

A Brief Overview of Policy Issues Related to Rural Nova Scotia's Black Community

Prepared by Brynn Kelly

For

Rural Communities Impacting Policy

Rural Communities Impacting Policy

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INTRODUCTION

Rural Communities Impacting Policy (RCIP) is a three-year project established through a Community-University Research Alliance partnership between the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre (AHPRC) and the Coastal Communities Network (CCN). RCIP's goal is to increase the capacity of rural, community-based organizations to use social science research to impact policies that affect their communities' health and sustainability. It was noted early in the project that Nova Scotia's rural Black population faces unique struggles and policy issues, raising the possibility that the African-Nova Scotian community may require different types of research, information, and tools for impacting policy that are specific to their own needs. As a result, a student intern, Brynn Kelly, was assigned the task of gathering information about policy issues that have impacted on Nova Scotia's Black community, both historically and today.

METHODOLOGY

The information in this report was obtained through a review of the literature relating to Nova Scotia's Black community with the goal of finding information that could qualitatively and quantitatively describe the issues faced by African-Nova Scotians. The information presented in this report was obtained primarily through internet and library database searches as well as from information provided by individuals within the Black community. Although we were able to obtain qualitative information from a variety of sources, it was fairly difficult to find academic reports and statistical information. Thus, most of the information presented was gathered from articles written and published by Nova Scotia's Black communities, press releases, and government documents.

In consolidating and presenting the information, we chose to select issues that were recurring themes in discussions with African-Nova Scotians and in documents produced by rural African-Nova Scotian communities. Each issue is briefly described and illustrated using relevant community examples. It is important to note that the examples given are not all-encompassing and that many more examples

exist than are mentioned here. Thus, this document should not be considered a definitive report on policy issues facing the rural Black Nova Scotian community: rather, it should be seen as a starting point for readers to consider the possibilities for future research and policy making.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Like other cultural groups in Nova Scotia, the Black community has an extremely rich history in the province. Most African-Nova Scotians, however, do not feel that their history is adequately acknowledged, especially within the province's education system. Dr. Esmeralda M. A. Thornhill, James Robinson Johnston Chair in Black Canadian Studies at Dalhousie University in Halifax, strongly emphasizes this point in the following quote from her Foreword to an International Symposium on racism held at Dalhousie in 2001:

The hidden history of African-Nova Scotian communities is symbolic of the generalized global obfuscation of Black History. It typifies what I term "Race Erase" – signifying the concomitant erasure of Black peoples as very active agents who also do contribute to the Making of History... (Thornhill, 2001a).

The African-Nova Scotian community has expressed that it is crucial to understand their history, for this history has impacted present-day situations and policies (e.g. Thornhill, 2001a, VBRIS, 2000). This report presents a brief historical description of Nova Scotia's Black community, based primarily on information drawn from the Black Loyalist Heritage Society's website and the Atlantic CED Institute's preface to its 2000 publication, *We Can't Walk Alone*.

According to the Atlantic CED Institute (2000), African-Nova Scotian history dates back to 1606 when the first Black person, Mathieu da Costa, arrived in Nova Scotia as an interpreter with the French colonising expedition. The Black community did not begin to be established, however, until the first large influx of Black settlers arrived in the eighteenth century. These settlers were Black Loyalists who had left the United States for Nova Scotia during, and just after, the American Revolution. They came

because the British promised freedom to Black slaves who were willing to escape from rebel-owned plantations and fight on the British side. When the British lost the war, some Black Loyalists were left in the United States without their freedom, while others were resettled in England, Florida, the West Indies, and British North America as both free settlers and slaves. Of those resettled in British North America, the largest group, totalling more than 3,500, was sent to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. According to the Black Loyalist Heritage Society, a priority system had to be established to deal with the large influx of all settlers. While White officers and “gentlemen” received first priority, and White privates and labourers received second priority, Black Loyalists had the least priority. As a result, many were not given the land and rations promised them, and when they were, they were generally of lesser and poorer quality than those given to White Loyalists (Black Loyalist Heritage Society, website; Morgan, Pleasant & Pleasant-Sampson, 1999). For example, the land grants given to Black Loyalists tended to be isolated from the White towns, of poor quality, and smaller in size than initially promised (Black Loyalist Heritage Society, website). The Black community may still be dealing with the effects of this policy two centuries later, for most Black communities are located on poor, undesirable land, away from town centres (Morgan, Pleasant & Pleasant-Sampson, 1999). In addition to dealing with these problems, the Black Loyalists also had to cope with issues such as harsh and unfamiliar weather, inadequate shelter, and prejudice (Black Loyalist Heritage Society, website).

In the 1790s there was a major exodus of African-Nova Scotians to Sierra Leone (Black Loyalist Heritage Society, website). This exodus was organised by the Sierra Leone Company, which was eager to recruit Black Christians for its new colony. According to the Black Loyalist Heritage Society, most free African-Nova Scotians opted to leave for Sierra Leone, and on January 15, 1792, 1,190 people emigrated. The segment of the Black population that stayed behind began to establish permanent communities across Nova Scotia (Atlantic CED Institute, 2000). Those communities were established by the end of the eighteenth century, and many still exist today.

Later in the century, the second major wave of Black settlers arrived in Nova Scotia (Atlantic CED Institute, 2000). Known as the Maroons, these people came from Jamaica (Atlantic CED Institute, 2000), where their ancestors had been brought from Africa as slaves by Spanish colonists (Cain, Copeland, Johnson, Sparks, Thomas, & Williams, 2000). By definition, the term “Maroon” refers to fugitive slaves in the in the West Indies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Random House, 1999). By hiding out in the mountains, the Jamaican Maroons resisted slavery and the British government for 140 years. However, after the Maroons lost a war with the British in 1795, those who would not submit to the terms of a British-imposed treaty were deported to Nova Scotia, then a British colony (Boyd, 1980). Although the Maroons were not promised land, they were able to settle in areas that had been vacated by the Black Loyalists who had emigrated to Sierra Leone. Eventually, however, like their Black Loyalist predecessors, in 1800 most of the Maroons were re-located to Sierra Leone (Cain et al., 2000).

The third major influx into the province’s Black community occurred early in the nineteenth century (Atlantic CED Institute, 2000). The War of 1812 between Britain and the United States brought Black American refugees to Nova Scotia, and these newcomers were able to live alongside the remaining Black Loyalists and Maroons, occupying land that had been vacated by those who had left for Sierra Leone (Cain et al, 2000; Atlantic CED Institute, 2000). Although some of these refugees later returned to the United States or emigrated to the Caribbean at the end of the war, others stayed and worked with the remaining Black Loyalists and Maroons to develop Nova Scotia’s Black community (Cain et al., 2000).

Although they came to Nova Scotia to start over and build better lives for themselves, the province’s Black population also faced many hardships (Atlantic CED Institute, 2000). In addition to facing societal racism, African-Nova Scotians dealt with inequalities in education, in the workforce, and in government policies (Atlantic CED Institute, 2000; Della, Fairfax, Reid, & Seaforth, 2000). Prejudice was manifested in inequitable policies related to issues such as employment (Oliver, 1996), access to

education (Desmond et al., 1999), and election regulations (Atwell, 2002). Examples of such policies are discussed in the “Policy Issues” section of this report.

With the growth of modern industry after Confederation, Nova Scotia recruited labourers from around the world (Atlantic CED Institute, 2000). The province’s Black population grew as new immigrants arrived from the Caribbean and the United States (Atlantic CED Institute, 2000). Many of these new African-Nova Scotians settled in Cape Breton (Atlantic CED Institute, 2000). According to the Atlantic CED Institute (2000), these settlers, like their predecessors, had to build a new life amid societal racism.

Recently, there have been attempts made to document the needs of Nova Scotia’s Black community. In 1996, the Nova Scotian government assigned a Task Force to research the quality of services the government provides to African-Nova Scotian communities. Its goal was to draft recommendations for government services based on consultations with Black community members. (Nova Scotia Government, 1996; Task Force, 1996). The intended purpose of this information was to help the government better serve the African-Nova Scotian community by directing government policies and services to meet their needs. To date, however, the African-Nova Scotian community does not feel that the recommendations of the report have been put into action (Bernard & Wien, 2001). Although the government has since appointed two separate committees to consult with the African-Nova Scotian community and take an inventory of services offered, the outcomes of these consultations are, to date, unclear to the Black community.

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

During our research we were able to locate 48 different African-Nova Scotian communities across Nova Scotia (see Figure 1). Although several of these communities have very small populations, they are historically and culturally significant. For example, although Africville no longer exists, the

parkland that has replaced the community has been declared a National Historic Site, and former Africville residents gather there annually for a picnic reunion (Legge, 2002).

Community List

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Shelburne | 25. Lucasville |
| 2. Birchtown | 26. Cobequid Road |
| 3. Yarmouth | 26B. Maroon Hill |
| 4. Greenville | 27. Halifax |
| 5. Southville | 28. Dartmouth |
| 6. Danvers | 29/30. Lake Loon & Cherry Brook |
| 7. Hassett | 31. North Preston |
| 8. Weymouth Falls | 32. East Preston |
| 9. Jordantown | 33. Truro |
| 10. Conway | 34. Springhill |
| 11. Acaciaville | 35. Amherst |
| 12. Digby | 36. Trenton |
| 13. LeQuille | 37. New Glasgow |
| 14. Granville Ferry | 38. Antigonish |
| 15. Inglewood (Bridgetown) | 39. Monastery |
| 16. Middleton | 40. Mulgrave |
| 17. Cambridge | 41. Upper Big Tracadie |
| 18. Gibson Woods | 42. Lincolnville |
| 19. Aldershot | 43. Sunnyville |
| 20. Kentville | 44. North Sydney |
| 21. Three Mile Plains | 45. Sydney |
| 22. Beechville | 46. New Waterford |
| 23. Hammonds Plains | 47. Glace Bay |
| 24. Africville | 48. Liverpool |

POLICY ISSUES

Numerous policies affect rural African-Nova Scotian communities. For the purposes of this report, however, we have tried to focus on policy issues that are either specific to rural Black communities or affect them in a unique way. The policy issues we have selected to discuss relate to land/geography, housing, racism, employment, youth, education, seniors, health, political representation, community empowerment and development, and the relationship between research and policy.

Land/Geography

It is a common perception among Nova Scotia's Black population that their communities are located on Nova Scotia's least desirable land (e.g. Borden, Desmond, Jordan-Simmonds, Merriam, Paris, & Wright, 1999; Morgan, Pleasant & Pleasant-Sampson, 1999). One reason given for this is that Nova Scotia's first group of free Black settlers, the Black Loyalists, were discriminated against by authorities (e.g. Black Loyalist Heritage Society, website; Morgan, Pleasant & Pleasant-Sampson, 1999). According to this argument, the government was reluctant to provide the land that it had promised to its new Black settlers. Consequently, many Black Loyalists were initially denied land, and once land was given, it was of very poor quality because most of the desirable land had been given to White Loyalists (Black Loyalist Heritage Society, website; Niven, 1994). According to Senator Don Oliver (1996), Black settlers, "were relegated to rural ghettos... where the opportunities were few, and basic services available were deplorable." Today, many Black communities describe their land as unarable or undesirable because the terrain is rocky or swampy (Borden, Desmond, Jordan-Simmonds, Merriam, Paris, & Wright, 1999).

Another important issue relates to the treatment of the land surrounding Black communities. Many residents believe that the government has chosen to locate landfills and undesirable industries within close vicinity of Black, rather than White, communities (Blackmore, Jarvis, Kelsie, Simwamu, & Wright, 2000; Morgan, Pleasant & Pleasant-Sampson, 1999). When considering this issue, a question

that arises is whether the landfills are located in or near Black communities because the residents are Black, rather than White, or whether they are placed there because this is where the region's worst land is located. While the former would reveal current systemic racism, the latter suggests that this policy may reflect the cumulative effect of previous discriminatory land allocation practices.

One community dealing with this issue is Beechville. A community report written by Blackmore and colleagues (2000) says that Beechville is struggling for its existence because over the past ten years most of the adjacent land has been expropriated by the municipality and turned into Bayers Lake Business Park. In addition, Otter Lake Landfill has recently been located within vicinity of the community, and a 440-unit housing development has been placed in the heart of Beechville. According to Blackmore and colleagues (2000), both of these projects have gone ahead without the community's approval.

The community of Upper Hammonds Plains has also been engaged in a long-term struggle related to its adjacent land. Around 1974, the municipal and provincial governments expropriated Pockwock Lake, an area totalling 365 acres, to supply water for the City of Halifax, Town of Bedford, and Halifax County (Della et al., 2000). This land now houses the Halifax Regional Water Commission's water treatment plant. Although the community was paid \$100,000 for the land, residents believe, in retrospect, that the settlement was unfair, partly because they were not experienced in negotiating this sort of arrangement (Della et al., 2000). Furthermore, even though the main water lines passed through the backyards of community residents, they were initially not offered water and, once they were, the cost of \$52 per foot was too expensive for residents. After a long struggle that included a media campaign, lodging a complaint with the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission, and public pressure, the community reached an agreement with the Halifax Regional Water Commission. Upper Hammonds Plains is now connected to the water system at a rate of \$12.50 per foot in frontage fees. The community attributes much of its success to its own research and planning: residents decided to conduct

their own research, rather than accepting the municipality's water installation charges at face value (Della et al., 2000).

Housing

Several historic African-Nova Scotian communities have identified a need for affordable housing for low-income residents (e.g. Upper Hammonds Plains Community Development Association, 1996; Blackmore et al., 2000; Task Force, 1996). In addition, the 1996 Task Force analyzing government services to Nova Scotia's Black community identified housing as a major policy issue. Based on Black communities' need for affordable housing, the Task Force (1996) recommended that community-based housing programs be implemented. Furthermore, the Task Force (1996) stated that the Black community should be informed of existing policies, such as a Department of Housing program that provides low-interest loans for families to build apartments onto their homes for seniors. In addition to assisting low-income residents, it is believed that providing housing will both entice Black citizens to move back into the community and foster community empowerment and economic development (Blackmore et al., 2000; Cain, Copeland, Johnson, Sparks, Thomas, & Williams, 2000).

Although housing issues are common in rural Nova Scotian communities, they have particular historical significance to the Black community. Cain and colleagues give a fairly descriptive account of the Preston area's housing practices over time in the 2000 edition of *We Can't Walk Alone*. According to this account, Black settlers were given very few provisions, and so had to make do with what they had when developing housing. The Black Loyalists of the 1700s initially lived in makeshift dwellings, such as transport vessels, public buildings, and tents. Once they had settled in, they built bark and log cabins without foundations, but were still greatly restricted by the lack of provisions. Similarly, the Maroons and Black refugees who arrived later either built cabins or renovated those that had been vacated by emigrants to Sierra Leone. It wasn't until the end of nineteenth century that modest homes had begun to be built. These homes became stereotypically known, however, as "tarpaper shacks" because tarpaper

was used for exterior weather-proofing. Other innovative uses of their limited resources included the use of newspaper as wall and ceiling insulation, sod and sawdust banking as foundation insulation, and plastic as storm windows. Creative interior-decorating techniques were also used, such as wallpaper made of Eaton's catalogues and flooring made of oilcloth. By the 1940s, electricity was introduced in most areas, but many Blacks did not get it until the 1960s or 1970s. Likewise, although running water and sewage facilities were introduced in the 1960s, some families could not afford them until the 1970s. Since the 1970s, homes have become gradually more elaborate. Historically, the housing facilities of African-Nova Scotian communities have lagged behind those in the rest of rural Nova Scotia. Today, African-Nova Scotians are working to ensure that their communities have housing that is on par with other communities. Doing so will both contribute to community development and help ensure that new generations do not leave historic communities in search of better and more affordable housing options.

In response to this need, in 1996 the Lucasville/Upper Hammonds Plains Community Development Association initiated a housing development demonstration project. Although the Association ran into some difficulties, such as difficulties in qualifying low-income applicants for mortgage financing, they were able to successfully complete three homes in 1996, with four more planned for the future (Upper Hammonds Plains Community Development Association, 1996). According to its project summary, the Association attributes much of its success to obtaining land already available to residents, adopting a self-build approach, and fostering partnerships with local businesses and suppliers to obtain discounts on materials.

In the 1970s, the Preston Area Housing Fund (PAHF) was established to act as a program delivery agent and rental superintendent for the Nova Scotia Department of Housing. Although the PAHF has been useful, area residents are now beginning to question the government's role as a large property owner and landlord in the community (Cain et al., 2000). Consequently, the present challenge for the PAHF is to consider a different arrangement with government so that it can be more community-run. The Preston communities would also like to deal with the problem of out-migration to places such

as Dartmouth, Halifax, and the suburbs of Cole Harbour and Lower Sackville. In 1999, Watershed Association Development Enterprises (WADE) conducted a study to research the housing trends of former residents from the Preston area who had moved to or near Dartmouth. According to Cain and colleagues (2000), WADE believes that its study shows that approximately \$750,000 per year is lost to rent in Dartmouth, a sum that could have been invested in home ownership or circulated in the Preston area's home rental market. Based on these findings, WADE is considering becoming a housing developer and apartment-building owner in the Preston communities. The 1996 Task Force identified the Preston Area Housing Fund as an exemplary community-based housing program.

Clearly, housing policies cannot be considered in isolation, for they are closely related to historical, cultural, and economic issues. In light of the issues reviewed above, many Black communities have been motivated to develop and control their own housing projects and policies.

Racism

Racism is an issue that the African-Nova Scotian community has been struggling with since the arrival of the first Black settlers (e.g. Thornhill, 2001a, 2001b; Atlantic CED Institute, 2000; Oliver, 1996). Although there may be a general perception that racism has been greatly reduced, or even eradicated, in Nova Scotia, many members of the Black community feel that racism remains an important issue that is continually reflected in society (e.g. VBRIS, 2000; Borden, Desmond, Jordan-Simmonds, Merriam, Paris & Wright, 1999; Task Force, 1996).

Just last year, Dalhousie University housed an International Symposium entitled *Racism and the Black World Response* (2001). This Symposium confronted several issues related to racism. One Symposium document that reflects wide concern about racism is East Preston's *Principled Statement of Position Against Racism*. This document was put together at a "town hall" meeting in East Preston on February 11, 2001. After outlining their perspective on the effects of racism, the citizens of East Preston resolved that they "condemn racism as violent, criminal, immoral, and oppressive," that they "demand

actions of redress on all these fronts,” and that they “demand the eradication of racism.” Since the ratification of this document, more than 400 people have signed it (East Preston Town Hall, 2001). A similar document, entitled *The Halifax Declaration of Principles and Priorities*, was adopted by International Symposium participants (2001). This document briefly outlines the participants’ positions on various issues. For example, the *Halifax Declaration* supports international strategizing among descendants of African peoples; a focus on youth; the recovery, reclaiming, and rehabilitation of African History; declaring slavery a crime against humanity; and globally addressing the issue of reparations. Furthermore, this declaration proposes that African-descended peoples adopt March 21 as the “International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.”

One of the largest issues related to racism is the struggle for reparations. Much of the discourse at the 2001 International Symposium, *Racism and the Black World Response*, centred around reparations policy issues. The following Symposium quotation from Dr. Esmeralda M. A. Thornhill, Dalhousie’s James Robinson Johnson Chair in Black Canadian Studies, illustrates the argument for reparations:

We did the dirty work for these three Americas. For that was our designated and imposed “place” – the “place” where Western economy needed us to be. And, as long as we stayed in that “plac,” there at the bottom, we were welcomed to work and live in these Americas ... in the ghettos, the favelas, and the bidonvilles, and in the isolated and alienated historic Black communities called Birchtown, Africville, Beechville, or Little Burgundy. ... As the children of those forbears who chose to survive, we are duty-bound to carry and pass the torch. We are duty-bound to claim our inheritance, to right the wrongs, to claim just reparations.

(Thornhill, 2001b)

Of course, there are arguments both supporting and opposing the implementation of reparations policies. Nova Scotia’s Black community argues that it would be better off today had it not been for unjust treatment and policies in the past (Leishman, 2001; VBRIS, 2000). For example,

Africville descendants are currently negotiating with the Halifax Regional Municipality to regain ownership of their lost land and to gain compensation for the opportunities they lost as a result of their relocation and the demolition of Africville in the 1960s (Legge, 2002; CBC, 2001).

Journalist Harry Flemming, of the Halifax Daily News, voiced many of the common arguments against reparations policies in a CBC interview with Joan Leishman (Leishman, 2001). These arguments, according to Flemming, are that history cannot be re-written, that it is unfair to require today's taxpayers to pay for past mistakes, and that many continuing efforts have been made to treat Nova Scotia's Black population fairly (Leishman, 2001).

Clearly, issues surrounding reparation policies are very controversial. The struggle for reparations is not unique to Nova Scotia's Black community, however. African-descended peoples around the globe are uniting in their movement so that they can strengthen their position and substantiate a claim that transcends monetary compensation (e.g. Thornhill, 2001b; Williams, 2001). According to writer and lawyer M. NourbeSe Philip, "The claim for reparations is both about money and not about money... it is in the making of the claim that the invisible matter of our memory that has been hidden for so long becomes more visible," (2001).

Employment

The importance of employment and unemployment issues seems to be universal across rural African-Nova Scotian communities (e.g. Task Force, 1996; Borden et al., 1999; Blackmore et al., 2000; Buchan, Edmonds, Glasgow, Johnstone, & Williams, 2000). According to the 1996 Task Force report, major needs among the province's Black population are long-term, sustainable employment, job training, career counselling, and small-business development. In addition to these typical employment issues, employment equity is of continual concern to the Black community.

African-Nova Scotians have been struggling with employment equity since settling in the province. In the words of Senator Don Oliver (1996), "Blacks were the last to be hired and the first to be

fired.” Moreover, only menial work was available to Black settlers and they were paid less than White workers for the same job (Oliver, 1996). Although far greater opportunities are available today, the 1996 Task Force to Black communities reported that there is an underlying sentiment among the Black population that government attempts to address employment inequities have been unsuccessful. The problem, according to the Task Force, does not lie within the government’s Affirmative Action Policy, but in its implementation, enforcement, and follow-up. The Affirmative Action Policy aims to make hiring processes within the Nova Scotia government equitable, to provide redress for systemic discrimination faced by those seeking government employment, and to address the role that unions can play in perpetuating discriminatory hiring practices (Task Force, 1996). Although Nova Scotia has had an Affirmative Action Policy since 1975, there was no accountability until the province of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Government Employees Union agreed to enforce it in 1992 (Task Force, 1996).

A couple of the Task Force’s concerns with the implementation of Affirmative Action Policy will be briefly discussed. One problem is that the province’s Black population does not seem to be hired for management positions. Since the Policy’s target groups are Black people, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, and women in management, the Task Force argued that this suggests that women are given preference for management positions. In support of this argument, the Task Force stated that occupational distribution figures revealed that 83, or 43.1%, of Blacks in the civil service worked in clerical or administrative support positions, while only 13, or 6.7%, filled management or senior management positions. In comparison, 12 out of 87 civil servants from other racially visible groups, or 13.8%, filled management positions. Another problem the Task Force had with the Affirmative Action Policy is that it is only implemented within the government, not within the private sector or any government commissions or boards (e.g. school boards). In response to this, the 1996 Task Force report suggested that government widen its scope by requiring compliance from organizations with government contracts over a specific dollar figure or employee level.

The province's Black community has been working to promote employment equity, as well as dealing with more general employment issues. Since 1995, the Black Business Initiative (BBI) has been working to promote employment through entrepreneurship. Specifically, BBI's goal is to foster the growth of Black-owned business in Nova Scotia and to provide education for Black business owners (BBI, website). It has done this by providing services such as training, advice, and mentoring to more than 600 Nova Scotian individuals and organisations, and by providing almost \$1 million in financial assistance to Black business owners. In addition, BBI has a program called "Business is Jammin'" that is specifically designed to train Black youth to develop business skills that will enable them to start their own enterprises in the future.

Several government initiatives are also underway to address employment issues among Black youth. For example, a Youth Employment Initiative Program was established for 2001-2002 in the Preston, Cherry Brook, Lake Loon, and Dartmouth areas. This program creates entry-level employment and apprenticeship opportunities for Black youth so they can gain meaningful experience, strengthen their sense of accomplishment, and become more attached to their communities (HRDC, 2001).

Clearly, issues surrounding employment are multifaceted. As well as being concerned with issues commonly faced by other Nova Scotians -- such as unemployment and lack of job training -- African-Nova Scotians also struggle with employment equity issues. So, when looking at employment issues, Nova Scotia's Black community must also consider policy issues surrounding Affirmative Action, union structure, and the Canadian justice system.

Youth

As in the rest of rural Nova Scotia, policies directed at youth are seen as paramount in rural Black communities. Although many of the problems African-Nova Scotian youth experience are similar to those of youth throughout rural Nova Scotia, they also face unique barriers. Policy issues surrounding recreational programs, health education, minimal employment opportunities, boredom, and isolation are

common barriers to rural youth, but some of these issues may need to be dealt with differently for African-Nova Scotian youth. For example, by emphasizing Black culture and history, programs may be more effective among Black youth and may serve to increase their self-esteem. In addition to these general issues, Black youth can also face issues or barriers associated with being a visible minority (Bowden, Desmond & Paris, 1999). These issues include not only racism, but also a more subtle sense of not belonging that can stem from a lack of culturally sensitive school curricula or role models (Bowden, Desmond & Paris, 1999; Oliver, 1996; Oliver, 1994).

According to Senator Donald Oliver (1994, 1996) and the 1996 Task Force, programs need to be developed that promote Black role models. Like Senator Oliver, many African-Nova Scotians believe that current and historical accomplishments of Black Canadians have been overlooked by both textbooks and society at large. This lack of visible role models is seen as detrimental to youth, for it can prevent them from realising their potential. Although this problem is relevant across Nova Scotia, it may be particularly relevant in rural Black communities. And, because rural Black populations tend to be fairly small, the lack of strong role models may be even greater than in urban centres.

Several rural communities have implemented their own youth programs. An account by Bowden and colleagues (1999) gives a good description of one such program in New Glasgow, a town with a relatively large Black community. According to this account, when citizens of New Glasgow saw an increase in vandalism, teen crime, and loitering, they held a youth meeting to determine what barriers youth faced and what they needed. After discovering that youth felt bored, isolated, and in need of a place of their own to “hang out,” a downtown youth centre was created. Although the youth centre is open to all young people, most who attend are visible minorities. Because minority youth said they often get the sense of not being welcome in town, the youth centre initiated anti-racism seminars to address this issue and to promote greater cultural awareness. In addition, the centre works to create sustainable summer jobs, organizes activities, and keeps young people informed of available alternatives and

services. Although the youth centre has had funding problems, young people have helped keep it afloat through fundraising efforts.

Young people in Kings County have developed their own non-profit association to deal with issues specific to youth, the Kings County Diversity Youth Association (KCDYA). Though it was founded under the guidance of the Kings County Committee for Equal Education, the young people themselves are responsible for the mandate and operation of the KCDYA. According to Morgan and colleagues (1999), the organization's main goals are as follows:

1. To raise the awareness of area youth;
2. To promote greater access to opportunities for success to diversified youth;
3. To actively participate in future governance;
4. To allow the ideas and voices of youth to be heard;
5. To assist youth in educational advancement and specialized training;
6. To foster youth decision-making in community development initiatives.

Several other programs have been implemented to provide employment opportunities and skills training for Black youth. For example, in 2001 Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) introduced a project to deal with high unemployment in the Black community by providing fourteen entry-level employment opportunities for Black youth in Preston, Cherry Brook, and Lake Loon (HRDC, 2001). The aim of this project was to enhance the participants' employability, ease their transition into the workforce, and help them gain information-technology skills and entrepreneurial exposure. It appears that Black communities in close vicinity to major urban areas such as Halifax and Sydney tend to be favoured for such projects. Since youth may face even greater barriers in more remote Black communities, it is important for projects to focus on these areas as well. As stated earlier, the Black Business Initiative also deals with Black youth issues by promoting business opportunities

through its “Business is Jammin’” program (BBI, website). When Black youth consider self-employment as a viable option it broadens the scope of their employment opportunities.

Education

Education is seen as one of the most important policy issues in rural Black communities (Task Force, 1996; Desmond, Dorrington, Mintus, Ryan & States, 1999; Morgan, Pleasant & Pleasant-Sampson, 1999; Blackmore et al., 2000). According to Desmond and colleagues (1999), Black students in rural Nova Scotian communities have historically been marginalized to a greater extent than urban Black youth. Possible explanations for this are that the Black population is smaller in rural communities and there is less accessibility to resources, role models, and cultural events (Desmond et al., 1999). This issue is extremely important, because education affects future employment opportunities and income.

Although many rural Black communities are dealing with education issues, current programs in New Glasgow illustrate common barriers and possible solutions. The Afrocentric Tutoring Program that Desmond and colleagues describe in *We Can't Walk Alone* (1999) is a good example of a community-based program. According to Desmond and colleagues, when the New Glasgow Black community realized that their children were falling through the cracks in the school system, they decided to look for a solution. Because most in the Black community earned low incomes, private tutoring was not an affordable option. Moreover, there were very few African-Nova Scotian professionals and educators living in local communities who could be drawn upon as resources. Thus, when the Black Educators' Association (BEA) offered a tutoring program, members of the Black community agreed to run the program, along with the BEA and HRDC. Because the program was implemented hastily, its initial years of operation were rocky. Consequently, the Black community revamped the project's cultural component and implemented a new Afrocentric Tutoring Program. The main issues impacting Black students were identified as lack of parental involvement in, and knowledge of, the school environment, lack of Black history and culture in the curriculum, increasingly higher rates of grade failure and

repetition, low academic achievement, and higher and earlier drop-out rates. Because students were dropping out as early as grades 8 and 9, the community realized that interventions must occur at the primary level. After the new program was implemented, much greater success was achieved. Although this success was not formally evaluated, it was informally acknowledged by teachers, parents, staff, students, and community volunteers. For example: school enrollment did not decrease when spring arrived; some teachers noticed improvements in students' work, skill levels, and attitudes; and some parents noticed improvements in work habits and grades. Moreover, Black and White students alike expressed enjoyment in learning about Black history and Black contributions to society.

In addition to this program, New Glasgow will also have a government program for adult learners. Just this past February, HRDC announced the implementation of an adult literacy project in New Glasgow (HRDC, 2002). This project, entitled "Building a Community Foundation for Learning," will receive \$50,000 in funding through the National Literacy Secretariat. As part of the project, the literacy needs of New Glasgow's Black community will be determined through a needs-assessment process that will include focus groups, interviews, and public information sessions. Through this project, the government hopes to remove some of the barriers that prevent full participation in the economy and society.

Although all rural African-Nova Scotian communities do not share the same educational programs, they do share many of the same problems. For example, Beechville's Black community also has a high rate of students dropping out of school at increasingly younger ages (Blackmore et al., 2000). Furthermore, while the relative absence of Black history and culture in school curricula is a problem across Nova Scotia, it is worsened by the minimal number of Black role models in small, rural communities (Desmond et al., 1999; Oliver, 1996; Oliver, 1994). In addition to youth education problems, many Black communities are also in need of adult education services that focus on literacy and skills training. The possible solutions to these kinds of shared problems are often similar, even though they may be implemented differently. Common focusses of educational programs include

tutoring, computer and skills training, adult literacy, early education or pre-school, promotion of Black history and culture, and support/counseling (Desmond et al., 1999; Morgan et al., 1999; Blackmore et al., 2000; Buchan, Edmonds, Glasgow, Johnstone & Williams, 2000).

Seniors

One group particularly affected by policy decisions is African-Nova Scotian senior citizens. In its 1996 report, Nova Scotia's Task Force to Black communities outlined the barriers Black seniors face and the services that are needed to help them to overcome these barriers. Perhaps the most important barrier that Black seniors face is that of income. Since most African-Nova Scotian seniors live on low, fixed incomes, they are sometimes unable to afford necessary medications, home care, food, and clothing (Task Force, 1996). Consequently, the health of Black seniors can be seriously compromised. This problem is especially pronounced in rural areas, because seniors there face significant transportation barriers. Without adequate transportation, rural African-Nova Scotians are particularly vulnerable and in need of home care. Because home care is too expensive for most seniors, the government has suggested that the resources taken out of rural institutions and facilities be put into home care. Unfortunately, the demand for home care is much higher than its availability. One possible alternative is to provide special transportation services for rural Nova Scotians who have health problems, are seniors, or are on low incomes. According to the Task Force, services like Access-A-Bus, provided to disabled persons in Halifax, should be extended to the rural Black population.

When considering the barriers that Nova Scotia's Black seniors face, it is important to understand the historical context. First, one must realize that the circumstances of African-Nova Scotian seniors are unique: they are not the same as those of White seniors or of today's Black youth. The prime schooling and working years of today's Black seniors took place decades ago, at a time when societal racism was more pronounced and opportunities fewer. This means that a poorer quality of education was

received and fewer employment opportunities were available. Consequently, this generation tended to have a low working income and could not save much for old age (Task Force, 1996).

This historical situation has produced a twofold problem. Firstly, because of their limited opportunities, Black seniors today have a high need for government services. Secondly, Black seniors are more reluctant to speak out than other groups because prior racism has led them to mistrust the system. This situation underscores the necessity of giving Black communities the resources to assess the needs of their seniors so they can then implement policies to meet those needs.

Health

Although health issues are not specific to rural Black communities, they need to be addressed because they are significant within the African-Nova Scotian community. According to Dr. Charmaine Royale, racism can provoke or worsen health problems because health is a, “state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Along this line of thought, the health of rural Black seniors, as mentioned earlier, can be affected by a lack of adequate income and transportation (Task Force, 1996). At Halifax’s International Symposium on racism, Dr. Sampson Sarpong of Howard University noted that because asthma is worsened by environmental factors like poverty, ethnicity, and urbanization, it is especially prevalent among inner-city Blacks (Sarpong & Royale, 2001). According to Sarpong, this problem is particularly relevant in Nova Scotia, because Nova Scotia has the highest incidence of asthma in Canada. The costs of asthma are high because it can increase learning disabilities in children and it imposes economic costs on adults. Thus, the relationship between quality of life and health is strong: improving one will help to improve the other.

Because of the importance of preventive health care, research is an important health policy issue. There is a strong sentiment within the Black community that health research and education should target the social, physical, and mental-health problems that tend to plague Black Nova Scotians (Task Force,

1996; Sarpong & Royale, 2001). Examples of such infirmities include diabetes, breast cancer, hypertension, sarcoidosis, prostate cancer, sickle-cell anemia, obesity, and asthma. (Task Force, 1996; Sarpong & Royale, 2001; Maritime Centre of Excellence for Women's Health, 2001). In addition, the Maritime Centre of Excellence for Women's Health (MCEWH) recommends that research focus on race as a determinant of health and the relationship between Black Nova Scotians' health and social and economic inclusion. The Black community may be able to initiate such research efforts by promoting the sciences to their youth and encouraging the recruitment of African-Nova Scotian health professionals and researchers (Task Force, 1996; Sarpong & Royale, 2001; MCEWH, 2001).

In addition to collecting data, Black communities need to ensure that their research influences the policy-making process. It is important to use this information to develop policy options, and to validate and implement policy recommendations (Sarpong & Royale, 2001). The MCEWH recommends focussing on the following policies:

- Identification of governmental knowledge gaps about Black Nova Scotian health;
- Integration of federal and provincial race, ethnicity, and gender data;
- Development of multi-cultural health, anti-racism, and equal opportunity policies for provincial health organisations;
- Development of a strategic health investment program;
- Establishment of screening programs, management, and support services focussing on health conditions that disproportionately affect the Black population;
- Provision of equitable funding for health initiatives, research, programs, and services within Black communities.

Political Representation

When considering the role rural African-Nova Scotians can play in the policy-making process, it is important to understand their role in, and experiences with, the broader political process. A common

sentiment in the Black community is that Black citizens are apprehensive about becoming involved in politics (Atwell, 2002; Borden et al., 1999). Much of this apprehension is likely related to past and present political policies.

At a meeting of Preston's Electoral Boundaries Commission last February, Yvonne Atwell expressed her opinion on the impact of historical policies on political cohesion in Black communities (Atwell, 2002). Although Atwell admits that she does not speak for the entire Black community, her opinions do represent one possible interpretation of present-day politics. According to her, several policies have negatively impacted the Black community. As one poignant example, the 1789 Act for Election Regulations effectively excluded African-Nova Scotians by requiring potential electors to have an income of 40 shillings per year in real estate, a house on owned land, or 100 acres of cultivated land. At the time, members of Black communities were typically not capable of meeting any of these requirements. Atwell argues that policies such as this have contributed to political apathy and have prevented the Black community from attaining political cohesion.

In the past several months, there has been much debate about provincial electoral boundaries and the possible creation of a Black provincial seat. Preston's Black community has been involved in a struggle to change electoral boundaries so that the Black population will be large enough to officially justify a Black seat in the Legislature. Because a significant portion of Preston's Black community has moved to surrounding areas, the community will lose this voting power unless former residents are included in the new electoral boundaries. Although boundaries were changed in the past to encourage greater political participation, this did not seem to work (Atwell, 2002). According to Atwell (2002), historical events have made the Black community suspicious of politicians and that potential candidates are hesitant to run in an election because of the high monetary cost involved. Thus, by creating a special Black Preston seat, or two Black provincial seats, Atwell believes that the government can remove barriers that hinder African-Nova Scotians from participating in the political process and having their minority interests represented. The government's response at the Preston Electoral Boundaries

Commission, however, was that Preston's population is not large enough to entitle it to another seat and that there cannot be any more than the current 52 seats. Although the outcome of this debate is unclear, Atwell stresses that African-Nova Scotians need be aware of the way that policy can shape their communities and the political landscape.

Of course, this issue is not unique to Preston. Other Black communities across the province are making an effort to encourage citizens to become involved in local government. According to Truro's Community Enhancement Association, one way to deal with the lack of a Black provincial seat is to hold information sessions encouraging members of the Black community to participate in local boards and councils (Borden et al., 1999). By becoming involved in politics and policy-making, rural Black communities can work to ensure that their interests are represented at the local and provincial levels.

Community Empowerment and Development

In order to deal with the issues they are facing, many rural African-Nova Scotian communities are focussing on community empowerment and development. Common elements of these empowerment and development policies are youth and adult education programs, life-skills and leadership workshops, job training, daycare and cultural awareness programs, and youth support. (e.g. Blackmore et al., 2000; Buchan, Edmonds, Glasgow, Johnstone & Williams, 2000; Borden et al., 1999; Bowden, Desmond & Paris, 1999). Some communities are also taking on large-scale development projects, such as the creation of community centres, community businesses, daycare centres, and libraries (Blackmore et al., 2000; Buchan, Edmonds, Glasgow, Johnstone & Williams, 2000; Bowden, Desmond & Paris, 1999). Beechville's Black community has even established an annual "Beechville Day" to empower and unite the community (Blackmore et al., 2000). Another common empowerment theme is the importance of partnerships and networking within the Nova Scotian Black community. The Black Business Initiative, for instance, is an important presence in the Black community that unites its members around the

common goal of business and entrepreneurial development (Blackmore et al., 2000; Borden et al., 1999).

A few African-Nova Scotian communities have decided to take control of their development by conducting their own asset mapping. By doing this, communities can obtain a statistical profile of their population and document all the assets and skills available to meet community needs. This is an important step for rural communities because it is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain this kind of information from outside sources. Moreover, it can be very empowering for a community to conduct its own research. Three examples are provided below to illustrate the kinds of projects that communities are undertaking.

HRDC recently published a statistical profile of the visible minority population in an area that encompasses Kings, Annapolis, Digby, Yarmouth, Shelburne, Queens, and Lunenburg counties (HRDC, 2002). This profile uses 1996 census data to examine the region's education, employment, and income trends. The trends revealed by this data could be valuable tools for regional Black communities that want to impact policies. In addition to being the region's largest visible minority group, the Black population tends to have less education and lower employment income than the general population. According to the profile, among Blacks who earn employment income 14.1% lack a grade-nine education, while only 7.3% have a university education. Compared to other employed visible minorities and non-minority groups, employed Blacks are more likely to lack a grade-nine education and less likely to have attended university. Although this may seem to explain why the Black population has the lowest average employment income (\$16,020), further data reveal that the relationship between education and income is not simple. Even among those with university degrees or trade certificates, Black employees tend to have lower incomes than other visible minorities or non-visible minorities. This report is very powerful: its statistics indicate trends, but leave room for the reader to interpret them and to consider policy issues.

In 2000, the Valley Black Resource Information Society (VBRIS) put together a Strategic Planning Project sponsored by the Kentville HRDC office and the Black Employment Partnership Committee. The group undertook a Black community survey that identified issues of community concern, developed a vision for community development, looked at the background and context of previous community development efforts, drew up a community development plan, and made recommendations for future community development. With its survey, VBRIS has created a statistical profile of the Black community itself, rather than a comparison of ethnic groups in the area. The survey covered such issues as employment, health, feelings of safety, home ownership, income, and involvement in -- and awareness of -- community research and projects. VBRIS's development plan includes goals and action plans for development in the areas of communication, outreach, employment, education, a multi-purpose centre, business, transportation, and tourism. In completing this project, VBRIS has provided its Black community with descriptive information, statistics, and a clear development plan, all in one concise document.

The third research project we will look at is an asset mapping report prepared by the Weymouth Falls Community Council (WFCC) in 2002. The report aims to reveal the assets African-Nova Scotian communities in Western Annapolis and Digby counties have, and to identify community needs. By surveying individuals, students, and community groups, WFCC was able to identify community strengths and weaknesses, as well as resources that can be drawn upon. The document's resource profile also outlines the need for a number of policies. For example, the report indicates that a program needs to be implemented to provide African-Nova Scotian youth with the tools they need to have input into their communities.

An additional suggestion of the report is that the African-Nova Scotian community incorporate technological education into its development policies. This is a difficult policy decision to make, however, because the region's African-Nova Scotian community has to decide whether being a "Technology Smart Community" is worth the considerable monetary expense involved. With the aid of

asset mapping reports, communities can begin to examine their existing assets and weigh the pros and cons of implementing new community development policies.

Research to Policy

A common concern within African-Nova Scotian communities is that research findings do not appear to impact policies. Part of this concern may stem from a lack of communication between community members and the government (Task Force, 1996).

As mentioned at the beginning of this report, the provincial government appointed a Task Force in 1996 to research African-Nova Scotian communities and draft recommendations for government services (Nova Scotia Government, 1996; Task Force, 1996). Although this Task Force submitted a report to the government based on its research within Black communities, most community members never received a copy of the report and few are aware of any government policies that have stemmed from it (Bernard & Wien, 2001; Upshaw, 2001). Consequently, community members were frustrated when, in 1998, the Nova Scotia government appointed an Interdepartmental Committee to complete another inventory of services to Black communities and review the 1996 Task Force recommendations (Bernard & Wien, 2001). When yet another government committee consulted with the African-Nova Scotian community in 2001, most of those consulted were angry and frustrated. This anger and frustration stems from not being given the previous Task Force and Interdepartmental reports, and from being unaware of any recommendations being put into action by government (Bernard & Wien, 2001). In support of this point, VBRIS's Strategic Planning Project revealed that 98% of those surveyed were not aware of the Black Task Force Report (VBRIS, 2000). Because government did not communicate any policy changes that would take place as a result of these research findings, the Black community was frustrated, rather than encouraged, by the consultations.

Similar sentiments have been expressed in reports written by Black communities. Digby and Annapolis counties' asset-mapping report states that African-Nova Scotian communities are frustrated

because they have been surveyed repeatedly but they feel no solutions or policies have come out of this research. This issue is also identified in VBRIS's Strategic Planning Project. According to its report, eight different projects, over a period of eight years, have identified community issues within the area serviced by the Kentville HRDC office. Several issues, such as education and youth programs, have been identified in almost every project. Thus, despite these prior eight projects, the same problems continue to recur. This track record makes VBRIS's Strategic Planning Project all the more daunting, yet important.

CONCLUSION

Based on their historical and present situation, it is important that the African-Nova Scotian community is able to influence and implement policies that affect them. With dwindling populations and unique barriers, it is especially important for rural Black communities to gain this kind of power. Involvement in the policy-making process is an avenue by which rural Black communities can take an active role in their sustainability and development. By documenting policy issues and trends in rural Black communities, RCIP aims to provide some of the information and tools that members of African-Nova Scotian communities will need when trying to change existing policies or implement new ones.

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