

Africville: A Municipal Exercise in Managing the Built Environment

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A Thesis Submitted to  
Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Bachelor of Arts, Honours in History

April 2021, Halifax, Nova Scotia

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Date: April 28, 2021

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### **Abstract:**

This thesis examines the relationship between the historic community of Africville and the city of Halifax through the exercise of land and property management. Through changes in early twentieth century municipal policy Africville became an increasingly imposed on by neighboring industry and city infrastructure. Many residents within the community insist that building permits were difficult to obtain and most had significant trouble obtaining legal title to their land. This thesis will also show how land value in Africville changed through the twentieth century leading to the community's displacement starting in 1964. Through evaluating Halifax's management of Africville's built environment, a greater understanding of Africville's pre-displacement history can be ascertained, alongside a fuller picture of the discrimination which the community experienced.

Date: April 28, 2021

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## Introduction

Once a small settlement on the edge of the growing port city of Halifax, Africville has gained considerable attention since the community's destruction. Between the vocal former residents of the community and the public intrigue in what was a unique Black community within Nova Scotia, there is no shortage of publications dedicated to Africville. Despite this, there always seems to be an incentive to continue the discussion; be it newly uncovered documents, renewed attention in the wake of contemporary events, or development of analytic methods that further our understanding of the community and its history. In the 1990s, when academics were keen to analyze and comment on the growing field of racial injustice in Black communities, Africville drew significant attention as it was a well-documented example of systematic racism in Canada that took place not even fifty years prior. However, the attention that Africville received extends far past the academic world and includes news articles, documentaries, books, and musical references.<sup>1</sup> Despite the community's destruction, Africville lives on in the memories of the past inhabitants, their stories, and the efforts of historians and community members to document its past.

This thesis covers the pre-relocation history of Africville, focusing on the changes in municipal policy in the early twentieth century. The history of this community will be shown through examining the relationships between the City of Halifax and the Africville residents. Many in Africville felt as though their community was treated with contempt, as though they were outsiders on land that they had inhabited for over a century. The people of Africville were

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<sup>1</sup> See Clairmont, Donald, and Africville Genealogy Society. *The Spirit of Africville*. Halifax, N.S, 1992. and Shelagh Mackenzie dir. *Remember Africville*. 1991; National Film Board. Available at <https://www.nfb.ca/film/remember-africville/>

mistreated and generally undervalued as a community in Halifax, a reality which becomes more apparent while examining Africville's relationship with land. This thesis aims to analyse this relationship by examining property ownership, property value, and the attempts made to maintain proper housing in Africville. Through examining underutilized primary materials, new details on the history of Africville were unearthed, leading to a more thorough understanding of the community, its people, and the displacement they experienced in 1963 with the decision for relocation. Focus will be put on information obtained from building permits and their applications, property value assessments, minutes of various Municipal committees and sub committees, and correspondence between city officials. Information included in the 1971 Africville Relocation Report has also been used to build a deeper understanding of Africville's relationship to land and state.

Before examining the history of Africville's community it is necessary to have a discussion on terminology. The word "Relocation" has been traditionally used to describe the events which transpired to Africville people in the later half of the 1960s, this can be seen in the original report published in 1971 from Dalhousie titled the "Africville Relocation Report". When considering the reality of Africville's destruction, the word "relocation" holds connotations which do not represent the experience of Africville's residents. While many families were moved to public housing within Halifax's north end, many more would settle in Dartmouth, Central Halifax and other nearby locations. In this sense the community was not relocated, from one location to another, but rather displaced from their original home of Africville to various other communities within Halifax. It is because of this that this thesis will use the term "Displacement" wherever applicable over referring to Africville's destruction as a relocation.

African-Nova Scotians are one of the province's oldest ethnic minorities. Originally coming to Nova Scotia as American loyalists, refugees, or people enslaved by White American loyalists in the aftermath of the American War of Independence, they had been promised land by the crown for opposing the American Revolution. Similarly, in the war of 1812, many African Americans sided with the British in exchange for their freedom and a plot of land in the remaining British North American colonies. Unfortunately, the land they received was not what they had been promised or were expecting and they regularly faced discrimination where their settlements bordered White communities. Facing starvation on account of poor land fertility and violence such as that which occurred in Shelburne and Birchtown when they were driven from their homes, many African-Nova Scotians made the decision to escape from their given land in Nova Scotia. Some chose to brave the trip back to the African continent when, in 1792, around 1200 people boarded ships to West Africa, helping establish Sierra Leone.<sup>2</sup> Most decided to stay in Nova Scotia, and make what they could of their land, or sell it to move into Halifax or another more desirable location. It was from these African Nova Scotians that moved into Halifax that the initial residents of Africville were descended.

Africville was virtually uninhabited until the 1840s when about six acres of land was purchased from absentee white property owners by William Brown and William Arnold in 1848.<sup>3</sup> Brown and Arnold both previously resided in Hammonds Plains and likely moved to be closer to the job opportunities the city offered. Although this is the first recorded instance of settlement in the area, it is thought that many eventual landowners were living in the area before

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<sup>2</sup>John Demont. "Letter from Birchtown: Reclaiming a Hard Past: Nova Scotia Blacks Celebrate a Historic Community." *Maclean's* (Toronto), 2000, 26.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Clairmont, Dennis Magill, Nova Scotia Department of Public Welfare. *Africville Relocation Report*. Dalhousie University. Institute of Public Affairs. Halifax: Institute of Public Affairs, Dalhousie University, 1971  
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purchase, as a community church was organized only a year after the land sale. The African-Nova Scotians who moved to Africville had mostly come from other African-Nova Scotian settlements of Hammonds Planes and Preston, a significant distance outside of Halifax. Many residents of these settlements chose to move away as soon as sale of their given properties was possible due to the lack of opportunities in these areas and very poor soil quality.<sup>4</sup> This often took much longer than was expected as the settlers were only given a “license of occupation” in lieu of a regular land grant. This prevented the struggling residents of these communities from moving, as it would mean forfeiting the value of the land they were given. While full grants were promised after three years given that the land was used and developed, it generally took African Nova-Scotians over twenty years to receive full ownership of their own land.<sup>5</sup> When finally given ownership more and more families would come to inhabit Africville: Eppy Carvery, Henry Hill, and Bennett Fletcher purchased an acre of land from William Arnold in 1848.<sup>6</sup> While Africville land was not particularly good for growing crops, it was suitable for livestock, fishing, and wage labour in Halifax. Unfortunately for the residents, the attitude from the Municipality of Halifax towards their existence would not be a departure from their experiences with the Crown and Provincial governments on their former plots in the countryside.

Almost immediately after settling in the area, residents were confronted with the first of many institutional intrusions which would come to define the history of Africville. In 1855, a railroad was built dividing the community in half. Several properties of Africville residents were appropriated for the construction, many of whom did not see compensation until many years later.<sup>7</sup> The Campbell Road Church, renamed Seaview United Baptist Church in 1927, played a

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid Page 44-46

<sup>5</sup> Ibid Page 41.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid Page 46

<sup>7</sup> Ibid Page 131-2

significant social role within Africville's community.<sup>8</sup> Most residents frequented the local church, which held baptisms in the Bedford basin on the shores of Africville and was renowned in the Baptist community for its friendly reception as a training spot for ministers. Over the years, the city continued to place industrial amenities next to the community, such as the city prison in the 1850s, infectious disease hospital in the 1870s, various factories or processing plants, even the city dump came to be located adjacent to Africville.<sup>9</sup> This came hand in hand with an overall loss of social cohesion in the community as living conditions declined. In 1912, an additional set of tracks was added to the railroad in the middle of the community which had already taken the lives of a few residents by the early twentieth century. With a higher-than-average adult mortality rate, in no small part due to the lack of clean water or safe transportation, the community suffered further from the Halifax Explosion.<sup>10</sup> While the community did not suffer significant direct damage from the explosion, the destruction of nearby Richmond made Africville even more isolated.

By the 1940s Africville living conditions had dropped considerably, in no small part because of the actions of the municipal government neglecting the area and investing only in further industrial development. From 1947 onward it was clear that the city had the days of Africville numbered. In 1948, during a meeting to extend water mains to Africville, residents expressed considerable support for extending city services and were resistant to being relocated. Despite this, the city denied the extension of water services and in 1954 approved a proposal to move Africville and obtain fifteen-acres of land for industrial development.<sup>11</sup> This plan was

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<sup>8</sup> Judith Fingard. "Loss of Social Cohesion in Early 20th Century Africville." *Journal of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society* 14 (2011). Page 156.

<sup>9</sup> Ted Rutland. *Displacing Blackness : Power, Planning, and Race in Twentieth-century Halifax*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. Page 88.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Page 162.

<sup>11</sup> Donald Clairmont, Dennis Magill, Nova Scotia Department of Public Welfare. *Africville Relocation Report*. 1971

endorsed by Gordon Stephenson, who was tasked with developing a report on redevelopment in Halifax and how it should be conducted.<sup>12</sup> In 1957, this plan was implemented and the land of Africville was officially zoned as industrial when all of Africville was formally appropriated for the industrial mile.<sup>13</sup> Despite the previous industrial investment and lack of residential services, the area was never industrially zoned until this act in 1957. Alongside the zoning, all Africville land been appropriated for the Municipality's envisioned "industrial mile" along the north coast of the peninsula.<sup>14</sup>

The Africville displacement started in 1964 and continued into 1970, with eventually the entire community and its structures being demolished. The Seaview Baptist church notably was demolished in the middle of the night, presumably to avoid protest. Meanwhile the city was attempting to settle with any remaining members who resisted the move. Many of the former occupants of Africville were moved into public housing in Uniacke Square, which previously had held another Black community, within Halifax's fifth ward, before they were relocated to create the public housing which the people from Africville would come to occupy.<sup>15</sup> While initially some community members were in favor of the displacement, after the process was underway and compensation began to be sent out, many residents felt as though they had lost something far more important than their material homes and land. This sentiment is still held by

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Page 148.

<sup>12</sup> Gordon Stephenson, John I. McVittie, Halifax . City Council, and Dalhousie University. Institute of Public Affairs. *A Redevelopment Study of Halifax, Nova Scotia*. Halifax, N.S.]: Corporation of the City of Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1957.

<sup>13</sup> Although all Africville land was supposed to be appropriated with the industrial mile in 1957, due to a lack of communication of this act and lack of materialization, during the relocation of Africville the Municipality chose to act as if the appropriation of 1957 had never taken place. Tina Loo. "Africville and the Dynamics of State Power in Postwar Canada." *Acadiensis* 39, no. 2, 2010. Page 36.

<sup>14</sup> Tina Loo. "Africville and the Dynamics of State Power in Postwar Canada." *Acadiensis* 39, no. 2, 2010. Page 36.

<sup>15</sup> Jacob Remes "What We Talk About When We Talk About Africville." *African American Review* 51, no. 3 (2018), Page 224.

many previous residents of Africville, some of whom continue to protest the demolition of their community to this day.

In his monograph on Halifax urban planning and race *Displacing Blackness*, Ted Rutland identifies three different approaches in critiquing and analyzing modern city planning. The first method is drawn from the work of the Marxist geographer David Harvey and his extensive work on urban geography. The second methodology revolves around the work of James C. Scott and his work *Seeing Like a State*, where Scott outlines how rational state bodies sought to regulate space to be organized along lines easily legible by government bodies. The third method of analysis Rutland outlines is drawn from the work of Michel Foucault, who relates his work on social norms and the organization of knowledge to the organization of city environments.<sup>16</sup> Rutland himself focuses on utilizing the third, postmodern direction to approach Haligonian City planning. This thesis resides mostly within the second category which Rutland has identified, stemming from Scott's work on High Modernist planning and intervention to examine the treatment of Africville by Municipal authorities. Marxist, and by extension purely materialist, analysis on urban planning in regard to Africville seem hardly justified, as it is widely regarded that over emphasizing materialist conditions is one of the primary reasons that twentieth century planners saw it prudent to demolish Africville in the 1960s. While the work in this thesis does focus on material goods, in housing and land, these should also be recognized as more than the sum of their parts. To Africville residents, owning their own land and housing meant freedom. It is within the Municipal efforts to encroach on the safety, stability and freedoms of Africville residents where attention will be focused in this thesis. The postmodern lens has been applied to

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<sup>16</sup> Ted Rutland. *Displacing Blackness : Power, Planning, and Race in Twentieth-century Halifax*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. Page 15.

Africville and its displacement extensively, both by Rutland and also Jennifer Nelson, who has her own monograph on the topic titled *Razing Africville*.<sup>17</sup> Understanding the dynamics of power and the dualities which were produced to exclude Africville from most of regular city facilities is important to this thesis. Because of this, the scholarship of Rutland, Nelson and the philosophers they draw from is utilized within this thesis, despite the main lines of analysis being mostly inspired by James Scott's work.

This thesis is by no means the first scholarship to pull together James Scott's analysis on city planning and the Municipal treatment of Africville. An article published in *Acadiensis* by Tina Loo, "Africville and the Dynamics of State Power in Postwar Canada"<sup>18</sup> is the first to make the connection. Loo draws from James C. Scott's work on High Modernism and the authoritarian state, specifically highlighting how the displacement was conducted and the authoritarian methods city officials used to complete the displacement. Loo notes that Gordon Stephenson, who wrote "A Redevelopment Study of Halifax Nova Scotia 1957," was a student of famous modernizer -- and as Scott describes him "the embodiment of high modernist urban design" -- Le Corbusier. Le Corbusier was infamous for demolishing old communities in favor of simplified, efficient, and sanitary planning.<sup>19</sup> The redevelopment study which Stephenson authored highly recommended the demolition of Africville, describing it as an "encampment or shack town". The municipality's implementation of Stephenson's plan is what ultimately led to Africville's destruction. Loo analyses how the displacement took place with regard to the authoritarian treatment many city officials took in the process, highlighting the city's appropriation of Africville land in 1947, which was done without consulting the residents or even informing them

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<sup>17</sup> Jennifer J. Nelson, *Razing Africville a Geography of Racism*. Toronto [Ont.]: University of Toronto Press, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Tina Loo. "Africville and the Dynamics of State Power in Postwar Canada." *Acadiensis* 39, no. 2, 2010.

<sup>19</sup>James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State : How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale Agrarian Studies. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. Page 106.

that the land they lived on was no longer theirs. Loo aims her main criticism at the attitude of the liberal welfare model which sought material quality of life over all other human needs.

Research on the history of Africville and municipal actions towards it began with the Africville Relocation Report. The core text on Africville, this several-hundred-page report was developed alongside the process of Africville's displacement and published in 1971 by Dalhousie's Institute of Public Affairs.<sup>20</sup> The report was written by Donald Clairmont and Dennis Magill who later published a monograph entitled *The Life and Death of a Canadian Black Community* in 1974,<sup>21</sup> which was the first academic study of Africville and effectively a refined publication of their displacement report. The displacement report goes into detail on the background of the settlement and the greater history of African Nova Scotians and their treatment by public institutions. Half of the report is solely dedicated to describing the community before its displacement. This is done by establishing a timeline of Africville settlement and using property deed records to give an account of property ownership in the early years of the settlement. The report also has dedicated chapters on the social structure of the community and the importance of the Seaview Church. The researchers spared no time in making sure as their report closely represented the Africville community to the greatest extent they could. Citations can be found through the report of a collection of primary documents from land deeds to city council minutes and various images, maps, or letters to or from Africville residents. The close attention given to the community's history through the report forms a solid

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<sup>20</sup> Donald Clairmont, Dennis Magill, Nova Scotia Department of Public Welfare. *Africville Relocation Report*. Dalhousie University. Institute of Public Affairs. Halifax: Institute of Public Affairs, Dalhousie University, 1971

<sup>21</sup> Donald Clairmont, Dennis Magill. *Africville : The Life and Death of a Canadian Black Community*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974.

foundation to work done by subsequent scholarship. The report spends the latter half discussing the displacement itself, the process, and its implications.

One of the most valuable contributions made in the Relocation Report is the in record of land ownership the authors established in the early history of the settlement. Land records were notoriously erroneous in the community due to the residents often passing on land unofficially. Clairmont and Magill were able to piece together a record of early land ownership in Africville, completely dismissing popular claims that the community was merely a collection of transients. Alongside showing the depth of history Africville had, they also helped to understand Africville's illegible land ownership and the process of settlement which occurred during the displacement.

The third body of scholarship, which Rutland utilizes as his main form of analysis, is focused on the work of Michel Foucault and other Post-Modernist scholars. Rutland's interpretation of Post-Modern urban planning criticisms is tied in with the conceptions of normal and pathological which he borrows from Foucault. According to Rutland the act of urban planning is directly concerned with improving the human condition, where depending on the definition of humanity, not all are beneficiaries. While James Scott's work is part of Rutland's analysis, he rightly proclaims that not all motivations and effects of urban planning, even in Africville's case, can be attributed to the simplifying modernist mentality which Scott criticizes.<sup>22</sup> Due to some modest agreement with this observation, this thesis also utilizes Post-Modern conceptions of space and power to contextualize Africville's history.

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<sup>22</sup>Ted Rutland. *Displacing Blackness*, 2018. Page 18.

It is impossible to discuss the treatment of Africville and its residents without involving race. The forces that motivated the city officials' treatment of Africville and the Halifaxians' attitude the community were undeniably racist. Jenifer Nelson draws on the work of Bob Carter to understand racism in a twentieth century mindset.<sup>23</sup> Much of Africville's blights were attributed to a "culture of poverty" which was said to pervade Africville. A step away from the biological racism of the colonial era, discussions on "unfavorable cultures" would replace the biological determinism that came before it.<sup>24</sup> In this way systematically discriminatory practices were overlooked as a people's condition was attributed solely to the culture of the group. There is an added complexity within the cultural context and history of African American peoples in North America. Added to the general labeling of being culturally an "other" is the legacy of enslavement and the White perspectives which come along with that history. Rutland, Nelson and many other scholars, argue that the dehumanization which took place in the chattel slavery system did not end with nineteenth century abolitionist movements. Rather the philosophical and moral beliefs in a "Black sub humanism" continued throughout the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> Despite legal changes, within cultural perceptions among the White majority, African Americans, and African-Nova Scotians by extension, were still seen as below human by many White Halifaxians throughout the twentieth century. Jenifer Nelson addresses the topic extensively in her book *Razing Africville: A Geography of Racism*. She also draws from post-colonial and postmodern literature providing extensive analysis on how Africville fits into the post-structuralist trend of intersectionality and critical race theory. The book's focus is something she argues is missing

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<sup>23</sup> Bob Carter. *Realism and Racism Concepts of Race in Sociological Research. Critical Realism--interventions*. London ; New York: Routledge, 2000. As cited in Jennifer J. Nelson, *Razing Africville a Geography of Racism*. Toronto [Ont.]: University of Toronto Press, 2009. Page 15.

<sup>24</sup> Jennifer J. Nelson, *Razing Africville a Geography of Racism*. Toronto [Ont.]: University of Toronto Press, 2009. Page 15.

<sup>25</sup> Ted Rutland. *Displacing Blackness*, 2018. Page 22.

from other publications on Africville.<sup>26</sup> While Nelson's book received some backlash from Clairmont in the form of a critical book review,<sup>27</sup> it should be noted that Nelson's work in addressing the nature of structural racism pervasive in Africville goes far beyond Clairmont and Magill's attempt to do so in 1974. This thesis overall will focus on how racist attitudes manifested themselves in Municipal decisions and the impact those decisions had on the community of Africville.

In examining the municipality's discriminatory practices towards Africville, this thesis will break down the ways in which land and property in Africville were controlled against the will of the community. In focusing on the land and built environment this thesis will be divided into two chapters, the first on land and property management and the second on the evaluation of Africville land and property.

The first chapter will take the same type of analysis which Tina Loo applies to the displacement process, and in turn apply it to examine how the community of Africville became a target for displacement in the first place. The discrimination which Africville's community faced can be seen in the decision made for its displacement, the process by which it was relocated, but most importantly, within the century long history of the community itself. Expanding on the limited literature on civic service denial and municipal decisions, we can understand the process by which Africville was discriminated against through looking at the regulatory practices on its built environment, by looking through what was permitted and not permitted to be built within

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid Page 27.

<sup>27</sup> Donald Clairmont "Razing Africville: A Geography of Racism." *Canadian Journal of Sociology (Online)* 34, no. 3 (2009). Page 921.

the Africville area. This includes what the municipality gave priority to regarding residential vs industrial development, and the impact the decisions made had on Africville.

The second chapter will examine Africville's experience with land ownership, through seeing how Africville property was evaluated we can gain insight into the municipality's perception of the community and how much it differed from residents' experiences. The evaluation of residents' land and housing would play a significant part in the displacement process, as those without legal title were forced off their land, and those with title were compelled to settle with the municipality. The evaluation of Africville as a physical plot of land will be shown through the changes in land value which the community experienced within the twentieth century.

## **Chapter I: Intrusion of Industry and Denial of Services**

Prior to its demolition, the community of Africville was known within Halifax for having very poor services, roads, and building quality. Popular discussions on Africville often focus on the community's lack of running water or the absence of paved roads and the repercussions of the lack of these services. These issues are no doubt concerning, especially when examining the city's negligence or even refusal to provide these services upon frequent petition. However, water and roads were only a fraction how completely the community was neglected by city policies. Africville buildings also had no civic addresses, they were downstream from the infectious disease hospital, their neighbors were slaughterhouses, prisons, and the city dump. Water quality in wells was poor and deemed unsafe for consumption as dump and hospital runoff contaminated the water table. Railway tracks separated the community in two, with towering electrical transmission towers dwarfing the residents' houses. To municipal planners the settlement must have seemed invisible, as no heed was paid to the community's needs or wellbeing. This chapter will attempt to show the more subtle impacts of this civic neglect, while also taking into the account less obviously hazardous issues such as the handling of building permits to build, renovate or repair structures.

What effects did all of this have on the physical wellbeing and social fabric of the community? When Halifax Municipal workers decided that the buildings in Africville were unfit for human habitation, what forces drove the housing to this state? Like any community there are a range of factors which come into play when answering these questions, many which are outside the power of a community's residents. Unlike most communities, Africville felt most firmly the

consequences of being intentionally ignored or being deliberately targeted and mistreated by public officials and city planners.

From the moment it was settled, Africville was marked as unwanted. Less than a decade after the first land was purchased by African Nova Scotian settlers, that land was appropriated for industrial development. Just six years after Arnold and Brown purchased their plots on Campbell road in 1848, the land directly adjacent to the road was selected as the thoroughfare for the new Intercolonial Railroad in 1854. Building parallel to the road which crossed the community, the railway required the expropriation and movement of multiple Africville buildings. Many of the owners of these buildings had considerable trouble receiving compensation for their loss and labour. Multiple payments were delayed with at least one instance where residents had to file an official complaint. William Brown had to submit a formal petition to the House of Assembly to receive compensation for his loss. Brown finally received compensation in 1861, a good seven years after the expropriation.<sup>1</sup> Rockhead prison was then established next to the community in the 1850s, and was located on the hill between Africville and the rest of Halifax.<sup>2</sup> The city's infectious disease hospital would also be placed on top a nearby hill, which would later continually cause complications with runoff into Africville's water supply. In addition to this, there would later be built multiple slaughterhouses, a leather tanning plant, a tar factory, the city dump, an oil plant storage facility, and a foundry to name a

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<sup>1</sup> Clairmont, Donald H. J., Magill, Dennis William, and Nova Scotia. Department of Public Welfare. Africville Relocation Report, Dalhousie University, 1971. Page 132-4.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Buggey. "Building Halifax 1841-1871." *Acadiensis* (Fredericton) (1980) Page 90: James Walker Allegories and Orientations in African-Canadian Historiography: The Spirit of Africville.(Special Africadian Issue)." *The Dalhousie Review*, 1997, Page 157. There does not seem to be a consensus on when the prison was first built, walker in his article says 1853, while Buggey claims 1857, the report also suggests 1855.

few of the undesirable industries constructed in the area. Large transmission towers would eventually be constructed in the middle of the community dominating the Africville skyline.

The industrial imposition on Africville would be finalized when the city dump was eventually moved from its previous position 1.5 miles away from Africville to 350 feet from the nearest resident's home.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 1, "The Seaview Baptist Church with houses in the background" 1965. Halifax Archives

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<sup>3</sup> Jennifer Nelson, "The Space of Africville: Creating, Regulating and Remembering the Urban Slum," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*, 2000. Page 166.

It is not that the Municipality was blind to the effects that proximity to these undesirable facilities would cause. In many cases, it was complaints from residents of other proposed locations that caused the industries to be moved into Africville. The residents of Africville were not considered of significant enough importance to protect from these effects. Ironically, it would be the municipality's drive towards greater 'public health' and improved living conditions which would subject Africville to industrial encroachment. Racism was a central undercurrent and it is clear that, in the City's estimation, Africville residents were not considered members of the 'public' in the same vein that most other Halifax residents were.<sup>4</sup>

The city's focus on industrialization in Africville did not help the growing African Nova Scotian community reach the quality of life its residents desired. Judith Fingard's article on social cohesion in the community describes the loss which it faced due to its industrial location. Eleven heads of household died between 1903 and 1917, causing permanent damage to the community's leadership and its social cohesion.<sup>5</sup> While the cause of death for all was not recorded, at least one, Edward Dixon, died of typhoid fever, very possibly from drinking contaminated well water. His death sparked a petition for a new community well to replace the one built in 1852.<sup>6</sup> Two other men, Edward Carvery and Thomas Brown, aged forty and thirty-five, respectfully, were killed by passing trains on the railway tracks which divided Africville. Three female heads of households also died before 1917, one who had been widowed when a passing train killed her husband, and another who died as a result of the Halifax Explosion.<sup>7</sup> The industrial expansion into Africville thus directly contributed to the community's degradation

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<sup>4</sup> Ted Rutland. *Displacing Blackness*, 2018. Page 89-90.

<sup>5</sup> Judith Fingard, "Loss of Social Cohesion in Early 20th Century Africville." *Journal of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society* 14 (2011): Page 160.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* Page 161.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid* Page 162.

through loss of valuable community members. Africville in the early twentieth century comprised around 130-150 people, such a significant loss of community members was difficult. In 1961, as public consciousness about Africville and its conditions began to spread, news articles began to be published on the dangers presented in having daily commutes over frequently used Africville rail lines.<sup>8</sup> However by this point, drawing attention to the dangers around Africville was more in justification for displacement, rather than a reappraisal of city policies in the area.

Despite the clear industrial intentions of the city with regard to Africville, there was no public or official declaration of the area being designated for industrial use until the 1910s. Before this time, planning in Halifax was relatively hands off, with the municipality mostly providing services such as infrastructure and record keeping, while leaving businesses and private interests to figure out the city's development. This would change at the turn of the century when modern city planning began to take hold in Halifax. It was at this time that the municipality's civil engineer, Francis Doane, began to transition into the city's first proper city planner, being officially given the title in 1916. After representing Halifax in the first National Town Planning Conference in Toronto, Doane began to push the municipality to take a more active role in economic planning and land management practices, such as zoning or tax reforms.<sup>9</sup> For Africville this meant a change in the municipal attitude towards the area. While the community was ignored in the nineteenth century, the early twentieth century saw a more visible push to actively prevent the community from flourishing. The first recorded confirmation by the

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<sup>8</sup> "Barbara Hinds, "Africville Children Risking Lives Daily at Rail Crossings," *The Mail-Star*, Halifax, N. S., September 9, 1961." As cited in Clairmont, Magill. *Africville Relocation Report*, 1971. Page 136.

<sup>9</sup> Ted Rutland. *Displacing Blackness*, 2018. Page 95.

city that the area was set for industrial use was in 1915 after most industry had been allowed to construct in the area. A city engineer responded to an industrial construction query with:

The Africville portion of Campbell Road will always be an industrial district and it is desirable that industrial operations should be assisted in any way that is not prejudicial to the interests of the public; in fact, we may be obliged in the future to consider the interest of the industry first.<sup>10</sup>

Its unclear exactly what the municipality defined as “the Public”, but what is clear is that the Africville residents were not included in this definition. It is doubtful that the residents of Africville were ever notified leading up to the city’s quiet 1915 announcement that their land was to be used for eventual industrial purposes. The land would only be publicly announced as industrially zoned in 1957 when the city expropriated all the land in and around Africville for the “Industrial Mile”. Despite this policy, life in Africville continued as normal as most residents were not personally informed of the expropriation and the city took no action to implement the industrial mile until the displacement of 1964. Residents of Africville had no idea that their land had technically already been expropriated out from under them when displacement began and because of this the municipality decided to pursue relocating Africville residents as if the 1957 expropriation had never taken place.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps more troubling than what Halifax chose to put in Africville, was what city government refused to give. The denial of civic services to the Africville community is well documented and was absolute in its scope. Famously, the community had no running water, or

Figure 2, Map Showing Distribution of School children who were infected with Tuberculosis as of 1957. Source: Stephenson Report

<sup>10</sup> “Minutes of the Halifax City Council, September 9, 1915, p. 211” As cited in Clairmont, Magill. Africville Relocation Report, 1971. Page 143.

<sup>11</sup>Tina Loo. "Africville and the Dynamics of State Power in Postwar Canada." *Acadiensis* 39, no. 2, 2010. Page 35.

sewage system of any kind. This was despite Africville being within city limits and multiple petitions submitted requesting city water services be extended to the area. In 1947, the Public Health and Welfare Committee recommended complete termination of Africville well examinations, admitting that they consistently run bad water, recommending instead that water services be extended immediately.<sup>12</sup> One city official, when interviewed for the Africville Relocation Report in 1969, professed that while on one occasion money had been set aside in the 1950s for extension of water service into Africville, it was deemed unnecessary as the city had the area eyed for industrial development and the community's days were already numbered in the eyes of the municipality.<sup>13</sup> Africville residents were petitioning for the extension of city services as early as 1852, with every application for services being denied save one to install a community well in 1852 and to repair it in 1902.<sup>14</sup> Water access would become a significant problem as Africville grew and industrial developments piled on around it. Water runoff from the city dump, various factories, and the infectious disease hospital no doubt played a role in the higher-than-average rate of sickness in the community. Out of Halifax's population of 160,000 residents in 1956 roughly 300 lived in Africville. As shown by a map of childhood tuberculosis cases featured in the Stephenson report in 1957, this small population experienced a disproportionate number of the childhood tuberculosis cases.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Halifax Municipal Archives, "Public Health and Welfare Committee minutes" 102-30A. 1947-12-01.

<sup>13</sup> Clairmont, Magill. Africville Relocation Report, 1971. Page 141.

<sup>14</sup> Ted Rutland. *Displacing Blackness*, 2018. Page 89.

<sup>15</sup> Gordon Stephenson, McVittie, John I., Halifax . City Council, and Dalhousie University. Institute of Public Affairs. A Redevelopment Study of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Corporation of the City of Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1957. Page 56.

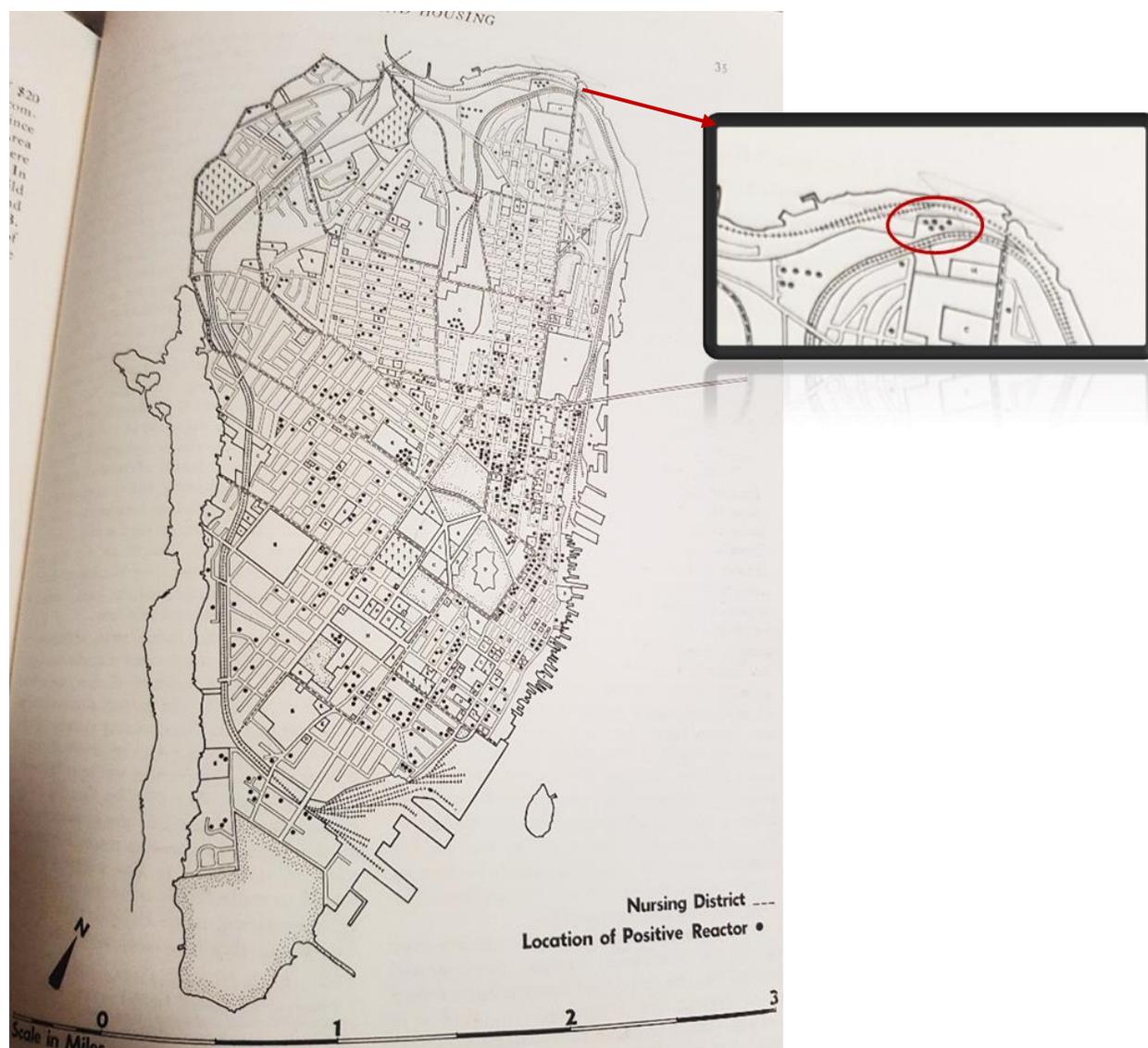


Figure 2, Map Showing Distribution of School children who were infected with Tuberculosis as of 1957. Source: Stephenson Report

However, water services were just a single example of the municipal services which had been denied to Africville. Despite paying regular city taxes, same as the rest of Halifax residents, the community was also devoid of paved roads, civic addresses, garbage collection or any public transport.<sup>16</sup> The only time garbage trucks ever serviced Africville was during the displacement to ferry residents' belongings away since moving companies refused the job.<sup>17</sup> The lack of paved

<sup>16</sup> Judith Fingard, "Loss of Social Cohesion in Early 20th Century Africville." (2011): Page 162. The residents would finally receive civic numbers in the 1940s.

<sup>17</sup> Jennifer Nelson, "The Space of Africville: Creating, Regulating and Remembering the Urban Slum," 2000. Page 167.

roads was no doubt a significant annoyance, as constant maintenance need to be done to ensure the roads were usable. More typical city services, such as police, fire or other emergency services, were also denied to Africville. Early in Africville's history, the city refused to station police within the community. This led to self-reliance as Africville policed itself through strong community ties and social systems. As social cohesion lessened in the twentieth century, community members once again began to petition the city for a police presence.<sup>18</sup> An incident in 1917 reveals some of the problems caused in Africville by its lack of police services and overall poor condition of the community. On March 11, 1917 a resident accused another of stealing a sum of money, the accused eventually managed to obtain a gun. The situation escalated and resulted in the death of one Africville man and the incarceration of another, both young and in their twenties. While the police were called for this incident, the long road to Africville delayed their arrival until the damage had already been done.<sup>19</sup> Similar situations also occurred in relation to the delay in fire response to the area, where on one night in the late 1930s four Africville residents lost their homes as the result of a house fire that also claimed the lives of three children.<sup>20</sup> The city later assisted the residents in rebuilding their homes, offering \$300.00 in compensation for building materials and labor.<sup>21</sup> An incident was also recorded in 1956 where, due to the fire services being unable to find any suitable hydrant or source of water, an Africville man's house was destroyed.<sup>22</sup> While in these cases the city did compensate the victims, more significant mitigation would have come from extending to Africville the regular emergency services that other parts of the city enjoyed.

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<sup>18</sup> Judith Fingard, "Loss of Social Cohesion in Early 20th Century Africville."(2011): Page 164.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Look to Judith Fingard's work for a more detailed retelling.

<sup>20</sup> Jennifer J. Nelson, *Razing Africville a Geography of Racism*. Toronto [Ont.]: University of Toronto Press, 2009. Page 74.

<sup>21</sup> Halifax Municipal Archives, "Halifax (N.S.) City Council minutes" 102-A1-1938-03-15. Page 10.

<sup>22</sup> Mail-Star, May 3, 1963 P.1

Another significant problem within Africville was the issue of approving building permits. The community complained multiple times that building permits for the Africville area were systematically denied with a variety of justifications, such as the area not having water service, or that repairs to dwellings were not extensive enough to bring them up to new housing standards.<sup>23</sup> Africville residents would become significantly troubled in getting permits approved, to the point of organizing a ratepayer's association in 1961 to address the issue.<sup>24</sup> Having barriers to obtain permits to legally would push newly constructed housing to become unregulated and, as a consequence, of generally lower quality. Residents are going to be fixing their homes or building new ones where required, whether or not their applications were approved. There is evidence that this was the case, that some residents built their homes within less regular avenues of construction.<sup>25</sup> Given the dynamics around house repair and construction, an intentional effort of the municipality to deny Africville permits would not help the city in regulating construction in Africville or to aid the housing quality of the community. However, aside from community testimony there is little information within secondary scholarship on the details of permit denial in Africville. Examining in detail whether building permit applications were systematically denied in Africville can potentially explain the community's lower than average housing quality. If the municipality was responsible for denying permits in Africville this would put the burden of the community's housing condition almost entirely on the municipality, painting the city's main justification for the community's displacement as very hypocritical.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Clairmont, Magill. Africville Relocation Report, 1971. Page 164, Page A28

<sup>24</sup> Ibid Page 77.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Page A20.

<sup>26</sup> Gordon Stephenson, McVittie, John I. A Redevelopment Study of Halifax, Nova Scotia. 1957. Page 27.

This being said, it is essential to examine to what extent permits in Africville were denied. Using the digitized records of building permit applications for Africville, available publicly on the Halifax Municipal Archives website,<sup>27</sup> and cross listing the applications with the ledgers of all issued building permits within Halifax,<sup>28</sup> we can determine which applications were accepted. The digitized permit applications only cover between 1934 and 1949, to look earlier than 1934 manually scanning through the ledgers for any permit filed in Africville is required. Starting with the oldest permits, a handful of permits were admitted between 1896 and 1906 labeled under “Campbell Road” but none listed as being issued in “Africville.”<sup>29</sup> It is unclear whether these permits were for Africville, as the names listed are not recognizable Africville families. There are no civic numbers listed in the ledger, meaning that either the permits were issued to Africville residents or non-Africville residents of Campbell road who also did not have civic numbers.<sup>30</sup> There are no building permit applications available from before 1934, potentially when these documents started to be saved. This leaves a significant gap in the documentation of building permits for Africville, which can be partially supplemented by examining the ledgers of all permits issued to find those addressed in Africville. No building permits can be found for Africville within the ledgers between 1929 and 1932, leading us to the digitized records starting in 1934.<sup>31</sup> Nine building permit applications were requested between 1934 and 1949, all of which can be cross-listed to the ledgers of issued permits, showing that all nine applications were accepted.<sup>32</sup> Of the nine permits requested three of them are requests for repairs to residents’ dwellings. Many of the requests have familiar Africville names such as

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<sup>27</sup> Halifax Municipal Archives, “Descending Permit Application Number Order” 102-39I-29.

<sup>28</sup> Halifax Municipal Archives, “Record of Building Permits Issued” 102-39I-1.

<sup>29</sup> Campbell road was the original name for the community before “Africville” became popularized.

<sup>30</sup> Halifax Municipal Archives, “Record of Building Permits Issued” 102-39I-1.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Halifax Municipal Archives, “Descending Permit Application Number Order” 102-39I-29, Halifax Municipal Archives, “Record of Building Permits Issued” 102-39I-1.

Howe, Carvery, and Brown. Within the section made for recording the name of the builder can also be seen these familiar Africville names, suggesting that significant amounts of the contracting for new buildings in the community was being done by the residents themselves. It was noted by Peter MacDonald, the social worker tasked with mediating between the community and municipal agents conducting the displacement, that many houses were built by members of the community, giving an example of a woman in who, in 1958, built her own house and would live there until displacement.<sup>33</sup> Within an interview conducted for the Relocation Report another resident, whose family had been in Africville for five generations, noted how the community would often help do repairs or build structures among themselves.<sup>34</sup> In the 1930s and 1940s records are two permits issued for the Africville school: one to add an extension to the building in 1934 and another permit in 1944 for significant repairs estimated at \$1,800 (\$27,500 today).<sup>35</sup>

The record of building permit applications after 1949 are part of a separate collection not yet digitized. These applications are filed alongside a copy of the issued permit, showing clearly which applications had been accepted.<sup>36</sup> All of the applications recorded in the 1950s are also shown to have been accepted, save one. One application made in 1953 for building repairs does not have a permit, meaning the permit was either lost or the application was denied.<sup>37</sup> Of the twelve applications between 1950 and 1957, most are for repairs, including large repairs to the Seaview Baptist Church in 1950 and repairs made to a property owned by a V. Desmond located on Barrington street in 1955.<sup>38</sup> This property was on the west side of Barrington Street with a

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<sup>33</sup> Tina Loo. "Africville and the Dynamics of State Power in Postwar Canada." *Acadiensis* 39, no. 2, 2010. Page 38.

<sup>34</sup> Clairmont, Magill. *Africville Relocation Report*, 1971. Page 81.

<sup>35</sup> Bracketed value is CAD in 2021, accounting for inflation. Keeping in mind that raw materials, lumber, etc. would have been cheaper historically than it is today.

<sup>36</sup> Halifax Municipal Archives "Building Permits for Acadia to Agricola Street, including Africville" 102-39I-29

<sup>37</sup> There was also a Permit present without a corresponding application, leading me to think that perhaps the collection is just not complete, and some documents are not included.

<sup>38</sup> Possibly a property owned by Viola Desmond, who did own a business on nearby Gottingen St.

P.O. box in Africville and was inhabited by a Joseph Williams. The needed roof repairs were done by Williams. There were also several applications listed either as repairs or demolitions, which speaks to the increasing number of residents leaving the community in the 1950s.<sup>39</sup>

From the twenty-one recorded applications made in Africville from 1934-1957, all of them save one were approved. The one missing permit might have been approved and can not be confirmed to have been denied. Despite the community's testimony, from the records consulted it seems as if most permit applications in Africville were accepted. There are two possible explanations for the high number of approved permits. The first explanation is that rejected building permit applications in Africville were not saved, or otherwise saved in a location that has not yet been found. While this is possible, it is unverifiable for the moment and less likely than the alternative.

The second option is that building permits were not systematically denied to Africville between 1934-1957. This is an unusual finding due to testimony from Africville residents on many occasions, but possible in the period of 1934-1957 as records seem to indicate.<sup>40</sup> There is clear testimony from the community that building permits were not handled regularly in Africville, yet this appears to not be the case in the last thirty years of the community. It stands to reason that the denial of permits residents protested must have occurred before 1934, where unfortunately records of building permit applications are absent. If this is the case, it is unclear when the city's attitude towards Africville building permits shifted or what may have been the motivations to do so.

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<sup>39</sup> Halifax Municipal Archives "Building Permits for Acadia to Agricola Street, including Africville" 102-39I-29

<sup>40</sup> Clairmont, Magill. Africville Relocation Report, 1971. Page 165.

The high rate of acceptance for permits would also line up with claims made by development officer R. B. Grant in his letter to a member of the HHRAC<sup>41</sup> in 1962, stating that sixteen applications were made in the early 1950s and of them only one was not issued. Within this letter Grant answers a series of questions made by the HHRAC in regard to Africville.<sup>42</sup> Grant pushed the idea of displacement over other alternatives and was seen as often distorting or whitewashing information regarding the displacement, so his information should be taken with a grain of salt.<sup>43</sup> However, he would likely have access to Department of Works records when he made the statement in 1962. Grant lists the sixteen permit applicants in response to a request by the HHRAC in 1963 to see the full list of the those who had their permit approved. The permits are labeled as “issued for construction in Africville”, despite Grant’s earlier claim that one of the sixteen was not issued.<sup>44</sup> The permits given also range from 1950-1962, hardly a collection of permits in the “early” 1950s. Comparing his list with the data from the Municipal archives, the first permit Grant lists appears to be incorrect. The permit of Thomas Howe is shown to be issued on June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1950 by Grant’s records. However, in looking at the physical permits Howe applied for his permit on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1949 and was issued it on August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1949.<sup>45</sup> Nowhere close to the June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1950 which Grant claims.<sup>46</sup> While some of his statements may not have been accurate, it does appear that they are mostly true. Grant’s list of accepted permit applications, for the most part, checks out with historical municipal records. In addition, there are many other

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<sup>41</sup> Halifax Human Rights Advisory Committee.

<sup>42</sup> Clairmont, Magill. Africville Relocation Report, 1971. Page A28.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid Page 248-50.

<sup>44</sup> Halifax Municipal Archives, “Incomplete Compilation of Minutes, Correspondence, and Related Documents Pertaining to Africville” CR5.2 Page 27. It is likely that the permit which was not issued was C. Hamilton’s permit to repair two houses’ roofs. This was the permit application which did not have a corresponding permit in the municipal records. It is also probably that the Municipality would want two permits for this application, as work is being done on two separate structures for repairs, explaining why it may have been denied.

<sup>45</sup> Halifax Municipal Archives, “Record of Building Permits Issued” 102-39I-1.

<sup>46</sup> It is possible that Grant made a mistake in misdating the permit, although its equally possible that he intentionally misrepresented the permit records to prove his point of high number of permits being issued in the “early 1950’s”.

earlier permits from the 1940s and 30s which also were issued to Africville. If permits were being systematically denied to Africville, there is no evidence of this happening between 1934-1957.

Looking at an individual case, the application process of Thomas H. Howe's permit is one of the most well documented Africville permits. Applied for on the 9th of June 1949 to build a dwelling, the proposed one-story building would be constructed with wooden framing and have a brick chimney, with floor dimensions of 18' x 22'.<sup>47</sup> This would give the structure a footage of approximately 400 square feet, a modest dwelling. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July the application was forwarded to the Health and Welfare Committee and it was decided to accept his application on the condition that he build a well and privy within City Regulations. It was also suggested by the Public Health and Welfare Committee that the Committee on Works be made aware of the

AFRICVILLE		St. No.	APPLICATION FOR NEW BUILDING		No.
To the Inspector of Buildings,		Halifax, N. S.,		9	day of June 1949
Sir:—The undersigned hereby applies for a permit to build according to the following specifications and in accordance with the detailed plans and specifications submitted.					
Location	Africville	St. No.	Side	2	between
Owner	Thos. Howe Architect	Builder	(Carpenter) Self	Estimated Cost	1200.
Class	Material	Purpose of Building	Dwelling		
Size of main building	18-Ft. front	22-Ft. deep	Ft. in height	No. of Stories	1
Size of extension	"	"	"	Nearest part to Street line	Ft.
Foundation wall, material	Frame	Thickness	Chimney, how constructed	Brick	
Style of roof and material	Pitch Asphalt	No. of elevators and for what purpose			
What kind of fire stop is to be used?	Date of permit from Health Board		Aug 9/49 Edward C. Thomas		
Permission is also applied for, to enclose that portion of the street in front of the proposed building extending into the street five ft.					
The undersigned hereby agrees that all work on the said buildings shall be done in strict accordance with the laws and ordinances of the City of Halifax and also with the conditions printed on the back of the permit which have been read by the applicant and that every obstacle will be removed from the street on or before the 15 day of August 1949 on which date this permit expires.					
OK. L. Alexander, Aug 11/49.			Thomas H. Howe Applicant		

Copy of 102-391-29-01, Africville building permit applications, provided by Halifax Municipal Archives

Figure 3, Building permit application for Thomas Howe's construction in 1949.

<sup>47</sup> Halifax Municipal Archives, "Descending Permit Application Number Order" 102-391-29, Page 361.

permit and to consider extending water service to the area.<sup>48</sup> In another meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> of August, about a month later, the Health and Welfare Committee mentioned that the funding for water service in Africville would be “forthcoming” and passed the permit onto the Works Committee for approval.<sup>49</sup> Howe would receive the permit to build his house a few days later on 12<sup>th</sup> of August. In retrospect we know now that this interaction would not result in the extension of water mains to Africville and that the subject would be dropped in favor of displacement.

If Africville building permit applications like Howe’s were being almost uniformly accepted, where does that leave community testimony to the contrary? It could still be possible that many permit applications were thrown out and not properly documented, this would account for the high rate of accepted applications. Unless this is found to be the case, we are left with the conclusion that in the last three decades of Africville, building permits were issued regularly upon application. It is likely that before this time building permits were denied more systematically in Africville, as community testimony seems to suggest. From this experience many likely would have stopped attempting to obtain a permit by the time applications were recorded in 1934. While examples can be found of permits being issued in the early twentieth century, a record of applications is not available, proving it difficult to find the rate at which permit applications were approved.

It is also worth noting that a significant portion of substandard housing in Africville was not constructed by its permanent residents, but by homeless or transient outsiders who came to Africville because the lack of regulation in the community. This transient population grew in the later years of the community. As Halifax expanded, so did its homeless population, and many

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<sup>48</sup> Halifax Municipal Archives, “Public Health and Welfare Committee minutes” 102-30A. 1949-07-04.

<sup>49</sup> Halifax Municipal Archives, “Public Health and Welfare Committee minutes” 102-30A. 1949-08-01, Halifax Municipal Archives, “Record of Building Permits Issued” 102-39I-1.

looked to Africville as a place that was away from law enforcement or other regulations. This problem would be felt strongly after World War II and was very visible to the community members. Africville residents complained of the new arrivals and felt as though their presence was directly contributing to the community's bad image in the Halifax public.<sup>50</sup>

The result of Africville's lack of services was an almost completely unregulated community within Halifax's borders. Within his work *Seeing like a State*, Scott describes the organic community dynamics present in unregulated communities.<sup>51</sup> He shows how deregulation produces community illegibility for prospective organizers, hiding the true workings of the community behind dense informal and social ties.<sup>52</sup> This can be seen in Africville where the uncertainty around building permits, along with lack of enforcement for non-permitted structures, encouraged unregulated construction, as many residents did not feel confident in official routes. This construction was often not uniform with little or no documentation, creating what the municipality saw as a "ghetto" of substandard housing which needed to be rectified. A similar situation arose with land ownership in Africville, where property claims in Africville did not always maintain proper title to the land. This will be explored more thoroughly in the next chapter. An illegible system of land ownership and inheritance would cause the municipality and Africville residents some problems.

A significant impact of the situation which Africville found itself within the twentieth century, is that due to declining living standards many residents no longer desired to live within the community. Between the factories, prisons, lack of services and difficulties with building new structures, many of the residents who could afford to do so chose to relocate themselves and

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<sup>50</sup> Clairmont, Magill. *Africville Relocation Report*, 1971. Page 80-81.

<sup>51</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State*. Yale University Press, 1998, Page 77-8.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

their families to nearby neighborhoods. Neighborhoods which, despite only being one or two kilometres away, had all the amenities and support that Africville was never offered. Those who could leave would almost always be the high achievers of the community, those who could afford to go.<sup>53</sup> This out migration in the 1940s and 1950s would further degrade Africville of its social vitality, pushing the community to become the slum that many Haligonians and municipal powers perceived it as from the beginning of the twentieth century.

The municipality's lack of interaction with the community meant that Africville residents had to find their own, informal solutions to the problems created by lack of service. For water this meant poor quality wells which produced water that made residents sick. For policing it meant relying on social cohesion which was greatly damaged by the dangerous industrial land which the city turned Africville into and the influx of transients. Lack of civic addresses necessitated a community post office to receive all incoming mail to the community. Lack of confidence on obtaining building permits necessitated unregulated construction which would further lower the living quality of the Africville residents. All of these problems could have been easily avoided if the Municipality of Halifax had given reasonable regulations and services for Africville or the people who lived there. Africville was not treated as part of Halifax and its residents were not given the same services as other tax paying residents of the city. Despite increasing effort to promote the health and wellness of the Halifax public, Africville was left out of, and even suffered from efforts to move undesirable industry away from the majority White Halifax population. While the city claimed that the displacement of Africville in 1964 was for the good of the residents, to alleviate their poor housing conditions and provide a path to better opportunities. It is clear that if the municipality truly cared about the residents of Africville, they

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<sup>53</sup> Clairmont, Magill. *Africville Relocation Report*, 1971. Page 81-82.

would not have permitted an industrial presence and neglected conditions which drove Africville to this state in the first place.

## Chapter II: Changes in Africville's Land Value

Apart from issues of building housing within Africville, problems with the regulation of the community's built environment can be shown at a fundamental level. The land which was purchased by Africville settlers was often taken from them, in some cases without proper compensation. Land was being expropriated from residents just six years after the first land purchase, setting a trend which would continue until the entirety of the land was expropriated for the displacement in 1964. In addition to this, the process by which property values were assessed had a significant impact on Africville residents. Not only would this determine the taxes residents would pay to the city, but also would be a key factor in determining the market value for residents' properties when they were forced to settle with municipal officials. A misrepresentation in property assessment would cause hardship for Africville residents as the money they put into their properties was not shown in assessments and would consequently undervalue Africville housing. This chapter will examine how Africville land value changed over the course of the twentieth century, examining the fairness of the property assessments and by extension the compensation received for the displacement.

Land ownership in Africville was always a complex system. Formal documentation of Africville property ownership was not the norm, which led to considerable problems for the community. According to a survey conducted in 1962, only 32.8% of the population of Africville had a deed to their property.<sup>1</sup> This was the result of various land practices in Africville which made for complex records of ownership. These practices included inheritance to multiple recipients for one property, changes in land use, original purposes going unrecorded, and

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<sup>1</sup> Halifax Human Rights Advisory Committee records, "Anonymized version of 1962 survey provided by Halifax Regional Municipality Archives", Halifax Regional Municipality Archives 1962.

squatting. Many residents did not own legal title to their land, despite it being inherited and previously legally purchased. Transactions of land were often done informally between family members, without officially changing the deed or recording the transaction. All of this led to very sparse official documentation of ownership. This caused serious grief during the displacement when only one third of residents were able to provide proper deed for their property, resulting in most residents not receiving fair compensation for their property when forced to relocate.<sup>2</sup> Anyone with clear ownership of land but without legal title would receive a \$500.00 (\$4,000.00 today)<sup>3</sup> “gratuitous payment” for vacating their property.<sup>4</sup> Those who were able to provide legal title would settle with the city for the market value of their property, as assessed by a third party.<sup>5</sup> Many of those who settled with the city at market value were perceived to have received fair compensation by Halifax’s Black community.<sup>6</sup>

Property assessment records on Africville are publicly available in the Municipal Archives of Halifax and show the historic property value assigned to Africville plots.<sup>7</sup> Many of the records go back to 1921 and all distinguish between land value and improvement (building) value. Property value was assessed by the municipality every year up to 1947. In an effort to displace Africville, all property had to be properly assessed, as to compensate the residents who owned the land. This was done in a 1956 assessment by J.M. Cleminshaw Co. Appraisers, a company specialising in large scale land appraisal based in Cleveland, Ohio. This assessment only assessed the buildings of the property, not taking the value of the land into account.<sup>8</sup> A

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<sup>2</sup> Halifax Municipal Archives, “Anonymized Survey” CR5.3.

<sup>3</sup> Comparing 500\$ in 1967 to 2021, using the Bank of Canada Inflation calculator to determine the approximate value in 2021 CAD.

<sup>4</sup> Clairmont, Magill. *Africville Relocation Report*, 1971. Page A18

<sup>5</sup> Tina Loo. "Africville and the Dynamics of State Power in Postwar Canada." *Acadiensis* 39, no. 2, 2010. Page 35.

<sup>6</sup> Clairmont, Magill. *Africville Relocation Report*, 1971. Page 365.

<sup>7</sup> Halifax Municipal Archives, “Halifax Property Assessment Field Cards” 102-19B Box48

<sup>8</sup> Clairmont, Magill. *Africville Relocation Report*, 1971. Page A26

second series of assessment was done by Cleminshaw Co. ending in 1967, the final assessment in Africville before displacement. Having the assessments contracted to Cleminshaw Co. provided less conflict of interest, in contrast to the municipal assessors evaluating Africville land which they would eventually appropriate and be compelled to purchase.

Following the building permit applicant Thomas H. Howe, we can see that after constructing his house in 1949 or the early 1950s, the dwelling was assessed at \$300.00 (\$2,950.00 today).<sup>9</sup> This assessment was conducted around 1956,<sup>10</sup> and is a great departure from the estimated \$1,200.00 (\$13,775.00 today) in the permit application in 1949.<sup>11</sup> It's fairly unlikely that Howe's property would depreciate to 25% of its original value in a handful of years, assuming the permit application had taken inflation and labor costs into account. On the 1960s assessments, Howe's property would rise in value considerably, with the land now being considered and increasing in value through the 1960s. The final assessment in 1967 would put his property at \$3,800.00 (\$30,000.00 today) with \$3,000.00 of that being land value.<sup>12</sup> Another resident, Mrs. Jessie MacDonald, would have a similar experience. Her 1921 assessment had her holdings valued at \$1,600.00 (\$20,500.00 today), with \$600.00 for the land and \$1,000.00 for the property. By 1947, the property value decreased to \$1,200.00 (\$17,200.00 today), with \$200.00 for her land, \$500.00 for her house and \$200.00 for the

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<sup>9</sup> Halifax Municipal Archives, "Halifax Property Assessment Field Cards" 102-19B Box23 Page 23..

<sup>10</sup> The assessment card holds no date but is located in a folder of Africville property assessments in the 1950s/1960s. Value for the pre-relocation assessment finished in 1956 are taken for the CAD value in 1955

<sup>11</sup> Halifax Municipal Archives, "Descending Permit Application Number Order" 102-39I-29, Page 361. Grant also claims that Howe's estimated cost for his construction was 2,000\$ in 1950. Very different from the 1,200 Howe estimated and the 300\$ his property was appraised at.

<sup>12</sup> Halifax Municipal Archives, "Halifax Property Assessment Field Cards" 102-19B. Box23 Page 99.



additional structure she had constructed on her property.<sup>13</sup> In the pre- displacement assessment done by Cleminshaw Co., her property holdings would simply be listed as \$700.00 (\$6,900.00 today). In the final assessment before selling her property in 1967, it would be valued at \$24,200.00 (\$190,000.00), with all the value being land.<sup>14</sup> Despite improving her property further with new constructions, the overall housing value was reduced to less than 50% in 1956, from \$20,500.00 to \$6,900.00, then her property value skyrocketed as land value was reassessed in the 1960s. These cases show a trend in the Africville residents' property assessments. Assessed values for land and housing often greatly decreased between 1921 and 1956, with the assessments in the 1960s greatly increasing the value of their land.

Another resident, James Hamilton, had his property value remain mostly static. Assessed at \$300.00 (\$3,850) in 1921, the value dropped to \$200.00 (\$3,000) in 1927, then climbed back to \$300.00 (\$4,800) in 1942, where it would stay until 1956.<sup>15</sup> This would change however, when in 1964 his property was assessed at \$2,400.00 (\$20,500).<sup>16</sup> For some residents both housing and land value would appreciate over the twentieth century. One resident, Joseph Carvery, experienced the this over twenty years. His house, originally assessed at \$200.00 (\$2,570.00) in 1921, was valued at \$300.00 (\$2,950.00) in 1956.<sup>17</sup> In accounting for inflation, this change is only an increase of 14%. While this is not the norm in the Africville assessments in the 1950s, it does show that some residents did experience moderately increasing housing values all through the twentieth century.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, Box48 Page 6.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, Box23 Page 75.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, Box48 Page 20, Box23 Page 30.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, Box23 Page 215.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, Box48 Page 10. Box23 Page 16.

In general, while the value of some Africville residents' houses would depreciate, considerably in some cases, the value of their land would be ever increasing as Halifax grew. When questioned why the initial assessed values by Cleminshaw Co. were on average significantly lower than previous property values, R. Grant responded that it was found that the Cleminshaw evaluations raised average property value around Halifax significantly, as their approach was to closely represent market values of properties. This, and complaints from Halifax residents about increased land taxation, caused the municipality to reduce all land values in Halifax by a flat 15%. Many Africville housing values would fall further with 1960s assessment after the passing of Ordinance 50 in 1958.<sup>18</sup> As many Africville properties no longer qualified for the minimum housing standards which were required of residential property, their value dropped considerably. While residents expressed annoyance at this, it seems as though the value of housing was made up for by rising land values.

These findings show some unexpected results. The property assessment records addressed show that property value in Africville generally dropped over the course of the twentieth century, until the assessments in the 1960s. The first re-appraisal of Africville land would raise its value considerably, despite many houses dropping in value. This leads to believe that the compensation deed-owning residents received for displacement was fair. As is corroborated by residents' testimony, those who settled with the city did not feel as though they had been undersold on their property. While many residents would feel as though they had lost much more than their property in the displacement, at the very least they had fair compensation for their physical holdings.

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<sup>18</sup> Clairmont, Magill. *Africville Relocation Report*, 1971. Page A28.

Another significant question that arises from the data is how the land value changed so considerably. If the value of Africville land had been assessed at an almost completely static pace throughout the twentieth century, why would it jump so considerably with the last few assessments before displacement? A good possibility for why this is lies in how Cleminshaw Co. conducted their assessments. The company's approach to assessment was to mirror the market value of a property. This would almost always result in an increase in the government assessments.<sup>19</sup> It is likely that in Africville this change would be seen most significantly with the land value of the community, due to its proximity to urban Halifax, but comparatively poor building quality. How the earlier assessments strayed so far from market value of the land is harder to say. Despite over thirty years of growth in Halifax, city assessors did not consider the community's land to have increased in any substantial value, only being adjusted prior to displacement in the 1960s.

The impact that historically low land values had on Africville residents is most likely counter productive to what the municipality wanted to achieve. Being assessed very low before the 1960s, residents would be less willing to move out of the community and sell their plots. Selling Africville properties anywhere close to the prices they were assessed at before the 1960s would yield insignificant money to purchase comparable land elsewhere near Halifax. Considering the balance of positives or negatives a person would weigh in deciding whether to leave the community or not, only being able to sell their Africville property for a fraction of what would be needed for a new residence is a definite negative. Yet even with this as the case, as noted in chapter two, with multiple permit applications for moving a residence, some Africville residents made the choice regardless. Overall, the reduction in material value of Africville

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid Page A28.

properties would lead to an emphasis on the immaterial, with one resident after being relocated in 1969 proclaiming,

Regardless of our wells going dry in the summertime, and the cold in the wintertime, I still prefer Africville a thousand times to this place I am in now.<sup>20</sup>

While most deed holders were satisfied with the value their properties had sold for, almost all residents after displacement said they missed the Africville way of life, with most describing their living conditions as worse or the same as in Africville.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid Page 304.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid Page 349, 347.

### **Conclusion**

It is difficult to describe all the ways in which a community can be discriminated against. This thesis has focused on the material aspects to discrimination, as it pertains to land and property management. From this focus, a collection of decisions and practices towards the community of Africville which greatly impacted its residents and their wellbeing can be seen. While the decision for displacement itself is problematic in many ways, the actions taken throughout the over one-hundred-year history of Africville can be seen as equally problematic, if not more. What city officials failed to see in Africville is the result of their own actions and practices. The reality is that municipal decisions to industrialize, marginalize, and refuse service to the Africville area were the main cause of the “deplorable” conditions which city policy sought to amend with displacement.

The municipality’s land management was detrimental to Africville residents throughout the community’s history. Although building permits and property assessments would eventually be conducted normally, the issues of water, emergency, and waste disposal services would never be amended. The loss of life and degradation of living conditions which the community experienced in the twentieth century are clear examples of how land mismanagement can impact a community and contribute to environmental racism. The conclusion that almost all building permits applications after 1934 were accepted and that property values, while historically undervalued, raised considerably in the years before the displacement, comes as a pleasant surprise. While it by no means rectifies the historic injustices of land management towards Africville, it does show that municipal authorities had sought, however limited their efforts, to improve their treatment of the community. Although the displacement which proceeded would be flawed in its principle and implementation, at the very least it seems those who had legal deed

to their property were properly compensated, and residents were permitted to build in Africville for the last thirty years of their residence.

It is too easy to proclaim that the events of Africville are a product of their time and that we as a society know better now than to repeat these mistakes. However, we must not forget the details of these historic injustices. Africville's treatment was a product of racism and while much of Canada is committed to fair and just treatment of all persons, this commitment is not always realized. The importance is in the details, the displacement of Africville was deemed progressive by those who maintained the standards of the time, in the same way as relocating undesirable industry to the north of Halifax was deemed a good thing to further the "public" health. The mechanisms by which the discrimination is carried out carries just as much weight as the framework which is used to justify the discriminatory practices. In this way the avenues by which Africville was discriminated against must be analyzed thoroughly, not just to have better record of the events which were carried out, but also to understand thoroughly how the racism the community faced manifested itself.

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