 2017). Reflecting this principle, the Africville Museum offers a diverse array of educational programs, seminars, and events designed to foster dialogue and deepen public understanding of Africville's history and the broader African Nova Scotian experience (Nelson, 2008; Thompson, 2012). The museum offers school tours, lectures, and cultural celebrations which are intended for audiences and visitors of all ages (Thompson, 2012). Additionally, the Africville Museum is instrumental in the advocacy for the preservation of African Nova Scotian heritage and the acknowledgment of the contributions of Black communities to the history and culture of Nova Scotia (Nelson, 2008; Thompson, 2012).

Posted online reviews also revealed visitors' assessments of the museum's presentation, with numerous visitors commending the museum's layout and the utilization of multimedia to convey Africville's story. According to Liu (2008), a museum is a location where visitors can both listen to and impart stories and engage in independent learning. This assertion aligns with the counter-storytelling tenet of CRT, which serves as a key analytical lens for interpreting the online reviews examined in this study (Adams, 2017). Counter-storytelling is a foundational method within CRT scholarship, used to convey the lived experiences of marginalized individuals and to illuminate the ways in which race and racism shape their realities (Delgado, 1990; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002a, 2002b). The Africville Museum exemplifies this approach by incorporating a range of recorded testimonies from former residents, thereby centering community voices and challenging dominant historical narratives (Kohl & Halter, 2021).

Thus, the Africville Museum fosters deep emotional and educational engagement through the use of personal narratives and community-rooted interpretation. Recorded interviews offer visitors the opportunity to hear firsthand accounts of life in Africville, the trauma of forced displacement, and the enduring sense of loss and injustice experienced by former residents (Nelson, 2008; Thompson, 2012). These personal stories not only bring the history of Africville to life but also highlight the community's resilience and strength in the face of systemic marginalization. Moreover, museum staff—often praised in visitor reviews for their deep knowledge and passion—play a crucial role in shaping these experiences. Their personal connections to the Africville community further enhance the authenticity and emotional impact of the museum's narrative. For instance, Rebecca M. commented that,

> The young man from Africville who gave me the tour was so good! He knew so much - specific dates and names - and was so passionate. The museum is small but mighty. Definitely worth a visit– Rebecca M.

Also, Olivia F noted that,

> I learned a lot and everyone there was very friendly and happy to share their personal stories. I hope I will be back– Olivia F. While Dan Plant also commented that it is
> A place to ensure history isn't forgotten. Shows the stories of the people that lived here and a society that wanted them gone. Wonderful displays, audio and video info spots inside the recreated Church and helpful staff to answer questions– Dan Plant.

Lastly, Shey Shields added that:

> "The staff working there know so much and are able to give you a crash course in the history of Africville. This museum uncovers an important part of Nova Scotian and

Canadian history that has largely been forgotten/ignored/ gone on taught to the larger public, which is a real shame. I learned a lot here"– Shey Shields.

The Africville Museum's role in educating visitors about the history and environment, including its exhibits, was evident in the online reviews as shared above. The online reviews examined for this theme pertains to the actual interaction of the visitors with the narratives talked about the demolished community, the physical context and exhibitions of the museum. Moreover, the Africville Museum's strategy of engaging former residents and stakeholders as guides and active contributors in narrating their histories exemplifies the use of the CRT counter-storytelling principle in museum operations (Kohl & Halter, 2021). This is a pivotal element that affects visitors' comprehension of the events that transpired in the Africville community at that time the community existed. Furthermore, Heller (2021) asserts the necessity of addressing the racial prejudice in Halifax which resulted in the demise of the Africville neighbourhood. This entails not just addressing discrimination but also rigorously analyzing the frameworks employed to interpret and convey history (Heller, 2021). The findings of this study were significant and strongly corresponded with Housen's (1987) claim that visitors' impressions are shaped by their comprehension and analytical reasoning stemming from their museum experiences.

Low Funding and Poor Access: Reproducing Marginalization

This theme highlights the underrepresentation of the museum within local tourism destinations and networks. Despite being located just 4–5 km from the heart of Halifax, the museum faces clear challenges. A substantial number of online reviews from visitors expressed challenges regarding the accessibility of the Africville Museum. Many visitors or tourists observed that the museum is difficult to reach by public transportation and that the absence of sufficient infrastructure indicates the ongoing dereliction, which mirrors the historical

marginalization of the Africville community. This theme was emphasized in multiple online reviews in which visitors detailed their difficulties locating the museum and the absence of obvious signage. For instance, Tonofhair expressed frustration with the "extremely poor access by bus," and Ray P. described the challenging walk from the nearest public transit stop. Also, William M noted,

> We were quite disgusted and shocked to see that there were no available walking routes nor any public transportation for the museum. Quite pathetic that the museum is going through the same difficulties and challenges that this historic community had experienced tenfold years ago. – William M.

Another visitor, Noémie L., also commented,

> For all visitors who don't have a car, this museum isn't accessible by foot, even though Google Maps insists it is! – Noémie L. Lastly, Hunter S mentioned that it is Educational and an important site. Tough to get to on transit which is ironic if you know Africville's history. Not their fault. Support this place and their service to remind us of our city's questionable past. – William M.

The museum visit experience of visitors is often influenced by the museum's location, among other factors, in addition to the exhibits (Du Cros & McKercher, 2015; Alexander et al., 2018). These accessibility issues are perceived as a manifestation of the more extensive historical neglect of the Africville community – a testament of the historical marginalization they faced and endured (Griem & Allen, 2022), as noted by Daisy E:

> The city of Halifax needs to work on its transit though as without a car it's hard to get to (though worth it) which seems to echo the way in which the Africville community was isolated and ignored in the past – Daisy E.

Additionally, numerous visitors expressed the opinion that the museum warrants additional backing, financial resources, and acknowledgment from both the municipal administration and the wider populace. The comments express the perception that the museum is inadequately funded and does not receive the prominence it deserves, particularly considering the significance of Africville in Canadian history. Visitors frequently recommended that the museum be granted additional public money and improved promotion in order to ensure broader awareness of Africville. For instance, Tobias G S noted the following:

> Important part of Canada's history with dedicated staff. Went there with a group of 10 visitors and I can't recommend it highly enough. Unfortunately, the museum does not receive public funding. Seeing that there are no bus stops, no sidewalks, no bike lanes leading to this famous site of Canadian history, despite being right next to the urban centre, made me wonder if the state takes reconciliation with the community seriously. I usually don't write long reports here on Google, but it was definitely worth sitting down writing this after a very pleasant visit. Go and visit! – Tobias G. S.

And STemi commented that,

> It was an insightful visit, it was quite sad to see every exhibit, but absolutely necessary to see and hear the stories of people that have been systematically discriminated for decades. I was happy to have made some time to visit while I was in Halifax. I really hope this institution petitions the federal government for more publicity, and placement on some federal tourism website. People need to learn about the misdeeds of the past, so that we could do better now and in future – STemi.

Nathan G's online review about the Africville museum reads:

> A very important museum for local and national history and culture. A nice park outside the replica Church, friendly staff. Learn about the neglect of the local African Canadian population in Halifax and efforts to reconcile by the government. Surprisingly, this is a national historical site but doesn't receive funding. Still struggling. Shameful. – Nathan G.

Also, Genelle J. commented:

> Very informative and easy stop and very necessary start to having awareness about what happens to black communities. My mind is blown that this was so recent, but folks still don't receive financial compensation for grave mistakes. I'm appalled. The front desk was knowledgeable and gave me more clarity when I asked questions. I hope they can also receive additional funding to maintain and continue to add to what they've already accomplished. Great job there. – Genelle J.

Subsequently, the above online reviews of the Africville Museum offer valuable insight into how public memory, historical injustice, and institutional neglect are perceived and experienced by visitors. These testimonials not only reflect individual emotional responses but also serve as informal yet powerful critiques of broader systemic issues surrounding heritage preservation and racial reconciliation in Canada. Tobias G. S.'s review underscores the museum's significance as a site of national historical importance, while simultaneously drawing attention to the infrastructural and financial neglect that undermines its visibility and accessibility. His observation raises critical questions about the sincerity of governmental commitments to reconciliation. This critique aligns with scholarship that interrogates the spatial politics of memory and the marginalization of Black heritage sites within urban planning and public funding priorities (Nelson, 2008; Walcott, 2003).

The visitor's call for greater federal support and visibility—particularly through inclusion on national tourism platforms—reinforces the argument that public institutions must play a more active role in amplifying marginalized histories. This aligns with CRT's emphasis on counter-storytelling and the need to center historically silenced voices in public discourse (Delgado, 1990; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002a, 2002b). Nathan G's review further critiques the paradox of Africville's designation as a national historic site without corresponding financial support. His use of the term "shameful" reflects a moral indictment of the state's failure to adequately support a site that symbolizes both historical injustice and the ongoing struggle for recognition and redress. This sentiment is echoed by Genelle J., who expresses disbelief that financial compensation has not been provided to those affected by Africville's destruction. Her praise for the museum staff's knowledge and clarity also points to the critical role of community-rooted interpretation in enhancing the authenticity and impact of the museum's narrative. Collectively, these reviews illustrate how the Africville Museum functions not only as a site of memory but also as a space of resistance and advocacy. They reveal a public consciousness that is attuned to the intersections of race, history, and institutional accountability, and they call for a more robust and equitable approach to heritage preservation in Canada.

Conclusion

Heritage attractions like museums play a vital role in enriching tourism by offering visitors opportunities to engage with a destination's historical, cultural, and traditional elements (Gursoy et al., 2022). This study employed the netnography methodology to analyze visitor experiences and opinions about the Africville Museum through online reviews. The findings advance the critical understanding of visitor's experiences at historical museum like the

Africville Museum and differentiate them from other forms of tourism (Gursoy et al., 2022). Furthermore, the findings of this study are highly noteworthy and directly relevant to Housen's (1987) claim that visitors' impressions of the Africville Museum are shaped by their understanding and reasoning based on personal experiences at the site. Museums' roles as cultural and educational institutions have long been linked to colonial and imperialist legacies, which frequently reinforce dominant narratives while marginalizing minority viewpoints (Kohl & Halter, 2021; Simpson, 2007). The Africville Museum disrupts these established frameworks by taking a community-led approach that highlights the perspectives of historically underrepresented communities (Faden, 2007).

By incorporating CRT tenets such as counter storytelling into its interpretative strategies, the Africville Museum serves as both a site of memory and a platform for confronting systemic racism (Adams, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021). This is consistent with broader museum movements that aim to shift from authoritative places to inclusive venues for public discussion of historical injustices and their present repercussions (Scott, 2016). Thus, visitor online reviews highlighted motivations tied to the museum's historical importance, evocative exhibits, social justice and the strong sense of community it fosters. These responses demonstrate that heritage museums not only preserve the past but also serve as catalysts for critical conversations about race, injustice and structural inequalities (Teslow, 2007). This research also underscores the value of online reviews as a modern tool for gathering critical insights in museum visitor studies. Unlike traditional comment cards or visitor books, online platforms like Google Reviews and TripAdvisor provide expansive, freely accessible data, encompassing diverse visitor perspectives over multiple years and seasons (Stoleriu et al., 2019). The rise of social media has expanded the impact of museums beyond physical spaces, fostering broader discussions about equity and

inclusivity in cultural heritage (Gao & Yu, 2024). As digital platforms become more influential, visitor online reviews contribute to ongoing debates regarding the role of museums in post-racial societies and their ability to engage audiences in meaningful ways (Sandell, 2016).

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research on visitor experiences at historical sites with legacies of violence and racial injustice, addressing knowledge gaps, particularly concerning post-visit reflections (Liyanage et al., 2015). The employment of CRT principles not only empower museums in confronting and critically reflecting on their colonial legacies but also to reposition these institutions as active agents of social transformation (Griem & Allen, 2022; Kohl & Halter, 2021; Moore, 2024). Through such engagement, museums can deepen visitors' understanding of racial justice and contribute meaningfully to broader societal efforts toward equity and inclusion. Thus, the study encourages continued examination of how tourists confront race-related issues at historical sites, fostering better communication across platforms and audiences (Popescu, 2022). Future research should also explore the long-term impact of museum interventions aimed at historical reconciliation, particularly within Black heritage institutions, to assess their role in shaping broader societal understandings of race, justice, and identity.

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Chapter Five – Conclusion

The Path Towards Healing for Africville

This dissertation aimed to explore the historic site of Africville and the museum. Through the lens of Critical Race Theory and methodology, I examined the Africville Museum from a heritage attraction perspective, how the former residents of the Africville community experience the museum and site in the context of heritage, how they have lived through the heritagization processes and how the reunion represents root tourism. I also looked at the experiences and perceptions of travellers and tourists of the museum. Heritage tourism studies can contribute to celebrating Africville as a site of hope and a meaningful site for anti-Black oppression and social justice. This dissertation was framed by the following objectives: a,) document the story of Africville through its heritagization process that led to the building of the Church replica and then museum of Africville; b,) explore the experiences and narratives of former residents and descendants from Africville regarding the site as heritage; c,) examine and document the former residents and descendants' Annual Reunion through root tourism; d,) examine how visitors experience and perceive the site and museum.

In the following paragraphs, I detail the summary of the three papers that made up my dissertation and provide interpretations of our findings from each chapter. I then discuss the implications of this research and its contributions to the broader knowledge. I also include policy recommendations that can advance the Africville situation. Finally, I note the limitations of this dissertation, make recommendations for future studies and presented my concluding thoughts for this dissertation.

For Paper One, Chapter Two

The objective was to examine the heritagization process of Africville and its evolution into a controversial site. Utilizing a CRM perspective, I analyzed the interpretation of Africville as an urban slum (Nelson, 2000), culminating in establishing this memorialized space. I

investigate how this site embodies a reconciliation paradigm that conceptualized the story of displacement and dispossession as a distinct and isolated "error" of the "past," acknowledged and recontextualized within mainstream Canadian history via the museum exhibition (Green, 2012). To accomplish this, I employed a critical race methodology, incorporating semi-structured interviews with key museum stakeholders, former residents, and descendants of the Africville community. This paper examined the Seaview Baptist Church, once the focal point of Africville, as it transforms into a contested site that reclaims space and identity while serving as a potential tourism destination for the anti-racism struggle, all within the context of anti-Black oppression and social justice, as well as the community's resilience.

The establishment of the Africville Museum, an undersized replica of the Seaview Baptist Church, was a settlement component after a formal apology issued by the city of Halifax in 2010 (HRM, 2018, 2023). The city's apology acknowledged the demolition of the Africville community and Church as a historical wrong; nonetheless, the article examines this as an element of an apology paradigm within the framework of CRM interest convergence. The CRM tenet of interest convergence asserted that progress in racial justice transpires solely when it coincides with the interests of the prevailing White demographic (Bell, 2003; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The apology and establishment of the museum function as symbolic acts that exonerate the state and mainstream society from profound accountability while simultaneously constraining calls for additional restitution (Balint, Evans, & McMillan, 2014; Kim, 2018).

The study also correlates and theorizes the experiences of former residents of the Africville settlement with broader issues of environmental racism, a concept initially presented by Benjamin Chavis in 1982. Environmental racism denotes the unequal exposure of underprivileged people to environmental dangers and the systematic neglect of their areas

(Bullard, 2003; Robinson, 2000). Environmental racism in Africville was manifested by the strategic location of unpleasant municipal amenities surrounding the community, leading to its characterization as an urban slum (Clairmont & Magill, 1971; McRae, 2023; Nelson, 2000; Tattrie, 2021). This racially motivated neglect resulted in the destruction of Africville under the guise of urban renewal. Additionally, the study contextualizes Africville within a historical framework of state-sanctioned racial violence, wherein minority group of people are systematically relocated, marginalized, and obliterated (Waldron, 2021). That is, the obliteration of the Africville community was not an isolated event but rather a component of a more significant trend of racialized dispossession that persists in influencing the experiences of Black Canadians today.

Thus, the Africville Museum, as the study contends, epitomizes Black museification by transforming Africville's past into a tourist destination and a venue for public education (Choay, 2019). The museum illustrates Africville's profound history and the tenacity of its former residents, yet it also risks commodifying their suffering, framing the destruction of Africville as a regrettable but singular occurrence of the past (Choay, 2019; Melis & Chambers, 2021). This procedure may marginalize the persistent efforts of the former residents and descendants of Africville, many of whom believe the museum inadequately addresses their calls for justice and restitution. Furthermore, several former residents of Africville and their descendants contended that the apology and the establishment of the museum inefficiently address the trauma inflicted by the demolition of their community. For them, the museum signifies a symbolic triumph; nonetheless, it fails to restore the land, residences, or community they have lost. The paper presented accounts from former residents who convey dissatisfaction with the museum,

indicating that it operates primarily as a tourist attraction rather than a significant venue for community engagement and healing.

Most crucially, this paper used CRM as a methodology. This framework substantially aided the examination of this research by delving into essential tenets such as the interest convergence, persistence of racism, counter-storytelling, and a commitment to social justice. CRM contends that racism is a permanent and systematic part of American society rather than an aberration or individual act of prejudice (Asch, 2017; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Regarding Africville, this paper contended that the community's demolition and later museification are expressions of this systematic racism, as Black people are constantly marginalized, segregated, and later, their histories are sold to White and broader viewers. Another critical idea from CRM is counter-storytelling, which is when the narratives of underprivileged groups question accepted historical narratives (Delgado, 1995b). The Africville Museum seeks to preserve the narratives of Africville's former residents; however, this paper argued that it immobilizes these stories within a fixed, historical time-space, as though the community's vitality ended with its physical destruction. This static framing overlooks the enduring presence of many former residents, who remain united through shared histories, kinship networks, and a resilient sense of belonging. In this way, the museum's narrative functions less as a living testament to an ongoing community and more as a reappropriation of their lives and stories for public consumption. Although positioned as a site for collective remembrance, the museum's framing often serves audiences outside the Africville community more than those within it, inadvertently reinforcing the disconnection between the people and the telling of their own history.

In general, the paper critiques the Africville Museum as a location of Black museification in which the history of Africville is commodified and depoliticized within the context of the

apology paradigm. Despite the museum's important educational role, the ongoing struggles of Africville's former residents and their descendants risk being marginalized within institutional narratives. This paper advocates for a more justice-oriented approach to museological practice—one that centers the voices, experiences, and demands of Africville's displaced community, aligning with calls for equity and reparative engagement (Short, 2012).

For Paper Two, Chapter Three

Through document analysis, this study first uncovers the historical processes that led to the organic emergence of Africville's annual Reunion. It then offers ethnographic accounts of the event, framed through the lens of roots tourism and memory tourism. Employing the CRM framework, I examined how the Africville Reunion simultaneously embodies roots-based and personal memory tourism while confronting systemic racial inequities. The analysis highlighted how the Reunion fosters community resilience, safeguards collective memory, and operates as a powerful platform for anti-racism advocacy. By critically engaging with the complexities of Africville's history and heritagization, this research advances broader conversations on the transformative potential of roots tourism within racialized contexts.

Roots tourism is the practice of travelling to one's ancestral country to gather genealogical knowledge and build a stronger connection to one's ancestors. Personal memory tourism, a similar tourism concept, focuses on persons returning sites associated with significant events in their personal or family history (Pavlakovič et al., 2016). These sorts of tourism are profoundly emotional and personal, frequently involving feelings of identification, belonging, and a desire to maintain family heritage. The Africville Reunion, which is held yearly on the former community's grounds, has become a focal point for those looking to reconnect with their roots and preserve Africville's legacy. Former residents and descendants come to their ancestral

community to commemorate Africville's history, culture, and perseverance (Clairmont et al., 2010). This return is highly emotional, with nostalgia, pain, and pride. The Reunion allows attendees to reflect on the community's legacy, exchange personal and familial memories, and create a communal recollection of Africville's past.

A significant observation in chapter three is the deep emotional bond that former Africville residents and their descendants experience when returning to the Africville Land. The Reunion transcends a conventional social gathering; it constitutes a profoundly personal encounter that elicits recollections of the community's coerced displacement and the forfeiture of the former resident homes (Marschall, 2015). As observed, numerous participants saw the Reunion as a "homecoming," that no longer exists, enabling them to reconnect with their history, confirm their identity, and enjoy a sense of belonging (Marschall, 2014). The Reunion fortifies familial and social connections. Participants convene with extended relatives, most of whom they encounter solely once annually at the event. These contacts are essential for preserving the community's cultural history and collective memory. The Reunion also serve as a venue for storytelling, enabling older generations to convey memories and histories to younger community members safeguarding Africville's legacy (Chen et al., 2014a, 2014b). In the context of Africville, the annual Reunion acts as an embodied mechanism through which elders pass down memories, cultural practices, and historical accounts to younger generations, thereby safeguarding the community's legacy. This kind of communal storytelling not only deepens the younger generation's emotional connection to their ancestry but also reinforces a shared sense of identity and resilience. Additionally, the Africville site, recognized as a National Historic Site since 1996, holds profound significance as a pilgrimage destination for those commemorating the ongoing fight against racism (Khan, 2021).

Overall, the Africville Reunion is a profoundly significant event for the descendants of former Africville residents, as it functions as a form of personal memory tourism and roots tourism. It facilitates the reconnection of former residents and descendants of the Africville community with their ancestral land, preserving their cultural heritage and participating in antiracism activism (Meethan, 2004). The study emphasizes the Reunion's emotional and social significance while identifying obstacles associated with public support and infrastructure. Ultimately, the Africville Reunion is a powerful symbol of resilience that serves as a reminder of the ongoing fight for justice and equality, offering promise for future generations (Brooms, 2011; Potter et al., 2024).

For Paper Three, Chapter Four

The study analyzed online reviews from tourists on major tourism review platforms, specifically Google Review and TripAdvisor, concerning the Africville Museum. The study's objective was to critically evaluate and comprehend the visitor’s perceptions and experiences at the museum. This paper employed a netnographic methodology to achieve its purpose. The remarks from visitors on online review platforms concerning the Africville Museum were evaluated through thematic analysis, through the lens of CRT. This research aim seeks to uncover any latent themes of race and racism evident in these statements, given the Africville Museum’s considerable historical significance. The museum represents a significant transformation in museum practices, moving from colonial and imperialist narratives to community-driven methodologies that prioritize diversity and justice (Griem & Allen, 2022; Moore, 2024).

Museums have traditionally reinforced Eurocentric narratives, marginalizing or excluding the histories of non-European communities. And academics have examine their involvement in

perpetuating colonial ideology and racial inequalities (Harris, 1993; Simpson, 2007). However, CRT offers an essential framework for confronting these disparities, utilizing principles such as counter-narratives to amplify disadvantaged voices and contest prevailing cultural assumptions (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). The Africville Museum embodies this methodology, incorporating community-oriented narratives and participatory techniques to emphasize the resilience and challenges faced by Africville's residents (Thompson, 2012). The exhibits, derived from personal objects and memories, guarantee that the history of Africville persists as a significant aspect of Canadian heritage.

Consequently, this study's netnography examined visitor reviews, through a CRT lens, to investigate the complex ramifications of race and racism in historical tourism (Kozinets, 2015). Thematic analysis identified significant themes, such as experiencing and learning about Canada's past and present best kept secret, emotional and personal connection, walking through an almost living museum exhibition and low funding and poor access: reproducing marginalization. Reviews have highlighted the museum's educational significance and its capacity to motivate visitors to confront matters of racial justice (Adams, 2017). Online reviews provide a distinctive perspective to assess the museum's influence. Numerous reviews highlighted the museum's function in informing the public about institutional racism and the injustices experienced by the Africville community. Visitors often characterize their experiences as deeply impactful, noting the museum's capacity to cultivate empathy and critical thought. Reviewers articulated indignation at the historical oversight of Africville and underscored the necessity for enhanced acknowledgment and support for the museum.

The Africville Museum serves as a critical site of memory, education, and resistance, preserving the history of Africville. Visitor reviews analyzed for chapter 4 of this dissertation

highlighted the museum's role in commemorating this marginalized history, fostering critical reflection on systemic racism, and countering dominant narratives through community-driven storytelling. As a Black space rooted in CRT principles, the museum engages visitors in confronting the legacies of racial discrimination and urban displacement, while amplifying the voices of former residents and their descendants (Griem & Allen, 2022; Moore, 2024). Emotional resonance emerged as a dominant theme, with many visitors describing profound feelings of sorrow, indignation, empathy, and inspiration. This affective engagement is strengthened by survivor-led interpretation, multimedia exhibits, and counter-storytelling, which together bridge personal memory and broader historical understanding, transforming the museum into a living archive of resilience, injustice, and hope for social change (Heller, 2021; Moore, 2024).

Despite its national historical designation and cultural significance, the Africville Museum faces challenges that mirror the historical marginalization it commemorates. Many visitors noted the lack of public transportation, poor signage, and limited funding as barriers to access, framing these infrastructural shortcomings as a continuation of systemic neglect toward Black heritage. Reviews called for greater municipal, provincial, and federal support, alongside increased public visibility through tourism platforms and educational integration. The museum's limited resources contrast sharply with its considerable social, educational, and cultural impact, prompting questions about the sincerity of governmental reconciliation efforts. Ultimately, the Africville Museum operates not only as a site of remembrance but also as an active agent of social justice, challenging historical erasure, fostering empathy and dialogue, and advocating for recognition, equity, and the preservation of African Nova Scotian heritage.

In conclusion, the Africville Museum illustrates the transforming function of museums as advocates for social justice. By prioritizing community involvement and impactful narratives, it safeguards the legacy of Africville while confronting overarching concerns of systematic racism and injustice. Visitor comments emphasize its importance as a memorial site and an advocacy platform, underscoring the persistent necessity for inclusive and progressive practices within the cultural sector. Subsequent study ought to further investigate the convergence of heritage, digital engagement, and CRT to enhance our comprehension of how museums might facilitate societal transformation.

Research Implications

This dissertation offers valuable implications for academia, public policy, and the tourism industry by critically engaging with the Africville Museum as a site of racial memory, resilience, and heritage tourism. Grounded in CRT and CRM, the research highlights the importance of acknowledging and addressing systemic racial injustices that influence the experiences of marginalized communities in Canada. These implications are multifaceted and extend across several domains.

Academic Implications

The study makes a significant contribution to the expanding body of literature on Black heritage tourism, particularly within the Canadian context, which has historically been dominated by narratives of emancipation associated with the Underground Railroad (McKittrick, 2006). By employing CRT, this research provides a nuanced examination of the ways in which race and systemic racism continue to shape the lived experiences of former Africville residents, including within the processes involved in heritage tourism development. CRT facilitates the

centering of marginalized voices, enabling the construction of counter-narratives that challenge dominant historical and cultural discourses (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002). In doing so, this approach foregrounds the often-overlooked realities of Black Canadians, revealing how power structures embedded in heritage practices perpetuate racial inequities while also offering possibilities for resistance and reclamation. These counter-narratives highlight the resilience and work of the Africville community, serving as a critique of systemic inequalities entrenched in institutionalized racism. By incorporating qualitative methodologies such as CRM and netnographic approaches (Kozinets, 2015), with participant observation and online reviews, the dissertation enriches heritage tourism studies by revealing the complex intersections between race, identity, and cultural preservation (Krippendorff, 2019). This integrative methodology not only broadens academic discourse but also provides a transferable framework for examining other heritage sites with histories of racial injustice. Such an approach deepens our understanding of marginalized histories while fostering critical engagement with heritage tourism as a tool for equity and reconciliation.

Policy Implications

From a policy perspective, this dissertation highlights the necessity of adopting more inclusive approaches to heritage preservation and urban development, particularly concerning marginalized communities. The findings emphasize the significance of supporting institutions such as the Africville Museum, which function as vital spaces for public education and platforms for advancing social justice (McRae, 2023). State policymakers are urged to acknowledge the cultural and historical value of Black heritage sites, recognizing their potential to foster equity, reconciliation, and collective healing (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021).

Furthermore, the study underscores the critical importance of providing financial and institutional support to communities historically affected by systemic racism. Such support ensures that these communities benefit from tourism revenue, their histories are accurately preserved, and their narratives are amplified within public discourse (Tavakoli & Mura, 2018). These measures are integral to creating more equitable and representative heritage tourism frameworks.

Implications for the Tourism Industry

The findings of this study present valuable opportunities for the tourism industry to embrace more socially responsible practices, particularly within the sphere of heritage tourism. The Africville Museum exemplifies a community-led, post-racial exhibition that authentically reflects the lived experiences of the Africville community. Its interactive design, enriched by the presence of community members as guides and storytellers, fosters a direct and meaningful connection between visitors and the history it preserves. However, while the museum and its exhibition are progressive in their approach, ongoing concerns remain regarding its location, funding, integration into broader tourism networks, and the ways these factors continue to reproduce historical marginalization.

As a compelling model, the Africville Museum demonstrates how tourism can serve as a platform for anti-racism education and cross-cultural dialogue, fostering deeper awareness and understanding among diverse audiences (Marschall, 2015). Consequently, museums and heritage sites are encouraged to move beyond traditional, static displays by adopting interactive and participatory approaches that actively involve visitors. This entails cultivating a communal approach to enriching the visitor experience and offering immersive avenues for engagement

with community narratives, all while safeguarding their authenticity and cultural significance (Tavakoli & Mura, 2018).

Furthermore, analyzing visitor feedback from online reviews highlights the increasingly recognized role of audience insights in informing and reshaping the practices of cultural institutions. According to Lu and Stepchenkova (2015), user-generated content provides valuable, candid reflections that can be systematically analyzed to guide institutional decision-making. Their study demonstrates that online reviews offer actionable data regarding visitor satisfaction, emotional engagement, and perceived gaps in museum programming. By integrating such feedback into strategic planning, museums can more effectively align their educational offerings with public expectations, thereby enhancing institutional relevance and responsiveness. This engaged approach contributes to the democratization of heritage spaces and reinforces the potential of heritage tourism to serve as a transformative site for critical education, public dialogue, and social advocacy.

Community Implications

The community-centered Africville Museum offers a template for fostering meaningful collaboration between municipal authorities and historically marginalized groups (Griem & Allen, 2022; Moore, 2024). This model can be applied to other contexts to address systemic inequalities and promote social justice. The study also underscores the transformative potential of heritage tourism in shaping public understanding of race and history. Sites like the Africville Museum serve as spaces for dialogue, education, and reconciliation. They challenge visitors to reflect on the enduring legacies of racism and inspire collective action toward a more equitable society (Perla, 2020). By emphasizing these possibilities, the dissertation highlights the necessity of reimagining heritage tourism as a vehicle for anti-racism advocacy and societal

transformation. In addition, for the Africville community and similar marginalized groups, this research serves as a testament to the power of heritage sites in reclaiming agency and fostering collective memory. The study illustrates how Africville has transitioned from a site of displacement to a locus of pilgrimage, healing, and activism. It underscores the importance of community-led initiatives in shaping narratives and ensuring that heritage sites remain meaningful to descendants and visitors alike (Adams, 2017; Kohl & Halter, 2021).

In conclusion, this dissertation bridges practical gaps by applying CRT to heritage tourism, offering insights that are both context-specific and broadly applicable. By focusing on Africville through a CRT lens provides actionable insights for academia, policy, and practice. By challenging dominant narratives and fostering dialogue on racial justice, the research not only enriches the understanding of Black heritage tourism but also advocates for transformative change across multiple sectors.

Limitations of the Work

One limitation of this research was the small number of formal interviews, with only seven in total. While this may have restricted a deeper exploration of the complexities of former residents' and descendants' perspectives, the richness of these interviews provided valuable insights. This limitation was also offset by extensive participant observation, numerous site visits, and the strong relationships developed with families and key informants, which allowed for a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the context.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of my participant observation at the 41st Africville Annual Reunion was significantly compromised by the unexpected shooting incident, which disrupted the conditions necessary for sustained engagement and consequently limited the depth and scope

of the data collected for Chapter 3 of this study. The Africville Annual Reunion traditionally serves as a vibrant site of cultural memory, intergenerational storytelling, and community resilience. It is a space where former residents and their descendants gather to commemorate their shared history and assert their ongoing presence in the face of historical erasure. My intention was to document these interactions through prolonged engagement, informal interviews, and sensory immersion. However, the shooting incident introduced an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, leading to the premature dispersal of attendees and the cancellation of several scheduled activities.

This disruption curtailed opportunities for informal conversations and participant engagement, both of which are essential for capturing the nuanced textures of lived experience. The emotional toll on community members also shifted the tone of the event, replacing celebration with concern and grief. As a result, the observational data collected was fragmented and lacked the continuity typically required for robust ethnographic analysis. Moreover, the incident influenced the ethical dimensions of the research. Prioritizing the safety and emotional well-being of participants necessitated a more cautious and limited approach to data collection. Many individuals were understandably reluctant to engage in dialogue or reflection in the immediate aftermath of the event, further constraining the scope of inquiry.

These challenges would have been addressed if I had spent more time or gained access through an insider's support at the study location to gain the trust of the former residents. Additionally, engaging and volunteering at the Africville Museum would have granted me access to more participants to interview which would have enriched this dissertation.

Recommendations for Future Research

Drawing on the three articles I produced for my dissertation, several more study themes surfaced that would help to enhance knowledge of Africville's past and present challenges and more extensive background of Black heritage preservation. I have specifically included several of them below.

The Intersection of Museification and Community Empowerment

The initial paper examined the process of museification, which frequently immobilizes a community's narrative, transforming it into a static display for external audiences (Choay, 2019). The Africville Museum seeks to preserve and honour the community's past, although it may unintentionally alienate the very populations it intends to serve (Melis & Chambers, 2021). A significant concern recognized is the disparity between the request of the Africville descendants and the museum's capacity to operate as a dynamic, engaging venue for community utilization. Subsequent research should investigate how Black heritage sites worldwide reconcile the conflicting preservation and community involvement objectives. Comparative analyses of Africville and other Black cultural venues, such as the National Museum of African American History and Culture, may generate methods for how museification might empower descendants instead of disempowering them.

Moreover, the Africville Museum's contribution to the reconciliation process between the City of Halifax and its former residents warrants additional examination. Research could assess the efficacy of the museum in fostering healing, understanding, and social justice and juxtapose it with other museums that share similar missions. Additionally, subsequent research might investigate the participation of former Africville residents and their descendants in the

governance and decision-making frameworks of the museum. This may yield insights into optimal approaches for community-driven heritage preservation initiatives.

Environmental Racism and Historical Erasure

This dissertation critically examined the historical displacement of Africville through the lens of CRT, particularly drawing on Tate's (1997), concept of the permanence of racism, which posits that racism is a central, enduring, and systemic feature of societal structures. Within this framework, environmental racism—a form of systemic racial injustice that locates hazardous infrastructures disproportionately in racialized communities—emerges as a salient manifestation of this permanence. The Africville case exemplifies how environmental racism operates as a material expression of the entrenched nature of anti-Blackness in Canadian society. Thus, Africville's forced relocation and the discriminatory siting of hazardous facilities in proximity to the community are not isolated incidents, but rather illustrative of broader, ongoing patterns of racialized neglect and dispossession, consistent with the CRT assertion that racism is embedded in the social, political, and spatial fabric of the nation.

Subsequent studies may investigate the ongoing impact of environmental racism on Black and Indigenous communities in Canada and elsewhere, analyzing trends of displacement and land appropriation tactics and marginalization. Research may further investigate how displaced populations, such as Africvillians, encounter contemporary forms of environmental injustice (Waldron, 2021). This may involve examining modern urban revitalization initiatives and their effects on disadvantaged populations. The framework of CRT can elucidate how ostensibly race-neutral policies sustain historical injustices (Nebeker, 1998).

The Role of Roots and Memory Tourism in Community Healing

Another interesting topic of inquiry is the impact of roots tourism on displaced populations' communal memory and identity. Specific studies may examine whether roots tourism may function as a sustainable therapeutic approach for communities impacted by racial trauma or if it jeopardizes the commodification of distressing history for tourist exploitation, akin to the commercialization of slavery sites in the U.S. Moreover, the potential of employing tourism as a mechanism for social justice warrants examination. Furthermore, future research could investigate how tourism to locations such as Africville can be utilized to advance social justice and combat racism, expanding upon the analysis of roots tourism and personal memory tourism. This may encompass examining the influence of visits on visitors' perceptions and actions concerning racial matters (Perla, 2020).

The Impact of Apologies and Restitution

The apology extended to Africville former residents is depicted in the documents as a component of an apologetic paradigm. This process has been criticized for prioritizing the state's exoneration over the healing of the impacted community (Balint et al., 2014). Research may investigate the enduring effects of governmental apologies on displaced communities such as Africville, concentrating on whether these apologies result in meaningful improvements, restitution, or reconciliation (Kim, 2018; Matsunaga, 2016). Moreover, although the articles reference the city's apology and the establishment of the museum, additional research could rigorously evaluate the efficacy of these initiatives in rectifying historical injustices. This may involve examining community member's perceptions of these actions and their effects on substantial reconciliation initiatives.

Comparative Studies on Displacement and Heritage Preservation

Africville's circumstances exemplify widespread patterns of racial displacement observed in urban areas worldwide. Comparative research on Africville and other historically Black and Indigenous communities that have experienced comparable displacement may provide significant insights. This may encompass communities in Canada, the United States, or other nations, analyzing parallels and contrasts in experiences, coping strategies, and long-term results. Communities like Seneca Village in New York and District Six in Cape Town may provide valuable insights. These studies may examine the various methodologies employed by governments regarding restitution, the conservation of cultural assets, and the reconciliation of displaced communities with their ancestral territories.

Overall, the proposed research areas would expand upon the findings of this dissertation's three publications, enhancing our comprehension of Africville's legacy, the function of Black museums in confronting historical injustices, and the broader ramifications for heritage tourism and social justice. Moreover, future investigations into Africville will enhance comprehension of the interplay between cultural preservation, environmental justice, and community empowerment. Through examining these issues in various case studies and the application of frameworks like as CRT, academics can propose solutions to reconcile historic preservation with the requirements of descendants while ensuring that displaced communities obtain the restitution and acknowledgment they merit.

Final Thoughts

This dissertation, situated at the intersection of race, heritage, tourism, and social justice, critically examines Africville's legacy through the lenses of CRT and Black heritage preservation. Across its chapters, it interrogates the historical and contemporary significance of

Africville, particularly the effects of its forced relocation, museification, and monetization within contemporary Canada. Central to the analysis is the critique of governmental apology frameworks, which often serve to absolve the state rather than deliver justice, as illustrated by the transformation of the Seaview Baptist Church into a museum—a symbolic gesture that falls short of the community's vision for a living, participatory space.

The research demonstrated how the Africville Museum, while preserving heritage, risks reinforcing marginalization through limited community agency, accessibility challenges, and a narrative emphasis on victimization over empowerment. Similarly, the annual Africville Reunion emerges as both an act of roots and personal memory tourism and a form of resilience, allowing descendants to reclaim identity, heal, and resist systemic racism, even as the commodification of heritage complicates these processes. These findings urge a re-evaluation of how museums and heritage sites can move beyond static remembrance to foster active community engagement, ownership, and social change.

By combining document analysis, ethnographic observation, and visitor perception studies, this work contributes to broader discourses in cultural heritage, race relations, and tourism studies, with implications for other displaced and marginalized communities globally. In closing, I intend to give back to the Africville community by providing the Africville Genealogical Society and the Africville Museum with a concise summary report of each chapter, ensuring that the research not only critiques but also serves the community whose story it engages.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide for former residents, community leaders and stakeholders of the Africville community

Questions for the Community Leaders of Africville (Semistructured Interview)

Can you tell me about your life in Halifax?

- Were you born in Halifax?
- How long did you live there?
- How big is your family?

End of Starter Questions//More general questions

- What does the story of Africville mean to you?
- Would you say this story is meaningful to all Black people from Nova Scotia?
- Can you summarize in your own words what happened to the Africville Community?
- What do you think about the apology and then the museum? What is the context in which the Museum was created?
- Whose idea was the museum?
- Who owned the lands?
- How has the museum been received by the community?
- Do you think the Museum has a redemptive power in providing homeplaces of meaning, belonging, and joy for African Nova Scotians?
- Was it a settlement from Nova Scotia? Was this what you were fighting for?
- What happened with the land? Who owns it? Are you satisfied with the settlement? Are the people satisfied in general? What would be the right thing to do?

- Is the question of the land a main problem in general in Nova Scotia and Black settlers? Is it the same thing that is being reproduced here with the Museum and Africville site?
- How do you perceive the historical significance of Africville in Halifax and what it means to the other Black community?
- Do you know anything about the museum exhibition? The story that is being told and who decided what the story was or how it was told? Is the narrative authentic?
- From your perspective, what are the key elements that should be included in the exhibits or programming of the Africville Museum?
- What is the role of the Church housing this Museum?
- Why was this Church/site so important?
- What role do you believe the Black community should play in shaping the narrative and curation of the Africville Museum?
- Would you say the Africville Museum is now a pilgrimage site? If so, why/how?

The Museum as a tourist site

- How can the Museum contribute to education and awareness regarding the history of Africville, particularly for younger generations? It's a source.
- Would you say this site is part of the Black heritage of Nova Scotia?
- Do you think the museum and park is now a tourist site? Is it visited? By whom?
- Would you also say it would be part of a larger root travel route, such as diasporic travel?
- How can the Museum engage with the local and broader Black communities to ensure ongoing collaboration and support?
- How could this site become more visited? What would favour its development as an iconic or must-see place in the region?

- Do you know haw visitor react when they learn about Africville?

The Museum as a "Heritage" and anti-racism symbol

- Would you say this Africville site/story is significant for Canadians? For Black travellers from anywhere? Does it represent the fight against racism?
- How do you envision the Africville Museum contributing to reconciliation efforts and fostering understanding among diverse communities?
- What steps would you recommend as a community leader to make the Africville Museum a place of reflection, learning, and positive community engagement?
- Would you like to add anything related to these topics?

Appendix B: Ethics

25/11/2023

Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number	H-10-23-9658
Titre du projet / Project Title	The Black Travel Movement: An Exploration of the Africville Park, Halifax, Nova Scotia
Type de projet / Project Type	Thèse de doctorat / Doctoral thesis
Statut du projet / Project Status	Approuvé / Approved
Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	25/11/2023
Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	24/11/2024

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

Chercheur / Researcher	Affiliation	Role
Precious NDUKAUBA	École des sciences de l'activité physique / School of Human Kinetics	Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator
Alexandra ARELLANO	École des sciences de l'activité physique / School of Human Kinetics	Superviseur / Supervisor

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

550, rue Cumberland, pièce 154 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154
Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 6N5 Canada Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5 Canada

613-562-5387 • 613-562-5338 • ethique@uOttawa.ca / ethics@uOttawa.ca
www.recherche.uottawa.ca/deontologie | www.recherche.uottawa.ca/ethics

25/11/2023

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Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l' *Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils* (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique du projet de recherche ci-nommé.

L'approbation est valide pour la durée indiquée plus haut et est sujette aux conditions énumérées dans la section intitulée "Conditions Spéciales ou Commentaires". Le formulaire « Renouvellement ou Fermeture de Projet » doit être complété quatre semaines avant la date d'échéance indiquée ci-haut afin de demander un renouvellement de cette approbation éthique ou afin de fermer le dossier.

Toutes modifications apportées au projet doivent être approuvées par le CÉR avant leur mise en place, sauf si le participant doit être retiré en raison d'un danger immédiat ou s'il s'agit d'un changement ayant trait à des éléments administratifs ou logistiques du projet. Les chercheurs doivent aviser le CÉR dans les plus brefs délais de tout changement pouvant augmenter le niveau de risque aux participants ou pouvant affecter considérablement le déroulement du projet, rapporter tout évènement imprévu ou indésirable et soumettre toute nouvelle information pouvant nuire à la conduite du projet ou à la sécurité des participants.

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above-named research project.

Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and is subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions or Comments". The "Renewal/Project Closure" form must be completed four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval or closure of the file.

Any changes made to the project must be approved by the REB before being implemented, except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) only pertain to administrative or logistical components of the project. Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes that increase the risk to participant(s), any changes that considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project or the safety of the participant(s).

Germain ZONGO
Responsable d'éthique en recherche / Protocol Officer
Pour/For **Daniel LAGAREC** Président(e) du/ Chair of the **Comité d'éthique de la recherche en sciences de la santé et sciences / Health Sciences and Sciences Research Ethics Board**

550, rue Cumberland, pièce 154 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154
Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 6N5 Canada Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5 Canada

613-562-5387 • 613-562-5338 • ethique@uOttawa.ca / ethics@uOttawa.ca
www.recherche.uottawa.ca/deontologie | www.recherche.uottawa.ca/ethics

Appendix C: Ethics Extension Approval

28/10/2024

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Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number	H-10-23-9658
Titre du projet / Project Title	The Black Travel Movement: An Exploration of the Africville Park, Halifax, Nova Scotia
Type de projet / Project Type	Thèse de doctorat / Doctoral thesis
Statut du projet / Project Status	Renouvelé / Renewed
Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	25/11/2023
Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	24/11/2025

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

Chercheur / Researcher	Affiliation	Role
Precious NDUKAUBA	École des sciences de l'activité physique / School of Human Kinetics	Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator
Alexandra ARELLANO	École des sciences de l'activité physique / School of Human Kinetics	Superviseur / Supervisor

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

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613-562-5387 • 613-562-5338 • ethique@uOttawa.ca / ethics@uOttawa.ca
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28/10/2024

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Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'*Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils* (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique du projet de recherche ci-nommé.

L'approbation est valide pour la durée indiquée plus haut et est sujette aux conditions énumérées dans la section intitulée "Conditions Spéciales ou Commentaires". Le formulaire « Renouvellement ou Fermeture de Projet » doit être complété quatre semaines avant la date d'échéance indiquée ci-haut afin de demander un renouvellement de cette approbation éthique ou afin de fermer le dossier.

Toutes modifications apportées au projet doivent être approuvées par le CÉR avant leur mise en place, sauf si le participant doit être retiré en raison d'un danger immédiat ou s'il s'agit d'un changement ayant trait à des éléments administratifs ou logistiques du projet. Les chercheurs doivent aviser le CÉR dans les plus brefs délais de tout changement pouvant augmenter le niveau de risque aux participants ou pouvant affecter considérablement le déroulement du projet, rapporter tout évènement imprévu ou indésirable et soumettre toute nouvelle information pouvant nuire à la conduite du projet ou à la sécurité des participants.

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above-named research project.

Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and is subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions or Comments". The "Renewal/Project Closure" form must be completedfour weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval or closure of the file.

Any changes made to the project must be approved by the REB before being implemented, except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) only pertain to administrative or logistical components of the project. Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes that increase the risk to participant(s), any changes that considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project or the safety of the participant(s).

Coordonateur / COORDINATOR
Coordonnateur de l'éthique / Ethics Coordinator
Pour/For **Daniel LAGAREC** Président(e) du/ Chair of the **Comité d'éthique de la recherche en sciences de la santé et sciences / Health Sciences and Sciences Research Ethics Board**

550, rue Cumberland, pièce 154 Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 6N5 Canada
550 Cumberland Street, Room 154 Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5 Canada

613-562-5387 • 613-562-5338 • ethique@uOttawa.ca / ethics@uOttawa.ca
www.recherche.uottawa.ca/deontologie I www.recherche.uottawa.ca/ethics

Appendix D: Contributions

This dissertation, *The Heritagization of Africville: Tourism, Racism, and the Politics of Commemoration*, benefited from the support of **ChatGPT (version GPT-4, OpenAI, 2025).** The tool was used to assist with language refinement, formatting suggestions, and academic phrasing to improve clarity and coherence throughout the writing process. Its use was limited to enhancing expression and ensuring alignment with scholarly standards; all ideas, analysis, and original content are that of the authors.